

## Ho'oponopono

*Healing through ritualized communication*

Manulani Aluli Meyer

Ho'okahi la'au, he mihi. *The first medicine is forgiveness*

Aloha is the art of understanding

*Travis Taiepa, Aotearoa*

Ho'oponopono is the healing of relationships between individuals.

*Moku Ilima, Moloka'i*

Hawaiians live in the largest interconnected land mass in the world. Hawaii-nui-ākea spans across 64 million miles of a vast Pacific ocean meticulously travelled by Polynesian navigators *thousands* of years before English sailors left their coastlines. We have been gloriously *connected* with our own peoples, practices and stories for 10,000+ years and because of the needs of our time, we are now discussing what this separation with our continental counterparts allowed us to understand. Ho'oponopono is one such practice shaped by oceanic minds instructed by expansive blue skies, humbling waters and a finite land mass of infinite beauty. It is a process that has endured travel, time and countless conundrums to continue to gift those willing and able to use pono to return to Pono - to use relative truth to recognize absolute Truth. Or is it the other way around? To forgive and be forgiven. Yes, maybe it is more the later expressed simultaneously and ultimately through principles in action. Thus begins the perceived contradiction of our times found in modern epistemology: *How do we inspire the practice of aloha in context with text?*

In my opinion the culture lies in the people. For ho'oponopono, which is the healing of relationships to occur, there has to be pono. Pono in this case translates: *to become one with yourself*, and becoming one with yourself you will then become one with akua, or your higher self. Alex Pua'a, Moloka'i

Ho'oponopono is thus first and foremost a *practice of principles*. It is not merely a set of ideas or a facilitation technique, or a family peace-making process. Ho'oponopono is *to make right*. It is a way of understanding the role of truth in how we evolve and then using that truth as effulgent awareness in all aspects of our lives so forgiveness, the untangling of emotions from their ego moorings, becomes the practice. Then it will be as Hawaiian kupuna Halemakua has taught us: *Truth is the highest goal, and aloha is the greatest truth.*

The Process Begins

*5 foundational ideas*

Mary Kawena Pukui wrote extensively about the Ka'ū family style of ho'oponopono in the seminal collection of Hawaiian culture: *Nānā I Ke Kumu*. Her scholarship, shaped by Christian ethics and understandings, became the foundation for family renewal practices in modern social-work and helped in a Hawaiian cultural renaissance still finding expression. She has been the inspiration for my own teachers: Lynette Paglinawan, Ann Beck, Malia Craver, and Abbie Napeahi.

Ultimately, people engage the process by knowing and agreeing to it. Ho'oponopono begins with five basic principles that undergo scrutiny and agreement before it begins:<sup>1</sup>

1. Each individual in the 'ohana (family) must share a common commitment to be part of the problem-solving process.
2. All words and deeds that are part of a ho'oponopono will be shared in an atmosphere of 'oia i'o (the essence of truth).
3. The 'ohana must share a common sense of aloha for one another or be committed to reinstating that spirit.
4. Everything that is said in a ho'oponopono is done in confidence and will *not* be repeated when the session is complete.
5. The haku (facilitator) must be commonly agreed on as a fair and impartial channel through which the ho'oponopono is done.

We can understand much from the above five ideas. Firstly, they are embedded in pono, in the balanced practices surrounding truth/aloha. These five agreements are ritually discussed at length within a group that is unfamiliar with ho'oponopono but in a family that understands them, just sitting down to *ho'oponopono* infers their agreement and practice. Because of the re-introduction of ho'oponopono in families, discussing the five agreements is common and indeed helps all understand their role in the process that then unfolds.

Do you see why these five principles are needed? Read them again slowly. Digest them. Feel the value of these ideas in relationship to the meaning of our lives:

1. Intention – commitment to solving the problem
2. Truth – honest sharing of ideas and emotions
3. Aloha – willingness to return to love through compassion
4. Wisdom – understanding energy and the sacredness of forgiveness
5. Trust – recognizing the purpose and role of others in life

These principles then become *practices* embedded within a cultural system all understood. They have evolved from a native epistemology contextualized by the geography of islands teaching us that getting along in defined spaces made more sense than sustained aggression. Peace through pono was the foundation of our native Hawaiian culture. If *aloha is our true intelligence*, ho'oponopono is proof.

