

A new video is available on YouTube that recounts a memorable Maya spiritual adventure, created by one of our most cherished IMS members:

The Maya 260-Day Sacred Creation Ceremony

by V. Garth Norman

In the summer of 2010, my wife Cheryl and I had the privilege to participate in a series of ritual fire ceremonies that included calling out the names of each day in the Maya's sacred 260-day calendar, just as they do for every *Waxaquib B'atz* (8 B'atz, aka Maya New Year) ceremony. We were joined by 13 Maya Spiritual Elders and a dozen Maya scholars. Our 10-day journey together was dubbed "Mayas to Izapa". The excursion from Guatemala City to Izapa, Mexico, was organized by president and vice president, Georgeann Johnson and Mary Lou Ridinger of The Maya Conservancy, Rodolfo Juan Flores of Izapa Cosmos, A.C., and Jim Reed, one of the directors of The Maya Conservancy and also representing the Institute of Maya Studies (IMS). Pat Manfredi, another IMS member, also participated in all ceremonies.

Izapa, Mexico began early, 1500 BCE (Olmec period), at 15° north latitude, where the sun's zenith passages on August 13 and April 30, bracket 260 days. Because of this, researchers believe Izapa was the birthplace of the Maya's 260-day sacred calendar. These 260-days (9 months) represent the human



K'iche' Maya spiritual elder Rigoberto Itzep Chanchovac of Mosmostenango, Guatemala, presided over the ceremony that included twelve other Maya representatives. Three were stationed in each of the four directions. The names of each of the twenty sacred calendar days were called out thirteen times; the representatives calling out five days from each direction. Tat Rigoberto's intention was to reactivate the connection to the sacred fire at Izapa. No ritual ceremonies had been performed in Izapa for more than 900 years.



Garth's new video is available at:

Mesoamerican antiquities built in the Formative period, 1500 BCE to 250 CE¹.

fertility-gestation period before the birth of a human child – the *summum bonum* supreme creation on earth. Around 500 BCE, a new group of immigrants settled the nearly abandoned Izapa temple center. They continued to observe and record the cycles of the sun, moon and stars, and maintained the 260-day sacred calendar.²⁻⁵

In 2013, Guatemalan archaeologist Mary Lou Ridinger summarized the Maya religious views recorded anciently on stone monuments at Izapa to include *Renaissance, Transformation, Resurrection, and World's Without End*. She states, "The Maya observed the night skies, and believe in parallel universes in which the earth is a cosmic mirror of heaven – i.e., *On earth as it is in heaven or As above, so below.*"

Ancient Maya literature, architecture, and culture is a mapping of the heavens, most evident at the Izapa Temple Center. "Ancient astronomers observed that new stars were continually being created in the Orion constellation. Their observations were 2500 years before the Hubble Space Telescope discovered in the 1990s that Nebula 42-43 is a place where new stars are born into the universe."

For the ancient people of Mesoamerica, creation is an ongoing process among all living things on the earth as well as in the heavens. Each day at sunrise is revered as a new creation for families on earth.⁶ Religious rituals and calendar



Cheryl and Garth Norman join Mary Lou Ridinger for a happy Kodak moment after the ceremony at Izapa.

astronomy that were initiated in Izapa were taken by migration to all parts of the Americas to perpetuate the sanctity of the family and ongoing creation. This intent is still evident today in modern Maya sacred ceremonies.^{2-5,7}

A little background is mentioned here about the Maya people. Their ancient libraries and native books were burned and destroyed during the Spanish conquest in the 17th century CE. A few Mesoamerican codices were hidden – one titled the *Popol Vuh* is thought to have

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¹ See: http://www.utexas.edu/cofalart/3471347m_map.html#f. Click "Formative".

² Norman, V. Garth. *Izapa Album*. 1973, BYU New World Archaeological Foundation.

³ Norman, V. Garth. *Izapa Text*. 1976, BYU New World Archaeological Foundation.

⁴ Norman, V. Garth. *Astronomical Orientations of Izapa Monuments*. 1980, BYU Press.

⁵ Norman, V. Garth. *Izapa Sacred Space: Sculpture Calendar Codex*. Sunhew Press, NC. Book Review by Dr. Allen J. Christenson.

See: <https://byustudies.byu.edu/showtitle.aspx?title=9369>

⁶ Ridinger, Mary Lou, 2013.

See: <http://www.mayaconservancy.org/mary-lou-ridinger-tedx-talk-now-on-youtube/>.

