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HAWAIIAN REBIRTH

YVES NAGER

**QUESTIONS, STORIES AND STRATEGIES TO
GUIDE YOU TO YOUR LIFE'S PURPOSE**

What does it mean to be Hawaiian?

He ali'i ka 'āina; he kauwā ke kanaka. (The land is the chief; and the people are its servants.)

What does it mean to be Hawaiian? Who is considered a Hawaiian? What does the Hawaiian culture mean to me, and how does it affect the way I live and share? These were just a few of the questions I pondered upon since Eunjung and I returned to Hawaii late January.

In this article, you will be introduced to 50 Hawaiian words and their meanings. These definitions are meant to help you understand their basic or most common meanings. However, they cannot encompass the rich, multi-faceted connotations embodied by *'ōlelo hawai'i* (Hawaiian language). I incorporated these Hawaiian terms in the article to express *hō'ihi* (reverence and respect) to the Hawaiian culture, and help you get a deeper understanding of the Hawaiian way of living.

A few weeks ago, a local movie producer from Oahu asked me if I am a Hawaiian after I expressed my interest in her movie, 'Waikiki'. According to the description of the movie, in this cinematic allegory of love and loss, a hula dancer fights for survival and her sanity in the shadows of Waikiki for an unflinching glimpse into *palekaiko* (paradise) where there remains hope through human connection and re-connection to *'āina* (land, that which nourishes).

When I began to delve into these meaningful questions I shared above, I first recalled memories of a variety of experiences that guided me on a new *ala loa* (pathway of life) in Hawaii for the past 13 years. However, the more I reflected on these questions, the more evasive the answers seemed to be.

From the first day I arrived on Oahu in mid-March 2008, there was a strange and dream-like recognition that these beautiful islands were calling me back home. I felt that I belonged to these islands although I grew up in Switzerland and never visited Hawaii before. I had recurring, vivid *moe'uhane* (dreams) as soon as I arrived in Honolulu, which led me to wonder if I lived here in another lifetime. Dreams were a significant aspect of ancient Hawaiian spirituality and continue to play an important role in modern Hawaiian culture.

Native Hawaiians believe that during sleep they sometimes receive visitations from *akua* (gods and goddesses) and *aumakua* (ancestral guardian spirits). There are several words in the Hawaiian language that describe different ways of dreaming. For example, *moe pi'i pololei* (clear prophetic dreams) require no interpretation as to the meaning of the dreams. *Moemoeā* (wishing dreams) show something which may or

may not be attainable in waking consciousness, and *ho'ike na ka po* (revelations of the night) carry the power of prophecy.

The healer Paul from the Big Island of Hawaii who gifted me with a new life in 2008 had reoccurring dreams about me before we met. He also mentioned that I lived in Hawaii before and one of the reasons he came to help me was that we were *'ohana* (family, relatives) then. I wrote my book 'Hawaiian Rebirth' largely because I was inspired to share *ka mo'omeheu o Hawai'i* (the culture of Hawaii) and support readers to live a purposeful and meaningful life.

From the very beginning of my Hawaiian journey, I found the usual tourist activities rather uninteresting. I was always more interested in the perspective and experiences of local people. Ever since, I do my best to learn about and share Hawaiian culture, values, practices, and history as best as I can based on the principles of *'ike loa* (see much, looking at the bigger picture) and *'imi loa* (seeking life in its highest form). Both words offer us guidance to live as a lifelong learner and view all experiences, whether positive or negative in our perception, as opportunities to grow.

Nowadays, a lot of research can be done online or by reading books about the Hawaiian culture, geography, beliefs, people, history, law, and language. However, I always learn the best by visiting *wahi pana* (sacred places) or listening to *mo'olelo ka'ao* (myths and legends) from a Hawaiian cultural practitioner that brings me to *ho'oma'ama'a* (growing in familiarity with a person, place, or idea).

It seems challenging to put into words what it **really** means to be Hawaiian. The more I learn, the more questions seem to arise about why I feel so connected with the Hawaiian culture, people, and land. To get a clearer picture, I believe it is important to look at the questions above from different viewpoints such as the word *Hawaiian*, lineage and physical appearance, history, cultural choices, places, and values of Hawaiians as well as what others say.

