

USING THE TZOLK'IN TO UNDERSTAND YOUR DREAMS

According to some Maya Daykeepers, each human being is born with two souls. One of them is known as the *uxlab*. The Spanish word *anima* is often used to describe this aspect of soul, since it is identical to what Catholic Christians perceive as the soul. It is invested in the body and in breathing. It remains within the body until the moment of our death.

The second aspect of the soul is quite different. In the K'iche' language, it is called *uwach uk'ij*, which literally means "the face of his or her day." In other words, this is the energy template or imprint of the Sacred Calendar day upon which we are born. More often than not, the Maya use the word *nawal* to describe this aspect of the soul. The word is borrowed from the Nahuatl word *nagual*, though its meaning is different from what you've seen in Castaneda's books. To the K'iche' Maya, our *nawal* is our day-sign, our spiritual essence, our archetypal imprint. And this is the soul which dreams. The *anima* may be vested within the human body, but the *nawal* is not. It can roam freely through the astral world while we are asleep. In its travels, it may meet and interact with the wandering *nawales* of others, whether humans, animals, plants or even minerals. From such interactions are our dreams fashioned and created.

I had known for many years that Daykeepers use dreamwork to monitor the spiritual progress of their clients. The shamanic teacher or road guide is also an expert dream interpreter, one who can guide the student in learning how to access the archetypal dreams in which the gods speak to us. Dreams are used to diagnose both physical conditions and mental states. Barbara Tedlock mentioned this practice in her 1981 landmark study, *Time and the Highland Maya*, as well as in a collection of ethnographic material on cultural dreaming practices. She did not supply details.

As part of our ongoing Curandera Project, my colleague Anita Garr and I paid a visit to well-known Momostenango Daykeeper Rigoberto Itzep Chanchavac, who had agreed to talk with us about Mayan concepts of energies within the body. When we arrived, however, he said that he would prefer to discuss dreams. He described the entire technique of shamanic dream interpretation in some detail (all of which will appear in the new book). In this article, I only have space for a mere outline.

Here is how it works. I will use the K'iche' terms in which I was taught rather than the more familiar Yucatec words which are common on the Internet, but I shall put the Yucatec terms in parentheses in hopes that the reader will not be confused

1) Keep a dream journal. Make note of the *ch'ol q'ij* (Yucatec: *tzolk'in*) day upon which the dream occurs.

How do we distinguish the day upon which a dream occurs? Let us say that it is 5 Ajpu (Yucatec: Ahau). At sundown of that day, the shamans will light candles at their shrines to welcome the energy of 6 Imox (Imix), which is just beginning. Throughout the night its energy will increase as 5 Ajpu vanishes farther into the underworld. When dawn comes, the energy of 6 Imox will rule alone and 5 Ajpu will have vanished completely. Therefore the day upon which the dream occurs is 6 Imox.

2. Examine the dream for any symbols which correlate with the day-sign Imox. Many times, of course, you will not discern any match between the symbolism of your dream and the symbolism of the day-sign. **But if a match occurs, it means you have had an important dream.**

3. Some days are more important than others. Be especially alert regarding dreams which occur on your own day-sign. Don Rigoberto also told us that days which occur upon the *nawal* Iq' (Yucatec: Ik) are especially important.

4. There are no cut-and-dried meanings such as one might find in a "Gypsy Witch Dream Book" at the local outlet store. Let us suppose that you have dreamed of having an argument with someone. If the dream occurred on a No'j (Caban) day, it means that you are out of harmony with your community because No'j has to do with the thoughts and ideas we share with others. If it occurred on an Ajpu (Ahau) day, you are out of harmony with your ancestors, because Ajpu symbolizes those who have passed before us. Under such circumstances, you will want to look back in reflection over your extended family system for dysfunctional patterns that continue to affect your life. If you dream of planting seeds on a Q'anil (Lamat) day, your current project will flourish, because Q'anil symbolizes the harvest; agricultural ceremonies are held on Q'anil days, and this is the day upon which *curanderas* gather healing herbs. If such a dream occurs on a Tz'ikin (Men) day, you are about to make money, because Tz'ikin is the "money day," and your dream seeds are seeds of prosperity. If such a dream occurs on a Tijax (Etnab) day, you are about to act as a teacher to others, because one of the higher meanings of Tijax is "the spiritual teacher," so your seeds are "seeds of wisdom."

Clearly, it is necessary to know the symbolism of the day-signs in great detail in order to perform this practice.

5. Here are a few more details, acquired from Barbara Tedlock rather than directly from Don Rigoberto. However, they all form part of the same tradition: Barbara's teacher was Andres Xiloj, and Don Rigoberto has studied directly with members of the Xiloj family.

If a dream remains "incomplete," in the sense that your recollection of the dream seems tentative and without a clear message, you can finish the dream by entering back into it. Here again, the Sacred Calendar is of great importance. Let us say that such an "incomplete" dream took place on 4 B'atz' (Chuen). The next recurrence of a B'atz' day will take place twenty days later; this will be 11 B'atz'. During those twenty days, you may meditate upon the dream and its meaning in preparation to attempting to re-enter the dream and bring it to a conclusion. The attempt to re-enter the dream will take place on 11 B'atz'.

For some, this technique is closely related to "lucid dreaming," in the sense that the dreamer is an active participant rather than a passive one, but those of us who have not mastered the art of lucid dreaming (which is most of us) may also perform this technique as a meditation, allowing your memories of the dream to guide you, in imagination, back into an altered state of consciousness wherein you "see" the conclusion of the dream. Interestingly enough, this method is replicated in almost every detail by Jungian analysts under the term "active imagination."

6. If you wish to consciously seek out an important dream, here is a technique from Yucatan. Try it on your own day-sign, or upon an Iq' day. Drink a glass of warm water mixed with a tablespoon of lemon juice. Do this about an hour after dinner in order to give yourself time to digest first, as well as time to make a few trips to the bathroom before retiring. While falling asleep, practice deep and regular breathing. Clear your mind of all thoughts and worries relating to the day just past, the day ahead, or mundane life in general. Instead, imagine the wings of a bird, moving slowly and rhythmically, the wings of the *nawal* carrying you into the dream world. Let the serene motion of the *nawal's* flight guide you to the magic of an archetypal dream.