

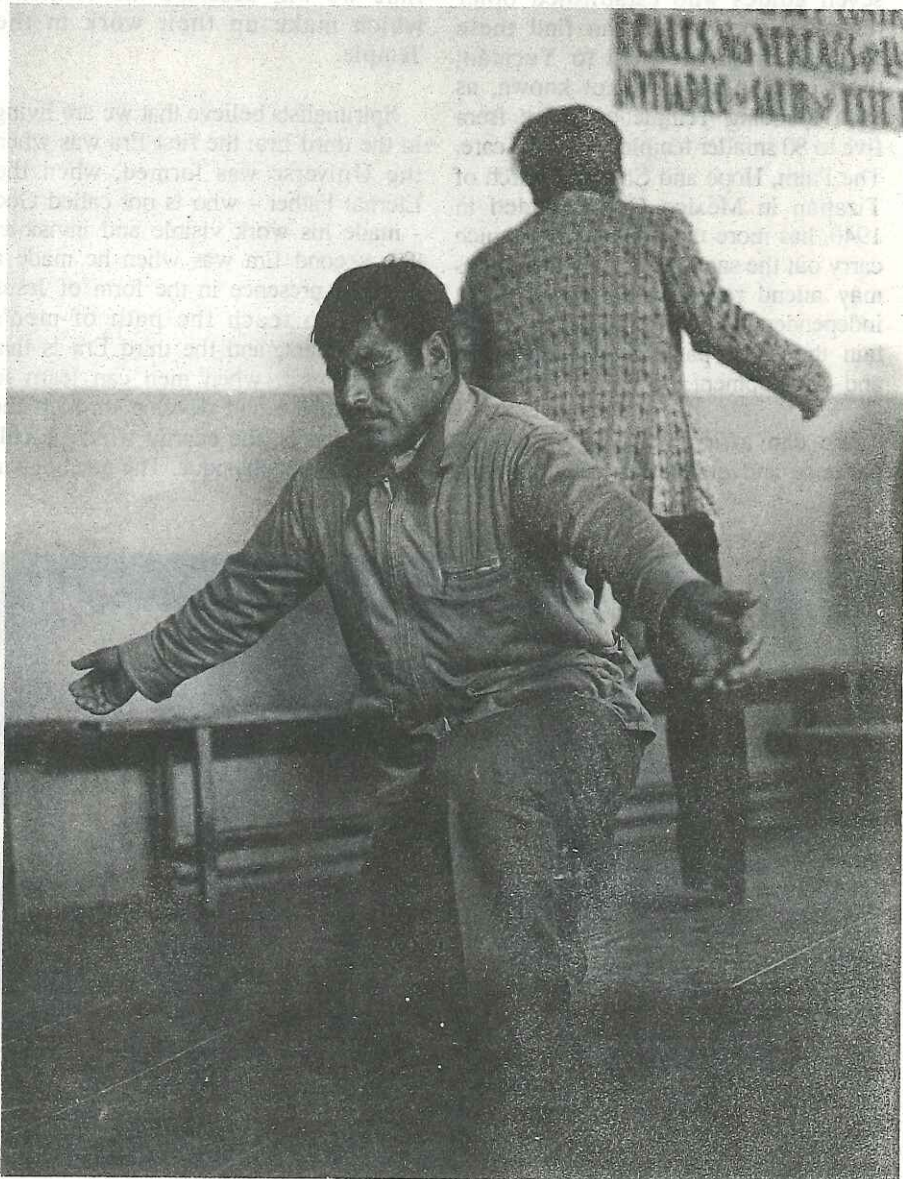
# Growing Spiritualist Movement in Mexico

Sergio López Ramos

All spiritualists have their nearby temple, where they know they were baptized, and some have an idea of their origins beyond that beginning, and acknowledge Roque Rojas as the initiator of the project to form a temple for spiritual development. Spiritualism has grown as an alternative in confronting a crisis in forms of personal development in the official church, as a possibility of dialogue with the Supreme Spirit or Eternal Father. Some spiritualists consider that Roque Rojas received a message in the form of a manifestation which indicated the course of his service in the construction of the Work: the work being that of the Eternal Father. Others consider that the literature of the epoch influenced him: newspapers and magazines which published translations of French and English articles relating experiences in temples and private centers, often confusing spiritists with spiritualists.

In fact, spiritist practices existed in Mexico before the emergence of spiritualists. The distinction between them is that spiritists only communicate through manifestations and messages, physical or verbal, and they believe they receive the energy which is manifested. There is literature on the theme, in favor and against arguments that spiritists are charlatans or genuine spiritual agents.

