

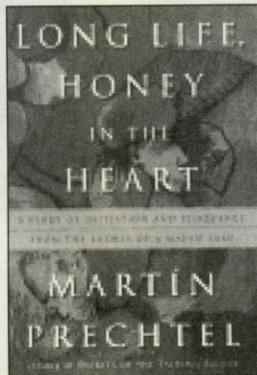


Martín Prechtel's *Honey in the Heart* continues amazing story of shamanism & initiation

Long Life, Honey in the Heart: Mayan Initiation, the Flowering of Eloquence

Martín Prechtel
25.95, (22.06) Hardcover -
288 pages . Tarcher, JT32

Teacher, shaman and artist Martín Prechtel's literary debut last year, **Secrets of the Talking Jaguar**, (13.95, JT28p) was a mind-blowing first-hand account of shamanic education and initiation in the Tzutujil Mayan village of Santiago Atitlan in Guatemala in the 1970s.



Now in **Long Life, Honey in the Heart**, Prechtel continues his autobiography with a detailed chronicle of a different sort of initiation, that of adolescent boys and girls into adulthood. Besides providing a unique insider's view of ancient initiation rituals, Prechtel's book also honors and mourns a culture that in the past 20 years has largely succumbed to the violent onslaught of Western modernity.

Where Prechtel's earlier book focused on the fantastic adventures of the young shaman-in-training, **Long Life** lovingly describes Prechtel's years as a husband, father, and village healer, as well as his service in the local religious hierarchy, the Scat Mulaj.

Long Life captures in vivid prose the unending tug of war involved in maintaining connections between the sacred world and the everyday world. For instance, the Mayans consider a floor in the hole in the Catholic church (built on the site of a Mayan temple) a sacred "mouth" through which the divine can be ritually fed. In a comic yet deadly serious struggle, the Catholics fill the hole with concrete again and again while the Mayans return and dig it out each time. A stone cover finally proves to be the

good-natured solution: "When a ritual dictated that we get into the Hole, we simply removed the stone cover with great reverence and prayer, replacing it when we were finished. And with that the Catholics let it all go, as now they could pretend it wasn't there."

This cultural jousting turns tragic in the 1980s, when both Left and Right join forces to crush indigenous spiritual practices, including the initiation of youth. In a display of cunning and determination, Prechtel, as young men's chief, succeeds in the difficult task of mustering a voluntary youth initiation after the government has ruled against the traditional mandatory initiation. This requires tremendous courage of all participants, and Prechtel doesn't minimize the risks: "Initiation was a dangerous ritual, spiritually precarious and physically hazardous. Chiefs and Ladies as well as initiates had died in doing it in years before."

No brief review can suggest the complicated sensual splendor of the Mayan world to which Prechtel brings an artist's eye for beauty. Much in that culture is based on the principle of courtship; not only earthly lovers, but the community and the gods themselves must be courted with eloquent words and beautiful offerings. In relating such courtships, Prechtel's voice itself attains gorgeous heights of eloquence.

Long Life, Honey in the Heart especially comes to life in its large cast of unforgettable characters, such as old man Ears who refuses to stay dead. And there is Prechtel's mentor A Sisay, who teaches him the powerful principle of kas-limaal, or mutual indebtedness: "The idea is to get so entangled in debt that no normal human can possibly remember who owes whom what, and how much . . . the Honey in our Heart comes from the tears of village indebtedness." The reader who takes Prechtel's Honey into his or her heart will find the flavor lingering there a long time.

—TRS

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Prechtel expands on the themes of grief and praise

Grief & Praise: Survival of the Male Soul

Martín Prechtel
10.00 (8.50) audio cassette, 45 minutes, 1999, CMC7

In this 45 minute tape presented at the Chicago Men's Conference, Martín expands on a subject he first introduced in a lecture given in 1998 (**Grief & Praise**, HW01, 10.00). Drawing again on his experiences with the Mayan people and on different styles in expressing and releasing grief, Martín's amazing

comparisons between cultures result in helpful insights. "Grief, inappropriately expressed," he concludes, "always turns to violence."

In opening remarks to the conferees Martín tells and elaborates on some of his personal story, detailing his lineage from Swiss and Canadian ancestry and his growing up on a Southwestern Indian reservation. Martín's talk, as usual, is both entertaining and deeply touching.

