



OTTO JOHN KRALOVEC III

PATHWAYS  
TO THE  
DIVINE

ONE MAN'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE  
SHAMANIC REALM OF THE ANCIENT MAYA

# PATHWAYS TO THE DIVINE

## CHAPTER 11

This sample chapter from Otto John Kralovec III's *Pathways to the Divine: One Man's Journey Through the Shamanic Realm of the Ancient Maya*, provides an opportunity to join John as he travels to the ancient Maya ceremonial center of Copan in Honduras. Like all chapters in the book, this chapter recounts his visionary experience with the ancient Maya and provides additional insights from recent discoveries about their spirituality and ceremonial practices.

Chapter 11, Consecration of the Maize, tells the story of John's vision of the ancient Maya ritual of preparing maize (corn) seeds for the annual planting. In this ceremony, the maize kernels were "awakened" by imbuing them with sacred, spiritual life-force conjured from the higher Divine realms. The entire process was aided by the spirit of the deceased founder of Copan, Yax'K'uk'Mo, summoned from the Otherworld to Rosalila Temple to preside over the ritual.

John's complete book, *Pathways to the Divine: One Man's Journey Through the Shamanic Realm of the Ancient Maya*, is available from Amazon Books.

PRAISE FOR  
PATHWAYS TO THE DIVINE

“John Kralovec’s *Pathways to the Divine* is a beautifully written and moving story which captures the heart and soul of the ancient Maya in a truly unique and memorable way. The writing is rich and dynamic and includes exquisite descriptions of the author’s experiences. While grounded in historical fact and the latest archeological findings, John’s profound spiritual insights add a new dimension to academic research. Stories such as Pakal’s death and the author’s encounter with Ix-Chel at both Tikal and Coba, are fantastically powerful.”

— Joy Parker, co-author, *Maya Cosmos:  
Three Thousand Years on the Shaman’s Path*

“This book is a highly original, engaging, and authentic metaphysical document of a genuine spiritual seeker’s journey of a lifetime ... John reveals the incredibly sophisticated spiritual technology of the Maya, Lakota, Anasazi and other indigenous cultures of North America. Even better, he so wholly absorbed me into the mystical visions that he exquisitely described that I lost all sense of self and time and I had my own mystical experiences along with his. It’s been a very long time since a book has transported me this way. More than ever in this chaotic world, we need spiritual instructors to guide and inspire us on our own paths to God. Through his book, John has beautifully shared so much of value that he personally discovered and that he learned from others, both in this world and from the higher spiritual realms. In doing so he has become a spiritual guide and inspirational teacher for us. *Pathways to the Divine* is a powerful and important achievement.”

— Walter Robert Dominguez, Producer-Director,  
*Weaving the Past: Journey of Discovery*

“John Kralovec has written an extraordinary book that offers a rare glimpse into the spiritual realm of the ancient Maya. No anthropological work can come close to capturing the true grandeur of the culture the way *Pathways to the Divine* does. Kralovec cites many academic works in this well-researched book, but his own spiritual adventures are what make it such a fascinating read. Anthropologists and archeologists can only interpret based on their own life experience, so they’re really stuck in what current Maya elders call “a materialistic view.” Yet the ancient Maya come alive through Kralovec’s shamanic experiences and rich descriptions. For readers who want to know if there’s more to life than our 9-5 jobs, TV news and celebrity gossip, Kralovec affirms that the answer is a resounding “yes.” And it can be found in deep spiritual work, having an adventurous spirit and belief in the unseen realms.”

— Molly Larkin, co-author,

*The Wind Is My Mother: The Life and Teachings  
of a Native American Shaman*

“John Kralovec has shown a remarkable transformation in the past three decades, grasping the essence of both Lakota and Maya spirituality. Now, he is on a journey to serve others and one of those ways is through this inspired work, *Pathways to the Divine*. His message, and those of indigenous teachers everywhere, is vitally needed today.”

— Doug Alderson, author,

*Seminole Freedom; The Vision Keepers:  
Walking for Native Americans and the Earth*

# PATHWAYS TO THE DIVINE

*One Man's Journey Through the  
Shamanic Realm of the Ancient Maya*

OTTO JOHN KRALOVEC III



SUMMIT PRESS

SUMMIT PRESS  
PO Box 235 • Granville, Ohio 43023

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First Edition  
ISBN: 978-0-9983533-0-2  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2016918718  
Printed in the United States of America

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Cover Design by Lászió Kiss, Super Massive Studio  
Book Design and Illustrations by Herkelrath Design  
Back Cover photograph courtesy of  
Grupo Megamedia, Archivo del Diario de Yucatán

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# CONSECRATION OF THE MAIZE

COPAN  
COPAN DEPARTMENT, HONDURAS – 2007

The ancient Maya city of Copan was built in a river valley along the Copan River in western Honduras, near the Guatemalan border. Although it lacks the grand monumental ceremonial architecture of Tikal, and was much smaller (Copan's population in its heyday was one quarter the size of Tikal's), it is the site of extraordinary artistic treasures that comprise the greatest in the entire Maya realm. In addition to its distinctive architecture, Copan is famous for its magnificent artwork that includes breathtakingly beautiful sculpted stone stelae, exquisitely carved stone hieroglyphic stairways, and stunning sculptures of supernatural deities and ancestors conjured from the other world.

Although I didn't know much about the specifics at the time of my visit, I had read that the hieroglyphics deciphered at Copan and the images in the ancient artwork that had been decoded provided unparalleled insights into the ancient spiritual realm of the Maya. I was also looking forward to visiting Copan because

Alfonso Morales had suggested I look up a friend and professional colleague of his, Luis Reina, who lived in the adjoining pueblo; Alfonso and Luis had worked together for many years on the archaeological excavations at Copan.

During the three-hour bus ride from San Pedro Sula, we drove through the lush, fertile Copan River Valley, passing tobacco plantations, coffee farms, and hot springs. The valley was at an elevation of two thousand feet, so it was a relief to leave behind the dense and sometimes oppressive humidity of the steamy jungle sites in Guatemala. The morning after our arrival I walked from the village to the ruins. When I arrived at the park I enquired about Luis but was told that he was in the country visiting relatives (it was Sunday, his day off) and wouldn't return until Monday. Rather than head directly for the ruins themselves, I decided to stop at the on-site Copan Sculpture Museum, an attractive new building that seemed to emerge organically from its surroundings. The entrance to the museum was framed by a stylized representation of the open jaws of a serpent, reminiscent of the Vision Serpent. The entrance led directly into a long, dimly lit, gently curving serpentine tunnel that created a wonderfully realistic impression of journeying from the contemporary world into the sacred realm.

Storyboards along the walls described the tunnel as a representation of a natural cave that, according to ancient Maya beliefs, provided access to Xibalba, the mythological Maya Lower World. The descriptive panels also introduced the famous *Popol Vuh* legend: the story of how the primal ancestral Maya Hero Twins descended into Xibalba, their trials with the Lords of the Lower World, and their eventual ascent to the celestial cosmos. Just beyond its end, the darkened tunnel opened dramatically into a large, two-story, sun-filled atrium surrounded by stunning displays of ancient Copan stone and stucco sculpture that included re-creations of temple facades; gigantic three-dimensional carvings

of killer bats, water birds and stylized macaws; life-size figures of ancestral warriors and mythical deities; and hieroglyphic reproductions. As I struggled to absorb all the treasures the museum held, my attention kept coming back to the structure dominating the center of the atrium.

Before me was the most incredible building I had ever seen. The three-tiered edifice, obviously created for ceremonial purposes, rose over forty feet and measured sixty by forty feet at its base. It was covered with boldly sculpted, highly stylized, otherworldly figures that I later learned included fanged vision serpents, other world deities such as the Celestial Bird, Cauac (also referred to as “The Witz Monster”), and Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (‘Radiant First Quetzal Macaw’), the founding ruler of Copan. The temple was painted bright blood red with brilliant green, yellow, and white highlights. It was so colorful and the sculptured images so vibrant and lifelike that the structure seemed almost alive with writhing serpents, flying birds, menacing monsters, and resurrected ancestors.

The structure before me was an exact, meticulously crafted replica of an ancient temple-shrine known as Rosalila. The actual building had been discovered accidentally by archaeologist Ricardo Agurcia when he was excavating beneath Temple-Pyramid 16 (also referred to as Structure 16) in Copal’s ancient acropolis. Rosalila had been buried intact within the much larger Temple 16. This was a stunning discovery because the ancient Maya typically destroyed older ceremonial buildings when newer ones were built in their place.

