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Chemehuevi Shamanism, Sorcery, and Charms

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SINCE the pattern for all human behavior was believed to have been set in the mythic era, it follows that the paradigm for every type of magical practice, whether for curing or for cursing, for summoning the forces of nature, for protecting one's self, or for influencing others, must have been established by the Early People. There were indeed shamans in the time when the animals were people, and those who were shamans in that period became the helpers, the indispensable spirit-animal familiars (*tutuguuvimi*) of human shamans. Who or what, then, were the shamans' helpers in the storytime? Then as now the first step toward becoming a shaman was the acquisition of a song; but whom or what did the songs of the mythical shamans summon?

SHAMANISM IN THE MYTHIC ERA

Fortunately, the surviving myths describe several instances of shamanizing, some of them with considerable detail. In each case the song was an invocation of power, and the power invoked was some sort of an attribute of the immortal (*nariwiinyapiwi*) who summoned it. After he had sung for a long time, the shaman began to interpolate certain instructions to the patient or his relatives, setting these off from the body of his song by the addition of the sacred syllables *-vini* repeated an indefinite number of times or sometimes shortened to a single *-vi*. (Individuals of great power, such as

the admirable Wolf or the evil Gila Monster, chanted in this manner even when not shamanizing).

One of the most curious and detailed accounts of mythic shamanistic practice is that found in "How Great Horned Owl Got His Feet Frozen with Snow." It narrates the manner in which Badger, on two consecutive occasions, resurrected and cured his brother's widow and her son. Both times the hapless pair had brought about their own deaths by visiting a certain house which they had been warned not to visit. When about to be overtaken by Skunk's deadly flatus, and again when pursued by the stream of poisonous blood sent after them by the blood-shamans, the woman, "encouraging her son with song," urged him on towards his uncle's adobe ground. Badger could see all that went on in that patch of adobe; if the mother and son had died before reaching it, he would have known nothing about them and consequently would have been unable to cure them. On both mornings after their demise had occurred, Badger went through a sort of ritual, presumably to enhance his power. First he asked each member of his family, beginning with the youngest of his three daughters and ending with his wife, if she saw anything in his adobe ground. Upon being informed by each one that she did indeed see something heaped up in the middle of it, he began his song:

Badger-ear hunts small game, hunts small
game
Badger-ear hunts small game, hunts small
game

Then, as he went underground, he enjoined his family to follow his progress closely with their eyes—only they could see him when he traveled in this manner. The verb *mah^ai-* 'to hunt small game,' is applicable to the hunting of any creature except the deer and the mountain sheep; it is even used of the hunting of persons for food by Ogres or cannibalistic tribes. But since it implies "pursuit with intent to do bodily injury" and Badger was on his way to heal, it seems inapplicable to his journey towards the bodies lying on his adobe ground. George Laird said the song was "just a song," and could give no further explanation. Songs of power were frequently obscure, often including apparently meaningless syllables or words and phrases which were untranslatable.

Upon reaching the heaped up bodies, Badger first restored them to life—presumably by the touch of his crook (*poro*), although the text does not so state. Then he inserts into his song

The knoll I want for pay, the knoll I want
for pay!

thus beginning a long stylized dialogue: the woman misunderstands or pretends to misunderstand his demand, Badger reiterates it and chants his refusal to each offer she makes. He does not want the boy's shirt, his weapons, nor his moccasins. He does not want the woman's shirt. But when she offers her skirt, he exclaims, "Very hot!" (*Ariririh!*), just as children even now cry "You're getting hot!" when the seeker comes near a hidden object. Then the woman asks, "It is this at my crotch?" and Badger chants his enthusiastic assent. Then the woman lies down. But it now appears that Badger has no desire for copulation. He proceeds to remove all her internal organs, sing

over them, and replace them in her body. This completed the cure. In Australia the shaman, during his initiatory trance, has all his organs removed and replaced by crystals or shells—in this tale it is the patient who undergoes the ordeal.

