

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WW-10

Interview with Antonio Vasquez, Curandero
November 20, 1972

El Vergel
Oaxaca, Mexico
15 December, 1972

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017
U. S. A.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

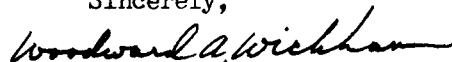
Here is the interview with Antonio Vasquez that I introduced in the previous newsletter (WW-9). It occurred in my room in San Cristóbal de las Casas, where Antonio Vasquez had come that day for an appointment. In addition to the background about him and my acquaintance with him supplied in WW-9, I should add something about the interview itself, the translation, and some possibly puzzling expressions it contains.

Antonio Vasquez knew that I was recording the interview with a view to reporting it to people who might be interested in his work and life. Several times during the talk he rapped on the recorder to emphasize a point. As you will see, neither of us speaks perfect Spanish, nor do we misuse the language in exactly the same ways. Consequently, we misunderstand each other now and then. I have translated the dialogue as accurately as possible, including false starts and misunderstandings. As it appears here, the translated interview is about 20 per cent shorter than the original. I deleted two sections that seemed too repetitive and uninformative. Otherwise, the interview is unedited.

I remind you that "Catholic" in Chenalhó refers to anyone who follows the local Indian religion, a synthesis of pre-Columbian Mayan paganism and Spanish--now Mexican-- Catholicism. This local Catholicism is not centered around Jesus Christ, or even Christ and the Virgin together, but embraces patron saints, Holy Cross, Holy Earth, and many others as important deities. Some of what I wrote in WW-8 provides background to this interview.

I have used phrases to translate some words in Antonio Vasquez's Spanish, trying throughout the translation to represent my understanding of his meaning, often at the expense of fluency and colloquial style. Note that: curandero means healer, brujo sorcerer, ladino a non-Indian Mexican, evangelista a protestant, and pulsation a technique of diagnosis through taking the patients pulse.

Sincerely,



Woodward A. Wickham

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas

W is Woodward Wickham.

V is Antonio Vasquez.

- W What are you doing here?
- V The, uh--
- W Are you going to visit someone who is sick, or--
- V Yes, sure! I have an appointment down below there.
- W Down there? Down where?
- V We are curing a sick man.
- W Here in San Cristóbal?
- V Here in San Cristóbal, and down in Tuxtla, in Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Yajalón.
- W You have clients in all these towns?
- V Yes.
- W Yes?
- V Yes, ladino people.
- W And how far do you travel to cure?
- V What?
- W How far away?
- V I go as far as people know me. Those who know me invite me here to San Cristóbal by telephone through the President. It's just that-- I alone, I am the only one, Antonio Vasquez, curandero.
- W Yes.
- V Yes ...the doctor. (Laughs.)
- W And people call you by telephone through the President (of Chenalhó)?
- V Sure, yes.
- W Then--
- V Nothing more than my name. By my name. "Where is this Antonio Vasquez, curandero, out there in Chenalhó?" The President there knows me, and when I return he tells me, and off I go.
- W And how, that is--
- V ...and at times a woman wants me to come here to San Cristóbal, or to whatever town. I take a bus.
- W How do people contact you? By telephone and--
- V Telephone, telephone, sure, of course. And if not, then they send a note by the bus driver's assistant.
- What I have learned, I dreamed.
- W Where did you learn your--
- V It's like this. I did not learn it in a school, like, from a teacher. Right?
- W Right.
- V Right. That type of learning comes as the first grade passes, the second grade, third, grade, fourth, fifth, sixth, then the first of secondary school. No. What I have learned, I dreamed. Nothing but dreams.
- W At what age?
- V Yes.
- W How old were you?
- V I began when I was twelve years old. I was twelve when I began to pray and to cure.
- W You were twelve when you began dreaming?
- V Yes, everything through dreams. As a little boy, when I was just 12 years old, it began.
- W And what happened in your dreams?
- V It was like this. In my dreams it said everything that a drink will do, everything incense will do, everything an herb will do, or something made from an herb. Thus is the sickness of diarrhea. Thus is the sickness of vomiting, and of the "seat," pain of the bones, an attack, as by a brujo, or in the stomach, in there (gestures toward his abdomen). This is it. This is it. It seems that--

