

COMMON SENTIENCE



# ANCESTORS

*Divine Remembrances of Lineage,  
Relations and Sacred Sites*

*Featuring*

**MINDAHI BASTIDA**

DR. KURT JOHNSON • GRANDMOTHER FLORDEMAYO • LINDSEY MORRISS  
DRS. J.J. AND DESIREE HURTAK • GINNY COLARUSSO • CHRIS CIEPIELA  
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Mindahi Bastida

Co-edited by Geraldine Patrick Encina

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# PART ONE

*Understanding Our Ancestors*

# IN THE BEGINNING



At the beginning of time, billions of years ago, all was darkness. Then light emerged, and where all was silence, sound broke through. Galaxies multiplied. Stars and solar systems were created and destroyed. Over 4,000 million years, this planet has become an astoundingly complex and vibrant body. Volcanic activity beneath the oceans formed supercontinents, rifts, tectonic plates, and continental masses. These spread apart and collided, submerged, and re-emerged. In more recent times, all sorts of organic forms have appeared, co-existed, and disappeared.

Some creation stories agree with the scientists that it all began with nothing, a vast, empty space with no sound or light or being. Such is the case of the *Popol Vuh* [The Book of Counsel] that comes from the K'iche-Maya peoples in Guatemala. They believe conscious beings from some other realm arrived to carry out different trials to create a world of creatures that would acknowledge and respect them.

Other creation stories start with a tumultuous world of monsters with massive strength and no sense of purpose. A mother attempts to appease them with the help of her twin sons that she conceives with the Sun. A

variation of this second story focuses on one of the monsters and the way in which the twin sons, two Quetzalcoatl serpents, transform the body of the monster, a Caiman, into a world with mountains, caves, water, and a starry sky.

In this story, along with the Caiman's body, there is a turtle that floats in the sea. The Haudenosaunee, the Otomi-Toltec, and the Maya consider this the ultimate motherland and home where the first fire was lit and the first seeds were grown. Among the Mapuche in South America, the twin serpents—Treng Treng Vilu and Caicai Vilu—have antagonistic forces; one works with the mountains, raising them at will, and the other works with the ocean waters. The two maintain a balance that can be broken with the slightest breaching of their mutual covenant.

The Otomi-Toltec carved the enormous basaltic Stone of the Sun (*Piedra del Sol*) to tell of the times lived and predict the times to come; the stone's resistance to the passing of ages shows how important it was for ancestors to mark the closing and opening of cycles. The stone identifies 2012 as the closing of a 5,200-year cycle, the last fifth of a 26,000-year cycle, whereby a new cycle begins on Year One Flint. The flint is the birthing element of Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl himself, so beginning the cycle on Year One Flint in 2012 has meant, for the Otomi-Toltec, that the dawning of a new Sun has begun under the auspices of Quetzalcoatl.

In these times of transition, humanity will be exposed to the unleashed force of the four sacred elements—fire, air, water, earth—while having the opportunity to evaluate their behavior and refresh their covenant with the ancestors. The ancestors have always worked hard to maintain balance and harmony in the world.



## HUMAN LIFE ARRIVES

We are the synthesis of all that has ever existed in the universe, our galaxy, our solar system, and in Mother Earth. The huge celestial bodies floating in the cosmic sea are our first ancestors. Equally, mountains, volcanoes, glaciers, and rivers of today are ancient ancestors that are still alive. All the biomass that sank to the sea bottoms and was crushed by the weight of time and rocks has become oil—a special and condensed form of ancestors.

Youngest of all are our ancestors of human origin. These ancestors are said to have come from stars in nearby constellations several million years ago. Oral tradition says that the most recent direct ancestors appeared thirty to twenty-five thousand years ago in Atlantis and Lemuria, two continents now sunken. As Earth's climate conditions became milder, their societies increased in complexity—but when their continents became unstable, they were forced to migrate, taking with them as much knowledge and technological skill as they could.

Native peoples view the process of evolution as beginning with a first mother or a first couple, the “old father and old mother.” These individuals always maintained a relationship with the stars. They are considered the parents of everything that exists in the world. In my particular lineage—the Otomi-Toltec—this couple is connected to Makih-Mu. They are thought to have come from the Pleiades, in the region of the sky called Yuh-Mu, to populate the continent Mu. There is even a time marked in the original calendar for the celebration of Mu. The celebration keeps us connected to our first mother and father, Makame and Makata.


Ancestors become important in our lives when we understand that they have handed down to us a significant responsibility: to maintain harmony with nature and the cosmos in every act of our lives. In doing this, we keep

alive the teachings about the original principles of life in an evolutionary way that honors our cosmogonic interrelation—our connection to the cosmos.

The teachings give us an opportunity to “know” ourselves and to reconnect with everything that exists that is meaningful to us. The connection helps us understand our identity and how sacred life is. It illustrates the importance of recognizing the root of one’s presence in the world. If we know where we come from, we can take responsibility for who we are and we can walk with dignity and care, relating to other beings with wisdom and humbleness.

