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Woman

HERBAL

# HEALING WISE

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## Wise Woman Tradition

The Wise Woman tradition is the oldest tradition of healing known on our planet, yet one that is rarely identified, rarely written or talked about. A woman-centered tradition of self love, respectful of the earth and all her creatures, the Wise Woman tradition tells us that compassion, simple ritual, and common herbs heal the whole person and maintain health/wholeness/holiness.

In the Wise Woman tradition good health is flexibility, openness to change, availability to transformation, and groundedness. The spiral is the symbol of the Wise Woman tradition.

The special powers and sensibilities of women (especially menstrual powers) are central to the Wise Woman tradition. Men in the Wise Woman tradition find the wise woman within themselves and become her.

In the Wise Woman tradition we nourish. We do not fix or cure or balance. We nourish health/wholeness/holiness in each individual, ever aware of each individual as holographically related to family/community/universe, in spiraling, ever-changing completeness. Problems become doorways of transformation.

Substance, thought, feeling, and spirit are inseparable in the Wise Woman tradition. Wholism, holographic imagery, and unified field physics are parts of the holy wisdom of the Wise Woman way: a choiceless "both/and" wisdom. Everyone wins. Each one is the best.

In the spiralic and amazing Wise Woman tradition, our self-healing options are as diverse as the human imagination and as complex as the human psyche. The Wise Woman tradition has no rules, no texts, no rites; it is constantly changing, constantly being re-invented.

The wise woman and the Wise Woman tradition have been invisible for thousands of years of our recent past. Now the time has come for us to recognize this invisible thread woven into our lives, this common thread that runs from our earliest foremothers to us, this thread of love and nurturance which can lead us out of the maze of planetary destruction, war, and self-hatred.



*I see the wise woman.*

*She carries a blanket of compassion. She wears a robe of wisdom. Around her throat flutters a veil of shifting shapes. From her shoulders, a mantle of power flows. A story band encircles her forehead. She stitches a quilt; she spins fibers into yarn; she knits; she sews; she weaves. She ties the threads of our lives together. She forms a web of spiraling threads.*

*I see the wise woman. She is at her loom: a loom warped with days and nights. White threads, black threads receive her flying shuttle, a shuttle filled with threads of many colors. Threads the colors of the earth, the common ground; threads the colors of the people of the earth. Some threads short; some threads long; each thread different, each perfect. These threads are alive with sound and color. These threads are mutable; they change at a touch. These threads are crystal antennae; they respond at a thought.*

*And intertwined with each thread is a thread blood red: a thread of such sensitivity, it cannot be seen, yet a thread of such vitality, it can never be hidden. As our blood flows over and under the days and nights of our lives and binds each moment to the whole, so the red thread of the wise woman binds us in the tapestry, cosmic web.*

*I see the wise woman.*

*And she sees me.*

## The Wise Woman Tradition

### Who Is This Crippled Old Black Woman?

I see the wise woman. She is old and black and walks with the aid of a beautifully carved stick. She's the ancient grandmother of us all and she represents health/wholeness/holiness in the Wise Woman tradition.

She's the one who brought me here. She brought me to the Wise Woman tradition, and she has guided me in the writing of this book. I have been following her traces for years, finding here and there a thread from her cloak.

I find many of her threads, vibrant threads, when I visit with and read about aboriginal women. The aboriginal woman, the original woman, the earth-based woman, the woman of earth colors, the woman of the mother cultures speaks to me. She speaks in a gesture, in a color, in a glance. She speaks in a smile, in a song, in a dance. She speaks to me of Wise Woman ways.

The crippled old black woman winks at me and spreads her arms.

*"These are the ways of our ancient grandmothers, the ancient ones who still live. These wise women are one with all life as they tread the ever-changing spiral. Every pain, every plant, every stone, every feeling, every problem is cherished as teacher: not teacher who grades, but teacher who guides. Night is loved for darkness and the stars. Day is loved for light and the sun. Uniqueness is our treasure, not normalcy. Our universe includes all; it is 'both/and,' not 'either/or.' This is the Wise Woman way the world 'round.*

*"These are the ways of our ancient grandmothers, the ancient ones who still live. These wise women receive nourishment from and give nourishment to the great mother of all. They receive her abundance with compassion, knowing they themselves will be food for others. They know that dying is the portal to the existence of death as birth is the portal to the existence of life. They celebrate all comings and goings. This is the Wise Woman way the world 'round.*

*"These are the ways of our ancient grandmothers, the ancient ones who still live. These wise women spin the invisible web which weaves us all together. They invite you to weave the threads of your own life back into the cloak of the ancient one, the holy blanket of the wise woman. They thank you for reweaving, wherever you can, the sacred threads of planetary, animal, plant, and personal kinship.*

*"These are the ways of our ancient grandmothers, the ancient ones who still live. The joy of life is the give-away. They give you a gift of a robe, a robe woven of unconditional self love: luminous, resonant, shimmering.*

*"Here, put it on. Ah! Do you feel it?*

*"As you emerge through the neckhole you become the center of the universe. All revolves around you, the world's axis, life's matrix, the still point in the ever-moving. The designs of the universe itself radiate down your sleeves and bodice. It is an ancient design. Lift your arms. You are the tree of life, the goddess, unique and whole.*

*"And as you trace the invisible way of the Wise Woman, wearing your robe, know that the ancient ones offer you safe journey. They offer you safe journey and the possibility of finding yourself healthy/whole/holy. This is the Wise Woman way the world 'round."*

### **The Wise Woman Tradition is Invisible**

The Wise Woman tradition is the oldest tradition of healing known on our planet, yet one that is rarely identified, rarely written or talked about. It is an invisible tradition.

Flexible and common, claiming no healers, having no universities, no institutions, the Wise Woman tradition is hard to see. I feel it as an invisible thread humming with wholeness, ancient and vibrant, stitched through my life, stitched through the lives of all who went before and all who come after me. An invisible, tenacious thread.

The reasons for the invisibility of the Wise Woman tradition are manifold:

- Nourishing is an invisible process.

The Wise Woman tradition is based on nourishment, a basic process generally taken for granted, not considered worthy of much note. Nourishment through giving suck and gathering and preparing food is presented as background by anthropologists who are fascinated by the occasional dramatic hunt. Wise women nourish in invisible ways, helping others to empower themselves without saying, "Hey, look at me healing you. Look at me teaching you!"

- Mothers are invisible.

Virtually all health care given worldwide (99% say some experts) is provided by mothers who care for their families' health, and most of this is done in the Wise Woman tradition. But this is not measured nor paid for, and anyway, isn't that what mothers do?

- Women, especially women of color, are invisible to white men and white male society.

The Wise Woman tradition is a woman-centered tradition. For hundreds of years, the news of the world has been given to us by white men who hardly see women at all, let alone black women. And they do not see women as powerful even when they do perceive women's existence. Women healers, midwives, and herbalists are frequently written out of accounts, omitted when lists are recopied, or known only by a husband's name. And the lineage of the European Wise Woman tradition has gone up in flames so often that tracing that thread is difficult indeed.

- A woman making dinner is invisible.

To claim that she is engaged in healing her family and community and keeping her universe in balance is a lot to claim for dinner. This is the Wise Woman way.

- Spoken words are invisible.

The Wise Woman tradition is an oral tradition, and we have grown accustomed to believing things only if they are written down, in books, like this one. The Wise Woman tradition flows from experience rather than faith in books; from creativity rather than dogma; from many unique individuals creating new ways to heal/whole, creating new/old wise ways, rather than a monolithic tradition. It is nonrepeatable, non-replicable, ever changing.

- There's no visible structure in the Wise Woman tradition.

There is no hierarchy in the Wise Woman tradition: no difference between above and below, no order of authority, no sense of "man" as better than all other forms of life. There's no president, no guru, no chairman of the board. There are no rules to follow. You can't get a degree or certificate in the Wise Woman tradition. You can't be tested on it, because there are no right and wrong answers.

- Uniqueness is invisible.

Each healing/wholing ritual encounter in the Wise Woman tradition is unique. Repetition is neither sought nor valued. In the Scientific world view, a single instance of anything is virtually invisible. The more repeatable something is, the more visible it is.

- Commonness is invisible.

It's just too familiar. When the European came upon native cultures he could not see that there were medicine women, because all women were medicine women. The few medicine men (often dressed up as women) were visible to him. And so European cultural biases perpetuated the myth of the medicine man, and the medicine woman remained invisible.

- Prevention is invisible.

If I drink nettle infusion while pregnant and don't hemorrhage, I haven't done anything visible or noticeable. We have become so used to invasive preventive medicine (as with mammograms) that nourishing as prevention is invisible to us. With Wise Woman ways we resonate in health/wholeness/holiness throughout our lives, so there are fewer emergencies and fewer heroic measures needed.

- One of the powers of the wise woman is invisibility.

