

Medicine of the Cherokee

*The Way of
Right Relationship*



J.T. Garrett and Michael Garrett

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Right Relationship*

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Eastern Band of Cherokee

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Lovingly dedicated to those who have walked before us, and those yet to come. Together, we are all dancing the Sacred Dance.

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Preface & Acknowledgments

“Medicine is a way of life, an object or ceremony having power or control over influences that may affect a person, and a path toward restoring health.

—FROM THE TEXT

A small boy searches for a way to explain life with all its complexities. His Cherokee grandfather smiles and explains life in all its simplicities.

Many years later, another small boy talks about the simple things of life, while his father describes how complex life is today. Inside, the father feels the not-so-distant words of his grandfather speaking softly:

You are not just alive, you are part of all life itself. You are kin to all things, and everything has life . . . and memory.

Things have a way of coming full circle—as a way of completing the Circle, and creating opportunities for life, love, growth, feeling, and learning. The wisdom of the past becomes the bridge to the future, like the rising and setting of the Sun in a continuous motion of ageless beauty. Healing becomes the understanding of a calm spirit, connecting the memory of our ancestors and all living things, experiencing a sense of oneness in the energy-flow of choice and presence through unity of mind, body, spirit, and natural environment.

This is the wisdom of the Cherokee, and of many tribes or cultures of people all over the world. It is more than knowledge. It is more than understanding that comes from reading a book. It is an experience that flows from one day to the next for a spirit among all living beings, from one generation to the next.

This book represents many of the old stories and teachings, which have been offered for the purpose of guiding us in our life-journey to becoming better “helpers” for the protection of Mother Earth and all our relatives. We feel very proud to be able to bring some of this wisdom to those interested and willing to seek out and honor their own vision as we all walk our individual paths. We may come from many different tribes, but we are all of one family.

A very special thanks goes to many Cherokee Elders who have been willing to share for the benefit of others. All of our Elders are very special and are to be honored as beloved people for living and sharing their experiences. A heartfelt thanks goes to family and friends who have supported, nurtured, protected, and, in some cases, tolerated us along the way.

We thank Barbara and Gerry Clow, our editors at Bear & Company, for their openness and persistence throughout the process of getting this book to publication. We especially thank Debi Duk for the illustrations that moved our spirits by capturing our thoughts and the theme of harmony and

balance. We thank the many friends and others who encouraged us to follow our vision for this book.

We thank a very special wife and mother, Phyllis, lovingly referred to as “Mama Bear,” for her loving patience, humor, strength, and sense of compassion. We thank a very special mother and grandmother, Ruth Rogers Garrett, and her sister, Shirley Arch, for sharing their stories and their understanding of Nature. “Mama” Garrett dedicated her life to family and friends, as an example of being a Cherokee woman and “helper” to everyone she ever met.

We thank a very special daughter and sister, Melissa, for showing us that all of us have our own “Medicine,” as well as our own lessons, challenges, and means of healing.

Last, but not least, thanks goes to you, the reader, for continuing, renewing, or beginning this new journey for the sake of yourself and all those with whom you are connected. May you walk the path of Good Medicine in harmony and balance. Together, we come full circle in the Medicine of the Cherokee, living the way of right relationship. “Wah Doh.”

