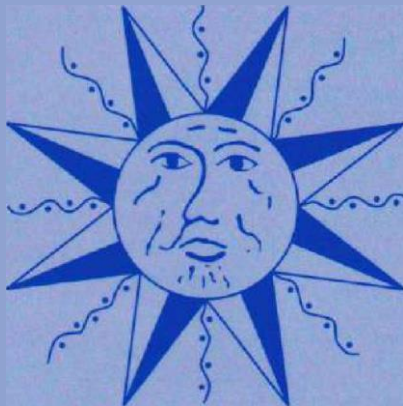




Popular Tradition

Guatemala in The Paths of The Sacred Magical Wrapper

Celso A. Lara Figueroa.



GUATEMALA IN THE PATHS OF THE SACRED MAGICAL WRAPPER

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Guatemala from the depths of history: Weaving the Magical Wrapper

Guatemala is one of the most complex regions in Latin America. In such little geographic space, the most diverse ecological niches and major dynamism and multiplicity social relationships merge. Given these intricate relationships between nature and society, Guatemala is an authentic magical wrapper, where the sacredness of a complete life, from the deepest rituals to the most everyday actions, mark and remark the everyday steps of the Guatemalan. The reason of that is the specificity of its history and its own and authentic cultural identities. However, social life gets lost in the thought of historical reality, the social conditions that arose in the 16th century determine its own route.

The 16th century and its Hispanic component constitute, so, this star fire that merge in one sidereal lane: the crucible of the sacred, where the intense sacredness of the prehispanic Guatemalan to the Guatemalan from the beginning of the 21st century merge in only one forge, made one log that blazes in the Milky Way of its identity and gives it cohesion, harmony, a unique and unmistakable personality.

The magical wrapper that the Heart of the Sky and the Heart of the Earth started to bast with *Pinabete* needles, corn thread with locks of lilies and morning stars, fulfilled as an echo and sky to build the animistic Christianity of today's Guatemalan. From here, the multiethnic and pluricultural nation that is Guatemala arises constituted by the mestizo, Mayan, Garifuna and Xinca people, this country wrapped in tender

corn leaves and cooed by millennial legends that are found and found again in counterpoint with the cross in its Churches' atrium, make of its daily life an authentic sacred-profane ritual. But this Guatemalan did not start in the 16th century. They come from immemorial times that are lost to the depths of social life, of the creation of the world and life. The Guatemalan man blooms in soil of the New World from very early.

The paleontological era watches as the prehistoric animals like mammoths and mastodons, etc, pass by, whose footprints are preserved in contemporary Guatemala.

In such way, the first habitants of America, also arrived to Guatemala, walking and leaving indissoluble footprints in their way south. That way, the Mayans appeared and other original cultures.

It is not little what is written about the Mayans: they, as the Greeks, were the ancient people that have captivated archeologists the most. The admiration caused by the physical remains that are left, as testimony of that people, have made that travelers coming from the Old World travel through these warm regions since the beginning of the 19th century. Regions covered in dense jungles, where the ruins of ceremonial centers that forged this people rest and, although entirely historically, have become almost a legend.

The Mayan subarea had an extension of about 325,000 square kilometers [approximately 125,483.202 square miles], saying, it occupied what currently is understood as the Mexican states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Yucatán and Quintana Roo, The Republic of Guatemala, the Belize territory and the West of the Republic of Honduras.

The origins of this people are lost in the past and it is not easy to say its origin; we, personally, believe that it was a culture that developed in situ, and although the mere Mayans started their meticulous time count in such remote period like the year 3113 BC, the archeologists and Mayists have not found until today vestige of their culture that could be traced before the year 2000 BC.

