



## A Perspective of Indigenous Concerns and Issues

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[HTTPS://ECAMPUSONTARIO.PRESSBOOKS.PUB/MOVEMENTTOWARDSRECONCILIATION/CHAPTER/THE-MEDICINE-WHEEL-TEACHINGS/](https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/movementtowardsreconciliation/chapter/the-medicine-wheel-teachings/)

We conclude our Indigenous issues perspective with an overview of the MEDICINE WHEEL. Again, note the common elements with our Catholic faith and teachings.

The medicine wheel is an important teaching in many Indigenous Nations. Medicine wheels were originally created on the land, made of stones or other materials. The most common image is the white, yellow, red and black circle and evolved to its current look in the 1960's. There are many interpretations and adaptations of the Medicine Wheel depending on how it is used by various First Nations Peoples. The Anishnaabek refer to the medicine wheel as the CIRCLE OF LIFE symbolizing the natural cycles of birth, growth, death, and regeneration; describing various aspects of life, both seen and unseen. It provides teachings about how to live life in a good way. Aboriginal people understand the connection to creation and all living things and of the need for balance and that we must work daily to strive for and maintain that balance.

The following teachings are provided by Elder Lillian Pitawanakwat-Ba from Whitefish River First Nation (Ojibwe, Odawa Potawatomi 3 Fires Council; Four Directions, 2006).

*“All parts of the wheel are important and depend on each other in the cycle of life; what affects one affects all, and the world cannot continue with missing parts. For this reason, the Medicine Wheel teaches that harmony, balance and respect for all parts are needed to sustain life”*

### **The East –Yellow–Physical —Springtime**

All life begins in the east; beginning our human life as we journey from the spirit world (in the womb) into the physical world at birth. The teachings from the east remind us that all life is spirit (wind, earth, fire & water—all alive with energy and movement). Prayers of thanksgiving honour all that we cannot exist without: the breath of life, the cycles of time & being grateful for life.

### **The South– Red–Social —Summer**

The summer and youth are represented in the southern direction. Summer is a time of continued nurturance and transition. As the young emerge from their childhood they struggle with their identity; wandering and wondering about life. In this direction, we are reminded to look after our spirits by finding balance within ourselves. If we listen to our intuition, then the spirit will help to keep us safe. Youth who grow up without spirit nurturance risk being exposed to dangers and distractions. Youth need nurturance, guidance and protection to help them through this transitional phase of life. As youth begin to journey into the next stage of life, they begin to become more accountable and start the planning stage of their lives—parenting, careers, etc.

### **The West– Black–Intellectual —Fall**

The western direction represents the adult stage of life. Death is also represented in this direction. Death comes in many forms – the end of our physical journey and crossing back into the spirit world; the setting sun and end of the day; or recognition that as old thoughts and feelings die, new ones emerge. The heart is also represented in the west. The heart helps us to evaluate, appreciate and enjoy our lives. By nurturing our hearts, we create balance in our lives.

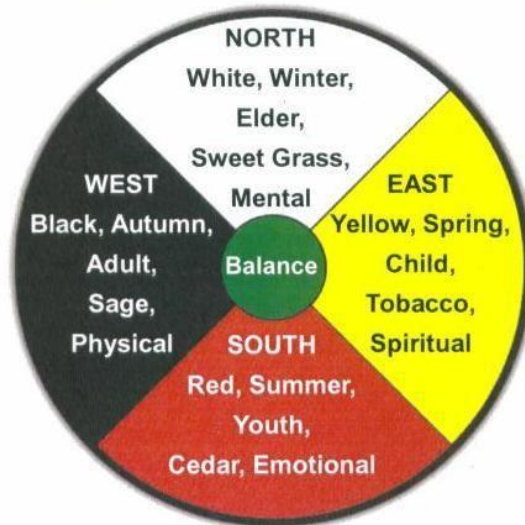
### **The North–White –Spiritual —Winter**

The north is referred to as the rest period, a time to be respectful of the need to care for and nurture the physical body. It may also be a period of remembrance – a time for contemplation and of reflection. Elders, pipe carriers and the lodge keepers, reside in the north. Their teachings help us to embrace all aspects of our beings so that we feel and experience the fullness of life. Wisdom resides in the north. Elder's share stories in the winter months. It is a time for rest for the earth.

The directions can also represent:

Elements of nature: fire (or sun), air, water, and earth	Animals: Eagle, Bear, Wolf, Buffalo and many others
Ceremonial plants: tobacco, sweet grass, sage, cedar	People (by skin colour): White, Yellow, Red, Black

# Ojibwe Medicine Wheel



*For the past year, we have explored many insights into the cultures, customs and traditions of First Nations Peoples; as well as issues & concerns that continue to affect them as they pursue their path to reconciliation. For me, it has been both an enlightening and rewarding venture. In presenting these discussions, it was hoped that the reader was able to appreciate the similarities of many First Nations Peoples' beliefs and moralities to those of our own Catholic and Christian faith while highlighting some of the adverse conditions and situations they continue to deal with.*

*The endeavour initially was meant, in a small yet significant way, to honour the obligation of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action #59 which states in part that "church parties...develop ongoing education strategies to ensure that their respective congregations learn about their church's role in colonization, the history and legacy of residential schools..."*

*My prayer at this juncture is two-fold: that we have, to some extent, honoured that obligation, and that we will continue to grow in knowledge and regard fellow parishioners and members of the community, regardless of their background, as our Lord and Saviour asks of us in John's Gospel 13: 34-35--<sup>34</sup> I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. <sup>35</sup> This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

*Al MacLeod*