

The Hero Twins – A Mayan Myth

A long time ago, there lived two Mayan twin boys named One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu. They were the first generation of Hero Twins and they were very talented at playing ball games. Huge crowds of people would come to see the twins play, but the crowd's cheers were so loud that they attracted the attention of the Lords of Death.

The Lords of Death lived in the underworld and liked to trick people into dying by putting them through a series of tests. They especially liked to trick people who were bothering them, and the twins were far too noisy playing their ball game! So the Lords of Death sent an invitation inviting them to play a ball game in the underworld. They explained that the twins had to make it safely into the underworld and call each Lord of Death by their name.

The twins had to bring their rubber ball and protective gear with them, but instead, they hid them under the rafters in their mother's house and then set out to reach the underworld. They had to cross three rivers to reach the Lords of Death: a river of spikes, a river of blood and a river of pus. They crossed each river safely and had passed the first test.

When the twins reached the underworld, they greeted the Lords of Death before them by name. Only these weren't the real Lords of Death, they were wooden statues, the twins had failed a test! The real Lords of Death came out and told them not to worry and to take a seat on the bench beside them. The boys sat on the bench and leapt back up again in shock; the bench had burned them! The twins had failed a second test.

Because the twins had failed the test, the Lords of Death sacrificed them and buried them under the ballcourt in the underworld. However, the head of one of the Hunahpu twins was placed on a branch in the fork of a tree. A lady named Blood Woman came and sat down by the tree and spoke to the head. When she returned home that day, she found out that she was pregnant and later gave birth to twins. They were the next generation of Hero Twins.

The Hero Twins grew up to be gardeners but every time they tried to clear the underbrush, the jungle animals put it straight back again. The twins set up snares and had no success, until they caught a rat. They were about to roast the rat over a fire until the rat spoke, wanting to save its life. "You aren't supposed to be gardeners!" it squealed, "your father and uncle were great ball players. You're destined to be great too, you just need the proper gear."

The rat led the twins to their grandmother's house and scurried up to the rafters, "Your father and uncle's ball and gear is up here in the rafters." The twins retrieved the previous twins' gear and thanked the rat, giving it some food and a drink of water. With their fathers ball and gear, the twins practised the game and soon became as great as the other Hero Twins. Once more, the crowds cheered and this angered the Lords of Death.

The Hero Twins were invited to the underworld to play a ball game by the Lords of Death. However, after talking to the rat, they knew about their father's mistakes and what to do when they reached the underworld. When the Gods tried to trick them with wooden carvings, the boys used a mosquito to bite them. This was to determine which of them were real when they reacted to the bite. They also refused to sit on the fiery bench, therefore passing both tests.

The Lords of Death were shocked as to why the twins weren't fooled, so they gave them more tests. They were sent to different houses where they had to complete a challenge in each one. In the blade house they would have been cut to ribbons but they crawled under the blades to escape them. In the jaguar house, they distracted the cats with bones. The twins knew they would be put through test after test until they died.

After passing all of the tests, the Lords of Death challenged the boys to a ball game. Again, the Lords tried to fool the twins by using a ball covered in sharp blades. The twins saw what the Gods had done and said they wouldn't play ball unless they played fair. The Gods agreed to play fair, but the boys knew they intended to kill them if they won. The twins won and the Lords of Death were furious. They told the twins to jump over a huge oven but instead they jumped into it. The twins were turned to ash and the Lords of Death sprinkled their ashes over the river of blood.

However the Hero Twins were not dead, it was all a part of their plan. When their ashes became a part of the river, they reincarnated as catfish and then over time were fully restored as themselves. The Hero Twins now possessed powers of the Gods and could kill things and bring them back to life again. They decided to travel and perform tricks for a living and the Lords of Death soon heard about their amazing act. They invited the twins to the underworld to perform and were delighted when they killed a dog and brought it back to life again. "Do us next!" one of the Lords cried.

The twins killed one of the Lords of Death and, when they didn't bring him back to life, the other Gods looked alarmed. The Lords of Death knew that they had been defeated. Rather than risk losing any other Lords, they sent the twins back to Earth and promised not to bother them again.

The Gods of the Heavens, who had provided a great deal of the magic, honoured the courage and cleverness of the Hero Twins by bringing them up to the sky to join them. One of the twins became the moon and the other became the sun. Their children became the rulers of the Earth.