

# HEALING AND THE CALENDAR

by Ken Johnson

One of the more extraordinary things that has been happening to us in the course of the Curandera Project is our discovery of just what a powerful role the *tzolk'in* plays in the art of healing.

We did not expect this. Previous works on Mayan healing have focused on Yucatan, Belize, and Chiapas, where the *tzolk'in* has not been common for many years. We worked primarily in Momostenango, where the calendar has always remained alive. And we found that it absolutely permeates the world of the healers.

In the first place, there are certain day signs which have a strong association with the art of healing. This means that healing rituals are commonly carried out on these days; and it also means that natives of these day signs may exemplify a special gift for the healing arts.

Foremost among these days are Tijax (Etnab) and Kawoq (Cauac). Tijax is, of course, the sign of the obsidian knife. Two kinds of people wield the knife: warriors and surgeons. This day has a very masculine energy, and therefore it is most especially associated with male healers. Kawoq is a much more feminine sign; in some ways, one may think of it as the sign of the Divine Feminine. It is a day sign of midwives, herbalists, and female healers in general. Rituals for healing are commonly performed on both Tijax and Kawoq days.

Another important sign for healing is Q'anil (Lamat). In the K'iche' language, *q'anil* means "yellowing" or "ripening," and has a special link with plants and agricultural growth. Herbs are plants; therefore, Q'anil has a strong association with herbalism. The herbalist Victoria Kej told us that she always gathers herbs when the full moon corresponds with a Q'anil day. (The village Maya use the term "full moon" to mean the several days per month when the moon gives the physical appearance of being full. A Q'anil day will correspond with a "full" moon two or three times per year.) Likewise, healing ceremonies are often performed on Q'anil days – Doña Victoria did ritual for us on the day 6 Q'anil.

I have already spoken of how shamans examine one's dreams for symbolism connected with the day upon which the dream occurred. It is believed that the natives of certain day signs have a strong innate talent for this kind of dreamwork – the ones we have most often heard mentioned were Tz'ikin (Men), No'j (Caban) and Imox (Imix).

The Mayan definition of "health and well-being" is different than our own. In Western culture we are considered "healthy" if we eat the correct food, get lots of exercise, and if the doctor's tests indicate that we are in good health. While all these things are important, in Mayan culture they are not enough. Don Jose Sanic Chanchavac, a professor of Mayan languages in Guatemala City and an authority on Mayan healing, kindly agreed to be interviewed by us while he was visiting his home town of Momostenango. He asserted that in order to enjoy true healthfulness, one must be in harmony with: 1) Mother Earth, which means that we are in ecological harmony with the planet all around us, 2) our ancestors, meaning our entire family history and those who

are part of it, including those who have passed, 3) our community, meaning harmony with our neighbors, 4) Grandmother Moon, meaning natural cycles, and 5) the *nawales*, meaning the day signs of the *tzolk'in*.

If we are not exemplifying the most positive aspects of our day sign, we are not in harmony with the *nawales*. If we are unhappy with our marriage or partnership, we are not in harmony with the day sign B'atz' (Chuen). If we suffer from the ravages of a dysfunctional family system, we are out of harmony with the day sign Ajpu (Ahau).

It is the business of the traditional healer to place us in harmony with all these things, always in accordance with the *tzolk'in*. I remember asking Doña Victoria about the essence of Mayan healing in general. She just laughed and said, "It's all about the calendar...."

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