# OUR IDENTITY



ur ancestors build and shape our identity, both in the here-and-now and in the eternal cosmos. Our identity is both tangible and intangible, matter and spirit.

My people say we are made of the flesh of corn, and in other latitudes, our brothers and sisters are deeply connected to and depend on potatoes, wheat, rye, or rice... all sacred plants. Our ancestors co-evolved with these foods, a process that took them thousands of cycles of birth, death, and re-emergence to develop. We are also made of water, which blesses us from the time we are born, and when she falls softly on our crops or lets us glide on her waters. We are made of air, inhaled and exhaled by millions of creatures simultaneously, however unaware we may be of this fact—for perhaps in our life we will only observe our first inhale and last exhale.

The life energy that we feel is the warmth generated by the pulsations of all our cells as they co-vibrate with galaxies, stars, the Milky Way, the Sun, the planets, the Moon, and with Mother Earth. Our Earth generously births, nurtures, embraces, and shelters every single one of her earthlings.

We don't need to understand rationally how all of this has come to be... how a fish, a fungus, a rock, a mountain, a river, a lake, an eagle, or a star

were created or what or who they are. When we allow ourselves to live in the mystery, we can fully celebrate life in all her beauty and manifestation. This sounds easy, but it requires a lot of inner work. First, we need to shift this sense of “me” and “myself” to a sense of “we” and “ourselves.” Becoming conscious that we are one more in the web of life is key to this inner work. It helps us build our identity, interiorize who we are, and answer within why ancestors matter so much.

In the process of building the collective sense of being in the world, it is good to recall that every human group that has ever come together has had common motivations: guaranteeing sustenance, maintaining shelter, and protecting the continuation of a lineage. This manner of good living is assured when there are wise community members who are in daily dialogue with the spirits of nature. This kind of dialogue prompted the celebration of waters, animals, and plants to become a central aspect of the group’s activities, till the practice became tradition. In this setting, every family member, old or young, a midwife or a maiden girl, is assigned a certain responsibility. When that responsibility is met, the community as a whole ensures that there will be plenty, because nature is rejoicing. As everyone learns of their contribution to the common good, they accept rules so that any misbehavior and misalignment with the laws of nature is addressed in good timing.

When everyone participates in such a community, observing their contribution to the common good, it cultivates a deep sense of belonging. This is the most important aspect of identity. When you can proudly say “I am from this community,” you are acknowledging all that has made you be the integral being that you are.

Looking deep enough at what makes us who we are, we can see that we are everything that, until now, has left a mark on us. These experiences carry a blueprint, a signature. We are the result of sounds, voices, smells, colors, lights, textures, faces, bodies, and all that stands out in the landscape and

seems to talk to us and to those around us. We are all that is in the skyscape, both at day and at night, which seems to feel with us. We are also what comes from our experience with the tangible world and with the intangible world, our dreams and visions. Every experience produces a perception within that makes us reason in a certain way. This reasoning is filtered by a worldview that has come from songs, dances, stories, legends, and myths held and shared by the members of our culture.

Our sense of who we are comes from our participation in activities like fishing, sailing, cultivating, beekeeping, weaving, herding, horse riding, cooking, playing music, dancing, making pilgrimages, partaking in or watching ceremonies, and much more. We love playing our part in these activities because they reinforce the sense of belonging to a group; and we acknowledge the way that the group produces and reproduces interactions with nature, especially when they honor the original principles of living in harmony with everything that is.

Our ancestors felt the same way; they were born in a landscape and prayed and worked and walked the lands and waters in a reciprocal relationship with all the ones living and dwelling there. When they died, they were integrated back to nature or by nature. This integration happened organically. Its meaning was reinforced in songs, dances, and prayers offered by their life companions. Consider here our human companions, as well as birds and animals, who likewise sing, dance, and pray. Even the wind and the waters do this, and even the mountains and volcanoes and the rivers and seas also do. So, for generations, the bodies of our human ancestors have transmuted into the four sacred elements, impregnated with the loving energy of all their relations, and that is why our ancestors considered mountains and creeks, seas, and winds to be their ancestors—and those of us who follow their guidance feel that way, too.

## THE MESSAGE OF THE ANCESTORS

Ancestors with strong spirits are capable of appearing in the dream world, and those of us who have the capacity can see, listen, and speak with them. But there are multiple other ways in which they manifest and support us in our life process. They help us evolve so that we can expand our consciousness about who we are and what our tasks and responsibilities are in this world. They show us all of this in what we dream but also in how we feel and taste, and in how we act or perform a song or a dance or any kind of task—especially when it is done with care and love. We can sometimes even see signals in the sky, in the air, in the water, and in minerals. Ancestors are omnipresent, ever present, everywhere present.

Our ancestors tell us how to live in sacred connection. For this, it's important to *feel* beautifully and it's necessary to *think* beautifully, but it's much more significant to *connect* beautifully. Through that kind of connection, you remember who you are, you *know* who you are, and you *celebrate* who you are. You are star dust. You are the balanced combination of the sacred elements. You are at the meeting point of the four directions and a dew drop in a fine thread of the web of life. You are the result of a sacred “touch” from the Divine source.

