

WHAT DOES ALOHA REALLY MEAN?

PULSE OF SPIRIT

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One of the most vital aspects of our existence is our intimate connection with our lineage through *Ha*, The Breath of Life. It is not usually talked about or taught, nor do we pay attention to it, yet it is a fantastic resource that can uplift our human experience if honored and given space.

My name is Ke'ahi, which means “the flame” and “the beacon of guiding light.” I am a child of my Hawaiian ancestry who grew up between O'ahu and the 9th island, Las Vegas.

I have been exploring my culture and my lineage, particularly around the breath. There is so much cultural history to sort through to touch and know the truth at the heart of the culture.

You may have heard that the Hawaiian word *haole* (pronounced “hau-lay,” not “hau-lee”) in a literal sense means *without breath*. *Ha* is The Breath of Life, and a definition of *ole* or *a'ole* is “to have

none”—*without breath*. You may have heard the word *haole* used disparagingly to describe someone of European ancestry. But I want to offer some other possibilities, as there are many perspectives on the meaning of language and behavior.

The same goes with history as it is passed down. There are many perspectives. One story about the word *haole* says that the term was very sacred in that ancient peoples thought that people of European descent were their ancestors reborn, and they paid them homage. There is video footage of the Australian Aboriginals doing this when they first met Europeans searching for gold.

Another thought-provoking story comes out of Pacific Rim history. It traces the origin of the word *haole* to the greeting passed down to the ancient Hawaiian people from the Maori. *Honi*, or *hongiri* (“hon-gee”) in Maori, is a ceremonial greeting in

which greeters touch foreheads and exchange *Ha*, the breath of life. What an intimate greeting!

The Hawaiian *honi* greeting is very different from the distant handshake they experienced when they first met European people. What would you think if you were in their shoes? I am sure it seemed awkward. They might have wondered, *What is this? Where is the connection? Where is the intimacy?* Some say that the Hawaiian people thought that because the Europeans did not have *Ha*, there was no need for a ceremonial exchange of it.

And here we come to the juicy part of the ceremonial style of greeting, *honi*, where foreheads touch. The forehead is called *alo* in Hawaiian. Greeters embrace each other and connect forehead to forehead, *alo to alo*; and then *ha*, The Breath of Life, is exchanged. *Aloha*. I want to sit in that, don't you? Imagine sitting in that sacred, intimate moment together as you read this. May I feel your energy, your presence, your heart? Let me breathe that in, and let me allow you to feel mine and breath mine in.

An elder once told me that when she was growing up in Hawaii, her elders would do this often. They would greet each other at the gate of the yard, hold each other's elbow and bring each other in, *alo to alo*. They might sometimes stay there for twenty or thirty minutes. And as a child, she was frustrated. She thought, *Okay, okay, I know the next thing that will happen when they come in. We are going to eat! We will eat because that is the next thing we do when people come over. We feed them, and then we get to eat. And I know there are some great cookies that my grandma just made.*

As children, we don't always understand why adults do what they do. *What are they doing? How come we don't just move forward to what's next?* How many times in my life do I do that? I want to move past that sacred space, that sacred moment, on to that cookie that is calling me. Not being intentional with my breathing at this moment, not seeing the opportunity to honor another through our connection.

There is a belief in the Hawaiian culture that our bones hold the written pattern of our ancestry. And so, when we put our foreheads together we can sense into the lineage of another. We are all survivors of so many things. Our ancestors survived and persevered. They lived passionately. Yes, they had their fears, their pandemics, and their human turmoil. Yet, they were also explorers, adventurers, and scientists. We are all descendants of survivors. I honor this moment given to me by my ancestors and to you by yours.

The intimate greeting *honi* honors this in you and me. There are forms of this greeting practiced by peoples around the world: the Inuit, Mongolian nomads, Bengalis, Thai, and Arabians, to name just a few. It was given to me by my ancestors and I offer it now to you.

I believe that we have the ability to tap into the wisdom and strength of our human lineage. We can become so distracted from what is happening internally and externally that we forget the greeting at the gate.

As you read these words at *this* moment, I invite you to breathe consciously. Breathe in this moment all of what is there for you, and let it all

go. Feel this moment flow through you. Breathe in the strength and lineage that is in your bones. Breathe in all that you are. And breath it out. This is a form of Attunement we can share with each other remotely. We can visualize someone in our lives that we would like to connect with in this way. Imagine holding their elbow with your right hand and bringing them in. Imagine putting your left arm around them, placed on their back, and putting your foreheads together. You are holding them, and they are holding you, both fully present. You are breathing in, feeling the All That Is in this moment—not negating anything heavy that may come up, not focusing on any one thing—breathing it all in and letting it flow out. I see you.

So I say to you, dear reader, *Aloha*. What an honor, what a privilege! Let us make the most of this moment and each moment we have, whether apart or together, knowing our deep connection, beyond connection, all in this breath. We take each other in, together in this moment, now.

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