- W And this was said to you in dreams?
- V Right. Right. I saw it there. Thus it was shown to me in my dreams.
- W And from whom did it come? From God?
- V From ladino people.
- W From whom?
- V Ladino people.
- W Oh, yes.
- V Yes, yes, yes. It is ladino people that showed me. There are no Indian people there, it seems.
- W Ladino people said this in your dreams, you say?
- V That's right. Yes, yes, yes. A gentleman comes to show me, that is, and then to pray. He showed me everything. Everything, everything. When I was still a boy, a big boy of twelve, then I could pray what was taught, because I had already learned. But in dreams, not as here, in a school. Therefore, one cannot learn to cure.
- W Ah, yes.
- So now all the doctors know.
- V Take a doctor, now. We have checked with a doctor, from Guatemala, Russia, United States, Mexico City, and, uh, the other one, I don't know, Western something. Eighteen countries brought to Chenalhó to check, to see the Indian--
- W They came in a group--
- V Yes, in a group. Yes, in a group, in a car, an open car. Seven, uh, seven sheep were killed to feed them. (Laughs.) So they got together there where I was curing, but, the thing is, they don't know, they don't understand it. I alone won. A gentleman from Panamá came along, and he went to pulsate some people there, but he didn't understand. Now those doctors, they are watching to know what technique, that is-- "What does he have?" But they are just going to check to see if in fact we know. We came there too. Now, I just pulsated here, like this. (Places his four right-hand fingers on the inside of his left wrist.) "What does he have?" What the heart says is expressed right here.
- W And the other doctors also see what you see?
- V Yes.
- W That is, the doctors from the other countries and you together--
- V Yes, together!
- W --know that--
- V Know!
- W --know that in fact it is the same disease?
- V Yes, that's right, they know, but-- yes, of course.
- W Yes.
- V O.K., then, we go to pulsate with both hands (he demonstrates, both his hands on an imaginary wrist), and the chief here in San Cristóbal asked, a doctor, because they were all doctors--
- W Yes.
- V Now he doesn't know. They are going to see if it is certain that we know how to cure. "No," I told him, "this gentleman has a lot of fear. (Thumps his own chest with his fist) He fell in the river--"
- W The sick person?
- V Yes, the one who is sick. "He fell in a river, or some sea, and for that reason he is very afraid."
- W Who said that, the sick person, or-- you?
- V Yes, I told him.
- W I see.
- V I said this to the doctor; I said it to the doctors there. "Ah, very good," they said, and clapped. (He claps.) Everyone, plenty of people.
- W Those watching.
- V Yes, they saw. Oooh, a lot of people. O.K., so it's the same. "You know how to cure, you people, all you Indians, and we do, too. It's the same." It's certain. It's certain: he fell into the sea. He fell in a plane, they told me. Against God's word. Because of this he ended up pale. Can he be cured? Why not? He can be fully cured. I cured him. So now all the doctors know.

