

PREFACE

We have arrived at this place, this spiritual way of life, together—but we took very different paths. This is, of course, true of everyone and everything in this life. We all walk our own path, but so often, we come to the very same conclusion. Perhaps you will come to this same conclusion as well.

This book is my way of life. I live these ways. I was raised in these traditional indigenous ways on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, but, growing up all those years, I didn't have a clue what a gift that was. I think about the way I was raised . . . I was raised to be a warrior. But to be a warrior, I wasn't taught about war. I was taught about love, compassion, generosity, fortitude, and courage. All of the things I needed to know and understand in order to take care of myself and be a warrior of peace and love.

In order to be a part of a community, you have to start with yourself. People benefit from that because they don't have to take care of you—you can take care of them and become the next teacher, passing on the values and virtues that you were raised with. Self-reliance and self-love come first. That's the first stage.

But as we get older, we go through different stages of life and different rites of passage. In my community, I became a scout, or a sentinel, watching over the camp. If danger came, I was to be a protector. If I didn't have the understanding of self-love and self-reliance, I wouldn't have been able to learn to love the community, to have compassion for the people around me. I had to love myself in order to love and protect others.

Of course, I didn't always remember that. When I returned from war as a combat veteran, I was damaged. Some wounds were visible, and some were unseen. I'd been married, but my marriage became further collateral damage from that war. I had to go through my own process of healing. And my community helped heal me. I immersed myself back into our traditional ways to try and find answers, and I reconnected with my elders to help heal and call my spirit back into my body. And I realized how effective this way of life is, this way of working with and helping people. It's more of a natural and nurturing way. I realized how powerful this way of life that I took for granted really is.

Part of realizing the power of walking an indigenous spiritual way of life comes from prayer, from connecting directly with God, or the Creator. Growing up, I went to church, and my community was deeply spiritual, but it wasn't until I left the reservation that I realized I didn't know how to pray. I think a lot of us are like that. We go to church and we recite these prayers, or we listen to our elders pray, but nobody teaches us how to do it for ourselves. And when I left home, I needed to pray. Church was synthetic, and our indigenous ceremonies were organic, and I was raised with one foot in each world . . . I felt so lost.

And so I just talked to the Creator. It was all I knew how to do. I said, "I don't know how to pray, but I hope you hear me. I hope you hear my voice that I send to you as I stand here before you. I ask you to guide me on this journey as I go into the world on my own. I'm scared; I feel lost; I don't feel like I belong here, or anywhere. But I trust in you, that you will bring me to where I need to be."

That's the way I learned to pray, just talking. The more I did it, the more comfortable I felt. And my prayer for you as you read this book is this: that you get comfortable with not knowing the right thing to do. We don't know how to do

everything, and we all make mistakes. A lot of times when I made a mistake, I would punish myself. But that is not a good way to live. Life isn't meant to be easy. If it were, we wouldn't need prayer, or spirituality, or healing at all.

I was meant to make my mistakes so that I could grow to be nourished, to learn and become a better person for my family and my community.

As these indigenous ways surrounded me more and more, I realized my purpose was to help people through these ways. It was teaching me to teach others. I learned that I don't carry these ways; these ways carry me. It comes without ego to walk the Red Road because there's no place for ego. It teaches you to see everything and everyone as a relative. *Mítákuye Oyás'ín* is the word for the oneness of everything that has been created by *Wakháŋ Thánka*, the Great Mystery. This is only the beginning, and from here we will journey together to learn and heal . . . no matter where you are from, whatever language we speak, we'll learn to see each other as relatives. It's up to all of us to make this life a good one.

INTENTION

The intention for this book is to grow communities. This book teaches the Native American philosophy as a way for people to find their way back to their own natural spirituality and healing. In fact, healing is just the process of finding our way back to our original design. It can help you come to terms with the embarrassing and wounded parts of yourself—and realize exactly who you are meant to be and your purpose on this earth. This book was born out of prophecy. Each message began as a prayer and was answered in ceremony.

Your indigenous spirituality can help you come to the realization that you don't have to go through a lifetime of

suffering to find a sense of connection and peace. You can get there simply by listening to your innate spiritual guidance. We all have it, whether we call it our conscience, our intuition, our moral values, or our virtues—it is already downloaded within us when we are born. We can feel in our hearts whether something is right or wrong. This doesn't need to be taught. We all have this knowing; we just need to be reminded. We are all human, and we all come with this same understanding. This is natural law, this is spiritual intelligence, and that's what this book is about.

