

with her husband improved a great deal.

Healing approach and the evolution of practices

Luisa is not attending any **centro** regularly. In addition, she does not offer **consultas**, in the sense of having a specific day in which she helps people. She thinks that a medium always has to depend on the spirits in order to help others. They are the ones who decide when a client can be helped. Consequently, according to Doña Luisa, a medium who gives **consultas** on specific days takes the risk of trying to help a client without the help of the spirits because they cannot be with the medium all the time.

Although Doña Luisa does not give **consultas**, when people in the community need her, she is ready to help them. However she told me that when she discovers that a client's problem is psychological, she will refer him or her to a mental health professional. She emphasized to me that she does not want to take a psychologist's job. Doña Luisa feels that she is only capable of treating spiritual problems, not psychological ones.

She was very concerned about those mediums who do not refer clients to a physician when they should. She said that she knew three clients who died because they were not

referred to a physician by the medium when they were asking for help. Doña Luisa said that a medium should be prepared to distinguish between physical, psychological and spiritual problems in order to be an effective helper.

Although Doña Luisa has the ability to **pasar** the spirits, she prefers to receive their communication through her mind. She does not like to be "taken" (**tomada**) by the spirits because she wants "to be conscious of what I am saying". Doña Luisa also likes to be conscious when she is helping a client because in this way she is totally responsible for what may happen.

If I say something wrong the client may say this is not true. The client is telling me that this is not true. It is not the spirit who made a mistake but myself.

Doña Luisa said that she does not need any kind of ritual objects in order to help a client. She thinks that all of these paraphernalia "are just a placebo" because the ritual objects do not have any function for attracting the **flúidos** of spirits.

A spirit never has told me to light a candle for him or her. In addition the money that is used to buy all of these things can be used to buy food for the people who are dying of hunger. The only thing that I need to attract good spirits is to be at peace with myself.

Presentation of a case worked by the medium

I had the opportunity to see Doña Luisa working on two cases. One of them will be described when I present the case of Miriam (See pp. 281-283). The other one was when, in the middle of one of the interviews, she decided to offer me some advice. Personally, I was very impressed with Doña Luisa's ability to "discover" significant things about my life. One piece of advice that she gave me was the following:

You had an illness in your childhood that isolated you from people. This illness made you lose a very important part of your personality. It was like someone stealing a candy from a child. But you can recover from it. This illness was a **prueba** that you got through your family. You began to pay your "karma" too soon.

I understood that Doña Luisa was talking about the illness that I had which was cured by a medium. For me it was very helpful to hear this because it was something to which I could relate very well. I have been working, trying to overcome the effects of this physical illness for many years. Through all of these years I have felt the great need to reconnect with these painful childhood experiences and to heal my inner child.

Doña JuanitaInitial contact with the medium

Doña Juanita is a sixty-seven year old medium who lives with her husband in a rural community on the mountains of Puerto Rico. I met her when I was an adolescent because I used to visit her **centro** that is located near my hometown. She is the **Presidenta** of a well organized **centro** which has a Board of Directors and several committees with different responsibilities. Her **centro** is called a society (**sociedad**) and it was associated with the **Federación de Espiritistas de Puerto Rico** for many years.

Doña Juanita let me tape the first interview. However, she was very conscious of the tape recorder and very concerned about how clearly she was expressing her ideas. Doña Juanita expressed that she has arteriosclerosis and that sometimes she may not talk very coherently. However, I did not have any problems following her lines of thought. Her conversations were very clear, precise, organized and articulated. I made an effort to communicate this observation to her.

At the second and following interviews, Doña Juanita

asked me not to tape the interviews because it was kind of difficult for her to organize her thoughts knowing that the tape recorder was on. Besides, she told me that her spirit guide does not like to be taped when he is giving a message. I decided that the best thing to do was to take notes.

Early experiences in her development as a medium

Doña Juanita's experiences with the spirit world began very early in her life. At the age of six she liked to recite very loudly in front of a tree. At that moment she was talking with her "invisible family". This "invisible family" had to listen to her and follow her advice. As a child she believed that she was responsible for educating this family. When her father heard her conversations with the invisible friends he told everybody: "Listen to my daughter, she is very crazy today". She was known in the community as "the crazy girl".

Juanita's family was very Catholic. She grew up visiting the Catholic Church every Sunday. One day at the age of eight she read something in a Catholic book that caught her attention: A woman who had died was talking to another one. She asked herself: How is it possible that a person who has died can talk to us? She could not talk about

these things at her home and she decided to ask a Catholic priest. The priest told her that "it is true that the dead can communicate with the living but you should not talk to anybody about it. You are too young to ask these questions".

However, Juanita's curiosity and interest in the spirit world continued despite the opposition of her parents. One of her neighbors had a daughter who was suffering from an **obsesión**; she was constantly yelling. Her parents brought a medium who treated the girl at the house many times. Juanita liked to observed how the medium helped the girl with her problems. When she explained to her mother what was happening with the girl, the mother prohibited her to visit that house again. But whenever she had an opportunity, Juanita went to see the medium working with the girl.

At a very young age, Juanita began to predict future events. She predicted the death of her grandmother and other family members. Juanita would also tell her parents when they would receive an unexpected visit from someone. Her parents began to take her predictions very seriously.

