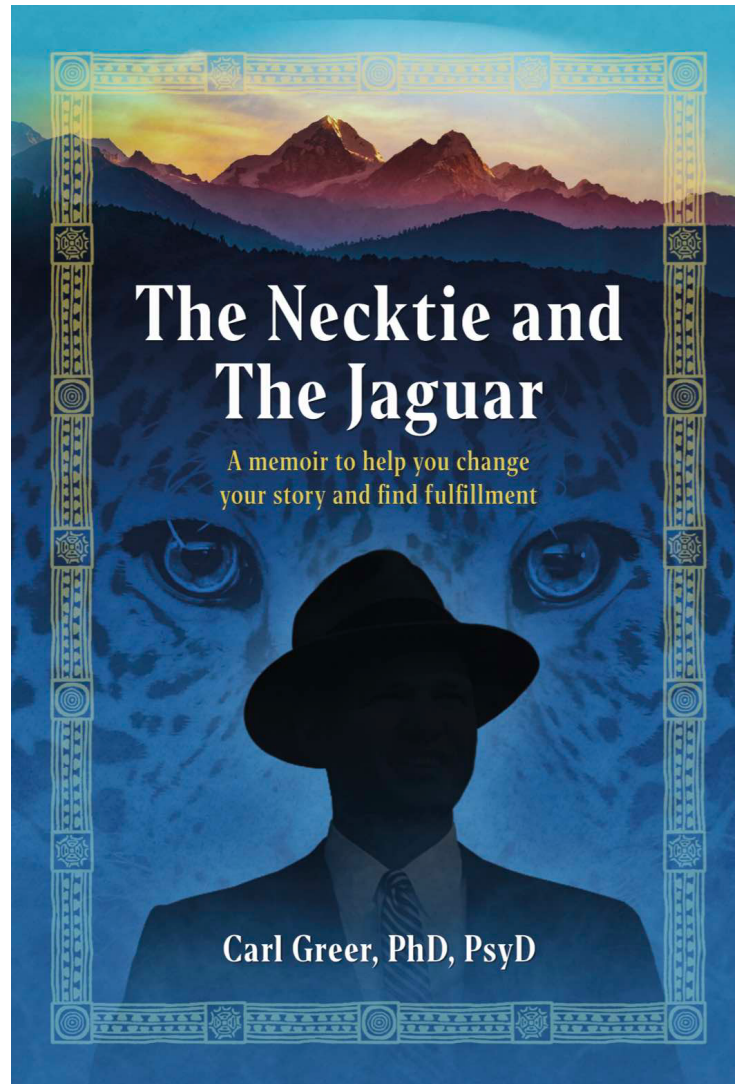




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Inviting in the Jaguar

The jaguar, a predator, contributes to the balance of the jungle by killing, which prevents overpopulation of other animals—a characteristic that would energetically affect me tonight. In essence, Alberto and I were asking the jaguar to help us to energetically kill off whatever we did not need—including any fear that might be holding us back in some way—so that we could be ready for something new. Just what needed to die was a mystery to us as we ingested the San Pedro with reverence for the power of this sacred plant. Together, we asked the jaguar and our fire to work with us, to give us strength and protect us. Remaining present in the moment of our experience, we sat together in silence before the fire we had built in a space outdoors with the night sky above us. I felt my everyday consciousness begin to give way to a more open state of awareness.

Alberto had given me a very old carved stone to work with, one he called a “jaguar stone.” I held it in my hand as I sat looking into the flames before us. Later that evening, Alberto would tell me that the jaguar stone contained three energies: that of the stone itself, that of the jaguar, and that of the shaman who had infused the stone with his and the jaguar’s energy in a ceremony that probably took place in Machu Picchu centuries before. At this point, I only knew the “jaguar stone” as he called it held some energies and had been a present to Alberto from a shaman—and that the carving on it looked a bit like a face.

Suddenly, a gale-force gust of wind came through, and we braced ourselves against it. It abated as swiftly as it had begun. Had it arrived to cleanse us, sweeping away energies we no longer needed?

Next, I noticed that the area surrounding us was filling with light from the ground up. Above us shone a dazzling array of stars and a full moon whose light pooled on the ground. I was still holding the carved jaguar stone Alberto had given me when suddenly my attention was drawn to the sensation of the rock in my hand becoming warm and pulsing like a beating heart. I looked down at it. To my shock, I saw the carved eyes were opening and closing.

“It’s alive! It’s alive!” I shouted to Alberto.

“Feed it, feed it! Before it feeds on you!” he exclaimed.

