

Weather Control Traditions of the Cherokee

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Abstract Raven Hail, a Cherokee elder who has lectured and written on Native American culture, was interviewed during the spring and summer of 2000. The focus of the discussions was on the perceptions and methods of two cultures regarding weather control. The knowledge of another culture's perceptions and concerns about weather, and its control is intriguing. The Cherokee society is matriarchal whereas the Judeo-Christian is patriarchal, leading to significant differences in attitudes regarding weather. For example, members of a matriarchal society believe themselves to be caretakers of the Earth, and those of a patriarchal society to be dominant over the Earth and its inhabitants. Three Cherokee weather "control" incantations are discussed; the Sun Dance, Storm Deflection and the Rain Dance. Each has its conduct entwined with the structure of society, spirits and the understanding of the cosmos.

1. INTRODUCTION

Like modern western cultures immersed in technology, other cultures share a vulnerability to weather's whims. Indeed, the indigenous peoples of the Americas likely respected their vulnerability more because of their dependence on nontechnical methods. What they lacked in chemistry, computers and aircraft was compensated for by their understanding of seasons, mythology, good and evil, and magic. Who are those who rely on technology to scoff at another culture's spiritualism?

In the spring and summer of 2000, the author, a technocrat, had a rich dialogue with Raven Hail, a Cherokee woman who is an elder and historian for her people. The two learned much about the other's culture using weather modification as a focus. Ms. Hail has written several books which record many aspects of the Cherokee beliefs and culture. She is fluent in the Cherokee language and script, and translated the passages given later in this paper. As of this writing, she is residing in Asheville, NC. The figure below is her logo which is a symbol for a raven with script for her name.



Figure 1. Raven Hail's logo.

In the sections which follow, some aspects of the Cherokee culture relevant to meteorology are described. Three types of Cherokee weather control are elucidated. These are, solar radiation, tornado/severe storm deflection and rain augmentation. Exposure to the Cherokee's concerns, attitudes and deep-seated faiths can be instructive to those subscribing to the western dogma.

2. CHEROKEE CULTURE

The Cherokee culture is threatened with extinction through dispersal, as during the infamous Trail of Tears, and assimilation into the white man's culture. One of Raven Hail's purposes in life is to record her culture before it is lost entirely. Weather aspects are part of this.

Cherokee society is matriarchal, implying a partnership of genders which are separate but equal, e.g., ranking of gender such as chairman, chairwoman, chairperson is not an issue. Their culture is, however, steeped in the symbolism of gender. For example, the Moon is male, the Sun Goddess is the supreme god or Great Spirit, all water is male, and the Earth is female. Social structure is matriolonic, meaning a white man can marry a Cherokee woman and the offspring are considered to be Cherokee, but not visa versa. The Cherokee belong to the Earth and are her caretakers. The Judeo-Christian society, on the other hand, is patriarchal which gives male (not Man-kind's which includes women's) domination over the Earth (Genesis 1:28). Patriarchal societies condemn snakes, however, in matriarchal societies, snakes are female and are displayed as female deities.

The relation to the Earth distinguishes the patriarchal and matriarchal attitudes in weather modification. Whereas the patriarchal society attempts to control the weather, the Cherokee attempt to pray to the proper spirits, soliciting rain, or diversion of storms, or other changes. For example, Grandfather Moon controls all the water on Earth and is therefore a spirit to whom water-related incantations are directed.

3. SYMBOLISM

Numbers have a symbolism for the Cherokee and are mentioned here because their use is entwined with the prayers and incantations discussed later. The number three means nothing for native Americans, though it is important in Judeo-Christian societies, e.g., "third time is a charm," and "Father, Son and Holy Ghost". Four is magic, especially for the Cherokee. Seven is a general magic number for all Native Americans. This number is so sacred that one does not use it in public or in print. Rather it is stated as another word. Note that the lunar cycle is 28 days = 4X7. The numbers 12 and 13 are magic/sacred for matriarchal societies but 13 is an anathema for patriarchal societies, as in Friday the thirteenth. Note that the Christian legacy has twelve apostles plus Christ = 13 entities. Six is the number of the Moon and the number 666 represents the triple Moon Goddess for a matriarchal society. But for patriarchal societies, 666 is associated with the devil, the archenemy.

There is no word for devil in the Cherokee language; however, there are evil spirits, such as the Raven Mocker who acts as a raven by stealing a victim's soul, causing sickness. This requires a specialist, a medicine man or woman, to ward off. A prayer must be done in Cherokee because the spirits will not pay attention to English. The tone of a prayer is not beseeching as in the Judeo-Christian tradition. For the Cherokee, an incantation is a succinct statement of how the mortal wants the situation to be (see the storm diversion incantation below).