Juanita remembered that as a child she liked to do charity with people. Her father had a shop and she used to steal things from it in order to give it to poor people. One day her mother prepared a great piece of meat and Juanita decided that she would like to share it with a poor family.

She cut a piece of the meat and gave it to them. When the mother asked what happened with the rest of the meat, Juanita responded that a cat had taken it.

Becoming a medium

At the age of fourteen, Juanita had her first **obsesión**. She described that after having cooked, she felt very angry. At that moment, she went to the altar of saints that her father had, and destroyed all of it.

When she was sixteen years old, she got married. After two months of marriage, she had lost more than 50 pounds. The doctors certified that she had tuberculosis. Juanita decided to visit a medium. After being treated by the medium, Juanita was cured of the disease.

Three years later Juanita suffered her second **obsesión**. She understood that the cause for the **obsesión** was that she had not accepted her role as a medium and the spiritual experiences she had been having. She did not want other people to know that she was capable of communicating with the spirits, mostly because of her Catholic background. Besides, she was very afraid of the spirit world.

Despite this conflict, Juanita felt a strong inclination to visit the sick people of the community and heal them.

Very soon she became the "physician" of the community:

When I visited someone who was sick, I heard voices that told me how the person could be cured. I touched the person with my hands and he or she got cured. At other times I prepared a tea from plants and I gave it to the sick. I also learned to give injections and many people came to my house in order to be injected with penicilin. Some women visited me when they had tumors on their sexual organs because they did not want to be seen by male doctors. My home became like a hospital for the community.

Once one of Juanita's sons became very sick. He lost his vision and could not walk for six months. According to Juanita, the child had pernicious anemia. One day she heard a voice that gave her the names of the medications that her son needed in order to be cured. At this time they were in a precarious economic condition and her husband had to borrow five dollars to buy the medication. In a few days, her son was cured. When people asked her how the child was cured, she told them that a woman from another town cured him. She did not want others to know that she could talk with the spirits.

After some years Juanita understood that she should not continue denying her experiences with spirits. She felt a special attraction to help people who were mentally ill. Juanita found that sometimes mental illness is produced by ignorant spirits. The person can be cured if these spirits are lifted up (**levantados**). She worked with several of these

cases and according to her she had a great degree of success.

At the age of 28, Juanita received the order from the spirit world to open a spiritist **centro**. On a Palm Sunday the **centro** was inaugurated. The meetings were divided into two major sections: the morning was dedicated to the teaching of the spiritist doctrine to children and in the afternoon the working of **causas** was held. A great number of children attended the **centro**. Juanita, along with other members of the **centro** dedicated part of their time to visit different prisons in Puerto Rico. They had conversations with the prisoners. They also presented entertainment activities such as dramas, songs and movies.

Years later Juanita's **centro** became affiliated with the Spiritist Federation. For several years the **centro** had a representation at the annual conference of the Federation. Juanita was a very active member of this organization. On many occasions she was in charge of presenting a drama, writing a paper and/or organizing a musical presentation. A few years ago Juanita decided not to continue her participation in this organization due to health problems and some disagreements with its Board of Directors.

Doña Juanita has confronted the possibility of her death many times. She has been operated on 14 times. She has had several heart attacks. In addition she was in a coma for 60

days; and had to be in a wheel chair for one year. In 1962 she had to go to New York in order to be treated for strong headaches that were producing hemorrhages. The doctor told her that she had a tumor on her brain that required surgery. However Juanita heard a voice telling her to go back to Puerto Rico and not let the doctor operate on her. She followed this advice.

Six months ago Juanita was unable to sleep for three months due to a brain dysfunction. She had to be treated in Chicago. Again she was in a very delicate condition but she was able to come out of it successfully.

When one sees Doña Juanita it is difficult to imagine that she has gone through all of this. Every time I went to visit her, she was involved in some kind of activity: cooking, washing the dishes, cleaning the house or working in the yard. I was impressed with what a strong woman she is. As she expressed to me:

I am aware that my illness is incurable. The physical pain in my body is continuous but I have learned to take it as something normal in my life. I am resigned to suffering because we come to this life to "polish" our spirit. Through suffering I am purifying my spirit. I am a friend of suffering.

For Doña Juanita, the spirits have been a source of creative inspiration through all her life. At times in which she has been in bed due to illness, the spirits have come to

dictate poems, songs and spiritual messages to her. She has preserved all of these messages. Sometimes, while she is sleeping, she has to wake up in order to write a poem or a message that the spirits are communicating to her. At other times she may receive a communication that may be important for the treatment of one of her clients.

Healing approach and evolution of practices

Despite her illness, Doña Juanita has continued her function as **Presidenta** of the **centro**. The **centro** is a cement structure which can accommodate up to 80 persons. It also has a small room which is designated for healing. There are also kitchen facilities. In front of the meeting room there is a large table which can accommodate about 30 mediums. On the center of the table there is a big goblet of water. On the front wall there are pictures of Doña Juanita when she was younger, Joan of Arc and Allan Kardec. There are no signs of **agua de florida**, candles, incense, or pictures of Catholic saints.

