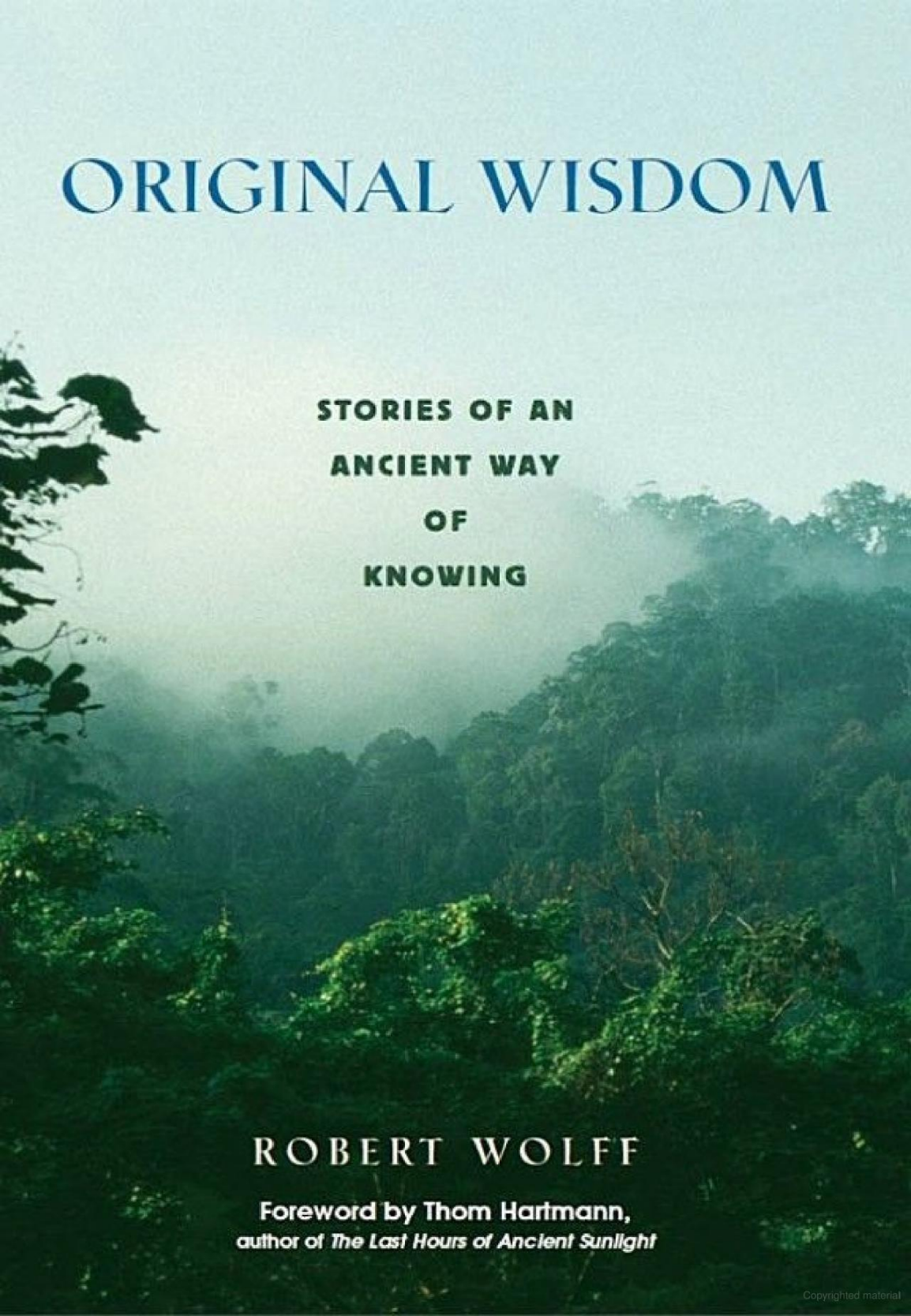
ORIGINAL WISDOM

STORIES OF AN ANCIENT WAY OF KNOWING



ROBERT WOLFF

Foreword by Thom Hartmann,
author of *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*

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Foreword

Most of us were raised in the Empire of the First World, a world and culture steeped in literacy, certain of the fundamental truth that life's great goal is to find that niche where we can spend our days working to the larger enrichment of another person or corporation.

