

Guide to Huichol Symbols

These symbols come from the Huichol Indian tribe and have been used for hundreds if not thousands of years. They express complex pre-Colombian beliefs that revolve around Shaman or medicine men who consume the hallucinogenic peyote cactus to speak with their gods who tell them where to hunt the deer and when to plant the corn. Today most people know the Huichol for their colorful bead art and yarn paintings which have evolved from offerings that they make to appease their gods. The symbols within the art have great meaning to the Huichol. Carl Lumholtz, one of the first to study the Huichol, wrote in 1901 – *"All sacred things are symbols to primitive man, and the Huichol seem literally to have no end of them. Religion is to them a personal matter, not an institution, and therefore their life is religious – from the cradle to the grave wrapped up in symbolism."*



Corn – the lifeblood of the Huichol. A gift from the gods. There are five colors of corn that come from Great Grandmother's five daughters.



Peyote – a sacred cactus. The doorway to the spirit world, it grew from the foot prints of the gods or heart of the deer and is what the mara'akame or shaman eat to communicate with their gods.



Deer (Tail) – are gods who give their lives so that the tribe can eat. They are spiritual guides who teach the Huichol how to make offerings to appease the gods.



Peyote Sun – with prayer arrows as rays, it represents the male energy that comes down so the corn will grow. It is the master of the heavens with the wisdom of the sacred peyote cactus.



Drums – used by the shaman during the harvest ceremony to thank the gods for the successful corn harvest.



Prayer Arrows – the points of contact between God and man. They are left in sanctuaries to ask favors of the gods.



Flowers – sometimes shown with a stem and other times without.



Fire – light, warmth, the power to cook. It is considered one of the oldest most important deities, Tatewari who must be fed.



Shaman – spirit guides and medicine men. They communicate with the gods and perform the rituals and ceremonies where the Huichol ask their gods to bring the wind that sends the clouds that contain the rain the corn needs to grow.



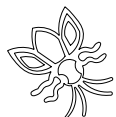
Pilgrims – Huichol who go on the arduous journey to leave offerings in the many sanctuaries including Wirikuta where the sacred peyote cactus grows.



Feathers – used by the shaman on their wands or muvieri to communicate with their gods. The most powerful come from the tail of the Royal eagle or hawk.



Gila Monsters – reptiles with magical healing powers. They are used by mara'akame or shaman to cure the sick.



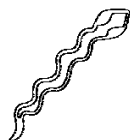
Bees – create the wax the Huichol need to make candles. They pollinate the fruit trees and their honey is an important nutrient in their diet.



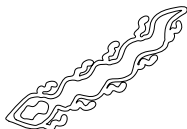
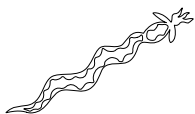
Salamanders – evolved out of the ocean. They are the reptiles responsible for bringing the clouds that bring the rain.



Spiders – employed by the gods to ensure that the ceremonies and traditions are properly carried out. The fear of a spider bite ensures the gods that the ceremonies will be carried out.



Snakes – sacred messengers, they take the messages from the mara'akame or shaman up to the gods and come back in the form of rain.



Eagle – a female deity who is married to the Sun. She flies over the Huichol and protects the community.



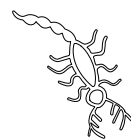
Rattlesnakes – the tongue of the Great Grandfather Fire, or Tatewari, they teach the mara'akame or shaman how to heal.



Butterflies – a symbol of good luck. Something the Huichol strive to transform into with its grace as it floats from flower to flower through the air.



Wolves – the Huichol believe that their ancestors were wolves. Powerful shaman can become shape shifters turning from human into the animal form of a dog or a wolf.



Scorpions – feared and respected. One of the leading causes of infant mortality. They are employed by the gods to protect the peyote where it grows in the desert.



Fish – special offerings used in ceremonies to feed the gods. They live in the rivers and in the ocean. It is from the fish in the ocean that life began.

