



## Case Report

# The Sacred Use of *Datura Wrightii*: Four Case Reports

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### Abstract

*Datura wrightii* was traditionally used for sacred dreams and was used in many California Indian religions. The purpose of this writing is to present 4 case reports of people who sought the sacred use of the plant. This is contrasted with the recreational use of the plant.

**Keywords:** Carlos Castaneda; California Indian; *Datura wrightii*; Recreational; Sacred

### Introduction

Carlos Castaneda brought *Datura wrightii* to the attention of the public in the 1960s and 1970s after writing several books that discussed the plant. Castaneda died in 1998 from hepatocellular cancer without ever divulging exactly how to use the plant. It is possible that he never actually used the plant and preferred *Lophophora williamsii*, peyote, instead [1]. He claimed to have learned from a Yaqui Indian healer, even though the Yaqui do not use *D wrightii*.

*D wrightii* was used in many California and Arizona Indian religions until these religions were called “Devil Worship” by Catholics that came to the area in the 1700s and later [2]. Currently, very few people know how to use the plant correctly in Sacred Ceremony.

“At the time of the White Dawn; At the time of the White Dawn, I arose and went away. At Blue Nightfall I went away. I ate the thornapple (*Datura*) leaves, And the leaves made me dizzy. I drank thornapple flowers, And the drink made me stagger.” Pima Indian *Datura* Song [3].

*D wrightii* is considered a dangerous and poisonous plant and is removed from many parks in California [4]. Several deaths have been

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reported from the inappropriate, recreational use of the plant [5]. It is not considered legal to use *D wrightii* in religious practices in California, despite the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978. It is called felony child endangerment. Several internet sites discuss the recreational use of the plant and may encourage people to experiment with the plant.

There is a resurgence in interest in psychedelic drugs, sometimes called entheogens, including clinical trials for depression and post traumatic stress disorder [6]. Entheogen means a substance that generates an experience with God. It is not clear how God is involved in these entheogen trials. *D wrightii* can be used by Chumash Indian Healers to treat post traumatic stress disorder (Cecilia Garcia personal communication). The plant is crushed and produces an aroma that helps awaken the spirituality of the patient. The plant can also be ingested as described in this writing. Despite the traditional use of *D wrightii* in these patients, there are no clinical trials with the plant. This writing discusses the use of *D. wrightii* by 4 people in sacred ceremony. This is distinct from recreational use. Sacred use involves fasting, prayer and a sacred intent. The dosage form used is either the flowers or seeds. Dosage concerns are discussed in an earlier publication [2]. The examples used an entire flower. This dose is too much for some people, especially small or unhealthy people.

### First Case Report

I am a healthy senior male with a slight, athletic build. I run an hour every day and have been vegetarian for more than 45 years. I do not smoke or drink alcohol. I was educated in Chumash Indian Healing for 14 years and sought answers to questions my teacher had not answered. In 2020, after fasting for 14 hours, I chewed and swallowed an entire flower from *D. wrightii*. About 20 min later, my mouth felt very dry. At the same time, my vision, smell, hearing and taste seemed to improve. I felt like I was floating with my feet barely touching the ground. On a few occasions, I believed that I saw flashes of light that were like rainbows. On two occasions, I believed that I heard something that sounded like a bear growling. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I prayed for guidance and felt reassured. After about 2 hours, the experience started to subside and was completely over in 3 hours. There was no nausea or discomfort.

### Second Case Report

I am a healthy, senior male with an athletic body. I ride my bike daily for 1 or 2 hours. I have been educated for several years in Chumash Indian Healing. In 2021, I fasted for 14 hours and had a question that I thought only God could answer. After eating a flower and experiencing a dry mouth, I began to feel like I was floating between different realities. I believed that I saw *D. wrightii* plants that seemed very beautiful to me, even though I was assured later they did not exist. I sensed evil in the presence of a person who passed by. My experience was sacred and very meaningful to me. I prayed and received an answer. I returned to normal reality within 4 hours. I had no feelings of nausea or other discomfort.

### Third Case Report

I am a healthy woman and keep myself active by bicycling, walking, gardening and other activities. I have been educated in Chumash Indian Healing for many years. In 2022, I fasted for 14 hours to prepare for my sacred dream. I experienced a dry mouth and felt like I was floating after eating a flower. I became happy and started to sing. I believed that I was very much in my own reality, but could interact with others when I wanted. My experience was very pleasant and sacred and lasted for about 3 hours. I prayed and felt reassured by my experience. I did not experience nausea or discomfort.

### Fourth Case Report

I am a healthy active woman. I was educated in sacred rituals for several months by Carlos Castaneda and his students. Carlos Castaneda in 1998, prepared a clear, brown liquid for me to drink as part of a sacred ceremony. He said it was made from the seeds of *D. wrightii*. He did not tell me how he made the drink or how many seeds were used. I had not fasted prior to the ceremony. I drank the liquid as instructed. My mouth did not become dry. I had mild feelings of floating for a few minutes. There was no nausea or discomfort.

### Discussion

The experiences with *D. wrightii* in these examples were mild, but did involve visual and auditory hallucinations, sacred dreams in at least two examples. Two people have tried to replicate these *D. wrightii* experiences without fasting, to no effect. However, it is important to remember that the plant can cause urinary retention in people with benign prostatic hyperplasia. It can also exacerbate anxiety issues in people that suffer from severe anxiety such as cyclic vomiting syndrome. If the dose of the plant is increased, such as for recreational use, the problems can become severe including respiratory depression and death [2,5].

*D. wrightii* was traditionally used by Chumash Indians four times in life: at the rite of passage, before marriage, before conception and at death [2,4]. Healers also used *D. wrightii* to seek answers to questions, such as how to heal a sick person. The traditional view was that the soul became separated from the body during the *D. wrightii* sacred dream [2,4]. The soul went to God and was instructed. Other California Indians used the plant in their own ways. For instance, *D. wrightii* was used mostly by Healers among the Paiute Indians [7].

Three of the authors are students of California Indian traditional Healing or are already recognized healers [4]. These authors used *D. wrightii* to seek answers to healing questions. In each case, answers became apparent. These authors believe that *D. wrightii* should be used for sacred dreams. A Chumash Indian healer, Cecilia Garcia, directly or indirectly taught these authors the sacred uses of *D. wrightii* [5]. Her grandparents had previously taught Carlos Castaneda about the Chumash Indian religion [2]. Castaneda never claimed to have learned about the Chumash religion. However, he did claim as in example 4 to use *D. wrightii* in sacred ceremony.

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