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In a trance. Photo by Mariana Yampolsky.

Spiritualists have a process of preparation and initiation so as to communicate with the spirit of a dead person, who appears in a live person who is subsequently named a medium, an "open mind" or "chosen vessel". Spiritualists are dedicated to a systematic project, seeking material and spiritual development in daily life, while spiritists use devices such as turn tables and curtains to carry out tricks.

Roque Rojas' ideas were taken up and developed by Damiana Oviedo, says Salvador Jaén, spiritualist of the Tears of Abraham Temple in Anahuac, Mexico City, while Jesús Ibarra, of the La Fe Temple in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, says the spiritualist church began in the Midday Temple, in the central suburb of Guerrero in Mexico City, and spread from there to the provinces through seven guides who established other temples. Today, one can find these Temples from Mexicali to Yucatán; their exact number is not known, as each founding Temple can have from five to 80 smaller temples under its care. The Faith, Hope and Charity Church of Tizapán in Mexico City, founded in 1940, has more than 70 temples, which carry out the same work, and the guides may attend regularly or may become independent, but they generally maintain the same patterns of preparation and development.

We can affirm, due to visual experience and oral testimonies, that the

number of Temples has been multiplying gradually, and that they exist with equal frequency in rich and poor zones, and the attending public also includes people from rich and poor classes. There are two trends of mystic organization observed by the faithful in these Temples: those who adore images of saints, and those who believe that communications should be conceptualized, but both work on the principle of spiritual communication.

### The Path of Spiritual Development

What do they do in the Temples? What principles do they follow? What are the necessary conditions or requirements? What are the different kinds of development? To answer these questions we will describe the steps of a person who is initiated or baptized, and at the same time we will describe the elements which make up their work in the Temple.

Spiritualists believe that we are living in the third Era: the first Era was when the Universe was formed, when the Eternal Father - who is not called God - made his work visible and invisible. The second Era was when he made a material presence in the form of Jesus Christ, to teach the path of men's development, and the third Era is that of the spirit, when men can learn to communicate and develop through the spirit, that is, the energy which is cultivated in his physique. The meetings in

the Temples, at the feet of the Eternal Father, are held in the belief in reincarnation, and this is confirmed when the spirit of the Father tells in what Age they have met previously and what the spirit who appears, has done.

The great majority of people who attend the spiritualist churches do so because of some pain or physical or mental illness. If the person continues going to the church, he or she can enter a preparatory process to get to know the Work - this is how the Temple is named - and what is done inside and outside the Temple. This preparation can consist of changes in the personal life style: for example, assume an attitude of greater solidarity, stop being rude and blasphemous, carry out acts to support the Temple, attend the Temple regularly, and in some cases, observe a period of sexual abstinence and fasts, which are imposed as tests to differentiate spiritual development and material temptations.

When the preparation is completed, the person can be presented at the feet of the Eternal Father by the church guide, or the Eternal Father calls the person for spiritual baptism: the marking of the spirit with the seven seals. At this point the person will be told how many reincarnations he has, his spirit name and from what tribe he comes; it is common to find references to Red Indian and Cherokee tribes, and to the twelve apostles; on other occasions the name will be related with Tibet - all this depends on each Temple's level of development. The initiate will also be told what is his/her spiritualist mission - this is the same as saying that there are various kinds of participation and development.

### Some Initiates become Mediums

The baptized person has many possibilities according to his/her spiritual development up to that moment, and might be told that he/she has capacities to be a medium, chosen vessel or "open mind". This means they will have the happy experience of receiving a spirit, in other words, of lending their body so that another being, someone who has died, can make him or herself present and communicate. If the initiate is to be a medium, he or she will be given a spiritual protector who will look after the body until it is called by the Father (that is, until its death). This protector



Improvised spiritualist temple in a Mexican neighborhood. Photo by Rosa María Torres.

has a name, and will be called by this name to come to the medium to begin the development, which consists of massaging the body, so as to be able to work with those beings who have died without knowing anything about the Word of the Eternal Father. This work is known as giving light to dark spirits.

There are special days stipulated for each Temple practice: for the giving of light to dark spirits, the chosen days are Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, with the times being arranged according to the material commitments of the members of the group. The giving of light consists of making the dead person pass through the medium seven times,

and the dead person will no longer believe that he/she is still alive and will then form part of the Temple's spiritualist chains: this signifies greater strength and protection. This kind of service is also given to those people who want to communicate with a dead friend or relative.

