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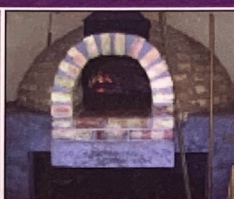
Food

Feature

Film



Santiago Apocala
Page 4



Mezzaluna
Page 5



Saint Valentine's Day
Page 6



Cinema: El Pochote
Page 9



Traditional Indigenous Medicine

Medicine, as defined by a dictionary, is the science of preservation of health and the treatment of disease for the purpose of cure. It is also defined as a healing art. Only there is not one single science, one single medicine. Different forms of practice aiming to preserve health, cure disease, and in broader terms improve life, have existed historically and many still co-exist.

To the eye of a hypothetical observer who was completely unfamiliar to any medical practice, all the different forms of medicine might seem quite similar. Most would diagnose and proceed in consequence. A regular session would include talking, physical exploration, and administration of medicines of varied kinds. However, there seems to be an astronomical distance separating some of the different forms of under-

standing and practicing medicine. Traditional forms of medicine that still linger alive around the world struggle against the institution of only one valid form of medicine. The assumption that there is one form of "modern, scientific" medicine automatically discredits the possibility of considering other options.

There is one dominant form of medical practice: institutional, white-coat, allopathic medicine,

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commonly referred to as scientific or modern medicine. The last two terms are not precise. First, there are different forms of science based on distinct rationalities. The idea of modernity implying evolution or development is applicable to many forms of practice. Through different roads, at different paces, all forms of knowledge evolve. As opposed to modern, the term traditional seems to preserve the idea of not-modern and consequently left behind. But tradition here is just a reminder of the ancient origin these practices have.

The distance separating them lies in the original conception of health-illness-healing but also in the concept of life itself.

Institutional medicine and its technologically advanced instruments seem to have focused on the bodily aspects of illness and to have forgotten the psychological, spiritual and social realms as an integral part of human beings and therefore as part of the process of falling ill and healing. The psychological side of medicine has been reduced to the study and treatment of behavioral and cognitive disorders but it is commonly forgotten when approaching what is deemed to be "physical affliction". Traditional medicine, in the other hand, considers human beings in their biological, psychological,



spiritual and social dimension, and thus considers illness as a consequence of some disequilibrium between these realms. In order to heal or cure, all sides must be considered.

The mystical frame from which traditional medicine normally approaches its practice is a source of conflict with the rational arguments of institutional medicine. The complete separation from any kind of superstition and the rejection of divine intervention (at least as a part of the specific practice) produce an impossibility of interchange with mystical understanding of medicine.

In the very complex context of a multicultural country like Mexico, conflicts between the indigenous traditions versus the western methods promoted by the state

are evident in the political sphere, in the education system, in the judicial ambit and of course in the public health system.

It is as difficult to an urban dweller who is used to hospitals, blood tests, x-rays and the rest of the institutional paraphernalia to accept that his suffering might be cured without ingesting pills but with a massage as it is to a native of an indigenous community to understand how a pill might cure fright.

The distrust generated by institutional medicine among indigenous communities has its source in the lack of understanding of the personnel who work with them. For this reason the Mexican Government has been introducing strategies that try to integrate different visions and ways of understanding life, death, illness and health into a more integral set of public health strategies.

Driven by the need to improve the quality of the attention offered in public health institutions that work within indigenous communities, openness towards traditional medicine has occurred. By doing this, professionals of the institutional medicine structure have learned not only to accept the existence of other concepts of medicine but also have found communication channels between this different medicines.

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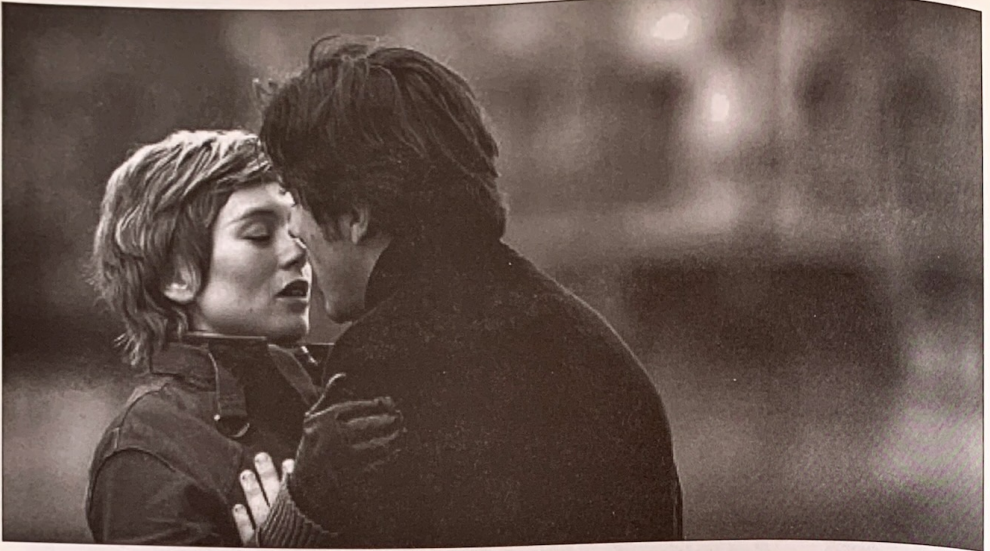
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Saint Valentine's Day

A Pagan-Christian tradition more than 1500 years old.

