

The comparison comes from an ancient tradition. 'Ohā, the root or corm of the taro plant, was not only the "staff of life" in the Hawaiian diet, but it was closely linked with the origin of the people. Legend tells that the progenitor of the Hawaiians was a mystic man-and-taro named Hāloa.¹

With Hawaiians, family consciousness of the same "root of origin" was a deeply felt, unifying force, no matter how many offshoots came from offshoots. As Mrs. Pukui explains, "you may be 13th or 14th cousins, as we define relationships today, but in Hawaiian terms, if you are of the same generation, you are all brothers and sisters. You are all 'ohana."²

This close tie among distant cousins indicates that in the past, 'ohana meant "family clan" more often than "nuclear" or "immediate" family. Today, the word means either.

The ties of 'ohana as an extended family were closest but not limited to the living or to those born into blood relationship. The core of the 'ohana were the living *pili koko* (blood relatives). However, non-related persons could be admitted to 'ohana status. And when a family member died, he remained—as a spirit—very much a part of the 'ohana.

who were
'ohana

The 'ohana or extended family of old, included:³
Makua, the parents and relatives of the parent-generation, (such as the aunts and uncles of other cultures).

Kupunas, grandparents and all relatives of the grandparent generation. In this *kupuna* (the broad meaning is "elder") group were great grandparents or their generation-equivalent, all called *kupuna kuakāhi*; the great-great-grandparents and relatives of the same generation, called *kupuna kualua*; and the great-great-great grandparents or other relatives called *kupuna kuakolu*. *Keikis*, the children. All, as previously explained, were "brothers and sisters" to each other. These *keikis* might be born within the 'ohana or *hānai'd* (taken in Hawaii's adoptive practice). Usually, the *hānai* was blood kin, given at birth to grandparents or aunts and uncles. All young children were *keikis* or *kamas*. One's grandchild was, more specifically, one's *mo'opuna*.

