



Reflections  
on the  
**HISTORY**  
of

*Hō'oponopono*

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# History of Ho'oponopono

## **Hawaiian peacemaking =**

enlisting Divine assistance to bring the parties  
back into harmony  
through repentance and forgiveness.

*This text is the result of my own research, interest  
and experimentation. It is a personal reflection  
rather than an authoritative resource.*

*Any errors contained within it are my own  
(and you are very welcome to \*gently\* point them out).*

*My intention is to get curious about the evolution of  
Ho'oponopono from a traditional dispute resolution tool  
to a New Age spiritual practice.*

*My desire is not to perpetuate cultural appropriation  
but to share my respect for indigenous wisdom  
by doing my little part in reconnecting  
the modern concept to its ancient roots.*

# *What does a lawyer know about ho'oponopono?*

I first discovered ho'oponopono in 2014, when I was studying for my Masters in Law. I was majoring in alternative dispute resolution, hoping to find an antidote for my disillusionment with the adversarial, litigation-focused legal system. While studying Advanced Mediation, I was encouraged to explore less common methods of dealing with conflict, including ho'oponopono.

It immediately appealed to me because, unlike the majority of modern mediation processes, which are extremely secular, ho'oponopono is premised on a spiritual framework. This was exactly what I had been searching for, through a lifetime of praying "make me a channel of your peace!"

The beauty of ho'oponopono as a unifying force is that it adapts to your individual relationship with divinity, whether that be ancient ancestral beings (as it was for the first Hawaiians who invented it), unspecified powers that be, the universe Yahweh, Allah or the Trinity.

Being a Catholic, my understanding of ho'oponopono is very strongly dependent on a Christian view of God. If that makes anyone uncomfortable, I take full responsibility. I am sorry. Please forgive me. I love you! Thank you!

If you want to stick with me, let me take you on an amazing journey... starting with defining some important Hawaiian words...

# *Aloha*

Alo = sharing; being in the present

oha = joyous affection

ha = breath

***The Breath of Love is in our Presence***

# *Ho'oponopono*

Ho = to make

pono = right or correct

(repeated - to make doubly right, with self & others)

***To tidy up. To make right.  
To rectify an error.  
To set things back on course.***

# Why Hawaii?

Think about the geography of Hawaii for a moment.

A series of relatively small, volatile volcanic islands, a long way from anywhere (at least in the early days when frail wooden boats were the only way to travel).

As many geographically isolated cultures do, Hawaiian communities developed with a focus on peace and harmony. It was hard for people to leave the islands, they didn't have the resources to lock up wrongdoers and their reverence for natural life and the extended family ruled out punishment as an option.

They were human, however, and living in close proximity to each other meant not only that conflict was inevitable, but that if it wasn't dealt with effectively, it had the potential to destroy their society through constant fighting between and within family groups.

What they needed was a dispute resolution system with an emphasis on restoration of relationships, retribution for wrongdoing and reintegration into society.

This is the society that gave rise to ho'oponopono, a system for dealing with disputes that recognises how disruptive unresolved conflict can be to social unity. Undesirable behaviour is addressed by focusing on the effect that individuals have on those around them.

# *The Hawaiian Mediation Process*



**Prayer**  
**Identify the Problem**  
**Discussion**  
**Sharing of Feelings**  
**< Reflective Silence >**  
**Confession & Forgiveness**  
**Cutting < or severing > the Cord**  
**Summary**  
**Closing Prayer**  
**Communal Meal**

# *Mediation - Hawaiian style*

A traditional ho'oponopono session is presided over by a leader or mediator, also known as a haku. This is a neutral facilitator who is not involved in the conflict. In the past, this role was filled by a professional male healer or priest, but these days it is more likely to be a respected community elder of either gender.

The ho'oponopono session always begins with the leader saying a prayer to open the proceedings. These days it is commonly a prayer to the Christian God, but historically it would have been to the ancestral beings, asking for "assistance and blessing in the problem-solving endeavour." The prayer is a necessary part of the ho'oponopono. It is the foundation stone on which the process is built.

Next, the leader identifies the general problem. The Hawaiian phrase for this stage, kukulu kumuhana, can be translated as "the pooling of strengths for a shared purpose."

In this stage the leader will also reach out to anyone who is displaying resistance, to invite them to participate meaningfully in the process. Thus it is not just setting the agenda and externalising the problem as we see in most modern mediations. It is more inclusive, a collaboration to identify what needs to be brought up for healing.

