

IX TRECENA

By Kenneth Johnson

Once, long ago, the gods walked alongside of human beings. That was in the darkness between the world ages, when humankind cried out for light. The gods guided us.

Then, one day, when the Hero Twins had conquered the Lords of Death, light appeared on the eastern horizon, and the sun rose upon a new world.

The gods laid down their burden and left the new era to the people. They fell into a deep sleep, transformed into the earth itself, its sacred places – rock formations, trees, and fresh running streams, towering mountains and quiet lakes.

Thus the K'iche' Maya say that the earth is *chomb'al juyub' tay'j*, “mountains and valleys alive,” for the earth is a living thing, comprised of the bodies of the gods themselves, both masculine (mountains) and feminine (valleys).

Ix is the day sign that serves as guardian or *nagual* of all the sacred places on the earth – the rock shrine beneath the trees, the freshwater spring at the edge of town, the mountains in the distant haze. Ix watches over the living energy of the gods in the earth.

In Mayan thinking, the earth is neither Mother nor Father, but both. How can it be a truly living thing unless it participates in both of the cosmic polarities, the yang as well as the yin? I have seen native altars dedicated to the Mundo or Earth Lord as well as to Mother Earth. In Mayan cosmivision, balance is an essential element.

All the same, there is something intrinsically feminine about the day sign Ix; among those born upon the day of the Jaguar, the men are typically softer and the women more intense. In some schools of thought, Ix is linked with the number 9, which is the day of women, the day when priestesses and curanderas perform their own special rituals.

Ix plays an especially important role as one of the *naguales* of the element of water. The trecena which has just passed, that of Imix, rules over the Mother Ocean, while Muluc rules the falling rain. Ix, the Jaguar, rules over freshwater springs – the water that bursts forth from the living body of the earth. Springs are always considered sacred among the Maya; I can remember gathering water from a sparkling spring at the beginning of each trecena, water we used in the performance of sacred ceremonies.

Each day-sign partakes of the eternal polarities of existence, and thus has its negative as well as its positive manifestation. In that context, this day sign is connected with the so-called Seven Sins. The Mayan concept of “sin” is quite different than the Seven Sins of Catholic Christianity, and the “misbehaviors” are usually listed as follows: excessive pride, ambition, envy, lying, criminal activity, ingratitude, and ignorance.

Note that the so-called “sins” so common in Christianity, Hinduism, etc. that relate to the consumption of food or enjoyment of human sexuality have no place in the Mayan cosm-conception. Unlike other religious traditions, Mayan spirituality does not regard the human body and its needs as negative, something unpleasant from which we must turn away. The human condition is seen as essentially positive; thus the “sins” or “shames” involve inappropriate or ungrateful behavior in terms of the community and our dealings with the other human beings with whom we share this blessed, earth-centered existence.

To put it in a different way, we may say that if Ix is the *nagual* of altars and sacred space – the whole exquisite world of plants and flowers and rocks that the Tz’utujil Maya of Santiago Atitlan refer to as the Blossoming World – thus by the magical alchemy of opposites and polarities, Ix is also the *nagual* of all those behaviors which prevent us from interacting in a spirit of gratitude and graciousness with the natural world, both earthly and human, that surrounds us.

But in its positive manifestation, Ix is also a day sign of magic, in the highest sense of the word. The jaguar is the most powerful animal in the jungle; in the deep shadows of its forest world, it is a kind of deity. Like the jaguar which is its animal totem, this day sign is filled with spiritual potency, strength, force, and vitality.

This is a time which may fruitfully be devoted to introspection and meditation, if the opportunity is there. It is also regarded as a favorable time to practice any kind of divination. Since this day sign is filled with so much vitality and strength (the strength of nature itself), it is an excellent time to ask for fortitude, both physical and mental.

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