

## The Rule of Opposites: A Paradigm for Counseling Native Americans

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### **Article:**

The Rule of Opposites offers a cultural lesson in perspective that is useful for counselors working with Native American clients. The Rule of Opposites, based on the concept of the Circle of Life, is presented as a worldview that allows individuals to move beyond their current frame of reference toward an understanding of universal truths and underlying meanings. Use of the Rule's 7 lessons helps both the counselor and the client to recognize and resolve conflict, to ask more effective questions, to seek harmony and balance in life for greater purpose and direction, and to explore personal decision making and choices.

Although the Native American population of approximately 2,3 million is steadily growing, this number represents only 1% of the total population of the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). Native American peoples have been described as representing "fifty percent of the diversity" in our country (Hodgkinson, 1990, p. 1), given hundreds of different tribes that exist across the nation. Heinrich, Corbine, and Thomas (1990) further described Native Americans as a group of persons facing "enormous problems" (p. 128), including unemployment, with a rate 3 to 11 times greater than that of the general population; a median income, half that of the majority population; high school dropout rates exceeding 60% in many areas; arrest rates three times as those for African Americans; and a rate of alcoholism double that of the general population.

Thomason (1991) suggested that most counselors will at some time include Native Americans in their clientele. The challenges inherent in working with these individuals were highlighted by S. Sue (1977), who found that more than half of all Native American clients did not return for a second visit to a community mental health center. Research since Sue's study reflects the importance of understanding the client's belief system (Thomason, 1991). As Manson and Trimble (1982) noted, "Native American clients may hold quite different beliefs about the etiology of their problems and the manner in which change can be accomplished" (p. 150). The traditional healing systems of Native American populations use culturally based metaphors and symbols to define both health and illness, which then are transformed into practices, such as rituals and ceremonies, that promote the healing process (J. T. Garrett & M. W. Garrett, 1994; Good & Good, 1986; Hammerschlag, 1988; Lake, 1991; Locust, 1988).

Native American people exhibit varying levels of acculturation, and they come not only from different tribal groups with different customs, traditions, and beliefs, but they also live in a variety of settings including rural, urban, or reservation (J. T. Garrett & M. W. Garrett, 1994). Native Americans represent a wide-ranging diversity illustrated by 252 different languages, 505 federally recognized tribes, 365 state recognized tribes, and many nations (Thomason, 1991). At the same time, a prevailing sense of "Indianness," based on common worldview and common history, seems to bind Native Americans together as a people of many peoples (Herring, 1990; Thomason, 1991). Although acculturation plays a major factor in Native American worldview, there tends to be a high degree of psychological homogeneity, a certain degree of shared cultural standards and meanings, based on common core values that exist for traditional Native Americans across tribal groups (DuBray, 1985; Heinrich et al., 1990; Honigmann, 1961; Oswalt, 1988; Peregoy, 1993; D. W. Sue & D. Sue, 1990). Although approximately 50% of the Native American population resides in urban areas, the degree of

traditionalism versus the degree of acculturation to mainstream American values and cultural standards for behavior is an important consideration in research and practice with Native Americans (J. T. Garrett & M. W. Garrett, 1994; Heinrich et al., 1990; Thomason, 1991). Cherokees and Navajos are both Native Americans, but their regional cultures, climatic adaptations, and languages differ greatly (Garcia & Ahler, 1992). Part of what they share in common, however, is a strong sense of traditionalism based on basic cultural values (Herring, 1990; Thomason, 1991).

Clearly, if counselors are to be effective in working with Native American clients, some understanding of this traditional worldview is necessary. DuBray (1985) and others have summarized the major value differences between Native American and Anglo-American culture. These include, among others, valuing harmony with nature rather than mastery over nature, a present rather than a future orientation, a preference for natural rather than for scientific explanations of phenomena, cooperation rather than competition, group relations rather than individuality, humility rather than attention, and sharing of wealth rather than saving for the future (J. T. Garrett & M. W. Garrett, 1994; Good Tracks, 1973; Herring, 1990; Lewis & Gingerich, 1980; Red Horse, 1980; Sanders, 1987; Thomason, 1991). Although this is essential information for mental health practitioners, an understanding of values does not, in and of itself, provide adequate guidance for effective treatment. Of equal importance are paradigms that integrate values within a framework for intervention. The Native American Rule of Opposites is one such paradigm.