Even more remarkable than the discovery of the building was the manner in which it had been preserved. Usually, the Maya ceremonially “decommissioned” a temple-pyramid and removed the artwork from the outside of the structure before constructing the new temple on top of it. However, the treatment of Rosalila had been different. Rosalila’s interior had been carefully filled with clay and rocks, and its sculpted outer panels had been covered with

a thick coat of white stucco before the entire structure was buried within the newer temple. Ricardo Agurcia has observed that “Rosalila was a living being, charged with spiritual force. It was wrapped in a white mantle and buried with due ceremony and offerings of great value. In life it was a sacred mountain that provided access to the world of the dead.”<sup>1</sup> He also noted that “[t]he embalming of the temple in white finds its counterpart in mortuary practices that remain in use among the contemporary Ch’orti Maya.”<sup>2</sup>

In *The Code of Kings*, Linda Schele and Peter Mathews observe that the ancient Maya conducted dedication rituals that allowed them to bring their ceremonial buildings to life and prepare them for use by human, spiritual, and supernatural beings.<sup>3</sup> They note that “[o]ne purpose of dedication rituals was to put *k’ulel* or soul force into buildings” and that “[t]his soul force was ever more powerful with usage.”<sup>4</sup> Their research had confirmed my previous experiences that ancient ceremonial buildings contained portals through which ancestors and deities materialized into the physical world. I hadn’t realized that “spiritual beings left residual energy in the buildings and the objects that opened the portals” and that the most intense *k’ulel* was found in very old buildings where very sacred rituals were performed.<sup>5</sup>

Archaeologists believe that Rosalila was built by Copan’s tenth ruler, Moon Jaguar, after 520 CE and used by three rulers for over one hundred years until its termination sometime around 655 CE.<sup>6</sup> Other excavations have revealed that Rosalila had been built on top of much earlier structures that included two elaborate royal tombs. The oldest and deepest buried tomb was filled with royal jade, symbolic of sovereign authority, and is believed to have belonged to Copan’s founder and first ruler, Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (‘Radiant First Quetzal Macaw’), who died sometime around 437 CE. A later tomb, the richest Maya female burial place found to date, was discovered above his and is presumed to be that of his

widow. Although her name is not known, scholars refer to her as “The Lady in Red” because her skeleton was found covered in rich hematite and cinnabar pigments.

The more I learned about Rosalila, the more enthralled I became with this architectural and spiritual masterwork. The building is composed of three levels, or as Agurcia has observed, “three bodies.”<sup>7</sup> The first and lowest level of Rosalila contains the main temple structure. The interior walls of the original building are covered with a heavy layer of soot from the ceremonial use of copal and smoke from the burning of torches. During Rosalila’s excavation, archaeologists found numerous ceremonial objects inside, including seven pottery incense burners (two of which were placed on carved stone jaguar pedestals), flowers, chert knives, ceremonial scepters, shark vertebrae, jaguar claws, and stingray spines used in ritual bloodletting.<sup>8</sup>

On the outside, the lowest level is adorned with bold, richly-sculpted representations that include K’inich Ajaw (the Sun God) portrayed as the Celestial Bird, and masks representing Copan’s founder, Yax K’uk’ Mo’, being conjured from the Lower World. Anthropomorphic images emerging from vision serpents adorn the lower walls, and massive serpent heads with images of deities emerging from their jaws form the building’s lowest corners.<sup>9</sup> The sculpted imagery and ceremonial items clearly identify this section of the temple as a representation of a sacred cave and a path to the other worlds. The images of Yax K’uk’ Mo’ and the proximity of his tomb beneath the structure document his supernatural presence during ceremonies.

An enormous mask of Cauac, the Witz Monster, dominates the walls of the narrower second level. Agurcia has observed that in this sculpture, “its brow is split, and scrolls that end by cradling a young ear of maize merge from this cleft.”<sup>10</sup> The four corners of the second level are formed by massive serpent heads

whose bodies descend from the upper, third level. The upper level itself, the smaller and narrower of the three, contains three small rooms connected by two narrow passageways. Together, the second and third levels comprise the roof comb of the entire temple structure. The presence of the mask of the Witz Monster identifies Rosalila as a sacred mountain (“*witz*”), while representations of incense burners confirm Rosalila as a “house of smoke” or temple.<sup>11</sup>

The spiritual symbolism of Rosalila’s architecture and iconography, viewed as a whole, is incredible almost beyond belief. Although described as a sacred mountain, a place of creation and the birthplace of the sacred maize, to me the combination of witz and serpent images, along with the depiction of a young ear of maize, identify Rosalila as a manifestation of Sustenance Mountain or Yax Hal Witznal, the “First True Mountain.”<sup>12</sup> I also came to believe that the interpretation of the imagery from the Temple of the Jaguar at Chichen Itza applies to Rosalila as well: both display images of “[t]he snake in the mountains [which] represents a conduit from the supernatural world into the human world—a kind of vision serpent” and also a “birth canal.”<sup>13</sup>

I was stunned with what all this seemed to be communicating about the purpose and function of this ancient structure. Maize was so central to the life of the ancient Maya that they referred to themselves as the “people of the maize” and Rosalila seemed to be at the very heart of their most sacred mysteries. The temple was the living embodiment of First True Mountain, the source of life-sustaining maize for the Maya. The sacred crop was birthed on the summit of Yax Hal Witznal, and was brought forth from the higher spiritual realms into the human world through the umbilicus of the supernatural serpents. Inside the sacred mountain, deep within the sacred cave, Copan’s founder, Yax K’uk’ Mo’, was resurrected from the other worlds to preside over the divine gift of maize to the Maya.

I spent three hours in the museum that day. Most of my time was spent at the Rosalila reconstruction, and the rest viewing the other exhibits of spectacular stone and stucco sculptures that included supernatural beings conjured from the other worlds, witz masks, *waybil* (god houses), images of killer bats (the emblem glyph of Copan), and other architectural works of art. Early that afternoon I left the museum area and walked toward the Great Plaza of Copan, beyond the entrance to the ruins. I found a semi-secluded area outside the plaza and stopped among the trees to prepare to properly enter the sacred site. I burned copal, smudged myself, offered a few short prayers to the Maya ancestors and their living descendants, and then walked directly across the grassy plaza until I found Stela H.

Standing in front of this magnificent stela, the freestanding, monolithic stone carving of Copan's thirteenth ruler, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil ('18 Rabbit'), was an electrifying experience. Although Frederick Catherwood's nineteenth century lithograph of the monument was hauntingly beautiful, seeing the actual stone masterwork was absolutely breathtaking. I immediately recalled in minute detail the moment I had first encountered Catherwood's drawing. I remembered the chills that had swept through my body as the ancient ruler's magnificent visage and elaborate ceremonial regalia seemed to leap off the page of the picture book in my hands. It was as if his image had called out to me, awakening what seemed to be an ancient, forgotten memory.

But Catherwood's striking drawing paled in comparison to the actual monument before me. The sculpted image of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil, dressed as the Maize God in his full ceremonial regalia, was over seven feet high, three feet wide, and three feet deep. The carved representation of his ceremonial headdress extended the sculpture's height to over eleven feet. The entire surface of the limestone slab was comprised of intricately-wrought carved images that depicted not only Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil, but

also supernatural deities, serpentine images of the twisted cords of the cosmic umbilicus that carried souls between the physical and non-physical realms, and wayob (animal spirit companions) conjured from the Otherworld.<sup>14</sup>

There on the grassy plaza, underneath a crystalline blue sky, Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil was as present to me through his sculpture as if he had been standing there in person. The space around me seemed to expand, time seemed to slow down, and the sounds of other visitors seemed to drift off into the distance. I stood there transfixed, mesmerized by the presence of the ancient ruler. I realized my legs were shaking and tears were running down my cheeks. Somehow, decades after our first encounter, I had found my way back to Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil and I knew something profoundly important was unfolding for me; I knew there was a reason for my being there.

I spent a leisurely time studying the other monumental stelae in the plaza and then ventured deeper into the ceremonial site. Unlike most other Maya sites, where limestone had been the primary building material, here at Copan, green and buff-colored volcanic tuff predominated. Although archaeologists believe that the ceremonial structures were once brightly painted (much like Rosalila), today they have an incredibly beautiful greenish patina that gives them an aura of enchantment. Copan's altitude and proximity to the river have resulted in trees and lush highland foliage that envelope the site and give it an unmatched natural beauty.