### Ho'oponopono *Cultural vocabulary*

Ke kala aku nei 'au ia 'oe e pela noho'i 'au e kala ia mai ai  
*I unbind you from the fault, and thus may I also be unbound by it*

The following vocabulary is from Mary Kawena Pukui. It has been the primer from which ho'oponopono practitioners evolved from. The following list is distinctly understood and practiced uniquely within families, islands, districts and within individual haku/facilitators:

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<sup>1</sup> M.K. Pukui, E.W. Haertig & C.A. Lee (1972). *Nānā I Ke Kumu: Look to the Source*. Honolulu: Queen Lili'uokalani Children's Center Publication

<b>‘Ohana</b>	Family blood ties, more recently a very close grouping
<b>Haku</b>	An unbiased mediator, one that is respected by all
<b>‘Aumakua</b>	Family god often represented by a living creature or plant
<b>Pule Wehe</b>	Opening prayer, usually said to the family ‘aumakua
<b>Kukulu Kumuhana</b>	A pooling of mana (energy/strength) directed to a positive goal A unified force. This is also a clear, objective statement of the problem made by the haku
<b>Mahiki</b>	The discussion of the problem, a time to unravel, to peel off each layer or event that has created the hihia
<b>Hihia</b>	Tangling of emotions that hinders forgiveness
<b>Hala</b>	Fault or transgression
<b>Ho’omauhala</b>	Period of unrest, still holding a grudge, hostility
<b>Ho’omalū</b>	A silent period, a ‘time-out’, a resting period
<b>‘Oia i’o</b>	The flesh of truth, absolute truth, the essence of truth
<b>Mihi</b>	Forgiveness, repentance, apology, confession
<b>Kala</b>	To release, untie, free, unbind
<b>Mo Ka Piko</b>	To sever the umbilical cord; symbolically, to cut off an ‘ohana member (an infrequent ending, but an option)
<b>Pule Ho’opau</b>	Closing prayer

Here are Hawaiian words that point to an enduring system of healing in modern-day Hawaii. How we *inhabit these ideas* is the discrete practice of many. Ideas such as mihi, ‘oia i’o, pono, kukulu kumuhana, and hihia have become a life-long purpose to understand and a process permeating all aspects of my own thinking, writing and behaving. Ho’oponopono, although a true and powerful healing process, is not separate from moment-to-moment modern consciousness. I have been a practitioner of this process for over thirty years and still there is an infinite store-house waiting to be explored.

Although ho’oponopono heralds specificity shaped by warm waters and blue skies, the following five highlights offer us general ways in which to engage in its universal appeal and helps extend its efficacy and relevance to world-wide healing:

- Kukulu kumuhana: quantum healing found in the pooling of intentionality
- Hihia: awareness that our mind creates and sustains obstructions
- ‘Oia i’o: truth-telling as an enlightened practice that dissolves obstructions
- Pono: practicing and living higher principles in thought, speech, action
- Mihi: illumination and purpose found in humility, interconnection, forgiveness

### **Kukulu Kumuhana**

Intentionality is the hallmark of consciousness. Husserl

Gathering energy for any purpose helps make that purpose tangible. Healing is no different. When we kukulu kumuhana, when we gather intentionally, we are in essence changing the fabric of our own existence. The special idea found within kukulu kumuhana is that it describes both the issue and how it can be resolved. It is a call for collective focus and for the application of aloha, pono and mihi - through compassion, truth and forgiveness.

In the actual practice, kukulu kumuhana is the time when a haku helps the 'ohana pause and focus on what is happening. This pause is meant to lend aloha to a family member who feels troubled, untrusting or resistant. When this happens, everyone may be asked to *breathe in stillness* and thus exist within the *spirit of aloha* for the individual - - we then sit with a clear, purposed and collective vision. When you kukulu kumuhana, the group offers a communal colonic, so to speak, helping clear pathways to forgiveness via non-judgement, trust, and compassion. I have seen this process produce miracles, as if the combined and silent intentionality of aloha is too much for a single heart to resist. It must inevitably collapse into its own healing and to the beautiful function of a family's certain evolution through loving non-judgement that will ultimately bring forgiveness.

In ho'oponopono, kukulu kumuhana is also the statement of the problem. It is embedded within an energetic field so that disease/cure becomes the same idea. I have found the practice enlightening and something that has enlivened a meditative spirit in my day, this idea that conflict brings forward that which is necessary for healing. And when we heal, unity is strengthened. That is kukulu kumuhana, the gathering of mana/energy to support the work of this life-time. It feels almost abstract to talk about, but the pooling of energy for a specific purpose is its own healing practice. Conflict allows this process to be activated. Do you see this? This is what kukulu kumuhana means: collective consciousness aimed at a specific idea. Why not make that idea the healing of people? Why not make this practice the healing of our planet?

