



Sacred
PATHWAYS

IFS & Ayahuasca Retreat in Brazil

INNER PREPARATION GUIDE



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WHY PREPARATION MATTERS

Entering the field of Sacred Plant Medicine is not only a journey with the plants — it is a meeting with yourself. What unfolds in ceremony depends less on the songs or the dose, and more on the inner field you bring.

Over three months, this preparation process helps you cultivate the ground of awareness, compassion, and trust from which transformation can truly grow. It is designed to:

Build safety and trust within your inner system by befriending the parts that protect you.

- Clarify what you are truly aligning with — what feels most essential for your healing and evolution.
- Strengthen your connection to Self — the calm, curious, and compassionate presence that can hold any experience with grace.
- In the traditions we work with — Huni Kuin and Santo Daime — preparation is sacred work. It is how the body, mind, and spirit learn to hold firm (*segura firme*) and stay rooted while the Medicine moves through you.

Through readings, guided practices, and weekly Holding Space sessions, you will gradually attune your inner system to the language of the Medicine. This process is not about striving, but about softening — allowing the inner soil to become receptive, grounded, and ready.

The Medicine meets you where you are. This journey helps you arrive with openness, integrity, and Self-presence — so that when the time comes, you can meet the force of the ceremony not as something to endure, but as something to dance with in awareness.

How the Preparation Journey Unfolds

This three-month journey invites you to move at a natural pace. It combines self-guided practices with shared presence and reflection — so that your preparation becomes both intimate and supported.

At the heart of the process lies the Holding Space practice — your ongoing partnership of mutual presence and witnessing. This is the thread that holds the entire container. Through it, you are accompanied, seen, and supported as you explore your inner landscape.

At the beginning of each month, an Online Preparation Circle introduces the new theme and opens a shared field for reflection. You'll be guided through readings and practices that support the unfolding of that month's focus.

This document follows the rhythm we invite you to explore — but it is not a prescription. You may choose to flow exactly as outlined or move at your own tempo. Trust what feels right for your system. The structure is here to hold you, not to confine you.

At a glance

Month 1: Befriend protectors → establish inner safety.

Month 2: Listen for intention → align psyche and nervous system.

Month 3: Anchor in Self → cultivate presence and readiness for ceremony.



Overview of the Three-Month Journey

Month 1 – Befriending Your Protectors

Theme: Safety, trust, and inner relationship

Purpose: To meet the parts of you that protect and guide your experience, and to cultivate inner safety as the ground of your preparation.

Elements:

Reading: My First Ayahuasca Experience

Practice: Befriending Your Protectors

Begin your Holding Space partnership

Month 2 – Intention Setting

Theme: Listening to what truly wants to unfold

Purpose: To clarify direction and intention — not as a fixed goal, but as an inner alignment that engages both psyche and nervous system.

Elements:

Reading: Intention Setting

Practices: Three Intention Setting practices

Ongoing Holding Space sessions

Month 3 – Anchoring in Self

Theme: Presence, embodiment, and readiness

Purpose: To strengthen Self-presence and prepare for the ceremonial field — learning how to stay rooted while the Medicine moves through you.

Elements:

Reading: Self as Anchor — The Art of Firmness in the Force

Practice: Self as Anchor

Ongoing Holding Space sessions

HOLDING SPACE PRACTICE

This practice is a gentle invitation into presence — a way of holding one another with care, compassion, and depth as we prepare for and integrate the sacred medicine work ahead.

Rooted in the spirit of the **Internal Family Systems (IFS)** approach, this practice cultivates **Self-to-Self presence** — a way of being with one another that invites curiosity, compassion, and openness toward all that arises. As you witness and are witnessed, you create a space where both Self and parts can be met with love and awareness.

As you move through your retreat journey, you will be paired with a **Holding Space Companion** — someone to accompany and witness your process. Together, you create a space where both of you are welcomed fully, just as you are. Each week, you are invited to meet for about one hour, offering each other 15–20 minutes of spacious presence.



What It Means to Hold Space

Holding space is not a technique. It is an energetic practice — one born from your inner state of being and quality of presence.

Each person brings their own energy into a space, but when one or both enter with the intention to hold space, the atmosphere begins to shift. People feel calmer, safer, and more able to rest into themselves. They feel seen without being judged, and heard without needing to explain. They begin to remember something essential: who they truly are.

HELD SPACE = AN INTENTIONALLY CREATED ENERGETIC CONTAINER OR “COCOON.”

It is a space where transformation becomes possible simply because we are received and held.

When you hold space, you are not trying to fix, guide, or change the other. You open your heart. You let go of control. You listen without an agenda. You become a presence that allows transformation to unfold — not through effort, but through stillness and love - Self-energy.

◆ **Structure of the Practice**

Total Time: ~60 minutes

Format: Each partner takes a turn being held

Flow:

- Grounding together (2–3 min)
 - Partner A shares while Partner B listens (15–20 min)
 - Short pause or transition
 - Switch roles
 - Optional 2–3 min closing
-

◆ **Settling In: A Simple Grounding**

Before beginning, take a moment to arrive together. You might invite each other to:

- Close your eyes gently
- Feel your feet on the ground, your body supported
- Take a couple of slow breaths
- Feel into the space between you — the connection you’re creating together
- Honor the time you’ve both made
- Let the energy of the day begin to settle and soften

No need to rush. This 2–3 minute pause is a doorway into deeper presence. Let it be a moment to simply be — before any words of the practice are spoken.

◆ For the One Listening

You are not here to solve anything. You are here to hold. To allow. To witness.

Let your presence be the support.

You are invited to listen from **Self to Self** — from that spacious, compassionate awareness within you to that same essence in the other.

With curiosity. Compassion. Calm. Clarity. Courage...

If you notice parts of you wanting to help, analyze, or fix, gently acknowledge them — thank them for their care — and invite them to relax back, so more of your Self can be present.

Let go of the urge to interpret or respond. Simply receive the other person in their wholeness.

If a question arises from deep presence, you may offer it gently — as a way of deepening, not directing. You may ask none, or just one. The purpose is never to guide the other somewhere, but to open space for what wants to emerge.

Examples:

- “What are you noticing inside as you speak?”
- “Would it feel okay to stay with that a little longer?”
- “Is there more that this part would like to share?”
- “If that part could speak freely, what might it want you to know?”
- “What’s the emotion or felt sense that comes with that?”
- “What would feel nourishing or supportive for this part right now?”
- “What quality of Self might feel helpful to bring in here — like compassion, courage, confidence, or calm?”

Even a well-intended question can close a space if it doesn’t come from true presence. So always feel free to simply breathe and hold.

Silence is welcome.

Some of the deepest holding happens in stillness.

◆ For the One Being Held

This space is for you. You are not expected to perform, explain, or resolve anything.

You are simply invited to share what’s present — to speak from your heart, or from any part of you that wants to be heard.

If you’re familiar with the IFS (Internal Family Systems) approach, you are encouraged to **speak for your parts, rather than from them.**

For example:

- “A part of me feels anxious about the ceremony...”
- “There’s a part that really longs to be accepted...”

This creates space for Self to be present, while honoring the voices within.

If you notice that you feel very blended with a part, that’s okay. You can simply acknowledge it: “I notice I’m really in this part right now.” Even that awareness begins to bring in Self energy.

You might speak about:

- What’s alive in you today
 - Your intention for the ceremonies
 - A quality you long to reconnect with (peace, joy, strength, courage...)
 - Something you’re learning or remembering about yourself
 - Or... you might not speak at all, and that’s welcome too
-

◆ **Closing Together**

After both have shared, take a few moments to acknowledge what you’re each taking with you — a feeling, an image, or a quality of Self that was present. You might simply say “thank you” and rest in silence for a moment before parting.

