

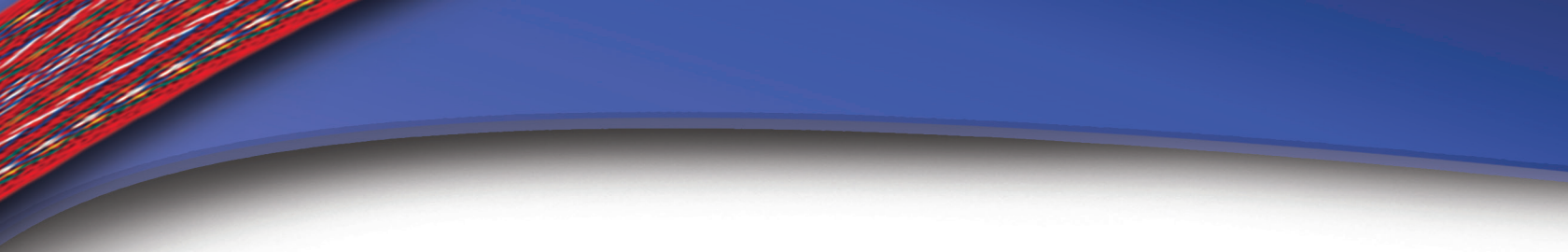
# Shining Mountains Living Community Services

## 2nd in Series



## Elders, Protocols and Ceremonies





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## ELDER PROTOCOLS

### ELDERS

Many Aboriginal languages do not have a word that translates to Elder. Commonly people who were well respected and known for their knowledge were referred to as: No t qua o (Cree) meaning Old Woman /Grandmother or Kc sano (Cree) Old Man/Grandfather. The coming of Caucasians however, changed the language and meanings of these words and the term “Elder” may have been created as an easier way to say this and to not imply that the person was directly related to the Old Person.

Some of our most prominent figures in communities are local “Elders”. Aboriginal people, by and large, value their Elders and address them with the utmost respect. They are consulted on a variety of matters, from personal needs or journeys, to community concerns. There are First Nation Elders, Inuit Elders and Métis Elders. Each has his/her own role to play, beliefs, thoughts and skills. Teachings vary between Elders, Nations and Aboriginal communities. Services provided by Elders are unique, they are the result of long training and experience in matters pertaining to Aboriginal culture, philosophy, practices and holistic approach to life. Elders are consulted during the THINKING about something stage, not just at the implementation stage. It is extremely impolite to wait and consult them only after plans are made. Elders are traditionally part of an event from the beginning to the end, this means that they are requested to not only open and close ceremonies/events/meetings but to stay and take an active role throughout.

The concept/levels of persons regarded as “Elders” fit into five main distinctions:

**1<sup>st</sup>**, Elders may be just older people who have lived a long time – the word for these people translates approximately to “those who have lived many winters”, what they have learned is how to survive. They may or may not have learned to live in a good way.

**2<sup>nd</sup>** Elders who are learning their skills, knowledge etc and are referred to as “As kca pio” or Helpers, these are people who assist their Elders in getting to an event, in conducting ceremonies, building sweat lodges, gathering medicines and so on.



**3<sup>rd</sup>** Elders who are able to teach, history, conduct – a wide variety of issues and the translation of their title is basically a “Teacher – someone who teaches or gives knowledge”

**4<sup>th</sup>** Elders who are skilled in the use and preparation of medicines, herbs, roots etc. “Healers”,.

**5<sup>th</sup>** Elders who are spiritual – these are the fewest and are the ones with the traditional ceremonies of naming, spiritual connections, spiritual ceremonies. – special ones

Basically, an Elder:

- passes on knowledge of traditional concepts, beliefs, spirituality, and ceremonies
- Conducts traditional spiritual ceremonies
- Provides advice and guidance

Elders are called upon:

- prayers to bless events, and help in a good way
- Advise and guide people in behaviours
- Offer accurate information about Aboriginal history, heritage, communities
- Provide insights on the historical role of Aboriginal people in Canada, including current situations and aspirations