## Hihia

Conflict is the mid-wife of consciousness. Paulo Freire

Entanglement is not simply a quantum physics description of the holographic universe. Entanglement also describes hihia, a Hawaiian expression of what happens when we are sloppy with our intentions, words or actions with others. We name this idea *hihia* and work toward the untangling, not to simply be free of negative forces that bind us to them, but to re-purpose ourselves in *pono*. Thus our relationships strengthen and our lives return to balance.

Hawaiians view this notion of entanglement in an active way. One is in *hihia* with another when a negative feeling arises. Even *one idea* hitches us to another forever if we are not vigilant about its essence and quality. Just the *thought* of hitting a child held consequences for the adult. *Just the thought*. Here is a world where thinking and being were not separate; a world where the essence of life was co-created by our own thoughts, intention and mind. Imagine.

In the ho'oponopono process we work to untangle emotions from the event by speaking about what actually happened, this is the mahiki phase. We go right to the heart of the perceived transgression. I have always found that it is/was never what we thought. The hala, the core of the issue, is deeper, hidden, and a secret even to those involved. *Especially* to those involved. There is always an origin, a cause, for how we feel about what happened and it takes time to unravel it, to help it get un-stuck. This is why it is an all-day process we begin in the early morning. Thus, do you see how the untangling actually strengthens our

deeper ties to each other? We unbind ourselves from the restriction of anger and fortify our ties of commitment and love. We walk from effects to heal the cause. Well, that is perhaps the purpose of conflict. We awaken together when we heal together.

Ho'oponopono is thus a practice one begins *inside*. To seek union with others begins first with my own healing. Ho'oponopono then is more than a peace-making process, it is first a way of life, a way of being, and a way of seeing the world that has brought me to union, healing, and thus an understanding of my life's meaning. Perhaps this entire book brings us into this (k)new seeing, giving us guiding principles in which to undertake our own purpose.

### 'Oia i'o

Love is not different from truth. Love is that state in which the thought process, as time, has completely ceased. Where love is, there is transformation.  
Krishnamurti

Truth is simple. In ho'oponopono, it is the currency of exchange we barter with. What we have come to know as haku is that people don't understand what the 'flesh of truth' really looks like, sounds like, or feels like. 'Oia i'o refers to the inside of the matter, the knowing that is not plainly seen in broad daylight. It is truth that hides because of fear and mistrust. We coax it out with compassionate exchange and direct nourishment. We love it forward and allow its sticky messiness to be collectively cleaned.

Most expressions of truth are cognitive. They *point* to an experience, a person, an action outside of us. They are typically empirical with a surface-level understanding that sustains polarity and the dual universe we actually produce ourselves. I have always found that amazing: that we whip-up our own suffering and then maintain it with our own unawareness through blame or shame. In ho'oponopono, anger is channelled to bring forth self-observation so that an idea can be understood. This very process of reflection instructs and nourishes. Is it any wonder people are curious about other ways of thinking and being? In this way ho'oponopono is no different from Buddhist, mystical Christian, Indian sutras, or ecstatic Sufi thinking. There simply *must* be a more unified process to life! Truth is this process and when it is applied within a collective, that collective evolves.

... we can never – and should never – attempt to intellectualize the truth.  
Truth is simple, and no-one knew this better than the Hawaiians. *Nana Veary*

Truth is recognized. In ho'oponopono it becomes clear that there are many 'layers' to truth. This mahiki phase of the process is 'unpeeling the onion'. It is a request to get at all interpretations of the issue or event so everything is known. Usually, it is in this unpeeling where the hala begins to be known, where the sorrow is understood, and when the cause is revealed. Here is where relative truth turns into absolute truth. It is almost impossible to express, although words can detail its effect. The causative process of forgiveness is not found in words. It is found in our na'au, our hearts or intestines where wisdom and compassion combine. Here is where healing happens.

## Pono

Pono is to become one with yourself, and in order to become one with yourself you must pull up *all* the negatives that we possess.