◆ **Why This Matters**

People heal in the presence of love. Love doesn’t need things to be different. It simply makes space. When we hold space for each other in this way, something sacred opens. We soften. We feel. We remember who we are beneath the noise of life.

Transformation isn’t about becoming someone new.
It’s about returning — to what was always true.

✧ Themes & Guiding Questions for Holding Space

These themes and questions accompany your **Holding Space** partnership and can also be used for personal journaling or reflection. They are here to help you slow down, listen inwardly, and connect with what is truly present — in yourself, with your Holding Space partner, and within the unfolding preparation journey.

Your **Holding Space sessions** form the heart of this process. Through them, you are witnessed and accompanied — creating a shared field of presence that supports your inner exploration. Each month introduces a focus that helps prepare the inner ground for the ceremonies ahead.

At the start of each month, we open the theme together in an **Online Preparation Circle**, followed by a suggested practice and guiding reflections. You can bring these prompts into your Holding Space meetings, or use them for journaling between sessions.

There is no right way to move through them — trust your rhythm. Let what resonates guide your exploration.

This is not about analyzing or achieving anything. It's about creating space for what is alive — to be met, felt, and held in awareness. Some prompts may help reveal what no longer serves you; others may open what is emerging. All are invitations — gentle doorways into presence, not tasks to complete.

You may also explore journaling through **free-flow or stream-of-consciousness writing**: set a timer, write without editing, let your pen flow and the words move through you. You don't need to make sense; you just need to listen.



Month 1 — Guiding Questions and Prompts for Befriending Your Protectors

Theme: Safety, trust, and inner relationship

This first month is about arriving — gently meeting what is already here.

Before looking ahead or setting intentions, we begin by noticing the sensations, emotions, and parts that are alive as you enter this time of preparation.

Some parts may feel open and curious, others cautious or protective. All are welcome. This is the time to meet your **protectors** with compassion — to listen to their concerns, honor their roles, and build the trust that will allow deeper layers of your system to unfold safely.

Through this, you begin to cultivate the inner safety that becomes the foundation of your work with the Medicine.

Bring these reflections into your Holding Space sessions or journaling:

What's Present Now & Inner Landscape

- What's alive in you right now?
- What do you notice in your body or your heart?
- Are there parts of you that want to be seen or heard today?
- What emotions or sensations arise as you think about the retreat?
- Is there something you are carrying with you into this process?

Concerns, Fears & Protectors

- What is it like to step into this space of preparation?
- Are there parts that feel anxious, hesitant, or in need of control?
- What fears or protective impulses are showing up?
- What are they trying to prevent or protect you from?
- What would help these parts feel more supported or at ease?
- What might your system need to feel safe stepping into this deeper work?

Healing begins by seeing your parts clearly and welcoming them home.

Month 2 — Guiding Questions and Prompts for Intention Setting

Theme: Listening to what truly wants to unfold

In this second month, we turn toward **intention** — the inner alignment that directs your healing and growth.

This is not about forming a mental goal but about listening to what your system, heart, and life are ready for.

As neuroscience shows, what we attend to reshapes the brain's pathways; what we bring presence to begins to transform.

When combined with Self-energy, intention becomes both a biological and spiritual invitation to reorganize around wholeness.

In your Holding Space sessions or journaling, explore both your direction and your intention:

 *Intention, Longing & Direction*

- What is your deepest intention for this retreat?
- If you could receive one thing from this experience, what would it be?
- Which parts of you are most invested in this intention — and why?
- What old roles, beliefs, or patterns are ready to release or transform?
- What do you hope will become possible in your life after this retreat?
- Which Self qualities (such as courage, clarity, or compassion) feel essential to this intention?
- If each of the ceremonies carried a distinct theme, what would you wish to open to in each one?
- What are you longing to heal or shift?
- What burdens feel ready to be released?
- Are there parts that feel stuck, tired, or forgotten?
- What do you most long to remember or experience again?
- If you could whisper a prayer to the Medicine, what would it be?

Intention is not a goal to achieve but a direction to embody — a living compass that guides the unfolding of your healing.

Month 3 — Guiding Questions and Prompts for Anchoring in Self

Theme: Presence, embodiment, and readiness

As the ceremonies draw near, this final month invites you to **anchor in Self** — to cultivate the firmness and trust that allow you to stay rooted even as the Medicine moves.

You are learning to meet intensity not by control or resistance, but through presence and surrender.

Segura firme — hold firm — means remembering your center, your breath, your embodied awareness, even when everything around and within you is in motion.

Bring these reflections into your Holding Space sessions:

 *Readiness & Self-Presence*

- What supports you to feel grounded and centered in your body?
- What helps you stay connected to Self when strong emotions arise?
- Which anchors or rituals remind you of your presence and safety?
- What does “holding firm” mean for you in your own words?
- How do you experience balance between surrender and steadiness?
- What qualities of Self do you wish to embody as you enter ceremony?
- What would it mean to trust the unfolding completely?

As you anchor in Self, preparation ripens into readiness — not through effort, but through embodied awareness. From here, you meet the ceremony as both participant and witness: open, grounded, and aligned with the current of the Medicine.

BEFRIENDING YOUR PROTECTORS

Before entering a ceremony space, it's natural to feel inner resistance, fears, or doubts. These are not “problems” to fix — they are voices of your protective system, often called *protectors* in Internal Family Systems (IFS) language.

To get a sense of how these protectors can influence a plant medicine journey, you're invited to read about Gabriella's first experience with ayahuasca:

👉 [My First Ayahuasca Experience – Life Architect Blog](#)

This story offers a living example of how protectors can shape, color, or even limit the unfolding of a ceremony — and how, when approached with curiosity and respect, they can become allies in transformation.

Protectors are survival strategists, gatekeepers of your inner world. They hold the keys to safety and to whether deeper layers of your psyche can open. At the same time, they also influence how fully you can meet the ceremony itself — as both an inner journey and a sacred encounter with the plant medicine.



They are deeply committed to:

- Keeping life together
- Maintaining control over experiences
- Avoiding risks, humiliation, or overwhelm
- Minimizing the activation of more vulnerable parts of you (your exiles)

They may do this by trying to hold you together — staying in control, avoiding embarrassment, and keeping you from feeling exposed or vulnerable. This can show up as controlling the environment, evaluating and judging, people-pleasing, worrying, scanning for danger, or shutting you down through distraction, numbing, or dissociation.

In short: they have kept you alive and functioning. And when honored, they can also allow the journey with the medicine to unfold with greater trust, openness, and safety.

How to Use This Practice

This is a self-reflection exercise to prepare for your ceremony by getting to know your protectors — the parts of you that work tirelessly to keep you safe and in control. When honored and reassured, they can soften and allow you to step more openly into the journey.

What you'll need:

- A quiet space where you won't be disturbed
- Paper (preferably a larger sheet so you can draw freely)
- Coloring pens or pencils (colors often help parts feel seen)
- An open, curious mindset

You might spend **45-60 minutes**, or return to it over several days. Move slowly, take breaks if needed, and approach your protectors with respect.

Beginning the Practice

We are preparing for a big step: entering a plant medicine ceremony. This is an unknown journey — mysterious, unpredictable, sometimes beautiful, sometimes challenging. Even if you've sat before, each experience is new. And this anticipation may stir things inside you.

Often, when we approach such thresholds, our protectors show up. They might appear in different ways:

- As thoughts or inner voices (“This could go wrong” / “You'd better be careful”)
- As bodily sensations (tightness in the belly, restless energy, tension in the jaw)
- As emotions (fear, doubt, irritability, even a numbing flatness)

- Or simply as shapes, colors, or vague presences

All of these are welcome. Protectors don't need to be fully "known" or named. They just need to be acknowledged.

