



The fire pit medicine wheel

A metaphor for the grief process

The Shamanic tradition across many cultures teaches the Medicine Wheel as a way to connect with spirit and to affirm our place in the universe. The Medicine Wheel teaches that each of the four directions has specific tasks for us to attend to in the process of living on the planet and carrying out growth process. There are power spirits for each direction, and there are special sounds and specific types of meditation prescribed for the passage around the Medicine Wheel. I have found that it is a wonderful challenging structure through which to do my grief work.

We start in the South, which is the place of the Healer and of the Inner Child of the past where we are called upon to shed our skins as the serpent does, and to be close to the Mother Earth in our process. We can call upon the spirits of the winds of the South to help us deal with our grief issues from the Child part of our personality and from our Inner Healer. In dealing with past grief, we face the challenge of our family-of-origin. In

dealing with the present grief we face the challenge of abandonment and how our Inner Child feels about the current loss we are suffering. This is the challenge of the open heart, the full heart, the strong heart, and the clear heart. The mode of healing is storytelling; the type of meditation is lying down, and the music is drumming.

We move to the West, which is the place of the Warrior. It is in this direction that we are called upon to face our deepest fears and to face our mortality. This is where the spirits of the Jaguar and the Grizzly Bear come to teach us about our fears and about our lack of integrity in our lives. In the West is where we deal with the grief around giving up our illusions. We have to deal in this quadrant with our loneliness and our deep terror about never again seeing this one who has died. This sound is from the sticks and bones- the type of meditation is sitting - and the healing salve is silence.

In the North we are offered the task of Mastery. This is the direction of the leader or teacher in us, and here we are given the opportunity to share our knowledge with others. Our guides are the Bison and the Horse. In this direction we face the deepest rage in our beings about being here. This is where we are "mad at God/Goddess" and where we deal with our fundamental rebellion against being alive, against being here, against having to take responsibility for being alive. In addressing our archaic grief we are called upon to forgive all of our family members and, ultimately, forgive ourselves. In dealing with current grief issues, we deal with the forgiveness of the person who has died or forgive the aspects of the events that are grieving us, etc. The music for this direction is the rattle; the meditation is the standing meditation; and the healing salve is dancing.

In the East we have the task of creating a Vision for ourselves. This is where we go on a vision quest and ask spirit for help in seeing far and wisely. We are assisted in this direction by the spirit of the Eagle; who flies high and can see very far. The healing salve for this direction is singing. We are called upon to use our inner vision, our intuition, and our wisdom, and the meditation for this direction is the walking meditation. When I have done my grieving in this direction I have looked at what I need to do in the other directions so that I can free my energy to be fully committed and fully present in my Vision. My present grief work addresses the current loss in terms of how it affects my accomplishing my Vision. So, since the Medicine Wheel is a circle, we can start anywhere and do it over and over again as we move through the spiral of life. We are challenged to face our feelings in

each direction and to do something about releasing the energy we carry with those feelings so we can move on in our personal growth and find our energy freed to create our Vision. This Ritual can be done in imagination or it can be done in actually using the Ritual of the stones for the basis. It is a Ritual that can enter all aspects of your life on a daily basis.

Medicine wheel fire ceremonies

The element of fire allied with the powers of the Medicine Wheel makes strong medicine. Fire has long been a powerful force for releasing negative energies and patterns and setting positive ones. By putting prayers into a fire you immediately release that prayer through the smoke as it curls upward to Spirit. Smoke quickly journeys from the physical to the Spirit plane.

Building a fire pit medicine wheel

What you need. A Medicine Wheel, a shovel, kindling, wood, flint and steel or matches, sufficient water to extinguish any sparks or fires, and tobacco.

1. Dig a fire pit at the center of the Medicine Wheel, in the position of the Creator. This pit will only be used for sacred ceremonial fires.
2. Determine when you will have a fire ceremony at the wheel. Before sunrise to greet the light of day or at dusk when light turns to dark are two powerful times.
3. Choose a fire keeper. This person will stay with the fire at all times.
4. Light the fire in the most natural way possible, using pine needles and pinecones or grass for kindling and using a flint or matches, not a lighter or any kind of starting fluid. Never allow anyone to throw anything into the fire unless it pertains to the ceremony you are doing.
5. Use wood that has been gathered with proper thanksgiving. When you see the smoke circling in all four directions, you know that the fire has been properly prepared.
6. Be very aware of the surrounding earth conditions when you build such a fire so that you do not endanger any of your relations.

7. Do whatever ceremony you have come to the wheel to perform. You should incorporate making offerings, of tobacco to the fire as part of this ceremony.

8. When the ceremony is completed, the fire keeper should put out the coals with water or earth.

Fire ceremony for releasing the old and inviting in the new

1. Smudge everyone involved, the area, and anything that will be used in the ceremony.

2. Have each person write on one piece of paper anything they would like to let go of or release in their lives. Some examples are :I would like to let go of the pain and loneliness I feel for the loved one that passed on," "I would like to let go of my habit of smoking," "I would like to let go of my anger", "I would like to let go of my attachment to a negative relationship". It is good if each person then goes to the stone that he feels will help him with his resolve and makes an offering.

3. Have each person write down on the same piece of paper something they would like to say to the loved one that has passed on, or something they would like to invite into their life. Some examples are "I invite more joy in my life", I invite more time to spend with my family", "and I invite serenity". It is good for each person to make an offering of thanks to the position that can help bring them this quality.

4. Begin the fire part of the ceremony with a prayer or chant to honor the element of fire and the Thunderbird clan.

5. Each person should make an offering of tobacco in thanks to the fire and wheel. Each person should give thanks for the purification and renewal the fire brings.

6. Next each person places his or her prayers in the fire, watching as the paper burns to ashes and the smoke spirals upward to Spirit. As the smoke rises, each person should release the negativity he or she asked to release and accept the requested gift.

7. After everyone has done this, gather together for another prayer or chant to complete the ceremony.