

# ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

Extracts from the book 'Dreaming a new Earth' by S Penchevre



# RELATE TO THE UNKNOWN

How can ancestral wisdom be articulated with contemporary, scientific, and rational ways of thinking? A chasm seems to separate the Ancients from the Moderns—using a simplistic classification—in the way they **relate to the Unknown**. For the former, the Unknown is honored as the Source from which the ancestors of ancestors and the intelligence of intelligence once descended. For the latter, the unknown is more often discreetly ignored or even repressed into the depths of an unclear subconscious...

In 2003, the French National Union of Associations for the Defense of Families and Individuals Victims of Cults (UNADFI) bluntly stated that “the **holistic paradigm** is totalizing and contradicts one of the essential foundations of democracy” and that the seeker “of **happiness** or ecstasy, which he pursues at all costs,” becomes dependent on his quest, like a drug addict.

Yet, can the knowledge systems of our societies be considered “complete” when they do not teach their followers to coexist harmoniously with that irreducible part of the unknown—and even the unknowable—that resides within them? Indeed, what knowledge do we speak of if we do not know ourselves and cannot face **death** with artistry and consistency? And also, how can we approach the unknown of **another culture**, of another worldview, if we do not honor this Unknown in all its magnificence within our own value systems?



# MYSTICAL REPRESENTATIONS FOR LAWS AND MODELS

**Various representations of primordial, archetypal forces** give ancestral knowledge systems a globalizing perspective, embracing the full diversity of manifestations and the unmanifested in a sense of unity. Modern thinkers may view these representations as innocent embellishments compensating for the existence of a vast field of ignorance, potentially leading their adherents toward rigid and limited worldviews. However, these representations are designed to balance and elevate the minds of those who engage with them, dynamically guiding them toward unity.

Cosmogonic symbols emerge as the result of a respectful flirtation between the truth seeker and the unknown.



Exceptional beings who, through intense ascetic practices, have extraordinarily focused their concentration in a single direction have gathered **a mystical experience** of the vibrant presence of the divine.

In a “modified” state of consciousness—or rather, in a “higher” state of consciousness, fully aware and not drowsy—seated at the gates of absolute and radiant perfection, these beings have received direct understanding of the functioning of **supreme laws** and have been infused with an advanced intelligence. This intelligence has blessed, enriched, and solidified their own discoveries regarding **evolutionary models**.

Returning from their state of ecstasy, they have simply shared the greatest joys of their hearts, leaving behind many breadcrumbs like Little Thumbs, generously making their paths visible to others.

# LANGUAGE AND SPIRITUAL WORLDS

**The cosmogonic readings specific to each wisdom tradition form the foundation of traditional knowledge systems** by bringing forth, validating, and consolidating the principles that unfold across various domains of knowledge.

Indeed, while behavioral patterns and practical lifestyles can be built through classical trial-and-error sequences, they are truly consecrated when certain individuals embodying them are suddenly illuminated by a powerful current of grace. Their minds then become enlightened with **the necessary language for integrating their knowledge**, and their evolutionary paths become naturally transmissible.



Values, conceptual frameworks, visual or auditory patterns, songs, dances, pictograms, and rituals emerge and flourish, shaping cultures and collective identities. **Spiritual “worlds” unfold**, floating between a humanity imprisoned by its incarnation context and the overwhelming power of a cosmic reality too dazzling to be directly approached.

The Yawanawa shamans distinguish the perfection of spiritual worlds generated over generations by the purest among their people from the understanding their community can generally grasp. Hushahu Yawanawa, the first woman of her people to be inaugurated as a spiritual authority, explains, for instance, that “in the spiritual world, women are honored just as men are,” that “tradition is perfect,” but that “humans are not.” Indeed, from reading the same “revealed” spiritual text, some have become fanatical suicide bombers while others have turned into profound thinkers... Hence, **the need to deploy ever-richer and constantly updated spiritual material**, signaling from all sides the right path to follow. Ultimately, and fortunately, Hushahu and her sisters believe that while humans are not perfect, they are evolving and gradually reconnecting with the latent wisdom that nourishes them.

# SPIRITUALITY IN PRACTICE



Although traditional communities do not always consciously consider the foundations of their knowledge and skills (especially when shamans, visionaries, and thought leaders are sidelined by the irresistible pull of modern consumerist culture), numerous examples highlight the inseparable links between traditional practices and ancestral spiritualities. Traditional medicine, which seeks to address the roots and abstract configurations of ailments by engaging with the patient's soul through a symbolic framework, is undoubtedly the most explored territory.

