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Time, History and Ritual in a K'iche' Community: Contemporary Maya Calendar Knowledge and Practices in the Highlands of Guatemala

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I. The Chol Q'ij – the 260-day count

For writing this chapter, I am greatly indebted to don Rigoberto Itzep Chanchavac, doña María Hernández Ajanel, Gregorio Itzep, don José Angel Xeloj, doña María Theresa López, don José Arturo Cabrera Aguilar, Marleny Tzicap, don Roberto Poz Pérez, don Miguel Chan and Elias López for the knowledge that they shared with me. Errors that might appear in the contents of this chapter are my fault alone. In case such errors or any misrepresentations appear, I would like to apologize beforehand to the community of Momostenango.

INTRODUCTION

The K'iche' calendar consists of several interlocked cycles, that together form one calendar. Chapter I and II focus on the counting of the days in the form of two intertwined cycles, the *chol q'ij* (260-day count) and the *junab' q'ij* (365-day count). Chapter I explores the application of the *chol q'ij* in the community of Momostenango, whereas Chapter II discusses, among others, the functioning of the *junab' q'ij* and the relationship between time and authority.

The 260-day count is, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, a shared characteristic of the Mesoamerican calendar system. This chapter addresses the underlying logic behind the cycle, the mantic qualities of the days, and the social role of the calendar specialists in the community of Momostenango. Furthermore, my general interest in the relationship between the perception of time, the landscape, and the formation of a community, which runs through the entire study, is also explored here. The data on which this chapter builds comes from participating in several rituals with don Rigoberto and don José Angel, and many formal and informal interviews and talks that I have conducted with calendar specialists.

The different forms of specializations among the calendar specialists are discussed first, followed by an overview of the different sorts of sacred places related to the K'iche' calendar in Momostenango. In the section that follows I discuss the 260-day count, elaborating on the perception of the Day-Lords and the Day-Numbers. After this, I look at the relationship between the 260-day count and the human being by examining how calendar divination works, how human beings are created by the days of the calendar, and how one's birthday determines his/her animal companion. In the last part of this chapter, I explore how the calendar promotes a specific movement through the landscape and, finally, I describe and analyze an initiation ritual for becoming calendar specialist.

CALENDAR SPECIALISTS

There are different specializations among calendar experts in Momostenango. If and how a person specializes depends on his or her abilities, which are revealed over the course of life. Each calendar specialist is always an Ajq'ij (lit. "expert of time"), even when he or she takes more roles, which will be added to that of Ajq'ij. Each Ajq'ij¹¹ has a *chak patan* ("work-service"), which is a burden that they carry throughout their life. The *chak patan* of the Ajq'ijab' (an *-ab'* or *-ib'* suffix indicates that the word is in plural) is to keep track of the *chol q'ij* calendar, the indigenous Maya calendar, and to pass its knowledge on to the future generations. Despite the colonial oppression after conquest, generations of calendar specialists have kept count of the days and have passed it on without letting the calendar shift one day (Miles, 1952, p. 281).

11 The role of Ajq'ij is present in many Highland Guatemalan communities (e.g. see Christenson, 2016; Lincoln, 1942; Schultze Jena, 1933).

Besides counting the days, the *chak patan* of the Ajq'ijab' is a social matter as it promotes the core values of the community and helps those that are in need. Being an Ajq'ij thus requires a strong sense of responsibility and justice. Every person who has a leading role in the community is a *kamalb'e* ("guide of the road"). Each calendar specialist is therefore, together with other people who have leading roles in the community, also a *kamalb'e*. Ajq'ij María Teresa López from the Mam speaking community of Concepción Chiquirichapa explains about the social responsibility of the Ajq'ij:

The Ajq'ij is a person who truly wants to guide his/her community. This is very different from the Ajq'ijes that only perform their own ceremony and one ceremony for the people but do not talk about the political situation, that do not talk about Mother Nature. Previously, the function of an Ajq'ij in a Maya community was to guide the community, to know how the economy, politics, and everything else would develop: the guidance of a community. This role also includes the prevention of, for example, the arrival of an earthquake, the [arrival of a] drought. This is the function of an Ajq'ij because he/she knows everything that will cause suffering. So, the Ajq'ij knows how to prevent, how to prepare, in the case of an approaching storm – Doña María Teresa López, Concepción Chiquirichapa, May 2014.

Each Ajq'ij receives training for a period of 260 days. During their training, the novices learn how to perform ceremonies, recite a ceremonial discourse, address the days, and perform a divination. The day of initiation, the Ajq'ij receives a sacred bundle, the *patan* ("service")¹². Inside the *patan* are the *tz'ite* seeds, red seeds from the coral tree (*Erythrina corallodendron*), which the Ajq'ij will use for divination purposes (Figure 6). People visit an Ajq'ij when encountering difficulties in life. The advice given is often based on the consultation of the K'iche' calendar through divination with the *tz'ite* seeds. Receiving the sacred bundle means for the Ajq'ij to accept the burden or *equele'm*.

¹² The *patan* is the mecapal or tumpline with which loads are carried on the back, by attaching the load to a rope that leans on one's forehead. As such, assuming the *patan* indicates that the service is a burden that has to be carried, wherever one goes.



Figure 6. The sacred *tz'ite* seeds and crystals that are kept inside the bundle of the Ajq'ij.

The Ajq'ijab' usually offer their service only to close family members, the *alaxik*. Occasionally, people from outside this circle also come for advice. Some Ajq'ijab' continue to actively learn and acquire knowledge from elder Ajq'ijab', although this is not obligatory and derives from a perceived necessity on the part of the Ajq'ij themselves. As the Ajq'ij acquires more knowledge, he or she becomes wiser and more experienced, which is reflected in his or her divination skills. As a result, more visitors will come to seek advice from him or her. Over time an Ajq'ij may become *Ajmesa* ("expert of the table"), a specialized role for recognized wise diviners. The *mesa* refers to the table that the Ajq'ijab' use for divination purposes. Usually a special table covered with a cloth is used for these practices. Apart from their duties as Ajq'ijab', *Ajmesa* specialists will perform ceremonies for the four directions at a specific altar (the *sillas y mesas* altar, see below) on the sacred hill of Paklom in the center of the town on specific days in the *chol q'ij*. The *Ajmesa* should not be confused with the *Ajnawal Mesa* ("expert of the spirit of the table"). The *Ajnawal Mesa* is a powerful expert in communicating directly with spirits during rituals, but does not necessarily have to be a calendar priest.

Finally, there is the role of the *Chuchqajaw*. The *Chuchqajaw* is a calendar specialist with a responsibility for the *xe'al* ("roots", lineage), which includes several *alaxik* (nuclear families), usually

between eight and ten. The Chuchqajawib' are highly respected persons in the community. Don Rigoberto and don José Angel estimate that there are around 60 Chuchqajawib' in Momostenango. If one should become Chuchqajaw depends on the day of birth and his/her personal capacities. The Chuchqajaw performs ceremonies for each family of the lineage on crucial moments in the year and in the *chol q'ij*. Furthermore, the Chuchqajawib' have the duty to educate and train the Ajq'ijab' in their lineages. Each Chuchqajaw has thus a responsibility over the religious wellbeing of a relatively large section of the town.

Chuchqajaw means “mother-father”, a term that indicates their role in the community. A Chuchqajaw is a responsible authority that takes the leading role of a mother and a father for their lineage. A new Chuchqajaw is chosen after the death of the former Chuchqajaw of the patrilineage, although this may take several years. The prospective Chuchqajaw is chosen through a divination ceremony performed by the Ajq'ijab' of the lineage or by the Chuchqajawib' of neighboring lineages. Although most Chuchqajawib' are male, women can also become Chuchqajaw.

The Chuchqajawib' are loosely organized in a council of Chuchqajawib', which meets several times per year to discuss the concerns regarding the wellbeing of the town. The council is led by two *Chuchqajawib' rech tinamit* (“the mothers-fathers of the town”), who carry the lifelong burden to perform ceremonies for the wellbeing of the whole community at important moments in the year, such as during the 8 B'atz' celebrations and at the beginning of a new year. It is also the *Chuchqajawib' rech tinamit*'s responsibility to perform a sequence of rain petitions for the community of Momostenango from February until May (see Chapter III). Today, however, the *Chuchqajawib' rech tinamit* are criticized by several Ajq'ijab' and Chuchqajawib' in Momostenango for their involvement in local politics, disregarding the service that they are supposed to offer to the community. According to some, the droughts that have threatened the community of Momostenango in the last five years are the result of the lack of commitment of the *Chuchqajawib' rech tinamit*.

SACRED PLACES

There are many sacred places for ceremonies in and around Momostenango. These places are usually called *tab'al* (“altar”) or *porob'al* (“place of burning”). The ceremonies that are performed in relation to the K'iche' calendar always involve fire, which is why the place for doing the ceremonies is called *porob'al* or *quemadero* in Spanish. Each Ajq'ij has his/her own exact way of performing a ceremony but generally a ceremony involves burning offerings such as sugar, incense, candles and aromatic herbs. I will therefore refer to this type of ceremony as “fire ceremony”. The smoke that the burning offerings produce is the alimentation of the sacred beings that are invoked during the ceremony (Figure 7 and Figure 8). The altars are living beings and can be summoned in ceremonial discourses.



Figure 7. Representation of the world drawn in white sugar. The other offerings will be placed on top of this representation.



Figure 8. The offerings for an elaborate fire ceremony.

The altars of Momostenango can roughly be divided in those that belong to the community (*komón*) and those that belong to the family (*ri alaxik*). Only initiated Ajq'ijab' are allowed to perform fire ceremonies at these sacred places. The house altar, *awas rech alaxik* ("altar of the family"), is usually located within the household. Bigger houses may have a separate room for the *awas rech alaxik* but often it is found in the living room or bedroom. This is the place where an Ajq'ij or Chuchqajaw performs his/her ceremonies for the family, and where visitors are invited to come and talk or to perform a divination ceremony. At the altar are the *meb'il*, archaeological pieces and important stones that have been found by family members or given by friends, and offerings (Figure 9). Because the *meb'il* are characteristic of each house shrine, the house shrine itself is often referred to with the *pars pro toto* term *meb'il* rather than *awas rech alaxik*. The ones who take care of the *meb'il* become by extension protectors of the nuclear family. Usually the *meb'il* are attended by leaving a glass of water and flowers, burning a candle, and offering drops of alcohol. When the *meb'il* needs something, they will manifest themselves in the dreams of those who live in the house in order to make their needs heard.

Each lineage (*xe'al*) has its own altars. At these places, lineage members come together at specific moments in the calendar to participate in a ceremony carried out by the lineage spiritual guide, the Chuchqajaw. The patrilineage altars are located outside the individual households of the families,



Figure 9. A house altar. In the wooden chest stands the *meb'il*, in this case a stone relic that was found at the milpa.

usually on the lineage ancestral grounds (*chinamit*). Although distinct from the house altars, the lineage altars are also called *awas rech alaxik*. The two main types of patrilineage altars are the *warab'al ja*¹³ ("the place of the house for sleeping"), the shrine to pray for health and support from the ancestors, and the *winel*, the shrine related to agricultural prosperity. These shrines are visited at specific moments and days in the K'iche' calendar (see also Chapter III for the timing of rituals related to agriculture and meteorology).

The public altars are known as *komón*, a derivative of *comunal* ("communal"). The term *komón* is also used to refer to a large group of people from a specific town or even to all members of a patrilineage (see lines 1038 to 1047 of appendix A). In general, *komón* refers to something that is shared with a large group of people (a community) and is accessible for everybody (Figure 10 and Figure 11). The *komón* are public and communal ceremonial places. Even if the shrine legally lies on private property, there is no owner of this place. The public altars are hierarchically organized, mirroring the social organization of the community and the hierarchy of the K'iche' calendar (see Chapter II). The public altars are also open for people outside of Momostenango. For example, during the patron saint feast (*nim q'ij* – "big day") many visitors from San Francisco el Alto, Quetzaltenango, San

¹³ The term *warab'al ja* connotes the perception that this is one of the places where the ancestors of the patrilineage rest and can be contacted.

