

“Embarking on the Purpose-Path: My Vision Quest Story” by Oswaldo Montoya

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost



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How do we connect with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit? This question was the subject of Jacqie Wallen’s sermon on Sunday, May 29 of this year. Among the different spiritual practices she shared, she highlighted the communion with nature. Just the day before I had returned from the mountains of West Virginia, where I was on a vision quest, so the sermon resonated deeply with my recent experience.

A “vision quest” is a rite of passage into nature. Its most visible phase is a solitary retreat of several days, in which

you expose yourself as much as possible to the forces of nature, carrying only the essentials to survive and fasting. It is a journey to “the sacred mountain” in search of answers and guidance.

This practice is a ritual and tradition shared by people from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Figures like Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad, Moses, and Native American prophets like Black Elk, undertook these quests and returned with a vision and mission for their lives in service to their community. However, this experience is not reserved only for them, but is also open to each of us.

Communal Dimension

Although my vision quest was a lonely journey, it was also a communal experience. It is the community that prepares us and drives us to venture into the jungle or the desert. And it is the community that expects us to return transformed, fulfilling our mission. In my case, four communities took care of me, prepared me and helped me in this adventure.

- The Purpose Guide Institute was the school where I was trained for three years in these practices of encounter with the soul and how to guide other people in this search.
- Seekers Church has also played a pivotal role, especially my “Soul Circle” during the Purpose Discovery Program and for Growing Edge Funds, which helped me paid for the first semester of this program[\[1\]](#).
- The Rolling Ridge Study Retreat community was my base camp, where I prepared and rested before and after venturing into the West Virginia woods, especially Joel Blunk, who prepared me for my threshold ceremony and Luke Bauer, who guided me in finding “my place of power”

on the mountain and was attentive to my safety during those lonely days on the mountain.

- The fourth community is my family: my wife Rosa Argentina and my children Camilo and Teresa Beatriz. They are a main source of inspiration in my life. Each of them also received my story with a lot of love and sincere curiosity.

The quest

A vision quest is divided into three phases. The preparatory phase can last months or years. In this phase we prepare ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually for the most visible threshold ceremony, which is the three or four days on the sacred mountain, followed by the incorporation phase, which lasts the rest of our lives.

During the **preparatory phase**, a key question is: "Why do I want to participate in a rite of passage into nature? Is there a crisis or transition in my life that drives me to this search?"

In my journal I wrote: "What really motivates me to embark on this madness? A yearning for transformation. The awareness of aging and mortality, the change of stage in my life as a parent with my children now young adults about to fly. A need for change in my professional and service roles. A pain for this broken world, on the verge of planetary disaster and with a Nicaragua suffering and plunged into a brutal dictatorship. What is my role in all that?"

Threshold

On the night I arrived at my base camp in Rolling Ridge, my first dream confirmed this path. I saw myself walking through the streets of Managua, near the mansion of the dictator Ortega, with a hidden gun, determined to kill him. However, their guards stopped me and intimidated me with their weapons.

That night I also dreamed of a Hare Krishna singer delighting an audience with his piano and mantras from a secluded corner of an auditorium.

During my stay at the base camp, Luke guided me with a map and suggested that I follow the "Krishna Brook," a stream that flowed from east to west and descended from a mountain. Luke recommended that area of the forest to find my place of power, and Krishna would guide me.

The morning I set off for the mountain to begin my threshold ceremony, Joel arrived to lead a beautiful farewell ritual. With a rattle and burning incense, he sang several prayer-poems, including the phrase "don't go back to sleep." Then, when I turned three times in the small circle of stones and asked aloud, "What is the new song I am called to sing?" rays of morning sunshine filtered through the foliage and touched my forehead. This was a signal I had received before. At the same time, I listened intently to the singing of the birds, as if they were saying to me: "That's right, you are also part of the choir and you have your own song."

