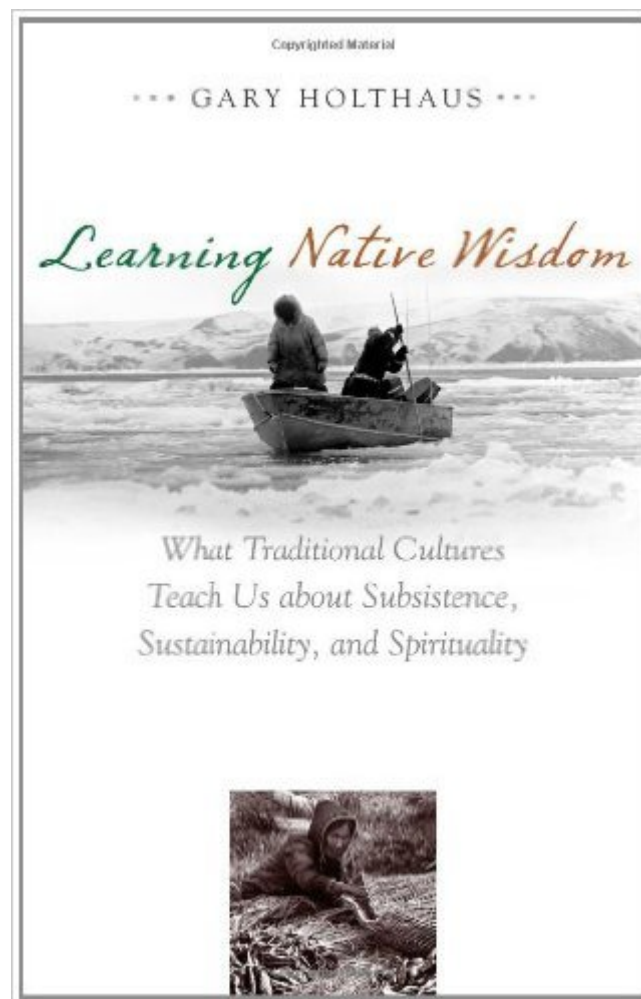


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Learning Native Wisdom: What Traditional Cultures Teach Us About Subsistence, Sustainability, And Spirituality (Culture Of The Land)



Synopsis

Scientific evidence has made it abundantly clear that the world's population can no longer continue its present rate of consuming and despoiling the planet's limited natural resources. Scholars, activists, politicians, and citizens worldwide are promoting the idea of sustainability, or systems and practices of living that allow a community to maintain itself indefinitely. Despite increased interest in sustainability, its popularity alone is insufficient to shift our culture and society toward more stable practices. Gary Holthaus argues that sustainability is achievable but is less a set of practices than the result of a healthy worldview. *Learning Native Wisdom: Reflections on Subsistence, Sustainability, and Spirituality* examines several facets of societies' cultural, economic, agricultural, and political life, seeking insights into the ability of some societies to remain vibrant for thousands of years, even in extremely adverse conditions and climates. Holthaus looks to Eskimo and other Native American peoples of Alaska for the practical wisdom behind this way of living. *Learning Native Wisdom* explains why achieving a sustainable culture is more important than any other challenge we face today. Although there are many measures of a society's progress, Holthaus warns that only a shift away from our current culture of short-term abundance, founded on a belief in infinite economic growth, will represent true advancement. In societies that value the longevity of people, culture, and the environment, subsistence and spirituality soon become closely allied with sustainability. Holthaus highlights the importance of language as a reflection of shared cultural values, and he shows how our understanding of the very word subsistence illustrates his argument. In a culture of abundance, the term implies deprivation and insecurity. However, as Holthaus reminds us, "All cultures are subsistence cultures." Our post-Enlightenment consumer-based societies obscure or even deny our absolute dependence on soil, air, sunlight, and water for survival. This book identifies spirituality as a key component of meaningful cultural change, a concept that Holthaus defines as the recognition of the invisible connections between people, their neighbors, and their surroundings. For generations, native cultures celebrated and revered these connections, fostering a respect for past, present, and future generations and for the earth itself. Ultimately, Holthaus illustrates how spirituality and the concept of subsistence can act as powerful guiding forces on the path to global sustainability. He examines the perceptions of cultures far more successful at long-term survival than our own and describes how we might use their wisdom to overcome the sustainability crisis currently facing humanity.

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Customer Reviews

There are many among us who feel that humans as a species cannot endure unless we create a more sustainable society. However, how can we achieve sustainability? Mr. Holthaus believes that it will take nothing less than a transformation in our worldview. In a series of essays in his book, 'Learning Native Wisdom,' he advocates returning to our indigenous roots as a part of this transformation. Demonstrating correlations between the worldview of the ancient Greeks and the indigenous worldview of the original inhabitants of North America; Mr. Holthaus illustrates how the western paradigm evolved into a fixation with independence from nature, harnessing it and manipulating it to conform to our desires. Climate change, our dependence on fossil fuels, and pollution are merely symptoms of this outlook; and the resulting imbalance that it has created. A more ecologically sustainable culture cannot be achieved unless our current paradigm is transformed at the personal level. This includes altering our language, our mythology and spirituality, as well as our relationship with nature. He feels achieving independence from nature is a foolhardy task. Instead we must embrace nature, re-sanctifying it like our ancestors. By changing our worldview and our spirituality to reflect the balance that we seek; then we can begin to change our institutions and customs to create a more balanced way of being. Yet, without this key change in our perceptions, true balance and sustainability is merely wishful thinking. Although I liked Mr. Holthaus's theme, I was disappointed with his book as a whole. I felt that Morris Berman's book, 'The Re-enchantment of the World,' made a more concise argument on this topic. Further, Mr. Holthaus's work was short on methodology.

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