

Ho'omanana

**Understanding the Sacred
and Spiritual**

Malcolm Nāea Chun

Ka Wana Series



Pihana Nā Mamo

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Foreword

For more than fifteen years, Pihana Nā Mamo, a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education through the Native Hawaiian Education Act, has been actively involved with Hawai'i Department of Education schools in improving educational results for Hawaiian children and youth. We have witnessed the powerful role that our rich culture and the desire to practice Hawaiian customs appropriately, play in motivating our students to learn and excel.

Ho'ōmana, Understanding the Sacred and Spiritual provides us with information and insight from traditional Native Hawaiian and other sources about religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. This topic was rarely spoken about in public but now appears on the front pages of our daily newspapers. Malcolm Nāea Chun's research and conclusions help guide us to a better understanding of the sensitivities and complexities of what ho'ōmana meant/means, then and now.

This booklet is part of the Ka Wana Series, a set of publications developed through Pihana Nā Mamo and designed to assist parents, teachers, students, and staff in their study and modern-day application of Hawaiian customs and traditions.

Pihana Nā Mamo is a joint project of the Curriculum Research & Development Group and the Hawai'i Department of Education, and production of the Ka Wana series represents the work of many collaborators. Mahalo to the many who have assisted in the production of *Ho'ōmana*: Reviewers Earl



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and Emma Kishi and Hugh H. Dunn; and the Pihana Nā Mamo ‘ohana of the Hawai‘i Department of Education and the Curriculum Research & Development Group, College of Education, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, and the U.S. Department of Education, which provided the funding for Pihana Nā Mamo.

Morris K. Lai, Principal Investigator
Pihana Nā Mamo

'Ōlelo Ha'i Mua

Preface

Do you believe I'm wearing a kukui lei?
It's Hawaiian in looks—it's plastic made in Hong Kong.
That's what became of a lot of our beliefs.
I wore this on purpose. I wanted you to know this is kukui nut.
It's not kukui nut, but it's Hawaiian, but it's Hawaiian made in
Hong Kong of plastic, and that's the way a lot of our beliefs
and customs have become.
attributed to Mary Kawena Pukui



Cultural revival and identification have gone beyond academic and intellectual arguments to a reality in communities and families and are now part of the political landscape of the islands. In asking the question “Who are we?” people are really asking how they see the world differently from others and how this affects the way they make decisions. These are questions about a people's world view—how they see the world around them, and ultimately, how they see themselves.


In the 1960s, social workers at the Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center, a trust created to benefit orphaned and destitute Native Hawaiian children, began to notice behaviors of their children and families that were quite different from the textbook cases they had studied in school. In response, the center initiated a project to identify Hawaiian cultural and social practices and behaviors, and to study them as they contrasted

with their Western counterparts. The impact and influence of the resulting books, entitled *Nānā I Ke Kumu*, are still felt in Native Hawaiian communities, where the books are now a standard reference.

By 1992 *Nānā I Ke Kumu* was considered historical information, and as the cultural specialist for the Queen Lili‘uokalani Children’s Center, I became involved in a project to update it. We were still seeing cases that involved Hawaiian cultural practices and behaviors foreign to both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian workers that needed to be considered in any programs designed to help. We were having to re-adapt traditional healing practices like ho‘oponopono to accommodate changes such as family schedules, misunderstanding or not knowing Hawaiian language and concepts, and having non-Hawaiian family members. We realized that there was, once again, a great need for a series that would examine, in depth, key concepts and values for Native Hawaiians to understand and practice today.

This series is intended to fill that need. Each title is supported by historical and cultural examples taken from our oral and written literature, in most cases directly from primary sources that recorded how Hawaiians acted, reacted, responded, and behaved in different situations. Our goal is to make this knowledge more accessible to teachers, parents, and students.

Knowing how our ancestors behaved begs the question of whether we are doing the same. If we are practicing our culture in a way similar to how they did, then we know that Hawaiian culture is very much alive today. If we do things differently, we have to ask if those changes have been to our benefit, and whether we can reclaim what has been forgotten, lost, or suppressed.



E nihi ka hele mai hoʻopā mai pulale i ka ʻike
a ka maka o inaina ke akua.