- W Yes?
- V Yes. (Laughs.)
- W And when did this happen?
- V (Leans back and exhales hard.) Ah, now it is some time, like six years past.
- W Yes.
- V So, they took a photograph, and went on to visit the Presidencia here, Tuxtla, Mexico City, and all the towns--
- W Then, you are known--
- V I alone--
- W --known in all the towns--
- V I alone--
- W --in the whole country.
- V I alone. The others, no. But-- then I was given 600 (pesos) prize and a gold pencil, as an award.
- W Yes, I see. From whom, this prize?
- V The pencil, it's a pencil.
- W Yes, but--
- V Three hundred pesos (sic).
- W Yes.
- V And a gold pencil.
- W From whom?
- V The others gave it to me, the one from Panamá, and--
- W Ah, the doctors.
- V Yes, yes.
- W The group of doctors.
- V Yes, yes, the group of doctors. Yes, they gave it to me. Only to me. There are no, there are no, there are no others. None.
- W And this sick person, this man that fell into the sea--
- V He fell into the sea.
- Plenty of cures.
- W How did you cure him?
- V I cured him with incense, with candles.
- W Yes.
- V And a little of the remedy. You see, it made him very cold, and frightened him. He wants to sit down, just sit down, does not want to eat, because he is very tired.
- W Yes?
- V Yes, he cannot get up. He is not happy. Therefore we go to treat him with incense, with everything. When one falls into the sea, we will speak with Holy Earth, that God should take his hand, because there is his spirit located. (He thumps the table.) So, we will raise this spirit, to seek that it be given up to God in Heaven.
- W Yes.
- V So, the spirit comes, and so he goes back to eating, as he is well.
- W Yes, but there are many types of sickness, right?
- V Yes, of course!
- W You cannot cure each kind of illness with the same cure.
- V Ah, no. No, no, no.
- W There are various cures?
- V Ah, there are plenty of cures.
- W Yes.
- V Lots, lots of ways. There is, there is the type for here. (Points to his head.) It is not fright. It is a different cure.
- W For example?
- V Headache.
- W How is headache cured?
- V Ah, yes, with a candle, too, but it is different.
- W Different. A different, a different fright, or--
- V There are those that want a little, tiny candle, and there are others that want big candles, one-peso candles, fifty-cent candles.
- W Ah.
- V So, if one cannot drink the remedy, he does not drink it. I will just blow here, here on the outside of his body, to blow (V chokes slightly and coughs) and thus (coughs) to know what (coughs) he has. If he has damage here (lays his hand on his sternum)-- there are many who have a lot of pain here, then the herbal tea is not made. He is not going to drink. I will look for all the

signs where he was when he was touched by the harm, making him vomit.

W Yes.

V There are those that vomit a bit of cotton, those that vomit a, uh, little piece of iron, those that vomit a water-toad--

W A different thing for each sort of illness?

V Yes, yes. That's the way it is. There are many here who know.

Blessing of the Devil

V Entirely a blessing of the Devil. (Raps the table with his knuckles.) Not God's blessing.

W What?

V Entirely a blessing of the Devil himself.

W Ah.

V That sort of blessing, you see? For that reason harm comes, and for that reason they die of the harm.

W Yes.

V God does not kill them. God tells us, let us seek favor, that we may know what we have.

W What we have comes from the Devil?

V The Devil, no.

W Ah, no?

V The Devil, no. Nothing but God Himself. "We beg help for what thing this patient has, this gentleman."

W Ah, yes. But why do we have something bad inside of us from God? (No response.) Why do we have something bad inside from God?

V The, uh, no--

W Because we have done something bad?

V Yes.

W It is, like, we are to blame?

V Yes, we are to blame. Yes, yes, of course. There are some that hit another. Some that harmed or mistreated someone.

W Yes.

V O.K., because there are those that know how to cast a spell. He talks of the Devil, because he knows him. Waiting as we smoke

a cigarette. Waiting while we eat.

There he does it with the blessing of the Devil. And we don't see them! Then, in just a short time, it hurts. Oh, it hurts you. By then it is all eaten. It comes on the wind.

W On the wind?

V Yes, by the wind.

W Like, in the air?

V They come in the streets, and we don't know them. Things are seen, things are not seen. But God is watching all the time. But the curandero arrives seeking the help of God, that we know what is there. We speak of everything.

W And when I vomit, at that time--

V Right then, in the very moment we vomit--

W --it goes away, the sickness?

V Yes, yes, the sickness.

W Yes, by vomiting?

V That's it. Yes.

W Yes.

V Drinking a, uh, the remedy-- I have one right here.

W A remedy?

V Yes. We will blow (on the patient) to name what he has, and we will walk around outside. We are with God all the time.

W Yes.

V A short time after the walk, everything comes out. We end up free, a happy person.

W Yes.

V Like, at ease.

W In order to understand what sort of sickness a person has, you use the pulse, right?

V Right.

W In whatever kind of case, stomach--

V In whatever! Just--

W At the beginning, the pulse--

V That's it. Just--

W And then--

V Just the pulse.

W Ah, yes.

A Gentleman from San Ramon

V You say, what does he have? There, there is a gentleman from San Ramón here. He's a ladino, and he was in Mexico City, and spent 12,000 pesos to get well, and he was not cured. But, now, as they called me, I cured him, and there came out of there something like three hundred worms.

W Ah, yes?

V Yes. Worms he has there. (Slaps his own lower leg.) Here in his, uh--

W One worm, or more?

