

The Dance of the Deer

What is the meaning behind the Dance of the Deer?

...

The Deer Dancers here in the region of Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, are appointed to carry out a tradition..

According to our ancestorsⁱ, there was a time when there was a massive draught, in our land.

*The sacred plants
the sacred trees
Each of the bushes began to dry
out*

*Each of the animals began to
die because of the draught.*

All of the animals- the tigers, the monkeys, the raccoons, and the deer saw how it was. They noticed that it was terribly dry and that those among them were dying. They thought that they would petition the divine Tzuul Taq'aⁱⁱ, the one who judges in the world, that he might do us the favor, *that he might grant us our water, our drink.*

All of the animals did it. They each gathered together. They elected the deer to represent their commission to San Pablo Xukaneb so that he might petition Lord Tzuul Taq'a who might *grant us our drink.*

That's the way they did it. The deer represented the animals and they prepared themselves for their journey to San Pablo Xukanebⁱⁱⁱ to ask that he do their petition.

Laj Xajol Kej

K'a'ru li-- k'auxl wan chirixeb' laj xajol kej?

...

Eb' laj xajol kej arin sa' qatenamit Alta Verapaz, Watemaal ke'xaqli chi xk'amb'al jun li na'leb'..

Chankeb' li qaxe'qatonil naq jun li kutan kiwan naq maaka'ch'in lix chaqi-e kiwan sa' li gateep.

*eb' li loq'laj awiimq
eb' li loq'laj che'
eb' li pim kilaje'ok chi chaqik,*

eb' li xul kilaje'ok chi kaamk xmaak li chaqi-e.

Ke'ril chi jo'kan eb' - Eb li xul, eb' li hix, eb li max, eb' laj ow, eb' li kej. Ke'xk'e reetal naq mas li chaqi-e ut yookeb' chi kaamk li komon. Ke'xk'oxla naq te'xtzama re li loq'laj Tzuul Taq'a li wan raatin chiru li ruchich'och' naq tixb'aanu li usilal *naq tixk'e chaq li qaha', quk'a'.*

Xe'xb'aanu eb' li xul chixjunileb'. Laje'xch'utub' rib'. Ke'xjolomi naq te'xxaqab' choq' xtaqeb' eb' li kej re nak te'xsik' chaq San Pablo Xukaneb' chi xb'aanunkil li xtaqlankil chiru li qawa' Tzuul Taq'a, xtz'amankil re naq taawanq chiru, *tixk'e chaq li quk'a'.*

Jo'kan b'i' ke'xb'aanu. Xe'xaqli eb' li kej. Ke'xkawresi rib'. Ke'xchap xb'eeb'. Ke'koheb' San Pablo Xukaneb' chi xb'aanunkil li xtaqlankileb'.

When they were half-way there^{iv}, the deer found themselves in danger when the jaguars blocked their path.

The deer needed to do their errand in San Pablo. They realized that they were in the jaguar's grasp.

They thought, "Who should they ask to help them there in the mountains?" They called the monkeys who lived nearby in the hope that they might come to their rescue.

The monkeys came. In their agility,
They began to tease the jaguars.

They began to pull on the jaguars' tails.

They began to grab them on the path to confuse them.

They began to trick the jaguars.

so that there would be time for the deer to escape and go to do their petition before Tzuul Taq'a.

That is what they did. They arrived at San Pablo Xukaneb in good time. They did their petition. *Tzuul Taq'a came.*

He granted the water.

He gave the animals their drink.

All of them were saved there.

That is the reason why the symbolic Deer Dance was created in our community.

Naq xe'kwulak yiitoq b'e, ke'xtaw rib' rik'in jun raylal naq ke'x kut chaq rib' sa' lix b'eeb' eb' li hix, sa' xb'eeb' li kej.

Yookeb' chi xik chi xb'aanunkil xtaqlankil aran San Pablo. Ke'xk'e reetal eb' li kej naq wankeb' sa' ruq' li hix.

Ke'xk'oxla naq te'xpatz' "ani taatenq'aanq reheb' aran sa' li k'iche?" Ke'xb'oq eb' li max wankeb' chi nach' naq te'chaalq chi xkolb'aleb' eb li kej.

Ke'chal eb' li max. Sa' li xseeb'aleb',
k'eok chi xb'atz'unkileb' eb li hix
K'eok chi xkelonkil chi xyeeb' eb li hix.
Ke'ok chix chapb'aleb' aran sa' b'e
chi xtontonkileb'.
Ke'ok chi xb'alaq'inkil eb' li hix

re naq taawanq tieemp reheb' li kej te'eleliq ut te'xik chi xb'aanunkil li xtaqlankil chiru li Tzuul Taq'a.

A'an xe'xb'aanu. Xe'wulak tz'aqal toj San Pablo Xukaneb'. Xe'xb'aanu chaq li xtaqlankil.
Kichal li Tzuul Taq'a.

Kixk'e chaq li ha'.

Kixk'e chaq ruk'a'eb' li xul.

Aran kilaje'kole' chixjunileb'.

A'an li yaalal sa' qayaanqil li chanru naq kiyola chaq li na'leb' a'in li xajol kej.

ⁱ “our ancestors” literally means “our root our tree.” The ancient ones have passed these legends to each progressive generation. It is their root.

ⁱⁱ Literally “the divine valleys and mountains,” *Tzuul Taqa* is the world; it’s “Mother Earth.” A beautiful sentence appears in *The Lost Notebooks of Robert Burkitt, Maya Linguist* (Weeks and Danien 2008 p.318), it is: “Thou reverend *Tzuul Taqa*, root and trunk of the world.”

Another way of translating this Q'eqchi' sentence is to say that *Tzuul Taqa* is the ancestor – or creator – of the world.

ⁱⁱⁱ There are 13 divine mountains that the Maya might call upon to petition for a specific purpose. *Xukaneb* is the highest one of the mountains located in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. “Traditionally, Q'eqchi' believe themselves to be the children of the 13 sacred mountains, the 13 summits from *Xukaneb* to *Itzamna'* along the Sierra *Yalijux*” (see: <http://www.cloudforestconservation.org>).

^{iv} When working with Carlota Yalibat in Cobán, she translated the phrase, *yiitoq b'e* as being on a cross-roads, or at an intersection. However, on my recent trip to Belize, when reviewing this phrase with Tomas Caal, he understood this to mean that they were half-way there.