

Global Warnings • Huichol Shamanic Vision • A Course in Miracles

NEW YORK CITY

APRIL & MAY 1998

free spirit



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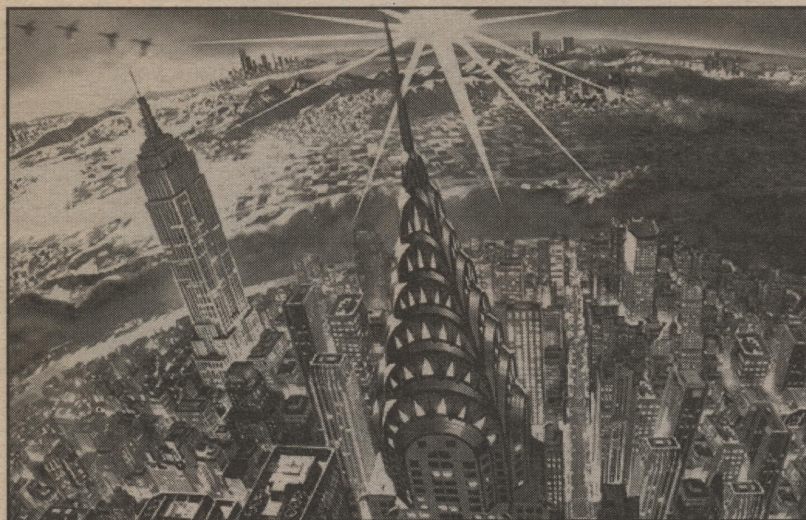
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CORRECTION February/March, issue 88

In the column "In Their Own Words," there was an incorrect spelling. The correct spelling of the name "Vittorio Repetto" is Vittoria Repetto. Free Spirit regrets the error.

ON THE COVER: *Our Great Grandfather Deer-Tail Assigns Our Ancestors Their Sacred Places*, a yarn painting by José Benítez Sánchez, foremost Huichol Indian artist and proclaimed shaman, considered a "fine artist" and part of Mexico's "national heritage." His work has been exhibited over the last 25 years in numerous galleries and museums throughout North America and Europe. A retrospective of his work was exhibited in 1986 at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City, where he attained full international recognition as one of the world's most accomplished living artists. This painting, signed by the artist on September 23, 1981, depicts the ordering of the ancestral deities out of primeval chaos, their assignment to specific sacred places on the earth, and the focusing and harmonizing of their combined energies through the sacrifice of the eldest of the deities, Our Great Grandfather Deer-Tail, in his embodiment as the vision-inducing, sacred cactus Peyote.

WELCOME TO FREE SPIRIT MAGAZINE



...a celebration of the human spirit and a resource for exploring the possibilities! Our readers look to Free Spirit for in-depth information on healthy living that includes the body, mind and spirit. There's a wealth of resources in each issue, and our readers make use of the articles and advertisements in their personal quest for a nurturing and balanced lifestyle. We print 50,000 copies every two months that are distributed throughout the five boroughs of New York City, New Jersey and Long Island. We put them in prime foot traffic areas such as natural food stores, restaurants, bookstores, libraries, and holistic centers—over 500 locations, where they are picked up and referred to often. In addition, we uniquely offer the opportunity to reach potential clients in Los Angeles.

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NEXT ISSUE: June & July 1998
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1

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DISPLAY ADVERTISING ►

2

Traditional display advertisements are very effective for events, products and services. They are sold by size. We recommend that the ad is sent to us camera-ready, if possible; digital Quark, Illustrator & Photoshop

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4

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3

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THE SHAMANIC VISION OF THE HUICHOL

INTO THE HUICHOL SIERRA

A silvery dawn breaks over Xangangüey—the massive volcanic cone that rises to the east of Tepic. We've come here to this mountainous town of crafts shops and sugar mills, halfway between Guadalajara and the Pacific coast, to take a plane into one of the most primitive and least disturbed areas of primeval wilderness left in Mexico—the Huichol territory of the western Sierra Madre.

The Huichol (pronounced *wee-CHOLE*) begin to assemble in growing numbers, the bright colors of their ruffled and embroidered clothing glowing with the hues of the early light. Some of them crowd around the ticket counter, summoning up their mostly limited Spanish to deal with the *mestizo* agents. A few of the younger women sit on the floor nearby, breast-feeding their babies. Others untie kerchiefs stuffed with blue-maize

tortillas and pass around the *comida* they have brought.

The wait can be a long one. That much can be depended on when traveling in Mexico—and even more so here, on the edge of a vast and mostly roadless Indian territory, where the only means of transport to the remote villages of the interior is a government-subsidized plane that's

scheduled to make the trip just twice a week, weather permitting. All the air strips where the plane will be landing, up on the highest plateaus of the Sierra, are more or less recently constructed dirt strips, which turn to impassable mud when it rains. There is no transport then, other than by foot or by burro—a condition that can last for weeks, as it takes many days just for the muddy strips to dry out enough for a plane to land.

