

The Inspiration Behind Our Symbol

Mayan religion was heavily influenced by the ceiba pentandra tree, a native tree to North and South America and Africa. Ancient Mayans called it a 'Yax Che', which translates to 'First Tree' or 'Green Tree.' The ceiba tree was sacred in their culture and had deep meanings within Mayan mythology and religion.

Another focal point of Mayan religion—like many religions around the world—were the four directions, and what these directions represented. North, East, South, and West. But they also held the center of these directions of great importance. Each direction represented a color, and according to ancient Mayans, followed the sun's path.

We've adopted a representation of the Mayan world tree, and the four directions for our symbol as we believe this represents all the elements on the planet and our understanding of our place in the world among these elements.

What Does the Mayan World Tree Represent?

In Mayan mythology, [the ceiba tree is considered to be the connection between all three levels of the earth](#). Mayans believed the roots of the tree stretch down to the underworld. Next, the tree's thick trunk represents the middle layer—the world we inhabit. Finally, the tree's branches reach up into the sky, creating a beautiful canopy of leaves, representing the upper world, or the heavens.

There are depictions of The World Tree in many texts and historic documents in Mayan culture. It was an integral part of their belief system. They also believed the tree embodied the four cardinal directions of life.

According to Mayan culture, the world tree was where everything came from. The ceiba tree has delicate white flowers that symbolized human souls. The idea of a 'tree of life' is in the roots of almost every religion and divine movement on the planet. There are depictions of trees of life in fiction and folklore, and we usually associate them with immortality, fertility, or youthfulness.

The Four Directions

Many cultures around the world have developed ideologies around the four directions and elements. Mayans were no different. They believed in [four cardinal directions](#): east, west, north and south. But they also believed in a fifth direction, which acted as the center for all other directions. The directions represented the sun's path, so north was also equal to up, and south also meant down.

To Mayans, the east and west directions had the most significance. Each direction was associated with a color. Red (called *chak*) represented the east, yellow (called *k'an*) was the south, white (called *sak*) symbolized the north and black (called *ek*) was the west. In the

center, the color was green/blue (called *yak*). The Mayans didn't have a word that distinguished green from blue; they were both the same.

Different Gods were associated with each cardinal direction and its corresponding color, as well as birds and objects for some directions. The center of the historical depictions of these directions was usually a ceiba tree – representing the world tree.

The Four Elements Surrounding the Tree

We chose to depict the four elements of life in our symbol to honor them and the fifth element, Spirit, for all we are gifted. At the top we see Wind and Fire. At the bottom, Earth and Water. We believe that connection to each individual element can grant us a different type of healing power, and thus should honor and respect each one. The Wind represents the communication between the inner and outer world. We breathe in spirit, and then exhale it once again. Constantly exchanging its love and knowledge. Fire represents rebirth and resurrection. The flame inside fuels our own fire and desire for growth and change. Earth represents the mother, the nurturer. The feminine caretaker that nourishes us and takes our pain. Water represents life and cleanliness. We are the water and as such must flow, and allow it to cleanse us inside and out.

The Mayan God Chaac

The Gods associated with the cardinal directions and colors were all connected to the [ancient Mayan god of storms and rain, Chaac](#) - often referred to as God B in historical texts. As Mayan agriculture depended on rain, they held Chaac at a particularly higher level of importance. It's easy to understand why. Rain helps us grow our crops and plants, and water is essential to survival. The Mayan deities related to rain were known by a variety of names among different cultures in Mesoamerica and were significant going back to the dawn of Mayan civilization.

Depictions of Chaac often show him holding snakes and axes made of jade to toss at clouds to make rain. Rain was part of the natural life cycle, helping to produce maize and essential crops. Chaac was also responsible for more perilous storms, hurricanes, and hail. The Mayans believed Chaac lived atop mountains and in high altitude forests that were covered by clouds.

Mayans connected all Gods associated with the four cardinal directions to different parts of Chaac. The North had Sak Xib Chaac, who was white. Representing the east (and most important) was the red Chaac, or Chaak Xib Chaac. For the south was the yellow Chaac called Kan Xib Chaac. The west had Ex Xib Chaac, who was black.

Together they were named the Chaacs or Chaacob, and Mayans worshipped them as a vital part of their culture. Ceremonies and Rituals were regularly held to honor Chaac in every city across Mayan territory to bring rain so the crops would grow.