The sacred mountain

So I set off for the mountain carrying with me four gallons of water, a tarp, a hammock, a mat, a sweater, my notebook and pen. Guided by the Krishna Brook, I was drawn to a center of power before reaching the top of the mountain. A community of rocks called to me, next to the fallen logs and trees. I designed a large circle to settle there for the next three days and created an altar on one of the rocks to remember my intentions.

As night fell on the first day on the mountain, fear came over me. In the previous two nights at base camp, I had also been afraid of the dark. The darkness intimidated me. I had prepared a kind of tomb in the earth for the ritual of dying and letting go of everything I had lived, but I could not do

it due to the fear of the dark in the forest. Instead, I took refuge in my tarp and performed the ritual of dying in there.

I wrote in my diary: *“and to think that for three days in a row I will be swallowed up by the dark night in the middle of this forest, cold, without food, without a cabin, alone. I thought hunger would be the hardest thing, but now I think it’s the darkness and the fear of snakes and other animals.”*

I survived the first night. The beautiful songs of the birds woke me up very early. On that second day I told my life story to the trees and rocks. I introduced myself to each of them. I told them what kind of seeker I am and the reasons for my presence there, my intentions. I asked them for help. I climbed high rocks and also gave some speeches addressing the entire natural community that hosted me. I sang, I danced.

I didn’t feel the need to “sit and meditate” as I do in my everyday life. Here it was not necessary. Here all experience is meditation. I don’t have to close my eyes to go “inward.” There is no interior, no exterior. Only the present experience. A sense of wonder at nature and each of its elements invaded me.

But also in those days I had moments of weakness and doubt. At times, I struggled with my faith in this spiritual practice, and spent half a day sleepy, taking several naps inside my tarp. I was afraid that nothing important would happen to me because I was in that state.

On the afternoon of the second day, mounted on a rock, I did a purpose circle, an exhaustive inventory of my life where I wanted to make peace with those who hurt me and whom I hurt. I didn’t feel much for those who hurt me. I don’t feel a grudge. So I focused on the ones I hurt, because there I do feel the weight of guilt. Fasting, silence and nature had my memory very sharp. I remembered what happened with each of them, and I asked for forgiveness by naming each person and a non-human

person that I directly hurt. I assured them that I have changed and that there will be no repetition of those wrongdoings. I identified that the cause of my shortcomings was unconsciousness of the harm I caused, and I recognized how my social identity as a male and my upbringing in a patriarchal world contributed to it. This reaffirms the importance of consciousness-raising work with myself and with others.

On one of those days I dreamed that my daughter "beats me" in a board game, and that my ego can't stand it. Even worse, my daughter is very relaxed playing and enjoying the moment without worrying about the final result but "I" am very tense. A friend accompanies her and I find it even more embarrassing to lose to two young women. My ego is in crisis and threatened. My daughter is my playful and spontaneous repressed self that puts my arrogant ego in check.

Soul messages

The last night I kept vigil, spending the whole night awake and off my tarp, inside a small circle of branches with the intention of receiving direction for my life.

The vision I received at dawn was intensely emotional. I saw myself as a songbird of conscience. The incessant singing of birds in the forest reminded me that I too had a melody to sing. My soul work was to sing to people's consciences to help in their awakening and freedom from oppression. In that vision, I felt deep pain and cried intensely.

The language of the soul is poetic and my soul is part of the soul of the world reflected in nature. Many signals I received before and during my threshold ceremony poetically communicated to me that **I am a songbird of conscience**. I have flown like a bird, traveling and thus singing to the consciences of people in many places. For years I have flown to many countries as a worker of conscience. It is up to me to

continue helping to raise people's consciences against the oppressive domestication that leads us to collaborate with unjust social systems and to see ourselves as enemies. It is my turn to help awaken the unitary consciousness, where there is no more separation between myself and the other, between the human and nature, between the inner world and the outer world.

A dream the night before I left home to go to base camp was the precursor to this message. In the dream I tell a teenager of the two most influential books when I was his age. Its titles are "Love in Socialist Society" and "The Insurrection of *Conscience*."

