

H) THE GREAT LAW OF PEACE - The Formation of the Confederacy

According to tradition, after receiving and following the cycle of Ceremonies, the Haudenosaunee villages began to prosper again in unity and harmony for a long period of time. Balance had been restored in their relationship to the natural world.

After some time, no one knows exactly how long, the people began to slip into the darkest period of their history. Wars and blood feuds erupted between villages. Chaos took over the peaceful life-style. The evil-minded people took charge. It became dangerous to travel in the forests. People became suspicious and violent.

The Creator sent another messenger of peace who was born under very special circumstances on the north shore of Lake Ontario. He was soon recognized as a special person, imbued with persuasive powers of the good mind.

He left home in a white stone canoe to deliver a message of unity and peace to the warring villages. He set out with a mission to establish a great peace, and took the name "Peacemaker." His actual name is still considered sacred by the traditional Haudenosaunee, and should not be used.

However, the first person to truly listen to the Peacemaker was a woman named Jikonsahseh, who took the Peacemaker in, fed him, repaired his clothes and accepted his message of peace.

The Peacemaker first visited the Mohawk and confronted the most evil people to change their minds and behavior to accept the concept of peaceful coexistence. He had the power to persuade people and was often tested to prove himself. Eventually, he

visited with five nations of Iroquoian speaking people, the Seneca, Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga and Onondaga.

He met two special people. First was a man named Ayenwatha, who was grieving the death of his family. They had been killed by an evil and powerful man named Tadadaho, the other man who would have a major role in the establishment of the Great Peace.

The Peacemaker restored Ayenwatha, removing his grief as they conducted a ceremony using wampum shell beads to remember the words of condolence. This was the beginning of the use of wampum, which is a tubular bead made from shells. It is used to symbolize important thoughts, words, ceremonies, and agreements. (Wampum was not money, although it was sometimes used as a medium of exchange.)

Together they travelled and spread the message of peace, finding the most evil people of each nation to change them to the way of peace. The most difficult person was the evil Tadadaho. It took the Peacemaker three tries to finally convince Tadadaho to change. He had to gather 49 men that he had converted to peace in order to show Tadadaho the strength of the message. All 49 men sang a Great song of Peace, called the "Hai Hai," which held their minds together with the one purpose of pacifying the evil mind of Tadadaho.

Tadadaho was transformed from the most evil, with a crooked body, and snakes living in his hair, to leader of the united people. His body straightened out, and the snakes were combed from his hair, as he stood in the light to embrace the way of peace.

To confirm this coalition, the first Grand Council was convened at Onondaga. The fifty men, including Tadadaho, were made the chiefs of the Confederacy, and given the

title of "Hoyaneh" which means "the men of the peace, caretakers of the peace." They represented the clans of their nations. The Mohawks have nine chiefs; Oneida have nine; Onondagas have thirteen, plus Tadadaho, Cayugas have ten; and the Senecas have eight. But all Hoyaneh have the same position, no one has more power.

The assembled chiefs gathered around a great pine tree that the Peacemaker declared would be called the Tree of Peace, to symbolize the strength and protection offered by the unity of thought to accept the Great Law of Peace, the founding constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy. The Tree of Peace has become an artistic symbol for the Haudenosaunee acceptance of the Great Law of Peace.

The Peacemaker also took five arrows and tied them together, stating that each single arrow is easy to break, but united as one they become unbreakable. He then tied five strings of wampum beads together at one end. Both of these acts were meant to symbolize the unity of the five nations under the Great Law of Peace.

Several large belts of thousands of wampum beads were woven to record the message of peace so that the future generations of Haudenosaunee will be able to learn of the formation of the Confederacy. These wampums, considered sacred, form the constitution of the Confederacy.

Wampum belts were also used to document treaties, pledges, obligations and contracts. Wampum strings are sent from Onondaga to the other Nations to notify them of a Grand Council meeting. The acceptance of the wampum strings is a binding commitment to attend the Grand Council meeting.

The formation of the Confederacy had a profound influence on the life-style and culture of the Haudenosaunee. The Peacemaker held a vision of all the members united

as one family, living under one roof, and thinking with one mind. He used the Longhouse as a metaphor for this union, stretching from the east to west, across the territory of the Five Nations. This was the actual origin of the use of the common name "Haudenosaunee," meaning "People of the Longhouse."

