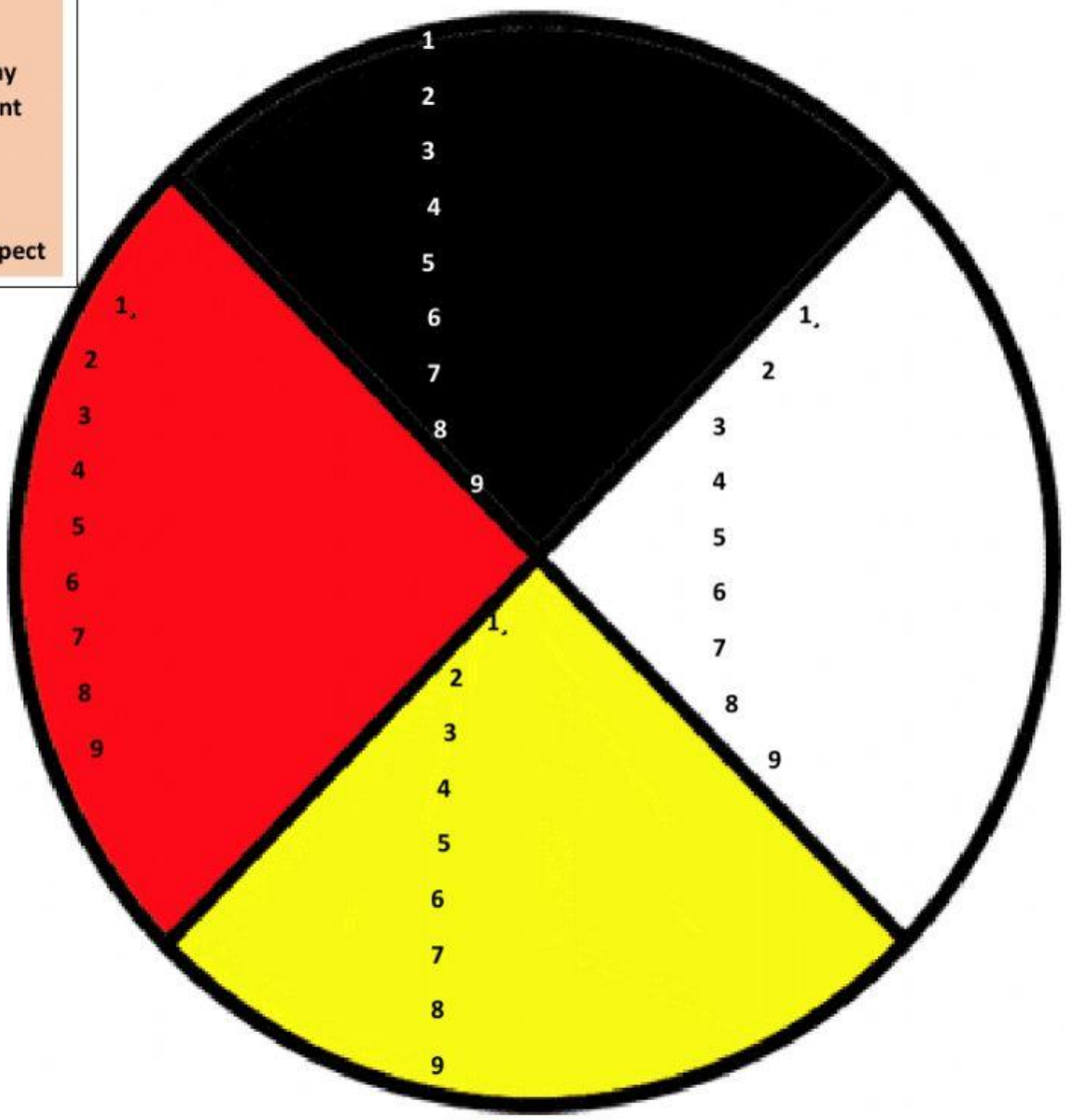
The Medicine Wheel

The Anishinaabe or Ojibwa nation has a teaching that the medicine wheel is the circle of life. All of creation is represented on the medicine wheel. The medicine wheel also includes all nations on Earth, not just the Ojibwa people. The teaching is that all things in life are in a circle. The Earth is a circle or sphere as are the Sun, Moon and all of the other planets and stars in our universe. The cycles of the seasons and day and night are circular. The life cycle is circular from birth to childhood to youth to adulthood to old age and finally to death and rebirth. These teachings are divided into the four directions.