## **But what about traditional agroecology or pedagogy? How are these practices nourished by spiritual visions?**

Among the Ashaninka of Brazil, a recent spiritual event marked a turning point in the development of the community's agroforestry systems: a shaman received a communication from the world of higher spirits, revealing that bees are a prime organizing force for ensuring the sustainability and fertile expansion of ecosystems. The shaman then conducted an experiment by isolating a shrub from its environment and mimicking the role of bees on some of its flowers. Observing the fertility of the branches he had manually pollinated, he presented—evidence in hand!—the spiritual insight to his community, which then integrated beekeeping into its practices. In the same community, another shaman, having received a request from an ancestor in a dream to build a school for traditional wisdom open to the world, saw the project realized to promote the transmission of indigenous knowledge among neighboring communities.



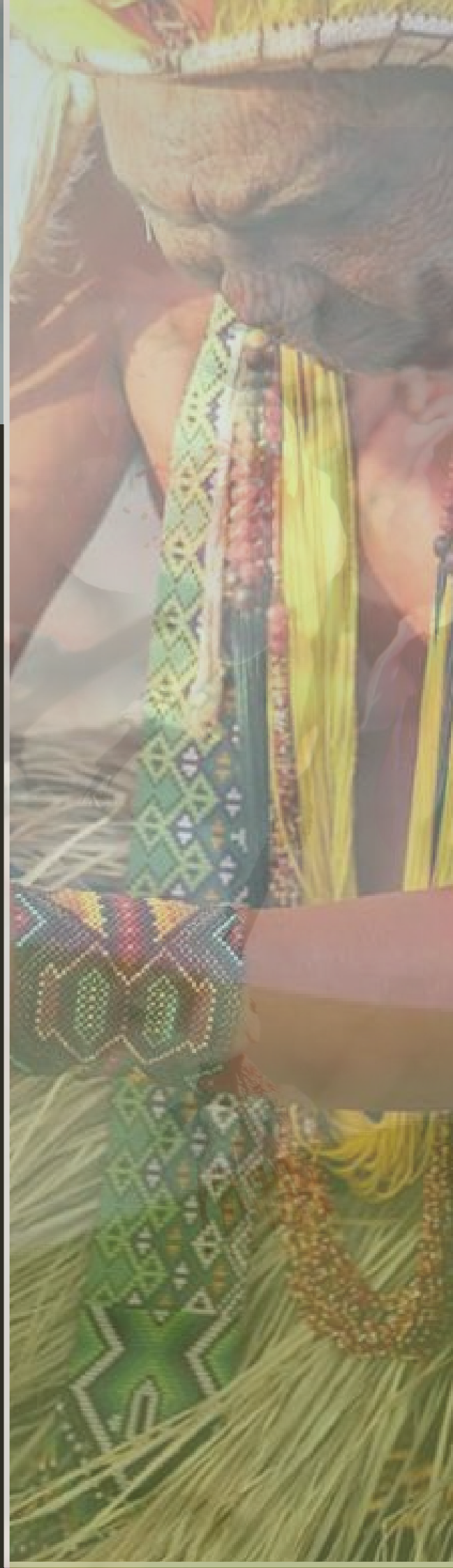
# SPIRITUALITY IN PRACTICE



The Upanishads of the Eastern tradition offer **a universal model of the link between inner wisdom and action in the world**, notably through the Bhagavad-Gita. This sacred text, part of the great epic poem Mahabharata but also considered independently as a “revealed” scripture, explains how and why to act in the world, even in the face of overwhelming confusion.

The Gita presents the case of a noble warrior on a battlefield where members of his own family are positioned in both opposing camps. Devastated, the warrior no longer knows what to do. The divine unity then visits him in the form of the avatar Krishna, granting him a vision of the divine at work in all things and instructing him on how each action should be undertaken with awareness of a greater cosmic unfolding.

This story echoes that of the Shuar warriors, “uwishin” (“men of wisdom”), who traditionally drank large quantities of the sacred visionary preparation, natem, before engaging in battle. For them, as in the teachings of the Gita, it was about communing with the divine principle (“Arutam”) and aligning with the rightful meaning of combat. Only this alignment could fill them with strength and lead them to victory. (Natem was also given to children as part of their education.)

