

Smoke Signals Radio Archive Episode 1994-01-08  
Segment 1  
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*Dan Smoke teaches listeners how to greet one another in the traditional way of the Ojibwe and Iroquois peoples. Dan then tells stories to teach listeners how each part of creation is unique, and those differences allow us to live in harmony with the rest of creation. Finally, Dan tells listeners about the Iroquoian tradition of Nu Yah (the new year's festival) and the meaning behind it.*

Host(s): Dan Smoke, Mary Lou Smoke  
Guest(s): Steve White

**DAN SMOKE:** Aanii! Boozhoo! Sge:no, shekoli! You're listening to Smoke Signals, a First Nations Radio Program here at Radio Western CHRW 94.7 FM, changing the face of radio. And my name is Dan Smoke, Asayenes, **Killdeer clan, Seneca Nation of the Iroquois Confederacy**. And I'm in the studio today with our technical person, Steve White, who's helping us courtesy of CHRW, and Mary Lou Smoke, my co-hostess, **Ojibwe Nation, Bear clan**. So, I'd just like to say hi Steve, and hi Mary Lou.

**STEVE WHITE:** Hi.

**MARY LOU SMOKE:** Hi Dan, how are you today?

**DS:** Very good, thanks. Very good. And I'd just like to greet all of our listeners at this time, too, in our traditional way, in our language. We say, in the **Ojibwe language**, we say 'aanii, boozhoo, aniish na?' which means 'Hi, hello, how are you? Greetings, and how goes your walk in life? How goes your journey? How are you?' And in **Iroquois**, in **Iroquoian languages**, we say 'sge:no, shekoli, skanako:ka' and that means the same thing in the Iroquoian languages. Right here in this area of **London**, we are, this has traditionally been an area where the **Ojibwe** and the Iroquoian peoples have lived in harmony for many, many thousands of years. And the various **covenants** that were held between these two nations was one of coexistence, one of living side-by-side, respecting one another's ways, language, cultural traditions, ceremonies, songs, dances. And in respecting each other's ways of life as distinct from one's own, then we learn to exist and coexist and respect the differences that we have with our brothers from the Ojibwe Nation, or our brothers and sisters from the Iroquoian nations.

So this is what natural law is all about. It's like when we look at the various nations of the world and look at the various four colours of man and we look at all the rest of **creation**, we start to realize that when we take a look at each individual part of creation, each is different from the other, and that those differences are what makes that particular part of creation unique. And because it is unique, you know, we don't try to change that part of creation. We leave it, because that part of creation has its own sacred instructions on how it is to live in peace and harmony and balance with the rest of creation. So we as human beings are no different. And when the Iroquois would coexist side by side with the Ojibwe or with the **Lenni Lenape** or with the **Cree** or with the **Sioux** or any other of the various nations and distinct cultures that existed here on **Turtle Island**, which we refer to as the **North American** continent is referred to as Turtle Island, then we don't try to change a **Seminole Nation** person into becoming an Iroquoian person. We don't try to change a person from the **Piscataway Nation** into becoming a member of the **Mohawk Nation**. You know, we respect the differences that the **Creator** put that person on here to walk and to live in peaceful coexistence with all the rest of creation

because we have a sacred respect for that person's walk in life, or that part of creation's instructions in life, then we don't try to change it.

And in much the same way, that is why we as nations, First Nations of Turtle Island, have retained our cultural uniqueness. That is why for so long, we have been able to retain our languages, we have been able to retain our songs, our dances, our ceremonies, and this cultural distinctiveness and uniqueness is what keeps ourselves intact, in balance, in harmony with the rest of creation. And in doing this, our families are intact, our families are in harmony with the rest of creation. Our communities are in harmony with the rest of creation. But because Native People and First Nations people have been subjected to a 500-year program of assimilation and genocide and a dominant society bent on trying to change us and to control us and to dominate us, we have lost a lot of our ceremonies. We have lost a lot of our language. We have lost a lot of our dances and our songs and our medicines and our knowledge, our wisdom of how to live in peace and harmony with all creation. And so, as we are now embarking on a new re-traditionalization of getting back this sacred knowledge and this sacred wisdom, it is incumbent upon our generation now to make the sacrifices necessary. It is incumbent upon our generation now to make the changes [inaudible] have a place, have a world that they can live in that is in peace and in harmony with all the rest of creation.

