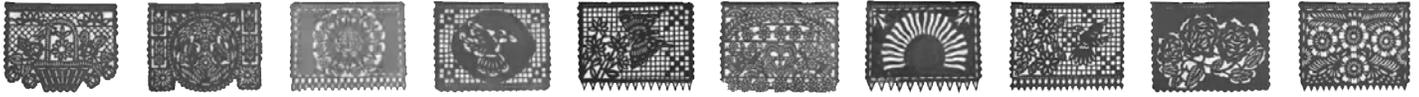


## SUPPORTING ARTICLES

The following articles are reprinted here with permission from Inside-Mexico (<http://www.inside-mexico.com/culturetraditions/traditions.htm>).

- “The Day of the Dead Ofrenda: A Heartfelt Work of Art” from Inside-Mexico (Article)
- “Misconceptions” by May Herz from Inside-Mexico (Article)
- “Day of the Dead: Celebration, History & Origins” by May Herz from Inside-Mexico (Article)
- “The Day of the Dead Offering” by Oscar Guzmán from Inside-Mexico (Article)



## “THE DAY OF THE DEAD OFRENDAS: A HEARTFELT WORK OF ART”

Reprinted here with permission from Inside-Mexico.

Ofrendas are an essential part of the Day of the Dead celebrations. The word ofrenda means offering in Spanish. They are also called altares or altars, but they are not for worshiping. Some people mistakenly think that Mexicans that set up altars for their defunct relatives are actually worshiping them. Nothing further from the truth. The vast majority of Mexicans are Christian Catholics, so they only worship God.

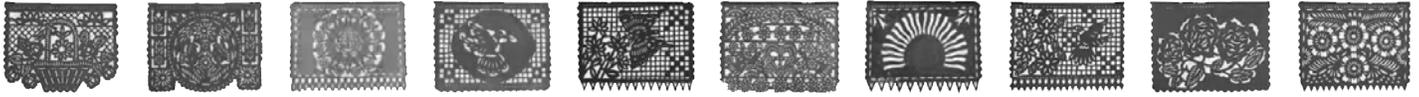


Ofrendas are set up to remember and honor the memory of their ancestors. Before setting an altar, they thoroughly clean their house. We must remember they are going to have very important “visitors”.

The ofrenda is set on a table, covered with a fine tablecloth, preferably white. Then the papel picado, cut tissue paper, is set over the cloth.

Several levels can be set on the ofrendas. Generally on the top level the images of Saints and the Crucifix are set.





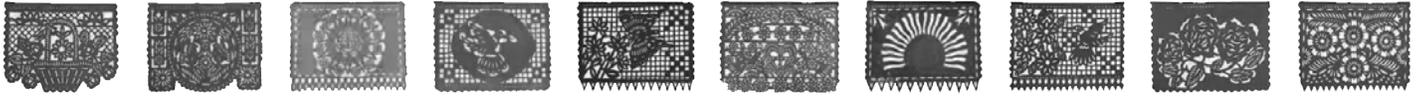
For each deceased relative a candle is set. Their light is thought to guide them on their way back. The light of the candles, also called *ceras* - waxes - symbolize Jesus Christ Reborn and faith.

Flowers, specially *Cempasuchitl* , adorn the ofrenda. Flowers represent the fugacity of life.

Salt and water are also essential; they are set to quench the thirst of the souls, tired from their long trip. Water also purifies and cleanses.



Incense, *Copal*, is burned and thought to elevate prayers to God.



Pictures of the defunct are placed on the ofrenda, as well as some of their favorite clothing, perhaps a hat or a shawl. For the children they place small toys.

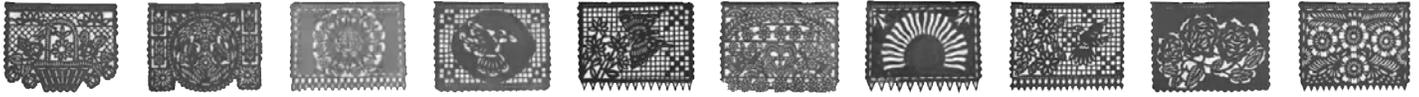
Food is specially prepared for the souls. Their preferred dishes are cooked for them and placed on the altar: mole, tamales, fruits, arroz rojo -red rice-, hot chocolate and dried fruit. Some times cigarettes or liquor if the dead relative enjoyed them when alive. And of course Pan de Muerto.



