



Original Wisdom: Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing

Robert Wolff, Thom Hartmann (Foreword by)

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- Explores the lifestyle of indigenous peoples of the world who exist in complete harmony with the natural world and with each other.
- Reveals a model of a society built on trust, patience, and joy rather than anxiety, hurry, and acquisition.
- Shows how we can reconnect with the ancient intuitive awareness of the world's original people.

Deep in the mountainous jungle of Malaysia the aboriginal Sng'oi exist on the edge of extinction, though their way of living may ultimately be the kind of existence that will allow us all to survive. The Sng'oi--pre-industrial, pre-agricultural, semi-nomadic--live without cars or cell phones, without clocks or schedules in a lush green place where worry and hurry, competition and suspicion are not known. Yet these indigenous people--as do many other aboriginal groups--possess an acute and uncanny sense of the energies, emotions, and intentions of their place and the living beings who populate it, and trustingly follow this intuition, using it to make decisions about their actions each day.

Psychologist Robert Wolff lived with the Sng'oi, learned their language, shared their food, slept in their huts, and came to love and admire these people who respect silence, trust time to reveal and heal, and live entirely in the present with a sense of joy. Even more, he came to recognize the depth of our alienation from these basic qualities of life. Much more than a document of a disappearing people, *Original Wisdom: Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing* holds a mirror to our own existence, allowing us to see how far we have wandered from the ways of the intuitive and trusting Sng'oi, and challenges us, in our fragmented world, to rediscover this humanity within ourselves.

Original Wisdom: Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing Details

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From Reader Review Original Wisdom: Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing for online ebook

Johnny Cordova says

The story of a man who befriended a group of indigenous hunter-gatherers in the jungles of Malaysia and in the process learned what it means to be human. There is so much beauty between these pages. A rare gem of a book.

Marcel Patrick says

What I loved about this book is the journey of awakening Robert Wolff embarks on. His time spent with the Indigenous Sngoi of Malaysia is a delightful and modest account of a realisation that we live in a world where our deepest knowing is buried beneath the clutter of our over 'educated' minds. The message is simple, that through spending more time in nature and allowing ourselves to listen inwardly a return to a deeper relationship with the earth and our spirituality is inevitable. Honestly written and subtly convincing.

James Owen Ether says

Robert Wolff writes about his experiences with native Malay and Sng'oi people while working in Malaysia. He's from another generation; one that didn't grow up reading Carlos Casteneda or having seen videos on Australian Aboriginal cultures. It's important to keep that in mind as he describes his transition from a very Western way of thinking and understanding the world to one rooted in the earth and in our inherent oneness with it.

I wasn't coming from the same place. I've been reading about shamanism and don't consider myself ingrained into American 21st century culture in any way. Still, his experiences resonated with me, and brought me back to a part of myself that I was so distant from, I had thought I was already there.

I now dream of going to live in the jungles with the Sng'oi, or, failing that, to allow myself to open to the divine around me and let my instincts lead me where I need to go. A wonderful read - inspiring, humanistic and brave. I recommend it to anyone, even if you think you're beyond it.

Nathan Andren says

This unassuming, subtle, joyfully sly book contains a powerful kernel of Truth. It guides the reader back to what it means to be human, and explores what it feels like to be fully human, fully present, fully aware. I've already recommended this short, easy, heart-opening book to many family & friends. I continue to encourage everyone to connect with the Gift Robert Wolff is sharing. Many thanks to my father for bringing this book

and insight into my life! May we all reconnect with Heart Consciousness, healing our selves and our world.

Erin Moore says

Some books stay etched in your mind, revealing their wisdom even long after you have shut them, making you question your own beliefs. This is one of those.

This book led me down a path of explorations of shamans, indigenous tribes, and old and ancient magic: the magic of intuition and connection. It has colored my writing in subtle ways, and the image of the Malays waiting on the path for the narrator – either because they knew that he specifically was coming, or knowing that someone would come- has stayed in my mind for over a year and eventually landed in one of my novels.

He also speaks of, and is echoed in other narratives I have since read, the ability of the Malay to know or sense things that would happen in the future. They even share these knowing with each other via dreams. When he tells of how dreams are shared and writes of the stories that emerge when everyone wakes and shares their dreams together, it is almost as if he is speaking of some primordial knowing that we once had but is now lost to us. He tells of a dream of a flower that was shared, and of how he wondered when a child says later in the day, “Come, let us go and see the flower.” And then, when they find the mysterious flower – one that is extremely rare, large and smells of dead meat (few people have ever even seen a Rafflesia), he questions how they knew where the flower was.

He doesn’t offer any answers, but his telling of this is just one more example of the intrinsic knowledge or foresight these people carried with them, the almost merging of the people with each other and nature around them. Indeed, he goes on to become a shaman of the Sng’oi himself, but even here, he confounds us with the simplicity and honesty by which this happens. His teacher tells him to that “you do not have to understand. You will just learn.” But these instructions are hard for all of us in the West to understand, I think.

