

### **Clan System - Responsibilities**

For many Ojibwa peoples, the women took their mother's clan, and the males their father's. Exceptions were made for Medicine People or Healers, or in cases where one did not know the Clans of their parents.

In a patrilineal (male dominated) society, children take their father's Clan. This might be done until the time of their adulthood rituals or for life.

In a matrilineal (female dominated) society, the reverse might be true, with the child assuming the Clan of the mother.

For some tribal groups, the child assumes a parent's Clan until he/she is of age to seek his/her own, on a Vision quest or Fast. The child, or adult, fasts and prays for a number of days until given a Vision. The guardian, or clan animal may appear in the vision to pass on information, directions, knowledge or guidance.

Clans are most often found or verified, by offering Tobacco and gifts to a Medicine Person who has the gift of clans. This may be done within the context of another Ceremony, such as in a Sweat Lodge. The Elder may Fast and pray until he is given the name. Some Elders use a Pipe to call for the Name and Clan. Most Elders request at least four days between the giving of Tobacco and the giving of a Name or Clan.

The Clan one held often meant obligations and responsibilities with a profound effect in all areas of one's life. It influenced one's family relationships, social responsibilities, vocational choices, and choice of marriage partners. One could not marry within one's own Clan. This encouraged marriage outside one's own village, promoting a widening of the genetic pool. In a survival level society it was essential that each person contributed to the well-being of the family, village and tribe.

### **Clan System – Animal Totems**

People of all nations in the world essentially have the same basic needs: food, protection, education, medicine and leadership. Traditionally, the Ojibway Clan System was created to provide leadership and to care for these needs. There were seven original clans and each clan was known by its animal emblem, or totem. The animal totem symbolized the strength and duties of the clan. The seven original clans were given a function to serve for their people.

The Crane and the Loon Clans were given the power of Chieftainship. By working together, these two clans gave the people a balanced government with each serving as a check on the other.

Between the two Chief Clans was the Fish Clan. The people of the Fish Clan were the teachers and scholars. They helped children develop skills and healthy spirits. They also drew on their knowledge to solve disputes between the leaders of the Crane and Loon Clans.

The Bear Clan members were the strong and steady police and legal guardians. Bear Clan members spent a lot of time patrolling the land surrounding the village, and in so doing, they learned which roots, bark, and plants could be used for medicines to treat the ailments of their people.

The people of the Hoof Clan were gentle, like the deer and moose or caribou for whom the clan is named. They cared for others by making sure the community had proper housing and recreation. The Hoof Clan people were the poets and pacifists avoiding all harsh words.

The people of the Martin Clan were hunters, food gathers and warriors of the Ojibway. Long ago, warriors fought to defend their village or hunting territory. They became known as master strategists in planning the defense of their people.

The Bird Clan represented the spiritual leaders of the people and gave the nation its vision of well-being and its highest development of the spirit. The people of the Bird Clan were said to possess the characteristics of the eagle, the head of their clan, in that they pursued the highest elevations of the mind just as the eagle pursues the highest elevations of the sky.

To meet all the needs of the nation, the clans worked together and cooperated to achieve their goals. The Clan System had built in equal justice, voice, law and order and it reinforced the teachings and principles of a sacred way of life. Today some people still follow their clan duties, but, for the most part, the original force and power of the Clan System has diminished to a degree of almost non-existence.