Now I know that I am a songbird of conscience like the Hare Krishna singer in my dream, who influenced the audience with his chants without occupying any prominent place in the room. Krishna consciousness was my reference to find my center of power on the mountain, thanks to the stream that bears his name, the Krishna Brook.

The dawn, after the night in vigil, burst with the song of the birds in the forest. What I was witnessing at that time is described in "El Canto de Meditación", a beautiful piece of music from the Misa Campesina, by Nicaraguan artists Pablo Martinez Tellez and Carlos Mejía Godoy. Spontaneously I began to sing it:

"Before the day is born, the birds of the mountain, give us their melodies, the guises and cenzontles, the sound peck of a carpenter is heard, that at the tip of a tree his house builds where he will live, and a sparrow jumps from one branch to another very close to there. Like those little birds, today I sing to you, Lord, asking you to unite us in strength and in love, I praise you a thousand times because you were rebellious, fighting night and day against the injustice of humanity".

I burst into tears. But I wanted to keep singing. I didn't want to stop. I continued to sing and cry, breathless. When I finished singing those lyrics, I decided to sing again. I thought that since I had already cried, I could sing more fluently. But no, I burst into tears again the second time, and the third time.

Certain parts of the lyrics of the song caused me more shock "*... Like those little birds, today I sing to you, Lord, asking you to unite us in strength and in love...*", and I thought of the division among Nicaraguans, and I was thinking of the division between nations. "*You were rebellious,*" the song goes, "*fighting night and day against the injustice of humanity.*" And I thought about the injustices I committed and the ones I witnessed. It was a deep lamentation, spiritual and emotional.

When it was time for me to return, I continued crying on the way back. But the pain came accompanied by liberation, relief, release, and gratitude for the confirmatory message of the work that I am meant to do as a songbird of conscience.

To conclude, there were other signs to support my call as a songbird of conscience:

The moon: A very dark night began, but as the hours passed I saw a light reflected on a rock. I could see the rock stripes on white with gray. How is it possible if it is dark? Until I recognized the faint ray of moonlight piercing the foliage of some trees illuminating the rock. It is a crescent moon. I looked for that moonbeam proactively. I positioned myself in its direction to receive that energy, knowing that it would help me to be awake and active. The fine ray moved between the trees and I followed it. The message was: *even though the night is dark, look for a ray of light and do not leave it. It will keep you awake. In the meantime, keep alive the conviction that will dawn. So it will be for Nicaragua that is going through another long dark night.*

The community of rocks: Forming a circle these immense millenary rocks take care of some young trees planted inside. I identify with that service. *Like a rock I will be as protection for my children and their peers. They have in me a stable being, despite my identity as a songbird of consciences, I become a stable rock for my young people when they need me.*

Dreams of the dictator Ortega: I already narrated what happens in the first dream where I want to kill him but his defenses prevent me. At the end of my threshold ceremony I dream of Ortega again. But this time he is voluntarily resigning. He says he is already 82 years old and tired and that it is time to leave. The people erupt in jubilation. In the first dream, Ortega is my oppressive, authoritarian, abusive ego, the same one that did harm. I can't kill him because that raises more to his defenses that repel me instantly. In the second dream, Ortega is my ego in a state of surrender. *It is necessary to maintain an active patience, an active hope, as in the night of vigil, with the conviction that it will dawn.*

Climbing up and down rocks: It was easy to climb a large rock and give my speeches from above to the community of the land that hosted me. It was hard to get down. I was afraid of falling and hurting myself on the way down. Not only do you have to learn to go up, but above all to go down. That happens to Ortega. He doesn't know how to get out of power, he's very afraid. *That happens to me when I'm in positions of power.*