All Elders (First Nations, Métis, Inuit)

- Treat the Elder with the utmost respect, as they have great knowledge and experience. Listen to the advice given
- It is best/wisest to approach an Elder through and with someone the Elder already knows. This gives the Elder confidence in talking with you and it gives you assistance in approaching the Elder

### **The Elder’s Helper**

Often Elders are accompanied and assisted by a Helper, wherever they go. The Helper does the booking, ensuring that an Elder does not forget dates or places or double book themselves, takes care of finances, provide translations if required, drives, ensure the Elder’s comfort and safety. The Helper also plays a role in the ceremonies, gathering and preparing plants, herbs etc, setting up sweatlodges and arbours, in doing so they are learning from their Elder and are being taught the responsibilities of an Elder themselves.

**RESPECT ALL ELDERS** (including your own)



## FIRST NATION ELDERS

### *Calling on an Elder for advice*

- Whenever approaching an Elder, begin by providing some information about the nature of the request, what problem you are having ie trouble sleeping, trouble with family, trouble in the community etc. Lay the tobacco (either in a pouch or even a cigarette) on a surface close to the Elder's hands and ask the Elder if he/she will speak with you. If your offer of tobacco is accepted, it means the Elder is available, feels they can meet your need and you can then ask for the guidance or help you require. Always acknowledge the Elder's help/contribution.

### *Calling to request opening and closing prayers, provide guidance throughout event*

- This is similar to asking for advice in some ways. So discuss the event or happening with the Elder. Let them know how long it will be ie one day, two days, a conference or workshop etc. Explain what you are seeking an Elder for – to conduct opening and closing prayers (the Elder should be invited to stay and help throughout the day(s)) If the Elder accepts the tobacco, the Elder is committing himself/herself to come. It is a good thing to also give the Elder a written reminder of the date, place and time. Keep in mind that when you have an Opening Prayer, you MUST have a Closing Prayer as well, since the two go together. An Opening Prayer serves to bless the process/event that is being held whether it is a feast, social, meeting or ceremony. The Elder speaks to the Creator to request/ensure that participants feel right about the process. During the event the Elder provides guidance, wisdom or just balance, while the Closing Prayer is to thank participants and honor the work that was done.

### *Calling on an Elder to be a full participant (on going) in meetings or on an advisory board.*

- This is again similar to the processes above.. So discuss the meeting, nature of the group with the Elder. Let them know how long it will be ie one day, two days, a year etc. Explain what your needs are, what the nature of the Elder's contributions and involvement would be (from active contribution, discussion, decision making etc.) Offer the tobacco in a similar method, if the Elder accepts the tobacco, the Elder is committing himself/herself to come. If he/she does not take/keep the tobacco gift it is because they do not feel they are the appropriate person to carry out the task. It is a good thing to also give the Elder a written reminder of the date, place and time. An Elder's role can give overall guidance, ensure balance between both people and the issues at hand. It is similar to the role of the Speaker of the House in Parliament, to keep participants on the right path, assist them to respect each other and seek workable compromises.



### *Differences between the Roles of Male and Female Elders*

- All Elders are different, each one of them, as well as male, female and between the Nations too. They each have their strengths to offer and traditional areas to work in. Find an Elder who is knowledgeable and who is right for the issue/concern that will be addressed. Access an Elder from the area/community first before bringing in Elders from outside the community. Bringing in outside/out of community Elders for an event/ceremony or other without support and permission from the local community Elders is not a good thing.

### *Respectful Manner to Approach an Elder and Show Gratitude*

- Tobacco equals honour. When asking an Elder for help offer tobacco, it is impolite to offer tobacco and then ask for more than one thing. For example, if you say “ I have brought you tobacco as a gift then you don’t request anything – gifts are not given with strings attached. If you say “ I have brought tobacco to ask if you can attend to offer prayers and guidance at our meeting” you don’t also ask for them to hold a sweat the next week. There needs to be only one purpose per tobacco offering. It is appropriate to provide an honorarium for an Elder to cover their expenses (travel, meals, accommodations and time spent away from home and family) this is similar to providing the same attention that you would for a lawyer, doctor or other professional attending a meeting/conference etc at your request. Financial transactions need to be discrete, provide payments separately (given wrapped in an envelope, handkerchief or other small cloth) is polite, and it is usually helpful to provide them upfront if possible. In the circumstances where an Elder requires the services of a Helper (for driving, assistance at ceremonies etc) the payments/arrangements need to also cover the accommodations/meals etc for the Helper. Anything else can be given at your discretion (ie basket of fruit, cloth in traditional colors, blanket, etc.)



