

Yawar Panga Ritual Ceremony¹

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The ritual ceremony of Yawar Panga is a specific healing act originally from the High-Amazon Basin of Peru, designed to operate a deep cleaning of the body of the participants. It consists in the ingestion of juice from the fresh leaves of a climbing plant identified as *Aristolochia didyma* S. Moore (family Aristolochiaceae), complemented with a ritual environment made of singing (ikaros), vitalizing blows of black tobacco smoke that the shaman directs towards his patient and the rhythmic sound produced by the beating of the shacapas (bunch of dry leaves of *Pariana* sp.).

A DETOX PLANT

Yawar Panga proves to be a very useful plant in the treatment of all types of intoxication, particularly in the first phase of the treatment of drug addiction. The rehabilitation of drug addicts, according to the methodology we use at the Takiwasi Center, requires a minimum time of nine months in which the use of Yawar Panga is maximum in the first week of treatment. Its emetic properties, and cathartic to a lesser degree, make it an excellent means of purification. It especially allows to disable the abstinence syndrome in the drug abuser, both in its physical and psychological aspects (especially anxiety). It also facilitates the starting of the treatment since the person immediately feels that "the plant is stronger than the drug". Often, the dream production with significant contents is awakened consecutively to the intake, which generates great joy to the patient that feels "alive from the inside" again, reconnected with his inner world previously anesthetized by the drugs. Relief is so palpable that it strengthens the subject's motivation to move forward.

This first step then allows a more efficient intervention of other vegetable preparations that can be better assimilated thanks to that previous cleaning. It should be noted that in the therapeutic protocol of drug addiction, all these remedies are associated with other techniques of contemporary psychology, energy work, ergotherapy, etc. Also, other non-addicted patients can participate in the ritual ceremony of the Yawar Panga in order to proceed to a general detoxification of their body. For example from excessive alcohol consumption; after having assimilated several medicines during a conventional pharmacological treatment; after a phase of intense stress or a period of holidays where

¹ Conference first presented during the VII International Congress of Traditional and Folkloric Medicine, Mérida, Mexico, Dec.1993, later increased in 2014.

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heavy foods have been over eaten, etc. Traditionally it is also used to expel some harmful brew that may have been given cagily to the patient with the intention of causing him "damage" (evil spell) and for the cure of snake bites.

SYMBOLIC LEXICON

The name Yawar Panga consists of two Quechua words: yawar = blood and the suffix "panga" which designates a broad leaf. It would then designate a "broad leaf of blood." It is called this way because when cutting its leaf or stem, it spills a reddish, bloody liquid. It is interesting to note that according to Paracelsus' doctrine of signatures, Yawar Panga precisely detoxifies blood. The names popularly given to the plants inform us not only about their morphological characteristics or the areas where they grow, but also about their therapeutic potentialities in a symbolic language. Thus, in some parts of the Lower Peruvian Amazon Jungle is known as Huancahui Sacha and in some other parts as "shoe of the deceased". Both allusions are related to the outstanding feature of the flower: the dark color with white veins are similar to the plumage that covers the neck of a falcon bird (*Herpetotheres cachininans*) that hunts snakes; "shoe of the deceased" refers clearly to the shape of the flower, similar to that of an ankle boot that fits some scrawny feet (shoe of the deceased). The arrangement of the stem of this flower presents the ovary's inferior chalice corolla and the other floral elements hanging from the pistil. Another name given in the Low Jungle is Machacuy Huasca that gathers the name of a poisonous snake (machaco or *Bothrops bilineatus*) and the suffix "huasca" that designates a climbing plant with a serpentine stem (as in aya-huasca).

At a symbolic level, Yawar Panga would represent both the power of the air (bird) that dominates the venomous snake in its therapeutic aspect, and potentially also a poisonous earth power (snake), that can kill the body in toxic doses. If we say that the snake symbolizes knowledge, it is good knowledge when it is inspired and ritualized, in a spiritual use (air), and it is bad knowledge when appropriated as non-ritualized consumable (earth). The spiritual (aerial) dimension of the Yawar Panga then has the power to dominate and remove poisonous knowledge, false knowledge or beliefs, which agrees with the traditional use of purifying from "evil" or "demons."

