

The Legend of Quetzalcoatl

Find out why cocoa is called the 'food of the gods'...

One day, Quetzalcoatl, the god of learning, came down to Earth on the rays of a morning star. This both surprised and delighted the people, who knew that he was no ordinary mortal. They built a huge five storey temple for him to live in, with a roof held up by four stone columns which were carved in the shape of men. The outside of the temple was decorated with butterflies and lined with statues of tigers.

Quetzalcoatl loved his people and liked living among them. He decided to give them a gift of a very special plant. Knowledge of this plant was jealously guarded by the other gods, who used it to make a drink which was only for them. Quetzalcoatl stole the small bush from paradise and brought it to Earth. He planted it, and asked his friend Tlaloc, the god of rain and life, to water it, and his friend Xochiquetzal, the goddess of fertility and vegetation, to tend to it. The tree flowered and fruit pods grew on it. Quetzalcoatl took the pods and showed the people how to roast and grind the beans that were inside. He showed them how to mix this powder with water and whip it into a frothy drink.

When the other gods realised what Quetzalcoatl had done with their sacred plant, they were furious. They asked Tezcatlipoca, the god of darkness and night, to bring about the downfall of Quetzalcoatl. He came down to Earth on the thread of a spider. He disguised himself as a merchant, and went to speak to Quetzalcoatl.

"You are looking very sad today my lord," Tezcatlipoca said.

"I had a terrible dream that the gods were plotting against me," Quetzalcoatl sighed, "I am worried for my people."

"Then I offer you this drink - it is the drink of happiness," Tezcatlipoca said. "Take it and be happy."

Quetzalcoatl drank the juice, not realising it would make him very drunk. He danced and jumped about, frightening the people of Earth, who did not understand their god's strange behaviour. Finally exhausted, Quetzalcoatl fell asleep.

In the morning, he awoke with a bad headache and foul breath. He realised that the other gods had ridiculed him and tricked him into losing the respect of his beloved people. He left the city, too ashamed to stay any longer. As he passed all the cocoa bushes he had given his people, he noticed that they had all turned into dry plants with thorns. Devastated, he walked all the way to the sea. Just before he left the land, he placed the last cocoa seed he had on the ground.

In time, this seed grew into a cocoa tree - Quetzalcoatl's last parting gift to the people he loved. He promised to return one day...]

