

MĀLAMA 'ĀINA : Caring for the Land

In traditional Hawaiian society, as in the rest of Polynesia, it is the duty of younger siblings and junior lineages to love, honor and serve their elders. This is the pattern that defines the Hawaiian relationship to the 'Āina and the kalo that together feed Ka Lāhui Hawai'i. Thus, the modern concepts of aloha 'āina, or love of the land, and mālama 'āina, or serving and caring for the land, stem from the traditional model established at the time of Wākea. The Hawaiian does not desire to conquer his elder female sibling, the 'Āina, but to take care of her, to cultivate her properly, and to make her beautiful with neat gardens and careful husbandry.

Moreover, throughout Polynesia, it is the reciprocal duty of the elder siblings to hānai (feed) the younger ones, as well as to love and ho'omalū (protect) them. The relationship is thereby further defined: it is the 'Āina, the kalo, and the Ali'i Nui who are to feed, clothe, and shelter their younger brothers and sisters, the Hawaiian people. So long as younger Hawaiians love, serve, and honor their elders, the elders will continue to do the same for them, as well as to provide for all their physical needs. Clearly, by this equation, it is the duty of Hawaiians to mālama 'āina, and, as a result of this proper behavior, the 'Āina will mālama Hawaiians. In Hawaiian, this perfect harmony is known as pono, which is often translated in English as "righteous," but actually denotes a universe in perfect harmony.

Excerpts from Native Land and Foreign Desires: Pehea Lā E Pono Ai? by Lilikalā Kame'eiehiwa. Bishop Museum Press, Honolulu, 1992