To the west of Tepic and moving toward us, across another range of volcanic hills, an ominously grey

cloudbank has appeared. In the rainy season, this would be the precursor of another storm sweeping in from the coast. Today, in February, a good two or three months before the rainy season begins, the weather is difficult to predict. It's been an unusual winter, with what some say has been the strangest weather in years—heavy winds and rainstorms over the last few weeks, at a seasonal time that in this part of the world is ordinarily bone dry.

Excitement stirs through the waiting room as our plane—a twin-prop DC-2 of antiquated vintage, the kind that rests aslant on a tiny rear wheel—revs up its engines and taxis toward us. The Indians surround it as it comes to a stop, piling in the rear door in hopes of getting a seat. As it turns out, the plane makes two circular trips in the course of the day, covering two distinct regions of the Sierra. The shorter, closer route, servicing the nearer pueblos of Ruiz, Guadalupe de Ocotán, and Tuxpan de Bolaños comes first. As our destination is one of the most remote—San Andrés, the ceremonial center of the *Tatéikitari*, one of the three major Huichol tribes—we must wait for the second flight.

Our guide, Juan Negrín, leads us into conversation with Tutukila, an old friend he has spotted in the waiting room. At one time a talented creator of yarn paintings—the art form for which the Huichol are most well known—Tutukila is now a teacher of young Huicholes, working for the Department



According to Huichol myth, these are petrified ancestors (*kakauryarixi*), who were turned to stone on their way to the Peyote Desert in the East, and are now stuck forever in the western Sierra.

JUAN NEGRÍN
WILLIAM MEYERS

Yauxali is a Huichol shaman/artist. Here he plays the small fiddle which is one of the native-crafted instruments used for the performance of Huichol ceremonial music.



of Education of the State of Jalisco, and dressed in the drab, bureaucratic garb that is essential to his new position.

But the Indians in modern dress are not necessarily those most removed from their traditions. A big man in nondescript khaki, with a regulation haircut, is introduced to us by Negrín, who unexpectedly kisses his hand by way of a formal greeting. He explains to us later that he is one of the more widely respected shamans among the Huichol. A man of great power and influence, he doesn't have to dress the part. When visiting Tepic he prefers to be invisible.

A small, middle-aged woman, standing quietly and dressed in black, seems especially out of place. She introduces herself as a Baptist missionary—a Chicano, from California—back in the home country now to spread the Word to the *indigenistas*. Her mission is to fly to the pueblo of Los Plátanos, then follow the guides she is to meet there on a two- or three-day hike over a mountain range to the remote mission of Santa Teresa, where she is committed to a six-month tour of duty with the impoverished, the malnourished and the diseased. She does not like to fly, not even in the kind of luxury airliner that brought her here

from California, and she has never gone in for long hikes. She is, to say the least, ill at ease.

A sprinkling of rain begins to dampen our faces as the DC-2 comes in over our heads and returns to the airfield with a roar. It's our turn now, and we join the throng by the plane. About 40 people manage to squeeze inside, along with the two-man crew. Few seat belts are buckled—some young boys without seats at all squeeze in with the baggage and a cage full of chickens—and, in the impenetrable din of gasoline-driven engines, the plane is soon hurtling down the runway again.

The wing-flaps, and then even the wings themselves, shiver with the strain as we lift off and watch the humid green fields of the sugar plantations around Tepic recede beneath us. In minutes we are over a flank of Xangangüey, looking down into the crater where, in some prehistoric era, the immense shaft of bare basalt that still projects above its rim, was first heaved up in fire. Negrín tells us that this is the major landmark on what is known in the Huichol mythology as the Path of Fire—the route by which fire was first brought from the Underworld (the ocean) and given to the

Huichol (the people).

Further on, after following the sinuous course of the *Rio Grande Santiago* into the higher mountains, we can't help but notice the bare gashes in the hillsides where a new, government-subsidized road into the Huichol territory is being constructed. To the West, we catch sight of some jagged peaks on the western horizon—*Los Picachos*, as they are called in Spanish, or *Los Cuatro Hermanos*, the Four Brothers. In Huichol, they are known as *Tucamerixi*, or the Lords of Darkness, who

form the jaws and fangs of the perpetually open mouth of the Underworld itself. And indeed, with the increasingly darkening clouds that have begun to roll around the highest peaks, there is a palpable sense of foreboding.

The plane makes its first breathtak-



Uxa, a yellow dye made from the bark and root of a tree, is used for facial decoration by returning peyote pilgrims in the ceremonial Peyote Dance.

ing landing at Ocotillo, reversing its props full-blast and coming to a screaming stop at the cliff-edge end of the airstrip. Another crowd of Indians of all ages comes running to meet the plane, some of them—those heading for Tepic—shouldering their way in to take the

A HUICHOL YARN PAINTING

SPANISH-HUICHOL TEXT

Here we see Our Great Grandfather Deer-Tail, *Tatutsí Maxakuaxí*, separating Our Male Ancestors (*Kakauiyari*) and Our Mothers (*Tateteima*) when they were loose. He assigned them each places where they would receive the votive offerings that would be their own. This is how he blocked their path so they could not get together again, so that they were separated at the center (*Ixriüapa*). There Our Ancestors were told they would not receive their offerings as he disposed if they left their sacred places. Our mothers give us different places to stay like Deer-Tail did with the male and female deities.

