

## **The Traditionalist Doctrine**

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*Disclaimer: This commentary is the opinion of the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Eastern Door or the Haudenosaunee.*

To a surprisingly significant percentage of Kahnawa'kehró:non, a return to traditionalism is perceived as a move backwards in popular progress, or at least what we are conditioned to believe as backwards. To such persons, by no fault of their own, traditionalism is identified with a way of life whereby one does not utilize modern technology or conveniences. These people falsely understand that the traditionalist, as a principle, refuses to utilize anything that has not been created from the hands or originated the minds of another Onkwehón:we. It is therefore mentioned that this is not the ideology behind traditionalism.

What is traditionalism? Traditionalism is a concept that is shrouded in mystery and subject to countless versions of interpretation and misunderstanding. Therefore, this author will attempt to investigate and offer an opinion of the true nature of Haudenosaunee traditionalism and its need to continue. As a universal definition, traditionalism is way of life desired and shared by a distinct group of people who share some type of common culture, language, and history. Moreover, a traditional society is composed of unique ancestral ideologies and belief systems that have successfully operated over a prolonged period of time; thus confirming the endurance and efficiency of such lifestyles. Social connections between the individual, family, clan, community, and nation are strongly bound within a traditional society. For example, within a traditional society a child is the responsibility of the not only the parents, but the whole community. Despite the simplicity of traditional societies, they should not be regarded as inferior in comparison to modern so-called progressive societies because traditionalism enjoys the stability of its social, political, and economic structures.

In essence, the unique brand of Haudenosaunee traditionalism is efficiency in practice. The traditional ways of the Haudenosaunee are based upon a universal utilization of efficiency. For example, the use of modern transportation is enjoyed by traditionalists and is far more efficient for long distance travelling than walking. In the spirit of efficiency, it must be recognized that the traditional ideologies of the Haudenosaunee have operated most efficiently for hundreds of years, discouraging them to adopt foreign ideologies that are somewhat less efficient and beneficial (i.e. the Indian Act). It is not necessary for these institutions to change because it has already been devised and refined to a level of near perfection, which proves to skeptics that the Long House way of life is not a relic of the past but the way to ensure Kahnawake's future. A popular rhetoric that distinguishes the traditionalist from progressive individualists is; when something is unbroken, it need not be fixed.

The traditional way of life of the Haudenosaunee is similarly characterized and synonymous to contemporary concepts such as communalism or socialism. In both communalism and socialism, an emphasis is placed upon the survival and welfare of the collective as opposed to the success and comfort of the individual. Such societies are composed of a group who voluntarily participate in a cooperative livelihood that shares the burden of labor and as well the fruit of such labor. This concept is reinforced by the Kaianere'kó:wa in its analogy of the bowl from which all Haudenosaunee would share from. This analogy of wisdom, of course, describes the nationalization

and sharing of all resources in the territories of Iroquoia and prohibits the Haudenosaunee to fight or draw blood over trade and commerce within their country. Contemporary Kanien'kehá:ka must learn once again to rely upon one another, for only in a society where people can truly rely and inter-depend upon each other in order to survive can they develop true trust amongst them.

Haudenosaunee survival can be attributed to its traditional philosophy of interdependence and balance. For example, traditionally there has been a division of labor between Haudenosaunee men and women. The reasons for such a division were to complete various tasks cooperatively with maximum productivity and efficiency. In the heyday of the Haudenosaunee, the winters were indeed harsh and the failure of a task could lead to starvation or worse. A consequence of individuals not participating in the interdependent structure of the Haudenosaunee would eventually result in social break down. Indeed, with the American and Canadian colonization of our homeland and assimilation of our people, the Haudenosaunee have now attained social breakdown. For one reason or another, Iroquois men and women did not fulfill their duties and were led into a foreign world of competitive nonsense.

Another example of this interdependent philosophy is contained within the condolence procedures of the Haudenosaunee, whereby those whose minds are not clouded by grief have a responsibility to condole the mourning and remove the painful obstructions that discourage their use of ka'nikonhrí:io or a good mind. This philosophy is also recognized within the origin of the clans and the procedure of its council whereby a strict balance of power and interdependence is needed for these systems to operate efficiently and effectively. What is learnt here is that the individual has a responsibility to the collective and the collective to the individual.

