

Navajo Blanket Examples & Info



What Does a Medicine Wheel Symbolize?

The medicine wheel is used by many Native American tribes as a source for health and healing. Most medicine wheels embody the four directions along with Father Sky, Mother Earth and the Spirit Tree. These symbols represent the dimensions of Earth and the cycles of life in Native American culture. Like most other medicine wheels, the Navajo medicine wheel is round, which symbolizes the never ending circle of life; birth to death, sorrow and happiness, rich and poor, good and bad. Inside of each circle are the four winds, the four directions, the four seasons and the times of day.

The Meaning of the Four Directions

The circle of the wheel are the four directions and each segment, or direction, is depicted with its own color, the movement of the circle is clockwise or also called “sun-wise.” For the Navajo medicine wheel, the colors are:

North is White

East is Yellow

South is Red

West is Black

The four directions can have different meanings attributed to them, such as:

The Four Stages of Life – Birth, childhood, adulthood, death.

The Four Seasons – Spring, summer, fall, winter.

Four of the Aspects of Life – Spiritual, emotional, intellectual, physical

The Four Elements of Nature – Fire, air, water, earth.

Four Animals – Buffalo, eagle, mouse, bear.

Four Ceremonial Plants – Tobacco, sweet grass, sage, cedar.

The medicine wheel represents life in balance and when a person is ill, their life is considered out of balance. The role of a healer in Native American culture is to help the sick person get their life back in balance through prayer, represented by their spirit; meditation, which is the mind or intellect; herbal medicine, which are plants and getting in touch with their emotional self.