At this point in the narrative, it is assumed that the boy also has been completely healed. Whether a more detailed account might include the removal of his organs also, and if so, through what bodily orifice this would be accomplished, we cannot know. Badger now administered to mother and son the scolding that always follows disobedience to a prohibition, penalty and removal of penalty. Then he sent them on their way with a command identical to the one they had received from Great Horned Owl as he lay dying: "Do not go to the first house you come to." This, as before, they promptly disobeyed; then they had to flee back to the adobe ground, where they were overtaken and killed by a stream of blood. Then the whole preliminary ritual is repeated: Badger looked at his adobe ground in the morning, queried each member of his family as to what she saw there, sang his song and "went under the earth." Then we are told, "He cured them the same as before." In ancient times, when this story was told in the traditional way, the whole process would doubtless have been rehearsed. After having given the mother and son another scolding, Badger directed them to continue their journey; then "without pausing" he went over to the house of the blood-shamans and killed them all—whether with weapons or in a duel of power, the narrative does not state.

The adobe ground mentioned in the myth was peculiarly Badger's possession, associated with his shamanic powers. Such power-spots are repeatedly mentioned in connection with those who were men of power in the mythic era; it would seem probable therefore that Chemehuevi men who had certain powers also possessed such spots,¹ but to date I have found no confirmation of this in my notes.

Badger's healing procedure is anomalous in that (1) it took place in the daytime (the elder of the evil sisters known as Two-Yucca-Date-Worm-Girls sang over and cured her sibling by day, and slain warriors were routinely "raised up" in daylight—but these were in the nature of emergency acts); (2) there seems to be nothing in the practice of other mythic or of human shamans paralleling the removal of the internal organs; and (3) Badger demanded "the knoll" (*mons veneris*) for pay, not for his own satisfaction but merely to cause the woman to lie down and spread her legs. Shamans formally summoned to treat a sick person arrived by night, completed their cures and/or left the necessary instructions, and departed just before daybreak.

Coyote, after he had caused his own daughter's desperate illness by secretly penetrating her with his sky-penis, set an example for all mortals who have sickness in the family by calling in the doctor. In the myth called "How Coyote Went to Pack Everlasting Water" the shaman he went to summon was *Tsixa*, Duck (probably the mallard). This shaman's song invoked the rainbow-shimmer of his feathers—the word in the song which George Laird translated as "iridescence" means literally "water-purple" and describes the colors of the rainbow. The following free translation illustrates the manner in which instructions were incorporated into song:

Duck-iridescence comes as it were floating
 hovers around us two
 hovers around us two
 Honored Coyote [*Sinawavipitsi*] far off-
vini you will go to pack water-*vini*
 with which she will be washed-*vininyinini-
 yini*
 hovers around us two
 hovers around us two
 some of the Everlasting Water [*Nariwiiny-
 apah*]-*vininyini*
 you will go to pack-*vininyininyi*
 hovers around us two
 hovers around us two

Duck-iridescence comes as it were floating
 hovers around us two
 hovers around us two

When Coyote had departed for the coast the shaman revealed the "bewitchment" which had caused the illness, removed the sky-penis from the girl's body and burned it.

"How Coyote Got Duck for a Doctor" begins in precisely the same way as the myth previously cited: Coyote, having constructed the framework for a brush house, told his daughter to stand up above him and apply the thatching. This was a pretext for staring at her private parts and thereby bewitching her with his sky-penis. In this story he first called on Hummingbird to perform the cure. Hummingbird's song

Muumuuh^witsikyani
Muumuuh^witsikyani^va
Muumuuh^witsikyani
Muumuuh^witsikyani

is untranslatable although it obviously derives from the hum of his swiftly vibrating wings. Hummingbird told Coyote he was under no circumstances to build a fire. However, when the night grew intensely cold, Coyote dispensed with his services, made a fire and sat warming himself by it. The next day he called in a different shaman, another Duck (*Kingkopitsi*, identified only as "a small kind of diver duck"). When night fell the new doctor arrived and sang:

I come from the black buttes packing only
 sinew on my rump

The meaning of this song is obscure, although I surmise it may have reference to a bodily peculiarity of this species of duck—or possibly to an incident in a forgotten myth.

