

SPiRiT OF CHOCOLATE: A Woman's Journey to the Rainforest in Search of Her Dreams

Spirit of chocolate

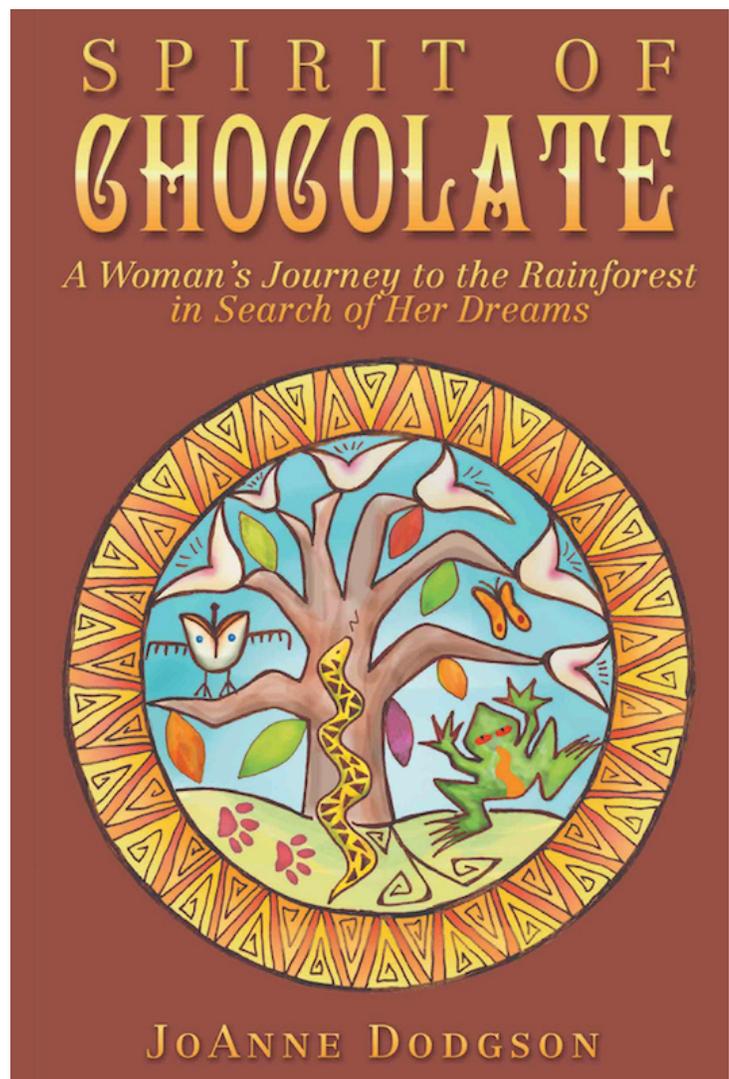
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Introduction

The story of chocolate begins in the rainforest with a tree who lives in the shade beneath the jungle canopy. Cacao (ka-KOW) is quite extraordinary, simply like no other. She's a magical, mystical tree.

Symbolically in ancient art and stories, cacao represents nourishment, life potentials, natural cycles, connectedness, and fertility. Cacao is associated with the Great Mystery, with the unseen and magical realms of Spirit. In indigenous cultures in Central and South America, the cacao tree is considered the World Tree, the Tree of Life, the Tree at the Center of the Universe. Cacao is life that feeds life that feeds life.



Her Roots

Cacao's homeland is the rainforest. In the wild, she flourishes in the rainy, hot and humid lands twenty-degrees north and twenty-degrees south of the equator. Cacao Tree depends on taller trees to provide shade. These protective trees, called mother trees, include the banana, coconut palm, and lemon. In the shaded land beneath the jungle canopy, the tender vine-like Cacao Tree thrives.



Her Flowers

Cacao's flowers are quite unique. They don't only grow on the ends of the branches nor do the flowers bloom just seasonally. The tiny pink and white flowers spiral all around the tree trunk and all along the branches. The flowers bud and blossom throughout the year.

Cacao blossoms have no scent, at least to our human noses. The midges, little flying insects, seek out the pollen inside the cacao blossoms. As the midges fly among the trees, the cacao pollen carried on the midges' bodies gets transferred from flower to flower. Once pollinated, the flowers transform into fruits.



Her Pods

Cacao's unusual fruit pods also hint at the magic of this tree. The fruit pods are thick-skinned deeply-ribbed oval bulbs, some weighing over one pound.

Cacao pods are a unique rainbow of colors - red, green, yellow, violet, brown, and orange - depending on the particular tree species and ripeness of the fruits. Cacao pods sprout all around the trunk and hang from all parts of the branches, just as the flowers do.

Cacao's pods don't drop to the ground when the fruit is ripe. Each pod is filled with a succulent creamy pulp which draws monkeys, bats, and parrots for a delectable feast. When the fruit pulp is eaten, the hard seeds inside the pod may be inadvertently consumed or dropped to the ground. The animals and birds naturally disperse the pods and seeds, planting the next generations of cacao trees.



Her Sacred Seeds

Cacao seeds are the part of the tree we use to make chocolate. Cacao seeds are highly nutritious and have unique chemical compounds that provide energy for the human body, that generate feelings of well-being, and evoke altered states of consciousness. Ancient peoples knew this and contemporary science bears this out.

In traditional ways of preparing cacao, the seeds are gathered from the pods, fermented with the pulp, and dried in the sun. The seeds are then roasted, winnowed, and ground into a thick paste.

Cacao elixirs, a warm beverage, are made by mixing the cacao paste with water and spices such as cinnamon, chili, and vanilla bean. In ancient

artifacts found in the American continents, chemical residues from cacao are evident in drinking vessels. In ancient art, cacao elixirs are depicted as elements of ritual and ceremony.



Her Magic

Cacao has been given the name Theobroma, food of the gods. When eating and drinking cacao, we are touching, tasting, embodying, and sharing the very seed of the Tree of Life.

Cacao provides nourishment for body, mind, heart, and spirit. Cacao has long been revered as sacred medicine.



Spirit of Chocolate

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