1. Direction
2. Colour
3. Season
4. Time of Day
5. Sacred Plant
6. Animal
7. Element
8. Life Stage
9. Human Aspect



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East

In the east, the colour is yellow. The yellow nation is in the East. It is the dawn time of day. East represents birth. It is the season of spring and the time of new life. The Eagle represents the East. The Eagle is the bird that flies closest to Great Mystery or Creator, Gitchie Manito. The Eagle is the messenger between the people and Creator. The Eagle saved the people from destruction once by interceding for us with Creator. It was a time when the people had forgotten how to live in harmony with the Earth and so Creator was going to destroy everything and start over but the Eagle pleaded with Creator to wait and see if Eagle could find some people who still remembered how to live in a good way. Eagle told Creator that he would fly out each morning at sunrise and if Eagle could find one person who still remembered how to live in a good way, Creator would have to spare the Earth. So that is why traditional native people have a Sunrise Ceremony at dawn to offer tobacco to the sacred fire and give thanks for the new day and for all of Creation. Tobacco (or ahsayma in Ojibwa) is the sacred medicine of the east. The smoke from ahsayma carries our prayers into the Spirit World. It is used when we are asking someone to do something for us, for example, perform a ceremony. The lessons we learn in the east are about kindness, open mindedness, innocence, joy, truthfulness, hope, guidance and leadership.

South

In the South the colour is red. The red nation is in the south. It is the middle part of the day. It is the season of summer. The time of life here is youth or adolescence. The animal of the south is the deer for the Anishinaabe people. For aboriginal people further south, the animal is the mouse or the coyote. The deer teaches us about being generous because deer gives us meat to eat and skins for our clothing, drums and shoes. Deer also teaches us to be loyal, honest and respectful to others. The sacred medicine of the South is cedar. Cedar is burned to purify your body from disease and to protect you. It can also be made as a tea to drink for cleansing your body.

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West

The colour of the west is black. It is sunset time and the autumn time of the year. It is also the time of your life when you are a adult. The black nation is in the west. In the west is a doorway through which all people must go when they leave the Earth for the Spirit World. For the Anishinaabe people, the buffalo guards this doorway. For some native peoples further south, the bear is in this direction. The buffalo is sacred to the native people because of everything buffalo has given us to help us to survive. The lessons that buffalo teaches us are about sharing with others and being generous. The sacred medicine of the west is sage. Sage is the women's medicine. The smoke from sage cleanses our spirits and helps us hear, see, smell, taste and feel things in a good way. Tea made from sage is good for the throat.

North

The colour of the north is white. It is the night time and the winter of the year. It is the time of your life when you are an elder. The white nation is in the north. The sacred medicine of the north is the sweetgrass. It was the first plant to grow on Mother Earth. We braid this grass as if it were Mother Earth's hair. The smoke from this sweetgrass offers protection to you and helps to take away your hunger when you are fasting. The animal of the north is the bear. The bear teaches us about the importance of fasting because the bear goes to sleep in the winter and doesn't eat for a long time until the spring. The lessons we learn in the north are about strength and truth and how to speak with a voice of wisdom to help those younger people who need guidance. As an elder, you are respected and taken care of. Elders are always served first at a feast and they are never made to line up or wait for things. Everyone must take very good care of their elders and listen to their advice.

Source: http://www.nwsslibrary.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Medicine-Wheel-Introduction.pdf

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