



What are the Underlying Values of Haudenosaunee Culture?

Our culture is a way of thinking, a way of feeling, but also an intuitive way of problem solving and a unique way to express ourself in the world. The Haudenosaunee call all of this “Ongwehonweka” meaning all of things that pertain to the way of life of the Original People. Ongwehonweka includes all of the values, mores, ethics, philosophy and beliefs that we have inherited from our ancestors.

VALUES

There are shared values held by each generation that contribute to the concept of the self. Values are shared principles that are considered important in life, that include:

- Thinking collectively, considering the future generations.
- Consensus in decision making, considering all points of view.
- Sharing of the labor and benefits of that labor.
- Duty to family, clan, nation, Confederacy and Creation.
- Strong sense of self-worth without being egotistic.
- People must learn to be very observant of the surroundings.
- Everyone is equal and is a full partner in the society, no matter what their age.
- The ability to listen is as important as the ability to speak.
- Everyone has a special gift or talent that can be used to benefit the larger community.

MORES

There are mores that are the customs that are considered essential to maintaining the characteristics of the community:

- Clanship relations and names are important. Clan identity impacts on nearly all aspects of the social, political and spiritual organization of the community.
- Council Chiefs protect the welfare of the people.
- Clan Mothers maintain social harmony.
- Faithkeepers keep the ritual order moving.
- Annual cycles of thanksgiving help establish order and rhythm.
- The arts connect the generations in spirit.
- The native languages are the keys to the expressions of the soul.

ETHICS

There are ethics that are the moral philosophy and principles that determine what is right and what is wrong in the mind of the traditional Haudenosaunee:

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| • To be generous | • To feed others | • To share |
| • To be thankful | • To show respect | • To be hospitable |
| • To honor others | • To be kind | • To love your family |
| • To be cooperative | • To live in peace | • To live in harmony with nature |
| • To be honest | • To ignore evil or idle talk | |

PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of the Haudenosaunee is the search for understanding of the basic truths of the native universe. It is how the Haudenosaunee have come to understand their role in the world and the important lessons that understanding teaches:

- There is a Creator who produced the things that give bounty to this life.
- The universe is full of living beings - sun, moon, stars, earth, winds, and rain.
- There is a living spirit in all things - animals, plants, minerals, water, and winds.
- People have power, called orenda, that accumulates through life experiences.
- People should live in peace with each other.
- People should live in harmony with nature.
- People should be thankful everyday.
- People should be kind, sharing what they have.
- Life is a journey, as people are born from the earth, exist on the earth and are returned to the earth to continue that journey after death.

BELIEFS

Belief is the feeling that something is real and true. The Haudenosaunee trust and have confidence in their beliefs about the universe, about the spiritual powers of that universe and about how humans are to conduct themselves on their journey through life. To believe is a conscious act that affects the way we see the world. Art, in broad terms of language, music, dance, and making things, is the act by which we manifest belief, express our own personalities as people living in the world. The Haudenosaunee beliefs include the following:

- The Universe is a large sphere that is divided into the Skyworld above and the Underwater World below. In the middle plane of that sphere rests the earth, which floats like an island on the back of a giant turtle.
- The celestial bodies and forces of that universe are living entities with an inner spirit that can be beneficial to humans if proper respect is paid to them. All people have a spiritual obligations to perform the rituals of thanksgiving in order to assure the harmony of the universe can be maintained.
- The Great Creator has sent three main spiritual messages to the Haudenosaunee after the Creation. These were the Four Sacred Dances, the Great Law of Peace and the Gaiwiiio, or Code of Handsome Lake.
- The children of the Haudenosaunee are born within a Circle of Tradition, but that birthright also requires duty to maintain that circle. Those that join another religion, become citizens of foreign countries or work against the general welfare of the people are considered to have removed themselves from within this circle. Those that do, leave all of the rights of the Haudenosaunee behind.
- Talent is a gift from the Creator to be used for the sake of the entire community, not self-aggrandizement.

This article is reprinted from www.sixnations.org, the official website of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.



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