

The Good Mind

Tom Porter, Bear Clan, Mohawk Spiritual Leader Speaks Out

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Mohawk Spiritual leader Tom Porter, Bear Clan, at Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and youth, Wisconsin
 Photo by Danny Beaton



(L) Eric Noyes, American Indian Institute and (R) Tom Porter, Bear Clan, Mohawk Nation

The Good Mind starts at the beginning of the world. There were instructions to us when we were first put here, to carry a Good Mind. In Creation time, that's when our Good Mind began to become aware of everything: animals, plants, waters, sky, sun, moon—everything that it talks about in our Thanksgiving Address. Hundreds of years after that, when they reinstated the Thanksgiving Address and ceremonies, then they taught the Clan System as a reinforcement of the Good Mind.

The Clan System was a social structure to produce a Good Mind and a Good Life, to be organized and to keep your bloodline straight. For hundreds of years, everything was good. Then they forgot again, as humans do. They forget. Unless they're told all the time; then they don't forget. So, they lost it again.

So this time, a baby was born called a "Teacher Baby" to come and help the people because they forgot how to have a Good Mind. So, he reinstated the Thanksgiving, which they had lost, and then he reinstated the Clan System again, which they had lost. Then he brought the ceremonies, and those are the ceremonies we do in every Longhouse today. When there are ceremonies, they reconnect us with the Thanksgiving. The things that they talk about in Thanksgiving are almost like reweaving a basket—the basket gets old; every once in a while they have to make it new. That's what our ceremonies are for, to renew, reenergize. If you don't have ceremonies then you don't reenergize; you lose your life; your life is almost meaningless.

For hundreds of years it was okay, then they forgot again, and they forgot all of it again and there was not a Good Mind anywhere because they fought each other, even cannibalism came to be. So, the Creator sent a teacher again—this time called "the Peacemaker"—to reintroduce the Good Mind once again and teach them how to be thankful with the Thanksgiving Address. Then he taught the Clan System all again; then

again reintroduced the ceremonies. When he finished all of that, he gave them a new teaching called the Great Law, which stopped all the wars. That's the one that really emphasized the Good Mind and how to have a Good Mind.

You have to have all those things that I told you about to reinforce the Good Mind. Everything was okay for a while, until the Europeans came and they brought alcohol, drugs, greed, and gambling and that destroyed the Good Mind. Handsome Lake is the one who showed things that the Europeans brought and how it destroys us, the Good Mind.

The Code of Handsome Lake told us that if you want to have a Good Mind, you can't touch alcohol or drugs; you can't follow the greed; you can't follow the gambling casino; you can't follow the deck of playing cards—all these things came to us from Europe. We are not supposed to do that. They said that if you didn't do that, you will have a Good Mind. All the things that are taught in the Longhouse, they make you have a Good Mind if you follow them. Each person has to decide if they want a Good Mind or not. That's what I know about.

Our Thanksgiving comes from the story of Creation; that's our instruction about how we are supposed to behave and relate to the world and universe that we live in. That's the original instructions; that's the basis, the first instructions. Those others are second instructions; then there are third instructions, also. So, all this can be taught if one is interested; it can only be taught if one is seeking peace. It will be a world of war if everyone does not seek the Good Mind, unless we are all of One Mind.

Mohawks have been doing a lot for other people, for everybody. It's up to the people if they want to make things better in the world. If they use a Good Mind, the people can stop the destruction.

We must have all of that which I talked about to be a good human and to be a good Indian. All of these things are taught to Iroquois people about the Spiritual world: if they are not together, then it's hard to have harmony. It's hard to think; it's hard to find your place in this Universe; it's hard to relate; it's hard to have respect; it's hard to have brotherhood—unless

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you have been taught all those things. Once you have all that, it's easy to find peace; it's easy to find clarity; it's easy to find compassion; it's easy to find a Good Mind.

Mother Earth, Nature, is what gives us Life. If we don't respect Mother Earth and Nature, if we don't listen, then Mother Earth will clean the world; she has a big power. Ultimately, we are Mother Earth's students. We are the children of Mother Earth. She has the final say in this life. The biggest problem today is what is happening to Mother Earth. Because people lost their dignity, their honesty, their soberness, they lost all the things they need to be wholesome human beings, and so the people are not operating in a wholesome way. The job now is to try to restore everything if they want peace, if they want a Good Mind.

If we get lost from our way of life, if we become wounded, we all need good teachers to help us find the Good Mind, to help us find our way back. Mother Earth needs healers, and all people need each other to heal.



**Robertjohn Knapp and Tom Porter. Traditional Circle of Indian Elders and Youth, Wisconsin
Photo by Danny Beaton**