Step 1. Invite Your Protectors to the Fire

Find a quiet space. You may close your eyes if that feels comfortable, or simply soften your gaze. Imagine yourself sitting at a fire, preparing for the journey ahead. Slowly, one by one, your protectors gather around the flames. They might show up as thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, or simply as colors and shapes.

As you listen inside, you may need to open your eyes again to draw or write, and then return inward. Allow yourself to move gently between the two — imagining, listening, and then marking down what appears.

First ask: "What concerns do you carry as I approach this ceremony?"

- Ask it again and again, patiently. Each time a new concern arises, note it down or give it a mark, color, or shape around the fire. Continue until no more answers come.

Then ask: "What are you protecting me from?"

- Again, repeat the question as needed. Each answer can be drawn, written, or symbolized around the fire, adding to the circle.

By the end, you'll have a circle of shapes, colors, or words around the fire — an image of your protectors, their concerns, and the deeper vulnerabilities they are guarding.

Step 2. Gentle Agreements & Anchors of Safety

Your protectors don't need to be pushed aside in the ceremony. They can become your **allies**. When honored, included, and given clear roles, they can sit by your side, supporting you rather than taking over.

Listen and Reassure

Turn toward each protector and reassure *I honor the ways you've cared for me. In this ceremony, I invite you to sit beside me as an ally:*

- "What would help you feel safe enough to let me open to this journey?"
- "What would make it easier for you to trust me and stay close without needing to control the experience?"

Offer Lighter Roles & Anchors of Safety

Your protectors don't need to hold the heavy burden of control. Instead, you can invite them to take on gentler, supportive roles. These can be paired with simple **anchors of safety** — practices or objects that remind you both that you are safe and present.

Examples:

- **Breath:** A protector can watch over your steady rhythm (in for 4, out for 6).
- **Eyes:** One might remind you to open your eyes if you feel lost.
- **Touchstone:** Another can hold onto a grounding object in your hand.
- **Mantra:** One might repeat a phrase like *"I am here. I am myself."*
- **Reflection:** A protector can note impressions for you to reflect on later.

These lighter roles and anchors give protectors something tangible to lean on, helping them stay by your side as allies rather than needing to take over.

Place Them in Your Drawing

On your fire drawing, add marks, colors, or symbols that represent these anchors. Imagine each protector choosing the one that helps them feel most at ease.

Closing the Practice

When you feel ready, set down your pen and look at what has taken shape around the fire. This drawing is not meant to be finished or perfect — it's simply a reflection of what showed up today.

You may notice that some protectors feel more at ease now, while others might come back with new concerns in the days ahead. That's natural. You can revisit this practice at any time — adding shapes, colors, or new answers as they arise.

There's no need to do it all in one sitting. Even small moments of listening make a difference. What matters is that your protectors are no longer left unseen. During the ceremony, you may remember your fire drawing. It can remind you that your protectors are sitting with you as allies, and that your anchors are always close.

INTENTION SETTING

In our approach, we see the intention not as a fixed outcome or a personal agenda to strive for, but as an alignment with our parts and something deeper inside of us.

In Indigenous traditions, ceremony is relational. We don't enter the space to "get something" or focus only on individual healing, but to come into the right relationship with oneself, with Nature, and with Spirit. Intention is collective as much as it is personal. It includes our ancestors, our communities, and our connection with the Earth. Healing becomes a weaving back into life.

The sacred plant medicine of ayahuasca is not seen as a tool, but as a Teacher, Guardian, or Elder — approached with humility, reverence, and care. We don't command her to perform. We arrive open to receive and learn.



From this perspective, intention is not a demand — but a quiet inner orientation, a soft turning toward what truly matters. Before stepping into the ceremonial space, we are not asked to define what we want, but to listen deeply:

What in me longs to be remembered, felt, or restored to wholeness?

Through the lens of Internal Family Systems (IFS), we understand that many of us carry parts shaped by wounds, burdens, and beliefs from earlier experiences. These parts may be protective, withdrawn, striving, or burdened. Rather than pushing them aside, we slow down and listen. We include them in the journey with curiosity and compassion.

These parts are our allies. And they, too, belong in the ceremony.

Rather than bypassing or silencing them, we invite them into the process. During the preparation phase, you'll be gently supported through following IFS practices:

- **Guided inner explorations** to sense what's alive in your system and build a relationship with it
- **Holding Space Practice** — learning how to accompany yourself and others in a grounded, compassionate way
- **Reflections and invitations** to notice which inner qualities may be longing to return

When intention arises from this place — one that honours the full complexity of your system — the Plant Teachers respond. They can reveal hidden burdens, reconnect us with forgotten parts, and illuminate what's been lost. In this way, the ceremony becomes a living dialogue with Self, with Spirit, with Nature, and with the lineage that holds us.

Intention and Neuroplasticity — The Biology of Transformation

While intention is a relational and inner orientation, it also has a very real foundation in the body. Modern neuroscience shows that the brain is continually reshaping itself — a process known as **neuroplasticity**. Every experience, thought, or emotional focus strengthens certain neural pathways while allowing others to fade.

When we set an intention with genuine presence and emotion, we tell the brain: *this matters*. Attention and intention act as signals that mobilize the nervous system toward learning and adaptation. New connections begin to form, and old patterns that no longer serve us can soften.

From the perspective of **Internal Family Systems**, intention becomes a beacon inside the nervous system — it says, “This is the direction of my healing; this is how my parts begin to realign within themselves and reconnect with Self and Self energy.”

As the Self engages and the parts attune to that intention, old burdens can release, the system reorganizes around greater harmony, and new pathways for healing take form.

In the ceremonial context, **ayahuasca** appears to amplify this process. Research suggests that plant medicines like ayahuasca can enhance neuroplasticity, increasing the brain's capacity to form new connections and release rigid patterns. This creates a window of openness where healing, insight, and integration become deeply possible.

In this way, **intention-setting is not only a spiritual act but a biological invitation to transform** — aligning the wisdom of mind, body, and spirit in the same direction.

Different Parts, Different Intentions

As you begin your preparation, you may already have a sense of what you want from this retreat. A clear intention may arise — something you've been longing for or hoping to resolve. Sometimes this intention is beautifully aligned with your deeper truth. But at other times, it may emerge from a single part of you — one that carries its own hopes, fears, or agendas.

