

## RITUALS AND PILGRIMAGES

Rituals are initiated when a child is given a name by his or her shamanic grandparents, *teukarimama*, in a sacred place where sacred water emanates from a special power spot consecrated to a collective ancestor. The child will return on a yearly basis to the spring where it is blessed. Children attend five-year seasonal ceremonies, like the Dance of Our Mother, *Tatei Neixa*, which occurs in mid-October, and participate significantly. They play rattles while a three-legged drum is beaten and a shaman chants about the path from the west to the east, for an entire night and day.

At dawn a bull may be sacrificed to Our Mother of Corn, *Tatei Yukáwima*, and thanks are



*Hakierite* © Juan Negrín 1986

given to Our Mothers of Rain, *Tateteima*, and to Our Father (Sun), *Tayau*, while a pure child<sup>1</sup> is picked to carry out the sacrifice symbolically. Later, copious quantities of raw corn beer are distributed to everyone, along with the bull broth. Until this thanksgiving offering, the new fruits of the harvest of corn, squash, and beans are not supposed to be consumed. At ceremonial centers, the night-long chant, *kawito*, is frequently performed by one of the few elders, *kawiterutsixi*,

who recount the ancient pilgrimage of the caterpillar, *kawi*, from the west to all the sacred places in the east, where the sun rises and he turns into a butterfly. The children who assist are prompted to imagine flying like cotton tufts or serpent-winged clouds to the land of dawn, *Pariteküa*, which they will reach on foot during pilgrimages as they mature. Ten to fifteen days later, the ears of corn have reached full maturity, and another ritual called *Teiyari Kuamixa* (in eastern dialectical variant) or *Ürikirra* (in western dialect) is celebrated.

The return of the peyote pilgrims, *Hikuri Teaxá*, is often celebrated at the ranches and ceremonial centers in mid-March, but not every year. (A few families make the pilgrimage every year, returning for the corn harvest, but this is a difficult task.) The first important annual traditional ritual, around mid-April, is held to propitiate the ancestors before the clearing of the fields. This three-day ceremony, called *Tukáripa Mawatsira*, includes an animal sacrifice, preceded by pilgrimages to sacred spots and hunts from

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<sup>1</sup> Hakieri (hakierite plural) is the name used for the child who symbolically carries out the sacrifice. They can be distinguished by the plumed arrows (muviérite) strapped to their heads.

which water and blood from willingly captured deer are brought to bless the grains and the newly consecrated fields. This ritual is also called *Tukaripa Viesta Weeme*. Afterward, the extended family and ceremonial center plots are felled, cleared of weeds and prepared for later burning and planting.

Major ceremonies are carried out at the time of the planting of the corn, after the fields have been burned on the hillsides. They are often preceded by the Peyote Dance, *Hikuri Neixa*, which has developed into a collective ritual to summon the rains at the height of the dry season. Ground peyote is consumed for three days, and a bull or a deer may be sacrificed.



Dance of *Hikuri Neixa* © Juan Negrín 1982

At night, during

*Namawita Neixa*, (a related ceremony) the main dancers step over the fire inside the main temple, and finally put it out with their bare feet. Then the ritual becomes the Feast of Toasted Corn, *Xarikixa*, and toasted corn meal is distributed in various shapes, like dough. Afterward, people go to prepare the fields together; they pray and leave their offerings in the consecrated patch called *itari*, like a mat for Our Ancestors created from a carefully sown plot of fertile land and sanctified with their offerings.

Traditional rituals are carried out on a family ranch level, *kie*, or a larger, clan ceremonial center level, *tukipa*. In a ranch setting, they are performed in front of the family shrine, *xiriki* that is set to the east of the patio, a standard feature of ranch houses. The *tukipa* is formed by a group of Huichol from neighboring ranches tending a ceremonial center; often they have maintained a loose family relationship. They enlist one another's descendants and other Huichol members in the area to maintain the main temple (dedicated to Our Grandfather Fire and Our Mother Ocean) and its shrines (dedicated to various Ancestors), to cultivate its sacred plot of land, and to carry out pilgrimages to the sacred power spots of Our Ancestors, with whose votive offerings they are entrusted for a period of five to ten years. The leading arrow bearer, *urukuakame*, is the principal chanter in the dry season ceremonies and the pilgrimage guide; the rainy season chanter, *tiikari mahana*, takes over his duties during the peyote dance to propitiate the ancestors who control the rains in early summer to early fall. Both are trained in numerous successful journeys that gain them acclaim as shamans (both healers and chanters of intricate Huichol tales and prayers). Another major ceremony, to prolong the rains, is carried out in mid-September, to ensure luck in hunting the deer for whom arrows have been