When we hear or read of people who live a more idyllic life in a laterally organized culture without layers of hierarchy or riches or want, we tend to think of them as either mythological or, if real, simply too ignorant to have developed civilization. Indeed, with books such as *The Ecological Indian* there is a worldwide movement afoot today to "prove" that indigenous peoples were every bit as wanton, rapacious, and planet-destructive as are we (albeit they were less technically competent).

And certainly some were. But such generalizations always fail; it's as if we were to try to describe all Europeans by the story of the Roma Gypsies or Attila's Huns.

It's even fashionable nowadays for First World eco-tourists to visit remote parts of the world, spend a week or two with an indigenous shaman, smoke a few plants, see a few hallucinations, then come back to declare themselves shamans and develop large followings. Shamanism for self-growth, shamanism for business, shamanism to build wealth and power—it's popping up all over, but always with a curiously familiar flavor since it's simply the most recent reinvention of the classic dominating leader/searching follower, you-pay-me-and-I-teach-and-lead-you way so many cults, fads, and religions have gone.

For those who have never learned the language of indigenous peoples, true contact is impossible, for the culture is embedded in the language. Ecotourists meet natives or guides who have already been culturally contaminated simply by learning to talk with us. Their worldview has been shifted by contact, and their hungers often tend toward metal, TV, candy, alcohol, and guns. So how is one to know what's true?

The question is important, because those of us with European or African or South American roots have ancestors who lived as indigenous, tribal

people for the vast majority of the history of the human race. Yet nobody in Europe today remembers the Old Ways, the sacred places and plants, the meanings of the stones and markings and holy groves. It was all wiped out in a massive holocaust led first by the Celts, then the Romans, and then the Catholic Church. And that great forgetting was then carried to five other continents by zealous missionaries, the first wedge of empire and theft, and brutally enforced by armies and trading companies for five centuries.

Now comes Robert Wolff. Trained as a psychologist with a smattering of anthropology, but possessing the heart and soul of an aboriginal Malay, he learned the language of the secretive Malaysian jungle people, the Sng'oi. A few books have been written about them, often dismissed as fanciful and one even as fictional, but none written (to the best of my knowledge) by people who actually lived among them and spoke their language.

But Robert Wolff did.

Through that experience he discovered a startling new reality, a new way of knowing, which is largely missing from the lives of modern Americans and Europeans, and when mentioned is often relegated to the fringes of science by our religious empiricists.

But the reality—and the profundity—of his experience cannot be escaped. This book will fascinate you in its reading and haunt you in its memory. Most important, it will fill you with hope for a human future more in line with what it means to truly be human.

Read it, dream about it, and share it with your friends. This is a message the world must hear.

Thom Hartmann
Montpelier, Vermont

Introduction

As I am preparing this collection for publication again I think back to my childhood. I grew up in a very small town in Sumatra. My family—mother, father, and one sister—was small, but we lived among a dozen people and their families who helped us live a rich and comfortable life. Those people I thought of as *my other family*. During the hottest part of the day, when we were supposed to rest, I often joined them as they sat around in the shade, sharing gossip and stories. The stories were fables, I knew, but even after many retellings they never lost their wonder. Over the years fables became lessons that began to tell me what the world "out there" might be like. Even now, so many years later, I hear the rhythm of the Malay language, I see people sitting around, leaning against a pole or against each other. Life was never hurried. I learned without being aware that I did. I still remember the time when it dawned on me that relations between humans can be very complicated and difficult, but nevertheless it was impressed upon me that humans always exist within a larger context. I knew that people, despite great differences, are related as humans, as we are related to the animals and plants around us.

Now I am an elder myself. The fables I heard when I was a child have faded into the background of stories I have lived, my own stories that continue their life within me—wherever it is that stories are kept.

A number of years ago I began to write down a few of these and then put some of them together in a book, which I published in 1994. The book found its own readers; I never marketed it. Now, a new version of this collection may find its way to a larger audience.

My life has spanned what must be a unique period in the long history of humankind: a period of immense changes worldwide. The human population of the world has more than doubled in the last forty years; we have pumped more oil out of the ground after World War II than in all history before then. In the last fifty years, the millions of cars and millions of

miles of roads we have built, and that have become commonplace, have changed the face of the planet forever. An ever-growing number of humans has access to facilities and luxuries kings could not have dreamed of even fifty years ago.