As the most isolated, longest, and oldest *pae 'āina* (archipelago) on planet Earth, Hawaii is unique in many ways including multicultural and ethnic diversity. Existing over 70 million years, the archipelago represents the full range of geological stages of an island's life cycle. According to the US census statistics, the population is officially divided into 8 groups of different origins. To my surprise, I learned that out of an estimated population of 1.4 million, approximately only 156,000 are considered Native Hawaiian with the remainder being mixed races. 37% are Asian, 25% are White, and 11% are Hispanic or Latino.

It was a distant past when people could tell Hawaiians from others by their outer appearances. The common people who were engaged in fishing, field labor and the like were usually darker due to the exposure to the weather than the chiefs and women of rank who avoided the sun. The lines of recognition got blurred over time because only 54% of the people who currently live in Hawaii were born here, and because there are many intermarriages leading to various Hawaiian-Asian-European combinations.

First, I thought I would get more clarity about who Hawaiians are by focusing on those who are engaged in Hawaiian cultural practices, traditions, and customs; the *Kupunas* (elders) and *Kahunas* (experts, priests, healers) who live, embrace, and *hanu* (breathe) the Hawaiian culture. However, I realized many Hawaiian cultural practitioners are of multi-ethnic ancestry and these Hawaiian spiritual cultural practices and traditions do not just belong to Hawaii but also to other Pacific islands.

I also learned that in ancient times probably the most important criteria for how much someone is Hawaiian lay not in their birth chart, but in their birth chant. Such credentials had to be established by the chanting of their genealogy. By looking at the legal and constitutional language, I further found out that there are two formal political definitions - one is *native Hawaiian* (with a small n) and the other *Native Hawaiian* (with a capital N).

But does it really give us a clear answer to what it means to be Hawaiian by studying these statistics or who is engaged in Hawaiian cultural practices? Probably not quite yet. So, let us continue by researching the word *Hawaiian* itself. When Hawaii was still a sovereign nation, the word referred to anyone who was from the place called Hawaii, irrespective of ancestry. Did you know that *Hawaiian* is not a native word either? True Hawaiian words always end with a vowel, never with a consonant (in this case, 'n').

Hawaiian culture is based upon age-old *mo'olelo ka'ao* (myths and legends), as well as *akua* (gods and goddesses), for example Maui (a demi-god who pulled up the island from the seabed) or Pele (the goddess of volcanos, fire, and lightning), and her sister Poliahu (a snow goddess). Like every other language, Hawaiian language is more than just a tool for communication. It is like a window that allows us to look into and connect with the culture. The most well-known word of the Hawaiian culture is *Aloha*.

There are many ways to describe *Aloha*. It is more than just a greeting to say hello or goodbye. *Aloha* is an expression of love and essence of being. One could also say *Aloha* means living in harmony with the people and land around you with sympathy, grace, and kindness. When I asked Pilipo Solatorio, a cultural practitioner and *kumu* (teacher)

I had the honor to meet 3 times on Moloka'i, how he would explain the essence of *Aloha*, he beautifully described it as 'Sharing the happiness of the breath of life'.

I usually start my emails, blogs and videos with the word *Aloha*, not with Hello or Hi because I love the warmth and kindness that this word emanates and what this word represents in the deepest sense - the unconditional extension of trust and friendship, even to strangers. I believe that especially during these unprecedented times of uncertainty, *Aloha* indeed can be a remedy for the world as Aunti Pilahi Paki said (you can read more about her on page 105 in my book), but only if we effectively practice in life what we speak about.

Peter Apo, a founding member of the Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association, expressed it this way: *'The Hawaiian vocabulary is loaded with behavior-guiding language and, no matter how accomplished a person becomes in any Hawaiian cultural pursuit or how high they rise into prominent positions of community leadership; if they don't practice the values, they are missing the essence of being Hawaiian.'*

I realized that there is an ongoing dispute over whether a requisite to being a Hawaiian is having native Hawaiian ancestry. In Hawaii, where blood and ancestry probably matter more than in any other US state, a legal challenge poses this question: Who is sufficiently Hawaiian? For example, Ty Tegan from the University of Hawaii's Ethnic Studies Department said: *'I think being local means spending a significant amount of time in the islands so you're rooted in the community'*.

