

Grinnell, George Bird. Some Cheyenne Plant Medicines. American Anthropologist, 1905. N.S. 7:37

Anthropology has long held an interest in how ancient cultures healed their sick or wounded. This article addresses many of the questions raised when one regards how ancient cultures utilized natural and spiritual resources. Herbs, spices, and even magic were used by the Cheyenne people as a remedy for symptoms ranging from a simple sore throat or toothache to the more complex task of relieving the excruciating pains associated with childbirth.

Grinnell suggests that there are, in existence, many ways the Cheyenne people deal with those who undergo physical and spiritual ailments. These ailments, whether physical or spiritual in nature, are treated by driving negative spirits away and drawing positive spirits toward the subject through the use of magical potions (most accompanied by ritualistic practices), and plant/herb mixtures applied directly to the wound. These plant/herb mixtures demonstrate the Cheyenne's acquired knowledge of effective, natural remedies, without dangerous side effects. This is suggested by Grinnell to be a process of "trial and error." Strong spiritual beliefs drive the healing at its core and although it is the medicines themselves that actually have an effect, the Cheyenne continue to perform these rituals in absolute faith and believe that it is the spirits that give the medicines their healing properties.

The Cheyenne people believe that some concoctions harbor magical powers and are released when applied directly to the person or animal. "The light powder made from dry flowers of the prairie "everlasting" when rubbed on the body is thought to protect the warrior...properly applied to the horse, it enables it to run for a long time..."

Grinnell wrote in a time of history when the rights and practices of men and women were segregated. Grinnell shows an interest in this by paying particular attention to healing practices performed by both men and women suggesting a cooperative approach to the very structure of Cheyenne culture. Although this comment could suggest that the Cheyenne people are of a lesser standard than the typical Europeans of the time, Grinnell looks at this as a difference rather than a classification and this tone can be felt throughout the entire article.

Grinnell describes many different medicines and their effects with informative detail and a close eye paid to the relationship between medicine development and cultural development. This article functions both as a reference to further study and study guide bringing the reader to be more aware of the mastery Cheyenne people demonstrated when faced with some of life's most troubling issues; healing the sick and wounded, but without killing them in the process.

CLARITY: 4

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