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# the SEED is the LAW

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### ■ Abstract

Since humanities arise from a specific place and from the people of that place, this article will focus on Peacemaker's revolutionary teachings about the seed of law. Long before the people from across the ocean arrived here on Turtle Island (North America) there was much warfare happening. According to John Mohawk (2001, para. 1), an Iroquoian social historian, "[t]he people had been at war for so long that some were born knowing they had enemies [but] not knowing why they had enemies". Peacemaker planted the seeds of peace which resulted in the Kayenla'kowa, the Great Law of Peace (n. d.), which is the basis of the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> Confederacy. With the burial of the weapons of war under the Great Tree of Peace the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> were able to develop their rituals and ceremonies to reflect their relationship with creation. This peaceful confederacy was disrupted shortly after the Europeans arrived with their violent imperialistic ways of life. The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) documented the situation of Aboriginal communities, which was the result of oppressive policies and programs of colonialism. The RCAP also captured the many different voices of the Aboriginal people in their struggle to revitalise their traditional teachings that will make them strong again.

*The Seed is the Law ... the law of life ... the law of regeneration. Within the seed is the mysterious and spiritual force of life and creation (Lyons, 1992, p. 33).*

### ■ Introduction

*Ka na'* (Onyota'a:ka or Oneida word for seed)? A mere seed? How can a seed be the law? These kinds of questions are needed to unpack and initiate thought for constructing a framework to promote Indigenous humanities. Since humanities arise from a specific place and from the people of that place, this article will focus on teachings from the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> (People of the Longhouse, also known as the Iroquois Confederacy composed of the Mohawk Nation, Oneida Nation, Onondaga Nation, Cayuga Nation, Seneca Nation and joined by the Tuscarora Nation in 1712) that are the basis of peaceful co-existence for all creation. As I begin this paper it is important that I introduce myself in my traditional language and bring greetings and thanksgiving to each and everyone:

*Sekoli Swakwekon. Ukwehonwe ne i. Onyota'a: ka tsi twa ka tu'ti. Tsyot s<sup>^</sup> nit ne Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> ne yu kyats. Kale Ka li wi saks ne yu kyats. Eileen Antone ne ab slo ni kek ne yu kyats. A no wal, ni wa ki ta lo t<sup>^</sup>.*

Greetings everyone. I come from Onyota'a:ka (People of the Standing Stone) known as Oneida First Nation of the Thames, near London, Ontario, Canada. My name in the Longhouse is Tsyot sa nit. My research name given to me by one of my thesis participants and an elder in my home community gave me the name Ka li wi saks meaning "She who gathers information". I am here to share with you some of the information I have gathered. Eileen Antone is my English name. I am from the Turtle Clan.

It is my contention that because of racist and discriminatory government policies I was not taught the language of my people. I was lead to believe that only the language of the dominant culture was valid and acceptable. I feel that it is a sad situation that many parents and grandparents experienced the oppression of these policies that they felt it

was better for them not to teach their children and grandchildren to speak the beautiful language that carries the culture, values and beliefs of our people. I firmly believe that it is necessary to begin this paper with an important foundational tradition of the Onkwehonwe (real people as opposed to the spirit/sky world people). This foundation in the cultural traditions of the Hotinosh<sup>^</sup>ni (People of the Longhouse) is the *Kanubelatuksla* words that come before all else. These words are called *Tetwanubelat<sup>^</sup>*, the Thanksgiving address:

As we draw our mind together the elders tell us that we give thanks to and for the people who have been able to join us in this particular activity. So we give thanks to and for you. We give thanks to and for Mother Earth our sustainer of life. We give thanks to and for all the plants and the three sisters that grow on Mother Earth with special thanks for the medicines of the four directions: Tobacco, Cedar, Sage and Sweetgrass. We give thanks to and for all the water that flows on Mother Earth as well as the water animals. We give thanks to and for all of the animals that walk or crawl on Mother Earth. We give thanks to and for the birds that fly overhead and we give a special thanks to the Eagle who flies high and gives us the gift of vision. We give thanks to and for the Thunders that come from the west bringing warm winds and rain to replenish the water system. We give thanks to and for our elder brother, the sun, for the light and warmth that we have. We give thanks to and for our grandmother, the moon, who regulates the water and coming of children. We give thanks to and for our ancestors the stars who continue to tell us the time to carry out our cycles and ceremonies. We give thanks to and for the four guardians who continue to give us guidance and direction. We give thanks to and for the prophets that brought the message of the good mind from Sonkwayatison. We give thanks to Sonkwayatison, the Creator, for all of these things. Ta ne tho n<sup>^</sup> ya wa.

Peaceful co-existence was not always the case for the Hotinosh<sup>^</sup>ni. Long before the people from across the ocean arrived here on Turtle Island (North America) there was much warfare happening. According to Mohawk (2001, para. 1), an Iroquoian social historian, "[t]he people had been at war for so long that some were born knowing they had enemies [but] not knowing why they had enemies". It was at the height of this troubling time that there was born into the Huron community, north of what is now known as Lake Ontario, a male child who would have an enormous influence on the people who constitute the Iroquois Confederacy.

## ■ The coming of the Peacemaker

Before this child was born, a spirit messenger from the Creator paid a visit to his mother with the news that she would bear a son (North American Travelling College, 1984, p. 17). Shortly after his birth this male child endured tremendous hardship at the hands of his grandmother. He miraculously survived the ordeal when his grandmother was also visited by "a spirit messenger from the Creator" (Thomas & Boyle, 1994, p. 12). The Grandmother was told "you are unable to erase this birth-event. This child has a great important message/work to do that is why he was born" (Elm, 1971). According to Elm (1971) a traditional Hotinosh<sup>^</sup>ni Oneida Chief, the spirit messenger told the grandmother:

He has the message of the Great Law (Kayenla'kowa), the Great Peace (ne kwáhoksk<sup>^</sup>:n<sup>^</sup>), for all nations (kwáhoktshyeyukwe'takwe:ku) therefore, you will nurture, raise and care for your grandson. You will name this child, a name that has never been given to a child before on Mother Earth since creation nor will ever be given in the future. The name is Tekanawi:tá:, that's what you will call him, your grandson.

Thomas & Boyle (1994, p. 11) explain that "This baby was born with a name, but the [N]ative people today know him only as the Peacemaker". With the care and nurture of mother and grandmother this child grew into manhood with many unique powers which were demonstrated when he became a man. The first demonstration of these powers was when he announced to his mother and grandmother:

I shall now build my canoe from this white stone, for the time has come for me to start my mission in this world. I know I must travel afar on lakes and rivers to seek out the council smoke of Nations beyond this lake, holding my course toward the sunrise. It is now time for me to go and stop the shedding of blood among human beings (North American Travelling College, 1984, p. 18).

## ■ The gathering together of the Five Nations

Thomas & Boyle (1994, p. 12) recount that the Peacemaker's mission in life was, "to bring peace, power and righteousness to all nations". The mission proved difficult. Cornelius (1999, p. 82), an Oneida/Mahican scholar and educator, explains that "At this time, the people had forgotten the old ways; thus, blood feuds, revenge, even cannibalism had become the prevailing human behaviour". With careful planning, the seed of Peace was planted within Hotinosh<sup>^</sup>ni

territory. Peacemaker began to visit certain individuals and explained to them his message of Peace. On his journey east he met Jokonsaseh, an evil woman who lived beside the path which passed between the east and west. Although Jokonsaseh was a wicked woman who enjoyed the fruits of evil, she listened and changed her ways as she accepted the message when:

He [Peacemaker] told her, "The message I bring is that all people shall love one another and live together in peace. This message has three parts: peace, righteousness and power, and each part has two branches. Health means soundness of mind and body. It also means Peace, for that is what comes when minds are sane and bodies cared for. Righteousness means justice practiced between men and between Nations. It means a desire to see justice prevail. It also means religion, for justice enforced is the will of the Creator and has his sanction" (North American Travelling College, 1984, p. 18).

