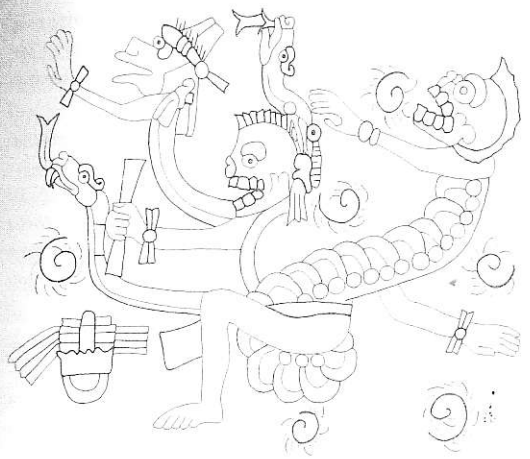


7.6 Various souls leaving the body of a dead person, in the Codex Vaticanus B (Drawing by Fonda Portales)

entities, in the physical body, which could be strengthened or weakened through the course of a person's life. All three had to function in harmony to maintain a person's balance and sanity. And if one of the entities was distressed, the others would be affected.

Like the body's transformation in death, the soul also experienced a conversion and separation, emphasizing, in yet another way, that the nature of life is transitory. Each of these experienced its own separation and journey at the time of death. An illustration in the *Codice Laud* depicts the distinct essence of each of the parts of the soul: The names of these entities are *tonalli* (head), *teyolia* (heart), and *ihiyotl* (liver or stomach).

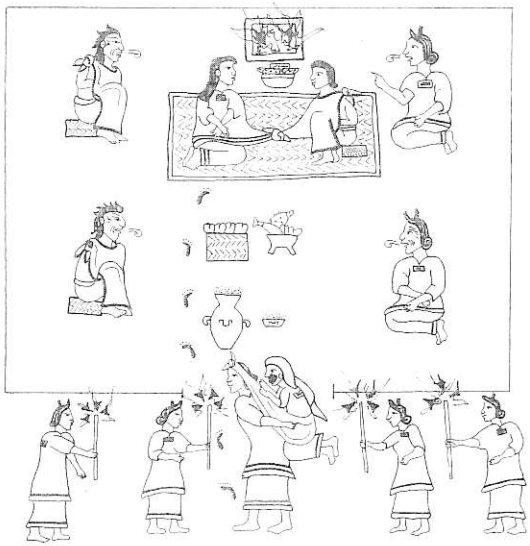
The *Tonalli*

The *tonalli* (from *tona*, "to irradiate" or "make warm with sun") was a complex entity that resided in the head or brain, harbored by the human skull. It was the force of will and intelligence and perhaps the most transferable energy among the living. It is believed that the *tonalli* was derived from the supreme god of duality, Ometeotl, and that it reached human beings at the moment of conception through the actions of celestial beings sending essential energy into the womb, depositing the energy into the head of the embryo. This energy shaped a person's character and destiny. Young infants and children were placed near the fire and eventually in the sun to acquire more *tonalli*. It was also present in animals, plants, and other objects.

As evidenced in the creation myth, the Sun and its warmth influenced all aspects of life, and it was also the primary source of energy for the *tonalli*. The very nature of *tonalli* was shifting and fragmented. It could be gained or lost through almost any interaction, especially with people such as family members or others with whom one had intimate contact. Other areas of the body where this energy resided were the hair, especially that found near the front area of the head (*piochtli*), and the fingernails. The hair in particular was thought to be the recipient of power and that it protected and prevented *tonalli* from escaping the body. Warriors captured their enemies by the hair to take their *tonalli* and increase their own. There was no greater prize in battle than the decapitated head of the enemy. This idea was often depicted in Aztec art and drawings.

Some present-day indigenous groups believe that *tonalli* is vulnerable to shocks and that they can get a disease known in Spanish as a *susto* or *espanto* (fright). Even the simple act of a person snapping their photograph or a hit or being scared by a surprise can cause them to lose their *tonalli*. Modern markets are filled with a variety of herbal remedies, and local healers offer spiritual treatments for *susto* called *limpias* (cleansings), which are intended to bring back the lost *tonalli*.

The *tonalli* remained near the body for four days after death in an attempt to retrieve all of the pieces of itself on Earth. Its journey after death also consisted of wandering about collecting its scattered portions. It was believed that the ritual burning of effigies on the anniversary of death for four years offered the deceased yet another opportunity for the individual to attract and recover even more fragments of *tonalli* left on Earth. Survivors of the deceased were to keep a part of their deceased's *tonalli* in the vessel that held his or her ashes and the locks of hair from birth and death.