From the three areas of high culture that took place in America, Mesoamerica was the one that reached the highest grade of cultural development and, at the same time, in the six subareas that comprised it, no one bloomed with such splendor as the Mayan subarea. How not to affirm this. These people were the ones to create a writing system that still amazes us, it was here that the calendar achieved the highest perfection and where the time was calculated with a never achieved before by an ancient people meticulousness. In Tikal the most beautiful and slender of all the New World, in Quiriguá, the highest monolithic monument in all Prehispanic America rises, the Stela E. If, as a ancient Egyptologist affirmed “Egypt is the Gift of the Nile”, the Mayan world is the Gift of the Corn, as we say, because the life of these people orbited around the farming of this portentous American grain that was their basic sustenance.

Practically, all the ancient cultures that reached a notable degree of civilization like Egypt, the Mesopotamian people, China and India, bloomed in a riverside, like the Nile, the Tigris, the Euphrates, the Yang Tse, and the Indo. The Mayans, instead, founded their main ceremonial centers in dry places, far from a river or lake, like it happened with Tikal and Uaxactún; this is weird because the Peten region

[where Tikal is located] has an abundance of rivers, most of them abundant. However, in other numerous cases, the ceremonial centers were established near a permanent water source like in the cases of Copan and Yaxha.

Preclassic Period (2000 BC-300 AC)

The first period of the ones that divide the study of the Mayan people receives the name of Preclassic Period. Some authors also call it Formative Period, precisely because during this time lapse the bases of this culture were set.

As can be appreciated, its duration was considerable, and that way it can be comprehended that in the two thousand three hundred years that the Preclassic Period lasted there was enough time to reach the splendor of the next period, that builds the climax of those extraordinary people.

Classic Period (300-900 AC)

In this period, of six hundred years of duration, the Mayans reached the peak of their cultural development; basically, all that splendor that we see of the Mayan world was built or created in that period.

Postclassic Period (900-1500 AC)

The passing of the Classic to the Postclassic was brutal and determinant; it did not happen gradually, but in an astonishing and sudden way. After visiting the magnificent ceremonial centers, now deserts, the visitor asks themselves: What happened with the Mayans? What happened to these extraordinary people? How did this ancient and impressive culture end so suddenly?

Apparently, towards the year 900 AC, a prolonged drought punished the territory comprehended as Mesoamerica during some years. This comes from scientists dedicated to paleobotany. This drought affected harshly the fields of farming and soon hunger was starting to feel.

The Mayan people turned their eyes to their priests, specially the ones in charge of the cult to Chac, the lord of rain, but the propitiatory efforts of the priests were useless. When the situation became disparate, the people rebelled and, after bloody revolts, the priests disappeared.

The situation then aggravated, because only the priestly elite knew how to read and write and kept the monopoly of their astronomical and all types of knowledge. With that, the Mayan centers were left without a government. With things like that, to the northeastern border the invader pressure of the Toltec people that were going southeast arrived, propelled by the drought that had done a crisis to the Mayans. These invaders came from Tula, irradiator center of culture located in the Mexican Plateau, and their language was Nahuatl.

The Toltecs were warriors, and their military technique was superior to that of the Mayans. The successive waves of Toltecs that positioned in the Mayan centers and imposed their domain in a moment of organizational chaos. The Toltecs established like that, took women from inside the Mayans. Their children inherited the memory of their coming from Tula and, of course, their Toltec ancestry, what ensured their nobility and right to the throne or government positions, while from their mothers, they learned Mayan as their native language and many cultural traits of these people. As a consequence, the Nahuatl language disappeared, but they were preserved intact, although confusing, other elements coming from Tula. Like that, the Guatemalan indigenous chronicles, like the Annals of the Cakchiquels and the Popol Vuh, settle in their pages references to

facts that to the profane reader might result obscure, unconnected and even contradictory, because those codices inform that these indigenous people of Guatemala, like the Cakchiquels and Quiches, came from Tula, from the east, crossing the sea and bringing their Toltec gods, like Tohil, Avilix and Jacavitz, but the stories are written in a Mayan language and use the old Mayan calendar 'in their long count', with their vigesimal system, that now they will calculate, counting four hundred days' years.