On the other hand, those who are ethnically Hawaiian do not appreciate when *haole* (individuals who are not Native Hawaiian or Polynesian) claim that they are Hawaiian, unless they have parents with Hawaiian blood. They say that you must have native Hawaiian ancestors to be considered Hawaiian, and even when you are born in Hawaii, it does not necessarily mean that you are a Hawaiian. If you grew up on the Hawaiian Islands and continue to do so, you are referred to as a *Hawaii resident*.

In this context, it is also important to look at the history of Hawaii. About 1,500 years ago, Polynesians arrived in Hawaii after navigating the ocean using only the stars to guide them. For a long time, Hawaii was an independent nation with a diverse culture that was developed over centuries. Still in 1843, Great Britain and France recognized Hawaii as an independent and sovereign nation, and the US did so one year later in 1844.

The Hawaiian Kingdom had treaties with at least 17 other states. Things started to change drastically when the Constitution of the Kingdom of Hawaii was signed

stripping the Hawaiian monarchy of much of its authority in 1887. Did you know that later the Kingdom of Hawaii was illegally overthrown in 1893? It was then annexed by the United States in 1898, and later Hawaii became a US State in 1959.

With the overthrow, a restructuring of Hawaii's law ensued and everything Hawaiian became illegal, including communal ownership of land, access to the sea, and most of all the ability to practice traditional of dance and sport. It is saddening that Hawaiians have been denied their religion and their traditional culture for many decades. They have suffered the loss of their ancestral land, the destruction of their cultural roots, and the rewriting of their history.

Looking at present time, it is a heart-breaking reality that the economic and demographic trends in Hawaii force the native Hawaiians to leave from the place they were born. Due to Hawaii's high costs of living and lack of decently paying jobs (the minimum wage is currently as low as \$10.10), many locals had to leave the islands or end up as the homeless on the streets, or in parks. Discrepancy between the rich and poor is drastic in some areas of Honolulu, where homeless people are found in the background of high-rise luxury apartment buildings, often having to move around because of the police checks.

According to 2018 statistics, someone working at the minimum wage mentioned above would have to work 109 hours, not a month but a week (!) to be able to afford a market rate 1-bedroom apartment. Such financial burden has drastic impact on the island community. One third of the people who expect to move away from Hawaii mentioned housing prices as their main reason for leaving, whereas nearly one third of all condominium units are owned by people from outside the state of Hawaii.

Higher cost for electricity, gas, and grocery compared with the US mainland further add to these challenges. Those who stay in the islands often face enormous difficulties, and many must work 2 or even 3 jobs to somehow survive in a place idealized as *palekaiko* (paradise) for enticing tourists to Hawaii. While the locals almost never have time to enjoy it for themselves, their jobs often are to sell paradise and a glossy version of Hawaiian culture to visitors. Paradise comes with a price, and 'affordable' housing in Honolulu could soon include 2-bedroom homes costing \$1 Million.

There is a video on YouTube called '*Anthony Bourdin Parts Unknown – Hawaii*'. By watching this video, you will find another explanation of what it means to be Hawaiian from someone on Moloka'i. Hanohano Naehu, a fishpond caretaker, *aloha 'āina* warrior, and slam poet was born and raised on Moloka'i on lands his 'ohana has stewarded for countless generations. At Keawanui, the largest fishpond on Moloka'i

where the formal restoration process began in 2001, Hanohano explains the following to Anthony starting from the 22:30 min mark of the video:

'You cannot be our blood; our blood is Kānaka. You cannot be Kānaka. Hawaiian is our nationality. You see this what we are standing on? This is 'āina (land, that which nourishes), and it matters so much that if you love this place and you don't want develop it, destroy it, or abuse it, then we are on the same team. But if you are eyeing this place and its resources as a money-making vehicle for yourself, we are enemies. It does not matter what race, religion, what sex you are. If you love this place and you can mālama (care and nurture) our 'āina the way we love it and our ancestors love it, then we can be more than friends, then we can be family.'

