Medicine Wheel: An ancient symbol in modern society

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The Medicine Wheel
An Ancient Symbol in Modern Society

by

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The Medicine Wheel - An Ancient Symbol in Modern Society

From Stonehenge to the Indian Mandala and the Christian wedding ring the circle is a universal symbol that we find in a variety of cultures and historical eras. On the Northern Plains this symbol is expressed in the form of stonestructures known as Medicine Wheels. But the rich and complex symbolism of Medicine Wheels has barely been discussed so far.

The study will begin with an archaeological overview to introduce Medicine Wheels as objects. This is to prevent the notion that the symbolism of Medicine Wheels is an abstract construction that is unrelated to the actual physical environment.

A combination of library research and fieldwork resulted in four models that explore the symbolism of Medicine Wheels in different social contexts. The first model relates to the pre-reservation lifestyle of American Indians. The context of the second model is a Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Program that utilizes the Medicine Wheel as a teaching device. The third model represents the struggle of American Indians to preserve Medicine Wheel sites and their cultural heritage in a wider sense. Medicine Wheels have found a following outside the American Indian context. This is shown in the fourth model which represents aspects of alternative teachings in a partly non-Indian social setting.

The Medicine Wheel as a symbol is examined in four different social contexts to find a possible change in its symbolic content. It is expected, that each cultural/social context is a determining factor in the symbolic meanings of the Medicine Wheel.
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Introduction

Medicine Wheel stone structures are common on the Northern Plains and are associated with Native Americans. Recently an interest in Medicine Wheels can be observed outside the Native American community.

This thesis will examine Medicine Wheels as a symbol in different social and scientific contexts. At the beginning, the archaeological aspects of several individual Medicine Wheels will be analyzed. The discussion will then continue to the symbolic meanings and contents of Medicine Wheels in general.

Symbolism

To provide a theoretical framework for the discussion, this section will introduce some thoughts as to the relationship between symbols and culture.

The main questions symbolic anthropology asks are: How is life defined? What are the underlying assumptions about the nature of the universe? Why is a particular symbol chosen, according to these assumptions, and not another? (Dolgin, Kemnitzer, Schneider 1977:20-21). To answer these questions, the role of symbols in a society will have to be examined. Symbols give order to the beliefs held by members of a society, they have an influence of how new
knowledge is integrated into the social order and at the same time ensure that old observations will be repeated. Symbols represent a complex set of experiences, motives, knowledge, and desire (Dolgin, Kemnitzer, Schneider 1977:7). This will be discussed in the model of Crow society. So symbols lend a stability and continuity to society. They also are a device to express underlying ideas and ideals. These are formulated according to specific assumptions about the universe which are based on perception, experience, and socialization (Dolgin, Kemnitzer, Schneider 1977:20). So the analysis of a symbol should reveal a social/cultural pattern that is perceived as reality by its members (Peacock 1988:82). The example of Crow society will demonstrate how a particular symbol is applied to express and reinforce a cultural reality as perceived by the Crow.

Symbols and symbolic behavior do not only convey information about the universe, they also arouse emotions. It is necessary to find the factors that determine the emotional content of a symbol (Leach 1989:78). The literature distinguishes public and private symbolism. In the public realm members of the same culture share systems of communication and attribute the same meaning to a defined item or symbol. It is the private realm where symbols or symbolic behavior can arouse emotions and alter the state of an individual (Leach 1989:79). This is a
capacity of symbols that will be examined in the models of the Four Worlds Development Project and the New Age Movement in which personal development is a major concern. As will be shown, the factors that determine the emotional content of the Medicine Wheel symbol in these contexts are derived from individual needs, desires, and problems.

The previous paragraphs discussed symbols on two levels, the public/cultural and the private/emotional. On both levels it is important to note that an abstract idea or ideal (worldview) and an emotion can be converted into a material object. This lends a permanence to both the ideal and the emotion. It also makes it possible to subject this object/symbol to technical operations (rituals, or in the case of the Medicine Wheel, use as a teaching device) (Leach 1989:37).

With regard to rituals it should be noted that these combine the public and the private symbolic realm. Rituals consist of symbols that express a certain view of how the world is constructed; at the same time people are engaged in an emotional charged social action that promote an attachment to these symbols (Kertzer 1988:40). This could be seen as a way to reinforce a particular social order in which every individual has his/her definite place and purpose. In the discussion of the following four models it will become evident, that a shift from the public to the more private or individualistic symbolic realm has
taken place from one social context to the next. In Crow society the Medicine Wheel symbol was applied primarily in the public arena (tribal rituals), whereas in the New Age Movement the Medicine Wheel symbol is applied by individuals who also decide on individual symbolic contents depending on personal needs (mental exercises).

As to why particularly the Medicine Wheel was chosen and what makes it a key symbol in four very different social contexts, it is necessary to unveil the underlying ideal/worldview and the personal needs and desires in these contexts. The four social arenas that will be examined are: the Crow of the pre-reservation period, the Four Worlds Development Project and its concern with substance abuse, the debate on the preservation of Medicine Wheel sites, and the New Age Movement.

Methodology

The role of the Medicine Wheel symbol in four different social contexts will be demonstrated in four circular models. This particular form demonstrates the interrelatedness of different aspects that seem to be important in each of the contexts. The circular form also adds a consistency in the discussion on a circular symbol.

In the context of the Crow the diagram allows the integration and connection of four different aspects of
life. Astronomical features could be observed and influenced the perception the Crow had of the universe. Obviously the sun and the stars were out of reach for the people but still could be integrated into the cultural pattern by means of mythological characters and events. Mythology provided a bridge between the celestial realm and the reality of the Crow in that these events explained the existence and the particular way of life of the people. It has been mentioned above that symbolic behavior and symbols give stability and continuity to a society. To provide both of these and to reinforce the cultural and social pattern, ceremonies (rituals) were performed that symbolically re-enacted mythological events, e.g. creation of the earth in a circular movement. The connection between ceremonies and lifestyle becomes clear with the observation that ritual actions (circular movement) is reflected in everyday activities (camp circle). In this way the lifestyle, or at least aspects thereof, is connected through a chain of symbols and symbolic actions to astronomical features.

In the context of substance abuse the specific aspects of the model are related to the specific needs and practices of the individual participants of the Four Worlds Development Project. This model as it is shown is not employed by the FWDP, rather it demonstrates the specific steps a person has to take to become free of substance
abuse. The primary goal is to become independent from alcohol and/or drugs, therefore this aspect has to be the starting point. To achieve this goal, the teachings/symbolic contents of the Medicine Wheel are employed. Since these symbolic contents are the main focus in a personal development, this aspect in the model is next to the first one. Once certain qualities and capacities are symbolically expressed or made visible, an individual needs willpower to act upon the teachings/symbols. If the individual is successful in his/her personal development and has achieved a different emotional state, a lifestyle will be possible that is free of drugs and/or alcohol which was the main goal and the starting point in this model. The circular shape makes it clear to demonstrate the stages of personal development and shows how symbolic contents of the Medicine Wheel are incorporated into this development.

In the third model the preservation of Medicine Wheel sites is the main concern. Therefore sites as a main focus are at the starting point of this model. To preserve Medicine Wheel sites it is necessary to generate some actions. It will be discussed that a specific attitude towards Native American cultures and religions as well as the education of the general public in these areas are a main concern in this context. This means that actions have to be oriented towards a greater awareness of the contributions and the role of Native Americans in the wider
American context. Once this awareness is established, it will be possible to integrate Native American heritage (that includes the Medicine Wheel symbol) into the greater American heritage. Ideally, this will lead to an acceptance of Medicine Wheel sites as parts of American history and culture and will make it easier to argue for a preservation of these sites. The model shows how one step leads to the next.

In the New Age Movement the discussion centers on the Bear Tribe. The model is not used by this group, but the aspects that are chosen are derived from the ideas and views of the Bear Tribe. Here again a personal development is a main concern. The Bear Tribe uses an astrological pattern to symbolically express certain qualities a person may want to achieve. The primary goal here is to develop a specific spirituality that will be the basis for a new emotional stage in finally for a new lifestyle. It will be discussed that the reason for developing this spirituality is a response to major ecological problems. The relationship between humans and the environment is a main concern for many spiritual teachers in the New Age Movement. On the basis of this spirituality it will be possible to solve ecological problems and achieve a less destructive lifestyle. This lifestyle will be based on the symbolic meanings that are expressed in the astrological chart. So the different lifestyle/social order is structured
by symbols that give a meaning to this lifestyle.

The context of the Crow has been chosen to provide a temporal distance to the other social settings. In this way it can be examined if the symbolic contents of the Medicine Wheel differ over a period of time or if they remain similar. This is also the social background in which the Medicine Wheel's main symbolic content, wholeness/unity, is most explicit.

The FWDP is related to a very specific, problem oriented context. This is an extreme contrast to the Crow society. It can be expected that the Medicine Wheel symbol will be applied differently in this context.

The third model, preservation of Medicine Wheel sites, is a wider context again and it will be examined if the symbolic content that is emphasized here, is similar to that of the Crow context.

The New Age Movement is concerned with the development of a holistic lifestyle but also with personal development. This should be reflected in the use of the Medicine Wheel symbol. Since a worldview (wide context) as well as individual use of the Medicine Wheel (specific context) play a role here, it could be assumed that the Medicine Wheel can combine both symbolic contents.
Chapter I

Medicine Wheel Stone Structures

To discuss the symbolism of Medicine Wheels, it seems appropriate to become more familiar with the objects as archaeological structures. There are circa sixty-seven Medicine Wheels on the Northern Plains plus others that lack sufficient information to classify them as Medicine Wheels (Brumley 1988:3). A problem when talking about Medicine Wheels is the agreement on the exact definition.

It is necessary to analyze the words "Medicine" and "Wheel" separately. The term "Medicine" will be explained in a later chapter. "Wheel" suggests that the stone structures are shaped like a wheel, have spokes, and a hub in the center like a wagon wheel. But in fact, Medicine Wheels can be found in different shapes and sizes.

Identification and Classification

The structural characteristics by which a Medicine Wheel can be identified resemble those of a wheel; a prominent, centrally located stone cairn of varying size; one or more
concentric stone rings of general circular shape, two or more stone lines radiating outward from a central origin point, a central cairn, or the margins of the stone ring. A Medicine Wheel should at least have two of the above components (Brumley 1988:3).

The first subgroup contains a simple form of the Medicine Wheel that shows one stone ring with a central cairn. The second subgroup includes the same form of Medicine Wheel like the first subgroup with the exception that the stone ring has an opening from which two parallel lines of stone form an entrance way. The third subgroup consists of Medicine Wheels with one prominent cairn from which several stone lines extend. Subgroup four contains stone structures with a single ring from which a variable number of stone lines extend. The Medicine Wheels in subgroup five consist of a small inner circle and a wider outside circle, both are connected by stone lines or spokes. In subgroup six, basically the same kind of structure can be found, the only difference being the prominent central cairn instead of the inner circle. Subgroup seven contains structures that consist of a central cairn and an outside ring from which a number of spokes extend. The difference of the structures in subgroup eight is that the spokes also extend inward and connect with the central cairn (Brumley 1988).
Medicine Wheel subgroups (adapted from Brumley 1988):

1.  

2.  

3.  

4.  

5.  

6.  

7.  

8.
Examples of Medicine Wheels

To become more familiar with Medicine Wheels, this section will discuss some examples of the stone structures.

Probably the best known structure on the Northern Plains is the Big Horn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming. It is situated on a flat shoulder of a bald mountain in the Big Horn Mountains at an altitude of about 9642 feet. The Wheel is roughly circular in shape and has a diameter of circa seventy-five feet. At its center is a stone-walled oval cairn that has an outside diameter of twelve feet and an inside diameter of seven feet. The center cairn is about two feet high, opening on the north side. From the cairn radiate twenty-eight spokes outward to the Wheel's outer circle. Around the outer circle are located six other cairns much like the central one. One of these cairns lies circa ten feet away from the Wheel and is connected to it by an extension of one of the spokes (The Wyoming Archaeological Society 1959:95-96). An opening in the outer circle or rim of the Wheel is circa two and a half feet wide. This entrance is positioned a little south of east. Two of the outer cairns also have openings toward the northeast (Grinnell 1922:300).

An important aspect of Medicine Wheels are the artifacts that are associated with them. In the eastern half of the
Big Horn Medicine Wheel twelve simple black colored potsherds have been found. In and near the central cairn were nine beads, most of them trade items. Some bone objects have been found between the central cairn and the eastern part of the rim. They seem to be from an animal the size of a deer. Some of these fragments show blue-green and reddish-brown color stains. In the interior of the center cairn fragments of rotted wood and the outer end of a bison limb were found (Grey 1963:34-35). Below the cairn some of the limestone had been removed to form a conical stepped hole or pit several feet below the surface. In the west cairn that is removed from the Wheel, was a piece of wood in the shape of a curved limb. One end was pinned between the lowest course of stones and the bedrock and the other end was pinned between the first and second courses of stone. This means that the wood had been incorporated at the time the Wheel was constructed. Wood fragments like these can be used to establish a date for the Wheel with the dendrochronology method. In the case of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel the date was circa 1760 (Grey 1963:35-36).

A few characteristics of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel offer an insight into its symbolic content. The opening in the rim towards approximately the east is a recurring characteristic in Native American society. Tipi entrances as well as camp circle openings often are positioned towards the east (Powers 1982:176). The east, as one of the four
cardinal directions, has a symbolic meaning that is related to the view that life is a journey in a circle. The symbol for the east is the sun that begins its journey every morning in the east (Powers 1982:176). So the opening in the east of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel is probably a symbolic expression of this idea.

Another characteristic that has a symbolic meaning is the central cairn. It can be interpreted as the connection to the metaphysical sphere. The central cairn is situated on the axis of the world and constitutes a connection between the world and the lower and upper spheres of the universe (Schlesier 1985:131-132). This will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

Another Medicine Wheel stone structure is the Majorville Cairn and Medicine Wheel on a partially shrub covered hill at the south bank of Bow River in Alberta, Canada. The Medicine Wheel measures circa ninety-four feet from north to south and circa eighty-five feet from east to west. It also has a central cairn and twenty-six to twenty-eight spokes running from cairn to rim. In the immediate area are four tipi ring sites, one buffalo jump, and three more cairns (Calder 1977:5). A variety of artifacts have been found at the Majorville site. The most abundant were projectile points (554) and scrapers from various periods. Other items included fragments of stone boxes and lids with decorative engravings, a sandstone mortar, a sandstone amulet in the
center of the Medicine Wheel cairn, bone tools, shell beads, trade items of European origin, and bone fragments from a variety of animals including humans and different bird species part of which were covered with red ochre (Calder 1977:34-206).

The most interesting items for this discussion are probably the buffalo stones because they can be seen as evidence for some cultural activity. They were partly natural, i.e. fossilized ammonites and bacculites that resemble a buffalo. Other buffalo stones were made of sandstone or siltstone and some were also covered with red ochre. Different kinds of pipes as well as pottery fragments have also been found. The artifact typology and a variety of dating methods have led to the conclusion that the Majorville Cairn and Medicine Wheel might have been maintained for a period of five thousand years. People of distinguishable cultural phases have used the Cairn from circa 3200 B.C. to A.D. 1800 and later (Calder 1977:34-206).

The Majorville Cairn and Medicine Wheel is a site where people have been active as artifacts like the buffalo stones indicate. The one artifact that is important for this discussion is the buffalo stone. In a number of Plains tribes, e.g. among the Mandan, these figures or effigies were used to "call the buffalo", a ceremony that should secure the supply of the buffalo on which the people
depended for food and materials (Curtis 1970:77). The fact that in the vicinity of the site is a buffalo jump does not seem to be a coincidence. The Majorville Cairn and Medicine Wheel with the buffalo stones are most likely related to the buffalo jump nearby.

The Ellis Site in southeastern Alberta, Canada, is another example of a Medicine Wheel. The structures on the site are two small stone cairns, thirteen tipi rings, and one Medicine Wheel. The Ellis Medicine Wheel has eleven spokes three of which have secondary stone lines (Brumley 1985:180-189). Within the central portion of the Medicine Wheel sixty-six fragments of human skeletal remains have been found. It seems that these belonged to one adult male of old age. Apparently he lay in an extended or flexed position in a southwest to southeast direction from head to foot. Fragments of bison bone were also found as well as a few projectile points (Brumley 1985:194-200). A partially decomposed wooden post was situated in the rim of the Medicine Wheel in the northeast portion of the southeast quadrant of the Wheel. Portions of the outer surface of the post were covered by a light turquoise blue pigment. It seems that the post had been driven into the ground at an angle with a northeast-southwest orientation. The wood was white oak which is not native to the area, so it must have been imported either as a piece of wood or as a manufactured artifact. Another piece of unidentified
wood in the rim of the Medicine Wheel was situated in the southwest portion of the northwest quadrant. Typological comparison of the projectile points suggests a site occupation from 1300-800 B.C. to the historic period. The human remains within the Wheel may indicate a burial as it is recorded for the Blackfeet (Brumley 1985:200-205).

