

## WHO ARE THE HUICHOL?

The Huichol Indians are among the last of the world's indigenous cultures that have been able to maintain their way of life and spiritual traditions into this new millennium. They live in remote regions of the Sierra Madre Mountains of western Mexico. Although some of their villages that lie near Mexican towns can now be reached by car, many of their communities and ceremonial centers are still isolated by mountainous terrain.

Nature is truly the home of the Huichol. Without supermarkets for food, electricity for lights or television, and roads for transportation, they practice sustenance farming, walk wherever they go, and wake and sleep with the cycles of the sun and moon. Their rich, nature-based spiritual tradition permeates every aspect of their life. For them, everything in the environment is alive, containing life force or soul. This is why corn, clouds, trees, flowers, and even rocks are sacred.

Most sacred of all are the spirits that give life to and nourish the world: Sun, Earth, Water, Air and Fire. The Huichol express their reverence for these natural powers in terms of kinship, calling them, as Tunuri learns to call them, our "Father Sun" or our "Mother Earth." Another important spirit is the Blue Deer—Kahullumari—who is the messenger between the worlds of mortals and spirits.

*The Journey of Tunuri and the Blue Deer* is a modern adaptation of a traditional Huichol story of a boy or girl finding his or her task in life by connecting with the powers of nature through the help of the sacred Blue Deer and the sacred cactus, *hikuri*, two of the most important elements of the Huichol spiritual tradition. It is important to note that this story is not based on a legend or fable; on the contrary, all of its characters (except Tunuri and his family) and places are as real to the Huichol as our families and homes are to us.

The setting of the story is Wirikuta, a special area in the state of St. Louis Potosi, Mexico, to which the Huichol make pilgrimages to find a

"vision" that guides their life. It is here in Wirikuta that they encounter Kahullumari, from whose footprints grow the sacred flowers of *hikuri* (peyote). Through the visions delivered by Kahullumari and *hikuri*, the pilgrims find answers to questions such as Who am I?, Why am I here?, and What is my task in life?

The sacred mountain Ra' Unarre, where Father Sun—Tayau—was born, is found in Wirikuta. The Huichol have many sacred sites, and in this story Kahullumari takes Tunuri to some of them so that he can meet his sacred relatives where they live. Tunuri visits Rapavillame, or Lake Chapala in Spanish; Tatai Urianaka—Mother Earth; and Tekata, where Grandfather Fire lives. The Huichol routinely make pilgrimages to these places as part of their annual ceremonial calendar. They bring offerings to the sacred sites in order to show respect and keep balance between their communities and the forces of Nature that give them life.

However, they don't do it for themselves alone. Like the Hopi of the southwestern United States, the Huichol believe that their sacred tradition of pilgrimages, offerings, and prayers keeps balance for the whole world and all living beings, and if they were to stop or be unable to continue such honoring, it would mean the end of the world. This is one reason why the elders and leaders of contemporary Huichol communities now spend much time and effort trying to maintain and preserve the sacred sites. Even so, many are in serious danger of destruction.

It is my hope that sharing stories such as *The Journey of Tunuri and the Blue Deer* will heighten awareness of the nature-based cultures that still survive on our marvelous planet. Despite all our differences in lifestyle, we all share the same Sun, Earth, Air, and Water, which means we are all connected in this sacred web of life.

To find out how you can help preserve Huichol sacred sites and culture, visit [www.JamesEndredy.com](http://www.JamesEndredy.com).

## HUICHOLO SACRED SYMBOLS

The drawings in *The Journey of Tunuri and the Blue Deer* are filled with creatures and objects that are sacred symbols to the Huichol people. Each of them represents something very important, and many of them are used in Huichol sacred practices and offerings. See how many of these you can find in the story's drawings.



This is a *muvieri*, the shaman's (priest's) wand that helps him communicate with the world of nature and spirit. It is made from Brazil wood and sacred eagle feathers.

This is *Kahullumari*, the *spirit deer*, who is the guide, messenger, and guardian of the sacred desert of Wirikuta.



This is a *prayer arrow*, which is used as a sacred offering to the spirits by men and boys. It is made from Brazil wood and reed and is painted with colored resin.



This is the *sacred eagle*, messenger of Father Sun and the sacred places.

These are the *sacred snakes*, spirit animals of the rain.

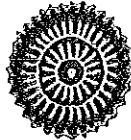


This is the *ririki*, the sacred house and temple, where prayer offerings are kept.

This is *hikuri*, the sacred peyote cactus that lives in the desert of Wirikuta.



This is a *nierika*, a portal between our world and the spirit world.



This is the *sacred butterfly*, who announces the arrival of transformative visions.

These are a *prayer gourd and candle*, which are used as sacred offerings by women and girls. The inside of the gourd is covered with beeswax and is then beautifully adorned with colored beads or yarn.

