And so *mimi* was used to *repel* evil in a sort of symbolic battle between two wicked forces. However, there is yet some belief that if water is completely unavailable for *pī kai,* urine may be used strictly as an emergency measure.

Pī kai, today, whether mixed with Christian, Buddhist or, possibly, Taoist concepts, serves both a religious and a psychological function: that of bringing, at least temporarily, a sense of protection from influences felt to be unclean and harmful. As many other rituals do, *pī kai* relieves somewhat the feeling of being helpless in the face of what is unseen, unknown and fearful. Certainly, the very act of doing something believed to be remedial can ease anxiety, even if the ritual is not recognized as being particularly relevant to the fear-filled situation.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Though the Hawaiian operation is usually called "circumcision," the operation actually slit and separated the foreskin, but did not remove it, as in circumcision. Whether or not the operation entailed making a surgical opening into the urethra or urinary canal (subincision) is not clear.
2. Beckwith. *Kepelino's Traditions of Hawaii,* p. 20. Calling this water the "water of Kāne" is often disputed. Use of the term "holy water" may reflect Kepelino's conversion to Catholicism.
3. Malo. *Hawaiian Antiquities,* pp. 97-98.

piko—umbilical cord or umbilicus; genital organs; posterior fontanel or crown of the head; summit or peak. Many other meanings. Many connote attachment: relationships with one's ancestors and descendants; boundary line of adjacent lands; junction of plant leaf to stem. From the literal meanings has come the "triple *piko*" concept of shared spiritual and emotional bonds.

Deriv: unknown.

The individual in old Hawaii viewed himself as a link between his long line of forebears and his descendants, even those yet unborn. Three areas of his body were thought most intimately concerned with this bond that transcended time. They were the posterior fontanel, the genital region, male and female, and the umbilicus and umbilical cord with which he came into the world. All were called *piko.*

triple piko

The Hawaiian observed in thought and ritual, a concept we term today the "triple *piko*". The concept, a fusion of reasoning and the poetry of mysticism, went something like this:

The *po'o* (head) was the place where the *aumākua* (ancestor gods) hovered; where man's own living *'uhane* (spirit) made exit and returned from the sleep-excursions of dreams. Though wicked possessing spirits entered the body by the feet, benevolent spirits took possession through the head. And so the crown of the head (located by the whorl of hair or "cowlick") was the *piko* sacred to the *aumākua.*[1] This was the symbolic "umbilical cord" between mortal man and his ancestors-become-immortals.

umbilical cord piko

The umbilical cord was the obvious link between the infant and the mother. Consequently, this *piko,* the umbilicus, and to some extent the closely associated placenta *('iēwe)* were venerated. The mother-child *piko* was extended symbolically to all blood-kin. Relatives were sometimes called "my *piko*". In dream interpretation, to dream of one's own navel was really to dream about a close relative. Dreaming of injury to one's navel was said to foretell death, illness or injury to a relative.

genitals also piko

The visible, tangible evidences of a bond with descendants were the genitalia, both male and female. These not only provided great pleasure, they made each person a progenitor, a creative link in the long and mystic chain from *aumākua* on through the flesh-and-blood offspring of the infinite future. And so the *piko* of the genitals were both enjoyed and reverenced. The *piko* of *ali'i* in particular, were paid tribute in *meles* (songs). In these the *piko* might be called *wai'olu* or *ma'i* and the songs called *mele ma'i.*

"Every *ali'i* and many commoners had such a *mele,*" says Mrs. Pukui. "We hear *'Anapau'.* That's Queen Liliuokalani's *mele ma'i. 'U'u'* is the *mele* about Queen Emma's *piko* or *ma'i.*

"Hawaiians never thought of this as being vulgar. Without this *piko,* there would be no children, no descendants."

The genitals, even of young children were given special care, primarily to facilitate later coition. But around the umbilical *piko* were centered symbolism and portentous beliefs. Whether or not actual cutting of the cord was accompanied with ritual depended on family rank and traditions. In a commoner family, the midwife might wield the sharp bamboo knife and tie the cord with *olonā* fiber* without ceremony. In the *ali'i* household, the degree of ritual might depend on sex and status of the baby. A first-born child rated more ceremony than later babies. According to Malo, "if the child was a girl, its navel string was cut in the house; but if a boy, it was carried to the *heiau* [place of worship], there to have the navel string cut in a ceremonious fashion."[2]

navel cord was hidden

For this high-born child, a *kahuna* cut the cord, and the "ceremonious fashion" meant offerings to the gods and chanted prayers. However, the overwhelming concern for Hawaiians of all ranks was proper disposal of the cord (the stump that later dropped off the infant's body). Mrs. Pukui recalls the belief that:

"If a rat found and ate the cord, the baby would have the thievish nature of a rat."

**Touchardia latifolia,* a shrub with strong, flax-like fibers.

And that:

"In every district on every island were places, usually stones, especially reserved for the *piko*. *Wailoa* was one on the Big Island . . . another was *Moku-ola*. *Ola* means 'life' and *loa* means 'long'. Mothers took the cords to stones with names like these so their babies would live long, healthy lives."