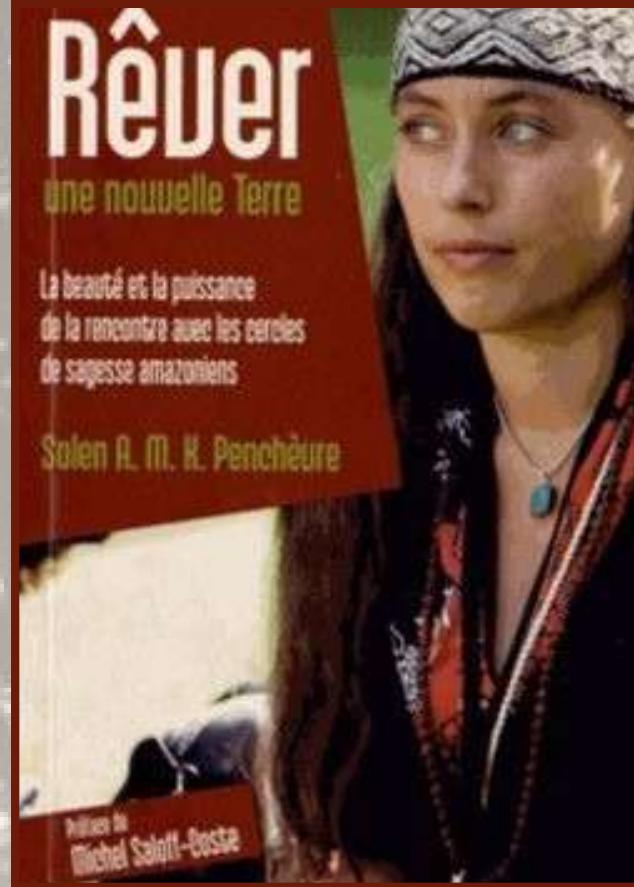


# SPIRITUALITY IN PRACTICE

The spiritual orientation of the Gita resolves any conflict or uncertainty regarding action. While, through the dialogue between the warrior and the avatar, it urges us to take concrete action—emphasizing that action is the preferred path to human fulfillment—it also highlights that the inner attitude in action is what truly matters and constitutes the real work to be done (and it is this, ultimately, that will determine the course of our actions over time).

The required attitude is one of **continuous self-giving in service of a higher will**. Since this higher will is in perfect harmony with all things, it is ultimately about turning intensely inward to sense, beyond illusions, which action aligns with this will; it is about breaking down one's own resistance to recognizing the universal flow of life within and learning to let it act freely through oneself.

Guided by this vision of a spiritual force acting through them and constantly seeking ways to better honor it, two advanced spiritual teachers and practitioners brought to life an exemplary practical project of international scope, supported by UNESCO: Auroville. The one known as "The Mother," the project's first initiator, later fully supported by Sri Aurobindo, explained how the spiritual intention shaped the entire utopian dynamic of Auroville: "The Earth needs a place where human beings can live beyond national rivalries, social conventions, conflicting moralities, and warring religions; a place where people, freed from all bondage to the past, can dedicate themselves entirely to the discovery and practice of the Divine Consciousness seeking to manifest." Within a few decades, disciples engaged in work by their guides—solely to refine their spiritual attitude—transformed a nearly barren land in southern India into a flourishing oasis of life. Thirty-five organizational units coordinate the daily work of 2,000 inhabitants, focusing on innovative approaches to architecture, economics, education, and permaculture. Coming from about thirty different countries, the Aurovilians first strive to embody the paths of peace and unity in their diversity and then propel themselves toward a truly different and sustainable future.



# FRAGMENTATION & DESTRUCTIVE CONSEQUENCES

Ultimately, when ancestral knowledge systems are approached in **a fragmented manner**, they risk not contributing to grand action plans aimed at restoring a collective experience of inner unity but rather producing unintended and excessively **destructive consequences**.