Walking through the ruins, I passed breathtakingly beautiful architectural masterpieces that included the Ball Court, the Hieroglyphic Stairway, and the Temple of Inscriptions. Eventually I made my way to the East Court (also known as the Court of the Jaguars) and found the entrance to the underground tunnel that led to the original Rosalila, entombed within the pyramid that supported Temple 16. My heart was racing as I covered the short

distance through the tunnel into the base of the pyramid, bringing me face to face with the excavated portions of Rosalila on public display. Signs along the tunnel walls helped orient visitors to the various architectural elements and provided a reference to the replica in the museum.

Although the tunnel was cramped and dark, it was thrilling to see portions of the actual temple in person, including an original stucco mask of the Yax K'uk' Mo' as the Sun God and a double-headed serpent with an anthropomorphic face emerging from its jaws. Knowing that the tomb of Copan's founder Yax K'uk' Mo' as well as the tomb and offering chamber of his wife were farther below me (although not accessible to visitors) made the experience all the more exciting. The ruins were relatively deserted that day so I had ample time to spend within the Rosalila tunnel and another called the Jaguar Tunnel that was also open to the public. By the time I had finished the second tunnel tour, I'd had enough for one day and decided to walk back to the hotel.

That night I had an incredibly difficult time sleeping as I struggled to make sense of the unexpected correspondences I was seeing between Maya maize and North American Pueblo Indian corn ceremonialism. The symbolism of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil depicted as the Maize God on Stela H and the Yax Hal Witznal imagery on Rosalila had helped me to more fully appreciate the role maize played at the very center of the heart and soul of ancient Maya spirituality. According to their spiritual traditions, the Maize God was the First Father of world creation and the Maya were originally created from maize dough. Maize was a primary component of their diet and they depended on it for their livelihood. It became clear to me that understanding this maize symbolism was the key to understanding who the ancient Maya were.

With this awareness, my thoughts turned immediately to the Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest. I had learned from

the writings of Hopi Indian scholar Barton Wright that the Hopi, as well as other Pueblo tribes,<sup>15</sup> believe that corn is their “Mother”<sup>16</sup> and the source of their livelihood. The Hopi and other Pueblo tribes have developed elaborate ceremonies designed to elicit supernatural assistance to ensure an adequate harvest. The Hopi believe that “God and nature are one” and that “[e]very object possesses a spirit or animus of its own that can be coerced to intercede for the Hopi in this dual world of the natural and the supernatural.”<sup>17</sup> I was realizing that the ancient Maya and Pueblo cultures shared surprising similarities regarding maize and corn.

I also began thinking about Rosalila’s role as a sacred cave and portal to the other worlds. As I did so, my thoughts turned to the Pueblo Indian altars at the Field Museum and the ancient Anasazi ceremonial kivas at Chaco Canyon. The altars were used inside subterranean kivas for rituals that involved accessing the Otherworld for supernatural assistance and blessings during sacred ceremonies related to the annual planting and harvesting of corn. The Pueblo peoples are also the living descendants of the ancient Anasazi Indians whose kivas at Chaco Canyon—places like Casa Rinconada—are the precursors to contemporary pueblo kivas.

Lying in bed that night I kept thinking about this possible kinship between the ancient Maya and Pueblo peoples. I couldn’t help feeling there were underlying universal realities they both recognized and shared that were expressed through their spiritual and ceremonial traditions. It felt as if I were coming full circle on a spiritual journey that had started for me as a young boy in the Field Museum and had led me here to Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil. It seemed he had first beckoned to me when I was five years old and was continuing to guide me.

Rosalila was built some five hundred years before Casa Rinconada. The exhibits in the Field Museum were based on observations of Pueblo ceremonies that occurred almost seven hun-

dred years after Casa Rinconada was abandoned. It was hard to comprehend a relationship between peoples separated by one thousand two hundred years and almost two thousand miles, yet the resemblances were inescapable. Quite unexpectedly, I found myself struggling to come to terms with the strange coincidence that the two cultures I had been most fascinated with since childhood shared analogous perspectives concerning maize and corn. I wondered if there might be something about the Pueblo rituals that would provide some insight into the ancient Maya.

The replicas of the Pueblo ceremonial altars and ritual practices in the Field Museum, created over one hundred years ago, were based on ethnographic research sponsored by the museum. My thoughts kept returning to one dramatic exhibit in particular; it was the re-creation of a ritual for renewing the world and sanctifying seed corn to promote better growth of the crops. The sanctification rites took place in an underground kiva and were the climax of a nine-day ceremony that occurred annually, immediately after the winter solstice. The exhibit, which used mannequins attired in authentic ceremonial regalia to represent Pueblo priests, was based on multiple observances of the ceremony by ethnographers between 1893 and 1900.

A special altar had been constructed at the rear of the kiva for the ceremony. The reredos (back screen) consisted of two six-foot high posts, about four inches wide and one inch deep, spaced four feet apart. A horizontal beam almost four inches high, one inch deep, and five feet long capped the two posts. Spanning the space between the two vertical posts were six horizontal slats, two inches wide by one inch deep, equally spaced from the top to the midpoint of the reredos. On the ground between the vertical posts, carefully tied bundles of ears of corn had been stacked in a large mound that reached almost to the lowest horizontal slat. The bundles belonged to families who would be planting corn crops the

following spring, and had been placed on the altar by the priests performing the ceremony.

In front of the altar, extending toward the center of the kiva, a coating of sand had been placed on the floor, creating a “sandfield” containing sacred objects for the ritual blessing. *Pahos*, small cane-shaped prayer sticks representing ancestors whose spirits would be summoned from the other worlds during the ceremony, had been inserted into clay bases and placed along the sandfield.

In the exhibit, two priests were depicted in the act of sanctifying the corn. One, identified as the Star Priest, held a large, circular image of the Sun. Beside him was a large framed vertical screen with an image representing Müy’ingwa, the Corn God (also referred to as the God of Germination). The complex ceremony involved chanting, prayers, and other ritual acts that continued throughout the night. At the completion of the ceremony, the bundles of corn were brought up from the kiva and spread out on a blanket in the plaza where the women who had originally prepared them for blessing retrieved their particular bundles. As a child, I had been particularly fascinated and profoundly moved by this exhibit; now the memories flooded back to me with crystal clarity.

My thoughts turned to another, much more recent experience. Several years earlier, I had spent months building a detailed replica of another type of Pueblo ceremonial altar. The idea for building the altar came from one of the workshops I had attended, given by Tom Mails. I decided to build an altar to use in personal ceremonies to help me realize certain results in my personal and professional life, much as the Pueblo peoples used altars in ceremonies to manifest an abundant harvest.

During my research in preparation for building the altar, I encountered a detailed colored rendering of a Pueblo altar in the *Twenty-third Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (circa.1901–1902), which particularly appealed to me. I

was able to draw plans and construct an exact replica. The altar consisted of a large vertical wooden back screen composed of six boards—each one four feet high, eight inches wide, and one inch deep, fastened together to form a single piece. A stylized representation of the sun rested atop the left outer board while a stylized representation of the moon rested atop the right outer board. The four center boards had scalloped tops representing clouds, with paintings representing rain below. In front of the back screen was space for a sandfield, with two pairs of additional vertical boards of the same dimensions positioned along each side. One pair had a representation of a spirit being with a dragonfly image painted below. The other pair had a star shape carved at the top; the left one represented Venus as the Morning Star and the right one represented Venus as the Evening Star. The image of a cougar was painted below each star. Additional details included carved representations of serpents and a celestial bird.

As I reflected on the Pueblo altars and ceremonies that occurred inside the kivas, my thoughts kept returning to Rosalila. Ancient Maya pyramids were built as “sacred mountains” and their corresponding temples built as “caves” providing a path to the Lower World. Subterranean Pueblo kivas are Lower World sanctuaries, containing portals to the other worlds, where the conjuring of ancestors and kachina spirits occurs during ceremonies. I began to see Rosalila as a magnificent fusion of the Pueblo kiva architecture and altar iconography. The striking similarities between the ceremonial structures and sacred imagery of both peoples, as well as the parallel roles that maize and corn played in their mythologies and worldview, led me to conclude that the ancient Maya and Pueblo peoples shared fundamentally similar spiritual truths.