The meeting begins with the reading of prayers from the **Colección de Oraciones Escogidas** (Collection of Selected Prayers). After the prayers, mediums who are sitting on the table pass their guides in order to prepare themselves for

the working of **causas**. When a medium has problems passing the guides, Doña Juanita rings a bell to hurry the medium up.

After all the mediums have passed their guides, usually Doña Juanita's guide gives the members a message about moral behavior and **Espiritismo**. Next, the mediums get prepared for the working of **causas**. The last period is the healing session in which each person goes to a small room to receive a **despojo**. At the end Doña Juanita "magnetizes" water and each person can have a cup of water. The meeting is closed with a religious hymn.

Doña Juanita told me that now she is giving less emphasis to the working of **causas**. According to her, many persons attend her **centro** with the goal that a medium will take away all the **causas** that they have, but they are not interested in improving themselves. There are Sundays in which she decides not to have any working of **causas** and dedicates the time to "meditation, spiritual reflection and dialogue".

Doña Juanita is also opposed to the use of ritual objects like **agua de florida**, candles and incense in the practice of **Espiritismo**. She thinks that some mediums use these things out of ignorance because they are not necessary for helping a person. However she likes to magnetize water because in the water a medium can deposit healing substances.

Presentation of a case worked by the medium

Doña Juanita told me about the case of a person who came asking for help because he had an obstruction in the kidneys and would be operated on in a few days. She described her treatment of this person as follows:

I told him to lie down on a bench. I made a meditation asking for the help of the spirit guide who is specialized in doing spiritual operations. I began to massage with my hands the area of the body in which the kidneys are located trying to take out the bad **flúidos**. Then I prepared a tea made of different plants and asked the person to drink it. The next day the person came to my house saying that he had thrown out the kidney obstruction while urinating.

Doña Juanita finished our conversation explaining how **Espiritismo** has influenced her life:

Through **Espiritismo** I have learned to love life, to be a good daughter, wife, mother and citizen. It has helped me to gain more confidence in myself. It has been a great support for me. Through **Espiritismo** I have been able to keep myself on the right path.

Miriam

Miriam is a thirty year old married woman who is the mother of three children. Miriam completed a bachelor's degree in science and she is working as a science teacher in a private school. Her husband also has a good job, after

having graduated from college. They seem to live by the standards of a middle-class family.

Early experiences in her development as a medium

Miriam grew up in a rural community in the south coast of Puerto Rico. She came from a family with few financial resources and a limited education. Her mother has never worked outside the home, and her father has been working in a factory all his life.

Miriam described her childhood as a difficult one. She felt very sad and lonely. Her father was an alcoholic who usually came home from work feeling very angry and aggressive. Her mother was a very passive and weak woman who suffered silently and with resignation. Miriam remembers listening to her crying at nights due to the problems with Miriam's father.

Miriam's childhood was influenced significantly by **Espiritismo**. Her uncle was the **Presidente** of a spiritist center and her grandmother was also a medium. Since she was a young child, her parents took her to spiritist centers in the community.

She also had strong religious tendencies as a child. She remembers wanting to be a nun but recognized that she was

not Catholic and that she wanted to have children. Miriam "fantasized" that she was a religious leader who gave spiritual messages about Jesus to a big parish.

There were two important family figures who influenced her development as a medium: her uncle and her grandmother. She described the relationship with her grandmother as follows:

My grandmother was a significant person in my childhood. She became for me like a sister and a confidant. She gave me the spiritist vein. She enjoyed talking to me about **Espiritismo**, motivating me to read Kardec's books. She was a medium who took her role in spiritist meetings very seriously. I admired her a lot.

Miriam also had an uncle who had a spiritist center. It was in this center that she began to develop as a medium. (This center followed the Indigenous **Espiritismo**). Miriam's uncle became a role model for her. She said that there were times in which her uncle was obsessed (**obsesado**) by ignorant spirits, leading her to believe at the age of ten that to become a medium she would also have to have this experience. By that time she thought that "if I had to go crazy in order to help others I would do it". Mediumship was very attractive to her because she wanted to help others.

She attended her uncle's center regularly. At the age of eleven, her uncle told her that in the **centro** she would have the opportunity to read the prayers. This represented a

great achievement for her, and she felt very proud and happy. Other mediums in the center were continuously telling her that she would become a great medium.

At age fourteen Miriam had a dream in which she made her first contact with a spirit. She described this dream as follows:

I was walking on the street when suddenly I saw a small Black woman with a beautiful necklace. As I got distracted by her necklace, she was getting nearer to me little by little. She spoke to me without moving her lips: "You met me in another life. I am your spirit guide". I woke up very moved and I could not sleep any more that night. I had to call my mother. This dream was very real for me.

The next day Miriam attended her uncle's center. In this meeting, a spirit communicated through the uncle saying:

Last night I told somebody that we have met in another life and she got scared. She does not need to be afraid. My name is Ana. Call me when you are in trouble.

Miriam understood that Ana was her spirit guide. Some days later, Ana gave her another message through her uncle: "I was your **nana** (a child caretaker) in another life. I love you very much and I will always be with you".