Andrés Xecul, Zunil, Almolongo, Nahuala, San Cristóbal and Totonicapán came to altar of Paklom to perform fire ceremonies for Santiago. The church of Momostenango (*teoxib'al*, “place of thanking”), where the patron saint Santiago lives, is also a *komón*.



Figure 10. The altar of Paklom is located at the top of the sacred central hill of Momostenango. This altar is a *Komón* and ceremonies may be performed here at any moment.



Figure 11. An Ajq'ij performs her ceremonies at the *Komón* of Alajsab'al.

The main *komón* in Momostenango are the altars Nimasab'al, Alajsab'al, Paklom and Pa Ja', which are respectively related to the Day-Numbers¹⁴ 9, 8, 6 and 1 of the K'iche' calendar (see also the section on the *trecena* cycle). Because the altar of Nimasab'al is related to the highest Day-Number, it is considered the head of the public altars, the

¹⁴ In the academic literature the term “coefficient” is usually used to refer to the number of a day. Calling it this way, however, presents the calendar as a mathematical equation, which it is not. I choose therefore to use the term “Day-Number”.

Presidente Mundo. Just like the days of the calendar, each altar has its own personality, a matter that is fundamental in determining the place to perform a ritual, depending on the type of petition or thanking one wants to do.

Three important public altars, Uja'il Paklom, Uja'il Santiago and Uja'il Alajsab'al, are known as *uja'il* (“place of water”, spring) or in Spanish *pila* (“place for washing”) and are indeed located near a spring. These altars are places where one comes to be washed and cleansed of impurity or negativity. Spring water flowing near the altars carries the negativity that causes sickness away. Don José Angel Xeloj explains about the *uja'il*:

It is symbolically called a “place for washing”, uja'il Paklom. It is there underneath Paklom, there one comes to the “place of washing of Paklom” when there is a disease in the family. To call it a place of washing means that there is a spring, there is a water source. So, this is where one begs and asks Dios Mundo that one of the children of the lineage may be refreshed. If one has a pain, for example, then he/she goes there and asks to be refreshed – Don José Angel Xeloj, 15th August 2016.

The spring altar Uja'il Alajsab'al is also known as Pa Ja' (“the place of water”) and lies below the hill that leads to the actual altar of Alajsab'al. Uja'il Alajsab'al is, as just discussed, related to the Day-Number 1 and is frequently visited in the thirteen-day ritual cycles (see below). When an Ajq'ij has sinned towards their sacred bundle and either he/she or their relatives experience repercussions in the form of sickness or other problems, a cleansing ritual is performed at this altar. Uja'il Santiago is related to the patron saint of Momostenango Santiago and to the Day-Number 3 in the K'iche' calendar. Cleansing rituals performed at this altar are usually meant to clear financial or business problems or for personal protection. The Uja'il Paklom lies at the foot of the sacred hill Paklom¹⁵ in the center of Momostenango. This altar is specifically powerful for curing sicknesses. If a person cannot be cured, or relapses, a ritual can be performed at this altar to petition health

¹⁵ At the top of the hill is the altar of Paklom itself.

and to get rid of the negativity that causes the illness to return. In case of sickness or problems, an Ajq'ij will first perform a ceremony at Uja'il Alajsab'al. If this does not have the expected effect he/she will go, depending of the character of the problem, to Uja'il Santiago or Uja'il Paklom.

Apart from the *Komón*, there are several altars erected to the benefit of the community, but they are not public. For example, the altars dedicated to the yearbearers, which can only be visited by the Chuchqajawib', for example, when making petitions for communal prosperity as part of the New Year ceremonies. Also, the *awas rech tinamit*, the town altar located in one of the rooms at the central park of Momostenango, is for the benefit of the community, but rituals can only be made there by the *Chuchqajawib' rech tinamit* and their assistants.



Figure 12. Don José Angel Xeloj performs a fire ceremony at the sacred place of Q'umarkaj, the ancient capital of the K'iche' people.

Although separated, communal and private altars complement each other. Ceremonial performance at the family altar helps to integrate the lineage, while ceremonies at the *Komón* contribute to the integration of all lineages within the community. For example, the *Komón* Paklom, is also known as *Waqch'ob' ke(ch) nantates*, "six divisions/parts of mothers-fathers", a symbolic reference to the presence of all the Momostecan ancestors at the heart of the community. These ancestors are referred to as *waq remaj*, *waq tikaj* ("six waterings, six plantings"), the creators of the community. Also, the communal altar at the cemetery, *tz'aqb'al b'aaq* ("wall of bones"), is an important altar for communication with community ancestors (see Chapter IV and V). This shrine is situated in the center of the cemetery, surrounded by the family and individual graves, and commemorates the shared past of the community.

Finally, archaeological sites are also sacred places. Most archaeological sites have specific places where ceremonies can be performed (Figure 12). Rituals performed at these sites usually commemorate the ancestors.

THE CHOL Q'IJ

The basis of the K'iche' calendar is the day, which begins at 12 o'clock at midnight. However, important celebrations start at sunset the day before, a fact that suggests, as I will discuss further below, that the day gradually starts from the moment of sunset on what in the European calendar would be the day before. Each day is a living being that influences the events on that day according to its character or *wachaq'ij* ("face of the day"). This character is defined by the combination of a Day-Number and a Day-Lord¹⁶. The Day-Number is only an attribute or a specific aspect of the Day-Lord and, although it seems that in the past both the numbers and the Lords were separate living beings (Lincoln, 1942, p. 106), a single Day-Number is today not understood as a living being. On the other hand, the Day-Lord is alive. So, a day (comprised by the Day-Number and Day-Lord) is a separate and living aspect of the Day-Lord.

¹⁶ The day-Lord is addressed with *Ajaw* ("Lord") or *nawal*. *Ajaw* is an honorary title for any responsible and divine authority. In the highland of Guatemala the term *nawal* usually refers to a (divine) guardian being. In order to avoid confusion, I will use only the term day-Lords.

Day-Lords	Translation	Day-Lords	Translation
B'atz'	Monkey, Thread	Imox	Translation unknown
E'	Tooth	Iq'	Wind
Aj	Reed	Aq'ab'al	Darkness
Ix	Translation unknown	K'at	Net
Tz'ikin	Bird	Kan	Snake
Ajmak	Sinner	Kame	Death
No'j	Wisdom	Kej	Deer
Tijax	Flint	Q'anil	Seed
Kawoq	Translation unknown	Toj	Payment
Ajpu	Blowgunner	Tz'i'	Dog

Table 1. The Day-Lords of the K'iche' calendar and their translation. See Thompson (J. E. S. Thompson, 1960, p. 68) for a comparison of the names of the Day-Lords among different linguistic groups in the Maya region.

The Day-Numbers and Day-Lords follow a strict sequence. For the numbers this means that the days are numbered in sequence from one to thirteen and after the thirteenth day the count begins again with the number one. There are twenty day-Lords in the K'iche' calendar. Each of the Lords has a specific name that gives an indication of some of its characteristics. Some of the names, such as Kawoq, Ix and Imox, are ancient K'iche', which makes it impossible to give a clear translation (B. Tedlock, 1992, p. 107). The names of the twenty days and their translations can be seen in Table 1. The meaning of each day, however, goes beyond a mere translation as each of the days is entangled in a web of many related connotations and mnemonic expressions, which together give meaning to that specific day. These connotations and expressions may differ again per community and, to certain extend, per person within a community. The many connotations and meanings of each day can be found in Appendix B and several mnemonic expressions are documented in Appendix C. The section below discusses the interpretation of the Day-Lords in more detail.

The Day-Lords also follow a strict sequence that is repeated after the twentieth Day-Lord has fulfilled his service. As the amount of Day-Numbers (13) and Day-Lords (20) are uneven, the exact same combination of Day-Number and Day-Lord is repeated after 260 days. This cycle of days is called the *chol q'ij*, the “lining of the days”.

For example, after the day with Day-Number

1 and Day-Lord B'atz' (1 B'atz') follow the days 2 E', 3 Aj, 4 Ix and so on, until the day 13 Aq'ab'al. After 13 Aq'ab'al the numbers continue from 1 while the Day-Lords continue until the end of their sequence of twenty is reached. Thus, the days that follow 13 Aq'ab'al are 1 K'at, 2 Kan, and so forth, until the day 7 Tz'i is reached. After 7 Tz'i, each of the twenty Lords have served for one day and the cycle starts again from the beginning, while the numbers continue in their sequence. Thus after 7 Tz'i follow 8 B'atz' and 9 E until after 260 days (13 number x 20 lords), all possible combinations have passed and the count repeats the exact same days for the first time again. The *chol q'ij* works the same way in each Maya community where it is counted and although the names of the Day-Lords differ per linguistic region, the intrinsic meaning of the days is shared over a wide area (Bunzel, 1952; Colby & Colby, 1981; Gossen, 1974; La Farge, 1947; Lincoln, 1942).

An intense debate regarding the first day of the 260-day cycle took place during the 20th century (see: Girard, 1962, p. 330; La Farge, 1947, p. 179; Lincoln, 1942, p. 108; J. E. S. Thompson, 1960, pp. 101-102). The final word was by Barbara Tedlock (1982, p. 96) who, based on her fieldwork in Momostenango from 1976 to 1979, argued that a first day of the 260-cycle did not exist and that the *chol q'ij* is a continuous uninterrupted cycle without end nor beginning, as was already suggested by Morley (1946, p. 269). According to her, anthropologists

looking for a starting date in the *chol q'ij* are referred to a nearby important date in the calendar rather than a starting day (B. Tedlock, 1982, p. 96). Today, however, the Ajq'ijab' in Momostenango agree that the day Wajxaqib' B'atz' (8 B'atz') – a very important day for those who keep track of the Momostecan K'iche' calendar – is the first day of the *chol q'ij*.

THE DAY-LORDS

Each Day-Lord has an effect on the events, feelings and weather phenomena that take place during his day. Appendix B gives a short overview of the personalities of the twenty Day-Lords. I composed this overview after interviews that I did with the Ajq'ijab' don José Angel Xeloj and don Rigoberto Itzep Chanchavac from Momostenango, don Miguel Chan from Chichicastenango, and don Roberto Poz Pérez from Zunil. As it can be seen in Appendix B, the character of the day indicates fruitful activities for that day. One's birthday in the *chol q'ij* is a determining factor in the development of the personality, interests, abilities, skills, and weaknesses of a human being. Although there is in the Highland of Guatemala a general consensus of the main characters of the Day-Lords, each person can have a different experience with a specific Day-Lord, which influences his/her perception of this Day-Lord's character. For example, the general character of the Day-Lord Ajmak is the following:

The day Ajmak connotes the concepts of reconciliation, mediation, fault, pardon, sin, atheism, and gift. The day Ajmak is also the day of the grandparents, the day of the deceased. This is a good day for communication with the ancestors, to tell their story, or to explain the origin of the peoples. Ajmak is the nawal of all the faults; on this day a person asks forgiveness for all the errors that he or she has made. Therefore, the day Ajmak is also the indicated day to resolve any problems that you have.

The person born on the day Ajmak is a good mediator and is very good in projecting plans for the future. This person studies a lot, is intelligent, has a good memory and treats others respectfully. He/she is very analytical, has patience, and is tenacious. This prudent person is a visionary. He/she is also shy and easily commits errors. Vanity is a problem for him/her. He/she is vicious, unfaithful, and angry, and tends to lie easily. He/she might have problems in the house. His/her health is determined by self-destructive processes, by his/her irresponsibility, and his/her irritated and confronting character – see Appendix B, Day-Lord Ajmak.