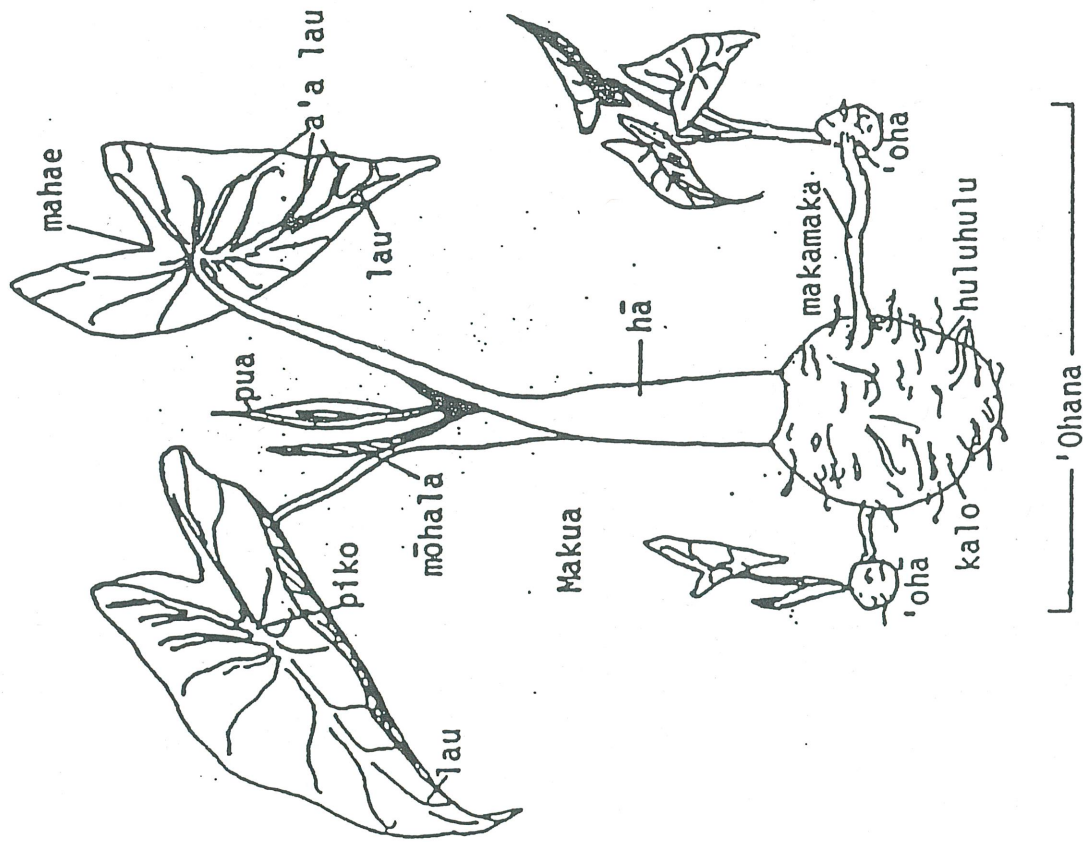
"make a son"
by ho'okama

Also family members in nearly every sense were those "adopted in friendship" or made (*ho'o*)* son, daughter, husband or any kin. A loved, non-related child could be made a *ho'okama* ("adopted in friendship" son or daughter); a woman could become a man's *ho'owahine* (wife); a woman could take a *ho'okāne* (husband). The relationship was a life-long one of love, loyalty and companionship. It did not include economic support, and the *ho'owahine* and *ho'okāne* status did not include sexual involvement.

puluna and
punalua

Sometimes 'ohana members and sometimes not were the various in-laws. *Puluna* (parents-in-law) shared no joint relationship until the birth of a grandchild linked the two families. With this happy event, parents of the bride and

*Literally, *ho'o* (to make) + *kama* or *kāne* or other kinship term.



'ohana—family; family clan or extended family.

Deriv: 'ohā, taro, especially taro grown from the original stalk called *kalo*.
na, plural; many.

"Members of the 'ohana, like taro shoots, are all from the same root," says Mary Kawena Pukui.

should die and no succeeding one was born, the 'ohana connection was severed or given only courtesy recognition.

However, sisters- or brothers-in-law were automatically related. They were to each other *punalua*, or *lua* (companion) of the same *puna* (source or spring).

Punalua also defined the relationship between two wives of the same man, or husbands of the same woman. Here *lua* was defined as "mate", each woman was "mate" to the same *puna* or "source".

"In the earliest tradition, the relationships of the wives always seemed to be one of deep friendship," explains Mrs. Pukui. "Later, people realized that jealousy often spoiled the friendship, and *punalua* took on meanings of rivalry or even hatred."

immortals also kin

The 'ohana also included the immortals; always, the *aumākua* (ancestor gods); often, the *unihipili*, the deified spirits of more recently deceased relatives. And because the *aumākua* could take many forms (*Kino lau*), the 'ohana roll call also took in named and known sharks or owls or lizards, or the fires of the volcano, or the rocks and pebbles of the stream. (see *aumākua*).

In old Hawaii, one's relatives were both earthly and spiritual. Both were looked to for advice, instruction and emotional support. Thus communication with the supernatural was a normal part of 'ohana living. Each 'ohana traditionally had its own dream interpreters, its own *haka* (medium) through which a spirit spoke; and to summon this spirit, each clan had one or more spirit "masters" or *kahus*. Even *mana*, that storehouse of supernatural power, was handed down within the family line. All these mystic practices or communications led back in one way or another to those long dead, always cherished 'ohana members—the *aumākua*.

The Hawaiian, therefore, had not only a sense of belonging to the supportive, here-and-now unit of family; he also had clear knowledge of his ancestry and an emotional sense of his own link and place in time between his ancestors-become-gods in the dim past and his yet-to-be-born descendants. (This is specifically outlined as "triple *piko*". See *piko*.) Or, to put it in modern terms, we could say the 'ohana system helped give the Hawaiian a healthy sense of identity.

Only the unfortunate, despised *kauwā* (slaves) lacked this tie with the immortals. It was believed the *kauwā* caste had no *aumākua*.

functions of 'ohana unit

Though the 'ohana of old included mystic beings, it functioned as the most practical of social-economic-educational units.

"Upland 'ohana took taro and bananas to seashore 'ohana and received fish," recalls Mrs. Pukui. "And when a man needed a new house, relatives from the whole 'ohana came to build it."

Within the 'ohana, elders taught youngsters to fish, raise taro, weave and build. Here proper behavior was taught, and rituals and *kapus* (taboos) memorized. Here family history was maintained in handed-down chants. Here the young boy observed male relatives and learned how to be a man (see *kā i*

man or god were family concerns. Birth was celebrated by family feasting. When death came, only 'ohana members prepared the body for burial.

provisions for family harmony

Obviously, this closely-knit unit had to function smoothly. Otherwise, chaos would result. And so, provisions and practices to maintain or restore harmony were worked out. We can group these rather loosely as follows:

Physical arrangements of 'ohana living minimized personality conflicts. Authority of the 'ohana senior was clearly recognized and obeyed. (See listing, *kupuna* and *hānau mua*.)