INTERPRETATION

In the beginning, the deities did not know what their power was or what their portion might be in it. So there was great confusion, and they overwhelmed each other with their power, threatening to throw everything out of balance and destroy it all over again endlessly. The initial confusion resulted from the Ancestors, both male and female, not knowing when they should leave their power spots and apply their energy in the world. The Sun, for example, could not be out all day and night.

The responsibility finally lay with *Tatutsí Maxakuaxi*, by far the most ancient and venerable of the Male Ancestors, who resides at and empowers the very foundations of the earth, to bring order out of the primeval chaos. It was through his younger and more humanly related emanation, *Tamatsi Kauyumarie*, or Our Elder Brother Fawn of the Sun, that the edification of the world was achieved.

In the center, Deer-Tail sacrificed himself in the form of peyote (one of *Tamatsi Kauyumarie's* material embodiments), so that when all the deities came to collect their share of offerings they would become aware of the havoc they were wreaking. They would realize that they had to confine themselves to certain sites which would be the ones where offerings are taken to them today. On the left side, Our Mothers Rain and Corn (*Tatei Witari* and *Tatei Niwetsika*) come at certain moments, but not all at the same time, and likewise there is a time when they must stop, yielding sporadically to the male deities, on the right.

The deities are being given the consciousness that they can't all strive to be in the same spot at the same time. That's why some are returning on their trails (lower right), and some are catching visions of *nierika* (upper right), or hearing sacred words (the yellow dots). This is the preliminary stage of the implied conclusion that harmony is made out of chaos with the help of the vision induced by peyote.

Above, we see Deer-Tail as Our Elder Brother, the deer messenger whose tail transmits the prayers and vows of the pilgrims (with peyote baskets on their backs, as well as one prayer bowl shaped like a flower) to Our Mothers of Rain, who are the two serpents just below the top *nierika* and the yellow flower/life symbol.

The serpent at the bottom center is the one who set off the panic alarm at the beginning of the world. She is *Tatei Hakiékame*, who was the water that rose from the lowest depths of the Underworld, finally reaching the surface and emerging at the oasis of *Tatei Matinieri* on the pilgrimage path to *Wirikuta* (the Land of Peyote). This latter deity, Our Mother Who Watches Over Us, is symbolized as a god-house (bottom center), at the entrance to the sacred desert of peyote. *Hakiékame*, before being confined to her sacred spot, was threatening to take over all three levels of the world with the power of her waters.

Our Grandfather Fire (*Tatewarí*), the antlered figure at the upper right, is connected to a shaman's basket, while in front of him is Our Father Sun (*Tayau*). They return to their sacred spots at dusk. At bottom left, Our Great Grandfather Deer-Tail is seen as a human figure bequeathing his power to the skull of a deer with antlers that are like deer tails. His own head is connected to the roots of the corn plants and of the peyote. His old embodiment is left behind like a boulder—or a *kakauiyari*—in the crust of the petrified Underworld. He ceases being anthropomorphic at this stage and is manifested as *Tamatsi Kauyumarie*, in his various forms, such as the fawn and the corn and the peyote, in our own world.

The small figure at the bottom right is probably one of the Huichol people realizing what vows Our Mothers request in return for a good life—or perhaps it is *Hakiékame* recognizing how much she is invading everyone's sacred space. Beginning with her, all the deities were startled by the realization of what they were doing, and their paths were then kept apart, free of conflict.



AS SEEN ON COVER:

Our Great Grandfather Deer-Tail Assigns Our Ancestors Their Sacred Places by José Benítez Sánchez (September 23, 1981).

places of the ones still disembarking. Some crates of oranges and potatoes, and the cage of chickens, are unloaded here. Within minutes we are taking off again. The pilot and co-pilot (who mans the door and directs the traffic) are wasting no time on this flight, with the sky as grey as it is.

Like Mexico's notorious bus drivers, who often seem to think they're piloting aircraft, this crew obviously takes pride in the high-speed close calls that show its expertise. The approach to *Los Plátanos* calls for the highest level of their skill—an aeronautical *tour de force* to be admired by anyone with the courage to look out the window. *Ocotillo* is nowhere in sight, but we're coming in for a landing anyway. Suddenly another towering, rocky peak has appeared in front of us, and, in a steep bank, one trembling wing-tip within scraping distance of its rocky walls, we round the peak in a tight, 180-degree turn, and emerge on its other side with the mountaintop airstrip already sliding under us. A combination of navigational instruments, seasoned experience and blind faith has brought us in for another landing.

We leave the missionary lady here. She is relieved to be on the ground again, but her eyes are no less filled with apprehension. Her guides and porters are already loading up with her gear—her six-month trip has only just begun.

In minutes we're in the air again, but with only one more landing to endure.



Wearing a turkey-feather hat, a Huichol shaman sits in a kind of wickerwork chair that is reserved exclusively for shamans.

