Día de (los) Muertos
A Tradition Through the Ages
Overview

- Welcome and Introductions
- The celebration's origins
- Catholic influence after the conquest
- How it is celebrated today
- Efforts to keep it alive
- Questions and experiences of Día de los Muertos
How familiar are you with Día de los Muertos?
Día de (los) Muertos

- Celebrated on Nov. 1 and 2

- Nov. 2\textsuperscript{nd} is a National Holiday in Mexico when deceased family members, friends, co-workers and even celebrities are honored.

- A great staple of this holiday is the elaborate altars (los altares de muerto) that are displayed during the celebration.
The Origins

- The celebration has its roots in prehispanic traditions thousands of years old

- Prehispanic cultures, such as the Aztecs, had very different beliefs regarding death

- Instead of going to a heaven or hell depending on how you lived your life, it was believed that the final resting place depended on how you died.
Tlaloc’s (God of Rain) paradise

If a death was somehow related to water, or lightning, or disease, the deceased would go to Tlaloc’s paradise.

A place of peace and abundance.
Omeyocan (Sun’s Paradise)

If you died during battle, as a captive of war, or, for women, during childbirth, you would go Omeyocan.

Ruled by Huitzilopochtli, the God of War.

A place of constant celebration, dances and sun worshiping.
Mictlan

It was believed that this is where most people when after dying.

This dark place was ruled by Mictecacihuatl, or the “Lady of the Dead,” and her husband Miclantecuhtli, the ruler of the underworld.
A Torturous Road to Mictlan

- It was believed that the deceased would have to go through a long journey to arrive in Mictlan.

- Therefore, several useful items were placed in the graves of the deceased.
A different Philosophy about Death

- The Aztecs and other Meso-American civilizations kept skulls as trophies and displayed them during the ritual. The skulls were used to symbolize death and rebirth.

- The skulls were used to honor the dead, whom the Aztecs and other Meso-American civilizations believed came back to visit during the month-long ritual.

- The festivities were dedicated to the goddess, known as the "Lady of the Dead", corresponding to the modern Catrina.
Spanish Conquest and Influence

- All Saints’ Day
  - November 1

- All Souls Day
  - November 2
Syncretism

- The combination of different (and frequently contradictory) beliefs, often while melding practices of various schools of thought
November 2\textsuperscript{nd} is National Holiday

- **October 28**
  - Those who died a violent death return on this day, so altars with water and food are set up outside homes so that the errant souls do not enter the house

- **October 31**
  - Dia de los angelitos. On this day, altars are set up with toys, candy, water and food for the children expected to arrive.

- **November 2**
  - After the children leave, the altars for adults are set up. It is expected the adults arrive at noon and stay for the rest of the day.

* These are the exception to the rule
Altar de muertos, Ofrendas
Common Foods

- **pan de los muertos**
- **golletes**
- **calaveritas de azúcar**
Common Images and Symbols

*catrina* - Famed Día de los Muertos artist José Guadalupe Posada's icon of death. Catrina means: a wealthy woman, it is said in a sarcastic manner. It was modeled in the French style, after the ladies of the early 1900s.

*Cempazuchitl* – marigold. Thought by Aztecs to symbolize death. Also known as "the flower with 400 lives”

*calacas* - whimsical skeleton figures that represent death
Common Misconceptions

- It is not the Mexican version of Halloween.

- It is not scary or morbid. There are no images of dead people, ghosts, witches, or the devil.

- It is not a cult. It is a Catholic Christian ritual intermixed with folk culture. For many, going to mass is an essential aspect of this celebration.

- It doesn’t honor death, but our dead relatives. It is an opportunity to reflect on our lives, heritage, ancestors and the meaning and purpose of our own existence.

- Altars or *ofrendas* are not for worshiping, but for offering love and remembering departed family members.

- It is not a sad ritual. It is a day of happiness as loved ones are remembered.

- It 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.
To the people of New York, Paris, or London, "death" is a word that is never pronounced because it burns the lips. The Mexican, however, frequents it, jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, celebrates it; it is one of his favorite toys and most steadfast love. Of course, in his attitude perhaps there is as much fear as there is in one of the others; at least he does not hide it; he confronts it face to face with patience, disdain, or irony.

~Octavio Paz
Día de los Muertos in Schools
Gracias!

Questions, thoughts, and sharing