Jokonsaseh was the first person to accept the Law of Peace and it is for this reason that Iroquois women possess the title of Chieftainship (North American Travelling College, 1984, p. 19). Alfred (1999), a Mohawk scholar, explains the role of leadership ingrained in the Great Law (n. d., p. 90):

In the Rotinoshonni tradition, the women of each family raise a man to leadership and hold him accountable to these principles. If he does not uphold and defend the Kaienerekowa [Great Law], or if the women determine that his character or behaviour does not conform to the leadership principles, he is removed from the position. As in other traditional cultures, the moral definition of leadership focuses on a person's adherence to the values of patience, courage, fairness, and generosity.

As Peacemaker continued his journey east to the Mohawk Nation he came upon the home of Tekarihoken a man who pursued the life of cannibalism. Again Peacemaker was able to convince the man to change his ways and accept the message of peace, power and righteousness and this is how Tekarihoken became the first leader of the Mohawk Nation and is also how the Mohawk Nation was the first of the Five Nations to accept the Great Peace (North American Travelling College, 1984, p. 20). According to oral tradition it took about 40 years or so to reach all of the Five Nations (Great Law of Peace, n. d.) to where there was fundamental change to the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> communities through the revolutionary teaching of the Peacemaker and an "understanding that human beings are rational beings capable of negotiating to solve differences" (Cornelius, 1999, p. 82). Eventually, Tadodaho, a strong, wicked

headman of the Onondaga, a vicious cannibal with a twisted body and snakes growing out of his head (Cornelius, 1999, p. 82) was approached with songs of Peace and the Peacemaker was able to comb the snakes out of his head and untwist his body so that he, Tadodaho, became well both mentally and physically thus enabling the establishment of the Great Law of Peace (n. d.). With the transformation of Tadodaho and within the Great Law, the Onondaga Nation became the Fire Keepers of the Iroquois Confederacy. Cornelius (1999, p. 82) states that the "Great Law of Peace ... established the form of government based on a consensus decision-making process". It was also based on the concept of non-violence as the weapons of war were symbolically buried beneath the Great Tree of Peace whose roots extended in the four directions inviting all to join who wanted to abide by the Great Law. With the burial of the weapons of war under the Great Tree of Peace the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> were able to develop their rituals and ceremonies to reflect their relationship with creation. The Peacemaker imparted many teachings to the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> through the one hundred and thirteen wampums of the Great Law (North American Travelling College, 1984, pp. 31-62). Kanatiyosh gives an example of wampum and states, "Since time immemorial, the Great Law of Peace was recorded through oral tradition and its messages and teachings were written into the symbols and pictographs of wampum belts" (n. d., p. 1). She describes what the wampum beads are, "The Haudenosaunee used and still use wampum, a long cylinder shaped bead made from quahog clamshell (the purple beads) and Atlantic Whelk (the white beads)" (n. d., p. 1). She explains that Wampum belts were and are used for recording the laws, official business as well as being used for religious ceremonies (n. d., p. 1).

One of the teachings of peace produced the condolence ceremony used when two warring parties came together in the space of a temporary truce at which time they acknowledged each others humanity and the losses each had suffered (Mohawk, 2001). During the condolence ceremony a set of three white wampum strings were used to express a given set of words to exchange, acknowledge and confirm each other. The first string was to clear the vision, the second string was to clear the hearing, and the third string was to clear the throat to restore the voice. The seed for Peaceful relations was planted. The seed of peace resulted in the Kayenla'kowa, "Great Law", which is the basis of the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> Confederacy. This was the system that was in place for the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> when the Europeans first arrived at Turtle Island.