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF WEATHER AND WATER IN CHEROKEE SOCIETY

Few details remain on the influence of weather on the Cherokee. Raven Hail remembers as a child on her mother's allotment near Bartlesville, OK, frequently grabbing a blanket and supplies, then running to the storm shelter. During tornado season, spending one night in the storm shelter per week was commonplace. She saw her home destroyed by a tornado. Her mother was so frightened by storms that she didn't consider praying for rain increases. Also, that would have

required speaking in Cherokee which was discouraged during the dust bowl days.

Water was principle to the Cherokee in their lives and in their rituals (Hail, 1987), challenging the primacy of the Sun and Her alter ego, Fire. Today's weathermen frequently stress the need for water, but before catchment and conservation were developed, water shortages were even more critical. The Cherokee considered buffalo to be attractors of snow, improving moisture and hunting when the buffalo were plentiful. Likewise, the Sacred Spruce Tree attracted clouds and rain. Prayers were said to the spirits of these entities to give proper thanks and to ask permission for their taking.

The Earth came from the depths of the Ocean and the line of life is symbolized by the River or Long Man (*ibid.*). Long Man's head is the highest mountain top, and his foot, the lowest valley. He (the River) moves unstoppably and eternally. The center of a village, the town house, was near the river bank, and functions included going to the river, preferably at dawn. On the fourth or seventh day of life, infants were baptized by holding above the water while the mother touched the child with wet fingers. Polluting the Long Man was forbidden. There were no sacrifices to the River Spirit; however, freshly-killed game was washed in the river allowing the mingling of blood with the waters of life.

Below are discussed the attitudes and incantations for fair weather, severe storm deflection and rain. The facts for these came from Raven Hail's investigations and memories.

5. THE SUN DANCE

Certainly water was important to the Cherokee; however, fair weather was desirable as well. The Sun dance, to be described below, stopped before Raven Hail's time. The Spirit Red Bird, the daughter of the Sun Spirit, was killed by the Snake whose intent was to kill the Sun. The physical abode of the Sun Spirit is the Sun, and The Fire is the Sun's alter ego on Earth whose spirit is Red Bird. The Sun was so sad that SHE hid behind the clouds. The two twins, Flint and Reed, consulted a wise man who told them to have a celebration with great happy noises. Compare this to the Hebrew Psalm: "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands." (Psalm 100:1). There were seven nights of singing and dancing (note magic seven). The Sun saw this and SHE began to smile again, coming from behind her mournful shroud of clouds.

Contrast this to the Plains Indian sun dance. These were patriarchal, and the ritual was bloody and savage, as depicted in movies such as "Little Big Man," and "A Man Called Horse." Skin was pierced with bone and antler, and the dancers were tied to a maypole-like centroid, dancing until torn loose. This was a significant event and women were not allowed to participate in the dancing. It was necessary for both genders to observe the suffering so both could deal with it. The Plains sun dance was required to present manhood.

6. SEVERE STORMS AND TORNADOS

The Cherokee believed it was impossible to abate the fury of a storm. Instead, an attempt was made to divert the storm's course by informing the storm of their fear and revealing the storm's attractor was at some other location. Stated ineloquently using a stag as a metaphor: Storm, you scare me but I'm not the one you want. The doe you want is over there. Go to her. A translation of a Cherokee storm diversion incantation by Raven Hail is below (Copyright © 2000, Raven Hail) Translating is difficult because words can have alternate meanings in the Cherokee language, depending on the context.

To Turn Away a Storm

*Yuhahi, Yuhahi, Yuhahi, Yuhahi, Yuhahi, Yu
Hear me!
Oh Great Heron of the booming cry!
You from the muggy swampland
with ruby talons under brooding shadow wings!
I greatly fear your savage jaws!
The spoor you seek is there beyond the trembling
treetops
Let the lightning flash
the thunder roar
the wild winds blow
and the rain come down in torrents;
Grandfather Mountain will echo back your full
majesty.
Listen!*

The first line is onomatopoeic and mimics the cry of a heron. There are thirteen lines, a magic number in a matriarchal society. Here the storm is equated to an enormous heron, whose jaws the mortal fears. The heron is told that his mate is beyond the shaking trees, and he is urged to go to her, taking all his lightning, thunder, wind and precipitation. If he does, he will be revered by the mountain through the echoes of his power.

The above incantation will not work because it is not stated in Cherokee. Figure 2 displays the

Cherokee script for this prayer.

A somewhat altered version of this is given by Mooney (1891) where the Storm Spirit is likened to an animal in rut, searching for his mate. Mooney describes the shaman's ritual who faces the storm with one hand toward the storm. He says the incantation several times, then blows in the direction the storm is to go, matching the direction his hand waves. A blade of corn is held while repeating the ceremony.

