ANCIENT MESOAMERICA:

Energies in the Human Body

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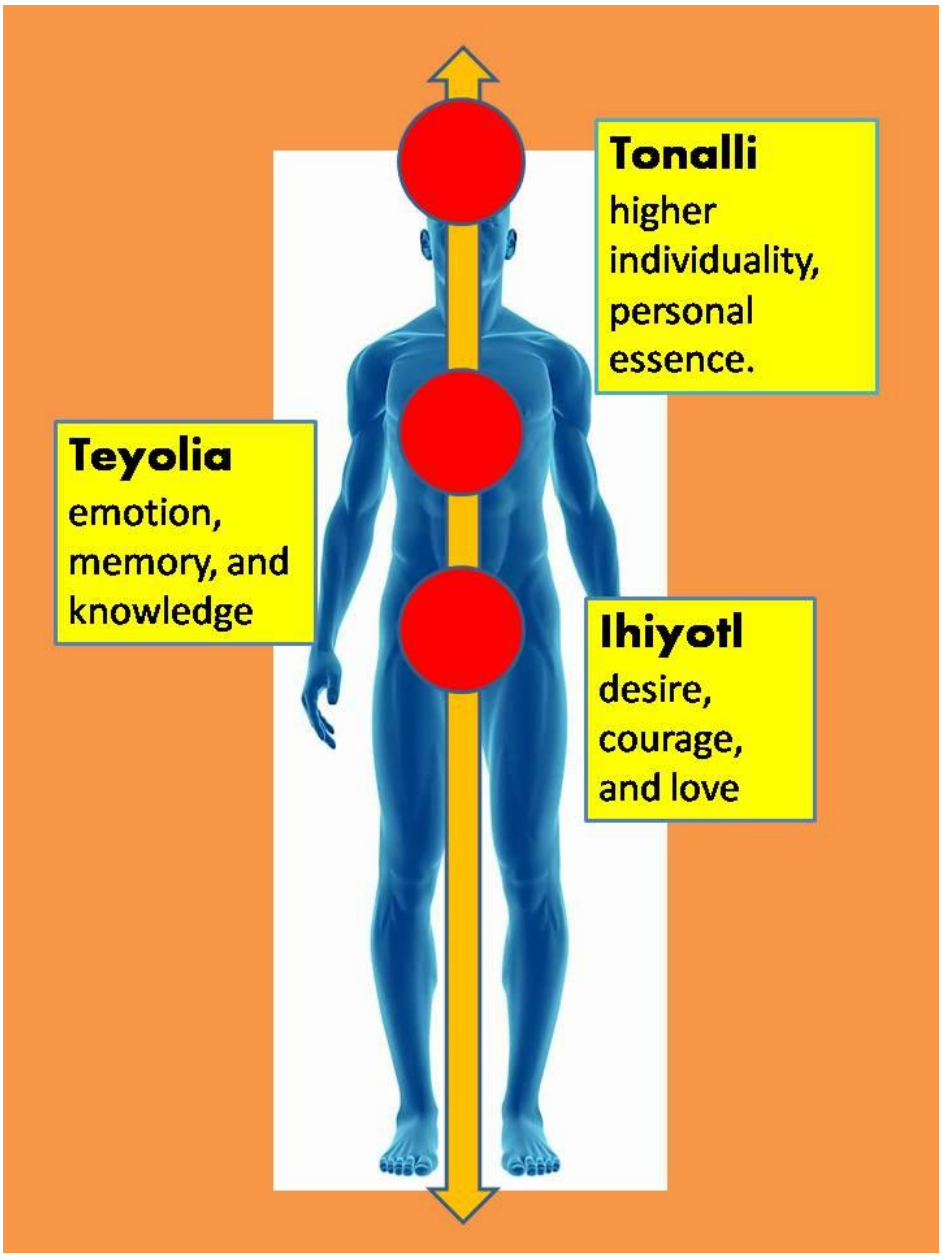
The idea or a central World Tree or World Mountain lies at the heart of the Mayan cosmovision. This is a universal symbol that transcends cultural boundaries – and so is the idea that the central tree or mountain is actually within the human body. There is a precise correspondence between the architecture of Heaven, the macrocosm, and the constitution of humankind, the microcosm. As there is a central tree or axis that forms the pivotal point of the world or the universe, likewise there must be a central axis that forms the pivotal point for man as a spiritual entity. According to Hindu thought, the spinal column is the human analog of Mount Meru. According to Kabbalistic Judaism, the Tree of Life is found not only in the mythical Garden of Eden, but within the human body, where it too corresponds to the spinal column.

Just as the vital energy from within the earth travels up the World Mountain or Tree of Life and the life-giving power of the gods flows down it, there is an equivalent energy that flows in the spinal column giving life to the inner or spiritual man. Hindus call it the kundalini; Kabbalists know it as the Shekinah. To the Classic Maya it was *itz*, the "dew of heaven."

Though no authentic sources regarding the esoteric nature of the human body remain from the period of the Classic Maya, Aztec sources tell us that, in fact, the people of Mesoamerica had highly developed teachings about the nature of spiritual energy in the human body. The vital force which traveled up and down the World Tree—and, by extension, up and down the spine—was called *malinalli* in the Nahuatl language, equivalent to the Mayan *itz*. According to the Aztecs it consisted of two streams; one flowed downwards from Heaven, and the other flowed upwards from the Underworld. The flow of *malinalli* concentrated itself in three specific centers within the human body. These centers form an obvious analogy to the Hindu doctrine of the chakras, the "subtle centers" or, more literally, "wheels" of psycho-spiritual energy within the body. In Hindu tradition, there are seven such centers, whereas the fragmentary sources surviving from Aztec times mention three.



The first of the three centers has its locus in the crown of the head; the energy associated with it is called *tonalli* in Nahuatl. The word signifies a warmth that originates in the sun and radiates through each human individual as a link with the solar force. *Tonalli* is placed in the mother's womb through the agency of the Creator; as the spark of light that links each of us to the gods, it is the locus of our higher individuality, our personal essence.

The second esoteric center is in the heart; the vital force that animates this center is

called *teyolia* in Nahuatl and is the source of emotion, memory, and knowledge. *Teyolia* is the "divine fire" that shapes our patterns of thought and habit. The *teyolia* may be transformed into a "divine heart" even in this lifetime. In Aztec tradition those who played the roles of the gods at religious festivals and those who dedicated their lives to the composition of spiritual poetry were believed to be especially filled with *teyolia. Teyolia* is a substance found everywhere, not only in the heart center. It is present in mountains and lakes, and in temples and pyramids as well.

The third center lies in the liver; its associated force is called *ihiyotl*. This *ihiyotl* is like a "luminous gas," a subtle energy that is the source of our emotions: hatred, desire, courage, and love. To examine one's own motivations and thus seek the truth of one's being was a process that the Aztecs called "discovering one's liver." It is the energy called *ihiyotl* that projects itself to others, creating tentacles of charm and attraction.

What remains to us may be only the rudiments of a much more complex system of human energies. In future articles, I will investigate some of the possibilities.

Note: This article is based on passages in *Religions of Mesoamerica*, by David Carrasco (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1990). Carrasco's summary is, in turn, based upon *The Human Body and Ideology*, by Alfredo Lopez Austin (Salt Lake City, University of Utah, 1988).