

THE CREATION CYCLE—The Five Worlds and Their Suns

Five worlds were created, each with its own sun, each following upon the death of the preceding one. The first world was illuminated by the sun of earth. The people of this first world acted improperly, so the gods punished them by causing jaguars to feast upon their flesh. No one survived, and their sun died along with them.

The second world was illuminated by the sun of air. Its people acted without wisdom, so hurricane winds descended upon the earth, and the people were punished by being turned into apes. Their sun died when they became animals.

The third world was illuminated by the sun of the rain of fire. Its people acted without respect and reverence for the gods, refusing to sacrifice to them, so they were punished by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions of fiery ash, and other forms of flaming death. Their sun burned along with them.

The fourth world was illuminated by the sun of water. The great god Quetzalcoatl created a race of human beings from ash. The people were very greedy, so they were punished by a great flood. Their sun drowned when most of the people were transformed into fish.

The Supreme Being tried to save one human couple from the deluge. His voice came to them and said, "Find a mighty tree, make a hole in the trunk large enough to hide in, and take refuge there until the flood waters recede. You will survive if you master your greed and eat only one corn cob each."

The husband and wife eagerly obeyed the instructions of the Supreme Being. They found a great tree, took refuge in it, and survived the flood.

When the waters had receded, they looked upon a strange world. Fish lay twitching on the ground where animals once had roamed. "Why should we gnaw on a corn cob when fish are so plentiful?" they asked one another.

They proceeded to break off dry twigs from their tree, make a fire, and roast one of the fish. The gods smelled the savory smoke and became enraged at the greed and disobedience of this couple. They descended upon them in wrath and cut off part of their heads, giving them brains the size of animals'. Then they transformed them into dogs.

Before the gods created the fifth world, our own world, they gathered together in the darkness to choose who would illuminate it by creating the fifth sun, the sun of four movements. This sun would combine within it the earlier four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. One wealthy god, lavishly dressed in shining feathers of the hummingbird and in jewels of turquoise and gold, volunteered—thinking more about the praise he would receive than about what the deed would entail.

"One will not be enough for this great deed," the gods said. "We need a second volunteer." Each god remained silent. Finally the gods asked, "'Will you help us, Nanautzin?"

Nanautzin looked up in surprise. Never before had he been worthy of their attention. He knew that the other gods despised him because he was misshapen, ugly, covered with disgusting-looking sores, and dressed in plain clothing made from woven reeds.

"If you will help us bring forth a fifth world, we will truly value you!" they said.

"If you wish it, I will do it," Nanautzin replied.

The two gods spent the next four days purifying themselves for the sacrifice. Then they approached the blazing fire upon the stone altar with their best gifts. The customary offerings were hay, dead branches, cactus needles, and bloody thorns. However, the wealthy god made a mighty show as he offered nuggets of gold, rich feathers, and gems. Nanautzin's offering seemed scanty as he placed in the fire three bundles of three green reeds, hay, the scabs from his sores, and thorns covered with his own blood.

All of the gods then built a towering pyramid of stone, made a bonfire on top of it, and let it burn for four nights while they too purified themselves. Finally they said to the wealthy god, "We are ready. Now perform the deed that you said you would do. Light up the world."

"How do you expect me to do this?" the wealthy god asked.

"You must leap into the center of the flames!" the gods replied.

The wealthy god's heart filled with terror, but he was ashamed to go back on his word. Four times he gingerly approached the flaming bonfire, and four times he

retreated in the face of the terrifying flames and the great heat. "I know I volunteered, but I just cannot do this," he admitted in shame.

"Then, Nanautzin, it is your turn to perform this great deed," the gods said.

So Nanautzin forced courage into his heart and jumped into the flames. As the fire burned away his life, his blazing clothing lighted up the sky and gave life to the sun.

The wealthy, cowardly god felt that he had no choice but to follow Nanautzin's brave example, so he too gathered the courage to sacrifice his life and he cast himself into the flames. But because Nanautzin had courageously led the way, from that time forth it was he who was honored among the gods. Many even say that Nanautzin was a form of the great god Quetzalcoatl.

The Creation of the Earth

Quetzalcoatl, the light one, and Tezcatlipoca, the dark one, looked down from the sky and saw only water below. A monstrous goddess floated upon the water, eating whatever she could find with her many mouths, for every joint in her body contained eyes sharp enough to spot any source of food and mouths that bit like wild animals.

"We must find some way to stop that goddess from devouring whatever we create," the two gods said to one another.

So it came to pass that the two great gods transformed themselves into two huge serpents. One of them quickly grabbed the goddess by her arms, while the other quickly grabbed her by the feet. Then, before she could resist, they pulled until she broke apart in the middle. Her head and shoulders became the earth, while the lower part of her body rose into the sky and became the heavens.

The other gods were angry at what Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca had done to the goddess. They came down to earth and decided to give her gifts that would compensate for her mutilation. They decreed that whatever human beings needed for survival, she would provide. They created trees, tall grass, and flowers from her hair, fine grasses and tiny flowers from her skin, small caves, fountains, and wells from her eyes, large caves and rivers from her mouth, hills and valleys from her nose, and mountains from her shoulders.