Historically, the Haudenosaunee have been attributed and praised by Western sociologists and anthropologists for their unique concept and sense of autonomous responsibility. Autonomous responsibility refers to the individual's conscious actions in relation to the welfare of the collective. These autonomous acts are committed without the sanctioning of any authority, but the individual commits the act knowing that it is harmonious with the current policy of the collective. This is one sociological aspect that distinguishes Haudenosaunee freedom and liberty from that of other societies and nations. It is a unique concept that sometimes becomes a problem when one who commits an autonomous act without properly understanding the effects or consequences of such an act.

How is this remedied? For our young people it begins in the home with education and positive upbringing that will eventually cultivate well-rounded individuals with a keen sense of duty and considerate responsibility. As for our adult population who may have been neglected in the ways of education and that are set in their rigid ways, an effort must be made to enlighten such individuals on their duties and responsibilities; as life is a constant learning experience.

Why must traditionalism continue to exist? From a political perspective, traditionalism must continue to exist in order to fortify and sustain our national status. Without this national status the Kanien'kehá:ka could not unlock its inherent rights and jurisdiction; ultimately being reduced as a ward of Canada or the United States. A nation by definition is a collection of people whose unique traditional components, such as language, culture, historical links, and specific political institutions

with defined territories, sets them apart from the fundamental characteristics of another collection of people. Simply, a people must be distinct from others in order to obtain a national status. A notable example of a people who capitalize on this technicality is the Quebec separatist movement. The political parties associated with the general movement for Quebec sovereignty (or at least a special status for Quebec in Canada) has developed this technicality into a strategy whereby they lobby their existing federal government into acknowledging and recognizing the province of Quebec as a “distinct society”. This political action is taken in order to lure their federal government into paving a road towards a separate Quebec state. Unlike Quebec however, the Mohawk Nation, as a traditional institution, does not need Canada to acknowledge it as a distinct society since its continued existence and operation is evidence enough for the world.

Commonly, the popular perception of nationhood is usually and erroneously associated with statehood, a concept that exercises the social, political, and economic jurisdiction authorized through nationhood and other inherent claims. Statehood, the nation’s next stage of evolution, is a sovereign or self-determining nation that occupies and controls a particular territory. A state by definition is an autonomous and self-determining nation that asserts jurisdiction and control over a defined territory within their traditional homeland. Without these traditional components in place and exercised, the Kanien’kehá:ka could not exist as a nation and assert its sovereign jurisdiction. One can objectively appreciate the extreme importance placed upon continued existence of traditionalism.

Although small in number, the traditionalist continues to live by these ideologies in order to ensure a prosperous life for themselves and their children; as it provides a disciplined and enthusiastic work ethic resulting in maximum productivity, and efficiency. Traditionalism provides a cultural platform and program that solve the many social problems that plague the Kanien’kehá:ka such as drugs and alcohol. Civically, traditionalism ensures equality, justice and liberty among its populace, which ultimately provides an atmosphere of peace, righteousness, and power.

### **The Unofficial Traditionalist Platform and Program**

In the previous section, definitions had been established for traditionalism, the reasons for its continued existence, as well as the internal benefits of this way of life, but what of the traditionalists themselves? What do they believe and what do they want?

In the case of the Haudenosaunee, a traditionalist is one who participates in the political, spiritual, and social systems of the Long House. These people live their life according to the traditional teachings of peace, righteousness and the power that results from unity and the use of a good mind. This equation provides for communal efficiency and social harmony. As stated in the previous section, the common ideology of the traditionalist is the emphasis on collective rather than the individual. The traditionalists operate much like a beehive with everyone contributing and cooperating in the efficient and complex division of labor system each of whom understanding his or her individual responsibility and duty to the survival of the collective.

It is these people who will ensure the stability of the Haudenosaunee infrastructure and thus fortify and sustain the national condition of the Kanien’kehá:ka. Let it be then established that the traditionalist is a nationalist by nature, however it must also be established that a nationalist isn’t necessarily a traditionalist as they are distinguished by their own complex social system.

With the above-mentioned introduction, let us now examine the unofficial platform and program of the traditionalist. One may note that many of the sections contained in this unofficial platform and program consist of the many subjects spoken of in the Ohén:ton Karihwatéhkwen, or the Haudenosaunee thanksgiving address.

