

## The Circle of Life

The following passage is taken from the autobiography of Black Elk, a famous holy man of the Oglala Sioux, who said in 1930-31

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation and so as long as the hoop was unbroken the people flourished. The flowering tree was the living centre of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it. The east gave peace and light, the south gave warmth, the west gave rain, and the north, with its cold and mighty wind, gave strength and endurance. This knowledge came to us from the outer world with our religion. Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The Sky is round and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball and so are the stars. The Wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The Sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood and so it is in everything where power moves. Our tipis were round like the nests of birds and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children. (Black Elk Speaks, pp. 198-200)

The circle is often referred to as the Medicine Wheel or the Circle of Life. It is a way of understanding the world and our place in it. The Medicine Wheel is a circular mirror, which reflects all things. The Wheel is divided into four; the number four is a sacred number.

## **Opening**

Begin with a Smudge Ceremony to acknowledge the Creator and the Four (4) Directions. We cleanse with one or all of the Sacred Medicines. This is similar to the burning of incense by a priest. Participation is strictly voluntary.

The circle handshake can be performed to break the ice. Participants both receive and give a handshake maintaining balance and equality and breaks down barriers between the participants.

## **Symbols**

- psychological symbol, representation, emblem, sign, letter, insignia, musical notation, example, substitute, number, designate

Symbols are a part of life, a part of ritual. They represent and express meanings, feelings experiences and beliefs. They are the language of the Medicine Wheel.

## Directions

East	South	West	North
Mental	Physical	Emotional	Spiritual
Earth	Fire	Water	Air
Smudging/praying	Diet	Supports	Ceremonies
Positive thoughts	Exercise	Friends	Prayers
Educating	Walking	Relationships (Healthy)	Listening
New things	Rest	Sharing	Hope
Playing	Sweating	Forgiving	Faith
Giving mind rest	Playing	Dancing	Making love
Making love	Laughing	Hugging	Giving
Letting go	Yelling	Unconditional love	Receiving
Time for reflection	Crying	Expressing feelings	Nature walk
Belief	Singing	Making love	Visiting grandchildren
Laughing	Sounding	Playing	Feasts
Child	Dancing	Smiling	Playing
Innocence	Making love	Crying	Elder-guidance & direction
Foresight	Growth	Accepted	Life & death experiences
New life	Focus on present	Together	Buffalo
Vision	Youth	Participation	White owl
Animals	Learning	Adult	See from all perspectives
New beginnings	Warmth/Sunshine	Darkness/Nighttime	Cold/Snow
Light	Berries	Mystery	Winter
Spring	Medicines	Protection	Wisdom
Rebirth	Wood cutting	Harvest	New Sweat lodge
Sacrifice	Harvest	Bear	Backbone of Nation
Sharing	Leaves drop	Turtle	Extrovert
Affection	High noon	Healing power	Teachers
Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
	Endurance	Mountains	Thinking/Reflecting
	Discipline	Strength	Rest
	Counsellors	Alternate reality, physical	Tree - honesty
Red	Yellow	Black	White
Redman	Asian Nations	Black Nations	White Nations, movement
Keeper of Mother Earth	Mind	Reason	Movement
	Do not suppress feelings	Hindsight	
	Introvert		
	Kindness, forgiveness		
	Openness		