The Rule of Opposites is based on an understanding of the meaning and cultural significance of the circle in traditional Native American culture. Seven lessons of this rule provide a cultural perspective on the circle, the nature and meaning of choice, and the importance of underlying truths. These lessons are applied metaphorically using the symbolism of the eagle feather as a sacred aspect of Native American spirituality. Implications for counseling Native Americans using the Rule of Opposites are discussed.

### **THE CIRCLE: A METAPHOR FOR LIFE**

Historically, many Native Americans have believed not only that the Earth is round, but also, by the very nature of the universe, that the Earth moves in cycles. These cycles reflect the continuous "Circle of Life." All life moves within this Circle of Life, and all life exists by virtue of the many circles or cycles. All life is in constant motion as the flowing waters of a stream; all life is interrelated and interdependent as the many intricate threads of a single web.

An understanding and appreciation of our natural surroundings is central to Native American cultures. The Earth, honored as "Mother," is composed of millions of intricately balanced and interdependent cycles that allow for the continuity of life. As an example, each day the Sun rises in the East, slowly working its way across the sky until, by the end of the day, it reaches the West and drops below the horizon, only to appear once again the following day. Rain falls from the sky, then evaporates into the clouds above the Earth, only to fall again in a continuation of the cycle. Similarly, the four seasons form a great circular motion as they change and repeat their cycle, bringing birth and rebirth. Because humans are a part of nature, and nature is known to move in cycles, many Native Americans believe that we, too, move in cycles. As a sacred symbol, the Circle is a reminder that "what we often see as progression or growth is, indeed, circular in nature or, rather, cyclical" (J. T. Garrett & M. W. Garrett, 1994, p. 139), representing a spiraling motion that can take on a particular direction through choice.

Circles of life surround us, exist within us, and comprise the many relationships of our existence. We each have a circle of self, composed of the many facets of our own development (e.g., mind, body, spirit), a circle of immediate family, extended family, tribal family, community, nation, natural environment, universal surrounding, and so forth.

Related to the Circle of Life is the belief that all things are alive, all things have spiritual energy, and hence all things are of essential importance within the Circle of Life (J. T. Garrett, 1991; Lake, 1991). From this belief stems the reverence of Native American peoples for life in all its forms: animals, plants, rocks and minerals,

people, Earth, Sky, Sun, Moon, Stars, wind, water, fire, thunder, lightning, and rain. All life exists in an intricate system of interdependence (J. T. Garrett & M. W. Garrett, 1994), so that the universe exists in a dynamic state of harmony and balance, reflecting the continuous flow and cycling of energy that emanates from each form of life in relation to every other living being. The interdependence of all energy cycles reflects a belief, related by Chief Seattle that "all things are connected like the blood which unites one family" (Book Publishing Company, 1988, p. 14); hence all life is worthy of respect and reverence.

The components of the Circle of Life, depicted as the ordinal compass points in the Circle shown in Figure 1, include mind, body, spirit, and natural environment. This Circle is also what many Native American tribes symbolize through the "Medicine Wheel." In Native American culture, "Medicine" refers to "the way of things" or a way of life" (J. T. Garrett & M. W. Garrett, 1994, p. 139). Each person has his or her own way of life, a way that is individually chosen and lived in context. Our choice of the way in which we focus our time and our energies in each of the directions (i.e., mind, body, spirit, natural environment) reflects our values and priorities.

Balance, another central concept in understanding the symbolism of the Circle, is a desired state wherein one is in harmony with the universe, "walking in step with the natural way (flow) of things," so to speak. Disharmony results when we are out of balance, when our energies are unfocused or poorly focused, and when we lose sight of our place in the universe. Well-being occurs when we seek and find our unique place in the universe and experience the continuous cycle of receiving and giving through respect and reverence for the beauty of all living things. Stated another way, "everyone and everything was created with a specific purpose to fulfill, no one should have the power to interfere or impose on others the best path to follow" (J. T. Garrett & M. W. Garrett, 1994, p. 139). Our chosen way of life shows how we focus our energies and how we seek a sense of harmony and balance among the interaction and interrelation of the four directions in relation to other living beings.

## **THE RULE OF OPPOSITES**

Because of the Native American emphasis on the concept of the Circle, what would otherwise be perceived as opposites or dualities on a linear continuum are thought of as actually existing in a circle that has no real beginning or end. Thus, in the traditional way, terms such as good and bad are seldom used in their pure or extreme sense, but rather are given a relative value because it is believed that one naturally implies the other. Truth lies somewhere between the two poles, rather than at one of the two poles. Using the Circle, it is believed to be more important for a person to look beyond surface value, such as good or bad, to seek what is true (Herring, 1994). In the traditional way, an understanding and use of the Rule of Opposites encourages the recognition of meaning and truth, which provides an operational means of "walking in step" with the Circle, seeking purpose and direction in life.

