

## SACRED SITES

The Huichol tradition is rendered by three different terms: the first refers to our heart/memory, *tayeiyari*- the second to how we develop, *tanuiwari*- the third to our life, *tatukari*, is transmitted by families, reinforced by communal living on extended family ranches and through clans at ceremonial centers, *tukite* (*tukipa*, sing.). Three places serve as the headquarters for what appear to be distinct Huichol subgroups, with ritual and dialectical variants. *Wautiia*, *Tuapurie*, and *Tatei Kie* are the ceremonial centers where traditional authorities are selected to supervise the general political and religious activities within their communities, which include the other *tukite* on their periphery.

Life on the earth level, *huriyepa* or *heriepa*, occurs between the underworld of conception and the heavenly dimension, and between the four cardinal directions that unite more or less harmoniously at the center. The powers that keep life in balance are



The first peyote felled by the shaman's arrow 1976

female water and earth elements with male igneous and wind forces. To the east is the land of dawn, *Pariteküa*, where the birth of Our Father ((Sun), *Tayau*, is celebrated at dawn by the hunters of Our Elder Brother Blue Deer, who changes into Our Mother Peyote when he is felled by their arrows in the desert. This is “where Our Ancestors paint faces on the pilgrims,” *Wirikuta*, and the Huichol paint their own faces with the pigment of a yellow root, *toy*, as they travel to that spot. Before reaching the hunting

grounds, they also climb Burnt Peak, *Leunaxü*, and visit other sacred sites to the east, where Our Father was born out of the underworld, spewing forth in a volcanic stream. Dew rose at the beginning of time, uttering different words to summon each of the creatures to appear under various guises at the crack of dawn and to manifest their potential in the light of day. (The beginning is a sketch of what is to come, as different beings realize their potential).

The pilgrims invoke Our Father to disperse the rain clouds that prevent the fruits of the harvest from maturing, having first visited the oasis of Our Mother Who Sees From Below, *Tatei Matinieri*, to pray for future fertility. She reflects Our Mother Ocean, *Tatei Haramara*, who is petrified in the sea off the West Coast, behind us, *tatsutiia*, as a sacred white peak called *Waxiewe*. That is where Our Mothers of Rain originate and the fertile soil mingles with the essential salt for spicing meals; it is also where the dead begin their journey in the



Pilgrims visiting *Tuimayau* during pilgrimage to *Wirikuta* 1992

underworld, before they are released to the heavenly realm of *Taheimá*, where Our Creator (Sun), *Taweviekame*, turns them into quartz crystals, *teiwaxixi* (plural). Pilgrimages are eventually also made to the Pacific Coast, in the west to invoke abundant rains and to collect salt.

The south is where life first appeared on earth after the flood engulfed the underworld. This region is to the shaman's right, *tserieta*, as he faces the east. It is on an island on a lake called *Xapawiyemetá*, the place of the wild fig tree, which used to be the recently desiccated Lake Magdalena, Nayarit, identified as a great vector of pre-Hispanic trade



Offering depicting *Tanana* at the base of a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the church at Santa Catarina 1980

between north and south Mesoamerica. The volcanic peak of Tequila is associated with this so-called 'lake'. Offerings are now often taken to Lake Chapala, Jalisco, and Pátzcuaro, Michoacán; some pilgrims travel as far south as Mexico City to leave votive offerings to Our Mother of the South Waters, *Tatei Xapawiyeme*, and to Our Root (the Virgin of Guadalupe), *Tanana*, assimilated on the horns of a bull (she is depicted standing on the cusp of the moon), associated with animal husbandry and the

winter solstice.

The north, *utata*, to the left of the chanter who faces the rising sun, is another area that affects the spirit of the Huichol, who perceive it as the source of their rivers, streams and the north rains, *Tatei Hauxamanaka*. There is a power spot on a peak called Fat Hill, overlooking a lagoon in the contiguous northern states that has been visited by Huichol pilgrims over the centuries, as have the other sites already mentioned. However, many pristine sacred places are within Huichol territory and have been kept secret.

The territory called the center, *ixrüapa*, is largely in the canyons shared by the three remaining core traditional Huichol communities, *Tatei Kie*, *Tuapurie*, and *Wautüa*. Pilgrimages on a minor, yet challenging scale are made along the flanks of steep riverbeds from towering peaks to deep hidden caves, to place votive offerings (arrows,



Pilgrims renewing the roofs of the shrines at *Teakata* 1982

bowls, prayer mats and disks<sup>1</sup>) there over an extended period of time. Among the sites visited are *Tsinamekuta*, or *Aitsarie*, where ‘Our Grandfather’ (Fire), *Tatewari*, was born in the central springs of a cave, and *Teakata*, the platform that serves as a prototypical ceremonial center dedicated to ‘Our Grandfather’ in a shrine connected to other principal ancestors: Our Father (Sun), Our Elder Brothers Deer and Wolf Ancestors, and several of Our Mothers (Ocean, Rain). Nearby are the sacred sites of Our Great-Grandmother, *Takutsi*, and to the southeast, of Our Mother Messenger of the Eastern Rain, *Nuariwame*, and the cave of the prototypical cultivator, *Tuamuxawi*. To the west, in the Sierra of Nayarit, is the area dedicated to the Setting Sun, *Sakaimuka*, and to Our Mother of the Western Rains, *Tatei Kiewimuka*, as well as the lake of *Nakiuta*, the lagoon of *Hakuepa* and other sites familiar to those still acquainted with them.

The list of sacred places is too extensive to be more than highlighted. Different families are taken by shamans to particular traditional sites that form a web around the central



A *kieri* “tree of wind” with offerings left by devotees 1978

ones dedicated to water and fire, depending on their family’s apprenticeship and on their ancestral relationship to particular ceremonial centers. They are enlisted as members of ceremonial centers, because they belong to family members who were connected to them previously, or because they live in communal regions that are near the ceremonial centers in question. Some are devoted to visiting power spots of Our Elder Brother “the tree of wind,” *Tamatsi kieri*, a solanaceous plant that is used less frequently than peyote and primarily dedicated to Our

Great-Grandmother of Oracular Insight, *Takutsi Nakawé*, and to Our Mother Ocean. It is endogenous to the western and northern Huichol Mountains, and is considered to exact strict disciplines from its devotees, renowned as great healers and musicians.

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<sup>1</sup> See article on [Nierika](#) and votive offerings.