**Amik Special Gifts to Help Others**

A long time ago, when a boy reached puberty, he would be sent out to fast by his father, uncles, grandparents or we-ehs (we-ehs are sort of like godparents).  The purpose of the fast was to receive a gift – a gift that would allow the boy to help his fellow Anishinabe people.

Somebody would set up a place for the boy to fast by finding a little area, preparing it, and perhaps getting some firewood for him (some people would have a fire; some would not).  Then early in the morning, by sun up, the boy would go out to fast.  The only thing he would bring with him was tobacco and sometimes a pipe.

The boy would stay out there for one to three days, or however long he could go without any food or water.  He couldn’t put anything in his mouth, not even a straw or a toothpick.

Occasionally the boy would put tobacco in the fire, offer it to the Creator, and ask for his gift.  At some point, the boy would begin to have a vision or a dream that would show him his gift.  It might happen when he was still fasting, or sometimes it might not happen for a few weeks or months later.

There are many gifts one can receive – for example, healing.  Healers are shown in their dreams or visions how to detect what is bothering a person.  So Anishinabe people would go to the healers for doctoring.

Other people were given instructions in their visions and dreams about which plants were good for certain ailments and how to prepare the plants.  If you received this gift and you started sharing it with your fellow Anishinabe, then you were known as a medicine man.  We had so many medicine men long ago, but we don’t have that many today because people aren’t fasting like they used to in order to receive their dreams and visions.

Another gift is being a spiritual advisor.  Spiritual advisors have powerful dreams in which they are told many things.  They also have the gift of knowing how to conduct our traditional Ojibwe ceremonies.  Sometimes this gift is the result of fasting, but sometimes it can also be passed on from one person to another.  There are not too many spiritual advisors.

Sometimes a boy would have a dream in which a person would come to him and ask him to give that person’s Indian name to someone else.  This boy would become a name giver.  (Another way a boy could become a name giver was if something significant happened in his life.)

These are just some of the more serious gifts our boys could receive by fasting and having dreams or visions.  In my next column, I’ll talk about some of the fun gifts people could receive, such as being an athlete or craftsman.