There are grave differences between an approach emphasizing "This-and-That," and the approach emphasizing "This-or-That," or in the extreme, "This-versus-That" (Watts, 1989). It is the oppositional nature of the latter two approaches that can result in discordant feelings, thoughts, or actions. Many times, in the counseling profession, we speak of the importance of attitude, and how attitude can make all the difference in the world. In Native American tradition, intention (or attitude) means everything; intention is considered as much as, if not more important than the act itself, because intention is the act itself (J. T. Garrett, 1991; Lake, 1991; Ywahoo, 1987). That is why harmony and balance are so critical to many Native American people. There is no such thing as keeping the mountains and getting rid of the valleys; they are equally important.

The Rule of Opposites is a paradigm that facilitates the process of examining and understanding our behavior and intentions. This Rule emphasizes the central role of choice in the Native American way of life and includes seven key postulates or life lessons.

1. Opposites are extensions of themselves, like two opposing hands of the same body; one opposite implies the other.

2. We choose our own (discordant) opposites wherein we are the true source of the difficulty we experience.
3. Everything serves a meaningful and important function in our lives.
4. Asking the right questions, instead of asking for the right answers, allows us to know the function rather than the effect of our choices.
5. Questioning our assumptions leads to the recognition of underlying meanings or truths and the relative value of choices made.
6. Understanding underlying truths eliminates any need for the existence of dissonance or discord in our lives.
7. Through choice of perspective and appropriate action, we are free to balance ourselves as we see fit.

Each of these lessons is explained in detail, followed by an example that shows how the lessons operationalize the Rule of Opposites to form an integrated understanding of the Circle of Life.

### **Lesson 1**

Opposites are extensions of themselves, like two opposing hands of the same body; one opposite implies the other.

All day long he moved down the longest, the loveliest of all the inlets, and it seemed to him that something strange happened to time. When he had first come to the village, it was the future that loomed huge. So much to plan. So much to learn. Then it was the present that had consumed him--each day with all its chores and never enough hours to do them. Now time has lost its contours. He seemed to see it as the raven or the bald eagle, flying high over the village. must see the part of the river that had passed the village, that had not yet reached the village, one and the same. (Craven, 1973, p. 148)

In this quotation from her book, *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*, Craven (1973) provided a graphic example of the first lesson in the Rule of Opposites. From the perspective of the raven or the eagle, the vision of the river in motion, despite location, remains the same. Where the river is flowing to, and where the river is flowing from, are less important than the motion itself. Different parts of the river do not exist on a linear continuum, but rather in a circle, wherein one part of the river is merely an extension of another; all is connected in flow. The nature of opposites is, simply stated, that both opposites are true. For every Is, there is an Isn't. The only true difference between these positions lies in the unique perspective of the individual. One person looks at the Circle and sees Is, whereas another person looks at the same Circle and sees Isn't. However, both are true, both persons are "correct" in their perceptions. Is and Isn't are not really opposite poles on a linear continuum, but rather exist in a circle where one is an extension of the other. Is exists as an extension of Isn't; one begins where the other leaves off. One opposite implies the other.

In a similar manner, asking the question, "Who am I?" automatically implies the opposite question, "Who am I not?" Likewise, "What did I do" implies the question, "What did I not do?" Opposites, thus are an inherent part of any given experience. They may be seen as extensions of one another, like two opposing hands of the same body.

### **Lesson 2**

We choose our own (discordant) opposites wherein we are the true source of the difficulty we experience. Because individuals are not always consciously aware of the existence of opposites, they may make choices that create disharmony. Conflict, whether intrapsychic or interpersonal, seems to be an ever present part of the human condition, such that a search for resolution of conflicts is an ever present and natural part of living.

According to the traditional Native American way, however, the idea of conflict is in itself an illusion. J. T. Garrett and M. W. Garrett (in press) noted the traditional Native American belief that all things are made up of energy. Thoughts and feelings, for example, are nothing more than energy. Through choices, thoughts and feelings, or even actions, take on a distinctive nature according to the direction in which they are moved. Essentially, "all is vibration [or energy], and what has the appearance of conflict is better understood as dissonance or discord, energies seeking resolution in harmony" (Ywahoo, 1987, p. 44).