#### ■ The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

With the principles of the Great Law in place the Europeans were able to settle in North America and because they, the Europeans, had a different worldview

they were able to oppress the Aboriginal people to gain a stronghold on the lands and resources that had been previously available to all people. The oppressive measures used against the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> people resulted in an armed standoff at Oka-Kanasatake in 1990 when the Oka mayor through major development initiatives wanted to put a golf course on the burial ground of the Mohawk people. The response of government to the Oka crisis was to commission a study on the situation of Aboriginal issues across Canada. This major study called the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (hereafter RCAP) began in 1991, took five years to complete and resulted in a five volume collection of data. A CD-ROM was also produced that contains the RCAP report and also the rich research reports from the various roundtables and public consultations that were held across Canada. RCAP found it useful to divide its own account of the historical relationship into four stages, with the first stage being "Separate Worlds". This stage is the period before AD 1500 where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies developed in isolation from each other (RCAP, 1996a). The account of the Peacemaker originated during the time of Separate Worlds.

The second stage was marked by "Contact and Co-Existence". The RCAP report indicates that:

The beginning of Stage 2 ... was marked by increasingly regular contact between European and Aboriginal societies and by the need to establish the terms by which they would live together. It was a period when Aboriginal people provided assistance to the newcomers to help them survive in the unfamiliar environment; this stage also saw the establishment of trading and military alliances, as well as intermarriage and mutual cultural adaptation. This stage was also marked by incidents of conflict, by growth in the number of non-Aboriginal immigrants, and by the steep decline in Aboriginal populations following the ravages of diseases to which they had no natural immunity. Although there were exceptions, there were many instances of mutual tolerance and respect during this long period. In these cases, social distance was maintained – that is, the social, cultural and political differences between the two societies were respected by and large. Each was regarded as distinct and autonomous, left to govern its own internal affairs but co-operating in areas of mutual interest and, occasionally and increasingly, linked in various trading relationships and other forms of nation-to-nation alliances (RCAP, 1996a, p. 38).

Because of increasing pressure from the European Nations, it was at this time that the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> and other East Coast Aboriginal peoples negotiated Peace

and Friendship treaties so that the people would be able to co-exist on the land. One of the first treaties negotiated in 1613 between the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> and the Dutch then later on with the French and the English was the Two Row Wampum, which is depicted on a beaded belt. This treaty shows two rows of purple wampum beads on a bed of white wampum beads. The white beads represent the purity of the agreement and the purple beads represent the two different people each going down the river of life in their own vessel. Whether it is the canoe or the boat each has their own way of being and as they go on the river of life they will never try to take over the other vessel. The three rows of white beads tell us that there is to be peace, respect and friendship as we all travel together on Turtle Island.

Stage three in this relationship is the stage of "Displacement and Assimilation". It is at this stage where assimilation took over creating such institutions as the Indian Act and residential schools. These institutions were then used to control the Aboriginal people thus disrespecting the treaty of the Two Row Wampum. As discussed in the RCAP report Stage 3, Displacement and Assimilation, the:

Non-Aboriginal society was for the most part no longer willing to respect the distinctiveness of Aboriginal societies. Non-Aboriginal society made repeated attempts to recast Aboriginal people and their distinct forms of social organization so they would conform to the expectations of what had become the mainstream. In this period, interventions in Aboriginal societies reached their peak, taking the form of relocations, residential schools, the outlawing of Aboriginal cultural practices, and various other interventionist measures of the type found in the Indian Acts of the late 1800s and early 1900s (RCAP, 1996a, p. 38).

These interventionist measures were used to control the Aboriginal people in Canada and had a negative impact in their communities. Marie Battiste (1995), a Míkmaq educator, describes the objectives and outcome of the formal education process for the Aboriginal peoples:

For a century or more, the DIAND [Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development] attempted to destroy the diversity of Aboriginal world-views, cultures, and languages. It defined education as transforming the mind of Aboriginal youth rather than educating it. Through ill-conceived government policies and plans, Aboriginal youths were subjected to a combination of powerful but profoundly distracting forces of cognitive imperialism and colonization. Various boarding schools, industrial

schools, day schools, and Eurocentric educational practices ignored or rejected the world-views, languages and values of Aboriginal parents in the education of their children. The outcome was the gradual loss of these world-views, languages, and cultures and the creation of widespread social and psychological upheaval in Aboriginal communities (1995, p. viii).