## METIS ELDERS

The first thing in contacting a Métis Elder is to do so through someone they already know and trust. Ask the contact person if the Elder that they are introducing you to, prefers the gift of tobacco, or prefers tea/coffee or some other symbol of respect. Not all Elders utilize tobacco or see it as an honor due to the impact of residential schools and the social stigmatizing of tobacco.

### *Calling an Elder for advice*

- Speak clearly and plainly, do not use big, long or technical words and don't talk too fast. Be clear about what the problem facing you is.

### *Calling to request opening and closing prayers*

- Explain what you need, what the occasion/event is such as a conference, graduation, memorial or special meeting. Some Métis Elders do prayers in English, Mitchif, French or Cree, others will not pray in public.

### *Calling for participation in meetings or for participation as a member of a group*

- Good Métis Elders are good at getting to an event on time, or even early. Being asked to take part in a meeting means he/she will sometimes offer prayers, watch and listen, give advice and act in respectful ways. The Métis Elder needs to know what the meeting/event is about and what you might require from them. In a meeting or on an advisory board, the Elder may frequently play the role of "observer" and advisor, they watch for non verbal expressions, nervousness, honesty and sincerity. When it is "the right time" they will bring up the weakness or strength by telling someone important in the group or by saying right there, but with respect and kindness. It is important when you call an Elder and in the meeting DO NOT contradict and Elder – you may never get another chance to work or speak with them again.

### *Differences in Roles of Male and Female Métis Elders*

- Whether an Elder is male or female is often not seen as important, but rather that the individual understands and respects Métis culture, history and way of life.

### *Respectful manner to approach Elder and show gratitude*

- Honoraria for meals, travel, accommodation and time are appreciated and often necessary to enable an Elder to attend an event. It is important to respect and acknowledge the wisdom and contributions of an Elder, that you are showing honor and not trying to "buy" the person.





## INUIT ELDERS

Protocols in dealing with Inuit Elders are also changing rapidly. The expectations of Inuit Elders living in the southern/central part of Canada may differ from those who live in northern Canada.

### *Calling an Elder for Advice*

- Speak with kindness, equality, respect and sincerity. Inuit Elders can play many roles depending on the situation.

### *Calling to Request Opening and Closing Prayers*

- Provide the Inuit Elder with all important information about the event and any necessary materials. Ensure that Inuit Elders are also provided with transportation to and from an event.

### *Calling an Elder for participation in meetings or to sit on an advisory board/group.*

- Follow the same protocols as for a First Nation or Métis Elder. Provide and discuss any relevant information before hand so that they can understand the issues and truly participate in the meetings. It is sometimes very challenging to find an Inuit Elder in Central/Southern Canada.

### *Differences in Roles of Male and Female Inuit Elders*

- The roles differ slightly, but so do the roles among Inuit Elders in general. Each one holds certain roles in his/her community. Traditionally, Inuit women Elders are teachers and care-givers, while the males are hunters and warriors.

### *Respectful Manner of Approach Elders and Show Gratitude*

- All recognition is appreciated. Inuit Elders DO NOT usually accept tobacco offerings, especially those in the north. Food, hides and skins as well as seafood were often given. Now it is more customary to provide the Inuit Elder with transportation, meals and accommodations at meetings or events as well as providing a financial honorarium. Most Inuit Elders do not have their own transportation and so it is important to be ready to provide it.

