

SACRED TIME

by **Kenneth Johnson**

The Sacred Calendar is about time.

We all know what time is—or think we do. It is a succession of dawns and sunsets, days and nights and seasons. We may divide it into hours and minutes or years and centuries, but we can never step outside of it—except perhaps in moments of special awareness which constitute the peak experiences of life. Time is one of the essential words. Life itself is subject to the regimen of time—not just human and animal life, but the life of planets and galaxies as well. Time is an inescapable fact of existence. Our personal quantum of biological energy will wind down in time, and time will overcome us in the end. We regard time as a kind of taskmaster, a relentless clock that holds us always in its grasp, ticking away the minutes toward our eventual extinction. Time is the linear reality that gives shape and pattern to our lives, defining our mortality.

According to many traditional societies, there are two dimensions of time: ordinary time and sacred time.

What has just been described is ordinary time.

If ordinary time represents a process to which all of us are subject and before which all of us are ultimately powerless, then sacred time represents cosmic order. It is the foundation of rhythm and motion. Without the sense of cosmic order implied by this sacred dimension of time, nothing could happen. There would be no loom upon which to weave the tapestry of life.

Sacred time exists contemporaneously with ordinary time. It is fashioned of the same elements—seasonal and celestial—which comprise ordinary time. It is simply our altered or ritualized perception of time that allows us to enter its sacred dimension.

When the shaman draws his magic circle, or when a priest approaches the altar to celebrate the mass, he enters ritual space. This is a sacred place where the ordinary laws of reality do not apply. This is where magic happens. Here lies the center of the universe.

We enter ritual space in our daily lives whenever we pray or meditate, whenever we create—in short, whenever we pay homage to the presence of the divine in our lives. For that moment, we are at the center of the universe. Whenever we enter ritual space, we enter ritual time as well.

Ordinary time may be going on all around us, but we are no longer a part of it. Our perception of time has changed. It is no longer a mere progression of hours and minutes, but a living, vital, spiritual presence. This is what the sacred dimension of time is all about.

Both ordinary and sacred time are generally measured by the patterns of heaven and earth, for it is these patterns, these constantly recurring cycles, that integrate us with the cosmic order underlying all things. Honoring these recurring changes is yet another way for us to enter the sacred dimension of time. Thus humanity has devised rituals to mark the four major changes of the solar and seasonal year—the equinoxes, when day and night are of equal length, and the solstices, when the sun appears to stand still and then "turn back" to the north or south. Priests and magicians of all cultures have charted the progress of planets and fixed the positions of the stars, for the orderly cycles of the heavens are among the most potent symbols of the cosmic order.

The Mesoamerican spiritual tradition exemplified its vision of the universe in cosmograms, diagrams of the infinite. The double pyramid construction of the Mayan universe was one such diagram; the geomantic city was another. But these cosmograms are essentially static; they are not in motion. The Maya believed that the universe, both human and cosmic, was constantly evolving through different worlds or "suns," different epochs of cosmic time. They believed that every moment in time was in a state of flux, a shifting tapestry of energies that manifested in earthquakes and volcanoes, in the wars of gods and men and the changes of the human heart and spirit. Hence the theme of transformation is central to all Mesoamerican mythology. In one story, a deformed and rejected god is transformed into the glorious sun of the new world epoch. In another, the god-king Quetzalcoatl is transformed into the planet Venus. The world is constantly evolving. Human beings must constantly struggle for universal order and harmony even as they struggle towards their own evolution.

To pluck order out of chaos we must understand the ebb and flow of energy in time, the vast transformations and metamorphoses that make up life on earth. Yet how shall we find the sense of cosmic order in this shifting, restless world of volcanic passions, both human and terrestrial? How shall we sense both the order and the chaos entwined in one vast scheme?

For this, the people of ancient Mesoamerica needed a cosmogram that was fluid rather than static—a cosmogram that moved in time, capable of embodying the flux and reflux of life.

This was the Sacred Calendar.

<http://www.jaguarwisdom.org>