*Alex Pua'a, Moloka'i*

Pono is central to ho'oponopono. It is a Hawaiian ideal to live a life of pono -- to actualize higher principles, to be truthful, to engage in the development of your ancient self. In the preparation to do this kind of work pono is both process and product of our efforts. To live a pono life is to radiate that understanding in all facets of work, relationships, events. This is why we wish to recognize it by practicing ho'oponopono.

We use truth to heal. The question still remains: How do we do this? What is the sequence and process? In a Hawaiian sense, there is always some kind of recognition of context, a maturing of awareness in timing. This is where pono extends and deepens from an individual process – respecting the chosen haku; to a collective one - agreeing to be a part of ho'oponopono. Because when you sit down to ho'oponopono, you know that healing is around the corner.

Pono is also described as: Goodness, uprightness, morality, moral qualities, correct or proper procedure, excellence, well-being, prosperity, welfare, benefit, behalf, equity, sake, true condition or nature, duty; moral, fitting, proper, righteous, right, upright, just, virtuous, fair, beneficial, successful, in perfect order, accurate, correct, eased, relieved.<sup>2</sup> So, to return to order, one must see first where it went astray.

So, of course, gathering everyone becomes the largest challenge of any ho'oponopono. This is why haku were never the ones to gather a family. Haku did not suggest the process, nor do they note the need for it. Pono is pono. A family animates themselves from within, no matter how much external pressure is exerted. We heal through our own intention and volition. It was not the place of a facilitator to suggest this ritual of healing. One simply held highest thoughts of all parties, period. In this way, when the family asked to sit and participate in this process, they were ready and we were available.

## Mihi

A spiritual understanding that is not practiced under fire is without value.

