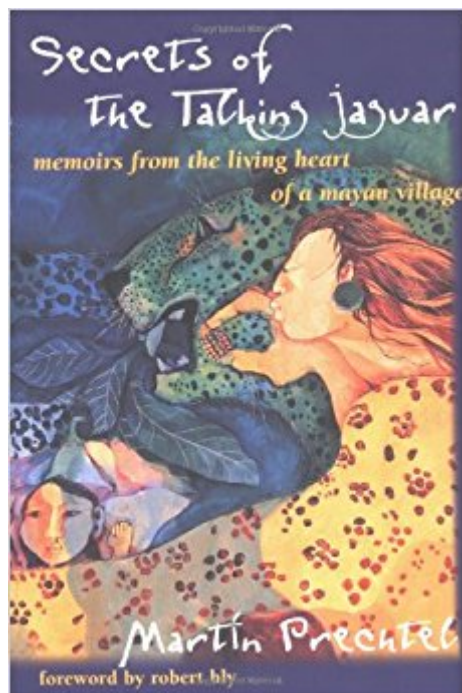




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# Secrets Of The Talking Jaguar: Memoirs From The Living Heart Of A Mayan Village



## Synopsis

Twenty-five years ago, a young musician and painter named Martin Prechtel wandered through the brilliant landscapes of Mexico and Guatemala. Arriving at Santiago Atitlan, a Tzutujil Mayan village on the breathtaking shores of Lake Atitlan, Prechtel met Nicolas Chiviliu Tacaxoy--perhaps the most famous shaman in Tzutujil history--who believed Prechtel was the new student he had asked the gods to provide. For the next thirteen years, Prechtel studied the ancient Tzutujil culture and became a village chief and a famous shaman in his own right. In *Secrets of the Talking Jaguar*, Prechtel brings to vivid life the sights, sounds, scents, and colors of Santiago Atitlan: its magical personalities, its beauty, its material poverty and spiritual richness, its eight-hundred-year-old rituals juxtaposed with quintessential small-town gossip. The story of his education is a tale filled with enchantment, danger, passion, and hope.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As late as the 1970s, among the Tzutujil Indians of Santiago Atitlan, in Guatemala, there was no word for "time," and the concept closest to the verb "to be" was the state of "belonging to"--in this case, to their village, which these descendants of ancient Mayans believed was the center of the universe. At the core of their philosophy was a rejection of progress--everything of importance had happened in the past. Their religion, which relied on communion with animal and plant spirits to understand daily existence, appealed deeply to Prechtel, a half Native American who grew up on a Pueblo reservation near Santa Fe: "The new aromas, the new sounds, things that I'd never seen

before, spun me into a trance, amplifying my already well-established erotic relationship with the landscape, my verdant quest to find a way to merge and mate with the spirit of the world." In his engaging first book, Prechtel describes his apprenticeship to Nicolas Chiviliu Tacaxoy, a shaman who taught him healing and divination skills, and his 13 years living as a Tzutujil. While his view seems at times romanticized, the picture he creates of idyllic Indian life?of the Indians' well-being, colorful rituals and rapport with nature?is so beautifully drawn that his delight in their culture becomes contagious, as does his grief when civil war creates havoc in their village. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Secrets of the Talking Jaguar: A Mayan Shaman’s Journey to the Heart of the Indigenous Soul” is Martin Prechtel’s first book, released in 1998. It’s a book about his journey from childhood in New Mexico as an outcast part-Native American to his true life and home in the then-Mayan city of Santiago Atitlan in Guatemala. A shaman named Chiv summoned him there, and became his teacher. It’s a book about the contrast between the culture of the alien US and the indigenous culture of the Maya. That’s a good starting point - the question of what it means not to be indigenous. To be indigenous means to truly have a home, to belong. But so then what are we in the US? What is most of the modern world?

We’re aliens. We’re homeless, lost, and unstable. Martin paints a beautiful picture of a culture that no longer exists. Military started coming in and breaking up the community in the 80s. Although a high percentage of the individuals serviced, their village was a culture dependent on many roles. Even with less than half being killed, running a way, or converting, the culture wasn’t able to survive.

**NOTABLE FRAGMENT** Political leaders had to be married. This gave leadership a 50:50 male:female split. This wasn’t done in the interest of these individual, but for the sake of the community. When leaders move up a rank, they throw a giant party and give away all of their wealth. Don’t trust a skinny shaman. Shamans are partially paid in food, and in a culture where food is scarce, fat is idolized. All Mayan houses are only one room. Their entrance is their mouth. The concept of a door is outside of their paradigm. We are each the House of the World, just as the outside is also the House of the World. Together these two form a mirror, for everything that can be found in the exterior can also be found in the interior. The concept of existence isn’t a part of Mayan culture. Everything “is” only in its relationship to everything else. The names for relatives in Tzutujil are subjective. There is no word for aunt - you describe the relationship to

the person we call aunt, depending on the specifics of where you are. You can't ask as the question, "who am I?" There is no being, or doing - only relationship.

I give this book ten out of five stars. It's really that good. After reading it I shipped a copy of it to a friend. Excited to share the magic within and also to have someone with which to talk about it with. Prechtel draws you in with the magic of his words and somehow manages to let it sink into your heart. I had some many moments of just pure wonder and my mind blown throughout reading this book. He somehow manages to explain the elegance of the Mayan way of life. How the sacred is merged into every aspect of their life but in a way a western reader can understand. His words are like seeds that he waters throughout the book till they are blooming inside you at the end. Magical and powerful book. You won't regret buying this one.

I can't say for certain whether everything presented in this book is completely factual. However, I can say that he presents an absolutely fascinating portrayal of the Mayans around Lake Atitlan - we have a friend who has spent time there, among them - and their traditional lifestyle.

This is the first of Martin Prechtel's books. Recommended by someone who has studied with the author, I found this book provocative and engaging. Prechtel is a shaman of great depth, sincerity and insight and he shares his spiritual journey with honesty and intensity. In no way can I do his work justice in a short paragraph. I was inspired, engaged and intrigued and wanted to continue on with the many books that followed. His teachings convey a deep respect for one's heritage and provides continuing inspiration to continue forward with meaning and commitment.

This is a fantastic journey. I wish I could have met Chiv. Martin is a great storyteller. He makes one feel his pain and his joy.

Good, thought-provoking reading.

Anyone with an interest in indigenous people as well as a lust for fascinating accounts of wayward travellers will find this impossible to put down. Humorous, yet poetic at times, the writer has a gift to share, and he does so with incredible dexterity. The insights into how the Maya lived within nature, their social hierarchy, inside jokes, love of life, and slow victimization by 20th (and 21st) century

power-mongers make this account a valuable resource for all human beings. Interestingly, the Mayan calendar, put forth centuries ago, ends within this decade, fodder for Armageddon-theorists in the last half century. Prechtel's book helps to explain how this happened before his eyes and the role he has come to play in keeping the soul of the Maya alive. This should be a must-read for anthropologists, linguists, spiritualists, environmentalists, economists, missionaries of all faiths, travellers, and policy makers. And yet with such a broad base, it remains a fascinating narrative as well. This was unquestionably one of the best books I have ever read.

A glimpse into a world we would have never seen were it not for the experiences and grand writing style of this wonderful and important man, Martin Prechtel. This book will always be in my library. His stories will always be in my heart.

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