



Book Review: INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE

by **Rafiq**

[Ed. Note: Four Arrows is one of the major Indigenous-based researchers, teachers and writers on “fear” and its importance in guiding humanity. He promotes us to become “connoisseurs of fear.” I have written a book on his work (Fisher, 2018).]

Indigenous Worldview and the Art of Transformation

Book Review: Four Arrows, *Point of Departure: Returning to Our More Authentic Worldview for Education and Survival* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2016).

We all have a worldview, an idea about the nature of reality. We may not be conscious of it, but we do. It shapes our thinking and our actions. Likewise, the worldview that is dominant at any point in history shapes our societies. If we wish to address the imbalances in ourselves and in our societies, we need to understand that these imbalances are the product of our worldview. Moreover, we need to recognize that the worldview that created the problems faced by the world cannot be used to fix them. For real solutions, we must look to our original worldview – the one that allowed us to live in relative harmony with our planet and with one another for most of human history.

This is the argument of Indigenous elder and scholar Four Arrows in *Point of Departure: Returning to Our More Authentic Worldview for Education and Survival*. He estimates that between 5,000 and 10,000 years ago, we began to depart from “a moral order that bound all life together.” This moral order was a product of Indigenous worldview. Since that time, we have evolved an anthropocentric moral order that separates life based on hierarchy. This moral order is a product of Western worldview. Four Arrows contends that all religious, cultural, and moral systems are not worldviews unto themselves but are expressions of one or the other of these two worldviews.

Before the point of departure, Indigenous worldview regarded what we might call “God” as inseparable from humans, non-humans, and the rest of Nature. In this sense, all of life was seen to be inspirited. After the point of departure, which was perhaps prompted by the advent of agricultural surpluses and the resulting sense that we had mastered Nature, Western worldview came to regard “God” as separate from creation. This distinction between the interconnectedness of all and the separation of all explains the differences between Indigenous worldview and Western worldview.

Because Indigenous thinking has been repressed and Western thinking has become dominant, the two worldviews are no longer in balance. The negative outcomes of this imbalance range from a likely “sixth mass extinction” to “religious dogma, absolute rule, class hierarchy, military

expansion, slavery, land ownership, economic debt, domination of women, greed, jealousy, a centralized system of government (the state), and large-scale war.” Four Arrows explains that balance can be restored only by means of Indigenous ways: “Recognizing and implementing the ancient pre-departure beliefs will enable us to understand that we are truly connected, and allow us to realize peace, respect, and sustainability again for the benefit of all human and non-human beings. It would be a mind shift from mutually assured destruction to mutually assured survival.”

More than a philosophical treatise, *Point of Departure* is a handbook on Indigenous practice. Coupling Western scientific investigation with Indigenous self-authored experience, Four Arrows not only offers evidence of the many phenomena attributed to Indigenous practice but also equips readers to adopt Indigenous methods themselves. He explains, “Theory is combined with recommendations for learning and praxis, and exercises are suggested for actualizing personal and, ultimately, global transformation.”

To this end, *Point of Departure* focuses on five aspects of Indigenous practice that can help to correct the imbalances of our Western thinking: trance-based learning, courage and fearlessness, community-oriented self-authorship, sacred communication, and the idea of Nature as All. To emphasize the holistic interdependence of these five aspects, Four Arrows places *trance* at the center of a figurative Medicine Wheel whose four cardinal directions are *fear*, *authority*, *words*, and *Nature*. In this way, the reader is reminded that the outcome of all trance-based learning is determined by one’s orientation to each of these four other aspects of Indigenous practice.

Trance refers to states of consciousness at the lower alpha and theta brainwave frequencies. Alpha is a state of light trance, and theta is a state of deep trance. Unlike the higher beta brainwave frequency of waking consciousness, trance frequencies give one access to “wisdom that is independent from reason and ego.” Four Arrows explains that this wisdom arises from “a vital energy within us and in the world, the source of which is creation itself.” Because Western worldview largely ignores this energetic realm in favor of the material realm, it denies that “all experience happens in two worlds at the same time.” Thus it “prevents us from fully learning.” Achieved through self-hypnosis and meditation, trance states can help us to undo negative subconscious programming by instilling new thinking, which in turn can lead to new behaviors. *Point of Departure* is full of firsthand accounts of how this process works, as well as simple techniques that anyone can use for the betterment of all.

