



SACRED COUNSEL

Preparing for *the Vine of the Soul*

A GUIDE TO MEETING THE MEDICINE

"Transformation is not an event. It's a path."

THE NATURE OF THIS WORK

Walking toward the medicine

Ceremony does not begin the night you receive medicine. It begins the moment you decide to sit with it — and it continues long after you return home. The weeks of preparation before your retreat, and the devotion you bring to integration afterward, shape your healing as profoundly as the ceremony itself.

If you are new to this path, release any hope of a shortcut. The peoples who have carried this medicine for countless generations never treated it as one, and neither do we. What the vine offers is older and slower: a way of loosening what has been stuck for years — grief, fear, patterns of self-protection that outlived their purpose — and returning that trapped energy to your life.

We encourage you to think of this not as taking a medicine but as *entering a relationship*. Like any real relationship, it asks something of you. You receive teaching and healing; in return you bring honesty,

discipline, and the willingness to stay present with whatever you meet. What you meet will sometimes be the parts of yourself you have kept in the dark — the unfinished, unloved, unprocessed pieces that psychologists call the shadow. The medicine tends to magnify these. It will not let you look away, because looking away is precisely how they became shadow in the first place.

That turning-toward is the heart of the work. Held with care, it is some of the most rewarding work a human being can do: painful memories soften, old imprints release, and life energy that was locked up in self-protection becomes available again — for joy, for creation, for love. The changes that last are gradual and grounded ones, carried forward by your own sustained attention.

"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it."

— RUMI

INTENTION

Begin with a question

Why are you seeking this medicine? Sit with that question until an honest answer starts to form. Your intention becomes your anchor during the deep work of ceremony and the first thread of your integration afterward — and while the vine will show you many things unbidden, you may also ask.

Ask specifically. A broad request tends to draw a potent but bewildering response; a focused one arrives with far more clarity. So go looking for the questions that live deepest in you. Where are you stuck? What relationship, loss, or decision keeps circling back? What do you most need to understand — or to forgive, or to release? Write these down. Let them rest for a few days on your altar or in your journal, revisiting them in meditation, until one or two ring unmistakably true.

Many guests find it powerful to give their intention a body: a small object found or made while holding the question — a stone, a photograph, a piece of your own craftwork. Carried with you into the retreat, it becomes a tether to yourself as you are now, and a quiet reminder of why you came.

YOUR COMMITMENTS

The dieta: preparing the vessel

Across the Amazonian traditions, working with the Vine of the Soul is inseparable from the dieta — a period of dietary and behavioral discipline that readies body, mind, and spirit to receive the medicine.

Part of the dieta is devotional: it demonstrates your seriousness and builds the foundation of respect on which this work rests. And part of it is straightforwardly physiological. The medicine temporarily inhibits monoamine oxidase (MAO), the enzyme your body uses to break down certain compounds found in particular foods, drugs, and medications. With MAO inhibited, those compounds can build up to levels that make you ill — so removing them beforehand is a matter of safety, not symbolism. A cleaner body also tends to mean gentler purging, leaving more of the night available for deeper work.

Begin the dieta at least two weeks before your retreat and hold it for at least two weeks after your final ceremony, giving the sacred channeled sound you receive in ceremony — and any plant remedies you may be given — time to fully integrate.

FROM TWO WEEKS BEFORE CEREMONY

SUBSTANCES

- ◆ No other plant medicines (San Pedro, mushrooms, cannabis, rapé, etc.)
- ◆ No street drugs (cocaine, MDMA, amphetamines, etc.)
- ◆ No alcohol

FOODS

- ◆ No pork
- ◆ No spicy foods (heat that burns the mouth)
- ◆ No deep-fried foods

BODY & ENERGY

- ◆ No sexual activity of any kind, including masturbation

FROM ONE WEEK BEFORE CEREMONY — ADDITIONALLY

FOODS & DRINKS

- ◆ No refined sugar
- ◆ No red meat
- ◆ No junk food
- ◆ No fermented foods
- ◆ Very minimal caffeine or other stimulants
- ◆ Minimize salt

Medications and health conditions — essential. Many medications interact dangerously with the medicine, antidepressants and other psychiatric medications above all. Disclose every medication and supplement you take in your application, and write to us at hello@sacred-counsel.com before starting anything new. The medicine is not compatible with pregnancy. If you will be menstruating during the retreat, please let your facilitators know when you arrive.

In this window, also set aside synthetic soaps, perfumes, and strongly scented products in favor of simple, natural, fragrance-free ones — and notice the habits that scatter your energy, from mindless screens to late nights. The dieta is less a list of rules than a slow gathering-in of your attention.

How you'll eat with us

Retreat meals are simple, clean, and alive: fresh vegetables, legumes, rice, eggs, fish or chicken, fruit, oats, salads, herbal teas, and fresh juices — food chosen to keep the body light and receptive.

PREPARATION PRACTICES

The practice of presence

Of everything you can do to prepare, a daily sitting practice may matter most. Mindfulness is simple to describe: paying attention to your experience, as it happens, without judging it. Practiced daily, it becomes something sturdier — the capacity to stay open and curious in the presence of whatever arises, pleasant or painful. In ceremony, no skill will serve you more.

The reflex the medicine most often meets in us is resistance — bracing against the experience, checking out, fighting the current. These are old survival responses, and they made sense when something was truly hunting us. But nothing in ceremony is hunting you. What rises in the medicine space is only what already lives within you, surfacing to be seen at last. Met with presence instead of struggle, even the most frightening material becomes workable — observable, knowable, and finally integrable.

Begin now, before you arrive. From the moment you commit to this work, feelings will start to move — excitement, doubt, nervousness, strange dreams. All of it is preparation. Watch it with warmth and without judgment, and you are already in relationship with the medicine.

