



The Weekly Historical Note

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May 18th, 2009

The Oneida Creation Story as told by Amos Christjohn

Editors Note: The Oneida Creation Story if told in whole could take multiple days from sun up to sun down. This version is considered a short telling of the story and leaves out many details.

Long Ago, before there was any land here there was water all over, the only things were the creatures that lived in the water and the birds that flew above the waters. Now, further above there was land which was called the Sky World and there were people living there, but these people had supernatural powers. In the middle of the land was a great tree which gave them their light. There were many different fruits on the tree, this is where their light came from, the fruits.

Now the rule was that no one could cut into the tree or a great punishment would be given to that person, whoever was caught harming the tree. Now there was this young couple and the young woman was to have a baby. This woman started to crave things and one of the things she craved was the roots and bark from the tree, so she asked her husband to go and gather this for her. He was afraid to get these because he would surely be punished. He waited for the people to go from the tree. As they all left he went over and started digging.

As he was digging, suddenly the ground caved in and it left a big hole in the ground by the tree. The man got very scared of what had happened, so he went back and told his wife what had happened and she asked if he got what she had wanted. He told her he did not because he got so scared. She got very mad and said she would get it herself.

As she got to the tree she saw the hole, she went over to get a closer look. As she was looking through she saw all the water down below. She did not know that her husband followed her. As she was looking through, she fell through the hole. As she was falling she tried to grasp hold of something so she would not fall. All she could get was some of the ground and roots of the tree. But she could not hold on and she fell through. As she fell through the birds and water animals saw a light through the hold that was made and they could see something falling. So the birds went up to see what it was and they noticed that it was a woman from the Sky World.

So they sent one of the birds back down to tell the water animals to see which one of them was able to support her upon their back. So they talked amongst one another to see who was able to support her. So they turned to the great turtle and she agreed. All the birds went up to bring the woman down safely on the turtles back.

As the woman fell she got very frightened and fainted. She never woke until she was on the turtles back. All she saw was water, all the birds and the water animals. She asked where she was and they told her that they saw the light shining through the hold.





So, she asked if they knew where there would be any mud or dirt so she could mix it with what she had grabbed as she fell. Some of the animals said they were not sure but there might be some at the bottom of the water.

First, the otter said he would go down and see if there was any, then he went underwater and was gone. Everyone waited patiently for the otter. Soon he came floating up to the top, but didn't get any mud. So the loon said it would try and went underwater. Everyone waited patiently for the loon to come up and soon she came up she too did not have any. So the beaver said he would try and away he went. Soon he came up with none and felt very sad. The woman told him not to feel bad and that he had tried his best. So the muskrat said he would try and he went down. For a long time the muskrat was gone. They became worried and then the muskrat came floating to the top with a little bit of dirt in-between his claws. The woman took it and put it with the dirt she had and placed it upon the back of the turtle. It began to grow and grow and different things began to grow too.

Then the woman began to gather things, for she was getting ready to give birth to the child she was to have. As the time came, she gave birth to a girl and she was very happy. The woman and her daughter walked about the earth and she taught her daughter the different things that grew and what they were used for. As the days and years went by, the young girl grew to womanhood and she looked very beautiful. As she was walking about for from her mother there was a man that before her appeared. She became very terrified at seeing this man and she fainted.

As she came to, she noticed that there were two arrows on her stomach. One had a sharp point on it and the other a dull point. She took them home with her. As time went on she felt funny inside her and she told her mother of this man that she had seen and of the two arrows he had left behind. So the mother told her of what had happened to her and how they got to where they are at now.

As the days went by the young woman did not feel too good because there was a great commotion within her body. When she finally gave birth to her twins, the one called the right handed twin was born the way all children are born and the left handed twin came from his mothers armpit. This is what killed their mother. Right away the left handed twin spoke up and said it was the right handed twin that killed their mother. Then the right handed twin spoke up and explained to their grandmother what had happened. He told her that he and his brother were arguing about who was going to be born the way all children are born and his brother said he was going any way he wanted to and so therefore he come out of their mothers armpit and that is what killed her. It was the left handed twin that killed their mother. But, the grandmother did not believe him and took the side of the left handed twin and got very angry with the right handed twin. She told him to bury their mother. And so angrily he started to bury his mother. As he finished, there immediately grew corn, beans, squash and Indian tobacco. Then the twins went about their own ways.

The thing different about the two was that they had powers to create things and they would grow rapidly. As the right handed twin was walking about he was creating the grasses and different medicine plants and giving them names. The left handed twin would





go around and give poison to some of the plants and also distort some others. Now as the right handed twin was going around he was creating different plants that could be used as food and also different kinds of trees. Some were tall and straight, some big and wide and he gave them different uses. And his brother would go around changing the edible plants by making them smell awful. He would give the tall trees rough bark and the big ones small and stout with sharp thorns. Then the right handed twin started to create different animals, small ones and big ones. These animals would eat the plants to help them grow. Then the left handed twin came around and made the animals that would eat the other animals that his brother had created.

Then the right handed twin made different areas where the waters would flow. He made streams, rivers, springs, lakes and the big oceans. Some of the rivers he made, the water currents flow in both directions and the springs with sweet tasting water. Then the left handed twin came by and made the rivers have rough and jagged rocks that caused the rivers to have very rough rapids. Some of the springs breathed poison and heat which made them smell very bad. As the right handed twin finished with the waters he went to the different birds and gave them beautiful colored feathers and songs that they could sing. Soon the left handed twin came and saw the birds, he changed some of the birds and the songs they sang. Later, the right handed twin went back to look at all the things that he had created. He noticed the other different things in his creations and knew he didn't create those things. He looked at everything he made and saw the changes. This made him very angry. As soon as he finished checking the things out he set out to look for his brother. Soon he found him amusing himself by the ocean. The right handed twin spoke very sternly to his brother and told him that he had no right changing the things that he had created. Then the left handed twin replied to his brother and said that he wanted to create things too. He shouldn't be the only one to be creating things. So the right handed twin said that it was time that they decided who would be the creator of all things on Turtle Island.

So they decided that they would challenge each other with a game of lacrosse. So the right handed twin made a big golden ball of sand and threw it in the east and said that this golden ball would be the one to start the game when it came up in the east and end the game when it went down in the west. So they agreed and went their own way to get ready for the game.

When the golden ball rose from the east they began the game and became rough with one another. When the ball set in the west the game stopped, but neither one won the game. So they said they would play the peach stone game when the golden ball came up from the east and end the game when the ball set in the west. When it rose from the east they began to play. It was going back and forth but when the ball set in the west, still no one had won. Then they said that they would think of something when the ball rose from the east. When it did rise the left handed twin said the only way that anyone was going to be creator of all things was that one of them would have to be killed. So they would have to fight with one another. They began to fight, but it was still even, no [one] was winning. They went to reach for something to kill the other with. The right handed twin reached for the deer antlers and the left handed twin reached for an old stick. As this happened,