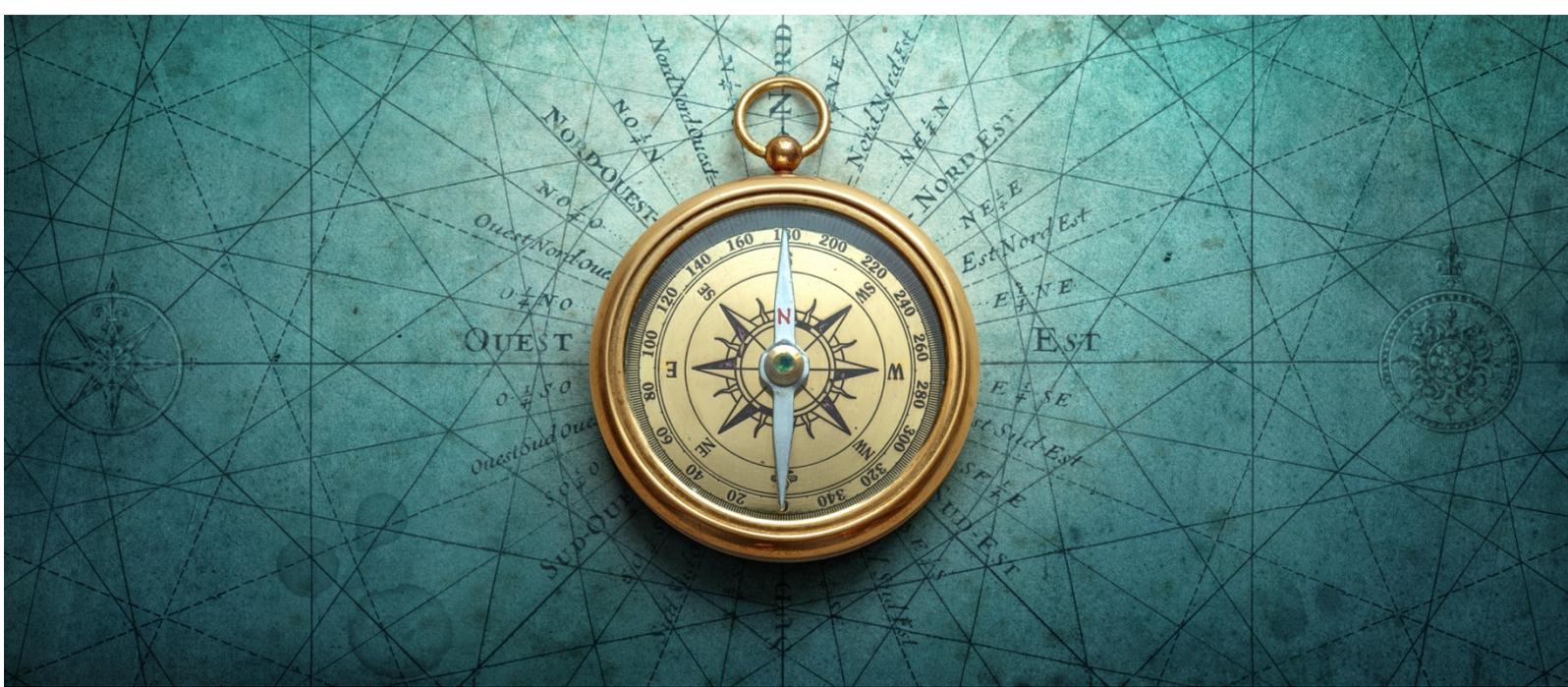
Perhaps a determined protector part wants to finally fix something, or an inner critic demands that you "do better" this time. Another part may be tired of suffering and simply wants relief. These intentions are understandable — they often arise from care, even if they appear controlling or desperate. Beneath them, there is usually an exile that carries pain or unmet needs.

Moving toward the ceremony with such an intention can sometimes narrow the field of experience. When the focus becomes "getting rid of" something — fear, shame, confusion, sadness — the system stays in a subtle posture of resistance. Healing, however, requires inclusion. Every part needs to be seen, heard, and welcomed into the process.

That is why, instead of clinging to a single fixed intention, we invite you to slow down and listen to the inner diversity of your system. Different parts may hold different intentions — and each one deserves a moment of your attention. You may find one part yearning for freedom, another asking for peace, another wanting to feel more connected, and yet another simply afraid of what's coming.

The aim is not to choose between them, but to let your **Self** — the calm, spacious, compassionate presence at the center of your being — hold them all. From that place of Self-leadership, your final intention can arise as something larger, wiser, and more inclusive. An intention that honours the truth of all your parts rather than serving the agenda of just one.

When intention comes from that integrated place, it becomes less of a goal and more of a prayer. It opens a conversation with the medicine.



Examples of Clear Intentions

Intention emerges uniquely for each of us, yet certain themes often arise on the path of healing and remembering.

Below are examples to help you feel into what a clear, heartfelt intention might sound like. You may recognize yourself in one or more of them — or they may simply inspire the shape of your own.

Let these examples serve as invitations rather than prescriptions.

💛 Reconnecting with Joy & Playfulness

- How can I reconnect with joy as a guiding force in my life?
- May I rediscover the freedom to play and laugh.
- I want to release the heaviness I carry and open to lightness and pleasure.

🌱 Healing Old Wounds & Letting Go

- I want to let go of the belief that I am not enough.
- How can I free myself from the pattern I inherited but no longer serves me?
- May I release shame and learn to stand in my worth.

Cultivating Inner Safety & Trust

- How can I feel safe being fully myself?
- I want to rebuild trust with my body and my inner guidance.
- May I create a home within myself where all parts feel welcome.

Clarity & Direction

- What is the next step on my soul's path?
- I long to feel more clarity about my work and how to serve in alignment.
- I want to listen deeply for what life is asking of me right now.

Healing Relationships & Opening the Heart

- May I open my heart to love and connection without fear.
- I want to understand and heal old relational patterns.
- How can I show up with more compassion and presence in my relationships?

Courage & Empowerment

- I want to reclaim my voice and power.
- May I live with more courage, aligned with my deeper truth.
- How can I embody my strength without losing tenderness?

Spiritual Connection

- I long to reconnect with the sacred.
- May I feel held by something greater than myself.
- How can I trust the unfolding of life more fully?

THREE PRACTICES FOR DISCOVERING INTENTION

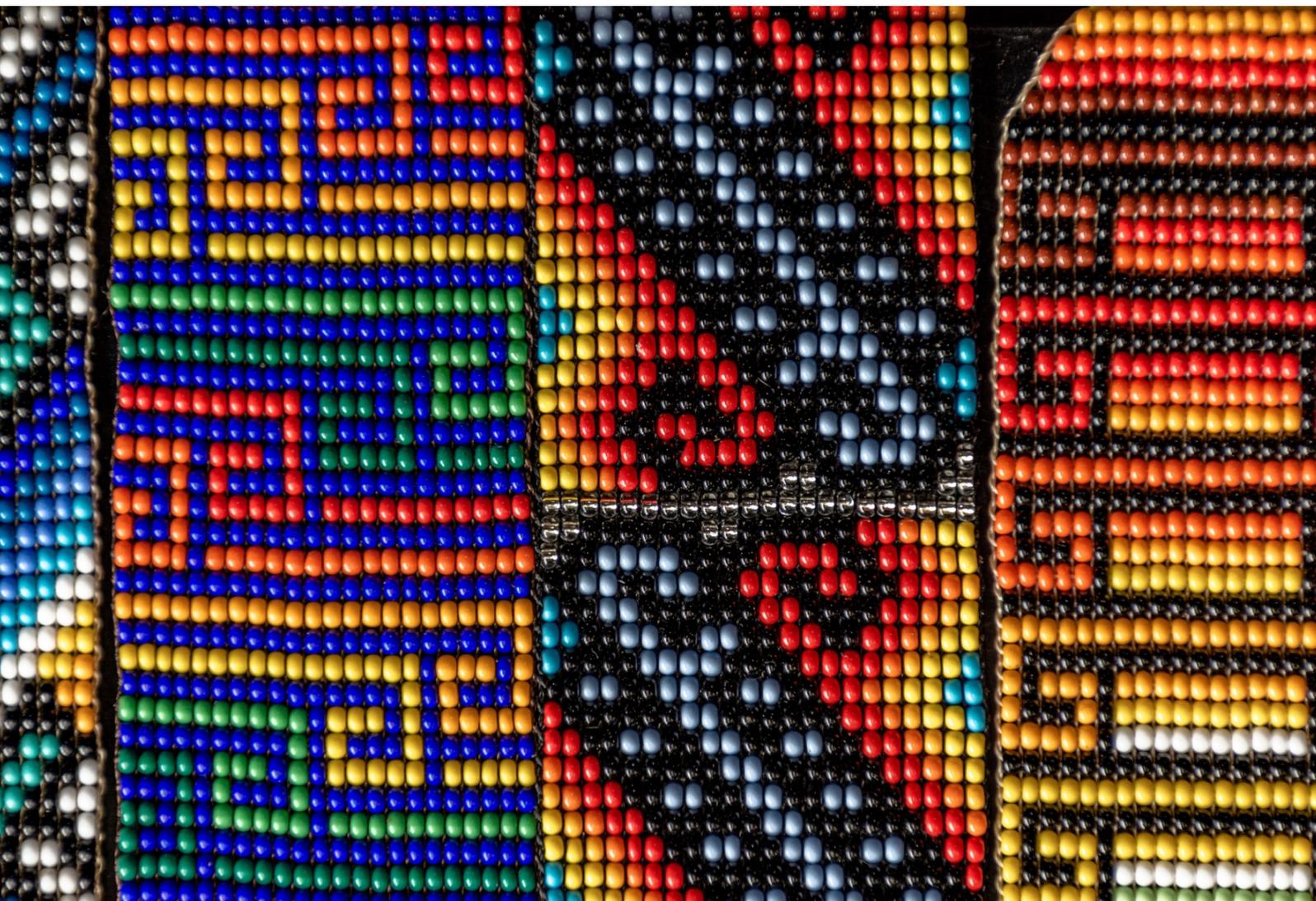
Each person connects to intention in a unique way. Some find clarity through quiet inner reflection, others through movement and embodiment, and others through meditation and creative expression.