V Inside. Inside it is.

W One or--

V No, like three hundred.

W Three hundred worms inside. Inside the wound?

V Here is his skin. (He holds his hands around his calf at a distance from the surface.)

W Ah, very swollen.

V He has an ulcer.

W Ah, yes.

V He has ulcers, dripping fluid. But the doctor in Mexico City operated, he says. But he did not win at all. Here, another time, just the same. It was operated on here.

W The same as before?

V The same.

W Again.

V Again. Yes. They operated, like three months ago, and it went back to swelling again.

W Yes.

V Yes. Just as is possible with the blood. They say there-- he says that only pus came out.

W Yes.

V Nothing came out. Just pus. With the doctor's operation. It was sewn up and

and he came out of it calm. Three months, the same grew back again, huge. That's the way it is.

W Yes.

V So, they called me there in Chenalhó, to come to cure in San Ramón. And then, the, uh, it's-- here they know everything, they know how to pulsate.

W Yes.

V O.K., so, it's just that I have an enemy, he tells me, because, he, uh--

W An enemy among the people?

V That's it. Among the people.

W Ah, yes.

V Among the people, among his friends, ladino people. Because there are many among the ladino people here who know that which-- There's one in Bachajón, he knows how to cast a harmful spell, an Oxchuquero who knows how to cast a harmful spell, Tenejapa, one from Chanal, Ocosingo, Tila, knows how to cast a harmful spell.

W They are curanderos?

V It is not to cure. It is to kill. To cast harm

W Aah.

V So that a person dies.

W Ah, yes.

V One pays money. O.K., you are going to help me. I pay you.

W He is like a brujo.

V Yes, yes. Of course. It is the same thing. I pay you, says the gentleman. I pay you, but you will help me.

W For example, this man in San Ramón.

V Yes, yes. Kill him. Cast one on him. Here is 500 pesos. O.K.--

W And in this way--

V And for this, for this he will cast harm on him. But it did not touch him in his true heart, but just his shirt.

W What?

- V It touched here, just the shirt, not in the heart itself. If it should take hold of the whole heart, he dies.
- W Ah. He didn't have, uh--
- V Like one, two, three days, he dies.
- W --didn't have any success--
- V Yes, yes. That's it.
- W --this brujo. But almost, right?
- V Yes, punishment.
- W Because the man is very ill.
- V Punishment, (laughs) yes, yes. So I cured him of this.
- W, In order to cure a man who has a sickness of this sort, that comes from a, let's say, brujo, do you have to know the brujo who makes this illness? Do you have to know, like, the name of--
- V Ah, yes, yes, sure.
- W And how, how--
- V It's like this. We will cure with just heaven, call out God's name, pray, and he will take the drink. Just the blessing of God. We invite God, here, plenty of God, to free everything, to take it out of where it is working, the worm, some animal, all the animals that are in his life, all the animals that there are attacking the, the-- One has a water-borne animal, and one has an animal here, here in the jaws. There is the parasite.
- W Then how did you cure him exactly?
- V I cured him entirely through God.
- W With, with prayers?
- V By prayer.
- W Yes. And what other cures?
- V With a little bit of water. With hot water and this herb I brought. I have it right here. (He begins looking in his fiber shoulder-bag.)
- W An herb?
- V Want to see it?
- W Yes.
- V With this, yes. (Gropes around in the bag.) You can cure everything with this, fast.
- W By prayer, and by this, uh--
- V For five years here I have been curing everyone with this. (Finds it, holds up a small bunch of grass-type herbs, folded once.) Eh?
- W Ah, it is like a grass.
- V Sure, a little grass.
- W Yes.
- V For pain in the heart, for harm by a brujo, from whatever source.
- W And how is it used?
- V It is drunk, boiled.
- W Ah, a little piece of this herb, and water, and, like--
- V With all of this.
- W Yes.
- V A swallow of this.
- W In, in--
- V Like a broth.
- W Of water.
- V Yes, of water.
- W And you cook it--
- V Water that's boiling, that boils.
- W Yes.
- V Yes. It boils, and all the force comes out of it.
- W Yes?
- V Yes. Then, with this in the glass, we go ahead and pray and blow. The water, nausea, and it stops.
- W The water is not drunk.
- V It is drunk. It is drunk.
- W The water made from the herb.
- V Yes.
- W What do you call this herb?
- V This is called baaj pookooj (lock up the Devil?).
- W And is there a name in Spanish?
- V This. This is it. Here is one again. It is yet another. It is for a harmful spell, too.