Westerners, who are in the vanguard of these changes, see them as progress, an assumption rarely questioned.

Perhaps because my perspective includes memories of a kinder, gentler world, I have become acutely aware of what we have lost. In our haste to create a world entirely based on artificial—that means man-made—*things,* we have thrown away much that is part of our heritage as creatures of this planet. By divorcing ourselves from Nature we have also removed ourselves from the wisdom that comes from living as part of What Is.

In this age it is not unusual anymore to visit and even live in faraway lands. We travel halfway around the earth for a week's vacation or for an assignment of a few months. Where French was the language of diplomacy not all that long ago, English has become the language of world trade. Tourists travel to outlying islands to find the perfect beach, or to an exotic big city for bargains.

And yet it seems that the easier it becomes to travel, the more difficult it is to meet people in their own world.

I feel blessed to have been able to meet the people who changed my life, a tribe of aborigines in Malaysia. In some ways they reminded me of the people I knew as a child, but they were more primitive. I can easily imagine that they are a rare remnant of humans as we used to be a few thousand years ago.

After leaving Malaysia, where we lived for a few years, I began to read all I could find written by travelers and scientists who had known other aboriginal people. The more I read, the more I realized that Bushmen and Pygmies in Africa, Eskimos in the high Arctic, Australian aborigines, and isolated tribes here and there around the world were described in very much the same words: peaceful, nonviolent, nonaggressive. All the aboriginal people who survived into the twentieth century lived in areas of scarce resources: dense jungles, arid deserts, snow-swept ice fields. They lived in isolation, far from civilization. They were shy. They were nomadic, with few possessions, and their communities did not have elaborate hierarchies of power. And there was something else these groups had in common: they could not be "tamed," to borrow the word Laurens van der Post uses to write about the Bushman of the Kalahari Desert.

I wondered what it was that affected me so deeply about the Sng'oi of Malaysia. Certainly, they had a kind of integrity that I had not sensed in

other people. I loved their joyfulness, their ability to be in the present, their utter simplicity. When I was with them I was moved by the strange synchronicities (C. G. Jung's term) that so often occurred. How was it possible that people without a telephone knew that I was coming to visit, when I did not know myself until a few hours before I left home? How could one person know what another was thinking and feeling and dreaming? But perhaps more than anything else, with the Sng'oi I basked in a kind of unconditional love that is rare in Western societies and in societies that have become Westernized. I now know that I could find them only if they wanted to be found. They trusted me.

My love for a people who experienced reality directly, rather than through layers of learned concepts of what the world *should* be, allowed me to rediscover a reality of my own that is as immediate and intimate as the world of the Sng'oi. I recognized that I had hidden this reality deep inside myself. I had always known that the world and I were inseparably *one*, but had suppressed that knowing, buried it under words and theories.

My friends the Sng'oi, and others of these stories, helped me regain the reality of being *part* of All-That-Is.

Westerners are intolerant of other ways to organize society, other ways to be human. We cannot accept that others may value different ways of being. We seem to be stuck in the idea that all people must want what we have and what we value—all those things that we believe prove that Western civilization is the pinnacle of human achievement, the best, the future.

Science is so sure that it is the only truth that it has become incapable of accepting other ways of learning about reality. Medicine, as a scientific discipline, for instance, is certain that all other forms of healing are quackery and are not to be tolerated; they must be rooted out, destroyed. Such arrogant insistence has eradicated much knowledge and wisdom in the world.

I always knew that there were other, older ways of healing.

For many years my work took me to many parts of Southeast Asia and the Pacific. I recorded and collected what I could of methods of healing and herbal medicines. I became obsessed with the thought that I ran a race with time, that soon it would be too late because no one would remember ancient traditions. It seemed that all such knowledge was being erased by our intolerance of other-ness. I was deeply saddened by what I believed was an irreparable loss. In our rush to create man-made chemicals, we rejected age-old knowledge of the riches of the earth that are freely available all around us. We invented machines, but ignored talents and

abilities we must have in our very genes.

My agony over what I thought of as a great loss stayed with me until one day when I was in Tonga, an island kingdom in the South Pacific (Tonga is one of the few countries that have escaped colonization, although not the overlay of a Western religion). I mentioned my despair over what we had lost to a woman who had been pointed out to me as a gifted native healer. So much knowledge and wisdom, I said, was lost through our crude but persistent efforts to eradicate native cultures.