PART ONE

THE INDIAN MEDICINE STORY:
A Cherokee Perspective

by

J. T. Garrett



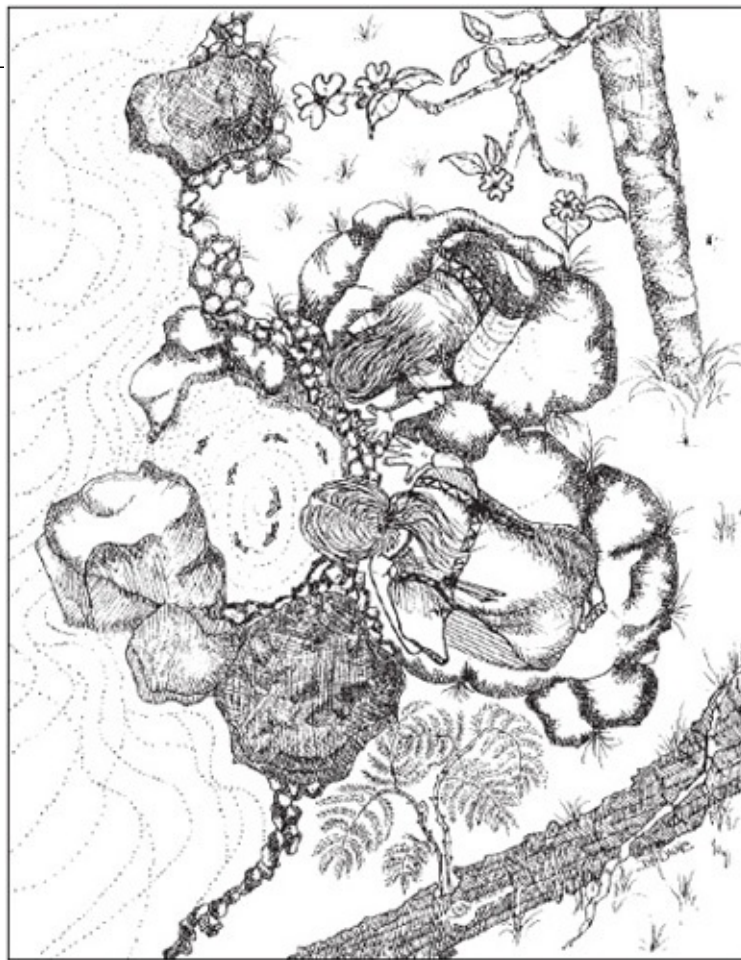
CHAPTER ONE

Keepers of the Secrets

My grandfather and I were sitting on a large rock on the edge of the Oconaluftee River on a warm spring day. I was looking into a small pool of water that was caught in an etched indentation on a rock. There were small minnows moving around. My grandfather said, "What do you see?" I was very young and he seemed tall, even sitting down. "I see the little fish swimming around, but they have no place to go." "Are you afraid for them or yourself?" My grandfather would often ask two questions at once. "The sun is hot, and I am afraid they will get too hot in the shallow water, besides what if they don't get back to their parents in the river?" I often didn't answer the questions asked, but used it as a chance to say what else I was thinking about. "Well, maybe they are alright in this special little pool of water. They might get out into the large river and a larger fish come by and eat them for dinner." Wow, I hadn't thought of that. "What will they eat to stay alive and what if they stay there and grow too big for the little pool of water?" I guess I must have learned to ask two questions as well from my grandfather.

"Grandson," he said, "you do not need to worry because Nature will take care of them. Whatever happens is all part of a greater plan of life. It is the Great One's plan. There are things you cannot see with your eyes that the minnows feed upon and there are larger fish that will feed upon them. The 'little fish' as you call them must learn to hide in the plants until they are strong enough to move quicker than the bigger fish. They will grow smart and outsmart the bigger fish whose belly is too full from its own greed. Life is like that." Grandfather told me much more that afternoon, but somehow, I can only remember about the little fish. That was the lesson of the little fish. There were not many more stories to be told by my grandfather to share with me, because he did not live long after that. I do cherish those special moments. Little did I realize that he was one of the keepers of the secrets. He understood about life and the story of Indian Medicine. Knowing that he would not be able to share with me for much longer, he made sure that I would learn the Medicine Way from other Medicine Men and Women (whom I'll refer to as Medicine Elders from now on).

This story of Indian Medicine begins with the many stories that were shared by many elder Native American teachers. There is a simple innocence about the complex nature of Nature. As a Native Medicine Elder once said to me, "It (Nature) is as it always was, but we as humans try to change it to make it ours. In fact, we are the younger, 'cause Nature was here before us. So we must honor Nature and in doing so, we honor our ancestors who realized the critical balance we have with all things." This chapter is about my experience and training in Indian Medicine with the keepers of the secrets. I feel very proud to be the one chosen to tell this story.



Reference is made in this book to “Elders,” who are Grandfathers and Grandmothers. This is an honorable title given to those who are respected in my tribe and in other American Indian and Alaska Native tribes (that I will refer to in the rest of the book as simply “Native American tribes” or “Native Americans”). It is an honor earned with time, experience, and in helping others. The term “Medicine Elder” as used with “Medicine Elder” is a reference to a Medicine Man or Woman. I am a member of the Cherokee Indians from the mountains of western North Carolina. At the age of 52, I was told by the Medicine Elders it was alright for me to tell this story. It was my vision as a student of Indian Medicine to share so that anyone interested would better appreciate Indian Medicine as more than an archaic herbal way. The natural way and healing by self-choices promoted by Indian Medicine are included in almost every “alternative” therapy today. With a blend of stories and teachings, I want to share what I was taught about the beginning of Indian Medicine.

It was my father who encouraged me to learn the Medicine. He was a wonderful and protective Irishman of several generations in America. His family brought a wealth of knowledge and skills in folk medicine for survival. Mixing with the Cherokee in western North Carolina, they survived well in the mountains. As my mother would share stories from a Cherokee perspective, my father had similar stories from Irish mythology and his own experiences growing up near the Eastern Cherokee Indian Reservation. It was from this background that I realized that there are many similarities in culture and stories of people all over the world. My intent was to promote a better understanding, while protecting the sacred aspects of the Native American culture, and sharing the “Good Medicine Way” or Cherokee traditional teachings. The purpose of Good Medicine is to bring about peace and healing through harmony and balance. This was needed in the beginning of time, and it is needed even more today. Ironically, it was my father who had lost the Irish teachings that helped me to realize why I really needed to learn and share the Medicine Way when the time was right.

The problems and concerns we face today are staggering, with the environmental stress and pollution, crime and violence, and other negative influences that harm us today. In an earlier time in America, conservation and revitalization of Mother Earth were of utmost concern because we had to live off the land, and the keepers of the secrets were helpers to us in that regard. These were farmers, loggers, hunters, herb doctors, mothers, uncles, grandmothers, and grandfathers who shared with each other the secrets learned, to help each other. Many did not have a certificate or a degree. They have just always been here when we needed help. As one Elder said, “We have been so busy learning and doing, that we have forgotten how to really listen.” This book is also about us spiraling to a high level of awareness and understanding based upon the “spirit-learning,” as one Elder called it. This is within each of us, as a memory from many genes and many generations since the beginning of time. This book is about finding something special in our lives that Native Americans call Good Medicine.

FINDING SOMETHING SPECIAL

Do you remember finding something in Nature and saving it in a special box or place? Maybe it was a rock, a bird feather, a crystal, or even an acorn. You just had to put it in a special place. My first Medicine Bag—using the term “Medicine” in the Native American way—was magical, sacred, and special for me. Of course, there was probably something in your special place or written in your diary that you did not want others to know. It was personal and private to you. Well, Indian Medicine is the way for Native Americans, as well as for many other tribes and indigenous peoples from islands and isolated locations in the world. In this book, the sharing will be with the understanding that specific sacred things and ceremonies will not be revealed, but respected as being sacred to an individual tribe. There is more than enough that can be shared that can guide us in finding something special.

