

Ahenakew, F., Gardip, B., & hafond, B.,
(Eds.). *Voices of the First Nations. To:*
McGraw-Hill Ryerson. 1995.



"Teaching Stick"

Elders Share Perspectives on Traditions, Spirituality

BY NOEL ARCHIE
STARR

In seeking information about traditions from the Elders, I followed the customs, that is I had to present tobacco to the Elders as an offering and sign of respect.

I would like to share some concepts about the meaning of the circle as shared by the Elders. This will enable one to gain a basic understanding of the world view, philosophies, and values of some of the Okanese and Starblanket Indian people of the File Hills Indian Reserves.

The circle has a religious significance. The circle is often a traditional symbol of oneness and relatedness of life and matter. The circle also symbolizes the unity of life; the seasons move in a great circle. The circle is Mother Earth.

Among the Indian people, Elders or teachers of the culture usually construct a circle or medicine wheel from small stones, which they place before them upon the ground. Each stone within the circle represents one of the many things of the universe. One stone represents you and another stone represents me. Other stones hold within ourselves, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, friends, animal and bird life. There are also stones which represent religions, governments, philosophies and

The late Bill Creely and his son Herbie Creely from the Okanese Band of the File Hills Reserves, Saskatchewan, are relatives of the Starblanket people. They shared their perspectives on the significance of Indian traditions and spirituality. They told me of the circle, the four directions and social education as it reflects on socialization of Indian people from child to Elder, individually, in a group or into a larger network of society.

nations. All things are contained within the circle and all things are equal within it. The circle is the total universe.

All things within the circle know of their harmony with every other thing and know how to "give away" one to the other, except man. Of all the Great Spirit's creations, man is the only one that does not begin life with the knowledge of this great harmony.

All the Creator's creations have spirit and life, including rivers, rocks, earth, sky, plant and animal life. It is only we, of all the beings within the circle, who are determiners. Our determining spirit can be made only through our harmony with humanity (all brothers and sisters) and with all the others spirits of the universe. We must learn to seek and to perceive. We must do this in order to find our place within the circle of life. We also must learn to "give away."

The vision quest is the way we must begin our journey, or search. We follow our vision to discover ourselves, to learn how we perceive ourselves and to find our relationship with the world around us. Elders share with us the Four Directions and their powers within the circle.

To the north of the circle is found wisdom. The color of the

wisdom of the north is white. Its medicine animal is the buffalo. It is also the home of the cold north wind.

The south is represented by the sign of the mouse and its medicine color is green. The south is the place of innocence, trust and for perceiving closely our nature of heart. It is also the direction one travels after death to join the Creator. That is why after burial of our loved ones, the feet are pointed in a southerly direction.

The west is represented by the sign of the bear. The west is the place where one looks within oneself, which talks of the introspective nature of humans. Its medicine color is black. The west is also believed to be the home of the Great Thunderbird. It is a blessing in early spring to hear the first thunder; it means the Thunder Birds are back. It is a signal for the sundance makers to set a date for the sundance.

The east is represented by the sign of the eagle. It is the place of illumination, where one can see things like an eagle from a high vantage point, one can see things clearly far and wide. Its medicine color is yellow, symbolic of the warmth from the father sun, when he gets up in the morning (sunrise).

At birth one is given a beginning

place on one of the Four Directions within the circle. This starting place gives one the first way of perceiving things, which will be one's easiest way and most natural way throughout one's life.

A person who perceives or looks at life from only one of these directions—south, north, east or west—will remain a partial person in development. For

example: a person who has only the gift of the north will be wise. But he or she will be a cold person without feeling.

Someone who has the gift of the east will have the clear, far-sighted vision of an eagle, but will not be close to things. This person will feel separated, high above life and will not understand or believe that he or she can be touched by anything.