She thought about that for a long time. Finally she said, "Yes, I know what you mean. Yes, we too used to have healers and much knowledge of healing and herbs. Most of that is gone."

She paused again for at least a minute, then she sat up straight and looked me in the eye, her voice becoming stronger and more affirmative: "But"—and she pointed her finger for emphasis—"that is not the whole of it. You see, there have always been people who know. When we most need it, someone will remember that ancient knowledge."

She sat back, smiling. "So you see, traditions may be lost, but the information is in here and in here," she said, pointing to her head, then her heart, "and when we need it most, it will be inside us, for us to find."

She was referring to herself, I knew. Her gift of healing did not come from a Western education, nor did it come from training in traditional healing. It came from within.

I must believe what she said is true. I have experienced that *knowing*. There were times when I needed knowledge of the plants around me—and it came to me. Instinctively I knew where to find the knowledge (now we would say information) I needed.

The same is true in other areas of skill and experience. The ancient art of building canoes may have been lost, but when I was a passenger traveling on the open ocean in a fourteen-foot Boston whaler for twelve hours with no land in sight, the sailors who manned the vessel remembered again how to find their way by the stars at night, and during the day by the currents and "the little winds," as some Polynesians say. It is true that what remains of old traditions is no longer a coherent system of knowledge and skills, yet individuals everywhere are rediscovering and recreating what their forebears had.

There are *kahuna* (priests) again in Hawai'i. A century ago, missionaries did what they could to eradicate all remnants of heathenism, but somehow enough ancient knowledge survived. I knew a modern-day kahuna well; he considered himself a *kahuna lapa'au*, a healing priest. He agreed that what he knew did not always come to him in a straight line, from father to son, from teacher to pupil, but rather from his own knowing—from inside himself.

Others have said the same.

Perhaps, despite great destruction of human experience, ancient insight and wisdom are not lost. Somehow they are still part of us, inside us. These insights can and will come back to us when we need them.

As a child listening to the people who were near and dear to me, I never thought that one way of looking at the world was better than another. When I returned to that part of the world as an adult I realized that our arrogant attitude toward other ways of being caused great pain, and eventually the destruction of almost all indigenous cultures in these latter years.

That was brought home to me most searingly when I visited a small island in the Pacific with a few coworkers. I had no part in the job the public health people had to do that day, so I asked one of the local people to show me around the island. I told him that I was particularly interested in learning about what I called native medicine. When he seemed doubtful I explained that, obviously, people who had lived on a small island, far away from other islands, must have developed ways to heal wounds. Certainly they must know how to assist in childbirth—perhaps even know ways to set a broken bone. “Oh that,” he said, “yes, there are some people who know.”

We walked around the island. He introduced me to a woman who knew herbs, and to two sisters who were midwives. We met a man who knew which of the many different kinds of seaweed could be used medicinally, and several people who had other healing skills.

I took copious notes, although I soon discovered that people were not happy when I made notes in their presence. So between visits, my guide and I would sit on a rock somewhere and I would write in my notebook. We talked.

It was afternoon when we came back to where the boat waited for us to take my friends back to the main island, and to take me back to the airport. The island did not have a harbor or much of a beach, so we had to be ferried to the boat in local canoes. I was in the last canoe. Just as we were about to manhandle the canoe into the water, my guide of the day rushed up with a gift. He wanted to thank me, he said breathlessly:

“You are the first [white man] who said some things we have is worth.”

His words made an indelible impression on me. I realized that what he said was probably true. Other white men may have visited his island, but nobody had ever taken the trouble to ask them about their lives, their practices, their beliefs, their knowledge—because we are so sure that whatever indigenous people have is not worth knowing.

The stories in this book are true in the sense that I lived them. I share them to honor the worth and wisdom of the many people I came to know all over the world.

Assumptions

My first career position was government psychologist in Suriname, a developing country in South America. I had worked before, of course, but this, I thought, would be the first step on my career ladder. Little did I know that this ladder not only went up, but it also went around the world.

While we were in Suriname, *Life* magazine photographed the jungles around Paramaribo, the capital city, for what later became the issue on the tropical rain forest in the series "The World We Live In." The country lies a few degrees above the equator. It is hot and humid and densely forested. Then, there were few roads—one traveled on the rivers in steamboats or dugout canoes.

