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Massacre of The Dreamers and The Imitatio Maria

Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés | Mar. 17, 2008 El Rio Debajo del Rio

A meditation for Holy Week and Easter

If one were to cease dreaming bold dreams, then bold and much needed actions on earth would also cease, for dreams are the primary fuel for the engine of doing. If it cannot be dreamt, it cannot be done. Thereby, protect rather than pre-empt the dreamer in your own soul.

Massacre of the dreamers

In our family it is said, that once, long ago, Moctezuma, *cacique*, chieftain of Mexico, in or about 1519, had been hearing constant rumors about pale-skinned warriors descending fully armed from the east coast of Mexico. Moctezuma, uncertain what to do or believe, sent for all tribal dreamers from all villages across the empire.

From every valley and volcano, the dreamers traveled overland dressed in their belts, leathers, mother-handed linen, feather capes, their gourds, jade stones, *quipis*, knotted counting strings, their bark prayer scrolls, their walking sticks, staffs of authority, their labrettes piercing their lips, their tattooed skin.

These muscled travelers, old, middle aged and very young, came before Moctezuma to tell the dreams they?d been dreaming about a most mysterious thing: The Future.

The Future was understood in dreams as a plain of possibilities. By the preponderance of dreaming similar images repeatedly, one trajectory or another was prophesied to come to pass.

The tribal dreamers took their calling to dream for ?the people of the earth,? as their serious troth to care for and protect souls. Dreamers led lives without rancor or vengeance, all in order to be lucid messengers between heaven and earth. Thus, one of the holiest prayers one could pray was to ask the highest source of dream vision to be granted an immaculate heart.

Even though Moctezuma had already heard the distant thunder of immense change bearing down upon the Nahua (Aztec) empire, he is said to have wanted to be told otherwise. He wished that the world he had put together by feast, conquest and marriage, would never end.

But the tribal dreamers could not support Moctezuma?s fantasy. The dreamers, instead, remained true to the dreams they?d been given from a force greater. They told Moctezuma that they dreamed he and all of Aztlan would fall, great fires would explode throughout the land, huge stones would crash to the earth, blood would run, the soul of Mexico would suffer greatly.

What Moctezuma ordered next could perhaps be understood as a man of great ego not wishing to be deposed. However, more so, he may have tried to do something no man can do: Pretend to be God by trying to stop time, to delay the natural cycle of decline, entropy, death -- and rebirth.

Despite being merely human, he may have thought, similar to emperors, armies, the misguided and despots since, that if he could stop dreamers from dreaming, if he could stop people from inaugurating preparation for change, perhaps he could stop this relentless end of his world as he knew it.

Ancient times sometimes show up in modern garb.

To this end of preserving his world, Moctezuma did the unconscionable in full knowledge. He ordered the slaughter of all the dreamers.

Moctezuma is said to have murdered every last dreamer who had spoken of his or her dream that the end of the empire was at hand, that a new day was coming and that there would first be a terrible cost. Thus, the red blood of every last gentle, innocent dreamer ran into the ground.

And not that far off, approaching on horseback, girded in cotton batting armor overlaid with leathern plates, carrying sword blades made from Toledo steel, with leather saddles squeaking and stirrup buckles jingling, the stranger advanced from the east anyway. Relentlessly so.

Moctezuma?s grave sin of the massacre of the dreamers caused also to be lost across the empire those who dreamed for everyone, not just for themselves. By killing the holy people, he silenced the living, walking, talking spiritual libraries of his own empire.

Entire tribal groups lost their messengers whose lives were dedicated to standing sacerdotally between the mundane world and heaven in order to deliver images, ideas, blessings, care, regard for right conduct, sweet honey on wafers of prayers.

The modern and ancient losses of those who dream for everyone, is ever great. If one dies in heart or spirit, one might lie in the grave for a time, but then the moment will come to refuse to remain dead any longer.

Like other parts and places and times of our world, Moctezuma did not quite realize that by murdering his dreamers, he had in fact hastened the death of himself and his empire, for there was no one left to dream new life.

This story would be bleak if not for the symbol of the blood of the dreamers sinking into the earth. For in the generations of Mexicans forward, still from those bloody fields, came golden grain.

The people who tilled those martyrs? fields, though enslaved, people who cared for the crops to their maturity, though under the lash of oppressors, people who harvested crops under demeaning overlords, still ate of crops fed by the blood of holy dreamers.

Thus, it is also said, of the most humble people who were enslaved, that each carried inside himself and herself, a portion of the noble ability to dream, which is the most radical thing of all. Like the crops that grew from the blood soaked earth, hope sprang up in them most strongly -- not from ambition but from the root of hope, which is grief.

All of us who have eaten from the golden crop nourished by the bloodspilt earth might sometimes be called to dream for others besides ourselves: to see the good, the not so good, to dream ideas, helps, ways in, ways out, hopes that can nourish people, prepare them, but most of all, sustain their souls come what may.

