

# Soyal: Hopi Winter Solstice Ceremony

**Soyal** is the winter solstice ceremony of the Pueblo, Zuni and Hopi (Hopitu Shinumu) Indians, The Peaceful Ones. It is held on or near **December 21**, the shortest day of the year. The ritual ceremonially brings the sun back from its long winter slumber. It also marks the beginning of another cycle of the Wheel of the Year, and is a time for purification. Paphos, prayer sticks, are made prior to the Soyal Ceremony, to bless all the community, including their homes, animals, and plants. This is the longest ceremony on the ceremonial cycle, lasting up to 16 days. The sacred underground ritual chambers, called kivas, are ritually opened to mark the beginning of the Kachina season.



The Native American name for this important ceremony is ‘Soyalangwul’ from which the term ‘Soyal’ is derived.

The ceremony begins on the shortest day of the year, and symbolizes the second phase of Creation at the Dawn of Life. Its prayers and rituals implement a plan of life for the coming year, ceremonially turning back the sun toward its summer path.

## Kachinas Come Down from the Peaks to Establish Life Anew

The Hopi People, indigenous inhabitants of northern Arizona, celebrate December as when the Kachinas come down from their home in the San Francisco Peaks to bring the sun back to the world. The Katsinam or Kachinas, spirits that guard over the Hopi, dance at the winter solstice Soyal Ceremony (Soyaluna or Soyalangwul), understood to mean “Establishing Life Anew for All the World.” The Hopi/Hisatsinom are one of the many Pueblo tribes in the Southwest.



“Katsinam are Hopi spirit messengers who send prayers for rain, bountiful harvests and a prosperous, healthy life for humankind. They are our friends and visitors who bring gifts and food, as well as messages to teach appropriate behavior and the consequences of unacceptable behavior. Katsinam, of which there are over two hundred and fifty different types, represent various beings, from animals to clouds.” – Official Hopi Tribal Source

Many other Indigenous communities, Native American tribes, and First Nations. hold celebrations near or after the winter solstice, honoring elders who teach and share their wisdom and stories to the younger members of the tribe, passing them down by word of mouth. Many different tribes and communities with myriad cultures and traditions honor Midwinter through varied ceremonies and sacred practices.