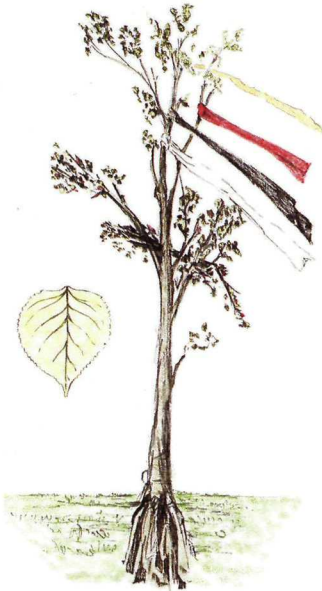




Pipestone

National Monument
Minnesota

The Number Four



The cottonwood tree is a sacred tree used in the Sun Dance ceremony.

Oceti Šakowin (D/Lakota) people grouped everyday activities, prayers, and ceremonies by the number four. Doing things in four respects the four grandfathers (the directions) and the four seasons.

Four elements make up the universe: earth, air, water, fire.

Everything that grows from the ground has four parts: the roots, stems, leaves, and fruit.

Things that breathe also have four groups: those that crawl, fly, walk on four legs, and walk on two legs.

The four colors represent the cycle of life, the cycle of seasons, and the four cardinal directions. The four colors and directions have been interpreted through Elders, and therefore differ slightly from tribe to tribe.

“Black is for the West where the thunder beings live to send us rain; White one for North, whence comes the great cleansing wind; Red one the East, whence springs the light and where the morning star lives to give men wisdom; the Yellow for the South, whence comes the summer and the power to grow.” – Black Elk

From *Lame Deer in Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions* by John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, pp. 131-132

"Tunkan, the stone spirit; Wakinyan, the thunder spirit; Takuskanska, the moving spirit; Unktehi, the water spirit – they are all wakan: mysterious, wonderful, incomprehensible, holy. They are all part of the Great Mystery. These are our four great supernaturals.

Four is the number that is most wakan, most sacred. Four stands for the Tatuye Topa – the four quarters of the earth...

Four, the sacred number, also stands for the four winds, whose symbol is the cross...

Four things make the universe: earth, air, water, fire...

...We take four puffs when we smoke the peace pipe. Those of us who believe in the Native American Church take four times four spoons of peyote during a night of prayer. We pour water four times over the hot rocks in the sweat lodge...

We set up four colored flags for all our ceremonies, which reminds me of the symbolism and the power of colors."