

Who we are as Anishinabe: Mike Swan

Although some information on ceremonies cannot be discussed, the following information was used from the website which was produced by the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, Anishinaabemowin Program - Kenny Pheasant, Director.

Ceremonies - Manidookewinan

Smudge – Nookweziganoon

The smudging ceremony is a purification ceremony. Any one of the four sacred medicines can be used. Sometimes all of the sacred medicines are used. The most common one is *mashkodewashk*, otherwise known as sage in English. Some pipe carriers and elders recommend that when people refer to these medicines, it should be in Anishinaabemowin. These medicines are picked from Mother Earth just for the purpose of purification. The four sacred medicines are *asemaa* (*tobacco*), *wiingashk* (*sweetgrass*), *mashkodewashk* (*sage*) and *giishkaandag* (*cedar*).

The smudging ceremony can take place anytime, usually before a meeting or Grand Entry at Jiingtamok (pow wow). Sometimes pipe carriers and elders recommend that this ceremony should be done if things get out of hand at the workplace or at home. The sacred medicine is lit, and some use matches instead of a lighter. Some actually use wood from a sacred fire. The smoke from the sacred medicine purifies the mind, body and spirit. The inside of rooms, especially motel rooms, should be smudged. Some people smudge when they hear bad news, such as a death or illness. Most people who smudge use a shell as a container, and usually eagle feathers are used to fan the medicines. If a person does not have eagle feathers, then other feathers are used, such as hawk feathers. The ashes that are left should not be thrown away, but scattered by the entrance at the door to symbolize that bad thoughts, words and feelings are not welcome inside.

The Four Sacred Medicines- Gichitwaa Mashkiki

Asemaa is used mainly for prayers and offerings of gifts. It is used as an offering in a sacred fire or as an offering in a prayer bundle. Its main use is for the pipe ceremony. It is a sacred medicine that was given to the first man, Nanabozo. He used it to speak to the Creator, and that tradition is still practiced today. Asemaa represents the eastern direction, the first part of the day, the first season (spring), the first stage of one's life, the first aspect of life (the mind), the first clan (the eagle), and the Oriental race.

Giishkaandag is another sacred medicine that has many uses. It can be used as a tea or used in a bath, especially with women who are with child, to nurture and purify their bodies. In the sweat lodge ceremony, giishkaandag is used to purify the area. Some Anishinaabe place giishkaandag in their shoes so that good things will greet them in their travels. The cedar tree has many medicinal qualities from the roots, bark, branches and sap. It is said that the cedar tree was the first tree to be created. Giishkaandag represents the southern direction, the middle part of the day, the second season (summer), the second stage of life (youth), the second aspect of life (the body), the second clan (the deer), and the Anishinaabe nation.

Mashkwadewashk is very common to the Anishinaabe. It has been said that it almost became extinct in this area at one time, but that because of the belief the Anishinaabe have in the power of asemaa, it is coming back. At times, the only place that it was found was in the western direction. Some place sage at doorways for protection from evil. It has been taught that a person should chew a few sage leaves before an important speech or presentation. Mashkwadewashk represents the western direction, the evening or setting sun, the third season (autumn), the adult stage of life, the third aspect of life (emotions), the buffalo clan, and the black race.

Wiingashk was plentiful at one time. Due to over-building and farmlands, the natural areas where wiingashk grew are diminishing. Wiingashk is the first plant that our Creator created, and it represents the hair of Omizakamigokwe (Mother Earth). It is a very powerful purifier. Some Anishinaabe wear wiingashk in their hair to get rid of headaches or bad thoughts; others just lay it on their forehead. Wiingashk represents the northern direction, the last part of the day (the night), the last season (winter), the last stage of life (the elder), the fourth aspect of life (the spirit), the bear clan, and the white race of man.

Talking Circle – Gichitwaa Naanagidoonwin

A talking circle is a ceremony that has strict rules. Anything that is said in the talking circle stays in that circle. Anyone who talks about anything that is said in that circle is not allowed in anymore. A group sits in a circle and talks about a certain topic or anything they want. Usually a topic is chosen. One person leads the ceremony, and usually an eagle feather or one of the sacred medicines is passed around. Everyone has four chances to say something. The feather or medicine is passed around four times. Sometimes just women have these ceremonies and sometimes it is just men, but most times it is all. These ceremonies can take place as often as needed, and there is no limit to the number that can participate.

Naming Ceremony – Waawiindaasowinan

Naming ceremonies are very important to both male and female. Most people receive their spirit name before they reach adulthood, but a person can receive it anytime. If a person wants a spirit name, there is a process that they must go through. An elder, a pipe carrier or a fluent speaker of the native language is offered asemaa to seek a name. Then the task of prayer and fasting begins. This is a long process, sometimes taking months to years before a name is decided upon. The name has to fit the person's spirit. Helpers are usually chosen by the person wanting the name or the parents of that person. When a name is decided upon, the naming ceremony begins – usually in a ceremonial lodge. Most of the time, the one who presents the name is the one to whom the asemaa was given, but this is not always the case. The name is presented to the grandfather spirits in the four directions, and everyone who is in the ceremony has to say that name after it is presented. The family usually prepares a feast and does a giveaway. Elders suggest that the person has to say his or name every morning to the four directions for about one year.

Fasting – Makadekewinan

This particular ceremony is not practiced a lot. Sometimes a person only does this ceremony once in their life. Young people are encouraged to fast before reaching the adult stage. Elders say that when a person fasts, the spirit gets stronger and the body gets weaker. Your mind is clear to receive messages from the Creator. In the old days, certain areas regarded as sacred places were chosen for fasting. A person who is fasting applies ashes to his or her face, usually making marks on the forehead and cheeks. This is to show others that they should not speak to them.

Medicine – Mashki Ki

The Anishinaabe word for medicine is translated as follows: *Mashki* means strength and *ki* comes from the word Aki, meaning the earth. So medicine simply means strength from the earth. We are taught from the medicine people that we only pick what we need, and we can only pick it when it is mature and after the thunder beings have come in the spring. Asemaa must be offered on Omizakamigokwe (Mother Earth) when the mashki ki is picked. Mashki ki should not be sold, because it is a gift from the Creator. The Anishinaabe also look at other things as medicine, such as a song, a story and even art. Some of the plants that we call weeds have a medicinal value in them. The medicine people know how to mix medicines to cure illness. The Anishinaabe were given these gifts of medicine from the Creator in many different ways.