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Elena Avila

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LA LLORONA HAS FOUND HER CHILDREN

by Elena Avila, R.N., M.S.N.

It's time to beckon our Toltec, Mayan, Azteca, mestizo soul back to us. La Llorona has found her children and we are the children. It's time to return home.

As a chicana, psychiatric nurse, and Curandera, I have been blessed with guiding many chicanos into the retrieval of their souls. Our souls wander away due to neglect and deprivation; hide due to trauma, illness, divorce and loss. And yet, it is so resilient and forgiving. It will come back to us when we take the time and courage to look for it. It will come back when we commit to care for it and allow it expression.

We are not strangers to trauma, oppression and loss. We are a young race but have had to fight long and hard to preserve our culture. I thank our ancestors for knowing that we are more than a body, mind and spirit; we are also a "soul". Our soul is our unique essence, our life force, the energy that gives our personal life meaning and expression. It is the integrative summation of all that we are and a mediator between body and spirit. When our soul is present, we accept dualized and fragmented parts of us as a paradox. When in love, we understand the paradox, "I find myself when I'm lost in you."

Without soul, we feel empty, depressed, hopeless, and homeless. We look into space and long for "something" that will give us that childlike innocence, joy, and creativity. Some of us become cynical, withdrawing and isolating ourselves from each other. Or, we long for the right relationship that will make everything okay. We get stoned or drink excessively to escape from our mundane lives. We get high in an unnatural way, and our creative juices get dry. We "forget" that it is our birth-right to greet Papa Sol each morning and say, "Gracias mi Diosito por otro dia de vida, gracias por tanto amor y alegria."

We are a proud, Chicano people who no

longer tolerate the injustice and oppression of a society that does not recognize the earth wisdom of her indigenous people. We are getting more involved politically in all issues that affect us. We are making our own decision on our health, education, work, and environment. We define ourselves through our culture and we are committed to the preservation of our gente. I urge that we become just as committed to our souls and heal ourselves from the dis-ease our antepasados called "SUSTO" or "SUSTO PASADO". Susto Pasado refers to traumas and unresolved suffering of many years duration. Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome is Susto Pasado! We no longer tolerate being victims and martyrs. I long for the day when we as a raza retrieve our collective soul and heal from 500 years of colonization and oppression. ATZLAN.

I counseled a family that had recently lost an eighteen year old teen to a violent death. He had been stabbed to death during a fight that had erupted at a party. He was to graduate from high school in one month. His killer was also a chicano teen from another high school.

His mother was familiar with death. She had lost her first husband in a similar way. She had also lost two daughters. One died when she was four months old and another daughter was stillborn. She had also witnessed the death of her daughter's newborn. The infant had only lived three hours.

During her first visit with me she stated, "I don't seem to be grieving much for my son. I have this calmness about me. My body is not doing well, though. I have been getting very ill." It was obvious to me that her soul was not present. The soul has an energy, a vibrancy that shines through the eyes. There is a vitality, a presence that is felt in the body when we move and talk. This shows through when we are in pain and in joy. The soul is sentimental and feels very deeply. When we experience grief, the grief is palpable, the sounds of the grieving are not blocked and the individual sobs and cries with every cell of the body. This grieving mother could only cry

from the head up. Her soul did not know what to do with that much pain.

Her 27-year-old daughter and second husband came with her. Her daughter was filled with hate and could not understand why she had lost her dad, daughter, and now her younger brother. She had two small boys that she was dangerously protecting. She constantly feared that her only remaining brother would die, too.

Her step-dad was the pillar of strength. He had come in to the family when she and her brother were young. He was also deeply affected by the death of his step-son whom he had helped raise since the boy was three. He was a strong chicano man who did not cry. He was drinking heavily.

When we began the ceremony for the soul retrieval, I asked them to say what was in their hearts, not their minds. The woman started to talk about how much she missed her son. She went into deep grieving and collapsed on the floor. We held her and I encouraged her to go deeper. She had been trying to be "brave" for the family and had lost her soul in the process. Losing a child is the worst pain a woman can experience. Her womb started to feel a tearing pain as I massaged her stomach. She cried out her son's name; something she had not been able to do at the funeral. Her body and soul had now reconciled; her soul and body were now cooperating in the expression of her pain.

Her example provided the courage her daughter needed to express how she felt. She lived in constant fear that her only brother would die, too. She felt shame because she had vengeful feelings against her brother's killer. She cried for her dead father and we called out his name and asked his spirit to help his daughter. It was very moving for all of us. Her step-dad witnessed the two women heal and realized that he had not been helping because he had been encouraging them "not to cry". A friend of the family had advised his wife not to have pictures of the dead boy around and especially not to light him any more candles because his mom was not letting him "rest in

peace". Her husband was supporting this advice. I asked the grieving mom to ask her soul what she wanted. She responded: "My son misses his candles. His last words to us were 'I'm very scared.'" She now lights her candles to him and feels at peace; a natural peace.

As the family was leaving that day, the father said: "Thank you for teaching me how to really support my family. Every time my wife cries, I will hold her and tell her, 'cry all you want, for as long as you want.'"

Our culture is rich with healing and our words can become Yerba Buena words when we tap into the old wisdom of our antepasados. Our souls are deeply embedded into that simple earthy knowledge, and we can find ourselves "back home" when we open up to all that we are.

As we rush to yet another meeting, as we scurry in airports to catch a plane or to fly back home after an exciting conference on People of Color issues, as we toss back and forth from another sleepless night, let us re-member to nurture our Chicano souls. Our souls do not like to work long hours, long meetings, unhealthy bodies, or the pain from a society that continues to ignore us. It does not like the drugs, the alcohol, the addictions we pump into our bodies to make it through the day. Our souls love music, dance, nature, poetry, creative expression, the full range of our emotions, and most of all, love and familia. The high drive pace that the dominant society tempts us with is making us ill. Let us call upon the courage that it takes to remember all of who we are and beckon our souls back home. Welcome home!