As will be discussed below, the outcome of the Day-Lord's character is also influenced by the number with which it forms the day. The characteristics of the Day-Lord are reflected in the behavior of the person who is born on this day. The day Ajmak, for example, is a day on which one easily commits errors. As such, this is also the day to petition pardon for the errors that were made. Therefore, a person born on this day can be unfaithful or may easily commit errors. This does not mean, however, that this person will definitely be like this, rather the character of the Day-Lord shows the possible weaknesses of a person and in doing so suggests the development of personal skills to counter the weaknesses. Knowing his/her tendency to commit errors, a person born on the day Ajmak may develop ways to overcome this weakness and become a better person.

Furthermore, on a day Ajmak it is possible to petition that an enemy (*k'u'lel*) damages his/her social life by growing envy, unfaithfulness and vanity. One can perform a ceremony on the day Ajmak to petition protection against these destructive characteristics, if he/she feels that such a petition was made towards him/her. The ceremony itself is a moment of reflection and return to the morals that were established by the ancestors which strengthens the character of the one who experienced a growing envy (Rappaport, 1999). The moral values of the day are evident in each of the characteristics of the days. Socially accepted or unacceptable behavior is pointed out by these characters. In other words, social conventions are embedded in the mantic quality of the days. The

days of the calendar emphasize appreciated social behaviors, such as sharing, bonding, taking care of family or friends, working hard, justice, and creativity. They also address incorrect social behavior, for example anger, selfishness, doubtfulness, lying, jealousy, envy, laziness, scariness, unfaithfulness, arrogance, or cheating. A negative personality feature is defined in terms of what behavior is not beneficial for the coexistence of members in a community. If the negative features of a person are not addressed correctly, the person may become seriously sick.

Each Day-Lord is related to specific words or expressions (see appendix C) identified by Barbara Tedlock (1992, p. 107) as mnemonic tools that map the meanings of the days in terms of social actions. She argues that the expressions related to each specific day are a way to keep and pass on the knowledge about the characteristics of each day. As she notes, some of these expressions use the literary or poetic tool of “paronomasia”: the name of the day recalls other words that have more or less the same sound. During my work in Guatemala I went through the mnemonic expressions that Tedlock documented with don José Angel Xeloj and don Rigoberto, to check if they are still used and to document additional expressions.

The mnemonic expressions are important in ritual contexts. For example, in ceremonies in which specific days are addressed, the mnemonic expressions are part of the flowery speech to properly address the day. Speech can be a form of offering, especially when it is a beautiful poetic speech built on metaphors. For this reason, a ritual specialist is called *Ch'awanel* (“talker”). Those specialists capable of the most elaborate and distinct speeches are usually regarded as very good ritual specialists and are highly respected in Momostenango.

In a ceremony, all the twenty Day-Lords are usually addressed in combination with the thirteen Day-Numbers, starting from the day of the ceremony itself (see appendix A, lines 222-765). As the Lord is addressed, his titles or functions in relation to specific aspects of life are mentioned and its positive aspects are petitioned. This flowery speech is guided by a net of mnemonic expressions. For example, one of the mnemonics of day E' is *ri b'e*, “the road”. This brings up a series of petitions and themes related to the road – in a metaphorical sense and literal sense –

such as *Xasachom ub'e* (“guide our road”) or *ma xasi taj nub'e* (“may my road not divert”). An experienced Ajq'ij will be able to connect several mnemonic expressions and connect these to the ceremony that takes place that day. The exact expressions differ per Ajq'ij, as they depend on their personality, teacher, and experience.

The mnemonic tools are originally in K'iche', but some of the Momostecan intellectuals such as don Rigoberto Itzep have invested much time and energy in finding correct Spanish translations for these mnemonics. Over the last 30 years don Rigoberto has been contributing to this process (see appendix A) to be able to share the knowledge of the calendar with a broader group of people, which includes both *ladinos* and K'iche'. Furthermore, the Spanish translation of the mnemonics is a good example of the continuity through practice: while the environment changes and fewer people speak K'iche', effort is taken to preserve that what is recognized to be important – in this case the symbolism embedded in time, transmitted and preserved in mnemonic expressions.

NUMEROLOGY

Numbers define specific characteristics of the days. This section discusses mainly two forms of numerology in relation to the K'iche' calendar: 1. Day-Numbers; 2. Distance-numbers. The Day-Numbers have been introduced above. These are the numbers that constitute a day in combination with a Day-Lord. The term distance-number, which I have taken for the lack of a better term from the academic literature on the precolonial Maya calendar, defines periods of a specific number of days. Although the symbolism related to the Day-Number and to the distance-number is very similar, there is one major difference: the first defines a moment, while the latter defines a period.

The Day-Number influences the intensity of the characteristics of a Day-Lord: low numbers give a light character, while high numbers give an intense character to the Day-Lord and its effects. For example, a storm on the day 13 Iq' – the day Iq' is related to wind and destruction (see appendix B) – will have a bigger impact than a storm on 1 Iq'. The numbers also influence the characteristics of the babies that are born on their day. For example,

Day-Lords	The Day-Numbers												
B'atz'	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1
E	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2
Aj	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3
Ix	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4
Tz'ikin	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5
Ajmak	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6
No'j	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7
Tijax	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8
Kawoq	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9
Ajpu	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10
Imox	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11
Iq'	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12
Aq'ab'al	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13
K'at	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1
Kan	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2
Kame	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3
Kej	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8*	2	9	3	10	4
Q'anil	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5
Toj	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6
Tz'i'	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7

Table 2. An overview of the 260 days of the *chol q'ij*. Reading starts at the left column.

a person born on a day with Day-Number 13 will have a more pronounced character in comparison to a person born on a day with Day-Number 1. People that are born on Day-Numbers above 5 usually have the capacity to become leaders because of their strong mindset. How this comes into being depends on the Day-Lord as well.

The combination of twenty Day-Lords and thirteen Day-Numbers dictates that when a Day-Lord returns after twenty days, its Day-Number is seven digits up (Table 2). For example, twenty days after the day 1 Tz'i', the same Day-Lord returns but this time in the combination 8 Tz'i'. Another twenty days later, the Day-Lord serves as 2 Tz'i'¹⁷. The Day-Numbers thus follow a specific sequence in combination with the same Day-Lord, which is: 1, 8, 2, 9, 3, 10, 4, 11, 5, 12, 6, 13, 7, and then 1 again and so forth. Similarly, the Day-Lords also follow a specific combination of appearance with the same number. In each reappearance of the same Day-Number, the Day-Lord that joins it will be thirteen positions ahead of the previous Day-Lord that appeared with this number, which produces

the following sequence: B'atz', K'at, No'j, Tz'i', Aq'ab'al, Ajmak, Toj, Iq', Tz'ikin, Q'anil, Imox, Ix, Kej, Ajpu, Aj, Kame, Kawoq, E', Kan, Tijax.

The numbers define days as *alaj q'ij* ("small day", the day with the numbers 1 to 5), *nik'aj q'ij* ("medium day", the days with the numbers 6 to 8), and *nim q'ij* ("big day", the days with the numbers 9 to 13). In many communities in Guatemala, the *nik'aj q'ij*, Day-Numbers 6, 7, and 8, are important days for rituals (Bunzel, 1952, pp. 277-283; Weeks et al., 2009, pp. 166-167), because they are balanced: not too high or intense, neither too low or weak. The sequence of Day-Numbers in combination with a specific Day-Lord enables an internal balancing of the intensity of the Day-Lords: a Day-Lord with a high intensity (high number) will be followed twenty days later by the same Day-Lord with a low intensity (low number). This system also facilitates counting in the vigesimal system as, for example, 40 days after 1 B'atz' follows the day 2 B'atz'. For a ceremony, the most appropriate number of the day depends on the specific occasion. Don José Angel Xeloj gives an example of the day Ajpu, the day of the ancestors:

Ceremonies on Ajpu can be performed from [the Day-Number] one until thirteen. But if there is a special work to be done, for example if the person [that the ceremony is

¹⁷ The difference between the cycle of 13 numbers and 20 lords is 7. Thus each time when a Lord reappears his number will be 7 digits higher than during his previous appearance. However, after the number 13 the count continues again with number 1. Therefore 20 days after the 8 Tz'i' follows the day 2 Tz'i'.

performed for] is deceased or if it is an elderly person, then one should wait for the numbers nine until thirteen. Yes, because these are strong. If it is a boy of, for example five years old, then one can use the day 1 Ajpu, 2 Ajpu, 3 Ajpu... And if the ceremony is to defend oneself in front of the day Ajpu, the days nine until thirteen and the day seven should be chosen. But the soft days, the small days, should also be used. Because, if we use the Day-Numbers 13 or 12, the result will be very strong as well: it will hit the other [who has cast a spell] very hard. In contrast, if we look for the Day-Numbers 2 or 3, it will take away the spell but [the effect on the other] will not be hard. The intention is to save myself, and that is it. It is then the choice of the Day-Lord, God or divine justice to hit the other back or not. The most important thing is that I save myself. Should I come to Ajpu, for example, [saying] “alright Ajpu, go make this guy suffer”? No! Because I would be mirroring that what it being done to me. It is better to relieve myself and leave it there – Don José Angel Xeloj, 24th August 2016

A clear distinction between good and bad days does not exist in the Maya calendar of Highland Guatemala (Colby & Colby, 1981, p. 224; B. Tedlock, 1982, p. xi). Days with high numbers are often described as dangerous because they intensify on the characteristics of the Day-Lord. This does not mean, however, that the day is intrinsically bad. There are also numbers that are more stable than others. The instable days are often slightly more dangerous, as it is difficult to know what to expect from them. I think that in early ethnographic studies these days have been taken as “bad days” (La Farge, 1947, p. 178; Schultze Jena, 1933, p. 28; Stoll, 1889, p. 63). Odd numbers tend to be unstable days and can therefore be slightly more dangerous. Especially the numbers 3, 7, and 11 need to be treated with much care. On the other hand, even days are more balanced days.

The days with a high Day-Number, whether an odd number or even number, are very adequate days for petition ceremonies. As the number is high, the effect of the petition might be stronger. Petitions

on *alaj q'ij* might have less impact. However, in urgent cases a ritual specialist cannot always wait until a high number of a specific day appears. For example, when a person is very sick the specialist will perform a ceremony on an *alaj q'ij* instead of waiting for another 20 days until a high number comes, because by then the patient might have passed away already.

Apart from high and low, even and odd numbers, each number has its own connotations and characteristics. These are always taken into consideration when deciding on the day for a ritual. The following list of numerals were the ones that I came across during my fieldwork as most significant:

- 1 The number one is important as it indicates the start of a motion and a beginning: without a beginning there would be nothing that follows. The number one is also the start of a thirteen day period (*trecena*) in Momostenango and celebrated with ceremonies.
- 3 The number three is related to the creation of life, as the place of creation is often referred to as a place of three big stones or mountains. The number three is also related to the three hearth stones, which are used for boiling food and alimentering the family. The number 3-days are related to the patron saint of Momostenango, Santiago, and it is an adequate day to petitioning health at the altar of *Uja'il Santiago*. Furthermore, number 3-days are good days for conducting business.
- 4 The number four carries many connotations and is a very important number. The number four is related to the four colors of maize, the four (colors of the) cardinal directions, the four stages of the day and the four colors day, the four yearbearers (see Chapter II), the four founding fathers, and the four stages of the moon. The number four also relates to steadfastness and stability: something carried by four legs is very stable. For example, the day 4 Kej is an important day in the calendar for authority: the number four connotes stability while Kej refers to the deer, the leader of the forest: it relates to the masculine powers and is often also perceived as a masculine day. This is a very suitable day for men to make petitions for strength and for travels.

6 The number 6-days are important days for fire ceremonies on the sacred hill of Paklom in the center of Momostenango.

7 The number seven is a day that is easily brought out of balance because of its central position in the sequence of thirteen numbers.