A Wise Woman tradition midwife tells me that when she is profusely thanked (right at the birth), she reconsiders what she did, looking for ways to be more invisible.

"I'm there to help her remember *her* power, not to display mine. I'm there to support *her* to deliver the baby; I don't deliver. I'm only there if I'm needed. The more invisible I am, the more I can really help."

Because it's invisible, the Wise Woman tradition is difficult to discover and easy to ignore. At the same time, because the Wise Woman tradition is the oldest tradition of health care among humans, its ways are deeply embedded in our collective consciousness, in our morphogenetic fields, in our ancient brain parts. We can try to ignore the Wise Woman tradition, but it won't leave us alone.

The wisdom of the Wise Woman way exists within each of us; it exists within you and it can come to life through you. The Wise Woman tradition lives in the woman self memory of each person. How do I know? The most frequent comment (and my favorite compliment) after a talk on the Wise Woman tradition: "I already knew everything you had to say, I just needed you to remind me."



## The Wise Woman Tradition is a Spiral



The symbol of the Wise Woman tradition is a spiral. A spiral is a cycle as it moves through time. A spiral is movement around and beyond a circle, always returning to itself, but never at exactly the same place. Spirals never repeat themselves. Spirals remind us that life is movement, that each moment is unique, and that form is the essence of transformation.

The symbol of the Wise Woman tradition is the spiral. The spiral is the bubbling cauldron, the curl of the wave, the lift of the wind, the whirlpool of water, the umbilical cord, the great serpent, the path of the earth, the twist of the helix, the spin of our galaxy. The spiral is the soft guts. The spiral is the labyrinth. The spiral is the womb-moon-tide möbius pull. The spiral is your individual life. The spiral is the passage between worlds: birth passing into death, death passing into birth. The path of enlightenment is the spiral dance of bliss.

The symbol of the Wise Woman tradition is a spiral. Spirals never repeat. Walk a circle and you can stay in balance, know the cycles, trust your every step. Walk a spiral, you will inevitably come to the unique next step, the unknown, the thirteenth step, the opportunity for change, the window of transformation.

The thirteenth step creates the spiral. Twelve is the number of established order. Twelve is easily divided and ordered into halves and quarters and thirds, easily categorized and labeled and defined. One step beyond the mutable twelve is thirteen, the wild card, the unique number, the indivisible prime. Thirteen, the number of change.

## The Wise Woman Tradition is Woman-Centered

The Wise Woman tradition is a woman-centered tradition. Everything is perceived as manifesting from the female center: life, nourishment, song, story, shelter, love, beauty, sacredness, healing, wholeness.

Earth is mother is woman is wholeness is health. So, whether they are men or women, all self-healing helpers in the Wise Woman tradition are perceived as women. (In some cultures, the men act this out by wearing female clothing, or by cutting themselves, so that they bleed like women [see **Blood Mysteries**].)

In the Wise Woman tradition, health/wholeness/holiness comes through nourishment, and nourishment comes through the mother; nourishment comes from woman. So healing occurs in the ground of woman power, in the ground of heart-centered compassion.

What is this woman power? This power of nourishment? This power of creation and destruction? What is this female energy? It certainly is not the opposite of what we think of as male energy. It is not "the passive" or even "the receptive." It is the void.

Female energy is the void of all being: the all-consuming void, the all-birthing void.

### The Power of the Void

In the Wise Woman tradition, all health, all coming to wholeness, begins with a return to the void. To heal, to become whole, we turn again around the spiral of our life. We turn again around the spiral and enter the void, the great unknown, knowing only that our form is reformed, that our form is transformed, that rebirth inevitably follows death.

When we resist our death, our return to the void, we call it "our problem."

The problem is I am in pain. The problem is I am out of control. The problem is I am falling, without chance of stopping, falling into the void of all beginnings, into the void of all ends.

The Wise Woman tradition asks us to let go and fall. Fall into the void. Fall into the open arms of the mother. Add on to yourself by letting go of everything. Become whole and healthy by turning on the spiral, by returning to the void.

Where does the spiral end? Where begin? In the void. Place of female power. Place we are taught to avoid. Nothing. Chaos. The spiral

emerges from and ends in invisibility, the great nothing dark womb of the goddess, endlessly empty, endlessly full, doorway of life, window of transformation, entry to death.

Death is part of successful healing in the Wise Woman tradition. Death the invisible, unique void. The void is woman power: simultaneously dynamic and relaxed; empty yet completely full; satiated yet always consuming; creative, abundant, insatiable, unfillable, unquenchable, wild, having nothing to receive, knowing everything is already present, completely calm.

Here in the void lives the Crone. Here we encounter the Crone in her power: Hecate chants words of power at the crossing. Kali, bedecked with musical, runic skulls, dances on the corpses. Cerridwen, the sacred sow, cosmic pig, feeds eternally. Hel, full of passion, guards the sacred fire. The unknowable goddess flutters her veil. The void contains all and consumes all.

From the void comes the Virgin who gives birth: Mary sits spinning the red thread of life. Persephone weaves the tapestry of the universe. Ishtar performs the sacred belly dance for her sisters. All life arises from the creative void.

Where is the void? Is it heaven? Is it hell? Up the mountain in my town, at the Tibetan monastery, the day begins with an invocation to the goddess Tara, life giver. An invocation to Mahakala (Kali), the goddess of death, closes each day. All things begin from woman. All things return to woman. In sickness, in death, we are the food, the nourishment of the void, the great goddess. Now I eat you. In life, in birth, she gives to us, nourishes us abundantly, cares for us compassionately. Now you eat me.

### The Wise Woman Tradition Heals with Nourishment

In the Wise Woman tradition, health/wholeness/holiness comes through adding on to, that is, through nourishment. Problems, pains, diseases, and illnesses are not fixed, or cured, or even brought into balance, in the Wise Woman tradition, but honored, supported, respected for their truth, nourished, and added on to the truth of the whole being. Nourishment helps us incorporate ("to intimately blend, to make into a body") all of our experiences. Each problem is acknowledged as a potential thirteenth step to transformation and growth.

Nourishment encourages expansion and growth. Nourishment includes. Nourishment supports each being as unique, holy, individual. Nourishing our problems encourages love for all parts of ourselves.

We become whole, and genuinely who we are, rather than the fixed, cured, balanced person we suppose we are supposed to be.

The Wise Woman tradition sees everything as nourishment. Nourishment insures life. Nourishment is the great grounding root and green leaf of the Wise Woman tradition. All health occurs through nourishment. (The immune system nourishes itself on viruses.) All is nourishment. Now you eat me. Now I eat you.

Cell by cell, you replace yourself. Thought by thought, you create yourself. Dream by dream, you envision the universe. You create a million new cells every second: impressionable, vulnerable cells. From what do you create them? With what do you imprint them?

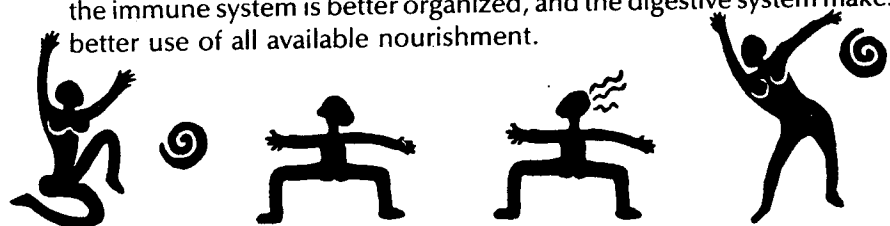
Nourish yourself optimally, with health/wholeness/holiness, to create healthy/whole/holy cells. Imprint them with vibrations of wholeness, resonate holographically, and you create health and flexibility in the Wise Woman way. *Not* "good health" as in the absence of pain and problems. *Not* immunity to all germs, viruses, hoaxes, disappointments, heartbreaks, setbacks, and sheer galactic perversity, but the stamina and grace to find the thirteenth step of every problem, to find pain's gift.

With optimum nourishment, says the Wise Woman tradition, we find ourselves walking an ever-increasing spiral of health/wholeness/holiness.

What of cleaning? What of toxins? How can you be healthy, holy, and happy if you're full of crap? Don't you have to clean the liver? Don't you have to clean the blood?

Nourish the new cells, optimally, says the Wise Woman tradition, and the old cells and other waste will be cleared away easily. The liver is replaced, every cell of it, in six weeks. Nourish each new liver cell optimally, and the liver will clean the blood. The kidneys are replaced, every cell, in a month. Nourish each new cell optimally, let the kidneys clean the blood. The blood volume itself is replaced, every cell, in three weeks. What cleaner blood than new and optimally nourished cells?

Partake of optimum nourishment, as understood by wise women through the ages, and soon every cell of your body is healthy/whole/holy: the nervous system functions more smoothly, the hormonal system fluctuates more evenly, the liver and kidneys are more effective, the immune system is better organized, and the digestive system makes better use of all available nourishment.



