

# Francisco I Madero

Francisco I Madero (1873-1913) was a Mexican landowner and democracy campaigner who launched a revolution, was elected the country's 37<sup>th</sup> president and was then assassinated. This article describes Madero's deep interest in mediumship research and spiritism, and the influence of these on his business and political activities.

## Life and Career

Francisco Ignacio Madero González was born on 30 October 1873 at the hacienda of El Rosario in the town of Parras, state of Coahuila.<sup>[1]</sup> His family was one of the wealthiest in northeastern Mexico. He was raised as a Catholic, but never felt enthusiasm for its creed. Aged twelve he was briefly a pupil of the Jesuits in Saltillo, Coahuila. Between 1887 and 1893 he attended different schools in France and the United States to complete his general education as a business administrator.

Aged 30, he returned to Mexico and took over a family hacienda, which he ran on progressive principles, showing a strong commitment to social justice and philanthropy. An outspoken advocate of democracy, he used his wealth to campaign against the autocratic president Porfirio Díaz, was jailed prior to elections in 2010 and escaped to the United States. There, he called for the violent overthrow of Díaz and, entering Northern Mexico, fought the government at the head of a revolutionary army supported by American arms and finance. The revolutionaries having eventually prevailed, Madero was elected president in 1911. But his moderate policies were opposed by radicals. After a year in office he was ousted in a military coup d'état and was shortly afterwards assassinated.

## Interest in Spiritism and Theosophy

In 1891, while studying at the École de Hautes Études Commerciales in Paris, Madero read a few issues of the *Revue Spirite* founded by Allan Kardec and was deeply impressed by the 'beauty', 'logic', and 'rationality' of the doctrines he found there.<sup>[2]</sup> He read Kardec's books and joined spiritist circles, where he observed some 'interesting mediumistic phenomena' and discovered his own mediumistic abilities. In 1893, while studying agricultural techniques at the University of California, he became acquainted with theosophical literature of Annie Besant, Henry S Olcott, and other leaders of Helena Blavatsky's movement.

Following his return to Mexico in 1903, Madero began to experiment systematically as a scribe medium receiving communications in writing, guided by Kardec's *Book of Mediums*. According to the memoir he wrote in prison in 1909, he made contact with invisible beings who instructed him about 'transcendental' moral and philosophical matters.<sup>[3]</sup> This inspired a considerable part of the ideological and ethical principles which he set forth as leader of the revolutionary movement known as *maderismo*.<sup>[4]</sup> He declared that his beliefs concerning the meaning of man's life on earth, the origins of life, matter and spirit, the immortality of the human soul, and reincarnation, came to him as a result of his conversion to spiritism and theosophy.<sup>[5]</sup>

In 1904 he joined a spiritist circle in San Pedro, Coahuila, and began a long correspondence with similar groups in Mexico and Spain.<sup>[6]</sup> In a letter to a coreligionist Juan Farías (10 March 1904) he mentions séances where the trances of psychic mediums made clear that magnetism 'is a real fluid, capable of producing a weak light when the current is very intense'. He added these details:

The phenomenon to which I refer was that, as we broke the magnetic chain that we had formed in the dark, a luminous current formed independently between two of our companions. We

renewed the same experience and the phenomenon was repeated, although not with the same intensity as the first time. I'll pass over other effects that we've seen because they are very common in spiritist séances, but this one of which I speak I've never seen it described in any book.<sup>[7]</sup>

He was convinced that the truths of spiritism should be propagated for the edification of mankind. Between 1905 and 1908 he held an intense correspondence with theosophists and spiritists, among them Léon Denis, one of the most popular of Kardec's followers.<sup>[8]</sup> He contributed articles to Mexican spiritist magazines under the *nom de plume* 'Arjuna'.<sup>[9]</sup>

Madero claimed there was no essential disagreement between spiritism and theosophy, but rather the contrary. On 1 January of that year, he wrote to coreligionist Manuel Salamanca:

Theosophy has the same fundamental basis as Spiritism (the progress of the Spirit through countless incarnations) and the only difference between them concerns the (apparent) origin of their revelation. ... If you study carefully the works of Allan Kardec, León Denis and Gabriel Delanne ... you will find that they constantly strive to demonstrate the likeness of the spiritist doctrine to the great religions of Antiquity in their esoteric sense. Such esoterism is Theosophy itself ... which for its comprehension constantly demands the development of our moral and intellectual faculties, and wants nothing from us but that we believe in that which our reason admits ... [Theosophy] not only brings us very useful teachings which come from the immense treasures accumulated in Hindu temples, but is particularly necessary in England and the United States, where the huge majority of spiritists do not admit reincarnation, the fundamental base of the Spiritist school led by Kardec, Delanne, etc.<sup>[10]</sup>

In February 1906 he founded the Society for Psychical Studies of San Pedro, Coahuila, to 'study spiritism and create circles of research'.<sup>[11]</sup> From their studies he and his partners determined that apparitions, clairvoyance, levitation, miracles, and other psychic or exceptional phenomena were real, physical facts, subjected to fixed and invariable laws. Those facts, he argued, should be examined by the positivist method of hypothesis in order to obtain 'metaphysical deductions', such as a thorough 'doctrine of the spirit' which would serve as a more elegant and logical philosophy than either materialism or Catholic theology. For Madero, spiritism was the one doctrine capable of satisfying man's most noble aspirations, truly able to solve psychological and social problems.

