

ART OF PEACE: PEACEMAKER'S JOURNEY

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PEACEMAKER'S JOURNEY

Peacemaker's journey began on the north shore of Lake Ontario and the message of the Great Law of Peace, Kaianerekowa, is still celebrated and practiced throughout Haudenosaunee territories. As well, in 1988 the United States (U.S.) Congress passed a resolution to recognize the influence that the Haudenosaunee constitution had on (both) the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Peacemaker's journey is a significant part of Haudenosaunee history, and Native American history at large. Peacemaker's journey also impacted Canadian and U.S. history and contributed to U.S. legislation.

IDENTIFYING TRAUMA

We can draw parallels between the time before the Great Law and the trauma that is currently afflicting our communities. Some of the current trauma might be directly linked to the process of colonization. The list can be short but the ramifications are still not totally understood and/or appreciated for their impact: disease, legislative abuse, lies, cultural genocide. The current term to describe the effect in our Native communities is 'inter-generational trauma.'

Between the time of Creation and the time that the Great Message, the Law of Peace, Power and Righteousness was sent from the Creator through the Peacemaker, the people experienced many changes. They were originally instructed to live harmoniously with all things: animals, plants, water, and each other. The people followed the cycles, respecting the natural laws of planting, harvesting and hunting and always remembered to give thanks.

Villages flourished, providing abundance for all members. Laws regarding clan lines were adhered to, allowing for healthy future generations, while addressing the villages' needs regarding bereavement. The people lived without fear of cold, hunger, or loneliness. They were living their lives to the fullest, perfecting the gifts given to each by the Creator while living in a state free from the slightest threat of (manmade) harm.

Slowly, the people moved away from the original teachings. They no longer practiced 'being of one mind' and became self-fulfilling. They forgot to be thankful for what was being provided and forgot to be mindful of each other. Caring and sharing was replaced with greed and violence. People lived in fear; sometimes isolating themselves and their families from their home villages in order to ensure safety.

Trauma was normal. Some elders have described that 'blood ran like rivers' throughout territories. The people were in constant state of fear. Bloodshed was rampant. Many families were traumatized and were so busy burying their dead that their own clans, ceremonies, and values were forgotten. During this time there was no end in sight to stop the trauma inflicting the villages, and the trauma became normal. Loss, which at one time would have been considered 'alarming,' was now an expectation. People experienced trauma upon trauma, grief upon grief.

The Great Law was sent by the Creator to the Peacemaker to provide the basis for the people to be safe and comforted without hunger or loneliness. The people accepted the law and rebuilt themselves, their families, and their villages. All of the villages were united, symbolically connected 'in one longhouse.'

For many of our native communities the high incidence of trauma is currently overwhelming and ongoing. Grief under normal circumstances can be difficult. But these (current) circumstances are unique and might indicate a shift. Before the Great Law, people were constantly warring, causing much trauma. Today much of the high incidence of trauma is too often self-inflicted.

So how can the teachings help? Now is the time for a new kind of 'healing society' where we put our minds together to develop strategies for our families and communities. We can review, rediscover and reformat ancient strategies from old teachings to reflect the spectrum of current needs. We can start the discussion of how we can use the teachings to help today. Syncretism!

1. Where the Water Never Freezes

There was a time, many years following the time of Creation, when people lived in fear. Many people were being killed for no reason. This caused much trauma in the villages.

On the north shores of Lake Ontario, near present-day Kingston, Ontario, there was a village. One woman from the village feared for the safety of herself and her daughter. They moved away isolating themselves. When the daughter was older, she became pregnant. This caused much concern for the girl's mother. She was alarmed as there were no other people in their lives.

The daughter repeatedly told her mother that she did not know how this happened. The child was born at their home in present-day Tyendinaga. The (now) grandmother was determined to rid them of the male infant. Three times she tried to end his life. She buried him, only to find him in his mother's arms upon return to their lodge. She then tried to burn him in a fire, to again find him in his mother's arms. Finally, she also tried to drown him but returned to the lodge only to find him safely being cradled by his mother.