DAILY PRACTICE

Ten minutes, every day

If you are an experienced meditator, sit daily for your longest sustainable stretch. If you are new, begin here — ten minutes a day, building toward thirty over your two weeks of preparation:

- ◆ **Keep one time.** Early morning works for most people; the day rarely steals it.
- ◆ **Take your seat.** A cushion or an upright chair, somewhere quiet. Set a ten-minute timer.
- ◆ **Name your purpose.** Silently offer yourself a phrase such as *"May I stay awake and gentle with whatever comes."*
- ◆ **Land in the body.** Eyes closed or softly lowered, feel your feet on the floor, hands in your lap, clothing on skin.
- ◆ **Soften what you find.** Where the muscles hold tension, let each exhale carry a little of it away.
- ◆ **Watch without fixing.** Observe the shifting sensations of the body and let them be exactly as they are.
- ◆ **Return, and return again.** The mind will wander constantly; that is what minds do. Each time you notice, come back kindly. The practice isn't stillness — it's the returning.
- ◆ **Befriend the breath.** Spend the last minutes following the breath at the nostrils. In an intense moment of ceremony, this breath will be your anchor and your safe harbor — build that trust now.

BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

Clearing the ground

Settle your affairs

In the weeks before your retreat, close as many open loops as you can — bills, work handoffs, arrangements at home — so your final two weeks of preparation are unhurried. Clean your home before you leave: you are preparing the place you will land in afterward, and returning to order and softness lets your energy go to integration rather than catch-up. Handle every obligation before you arrive, because carrying the noise of daily life into the retreat genuinely interferes with the work. Treat your time with us as a true retreat: offline, unreachable, and fully inward.

Tell your people

Deep inner work needs witnesses. Let the people closest to you know what you are stepping into, and ask them — in whatever language is natural between you — to hold you while you're gone. If you work with a therapist who understands this territory, loop them in. The support you gather now is the net that catches you when you return.

Go outside

If we could make one suggestion mandatory, it would be this one: spend time in nature, generously and often. Long walks in the woods, hours by the water, a garden if the city is all you have. Nothing settles the nervous system, or reconnects you to the quieter layers of yourself, like the living world — and every other part of your preparation draws on that connection.

What to bring for ceremony

- ◆ A journal and pen — and art supplies, if they call you
- ◆ A small flashlight with a red-light setting, for moving to the bathroom without disturbing the space
- ◆ Warm layers and long, comfortable clothing; nights can turn cool
- ◆ A refillable water bottle
- ◆ Your intention object, if you made or found one
- ◆ Light spiritual reading rather than distracting entertainment

- ◆ Simple, unscented, biodegradable toiletries

THE NIGHT ITSELF

What ceremony may hold

Expect, first, to be cleansed. The medicine's early work is purification, and the purge — usually vomiting, occasionally diarrhea — is so characteristic that the medicine is affectionately called *La Purga*. It is far more than physical: the purge moves stagnant emotion and old imprints out of the system along with the toxins. Some people purge heavily their first night and travel deeper afterward; others barely purge at first and cleanse strongly later; some don't purge at all in early ceremonies. Every pattern is normal.

Hold visions lightly. Dazzling visionary journeys in a first ceremony are the exception, not the rule — and even the colors, geometries, and creatures that may appear are somewhat beside the point. The deepest healing moves through levels the eye never sees. We hold ceremony for healing, not spectacle.

No two nights are alike, and no one — however experienced — can predict where a ceremony will go. Difficult passages may come, and when they do, remember: there are no bad ceremonies. The hardest nights are consistently the ones people later name as the turning point. If you feel apprehensive beforehand, welcome that too; it is simply reverence wearing the clothing of nerves. You will begin with a gentle dose if you are new to the medicine, and you will be held — energetically, emotionally, and physically — from the moment the ceremony opens until well after it closes. Every guest is medically and psychologically screened before confirmation, and every medication is reviewed before you ever sit with the medicine.

AFTER THE MEDICINE

Protecting what you received

The medicine keeps working long after the ceremony ends, and the weeks that follow are when its insights settle and take root. How gently you tend to yourself now is the quiet second half of the work.

A NOTE ON WHAT FOLLOWS

Let the clay set

These are general guidelines, and to some they may seem excessive. They are not here because breaking them will create a negative outcome, but because doing so may diminish or shorten the window of afterglow — when much of the insight is still landing. We encourage you to treat the weeks following your ceremony with the same reverence you brought to your preparation.

FIRST WEEK

- ◆ Limit spicy foods, red meat, or pork
- ◆ No alcohol
- ◆ No recreational drugs
- ◆ Conserve sexual energy

Gentle yoga, soft breathing practices, and meditation are welcome from the very first day and will actively support the settling.

Come home slowly

You will be remarkably open and tender in the days after your retreat, so plan your re-entry the way you planned your arrival. Don't step off the mountain into a crowded calendar. Give yourself quiet days first; keep the schedule light for as long as life allows. What you'll find yourself craving — time in nature, unhurried reflection, the company of people who understand — is exactly what the integration asks for.

The longer road

Integration support is woven through the retreat itself: space to process each ceremony, and practical guidance for carrying your breakthroughs into daily life. But understand what the medicine does and

doesn't do. The Vine of the Soul loosens the grip of conditioning, lights up the shadow, and shows you the fear-built beliefs that have run your life unseen — and then hands the work to you. Becoming intimate with those fears, embracing what you found in the dark, and patiently parenting yourself back to wholeness: that is the slow path, walked over months and years, toward feeling steadily lighter, brighter, more compassionate, and more at home in yourself and the world. The medicine walks it with you far longer than you might expect.



SACRED COUNSEL

Integrative support for the path of awakening.

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