Vectors (represented by arrows) are used in physics to depict both the direction and the magnitude of energy. Vectors can also be applied to thoughts and feelings. For example, feelings of joy or sadness are nothing more than energy (of a particular magnitude). It is not until a choice is made, be it ever so slight as a choice in perspective, that the energies making up the feelings of joy or sadness take on direction, thus becoming joy or sadness, and the tears that flow from either. In actuality, these opposite feelings are one and the same, nothing more than energy that has been assigned a direction through choice.

Similarly, conflict is nothing more than energy that has been assigned a direction through choice. Through choices, we choose the discordant opposites which become the source of our problems, or rather, energies seeking resolution in harmony. Unfortunately, we often have more choices available to us than we realize. We make choices that may not prove to be useful or constructive in the short-or the long-term. As perspectives change, however, hindsight may reveal that a greater array of choices was indeed possible. The challenge, then, is to achieve a greater range of perspective. This is what some refer to as wisdom. It is never the energies themselves that are the source of our problems, but rather, it is our understanding and use of these energies.

### **Lesson 3**

Everything serves a meaningful and important function in our lives. Storytelling is an important part of Native American culture as a way of relating personal and social values, beliefs, and practices (Duryea & Potts, 1993; M. T. Garrett, 1995; Herring, 1990; Little Soldier, 1985). Many of the old stories and legends relate a number of basic life lessons. One of the basic lessons frequently conveyed through story is the idea that everything and everyone has a specific purpose on Mother Earth. As one elder put it, "Don't ever try to be what you're not, and don't ever let anyone else tell you that you are either."

In a real sense, everything and everyone possesses intrinsic value or worth by merely existing in the Circle of Life. This intrinsic worth extends to experience as well. In other words, every experience also possesses intrinsic worth by the very fact that it occurred and, therefore, is a gift of sorts.

Counselors frequently hear "waiting" stories from people who are waiting for life to happen. They are waiting to grow up, waiting to get married, waiting for the right job, waiting for their kids to grow up, waiting for retirement, waiting for the cemetery, and so forth. Native Americans believe that life is meant to be lived, that every experience is to be experienced fully as a gift. Stories provide valuable guidance in this process. Native Americans traditionally believe that everything happens with a purpose, and this is conveyed through story. Every experience thus offers a unique opportunity to learn and to grow in ways that would not be possible without all of our experiences, both good and bad. Therefore, there is no real right or wrong way to do things, in that one may learn no matter how things are done.

### **Lesson 4**

Asking the right questions, instead of asking for the right answers, allows us to know the function rather than the effect of our choices. A commonly posed question that reflects one's outlook on life is: Is the glass half empty or half full? This question presupposes that the answer can only be one of two possibilities. According to Native American tradition, the Rule of Opposites poses a different question: Is the glass the right size? After all, it might be too big.

The Rule of Opposites thus provides a reminder to clarify one's assumptions by asking the right questions rather than by seeking the right answers. For example, when faced with a decision between the unacceptable and the

undesirable, individuals often focus on the choice between what seems to be the "lesser of two evils." A change in perspective may focus on a different question, such as: Does this situation represent a deeper lesson (truth) for me than what I perceive right now? Rather than understanding the situation as a limitation, one could be helped to see an opportunity.

Looking at decisions as a set of opposites on a linear continuum may lead a person away from understanding the continuum itself, in other words, the true meaning of a given situation or an experience. For example, a person who is angry may invest considerable energy in defending why it is that someone made him or her upset. An alternate course of action would be to examine the energy of his or her discord and to clarify the underlying meaning of his or her feelings. Questions that could stimulate an examination of the function rather than the effect of the choice to be angry would be: In what way is my anger useful for me? What function does my anger serve for me? What does my anger mean to me? The answers to these questions may reveal the true source of one's anger, and the basis for the choice of this reaction to these particular circumstances, as well as overall patterns therein. At the same time, the question of what other choices one might have made naturally arises, as possibilities present themselves.

### **Lesson 5**

Questioning our assumptions leads to the recognition of underlying meanings or truths and the relative value of choices made. In Native American tradition, everyone and everything is believed to possess universal purpose, because each has a place in the Circle. Hence, it is important to seek the underlying meanings of experiences rather than the surface judgments that may cloud our perceptions. The Rule of Opposites encourages us to clarify the assumptions on which we are acting, rather than focusing so much energy on justifying our actions and perceptions.

