



by Loren Woerpel, Noc Bay Trading Company

## PRAYER WHEEL

This hoop, divided into quarters by leather thongs representing the four directions, is also called a Medicine Wheel by some. Decorated in a personal way with animal fur, feathers, colored yarn or ribbon and other items, the Prayer Wheel is often carried today by both men and women dancers.

Originally the basis of the hoop was a willow or ash branch striped of bark, bent and spliced into a circle. These instructions suggest ways to make a prayer hoop using a 8 inch diameter bare metal hoop as the base.

Materials needed include a 8 metal inch hoop, one rabbit fur, two 40 inch long soft leather thongs, some thread, some crow beads, tin cones, feathers, colored yarn or ribbon and leather glue. Tools needed are a sharp scissors and a long nosed pliers.

The first step is to cover the hoop by winding strips of rabbit fur around the bare wire. Cut the rabbit into 1 inch wide strips. Note that the fur lays in the direction from head to tail. Lay the rabbit fur out with the fur down, the head end towards you and the tail end away from you on a suitable cutting surface. Cut the strips as in Figure 1.

Put a mark on the tail ends of the strips so you will remember which end is which. Now shake them out to get rid of any loose hair. You will start each winding with the tail end of the strip.

Place a small amount of glue in the center of this tail end for about two inches. Hold the tail end in place on the hoop by wrapping it with a piece of thread and tying off with a knot. Figure 2. Begin to wind the strip around the hoop as in Figure 3. After two winds, run a bead of glue down the center of the leather side of the strip about half way. Continue to wrap and glue until you reach the end of the first strip. Fasten the end with another winding of thread.

Continue with the next sections the same way. Finish by overlapping the starting spot, trim off any excess fur strip and tie off with a piece of thread. Pull and ruff up the fur to hide the wrapping seams as much as you can.

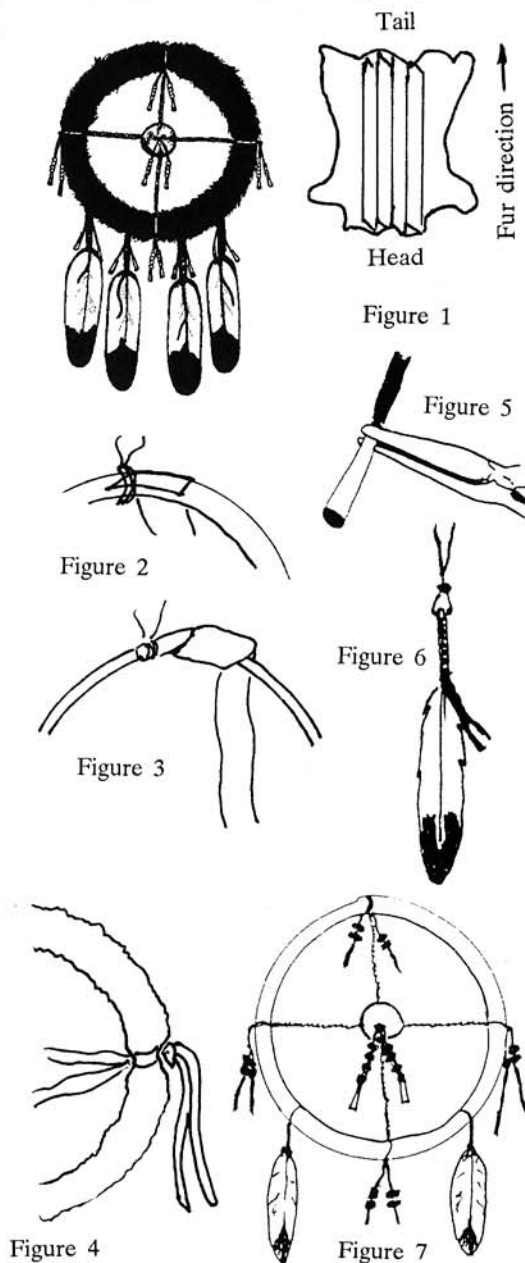


Figure 4 shows how to begin tying on the cross thongs that will divide the hoop into quarters to form the four directions. Cut one 40 inch deerskin thong in half. Tie the two pieces together in a knot about 5 inches from one end. Position that knot against the hoop as shown and pass the two long ends of thongs on each side of the hoop. Begin twisting the two thongs together until tightly twisted for the length directly across the hoop. At the other side, pass each thong around each side of the hoop and tie a double overhand knot.

Take a second thong, cut it in half and also tie them together 5 inches from one end. Start this pair of thongs the same way at a position to exactly form a cross when twisted and tied to the other side. Twist these thongs until tight to the intersection with the first thong and its center. Pass each thong around the opposite sides of the first thong and continue to twist. When tight to the other side of the hoop, again pass the thongs around both sides of the hoop and tie a knot as before.

Now trim off all of the thong ends to leave about a 5 inch fringe. This is the basic form of the Prayer Wheel. Now plan your decorations to finish it in your own special way. Following are some ideas.

Crow beads in various patterns and colors can be threaded onto the leather thong fringe you left hanging. Hold the beads on by tying a knot at the bottom of the thong, or end the thong fringe by attaching a metal cone to the end with pliers as in Figure 5.

Figures 6 and 7 show some decorating ideas with feathers. Trim the feathers into the desired length and shape if necessary. Prepare loops at the base of the feather and cover the quill with colored yarn. Use yarn and extra beads to attach the feathers to the hoop or to the center of the cross thongs.

Colored ribbon and yarns can be used as additional fringe tied to various parts of the hoop. Common colors used represent the four directions; white, red, yellow, and black. Sometimes shells, medallions or conchos are fastened to the center cross.

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