

# *Ho'oponopono*

**Traditional Ways of Healing to  
Make Things Right**

**Malcolm Nāea Chun**

**Ka Wana Series**



**Pihana Nā Mamo**

# *Ho'oponopono*

## Traditional Ways of Healing to Make Things Right Again

Malcolm Nāea Chun

Ka Wana Series

Curriculum Research & Development Group  
University of Hawai'i

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# *Ka 'Ōlelo Mua*

## Foreword

The growing need for reconciliation in contemporary society has rekindled an interest in the Native Hawaiian practice of ho'oponopono. Perhaps more than ever, people are in need of new and creative ways to build and strengthen relationships with others.

*Ho'oponopono, Traditional Ways of Healing to Make Things Right Again* was designed to provide insight and guidance in our understanding of a Hawaiian way of healing and reconciliation. Malcolm Nāea Chun, a cultural specialist with the University of Hawai'i's Curriculum Research & Development Group (CRDG), has researched historical accounts of peace making in Hawai'i and explored modern-day applications of ho'oponopono. For many students and their families, ho'oponopono represents a compelling means by which to restore and mend broken relationships.

This book 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 CRDG and the Hawai'i Department of Education, and production of the Ka Wana series represents the work of many collaborators. Mahalo to Linda Thomas and Gene Uno for their reading and comments; Lori Ward for her editing and proofreading; Allen Emura and his staff of the DOE Reprographic Section; Puanani Wilhelm and the Hawaiian Studies and Language Section for proofreading the documents; Project Co-Directors Gloria S. Kishi and Hugh

*Ka Wana*

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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 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 Liliʻuokalani 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 hoʻoponopono 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.

# Ho'oponopono

*“We forgave and were forgiven, thrashing out every grudge, peeve or sentiment among us. In this way, we became a very closely bound family unit.”*  
- Mary Kawena Pukui



Hawai'i historian Samuel Manaiakalani Kamakau described what families in pre-contact and pre-Christian Hawai'i did to seek reconciliation and forgiveness.

The Hawaiians are said to be a people consecrated to the gods; the 'aumakua gods were “born,” and from them man was born.

When trouble came upon a family for doing wrong against an 'aumakua god [...] (t)he cause for this trouble was shown to them by dreams, or visions, or through other signs sent by the god. It was pointed out to them what sacrifices to offer, and what gifts to present, to show their repentance for the wrong committed by the family. They were to go to the *Pohaku o Kane*, their *pu'uhonua*, where they were to make offerings to atone for their wrong doing (*mohai hala*) and to pacify the god (*mohai ho'olu'olu*) [...] (1968, 32)

He also observed

The *Pohaku o Kane*, the Stone of Kane, was a place of refuge, a *pu'uhonua*, for each family from generation to generation. It was not a heiau; it was a single stone monument [...] and a *kuahu* altar with ti and other greenery planted about. There the family went to obtain relief. (1968, 32)

When the high chiefs ended the state religious system in 1819, places of refuge such as Pōhaku o Kāne gradually ceased to be used and other forms of seeking reconciliation developed.



*Mary Kawena Pukui in a Fritz Henle photograph, reprinted courtesy of the Henle Archive Trust.*

Today, a “descendant” of those early forms of reconciliation is still practiced. It survives largely through the efforts and determination of Mary Kawena Pukui, formerly a translator and consultant at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Hawai'i.

When interviewed by the museum nearly fifty years ago, Pukui spoke of a way in which Hawaiians were able, on a course to healing, to “set to right first” mental problems. The interview was tape-recorded and transcribed. Pukui called this way of mental cleansing ho'oponopono.

She noted in the interview, “Today, the ho'oponopono remains only a fond memory since the death of my mother in 1942. [. . .] The ho'oponopono is rare today and is regarded as a silly remnant of heathenism by most people and squelched at every turn” (Tape H-41G, 7/10/1958). Pukui was afraid that this way of life would soon be forgotten.

From the mid 1960s through the early 1970s, Pukui had the opportunity to ensure that this part of Hawaiian culture would not die. She collaborated with mental health professionals and social workers at the Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center to codify the cultural practice in systematic terms that could be understood and learned by modern professionals and families. She wanted to ensure that Hawaiian families would once again be able to use ho'oponopono.



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