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Chapter 1

Many Nations, c-1450-1784

Most American Indian tribes' names for themselves translate into English as "people." Tribal affiliation means being one of the people in community. From the person through the family, the clan or band to the tribe, loyalty and mutual support can be counted on without hesitation, especially at periods of crisis. Tribalism remains one of the strongest forces at work in the world. The primary purpose of the tribe, in the past as now is to ensure as beneficial a life as possible for members of the tribe. The landscape in which the tribe lived serves as part of the community whole and is defended at all costs.

Tribes have always had two basic internal strengths: clans or bands and customs. While the tribe make decisions on general affairs, clans or village communities handle specific problems. The particular issues affecting the few are kept out of tribal affairs by allowing clan or local solutions. Customs rise as clans meet specific problems.

In the classical past, a tribe prospered or suffered as one. When the tribe had an abundant harvest or adequate hunting, everyone benefited. When these were poor, everyone suffered. Tribalism did not provide economically so that half went without, while the other half thrived. Leadership, land-use, education were concerns of importance for the tribe for the benefit of all. The tribe operated as a cultural unit because of family relationships, shared experiences in a specific landscape, a common collective memory, and a common language, although there existed more than one dialect of that language.

Clearly many tribes live in the contemporary world lacking the consciousness of their identity, the commitment to a common way of life, and a shared contemporary tradition. Yet Native American tribalism continues to be a force because of the sustained need for family relationships and a concept of home ground.

Iroquois White Roots of Peace. The League of the Iroquois existed as a significant union of tribes in what is now upstate New York. Of the many federated systems for collective action by tribes in North America, covering an extended geographic space, one of the most famous and lasting is the Iroquois Great Law of Peace or *Kaianekowa*. This system was based upon concerted agreement and then recorded on wampum belts that contained its provisions. The text of the Great Law began with the planting of the Tree of Great Peace – the great white pine which served as a metaphor for the unity of the league which originally included the Seneca, the Cayuga, the Onondaga, the Oneida, and the Mohawk tribes. The tribes initiated this federated system of governance anywhere from the ninth to the middle fifteenth century before modern European contact in the sixteenth. The evergreen tree and the principal fire were located on the land of the Onondaga Nation, the center of the federal system, which has lasted well over five hundred years.

The order of peaceful federation came from the vision of Deganawida, the Peacemaker. The first person he convinced of the significance of his message was Jigonhsasee or New Face, a woman who lived alone. This success was followed by convincing Ayon-hwathah or Hiawatha, an Onondaga man, who in turn, took the vision to Thadodaho or Adodarhonaah, a particularly malevolent medicine man.

After a considerable amount of time, no degree of success arose among the Onondaga. Then Peacemaker took his vision to Mohawk country. He waited in a tree at Cohones Falls near the mouth of the Mohawk River. Some Mohawk cut down the tree so that it fell into the gorge. But the next morning a Mohawk party found Peacemaker by a fire on the bank of the river. This feat convinced the Mohawk of his power. They accepted his message and became the founding tribe of the League of the Iroquois.

In the meantime, Hiawatha had failed to convince Tadodaho of the value of the peace plan. During this period, the malevolent medicine person had overseen the death of Hiawatha's three daughters. Devastated by grief, Hiawatha left his home and traveled east to the Mohawk country. Along the way he walked to a lake, which had become dry. The dry lake was covered by shell beads which he collected. He placed most of these in a buckskin bag, but began to string some together as a symbol of his sorrow. In time he met Peacemaker. Deganawida began to chant the Requickening Address or Consolation Ceremony for the first time. It asked the grieving person:

1. To wipe away the tears
2. To unplug the ears
3. To unstop the throat
4. To restore disturbed organs of the body and remove the yellow spots
5. To wipe the blood from the mat
6. To dispel the darkness and bring daylight
7. To make the sky beautiful
8. To replace the sun in the sky
9. To level the earth over the grave
10. To bind the bones together by the twenty string of wampum given for murder
11. To gather together the scattered firebrands and rekindle the fire
12. To raise up the minds of women and warriors
13. To dispel the insanity of grief
14. To restore the torch to its place
15. To restore the chief by raising him up again

The ritual cleared Hiawatha's mind of grief. Together they sang the Peace Song, the *Hai, Hai*.

The Peacemaker and Hiawatha taught the ritual to the Mohawks and accepted adoption into the Mohawk Nation. With this essential ritual they traveled westward accompanied by Mohawk chiefs to the Oneida villages. The Oneida joined the League and were called the "younger brothers" by the Mohawk. Beyond the Oneida were the Onondaga, where the dangerous Thadodaho lived. They bypassed this obstacle to approach the Cayuga, who also joined. The three nations then returned to the Onondaga. The Onondaga joined. Then the chiefs of the four nations went to the Seneca, who also joined. This completed the League in its early passage.

Fifty chiefs sat as equals in the Council of the League of the Iroquois. Together they accepted the Great Laws. The code of peace rests on four points. First, the mourning song or ceremony served as the basic foundation of the League. The requickening talk bound the whole together as the basis to short circuiting blood feuds. Second, there was the will to be righteous in the presence of the code and fire. Third, there was the power to be exercised as civil authority. Fourth, peace was to be maintained as the basis of health in the society.