Walk softly along the trail and don't touch anything, don't look
in places you shouldn't or else the god[dess] will be angry.
Traditional Hawaiian proverb attributed to Pele



When one hears talk about Hawaiian religion, there should be an inner voice that says, “This is not the same thing as religion as I know it today.” Today traditional Hawaiian religion is neither organized nor institutionalized like many world religions, and what is left of its temples and places of worship are only the foundation walls and house sites.

Yet what remains of Hawaiian religion can have great meaning and importance. Why is this? The Hawaiian scholar Davida Malo tried to explain in his writings on Hawaiian traditions, *Ka Moʻolelo Hawaiʻi*, that what he knew as religion, or hoʻōmana, was to be found in almost all aspects of Hawaiian culture and life. He described the building of canoes, hunting of birds for feathers, farming, fishing, the conception and initiation of chiefly children (that is, boys), healing, even sorcery and dancing as acts of hoʻōmana.

It appears all aspects of Hawaiian culture that required prayer are linked to hoʻōmana. In fact, the term *kahuna*, which is usually translated as priest, actually is intended for a person who happens

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to be an expert in his or her tasks involving prayer and rituals. Hence, an architect (*kahuna kuhikuhi pu'uone*), a canoe builder (*kahuna kālai wa'a*), and a traditional healer (*kahuna lā'au lapa'au*) are all experts who knew the prayers involved in their work. The prayers were necessary to begin and complete their tasks.

Although Hawaiian religion no longer involves organized temple worship, one can see elements of *ho'omana* when Hawaiian groups begin and end their meetings or gatherings with prayer or when someone is called to bless a house or property. So what is *ho'omana*?

Ho'omana is the word Malo uses to describe religious activity and, sometimes, worship. Malo was one of the earliest Native



Re-creation of paehumu, or circle of major gods, at Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau, Hawai'i. Photo by Malcolm Nāea Chun.

Hawaiians to discuss traditional religious practices. He was well qualified for the task having been trained, prior to the establishment of Christianity in the islands, as a genealogist. That training would make him familiar with much of the lore associated with the gods, chiefs, culture, and society. When the missionaries were established in Hawai‘i, Malo became one of their most avid students of history, which was the closest subject they had to traditional genealogies.

Malo’s writings were not made public until after 1898, so his descriptions of ho‘omana were not a part of the discussions about religion in early (post-contact) Hawai‘i. In those discussions, religion was seen as organized and institutional, that is, conforming to familiar Christian definitions and judgments, and the discussion was, therefore, focused on the worship of a particular akua (deity) and on major religious ceremonies and rituals at the large stone-walled temples.

Ho‘omana comes from the root word *mana*, which is not an easy word to translate into modern concepts. A lot of people, in particular anthropologists, have written whole studies attempting to do so. In the Pukui-Elbert *Hawaiian Dictionary* it is described as a “supernatural or divine [. . .] miraculous power.” The prefix *ho‘o-* is a causative, that is “to do” or “to make happen” or, in the case of many Hawaiian cultural activities, to “imbue with.” Thus, literally ho‘omana means “to cause something to have mana.”

This explanation makes sense if you are using prayers, because prayers are meant, when chanted or invoked, to cause something to happen that you yourself cannot do alone. This use of ho‘omana as worship or religion may not actually be too far from what is meant by religion if we go back to the Latin roots of *religio* (linking back to) as in *to rely upon*. A prayer may be a

message, but it takes an agent who has heard the prayer to cause something to happen.

Again, Malo pointed out this relationship.

Eia wale no ka (ke) kanaka mau akua e like maka ai, o na kii laau, a me na kii pohaku i kalai lima ia, ma ka manao ana o ke kanaka, i hoopii aku ai, i ua mau kii la ma ke ano maoli o ke akua ma ka lani ana i manao ai i akua nona iho, ina o ka lani e hana i ke kii a like me ko kalani.