My mother, Ruth Rogers Garrett, taught me many Cherokee stories. She taught through example to be a helper to everyone you ever meet. She taught me that everyone is special in this life, that love has no boundaries, and that boundaries cannot be set on love. She still has rhymes and songs that she shares with us. I still have a strong image of her in our small flower garden working and even talking with the herbs and plants. My first lessons were to respect all life, protect Mother Earth, and nurture the plants and herbs. I look whenever I go home to the Reservation to see if comfrey, fennel, catnip, rosemary, and many of the plants that we care for are still growing in the backyard. Sure enough, they are always there, reminding me that life does go on. Aunt Shirley would tell me stories of the Spirit People and teach me how to “mix Medicine” from Nature’s gifts. She knew how to survive and knew the lessons of the animals. My Grandfather Oscar Rogers learned as a young Cherokee how to track animals, eat food from the wild, and recognize plants and herbs from arrowwood to yellowwood. Even my great grandmother was an herb doctor in the Tennessee mountains, or “hills” as they called them. Aunt Shirley learned, along with others in my family, how to survive. While she and my mother did not have the degrees in herbology, they were the best teachers about herbs that a young person could have around. I was truly blessed. And they too were some of the keepers of the secrets.

In my youth on the Cherokee Reservation in North Carolina, my Medicine Bag took on a new significance as I began to study Indian Medicine. My vision was sharing some of the teachings and “bridging the gap,” a term I will explain later in this book. My Medicine Bag continues to change with new things replacing old things and vice versa, with the realization that Indian Medicine is dynamic and continues to change, as opposed to some things that will always stay the same. As a Medicine Elder said, “Your Medicine is your life, and your life is represented by all those things that you have said, that have been given to you, and that you have given others, and it is all that you are. You

Medicine is all the things that you ‘bundle’ together in the form of objects that you hold sacred to the world.” I came to realize that Medicine, unlike the term “medicine,” is not just a substance used in the treatment of disease or an agent used to restore health as taught in the dictionary. The Elder said, “you believe only what you read to be true, then you will miss the greatest part of your Medicine ’cause you will limit yourself to just what you see. There is much more to life than what meets the eye.” The dynamics of the lessons taught by Native American Elders remind us that not all understanding is in the books. There is still much to learn and relearn in life’s lessons.

The Elder went on to explain that Medicine is a way of life, an object or ceremony having power or control over influences that may affect a person, and a path toward restoring health. Medicine usually includes more than the individual; it often includes the family, clan, and tribe in a natural or universal setting. Each person’s Medicine is sacred and powerful among Native Americans, as it is for everybody. By learning more about our ancient and traditional or cultural teachings, we can “bridge the gap” in our own lives for a more healthful and balanced life.

A CHEROKEE STORY: THE BOYS

Early Indian stories are ways to communicate values and lessons that remain dynamic, whether one thousand years ago or one thousand years ahead. The stories are a part of our “Medicine” for values, direction, and healing. Many stories are used in this book for you to better appreciate bridging the-gap in your own life. Some Elders say the Cherokee originated from a place far away, possibly even from the stars and the “star spirits.” There is a story, long guarded as the origin of the use of pine in ceremonies and at certain special times for burning to carry a message to the stars. As the story goes, very early in our existence, there were seven boys who used to do almost nothing but play the Indian ball game of using a stick to move a round stone across the ground. Their mothers were not pleased because the boys would not work in the cornfield. Once they were very hungry after playing ball, and they went home to eat. Their mothers put the ball stones in water and said, “Since you won’t work, you can have the stones instead of corn for your supper.”

The young boys were upset, and they went away saying, “We will never come back home again.” They were doing the Feather Dance, which was to dance using small steps around in a circle, praying to the spirits to take them away. Suddenly, their feet were lifting off the ground as they continued to dance around and around. The mothers went to find the boys and noticed that they were going higher and higher upward toward the great skyvault. The mothers tried to pull them down, but they kept going upward. One mother hung on to her son, and he suddenly fell to the ground with a thunder. The other six were suddenly pulled higher and higher until they went into the skyvault.

Some say that we now see them at night as the Pleiades or “The Boys,” as they are called by the Cherokee. The seventh boy who struck the ground fell so hard that he was covered by the earth, never to be found again. The mothers grieved every day, shedding tears on the ground where the boys once were. One day they noticed that a small tree started to sprout from the spot where the seventh boy struck the ground. Today that tree is known as the Pine That Grows Very Tall, trying to reach his friends, The Boys, in the sky-vault. The pine is considered sacred and used in some ceremonies and burials. It is also said that if you listen to certain pine trees when the wind blows, you will hear messages from the spirits of The Boys.

Early Cherokee stories, and those of other Native Americans, sometimes refer to star spirits and how they influence our lives. The energy of light from the Sun, the Moon, and all the stars is considered by elder teachers as connected strongly to us. The stars had a special significance to the

who looked up into the skyvault at the brilliance and magical power of the lights that would sometimes move about in the heavens. Unlike the daytime when the sky would have the Sun or clouds, the sky at night was active with “star spirits” or “star people.” It is easy to understand why many of the earlier stories originated from gazing at the wonder and power of stars that would even move on occasion in the huge sky above. They also say that is the reason why we are connected to the star energies, and cycles of the great skyvault above us.

Native Americans understood the delicate and critical balance of Mother Earth with the Universal Circle. The balance of the environment was emphasized in the stories and the teachings as sacred values. This same balance is what we call homeostasis in our bodies, which must be in balance with the Universal Circle as well. If Earth experiences an earthquake, it affects us too. Every harm to Mother Earth is also harm to us, our well being and our health. This is the reason that Native Americans show respect in ceremonies, dances, and song-chants to the Four Directions, the Upper World, and the Lower World. We learn to understand the critical balance of our lives with Mother Earth as a physical, mental, spiritual, and natural connection.

A TIME FOR SHARING

As Indian people, we were taught that sacred things were not to be shared, except among our own tribes. According to some Native American Elders, it was alright for me to share some of the stories and sacred things, particularly after a vision I received in 1987, but only to create peace and understanding in the world. My vision quest that year involved seeing a large white eagle flying over the Great Smoky Mountains; somehow I knew it was time for us people to relearn the ancient teachings for regaining harmony and balance. As one Elder put it, “We have learned too much today so much that we have forgotten how to learn the important lessons of life. We think we ‘gotta’ learn everything from a book. The truth is that we had better learn the truths, those taught by the Ancient Ones.” During the same year, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed under President Carter. This piece of legislation provided protection from earlier persecution about sacred beliefs, activities, and places honored by Native Americans. Most of what has been shared with the public about Indian stories of life is through sketchy myths recorded by mostly nonIndian writers, researchers, and anthropologists. Language differences and perceptions affected how these stories and teachings were told and understood. However, there is a story to tell, by the Indian keepers of the secrets, as only they could have told it in a traditional and cultural way.

IN THE BEGINNING

The Cherokee story spoke of the origins of life itself. It told of spirit people in the skyvault coming to Mother Earth and the beginning of the First Fire. As the story goes, the universe was like a giant sea of water flowing freely as a huge pool of energy with no physical form. As one Medicine Elder put it, “Scientists and those others who ‘think they know’ are on right track, but they often look at the little things and say, ‘I wonder how this came to be?’ instead of looking at the whole and the little things as pieces of the larger puzzle of life.”

As the story goes, Mother Earth is suspended at the Sacred Four Directions by a twine of energy from the sky-vault, which is solid like a rock, but we just cannot see it. Each of us, being held in suspension by the same Four Directions, consists of energy as a child of Father Sun and Mother Earth. This delicate existence is considered to be under our care. If we do not protect Mother Earth, she will drop her energy cords at each of the Four Directions and plunge down into the sea of infinity.

Therefore, Native Americans have always understood themselves to be the keepers of Mother Earth as good children protecting the elder parents.

In recent years, a worldwide environmental movement has focused on protecting Earth from pollutants and hazardous energy and dangerous radiation. We are concerned about Mother Earth and the adverse effect that our existence has had on her. She has a tremendous ability to continuously revive and “clear” herself. This has been the case in many renewed beginnings of humankind after disasters over millions of years. A real question in the minds of many people today is whether Earth will survive the many generations to come who may not understand the delicate balance of our existence with the star spirits in the sky. The stories and the wisdom of the Native American ancestors are not to be taken lightly. These teachings focus on values learned from millions of years of survival. As an Elder put it, “We are at the end of a beginning and at the beginning again; it is a matter of what we want to do with our choices.” Native American teachings show that we are the chosen “animals with choices, and Good Medicine choices must be made to maintain the harmony and balance of Mother Earth. Some feel that we must make these critical choices within the next seven years. These are the critical years, according to the keepers of the secrets, as we spiral to a new plane of spiritual existence with a renewed understanding. As an Elder said, “We must go back to the beginning to understand that there is an end and a new beginning to everything!” The secret is Good Medicine choices for harmony and balance.

THE CHEROKEE STORY OF THE BEGINNING OF MOTHER EARTH

This story has been told many times, but I want to tell it as it was told to me. In another time, the Cherokee Spirit People were in the skyvault. It was getting crowded in the skyvault, and the Great One decided it was time for spirit beings to become physical beings and spread out of the skyvault. There was a Great Council meeting of all the spirit beings to decide on the plan. The Great One said, “Those of you who choose to be a part of the creation of Mother Earth will also have to protect her. The Cherokee Spirit People have been chosen to be keepers of the secrets and keepers of Mother Earth and all living things that go over into the physical world. They will be given the power Medicine of choice to do this. Other human spirits of tribes will also follow, and they will be given the power Medicine of choice to be keepers as well.”

Earth at that time was like a large island floating in a sea and held in place by four Cords of Life. The Great One said, “These ‘Cords of Life’ will hold Mother Earth suspended as long as everything is held in sacred balance. These spirit beings will include the four-legged ones, the two-legged ones, the many-legged ones, the no-legged ones, and the winged ones. Everything and everyone will live in harmony, interdependent on one another for sustained life and regeneration of life.”

It was the first task of the Animal Clan to go down to learn what they could about this new Earth. The little Water Beetle of the Beaver’s grandchild went first, fluttering around, but it could not find a place to land. Soon it dropped into the water many times, coming up with muddy feet, and that mud became islands. The Bird Clan said it wanted to go down because they could fly for long distances to search for a place to land. The Great Buzzard flew down, but he was so large that he tired quickly, and his large wings kept striking the water and churning up mud that made mountains and valleys until he returned home in the skyvault.

By this time, Earth was dry where the Animal Clan and the Bird Clan stirred the mud from the

water as the Sun tracked across. The Fish Clan said they wanted to go down into the water and just stay there, but some wanted to be able to walk on the land. What we now call the Crawfish did crawl up on the red clay, and he was baked in the hot sun, so that today we call him the Red Crawfish. On the seventh day, some of the Animal Clan, who were hiding in the mud because of the hot sun, came up to take a look. The first of these was the worm, and he was burned so badly that we call him the Red Worm. It was still hot, and they called to the Great One for help.

The Great One came down on the seventh day, hearing the prayers, and brought many beautiful plants and trees to provide the air for the Cherokee to breathe into their lungs and become physical human beings. Of course, they were not used to breathing, so they had to rest that first day, but they would work for six days and learn to rest at night when the Sun would rest. The Great One was very proud of the spirit beings for the good work they had done. He asked the Thunder Beings to strike a tree so the fragile physical beings would have heat from the Sacred Fire. From that time on, all the animal, insect, bird, tree, plant, and human clans would give ceremony around the fire and dance for the Sun to celebrate and honor the gift of life on a now-living Mother Earth.