## Blood Mysteries

In the beginning, according to the Wise Woman tradition, everything began, as everything does, at birth. The Great Mother of All gave birth and the earth appeared out of the void. Then the Great Mother of All gave birth again, and again, and again, and people, and animals, and plants appeared on the earth. They were all very hungry. "What shall we eat?" they asked the Great Mother. "Now you eat me," she said, smiling. Soon there were a very great many lives, but the Great Mother of All was enjoying creating and giving birth so much that she didn't want to stop. "Ah," she said smiling, "now I eat you." And so she still does.

We all come from the same mother. She is the wise woman. We all return to her embrace, her bloody-rich womb place, when we die. Every woman is a whole/holy form of her, able to be whole/holy mother of all life, able to be whole/holy destroyer of life. Her power is her blood that flows and flows, her blood which is life and gives life. Every woman's menstrual blood and birth-time blood is a holy mystery.

What are the blood mysteries? Why are they central to the understanding of the Wise Woman tradition?

Blood mysteries teach that menstrual blood and birthing blood are holy blood, power blood, healing blood. The blood mysteries teach us to remember that life and healing come from and return to woman, to the wise woman, to the woman who bleeds and bleeds. And does not die.

Blood mysteries reveal that menstrual (moontime) blood and birth blood are so holy, so full of potential, so full of the void, that they are to be used only to heal, to heal by nourishing. Holy woman-blood is nourishing blood, blood of love, blood of abundance, blood that heals the earth.

Blood mysteries recall the immense power of the bleeding woman. Power enough to share in great nourishing give-aways. Give-away from woman womb to earth womb, give-away from mother to matrix, give-away of nourisher to nourisher. When we bleed into the ground (in reality or in fantasy) our power regrounds as our blood flows through the personal root chakra and into the earth.

Bleeding into the ground, bleeding freely, we know ourselves as women, as nourishers of life, as givers of nourishment to the plants, givers of holy nourishment: our moontime blood.

I am woman giving away nourishment to ensure this planet's life. With my moontime power, my blood, with my birthing power, my

blood, I feed the earth who feeds us all. Every month I remember: I am woman. I am earth. I am life. I am nourishment. I am change.

I am woman, blatantly and repeatedly confronted with my changes: hormonal harmonics stirring moon time visions, ovulatory oracles, pre-menstrual crazies, orgasmic knowings, birth ecstasies, breast-feeding bliss, menopausal moods.

I am wholeness. I am woman of wisdom. I know life, death, pain, and health in my marrow, in my womb. I know the bloody places: the narrow bloody space between life and death, the bloody place of birth, the bloody mess of nourishing life, the bloody flow of letting life go. I am woman. My blood is power. Peaceful power. Peaceful blood.

My blood is holy nourishment. My blood nourishes the growing fetus. My blood becomes milk to nourish the young child. My blood flows into the ground as holy nourishment for the Great Mother, Gaia, Mother Earth.



Gaia, whose ways are bloody. Woman, whose ways are bloody. Blood of nourishment. But bloody. Bloody menstrual blood, bloody birth blood. Blood of peace, nourishing blood. Blood of health/wholeness/holiness, not of sacrifice. The Wise Woman tradition is a bloody-handed woman, a bloody-thighed woman, a woman who gives birth, a woman who sees to the other side of things.

Health/wholeness/holiness is always changing. Life is mysterious, moving in spirals of change. Spirals moving to, through, from the void. Change making the hole so we can see the holy healthy gift of our wholeness.

*"Sit, sister, here on the soft green moss, and give your sacred moon blood to the earth, back again to the spiral of life. Let flow your womb's blood red to the green and brown of earth. Sit here. Relax and close your eyes and let the visions come. Rest now and give your moon blood to nourish the mother who nourishes us. Relax and let the visions come."*

The time of menstrual bleeding, according to the Wise Woman tradition, is a time of visions. Any woman who pays attention to these visions will find the powers of shamans, witch doctors, medicine wo/men.

"Add a bit of red leaf to your herbal mixtures, any red leaf except poison ivy. That will make the medicine strong," says a friend, apprentice to a Native American shaman. And the wise woman inside me whispers: "They do this to evoke the power of menstrual blood."

These are the natural powers of menstruating, menopausal, and post-menopausal women:

- Oneness with the earth as a responsive nurturing presence
- Communication with plants, animals, rocks
- Weather making
- Shape shifting
- Invisibility
- Communication with fairies, devas, elves, dragons, unicorns
- Foreknowledge
- Acutely sensitive senses of smell, taste, hearing, sight, touch
- Healing

The Wise Woman tradition understands healing/wholing as blood mysteries. The blood of birth and death, and the blood of nourishment, these are the natural knowledge of women, these are the things that make us wise.



## Holographic Understanding is a Wise Woman Way

The whole is more than the sum of its parts in the Wise Woman tradition. And every part is seen as the whole in the Wise Woman tradition. The part is as whole as the whole is. These are holographic understandings. They follow the way of the hologram.

Hologram is derived from the Greek words *holo*, meaning *whole*, and *gram*, meaning *to write*. Thus the hologram writes the whole.

A hologram is formed by splitting a laser beam into two parts: one travels directly to a photographic plate, one is bounced off an object and onto the plate. The resulting interference pattern at the intersection of the beams, which is recorded on the photographic plate, is not only extremely complex, but usually invisible to the unaided eye. When the photographic plate is illuminated with laser light, the original object is seen three-dimensionally, with luminous depth and great detail, from many viewpoints. If only a small part of the plate is illuminated, the entire object is still visible, though somewhat less sharply, with less definition and detail, and from fewer viewpoints.

The individual cell in the body is one small, whole picture of the entire being. The person is composed of millions of cells, millions of pictures, collected together and becoming more than the sum of the parts. In this collection of cells the luminous depth of life stirs and we see great detail, great adventures.

Nourish each cell as unique, nourish it optimally, says the Wise Woman tradition, and the person will thrive, heal, and become whole as an inherent part of being alive.

With holographic understanding, the Wise Woman way treats each being as a complete and perfect wholeness. With holographic understanding, the Wise Woman way knows that everything we think and do affects the whole: our whole/holy selves, our families, our communities, the earth as a whole, and even the vast universe.

With holographic understanding, the Wise Woman tradition sees each illness as an expression of the ever-changing truth of the full being, and the healing/wholing of the illness to be the wholing of the entire being, family, community, planet, universe.

With holographic understanding, in the Wise Woman way, we nourish and add to each being. Nourishing, we add to wholeness, rather than eliminating "the problem." Adding to, we increase the clarity of the hologram. So each personal problem is seen as an opportunity to strengthen family. Each problem is understood as an opportunity to create community. Each problem is valued as an opportunity to heal the earth. Each problem is respected as an opportunity to nourish the universe.

If we do not nourish the universe and heal the earth and create community and strengthen the family when we cure the pain or the problem, then, to the Wise Woman way of thinking, we have not healed anything at all, even if the patient is well. If we heal the person but disrupt the family, the community, or the earth, then wholeness is not increased, nourishment is not in action, health does not occur, and holiness is forgotten.

In the holographic understanding of the Wise Woman way, you and I are each, no matter how different, a whole picture of the entire universe. Physicists and mystics say this in different ways. We can read the entire universe in each other, though the finer details aren't clear. Our health, our pain mirror and illuminate part of the joy and sadness of the universe. The more of us that think and act in certain ways, the clearer that expression is in the universe.

Each cell is a living entity with feeling and spirit, not just physical substance. Full integration of all parts with all parts is part of the holographic understanding of the Wise Woman tradition.

The Wise Woman tradition knows that individuals aren't just a body, a mind, and a spirit, and even if they were, wouldn't separate the parts.

When we're doing emotional work, we understand that therapy has its emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects. When we are responding to our soul's longings, we are full of feeling, and need to create a physical expression of our heart's desire. When we are engaged in intense physical effort, such as lovemaking, the emotions are more accessible, the spirit closer at hand. All aspects of our being are integrated, inseparable, in the Wise Woman way.

Integration obviates hierarchies. The Wise Woman tradition does not believe that the soul is higher than the body, but that it is in a mutual relationship with the body. All parts of the body (and any part of the body) reflect, holographically, the soul, the spirit.

Optimum nutrition depends on the availability of whole, integrated food and energy sources. Holographically, their wholeness activates the wholeness of each of your cells.

Wild plants are whole, integrated food and energy sources. Wild plants carry spiritual power, emotional power, physical power, and other, invisible, unnameable powers as well. Eat a wild plant, and you're eating wholeness. Wild plants are readily available resonators of health/wholeness/holiness, optimum nourishers to all parts of your being. This is one of the reasons that the Wise Woman tradition herbalist prefers to use wild plants.

