
The Day Of The Dead In The Mexican Culture

Growing up as a kid in foster care, I was surrounded by many other cultures and races other than my own, of which each brought their own traditions and cultural rituals to my life. One cultural rite I have partaken in for many years and has the most impact on me personally is that of El Dia de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead. The Dia de los Muertos is a culture rite of Mexico that is a celebration of life, death, and hope whilst recognizing mortality, transience, and death. As you learn more, a vast majority of people tend to become most fascinated by the intrinsic rituals celebrated by Mexicans as part of Dia de los Muertos.

If one were to travel through Mexico, you might marvel at all of the rich history, culture, and traditions of the Mexican heritage. One main noticeability is that of the abundant folk-art presentations of skeletons. Celebrated annually on November 2, the Dia de los Muertos can be tracked back as far as the Mayan and Aztecan empires, demonstrating a cultural rite over at least 3,000years. El Dia de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead, is an entire day of remembrance, and dedicated to the dead, that is celebrated throughout Mexico and many parts of the Americas. In juxtaposition to American approach on death, in these countries they do not fear death as a stranger, but rather see it as a welcomed friend. The Day of the Dead is never a sad or scary celebration but rather a day to remember and cherish family member who have not only died, but those who are still alive with us. This celebration is marked by a colorful, ecstatic party accompanied with dancing, music, lots of food and drink, and is believed that you are also surrounded by the spirits of the dead. Ritually, this is a day when families visit the graves of their lost loved ones, usually bringing gifts and special foods for the souls who are said to return and visit that evening; this same gifts and tokens of love are also brought for those attending to celebrate in the moment.

On the day of Dia de los Muertos, people are known to celebrate this cultural rite in both their homes and in cemeteries. Once at the cemetery/grave of their loved ones, families would clean the headstones, decorate them with flowers, and bring an accompaniment of music, food, and drink. The development of these cemetery altars is specifically a family affair, also known as ofrendas, or offerings; amongst these alters are left four different, yet each equally important, items each representing one of four elements: earth, wind, fire, and water. Each of these four elemental gifts has a high significance in regards to the Dia de los Muertos; the water is used to represent the quenching of a souls thirst from their journey between life and death. The fire element is represented by the candles left behind at the graves, while they use punched paper, or papel picado, to signify the element of wind.

Around certain regions of Mexico, many various toys and figurines are made on this occasion;

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mainly consisting of skeleton figures. One may speculate where and why these skeletons are so predominant in the cultural rite, and with a little pursuing of questions and readings gather a better understanding of the origin and cultural rite of this iconic skeleton figure and its reformation from pre-Colombian the present-day Mexico. It has been said that Jose Guadalupe Posada, a Mexican printer, made various prints depicting Calaveras gave a huge rising popularity to present day figurines through vast satirical and politically critical renditions of these skeletons being engaged in everyday life and activities, often presented in a celebratory manner. Calaveras, as seen today, are now one of the most original trait of Mexican folk art, such as Dia de los Muertos, depicting skeletal figures in daily life usually sporting some form of wardrobe representing various characters, both elegant and modest. Using the symbolism of a skull dates back to the Aztecs who ritualistically kept skulls as trophies that encompassed the symbolism of reincarnation and death.

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