Fear relates directly to trance because in a state of heightened fear, we can enter a trance state and become unknowingly susceptible to subconscious programming by others. Owing to its grounding in trace-based learning, Indigenous worldview protects one from such external manipulation by orienting one toward internal energetic wisdom. It recognizes that one’s sense of separation from the inspirited realm is the source of fear and that courage is thus derived from realization of one’s interconnectedness with all. This kind of courage is not rooted in dogmatic certainty about reality but in acceptance of the unknown. The inspirited realm is regarded as the “Great Mysterious” – “an unexplainable power that manifests through countless beings, spirits, and matter.” When such courage accompanies our actions, we can become fearless enough to be selfless on behalf of others. Generosity is the highest expression of courage. *Point of Departure* offers metacognitive strategies for facing our fears so that we are not weakened by them but are able to use them to achieve personal transformation and to practice virtues.

Authority relates directly to trance because trance-based learning fosters internal authority and self-authorship. This type of authority frees one from dependence on external authority, protecting one from potential misdirection. It also emphasizes that “the highest authority for all decisions comes from one’s personal, honest reflection on lived experience with the understanding that everything is related.” Thus Indigenous self-authority is rooted in firsthand knowledge but is oriented toward the community and the greater good rather than toward ego fulfillment. This focus on the community ensures a balance between the individual and the collective – in contrast to Western worldview’s emphasis on obedience to external authority for the good of a few. Within Indigenous societies, this balance is further reflected in the fact that authority is nonanthropocentric, nonhierarchical, and noncentralized. *Point of Departure* provides concrete ways to determine the sources of authority that guide our decisions and actions so that we might embody our full potential as individuals on behalf of the human community.

Words relate directly to trance because the language that we use in self-hypnosis to instill subconscious ideas has a critical impact on the effectiveness of this practice. For example, negative words like *not* or *won’t* should be avoided because they “do not form images in the mind.” In contrast, positive phrasing that uses the present progressive verb tense results in active images that facilitate creative visualization and orient one toward change. This orientation is at the heart of Indigenous worldview and is evident in Indigenous languages themselves, which “emphasize process, subjectivity, transformation, and living connections with a more verb-oriented structure.” In contrast, “Indo-European languages emphasize categories, objectivity, permanence, and a separation from Nature with a more noun-oriented syntax.” The Indigenous orientation toward transformation is spiritual, as reflected in the fact that “the concept of god is a verb in most Indigenous languages. For example, in Lakota, *Wakan Tanka* (god) is literally the ‘great mysteriousing.’” *Point of Departure* shows us how to balance the left-brain language favored by Western worldview by using Indigenous right-brain language to “more authentically describe reality, enhance relational ethics, reduce deception, and manage unconscious thoughts and behaviors.”

Nature relates directly to trance because the “vital energy” that we access while in a trance state is the same energy that animates the world. Just as we can commune with this energy through self-hypnosis and meditation, we can commune with this energy when we are immersed in Nature and mindful of the wisdom that Nature imparts. Indigenous worldview regards Nature as the ultimate teacher and source of experiential learning. Vision quests, for example, are done while one is alone in Nature. And animals can model right behavior, demonstrate the interconnectedness of all, and symbolize spiritual lessons particular to one’s own circumstances. In contrast, Western worldview fosters a separation from Nature that deprives us of this kind of knowledge. Moreover, its hierarchical “discrimination against Nature” is “the foundation for human discrimination against other humans.” Without a spiritual connection with Nature, we have lost our spiritual connection with one another. For the good of our human relations and the salvation of our ecosystems, *Point of Departure* implores you to “be courageous in using what you learn from Nature in word and deed to bring balance back into the world.”