It is important to mention that they will not eat the food, they only enjoy the aroma.

Sometimes a cross is made with petals of the cempasuchitl flower. Also with the petals, paths are set to guide the souls to the ofrenda.

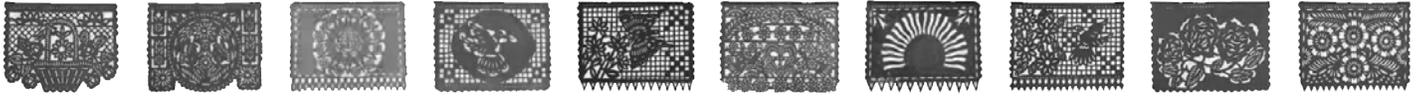




Sugar skulls and calacas -skeletons - are also included. In many towns, there are contests of ofrendas.



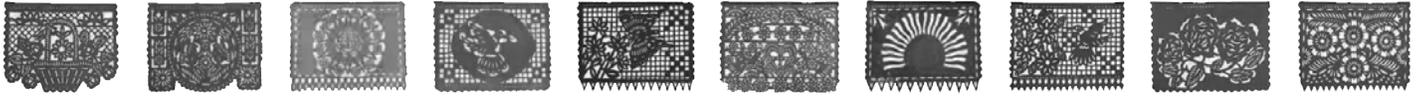
Judges go house by house and elect the three most beautiful altars. Ofrendas are works of art, ephemeral art that is!



## “MISCONCEPTIONS”

Written by May Herz and reprinted here with permission from Inside-Mexico.

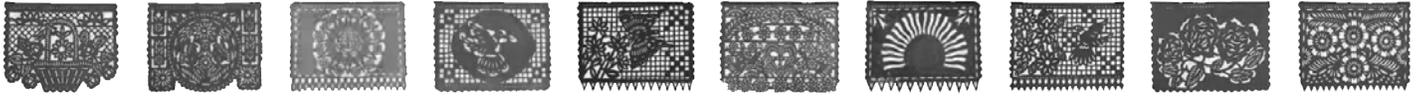
- El Día de los Muertos is not the Mexican version of Halloween. Mexicans have celebrated the Day of the Dead since the year 1800 B.C.
- It is not scary or morbid. There are no pictures or images of dead people, ghosts, witches, or the devil.
- The Day of the Dead is not a cult. This ritual has nothing to do with cults. It is a Catholic Christian ritual intermixed with folk culture. Going to mass is an essential aspect of this celebration.
- It doesn't honor death, but our dead relatives. We welcome the opportunity to reflect upon our lives, our heritage, our ancestors and the meaning and purpose of our own existence.
- Altars or ofrendas are not for worshiping but for offering our love and remembering our departed family members.
- It is not a sad ritual. It's a day of happiness because we will be remembering our loved ones. Although when in the graveyard, people assume an introspective attitude.
- The Day of the Dead is about love not fear.
- It is not a “strange” ritual. It is very similar to going to a grave and leaving flowers or stuffed animals, lighting a candle to remember the deceased.
- It is not a careless or fearless confrontation of death. It is a moment to reflect upon one's life and the cycle of life and death.



## “IDEAS ERRÓNEAS SOBRE LA CELEBRACIÓN DEL DÍA DE MUERTOS”

Written by May Herz and reprinted here with permission from Inside-Mexico.