In 1908 Madero offered new results of mediumship research at the Second National Spiritist Congress, arguing that spiritism is a 'scientific religion'.<sup>[12]</sup> The paper conveys a dramatic, typically Kardecist view of the spirit's material evolution in connection with Pierre-Simon de Laplace's nebular theory and showing concordance between ancient hermetic ideas, and the discoveries of modern science.<sup>[13]</sup>

In September 1909 Madero embarked on a 'Manual espírita' (*Spiritist manual*), an exposition of the spiritist creed and an attack on materialistic philosophy. This was published under the pseudonym 'Bihma' in 1911, after he had been elected Mexico's president. Organized in the form of a catechism, it was 'dedicated to the youth, the working classes, and the masses in general'.<sup>[14]</sup> It stresses the reality of mediumship, reincarnation, and the law of evolution which determines the progress of spirits. Psychic phenomena such as hypnotism, telepathy, and mediumship are real because every human personality is endowed with certain 'psychic forces'.

Madero viewed mediumship as a peculiar force because 'it can only manifest its effects with the cooperation of the spirits who inhabit space'. He considered that every material body is controlled by a spiritual entity, and 'spirits follow certain procedures to exert their influence over the inhabitants of our world'. That influence is the 'spiritist revelation' which, along with 'scientific

experimentation of mediumistic and animistic phenomena’, proves that ‘in each incarnation the spirit increases its wisdom and virtue, until the moment comes when, being highly developed, it finds its material encasement rather narrow, and so it irradiates outwardly and produces’ all kinds of paranormal phenomena.<sup>[15]</sup>

## Archive

The official archive of Madero’s literary legacy is the ‘Fondo Histórico Francisco I. Madero’, administered by the Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, OM-DGPCAP. It is here where the bulk of his writings on spiritism and psychic research can be found.

## Works

### Books and Manuscript Editions

*Archivo de don Francisco I. Madero. Epistolario* [Archive of don Francisco I. Madero. Collected Letters] (2 vols.) (2021, ed. by Roberto R. Narváez ). [Vol. I \(1900-October 1909\)](#), [Vol. II \(November 1909-1910\)](#). with introduction and notes. México: INEHRM.

Bihma (pseudonym) (1911). *Manual Espírita* [Spiritist Manual]. México: Tipografía ‘Artística’, 1ª de la Violeta y 4ª de Soto.

*Obras completas de Francisco Ignacio Madero: Escritos sobre espiritismo, doctrina espírita, 1901-1913.* [Complete Works of Francisco Ignacio Madero: Writings on spiritism, spiritist doctrine]. Vol. 7 (2000, ed. by Alejandro Rosas Robles). México: Clío. *Cuadernos espíritas, 1900-1908 (Spiritist notebooks)*. Vol. 8 (2000, ed. by Alejandro Rosas Robles). México: Clío, ed. by Alejandro Rosas Robles.

### Selected Articles and Lectures

El Moderno Espiritualismo en México [Modern Spiritualism in Mexico] (1905). *Alma*, 15 November.

Estudio remitido al Primer Congreso Espírita por el delegado Francisco I. Madero (1906). *El Siglo Espírita*, 10, 17, 24, and 31 May, and 7 June.

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Comentarios al Baghavad Gita [Commentaries to the Baghavad Gita] (1912). *Helios* 7, 8-10.

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## Literature

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I. Madero', SHCP-OM-DGPCAP.

Ross, SR. (1955). *Francisco I. Madero: Apostle of Democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tortolero Villaseñor, A. (2004). *El Espiritismo Seduce a Francisco I.*

*Madero [Spiritism seduces Francisco I. Madero]*. México: Senado de la República.

## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- 1.^ All the information in this section comes from Ross (1955).
- 2.^ Madero (2021), vol. I, 13.
- 3.^ Madero (2021), vol. I, 20-22.
- 4.^ In a letter to his father dated 20 January 1909, he said that *The Presidential Succession of 1910*, a book of his authorship through which he publicised his political ideals, largely derived its contents from his mediumistic trances. Madero (2021), vol. I, 783.
- 5.^ Madero (2021), vol. I, 13.
- 6.^ Madero (2021), vol. I, 157. Tortolero Villaseñor (2004), 84.
- 7.^ His interest in magnetism awoke especially as a result of his own practice in homeopathic medicine. Madero (2021), vol. I, 194.
- 8.^ Madero (2021), vol. I, 180, 404, 424, 579.
- 9.^ Madero (2021), vol. I, 288.
- 10.^ Madero (2021), vol. I, 392.
- 11.^ Madero, 'Documentos sobre espiritismo', Fondo Histórico Francisco I. Madero, 35159-60.
- 12.^ Madero (2021), vol. I, 664.
- 13.^ Madero (1908), 9458-76.
- 14.^ Quoted from the version published as appendix to Madero's *Collected Letters*, Madero (2021), vol. II, 2225, 2227.
- 15.^ Madero (2021), vol. II, 2229-30.