⁷ See: <http://lizapacalendar.com>





L) Stela 5, in Plaza C at Izapa (2012 RTI digital photo by Dr. Jason Jones⁹). CL) After the ceremony at Izapa, Garth Norman led the entourage from plaza to plaza, stela to stela, explaining the history and significance of all. CR) Rigoberto Itzep Chanchovac and his wife Maria preparing for our ceremony at Iximche (photo by Jim Reed). R) This sacred ceiba tree grows amidst cacao on land in Izapa owned by The Maya Conservancy.

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originated in the Izapa region. The few codices and many carved stone monuments that were not destroyed have been decoded by modern archaeologists and scholars giving us insight into the astronomy-calendars, religion and society of ancient Mesoamerican civilizations.

Today, there are 12+ million Maya living in Central America, with the vast majority residing in villages in the highland mountains of Guatemala. For 30 years, from the 1960s to 1996, over 200,000 Maya were executed in what was deemed a Civil War. During this time, many Maya fled north to neighboring Mexico, and to the U.S. Maya families today plant, cultivate and harvest their own food in their mountain villages. They have no weapons, only shovels and hoes for farming. They pray daily and honor their ancestors in their

family activities and in their sacred seasonal calendar rituals.

The symbolic carvings in stone are rich with meaning. The Maya Family Tree, based on the sacred ceiba tree (above, right), designates ancestors as the roots, the husband and wife as the tree trunk, and the branches as their posterity. The Tzotzil-Maya “World Tree” (below, left) designate roots as the *Underworld – Place of the Dead* (ancestors); the live part of the tree as *Earth – Place of the Living* (families); and the branches of the tree as *Heaven – Place of the Gods*.⁸ This last analogy correlates with Izapa’s famous *Tree of Life* stone – Stela 5 (above, left)⁹.

⁸ Lowe, Lee, Martinez. *Izapa: An Introduction to the Ruins and Monuments*. 1982, BYU New World Archaeological Foundation.

⁹ Jones, Jason, University of Warwick, England. See more RTI digital photos of Izapa Stela 5 in *Izapa Sacred Space*, Norman 2013:270 and at: <http://izapacalendar.com/nwaf>

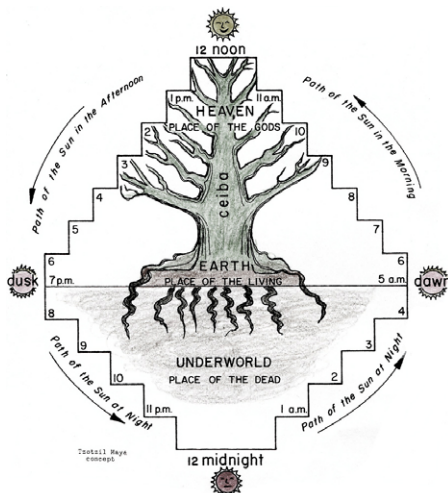
The series of Fire Ceremonies that Cheryl and I witnessed in 2010 was based on the most important and fundamental of all Maya rituals, the calling out of the sacred calendar day names. Rigoberto Itzep Chanchovac, a *chuch q’ajaw* of Momostenango (in highland Guatemala) (above, center, right) conducted the sacred creation ceremonies at five ancient temple centers (Iximche, Santiago Atitlan, Tak’alik Ab’aj, Momostenango, and Izapa). Each ceremony lasted from 2-3 hours. All consisted of the same main elements that are portrayed in my new YouTube video.

The Maya believe each Fire Ceremony offers the opportunity to use the source of all light, symbolized by the flames of the fire, to amplify our intentions and obligations. The creation of the earth is presented near the beginning of each of their ceremonies.

An account of the creation of the world recorded in the *Popol Vuh* and carved on Izapa monuments, states:

“Then the earth was created by them [the Creator Gods]. Merely their word brought about the creation of it. In order to create the earth, they said, “Earth,” and immediately it was created. Just like a cloud, like a mist, was the creation and formation of it.

Then they called forth the mountains from the water. Straightaway the great mountains came to be. It was merely their spirit essence, their miraculous power that brought about the conception of the mountains and the valleys. Straight away were created cypress groves and pine forests to cover the face of the earth.”¹⁰



L) The Tzotzil Maya “World Tree” (Lowe, Lee, Martinez. *Izapa: An Introduction to the Ruins and Monuments*. 1982, New World Archaeological Foundation, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT).

R) Newly designed cosmogram featuring the Tree of Life and elements carved in stone at Izapa, including the Hero Twins igniting a fire and the ballcourt throne (by Jim Reed).

¹⁰ *Popol Vuh: Sacred Book of the Quiche Maya People* translated by Dr. Allen J. Christenson, 2007.