In the Wise Woman tradition the body is more than a physical

object. Emotional bodies, energetic bodies, dream bodies, soul aspects, and subtle bodies, to name but a few, are just as integral to the hologram as the physical body.

The Wise Woman tradition understands that healing/wholing transformation in the body creates change in the entire being.

With Wise Woman holographic understanding, we learn to see the interconnections and weavings of all ways of being. We learn to perceive and strengthen the weave of ourselves and our lives by walking the way of the flowing spiral and looking for the pattern of the hologram. We begin to see the once-invisible threads of nourishment that weave us in the web of our grandmothers. We begin to notice the story cloak of the ancient ones.



### The Wise Woman Tradition Says Health/Wholeness/Holiness is Ever-Changing



In the Wise Woman tradition, health is flexibility: loose muscles, quick mind, unlimited curiosity. Wholeness is inclusive, pliable, expanding to accommodate. Holiness sees the holiness, wholeness, health, and nourishment in all beings.

So health, from the Wise Woman perspective, includes a lot of people who are considered sick by other traditions. Confinement to a wheelchair, blindness, extreme age, terminal illness, mental retardation, and other disabilities do not disqualify any being from health/wholeness/holiness in the Wise Woman tradition.

Resistance clenches the muscles, causes pain. Resistance prejudices the thought, causes isolation. Resistance says holy must be exactly like this or it doesn't count, and the glory fades from the world.

Flexible, pliable, and ever-changing: that, says the Wise Woman tradition, is health.

Every problem, each pain, disability, disease, is understood, in the Wise Woman way, as a hole for the entry of wholeness, a portal for the arrival of an ally. An ally who opens doorways of transformation. An ally who can protect you. An ally who brings you gifts. An ally who returns your missing pieces. An ally who guides you toward integration, through disintegration. An ally of wholeness, who accepts all of you. An ally who reminds you of your mortality and your immortality.

Healing is not *done* in the Wise Woman tradition. Health is allowed. Wholeness is nourished. Holiness is acknowledged. The wise woman smiles.

The Scientific tradition seeks an objective, impersonal, physiochemical solution to disease. The Heroic tradition seeks to cure by suggesting that you create everything, are responsible for everything, and you can make it all better if you follow the rules from now on. The Wise Woman tradition seeks to understand the personal, social hologram of the disease and to nourish wholeness.

In the Wise Woman tradition, wholeness nourishes wholeness. Fractured or isolated substances, such as drugs or vitamin supplements, create fractured and isolated people, not healthy/whole/holy people. The Wise Woman herbalist pays attention to preserving the integrity, the wholeness, of the plants she uses, rather than to preserving the active constituent or any other single aspect.

Healing/health in the Wise Woman tradition is concerned more with creating meaning than with creating a particular outcome. Healing/health is not dependent on curing, or removing the problem, but on making the problem meaningful, specifically, by finding the gift and the nourishment that the problem brings.

Healing/health, the Wise Woman way, is concerned with the story: the person's story, the family's tale, the community's fable, the planet's myth. When the Wise Woman knows the story (or even a part of the story, in holographic knowing), she can read the story line. She can retell the story, expose deeper roots of the tale, reveal new meanings in the fable, and create anew the myths.

Every personal story has a meaning both special to the one and true for all. By retelling the story, the wise woman weaves wholeness. By exposing the deeper roots of the tale, the wise woman grounds health. By revealing what has been hidden, the wise woman tears holes for holiness. By creating anew the myth, the wise woman offers optimum nourishment.

This is different from finding the lesson or the teaching of a disease or problem. "Learning your lesson" is a thought pattern from the Heroic tradition. Learning the lesson implies that you will never do the same thing again. ("Never doing it again" leads to loss of spontaneity.) Once you learn your lesson, you get well, you are cured. (If you are still sick, you haven't yet learned your lesson.)

The wise woman is impeccably clear of guilt and self-blame (without feeling guilty when she's *not* clear of guilt and blame), while acknowledging herself as creator of her universe.

Receiving the nourishment of the problem, allying yourself with your pain, and loving yourself implies that you are free to continue to have the problem, consensually, as a matter of intent. You can choose to die.

Death is not failure in the Wise Woman tradition. Death may be chosen as a gift of integration and wholeness to self, a gift of optimum nourishment and health to the family and larger community. Disintegration of family and self-respect (and the lost opportunity to strengthen community ties by care-tending the dying at home) is natural when a family member is kept alive in an institution until the family's resources of money, time, and good cheer are exhausted—as is generally the case today in industrialized nations, with Scientific tradition approaches to health.

The Wise Woman tradition can allow death because the Wise Woman tradition is grounded in change. The only thing certain is change. Remember the void? The spiral of life and death is ever-changing and unique, flowing through all possibilities. This is the wisdom of the Wise Woman way.

Do not try to outwit and avoid pain and problems. They can be your means to greater wholeness, to more vital health, to a soaring spirit. They are part of your unique gifts. Fixity is worse than death, counsels the Wise Woman way. Keep on stepping around the spiral. What comes next?

### The Wise Woman Tradition is a Both/And Universe

The both/and universe embraces all possibilities. The both/and universe is inclusive. The both/and universe accepts every part of us. There is difference, there is distinction, but not opposition. In the both/and universe, opposites are not compromised and evened out, but united as powerful allies, each with individual uniqueness.

The Wise Woman tradition asks us to nourish all parts of ourselves, and to see our problems as allies, bringing gifts. Sometimes those gifts are the "bad" parts of ourselves. We worry that if we nourish our "bad" parts (bad child, bad parent, bad person, bad lover, bad friend) we'll lose our good parts. We are used to an either/or universe, where one is either bad or good, sick or well, dead or alive.

In the Wise Woman tradition, we are both good and bad simultaneously. We find missing parts of ourselves when we ask to see the gifts, disguised as problems, that our allies bring.

We may discover the bad child, who is an important part of the real child. Following the Wise Woman way, we nourish the bad child. We nourish by listening to this child's needs and answering them. We nourish by allowing, providing, time for communication. And we find ourselves more whole, more holy, more real, more joyous, more alive as a result, not bad (as we feared).

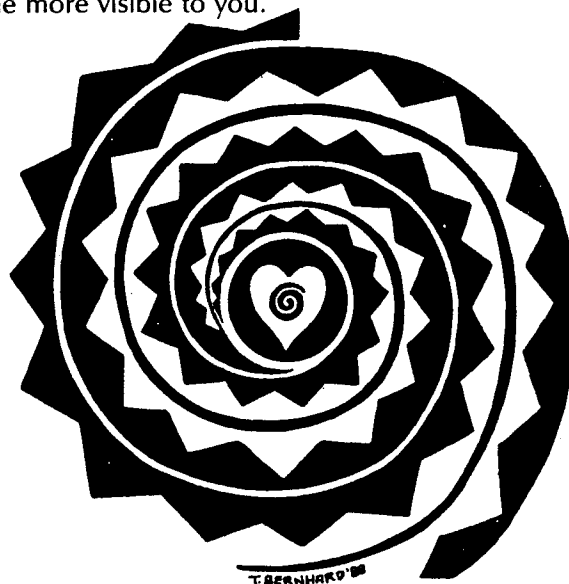
We are both sick and well at the same time, in the Wise Woman tradition. From one viewpoint, we know that different parts of us are healthy and sick. From another viewpoint, we understand that sickness builds health. An immune system unused is an immune system fallen into disuse. People who suddenly die from cancer and heart attacks are often people who were "never sick a day in their lives."

Understanding the gifts of health/wholeness/holiness in every illness, we follow the Wise Woman way and try to nourish ourselves in sickness as in health. How difficult it can be. How little we feel we deserve, how little we love ourselves when we are not well, not able. Even if we are only partially unable, even if we know we will recover shortly, we don't love ourselves as whole, we don't open our hearts to our own holiness.

In the Wise Woman tradition, we are alive and dead at the same time. Each second a million new cells in each of us stir to life. Each second a million more cells expire, die. Breathing in we inspire and live. Breathing out we expire and die. Our death gives life to others. The death of others (plants, animals) gives life to us. Now I eat you. Now you eat me.

Chaos, permeability, and nonsense are honored in the Wise Woman tradition, not instead of, but in addition to honoring order, boundaries, and logic. Life and death co-exist; there is no pitched battle; there are no enemies in the Wise Woman tradition.

The next time you have to make a choice *between*, try this: change the "or" to "and" and look at your decision from a place of inclusion. Let new vistas appear. Let the spiraling path of the Wise Woman tradition become more visible to you.



## The Wise Woman Tradition is Heart-Centered

In the either/or universe, we know where we stand and how to keep in balance. We strive to keep away badness, sickness, death and we struggle to hold onto goodness, health, life. Holding back the awful things with one hand, we cling to what good we have with the other. It seems such a secure balance. Such a familiar universe.

