

A Meeting of the Minds

A New Look at Peacemaking, Justice and Self-Governance Based on Ancient Algonquin Indian "Meeting of the Minds" Traditions A Brief Outline

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Maintaining peace and justice is a very valuable and important goal. It should be the main, primary objective of any government. In order to maintain these twin societal virtues, peace and justice, there must be doorway after doorway to peace, and barrier after barrier to war. There must be layer after layer of problem solving mechanisms imbedded in the culture which are designed to prevent conflict both internally and with other peoples and other nations of the various confederacies. As Thomas Hobbes correctly noted, there are flaws in the human mind which lead to war, but as he failed to understand, ancient pre-monarchal governments maintained peace without written laws or kings because those governments evolved with those flaws already accounted for, and were therefore holistic solutions rather than monkey-wrench, quick fix solutions or social oppression. As repressive monarchal solutions are on the rise again, I thought perhaps it a good time to re-examine the Algonquin models, which are at least one source for the definition of "freedom" as alluded to in the U.S. Constitution.

The following are based not only on oral tradition, colonial documentation, current practice, and linguistics, but also on my own common sense extrapolation of Algonquin governmental logic and pragmatist philosophy, in order to make it complete. In a future treatment, I will attempt to fill out this framework with examples from not only Algonquin history but from ancient peace-loving cultures from around the world.

The Algonquin systems of governance, peace and justice, do not exclude war, or corporal punishment either. But those are last-gasp options representing the acknowledged failure of statesmanship. Until the other steps have clearly failed, those practicing what the Algonquins call The Way of the Heron should not engage in war. It is said that war is the failure of diplomacy, and nowhere is this more true than in Algonquin society. Even archaeologists have marveled at their lack of fortifications in disputed territories, relying instead on ancient traditions of diplomatic skill as a means of homeland defense.

I will present seven aspects of Algonquin self-governance which promote peace and justice, each with seven levels, stages, or components, depending on the situation. These cycles of sevens within sevens is in accordance with Algonquin beliefs about the creation of the universe and its construction. They are 1. Principles of Respect 2. Honoring the Levels of Creation 3. The Seven Sacred Covenants, 4. Seven Aspects of Self-Governance 5. Levels of Ethical Response. 6. Levels of Restorative Justice, 7. Levels of Political Protest.

The first four groups of seven represent the beliefs of the people which insure a peaceful, conflict-free atmosphere. The last three groups of seven represent the best problem-solving techniques of the Algonquin people, for when conflicts arise, developed over centuries and still used today.

Seven Principles of Respect

1. Respect for feelings and for suffering
2. Respect for individual space.
3. Respect for limitations as well as strengths
4. Respect for boundaries and differences
5. Respect for truth
6. Respect for the earth and all paths, peoples, etc.
7. Respect for yourself in all aspects, high and low.

Honoring the Seven Levels of Creation

1. Honor the Creator
2. Honor the Sun
3. Honor the rocks
4. Honor the elements, wind, fire, water, earth.
5. Honor the plants
6. Honor the animals and birds
7. Honor mankind

Seven Sacred Covenants

The people, individually at adulthood, and as a nation, in keeping with the tradition of their ancestors, should choose to make the following [sacred covenants](#) with the Creator.

1. To protect and keep the land sacred and to keep [mother earth](#) free from devastation and exploitation.
2. To honor and respect animals and their rights,
3. To respect the dignity and free will of each person, to the extent that it does not infringe on the free will of others.
4. To respect the diversity of human races, beliefs, and traditions.
5. To uphold every human's right to negotiate as equals and to have their voices heard.
6. To respect everyone's thoughts and decisions including our own. We have inherited the ancient right to come to a meeting of the minds concerning all decisions that affect our life.
7. To strive for non-violent solutions to every problem through the Way of the Peacemakers. These are set forth in greater detail below.

Seven Aspects of Algonquin Self-Governance

1. Governments were decentralized. Governmental Councils were centered around sacred council fires, which were ideally located on islands in a river at the crossing place of a trail or major trade route. Many U.S./Canadian capitols are still located within a few miles of such probable historic sites.
2. Governments were laterally constructed, not top-down, although the sachem ("fingerpointer") system, and the war chief/peace chief systems possessed limited executive aspects, to be discussed elsewhere.
3. No one central chief for all Algonquins. Decision-making was kept on the local level where possible.
4. Grand chiefs were not automatically replaced when dead, the position of grand chief must be won by merit. Confederacies usually had no Grand Confederacy Chief, but were governed via meetings of the minds between Grand Chiefs.
5. Government structures were intentionally fragile and flexible so as to prevent co-option by outsiders or usurpers. Migration was a viable alternative to war if the people felt threatened. Neighboring relatives were expected to harbor such refugees for a time.
6. Governance was structured along lines of communication not power. Grand Chiefs within a confederacy would sweat together at least once a year and then talk about their concerns.
7. Government consisted of twelve confederacies, most of which included either seven nations. Some of these nations developed into lesser confederacies of subtribes over time. A few confederacies had more or less nations at any given time.