(He shows me a brownish root, turnip-shaped, about the size of an egg.) To get rid of something, without praying, without blowing smoke. It is enough, this alone. For new pain, here (points to his head). It is very bitter, very bitter.

W Ah, yes. You make a sort of tea of this?

V That's it.

W In little bits--

V That's it, little bits of water, little--

W But it is a root, right?

V --bits of water. It's, it's the head. With this little heap, made with hot water. If you have a pain here, some some people can't get up. With this here, right away.

W And this, uh--

V It's called jicato.

W What?

V It's called jicato.

W Ah, yes. You say this is the head?

V Yes.

W And it looks like a head, too.

V Looks like it, yes. (Laughs.) It is this, the doctor says, that they make-- it is this they put in this Mejoral (a patent medicine for headaches).

W Ah, yes? Mejoral. At the pharmacy?

V Yes, it is of that that they make Mejoral. But it contains other things.

Sickness and envy.

W And the sickness of the stomach and below, where does that come from?

V From the earth. The earth.

W Ah, yes.

V But only a little, tiny speck is planted.

W It's just that I mean to ask, what is the sickness you use this for.

V Drink it, to get rid of--

W For what sort of sickness?

V Well, I tell you, the stomach pain, when it hurts, this stomach pain.

W And where does the stomach pain come from?

V Where does it come from? You know--

W From the air, or from, from--

V You know. Envy.

W Envy?

V Envy, that's right. It just comes from envy.

W Yes. For example, if I have something, something fancy--

V That's it, that's it.

W And if a man wants what I have--

V That's right. There are some people looking at you stopping there. You have a car, you have money. You have both, no?

W Yes.

V There is where the sickness comes from. You have a very expensive spirit.

W Yes, yes.

V Yes.

(silence)

W And any person can make pain in my stomach out of envy?

V Yes, sure.

W He does not have to be a brujo. Anyone.

V Anyone.

W Who feels envy.

V Yes.

W Can make something sick inside me.

V Yes, yes. The Chamulas, all those people out there do things that way.

W Ah, yes.

V Yes. In this way I have cured people for 45 years, going around curing.

W Forty-five years.

V Yes, 45 years.

W You have been curing.

The President sent for me.

V Now they sent for me in Mexico City, and I am going this 10th of January. They sent me a call here. I'm going to go.

W The 10th of--

V The 10th of January.

W Of January past, or of this coming January?

V Of this January. I'm going to go.

W In this coming January.

V Yes.

W You're going to Mexico City.

V Yes.

W To cure this man?

V We are going to compare with a doctor.

W What kind of sickness does he have?

V Of whatever kind. We'll see.

W But, is there a sick person there?

V Sure, sure there is sickness there.

W That is, who wants you to go to Mexico City?

V The President. The President.

W The President of the--

V Of the Republic.

W Ah, yes.

V Yes, the President sent for me, you see. He says that they want me to help, talk, but they don't want us to earn anything, just cure. It's not that they are not paying here, but it is very little.

W Is it that many curanderos are going to visit Mexico City?

V Yes.

W To help the government.

V Yes, sure.

W From all parts of the country.

V Yes, yes.

W It is like a conference, a meeting.

V A meeting, yes.

W A meeting of curanderos.

V Yes.

W And you have to pay for the trip.

V The President, the President. The government pays for the head doctors here, too.

W To visit the capital.

V Yes. The head doctor has invited me.

W Have you visited the capital before?

V Huh?

W Have you visited the capital before?

V They sent me a notice. No, not yet. I'm going for the first time. They sent me a notice, to say the period of time, how much time I am going to spend in Mexico City, because they want Antonio Vasquez, curandero, on that trip, to compare. If it works out, they will pay the round trip, and each month, each month.

W Ah, they are going to pay you.

V Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

They call all the Devils.

