For all Ancient Path Vision Quests, we use the Medicine Wheel as our guide, also called the Sacred Hoop. There are many reasons why this is a powerful map for the Vision Quest. Not the least of which is that it is based on natural cycles and reminds us that no matter where we live, we are not separate from these cycles. The Medicine Wheel is a tangible mechanism, similar to the labyrinth, upon which the healing of people, communities, and nations can be focused. It helps us remember our indigenous ways of knowing residing deep within us. The basic design is a circle, which has no beginning and no end. It is infinite and represents regeneration, equality, balance and continuity. Within the circle is a center-point. Lines can be drawn from anywhere on the circumference to the center. Each of these spokes represents a direction, a quality, gift or strength. On a grand scale, each human life and all life on Earth is a spoke on the great wheel. We all come from and return to the One source at the center, the Great Mystery. We all enter life with our own unique gifts and wisdom to offer to our people and our world. All the gifts together create balance and wholeness. When someone doesn’t offer their gift, because they’ve never discovered it, they devalue it, or were taught it was wrong or bad, it throws the Sacred Hoop out of balance. When we Vision Quest, we return in a humble way to the Creator to ask for remembering of our unique gifts. We cry for a vision, that will help us and our people become whole again.

The four main medicine powers reside on the cardinal directions: East, West, North and South. Almost all indigenous traditions call on the powers of the four-directions, or four-winds, during prayer and ceremony. Calling in the four-directions during ceremony creates an immediate and strong connection to the spirit world and opens a direct channel through which communication can happen. When we invoke the creative force of the Medicine Wheel, it is very powerful, and once that connection is made we want to be mindful of our words and thoughts, and we want to act authentically. During the Vision Quest you will each help to build the large Medicine Wheel at base camp, and then a smaller personal wheel at your sacred solo place.

During this particular time of history, there is much out of balance on the Earth and within the human heart and mind. More than ever the world needs people to take the sacred pilgrimage into the wilderness to pray for vision for these times. Every Vision Quest experience brings balance to the world today, because we come more into balance in ourselves. Whenever we perceive all life as sacred, with inalienable rights, that helps mend the Sacred Hoop. Whenever we sit and listen and observe the experiences of those less privileged than ourselves, desiring to understand and serve, we bring more balance and wholeness onto the Earth. This is part of what committing to Vision Quest is.

We, at Ancient Path Vision Quest, thank you for your commitment! And our commitment is to hold and protect your lives during the journey. All of us will be held and protected within the Medicine Wheel.
(Teachings of this Medicine Wheel thanks to Ohki Forest, Iroquois/Mayan teacher and healer.)
The Seven Sacred Directions

The Medicine Wheel of the plains Indians served as a compass, directing them to a life of integrity and alignment with the Great Spirit and Mother Earth. At any point one could create a Medicine Wheel by standing facing the rising sun and putting one’s arms out to the side. Before you is the East, behind the West, to your right the South, and to your left the North. The bowl of the sky encircles you. There is a color assigned to each of the four directions. Native cultures from North America, Mexico, Central and South America all have different colors for the directions as has been handed down to them by their ancestors and creation stories. I was taught by my Lakota teachers that the west if black, north is red, east is yellow and south is white. More recently the Maya elders I’ve learned from teach that east is red, west is blue, north is white and south is red. The Lakota hold their ceremonies in a clockwise manner, which they call sun-wise. The Maya, Hopi, Pomo and Miwok, Huichol and other southern groups hold that counter-clockwise is the direction of the natural cycles and that the earth changes we’re facing now are calling for humanity to return to the natural harmonics of cosmos and earth.

We will be holding ceremony according to the ancient wisdom of the Maya and Huichol, who are my ancestors, going counter-clockwise. Yet I will also be bringing in the traditions I grew up with (through my twenties), which are Lakota. And we will be inviting the spiritual wisdom of all of our paths into every ceremony and circle, because we each hold gifts for the tribe!

Maya Prayer of the 7 Galactic Directions

From the East, House of Light, may wisdom dawn in us so we may see all things in clarity.
From the North, House of Night, may wisdom ripen in us so we may know all from within.
From the West, House of Transformation, may wisdom be transformed into right action, so we may do what must be done.
From the South, House of the Eternal Sun, may right action reap the harvest so we may enjoy the fruits of planetary being.
From Above, House of Heaven, may star people and ancestors be with us now.
From Below, House of Earth, may the heartbeat of her crystal core bless us with harmonies to end all war.
From the Center, Galactic Source, which is everywhere at once, may everything be known as the light of mutual love.
Getting To Know the Directions

Most native cultures believe that all things on Earth are relatives. Therefore, all things in nature, including humans, are able to relate to one another and be in relationship. It is up to you to be open, trust your experience and develop and nourish these relationships throughout your life. Here are some suggestions of how to do this with the Four Directions:

- Find a place in nature,
- Sit facing the direction you are attuning to.
- Witness what is happening in the natural world - the movements of animals, plants, trees, waters, weather patterns, etc.
- Close your eyes and open your senses – smell the air and earth, listen to the life around you (birds, crickets, cicadas), feel the temperature of the air.
- Ask the direction to show you through symbols, colors, animals, feeling, hearing, etc., what the medicine is of this direction.
- Open and receive the medicine into your own body, what does it feel like?

What you receive, discover and sense while sitting in nature with your direction are your indicators of the “medicine” that resides in that direction. Once you come to know the directions, offer gratitude to the directions, nature and everything that has given you insights.