## Contacting Elders

To Contact First Nations Elders, you may be best served by contacting the Native Friendship Centre in the community closest to where you require their services. The Friendship Centre staff or administration will be best able to help you when they know in what regard or area of expertise you need assistance. They can also usually help you to approach the Elder in a good way.

Red Deer – 403-340-0020

Rocky Mtn. House – 403-845-2788

To Contact a Métis Elder, call the Métis Local in your community or in the community closest to where you require assistance. You may also contact the Métis Nation of Alberta, each area of Alberta has a regional office and the staff or President will be able to assist you.

Red Deer Métis Local Office: 403-346-9794 ext. 150

Metis Nation of Alberta : Head Office – 780-455-2200

Region 3 Calgary- 403-569-8800

Inuit Elders are best contacted through the nearest Inuit Community to you or closest to where you intend to hold the event.

ALL ELDERS need to be treated with RESPECT and DIGNITY at all times. A community usually determines who their Elders are. Just because someone is a senior does not automatically give them the title or knowledge of an Elder in the traditional sense. Some of our older people have made tremendous errors in their lives or have become very European in their outlook and treatment of their people. Other Elders have lived so long that like all other creatures they begin to lose their strength and memory of events.



## HOPI PROPHECY (made in the mid 1800s)

“Our people are now living in our midnight. We will come into our daylight and become leaders again, when the eagle lands on the moon”

This prophecy was, for two centuries seen as unfulfillable, however in 1962 around the world was heard “The Eagle has landed”, on the moon, when Neil Armstrong landed there.

Spirituality was always an important part of both everyday life and of significant ceremonial times or events. In every day life, prayers and gifts of thanks were offered upon rising, at noon, early evening (supper time) and just prior to going to bed. Prayers and an offering (gift) of thanks such as tobacco, were also offered before starting a task such as gathering medicines, plants, herbs, sage, sweetgrass, hunting or fishing. It was a symbolic way of thanking the Creator and of showing respect for the life of the plant or animal- to acknowledge that their gift of life for the people was appreciated.

Ceremonial times were also prayed about, offerings made, often by many medicine men at the same time. There were specific reasons and rules that surrounded and guided the ceremony and the participants. Ceremonies include times of grieving, jubilation, successes and end/beginning of seasons.



## CEREMONY PROTOCOL

***ALL CEREMONIES FROM SMUDGING TO SWEAT LODGE ARE TO BE TREATED WITH RESPECT AND MAY ONLY BE CARRIED OUT BY A QUALIFIED ELDER, ELDER'S HELPER OR A SPECIAL PERSON WHO HAS BEEN TRAINED AND GRANTED PERMISSION.***

### SMUDGING

Different nations and bands traditionally used and still use various grasses, roots and herbs for personal and ceremonial preparations. The most common ones are sweetgrass, sage and cedar. Sweetgrass is a special type of grass that grows in marshy places, when it is gathered it is braided with three strands, the strands signify mind, body and heart, the place where it is tied signifies spirit/connection to Creator. Smudging is a symbolic way of cleansing the individual and praying for guidance to live life in a good way. It is also used to smudge places/items such as rooms and gifts for the same reasons. Prior to smudging, individuals remove all metal jewellery such as chains, watches, rings or earrings, as well as glasses, symbolically indicating that we came into this world with nothing and we will leave with nothing. Each individual washes themselves with the smudge (smoke) scooping it in their hands to bring it up to eyes, ears, mouth, over the head, down the front, stomach and chest, down each arm and leg, praying in silence for their individual needs, for good thoughts, seeing/hearing and speaking good words, for vision and strength to do the right things and move forward in a good way. When the individual is through, they cup their hands and bring smudge to their heart four times, the person can say "All my relations, Thanks or Ah Hah" as they chose. The smudge is then carried to the next person.

A woman on her moon time, does not smudge with cedar or sweetgrass, if these medicines are being used, the woman steps back out of the circle. A woman on her time, however, may use sage. Sage is seen as a woman's medicine and may be used at any time.

