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## No room at the inn: La Posada, the Latino way

by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés

El Rio Debajo del Rio

**Since time out of mind,  
dark forces rise up to kill  
The Light of the World.**

### **Part One, The Spirit that will not die:**

We Latinos are of an ancient culture which barely survived the bloody holocaust unleashed by Conquistadores. We know by heart this fact of the murderous dark being ever against the transforming light.

And you also? Your own immigrant people, no doubt, knew this fact as well. You may well realize too that whenever we carry an uncanny and far-reaching light ourselves, whenever we carry love of a Light Greater... something all oily, and yet jagged-hearted, steps out from the shadows and attempts to douse the Light.

**Las Posadas are modern enactments of the night the Holy Family tried to find shelter at an inn during a mass migration of tribal groups all swirling across the land,** trying to meet the demand of Emperor Augustus to return to their birth villages to be registered in a census so they could be taxed.

The hardship this ruling-class decree imposed on shepherds, farmers and family people born in different villages, is obvious... and therefore the need of shelter for Maria who was in such delicate condition, was all the more critical.

**No room at the hostel:** In La Posada, which literally means, "the inn" or "place of shelter," we each aim to make ourselves into a receptive, welcoming inn, a sheltering refugio, a place for the Child to be born.

We make this temenos in ourselves via examination of the condition of the rooms of our hearts. In us, via refurbishing, cleansing those rooms, readying them to receive the Guests. In us, via our actions in the world that are of a *hospitable* nature. In us, in the way we make room for light -- or fail to -- with every mundane and holy happenstance within our reach... all this and more.

In Posada, we muster for this measuring and remodeling by confronting our foibles, our weaknesses, our overly prideful strengths, our lack of love, our brevity of real care and regard, impulses to love too much and thereby ruin ourselves or whatever we "over-love." This self-questioning is not meant to be punitive but rather, in the spirit of the birth of the Light of the World, that is, *enlightening* to our tired, stale ways of thinking/acting in the past year.

**Too, there is significant synchronicity between the theme of the inn found in Luke's writing, and our actual Latino history, in part as a conquered people who are still trying to heal.** As reverent and orderly as some Posadas may seem, they in fact carry a deeper root, one that cannot be parsed well via intellectual or academic analyses only.

Sometimes, in order to better translate the soul's intelligence, emphasis cannot be placed on whether an ancient innkeep reference inferred in an ancient manuscript, for instance, is strictly factual rather than allegorical. Sometimes the emphasis has to be on how modern people learn/remember soulfulness via the leitmotifs of ancient stories. Many find pathways to definitive renewal by understanding in their own ways, that a tiny story such as, "no room at the inn" can carry deep spiritual and psychological truths and guidance for them.

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Thus, unlike the inn keep of old, whom, for whatever reason, said, No room here for you Mother So Pregnant and So In Labor, no room here for you Father So Distraught... the heartbeat that runs through Posada pledges to give/find/invent/build shelter for The Light, the precious one-of-a-kind Light, and the one who carries that Light, Madre Maria. To find and celebrate, no matter how humble, all who want to, wish to, will say Yes! to making room for the Light.

**And a strong underlying root that ties Luke's inference of innkeeper to church practices of Posada? It is this:** We sometimes speak about the story of the Inn as being a story of "not seeing..." not being able to imagine what is coming next. Not seeing the Light of the World is present and in need of protection. And in that, is our Latino connection as a tribal people, to our own naive failure to protect. It wasn't that we turned away the Light. It was that many years ago, and too often now as well, we did not know to turn away those who would destroy our lights, and the Light.

Miré: Once long ago, but still in fresh memory, Latinos as a people for as far as you can see ocean to ocean on a map... we tragically tried to offer hospitality to our own murderers; we naively offered "rooms at our inns" to those who would become, in fact, our killers; we offered friendship to conquerors whose only light carried was the glitter in their eyes for lucre, gold and slaves...

Thus, we learned grievously from having the lights of our science, our astronomy, our healing methods, our great literature, our artworks, dancers, storytellers, our holy people, our writers, our children, our old

people, our mothers and fathers killed off and doused forever... we learned from being murdered wholesale in every way possible, that we now have to be ever vigilant, to fight back against darkness's first footfall, to stave off the dark's first bony thrust that tries to kill any aspect of the Light. To say 'no room at the inn' when it's a viper who's asking to be kept, but 'yes,' ever 'yes' to making room for the Light of the World.

**This is a good part of the reason why we *become* La posada, why we become each of us, an inn, why so many sing loud** and dance strong at this darkest time of the year. This is why the old prayers are chanted out loud during this time, the young people stumbling over the old phrases because they are still learning them. The old people pray louder then, covering the small mistakes of the young who are still learning.

