

BASIC PROTOCOL AT HAWAIIAN SACRED PLACES

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A lesson in protocol begins by following the kapu or special rule for this written work. The following 'olelo noeau (wise saying) is my kapu for this written work. The kapu is given with this mana'o (thoughts) and the reader accepts it by reading my mana'o. Thus, each reader is now obligated to uphold this kapu which is shared "to continue to do good" at na wahi pana (sacred places). As Tutu Pukui noted in her translation, "Blessings come to those who persist in doing good."

O ka pono ke hana 'ia a iho mai na lani.

Continue to do good until the heavens come down to you.

Much of this work is based on protocol taught to me in my childhood from my 'ohana (family). These kapu or special rules are based on the Hawaiian concept of aloha 'aina. What is presented here may differ from other Hawaiian family's teachings. No offense is intended nor any assertion that this is the only way of teaching. Only clarity for proper behavior at Hawaiian sacred places is my focus.

In recent years, there has been increased evidence of desecration and destruction at many Hawaiian sacred places by unknown persons. Much of the damage is done through ignorance of appropriate behavior rather than outright vandalism.

The increase of desecration at heiau, burial sites and burials, and other significant places is of great concern to native Hawaiian practitioners, to families who are the "kahu" (caretaker) of certain sacred places and others who malama these sacred places. Hawaiians and non-natives note a more comprehensive effort must be undertaken to educate everyone on proper protocol. Educational outreach and awareness of culturally appropriate behavior is necessary to sensitize everyone who visits the special and sacred places throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

Basic protocol or knowledge of proper behavior is a very important part of Hawaiian culture. This includes understanding the history and usage of a sacred place, and it requires a proper attitude of respect for the culture and the peoples.

For instance, thousands of visitors and residents go to the various National Parks (i.e., Volcano, Honaunau, Haleakala) and leave an offering of a ti leaf wrapped around a stone. Native Hawaiians are offended by these "stone laulau" offererers that:

- a. often are stones and ti leaves removed from the sacred site itself, thereby adding to the damage and desecration'
- b. have no cultural meaning and therefore are considered to be disrespectful and offensive to the "gods" and that place; and
- c. are left at inappropriate areas throughout the sacred place, thus the offering becomes a desecration in itself.

Ignorance can no longer be an excuse when one purposely visits other peoples and other countries and blatantly ignores other cultural mores. Common sense and simple courtesies that you would display in a church or temple or other religious edifice apply to the sacred places in Hawaii. Heiau, burial mounds, sacred pools, and many of the natural forms that make up Hawaiian sacred places require the same kind of respect as visiting a cathedral in Rome.

The culturally appropriate visitor will find the following tips invaluable when visiting Hawaii and its special places:

- a. Prepare and research the places, the peoples and the culture you plan on visiting.
- b. Dress modestly especially when planning to tour sacred places.
- c. Avoid loud and aggressive behavior including keeping romantic or sexual behaviors out of the public view.
- d. Don't be obtrusive, disruptive or damage to the environment wherever you go including being careful not to step on, to sit on or to stand on anything that you may not normally do. Some sacred places are what may seem only "a pile of stones" to the unknowing visitor.
- e. Do not plan on taking photos at a sacred place.

One basic concept that permeates throughout Hawaiian culture is "aloha 'aina" or love of the land. This is explained in the Kaho'olawe study on the protocol of Aloha 'Aina for that island:

"Land, especially within the vast sea, is precious. With this limited resources, Hawaiians understood that the role of humans is to care for the land, not just to use the land...Aloha 'aina, malama 'aina, and ke kahu o ka 'aina (stewardship) are terms defining the relationship of Hawaiians to Kaho'olawe...the late Aunty Edith Kanakaole observed, "Our kupuna leave us the same thought saying: E malama pono I ka 'aina; nana mai ke ola. Take good care of the land; it grants you life."