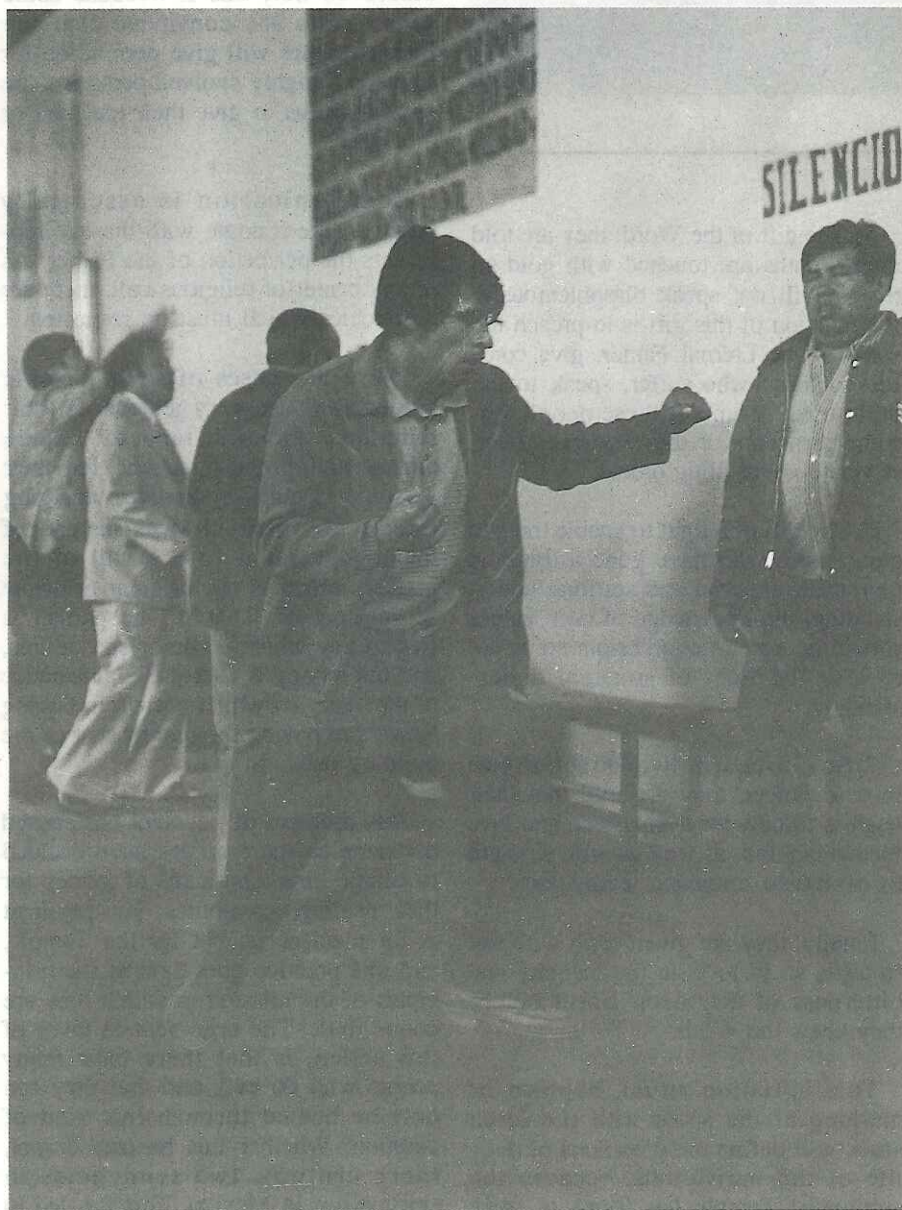
After a certain period of practice, according to the Work, the Eternal Father will be asked to give a spiritual doctor the capacity to cure physically and spiritually. This doctor can be an indigenous person, an allopathist or homeopathist, and he/she will attend the public on Tuesdays and Fridays exclusively. It is common to see queues of patients waiting for attention; in some

Temples patients wait from 5 a.m. to receive cards for their appointments; other Temples attend only in the afternoon, others work all day - which means that that Temple has a considerable number of mediums so they don't get tired.