The Fort Smith Medicine Wheel, located within the Crow Reservation in Montana, consists of a central circle of stones with a diameter of a little over three feet. Six spokes radiate from this point outward, The Wheel apparently had not been built in accord with the four cardinal directions and no cultural remains have been found. It is suggested that this simple structure may have been used for a vision quest or perhaps as a marker for some special event (Brown 1963:226-228).

The archaeological evidence found with the stone structures offer some possibilities as to the purpose and use of Medicine Wheels. They may have been associated with ceremonies that centered on the fertility of the buffalo and with this on the survival of the people. Other possibilities are the burial and the vision quest. Because of the great age and the continuous use of some of the examples, it can be assumed that different people made use of Medicine Wheels in different ways.
Chapter II

Theories on Medicine Wheels

In this chapter several theories concerning the possible use and purpose of Medicine Wheel stone structures will be discussed. Some of them have already been mentioned in the previous chapter but will be examined here in more detail after a short literature review.

Literature on Medicine Wheels

The literature on Medicine Wheels can be divided into three major groups: first, the archaeological literature about Medicine Wheel stone structures and cairns; second, discussions on astronomical alignments and a possible calendrical use of Medicine Wheels; and third, interpretations on the ceremonial and symbolic aspects of Medicine Wheels. The second and third group cannot always be clearly differentiated.

The theoretical discussion is dominated by the idea that Medicine Wheel stone structures are related to astronomical configurations (Eddy 1974:1035-1043, Kehoe & Kehoe 1977:85-
The archaeological interpretation of Medicine Wheels is difficult or often impossible for various reasons. Often natural causes or vandalism have destroyed the original stone structure (Forbis 1958). Some Medicine Wheels have been built over a long period of time. In the case of the Majorville Cairn the artifacts found in different layers of the Cairn stem from different time periods. This suggests a continuous use of the site (Calder 1977).

The fact that people of the Northern Plains led a nomadic lifestyle for most of the year makes it extremely difficult to determine what peoples participated in building the Cairn and what was the purpose. A long time span also leads to the idea that the site may have been used for various reasons. These are only a few problems that are met in the interpretation of an archaeological site. They have partly been discussed before but it should be emphasized here that it is extremely difficult to base a theory on the archaeological record alone.

A number of Native American oral traditions in which the Medicine Wheel plays a part, and in some of these narrations, it is explained how a Medicine Wheel came into existence while others simply tell how Medicine Wheels were used (Conner 1965:1-2, Clark 1966:303-304 Grinnell 1922:299310, Allen 1913:7-74). These accounts show that
Medicine Wheels were of importance and were integrated into the lives and legends of Native Americans. It can be assumed that the Medicine Wheel had a specific symbolic function in Native American societies that will be discussed in a different chapter.

A number of authors have discussed possible astronomical aspects of Medicine Wheels. Most stone structures have lines of rocks that radiate from the center of the Wheel. In some cases only these radiating spokes from a single cairn can be seen, in others the spokes are connected by stones that complete the circle.

There are some problems with the astronomical theory. Medicine Wheels have different numbers of spokes, from four to twenty-eight. The spokes also point in almost all directions. Some are summer solstice oriented, in other Wheels the spokes point at the rising points of Aldebaran, Rigel, and Sirius, the brightest stars of the summer dawn (Eddy 1977:147-169). Sun, moon, and stars play an important part in a number of creation stories of American Indians. Events like the Sun Dance or the Morning Star ceremony of the Skidi Pawnee were timed according to certain astronomical constellations (Williamson 1987:218-235). The Moose Mountain Medicine Wheel is interpreted as a symbolic Sun Dance Lodge (Kehoe & Kehoe 1977:85-95). A Pawnee sky map demonstrates the knowledge of Native Americans about astronomical constellations (Wedel
1977:131-146). All this is evidence that astronomical constellations were part of the Native American ceremonialism.

Grinnell (1922) interpreted the Big Horn Mountain Medicine Wheel as an outline of the Cheyenne Medicine Lodge. In the case of the Sheepeaters the spokes of a Medicine Wheel represented the number of tribes that met for a semi-annual sun worship (Allen 1913:9). A calendrical use as day counter between lunar month intervals is suggested in an interpretation of the twenty-eight spokes of the Big Horn Mountain Medicine Wheel (Eddy 1974:1035-1043). Another suggestion is the use of Medicine Wheels as calendars not only for rituals but also for any other public event (Hall 1988:181-194).

Medicine Wheels also were interpreted as gravemarkers for Blackfoot war chiefs. Later these gravemarkers were seen only as memorial markers (Dempsey 1956:177-182).

There is no doubt that Medicine Wheels had some astronomical significance. In most cases this is discussed in terms of a calendar to mark and/or schedule important ceremonies. In this respect, Medicine Wheels are closely related to the ceremonial and religious aspects of Native American cultures.

The symbolic aspects of a Medicine Wheel are rarely mentioned in these theories. The bulk of the material consists of archaeological descriptions and astro-technical
observations. To understand the significance of Medicine Wheel stone structures, it is necessary to discuss the symbolic contents of the Circle in general and the Medicine Wheel in particular. It is also essential to place Medicine Wheels in a proper cultural, historical, and sociological context.

The following theories will be discussed in terms of symbolic contents and context.

**Astronomical Features**

Astronomical observations have played an important role in a number of societies as diverse as those of Egypt, Mexico, Peru, Great Britain, and North America. Structures like Stonehenge in Britain and Ballochroy on the Kintyre peninsula in Scotland show a relation to the sun and moon cycles or the solstices and equinoxes of a year (Krupp 1974:9-20, Burl 1980:191-200, Hawkins & White 1965:11-20). Discussions and analysis of these structures show that astronomical observations were not unusual in prehistoric times. Apparently astronomical constellations were a common concern among different societies and it is this context in which Medicine Wheels, if interpreted as observatories, must be placed.

In cultures in which astronomical features played an important part, these features often were regarded as
personifications of mythological characters and became symbols of them. So natural objects were integrated parts of a people's existence (Burl 1980:198). In this regard, Medicine Wheels as observatories were placed into the symbolic-mythological context.

Before analyzing one specific Medicine Wheel as observatory, it seems appropriate to insert an explanation on astronomical observations in general. The position of any object in the sky is measured by two angles one of which is called declination, i.e. the angle at which an object declines or slopes downward toward the horizon. This angle determines at what points an object, the sun for example, rises and sets. The greater the angle the further to the north these points are, the smaller the angle the further to the south they are. In summer the sun rises and sets far to the north, in winter far to the south. So the sun moves through a complete cycle through the year, reaching the high point in summer, the low point in winter (Heggie 1972:43-45). The moon completes a similar cycle but needs only one month; so one month it is far to the north, the next month it is far to the south. The monthly maximum declination changes slightly over nineteen years and also varies cyclically a little over six months. These changes eventually result in a new angle. This means that the rising point of the sun slowly changes over time, whereas that of the moon changes quite notably (Heggie
1972:45-46). In regard to the sun the change is most notable around midsummer. Now the rising point of the sun on the horizon could be marked by long alignments of stones or by a circle with a single menhir (big or upright stone like a cairn). An observer would stand at one end of the alignment and look beyond the other end. From the point on the horizon the declination of a rising or setting object then has to be found. Usually this is enough for measuring the angle, but at some sites the alignment of a single menhir is in one line with a distinctive landmark like a valley or a hilltop (Heggie 1972:46-48).

In the northern hemisphere the sun rises and sets far to the north. The point farthest to the northeast marks the summer solstice, the point farthest to the southeast marks the winter solstice. The point between these two solstices that the sun reaches on its annual cycle is called equinox. When the sun has reached the solstice point it seems to remain on the same spot for a couple of days, hence the name "solstice" which means "sun still" (Krupp 1974:11).

This explanation shows that an observatory had to fulfill certain requirements that allow the observation of the rising and setting of the sun. It is assumed here that only the most visible features, such as the sun, were considered for any observations. A single menhir (upright stone) in a circle and some alignment that is in line
with the point of sunrise or sunset around the summer solstice.

The Big Horn Medicine Wheel fulfills these requirements. It is constructed to show the point of the summer solstice sunrise and also the rising point of several other prominent stars. The cairn positioned several feet away from the Wheel is in one line with the central cairn and both are in line with the point of the summer solstice sunrise where it has been 200 to 700 years ago. The other cairns that are connected with the Wheel seemed to have a specific function too. One cairn is positioned to the northwest on the rim. If this one is put in one line with the central cairn an observer would have the rising point of Sirius in sight (Eddy 1977:150-151). If the same cairn is put in one line with the cairn to the east of the Wheel the rising point of Rigel would be in sight. The same cairn in line towards the one to the northeast shows the rising point of Aldebaran. The cairn to the southeast, put in line with the central cairn, reveals the point of the summer solstice sunset in the northwest (Eddy 1977:151).

The first star to rise in the cycle would have been Aldebaran, in circa A.D. 1200 at the marked point. The other stars appeared later in intervals of about twenty-eight days; first, Rigel, then Sirius. The twenty-eight days are roughly one "moon" and correspond to the number of spokes in the Wheel (Eddy 1977:152).
It is important to note that the individual features of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel were not built at the same time. The central cairn is much older than the spokes and it is suggested that the cairns, as the more important features for the astronomical interpretation, might have been built first (Eddy 1977:152). The spokes and the cairn may have been built by different people and so far it has been impossible to find out who exactly had built the Medicine Wheel. It has been claimed by or for the Crow, Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapahoe, Shoshone, and probably others (Eddy 1977:149). The Big Horn Medicine Wheel seems to be a good example of a megalithic observatories and leads to the assumption that astronomical observations probably were of significance for prehistoric people on the Northern Plains.

The Moose Mountain Wheel in southeastern Saskatchewan, Canada consists of a central cairn and several smaller cairns outside the rim of the Wheel. These are connected to the central cairn by spokes. Similar to the Big Horn Medicine Wheel the cairns at the Moose Mt. Wheel mark the summer solstice and the rising of Aldebaran and Sirius. The time these markers would have fit is circa A.D. 1. At this time the bright circumpolar star Capella could have been marked at the Moose Mt. Wheel too (Kehoe & Kehoe 1977:85-86). An interesting peculiarity is the sunburst motif. This is a little mosaic beside the cairn that is
needed to mark the summer solstice sunrise (Kehoe & Kehoe 1977:86). Sunburst designs are also found at various other Medicine Wheel sites like the Roy Rivers Medicine Wheel in Saskatchewan (Kehoe & Kehoe 1977:89). Usually these sunburst designs are related to those sightlines that mark the summer solstice sunrise and therefore can be considered a very appropriate symbolic expression of the sunrise.

As to the purpose of astronomical observatories, a possible relation between Medicine Wheels and mythology has been pointed out above and will be further discussed in a following chapter. It is also essential to keep in mind that areas of life like mythology and religion were more integrated into everyday life in Native American societies than in modern industrial societies. So it can be assumed that Medicine Wheels were first, an integrated part of a people's mythology and religion, and second, that Medicine Wheels were a firm and probably important aspect of Native American life in general.

That astronomical events were of significance for Native Americans can also be seen in the winter counts of several Plains tribes. Here celestial movements and outstanding events like the eclipse of the sun are recorded. Usually this is expressed as the "death of the sun" or the "death of a star" (Chamberlain 1984:26). These winter counts or records are kept on bison skins in the forms of drawings
with one drawing for the most significant event for one year. The fact that many celestial events were regarded as significant enough to be recorded shows the importance of astronomical characteristics.

The Sun Dance Lodge Plan

The Sun Dance is probably the most prominent Native American ceremony that is known outside native societies. For many Plains tribes it was an elaborate performance that involved countless characteristics that could be discussed. The Sun Dance has been described and analyzed by various authors (Ewers 1989, Stands In Timber & Liberty 1972, Powers 1972, Grinnell 1972). In this section the focus will be on one particular characteristic of the Sun Dance, the Sun Dance Lodge.

The Big Horn Medicine Wheel is interpreted as a plan for the Cheyenne Medicine Lodge or Sun Dance Lodge. The outer circle represents the wall of the Lodge, the spokes stand for the lodge poles, and the inner circle or hub represents the center pole of the Lodge (Grinnell 1922:307). The cairn to the northwest of the entrance has been interpreted as an altar, the place in the Medicine Lodge that is especially sacred. The cairn that is at some distance of the Wheel is approximately at the location of the "lonely" lodge where the instructions were given.
to the Medicine Lodge makers and from which the Medicine Lodge women carried the buffalo skulls down to the Medicine Lodge (Grinnell 1922:307-309).

In a critique of this theory it is pointed out that there are more cairns than are needed for the Cheyenne Medicine Lodge. These do not even lie at or close to the cardinal directions (Eddy 1974:1036).

The Big Horn Medicine Wheel may have been used for different purposes of which that of the Sun Dance Lodge is only one possibility. Also the plan of the Lodge is associated with the Cheyenne but it is unlikely that they were the only tribe that made use of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel.

A buffalo skull has been found on the east side of the central cairn (Grinnell 1922:305). This is the position occupied by a bison skull in several ceremonies of different tribes (Grey 1963:38). This is not a conclusive evidence for the Sun Dance Lodge plan but neither is it an argument against this interpretation. So the use of the Big Horn Medicine Wheel as a Sun Dance Lodge seems to be a possibility.

The Sun Dance includes some relation to astronomical features. Among the Cheyenne the ritual instruction of the Medicine Lodge makers began with the sentence, "To the bright star, I give my wife." (Grinnell 1972:221,II). A part of the ceremony was the ritual marriage of the wife
of the pledger to the Sun Dance priest. This union symbolized a plentiful summer, health for the people, and an increase in their numbers (Stands In Timber & Liberty 1972:95). The priest in this part of the ceremony stood for the Creator and, together with the other priests, was called "The Reanimator" (Hoebel 1978:20). In another part of the Sun Dance selected women, by ritually placing sods of grass around a buffalo skull, re-enacted the creation of the world (Grinnell 1972:256-259,II).

The Creator, symbolized by the priest, and the symbolic act of re-creating the world and the people are essential aspects of the Sun Dance. The sun was recognized as a life giving and life sustaining force among many Plains tribes. It often had symbolic significance as one of the two primary personified life forces, male or female. Therefore it seems reasonable that the sun should be of importance in a ceremony that centers on the re-creation of the world and the people.

Other astronomical features that have been mentioned before, e.g. Aldebaran, Rigel, and Sirius, are incorporated into the annual ceremonial period of the early Cheyenne. This period lasted about fifty-six days. It began with the rising of Aldebaran and ended with the rising of Sirius (Schlesier 1987:83-84).

The connection to the sun was established through the center pole of the Sun Dance Lodge. It was erected ritually
and represented "the sunshine of the world" (Hoebel 1978:21). Between its two forks at the upper end were lashed bundles of dogwood and cottonwood brush. This represented the nest of the Thunderbird, the spirit who controlled the sun and the rain (Hoebel 1978:21).

The sun as a life force or creator of life was symbolized in the center pole of the Lodge. The Sun Dance priest was called "Reanimator" and symbolically recreated the people with the wife of the pledger. He took on the role of the creator or the sun. The whole ceremony as a renewal of the tribe could not be done without this recognition of the importance of the sun. So astronomical features were incorporated into the Sun Dance. To assume a relationship between astronomical observations and a ceremonial structure seems reasonable.

**Calling of the Buffalo**

The significant find at the Majorville Cairn and Medicine Wheel are the buffalo stones. Because both structures are not necessarily related they are examined separately. The buffalo stones were found in the Cairn.

Buffalo stones played an important part in the mythology and ceremonial life of several Plains tribes like the Blackfeet. It would be futile to try to establish a relationship of one particular tribe to the Majorville
Cairn. For this discussion to analyze the importance of buffalo stones generally will be sufficient.

In two Blackfeet oral traditions a woman found a stone, shaped like a buffalo. This stone talked to her and taught her the ceremony to call the buffalo in times of need (Wissler & Duvall 1909:87-89) For many Plains tribes the buffalo was the main source of food and materials and as such had acquired a symbolic meaning that was related to the welfare and the fertility of the people. That a natural object like a buffalo stone could become a significant ceremonial object seems understandable in this context. Many other tribes performed variations of the Calling of the Buffalo; not always was the buffalo stone important.

The Blackfeet cannot be directly associated with the Majorville Cairn because it is not known if or when they have been at the site. Since the buffalo played such an important role in the life of most Plains tribes it seems reasonable to assume that other and/or earlier tribes had a similar use of the buffalo stones they found. The fact that a buffalo kill site is nearby only re-enforces our interpretations of the Cairn.

The Majorville Medicine Wheel has been interpreted as a Sun Dance Lodge (Calder 1977:205-207). The Sun Dance and the Calling of the Buffalo were ceremonies that had the welfare and prosperity of the people as a central theme.
Burial Markers

A custom of the Blackfeet was to erect burial lodges for prominent warriors upon their deaths. The lodge that the warrior had lived was arranged with backrests, beds, and his favorite equipment. The finely dressed body was laid on a platform at the center of the lodge, feet towards the east. Then rocks were piled extending outward from the lodge in the four cardinal directions. Each pile represented one coup the warrior had counted on his enemies. Usually death lodges were erected at some distance from camp (Ewers 1985:285-286). These burial structures today are classified as Medicine Wheels because they have two characteristics, central cairn and spokes, that define a Medicine Wheel as discussed in an earlier chapter.