By Rafael Bucio

Look at any calendar and you will see that nearly every month boasts some reason to celebrate (here in Oaxaca, there seems to be one every week). Whether civic or religious, whether officially observed or inarguably inane, the list of holidays parades on year after year. In the celebrations department, February is one of the most notable months.

February 2nd is El Día de la Candelaria -Candlemass- an important celebration in the entire Roman Catholic world. It is the commemoration of the day Jesus was taken to church for the first time, to be presented to God.

That same day, Pennsylvanians observe a wholly different kind of festivity, consulting a small, furry animal for some old-fashioned weather forecasting. Punxsutawney Phil is a groundhog who has been accurately forecasting the weather for more than 100 years. This tradition might have its origin in this Scottish couplet: "If Candlemass Day is bright and clear, there'll be two winters in the year." Phil comes out of his burrow on this day and checks out his shadow. If he can see it, (if there is enough sun), that means six more weeks of winter remain. If the day is

cloudy, he gets ready for spring (sort of reverse logic).

The list continues, from Mexico's Flag Day (perhaps one of the most useless public holidays, formerly of mandatory observance) to New Zealand's Waitangi Day and the Chinese Lantern Festival Day.

Undoubtedly, Saint Valentine's Day is the most prominent of them all, at least commercially speaking. Officially known in Mexico as Día del Amor y la Amistad -Love and Friendship Day- not only romantic love but all types of affection are celebrated on this day. Heart-shaped greeting cards, pink teddy bears, balloons and red roses are omnipresent. Bars and restaurants have their facilities decorated with the season's motifs and offer special deals for couples. Hourly-rated hotels and motels enjoy full occupancy as long lines of couples queue for burning beds after having enjoyed a romantic dinner. Late at night, the ill fated can be seen serenading solo while drowning their sorrows in nepenthe.

A poor, lonely fellow alone at the bar may well wonder: How did this all begin?

The origins of Saint Valentine's Day go back to Rome during the third century. In order to obtain protection from the

wolves that roamed around, citizens had a feast in honor of Lupercus, the god of fertility, husbandry and shepherds. Lupercalia was held on February 15. Luperci priests sacrificed dogs and goats, and then, dressed in loincloths, ran around beating women with thongs made of goatskin as a means of purification. (Imagine presenting your sweetie with a goat whip this year!)

The day before Lupercalia, a somewhat tamer celebration was held in honor of Juno Februata, the goddess of fever (love). The names of young, eligible maidens would be written on billets and put inside a box to be drawn by young, eager bachelors. The resulting matches were considered couples for the whole year, beginning in March. This celebration continued long after Lupercalia disappeared.

When Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, the church transformed the old pagan lottery of Lupercalia into Saint Valentine's Day in 496. Pope Gelasius declared February 14 a holy day devoted to the martyr Saint Valentine. The church modified the celebration so that instead of drawing maidens' names, saints' names were drawn. The lucky

contestant was supposed to emulate the life of the saint whose name was written on his slip of paper.

The celebration returned to the original format centuries later with subtle differences. In France the tradition changed during the 17th century so that both maidens and bachelors drew billets out of the urns. Hence one would have two valentines. It wasn't until the 18th century that people decided to abandon the lottery and choose sweethearts on their own.

Paul VI removed Saint Valentine from the Catholic calendar in 1969, but the holiday proved it was here to stay. Valentine cards have been sold since 1840. Nowadays, only Christmas is a more profitable holiday for greeting card manufacturers.

Now the man at the bar might be wondering: Who is this



Valentine dude?

There are several stories explaining who he was, or perhaps there were several Valentines who eventually merged into one. The most popular version is that Valentine was a priest who married young couples against the prohibition passed by Emperor Claudius II (who felt that single men made better soldiers). He was later imprisoned for his

insolence.

Another popular version says that Claudius sent Valentine to prison for helping Christians, where he fell in love with the jailer's daughter. He allegedly sent her letters signed "from your Valentine" which explains the expression "be my Valentine." An alternative version of this story claims that he cured this girl from blindness. This made Claudius so furious, he had Valentine, (or more likely Valentinus), clubbed to death and beheaded on February 14, 270.

Far beyond the Christian realm and far away from the commercial celebrations, February 14 is the day of lovers, as well as the day of singles yearning to change their status. But most important, it is the day in which we are reminded that siempre hay un roto para un descodico.

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