Quickly, he pressed into my other hand my bottle filled with

Florida water, used for blessings, ceremonies, and cleansings. “Feed it! Hurry!” he cried. Knowing what he meant, I took some of the water into my mouth and sprayed it out in a mist toward the jaguar before it could devour me.

Instinctively, I knew the beast hungered for me just as I had hungered for its essence—the alchemical potential I had yearned for as far back as I could remember. My soul had craved nourishment, yet

I had denied it again and again. My heart pounded in fear, but then the jaguar's threat lifted like a fog and floated away into the night air. I felt the wet stone in my palm, sinister no more yet still alive, warm, and breathing. I realized the danger had passed.

Feed it. So simple.

It's said that the unseen world can exact a price on those who neglect their spiritual nature. Were the health challenges I had developed the result of this stingy starvation diet I'd inflicted on my long-suffering soul?

This much I knew: A sated jaguar has no reason to attack a human.

Feed it. Feed it well.

Thy will. My will. No more denial.

Despite feeling I had gained a crucial insight and escaped the danger

that had been posed by the powerful jaguar energy I was working with, I remained somewhat on edge as the shamanic journey continued.

At one point, I became aware of energies attacking my energy field. Fortunately, the jaguar appeared in front of me and leapt at my energetic adversaries, dispersing them. Then it glided into a black pool of water and swam away. I realized that the jaguar that had wanted to feed on me was a powerful spirit animal serving as my protector, at least for now. I wondered how my new relationship with it would evolve. If the jaguar was my ally, how might he help me?

I looked over at Alberto and asked, "What does it mean when people say they have become one with the jaguar? Does their consciousness go into the jaguar or does the jaguar's consciousness go into them?"

In lieu of a response, Alberto began to shake his rattle. To my surprise, at that very moment, I knew the answer.

"Alberto!" I said. "*I am the fucking jaguar!*"

Somehow, I was inhabiting the jaguar's physical and energetic body as it inhabited mine. His helpful energy was there for me, inside my own energy field.

We were united.

Then, I found myself in an underground cavern where I was initiated into an ancient order of jaguar shamans who were helping me to receive the power of jaguar energy.

I was changing . . .

No longer in the cavern, now I was flying over the earth and looking down on a city thousands of years old. I sensed it was Mycenaean and noticed that its structures formed a pattern of squares

and circles—a circle around a square that enclosed another circle, and so on. As I observed the city from above, I saw that one structure had a deep hole in it. Like an eagle, I could see far into the hole, into a place I somehow knew to be the holy of holies—the most sacred place, where one can experience Spirit directly and receive life-changing revelations. I flew down and was just about to enter it when Alberto lit a candle, yanking me back into ordinary consciousness.

I was disappointed to have missed out on such a wondrous opportunity, but then my consciousness shifted again. I was now at a place outside of a chamber, guarded by the Knights Templar, that I knew contained the secret of the Holy Grail. As I began opening the door to go inside, Alberto once again interrupted my shamanic journey to point something out to me.

A few words had snapped me back to ordinary reality—but it was okay because very soon, my journey continued. I quickly let go of my attachment to what I might have experienced and opened myself up to what was happening in the present. Later, as I thought about it, I came to realize the lesson of these interruptions and of my ability to shift back into everyday awareness when I was using San Pedro: that the line separating the reality of a shamanic journey and the reality in the world of our senses is very thin. One can bleed into the other. What's more, we have to accept that we aren't always in charge of which reality we are in. Journeys can end and begin abruptly. Maybe Alberto was supposed to interrupt me before my entering the holy of holies and before I walked through the doorway to enter the room where lay the Holy Grail. Maybe there was a reason I was yanked back to my place before the fire, listening to Alberto speak before he, too, returned to his journey state. Or maybe he was just interfering with my experience! Instead of being limited to one interpretation, I was aware of all the possibilities.

I intended to be accepting of whatever happened on my journey, but from an ego perspective, I wanted to know and understand everything. The truth is we can't know for sure what is random chance and what is destiny. Working with and trusting Spirit helps us to accept the uncertainty of our situations and the limits of our knowing and understanding. Since that San Pedro experience, I have come to believe that we will encounter the holy of holies only when we are ready, not before, and I'm okay with that.

Now I entered the transpersonal realm of the journey again. Several harlequin-type figures wearing masks and costumes with geometric, diamond shapes appeared in front of me. Something about them troubled me. They didn't seem at all friendly. I recognized they represented a robotic, ineffective way of moving through life—a way of being dead while still physically alive. After the journey ended, I would ponder this image and recognize its message for me: I needed to stop living as if on autopilot, without a sense of purpose and creativity. I wasn't writing my own story and claiming my own way of operating in the world.