This is why at this darkest time of year we sway with our rosaries in that little dance that overtakes our bodies as we pray the beads aloud. This is why we wear our mantillas to shutter out the distractions on all sides, making a little church right before our eyes... one wall of which is our own face, the other walls made up of the veil that literally stands between the worlds.

This is why we light our velas, vigil candles, willingly burning our fingers by purposely cupping the fire, 'offering up' and doing everything we can to protect the little flames from the cold wind that we know, that we have always known. The flame, whether of hearth or of heart, cannot in the dead of winter, be allowed to go out. Everyone has fire clan memory. Once lost, this way of knowing about the preciousness of Light, remains in the blood forever.

This is why those in Posada, looking like a herd of giant black crows in dark overcoats, clump together in awkward procession from the church, accidentally stepping on each others' heels as they stop/start, stop/start, lurching forward with such perfect broken-hearted love inside ... striving to create in themselves shelter for the Light immanent.

**Many a soul's silent litany goes something like this: They may have killed us long ago, but we are still alive. Completely alive.** Thus, we make processions, thus we create Posadas, all in the dark... to show that we are still here, and that the Light will never, ever be unprotected again, that the Light is not 'out there' somewhere lost, but is being cradled and watched over by this 'imperfectly perfect' flock of human beings.

Thus, even as we all, just yesterday, bumbled into all kinds of errors, tonight, la gente, the people are wearing again the old feather-capes of holiness; the quetzal headdresses, and they are dancing and singing with literal fire in their hands, all in order to protect the Light of the World, the precious little Cristocito.

## **Part Two: The Ritual that continues to live**

**In Las Posadas, the intent is to travel with José y Maria y El Bebe, to not be separate from their travail and desperation in searching for safe haven for The Gift ...** (Today, as in times past, there is often the feeling of exile from the mainstream culture. We all sense this in some way. That sense of exilio is very real, and there is no 'pretending' about this matter to those who participate in Posada, for the underlying elements of being reviled, looked down upon, saying there is no place for you here, are still too often very real in our times.)

Thus, the La Posada ritual seeks to re-enact the spiritual and psychological fact of not being welcomed despite being a great Gift.

As with all other rituals, Posadas are practiced somewhat differently depending on locale, the family, the

parish, the country of origin, the venerable and cranky old women's say-sos.

There can be as many as nine nights to La Posada ritual, and so, beforehand, it is arranged that at the homes of nine pre-chosen people, when the pilgrims representing the Holy Family come to their doors, they will be sent away. Myriad people will refuse to give shelter to the Holy Family.

The rituals commences then, at night, with a procession beginning at the parish church, often accompanied by singing the Litany of La Virgen.

And then, with rosaries swinging and candles lit, the procession of souls walks into the night toward the first of the homes that will turn away those bearing the Christ Child.

**In some Posadas, each night, different people are chosen to portray Maria y José, and sometimes a child is chosen each night to portray the coming Child, or else, a beautiful little muñeca, doll or doll-like marionette of the Christ Child, the exact size of a newborn baby, is carried, swaddled and held close by people of various ages.**

When I lived in Albuquerque a thousand years ago, I remember in particular how a sweet staggering toddler carried the Cristocito with his mami and papi and abuelita waddling behind, crouching over the child to make sure the little Christ Child would not be accidentally dropped.

I also remember the old people in slouch hats, old ragged mantillas, woolen headscarves and woven sash-bandannas who walked with side to side swaying because of this bad hip or that crooked knee aching so...

and I remember an old one's hands which were like end-sawn boards from his years of labor...Those old hands had touched and learned so much about life and death... and they now held the little Christ Child muñeca so tightly to his chest, as though he alone had sole responsibility for protecting Christ's birth into the world -- that if he didn't carry and hold on tight to the radiant little child, the entire world would somehow remain dark forever.

**Thus, the traveling procession proceeds from house to house, and when I lived in Taos, for La Posada is in dead of winter, some dressed in burlap biblical clothes? they'd made and then wore their combat or flak jackets over, or their long black overcoats with the big celluloid buttons over housedresses that were patterned like wallpaper, their pea jackets or wool and cotton rebozos, shawls.**

Singing, much singing, and crowding together on the side of the road, here and there stopping for old knees bending into a Pueblo semblance of shuffle dance. A drum. A flute. Voices. Cristocito. The eyes of so many tired, worn down people filled with hope in the candlelight.

At each of the nine houses, knock, knock, knock, and silencio til the door was opened and the people behind the door, often uncles and aunts, abuelos y abuelitas, the elders, the neighbors, would answer, take one look, and in some form of high dudgeon, say, or snarl, or bellow, "No, no, go away?"

