

“A Comparison Between the Ancient Hawaiian Ho’oponopono Process and the Repentance Process”

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The ancient Hawaiians strived to live together in peace and harmony. They followed certain laws and practices which kept their families and communities orderly, and living harmoniously.

Hawaiians of old were a very spiritual people. They believed that all matter possessed a ‘spiritual essence’. They believed in and worshipped many gods. Hawaiians also believed in ancestral spirits who dwelt in the form of animals and plants. They believed that when they spoke, nature could hear them. Ancient Hawaiians spoke to plants when asking permission to use them. When they went fishing, they said they were going “*holoholo*”, or for a walk, because they believed that the fish might hear them and run away if they said they were going fishing. (Dudley, 1).

In these ways and in many more, the Hawaiians lived in harmony with nature and the gods. Likewise, in the family and community, ancient Hawaiians followed certain standards of living which dealt with relationships and family living.

Interestingly enough, there are many similarities and parallels between some of the practices and beliefs of the ancient Hawaiians and the beliefs and practices of the gospel today. It could be argued that the similarities in some of these methods may be universal and common to all or many cultures and peoples, but I think differently.

The ‘*ohana*, or family, was the core of the Hawaiian community. The ‘*ohana* consisted of those related by blood, through marriage, through *hanai*, or adoption, and those who died and remained spiritual ancestors. Most often, the family made up an entire village. (Pescaia, 52). In the church, we are taught that our families are the core of society and our number one priority here on earth. We can also look to the members of our gospel as a family, born into, or “adopted” into the fold.

When troubles arise in either of these settings, or when an offense or sin is committed, a process must exist which will deal with these concerns, address them, correct them, and put things back to normal. Harmony and balance has to be maintained. For the Hawaiians, the *ho’oponopono* process dealt with problem-solving, and in the gospel, we have the process of repentance.

The literal translation of *Ho’oponopono* is “to make right” or “to set straight” (Pukui). *Ho’oponopono* was an active, integral part of Hawaiian society and adherence to its process and order were crucial in

maintaining order in the family and community. The *Ho'oponopono* process consisted of nine steps. I would like to outline these steps, as defined by Mary Kawena Pukui, and in turn, compare them with the various steps of the repentance process, as outlined by Spencer W. Kimball.

It should be noted that a *Ho'oponopono* session was called when an offense was committed, and was held in a group, family, or between parties. Repentance, in general, is an individual process, but often involves church authorities or others that may have been affected or offended.

THE HO'OPONOPONO PROCESS

THE REPENTANCE PROCESS

1) *PULE* -prayer to ask the gods for divine guidance and assistance. It laid the foundation for sincerity and honesty in problem-solving (Shook, 21).

Prayer is an integral part of the repentance process.

2) *KUKULU KUMUHANA*-identifying the general problem, gathering emotional and spiritual forces to help those in need. Offender must be a participant in solving the problem.

The sin must be identified by the sinner. He must realize he has done wrong and seek change.

3) *HALA* -transgression is brought forth and focused on. The sin is associated directly with the sinner.

The sinner must face his sins and come to grips with what he/she has done. There must be genuine sorrow, guilt, & grief.

4) *HIHIA* -"negative pulling". Exposure is given to the problem and the tension increases.

Abandonment of sin; committed to doing it no more.

5) *HO'OMALU* - a cooling off period, a time for reflection and mediation. Time for a "change of heart."

6) *MIHI* -seeking forgiveness. Confession of the act is sincere and forgiveness is asked.

Confession of sins to Lord and/or leaders.

7) *KALA* -to unbind the injured and injurer from the wrong. Both parties seek a resolution by letting go of negative feelings.

Restitution to injured party where possible.

8) *OKI* -"to cut" or remove all negative thoughts

Forgiveness of self

and feelings. It is cast off and "remembered no more."

and of others.

9) *PANI* - closing ritual which included offering of gifts to the gods (usually food and a prayer).

Offering of a broken heart, contrite spirit.

It was considered "bad luck" to discuss the matter further after a *Ho'oponopono* session, and it was even worse luck to harbor ill feelings or not to forgive. A person who refused to forgive and forget "would suffer the consequences and repercussion of the 'aumakua', or ancestral Hawaiian gods." (Panglinawan, 3).

Does this sound familiar? Moses 26:31 reads, "And ye shall also forgive one another your trespasses; for verily I say unto you, he that forgiveth not his neighbor's trespasses when he says that he repents, the same hath brought himself under condemnation." The Hawaiians shared this mutual belief.

Being fair and just was very important to the ancient Hawaiians, as it is in the gospel. When laws were broken, punishment was applied appropriately. In a Hawaiian family, for instance, when a family member committed a serious crime against another family member, it was termed "*moku ka piko*," or "the umbilical cord is cut", as an indication of the ruptured relationship. Privileges and obligation of relationship ceased and there was no mutual help or voluntary assistance in times of need (Handy, 49). Only when the proper penance was made and a serious *Ho'oponopono* session was held could the ties be restored.

Likewise in the church, certain privileges are taken from members who commit serious sins and until the repentance process has been completed and restitution made with the proper authorities, these privileges will be withheld. Spencer W. Kimball explained it this way:

Church penalties for sin involve deprivations-the withholding of temple privileges, priesthood advancements, Church positions and other opportunities for service and growth. Such deprivations result from errors which are not always punishable by serious measure but which render the honors and blessings in God's kingdoms. (326).

Of course, these privileges, like those of the ancient Hawaiians, are restored when repentance and restitution takes place.

Ho'oponopono was used in my home as a part of our weekly family home evenings. It served the equivalent of a "family counsel" or "family

court,” and it dealt with specific family problems and disagreements. In keeping with the traditional *Ho’oponopono* practice, the head of the household conducted these matters. My mother, as a single parent, and sometimes my brother, as the Melchizedek priesthood holder, often assumed this “less than pleasant” task.

But, as with my ancestors before me and with our church and in our homes, there must be order, and keeping peace and order is not an easy task. In some of these sessions, harsh words were often exchanged, hurt feeling shared and wrong-doing confessed. Tears often flowed and emotions flared. Yet, at the end of it all, just as in the days of old, peace eventually prevailed, wounds were set to heal, sighs of relief were heard, and heart-felt hugs were exchanged.

The practice of *Ho’oponopono* is practiced in many Hawaiian homes today. Although I don’t believe they follow the nine precise steps, a simplified form is used, and the same objective is reached. *Ho’oponopono* is also being used in the Hawaiian community to settle issues facing the Hawaiian people today.

Some of the similarities and parallels which I have illustrated are but a few of the many between the practices and beliefs of the ancient Hawaiians and those of our modern-day gospel. Is it any wonder that the people of ancient Hawaii seemed so eager, willing and ready to accept the gospel and make Hawaii one of the strong stations of the church here on earth?

I truly feel that it was the simple beauty and truth of the gospel which led to the conversion of many of the Hawaiian people. That, and a warm familiarity of common practices and beliefs. I truly believe that the Lord cared for and loved those peoples “upon the isles of the sea.” By acknowledging the *Ho’oponopono* process as just one of the parallels between the practices of the ancient Hawaiians and the gospel, we see His handiwork in all of these doings.

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