MODERN - DAY SECRETS

There are many secrets that affect our health and medicine today. From the Medicine of Native Americans to the modern medicine, there will always be keepers coming forward with reality options and stories of wellness and miracle cures from new discoveries. In the United States today, there exist some of the finest and most modern medical treatments in the world. We are truly gifted. While some Americans may feel frustrated with a lack of success in treating cancer, AIDS, and some other diseases, we are much healthier than our forefathers in many ways. Many of us, for example, can choose homeopathy or naturopathy, therapies that allow complementary allopathic and osteopathic treatments. It has been my experience that we truly have choices in medical care that we can add to our Medicine Bag.

The real challenge for health-care professionals and medical-care professionals is to allow and promote healing and prevention. Those choices include many alternative therapies that will be the integral therapies of tomorrow. **Ayurveda**, for example, is a preventive medicine based on a 5000-year-old system of treating and preventing disease with a focus on physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental traits of a person. As with Indian Medicine, the approach is focused on balance by keeping life forces flowing freely. The treatment modality is based on a balance of life activities.

There are many therapies today that are similar to Indian Medicine. These examples of present day therapies today are the secrets of yesterday: **herbal medicine** that uses botanical medicines as remedies or treatments for ailments or illness; **chiropractic** with manipulation of the musculoskeletal structures of the body for a proper relationship with the nervous system; **hydrotherapy** using water “sweats” or saunas, and steam treatments; **guided imagery** with concentration on specific, directed mental images for relaxation and for boosting the immune system to combat disease; **Feldenkrais Method** for movement exercises designed to release habitual patterns of tension related to posture and movement; **therapeutic massage** with systematic application of pressures to muscles to promote relaxation and increase circulation; **shiatsu** as acupressure on points of the body for improving energy flow and balance, similar to acupuncture; **rolfing** using the thumbs and other appendages to manipulate connective tissue for proper alignment of the body; **qigong** as a system of exercise with focus on breathing, meditation, and movement to restore the flow of vital energy and to boost natural healing; **t'ai chi chuan** as a form of meditation with movement and slow-motion exercises with

coordinated breathing for improving energy flow in the body and spirit; and many more, such as **hypnotherapy** with an induced state of influence, **magnetic field therapy** with the use of magnets to stimulate or calm pain and to promote the body's natural healing, and **meditation** to quiet the mind and focus on calm, control, and receiving the gift of healing. These gifts are all parts of our God-given Indian Medicine Way that is with us today.

A special therapy that has been around for over 100 years with values similar to Indian Medicine is **homeopathy**. The symptoms of the body are related to its natural defenses, and the small amount of remedies are to provoke a specific response. This is referred to as the Law of Similars. As in Indian Medicine, homeopathy teaches that the highly diluted drugs are more potent than the concentrated drugs, called the Law of Infinitesimals. The illness and its remedy is specifically suited to the person based on a profile that includes the physical, emotional, and mental states in the total-symptom picture. This seems very effective in treating chronic arthritis, headaches, autoimmune diseases, and allergies, as well as many acute infections. The thing I like is the home-care approach with self-care manuals.

Naturopathy traces its roots back to the approaches used by my great grandmother who emphasized prevention and use of combinations of remedies that act as “helpers” for the body's natural healing power. This is very similar to Indian Medicine. The modern training for a naturopath includes a standard medical workup with training in traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurvedic medicine, including herbal medicine, acupuncture, hydrotherapy, massage, therapeutic exercise, and counseling. Many of the secrets of commonsense approach to health and medical care are available in this therapy.

Other secrets that have become more popular today include **orthomolecular nutrition medicine**. By adjusting the balance of vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and other nutrients in the body, the focus is on the patient participating in well-being, rather than on the illness. Similarly, Indian Medicine focuses on the balance and adjustments in life with remedies to bring about harmony. Orthomolecular physicians, like osteopathic and allopathic physicians, can treat a broad range of acute and chronic diseases that also include psychiatric illnesses. **chinese medicine** focuses on prevention using the secret of detecting energy flow in the body to find the illness or problem before it happens or manifests in the body. Similarly, Indian Medicine focuses on detecting and clarifying choices that a person can make to prevent illness and disruption of the harmony and balance. While other therapies will be mentioned in this book, there are many secrets from the keepers of the secrets that have emerged in many alternative and complementary therapies that are available today. As the Medicine Elders say, “We are the human spirit beings who have choice, but we must find it for ourselves.” We can do that by seeking the secrets of the keepers who have been given the gift of understanding.

THE SECRETS OF THE KEEPERS

As a student of Indian Medicine, I ran into difficulty when someone would criticize me or one of my elder teachers. It was also difficult for me to live the traditional Medicine, then put on the suit and tie and be a hospital administrator in the white man's way. My first mistake was to present myself the way I was *told* to do. It broke the Native American way of presenting myself as a helper. I overheard a tribal member say, “He is going to be like the rest,” and I knew that she was talking about *control*. The Native American person accepts you as you want to be. However, they respect you for how you are with others. Humility and the Rule of Acceptance helped me to cope with criticisms. They also helped me to better appreciate the unique values and teachings of Indian Medicine. One of the important

lessons for me to learn was having the negative energy move around me, instead of internalizing and reacting to criticisms. ~~The Rule of Acceptance is the ability to accept anything said or done with the realization that it is what another says or does, not what we say or do.~~ In this case, an action does not necessarily require a reaction, but an *interaction*. This interaction may be with the person or person creating the action, or it can be with someone else to clarify or resolve a state of nonacceptance. As a student and apprentice, I was to accept everything and learn to listen. This can be very difficult in an environment where we are taught to be assertive, to analyze, critique, and “take charge.” There were many more lessons to learn in Indian Medicine and in life.

