

MEDICINE CIRCLE

A Ritual of Inner Duality and Balance

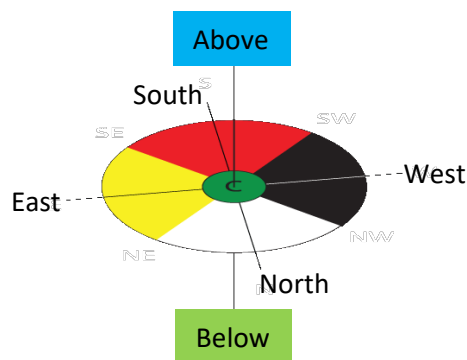
by Mark Hixon,

as taught by Cherokee elder Don Jones “Two Snakes Dancing”

The Medicine Circle (also known as the Medicine Wheel or Circle of Life) is an ancient Native North American ritual performed on a circle of stones laid as a compass rosette. Given the hundreds of tribal cultures, there are many different rituals that can be performed in a Medicine Circle, nearly all of which involve dualities. Here I summarize one such ritual, and I encourage you to explore different variations.

To understand the Medicine Circle ritual, some foundational concepts must be explained. We live in a universe of nonbinary gradients, yet the extreme ends of these gradients nonetheless form *dualities*: light & dark, yin & yang, etc. Within each of us live the dualities of our individual personality which reflect multiple human archetypes. An *archetype* is a fundamental, distinctive part of the human psyche shared by all. A *ritual* is an external activity that provides the opportunity to alter our perceptions of time and space, thereby reflecting and enhancing an internal process. **The ritual described here focuses on balancing the energies of six archetypes, which in turn fosters a centered, balanced life.**

The layout of the circle of stones on the Earth gives the four cardinal compass directions, yet there are also the directions of “above” and “below,” so that the circle is actually a sphere of six directions. At the center lies “within” (“c” in the figure below) – where all directions and archetypes intersect – giving a total of seven sacred perspectives:



In this particular ritual, the six key archetypes (directions) form three dualities (opposite directions):

- the **Child** (East, yellow) vs. the **Magician** (West, black): emotion vs. intellect
- the **Warrior** (South, red) vs. the **Sovereign** (North, white): the follower vs. the leader
- **Father Sky** (Above, blue) vs. **Mother Earth** (Below, green): spirit vs. groundedness

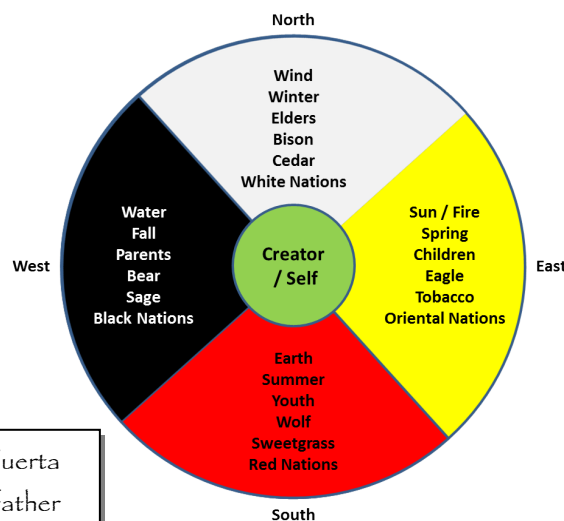
Dualities also exist *within* each archetype, some of which serve us, and others of which hold us back.

(over)

The Medicine Circle Ritual starts with calling, imagining, and embracing your inner archetypal dualities of each direction in your own way, traditionally in the following sequence:

- Face the **East**, the direction of the **Child**, whose color is the **Yellow** of the dawn sun. The Child is the archetype of the dualities of essential feelings: joy and sadness, fear and anger. Do I embrace all my feelings and have empathy and compassion for others – the ability to feel and care for the feelings of fellow beings? Or am I emotionally blocked or lost in emotional imbalances of the childhood wound (shared by all of us)?
- Face the **South**, the direction of the **Warrior**, whose color is the **Red** of the noon day sun. The Warrior is the archetype of the dualities of challenge and conflict. Do I face adversity with true courage (embracing then stepping through fear) to persevere with personal boundaries of integrity, and as needed, clean anger? Or do I cut others uncleanly with the cowardice of projective judgment, destructive criticism, and hatred?
- Face the **West**, the direction of the **Magician**, whose color is the **Black** of night, a place of mystery. The Magician is the archetype of the dualities of the mind: intellect and intuition, logic and magic. Do I trust and integrate both sides of these dualities, and understand that all knowledge is incomplete and tentative? Or am I lost in the imbalance of the false certainty that there is only one way of knowing the Universe?
- Face the **North**, the direction of the **Sovereign**, whose color is the **White** of elderhood. The Sovereign is the archetype of the dualities of leadership: generous wisdom and selfish tyranny. (We are all leaders, even if we lead only ourselves.) Do I forgive and bless others as well as forgiving and blessing myself? Or do I focus on my own ego, narcissism, and manipulation of others in a misguided attempt to benefit only myself?
- Face **Above**, the direction of **Father Sky**, whose color is the **Blue** of a sunny day. Father Sky is the archetype of the dualities of spirit and connection or the lack thereof. Do I embrace the reality that all beings are connected and that Spirit is everywhere? Or am I adrift in physical isolation and spiritual emptiness?
- Face **Below**, the direction of **Mother Earth**, whose color is the **Green** of the living Biosphere of Earth and Ocean. Mother Earth is the archetype of dualities involving giving and groundedness. Do I tread on Mother Earth gently, nurturing all beings with humility and honoring future generations? Or do I arrogantly claim the Earth as mine only, to exploit now to my own ends?

Then look **Within** by placing your hands on your heart, and ponder where your archetypal energies are balanced or imbalanced. The final step is placing yourself within the Medicine Circle at a location that draws you, acknowledging your present balances and imbalances within. Silent reflection or prayer follows, with an ending intention of fostering balance by means of specific changes in thoughts, words, and deeds to be the change you wish to see in the world (to paraphrase Mahatma Gandhi).



The Medicine Circle at Rancho La Puerta was built by Phyllis Pilgrim and Grandfather Silver Raven (a Shoshone elder) in 1996.

Source of figures:
Museum of the American Indian
Washington, D.C.