To support this diversity of experience, we invite you to explore **three practices** — each offering a different doorway into your inner world:

- A **contemplative practice** for inner dialogue and Self-connection
- A **movement-based practice** for embodied reflection
- A **meditative and creative practice** for symbolic listening

You may feel drawn to one, or you may wish to experience them all at different moments in your preparation.

There is no right sequence. Each is a complete path in itself — and together, they offer a holistic way to let your intention unfold from within.



1. A CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE — Inner Dialogue with Parts

You can use the following practice as a way to clarify and align your intention before the retreat. You may do it in writing, through inner dialogue, or during quiet reflection.

In our experience, choosing an intention is not something that can be done in a single practice or technique. It's a process that takes time. Our intentions grow within us.

Because of this, the practice described below is not meant for you to decide on your intention, but rather to begin and support the inner process of discovering it. You can return to this exercise several times, finding something new each time.

It may be that after doing this practice, you already feel clear about the intention you want to bring. Even then, we invite you to give yourself more time. Having a few more days—or even weeks—to contemplate your intention(s) can help ensure that your choice is deeply rooted and aligned with you and your parts.

With time, it will likely become increasingly clear which intention feels most right for you.

Also, remember that we will have three ceremonies during the retreat. You are welcome to bring a different intention to each one, which means you can have up to three intentions (making it easier for those parts of us who have a hard time making decisions, right?).

At the same time, it's good to have a primary intention—something most important in your life right now—because sometimes it takes more than one ceremony with ayahuasca to receive the healing you are looking for. It's also perfectly fine to stay with a single intention and let the process unfold through all three ceremonies.

1. Arrive in presence

Find a few quiet minutes. Sit or lie down comfortably. Bring attention to your breath and body. Sense your feet on the ground, your spine supported. Invite your awareness to settle.

2. Acknowledge all that is here

Gently ask inside: “What parts of me are here as I think about this retreat?”

You might notice excitement, doubt, fear, control, hope, or longing. Let each part show itself without judgment.

3. Listen to their intentions

Ask each part:

“What do you hope will happen in the retreat?”

“What would make this retreat meaningful for you?”

Write down or simply feel their answers. Don't rush. Let every part have a voice.

If parts show up judging other parts' hopes and intentions, turn towards them, thank them for sharing their concerns, and let them know that we are not choosing any intention yet — we are just hearing all the parts out.

4. Appreciate their positive intent

Even if a part's wish seems unrealistic or demanding (“I just want to be fixed”), recognise the care underneath. Each part wants something good — safety, connection, relief, love.

Acknowledge this goodness:

“I see that you're trying to help me.”

5. Sense into the Self

Now, see if you can hold the hopes of all of these parts at the same time in your heart and mind, while not being blended with the energies they carry. Take a few breaths, and allow some time to connect to a place of calm curiosity inside of you. Notice what happens when you turn toward all these parts from this space.

6. Double-check for intentions held by parts that are hidden

Now that those parts of you who made themselves known were heard, and that there is a deeper sense of Self-presence, check in with your internal world if there are any parts that didn't speak up yet:

“Everyone is welcome here. Are there any other parts who want to share their hopes for this retreat?”

If parts show up, hear them out, appreciate what they are bringing in, and take note of their intentions (on paper, or in your mind).

7. Explore further

Use these prompts to explore further. Wait for new insights to arise — not from effort, but from listening. It might come as a feeling, a phrase or an image.

- Which of these intentions feel most aligned with me?
- Is there another intention, a longing, that comes from a different place in me?
- What is my true intention, the one that includes all of me?
- Which intentions are unacceptable to some parts? (if some parts speak up, explore further with them about the reasons behind that)

Remember that there is no specific outcome that should happen within this practice. Finding the right intention is an organic process. When you give enough space for it and arrive at an intention that feels right for you, sense the intention and hold it lightly — as an offering, not a command.

This is how we step into ceremony — not with an agenda, but with openness. When we approach intention in this way, we are not trying to control what unfolds. We are entering into relationship — with ourselves, with Spirit, and with the vast intelligence of life that already knows what we most need to see.

🌀 2. THE LABYRINTH WALK — A Movement-Practice for Clarifying Intention

The Labyrinth and the Medicine Journey

The labyrinth mirrors the medicine journey itself — a living symbol of descent, communion, and return.

It represents the inner spiral of transformation: moving from the surface of awareness toward the deep center of Self, and then back into life with new understanding.

- **Entering the labyrinth** — like drinking the cup — crossing from ordinary consciousness into the sacred.
- **The inward spiral** — descending into the visionary field, meeting the unknown, encountering the parts of you that are ready to be seen.
- **The center** — the still point of communion, where Self meets Spirit, where inner listening ripens into knowing.
- **The return** — bringing your intention home through embodiment, choice, and daily presence.

By walking this path with awareness, you begin the ceremony before it begins — already listening, already in dialogue with the intelligence of the medicine and the deeper Self within.

This practice opens the way for your intention to reveal itself naturally, as a felt sense rather than a mental construct.



Preparing Your Space

- Choose a quiet, natural place where you can walk undisturbed.
 - You may use stones, flowers, or sticks to mark a spiral or simple pathway, or you can walk an imagined labyrinth with your body as the vessel of movement.
 - Bring a journal or something to record reflections afterward.
 - Allow the space to feel sacred — light a candle, make a small offering, or take a few deep breaths to arrive.
 - Set a **gentle timer** on your phone: *approximately 30 minutes* for your inward walk, *5–10 minutes* to rest in the center, and *another 30 minutes* for your return walk. Choose a soft sound or chime that will not startle you.
-

1. Arriving and Inviting Self-Energy

Stand at the entrance. Pause. Breathe.

Invite the qualities of Self — curiosity, compassion, clarity, calm, courage, confidence, creativity, and connectedness.

Let these qualities fill your body as you prepare to walk.

If parts of you arise — excitement, fear, confusion — simply acknowledge them: *I see you. I'm here with you.*

There is no need to push anything away. All parts are welcome on this walk.

2. Formulating Your Intention or Guiding Question

From this grounded, Self-led space, sense into your heart and ask:

“What is my deeper intention for this medicine journey?”

“What part of me is asking for healing, clarity, or release?”

“What does my system most long to remember or embody?”

You don't need to *decide* your intention. You are here to *discover* it.

Whisper your question to the Earth, to the wind, or to the medicine field itself.

3. Walking the Path — Listening with the Body

Cross the threshold and begin walking slowly.