We hold different stages or layers of identity, both tangible and intangible. Tangibly, we are part of a family, a clan, and a culture. We are also in physical interaction with the place where we were born, the landscape and the territory. The character and vocation that we develop are in relation to the social group that we live with. The ecosystem that we grow in also determines what we feel most attuned to.

Our ancestors have passed down dances, rituals, and popular songs to enrich our identity. For many of us, they are a natural component of our daily lives. Also common in many societies and cultures are festivities celebrated to enjoy specific calendar events. For example, the celebration of the new

year means the renewal of the life cycle to many different cultures. Special activities to celebrate both migratory and mating cycles, such as those of whales or geese, sometimes go back centuries. Many rituals happen around the arrival of a new season, such as spending family time with cherry tree blossoms in Spring or with ripe grapes to collect them for wine-making in Summer or Fall. Hence, ceremonial practices are continuous and cyclical expressions that relate the material world to the spiritual.

These practices help maintain the bond of identity over time, and the bond becomes weakened when festivities and celebrations are not practiced. When they are carried out, the sense of community is invigorated among participants. People generally commit to come together again, and so the cycle of life keeps going. At these occasions, most people dress in their local attires and eat traditional dishes. The markets offer a whole display of fruits, meals, clothes, woven materials, art pieces, music, and more. They are the living evidence that what we harvest and how we transform food, fibers, and minerals strongly reflect the region we come from. There is always an imprinting, a seal that marks the provenance of what is made locally in traditional ways.

Our ancestors have also passed down intangible knowledge, such as through languages. Language reflects our relationship with nature, the landscape, and the sky. Language contains the most significant expressions of the collective identity within a bioregion. Languages include the presence of ancestors and the wisdom they offer to the world. When you lose a language, you lose wisdom and identity. You lose the west, the south, the east, and the north. Then you hardly know where you are in the world.

When a language is lost, not only the people lose it, but the whole world loses it. Possibilities of understanding the collective existence are lost, and possibilities of understanding the uniqueness of a culture are lost. For instance, distinctive identity features are part of the written symbols of language. However language is transmitted, it is possible to recognize

which region or culture a person comes from by listening to it or seeing it in symbolic form. Even the cosmology of a group is revealed through language, as it creates abstract symbols which allow us to connect with nature and the universe in special ways.

The tales of our ancestors help connect us to manifestations that are between the tangible and intangible, such as mermaids or dragons. These beings are tied closely to the belief of a people in relation to mythological figures in creation stories and other narrations. Religious and spiritual practices related to nature are normal among original peoples and are increasingly common among “grounded” communities of faith. In such practices, there is a special relationship with sacred animals, plants, mushrooms, and minerals, and this also makes up one’s identity—for you may have more affinity to crystals than to medicinal plants, and so forth.

## OUR COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

By giving ourselves space to take a close look at all this, we can rethink the identity we have built as individuals. Identity is formed in relation to family, but also to the community, the town, and the natural environment. Identity is affected by the region, the country, the continent, and beyond. However, it is important to emphasize that the different layers of identity can be built on only if the first layer is well-cultivated and secured. Otherwise, the person keeps feeling out of place. That happens because they have not resonated with any community—and because they have not been guided into taking on a responsibility. Identity forms naturally when you know who you are and where you come from. That is why it is important to know our lineage: where we come from, our original culture, and the collective identity of the culture.

Collective identities among cultures are first formed by landscapes. In ancient cultures, the savannah, the desert, the jungle, the coast, the islands



and seas, the forests and volcanoes became our first mothers and fathers. As will be further elaborated, they are our most ancient ancestors, so we honor and pay respect to them; we thank them for being the source all of life, including human life. This acknowledgement gives our identity a *projection*; that is, our original place of reference acquires meaning beyond the self. Then we are better equipped to feel in unity with the diverse planetary community.

In the process of cultivating a sense of identity, we become naturally connected with our ancestors. This experience can heal us if we proceed with care, reverence, and respect, offering permanent co-responsibility with life and a true willingness to transcend. The process shows us how to keep mind, body, and soul in balance, and how to do it in a humble way. When we leave life, we continue to be—as our ancestors are. For we are not here forever in matter; rather, we remain as spirit in continuous transcendence.

Building a strong sense of identity, both individual and collective, is medicine that heals the body, soul, and spirit, transcending time and space. It implies a firm responsibility that directs us, telling us what, how, where, and when to carry out activities. In every activity, we have the opportunity to reaffirm who we are and to evaluate how we are behaving with Mother Earth. Indeed, Earth is our great mother and we owe everything we are to her; likewise, we recognize the Sun, the Moon, and the stars as our elders.

Acknowledging these elements of our identity reminds us that we are not single or alone: we are all our relations.