In her adolescence, Miriam continued her participation in the spiritist center but the spirits did not communicate through her nor did she have the capacity to see them. As she explained: "I just helped the group with my prayers and

good thoughts. I did not have enough confidence to communicate with the spirits." She also had dreams in which she traveled to other countries. She felt as if she was really in these countries, waking up tired from these "imaginary" trips.

By that time, her grandmother died. It was very difficult for Miriam to accept her death. She used to receive a lot of emotional support from her grandmother. However Miriam recognized that her grandmother, as a spirit, continues influencing her life:

I have been able to communicate with her. She has become part of me. When I am confronting a difficult situation, the person that I call for help is my grandmother. But also she has scolded me when I have not dealt with issues in the right way.

Becoming a medium

In college, Miriam continued her involvement in **Espiritismo**, visiting different centers. However it was not until she graduated from college and got married that she began "to work" as a medium. She attended a spiritist center where she took classes to know her spirit guides. These classes were based mostly on meditation exercises. It seems that this center was more oriented towards the tradition of Kardecian **Espiritismo**. Miriam described how in one of these

meditations she could verify that her spirit guide is Ana:

I did not want to force her figure or anything else. Simply, I followed the direction of the group leader. I made an effort to relax and to be calm. I asked for my spirit guide and Ana was the one who came. She smiled at me, corroborating that she was my guide.

After this experience, Miriam met an experienced medium who helped her to **pasar los espíritus**. Through this medium she got confidence in her mediumistic capacities. She remembers that this medium told her the following:

If one wants to learn how to swim, one has to throw oneself into the water. A similar thing happens when one wants to learn how to **pasar** the spirits. You call your guide and she will not let anything bad happen to you.

Miriam and this person started to work in collaboration treating different cases. Through this process, Miriam learned to **pasar** good and bad spirits and to identify their nature. Miriam also developed the capacity to see and hear the spirits. At the beginning she had doubts whether it was really a spirit who was communicating through her. According to Miriam this happened because she is a conscious medium. She is able to remember almost completely the message that a spirit can give through her. Miriam likes to be conscious because in this way she is able to control and modify the verbal manifestations of spirits when their language is inappropriate.

In the process of developing faculties, Miriam learned how to differentiate between good spirits and bad ones. She said that one can do this by identifying and feeling the kind of **fluido** the spirit has. She confessed to me that she does not like to **pasar** ignorant spirits because they leave her with the bad **fluidos**. But when it is necessary to work a **causa** she will do it. She thinks that sometimes a spirit does not need to **pasar** through a medium in order to be educated.

Miriam also has a very good knowledge of her different spirit guides. She has three major guides: Ana, a European physician, and Saint Francis of Assisi. As I described before, Ana is a Black woman who in another life took care of Miriam when her mother died. She is Miriam's principal spirit guide. In addition Miriam has identified Saint Francis as another of his guides. Several times he has spoken through her. Miriam has different books about this saint. The last guide that she has identified is an European physician who she met in another life. Miriam said that she needed this guide in order to be involved in spiritual surgeries. At first she did not trust this spirit but then she understood that it was a good spirit.

In the beginning Miriam thought that in order to help others she has to be a fully-developed medium. However, she

then understood that the only way to become a fully-developed medium was to start helping others: "It is through practice that one can become an effective medium".

Miriam began to work alone as a medium with cases referred to her by friends. She could tell people about their problems without them giving any kind of information. Miriam also continued attending her uncle's spiritist center when she visited her parents. There were times in which she was in charge of the meetings because her uncle was having several health problems. According to Miriam, it was expected that she would become the **Presidente** of the center because it was seen by the family as her spiritual responsibility. However by that time she began to recognize that her uncle was not behaving as a spiritually evolved medium. According to Miriam, "her uncle was not dealing correctly with several problems in his life". Although "he was helping many people, he could not help himself". Miriam began to have several doubts about her involvement with

Espiritismo:

I was confused. I asked myself why my uncle who had so many spirit guides, was not happy with his life and why he was having so many problems. I had to work alone in the spiritist center helping so many people. I did not know if my uncle would come back to work at the center. I wonder what would happen if the center had to be closed.

Miriam decided not to continue working at her uncle's center. This was a time for her to re-think her role as a medium and her involvement with **Espiritismo**: "I remained latent and receptive, like a hermit in my own soul." This was a period for reevaluating her involvement with **Espiritismo** because her uncle who was a "master" for her was not dealing effectively with his own life. She began to question the potential dangers of becoming a medium. She understood that in order to become an effective medium she should not make the same "mistakes" that her uncle made:

My uncle made people too dependent on him. He helped people without teaching them how to help themselves. People cannot become dependent on you because then you are not really helping them.

This issue became critical in her practice as a medium.

As the number of people who came to her asking for help increased, Miriam began to feel overwhelmed by her responsibilities as a wife, a mother of three children, a worker, and a spiritist medium. People called her at any time of the day asking for a **consulta**. As she described:

Sometimes it was difficult for me to have a free time in the day in order to see a client. Some of them were not aware that I also had other responsibilities, criticizing me for not having the time to see them. I needed to set some boundaries in order to have some time for my family and myself.

As opposed to other mediums, Miriam does not have

specific days or hours in the week to see clients. Clients come to her referred mostly by friends who know she is a medium. Miriam has a small room in the house where she sees the people who come asking for help. She made it clear to me that she is not a medium of **consultas** referring to those mediums who see 20 or 30 clients in one day. She has doubts about their effectiveness. According to her it is impossible to really help so many persons in just one day.

