

Place of the Prickly Pear Cactus

(<http://aztecs.mrdonn.org/place.html>)



The ancient Aztecs believed in many gods and goddesses. Each god had a job to do.

The sun god, for example, brought the sun up every day.

The Aztecs believed it was important to keep the sun god happy. They truly believed if the sun god was not happy, he would refuse to bring up the sun, and the world would end.

The ancient Aztecs spent most of their time trying to keep their many gods happy and well fed.

The Aztecs believed that human sacrifice was necessary. They used people to feed their hungry gods. Some of the people sacrificed were Aztecs. But most of the people they sacrificed to keep their gods happy were people captured from neighboring tribes. This did not make them popular with their neighbors!

Each time the Aztecs tried to settle down and build a city of their own, other tribes in the area would band together to chase them away. No one wanted the Aztecs for a neighbor. The Aztecs were very sad about this. They did so want a city of their own.

According to legend ...

One day, the Aztecs were magically visited by their main god, the god of sun and war. He promised his people that they would have a city of their own some day, but they had to seek a specific and magically special place to build it. To find this special place, they were to look for an eagle, perched on a cactus, holding a snake.

"Not only that, but listen well," their main god told them. "When you find the magical place of the eagle, snake, and cactus, you are not to make war with your neighbors. You are to settle down peacefully until you gain strength, and use this peaceful time to build a glorious Aztec city, a city of your own, in honor of me."

For the next 200 years, the Aztecs wandered in the Valley of Mexico. They never doubted their main god. They never gave up. They were always on the lookout for an eagle, perched on a cactus, holding a snake in his mouth.

One morning, an Aztec priest was standing on the swampy shore of Lake Texcoco. He yawned and looked out across the lake. He could not believe his eyes. On one of the many small islands that dotted the lake, he saw an eagle, perched on a cactus, with a snake wiggling in its mouth.

The Aztecs had found their home at last. As the people gathered and stared in wonder, the cactus grew into a comfy island. It was on that island that the Aztecs founded their civilization. They named the island Tenochtitlan, "the Place of the Prickly Pear Cactus".