

AKBAL TRECENA

by **Kenneth Johnson**

The symbolism behind Akbal (or Aq'ab'al, to use the K'iche' pronunciation) can be a bit confusing. Technically, the word means "darkness." If you want to say "goodnight" in K'iche' Maya, you say "Xoq aq'ab." But when the Maya teach you about the day signs, they will tell you that Akbal actually symbolizes the dawn, or, more precisely, that magical moment when the darkness begins to surrender to the light.

In the interval between the end of the Third World and the beginning of the Fourth World, there was a time of darkness. During this time, the Four Jaguar Fathers led the first people away from Tulan, and, according to the *Popol Vuh*, they wandered for a long time in darkness.

The *Pop Wuj* tells us that they gathered upon the mountain called Hacavitz, where they wept to see the light of Venus, the Morning Star. The Four Jaguar Fathers made an offering, burning so much copal that great clouds rose into the sky. At last, the sun rose upon the Fourth World. Birds and animals cried out for joy, and so did the people, laughing and weeping at the same time.

This day-sign personifies that "dawning" which is so important in all of Mesoamerican myth. But this primal event, the dawning of the sun of the Fourth World, is not a concept which is limited to some mythic era, long ago and far away. It is, in fact, eternal, part of the ever-recurring cycle of human existence. To the Maya, each day is like a blossoming plant, and the dawn is the first sprout, emerging from the dark womb of night and ready to flower. The dawn is Sun Father's arrow, shot forth as he appears in the first moments of ruddy dawn, an arrow which coaxes the new life of a new day from the waiting earth.

Dawn of each new day. Dawn of enlightenment. Dawn of consciousness.

And, very importantly, the dawning of love.

In love and romance is the renewal and the continuance of human life. Each new love is like a new dawn, capable of bringing to light a new world in the form of a child. The same primal force that coaxes new life from the Blossoming World each day also coaxes forth feelings of passion, of love, of the magnetic attraction between woman and man.

Akbal is the principal calendar day for love and romance. Chuen may be slightly better for an actual marriage ceremony, but Akbal is the day for all your romantic dreams to manifest. There used to be a rather charming custom in the highlands, only parts of which remained by the time I got there. When a young man wanted to marry a girl, he would choose a group of "marriage singers" (many of whom seem to have been born on Akbal days) to walk down the street, serenading the girl until they reached the house of her parents, where they would negotiate the marriage arrangements. This kind of public serenade could be the most delightful moment in a girl's life – unless, of course, she didn't know the boy had feelings for her, in which case it could be jaw-droppingly embarrassing. At present, they still have specialists who do the negotiations, but to the best of my knowledge they no longer walk down the street and sing.

Then, using poetic phrases and formulas, the chief wedding singer negotiated matters with the girl's parents. Akbal days were commonly chosen for such serenades.

Women born on Akbal days are known for their romantic temperaments. Akbal men are known for their artistic flair, especially when it comes to words. It can sometimes be noted that Akbal people often have their own "power times," and that these are the in between times of dawn or dusk.

What to do during the trecena of Akbal? This day sign symbolizes both darkness and dawn; hence it is a time of new beginnings. It is the *nawal* of clarity or light, the trecena to ask for the dawning of the light in all things. During this time, we express our intention always to think and act with perfect clarity. It is a special time for those who set the bones of the sick and the healers with natural plants.

Above all, it is a time for love.

Arrange a romantic evening with the one you love.

Write a poem.

Dust off the guitar you played in college and pick a few tunes.

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