Two of these Medicine Wheels are on the Blood Reserve in Alberta, Canada. The two warriors for whom these markers had been erected were Nitapinaw and Many-Spotted-Horses. Nitapinaw's Wheel looks exactly like the burial marker described above. It consists of a cairn and four spokes radiating in the four cardinal directions. According to tribal elders it had been erected where Nitapinaw had died or where he had been buried. Many-Spotted-Horses' Wheel had been constructed at the site of this tipi or where he had died (Conati & Tailfeathers 1985:77). The burial
lodges of great chiefs and medicine men were marked in the same way. The interpretation of the rock piles as coups is complemented by the interpretation of the lines of rocks as warpaths (Kehoe 1972:184).

To understand the significance of this type of Medicine Wheel, it is necessary to place these structures in the social-religious context of the Blackfeet. The Blackfeet word for Medicine Wheel is atsotakeeh' tuksin which means "from all sides a small marker of stone for prosperity" (Dempsey 1956:177). Prosperity and the welfare of the tribe were a concern of the people. Again it found its symbolic expression in a Medicine Wheel structure.

The sometimes elaborately painted lodge cover was part of a complex of sacred objects that the owner had received in a dream-vision (Ewers 1989:165). Designs on lodge covers were seen as good or strong medicine and played a significant role for the success of an individual and the welfare of the tribe on a wider level.

Another interpretation of the Blackfeet burial lodge is that it should scare off enemies. It is thought that nobody would attack a camp that was lead by a noted warrior as was advertised by the marker (Dempsey 1956:178). This argument seems doubtful because, as the burial marker indicated, the warrior was dead and not every enemy might have feared him. The interpretation may be related to the Blackfeet belief that it was possible for the spirits of
the dead to come back to the living (Ewers 1989:184).

**Historical Markers**

The interpretation of Medicine Wheels as historical markers is another possibility. An example would be the Grassy Lake Site in Alberta, Canada. Here the cairn has been interpreted as a marker for the rescue of a Blackfeet boy who had fallen out of a travois and had been raised by a bear (The Archaeological Society of Alberta 1976:6-9).

Another explanation is that the cairn was erected by Mexicans after a skirmish with Indians (The Archaeological Society of Alberta 1976:9-11).

This interpretation is mentioned here only to complete the list of Medicine Wheel theories.

**Vision Quest Sites**

It has been suggested that the Fort Smith Medicine Wheel can be interpreted as a vision quest site. This was one of the major practices among the Crow on whose reservation this Medicine Wheel is (Brown 1963:225-230).

The vision quest was a way to acquire a guardian spirit or the items for a medicine bundle. Primary characteristics of the quest were a solitary spot, several days of fasting and praying. The Crow sought songs, names, hunting
techniques, and war plans in visions (Lowie 1983).

The spokes of the Medicine Wheel do not radiate towards the four cardinal directions. Since the western direction was important in the Crow vision quest, it was the direction the seeker faced during his quest, this seems to argue against a possible use as vision quest site. The Medicine Wheel obviously was not visited on a regular basis and no cultural materials have been found (Brown 1963:225-230). This may imply that it was a solitary spot that was only visited infrequently by individuals. If the purpose of these visits was to seek a vision cannot be determined, but the use of simple Medicine Wheels as vision quest site should be included as a possibility. The Medicine Wheel as a symbol provided the means to establish a connection to the metaphysical/spiritual realm. As a vision quest site it would be an intermediary between the actual world and the spiritual.

The above theories show that Medicine Wheels may have had different purposes, depending on the context in which they are placed. Medicine Wheels as observatories and in connection with buffalo stones may have been related to the wider symbolic context of mythology and ceremony. Both aspects were centered on the concern for the welfare and prosperity of the people. The Medicine Wheel in this context may be seen as the stage on which symbolic events were acted out in the hope to influence or reinforce actual
life situations.

The Medicine Wheels as a burial marker has to be seen in a different context and is limited to one tribe, the Blackfeet. The spokes of the Wheel, representing the success of a warrior and his path in war, may be interpreted as a connection to the supernatural realm. In this sense they became a symbol for success that the people hoped for even after the warrior was gone.

The evidence for Medicine Wheels as historical markers and vision quest sites is not too convincing but may be included in the discussion as possibilities for the purpose of Medicine Wheels.
Chapter III

Philosophical Aspects of the Medicine Wheel

In the previous chapter it has been shown that Medicine Wheels have to be interpreted with regard to their proper context that includes mythological, ceremonial, and symbolic aspects of Native American societies. In this sense Medicine Wheels were, and to a large extent still are, a part of the worldview and philosophy of a people. In this chapter the philosophical aspects of Medicine Wheels will be examined.

Native American Conception of "Medicine"

To understand why certain wheel shaped stone structures are called Medicine Wheels, it is necessary to analyze the term "medicine" as it is understood in all Native American societies.

Largely, "medicine" in industrial societies is associated with health and sickness in the clinical sense. The definitions of "medicine", "health", and "sickness" do not include, for the most part, aspects that are removed
from the immediate concern. For example, "sickness" is associated with only the immediate cause, e.g. a virus, it is not associated with the wider physical and psychological context in which the patient lives, e.g. work satisfaction or positive/negative attitude. Only very recently this has started to change.

Among Native Americans, the term "medicine" is meant more encompassing. One of my Salish-Kootenai informants mentioned objects like stones and amulets that are described as "medicine" (Meissler 1993). The term also includes ritual acts like dancing and smoking the pipe as well as sacred places (Hansen 1978:27). The Native American conception of health is associated with places, religion/philosophy, specific actions, objects, and animals. The individual is put into a relationship with all these things and the well-being is determined on the basis of this relationship. If it is stable the person will be healthy and under the influence of "good medicine". This is essential to acknowledge in a discussion on Medicine Wheels because it lends a new significance to them.

Remembering that Medicine Wheels and the ceremonies that may have been performed in them centered on the fertility and continuity of a people, it becomes apparent why these stone structures are called Medicine Wheels. Only a healthy people will be able to prosper.
Basic Symbolism of the Circle

Because Medicine Wheels are circular in shape and are part of the symbolic aspect of Native American societies, it seems useful to examine the basic symbolic meanings of the circle in general before discussing the symbolic content of Medicine Wheels in particular.

The circle generally stands for perfection, eternity, unity, a cyclic process, the ultimate state of oneness, never ending existence, and protection (Olderr 1986:25). These interpretations seem closely related and seem to describe a state of existence as well as a process that perpetuates this state. The symbolic interpretation of the wheel in particular is: sun, passage of time, fortune, transcendence, progress, completion, power, but also torture (Olderr 1986:278). The notion that seems to be underlying all these interpretations is that life appears to be related to the cosmic sphere. The Arapaho expressed this notion in their conception of the world as a highly ordered place and called it the "Great Circle" (McCoy 1988:106).

An Salish-Kootenai informant pointed out that a lot of things in nature are round, e.g. trees, birds' nests, and grass stems, and that therefore the circular shape would be an appropriate choice for a symbol that is associated with life itself (Meissler 1993). For this informant, the
Medicine Wheel symbol is a reality and she turns to it in a contemplative way to be able to keep her balance and live outside her native environment (Meissler 1993).

An essential idea in this regard is that of order. It has been said before that, according to Native American worldview, an individual will see him- or herself in relation to his or her surroundings. For the individual to be in good health, it is crucial that this relationship is stable, and it is therefore necessary to live in an ordered environment.

Another important idea is that of reality. That the symbolic interpretations of the Medicine Wheel are viewed as reality by the informant may lead to the impression that these interpretations, e.g. unity, protection, or progress, reflect an attitude a person may carry in everyday life. This may lead to a specific worldview and a specific sense of identity that is different from that of members of industrial societies. In this regard, the symbolic contents that are expressed in the circle or the Medicine Wheel may be seen as a framework or a philosophy for a people's worldview, self-perception, and identity. The weight has to be put on "identity". A loss of the opportunity to symbolically express and reinforce this worldview in the Medicine Wheel and related ceremonies would result in a loss of identity and Native Americans would cease to exist as a people.
The circle as a symbol is also of concern outside Native American societies. A psychological interpretation offers the circle as a symbol of the Self. It expresses the relationship between "man" and the whole of nature and ultimately stands for the most vital aspect of life, wholeness (Jaffe 1968:266). The idea that wholeness or unity includes the relationship between the individual and nature or the environment again becomes obvious. This concern seems to be part of a worldview and may be reflected in the Medicine Wheel as a symbol of unity (Coe 1976:14).

The circle is also mentioned as an archetypal symbol. As such it is a symbolic expression of basic human emotions. Archetypes are dynamic factors that are influential in the creation of myths, religions, and philosophies that characterize nations and epochs in history (Jung 1968:68). The Medicine Wheel as a symbolic expression of the human concern for wholeness that is part of the worldview of a people seems to confirm this.

It has been pointed out that symbols are often not taken seriously. In industrial societies people tend to separate symbolic images from the "serious things in life" (Eliade 1969:19). But symbols like the circle or the Medicine Wheel are charged with meanings that relate to actual situations. They are necessary for the individual's health. That they often come about spontaneously does not mean they are arbitrarily invented (Eliade 1969:19-20). In this sense
symbols reflect a certain way of life that depends on environmental and historical circumstances. The Medicine Wheel as a symbol is part of reality and it becomes clear that it can only be understood in the context of this reality or in the proper cultural context.

In an anthropological discussion on symbols the concern with the cultural context in which a symbol operates is essential. This context plays a determining role in establishing an image as a "key symbol". A culture can be analyzed in terms of its orientation (values, norms, beliefs, etc.). The image that seems to express this orientation would be a key symbol. An object or image that seems to be of general interest for the members of a culture may also be a key symbol (Ortner 1979:93).

If it can be said that a central ideal or orientation of a society is wholeness or unity and the form of the circle is found in numerous social and cultural activities, then the circle/Medicine Wheel can be defined as a key symbol. The following four models will show how the Medicine Wheel symbol expresses an underlying worldview and also plays a role in different areas of a culture, e.g. ritual, myth, etc..

A distinction is made between symbols that express and summarize ideas into a unitary system (summarizing symbols) and symbols that are employed to differentiate specific feelings or ideas and to translate these into actions.
(elaborating symbols) (Ortner 1979:94-95). The latter group is further divided into root metaphors that help establishing a certain worldview and key scenarios that provide strategies for organizing action upon this worldview (Ortner 1979:96).

Root metaphors, e.g. "Great Circle" (McCoy 1988:106) and actions that are based on this metaphor, e.g. Sun Dance, are closely related. It seems that the Medicine Wheel is a good example to express this relatedness. The conception of wholeness/unity and its expression in various cultural/social objects (Medicine Wheel, camp circle, etc.) and activities (Sun Dance, passing of the pipe, etc.) seem to confirm the Medicine Wheel as an important symbol. But it is the specific cultural context that determines if the Medicine Wheel can be called a key symbol.

The content of a summarizing symbol has to be more significant than that of other symbols in the same context. The elaborating symbol has to have an organizational function in a specific context (Ortner 1979:97-98).

To discuss the Medicine Wheel as a key symbol these two qualities have to be analyzed in a specific cultural context. The four models that will be discussed in the following chapters put the Medicine Wheel in different contexts and show the role this symbol plays in them.

Symbols can be manipulated or constructed to bring them into accord with the cultural system but the cultural system
is also manipulated in terms of the relationship that is expressed in the symbol (Geertz 1966:7). This means that there is a feedback between a culture and the symbols it uses to express itself and to reinforce the cultural pattern. If the cultural context is confirmed in the symbol then the Medicine Wheel is directly related to and reinforces Native American culture and identity.

Symbols can be interpreted and elaborated in support of any specific proposition (Lasswell, Lerner & de Sola Pool 1952:9-10). This makes it even more essential to find the link between the symbolic contents and reality or cultural context. In terms of the Medicine Wheel this means an acknowledgment of its significance for a specific worldview. If Medicine Wheels are separated from their context these symbols could be grossly misinterpreted which would imply a misinterpretation of the culture of which they are part.

Cyclic Perception of Time

An important aspect of the circle as a symbol is its relation with a particular perception of time. Members of the industrial world generally perceive time as linear whereas other people think of it in terms of a cycle or circle.

The line or the circle with regard to Time can be seen
as a metaphor. It can be employed to express feelings about certain events, e.g. life and death. Both can be viewed as events following each other or as recurrent events in a cycle. Religion has a major influence on which of these metaphors are chosen. For example, a mythology that justifies the belief in reincarnation is also a mythological representation of time (Leach 1965:242-243). According to this line of thought, time is a symbol that expresses the feelings of humans about what they observe and how they interpret it. This may be seen as a factor in the way how people define themselves and how they put themselves into relation to other things.

Time is linked to mythology and the earliest calendars show that major festivals or religious rites were marked most prominently. It reflects the observation that certain things repeat themselves and that time intervals begin and end with the same thing (Leach 1965:246-247). Medicine Wheels can be used to mark the summer solstice, a major recurrent event. It has been discussed that one function of festivals is to order time, e.g. the Sun Dance at midsummer. Thus a certain perception of Time is created by establishing intervals in social life (Leach 1965:248).

It becomes apparent that time is a major factor in the symbolic interpretation of the circle or Medicine Wheel. The sun seems to be an influential factor too because many ritual acts are performed in accordance with its movement.
An example is the ritual smoking of the pipe of Native Americans. The pipe is pointed to the four cardinal directions and to points above and below. This places the individual or the Earth in the center of the universe. It reflects the idea that the universe is a circumscribing sphere (Hartley Burr 1953:9-10). Without a circular perception of time this idea could not be expressed. This shows that the relationship of Native Americans to the universe is also defined by their perception of time. The sun whose annually repeated climax, marked with the use of the Medicine Wheel, is a determining factor in this regard.

The movements of the zodiac, sun, moon, and planets is expressed in the idea of the solar walk. This describes the belief that people are on a journey that eventually will lead them beyond the confines of this world. The concern with sun movements constitutes a paradigm in numerous Native American traditions (Brotherson 1984:15-16). The idea that a person's life is a journey around a circle may have an influence on the perception of time.

This chapter discussed various symbolic aspects of the circle or Medicine Wheel. The Native American concept of health is a major factor in the interpretation of the Medicine Wheel and has an influence on how people define themselves and their relationship with the environment. Native American life is also structured according to the
circular perception of time which is expressed and reinforced by the circle symbol. So the significance of the Medicine Wheel as a symbol can only be understood if these two factors and their importance for the lifestyle of Native American societies are taken into account.
Chapter IV

The Medicine Wheel in Crow Society

A Case Study

To discuss the Medicine Wheel symbol as an influential part of a Native American society, the Crow have been chosen as an ethnographic example of a Plains tribe. The Crow, like many other people, have experienced numerous changes over time in their lifestyle, religion, and social organization. A number of elements of the Crow worldview and belief system have been modified and adapted to a contemporary lifestyle while other aspects are being rediscovered.

To place the Medicine Wheel symbol into their cultural context it is therefore necessary to choose one particular time frame which, in this case, will be the past or pre-reservation/early reservation period. The reason being that at this time the importance of the symbol was still clearly recognizable.

The intent in this chapter is to show how the Medicine Wheel as a symbol and as an expression of a particular
worldview was employed to demonstrate and reaffirm the interrelatedness of different aspects of life. According to Native American worldview, things like natural phenomena, e.g. astronomical constellations, religion, lifestyle are connected and one has an influence on the other. The Medicine Wheel, as a symbol of wholeness, expressed this idea and was a means to lend identity and continuity to the Crow as a people.

It is important to note that no attempt will be made to connect the Crow with one particular Medicine Wheel stone structure. Rather the symbolic contents and the importance of these contents for a people will be demonstrated and discussed.

The Crow

The Crow or Absaroke were a Siouan speaking people who early in their history lived in eastern Nebraska and Kansas. Based on linguistic research it has been established that the Crow once were part of the Hidatsa in the east. About five hundred years ago the Crow split off and moved west onto the Northern Plains (Lowie 1983:3). There they distinguished three major divisions among themselves. The River Crow in the lower Yellowstone/Missouri region, the Main Body, and the Kicked-in-their-bellies in the Wind River region. The latter two were lumped into the Mountain
Crow (Lowe 1983:3-4).

Aspects of Crow social organization and lifestyle will be discussed on the basis of the following model.

Crow life can be symbolized in a circle with four major areas. The circular form makes it possible to connect these areas and show how one is related with the other. The result is a unit that includes individual elements of the Crow lifestyle. The symbolic meaning of wholeness and unity can be understood in this way.
Astronomy

Similar to other Native American peoples, stars played a significant role for the Crow. The most important were the Morning Star and the Big Dipper (the Seven Stars), but also the Sun and the Moon (Lowie 1922:321). Astronomical features had a special meaning because they were interpreted as deities. It is thought that Native Americans sensed the symbolic content of what they saw. Therefore symbols like astronomical features were perceived as more realistic than members of industrial societies may perceive them (Brown 1992:72). It is important to acknowledge this difference. It does not mean that Native Americans lacked the cognitive ability to analyze symbols as such, it only means that symbols were accepted as part of reality.