Where is the balance if we let go of resistance to illness, to death? If we acknowledge our own inability to live up to the standards of thoughts and behavior we set for the perfect person? If life and death co-exist in us, will we choose life? If health and sickness are inevitable turns on the spiral, is exercise and attention to nutrition a waste of time? How is chaos honored without losing all order?

The Wise Woman tradition balances all possibilities in the heart's center, the heart's truth. Balances by simply allowing the heart's truth, the heart's center. There are no right answers in the Wise Woman tradition. The right answer is "I don't know." The right answer is, "I'll have to wait and see." The right answer is silence, wherein the heart's truth rings and health/wholeness/holiness occurs.

The heart's truth is compassion, forgiveness, unconditional self-love. The heart's truth is the both/and universe. In the Wise Woman tradition the focus is on opening the heart, not toward others, but toward self.

Self-love, self-forgiveness, and deep compassion for one's own humanness, nourish the heart and give balance amidst the windings of the Wise Woman spiral. Nourish the individual heart, says the Wise Woman tradition, until the nourishment and love flow out. There is abundant nourishment for every heart when we learn to receive it.

Unconditional love is not for giving, but for taking, claims the Wise Woman tradition. The Wise Woman tradition demands that we learn to receive the abundance of the universe. Learn to receive the blessings of our mother. Learn to receive the ever-changing, ever-different flow of life and death, wellness and sickness, good and bad, with respect and joy.

Learn to accept unconditional love from yourself, says the Wise Woman way. Learn to forgive yourself completely. Even to forgive yourself for causing others to hurt you. Learn to have compassion for your own suffering.

Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.

Learn to distinguish, with Wise Woman vision, both/and unconditional love from the sort of unconditional love that's an undercover bargain: *"I'll love you unconditionally: you can do anything and I'll forgive you; I'll always be available to you; and if I fail, you can punish*

*me. In return, you must love me unconditionally: no matter how I behave to you, you must always excuse me, and you must be immediately available to me; if you fail, I can punish you."*

You need love to exist, to survive. In the Wise Woman tradition, love is a crucial aspect of optimum nutrition. Forgive yourself, better yet, enjoy yourself for your attempts to get love. Understand that your fights with your beloveds feel like life-and-death struggles because they are, for certain parts of yourself.

Our attempts to *give* love unconditionally are usually sophisticated stratagems for extracting love *from* the universe or another person.

The inner well of need for love and nurturance seems like a bottomless pit when we first gaze down it alone, with no one else to blame for the echoing hollowness. With each act of lovingkindness for ourselves, it fills. Slowly the bottom becomes at least visible. Others don't seem to be sources of pain so often. They, all of them, seem more and more like oneself.

As we love ourselves, and nourish all aspects of ourselves, a rare compassion is nourished, a tender compassion for everyone and everything. We are filled with compassion. We forgive ourselves deeply. And we realize that everyone who ever wronged us was a healer, a teacher, a lover of ours. The heart bursts with compassion. The floodgates of love spill over.

Once we have filled ourselves with unconditional love, once we agree to love and nurture all aspects of ourselves, we emit the energy of unconditional love. We don't do anything particular, yet the beings around us feel this love. Just by being, we resonate love and health/wholeness/holiness.

Some are attracted, some repelled by this vibration of truth, beauty, and love. There is no attachment in us to winning this one or that one, healing this one with love, being adored by that one. No attachment to getting you to accept my love so that I can expect love from you. Right now I love myself, and the universe loves me, and I am in the midst of all this love. If you reject my love, I remember. I remember with compassion the love I rejected before. I remember how vulnerable, how lonely I felt. I love myself as one who has rejected love, and so my love includes you in your rejection of love.

The welling heartsprings themselves are nourished at their sources when we love ourselves unconditionally. This constant inner flow of unconditional love and compassion *for self* creates an axis in the chaos of ongoing life and unwinding death. An axis, a string, a resonant fiber, vibrating wholeness, humming a love song, sounds within you. It flows out from you and touches, sounds in everything.

In the Wise Woman tradition, this strong center of unconditional self-love is a magic carpet, a cosmic surfboard on the turbulent, unpredictable flow of being.



### The Wise Woman Tradition Loves Rough



Just as receptive power seems a contradiction in terms to some, so does rough love. Compassion, forgiveness, and unconditional love evoke a sense of squishy soft acceptance to many. In the Wise Woman tradition, love is rough, real, truthful, and unattached to outcome. In the Wise Woman tradition, love says "no" as often as "yes."

The Wise Woman tradition sees compassion as passionate. Passion shared is compassion. Passion is rough; passion is wild. Screams and shouts and tears and touches are part of living with passion, being com/passionate in the Wise Woman way.

Forgiveness is focused on self, in the Wise Woman way, and believe me, that can be rough. Forgive yourself for being hurt, for suffering, and love yourself enough to tell yourself the truth about it. Is it time to say "no"?

In the Wise Woman tradition, forgiving ourselves opens our vision to our limits, to our cramped spaces, to our self-inflicted prisons. Keen-sighted from the truth, we see how to free ourselves by setting boundaries that truly protect our fragile aspects yet are moveable, permeable to nourishment, so we receive the intimacy we desire. Saying "no" leads to unconditional love.

Unconditional love that nourishes the inner being does not tolerate abuse, ugliness, lies. Unconditional self-love brings self-respect and demands it of others. Unconditional self-love knows that it is unloving of anyone, self or other, to allow abuse to continue, no matter their age or circumstances. Loving ourselves unconditionally strengthens our power to say "no" when our heart knows that beauty and truth are not present.

The wise woman understands that, for most of us, saying "no" is hard to do. We're afraid that if we say "no," we won't get enough love. Or worse yet, we won't be allowed to give our love away, and we need to give our love away so we can expect to get love from others. The wise woman understands that we expect love to come from outside, not inside. She knows that this expectation, this assumption, this hope—that love comes from outside—prevents us from speaking our truth when our heart demands that we say "no."

Loving ourselves, generating love from inside, not trying to get it from outside, that is the Wise Woman way, a way that allows "no" to

reveal its loving nature.

Become aware of how often you do the expected thing, the good thing, the right thing, says the Wise Woman helper, and acknowledge the part of yourself that is a liar, that is afraid to say "no."

Truth and unconditional love support each other. To love yourself unconditionally, you must tell yourself the truth. You cannot hear your own truth if you are lying to others. Begin to tell the truth in the smallest thing. This brings you wholeness. Tell the truth often and you will be filled with beauty. You will have health. You will walk the beauty way of health/wholeness/holiness. Your truth will bless all you encounter. You will be blessed. Do not be afraid to reveal your own uniqueness, for that is part of your blessing.

### The Wise Woman Tradition Insists on Uniqueness

The Scientific tradition defines truth as repeatability. The Wise Woman tradition says nothing is ever the same. Nothing ever really repeats. Everything is unique, is it not? Unique and ever-changing. Uniqueness is the truth of the Wise Woman way.

The Wise Woman tradition does not insist on fixity, does not look for repeatability, and recognizes that there is no such thing as an objective statement or an objective universe. One incidence of something is valid information in the Wise Woman tradition. Uniqueness is recognized and validated in the Wise Woman way. The wise woman knows that change is always moving, fixity is fantasy.

Each person is a unique manifestation of individual and universal consciousness. Each being is unique. Every situation is unique. Every relationship is unique. Each time is unique. Every moment is unique. Each pain, each problem, is completely unique from the view of the Wise Woman tradition. The wise woman looks for the uniqueness, the difference, not the similarity, the sameness. The uniqueness is the hole through which the health/wholeness/holiness is known.

The unique reality of a chickweed flower is far more important in the Wise Woman tradition than a rule for harvesting it, or its chemical composition.

Objectivity is understood as impossible to achieve in the Wise Woman tradition (as well as in quantum physics). Subjective factors are discussed openly and considered in future decisions. When a wise woman measures (length of time before placenta is delivered, normal growth, and so on) she refers these figures to the unique situation, the unique individual, not the norm. Interrelationships are looked for and acknowledged in the Wise Woman way, adding to our appreciation

of uniqueness, as we see that everything changes.

The Wise Woman tradition says everything is uniquely connected in an ever-changing spiral web of nourishment and transformation. Uniqueness gives way to more uniqueness. Everything is mysteriously related. The forms keep changing. All things are possible. Trust uniqueness.

The Wise Woman way has no standard other than uniqueness. Uniqueness includes all. All possible treatments, from meditation to surgery, are used in the Wise Woman tradition. For each unique problem has a unique need and a unique gift. Standardized treatments give prompt relief in most cases and are fairly successful in curing or eliminating problems. Unique treatments, such as the Wise Woman tradition uses, nourish the healthy/whole/holy being, the community, and the planet.

The validation of the individual's unique reality is one aspect of optimum nourishment in the Wise Woman tradition. Each being's experience is a unique experience. Support for the individual's unique perspective is a trait of the wise woman. The uniqueness of each being is identified and validated, supported and nourished, in the Wise Woman tradition.

Many unique realities co-exist, each in its truth, in the both/and universe of the wise woman. Your truth does not have to be my truth to be true.

Multiple unique realities exist both within and between beings. An individual being can contain many unique realities, many different ways of experiencing the realms of life and death. Unique and differing realities exist among different kinds of beings as well: rocks, animals, plants, people, devas.

In the moon lodge, in the sweat lodge, realities come and go. Each breath is unique. Each moment is the birth of the universe and myself. Each moment of my existence is a unique experience. In the moon lodge, in the sweat lodge, my reality shimmers and shifts. Each reality has its own unique resonance. Each unique reality offers a special nourishment. Each reality has unique needs. In the moon lodge, in the sweat lodge, uniqueness becomes ordinary. Such is the Wise Woman way.



## There Are No Diseases in the Wise Woman Tradition

How does someone following the Wise Woman way deal with disease, such as high blood pressure, a fever, cancer? In the Wise Woman way, these words describe things that do not exist. Disease has no existence on its own. Any disease is bound inextricably to the being and setting which expresses and embodies it. In the Wise Woman tradition, disease, pain, and problems exist only within the framework of a particular person and particular society, not independently.

Diseases are certainly recognized, and diagnostic skills are honored within the Wise Woman both/and, holographic, spiraling way. But the focus is on the person as an individual, not on the disease as an entity.

The Wise Woman tradition maintains that the name of the disease is not the disease and that the name of the disease cannot be treated, cannot be healed/wholed. "High blood pressure" is a static, unchanging phrase, and as such can only be eliminated or reduced, not healed. From the Wise Woman perspective, the disease itself is a gift of wholeness to be cherished and nourished, not hastily cured.

Disease does not exist apart from the being manifesting it. Even a typhoid bacterium, a polio virus, is not typhoid or polio without a being to manifest it. And because each being is unique, so each expression of typhoid or polio is unique, and must be treated uniquely in the Wise Woman tradition.

In this way, the being expressing the disease is nourished and becomes healthy/whole/holy in the Wise Woman tradition, whether or not the disease is proclaimed "cured."

The wise woman sees our disease, our problem as an ally of wholeness. Our wholeness comes from disease as well as health in the Wise Woman way.

## The Wise Woman Never Asks Why

The Wise Woman tradition accepts chaos. The Wise Woman tradition knows that health/wholeness/holiness is of the void and ever-changing. So the wise woman doesn't ask "why?"

The Wise Woman tradition has no goal but wholeness and inclusion. The Wise Woman tradition accepts uniqueness. The Wise Woman tradition gives up control. So the wise woman doesn't ask "why?"



*Why am I sick? Why did this happen to me? Why do I feel this way? Why do I have these dreadful menstrual cramps?*

The wise woman knows that the answer to "why?" is always "because."

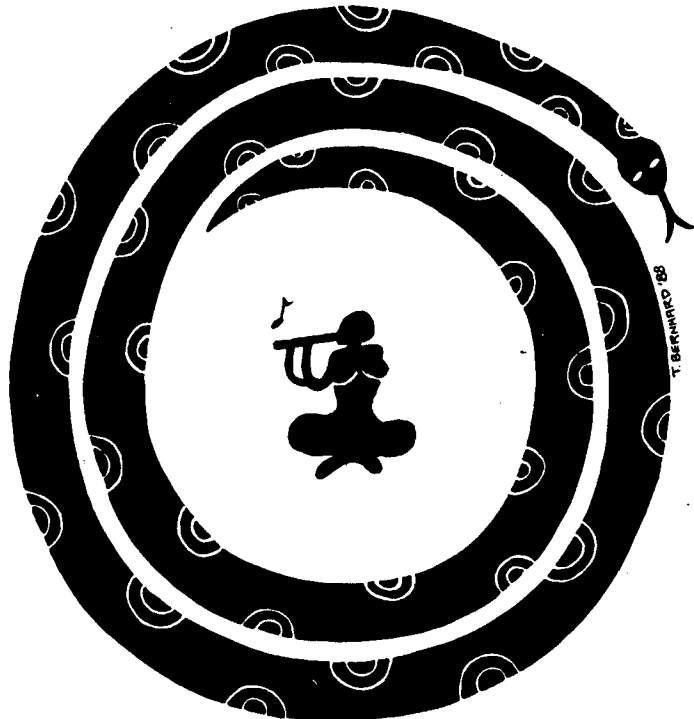
*Because I ate the wrong thing. Because the world is a rotten place. Because they were awful to me. Because all the women in my family do.*

And that "because" leads to guilt and blame.

And to the setting up of boundaries to maintain control and ensure that the pain/problem never happens again.

*So I'll never, ever even think about hot, salty, crisp french fries again. And now I'm on my own and everybody else is out for number one, too, and that's the way it is; don't trust anybody. I'll never feel so much about anyone again. I wish I didn't have a uterus; I wish I weren't a woman.*

The Wise Woman way defines health as flexible, encompassing, and vital. How can these attributes be nourished with limits and guilt? How can wholeness be nurtured with blame and boundaries? How can holiness be recognized through fear and separation? They cannot. So the wise woman doesn't ask "why?" The wise woman asks "how?"



How is this problem my ally?

*Menstrual cramps are not an ally.*

How does this condition benefit me?

*I get no benefit at all from being in pain and sick to my stomach and I resent your implication that I do it to get attention or something.*

And the wise woman asks "what?" What does this pain/problem prevent me from doing?

*When I'm cramping, I can't cook dinner, I can't drive the kids around, I can't even read.*

What nourishment am I given by my pain/problem?

*All I can do is curl up in bed or in the bath tub and close my eyes and kinda dream.*

What part of myself is revealed there?

*I feel like a bad mother and a worthless person if I just lie around and don't do anything.*

What nourishment does it need?

*I guess I could accept myself. Yeah, maybe it is good to have one day every month for myself. Just for myself. Just for me.*

And again the wise woman asks "how?" How can I open to receive the gift of this situation?

*You mean, how could I encourage the cramps? No. Oh, how can I have that day to myself, how can I accept a day for myself and not have to be in pain?*

How shall I nourish wholeness?

*I guess being a bad mother one day a month isn't so terrible. And I found the perfect green ally, *Senecio aureus*. And I think it will be good for the kids to be more on their own.*

What strengthens me, my community, and Mother Earth in this situation?

*Women used to believe that their menstrual time was special and holy? I'll have to think that over. Bleeding on the earth nourishes all life? Wow, that's kind of a big responsibility, don't you think. Besides, what if someone saw me? Are you suggesting that my menstrual cramps are the earth's way getting me to love and nourish her? That's weird. Kind of the ultimate recycling. Save a tree and all that, huh? Don't support the multi-billion dollar "feminine hygiene" industry. And it fertilizes plants? No wonder some women have a green thumb. Say, these cramps could be not so bad after all.*

### **There Are No Cures in the Wise Woman Tradition**

In the Scientific tradition, curing consists of getting rid of the problem as quickly as possible. In the Heroic tradition, curing consists of allocating guilt, asking for forgiveness, accepting punishment, and learning the rules so it never happens again. In the Wise Woman tradition, there are no cures.

Problems are not cured; they are not enemies to be eliminated.

In the Wise Woman tradition, we do not love our enemies. We make them our allies. In the Wise Woman tradition, we eliminate our enemies. We eliminate them by accepting all their gifts, by feasting on the nourishment they offer. In the Wise Woman tradition, we gain cooperation from our enemies by respecting their unique reality. They become our supporters. In the Wise Woman tradition we honor and cherish our enemies as benefactors of our health/wholeness/holiness; for our enemies force us, as few others will, to be strong and wise.

Problems are not the result of wrongdoing, in the Wise Woman tradition. Problems are allies, powerful presences, who come to help us to wholeness. Sometimes these allies leave when we incorporate them into our compassionate heart. Sometimes, recognizing them as needed helpers, we consent to their continued presence.

Sometimes substances (insulin, antibiotics) or techniques (surgery) strongly associated with the Scientific tradition are used by the wise woman; she understands these substances and techniques as nourishments not cures. It is not the thing done that indicates the tradition, but the thought behind the action.

Getting cured is not the goal in the Wise Woman tradition. Instead, we are healed/wholed/made holy and nourished in our uniqueness.

Outwitting death as long as possible is not the goal in the Wise Woman tradition. Balanced in the heart with the inexhaustible goddess who churns the waters of birthing and dying, we lose our anxiety to be cured or to cure.

Nourishing our wholeness, compassionately embracing our multiple and contradictory self images, unconditionally loving our own neediness, we gradually come to know that the Wise Woman way to health/wholeness/holiness is not by curing our problems, avoiding pain, and living as long as "humanly" possible, but by accepting problems, pains, disease, and death as allies. And by accepting the gifts of our allies.