THE CREATOR'S LAW

We need to remember to balance natural law with the modern world and to reconcile our past with the present. These things are already perfectly balanced in us, just as the moon is perfectly balanced with the earth and the sun is perfectly balanced with the planets. And that balance—that self-actualization—has to start within us, with our own self-love and our own self-reliance.

If you're uncertain whether you're on the right path, whether you're reading the right book or making the right choices in life, the natural law of the Creator will guide you. Ask yourself, have you seen a dragonfly recently? The dragonfly is a messenger, delivering guidance from the spirit world to those who are on a journey of spiritual self-actualization. Pay attention. The moment you pick up this book and begin reading it, the dragonfly will begin to show up in various places in your life. And, like the dragonfly, our hope is that this book will show up in your life at the moment it is needed.

Our journey begins—as always—from within.

INTRODUCTION

INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY

*To our elders, forgive me speaking before you;
I am young and still learning. Thank you for all
the things you taught us to keep these ways alive.*

— DOUG GOOD FEATHER

Many people are attracted to the humble ways and ancient wisdom of Native American spirituality; however, this book is not meant to teach people how to be "Native American." **The intention of this book is to help people build a bridge from their life in the modern world back to the deep ancestral roots of their innate spirituality.** In fact, if we were to journey back to our earthly ancestral origins, each of us would discover heritage and wisdom deeply rooted in the indigenous spiritual ways of ancient Europe, Africa, Asia, North and South America, the island nations, the Arctic nations, and other lands that now only exist in myths and legends. The goal of this book is to guide people on a personal spiritual journey to make this connection, using their own indigenous heritage, teachings, and way of life. Obviously, we may not all be Native American, but each and every one of us is indigenous to Mother Earth.

Indigenous spirituality is not a religion; it's a nature-based way of living in alignment with Mother Earth and the spiritual laws of the universe. The answer to any meaningful question can be found in the natural world if you learn

how and where to look. Those who learn to *Think Indigenous* live unencumbered by any human's attempt to exploit and manipulate the intention of the Creator. Indigenous spirituality is both a practice and a way of life. No political party controls it, and no religious dogma dictates it; you can practice any religion and also identify with indigenous spirituality. As we learn to Think Indigenous, we're learning the principles of honor and compassion for all beings and how to integrate these principles into our daily life so that we can experience a powerful and beautiful relationship with the people and world around us. So let's begin where this journey started.

A VISION QUEST

This book came into being as a result of a prophecy that was shown to me while I was on a vision quest on Bear Butte, a spiritual place in the Black Hills of South Dakota that's been used for vision quests by indigenous people for thousands of years. In this vision, Great Spirit instructed me to share the ways of Native American spirituality to help people who are suffering and need to connect with the ancestral wisdom and healing of their own spiritual roots. Everything that this book is came out of this vision quest—which isn't to say that it's new. It is a synthesizing of so much history, along with so many stories, philosophies, and teachings from all over the world, gathered into one very profound moment.

That moment was not easy to reach, however. A year or so before my vision quest, I was suffering from debilitating PTSD, which one day brought me to be lying in a ditch on the side of the road, weeping. But someone came—a helping hand to pull me to my feet and brushed me off, lifting me out of the ditch. But when I turned around, no one was there.

A couple of weeks later, an elder came to me in a dream and told me to spend one year preparing for a vision quest—which wasn't something I had even considered attempting. The elder said to spend that year thinking about what I wanted to do in life—what impact I wanted to have on this world—and then to go to the Black Hills for answers.

On a vision quest, you put water away, you put food away, and you give yourself wholly to the spiritual way. You don't necessarily know if there will be life or death on the other side, but you put your trust in the Creator.

I fasted on the mountain for four days. By the second day, I was ready to give up. I felt that I was dying. And then, out of nowhere, I was surrounded by tiny butterflies, fluttering around me, holding me up. And my doubt and suffering disappeared.