According to the Crow belief system, all the named stars had lived on earth at one time (Lowie 1983:107). This explanation provides a direct connection between life on earth or reality and the stars that are seen. Once they had been real persons. This idea is confirmed by the interpretation that religions hold to reality and express it. Therefore it is important to look beneath a symbol at the reality which it represents in order to understand it (Durkheim 1965:14).

A commonality that stars, specifically the sun, and
deities have is that both are life sustaining forces and both are out of reach of humans. They could be influenced to a certain extent but people more or less depended on them. This may have been a reason why stars could easily be interpreted as deities. The sky revealed the infinite distance, the transcendence of the deity (Eliade 1987:117).

The significance of astronomical features for the Crow becomes apparent with the realization that a symbol stands for an idea or concept and that it conveys a message in a concrete way. Without symbols the spiritual could not be expressed or perceived (Beck, Walter & Francisco 1992:74). In terms of Crow mythology this means that they would not have come into existence without these deities. In terms of Crow society it means that without this symbolic expression they could not have defined themselves the way they did.

Here reality, the Crow's existence, and symbol are skillfully connected. Astronomical features provided the basis for the mythology of the Crow that constituted a framework for the Crow worldview. It also shows how natural observable phenomena were integrated into the belief system and the wider context of Crow society.
**Mythology**

The connection between astronomy and myth is that deities, as represented in stars, played important roles in myths. It is important to understand the impact these deities had on Crow culture. The intention in this section is to show a direct relationship between particular astronomical features and mythological events. This will be essential in understanding the significance of unity or wholeness as it is symbolized in the Medicine Wheel.

In the Crow's creation myth, the Sun as Old Man was responsible for forming earth and its boundaries. Sun/Old Man said that there was only one path for him and for that he wanted to make the earth. Since there was no material to do this he sent four different animals to dive into the water to get some mud. Only the fourth succeeded. Then Sun made the earth by spreading the mud from east to west. (Lowie 1918:14).

The path of the sun circumscribing the boundaries of the earth reveals how the Crow defined their universe. In this very first mythological act that was performed in an east to west direction the movement of a natural phenomenon was imitated. This is significant to note ritual acts were performed in the same direction.

Sun/Old Man saw a person on this first journey of
creation. As he approached it, it turned into a Tobacco plant. Sun wanted all people to have this plant from then on. He said the star above had assumed this form and would take care of the people. If people would care for the Tobacco plant, it would be the means of their lives. Upon finding the Tobacco plant, Sun then made the Crow out of clay (there are different versions of this myth) (Lowie 1918:15-16).

Here Old Man is also the giver of life to the Crow. The Sun as life giver can easily be turned into the sun as life giver. It apparently moves in a circle around the earth and gives and sustains life. This is another case in which a natural phenomenon was translated into a mythological event. Life depended on the movement of the Sun/sun that was circular.

Two major classes of symbols, objects and actions, are distinguished (Tillich 1961:93). The movement of the sun is symbolized in the mythological movement of Sun. So a specific kind of action is associated with the shape of the Medicine Wheel. The link between the sun's movement as a life giving force and the circle cannot be ignored.

Tobacco also was important as a life giving force. Besides that, the plant was seen as a transformation of the stars. Sun said the people should care for the plant and it would care for them. Sun adopted a fasting boy and instructed him in the planting of Tobacco. This was the mythological
first member of the Tobacco Society of the Crow (Lowie 1983:275).

If the people would care for/observe the stars/deities, then the stars/deities would care for the people. This interpretation again shows how natural phenomena were symbolically incorporated into mythological events. It can be seen as a way to demonstrate the consistency or relatedness between astronomical features and mythology and thus contributed to a worldview of which wholeness was a central concern.

In the Crow mythology Old Man was also called Old Man Coyote and numerous myths exist about his adventures. The coyote is commonly known as the trickster or culture hero. This is the character that brings objects, rules, and rituals to the people. Among the Crow this character is also Sun (Lowie 1922).

The Morningstar was Sun's son. After conquering several monsters on earth, he returned to the sky and became the Morningstar. The role of Morningstar is somewhat controversial. Some prayed to him in time of war, others did not hold him for a deity at all but rather saw him as an ordinary hero outside the mythological realm (Lowie 1922:321). Of significance in this case is perhaps that Morningstar's mother was a Crow woman (Lowie 1983:112).

Here the relationship between the sun and the Crow is symbolized in a connection between Sun's son and a Crow
woman. This symbolic expression emphasizes the sun as life giving force and confirms the relatedness between the sun and the people.

In another Crow myth, Morningstar played a culturally prominent role. An orphan boy was fasting at a lonely spot. In order to receive power from Sun, he cut off the first joint of his index finger. In the vision that followed Morningstar appeared in the form of a human. He brought with him a powerful arrow that he showed to the boy and instructed him how to use it. He told the boy to return to his camp and make seven arrows, each a different color. They would be the central objects in seven medicine bundles. Morningstar also taught the boy the appropriate rituals that belonged with the bundles and then gave him the original arrow (Harrod 1992:85).

It has been suggested that the arrows came from the Big Dipper, the seven stars, because of the number seven (Harrod 1992:85). But for this discussion it is not important to try to determine the role of particular stars. Rather the relationship between stars in general and the Crow is of interest.

Arrows were of course of major importance for the Crow in their hunting lifestyle. Again the life giving force of the stars was related to the life of the Crow. The first arrow was held sacred and can be seen as a direct link between the stars and the people. So far the discussion
has focused on symbols as expression for emotions or ideas. Now it becomes apparent that objects also can acquire a symbolic meaning. Natural or historical objects can become religious symbols if they are perceived as holy (Tillich 1961:92). The arrow as a hunting weapon was important for the Crow's survival and its role in the above myth may be an expression of this importance.

It is the meaning of an object that makes it a symbol and this is dependent on the context in which the object plays a role. Genuinely mythical and cultic works are meant to describe real happenings, they are not seen as symbolic representations. Only humans in looking back on this event and ascribing a significant meaning to it, make them into symbols (Kahler 1961:65).

Another character in Crow mythology is the moon. In some cases Moon was thought of as male, but generally Moon played the role of an old woman. In one myth the Crow received one of their sacred objects, the sacred doll, from Moon. This doll later was employed in the Sun Dance where it represented Moon (Lowie 1922:320). Another myth told how a very poor old couple, upon the advice of Moon, employed the help of four young men to catch horses. So in the end the old couple became wealthy (Lowie 1922:186-188). There were other objects and songs that had been received from Moon that were thought to give power and bring success (Lowie 1922:421).
Moon will be discussed here as a female. The general role of Moon is that of an advisor or helper for the Crow. She was not really responsible for anything that had a real impact on Crow culture, but she seemed to be a source of power in everyday life. Although Moon did not have the importance of Sun, she played a role in the Sun Dance. As a source of power or as an advisor for the people she can be related to Crow lifestyle.

As to the symbolism of the moon, the gender in which it was thought of is important. Sun was viewed as male. Because the sun and the moon seem to be two complementary figures at the sky, it seems to make sense to view Moon as a complement to the male Sun, so the gender for moon would be female. In consistency with this both characters should have a complementary relationship with the people. Sun was the life-giver, and it seems that Moon saw to it that the people could live successfully. Both were sources of power and both kept the Crow alive. Again here is the direct relationship between an astronomical figure and a mythological one.

According to a myth the Big Dipper or Seven Stars had been seven brothers. They had been killed by Red-woman but another brother brought their corpses to a sweatlodge and restored them to life. Then they decided to become the Seven Stars so they could live forever (Lowie 1918:126). This constellation also was a source of power for the Crow
and frequently gave visions to individuals. This would bring success to the visionary (Lowie 1922:322). With this configuration the Crow had another source of power that helped them succeed with their life.

These are only very few examples of the myths of the Crow. They show how astronomical configurations were translated into mythological characters that had a direct relationship with the people, but most importantly, were a source of life and power. There are many other myths that reflected the social organization, the division of labor, the relationship with animals. At this point it is more important to note that the sun, the moon, and the stars had a direct relationship with the people and that these figures were the origin of life.

The symbolic circular movement in the mythological act of creation was related to the movement of these natural phenomena. Therefore the circle could become one of the most significant symbols for the Crow. It was directly related to the creation of life and to the figures that sustained life. The circle or the Wheel as a source of life becomes understandable in this context.

Although the Medicine Wheel is discussed as a concept or idea rather than a stone structure in this chapter, the interpretation of some of these structures as astronomical observatories seems to be verified.
Ceremonies

In this section those ceremonies in which the major mythological characters played a role will be examined. Since most ceremonies were quite lengthy and can be found in various sources the discussion will focus on those parts that refers to the characters.

An obvious assumption would be that Sun played a major role in the Sun Dance ceremony. However, this was not so. The basis of the Sun Dance was the idea of revenge, although the Sun is mentioned at some points (Lowie 1983:326). Sun was more important in the sweat lodge ritual. The Crow viewed the sweat bath as an offering to Sun. So the sweat bath was a serious undertaking that had to be inspired by a dream-vision or be supervised by an experienced tribesperson. The purpose of the sweat bath was to ensure success in war; it was also intended as an offering, e.g. if someone became sick the person would promise to perform a sweat lodge ritual after health had been restored. The sweat bath consisted of a small domeshaped lodge with heated stones in the center over which cold water would be poured. The resulting steam produced an intense atmosphere. A fairly typical prayer of a participant was, "Sun, we are doing this for you! May we live until the next winter!" (Lowie 1983:257-258).
As life giver, Sun was also responsible for the continuing existence of the people and may have been thought of as always present. If Sun was only a side figure in the Sun Dance, this was not because he was unimportant but, because his presence may have been felt at all times with the special emphasize of a ceremony. Sun was specifically called upon in certain situations, e.g. during a sweat bath if a person had survived a sickness or to ask for success in war which would guarantee the continuity of the Crow as a people.

The Crow had an elaborate ceremony of the planting of Tobacco to ensure their continued existence. The ceremony was divided into different stages from preparing the ground to the harvest. Usually the ceremony also involved the initiation of new members into the Tobacco Society. The Mixers who had had a dream-vision of the right piece of land mixed the soil with ashes. Then other members of the Society planted the seed and built a brush corral around the patch. In the fall they came back for the harvest. As part of the harvest ceremony, a Tobacco Dance was performed in which women played a prominent part. Pieces of pemmican were then placed beside the plants, the pemmican was charged by selected people like an enemy. Afterwards the Tobacco was carefully gathered (LeForge 1974:189-190).

The ceremonial symbolism is explained in a myth. Sun saw a person on his creation journey, this person turned
into a Tobacco plant representing the stars. Here is the connection between people, Tobacco, and stars. It was obvious for the Crow to take particular care of the planting and harvesting of Tobacco.

Women played a major part in the ceremony and this also relates to the life sustaining force of Tobacco. Since women were important for the continuation of the Crow it is not surprising why they partook in a ceremony that symbolized the same purpose. It can be said that the planting and harvesting of Tobacco was designed to ensure the existence of the Crow. The plant was given to them in a mythological event by a character that was symbolized by the sun. The connection between astronomy, myth, and ceremony becomes clear.

The moon played a role in the Sun Dance in the form of the Sun Dance doll. This ceremony was performed if someone wanted revenge for the death of a brother or other close relative. An example would be Has-No-Name. He had lost his family and went onto a hilltop to fast and mourn. In a vision he saw four men and four women dancing. One of the men carried a Sun Dance doll. One of the women was one Has-No-Name knew and upon his return to camp he married her (Ewers 1975:27). Later he made the doll he had seen in his vision for a friend who wanted to avenge his brother's death. The doll was sewn by men and women were not allowed to touch it. The sewing and stuffing of the
doll was encased in an elaborate ritual. Finally the feathers of an owl were attached to the doll. The owl was a sacred bird because it could see at night (Ewers 1975:27-28). The doll was then painted in the following manner: red semicircle on forehead for the rainbow, two streaks beneath eyes like the streaks of an owl for the power of visions, blue stripe down the body for the sky, horizontal stripes on one side for the wrinkles of old people to ensure long life and health, horizontal stripes on the other side to represent eagle plumes as a symbol of fog, black spots around the neck for hail and rain or storm (Ewers 1975:27-28).

Some of these symbolic elements can be related to the moon. Rainbow and sky are features of the sky where the moon has its place. More interesting is the owl, a night bird that shares not only the place but also the time with the moon. The life force element is represented in the stripes that symbolize the wrinkles of the old people. Because the Sun Dance was performed after the death of a person, this is significant. It can be seen that the moon, or Moon, was associated with sustaining or reinforcing the life of the Crow.

It is interesting to note that the original Sun Dance doll was the result of a vision in which a Crow saw seven men and in front of them a woman holding the doll. The woman was Moon and she gave the doll to the visionary.
The owner of a Sun Dance doll became the instructor for those who wanted to perform a Sun Dance. He controlled every step in the preparation of the ceremony (Lowie 1983:302-304).

The female element seems to be important in this ceremony. Women represented a life giving element in society and it could be concluded that this was a central concern of the Sun Dance. Especially after the death of a person the continuity and life of the people had to be ensured.

The fact that no woman was allowed to touch the Sun Dance doll can be seen in terms of the complementary roles of male and female in Crow society. These two roles or aspects must not be allowed to mix or interfere with each other so not to upset the cosmological balance this relationship represented.

The circular Sun Dance lodge and the movements of the dancers in a circle symbolically repeated the concept of the world (Frey 1987:154). Again a ritual circular movement symbolized the relationship of the people with the universe. In the Sun Dance the circular movement can be interpreted as a symbolic re-creation of the world after the death of a person. In terms of the symbolic wholeness that was represented in the circle, the loss of a life would have meant a disruption of the wholeness and unity of the people.

A major purpose of these ceremonies of the Crow seems to have been to ensure the continuity of the people.
According to the worldview in industrial societies rituals or ceremonies may appear as inadequate means to perpetuate life. It seems appropriate to analyze rituals in general to show their meaning for a society.

Rites are not practical but expressive (Langer 1979:45). This is also true for symbols. A ritual is a symbolic act that is employed to express an idea, or on a more intense level, the emotions that are associated with this idea. The motivation to perform a ritual is the desire to symbolize this idea (Langer 1979:49).

For the Crow, this idea was their continuity as a people. The male-female complement and the circle allowed the symbolic expression of the idea that they were an integrated part of a whole and that they were, to a certain extent, dependent on their environment. The concepts of the cycle and dualism were discovered or clarified by lunar symbolism. This allowed for the integration of apparently unrelated facts into a single system (Eliade 1987:156).

Through the employment of a symbol that stands for wholeness different aspects of the life of the Crow were tied into a single whole. Astronomy, mythology, and ceremonies were individual parts that together constituted a complex web that the Crow used to describe their worldview and their relationship to the environment.
Lifestyle

The term lifestyle is more encompassing than the term social organization and therefore seems more appropriate for the discussion in this section. The term describes not only the outside structure of a society but also the underlying philosophy that provides a framework for a certain way of life.

The female-male dualism also existed in the social life of the Crow. Generally women cared for matters of the family lodge like sewing, gathering and preparing food; they also took part in their husbands' appearance, prepared sweatbaths, etc.. Men hunted, went on horse raids, defended the camp, and manufactured their weapons (LeForge 1974:170, Lowie 1983:60,84).

Women could gain prestige and could be just as honored and respected like men. Every kind of work was important and contributed to the well-being of a family, and on the next level, of the people whether this was a victory in war or a lodgecover well done. Women could be honored by transporting their husbands' shields when the camp moved and could seek visions if they wanted. In fact, women were generally the custodians of sacred objects (Lowie 1983:60-61).

The complementary roles of males and females has been
emphasized in the discussion on ceremonies. It also was
reflected in the social life of the Crow. Perhaps the most
complementary task among the Crow was the buffalo hunt.
Men did the actual hunting and women prepared the meat
and hides. A good tanner was sought after and would be
paid with horses for her work (Lowie 1983:74-75). In this
way women could acquire wealth that was measured in horses.
The kind of work men and women did was different but of
equal value to the Crow. In this way they can be interpreted
as parts that constituted the whole of the people. This
is one example in which, through the division of labor
and the value ascribed to it, the unity of the Crow was
symbolized in everyday life.

The one area in Crow social life in which care was taken
that male and female spheres did not connect was the
menstrual taboo (Lowie 1983:60). Here women had to stay
away from objects that belonged to men for a couple of
days. The reason the literature usually offers is that
these objects must not be "poisoned" by menstrual blood.
This seems to be a rather negative interpretation and
apparently reflects the social values of western industrial
societies rather than those of the Crow. In the context
of Crow society, this custom can be interpreted differently.
Male and female constituted two distinctive areas in all
aspects of life. In the cosmological order, the mythology,
and the ceremonial life of the Crow men and women had
separate but complementary roles. The Sun Dance doll could not be touched by women so not to upset this complementary balance. The operative word here is "balance", both spheres had to be kept separate so men and women could function properly. The custom may be interpreted as a symbolic expression of this concern.