From a solely ethnical point of view, being Hawaiian is reserved for residents with Hawaiian ancestry, descendants from the Polynesian people who discovered the islands and were their original inhabitants and have lived in these islands for centuries. They are referred to as *kānaka maoli*, the indigenous people of Hawaii. Even indigenous Hawaiians who were not born on the islands are still Hawaiian people, or *kānaka 'oiwi*.

If you are not ethnically Hawaiian, you could still claim that you are *Hawaiian born*. Furthermore, there is another term *Islander*. In the U.S. Census, the term *Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander* refers to people having origins in any of the original people of Hawaii, Guam, Tonga, Samoa, Fiji, New Zealand and the Marshalls or other Pacific Islands. Residents of any ethnicity who are born and raised on Hawaii, or have simply lived here for a long time, may also be referred to as *kama'āina* (children of the land).

However, living in Hawaii does not necessarily entitle you to become *kama'āina* (a child of the land). Some people say once you get your first Hawaii driver's license, you automatically become *kama'āina*. However, in order for someone to be referred to as a *kama'āina* in the truest sense, it is essential to have deep appreciation of the land, be spiritually invested, feel called to take care of the land, the plants, the animals, and the people, and appreciate and practice the values of the Hawaiian culture.

The term *Hawaiian* also refers to other aspects such as geography, culture, traditions, values, and customs. Other than learning from local cultural practitioners, visiting sacred Hawaiian places, offering *ho'okupo* (offerings, gifts) and meditating at these sites provided me with insights beyond time and space. These visits proved to be more vibrational and energetic experiences compared to my learning through online research, reading books, and listening to *mo'olelo ka'ao* (myths and legends) shared by Hawaiian cultural practitioners.

After Paul, the first Hawaiian healer I've ever met, worked with me in 2008, I developed a yearning to visit and meditate at *heiau* (ancient Hawaiian temples or sacred sites). It did not make sense at all to me logically at the time because I grew up in Switzerland and just had arrived in Hawaii a few weeks earlier. Since then, visiting sacred temple sites in Hawaii became one of my most cherished passions and missions. For the past 13 years, I have offered my prayers and meditated at more than 50 *heiaus* on all the Hawaiian Islands it's possible to travel to.

Over time, many of these rock-built structures at *heiaus* have disappeared and diminished from the landscape in Hawaii. They began declining and eventually got destroyed after 1819 (the year King Kamehamea I passed away) when the end of traditional religion was declared by King Liholiho (Kamehamea II) and Queen Ka'ahumanu. Missionaries' opinions of *heiau* as monuments of superstition and madness further added to the decline of their upkeep and in many cases to the dismantling of these traditional Hawaiian religious artifacts.

However, there are now several revitalization projects of traditional *hale* (house, building), and *heiau*, including Pi'ilanihale on Maui which is the largest *heiau* in the entire Pacific area. Such building practices have become places for teaching, and they provide opportunities for gathering of the local communities. It serves to restore and revive these building practices that come from the living traditional Hawaiian values which were passed on over many generations from *Kuhikuhi Pu'uone* (master architects and engineers).

Kumu Palani from Maui has been recognized as one of the key people who helped bring back the customs and techniques of traditional Hawaiian *hale* building. He recognized that the revival of traditional Hawaiian *hale* and *heiau* building would work only if it coincided with a revival and strengthening of Hawaiian *hana kupono* (protocols) and values, such as *laulima* (many hands working together), *mālama 'āina* (to care for and relate to the land), and *maiau* (to be thorough and careful in work).

Such *wahi pana* (sacred places) remind us that the land is not just a resource to take from, but that it is sacred, and that it is family. This is foundational to understanding and experiencing *aloha 'āina*. 'Āina can be described as that which nourishes and encompasses land, ocean, heavens, land-based water systems, plants, and animals. 'Ike kupuna (ancestral knowledge) teaches that land is a relation and perspective carried in the idea of *aloha 'āina*, a way of life that is evident in Hawaiian practices such as:

- Showing *hō'ihi* (reverence and respect) for all life forms by asking permission to take from the environment and treating land as a family member.