At midnight—midnight and just before daybreak are the critical times in shamanizing—Duck revealed Coyote's misdeed. He began by interpolating into his song the declaration that Coyote also had a song. Coyote, eager as

always to possess a shaman's song, asked that it might be sung so that he could imitate and remember it. The song given him constituted an admission of his crime:

I would grin showing dirty-white teeth
I would grin showing dirty-white teeth
when I would look upwards
when I would look upwards

Thus Coyote was tricked into a confession and his confession brought about his daughter's cure.

In "How Crow Was Made Black" it was Coyote's nephew, Crow, who lay sick at Coyote's house, and this time also Coyote summoned Duck (*Tsi:xa*) to perform the cure. He sang of his Duck-iridescence and agreed with Coyote that the cause of Crow's illness was "bewitchment," but did not reveal the culprit (who was, according to George Laird's comments upon this myth, Blue Beetle, Crow's gambling opponent). Instead of revelation of the offender and removal of the offensive substance or revelation and forced confession, the prescription was that Coyote should paint his nephew black. When Coyote finally complied with this requirement, Crow was cured.

In the four instances given of Coyote's employing a shaman, payment was offered and accepted in advance. In both cases where Duck (*Tsi:xa*) officiated, his payment was Coyote's pottery spoon, which he promptly made into his beak. Hummingbird, although dismissed before he could effect a cure, was paid with Coyote's awl, which he also made into a beak. And Duck (*Kingkopitsi*) received a preparation to seal up the cracks in his feet.

SHAMANISM AND SORCERY IN THE HUMAN ERA

The Chemehuevi word for "shaman" is *puh^wagant̄i* 'one who possesses *puh^wa-* [*pua-*, *-vua-*]'. Every shaman is also *huv^wia-gant̄i* 'one who possesses a song,' but conversely, although every song is associated with some sort of

power, not everyone who owns a song is a shaman. George Laird invariably translated *puh^wagant̄i* as "doctor," and every genuine doctor was also *tutuguug^want̄i* 'one who has a helper,' and was presumed to have the ability to heal.² *Tutuguuvi* means "helper," "spirit-animal familiar;" those who were shamans in the story-time became shamans' helpers in this present time.³ However, not every helper with whom the shaman had contact enabled him to act beneficently at all times. Whether a shaman was consistently helpful or potentially dangerous depended upon what sort of familiar he had.

The Buzzard is an ideal helper. Since he (in his present form) eats carrion only, he enables the shaman whose helper he is to suck loathesome sores without disgust and thus to remove pus and corruption of every sort. But all raptors and all animals who eat fresh meat make their possessors extremely dangerous—persons whom it is better not to offend. "If a doctor wants to make a person sick," George said, he sends his *tutuguuvi* to eat on him—that is what makes him sick. The Eagle and the Hawk are the worst, because it is sure death when they eat on a person." The Mountain Lion, the Wildcat and the Bear are among the *tutuguuvim̄i*; but not Coyote of the myths (nor the animal coyote), nor any of the lizards. The Rat is an undesirable helper; although he does not kill, he causes sickness. On the other hand, the Bat is extremely helpful to the healing shaman. His ability to freeze water "when he was a person" gives his possessor skill in curing burns—presumably also in reducing fevers.

If a doctor who has a dangerous helper dreams that he has killed an animal, this signifies that his *tutuguuvi* has killed or injured a person. If he dreams that he has killed a chicken or other small animal it means that a child is dead or dying because of his familiar. The damage has been done without the shaman's directing, willing, or desiring it. If the family of the dangerously ill person hires another

shaman who sings until the matter is revealed to him, and the dreamer then admits that he has had such a dream and tells it, the sick person (but not one who is already dead) will recover.

