Principles of Four and Seven

Spiritual and Ecological Responsibility

*A guide for all Individuals and groups but especially for leaders and policy makers*

Introduction

The aim of this article is to outline some guiding principles and simple practices that may help to bring us into better alignment with our surroundings and improve the outcomes of our intended plans for sustainable development, community projects or other group events. It has been shown how we may benefit from aligning with the right intentions and to the basic principles set forth by our ancestors. These basic practices help us to create a place of common ground before any undertaking, whether this is the start to the day, the beginning of a project or meeting, or any undertaking that seeks guidance for the way ahead.

Get used to talking to the land itself

One of the most valuable principles to bear in mind before any group activity or meeting is that of interdependence. Everything is co-dependent and as humans we rely on each other for support, so that decision-making should always be mindful of the inter-relationship principle. And this extends to our relatives in the animal, bird, insect, tree, fish and plant communities that also need to be taken into consideration during any proposed development projects or undertaking that may affect their lives. It is proper to ask the land for permission before any building work or activity is planned. The land will find a way of communicating to an individual or group of people with the right intentions behind them. A trusted and respected representative or chosen group member may ascertain how best to proceed from a genuine, openness to any reply and intuitive response from the land and its guardians, sharing with the circle or group.

The Four Directions

There is a core belief or understanding that there exist four primary qualities, tones or colours assigned to the four cardinal directions which also correspond to the four main types of solar resonance, the four elements (earth, air, fire, water), the four archangels and the guardians of these four directions. When the sun rises it is red in the east; at noon it is the yellow sun of the south; when the sun sets in the west the colour is black to represent the night; and in the north, at midnight, the sun is among the stars, so the colour representation is white. These four colours could also be said to represent all the peoples of the Earth. This ‘four-ness’ is significant and builds structure and support to any undertaking. By honouring these four primary foci we are more likely to be operating from a place of balance, equality and integrity. Thereby creating strong foundations from which to proceed.

A good practice to adopt at the start of a group activity of any kind would be to first align with the FourDirectionsand their helpers, the guardians of Earth and Sky, and the Great Spirit that dwells at the centre of all things. This will certainly connect all participants with their own hearts and with the heart of the earth. If this simple, cross-cultural practice could become commonplace among individuals and groups from all walks of life, especially those in positions of local, national or global responsibility, perhaps the world could be a better place?

The Practice

Take three deep breaths. Allow the focus on the breath to let yourself become centred, feeling the Earth beneath you, the sky above you and your heart as the centre, at one with all existences. Visualise a connection to a central fire or light and provide a visual focus in the form of a lantern or fire if possible. Include the great love that surrounds us, that holds all things and that is at the centre of all things. In this way, we may set the right intention for any subsequent proceedings. If there are fire regulations that prevent the lighting of a candle, a lantern may be used, or the light may be visualised instead as the best way to achieve this central focus.

Consider These Three Easy Steps:

* Sit in a circle. This builds a sense of trust, equality and stability. Avoid seating arrangements that place “officials” at one end of the room (or meeting space) and “subjects” at the other end. Where possible, hold meetings outside.
* Be mindful of the Four Directions and Four sacred elements of earth, fire, water and air that make up all our world and our Universe. It may be helpful to bring a compass and to let all participants know in which direction they are seated or standing.
* Be mindful of the following Seven Principles, reading them out if necessary

The Seven Principles

These seven principles represent the fundamentals underpinning any right relationship with the earth and with each other. They are the foundations for right-living and for peace. Each of the principles are interrelated, forming the points of a seven-pointed star.

1. **Truth:** Always seek the truth in all things.
2. **Honesty:** Be true to yourself and your world
3. **Respect:** For all life, for our elders, for the authority that comes from honest reflection of lived experience.
4. **Love:** Love yourself, your family, your neighbours and the earth, listen to your heart.
5. **Wisdom:** Everyone has a special gift; true wisdom uses these gifts to build a peaceful world. Draw on the wisdom of past, present and future generations.
6. **Humility:** Remember to be thankful, by finding the humility to show respect and thanks; this helps to complete the circle.
7. **Courage:** It takes courage to do what is right, have courage, be generous.