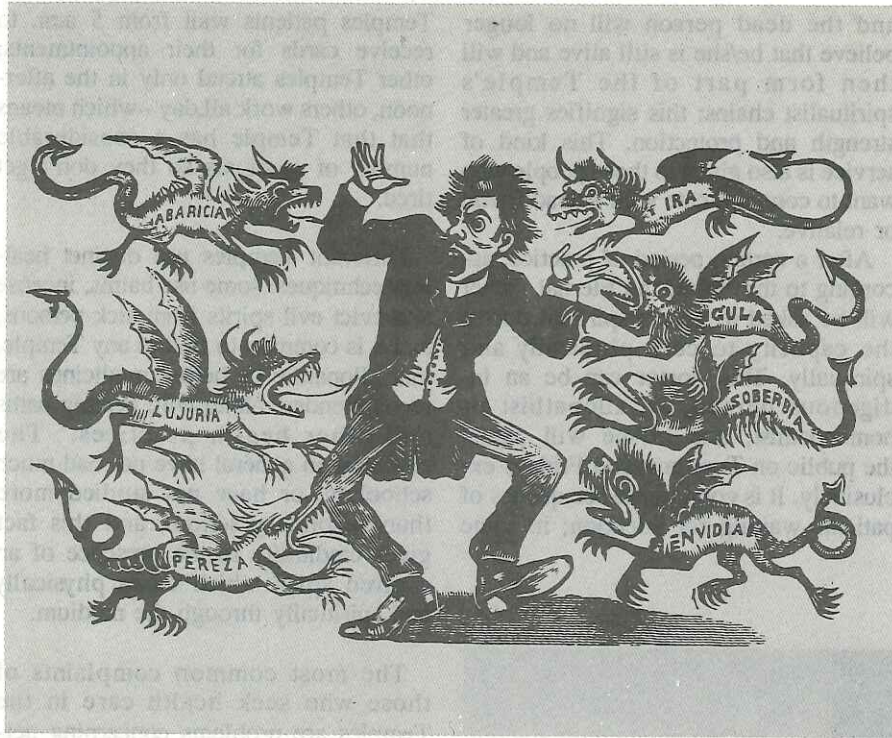
Different Temples use distinct healing techniques: some use balms, incense and evict evil spirits from sick persons, and it is common to find in any Temple, that allopathic or herbal medicines are recommended, along with healing baths and other health practices. The mediums in general have not had much schooling, or have not studied more than secondary school, and this fact gives credibility to the presence of an evolved spirit which cures physically and spiritually through the medium.

The most common complaints of those who seek health care in the Temples are problems concerning personal and passionate affairs; people seek orientation or clarity about their material lives. Most of the people only attend healing ceremonies, and ignore the spiritualist work of the temple, although some people do join the church, and attend regularly, including Sundays, which is teaching day, when the Eternal Father is present and gives his message, sometimes in metaphors and parables, other times directly and plainly: this depends on the kind of development achieved by the Temple and the medium who receives Him. The teaching is about spiritual life and its articulation with the material world, as well as a kind of preparation necessary for the times which are due to arrive. Sometimes there may be an announcement of an important natural or social event which will take place. Sunday is also the day for baptisms, along with the days 1, 7, 13 and 21 of each month.

The number of people who attend the spiritualist Temples is enormous as each founding Temple has an average of 10 smaller temples with an assistance of 10-100 people. Those who seek health care in the Temples may or may not have the right to State health institutions such as the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) or the State Workers' Social Security and Services Institute (ISSSTE); what they are looking for is a service where they are treated differently with an opportunity to dialogue about their ills, and usually they find this in the spiritualist Temples.



Spiritualist session. Photo by Mariana Yampolsky.



Engraving by José Guadalupe Posada.

### The Baptism

During the baptismal ceremony, the spirit is given a mark or identity when he receives the seven seals, and the person is told what is his/her mission in the Temple. The order may vary, but the baptism consists of the following seven points:

1) The person will be informed if he/she is to be a medium, in which case the work we mentioned above will be carried out.

2) The quality of clairvoyance, used to perceive the manifestations or receive the messages - which is something not anyone can do - and make these known as part of the mission.

3) The quality of hearing, so as to hear the words of those brothers and sisters who wish to communicate, or of highly developed spirits; again, so as to communicate this, and thus contribute to the development and courage of others.

4) The gift of healing with the hands: the hands are given a pure and perfect healing balm, to cure those who are ill and dying; some spiritualist healers visit hospitals to rub this balm on sick persons, and they also use it on plants and animals.

5) The gift of the Word: they are told their mouths are touched with gold so that it will not speak blasphemously; the function of this gift is to preach the word of the Eternal Father, give comfort to those who suffer, speak to the multitudes. Some of these people become preachers or they dedicate themselves to counselling others.

6) The gift of a light to enable them to guide those who have gone astray and give them material and spiritual understanding; the knowledge of both values should be kept in equilibrium so as not to lose the light of spiritual understanding.

7) So as to be sensitive and able to give love to others, they are told that their heart is filled with compassion and love for humankind, as well as with strength to overcome mundane temptations.