Suriname had been a colony first of England, then of Holland, and now had a new sort of independence. The original population was Native Caribbean American. They call themselves Arawak. They were displaced by African slaves a few hundred years ago. Because of the dense jungle, a majority of slaves escaped almost immediately and were never captured. Instead, these slaves who liberated themselves established a seventeenth-century African culture in the interior of Suriname. A hundred years ago they made peace with the government of the Netherlands. The Djuka, as they called themselves then, controlled the interior; the Dutch ruled a narrow strip along the coast, with the capital, Paramaribo, and a few other small towns. Today Suriname is independent.

The colonists were certain that they were unable to work in that climate. They were probably right: they wore too many clothes for a tropical jungle, but they also thought themselves vastly superior to people who did not have their kind of civilization. So workers had to come from elsewhere. After the abolition of slavery, people from South Asia (now India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka) and later from Java could be talked into signing contracts as indentured laborers. Although the contracts guaranteed that they would be returned home after their term was served, many chose to stay.

In Suriname all people mixed indiscriminately. The palette of skin colors

there is unique in the world. There may be few African blacks (also called blue-blacks), but there is, every other shade of black, brown, beige, yellow, and almost-white.

Suriname has aluminum ore that is mined by ALCOA, the United States aluminum company. Some people worked for ALCOA, a few people grew food—and a few even found gold nuggets in the jungle and smuggled them to Miami—but there was not much of anything people could do to make a living, except work for the government, the largest employer in the country at that time.

Very soon after we arrived I heard that some of the department heads and other bosses felt that workers were lazy and unambitious. That surprised me because people I had befriended seemed happy, active men and women, always ready to improve themselves. Since there was no institution of higher learning in the country, they wrote away for correspondence courses. It was only later that I learned that my friends often took courses that had little or nothing to do with their work. But the students felt they were improving *themselves,* not their work skills. They desperately wanted to learn and they found learning where they could.

After I was hired I was asked, What does a psychologist do? I had two degrees in psychology, one of them a brand-new, untested degree in social psychology from a famous American university. I thought I knew survey technology; I was supposed to know how to construct, conduct, analyze, and interpret an "attitude survey." So when I was asked what a psychologist does, I explained attitude surveys, sampling, research in general, the importance of validity and reliability—none of which was an answer to the question, of course. Then I said that a psychologist finds out what people are *really* like, not what other people think they are like.

Undoubtedly I explained too much. I got no reaction. I thought the subject closed. In fact, I almost forgot about it.

Someone knew, however, that psychologists also administer tests. I was put to work testing children in a newly established child guidance clinic. My first official action had to be telling my superior that we could not use any of the tests he had ordered because the tests were designed for Western-educated children. Local children spoke a different language, had a very different culture, and could not be expected to be within norms developed elsewhere.

We invented other tests and we managed.

About a year later, when I had almost forgotten my earlier conversation about what a psychologist does, a notice in the local paper screamed: *The Government hereby announces that the Government Psychologist will conduct a scientific study to find out why people are so lazy. All people are notified that they must cooperate!*

I protested. I tried to make my superiors understand that under the circumstances I could not do a valid study. They agreed to wait six months, while I carefully and secretly designed a survey and hoped people would forget the notice in the newspaper.

Our survey would ask a sample of government employees questions about their attitudes toward work. When we did a trial run, we discovered that few people had ever taken a multiple-choice test. Our trial run failed miserably. I revised my ideas and designed an interview study. We changed the questions somewhat and trained interviewers.

Through this we discovered that it was not the format after all, but the *questions* that were wrong. Too many people could not answer the questions our interviewers asked. For instance, after a section in which interviewers asked employees what their jobs were (by jobs *we* meant careers), we asked, "If you were not doing what you are doing now, what would you prefer to do?" A common enough question in the West, which I expected would lead people to express their satisfaction with their job, and perhaps even their motivation and ambition.

Instead I was met with blank stares.

To our question they responded, "What I am doing now." They asked, What else would we be doing? Yes, definitely, what they were doing now.

At the children's clinic, meanwhile, I had been trying to use a test that was commonly used in Europe and America at that time. I would give the children a plain piece of paper and some colored crayons and ask them to draw something, anything.