One other fascinating piece of information occupied my thoughts that night. Shortly before leaving on this trip I had read an article in a scientific journal that provided new evidence of a

direct connection between the ceremonial practices of the ancient Maya and Anasazi peoples. For years, archaeologists had recognized the similarities between ancient ball courts, platform mounds, and certain construction techniques discovered in the American Southwest and those in the ancient Mexican and Maya realms. In Chaco Canyon, archaeologists had also discovered other Mesoamerican goods, including copper bells, cloisonné, and feathers from scarlet macaws (a species native to Mexico and found in the Southwest). Recently, researchers had found residues of Mesoamerican cacao inside pottery cylinder jars in the Pueblo Bonito ruins at Chaco Canyon. This discovery documented Chacoan ceremonies' use of unique sacred pottery of Maya-inspired design in connection with the drinking of cacao—a ritual practice common among the ancient Maya.<sup>18</sup>

The cacao residues found inside cylinder jars contained a specific chemical composition found only in cacao from the Maya areas of Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras. The jars—vase-like cylindrical containers typically two-and-a-half times as tall as they are wide—were a classic Maya ceremonial shape not found elsewhere in the Southwest. In addition, they were decorated with complex symmetrical serrated patterns instead of the simpler banded patterns found on indigenous Anasazi pottery.<sup>19</sup> We now have evidence that rituals performed by Chaco practitioners at Pueblo Bonito between 900 and 1200 CE followed Maya ceremonial patterns, or that Maya practitioners may have performed rituals at Chaco Canyon during this time, or both.

One of the reasons I struggled that evening to make sense of my strong impressions regarding a possible link between the ancient Maya, ancient Anasazi, and Pueblo peoples is that I had never found any significant references to the American Southwest by any Maya scholars. It had always puzzled me that in twenty years of research I had only come across one single reference. Scholars of North American indigenous cultures have frequently suggested

possible connections between North American and Mesoamerican Indian communities, but that has not been the case with Maya scholars. I was becoming more and more convinced of a strong connection between these cultures did exist. I hope that someday, someone will study this in more detail.

I woke early the next morning, despite having gotten very little sleep, and after a quick breakfast decided to walk back to the ruins. At Yaxchilan, my experience with the Plains Indian Sun Dance had helped me appreciate at least some aspects of ancient Maya bloodletting rituals. Now, I hoped my experience with the Pueblo Indians would help unlock some secrets of ancient maize ceremonies.

When I arrived at the ruins I went directly to the museum and inquired about Luis. In a few minutes he emerged from his office and greeted me with a big smile and a warm handshake. His sister had spoken to him the day before about my being here and he had adjusted his schedule so we could spend a little time together. We talked about my interests in the ancient Maya, the journey I had been on for the last two-and-a-half weeks, and my particular interests in Copan. As we toured the Museum together, Luis provided background information on the construction of the museum, the exhibits, and in particular, the reconstruction of Rosalila. He shared with me some of the history of the archaeological investigations at Copan—it is one of the most extensively studied of all Maya sites—and we talked at length about Alfonso and the work they had done together on Copan's excavation tunnels.

The extensive use of tunnels to study the sequence of building that occurred over centuries is a defining characteristic of the archaeological investigations at Copan. The tunnels here totaled over two miles in length, a dramatic contrast to the smaller, limited, poorly maintained ones I saw at Tikal. As was common practice, the ancient Maya buried older structures with wet-laid fills before building newer, grander structures over them. As a

result, archeologists have been able to tunnel into the fills and reveal the older underlying substructures. While time-consuming and labor-intensive, this process prevents the destruction of underlying architecture that occurs when open trenches are dug for exploration purposes; it eliminates the need to completely dismantle and desecrate entire pyramids and temples to study successive levels of superimposed buildings or to search for hidden tombs, as occurred at the North Acropolis at Tikal.

At Copan, archeologists have discovered that the area known today as the East Court had actually been built-up “layer cake” fashion over hundreds of years, as earth and stone platforms elevated its surface. The courtyard’s original surface was actually several meters below its current level. This build-up began with the construction of the tomb of Yax K’kuk’ Mo’. At a later time, his wife’s tomb was placed within a platform constructed at a higher level, and even later the base of Rosalila was constructed on a platform at a still higher level. Temple-pyramid 16 (also referred to as Structure 16) was constructed on the highest level of the courtyard, the one we see today. All of the structures surrounding the courtyard as it exists today encapsulate older ceremonial buildings and, archeologists speculate, possibly undiscovered tombs.

After Luis and I had spoken for a while, he took me to meet Professor Oscar Cruz, the Copan regional director for the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (IHAH). Professor Cruz was a recognized expert on the ancient Maya and had played a major role in the successful completion of the museum project. We spoke at length of his academic interests and the ongoing archaeological work at Copan. When I mentioned my work with the Maya and showed him a copy of the newspaper article with pictures of me participating in the Fire Ceremony in Merida, Professor Cruz told me about local Maya shamans who still conduct ceremonies here in the ruins. He also told me the specific location

where these rituals occur and gave me permission to perform a ceremony while I was there.

Both men had busy schedules and our meetings ended sooner than I would have liked, but I was grateful for the time I'd had with them, and Luis and I were able to make plans to meet for dinner that evening. As I walked toward the ruins from the museum, I continued to struggle with thoughts that had kept me up the night before. I stopped in a grove of trees before entering the Great Plaza, burned copal, said a few short prayers for the Maya ancestors, and asked for help and guidance during my time at the ruins that day. I also asked the spirits to help me find a place to conduct a longer prayer ceremony later in the day; I was hoping to have some private time as I'd had at Tikal, even though I knew from my earlier conversations with Professor Cruz that I couldn't stay late after the park closed.

As I entered the Great Plaza, I realized that something had shifted for me in a profound way during the last twenty-four hours. I began seeing the ruins in a completely different way. Instead of just traces of red painted on the stelae, I could imagine them bright red like the painted surfaces of Rosalila; the sculptured imagery on the stelae seemed to come to life as well, and I could see the symbolism of maize everywhere. I remembered observing the kachina dances on the Hopi Indian reservation and marveling at the precision of the dancers and the beauty of their colorful masks and ceremonial regalia; every movement, every image, every accoutrement had a clear meaning for everyone in the community.

And so it must have been here as well. Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil presided over the plaza, resplendent as the Maize God, on display for all to see and admire. There could be no doubt about his primal role as First Father. Moving farther into the ruins, I passed the Ball Court. I had seen many such structures over the years at several different ruins, but it was as if I were seeing a ball

court for the first time. I recalled Linda Schele and Peter Mathews' observation that the ball game itself was a reenactment of the Maya creation and origin myths and that "[t]he Maize God died and was reborn in the ball court."<sup>20</sup> Once again, the maize symbolism struck me dramatically in a way I hadn't appreciated before.

Continuing on, I passed the magnificent Hieroglyphic Stairway and then scaled the stairs that led up to the area of the ruins that included the Acropolis and the East Court. When I reached the top of the stairs, I was standing beside the temple on top of Temple-pyramid 22 (also referred to as Structure 22), the Temple of Meditation. This temple, built some two hundred years after Rosalila, contains a beautifully sculpted doorway and abundant sculptural and hieroglyphic images that, like those at Rosalila, also identify it as a representation of the primordial Yax Hal Witznal, the "First True Mountain of Creation," or "Substance Mountain." Although architecturally and artistically it is much different from Rosalila, the temple is arguably one of the most dramatic expressions of Yax Hal Witznal in the Maya realm.

From the vantage point of the temple, I looked out across the sunken East Court, ancient Copan's original plaza, toward the massive Temple 16. Rosalila was nestled out of sight within its interior, and the tombs of Yax K'uk' Mo' and his wife were deep inside the earth beneath Rosalila, and well below the current grade of the courtyard. As I gazed at the area, I tried to imagine Rosalila in its full splendor and glory standing as it once did as the centerpiece of the royal acropolis. I imagined the structures around me—built much later than Rosalila—dissolving like mist evaporating in the morning sun to reveal the radiant temple as the center around which the spiritual life of the ancient city revolved over one thousand five hundred years ago.

I could easily imagine Rosalila—the living embodiment of the First True Mountain of Creation and a portal between

the worlds—at the very heart of Maya spiritual life at Copan. My thoughts returned to the Pueblo Indians and the kachina dances I had witnessed years earlier in Arizona. I wondered if the ceremonies at Rosalila might have shared any similar elements. In the Pueblo ceremonies, men from the villages, attired in spectacular regalia and wearing dramatic masks, impersonated kachina spirits who had been summoned from the Otherworld to provide supernatural help with the season's corn crop. After emerging from the underground kivas, the kachina spirits danced to the beat of drums and tones of sacred chants in the open plaza, surrounded by the community.