The ancient civilizations of the prehispanic world had as a linking point the huge and intense respect to nature; they achieved a perfect balance between the green world of these lands and Social life, to the point of founding a conception of the world and their imagination that created beings that protect and feed it, characters that although the destiny's avatars have reached our days.

In the Guatemalan mayan society sanctifies the nature, makes it its own, makes it part of itself and introjects it in each member in a family, to each individual of everyday life.

Guatemalan history is unique and unrepeatable. With the arrival of the European contingent via Spain, the whole American world and the Guatemalan vision of life got messed up. This is not the adequate place to trace a long Guatemalan history, but the leading thread that characterizes it and makes it unrepeatable its funded in two essential axes:

a) A) a Spanish population, that already entered the Renaissance, have not forgotten the big elements of medieval culture: the fears of life, the belief in a world of invisible beings and a spiritual life that moved to Guatemala

and the rest of the New World from very early.

In other parts of America, it disappeared, however in Guatemala it remains, because, similar to the beliefs and the world vision of the Mayans and Mayan people syncretize, merge and become own in this magical wrapper that is Guatemala. The characteristics are, then, in the pure religiosity, in the belief in extra natural beings that co-exist in a natural way with men and the rise of a popular religiosity where the Saints, the Cross and ancient prehispanic Mayan deities become unique and refine in an animistic popular Chistianism, further from the official, from what the evangelizer fathers would want, and B) the deep relationship between society and nature, unique aspect of Hispanic America in its beginnings.

These two axes have to model the Guatemalan culture since forever and forever, and this explains the idiosyncrasy in our country, they explain what we are and how we are. Religious beings, tied to nature teachings and the plans that come from high above.

The Colonial Process in Guatemala, for almost three hundred years, did nothing but sustain this Sacro-religious aspect, that allowed, on one side, the development of a very Spanish Christianity and the 'mestizo-ladino', where the Jesus of Nazareth figures, the *Virgenes Dolorosas* figures and the buried figures turn in the path of the everyday life of the people, they sanctify every instant and make it authentic and unrepeatable and, on the other side, the animistic Christian of the indigenous people, that resumes the Christian world but turn it into their own beliefs; more than believing in the Christian, the ancient deities play on their toes behind the Cross, behind the baroque altars, bulrush, and the convent cloister of the interior, slow, with the time of the heart of the sky and earth, without the doctrinaire priests notice. When the ecclesiastic authorities noticed that, towards the end of the 18th century, it was too late. The vision of the archbishop Pedro Cortez y Larraz, from between 1765 and 1770, about it is very eloquent. In such a way that the already formed Guatemalan culture reached

independent life on September 15th, 1821. But all the roar of the social and spiritual life is focused in the urban centers, while the world in the country side is semi-isolated and takes its final connotation: twenty three ethnic groups of Mayan origin and Mayan spread in all the country with its own specificities, the Mestizo people, criollo, descendants of Spaniards and other population contingents, and the Garifuna people, that enters the Guatemalan scene in 1800, by accident, after a war boat sank in the coasts of Roatán in Honduras, and its people later spread towards the coast of Belize and the rest of the Atlantic Guatemalan coast.

Not even the Liberalism of 1871, with its deep dispossession of the communal land, not even the semi-slavery of the Indigenous people could amalgamate the cultures. On the contrary, the regionalisms and localisms got reaffirmed and the Municipality became the attraction point, where the country life followed the nature's rhythm, time, the star count and the *katunes*.

However, the avatars of capitalism from the beginning of the 20th century and the grave problems of the Civil War that decimate people on the countryside, the Guatemalan society remained unharmed. Two facts that unusually marked the life of the Guatemalan are: the 1976 earthquake of San Gilberto that stripped Guatemala in all its miseries, and the indigenous awareness from 1992. This point is crucial to understand the 21st century Guatemala, the awareness of the Mayan groups since that year until our days has settled their culture, has made them proud of themselves, demand their rights and obligations. And since then, life has been modeled into three big groups that are part of this magical wrapper: Mestizo, Mayan and Garifuna.

