The tree of peace: symbolic and spiritual values of the white pine

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Abstract
The original meaning of the word "spirit" (i.e. breath or wind) suggests an experience in which one feels touched or moved by something that can be felt but cannot be seen or grasped. The experience of spirit is often depicted through the use of symbols. Symbolism allows a concrete object, such as a tree, to represent an experience that is intangible and hard to describe. Trees have been important spiritual symbols in many human cultures. Evergreens often symbolize immortality and eternal life because they retain their leaves throughout the winter. To the Iroquois people, the white pine is a symbol of the Great Peace that united their separate nations into an enduring League. The Peace Tree is related to the Tree of Light, a central symbol in Iroquois cosmology. Similar mythological trees are found in European traditions, including the Norse World Tree and the medieval Christian Tree of Life. The World Tree symbolizes the unity of all life, and the struggle of order and growth against chaos and disintegration. The white pine is thus linked to one of the most universal spiritual symbols of the human species.

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When we discuss the history and value of the Eastern White Pine, we typically do so within the framework of American colonialism, repeating tales of 'The King’s Broad Arrow' and other events that took place around the time of the Revolutionary War. But of course, the venerable *Pinus strobus* and the landscape in which it grows flourished for a long time before any European settlers arrived on the shores of what we now call North America, and it remains important to some Native American tribes all these centuries later. The Iroquois (whose true name is Haudenosaunee Nation) call the Eastern White Pine *kahs-kwin* or *kahs-kwineh*. Native American Symbolism: The pine tree symbolizes creativity, peace and harmony. Pines are symbolically and ceremonially important trees to many Native American people, but their meaning varies from tribe to tribe. The pine tree is a symbol of longevity to the Algonquian tribes of the northeast, and to the Great Lakes tribes, such as the Anishinabe and the Potawatomi, pine trees also represent wisdom and harmony with nature. The Iroquois tribes saw the pine tree as a symbol of peace, and burned pine wood as an incense to pacify ghosts and banish nightmares. Sage is burned as a spiritual cleanser before many traditional ceremonies, and is also one of the herbs frequently included in medicine bundles and amulets. Sagebrush: Purification, Exorcism.