Kachina dancers appeared bare-chested, wearing knee-length dance kilts of white homespun cotton embellished with two striking vertical embroidered panels decorated with stylized symbols in black, green, and red, representing clouds, lightning, rain, the rainbow, and life. Tied around their waists were broad white homespun cotton sashes with embroidered end panels containing stylized representations of mountain lion teeth, tracks of the War God, and blossoms of squashes, melons, and flowers. Dramatic body paint was used extensively to represent specific supernatural powers. Ceremonial dance moccasins, leather arm bands, and various types of necklaces (including turquoise, coral, shell, corn, horn and sometimes mountain lion claws) were also worn, and dancers carried large gourd rattles they shook rhythmically to accompany the singing of sacred songs. A fox fur pelt hung from the back at the top of the kilt and extended downward with the fox tail almost touching the ground. The most striking items of the dance regalia were painted leather helmet masks representing the specific supernatural kachinas the dancers were impersonating. The masks, which covered the dancers' heads, included various symbols representing an abundant harvest (corn, rain, lightning, etc.), animal powers (wolf, buffalo, deer, etc.), and celestial bodies (sun, moon, stars, etc.).

As my thoughts returned to the present, the ancient stone structures around me reemerged and in my mind's eye Rosalila withdrew into the interior of Temple 16. Although I loved being at the temple and close to the East Court, I was anxious to see the other locations in Copan where I had been told the contemporary Maya shamans still performed ceremonies. And I hoped to conduct a prayer ceremony myself in the ruins later that afternoon. Although I had intended to do so at a site that was still being used by the contemporary Maya, Rosalila and the East Court were intensely compelling. Something was beckoning me to this particular place, reaching out through the ages to touch a place very deep inside me. I knew I would return here when the time came to do my ceremony.

I turned, descended the steps back down the pyramid, and headed toward the Great Plaza. Before I reached it, I took a side path Professor Cruz had mentioned, and followed it to a secluded wooded area away from the main ruins until I came to a large monolithic stela. I was in an area a distance from the main paths that led through the ruins, at the edge of an ancient sacbe that had once been used to enter the sacred ceremonial center of Copan. The stela had been erected by Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil to mark the end of the first period of his reign. While not as dramatic as the others he had erected in the Main Plaza, the hieroglyphics on the monument delivered an important message, linking Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil to rituals performed two hundred sixty-six years earlier by Copan's founder, Yax K'uk' Mo'. At the base of the stela in front of me, I could still see faint traces of a Fire Ceremony that had been held on the recent equinox.

I spent quite some time undisturbed in this shaded, semi-secluded and serene setting, thinking about the last twenty-four hours and recording my impressions in my journal. The writing helped me organize my thoughts and make sense of the seemingly ran-

dom insights I had been experiencing. My knowledge of the striking similarities between the spiritual worldview and ceremonial practices of the ancient Maya and the indigenous peoples of North America had allowed me to enter the sacred realm at Copan with ease and comfort. I had found that while the specific rituals differed, the same eternal truths were being expressed. The ceremonies I performed in ancient Maya settings, like those I performed at sacred sites in North America, moved me closer to a universal Divine presence. I finished my journaling early that afternoon, returned to the hotel to get my things for the ceremony, and then walked back to the ruins. I went directly to the East Courtyard, the Court of the Jaguars, where I had decided to do my ceremony.

I descended the steps next to Temple 22 leading into the sunken courtyard, and at the bottom I paused briefly to say a silent prayer and ask permission from the spirits to enter. I walked over to a park guard standing near the entrance to the tunnel that led to Rosalila, showed him a copy of the newspaper article from Merida, and explained the prayer ceremony I wanted to perform. With his consent, I placed a small ceremonial blanket on the ground along the midpoint of the eastern boarder of the courtyard, took my ceremonial items out of my bag, and prepared a small altar on the blanket. After lighting a piece of charcoal and placing it in my bowl, I added copal and smudged myself with the fragrant incense.

I tried to imagine the route ancient priests would have taken to enter the courtyard when performing ceremonies, and my attention was drawn to a narrow passage at the southeastern corner that led out of the East Court. Cradling the bowl with the smoking copal in my hands, I stood up and walked toward the passageway defined by a low stone wall along its eastern border and by the base of Temple 16 along its western border. I followed the passageway out of the courtyard until I reached its end at the far side of Temple 16. I turned, paused, placed more copal on the burning charcoal, and

said a few more prayers, asking for blessings and guidance from the ancestor spirits. Imagining how ancient ceremonies would have been conducted, I then retraced my steps along the passageway and reentered the East Court. Much as I had done at Tikal, I walked slowly in a clockwise direction around the perimeter of the courtyard. As I walked, I sang Plains Indian prayers and spirit-calling songs and used a feather to smudge the perimeter of the courtyard with copal smoke. When I was finished, I walked back to my ceremonial blanket and sat at the eastern boarder of the courtyard, facing west.

Except for the guard facing the entrance to the Rosalila tunnel, I had been alone in the East Court since my prayers began. But now I could see dozens of spirit beings entering the courtyard from the south and taking positions along its perimeter. I was quite familiar with multiple spirit encounters at night and limited spirit encounters during the day, but the numbers of spirit beings (there seemed to be around forty or fifty) and the intensity of their presence surprised me. Though I felt some anxiety, I quickly realized that none seemed threatening and I was able to relax and continue praying. I found myself sinking deeper into the energy and spirit of the ancient ceremonial plaza and my heartbeat quickened as I opened to receive any guidance, insight, or revelation that might be granted me.

As I prayed, I continued to add copal to the charcoal. After each round of prayers, I paused to watch the veil of smoke from the copal drift upwards toward the heavens or I looked toward Rosalila. From behind the translucent copal vapors, the ancient ceremonial structures around me seemed to shimmer, mirage-like in the late afternoon sun, their physical boundaries yielding to reveal an inner spiritual essence. I allowed my breathing to become slow and deep as I continued to open myself to the energy in the courtyard. Suddenly, I felt the ground beneath me

give way and felt myself dropping down below the surface of the courtyard, much like the experience I'd had many years before inside Casa Rinconada, the great kiva at Chaco Canyon.

I knew I was still in the East Court, but realized that I was moving into sacred time and space, experiencing the courtyard as it had been when it was the Main Plaza at Copan, shortly after the reign of Yax K'uk' Mo'. I experienced myself coming to rest on an older elevation of the courtyard several meters below where I had been sitting just moments before. Temple 22 behind me, as well as Temple 26 and other buildings in my field of vision, began losing their physical substance and eventually vanished like wisps of smoke, only to be replaced by smaller, older, phantom structures I didn't recognize. Temple 16, to my left, had disappeared as well, its former location shrouded in a dense fog.

As this was occurring, the numerous ancestor spirits that had gathered around me earlier appeared less like phantoms, as if they had taken on physical bodies. The immediacy of their presence startled me and I experienced pangs of anxiety regarding this transformation. After taking a few deep breaths to calm myself, I realized I still felt safe and could continue to allow the vision to unfold. However, the experience was still unsettling enough that I periodically pulled my attention back to present time and space to maintain a connection to physical reality.

Off to my left, in the space formerly occupied by Temple 16, Rosalila began to appear, emerging from the shadows of the other worlds as if a veil had been lifted to reveal an amazingly beautiful apparition. I turned my body slightly to the left so I was directly facing this magnificent temple. As I continued to look, the once translucent structure became increasingly opaque, metamorphosing into a numinous form unlike anything I had seen before. It looked like the replica in the museum and the stonework seemed to have characteristics similar to the original

ancient masonry. But the temple itself seemed to have a startlingly organic aliveness. It was like a living, breathing being filled with life force and awareness.

As Rosalila came into sharper focus and my impressions gained greater clarity, the surrounding space in the ancient plaza seemed to open up and become more expansive. The ancestor spirits around me had taken on physical bodies as real as any I had encountered in everyday life. Preparations for some sort of ritual seemed to be underway. The level of intensity of activity around me and the tangible excitement in the air gave me the distinct impression of being at the epicenter—both physically and spiritually—of a great ceremonial event unlike any I had observed, or participated in, before. The energy surrounding the occasion was electrifying; an atmosphere of holiness was pervasive and palpable.

I turned my attention away from the preparations occurring around me and focused once again on Rosalila. I was still struggling to fully accept my sense of the vividly animated temple. At the same time, because the temple seemed so organic, I was terrified to think that if I were to go over and touch the building it might feel warm and fleshy. From where I was sitting, I couldn't see into the temple; there were no doors facing me. But I could tell that a ceremony was occurring inside. Clouds of copal smoke were flowing out of the temple's window openings, filling the plaza with a pungent fragrance. I could also hear chanting coming from the temple's interior.