Perhaps it was this legend of the Massacre of the Dreamers arising in post-Cortez Mexico that gave rise to another now ancient ritual, the beginning of healing in the next phase of the life/death/life cycle, the night between two days, that occurs after dearest beliefs and dreams are massacred.

Dar el pésame* and the*Imitatio Maria

Pésame -- the giving of condolences, a special, highly personal sharing of comfort -- is a ritual of Good Friday. In the rite I know from rural backwoods, the statue of La Nuestra Señora/The Blessed Mother is carried down from her *nicho* or her altar and placed in ?the people?s tierra,? outside the altar rail.

There she stands then, often with a rebozo or mantilla draped over her head and shoulders. She stands in her *agonistas* for her son?s literally nearly being beaten to death before being crucified.

Her only child whom she suffered to give birth to alone on a cold desert night, and whom she fled with at night to avoid a slaughter of innocents, is dying. She now, like dreamers who dreamed so well and so hard, yet were slaughtered, sees the end of her child?s life as she knew it, an end she would never, as a mother heart, desire for her beloved in any way.

In ritual *pésame*, people come to church to be with her in her time of torment, just as dreamers came to Moctezuma, not to be his governmental advisors, but as comforters to aid his suffering soul. Maria, Mary, Miryam understands this as Moctezuma did not. And, she receives with gracious sorrow, all that the dreamers -- who are we -- have to give to her, our condolences and our comforts as well as our own personal sorrows, which in some ways mirror hers.

In this way, we are brought body, soul, mind, spirit, emotive being, to the underlying meaning of loss -- and eventual rebirth. In *pésame*, we do not witness the Passion with intellect or even only eyes, ears and heart. We share in it all the way down to our grief and courage bones.

This is to my mind, what I?d call an *Imitatio Maria*, a following of Our Lady, insofar as we who are only human, can become a Mary on earth, giving birth to the holy child every day, protecting, guiding, helping, learning, eventually suffering the unspeakable loss, grieving, bewildered, wandering, and finally finding the child again, in an entirely new way.

No despair forever. Instead, an often odd configuration of new life, at least odd to us who are fairly leaden rather than completely mercurial in making quick turns in new behaviors regardless of how quicksilver our thinking might be.

So, one by one at *pésame*, people come to sit in the little pews, staying close to La Señora; they will not leave her. Some bring her water. Some bring food. She will not eat or drink; we all know. But it is the offering, the preparation of that green chili, that posolé that matters as a source of caring shown.

Then gradually, each person will come to her one by one, perhaps wipe her feet with their tears, touch her cheek, tell her in their own words how they understand her grieving, for they too have their own grief -- for her, for their savior, for those they love in their own lives who suffer so, for their own suffering souls.

People will ask please to also receive a resurrection of health or heart or mind or soul or spirit. Many a time a man or a woman or a teenager or a child or an old woman or old man will break down sobbing while speaking to her, giving a barren wasteland kind of howl. And the rest of us, well, you can feel it, like one giant collective sob pushing back the walls of the church as all of us are in union with one another -- in mysterious ways, one mind, one heart, one soul. The way it?s supposed to be; the way it is.

I suppose an observer might say the people are playing pretend with a statue. But those devout souls who touch her cheek feel the ancient and timeless Mary Maria Mir-yam far away in time up close; flesh warm, tears wet, love deep.

They will tell you she comforts them as they comfort her. And some of us will say, she prays her ancient blessing over our torn parts, the same one she once spoke to mend up the fear of the frightened Cuauhtémoc, Santo Don Diego, at Tepeyac. Then as now today, she still says:

Have your forgotten? I am your mother,
and you are under my protection.

Massacre of the dreamers behind us.

Pésame beside us.

The new dawn just ahead.

May all of us, with infinite tenderness, comfort each other in this special lacuna of time and escape the hubris of either withholding comfort or else suffering in silence refusing to be comforted. May we all find certainty, each in our own way, that the clearest of the dreamers are still fully alive inside us despite the dark, and that the Immaculate Heart is not for hire by acts of perfection, but is inherent and comes when called. In case anyone might have forgotten for just a moment, it is also known by the name: Beloved.

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> There are many legends, some true, some partially true, and some not at all true, and some that ought to be true for they have such psychological and spiritual integrity. But because of the dearth of accurate reportage and destruction of codices of the Nahua, we may never know all the facts regarding the conquest of Mexico. *Massacre of the Dreamers* is also the title of a book by Ana Castillo, its subtitle is: *Essays on Xicanisma*. Gratitude to Dr. Castillo for giving me reference to a print notation for this legend. Quote from Laurette Sejourne's *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico*: "Anyone dreaming anything about the end of the Empire was ordered to the palace to tell of it. ... But finding no good in the thousands offered, Moctezuma killed all the offenders. It was the massacre of the dreamers, the most pathetic of all.?

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