To my astonishment, of the children who were given the test (263, at first), only two produced anything at all. The rest sat with dead faces. Ages varied, but all the children were primary-school-age. Their average age was eight and a half.

The Draw Something, Anything test had been discussed extensively in psychology books and journals; there were established norms to interpret the work that children would produce. The test was considered to be cross-cultural; it could be used in any culture without bias, the experts said. And yet here was a population where children between the ages of six and ten years did not produce anything that could be analyzed.

I thought of several explanations. Perhaps paper and pencil were strange to them (I was wrong about that). Or, I thought, they were scared of me, because I am white. I got along with the children well enough and had never sensed any fear in them, but in a country of people of all imaginable colors, few were as white as I am. I asked a native teacher to help me administer the test. She asked the children to draw something, anything.

Same result: blank stares.

When my family and I made friends, we were struck by the many possible configurations of families. They were only sometimes made up of father, mother, and children, and were much more likely something else. We knew a mother and twelve children who had varying arrangements with at least four of the children's fathers. While these men were not live-in parents, they were considered family and they regularly visited the mother's large home. Another family we knew occupied three adjacent houses. There were three grandmothers, two grandfathers, fathers, mothers, countless aunts, uncles, a colorful (and powerful) grandaunt, nieces and nephews, cousins—and, of course, many children. I never learned who the head of that family was, but as we got to know them, it seemed as if there were several separate webs of relationships and decision making that were hard to comprehend. The young woman who managed the money in that family became a special friend of ours. When we asked her how many people were in her family, she threw up her hands and said, "I never know from one day to the next. People come and go."

Few people in Suriname were rich because, in part, it is almost impossible to become rich when the money that is coming in is shared by such large extended families. Yet nobody in that large group went hungry.

All of these different kinds of families seemed to have in common that they wished fervently for their children to improve themselves. Improving yourself did not mean learning a particular skill, but becoming more knowledgeable in general, becoming, perhaps, more cultured.

But I am getting ahead of my story. I did not fully realize the importance the families attached to improving oneself until after the results of the survey.

The survey was barely limping along when a man came to see me. Although uneducated, he was obviously intelligent and insightful. He said that because he thought I liked the country's people, he wanted to help me.

"It is very simple," he said. "People here have not had much choice about

anything. We do not think in terms of what we would rather be doing. When a boy reaches the age when it is thought that he'd better do something to stay out of trouble, the first job that comes along is what he does. When it is time for him to get a woman, the first woman that comes along, who is willing, is his woman."

Very simple, indeed.

Immediately I made the obvious connection with the Draw Something, Anything test. What would happen, I wondered, if I asked the children to draw a house, or their mother, or themselves? They all drew with gusto and no little skill. All along it was not that they could not draw, what blocked them was my instruction to draw something, anything. They needed to be told *what* to draw. The children had no difficulty expressing themselves, imagining, creating, but they had never been given that much choice, that much freedom.

I discussed this with teachers and others. Yes, they all agreed, the culture, the way people had been living, did not allow many choices, so that such an open-ended direction to draw something, anything might well be meaningless to the children, perhaps even frightening.

I can choose between carrots and tomatoes if both vegetables are on a dish in front of me. But when there is only one vegetable, and from past experience I know that is all there is, it would be foolish for me to say what I would rather have. I take what is offered.

Now I understood the stares we received when we asked some of the questions on the survey. They had never been asked those kinds of questions before. People had never thought about what they would *rather* do. They did whatever work there was. Because choosing was not something people had much practice with, choosing an imaginary alternative was simply not in their experience.

The survey became a much larger project than I had foreseen. I had to reconsider questions that would have been routine if we had done this survey in a Western country. This was not a Western country, however.

We could no longer ask what people would rather do. Instead we read them little stories, with the idea that by identifying with the people in the story, they could tell us what they thought the people in the story would choose. After doing some trial tests, that seemed to work well enough.

In the end, when we had rewritten the questions several times, when we thought we had good, reliable information, when we had analyzed all the information forward and backward . . . I found that it was the questions *I had*

asked myself that were wrong. I had made assumptions about human behavior that might have made sense in a Western society, but they made no sense in Suriname at that time.