And so, that is why as First Nations people, we are trying to share our knowledge, our wisdom of how to live in peace and harmony with the rest of creation, with people from the **four directions**. And when we refer to the four directions, we are always referring to that sacredness of four, because four is wholeness, four is completeness, four is unity, four is oneness. In the Iroquoian language, we say **denetho** which means *we have spoken, we are of one mind, we are of one heart*. And it is very important that we speak of one mind, that we speak with one heart, because in consensus, in unity, you have power. It has often been said as an example of this unity at work is you take one arrow, and you can see how easily that one arrow can be broken. But if you take the five arrows, which is symbolic of the five nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, and you try to break those five arrows, you'll find that it's a lot harder to break. The spirit of the people is a lot harder to break when there is unity. The **Great Law of Peace** talks about the peace, power, and righteousness of maintaining unity at all costs, of maintaining the necessary balance and harmony so that we live and coexist with the rest of creation, respecting all creation and paying tribute by acknowledging our gratitude in ceremony to the Creator for providing us with all this creation that we have around us.

So that we can pay tribute and give thanks to the Creator for the **Sun**, our eldest brother who shines, who gives us light, who gives us heat, so that we can see the mystery of life unfold before us, and this is very important. People thought that we were pagans because they saw us doing a ceremony for the sun, and it was known as the **Sun Dance** ceremony, and they thought we were worshipping the sun. This was not the way it was. I mean, we had to explain to them that what we were in fact doing is we were acknowledging our gratitude to the Creator that he gave us our eldest brother the Sun, and he gave our eldest brother the Sun instructions on how to help and give sustenance and give life force to all creation. And our eldest brother the Sun continues to do that today. Now we have a problem with the ozone layer, so his life force that he is giving us is harming us, so we have to change that. We have to replace, we have to give back to that ozone layer. And we find examples of that all throughout our creation. We're finding examples of this. We're polluting the water.

The **Grandmother Moon** looks after the water when she shows her face on the full moon. When she shows her face, she's attracting and bringing up the depths of the water, the bodies of water, all over creation. She's bringing up the waters that comes from the deepest depths of

that body of water, brings it to the surface, and the surface water goes down to the depths. So that water is being purified, that water is being circulated. And in doing so, in purifying that water, it is being cleansed so that all life, which depends on that water, which depends on the lifeblood of our Mother Earth, can get sustenance, can get life from it. And so today, we are seeing the very destruction, the very pollution of this life force that is now causing us harm if we drink that polluted water. The same is happening with our Father the Sky, with the air. The air is being polluted. So we have to, we have to get back to the sacred instructions, we have to get back to the healing of our Mother Earth, of our **Father Sky**, of our Grandmother Moon and the water, of our eldest brother the Sun. We have to...that healing journey begins with ourselves, and it has to happen from within ourselves. The individuals. So that as we become healed and we become more positive and become more sharing and giving and re-traditionalized in the sacred instructions that the Creator gave us, then our families become empowered.

As our families become empowered, our communities become empowered in a healing way, in a positive way. Together, with our communities becoming a positive force, a consensus that I talked about, the peace, power, and righteousness of the Great Law of Peace, or the peace, power, and righteousness of the **Three Fires Confederacy Law** of the Ojibwe, **Potawatomi**, and **Odawa**, then we see more and more of this unity starting to come back. Come back into our families, come back into our communities. And together with our communities, we'll see our nations beginning that healing journey. And as our nations begin that healing journey, then together as nations we can begin to heal our Mother Earth. We begin to heal our Father Sky. We begin to heal our eldest brother the Sun and our Grandmother Moon and the water.

So, it's very important that these messages of knowledge and wisdom be shared. And for us here at Smoke Signals, in the oral tradition of our grandmothers and of our grandfathers, it is incumbent upon us to pass that on from generation to generation so that as we go through life in our youth and our truth stage, in our fast stage of our lives, in our wandering stages of our lives, in the good stage of our lives, into the truth stage, into the planting stage, you know, 'til finally we achieve the thunder stage of our lives when it is our turn, because we have spent all our lives absorbing the knowledge and wisdom of our elders, of our grandmothers and grandfathers, of our spiritual leaders, of our ceremonial leaders, of the people who have vast reservoirs of knowledge and wisdom, of how to best live in peace and harmony with creation. When it is our turn, it is our turn to pass on that knowledge. It is our turn to give that knowledge to the young people and share that as unconditionally as it has been shared to us.