The leader may also use this stage to educate the participants about the process that the mediation will follow.

Traditionally, a ho'oponopono session will dive deeper than the initiating event or problem to get to the heart of the matter. Especially where family is involved, "the initial hurt is often followed by other reactions, further misunderstandings, and so forth until a complex knot of difficulties has evolved."

The leader holds and supports the participants in a systematic discussion of the problems, layer by layer. This process is often compared to peeling an onion.

The next stage of ho'oponopono involves a sharing of feelings, with everyone who has been affected by the problem being invited to speak about how it has affected them.

How different this is from the adversarial justice system where everyone, including the victim and the offender are confined to the bare facts, and their stories are stripped bare of "irrelevant" emotion!

In ho'oponopono, the leader encourages sharing "honestly, openly, and in a way that avoids blame and recrimination." When emotions run high, the leader may call "a cooling off period of silence." This gives those who are upset an opportunity to remember what is important to them and to calm their reactions.

When the issues and emotions have been fully discussed, the leader invites the transgressor to engage in "the sincere confession of wrongdoing and the seeking of forgiveness." It is a cultural expectation that if someone asks for forgiveness, it will be granted. This also involves talking about what needs to be done to make things right, and putting plans in place for that to happen.



Once the transgressor is forgiven, there is a unique and important process known as “cutting the cord.” This refers to the entanglement that binds the offender and victim together.

The Hawaiian phrase used translates to "I unbind you from the fault, and thus may I also be unbound by it."

This allows both parties to move forward freely, and the incident is generally considered to be over and done with – not forgotten, but no longer of importance to the individuals or the community.

To close the ho'oponopono, the leader will summarise what has occurred and reaffirm the strength of the family and their caring for each other.

Another prayer is offered in thanksgiving, and then there is a communal meal which everyone contributes to provide.

Of course, ho'oponopono is not always successful. Sometimes someone may refuse to participate, "to embrace the family with any sense of aloha."

In this situation, the family have the option of cutting another cord – in this case, the ties that bind that person to the family.

Source for quotes & process:

E. Victoria Shook,  
*Ho'oponopono: Contemporary Uses of a Hawaiian Problem-Solving Process*  
(University of Hawaii Press, 1985)

*Hō'oponopono  
& Conflict*

**ENTANGLEMENT**

**LOVE & FEAR**



# *Ho'oponopono & Conflict*

In ho'oponopono, the Hawaiian word for the causative event is "hala" - the transgression or wrongdoing.

However, hala is also the name of a tree that has "long, stilt-like roots that weave loosely around each other like wicker." Hala therefore has a dual meaning of wrongdoing and entanglement.

The hala relationship "implies that the perpetrator and the person wronged are bound together." This "relationship of negative entanglement" is known in Hawaiian as hihia, which can also mean fishnet or knot. <sup>1</sup>

Here is a lovely connection for you to contemplate.

In the "Our Father," the prayer that Jesus gave to the world when his disciples (many of whom were fishermen) said to him "teach us how to pray" there is the line: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us."

In Aramaic, the language in which these words were originally spoken, it is possible to translate this phrase in relation to tangled threads and cords... we are seeking to be released from an entanglement.

One scholar translates the phrase in Aramaic as "Loose the cords of mistakes binding us, as we release the strands we hold of others' guilt." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Steuterman Rogers, K. 'Sacred Harmony' Hawaii Magazine (Jan/Feb 2004)

<sup>2</sup> Douglas-Klotz, D., Prayers of the Cosmos (Harper Collins, 1994) at 30-31

Imagine a child coming up to you with a tangled mess of string, saying "Can you untie this?"

That's a good metaphor for ho'oponopono.

Untangling the conflict requires patience, tenacity, concentration, vision, working through things in order, backtracking to find the source of the problem, teasing out the problem little bit by little bit until voila. Success!

In the worst case scenario, the parties can resort to a pair of scissors, with the option of completely severing their relationship.



*Hō'oponopono*  
*in Mediation*

**BRINGING GOD TO THE TABLE**

~~**NEUTRALITY**~~

**100% RESPONSIBILITY**



# *Ho'oponopono & Modern Mediation*

There are two main aspects that I would like to focus on in exploring the difference between ho'oponopono and modern facilitative mediation processes: the role of the divine and the role of the mediator.

