

### **Birth of the Haudenosaunee**

#### **Journey of the Peacemaker**

Over a thousand years ago on the shores of Onondaga Lake, in present day central New York, democracy was born. The Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and the Mohawk people had been warring against each other and there was great bloodshed. These five nations had forgotten their ways and their actions saddened the Creator.

The Creator sent a messenger to the people so that the five nations could live in peace. His name was the Peacemaker.

The Peacemaker carried powerful words of peace to the five nations. He traveled in a canoe of white stone to show that his words are true.

One of the first to join the Peacemaker’s vision was an Onondaga named Hiawatha. Hiawatha was in mourning with the death of his daughters. The Peacemaker used Hiawatha’s purple and white wampum strings to clear his mind to think clearly again. Together they traveled to the other nations persuading them to put down their weapons of war.

The Peacemaker then sought out the most evil people of the five nations. He knew that for peace to endure, these men needed to be turned into good-minded leaders.

The Peacemaker had already successfully convinced the Mohawks, Oneidas, Cayugas, and Senecas to join the Great Peace; however an Onondaga named Tadodaho stopped the completion of the vision. He was the most evil person of the time. Tadodaho was so evil that his body was twisted and snakes grew from his head.

The Peacemaker gathered all of the chiefs. They traveled together to convince him to join the peace. Only then did Tadodaho accept the Peacemaker's message and his special duty of caretaker of the council fire of the Haudenosaunee. His body and hair straightened and he became the last of the fifty chiefs. The five nations were united at last!

The Peacemaker showed them that one nation can be easily broken, like a single arrow; but five nations bound together, like five arrows, will become strong. The Peacemaker further symbolized this union of peace by selecting the white pine tree. The tree’s pine needles are also bundled into groups of five to remind us of the Great Peace. The Peacemaker uprooted a great white pine tree leaving a great hole. Everyone then buried their hatchets of war and replanted the tree. The Peacemaker placed an eagle on top of the Tree of Peace. The eagle is there to warn the Haudenosaunee of any dangers to this Great Peace.

A wampum belt made of purple and white clam shells was created to record the event. Four squares (starting from the east) representing the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga and Seneca Nations with the Great Peace Tree (representing the Onondaga) in the center. This became known as the Hiawatha Belt which showed the union of the five Nations.

## Coming Together

The Onondaga Nation is a sovereign nation with its own government. This began when the Peacemaker replanted the Great Tree of Peace. It has been in existence for countless centuries.

The entire Haudenosaunee (Ho-den-no-sho-ne) has fifty Hoyane (Ho-ya-nay) or chiefs among the five nations. The Hoyane are all considered equal. To show that they are leaders, the Peacemaker places the antlers of the deer on the Gustoweh (Gus-to-wah) or headdress of every Hoyane. When in council, every chief has an equal responsibility and equal say in the matters of the Haudenosaunee.

The Peacemaker envisioned the chiefs holding arms in a large circle. Inside the circle are the laws and customs of our people. It is the responsibility of the Hoyane to protect the people within the circle and to look forward Seven Generations to the future in making decisions.

At Onondaga, there are fourteen Hoyane, including Tadodaho. Each chief works with his female counterpart, the Clan Mother. In council they are the voice of the people of their clan.

The council is divided into three benches or groups. Each bench must work together on decisions for the nation. When a decision by council has been agreed upon by all three benches, it comes with the backing of all of the chiefs in agreement. It is said that the Council is “Of One Mind”. There is no voting.

Since that first meeting with the Peacemaker, the Onondaga Nation Chiefs and Clan Mothers continue to govern by the ways given by the Peacemaker. This makes the Haudenosaunee and the Onondaga Nation the oldest continuous democratic government in North America.