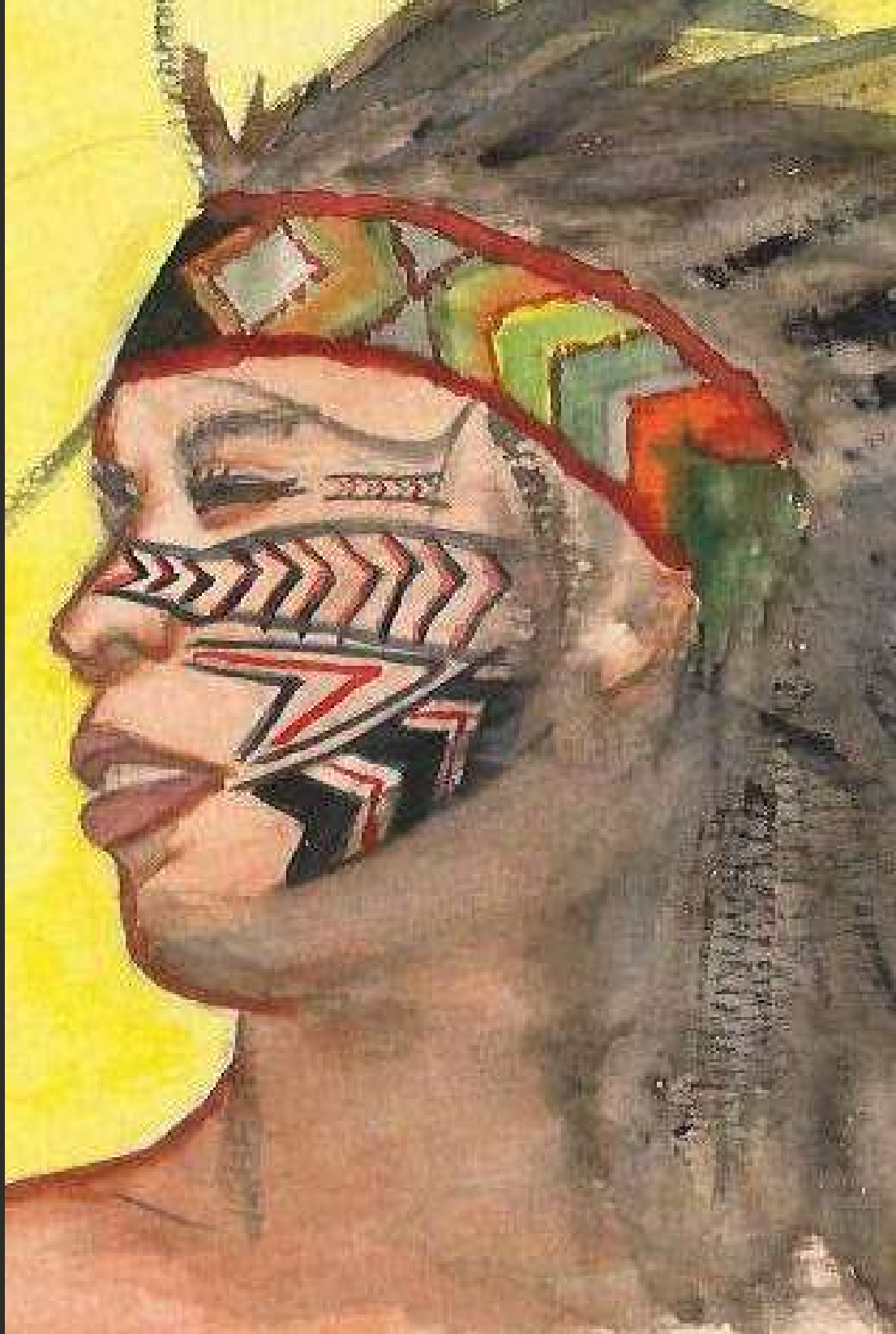
Thus, practicing yoga exercises, such as postures or intense breathing techniques, without a comprehensive approach to this path and its purpose, can "wildly" awaken the inner forces of the psyche, leading practitioners to burn their wings in the sun of their ego, causing physical bodies to be harmed rather than rejuvenated and soothed, and minds to become agitated rather than ordered and centered. Yoga practices have crossed oceans and cultural divides, becoming as commonplace for New Yorkers as a fast-food menu... Representing a six-billion-dollar market in the United States in 2011, yoga has been repackaged to fit the tastes of fitness, relaxation, or neuroscience, allowing it to enter spaces it might never have reached otherwise. However, for public well-being and the full preservation of this system of knowledge— a precious heritage of humanity— it is to be hoped that the essence of this path will be approached with greater reverence, attentiveness, and patience and that public institutions will, through dialogue, support a gradual adjustment and professionalization of its transmitters.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the use of powerful and mysterious plants known to Indigenous peoples, which, when taken outside their cultural, initiatory, cosmogonic, and pedagogical frameworks, have left more than a few Westerners dangerously disoriented. Even more concerning is the forced use of synthetic psychotropic substances in contexts devoid of any benevolent intent. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) conducted such a project: from the 1950s to the 1970s, the MKULTRA project aimed to manipulate individuals mentally by administering LSD to them.





# BE INDIGENOUS!



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The Institute of Indigenous Knowledge Systems promotes harmonious coexistence of human beings on Earth through preservation and transmission of traditional Indigenous ways of Knowing and Being.