Rosalila appeared to be enveloped by a massive cylindrical energy vortex radiating several meters from the building itself. The vortex also extended downward to embrace the burial chamber of Yax K'uk' Mo', who had "entered the road" to take the journey to rejoin his ancestors, some one hundred years before Rosalila was built. The burial chamber itself seemed to be an integral part of the ancient architecture, linked through stone and earthworks to

the masonry substance of the temple and now energetically linked through the vortex that also extended heavenward, above the temple's uppermost third level and roof comb. The roof comb seemed to connect Rosalila to the Upper World while the burial chamber connected it to the Lower World.

Suddenly it dawned on me that I was in the presence of the actual "First True Mountain of Creation;" this human-made structure had transformed into the supernatural mountain. To the Maya, mountains and caves are living beings and here, through the spiritual genius of the ancient Maya, Rosalila had been created and brought to life to serve the needs of the people of Copan. Through prayer, ritual, and the visitation of the ancestors, *k'ulel*—"soul force"—had saturated Rosalila's stone and stucco structure until it had become a living, conscious being. Rosalila seemed both male and female, primordial father and mother, embodying the attributes of the Sun God in the sky above and the Goddess below in the sacred cave-like womb within the temple.

I realized that Rosalila was the crown jewel of Copan, a magnificent expression of "Substance Mountain," a majestic tribute to the founder, a dramatic symbol of the physical and spiritual preeminence of the city, and a stunning beacon of hope to all. Rosalila served as the bridge between the physical realm, the Upper World, and the Lower World, channeling supernatural powers and providing a portal to access the wisdom, guidance, and assistance of the ancients. And now, within its hallowed chambers, an ancient ceremony was occurring to ensure the survival and well-being of all of Copan. It was becoming clear to me that the thoughts I had struggled with over the past twenty-four hours had been preparing me for what was about to be revealed.

In the next instant of my vision I knew I was witnessing a ceremony to sanctify the maize seed at the beginning of an annual growing cycle. I understood that bundles of maize ears,

saved from the previous year's crop, had been brought to the temple from around the countryside over the past several days. Pilgrims carrying small bundles of life-giving maize had traveled to the temple on ancient sacbeob, as part of a reverent and joyous procession to the center of the universe, the *axis mundi*, the place where heaven and earth would be united and the Maize God would dance to bless their crops. They had traveled prayerfully, reverently, some in silence, some singing softly, and some speaking in hushed tones. This was a new beginning, a time of resurrection and rebirth.

I sensed that the maize bundles had been carefully stacked somewhere within the temple, although I wasn't sure if they were in the main chamber or in the small rooms on the uppermost third level, at the very top of the sacred mountain. The ceremony underway inside the temple seemed to be building in intensity, the activity on the physical human plane occurring simultaneously with the activity in the Lower World and the celestial realms. The vibration field within the vortex was becoming stronger as the three worlds came into alignment. Pulsing waves of energy radiated out in all directions. Rosalila's physical body was shifting as well, adjusting to the changing energy patterns and opening to receive the supercharged force flowing throughout the vortex.

As the energies of the three realms continued to align and balance, Rosalila's physical structure acted to channel the forces into an energetic octahedron composed of two opposing four-sided energy pyramids, one pointing toward the heavens, the other pointing toward the Lower World. The two pyramids shared a common energetic base—oriented to the four cardinal directions—at the same level as Rosalila's structural base. The apex of the upper energy-pyramid rose from the shared base to a point in the air past the top of the upper roof comb. The lower pyramid descended downward from the shared base to a point below the tomb of Yax K'uk' Mo'.

Once the energy pyramids were fully formed, the tip of the upper pyramid began acting like a lightning rod, attracting and absorbing celestial energy from the Upper World that entered the energetic pyramid like lightning bolts. The tip of the lower pyramid acted in a similar fashion, attracting and absorbing the energy of the Lower World. The penetrating energies from the opposing realms coalesced in a pulsing sphere whose core was positioned at the center of the base of the two pyramids. One half of the hemisphere of the pulsing core protruded up from Rosalila's base while the other half extended below. This supercharged sphere continued to grow in intensity, sending pulsating, spherical waves of energy out from its core.

Although I wasn't completely certain, it seemed to me that the priests inside the temple were sitting in a circle around the perimeter of the energy sphere. I could hear chanting inside the temple, as clouds of copal smoke continued to billow from open vents in the temple walls. I tried to sense what the experience must be like for the priests inside but couldn't as nothing in my personal experience had come even remotely close. I was certain, however, that the sphere was actually a portal beginning to open, and that the portal seemed to rest inside the jaws of the gigantic Otherworld serpent represented in full relief on the sculpted corners of the temple.

Directly behind the gaping jaws, I could now see the body of the serpent forming an energetic tunnel, a supernatural umbilical cord, along which ancestor spirits could travel between the worlds, from the celestial realm to the temple itself. To my amazement, someone or something was about to emerge from the serpent's mouth, through the spherical portal, and into the temple chambers. I realized that my heart was racing and my breath was short as I sat in awe and fear. Although I had witnessed this phenomenon before at Yaxchilan with Lady Xook, the intensity and vividness of the event unfolding before me took me completely by surprise. I knew it was somehow related to the maize ceremony

occurring inside the temple and to the mythology of the sacred mountain where maize had originated, all involving the Celestial Bird and the Sun God. Perhaps I was about to witness the resurrection of the founder of Copan, Yax K'uk' Mo' himself.

At that moment, the frenetic energy subsided and a startling calmness descended, as if everything and everyone were suspended in time and space, at the still-point in the center of a spiritual storm. I could see an orb of light moving through the body of the serpentine tunnel that stretched out into the other worlds. Within moments, rays of brilliant, dazzling light from the orb began to emerge from the serpent's mouth and then, like the sun breaking over the horizon, the orb emerged from the mouth of the serpent like a glorious tropical sunrise. The radiant orb shone at the center of the temple, in the exact center of Copan, like the sun shining at the center of life.

Soft ripples of energy began to disrupt the surface of the sun-like orb inside the temple as a translucent form became visible within the orb. The form became increasingly opaque, eventually recognizable as Yax K'uk' Mo', resurrected as his avian way, Quetzal Macaw. Yax K'uk' Mo' seemed vividly alive and magnetically present within the orb. He had returned from the higher realms, bringing the Sun, the source of life. And there, inside the sacred cave at the heart of the sacred mountain, he began to dance, bringing his blessings for the future of his people. He was resplendent in ceremonial regalia, luminous Quetzal feathers trailing from his outstretched arms, fluttering with his graceful movements.

He danced as both Yax K'uk' Mo' and Quetzal Macaw, a manifestation of the Celestial Bird at the center of creation. He was both Copan's first ruler and the archetypal First Father who brought maize to the Maya people. He danced as Sun God and Maize God, the symbolic representations of divine essences that sustained and nurtured life. Yax K'uk' Mo' had been resurrected

as Yax Hal Witznal to aid in the resurrection and transformation of maize seed from the previous year. Through his dance, his k'ulel (soul force) would impregnate the seed corn, ending its period of dormancy, filling it with divine life. Soon, the seed corn would be awakened and ready for planting so the cycle of life could start anew.

As each slow, rhythmic footstep touched the temple floor, k'ulel from the other worlds flowed into and through Yax K'uk' Mo', into and through the portal, penetrating the physical realm and Rosalila. The cosmic dance intensified the radiance of the solar orb and amplified the divine energy present during the ceremony. Prayers from the priests joined those of other ancestor spirits conjured earlier from the other worlds. Together, their energy mingled with the holy incantations being carried toward the heavens on the smoke from the copal incense. The center of the temple, at the heart of Copan, had been transformed into the center of the sacred mountain at the heart of the world—the place of all creation within the heart of the Divine.

I was completely enthralled as Yax K'uk' Mo's danced; life was beginning anew, the world was reborn, and the great cosmic cycles were continuing to unfold. I suddenly realized that the portal and solar orb had vanished into the ethers, revealing Yax K'uk' Mo' in crystal clarity dancing on the temple floor. The energy of his movements had intensified and the impact of his rhythmic footsteps was creating energy fissures erupting like lightning bolts within the vortex around Rosalila. I looked toward the top of the pyramid and noticed that the roof comb at the upper levels of the temple was acting like a metaphysical lightning rod, drawing and focusing the numinous flashes of primordial, cosmic, creative life force into the temple.

I was witnessing the ritual that summoned the cosmic forces that drew life into the temple to impregnate the seed corn—a ceremony reenacting the primal creation of maize on Sustenance

Mountain. The soul or spirit of the maize had departed with last year's harvest<sup>21</sup> and now a miraculous rebirth was about to occur. Life force would soon saturate the maize kernels, awakening and resurrecting them.

