

## Fire

Fire is the first medicine but is not referred to as such very often. Without it we couldn't light our sweet grass or burn our tobacco. All fire is sacred but we often call a fire that's had tobacco offered on the ground first a sacred fire. I offer tobacco and light sweet grass in my wood stove all winter long.

The elders say that you have to watch fire like you would a child; if it gets a chance it will go over and burn something. We don't want it to burn something we hadn't planned. I put tobacco around the fire and ask it to stay where I put it.

There are a few ways we keep a fire when we are having a ceremony. But they all include the fire keeper smudging the fire and offering tobacco under the guidance of the elder conducting the ceremony. We have a formal fire and a non-formal fire, we sometimes joke and laugh around a non-formal fire but always become quiet when someone wants to pray. A formal fire is only for offering tobacco and praying, not sitting around it for conversation, and people are smudged before entering where the fire is located.

## Sweetgrass

Sweetgrass is often referred to as our first medicine. The reason being is it helps us remove our anger. It's also a self-diagnostic medicine where the strands of the braid represent our mind, our body, and our spirit. If we burn it, offering the smoke to the Creator, and it burns straight across, we know at that time we're in balance. If only two parts burn, then we can look at ourselves to see where we are out of balance.

The fire is always smudged with sweet grass first. The pipe is always lit with sweetgrass. The drum is always smudged with sweetgrass. I use sweetgrass first to control the energy around me, so that I can feel protected from energies that I don't want to have influencing me or the ones around me.

## Tobacco

Tobacco is also referred to as our first medicine. We offer tobacco for help and teachings. We offer the elders tobacco so they can discern our true desires and help us by praying on our behalf. We use it to protect ourselves, ask for forgiveness, or as an offering when we want to take something from the earth. We offer the smoke from tobacco so our prayers travel all the way to the Creator. We offer tobacco when we do a ceremony for help and to do the best we can to help ourselves and others.

## Fungus

Fungus attracts ALL the spirits around us. ALL of them. It is best not to use this in a ceremony until you feel sure you understand what that can mean. It also has the ability to remove the "beast" the "devil." It's up to us to discern the spirits that are left and know how to take appropriate action. We don't burn fungus until we have a good understanding of all the medicine.

## Sage

There are many different kinds of sage and their best usages vary, but they're mostly used to attract the good spirits. I would use White Sage as part of a smudge along with fungus as people entered the arbor for dancing and before they entered the circle of a formal fire. I never put sage alone in a smudge bowl and burn it. I have sweetgrass for general smudging. I use Grandmother Sage to attract the love of the grandmothers when I'm doing healing work. I use Healing Sage when I'm healing with my hands.

## Cedar

Cedar is also used along with the fungus. It's part of discerning what's around you. It can be used to remove evil or demons and at the same time our ancestors love the smell of it. The burning of it offers a space for our ancestors to work

## Red Willow

Red willow is similar to tobacco. I think of it as the very best. It's hard to acquire. It takes a lot of work to get a little.

## Circle of Life

Most call this the medicine wheel. It's an understanding of our selves. If we put a direction to it, it starts in the east going clock wise back to the east. If we break it in to quarters we start to define it more. From the east to the south I think of the grandfather and grandmother eagle. I think of the first part of my life from 0 to 20, I was a child pure, innocent and playful. When I ask for help from the eagle I ask them to remove "blank" so I can return to being pure. The eagle is also the messenger of the creator so I know my prayer is heard.

From the south to the west is grandmother of all and the grandmothers. The grandmother of all is a long topic so I'm just going to generalize. When I think of the grandmothers I think of love, forgiveness, kindness, wisdom and healing. I think of the second part of my life from 20 to 40. When I make a mistake I ask them for help to forgive myself I ask them for help to have good words for people I'm trying to help and communicate with. And I ask for wisdom to know what the right thing to say to the person I'm talking to.

From the west to the north it's the bear "master of the animals." When I consider what the words "master of the animals" mean, I think of myself being an animal, and I can ask for help from the bear and the other animals. The help we get from the animals we call medicine. When I think of medicine I think of the third part of my life from 40 to 60. When I think of asking for medicine I think what animal trait would help me, "like the wolf it hunts in a pack" if I wanted to work well with others I could ask for that medicine, the fox is sly a good hunter quiet, the beaver is hard working and industrious, the Buffalo is thought to know everything but with the way its been treated by man only the white buffalo will help him, the list goes on and on.

From the north to the east it's the creator and the grandfathers. The grandfather of all is a long topic so I'm just going to generalize. When I think of the grandfathers I think of love, teachings, understanding and strength. When I think of teachings I think of the fourth part of my life from 60 to 80. I simply ask the grandfather for teaching. Peace, Happiness and Patience. I ask understandings when I'm perplexed.

That's the circle of life, but if I'm praying I add three more.

The mother earth. The elders told me to start on the mountains and work down.

The spirit world, the sun, moon, clouds, stars, mist.

The truth, the fire that burns in my heart, the drum, the pipe.