AD 022 (DS00T'J)

GFA! GFA! GFA! GFA! GFA! G!
 0FI!
 FZII 0000Y WJ.
 FV'00TE. E00S'TP.
 JLI'T-I T0 FM'h.
 JIIT0 SW'00S F0WTE 0S'0T.
 0E0T0B.
 0TI JE0 0SC00iB'
 020 00WY
 0S'00'GT'00T.
 JH'00S' SG'0T' D0'00'0FA'
 JS00'00T.
 0FI!

Figure 2. Script for Cherokee Storm Diversion Prayer Given in Text.

7. RAIN

The rain ritual is the most complex of the three discussed herein. Simply uttering a prayer to the Great Spirit, the same as the Sun Spirit, may not be appropriate. If something small is needed, go to a lesser spirit. Medicine women AND men, called day keepers because they kept track of the calendar, could determine which deity. Only some spirits can bring rain. The Plains Indians rain ceremony was different from the Cherokee's and is not discussed in this paper.

Dancing is part of the rain ritual. A circle of twelve stones is laid out, six round and six obelisk. In the middle should be one stone, the oolsati stone, meaning "it shines through." For the Cherokee, this is the eye of the dragon which is all that is left after its killing and burning. Quartz is the most powerful because it is the most common crystalline stone on Earth. For example, common foods are the best and caviar is the worst food because it is the rarest and most expensive. An analogous stone was on top of the Great Pyramid and is imprinted on a one-dollar bill. Stonehenge similarly has a head stone. The Cherokee circle of twelve plus one = thirteen stones is a generic setup for magic. Note that the total number of stones is magic. Men and women dance in and out of these

stones, chanting and offering incantations. In so doing, a form of energy is generated, as wires moving through a magnetic field. The oolsate stone focuses this energy. The dance is around a circle, demonstrating the importance of the circle to Cherokee society.

The number of dances is unimportant. The dancers must alternate male/female to give the maximum power, and it is important for the dance to have symmetry. Some music or noise is necessary depending on the occasion. The chant/song depends on the season and the amount of rain desired. A leader or shaman beats a drum, directs by shaking shells, stopping suddenly. Everything must be done exactly as prescribed or the ceremony could be dangerous.

The rain chant below was translated by Raven Hail (Copyright © 2000, Raven Hail).

Rain Dance Chant
Redbird! Redbird! Redbird! Redbird!
Hear me, Maker of Rain!
You, up there in the Sunland!
Now, then---
Come down, O Nimbus
and touch the Earth!
It is done!

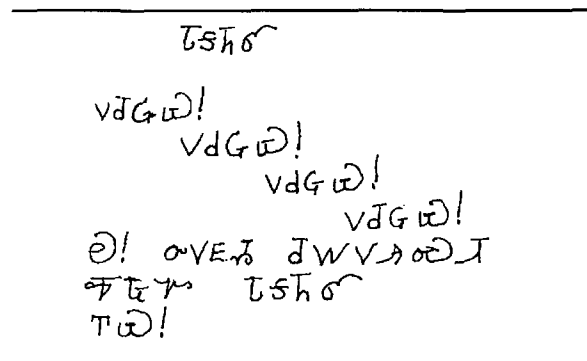


Figure 3. The Rain Incantation Written in Cherokee Script.

Don't try this version because, as with the storm diversion incantation, it will not work in English. In this case the prayer is to Redbird. Her name is said four times, a magic number. Note that in the Cherokee tradition the prayer is a simple statement of what the mortal wants. At the end of the prayer, the phrase, "It is done!" implies the American slang, "There," or "O.K., there you have it." Figure 3 shows the song/chant in Cherokee script.

8. COMMENTS

Throughout the interviews, the white man, including the author, was referred to as "White Eyes," which may or may not be derogatory depending on the tone. Like other ethnics, the Cherokee believe they are principal and a "White Eye" is anybody not Cherokee; similar to "gentile" for those of the Jewish tradition. The "white" comes from the Cherokee term, "yonig" which is a contraction of "unaka" = white, plus "yun-wi" = people. The clash of the Cherokee and White Eyes' cultures and injustices placed on the people can be summarized by her quote, "You White Eyes brought us wine which was a sacrament and destroyed us. We gave you tobacco which is a sacrament and it destroyed you."

The White Eyes may scorn the techniques described above, but attitudes can work both directions. Raven Hail, a curious intellectual, queried about the White Eye's patriarchal methods of controlling nature through weather modification. The standard glaciogenic process with anthropogenic intervention was described to her. She responded, "I never heard of such (expletive deleted)!" Then she asked for more details, satisfying her intense interest. Her response to a description of warm-cloud modification was, "Both man and nature can cause pollution."

Cherokee religion and myths were repressed by the White Eyes, and the Cherokee say few incantations anymore. For Raven Hail, the sensible thing to do would be to get elder Cherokee together with weather modification scientists to share ideas.

7. REFERENCES

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