specially painted; it is called *Tükáripa Mawatsira* or *Viesta Weé*, similar to the names of the rituals used at the time of clearing the fields. But *Tukáripa*, which stands for clarity and daylight, is substituted in the rainy season ceremonies by the term *Tükáripa*, which denotes the darkness that prevails during heavy rains.

Different members of the ceremonial center are assigned guardianship of the gourd bowls (*xukúrite*) and votive arrows (*urute*) of Our Ancestors (*Kakauyarixi*) from the various shrines and the temple. During their five- to ten-year service, those who care for the shrines and offerings of certain ancestors make special pilgrimages to their sacred spots in the cosmography, taking offerings and returning to the ceremonial center with sacred



*Teakata* © Juan Negrín 1976

water and other goods from such locations. Every other year, around mid-February, they make group pilgrimages to *Teakata*, the prototypal ceremonial center of Our Grandfather (fire) in the Huichol canyons. After this ritual, *Teakata Metayaxuene*, the pilgrims are ready for the 350-mile journey to the eastern desert of *Wirikuta*,

where they collect peyote, and to the sacred coast of the western ocean, *Haramaratsié*, where they collect salt every other year. Every five years they repair the roofs of the main temple and enlist some new members, while others fulfill the next five-year cycle of duties until they have completed five or six pilgrimages. Deer hunts and fishing remain integral components of traditional rituals, although deer snares are rarely used, since this game became scarce after the introduction of rifles in the area.

Some ceremonies only take place at the three central communal headquarters that the Franciscan missionaries established in three traditional ceremonial centers during the eighteenth century (*Wautüa*, *Tuapuri*, and *Tatei Kie*). Each has a government building structure (*caliwei*), a traditional ceremonial center, and a church (*teyupani*), now under the Huichols' internal control. Among the ceremonies conducted is the change of staffs for the traditional authorities, *Itsú Teaxá*, toward the end of the first week of January. This annual transfer of powers is supposed to be guided by the dreamed consensus of the council of elder shamans (*kawiteruxixi*), who choose a governor (*tatuani*), a judge (*harikarte*), a captain, a constable (loose terms with native and syncretistic meaning) and their emissaries or guards (*topilitsiri*), as well as 'commissars' in each ceremonial center. All these representatives are supposed to serve without remuneration for a year, which is difficult if they have to make trips outside the community to settle border and criminal disputes with the external Mexican municipal, state, and federal governments. Each

Huichol headquarters has taken over the church building, the foundations of which were laid by the Catholics; the churches are now cared for by different community members who serve the center's Virgin, its Christ(s), and its particular saints for year-long terms. Their tenures are changed or renewed without much fanfare before the year's end, around the winter solstice. Another ceremony that is celebrated only at the communal headquarters is the Easter Holy Week; it is carried out as an irreverent ritual within several of the communities, with bulls sacrificed to the new deities of Christ and the Virgin, in charge of matters concerning money exchange and cattle.

Rituals are also performed after a death; the person may return as a fly or a ghostlike being to haunt living acquaintances unless the spirit gains a



*Xiriki with urukate* © Juan Negrín 1975

transcendental spot in the sky with Our Creator (Sun) and is brought back to earth in the form of a crystal quartz, *teiwari*, by the attending shaman's feathered arrow. The crystal is kept as a sacred family icon wrapped in an arrow shaft, *urukame*, in the family shrine and is regularly given votive offerings; it may appear in a higher state, as *yumuutame*, which is kept in a votive bowl. There are more rituals, particular to the initiation of young women in weaving and males in hunting, among other specialties.

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