- El Día de los Muertos no es la versión Mexicana de Halloween. Los Mexicanos han celebrado el Día de los Muertos desde el año 1800 A.C.
- No es una celebración que provoca miedo ni es mórbida. No se ponen fotos de la gente muerta, ni de fantasmas, brujas o demonios.
- El Día de los Muertos no es un culto. Es un ritual que no tiene nada que ver con cultos o sectas. Es un ritual Católico mezclado con el folklore popular. La celebración de la misa Católica es una parte esencial de esta maravillosa fiesta.
- No se honra o adora a la muerte, se honra la memoria de nuestros familiares que han muerto.
- Es una oportunidad para reflexionar sobre nuestra vida , nuestros familiares, sobre el sentido y el propósito de nuestra existencia.
- Los altares y ofrendas no son para adorar a los muertos sino para recordar a nuestros familiares difuntos y ofrecerles nuestro amor y recuerdos.
- El Día de los Muertos no es un día de tristeza, al contrario, ese día estamos contentos por que estamos recordando a nuestros seres queridos. Sin embargo cuando estamos en el cementerio nos volvemos pensativos y reflexionamos en una actitud de introspección.
- El Día de los Muertos está dedicado al amor no al miedo.
- No es un ritual “raro” o “extraño”. Es muy similar a la costumbre de ir al cementerio y dejar flores, muñecos de peluche, globos o velas para recordar a los difuntos.
- El Día de los Muertos no es una confrontación con la muerte, es un momento para reflexionar sobre nuestra vida y el ciclo de la vida y la muerte.



## “DAY OF THE DEAD: CELEBRATION, HISTORY & ORIGINS”

Written by May Herz and reprinted here with permission from Inside-Mexico.

From the beginning of time, man has felt the need to explain the mystery of life and death. Many civilizations and cultures have created rituals to try and give meaning to human existence.

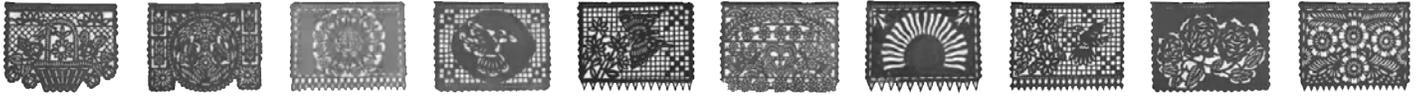
- Where do we come from?
- Why does life end?
- Is there “life” after death?
- If so, what kind of “life”?
- Can we do something while alive so we can enjoy “life” after death?

These are some of the questions man has asked himself in order to understand our finite existence on this earth.

To the indigenous peoples of Mexico, death was considered the passage to a new life and so the deceased were buried with many of their personal objects, which they would need in the hereafter. Many times even their pets were sacrificed so they would accompany their masters on their long journey.

From pre Columbian times, El Día de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead has been celebrated in Mexico, and other Latin countries. This is a very special ritual, since it is the day in which the living remember their departed relatives. Sometimes, when people of other cultures hear for the first time about the celebration of the Day of the Dead, they mistakenly think it must be: gruesome, terrifying, scary, ugly and sad. Nothing further from the truth, Day of the Dead is a beautiful ritual in which Mexicans happily and lovingly remember their loved relatives that have died. Much like when we go to a graveyard to leave some lovely flowers on a tomb of a relative.

On November 1st and 2nd Mexico celebrates the Day of the Dead, and there are two very special places where this ritual is specially impressive: Mixquic, a small town in Mexico City, and in Janitzio, a charming



little island in the state of Michoacan.

The first inhabitants of Michoacan, the state where Janitzio is located, thought that because of the extraordinary beauty of this lake, it was the door to heaven and that through it the gods used to come down to earth.

One of the vastest and richest kingdoms of pre-Hispanic times was established in this Mexican state, the Purepecha Empire, which was able to maintain its independence from the powerful Aztecs, who at the time had control over most of Mesoamerica, Middle America.

Like the rest of the pre-Hispanic civilizations, these people succumbed to the Spanish conquerors, which imposed their customs, their language and their Catholic religion. The natives acquired these new cultural elements but blended and adapted them to their own culture; from this fusion new beliefs and ritual were born, such as the Celebration of the Day of the Dead.