These resurrected maize seeds would be planted in the fields in the spring and grow into fully mature maize plants, the divine presence permeating the kernels, ears, and body of the sacred plant. Once summoned from the higher realms, the Maize God, representing the spiritual essence of maize, would remain until the harvest and then depart until He was resurrected the following year. The people would have the divine gift of maize for their sustenance and well-being and the cycle of birth, death and rebirth would repeat all over again. I was at the very heart of one of the greatest spiritual mysteries.

I immediately thought once again of my journey with Itzam-Ye, the Celestial Bird, over twenty years earlier. In some way I didn't fully understand, Rosalila now inhabited the same space Itzam-Ye had taken me to in the spirit realm. At this moment, the Upper World, Lower World, and physical world had merged and all three realms were united with Rosalila, the Center of the Universe, the place of divine creation. The ceremony I was witnessing was occurring at the place where life begins and ends, where the circle starts and finishes, where the cycles come and go, a place both source and destination.

I sat spellbound as my vision continued to unfold. Swirling cloud-like masses of transcendent cosmic gasses coalesced around the Universal Center. The translucent k'ulel-infused vapors, saturated with the life and soul force of the Divine, were being drawn toward the still point of creation. For a moment the transcendental energies appeared to thin, and I could see the ears of maize from the previous year's crop enshrouded by the supernatural forces at the center. Divine life and soul force penetrated each kernel and

moved deeper into the core of each ear, saturating every cell. Moving deeper still, k'ulel streamed toward an infinitesimally small microcosmic point within the atomic structure of each ear.

The divine essence infused and then merged with the physical structure of the maize as the corn was transmuted and the Maize God—the unique expression of the Divine, clothed in the physical body of the grain that grew on the leafy stalks that fed the Maya people—was manifested. The kernels, imbued with sacred power, glowed with divine radiance that emanated from the spirit, soul, and life force within them.

Like an infant, the resurrected seed maize seemed both miraculous and fragile. My thoughts turned to the Maya classic, the *Popol Vuh* or “Book of Counsel” written by a Maya scribe in the mid-1500s during the Spanish Conquest. The book records the ancient Maya oral traditions regarding the creation of the world and the exploits of the Hero Twins. When I had been at Palenque with Alfonso Morales earlier on my trip, we had spoken about the maize symbolism in the *Popol Vuh*. Alfonso suggested that the battle with the dark forces in the Lower World by the Hero Twins could be interpreted as a metaphor for the potential perils facing the vulnerable maize seed during germination.

Reflecting on Alfonso’s comments, I recalled the accounts of Pueblo Indian corn ceremonies I had read about years earlier. During the ceremonies, Pueblo priests enacted rituals inside underground kivas designed to keep the corn seeds safe during the underground germination period and to ward off destructive forces of drought, disease, insects, birds, and other animals that could damage or kill the nascent corn. I thought about the parallels between the Hero Twins fighting for survival in the Lower World and seed corn germinating underground. As I considered the importance of the Pueblo priest’s prayers and rituals to protect the seed corn and ensure an abundant harvest, I realized I had not seen this in my

vision and wondered if something similar might have occurred at Rosalila but had not been revealed to me.

The act of divine creation evaporated in my vision to reveal a scene of the Maya priests inside Rosalila, praying and chanting over the carefully stacked bundles of ears of maize. With hands extended in a gesture of blessing, the priests surrounded the bundles, arms outstretched, open palms facing the ears of maize, and performed a ritual “laying on of hands.” Yax K’uk’ Mo’ stood behind them, adding his prayers to theirs, bringing blessings and k’ulel to the ceremony along with the other ancestor spirits and supernatural beings summoned into the chamber. The annual consecration and sanctification of the seed maize concluded just as the sun broke the horizon to the east and the first light of dawn streamed into the temple.

Priests carried the bundles of ears of maize with their resurrected kernels out of the temple and into the courtyard in front of Rosalila. The pilgrims who had brought the maize to Rosalila from their villages had been waiting patiently, prayerfully, for this moment. They moved reverently toward the bundles as the priests carefully placed them on blankets spread out in front of the temple. As the priests held up the bundles, each tied with a unique distinctive cloth band, pilgrims stepped forward to receive their own bundles. The priests acknowledged each pilgrim and offered a prayer for a bountiful harvest; the pilgrims in turn expressed their deep gratitude to Yax K’uk’ Mo’, the other ancestors who were present, and the priests.

By midday, the courtyard had emptied and the pilgrims were on the sacbeob, returning to their villages. The priests inside Rosalila had completed rituals to enable Yax K’uk’ Mo’ and the other ancestor spirits and supernatural beings to return to the other worlds. And now a vigil began that would last until the maize seed had defeated the dark forces in the Lower World and

had risen safely to complete its transformation into the fully ripened kernels on silky-tasseled ears hanging from the leafy stalks, and ceremonies would continue at Rosalila throughout the entire growing season until the corn was ready for harvesting. Farmers in the villages prepared for the planting season by invoking the protection and blessings of their ancestor and guardian spirits. Ancestral fields (*milpas*) were prepared to receive the resurrected kernels through ritual, prayer, and careful tending.

As my vision of the consecration ceremony ended and the images from the past faded, I was left with the same sense of the excitement, hope, and optimism that must have accompanied the ceremony some fifteen hundred years ago. The gift from the Divine, the dawn of a new year, the beginning of a new cycle, the blessing from the founder of Copan, and the presence of the ancestors all seemed to coalesce into a magnificent spiritual tapestry reflective of the rich, colorful life of the ancient Maya. And through all of this, Rosalila had stood in the center of Copan, at the heart of the ceremony, a silent, vigilant sentinel. As the ancient images continued to recede, the structures in the East Courtyard regained their present-day form and Rosalila disappeared from view.

The area around me that had been so animated and alive in my vision now seemed empty and deserted. The guard was still in the courtyard with me but the park had closed and I was the only visitor left inside. For a few moments I watched the soft shadows cast by the late afternoon sun moving across the ancient stone masonry beside me. The setting was perfect, breathtaking and beautiful. And yet, after the vividness of my vision, everything seemed a little dull and muted.

I decided to stay as long as I could and see if I could recapture some of the magic I had experienced from my vision. Looking around the perimeter of the courtyard, I realized the ancestor spirits who had joined me when I first arrived were still with me.

Although not as vivid as they had been in my vision, their presence was very intense nonetheless.

As I looked at them, something quite unexpected happened. It became clear to me that they wanted me to leave the ruins immediately. Communicating with me telepathically, they insisted it was time for me to go. I didn't sense any disapproval or dissatisfaction on their part—they seemed to be pleased with the ceremony I had performed in the plaza—they simply wanted me to leave now.

I was incredibly conflicted. It had taken me decades to finally find my way to Copan and there wasn't anywhere else in the world I would rather have been at that moment. Yet I knew better than to ignore the wishes of the spirits at a sacred site. The thought flashed into my mind that maybe I could pretend I didn't really see them, or pretend they weren't really there at all. But I knew that wouldn't work. I knew I couldn't fool the spirits and that I really did need to leave. The ancestors instructed me to leave the courtyard the way I had entered, from the south, and to walk directly through the park without stopping or looking back.

I quickly repacked my ceremonial objects, stood up, and started walking toward the southern passageway behind Temple 16. The guard noticed I was leaving and rushed over to me with a surprised look on his face. He had clearly expected me to stay longer and, as we spoke, he made sure I understood that it was all right if I did. I thanked him and continued on. As I walked through the passageway, I had the distinct impression that the spirits had remained in the courtyard. I remembered several North American Indian sweat lodge ceremonies where medicine men told me that spirits who visited often stayed behind after the ceremony had finished. It seemed the same here.

I was still anxious as I left the park and headed for my hotel. I hoped I had conducted myself in a respectful and responsible manner in the eyes of the ancestors, and that nothing bad would happen later

that evening. The walk back was pleasant and calming for me. My concerns began to diminish as I got closer to town, and by the time I had reached my hotel I was sure everything was going to be all right. At dinner, Luis and I picked up our conversation where we had left off earlier in the day. As we sat in the open-air upstairs dining room of the restaurant, Luis shared colorful stories about the people and personalities behind the local archaeological activities and Sculpture Museum. It was a beautiful, warm tropical evening and the dining room had a spectacular view of the mountains surrounding the Copan Valley. The moon was almost full and as the evening progressed, brilliant stars emerged in the darkening heavens. I found myself wishing I had more time to spend at Copan, but unfortunately this was my last evening here. In the morning I would take the long bus ride back to San Pedro Sula, where I would spend the night before flying back to the States the next morning.

