

## Mayan Religion

### Creation Myth of the Maya

Before there could be humans, there was a need for other items. Most important was corn and chocolate. The myth stated that K'awiil hurled his lightning bolt into the side of the mountain, breaking it into two. Inside he found two plants growing, maize (corn) and cacao (chocolate tree). Throughout Mayan history, maize and cacao have been closely linked for this reason. The second part of the Maya creation myth involves the creation of man. The Mayan gods wanted to create human beings with hearts and minds who could "keep the days". "Keep the days" also meant that the gods would have someone to worship them. The gods tried to create humans multiple times but each was a failure for different reasons. Finally, the gods were successful in creating humans out of yellow and white corn. The last part of the creation myth had to do with bringing corn to humans... The Hero Twins played an important part here. The Hero Twins, were descendants of the gods. The twins were playing in the ball court one day and disturbed the gods of the underworld. The gods challenged them to a game, but the twins won. They brought back to life their dead father and made him the corn god, allowing humans to have a food source. The twins then climbed up to the sky and became the Sun and Moon ruling over all earth.



Religion was important to every part of Mayan life. The Mayans worshipped many different gods. They were polytheistic. In fact each day, month, city and job had its own special god or goddess assigned to it. They Mayas had a variety of religious festivals and celebrations. Most of these would include human sacrifices. The Mayans believed that since their gods did not have blood they needed human blood to survive and keep the world in balance.

The Mayan empire was divided into many different city-states. Each city-state had its own ruler who took care of the people in his city and made the rules for his city. The ruler of each city-state was considered to be a living god and would help the priests during religious ceremonies.



Many priests would help the ruler enforce the rules and keep the city running. These priests would perform many religious duties as well keeping the gods happy bringing good to their city. Some performed medical rituals while others the human sacrifices. Some of the priests had knowledge of mathematics and astronomy used to predict events in time. Or when they should plant and harvest. While others were considered prophets. The Mayans believed that only the priests could explain the mysteries of life and death.

Many of the Mayan religious ceremonies included gifts and sacrifices to the various gods and goddesses. They Maya's believed the gods would give favors to them in return for prayers, offerings and of course sacrifices. The sacrifices included many different things such as valuable gifts, their blood and human sacrifices.



In many ceremonies, the priest would cut themselves (bloodletting) to give blood to the gods. The Mayans had 3 methods of giving the human sacrifices. Often, the priests took the victim to the altar at the temple. Then the priests would cut the heart out of the living victim and present it to the god.

In another method, the priest would tie the victim to a wooden pole. Then they would throw spears and arrows at the victim's chest in the area of the heart.

In the 3rd type of sacrifice they would throw the victim into a sacred well. The most famous of these wells is the "Well of Sacrifice at Chichen Itza". If the victim survived the fall and did not drown, the priests pulled them back out of the well. The Mayans believed the gods had chosen to spare these victims. The priests then would ask them what messages they brought back from the gods. The victims would then receive special treatment from then on since they Mayas believed they had spoken to the gods because they survived.



The Mayans also worshipped the dead. They believed the dead would become one with the gods. They worshipped their past family members, ancestors, at many of their religious ceremonies. They even buried their family members under the floors in their own homes. Dead rulers sacred remains had pyramids built over them.



A few Mayan gods and goddesses

Itzamna: He was the head god, lord of the heavens lord of night and day. His name meant lizard. The Mayans believed he invented books and writing.



Chac: He was the rain god.

Yuan Kaax: He is the god of corn (maize). He is also the god of all agriculture.



If Chel: She is the moon and rainbow goddess. She is also the goddess of weaving and childbirth.





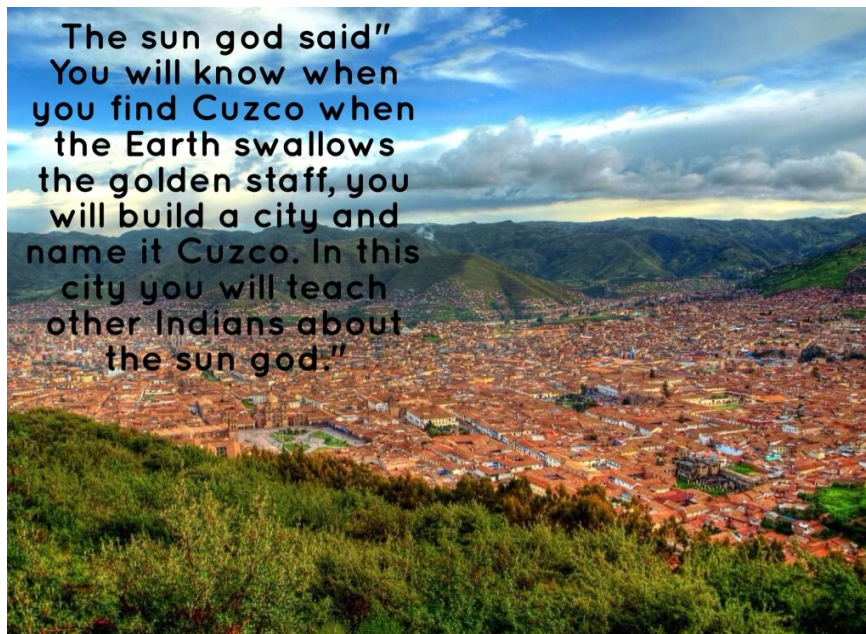


Ah Puch: He is the god of death.