We mistakenly see our diseases and injuries as other than ourselves. We say our arthritis is bad, not ourselves. My stomach/arm/head hurts, not "me." We fail to see that we have already "embodied" our problems.

Struggling to be rid of the pain and impairment, we paradoxically struggle *against* our own wholeness, our own variety and variability, our own perfection in the moment as a holographic expression of the whole.

Allowing ourselves to find the ally in our problem and accepting the ally's gifts, we validate our own health/wholeness/holiness and nourish ourselves in compassionate transformation. We turn, heart-centered, in the moving spiral of wholeness.

We come to see suffering as resistance and denial, so more and more we open to ourselves, we accept ourselves. And we are filled with joy. What a way to be not cured!

### **There Are No Rules in the Wise Woman Tradition**

The only rule in the Wise Woman tradition is that there are no rules.

Allowing the unjudging flow of compassion, in a Wise Woman way, we are challenged to remember that the perfect wholeness of each moment is ever-changing. There can be no rules. Loving ourselves unconditionally, with Wise Woman roughness and compassion, we are challenged to acknowledge the unique perfection of each pain. There can be no rules. Looking at the both/and hologram with Wise Woman vision, we are challenged to increase the clarity and brilliance of the whole by nourishing—nourishing the web and each of its unique parts. There can be no rules.

In a both/and universe there can be no rules. Any time you think this is exactly the same as before, you're wrong, says the Wise Woman tradition.

Rules make comfortable, secure boxes to hide behind when normalcy stretches its limits and the unexpected occurs. Rules are safe. Rules are not elastic. Rules are visible. Rules are accountable. Rules are regular. Rules are logical.

All rules are made to be broken, says the wise woman.

### **There Are No Healers in the Wise Woman Tradition**

We are all healers in the Wise Woman tradition. Self-healing and self-loving, we co-create healing with our allies. Our allies are our problems; they bring us gifts of wholeness. Our allies are wise women; they support us in our transformation. Our allies are green allies, wild plants: they supply us with optimum nourishment.



The Wise Woman tradition asks us to ally ourselves with our pains and problems, receive their gifts, honor them and listen to them, and to nourish compassionately all aspects of ourselves.

The Wise Woman tradition sees everyone as a potential wise woman, as a wise woman in disguise. Seeking support, we ally ourselves with a woman of wisdom. We listen for resonance. We seek ones who can magnify our tone for us, guide us, support us in the vulnerability and chaos of our expansion. We seek the wise woman who encourages, not return to balance or normalcy, but transformation and refinement. We seek the ones who nourish us through the incorporation, not the remission, of the problem.

We go to visit the healer. There is ritual of respect. The healer is welcomed as a visitor to our homeland. We lodge at the healer's home, are treated as honored guest.

Wholeness is accepted, says the Wise Woman tradition, not created. We are precious gifts to each other: for together we are part of the whole universe. Let us love ourselves gloriously and heal each other. Let us see health/wholeness/holiness in ourselves and each other. Let us fall in love again and again. Let our hearts beat and our breath flow at one with the universal pulse: grief/joy, grief/joy, grief/joy.

Having no goals, resonant with truth, beauty, joy, and wholeness, the wise woman does nothing. She is still, sensitive, alert. Like a dolphin she sends out sonar waves to test the frequencies of wholeness. She opens herself to the hologram of this unique being, at this time, in this place.

Having no rules to teach, no morals to preach, the wise woman is silent. She is full in her silence; she is empty in her silence. Her expression is quite clear; she's in love. Her strength is quite visible. She does not reach out. The best helping hand is often the one that touches not.

Energy is visible around the wise woman, sparks and flashes caught in the corner of the eye. Look deeply into her eyes. Feel the energy coil and shift. There is alliance, attunement, acceptance, agreement. Barriers are lifted. Wholeness is revealed.

Blessing the wise woman, blessing ourselves, we part. Savoring the taste of truth-telling, knowing that we empower ourselves, accepting the gifts of the wise woman, we continue our self-healing journey. There are no rules, in the Wise Woman way. There are no cures, in the Wise Woman way. There are no healers, in the Wise Woman way. There are the questions of transformation: "What is the health/wholeness/holiness here? How is it nourished?"

## Optimum Nourishment

Nourishment is the keynote of the Wise Woman tradition. Nourishment comes from women. Breast milk is the archetype of nourishment. Now I eat you. Nourishment comes from the earth mother. She gives us abundant nourishment of sweet grains, green allies, and animal give-aways. Now you eat me.

Health/wholeness/holiness is remembered through optimum nourishment in the Wise Woman tradition. Nourishment is a constant need of beingness. Alive or dead, we need nourishment. (Why else are the dead given waybread?)

Optimum nourishment, claims the Wise Woman tradition, is whole, holy, vital, wild, unique, local, common, simple, messy, fresh, abundant, accessible, seasonal, varied, and full of love.

In the Wise Woman tradition, optimum nourishment encourages and supports wholeness, holiness, vitality, flexibility, individuality, intimacy, self-love and self-acceptance, integration, originality, sensitivity, responsibility, creativity, centeredness, and compassion as well as providing physical, emotional, and spiritual sustenance.

Healing and change are best carried out by providing nourishment, counsels the Wise Woman tradition. The wise woman looks at everything from the viewpoint of nourishment. How can optimum nourishment be made accessible, or more desirable, in this unique instance? What nourishment feeds the larger hologram (the family, community, and planet) as well as the individual? Who is starving? How can the one who hungers find nourishment? Who is giving away? "Now you eat me." Who is receiving nourishment? "Now I eat you."

Optimum nourishment, says the Wise Woman tradition, is needed to sustain personal, cultural, and planetary growth. Optimum nourishment, says the Wise Woman tradition, is needed to support the spiraling of transformation, individually and universally. Optimum nourishment is needed, says the Wise Woman tradition, to give the courage and strength to accept our own unique health/wholeness/holiness.

Optimum nourishment? How do we get it?

Appreciate your uniqueness, to begin with, says the Wise Woman tradition. Ally yourself with your problem instead of fighting it. Make yourself available to receive the gifts of your allies: the hidden parts of yourself brought to the surface by your problem allies, the delicious foods prepared from your green allies, the wisdom of your inner and outer Wise Woman allies. Accept these gifts of abundance from your mother. Open yourself to nourishment in the Wise Woman way; open yourself even to nourishment which comes in disorderly, mysterious ways.

Give up blaming yourself for your own problems. Give up blaming yourself for everyone else's problems. Give up punishing yourself. Realize that denying any part of yourself optimum nourishment denies the whole of you, and the whole of the universe as well, from the Wise Woman perspective. Love every part of yourself enough to offer it nourishment. Health/wholeness/holiness are the natural consequences of giving optimum nourishment to every aspect of one's being, according to the Wise Woman tradition.

Remember that the state of your health/wholeness/holiness reflects not only the nourishment available but what you choose to consume, to integrate into yourself. Remember that nourishment, in the Wise Woman tradition, comes in many forms and with many energies. And that health/wholeness/holiness can receive nourishment from every form and every energy. The wise woman knows: the more forms and energies of nourishment you accept, the greater your access to optimum nourishment. There are no food rules in the Wise Woman tradition.

There can be no food rules in the Wise Woman tradition. I am sitting on an airplane, face to the window, crying. I have just had a fight with the stewardess about my carry-on bag, and lost. The older woman sitting next to me reaches into her capacious purse (nearly as big as the bag they wouldn't let me take on!) and finds a wrapped bundle. It is a pastrami sandwich. I am a vegetarian. Smiling tenderly, she catches my eye as I turn to see what she's doing, and offers me half of her sandwich.

With my local vision, I see meat; I ready myself to say "no." Then I look with Wise Woman eyes: She is the goddess, this woman. She is wholeness, holiness, the wise woman. She offers me nourishment, mother love, acceptance in my misery. I feel the openness of my heart.

I offer myself compassion, and smile back at her. I open myself to the sacrament she offers. I accept the nourishment she offers me. I accept the healing gift of pastrami on rye.

Locked into a rule ("I don't eat meat"), how can I be ready to receive the abundance of the universe, the mother's nourishment in its multi-faceted forms? Rules, maintains the Wise Woman tradition, especially about food, generally restrict our access to love and optimum nourishment. Following the Wise Woman way, we find nourishment even in mysterious and absurd places.

Everything offers us both physical and energetic nourishment when we are open to receive it. If we recognize only the form, says the Wise Woman tradition, we open only to nourishment from the form. When we recognize and nourish ourselves with the energy as

well, we find health/wholeness/holiness.