The helpers come from the northwest, from *Tutuguurivipi*, Land of the Familiars. In this context George Laird said that the souls of the dead (*naugutsiwí*) also go northwest, not directly north as stated elsewhere. He was not entirely sure, but he *thought* that their place (*Naugurivipi*) lay beyond that of the familiars. After long thought he recalled the word for "northwest"—*kiwiyankwa* (*sic*, probably a mishearing of *kwiyanakwa*). This and *kwiyanamari* 'north wind,' are "doctors' words," not to be employed by ordinary folk. There are no Chemehuevi words for "northeast," "southwest," or "southeast." The ordinary terms for "north" and "south" are respectively "upstream" or "up country," "downstream" or "down country" with directional prefix; those for "east" and "west" refer to the place of emerging and entering in of the sun.⁴

Wiw'wingkuratsi, Dragonfly, is the messenger (*tin yawitsi* 'carrier of tidings') between shaman, familiar, and patient. His function is important, especially when the shaman lives at a considerable distance ("say twenty miles") from his patient. The relatives who come to seek his services, "to insure a good job," should come to him and awaken him very early in the morning—startling him so that he awakens suddenly. Thereupon the doctor begins singing his song (the song which is peculiarly his, not to be "borrowed" or "imitated" by anyone else). At first he sings it silently, in his heart. But if the sufferer is desperately ill the doctor may sing out loud to hold him in life so that he will not die before the shaman arrives. As soon as the shaman starts on his journey, the messenger leaves the familiar, who will not begin his own journey until much later, and flies to the sick person, then to the shaman to report his patient's condition. Thereafter, the messenger

constantly flies his three-way course, keeping the doctor informed as to the state of his patient and the location of his familiar or familiars (almost all shamans have two or more). A familiar does not leave his own land until long after the shaman has started; he may leave at midnight or before, but he never travels by day. The familiar reaches doctor and patient early in the morning. Then, even if the sick person has already died, the helper may be able to overtake his soul and bring it back; but it is very difficult to bring back a soul who has reached the Land of the Dead. This is an arduous task indeed, because those relatives who have gone before will do their best to prevent the spirit of the newly dead from returning. (Among the Chemehuevi it was always the helper, not as in Siberia and elsewhere the shaman in trance, who undertook the journey to another world.)

The shaman sings constantly over his patient until notified by the messenger that his familiars have arrived. He then says: *tutuguyaawa'ingumpani* 'I am going out to fetch my helpers.' He leaves the house and when he returns he brings his familiars to the patient in his cupped hands, singing all the while. He then brings his hands up to the seat of the illness or injury and blows through them, blowing the familiar(s) into the patient to work while he himself sucks out the sickness or corruption. He takes whatever he has sucked out (*pakangkirin tuma'atsi* 'sickness which has been removed') and shows it around the room to the spectators, at the same time examining it himself to make sure that he has it.

(This account was given very early in my work with George Laird. He told it so unhesitatingly and with such an abundance of detail that it must describe a proceeding which he himself had witnessed.)

Sometimes a malicious or revengeful shaman called for sickness (*pagapay naw'wigyah* or *pakangkirin naw'wigyah* 'calling for sickness'). This process does not always in-

volve the assistance of a dangerous familiar. George said: "The doctor has to play sick first, that is the way they *naw'wigyah* it"—clearly a form of sympathetic magic analogous to bringing snow by blowing fluff into the air. This and the sending out of a carnivorous familiar were not the only ways to cause illness or disaster, nor was the power to curse or bewitch the exclusive property of shamans. Many persons had the ability to do so by silently willing: "May that one fall ill (or fall down, or break a leg, or be wounded)." The identity of the offender would be revealed to the curing shaman as he sang, and he would then make it his prime objective to force a confession. *Puh'akavatsi* means "bewitched," "put a curse on someone"; and *puh'avaritini'atsi*, "told on' the culprit." Revelation—and if possible confession—were essential to healing.

Unfortunately, but quite understandably, the material furnished by George Laird contains no specimen of a shaman's song from the human era, therefore we cannot know if these bore any resemblance to the songs of familiars in that story-time when they themselves were persons and shamans. Even if George had been able to recall such a song, I am sure he would have had qualms about attempting to "imitate" it. This reluctance did not apply to the songs of mythical shamans; in the course of the narration the narrator identifies with each character in turn.

In addition to full-fledged shamans, those who possessed helpers and could cure various types of disease, there were several sorts of specialists, having power in one area only. Among these were rain-doctors, sun-doctors, wound-doctors and snake-doctors.