## **END OF EXCERPT PART ONE**



# PART TWO

*Divine Remembrances of Lineage,  
Relations and Sacred Sites*

# THE MYSTICAL HEATH

Standing on a deep sandy path in Northern Germany's famous Lueneberg Heath Nature Park, I felt an indescribable connection to the local landscape, which seemed a wonder to me as an exchange student from America. Rolling, sandy hills were interspersed with clumps of tall green grasses and plentiful heather plants, their deep purple stems cloaking the hills in vibrant color.

After several hours of walking, the Heath all around me boasted endless views of the sun-kissed heather sprigs, their stems glowing as if encrusted with precious stones from the sunlight dancing off them. It would soon be my turn to dance, but on the inside, as the heath gifted me on an August day with its energy and a view into ancestral worlds that a 16-year-old rarely glimpses.

The heather blossom's intoxicating sweet scent hung in the air. The stunning views were interrupted only by an errant pine or silvery birch tree, with a strip of deep green brush and trees on the far horizon. Suddenly, I became rooted to the heathland as a pulsing energy began to be emitted from the sandy path. The sensation reached up through my feet, into my legs, torso, and heart. I stood there as if alone, the fellow hikers in this vast area

fading from awareness while I connected deeply to the land, and its timeless whispers.

The lure of Germany first captured me as an 11-year-old who found the language easy to learn. Fascinated with German culture, heritage, and history, I was fortunate to spend a high school summer in Northern Germany as an American Field Service exchange student, where I soon felt like I was home.

Up until the nature park visit, life on a small dairy farm had seemed simple, yet fulfilling. I enjoyed helping my host family make daily excursions to milk their small herd of white and black Holstein cows by hand as they grazed in nearby pastures. I appreciated the century-old farm with its combination house and barn under one enormous, straw-thatched roof. And the land that was so flat that one could see to the horizon over the small, lush pastures of nearby families, see to where the deep green grass met the clear, robin-egg blue sky.

My host sister and instant good friend was just a year older than I on this warm August day. The wide tires of our heavy, old bicycles hummed with purpose as early in the morning we peddled down narrow country roads that carried few automobiles, cherishing our freedom from farm work and adult supervision. We sped to catch a train from the nearby village, sneezing and laughing while inhaling the fragrance of freshly cut hay and shouting “Moo!” at grazing cows in lush, green pastures. It was exciting to venture to the Lueneberg Heath, the largest of its kind in Central Europe, stretching from Oldenburg to Bremen to Hannover.

Once aboard a train to a neighboring town near the famed Heath, we settled into its gentle swaying rhythm as we spied cotton-ball clouds out the windows that drifted slowly above us in a bright blue sky, their shapes slowly casting playful shadows upon everything below.

Because no cars were allowed in the heathland area, we linked arms upon arrival and strode off, our feet sinking into the warming sands of the path leading to the amethyst-bejeweled hills ahead. A pair of stocky ponies whose

coats matched the path color surprised us with their camouflage as they crested the first hill we reached. Their broad heads hung low, eyes hidden by their long forelocks that floated up and down with each step. Attached to the ponies was a small wooden wagon bearing tourists, and we stepped aside to let the ponies with their gentle four-beat cadence and wobbly wagon load pass by.

The intense August sun bore down on us for the first hours of walking into the beauty of the rolling, tufted, blooming landscape. Small herds of shaggy Heidschnucken sheep appeared around a bend, roaming at will across the heathland while grazing upon wayward weeds and tree shoots. The sheep barely raised their heads as we strode by, our shoes coated with glittering golden sand like pixie dust.

One could feel Mother Nature's presence here, singing to her fields of heather and laughing at the shaggy sheep munching the day away. The mystery, the life power of the Heath, caused me to suddenly stop as I felt a shift, a type of mental swoon. The pulsing energy from the path rose in my body as the people on neighboring paths disappeared from my vision. The Heath itself shape-shifted, transporting me to another time.

I was on these same hills, but without the walking paths. Larger birch and pine trees had sprung up before me, clustered haphazardly around the borders of the heath fields and within them. I looked down, bewildered that my feet now sported coarsely carved wooden clogs with blunt tips that peeked out from underneath a long, dark, plain skirt.

My dazed mind picked up a lovely, soft whisper of *Remember!*

*Remember what?* I silently replied. But to whom?

*Remember!* The whisper commanded me. *Remember!*

Visions swept over me, as I stood still, trembling. I had walked this heath many times before in various lifetimes. I was the young peasant girl in the dark skirt and wooden shoes, gathering firewood and picking sprigs of heather to sell at a market to help feed my family. I saw myself searching among the

trees for small fallen branches, which snapped loudly as I broke them for bundling to carry home. My hands were dirty and calloused, and my nails were torn in jagged edges. The bundle of sticks weighed upon my shoulders and back, and broken branch tips dug into my skin through the loose blouse. The fragrance of the pines and heather blossoms filled my nostrils.

