

# Cultivating Sacred Kinship to Strengthen Resilience

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Our *aloha nui*<sup>4</sup> (profound affection) to you, dear readers! We are part of Hālau ‘Ōhi’a, an intensive native Hawaiian stewardship and lifeways training program created to enhance the capacity of natural resources and conservation professionals to engage self, others, and place. The goal of this chapter is to share our collective professional and personal experiences in Hālau ‘Ōhi’a from the perspective of both *kumu* (program developer and master instructor; Kekuhi) and *haumāna* (students; Heather, Christian, Kainana). We describe the pedagogy and epistemology of Hālau ‘Ōhi’a and we share specific exercises from our practice that you can adapt and use in your own places. We believe these practices can inform a larger community of professionals interested in green readiness, response, and recovery because they can enhance personal, community, and global resilience through the cultivation of sacred relationships to place. (For more information see: Hawaiian Skies 2017, Kealiikanakaoleohailani and Giardina 2015, McMillen 2016 in Literature Cited section).

Through Hālau ‘Ōhi’a, we have come to honor three foundational principles for building community-based resilience. First, personal resilience is enhanced when we embrace multiple ways of knowing the world the around us. Second, community resilience is enhanced when we recognize and engage our many diverse and intimate familial relationships, including those with all other beings in our communities. Third, global resilience is enhanced when we embrace the notion that we are reflections of our Earth—biogeochemically, evolutionarily, socially, and spiritually—and that by exploring these connections through mythical texts and creation stories, we heighten our appreciation of our interrelationships with each other and with our places across time and space. In this chapter, we share the skills practiced in Hālau ‘Ōhi’a as a multiscale approach to strengthening personal, community, and global resilience.

## What is Hālau ‘Ōhi’a?

A *hālau* is a place of learning and literally means “many breaths”; *‘ōhi’a* (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) is the most important native tree species in Hawai’i (Figures 1 and 2).

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4. As one of the official languages of Hawai’i, Hawaiian words are not foreign and so need not be italicized; however, they are italicized throughout the chapter for the ease of reading.



**Figure 1: 'Ōhi'a (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) blossom**

Photo by Heather McMillen, used with permission.



**Figure 2: 'Ōhi'a tree inside Kīlauea Iki, the crater adjacent to the main summit caldera in Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park.**

Photo by Heather McMillen, used with permission.

propagation, environmental education, ecological restoration, invasive species management, agroforestry, geography, marine biology, agronomy, anthropology, ethnobiology, communications, ecology, astronomy, navigation, and more. Participants include those with native Hawaiian ancestry and those with other ancestries; those who were born in Hawai‘i and those who arrived later in life. As with the larger group of participants, our (the authors’) ancestry and experiences are diverse. This is an important aspect of this training. For native Hawaiians, there is clearly an element of reconnecting or strengthening cultural connections. But the larger motivation of our collective group stems from recognizing that native Hawaiian perspectives and practices provide a blueprint, a pathway, and a portal for entering into what we contend is a more effective way of engaging stewardship and promoting resilience. We see the approach of Hālau ‘Ōhi‘a to be broadly relevant and broadly accessible, including beyond the context of Hawai‘i. Here we integrate four perspectives on our collective learning through Hālau ‘Ōhi‘a.

Participants in Hālau ‘Ōhi‘a are asked to engage deeply the philosophy of *aloha* (Figure 3). Literally translated, *alo* means “face-to-face” and infers engaging in an exchange with what is in front of you. *Hā* means “breath” or “life.” *Aloha* means an exchange of sacred breath with a being that is loved. *Aloha* has been described as a mode of interacting with the world that operates at the level of the individual, but is most fully expressed in community with other beings, human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate. To live one’s life with *aloha* requires engaging that part of oneself that allows for empathy, compassion, kindness, affection, veneration, commitment, reverence, and gratitude for all aspects of life. The philosophy of *aloha* is not unique to Hawai‘i; it is a Hawaiian expression of a globally common indigenous perspective on well-being, one that is focused on family, community, and the environment, and that reflects an understanding of the interconnections among “social, cultural, spiritual, environmental and psychological aspects of health” (Donatuto et al. 2014, p. 356; cf Salmón 2000). *Aloha* is a knowledge-practice-belief system that is akin to other holistic systems based on “connections between human beings, nature, and spiritual beings” (Donatuto et al. 2014, p. 356). In the context of Hālau ‘Ōhi‘a, proficiency in the practice of *aloha* comes through consistent, life-long practice that exists in all aspects of being. Hālau ‘Ōhi‘a’s pedagogy, defined here as

### Key Concepts in Hawaiian

- Aloha:** philosophy for interacting with the world; exchange of sacred breath with a being that is loved
- Hālau:** place of learning, literally “many breaths”
- Ki‘i:** reflection
- Mele komo:** poetic text that asks permission-to-enter
- Mo‘okū‘auhau:** genealogical chant
- ‘Ōhi‘a:** *Metrosideros polymorpha*, an endemic tree species in Hawai‘i with extremely high cultural and ecological value
- Ohana:** family

Figure 3: Key concepts in Hawaiian.