The grandmother was then visited by a messenger, who informed her that the infant was sent with great message of Peace, power and righteousness for the people. She then accepted her grandson and helped her daughter to raise him. At the place where she tried to drown him, to this day the water never freezes.

When the infant boy grew, he told his mother and grandmother that he had a message, which he was sent to share. He asked if they could go to their home village. They took him into the village, and he asked if they would hear the message. The people from the village agreed to hear this young man's message. The message was heavy and was presented at a time when violence was rampant and killing and loss were common and valued. Many warriors knew self-worth only through warfare. His message would be unusual during this time. The message was:

- Peace (healthy body, healthy/good mind)
- Power (harmonious, non-violent unity)
- Righteousness (justice between people and justice between nations)

Traditionally, these principles were followed with the understanding that all decisions are made in the best interest of the 'faces yet to come,' meaning we begin the decision-making process by considering the best interest of our most vulnerable: the unborn, then the babies, the crawling ones, then the children, and so on...

The people of this Huron village then met. They discussed the message, and after much deliberation they accepted it. They (the Peacemaker, his mother and his grandmother) then stood, and the people from the village formed a line and shook their hands. They agreed to follow these teachings and follow the Great Law of Peace, Power and Righteousness.

2. White Stone Canoe

When they left the village and returned to their home in present-day Tyendinaga, the young man would leave for long periods each day. Finally one day he asked both his mother and grandmother to accompany him. He had built a canoe from white stone and informed them that he would soon be leaving to share the great message.

They were puzzled as to why he would use this material to build a canoe. To make a canoe of stone would have taken much longer and much toil, and after all, would surely sink. The Peacemaker told them that this was a way that the people would know his message was powerful.

Then Peacemaker took his mother and grandmother to a hill near their home. He took them to a tree and told them that this tree would help them to check on his wellbeing. If they should worry about him, they should cut a piece from the tree. If the tree drips with sap, then they will know that he is well. If the tree bleeds, they would know that his message was not accepted and he had been killed.

The three of them went to the canoe and helped push it into the water. The canoe left a mark in the shore. Some people who currently live in the area where the Peacemaker was born still know where this happened.

3. Hunters on the South Shore

When the Peacemaker's canoe touched the south shore of Lake Ontario (near present-day Rochester, N.Y.), he met either a family or a group of hunters. He told them of the message that he was bringing and told them to return to their villages. He told them to tell their leaders and colleagues that he would be travelling to their villages to bring the message.

4. Ganondagan

Peacemaker made his way to meet with the person who was believed to contribute greatly to the trauma that was affecting everyone. He went to the home of Tsikonhsase. She was a cannibal and a witch. She lived near Canandaigua Lake at the crossing of two great trails. She was known to have a lodge that was warm in the winter and cool in the summer. She was a good cook and always had a pot of seasonal soup or mush, and fresh tobacco for the pipes of weary travelers who were actually the warring men.

Tsikonhsase was known for pampering them, gaining their confidence in order to be entrusted with their secrets of calculation and warfare, claiming to be on the side of her guests. Her location was ideal and strategic as individuals from all directions sought refuge with her. Thus she was able to manipulate many warriors and wars using her hospitality.

When the Peacemaker came to see her, he told her to stop. She accepted the message and was made the first clan mother; named the 'Mother of Nations.' She is also known as the 'Queen of Peace.' Afterwards, when warriors would attend her lodge, she would share with them the teachings of the Great Law. She advocated for Peace, power, and righteousness. Her warmongering had changed and, taking no sides, her people would now be known as 'Neutral.'

It is important to note that the clans were already established before the Great Law. The family was structured around the maternal ties. This meant that children followed the direct lineage of their mother. With Tsikonhsase being placed as the Mother of Nations, the nations would also be matriarchal.

This means that the decisions were made by the women and the clan mothers and adhered to by chiefs. It was understood that there was an innate, natural power that the women held and their connection to the earth and to life was unarguable. Haudenosaunee would be both matrilineal and matriarchal.

Tsikonhsase replaced her old ways with teaching the warriors about the Great Law of Peace. Peace, power, righteousness, compassion, unity, justice/forgiveness.