(The gods of the people only looked like what they were seen through the wood and stone images carved by hand from what the carver thought they looked like as the shapes of the gods in the heavens. If the god was from the heavens then the image was created to look like the heavens.) (49, 195)

And,

Alaila, lalau ke kahuna, I ka ai, a kaumaha aku I ka lani, aole I na kii la, no ka mea, ua manao ia, aia no ma ka lani ke akua, he mea hoomanao wale no ua kii la, e ku ana, imua o ke anaina kanaka a pau. (Malo 104)

(Then, the priest seized the food and offered it up to the heavens and not to the image, because it was believed that the god dwelled in the heavens. The image was only a representation [of the god] as it stood before all those gathered.) (Author translation)

He is saying some important things here that we cannot let go right away. First, contrary to the popular Christian prejudices, the wooden and stone images were images, not idols. (There is a tendency for members of a religion, when set on conversion, to harshly prejudge another religion rather than try to understand it.) When one is beholding the golden statue of Buddha, is one worshipping an idol or is one reminded, by the position and hand placements of the Buddha, of one's spiritual journey? Do

Christians worship a cross set on or above an altar, or is the cross merely to help the worshipper remember and reflect on the suffering and resurrection of Christ?



Reconstruction of Hale o Lono heiau at Waimea, O'ahu by archaeologist and cultural consultant Rudy Mitchell. Photo by Malcolm Nāea Chun.

Second, and more important, he is making the point that it is the relationship with something greater than yourself that should be the focus of a prayer or ritual. A wooden or stone image is just a piece of wood or rock until it is “ho’omana,” imbued with mana, or in the religious-poetic language “when the god dwells (noho) in the object.” Hence, certain trees, stones, rocks, and places could become sacred when mana is invoked and the divine intervenes.

The relationship with the divine and the use of prayer as a means of communication are the first two elements the historian Samuel M. Kamakau said were essential in “the Hawaiian school

of medical kahunas.” “The foundation of the knowledge and skill [. . .] was the god. [. . .] Second came prayer” (1964, 107).

Kamakau stated that by using both prayer and skill, an able student could

concentrate on the cliff until it crumbled. He would concentrate his prayer on a hard rock and it broke up as if nothing, just as if a roll of powder had been inserted into the rock and had broken it to fragments. He would concentrate his prayer upon a grove of trees and the trees would wither. He would concentrate his prayer upon a whale and it would be cast up on land. He would concentrate his prayer upon a shark that had eaten a man, and the wicked shark, and the man, would land on shore. The mana of the [. . .] prayers was his, and the mana was made manifest. (1964, 121)

Whether or not a student, or even a master kahuna, could accomplish such a task is not the point. Kamakau’s statement shows how important prayer can be for an expert to be able to cause mana, to ho’omana, in his or her particular task.

Prayers and ceremonial rituals were both personal and communal, although there were differences for the kanaka (ordinary person) and the ali’i (chiefs). The prayers of the kanaka did not involve the service of kāhuna or kahu akua (guardians of gods), whereas the ali’i were dependent upon the kāhuna, for the ali’i did not recite their own prayers. This distinction is clearly brought out in Malo’s description of the rites concerning sub-incision of boys of “proper” families and of the high chiefs.

Pela no e hana ia ai na keiki a ka poe haipule, a me ka poe koikoi, a me ka poe hanohano, a me ka poe kahuna, a me ka poe alii haahaa, he okoa ka hana ana i na keiki a ka poe alii, kiekie a o na keiki a kekahi poe, aole no i hana ia pela, e lawe wale aku no ka lakou mau keiki imua, a e kahe wale

iho no me ka hoomana ole i ke akua. (That was the way it was done for boys of religious families, those of rank and prestige of kahuna(s) and the lesser ali'i (ali'i ha'aha'a). The procedure for boys of higher ali'i (ali'i ki'eki'e) was different from the boys of others. It was not done in this manner. Their [the others] boys were only taken to the mua and cut without any religious rites to the god.) (52, 199)

However, not all of traditional Hawaiian society was religious. Malo tells us that there were people who had no gods and survived without them [“those who had no god did not worship at all” (273)]. These ‘aiā were listed in a prayer for purification as persons whom the kahuna would seek to dispel or chase away (hemu) (Malo 54 & 201–202). Here Malo is speaking of certain purification rituals where these ‘aiā were not welcome, but his mention of them as a group also tells us quite clearly that there were non-religious or irreligious persons in traditional Hawaiian society. This statement has several implications:

- ☀ Contrary to popular belief, being Hawaiian did not necessarily mean you had to be religious or practice religious rituals.
- ☀ Traditional Hawaiian society practiced a high level of tolerance for behavior contrary to that of most of society.
- ☀ Religious practices and behavior had to be reinforced as being positive and good, and people had to be constantly reminded of their responsibilities.