Each step is an invitation to listen — not with the mind, but with the body.

Notice what calls your attention: a sound, a sensation, a memory, a shift in emotion.

Let the labyrinth move you. Allow your parts to speak, your body to express, your awareness to soften.

If insights or images arise, acknowledge them gently.

If nothing comes, simply keep walking. The medicine works in silence as much as in revelation.

Walk for about **30 minutes**, following your natural rhythm. Let your timer guide you gently toward the center.

4. The Center — Meeting the Self

When your timer sounds, pause or sit at the center.

This is the heart of the labyrinth — the place of stillness and surrender.

Invite whatever wants to be known.

Perhaps a word, an image, or a feeling arises. Perhaps you simply sense peace.

Trust what comes. Trust what does not.

Here, let your intention find you.

You might whisper softly:

“Show me what I most need to know now.”

“What truth is ready to emerge from within me?”

Stay here for **5–10 minutes**, resting in presence and allowing the dialogue with your deeper Self to unfold.

5. The Return — Anchoring and Readiness

When it feels complete, begin your journey back along the same path.

Let each step become a gesture of commitment:

“I am saying yes to this path.”

“I am ready to listen, to learn, to be guided.”

Walk for another **30 minutes** as you return, letting your body carry your intention — not as something to hold tightly, but as a quiet flame within.

Allow your parts to sense that something sacred is approaching, and that they will not go alone — the Self will be with them.

This is a time of alignment and trust.

As you walk back, imagine the Earth receiving your footsteps as an offering — each one saying: *I am ready to walk in harmony with what is coming.*

After the Walk

Take time to write or draw what you experienced.

What words, images, or sensations carry the essence of your intention?

Notice how your system feels — open, quiet, connected, or still unfolding.

Offer gratitude to your parts, to the Earth, and to the spirit of the medicine for walking with you. This practice can be repeated anytime — during preparation, after ceremony, or whenever you seek guidance from within.

✨ 3. THE JOURNEY TO YOUR TIMELESS SELF – A Meditative and Creative Practice for Deep Listening

1. Arriving in Presence

Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit or lie down.

Let your breath slow and deepen.

Feel the support beneath you and the rhythm of your breath anchoring you in this moment.

Notice what's here in your inner world as you prepare for this retreat.

Perhaps you sense parts that feel excited, hopeful, unsure, or protective.

You don't need to change or silence them.

Just acknowledge them:

“All parts of me are welcome to be here.”

Take a few breaths and allow your system to settle.

2. Entering the Meadow

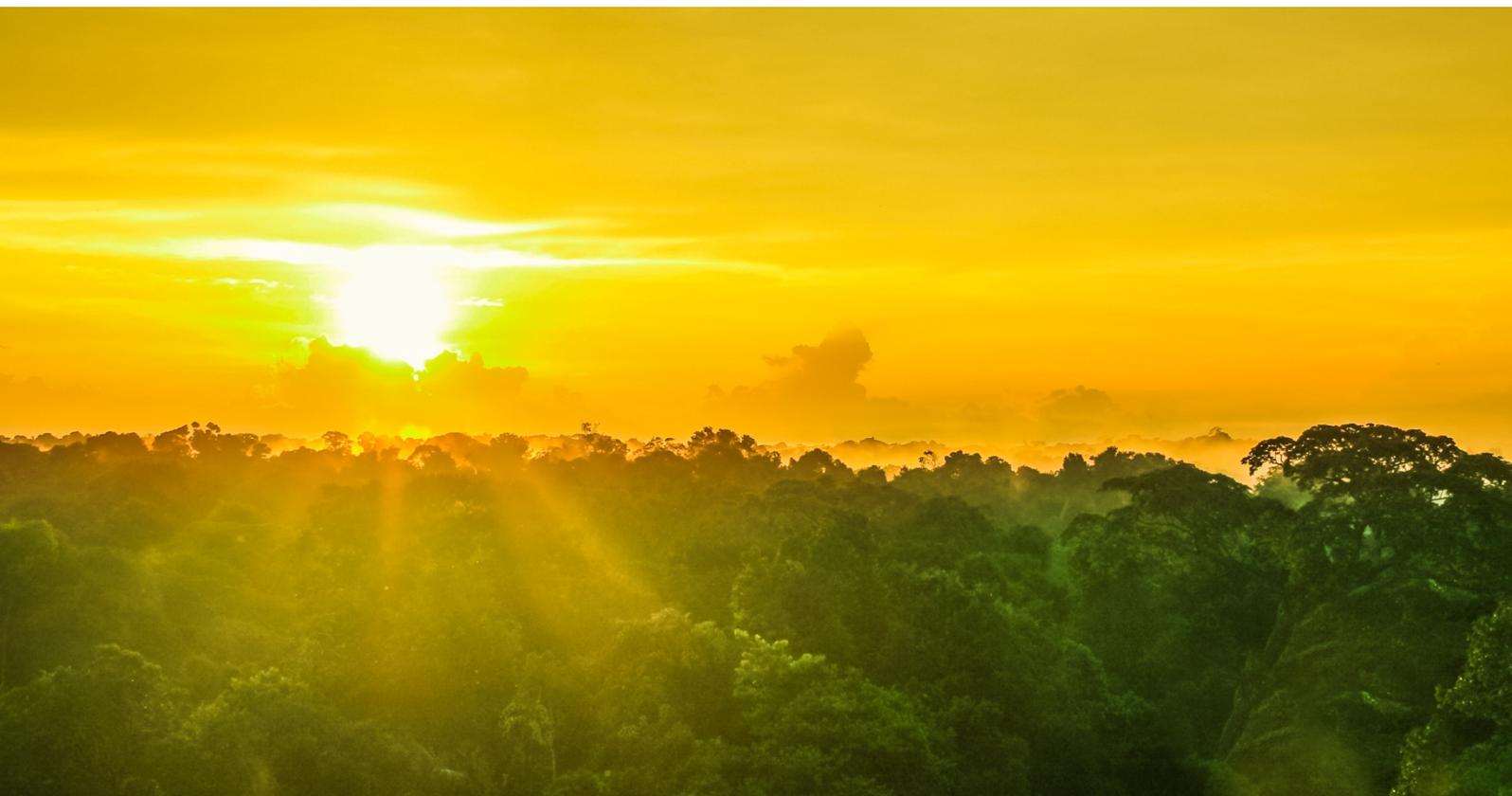
Imagine yourself standing in a wide, peaceful meadow.

The air is fresh, the sunlight soft.

You feel the steadiness of the Earth beneath your feet and a gentle breeze across your skin.

This is your sacred inner landscape — a space of safety and connection.

Ahead stands a great **Lifetree** — ancient and luminous, its roots reaching deep into the Earth, its branches stretching toward the sky.



3. Meeting the Lifetree

Walk slowly toward the Lifetree.

Place your hand on its trunk.

Feel its slow, steady pulse — the same rhythm that lives within you.

You might quietly say:

“I’m here to listen to what my system is ready to show me.”

As you make contact, a gentle doorway of light appears in the trunk — an opening that leads upward through the Lifetree.

4. Rising Through the Lifetree

Step through the doorway and feel yourself being carried upward in light.

The air becomes brighter as you rise through the glowing trunk and branches.

When you emerge above the clouds, you find yourself surrounded by clear, radiant light.

It feels calm, quiet, and spacious.

5. The Gatekeeper

A presence appears before you — the **Gatekeeper of the Upperworld**.

They might look human, animal, or simply appear as light.

When you feel ready, say silently or aloud:

“I’ve come to meet my Timeless Self — the one who remembers what my system most deeply needs right now.”

The Gatekeeper nods and opens the way.

6. Meeting Your Timeless Self

Ahead, a gentle radiance begins to take form — your **Timeless Self**.

