



SACRED TRADITIONS: THE CREATION OF A *DESPACHO*

By Anita Stewart

The reverent creation and offering of a *Despacho* gives each of us the chance to step into the sacred center of our own life, offering deep gratitude and prayers for our world. *Despachos* are most often offered to *Pachamama* (the energies of Mother Earth), or to the *Apukuna* (the energies of the mountain spirits). When we make a *Despacho*, we prepare a delicious meal for the Unseen world --- it is as if we cooked and served a holiday dinner for our families and our friends, while consciously adding love and prayers along with each of the main ingredients and the spices!

In the Andes Mountains of Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia, a man or woman initiated into the path of service and healing is called a *Paqo*. *Paqos* study for many years to develop skills of working with the energies of the seen and unseen world and to understand *Ayni*, sacred reciprocity, as it operates in the world. A *Paqo* may learn to make dozens (some say hundreds) of types of *Despachos*, as he or she learns how to work with the flow of energy.

Here in the United States, although few people have developed that deep level of understanding of the traditional Andean *Despacho*, we can create and offer a beautiful ritual offering using items from nature that we find here. These ingredients may come from the grocery store or from the woods or beach near our own homes. Wherever we live, we are still able to add an essential ingredient to each item that we place in the *Despacho* --- our heartfelt gratitude for the many gifts we have received and our prayers for the healing of our beloved planet.

What is a *Despacho*?

Physically, a *Despacho* is composed of items called *Recados*, that are infused with prayers, then ceremonially arranged in a beautiful pattern on a large piece of paper. The mandala- like creation is folded into a bundle and ritually offered to the fire or to the earth.

A *Despacho* traditionally includes *Recados* associated with each of the directions, representing different elements. It may include:

- Animal products to feed the *Tirakuna*, the watcher spirits in the South
- Plant products for the *Awkis*, the nature spirits of the West
- Mineral products like sand and crystal for the *Mallkis*, the spirits of the great trees of the North
- Creations we make with our own hands for the *Machula Aulanchis*, the Benevolent Old Ones of the East, who love beautiful things that humans create (for example, a poem that you write or a picture that you draw).
- A shell, a cross, and *Untu* (llama fat) often placed in the center



How is a *Despacho* created?

If we were in Peru, we would probably go to the *Curanderos'* (healers') market and purchase a *Despacho* kit, a large bundle containing many small items individually wrapped in newspaper. Then we would add fresh red flowers for *Pachamama* and white flowers for the Apus. The *Despacho* would then be created, activated, and offered by the ceremonial leader.

Here in the United States, we can respect the *Despacho* tradition of the Andes by following the essential steps in the process and by learning about the deeper meaning of what we are creating, rather than simply following a "recipe." We use items from the Andes or from our own culture, selected to symbolize and embody the intention we hold for the *Despacho*. Examples of traditional *Despacho* items: Shell, cross, bay leaves, flowers, candies, cookies, sugar, cotton, nuts, grains, seeds, tobacco, cornmeal, animal fat or jerky, feathers, tiny crystals, powdered stones or minerals, gold and silver foil or beads, something you have written or drawn, spices, incense, photos, red string or yarn to tie the package, Florida water or wine to sprinkle on the *Despacho*.

As we create the *Despacho* in an atmosphere of reverence, we connect our loving intentions with the prayers of people throughout the Andes, as well as with people in varied cultures in other parts of the world, where similar offerings in different forms are a part of daily life.

What are the main parts of a *Despacho* ceremony?

- 1) Establish our intention for the *Despacho*.
- 2) Identify someone as ceremonial leader for the ritual offering.
- 3) Assemble the *Despacho* ingredients.
- 4) Consecrate the ground, as we would to establish space for an altar or mesa. Place *Khuyas* on the central mesa and activate the mesa, as we prepare ourselves and the sacred space for ceremony. Speak our intention and prayers for this *Despacho* offering.
- 5) Create the *Despacho*, either individually or together as part of a group ceremony (for details, see below).
- 6) Activate the *Despacho* through prayer and invocation.
- 7) Offer the *Despacho* to the fire or the earth.



How do we create a *Despacho*?

There are many ways to create a *Despacho*. Here is a simplified outline of steps to create a community *Despacho*. Medicine songs or music may be offered during this process. The ceremonial leader coordinates the steps of the ceremonial process and the timing.

Lay out the paper and the offering items in the west of the mesa. Each person circles the mesa clockwise, selects an item, and takes it back to her seat. She then holds the item in her right hand, and gently breathes a prayer into it. When the ceremonial leader directs, each person circles back to the west and places the item onto the *Despacho* paper, in a way that creates a beautiful and balanced arrangement of the whole.

After all the items have been beautifully laid out on the paper, the paper is folded carefully to contain the arrangement. After folding the paper, the pattern of the design no longer exists in the physical form --- yet the feeling of the design remains in our minds and is held in the energies all around us, even after we bundle and wrap the *Despacho*.

Tie yarn around the *Despacho* bundle, wrap it like a gift, and sprinkle with Florida water or an alcoholic beverage. Wrap the *Despacho* in a ceremonial cloth (which will be removed, before the offering is placed in the fire or in the earth).

How do we activate the completed *Despacho*?

The *Paqo* or ceremonial leader prays over the ritual bundle and may also ask that each participant breathe in a final prayer to help energize the completed *Despacho*.

How do we offer the *Despacho*?

Most commonly, a *Despacho* is offered to the fire and burned, or depending on its purpose, it may instead be offered to the earth or water. Someone prepares the fire or digs a hole in the earth. The fire or the ground is fed with cornmeal, tobacco, and coca leaves (bay leaves or other local leaves, if you are here in the U.S.), and is given a libation of alcohol or Florida water.

Medicine songs and music may be offered at this time, to deepen the feeling of sharing sacred space.

When the time feels right, the carrier of the *Despacho* goes to the place where the offering will be presented (often, from the east of the fire) and all the participants form a circle.



The Pachakuti Mesa Tradition

Oscar Miro-Quesada

The carrier of the *Despacho* unwraps the fabric from around the bundle. She reverently places the *Despacho* in the fire (to send its prayers through the rising smoke) or in the earth (to plant its intention, like planting a seed in the ground).

Everyone continues to hold space, until the ceremonial leader indicates that it is time to close the circle, either when the offering has been completely consumed by the fire or when she or he intuitively knows that the ceremony is complete.

Remember

We are creating beauty through the art of the Despacho, as we say “Thank you!” and return a small part of the many gifts we have received back to the Source.

Take pleasure in each step along the way ... this is a form of sacred play, as you select and offer your ceremonial medicine to the world!