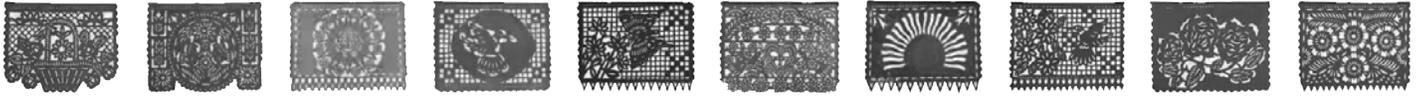
Michoacan is probably one of the most representative of the merging of the two cultures, observed in their magnificent Spanish architecture, its spacious plazas or squares, and their folklore and religious fervor of their traditions.

Towards the last days of October, the entire region prepares for the great fiesta of Los Días de Muertos, the Days of the Dead. The square fills with stands that offer all types of colorful figures allusive to death, the most popular made of sugar.

Markets are filled with the cempasúchil flower; this orange marigold was the flower that the Aztecs used to remember their dead by. Its color represents the tones of earth and is used to guide the souls to their homes and altars.

Many families grow their own cempasúchil, believing that doing so is more appropriate for their offerings. Through their work and their care, these flowers grow and will finally adorn their ofrendas and their tombs.

Very early in October, all over the country, bakeries offer the delicious Pan de Muerto, Day of the Dead bread, made with flour, butter, sugar, eggs, orange peel, anise and yeast. The bread is adorned with strips of dough simulating bones and at the top a small round piece of dough that symbolizes teardrops. These breads are placed on the altars or ofrendas, and are also taken to the tombs in the graveyard.



Another traditional dish prepared for the celebration is the tasty Calabaza en Tacha, Sweet Pumpkin, a dessert prepared with pumpkin, cinnamon, and piloncillo, dark sugar cones.

Janitzio is one of the islands on lake Patzcuaro, with 1,500 inhabitants. Little white houses all with red tile roofs crowd the island, and at the summit the stone statue of one of the fathers of Mexico's Independence, José María Morelos, dominates the view.

To get to the island it is necessary to take launches that constantly go to and fro Janitzio, carrying and bringing passengers as well as provisions and merchandise.

There is no busier times for the launches than on the days of the dead.

On the eve of El Día de Muertos, the boats are loaded with people that are very busy taking the flowers and essential articles for the celebrations.

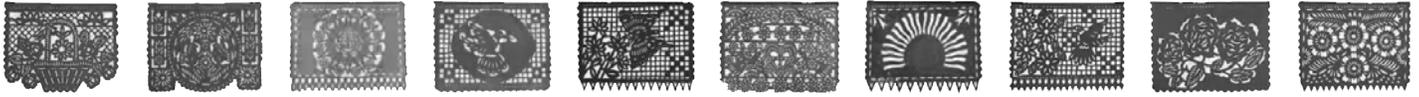
The island is dressing up with beauty and mysticism!

On the lake, one can also see the fishermen with their traditional nets that grace the view. They are called Butterfly Nets. Watching the fishermen go out in groups is a bewitching spectacle, particularly during the early hours of the morning, with the mist and the calming stillness of the lake. The people of Janitzio have conserved this form of fishing, as well as other millenarian customs and traditions that are part of the enchantment of this island. Especially distinctive is the way in which the women dress, and their methods of cooking.

In addition to fishing, they complement their economy with the production of handicrafts for sale to the many visitors that come to Janitzio, and in many small inns they offer the delicious pescado blanco, white fish, unique to Lake Patzcuaro.

Many of the locals work and study outside the island. Since there is only an elementary school on the islet, when the kids go on to high school they have to attend schools in Patzcuaro. You can imagine how striking it is to see the young students on their rowboats, crossing the lake early in the morning to get to school.

By October 31st, all the houses and shops, as well as the docks are decorated with cempasuchil flowers and



fruits from this region. The whole community participates enthusiastically in the preparations of this festivity!

Ofrendas are set up in the houses for their dead relatives. Generally ofrendas are set up on a table covered with a tablecloth and papel picado. They are decorated with sugar skulls, candles, cempasuchil flowers, and paper mache skeletons. Plates with the favorite foods of their dead relatives are also set on the ofrenda. Some have also liquor and cigarettes. On the ofrendas for the deceased children they place toys in addition to the food.