Then the Heath appeared to rise in a waving roll, changing the landscape and showing a vision of myself as a teenaged boy in tattered pants that reached only to my calves. Looking down as the boy, I saw wrinkled, old hand-me-down leather boots that were much too large for me. The cold iron of a long gun was in my arms, with my grip tight on the wooden stock as I tripped over the primitive trails from the oversized boots making it slow going. From hunger in my belly, I knew that I was hunting for rabbits on the rolling hills.

The Heath shifted yet again, and the air moved around me. Gazing about, I made out the shapes of uniformed German soldiers brushing past me into the deepening twilight as they crushed the fragile landscape, marching onward to another conflict. One soldier stopped right before me, his back to me. His long, woolen coat of gray was draped over the grasses and heather. He turned and his gaze startled me, seeming to look right at or through me. Suddenly, I felt myself moving forward with him as he turned and marched to catch up with the others. I was now a soldier in this patrol, full of fear, hunger, thirst, and exhaustion as my booted feet bore me forward. The only sounds came from the grasses being flattened by our boots, and an occasional clink of a metal canteen hitting against belts and guns.

*Remember!* the whispering voice insisted.

“Cheri?” I heard my name being spoken louder, and close to my ears.

The sound brought me back from my sleep-like journey to a foggy awareness of my own body, and of a woman talking to me. I turned to my host sister. Apparently, she had asked a question that I missed.

“Ja?” I finally croaked, still wanting to keep the mystical feelings and visions with me.

Yet I had been pulled out of the Heath's embrace. The Heath had let me go after fulfilling her goal to help me remember.

Once again, I noticed older women in sturdy skirts with walking sticks on the nearby paths as my vision refocused on my 16-year-old self's surroundings. I was back in virtually the same place and time based on their positions on the path. What had seemed like an hour of visions to me must have lasted just a few seconds.

Despite being dazed, I managed to return more fully to the present time as we retraced a pathway back to our starting point and I began processing my visit to the mystical Heath. I spoke nothing of my experience to my host sister, deciding to keep this special memory private. It was a gift to me from the Heath, and I cherished it.

The Heath had reminded me of previous lives and, to return that honor, I struck upon the perfect idea before drifting off to sleep that night. In repayment to the Heath for opening my eyes to mysticism, I promised that, if I ever had a daughter, her name would be Heather. And so, I now have a living memorial to the Heath, as well as everlasting gratitude for the landscape that helped me remember my eternal self.

*Cheri Eujen*

**END OF EXCERPT PART TWO**



# PART THREE

*Deepening Your Ancestral Connection*



# PROTOCOLS AND DISCIPLINE TO DEEPEN CONNECTION



Ancestors connect us with our origins. They are everywhere in nature, and this is why nature is so sacred. In order to interact with ancestors in a good and respectful way, we must follow certain protocols or re-create protocols.

In this chapter, we will explore some important protocols: acknowledging original inhabitants of a land, asking permission of major ancestors, honoring clans and what they stand for, honoring the dead, and reciprocity—the protocol of reciprocal taking and giving through offerings and payments. We'll also learn about healing the ancestral lineage. By doing these things, we can help deepen our connection with ancestors. May it be so.

## ACKNOWLEDGING ORIGINAL INHABITANTS OF A LAND

To deepen our relationship with ancestors, we need to have an attitude of reverence and acknowledgement of the sacred and the mystery. The attitude needs to come from our individual being, but it is in relation to our collective being, which is in relation to our ancestors. We must have a disciplined

practice that always takes time to recognize where we stand in this world and to honor ancestors both in the material and spiritual world.

Every time there is a public or private act of civic or spiritual ceremony, we must acknowledge who was there before us—what species lived there and what peoples inhabited the territory before our existence. Ideally, the acknowledgement will be spoken in the original language and said by a local spiritual keeper of that land. This acknowledgment can also be mentioned at any public gathering by a representative of original peoples and nations or anyone who takes the word in public.

## ASKING PERMISSION OF MAJOR ANCESTORS

If you go to a lake, forest, cave, or any other sacred site, you must ask permission to be let in, as these places are major ancestors. This request happens in a ritual format, where you present an offering or a payment to the sacred site as a whole and to the entities and deities that are dwelling in the sacred site. Then you need to listen: Open your heart and your senses and wait for a response. Are you being let in?

When people are not aware of these protocols, or they have forgotten about the important role of the beings, then these beings begin to be manifest in negative ways such as accidents, hurricanes, tornadoes, or earthquakes. At times, a disruption in the harmony of a site happens because of interference with the original configuration or the natural cycles. Ecologists and conservationists speak up and try to help, but the reparation needs to be sealed by spiritual authorities, because they know how to communicate with the entities and deities.

Much of what we have seen happen in the last generations is because our relationship with our ancestors is broken. We have not taken into consideration that they are always there to guide us, and when they have

communicated to us in regard to the way that we need to live with Mother Earth, we have failed to follow their directions.