13.1 Scenes from a marriage ceremony, in the Codex Mendoza (Fonda Portales)

When a match between a bride and groom was contracted, the *cihuatlanqui* consulted the soothsayer to set the wedding day. Weddings could only be performed on good day signs—Reed (Acatl), Monkey (Ozomatli), Crocodile (Cipactli), Eagle (Quauhtli), and House (Calli). These days were thought to be lucky and prosperous. It was the matchmaker's responsibility, together with the soothsayer, to make sure that the couple began their marriage on a fortunate day.

Before the day of the marriage a wedding feast was planned at the bride's home. Preparations for the feast could last approximately three days. The bride had a bath and washed her hair. She then sat near the fire on a dais covered with mats and the elders of the young man's family came to offer her advice. She was told to leave childishness and to be most considerate, to speak well and tend to the sweeping. The advice of an elder was strongly encouraged.

Once the marriage had been arranged, the matchmaker's duties did not cease. The wedding of the young bride began at night, when a procession of family, elderly women, and young unmarried girls carrying torches led her to the groom's house. The matchmaker who contracted the marriage carried the bride on h tting on a mat in front of the hearth, th re a new *huipilli* (tunic), beside her lay skirt. The groom, sitting next to her, wore a new mantle; beside him lay a new loincloth. The *cihuatlanqui*, acting as priest of the wedding ceremony, tied the bride's *huipilli* and the groom's mantle together and led them to the bedchamber, where they would stay and pray for four days under her guardianship. The bride and groom left the bedchamber only to give offerings at the family altar twice a day—noon and midnight. At the end of the four days, the couple could consummate their marriage. In these capacities, the matchmaker established her significance.

The Midwife

Midwives were respected women who supervised and assisted a woman's pregnancy and delivery, and performed the ceremonial rituals associated with childbirth. Aztec society cherished these women for their expertise in delivering children. Particularly revealing of the midwife's position in Aztec society is the turquoise earplug (*xiuhnacochtli*) she wore. Turquoise was a stone reserved for the venerated and powerful.

During a woman's pregnancy, the midwife (*temixiuitiani*, *tietl*, or *tlamatqui*) performed an extensive array of duties. She offered emotional support as well as medical advice. Given the Aztec love of speech and linguistic ceremony, the midwife addressed the pregnant woman with long speeches on how to protect the unborn child. The midwife instructed the woman never to chew *tzictli* (chewing gum), since this would cause the child to form a swollen mouth and a weak palate, leaving it unable to breast-feed. She also warned the pregnant woman never to look at red objects, since this would cause the child to be born in the wrong position. Advice was not reserved for the mother alone; the father, too, received admonitions. He should not look at phantoms for fear that the child would develop heart disease.

The midwife alone managed the household while a woman was pregnant. She prepared meals and took charge of the household chores. She also prepared baths for the pregnant woman and massaged

child, her family members gathered around her and praised her strength in enduring fatigue and pain in the arduous separation of the "jeweled necklace" or "quetzal feather" (affectionate nicknames for the newborn child) from her womb. They entered her domicile with ash on all parts of their bodies, especially on their joints and knees to prevent the newborn child from being lame. Even children in the cradle had their joints ashed for the occasion. For four days, a fire was kept constantly stoked; this symbolized the new child's importance in Aztec society.

A woman who died in childbirth was revered as a woman warrior. Her death for such a noble cause placed her among the deified, and rather than traveling to the underworld, she was carried to the palace of the Sun, where she was destined to become a goddess of the Cihuateteo. The husband carried his wife's corpse on his back to the temple of the *cihuapipiltin* (princesses) and guarded her body for four days before her burial at sunset. He, with the help of his friends and the midwife, kept watch for warriors who would potentially steal her body. Considered sacred, the middle finger of a dead woman's left hand was thought to bring luck for warriors in battle, and her stolen hair was thought to be a vestige of divinity. Soldiers believed that if they placed the hair or the finger in their shields, they would be brave and would blind their enemies (see chapter 5).

Widows could either remain unmarried or remarry. She could, for example, become a secondary wife to one of her husband's brothers, and it was not unknown for a widow to marry one of her husband's slaves and make him her steward.