The intervention of a psychiatrist and a medium in the life of Miriam

In her account, Miriam emphasized how her husband has been an obstacle for her development as a medium. As she explained to me:

Usually my husband reproaches me for the time that I spend helping other people. Most of the times I have to see clients when my husband is not at home. He does not cooperate with me so that I can visit someone who needs help. Instead of being a facilitating agent, he has been a limiting agent. Because of that, I have felt a lot of resentment towards him. My husband also asks me why I continue seeing people if they do not improve. Sometimes he has confused me a lot. I am frustrated because he has not let me do what I want to do as a medium. Usually I have to overcome several obstacles in order to help someone.

Miriam's relationship with her husband was causing her a significant amount of stress and anxiety to the point that

she has thought about the possibility of getting a divorce. She was not happy in her marriage. To deal with this problem, she decided to go to a professional therapist (a psychiatrist). She wanted "to learn how to deal more effectively in the relationship with her husband" because she was getting "depressed" and was losing her appetite.

In the beginning, Miriam was taking medication prescribed by the psychiatrist, but the medication made her sleepy and she stopped taking it. Yet, she is ambiguous about how much this psychiatrist has helped her. The psychiatrist has identified the problem being that Miriam is repressing her anger and aggressive feelings towards her husband. He argues that in order to resolve this problem she has to get in contact with these feelings and express them. The psychiatrist recommended Miriam think more about herself and consider divorce as an alternative. Miriam described the last session with the psychiatrist as follows:

I feel very confused because the psychiatrist told me that I want to help others in order to be recognized and to overcome my loneliness. This really disturbed me because I want to help others without any kind of selfish interest. He also told me that I don't have enough knowledge about personality and behavior to help others. Besides he expressed that I get too involved with the people I try to help and that it was affecting me emotionally.

As Miriam was talking, I was feeling angry at the

psychiatrist. I thought that he was very insensitive and inconsiderate toward her. I said: "Well, maybe one does not need to know about theories of personality in order to help others. I know some cases in which psychiatrists have not been able to help but a spiritist medium has been successful."

My comment led to a discussion about the nature of helping. Miriam had the opportunity to talk about some of her frustrations in trying to "help" others. She brought the case of her uncle who has "helped many people but has been unable to help himself". Miriam told me that she has made several "mistakes" trying to help others because of lack of knowledge and experience.

Afterwards, Miriam continued talking about her experiences with the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist recommended that in order to express this "anger" toward her husband she could do an exercise: When she is ironing clothes, Miriam should think that she is ironing her husband's face! Miriam found it impossible to do this exercise because "just to think that I am ironing his face makes me uncomfortable. I care too much about him".

In another session, Miriam expressed to the psychiatrist that she wants to be a peaceful person like Saint Francis. "The psychiatrist responded ironically: How did you know that

he was a peaceful person? Did you meet him?" Miriam felt offended by this comment. As I wrote before, Saint Francis is one of Miriam's spirit guides.

Miriam disagrees with the psychiatrist's emphasis on "the search for one's happiness and pleasure as a priority in life". For Miriam the happiness and well-being of her children is the most important thing, it is more important than her own happiness. She considers that her husband is a good father and in this sense a divorce will affect her children negatively. She will stay married in order for her children to have a good father.

At the time of these interviews Miriam was also struggling with an issue related to her own development as a medium. She was told by the spirit world that she would have a very important mission in her life: to give birth to a very spiritually advanced child. However, at that time she and her husband were considering not having another child due to the financial situation and because Miriam was very busy with her three children. She talked to her husband about what the spirits told her to do. Her husband responded that maybe everything was in her mind and that they should not have another child. Miriam did not know what to do. She wanted to obey the spirit world but on the other hand she wanted to be faithful to her husband. She could not be pregnant

without his consent. The spirits continued telling her that she should have another child. She began to doubt the authenticity of these spiritual messages: "Is this just produced by my personal wish to have another child? Is this truly a real communication from the spirits or am I inventing it in order to have another child?"

While she was dealing with this conflict, her husband continued pressuring her to make a decision. After a great deal of discussion they decided that he should have a vasectomy.

Miriam was crying while describing this experience. She felt frustrated and guilty because she could not carry out or fulfill the mission that was given to her from the spirit world. She understood that this spiritual revelation was not caused by her mind. After her husband's vasectomy, she had experiences with the spirit who is the one that she was supposed to give birth to. According to her, this spirit was very anxious to be born or "incarnated" in this world. Miriam suffered very much because she was not sure if she made the right decision.

At this time I decided to make an "intervention" in order to help Miriam with this problem. I knew a medium who lived near Miriam. I thought that this medium named Luisa may be helpful in dealing with Miriam's problem. I asked

Miriam if she would like to visit this medium with me. She was very eager to do that. I called Luisa telling her that there is a person who needs some help and if she would be able to see her. This was the only information I gave her.

