

Pinasal Ritual

ITNEG*, ABRA PROVINCE, NORTHWESTERN LUZON ISLAND, NORTHERN PHILIPPINES. *This elaborate rite is confined to San Juan village and nearby settlements. The right to it is not hereditary; anyone who can afford the expense involved may celebrate it. However, it usually follows the say-ang, if a member of the family is ill and does not become well. They believe that not all spirits are not present at each ceremony and so they may need to perform others until they find a cure for the illness.*

ON THE FIRST DAY, the house is decorated as in *tangpap* and *say-ang*. A bound pig is placed beside the door, over which mediums recite a *diam* and later summon several spirits. Liquor is served to the guests, who dance the *tadek* or sing songs in praise of the family.

Early the next day, the pig is killed and after its intestines have been removed, is covered with a colored blanket and carried into the house. It is met by the mediums who wave rain coats above the animal and then wail over it. The pig and its covering are payment in part for the life of the sick person. They cry for the pig so that they will not need to cry for the patient. Later, the pig is cut up and prepared as food, with only the head and feet left for the spirits.

Gipas, the dividing, follows. A Chinese ceramic jar is placed on its side and on each end, a spear is laid, so that they nearly meet above the center of the jar. Next, a rolled mat is laid on the spears and four beads and a headband are added. The mat is cut through the middle, so as to leave equal parts of the headband and two beads on each half. This shows that the spirit is now paid and is separated from the house.

After this, they stretch a rattan cord across the center of the room and place on it many blankets and skirts. A man and a woman, who represent the good spirits Iwaginan and Gimbagon are dressed in fine garments and hold pieces of gold, a fine spear and other

prized articles. They are placed on one side of the cord. In front of them are a number of men with their hands on each others' shoulders. The mediums enter the other end of the room, spread a mat and begin to summon the spirits. Soon, they are possessed by evil beings who notice the couple representing the good spirits. They seize sticks or other objects and rush toward them trying to seize their wealth. When they reach the line of men, they strive to break through, but are unsuccessful. Finally, they give this up, but instead attempt to seize the objects hanging on the line. Again they are thwarted. "If the evil spirits get these things, they will come often, their children will marry and harm the family; but if the good beings keep their wealth, their children will marry and aid the owner of the house."

Later, one of the mediums and an old woman count the colors in a fine blanket. Usually, there are five colors, so "the spirit is powerless to injure the people for five years." Next, the couple gamble, but the medium always loses. Finally, the spirit becomes discouraged and departs. The decorations are now taken from the room and the sick person is carried down to the river by the members of the family. At the water's edge, the oldest relative cuts off a dog's head as final payment for the life of the sick person. Since the act is done beside the river, the spirits will either witness the act or see the blood as it floats away. Hence, it will not need to visit the town. The rattan cord and vines used in the house are thrown into the water for the same reason.

The whole family is covered with a large blanket while a medium swings a coconut over them. Then, resting the halves on the head of each family member for a moment, she releases them, meanwhile calling to the spirit, "You see this? This is your share. Do not come any more." After assuring them that the sickness will now fall away from them, she waves

burning *cogon* grass over their heads while she cries, "Go away, sickness." The blanket is removed and the family bathes. While they are still in the water, the medium takes a spear and shield in her hands. She goes to the edge of the stream and begins to summon spirits, but all the while she keeps a sharp watch for the old man who killed the dog, for he is now armed and appears to be her enemy. However, she is not bothered until she starts toward the village. When she nears the settlement, she is suddenly attacked by many people carrying banana stalks which they hurl at her. She succeeds in warding these off, but while she is thus engaged, an old man runs to her and touches her with a spear. Immediately, she falls as if dead. It takes several moments before she regains consciousness. This attack shows the spirit how unwelcome it is, in the hope that such bad treatment will convince it to stay away.

After the return of the family to the village, the guests drink *basi* (sugarcane wine), sing and dance. Usually, several spirits are summoned by the mediums.

The next morning, two *pinalasang* are constructed in the yard. Each supports a plate containing beads. A string of beads is suspended from one of the poles and a jar of *basi* is placed beneath. The mediums call the spirits in front of them then offer the heart, livers and intestines, while they call out, "Take me and do not injure the people." The final act of the ceremony is constructing the spirit raft *taltalabong*, load it with food and set it afloat on the river, "so that all the spirits may see and know what has been done."

In addition to the regular payment for their services, the mediums divide the jaw of the pig and carry the portions home with them as their protection against lightning and the spirits whose anger they may have incurred.

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(opposite page) Rafts or *taltalabong*, drying on stands, are similar to the spirit raft mentioned in the ritual.

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