W When you cure, for example this--

V I--

W --this man with the leg--

V The one that came out--

W --in San Ramón.

V There are times when, O.K., sure, he told me, you see, I cured him, and he recovered from what had come to him. And the doctor in Mexico City did not overcome it. I won. He says, "I am going to give you 1000 pesos because I came out of it well." He did not give it to me. He gave me just 500 pesos.

W Ah, yes.

V Yes, he gave me 500 pesos. Now I want it, O.K. Before he had little, but now he's a little older. When he sees me, he gives me ten, fifteen pesos. So I can eat. Because he is well. But nobody in Mexico City or down here in Tuxtla won, he tells me. But with this herb, yes, they came out.

W One could see the worms come out?

- V Come out, yes.
- W You can see them?
- V Yes.
- W Coming out of the wound.
- V Yes.
- W In the moment after the cure, or when?
- V Not in the moment. After a short while, we begin to pray, and then he just starts to drink. We wait, like, half an hour or an hour. Then they begin to come out. By vomiting, or they come out here (points to his lower leg).
- W Ah, yes.
- V Or we defecate them or urinate them. We wait here to see where the damned thing comes out. In that way, it does no harm. A sickness from God, yes, that comes out through injections. Injections, pills, here with the doctor. That's a disease from God. But an evil spell, that does not leave in that way.
- W Yes.
- V Hm? That is why I am trying these other ways. This evil spell is not made to go away by the doctor. Nothing, nothing is relieved.
- W The evil spell?
- V The evil spell, the evil act. It does not leave through medicine, with the doctors.
- W But there are sicknesses that the doctor can cure.
- V Sure, of course. Like a sickness from God. Sickness from God, punishment from God, whatever. Yes, that is removed by a doctor.
- W Yes. But the sickness we get from other people--
- V Yes.
- W For example, through envy--
- V That's it.
- W This they cannot cure.
- V These do not come out through a doctor. And the poor doctors, they struggle, they inject injections, but they just spend a lot of money. But it does not come out.
- W Yes.
- V But with what, with what I am doing now, yes, right away one is cured.
- W This man from San Ramón, for example, do you know from whom, from which, from which brujo the sickness came?
- V Yes.
- W And how is that known? How do you know? From, from how-- By looking at how the leg appears, or by talking with him about his life and his friends, or--
- V No, look. What comes out, what is overcome by giving something to drink?
- W Yes.
- V No, it's this way. This comes from just calling on the Devil. It is nothing but "enchantment."
- W Yes?
- V Yes. They call, they talk, as with God, but they are talking with the Devil.
- W They talk right here--
- V Right here, today, they are talking. That which occurs is what the wicked man knows. It isn't made up by him. It comes straight from the Devil.
- W Who "knows," the sick person?
- V The person, the people who know how to cast a-- the brujo.
- W Yes.
- V Yes? In this way they call "All the Devils, we call on all the Devils. Devil, Devil." In this way (palms up at chest level), but on their knees. The Devils come. What, what is he going to give him. There are times he wants to give him worms, or he wants frogs, or wants to give him toads, or knives.
- W Yes.
- V So that the people do not know what they are eating. Vomiting blood, then, because it gets into the blood, but only through the blessing of God-- I mean, the Devil. God, no, God does not destroy them.
- W Yes.

V And so we come, speaking only of God, only of God, only of God. See how we talk only of God? All the Gods? Let's see if help will be granted to remove this, and to remove what he has working here.

W Ah, yes.

V The infliction of the Devil is what we remove. The blessing of God comes to free him.

W Yes.

V One comes out really strong.

W Yes.

V That is the way it is.

W Yes.

We go up whatever mountain, to any town.

V A Catholic--

W Yes?

V But a wicked man who knows how to cast a harmful spell, one who wants to destroy someone, he is not a Catholic. He is different.

W Yes.

V He kills people.

W Yes, yes.

V He will kill anybody.

W Yes.

V That is the way it is. (Laughs.)

W You say that you are a Catholic, right?

V Sure, sure, yes.

W But, it's just that there are many people in Chenalhó that are not Catholic, right.

V No, no, no, you are right. There are evangelistas (protestants) out there.

W Yes.

V There are others. There is a bad one out there who is nothing but a brujo.