The camp circle was another main aspect in the social life of the Crow. In every camp each lodge occupied the same spot in the circle. Close relatives, members of the same clan, built their lodges close to each other with the entrances always facing east. The first step in setting up a lodge was to choose a center spot on which the belongings of a family were piled and around which the lodge was erected. In front of the entrance medicine objects (shields, bundles, etc.) were hung on a tripod to protect the family from harmful intrusion. These objects typified the attitude toward Sun. The whole camp represented a rough circle (LeForge 1974:148-150).

The camp 'circle' was not a coincidence, it symbolized the whole worldview of the Crow. The members of a clan lived close together and all clans were united in the camp or the circle. This may not have always been possible in reality but the issue here is to discuss the camp circle as it should have been in ideal circumstances. Within this camp circle each lodge had a definite spot just like everything in a whole has its particular spot. The
individual family lodges symbolized smaller circles that were protected by medicine or Sun. The Crow symbolized their relationship with the cosmos with the particular shape in which they built their camp and they also reinforced and symbolized their relationship to Sun in particular.

The religion of the Crow was not separated from other aspects of their life. It was symbolically expressed and reinforced in nearly every activity and the symbol that could be employed in so many different ways was the circle. Religion can be defined as a system of ideas with which individuals represent the society of which they are parts (Durkheim 1965:257). The same can be said about the Medicine Wheel philosophy. The Crow gave a perfect example of this definition simply by setting up their camp circle. In assigning each matrilineal clan and within each clan each family a particular spot in the circle the Crow expressed their belief in this spatial structure of their society.

The aspect of spatial orientation is one of the most profound symbolic expressions. At the basis lies the idea that humans put themselves in relation to everything else and this relationship defines how people identify themselves. The naming of stars, myths, and ceremonies all relate to this relationship which can be expressed in a certain spatial order which of course reinforces the former aspects (Hallowell 1977:133).
The social aspect of the Tobacco Society was the adoption of new members. Membership in the Tobacco Society was brought considerable social prestige and people were willing to spend high amounts of property to be accepted. What is important here is that men and women, often a husband and wife team, would be adopted into the Society (Lowie 1983:276). Again the complementary aspect of Crow society is expressed here.

In terms of symbolism the adoption into the Tobacco Society stood for renewal of the tribe. The proceedings were sometimes called "having children" (Lowie 1983:277). The symbol of birth signifies the concern with the well-being and continuity of the Crow as a people. It becomes obvious how the symbolic aspects of the astronomical, mythological, and ceremonial areas are connected with the social sphere. The Tobacco Society was part of the social organization of the Crow that not only provided social prestige but also reflected the cosmological order and religious beliefs of the Crow.

The Medicine Wheel as a concept to express wholeness and unity was apparent not only in the religious area of Crow life but also in other major areas, e.g. social organization. The circle as a symbol also allowed to express concerns and ideas that can be seen as constituting parts of wholeness, e.g. the male-female complement.

The symbolic interpretation of the Medicine Wheel in
this context can be twofold. First, as a summarizing symbol it expresses the underlying ideas and ideals that were important in Crow society. Second, as an elaborating symbol the Medicine Wheel or the circle was used as a structuring device to organize social life (Ortner 1979). This seems to be a good example of how both categories can be united in one symbol (the literature discusses both in terms of different symbols, Ortner 1979).

It has to be emphasized again that the essential factor in the interpretation of a symbol is the context in which it operates. In this context the philosophy expressed by the circle or Medicine Wheel is essential for the continuity and identity of the people.
Chapter V

The Medicine Wheel in a Particular Context

In this chapter, the Medicine Wheel will be discussed in the specific context of drug and alcohol abuse. Both have become a major problem and numerous therapies, support groups, and special programs have been set up to solve it. One unique program that deals with alcohol and drug abuse among Indians was designed by the inter-tribal Four Worlds Development Project out of Lethbridge, Alberta. Direction for the Project was set at a conference in Lethbridge in December, 1982. The participants were native elders and spiritual leaders of various native communities (FWDP nd). The Project is based on traditional Indian teachings and values and the primary goal is to set Indians on the path of their own development. A key word of the program is 'healing'. The return to traditional values would transform Indian societies which eventually have a healing effect on the whole planet, so it is prophesied by tribal elders (FWDP nd). The symbolic contents of the Medicine Wheel are used as guidelines in this project.
The model shows the steps a person has to take in order to become free from substance abuse. The teachings of the Medicine Wheel are applied as a guide to transform a dependent individual into a free person with a healthy lifestyle. The intention here is not to discuss the Four World Development Project specifically but to show the relationship between the Medicine Wheel symbol and a particular problem.
Goals

The problem of drug and alcohol abuse is part of a wider context. It is seen as a clear indication that something is wrong in the spiritual, cultural, social, and economic life of the whole community (FWDP nd:1). These areas are treated as parts of a whole that affect each other. A major goal of the alcohol dependent individual would be to solve the problems he or she has in the social or economic area. Because problems in one or more of these areas are seen as the root of substance abuse it would be possible to become independent of drugs or alcohol.

The first step a dependent person has to take is to get to know his or her own capacities. One assumption on which the program is built is that human capacity is created through interaction with the environment and inherent human traits and that personal transformation or development is a never-ending process of this interaction. Knowledge about oneself that includes self-esteem, determination, physical health, and a social self are key factors (FWDP nd:2-3). These factors are individual aims a person has to strive for in order to reach the bigger goal.

Awareness of one's physical capacities, a self-concept, self-esteem, and self-determination are the elements that constitute one's identity (FWDP 1985:17). These are the
factors a person has to concentrate on in a first step of transformation. Then to put this identity or self into the wider context of society, culture, economy will help to create a stable basis that is essential for a healthy lifestyle.

Here a person is seen as a part of a whole. To be able to live in a community and not disrupt it but be part of it, an individual has to learn a certain kind of behavior. The basic idea here is that humans and nature react upon each other, so human law is a reaction and often a reflection of natural law. The practical knowledge that is necessary for right judgment and discernment of acceptable behavior is gained by looking at the environment as a whole (Lombardi & Lombardi 1982:20). The bottom line here is that people are not outside the environment but an integrated part of it. So in order for the environment to function smoothly they must not put themselves above or outside it through destructive behavior; this goes for the social as well as for the natural environment.

So individuals and environment constitute a whole and have an effect on each other. An unhealthy environment can create unhealthy individuals which in turn perpetuate the former. The Medicine Wheel as a symbol for wholeness can be employed to offer a focus for the individual to concentrate on. It fulfills the requirements of a symbol to stand for an inner experience or an emotion. It is
outside the individual but expresses something inside the individual (Fromm 1960:12).

A symbol can add new values to an object or operation (Eliade 1969:178). In the context of substance abuse the Medicine Wheel can be used to symbolize the major goal of the individual, wholeness of the environment of which the individual is a part. For Native Americans it also means a return to a major concept that is the basis of many of their cultures.

Teachings

The FWDP offers the Medicine Wheel as a tool. It shows how each person is part of a wider context in which different aspects are interrelated. Gaining knowledge about oneself is one goal of a drug or alcohol dependent individual and an important step in achieving this goal is to understand this relatedness and one's own role in this relationship.

The Medicine Wheel is divided symbolically into four regions according to the four cardinal directions. In this way the teachings follow a natural pattern like the turning of the seasons. The key factors of each direction that can be related to the substance abuse problem will be discussed.

East: is described as the place of birth or where the
journey around the Wheel begins. The main factor for this direction is the awareness of the present moment. Looking to the future or the past keeps people from looking at the present activity. It is this concentration on the present that makes physical tasks possible. To choose an activity like beadwork, hunting, etc. and then to totally concentrate on it is described as a person's merging with the activity at hand. This is the necessary first step in acquiring willpower (FWDP 1983:42-47).

South: is the place of physical strength and sensitivity. Important here is to learn to control and test one's body, or in short, to learn discipline. This also includes the realization and control of feelings. Learning to choose and to pursue goals is the main factor in this direction. To acquire the ability to think clearly and to deal with emotions such as violence is an important focus in this part (FWDP 1983:48-52).

West: is the direction of dreams, prayer, and meditation. Here is emphasized the importance to stick to one's challenge. Prayers and meditation are helpful if the experience becomes painful. What is essential is that a prayer is interpreted as a travel to one's center. This may lead to experience the connection between the human spirit and the rest of the universe. To set aside a certain place for prayer might help in this exercise (FWDP 1983:53-61).
North: is the place of wisdom. At this point it should be possible for the individual to think, analyze, understand, etc. These abilities can be developed if the individual decides so and has the necessary determination. This is also the place of fulfillment where the individual can complete the goals he or she has set. It is also said that the journey around the Wheel or through these exercises may start over again (FWDP 1983:62-65).

These are only a few examples of how the Medicine Wheel as a symbol may be used as a guideline. Within the Wheel there are other symbols like the four directions, and related to each direction are more symbols still. But most important is how the Medicine Wheel symbol itself is applied to a specific problem.

There are four stages that can be described as exercises. These include the acquisition of certain skills, e.g. concentration, physical and emotional discipline, willpower, and a number of mental skills that help to cope with problems.

The FWDP has developed a very detailed curriculum for the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse. This curriculum attacks the problem on a more complex basis. For this purpose a holistic approach is used that is divided into three steps:

On the individual level all four aspects of being have to be developed: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual.
On the family level relationships are also divided into four segments: grandparent-grandchild relationship, marriage relationship, parent-child relationship, and sister-brother relationship.

On the community level the domains that affect the health of the individual and the family are political, economic/environmental, social, and spiritual/cultural (FWDP 1988:83-85).

Together the four segments are illustrated as a circle. The FWDP uses this one symbol in the form of the Medicine Wheel as the basis to express numerous values and relationships. But beneath these different aspects the underlying idea is wholeness.

The Medicine Wheel symbolizes the wholeness of the individual, the family, and the community. What makes this symbol really interesting is, that it leaves room for many other symbolisations within it. The symbols that can be put in the place of the four directions are endless and can be interchanged depending on the problem or context at hand. The aspects of a symbol may change but the function remains the same (Eliade 1969:16). The function of the Medicine Wheel symbol still is to affect emotions and communicate information/teachings (Ortner 1979:92). In this sense it is used as a key symbol in this particular context. Its function as a summarizing symbol becomes obvious in that it expresses the underlying idea/ideal
of health (for both individual and community). Its function as an elaborating symbol can be seen in the directions/teachings each of the quarters symbolizes (Ortner 1979). The circle or Medicine Wheel as a symbol seems to be very adaptive and can easily be applied to a specific problem like substance abuse.

In this context also belongs the concept of health. In a previous chapter it has already been discussed that the Medicine Wheel is associated with the Native American conception of health. In this particular context health becomes even more important. It has spiritual, cultural, social, economic, political, psycho-motor, cognitive, volitional, and psychological dimensions. All of these must be integrated into one person, one family, one community, and one nation (FWDP nd:10). All these aspects and their relationship with each other can be symbolized by the Medicine Wheel.

The health concept has its roots in the attitude toward the world and human's place in it. Almost anything can be medicine because it acts on body, mind, and spirit (Lombardi & Lombardi 1982:29). In this way health can also be seen as an interrelating agent that can be expressed in the Medicine Wheel symbol.

Spirituality has already been mentioned and to understand its importance the term needs to be discussed further. Spirituality is seen as an integrated part of each human
being and is part of the everyday life of every human being. This is a major difference to the worldview in industrial societies where it is common to think of different aspects as unrelated, separate entities. An aspect like spirituality also may pose a problem in this kind of worldview because it can hardly be proven by common scientific means and therefore tends to be ignored or even ridiculed by members of these societies. So the major step that has to be taken to understand the Medicine Wheel, its symbolic contents, and its importance for Native American people is to overcome this prejudice against this important aspect.

One of the principles on which the Medicine Wheel in this context works is that human beings are material as well as spiritual beings. Spiritual here is defined in terms of four related capacities. First, the capacities to formulate and/or respond to non-material realities like dreams, ideals, purposes, aims, and theories. Second, the capacity to accept these realities as representations or manifestations of unknown human potential (FWDP nd:15). Third, the capacity to give these realities symbolic expression. Fourth, the capacity to use this symbolic expression to guide action to translate potentiality to actuality. Among the underlying values of spirituality are honesty, love, wisdom, justice, courage, respect, etc. (FWDP nd:16).

The basis of understanding spirituality is the realization
that certain experiences like dreams or visions but also ideas are part of human reality. People outside the Native American societies tend to exclude these things from their reality because often an experience like a vision is lacking "scientific proof". To accept these realities as part of the human potential is essential for an individual to get to know their own personality better.

The Medicine Wheel as a symbol is the expression of spiritual experiences and ideals, it stands for the wholeness of the universe in which humans have a firm and secure place. The reality of these spiritual experiences is called "spiritual authenticity" in recognition of an ideal that can only be expressed in a symbol (Eliade 1969:16). In terms of wholeness the ultimate solidarity of humankind, if it exists, can only be felt and expressed at the level of symbols (Eliade 1969:17). The Medicine Wheel is the means by which a spiritual experience and an ideal can be formulated and expressed.

The Medicine Wheel symbol seems to be the ideal tool to show how different parts of human life are interrelated. It can be used to show this on different levels, the individual, the family, the community, and the national.

It can be concluded that the Medicine Wheel is a very adaptive and flexible symbol that can be applied to a very general context like the Crow society but also to a very specific context like the drug and alcohol problem. The
fact that it can be divided into four sections, according to the four cardinal directions that play such a major role in Indian belief systems, is an important advantage. This allows the development of a step by step program that is designed to break away from substance abuse or to prevent this problem in the first place. Into each of the four sections values and traditional teachings can be plugged in that in themselves can be expressed in numerous symbols. In this way the Medicine Wheel serves not only as a symbol but as a guideline for people with a specific problem.

As a symbol the original meaning of wholeness is still present and very essential. It is the ultimate expression of the interrelatedness of each human being with the environment and thus the Medicine Wheel again deserves its term as it stands for the ultimate idea of health.

Willpower

The teachings of the Medicine Wheel emphasize willpower as a necessity in order to change an unhealthy lifestyle into a healthy one. Because willpower is really the driving force for an individual to change and develop this aspect will be discussed in more detail in this section.

At the basis of willpower is the decision to change. To decide is an act of will and in this context it is important to discover and develop qualities that may help
to change one's lifestyle (FWDP 1985:34). Without this act of will these qualities remain hidden.

The Medicine Wheel helps to discover these qualities in that it serves as a mirror for each individual. It can be used as a model for what an individual could become which might be something else for each person (FWDP 1985:35). The focus in this section will be the learning experience or what is often called the "journey around the Wheel". By looking at the different aspects of each stage, a few of which have been discussed in the previous section, a person may recognize some that are familiar or that represent familiar feelings whether these are positive or negative. This is meant when the FWDP describes the Medicine Wheel as a mirror (FWDP 1985:35). It also offers aspects that a person might choose as a goal and so the Wheel shows what may be in the future. In this sense it reveals a vision.

The central idea here is that a commitment has to be made to experience these stages which might become a lifelong journey (FWDP 1985:37). This is why one of the project's principles is a lifelong learning experience. How to live as individuals and as members of a family or a community in ways that are life-preserving instead of destructive requires a serious commitment. Learning is the fundamental dynamic of human development (Bopp 1988:5). This commitment is enormous for a person with problems
and willpower is essential in this regard. The Medicine Wheel with its multiple symbolic capacities is employed to help the individual to develop this essential capacity. The four directions are again filled with symbolic meanings that relate to willpower.

East: it takes willpower to make the decision to set goals for oneself. An important point is to make these goals visible in order to be able to concentrate on them. The FWDP offers the symbol of the mouse that may help to learn the first step in the development of willpower. The mouse does everything she does with all of her tiny being (FWDP 1985:45-46). This symbol seems to be well chosen. A person that is overwhelmed with problems may feel small indeed, seeing that there is a creature that does all the things it has to do to survive and never minds its size might be a picture of hope.

South: having developed a first sense of willpower and the ability to concentrate, it is time to decide which goals to pursue. It needs discipline to stick to these goals and not look for one that seems easier to reach if problems arise. So a person needs a lot of determination which is an aspect of willpower. The red willow tree is the symbol for determination because it is strong and flexible and can survive flood, fire, severe winter, and droughts (FWDP 1985:52). This is something a person can think of, or visualize, when it becomes hard to pursue
the goals. A symbol like the red willow tree offers something to concentrate on in a moment of indecision or doubt.

West: a person might experience times during the learning process in which it seems easier to give up than to continue, especially if new problems arise or no immediate success is felt. So perseverance, power, and great strength are necessary. The FWDP has chosen several symbols that express these qualities. Thunder and lightning stand for power. Strength is a quality that comes from within a person and so the bear is the symbol for it because he retires to a dark place to gain strength for a new summer. The turtle is the symbol for perseverance (FWDP 1985:53-54).