When a woman turned 50, her domestic obligations ceased. She became an elderly woman respected for her advice and wisdom, allowed to make long speeches, and allowed to drink pulque until inebriated.

The Courtesan

Folio 63r of the *Codex Mendoza* illustrates a woman standing near a *telpochcalli* youth, and the glossing of the folio implies her promiscuity. She is plainly dressed, reflecting a commoner status. This illustration clearly indicates a sexual relationship between

13.3 Image of an auianime *(courtesan) in Diego Rivera's mural in the National Palace, Mexico City* (Fernando González y González)

the woman and the young warrior in training, regardless of the father's strong warning to his son to preserve his sexual energy for marriage.

Sahagún describes the courtesan (*auianime*) as a woman infatuated with her own beauty. According to him, the harlot paraded about the town wearing perfume, makeup, and ornate jewelry, and carried a mirror with her to check constantly her appearance. Casting incense around her as she walked, the *auianime* pretended to be jovial, waving and winking at passersby. Despite her merry disposition, she fell to ruin by her gaudy appearance and lascivious behavior, according to the Spanish friar. Interestingly, in spite of the conservatism of the Aztec society, which valued moderation and solemnity, the courtesan played a role in the community, as a socially accepted escape valve and a motivation for the arduous life of the warriors.

13.2 Image of a midwife handling an infant after delivery, in the Codex Mendoza (Drawing by Fonda Portales)

her belly, readying the womb for labor. When a woman first became pregnant, she bathed initially with the midwife in the *temazcalli;* here the midwife gently shook the womb to inspect how the baby lay.

Given the complications of childbirth, the midwife needed to have a comprehensive knowledge of medicinal herbs and surgical methods. When the pregnant woman neared delivery, the midwife gave her *cinapatli* (a medicinal plant) to cause contractions. If this prescription proved ineffective, the midwife administered a liquid mixture of water and opossum tail (*tlaquatzin*) to hurry contractions. This mixture brought an abrupt and even violent delivery. If the child died in the womb due to complications, the midwife dismembered the fetus and extracted the remains.

After a woman successfully delivered, the midwife gave a long speech to warn the infant of the dangers and sorrows in life. The midwife also cut the umbilical cord, washed the baby, performed the naming ceremony, and recited prayers for the new child. Cutting the umbilical cord required more than performing the incision. A midwife was in charge of protecting the umbilical cord from theft. If the child was a girl, the midwife placed the dried umbilical in the hearth and prayed that the girl grow to be a talented weaver and gifted cook; if the child was a boy, the midwife placed the dried umbilical cord on the battlefield and prayed that the young boy grow to be a valiant and successful warrior. Praying to Chalchiuhtlicue, the water goddess, the midwife dedicated the child to her care. Today, near the shrine of Chalma, this practice continues. Pilgrims often travel great distances to hang the umbilical cords of their newborns as offerings to fertility on the huge *ahuehuete* tree (a thick cypress), from which water springs out of the roots.

During the naming ceremony, the midwife acted as priest and ritually bathed the child under the early morning's sunlight, making sure to bathe the child on a fortunate day. If the child was born on an unfortunate day, it was the midwife's responsibility to postpone the bathing ritual and naming ceremony. She performed four water rites, during which she warded off evil spirits and begged the gods to watch over the new infant. After these rites, observing children shouted out the new child's chosen name, and a great feast, according to the family's means, followed.

The Wife/Mother

The Aztec woman married around the age of 15, and sometimes as young as 10 or 12. Aztec society expected her to be clean, hardworking, talented in the kitchen, and proficient at housekeeping—persistent in sweeping and purifying her home of evil spirits. The wife's domestic role, however, did not make her a second-class citizen. She was vital to the economic condition of her family. A wife owned her own property. She wove materials to be sold at the market as well as to pay tribute to the government. She tended to the family's domestic animals, making sure the animals could be sold for fair prices. Attending to the needs of her family's health and well-being, she ground maize for five to six hours a day to cook delicious meals. And finally, attending to the needs of her community, she prepared meals for offerings at the temple that ultimately fed the priests, as well as meals for warriors as they fought in battle. The image of an Aztec woman sitting at her loom all day reflects only the upper-class nobility, who, because they could afford servants, had time for more relaxing activities.

A woman's most important role was that of mother. In giving birth, a woman achieved the recognition and respect of the warrior. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún recounts the festivities surrounding a woman giving birth. When a woman delivered a