8 The number eight is the sum of one (the beginning) and seven (the middle). Furthermore, it is the double of the number 4 and therefore indicates discipline and strength. In a ritual context the number 8 calls to mind the days 8 B'atz' (the day of the Ajq'ij) and 8 Kej (the day of the Chuchqajaw). It connotes authority and leadership. In Momostenango, number 8-days are days for performing ceremonies at the altar of Pa Ja'.

9 The Day-Number nine is related to both new life and death. This number is associated to the nine moons that pass during the gestation period while it is also linked to the nine days of *velación* (vigil) after a person's death. The number nine is an important number in relation to the ancestors. For example, 9 Kame is a day for the commemoration of the deceased. Also, participants to ritual dances usually promise the ancestors to fulfill a *novena* (nine times) of performances (see Chapter IV and V). For dances that take place annually this means a promise for 9 years, while for dances that take place biannually, such as the *baile de la conquista* in Momostenango, the *novena* encompasses 18 years. The number nine is a feminine number related to women. The day 9 B'atz' is related to the umbilical cord and is a day to commemorate anything that has to do with pregnancy. Midwives usually perform ceremonies on this day. Finally, the number nine is an adequate day to perform ceremonies at the altar of Nimasab'al

13 The number thirteen signifies the end the cycle of 13 numbers. This number connotes a completion of something, and indicates the beginning of something new. It relates to continuity and repetition. In contrast to the number nine, the number thirteen is a masculine number.

20 Twenty is an important distance number. Lapses of time are often, also in the Gregorian calendar, counted within a vigesimal system.

40 Often a period of 40 days is counted for the preparation of important ceremonies and dances.

CALENDAR DIVINATION

There are many forms of divination in the Maya communities of the Western Highlands that do not involve the use of the calendar. For example, information or messages can be revealed in the flames of the kitchen fire or the ceremonial fire, or in the reflection of light by the bubbles inside a crystal stone. Also during the preparation and consumption of specific food, such as the sacred maize drink *atol*, mantic messages can be experienced. For example, when *atol* has a bitter taste it prognosticates that there will be a disagreement within the family. During the preparation of *atol* in anticipation of the arrival of the K'iche' New Year, two important ingredients of the ceremonial drink, the *kuchun* root and zapote seed, need to rise and turn white. If they fail to rise and remain grey or black it will mean that the year to come will be a difficult year with many obstacles to overcome. Divinatory signs can also be revealed in the environment at any moment. Talented people, not necessarily Ajq'ijab', are able to discover these signs and interpret the message that they convey.

One of the divinatory abilities that is shared by the Ajq'ijab' of Momostenango – but not restricted to them – is that of the movement of blood (*brinca la sangre*, “the blood jumps”). The twitching of specific parts of the human body carries specific meaning (see appendix D). Although the interpretation of the twitching signs generally follows a shared system – for example, the rights side of the human body signals that events will have a positive outcome while the left side usually prognosticates a less fortunate outcome – each person has to learn how their body communicates to them. For example, a twitch above or underneath the eye may mean that sickness or death will come or that a family member or friend that has not been around for a long time will come to visit. Therefore, a person has to learn how to interpret the messages conveyed in the speaking of blood in his or her own body. There are three forms in



Figure 13. Don Rigoberto Itzep performs a calendar divination.

which the blood speaks to a person: pulling, pushing, and tapping (or running from one side to the other). The speaking of blood is an important divinatory tool that supplements the messages revealed in calendar divination.

The use of the calendar for divinatory purposes (*ch'ob'onik*, “to understand”) in modern K'iche' is a practice rooted in pre-Columbian times (D. Tedlock, 2010, pp. 165-183). Different divinatory calendar practices have been previously documented in several communities throughout the Highlands (Colby & Colby, 1981, pp. 222-247; La Farge, 1947, p. 182; Lincoln, 1942, pp. 121-122; Schultze Jena, 1933, pp. 42-46; B. Tedlock, 1982, pp. 153-171). Calendar divination is a mantic technique that is based on counting and interpreting days of the *chol q'ij*¹⁸. As previous studies have shown, the practice of calendar divination in different communities shows much similarity. In a divination session the calendar specialist uses the *tz'ite* seeds that are kept in the sacred bundle to count the days. As these studies have already provided detailed accounts and analyses of the divination practices, I will restrict my discussion here to the observations of calendar divination with don Rigoberto Itzep.

The exact counting and interpretation of the *tz'ite* seeds differs between communities but also

between members of the same community. The description of calendar divination with *tz'ite* seeds that follows is based on the methodology employed by don Rigoberto Itzep and should thus not be taken as standardized form of *tz'ite* reading, but rather as one of the many possible ways. It shares many similarities with the methodologies of other Ajq'ijab' in and outside of Momostenango, but it differs at some points depending on the training each specialist has received.

In a divination ceremony, the visitor (*uwinaqil*, “person”) sits at a small table in front of the Ajq'ij. Don Rigoberto covers the table with a white cloth on which he places his sacred bundle (*patan*). As the visitor and don Rigoberto talk, the reason for doing the calendar divination becomes clear. There may be many reasons for performing the divination: land disputes, experienced envy by others, disagreements between friends or family, loss of objects or money, illnesses that affect oneself or the family, plans for starting a business, a travel, or another project, interpretations of dreams, determining a day for marriage proposal, and many more. Community members can visit the Ajq'ij basically for any concern they may have.

Once the concern of the visitor has been determined, don Rigoberto empties the contents of the *patan* on the cloth. From this heap of seeds and stones, don Rigoberto selects four stones – crystals and other stones – that will be used to count the

18 This form of calendar divination is practiced by many indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica. For a recent study on Ayöök (Mixe) calendar divination, for example, see Rojas Martínez Gracida (2014).

rounds, and places them on the side of the table. Then he rubs with the palm of the hand over the heap of *tz'ite* (*b'arajear*¹⁹) in a counterclockwise movement, while speaking in manner similar to the discourse pronounced, in the case of don Rigoberto, at the beginning of fire ceremonies. Don Rigoberto incorporates the question of the visitor into his ritual discourse. Following this, he grabs a handful of *tz'ite* seeds from the heap and forms a smaller heap of *tz'ite* that is then placed on the right side of the table. While reciting specific words, don Rigoberto forms groups of four seeds, creating first rows and then columns. According to don Rigoberto, a single handful of beans will yield between 19 and 25 groups of seeds. The row consists of seven groups of four *tz'ite* beans. When completing a row, he proceeds to group the beans in a new row, starting again on the right side. The first row is placed close to the visitor while don Rigoberto slowly works his way towards himself (Figure 13).

Each of the *tz'ite* seed groups forms a day of the K'iche' calendar. When the groups have been formed on the table, the Ajq'ij usually counts them, starting from the day of the performance of the divination or from the day that a specific concern arose. While counting the days, the Ajq'ij receives signs from the movement of his/her blood on specific days, which leads him/her to bring specific topics to the conversation.

According to Tedlock (1982, p. 162), the last pile on the last row indicates if the outcome of the divination is reliable, while according to Schultze Jena (1933, p. 42) the last pile displays the outcome's value. Both can be said to be correct in my experience. If the calendar divination closes with a final group consisting of three beans it means that the answer is negative, but not extremely devastating. If only one bean remains, the outcome is very negative. When two beans form the final group, it indicates that the result is mildly positive. In case the final group is formed exactly by four beans, the result is very positive. When three beans remain in the last group, don Rigoberto splits them in a group of two and a group of one bean. If the amount of beans of the last

pile differs in each of the four divination rounds, it means that the outcome of the divination ritual is not very reliable or that the outcome is uncertain, which the Ajq'ij will tell to the visitor.

The lining of days, the communication with specific days, the personal story of the visitor and the speaking of blood experienced by the Ajq'ij bring to the table a range of topics. The visitor and the Ajq'ij enter in a dialogue during which the specialist is able to discern the underlying issues of the concerns or problems of the visitor. Issues are brought to discussion by using the symbolic system of the calendar days. After performing four rounds of divination, counted with the four stones that have been selected at the beginning of the divination ceremony, the Ajq'ij has a clear understanding of the situation and can offer counseling on the possible solutions. The practice of calendar divination is therefore not a case of fortune telling or making prognostications, but is rather about allowing a person to cope with the situation he/she is in.

If the concern of the visitor is a closed question – for example if they can travel to Chichicastenango in following two days- the Ajq'ij will have a positive or negative advice after four rounds. Even with a positive response, don Rigoberto advises the visitor to be always careful and conscious. If the concern of the visitor is very open – for example why he or she has been losing money – the Ajq'ij will be able to determine the cause of the problem and propose a solution, for example in the form of a ceremony or offering at a specific place, for sacred beings or ancestors who can help in this situation. The Ajq'ij bases the moment for such a ceremony on the *chol q'ij* and the characteristics of the Day-Lords.

TIME AND THE HUMAN BEING

The numbers of the *chol q'ij* tend to have a feminine aspect while the Day-Lords have a masculine aspect. When the number and the Lord join for a day and interact, they create *pensamiento y movimiento*²⁰ (“thoughts and movement”) or *chapo winaq* (“to begin a human”). A day is thus both feminine and masculine and it creates human life.

19 *B'araj* means “to roll” and *b'arajear* is likely a Hispanicized form of the K'iche' verb. However, it is also possible that there is a link with the Spanish word *baraja*, a set of playing cards from Spain which are also used in divinatory practices.

20 *Pensamiento y movimiento* a diaphrastic kenning that stands for (human) life.

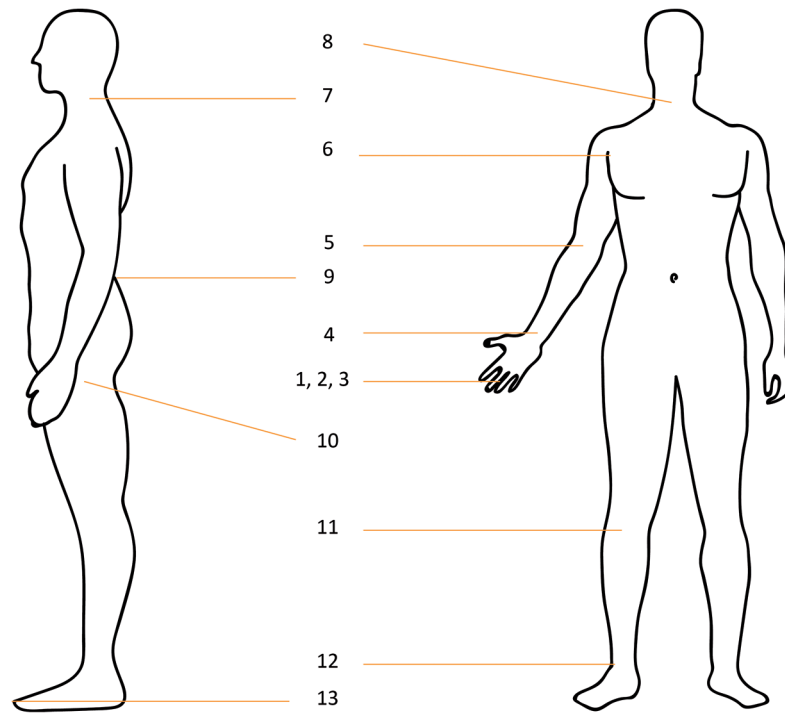


Figure 14. The locations of the thirteen Day-Numbers in the human body: 1, 2, 3. The joints that connect the phalanges of the finger; 4. The wrist; 5. The elbow; 6. The shoulder; 7. The neck joint that enables moving up and down; 8. The neck joint that enables moving to the sides; 9. The lower spine; 10. The hips; 11. The knees; 12. The ankles; 13. The phalanges of the toe.