This is the essence of you untouched by fear, striving, or story.

You might sense them as a light, a presence, or simply a peaceful awareness that feels like *home*. Allow yourself to rest in this presence.

Notice what happens in your body — perhaps a softening, a warmth, a sense of calm or tenderness.

7. Listening for What Wants Attention

From this place, begin a quiet conversation.

You might say:

“I’d like to understand what this Medicine retreat is really about for me.”

“What in me is ready to be seen, felt, or remembered?”

“Which parts of me most need care or space right now?”

Let whatever arises come as it will — an image, word, memory, or emotion.

You don’t need to make sense of it. Just notice and listen.

If any parts react — perhaps a worried or skeptical one — turn toward them gently:

“I see you. You don’t have to change or know anything right now.”

Allow your Timeless Self to stay present with all of it, offering calm, curiosity, and compassion.

8. Receiving a Symbol or Image

Sometimes your Timeless Self may offer a symbol, color, gesture, or word that represents the **seed of your intention** — something your system is ready to explore or open to.

You don’t need to understand it yet. Simply receive it.

Imagine placing it in your heart, where it can grow and reveal its meaning over time.

9. Returning

Thank your Timeless Self for their presence.

Thank the Gatekeeper and the Lifetree for their guidance.

Begin to gently descend through the branches, back through the trunk of the tree.

Feel yourself returning to the meadow, to your body, to your breath.

Take a few deep breaths.

Notice the sensations of your physical body — the weight of your hands, your feet, your chest rising and falling.

When you’re ready, slowly open your eyes.

Creative Reflection: Drawing Your Experience

Take 20–30 minutes for quiet reflection and creative expression. You'll need some paper and colored pencils, pastels, or markers.

Step 1. Recall

Close your eyes for a moment and remember what stood out in your journey — an image, a color, a symbol, a feeling, or a word.

Step 2. Express

Without trying to make it “look good,” begin to draw or paint what you remember. Let your hand move freely.

Allow shapes, colors, and textures to emerge intuitively. This is not about creating art — it's about giving form to your inner experience.

Step 3. Explore

When you're done, take a few minutes to write a few lines in response to these prompts:

- What do I notice when I look at my drawing?
- Which parts of me might be represented here?
- What message or feeling seems to come through?
- Is there a word or phrase that captures the essence of this experience?

Step 4. Listen

Let your drawing or journal entry sit for a while. You may want to revisit it in the next few days — sometimes new insights arise with time.

Remember: **Your intention will unfold naturally.** It may not come as a sentence, but as a feeling, image, or quiet knowing. Hold it gently, with curiosity and patience.

SHARE YOUR PROCESS — Allow It to Unfold

In our practice of organising retreats and facilitating group process, we have found that the act of sharing (by saying it out loud or writing it down) helps the process unfold further. Sometimes things “click” when we share where we are at in our thinking about our intention, and sometimes new insights come up as we do it.

We suggest two ways of sharing how your intention-setting process unfolds.

1. Share with your Holding Space Practice Partner

As your intention continues to unfold, remember that it is a living process — not a single statement but an evolving relationship with yourself.

In our first **Online Preparation Circle**, you’ll be paired with another participant for our **Holding Space Practice**, where you’ll have the opportunity to meet regularly and share what is emerging.

This practice will give you plenty of opportunities to share your path to discovering your intention.

2. Share with the Integration Team

If you want to share about your process with us, use this Google form: [Sacred Pathways Sharing Space](#)

We have prepared a space where you can share about where you are with your intention.

Everything that you write there will be accessible only to our **Integration Team: Michael, Gabriella, David, and Rodrigo**, and will not be shared anywhere else.

You will be able to go back and edit or add more notes to your form. After you write something there for the first time, you will get an edit link — please save it for later and use it whenever you want to add something you feel might be useful for us to be aware of.

Knowing about your intentions or how your inner preparation process is going will help the Integration Team support you better before, during, and after the retreat.

Using this form is completely optional.

SELF AS ANCHOR — THE ART OF FIRMNESS IN THE FORCE

How indigenous Amazonian and Santo Daime traditions teach us to stay connected to Self amid the force of Ayahuasca

When the Medicine moves through us, it can feel like being carried by a powerful river—luminous, unpredictable, alive. In that current, every part of us may awaken: longing, grief, confusion, wonder, fear. It's easy to be swept away by visions or sensations, to lose sight of the center of awareness that can hold it all.

At our **Sacred Pathways** retreats, we bridge two living lineages of wisdom: the indigenous Huni Kuin tradition and the Santo Daime path.

Each offers its own way of meeting the Medicine—one through the grounded relational presence of the forest, the other through the disciplined firmness of prayer and song.

Together, they invite us to explore a simple but profound question:

How can we remain anchored in Self, even in the strongest force of the Medicine?

Let's look at what these traditions can teach us about that art of staying in Self —what the Huni Kuin call *segura firme* (“hold firm”) and what, in IFS language, we understand as being in Self-presence.

The Huni Kuin Way: Presence as Relationship

The Huni Kuin, the “True People” of the western Amazon, hold a profound understanding of relationship. In their ceremonies with *Nixi Pae* (Ayahuasca), the aim is not to escape the body, but to enter deeper communion with the forest, the ancestors, and the community of beings seen and unseen. Their songs guide the vision, calling each person to remember their place in the web of life.



The Huni Kuin way of working with the Medicine is relational: we stay upright, we sing, we breathe, we stay connected to the collective field. The power of the force (*força*) is not something to endure alone; it is something to *dance with* in awareness. The elders often remind us:

“Segura firme” — hold steady.

This firmness is not rigidity. It is the embodied stance of respect, of knowing that Ayahuasca has its own consciousness, and we are here to meet it in reciprocity.

When the current becomes strong — when visions come, when the body purges, when fear arises — the teaching is to stay aware, to stay present, to breathe. Not to collapse into the experience, but to *hold* it with heart and humility.

Central to their tradition is the use of Hapé (also spelled rapé) — a sacred snuff made from finely-ground tobacco and ash, administered into the nostrils. It is used for greater clarity, focus, grounding, and alignment. For the Huni Kuin, Hapé is more than a tool — it is a relational bridge: clearing mental fog, opening channels of awareness, returning one to the earth and body.

In this way, the Huni Kuin teach us that **grounded presence** is not optional—it is foundational to deep work. This mirrors what we might call **Self-presence** in IFS. Even when intense parts surface — a terrified child, an angry protector, a longing exile — we stay in relationship with them, not lost in them. We witness them, breathe with them, sing with them. The Huni Kuin teach that this is how healing happens: through right relationship, through presence in the force.

Firmness in the Santo Daime Tradition

The **Santo Daime** is a syncretic spiritual tradition that arose in the Brazilian Amazon in the 1930s, blending Christian mysticism, Indigenous Amazonian wisdom, and Afro-Brazilian ritual roots. Its followers, known as **Daimistas**, gather in ceremony to drink the sacrament of the **Daime**—a sacred brew of Ayahuasca—while singing hymns that invoke divine light, love, and healing.

For Daimistas, the work with the Daime is a sacred discipline—a way of purification, prayer, and service. The hymns, uniforms, and carefully structured ritual form create a spiritual container where the heart can open and the soul can align with the Divine current.

The Daimistas, too, understand that transformation requires both grace and discipline. In the Santo Daime works, participants stand in rows, holding hymn books, singing through the night while the Daime unfolds within. Every movement—every step, every song—becomes a prayer. The structure itself is the teacher: a firm, luminous container where devotion and self-effort meet.

In this context, *firmness (firmeza)* is a spiritual virtue. It means being grounded, centered, and calm in the heart; connected to God, to the Divine Light that moves through all.

