

The Riddle of Peace: The Spirit and Rule of Law

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The Haudenosaunee constitution, the Great Law of Peace, is a composition of social wisdom and practical civic instructions that formulate the Haudenosaunee's exemplar governing structure. It is used by some as an instrument of peace that ensures freedom and liberty to its populace, while others use it as club in order to rigidly consolidate power. How then, do the people ensure that the second course is avoided?

Recently I was made aware of a distinction that has induced within me, a greater understanding of the Great Law of Peace. This distinction exists between the terms Kaianerenhsera'kó:wa and Kaianere'kó:wa. Both of these terms vaguely describe, in Kanien'kéha, what is often called in English; the Great Law of Peace. But it must be taken into account their literal translations and what is implied by these terms.

Kaianerenhsera'kó:wa, from its root word kaianerénhsera (law), identifies in English; the "great binding law". It suggests a collection of laws that consist of both what the Peacemaker originally devised as well as what has been added to the rafters of the symbolic Long House that is the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy. It outlines the governing structure of the Haudenosaunee, its institutions, and its political processes. It contains all the aspects of what political scientists call a constitutional democracy and due to its pure political perspective will therefore be dubbed in this commentary, as the "rule of law".

Kaianere'kó:wa, from its root word ioiánere (goodness), identifies in English; the "great goodness." In reference, this term combines two integral parts of the Great Law of Peace. Primarily it includes the story of the origin of Tekanawí:ta and the formation of the Great League of Peace; which will accordingly be dubbed as the "spirit of law." Furthermore, the Kaianere'kó:wa also includes the aspects of Kaianerenhsera'kó:wa or rule of law, that has been previously described in the paragraph above.

Let it then be recognized that Kaianere'kó:wa incorporates both the spirit of law and the letter of the law and will be used by the author as the all encompassing term for the Great Law of Peace. Indeed, one also must acknowledge that an imbalance of either quality will upset the social stability of the Haudenosaunee. For example, if the spirit of law existed without the discipline or letter of the law, then the universal principles of efficiency and discipline would disintegrate and thus chaos would reign. Likewise, the letter of the law without the spiritual and philosophical basis would pass upon the people, a sense of fascist totalitarianism and would ultimately go against the principles for which the Great Peace was formed. In either scenario of extremity, either too lenient or too rigid, it is without question that the majority of Kanien'kehá:ka would not accept to live in a society where freedom and liberty cannot be enjoyed.

How then, does one maintain such a balance? In order to successfully maintain the existence of freedom and liberty among the Haudenosaunee, all the components within the Kaianere'kó:wa must be considered; both the spirit and rule of law. However, when one is unclear of a particular issue in

consideration or concerned of an imbalance, one must simply resort back to the three principles for which the Kaianere'kó:wa was created. This also applies to the many interpretations of parts contained within the Kaianere'kó:wa that are somewhat controversial. Again, in order to determine the validity of a particular interpretation, one must compare the interpretation with these three principles and determine for themselves, whether or not it is consistent or contrary with the original teachings of the Peacemaker.

This author will now attempt to render the three principles according to his understanding:

Skén:nen- Generally translated as “peace” or “contentedness”. This peace not only means the absence of war or violence among the Haudenosaunee, but the mental health and well being of the individual. It is a state of mental contentedness and intense concentration. The health and well being that is achieved as an individual ultimately results in the peace and contentedness of the collective. This principle produces an atmosphere that is free of war, violence, anger, and hatred.

Karihwí:io- Generally translated as the “good message” or “good way”. Ka'nikonhrí:io, or the “good mind”, is sometimes supplemented for the term Karihwí:io. This principle is commonly and erroneously translated as righteousness, although righteousness is in fact the result of practicing the good tidings and good mind. In any case, it refers to the power of reason and inner goodness. This righteousness provides an atmosphere liberty and justice that is free of corruption and evil intent.

Ka'shatsténhsera- Generally translated as “power” or “strength”. This power or strength is built as a result of establishing a bond among those who practice and share the previous two principles. The bond is a result of who have found peace and righteousness, not only within themselves, but also amongst themselves. This power or strength provides an atmosphere whereby if anything should anything attempt to penetrate the tranquility and stability firmly established, a person can rely on the support of others to help maintain their strength.

In recent years unfortunately, the Kaianere'kó:wa has been used as a weapon rather than an conduit of these three principles. It must be recognized that the true essence and objective of the Kaianere'kó:wa are the principles for which it is pillared upon that co-habitat into a moral equation that establishes specific criteria for efficient and balanced decision making. Not only are these principles both the criteria and result of the Kaianere'kó:wa., but it must be further noted that they are interdependent upon each other, as one will not succeed without the reinforcement of the other. With this essential foundation embedded in the minds of the people, a perfect balance will be maintained between the spirit of law and the rule of law; and thus the riddle of peace will be solved.

Ever onward towards the good tidings of peace and power!