On one occasion, I became angry at a person who strongly criticized my Medicine Elder for including her spiritual beliefs in using herbs. He got to the point of yelling at her, and I retaliated, started to speak, causing harm to the other person. My teacher would not speak to me for over four days. When she spoke, her words were strong: “You were chosen, not by yourself or by any human being, but by a power better than you and me. Don’t listen to those who would criticize you or me for being in the Medicine. Live the truth of the Native American ancestors, and I will tell you, they would have forgiven the person. Instead, you gave your power away!”

It was apparent to me that she was not pleased because I was not to interfere with her lesson, nor make a new one for myself. The idea of giving my power away was a thought, and a lesson that I was to go up on the mountain and learn by myself. I realized that I did not “turn the other cheek,” but how was I supposed to just sit there and listen? It suddenly dawned on me that just because someone stands there and yells, this does not mean that I have to stand there and listen. I learned the lesson of acceptance. The spiritual power entrusted in me was more important than the person trying to take that power away from me. I learned something about the lesson of the opposites, and was able to look at things both ways and in the third person. The Elder said, as I returned that evening, “It is time for all of us to evolve to a higher level of understanding about these things, in a spiritual way. Find ways to understand the fears that others face. They wear a mask, you don’t have to, unless you have something to hide. If that is the case, then you don’t need to be in the Medicine yet! If you are going to defer to someone, let it be those who need us, such as the four-legged and the winged ones who are disappearing, or defend our Earth Mother from the pollution and destruction, and defend the little spirit ones (under the age of seven) who are being abused! Be the keeper of the secrets and live the true life of the spiritual person on a journey to the secret world.”

I give thanks for my traditional and cultural training, my apprenticeship in Indian Medicine, and my experience in working with the United Methodist Mission in the Great Smoky Mountains. Each in its own way had secrets that sustained me during the Vietnam War and in choosing a career in Public Health with the Indian Health Service. It is with deep respect and appreciation to the Cherokee and other Native American Elders that I am thankful for their sharing and their support of me writing this book. While not mentioning their names, I honor their Medicine power. For those who have passed on to the other world, I honor their memories. As an Elder said, “There is a time for grief, and that must be done. We will all be on a different journey someday. There will be a time when you will be the one to share. Learn to honor the memories and let the rest go. A good way to honor that memory is to be a helper to others.” You will now go with me through a journey of the Four Directions and experience each direction as we come together into the Universal Circle. We will be on the Good Medicine path of harmony and balance, and we will share the Native American purpose in being a keeper of the secrets and a protector of Mother Earth.

CHAPTER TWO

Four Sacred Directions

This chapter focuses on the Native American teachings of the Four Directions. Then the chapters that follow describe each of the Four Directions, activities to honor them, and how the energy affects our lives.

The Four Cardinal Directions, as we call them, are what were called the “Cords of Life.” Each cord or direction has its own energy. Some people have a pulling to one or the other, and some feel in between one and the other. Hope-fully, they are somewhere in the circle. Of course, the directions have their opposite poles. That makes some people think they are going one way, when they are really going the other. Understanding these relationships is necessary in learning Indian Medicine, and these relationships are understood in lessons. Just like the lesson of the eagle feather, everything has two ways that are opposite. You should know that we are influenced by the directional energy and that not all opposites attract.

The Four Directions are the South, West, North, and East. This clockwise circle represents the spiral of life with directional energy that influences our lives. The center of the Four Directions is the Universal Circle, which moves to infinity like rings of water when you toss a rock into a pool. Everything in the Cherokee Way or teachings begins with the fire in the center as the path to the Great One and the beginning of all living things on Earth. Native Americans respect the council or circle gathering as a “coming together” to hear issues and for resolution, ceremony, and bonding of an individual with family, clan, and tribe. The Council Fire is often symbolized in some way to remind us that the first council was around a fire. It also shows respect for the cultural traditions. The Four Directions represent the Cords of Life, or energies that influence and affect every part of our being.



As I was taught these lessons, I found myself having to shift to another level or place of understanding. I learned that the Cords of Life provide us with balance, while we maintain harmony with everything as the keepers of our Mother Earth. Our biggest concern right now is that we are affecting the balance of Earth by interfering with the energies and polluting the environment. While we cannot change the Four Directions, considerable concern was expressed by several Native Americans about the very serious effect of interfering with Earth's energy balance by introducing another energy such as nuclear radiation. The Elders also said that we feel the effects of every war for many generations, like a stone thrown into the water with rippling effects until Mother Earth is able to "clear" herself.

The Four Directions provide a helper to us for the understanding of our own behavior and direction. They provide a guide for us to find our place or spot in the energy balance. As the Elders said, "We need to get back to the Center Fire and get in touch with our spirit self, then find our place in the circle for peace of mind. The Directions provide us balance, but we have to find harmony and relationship to everything in our environment." The rest of this chapter is my journey through the experience of learning Indian Medicine. It is necessary to remove our critical hats and just accept some ideas until we can decide what fits best in our lives. Many people tend to think of the environment as just air, water, and land mass. People tend to forget about the trees, plants, animals, birds, and synergistic harmony of all things. Maybe it is a good time to get back to the center of the circle and rekindle our sense of connection with Nature and our synergistic harmony with all things in the Universal Circle.

THE CENTER OF THE CIRCLE

The circle is considered by Native Americans as the Universal Circle with the Four Directions

being identified on the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel represents the individual and the clan lessons in life for directions and guidance for us to follow. This is as sacred as the other things that guide us. In Cherokee teachings, the number seven is considered sacred, or the Sacred Seven. With the Four Directions of South, West, North, and East as the sacred four, the number five is to be referred to as the Sun or the Upper World. The number six is considered to be Mother Earth, and the number seven as the sacred fire in the center of the circle. The Sacred Seven becomes our connection with the Great One in the Universal Circle. It becomes the center of us as the spirit self connected to the Universal Spirit.

