

How It All Began

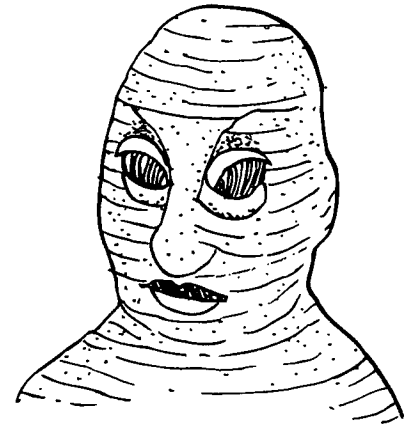
A Quiché Mayan Myth from Guatemala



At the beginning of time, the Creator, who was the mother and father of everything that existed, looked around. Within the four corners and four sides of the universe, there were no people or animals to praise him. No birds, fish, crabs, trees, rocks, holes, canyons, straw, or reeds could be found. There was nothing. No noise could be heard in the sky. The sea floated through space. It, too, was calm and lifeless.

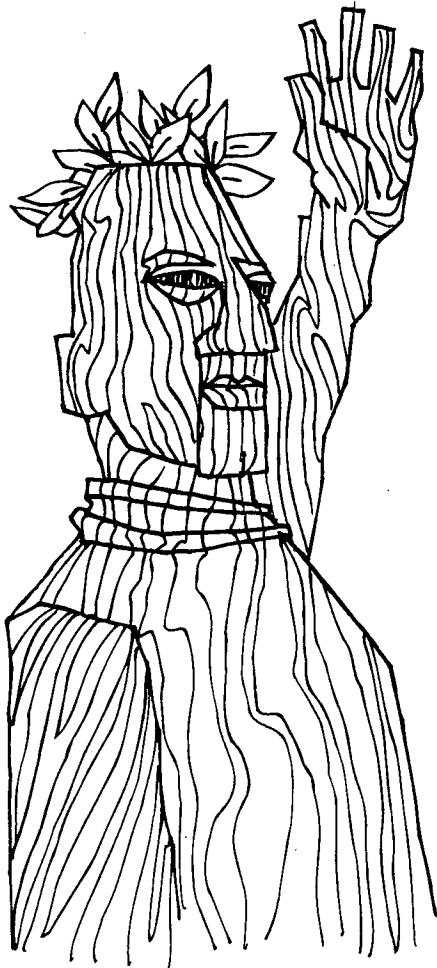
The Creator set to work to fill the great void. First the Earth appeared. It was formed from the dust and mists that swirled through the universe. There were plains, mountains, canyons, and rivers. Then came the deer, birds, snakes, and other animals. They were given homes on Earth. The birds were told to live in the trees and reeds and were taught how to fly. The Creator showed some animals how to walk on four feet, and other creatures, like the snake, how to crawl on the ground.

Each kind of animal was to make its own noise. The animals were told to praise the Creator and the gods with their special voices. They squawked, roared, chirped, and squeaked, but they could not sing praises to the One who gave them life. The Creator was displeased. Clearly, the world needed another creature. It was decided that these animals would not be destroyed. Instead, they would serve as food for others.



The Creator talked with the gods who had great vision and asked them to solve the problem. First, it was decided to shape people from the muddy Earth. These new creatures turned out too soft. They couldn't bathe because they dissolved in water. They made noise, but they could not think. Clearly these creatures would not serve the gods well. They were destroyed.

The next people were carved from wood. They were much hardier. They will be perfect, the Creator thought. He soon realized that there was something wrong. The wood people were unfeeling and not very smart. Their bodies were dry, without moisture or blood. The expressions on their faces never changed. They couldn't smile or cry. When the Creator told them to praise the ones who brought them life, their words had no meaning.

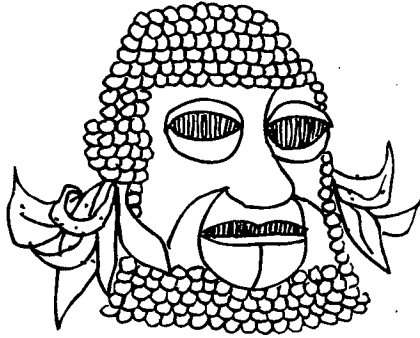


The wood people had many children. Their children were just like them, and none of them could praise the gods either. Clearly, these people would not do. So the Creator made sap flow from the trees. The sap ran like a river over the wood people and knocked them over. The animals broke them into pieces. The chickens pecked them because the wood people had never fed them. The dogs chewed on them because the wood people had beaten them. The grinding stones beat the wood people because they had been made to work all day and never given time to rest. Even the jars and cooking pots stomped on the wood people because their masters had left them in the fire too long and burned them.

The few wood people that survived climbed to the roofs of their houses for safety. The roofs collapsed. They tried to hide in caves, but the caves wouldn't let them enter. When they climbed trees, the limbs threw them back onto the ground. These wood people turned into monkeys. That is why monkeys look very much like people.

Once more the Creator decided to create people who would worship the gods. He listened to the advice of the animals. The magpie, the coyote, the crow, and the jaguar found yellow and white ears of corn growing in the fields. Food and drink were made from the corn. People were created from the food. The corn drinks made the people strong and healthy.

These corn people were our ancestors. There were four men and four women. They had many children. The corn people could speak, and their words had meaning. With their vision, they could see the whole Earth and universe. They were grateful and they gave thanks to the gods and the Creator for the Earth and sky.



The corn people prayed so well that the gods became worried. The corn people were too perfect. They saw and knew everything. They were exactly like the gods. The Creator fogged the eyes of the corn people so they saw less and didn't know everything.

All this time, there was no light in the sky—no sun, no moon, or stars. The corn people prayed for light. The Creator heard them and gave the world light so all could see what had been created. During the day, the sun warmed the Earth, the animals, and the corn people. At night the stars and moon shone in the heavens.

There was great joy when the sun rose in the mornings. All the people and creatures praised the work of the Creator and the gods. People danced and burned a sweet incense that pleased the gods. They made offerings. The world was as it should be. Clearly, it was perfect.