The goddess is often unhappy. Sometimes in the night, people can hear her crying. Then they know that she is filled with a ravenous thirst for human blood.

Whenever this thirst comes upon her, the goddess will not provide the fruits of the soil and will not stop crying until the blood from human hearts has quenched her thirst. She who provides sustenance for human lives demands human lives in return for her own sustenance. So it has always been; so it will ever be.

The Creation of Human Beings

In the fifth world, our own world, the great god Quetzalcoatl prepared to create a new race of human beings. First he decided that his creations must have nourishing food to eat. He set forth across the face of the earth, stopping to examine every plant and animal to see if that particular food would be best for his people.

When the ants showed him the grains of corn they ate, Quetzalcoatl decided that this was the food for which he had been searching. But he knew the ants would never give him their corn. He would have to steal it from them.

So Quetzalcoatl transformed himself into a black ant. Along with the other black ants, he laboriously transported the corn from the field to a place of storage, grain by precious grain. But Quetzalcoatl only pretended to store the corn for the ant community. He was really building an enormous pile of grains for the people he was about to create. Finally he collected enough corn in his secret hoard to enable him to teach his people to plant it and produce a crop for themselves. He resumed his normal shape, put the corn into a huge bag, and returned to the heavens with it.

Quetzalcoatl was now ready to turn his attention to the second part of his plan, the creation of our present race of human beings. Each day he flew across the heavens from east to west, following the path of the sun. Each night he traveled through the Underworld from west to east, emerging at dawn. During one of his night journeys through the Underworld, Quetzalcoatl decided to find the Lord of the Dead Land and take the first step toward creating the new race of human beings.

"I would like you to give me the bones of my father that are buried in this land," he said to the Lord of the Dead Land.

"Why should I do you this favor, Quetzalcoatl?" the Lord of the Dead Land asked. "Whatever is buried belongs to me. What do you intend to do with these bones?"

Quetzalcoatl replied, "These bones are very dear to me, since they are all that remains of my father. The gods want another race of human beings to live upon the earth, and I intend to create them from my father's bones."

"Here they are, then," the Lord of the Dead Land replied. "The bones will be yours once you perform the deed I require of you. Take this conch shell in one hand and carry the bones in your other hand. Blow into the shell, making a great sound, as you walk four times around that circle of jade."

Quetzalcoatl took the bones and the conch shell from the Lord of the Dead Land and began to walk around the jade circle. When he tried to blow into the shell, it made no sound, for something was blocking its interior.

Quetzalcoatl called on the worms and the bees who lived in the Underworld to help him. First the worms entered the shell and pushed through the substance that was blocking it. Then the bees entered the twisting passages and cleared out any material that the worms had left behind.

Once Quetzalcoatl had successfully blown on the conch shell as he walked around the circle of jade, the Lord of the Dead Land had said he could take the bones. However, the lord secretly told his servants to examine Quetzalcoatl before he left and make certain that the god left the bones behind.

When the servants commanded Quetzalcoatl to leave the bones behind, the great god did not know how to evade the order. He called on his nahual, his animal double, for advice.

"Pretend to leave the bones, Quetzalcoatl," his nahual replied. "Then, once the servants have returned to their master, pack up the bones and take them with you."

So Quetzalcoatl pretended to obey the order to leave the bones, but he carefully wrapped them up and returned to the upper world.

The Lord of the Dead Land was not deceived by Quetzalcoatl's actions. He said to his servants, "Quetzalcoatl has disobeyed my orders and has taken the bones with him. Dig a pit that will trap him and cause him to drop the bones."

The servants of the Lord of the Dead Land dug a pit in the earth and concealed it well with leafy branches and dirt. As they had planned, Quetzalcoatl tripped and fell into the trap. Birds threatened him so menacingly that the great god fainted from terror,

dropping his precious package. The birds then pecked apart the wrappings and the bones within them.

When Quetzalcoatl awakened, he wept with grief at his plight. "Oh, my nahual," he cried. "What should I do now?"

"Do not despair," his nahual replied. "Make the best of it, and continue your journey."

Quetzalcoatl gathered up the bones that the birds had pecked into tiny pieces, wrapped them as best he could, and returned with them as he had intended.

The goddess Woman Snake ground the bits of his father's bones into bone meal and placed the meal in a jade bowl. Then Quetzalcoatl pierced his body and moistened the meal with his own blood. From this mixture he molded the new race of human beings, both male and female.

The Creation of Music

One day Tezcatlipoca, god of the heavens, came down to earth and wandered from place to place, observing all the beauties of nature. As he walked, he said to himself, "Earth Monster has brought forth mountains and valleys, rivers and streams, forests and meadows. In the light of Sun's rays, her flowers sparkle like brilliant jewels among her blades of grass. Clearly, there is much on Earth to please the hearts of human beings. Yet creation is not complete. Something is missing. Animals roar and people talk, but I hear no music! My heart is heavy with sadness, for music delights the soul as nothing else can."