WAY OF USE

From the leaves of Yawar Panga we extract the juice, which is given to drink fresh to the patients, without further preparation or any other addition.

For drug addicts it is prescribed in two initial chances: one at the time of being admitted to the Takiwasi Center and the other during the first week of treatment. During the nine-month treatment intakes may be repeated if necessary.

It is worth mentioning that this plant within the context of biochemical research is not yet fully elucidated. The action mechanism at the level of the digestive system and particularly of the gastro-intestinal tract that produce vomiting and anal evacuations is still unknown; but its use is inspired by an ancient traditional knowledge. The degree of absorption of the emetic-purgative substances and what stimulation they produce in the chemical-receptor have not yet been studied. According to the phytochemical studies carried out, aristolochic acid and other derivatives of lignanic structures and their glycosides are responsible for its activity. What is not yet known is whether aristolochic acid and the other compounds undergo metabolic degradation in the body or compounds are simply excreted as such. There are references about lepidoptera that in larval form extract aristolochic acid from plants that produce these substances as secondary metabolites to use it as a defense mechanism against their attackers: chunks of 0.15 mg/larva are enough to produce undesirable effects to the organism of a bird who weighs 300 gr. Exaggerating this reference, 30 mg of aristolochic acid are sufficient to cause the emetic-purgative effects in a man with an average body weight of 60 kg.

Yawar Panga is not given as any other potion. The efficiency of its natural qualities is reinforced in a special ritualized environment. Logically this requires the patients to be prepared, so they are told beforehand that it is an emetic (vomitiv) and cathartic plant. They are reminded that it is important to have a respectful attitude during the ceremony because it is a means of cleaning not only the body but also the spirit. They are also informed that they will have to drink plenty of water (a minimum of 6 liters within 2-3 hours) so that the emetic effect is delivered under the best conditions, and that the cleaning is effective and will produce a renovating action. Not drinking water delays the process by making it slow and uselessly painful. In fact, water is the vehicle to spread the active substance through the gastro-intestinal tract and also produces an increase of the intestinal content with the consequent increase of volume.

To facilitate the absorption of the purgative emetic components of the Yawar Panga and its subsequent elimination, patients are previously given a light purgative. The day before they can take, while fasting, the water of two coconuts (*Coco mucifera*) to which are added a bottle of milk (sulfate) of magnesia of 120ml and an envelope of fruit salt of 5g (citric acid + sodium bicarbonate + anhydrous sodium carbonate): this purgative works as a buffer for the gastro-intestinal pH.

The Yawar Panga ceremony is run by a healer or a therapist who has followed a process of initiation. He gives each patient approximately one tablespoon (15ml) of Yawar Panga juice, which does not present an unpleasant taste. Ten minutes after taking the potion, the patient begins to drink plenty of water to activate the chemo-receptor zone (vomit's central mechanism) and the stomach (place where the vomit reflex is born). Every time the patient drinks water, the vomiting comes along. The emetic

action can last for an average of two hours. During this time the patient has drunk approximately six liters of water. Despite its ostentation, vomiting is not painful, it comes naturally. The emetic waves stop abruptly in some people and progressively in others, and in the latter they can last several hours according to the heaviness of the toxic "loads" at various levels (physical, emotional or spiritual). However, in obsessive personalities, the patient tends to want to continue drinking water to get rid of "all the evil" and it is necessary to stop him since the single intake of water awakens a vomiting reflex without the benefit of purification and could provoke disequilibrium at the electrolyte level.

At the end of the ceremony measures are taken to suspend the vomiting effect if this does not occur naturally. A very simple way is to give some cinnamon tea with sugar. The volatile oils of the cinnamon cut the spasmodic action produced by aristolochic acid, and the sugar replaces the lost energies after the drastic elimination of electrolytes and metabolites. Sugar cuts off the action of depurative plants and particularly bitter-tasting plants. A slice of lemon may also be used to pass it under the armpits and over the abdomen. A shower after the session is recommended to reduce the effects, refresh the body and clean up the bad smell and sweat.

