

M4RR – October 2014

Since making the Apology to First Nations Peoples in 1986, the United Church of Canada has been on a journey of living in right relations with First Nations Peoples. I am sharing some First Nations' teachings, because I believe that through knowledge and understanding comes respect and healing, an important part of our journey together.

The Four Sacred Medicines

Many plants are used as medicines in traditional healing practices, but those most commonly used in Anishnabe ceremonies are tobacco, sweetgrass, sage and cedar.

Tobacco is always the first medicine. It is used as an offering – when you are going to harvest something from Mother Earth or when you are asking a favour of someone. If the favour cannot be carried out, the tobacco will not be accepted or will be returned. Tobacco helps us to communicate with the Spirit World, carrying our prayers to the Creator. When possible, use natural tobacco rather than the chemically-treated kind that you purchase in stores.

Sweetgrass is considered to be the hair of mother earth and is often braided. When braided the three strands represent Body, Mind and Spirit. The teaching of sweetgrass is kindness because it bends without breaking. It has a pleasant, sweet aroma and, when used in smudging, has a calming effect and attracts positive energy.

Sage, a different variety than is used as a spice, is used in smudging for clearing the mind of troubling thoughts and removing negative energy. It is also used for cleansing rooms, buildings and sacred items, such as drums and shakers. Often in women's circles, only sage is used for smudging.

The fourth sacred medicine is cedar. Like sage and sweetgrass, cedar is used for smudging and purification. Cedar is primarily used for protection and grounding. During times of teaching, Cedar tea is often served, and cedar baths are used for healing. Cedar branches cover the floor of the sweat lodge and a circle of cedar surrounds the faster's lodge.

These sacred medicines should be stored in a dry place in paper or cotton bags or wooden boxes. They should not be touched by anyone who has consumed alcohol or drugs in the past 4 – 7 days.

Submitted by Carol Germa. Based on teachings received over the years from several elders, The Four Sacred Medicines by Anishnawbe Health Toronto, and Anishnabe 101 by The Circle of Turtle Lodge.