



Huna Article

Working With the Eye of Kanaloa:

And symbols generally

By Graeme Kaponu Urlich



Over the last 35+ years working with Huna, symbols, and in particular, the Eye of Kanaloa, the orientation has always been with the single point of the star downwards. Abraham Kawaii used it that way and Ed Kaiwi had a tattoo of the star that way. The star is depicted this way in Leinani Melville's book "Children of the Rainbow." Until recently, I've only seen it depicted the other way up once.

More recently though, I am seeing it all over Instagram and other places depicted with the single point upwards with meanings attributed to it that I have never heard of before. Sometimes I see it without any regard to an orientation at all.

As with any symbol, we can add personal meanings for specific purposes. I do this and sometimes share these with others as useful tools they may choose to use, but I always explain that this is something I made up because it was useful. I make it clear it is not part of the source tradition, merely based on it, so the core meaning is not lost.

Often the same or similar symbol may have different meanings in different traditions and it is important to know which tradition and meaning is being used. Some people see a symbol and get a specific meaning from one tradition and think this meaning applies to all traditions and variations of traditions. The meanings in cultural contexts usually have many layers of meaning and Westerners in particular tend to only get superficial understanding.

One group in Italy came up with a design they called an evolution of the Eye of Kanaloa. It had wavy lines instead of straight lines and a Star of David in the centre with other images on it as well. There was nothing remotely Hawaiian about it and I personally feel claiming it to be is disrespectful of the tradition.

Other symbols have been distorted over the years. What is now known as the Nazi Swastika, with the associated revulsion for what they did, originated in India 7000 years ago. Svastika is a Sanskrit word meaning "well-being", a symbol of good fortune and abundance for millennia in Hinduism, Buddhism, and pre-Christian Europe before there were Nazis who used it as a symbol of racial superiority that is now mostly associated with hatred and genocide.

Most people today are only familiar with the latter meaning and react to it accordingly. One Hindu man, not so long ago, was attacked for displaying the symbol from his tradition because the attackers assumed the latter meaning. Such are the consequences of a lack of knowledge and understanding. It is advisable to ask someone what meaning they are using before taking drastic action based on misinformation.

In Hinduism it is used right-facing (swastika) symbolising surya ("sun"), prosperity and good luck, as well as left-facing (sauvastika) symbolising night or tantric aspects of Kali. The depth of meaning of such symbols simply can't be expressed in short articles such as this and require in depth study of the traditions they come from to begin to comprehend them. Some Native American tribes, like the Navajo and Hopi, have used a similar symbol sometimes referred to as "whirling logs" to represent the four directions as well as good luck and well-being. This is interestingly similar to the Asian Indian concepts. Was there a connection? Hmmm.



The pentangle is another symbol with mixed meanings in the modern age. Depicted with the single point upwards it has positive connotations of magic and protection, among other things. In Mathematics it may be associated with a “golden ratio.” When the single point is depicted downwards though, the symbol is usually associated with things satanic and demonic. People unaware of the positive meanings may well interpret it as having bad meanings regardless of the orientation and context, and potentially have a negative reaction to it depending on the strength of the associations they have with it.

I personally do my best to teach Kupua Tradition as I have learned it, to keep a core foundation of the tradition intact. I feel this is important so as not to dilute the effectiveness of the knowledge. I do this by not allowing myself to change fundamental aspects of the knowledge or tinker too much with the various symbols used. I must admit to feeling disquiet when I see others doing it but to some extent that can't be helped.

I will typically only ever use and display the Eye of Kanaloa with the orientation I have always been taught is the “correct”, traditional one, with the single point downwards. I will only ever teach it this way out of respect for the tradition and my teachers. Yes there will be aspects of the Kupua Tradition that I have yet to learn, layers I have yet to uncover, but until those come to my attention, I will stay with what I have learned so far in order to perpetrate it in the purest form I am able. A Kahu is a caretaker of the knowledge after all.

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