

TEACHINGS ON SEMEH (TOBACCO) ACCORDING TO THE ANISHNAWBE:

“Always through tobacco”, the Elders say. “Tobacco is the connector to the spirit world.”

Tobacco is the first plant that the Creator gave to Aboriginal Peoples. It is the main activator of all the plant spirits. Three other plants – sage, cedar and sweetgrass – follow tobacco, and together they are referred to as the four sacred medicines. The four sacred medicines are used in everyday life and in ceremonies. All of them can be used to smudge with, but also have many other uses. Within the Medicine Wheel, tobacco sits in the eastern door, sweetgrass southern door, sage in the west and cedar in the north. Elders say that the spirits like the aroma produced when we burn tobacco and the other sacred medicines.

Traditional tobacco was given to us so that we can communicate with the spirit world. It opens up the door to allow that communication to take place. When we make an offering of tobacco, we communicate our thoughts and feelings through the tobacco as we pray for ourselves, our families and others. Tobacco is always offered before picking medicines. When you offer tobacco to a plant and explain why you are there, that plant will let all the plants in the area know why you are coming to pick them.

When you seek the help and advice of an Elder, Healer, Knowledge Keeper or Medicine Person, and give your offering of tobacco, they know that a request may be made as tobacco is so sacred. We express our gratitude for the help the spirits give us through our offering of tobacco. Many Aboriginal Peoples make an offering of tobacco each day when the sun comes up. Traditional tobacco is still grown in some of our communities for these purposes. (Some wording is from Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 2000).

Below is a rendition of The Medicine Wheel: Representing Four Directions and Four Sacred Medicines:

