

The Makahiki Festival

The Makahiki festival was a time to rest, and a time to make great feasts of commemoration ('aha'aina ho'omana'o) for life and health of the body, and for the help received from the gods. All manual labor was prohibited and there were several whole days of resting and feasting. Chiefs and people made many joyful Makahiki feasts at the end of each year. The custom (mālama) of feasting came from very ancient times; and from the time that chiefs became rulers of the kingdoms, yearly feasts ('aha'aina makahiki) were held in commemoration. This perhaps was the main reason for the observance of the feasts.

They gave thanks to the god for his care, and for his help; from him came life, blessing, peace, and victory. Lono is the laua'e, lā'i, kukui, 'a'ali'i, lama, maile, palai, 'uala, certain kalo, the black pua'a, 'aweoweo, and kūmū. These are plants and animals that are representative of Lono, his **kino lau** or body forms.

Lono is the indigenous mana or power of the 'āina. He is identified with the stable ongoing interest of the Hawaiian planters. The seasonal rituals to Lono and Kū each year represent the many changes or transformations of political/social power between the maka'āinana and various usurpers, the ruling chiefs.

Lono-i-ka-makahiki, Lono as the god of agriculture and fertility was honored during the Makahiki festival held annually.

The Makahiki season is a four-month period of the year, beginning with the first sighting of the Makali'i (the constellation Pleiades) in late October or early November on the horizon. As the year's harvest was gathered, tribute in the form of goods and produce were given to the chiefs from November through December. Various rites of purification and celebration in December and January closed the observance of the Makahiki season.

The Makahiki was a form of the "first fruits" festivals common to many cultures. Something similar was observed throughout Polynesia, and in Hawai'i the festival reached its greatest elaboration.

While the lands rest and are softened by the rains in preparation of the new planting season, all wars were prohibited and goodwill prevailed. The chiefs joined with the maka'āinana in feasting, testing of argumentative skills and athletic competition.

When the Makahiki began, pork, coconut, and fish were placed under kapu; the eating of flesh foods (i'o) was kapu during the last three months of the year.

There were three Makahiki images carved. Rites were performed for the main Makahiki god, Lonomakua. His image, called the akua loa, was a 16 foot pole with a carved human head at the top, and crosspiece hung with sheets of tapa, fern and feather streamers. It was borne around the island, stopping at each land section, ahupua'a, to receive the people's tribute. As the akua loa moved on, his place was taken by the god of play or pa'ani, and the chief's kapu over the land was lifted. This image, similar to the akua loa and called the akua pā'ani, was set up to preside over the sports and games participated in by the people of the land and by those who followed the procession of the akua loa.

The akua pā'ani's work was to promote the strengthening of the body. A place had been made ready before the akua pā'ani came, and the maika sites and level places (pu'uhonua) were full of people in readiness for competitive sports (hakakā le'ale'a). Those

on the side of the god were trained for boxing (mokomoko), fist fighting (ku'iku'i), lua fighting (ku'ialua), wrestling (hākōkō), chest-pushing (kulakula'i), and hand gripping (pū'ili); for spear-throwing ('ō'ō ihe), a pushing contest in a squatting position called "playing turtle" (honuhonu), wrist-turning (umauma), tugging with hooked fingers or arms (loulou), maika rolling, dart-throwing (pahe'e), sliding (koi), turning somersaults (kūwalawala), noosing (pāhelehele), and other games that strengthen the body.

The selected players (moho) from among the people had also been trained, and they knew how to "size up" a man and knew what kind of bruises he could inflict. Their opponents did not escape the knuckles of the people's players, who had studied them well for signs of their weakness. Many an opponent would receive a punch in the chin breaking the jaw, and be left "floating in the water" (ho'olana i ka wai; semiconscious). These were the doings of the akua pā'ani all around the island. The food ('ai) of his followers (po'e kanaka) was whatever they seized and pulled up.

After the akua pā'ani came the akua kapala 'alaea, a god painted red with 'alaea earth. On ones side he was kapu and on the other side, free. After him came the akua loa, who was the Makahiki god, and most of the other gods. The akua loa made a right circuit of the island. Afterward, the akua poko appeared with the female gods, and his procession went to the left, along the beach of Waikīkī. The akua poko collected tribute from the makua lands set aside by the chief for his direct support. The akua loa and the akua poko met at Kalaeoka'ō'io, the cape of the 'ō'io [the dividing line of Ko'olaupoko and Ko'olauloa districts] at Kualoa and Ka'a'awa. This is the reason for the names Ko'olaupoko and Ko'olauloa. At the spot where the companies of the two god-images met, the images were furled up and the ka'upu bird ensigns twisted around.

Much wealth was acquired by the god during this circuit of the island in the form of tribute (ho'okupu) from the various land sections at certain places and at the boundaries of all ahupua'a. There the wealth was presented - pigs, dogs, fowl, poi, tapa cloth, dress tapas ('āhu), 'oloa tapa, pā'ū (skirts), malo, shoulder capes ('ahu), mats, ninikea tapa, olonā fishnets, fishlines, feathers of the mamo and the 'ō'ō birds, finely designed mats ('ahu pāwehe), pearls, ivory, adzes (ko'i), and whatever other property had been gathered by the konohiki, or land agent of the ahupua'a. If the tribute presented by the konohiki to the god was too little, the attendant chief of the god would complain, and would not furl up the god nor twist up the emblems and lay him down. The attendants kept the god upright and ordered the ahupua'a to be plundered. Only when the keepers were satisfied with the tribute given did they stop plundering in the name of the god. Most of the wealth received in this circuit of the god was given to the crowd - to the people who attended to the god, to those who carried the image, to the people in the procession. Only the most valuable things were saved and displayed before the chief.

Upon the completion of the circuit of the island, and the return of the Makahiki gods to the ruling chief's heiau, rites were again performed for the akua loa, and then the images were dismantled after the chief ceremonially recaptured the island. At that point the chief's kapu were reimposed upon the maka`āinana for the rest of the year.

In another ceremony marking the closure of the Makahiki, a canoe with offerings to Lono was set adrift to return Lono to the ancestral lands of Kahiki. When the Makahiki season closed, Lono went back to Kahiki and Kū returned. The ruling chief, symbolic of Kū, again reasserted his power and authority over the maka`āinana and the Kū rituals again

took precedence.

When the god returned and went into the heiau and into the house of the god, then he was kapu again. The people would not see him again until the next Makahiki circuit. He was very kapu. The attendants who anointed him, the ruler, and the kahuna would be the only ones who would see him.

The ten (‘umi) ho`okupu for Makahiki are:

1. `Ekahi - nui hiwa, (black coconut) cracking of niu signified opening of ceremonies.
2. `Elua - lama, (lama wood) for enlightenment; also to Laka.
3. `Ekolu - `awa, favored drink of the akua.
4. `Eha - pua`a, (pig) ceremonial food of ka po`e kahiko.
5. `Elima - kalo, (taro) staple food of ka po`e kahiko.
6. `Eono - i`a `ula `ula, (red fish) `aweoweo or kumu favored fish of the ali`i.
7. `Ehiku - `ulu, (breadfruit) symbolizes growth.
8. `Ewalu - `uala, (sweet potato) signifies humans' relationship to the akua.
9. `Eiwa - mai`a, (banana) variety sacred to Lono.
10. `Umi - ipu o Lono, (gourd of Lono) gourd containing fresh water.

In the kapu period of Kāne, the people of Kāne [that is, those whose god was Kāne] observed the kapu on the day of Kāne and also on the day of Lono. When the kapu Kāne and the kapu Lono came along no fires were made nor tapa beaters sounded, and all other sounds were silenced. Neither chickens nor owls must make a sound, lest the success of the king's ritual be destroyed. At the dawn of Maui, men, women, and children went hi`uwai bathing, then dressed in their best. They feasted joyfully in their fine clothing, with chanting and dancing. The kapu of the Makahiki had ended, and all was free, noa.

Source:

Kamakau, Samuel. *Ka Po'e Kahiko The People of Old*. Bishop Museum Press; Honolulu, 1987.

www.kahoolawe.org/makahiki

