



## Huna Article

### Spiritual Pitfalls by Graeme Kaponu Urlich

It's not possible to discuss this topic without recourse to sweeping generalisation so some will recognise what I am talking about while others will apply a very specific interpretation, based on their personal life experience, and probably not finish the article. We all see the world through "our own ideas and beliefs, our language, our biases"<sup>1</sup> and expectations. Each of the issues I have touched on here could all be the subject of complete books as there is a great deal more to say about them than can be superficially summarised here. There are many more of course but hopefully it inspires more thought on each. There is no intent to criticize anyone here but simply to raise awareness of a few of the traps and pitfalls many fall into, myself included, from time-to-time.

Huna is a philosophy, a set of ideas that doesn't replace others necessarily, but can help us make whatever rules for life we have work better for us, or help us change them if we choose to. The hope is that those who are interested can solve some of the issues talked about below in their own lives. Two of my articles, ["Infusion Confusion"](#) and ["Spirituality?"](#), go deeper into some of the concepts and there are links at the bottom to other free resources. The article ["A Wonderful Adventure"](#) talks about the process I experienced as a student of Huna and later, as a teacher. Huna has sustained me through some difficult times.

Quite often people will try this or that group or system in the hope of solving a problem, become disillusioned and drop out, possibly becoming quite depressed because it leaves them feeling even more helpless and hopeless. Some find their way to more effective groups and systems and Huna is the way I found. It teaches how to reawaken the personal power to choose and offers effective tools to create the changes that are wanted to have a happier life. Most use it for personal development and creating and refining their space in the world while some take it further and go more deeply into the shaman healing practice.

Everywhere I look these days there are many women's circles and workshops advertised and far fewer men's circles and workshops. While there is benefit in these events for some initially, I wonder if it has led to an inability for "spiritual" men and women to relate to each other effectively in many cases. I encounter, sometimes with undisguised hostility, a real competition for recognition of superiority of one gender over another. When everyone of another gender becomes a symbol for all of the problems in an individual's life, it becomes very difficult to solve the problems.

It seems a "battle for equality", often in the guise of "oneness", has gotten things way out of harmony. Perhaps a pathway into circles for all people who want to come together to learn and grow more cooperatively would be beneficial? There is often talk about being "likeminded" and "all inclusive". I suspect, based on experience, this is relatively rare, other than superficially. I have even heard heated arguments about the virtues of different variations of yoga and things like reiki. A number of "spiritual dogma" appear to be in active conflict, seen as threats rather than just different.

My parents grew up through the great depression and World War II. I spent my early years on the dairy farm they operated in the central Waikato region of New Zealand. There was a clear sense of partnership in the way my parents worked together.

Looking after the house, which was a hundred years old then, cooking magnificent meals on the old coal range and preparing preserves and other seasonal chores was a fulltime role that my mother enjoyed. Having clean clothes involved lighting a fire to boil water in the copper and hand washing in two concrete tubs with a hand operated wringer in between. I still remember her delight the day the first electric washing machine arrived at the farm.

My father on the other hand, mainly operated the farm. He did the milking with the help of my older brothers. I remember hanging out with him during milking time and learning as he did fencing and so on. I can remember steering the tractor around the paddocks while my father fed out hay from the trailer when I was very young. Planting and harvesting the vegetable garden and feeding young animals was something I could actually help with as well. There were many more tasks than that of course, but I remember fondly the sense of satisfaction in harvesting a vegetable for that night's meal, that I had planted myself.

There were times, like baling hay and harvesting the orchard, where everyone pitched in with the work. Neighbours turned up to help and I can remember going to the farms of friends to help out with their major tasks when needed. The success of each farm family relied upon this level of cooperation and community. Race wasn't considered and it didn't matter what church each family attended, nor did it matter if they didn't.

In this day and age it seems the fashion of being angry and offended "social justice warriors" is creating massive divisions not only between genders but age groups, many younger people have little respect for older, more experienced heads and hearts, often blaming them for all their problems. Symbols without substance are fought against instead of building the future on practical foundations. Justice is important but it can only be achieved by practical means with a focus on what works, not through anger about what is perceived to be wrong.

According to some, I'm too old to have "spiritual awareness". Different schools of thought have become mushed together, often with conflicting ideas and the confusion that brings, leading to great arguments and sometimes hate for anyone who disagrees with a point of view. Others have become completely polarized on what seem to be minute details.

Some people think you can't be spiritual unless you adhere to a specific diet. I hear very often about "inclusive" gatherings but there will only be vegan food available. I have no problem with anyone choosing a vegan lifestyle and I have no problem eating only vegan food from time-to-time, but a gathering where two people can't sit down across the table from each other and one is not able to enjoy the food of their choice? There is judgement in that, intolerance, and it is not "all inclusive".

Trauma is another word that gets used either as an excuse not to attempt growth or a reason why everyone should "make space" for their feelings over everyone else. There are people out there who have been through some hard knocks and need help, there is no intention here to minimise the struggle some people face, but some common approaches to healing it seem, in many cases, to lock in the behaviour and make it worse. It can become a debilitating shield or even a weapon for some. I talk about some of this in ["Healing Trauma."](#)

Race and culture also comes into the picture. I'm sometimes told it's not possible for me to have the knowledge I do from an ancient and unbroken lineage of Hawaiian shaman, because I wasn't born in the islands and don't have Hawaiian blood. They don't understand that being born into a particular race or culture doesn't automatically bestow knowledge or privilege on them. Yes they may have more potential exposure to certain knowledge and skills, but it is still up to them to do the work and develop them. Many of the decriers have been alive fewer years than I have put into learning and carrying the knowledge forward as

best I can. One of my native born Hawaiian teachers was an apprentice for 20 years and was still developing his work at his death. This is knowledge that once belonged to the whole world, aspects of it crop up in many teachings and, I believe, needs to be widely known again.