We, as human beings, possess the unique ability to reflect on our feelings, thoughts, and actions. Although we have the ability to view circumstances from multiple frames of reference, we sometimes fail to do so. When we ask a question, we need to include in our focus both the opposite of that question and an alternate question or questions that turn our focus to what is true, rather than to what is right or wrong, good or bad. For example, the question "What did you say?" implies the opposite question, "What did you not say?" These are both equally important questions, and part of the same truth. A focus on either or even both questions, however, will not reveal the assumptions underlying what was said or not said. An alternate question is required to reveal the personal choice that was made and the personal value of that choice. "How did you come to make that choice?" and "What does it mean to you?" are questions that seek to clarify the underlying assumption, more than the outcome (or even cause) of a decision or an action.

### **Lesson 6**

Understanding underlying truths eliminates any need for the existence of dissonance or discord in our lives. We are sometimes faced with a decision between the unacceptable and the undesirable. This is a natural part of living. Every decision involves many complicated factors and options that must be weighed carefully against one another. Because all things are connected like the many strands of a web, and because everything in the Circle of Life affects everything else, we need to develop a greater understanding of our unique place and purpose in the universe. We need to step beyond our Individual frame of reference to recognize deeper meanings and lessons that present themselves to us. Reacting to life circumstances without pausing for reflection limits our ability to perceive underlying truths through multiple perspectives.

In the traditional way the idea of seeking resolution of dissonance and discord really encompasses a seeking of harmony and balance among interrelated thoughts, feelings, and actions. Recognizing the relationship or commonality among things is key to seeking a sense of harmony and balance, which occurs when one recognizes and honors universal truths and underlying meanings.

## Lesson 7

Through choice of perspective and appropriate action, we are free to balance ourselves as we see fit. In Native American tradition, living a life of harmony and balance does not mean living a life without challenges, difficulties, hardships, or even conflict. What it does mean is making constructive and creative choices through clear intention (wisdom) to fulfill one's purpose in the Greater Circle of Life by maintaining and contributing to the reciprocal balance of family, clan, tribe, and community in the context of personal, social, and natural environment.

Imagine the effect on a still lake when a pebble drops through the glassy surface. Cycles of energy radiate from the point of impact in ripples that extend and return in a cyclic motion until harmony (or balance) is restored on the lake's surface as a new state of motion. "Sleeping mind perceives the ripples as challenges of life; awakened mind sees them as ripples on a lake. Human beings have a particular opportunity to realize the arising nature of the mind, mind's creative nature and to generate those thoughts and actions which are beneficial to harmony and balance." (Ywahoo, 1987, p. 34).

Where one may perceive the everlasting difficulties that life presents, another may perceive only ripples on a lake. The difference in perception reflects a difference in choice of action or reaction. There is an old anecdote that illustrates this point: Once, a Native American, acting as a guide for a hunting expedition, had lost his way home. One of the men with him said, "You're lost, Chief." The Native American replied, "I'm not lost, my tipi is lost."

The Circle of Life is driven by individual choice. Each choice requires us to seek our place within the Circle, a place that balances the opposite pull of spiritual (spirit) and physical (body), mental (mind), and natural (see Figure 1). Life consists of a continuing series of choices that present us with challenges to be met or ignored, consequences to be accepted or rejected. Because we have the freedom to choose, we also possess the freedom to seek a unique personal balance in our lives--or to maintain them in a state of disequilibrium. Either way, we have the opportunity to learn and to understand. The primary lesson of the Rule of Opposites is the lesson of choice.

### **THE EAGLE FEATHER AND THE RULE OF OPPOSITES**

Eagle Medicine is the power of the Great Spirit, the connection to the divine. It is the ability to live in the realm of the spirit, and yet remain connected and balanced within the realm of the Earth. Eagle soars, and is quick to observe expansiveness within the overall pattern of life. From the heights of the clouds, Eagle is close to the heavens where the Great Spirit dwells. (Sams & Carson, 1988, p. 41)

Eagle feathers are considered to be infinitely sacred among Native Americans who make use of the feathers for a variety of purposes, including ceremonial healing and purification. Eagle Medicine represents a state of presence achieved through diligence, understanding, awareness, and a completion of "tests of initiation," such as the Vision Quest (Lake, 1991) or other demanding life experiences. Highly respected elder status is associated with Eagle Medicine and the power of connectedness and truth. It is through experience and patience that this medicine is earned over a lifetime. And, it is through understanding and choice that it is honored.