We climb to the highest altitudes of the Sierra, the outcroppings of volcanic rock interspersed even here, on the steepest imaginable slopes, with the checkered patterns of the terraced *coamil*—the field of the planting-stick, where corn and beans and amaranth are grown. A high plateau opens up among the peaks, with

a small collection of adobe and thatch structures near one edge—the ceremonial center of *San Andrés*. A swarm of dots, like ants, moves out from the buildings and gradually becomes recognizable as another running crowd of Indians, while the airstrip comes up fast and hits us with two hard thumps before the

wheels finally settle into the dirt.

Almost everyone, young and old, in the chattering swarm around the plane is dressed in the embroidered white *manta*, or thick cotton cloth, of the traditional Huichol. It is a bright sight on a day that grows increasingly dark. The shouting plane crew makes it clear that there is no time for the nonessential. We drag our packs and bags off the plane as fast as we can make our way through the people pressing in the door.

Once we are out, in the air and the wind, a gust of rain hits us full in the face. Before we are fully off the airstrip, the big propellers are turning over again and the plane is moving. We can see the door finally being sealed just as the plane makes its turn at the end of the strip and takes off. In seconds it's a dwindling dot in the sky, and the rain is coming down harder, turning the dirt under our feet into mud.

It is impossible now to say exactly when the plane will return.

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ON THE HUICHOL CULTURE

The Huichol are the least acculturated of the many indigenous Mesoamerican cultures that still survive in Mexico. No more than 10,000 Huicholes live today on the communal land of the mountainous northwestern territory that the Mexican government acknowl-

INANNA HYPER-LUMINAL

V.S. FERGUSON

As this cycle of time, the Age of Confusion or Kali Yuga, draws to a close and the veils are lifted, we will remember who we are and regain our innate ability to access the myriad layers of nested dimensional realities that have existed all around us all along.

INANNA RETURNS V.S. FERGUSON

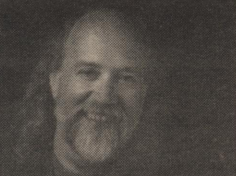


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Jason Shulman IN NEW YORK CITY



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edges to have been theirs since pre-Columbian times.

Well known for their shamanism, their spiritual devotion, and their pilgrimages to the distant desert of *Wirikuta* in the east, in search of the sacramental *hikuri* (or in Spanish, peyote) cactus, the most traditional Huichol are far removed in consciousness from the materialistic society that now surrounds them. Many of them are on the years-long path of shamanic training, which is burdened with austerities, while all Huichol are involved to some extent in their highly evolved, mythological religion of ancestor worship, collective ceremony, or shamanic pilgrimage.

Although no one knows how long the culture of the Huichol has been evolving within the steep confines of the Sierra Madre, they did occupy a larger region of Mexico before the expansion of the Aztec culture in the Valley of Mexico. The region they inhabit now is a shrunk-en version of that territory, indicating a gradual historic retreat from one invading population after the next. Given the harsh reputation of both bloodthirsty Aztecs and messianic Spaniards, and the traditional Huichol tendency to avoid all violence, how they arrived at their contemporary geographical position of extreme isolation is easy to understand.

The Huichol's sacramental use of the psychotropic cactus *hikuri*—or peyote—for many of their religious ceremonies is another element in the complex of

historical forces that may help to explain the peaceful but intensely spiritual and visionary nature of their culture. It raises the question of why so many of these people, who already suffer lives of extreme hardship, would embrace a spiritual discipline that exacts a far greater price in terms of physical discomfort and deprivation. The answer lies in the personal healing power of those few who successfully meet all the challenges and appear to have forged a lasting con-

nection with the ancestral deities.

The people are guided on the path by the *marakate* (or "chanters"), the Huichol version of that class of shamanic guides and healers that has been found to preside over the magical and religious ceremonies of a broad range of "primitive" (pre-priestly) cultures around the world. The *marakame* is in charge of the fiesta—he leads the singing, the chanting, the dancing—deciding when the time has come to start, and when

to stop. He heals the sick and diseased, and offers remedies to the crazed. If things go wrong, or not according to plan, he can tell why. In the spiritual realm he is the final authority.

Beneath the overlay of political structure and organization that has evolved from centuries of interaction with the Aztec empire, the Catholic church and the Mexican government, the *marakate* still hold the real power for the Huichol. It is at their ceremonies that the people truly come together for what amounts to their cultural and tribal communion. And it is the *marakate*, through their extremely long ceremonial chants—easily lasting as long as 72 waking hours—who keep track of, and give perpetual life to, every detail of the vast and complex Huichol mythology.

At the more material and political levels, the Huichol are independent and diverse. Each of three colloquially distinguishable tribes chooses a governor for itself from a populace of generally reclusive and preoccupied homestead farmers, often reluctant but obliged to serve. The traditional governor—or *tatoani*, who is often a *marakame* himself—and his equally obligated associates may deal with matters of general concern, such as food supply, or criminal punishment (no jails, but public stocks), disputes over land and its development, or how to deal with the church or the government.

Their "general assemblies" and their prolonged discussions can go on for

These women are dressed in full regalia for one of the rituals in the Huichol annual ceremonial cycle. Many Huichol women are masters of weaving, embroidery and beadwork.