Characteristic of this region are the wooden arches that the families create and adorn with cempasuchil and fruits for the tombs in the cemetery. A very interesting tradition is that for the first three years that follow the passing away of a person, every November first, it is the godparents of the deceased who decorate the arch. When they finish, they go to the parents' house and lovingly offer it to them. During the morning of November 1st, the ceremony in honor of the Angelitos takes place in the cemetery.

The little angels or angelitos are the children that died and that could never experience the happiness and sorrows of adulthood.

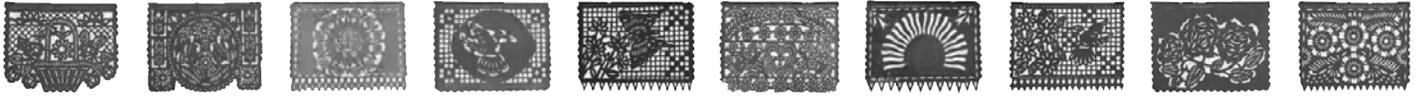
Very early the bells of the church start ringing, calling children's souls and the living relatives that will attend the ceremony.

At 6:00 A.M., in the small chapel of Janitzio, mass has already begun. Remember, this is fundamentally a Catholic ritual. After mass, the women and children go to the graveyard to clean and decorate the tombs. They bring with them flowers, bread and fruits in baskets covered with napkins that they embroidered themselves, as well as the copal, incense, that they will burn so that the aroma will help guide the returning souls.

Each family brings with them in honor of their deceased relatives.

A beautiful view enriches this mystical moment... in the distance, from the graveyard the fishermen can be seen with their canoes starting their working day. The lake is so peaceful, as if welcoming the spirits that are returning home.

Slowly, and quietly, the cemetery begins to fill up. The music of a band can be heard slowly approach-



ing the graveyard. It is a family that is carrying an arch accompanied by the band. Their son died a few months before, and this morning is the first Day of the Dead that they will be honoring him. This is why they have brought a band with them.

Music resonates fills the burial ground.

Around nine in the morning the ritual in honor of the deceased children ends. In a couple of hours, at nightfall, the most impressive celebration will begin, the ritual in which the souls of the deceased adults are honored.

It is surprising how in such a little island, thousands and thousands of visitors will arrive in order to witness this beautiful rite.

In the preceding hours, the carpenters laboriously work to set a stage for the folkloric dances that will be performed as part of the celebrations.

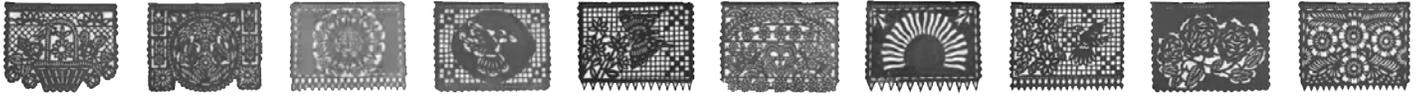
At night, with everything ready, the dances begin. The Danza de los Viejitos, Dance of the Old Men, representative dance of this region. In pre-Hispanic times this dance was performed as a ritual honoring the Sun.

Another popular dance is the Pescado Blanco, White Fish, through which the inhabitants of Janitzio express their gratitude to the lake, since fishing is their most important economical activity.

Also at night, as a way of expressing their gratitude to God for all the blessings they have been given, the fishermen go out to the lake with their canoes, lighting the way with torches and carrying out an impressive ritual with their butterfly nets.

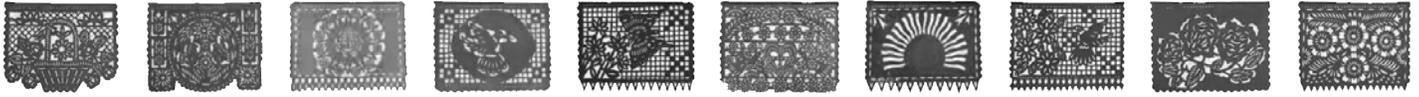
At midnight it is the graveyard of the island the place in which living and dead will reunite once again.