We can only be taught to the level we are able to grow into and many teachers, particularly in Hawaii, watch for aptitude, initiative and attitude, and will invite those who show promise. As a person grows into the knowledge more of it becomes available to them. The teachers are guides and stewards but the work must be done by the student. The transition from a Western intellectual way of learning to an experiential way of learning can be difficult, but that is the same regardless of race.

In [“Lost In Metaphors”](#) I talk about how ideas like Divine Feminine and Divine Masculine have come to be seen as immutable objective reality. Spiritual clichés abound and few seem to look for deeper meanings in them. This isn’t a criticism, it’s an observation and it does seem to cause people considerable confusion and distress in some cases. It’s not uncommon for people to experience something unusual and search for a rational explanation for it. Sometimes these made up ideas<sup>2</sup> turn into “facts” that get applied to everyone, whether they fit or not. Huna gives me a framework to look at ideas and work out if they are useful to me in my own life. Ideas need to be tested for their ability to be applied on a practical level.

Often times I see people making a new decision or expressing a desire for something new in their lives and then uttering a cliché that shifts their focus back and puts an obstacle in their path before they start or immediately acting on a habit that keeps them where they are. On the other side of that, they may repeat a positive cliché but without the conviction that shows they mean it.

I’ve seen people convinced to go on a diet by a friend and then the friend encouraging them to eat something that goes against the diet, because they deserve a treat for staying on the diet. [“The Kupua Stone”](#) talks about the process of doing things differently to get a new result. It’s up to us to choose the result we want. Often, the cooperation of others will be involved.

To make the farm work, each partner, and the children who could, needed to know what their role was and to know there would be help when needed. Yes there were historical role models here but based on practical needs and abilities rather than ideals. While my father could and would do meals etc. when needed, and my mother would get down to the milking shed and drive the tractor when needed, each primarily took care of the tasks they were best suited to. It worked well, their different skillsets were both necessary and complimentary, equally valued. There was nothing to stop them reversing the roles or dividing the workload differently, this is just what worked for our family.

What point am I trying to get to? I’m not sure I know but it seems that the way many people are trying to solve their problems is by beating down anyone they can find who might be able to give them what they want, even though they don’t seem to know what that is, and it doesn’t work very well. There seem to be many ideals talked about, based only on emotion without any consideration for practical needs and possibilities. The effect this has on our ability to relate to each other in a loving and cooperative way, with the Aloha Spirit<sup>2</sup>, is devastating.

It seems to me that things have gotten way out of harmony and there is a need to clarify some of the ideals and goals on an individual and group level. It’s not that everyone “should” think the same way. To borrow an analogy from a friend, that would be like every instrument in an orchestra playing the same note. I think most people would start to feel irritated in that case. It is useful to have a score to play from though, and perhaps a conductor to keep time (focus) within group or individual recognising that different groups prefer various kinds of music.

It would be beneficial I think, for there to be an acceptance that people don't all think the same way, that different people live by different rules. Many different skillsets are needed in the modern world. People operate on different value sets and some understanding on what our own values are, and how to work with the results we are getting in life is very useful. Huna is the framework of ideas that give me that foundation in my own life. It gives me tools to look at what I am thinking and doing, through the results I get, and to create change where desired. There are others systems that may work well for different people as well.

When I am struggling to find a way through a situation where there may be a difference of opinion or desired outcome, either within myself or with others, I come back to the seven principles of Huna<sup>2</sup>.

- 1 Ike. The world is what you think it is.**
- 2 Kala. There are no limits.**
- 3 Makia. Energy flows where attention goes.**
- 4 Manawa. Now is the moment of power.**
- 5 Aloha. To love is to be happy with.**
- 6 Mana. All power comes from within.**
- 7 Pono. Effectiveness is the measure of truth.**

These seven principles<sup>3 4 5</sup>, along with the four levels of reality or four perspectives from which we can view the world or particular experience, help me to see what result I really want, what I am thinking about how to get there and what attitude and ideas others may have, especially people who I may need to work with to get to my result.

In this process there may be a realisation that a different result may be more useful and easier to get to. It may become apparent that my current plans may need to be adjusted or changed completely if my situation doesn't seem to be progressing well. I may need to cultivate new friendships or working relationships with different people. In writing this, I am again reminded of the value of experiential learning, development through doing.

This article started with a question in my mind and in the writing of it, it again becomes apparent to me, that the Aloha Spirit<sup>4</sup> is the most effective way to harmony, where every instrument in the orchestra plays its different part and together make beautiful music that I have found anywhere. It really is "all inclusive." Trying to bend others to my way of thinking to achieve my goals takes so much effort that I tire myself out and build up so much tension that I end up achieving nothing. So many people have been brought up thinking that's the only way.

I have found that not only understanding what I am really thinking about my goals, and what the motivation is, but seeking out, or attracting, people who I can work with is a lot more effective than trying to fit in with or manage people who I can't. I end up where I don't want to be that way. Giving people permission to be who they are and do what they do, to quote the same friend as before, without any judgement other than the discernment around who I can work with and who I can't, is the way to go for me.

Graeme Kapon Ulrich (April 2024)

[Aloha New Zealand - School of Huna and Hawaiian Shamanism](#)

1. [Why people don't see the same things sometimes](#) (video)
2. [How Made Up Ideas Become Truth](#) (video)
3. [The Aloha Spirit Booklet](#)
4. Detailed in [Urban Shaman](#) by Dr Serge Kahili King PhD
5. [The Seven principles of Huna Philosophy](#) (video)