

The Maya

Connecting Earth and Sky

Narrator: In our Maya tradition, time is cyclical, and we believe that all things in the Universe are interconnected. Watching the sky makes it possible for our people to define predictable cycles in our lives.

José Huchim: Our view of time is something cyclical. That has to do with the renewal of all things, of time and of the calendar.

These days, in rural communities, there are still people who are guided by the apparent movement of the stars to plant their crops; therefore, in some ways that ancient knowledge is alive and continues to put in practice today.

Narrator: For our ancestors, the ceiba tree signified the tree of life and our vertical connection between the Earth and the sky. Today, the ceiba tree is still considered sacred, and it is planted at the center of our villages.

Alonso Méndez: It was believe that the sky was carried or was lifted by a pillar a great pillar which was the ceiba and the ceiba represented the connection, the divine connection between sky, the Earth, and the underworld.

Narrator: With the arrival of the March equinox, when the day and night are of equal length, the soil is prepared for planting. This is the time when Kukulcán, the feathered serpent, slithers down the pyramid of El Castillo in Chichén Itzá. Our grandparents tell us that Kukulcán is the cord that connects the Earth and the sky.

The equinox is also the time when the Sun aligns with the principal temple at Dzibilchaltún.

José Huchim: We have verified that the Sun appears through the central door of the Temple of the Seven Dolls on March 21st and September 22nd, the days of the equinoxes. Today, we also know that on the northern part, the famous Seven Dolls are linked to the Pleiades. Thus, this is a ceremonial building that in certain ways serves as an observatory.

Narrator: A few months after the equinox, when the Sun is passing overhead through the center of the sky, we begin planting corn, beans, and squash. This time, called the zenith passage of the Sun, typically coincides with the first rain storms.

Alonso Méndez: In the tropics, the weather patterns are also linked to the astronomical patterns in the seasonal calendar. The first rains coincide with the first zenith passage and the farmer can

determine that and they possibly were using their own digging sticks. At high noon the stick will have no shadow on the ground and so the farmer could tell by watching the movement of the Sun and by watching carefully the shadows when the first rains usually arrived during the year and so began the planting season.

Narrator: Late July marks the time of the canícula, a short dry spell when we bend down all the corn stalks before the possibility of a late rainfall. Farmers know when to do this by observing the Milky Way high in the sky and the bright star Sirius rising in the East before sunrise.

Our culture remains strong because the Maya way of life is rooted in our communities, our native languages, and a deep understanding of our connection between the Earth and sky.