As one Daimista teacher puts it: *“Firmness is grace and work. Grace is what comes through the Daime; work is the discipline that allows it to flow.”*

Firmness is not about controlling the experience. It’s about being **anchored enough** that the light can move freely through you. Daimistas learn to focus on breath and heart, to pray, to sing with clarity, to stay in their row even as the current of the Daime intensifies.

This is a practice of *staying in Self* under the most demanding inner conditions — when every part might be activated, and yet one chooses to remain in alignment with the higher presence moving through.

Over time, this discipline becomes a way of life. It cultivates humility (“paying attention,” as the elders say), patience, and faith. The ritual container itself becomes an alchemical space where the human self gradually learns to serve the Divine Self — to become a conduit of Love, Light, and clarity.



Self in Altered States — Bridging the Traditions through the Lens of IFS

Working with powerful Plant Medicines and deep ceremonial spaces means entering states that can profoundly shift our ordinary sense of self. In these expanded states of consciousness, parts of us can awaken vividly—joy, awe, terror, grief, longing—and our usual inner boundaries may dissolve.

This is where the **practice of staying in Self** becomes essential.

In Internal Family Systems (IFS), the Self is the inner seat of awareness that is calm, curious, compassionate, and connected. It is the “firmness” within us that can hold all parts, no matter how intense the inner movement.

When we stay in Self, we don’t fight the parts or get lost in them.

We **witness** them.

We **befriend** them.

We **hold** them with compassion while remaining anchored in the body and the breath.

Even as the Medicine dissolves old patterns and opens the doors of perception, the Self remains the **anchor** — the steady presence that can navigate the current.



The Self as Particle and Wave

Richard Schwartz describes the Self as both individual and universal—a spark of an infinite fire, a drop of an endless ocean.

Our personal Self is like a particle—a distinct point of consciousness, capable of intimate relationship with the parts within us. Yet it is also a wave—inseparable from the larger field of the Self that permeates everything: what we might call God, Source, the Great Spirit, or the Divine.

When we enter altered states, the boundary between these two often softens.

We may feel not only more Self-led within but also connected to something vast and luminous—the larger Self that holds us all. The Medicine, in this sense, becomes a bridge between the personal and the universal: awakening the awareness that *our Self is of the same essence as the Great Self*.

Schwartz writes that as we unburden, “we increasingly experience our Self—and we also increasingly sense that our Self is connected to the Self, otherwise known as God, the Source, the Absolute Ground of Being”.

This awareness doesn’t remove us from life; it roots us more deeply in it.

The Practice of Anchoring

Through the lens of IFS, we might describe these orientations in four aspects of Self:

- **Self as anchor:** holding calm awareness, curiosity, and compassion amid intensity.
- **Self as witness:** noticing when protectors arise, when exiles speak, when overwhelm builds.
- **Self as integrator:** using the altered state not just for experience, but for healing and insight.
- **Self as embodied:** staying rooted in body, breath, and heart, rather than floating away.

In practical terms, entering an altered state intentionally—whether through ceremony, prayer, or Medicine—demands more than surrender; it calls for **a steady presence**. Without this inner anchor, we can lose orientation, merge with a part, or become swept away by the force of the experience. By staying in Self, the Medicine’s power becomes something we work **with**, not something that works **through** us without awareness.

From this perspective, the wisdom of IFS aligns beautifully with both the Huni Kuin and Santo Daime lineages:

- The **Huni Kuin** remind us to stay connected — with the forest, the song, and the collective field.

- The **Santo Daime** teaches us to stay disciplined — in prayer, in alignment, in the heart.
- **IFS** invites us to stay in Self — aware, compassionate, and calm amid the unfolding.

All three point toward the same essence: the capacity to be present with what is, to stay open to Ayahuasca while remaining rooted in one’s true center.

To stay in Self, then, is not only to stay centered within our inner system, but also to remember that our center is made of the same light that moves through the forest, the songs, and the stars.

Practical Guidance — Staying in Self in Ceremony and Integration

Below is a framework to guide your practice of Self-presence before, during, and after ceremony. It’s not a checklist to follow rigidly, but an orientation to lean into.

Pre-Ceremony Orientation

- **Set your intention:** “I will remain in my Self, be present, notice my parts, allow the Medicine to move but not lose myself.”
- **Check in:** Notice which parts are active—“I’m scared,” “I want relief,” “I want to merge,” “I’m trying to control.” Acknowledge them and invite your Self to lead.
- **Ground:** Take a few deep breaths, feel your body, your feet or seat, connect with the earth or the room.

During the Ceremony / Work

- **Grounding cues:** Feel your body, your heart, your breath.
- **Name what’s present:** “A protector is active,” “A fearful part is speaking.” Stay curious, not reactive.
- **Use the container:** Let the ritual, the songs, and the community hold you. You are not alone.
- **If swept away:** Remind yourself: “I am here. I am witnessing. Parts are active.”
- **Affirm connection:** To Medicine, to Self, to community. Ask, “How can I stay anchored in this current rather than be consumed by it?”



Post-Ceremony Integration

- **Reflect:** Which parts showed up? Which were loud or silent?
- **Dialogue:** “Thank you for trying to help. I’m here in Self and I hear you.”
- **Assess firmness:** What felt stable, what felt shaky, what support is needed next time?
- **Integrate:** How does what emerged want to live in your daily life?

Attitudinal Posture to Cultivate

- **Humility:** Paying attention with an open heart; mastery is never assumed.
- **Curiosity:** When parts activate, ask gently, “What are you telling me?”
- **Service:** Recognize this work serves not only you but others and the field of healing.
- **Patience & Faith:** Firmness develops slowly—step by step, ceremony by ceremony.
- **Relational Presence:** Stay connected internally and externally—with others, with the forest, with the Medicine.

Bringing It Together — The Sacred Pathways Approach

At **Sacred Pathways**, we root our retreat in the Huni Kuin tradition while our guardians are also shaped by the Santo Daime path. This blend offers a richly held container: the grounded relational presence of the Huni Kuin and the disciplined clarity of the Daime lineage.

In many Western settings, participants are invited to lie down with Ayahuasca—to close their eyes and be carried by the inner journey. This can be deeply valuable, allowing the psyche to soften and receive the Medicine’s intelligence. There are moments when lying down is exactly what is needed: to rest, to surrender, to let go into trust.

At Sacred Pathways, we honor that dimension of surrender while also inviting a different posture—one of **active presence**. The guiding attitude is not resistance or control, but a gentle *staying in Self*: upright, aware, connected to breath and heart, able to witness what arises.

You are fully allowed to journey, to be moved, to be carried away—and at the same time, to remember **who is journeying**. Even as the current deepens, let your Self stay present: calm, compassionate, embodied.

As our teachers say: **Segura firme — hold firm.**

When you stay in Self:

- The Medicine becomes something you **meet**, not something that sweeps you away.
- Parts can speak and be heard—the Self does not dissolve.
- Integration becomes more available—not only what happened, but who you became through it.
- The result is not just personal transformation but **service**: to yourself, your parts, others, and the world.

And yet, staying in Self is not about efforting or holding tightly. It’s about trusting presence—allowing the river to move through you while remembering the ground beneath your feet.

There are moments to soften, to surrender, to rest into the Medicine; and there are moments to stand, breathe, and hold firm. Both are sacred.

When we remember Self in the current—when awareness, compassion, and grace lead—the ceremony becomes more than a personal journey. It becomes a prayer in motion. And from that place, what unfolds is no longer something we do, but something we are moved by.

The Invitation

The Medicine teaches us how to meet ourselves.

When we stay in Self—with firmness, with heart, with humility—every experience becomes a doorway into healing.

The current that once seemed overwhelming becomes the current that carries us home.

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