

## The Maya

### The Maya People

#### NARRATION:

People sometimes ask me about my Maya heritage, which is very diverse.

More than 6 million Maya currently live in Mesoamerica, including my country of Guatemala and large areas of southern Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.

We speak more than thirty Mayan languages. Despite differences, words like Sun, time, mother, house, and corn, are almost identical to the ear even if spoken in other Mayan tongues.

This is because our languages share a common linguistic origin, and because these words convey the very essence of our culture. This includes our relationship with corn, along with the importance of family, respect for our elders, and the fact that we, the Maya, have always been keen observers of the skies.

Keeping track of the movements of the Sun and the seasons enabled my ancestors to develop one of the most accurate calendar systems ever invented.

Knowledge of the sky is still strong in farming communities, and my grandfather observes the Sun and the stars to know when to plant. My people also keep an accurate count of the days in our sacred Calendar, in order to time rituals and celebrations.

My ancestors developed a writing system of hieroglyphs, invented the mathematical concept of zero, and built great cities like Uxmal, Palenque, Tikal, Copán, and Chichén Itzá. These cities have buildings that were constructed to align with the Sun, Moon, and stars.

We don't know why the great cities of the past were abandoned. Overuse of natural resources, war, drought, disease, as well as often contradictory and counterproductive human behaviors, are all likely to have contributed to the decline of our old splendor.

By the time the Spanish reached our land in the 1500s, Maya people had already left the great cities. Despite the oppression by the Spanish invaders, we have endured.

Today, we grow our corn as we have done for thousands of years. We weave our traditional clothes with ancient designs that reflect star patterns and our intimate

relationship with nature. And we use our sacred Calendar for the well-being of our communities.

We are active participants of the world. We are teachers, doctors, archaeologists, web-designers, calendar day keepers, and more.

Our culture is being preserved through language, tradition, and a deep connection with the land, and the sky.