There is no pain in the heart but the breaking of barriers to love. As we follow the Wise Woman way, surrender our barriers to self-love and allow ourselves to feed on the mother love of the earth, we notice the various qualities of nourishment available to us. Sitting in a circle is a nourishment. Practiced consistently, this creates a different state of health than always sitting in rows. Daydreaming is a nourishment. And engaged in regularly but not exclusively, this creates a different state of health than chronic logical thought does.

Some forms and energies of nourishment are easy for us to consume; others are difficult. Some warm us, others cool us off when the pressure rises. Some kinds of nourishment allow us to exist in certain environments, other kinds prevent us from experiencing our environment at all. When we give up our rules and recognize our unique place in the hologram of all life with self-love and self-respect, the Wise Woman way, we find it easier and easier to choose the optimum nourishment for ourselves in any situation: shoulders to cry on, chickweed in the pavement cracks, a shooting star that takes away the breath.

Every food offers its special nourishment. Eating wild food is consuming optimum nourishment. Do it frequently, in addition to your regular diet, and your tastes begin to change. The junk foods you couldn't resist before now irritate your tongue, smell offensive, and generally annoy you. The body (as well as the rest of our "selves") prefers the best nourishment it is offered. Hard to believe that most premenstrual women would really rather eat organic kale or cooked nettles than chocolate, but I've seen it many, many times.

Optimum nourishment is craved and sought after. The Wise Woman tradition evokes health/wholeness/holiness by recognizing the opening, the hole, for the desired nourishment to enter. Trauma, grief, pain, disease, and injury create holes. So do safe space, consensual agreement, and respect among beings.

Once there is openness, the wise woman knows that when one being (person, plant, animal, rock) is more compassionate, more self-loving, and more aware of personal and planetary wholeness than another, then fuller integration in the other will be supported and nourished, no matter what the techniques of interaction.

This openness can occur between plants and people (and animals and people, and stones and people, and so on) as well as among people, and is an important key in understanding optimum nourishment. A wild plant nourishes the fullness of your being from the fullness of its being. A cultivated plant nourishes less fully, evokes less integra-

tion, wholeness, strength, and energy, according to the conditions of its life.

The Wise Woman tradition is nourishment: optimum nourishment from the heart, conscious nourishment of planetary wholeness, in an ever-changing, ever-spinning, mysterious spiral. Optimum nourishment, the Wise Woman way, is simple no matter where on this planet you are.

### The Wise Woman Tradition Is a Simple Approach

Simple means easy. Simple means common. Simple means single. The Wise Woman tradition is easy, and singular, and very common; and herbally, the Wise Woman tradition urges simples. In a simple, one herb alone is used.

(An infusion of oatstraw, a tincture of dandelion, or a poultice of chickweed is a simple. Simples are usually as effective as compound remedies, far less expensive, and their quality is more easily judged. Using simples has the added advantage of self-teaching the effects of single herbs on your body.)

A Wise Woman midwife, for instance, finds birthing tinctures containing many herbs less reliable than a simple tincture of blue cohosh alone, or even blue cohosh, ginger, and black cohosh given simultaneously, but from individual tinctures.

The green gifts of Mother Earth are individual, singular, unique. They each carry a specific wholeness in the form and energy that most suits the particular plant, but they contain, as well, a multitude of lesser abilities. By using simples, we give ourselves a chance to encounter these subtleties in each plant.

Using simples, we experience the uniqueness of each herb. Using simples, we are stretched to become allies, deep friends with each herb. They become our friends in the same ways other beings do: with attention, with love, with care and concern, with time spent together, alone. We come to know, cherish, honor all aspects of each green ally, by being closely and simply together, without distraction.

The wise woman may have only a very small group of allies, sometimes only one plant ally. This is part of her invisibility; simple is invisible. She learns, through the use of simples, the ways of her green allies, just as she learns her own ways, her strengths and vulnerabilities, her harshnesses and softnesses, her predictabilities and eccentricities. She becomes so intimate, so allied with those herbs that a handful of them, thirteen or so, suffice for helping her integrate health/wholeness/holiness with the problem at hand, no matter what the problem is, her life long.

How long does it take to make a friend? Start with a year. Choose the herb you want to be friends with. Not an exotic herb, but a local plant, a common plant, a simple weed. Visit . . . sing with . . . draw . . . gather . . . eat . . . experience your herb as often as you can. Every day is not too much.

Not just in the day, at night, too. Not just in the sun, in the rain, too. Not just in spring and summer, in autumn, winter, too.

Keep notes. Write down what you see, smell, feel, hear, experience with this ally-to-be. Invite your herb into your dreams. Introduce your other friends, and your family. Invite your green friend to your parties and celebrations.

Read about your herb. Ask other people about their experiences with this plant as ally. Sleep together. Become available to the emotive force, the physical power, and the holiness of this green ally. Notice what nourishment is available to this plant, and what nourishment it chooses. What are the needs of your ally? Can you hear, sense, feel, know within yourself what is needed? Ah, you are becoming friends.

Ask your new green friend to help you. Rest in her strengths. Make use of her abilities. Call upon your friend. Ask for exactly what you need. Ah, now you are becoming allies.

In the Wise Woman way, we are all herbalists, for we all eat the plants of the earth. The Wise Woman herbalist allies herself with plants that are local and common. Open your door, and there is your ally, waiting to be seen, heard, and cherished, yes, even if you live in the city.

Health/wholeness/holiness, the Wise Woman way, is simple.



### Wise Woman, Witch Doctor, Green Witch

The Wise Woman tradition is natural to women, but not limited to them. ~~Men can be wise women too.~~ Anyone can come to know the wise woman within. Anyone can learn to recognize the wise woman in all other beings. This is the Wise Woman way. A woman whose life is spent in the Wise Woman way may call herself, or be known as, a witch. Witches heal. Those whose special love is the plants, or the green nation, are known as green witches. (Men, of course, may be known as witch doctors when they follow the Wise Woman way.)

Witches heal. Witches are not now, nor were they ever, involved in anything other than the preservation of life and joy. Their blissful delight in life and insistence on honoring the life-giver, life-nourisher, the Mother Earth, earned witches the opprobrium of the Catholic Church, which insisted that life came only from the father and that life and the body were full of suffering.

Witches honor the male principle in the form of a horned animal. How ironic that religions which claim to honor the male cast this image as the very image of the devil, evil incarnate. Pan, horned and hooped man of the European witches, is full of fun and music, not fire and brimstone, though he does have a reputation for being hot.

A woman learns to be a wise woman by living her life with attention. When she accepts the cloak of her holiness, deeply compassionate for her own wholeness and chaos, and loves herself, she knows herself as wise woman. Each month's stay in the menstrual hut adds to her power and wisdom. At menopause, she becomes the crone, ancient wise one, keeper of the visions. She is wicce, bender and shaper of stories and realities, keeper of wisdom; she is witch. A witch is a woman of power.

A green witch is allied with the green growth of the earth. A green witch is a wise woman whose own heart is as green as the heart of the earth. A green witch is one of the colors of the rainbow of witches, rainbow of wise women, rainbow of women of power.

"Witch doctor" is presently a derogatory term. "Shaman" is used instead. Read "shaman" as "she-man" (though the actual derivation of the word is far from it) and remember that these are men who are connected to their own wise woman within.

Men of all cultures who desire to be powerful train to become wise women. The Wise Woman way is not a natural flow in their lives, so they have learned to copy women's ways, and invent special ones, to find the woman within, who must be present before any man can provide or even support optimum nourishment for health/wholeness/holiness.

Some of the ways a man can find his wise woman within, his womb/man-hood:

- honor and protect all women
- sit alone in a dark place (cave, kiva)
- sit alone on a high point and cry out
- act out pregnancy, birth, and menstruation
- sweat
- fast and pray

Attention to the care of all women brings a man into alignment with his female principle in a natural, invisible way.

Sitting in cave, kiva, sweat lodge, or other small dark place, the man re-enters the mother's womb. The man enters the void. In the dark, no sound but his own breathing, no food, no water, the mother comes to him. She shows him visions of creation, and visions of dissolution. If he is open, she enters and he knows the wise woman within, and becomes capable of giving nourishment and resonating wholeness.

High above even the flight of the hawk, he sits, crying his need with voice or with spirit. How to be whole? How to be nourished? She appears. As her consort, he shares her power, the power to create, the power to include all, the power to weave the strands into a pattern that enriches all.

The sweat lodge follows the way of the moon lodge. In cultures where the Wise Woman tradition persists, the men train to find their wise woman within while the women are in the menstrual lodge. One tale has it that the Native American sweat lodge was given to the men to still their jealousy of the women's moontime rites.

*The wise old woman is carved larger than life as the main support of the men's dance hall in Papua, New Guinea. The wise woman smiles from shrines in thousands of cathedrals across Europe and lawns in North America. The wise woman is buried in the ground of every country. The wise woman's robe still flows down your back, centering you in the ever-changing, ever-spiraling mystery.*

Everywhere I look, the wise woman looks back.

And she smiles.



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