

## THE RETURN OF THE HAWAIIAN KAPU 'AWA

**[I have been asked to tell this mo'olelo and humbly do so, for those of us who participated feel honored to have been given this opportunity to serve our ancestors and our people in such an historical event. It is a simple story of tradition, of the wisdom of our ancestors and of the essence of being Hawaiian. It is also a confirmation of truths long known by native peoples. I hope that sharing this shall serve to educate and to inform, as it is presented with aloha, 'Ōlohe Lua Aīwaiwa, La'akea Suganuma.]**

### THE SUMMONS:

Sometime in July, my friend, Emil Wolfgramm, mentioned that the World Indigenous Peoples' Consortium, consisting of leaders of cultural based institutions of higher education, had decided to hold their annual meeting in Honolulu. Peter Hanohano, who heads the Native Hawaiian Education Council, was hosting this gathering and had requested a 'awa ceremony to be held at Windward Community College on the morning of Wednesday, August 13<sup>th</sup>. Emil planned to recommend a traditional Hawaiian ceremony to be conducted by Pā Ku'i-A-Holo (lua practitioners). He talked to 'Ōlohe Mitchell Eli who asked me to contact Emil for particulars. I began to gather all the information needed to prepare for the ceremony.

### THE CHALLENGE AND HOPE OF THE ANCESTORS:

When this was first mentioned, I recognized it as much more than a simple request. This one task was intended to fulfill a greater spiritual mission conceived by our ancestors. The truth is that there had not been a traditional Hawaiian 'awa ceremony here in a very, very long time. Within our Pa, we have long discussed the fact that what have been conducted and touted as traditional Hawaiian 'awa ceremonies have not been Hawaiian at all, but a conglomeration of other (Samoan, Tongan and Fijian) traditions. There are a variety of reasons for this. There are those who just are not aware and are doing what they think is correct with good intent, there are others who have been taught incorrectly and there are those who just don't care and knowingly sacrifice tradition for pageantry. Many of our traditions have been distorted, the kapu 'awa being one.

So this was not just a random request but an appeal from our 'ohana in spirit to be properly represented. I considered this high honor, which also meant an equal level of responsibility. Among other things, Hawaiian 'apu had to be made, a kānoa had to be made, the right kind of 'awa had to be gathered and old Ka'ū family chants had to be learned.

### THE UNIQUE ELEMENTS OF THE HAWAIIAN KAPU 'AWA:

Although there were variations by districts, there were certain elements that were universal. Many of us have seen 'awa ceremonies that involve the use of a single 'apu (coconut shell cup) to serve the participants, one by one. This was not so in our tradition. Every participant drank from their own 'apu 'awa ('awa cup). In addition, everyone had another 'apu for wai (fresh water) or aumiki (mixture of water and noni) which was used to cleanse the mouth after the drinking of 'awa. What this meant is that to do this properly, approximately 80 'apu had to be made.

And the Hawaiian 'apu is cut differently than anywhere else in Polynesia. Most are familiar with the 'apu that is cut across the center with the "eyes" portion discarded. The true Hawaiian 'apu was cut lengthwise, above the center, so that the "eye" on top was used to hang the 'apu out of harm's way when not in use, so that it would not be defiled. In addition, the Hawaiian 'apu, especially those used ceremonially, were highly polished. We had to make two smooth, polished 'apu per person.

As far as serving, we are familiar with seeing the serving order from highest to lowest rank. In the kapu 'awa, the first served is the second highest ranking and the last cup, the "cup of honor," goes to the highest ranking person. Why? Because the last cup contained the sediment that settled at the bottom and is the most potent.

Also, a traditional kānoa had to be made. Our people used gourds and wood bowl with notches to pour into 'apu or bowls without notches to dip into. With little time, I looked but could find nothing here. My son, Manu, told me a friend of his was going to Waimea, Hawaii, to get some ipu. I described what was needed and hoped for the best.

But first, the big question was, from where would we gather the coconuts, niu hiwa, necessary to even start this long process? I had nine coconuts on which I started to work. I also put out the word to the members of the Pā to gather what they could and meet at Ulupō Heiau on Saturday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, four days before the ceremony was to be held.

#### THE WORK BEGINS – LAULIMA:

Here, I will summarize what miraculously took place in four days. Throughout, I kept hearing, "Don't worry, everything will be provided." Even though I knew this, I couldn't help but worry. We had nothing and only a few days to go. Those who came to help, some of them almost continuously, day and night, from the Pā, were Henry, Mamo, Noelani, Scott, Pi'ilani, Hoku, Sandy, Wally, Bev, Manu and Kanoa. Nakulu brought in the much prized 'Awa Mo'I from Kaua'i. Gourds were brought in from Waimea and I chose one to make the kānoa. When we met at Ulupō, we only had a few coconuts until Manu came with about fifty, because his neighbor just happened to trim his trees that morning. Scott said he could provide the cooking banana for pūpū, kukui nuts for oil and la'i to place the pūpū on. In our tradition, a morsel of food (banana, fish, chicken, pork) was eaten after drinking 'awa to take away its taste. That night, I drained and cut all the husked coconuts and over the next three days, until the early hours of the day of the ceremony, the 'apu were made.