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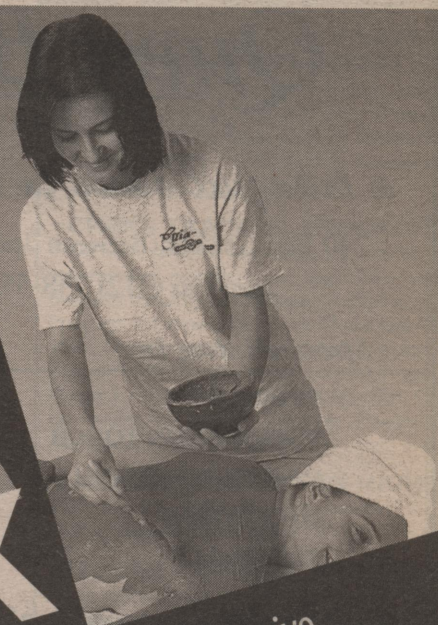
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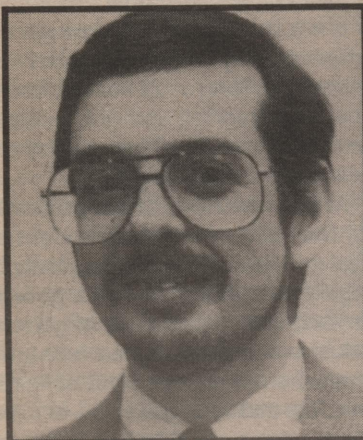
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many days and nights before a mandatory "general consensus" is finally reached. Since the highly independent and influential governors voice the opinion of the traditional elders, the outside government has often and increasingly challenged their authority.

But whatever political role he may play at times, it is the *marakame* himself who holds the people's lifelong respect. It is through his counsel that the individual Huichol learns the challenges he must meet and the deeds he must accomplish to traverse his own unique shamanic path. In the *marakame's* relationship to the individual household, and its relationship to the ancestral spirits—often materialized, housed, and venerated as a transubstantiated quartz crystal, or a *kawí*, in the *xiriki* ("god-house" or "temple") maintained by each homestead—lies the foundation strength and durability of the Huichol culture.

This is not to say that there are no failures among the *marakate*—each of them maintains an extraordinarily precarious balance in the effort to retain the lifelong respect and devotion of the people. Some of them, mainly those dedicated to enlarging their personal power by whatever means, are eventually recognized to be evil sorcerors, and have been known to be expelled from their land. But a few go on to become great elder shamans—like the *kawitero*, who operates at the sub-tribal clan level and officiates at the great ceremonial centers.

The subsidiary importance which the Huichol attach to their political life, compared with the devotion of their shamanic vigils and pilgrimages, is reflected in their relative indifference to material possessions and comforts. The family of a typical Huichol *rancho* will maintain a few small structures of stone, adobe, and thatch for cooking, storage, or staying dry in the rainy season, but generally the people will sleep outside on bed platforms of lashed sticks and spend their days tending their hillside cornfields or

their animals, or gathering their firewood. The food they cultivate—limited usually to the immemorial Mesoamerican staples of corn, beans, squash, and the flowering amaranth—is just enough for the family to subsist another year, if that much. There is never a surplus; there are often shortages.

What matters most to the Huichol is not the accumulation of riches, or even the laying up of reserves of basic necessities, but the cultivation of a strong and healthy *iyari*—the "spiritual heart" and the collective strength of the ancestral deities, which flows into the heart of the dedicated and self-disciplined Huichol and imbues him with dignity and integrity—and, if he is on the path of the *marakame*, with *nierika*, or supernatural vision.

In the Huichol cosmology the ancestral spirits include the primeval animals and elemental forces as well as their forebears...all have given their own *iyari* and sacrificed themselves so that the present generation might live. With their seasonal celebrations, which draw all the traditional Huichol together regardless of any unresolved differences, they regenerate the primordial energies of their mythic heritage. Through material sacrifice and indifference to physical hardship, the Huichol are able to emulate the example of their creators and make themselves worthy of the wisdom and the way of life bequeathed to them.

For the truly dedicated, there is the long and arduous pilgrimage to the desert of the northern central plateau, five hundred kilometers from the Huichol country, to collect the peyote for the spring and autumn fiestas (such as, at the latter time, the "Feast of the First Fruits"). A period of fasting and sexual abstinence on the trail that may last up to three months includes the arrival at *Wirikuta*, the Land of Peyote, and the achievement for each purified pilgrim of the eternal level of consciousness that is generated there. At that point he no longer emulates but *becomes* his sacred ancestors and the elemental energies

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that gave birth to them.

One of these ancestors is *Tamatsi Kauyumarie*, Our Elder Brother Fawn of the Sun. If there is any single figure in the Huichol mythology that comes close to resembling the self-sacrificing Christ of Western civilization—the mediator between man (or shaman) and the Holy Spirit (the deities)—it is *Kauyumarie*, the willingly immolated Deer. In his embodiment as the small deer that is indigenous to the Huichol Sierra, he is found less and less frequently within those parched and sparsely wooded forests of pine and oak, his presence on the earth more precarious now than the presence of the Huichol themselves.