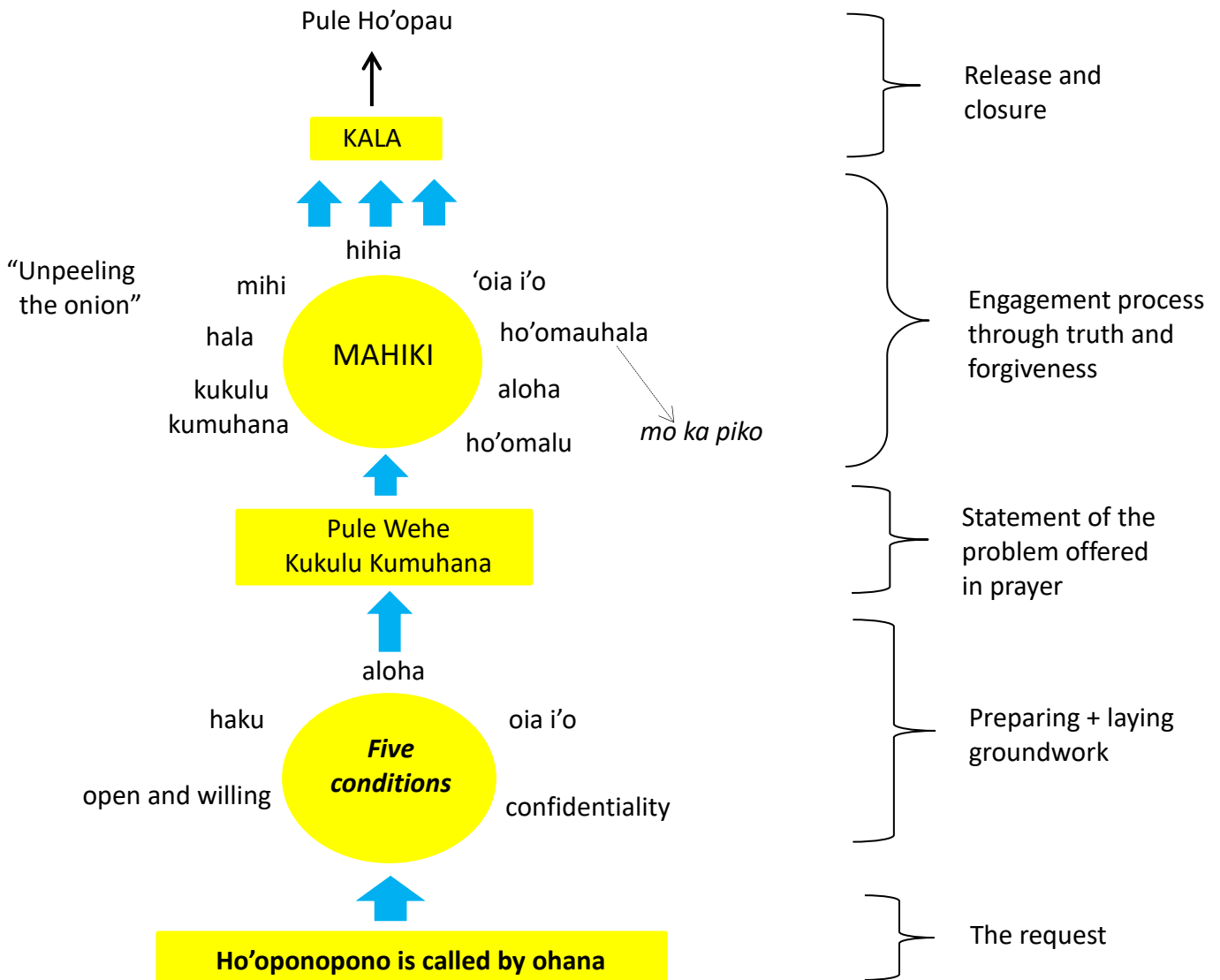
I-Ching

Mihi is the heart of ho'oponopono. It is often the quiet moment of recognition, compassion, release. Forgiveness is something tangible. I have always felt a lift in the room, as if heaviness of heart does indeed hold weight, and when it's gone, it's gone. A lightness – kala-fills the space. We *feel* forgiveness, it is not just an idea. Mihi is this process. It is a practice of allowing, of seeing, of letting go. Often it is not done with words but through *understanding*. Do you sense the function of this idea?

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<sup>2</sup> Ulukau.org (Hawaiian Dictionary)

Diagram: Ho'oponopono – To Set Right  
A Hawaiian Peacemaking Process



Mihi is the implication found in loving, so it is not different from truth. Forgiveness is a central practice of compassion that ho'oponopono brings forward. It gives us safe passage through dark corridors of our own fears and stuckness. It is the core practice of aloha.

We transform through forgiveness. I have seen it, felt it, and it has transformed my heart and mind. Mihi is this practice. To forgive is to reconnect through loving understanding. It does indeed shift everything. It is the product of a successful ho'oponopono but it is also its process: a simultaneous event that is nourished by humility and the intentionality that peace is preferable and loving is the song of songs.

This is why ho'oponopono works best when it seems most impossible. The ultimate cosmic SWAT team because *loving is a practice of awakensness*. You were in sorrow because you were once in love. Pono reminds us that loving is our natural state and mihi, the art of forgiveness, helps us *practice* this clarity.

## The Process Continues

*What is never said is the point of the conversation.*

Ho'oponopono in this tale is a group process. It is a ritualized way to share truth, truth and more truth so that broken hearts mend and core issues are transformed into light and a memory that no longer holds emotion. We still *remember*, that is an important idea, but there is no charge in it. It has been forgiven. It is released.

Here is a healing practice leaping from the text of this collection from around moana-nui-ākea. We are in a unique time on the planet and how we address the quality of our relationships is central to how we will evolve. Here too is the gift of this Hawaiian healing practice: it is not simply rules of engagement, it is a call to enter your own pono. To be true. To live truth. To heal and thus to help others heal.

Ha'ina mai ka puana  
*Thus ends the story*

He ali'i ka la'i, he haku na ke aloha  
*Peace is a chief, the lord of love.*  
*Where peace is, there love abides also*

Here is ho'oponopono, a Hawaiian ritualized communication process that transforms pain into understanding, dark thoughts into illumination, and anger into its core purpose. We are strengthened through hardship and turmoil, *or we are not*. Here is a blueprint for the structure of collective healing, a recipe that gets easier the more we bake it. Here is a way to harness the wild horses of mistrust and anger so that fields of peace can be planted. In this way we practice with our children and give them ways to experience their own pono and find ways to heal with and through their own hala.

Ulu a'e ke welina a ke aloha  
*Loving is the practice of an awake mind*

But what is grief if not love perservering. *Metatron*

Fundamentally, ho'oponopono is a simple method involving complex arrangements of Hawaiian cultural beliefs organized around intention, truth, compassion, wisdom and trust. It cannot be detailed in any article, just sketched. Why? Because the ultimate use of pono can never be prescribed, franchised, or pulled from the richness of its moment-to-moment presence. It is a process, yes, but it is more a way of life teaching us the primacy of truth and the purpose of forgiveness, and that ultimately there is only loving left to do. 'Oia wale no.

*Amama ua noa.*



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