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Celebrating Life on Day of the Dead in Mexico

*Day of the Dead —that is a celebration of the continuity of life— is one of Mexico's most important religious holidays, celebrated in November each year by **Mexperience** SOURCE: INTERNET*



One of Mexico's most important religious holidays is celebrated on All Saint's Day (November 1) and All Soul's Day (November 2): *Dia de los Muertos* (sometimes called *Dia de los Fieles Difuntos*) – Day of the Dead. Traditionally, November 1st honors deceased children, November 2nd honors deceased adults.

Cultural History

The Day of the Dead, All Souls Day, is an official holiday of the Catholic Calendar. All Souls Day is on November 2, following All Saints Day.

The choice of November 2 is traditionally attributed to St. Odilo, the fifth abbot of Cluny (city of France famous for the Abby), because he wanted to follow the example of Cluny in offering special prayers and singing the Office of the Dead on the day following the feast of All Saints.(63).

The day was founded to honor all the faithful departed and along with the offerings and the Office of the Dead, there are three Requiem Masses that are said by the clergy to assist the souls from Purgatory to Heaven.

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The modern view of death derives in part from Pre-Hispanic times. The Aztecs played a very important role in the development of this tradition. Through their history this festival emerged as one of complexity and varied interpretations.

The Aztecs had various perceptions of their world. Perceptions as simplistic as a "flat disc" surrounded by water, to a toad floating in a water-lily filled sea. In this world were contained different directions with various associated colors and symbols to each direction and level. One of the most important of these interpretations is that of the terms of a person's death.

The Aztecs believed that after a person died, his/her soul would pass through nine levels prior to their final destination, Mictlan - the place of the dead. They also believed that a person's destiny was founded at birth and that the soul of that person was dependent on the type of death rather than the type of life lead by that person. How a person died would also determine what region they would go to. Once they arrived to their specific region a person's soul would either await transformation or linger, awaiting the next destiny.

Two months of the Aztec calendar were devoted to the dead. The ninth month was dedicated to infants, and the tenth month included a great feast for dead adults.

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Day of the Dead: Spiritual Significance

The "Day of the Dead " is celebrated by many catholic countries, worldwide. This celebration originated with the Roman Catholic's, and was established in the Catholic calendar as an official holy day. The Catholic religion is based on works, and the theological idea of Purgatory has been accepted as a means of paying for sins, and buying your way into Heaven.

Those believers who died in a "state of grace" were promised "heavenly rewards", after paying for their sins in purgatorial flames, while those who did not die in a "state of grace", were to spend eternity suffering in Hell. Catholics did, however, believe that they could pray their loved ones out of Purgatory. This practice gives us an idea of the spiritual significance of honoring the deceased.

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November 1, is the official All Saints Day, which honors all saints who attained Beatific Vision, followed on November 2, All Soul's Day honoring the faithful departed.

Traditions

Many customs are associated with The Day of the Dead celebration. In the home an altar is made with an offering of food upon it. It is believed that the dead partake of the food in spirit and the living eat it later.

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The "ofrendas"- offerings, are beautifully arranged with flowers, marigolds (zempasuchitl) which are the traditional flower of the dead. There is a candle placed for each dead soul, and they are adorned in some manner. Incense is also used. Mementos, photos, and other remembrances of the dead are also adorning the ofrenda.

It is also traditional in some areas to go and see the play Don Juan Tenorio. Paper mache and sugar skulls are popular, as are cardboard coffins from which a skeleton can be made to jump out. Special masks are also worn, allowing a person to achieve a facial expression for which they feel they are inadequate to achieve.



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