Once a year a material representative of the god is shot with bow and arrow and sacrificed ceremonially for the sake of the rebirth of the Earth. In the desert of *Wirikuta*, where the godly incarnation of *Kauyumarie* dwells, the peyote cactus button that is found and collected is also shot with *urute* (sacred arrows) and revered by all, before the bitter cactus flesh is finally consumed—infusing the communicants with his holy spirit. The fasting and other sacrifices may take three months before performance of the Peyote Dance at a ceremonial-center event frees the pilgrim to return to a normal schedule. When supernatural vision is gained through shortcuts or lazy alternatives, not the rigorous route, it may cause harm—which is the explanation for the importance of the long trails and fasts and confessions.

The art of the Huichol is often a direct response to, or expression of, this level of experience. Whatever the degree of its sophistication, it is always some form of expression of the spirituality of the culture. From the tiniest patterns woven into their clothes and carrying bags to the often astonishingly visionary portraiture of their yarn paintings and sculpture, the subject matter of Huichol art is a vast and elaborate mythology—the more evolved and transcendent incarnations of their forebears, to whom they pay perpetual homage, as well as the spiritual essences of the animal and plant life in their earthly environment.

Of what real value to this planet is such an original culture—by which one must mean a “primitive” culture, so far significantly unaltered by contact with industrialized, consumeristic civilization? Of no more or less value perhaps than a single species still surviving in its original habitat. There are large factions, of course, for whom the survival of a species, biological or cultural, is of far less significance than the perpetual growth of a gross national or international product. But for those to whom the passing of a single species is lamentable, the disintegration of a culture such as the Huichol must be especially foreboding, for it signals the departure from this planet of entire levels of consciousness—levels that might otherwise prove as healing to our soul as the lost medicinal herbs of its ravished rainforests could have been to our body.

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ON THE HUICHOL COSMOLOGY

As is believed within many other prehistorically evolved cultures, the Huichol consider themselves to be the Original People—risen from the Ocean after devastation by flood, then given a beautiful and arable homeland at the center of the newly created Earth. According to Huichol mythology, life began developing in previous times, in *Watetüapa*, or the Underworld, which could be described as a kind of collective womb. That is where all the creative forces were linked, but not well defined.

The primordial confusion resulted in the flood that was precipitated by *Tacutsi Kiekari Maakame Nakawé*, Our Great Grandmother of Development and Destruction—the multi-faceted figure who not only blessed mankind with fer-

Brother Wise Neighbor, whose name indicates that knowledge can be gained from afar. But he is connected to the Tree of Wind, a species of *datura* in the form of a small tree, which is linked with sexual temptation.

If anything has kept the Huichol culturally homogenous, it has been their racial separation from other groups, even intertribally. Sexual distraction, in general, is believed to prevent anyone from transcending the desirous life and achieving a shamanic level of healing or chanting wisdom. Although the Huichol feel it is not so difficult to achieve the knowledge necessary to do harm, not all supernatural vision (*nierika*) is necessarily a life-endowing experience (for the spiritual heart, or *iyari*).

This is why the Huichol find it so important to become involved in six complementary years of rituals involv-

FOR THOSE TO WHOM THE PASSING OF A SINGLE SPECIES IS LAMENTABLE, THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE HUICHOL CULTURE MUST BE ESPECIALLY FOREBODING. IT SIGNALS THE DEPARTURE FROM THIS PLANET OF ENTIRE LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

tile land at the center of the earth, but who also is a deity of growth and development who can get out of hand and wreak havoc to re-create order. She warned *Watákame*, who would become the first cultivator, to escape in a canoe with seedlings and a black bitch, which was *Tatei Niwetsika*, Our Mother Corn.

The Huichol consider themselves to be connected to every natural force and creature, including *Tatewari*, Our Grandfather Fire, and *Tatei Yurianaka*, Our Mother Young and Fertile Earth, where we now live. Like Our Elder Brother Blue Deer—who is peyote—and *Tateteima*, Our Mothers of Rain, we all lived in semi-human, amorphous and connected forms before this world was developed out of *Tatei Haramara*, Our Mother Ocean, in the West. The Huichol now live in the Earth's center, or *Ixrüapa*, but they recognize the importance of all cardinal points, which are charged with power, on the surface of *Heriepa*, the Earth.

The East is where Our Father, the Sun, first rose and the third world, the Sky, appeared above. The Sky is *Taheimá*, and her embodiment as an animal *Tatei Werika Wimari*, Our Mother Young Eagle Girl, whose two heads observe the rising and descending sun. If we do well in life, our soul (*kupuri*) may rise and never get trapped in the amorphous mass of the Underworld again.