*Ganondagan is near present-day Seneca Falls, N.Y., where the first U.S. Women's Rights Conference was held in 1848.

5. Thatataho

Peacemaker went to see the man who was known as the most 'twisted.' He travelled eastward to present-day Onondaga Lake, N.Y. He approached Thatataho, who was known as a cannibal, as were many at that time. He was also known as a wizard, practicing many hurtful deeds. He is described as having a twisted mind, and appeared as though he had snakes living in his hair and wrapped around his body. His hands flailed in front of him when he spoke.

Peacemaker did not argue, but turned away and left.

6. Cohoes Falls

Peacemaker journeyed east to Mohawk territory. He met with the people. They were unsure of his words and told him of their plan to prove his words. They were at Cohoes Falls near present-day Albany, N.Y. If he survived going over the falls, his words were true. Peacemaker agreed to their plan. This story changes: some say he was thrown tied to a branch or tree, and others say he jumped untied over the falls. The people waited and, when he did not reappear in the water, they returned to their village believing that he had surely drowned, validating their concerns that his words were untrue.

7. He Survived the Cohoes Falls

In those days, travelers would follow an important protocol. They would not go directly into the palisade of a village. They would build a fire, and the smoke would beckon the village runners to go and find out their business. Some say it was the next day, others say it was up to three days later; the people in the village near Cohoes Falls saw the stream of smoke that was so straight that it ‘pierced the sky.’ They sent their runners to find out whose fire it was and what their intended business was. The runners returned to tell their village that the fire beside a cornfield belonged to the man who had been thrown over the falls. They were then instructed to escort him into the village. Because he had survived this feat, the people of the village accepted the message of Peace, Power, and Righteousness. When he arrived in the village, the people greeted him and took care of him. They offered words of comfort and support.

8. Peacemaker Lifts the Grief From Ayonwatha

Ayonwatha (Hiawatha) had wandered alone for some time, heavy with grief. He had had many daughters who had each, one by one, died. His grief became so heavy that he could not bear to be with others.

One day he went to an elderberry bush. He cut twigs from the bush and strung them together. He recited to himself that these strings of beads made from the elderberry twigs would help to lift the burden of grief from people.

The beads would symbolize the following:

1. The soft deer hide to dry the tears from your eyes, allowing you to see all of the beauty of creation.
2. The eagle plume to wipe away any dust that has settled by your ears so that you can hear the beauty of those who you love and hear the laughter of the children and the songs of the birds.
3. The water that you drink to clear your throat so that you can speak clearly again.

When Ayonwatha met Peacemaker, his grief was evident. Peacemaker extended himself to help lift his grief. Ayonwatha explained the string of beads that he had made.

Peacemaker agreed to perform this ceremony for him, as he could not be expected to lift his own grief. Ayonwatha and the Peacemaker would become strong allies. Peacemaker had a speech impediment and Ayonwatha became his spokesperson.

9. Thatataho Sees Peacemaker’s Reflection

Thatataho was cooking when Peacemaker climbed on the roof of his home and looked in through a hole. Thatataho looked into his cooking pot and saw Peacemaker’s reflection. When he saw the kindness in Peacemaker’s Face, he immediately began to change.

10. Tsikonhsase Helps Straighten Thatataho

At the time when Thatataho was ready to completely transform from the ‘creature’ that had become, Thatataho was said to have a crooked body; his hair and his mind were twisted and tangled, and he appeared as though he had snakes in his hair. Peacemaker and Ayonwatha helped to straighten him, some say by using the power of the ‘good mind.’ There are also stories of them massaging medicines into his crooked body. Tsikonhsase would help to straighten him. She placed the deer antlers on his head to show that he was now a chief. In the photo he holds the ‘white mat’ that symbolizes the fragility of the Peace. It is understood that Peace is delicate; it can be disrupted by harsh words. The stick that he holds helps to keep the fire clean.