Ways to express and correct hostilities and injustices were established. (See *ho'oponopono* and associated concepts.)

If good relationships could not be restored, a clean break of family ties was done in formalized procedure. (See *mō ka piko* under listing, *piko*.)

Rules of conduct were clearly outlined. Roles and responsibilities within the 'ohana were defined and understood.

housing gave privacy

The very housing system lessened discord. Smaller family groups within the total clan or 'ohana had their own households or *kauhales*. Given any prosperity at all, each smaller family unit had not one, but several houses. "Togetherness" prevailed at night when everyone slept in the *hale noa* (house free of *kapus*). Otherwise, everyone could get away from each other. The men ate, enjoyed "man talk" and honored the gods in the *mua* (men's eating house). Women and young children ate in their own *hale aina* ("meal house"). There were separate houses for crafts, for storage, even for vacation use. A menstruating woman was restricted to the *hale pē'a* ("unclean house" or menstrual house). There the very isolation of her *kapu* state let her get a good rest.

When the Hawaiian needed privacy he could find it. He also had the restorative balm of quiet. The music of nose-flute or *'ukeke** was soft; the beat of gourd or drum blessedly non-amplified. And especially if *ali'i* were around, night noise was *kapu*. Forelander records:

"Set apart [sacred] is the evening. Work has ceased . . .

It is sacred. Let there be *kapu*.

. . . *Kapued* the voice, the loud talking,

The groaning, the murmuring,

The low whisperings of the evening.

The high chiefs rest."⁶

'ohana roles and rules

Within the 'ohana, each one knew where he stood in the family rating system. (See *punahele* and *hiapo* listings.) He also knew pretty much what he must and must not do. Rules, expressed or implicit through custom, governed conduct. A few examples:

*Small instrument something like the Jew's harp.

A younger sibling obeyed the older one; the elder child cared for the young one. Young people learning to fish, build a boat—or any skill—were expected to “*nānā, ho’olohē, pāa ka waha*” (“watch, listen, shut the mouth”)—and ask questions *after* the demonstration.

There were rules governing sleeping arrangements. In the 1950’s, Mrs. Pukui wrote in her *Polynesian Family System in Kauai*:

“In the *hale noa*, a man slept beside his wife, and next, but not too close to her, might be her sister . . . a man never slept between two women, unless both were his wives . . . a young son might sleep next to his mother, but not after he had grown up . . .”⁷

“How close was ‘not too close?’ I asked Mrs. Pukui in 1971.

“Everyone was separated by the sleeping mat. Every person slept on his own mat and was supposed to stay on it. I slept between my grandmother and my aunt. When I was just a little girl I had a very small sleeping mat. As I grew up I had bigger mats.”

The rule of the *poi* bowl contributed to amiable, if sexually segregated, dining. This, based on the belief that *laro*, source of *poi*, was god-given, went: “. . . When the *poi* bowl is open, there must be no haggling, quarreling, arguing . . . nor should any serious business be discussed until the *poi* bowls are covered.”⁸

Other customs symbolized and reinforced family closeness and loyalty. Co-author Pukui explains that:

“A man might wear his brother’s *malo* [loincloth] but not the *malo* of anyone else . . . Young people were told to ‘behave so you won’t shame your family.’ . . . If two persons would not end a quarrel, they could break the family tie. But if a person behaved disgracefully, his *’ohana* could not disown him.

“Somebody in the family may be a drunkard or a rascal—even a thief—but he is still a relative. You might not like him—but you cannot cast him off.”

And always, linking the Hawaiian family was *pule ’ohana* (family prayer), first to Hawaiian deities; later, to the Christian God. Always this was a part of the major prevention or remedy of discord, the *ho’oponopono*. *Pule* was so much a part of family living that to this day “*’ohana*” is often used to mean “*pule ’ohana*.”

ties of blood defined ’ohana

’*Ohana* members of the past often lived in the same area. This proximity undoubtedly made it easy and convenient to maintain family ties; it did not determine ’*ohana* membership.

