

Congregation of the Great Spirit



The Circle

Symbolizing life and the paths we all must walk in this life, the circle is sacred to American Indian People. It is marked with the four cardinal points. Each of these points is assigned helper spirits, or Grandfathers and Grandmothers, by the Creator. Each has been given a different gift by Him so as to help the People. They are honored because they, too, are sacred.

The Eagle

The strongest and bravest of all birds, it flies so high that it carries our prayers to the Creator. Native Americans consider this bird and all its parts to be sacred, and often use eagle feathers in prayer. When they are fanned over someone, this means blessing, wishes for peace, happiness, and love.

The Medicine Box or Basket

For thousands of years Native people have offered prayers of thanksgiving.

A smudge was used to carry the prayers to the Great Spirit. The elements used among the tribes were "sage" for cleansing (purification), strength and meaning; "tobacco" a gift or offering for requests made of someone and, or, in gratitude; "sweetgrass" for truth and purity, the first grass that grows in Spring (braided into the hair of Mother Earth, brings Creator's blessing; "cedar" which heals and gives comfort, sends another on their journey in a good way; a straight tree, so the smoke and prayers rise to Creator uninterrupted.

These elements were kept in a medicine box or basket, in a special place in their lodges and treated with great respect (Author unknown)

The Four Directions

EAST (yellow / sweetgrass) Where the sun rises. It brings new light, new beginnings, and understanding. It is also the direction of spring, birth, and babies. Sweet grass brings the Creator's blessings.

SOUTH (red / cedar) Where the sun is at its highest and warmest, it brings us the gifts of summer, growth, the young and women. Cedar heals, brings God's blessings and calls His attention to our prayers.

WEST (black / sage) Setting in the west, this is where the day comes to fulfillment. It is associated with autumn, the adult and fulfillment. It is also the direction from which come the thunders who bring us water, which gives life. Sage

purifies and sends evil away.

NORTH (white / tobacco) From here come the harsh cold winds of winter. It is associated with hardship, cleansing, the elders and purification. If you can face this direction and stand firm you will learn patience and endurance. Tobacco is an offering used to carry our prayers to the Creator.

Smoke

This is the sign of love placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The fragrant smoke rising up and spreading out to all the people is a sign of our prayer going upward to the Creator and outward to those worshiping with us. This smoke purifies, blesses, and makes holy the people and the sacred things and places.

*In Indian traditions, sweetgrass, tobacco, or dried cedar placed on smoldering bark made a wonderful smoke for prayers and blessings.

**Both in the smoking of the pipe and in burning cedar, the sweet smelling smoke is a visible sign of prayer rising to the Creator.

Smudging

The people of Turtle Island use smudging to help clear our minds and to help cleanse our body of all negative things. It is a process that began when our people were given our helpers, the fire. It started with our first medicine, which was tobacco. Tobacco was burned in the fire. Eventually we were given the pipe. We smoked the pipe, asked that our minds be clear, and have only good thoughts in whatever we were doing that day. After a while we received three more medicines to help us in this way, including cedar, sweetgrass and sage. All of these medicines help us in the same way as tobacco. They are also used as internal and external medicines when used with other herbs and plants.

When smudging ourselves, our hands are used. When making the smudge available to others, an eagle feather is used. The eagle feather is very sacred to all of our people. The eagle is our messenger to the creator because he flies the highest in the sky and is closest to the creator and the king eagle that sits at his side. Unfortunately, not all of our people have access to an eagle feather, so a substitute from any large bird may be used.

The ceremonial process of smudging helps us to clear our minds and bodies so that we may make good decisions without negative interfering. We must remember that some people have different ways of doing traditional things, we must respect them. We do not have to participate, but respect must always be there.

The same respect should be given to us in our traditional ways and not be criticized. If different ways of doing traditional things offends others in any way, then they should not participate, just as we would not participate in anything that offends us. We all have to acknowledge and respect others' beliefs in order to teach our young ones the right way. If we criticize and disrespect others, what are our children going to learn? We also have to learn to be humble. Share whatever knowledge you have with others so there will be a lot less misunderstanding. By Waubano (ICS)