

A close-up portrait of a woman with dark skin, wearing a white headwrap and a white top. She has a nose ring and is looking slightly to the left. The background is bright and out of focus.

A CONVERSATION WITH
ANGELIQUE "SOBANDE" GREER

MEDICINE PATHS



Part 1
Ancestral Beginnings
Part 2
The Ozain Medicine Path
Part 3
Questioning Assumptions /// Cultural Appropriation

interview, design, and editing by Heather Wood Buzzard, MA

The word 'Ozain' was the first thing that struck me about Sobande's proposal to teach an intensive at the 2018 American Herbalists Guild Symposium. In a natural health world within which TCM flu remedies and Ayurvedic diet protocols are enjoying rising popularity, Ozain and the wealth of history it carries so far remain in the undercurrent of ancient systems of medicine.

I had come across Sobande's name before, teaching seminars on memorable and vital topics you don't hear talked about: 'Herbs, Slavery, and the South' and 'The Underground Railroad and the Soul Food Diet'. But the word Ozain and I hadn't crossed paths before this. Having spent three years at the Appalachian Center for Natural Health with Phyllis Light, I have been soundly immersed in traditional Southern Folk Medicine. Since encountering Sobande, I have come to think of my training as one of the many springs which have emerged from a well which runs so deep as Ozain.

In early September, I sat down for a long and juicy (virtual) conversation with Sobande. Having no time for small talk when there is real talk to be had, we leapt straight into the depths of the divine cause of life, multiplicity of perspectives as a way of healing, and of course, Ozain itself.

1. ANCESTRAL BEGINNINGS

HWB: Where did your path into herbalism begin? Can you speak to how you as an herbalist and medicine woman are aligned in relationship to 'the divine cause of life' that you reference, how this tradition has been passed to you, and how you carry on this ethic by teaching it to your students?

ASG: My path in herbalism began by listening to the stories of my great grandmother "Dorothy Louise Greenwade". She told me stories about her great grandmother who was a healer and a slave on a plantation somewhere in Lexington, KY. My great grandmother talked in depth about plants and things that old black folk used as every day, common-sense medicine. My granny opened the door to my imagination and paved the way for me as an herbalist.

The Divine Cause of life is a philosophy that teaches us to condition the body in its entirety so that disease will not attack it. This philosophy becomes a daily ritual of self-care, a walk of sorts that begins with the mind body relationship and flows through a continuum of spiritual recognition that shows itself in my everyday life.

This information is generally obtained through initiation, many years of study, and practical application passed down from one generation to the next through oral transmission.

After years of research, initiation into various African spiritual systems, study, practice, and consults with initiated elders throughout the diaspora I have obtained the basic principles as a foundation for incorporating the medicine and magic into mainstream holistic health sciences and thus the development of a basic curriculum that allows my students to have a broader understanding of health that crosses, racial, cultural, gendered, and spiritual boundaries.

HWB: Honoring the ancestors is a significant part of your work. Is this a practice that can be taught? If so, how, and how has your ancestry informed your work with herbal medicine today?

ASG: Honoring my ancestors is a daily walk seen and unseen. It is the foundation of all my work. This is my culture, my birthright not to be taught...only observed, respected, and honored.

Herbal medicine is a part of my DNA. It is the window to my very existence on the planet. I am the bones of my mother's mother. A direct descendant of Africans who were slaves that built the United States of America on their backs. Slave women who had a direct connection to GOD, the land, the people, and the plants. Slave women who bled & bore their babies in the cotton fields of Alabama, while drinking herbal teas laced with marigold and lemon balm to

stop the bleeding so they could get back to picking cotton.

My ancestry
in this plant
medicine runs
deep and
strong. It
guides me as
a scholar,
teacher, and
student.



Herbal
medicine is a
part of my
DNA.

DIS-EASE ROOTS ITSELF IN OUR EMOTIONAL BLIND SPOTS.

2. THE OZAIN MEDICINE PATH

HWB: You talk about the Ozain concept of 'conditioning the body in its entirety'. How does this act as a tool for practitioners and aid in holistic healing? Could you describe what happens in your work when you use the Ozain assessment?

ASG: To understand this concept as it applies to medicine and healing is to understand that the tools used in the Osain Herbalism System is merely a cosmic way to explain the physical attributes that happen in nature and thus the body. It allows students to use the information and diagnostic tools they already know and elevate it to a non-western platform of assessment and evaluation. The Osain Client Assessment System is an essential piece of Herbalism that trains students to truly tackle the mind, body and spirit.

HWB: You mention African Spiritual Herbology as a bridge between the physical and spiritual realms. Why is this bridge essential?