“You are not ’*ohana* because you live in the same *kuleana* [area] or community. You can be neighbors and close friends—but to be ’*ohana* you must all come from the same root or be linked by the same *piko*.”* emphasizes Mrs. Pukui.

It is this blood tie (including its *hānai* and *ho’okama* equivalents) that is the core of ’*ohana* in its broad meaning of concept, or emotional force. Or, with concept put into practice, the core of “*’ohana* living” or the “*’ohana* way of life.”

*The *piko* or umbilical cord of a grandchild was considered the “blood link” between the child and the two pairs of grandparents.

Center staff members and others in the social science fields are now trying to determine to what extent the ’*ohana* way of life still exists and whether the ’*ohana* concept can be revived and used to benefit Hawaiian families of 1971.*

the concept of ’ohana

Before we report any current observations, let’s *peki i hope* (back up) and try to define ’*ohana*, the concept. We could say:

“It is a sense of unity, shared involvement and shared responsibility. It is mutual interdependence and mutual help. It is emotional support, given and received. It is solidarity and cohesiveness. It is love—often, it is loyalty—always. It is all this, encompassed by the joined links of blood relationship.”

There is plenty of evidence that this feeling of ’*ohana* is very much alive today. Center case records show that a strong sense of family unity and total involvement exists on both conscious and unconscious levels.

One indication comes in the very number of names and intricacies of relationships listed in any case record. Few cases list only Mother-Father-Children. Most take in children, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins of varying degrees and generations, and *hānai* children—all involved with the problem at hand.

The same records show extended ’*ohana* influence in clients’ dreams, visions or experiences with portents, and how they interpret these mystic-tinged messages from the unconscious. Most often the person in a dream or vision is a blood relative; less frequently a wife or husband. In both cases, the person is usually deceased. Only occasionally, clients report dreams about a lover, teacher, employer or film star or entertainer. “‘Though a person dreamed about or envisioned is not recognized, the client often says “this was Grandma or Auntie” or “it means something is going to happen to Mama or Tūtū.” Portents, as well, are most often thought to apply to relatives. Sometimes this is the traditional interpretation, as in *nahu akua* (see listing).

Even when dream content or client interpretation is clearly one of denial and projection, the projection is most often directed at a family member. Some of these dreams were, of course, stimulated by day events with deep family involvement.

This day-by-day involvement and interdependence is noted in *Studies in a Hawaiian Community*. Nānakuli Hawaiian families surveyed tended to turn to relatives or friends for medical advice.⁹ Nearly two-thirds of the men got their first jobs through relatives or friends.¹⁰

’ohana concept in casework

Obviously the ’*ohana* “spirit” is not keeping Hawaiian families friction-free today. Center case workers see families-in-trouble as well as cohesive families troubled *about* a member.

*The Human Services Center, Governor’s Office, is beginning a project in which one caseworker will work with 7 or 8 nuclear families who are all related or members of the same ’*ohana*. If one family’s house needs painting, for example, paint will be furnished and the ’*ohana* encouraged to cooperate in the painting.

What has eroded the emotional structure of *'ohana*? Sometimes, changed housing conditions. The *'ohana* of old had as many as 7 or 8 houses. Today, in Papakolea, as many as 12 persons are crowded together in one house.¹ In low-income housing projects, nature-loving Hawaiians are jammed into concrete high-rise apartments.

Sometimes, the conflicts of inter-ethnic marriage. The individualistic *haole* who may have left the mainland to "escape family" marries into a Hawaiian family and views *'ohana* concern as "meddling."

Increasingly, conflicts of generation. The Hawaiian teenager is often caught between the "do things family way" customs of *'ohana* and the "do your own thing" of the young culture; the "respect the senior" code he grew up in and the "don't trust anybody over 30" creed of his peers. Hawaiian parents may not view the child with the mainland scholarship or the job offer elsewhere as "going away to develop his talents" but "going away and leaving his family." (This is not exclusive to Hawaiian families.)

Very often Hawaiian families-in-trouble cherish the idea that they are *'ohana* in the traditional sense—but practice few of the traditions that helped the *'ohana* function smoothly. Specifically: the obligation to forgive and release (*mihī* and *kala*) when asked for forgiveness; holding family discussions, prayers and, ideally, *ho'oponopono* to prevent and remedy hostilities; and observing the *ho'omalu* (period of silence) so tempers could cool and thinking become rational. There were even ways to replace the ranking senior if the *'ohana's* head became incompetent or autocratic (see *kupuna* and *hānau mua*). *Mō ka piko*, the symbolic "cutting of the cord" (see *piko*) let individuals sever family ties with the knowledge that they might later be rejoined in *'ohana* bonds. All these practices helped preserve the total *'ohana* structure. All are potentially helpful in present day casework with Hawaiian families.

