

# The Five Principles of the Andean Codex

Introducing *Munay*, *Yachay*, *Llank'ay*, *Kawsay*, and *Ayni*

by J. E. Williams, OMD

## I began my apprenticeship in shamanism among American indigenous tribes in 1967

when I lived a year with the Siberian Eskimo, or Yupik, people on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea. In the isolated Arctic world of snow and ice, I experienced and learned about love and natural beauty from what were considered by my anthropology professors a primitive and dying people. For me, however, it was not a marginalized existence. The Eskimo showed me a new world.

Since then, I've worked with, lived with, and learned from Indian people in North America, Mexico, and also Peru. In 2000, I met Sebastian Palqar Flores, a traditional Q'ero paqo, or shaman, from the high Peruvian Andes Mountains. Later, I documented my adventures and studies in my book, *The Andean Codex*. The Q'ero taught me a new way of looking at the world.

After more than 10 years of working with traditional indigenous people in Peru, I've

learned there are five ethical principles that constitute the Andean value system, which, along with the earth-based worldview of the Q'ero, forms an eco-spiritual philosophy rooted in balance and harmony built on a deep, abiding love that emanates from an open heart. In Quechua, the language of the Incas, these five principles are termed *munay*, *yachay*, *llank'ay*, *kawsay*, and *ayni*.

*Munay* (pronounced moon-aye) represents feelings and emotions and means love and amiability. Its outer expression is natural beauty and loveliness. In its highest form, *munay* manifests through benevolence or loving-kindness. When made personal, it reflects the harmony of nature in one's character through a tranquil mind and an open heart. The Q'ero incline toward integration and balance in all that they feel, think, and do. Their compass is beauty, *munay*. Beauty and happiness make an inseparable pair.

*Yachay* (pronounced ya-chey) means to learn and know. It also means the knowledge of things and the deep, abiding wisdom found in ancient memories.

True knowledge, the Q'ero believe, comes from direct personal experience guided by insight and intuition. In its highest form, it suggests the superior consciousness one arrives at through the proper cultivation of one's life based upon spiritual principles. This also implies a careful unlearning of thought patterns that don't serve our well-being and happiness.

*Llank'ay* (pronounced yan-kay) means to labor and suggests an attitude of service through physical work. But the spirit of *llank'ay* goes beyond physical labor to include mental and creative work, and includes performing shamanic ceremonies and conducting healings. Balancing outer and inner work produces harmony. In its highest form, it manifests as personal power and physical strength achieved through self-discipline.

*Kawsay* (pronounced cow-say) means life and suggests the perennial vibration from the energy of the life force. It forms the matrix for all organic things, living and non-living. To the Q'ero, a stone is just as sentient as an animal. All things, according to the Andean worldview, are imbued with *kawsay*, and everything is connected through a web of living energy.

*Ayni* (pronounced aye-knee) is the most important of the five principles and means reciprocity and respect. It is the central theme of the Andean way of life. Without *ayni*, there is no renewal cycle. The absence of renewal is taking place on a global scale. We have taken from the earth for centuries and have given nothing back. We have been disrespectful of the whale, the tree, the fish, the planet's biosphere, and seas. *Ayni* implies the conscious and willing acknowledgement of the interconnection between humans and the natural world that sustains us. By reciprocating all the good that comes to you from others, nature, and the world of living energy, the circle of life is complete.

My years in Peru gradually began to make sense. When I put aside all my reading on metaphysics and Eastern philosophy, I realized the message of the Q'ero was very simple. To practice the first principle, *munay*, you have to open and clear your heart. To practice the second principle, *yachay*, you have to let go of opinions, judgments, and the idea that accumulation of information equals knowledge. To practice the third principle, *llank'ay*, you have to act from a place of selflessness, knowing, and love.



These three principles are synergistic. They work as a whole and are interdependent and mutually supportive. For example, love and beauty, *munay*, make daily life pleasing and soften the hard edges of stress. Without initiating right action, *llank'ay*, nothing gets done and things stagnate. Action for its own sake can lead to conflict and error; therefore, the best action proceeds from a place of experience and knowing, *yachay*.

Think of these three principles as the ability to feel, to think, and to act. To let negative emotions control your thoughts leads to anxiety and behavioral challenges. To act without thinking, causing a cycle of errors, each compounding the other until there is no way out. But to over think a situation can lead to unbalanced, dry logic. Lacking heart, you can be right but unhappy.

Reciprocity, *ayni*, guides them all and brings the three together as a synergistic whole. There is no particular starting or ending point. Together, they form the circle of life. And life, *kawsay*, embraces them and all things while continuously evolving towards the creative ideal.

These are amazing principles from a good people. But what value do they have in the modern world? To answer that, perhaps a better starting point is in order.

What is the greatest question of our time? The same concerns that have occupied humans forever are still important. How am I to be happy? How can I avoid pain and prevent disease? In our post-modern, first-world society, because we have solved many of these basic questions, we now have the leisure to contemplate deeper and more intriguing ones. How can we use our minds to alter reality? Can the science of mind attract more money? Fascinating concerns! Indeed. But are these the most important questions that should occupy our time?

A tremendous irony exists in our contemporary world. The social and psychological research evidence clearly points out that the more wealth Americans have, the unhappier we become. What is missing? Perhaps it's reciprocity. A little bit of *ayni* could go a long way in our times of personality disorders, anxiety, and narcissism. We have created a society in which people find it difficult to show basic affection. In place of community, we experience greater and greater degrees of loneliness and alienation. Family values and a sense of community are far stronger among our less wealthy neighbors to the south. They are also happier. Perhaps we should use the power of our minds for personal healing, inner satisfaction, and greater self-worth... and saving the planet.

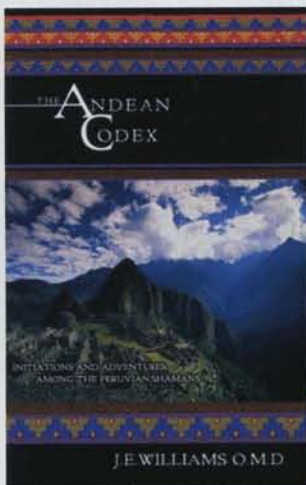
The Q'ero abide in an abundance of love and indissoluble resilient values. They have lived at elevations higher than any

other people on earth for more than 1,500 years without dependence on the external support of science or centralized government. I don't mean to suggest that we abandon modern progress and return to primitive living or that we should idealize the old ways to such a degree that it prevents further development. But wouldn't it be nice to find the Garden of Eden within?

The challenge we face is to find ways of enjoying the satisfaction of harmony and happiness found in traditional communities, like the Q'ero, while benefiting fully from the material achievements of Western civilization. I am working on just such an experiment in my own life as well as with projects among the Q'ero.

By living a truly ethical life, as contained in the five principles discussed in this article, without the dogma of religion or the tunnel vision of political ruthlessness that are accelerating environmental destruction on an unprecedented scale, where we put the welfare of others first and provide for their happiness, while providing for our own, we can change our world.

Perhaps it's time to take a closer look at the value system of indigenous peoples who know the value of sustainability and the truth contained in five simple principles. We are very close to the tipping point. For the sake of the planet, our own welfare, and the future of our children and grandchildren, let's make it a turning point.



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