As I lay in bed trying to fall asleep that night, images from my trip kept flooding my consciousness. I could barely believe the extraordinary good luck I'd had on the trip and how incredibly fortunate I had been. Hunbatz Men, the Maya elders in Merida, Alfonso, and Luis had all opened doors for me in ways I could never have anticipated.

I did finally fall asleep, but sometime in the middle of the night I awoke in a panic, sensing that someone else was in my room. It took me a few moments to realize that this feeling was the same as the one I had experienced years earlier in Yaxchilan when I first encountered my Maya tutelary spirit at the ruins. Now he was here with me again; I was relieved it was someone familiar and not an ancestor spirit from the ceremony earlier in the day. However, I was certain he was with me now *because* of that ceremony. I had never experienced him quite the way I was experiencing him now, extremely present and more three-dimensional than I was used to. But more importantly, I sensed he was what I could only describe as “pleased.”

As he stood before me, he let me know telepathically that he had come to talk to me about the ceremony at the courtyard. He wanted me to know the spirits were happy with how I had conducted myself and that I had done a good job—not perfect, but good enough. Being asked to leave quickly had been a test of sorts, a way for the spirits to determine how aware I was and how respectful of their wishes I would be. He let me know I had done exactly the right thing and that as a result I had earned their trust. The spirits would welcome me back in the future and were willing to reveal more to me. As he told me this, I knew from his countenance that I was moving into a deeper, richer level of understanding and awareness of the ancient Maya and the deeper universal spiritual truths they understood and lived. In the morning I would be leaving Copan and returning to San Pedro Sula for a flight home. But at that moment, it felt as if this magical ancient realm were my true home and I had been accepted into its spiritual family. I knew then, without a doubt, that I had been chosen to share the gifts of wisdom they had given me through my visions.

CATHEDRAL OF ST. PETER THE APOSTLE  
SAN PEDRO SULA, HONDURAS – 2007

The light from the late afternoon sun shone through the stained glass windows casting soft, colorful shadows on the pale yellow plaster walls of the Sanctuary. Although less than sixty years old, the peaceful, serene Cathedral of St. Peter the Apostle had an almost timeless quality; I felt welcomed and comforted. I had wanted to visit the cathedral, situated at the west end of the Central Plaza in San Pedro Sula, as my last stop in Honduras before returning to the United States. The three-hour bus ride from Copan earlier in the day had seemed almost interminable, and I was weary from the past three weeks of travel and intense emotional experiences at

the ruins. I was hoping the cathedral would provide a brief refuge before I reentered my demanding, hectic twenty-first century life.

As I looked around the Sanctuary, I was impressed with its soaring spaciousness and the relative simplicity of the cathedral's interior architectural style. The building did not have the grandeur or richness of many of the great European cathedrals but it seemed a perfect expression of the local environment and blended wonderfully into the neighborhood. The openness of the structure, the brightness of yellow plaster walls, the light that streamed through the stained glass windows, and the soft breezes from the large doors that opened onto the plaza at the end of the nave and transepts helped me experience an emotional and mental expansiveness matching my surroundings.

Sitting in a pew near the central gallery, I looked up to study the enormous oversize portraits painted high above me on the upper wall of the central cupola. The images were both familiar and somewhat foreign at the same time. I immediately recognized the four portraits, San Mateo, San Marcos, San Lucas, and San Juan, as the four apostles I knew as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Beside each figure was their winged counterpart: angel, lion, ox, and eagle. Looking over to a small chapel off the narthex, I saw a large female statue dressed in flowing robes with a banner draped over her shoulder identifying her as Nuestra Madre, the figure I knew as Mary the mother of Jesus.

While I was comforted by my intimate knowledge of the ceremonies that occurred here and by my familiarity with the architecture and iconography, the fact that everything was in Spanish and I was in a foreign country shifted my frame of reference just enough to allow a fresh insight to come to me. This was the spiritual world I had grown up in and the lens through which, as a child and young adult, I had viewed the sacred realms and the ultimate reality. But now I was reminded that I had experienced

a far different reality through my studies with indigenous elders and experiences at the ancient ceremonial centers of the Maya. The world would never look, or be, the same to me again. Among the many new truths I came to embrace were that God (Hunab-Ku, Wakan Tanka) was in this world and available to all, the Divine Feminine was an active equal presence, the other worlds and higher spiritual realms were readily accessible, and a spiritual quest could lead to an encounter with the Divine in this world, not just the next.

While I was staying at Tikal earlier in my trip, I visited the nearby town of San Jose to meet with local Maya elders. During one conversation, I asked how it was possible for contemporary Maya to preserve their spiritual traditions while surrounded by the pervasive influence of the Christian Church. I was told that traditional Maya—those who had not abandoned their spiritual heritage—protect their ancestral beliefs and blend them with Christian religious observances (anthropologists refer to this as “syncretism”). Christian saints are seen as representing Maya deities, the Christian cross represents the World Tree, the Christian resurrection is a reminder of the rebirth of the Maize God, and religious observances are tied to the Maya calendar. “Traditional Maya may worship in a Christian setting,” the elders told me, “but all the time they are thinking Maya.”

I looked up at the cupola and saw the apostles—ancestors accompanied by their way animal co-essences (angel, lion, ox, and eagle)—looking down from the Upper World; I looked over and saw Nuestra Madre—the Goddess, our sacred Earth Mother—with her open palms offering a blessing; I closed my eyes and gave thanks for the astonishing spiritual pilgrimage that was just ending and the equally extraordinary spiritual journey that I knew was just beginning.

## Chapter Notes

1. Agurica Fasquelle 2004: 111
2. Ibid., 102
3. Schele and Mathews 1998: 48
4. Ibid., 48
5. Ibid., 50
6. Agurica Fasquelle 2004: 103
7. Ibid., 102
8. Ibid., 104
9. Ibid., 107–109
10. Ibid., 109–110
11. Ibid., 110
12. In *The Code of Kings*, Schele and Mathews describe the basic imagery associated with Yax Hal Witznal, “First True Mountain (43).” Different scholars studying Rosalila at Copan have arrived at various interpretations for the serpent imagery on the upper structure. They “have been variously interpreted as symbols for the sides of the sky, smoke produced by the burning of incense to attract dark clouds and the precious water they shower upon the earth, and representation of *chijchan*, serpents still revered by the nearby Chorti Maya (Fash 2011: 43).” In *Maya Cosmos*, Freidel, Schele and Parker describe Temple 22, “Temple of Meditation,” a structure built some two hundred years after Rosalila, as “Copan’s version of the ‘First True Mountain of Creation,’” due to the beautifully detailed and magnificently executed sculptured images and hieroglyphics that adorn the Temple (149). I believe the serpent images on Rosalila identify it as an earlier representation of Yax Hal Witznal.
13. Ibid., 217
14. Ibid., 154–156

15. The contemporary Pueblo Indians are comprised of approximately nineteen tribes in the Southwestern United States that share similar cultural, political, social and spiritual practices; they include the Hopi Indians in Arizona and the Zuni Indians in New Mexico.
16. Mora 1982: 17
17. *Ibid.*, 17
18. Crown, Patricia and W. Jeffery Hurst. “Evidence of Cacao use in the Prehispanic American Southwest.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA* 106 (2009): 2110–2113
19. Washburn, Dorothy K., William Washburn and Petia Shipkova. “The prehistoric drug trade: widespread consumption of cacao in Ancestral Pueblo and Hohokam communities in the American Southwest.” *Journal of Archeological Science* 38 (2011) 1634–1640. These researchers conducted a similar analysis using a different experimental method with a larger and more diverse pottery sample. As a result of their study, the researchers “propose the existence of extensive trade and interaction among the peoples of the American Southwest and Mesoamerica.” They found that “similarities in [pottery] vessel contents, form and features” are the result of “direct and extensive interactions between” the American Southwest and Mesoamerica. They also believe that “one possible interpretation is that [cacao] was traded for Southwestern turquoise.” By 900 CE, turquoise was in high demand in Mesoamerica, replacing jade as the most sought-after luxury mineral. The researchers note that Neutron Activation analysis has matched turquoise from New Mexico with turquoise found in Chichen Itza and in the Yucatan. They believe that at the height of the Chaco civilization, (900–1150 CE), there was “long distance activity that tied together the American Southwest and the Mesoamerican states.”

20. Schele and Mathews 1998: 73

21. Maya scholar Simon Martin has observed that “[n]umerous ethnographic sources describe the soul or spirit of corn, and even the idea that such a spirit must leave the cob before it is harvested (Martin 2006: 159).”