- Living with *pō'aiapuni* (nature's cycles) by refraining from fishing during spawning cycles of marine life.
- Taking from the *'āina* only what is needed and using what is taken.
- Planting, fishing, or harvesting by phases of the moon and according to *kaulana mahina* (lunar calendar).
- Following *hana kupono* (protocol) such as *oli* (a type of chant), *pule* (prayer) and *ho'okupo* (offering) when visiting sites.

When Hawaiian cultural practitioners get trained to develop *pilina 'āina* (intimate connection to the lands), it includes *lololo* (observation, documentation), *ho'ohanohano* (dignity, respect), and *hana kaulike* (justified work). For example, *lololo* involves group observations of the natural elements and wildlife from before dawn to sunrise, including conscious observation of natural resources. Over time, new insights grow regarding seasonal changes as observations are analyzed and documented. This lies in sharp contrast to the fast-paced way of living in western societies.

Cultural places in Hawaii are connected to generations of native Hawaiians. Often, I noticed visitors at such sites who seemed unaware of their significance. Instead of showing *hō'ihi* (reverence and respect), they take selfies, leave trash, drink alcohol, or even walk on the rock walls surrounding *heiau* (ancient Hawaiian temple or sacred site). In such moments, I feel conflicted if I should say something or not, because although I feel very connected to these sacred places and am aware that it is *kapu* (prohibited, restricted), I am not a Hawaiian myself.

I feel honored and blessed that 10 years ago, before I left for the Big Island for my 35th birthday, I met a *kahuna* (expert, priest, healer) here on Kaua'i who told me that I have to go to the Big Island to honor the goddess Pele. She mentioned of 3 important aspects to remember when you enter a sacred place:

1. Acknowledge the *'uhana* (spirits or the ancestors of the land) and ask their permission to enter.
2. Have a specific purpose for the visit and carry respect for the ancestors of the land and the land itself.
3. Bring *aloha* to that place and be humble and grateful during and after your visit.

So, can I or people from other countries be a Hawaiian? The short answer is no unless they have parents with Hawaiian blood. However, people of all background can and should live according to the principle of *aloha 'āina*, no matter where they are on this

beautiful planet Earth. It is my sincere hope that this article inspires you to *aloha ʻāina* when you visit Hawaii next time. By doing so won't make me or you a *kānaka* (indigenous people of Hawaii), but we certainly can become *ʻohana* (family) and grow into becoming *kamaʻāina* (children of the land).

Being part of *ʻohana* means to *hōʻihi* (have reverence and respect), commit to understanding the culture, the land, the history and genealogy of Hawaii, *mālama* (care and nurture) for it, and most importantly support Hawaii and its culture to thrive. As Hanohano Naehu eloquently said: *ʻWhen you give to the ʻāina, it feeds and reciprocates you in ways that nourish your whole existence.ʻ* This resonates with me deeply since I wrote in my book *ʻHawaiian Rebirthʻ*: **ʻIn any relationship, it's important to be willing to give first, before asking what you want to receive.ʻ**

Because Hawaii, the land, the animals, the people, and the culture gifted and blessed me with so much, I want to give back by educating readers and visitors about Hawaii, the land, and the local culture. Since I moved here and after my book *ʻHawaiian Rebirthʻ* came out in English and German, I often receive emails from people asking me about Hawaii, where to stay, good places to visit, what they can do while in Hawaii, etc. They expect me to give straightforward answers to complex questions.

However, I am hesitant to answer such questions on a surface level without addressing the unique energy and vibration the Hawaiian Islands hold and what I am writing about in this article. The quality of their time here in the Hawaiian Islands will largely depend on where people are on their life's journey and their intentions as to why they want to visit the islands. Whereas someone may highly resonate with a particular Hawaiian island or area, another may not at all be drawn to or feel special connection with the same island or area.

In conclusion, I am not a Hawaiian. However, as someone who loves Hawaii, its culture and people, I feel committed to assisting *malihini* (visitors, foreigners) with their journeys in much more meaningful ways by helping raise awareness about what I addressed in this article. It is my sincere wish to help the visitors learn more about, respect and appreciate the Hawaiian culture and connect with the sacredness of the islands deeply for their healing and bring mutual blessings through harmonious exchanges between the visitors and the locals the land.

