



the way of the ANI YUNWIWA

Ven. Dhyani Ywahoo, chief of the Green Mountain Ani Yunwiwa Cherokee, is recognized as a compassionate and gifted teacher in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. She writes about how she received her training from her grandparents, who were also her teachers.

When I think of how my grandparents taught their healing methods to others, many happy memories awaken. It was clear that my grandfather was the primary student of his father-in-law. There was an unspoken ease and mutual respect between them, which they shared with those who approached them with respect. Many people came to visit for teaching and healing; those who had a great commitment to learn came to stay for months and brought provisions for themselves and the family. They were tested with humor and tasks to determine their level of understanding.

My grandparents would just listen and they would offer tea. People who wanted healing had to come in the right way; usually they had to come four times. My grandparents would always insist that the person do something before coming back again. Violet came many, many times. First they told her to put bowls of water in her bedroom and to put pretty flowers around her room. She came back. They told her to put salt in the corners of the room and white chalk under her bed. She did everything, and still there was sorrow in her heart and a rage in her husband. My grandfather and grandmother really gave both of them some homework. For the husband, so he could feel more peace, certain things were told to him, which I did not hear. They had come from far away places, in their emotions and geographically. I asked, "Is it because he comes from far away that they cannot get along?" I got one of the usual answers, that was

both yes and no. "Yes, he does come from far away and from a culture that is a little different from that of his wife ... and where there's love and ease, distance doesn't mean anything." For Violet and her husband there was no resolution, and no child

born to them, and so I learned that sometimes healing does not bring people what they think they want, and that people can ask to be healed of something that is really not a disease.

I think about the remedies that were offered – bowls of water with flowers, flower petals, and, sometimes, orange water, orange oil, to lift up the spirits, liven the heart and disintegrate the stench of anger.

As I observed my grandparents in their capacity as medicine people, I felt as though I were being encoded with information. Somehow they impressed on me that I would remember in the future what they showed. The core of all their remedies was about reconnecting with love in the heart, and they would say to those who asked, "Illness comes if you have discord with family, if you have disturbed sacred places, if you have a gift and you don't use it, if you say you will and start

to do something and don't finish it, and if you ignore the call to do something."

They also taught people how to dream; I thought this was to soften the seedpod around the heart so that the connections to one another could be more clearly revealed. The tones of my grandparents' voices when they spoke to someone in need seemed more musical. Each one's voice would play off the other, as if their



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voices were weaving through the person's body, gently loosening adhesions, pain. My grandfather could actually put his hand inside a person and pull out stagnant clots of hope gone sour.

This was just their 'minor' healing work, as they called it. 'Major' healing would go on in a cabin with pull-down shutters so it was black inside, and a dirt floor where one would sit and rattle and work with a small drum that had water in it, to go to the very sources of discord and disease and bring them to resolution. On these occasions the father of my grandmother would come. When he worked in a medicine way he always wore a special jacket. People call them Cherokee hunting jackets, but I don't think he was hunting any animal. It was more that he was hunting the cure, that elusive sense of balance that brought resolution to disease.

This jacket fascinated me, because it was appliquéed and embroidered; it had pictures on it. He was deep into geometric shapes; they conveyed whole encyclopedias to him, and to me when I looked at the designs with him. Just to look at that jacket would take me into other worlds. My great-grandfather was a tall, straight, thin, sinewy man. His head was long and his skin was like gold ivory.

Visitors seemed to come from everywhere and some even appeared to come from other times. They seemed to have a secret language understood in some ancient part of their beings and they had their own unique codes and patterns of hand movements, somewhat like visceral sign language which impacted on your thought and flesh. They would stay for a very long time.

Although my grandfather had a cabin in the circle of family cabins, he also had a place far off in the woods, and when men such as these came they would go off into the woods together where you would see a lot of strange light and fog and clouds. In my child mind I thought, "Oh, they are all magicians!" Great-grandfather Eli Ywahoo had a chameleon-like quality. If he were around Caucasians he would actually begin to look like one; with other Indians he appeared in his usual form; if he were around African Americans he would begin to look like one. On a few occasions Chinese people would come and then he would even look Chinese. So I was convinced that his flesh was like his jacket, that he could take on and off at will.

When all three – my grandmother Nellie Ywahoo, my great-grandfather Eli Ywahoo, and my grandfather Eonah Fisher – were going to make medicine together, one could feel the very center of the world quivering with anticipation, and some kind of magical cloud of ultra clarity would descend over the community as they prepared for the ceremonies. In the corner of your eye you could see giant beings walking about the cabins and in the nearby woods; sparkles would reveal the presence of the little people.

Sometimes bears would come. So that we would have no fear, we were reminded of the time long, long ago when the animals and the people could understand one another. There was a story in our family that in the late 1600s or early 1700s, many of our clan members went off to live with the bears rather than get involved in the Englishman's wars. I was told that these bears were also my relatives. To hear my parents speak, every one was a relative, every person and every creature. So I would ponder, "On whose side, exactly? How were we related, and through what line was I related to this bear or this great stag that would come walking through?" I can't say that I fully understand those genealogical lines yet!

Human beings of many types related with respect for one another. Their respect came from understanding the pulse of the universe, and the donning and taking off of different robes

on different bodies. I would have the sense that many of these visitors were just continuing friendships from the beginning of time. In the cabin, with its shutters drawn and the sound of the rattle, I glimpsed how we were all one. The sound of the rattle seemed to wake up a crystal deep inside the brain that recalled from the first sound how we were one, and it resonated into myriad overtones of many people and beings. Perhaps crystal was the first television, and who knows whether it came before or after fire. Fire revealed many dimensions and the crystal carried us through many dimensions. On these special occasions when all three of my

elders would make medicine and ceremony together, the stars seemed to dance and come close to Earth, and I would sense people disappearing and reappearing in the dark, as if they let go of the dream of someone, some "I", and would return to space and then "pop!" back into the cabin.

Often, in the repetitive sound of the rattle, I could hear the voice of someone asking, "Are you the one, are you the one? Do you hear the crying? Will you listen and reach out to those who are lost?" Occasionally I thought that my grandparents were ventriloquists because of the different voices that would sing out in ceremony when I knew that there were not that many people in the room.

The medicine of my grandparents was to listen and create space, and to get people actively participating in dispelling their own confusion; that impressed me. Even for me, as a child, they left space for me to grow. Eli Ywahoo, Eonah Fisher and Nellie Ywahoo were teachers who revealed the sky in your eye. ☉

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