

# Long Life, Honey in the Heart

Martín Prechtel

## **Introduction: Looking For Home**

(...)

Initiation rituals were not done for the initiate's benefit. They were done to keep the Universe alive for all of us. It was believed that in initiation by learning the ways and language of each layer, and then doing the rituals of each, the world as a Deity would stay flowering and flowing, greased on the beauty of the rituals.

One main reason individuals had for seeking initiation was to avoid becoming a ghost after they died. Ghosts are the spirits of people who at death could not get into the next layer of existence. This happened for two reasons. The Tzutujil believed that the dead rowed themselves to the other world in "a canoe made of our tears, with oars made of delicious old songs." Our grief energized the soul of the deceased so that it could arrive intact onto the Beach of Stars where the dead go to the other side of the ocean, the salty Grandmother Ocean who tossed and surged between us and the next world. On this beach of star souls our dead were well received by the "last happy ancestor" and then initiated further in that world into the next layer of life. After four hundred days of initiation into the next layer, these dead would graduate into the status of ancestors. In their new form they could help us here in this world, when they ritually fed our souls from their world just as we living here in this layer fed the beings we'd left behind in the previous layers of life.

Therefore, when a person was buried and not enough tears were shed and when truly felt grief was absent, the soul of the dead person could not make it to the next world and would be forced to turn back. Scared and invisible, it took up residence in the body of the tenderest and most familiar person it could find. To give themselves a feeling of physical substance, in desperation, the ghost would eat the life of that person. For this reason ghosts usually devoured their relatives, especially their grandchildren, jumping into their bodies and eating them from the inside out, consuming the little child's spirit also. Then the ghost went on to the next grandchild or some other relative of the next generation. Alcoholism, substance addiction, most depression, homicide, suicide,

untimely deaths, accidents, and the addiction to argument were caused by the endless hungers of such ghosts. This kind of ghost consumed soul after soul until a whole series of generations had been destroyed.

The second way a ghost came about was if a person hadn't become initiated, or suitably layered, while alive. In that case, one didn't really exist and upon death there wasn't enough of him or her, as a person, for them to row to the next shore. Each layer of initiation, each layer of remembering and its language ability, was very literally represented by a layer of special clothing that the people wore. This thickened a person into a spiritual substantiality, making a person into a full human. At death each of these layers of clothing were considered a language and the body was dressed in them like husks on an ear of seed corn. When you went to the other world you were recognized by these husks, by your layers of clothing representing the other worlds that you had re-remembered through initiation. It was only then that the custodial spirit of the other world allowed you to pass into that layer. Without this clothing you were invisible to the beings in the other world and your only recourse was to return bodiless back to this world, devouring the future of your people instead of becoming an initiated adult soul that could help our world from the next. This ghost problem, of course, is what makes the uninitiated world of modern times so scary. There are ways for shamans to deal with the ravages of ghosts, the epidemic destruction of lives through depression and addictions. But Tzutujil thinking said it was better to have initiations and avoid the ghost problem altogether.

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