### PIPE CEREMONY

The Pipe Ceremony is only conducted by a PIPE CARRIER who has been given both the privilege and responsibility of carrying a pipe and bundle by his/her teacher. Participants in a Pipe Ceremony gather together for a specific purpose and a pipe is filled with a sacred tobacco/herb mixture is prayed over by the Pipe Carrier, ceremoniously lit and is past around the circle at least four times. The pipe continues to be past around the circle until all of the tobacco mixture is consumed. Each participant puffs on the pipe or touches it to their head, shoulder and heart symbolically giving their affirmation/word to support or abide by the decisions reached or belief agreed upon in the circle. The Pipe is also used in the Sweat Lodge.



## SWEAT LODGE

The sweat lodge is a symbolic re-enactment of an experiential like return to our mother's womb, which is the cleansing and renewing of a person's mind, body, heart and spirit. The sweat lodge itself is a small dome shaped enclosure constructed of willow bows and covered with blankets and a tarp, it has a low entrance that depending upon the Sweat Lodge holder's teachings may face south, east or west. A spiritual Elder, who will be the Sweat Lodge holder or keeper, determines the location and positioning of the lodge before the construction is begun. Prayers are conducted with ceremony, willows collected, the holes dug for the branches and one in the centre for the grandfathers, the structure created with interwoven branches and a first sweat is held all in the same day. There is a sacred mound built just outside the door of

It requires an act of complete humility to sit in a foetal position admitting powerlessness before our Creator. Disclosing our difficulties, sharing our problems with other people and in prayer asking for the needs of our innermost self. Then after the rounds we re-enter the world reborn with new hope and a changed attitude.

Sweat lodges have been amongst our people long before Europeans arrived on the shores of our land and built churches in our communities. The lodges were where our people went to pray, regain their strength and balance in close contact with their Creator. Participants do not eat prior to the sweat ceremony and the ceremony often begins at daybreak or at midnight. It usually lasts at least four hours, this may be shorter or longer depending on the number of people in the lodge, the length and number of prayers, songs and teachings. Sweat lodge ceremonies are conducted for various reasons such as preparation for a vision quest, for marriage, enlightenment of a specific issue, for illness, birth or death, celebration of the change of seasons or for help/guidance with a specific community issue.

Sweat protocols call for people to refrain from drinking or consuming mind/mood altering substances for up to four days prior to the sweat, women do not go into or close to a sweat on their moon time. Women enter the sweat to the left of where the sweat lodge leader sits and men enter to the right hand side, this leaves the Elder and his/her ascapio in the centre of the people. Women wear a long flannel gown or long skirt and long sleeved shirt (with not buttons, or zippers) while men wear shorts/swim trunks. Each person should also take in a towel with them to cover up if they get too hot, and many take water to drink after a round. Participants bring tobacco to the lodge and give it to the Elder as well as a "print". A print is a piece of broadcloth/cotton that is about a yard (meter) in length. The color of a print varies but is a basic color ie blue (gaining insight) yellow (for healing) white,(physical change) red (finding vision).



Participants may bring fish or berries to break the fast, these are left on the Sacred Mound during the sweat. Participants also bring food items ie stew/soup, bannock; for a potluck meal at the end of the sweat.

There are four rounds to each sweat lodge ceremony. Four rounds in honor of the four directions / four grandfathers. At the beginning of each round the door is closed and it is completely dark in the sweat, prayers are said and prayer songs sung. At the end of each round the leader calls for the door to be opened, in some sweats participants go outside the lodge, may bath or pour cool water over their heads/bodies from a stream, lake or bucket if none other is available. This is a symbolic refreshing of ones' self and a washing away of the issues discussed in the round. In other sweats, the participants only go outside to cool off and not to bathe with the water. Each round honours a specific thing or purpose, after the four rounds are completed the sacred pipe is smoked by all participants and a feast/meal is shared.

#### General Round Information:

**ROUND ONE:** honours Mother Earth and all life/gifts that come from her. Some sweat leaders call this the children's round.

**ROUND TWO:** honours all women, all our sisters because they are the backbone, the heart of Indian people and have the gift of bringing forth new life.

