

## Parenting the Peyote Way

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IT WAS NOVEMBER 1980. Matthew Kent, Norah Booth, and I were following DEA-authorized peyote distributor Marcos Muniz, in a search for peyote plants growing on an expansive ranch in south Texas. On our last visit Marcos had offered to help us buy land for the Peyote Way Church, but our plans had changed. Only a few days before, Matthew—my soul mate and husband, Norah—Church Archivist and friend, and I had spent the night in a Richardson, Texas, jail. Our land purchase mission had been delayed when the church truck, bearing “Peyote Way” signs and designs and a load of Mana pottery, was ostensibly stopped for “impeding traffic.” Each of us carried four dried peyote buttons as prescribed in Church bylaws. The charge was misdemeanor possession of peyote. We paid the bail and, under the advice of counsel, covered the truck’s signs. By the time we reached south Texas we no longer planned to buy land, as the down payment had been converted to bail money. Marcos thoughtfully offered to help us find a few plants to take home.

### PEYOTE PRAYER

There’s an art to finding peyote in its native environment. Marcos suggested talking to it and began making sing-song calling sounds, reminiscent of calling one’s child or pet. Pretty soon he had found a peyote plant, and suddenly the winter desert revealed more plants around my feet. I was excited, but my mind still lingered over personal concerns. We had just initiated what ultimately ended up being a nine-year suit against the Texas and Federal governments for their discriminatory peyote laws, and here was I, contemplating what was possibly a miraculous pregnancy. Part of Matthew’s spiritual commitment was to a monastic life. He had had a vasectomy three years earlier. I chewed on a few freshly cut tops, or buttons, and prayed. Experiences with this holy plant had convinced me that the sacramental use of peyote was not danger-

ous to me. I had come to this peyote field to pray for a daughter. Prior to our Texas trip, Matthew had begun complaining that he was experiencing a tugging sensation between his legs. I suggested his vasectomy was reversing. My menses, which had stopped the same month as his operation, were finally recurring sporadically.

### MIRACLES

I had been ingesting peyote in the Church’s prescribed Spirit Walk structure (see [www.peyoteway.org](http://www.peyoteway.org)) several times a year, but had increased my use as my prayers focused on healing and having a child. Matthew, whose focus was on peyote legalization, had also been sucking on a peyote button a day for its spiritual and tonic effects. Nine months after our Texas mission, Matthew caught Joy, our beautiful, healthy daughter, the first of our three children born at home. To us, and to our families and friends, these were all miracle births. Joy, 21, is an avid reader and creative artist and writer. Joseph, 18, is an honor student and a member of Phi Theta Kappa. Tristan, 13, is an excellent cook and budding musician. All three children were born and grew up during our lawsuit.

Those days we spent raising kids, tending the holy sacrament peyote, counseling spirit walk visitors, keeping records of our peyote distribution, and consulting with the A.C.L.U. lawyers who had taken our civil suit against Texas and the Federal government for their abridgment of our 1st, 5th, 11th, and 14th Amendment rights. Ultimately, we decided not to take our case to the Federal Supreme Court, due to an unfavorable ruling against Alfred Smith and Galen Black, two Native American Peyotists. In that case, the court ruled that the State of Oregon was justified in prohibiting the religious use of peyote. This ruling essentially nullified First Amendment freedom of religion guarantees, causing outrage among the religious community

by giving the government broad power to enforce criminal laws that conflict with religious practice. What would happen to the sacramental wine use in Catholic ceremonies in places that ban alcohol? What about a prisoner's right to follow dietary restrictions due to faith? The list goes on and on. Fortunately, Arizona state law protects the *bona fide* religious use of peyote regardless of race. We decided to postpone our arguments and wait for a friendlier Supreme Court. We may have a long wait.