Ho'oponopono is a faith-based mediation. There have been attempts to use the process in a secular setting but it really loses its power. It requires that you bring God to the mediation table. You make God a party to the mediation. You invite Wisdom to work with you and through you – not surreptitiously, in private prayer – which is something I do always – but OPENLY.

As I am sure you can imagine, this can make the process kind of hard to sell in a secular world, which is why you may have heard of mediation but never seen ho'oponopono offered as a mediation process...

The primary mediation model that is taught, practiced and widely accepted today is the Facilitative model, where the mediator facilitates the discussion between the parties. (It's not the only one, there is narrative mediation, transformative mediation and others).

There are two essential principles that underpin the facilitative process, first, that the parties are empowered to self-determine the result, and second, that the mediator **MUST** be neutral.

There is all kinds of academic literature out there exploring the issue of mediator neutrality – is it possible, is it desirable, is it actually achieved in practice... there is always this suspicion that the mediator is invested in some way in the result.

Ho'oponopono in its modern form throws this entire discussion out. The mediator is not neutral – the mediator is 100% responsible - **RADICALLY RESPONSIBLE**.

The mediator accepts responsibility for her role in having **CREATED** the conflict, even if she never met the parties before in her life!



# *Mediator Responsibility?*

Unsurprisingly, THIS is what makes most mediators reluctant to even think about ho'oponopono as a realistic model for modern dispute resolution – it sounds like total crazy talk to them!

However, if you have an interest in ho'oponopono as a spiritual practice, you may have heard or even embraced the concept that everything in one's awareness is a reflection of oneself and one's beliefs.

Once you accept that, it starts to be possible that what we perceive to be "the truth" is only our own experience through our own filters of what we call "life."

If what we see and experience is a projection of our understanding onto the world, then experiences that we do not want can be seen as unresolved issues or beliefs or programs in our subconscious coming up for our attention. If we let these old stories go and no longer focus on them, changing our internal world, then the way we experience our external world changes too. The experiences may still happen, but since we no longer attach the same importance to them, they no longer have power over us.

Modern ho'oponopono asks us to accept that we are 100% responsible for everything that appears in our reality. This is pretty complicated stuff, going into epigenetics and quantum theory far beyond the scope of this simple exploration. To be honest, it is something that I don't fully understand but accept and surrender to not understanding!



In a way, this recognition of responsibility is a form of radical self-care.

As Hew Len (the progenitor of Ho'oponopono in its modern form) says:

"Every time we nose into other people's business, we get their problems. ... what we are doing is realizing that we are the most important being in creation and work on ourselves. And if the "I" [the Divine] is kind enough to take it off other people, that's wonderful. I'm interested in getting me free and then surrendering and allowing the "I" to do whatever He needs to do."



# *Hō'oponopono & Healing*

**ANYTHING** you experience is  
yours to heal...  
a projection of yourself.



# *Ho'oponopono & Healing*

I just shared a quote from Dr Hew Len, the man who brought ho'oponopono into the New Age (along with Joe Vitale).

Dr Hew Len was a mental health professional, and he took on a role in a hospital for the criminally insane. There was a massively high staff attrition rate, no one wanted to work there for long, these were all of the most hopeless cases.

Dr Hew Len decided to experiment with ho'oponopono. He NEVER saw any of the patients. He sat in his office, looking over their files and working within himself, forgiving and letting go. As he did this, the outside changed.

Patients who had been shackled for years became calm and could be let walk around freely. Hopeless cases, men who were NEVER going to get out of there, were released with a complete discharge.

What Dr Hew Len said he was doing was “healing the part of me that created them.”

He took complete responsibility. COMPLETE responsibility.

In this version of ho'oponopono “the therapist must be willing to be 100% responsible for having created the problem situation, that is, he must be willing to see that the source of the problem is erroneous thoughts within him, not within the client. Therapists never seem to notice that every time there is a problem, they are always present!”

Think about that from the perspective of your own work!

I am a lawyer. Every time my clients have a legal problem, there I am. Obviously, I am part of the problem – and since my clients come and go with just one problem each, but I have all of their problems in my life, the problem must be my problem.

I'm sorry! Please forgive me! I love you! Thank you!

Ho'oponopono gives us the tools to release the problem from our own consciousness, to offer it up to the Divine and allow Him to untangle the knots for us. We don't need to understand the cause of the problem, if we can just hand the issue over and release our need to be in control of the resolution.