Native American teachings say that we are all brothers and sisters to everything in the Universal Circle. When I was a young boy, my grandfather would say, "The plants are your brother and sister even the skunk is kin to you. We are all related and connected to each other." I was looking down at the rock by the river where we were sitting and said, "And even this rock?" "Especially this rock," said my grandfather. "Many of the things we learned, we learned from the rock. After all, Grandfather Rock was the first one here. His energy is so solid that we can stand on him. He is at peace when we lay in his lap. Here, try it." There was a rock with an indentation similar to a chair. As I lay there on the rock, I sensed a very peaceful feeling. My grandfather said, "When I was a boy and the chores would get too hard and I would be tired, I would do just as you are doing. You see, the rock has energy too, and that good energy makes you feel good. I used to know that I was protected by the rock. You can also talk to the rock." My eyes lit up. "Are you serious?" "Yep, but you have to know how to talk to the rock, just like you have to know how to talk to the animals in the woods.

"Pretend you are smiling, but don't show it on your face. Can you do that?" "Yea, I think so," I said as my eyes closed. With the water gurgling over the rocks and a slight breeze rustling the pines, I fell asleep. After a while I awoke and looked around to see my grandfather's big smile, and I smiled. "Oops, you were not to show me your smile." We laughed, and he said, "Well, you talked to the rock." "Yep, for a long time. I don't know what we talked about," I said with a curious thought in mind. "Well, I believe that is a secret between you and that old rock." "What did you do while I was talking to the rock?" I asked. My grandfather looked at me with a grin, "I was talking to the fish, 'cause I was fixin' to go get my fishing pole."

Native Americans honor these memories in giving thanks each day and in ceremonies for the lessons learned, and to be learned, from our Elders. The Four Directions give us direction in our lives and these stories connect us, with a sense of being, to everything around us in the Universal Circle and to the power of the Great One.

In Native American teachings, the plants were here first; then came the birds and the animals. The human spirits were from spirits who were willing to share themselves so the humans could be physically and be the keepers of Mother Earth. We are considered as being much younger than the other spirits. That also means we have much yet to learn from the plants about taking care of our health; from the animals about survival; and from the birds about our spirit freedom.

Coming to the center of the circle connects us to the fire. The fire generates a spirit of action and inner-action with guidance. It raises our level of awareness and sensitivity to concerns that all of us have for harmony and balance in our lives. Coming to the center is also a way of saying that we must come together as people for action and resolution as helpers and protectors. We "center" ourselves to rebalance when we get "a little off kilter," as my father would say. It is also a way to emphasize that we get in touch with our deeper spirit self and to follow our gut feelings. Sharing about the teachings of energy and feelings gives us a better understanding of the lessons from Native American ancestors.

that can help us be better helpers.

THE RULE OF OPPOSITES

In Indian Medicine, energy is a continuum that does not change. We as energy beings have our own special vibration, and we connect with other energy by a process of phasing our energy into our center or spirit self, then emerging or opening our hands to receive the energy of the Universal Circle. Instead of seeing energy as just being work, the elder teachers consider it associated with each of the Four Directions as physical, mental, spiritual, and natural. It can be directed, interfered with, and taught. This concept is not easy to teach others, except through exercises and what my son and I refer to as Full Circle gatherings. What I refer to as the Rule of Opposites has two lessons: first, to learn how to train oneself to use energy; and second, to understand that whatever we think or do, there is the opposite of that. To understand this lesson is to be aware that what we say or do may really mean the opposite of what we are meaning to say or do. The energy I am referring to will go through anything and is constantly around us as natural energy. Physical energy is caused by friction or electrical impulse, and the Elders refer to it as a lower level of energy. Mental energy is a form of communications or spirit energy that has memory. It is fairly easy to interfere with this energy, as it is a higher energy that goes “outside of the wires” (that is, extends outside the body the same way that electric energy can be detected outside electrical wires) due to a lower-frequency vibration in the body itself. The higher level of energy (spiritual and natural) is only possible to connect with when we spiral to a much higher level of calm and connection. Connecting with Mother Nature is the easiest way to reach this spiral and to become more sensitive to the feeling of energy differences.

The sacred items used with energy include such items as a power feather, a power stick, or a power crystal. Each of these items has the same four types of energy—physical, mental, spiritual, and natural—as does everything in Nature. Each of us also has a male and a female spirit energy. As an Elder said, “We are energy with connections with other energy. We are people polarized with opposite energy as well. Sometimes we think we are going in the right direction for us, when, in fact, we should be going in another direction. The white man’s way is to control adversity; our way is to walk the peaceful path in harmony with our environment and to find the Good Medicine Way.” This Elder was a female who told me a wonderful story about why the Sun rises in the East and sets in the West, and the relationship of the Sun and the Moon. The story goes as follows:

There was a time when the Sun was very young, and she lived in the East. There was a young man who would come to visit with her in the evening, maybe this was the beginning of courting. She thought it was strange that he would always leave near daylight. They would talk and stare at the beautiful stars in the deep universal skyvault. While she could talk with him, she could not see him. He would not even tell her his name. Out of curiosity, she decided to find out who he really was by touching him in the dark of night. As on every night in the past, he came to see her saying very nice things to her about how bright her smile was and how she was so round and perfect. While sitting in the dark, she reached her hand into some warm ashes from an earlier fire. She said, “You are very cold from the wind hitting your face. Here, let me warm your face,” as she put the ashes on his face. He did not know that she had ashes on her hands, as she was pretending to feel sorry for him. At the first peek of daylight, he abruptly left on his journey.

