

INTRODUCTION

Psychology and medicine have become so enamored with their progress pioneering new techniques and new drugs that our rich professional heritage as healers is not fully appreciated. The solid principles upon which the transformative mental and physical health methodologies were constructed are unintentionally forgotten amidst the allure of seemingly new and novel approaches. I intend *Ancient Ways* to be a clarion call to healers, reminding them that our allied professions have an enduring foundation with a strong, reverent history that should never be abandoned. With this book I hope to foster a new humility toward our predecessors in the healing arts. The wise men and women who still practice traditional healing methods, especially in indigenous cultures, are continuously making important contributions to the practices of contemporary psychology and medicine. If as professionals we can alertly avoid the intoxicating hubris that can accompany scientific advances and modern day innovations, traditional insights may be remembered, enabling us to preserve the complexity, humility, and utility of ancient healing traditions.

When a friend and colleague, Rupert Ross, wrote *Returning to the Teachings*, I was inspired not only to meet the Canadian Ojibwa people described in his book, but to explore his basic premise that traditional Native forms of healing still have application today. More specifically, in the case of the sexual abuse epidemic, sacred Ojibwa traditions offer us a hopeful roadmap out of the morass of sex crimes by applying ancient healing practices to contemporary problems. As a result of inspiring and revolutionary stories coming out of the far north woods, we must rethink our homogenized and mechanical approaches to victim care.

One of the fundamental theories posited in this book is that many thousands of years of doctoring a suffering and ill populace likely

resulted in the discovery of many efficacious treatments that have stood the test of time. These methods were simultaneously developed in traditional cultures at antipodal geographic locations and were continuously used over thousands of years for a reason: because, not only were they naturally responsive to the human condition, but they worked so very well. And, upon closer examination, the old and new ways may not actually be that different. Some traditional and contemporary treatments often are fundamentally the same although periodically being tweaked somewhat to fit the language and accepted technologies of the time in which they are used. This book posits that old methods can be successfully blended with modern practices to enliven the healing process and restore essential lost elements of ritual, sacredness, community, love, mystery, and Nature's healing forces. I further contend that the old ways remind us that what needs to be studied is a person's response to an intervention more than the intervention itself.

When bold and challenging ideas are first born they may initially be branded as outrageous or, perhaps more benignly, be dismissed as trendy. That is just the reaction that innovations tend to trigger in well-established guilds and professional associations. Ideas that are out of the mainstream are often called "alternative," suggesting they are not the preferred choice of professional practitioners. Old ideas, moreover ancient ideas from primal cultures, when not being discounted as "primitive," paradoxically can be nullified by being labeled as "New Age" capriciousness. In similar ways an eclectic practitioner may be disparagingly referred to as someone who simply doesn't know *best practice* or who has yet to discover what really works. And the proponents of positive psychology, well they're just a bunch of "kooks" who live in a fanciful world devoid of any scientific rigor. Shamanic adherents — some of whom are not traditionally trained in psychology and medicine — are denigrated for trying to find an "easy entry" into the healing guilds. While criticisms like these can develop out of legitimate consumer protection concerns, they can just as easily arise from feeling

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threatened in one's professional identity. *Ancient Ways* will provide some balance when examining the old and the new. I hope it will also foster thoughtful reflection on the many valuable contributions that a wide variety of treatment approaches can offer our patients.

In preparing this manuscript I was repeatedly reminded of an old Jewish proverb: "We do not see things the way they are but as we are." *Ancient Ways* is intended to offer encouragement for us to remove our professional blinders, if only for a brief time, and to grapple with some of our *cognicentrism* – the habit of misinterpreting and discounting ancient healing practices as a result of our limited training and cultural exposure. Another aspiration in assembling this text is to effectively encourage the psychotherapy profession to increasingly become more open-minded while reviewing our long history as doctors of the body and soul, and to not cast aside methodologies that have been practiced since our earliest human history just because they have never been subjected to formal research. Said differently, the reader is encouraged to invite common sense, detached professionalism, and anthropological insightfulness into the evaluative process and to fully appreciate the rich wisdom of our multi-cultural healing history. And if that leads to a shift in thinking, then you are wonderfully alive and growing, much like the patients we have the privilege of treating.

I have learned much about practicing psychotherapy from the field of anthropology, more than from any other discipline. A unique contribution of anthropology is to shine a light on different cultures to teach us about diverse ways of life. While that is partially true, and I too have broadened my understanding of the world's rich diversity, anthropology's greatest gift is not so much in helping us learn about others, as it is to learn about ourselves. Cultures (and the healing professions too) hide more than they reveal and strangely enough what they hide, they most often hide from their own people. Renowned anthropologist Edward Hall repeatedly told his students that the primary task of the ethnologist is not to understand foreign cultures, but through our

study of them, come to a deeper understanding of ourselves through contrast and comparison (Hall, 1990).