The chapters on each direction of Four Arrows’ Medicine Wheel employ a range of Western scholarship and Indigenous experiential knowledge to illustrate the differences between Indigenous worldview and Western worldview. The chapter on trance-based learning includes

a complement to the ideas of Miguel Ruiz in *The Four Agreements*. The chapter on courage and fearlessness includes an overview of Western philosophy's idea of courage alongside an account of how both Mohandas Gandhi and Huston Smith led lives that demonstrated Indigenous transformative learning. The chapter on community-oriented self-authorship includes a discussion of MRI studies confirming that whole-brain functioning is enhanced when Indigenous right-brain orientations toward fear are combined with Western left-brain knowledge. The chapter on sacred communication includes a comparison of the linguistic theories of Benjamin Lee Whorf and Noam Chomsky. The chapter on Nature as All includes an assessment of the life of Ohiyesa (aka Charles A. Eastman), a Santee Dakota who graduated from Boston University School of Medicine in 1890 and straddled the Indigenous and Western worlds.

Point of Departure does not claim that the holistic orientation of Indigenous worldview is unique to Indigenous peoples or that the individualistic orientation of Western worldview is unique to Western peoples. Rather, the holistic and the individualistic orientations are two halves of a single whole. Each is one half of the human mind. Thus each is a product of human experience. What Indigenous worldview shows is that Indigenous peoples actively worked to maintain a balance between the two by coupling their left-brain material experience with their right-brain spiritual experience. They were well aware of the risks of moving too far in one direction or the other. Four Arrows writes, "The ancient stories helped to create cultures that held on to the balance because of what they taught."

Today, the excesses of Western worldview have produced forces that are intentionally, systematically, and maliciously working against our collective best interests. But the solution does not lie in fighting the left-brain system with left-brain approaches. The worldview that created our problems cannot be used to fix them. Rather, the solution lies in adopting right-brain practices that can complement our Western worldview. The battle is a spiritual one, and we must become Indigenous warriors. Four Arrows writes, "If the reader uses this unique Medicine Wheel and its interactions to consider daily choices, feelings, problems and deep-seated beliefs, my vision tells me we have a chance to help restore the world for the seventh generation."

Point of Departure is a unique and profound book. It offers a lucid presentation of ideas that are often rendered in the overly abstract language of metaphysics. This is a huge achievement! More than that, it presents simple techniques for putting Indigenous worldview into practice. Perhaps most remarkable is its appendix, where Four Arrows tells two personal stories that illustrate the effectiveness of Indigenous methods – stories whose outcomes are "miracles" when seen through Western worldview but are fully understandable when seen through Indigenous worldview. Anyone can achieve similar outcomes using trance-based learning. It's a matter of remembering that "fear offers an opportunity to practice a virtue; authority comes only from honest reflection on lived experience with the realization that everything is related; words and other forms of communication are understood as sacred vibrations; and Nature is the ultimate teacher."

Four Arrows [aka Dr. Don Trent Jacobs] teaches in the School of Educational Leadership for Change at Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara, California. Among his twenty-one books are *Teaching Truly: A Curriculum to Indigenize Mainstream Education* (2013), *The Authentic Dissertation: Alternative Ways of Knowing, Research and Representation* (2008),

and *Primal Awareness: A True Story of Survival, Transformation and Awakening with the Raramuri Shamans of Mexico* (1997).

[Ed. Note: this article is republished from Good Reads with permission from the author; for more information on Four Arrows and his transdisciplinary approach to fear, see Fisher, R. M. (2018). *Fearless engagement of Four Arrows: The true story of an Indigenous-based social transformer*. NY: Peter Lang]

Rafiq is writer and filmmaker **Robert Sean Lewis**. He wrote his first book, *Gaj: The End of Religion* (2004), to counter the idea of “God” as an individual who could take sides in the “war on terror.” His memoir *Days of Shock, Days of Wonder* (2016) tells the story of his confrontation with the spiritual and cognitive dissonance of the 9/11 age. His documentaries include *Be Smile: The Stories of Two Urban Inuit* (2006), *Khanqah: A Sufi Place* (2011), and *Cosmic Shift: Pilgrimage into Mayaland* (2012). *Be Smile* screened at the American Indian Film Festival in San Francisco in 2008 and at Cinema Politica in Montreal, Ottawa, and Fredericton.
