FINDING THE SOURCE

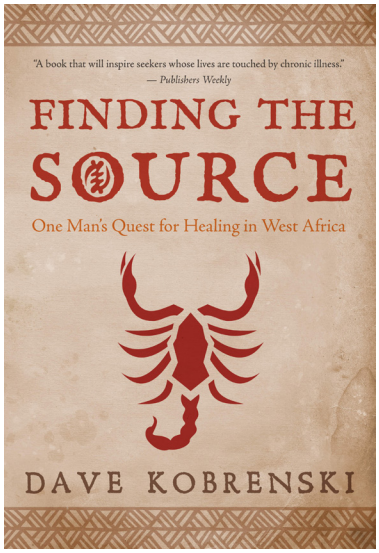
One Man's Quest for Healing in West Africa

by Dave Kobrenski

DAVE KOBRENSKI
CULTURAL ARTS

Book Club Discussion Guide

BOOK SUMMARY



Deep in the heart of West Africa, there is a power as old as the Earth. This is a land where ancestors walk among the living and impish spirits dwell in the forest. Occult knowledge is guarded by secret societies, and blacksmith artists carve sacred masks that invoke deities. Here, art is magic...and it is not for the uninitiated.

An ocean away, Dave is a struggling artist who longs for adventure in distant places. When fate brings him to West Africa, his dream becomes a reality, and he's drawn into a world of ritual drumming, ancient traditions, and vodoun magic. But the dream soon turns into a nightmare.

The mysterious illness comes on violently. As Dave convulses with pain, the villagers call it a curse, suspecting sorcery or ancestor spirits. At first, Dave's not so sure. Back in America, his doctors lead him down a dangerous road of pharmaceuticals and opioid painkillers, but the condition only worsens. As the years go by, Dave's suspicions deepen, and he must decide. Was it really a curse that beset him all those years ago?

Facing a life of disability and heartbreak, Dave's final desperate quest for healing brings him back to West Africa to answer that question. To find the source, he must question everything he thinks he knows, and put his trust in the words of a shaman and in spiritual forces he's not sure exist. But in the end, it's his own demons he must confront, before the curse finally destroys him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dave Kobrenski is an artist, musician, and author of three books, including *Djoliba Crossing*, *Drawing on Culture,* and his most recent book, a narrative memoir titled *Finding the Source*.

Between 2001 and 2021, Dave traveled extensively in West Africa to study traditional music with master musicians, including Famoudou Konaté, Sayon Camara, Nansady Keita, and more. His apprenticeship with Lanciné Condé, a master of the Malinké flute tradition, lasted for fifteen years until Lanciné's untimely death in 2021.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Photos and supplemental materials available at:

ftsbook.com/more

Leave a review of the book at:

ftsbook.com/review

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. The title speaks of "The Source"—what do you think "the source" represents in the book (physical health, spiritual healing, cultural connection, something else)?

2. Kobrenski balances Western medicine and traditional African healing practices. How does the book portray the tensions and interplay between these two systems?

3. The motif of illness is central, both physical (his spine/back) and possibly spiritual or cultural. How does the author frame suffering? How does it shape his worldview?

4. What does the book suggest about the meaning of healing—when is it "physical," when is it "spiritual," when is it "relational"? How might this model apply to readers' lives?

5. There are moments where culture, expectation, and belief conflict. Did you notice any scenes that challenged your own assumptions? Which ones stood out?

6. How does the author's relationship with his own body / illness evolve? Consider how despair, advocacy, agency appear in his narrative.

7. How did the vivid descriptions of West African culture (ritual drumming, spirit belief, community ethos) deepen your understanding of that region? Did any contrast strongly with your prior assumptions?

8. In what ways does the story challenge Western-centric ideas of health, healing, success, or adventure?

9. Has reading Kobrenski's journey made you think differently about your own health or healing journey—physical, emotional, spiritual? If so, how?

10. What parallels (if any) can you draw between Kobrenski's search for the "source" and a search in your own life (meaning, purpose, place)?

11. Are there elements of "adventure" in the book that you found inspiring or troubling? Would you undertake a similar journey? Why or why not?

12. After finishing the book, what questions do you still have (about the author, the cultures, the process of healing)? Would you want a "what happened next" chapter, and what might it include?

13. What was the most challenging or difficult part of the book for you to read or understand? How did you overcome it?

14. Did you highlight or bookmark any passages from the book? Did you have a favorite quote or quotes? If so, share which and why?