Over many years, a transformation of my consciousness occurred as I traveled from Indian reservation to Indian reservation in North America; my once romantic and simplistic notions of Native healing methods were challenged by witnessing powerful healings firsthand. Slowly my narrow university training in psychology was eroded and replaced by a deeper, more comprehensive approach to mind-body medicine (hereafter referred to as *mindbody* to signify unity). The most pivotal growth experiences in my entire career as a psychotherapist were spawned by a sojourn in Africa. Visiting numerous traditional healers (also known as shamans and sangomas) throughout southern Africa – particularly Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Swaziland – led to the crystallization of many ideas that previously had been just vague notions residing in the back of my mind. I observed traditional methods of gathering medicines and the application of healing techniques. Many of the approaches closely resemble the biochemical and neuropsychiatric practices applied at some of the most prestigious clinics in North America. Most shamans complemented their approaches with the extra components of loving touch, highly focused attention, spiritual interventions, highly choreographed rituals and ceremonies, the well planned use of placebos, and much more. This amalgam created a potentiating quality, with each element gaining power when used atop another. One-dimensional treatments were rarely in evidence. Once I had immersed myself in indigenous thinking my mind never returned to its former narrow dimensions.



The Zuni Indians of the Southwest have many ways of *knowing*. They have five words meaning, “to know.” One is used to describe geographic knowledge that comes from different locations, perhaps implying dif-

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ferent tribal ways of knowing as well. A second way of understanding comes from knowledge received from acquaintances, Elders, animals, and objects found in the natural world. The third way of knowing comes from a methodic way of thinking, analyzing, speaking, seeing, and acting. A fourth method is what the Zuni describe as an acquired knowledge, understanding that arises from personal experiences. The first four ways of knowing involve rational processes of intellectual development. The fifth way involves abstract understanding and intuitive knowledge. Four ways of knowing are rather concrete and factual. The fifth way reflects a bigger, more expansive, and ethereal world that references important invisible counterparts, and acknowledges things that cannot be seen with the eyes or sensed by touch. Much noetic learning, the Zuni have taught us, happens within a person's inner spiritual landscape during ceremonial activities (Cushing, 1981).

The memorization of facts, such as learning about all the psychotropic medications and their vast side effects, or the proper techniques for implementing EMDR, is necessary. Memorization alone, however, may not stretch the mind to new reaches, to new possibilities. For myself, knowing the full range of healing options required the ability to regularly suspend my disbelief, to immerse myself in mystery, whether it was the frightening prospect of eating termite dung with mind-altering plant medicines among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, or my suspicion watching South Africa's Venda patients drinking traditional medicine mixed with their own urine to supposedly heal AIDS. *Ancient Ways* uses diverse cultural stories and examples to stimulate other ways of knowing. This form of ethnography is akin to comparing a cultural accountant with an otherworldly mystic. It is an invitation to explore the ancient mysteries of shamanic healing, the science of the preliterate world.



Allopathic medicine and pathology-focused psychology are focused on an ever-increasing disordered and broken nature of the human body-mind. The two professions are quite mechanistic and technical in nature and not heart-driven, unlike most traditional forms of healing. Allopathic medicine focuses on *curing* while traditional medicine uses the language of *healing*. The former sends logic to the rescue; the latter sees the dangers and limitations in certainty while, at the same time, emphasizing relationship over technology as being paramount in the healing process. Rather than characterizing the coldly clinical methodologies of science and the mysterious approaches of ancient healers as oppositional, it might be more helpful to see them as parallel modes of acquiring knowledge, different and perhaps adjunctive ways of decoding the Universe. Throughout *Ancient Ways* I will contend that these two ways of knowing can easily be combined to optimize patient care. And in doing so, I hope to convince the reader that you can craft a blended systems approach that is more efficacious than electing to use just one modality to the exclusion of another. As Heracleitus, an early Greek philosopher, said, “From the strain of binding opposites comes harmony.”

While this book is injected with many examples drawn from my historical specialization of treating physical and sexual abusers and their victims, its application is much broader. It will be left to the reader to apply these concepts in their own practices, as divergent or as specialized as they may be.

Note that throughout the text many words are capitalized as formal nouns to denote their valued character, importance, and sentient qualities. Nature, Elders, Universe, Mother Earth, Pachamama, and Grizzly, are few stylistic examples of the reverent indigenous influence I am attempting to communicate in *Ancient Ways*. The reader will also note the frequent citations of other authors whose work often, in very succinct words, buttresses my ideas. In that fashion let us begin with the words of Marcel Proust who wrote, “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.”