The length of the cycles of the numbers and Lords, respectively thirteen and twenty, represent the human being. The relationship between the twenty Day-Lords and the human being is very clear as *winaq* is the K'iche' word for "twenty" and for "human being". All specialists in Momostenango agree that human being is the basis of the vigesimal counting system because the human being has twenty fingers (toes and fingers). The thirteen numbers of the *chol q'ij* represent thirteen joints that make movement of the human body possible (Figure 14). The relation between the numbers and the human articulations is shared over a large area. Ajq'ij José Arturo Cabrera Aguilar from the Mam speaking community of Concepción Chiquirichapa explains:

These thirteen joints are very much related to the life of the human being: because of these there is equilibrium in the body. If

one joint would be missing, the human being would be disabled and would not be able to do any normal work. So that is why these thirteen joints are so important for us – Don José Arturo Cabrera Aguilar, Concepción Chiquirichapa, May 2014.

Today, the days of the Momostecan K'iche' calendar create life²¹. Although not all Ajq'ijab' agree on this, for many people the days build the human. During pregnancy, different Day-Lords are each day at work on a specific part of the baby's developing body in the mother's womb. For example, Lord Aj (Reed) works on the spine. Each day of Lord Aj, the

²¹ Schultze-Jena (1933, p. 35) was the first to register the existence of a close relationship between the *chol q'ij*, the cycle of the moon and the human gestation period. In short, he observed that nine moons pass after the last menstrual period of the mother until the baby is born. This period of nine moons encompasses nine months, a period of more or less 260 days.

Day	Part of the Body	Nawal of the person
B'atz'	The umbilical cord The veins	Monkey
E'	The feet The teeth	Mountain cat
Aj	The spine	Armadillo
Ix	The blood	Jaguar
Tz'ikin	The eyes	Quetzal
Ajmak	The female genitals	Vulture
No'j	The brain	Gazelle
Tijax	The teeth and the tongue The sexual organs	Wolf
Kawoq	The heart	Lion
Ajpu	The chest	Eagle
Imox	The left arm The muscles	Fish
Iq'	The lungs	Weasel
Aq'ab'al	The stomach The right hand	Fawn
K'at	The ribs	Lizard
Kan	The nervous system	Serpent
Kame	The nails	Owl
Kej	The hands	Deer
Q'anil	The sperm and the ovule	Rabbit
Toj	The ears	Shark
Tz'i'	The nose	Opossum

Table 3. Relationship between the *chol q'ij* days, the human body, and the *nawales*.

baby will develop a part of the spine. The section of the spine that is being developed that day depends on the Day-Number. After all thirteen combinations with this Day-Lord have passed, the spine will be complete. Similarly, on days that Lord No'j, the day of wisdom, is present, the brain and memory of the baby are developed, and on the days B'atz' the umbilical cord progresses. Therefore in 260 days (= nine months) all Day-Lords have worked thirteen times on the development of a baby, and the baby will be fully formed (Table 3). The *comadronas*, midwives, guide and monitor the developmental process and help the days, the mother, and the baby with their knowledge.

According to don Rigoberto, after the 260 gestational days the baby remains for another nine or thirteen days in the womb²². This period is needed to make sure the baby is ready for birth. After birth and throughout the course of one's life, the Day-Lords continue to have an influence on the bodily parts that they once helped to create. Twenty days

after a baby boy is born, i.e. on the first return of the Day-Lord on which he was born, he is presented to the ancestors and the *Ajaw*²³ at the house altar. Having fulfilled the period of *jun winaq* ("one human" / "one time twenty"), the baby boy has become a complete human. Baby girls are presented forty days after birth, upon completion of the period of *kyeb' winaq* ("two human" / "two times twenty").

The relationship between specific Day-Lords and parts of the human body in the Momostecan calendar calls to mind the famous page 54r of the Codex Vaticanus A, which combines 16th Century European astrological imagery with a model from precolonial religious codices that can be found in the Borgia Group. On page 54r, a human body is depicted surrounded by days that are related to a specific part of the body (see Anders & Jansen, 1996, pp. 245). A comparison with contemporary views of this relationship between the days and the body might provide a better explanation of this codex scene.

²² The number nine is feminine and could therefore be related to the birth of a girl. The number thirteen is male and could therefore be related to the birth of a boy.

²³ The *Ajaw* ("Lord") is the creative force of everything around us.

THE NAWAL

The existence of *nawales* is a phenomenon present in many indigenous communities of Mesoamerica. The term *nawal* derives from the prehispanic Nahuatl word *nahualli*. The original meaning of this word is still heavily debated, but it seems to be related to the ability of powerful leaders to change shape (see Klein, Guzmán, Mandell and Stanfield-Mazzi, 2002, 391-392; López Austin, 1967, 95-99; Mikulska Dąbrowska, 2010, 272-331; Martínez González, 2011). Today, as maybe in the past as well, the conceptualization of the *nawal* or *nahualli* is slightly distinct in each region of Mesoamerica. In Momostenango, a *nawal* is a specific energy that accompanies a person, an object or natural manifestation and may manifest itself in the form of a particular animal. This companion animal will be one's guiding spirit for the rest of his/her life.

The presence of *nawales* in Guatemala has been dealt with in the past by several anthropologists (Bunzel, 1952, pp. 274-275; Wagley, 1949, pp. 65-66). Today, one's *nawal* is determined by the day on which one is born, while in the past people were often not aware of their animal companion. According to Termer (1957, p. 129), for example, people had to consult an Ajq'ij to know their *nawal*, or they would realize that by having a rare encounter with that animal. The change in awareness of one's *nawal* might be related to the growing accessibility of printing techniques and social media in the Highlands of Guatemala. Don Rigoberto has written and printed, for example, overviews of the relationship between a Day-Lord and a *nawal*, and he sells these documents at a market stand. On the social media website of Facebook there are also many Maya organizations that publish information about the Maya calendar, such as lists of *nawales*. Easy access to this information probably contributes to a growing awareness of one's *nawal*.

The birthday imbues a person with specific characteristics that will accompany them throughout their life. Furthermore, the Day-Lord that ruled on the day of birth also defines one's *nawal*. The twenty different *nawales* are the animal counterparts of the human being. At specific moments, usually at night, a person can become his/her *nawal* and experience what the *nawal* experiences. If something happens to the animal, the person will also feel the same. Today, there is a general consensus, however, that apart from one's

nawal, a person may also have a special relationship with a different type of animal. This animal manifests itself occasionally to a person when he or she is alone, but not often when other people are around.

Not only humans have *nawales*. Each aspect of nature has its *nawal*. For example, watery places in Momostenango often have a snake as a *nawal* (see also Chapter V) but also the wind, mountaintops, trees, and stones, among others, have a *nawal*. Although these *nawales* are not tied to the K'iche' calendar, they do represent the living aspect of the place. The *nawales* of these places are usually animals that behave strangely or always appear at the same location. For example, ducks that swim at the waterfall at *barranquito*²⁴ in Momostenango are the embodied form of the waterfall itself. Disturbing these ducks is a form of disrespecting the *barranquito* site and can have repercussions in one's life.

A TRECENA CYCLE

In Momostenango there are four public altars (*komón*) that are related to the Day-Numbers 1, 6, 8, and 9 of the K'iche' calendar (Table 4). Days with these numbers are very appropriate days for performing ceremonies at their respective altars and the altars are therefore highly visited on these days. The repetition of these numbers within a thirteen-day period establishes a routine of ritual movement through the landscape as the Ajq'ijab' come together at a different altar four times during a thirteen-day period, or *trecena*. It is not obligatory to come to the altars on these specific days (as it is for example, in the case of the renewal rituals surrounding the day 8 B'atz'), but many devout Ajq'ijab' and especially Chuchqajawib' do follow the *trecena* cycle of ceremonies. More importantly, if an Ajq'ij commits to perform a ceremony on one of the altars but does not follow through, he or she will suffer repercussions for not fulfilling the promise. As will be discussed in more detail below, on the day 6 Toj the debts of unfulfilled promises can be repaid.

Important ritual Day-Numbers²⁵ related to the *trecena* in Momostenango are 1, 6, 8 and 9. Robert Burkitt, one of the few ethnographers who worked in

²⁴ *Barranquito* is one of the bath places located at the border of the town's urban zone.

²⁵ Day-Number 3 is related to the altar of *Uja'il Santiago*. However, most Ajq'ijab' do not consider it to be part of the same ritual cycle that the Day-Numbers 1, 6, 8 and 9.

Day-Lords	The Day-Numbers													
B'atz'	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	
E'	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	
Aj	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	
Ix	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	
Tz'ikin	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	
Ajmak	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	
No'	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	
Tijax	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	
Kawoq	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	
Ajpu	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	
Imox	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	
Iq'	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	
Aq'ab'al	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	
K'at	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	
Kan	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	
Kame	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	
Kej	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8*	2	9	3	10	4	
Q'anil	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	
Toj	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	
Tz'i'	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	

Table 4. The count of the *chol q'ij* with the ritual days in the *trecena* cycles marked in blue and the celebration of 8 B'atz' marked in red.

the Highland of Guatemala in the beginning of the 20th century, documented in his field notes (1918-1923) that in Momostenango the average amount of donations in the town church peaked on the days 1, 6, 8, and 9 of the K'iche' Calendar (Weeks et al., 2009, pp. 162-175). Although he does not incorporate factors such as rainy season, dry spells, earthquakes, Christian celebrations or other phenomena that could have affected the donations on a specific day, his findings show that the ritual *trecena* cycle in Momostenango involved the same Day-Numbers at the beginning of the 20th century as it does today. Furthermore, it is clear that the church was mostly visited at moments that were and are meaningful in the K'iche' calendar.

On days with Day-Number 1, the ritual specialists perform ceremonies at Pa Ja' ("the place of water") also known as Uja'il Alajsab'al (Figure 15). Because Pa Ja' is related to the number 1, it is also known as *junib'al* ("number-one-place"). The altar of Pa Ja' is situated next to a water spring on the banks of a small river that flows through Momostenango. On the sacred site are several old adobe structures. Pa Ja' is specifically related to the sacred bundle of the Ajq'ijab' for which ceremonies are often performed at this place. As the Day-Number 1 announces a new period of 13 days, it is likely that the ceremonies performed at Pa Ja' on these days

are opening ceremonies for the *trecena* that follows. According to Barbara Tedlock (1992, p. 60), both numbers 1 and 8 days are appropriate for performing permission rituals (*permisos*, "permissions", or *ch'ajb'al*, "water for washing"; a metaphoric expression for the ritual preparation and presentation of new Ajq'ijab'). Today, however, only number 8 days are suitable for this ritual presentation.

On days with Day-Number 6, the Ajq'ijab' perform ceremonies at the altar of Paklom at the top of the sacred hill in the center of Momostenango (Figure 16). While the entire hill is the heart of the



Figure 15. The altar of Pa Ja' is located near a water spring. Several old structures and adobe walls make up this sacred place.

town, the altars are located only on the southwestern part of the hill. Paklom is also located in the center of the four sacred mountains that surround the town of Momostenango (see Chapter II). Because it is the heart of the town, the altars of Paklom are the most visited; at any moment of the day specialists are performing rituals there. As Paklom is related to Day-Number 6, the altars are also known as Waq'ib'al ("number-six-place").

On days with Day-Number 8, the Ajq'ijab' perform ceremonies at the shrines of Alajsab'al, also known as Ch'uti sab'al, which both mean "little place of offering" (Figure 17). Because this altar is related to Day-Number 8 it is also referred to as Wajxaqib'al ("number-eight-place"). Alajsab'al is located on a small hill overlooking the town of Momostenango, a few hundred meters away from Pa Ja'. Number 8 is one of the most powerful and celebrated Day-Numbers of the Momostecan K'iche' calendar which is why many Ajq'ijab' visit Alajsab'al on this day. This is also evident in the numbers collected by Robert Burkitt in relation to church visitation (Weeks et al., 2009, pp. 173-175). Furthermore, number-eight-days are also adequate days for permission rituals in the preparation of future Ajq'ijab'.

