

Aztec Friendship Dance: Indigenous Rituals & Histories

Though it is widely assumed that the Native Americans, American Indians, or Indigenous People of America are gone, we still very much exist, and continue to fight to protect and preserve our cultures, our lands, our waters, and our people. Indigenous People exist throughout what we call “Turtle Island”, from the top tip of Alaska, to the bottom islands of Chile and Argentina.

Borders that separate countries, such as the one between the United States of America and Mexico, or between Peru and Colombia, don't mean much to Indigenous People. We have been here, together, before these countries existed; and we will be here after they leave or change. We are connected, and unified, by the lands and skies of Turtle Island.

Cuauhtémoc at 5 years old, at the Mount Madonna Powwow, and Cuauhtémoc at 20 years old, dancing at the Stanford Powwow.



Aztec Dance, or Danza Azteca, is the name for the dances of the Mexica People: the people of the sun. This name is where the country of Mexico gets its name from: the land of the Mexica People became Mexico.

Many of the dances we practice have roots, moves, and choreographies from before the invasion of the Spanish kingdom, making some dances over a thousand years old. The friendship dance is one such dance; and so is *Tlaloc*, or “the rain dance”.

For the Aztec/Mexica people, dance is a prayer, and dancing heals the earth. As we move, we believe we change the flow of energy around us. And so, we must be positive in our thinking when dancing, so that we always influence the flow of energy towards a good way: toward health. It is an important responsibility to be a dancer.

Before we dance, we must always call upon the spirits of the ancestors. They are our forefathers who gave us the knowledge and energy to dance. It would be disrespectful to dance without thanking them for all they have done for us. We do this by thanking the four directions.

East—The Direction of **Male** Energy (the entranceway, where the sun rises): men, warriors, healers, leaders, protectors, caretakers.

West—The Direction of **Women** Energy (the focus of the circle, the internal world, where the sun sets): women, warriors, healers, leaders, protectors, caretakers.

North—The Direction of **Elders**: the departed, the old one, wisdom, history, tradition, and the spirits.

South—The Direction of the **Children**: the newborn, the fresh, the playful, the creative, the innovative, and the spirits.

Sky—The *Unifying* Direction of the **Sun**, air, rain, stars, birds, bees, and butterflies.

Earth—The *Unifying* Direction of the **Earth**, water, rivers, place, food, growth, and home.

Tlaloc is the name of the Rain God—and so the rain dance is named after, and for him. He has huge eyes, and jaguar teeth, and is a fierce warrior of the sky. He is the god of Rain, Frost, and Disease. His symbols on earth are the tree frog, and the deer. As we dance together, we enact his elements to honor him, and ask for good healing waters to rain down upon us.



The Friendship Dance is about sharing who we are, and what we are thankful for, in our lives. All Aztec Dances are at some level friendship dances, because we add elements of ourselves in the dancing. But, this dance is especially made to see each other, listen, and be thankful for our new and old friends.

The leader of the dance will start out with a **permiso**, an asking of permission from the ancestors to dance. *It looks like a mini four direction ritual.* And then, each dancer in the friendship dance will offer a movement to add to the dance. After we have shared our movements with each other, in a two-step, we dance into a serpent, to unify us, and remind us that our journey through life is never alone, but always accompanied by friends.

For more information on Aztec Dance or Culture, please visit <http://www.tezkatlipoka.com/tezkatlipoka-aztec-dance-home> or www.facebook.com/TlalocSJ