Finally, they are given earth with salt to taste, so as to taste the inequity and bitterness of action on Earth before they knew the Work.

This initiation ritual, baptism or marking of the spirit with the seven seals, will define the directions of daily life of the individuals, because the spiritualist Temple has forms of work which combine with the cultural

religious practices of Christianity, and which involve prayers, invocations, hymns and specific tasks according to the commission assigned, which might be a John the Baptist, Moses, Preacher, Golden Pen (secretary), Guardian, Samaritan, etc. The functions are associated with those of the disciples who were with Jesus Christ.

In relations to this, the Temples have only one altar with 12 or 7 steps, culminating in a triangle with an eye in the center. This represents the 12 apostles and the 7 levels of spiritual development required to achieve illumination or to reach fusion with the Eternal Father. The altars are adorned with candles and white flowers, some altars have a cross and images of saints while others do not; this is because some spiritualists are convinced that the Eternal Father will give permission for saints and highly evolved persons to be present, so as to give their teaching or message.

Communication is essentially spiritual, the triangle with the eye represents the perfection of the Father. As in any center of religious cult, there are hierarchies which must be respected.

There are cases of some Temple guides who are very jealous of their functions, and who tend to exclude others, and propose actions for their personal benefit, sometimes charging directly for their services instead of leaving payment to the will of the patient, which is the original principle of spiritualists. That is, the patient is free to pay whatever he or she desires, and the money is used for maintenance of the Temple - which goes from buying flowers to paying the rent or cost of the building used.

This problem of payment has caused divisions as some guides have decided to charge important sums of money for their healing ceremonies. The payment is for themselves, not for the Temple, and this practice goes against the principles of the mission to which they are committed. The argument in favor of this action, is that there exist many people who do evil, and that they can only be healed through this kind of curation. Whether this be true or not, there are now two tendencies in spiritualism in Mexico. This has led to confusions among patients, and has not



Talk given by an experienced member of the spiritualist religion. Photo by Mariana Yampolsky.

avored the spiritual development envisaged in the original principles.

### Development of the Spirit

This leads us to reflect on the spirit, the energy handled by the spiritualists. While for many men of science its existence is undeniable, it is also true that there are many paths for its development - such as Zen meditation, parapsychology, healers and witch doctors, with the corresponding construction of distinct life styles.

Perhaps one aspect which crosses these practices is that of morality and the categories of good and bad, with the implied struggle against evil. In some Temples these approximations have been overcome, and spiritual development is assumed to be an integral part of life, with opportunities to achieve other levels of spiritual growth, without

having to result victorious, but making changes of attitude in daily life and living in a more constructive manner. Some spiritualists know that this is their only opportunity to reach a level of development on the scale of the spiritual world. Many believe, the discipline in spiritualism has allowed live or dead persons extraordinary success in healing, solving family problems and in providing peace in the security of being on the right path.

On the other hand, there are tragic stories about the end of their lives and their spirits after being defeated by earthly passions or temptations which nullify the individual's development and lead him/her to have to begin again in another incarnation.

Doubtlessly, spiritualism is an option in these times of crisis of spiritual values, in learning how to live a daily

existence where there are not many choices in confronting the future, where physical and mental health are so inter-related that modern medicine often fails to provide real solutions and where public institutions have lost the mystique of humanitarian service, and patients are faced with the need to search for alternatives beyond the medical formality. As the spiritualists themselves say, we are in the third Era, of dialogue and spiritual development, and if the spirit is sick the body will experience the consequences. Thus, their aim is to cure the spirit.

Spiritualist Temples are therefore a sanctuary for those who are to find the future promised by the Eternal Father, a future they will build themselves with the guidance of his light.

The third Era and the emergence of new forms of life and of new interpersonal relations, seem to be Utopian today, but the proposal of the spiritualists is not to be disdained entirely, if and when it is observed with consciousness and dedication to the practices, because the spiritualists maintain that it is possible to build alternatives, taking into account the principle of the Father's work, and create a just life in harmony with the evolution of each spirit.

Another element observed in the Temples, as in any human group, is the existence of passions and feelings of envy and destructive competitiveness, which provoke divisions and demonstrate the fact that these people are not well prepared, still experiencing conflicts between spiritual and material values. Spiritualists do not demand of each other a life of sacrifice and suffering, what they do demand is identification with spiritual growth which be materialized in daily life; this materialization should consist of attaining levels of emotional expression and relations in life which encourage other individuals.

Finally I wish to point out that these notes come from direct experience with spiritualists, and that each person lives life's difficulty according to their level of evolution; thus, individuality is an important aspect in the understanding of these experiences. ■