My beginnings as an idealistic young lawyer, newly admitted in 2009.

*I'm Sorry*

**REPENTANCE**



# *I'm Sorry: repentance*

"I am sorry" is a statement of atonement.

Atonement means making amends for something done wrong.

This is often the biggest sticking point for those interested in ho'oponopono. In a world full of guilt and shame, we don't need more reasons to feel bad about ourselves... we resist the thought that it is all our fault.

Other people are behaving badly. Others are causing sorrow and suffering, not me. Why should I be the one who has to apologise?

There are really only two causes of action in the universe – love and fear. When we say I am sorry, we are saying “I am sorry that I have given in to fear. I forgot for a moment that I am love. I am sorry!”

The words "I am sorry" are not carrying blame or shame or guilt. They are simply an acknowledgement that you have drifted into fear and out of love.

I like to think of Pandora, opening the box and releasing all negativity out into the world, until only hope remained. I'll bet she was sorry.

When I let my thoughts do the same – bring darkness to my world of joy and beauty, I regret it. When I notice that is what I have done, saying "I'm sorry" – to God, to my higher self, to the whole world – is easy.

You are NOT saying “Oh God, I am so sorry I have created this mess again!”

If anything - in your environment, in your life, in your relationships, in the world - is disturbing your peace, if there is anger, frustration or upset in your life, there is bound to be fear at the bottom of it.

You can dig & journal & meditate to find the root cause (sift through the smoke to find the source of the fire) – and sometimes that is necessary for our ego’s peace of mind... and sometimes you can simply shortcut the process with repentance & contrition for having let chaos cloud your faith that you are divinely supported and all will be well.



*Please Forgive Me*

**RECONCILIATION**





# *Please Forgive Me: reconciliation*

When we ask forgiveness, we open ourselves up for healing.

We know ourselves, when we hold a grudge against anyone – including ourselves – that lack of forgiveness keeps us stuck in the negativity. We remain entangled.

Asking for forgiveness is only hard if we are scared that it won't be granted, or if we are scared of repercussions – there it is – sneaky old fear again... but what if you knew that the moment you asked, you would be joyfully forgiven?

We are asking for forgiveness for having forgotten how much our Creator loves us, for having let doubts, fear and worry interfere with the blissful existence He designed for us.

Not “please forgive me” for any of the numerous accusations our subconscious and inner critic can throw at us. Just “please forgive me for forgetting how much you love me.”

The old testament prophet, Isaiah, channels the Lord saying “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.”

I love that forgiveness is self-care, even for God!

We are asking for forgiveness for having turned away from joy, for shutting the Divine out of our life, not for the chaos or mess that we have manifested instead. We are asking forgiveness for preferring to cling to our suffering and wrap it around us more and more tightly.

By asking forgiveness, we exercise our free will, handing our problems over to the Creator, saying “God, please cut these cords that bind me.”

By asking for forgiveness, we are reaffirming our belief in the faithfulness of love, knowing that the moment we ask, it is granted.

We are putting down the burden of separation and expressing our desire to be reunited.

We are holding out our arms like a little child, sure in the knowledge that we will surely be scooped up in the embrace of endless love.



*I Love You*

**REINTEGRATION**



# *I Love You: reintegration*

Think about the importance of love for a moment.

Call in a loving thought and feel how it changes you. Did you smile? Did you relax and soften, even if just for a second?

The world is overflowing with stories about the power of love.

I hope you will forgive me if I share with you three of my favourite lessons about divine love...

Jesus was asked “which commandment is the greatest in the Law?” His listeners were not expecting his response. He said “You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians saying “There are three things that endure: Faith, Hope and Love, but the greatest of these is Love.”

In John’s gospel, talking about the love of God, he says “God is love, and those who live in love live in union with God and God lives in union with them. ... There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear.”

Love is the greatest power for healing. Just reaching out with love to the divine sets up a vibrational frequency that lifts our spirits and fills us with a sense of peace and well-being. So many of our spiritual techniques and tools demonstrate to us that whenever we move from fear to love, we change the world!

The “I Love You” phase of the ho’oponopono mantra reflects closing stages of the mediation process.

After forgiveness comes the affirmation of caring and the strengthening of bonds.

There is a celebration of relief and freedom at no longer being caught up in the entanglement of negativity.

There is a welcoming back into oneness, wholeness, communion with one another, with the divine.

What’s not to love?