ASG: This bridge is essential because it allows Osain Practitioners to access a vast amount of information that might not be taught in more traditional settings, especially when it comes to academia. Dis-ease is defined as the lack of harmony between the personality and the spirit, a conflict between the lower and higher self. It is an emergency call for help because dis-ease roots itself in our emotional blind spots. This assessment system employs a technique that is unheard of in Western training.

HWB: In a field full of various assessment traditions from many cultures, Ozain is different from other body-mind methods used in traditional healing systems. Where does it fit in?

ASG: Although this ancient system of herbalism and evaluation can be difficult to understand, most of our students see the connections between Ozain and the modern world through more study and learning from elders in the field.

I do believe that modern integration of the Ozain system will propel us into a healthier and more conscious future. I am hoping that as more people learn this assessment method, more herb programs will value it and include it in their school's established curriculum.

The more organizations and institutions that share this valuable information, the more students have the chance to develop a truly well-rounded and inclusive view of healing.

3. Questioning Assumptions /// Cultural Appropriation



Ancestral
healing is
central to our
own healing.

HWB: You speak beautifully of oneness with creative essence and wholeness with spirit through healing with herbs. How do you convey these complex ideas in your work with clients and students?

There is room at the
healing tree for all of us.

ASG: Healing and wholeness of the spirit is not just about the plants, it's about healing our souls. I believe that to truly live in alignment in this work one must always ask the following:

- Do classes and conferences need to have diversified curriculums, workshops, and panels?
- Have you questioned "authenticity" and "legitimacy" and why it is that certain systems are thought to be more so than others?
- Have you questioned why certain voices are not present in the books available and why certain people are permitted to speak for others authoritatively?
- Have you questioned whether you are hearing or teaching from one perspective? Are you using the same old models over and over again?

This is ultimately the model of inquiry for creative essence and wholeness with spirit through the plants. There is room at the healing tree for all of us!

HWB: How does the issue of cultural appropriation enter your sharing this information?

ASG: Cultural appropriation has always been a huge issue in the herbal community, especially when it comes to indigenous people and people of color. Our work and history are not for sale. Our information is stolen, used, misquoted and never given credit. Those who are studying, teaching, training, sharing, exploring, visiting and learning, please remember that it is imperative that healing hubs, centers, schools, conferences, workshops, apprenticeship programs, and those offering information in this field be open to the vast amount of knowledge and those who have access to it.

If organizations never allow new faces of black and brown hues who represent the knowledge of their people, experiences, and cultures to share their history, it easily becomes lost, abandoned, and misconstrued. Ancestral healing is central to our own healing. At the core of this healing is knowing our histories which can be extremely difficult but not impossible (see the work of philoso-activist Toi Scott). The practice of stealing the cultures and traditions of others without asking and without giving back must stop.

LEARN MORE

INTRODUCTION TO THE OZAIN AFRICAN HERBALISM SYSTEM FOR CLIENT ASSESSMENT

Ozain herbalism is a spiritual and philosophical science born from oneness with the Creative Essence bringing about wholeness in the human spirit. Seekers of Ozain aspire to bring themselves into alignment with a relationship to the divine cause of life. Ozain, ('Divine Orisha of Plants') teaches students to condition the body in its entirety so disease won't attack. Attendees will glimpse the beauty of African Plant Herbology and how it connects to our physical and spiritual world.

WHEN

October 25, 2018 8 AM-12 PM

WHERE

Unicoi State Park and Lodge

HOW

Register at
americanherbalistsguild.com

29th Annual Symposium

Bioregional Herbalism

Keynote Speaker:
Phyllis D. Light



October 25-29, 2018 - UNICOI State Park and Lodge - Chattahoochee National Forest of North Georgia

ABOUT ANGELIQUE

Mystic, Manifestor, Dream Weaver, Desert Storm Army Veteran, Herbalist & Healer are just some of the things that describe Angelique "Sobande" Greer. She embraces the name given to her by her spiritual Godparents (meaning the seer came with me) and believes that she has been called back to the healing ways of her people. She is a Master Herbalist, Certified Holistic Nutritionist, Consultant, Educator & Author with over 25 years of experience in the field. She founded & runs the only African American School of Herbalism & Natural Health that teaches the art of herbalism & healing the old fashioned way. She is also the founder of the United States first Afro Botany Certification Immersion Program, providing students with a unbridled opportunity into the African Diaspora to learn about the plants, the people, the culture & the rituals of healing. Sobande resides with her husband just outside Nashville Tennessee where she maintains a private practice that centers on education & consulting. She also holds annual International & Domestic herbal retreats for women of color.

Learn more about Sobande and her work at NaturalChoicesBotanica.com or email info@naturalchoicesbotanica.com.