

Happy New Year 5521!

22.06.13

As in the past two years, we again joined hundreds of indigenous Aymara to celebrate the June 21 Winter Solstice halting the dawn of the new Aymaran year 5521.

We got up at 4:30 a.m. By 5:10, in utter darkness, we were climbing a nearby mountain along with crowds of other celebrants.



The sacred ceremony is led by Aymaran priests, called *yatiris*. The head priest, pictured below, opened the event by blessing the mountains, called *apus* or “protectors,” the sky, Lake Titicaca and its tributaries, and the people of all nations – he named countries in South America, Europe, and also the U.S.





The yatiris solemnly prayed for the blessings of the Supreme Spirit, *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), *Inti*, *Wara*, *Yassi* (Father Sun, Mother Moon, and the stars), and *Manco Kapac* and his sister/wife *Mama Ocqullo*, who, according to the Aymaran creation story, mystically appeared from nearby *Isla del Sol*, Sun Island, under direct orders from the sun after a very long period when the earth was a dark and lifeless wasteland.

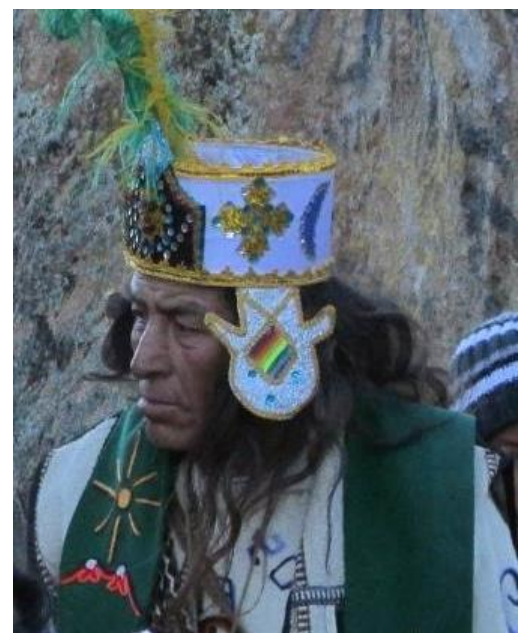


The 2000-year-old Solstice ceremony is primarily celebrated at three holy Aymaran sites: on *Isla del Sol*, in the ancient Tiwanacu ruins about two hours away from Copacabana, and on *Inti Watana*, a mountain overlooking Copacabana. At each site, celebrants turn their palms to the new Solstice sun as it crests the mountains. It's both a personal welcome to the New Year, and an invitation for a new dawning in each person's life.