*Thank You*

**REJOICING**



# Thank You: rejoicing

Remember the celebration dinner at the end of the ho'oponopono mediation? Now is the time for an outpouring of gratitude.

We are thankful for our creation as thinking beings who can notice and shift ourselves – internally and externally – from experiences of negativity and fear..

We are thankful that our prayers are answered (although perhaps not in the format or timing we anticipate.) We can trust in God's promise: "Ask and it shall be given unto you. Seek and you shall find..."

We are thankful for the love in our lives, both given and received. We are thankful that we can let go and let God deal with whatever entanglement is messing with our calm. We give thanks that there is an effective antidote to fear. We are thankful for the void.

I experienced an incredible epiphany recently, along with an outpouring of immense gratitude. I was blissing out to a lady beautifully singing the Magnificat – Mary's canticle of praise and thanksgiving – "My soul magnifies the Lord / And my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour... For He who is mighty has done great things for me / and holy is His name"...

and then we came to the line which always worried me: "He has filled the hungry with good things, / and the rich He has sent away empty." What is the point of having a successful business, I would ask myself, if it means God will reject me?

The answer was one of those powerful jolts of enlightenment, as I suddenly realised – I have been hungry and God has filled me with good things.

Now I am richly blessed with abundance – and I am EMPTY! I am empty of fear, empty of doubt, empty of guilt and shame and suffering.

In that moment I felt oneness with the void, empty of all that separates me from the divine, and my sense of gratitude was overwhelming as I realised I was being sent away, not out of rejection, but to fulfil God's purpose for me.

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!





# *Taking it Further*

## **MORE RESOURCES**

If you would like to know more, you might start by researching some of the extensive writings and Youtube videos made available by Dr Hew Len and Joe Vitale.

NOTE: Ho'oponopono has evolved into a massive new-age spiritual business. There are courses, cleaning products, books, a whole movement around miraculous cures and self-development. To my mind, a magic sweeping clock that automatically cleans all negativity from the world as its rainbow coloured hands tick around is going from the sublime to the ridiculous... It may well work, but I am not tempted to buy one. How far you take your exploration of ho'oponopono is up to you! I hope you have enjoyed this sharing of my experiences and research.

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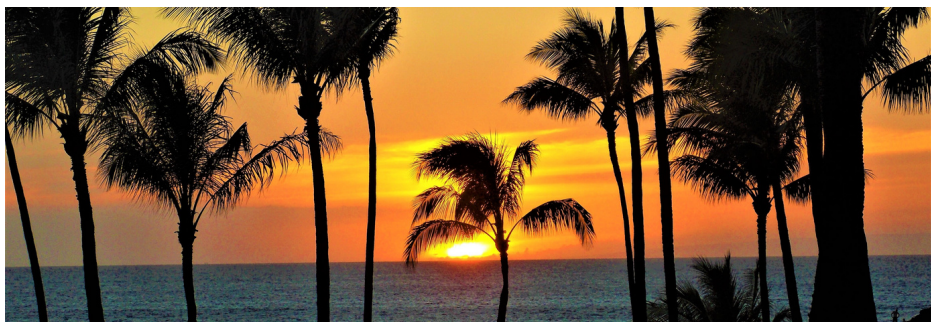
# Closing Prayer

## FROM HAWAIIAN TRADITION

Now we dismiss our ho'oponopono and we pray that all this trouble be taken away and laid away.

O, great eyeball of the sun, please take all this bundle of wrong-doing. Take it out to the West with you. And, as you go down again, to your rest, please take all the faults and trespasses that were committed. Lay all of this in the depth of the sea, never more to come back.

**Amen**



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(Look to the source). Vol. I  
Puke | Kope Pa'i Pepa | Huli | Ho'oka'a'ike

# Michelle Whitehead

trading as



# Carefree COUNSEL

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I am an Australian lawyer, mediator & best practice business mentor. I help enlightened entrepreneurs create contracts that care, protect their intellectual property and approach conflict with empathy seeking win win solutions. In 2014, while completing Advanced Mediation training in connection with my Masters in Law, I conducted research into the ancient Hawaiian dispute resolution process known as Ho'oponopono with its unique focus on relationship healing through divine intervention, acceptance of responsibility, and forgiveness. My fascination with Ho'oponopono and its ongoing evolution into a powerful self-development practice continues to this day. It has become an integral element of my own spiritual and professional life.