The Ayahuasca Vine

As it is our main form of connection to source, and our true selves, we have incorporated the Ayahuasca vine in the middle of our symbol wrapped around the ceiba's trunk. The vine has been depicted in art dating back thousands of years. Shamans traditionally brewed it as a [way to allow DMT into the body orally](#). There are ritualistic ties to spirituality associated with the vine in the indigenous cultures from Mesoamerica.

Ayahuasca translates to 'vine of the spirit' and is believed to have healing properties. Ayahuasca is traditionally used in spiritual ceremonies led by shamans (spiritual leaders). The vine is brewed with other plants of which vary depending on the region. The ceremony allows people who drink the tea to connect with source on a spiritual level, allowing for physical, mental, and emotional revelations. We chose the ayahuasca vine as the tree trunk in our Symbol to recognize how it extends out of the ground and wraps itself around the other tree trunks as it grows. The vine has deep connections with healing and spirituality in Mayan culture, and we feel tying it together with our adaptation of The World Tree and the Four Cardinal Directions represents the connection humans have to nature and our respect for Mother Earth.

History of Mayan Religion with Catholicism

When Spanish conquerors crossed the ocean and colonized Mesoamerica, the Mayan civilization was already thousands of years old. They had their own beliefs, culture, and mythology. Spain was primarily a Catholic country at the time and brought over their own Roman Catholic priests in order to hold mass in the colonies.

The Spanish colonization of Mayans was not a peaceful one, and [the brutal battles and wars lasted around 170 years](#). A huge part of the Spanish colonization of Mayan lands was the forced adoption of Catholicism into Mayan culture. There are still thousands of Mayan Catholics today in an example of forced and successful religious syncretism. Mayan deities have merged with members of the Catholic Trinity, the Virgin Mary, and Catholic Saints. They use many depictions of Catholic imagery in more recent Mayan culture, reworking it to suit personal styles.

In 1562, Fray Diego de Landa attempted to annihilate any trace of Mayan culture left from before the Spanish invasion. An event that saw forty Mayans made up of leaders and governors arrested and punished for not following Catholic traditions. Traditional Mayan icons were burned and destroyed, and the Mayans suffered.

Motivated by myths of gold and riches, the Spanish attempted to dominate Mayan lands, and in doing so wanted to [decimate all evidence of Mayan culture](#). As a response to this, there's evidence that Mayans [publicly converted to Catholicism as an act of self-preservation](#), but then continued to practice their own beliefs in private. This involved blending the Mayan deities with the Catholic God and Holy Trinity. Spanish colonizers taught converted Mayans how to read and write in Spanish—something the indigenous used to their advantage when preserving their own beliefs and ideologies against the invaders.

The Spanish focused their attack by dividing up Mayan towns and cities and attacking them one by one, their brutal conquest comprising a series of planned attacks, sieges, and drawn out military campaigns. A combination of Spanish brutality and introduction of disease saw the Mayan [population decline by an estimated 88%](#). The Spanish invaders exposed the Mayans to smallpox, measles, influenza, typhus and yellow fever for the first time, which had a devastating effect on Mayan communities.

Towards the end of the 16th century, Spanish friars attempted to use less brutal conversion methods, but their end goal was still the same. They wanted Mayans to give up their centuries old polytheistic religion and convert to theirs. There is also [evidence of friars forcing themselves on women](#) sexually as part of their confession.

The agenda to force Mayan Catholics to give up their religious roots and follow European Catholicism continued [right into the twentieth century](#). The forced conversion of Mayans to Catholicism can be considered a form of cultural genocide. It may well have been, were it not for the brave Mayans who persevered and blended their religion in place of converting completely. Doing so has allowed Mayan traditional culture and religion to continue to be celebrated. We strive to connect to our Mayan ancestors and their ways so that we may regain that knowledge and connection that Mayans had before being forced into another religion, so that we may decolonize ourselves through their rightful teachings

Here at the Temple of The Four Winds, we believe we are part of a 'oneness' with Mother Earth and Creator. The World Tree and the Four Cardinal Directions revered in Mayan culture represent our connection with the earth and our creator. We are all a small part of what makes the Earth a fascinating and beautiful place.

Every being and element are interconnected. We created our symbol as a representation of the deep connection all beings have.