

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:16,169

This series presents information based in part on theory and conjecture.

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00:00:16,169 --> 00:00:20,689

The producer's purpose is to suggest some possible explanations, but not necessarily

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00:00:20,689 --> 00:00:27,689

the only ones to the mysteries we will examine.

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00:00:27,689 --> 00:00:33,370

With the magic powers believed to dwell inside a cloud of smoke, a Mayan healer performs an

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00:00:33,370 --> 00:00:38,010

ancient cure.

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00:00:38,010 --> 00:00:44,690

The rising smoke will lift away the patient's evil spirits.

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00:00:44,690 --> 00:00:50,370

In an age-old Inca ritual, the fertile power of a tiny rodent is symbolically transferred

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00:00:50,370 --> 00:01:02,730

to a troubled patient.

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00:01:02,730 --> 00:01:08,210

To us, this kind of medicine may seem primitive and strange, for it is the work of people

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00:01:08,210 --> 00:01:19,370

we call witch doctors.

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00:01:19,370 --> 00:01:24,730

According to many old movies, witch doctors are fierce-looking natives, frantically performing

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00:01:24,730 --> 00:01:36,731

strange rituals.

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00:01:36,731 --> 00:01:43,331

Based on their apparent healing ability, however, witch doctors should not be shrugged off lightly.

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00:01:43,331 --> 00:01:46,371

Among the Zulu of Africa, he is the Garnjah.

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00:01:46,371 --> 00:01:49,731

The Tungus tribes of Siberia call him Shaman.

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00:01:49,731 --> 00:01:52,971

To the North American Indian, his name means Medicine Man.

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00:01:52,971 --> 00:01:56,251

In Latin America, he is the curandero.

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00:01:56,251 --> 00:02:00,651

The familiar term witch doctor was invented by European explorers to describe the role

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00:02:00,651 --> 00:02:05,291

of healers in foreign cultures which they did not understand.

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00:02:05,291 --> 00:02:09,051

If we attempted to scoff at the work of witch doctors, we should remember that throughout

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00:02:09,051 --> 00:02:14,651

history, witch doctors have enjoyed as much success in their respective cultures as physicians

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00:02:14,651 --> 00:02:25,212

have in ours.

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00:02:25,212 --> 00:02:30,052

In the Yucatan region of Mexico, an annual religious ceremony intermingles the strong

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00:02:30,052 --> 00:02:42,092

traditions of both Spanish and Mayan culture.

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00:02:42,092 --> 00:02:52,652

A holy procession invokes the power of the Mayan rain god, Shok.

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00:02:52,652 --> 00:03:01,012

The culmination of the ceremony, however, takes place in a Christian cathedral.

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00:03:01,012 --> 00:03:05,732

Adorning the cathedral's face are ancient Mayan signs for the gods of the sun and the

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00:03:05,732 --> 00:03:08,732

moon.

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00:03:08,732 --> 00:03:13,892

Here, where Mayan culture is still alive, ideas about illness and health are often

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00:03:13,892 --> 00:03:19,293

sphrankingly different from our own.

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00:03:19,293 --> 00:03:26,453

At 86, Philippa Chu is a respected Mayan witch doctor with a reputation for possessing especially

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00:03:26,453 --> 00:03:31,733

strong powers.

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00:03:31,733 --> 00:03:38,853

Today, a mother has brought her daughter to Philippa for help.

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00:03:38,853 --> 00:03:46,013

The young girl wishes to marry a man her mother does not approve of.

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00:03:46,013 --> 00:03:50,813

The mother hopes that Philippa's powers can dispossess the girl of her seeming obsession.

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00:03:50,813 --> 00:03:57,013

She has brought several special plants and a strong local alcohol which will aid Philippa

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00:03:57,013 --> 00:04:07,293

in her cure.

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00:04:07,293 --> 00:04:13,653

Using the potent alcohol as well as herbs believed to have curing properties, Philippa concocts

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00:04:13,653 --> 00:04:20,654

a powerful potion.

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00:04:20,654 --> 00:04:25,374

Philippa is renowned for her use of so-called white magic, ridding people of spirits or

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00:04:25,374 --> 00:04:35,254

hexes which they believe can afflict them.