Another important force is *Eaká*, the Wind, which the Huichol call *Tamatsi Eaká Teiwari Timaiweme*, Our Elder

ing fasts and sexual abstinence, each of which can last for three months. Each begins before a series of pilgrimages, and it only ends after the Peyote Dance; and it is complemented by long walks on mountain and desert trails, which allow the traveling companions to achieve a cleansing. Before gathering the sacramental cactus, they must openly confess all of their sexual relations, for the consequences of dishonesty under the forceful spell of *nierika* are highly dreaded. Copyright © 1998 Juan Negrín

BIOGRAPHIES



JUAN NEGRÍN

JOSÉ BENÍTEZ SÁNCHEZ, cover artist, was born in 1938 to Huichol parents of the Community of *Wautüa* (otherwise known as the Indigenous Community of San ... “Huichol” continued on page 44

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GLOBAL WARNINGS...continued from page 25

food production simply goes to feed our own population.

S: Let's move on. You point out in *The Story of B* that the major religions of the world, including Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, all grew out of a fundamental sense that there is something wrong with human beings, and that salvation of the individual is of primary importance.

Q: These are the religions of a particular culture. They all appeared in response to the needs of people who lead anguished lives. They are religions of anguish.

Buddhism, for example, teaches that to be alive is to suffer, and that the only way to achieve peace is to relinquish desire for something better. End desire, and you will not suffer as much. You will have peace. And perhaps eventually you will achieve the ultimate peace, nirvana.

In Christianity, the understanding is that some terrible original sin was committed, and that we all suffer for it, but we have been saved from that sin by Jesus, who said that in the kingdom of God the haves and the have-nots would change places: "The first shall be last and the last shall be first."

All such religions are religions for the have-nots, for people who have no hope of getting the good things enjoyed by only a handful of people.

S: You say these religions belong to one culture. What are the roots of this culture?

Q: Our culture has its beginnings in the agricultural revolution, which started around ten thousand years ago in the Near East and spread eastward to India and the Orient and westward and northward to Europe. About five hundred years ago, it spread to these shores on the ships of Christopher Columbus. Wherever you find that food is locked up, that's where our culture is. Wherever people have to work for a living to gain access to the food, that's where our culture is.

This goes back to ancient times, when there were royalty, nobility, and commoners. The royalty lived really well, the nobles lived comfortably, and the commoners lived like shit. We'll never see the end of it so long as our economy is based on an exchange of products:

In the tribal paradigm, the wealth belongs to the tribe as a whole. It is the tribe that lives well, and not just a few individuals at the top. But when you have an economy based on the exchange of products, wealth will always concentrate in the hands of a few. And when that happens, you have anguish on the part of poor people.

As our system developed, many people became dissatisfied with it and, where possible, walked away. But when all the food is locked up you can't walk away. So people began to look for other ways to escape: if you can't get rich and live in a palace, how about nirvana, or heaven?

Humans lived on this planet for hundreds of thousands of years without re-

ligions of anguish, because they had a life that worked for them. They did have a religion, but it was not a religion that painted humans as alien beings, fallen beings, flawed beings. Rather, it painted humans as participants in a sacred process: the world was a sacred place, it said, and people belonged there. This religion was what we call animism.

S: Given that we're not hunter-gatherers any more, how can we learn to see ourselves as engaged in a sacred process?

Q: One of the basic ideas of our culture is that people are fundamentally no good, that people are greedy, cruel, and vicious to the core: That is our nature, so get used to it, folks. Get as much as you can, then get really good locks for your doors.

I want to change that basic attitude. Not only is the world a sacred place, but we belong in it. We're not alien monsters here. We should stop perceiving ourselves in that way and begin to reevaluate our place in the greater community. I'm proposing that we all belong to a community of life. We are no better or worse than other creatures. Our old vision of ourselves as the despots of the world, snapping our whips and making nature obey, might have thrilled us, but it's not working out.

What's important to know is that the world religions of today are not the only religions. They are only those of our particular, estranged culture. I'm not advocating that they be abandoned, although perhaps, if we adopt a healthier vision, they'll die of their own accord.

I'd also like to advise people against pinning their hopes on the utopian idea that we can become better than people have ever been before. In this sense, our present system is a utopian system, one whose institutions would work perfectly if people would just be better than they have ever been: our schools would educate; our laws would be obeyed; our governments would govern effectively and justly. The success of tribal systems doesn't depend on people being better human beings. Indeed, that is why they succeed.

In the same way, nothing that I'm proposing requires people to be better than they've ever been. Besides, people don't need to be better, because there's nothing basically wrong with them in the first place. For hundreds of thousands of years, people lived on this planet harmlessly, or as harmlessly as any other creature so there's no need to change our nature. All the changes I'm talking about can happen without people becoming better than they have ever been. People need only to continue being what they are. That's the direction in which hope lies.

This article originally appeared in *The Sun*, 107 N. Robertson Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27516; (919) 942-5282.

In addition to writing, the author is the Director of Life On Purpose, an organization dedicated to people clarifying their life purpose and living true to it. Life On Purpose offers Power of Purpose Teleclasses and individual life purpose coaching. Brad lives in the "Paradise Found" of Flat Rock, NC in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He may be reached by calling 1-800-668-0183 or drop him an e-mail at lifeonpurpose@compuserve.com. ■

HUICHOL

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Sebastián Teponahuatlán, Municipality of Mezquitic, State of Jalisco, Mexico). He was raised by his adoptive father Pascual Benítez, a practicing marakame, or shaman, as well as by his maternal grandfather, who died at the age of 105 after leaving a strong imprint on young José's early memories: his ability to remember his dreams in detail and his capacity for intense concentration were qualities that marked him as exceptionally gifted. He studied art in his youth and practiced the skill of making yarn paintings.