The butterflies left and the suffering returned, but then another swarm came. Larger butterflies, in so many colors—blue, red, green—surrounding me with compassion and taking away my fear and pain. They guided me through that entire day, and what was actually hours felt like minutes. They gave me the strength I needed to stay on that mountain so I was able to keep the commitment I had made.

On the third day, a blue bird came at daybreak, singing a beautiful melody. As I listened, I was hypnotized by the blue bird's song, and it took me into my vision and the root and reason for my quest. The elder that had come to me in my dream appeared once more. The elder said, "It is good that you came. That was me that picked you up out of that ditch. We are going to show you your purpose—look."

The elder pointed off into the distance, and the ground I was standing on rose up. I could see all the people on earth, and they were in chaos and despair. "Look," the elder said. "You people make yourselves sick. In order for the people to heal, people must be willing to make sacrifices, and people must be willing to forgive and love."

THE BUTTERFLY PROPHECY

My vision is known as the Butterfly Prophecy, but similar prophecies have occurred in different cultures and been known by other names. These similar prophecies share three primary messages: First, that Grandmother Earth is in the process of bringing balance to human-caused ecological destruction. Second, that it is time for chosen keepers of traditional wisdom to build bridges between nations and share their indigenous wisdom to help heal and raise the vibration of humanity. Third, that there are many people from many nations and races who will recognize these ancient indigenous teachings and be a part of the healing and help humanity cross the threshold into this new era of deeper spiritual connection with Mother Earth and with each other.

The people referred to in part three of the Butterfly Prophecy are known as Star Seeds, people who have been planted here with an inherent sense of knowing of earthly and celestial spiritual flow. Star Seeds will feel the heartbeat of Mother Earth pounding in their chest as they read the strangely familiar words of the prophecy.

We are talking directly to you. This book is not in your hands by accident; you called these teachings to yourself.

THINK INDIGENOUS

Think Indigenous is the philosophy of traditional indigenous life, in service to the Great Mystery by helping to raise the vibration of love on Mother Earth. We're common men and nothing more. As Native American authors, we must state to our elders that we won't be speaking anything of the ways of indigenous secret societies, the highly guarded esoteric teachings, or our sacred ceremonies. We will be sharing only those things that we've been instructed to share—

indigenous stories, analogies, metaphors, lessons, and personal experiences as a means to help the reader reconnect with their own natural sense of indigenous spirituality.

Indigenous spirituality is important in the modern world because this vast ancient knowledge can help us solve many modern problems. One of the reasons we have modern problems that we don't seem to have modern solutions for is as humanity has evolved, technologies have separated us from the natural world. We've drifted further and further away from the ability to recognize and connect with the source of our original spirituality. We no longer think in terms of immediate social responsibilities or long-term consequences to our unborn children—we think in terms of exploiting people and the planet with a degenerative cultural perspective and rapacious societal belief. The ability to Think Indigenous helps us reconnect with our ancestral spiritual knowledge, find a sense of balance in our daily lives, live in congruence with the environment, get clarity and understanding of our purpose, enhance our natural intuition and psychic abilities, and attract and allow all that is genuine and sacred. At this time in history, there may be nothing more important to humanity and Mother Earth than restoring essential elements of our indigenous ways of thinking back into our modern world and our daily lives.

Every indigenous culture has individual beliefs. What unites all indigenous cultures is the core philosophy of living in harmony with the ways of Mother Earth and in alignment with the natural laws of the universe. These core spiritual concepts are true for most human societies. Unfortunately, after the countless worldwide migrations of billions of people over many generations, a massive number of modern-day humans have lost connection with the spiritual origins of their ancestors. Though this connection has been lost to history, the spirit guides of these Star Seeds still hold

vigil over the latent memory of the ways of Grandmother Earth and Grandfather Sky.

The fundamental nature of our collective indigenous spirituality is what unites us all as one people, and we can all rest assured that the Creator does not require anyone to be born Native American in order to understand how to Think Indigenous.

APPRECIATE, BUT DON'T APPROPRIATE

There's a fine line between the appreciation of a culture and the appropriation of that culture. To appropriate a culture means to emulate and imitate the distinct language, music, designs, symbols, rituals, traditions, mannerisms, and styles of dress that make up the defining elements of a specific group of people and their heritage. When someone who is not of a specific heritage steals any element of that culture, they are insulting and dishonoring the great love and loss, victories and defeats, and joys and suffering that were experienced and endured to achieve that distinct heritage and become that unique cultural identity.