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00:04:35,254 --> 00:04:39,894

In her native Mayan language, Philippa chants to the spirits that are believed to affect

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00:04:39,894 --> 00:04:51,214

the girl, urging them away.

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00:04:51,214 --> 00:05:16,775

When the spirit is directly onto the skin, the potion purges the spirits from the body.

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00:05:16,775 --> 00:05:19,895

The unwanted spirits have been completely driven away.

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00:05:19,895 --> 00:05:25,375

The potion is given a final blessing.

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00:05:25,375 --> 00:05:31,815

To ensure that the spirits will not return, the potion must be swallowed.

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00:05:31,815 --> 00:05:36,175

Whether the result of Philippa's magic will merely the power of a mother's persuasion

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00:05:36,175 --> 00:05:40,735

and concern, the cure was successful.

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00:05:40,735 --> 00:05:57,255

The girl decided to give up her plans for marriage, at least for now.

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00:05:57,255 --> 00:06:10,256

In the lush jungles of the Yucatan, Anciana Santana stalks a valuable quarry.

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00:06:10,256 --> 00:06:20,936

The objects of his hunt are berries, herbs, and plants with medicinal power.

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00:06:20,936 --> 00:06:25,496

Santana is an herbalist, familiar with the special properties of hundreds of different

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00:06:25,496 --> 00:06:30,176

tropical plants.

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00:06:30,176 --> 00:06:45,496

With them, he will make an incredible variety of folk medicines.

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00:06:45,496 --> 00:06:50,896

Santana's knowledge dates from ancient times.

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00:06:50,896 --> 00:06:56,736

Both the Aztecs and Mayans had a highly developed medicinal pharmacopia.

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00:06:56,736 --> 00:07:02,176

Those contained chemicals still used for the treatment of burns.

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00:07:02,176 --> 00:07:05,977

Ipicac roots provided a cough remedy.

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00:07:05,977 --> 00:07:13,617

The Dioscoria plant relieved skin disease.

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00:07:13,617 --> 00:07:19,097

Every day outside his simple hut, Anciana Santana is called upon to provide treatment

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00:07:19,097 --> 00:07:20,097

for the ill.

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00:07:20,097 --> 00:07:37,617

A troubled man complains of persistent headaches.

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00:07:37,617 --> 00:07:42,697

Santana often determines if he can indeed provide a cure by dividing the nature of the illness

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00:07:42,697 --> 00:07:54,617

with the aid of a small glass ball.

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00:07:54,617 --> 00:07:59,697

Once having decided that a cure is possible, Santana carefully prepares the proper plants

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00:07:59,697 --> 00:08:01,257

and herbs.

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00:08:01,257 --> 00:08:11,258

Often the leaves are cooked to enhance their medicinal power.

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00:08:11,258 --> 00:08:28,578

Finally, the herbal medicine is ritually sealed in a bottle.

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00:08:28,578 --> 00:08:39,098

Santana prescribes the dosage and tells his patient to return if the remedy is not effective.

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00:08:39,098 --> 00:08:44,178

A surprising number of present-day drugs owed their discovery to primitive herb doctors

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00:08:44,178 --> 00:08:47,898

throughout the world.

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00:08:47,898 --> 00:08:54,098

Common aspirin has its origin in the bark of willow trees.

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00:08:54,098 --> 00:09:00,499

The geotallus from foxglove leaves still is used to stimulate failing hearts.

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00:09:00,499 --> 00:09:11,699

Quinae from Sincona bark provided the first cure for malaria.

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00:09:11,699 --> 00:09:16,059

There is more to ancient medicine than a knowledge of healing plants.

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00:09:16,059 --> 00:09:20,499

We are now beginning to understand the other forces at work in the witch doctor's rites

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00:09:20,499 --> 00:09:22,019

of healing.

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00:09:22,019 --> 00:09:30,299

Plants that are still performed with astonishing results.

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00:09:30,299 --> 00:09:44,739

The Peruvian Andes, jagged domain of ancient Inca civilization.

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00:09:44,739 --> 00:09:49,499

The magnificent city of Machu Picchu perched at the edge of a world filled with magical

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00:09:49,499 --> 00:09:55,140

forces.