Finally, on days with Day-Number 9, the Ajq'ijab' perform ceremonies at the shrines of Nimasab'al, the *Presidente Mundo*. Nimasab'al means literally "big place of offering" but is also known as B'elejeb'al ("number-nine-place") because of its relation with its Day-Number (Figure 18). Nimasab'al is located on the top of a hill at the western outskirts of town. Standing atop on the hill of Nimasab'al one can see the three other main altars of Momostenango. However, the overview of average donations on Day-Numbers by Burkitt shows that the donations on Day-Number 9 are significantly less than on other ritual Day-Numbers. A possible explanation for this is that Nimasab'al is located at quite a distance from the Church of Momostenango and the most appropriate moment for ritual is at sunrise, coinciding with Catholic mass. This might have resulted in less participation during mass and, consequently, less donations. However, it is also possible that throughout the 20th century Nimasab'al was restricted to Chuchqajawib', as Tedlock (1992, p. 71) mentions, and that the current accessibility for all Ajq'ijab' is only a recent development.



Figure 16. The sacred hilltop of Paklom on the day 6 Kan.



Figure 17. The altar of Alajsab'al.



Figure 18. The altar of Nimasab'al lies on a hill top about 30 minutes walking from the town center.

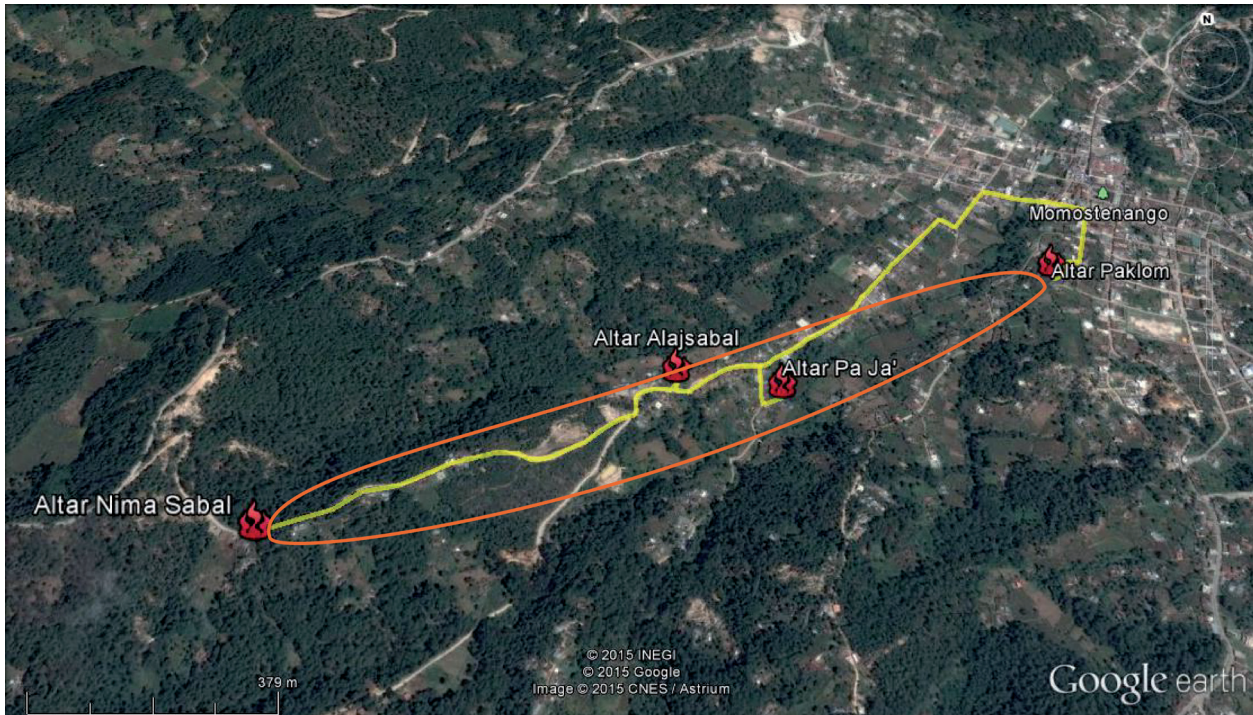


Figure 19. The ritual activities during a *trecena* cycles plotted on the map of Momostenango shows how the *chol q'ij* decentralizes religious space.

As it can be seen on the map above (Figure 19), the ritual cycle creates also a cyclical movement of calendar specialist throughout the *trecena* period. The numbers 1, 6, 8, and 9 direct the Ajq'ijab' respectively counterclockwise from the south, to the east, and north, and then west, a cycle which they complete during a period of thirteen days. In a period of 260 days, the most devout Ajq'ijab' might visit the altars up to 80 times and complete 20 *trecena* cycles. For the Chuchqajawib' it is an obligation to complete all cycles of the *trecena*.

By visiting the altars at specific moments in time the Ajq'ijab' reiterate the feeling of belonging to a community: they see the same people at the same place at the same time. This feeling is strengthened by the performance of a ritual. Although each ceremony is done individually, these rituals nevertheless enforce the shared social conventions and religious basis of a community. Momostenango's space is decentralized as the spiritual guides move through town during a period of thirteen days. When there is only one place of spiritual worship, such as a Catholic church, the

environment is organized according to a pattern of center and periphery, in which the latter is usually marginalized, while the former attracts more attention. By visiting all four main altars of town on a strict cyclical basis, marginalization of certain parts of the town is precluded.

While most ethnographers, such as Termer (1957, p. 129), Lincoln (1942, p. 104), and Wagley (1949, p. 69), have focused their attention on finding remnants of the *veintena* cycle (see Chapter II), to my knowledge, only Ruth Bunzel has specifically mentioned the *trecena* cycle in Chichicastenango. According to her, each *trecena* cycle had specific characteristics that were usually determined by particular prominent days within that *trecena*. She²⁶

26 Bunzel argues that "[t]here is a striking correspondence between the character of the great days that dominate these periods and the fortune attributed to the "houses" occupying the corresponding position in the Aztec *tonalamatl*, as expounded by Sahagún" (Bunzel, 1952, p. 284). In early colonial Central Mexico, the *trecena* periods were called "houses". Each house was named after the first day of the *trecena* and had a particular effect on the events in society for a duration of thirteen days. Bunzel's observation has, to my knowledge, been largely overlooked. Future research on the parallels between the Central Mexican *trecena* system and contemporary perceptions of the *trecena*

Trecena	Prominent days	Influence
1 B'atz'	7 No'j, 8 Tijax	General pardon.
1 Q'at	8 B'atz', 9 E'	Good days. Commemoration of the Calendar.
1 No'j	7 Aq'ab'al, 8 K'at, 9 Kan	Bad days. Days of sorcery.
1 Tz'i'	7 Ajmak, 8 No'j	Bad days. Pardon for the evil thoughts.
1 Aq'ab'al	7 Toj, 8 Tz'i'	Bad days. No ceremonies.
1 Ajmak	7 Iq', 8 Aq'ab'al, 9 K'at	Bad days. Defense against sorcery.
1 Toj	7 Tz'ikin, 8 Ajmak	Bad days. Pardon for covetousness.
1 Iq'	7 Q'anil, 8 Toj, 9 T'zi'	Bad days. Pardon for sexual sins.
1 Tz'ikin	7 Imox, 8 Iq', 9 Aq'abal	Bad days. Defense against destruction.
1 Q'anil	6 Aj, 7 Ix, 8 Tz'ikin	Good days. Thanksgiving for wealth.
1 Imox	7 Kej, 8 Q'anil	Good days. Thanksgiving for crops. Celebration of the Milpa.
1 Ix	7 Ajpu, 8 Imox, 9 Ix	Bad days. Defense against occult powers.
1 Kej	7 Aj, 8 Ix	Good days. General thanksgiving. Commemoration of earth.
1 Ajpu	7 Kame, 8 Kej	Good days. Commemoration of the dead.
1 Aj	7 Kawoq, 9 Imox	Bad days. General Pardon.
1 Kame	7 E', 8 Aj, 9 Ix	Good days. Invocation of Destiny.
1 Kawoq	7 Kan, 8 Kame, 9 Kej	Good days. General Pardon.
1 E'	8 Kawoq, 9 Ajpu	Bad days. Pardon of ancestors.
1 Kan	7 B'atz', 8 E', 9 Aj	Good days. Celebration of Life.
1 Tijax	7 K'at, 8 Kan, 9 Kame	Bad days. Defense from sorcery.

Table 5. The *trecenas* periods and their general characteristics in Chichicastenango according to Ruth Bunzel (after Bunzel, 1952, pp. 277-301).

even documented prayers of rituals specialists invoking the Lords of the *trecenas* during curing rituals (Bunzel, 1952, pp. 391-394).

The prominent days of the *trecenas* are the central days with the Day-Number 7, 8, and 9, which are, according to Bunzel, “indifferent, neither gentle nor violent, the days of measured strength” (Bunzel, 1952, p. 283). Comparing her description of the characters of the *trecenas* and the prominent days that she mentions of Chichicastenango (Table 5) with the mnemonics and meanings of these days (appendix B & C) in Momostenango, it seems that characters of the *trecenas* are mostly influenced by the number-8-day of that *trecena*. Both in Chichicastenango and Momostenango the day before and after a very important ritual day are commemorated as respectively annunciation, or welcoming, and a farewell. For example, on 7 Kej, the day before the day of the milpa (8 Q'anil), some Chuchqajawib' already go to the *meb'il* to prepare the welcoming of the day 8 Q'anil. Similarly, the day 8 B'atz' is welcomed already two days before (on 6 Toj) and fades out a day after (on 9 E') and rituals preparations for the K'iche' New Year also start two days before the actual entrance of the Year Bearer.

system in Guatemala might contribute to the understanding of the process of continuation and to the interpretation of the precolonial Mesoamerican calendar systems.

Concerning the calendar system in the Ixil area, Robert Burkitt mentions that in Nebaj the “blessed numbers” are 5, 7, 8 and that in Aguacatan the most important numbers are 5, 6, 7, 8, with the number 8 being the most prominent ritual day (Weeks 2009, 167, 171-172). It is therefore quite likely that a *trecena* system, in which each *trecena* is defined by the Day-Number 1 until 13 and is characterized by the number-eight-day, was widespread in the Highlands of Guatemala. Today, although agreeing on the importance of number-8 days, the Ajq'ijab' with whom I worked with in Momostenango state that there is no shared characteristics in the days that share a *trecena*.

One final observation made by Ruth Bunzel is worth mentioning here. Several important number-8-day celebrations in the *chol q'ij* have a parallel Catholic celebration in the Gregorian calendar (Table 6). Thus, while the celebrations of the *chol q'ij* shift in relation to the solar calendar and meteorological phenomena, these Catholic parallels are fixed within a specific period of the solar year and all the cycles that are influenced by the solar cycle, such as the agricultural cycle. This means that in the case of Chichicastenango, the day 8 Q'anil commemorates the milpa at any moment in the solar year, even when unrelated to the agricultural event they mean

K'iche' calendar day	Celebration	Christian variant in Chichicastenango
8 Kej	commemoration of the dead	2 nd of November: all saints
8 Ix	commemoration of the earth	3 rd May: Exaltation of the Cross
8 E'	commemoration of personal life	San Juan Bautista (June 24 th , Midsummer night)
8 Q'anil	celebration of the <i>milpa</i>	Corpus Christi
8 B'atz'	commemoration of the calendar	Feast of San Pedro

Table 6. Identification of the characteristics of the *chol q'ij* in the Catholic celebration cycle in Chichicastenango (after Bunzel, 1952, p. 301).

to propitiate, while *Corpus Christi* always coincides with the commemoration of the *milpa*, at its first stage of sprouting, a very crucial moment in Maya subsistence farming. Similar parallels between *chol q'ij* celebrations and astronomically fixed Catholic celebrations are to be found in Momostenango (see Chapter III).