One afternoon, Miriam and I went to see Luisa at her home. After we got acquainted, Luisa told Miriam that she saw the spirit of a baby child in her lap. After hearing this Miriam started to cry while she explained her problem to Luisa. Luisa seemed to know what was happening with Miriam before she talked about it. After hearing Miriam, Luisa offered her several pieces of advice. First, she told Miriam that she did not need to feel guilty about not fulfilling her mission because it was out of her control. It was something that required her husband's cooperation. Second, Luisa said to Miriam that God will never ask us to do something which may be impossible to carry out due to material circumstances. God understands why she could not fulfill this mission. Third, Luisa expressed to Miriam that there is the possibility that this spirit will come through another family member. Miriam had also received this message from the spirit world. For Miriam this was a very important confirmation or **comprobación** because at least she can be near this spirit when he or she is born.

Luisa also gave feedback to Miriam about her marital

problems. She told Miriam that she has to consider two questions: How much love does she have for her husband in order to stay in this marriage? and How important is it for her that her children have a good father? Miriam expressed to Luisa that she does not want to get divorced because her husband is a good father and that she loves him very much. Miriam was interested in giving a second chance to her marriage. Luisa recommended that she sit down in front of their bed when her husband is sleeping and talk to his spirit because in this state he is more receptive to change. Through the whole meeting, Doña Luisa did not appear to go into any trance state, not showing any sign of being possessed by a spirit. She worked with Miriam without getting into any apparent altered state of consciousness.

The meeting seemed to be helpful for Miriam. She expressed to me that Luisa helped her to achieve a deeper understanding of her problems and not to feel guilty for not fulfilling her special mission. I noticed that she was happier and more optimistic than in the other interviews.

Healing approach and evolution of practices

Although Miriam is a medium who developed her **facultades** within the tradition of Indigenous **Espiritismo**, she

recognized that her practices as a medium have changed significantly:

I learned that I do not need to sit in front of a **mesa blanca** (white table) or to use different kinds of rituals in order to help others. For example, in the past I used candles because they made me feel solemn. Now they don't have any meaning for me. But there is something that I always need in my work as a medium: it is pure water. The water makes me feel more faith. Also one can prepare water and it can become a medicine for a client. However sometimes I work without water. Little by little I have been leaving this baggage (referring to the ritual objects). I had to get rid of these things. I need the emotional independence from all of these things.

Miriam believes that the table in a **centro** creates distance between the public and the medium because it establishes a kind of hierarchy. She learned that she could work without a table and still be an effective medium. According to Miriam the function of the other ritual objects is to create a good environment to work as a medium. But she can contact the good spirits without using these objects. In addition Miriam sees that there is an advantage in working without using ritual objects: she can help people without being identified as a medium. In this sense she can reach people who are not **Espiritistas**.

Despite this difference with Indigenous mediums, Miriam's healing approach is based on prayers, **despojos** and **pases**, the preparation of "magnetized water" and the working

of **causas**. Therefore she is still very much influenced by the practice of Indigenous **Espiritismo** as it is seen in the presentation of the following cases.

Presentation of a case worked by the medium

In order to describe her approach in dealing with cases, Miriam presented several cases to me in which she has been involved. She described one of these cases as follows:

A very nervous woman came to me asking for help. She had gone to a professional helper before. A naturalist had told her that she had cancer. She was eating very little. I told her that she did not have any cancer. I gave her some hot coffee and cookies. After that, we went to my room to pray. I understood that her problem was that she did not know how to **pasar** her spirit guides. She had spirit guides who wanted to communicate through her. This sensation made her become anxious and nervous. She needed to learn how to meditate and how to **pasar** her guides. I explained to her how to **pasar** her guides and that she should not get nervous. I also told her that she did not have any kind of physical condition. I gave her a small pigeon statue. She prepared a room in her house in which she could meditate. In this room she had a goblet of water, the pigeon that I gave her and flowers. After she began to **pasar** her guides, her nervousness disappeared. She did not continue taking her medication.

However Miriam made the point that a dependency was created between herself and the client. In Miriam's view, the client used her as a substitute for the medication. The

client did not want to confront her "material" problems. Miriam decided to refer her to a professional helper because the client was getting too dependent on her. According to Miriam, the client did not want to take responsibility for the "material" problems that she had.

I also had the opportunity to observe her working with a case at her home. This client was a woman who was experiencing a lot of stress due to family problems. Miriam had worked with this case before. We met in the room which Miriam has prepared for seeing her clients. In this room there are several books on **Espiritismo** and personal growth.

Miriam began the meeting with a prayer asking for the help of God, Jesus and the good spirits. She made a petition for the meeting to be a productive one. After it, she gave me a book of spiritist prayers, asking me to open it and at random to read a prayer. I opened the book and read a prayer for the people who had died recently. Miriam commented to the client that this prayer was for her grandfather's spirit because he is still confused about his condition. According to Miriam the grandfather is intervening in the family's affairs as if he were still alive. He has not recognized that he is a spirit.

Then, Miriam asked the client to read at random a passage from another book. When the client was reading it,

Miriam interrupted her in order to say that she received an **evidencia** (spiritual revelation) in which she saw many dogs fighting. She said that this may be a symbol for discord and conflict. The client began to talk about her family's conflicts due to financial interests. Family members were getting out of control without any reason. While the client was talking about these issues Miriam moved her hands rapidly back and forth around the client's head as if she was trying to put something inside it. Miriam began to talk in a different tone of voice with her eyes closed. I noticed that her principal guide, Ana, was communicating through Miriam.

