

# La Cosmovisión Andina

## Callejón de Huaylas, Peru

The *Cosmovisión Andina* represents a familial relationship between man, nature, and God and is essential in understanding Andean culture. It is the lens through which *campesinos* see their world and their lives- how everything is connected and flows from one thing to another and how this view will continue to flow through time.

The Callejón de Huaylas and all of Peru have endured terrible events at the hands of man and nature, whether it be natural disasters or the disaster of having local resources destroyed and pillaged. Yet they all sit together in the *Cosmovisión Andina*. The *Cosmovisión* is a template for all humankind to appreciate, a viewpoint from which everyone can learn. In the midst of our battle with global warming and other modern calamities, the *Visión* represents a way for all beings to peacefully cohabit the Earth as a larger model of a loving family.

*Cosmovisión Andina*: trans. Andean Cosmo-Vision  
Cosmo: referring to the universe  
Visión: referring to how something is viewed

In June 2010, I spent three weeks at the Center for Social Well-being field school at a ranch in a small town called Carhuaz in the Peruvian Andes. There I participated in the Action Research in the Andes program where I studied Andean ethnography and ecology, medical anthropology, Spanish, and Quechua. Along with regular classes, the other students and I had guest lecturers and went on field trips and other excursions. From the overview of information, we were encouraged to form our own research questions and pursue them. My first intent was to study the socialization of plants; I was inspired by the human-like names given to plants and how they were referred to as either male or female. I soon realized this was only part of the larger picture, the *Cosmovisión Andina*. In pursuing my research question, I held interviews with the Quechua teacher, Cesar Vargas, and the children at a school close by. I also look video footage of certain events relevant to my topic, including the *Pago a la Tierra* ritual, and I read articles and books available in the ranch library.



Every culture or community has an order for their world, an understanding of where everything fits in and how the world works, as they call it in the Callejón de Huaylas, the *Cosmovisión*. According to the *Cosmovisión Andina*, everything is connected and everything is on the same plane. This differs from the *Cosmovisión Occidental*, which is a representation of how Andeans understand the western *Cosmovisión*. In this prototype, there are again three circles with God on top, followed by man, and then Nature. This diagram puts Man in a more prominent position than Nature, which creates an inability for the occidental man to be able to see nature as an equal and gives him leave to disrespect or destroy it. Another Andean criticism of the *Cosmovisión Occidental* is that it is too abstract. No one knows who God really is or what He looks like. According to Andeans, their categories are more concrete, especially as it relates to their deities.



The diagram on the right side of the poster depicts the Andean Cosmo-Vision. It shows that the three major entities recognized by Andeans in their worldview are also Man, Nature, and God or Deities. In this diagram, all of the components are equal and all can be integrated in some way; nature can be human, humans can be deities, and deities can be nature. As a whole, it represents *Pachamama*, which means "Mother Earth" in Quechua. Andean *campesinos* do not consciously conjure up the *Cosmovisión Andina* diagram whenever a decision needs to be made throughout their daily life, but it subconsciously informs these decisions and determines how they see the world. For this reason alone, it is important to understand the *Cosmovisión* concept because being informed about other cultures and their outlook can help to prevent conflict. It is also important because it is a model from which we can learn because Andeans believe plants are equal to humans, they see plants as having familial relationships. *Pachamama* is a word that naturally grows around corn in the Andes. The name means "mother of the corn" and the people of Carhuaz do not pull it from the corn fields because it is good for the corn to grow next to its mother. Beliefs such as these result in more biodiversity, which is more ecological and better for the environment than monocropping. More examples of how each component of the diagram is integrated with the others are provided in the appropriate section of the diagram.



### MAN ↔ DEITIES:

- In Andean belief, everything within *Pachamama* has a spirit. People of Carhuaz and other parts of the Callejón see humans as deities after they die and their spirits live on.
- In the Callejón de Huaylas, there are professional healers who heal either by plants or by *cuy*, which are guinea pigs. *Cuy* healers have to call on a form of supernatural power in order to perform their healing.
- The Andean Cosmo-Vision is based on beliefs that go at least as far back as the Incas. These rulers believed they were children of the sun god, Inti.