### FORMATIVE YEARS

Against this legal scenery our children were raised. The first six years of life are crucial to the development of a child's self image and worldview. During these early years, they form many conclusions about their world, based on daily observations of parents and caregivers. If a person has made a conscious decision to have a child, it follows that they would want to stay home with their kids those first six years. And so we did. Our spiritual connection to peyote was witnessed by our children and became integrated into their understanding of reality. When the kids were small we kept the planters out of their reach, but they soon came to recognize that peyote was sacred. We didn't go to traditional church for Sunday services. Instead our devotion was expressed as watering and feeding peyote and San Pedro plants and providing spirit walks and counseling for visitors. Joy could often be observed quietly listening to Matthew talk to a visitor. She loved his stories and obviously found the spiritual discussions intriguing.

When the children were ready to discuss drugs and the law, we read with them *From Chocolate to Morphine* by Andrew Weil and Winifred Rosen. I liked that this book pointed out that addictive drugs like coffee, tobacco, alcohol, and sugar are socially acceptable. We also read the Constitutionally aligned Arizona statute concerning peyote with them, and compared it to the discriminatory Federal law. We explained that plant sacraments have a long history of safe religious use among indigenous people. As the children got older we also discussed more complicated issues surrounding the topic of drugs, like the politics and profitability of pharmaceutical drugs, and their subsequent listing as legal or illegal.

In our home, television—as a mind-altering substance and tool for the dissemination of propaganda and advertising—was prohibited. The kids' first television experience was as a video monitor for the movie, *The Neverending Story*. Joy was five. The kids used their imaginations, read books, and played with each other when we weren't home schooling. That kind of simplicity didn't last, and today I have to make a reservation to use the Church computer.

Joy's initiation into the entheogen community came with a spirit walk shortly after her fourteenth birthday. She was mature but far from an adult. Joe, who had been in trouble at the tender age of eleven, was initiated the summer of his twelfth birthday. Tristan had his first spirit

walk last summer. He's thirteen. We chose to allow our children to participate in a spirit walk during adolescence because it is a time of great physical and emotional change. We felt the peyote would help the kids remember who they were and where they came from. Through the Spirit Walk, peyote helps us to realize that we are not our bodies. We occupy them for a short time, and then we are gone. Our bodies die, but that which is truly ourselves continues.

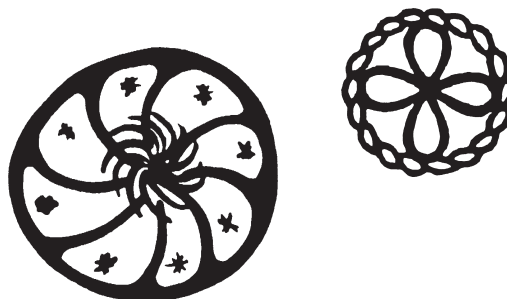
Raising children to have a healthy spiritual attitude about entheogens in a hostile Drug War climate is challenging, but I think a few general conclusions can be drawn from our experience. As parents and caregivers, we must be aware of the example and environment we provide for our children, as they are constantly learning from the examples, good and bad, of others. If children witness a daily demonstration of devotion and reverence towards entheogens, they will recognize the spiritual nature of entheogens.

Regardless of whether kids go to public school or home school, we are all home schoolteachers. We must maintain an open atmosphere of communication with our kids by conversing with them daily about any and all subjects of interest to them. These discussions encourage a child to communicate complicated ideas and question confusing societal behavior. Kids learn quickly what is appropriate to discuss with others. Showing the child where to find information in books helps them to develop their opinions based on facts instead of propaganda and scare tactics. Finally, by being consistent and honest with our kids, we may prevent them from causing harm to themselves or others.

### DAILY EXAMPLE

In an American society obsessed with alcohol and tobacco, and where relief from all manner of problems is only a pill away, rational consideration of entheogens is replaced by hysteria and banishment. A home environment of honesty about drugs and the law puts the parent in a social minefield, but there are ways to get through it. Consistency, sincerity, and love are the parent's allies. The daily example we present to our children helps them to process all the baffling contradictions of our society and form a balanced worldview.

May your spirit walk experiences inspire you and remove all your fears. •







**RABBI MATTHEW S. KENT**

*The Praying Woman*, 1995, acrylic on canvas, 36" X 48"