

Navajo Roles and Responsibilities of a Leader

Navajo Nation Supreme Court 2010

“The laws, culture, and value system of the Navajo People have their genesis in the Journey of the Dine from time immemorial to the Emergence into this world. The People are taught early on about the role and responsibilities of a leader and how they are selected. Today, we are again involved in a dispute about leadership and authority, *naat'aanii baa sah has liligi hane*. There is a well-known episode from our Emergence that tells us how a dispute came to be and how it was resolved. The episode began when a question arose as to who would be selected as leader.

It is important to me as a Navajo that our government is remaining true to the origins of our People and turning to our stories and history for guidance.

No. SC-CV-02-10
NAVAJO NATION SUPREME COURT

OFFICE OF THE NAVAJO NATION PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT and JOE SHIRLEY, JR., in his capacity as President Of the Navajo Nation, and as an individual Petitioners-Appellees,

v.

THE NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL and LAWRENCE T. MORGAN, in his capacity As Speaker of the Navajo Nation Council, And as an individual Respondents-Appellants.

<http://www.navajocourts.org/NNCourtOpinions2010/06MorganvShirley.pdf>

The laws, culture, and value system of the Navajo People have their genesis in the Journey of the Dine from time immemorial to the Emergence into this world. The People are taught early on about the role and responsibilities of a leader and how they are selected. Today, we are again involved in a dispute about leadership and authority, *naat'aanii baa sah has liligi hane*. There is a well-known episode from our Emergence that tells us how a dispute came to be and how it was resolved. The episode began when a question arose as to who would be selected as leader.

A group of the People nominated the wolf *Ma'itsoh* and they talked about his qualities, that he would protect the People so that we would come to no harm, and he had powerful words and connection to the Holy People. Another group nominated the bluebird *Dolii*, that he was compassionate and had qualities of nurturing, which the People need because that's the way people grow. Yet another group nominated the mountain lion *Nashdoitsoh* because he was a hunter, so the People would never go hungry, so it was about survival. Finally, the last group nominated the hummingbird *Dah yitih*, who was swift and would go from plant to plant bringing back pollen, and the pollen represents spirituality and reverence which the People need to have honor for one another.

The People couldn't agree to choose one leader among those nominated, they each wanted the one each nominated. Finally, they resolved to send the wolf towards the East and bring back something for the People

that will sustain life. The bluebird was sent to the South, the mountain lion was sent to the West, and hummingbird to the North. The People waited and waited and no one came back. They kept looking into the four directions for their leader until one day, the People looked into the North and there was something white that was moving, and it was the dawn moving towards them. They saw it was the wolf, who had brought back the dawn *Hayoolkaai* as his coat, which is thought *Nitsahakees*, white shell which is used in mineral offerings, the white corn for food, and songs *Sin doo Tsodizin*. At midday, the People looked into the South and there was something blue that was moving, and it was the blue sky moving towards them. They saw it was the bluebird, who had brought back the blue sky *Yadihil Nihodeetl'iizh* as his coat, which is planning *Nahat'a*, turquoise which is used in mineral offerings, the blue corn for food, and wise words *Yodi doo Niitl'iz Saad*. When the sun set, the People looked into the sunset and there was something gold that was moving, and it was the mountain lion moving towards them, who had brought back the gold of the sunset *Nihotsooi* as his coat, which is *Iina* life, abalone shell which is used in mineral offerings, yellow corn for food, and birth and development *Oochiil doo anoohseel*. Finally, after dark, the People looked into the North and saw all kinds of different colors moving into each other, and it was the hummingbird moving towards them, who had brought back the night *Chahalheel* as his coat, which is *Sihasin* hope, jet which is used in mineral offerings, squash for food, and reverence *Hodilzin*.

The People were awed as each of these was brought out. In spite of what each group had previously assumed was vital to sustain life, the People felt that *Ma'itsoh*, *Dolii*, *Nashdojtsoh* and *Dah yitih*, each brought back a crucial element for life, therefore all would be leaders and must work together to sustain life. The People decided to make all of them leaders. We re-tell this story to emphasize that, since beyond recorded time, the People have understood the separation of functions of leaders, and that in order to survive as a People, there must be collaboration and coming together both in the community and in the leadership chosen by the People to pool skills, resources and characteristics. There is no supremacy of anyone portion of the day over another, therefore there is no greater skill, resource, characteristic, or leader over the others. The People choose and challenge their leaders to give something useful and valuable to the People in equal parts, and the leaders provide.

With this episode, Fundamental Law was established that there should not be concentrated power. There are different components of government that must work together. The modern system which reflects those components must work together. Pp.21-23.

There are other versions of this episode. In one version there was a leader who needed to be replaced, and the owl provided guidance on the search and methods for selection of new leaders.