**ROUND THREE:** honours all men, all our brothers because they protect all life.

**ROUND FOUR:** honours ourselves, now that we have prayed for everyone else, we pray for ourselves, what we need/came to the sweat for. We pray to become better people, help with life problems etc.

If the Sweat is a Healing Sweat, the prayers, medicines given etc are a part of Round Two. The Elder/Healer gives the person who underwent the healing, instructions regarding tobacco, prints or use of other medicines.

If the Sweat is a Grieving Sweat (to help those still here with their grief and to honor the person who has left) a Warriors staff is brought into the sweat and is part of the ceremonies. After the last round the deceased's name is not to be used for one year.

Six Basic Colors are used in sweat lodge ceremonies.

**COLOR RED** – East direction, in honor of the Red Race or Indian people, given the gift of vision/prophecy.



**COLOR YELLOW** – South direction, in honor of the Yellow Race or Asian people, given the gift of time. (Some nations use a bright green to indicate this direction)

**COLOR BLACK** – West direction, in honor of the Black Race or African people, given the gift of introspection (Some nations use deep blue to indicate this direction)

**COLOR WHITE** – North direction, in honor of the White Race or White people, given the gift of logic/movement.

**COLOR GREEN** – in honor of Mother Earth, giver of new life to all creation, dark green

**COLOR BLUE** – in honor of Father Sky, the ultimate of all universal powers.

**COLOR PURPLE/MAUVE** is also used –

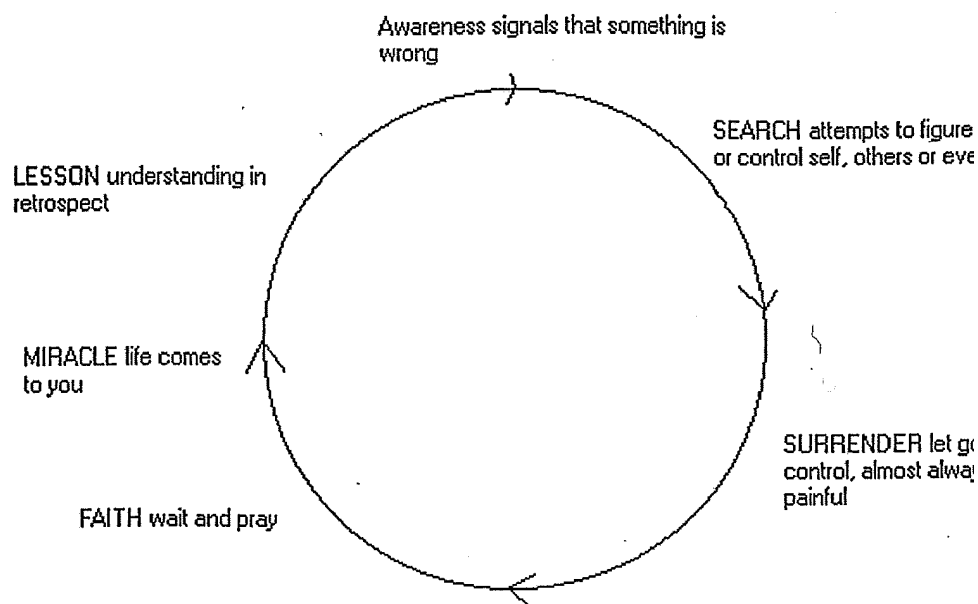
## LESSONS FROM THE MEDICINE WHEEL

Since the beginning of North American time, the medicine wheel has existed. The wheel is an educational system that taught Aboriginals everything necessary for a fruitful life. Wheels were the Aboriginal peoples bibles, law books/courts, schools and medical texts. They were a total teaching of life. They were not on paper as this is, but were held securely within the heart, mind and memory of every individual. The medicine wheel is also referred to as the Sacred Hoop, the Sacred Wheel and the Circle of Life.