Some pretended harshness, "No, no room here for the likes of you!?"

Some answering sadly, "We're full already. No vacancy. I have no room for you?"

Some acted brittle and bitter: "No! Go away, don't let me catch you here again.?"

**And on one memorable occasion, one of the grandfathers of the house who'd already had a bit too much drinking his Christmas cheer, accidentally disrupted Posada by yelling the opposite sentiment over the "No, sorry, No room here, we're all booked up....?"**

From the kitchen, he cried out, "Ah Mio Dio, Yes! Come in! Come on, come one and all, we got plenty of room, what the hell you talking about? Come. Come."

"No abuelo, we're supposed to say No."

"Oh hell with no. Say yes! Say, Si, se puede. Say Yes, it can be done. Come in, we got plenty of room!"

And our Posada group of dark crows, feathers lit by firelight all flew in formation away from that house, having to decline abuelo's slightly tipsy invitation.

We had to instead go back out into the dark to search for shelter for Cristocito.... to search until we felt how deeply important it was, and how in some measure how a desperate search it had been for the Holy Family. To remember what was most important to shelter. To unite us all with ancient Maria y José y Jesús in a palpable way, rather than to separate us into two categories: modern audience merely watching ancient stage play.

So, time and again, the people who vowed to protect the Light, knocked at doors, and sang the songs asking for shelter.

**It is amazing what emotions, memories, thoughts and feelings come up for souls when their egos think they are, in one sense, only participating in a pageant.** I see it occur at Pesamé also, the time when after Christ's crucifixion and death, the statue of Maria is brought down from her alcove to the nave or altar rail, and prayerful people come to her on their knees to give her comfort and condolences.

Then too, you see men weep, and women tear up, and little children cry because they are in sometimes mysterious ways, moved by the loss of the Light of the World. The night between two days. The darkness without knowing for sure if the Light will be allowed to be born again, if the Light will make it through alive. We never know if it's the story or the longing the story causes us to remember, that makes so many weep.

And this element is in La Posada as well. A child answering the knock and saying in a sweet little voice, "No, no room for you here," can strike at any parent's heart who is trying to let go of a beloved child, any parent who is estranged from his or her child, any parent or grandparent who has lost a child, any squadron member who has lost a bud, any person suffering from feeling shunned. And you can hear the tears in the dark then; the tears come through the singing voices in the wavering, in the loss of timing.

And if the door is answered by a bent over elder, one so frail who cheeps out in a little voice like a tin flute, "No, no one can stay here?... you can be sure that those of us who have lost our mothers and fathers, those of us who have no elders left, those of us who long so badly for a mother or father who is real and loving to us, those of us who know the evanescence of life and always want to say to the very old, "Don't die, don't die, don't die..." well, then the pilgrim song asking to please give us shelter, deteriorates into some serious howling and sobbing.

**And it's alright. We're together. It's all alright. We hold each other. We hold onto each other, we comfort each other,** we hand Kleenex all around, hold candles for others while they dry their faces. Arms over shoulders now, arms around waists, a tribe of heart-wounded soldiers, we act as crutches and bandages for each other as we move to the next house, the next.

...until finally the search is ended. Finally, we come to the last house, where at the very end of the long search, the compassionate people welcome in the weary travelers.

Sometimes different old women stand as midwives in the last house, and hurry to take Maria by the arms and help her to lie down as well as any nine-months-pregnant-and-in-labor woman can lie down on a straight back chair when she can no longer fold in the middle, and sprawls with legs straight out.

We laugh about this, and there are inevitably reminiscences then about "the time I was ten months pregnant and big as a house," and how "her water broke, and I was so scared, I tried to put the house key in the ignition to get her to the hospital..." and other stories of the birth of someone's precious light in someone's precious world.

In this last house there will be servietas, special snowy linens folded just for this moment, and cakes and sweets and often a piñata, and there will be much rejoicing that at last has come a place for the soul that is pregnant with New Life to rest, and for José the protector to be congratulated and refreshed, and that a place of honor, no matter how humble, has been prepared for the Child of Light to be born.

Again.

**And we are changed.** We have gone through a dark night and been whipped around by memory-- ancestral and common and personal and momentous. We are not separate from Maria, we are not separate from José, we are not separate from the Cristocito.

**We are together in all this.** No one will be left stranded. We are the new innkeepers.

We know how to make room.

*May you always and forever*

*make room for The Light*

*And especially dear brave soul,*

*may room always be made for your special*

*and precious light here on earth.*

Blessed Christmas to us all.

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