

It is common to classify Native American customs, mode of life, social structure, and religious beliefs according to 15 geographic areas which differ significantly in climate, vegetation, terrain, and availability of food. The usual order of listing of them is: arctic, subarctic, northeast (or eastern woodlands), southeast, plains (or prairies), plateau, northwest coast, great basin, California, southwest, middle America (or Mesoamerica), Caribbean, Andes, tropical forest, and South American marginal. Differences in religion tend to be associated with these different general areas. For purposes of this encyclopedia, there will be a four-fold division: North America, Central America, South America, and Maya. Only the Māyā and Inca receive any extensive discussion in early theosophical writings. Recently, there have been theosophical publications concerning the natives of North America, but even those do not explore the religious ideas theosophically. This article shall cover the Central American and North American Indian Religions.

It is hypothesized by some anthropologists that humans migrated to the Americas as long as 35,000 years ago by way of the Bering Straits during the glacial period because the ice mass covering North America had caused the ocean levels to recede significantly, affording a solid land bridge where there are now a chain of islands (the Aleutians). The theosophical view, as articulated by Blavatsky, suggests that the migration came westward much earlier from Europe and northern Africa (*IU* I:552), since she claims similarities between ideas among “the Mexican Indians” (presumably Olmecs, Mixtecs, Toltecs, Mayans, and Aztecs) and the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Egyptians in the use of the tau (*IU* II:254; cf. I:555, 572), the name of their priests (*IU* I:556; *SD* II:213), some religious ideas (*IU* I:551, 553-4, 557-60), and certain taboos relating to fire, which either came from or spread to other areas, such as the Sioux in the plains of North America (*IU* I:248). And there is the obvious similarity between the pyramids of Egypt and those in Mexico and Central America. But she also states that there was a direct contact between the American continent and the Euro-African continent during the Atlantean period (*IU* I:558; *SD* II:407 fn) and that the ideographs used by the “Red Indians,” i.e., the hieroglyphics used by Olmecs, Mixtecs, Toltecs, and Mayans, are related to Senzar, the sacred language of the Atlanteans (*SD* II:439). She claims that “man has lived in America at least 50,000 years ago” (*CW* II:335). That would mean the ancestors of those people migrated to what are now the Americas