They all have history in common; they all pretend to have a separate history that would join in a not that far katun, but what is still valid is the Guatemalan idiosyncrasy.

In this history forge, the Guatemalan has formed their past in a peculiar unrepeatable way: He is a collective being, adorable, soft, of a paused talking, with a “*cantadito*” that reminds of the conventual latin of the 16th century, very unsociable, very suspicious, that uses *vos* instead of *tú*, that, because they walk a lot in lily circumlocution filled streets, they always beats around the bush.

Suspicious to the very end, when the Guatemalan knows how to find the path to the heart, they open like a fire flower, like the mythical *Lirolay* flower, extends their hand and laughs at themselves. The Guatemalan, Mayan, Mestizo, Xinca or Garifuna, despite themselves, takes the stick of their history and comes back to the sacred, through the big door. They introduce themselves, on their tippy toes, into the Lord of the Hills *ceibas* and comes back to the syncretism of their daily life, where two winds wrap them always: the Christianity cross and the Mayan religiosity animism but turned into one and indissoluble.

The Guatemalan animism Christianity is unique in the Latin-American world, and has little to do with the official Christianity, whether them being Catholic, being from another evangelic denomination or historic Protestant.

The crucible of the sacred settles the life of the Guatemalan. But this same intense load of history and culture catapults them to the galaxies of their myths, rituals and ceremonies, and each of the people of this magical wrapper commemorates history crucible with their own ways of living, whether they are common, specific products of their millennial culture.

An essential element permeates all Guatemalan being: the biological and cultural miscegenation. In Guatemala there are not pure cultures, but dazzlingly creators that knew how to give racism and discrimination a 360° turn and intersperse,

bind them with such solidity like the Flying dancers of the Palo Volador; the Guatemalans are mestizos by the four cardinal points, although their sparks are diffused as far as Gukumatz and the Heart of the Earth, as far as the world of black Africans and as far as the western culture subtleties.

Hybrid Guatemalan. Muleteer of the waters and winds, everyday stirs this crucible of the sacred of their parties and ceremonies, amalgamated, poetically perfumed with pine trees and *pinabetes*, smelling like pom and sawdust.

NATURE AND SOCIETY: THE THREADS OF THE MAGICAL WRAPPER

The Guatemalan culture and nature transits since their origins by the hand of the ritual: All everyday life is sanctified and reseeded as a unity factor in the world of the current Guatemalan society, of any of the ethnical groups that habits their valleys and mountains. The ritual paths are mystery arcanses in Guatemala: all activity that emerges from the crucible of their collective lives that translates to unusual sacred exercises. It is a concretion of the ritual and fathomless history.

The Guatemalan society ritualizes every sigh of their social life in a way that the old ways of their culture of the 17th century emerge new and magical, like a prolonged echo of the found steps in their past, where they refine, in an effulgent way, not only in the parties and ceremonies, but also in any everyday life action, from walking to their jobs, breaking the earth, selling in the markets, knocking on love doors, or starting the road to death. All in this magical wrapper assumes the routes of reality turned myth. Living in Guatemala is penetrating in a book of corn and wheat where the unknown mysteries become real, where deities coexist

with men in full freedom, where men become *nahuales* and the magical animals become feathered snakes or Lords of the Hills. Country where life happens spinning time and cosmic spaces. Magical wrapper where laughter becomes a tender tear or a one thousand iridescences cloudscapes and where, in each corner of the four cardinal points, the snippets of their amalgamated history, unique and unrepeatable. It is the mysterious country where, in its sidewalks, the color of their men and women, the music of their trees and the singing of their textiles and pottery rises. People that laugh about themselves and express their mystery and magic in their dances and sonorous songs in barely perceptible whispers.

Lakes that intonate incredible stories. Volcanoes that resume the myth. Sunrises that wrap the plain life. Guatemala is an amber route and sun that sanctifies all the acts of their history in the intense myth of the eternal return.