Ana said that she will use her "magic broom" to "clean" the client's home of all the bad **fluídos**. She also gave support to the client, indicating that she stay calm and peaceful. Ana also acknowledged the client's spiritual strength in dealing with the problem. She advised the client not to take other people's responsibilities.

After Ana's communication, another spirit came to talk through Miriam. This spirit was the client's mother-in-law. The client had a conflictive relationship with her mother-in-law when she was alive. The mother-in-law was very authoritative and demanding. In her communication through Miriam, the mother-in-law indicated that she wants to control the family members and to influence their decisions. The

client and myself made an effort to convince the spirit to desist in trying to continue influencing the family members. However she was very resistant to changing her behavior.

Miriam told us that the mother-in-law had been lifted up (**levantada**) by a group of **espíritus de luz** in order to educate her spirit. Then Miriam closed the meeting with a prayer, giving thanks to God and the good spirits for what had been achieved in the meeting.

Through all the interviews, Miriam strongly emphasized that being a good medium is to be an instrument of peace and love. She asks herself every moment how she can contribute to the peace of other persons. According to Miriam, mediums do not have special powers, they are instruments of the power of God. Miriam wants to become a "functional medium", one who is prepared at any time to help others. She stressed that in order to help others, one has to grow as a human being. In order to become a good medium one has to constantly evaluate one's heart and soul:

A good medium should be very aware of the needs of others. There is always a sad person, a lonely person, an unloved person who needs our support. My happiness and satisfaction is to give from myself without any interest, just for the pleasure of giving.

Doña Luz

First contact with the medium

Doña Luz was referred to me by a friend of mine who had been helped by her. On my first visit to Doña Luz's house I found her sitting on the balcony. I introduced myself as a student who was doing a study on the development of mediums. Her initial reaction was to recommend several books on **Espiritismo** to me. I explained to her that I was more interested in her own experiences as a medium.

I discovered that Doña Luz was attending a center based on Trincado's philosophy. I had met the director of this center before. When I mentioned this to Luz she was more positive about being interviewed. We agreed to meet at her home the next day.

Early experiences in her development as a medium

Doña Luz is a fifty-nine year old woman who lives with her husband and younger son. Her academic education is very limited. After passing the first grade, her father told her that she could stay at home because she did not need any more education. She does not know how to read or write very well. Her husband has worked as a barber all of his life.

Luz described her family of origin as "very poor and moral". Her grandmother was a medium who "cured people with leprosy using plants". Luz was reared by an aunt because her mother was killed in a car accident.

At the age of seventeen, Luz had the painful experience of seeing her sister commit suicide. This experience was very devastating for her. After her sister's death, Luz began to have "mental problems":

I began to hear voices that told me to commit suicide. I used to leave home and to yell in the streets without any reason. I could not control myself. My family took me to a doctor, and he said that I had something wrong with my nerves (**enferma de los nervios**). The doctor prescribed several drugs for me.

However, Luz continued hearing the voices that were telling her to commit suicide. Her grandfather decided to take her to a famous **centro** in the community presided over by a medium called Juan. According to Luz, through attending this **centro** and following the teachings of this medium she got completely cured:

This was my medicine. Don Juan taught me how to control my thoughts and the voices that I was hearing. He also told me that I was passing a **prueba** in order to develop **facultades**. In addition Don Juan said to me that I have to learn how to use my thoughts to reject the spirits that were troubling me.

Becoming a medium

After being cured in this **centro** Doña Luz described her life as a "normal" one. She understood that her mental problems were caused by an **obsesión** ("spirit obsession"). She also believes that her mental problems were a **prueba** that she had to pass in order to become a medium.

To develop great and good **facultades** one has to go through very hard **pruebas**. **Pruebas** also increase your faith in the spirit world. Although there are persons who develop their **facultades** without having an **obsesión**, people say that the medium who has gone through an **obsesión** develops greater **facultades** than a medium who has not had this experience.

Luz continued attending Juan's **centro** and with the help of Juan, she became one of the most active mediums at the **centro**. Luz is very grateful to Juan for both his help and for showing her what a medium should be.

One day Juan was sick and he asked Luz to be in charge of the **reunión** until he got well. Luz remembers that her legs began to tremble when she initiated the **reunión** that day. She knew that it was a great responsibility to be the leader of a spiritist meeting.

After a short period of time, Juan died and Luz was designated to permanently occupy Juan's position as a **Presidenta**. At first Luz felt very insecure because of her very limited academic education.

I found myself like a "cockroach in a dance of hens". I could not talk about scientific **Espiritismo** or very profound things. But without knowing how, I began to receive very important lessons from the spirit world. In the **reunión**, I emphasized that mediums have to be responsible and moral and by no means can they charge for their services.

Luz is a conscious medium. She prefers to work in this way because she wants to have control of the spirit's communication. Luz argued that unconscious mediums let the spirits say bad words. As opposed to other mediums, Luz has not identified her guides by names or physical appearance. She expressed that the spirits have never given her their names. Luz does not consider it important to identify our guides by names because in the spirit world the spirits do not have names.