Side effects observed from time to time in patients during the ceremony are not always the same but they evoke vagal reactions such as head heaviness, cold or low blood pressure, shaking, drunkenness, dizziness, weakness, depressive feelings and sleepiness. These symptoms are temporary and are naturally compensated in most cases; in a few others the therapist intervenes with blows of camphor, tobacco, florida water, prayers and energetic maneuvers to regulate the patient's energy. Sometimes an experienced healer can "suck" the area of the solar plexus to reduce spasms. If he has to deal with a drop in pressure and significant fatigue he can give the patient a lemon to suck with a little bit of salt.

Vomiting occurs naturally but there are cases of significant blockage, which often have to do with psychological aspects, so after 2 hours without achieving vomiting this can be induced by manual stimulation of the vomiting reflex using the fingers or a thin leaf that touches or tickles the bottom of the throat. The recommendation is to find out before the session if the patient has an attitude of rejection toward the vomit or never vomited in his life, which may lead to take precaution. For some people (and more often in women with a psychological connotation of abuse) forcing themselves to ingest a significant amount of water can be considered as a form of violent intrusion, a "rape" of the integrity, and so they refuse to drink water, therefore in these cases it's better to choose another way of purging.

At first patients remove the remains of the food eaten previously and still not digested. Fasting or

eating lightly (a soup for example) at noon is recommended. Then the vomit eliminates the phlegm that corresponds to mucous secretions of the digestive walls and is a signal of deep purification. In some cases the patients experience the evacuation of products ingested many years before and recognizable by their smell, as inhalers to treat asthma or ether used as an anesthetic in some surgery. These signs give an idea of the significance of that cleaning that is carried out, not only on a physical but also on an energetic level, those substances having been metabolized at an organic level but not at an energetic level.

In the third stage, some people eliminate bile (yellowish, warm and bitter liquid), sometimes in big quantity, which indicates over-production at the hepatic level and vesicular retention. That elimination occurs in people who tend to constant worry, to return endlessly to undigested grudges, to think obsessively of past grief. Consequently to this behavior, often a deep feeling of injustice appears, the feeling that life has not been fair, the non-acceptance of what it was for one to live ("Why me, why this suffering in my life? Why this family, this body, this place, etc.?").

Usually the patient ends up very tired and wants to rest at the end of the ceremony. Once achieved, the sleep is generally deep, often with meaningful dreams. At each Yawar Panga dose it becomes easier to vomit, it comes and finishes faster, and the fatigue after the ceremony diminishes. The purge is performed in the afternoon so that the patient can then rest for a full night. No food is eaten after the session and until the next day.

During the ceremony, pains can be awakened in certain parts of the body that indicate muscular "shields" that correspond to energetic blocks, somatic memories of emotional problems recorded into the body.

Yawar Panga has no visionary effects, however, in sensitive people, images with important meaning can emerge as a daydream. More often repressed emotions (anger, fear, sadness...) that the patient can express during the process are mobilized. All these cathartic manifestations are in themselves curative and represent interesting indications for diagnostic and therapeutic exploration.

We can also notice light sensitivity and for this reason the ceremony is carried out in the semi-darkness.

In certain cases, throat's irritation caused by vomiting efforts may tear blood capillaries and the patient spits out some blood. It does not represent any danger nor requires any special treatment.

The day after the ceremony the patient experiences a pleasant sensation of relief, clarification of ideas

and nice mental clarity, body relaxation and luminous aspect. Perceptions of the five senses become more acute, especially at the olfactory level.

The only side effect found sometimes the next day is certain moderate pain in the throat and upper chest because of the violent mobilization of muscles usually underutilized. It does not require any intervention and disappears in a couple of days at the most.

It is worth emphasizing that the emetic evacuation can be associated with other types of physical elimination through other natural pathways: diarrheal evacuation (purgative action), hypersalivation, intense sweating, heavy urine, strong breath.