The bell at the entrance rings all night long, calling the souls to return and enjoy the splendid ceremony. It is mainly the women and children who silently find the tombs of their relatives, on which they place the lovely embroidered napkins and set candles, the flowers and food that their dead so much enjoyed when alive. This is how the night goes by, with prayers and chants from the women and children, while the men silently observe what goes on. Their songs and prayers are elevated to the sky, begging for the eternal rest of the souls and for the happiness of the living.



The essence of this beautiful ritual is to lovingly and happily remember the dead relatives, their life, and in this way, give meaning and continuity to human existence.

The Day of the Dead is a grand celebration of life itself!



## “THE DAY OF THE DEAD OFFERING”

Written by by Oscar Guzmán and reprinted here with permission from Inside-Mexico.

*“I am so accustomed to being alive  
I didn’t realize I had turned into a vulture”.*

Jorge Reyes  
(Mexican Composer)

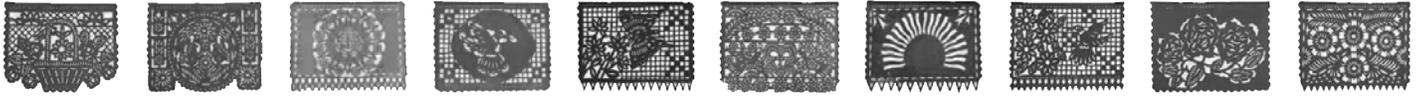
The sound of the rain, the smell of wet earth, the heat of fire, the color of the sky glowing in the afternoon and the taste of hot coffee: all sensory experiences that we keep with us and that accompany us as we go through our life on earth.

But it isn’t always like that. Some day, sooner or later, we cross the threshold that divides life and death, and then our perception of the world as we know it changes. And red after red is perhaps a more surprising color than any other shade that has ever been seen or imagined; we hear the sharpest sounds that have ever been heard and we discover the hidden beauty of the odors that are hidden from our earthly noses...Or perhaps, we won’t even need our senses -- sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch -- for we will have the new sensory experiences that our soul never used while life flowed by day to day.

What experiences manifest themselves in that moment? What new textures do we learn? What new senses do we discover? Until now, no one has been able to answer these questions that are as unsettling as they are old.

But there is a moment where simple belief is confused with faith, a magical moment in which whatever’s out there and our world reconcile, and crying and pain suffered in the wake of irremediable loss of a loved one is transformed. And body and spirit are reunited, the world of the alive and the kingdom of the dead, color, magic, tradition, mysticism untie to form one of the most celebrated parties in Mexico: the Day of the Dead.

The Day of the Dead offering is a living hope to spend just one more day with our loved ones from far away, from a remote place that allows them to return to earth, to the land of tastes, smells, colors, sounds



and textures...where they must relearn about senses and experiences that are no longer useful to them. They come back to share our elements, those which surely they also had at one time, and it is our only way to ensure communion in the festivity.

It is because of that that the flower zempaxochitl is yellow, so that it can be seen from far away. And therefore the trail of flowers is the first guide that shows the guest to the home, where the altar is awaiting his arrival. And it is also necessary to be able to recognize the aroma of the house, so the guest feels at home, so that he can identify and enjoy his stay in the place that holds so many memories. It is because of this that incense is used. It should be lit in the house to blend both aromas, so that later, when the guest comes, he won't get lost on the way. It is also said that smell is the only one of the five senses that is used after death. It is developed in order to make the return home a little easier.

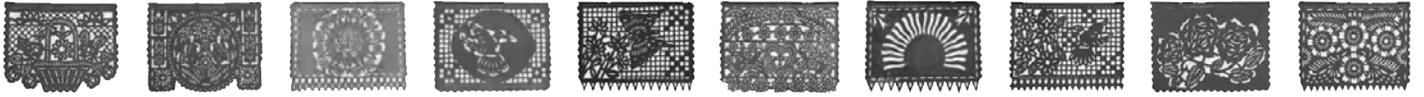
But it isn't only the memory of the senses and eternal life that allows the communion. It is also necessary to remind them of the world as they knew it, the world that they left behind, so full of material things, so sensory.