Our journey continued, and Alberto suggested we do a nature painting together. In other words, we should let ourselves be drawn to natural objects around us and place them in the designated spot for the "painting," choosing the objects and their placement using our intuition. Nature paintings can give us insights into ourselves that are hidden from the conscious mind. Alberto asked me to draw four quadrants in the dirt, which I did. He commented on my precision. I said, "After all, I am an engineer!" and we both laughed.

Alberto drew a dove in one of the quadrants, and I drew a dragon in another. I watched mesmerized as my dragon come to life and began to gobble up Alberto's dove. When we realized we both were seeing the same thing, we laughed.

Then, I noticed some odd stripes on Alberto's face. I asked, "What are those markings?" He said he had received them energetically years ago during an initiation that had installed jaguar energy into his light body. I realized that the initiatory energies he had received had left their impressions on his energy field and that was what I was observing—jaguar markings.

The journey continued, and as I looked up at the night sky, I felt my attention drawn upward to a particular star. I reached toward it and saw light going from the star to me and back and realized we were exchanging energies. Of all the energies I had encountered since beginning this journey, the star's was the most gentle and benign yet the most powerful. I felt very comfortable communing with this kindly celestial entity and began to describe its beauty and qualities to Alberto.

"I know," he said. "I can see it, too. It's reaching down to you from the sky."

I asked Alberto if he would like me to give him some of the energy I was exchanging with the star. He said yes, and I held up my hand again to gather some of the energy to send it his way. When I pointed my hand toward him to transfer the starlight, the energy was so strong that Alberto stumbled backward a few steps, nearly knocked over by the power. Once again, we were having the same experience of the energy around us—seeing and sensing in sync with each other.

I suddenly became highly aware of the electromagnetic field surrounding my body. My field seemed to pulse and then fizzle as if it were being short-circuited. I felt anxious and concerned. Somehow, I knew that I needed to repair my field by weaving plant energy into my "fizzled" grid. I felt myself begin doing this, not questioning how this plant energy I needed showed up just as I realized I wanted to work with it.

Immediately after my energetic healing and repair, I felt my whole field start to come alive again. However, I had an inner knowing that the healing I'd experienced was not a quick, permanent fix. There would be more repair work to do in the future using plants. In fact, I would again use sacred plants for journeying. I would even go on to develop a new relationship with ordinary plants, modifying my diet to make it more plant based.

Soon after that plant-healing part of my journey, I returned to an ordinary state of consciousness again. I looked over and saw that Alberto had fallen asleep on the ground. Not yet sleepy, I sat before the fire and opened myself up to learning any lessons it had for me, sensing it might have some message I could benefit from. The flames in front of my eyes appeared to be like liquid. It occurred to me that I was watching all the elements transform themselves. The wood contained water, oxygen, and elements of the earth that were becoming fire and smoke—smoke that became one with the air drawn up into the sky, leaving behind ash, something people around the globe have used as fertilizer. The smoke would come down to earth again, embedded in rain—water that would help plants to break through the earth and reach skyward. Fire, I realized,

renews itself over and over again, transforming continually. What seems dead is not really gone but merely nourishment for new life. Pachamama wastes nothing—even when fire seems to consume it.

I fell asleep at some point, and when I awoke, I noticed the fire had been reduced to mere embers. As I gazed into it, I began thinking about my call to do shamanic work and how important it was to me. I silently resolved to dedicate my life to my shamanic path. The very moment I had that thought, the embers burst into bright flames that leaped upward, as if the fire were reading my thoughts and responding, “Yes!” Pachamama was speaking to me through the fire, encouraging me to walk the shamanic path.

Soon afterward, I drifted off to sleep again, and as the dawn began to break, I woke up and looked around. To my surprise, I saw that nothing, not a single object I could see, had been blown away by that powerful wind we had experienced the night before. I walked around, sure that I must be mistaken, but I was not. It was bewildering not just to me but to Alberto, who by now had awoken, too. The wind that swept through with such intensity had seemed so real to both of us.

My bare feet sunk into the grass moist with dew as I went to check on my mesa. My glass bottle of Florida water was not even knocked over, much less shattered. My mesa stones had not been blown away but had somehow gently rearranged themselves into a different formation than the one I had left them in earlier. I was sure I hadn’t touched my mesa after laying it out—and later, Alberto said he hadn’t done so either. The new arrangement of my stones seemed to be giving me several messages: that the lessons of my childhood and family would continue to influence me but not nearly as much as they had. That I had new interconnections with the cosmos. That my relationships and sense of spirituality were changing. That I needed to get rid of my attachments if I wanted to find serenity and strengthen my commitment to my shamanic practice.