Discussion

These principles may be used to create a valuable framework for living a life of balance, since they transcend any boundaries of religion or culture and should resonate with the hearts of all peoples. The indigenous perspectives of all peoples that draws on the wisdom of past generations offer valuable wisdom and knowledge in helping us through these times, enabling us to circumnavigate the transitioning back toward a more peaceful, harmonious way of life. These seven principles could be brought into the teaching curriculum of schools, institutions, organisations or communities.

At the core of these foundational principles is the concept of interconnectedness of all things, and through this, the principles of equality and respect are clearly set out. Whenever we look at Nature, we see these principles in operation. Being respectful of diversity, we can adopt a cooperative approach to problem-solving and maintaining healthy systems of organisation. The teachings of the circle and the Four Directions demonstrate that humans are not superior to other life forms so that the trees, animals, birds, insects, rocks, water courses and spirit of the place should be honoured and included in the decision-making processes. It makes sense to include them all before we take any actions that will affect them. These skills are surely ones that we all have and part of us may remember as ancestral practices that were part of the operational natural laws of the land.

When we put these mutually supporting principles to work, we may find that we are living in a more peaceful way. Generosity means that our neighbours will not fall into poverty. Honesty means that we are honouring the reciprocal nature of all relationships and creating a world based on lasting, strong foundations. Interconnectedness teaches us not to rely on the authority of any one individual but shows us how to include all available viewpoints to gain a healthy perspective.

There is a particular need to encourage our leaders and policy makers to restore the levels of integrity to their decision-making by adopting these simple measures and principles. Individuals or groups may benefit from holding up a mirror to see if these steps have been followed and carried through. Most of our current courtrooms and meeting rooms are set up like a theatre. But surely it is sensible to offer a neutral space with circular seating, preferably in a natural setting, in the presence of God/Goddess, the Creator, the angels and deities, abiding by the true, natural laws of the Universe?

**Please use the poster included after the “Useful References” to pin up on the notice board of your local community centre, meeting room or staff room at your school or place of work.**

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*Useful References*

Cicawa Wolf Woman, *The Seven Sacred Teachings*. Ontario, 2023

San, (2020) “The Seven Principles of Ma’at”. *Iseum Sanctuary, 12* July Available at <https://iseumsanctuary.com/2020/07/12/the-seven-principles-of-maat/>

Stargrove, M, (2011) “Manifesting Ma’at: Creating Healthy Futures in Alignment with Gaia”. 22 May. Available at <https://gaiastartemple.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Mitch-Stargrove-%E2%80%93-Manifesting-Maat-Creating-Healthy-Futures-in-Alignment-with-Gaia-%E2%80%93-Living-Maat-May-22-2021.pdf>

Wahinkpe Topa [Four Arrows], (2013) “Seven Indigenous ‘Spiritual’ Principles for Guiding All Students Toward Survival, Peace, Health and Happiness”*. The Stringer,* 10 August. Available at <https://thestringer.com.au/seven-indigenous-spiritual-principles-for-guiding-all-students-toward-survival-peace-health-and-happiness-4572>

1. Aim to **sit in a circle**: Arrange seating that is as circular as possible. If it is not possible to rearrange seating, use the symbol of the circle to demonstrate equality of all present.
2. Find out the four cardinal directions: north, south, east and west, so that there is a sense of balance, inner and outer orientation and alignment. Take time to **centre**:
3. Take a few minutes to turn everyone’s thoughts to the centre of the Earth, taking a few breaths together so that the focus is common to all participants.
4. Passing a “Talking Stick” is one method for letting each person speak in turn. If the group is very large, allocate a speaker for smaller groups.
5. Include these Seven Principles:
* Truth Seek the truth in all situations
* Honesty Be true to yourself and others
* Love Love is the principle which holds all things
* Humility We can all learn from each other
* Wisdom Each person can bring something new - honour the elders
* Respect The foundation of any proceedings, respect each other
* Courage Have the strength to stand up for the truth and all goodness

**Maximise potential outcomes and increase mutual beneficial results for all participants using these fundamental principles**

**Five-Step Plan for Meetings**