From personal experience and before I began a concerted effort to find out how the Onyota'a:ka child could best be served in the educational process, I didn't understand anything about the underlying Euro-Western principles that Native schools were built upon. I only knew that I was made to feel inferior; and that if I "worked" hard enough that maybe some day I would be just like the White people who were running the schools and every other system I was affiliated with. I didn't understand that the objective of the school system was to implicitly assimilate the Native people so we would no longer know who we were and that we would take on only the values of the dominant society. Upon research and reflection I was able to discern the importance and uniqueness of Aboriginal peoples and that our ways, our relationships and our stories were still with us. As Monture-Angus (1999, p. 159), a Mohawk scholar, indicates:

Aboriginal people in fundamental ways are always sharing and affirming these present and ancient kinship relations. These relationships are the basic fabric of Aboriginal laws. Every time Aboriginal people greet each other, they are affirming the fundamental relationships that exist between them.

The RCAP also found that:

These interventions did not succeed in undermining Aboriginal social values or their sense of distinctiveness, however. Neither did they change the determination of Aboriginal societies to conduct their relations with the dominant society in the manner Aboriginal people considered desirable and appropriate, in line with the parameters established in the initial contact period ... Non-Aboriginal society began to recognize the failure of these policies toward the end of this period, particularly after the federal government's ill-fated 1969 white paper, which would have ended the special constitutional, legal and political status of Aboriginal peoples within Confederation (RCAP, 1996a, p. 38).

The fourth stage, the stage that we are now in, is referred to as "Renewal and Negotiation". The RCAP report makes public that:

This stage in the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies, which takes us to the present day, is characterized by non-Aboriginal society's admission of the manifest failure of its interventionist and assimilationist approach. This acknowledgement is pushed by domestic and also by international forces. Campaigns by national Aboriginal social and political organizations, court decisions on Aboriginal rights, sympathetic public opinion, developments in international law, and the worldwide political mobilization of Indigenous peoples under the auspices of the United Nations have all played a role during this stage in the relationship. As a result, non-Aboriginal society is haltingly beginning the search for change in the relationship. A period of dialogue, consultation and negotiation ensues, in which a range of options, centring on the concept of full Aboriginal self-government and restoration of the original partnership of the contact and co-operation period, is considered. From the perspective of Aboriginal groups, the primary objective is to gain more control over their own affairs by reducing unilateral interventions by non-Aboriginal society and regaining a relationship of mutual recognition and respect for differences. However, Aboriginal people also appear to realize that, at the same time, they must take steps to re-establish their own societies and to heal wounds caused by the many years of dominance by non-Aboriginal people (RCAP, 1996a, pp. 38-39).

In RCAP the Commissioners report that new ways of working with Aboriginal peoples are paramount. They contend that a new relationship is necessary to "bring about change in human lives ... to ensure that Aboriginal children grow up knowing that they matter – that they are precious human beings deserving love and respect ... that they hold the keys to a future bright with possibilities in a society of equals" (RCAP, 1996b, pp. 38-39).

In appreciating the work of the RCAP now is the time to find the old seeds of our traditions, plant them and nurture them for the revitalisation of peace, power, and righteousness for all the Nations of the world. In this fourth stage Aboriginal peoples have more opportunity to research and reflect on their situation and Monture-Angus (1999, p. 160) found in her reflection that:

Maintaining good relationships with your family, clan and nation, but the rest of the living world as well (by which I mean the environment and all things around us), means that you are fulfilling one of your basic responsibilities as a human being. It is this web of relationships which provides the support, encouragement and instruction necessary to living a good life. It is this

web (or the natural laws) that is the relationship that has been devastated by colonialism.