Living in this metaphorical Longhouse, each nation/family had a specific duty and identity within the Confederacy:

ELDER BROTHERS:

Mohawk Nation - Keepers of the Eastern Door
Seneca Nation - Keepers of the Western Door

FIREKEEPERS - Onondaga Nation

YOUNGER BROTHERS:

Oneida Nation
Cayuga Nation
Tuscarora Nation (which would join the Confederacy around 1710)

The Great Law of Peace brought order and structure to the way decisions would be made in Grand Council. It stressed a principle of consensus, rather than majority rule. This system required more cooperation and more negotiation in order to arrive at a unanimous decision. However, when the Hoyaneh finally agreed, the agreement became supported by all, with no dissenting minority.

Before an issue could be discussed in Grand Council, the Firekeepers decided whether the issue was suitable for debate in a Grand Council meeting. Issues are introduced into the Grand Council by the Elder Brothers. Once the Elder Brothers reach agreement on the issue, they present the issue to the Younger Brothers. Discussion is conducted among the Younger Brothers until they reach agreement and they announce their decision to the Elder Brothers. If the Elder Brothers agree with the Younger Brothers, the Elder Brothers present the decision to the Firekeepers. The Firekeepers determine if the decision violates any rules or laws. The decision is then announced to all the people. If the Firekeepers find a problem, the issue is returned to the Elder Brothers and the process is repeated. The issue may go through the process three times. If agreement cannot be reached after three times the issue is in need of further examination, revision and presentation in another manner.

The Great Law incorporates a cultural management theory as well. The Hoyaneh were instructed to think of the future when making their decisions and not to think only of themselves. They were told to consider the impact of their decisions on the seventh generation yet to be born. Such long-range thinking has helped the Haudenosaunee survive with not only a deep respect for the past, but a healthy regard for the future as well.

It is said that each Hoyaneh, when they were originally assembled in a circle around the Tree of Peace, was instructed by the Peacemaker to walk into the forest until they saw an animal, then they would adopt that animal as the clan totem on the Condolence cane. Each title within the Haudenosaunee belongs to a clan. Only Tadadaho has no clan, as his position belongs to all the people.

The clan system revolves around the women, giving them equal rights in the society. There is a balance of duties between men and women, with women heading the clan. A

Clanmother was selected to look after the welfare of the clan, naming the children with a hereditary clan name, arranging and approving marriages, resolving or facilitating resolution of family disputes, and selecting the male leaders of the clan, including the Hoyaneh. The procedure for removal of an errant Hoyaneh resided with the women. Three warnings were given to the errant Hoyaneh, if his actions were not corrected, his Deer Antlers, which were a sign of his position, were symbolically removed. Women were acknowledged as the holders of the land, with responsibility for the crops. Women leaders supervised the planting, cultivation and harvesting of crops. These are two very important economic and political rights.

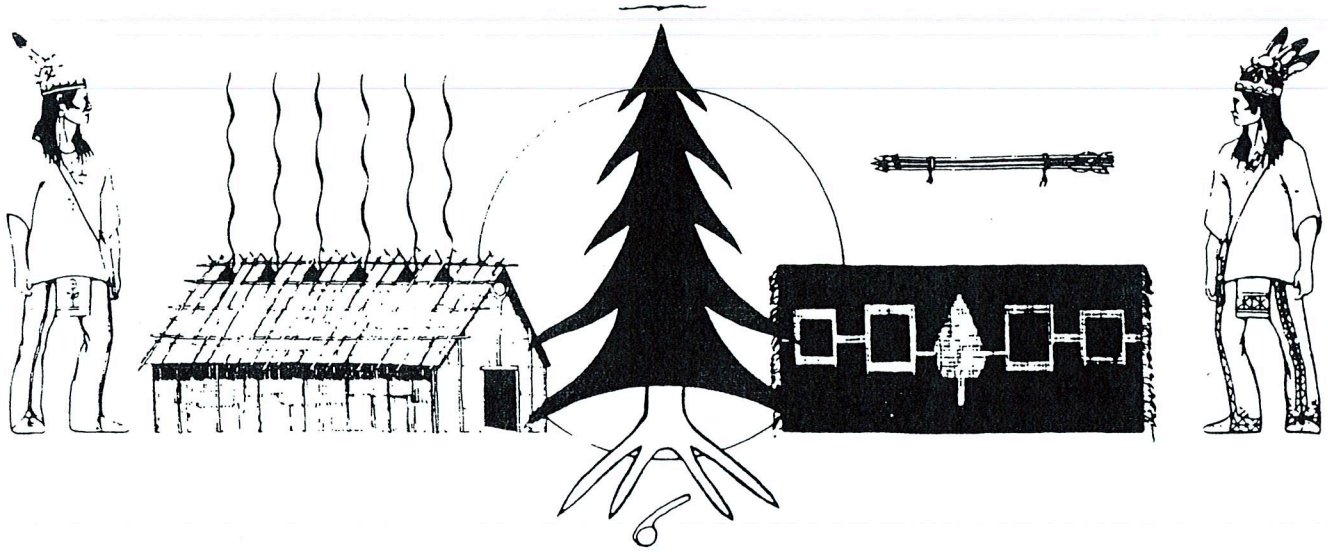
The Great Law also confirmed the individual freedoms which are known today as "human rights." These include the freedom from subjugation, freedom of choice, freedom of speech (regardless of age), and the democratic concept of popular initiative of the will of the people as the ruling authority. Leaders were directly accountable to those they served, and were recalled if they failed to perform for the benefit of the people.

