

Dare to Know: *Sapere Aude*

Monachi Observation #2 by César Avilés

I

In school, they said I was part Taino Indian. That we Puerto Ricans are descendants of Tainos, Spanish colonizers, and African slaves. That's when I stopped listening. The only knowledge I wanted to acquire was in music. Besides being my talent, music lived in me as an entity, kind of like a soul. This entity asked hungrily for knowledge; music knowledge, that is. And when I fed it, it delivered her endorphins. *Taino who?* Music gives me *the* pleasure. No Taino could do that. They were all dead. Moreover, under the exceptional support of my parents, who also fed the hungry entity, I bloomed like a flower under optimal conditions. I became Music. And as Music, I couldn't know—or understand—anything outside myself. Music, being sound, can only hear its colors. But then, is Music music alone? Or is Music more than music? *Sapere Aude.*

II

As the cliché goes, the arrival of my son changed my status quo. I may be part Music, just like I am part Taino, but I'm definitely not *just* Music. Music can't have human babies, and I just had one. To continue, I needed new knowledge. Holistic knowledge. It's not that Fate forced me to search for knowledge. More like, if I wanted to live well as a part-Music-part-citizen entity, I needed answers. So I decided to dare to know. And when I did, I learned that caring consistently about knowledge eventually gives you (at least) *some* knowledge. I may be wrong about that last statement, but I'll go with it for now. *Sapere Aude*

III

My commitment to knowledge led me to the College of Stoic Philosophers and, eventually, the Fourth School, the Stoic monastery. I read Abbot Erik's Moo, Brian Weiss' books, Michael Newton's, and others here. I learned about the unknown from a different perspective (I was a Christian for 30 years!). *If spirit guides do exist, as these reputable people say, they may also have answers for me.* I had to experience it myself. And then I did.

The more I read about the Stoic belief in internal/external *daimones*, the less sleep I got. Not because actual *daimones* haunted me in the night, but because I couldn't stop reading about them. The topic fascinated me. I cared. At this time, I started meditating and practicing shamanic journeying, and asking my questions. Then I doubted my experience. And then I trusted in the process once again. I trusted because the answers I received made sense. They were good answers. And then I doubted again. Abbot Erik was patient and assured me that it doesn't matter who's sending what—I am getting answers! And I am living a better life because of these practices. The Stoics say that Fate is God and that, at that time, struggling with doubt was *good*. Not only good, struggling with doubt was the best possible arrangement. So if it's *that* good, I should smile at it. I should smile at doubt because there is nothing to fret about. The present is good. *Sapere Aude.*

IV

I recently finished my year-long studies with our Abbot Erik. I am now a proud Fellow of the Monasterium Stoicorum. During the course, we studied Heraclitus, the *daimon*, and the relation between philosophy and mysticism. For a whole year, I recorded my meditations, dreams, contact with *daimon*, journeys. Not everything in my journal is a treasure. The whole year was an experiment, and I'm sure not everything in there is valuable, or true for that matter. That's fine. Because the journal also contains beneficial advice. Guidance from my *daimon* or even my subconscious mind to act right, live better and follow Nature. This past year of studies was a search. Search for knowledge. Search for answers. And this search made my journey. The search itself was the benefit. Because when I searched, I was awake; a necessary condition to find. After concluding my fellowship studies, I believe that even if it takes a lifetime to find a grain of wisdom, the quest I'm in will be worth it. *Sapere Aude*.

V

"César, do you see those white rocks at the bottom of the canyon?"

I squinted, "Yes."

"That's where the highest number of petroglyphs on the island is located."

At the summit of one of the highest peaks in Puerto Rico, I looked down. Wow. I cared. I cared about the Taino Indians that lived in my native Puerto Rico. My ancestors.

That was last month (August 2021). I flew home after six years of absence. It was time to go. However, in six years, a lot of things have happened. For the first time, I set foot in my country as a Stoic. And for the first time, I was there caring about something other than music. *Sapere Aude*.

VI

Except for the hiking trip, I spent every day in Puerto Rico with her. She's 83, and the Alzheimer is taking the best of her words. She loves to go shopping. Me too. So we teamed up and visited every mall in the area—for seven days! LOL. My wish to learn about my origins ignited during that hike, so I took grandma on a road trip to the only bookstore I knew. Once there, grandma was tired and fell asleep on a comfy couch near the exit. I was free to roam the store and get what I needed. Skimming through books, I quickly read that the Taino Indians believed in a *daimon*-like deity. The day couldn't get much better. Armed with new resources, I woke up grandma and headed to taco-land for lunch.

VII

Today, I still don't know myself. But I know that I know myself more than I knew myself ten years ago. Stoicism has rationally explained my roles and duties, my place in the universe, what I am. Their message resonates, and I decided to adopt their beliefs for now. Also! After 35 years, I learned that the Spaniards did not "discover" Puerto Rico in 1493 but that they *invaded* us. Injustice was committed toward the Taino. Moreover, it's possible I still don't know anything (like grandpa Socrates used to say). So I cannot say that I now know. I can only say that I dare to know. *Sapere Aude*.