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00:09:55,140 --> 00:10:00,540

In the cool mountain winds, there coarsed hundreds of spirits whose powers affected all aspects

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00:10:00,540 --> 00:10:04,660

of life.

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00:10:04,660 --> 00:10:11,260

The power to cause illness was thought to reside in the spider.

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00:10:11,260 --> 00:10:21,540

The spirit of health lived in the sun.

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00:10:21,540 --> 00:10:28,340

With an old Inca witch doctor, or San Coyac, Dr. Fausto Aguilar practices an ancient Inca

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00:10:28,340 --> 00:10:33,900

ritual.

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00:10:33,900 --> 00:10:38,700

Leaves from the sacred coca plant are offered to the sun god in request for the power to

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00:10:38,700 --> 00:10:50,460

cure.

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00:10:50,460 --> 00:10:54,541

Dr. Aguilar holds degrees in both medicine and psychiatry.

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00:10:54,541 --> 00:10:59,661

Yet Aguilar has found that with many of his patients, he must also use traditional healing

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00:10:59,661 --> 00:11:08,821

rituals which are deeply ingrained in Peruvian culture.

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00:11:08,821 --> 00:11:14,821

In his offices on the outskirts of Lima, symbols and customs serve as powerful medicine.

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00:11:14,821 --> 00:11:20,941

Dr. Aguilar still performs the ancient ceremonies which are believed to ensure protection from

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00:11:20,941 --> 00:11:24,861

the powers of evil spirits.

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00:11:24,861 --> 00:11:39,581

This patient is a woman who was infertile.

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00:11:39,581 --> 00:11:44,461

Though the patient is technically cured of her physical problem, Dr. Aguilar must also

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00:11:44,461 --> 00:11:48,742

take into account the effect on the patient of cultural beliefs.

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00:11:48,742 --> 00:11:51,422

And so the cure begins.

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00:11:51,422 --> 00:12:05,982

A long wooden rod symbolizes the healer's divine power.

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00:12:05,982 --> 00:12:11,182

The rod will create a protective barrier to guard the patient from the return of malevolent

103

00:12:11,182 --> 00:12:30,182

spirits.

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00:12:30,182 --> 00:12:49,623

Final prayer invokes the curing powers of the gods of the sun and the moon.

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00:12:49,623 --> 00:12:54,083

In the early 19th century, when western trained physicians began to practice their skills

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00:12:54,083 --> 00:12:59,543

in Africa and Asia, they found that patients often did not respond to treatments and therapy

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00:12:59,743 --> 00:13:01,543

that were effective in Europe.

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00:13:01,543 --> 00:13:06,543

Increasingly, we are discovering that cultural tradition and belief play a powerful role

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00:13:06,543 --> 00:13:16,543

in healing, that a patient often cannot be understood or cured away from his culture.

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00:13:16,543 --> 00:13:22,823

Today in Los Angeles, a unique program recognizes the power of culture in healing.

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00:13:22,823 --> 00:13:27,583

At the Metropolitan State Mental Hospital, certain patients receive regular care from

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00:13:27,583 --> 00:13:31,983

a witch doctor.

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00:13:31,983 --> 00:13:39,743

Leon is a Mexican curandero.

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00:13:39,743 --> 00:13:45,664

Before each curing ritual, he appeals to a great master for the power to heal and exercise

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00:13:45,664 --> 00:13:47,944

evil spirits.

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00:13:47,944 --> 00:13:53,504

His patients are Mexican-Americans with strong ties to their native culture.

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00:13:53,504 --> 00:13:58,704

The ceremony begins with prayer.

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00:13:58,704 --> 00:14:04,384

Afterwards, Leon ritually exercises each patient's evil spirits.

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00:14:04,384 --> 00:14:11,744

His first patient, Pedro, suffers from a kind of cultural shock.

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00:14:11,744 --> 00:14:17,464

Raised in a small Mexican village, Pedro's first exposure to the urban world of Los Angeles

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00:14:17,464 --> 00:14:20,304

was emotionally overwhelming.

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00:14:20,304 --> 00:14:36,224

Out of fear, he detached himself from reality and lapsed into a catatonic state.

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00:14:36,224 --> 00:14:41,705

With all the powers he can summon, Leon concentrates on the particular spirits which he perceives

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00:14:41,705 --> 00:14:51,145

to afflict each patient and works to drive them away.