Although Luz told me that in general her relationship with the community is a good one, she said that some people have called her a witch. Others have commented that she is a good woman but an **Espiritista**. She told me the story of a Pentecostal group that asked her if they could install their electrical amplifying equipment in her home because they wanted to offer an outdoor public service in the neighborhood. Luz gave them permission. She remembers that in that service they attacked and criticized the **Espiritistas**, telling the public that the mediums are

inspired by the Devil.

Healing approach and evolution of practices

Luz presided over this **centro** for eight years. Due to some disagreements with the people who owned the **centro**, she decided to stop attending it. According to Luz, she suggested changing some of the traditional practices and proposed new ones. For example, in the **centro** the only book read was The Gospel According to Espiritismo. She suggested reading other books by Kardec and discussing them. However this was not well received by other members "who did not want to get any kind of instruction".

Another point of disagreement between Doña Luz and the members was in the area of religion. Doña Luz did not want other mediums to go to the Catholic Church. She disagreed with these mediums when they said that all the religions were good. According to Luz, in **Espiritismo** one can find everything and there is no need to go to any church "to hear that **Espiritismo** is something from the Devil".

Doña Luz's opinion about religion is a negative one. She thinks that religion enslaves people because one has to believe in the leader's argument without having the opportunity to question it. For her, **Espiritismo** is not a

religion because it has no dogmatic truths. It is a science because it encourages people to reason and reflect on the nature of life. It is in this context that Doña Luz argues that our faith has to be "rational".

After being the **Presidenta** of this **centro** for eight years, Luz became aware that she "could not continue supporting any religion" and that one "cannot believe in altars and rosaries". She also began to doubt the divinity of Jesus Christ. It seems that the members of the **centro** were not ready to accept this radical departure from the Catholic religion. Luz thought that the best thing to do was to leave the **centro** and to look for another place where her ideas could be accepted.

A group of college students that was attending the **centro** asked her to meet with them in order to study **Espiritismo**. Luz liked this idea very much and they met for about two years at her home. Besides discussing Kardec's books, they also had some time to work **causas**. The group also published a magazine about **Espiritismo**. According to Luz the group was dissolved when most of the students graduated from college and moved to different towns.

For some time, Luz did not go to any **centro** because none of them satisfied her. About seven months prior to my initial interview Doña Luz was invited to a spiritist center

based on Trincado's philosophy. She liked the place and has been attending it every week.

The meetings at this **cátedra** (the name that **Trincadistas** give to this center) follow the model of Kardecian **Espiritismo**. There is a complete absence of ritual objects, prayers and religious pictures. The emphasis of the meetings is on the study of **Espiritismo** and the works of Trincado, although from time to time there can be a manifestation of an evolved spirit or an ignorant one. The leader of the group said that they do not invoke the spirits but if they want to manifest through a medium it is acceptable. I noticed that the leader is not a medium but he has a vast knowledge about **Espiritismo**.

This **cátedra** is located in a rural area. The public who participate in these meetings comes from middle and lower social classes.

Luz pointed out that her participation in the **cátedra** has been limited to "observation" because she has not read the works of Trincado. But she has been concentrating very much on the discussions, trying to learn the most important facts of Trincado's philosophy. From time to time she gives a "revelation" related to one of the participants.

The two major ways which Luz uses to help people is to give them "magnetized water" and **sobos** (massages) in the area

affected by the spirit. For example, she described that one of her clients had a **causa** in the stomach and Luz felt the client's **causa** in her own stomach. Then she asked if he was experiencing stomach problems and the client responded positively. Luz massaged his stomach in order to take out the bad **fluídos**. After it, she prepared "magnetized water" and gave it to the client.

Luz recognizes that in the process of working a **causa**, she does not like to **pasar** a spirit and "start to cry and yell due to the spirit's aberrations". She prefers to work a **causa** by listening to the spirit and receiving his or her vibrations. She also thinks that this is the best approach because some clients become very afraid when they hear the evil intentions of an ignorant spirit. Using this way, she can choose what is appropriate to tell a person about the intentions of an ignorant spirit. However Luz admitted that sometimes there is no other alternative than to **pasar** the ignorant spirit because he or she is too strong.

Luz criticized those mediums who develop their **facultades** only by the study of books. She made it clear that she is not a "medium of books but of experiences". As she expressed: "It does not matter how many books one has read, but what is important is to have the special power to help others". Luz commented that she has been in spiritist

groups of professional people who like to talk about physics, chemistry, biology and other difficult areas:

I have felt very uncomfortable there because I do not have the capacity to understand all of those things. However when these groups need someone to work a **causa**, they look for me because none of them is able to do that. They are great intellectuals but not mediums.

In our last interview Luz expressed her dissatisfaction with the meetings at the Trincado's center. According to her, there is a medium in the center who is not giving authentic spirit communications. There is no spirit talking through him when he is giving the messages, she stated. Luz complained that "the director has to call his attention to this because one cannot let this happen in a center". In addition two mediums who have college education claim that spirits of famous personalities such as José Martí, Simón Bolívar and William Shakespeare have communicated through them. Luz has doubts about the reality of these communications. She believes that "there are mediums in the center who are too arrogant".