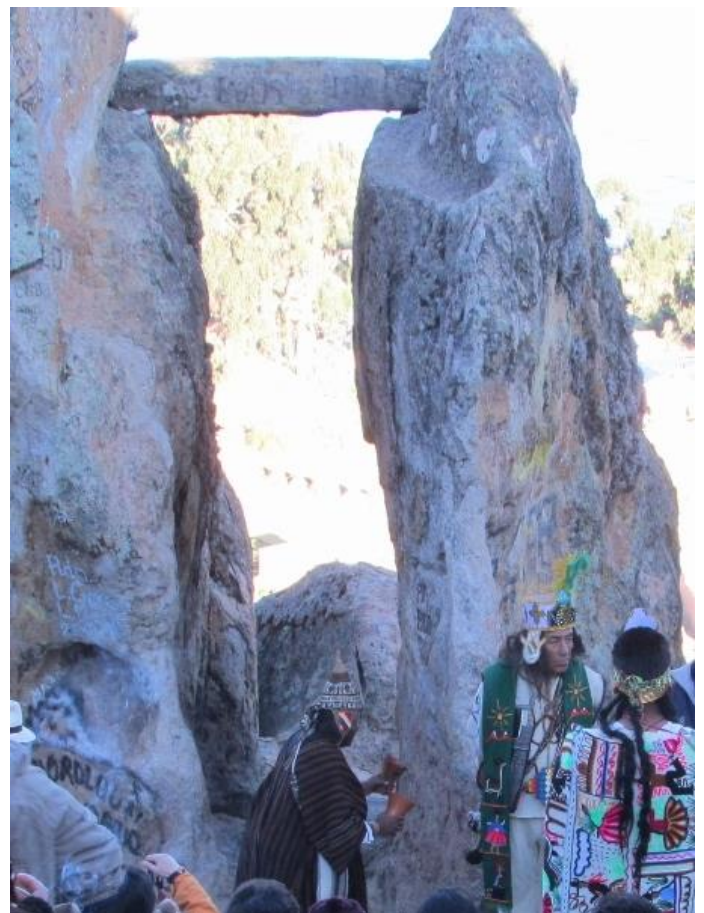


Many people bring sacrificial gifts, especially coca leaves, for Pachamama; she also has quite an appetite for grain alcohol and beer (look closely at the photos!). Wrapped in white paper, offerings to Pachamama are presented to the yatiri, who blesses gift and giver. The supplicant then circles counterclockwise around the bonfire, usually sprinkling alcohol or coca leaves, as the yatiri nestles the offering among the flames.





In Copa, about 20 minutes after the Solstice dawn, the sun rises high enough that rays pass through a hole carved in the rocky mountain top. If those rays illuminate a raised stone altar, it foretells a good growing season for the coming year. At our first Aymaran Solstice two years ago, moments before it would have flooded the altar with light, the sun was obscured by a sudden bank of clouds. In unison 2000 Aymara sighed dolefully. Months later, after the worst floods in memory, virtually the entire Altiplano harvest was lost.

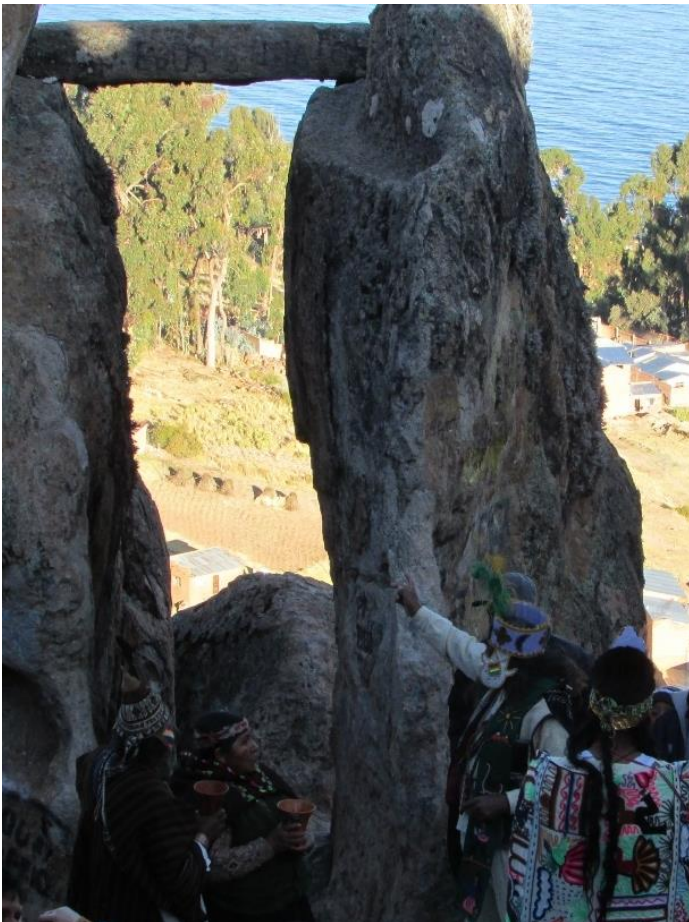


Just after sunrise and before the sun's rays reach the ancient altar, a ritual is performed to bless the mountain and thank it for its role in the ceremony.

This year, just minutes before the sun would rise enough to shoot rays through the portent stone portal, a six- or seven-year-old boy thrust his face into the backside of the hole, grinning and laughing. Two grumbling men rushed behind the stone tower. Instantly the kid was yanked away. Alas, Jeff couldn't get to the camera fast enough to capture that.



Moments later on the stone altar, a simple circle of light glowed with the promise of a good crop year.



Everyone shouted “*Jallalla!*” (ha YA ya), Aymara for “Hooray!” In celebration, big hugs and greetings of “*Wali Suma Machaq Mara!*” Aymara for “Very Happy New Year!” were shared all around, along with bags of fresh coca leaves.

Wali Suma Machaq Mara to everyone!

We are all a part of this ancient cycle of renewal and rejuvenation no matter where on Earth we call home. Turn with hope and eager anticipation to welcome the endless possibilities as each new day dawns in your life.

