

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEDICINE WHEEL

By Chandra Behrenz

INTRODUCTION

The medicine wheel represents the four stages of life: Infancy, youth, adulthood and maturity. In some cases after maturity, the cycle continues back to infancy once again. Everyone's life cycle follows the medicine wheel. All cycles are beautiful in and of themselves – including joy and sadness, and life and death. The medicine wheel includes ALL of creation – it is not just limited to human life cycles.

THE EAST

The east is the starting point of the medicine wheel. It is here that the life cycle begins. The east is represented by the woman spirit. The east is our spiritual selves and is the infancy state. It is a time of visioning and awareness.

THE SOUTH

The south is the summertime of our lives: Youth and energy abound. Much understanding happens during this time, but understanding takes time. It is a time of relating. Interestingly, elders in the northern direction of their lives relate to the youth in the summer of their lives better than the parents in the western direction of the wheel. The southern direction is the physical self.

THE WEST

The western direction is the time of adulthood and responsibility. This time usually represents the raising of children. In the west, it is the emotional part of the life cycle:

The theme of figuring things out, dealing with past issues, and acquiring new knowledge and reasoning skills happen at this time. Reconciliation can also occur at this stage.

THE NORTH

The north is the mental journey and is usually found in older adults who are done raising children and are empty-nesters. They have more time to reflect and gain a greater understanding. These people are not all elders, but are in the northern segment of their lives. Some of these people will go on to become elders in their communities. Some will live long enough to return to the east and infancy stage once again before their spirits return to the Creator. People in the northern segment look back upon their personal journeys and look forward. Much wisdom and movement happens here. This is the time for relating to the youth in their segment in the south. This is the time of healing and reconciliation with God and with one another.

CONCLUSION

The medicine wheel makes so much sense explaining the circle of life. For me, the east is a vision of truth and reconciliation that is ongoing. It is time for me to open my views in a broader capacity. As a person of Métis descent, the subject matter is of personal interest. I am at the infancy stage of learning so am just beginning.

In the south I gained an understanding of the importance of keeping traditional languages flourishing, and how time is of utmost importance to achieve this. We must strive together to keep the culture flourishing before much is lost in time.

In the west, I am thinking about my role as an usher/greeter in my parish. New knowledge helps me to gain a better understanding not only of my ancestors, but also a new respect for the overlap in traditional First Nations spirituality and Roman Catholicism. It is here I realize that faith was already deeply embedded in the First Nations culture well before the introduction of Christianity.

I recognize that I am currently in the northern segment of my own personal life cycle. As Deacon Harry Lafond pointed out, grandchildren are a blessing. I currently have six grandchildren, and am instrumental in their religious education and Sacramental preparation programs. So going forward, I am eager for the second installment in this educational series. I look forward to doing it and gaining new wisdom.