In the struggle to decolonise, Aboriginal peoples must reframe the situation they find themselves in. Linda Smith (1999), a Māori educator, talks about reframing as being part of the decolonising process and articulates in her book that, “[r]eframing is about taking much greater control over the ways in which [I]ndigenous issues and social problems are discussed and handled” (p. 153). For the most part, governments and non-Aboriginal social agencies fail to recognise the relationship between Indigenous social problems and the history of colonisation (Smith, 1999, p. 153). Renewed awareness of Aboriginal traditions in Aboriginal literacy contributes to the development of self-determination, affirmation, achievement and sense of purpose (Antone et al., 2003, p. 6). The renewed awareness of Aboriginal traditions gives Aboriginal peoples skills to effectively participate in and to contribute competently and “in a good way” to society as a whole. With reference to the Antone et al. (2003) study, Aboriginal literacy consists in what Freire (1970) called the “conscientisation” of Indigenous peoples. This is in regard to the way in which Aboriginal literacy practitioners add their voices to the role of literacy, in the shaping and reclaiming of Aboriginality. Aboriginal literacy involves the certainty, awareness and knowledge that originates from “knowing for oneself”. Just as Smith (2005, p. 3), a Māori educator and scholar, explains:

A further issue here is that many indigenous groups have followed practices and programs of what has been termed “decolonization”. In many ways this is a different way to achieving similar outcomes to the processes of “conscientization” and “consciousness-raising”. However, I would argue that both of the processes are very different and teach and emphasize some distinctly different elements. My preference for using the latter terms is in fact based on the proactive and positive stance of a Kaupapa Maori approach. The term “decolonization” is a reactive notion; it immediately puts the colonizer and the history of colonization back at the ‘centre’. In moving to transformative politics we need to understand the history of colonization but the bulk of our work and focus must be on what it is that we want, what [it] is that we are about and to “imagine” our future.

In summary, the lesson of the Kaupapa Māori approach from New Zealand is that transformation has to be won on at least two broad fronts; a confrontation with the coloniser and a confrontation with “ourselves”. This

is what I have labeled as the “inside-out” model of transformation – in this sense, as Paulo Freire (1970) has reminded us, “first free ourselves before we can free others.

In the process of “conscientization” Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> need to continue to lift up the teaching of the Peacemaker so that we can continue the process of Peace, Power and Righteousness in order to have a good mind to work with ourselves and all of creation around us. The Onkwehonwe respect for Mother Earth needs to be lifted up and by transplanting this respect it means we understand our connection to Creator/Sonkwayatison/the-ones-who-created-all-living-things on Mother Earth. Another way of saying this would be that a renewal of the Two Row Wampum would require the Aboriginal Nations and the immigrant Nations to sit down again and talk about what vision vessel would be able to properly house the current needs and provide for ample space for the coming generations to have sufficient relationships with Mother Earth.

At this particular time the Kanuhelatuksla establishes us in a relationship with Creation on Mother Earth by bringing our minds and thoughts together as one. Yes, Creator gave us all our own language and it is necessary to reinforce the preservation of all languages. If one language dies then we all become less because the spirit people who spoke this language return to Creator up in the Spirit World. The first words of the Kanuhelatuksla addresses all people gathered in our midst, thank-you for coming to share with us and with Creator. At this point sometimes the issue is named such as in this paper – The Seed is the Law – and all thoughts then focus on how our thoughts can construct a new framework to promote Indigenous humanities.

The strength of the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> people lies in their trust in the Great Peace. The Great Peace contains laws to guide our actions in relationship with others. The RCAP is a compilation of grievances that show us where both sides need to update relationships. Hence the new seeds or regeneration need to be given good soil to grow in. So we have to create that good soil – Two Row Wampum, a bed of white wampum means purity or good soil. RCAP lists many ways to honour Indigenous peoples’ traditions. These Indigenous peoples’ traditions are the original instructions from Creator continuing to operate in the hearts of the keepers of the traditions. In today’s society, keepers of the knowledge are the elders of the Nations, they are the Teachers. This paper seeks to provide light along the pathways of life for other Nations’ elders. What is this light? This light comes from the seeds that are within us. What is the purpose of those seeds? These seeds provide food for our survival. Survival in today’s context comes in various shapes and sizes. Today survival is now on a global level. This global survival needs a humanities framework and so we give thanks and ask Creator Sonkwayatison to help us create this new soil for the seeds that will give us a good mind to