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00:14:51,145 --> 00:14:56,825

When Leon has completed his spiritual exorcisms, each patient receives a cup of water which

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00:14:56,825 --> 00:15:07,665

is ritually blessed and imbued with beneficial power.

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00:15:07,665 --> 00:15:25,025

The water is a universal symbol of cleansing and health.

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00:15:25,025 --> 00:15:40,346

The curing ritual ends as it began, in communal prayer to the spirits of health.

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00:15:40,346 --> 00:15:46,426

Ignacio Aguilar is the founder and director of this remarkable clinic named Zipetotec,

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00:15:46,426 --> 00:15:50,386

after the Aztec god of spring and rebirth.

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00:15:50,386 --> 00:15:56,026

In treating people who believe that mental disorders are often caused by curses or bewitchment,

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00:15:56,026 --> 00:16:05,826

Aguilar uses ancient curing ceremonies to augment conventional treatment.

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00:16:05,826 --> 00:16:21,986

Maria suffers from a severe loss of identity and self-esteem and a crippling sense of personal

134

00:16:21,986 --> 00:16:27,906

guilt.

135

00:16:27,906 --> 00:16:33,547

As part of his efforts to treat Maria's complex emotional problems, Aguilar performs an age-old

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00:16:33,547 --> 00:16:36,987

Aztec healing ritual.

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00:16:36,987 --> 00:16:42,627

Smoke from fire, the visible form that all spirits take, symbolically draws malevolent

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00:16:42,627 --> 00:16:51,947

forces out of her body.

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00:16:51,947 --> 00:17:06,387

Aguilar commands that Maria's evil spirits go away.

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00:17:06,387 --> 00:17:12,267

The leaves on a branch represent these spirits still clinging to her body.

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00:17:12,267 --> 00:17:37,748

As each leaf breaks off, an unwanted spirit is symbolically cast away.

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00:17:37,748 --> 00:17:54,788

Aguilar tells Maria that she has been cleansed, that she is no longer possessed.

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00:17:54,788 --> 00:18:24,148

Now he tells her she is a new woman.

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00:18:25,149 --> 00:18:46,349

The ancient ceremony has a powerful cathartic effect.

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00:18:46,349 --> 00:18:51,069

Symbols have very important things in our lives, and it's very important that we surround

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00:18:51,069 --> 00:18:56,509

a patient who comes to a hospital where everything is alien to him in terms of his culture, that

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00:18:56,509 --> 00:19:02,989

these symbols be a vivid connection in order to establish a therapeutic relationship.

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00:19:02,989 --> 00:19:06,269

Hence the importance of having symbols like what you see on the walls and what you have

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00:19:06,269 --> 00:19:08,149

seen throughout the ward.

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00:19:08,149 --> 00:19:13,029

And what we're trying to do here is to provide treatment that in effect works to the extent

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00:19:13,029 --> 00:19:14,749

that the person gets well.

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00:19:15,749 --> 00:19:20,869

When a patient comes with this kind of problem to the hospital and we provide the proper

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00:19:20,869 --> 00:19:32,870

mediums, he leaves and he lives well.

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00:19:32,870 --> 00:19:41,230

Familiar music is another powerful cultural tool that Aguilar uses.

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00:19:41,230 --> 00:19:48,230

With the once totally withdrawn Pedro, it has provided the first step back into reality.

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00:20:12,230 --> 00:20:18,230

When viewed outside of their cultural environment, the magical art of the witch doctor can be easily dismissed.

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00:20:18,230 --> 00:20:23,231

Yet in places where beliefs about the causes of illness are different from our own, the

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00:20:23,231 --> 00:20:27,231

so-called witch doctor can function as an effective healer.

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00:20:27,231 --> 00:20:32,231

A mastery of natural herbal remedies and the fact that most illnesses are overcome by the

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00:20:32,231 --> 00:20:36,231

body's own defenses greatly aid the witch doctor's power.

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00:20:36,231 --> 00:20:41,231

Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that many illnesses are psychosomatic.

162

00:20:41,231 --> 00:20:48,231

The ability to inspire confidence, trust and faith is one of the most potent medicines of any doctor.

163

00:21:06,231 --> 00:21:13,231

Thank you.