**Jim Clark Tobacco As Gift and Offering**

There was a fellow who came to visit Mille Lacs about three or four years ago. He came in from Chicago, and he was trying to find out how the Anishinaabe tap maple trees and make the maple syrup here in the spring.

The man went out to where our people were tapping the maple trees so he could watch them. And of course, there were some Anishinaabe men out by the maple trees who put tobacco by the trees and talked in our language.

Well, the man from Chicago went back home and wrote an article that said those Indians don’t know anything – they go outside and throw tobacco by the trees and talk to them.

He didn’t understand that the men weren’t talking to the trees – they were thanking the Creator. And he didn’t understand how important the tobacco was in giving thanks.

Tobacco plays a great role in our Anishinaabe culture, but I think that maybe many non-Indians don’t know what that role is. So I’d like to share something I wrote a few years ago with my friend Rick Gresczyk.

Tobacco – what we call asemaa – is a gift from the Creator. It is used by our people from the cradle to the grave. An Anishinaabe is encouraged to carry tobacco with him or her at all times.

Tobacco is often offered in the morning and evening to give thanks for the day and to ask for special help before anything is harvested, like sap, wild rice, berries, medicine, and game.

Tobacco is present at most Ojibwe ceremonies. It is offered to the thunderbeings during a storm, and protection and safety are prayed for. It is given to other people when asking for knowledge or favors. For example, tobacco is given to a namer before a baby is named.

Tobacco is also offered before a legend is told and before a trip is taken. People who have died are given tobacco to take with them on their journey.

There are several ways tobacco can be used. It can be smoked in a pipe. It can also be put in a fire, or put in the water, or at special places, like a special rock, waterfall, tree, or on a clean place on the ground.

Asemaa – tobacco – is a gift that is not to be abused. That’s why it made me a little mad when that man from Chicago wrote what he did. He didn’t even try to understand what our people were doing. He didn’t ask any questions.

A lot of Anishinaabe understand the English language now, and that’s good. We understand other people’s traditions. We respect them. We hope that non-Indians can also respect our culture.