In that sense, also the most fathomless points of nature and society get sanctified. It can be affirmed that in Guatemala, both Mayan and Garifuna and Mestizo societies sanctifies society starting from nature in the meantime that the connective thread of this magical wrapper. And the Earth Mother and the Heart of the Sky, have an intense vital commutation, a cosmogony, maybe unique in Latin America, product of its unrepeatable history. And that cosmogony is reflected in the agricultural rituals that are practiced by the twenty three Mayan villages, that also tackle the Garifuna with little variants, influenced in big measure by the indigenous people of the North region and Mestizos from the Guatemalan East.

In the Mayan world, the reunion of the numbers had its own meaning and character. Each figure represents one of the most elemental characteristics of the cosmovision, while it coincides with a specific phase in the creation of the world chronology (cosmogony).

For this reason, the Magical wrapper threads are based in a numeric series count, deepening in the meaning of each number. This way, we will

deepen in the basic concepts of the structure of the universe, that, with each number, becomes more complicated.

Traditional agriculture is the result of a careful and long selection process of seeds, farming and techniques, in search of the best way of production according to the man capacities and in harmony with nature. It is based on the cosmovision, that explains and reasons reality in an integral way through rituals and knowledge given through a continuous process of fathers to sons. The rational aspects and the spiritual aspects of the global practices get mutually strengthened and they can not be separated.

Practices and beliefs that apparently have no direct or scientific efficiency or utility, have a very old fundament and a concrete utility, through the respect and veneration, they guarantee the sustainability of the relationship with Earth, the one that the man depends on for survival.

In Western culture, both the creation of the world and the numeric system start in Zero. According to the Mayans, the creation did not originate from a void equivalent to zero, but to one that completes with the Mayan zero, symbol of the conclusion of a cycle. This zero a lot of times corresponds to a twenty, but it can take the place of thirteen or eighteen, depending on the cycle you are counting.

The Primary Sea and the Cosmic Tree constitute the holistic vision of the Magical wrapper. In the Mayan cosmogony, the initial phase is the one of a state of unity, of the Primary Sea, before the world wakes up. "Nothing moved, nothing could be heard, in the darkness, in the night. But they were in the water, in the darkness' light: Tzaqol, B'itol, Tepew and Snake-Quetzal." (Popol Vuh)

In this primary unit is where a consensus is given, in harmony, the conception of the world, of the clarity (the sun), and the human being. The Popol Vuh continues: "... and then, his world arrived, came the majestic Snake-Quetzal, here in the night, in the darkness. He talked with the majestic Snake-Quetzal, they talked and thought, and they devised. They agreed, joined their words, their thoughts. It was clear, they agreed in the light, and humanity was clear, the growth and the human character of the trees and life growth, humanity, there in the night, in the darkness, this was done by the heart of the sky named Juraqán".

This Primary Sea is like a type of cosmic uterus, a symbol of fertility. Other symbol of fertility and renaissance is represented by the Tree of the Center or Mayan Cross. "The tree, man and woman at the same time, fertility and life, is the cosmic tree, the cosmos itself." It is the log, the origin of all ideas and things.

The first big beginning of the Mayan cosmovision of Guatemala is the integration and harmony. All element of reality fits inside a harmony unit integrated: all has its own place in the cosmos, has a reason and function. The existence of each thing and every one is justified; but there is not any apart, but "each one together". Everything has a relationship with everything, in a holistic vision of reality.

It all contrasts with the rationalistic vision, where only the causes and consequences of things are contemplated, and what can not be explained scientifically is considered "awareness". In the holistic vision, human beings also have their function inside it all; not as an owner, but in relation to respect nature, given that the human is not the one that dictates nature's utility.

In the books of Chilam Balam its talked about Junab'k'u, ancient Mayan name that gets translated to "They are one of the gods" (jun=one, ab'=plural suffix, and k'u=generic gods name), that represents

the Creator God. This means that God kept himself in harmony and unity.