The interconnectedness among Source, me, and my mesa felt very real as I stood before it, alone and amazed at having experienced such a powerful and magically inspiring night.

The morning sun continued to rise above the horizon, enhancing my feeling of resurrection. I remembered having experienced initiatory energies as I was working with the jaguar during the journey. I knew something in me had been altered—and maybe something had died, giving way to this sense of rebirth and renewal. The jaguar energy had not fed on me after all. It had entered me and was now with me and perhaps would help me to achieve balance by letting go of energies that weighed me down and caused me to get caught up in a lifeless, harlequin-like way of living.

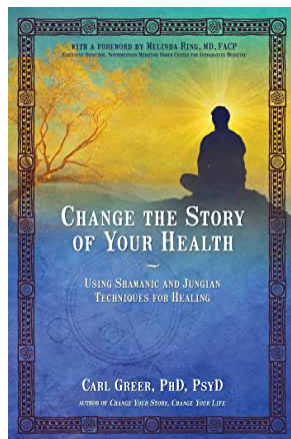
As I thought about all the shamanic work I had done so far, I felt that I was being drawn closer to Source in its many forms, including spirit animals. Tonight was the first time I had journeyed alongside another person and been aware during the journey that we were sharing experiences—of the jaguar in the stone and its pulsing and blinking, of the powerful wind that swept through yet left no damage, of the dragon consuming the dove in front of our eyes, of the star’s energy I shared with Alberto only to see him knocked backward by its power. What was real and what was imagined?

Like any journeying experience, the story of that night on the mountain with Alberto could simply be a tale to tell others, nothing more. But for me, it was a deeply moving reminder that our individual consciousness is always connected with the minds of others even if we don't realize it. We are part of a great mind or consciousness shared by all. After tonight, this would no longer be simply a belief of mine I had first learned about when studying to become a Jungian analyst. Now, I had experienced it to be true and felt my oneness with all of creation.

***The Necktie and the Jaguar* by Carl Greer is available from:**

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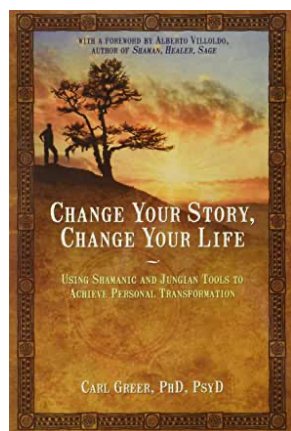
Also by Carl Greer



The story of our health is more in our control than we might think, according to clinical psychologist, Jungian analyst, and shamanic practitioner Carl Greer, PhD, PsyD. We can not only reframe our experiences but actually experience less stress, greater well-being, and even better physical health than it might appear if we are willing to identify our health story and begin rewriting it.

Through journaling exercises and expanded-awareness practices, many of which involve working with and in nature, and which are influenced by Jungian and shamanic traditions, anyone can tap into hidden resources for healing and work with them effectively. Whether gaining insights and balancing energies outdoors, dialoguing and interacting with the earth or a river or lake, or working with dreams, an inner healer, or a symbol encountered on a shamanic journey, readers will find they are able to learn why they have struggled to change their habits and will be empowered to

experience greater wellness within a satisfying health story.



We all have a story, but what we often don't realize is that *we* are the storytellers, and we can rewrite the story at any time to make it more satisfying. In *Change Your Story, Change Your Life*, Jungian analyst and shamanic practitioner Carl Greer has written a practical guide for transformation using the overlooked tool of the unconscious mind.

Drawing on his knowledge of shamanism from both North American and South American indigenous trainings and his background in Jungian analytic psychology, Greer presents exercises for examining our current story and techniques for working with the archetypal energies that power it. Greer helps us to tap into wisdom and power hidden from us when we're in ordinary consciousness.

Greer explains his method for dialoguing with archetypal energies, symbols, emotions, and inner figures--a method inspired by Jungian active imagination. By journeying into unseen worlds usually hidden from our awareness, we can identify, understand, and work with the various energies that both influence our stories and determine the themes that reoccur in our lives. Then, we can ensure that the changes we want to make will last until we are ready to change the story once again. Providing invaluable information about working with archetypal energies encountered in nature and dreams and during shamanic journeys, *Change Your Story, Change Your Life* is a practical and engaging guide for anyone looking to achieve transformation.