

FEASTS AND GIVEAWAYS

Feasts and giveaways are an important part of Native life. They are held throughout the year to acknowledge the help received from the spirit world, our relatives and ancestors, and other members of the community. Feasting gives us the opportunity to honour all those who have helped us, to feed them and express our respect for what they have done for us.

Feasting is also spoken of as the way we strengthen the life and spirit of our bodies.

TYPES OF FEASTS

Feasting may be an individual or group event. At larger gatherings, drumming, singing and Traditional dancing may be a part of the ceremony and feast. Tobacco is always offered and the foods served vary according to the customs of the community or territory and the reason for the feast.

Feasting is done for many reasons. Some of these are given here:

< Seasons <

There are spirit feasts with the four seasons, the spring, summer, fall and winter. The feast for honouring and feeding the dead is held in the fall and, in some communities, also in the winter.

Some people hold a feast before the seeds are put in the ground and again after harvest time. Feasting the harvest may consist of taking a plate of food back to the garden and leaving it there as a way of giving it back to the earth.

< Names and Clans <

Feasts are held at naming ceremonies.

When clans gather they will feast their clan, usually every spring and fall.

< Fasts and Sweats <

Fasters are given a drink of water and berries after their fast and the sacrifice they have made for everyone is honoured at a feast. Feasts are often held after the sweat lodge ceremony as well.

< Sacred Items <

We feast the gifts that we carry. We acknowledge the spirit of our pipes and feathers for their power to help us. We have drum feasts for the drums we carry. We feast all the items that we took with us on our fasts, such as our colours, feathers and shakers.

< Berry Ceremony <

A berry ceremony is held to thank Mother Earth who has given birth to the berries.

< Moontime Ceremony <

There is a feast for a girl who has just begun her moontime.

< Helpers <

We feast the helpers that are given to us and all the others who so eagerly give us help when we ask for it. People will feast the eagle, the bear, the wolf, the mountain, the fire, the plant medicines, and all the other spirit helpers who come to them.

< Many Other Feasts <

There are feasts for the salmon and deer because they have come back.

There is a feast of wild meat before the girls go out to dig for bitter root and carrots.

< Feast for the Dead <

A feast is also a way to maintain a relationship with our families or loved ones who have gone to the spirit world. At a Feast for the Dead, the teachings say

that we can call the spirits back. This is also the time when we can ask them for help in addition to showing our gratitude to them for the help that they have given us. In some communities this ceremony is held in the fall between the time that the leaves fall off the trees and the first snowfall.

The feast begins with prayers and an offering of tobacco. The people and directions are acknowledged and the spirits are told what is being done. The food is set out on the table.

The foods prepared include those that the relatives and ancestors liked when they lived here. This might be wild meat, corn, squash, and berries. Other foods and teas, such as cedar tea, raspberry tea, and red willow tea, are added to these four basic foods. Salmon, bannock and wild rice are other foods included in feasts. The smudge bowl is taken around and the food and people are smudged.

Gifts of cloth and leather are also given with the food and tobacco offering for the spirits.

Out of respect, the younger ones make up a plate of food for the Elders. By doing this, the younger ones learn about taking care of another human being. The Elders are the first to be served and then the other participants follow in a specified order. As the feasters make up their plate of food from the dishes laid out on the table, they put a spoonful of food for their relatives and ancestors into a pot set out for this purpose. At the end of the feast this pot of food is taken outside and the food is set on the ground for the spirits. Any food remaining on the table at the end of the feast is taken out and put on the ground or burned when the sun comes up in the morning. It is said that during the night, many spirits come from every

direction to share in the feast. The spirits of the relatives and ancestors bring other spirits who haven't been remembered and they share the food with them.

A feast will be given when a family member has died. A sacred fire burns for four days and a food offering is made for the person each day before sundown. A ceremony is held before the feast where it is said you eat with your relative for the last time.

GIVEAWAYS

Very often a feast is followed with a giveaway. We have given tobacco and food to the spirits to express our gratitude for what we have received, such as a return to good health, a name for our child or a plentiful harvest. With the giveaway we thank the people who have come to be our supporters. Some people say that the things that we give away are things that we are giving to the other side, the spirits, even though a person here is receiving the gift.

The person who is holding the feast and giveaway may make ribbon shirts, moccasins, dresses and small tobacco pouches for the people, or they may give blankets and other useful items for the home. They feel good after giving away the gifts that have been made and that they value.

At a traditional wedding, for example, the couple gives all kinds of gifts to those who come. By doing so, they lay the foundation of sharing for their future together.

A good example of feasts and giveaways is when a young warrior has his first kill. The new hunter holds a feast and gives all of the animals' meat to the community in respect for becoming a hunter. This is the

rite of passage of a boy to a hunter.

As our awareness and knowledge of our traditions and culture increases, so does our honour and respect for these ways. This has not always been the case in our communities. There are always those who present themselves as Healers, Elders or Medicine People who have not earned that title and may use the teachings and medicines in the wrong way. It is important for everyone, especially young people, to be aware of this and to exercise caution when they seek healing, teachings or advice. It is advisable to consult with people whom you trust to get referrals to respected and recognized Traditional Elders, Healers or Medicine People.

Other pamphlets in this series include:

- C Approaching Healers, Elders and Medicine People
- C Fasting
- C Your Name and Colours
- C Clans
- C Sweat Lodge
- C Moontime
- C Traditional Healing
- C Four Sacred Medicines
- C Sacred Items and Bundles

Special acknowledgement is given to the following Healers and Elders who contributed their knowledge and understanding of the traditions and culture in the preparation of these brochures:
Jake Aguonia, Garnett Councillor,
Harlan Down Wind, Roger Jones,
Rose Logan, Mary Louie, Dorothy Sam,
Nelson (Sugar Bear) Shognosh,
Geraldine Standup and Ella Waukey.

This project has received financial support from the Government of Ontario, Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy.

Anishnawbe Health Toronto
225 Queen Street East
Toronto, Ontario M5A 1S4
Tel (416) 369-0486
Fax (416) 363-1083

©Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 2000



FEASTS AND GIVEAWAYS

“Native Teachings are about a Way of Life”

The information in this pamphlet is only a small portion of the many and extensive Native Teachings that exist. Teachings vary from First Nation to First Nation and even from one geographic region to another. For more information, please consult with a Traditional Elder, Healer or Medicine Person.

ANISHNAWBE HEALTH TORONTO