Though they may seem insignificant because they are unlabeled, the arrows are the most important part of the diagram in understanding the Andean worldview. Discovering what they represented constituted much of my research in Peru.

There exist many balances within the Andean understanding of the universe. The masculinity and femininity of nature, the wet and dry seasons, the notion of hot and cold with certain foods and illnesses. The arrows are what keep these dichotomies in balance and support the entire Andean Cosmo-Vision. It is therefore appropriate to say that these arrows represent *Flow*. *Flow* can be understood as a sort of cycle of reciprocity between all members of the *Cosmovisión Andina*. In the Callejón de Huaylas, this *Flow* is something that is subconsciously taught and understood, which is why the arrows remain unlabeled. To Andeans, *Flow* is necessary for the normal continuation of life; it occurs from man to nature, nature to deities, deities to man- from one to another and within groups. *Flow* can be better understood by looking at cultural practices and beliefs that exemplify it.

- The calla lily, a natural instrument of sewage treatment common in Peru, is a perfect example of the concept of *Flow*. Man eats plants, and it leaves him as excrement; the calla lily grows from man's sewage, absorbing the waste as nutrients for itself; nature flows into man, and from man flows new nature.
- Rather than the more western, linear view of time, Andeans see time as occurring in a circular direction; flowing as a cycle.
- Anxiety in the Andes is very often caused by someone not fulfilling a social obligation, i.e. the "flow of things" are disrupted.
- Concerns over menstruation focus on the nature of blood flow, particularly the consistency of flow and the quantity expelled... When menstruation fails to begin in a given month, women worry that the blood is stuck inside the abdomen.
- There is a belief in Peru that the Milky Way moves in a circle throughout the twenty-four hour day, flowing as a river during the day and up through the sky at night.
- When Andeans take a drink of alcohol, they toast the person next to them, drink all but the last bit, and pour the rest on the ground. They are providing *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) with drink in gratitude for providing them with food, drink, and life.
- *Pago a la Tierra*, which means "Payment to the Land", is a ritual practiced in the Andes that is meant to connect the participants to the land and to each other as brothers and sisters; it symbolizes the flow between man and nature, and between men. During the ritual, a drink is passed around the circle to share with each other and the land (see above), petitions are said to coca leaves, which are then given to *Pachamama*, and everyone dances together in a circle around the ritual space.
- Myths that are taught to children by parents, grandparents, and schoolteachers that reinforce the concept of *Flow*. The myths depict nature and animals as having human-like qualities, and many of the animals have a specific character and mannerism that is representative of a personality found in some humans, much like the Uncle Remus tales from the southern United States. In Andean mythology, each character's personality gives them a place in society and a place in the overall functioning and flow of society.



### NATURE ↔ MAN:

- Plants are classified as being male or female.
- Plants are given human like names. Potatoes in particular seem to take on human qualities because of their names. For example, there is *la reina de los papas* ("the queen of the potatoes"), *aya papa* ("ancestor potato"), *huira pashla* ("the fat woman potato"), and *lactan huacachi papa* ("the potato that makes the daughter in law cry").
- Plants are seen as having familial relationships with humans and other plants. Plants are brothers and sisters to each other and brothers and sisters to humans.



### NATURE ↔ DEITIES:

- In traditional Andean belief, different elements of nature are recognized as deities. Rivers, air, hills, and mountains are all deities. Mountains are referred to as *apu*, the Quechua word for "spirit".
- In the Callejón de Huaylas, there is a huge range of biodiversity and all of the different herbs and plants have different medicinal properties known to Andeans of all ages. The Andean belief in the healing power of plants is similar to our unwavering faith in biomedicine, a religious-like faith.



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