So Tezcatlipoca summoned Quetzalcoatl, in his form as Wind. "Wind, hear my voice and come to me!" he called to each of the four corners of the world.

Wind groaned complainingly and reluctantly gathered himself together from where he lay scattered over Earth's surface. He rose higher than the tallest tree and the mightiest mountain, and in the form of a great black bird, he came forth to meet the god of the heavens.

Tezcatlipoca heard the waves rise in tumult from the ocean depths and crash with a roar upon the sandy shore. He heard the branches of the trees creak and moan as their leaves tossed and touched. He smiled. Quetzalcoatl had heard his voice, and he was coming.

Quetzalcoatl arrived quickly. As usual, his tempestuous disposition gave him an angry look even when he was quiet. He rested at Tezcatlipoca's feet without complaint.

"Quetzalcoatl," Tezcatlipoca began, "I find that ripe fruits, colorful flowers, and the brightness of Sun's rays make the whole earth beautiful. Yet, in spite of such beauty, Earth is sick with sadness! Not one beautiful sound fills the silence. Not one animal, bird, or human being can sing! Even you know only how to whine and howl, or moan and groan!

"Life must contain music! Music must accompany the awakening dawn. It must inspire the dreaming man. It must comfort the waiting mother. One must be able to hear it in the wings of the bird overhead and in the waters of the nearby brook.

"You must travel high above to the roof of the universe, find the house of Sun, Father of All Life, and ask him to give you musicians to live on Earth and add their beauty to the world. Surely Sun can do this, for he houses many musicians and a flaming choir whose brilliance sheds light upon the earth. Choose the best among both and return to Earth with them.

"When you reach the shore of the ocean," Tezcatlipoca concluded, "You will find my three servants, Water Monster, Water Woman, and Cane and Conch. Command them to unite their bodies and create a bridge on which you can travel up to Sun."

Quetzalcoatl agreed. As he traveled across the face of Earth, he heard what Tezcatlipoca had described, either sad silence or harsh, raucous chatter. When he reached the seashore he found Tezcatlipoca's three servants, who created the bridge for him. Even with the bridge, it took all of his mighty breath to bring him to the house of Sun.

Sun's musicians strode about the halls in colors appropriate to the music they played. Those who played cradle songs and melodies for children wore gleaming white. Those who played songs accompanying the epics of love or war wore brilliant red. Those who wandered with their music as minstrels among the clouds wore bright blue, and those who sat in the golden rays of Sun playing their flutes wore radiant yellow. Quetzalcoatl could not find a musician dressed in a dark, sad color, for there were no sad songs.

As soon as the Father of All Life saw Quetzalcoatl, he exclaimed, "Musicians! I see Wind, that turbulent pest who annoys Earth, approaching our peaceful kingdom. Be silent! I want to hear no singing! I want to hear no playing of instruments! Whoever makes a sound when Wind speaks will have to return to Earth with him, and you will find no music there."

Wind climbed the stairways to the halls of Sun. As soon as he saw the musicians, he raised his deep voice and shouted, "Musicians! Singers! Come with me!"

Not one musician or singer replied to his call.

Wind shouted again, more harshly, "Come, musicians! Come, singers! The Supreme Lord of the Universe summons you to join him!"

Again, not one musician or singer replied to his call. They remained in frozen silence in obedience to the wishes of flaming Sun, like a colorful array of dancers suspended in the midst of their dance.

Then Tezcatlipoca, God of the Heavens, expressed his rage. From the four corners of the sky, flocks of black storm clouds rumbled ominously toward the house of Sun, lashed forward by the whip of their lord's lightning bolts. Mighty roars of thunder poured from the great god's throat, engulfing the house of Sun in torrential sound.

The storm clouds swallowed Sun, Father of All Life, who drowned like a flaming beast. Shivering with terror, the musicians and singers flew into the lap of Wind, who lifted them gently—so as not to crush their music—and happily carried them down to Earth, who was waiting far below.

Meanwhile, Earth scanned the heavens with her dark eyes, watching for the first appearance of Wind. Her face shone with a special radiance and she smiled with delight upon seeing that Quetzalcoatl's quest had been successful. All life welcomed the wanderers. Trees lifted their leafy branches, birds fluttered their wings, people and animals raised their voices, and flowers and fruits lifted their faces in greeting.

Sun's musicians and singers landed happily upon Earth and wandered off in small groups. One could not travel to the most distant corners of the world without meeting singers and musicians all along the way. Even Wind was now happy. No longer did he sadly sigh, moan, and groan as he had in former days. He now sang along with the rest of all life, refreshing the trees of the forest, the meadows, and the ocean waters with his gentle breezes.

So it came to pass that Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl helped one another to create music upon Earth. Music accompanied the awakening dawn. It inspired the dreaming man. It comforted the waiting mother. One could hear it in the wings of the bird overhead and in the waters of the nearby brook. From that time forth, every living thing could create its own kind of music.