Building the Medicine Wheel at Base Camp

When building the base camp Medicine Wheel, we will all be gathering the stones and branches that will create the circle and direction lines. You need to address the stone and tree people with the respect of an elder and teacher. When you find a stone or branch, introduce yourself to it. You may share with it why you are there and ask if it will come with you to sit in the Medicine Wheel of the Vision Quest Community. When you have found a stone/branch that will be a part of our Medicine Wheel, be sure to offer gratitude to it. You are the caretaker of this stone/branch from the time you lift it from the Earth until you return it to nature.
The Medicine Wheel: A Physical Manifestation of Spiritual Energy

The Medicine Wheel is an example of the ancient use of symbols and symbolic thinking as a way of creating deep relationship and connections with all aspects of self, community, Earth, cosmos, time, space and spirit.

Native people were able to live in a world of deep meaning because of their complete integration with symbolic/soul-centered perception.

- The Medicine Wheel is a physical manifestation of spiritual energy.
- A mirror in which we can better see what is going on within us.
- Helps us with Vision. To see where we are and in which areas we need to develop in order to realize and become our potentials.
- It is a wheel of protection and enables us, and allows us, to gather surrounding energies into a focal point and to commune with spirit, self and all of creation.
- A major symbol of peaceful interaction among all living beings on Mother Earth. Represents harmony and connections.
- Helps us to recognize that we are intimately connected to everything else in the visible and invisible worlds.
- Helps us to recognize what our unique part is in the sacred web of life.

History of the Plains Indian Medicine Wheel

Indigenous communities all over the globe organized their living, dying, time and space around some sort of wheel symbology. Medicine wheels of one kind or another were and are the guiding spiritual force behind their social, ceremonial, educational, environmental, political, and spiritual systems. The symbol of the circle with a cross inside specifically, is found in many ancient cultures across the world, including Scandinavia, Mongolia, the British Isles, and all of the Americas.

The ancient North American Medicine Wheels that were built with stones on the earth, are mainly clustered in southern Alberta and various spots in North and South Dakota, Montana and Wyoming. Scattered across the plains of Alberta are a number of stone Medicine Wheels. Some are extremely large circles measuring 12 meters across or more. They are the remains of special ceremonial dances and spiritual events celebrated by the plains First Nations.

Historically speaking, the term "Medicine Wheel" was first applied to the Big Horn wheel in Wyoming, the most southern and one of the largest known. That site consists of a central circle of piled rock surrounded by a circle of stones. Rays of stones travel out from the central core of rock and its surrounding circle. Alberta has about 66% of all known Medicine Wheels, (46), which suggests that southern Alberta was a central meeting place of many plains tribes who followed Medicine Wheel ceremonies, which were known to center on the summer solstice.
Meaning

The Medicine Wheel is a circle divided by a line going vertically and a line going horizontally. These lines connect the quadrants of the horizons where the sun rises and sets, the north star and where the sun reaches it’s zenith. The circle itself represents the Sacred Hoop of life. When the hoop is whole, there is harmony on the planet. It symbolizes the continuation of the seasons, regeneration, the continuation of the people living in harmony with the Earth. Unity, strength, protection, infinity and spiritual continuum are all qualities attributed to the circle of the Medicine Wheel. The quadrants all come together at the center of the wheel where the qualities of each corner of the Earth is integrated into a Whole. This is the stillpoint, a place of unity and peace. This is where the Tree of Life grows, it’s roots reaching deep into the Earth and it’s branches reaching high into the sky realm, connecting matter and spirit. To relate to life in terms of the Medicine Wheel will connect you to Earth’s innate wisdom and healing energies.

Teachings of the Kaqchikel Maya regarding the counter-clockwise circle:

Everything in nature and the cosmos moves counter-clockwise. If you watch a vine grow. If you watch water spiraling. Even when you swim, which way does your body naturally want to turn? The planet spins in a counter-clockwise direction and the galaxy spirals in a counter-clockwise direction. We are out of balance on the planet, because we have been forced to move in a clock-wise manner for everything. This has created discord. We are wound up so tightly, now it is time to unwind. During the time of the end of our calendar, on your calendar 2012, the earth will go through a great purification. Anyone and any system that can’t come into harmony with cosmos and natural systems, will leave the earth.

When the Maya invoke the four-directions, they begin with the east, then turn counter-clockwise to the west, creating a line across the circle. They then turn counter-clockwise to the north, and then to the south, creating the vertical line. To each direction they bow and touch their foreheads to the earth.

The quadrants of the Medicine Wheel (in some traditions) symbolize:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>East</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>North</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>birth</td>
<td>youth</td>
<td>adulthood</td>
<td>elderhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spring</td>
<td>summer</td>
<td>fall</td>
<td>winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mind</td>
<td>body</td>
<td>emotions</td>
<td>spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>True Strength</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MEDICINE WHEEL MADE OF ROCKS AND LOGS, VISION QUEST 2009: WILD HORSE MEADOW, MONO LAKE BASIN, CA
When we hold this ancient map with respect, we will follow its instructions to a good life. The Medicine Wheel will guide us before, during and after the Vision Quest as a sacred container for the important work we are doing. It is the net that will catch us when we trip and stumble. It is the mirror that shows us a reflection of our true selves, where we can grow and where we have gifts to offer. It is a symbol of our lives and how we fit into the greater scheme. That is why this symbol has been found all over the world in most ancient cultures, the cultures of our ancestors. The Medicine Wheel lives within us, even if we don’t acknowledge it. Yet, when we do acknowledge it, it can come alive with all its medicine to help guide us.