**Lee Staples Spirituality Part I**

Spirituality is difficult to define clearly and concisely.  It entails our interaction with and respect for one another’s spirit, and our acknowledgement of the powers in the environment or universe as being greater than ourselves.  This column and my next one are an attempt to define spirituality from the Anishinaabe perspective, as I understand it.  Today I’ll talk about our relationships with other people and their spirits, and next time I’ll talk about our relationship to the environment around us.

In the course of our lives, we will encounter people who seem to draw us to them.  There seems to be something very nurturing in being around them.  Usually these are people who emanate a sense of peaceful living and never have a harsh word for anyone.

I had the opportunity to live in the same household with one of these individuals.  She was an Elder of ours who was in her 80s and since has passed on.  Living in that household for more than two years, I never once heard her say a harsh word about anyone.  Many of our people came to her for advice.  Sometimes people would come in expressing their anger about what another individual had done to them.  The word I always heard this Elder say was "Shi we nim," which means to have compassion for that person, even if they have not been so nice to you.  That explained why I felt such a sense of peace and well-being when I was around this Elder – it was what she practiced in her own life.

We have been taught that negative feelings – such as jealousy, anger, rage, resentment, etc. – do us more damage than the person or persons to whom they are directed.  They block our own spiritual growth, because our spirit is caged up with all these negative feelings surrounding it.

There are times in our lives when we can get direction from the powers that we rely on, but this ability is blocked off when a person is absorbed by negative feelings.  Also, with the connection between mind, body and spirit, these negative feelings can have a direct negative impact on physical health.

I perform traditional funerals for our people, and I was told by one of our Elders that when I talk to those closely related to the deceased, I should remind them about the importance of shi we nin di wad – to have compassion for one another.  She said that this is far, far more important than those material things left behind by the deceased that family members frequently want to squabble over.

She added that when it comes time for us to make the journey to that other world, there is a small bundle we carry on our backs.  It is the spiritual energy that results from all the good things that we do for one another, and it is a very light bundle.  The material things have very little value, especially at that time.  And she didn’t say this, but I always think of the reverse – how heavy that load would be if we were hateful and mean to one another.  I can visualize the person who has a lot of anger, resentments, jealousies, etc. all hunched over, trying to move down that path laid out for us in the afterlife.