

Dealing With Covid in Hawaiian Poetic Terms

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I was thinking about another Coronavirus (Covid)-19 update since it has been two months since the last one (June Newsletter) and Arizona is experiencing a real surge in cases, yet there is some good news too. Then I thought about writing one of my cultural articles instead, for welcome diversion. In the end, I decided to combine the two, because this is the Civic Club's Newsletter after all and yet we are all caught up in Covid issues and concerns at every turn, some of them new. Also, it is a good time for some repetition of what I wrote four months ago (April Newsletter).

My wife Kēhau had the idea to change her 'Ōlelo (Hawaiian language) teaching a bit this month by including a list of Hawaiian values. (Try hard to learn them all because they are at the very core of Hawaiian culture.) Amazingly, that was just the way I was going to write — using Hawaiian values as my springboard. So I've selected 11 of the 25 Kēhau listed; five that I've paired plus one more.

Aloha and Ho'omana. Aloha entails so much more than just love and compassion, including concern, community and self-awareness, and kindness. Ho'omana (spirituality) also covers a very broad field. "Aloha ke Akua" springs forth immediately to mind, as does "Aloha Spirit". Does not Aloha embody the very essence of our higher self, a self that can go soaring in thought and deed?

We need that higher level of self when called upon for Wiwo (Obedience) and Laulima (cooperation) when facing the personal challenge of rules and regulations about Covid or anything else. Those two values help us overcome our natural human tendencies to independence and selfishness. Even a child instinctively dislikes rules! Those beloved hugs and kisses and family or friend gatherings can indeed, though painfully, be put off til another time.

One of these new rules involves Ma'ema'e in Hawaiian (cleanliness) in learning and practicing the new ideas for heightened cleanliness to avoid Covid infection. Na'auao (intelligence) comes right into play. In our early years, fingers in the paint jar left a mark here there and everywhere until our intelligent recognition that something on our fingers (or someone else's) remained there and was being transferred to other things or even our own face, mouth, nose, etc. And so it is today that intelligence — if we simply allow it and tap into it — helps us remember that familiar things we have always thoughtlessly touched: doorknobs, handles, gates, keys, wallet, credit card or pen may well have an unseen but potentially very harmful "paint" on it that we must not transfer and must consciously be aware of at all times and frequently clean or wash away.

Pa'ahana (diligence) and Ho'omanawanui (patience) are required. Remember that long trip we took when young, constantly asking our parents: "are we there yet?". It seem as if the current upside-down world will never end, as we face renewed waves of Covid and media banter, and perhaps new or reinstated rules. But these two Hawaiian values are highly important to carry with us like a torch lighting the way. We are on a difficult path, but all paths reach an end with time.

Now we can turn to Koa (courage, also meaning warrior) and Kōkua (helpfulness). Who would have thought a year ago that it would take real courage, indeed being a spiritual warrior, to show Kōkua by not doing something for others? But it is an extreme curiosity that not going to visit Grandma or Grandpa or senior Uncle/Aunty...or inviting them over to your house or gathering, is the most difficult yet the height of today's helpfulness. Thankfully we have our cell phones, texting, Skype, ZOOM and even talking at a distance to fall back on and keep in touch. These things may be new, a bit tricky to learn, and sometimes troublesome, but the least of proud warriors amongst us, even kids, can learn them and do them.

Which brings me now to the Hawaiian value I selected for last: Kūpono (honesty). Why honesty? It's because being honest with ourselves is often the most difficult task we face. Time and again we see people saying "Well, it's just this once" regarding a gathering or shopping or a meal at a favorite restaurant. Or else obviously thinking (or even saying in denial) "it won't happen to me" as they do something dangerous to themselves or others. Or repeating: "you only live once". Or perhaps: "we all have to die sometime". Thinking that masks or distancing or constantly keeping that childhood paint jar in mind are grand annoyances and thus simply something to refuse are instead just failing to be honest with ourselves. Humans have huge built-in defense mechanisms and they very prominently lead us to fail to be honest in our thinking. With that natural tendency to mental defensiveness comes a lack of Kōkua for ourselves, and it then creates a potential lack of Kōkua for others as a side-effect. And that is not Aloha to our spiritual selves or to all the other values above.

These trying times will pass, and Hawaiian values can go a long way at helping us all to get through them, as new science, treatments and potential vaccines glow on the horizon before us.