

The 'Pay' of Medicine Men
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SOME PEOPLE, ERRONEOUSLY, believe that all healing work is done for free in Native way. Ceremonies are free; though, usually, gifts will be given.

Specific acts entail ugista 'ti – an archaic Tsalagi (Cherokee) word meaning, literally, "for to eat." In ancient days, one would give the shaman or medicine man a deer hide or moccasins, something useful if he performed a curing ceremony or specific task outside of the ceremonial duties of the tribe. Of course, the tribe provided food. Later, after the Europeans came, that became beads or something to trade for food; ugista 'ti.

When I started on this path, I tried what was presumed "Native way," and only took "a gift from the heart" as payment, instead of money. That was a mistake. I soon learned that people had no idea of what a gift of the heart meant, so they would dump anything unwanted. There was no "value in exchange." It's not what is given, but the worth of the gift to the one giving, the one receiving; the manner in which it's given. The "thing" itself is only a token, but it must be valued, of equal value to what is given, and given freely, from the heart.

The medicine man/shaman/healer gives the best that he has to give: the gift that Creator gives, and gives it freely, to the best of his (or her) ability. The one receiving gives back to honor the gift. The gift itself belongs to Creator, so the medicine man/shaman/healer doesn't receive "payment" in this way; he (or she) doesn't own it, God does; what is given back is merely a token, a token of gratitude and joy for sharing this gift of the Creator. All give and all receive. If you don't value the work, then there is no benefit. If you take without giving, what have you received? You have only dishonored yourself, disrespected the giver and devalued a gift from God.

Another misconception involves tobacco. Some people think that if you give an elder or healer some cigarettes or tobacco, then he should do anything you ask. Believe it or not, there's a good bit of truth to that. But not in the way most people think. Tobacco is

given to seal an understanding. Tobacco is given to honor the elder or healer. It is not "payment." It is a token of respect. For example, there are several healers (shaman, medicine men) who come here and give tobacco. It is not to say they expect anything; it's just an acknowledgement, thanks, a sharing. But if you ask a healer/shaman/medicine man to do something for you and offer him tobacco and he takes it, he's giving you his word he will do it. So, be careful what you ask for; you might get more than you bargained for; and, if he returns the tobacco, it means you have not done your part, or he cannot in good conscience do what is asked.

Traditionally, Native people take giving both very seriously and very lightheartedly. It has to do with Native thoughts about "property" and "value." People make light of the story about how Manhattan was "purchased" for a handful of trinkets. The Natives thought the Europeans were crazy and had the joke on them: How can you "own" land? One may as well "own" the sky, or the waters? No human being can possibly "own" land, carry it with him, use it.

The term "Indian giver" has an element of truth, as well. If a Native person gave something to someone and it wasn't used, it was often taken back. What's the use of having something if you don't use it?

In Native way, Eastern tribes at least, all the property belonged to the women. It was a matrilineal society, through the woman's line, not the male line. This caused a great deal of confusion among Europeans who married into the tribes. Women were the property owners; men owned nothing except what they could use. Women, being the property owners, made the decisions for the people; the men carried out their instructions.

For example, when I recently married my wife Annette Waya, in Native way, everything I owned became hers. She is the giver of life; the maker, literally, the home. A secret: If you want a medicine man to do something, talk to his wife. Similarly, you will notice that most medicine men rely on their wives to make most of their decisions regarding daily life.

Cowboy and Indian movies notwithstanding, in the old ways, everything of importance belonged in common; the tribe mattered; the old people, the women, the children, all were honored, all respected, all protected. And this relates to how Medicine men were

regarded and what we do today. Medicine men were not supposed to kill for food, and since they provided healing ceremonies for the tribe, the tribe provided for them.

Nowadays, even a lot of Native people think that medicine men should just do what they do for free like "in the old days." Well, in the old days, medicine men didn't pay rent, they didn't pay for groceries, they didn't need cars and gasoline, etc. The tribe provided for all needs.

What is often forgotten is that when individuals in the tribe wanted something for themselves they practiced *ugista 'ti*: they gave a gift that could be traded for whatever the medicine man wanted or needed, or something that was useful.

This is something most medicine men I know wrangle with, and we all get grief for it from some people. They think we're "making money" off of ceremonies if we receive anything. First, believe me, nobody "makes money" off of doing ceremonies; not that I know of, anyway. Even with a generous gift, by the time you take out expenses such as food, lodging and travel, there's not much left over, if anything. Forget anything for the medicine man's time, training, expertise or the money he spent to learn or travel to where he could learn what he does.

No, in the old days, medicine men were respected for what they did, what they knew, and how they helped. They didn't have to worry about food, shelter, clothing, or really much of anything except doing what they were supposed to do and enjoying life themselves, like others. And they didn't have to travel very far.

There have been times in the past when the only food I had to eat was what was left over from what people brought to Drum Circle. There have been times when I cooked all the food I had for the people who came here and there wasn't enough money in the basket to pay for the food or even to replace the sage that was burned in the ceremony. But, conversely, there have been times when Spirit has provided a lot and I've given it all away; to other medicine men or families in need, or to worthy organizations. No one has ever been turned away for lack of ability to pay. But I have turned away people who only want to take. Most of what comes in now goes to gasoline for travel to do ceremonies.

The Owl Society that we have started has only one requirement for dues: wood for the Asi/Inipi. My newsletter is free; the Asi/Inipi is free; our Drum Circles are free; the ceremonies are free; the hundreds of people I correspond with counseling, teaching, encouraging... All free. That is, existing from what Spirit provides, which includes generous gifts and thoughtfulness.

Everything we have comes from Spirit. We may think we "earn" this or that, or receive this or that from our good words, winning personality, expertise, or whatever.

But, in the final analysis, everything belongs to the Creator. We don't "own" anything. Our life on this Earth is limited and, as the saying goes, you can't take it with you. In this, we are all either givers or takers. If we give, and associate with and emulate people who give, we all receive. If we take, and associate with and emulate people who take, we're all impoverished. Creator isn't called Taker. Creator creates. Those who are not with Creator take; those who are with Creator, with the Flow of Creation, give. That is the way of abundance; that is way it was meant to be. It is a circle; the Great Hoop of Life. The way Creator meant for things to be: giving to abundance, so all may reflect the abundance of Creation.

I didn't intend to launch in to this epistle on giving and taking; but I offer it in a good way. Sadly, with its focus on acquiring wealth, our society encourages poverty. Materialism is valued; spirituality is devalued. Our material society sees little value for matters of Spirit and gives little of value to support it. But maybe that puts the onus where it properly belongs, with us each individually.

Support those who support you, those who support goodness, those who honor Creator; and you will be supported.

Aho.
Tsiwonisv
Mitakuye Oyasin
Gus dii dada dv ni PathFinder
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