## HONORING CLANS AND WHAT THEY REPRESENT

In many communities and societies when there are festivities or rituals, ancestors are invoked by clans. We must respect this ceremonial act and those who perform it; if we are initiated into a clan or a sacred practice, we must be disciplined about it. To honor the spirit of thunders, clouds, volcanos, and more, people from each lineage reproduce specific dances and music, and wear ceremonial attire. The Bear clan people carry out their dances to honor their ancestral lineage and so do the Deer clan, or Snake clan, or Eagle clan. When they dress as the animals they are connected with and perform the dances, they can share that connection with others, and this increases our level of sensitivity about caring for sacred places and their inhabitants.

Clans also carry out special rituals through pilgrimages to sacred sites. Some of these sites have one or two sacred elements—the fire, the wind, the earth, or the water—that are prominent. Certain *mamos* from Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia, work with the waters. They work to ask the waters to come back again after they have gone. Mothers of the waters carry out ceremonies for all the waters, including hidden spring waters. They see waters even in the sky. Other spiritual leaders and the families are related to volcanos, and they perform ceremonies for the spirit of volcanos, which are very beautiful.

The level of complexity in relationships can go even further. There are some spiritual leaders that are in relationship with certain celestial bodies such as the Sun, the Moon, and even more distant planets and certain stars in the sky. They are the clans of those celestial bodies.

## HONORING THE DEAD, *DÍA DE MUERTOS*

Since ancient times, Mexico has honored its ancestors in a major celebration that takes place every year in the month of November. In the highlands of Mexico, where the Otomi-Toltec tradition prevails, forty days before, in September, utensils and drinks are prepared and the *cempaxúchitl* flower is planted so it will be ready for the offerings. In most houses, the offering is prepared at the altar, which becomes filled with decorations of *papel picado* of bright colors such as Mexican pink, purple, blue, green, orange, and yellow. Flowers, candles, and food fill the space in a beautiful array.

The colors, flavors, and aromas that make up the offering are varied, according to the region. The offering is decorated with flowers. In some places, bows are prepared. Living spring water, or holy water, is an important feature. Candles also are part of the offering; each one represents the soul of an ancestor.

The first souls that are expected to arrive are the souls of ancestors who died by accident, on October 29th. On the 30th, those who died and did not receive a name are received. On the 1st, children and those who died without getting married are received. On November 2nd, older people or adults are received. In the first days, the most basic of the offering is placed: flowers, candles, water, fruit, and a little food. To receive the children, *tejocotes*, sweet potatoes, *chayotes*, oranges, peanuts, and sweets are placed. Sweet tamales and atole and hot chocolate drink are prepared for them, among other traditional drinks. Over the night of November 1st and into the dawn of November 2nd, the offering is completed with fruit. Turkey or chicken mole is prepared and drinks such as mezcal, tequila, or pulque are placed at the altar. Candles are also added to welcome adults.

At dawn on November 1st, a path of white flower petals is placed from the sidewalk to the altar. Prayers are made with an incense *copal* to prepare

for the coming of the ancestors, and the door facing east is left ajar. Then at dawn on the 2nd, yellow flower petals are placed on top of the white ones.

In some localities, breads of the dead with pumpkin seeds are placed at the altar, too, as well as the fruits that people liked during their lifetime, such as orange, guava, and boiled *camotes*.

It is important to mention that the passing of the dead is not to be lamented at this time; the holiday is a ceremony to celebrate our connection with our ancestors, acknowledging that they have transcended. People are happy because they are going to receive their ancestors, and a deep connection is cultivated with them in that level.

Some people go to the cemetery during the day to light candles and leave flowers. In other places, the ritual of lighting candles and placing flower petals around the grave takes place at night. The relatives of the people who have left, both adults and children, visit each grave, and the cemeteries become filled with candles. It is a spectacular view surrounded by the aromas of the *cempaxúchitl* flowers. This memorable experience is a chance to be with the ancestors who have transcended. During the vigil, the elderly take care to keep the candles with dignity, upright.

At dawn on November 3rd, everyone returns home and the offerings at the altar are gathered. Elders say that fruits, breads, and drinks have already lost their aroma and their essence, but that they have to be shared, so baskets are filled with mole, tamales, breads, and fruits and shared with nearby neighbors and *compadres*. Some food is brought to the home fireplace or kitchen to heat it up on the *comal* (hot clay pan) or in clay pots. Everybody gathers at the dining table to share and complete the celebration.

There is a tradition in which children ask for “their little skull.” They go from house to house asking for a piece of fruit or a coin to be able to enjoy these festivities. The Day of the Dead is a celebration of ancestors, but also celebrates the continuity of life. The ancestors return to where they had lived and have an opportunity to contact their relatives. How beautiful it is to live

those mystical moments of joy, where relatives gather in communion with their beloved ancestors.

## RECIPROCITY: OFFERINGS

Interacting with ancestors requires us to understand and practice the principle of reciprocity. For this, it is necessary to distinguish between offerings and payments, for they entail different levels of commitment, experience, and responsibility.