The cords were carefully secured. Co-author Pukui continues:

"They were pushed into the cracks, then tiny pebbles were forced in to hold them in place. A few were wrapped in human hair. These were from babies who had died. The hair was from the head of the mother or grandmother or any relative who had cared for the baby. While wrapping the cord, the relative would address the [spirit of] dead baby, saying, 'Here is a part of my body, my hair. May it be a token of me in the spirit world. Do not come back to hurt me. Do not be angry with us. When you wish to come back to us, come in love to help us.'"[3]

Cords were often kept until they could be disposed of at a planned location. Again, quoting Mrs. Pukui:

"I have seen many old people with small containers for the umbilical cords . . . One grandmother took the cords of her four grandchildren and dropped them into *Alenuihaha* channel. 'I want my granddaughters to travel across the sea!' she told me."[4]

Mrs. Pukui believes that the story of women hiding their babies' *pikos* in Captain Cook's ship is probably true.

"Cook was first thought to be the god Lono, and the ship his 'floating island.' What woman wouldn't want her baby's *piko* there?"

symbolism of the placenta

Symbolic forecasting was also extended to the placenta *('iēwe)*. It was always washed. An unwashed placenta meant the child would have weak, sore eyes. In the Puna district, the placenta was put on the highest branch of a *hala* tree, so that the baby's eyelashes would stand out prettily, like prickles on a *hala* leaf.

Usually, the placenta was buried under a tree and the tree became the property of the child. This was thought to keep the child, even through adult life, close to home. Or, yet more mystically, to insure that the child's spirit, after death, would never become that homeless, hungry wandering spirit called *ao kuewa*.

idols, houses given pikos

Early Hawaiians applied the idea of umbilical attachment to their idols. Wrote David Malo:

"They [priests] put a long girdle of braided coconut cord about the belly . . . of the idol, calling it the navel cord from its mother. Then the king and the priest came to perform the ceremony of cutting."[5]

The *piko* concept was extended even to houses.

"The belief that when a house is completed it has a personality goes way back," explains Mrs. Pukui. "The thatch over the doorway was the umbilical cord, and that had to be cut."

Here the Hawaiian idea was quite different from the feeling that a house with its furnishings eventually takes on the personality of its owners. In old Hawaii, the newly completed house *was* a personality in its own right. As such, it was a candidate for cord-cutting. One beautiful prayer used in the cutting on Molokai went, in part:

"Cut now! Cut the *piko* of your house, O Mauili-ola*
That the house dweller may prosper.
That the guest who enters it may have health.
That the lord of the land may have health.
That the chiefs may have long life . . ."[6]

A more usual prayer invoked blessings "from the four corners . . . from the ceiling to the floor . . ." Nearly identical blessing for a human mentioned the "four corners of the body", meaning the shoulders and thigh bones, boundaries enclosing the vital organs.

mō ka piko
the cord is cut

Cord-cutting was extended symbolically to human relationships. However, the conceptualized *piko* that linked Hawaiian blood-kin was not the mother-and-child "silver cord" of Western thought. The Hawaiian *piko* joined all members of the *'ohana* (family). In Western cultures, "cutting the cord" denotes a beneficial freeing from a dominating, possessive mother. In Hawaii's past, *mō ka piko* conveyed a tragic disruption of loving relationship.

Mō ka piko la ("severed are the umbilical cords") was a clear pronouncement that a family tie was broken. The offended one could make the statement to the offender. Or, a third person (always a relative) whose peace-making efforts had failed could declare the severance. Either way, *mō ka piko* was a last-ditch measure taken for only the most serious offenses. Such as, to quote Mrs. Pukui:

"Helping a sorcerer destroy a family member . . . cruelty to or heartless neglect of a child or parent of the other person . . . refusal to forgive . . . offending another beyond all endurance . . . not saving a life you might have saved."

Mrs. Pukui draws the following distinction:

"If a relative shamed or disgraced you, you could not cast him off. But if he destroyed the family peace and love with quarreling and grudge-holding, then you could *mō ka piko.*"

Though the *piko* was symbolically cut only between two persons, actually the trouble maker was cut off from the entire family. For the *'ohana* system was one of total involvement.

"All the relatives lined up with the one in the right," recalls Mrs. Pukui. "The total family tie is cut away from the offender. There is no more mutual help or love between him and the rest of the family."

In one historic example, *mō ka piko* resulted when family members took opposite sides in a religious-social—perhaps even political—issue. At the time when eating *kapus* were first broken, Liholiho ate with the women, thereby taking a stand for *'ai noa* ("free" eating). His cousin, Ke-kua-o-ka-lani openly refused to give up the eating *kapu*. This led to quarrels. When Liholiho's mother, Ke-opu-o-lani failed to bring about peace, she declared *"mō ka piko la*

*God of health, associated with life, source of life, power of healing.

e na hoa hanau" ("severed are the umbilical cords, Oh cousins.") There followed open bloodshed.[7]

Says Mrs. Pukui, *"Mō ka piko* was a terrible thing."