W He is what?

V Pure brujo. Knows how to cast spells of sickness.

W People--

V Kills people.

W Ah, yes.

V Yes.

W And you cannot cure evangelistas, right?

V No. I don't have anything to do with them.

W Ah, yes.

V I have nothing to do with the evangelistas. That's different.

W And do they have their own curandero?

V No. No, no, no. They don't have one. Just medicine.

W Ah, medicine.

V Just medicine.

W Then they lack a way to cure--

V Yes, they lack a way to cure.

W --a sickness that does not come from God.

V So, you see, for example. Here near San Cristóbal. We're on a mountain, in another town. And there is no, you know, doctor. If someone is sick, who will cure him? He dies there.

W Yes?

V But some of us leave and go up whatever mountain, to any town. We can cure him quick, by God's blessing, if he is a Catholic. There in the mountains, where there is no doctor, in the schoolhouse. In this municipio.

W Yes.

V Yes, yes.

The lady with angina.

V We know something of every sickness. There is a medicine. Heart pain, or headache, or pain in the bones, for these there are , I say. Or lack of blood, or carrying too much blood, OK, they have their remedies, too. If not, there are some, too, that grow lumps, tumors, whatever. There are remedies for these, too.

W Yes?

V Yes, yes. They can be cured, too. There is an angina (severe sore throat) here. She

could not eat any longer, either. A lady here in San Cristóbal, here in the market. Over there. I cured her. The store that does a pretty big business, has music and a loudspeaker. Señora _____. You know her, right?

W I think so.

V I cured her, you see.

W Of which--

V She could not speak.

W Yes.

V She could not breathe. Like this. (Fills his lungs and breathes shallowly.) It didn't go out. It stayed that way. She went to Mexico City, too, and they did not cure her. She is the sister of the _____ in Chenalhó, Señora _____ here in San Cristóbal.

W The sister of Don _____ in Chenalhó?

V That's the one! She talked with him. "Who is that curandero there in Chenalhó? Because I am sick. Now I have been in bed for three months, still can't eat, still can't get around. Because I can't breathe." (He breathes deeply.)

W Something wrong in the lungs.

V Yes, yes. Can't breathe. Breath does not go out, does not go out. It seems there is some cotton or something stuck in there. OK, so here is Antonio Vasquez, who knows. "I will send him right away." He notified me right away. He sent me. The next day I came to town and visited Señora _____.

W Yes.

V What is this? Like something out of position. "For what reason I don't know. I can breathe in, but it does not go out. I want to die, thanks, two or three months sitting here. I've not been able to sell a thing in the market." She says it is certain if I don't eat I am going to die. No, nothing passes. OK, I am going to cure you. It will be 300 pesos, when you want to. OK, I go to cure, another cure, another cure-- three cures. It still was not passing.

W Three cures, all by you?

V Yes, I did the curing. I cured her three times, just three times. And with

this one, it was done. With this one, finished.

W The third?

V Yes. She was well.

W What sort of cause--

V I found something bad in her spirit.

W Ah, yes.

V Pure envy. Because she makes a lot of sales. She is rich, Señora _____. For that reason, those who are poorer have envy.

W How do you know what is happening in a person's spirit?

V You know how to dream, at night?

W Yes.

V Things appear in his spirit, in dreams, waiting for him. You see, like this, if there is in his spirit, in his dream, his smoking a cigarette, he takes a cigarette, smokes it, there is your sickness. You have taken on the sickness. You eat, or drink, drink some coffee, or eat some bread--

W In this instant comes the--

V That's right, at that moment. In that way, the sickness came in. Right then, right then it is waiting, in the dream.

W Yes. Now, then when you meet a sick person who wants your help, you feel his pulse, right?

V Right, right.

W And do you also talk with him about his dreams.

V Yes, sure. But it is here that it tells. Look, look, right here, now. (Holds his own left-wrist pulse and looks into space for a few seconds.) Here is the blood, then, eh?

W Yes.

V It says something a little bit off in us. Pure bad spirit. In the dreams. And also-- (feels it again) envy, where I am working.

W Yes?

V Envy there. It touches us a little, too. We're OK, but I am always--

W Yes?

V --fighting a battle. (Laughs.)