Who we are as Anishinabe: Mike Swan

So far we have covered ceremonies, values, prophet and migration. This one is from a White Earth elder from Waubun, Mary Favorite on the Medicine Wheel. Some people will not agree on the article and some will not agree on the colors of the directions. So I do invite them to write up their version and send it to me.

As I stated in the first part of this series in March, this is part of a series of “Who we are as Anishinabe” which is meant to help provide some information about tradition, language, and culture. In no way is this meant to imply how a person should live one’s own life, or condemn someone else’s belief or values. Many people will not agree with what is written or said. Some things cannot actually be written about in the Anishinabe culture or tradition. These lessons will have to be learned in person by going to ceremonies, teachings, and listening to others who possess that knowledge. All it takes is a little faith and asemaa, ask around and give someone asemaa (tobacco) to ask for that help or direction.

Can the Anishinabe culture heal our people? Yes, it will help some, but it will not help everyone. Some of our people do not have faith, respect or values for themselves or for other people. They do not know anything about Anishinabe way of life, or have Christian values, or any other value or beliefs. However, we must respect their individual choices, and they should respect ours.

Today our people and communities are hurting and they have been for a long time. Abuse of prescription pills, illegal drugs, and alcohol are impacting us all. Too many of our people stand by and think this is okay, it is just a part of our everyday lives living here on the reservation. It’s the only way that some people can cope with living conditions, lack of jobs, poverty, everyday problems and some do it just to have so called fun or good time. It becomes a problem when it starts affecting people around us, such as your family, your neighbors, and your community.

These problems are not for any Tribal Council to address alone. The RTC is a government that can only do so much. We need to get away from being dependant on the any government for help or taking care of us. We cannot blame someone else for our problems; we need to take responsibility for our own actions. It is up to us, as individuals, as a people, as Anishinabe, to address the abuse of prescription pills, illegal drugs and alcohol, each and every one of us.

This change must come from within one’s own mind, soul, heart, and spirit.

The time is now to heal ourselves, our homes, our communities, and our reservation.

Medicine Wheel
Traditional teachings of the Ojibwa people encompassed all aspects of the person’s life, in relation to the world around them. The learning process addressed and teaches about the inseparability of the emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual dimensions. Native people believe everything happens/goes in a circle clockwise, therefore the medicine wheel is a circle divided into four quadrants.

The Medicine Wheel is an interconnected system of teachings relating to the seasons, directions, elements, colors and the cycle of life. It speaks of the need for balance, harmony and respect as bringers of happiness. It is an ancient system of traditional indigenous knowledge that many tribal peoples share under many different names.

Experience continues to be a fundamental principle of the Anishinaabe learning processes.

If you look at the Medicine Wheel, it is in four quadrants, four is a sacred number among many tribal people. Four directions, four races of people, four cycles of life, four seasons, four winds and four quarters of the moon.

We began in the east, it is the start of a new day or beginning new. The season is Spring, everything is just starting to come alive, to bud or grow, the trees, the grass, the flowers. The stage of life is infancy again because of the newness. The element is Earth, which was the first creation. The color is red. In the physical health quadrant is how a person takes care of self in a good physical way – nutrition, are your family meals healthy and nutritious; exercise, are you exercising on a regular scheduled basis; boundaries, are you aware of what are healthy boundaries; personal hygiene on a daily basis.

And in the south quadrant, everything that comes from this direction is warm, thus the season is summer, the life stage is youth. The element for the south is air, because we all need air to breathe, the vegetation to grow. The color is yellow. In the emotional health quadrant is how aware are we of our emotions – identify feelings, healthy ways to express these feelings, not
being afraid to seek help.

In the west, we are now entering the third quarter of the circle/wheel, the season is fall, vegetation is beginning to go dormant, leaves are changing and falling off their branches and the grass is turning brown, the life stage is adult, we are preparing for the completion of our circle and passing down some of the knowledge that we had learned. The element for the west is water, again an essential for growth and for us humans, without it we wouldn’t live. The color is black. In the spiritual health quadrant is how aware is a person of their spiritual being-mentor, do you have a mentor and do they practice the Native Traditional way like ceremonies cleansing or rituals such as naming, big drum; Christian such as church, baptisms, communion, or other practices of spirituality. All beliefs focus on basically the same principles, morals, values and spiritual guidelines.

The north, we are now in the final quarter of our circle/wheel, the north is cold, the season is winter, things are in the dormant stage, the vegetation, the insects, the stage of life is the elder, we have completed our circle and have passed down our knowledge to our children and grandchildren, the element is fire, to keep us warm and some of the insects and bugs that are in the dormant stage, so in the spring they will come back to reproduce and complete their circle. The color is white. In the intellectual health quadrant is how aware we need to be about our education – education is the power in the modern technological and the traditional world. Are you teaching and learning about the electronic world with your children, helping with homework, reading to your child, the seasons, tobacco to elders, fasting, language and ceremonies.

If you mix the colors of the four races of people, you will get brown, which represents the Earth.

Being able to find balance and harmony helps a person live a moral, noble, intuitive and spiritual life. Everyone needs a balanced life. Start the day by offering tobacco, praying for a good day and to ask for guidance in your life.

~ Mary R. Favorite
White Earth Elder, 2004

Keep in mind what this is in no way meant to imply how a person should live one’s own life, or condemn someone else’s or my belief or values. You should be capable of making your own decision of life yourself. Many of us will have our own interpretation or belief in the Anishinabe way of life. But if it starts affecting people around you because of substance abuse, drugs and alcohol, that is when other people like police, court system, social service, ICW and others become involve in your life.

We are working on providing more information to help expose everyone to Ojibwemowin with delegating one page in the tribal paper for kids and adults with language, puzzles, and information.
I will be asking other spiritual people around the reservation to assist in providing information in the coming months.