The toxicity of aristolochic acid and other metabolic products of the Yawar Panga if taken in a safe way (30mg / for a man that averages 60kg of body weight) acts as an ideal emetic with better outcomes than those of the artificial emetics sold in pharmacies. According to our experience, except for very rare cases, even subjects that have a so called "hard stomach" do not resist that portion (a spoonful) of Yawar Panga: all of them vomit. So it is important to use this plant in cases of poisoning. A dose higher than indicated could lead to dangerous consequences. However, with proper management, also 10 years old children and older can be given the plant with the same guidelines and prescriptions as for an adult: the demand of drinking plenty of water requires a minimum of voluntary participation and understanding from the patient.

As a precaution, it is considered contraindicated to give this potion to pregnant women, patients with serious metabolic disorders (eg diabetes), people with a weakened organism, serious cardiovascular problems (heart failure, hypertension) and people with injuries of the digestive tract (ulcer, fissure of the esophagus, etc.) because of the risks of bleeding.

It has been pointed out by the scientific literature the possibility that aristolochias plants may be carcinogenic, especially at the renal level (Michel J. et al, 2013; Subhuti Dharmananda, 2001). However, studies were not performed on *Artislochia didyma* and refer mainly to the **prolonged use of capsules** containing aristolochias in Chinese medicine without the aim of purging. It seems unlikely that a one-time use, in which the plant is also eliminated by vomiting, may be responsible for such an irritation that could lead to a cancer. The role of associated medications and the importance of the biological terrain of the patients with previous kidney failures are also to be considered in cancer cases. In Amazonian traditional medicine these complications are not known and we have never seen them in any patient in 28 years of weekly ceremonies with thousands of people.

RITUAL CONTEXT

The healer leads the ceremony through shamanic songs called "Ikaros". From the beginning, the *maestro* "charges" the vegetable preparation with its ikaros and blows of black tobacco smoke. Once the healer has "offered" (delivered with love) the juice of this plant to the patients, it's the time for a work of about two to three hours. The healer sings and invokes forces beneficial to the treatment. The ikaros belong to those healers who have ingested psychotropic plants and have modified their normal state of consciousness to be able to directly learn from the plants through dreams and visions. This process of initiation is long, arduous and demanding: it follows precise and strict rules (control over food, sexuality, sleep, etc.).

The ikaros or sacred chants play a very important role during the healing session, they are like the helm of a boat through which the healer guides the ceremony.

While shaking rhythmically the shacapa (bunch of dry branches) or the maraca, the therapist starts to sing the ikaros to activate the individual and collective energies in play and strengthen the effect of the brew. Several other techniques are used during the Yawar Panga session for the same purpose: camphor blown, florida water, cinnamon, massage... In some cases the patient is asked to perform certain movements and breathing exercises intended to facilitate the expulsion of the toxic substances. At the beginning and at the end of the ceremony, after an ikarada, the healer blows the patient on different parts of his body: crown, back, chest and hands.

The blow acts as a subtle energy restorer, an experience that can be better understood when one perceives it while in a modified state of consciousness, with increased sensitivity.

It is worth emphasizing that the effectiveness of the ritual context becomes evident in the treatment with Yawar Panga. Experience has taught us that when a non-initiated therapist gives the preparation, without the proper ritual, the emetic effects are slower to manifest (after an hour or more instead of the usual 10 to 15 minutes) and do not reach the efficacy achieved in the ritual framework. The sessions tend to last a long time, with the consecutive exhaustion of the patient.

EFFECTS OF THE PURGE

The function of vomiting and the eliminations associated is to purify. When a person vomits not only he brings up the water and the toxins ingested to a physical level but also the toxins ingested through food, environmental pollution and chemicals absorbed, including medicines and drugs. Also, on an emotional level, he frees himself from his blockages, from psycho-affective elements that are kept or repressed, which disturb and unconsciously affect him. Sometimes they make him think and act inappropriately even against his own will. All the impurities of the body and the mind are eliminated together.

At the psychological level, vomiting involves a voluntary opening of the subject to "give back" and acceptance to face "the evil" that he has inside. Unlike anal evacuation linked to sadistic and domineering connotations, oral elimination involves humility and submission with confidence towards the therapist and to be guided through him toward life. In itself, it signals and manifests the desire to "bow down", to break the harshness ("hard nape village people", the Bible says facing the rebelliousness of the Jewish people) and to free oneself from the "devils" one has inside. The patient decides to "throw up" what he has incorrectly ingested, the physical, mental and spiritual foods he swallowed without having the ability to digest them, metabolize them. With the purification of the mouth is the verb that is purified, the word and therefore the thoughts. If life is considered as a perpetual movement, every act of retention constitutes a way of stopping the vital flow. It becomes evident how many times, in a neurotic way, a person "wants" his own suffering, prefers to maintain it, since it is known and regular, instead of getting rid of it and explore other ways of living. Hold on to something corresponds to an act that has to do with "having" and blocks from "being." This retention constitutes in some way a spiritual transgression in the way that it is opposed to the flow of life, the vital energy, and to the basic trust which is an act of faith. It is then a matter of restoring what has been improperly retained, returning it. Dare to let go, to give up the non-acceptance of what constitutes our life. The power of Yawar Panga leads us to this necessary abdication, to that beneficial surrender to what is greater than us. In this sense appears a breaking point for pride, vanity, self-sufficiency to go towards acceptance of what life gives us and recognition of our limitations, our poverty, our inner dirt, even our misery. That misery that appeals to the mercy of something that goes beyond us. It invites us to exist for being and not for having. It invites us to renounce to the spirit of revenge that always seeks a return, a compensation for what we consider has been unfair to us in life. It invites us to give up the pattern of feeling victims facing a life that would be "bad" and recognize that it is us who do not know how to accept the goodness of life because we are not given it as we want, the way we want, when we want. It means giving up this enormous ambition and belief to know what is right for oneself and what life is, and for that blindness we cannot see the greatness of what is beyond us and we cannot access to the humble contemplation of the extraordinary mystery of being alive. The Yawar Panga gives access to this understanding, not in an intellectual way, but thanks to the body inscription that is given through the vomit.

Traditionally in curanderismo, the oral elimination is also a chance to extract from the mouth "a damage done". We consider that it's possible to emotionally disturb an individual by making him secretly swallow a brew prepared for such purposes. We know that in witchcraft there are multiple harmful substances (menstrual blood or graveyard ground for example) that can be surreptitiously introduced into the drink of the victim. The "energetic" disturbance caused by the presence of such toxic substance has physical, psychic, spiritual and behavioral effects. Purification is then exercised

simultaneously at these different levels.

This traditional infestation is intentional but in many people we can also see infestations that are not induced. These are forms of spiritual contamination by evil entities (evil spirits) that parasitize the person. They have different degrees of importance, from a simple obsession to exceptional forms of possession. In these cases, the Yawar Panga, strengthened by an appropriate ritual which requires much preparation, plays an exorcist role. These infestations occur through practices of magic, spiritism (ouija), occultism, when hanging out with people or at places that are spiritually contaminated, for energy vulnerability as in drug use and desacralized sexual practices or through abuse (rape, incest), when taking psychoactive plants without ritual context or with inadequate ritual context, for profanations of the sacred, transgenerational inheritances, etc.

Likewise, in drug addiction, vomiting fulfills a therapeutic function at these three levels: it eliminates the drug as a toxic substance but also calms the emotions and opens to the reconnection with the spiritual dimension. This energy rearrangement allows the subject to recover fundamental values, to obtain greater clarity about his real situation and to strengthen his motivation to continue the treatment. External observers, because of the spectacular emesis, often believe that this type of treatment is a kind of punishment, a repulsive measure designed to discourage the drug addict from returning to the drug. Rather, it is a necessary and sometimes difficult clean-up but finally so appreciated by patients that many of them, when they go through a crisis or feel bad, spontaneously request a session of Yawar Panga.

The clean-up provoked by the Yawar Panga ceremony allows the consecutive introduction of other master plants (Ayahuasca for example) that we use with addicts hospitalized at Takiwasi Center. The addict thus begins a path of recovery which is at the same time his own initiation, destined to reverse the counter-initiation recklessly undertaken with addictive substances.

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