work for the good of all humanity. The global house acknowledges that we all come from the star people, our ancestors. The Stars were the first thoughts of Creator as they went out to give light to the darkness. The darkness has another light that we call our grandmother, the moon, who sets the time here on planet earth and therefore regulates when the time is right for planting new seeds. Grandmother Moon sets the boundaries of the seasons of summer, fall, winter and spring. In Grandmother Moon's relationship to planet Earth it is a constant and can be relied upon because Creator made it so.

Akwesasne – a Mohawk community, situated on an island in the St Lawrence River, a large river flowing from the inner great lakes of Turtle Island out to the great Atlantic Ocean – in their struggle for survival, have turned their efforts to monitoring the St Lawrence River that carries the life blood of Mother Earth and Turtle Island. Because the rivers are used to carry out the effluents of the water purification systems of the big industrial cities (The Great Peace, 1998) upstream the Mohawk people have focused attention on the environment. Their findings have brought out new ways to protect Mother Earth. This has started a major joint environmental study of revitalising the Great Lakes ecosystem which had been found to be dying in the 1980s. The Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> are vitally concerned at what happens to one small island which in turn will affect the bigger Turtle Island, and so the whole planet.

The RCAP reports that the elders are saying to the young people “learn your mother language”, whether it be Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Tuscarora or any one of the languages in the 11 major language groups. Onkwehonwe traditional teachers are saying “learn how to say the Thanksgiving Address in your language and this will give you a new heart”, “learn how to sing your Nation's traditional social dance songs”, “learn the traditional origin stories of the sacred medicines of your people”, “learn the meaning of giving tobacco to elders for their help in sharing their knowledge to your questions”, “learn how to practise what you learn from the traditional teachings”. Why are Aboriginal people on Turtle Island so attracted to the Pow Wow gatherings around the big drum? The drum is speaking to the very soul of the individuals awakening the conscientisation or as Smith (2005, p. 3) writes, awakening our ability to focus “on what it is that we want, what [it] is that we are about and to ‘imagine’ our future”. Many First Nations People of Turtle Island are now participating in higher learning, attending colleges and universities. There in those institutions the findings of the RCAP are being implemented through the Aboriginal studies programs and departments that are providing renewed spaces for people to participate in consciousness-raising conducive to the learning of all people.

## ■ Conclusion

The peaceful confederacy of the Hotinosh<sup>ni</sup> was disrupted shortly after the Europeans arrived with their violent imperialistic ways of life. The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) documented the situation of Aboriginal communities, which was the result of oppressive policies and programs of colonialism. The RCAP also captured the many different voices of the Aboriginal peoples in their struggle to revitalise their traditional teachings that will make them strong again. As Hampton (1995, p. 31) states:

The coming of Western civilization [meaning Western Europe], with its Western forms of education, to this continent was the autumn of traditional Indian education. In the fall, the wild grass dies. The Europeans took our land, our lives, and our children like the winter snow takes the grass. The loss is painful but the seed lives in spite of the snow. In the fall of the year, the grass dies and drops its seed to lie hidden under the snow. Perhaps the snow thinks the seed has vanished but it lives on hidden, or blowing in the wind, or clinging to the plant's leg of progress.

Oren Lyons (1992, p. 33) further asserts that “The Seed is the Law ... the law of life ... the law of regeneration. Within the seed is the mysterious and spiritual force of life and creation”. Indigenous humanities mark our place and progress across time and space and allow us to locate ourselves reflectively and spiritually in relation to each other and to the world we all share. All my relations. Ta: ne: tho na ya w<sup>ni</sup>.

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