## Inca Religion

### Creation myth of the Inca

According to the Inca, Viracocha, the Inca creator god, came from the water of Lake Titicaca. He created land and sky and people before returning to the lake. But Viracocha was not happy with these people and caused a great flood that wiped out all of humanity. He then tried again. This time, Viracocha created the sun, moon, and stars first. Then Viracocha created man, but left them inside the earth, sitting in rocks, streams, and caves. He then created another race of humans whose job it was to awaken the people of the earth. He saved two very special people from this group to travel to Cuzco to awaken the Inca. They were Manco Capac and his sister. Viracocha also went with them to found the capital city of Cuzco.



Like the Maya, the Inca worshipped many gods and goddess. (Polytheistic). The major Incan god was the god of nature, Viracocha, the creator.

Another Incan god was Inti, the sun god. Gold was the symbol of Inti and the Sun God temple was the most important building in the capital city of Cuzco. Silver represented tears of the Moon. The Inca believed that Inti was the father of all Incan rulers. They even worshipped their rulers like they were living gods.

Major Inca goddesses included those that controlled both the earth and the sea. The Inca also worshipped many other gods and goddesses including those of thunder, the Moon, stars, and rainbows to mention a few.

The Incan tried to communicate with the gods through something called divining. Divining is when you look into objects to find "signs". Priests would look at animal organs or maybe smoke from a fire looking for signs from their gods. The Inca would use these signs to help them decide when to



plant crops, go to war or any other important decisions.

The Inca also worshipped *huacas*. A huaca is a sacred place or thing. They could include mummies of the dead, temples, holy places, and other things of natural life like mountains, springs and even stones. In fact Inca families would keep small statues in their homes to worship.



Remember the creation story?

Religious ceremonies were an important part of Inca life. Priests would perform daily ceremonies at the various temples and the high priest was a favorite relative of the ruler.

The Inca had major religious festivals during each of the 12 months of their year. The Inca year began in December with the festival "Capac Raimi." (Magnificent festival). This was the most important and elaborate of all the celebrations. In March they celebrated the ripening of the earth. (Pauca Huaray). The June ceremony of Inti Raimi was the festival of the Sun while Uma Raimi the festival of the water, was in October.



Some rituals would take place inside the temple, usually only the priests were inside. The great monthly festivals would occur outdoors so that all the people could participate. These celebrations would include dancing, feasts, games, songs, and parades. Sacrifices and offerings would also be give to the gods and goddesses.. The Inca sacrificed animals such as the llama, guinea pig and at times humans, including child sacrifices.

A few Incan gods and goddess



Viracocha: The creator god



Inti: The sun god



Chuqui. Illa: The god of thunder

## Aztec Religion

### Creation myth of the Aztec

The Aztec believed that they were the god's 5th attempt at creating humans. The first attempts all failed because of fighting between the gods. On the last attempt, the creator god, Quetzalcoatl, went to the underworld to retrieve the bones of past human attempts. On his way out he tripped, scattering the bones and breaking them into different sizes. The Aztecs believed that this was why people were different sizes and shapes. From these bones, Quetzalcoatl mixed his blood and created humans. Quetzalcoatl knew he needed to feed his creation and went looking for a food source. He came upon an ant that was carrying a corn kernel, and followed the ant to the mountain. He turned himself into an ant and crawled through a crack to find that the mountain was filled with corn, beans, peppers, sage and other foods. Quetzalcoatl split open the mountain to give the food to mankind. This angered the rain god, Tlaloc, who stole the food. The Aztecs believed that Tlaloc kept the food and only gave part of it back to mankind each year in different amounts. The Aztecs were told by Quetzalcoatl to settle in a place where they saw an eagle perched on a cactus. Lake Texcoco.



The Aztecs like the Maya and Inca were polytheistic. In fact each month of the calendar had a festival with music, dancing, parades and of course sacrifices.

Each village and job even had their own god or goddess. A different god also watched over each day and part of the day. The people worshipped the many gods and goddesses to bring good forces of nature and to keep away any harmful powers.



During the ceremonies the priests would say their sacred chants providing the magic needed to avoid rains at harvest and to celebrate the Earth Mother goddess Tlazolteotl. Most ceremonies also required human sacrifice to keep the the gods happy with them as a people. Usually the sacrifices were captives of wars or slaves. During the sacrifice the priest would cut open the victim's chest and tear out the heart. Then placed it on the altar of the god or goddess. Sacrifices can also include women and children. Aztecs explained that the blood given in sacrifice gave the gods new strength and energy.



Some Aztec gods and goddesses

Huitzilopochtli: Sun god and god of war, chief god of the town of Tenochtitlan



Tlazolteotl: Mother of gods earth goddess

Quetzalcoatl: God of learning and the priesthood, also god of arts and crafts



Tezcatlipoca: Sun god, most powerful of all gods, chief god of the city Texcoco