Of course, Surinamers were not lazy—far from it. They sacrificed their own time and money to take correspondence courses. True, the courses they took often had no bearing on their jobs, but acquiring new or better job skills was not why they took them.

I had assumed that workers thought as Westerners do: the better you do a job, the more income you will get. Therefore it is to your advantage to learn things that help you do a better job. I assumed that was how people everywhere thought about work. These assumptions are so basic in our society that we are not aware that we hold them. In Suriname at that time, however, your worth was not determined by what you did, or how well you did it, but by your becoming a better person.

Most families we knew wanted the children to become better people. They had not learned that in a Western world it does not pay to acquire a general education, but it is important to have better training for a specific job.

Someone told me, “It is not so much what you have [training, skill, or even money] that determines your worth, but who you are [a good person].”

In tribal societies one’s worth comes from the tribe one belongs to, not from individual skills or competence. In Suriname, government employees knew, of course, that they no longer lived in a tribal society, but they felt that they now belonged to the government. They were proud to belong to the government, which they called *papa govn’men.* It was a prestigious tribe to belong to. And to show their pride as well as their appreciation, they took correspondence courses to better themselves. You did your tribe proud by becoming a better person.

It did not occur to people that an employer might not care whether you were a better person. The employer was interested in hiring a better-qualified employee, or a better-educated employee, or a more ambitious employee who might acquire new job-related skills.

The expectations of employer and employee were very different. Employers grumbled because employees were lazy, they said, or unambitious. But the behavior they judged lazy or unambitious was rooted in tribal thinking. Employers thought as Westerners think. Employers lived in one reality, the reality of the West. Employees lived in a very different reality: the reality of a tribal people.

Some years later I met a very sophisticated university professor from Suriname's neighboring country Guyana. He was bitter and quite outspoken about what he called the colonial experience: "Their [the colonists] whole culture is designed to imprint on us [the colonized] that they are better than we. They tell us that we must strive to become like them, lords and ladies. But we cannot become lords and ladies. We shall always be less."

He spoke impeccable, immaculate BBC English. If you had not seen his dark brown skin, you certainly might have thought him Lord something or other.

Surinamers, perhaps, felt *less* as well, and perhaps believed that improving themselves would buy entry into the civilized world.

I learned that I cannot make assumptions about what drives people, nor can I make generalizations about what people are really like, until I can stand in their shoes, so to speak.

My apologies to the blank-faced children whom I asked to draw something, anything. They had not learned to choose. They never had to choose—there had been few possibilities for choices in their lives.

Even a few hundred years ago—almost everywhere in the world, except perhaps western Europe—I spent my life where I was born, with the people of my tribe. I did what my father did, or perhaps what a maternal uncle did. I married the girl next door, or at most a few doors away. I ate what everyone else ate, most likely what there was available to eat. I wore whatever everyone else wore. I belonged to the religion of my forebears. I died and was buried in the same cemetery where my parents and their parents were buried, or was cremated as they were cremated. I did not have to choose much.

How much simpler life was when we had a bard who sang the songs he knew and we knew as well. How much simpler when there was one healer in our village, and she did not expect *me* to tell her what was wrong because she knew. I did not pay her, although she often expected a gift at midwinter. If the roof leaked, neighbors helped repair it. If the soles of my shoes were worn, the village cobbler repaired them. We ate what was in season. We traded eggs for vegetables, perhaps, or milk for a wool sweater.

Not a bad time, on the whole. A time when a major decision might be whether I should go on a vision quest now or later.

Today we go on a vision quest over the weekend. We take shamanic training at a two-day workshop that is repeated every few weeks for others who want to learn whatever it is that a particular teacher has to say about shamanism. There are a hundred others who will teach us differently about what *they* think shamanism is. There are undoubtedly catalogs that will list the various shamanic traditions we can learn.

Having so many alternatives serves only to devalue all of them.

What has made life in the Western world so stressful is that we think we must choose among a chaos of products and services. Frankly, neither the products nor the services work well anymore—we are in too much of a hurry to give much thought to consequences while we make money, invent new gadgets, start new fads, create new everything. Our very existence on this planet is threatened because, in our haste, we have made—and continue to make—bad choices.

Stress is the price we pay for affluence—an affluence that in the end is little more than a glut of increasingly meaningless choices.

If someone would tell me today to draw something, anything, I too would stare into space with a blank look on my face.

Too many choices.


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