



## The Spring of Bats

*Nahua People - Mexico*

A long time ago a tribe arrived in the lands of Tlazincahuatl in San Luis Potosi. They did so exhausted from the obstacles overcome in a long pilgrimage that for years took them across deserts and lakes to find a promised sign. Weak and lost, they decided to stop searching and build a new home in a huge cave beside a magnificent spring.

One day, tired of removing huge stones and rubble from their new home, the settlers took a bath and enjoyed themselves in the delightful waters of the crystal-clear miracle of the earth.

As they all swam, the majestic tree from which the water originated shook its branches and began to speak. It was Tlaloc, god of the nectar of the earth, welcoming those he had been waiting for, as he had long needed someone to take care of this wondrous place. He gave them licence to live there, as long as they revered its water, and if they did, they would lack nothing.

For hundreds of years they offered dances, songs and prayers of all kinds to Tlaloc, because they were grateful to him for letting them live there. But as nothing lasts forever and time passes and people forget, after many generations everything changed. They did not provide the care that the water and the land deserved, they cut down the trees and the spring dried up.

Tlaloc was angry because they had killed the wonder of the place. As punishment, he sent a storm of rampaging bats to inhabit the cave so that no one could return to it.

Hundreds of years passed, but the people did not forget the grief and condemnation. So they moved to a nearby valley where they managed to restore the spring after a long time of proper care. As a result, the festivals and songs returned to the place.

Nowadays this tradition is still alive, now it is a happy and proud orange farming community which every year goes to the spring to thank Tlaloc for the beautiful source of life which was granted to them.

However, they carry in their hearts the memories of the bad times, which they pass on by word of mouth to the younger villagers because, if they forget them, not only will a merciless drought befall them, but terrible beasts will come and take their home in revenge. □

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## Comments

A wise story about the need of caring the natural resources, a story that has been passed down from generation to generation among the Nahua Peoples as a traditional knowledge linked to the care of the environment.

The Nahua Peoples are those who had in common the Nahuatl language, as well as a number of customs and beliefs. Strangely, Nahuatl remained widely used throughout the centuries of colonisation, perhaps because it was not suppressed by the Spanish colonisers, since it was declared the official language of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, along with Spanish, by King Philip II (1570). However, Nahuatl would begin a marked decline in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, it is still spoken by around three million people in Mexico, the United States and Honduras.

The Tepanec, Xochimilc, Chalca, Acolhua, Tlahuic, Tlaxcaltec and Aztec (Mexico) peoples are commonly identified as Nahua, although other sources (INPI, 2017; Pavón Cuéllar, 2021) add to these the Mixquicas, Matlazincas, Coixcas, Mallinalcs, Huexotzincs, Culhuacans, the Mexicaneros of Nayarit and Durango, the Nicaraos of Nicaragua and the Pipil of Guatemala and El Salvador. Considering that there are 59 distinct

indigenous peoples in Mexico, the diversity of the Nahua Peoples is an indication of the importance of their culture and the powerful economic, administrative and warrior civilisation they built in the Valley of Mexico until the arrival of the Spanish colonisers.

According to tradition, the Nahua Peoples had their origin in a marshy region they called Aztlán, located in the northern regions of present-day Mexico. Others speak about Chicomoztoc, while other authors say that the latter place was one of the stages of the pilgrimage which began in Aztlán and culminated with the arrival of the Nahua in the central valley of Mexico, and even beyond, expanding throughout Central America up to the present-day border between Costa Rica and Panama.

Sources suggest that this Nahua pilgrimage took place from 500 CE onwards, sometimes coming into collision with the Chichimec Peoples who occupied the region, and it is argued that the Nahua may have been involved in the collapse of Teotihuacan as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The Nahua developed Toltec culture between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, until they were invaded by the Chichimecs in 1168. Subsequently, after being subject to the Tepanecan government of the region between 1345 and 1428 (INPI, 2017), the Aztecs would lead the Nahua to their great civilisational apogee between 1430 and 1521, with the expansion of the great city of Tenochtitlán, which would eventually evolve into the present-day capital of Mexico.

We wish to express our heartfelt thanks to Norberto Zamora Pérez from the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples of Mexico (INPI) for facilitating our access to the rich cultural materials of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and for advising us on these issues. We are also grateful to César Eduardo García Martínez for kindly lending us his magnificent adaptation of the story 'The Spring of Bats.'

## Sources

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### *Associated text of the Earth Charter*

Principle 8b: Recognize and preserve the traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom in all cultures that contribute to environmental protection and human well-being.

### *Other passages that this story illustrates*

Preamble – Earth, Our Home: The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air.

Preamble - The Global Situation: The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species.

Principle 5b: Establish and safeguard viable nature and biosphere reserves, including wild lands and marine areas, to protect Earth's life support systems, maintain biodiversity, and preserve our natural heritage.

Principle 5e: Manage the use of renewable resources such as water, soil, forest products, and marine life in ways that do not exceed rates of regeneration and that protect the health of ecosystems.

Principle 7: Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.

Principle 7f: Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.

Principle 9a: Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.