George remarked with some sadness, "They [presumably the Chemehuevis living along the Colorado River] used to have a rain-doctor, but they [the rain-doctors] are all dead now." *'Iwarimpuh'aganti* is the word for one able to summon the rain (*'iwanaw'wigyah* 'calling the rain'). Nothing was said of a rain-

doctor's having had a helper. The bull-roarer was sometimes used to bring rain. It is called *muumuitu'inyumpi* 'instrument for making *muumu*' from the sound it produces, imitated by George as *muumu muumu*, with very strongly nasal u's. Here is another instance of sympathetic magic—the bull-roarer makes a sound like thunder, therefore it invokes the thunder clouds which are accompanied by rain. *Muumuitu'ik 'iwarimpasigyah* means "swinging the bull-roarer to call the rain." A rain-doctor is also known as *'iwarinonosigyanti* 'rain-dreamer.'

Certain shamans had power to summon intense heat. This was *tavan'nawigyah*, literally "calling the sun." A sun-doctor (*tava-vuaganti*) specialized in the healing of sun-stroke victims. Probably the power to call for killing heat and the power to heal its effects were vested in the same person, but it was not definitely so stated.

Huvuaganti, almost invariably translated "wound-doctor," literally means "arrow-doctor" or "bullet-doctor" (*huuh* 'arrow' has been extended in post-contact times to apply to "bullet"). A wound-doctor specializes in the cure of wounds inflicted by arrow or gunshot.

Kwiyavuaganti 'rattlesnake-doctor' does not mean one who has the Rattlesnake as his familiar but one who specializes in the cure of rattlesnake bites.⁵ George commented: "Snake-doctors, arrow-doctors, and sun-doctors do not ask for pay, but the patient can pay if he wants to."

Since *Sinawavi*, 'Mythic Coyote' never became a shaman he did not become a helper to mortal shamans. Nonetheless there is such a term as *Sinawavauganti* 'Coyote-doctor' also known as *Sinawanonosigyanti* 'Coyote-dreamer.' These designations are applied to a man who is compulsively lecherous and/or incestuous—one not so much possessing as possessed by the spirit of Coyote. His conduct was not considered admirable; it violated taboos which bound the ordinary man. But the

Coyote-dreamer could not be held accountable for his actions. He was merely following Coyote, committing acts which had been performed by Coyote in the story-time. This theory of predetermined wrong-doing is curiously reminiscent of the doctrine of predestination which deeply concerned many Protestants at the time when I was growing up. All Chemehuevis "followed Coyote"; but Chemehuevi philosophy did not hold it inevitable that all persons should emulate all Coyote's actions.

SELF-CURING AND CHARMS

Curing by the use of medicinal herbs was a subject which George Laird never discussed at length. He said that all such practices came under the head of "self-curing" or self-medication which did not involve the ministrations of a shaman. Quite probably herbal remedies belonged almost exclusively in the province of women. I have heard from other sources that there are (or were until recently) a few women skilled in this art; also that preparations from the Creosote Bush were a widely used panacea. When George and I returned to visit the Colorado River Tribes Reservation in 1925 we saw one of his young nieces who had recently given birth wearily walking up and down, soothing her fretful infant. Plastered to a temple she had a round leaf, or possibly a circle cut from a larger leaf. When I inquired, I was told briefly that it was "to cure headache." Since I was there in the capacity of visiting relative, it seemed discourteous to pursue the matter. In aboriginal (and not improbably in more recent times) all such practices had about them an aura of magic, for the pervasive wonder of the story-time when the Early People set the pattern for all living inevitably spilled over into "this present time."

Walking northwest from Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1919, George saw a pile of stones, each stone weighting down a bit of brush, which he believed to be a *muhuarakin'napitsi*, literally "mosquito press." He said that such a

heap was built up stone by stone by sufferers seeking a cure for rheumatism (*t'i'iyavv̄*). Each afflicted person brings with him a stone of any kind or size convenient for carrying in the hand. This stone might have been picked up close by, but would more likely have been carried a considerable distance—"say from Albuquerque up here." Arriving at the "mosquito-press," the sufferer breaks off a bit of any variety of bush—or he may bring with him a piece of brush which he has carried for a short distance. He lays his brush on the heap and weights it down with the rock he has been carrying. Then he sits, stands, or lies in a position that will bring the diseased part of his body as nearly as possible over the pile or at least in contact with it. There he rests "for an hour or so." George did not say in what manner the site for such a pile was selected, or whether the one who laid down the first stone was possessed of any special power or insight. Either he was ignorant of these matters, or my questioning was too cursory and inept to elicit the information. One may be sure that the practice and its efficacy were rooted in the arcane world of myth.