The presence of the four elements is required: water, earth, wind and fire. No offering can be complete if one of those elements is missing, and their symbolic representation is a fundamental part of the offering.

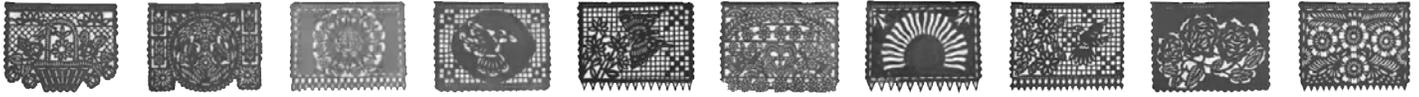
Water, the fountain of life, is put in a glass so that those who come thirsty can relieve their thirst after a long journey. Bread, made with products of the earth, is there to satisfy their hunger. Wind, which moves the colored papel picado that decorates and brings happiness to the table. Fire, which purifies everything and for this occasion comes in the form of a candle that is lit in their name so that we can invoke our dearly departed.

Later comes the banquet with all its specially prepared delicacies, the most splendid part of all the party. Depending on the resources and the geographical zone, there are tamales and buñuelos, coffee and atole, beans and corundas, mole and enchiladas -- all the food that the visiting loved one once enjoyed. It is a must to serve the food while it's hot so that it puts off a stronger aroma.

Other key items are the picture of grandma, uncle's hat, the rattle that the baby never played with. Sugar calaveras with the deceased's name on the forehead, and little pumpkins are all typical of this time of year. Images of saints are also present to guide and accompany our beloved back to their new home.



For the children there are candies and fruits; for the adults, cigarettes and tequila. For everyone there is the hope of having our loved ones at our table once again, sharing for a brief moment of our time as we know it...



## “OFRENDA DE DÍA DE MUERTOS: CONJUNCIÓN DE ELEMENTOS”

Written by by Oscar Guzmán and reprinted here with permission from Inside-Mexico.

*“Estoy tan acostumbrado a estar vivo que ni me di cuenta cuando me volví zopilote”*

Jorge Reyes

(Mexican Composer)

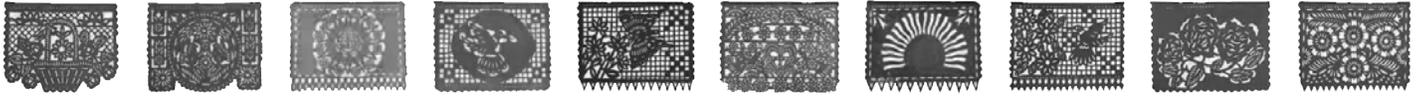
El sonido de la lluvia, el olor de la tierra mojada, el calor del fuego, el color del cielo arrebolado en la tarde y el sabor del café caliente: sensoriales experiencias que guardamos y nos acompañan a través del recorrido por la vida terrena que transitamos.

Pero no siempre es así. Algún día, tarde o temprano, cruzamos el umbral que divide la vida y la muerte, y entonces cambia nuestra percepción del mundo tal y como lo conocemos. Y el rojo después del rojo es un color quizás más sorprendente que cualquiera de las tonalidades que se hayan visto o pensado jamás, los sonidos más graves quizás se hacen audibles y descubrimos la belleza escondida de los olores ocultos a nuestro débil olfato terrestre... o tal vez, muy probablemente ni siquiera son nuestros sentidos, vista, oído, olfato, gusto y tacto, necesarios ante las nuevas experiencias sensoriales que registran aquellas áreas que nuestra alma nunca utilizó mientras la vida fluía día a día.

¿Qué experiencias se manifiestan en ese momento? ¿qué texturas nuevas aprendemos? ¿qué sentidos nuevos descubrimos? Hasta ahora, nadie nos ha de dar respuesta a esas preguntas, tan inquietantes como antiguas para las culturas precolombinas.

