



The Body and Medicine  
Joseph Eagle Elk, Lakota Medicine Man

People seem today to misunderstand how to be cured. They go in to see a doctor or a medicine man, and they never think of that doctor or medicine man much. They just take the medicine and don't think much about the medicine or their body. When a person takes a medicine, white medicine, herbs, Indian medicine, whatever, they need to understand that medicines are people. They are persons. You need to treat them like people who you invite into your body. You need to welcome them into your body by talking to them, telling them you are happy that they have come to help you. You also need to talk to your body. We are made up of both body, spirit, and our destiny, but our body is intelligent and has a spirit that understands. We should talk to our body and ask him to welcome the medicine. We need to explain to her (our body) that the medicine is there to help with the pain or the sickness. We should say, "I know you get real tired. I know that I have not treated you too good and I ask you to forgive me for this, but we have a friend who is coming to help us. Here is a medicine that I am going to take, so I ask you to give him a hand, help him, and you will feel better." Sometimes we try to keep our hurt and pain. Sometimes it doesn't want to leave us, but this medicine is our friend and she can help us, so help the medicine. Then tell the medicine you have talked to your body and asked her to help with her work.

Tell him you will follow the doctor's orders so that the body and medicine can get to know each other and work together to heal. We have to do this because they don't know us very well and they don't know each other very well. If they are not welcome in our bodies, then they are not free to do their work. Ask them to talk to each other. So the most important thing for the medicine to work is to build up that relationship so the medicine can talk to the body and the body can talk to the medicine. They need to become friends. Maybe even more, they need to know that they are relatives. You need to help with this if you take the medicine. Some of the plants and foods that are the medicines are the ones that are relatives to other plants and foods, so if you eat them together then they know each other and can build up your body. It is no good to have a fight going on inside of you by eating things or taking medicine where no relationship is possible.

Well, medicine and the doctors are the same way. People today don't put anything into their relationship with the doctor. The Western doctors are just like Indian doctors. They are doctors because they have a gift. They cannot do their work without the help of the people. The patients have to think real deeply about the doctor and think real deeply about the medicine and talk to the medicine so it will be filled with its power to do the work that it can do. They need to put all of their thoughts into this doctor so he can become strong. The physician or medicine man has the same responsibility to think deeply about his medicine and about the patient and to use his gift fully. But today it looks to me like the reason a lot of physicians are having a hard time and are troubled is because the relationships between them and the patients are not good. I see that people want more and more, they want to get and to get, and too often they do not want to return

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anything for the doctoring and to the medicine. There has to be equal responsibility and equal giving.

I see a lot of people, just like the white doctors. I remember a case of one woman who came to me with the pipe and asked for help. She was very sick with a heavy and difficult sickness. I told her I would doctor her, but about that time another person came with a very light and not so serious a sickness as compared to the first woman. But this second person kept following me around and would not let me go. She did not need my help. She could help herself, but she kept demanding more and more. To me, this made it hard for me to concentrate on the woman with the serious sickness. We know that in order for our ceremonies to work and people to get really better that we must have a single focus. We must have everyone of a single mind in the ceremony for the power to come. But this is hard if you have to doctor many people, all demanding equal treatment when they are not equal. Some need to take care of themselves. They don't need us. So people need to take time to think deeply about the medicine, their body, and the doctor and put all their energy into creating the relationship. More and more, people will find that there will be less medicine men for a while because maybe the people need to learn to do things on their own.

Doctors, white doctors, have come to me and asked for advice, but it seems they mostly want to know about my medicines and how they are prepared. I try to tell them that each medicine man is different. He has different powers, his own vision and gift. I want them to know that they have a gift and they have to find their own source of healing. I can't help them with medicines. I can tell them how to think deeply about the medicines, the body, the person, and the healing.