By 1968 José Benítez was recognized as one of the foremost practitioners of Huichol arts, and he was invited to perform Huichol music and dance at the Olympic Games in Mexico City. During the next three years he headed a workshop for the performance of Huichol dance, and he tutored other Indians in the manufacture of yarn paintings. Eventually he was placed in charge of selecting authentic Huichol crafts for a government program that was meant to support the heavily exploited Indian artisans. But he soon left this position, which he felt made him a critic of the crafts of his own people rather than allowing him to direct their creative energy.

By 1971 José Benítez was recognized by other Huichol yarn painters as the foremost master craftsman of the medium, having acquired the status of a shaman among his colleagues. The degree of his inventiveness was such that craftsmen who had worked with him were baffled to see his newly evolving stylistic approaches after only a few months. His themes were intimately tied to his dreams and the religious experiences that provoked them.

When he decided to work together with his friend and agent Juan Negrín in 1973, he turned exclusively to his own art in order to express the spiritual vision of his heritage with all its raw and primal power, and this rekindled his urge to return to the shamanic path and fulfill its requirements. His growing dedication to art as a serious endeavor, beyond its economic value, was paralleled by a return to his family rituals and religious pilgrimages and disciplines— even returning to live again in the Huichol mountains.

In the 1980s, proclaimed a "creator of fine arts" by the government of Mexico— with a retrospective of his life's work exhibited in 1986 at the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico City—José Benítez Sánchez made the definitive break from all former associations with indigenous "folk art" and attained full international recognition as one of the world's most accomplished living artists.

Most importantly, the acceptance of the work of José Benítez and his Huichol colleagues as a major art form by Mexican, American and European fine-arts institutions has opened up a new platform for the discussion of cultural despoliation. This increasing awareness of the Huichol as a cultural group capable of

... "Huichol" continued on page 82

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HUICHOL

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engendering important art grounded in a rich philosophical tradition represents a major hope for the cultural survival of the Huichol as a whole.

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OSNAT KRASNANSKI

JUAN NEGRÍN, co-author, is of Spanish-American ancestry—grandson of President Juan Negrín, who was deposed by Generalísimo Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Born on September 20, 1945, in Mexico City, he was given his early edu-

cation in Paris, and he enrolled at Yale University in 1963. Fluent in Spanish, French and English, he is still learning Huichol.

Concentrating his studies in art, philosophy, and comparative religion, with a special interest in the art of the traditional indigenous cultures, he availed himself of his Mexican citizenship to move with his family to Guadalajara in the 1970s. This led to his eventual involvement in the Huichol culture—their native territory, still purely neolithic at its core, lying only a few hundred miles northwest of the modern Mexican city.

Struck by the symbolic and aesthetic nature of Huichol "yarn painting," Negrín researched the art form and its significance by approaching more than 50 Huichol artisans. Over the following three decades, he commissioned many works of art and artisanship, tape-recording interpretations by shamans and the artists themselves of the inner meanings of their works. Finding Huichol art to be an embodiment of the deeply devotional religion that lay at the heart of Huichol culture, Negrín spent many years living with the Huichol and participating with them in their religious rituals.

This led to his being taken into the confidence of the Huichol community. After successfully defending their territory against governmental land encroachment, he was allowed to attend and record—with tape recorder and camera—numerous religious ceremonies, accompanied by traditional Huichol music, previously unknown to the outside world.

Negrín's ongoing and active interest in the communal needs of the Huichol led to his being asked in 1979 to serve as their advisor in all political affairs and their representative to the Mexican government. It is a unique honor for a non-indigenous person to be perceived in this way among the Huichol.

In 1980, Negrín organized the Foundation for the Preservation of Huichol Traditional Sacred Art—the first of three foundations he was to found for the benefit of the Huichol, its directors distinguished shamans of the Huichol Sierra. Pursuing an ever-intensifying study of the Huichol culture, and convinced that exposure to Huichol masterpieces by authentic artists, together with a deeper comprehension of Huichol philosophy, could bring greater understanding and respect for the people of the Huichol

culture, he organized more than 40 exhibitions at universities, museums, and galleries in North America and Europe.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Negrín turned his attention to the preservation of the natural environment of the Huichol Sierra—in which not only the art but the people and their entire culture were inextricably rooted. A project initiated by Negrín with the most traditional Huichol communities involved the construction of collectively operated sawmills and carpentry workshops for the encouragement of cultural self-sufficiency, environmental protection, and the wiser use of forest resources. The project was funded by the Association for the Ecological Development of the Western Sierra Madre, a foundation organized and initiated by Negrín and dedicated to preserving western Mexico's native ecology and indigenous cultures.

In 1995, Juan Negrín was presented the "Person of the Year" Award by Pro Habitat, a nonprofit Mexican environmental organization, which each year honors a person whose life's work has contributed significantly to the preservation of the native ecology of Mexico.

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