North: after passing through three stages in the development of willpower a person should be able to deal with specific situations, analyze them and solve problems. But a final lesson still has to be learned, that of detachment and balance. This means that a person should not get carried away by emotions but be able to make conscious decisions to act and then stick to these decisions (FWDP 1985:66-68). The learning process will start over again at this point and a person might be able to reach higher levels of willpower.

What becomes obvious in the above passage is how closely symbols are related to emotions. They can be employed to express emotions but also to trigger them. The many symbols
that can be related to willpower make it clear that a symbol can be used not only to express what a person feels at a particular moment but also what one might want to feel. To have the strength of a bear is something a person may wish for and the visualization of a bear may be helpful to achieve the feeling of strength.

So symbols are indeed a vital factor in changing a person's attitude towards the self or towards the world. This is an important realization when dealing with a problem like alcohol and drug abuse. One central theme in the conception of symbolism is the human response (Langer 1979:24). Symbols are not randomly chosen but are expressions of emotions that are very concrete, very real. They also can be carefully selected to visualize an abstract concept, e.g. willpower. Symbols help to translate a concept like this into a picture. This makes it easier to concentrate on it. So the relationship between humans and symbols is certainly not a passive one but is very constructive (Langer 1979:24).

The Medicine Wheel is an extremely useful device to express abstract concepts which seems helpful in concentrating on these concepts. The different symbolic contents of its four quarters can be connected to a meaningful whole. In this way it can be shown how different aspects of human life are related.
Lifestyle

In the FWDP the change towards a different lifestyle is called "healing" and it is thought that the healing of an individual goes hand in hand with the healing of the entire community (Bopp 1986:26). This implies that changes in the community have to be made. The basis for an improved lifestyle are traditional Native American values. Because the project is an inter-tribal one the weight is put on values that are more general; they include respect for others, sharing, cooperation, and self-reliance (Bopp 1988:53).

The root of the substance abuse problem is thought to be loss of identity. Members of an Indian community can no longer identify with the traditional values but also cannot reject them completely. The identity confusion and alienation makes people susceptible to alcohol and drug abuse. By keeping the focus on the more general values people are led to a new/old identity. It also allows for much freedom in the choice of lifestyle whether this be a "modern" or a more "traditional" one (Bopp 1988:53).

In a previous chapter it has been discussed how the identity of a people is related to the worldview or philosophy that is expressed in the Medicine Wheel. In this context identity becomes an essential part of a
person's healing and/or learning process.

A reason why the Medicine Wheel symbol is so useful for the FWDP seems to be that it can express the values named above. The Medicine Wheel is not only used on the abstract level but also in activities like powows and ceremonies that are part of the curriculum of the FWDP (Bopp 1988:84). In the circle people can learn to express their feelings, experiences, and visions. It can be said that the Medicine Wheel is reintroduced into the community as a device to formulate an identity. This is the basis on which a healthier lifestyle can be built.

To understand the effect of the Medicine Wheel in real life, it is necessary to see how it is incorporated into the envisioned lifestyle in this context.

The exercises discussed in the previous section should be a part of an individual's daily routine. A number of activities, e.g. dancing, are included in the curriculum of the FWDP (Bopp 1988:1). This includes the Medicine Wheel into the everyday life of a person. But activities like these cannot be seen as separate from the rest of the life of an individual or a community. So almost everything the FWDP does is formulated in a circle. An example is the circle of curriculum development, training, community and program support, and networking and information service with research and development as central concerns (Bopp 1988:1).
An example on the community level shows that different aspects are interrelated and any one of them can be chosen as starting point to solve communal problems. Environmental issues, education, land claims, leadership and administration, health, economic development, housing, social services, elders and youth, family, women, abuse (physical, drugs, alcohol) are all parts that constitute a community (Bopp 1988:8).

The purpose in designing development models as a circle is to show the individual aspects and their relationship with each other. In this regard the FWDP goes beyond the immediate problem of drug and alcohol abuse that cannot be isolated from other issues. Here the holistic approach is emphasized and to begin to work on any issue means to work on the whole problem of human development (Bopp 1988:8).

There are two levels on which the Medicine Wheel is used, the individual and the community level. It seems that emotions play a bigger part on the individual level than on the community level where working models are more in the foreground. Both aspects can be seen as a complementary whole to which each individual contributes his or her part. That the Medicine Wheel can be employed on both levels, in the spiritual/emotional as well as in the material realm, demonstrates the adaptability and flexibility of this symbol as a "key symbol".
The symbolic meaning of the Medicine Wheel, wholeness, is still there but in this particular context also has taken on new meanings. History constantly adds new meanings to a symbol but they cannot destroy the structure of a symbol (Eliade 1987:137). So the basic symbolic content of the Medicine Wheel is combined with a number of new meanings that are adapted to or derived from a particular context. In this way the Medicine Wheel is a summarizing symbol in terms of its basic symbolic content, but also an elaborating symbol that can be filled with symbolic meanings according to a particular cultural/social background.

In the previous chapter the Medicine Wheel was discussed primarily as a religious symbol. In this chapter it seems to be used in a more profane context. Both areas cannot be seen isolated but have to be put into a wider social context. A symbol then has social meaning that is found in the religious, political, and economic area (Duncan 1968:31). This is one reason why the Medicine Wheel can be used in a context that is not primarily religious but is focused on a specific social problem.

In the Native American worldview the religious aspect is not separated from everyday life. In fact, there is no word for 'religion' in any Indian language (Brown 1992:2). Religious beliefs are integrated parts of a whole culture. To separate these beliefs from the rest of a
culture means to tear apart the whole. It might have been this departmentalized thinking, that has an effect on how people organize their lives, that may have caused problems for Native Americans in the first place, e.g. the loss of their identity. In an effort to restore a healthy lifestyle the spiritual/religious aspects are taken into account and again made part of the whole.

The Medicine Wheel as a symbol owns another capacity that has not been mentioned yet. It serves as an intermediary between the spiritual/religious and the secular areas of human life. The spatial expression for this intermediary would be a Medicine Wheel stone structure that may help to visualize the symbolic contents of the Wheel. In terms of religion this form of the Medicine Wheel would become a manifestation of something sacred, of a spiritual experience or emotion. In this instance it would open a communication between the religious and the secular (Eliade 1987:63). The Medicine Wheel would be the very visible expression of a person's spiritual aspect (visions, goals, spiritual emotions). It would also constitute a link to the secular problem of alcohol and drug abuse in that it makes the visualization of the traits possible that have been discussed earlier.

By following the teachings of the Medicine Wheel and developing the necessary willpower a person may find the strength to change his or her lifestyle and thus achieve
the goals that have been mentioned in the beginning. The Medicine Wheel as a symbol can be applied to a specific problem oriented context and so seems to be very flexible and adaptive. The basic form of the Wheel, the circle, retains its main symbolic meaning of wholeness. This is an essential part of a functioning individual and a functioning community. It demonstrates that both consist of individual aspects that have an effect on each other. The Medicine Wheel symbol also allows the inclusion of a multitude of other symbolic expressions because it can be divided into different sections that are still connected through the circular form. In this sense the Medicine Wheel can be interpreted not only as a religious symbol but also as a useful teaching device that still has a purpose and meaning in a secular modern context.
Chapter VI

Preservation of Medicine Wheels

In this chapter the importance of Medicine Wheel stone structures in the wider context of Native American and American heritage will be discussed. Medicine Wheels are not only archaeological or historical sites but are an integrated part of a worldview that is still lived by today. These stone structures still have a meaningful purpose in the modern context and therefore have to be preserved.

The following model will demonstrate the four steps that are necessary to accomplish the preservation of Medicine Wheels. It will also be shown that they are not only associated with Native American identity but also with American history in a wider sense. This leads the discussion out of the solely Native American context into a context that also includes non-Indians.
The goal is the preservation of Medicine Wheel sites. In order to do this some kind of action is necessary. It should be directed towards a greater awareness of American Indian issues in the general public. The creation of awareness of Medicine Wheels is not only essential among Native Americans but especially among people outside the Native context. Medicine Wheel stone structures have to be interpreted as parts of the wider context of Native American heritage and American history as a whole.
An article from the Char-Koosta News that appeared in 1992 demonstrates a problem that seems to be common in the discussion on Medicine Wheel sites. The issue was that apparently some rocks had been moved during a ceremony at a Medicine Wheel site that was defined as a National Historic Landmark. The question that arose was, whether the movement of rocks during Indian ceremonies was allowed or not. The director of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation came to the conclusion that it was not up to them to make a decision like this (Char-Koosta News 1992:6).

The problem here is twofold. First, Medicine Wheel sites are treated like relics from the past. This can create problems when they are actively used today. Medicine Wheels are certainly historical sites. But this does not mean they have become useless. On the contrary, they are very much alive and used today. This does not seem to be realized by a number of people and agencies. Second, who owns Medicine Wheels seems to be a major problem. Federal agencies like the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation feel responsible, but they are not the people who use Medicine Wheels. The stone structures are an active part of contemporary Native American life. So the split
responsibility between Native Americans and Federal Agencies seems almost irrational.

One Indian informant pointed out that the question of who has built Medicine Wheels and who "owns" them is not too important. Different people use the same Medicine Wheel for different purposes and it is the symbolic content of the Wheel that is the vital part for each people. The importance of Medicine Wheels for Native Americans seems to be ignored or not realized by the mainstream society. So Medicine Wheel sites, e.g. the Big Horn Medicine Wheel in Wyoming, are subject to a range of abuse, disrespect, and damage.

One of the issues that face Medicine Wheel sites is timber sales like the one the US Forest Service proposed in 1992 within a three mile area of a Medicine Wheel (Hubbard 1992:1-2). This demonstrates the ignorance mentioned above. Obviously the US Forest Service is in a more powerful position. A short sentence from another news article speaks volumes, "Representatives of Indian tribes and area groups have been invited by federal and state officials to a meeting here to discuss the future of the Medicine Wheel National Historic Landmark" (Sheridan Press January 1993).

Destruction of Medicine Wheel sites through 'development' projects like timber sales is only one problem. Another threat is tourists. The Big Horn Medicine Wheel seems to be a major attraction counting thousands of visitors during
the three month summer season. The Forest Service, responsible for the site, and tribal groups try to work out a management program to handle the masses (Riley 1993).

It is interesting to note that an agency like the Forest Service is burdened with a contradictory obligation. On the one hand it is asked to handle timber sales, on the other, it is expected to protect sites from destruction from exactly these actions.

So vandalism, tourism, and development all work to destroy religious and cultural sites of Native American heritage. The American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 put these sites under protection. All that did was to turn an open and deliberate destruction into a more subtle activity like the building of roads and recreational areas (Hughes 1991:24). One Indian informant compared Medicine Wheels to churches. To build roads through St. Paul's Cathedral or to designate St. Peter's as a "recreational area" seem to be an impossibility. But it is exactly this difference in attitude towards basically the same structure that is the problem.

It becomes apparent that something very fundamental is wrong when it comes to understanding Medicine Wheels. The major problem seems to be that Medicine Wheel sites do not trigger the same feelings of reverence or awe in people that are not Native Americans than places like the above mentioned Christian sites. The sacredness of land is
primarily an emotional experience. People can experience a feeling of unity with a place that is complete. Certain places can evoke the feeling of being within something bigger, more powerful than ourselves (Deloria 1991:2930). These can be places that are geographically unusual and so create a difference to everyday life; another example would be a place of historical importance and remind of a people's past (Bender 1991:322-323). This feeling of reverence seems to be present when non-Indians approach a Christian cathedral but not when they approach a Medicine Wheel.

Once they understand that Medicine Wheels express the same emotional experience for Native Americans, they will be more willing to appreciate these sites as sacred places and not just as tourist attractions or archaeological curiosities.

**Action**

The action that will have to be taken toward the preservation of Medicine Wheels has to go beyond what is done now. Up to today numerous meetings between Indian people, federal and state officials, and various organizations such as the Medicine Wheel Alliance have been held. A problem in this debate seems to be that the responsibility for the site is divided between Native
American people and the Forest Service. However, in an article from January 1993 is noted that the Forest Service managers began working directly with Indian tribes (Star Tribune 1993).

Some of the short-term management decisions include provision for controlled pedestrian traffic, prohibition of placement of any article on the site (except for ceremonial purposes), provision of interpreters to educate visitors to cultural and traditional importance of the Medicine Wheel, distribution of a brochure on proper etiquette and respectful behavior, plus numerous other issues (Keown February 1993). So some efforts are made but the problem of long-term management still is not solved.

What seems to be most important is the education of the public on the purpose and meaning of Medicine Wheels. But words alone will be insufficient. The reason being that words alone cannot really instill an emotion for a place that is related to a different culture. Most non-Indians lack the historical perspective of places because they have not lived on the land long enough (Deloria 1991:31).

The historical perspective mentioned here is an important aspect in this discussion. It often seems like the history of this land is divided into Native and non-Native history. If US officials and Native Americans want to work together on the Medicine Wheel issue, it seems appropriate to use a different approach to the history of the US. It should
be realized that a big part of history has been shared by both parties and both sides had and have an impact on one another. To bring this to the consciousness of the public would be an essential step towards acquiring a different attitude towards Native American issues.

Medicine Wheels represent the identity of a people without who American history as it is would be unthinkable. Although the public is aware that these sites are still used, it seems that it is difficult to grasp the true meaning of these symbols in the contemporary setting. A more inclusive approach to history would be necessary to better understand Native peoples and their ways of life as it is represented by the Medicine Wheel. This could begin at an early age in the classroom where Native and non-Native history could consume equal time.

Medicine Wheel sites are used by different Native peoples for ceremonies. The Forest Service acknowledges this but manages the sites as recreational areas for tourists. This seems to be a contradiction. Tourists certainly can be an advantage in terms of raising awareness for Indian issues, provided they are controlled. But in treating a sacred site merely as a tourist attraction certainly does not protect its sacredness; it also does not help people gain some respect for a different religion. This is an area where some action is needed.

"At no time do we use the term 'sacred' to describe the
significance of a place as a justification for its preservation." (Swan 1991:64). This relates to a problem that was mentioned earlier. The spiritual or sacred aspect is not taken seriously in a modern industrial society. Any protection that is afforded is more grounded in the political realm than the religious (Swan 1991:65). In a more holistic worldview, like that of Native Americans, the political and spiritual realms would be seen as interrelated and therefore would carry the same weight in any decision. A result of the departmentalized thinking in industrial societies seems to be that religion or things that are sacred rank lower than economical or political issues, or political and economic issues are raised into the realm of the sacred. It seems to be appropriate to bring these different worldviews to the attention of the public in a more direct and forceful way than has been attempted until now.

Another problem that is related to the above is that for a long time religions that are non-Christian have been disregarded as inferior or not religions at all. Although this has changed officially, this attitude is still recognizable in many subtle ways. A main factor here is that Christianity separates God/Creator from humanity, whereas Native Americans assume a place in creation that is dynamic, creative, and responsive (Allen 1986:56-57).

This may have a direct consequence on the attitude towards
land and other living creatures. Being part of creation puts people in a responsible position to take care of the other part; it also has an impact on people's identity. This is a realization that has to be taken into account. The goal here is to understand and accept different religions as equal, not as something inferior. After many centuries of being taught the opposite, this is difficult to accomplish. The complaint of an Indian expresses exactly this concern, "How do you think they'd feel if we went into church and started gawking at them?" (Sheridan Press February 1993). An emotional retraining seems to be called for.

A main symbolic meaning of the Medicine Wheel is unity, a main symbolic meaning of the Christian wedding ring is unity. Both have to be seen in their own contexts of course, but there are things and concerns that are universal and shared by all people; the concern to "belong", to "be part of" is one of them. Unity and wholeness are not experienced by human senses but as ideals. A symbol that expresses an ideal makes it possible to grasp it as a concept people can live by (Shea 1981:76).

The Medicine Wheel and its symbolic contents could be the appropriate symbol to close the gap between the concepts of both cultures. It satisfies an emotional/psychological need that people from both sides can recognize. It represents the identity of American Indians and they are
a part of American identity.

A site that is marked as a religious site cannot be marked as a historical site at the same time. This certainly reflects the non-Native worldview. A holistic approach in which history and religion are seen as equal parts of a people's culture would seem much more realistic, especially in regard of a site that symbolizes wholeness.

Because Medicine Wheel sites are actively used as religious centers, the supervision that is imposed by Federal agencies threatens Indian rights under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. The Establishment Clause assures the separation of state and church. Until recently the Supreme Court had drastically narrowed the Free Exercise Clause so that Indians are allowed to believe but can be restricted in the practice of their belief (Pevar 1992:228-229). This made the American Indian Religious Freedom Act practically worthless. Today Native Americans can practice their ceremonies at a Medicine Wheel, but these ceremonies are threatened because the future of the sites is not guaranteed.

Medicine Wheels can be managed by non-Native agencies that "allow" Native Americans to practice their ceremonies when it seems convenient. As long as they don't guarantee free and undisturbed use of the sites without outside intervention, development projects and tourist business will always be the stronger arguments. A rethinking of
how to define Medicine Wheels seems to be in order.