The circle can best be understood if you visualize it as a mirror in which all life is reflected. “The universal mirror of the people”, the old teachers tell and “each person is a Mirror to every other person” according to Hyemeyohsts Storm. A mirror reflects an image back to you, but it is you who gives it personal meaning. So is an ocean, desert, rock or mountain top. For example one person observing the ocean may feel fear, loneliness; another might feel calm and peaceful while another feels nothing at all. In all cases the ocean will still be the same, but it is perceived or seen differently as it reflects the feelings of the different individuals who experience it.



### *The Spiritual Journey*



The wheel you see here is just a circle and one of many. You can interpret from it what you chose and leave the rest. The most important thing about this wheel is that it reflects or shows the importance of the number four amongst Aborigines and the fact that it represents the “Wholeness” of our world and life. It demonstrates how, though all people of this earth differ greatly from each other, we all fit in together, that we are all here for a purpose and we are all related to each other.

This wheel represents the totality of our being. If you take away any one quadrant or element, then the circle is unbalanced. Complete harmony occurs when each portion of the circle is working and interacting with the rest. All elements or portions revolve around the Creator. Each race, each nation has a different identifying name for the Creator – God, Manitou, Kaila, Buddha, Wakan Tanka are some of the names Creator is known by. No matter what the Creator is called each nation has a belief that there is a higher or greater power linking us all together.



## EXPLAINING THE CIRCLE

The wheel shown moves from east to north in a clockwise direction. It reflects four colors, four races, four seasons, four elements, four levels of being, four directions or positions and four positions in society that we take when we decide to take action over something in our lives.

### ***Four Colors/Four Directions:***

Red is the eastern color and represents the redman or Aboriginal person, spring, fire spiritual growth, the individual vision and seeing.

Yellow is the southern color representing the oriental/Asian race, summer, earth, heart, feelings, family, meditation and thinking. (Sometimes green for growing is used here)

Black is the western color and represents the black or African person, autumn, water, introspections, the community, reason and internal reflections. (Sometimes blue/dark blue is used here to reflect water.)

White represents the white man (Caucasians) winter, air, physical, the nations, action, movement and doing.

***Four Races of Man:*** The wheel shows how all the world's races work together to make this world complete. Each race is gifted with special attributes.

Aboriginal nations sits in the east with the gift of vision/ prophecy and help people to see or understand in a different way.

Orientals/Asians sit in the south, famous for their insights and great mediators like Buddha. The help people explore their minds and inner beings.

African nations/people sit in the west and is best known for "soul" – they help us explore our inner understandings/feelings.

Caucasian/white nations – is very much into action/movement in the north of the wheel. They build rockets, ships, planes, and other projects of huge proportions. He provides us with material things through his way.

**Four Levels of Being:** We each have our spiritual, logical, emotional and physical sides or aspects. We have all entered into the circle at our birth at different points, some of us are more spiritual than physical, more logical than emotional and so on. When we are well developed in each of these areas then we experience total harmony, balance and peace. However, when we become too “heavy” in any one area, we can fall off, becoming unbalanced, physically ill, depressed, mentally ill or too unfeeling and logical.

### MOVING AROUND THE CIRCLE

Starting in the east at vision, we see how all actions are born. First we conceive or think of an idea – We have a vision. In the south, we consider it to determine if we will/can accomplish it – We have a desire. Moving to the west, we reason whether it is a good thing to do or not and what it might mean – We experience introspection or going inside. Then in the north, we take action or non action depending upon the evaluation of our vision or idea as desirable or not. Often after taking action, when we move again into the east, our new vision/ideas have changed dependant upon realizations gained from our earlier journey around the circle.

Talking and Healing Circles

### COMPARING SPIRITUALITY

| <u>Contemporary Religion</u> | <u>Native Spirituality</u>   |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Church                       | Sweat Lodge                  |
| Essence/incense              | Smudge/Sweetgrass/Cedar      |
| Confession                   | Reality with other people    |
| Baptism                      | Name Giving Ceremony         |
| Sin                          | Learning Experience          |
| Bible                        | Medicine Wheel/Sacred Circle |
| Priest/Minister              | Elders                       |
| Tithes                       | Gifts/offerings of sacrifice |
| Communion                    | Pipe Ceremony                |









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