In sum, the *trecena* ritual cycle in Momostenango decentralizes religious activity. Not only the Ajq'ijab' move through the town throughout the *trecena* but also the centers of ritual attention shift counterclockwise in Momostenango. As such, a broad area of Momostenango is incorporated into the geographical range of religious activities, which, to a certain extent, prevents their marginalization for not being close to the central square of Momostenango, marked by the Catholic church. Remnants of the *trecena* cycle have been documented in other towns as well in the Highlands of Guatemala. In these places, however, there were no known altars that had to be visited according to the Day-Number, as is the case in Momostenango. Possibly, all the *trecenas* in these towns followed a similar system in which the number-eight-day was characteristic for the personality of the *trecena*. However, more research on this topic is needed for a concluding statement.

BECOMING AN AJQ'IJ

The Ajq'ijab' of the community are born with the abilities needed for this role. To become Ajq'ij is often not their own choice but rather the choice of the ancestors and the days. Although they receive a calling for their future service to the community, they still have to train with a Chuchqajaw from their lineage. After a period of training, the students are initiated in the community of Ajq'ijab'. The social responsibilities and duties that come with this initiation will last a life-time. Only on very rare

occasions Ajq'ijab' refuse to continue their social duty, for example if they convert to Protestantism, in which case they will leave the sacred bundle they received upon initiation at one of the sacred places of Momostenango. The majority of Ajq'ijab', however, will accept their important role in society for the rest of their lives.

The Calling

To become Ajq'ij, a person needs to receive a calling by the world or *Juyub'-Taq'aj*, the days, and the ancestors²⁷. The calling comes in the form of experienced problems and dreams. The most common problems taken as a calling are specific illnesses (B. Tedlock, 1982, p. 54). Usually these illnesses will not be cured until the person accepts the role in society that he or she is selected to fulfill. However, any personal problem that one has trouble solving might be an indication of the calling to fulfill a service to the community. Financial problems, such as for example loss of money or being unable to find a job, might be indicative of the fact that a person needs to follow another path altogether in life. In fact, practically any problem experienced in life can be a suggestion that a person is not following the mission that was determined for him or her.

Incurable sickness or financial problems do not necessarily mean that one has to take up the burden as Ajq'ij, as there are many other services for the community. For example, the musician Francisco Sigüentes, whom I met on 8 B'atz' year

²⁷ Juyub'-Taq'aj literally means "mountain-valley". This diaphrastic kenning refers to the complete world. Cultural regeneration programs prefer the word *cosmos* as a translation of Juyub'-Taq'aj, because it has a more universal connotation and goes beyond the world as a mere physical entity. Juyub'-Taq'aj is the totality of everything that exists and of everything that has existed and contributed to world as it is today. Although time and the ancestors are aspects of the Juyub'-Taq'aj, they are often also emphasized and invoked additional to the Juyub'-Taq'aj.

2 Kej (31st of January 2015), told me that he became musician because when he was 25 years old, he came back to Momostenango from Guatemala City and was financially broke. The father of his friend, a *kamalb'e*, interpreted this problem as a sign for having to take the burden to become musician. By becoming a musician and returning to the traditions of the ancestors of the community of Momostenango, he was able to get his life back on track. He has been playing the tambor in Momostenango for over 50 years on important moments such as 8 B'atz' or during the Patron Saint feast (Figure 20).



Figure 20. Francisco Siguentes (on the right) plays music with his friend at the central park of Momostenango during the celebration of 8 B'atz'.

The calling of an Ajq'ij is usually accompanied by dreams in which the Day-Lords manifest themselves to the person. The combination of experiencing seemingly unsurmountable troubles and dreaming about the Day-Lords is a reason for visiting the Chuchqajaw of one's lineage. When the Chuchqajaw believes that this might be a call to become Ajq'ij, he will perform a divination ceremony during which it will become clear if this person should become Ajq'ij or if there is another *patan* ("service") or *equele'm* ("burden") for this person to fulfill.

An important aspect of determining the social duty of a person is the *wachaq'ij* ("the face of my day"; the characteristics of one's birthday). Whether someone should become Ajq'ij depends on the Day-Number and the Day-Lord of his/her day of birth. In contrast to what Tedlock (1992, p. 116) states, in my experience there is no specific

Day-Lord that prevents one from becoming Ajq'ij. If one is born on a day consisting of a reasonably mild Day-Lord and a very high Day-Number, a person might be determined to become Ajq'ij, while someone born on a day consisting of a strong Day-Lord and a very low Day-Number might not be destined to be Ajq'ij. The main requisite for becoming Ajq'ij is feeling comfortable in a leading role.

In other cases, if the dreams and problems are not recognized as signs in a specific moment, later in life the person may realize the true call. For example, when an Ajq'ij of a family passes away and the family is in need of a new Ajq'ij to perform the ceremonies of the household, other ritual specialists from the lineage will come together to make a divination to determine who should fulfill the role of Ajq'ij. After the divination, the one who is pointed out to become Ajq'ij will probably realize that he or she has been receiving the signs of the calling but had not recognized them until this point. It is not really possible to refuse the role of Ajq'ij. If one does not take up the burden that is bestowed upon him/her, it is likely that he or she will experience negative consequences.

The Training

When the Chuchqajaw has determined that a person should become Ajq'ij, he establishes a training period for the future Ajq'ij. The moment of initiation usually determines the form of training. In Momostenango there are two possible moments for the initiation of a new Ajq'ij: on the day 8 B'atz' or on the *wachaq'ij* (the day of birth in the *chol q'ij*) of the future Ajq'ij. In both cases the training period is exactly 260 days, a full cycle of the *chol q'ij*, and is known as *kachaj ri patan* ("to wash the service"). Thus, if a person will be initiated on the day 8 B'atz', his or her training will start immediately after the previous celebration of 8 B'atz', while if a person will be initiated on his or her *wachaq'ij*, the training will have to start on the previous *wachaq'ij*, 260 days earlier. The moment of initiation is determined by both the Chuchqajaw and the Ajq'ij, who discuss the possibilities depending on other obligations. However, initiation on 8 B'atz' is in Momostenango by far the most popular moment for initiation.

Although the training period is officially 260 days, it sometimes happens that a novice who starts halfway a 260-day period is still able to be initiated on the following 8 B'atz' or on his/her *wachaq'ij*. On the other hand, it is also possible that the training period of a person takes longer. For example, don Rigoberto Itzep Chanchavac took almost 4 years (from 1979 until 1982) to receive his *patan*. The reason for extending his training period, he explained, was that he truly wanted to know what his task was about. He spent therefore four years investigating the details of the K'iche' calendar and talking with the elderly Ajq'ijab'. He realized that one day the elders would pass away and he would be in charge of passing on their knowledge to future generations.

In the case of initiation on the *wachaq'ij*, thirteen ceremonies (each time that the Day-Lord of the *wachaq'ij* returns in a period of 260 days) have to be performed by the Chuchqajaw, during which the novice is presented to the calendar and to the deceased calendar specialists of his or her lineage. Powerful calendar specialists from the lineage continue to be influential in daily life even after death, and they need to be informed about the initiation of a new Ajq'ij. In the case of initiation on 8 B'atz', twenty ceremonies (each time that the number 8 returns in a period of 260 days) have to be performed by the Chuchqajaw²⁸. These ceremonies can only take place at the sacred altars of Alajsab'al (see below), the altar that is related to the number 8. The other altars cannot yet be visited for rituals by the apprentice.

As in the case of the duration of the training period, the moments of the presence of the student during these rituals are not strict. In the ideal case, a novice joins the Chuchqajaw, who introduces him or her into the knowledge of the calendar in each of the thirteen or twenty ceremonies, in which he or she is presented. However, it might be possible that the future Ajq'ij is not able to join in the ceremonies due to work or other obligations. Depending on the Chuchqajaw, the novice has to be present at each ceremony, or there is flexibility. Even if the novice is not present, it is important that the Chuchqajaw brings the *patan* of the novice to the ceremony and twirls it through the smoke of the ceremonial fire at the end of each ceremony.



Figure 21. Don Rigoberto renewing his responsibilities as Chuchqajaw on the day 8 Kej.

In the initiation period leading to the day 8 B'atz', the day 8 Kej is an important day. In general, on this day the Chuchqajawib' of the town reinforce their promise of social duties in special ceremonies on the sacred places in and around Momostenango (Figure 21). 8 Kej is also the day on which Ajq'ijab' in training formalize their commitment to the community and their family. On 8 Kej, 104 days before the initiation on 8 B'atz', the Chuchqajaw that guides the Ajq'ij announces to the Day-Lords, the ancestors, and all divine beings, that there will be a new Ajq'ij. During this ritual, the divine beings are invoked for guidance and strength for the future Ajq'ij. From 8 Kej onwards the apprentice will have to accompany the Chuchqajaw on the number 8 days during the last quarter of 260 days: 8 Ajpu, 8 Aj, 8 Kame, 8 Kawoq, 8 E', 8 Kan, 8 Tijax and finally 8 B'atz'.

Apart from learning to perform fire ceremonies, during their training period apprentices are also taught how to read the *tz'ite* seeds. The apprentice accompanies the Chuchqajaw, who explains the procedure to the novice while performing a divination. Over the time of apprenticeship, the novice has participated several times in divination ceremonies and they are able to understand and perform at least the basics of the *tz'ite* reading.

The training of the apprentice, or in K'iche' *we k'omal*, is based on practice. By accompanying the Chuchqajaw to the altars, the novice gradually learns what is being done. Each time that the novice accompanies the Chuchqajaw, he or she is allowed to perform more activities. The training starts with being

²⁸ According to Barbara Tedlock, preparation ceremonies take place on days with Day Numbers 1 and 8. During my fieldwork I have only come across the Day Number 8 for training and preparation rituals.

present, while observing and listening. It continues with the preparation of the offerings at home and at the altar. Ideally, the novice learns the prayers by listening to his teacher and will be able to perform the whole ritual by themselves at the end of the 260-day period. During the training period, the novice dreams often of the Day-Lords and learns counting in his/her dreams.

Those who join their teacher to the ceremonies during the period of training will have at the moment of final initiation a profound knowledge of the *chol q'ij* and are able to perform the counting of days and to express the ritual speech by themselves. Often, as I saw during my fieldwork in 2014 and 2015, and as also Tedlock describes (1992, pp. 60-71), even on the day of the initiation, the apprentices are not completely independent and the teacher has to join in to perform the ritual correctly. After the initiation many Ajq'ijab' continue to learn from the Chuchqajaw who guided them during the 260-days training and from other wise Chuchqajawib' in the community. The day 8 B'atz' is therefore the moment for accepting the social role which had been promised and formalized on the day 8 Kej, while after accepting the role the education often continues.

Apart from learning the counting of the days during the training period, the future Ajq'ij is also gradually introduced in the community of Ajq'ijab'. By joining in the ceremonies at Alajsab'al on the days with number 8, the novice is not only presented to the Divine Beings but also to the community of calendar specialists.

The Renewal of Commitment

After 260 days of training follows the initiation of an Ajq'ij. The day 8 B'atz' is the main day of initiation for the novices, but those who are already initiated also renew on this day their commitment to the community and to the world. As 8 B'atz' is a powerful day, its presence or characteristics already start two days before, on the days 6 Toj and 7 Tz'i', and fade away a day after, on 9 E'. Therefore, the four days of 6 Toj, 7 Tz'i', 8 B'atz' and 9 E' are important in the initiation of Ajq'ijab' and in the renewal of the social promise by those who are already initiated. Participants should not undertake many other activities during these days and abstain from heavy food such as meat and chili and have to practice sexual abstinence.

