

The Circle – Part 3

The Medicine Wheel

Another symbol that employs the circle is the “medicine wheel.” The medicine wheel is usually depicted in the form of a circle that is divided into four parts by two crossed lines within it. Among Anishinabek, the medicine wheel is used to teach a number of lessons about Anishinabek beliefs and way of life. For example, it is believed that the universe is made up of four distinct “worlds,” each of which is occupied by a specific category of being: 1) “elements,” or the physical world; 2) “human persons”; 3) “other-than-human persons”; and 4) “spirits.” The physical world consists of four sacred elements: earth, air, fire and water. There are four groups of other-than-human persons: 1) plants, 2) animals, 3) birds and 4) fish and things that crawl. In the spirit world there are also four groups: those spirits found below the earth and in the water; spirits found on the earth; those found above the earth; and a group of spirits found within a “fourth dimension.” All of the beings within these worlds are related to one another.

The Anishinabek say that all human persons are related and belong to one great family. There are four symbolic races in the human family: red, yellow, black and white. They are represented in the quadrants of the medicine wheel in the manner shown in the diagram. Anishinabek



people believe that a person has four aspects to his being, namely, the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. An Anishinabek person could meet all of his needs in each of these areas by forming relationships with members of the physical, spiritual, other-than-human person, and the human person worlds.

The most important relationships in the human world are those of family and kinship. Family and kin provided warmth, support, stability, companionship, and emotional support. Family is everything.