

## THE FOUR SACRED MEDICINES

Tobacco is the first plant that the Creator gave to Native people. It is the main activator of all the plant spirits. Three other plants, sage, cedar and sweetgrass, follow tobacco, and together they are referred to as the four sacred medicines.

The four sacred medicines are used in everyday life and in ceremonies. All of them can be used to smudge with, though sage, cedar and sweetgrass also have many other uses.

It is said that tobacco sits in the eastern door, sweetgrass in the southern door, sage in the west and cedar in the north.

Elders say that the spirits like the aroma produced when we burn tobacco and the other sacred medicines.

### TOBACCO

Traditional people say that tobacco is always first. It is used as an offering for everything and in every ceremony. "Always through tobacco," the saying goes.

Traditional tobacco was given to us so that we can communicate with the spirit

world. It opens up the door to allow that communication to take place. When we make an offering of tobacco, we communicate our thoughts and feelings through the tobacco as we pray for ourselves, our family, relatives and others.

Tobacco has a special relationship to other plants: it is said to be the main activator of all the plant spirits. It is like the key to the ignition of a car. When you use it, all things begin to happen. Tobacco is always offered before picking medicines. When you offer tobacco to a plant and explain why you are there, that plant will let all the plants in the area know why you are coming to pick them.

When you seek the help and advice of an Elder, Healer or Medicine Person, and give your offering of tobacco, they know that a request may be made as tobacco is so sacred.

We express our gratitude for the help the spirits give us through our offering of tobacco. It is put down as an offering of thanks to the First Family, the natural world, after a fast. Traditional people make an offering of tobacco each day when the sun comes up.

Traditional tobacco is still grown in some communities. For example, the Mohawk people use a traditional tobacco that they grow themselves and that is very sacred to them.

### SAGE

Sage is used to prepare people for ceremonies and teachings. Because it is more medicinal and stronger than sweetgrass, it tends to be used more often in ceremonies.

Sage is used for releasing what is troubling the mind and for removing negative energy.

It is also used for cleansing homes and sacred items. It also has other medicinal uses.

There is male sage and female sage. The female sage is used by women.

### CEDAR

Like sage and sweetgrass, cedar is used to purify the home.

It also has many restorative medicinal uses. Cedar baths are healing.

When cedar is put in the fire with tobacco, it crackles. When it does this, it is calling the attention of the spirits to the offering that is being made.

Cedar is used in fasting and sweat lodge ceremonies as a form of protection: cedar branches cover the floor of the sweat lodge and a circle of cedar surrounds the faster's lodge.

## SWEETGRASS

Sweetgrass is the sacred hair of Mother Earth. Its sweet aroma reminds people of the gentleness, love and kindness she has for the people.

When sweetgrass is used in a healing circle it has a calming effect.

Like sage and cedar, sweetgrass is used for smudging and purification.

## TAKING CARE OF THE MEDICINES

You take care of these sacred medicines by keeping them in a dry place. They can be stored in paper bags or wooden boxes.

If you have been using alcohol or drugs, Healers say you should wait four to seven days before touching the medicines.

As our awareness and knowledge of our traditions and culture increases, so does our honour and respect for these ways. This has not always been the case in our communities. There are always those who present themselves as Healers, Elders or Medicine People who have not earned that title and may use the teachings and medicines in the wrong way. It is important for everyone, especially young people, to be aware of this and to exercise caution when they seek healing, teachings or advice. It is advisable to consult with people whom you trust to get referrals to respected and recognized Traditional Elders, Healers or Medicine People.

Other pamphlets in this series include:

- C Approaching Healers, Elders and Medicine People
- C Fasting
- C Clans
- C Your Name and Colours
- C Feasts and Give Aways
- C Sweat Lodge
- C Moontime
- C Traditional Healing
- C Sacred Items and Bundles

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“Native Teachings are about a Way of Life”

The information in this pamphlet is only a small portion of the many and extensive Native Teachings that exist. Teachings vary from First Nation to First Nation and even from one geographic region to another. For more information, please consult with a Traditional Elder, Healer or Medicine Person.

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