The Sng’oi that he writes about have no schedule, no sense of hurrying, and have – despite no machines or machinery of any kind – time every day for naps or even just being content. The author definitely destroyed some of my own preconceptions about hunter-gatherers (or in the case of the Sng’oi, mainly gatherers) by explaining that the Malay don’t sit down for elaborate meals. Instead, most people snack and graze throughout the day. These are also a people that encourage laughter. “What remains most vivid in my memory of the Sng’oi is their contentment, their joy. Voices were never raised in anger.

As with any other book I have read on indigenous peoples, the respect and care given to the young is so different and enlightening as to make it almost painful for a Western mother like myself to read. Mr. Wolff tells us that children over the age of around two are never admonished. Instead, they are asked their opinions and allowed to choose for themselves what they do throughout the day. Treated like equals, they act like equals. And, of course, babies are allowed to nurse far longer than we allow them in the West, and are carried and handled and slept alongside of. It’s a sobering treatise on the care little ones, but I know that this is one message that will be hard to internalize.

And, while the Malay encouraged the author to tell them of the outside world, we know that the idealized world he has written of will come to an end, or has already done so. It is like a sharp pain to hear the peaceful people that he met say, “Once we could be lost. Now there is no place left to be lost.”

Julianne says

This book literally fell into my hands...so I had to read it. It was great. I highly recommend reading this book. It will absolutely deepen your personal relationship with yourself and with the earth.

David says

Wolff's experience with the aboriginal peoples of Malaysia and Sumatra, his acceptance by them, and his transcendence into 'shaman-hood' through a great forgetting of humanity's place in the world reveals the ultimate pleasures of the wholly simple life... and is living proof of David Abram's postulate from 'The Spell of the Sensuous' that 'we are only human in contact and conviviality with that which is not human.'

Leanna Pohevitz says

Some parts of this book were very moving and beautiful but for the most part, I felt like the author was doing what he chastised others for doing. He was assuming he could confine the people he was meeting into his own narrow understanding of the possible. He forced them to meet his expectations. That being said I did find some commentary enlightening - namely, did we figure out which mushrooms were deadly by trial and error...it's a thought that will stick with me beyond this book.

Frank says

I wasn't sure what I was in for when I started this book, but it was a wonderful little surprise. The author's deep connection to the Malay people was the key to making this book and his experience possible.

I don't think I've read anything that comes close to this book in conveying so clearly how another culture perceives the world and how they fit in it.

Jake says

Great story of some tribes that have not changed their style of living, while our culture catapults in every direction. Amazing insight into our untapped intuition I believe we all possess. Innate knowledge that transcends time and space explained in terms we all understand. "Do we dream the life we live, or live the life we dream?"

Aaron Urbanski says

I loved this book! One of my all time favorites. I keep having to buy it because everyone I lend it to refuses to return it.

Olivier Goetgeluck says

In order to find out what the typical diet is for any group of people, we must also know something about how these people live, what is available to them, what is important in their culture.

By judging others less than ourselves, we cannot learn from them.

Different reality:

My reality is made in my head; I create roles for myself, I create a structure that requires certain activities and prohibits others. I live in time. I have an agenda.

Their existence had no reality until they lived it.

They were very selective in what they could use from our world.

Westerners are so used to thinking of training, learning, and teaching as verbal activities that we forget that much perhaps most - learning happens without verbal instruction.

Deep inside I always knew, but so much that I learned smothered that knowing.

Richard Reese says

Original Wisdom is an unforgettable book. Like all humans, author Robert Wolff was born a wild animal, ready to enjoy a pleasant life, romping around in a tropical wilderness. He grew up in Sumatra, the son of Dutch parents. His father was a doctor. The young lad suffered the misfortune of being educated by the dominant culture. It trained him for an unnatural life of schedules, destinations, and anxiety. His wildness was paved over, and his consciousness became disconnected from All-That-Is.

Wolff was interested in healing, and hoped to become a doctor, but World War II interrupted his plans. After the war, he became a social psychologist, and worked on a number of government projects. Work included numerous visits to rural villages in Malaysia, where life was very laid back. The people were “soft, gentle, polite.” Villagers were the opposite of city people, who tended to be “crude, loud, insensitive.”

Oddly, the patients in Malaysian mental hospitals included whites, Indians, and many Chinese — but no Malays, who were half of the population. Malay villages had a healthy sense of community. They accepted the presence of people who were odd; there was never a thought of sending them away. Everyone knew the village thief, and no one reported him to the police, because he belonged where he was. Malays respected one another.