These three groups of seven acts represents seven types of response to unethical action.

Seven Levels of Ethical Response to Injustice

(An observation of fact; there are relative levels of ethical action in any society. History shows us examples of each level of response in Algonquin society, however, the Way of the Heron encouraged only the highest level of ethical behavior)

1. Self-sacrifice, beyond the call of duty to address injustice of others
2. Organize and teach in order to prevent future injustice
3. See injustice, stop it.
4. See injustice, report it.
5. See injustice, do nothing
6. See injustice, join in for personal gain
7. See injustice, commit copycat crimes

Seven Options For Victims Under Algonquin Restorative Justice:

Algonquin restorative justice is on the upswing again, and is getting some good press. This system is simple if the charge is destruction of property; the guilty party fixes the damage. In the case of a robbery, the guilty party replaces the object. However, in the case of murder, there were roughly seven levels of options open to the victims. As there were no jails, it was felt that justice should be swift so that anger does not build up over time which might lead to war. However, this justice can take many forms.

1. Forgiveness of the murderer
2. Lecture the murderer, teach them a lesson. (Ah-doo-ga'an, a teaching tale, see No Word For Time)
3. Pelts or other goods of considerable value
4. Adopt the murderer as a slave to do the work of the deceased.
5. After a period of trial to prove loyalty, adopt the murderer as a family member to do the work of the deceased, to help raise the family, etc.
6. Mark the murderer or injure them in some way.
7. Kill a family member of the murderer, or kill the murderer.

According to custom, a murder could only lead to war if the one killed was a chief. It was thought that if a chief was killed, the entire tribe suffered.

Seven Levels of Political Protest, Civil Disobedience, Non-Violent Demonstration, etc.

In the Algonquin political system. These devices should only be used as measured responses in proportion to the crime.

1. If communication is possible, work towards a meeting of the minds using the Way of the Heron mediation techniques: 1. fact finding, discussion 2. brokered negotiation 3. purification, 4. direct action. If there has been conflict, come to a treaty agreement. Use symbols such as burying the hatchet, smoking the pipe, etc.
2. If communication is not possible with the leader(s), the people will organize a march or other peaceful demonstration. March may involve both chants and slogans and non-verbal symbolic behavior. No laws are broken. Stirring oratory is made, usually by speaking truth from the heart, but sometimes in the Algonquin form of the Harrangue, an ancient art of complaining.
3. Peaceful demonstrations in which a minor law is broken to help dramatize the issues, or in which a minor unjust law is broken in order to change it. An example is when priests trespass into School of the Americas grounds. It is trespassing and trespassing is illegal, but it helps them bring attention to larger issues. Level 3 often involves obstruction as well, such as the Penobscot lashing themselves to a "Liberty Pole" to keep it from being cut down, (Thoreau, The Maine Woods) or Greens blocking entrance to the WTO meeting. (1999)
4. Peaceful demonstrations in which an important law is broken because it is unfair. Take for example Gandhi in South Africa, leading people of color to burn their green cards. (Gandhi) Note that arrests may occur, and that some protestors might be injured. These injuries if not responded to (passive resistance) are less plentiful than injuries arising from armed resistance.
5. Demonstrations or protests in which there is destruction of property, but not people. This may be called sabotage. The Manhattan Indians resorted to this to try to stop the murders under Dutch Governor Kieft. The Green Party has been known to try these tactics. Keep in mind that these acts are clearly illegal and will generally result in prison terms. It is important that no innocent bystanders (those not involved in the political protest) are placed at risk.

6. Conflicts in which people are injured, in which protesters allow themselves and others to be injured; was only used in extreme cases, usually in self-defense. Most "non-violent" leaders throughout history, including Martin Luther King, have kept this option open, but always found a way to prevent its use. Passivists such as Quakers, and Traditional Jainists, exclude this possibility, as well as step seven, which is war.

7. War, ie, conflicts in which people are killed. This is the last option, to be used when all diplomatic measures have not only stalemated, but have failed completely. It could be argued that the Colonial government went through all six stages and all available diplomatic tactics before resorting to revolution against King George III.