It was. But like so many Hawaiian concepts of disruption or punishment, it carried with it its own remedy. The cord could be re-tied.

retying the cord

This remedial step rested on Hawaii's basic belief that when a sincerely repentant wrong-doer asked for forgiveness, it must be granted (see *mihi* and *kala*). However, the extreme gravity of *mō ka piko* demanded that readmittance to family love be solemnized with ritual. Wrote Mrs. Pukui:

"It was not enough to go to ask pardon . . . and say 'Brother, I have done wrong to you. Please forgive me.' He [offender] had to offer the prescribed sacrifice to him and to their mutual *aumākua.*

"The only way to reinstate himself was to go to an older and trusted relative, preferably a *kahuna,* with the gift of a pig. The two together would then go with the pig to the offended party to ask his pardon and that of the *aumākua* . . . The offended relative could not refuse him then . . . The pig was killed and eaten by both parties . . . The feast was naturally an occasion for rejoicing and merriment, and the night was spent together under one roof."[8]

Both cutting and re-tying of the symbolic *piko* were natural to old Hawaii's expressive society. Relationships were spelled out; feelings were discussed. And when the time came for apologies and forgiveness, there was no need to fumble embarrassingly for the "right approach." Ritual was the Emily Post—and if doubt remained, one consulted the *kahuna.*

piko beliefs of the present

Today—late in 1971—what remains of the old *piko* concept? Of the customs associated with the physical *pikos?*

As far as we know, *piko* folkways have outlived memories of *piko,* the abstraction. Specifically, quite a few women still follow old customs that concern the umbilical cord stump. Here we must take a look at traditions of other ethnic groups. For nearly every culture has given the navel cord and placenta mystic significance. Still-remembered, sometimes-practiced Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese and Filipino customs are all quite similar. In fact social contact and intermarriage may have increased similarities and strengthened memories.

In 1953-54, Hawaii's public health nurses surveyed young mothers who were public health clients and found that:

Hawaiians still placed great importance on cord disposal, especially keeping the cord safe from rats so the child would not become a thief. (A Hawaiian social work student remembers after her brother was born ten years ago "seeing the cord hidden in the bathroom.")

Filipinas also thought the cord must be safely disposed of, usually by burying. A few mothers saved the cords of siblings and tied them together to insure later close sibling relationships. A few burned the cord stump and put the ashes in a drink given the baby. This was said to save his life in illness, prevent him from cutting himself, and was a way of avoiding a curse that might be placed on him.

Chinese: A few mothers kept the cord as a good luck charm for the baby.

Japanese: A few kept the cord until the baby grew up. Some buried the cord. One woman believed the placenta should be cleaned or the mother would get an infection.

All four groups mentioned that the placenta should be buried deep in the ground because: this would keep away devils (Filipino); so harm would not befall the baby (Chinese); so the child would not wander and so animals would not eat the placenta (Hawaiian). Some Filipinas also thought mishandling the placenta would cause the baby to be sick or later to become insane.[9]

Whether concern about the placenta causes some few women to cling to home delivery is not known. In 1971, Oahu hospital nurses remembered no requests to take the placenta home or expressions of concern about it. However, one woman who asked to see the placenta "from intellectual curiosity—to see what it looked like" said she got a "disgusted response" from the nurse. Another woman asked for the placenta "so my son can take it to his science class!"

From Hana, Maui, Milton M. Howell, M.D. reports:

"Our last request for the placenta was in 1963. The request was granted. All placentas here at Hana Hospital were carefully buried among the banana trees in the back until about 1964. At that time, some dogs found the material, dug it up and ate it. Obviously this was greater desecration than burning, so incineration has been in effect since that time.

"At the home of one of our nurses are several fruit trees. After the birth of each child the placenta was buried and a fruit tree planted in that spot.

"Some families continue to save the remnant of the umbilical cord. These are arranged in jars and kept in alcohol."

On Niihau the placenta is called *honua.* There the *honua* was usually buried until recently. Within the last year (1971), the Robinson family (owners of the island) have insisted that *hapai* (pregnant) women go to Kauai and have their babies born in the hospital. The *piko* is still buried or put in a bottle and cast into the ocean. The reason is that "if the *'iole* (rat) eats it, the baby will grow up with *hana keko* [ugly behavior] and bring shame on the family."[10]

Younger women on the major islands sometimes keep the navel cord out of respect for the belief of elders. A Japanese secretary said, "I kept my baby's cord in a jar for years because my mother told me I should use it for medicine if the baby got sick. After Mother died, I threw it away."

The *piko* in its other meanings—and misuses of meaning—is referred to fairly often today. The penis *(ule)* is sometimes called *piko.* The greeting *"Pehea ko piko?"* ("How is your navel?") is used, though many Hawaiians resent this, especially when said by a *haole* (Caucasian). A youth with two cowlicks recently pointed to them saying "two *pikos*—nice, eh?" This probably referred to the old belief that *piko lua* or "two *pikos*" meant a child would be bright, alert and active.

The "triple *piko*" concept seems to survive only in fragments. The *po'o* (head) may be thought *kapu* and not to be touched whether or not the *piko* tie with *aumakua* is yet remembered or believed. The dreamed about *navel* is often interpreted as a dream about a relative.