

## DIVINATION WITH THE TZOLKIN

By Kenneth Johnson

In addition to its many other functions, the tzolkin can also be used as an oracle or tool for divination.

This is how it works. You go to the Daykeeper's house. In his or her shrine room a table will be set up. He opens his vara sagrada or sacred bundle, and brings forth his tz'ite seeds. These seeds are bright red and come from a species of coral tree, so the seeds look just like red coral. There are many such trees in the area where I lived; during a walk through the woods you can see them lying on the ground pretty much everywhere. But even though they are common, they become sacred objects when the Daykeeper is initiated and his vara sagrada is consecrated.

The table may be decorated with quartz crystals or other objects, perhaps even relics from the ancient days found while working in the cornfields. (Yes, I know that such things are supposed to be sent to a museum, but in the villages, whatever you find in your own cornfield is yours.) The seeds are placed in a pile on the table, or perhaps in a bowl.

You ask your question, and the Daykeeper grabs a handful of seeds. She or he begins to lay them out in groups of four, all along the table in rows. Of course, very often one will not end up with a group of four, but with only 1, 2 or 3 seeds in the final group. This is significant. A divination which ends with a group of 4 is much more powerful; if it ends with just 1 seed, the answer to the client's question may be regarded as inconclusive, or perhaps the Daykeeper will choose not to read at all.

The shaman begins to count the seeds. Sometimes a Daykeeper will begin with the day of your birth; sometimes on the present day. Let us say that it is 1 Chicchan. So the first group of four becomes 1 Chicchan, the next one 2 Cimi, then 3 Manik, 4 Lamat, and so on. Let us say that the count ends up with 3 Ahau. That is the first result, but ordinarily a diviner will wish for two results.

The Daykeeper returns to the beginning of the rows. She or he starts to count again, this time with 4 Imix. Let us say that the result of the second count is 7 Caban.

Now the oracle can be read. Since Ahau is the sign of the ancestors and the ancestors are the origins of our family, it suggests that the client's problem or the essence of his or her question has to do with something going on in the family system. Since 3 is a low number, however, it is probably not serious, or at least not as serious as the client may imagine. 7 Caban suggests that the issue will soon come to a conclusion, because 7 is the number of endings. The solution will arise from the client's own mind and clever ideas, because Caban is the sign of the Thinker.

Sometimes, as the Daykeeper is counting, his or her hand may begin to shake or tremble over a particular group of seeds – in this case let us say 5 Muluc. This happens because the shaman's koyopa or “inner lightning” – an energy within the body which many have compared to the

kundalini – has been awakened by the power of that day sign, causing the shaman's hand to shake. I have actually seen this several times, and it is quite impressive. It means that this particular day sign has a special message which it wants to give to the client. Since Muluc is the day sign which rules over the sacred offerings that the Maya make at their shrines, it may mean that performing a ceremony of offering will spark the client's clever idea which will form the solution to the problem or situation.

While only initiated shamans are allowed to handle the tz'ite seeds, you could try this with corn kernels instead. If you are not interested in counting each day sign one by one, you can of course use any of the decks of cards available which are based on the tzolkin. The object is to come up with two pairs of numbers and signs.

This is just one of many ways in which the contemporary Maya use the tzolkin, along with astrology, ceremony, and dreamlore.

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