

THE DAY 8 MANIK

By Kenneth Johnson

The trecena of Ahau (Ajpu) contains one of the “great” days of the tzolk’in – 8 Manik (Kej).

In many Guatemalan communities, the ritual cycle for each trecena begins on the 6 day. In some towns the 7 day is celebrated; in others, it is passed over. 8 and 9 are the two most important days in each trecena, the days when the most ritual activity occurs.

In Momostenango, they had a special shrine dedicated to the number 8. It lies in a small barrio (neighborhood) not far away from the center of town. A Mayan altar can look a lot like a National Forest campfire pit in the U.S. Essentially, it is a small stone fire circle. But at the “8 Place,” each fire circle is surrounded by a half circle made of earth and broken pottery. The local K’iche’ Maya have been breaking pots there for centuries. In time, earth builds up around the shards of broken pottery, forming a semi-circle around the altar itself. When I asked, “What does it all mean?” the reply was: “The half-circle is the dome of sky above us. We keep pottery in our homes, so here we see the dome of heaven in close connection with our homes on the earth.”

As above, so below.

The 8 day in the trecena of Ahau is Manik. This is one of the most important days. While it is acknowledged that the deer is the totem of this day sign, its deepest meaning goes to the fact that it is the symbol of the four corners of the universe; thus Manik symbolizes the four directions and the fourfold Medicine Wheel of life itself, of all existence.

Upon this day, the most skilled and respected shamans are initiated.

When one first takes the path of the daykeeper, one will very likely (depending on your community or your lineage) be initiated on 8 Chuen (B’atz’). But this is just the beginning. A daykeeper is not the same thing as a lonesome shaman in a jungle hut, ingesting many substances and communing with many spirits. A daykeeper is a servant of her or his community – usually a counselor or spiritual guide, often a healer, and always an individual who performs ceremonies for the benefit of others.

In time, one grows in wisdom and becomes knowledgeable in many different matters, whether worldly, psychological, or spiritual. Then, one may become a *chuchq’ajaw*. This term is most often translated as “mother-father.” A mother-father serves the community with the nurturing heart of a mother and the quiet authority of a father. A mother-father’s path is to place her or his energies at the service of others, to be a helper and a guide.

It is upon the day 8 Manik that the mother-fathers themselves are initiated into this high level of the shamanic path.

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