Pero hay un momento donde la simple creencia se confunde con la fe, un momento mágico en el que el más allá y nuestro mundo se reconcilian, y el llanto y el dolor sufridos ante la irremediable pérdida del ser querido se transforma, y se vuelven a unir la carne y los espíritus, el mundo de los vivos y el reino de los muertos, color, magia, tradición y misticismo vertidos en una de las fiestas más celebradas por los mexicanos: El día de muertos.

La ofrenda del día de muertos es la esperanza viva de convivir al menos por un día con quienes desde lejos, de un lugar muy lejano y remoto, se les permite regresar a la tierra, aquí, a esta tierra de sabores, olores,



colores, sonidos y texturas... donde tienen que reaprender los sentidos y experiencias que ya no les son útiles, o al menos, compartir con nuestros elementos, aquellos que seguramente también tuvieron alguna vez como nosotros, y es nuestra forma, única posible conocida, de asegurar la comunión en la festividad.

Por eso el color amarillo de la flor de zempaxochitl, para que puedan verlo con su mínima vista, y es entonces el camino de flores la guía primera que conduce al convite en la casa, donde el altar espera su llegada. Y necesario es también reconocer el olor de la propia casa, para que se sientan a gusto, para que se identifiquen y puedan disfrutar la estancia en el lugar de sus recuerdos. Por eso se recurre al uso del somerío o incienso, que debe ser encendido desde la propia casa y fundir ambos olores, para luego ser llevado al exterior, y así evitar que se pierda en el camino que ha de traerle de vuelta al hogar. Se dice además que el olfato es el único de los sentidos que se utilizan en el más allá, y se desarrolla para facilitar el regreso guiado por el aroma de la propia vivienda.

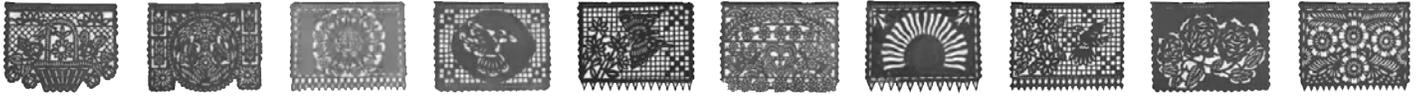
Pero no es solo el recuerdo de los sentidos y la vida terrena lo que permite la comunión. Es también necesario recordarles el mundo tal y como ellos lo conocieron, el mundo que abandonaron, tan lleno de materia, tan sensorial.

Se requiere la presencia entonces de los cuatro elementos con los que todo está formado, en conjunción: Agua, tierra, viento y fuego. Ninguna ofrenda puede estar completa si falta alguno de estos elementos, y su representación simbólica es parte fundamental de la ofrenda.

El agua, fuente de vida, en un vaso para que al llegar puedan saciar su sed, después del largo camino recorrido. El pan, elaborado con los productos que da la tierra, para que puedan saciar su hambre. El viento, que mueve el papel picado y de colores que adorna y da alegría a la mesa. El fuego, que todo lo purifica, y es en forma de veladora como invocamos a nuestros difuntos al encenderla y decir su nombre.

Luego, presentar los manjares que se preparan especialmente es el ágape en mayor esplendor de toda la fiesta. Dependiendo de los recursos y la zona geográfica, rondan los tamales y los buñuelos, el café y el atole, los frijoles y las corundas, el mole y las enchiladas, comida que el difunto acostumbraba y “que no se te vaya a olvidar aquel guisado que tanto le gustaba a tu abuelo, ya ves que siempre se lo hemos puesto en su altar”. Hay que servir los alimentos calientes, para que despidan más olor, y puedan así disfrutar del banquete.

No puede faltar la foto de la abuela, el sombrero del tío o la sonaja con la que el bebe no jugó. Calaveras de



azúcar con los nombres de los convidados y calabaza en tacha, dulce típico de la época. Imágenes de santos, para que los acompañen y guíen por el buen camino de regreso.

Para los niños, dulces y fruta, para los adultos, cigarros y tequila. Para todos, la esperanza de tenerlos en la mesa una vez más, compartiendo un breve instante de tiempo, de nuestro tiempo como nosotros al fin lo conocemos...