The fact that Medicine Wheels are religious sites necessarily makes them historic sites also. To accept Native American history, including the religious aspect, as a part of American history in general seems to be a more useful approach than a discussion on the difference between religion and history. To accept Native American religions and history as valuable and equal aspects of American belief systems and history would have to be a main goal of any action that is taken towards the preservation of Medicine Wheel sites.

In a society where utilitarian individualism and pragmatism weigh more than shared values and religious practices, the latter will be perceived as not practical or irrational. Utilitarianism tends to concentrate on the rationalization of means or on technical reason (Bellah 1976:336).

This will especially be the case with a religion that people outside Native American societies cannot identify with. This is a true threat for Indian religious practices in general and Medicine Wheel site use in specific. So it is necessary to create an awareness of Native American religions in the public. This can be done in including Indian history and religion in a public education program, preferably with Native instructors. A first step would be to guarantee Native religious practices at Medicine
Wheel sites without any rationalization attempt at why clear cuts may be more important or useful.

The actions that have to be taken to preserve Medicine Wheel sites can be summarized as follows. The sites have to be managed in terms of tourist traffic. The public has to be educated about the sites on a much wider scale than is currently proposed. This would include a rethinking of American history to include the history of Native Americans on an equal basis. The notion that one culture or one religion is somehow superior to other cultures and religions has to be eliminated. A new emotional basis for people to act upon has to be the preliminary step towards the preservation of Medicine Wheels. This basis could be created through a more relativistic view with regard to different cultures.

Another issue that has to be attacked is the departmentalized thinking that is necessary in the study of individual aspects of human lives, but has proven destructive when it comes to issues like the protection of Medicine Wheels. This is a symbol for wholeness and unity and is therefore ideal to stand for an holistic worldview. One Medicine Wheel site may be visited/claimed by different native peoples, e.g. the Big Horn Medicine Wheel as has been mentioned in a previous chapter. The ceremonies that are performed will be different ones depending on the people involved. According to an Indian informant a Medicine Wheel
site west of the Great Slave Lake in Canada may be visited only by a Cree shaman to find out what the future year would bring (Meissler 1993). This is one example of how Medicine Wheel sites are used today. But the issue in this chapter is not so much to discuss specific ceremonies but to point out that Medicine Wheels are parts of Native American life and that this should be respected, regardless of whether the ceremonies performed have a meaning for non-Indians or not. As long as political and economic/developmental aspects are ranked higher in the management plans for Medicine Wheel sites, any preservation plans will be doomed.

Awareness

An important aspect in the preservation issue is to create awareness of the importance, use, and meaning of Medicine Wheels.

So far the educational measures in this regard are planned primarily about Medicine Wheels for on-site visitors. This seems to be insufficient because of the short time a visitor will spend at the site. To "sensitize" visitors to the cultural and traditional importance of Medicine Wheels, a long-range plan on a wider scale will be necessary. A long-range plan should include Indian history, culture, and religion that are treated as essential parts
of American history, culture, and religion. Generally the impression is created that Native Americans have nothing to contribute to American history and lifestyle. History textbooks and museums as well as TV documentaries can be utilized as important influences by which the public consciousness is shaped. In terms of using different media the possibilities seem unlimited.

The emotions and beliefs of non-Indians have been shaped to mesh with machines and institutions of their world (Deloria 1991:36). The different emotional experience that can be triggered by being on a special site is not restricted to Indians (Deloria 1991:36). Non-Indians have to re-learn this experience.

To re-learn or re-discover a sacred experience and so become aware of new/old aspects of life seems to be a very real need for many people today. The Human Potential Movement is a sign of this recent concern. Here transpersonal techniques are used to achieve a sense of something that goes beyond the everyday self (Stone 1976:101). So it could be assumed that an interest in things that are sacred is present and that at least parts of the public (e.g. followers of the New Age Movement) would be willing to learn about Medicine Wheels.

An ideal measure to create awareness of Native American concerns would be to invite Native Americans to schools on a frequent basis to establish a constant contact with
the younger part of the public.

The Medicine Wheel and its symbolic content could be a good example to find common experiences and concerns for non-Indians and Indians. Symbolic meanings are based on emotional experiences and ideals. Certain experiences are shared by all humans and are symbolically expressed in certain symbols of which the circle or Wheel is one. To understand the meaning of the Medicine Wheel, non-Indians would have to heighten their awareness of these experiences. In modern industrial societies many things have been stripped of their emotional energy, that people do not respond to them anymore (Jung 1968:33). This may sound like a cliche, but what is meant here is, that people rank material concerns higher than emotional ones.

This is definitely a basic problem with regard to understanding the importance of Native American religion and spirituality. But non-Natives have the same potential for certain experiences like Native Americans. They have to be made aware of this fact and of the possibilities this would open. In the "civilizing" process people have divided their consciousness from their deeper psychological strata (Jung 1968:36). This argument seems to imply that humans in industrial societies have become insensitive towards emotional/psychological aspects that include religious experiences. This problem is related to the higher rank of material issues that is mentioned above.
A symbol with which members of both cultures can associate some experience would make a mutual understanding and respect easier. The Medicine Wheel as a symbolic teaching device can open new insights and experiences for non-Natives. In this effort the assistance of Native teachers would be essential.

Awareness has to be created on two levels, the rational and the emotional. People that live outside the Native American context have to learn to experience things that belong into the spiritual/sacred realm. Only this will make it possible to understand the importance of Native American issues in general and Medicine Wheel sites in particular. Mere lectures will certainly not be enough. With regard to the rational the contribution of Native Americans to the history and belief systems of this country has to be put into a proper perspective.

Medicine Wheels are not only important for the individual but are expressions of experiences of a community (Deloria 1991:29). This means Medicine Wheels have to be seen as integrated parts of a culture. To create an awareness of the fact that culture consists of many individual aspects that have an effect on each other is of importance. So Medicine Wheels cannot be discussed as isolated items that have no connection to Native American societies in a wider sense. The preservation of Medicine Wheel sites is dependent on this realization.
Heritage

Medicine Wheels as an important aspect of Native American identity have been discussed earlier. They have to be seen as parts of a heritage that is still important today and is part of the wider context of American culture.

Without Native Americans this culture would not be the same today. In the literature it is rarely appreciated that Native societies had an impact on the mainstream society. This perspective is surprisingly unrealistic. Different food items like corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, and turkeys are only a few items that the first settlers had to learn about from Native Americans (Weatherford 1991:112). It seems ironic that exactly these items today are considered "typical" American, meaning mainstream America, and play a major role in non-Indian holidays. They are part of American identity but also of Native American identity. It is important to find commonalities like these to bring both cultures to mutual respect.

With regard to Medicine Wheels the public has to understand the significance of them for the wider social context. The relation of Medicine Wheels to American history has been discussed above. Here it should be mentioned that it is essential to educate the public on the meaning of the ceremonies that are performed at the sites. This would
create a better understanding of Native American religion.

To integrate Medicine Wheels into the heritage of the American people as a whole it seems necessary to educate the public on a number of different aspects of Native American culture. An appreciation of the contribution of Native peoples to the heritage of America is essential to inspire some respect for an important symbolic structure like the Medicine Wheel. If this could be accomplished members of the mainstream society would realize the importance of Medicine Wheels not only for Native Americans but for themselves.

Rational arguments in the debate on the protection of Native American cultural aspects will be insufficient if not a solid basis of understanding and experience is created. The Medicine Wheel as a symbol of wholeness and unity can also be employed to stand for the wholeness of the American heritage and the unity of the people that play a part in it.
Chapter VII

The Medicine Wheel in the New Age Movement

The Medicine Wheel with its symbolic contents has a special significance today in relation to environmental problems and has become part of the New Age Movement. It is also often used as a healing device. The popularity of a Native American symbol seems to be related to the notion that these people live closer to nature or in harmony with the environment. So the Medicine Wheel as a summarizing symbol expresses this ideal. A number of people are concerned with alternative ways of life and the Medicine Wheel has become a significant symbol in this context.

The primary example in this chapter will be the Bear Tribe, a group of people that use the Medicine Wheel to express a particular philosophy of self-reliance that is a response to mostly environmental problems. The Bear Tribe will be discussed more specifically later in the chapter. Other examples would be the workbooks that are offered to achieve personal improvement and health and that are published by a number of individuals who consider themselves spiritual teachers. Each of the spiritual teachers may apply
the Medicine Wheel with different symbolic contents according to specific needs and purposes. In this sense the Medicine Wheel as an elaborating symbol provides a structure for individuals in their personal development.

The model below will show a similar relatedness between spiritual and material matters that has been discussed in the first model on the Crow. In this case the features have slightly changed.

The discussion of the model will begin with astrology as it is introduced and used by the Bear Tribe. Stars and planets are used as an aid in finding an identity and are
thought to influence the spirituality a person may develop. This spirituality is the basis for the relationship of humans with the world. This relationship is important to solve and prevent ecological problems. A new or reshaped worldview is seen as essential in living on this planet without destroying it. In terms of personal development and health, stars and spirituality are often named as the basic factors in becoming healthy and whole human beings. Healthy humans with a new or better worldview will lead a different lifestyle which is reinforced by an inclusion of astrological concerns.

Astrology

Because the Bear Tribe is the primary example it seems useful to become more familiar with it before explaining its use of astrology. This group that consists of Indians as well as non-Indians was founded in the 70's by a part Chippewa, part Norwegian who called himself Sun Bear. After an adventurous life he began teaching a philosophy that included traditional Native American elements, astrology, the Medicine Wheel, and was aimed at contemporary ecological problems as well as the spiritual well-being of individuals. Until his death in 1992 Sun Bear worked the lecture circuit and became quite popular. The mixture of cross-cultural elements in his philosophy of self-reliance and the concern
with contemporary problems seemed to have an appeal for a lot of people from all age-groups, social strata, and backgrounds. It can be said that self-reliance is the central aspect in the worldview of the Bear Tribe.

Today the Bear Tribe offers workshops, has published numerous books and articles and has grown into an organization with offices on the east and west coast. Publications usually contain a contact address and lecture tours also offer possibilities to become involved with this group. Some of the central issues that are taught are: earth awareness, personal vision, self-reliance, personal responsibility, and finding ways to preserve and protect the environment for this and future generations (Bear Tribe's Vision Statement June 1993).

The astrological pattern that is used by this group seems to be more a technique. The Medicine Wheel is based on a person's relationship with the earth than on positions of stars and planets (Sun Bear, Wabun & Weinstock 1987:181).

The Wheel is divided into four quarters according to the four cardinal directions with each direction corresponding to a timespan of circa three months, e.g. North: December 22 to March 20. Every month is related to a number of aspects like moon, animal, plant, mineral, spirit keeper, color, clan of elements, and complement. The first month in the annual cycle is the one I named as an example above. These are the aspects that are ascribed

It would go beyond the scope of this thesis to explain every aspect. The principle is that each of these aspects symbolizes certain qualities that relate to different aspects and capacities of humans and that a person can learn about in this way. The main idea is that a person travels around this Wheel, learns about each aspect and is then able to relate properly to everybody else (Sun Bear & Wabun 1992:10). The difference from the common astrological chart is that a person does not have a fixed point of identification like e.g. the libra; persons move in their experiences around the Wheel and thus learn about the qualities that are available to humans.

Although an informant who is a non-Indian member of the Bear Tribe states that astrology is not as important as the ideal of self-reliance or the symbolism of the circle, it seems that this astrological chart is an integral part of the Bear Tribe's philosophy. Also it is built on the Medicine Wheel model. The individual astronomical features and their symbolic contents can be expressed within the Medicine Wheel. This is another example of the possibilities of symbolic expressions the circular shape allows and of how the Medicine Wheel can be adapted to another specific context. In this case the symbolism relates to personal
development and growth.

It is interesting that the symbols of the astrological chart are taken from the natural environment and are ascribed partly observed characteristics. These can be related to human characteristics and the familiar images may help in visualizing these qualities.

The idea of identity, discussed earlier, is a focal point in this context again. The symbolism of the Medicine Wheel and its individual sections are closely related to the identity of a people. In this context the informant from the Bear Tribe said that she entered the Wheel as a Red Hawk. She has spent a long time learning to be a Snake and today still is in this stage after almost six years in the Tribe. This is the experience of one individual and cannot stand for the other members. But it expresses the connectedness of humans to other beings as it is symbolized through shared characteristics. The Bear Tribe assumes that each person will find some familiar trait in an animal, plant, or object that also is part of the person. This may also be a trait that is desired. To be able to define oneself in terms of one's relatedness to the surroundings and to realize that one shares characteristics is one of the central achievements for a person that is using the Medicine Wheel in this way.

Lynn Andrews in her workbook does not mention symbols directly, but she emphasizes the importance of
visualizations. She offers a crystal that stands for the power animal of a person (an animal a person chooses as identification/power source). This crystal can be looked at or touched when it is not possible to perform a ceremony, build a Medicine Wheel, etc.. The crystal gives something tangible to feel with one's hands (Andrews 1990:61).

Symbols are visualized ideas and emotions and the Medicine Wheel as an astrological chart offers numerous possibilities to express qualities that humans may strive for.

Religion can be defined as a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate humans to the ultimate conditions of existence (Bellah 1965:74). This is exactly what is shown in the astrological example. The aspects animals, moon (season), plant, mineral, etc. are parts of each individual's existence. The qualities that are ascribed to them are mostly observed and put parallel to human qualities. This results in a complex net of qualities in which humans can find their place and define their relationship to each of these aspects.

The fact that the Medicine Wheel is used as a basic model seems appropriate because it is the ultimate symbol of interrelatedness of many individual aspects.

The moon/seasons are recurrent and so can be arranged in a circular fashion. This expresses the fluidity of organization within a greater scheme (Bellah 1965:77). Everything is related and is encircled by a something
greater that humans cannot control and that might be termed the ultimate condition.

In this way the Medicine Wheel is an important aspect of human existence. According to an informant it represents the universe and the stages of our lives from birth to death and beyond.

**Spirituality**

In the example of the Crow spirituality was discussed in terms of the community as a whole, not of the individual. The Medicine Wheel was a symbol that expressed the Crow way of life and was primarily tailored to their society. An important observation is that society bends individuals to function in conformity with the symbol (Whitehead 1961:240). This is true in some contexts. But among groups like the Bear Tribe an interesting development in terms of symbolism and spirituality can be observed.

The spirituality of an individual Crow was primarily defined by the community and its interpretation of the Medicine Wheel (circle) symbol. In the Bear Tribe the astrological chart offers a wide variety of qualities that an individual might choose to explore without the restricting rules of a particular society. Everybody is free to find his or her own spiritual experiences and/or fulfillments.
To do this, the visualization of a specific quality in the form of a symbol is an important aspect in working with the Medicine Wheel. There is a relationship between architectural designs and spirituality (Campbell 1988:214). This is one reason why the Bear Tribe and others actually encourage people to build their own Medicine Wheel in their backyards. Another possibility is to draw a Medicine Wheel on a sheet of paper and then focus on each quarter and its selected qualities in a kind of meditation exercise (Medicine Eagle 1991). It has already been mentioned that the possibilities of symbolic expressions within the circle are numerous.

The old symbol of the Medicine Wheel has assumed a meaning that carries it beyond a specific society into a wider context. The basic symbolic function though, expressing a relationship of different aspects of life and according to which humans may identify themselves, is still the same.

To acquire a spiritual conscience that is in accord with the Medicine Wheel, Sun Bear offers a kind of mental exercise. Visualizing the Medicine Wheel and a particular characteristic in it, a person has to put aside the everyday life and also one's ego to become free to make complete concentration possible without any distraction. If successful, a person will experience that particular symbol or rather its qualities (Sun Bear & Wabun 1992:194). Achieving a different state of mind, one that might feel
unattached to the physical body seems to be important here. In this way different mental/spiritual experiences are possible.

The fact that every person can concentrate on a different quality should open a vast range of emotional experiences. The exercise is aimed at putting a person into balance and harmony with the surroundings and see him- or herself as part of the environment. People must strive to blend with nature and not try to conquer her (Sun Bear & Wabun 1992:195). This is the central idea of the kind of spirituality that the Bear Tribe philosophy teaches.

The spiritual view with regard to the environment has received much attention lately. A shift from the instrumental to the spiritual point of view can be observed. There are two major differences between these two viewpoints. In the instrumental the environment is seen as a tool to achieve behavioral and economic goals; the emphasize is put on material features of the environment. In the spiritual viewpoint the environment is seen as an end in itself, as a context in which human values can be cultivated; the emphasize is put on symbolic and affective features of the environment (Stokols 1991:351).

The search for spirituality seems to be a response to the many environmental problems humankind faces today. The Bear Tribe informant sums it up by saying, "We would do well to recognize the interconnectedness of all of life
as a circle before we destroy the earth and ourselves as well."