Offerings are presented in ceremonial acts to make a request or to give thanks for a favor received from the ancestors. Elements in offerings generally consist of flowers, fruits, tamales, sage, or *copal* (sweet pine resin), tobacco, water, clean soil, stones, seeds, and artisan alcohol. Unlike payments, which require a personal effort to produce, offerings can be purchased at local markets.

When presenting an offering yourself or participating in one led by someone else, keep your mind focused on good, pleasant, clean thoughts so the offering is received by the entities and spirits in a good way. When setting up the offering, be sure there are lit candles, ideally in the four directions, so that the fire is present. Also light incense and include flowers so that beautiful scents fill the air. Bring in the other two elements, water and soil, represented by stones and seeds.

Start by acknowledging the major ancestors in the four directions where there are sacred sites and bioregions. Name all the beings that you can remember that live in the place where you are. Include animals, plants, and people. Recall your maternal and paternal ancestors as well. Then clearly state why you are presenting the offering. This is important because words imprint on the offering the energy that ancestors will receive.

You might be expressing gratitude for something granted to your community or yourself; or you might be asking ancestors for guidance or to open doors and paths that will make your life better or facilitate the healing of your community. This act, when done with a humble and open heart, strengthens the spiritual interconnection between ancestors and the person, their family, and their community.

Offerings can vary in format, size, and content. A group offering can be done with family members or loved ones who are close to you, or it can be done with the whole community. Some offerings are monumental and require hundreds or thousands of people; in these cases, special people spend weeks collecting everything that will be needed. The offerings will include flowers, fruits, seeds, paper, woven bulrush, or woven palm. The air will be filled with incense and *copal* (sweet pine resin), as well as the sounds of ancient and modern instruments. At the opening and closing of these events, a discourse is offered by the spiritual authority.

## RECIPROCITY: PAYMENTS

Spiritual payments are important and require greater responsibility than offerings. They are more elaborate and there is more time and effort involved in obtaining all that is needed for the delivery at the ceremony.

Payments are made as an act of reciprocity for what we have spent or for what we have taken in our lives. You pay, for example, for all the oxygen that has been breathed, for all the food that has been consumed, for all the water that has been drunk, for the energy of the Sun that we have received, for the breezes of air received, for everything that the eyes have seen. We pay for the paper that we have used and for the metals that make the technology we use. We pay for the coal that brings electricity to our homes and the copper in the wires. We pay for the plastic and all the products that come from oil. We

pay for all that communities in biodiverse regions suffer because of mining, logging, and oil drilling.

We pay Mother Earth for everything that is given to us without us giving anything in return. In this act, participants humbly recognize that nothing we experience or have can be taken for granted.

A payment must be prepared over days or several months or moons, and it may take a year or more to gather everything that is going to be needed. Generally, flowers and fruits are cultivated, candles and incense are prepared, stones and crystals are collected, pure water is collected from various places, clay or vegetable fiber figures are made, honey is harvested, feathers and beetles are collected from the forest, and secretions from the body are collected. Each of the elements is treated with care and kept in a safe place on the altar. There they are frequently blessed by household members.

As the day approaches, special food and drinks are prepared. On the day of the ceremony, the place where the payment will be presented is cleaned, first with a special broom, then with flower water, then with sweet-smelling incense. To do this, the traditional priest first speaks with the entities of the place, which ideally is a place in nature that is considered sacred or special. The spiritual authority explains to the entities that people want to present an offering and asks their permission. A woven mat or an embroidered blanket is placed on the clean surface and all the elements are arranged in the most beautiful display possible. The ancestors greatly appreciate aesthetics, and this beauty we co-create helps our psyche to raise the connection with the Great Spirit, the ancestors, and the entities. All or part of the process can be accompanied with harmonious music or songs.

When the ceremony is about to begin, the roads to the four directions and to the heart of Heaven and Earth are opened with a fanfare of sounds from ceremonial instruments. The person in charge of the ceremony invokes the ancestors and presents them with each of the elements of the payment. In many cultures, everything that is presented is named in diminutive as a



gesture of respectful reverence, such as “We bring you these little flowers, this little fruit.” Everything is done and said with love, softness, and respect so that the payment will be well-received.

Once the ceremony—which may include a vigil—is complete, part of what is presented is buried or deposited at the foot of trees or hung on branches, or left beside a nearby spring or stream, or at the entrance of a cave. Some things, like feathers and flowers, are distributed among the participants so that they can take it back to their own altars and continue to maintain the connection with the ancestors in that way.

With this act, we ensure that harmony, health, and good life will be maintained for everything around us—which is the collective family—and beyond, because the ancestors communicate with each other, and if one is happy, the others resonate with that good energy and keep everything in harmony.

## HEALING THE ANCESTRAL LINEAGE

Many of the lineages in the world have been partially or fully lost, and with it has gone the practice of responsible reconnection with nature, Mother Earth, and celestial bodies. In a few cultures, this practice that started hundreds or thousands of years ago continues today. A distorted perception led people to lose the sense of reverence for what creates and nurtures life. Instead of co-participating in the processes of nature, many started to try to control and exert dominion over nature, as well as dominion over people and territories. The laws of nature were put aside so these people could impose the so-called “Divine laws” and man-made laws. The laws were meant to subjugate and manipulate others and ultimately to accumulate wealth—even if that meant breaching states of natural balance in ways that might have long-term repercussions.