THE THREAD OF THE WRAPPER

Between the Guatemalans of all times, a symbol of this primordial unity is the Saint Cross, descendant of the Green Mayan tree. It symbolizes the unity and origin, the navel of the world. Also the Saint Mother (Loq'laj Na') represents the unity and primary origin. The word *na'* not only means "mother", but also "origin" (for example in *xna'k'anti'*: predecessor of the snake) and "sacred water" (for example in *q'ixna'*: cacao beverage and in *kaqnab'*: lake of the mountain). In Her, the Lord that started to create it all was born, she is the mother of God. The Mayan people often identify her in the Cross. In various stories of the "flood and individual" topic, the Saint Mother appears (often as a hill) that saved the people from the waters (or other dangers like the Spanish conquest). Although the traditional women of the Cross and stories are disappearing, these symbols often appear in the dreams of the habitants of the West of Guatemala.

On the other hand, the *xeel* is a way of sharing also with the ones that are not present in a party: the absentee, in a leaf that later has some food (often all the meat with tortillas and tamalitos of the abundant portion that would have been theirs).

Not only activities and food are shared, but also the feelings that go with them. For example, when someone does not share their food, does not give lodgment to a person, etc., a sentiment of rejection towards that person rises for not respecting or considering the person that asked for shelter (*q'oq*). This can affect in a negative way the

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individual that did not want to share they could get the sadness illness, depression, low self-esteem, etc. This is called q'oqonk. For the Mayan Guatemalan people, the unity of opinions and heart (junajil) is very important for coexisting, to perform ceremonies and offerings... This expresses also in the way of decision making in the community: generally matters and problems are discussed until a consensus is reached and everyone can accommodate to the decision taken.

In addition, the holistic vision of the world, where each element has its place and reason for being, carries in practice an attitude of respect towards nature. The traditional farming, based on the cosmovision that reasons the integral reality, also has an integral or multifunctional vision, saying, it has a role in many and different aspects of life: in a material level, in food security, in environment management: in social level, in social coexistence, in gender and education equity; and in spiritual level, in living with identity, in spirituality. As the cosmovision pretends to explain all reality, traditional farming aims to satisfy all the basic needs on the different levels, searches the integral wellbeing (xsanhil ch'olejil). This happens when the man feels fully happy and satisfied. To a material level, in the production, this satisfaction can be achieved through, to mention, polyculture, a farming system that aims to self-sufficiency; meaning, the production that is destined, above everything, to self-consumption. The polyculture combines many different cultures in just one land. It also includes food that are not seeded, but grow spontaneously (passion fruit, nightshade...) or wild animals that search the cornfield, like the Collared peccary. A balanced polyculture provides a balanced feeding to the man. If you ask a man what is sowed in the cornfield, he could answer: "Chixjunil" (all together). It is hard that the q'eqchi farmer who does not live in the land, specializes only in just one or two cultures, although the diversity of cultures has decreased a lot in the last twenty years.

The search for integral satisfaction also has consequences in ecology: the idea that integration does not allow to exclude any element in reality. The human has to treat with respect every living being and also things, even has to share with them what he has. Not sharing during the sowing or harvest could result in plage, disease, lack of germination or growth in the cornfield.

This is manifested, among other things, in the treatment that we give to the "plages" and predatory animals of the cornfield: we do not call them plague, but we share with them. As a preventive measure, we sow in the middle of the tronera (a zompopo nest) [zompopo is the name given in Guatemala to the hairy-headed leafcutter ant.] because if we don't share with them, angriness might be caused over the cornfield.

In the case that they are eating a lot of the culture, they are given something to eat (sometimes poch or tamalitos), in the cornfield or they get captured alive and they get blessed by a priest, for their later release in the cornfield. In that way, at the end of all accounts the magical wrapper is completed, but only in the plot of nature and society. Without them, Guatemala, this wonderful magical wrapper of corn, beans, hopes with streets of lilys and blue roofs of tarlatan and stars that have guided, guide and will guide this men towards the south of Mesoamerica and the Belt of America, "heart of the Poinsettia", would not be complete, would not be one, like how the poet Miguel Angel Asturias would remark with such a bull's-eye.



en un espacio sagrado
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