After restoring peace to their territories, the Haudenosaunee then began to carry this message of peace to many other nations. To understand the 'wars' or conflicts of the Haudenosaunee, one must view them from a Haudenosaunee perspective. Under the principles of the Great Law Of Peace, conflicts should be the last resort to issues. While it is a historical fact that the indigenous nations did wage war against other indigenous nations, they were not without reason, nor were they as contemporary recorded history depicts them. First and foremost, the Haudenosaunee relied on a process of negotiation and mediation before thoughts of a military solution were employed. The diplomacy of the Haudenosaunee remains an attribute and a discipline. All avenues were exhausted before thoughts of aggression were considered. When the battlefield was taken and the Haudenosaunee were the victors, processes were introduced to the nation to continue its culture and ways of living with one important condition: never to pick up the war axe

against its neighbors again. By the mid 1600s, the Haudenosaunee had numerous nations as their allies. Many other indigenous nations shared the protection offered by the Confederacy. Haudenosaunee influence was felt as far north as James Bay in Quebec, as far south as the Carolinas, and as far west as the Mississippi River.

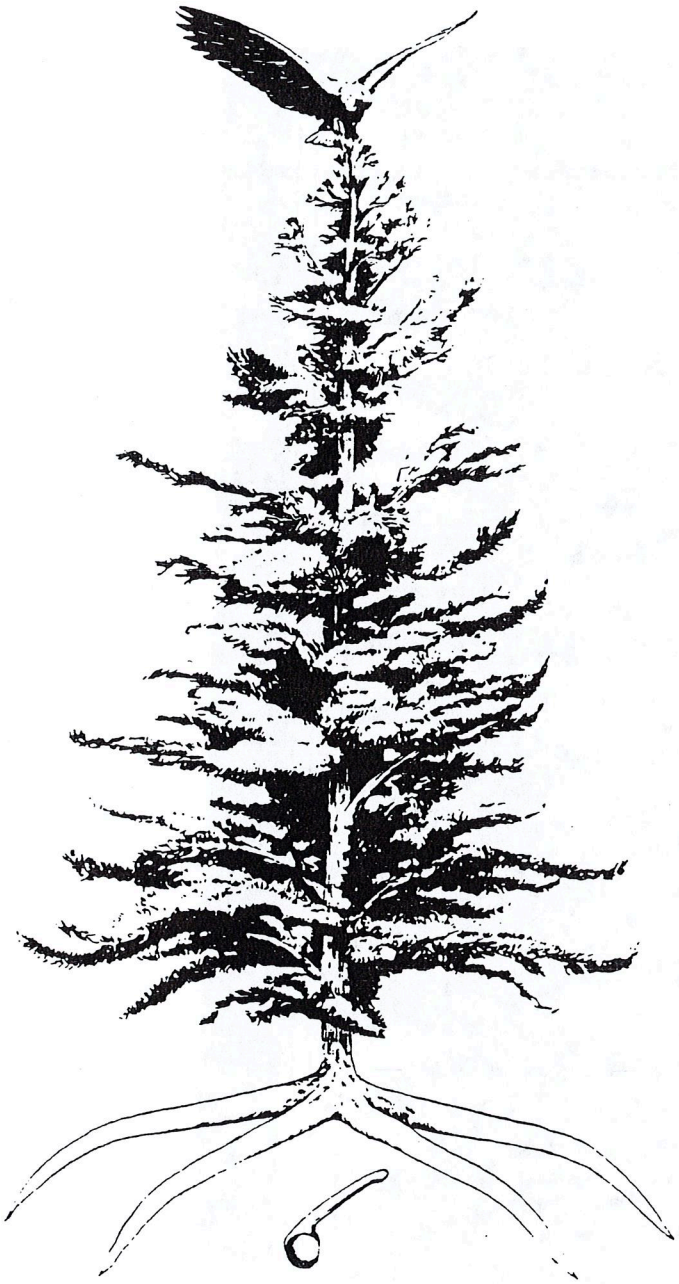
The Great Law of Peace offered an intertribal framework to resolve differences. It also created a unified diplomacy among the Haudenosaunee that would deeply affect the history and culture of the Europeans in North America.