When the Moon came up in the skyvault the next day, the young Sun could see the ashes on his face. Then she could see that it was her brother, the Moon, who was coming to see her. While she was

excited to see who he was, she also knew that the Moon was her brother. The Moon felt ashamed, and to this day comes up at the other end of the skyvault to keep his distance from the Sun going down.

While the story is used to teach values, it is also told to help us better understand energies. Not all opposites attract, though certainly some attract, but show their face later. While we are all brothers and sisters, there is an attraction that is Good Medicine. While things are not always as simple as “attract and repel,” the Rule of Opposites helps us to understand the point of differences in energy.

A friend of mine worked very hard to be the best salesman, to make a lot of money for his family and to have what he called “the good life.” Both of us were from tribes on reservations. I sensed that he was going in one direction but really wanted to be in another, and I talked to an Elder about the situation. My fear was that I might be doing the same thing he was doing. The Elder said, “Sometimes the American dream is also the American nightmare. The Indian way is to help our brothers and sisters and to care for those who cannot care for themselves. It is about giving, but it does not mean that we cannot have ‘the good life.’ It is a matter of what is meant by ‘good life’ versus Good Medicine Way. You must follow your vision.” The friend died at an early age of a massive heart attack, and I felt guilty because I did not try to change his mind. The Elder said, “You cannot change someone’s energy, only interfere with it, and you could take on their consequences. You must be careful about these things and remember your teachings! The direction he was really seeking was the calm of the mountains, while he perused the city—it was his choice.”

Our feelings, like the young Sun and Moon, tend to draw us toward someone or something. The Rule of Opposites teaches us that energy can reverse itself, as it has done with Mother Earth many times over the past four billion years or more. Influences can be very strong, but we still must follow our gut feelings and spirit guidance to be sure that the path is Good Medicine. As an Elder said, “Is this the vision of reality or nonreality that we seek to find? Use the **feel** of energy to see if it really attracts or actually repels once the energy is mixed. Remember the lesson of the mask as you meet people who present themselves as someone other than who they really are. Seek a vision that is real and of truth, not of consequences.” He also spoke of two persons very much in love, who could hate each other very much, given consequences and circumstances. The point was that the “feel” of energy is something to be learned in life, while understanding the Rule of Opposites.

The Rule of Opposites can be used as an “energy-check” to see if the direction we are going is really where we want to be. Sometimes we can be going in entirely the wrong direction and projecting our reason as an excuse to drink or whatever. These are the “I have to do this because . . .” people or the “I don’t have any choice” people or the “He (or she) made me do it” people. A good energy-check is to ask an Elder or your family about the choices you make. Another is to just sit within the energies of Nature, under a tree or in a setting with plants. Breathe in and out several times and focus on turning inward toward the heart or the gut, and just ask where you should go or what you should do. Once you have gone through the Four Directions, you will better understand the Rule of Acceptance and the Rule of Opposites.

LESSON FROM OUR ANCESTORS

One of the Cherokee Elders often spoke about the emergence of teachings coming from the Four Directions. He said that some Medicine Men refer to the period today as a cycle that started in 1990 as the emergence of a new Sun gave us new direction and the integration of a renewed understanding. A renewed healing will begin taking place that will overshadow the misunderstandings of the past for

centuries. Some of the Native Americans and traditional healers have been willing to meet in joint sessions with the United Nations and other national and international organizations to call attention to concerns about our environment and survival of life on our Mother Earth. Unlike the messages of gloom and doom, their messages are generally about the need for renewal, clearing, and revival of the traditional cultural ways to be helpers in this renewed healing.

It is wonderful to see the “coming out” and sharing of the traditional knowledge, stories, and wisdom by Native Americans today. The Elder, in speaking to me about these concerns said, “We must share the truth, because there is so much untruth based on greed and possession of something. My time has come and gone; now it is time for you and others to become the Elders with a message, prayer, and a vision. Tell them (all people) that we (Native Americans) have been on this Earth Mother for a long time. We know her signs, and she is hurting. They must help her, and pray for her, and you must be a keeper and sharer of the wisdom.”

CHOOSING A DIRECTION

A young boy was sitting in the middle of a path that crossed in the directions of North and South, East and West. The Medicine Elder said to the boy, “Why are you sitting in the path?” The boy said, “I don’t know which direction is the right one for me to follow. I have been sitting here for many passing of the moons, and it has not come to me. Are you willing to help me?” The Elder told the boy the stories taught to him by the Grandfathers and Grandmothers about life and the Four Directions, about the Universal Circle and giving thanks to the Great One. The young boy realized that it was not his time to go away from his village. He realized that, in giving thanks each day to the rising Sun, he would be guided when the time was right for his journey into life. The Elder shared a “Clearing Way” chant and how to perform a “Blessing Way” chant to share with other young people, to guide them and to teach them the values of life. The young boy learned respect for all his brothers and sisters, particularly the Elders, and then the Elder was gone.

As the boy shared what had happened and told of the Medicine Elder, the people were surprised. They had not heard of this Elder, and he had not come through the village in his travels. The young boy was told that he had had a vision and that a “spirit teacher” had come to him. My teachers said that choosing the directions at the right time would come in “small pieces,” or like a film rolling in front of us when we would least expect it. The activity would be to meditate in the calming energy of a tree or a garden of plants and flowers to “quiet the mind and to listen to the heart.”

The journey through the Four Directions will be to find your own place where there is a sense of harmony and balance. As you read the chapters on each of the Four Directions, consider which direction “feels” most comfortable to you. You may feel a little between two of them, but still choose one that seems to fit you at that moment the best. We will start the journey in the direction of the South.

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