Guidance was provided throughout. The day before the ceremony, I awoke with the answers I needed. One of these was that there would be forty (a significant number) people in the ceremony. It wasn't until we were at Windward, setting up for the ceremony, that I learned that the final count of 'apu was forty-one 'apu 'awa and forty-one 'apu wai, one set for me and forty for the participants; not one more or less!

#### THE KAPU 'AWA – THE JOINING OF PEOPLE, ANCESTORS AND HIGHER POWERS:

On the morning of the ceremony, we gathered and went about putting everything in place. The kapu area was designated, mats were placed, the la'I, pūpū and 'apu wai

were set in place, the 'awa mixed, strained and poured into the kānoa, and all were assigned duties; to pour, serve, assist and as kia'i (guards) to maintain the kapu.

The people entered and forty were seated. There were Maoris from Aotearoa (New Zealand), Natives from Turtle Island (North America) and Aborigines from Australia, as well as other officials and our own Hawaiians. I explained that there was to be absolute quiet and no moving about. Pikai (purification by the sprinkling of salt water and 'olena) on the participants was done first. As the 'awa was being poured and served, I addressed the group and told them that it was quite interesting and appropriate that a gathering of indigenous educators had caused a series of events that would educate many. I said that we know that western education is important but that education of our traditions and ancient wisdom is just as important, for the first is for the survival of man and woman in today's world but the second is for the survival of the soul. I added that they are all participants and not observers and proceeded to explain what had occurred to prepare for this and the procedure that will be followed. I explained that I am using very old family chants from Ka'ū that had not been used in a setting like this for at least 150 years; the first, a pule kahea to call for the ancestors and Higher Powers to come and join us and the other, a tribute to our ancestors, and that this was not a performance but a real Hawaiian ceremony.

When all were served, the chants were done and I dedicated the essence of the 'awa to those in spirit and the substance to us in body. We then partook of the 'awa, cleansed our mouths and the pūpū was consumed. By then, many in spirit had come and joined us and I invited those, who felt compelled to, to speak. Then began the true essence and "magic" of our purpose.

There was great oratory from Tom Davis, President of Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College, poetically describing the group, places and purpose. Manaiteangi Forbes of Te Wananga O Aotearoa, a Maori, began to describe all the spirits that he could see that had joined us. He pointed out various (some very large) native chiefs and where they stood, my grandmother, Mary Kawena Puku'i and expressed surprise at the number of Europeans and Orientals that had come. He mentioned a name that had been offered by a Aboriginal chief who was there in spirit and one of the Aborigines acknowledged who he was. Richard Jenkins, Vice-Chair, First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium spoke and said that there was a funeral being held this very same day for Peter John, long-time First Nations leader and that his spirit had joined us. Many others expressed feelings of knowing that this was real and gratitude at being allowed to be a part of the ceremony. When the verbal offerings were completed, I declared the kapu 'awa a success and ua pau (finished).

#### THE AFTERMATH AND LESSONS LEARNED:

I was provided feedback for days after the ceremony. Significantly, I was told that nothing had been accomplished during the first two days of the annual meeting, but after the ceremony, held on their third meeting day, the group was inspired, discussion flowed, and they were able to complete their business. Many Maori expressed that it was not until the kapu 'awa, that they finally felt welcomed. Others were honored to be a part of our Hawaiian tradition. What this meant to me is that all Native Peoples are connected to their ancestors and that connection must be made and acknowledged for things to be pono. Emil and I later joked that this was the grand plan of the ancestors and how we were only, sometimes unwittingly,

following their script. I related to Emil that I heard a voice say, "Do not diminish your roles, for a plan is only a plan unless there are those able and willing to carry it out. It is always in partnership."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Mahalo to all those, mentioned and not, who were a part of making this happen, especially to those members of Pā Ku'i-A-Holo who worked tirelessly. I had told them that when they get especially tired and feel like putting everything aside, to remember that we were doing this to honor our ancestors. Mahalo to 'Ölohe Lua, Jerry Walker, for his research and support. This mo'olelo has been related here not to bring any accolades or to make any of us appear as more knowledgeable or special in any way. We all have roles to play as we "rapidly progress to the past." It is simply a story of the truth of things.

With Aloha, Ölohe Lua Aïwaiwa, La'akea Sukanuma.

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