

THE ROAD OF DAYS

by **Kenneth Johnson**

In Yucatec, the word “eb” means a “stairway” or a “ladder.” The idea is that time is like a path or a road – or, perhaps, like climbing the stairway up an ancient pyramid. The K’iche’ word for this sign, E’, doesn’t really mean anything. (You’d be surprised how many day sign names don’t actually mean anything.) But the Maya love to teach through word play, and when they are teaching about this day sign they often say “b’e,” with a strong accent at the end, because the word b’e means “road,” and this day sign is the Road of Life.

I usually talk about day signs rather than numbers, but time is a road and the numbers can be seen as a road too, so let us talk about it.

At the beginning of each trecena we used to go to a place called Paja’, meaning “place of water,” which was the place of the number 1. It was a pretty meadow with a stream running through it. The trail was hard to find and led downwards from the town to the meadow. Paja’ was called a “low place” or “low shrine.” We begin at the bottom, and we climb up the road of time.

After welcoming a new trecena, there were no important ritual days until we reached day 6. That was the beginning of the ritual cycle, which ran from the 6 day until the 9 day. The Maya like the middle days because their energy is balanced – neither too soft (1 through 5) or too strong (10 through 13). The place of the number 6 was a “higher” place, in fact the sacred hill Paklom at the center of town. Some communities celebrate the 7 day, but we never did – probably because of its association with death and endings.

The principal day of ceremony along the Road of Life which is each trecena was the 8 day, and the 8 place was a “high place” too, on a path which led from the main part of town into the hills beyond. So walking the road of the days really was like climbing a stairway or the steps of a pyramid – the shrine gets physically higher as the days go on. If you want to think of all this in such “New Age” terms as evolution or ascension, I doubt if the Momostecans would mind, although I cannot say that I ever heard any of them use such words.

The “8 place” was called Chuti Sabal. While the shrines at Paklom were built of stone, the altars of Chuti Sabal had a foundation of earth, each one piled into a semi-circle and strengthened with broken pottery. I was often told that the semi-circle symbolized the dome of the sky, while pottery symbolized one’s home (in Momos, they still use clay pots for almost everything). So the sky was brought into one’s home, Heaven and Earth were united.

Then one began the steep climb to the place of the number 9, called Nima Sabal. This term can be literally translated as “the place of greatness.” It stood on a ledge looking out over the town and the surrounding villages and was altogether very beautiful and inspiring. Thus the Road of Life was walked, from the lower meadows of the 1 place to the high ledges of the 9 place.

As you begin to walk the new trecena, give thanks for the Road of Life itself – and thanks to the Divine Power, El Ajaw, for giving you the opportunity to walk it.

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