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INTRODUCTION TO THE MEDICINE WHEEL BY RICHARD J. CLOFINE, DO

We all have our own Medicine Wheel. It is a mental construct that serves as a most basic way to orient us within time and space. The Medicine Wheel divides our world into different directions and applies specific meaning and significance to each direction. Almost every culture has oriented themselves around seven directions: east, south, west, north, center, above and below. This directional orientation is achieved by simple observation of the natural world. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Generally, regardless of where we sit on the globe there are four phases of the moon and four seasons to which we orient ourselves. Therefore, our personal medicine wheels are a reflection of our relationship to the natural world.

The Medicine Wheel can be seen as a cross-cultural archetype. The work of C.G. Jung defines archetypes as ideas or modes of thought that are derived from the experience of the race and is present in the unconscious of the individual. These are universal prototypes. Some archetypes we are familiar with, that cross all cultural barriers, are mother, child, lover, hero, villain, warrior, crone and sage. We are most familiar with the term Medicine Wheel when applied to Native American Spirituality. The Native Americans give each of the four directions specific significance and relationship to colors, powers, archetypes, animals and spirit guides. The details will vary between tribes, and individuals. The archetype of the Medicine Wheel is manifest in many different cultures, anytime we see four directions given significance and meaning.

The Medicine Wheel can be a tool that helps us to face the amazing infinite nature of the universe in which we live. Or, maybe the Medicine Wheel is just a toy to play with, that helps us enjoy and cope with the infinite mysteries we face, the things we cannot, do not or will not understand. When someone chooses to work the Medicine Wheel, they explore what wisdom each direction holds for them. The Wheel can be practically used to help understand, and deal with specific life circumstances (e.g. jobs, relationships, and illness). The Wheel is also used to contemplate the flow of events unfolding over the years of a lifetime, or lifetimes. Our consensual experience of the physical world determines a lot of "what goes where" on the Medicine Wheel. Working the Wheel is accomplished in both consensual reality and through personal introspection. From a cross-cultural archetypal perspective, you will share a lot of this with your 'tribe', though in the end it is YOUR wheel. In the final word, only YOU can develop and work your Wheel.

In my healing work I see my Medicine Wheel as an organizing principal that neatly ties together many diverse aspects of my inner self and the outer natural world. On all levels of creation, the Wheel brings order. The hormonal cycles manifesting from the brain, ovaries, and uterus are easily understood in terms of the Wheel. It ties these events to natural lunar rhythms both physically and energetically. Ovulation and conception occur in the full moon of the east. Menses and birth occur in the new moon of the west. This allows seeing these things in a new way that is more easily understood because it is related to our experience of the natural world. Working the Medicine Wheel Archetype empowers the individual with new tools with which to embrace the chaos of life. It serves as a way to focus and reconnect to the rhythms of the natural world.