Facing the source of fear: I overcame the fear of the dark by knowing and accepting it, making it my friend. The first night I didn't get out of my tarp, terrified. The second night, I was outside until midnight until a strong wind sent me to my tarp. The third night, the darkness was my company in the vigil. *My fears of death and money I will face by dedicating attention to them and getting to know them. By fleeing and avoiding, fear is strengthened.*

Compassion for the sleep-deprived, food-deprived and the homeless: I gave up these needs for three and a half days, voluntarily and planned. What about those forced into these hardships? The homeless, the refugees, the security guards, the police and health workers doing night shifts, those who care for a loved one in the middle of the night? *Compassion and solidarity for them.*

The blessing of the morning sun: I walk back to the base camp, being close to joining the main path, I turn around to say goodbye to the sacred mountain and at that moment, without looking for it, a ray of light that crosses the foliage of the trees hits me on the forehead!! He did it at the end of the farewell ceremony on day zero, and he does it at the end of my threshold ceremony. He did it on my first vision quest three years ago and in days after. It is a confirmation message in case doubts invade me.

Other “coincidences” happened to me those days and later. Like the memoir of Camilo Mejía[2] that fell into my hands in the cabin at the base camp. Camilo Mejía, Nicaraguan son of singer-songwriter Carlos Mejía Godoy, already mentioned, with a testimony of the power of consciousness and the importance of critical thinking. He was a conscientious objector as a soldier in the war in Iraq.

Another synchronicity: One of those was the book about birds[3] I ran into in the cabin where I bathed the day after my threshold ceremony. In this book I am instructed about migrating birds and about the empty nest period when young birds leave the nest. It reminded me of my rite of passage as a family, as my children enter adulthood and prepare to leave the nest. But my role as a parent bird continues, as I read in the book referring to the young birds that take flight: “They are not lost, but under the watchful eye of a parent bird”.

And I briefly want to mention two more synchronicities after my threshold ceremony. To unexpectedly come across an

exhibition of migratory birds and singing birds at the Washington DC Zoo[\[4\]](#), which includes the flight route from Nicaragua to the United States, and to be welcomed by singing birds at the hotel in Tbilisi where I flew for a meeting with professionals in anti-militarist activism.

And finally. I promise that this is the last one: preparing for this sermon I see that in the lectionary for this Sunday it is time to read the parable that Jesus makes narrated in Matthew 13:3. Jesus uses the image of a mustard seed to illustrate the Kingdom of Heaven. Seed that becomes a tree where birds take refuge. We are the birds who find refuge in the kingdom of heaven here on earth in the trees, the rocks and in all of nature.

And now what papá?

This is what my daughter Teresa asked me when I told her my story of the vision quest. She tells me “So, papá, now you understand your life, your path, and your true identity better. But now what? What’s going to happen to you? What is your future? Where are you headed?”

“I don’t fully know,” I replied. You have to give the vision time to mature. I have to act on what has been shown to me. It is not the time to have everything clear and defined. I must enjoy the process of revealing the vision and give it the space to unfold in my life.

I trust that the vision will transform me. I aspire to be useful in the awakening of consciences, evolving from an “egocentric society to an eco-centric and soul-centric one”[\[5\]](#). I feel called to continue my consciousness-raising work for social justice. I also want to walk with others on this transformative journey of self-discovery and soul initiation, supporting people to live in alignment with their unique soul’s calling.

May it be so.

[\[1\]](#) I especially want to thank Marjory Bankson, one of my mentors in this soul call quest, and Elizabeth Gelfeld, Trish Nemore, and Billy Amoss, who were part of my “Soul Circle” during the Purpose Discovery Program, giving me listening and support in my search process.

[\[2\]](#) “Road from Ar Ramadi: The Private Rebellion of Staff Sergeant Mejia.”

[\[3\]](#) BIRDS of Eastern and Central North America

[\[4\]](#) “Visit of Bird House”

[\[5\]](#) My gratitude to Bill Plotkin and Joanna Macy for sharing their wisdom with us at Purpose Guide Institute. Their teachings on the shift in human consciousness and society have been transformative.