Visitors and residents alike need to understand and practice aloha ‘aina at sacred places and throughout the islands. It is a traditional relationship to the land that today must often be relearned and taught to everyone in order to protect, to preserve and to implement proper uses to maintain the harmony between man and the land. The late Hawaiian activist George Helm expressed his thoughts about aloha ‘aina (Ritte, p. 27, Copy of a letter by Helm dated 1-29-77):

“The truth is, there is man and there is environment. One does not supersede the other. The breath of man is the breath of Papa (the earth). Man is merely the caretaker of the land that maintains his life and nourishes his soul. Therefore, ‘aina is sacred. The church of life is not in a building, it is the open sky, the surrounding ocean, the beautiful soil. My duty is to protect Mother Earth, who gives me life. And to give thanks with humility as well as ask forgiveness for the arrogance and insensitivity of man.”

In Hawaiian thought, it is considered “hewa” (sinful) to speak or act disrespectfully in the presence of the many gods when visiting na wahi pana. Careful observation of protocol lessens the odds of displeasing the many gods and thereby bringing shame or harm on oneself or one’s family. Here are some basic rules taught to me:

- a. Before you enter the sacred place, ask permission of the spirits there. You can simply take a moment to silently ask for permission, tell the spirits who you are and why you are there, and give thanks for the privilege of entering that sacred place.
- b. Know that you are in the presence of the many gods. All life forms seen and unseen are sacred. Therefore all things require respect for their mana (spiritual life energy). Maintain an attitude of respect with little or no talking.
- c. All prayers offered in silence should first acknowledge the spirituality of the place, the unseen and the peoples of that place. Know that the mana of the place is now a part of you, as you become a part of that place simply by being there. Include in your silent prayers a thanks before and after, and do not forget to apologize for any shortcomings you may have caused to the sacred place.
- d. Silence is the best behavior to practice at Hawaiian sacred places. This way you will not disturb anyone else who may be there nor will you disturb the harmony of the sacred place.
- e. Offerings are not required. Your silent prayers or chants are an offering in itself. Most offerings are done in more formalized rituals or ceremonies. The simple rule when making offerings is to bring items of flowers, ferns or other greenery, and

non-meat items. If you are unsure, then do not bring anything. If there is no kahu taking care of a sacred place, then the offerings often accumulate and begin to litter the area rather than be an enhancement for the gods.

- f. A basic rule to follow is – if you are unsure, then don't do it. If you feel you have stepped on or sat on or desecrated an area, than by all means say you are sorry and apologize to the gods. The mana of a place can often affect one's health. For example, many Hawaiian families have experienced a young child suddenly getting sick after an outing to the beach or to the mountains. This requires the parent or an adult to go back to all the areas that the child may have been exposed to and ask forgiveness of the spirits there. By the time the adult returns home, the child is more than likely feeling better again.

All behavior is learned from rules to ensure one's safety or for protection of the natural resources. The Hawaiian practice of lokahi (to maintain a spiritual, cultural and natural balance) with oneself, with others and with the 'aina contributes to aloha 'aina. As observed by the Kaho'olawe Commission study, "An inherent aspect of lokahi is the practice of conservation to ensure availability of natural resources for present and future generations. Rules of behavior are tied to cultural beliefs and values regarding respect of the 'aina. These include the virtue of sharing and not taking too much, and a holistic perspective of organisms and ecosystems that emphasizes balance and coexistence."

In closing, I leave you with Nana Veary's simple words regarding protocol. She says, "...Ask permission and give thanks – that was the Hawaiian protocol that extended to every aspect of life in nature. If you observe this constantly, you begin to develop an inner silence, a deep strength that comes from having your mind attuned to the universal consciousness that pervades all things...Whenever I fly to any other island, I ask permission of its guardian spirits. As the airplane lands, I ask permission to be on the island and to partake of its beauty...I always see a rainbow or some sign of welcome. I always feel that this is nature speaking directly to me, responding to my reverence."

As a general rule, proper protocol at Hawaiian sacred places is basically approaching with an attitude of respect and of having as little impact on the 'aina, on the peoples and on the culture as possible. The physical differences of Hawaiian sacred and significant places require as much respect if not more than that of a historic church structure; the 'aina after all having been fashioned by the many gods and Papa (Mother Earth). Ua pau.

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This is not a complete list by any means. Any discrepancies or errors herein are mine alone and do not reflect upon my written or cultural resources. E ho'omau kakou!