There is another aspect to spirituality in this context that should be mentioned and that relates to health. Caryn L. Summers, a former alcohol victim, has developed a workbook that is designed to help people deal with their own positive and negative personality traits, organize their daily lives, and develop a certain spirituality or rather become aware that the spiritual aspect is an integrated part of each human being (Summers 1991:94). Caryn also uses the Medicine Wheel as a model that she has divided into different sections to provide a step by step program that deals with one human aspect at a time. The aim is not only to blend each aspect (emotional, physical, spiritual) into a larger whole but to coordinate the aspects into a functioning whole. Again meditation or concentration is the key exercise. The focus here is a God image inside the self that is called the center of power. By meditating on this center personal power and so the power to change oneself is achieved (Summers 1991:94,137).

Some instructors also encourage people to develop ceremonies and personal mythologies in order to deal with past problems and acquire a feeling of being balanced. A mythology is a series of outwardly connected actions that a symbol can embody in unity (Bachofen 1967:46).
This reminds of the Crow where a relationship between mythology, ceremony, and lifestyle has been demonstrated. This principle still seems to hold true in a contemporary setting.

The reason that the Medicine Wheel symbol is one of the most basic symbols of humankind may be that it stands for very basic concerns and emotional needs.

Spirituality can concern two areas of life, the individual and the environmental. The concept of health is important for both areas and this is the aspect that seems to be closest related to the basic symbolic meaning of the Medicine Wheel.

Healing is described as an experience that is related to the spirituality of a place for people who are sensitive enough to be aware of this (Hughes 1991:15). Certain places are set aside that are often marked by features like mountaintops or trees to represent a sacred space. They are walled in to mark the boundary between holy and ordinary space (the outer rim of the Wheel). Within this boundary a natural state is kept and the present of spirit is recognized in the environment itself (Hughes 1991:18).

It has been mentioned before that the Medicine Wheel is an intermediary between the physical world and the cosmos. But to recognize this a certain sensitivity to the environment is necessary. Sometimes a tree, as the tree of life or the center pole, emphasize the intermediary
aspect of the Medicine Wheel in that it points upward. To develop this sensitivity towards the spiritual symbols may help. The symbols that are taken from the natural environment in the astrological chart above help to achieve an awareness of this environment because a person will be confronted with characteristics that he or she may have in common with other features of the environment.

The relationship between the spiritual and the physical is important in this context. The spiritual can be expressed in the form of spirits. The existence of these spirits, the earth's existence, and human's existence depend upon the maintenance of natural laws in a harmonious balance.

A law of physics states that for every action there is a reaction. This is also true for the spiritual aspect (Medicine Grizzlybear Lake 1991:52). In terms of spirituality this means that each time a spiritual place is disturbed an imbalance is caused. These spiritual places are specific localities that are called power centers and include Medicine Wheel sites (Medicine Grizzlybear Lake 1991:52).

The argument above seems to be confirmed if the current environmental destructions are interpreted as result of a loss of spirituality in the industrial society.
Ecology

A major reason why Medicine Wheels have become so popular seems to be the destruction of our ecological environment and the numerous social problems people face today. The wish to live in harmony with nature means to include the natural environment into lifestyle that is holistic. The Medicine Wheel stands for wholeness and can therefore be seen as a key symbol in this context. The concern with healthy foods would be an example. This is also a concern for the members of the Bear Tribe. That many of these problems have become a concern apparently almost simultaneously seems to have created an environment in which people started to look for alternative ways of life. It appears that the increasing use Medicine Wheel as a symbol and teaching device is a response to this search. As a symbol for wholeness and in its capacity to demonstrate the interrelatedness of environmental, personal, and social factors it seems to be an ideal tool envision an improved lifestyle.

An important realization here is the idealist/realist conflict that is cultivated in the mainstream (Sun Bear, Wabun, & Nimimosha 1992:91). Being realistic seems to imply that ideals cannot be reached and so being idealistic has become a somewhat negative term. An idealistic person
does not seem to be taken very seriously. But ideals are expressed in the Medicine Wheel exactly to provide a focus for people to achieve a realistic way of life. A balanced existence between people and environment seems to be very idealistic at this point but it has become obvious that this has become a central concern for a lot of people.

One of the central ideals for the Bear Tribe is self-reliance. In one of its publications the Bear Tribe gives directions in terms of food, house building recycling, land and water management (Sun Bear, Wabun & Nimimosha 1992).

For an informant from the group self-reliance means taking power/control over her own life. For other members of the Tribe self-reliance might mean different things, e.g. just to learn to prepare healthy food. But even this would be part of being in control over one's life.

Self-reliance is certainly a struggle because of the multiple skills that would be needed to sustain the members of a community. But aside from all these practical considerations people need a particular philosophy or worldview to give them the strength and hope to achieve a measure of self-reliance or power over their lives. The Medicine Wheel obviously provides the necessary symbolic qualities that can express this worldview or philosophy.

The key principles for each individual to be in control are keeping order, discipline, responsibility, and patience.
They are necessary for making decisions and stick\textsuperscript{10} to them, to take responsibility for one's own actions but also for the environment in a wider sense, and to slowly change one's lifestyle (Sun Bear, Wabun & Nimimosha 1992:70-74). For these characteristics or skills to develop a person may want to pass through the stages of the Medicine Wheel that have been discussed earlier. The Bear Tribe puts personal growth and awareness at the basis of a balanced relationship with the environment. The importance of personal growth with regard to the environment can be demonstrated with an example.

The Bear Tribe feels it is irresponsible to rely on wild plants too much at this time because people have reduced their numbers dangerously. But they can be used sparingly. The first step is to approach an herb with humility and respect. The herb is told why it is needed. An offering is made in form of tobacco, cornmeal, or a prayer because people cannot take from earth without giving something back. A patch is never "clear cut" so plants can multiply (Sun Bear, Wabun & Nimimosha 1992:149).

Plants are reduced in numbers so it is irresponsible to pick too many. This is a sensible conclusion. That this has become a concern reflects an attitude that has been mentioned before. The environment is viewed as a tool to be used for convenience (Stokols 1991:351). What is needed is a different attitude towards ecological matters. The
humble and respectful approach may be seen as an exercise in acquiring this attitude. To envision somebody approaching a plant with humility might appear silly and irrational. What is really meant here is for each person to be more aware of what he or she is doing and of the consequences thereof. To talk to the plant like telling it why it is needed can be seen as a small mental exercise. The act of giving something back to earth is really a symbol here. A prayer functions as a symbolic expression of the relationship of humans with earth.

Principles like the above can influence people's attitude and behavior. This is the essential basis for solving environmental problems. The Medicine Wheel can be used as a teaching device. A person can acquire this attitude by passing through the stages on the Medicine Wheel and thus become more aware of personal capacities.

Another aspect of the Medicine Wheel that is mentioned by the Bear Tribe is its use in celebrations. Members of the Tribe use the circle several times a day, e.g. they form a circle during a prayer, before a meal, or in a council. The constant use of the symbol serves as a reminder that humans and environment form an interrelated whole (Sun Bear, Wabun & Nimimosha 1992:41).

The Bear Tribe and others divide human life into different stages similar to the seasons. Youth relates to spring, summer to adulthood fall to middle age, and winter to
old age (birth and infancy are interpreted as dawn) (Sun Bear, Wabun & Nimimosha 1992:45). As each person passes through these stages celebrations are held to mark the passage from one stage to another. One reason for these celebrations is to show that change means growth and not loss (it may be regretful to have to leave a particular stage) (Sun Bear, Wabun & Nimimosha 1992:46).

These celebrations can be compared to rites of passage that are common in many societies. They particularly tend to occur in societies that are "cyclical" and where change is related to biological and meteorological rhythms (Turner 1967:93). These rhythms, e.g. seasons, are cyclic and the ideal form to symbolize them is the circle or in this context the Medicine Wheel. To divide the life of humans into similar cyclic stages may result in a feeling of being part of the environment. This may also be an emotional basis for a different attitude. In this context the Medicine Wheel is significant to symbolize the individual stages of personal development and the stages of change every person experiences.

Symbols also stand for a common purpose of a community (Whitehead 1991:241). The purpose for the Bear Tribe is self-reliance and a balanced relationship with the environment. This seems to be a concern many members of the group and of the general public have in common. A philosophy or belief system that is based on a specific
concern is likely to change rapidly and may become highly compromised (Borhek & Curtis 1975:66). In this context the change would depend on the success of the teachings of the Bear Tribe and other similar groups and individuals.

New religious orientations have been a result of specific needs of people in the past (Wuthrow 1976:283,293). The use of the Medicine Wheel can be seen as a result of the need of people to solve major environmental and social problems. As long as these problems remain unsolved, it seems likely that this symbol will become increasingly important. The reason being that it is extremely adaptive to specific contexts and expresses basic human emotions and ideals that are closely related to an improved lifestyle.

**Lifestyle**

One of the major concerns for the Bear Tribe is to leave the city environment and to live closer to the land. Therefore the instructions are offered of how to buy land, build homes, plant gardens, can foods, make clothes, trade, or establish a home industry to become more self-reliant (Sun Bear, Wabun & Nimimosha 1992).

These instructions may not be practical or desirable for every member of the group. For an informant life changed more in terms of her feeling about herself and her "place
in the Wheel of life”. She finds comfort and encouragement in the Medicine Wheel philosophy. The Medicine Wheel is a symbol for Life as a great web and alone this realization seems to be comforting. To actually live by this realization may change the lifestyle of an individual to various extents.

Health is a major concern for people who try to change their lifestyle and the term is used frequently in different contexts. It seems like things are evaluated in terms of their state of health. Evelyn Eaton, closely related to the Bear Tribe during her lifetime, notes that people can learn to take control over their physical/mental health (Eaton 1989). To learn to think and decide independently from medical specialists and authorities is an important aspect of self-reliance.

Holistic healing includes many things contemporary medicine has ignored for a long time. But this seems to change and to experiment with new ways of healing appear to be a trend in various industrial societies. Evelyn found doctors in the AMA (American Medical Association) who have realized that healing also takes place on a spiritual level (Eaton 1989:194-195).

Evelyn meanwhile has died of cancer. But to take this as evidence for the worthlessness of alternative or holistic ways of healing would be typical for the cynicism that can sometimes be observed among scientists. The important
aspect here is not to try to live as long as possible but to try to live well and accept that what cannot be changed in a mature and graceful manner. News reports on the topic of how to deal with disease and death and the discussion on euthanasia reflect the concern of the public. New movements and organizations like the Bear Tribe are not simply a reflection of religious unrest, but are part of a broader wave of what is called "countercultural" lifestyles and social arrangements (Wuthrow 1976:292).

In the envisioned lifestyle of the Bear Tribe religion would be an integrated factor that would have an influence on everyday activities. To achieve a lifestyle that is holistic the religious aspect has to be part of it. According to the Bear Tribe informant, a former certified speaker of the United Methodist Church, one does not have to discard one's religion in order to establish a new lifestyle (Meissler 1993). Elements that correspond to the new teachings and principles can be included. The Medicine Wheel offers a wide range of possibilities for the symbolic expression of different elements, it is not bound to one specific religious belief.

A new lifestyle cannot be established from one day to the next on the basis of rational arguments alone. The foundation for a change in attitude has to be a particular worldview or philosophy that holds the promise to fulfill the needs of the people. To express emotions, ideals, or
a worldview is an essential part of a symbol. The Medicine Wheel as a symbol for a holistic worldview and for health seems to be able to express this philosophy.
Conclusion

This discussion on Medicine Wheels began with an archaeological overview. Several individual stone structures have been analyzed to provide a background to better understand the purpose of Medicine Wheels. Important were the artifacts that have been found at the sites because they offered some indication of the possible use of the structures, e.g. the buffalo stones that may have been used in the Calling of the Buffalo ceremony. Other theories named the vision quest or the Sun Dance Lodge as possibilities. The major theory however was that some Medicine Wheels may have been built as astronomical observatories.

To understand the significance of Medicine Wheels the basic symbolic meanings of this symbol has been discussed. This included an analysis of the term "medicine" as an important aspect of Native American societies.

By analyzing the symbolic meaning of Medicine Wheels it then could be demonstrated that they indeed can be associated with astronomical features. This was shown in the example of the Crow. In this context astronomical features were translated into mythological personalities that brought order into the universe of the Crow. This order was reinforced through ceremonies that confirmed
the acts and identities of the mythological characters. Important elements were the life-giving force of the sun/Sun, the male-female complement and of course the creation act in a circular fashion. The roles these elements played were important in so far as each contributed to the existence of the people and to the order of the universe. This was reflected in a lifestyle in which male and female activities were, though different, of equal value.

The Medicine Wheel symbolism is expressed in that all these factors are related and work together to form one meaningful whole. At the beginning the act of creation was performed in a circular fashion. It was a symbolic act and the ultimate expression of the relatedness of everything that exists. This realization formed the framework for a worldview and found its expression and confirmation in the Medicine Wheel symbol.

A very specific context in which people use the Medicine Wheel as a teaching device was discussed next. With regard to the contemporary drug and alcohol problem a program offers traditional values that Native Americans can use as guidelines in order to become free of their dependency. The main problem here seems to be to get and keep a focus on one's goals. So a number of elements from the natural environment are taken to express values and characteristics that can be achieved or experienced. The elements, e.g.
animals, are expressed symbolically in the different quarters of the Medicine Wheel. To be able to follow these teachings or guidelines willpower is an essential prerequisite for a person.

The Medicine Wheel as a symbol has been discussed on two levels in this context, the individual and the communal. On both levels the primary symbolic meaning, wholeness, was significant. Only a person that is healthy can be called whole and only a healthy community in which the relationship between different factors is stable can also be called whole. In addition it has been shown that the Medicine Wheel symbol allows the inclusion of numerous symbols that seemed useful in this context. The major symbolic expression of unity and wholeness and the different symbolic contents that can be chosen according to the needs of the context are two characteristics of the Medicine Wheel as a symbol.

The discussion on the preservation of Medicine Wheels showed the importance of these structures for contemporary Native Americans and also for the American public generally. Identity was a key term here because Medicine Wheels symbolize and reinforce elements of Native American worldview that still are important today. It has also been pointed out that Medicine Wheels can be seen as part of the wider American history. To bring the significance of Medicine Wheels to the awareness of the public will have to be a main goal in the preservation efforts. The two
major problems that have to be solved would be the exclusion of Native American history as influential part of American history and the exclusion of assumed impractical (unprofitable) aspects like philosophy and spirituality.

The significance of the Medicine Wheel symbol with regard to environmental and social problems has been discussed in the last chapter. It seems to fulfill the emotional needs of people that look for improved ways of life. The Medicine Wheel also is used to express elements of personal growth and communal improvement. Its two main characteristics may be the reason why this symbol has become so important in the New Age context. Wholeness or the interrelatedness of individual elements in human life is a central concern in this context. The incorporation of individual symbols is a major advantage that allows the adaptation of the Medicine Wheel to a contemporary and specific context like this.

The Medicine Wheel as stone structure or symbol is still a meaningful device for people to express basic emotions, ideals, and concerns. Although it has been associated with Native Americans for a long time it has been shown that the Medicine Wheel is not restricted to one particular society or context. Unity or wholeness as the main symbolic meaning becomes increasingly important outside the Native American context. This can be seen as a reaction to contemporary problems and an attempt to achieve an improved
way of life.

Wholeness as the main symbolic content of the Medicine Wheel is the underlying assumption/worldview in all four of the contexts that have been discussed. In this regard the Medicine Wheel can be interpreted as a summarizing symbol in four extremely different social settings. The wish for harmony with the environment/universe seems to be the main concern that leads to the adoption of the Medicine Wheel as a key symbol.

Each of the social contexts is also related to specific lifestyles/problems. The Medicine Wheel as a key symbol can be filled with different symbolic contents according to each of the contexts with their specific needs and requirements (e.g. personal development). Here the Medicine Wheel as an elaborating symbol provides a structure through its symbolic contents by which people can organize their lifestyles and express their experiences.

Depending on the social context, different weight is put on the Medicine Wheel as a summarizing symbol and as an elaborating symbol. In the Crow context the use of the symbol was related to the community with the intent to express and reinforce a specific worldview. In the FWDP context the Medicine Wheel is more important as an elaborating symbol because its use is aimed at individuals with a specific problem. Personal development includes a clear strategy to structure one's life. The multiple
symbolic contents of the Medicine Wheel can be adapted to individual needs.

In the context of the preservation debate the weight seems to be on the Medicine Wheel as a summarizing symbol. The main focus here is to include Native American culture into the wider American culture. This is an expression of wholeness for which the Medicine Wheel can be used as an expression.

The Medicine Wheel as a key symbol in the New Age Movement seems to put equal weight on both the summarizing and the elaborating aspect. As a summarizing symbol the Medicine Wheel expresses the wish to live in a closer relationship with the environment and to create a unity between people and nature. As an elaborating symbol the symbolic contents of the Medicine Wheel can be adapted to personal visions, problems, and experiences.

In conclusion it can be said that the Medicine Wheel as a key symbol retains its main symbolic meaning of wholeness, although this can be pushed in the background in specific social contexts. The Medicine Wheel can also be filled with symbolic contents that do not eliminate the original one but rather add different aspects to it according to the specific social setting. This combination allows the use of the Medicine Wheel symbol in completely different societies and in different historic periods.
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