Wolff was grateful that he had learned to speak several languages, because this ability expanded his awareness. Languages are unique products of the cultures in which they evolve. Different cultures perceive reality in different ways, and many ideas cannot be accurately translated from one language to another. Consequently, it was clear to him that the Western worldview was not the one and only way of interpreting

reality. Most Western people never learn this. Insanity seems perfectly normal to the inmates of the loony bin.

His career began in the 1950s, the dawn of the most horrific era in human history. Population grew explosively, as did the ecological blitzkrieg. Traditional cultures were being exterminated by a plague of bulldozers. Wolff worked hard to learn and record the knowledge of traditional healers. He believed that their skills were the time-proven results of thousands of years of trial and error. A tremendous treasure was on the verge of being lost forever.

He remembered the days before antibiotics, when Western doctors were little better than witch doctors. He detested modern healthcare, where doctors practiced medicine, not healing. They were highly skilled at temporarily postponing death via extremely expensive treatments — even if the additional weeks or months of existence were meaningless. Not long ago, most of those with fading spirits would simply have been allowed to pass to the other side in peace.

In his crusade to preserve ancient knowledge, he met a number of healers who had not been the apprentices of venerable elders. They acquired their skills via inner knowing. Intuition told them what herbs to use, and the way to prepare them. These healers told Wolff to relax; a treasure was not being lost. The wisdom was always accessible. When it was needed, someone would find it. This notion gives Western folks cramps, because they process reality via thinking.

One day, Wolff learned about a tribe of hunter-gatherers who lived in a remote mountain forest — the Sng'oi (or Senoi or Sakai). Meeting them opened the door to a series of life-changing experiences, a great healing. They were masters of intuition and inner knowing. They lived in a spiritual reality, “where things were known outside of thinking.”

Their camps were not close to the road. Whenever Wolff arrived unannounced for a visit, one of the Sng'oi would be waiting for him in the forest. The guide would stand up and, without a word, lead him to the village. This baffled Wolff. How did they know he was coming? When asked, they told him that they had no premonition of his arrival. They had experienced a feeling to go to a place and be there. When Wolff appeared, they understood why they were there.

They knew each other's unspoken thoughts, communicating telepathically. Their shaman could sometimes foresee future events. In the mornings, the Sng'oi discussed their dreams. Once, Wolff described a dream. Its message, they told him, was that he was needed at home. He returned to his family, and learned that a child had had a medical emergency.

“They had an immense inner dignity, were happy, and content, and did not want anything.” They loved to laugh and joke. They were often singing and smiling. Angry voices were never heard. Each new day was a blank slate — no plans, no jobs, nothing that had to be done. They floated, inspired by feelings. Life in a tropical rainforest was not a tough job.

One evening, while sitting in a group, Wolff went into a trance, and spoke to the others, an experience he did not remember. A Sng'oi shaman recognized that Wolff had shamanic powers, and offered to open spiritual doors for him. His name was Ahmeed, and his job description was “to bring new knowledge to the People.” Wolff accepted his offer.

The learning process involved long, silent walks in the forest, with no food or water. Wolff was frustrated, because he was thinking like crazy. It was impossible to still his furiously roaring mind. He could not hear

his inner voice. At the end of the walks, he was exhausted; his mind fried.

Eventually, his thinker got more and more flaccid, and he learned to pay attention. Some days, he could float away from his mind, and vividly experience the sounds and smells of the forest. Everything changed. The world became intensely alive. He ceased being an observer, and became a living part of All-That-Is.

After months of practice, he gradually remembered how to be a human being. “The all-ness was everywhere, and I was part of it. I cannot explain what went on inside me, but I knew that I had learned something unbelievably wonderful. I felt more alive than I had ever felt before. All of me was filled with being.” He felt great love for the people. The trees and mosquitoes were his family.

Back in the civilized world, Wolff was no longer the same person. Inner knowing could be painful, and sometimes had to be turned off. He could sense the feelings of the people around him, and this could be overwhelming. “It was frightening to discover how many people think nothing at all, but feel waves of anger, resentment, and bitterness — although they act as if they are deaf and blind to their own feelings.”

As the years passed, Wolff became whole and confident, as his humanness recovered. Being human was so much healthier than being civilized. That’s his message. Even adults can heal. It’s never too late to try. “Knowing inside is not something unusual; it is how we are. All humans can have that connection with All-That-Is. The connection is within us.” Cultures without the connection are on a bleak path.

Wolff’s website is [here](#), and many of the stories in his book are [here](#).

Jess Munro says

It was a nice book, really easy to read, the Malaysian natives have some great wisdom to share.
We lost contact with nature in this western civilization, we need to learn from the roots, from the animals
from the trees
From within us.

Jake Gold says

First hand take of an individual's experiences in a hunter gatherer tribe. Nothing crazy here. There were some nice heart warming chapters. And a few very weird ones. For a better exposition on the experience of being in touch with nature, I recommend the book *Becoming Animal*.
I recommend this for people interested in non modern western view of reality and nature/anthropology fans