I believe these special, sacred energies of the Hawaiian Islands can be a catalyst for transformation for those who come to the islands with the right intentions and willingness to shift, just as my life was deeply transformed and my life's direction was turned around to align with my life's purpose. If you are interested to visit Kaua'i or any other Hawaiian island, I can offer guiding hands for deeper understanding of your

life's journey through cultivating right relationships between you and the Hawaiian Islands. At the end of the article, you will find a glossary, and a recommended reading list.

I invite you to learn more here -> <https://yvesnager.com/work-with-yves/sacred-journeys/> & <https://yvesnager.com/work-with-yves/private-vip-retreat/>. Then we can together *ho'okipa* (be of service) to not only your life's journey but also to the Hawaiian Islands and the locals, and ultimately to Gaia and the universe. It would be my honor and pleasure to support and guide you along your journey of healing, awakening, and transformation.

Mahalo nui loa (thank you very much), Yves

(This article is also available as an audio version on my [YouTube](#).)

Glossary

The English definitions are meant to assist you with basic or most common meanings, but they cannot encompass the rich multiplicity of meaning that Hawaiian language embodies.

Āina (land, that which nourishes)

Akua (gods and goddesses)

Ala loa (pathway of life)

Aloha 'āina (a way of life evident in Hawaiian practices)

Aumakua (ancestral guardian spirits)

Hale (house, building)

Hana kupono (protocol)

Hana kaulike (justified work)

Hanu (breathe, breath)

Haole (individuals who are not Native Hawaiian or Polynesian)

Heiau (ancient Hawaiian temple or sacred site)

Hō'ihi (reverence and respect)

Ho'ike na ka po (revelations of the night)
Ho'ohano hano (dignity and respect)
Ho'okipa (hospitality, be of service)
Ho'okupo (offering, gift)
Ho'oma'ama'a (growing in familiarity with a person, place, or idea).
'Ike kupuna (ancestral knowledge)
'Ike loa (see much, looking at the bigger picture)
'Imi loa (seeking life in its highest form)
Ka Mo'omeheu o Hawai'i (the culture of Hawaii)
Kahuna (expert, priest, healer)
Kama'āina (children of the land)
Kānaka (the indigenous people of Hawaii)
Kapu (prohibited, restricted)
Kaulana mahina (lunar calendar)
Kuhikuhi Pu'uone (master architect and engineer)
Kumu (teacher)
Laulima (many hands working together)
Lōkahi (unity, oneness, harmony)
Lololo (observation, documentation)
Mahalo nui loa (thank you very much)
Mālama (care and nurture)
Mālama 'āina (to care for and relate to the land)
Mai au (to be thorough and careful in work)
Malihini (visitor, foreigner)
Moe pi'i pololei (clear prophecy)
Moemoeā (wishing dreams)
Mo'olelo ka'ao (myths and legends)

Moe'uhane (dreams, soul sleep)
'Ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language)
'Ohana (family, relatives)
Oli (a type of chant)
Pae 'āina (archipelago)
Palekaiko (paradise)
Pilina 'āina (intimate connection to the lands)
Pō'aiapuni (nature's cycles)
Pule (prayer)
'Uhana (spirits or the ancestors of the land)
Wahi pana (sacred places)

Recommended reading

- Change we must (Nana Veary)
- Detours: A Decolonial Guide to Hawai'i (Various authors)
- From the Mountains to the Sea (Julie Stewart Williams)
- Hawaiian Legends of Dreams (Caren Loebel-Fried)
- Kanaka Hawai'i Cartography (Renee Pualani Louis)
- Nānā I Ke Kumu (Mary Kawena Pukui)
- Nā Wāhine Koa: Hawaiian Women for Sovereignty and Demilitarization (Various authors)
- The Legends and Myths of Hawaii (David Kalakaua)
- Then There Were None (Martha H. Noyes)
- This is Paradise (Kristiana Kahakauwila)