#### **Regarding Onónhkwa (the medicines)**

The traditionalist believes in the power of the medicines that mother earth provides. These medicines may at the time be shrouded in mystery, but it is believed that Shonkwaia'tíshon has provided our mother the Earth with the healing power to combat the many sicknesses that harm our people. The traditionalist makes an effort to learn about the many various medicines and their uses and at the same time teaches his or her knowledge among other Onkwehón:we so that this knowledge is never lost. A traditionalist is responsible for using his or her knowledge of the medicines to help anyone that is in need, as all Onkwehón:we have come from the earth.

#### **Regarding Kanien'kéha (the way or language of the Mohawk people)**

The traditionalist believes and recognizes the importance of learning and teaching our language. Language is said to make up one third of one's culture and provides a necessary link into ancestral thinking. The traditionalist is dedicated to either learning or teaching their knowledge of this ancient language. The traditionalist understands that in order to survive as a nation; the language must survive.

#### **Regarding Kanonhsonni'kéha (the way of the Long House)**

The traditionalist celebrates and cherishes life and the renewal of life. The traditionalist does not worship idols, nor do they celebrate wars, battles, or anything else that lives only in the past, as the Haudenosaunee are a people who are consistent with renewal. The traditionalist regards time as a natural cycle whereupon mother earth replenishes itself. As mother earth enters into its different stages, the traditionalist will celebrate and offer thanks to the Shonkwaia'tí:son and the natural world by way of ancient convention. The traditionalist is committed to learning and sharing knowledge of these old ways.

#### **Regarding Ohontsà:ke (Mother Earth) and the Natural World**

The traditionalist believes in the celebration of mother earth's many means and forms of sustenance and survival. From the soil to the four winds, the traditionalist recognizes its connection with the earth and respects its power. Again the concept of celebration and renewal is emphasized here. The traditionalist wants to put an end to the unnecessary destruction and rape of our mother Earth by any means necessary. The traditionalist will be forever environmentally conscience of their responsibility and spiritual connection to mother earth and the natural world. The traditionalist is also a devoted gardener; learning mother earth's secrets to be tangibly self-sufficient.

#### **Regarding the Kaianere'kó:wa (The Great Law of Peace)**

The traditionalist believes in the efficiency and righteousness of the Kaianere'kó:wa as the primary means of providing peace and power to its people. The traditionalist encourages all Kanien'kehá:ka to follow the teachings of the Kaianere'kó:wa as well as its efficient system of governance. The traditionalist is responsible for educating the non-traditional people

within their territory, of the wisdom and efficiency contained within of the Kaianere'kó:wa so that it may flourish and continue to exist.

### **Sovereignty and Independence**

The traditionalist believes in the sovereignty and autonomy of the Mohawk Nation and the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy. The reason the traditionalist desires to be sovereign and independent is to have a geographical land base where our people can practice our way of life and the Kaianere'kó:wa without foreign interference. Through enhancing and embracing the principles of the Kaianere'kó:wa under the protection of sovereignty and independence, the Kanien'kehá:ka can finally enjoy great rights such as freedom, liberty, and justice as it will be provided as the final result of this equation. Thus, the traditionalist is responsible for asserting the sovereignty of the Mohawk Nation and the Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy so that it is recognized and respected by the world; particularly Canada and the United States.

### **Regarding the Kahswénhtha (the Two Row Wampum)**

The traditionalist believes in the Kahswénhtha whereby each nation will travel side by side, the river of life in their own vessels. It is provided here that never shall one cross into the path of the other; thus establishing a code of non-interference. Furthermore, each vessel shall contain within it their various institutions, customs, and beliefs, etc. Never shall one vessel impose such items upon the other; thus establishing a policy of mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and independence. The traditionalist pledges to continue to fulfill their responsibility in upholding the Haudenosaunee end of the Kahswénhtha as a means to attain peace and friendship throughout the world. Once recognized under a banner of non-interference and mutual respect, peace will reign between the Kanien'kehá:ka and any other people who uphold these principles.

The ironic part of this program is that there are many within the Mohawk Nation who may not consider themselves to be a part of the traditionalist denomination; yet they unconsciously live their lives according to these principles. Such people have planted gardens, raised their children with a sense of autonomous responsibility, and have taught the young one the importance of the language. They believe in non-interference, interdependence, and respect for the natural world. These people may not go to any Long House, but unconsciously have the heart and spirit of our ancestors nonetheless; and thus an integral part of our cultural survival. Those who are Haudenosaunee, be patient with those who haven't yet felt comfortable enough to enter our Long Houses, but consistently encourage them with good words and nurture their noble spirits; so that one day we may be of one mind, body, and heart.

Ever onward towards the good tidings of peace & power!