11. Edge of the Woods

The three Mohawk turtle titles:

- Tekariho’:ken (He Thinks Two Ways; Separates/Divides the Matter)
- Ayonwa:tha or Hiawatha (Always Awake; He Who Combs)
- Sha’tekari:wate (Things/Matters of Equal Height; Level Words)

They were met at the wood’s edge.

12. The Seneca Join

- Kanonhkeritawi (snipe)
(Hair Singed Off; It Broils)
- Teioninhokara:wen (wolf)
(It keeps the Doorway Open; It Holds up the Door Flap; Open Door)

The Seneca were adamant that they would not endorse the Law of Peace. They finally agreed after much discussion about their role and following a long total eclipse of the sun. *This was at the time of ‘high corn.’

- August 31, 1142 (Barbara A. Mann and Jerry L. Fields, 1997).

13. Tully Lake

When Peacemaker was preparing to install the chiefs in office after they had been chosen by the families and then presented by the clan mothers, Ayonwatha was sent ‘toward the rising sun’ to gather the people of this endeavor.

He came to a place called Tully Lake (in present-day New York State). The lake was covered with thousands of ducks. When Ayonwatha neared the lake, the ducks all flew away, taking all of the water. Ayonwatha then walked on to the bed of the lake to find the beautiful purple and white quahog shells.

These shells later replaced the elderberry twigs and became the wampum used to record agreements and for ceremony.

14. Individual Arrows are Broken

Again, this part of the story can change. Ayonwatha took five arrows and broke them each individually. He explained that nations are weak on an individual basis, but that there is strength in unity.

15. Peacemaker and Tsikonhsase

Peacemaker standing behind the council fire is clutching the five bound arrows symbolizing the Five Nations.

‘Now they will be united, they will be as one mind and one head, one heart, and one power.’

When Ayonwatha found the quahog shells at Tully Lake, wampum beads made from these shells would be strung together and used to record significant agreements as legal documents. The wampum belts seen in the photo from left to right are:

- Thatataho Belt (representing the 14 Onondaga chiefs). It was the duty of Thatataho, the principal Onondaga chief, and his colleagues to be the keepers of the Great Council Fire.
- Two-Row Wampum (second belt at Peacemaker’s feet). It reminds and reaffirms equality between genders and nations.
- Five Nations or Ayonwatha Belt (in Peacemaker’s hand). It symbolizes the territories now joined as in ‘one longhouse.’ This belt is the national belt of the Haudenosaunee. This belt records when the 5 nations – the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk – buried their weapons of war to live in Peace. Each square represents a nation, and the white line connects each nation in Peace.
- Dust Wing Fan or Ever-growing Tree Belt (beside fire). The white roots of the tree have spread out, one to the north, one to the east, one to the west, and one to the south from the Haudenosaunee territory. The Great White Roots represent Peace and strength. If any man or any nation outside of the Five Nations wished to obey the Great Laws of Peace they may follow one of the roots to the tree and they are welcome.
- Women’s nomination Belt (held by Tsikonhsase). It records the rights of nomination given to the women (clan mothers).

- Dish with One Spoon (in pottery). It represents the idea that all of the hunting lands of the Haudenosaunee were meant to be shared and that there should be no hunting disputes: 'they will have one dish and the food which belongs to one will belong to all.'

Peacemaker informed the men (who were nominated by the women) that they shall carry the good mind, share, care, and be generous. 'You will work with the other clans of your nation. Everyone will work together so that everyone can walk on the earth without fear.'

16. Encircles Everything

All of the nations joined together as in one longhouse. The Mohawk are the keepers of the Eastern door, the Seneca are the keepers of the Western door, and the Onondaga are the fire keepers. The Oneida and Cayuga are the younger brothers and provide a safe place if needed.

There are 50 chiefs and 49 clan mothers. They form a circle around the Tree of Peace. The weapons of war were buried and were carried away by an underground river.

The clan mothers are on the outside of the circle welcoming their family back into the circle. During these times of evident trauma in many of our communities, there may be a need for making a conscious effort to reinforce the teachings of unity and safety.

17. Tuscarora's Join

Unity does not have to be limited; it can embrace everyone, and it works best when it's shared.