The Kapu System of Prohibitions and Restrictions

The kapu system is another part of Hawaiian religious belief and practice that has been popularized and misunderstood. The very word *kapu* brings to mind for many today certain images related to what people think of as traditional Hawaiian religion. These may include stone-walled temples, huge carved wooden images, and things one is, or is not, supposed to do for fear of divine punishment. Landowners used to place imposing signs with the word KAPU across their vacant property.

Although related to the divine, the establishment of the kapu system did not directly impose any religious belief or ritual. It did regulate how people worshipped. Today this might be similar to the idea of the separation of men and women worshipping in a mosque, or other distinctions that men, more than women, may have with regard to religious worship and leadership. And like those examples, the establishment of the kapu system was not divinely inspired but was imposed by those in power.

The Reverend Ellis, in the early 1820s, was able to learn about kapu in his travels and noted the following:

It is a distinct word from rahui, to prohibit, as the ohelo berries at Kirauea were said to be prohibited, being tabu na Pele, sacred for Pele, and is opposed to the word noa, which means general or common. (278)

And,

[a]lthough employed for civil as well as sacred purposes, the tabu was entirely a religious ceremony, and could be imposed only by the priests. (Ellis 279)

It all began with one of the traditions about Wākea and Papa, an ancestral couple of the Hawaiian people, not gods but actual human beings in Hawaiian genealogies. This particular tradition says that Wākea wanted to sleep with his own daughter, Ho'ohokukalani, but he could not think of a way to do so without his wife, Papa, knowing.

So upon the advice of his kahuna pule (expert in prayers), Komoawa (or Komo'awa), he declared that there would be four sacred nights a month. During that time Wākea and Papa would be separated as husband and wife, and certain foods would be prohibited (kapu) for women to eat. This separation would give Wākea the opportunity to go off and to sleep with Ho'ohokukalani.

Papa agreed. The kahuna pule would wake Wākea in the early morning before Papa got up. However, in the end, Wākea could not wake up from his sleep, even when the kahuna pule tried several times. Malo provides us with Komoawa's chant.

E ala au aku, e ala au mai, e ala makia, o makia a hanohano i ke aka, o ke ake kuhea, o keakekieihikina, Ku kahikinailunakalani, kaopuauulu nui, kaopuamakolu uakaua, kahe ka wai, mukeha, OiliolalapaikalaiPONIPONIHAAIKAMEA, mokapawa, lele ka hoku, haule kalani moakaka, i ke ao malamalama. Ala mai mai uao [. . .]. (121)

"I awaken [you] there, I awaken [you] here. Concentrate upon waking up. Catch your breath. Breathe this morning. The desire to call out and look at the east. [?] The east appears up in the heavens, the large rain cloud, the heavy laden clouds rain, water flows, the flashing [of lightning] appears in the purple heavens humbling one. [?] The dawn breaks and the stars fly away. The clear sky falls to the bright light. The person who is the go-between wakes you up." (294)

When Wākea finally did wake up in the morning sunlight, he had to cover himself up with a kapa (sheet of bark cloth) to hide himself from Papa's sight as he returned to the mua (men's house) where he should have been for the religious ceremonies of those sacred nights. Papa saw him and they quarreled. They were separated, but the division of foods, houses, and eating remained as kapu.

In a version recorded by Kepelino we find the following:

As the chiefess sat that morning in her own house, Wakea covered his head with the sleeping-tapa, ran from Ho'ohoku-ka-lani and came to Papa.

Papa was puzzled by Wakea's manner. She ran to meet her daughter and Ho'ohoku-ka-lani related all that Wakea had done that night. The chiefess was very angry and she came to the house where the sin had been committed. Outside the house she found Wakea, they quarreled, and Papa related to Wakea everything that her daughter had told her. When Wakea heard all the shameful things he had done he was ashamed and angry, and he beat the chiefess and spat in her face and their union was broken.