And so, when we look at what we're doing, we are completing the very same sacred circle of love that we see all around us in creation. When we see the water cycle, when we look at the tree cycle, when we look at any cycle in life, we think of the circle where there's no beginning and ending, and it just keeps going on and on and on. We're no different. Human beings are no different in that regard because we have, we are following the very same instructions that the Creator gave to us. So, with that, I'd just like to read a little bit about the sacred circle of love because the circle is a sacred symbol to all First Nations people. When First Nations people looked around in nature, it seemed that the circle held all the highest ranks. The sun was a circle. The moon was a circle. Time marched relentlessly in a circular pattern. Summer, fall, winter, spring, and back to summer again. There were no real endings or beginnings, just the ceaseless circle of creation. Every human life itself seemed to be circular. Babies were born, they grew up. They became old and died. New babies were born to take their place.

The homes of First Nations people, for example the **Lakota**—the **teepee** has become the universal image of Native Americans. It has a circular base. And when a village set up a camp, the teepees were arranged in a larger circle. The Lakota philosopher **Lame Deer** put it this way,

quote, “With us, the circle stands for togetherness of people who sit with one another around a fire. Relatives and friends united in peace while the pipe passes from hand to hand. All the families in a village were, in turn, circles within a larger circle, part of the larger hoop of the nation. The nation was only a part of the universe, in itself circular. Circles within circles within circles, with no beginning and no end. To us, this is a beautiful and fitting circle, and reality at the same time expressing the harmony of nature and life. Our circle is timeless, flowing. It is new life emerging from death. Life winning out over death.” And this circle as we are starting to find in our communities is coming back. Its symbolic importance is coming back as we start to relate again, and get connected again, to nature, to creation, as our spirituality is starting to become once again coming back into power within ourselves, within our families, within our communities, and within our nations. We’re seeing that more and more people are wanting to know about the First Nations spirituality.

It is often said by many of our teachers that all you really need to know about First Nations spirituality is that everything in creation is alive. Everything that is animate is alive, and that’s the first thing you must know. The second thing is that we are related to everything. We are all related. So, it is very customary that when we have, when our ceremonial leader is finished talking, he talks and gives tribute and acknowledges to the Creator all his relations, all her relations. In the Sioux language, they say **Mitákuye Oyás’iŋ**, which means *all my relations*. And then they close. In the Iroquoian language, we say **denetho**, which means *we have spoken, we are all of one mind, all of my relations, we are all of one mind and one heart*. So, in the circle, in the sacred circle of life, we are all of equal height and no one is any superior or inferior to anybody else in the circle. And that’s why the circle is so important to us as First Nations people.

**DS:** So, just wanted to share that with you because we are beginning a new year, and it is traditional in Iroquoian communities that we go around and we say “**Nu Yah!**” to one another. Nu Yah, which means *time again for renewal*. This is a time when, right now, our Mother Earth is resting. She has a blanket that’s covering her, insulating her, keeping her warm so that all of her creation can rest whilst the time for renewal approaches. And that time for renewal is acknowledged when we come together in the **Midwinter ceremony**, which takes place, I believe it’s five days after the **New Moon** in February, which is the exact middle of the winter season. And it’s at that time that we acknowledge that all of creation will be waking up. All of creation will be coming back to life again, and that we are going to once again start the renewal of life. We are once again going to start our sacred instructions and begin that work of life once again. And we give tribute and give acknowledgement of our gratitude to the Creator during this ceremony.

But the actual custom of going around from household to household to say “Nu Yah!” is to acknowledge to each of these households, you know, it is a good time to come together and show our love, our brotherhood, our sisterhood, to one another in this sacred circle of love. So, that custom is still adhered to today in most Iroquoian communities. I know on my home reserve—the **Six Nations Reserve**—they still practice that. I grew up with that. I would walk to a home and I’d knock on the door and I would say “Nu Yah!” when they’d answer the door, and then I would be welcomed inside, invited inside to their home and they would usually give me some baked goods, donuts, cookies, candies, whatever, and then I would leave and go to the next household, so that by the time I got back to my home, my grandmother’s place on the Six Nations Reserve, I had a whole bag full of these baked goods. It was almost like trick or treating. So, that’s a nice custom. I’m really glad to see that it’s still alive today. I’m really glad to see that it’s being embraced by our brothers and sisters and I’m glad that we have retained a lot

of these traditions and a lot of these ceremonies because our lives depend on it. Our future generations' lives depend on that.

**DS:** So, we're going to listen to a song right now. We're going to listen to **Sharon Burch**. This is from her album entitled **Yazzie Girl**, and this song is entitled "**The Rain Song**," part of creation.