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SYMBOLS OF THE HAUDENOSAUNEE



Artist: Kahionhes

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TREE OF PEACE

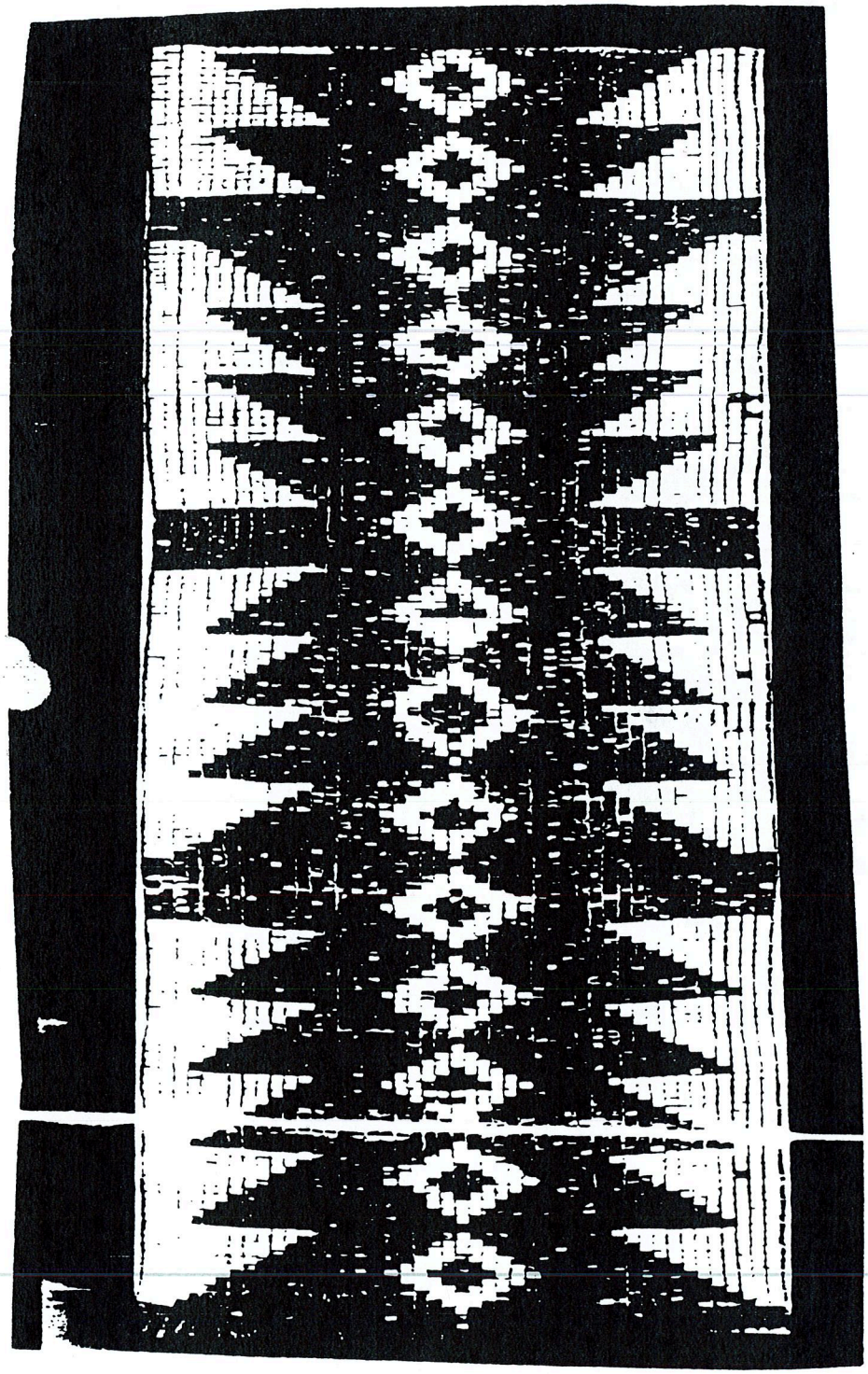


White Roots that go to the Four Directions, Guardian Eagle ever watchful above, weapons of war buried beneath

Artist: Kahionhes

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ADODARHOH BELT



With this belt, Adodarhoh (first Chief of Chiefs, an Onondaga) was commissioned to screen matters brought before the Grand Council to ensure no proposals that could injure the Confederacy were acted upon. The elongated v's represent seagull's wings and the long bars, sticks used to sweep or throw away any detrimental "creatures" near the council fire.