At that time disagreement arose among the chiefs, the manner of worship was changed, laws were made and proclaimed throughout all the land. Here are the laws of class I:

1. It is not right for a man to eat with his wife.
2. It is not right for a woman to enter the *mua* or house of worship.
3. It is not right for women to go to the men's eating house.
4. It is not right for women to eat bananas except the *pupuule* and the *ibolena* varieties.

5. Women must not eat pork, the yellow coconut, the *ulu*a fish, the *kumu* fish, the *niuhi* shark, the whale, the porpoise, the spotted sting-ray [hahalua, hihimanu], the *kailepo*; all these things were dedicated to God; hence women could not eat them.

Here are the laws of class II:

1. There is to be one house (the *noa*) for the wife and the husband, etc.
2. There is to be a house (called *mua*) for the men's eating house.
3. There is to be a heiau for the images.
4. There are to be a two eating houses, one for the men and another for the women.
5. There is to be a house (called *kua*) for tapa beating.
6. There is to be a house (called *pea*) for the separation of the woman when she is unclean. (64)

This became the core of what we know of as traditional Hawaiian social structure:

- ☀ the separation of women and men in eating, working, and living;
- ☀ the desire of the ali'i to have children through their closest relatives as a means of ensuring high rank and stature;
- ☀ the dominance of men and masculinity in religious activities (most or all priests are alleged to be male as are the "major" gods); and
- ☀ the increased power of the kahuna in charge of religious activities.

This is illustrated in the relevant lines found in the Hawaiian creation chant “Kumulipo.”

Papa-seeking-earth
Papa-seeking-heaven
Great-Papa-giving-birth-to-islands
Papa lived with Wakea
Born was the woman Ha‘alolo
Born was the jealousy, anger
Papa was deceived by Wakea
He ordered the sun, the moon
The night of Kane for the younger
The night to Hilo for the first-born
Taboo was the house platform, the place for sitting
Taboo the house where Wakea lived
Taboo was intercourse with the divine parent
Taboo the taro plant [‘ape], the acrid one
Taboo the poisonous ‘akia plant
Taboo the narcotic auhuhu plant
Taboo the medicinal uhaloa [plant]
Taboo the bitter part of the taro leaf [la‘alo]
Taboo the taro stalk that stood by the woman’s taboo house
Halao was buried [there], a long taro stalk grew
The offspring of Halao [born] into the day
Came forth. (Beckwith 124–125)

The plants mentioned in the Kumulipo are not the same as those found in Malo and Kepelino. Those mentioned in the Kumulipo are believed to have chemical properties or bitterness that associate them with matters of life and death or with communicating with the spiritual world. They are called “ka ‘ai lani makua” or “elder chiefly or heavenly foods” (Beckwith 233).

The kapu system of prohibitions lasted until October 3rd or 4th of 1819, an amazing forty-one years after Captain Cook’s arrival at Waimea, Kaua‘i. The ali‘i themselves ended this system of privilege and ironically, the highest ranking of them at that time

was a woman, Keōpūolani. Kamakau noted, “This was a strange thing for a tabu chiefess to do, one for whom these tabus were made and who had the benefit of them” (1992, 224).

There are several theories as to why this system was ended, but I favor the thought that the female aliʻi, particularly Keōpūolani and Kaʻahumanu, who were the wives of Kamehameha, determined that this was the best way in which to ensure that Kamehameha’s children and grandchildren would rule the Kingdom. By ending this privilege system they ended the system that also determined who could rule, a system that had allowed, and perhaps even encouraged, rebellion among siblings.

As interesting as those thoughts are, it is what happens after the “overthrow” of the kapu system that deals with traditional Hawaiian religion. It is assumed that the overthrow of the kapu system also ended traditional religious practices, perhaps because these two events happened at the same time, or perhaps because the image of the kapu system as the Hawaiian religion is so strong in the imagination of non-Hawaiians.

The missionaries, upon their arrival in 1820, just after the end of the kapu, would proclaim joyously

They have indeed thrown away their idols as worthless things, unable to save them, but they have not heard of Jesus; no Christian has yet said to them, there is a God in heaven who made them and the world, nor pointed them to the Saviour, “the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world.” (*Religious Intelligencer*, April 28, 1821, 770)



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