Discussing Native American spirituality is a way to help people living in a modern world to connect with their own natural spirituality, but it is not an invitation for the reader to adopt Native American culture as their own. It is, for instance, deeply insulting and supremely ignorant for a sports team, school, company, or costume to appropriate Native American culture. Wearing a sports team's Native American logo or wearing a "Native" costume to a party or a war bonnet to a music festival is an act of outright racism. Again, it is good to appreciate Native American culture, but it is not acceptable to adopt or appropriate the heritage of it as your own, no matter the circumstances or intentions.

However, we can honor and use certain teachings, as they are universal to Natives and non-Natives alike. Terms like *the Red Road*, *in a good way*, *Sacred Hoop*, or *medicine* are shared by many cultures that span thousands of years, with only slight variations and meanings. These terms and words act as a kind of shorthand that we use to sum up something that has a lot of meaning without using a lot of words. It's okay for us to use these words and terms in reference to the context and teachings of this book. Let's get into some of these meanings now so we have a reference for the rest of our discussion on how to Think Indigenous.

THE RED ROAD

Many people come to a point in their life when they struggle with the purpose of their walk here on earth. They have reached a crossroads; it is here that they will discover the beginning of their *true* journey—walking the Red Road. Those of us who feel called to live life rooted in nature-based spirituality are said to "walk the Red Road." This simply means that we have certain universal truths and sacred principles that guide us as we live a spiritual life. The term also has meaning for people who use these universal truths and sacred principles to overcome great adversity in their life, like homelessness or extreme abuse or neglect, or for those who are courageously battling moral injury, anxiety, or depression or who face addiction but make a decision every day to live a life of sobriety.

In a Good Way

"In a good way" is a term that's used in conjunction with walking the Red Road. If "walking the Red Road" means that we are on a virtuous path of learning universal truths and

sacred virtues, then “in a good way” means that our daily actions and behaviors are in alignment with those teachings, morals, and virtues. These ways are as profound as they are simple, they are as powerful as they are humble, and they are as sacred as they are common. These are living virtues that cannot be purchased, and they are not for sale; we either live them or we don’t.

THE SEVEN SACRED DIRECTIONS AND THE THREEFOLD PATH

The Creator has laid down many paths to spirituality; *Think Indigenous* is just one of those paths. No matter which path we take, all of them end up teaching us about our spiritual connection as the creation of the Creator, why we’re here and what we’re meant to do.

The Sacred Hoop of Life and the Seven Sacred Directions that make up that Hoop of Life help us to understand life, and they expand our understanding of creation and the Creator. The Seven Sacred Directions—East, South, West, North, Above, Below, and Center—are powerful forces of universal energy that dynamically interact with everything that’s in our environment and awareness as human beings. All these energies, spirits, forces—whatever names you know them by—are in constant movement with each other and with every being on Mother Earth.

In the final chapter of this book, we’ll braid these strands of indigenous thinking into modern life through three related pathways composing the Threefold Path:

- **The Way of the Seven Generations:** *Conscious living* is a modern term for the ancient way of living in harmony with the laws of nature and how the personal choices and decisions we make

will affect the lives of our unborn relatives seven generations from today. Conscious living also takes into account the many generations that have come before us, which stand as examples of what to do and what not to do so that we can avoid past mistakes and learn to allow joy and success to reach us faster.

- **The Way of the Buffalo:** *Mindful consumption* is a modern term for the ancient practice of respecting and honoring all beings on Mother Earth. We’ll learn the practice of being intentional and deliberate with our impact on the earth and the beauty of walking on our journey of life with the awareness of a circular mindset. Mindful consumption is about our role in nurturing our self and being a steward of those things under our care.
- **The Way of the Community:** *Collective impact* describes the process of finding your truth and being a part of a like-minded community. We discuss how to elevate awareness and become a living example of truth in action. We also learn about activism and how to shine a light on the crimes being perpetrated against our Mother Earth and our relatives from every nation.

You will learn how to live a life that will help you to be happier as you build a powerful connection with these spiritual ways. There are many ways and paths to spirituality. This way is just one, but it is a good one.