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We hope you enjoy reading the article. Nicholas Breeze Wood (editor)



Bundles of Power

A brief introduction to Q'ero style mesas

The word mesa is the Spanish word for table, but in a spiritual or shamanic context, the word means an altar, a sacred space through which a connection is made to the spirit worlds.

Across Latin America, there are many forms of mesa, depending on both the region and the individual mesa holder and the tradition they are part of; and a mesa may be a permanent, or semi-permanent affair, or a temporary or portable altar.

The portable bundles of sacred objects used by p'aqos of the Q'ero people of the high Andes, the descendants of the Inca, represent the portable form of mesa, and it is on these that this article will mainly focus.

The objects within a mesa - whether a permanent 'open' mesa or a portable 'closed' mesa bundle - are very personal, collected in accordance with one's own spiritual understanding and cosmology. The contents will also be influenced by the guidance of one's human teachers and the spirits.

Some mesa traditions from South America - especially those in which

the mesa is an 'open' static mesa - may well contain a large collection of various objects, often including staffs, swords, bottles of herbal tinctures, statues and many other items.

In other traditions - those of the 'closed' Q'ero mesas for example - the main content will be power stones, which the Q'ero call *kuyas*. Although often a *kuya* will be a stone, they do not actually need to be, and can in reality be any power object.

In more fixed environments, where the shaman operates from out of a house or other building, there is no need to bundle up a mesa, except to cover it with a cloth to 'put it to sleep' when it is not desirable to have it active and 'awake.' Instead it can be put on the top of an actual table or other piece of furniture and left there.

Q'ero mesa bundles, on the other hand, suit their specific, less static, culture, as the Q'ero are farmers and llama herders, spending a lot of their time walking in the mountains or working in the fields. They also often perform

ceremonies outside rather than in a fixed location, and so it makes sense for their mesas to be portable bundles.

GATHERING YOUR OWN MESA

Mesas, in either form, are deeply mysterious magical and profound, and also something that anyone might build and have themselves.

You do not need to have a formal empowerment in order to make and hold a mesa, and many of you reading this will already have an 'open mesa' in the form of an altar, in your homes or healing spaces.

To create a mesa bundle in a more Q'ero style is perfectly possible, if you feel moved to do so, and it will - if you work with it on a regular basis - deepen your connection to Spirit, and reflect back to you about the spiritual currents and eddies you move through, and so give you teachings about yourself, your life, and those around you.

First you need a piece of cloth in which to wrap the mesa items and on which you can lay them out on occasions.

These cloths are known as *mestanas* by the Q'ero, and they are traditionally a piece of hand woven woollen cloth, with rich decorative patterns woven into them.

However, you do not need to use a traditional Q'ero *mestana*, and the lack of one won't decrease the spiritual power of your mesa. Any suitable piece of cloth will do. However, Q'ero *mestanas* are beautiful, and the buying of one does support Q'ero culture. Wrapping your mesa bundle in one might also help to remind you what your mesa is for, that it is a sacred thing, and help you keep connected to it.

If you do wish to use a traditional *mestana* cloth there are many places selling them now

online, and you should easily be able to find one.

A mesa contains rich symbolism of the Cosmos. It honours the Lower, Middle and Upper Worlds, as well as the Four Directions and Centre, the Four Elements and the duality of creation - yin and yang - or to use the Q'ero words, *yanantin* and *masintin*.

The mesa is imbued with this symbolism through the decorative patterns on the cloth, the objects contained within the bundled mesa, and the way they are laid out on the cloth, on occasions in which the bundle is opened.

If you are going to assemble your own mesa bundle this symbolism needs to be thought

A mesa contains rich symbolism of the cosmos, brought into the mesa through a mix of the decorative patterns on the cloth, the objects contained within the bundled mesa, and the way they are laid out on the cloth when the bundle is opened

about and included, although it is good not to get too cerebral with it - not too 'in the head.' Saying that, it is possible to just gather sacred objects together in an intuitive, serendipitous manner, and have them reveal their symbolism over time. But on the whole it is better

Below: a collection of mesa bundles at a Q'ero despacho ceremony



to consciously form a ritual map, reflecting the symbolic potency you are working with.

FINDING POWER OBJECTS

A mesa is a symbol of balance, that is why it has the internal symbolic structure of the Four Directions and the Spirit Worlds etc. within it. Its main purpose is to radiate balance and healing, and it is empowered by the objects within it and their inherent spiritual power and symbolism.

The Q'ero know this power as *huaca*, and the word not only means the spiritual power of a sacred object, but also the place in the natural world where that power resides. The contents of a mesa are charged in huaca from the huaca resident in the place where they came from. This might be a sacred site, an ancestral grave, the

revered mummy of someone who gave their life in sacrifice, a sacred spring, a cave, a venerated rock, a piece of land where a great person lived, or a sacred tree and so on.

Sacred objects - most often rocks - from these power places have huaca in them already because of their natural association with their location. They are like spiritual sponges, having soaked up that power. But sacred objects can also be taken to those power places to be 'charged up' by being exposed to them.

Sacred objects also gain huaca by being present during prolonged or repeated sacred activity such as ceremonies.

As already stated, most of the sacred objects in a traditional Q'ero mesa will be stones called kuyas.

These kuyas can be deliberately sought, or may be found in auspicious or miraculous circumstances, or maybe given from other mesa carriers. Some may look very ordinary, while others may look very strange or unique.

Together they form the energy matrix of a mesa, but when the mesa is opened and the stones taken out, they might have specific uses for different types of healing or empowerments.

This energy matrix is never static, as no mesa is fixed in time; its contents always change to reflect the changes in the mesa carrier and the situation of their life. And so a mesa is at the same time both a mirror of the microcosmic reality, and a map of the macrocosmic reality.

It is not ethical to go to an ancient sacred site and rob it of one of its stones. If everyone did that great damage could be caused to them. However, one needs to have awareness of when a sacred stone is offering itself to you. This act of sacred reciprocity is an essential part of Q'ero spirituality. You could, for example, make a prayerful

pilgrimage to the top of a mountain, and there make prayers for all beings and leave biodegradable offerings - such as flower petals - and while there, ask for a power stone - a kuya - to come to you. Stones will come, often in amazing circumstances.

Take time to assemble your mesa, it is not a quick 'gather it in a weekend' type of sacred bundle, let it grow and develop as you do.

WORKING WITH YOUR MESA

Your mesa contains the Universe and also reflects you and your place within the Universe. Because of this, simply sitting with it and 'dreaming' with it, meditating with it, has the potential to take you into deep places and give you great insights. And the more you spend time with it and connect to it the deeper the connection will be.

A mesa bundle also soaks up and stores huaca power. This increases the more you use your mesa and the more you take your mesa to sacred sites and ceremonies where power is freely there to bless and charge it.

With the love from your heart towards your mesa, which you will develop as you deepen your connection, your mesa bundle can be your friend and your road map; your mirror and your guide; and both the key to your path, and the corner stone of it: a true point of balance and beauty in your life.

Below: a mesa bundle 'soaks up' power at a sacred site