The eagle feather, which represents duality, tells the story of life. It tells of the many dualities or opposites that exist in the Circle of Life, such as light and dark, male and female, substance and shadow, summer and winter, life and death, peace and war. The eagle feather has both light and dark colors, dualities and opposites (Lesson 1). Though one can make a choice to argue which of the colors is most beautiful or most valuable (Lesson 2), the truth is that both colors come from the same feather, both are true, both are connected, and it takes both to fly (Lesson 3) (J. T. Garrett & M. T. Garrett, in press).

The colors are opposite, but they are part of the same truth. The importance of the feather lies not in which color is most beautiful, but in finding out and accepting what the purpose of the feather as a whole may be (Lesson 4). Traditionally, one earns the eagle feather through enormous acts of courage, understanding, compassion, and

generosity. Often, it is through such acts that we transcend our ordinarily limited state of being and begin to recognize the commonality (rather than oppositional separateness) of things as well as intrinsic value and underlying truths (Lesson 5). Through such acts, a recognition of universal "oneness" or truth occurs, and universal learning takes place. An honoring of underlying meanings, choice, and the interrelationship of all things in the Circle of Life emerges (Lesson 6).

Native American tradition thus recognizes the oneness of differing phenomena through the metaphor of the eagle feather with its duality of colors. A decision or choice is made to honor both through harmony and balance, as it is only through harmony and balance that universal truths may be perceived and experienced (Lesson 7). It is only through maintaining the harmony and balance of our feather that we are able to fly. "Balance describes a condition of order and dynamic design in a context where all elements, pain as well as pleasure, serve a useful and necessary function" (Peterson, 1988, p. 47).

The Eagle feather teaches us about the Rule of Opposites, about everything being divided into two ways. The more one is caught up in the physical, or the West, then the more one has to go in the opposite direction, the East, or the spiritual, to get balance. And it works the other way too--you can't Just focus on the spiritual to the exclusion of the physical. You need harmony in all Four Directions. (Garrett, 1991, p. 173)

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELORS**

The concept of choice is central to the Native American way of life. For every choice there is a nonchoice, or some kind of alternative that was decided against. With every choice that is made, an option is given up. The process of letting go is rarely an easy one. A person's choice to accept or reject the consequences of a decision illustrates the diametrical opposition that is an inevitable part of human possibility.

There are important lessons about the concept of the Circle for counselors regarding the Rule of Opposites. We must realize that discrepancy, incongruity, and paradox rule the lives of many clients. There may be discrepancies [or discord] between the real self and an ideal self, a present behavior and a goal behavior, rational and irrational ideas, or between a problem and a desired solution. Clients come to us with many unresolved conflicts and contradictions (Ivey, 1991, p. 90).

An understanding of the Rule of Opposites is essential for working with Native American clients who may be experiencing a great deal of dissonance or discord in their lives, but who perceive this in a much different way than might be expected within the majority culture. Asking the right questions and being open to what we do not readily perceive to be true bridge the gap between what we see and what really exists. By understanding that everything has meaning and purpose, our goal in counseling becomes one of helping Native American clients to discover their purpose, to examine their assumptions, to seek an awareness of universal and personal truths, and to make choices that allow them to exist in a state of harmony and balance within the Circle of Life.

A one-directional approach to living provides goals of feeling more pleasure, less pain, more happiness, less sadness, more positive and less negative (Peterson, 1988). In the multidirectional approach prescribed by the Rule of Opposites, our goal is to find meaning in both pleasure and pain, happiness and sadness, positives and negatives. A shift in perspective allows us to seek a balance by realizing that everything serves a valuable and a useful function in our lives. This shift in perspective also allows us room for full consideration of the choices we make. As we begin to understand universal truths, we are able to eliminate the need for discord in our lives and make choices to increase our sense of harmony, balance, and personal meaning.

For many Native American clients, the understanding and reconciliation of discordant opposites is an essential therapeutic goal in achieving a unity of greater harmony and balance among the four directions--mind, body, spirit, and natural environment. Given a wide diversity among members of the Native American population, it is important to assess a Native American client's geographic origin (reservation, rural, or urban-based), level of acculturation (traditional to acculturated), specific tribal customs and beliefs, and whether English is spoken as a first or as a second language (J. T. Garrett & M. W. Garrett, 1994; Heinrich et al., 1990; Herring, 1994). The

general applicability of the Rule of Opposites, however, lies in its use as an operational means of moving the client beyond his or her limited frame of reference to a different level of understanding to make more effective life choices.

DIAGRAM: Figure 1. The Four Directions of the Medicine Wheel (Based on Cherokee Teachings)

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