In this man-made regime, laws about protecting nature are permissive, for they are always in tandem with profitable development plans. Under the dominion framework, every place in the world is vulnerable: even pristine places, or places that local people have kept almost intact, are susceptible to exploitation of the waters, land, and people.

The unfolding of complex financial, military, and religious institutions and structures, with long-term plans, is happening before our eyes. One of the oldest institutional plans that has enabled this dominion process is the 14<sup>th</sup> century Doctrine of Discovery through the Papal Bulls (pronouncements from the Catholic Church). The Doctrine of Discovery stated that European explorers, whom the Church considered biologically “superior” to native people, had the right to conquer any land or people they discovered. The effects of this idea are still being felt today in many countries around the world.

Knowing how interconnected we are, it is probable that in your own lineage, or the lineages of the people in your circle of interactions, includes a traceable history of impacts made to waters, land, and people. This damage can be healed if you begin working on it with an open heart and with responsibility.

## EXPLORING OUR ANCESTRAL LOCATIONS

Some people research their genealogy as a hobby, at a superficial level. But a nicely printed family tree is only the first step to exploring about your foremothers and fathers. What comes next runs the risk of finding information that can turn out to be highly significant. To undertake this task, we must be ready to find out what things people in our lineage did that had repercussions on their descendants and in the extended community.

**END OF EXCERPT  
PART THREE**

# MEET OUR FEATURED AUTHOR



MINDAHI BASTIDA is the Director of the Original Nations Program of the Fountain, a caretaker of the philosophy and traditions of the Otomi-Toltec peoples, and an Otomi-Toltec Ritual Ceremony Officer. He is a consultant with UNESCO on issues related to sacred sites and bioculture. Mindahi has also served as Director of the Original Caretakers Program at the Center for Earth Ethics, Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, and General Coordinator of the Otomi-Toltec Regional Council in Mexico.

Born in Tultepec, Lerma, Mexico, Mindahi holds a Doctorate of Rural Development from the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana and an M.A. in Political Science from Carleton University, Canada. He has written and published extensively on biodiversity, Indigenous knowledge and related topics, and has taught on subjects ranging from sustainability, ethics and earth spirituality to Indigenous voices, communitarian links and intellectual

property rights. Mindahi frequently lectures on Indigenous Peoples-Nation State relationships, intercultural education, sustainability and Indigenous peoples, cosmologies and philosophies of indigenous peoples, and biocultural sacred sites. He is also deeply involved with the Biocultural Sacred Sites for Humanity, Original Peoples proposal, UNESCO, the Timekeepers Program and the Process of Unification in charge of the Latin American and the Caribbean region. Mindahi is also President of the Mexico Council of Sustainable Development, a member of the Steering Committee of the Indigenous Peoples' Biocultural Climate Change Assessment Initiative, and he has served as a delegate to several commissions and summits on Indigenous rights and the environment.

*Mindahi Bastida is a uniquely gifted ceremonial and thought leader from a rich cultural tradition. In this extraordinary piece of work, he frames a diverse collection of reflections on mystical experiences with his own powerful truths.*

*ANCESTORS is more than a book—it is a multi-dimensional experience with the capacity to expand both minds and hearts.*

—**Karenna Gore**, founder and executive director of the Center for Earth Ethics

*ANCESTORS is a gift to its readers: an evocative guide to understanding the consciousness behind an Indigenous focus on ceremonies, sacred sites, ancestors, prayers, offerings, and other expressions of the human relationship with Mother Earth.*

—**John Briggs**, distinguished professor and author of *Fire in the Crucible* and *Fractals: The Patterns of Chaos*



## ***Ignite the Divine Remembrances Within You***

The full scope of our ancestral legacy extends far beyond blood relations. Spiritual leader Mindahi Bastida explains how the consciousness of ancestors is interwoven through the web of time and space, and we are the synthesis of all that has ever existed in the universe. Discover who the ancestors are, the legacy we each inherit, our connection to the motherlands, and the importance of sacred sites.

Sit around the sacred fire with Mindahi Bastida as he shares his personal experiences and deep bond with his ancestry. Listen to the stories of our ancestors, including:

- a woman who traveled to a foreign land and remembered past lives there.
- a man who is visited by the “tall ones” with messages to share with others.
- a father who brought gifts of love and wisdom from spirit.
- a man who provoked the guardian spirits of the land and learned to respect them.
- a woman who journeyed to meet the spirit of her ancestor and healed family karma.
- a mother who received the Divine spark as a remembrance of her duties as a healer.

Walk in reverence and relationship with your ancestors. Understand ancient traditions and learn blessings and ceremonies you can practice today. Develop the wisdom to heal ancestral karma and become a guide and counselor for the rising generations.

*ANCESTORS reminds us that we are not alone: we are all our relations.*



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