The day 6 Toj is the day for paying the debts (*tojonik*: “payment”). This is the appropriate day to perform a ceremony that an Ajq'ij has not been able to complete despite having committed to it. Each Ajq'ij should keep track of the ceremonies that she/he missed since the previous 8 B'atz' celebration and address the days on which these ceremonies would have taken place and the divine beings that should have been addressed. The offerings are for these days and their corresponding divine beings. Because of the number of the day 6 Toj, these ceremonies should be publicly performed at the sacred hill of Paklom near the center of Momostenango. After the day 6 Toj, each Ajq'ij is able to start a new 260-cycle without any ceremonial debts to the calendar and the world.

The day 7 Tz'i' is a day of self-reflection for the Ajq'ijab' and ceremonies are privately performed at the house altar. In these private ceremonies the Ajq'ij petitions that his/her life of and the lives of relatives be guided by the morals and principles established by the ancestors. Guidance is asked to avoid improper behavior and to have an equilibrated and conscious life. After sunset on 7 Tz'i' the day 8 B'atz' starts entering the present and usually the first Ajq'ijab' begin their pilgrimage to the sacred places of Momostenango.

The day 8 B'atz' is for the profession of Ajq'ij the most important day of the *chol q'ij*. Currently, all Ajq'ijab' that I have spoken agree that the day 8 B'atz' is the first day of the K'iche' calendar. On 8 B'atz' the Ajq'ijab' visit the main sacred places of Momostenango, performing ceremonies and leaving offerings at each of them (Figure 22). Those who come from the *aldeas* (surroundings) of Momostenango usually start visiting the altars from sunset on 7 Tz'i' onwards but the majority of Ajq'ijab' wait until 12 o'clock at night. The altars of Momostenango are crowded until at least sunset of the day 8 B'atz'. During the entire day all Ajq'ijab' who have been trained and initiated in Momostenango, come to the town and visit the five main altars: Nimasab'al, Alajsab'al, Pa Ja', Paklom, and Kokoch. Depending on the Ajq'ij and their specific education, the altar of Uja'al Santiago at the foot of Paklom is also included. On 8 B'atz' the Ajq'ij renews his/her bond with the sacred bundle and reinforces his/her promise to the community, the ancestors, the calendar and the world.



Figure 22. The 29th of January 2015: the day 8 B'atz' at Paklom.

The day 9 E' is the day of the new road (the mnemonic for E' is *ri b'e*, "the road") that follows the payments of the debts (6 Toj), the reiteration of the morals and values of the community (7 Tz'i') and the renewal of the promise (8 B'atz'). On this day, a clear road in life is petitioned together with guidance for the following 260 days. The ceremonies are publicly performed on the sacred place of Nimasab'al. For those who are initiated the previous day, 9 E' is the new road of being Ajq'ij.

The Initiation

The initiation ceremony is similar in practice and meaning to that of marriage (Ajxup Pelicó & Zapil Xivir, 1999, pp. 37-42). The *tz'ite* seeds that the novice receives after initiation are the *kulaj* ("spouse") of the Ajq'ij. The female Ajq'ijab' refer to their sacred bundle, in which they keep the *tz'ite* seeds, as *wachajil* ("my husband"), and the male Ajq'ijab' will call the bundle *wixoqil* ("my wife").

The bond between the Ajq'ij and the *tz'ite* is similar to that of spouses: the Ajq'ij takes care of the *tz'ite* and the *tz'ite* will complement the Ajq'ij. During the initiation ceremonies in 2014, don Rigoberto Itzep Chanchavac emphasized several times that just as with spouses, one should never leave their sacred bundle and should always treat it with respect and affection.

The private ceremony for initiation is comparable to that of marriage. In the case that the future Ajq'ij is not married, he/she will be presented to the ceremonial guide (the Chuchqajaw) and to the *tz'ite* seeds by his/her parents. The role of the parents in and after the ceremony is similar to their role in marriage: to support, accept, and advice about the duties that their child will have as Ajq'ij. Close relatives and friends are present in the ceremony as testimonies of the social commitment that takes place. In the case of a married Ajq'ij, his/her spouse is usually also trained and initiated together with his/

her partner. Even if the spouse is not initiated, the responsibility for fulfilling the norms and rules of being Ajq'ij is still shared in marriage, for example in the cases of sexual abstinence on ritual days.

While ceremonies on the day 6 Toj are similar to the initiated and the uninitiated alike, the activities on 7 Tz'i' and 8 B'atz' differ. In 2014 I was present at the initiation of three Ajq'ijab' under the training of don Rigoberto Itzep Chanchavac. The students were Ralankil Abyayala Itzep Hernández, Anita Garr, and Javier García. Because, according to don Rigoberto, the sacred altars of Momostenango would be overcrowded with Ajq'ijab' and disturbed by very loud *zarabanda* music performances on the day 8 B'atz', he chose to do the private rituals of 7 Tz'i' and public rituals of 8 B'atz' on one single day, 7 Tz'i' (15th of May 2014). The fact that it is possible to shift to an earlier moment or to postpone ritual activities shows the flexibility in religious practice among the specialists of Momostenango. I will discuss my experience of the initiation at don Rigoberto's house below.

At 9 o'clock in the morning of the day 7 Tz'i', the visitors – mostly relatives or very close friends of don Rigoberto and the future Ajq'ijab' – came to the house of the Chuchqajaw don Rigoberto Itzep. Some visitors also helped to decorate the house with flowers, pine needles and lemons. At 10:30am the ceremonies began. The novices entered the house patio in procession by passing through the front door and underneath an arch made of flowers and pine branches. Each of the novices was accompanied by three relatives or close friends, who helped to carry the offerings (Figure 23). Among these offerings were a woven basket with four *comales* (flat ceramic pans for warming up tortillas) and two ceramic vases, filled with pure water from the spring of *Uja'il Paklom*, and pine needles.

The short procession entered the patio and came to a close in the middle of it, where Chuchqajaw don Rigoberto sat on a bench shared with two Ajq'ijab' who would assist him during the initiation ceremony, one on each side of him (Figure 24). In front of them stood a table with the offerings. While the novice sat down in front of the table, one of the assistants recited a ceremonial discourse meant to present the novice and the offerings to the Chuchqajaw. As don Rigoberto explained in his opening speech, the three



Figure 23. The ceremonial entering of the house. The novice (in the back) is assisted and presented to his teacher by his relatives.



Figure 24. The authority of the initiation ceremony: Chuchqajaw don Rigoberto flanked by a male and a female Ajq'ij.



Figure 25. Ralankil Itzep receives her flower necklace and headband.

Ajq'ijab' behind the table represent the religious authority. He emphasized that by sitting in this way, they were not copying the social order, but, quite the opposite, the social order (the indigenous authority) was made according to a sacred hierarchy, expressed in the K'iche' calendar (see Chapter II). During his speech, don Rigoberto pointed out the importance of this moment and elaborated on the gifts that the Ajq'ijab' brought. After him, the other two Ajq'ijab' also addressed each of the novices personally. Both gave the future Ajq'ijab' advice on the social role of the Ajq'ij. It was emphasized that the Ajq'ij should never ask a specific price for their service, but will always accept whatever can be given. Following the speeches, don Rigoberto invited everybody present to join in reciting the "First Dawn" section (see appendix A lines 33 to 55) of the Popol Vuh, which is characteristic of don Rigoberto's teachings.



Figure 26. The novices have prepared their offerings in the four *comales* and are ready to perform the fire ceremonies.

After the speeches, each of the three future Ajq'ijab' received a flower necklace and headband, which we had prepared the evening before, a headband of four colors that distinguished the persons as Ajq'ijab', a necklace made of the *tz'ite* seeds, and personal gifts that had been blessed by don Rigoberto (Figure 25). The religious paraphernalia were handed to the participants by an Ajq'ij from the opposite sex.

Following the handing of the gifts and religious paraphernalia came the consumption of sacred atol, a ceremony referred to as *kwaq uja'il* ("we consume his drink"). The atol or *uja'il patan* ("the water of the service") was prepared by the doña María Hernández Ajanel, the wife of don Rigoberto Itzep, and her relatives. All visitors and participants were given a cup of atol, called *k'a*, that is especially prepared with crushed zapote seeds. This atol should be finished completely and



Figure 27. The novices perform the fire ceremonies in the four *comales*.

the residues should be taken out of the drinking cup. Repercussions, *kuya' k'ax* (“it gives pain”), will follow if the *atol* is not completely consumed.

After the consumption of *atol*, the novices performed fire ceremonies in the four *comales* that they brought. In each of the *comales* a fire was made and each of the 260 days were invoked (Figure 26 and Figure 27). The first time that they invoked the cycle of 260 days, the novices needed help from don Rigoberto. Later during the day, the novices had repeated the cycle of 260 days several times and were able to count it individually and express the appropriate ceremonial discourse independently.

To close the private ceremonies of the day, the participants danced together with the Chuchqajaw around the offerings and the *comales*. Finally, a ceremonial lunch of *caldo* and *tamalitos* (broth and small tamales), prepared again by doña María Hernández Ajanel, was shared with all visitors

(Figure 28). This lunch would usually conclude the activities for the day 7 Tz'i', but in this specific occasion it bridged the private morning ceremonies and the public afternoon ceremonies, of which the latter usually take place on 8 B'atz'.

After the lunch at home, we made a pilgrimage to the *komón* of Momostenango. Normally Nimasab'al is also visited on the initiation day but don Rigoberto decided to skip this altar due to his health problems; the complete pilgrimage from Nimasab'al, to Alajsab'al, Pa Ja', Paklom, and Kokoch is an intense hike. Each Ajq'ij has his/her personal place to perform ceremonies at the public altars. The exact location for the novice to perform his/her ceremonies was revealed in a divination ceremony performed by don Rigoberto, prior to the activities of 7 Tz'i' and 8 B'atz'. At the public altars, each of the novices performed a ceremony.



Figure 28. After the ceremonies all the visitors joined in for the lunch.

After arriving at the altar, pine needles were gently thrown in a circle around the altar. All the *comales* that had been used earlier in the day, were left at the first altar that was visited²⁹. After making a circle of flower leaves on the altar, don Rigoberto placed the *comales* neatly top-down in line on the spot where the future Ajq'ij would be performing their ceremonies in the future. The ashes and residues of previous private ceremonies held at home remain in the *comales*. The *comales* would remain there as an offering for the four year bearers (see Chapter II). The many ceramic sherds at the altars of Momostenango show that the new Ajq'ij follow the footsteps of the ancestors. Because all Chuchqajawib' visit the altars in a different sequence or start the procession at a different altar,

each of the altars Nimasab'al, Alajsab'al, Pa Ja', and Paklom have remains of many ceramic sherds and whole pots on their shrines. Each of these sacred sites consists for a part of broken ceramic sherds that past generations of initiated Ajq'ijab' have left there (Figure 30).

The same pattern of rituals was followed on the other altars that were visited that day: Pa Ja', Paklom, and Kokoch. At Pa Ja' the initiation ritual discourse invoked not the number-8 days but the number-1 days and at Paklom the number-6 days were invoked. At each following sacred altar, the student took a more independent role in the reciting the prayers and performing the ritual. The pilgrimage ended at the altar of Kokoch, in front of the church of Momostenango. Here the sacred bundle was handed to each apprentice, as a sign that they have become officially an Ajq'ij and accepted all duties and responsibilities that come with this role. The

²⁹ Because people do not always follow the same sequence in visiting the altars on 8 B'atz' and traditions may vary between persons, sherds of *comales* or whole *comales* can be found on each of the altars.



Figure 29. Ralankil Itzep performs her initiation ceremony at the altar of Alajsab'al.



Figure 30. A large part of the hill of Alajsab'al consists of ceramics sherds.

Chuchqajaw embraced the three new Ajq'ijab' one by one, and after him all those who are present followed in line to congratulate them, before each family finally went to their own house. On 9 E', the new Ajq'ijab' would perform their first individual ceremony at the altar of Nimasab'al.