The aged Rattlesnake in "How Bat Killed Rattlesnake" gave the Sky-Downfeather-Brothers a "charm" (*itatsono*) which they were to hang above them when they lay down to rest. This would fall at the approach of danger and thus warn them when they were about to be overtaken by Rattlesnake's vicious wives. George Laird had no idea of the nature of this charm—"it was some little secret bundle that he had." It is my understanding that the use of a warning charm was not confined to the mythic era.

Masutukwigyanti means "possessor of a *masukwi*" (*sic*, probably for *masukwi*). This object was defined as "something they have that gives them power to hypnotize others—to force others to do their will—some secret thing they carry. If a man has this he can make any woman he desires come to him."

The above was all that George was able to

tell me concerning charms or secret bundles. I find nothing in my notes to indicate how they were made, or by whom, or how they were acquired.

Chemehuevi magical practice appears on the whole to have involved remarkably little in the way of material accessories. It hinged almost entirely upon the dreams, songs, supernatural contacts, and innate powers of the practitioner.

[Excerpted from *Mirror and Pattern: George Laird's World of Chemehuevi Mythology*, now in preparation.]

NOTES

1. The writings of Carlos Castaneda indicate that this is the case where shamanism and sorcery are still practiced.

2. This differs from the Kawaiisu usage. According to Professor Maurice Zigmond, the cognate word *pohagadi* refers solely to a "bewitching shaman," while a "curing shaman" is *huviagadi* 'song possessor.' In Kawaiisu *pohagadi* means "possessor of poison"; but Zigmond also notes that in Paiute *poa* is the word denoting spiritual power. Maurice Zigmond, *The Spiritual World of the Kawaiisu*. In: *Flowers of the Wind, Papers on Ritual, Myth and Symbolism in California and the Southwest*, Thomas C. Blackburn, ed. Ballena Press Anthropological Papers No. 8, 1977.

3. These early notes quote George as saying, in answer to a question, that the Deer and the Mountain Sheep were not helpers. In the much later "Poway period" of our conversations upon these matters he volunteered the information that the

Deer and the Mountain Sheep were the only exception to the rule that all helpers had formerly been shamans—this although they appear in the myths primarily as game animals of the Early People. George Laird himself commented upon this. His later information is too detailed and too spontaneously given to be discounted. I recall that at one time he mentioned agility, the ability of a lame man to run up an almost perpendicular cliff, as one of the powers conferred by the Mountain Sheep upon his possessor. The songs of Mountain Sheep or Deer shamans are not to be confused with the hunting songs of those born into the Mountain Sheep or Deer divisions of the tribe. See Carobeth Laird, *The Chemehuevis*, Malki Museum Press, Banning, 1976.

4. Dr. Sylvia Broadbent informed me that Southern Miwok directions are "skewed." When she asked a consultant to point towards the north he indicated a point considerably west of north. Should this be true also of the Chemehuevi it would account for George Laird's apparent confusion on the subject; possibly Wolf and Coyote departed in the direction we would call northwest rather than north, and Coyote's grandson (the Horse) may have gone northwest rather than west. In post-Contact times the ordinary Chemehuevi directional terms came to conform to the White Man's terminology, but this conformity would not extend to the use of these terms in myth nor to the ancient sacred words that shamans use.

5. In *The Chemehuevis* I give George Laird's elaboration of this subject: A rattlesnake-doctor was a person who had recovered from the bite of a rattlesnake on the hand or on the foot; his cures were effected by laying the recovered member upon the place where another had been bitten. He could also cure toothache by placing his hand or foot against the aching jaw.

