

### The Four Sky Dwellers

The number four has great significance for the Mohawk peoples. Like many other Aboriginal peoples, the Mohawk respect the four directions as messengers from the Creator, sent at the beginning of time. The Mohawk refer to the four directions as the Four Sky People, the Four Sky Dwellers, or the Four Brothers: East, South, West and North. Some believe that the North and East are twins and the South and West are twins. Together the four directions have the job of helping Mother Earth. South and West provide the climate for the growth of food for nourishment and survival, whereas North and East provide the relief and rest through cold and snow to allow Mother Earth to *rejuvenate*.

Four is also a number representing the four seasons, the four winds. All of these forces are intertwined to represent completion and wholeness, *interconnectedness* and *interdependency*, as none of these elements can be removed from the others; all work in unison to sustain life. As we need them for our survival, we are obligated to respect them and treat them with great sensitivity.

The Four Directions are considered to be messengers, as they help to communicate with people, as direct communication from the Creator would be so powerful it would overwhelm. Traditionally, the Mohawk believe, therefore, that important messages are received from nature, from plants and animals, from the wind and the water, and so on, as they see these energies as coming from the Creator. The messages are for protection and are taken seriously as having great importance.

### The Tree of Peace

The Four Sky People are powers that dwell in the Sky World and can *manifest* themselves as people when necessary in order to communicate with people. Mohawk believe this happens at critical times in history when extremely significant events are to take place with great impact on this nation. The interpretation of the messages is considered to be a responsibility of only the most respected individuals in the community. The visit of the great Peacemaker was one of these times, a spirit who came to give five warring Iroquois Nations (of whom Mohawk are one) a *constitution* of peace, as symbolized by the Tree of Peace, with four white roots reaching out to the Four Directions, and a bird on top keeping watch. The Peacemaker explained that all who committed to peace could take shelter under the tree, under which the warring nations buried their weapons (hachets).

By the time of the *Declaration* of Independence in the USA, the Iroquois had been living peacefully for many years. This peace inspired European philosophers to such as Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Locke to learn more about the Great Law of Peace, using it as a basis for the formation of a new American government constitution. The Tree of Peace became the Tree of Unity and the bird on top the tree became the eagle, symbol of the American government. "Of the People, For the People, and By the People" became the motto of the government, based on the governing structure of the Iroquois.

The Tree of Peace has since come to receive the attention of the United Nations as a profound model of peaceful disarmament, garnering international acceptance as a symbol of peace, and the Iroquois are termed the "oldest living participatory *democracy* on earth."