In current casework or psychotherapy, often a first essential is to help the Hawaiian family get a good look at itself as a family. Dr. Haertig describes this process of directed self-scrutiny as going along these lines:

"Are you really an *'ohana*? Or just relatives who quarrel? Do you really help each other? Care for each other's happiness? Or do you merely hold each other back? Try to make everyone in the family conform to the same ways? Do you think *'ohana* means all the family must live together? Or do you remember that the *'ohana* of old let its navigators and explorers venture forth—and the *'ohana's* love and prayers went with them?"

When a genuine feeling of family unity and loyalty exists, then the troubled family—or member in trouble—has a strength to build on. The sure knowledge that the "family still cares" can help the released prisoner go straight or provide the glue sniffer or drug taker incentive to 'oki (sever; break off) the habit. Here the social worker must sometimes help the family understand that *'ohana* concept does not mean "everybody under the same roof."

The sex-offender, the alcoholic or the abusive person usually should not be taken into the home with young or adolescent children. The caseworker can point out that job-finding assistance, transportation, frequent visits—all these are valid ways to demonstrate family loyalty and support. The worker may need to explain that perhaps this wonderful bond of *'ohana* will be better maintained if the quarrelsome uncle—or the daughter who wants to live in her own apartment—does live apart. The goal is to keep *'ohana* affection warm

and communication lines open; not to strain relationships by forcing conformity or subjecting daily living to undue stress.

For the true *'ohana* of old was fundamentally one of relationship, not geography or proximity. As Mary Pukui reminds us,

"The miles or the years of separation do not matter—as long as the blood link is there."

can we "stretch"
'ohana concept?

Today the concept of *'ohana* is often extended to include unrelated persons, community groups, or church membership. In this valid? Is this broader application of the concept successful?

If we want to stay within the bounds of traditional definition, it's stretching the *'ohana* concept pretty far. What is most often meant are the *characteristics* of the *'ohana*, such as cooperation and feelings of cohesiveness and unity.

From the standpoint of human behavior, trying to superimpose the *'ohana* concept on a group that is not *'ohana* has quite a few strikes against it. Perhaps non-related persons may with some success turn a minister into a *makua* (parent) if they themselves want this kind of pseudo parent-child relationship. Hawaiian congregations who call their woman minister "Mama" seem to have family-like feelings.

When the *'ohana* concept is affixed to a non-related group, the family bond is clearly artificial. Efforts of industry and government groups to build "one big happy family" have failed. Says Dr. Haertig:

"For example, when the head of the firm is fashioned into a paternalistic 'father image', then each person reacts to him according to individual memories of and experiences with his own father. A lot of these are going to be negative. 'Father' may have been a tyrant to one, a weak person to be manipulated to another. To other employees, 'Father' may have been a violent, hostile person, a seductive one, or an incompetent whose judgment was not to be trusted.

"In general, when you attempt to 'create a family', you are dealing with each person's past experiences with parents, siblings, even grandparents. Negative experiences may be applied to the 'created' parents and siblings; loving experiences and memories may mean the artificially created relative is totally rejected. It's far better to stay realistically employee-employer, caseworker-client, friends or neighbors.

"The real *'ohana* is a natural phenomenon. The superimposed concept makes a contrived situation."

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Mrs. Pukui tells that Wākea (personification of the Father, Sky) and his wife Papa (Earth, the Mother) had two sons, one born in the form of a taro, and one born in the form of a man. Both were named *Hāloa*. The taro-child was buried in the earth and gave forth new shoots; the man-child grew up and fathered offspring. Both merged into the one mythical person *Hāloa*, named from a combination of *hā* (breath) and *loa* (long and continuing). *Hāloa* therefore meant "continuing breath" or "life". Or, because *hā* also means "stalk", *Hāloa*, referring directly to the taro, may be said to mean "long stalk."

Many versions of Wākea and Papa and their offspring are given. Some are found in *Malo*, second edition, pp. 238-244, and Beckwith's *Hawaiian Mythology*, 1970 edition, pp. 293-306.