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the method and practice of teaching, and epistemology, or foundational collective knowledge system, requires that participants cultivate multiple ways of knowing our biology, minds, spirits, communities, and the places where we live, work, play, and engage. To begin this practice, we ask you to: *inhale, exhale, observe, and repeat: A (ah)- LO (loh)- HĀ (haahh) to the beings that surround you. Aloha sun, aloha cool breezes, aloha person walking down the street, aloha scent of gardenia flowers, aloha squawking birds, aloha heartbeat, aloha 'ōhi'a tree, aloha delicious breakfast, aloha computer, aloha Earth!* (Figure 3).

The Hālau 'Ōhi'a pedagogy is focused on cultivating sacred, *aloha*-based relationships. We share our approach because we have learned that by encouraging our bodies, minds, and spirits to holistically understand and embrace *aloha*, we greatly enhance our capacity as conservation professionals to express *aloha* for ourselves, each other, and our places. In the context of this paper, our hypothesis is that an *aloha*-based strategy to green readiness, response, and recovery will increase social and ecological resilience in times of distress and disturbance by building emotional, psychological, and spiritual resilience at personal, community, and global scales. The first step of this process requires a personal shift from viewing conservation as organizationally-driven management of biophysical objects to the sacred stewardship of an array of family members. This deeply familial and internalized connection to place requires additional skills, views, and methods that are rarely taught in schools following a western approach to professional resource management. For this reason, Hālau 'Ōhi'a seeks to create a space where kinship-based approaches and associated skills are actively engaged, developed to proficiency, and celebrated by resource managers in professional and personal contexts.

The remainder of this paper consists of further description of our epistemology and then a description of and instructions for practicing specific skills to cultivate sacred kinship relationships. These exercises include: creating your own *mele komo* (chant requesting permission to enter) and *mo'okū'auhau* (genealogical chant), and the practice of deeply engaging stories to reveal their meanings across universal, community, and personal levels.

## Multiple Ways of Knowing our Environment

Engaging multiple ways of knowing our environment entails being willing to freely and nonjudgmentally engage the material and immaterial, the conscious and the subconscious, and the rational and nonrational. This approach asserts that, as conservation professionals, we limit ourselves when we compartmentalize the professional and personal, the biophysical and the emotional, and the intellectual and the spiritual, and that such compartmentalization reduces our ability to effectively steward and be stewarded. Acknowledging this holism

into our personal and professional lives is liberating because it allows us to become proficient in engaging multiple perspectives, views, and epistemologies, and thus allows us to create diverse opportunities to expand our capacity to know and steward our environment. We suggest that such proficiency also allows professionals to more effectively understand and engage the diverse ways communities view and engage their worlds, and such understanding is a path to strengthening programmatic capacity to foster green resilience.

A critical element of multiple ways of knowing is a conscious shift from learning *about* the objects of a place for management purposes to placed-based learning *from* the diverse members of a community for stewardship purposes. In Hālau 'Ōhi'a, we request permission to enter into a space (e.g., our classroom, a forest, a community center), and as we do this, we wonder: *What will I learn from this place; Who will provide me with this learning; What will the lessons mean for me as a person, a professional, and a community member; How will this experience further my practice of aloha?*

A *mele* is a Hawaiian poetic text. A *mele komo* is a *mele* recited as a chant that requests permission to enter, and it prepares us to enter into a space by opening ourselves to learning. This is the first skill that is taught in Hālau 'Ōhi'a because requesting entry into any space is fundamentally respectful of that place. More deeply, the *mele komo* reminds the practitioner of their relationship with a place that is a source of sustenance for individuals, that allows for the well-being of our families and communities, and that with our stewardship will continue to sustain in every sense of the word our interdependent kinship networks. Perhaps most importantly, the *mele komo* renews our sacred, ideally intergenerational responsibility for and commitment to stewarding place.

This *mele* (Figure 4) follows the traditional Hawaiian form for *mele* but it is a contemporary chant composed specifically for Hālau 'Ōhi'a. This *mele* highlights that Hawaiian culture is a living and ongoing process that continues to embrace both old knowledge systems and perspectives and new contexts.

**Mele Komo**

**Two million lives in the seeds of 'ōhi'a strewn  
about from near and far in Hawai'i**  
*Ua lū kinikini ka hua 'ōhi'a lehua mai 'ō a 'ō o  
Lononuiākea*

**Carried on the wings of the wind**  
*Halihali 'ia e ka 'ēheu hulu makani*

**Caressed in the warmth of Honuamea-volcanic  
earth; nourished by Kānehoa-Sun**  
*Hī'ipoi 'ia e ka Poli mahana o Kānehoa, o Honuamea*

**We are rooted, tapping the source of  
water-unfurling, peaking towards full bloom**  
*Ua a'a, ua mole, ua mōhala a'ela*

**A diversity of hues-brilliant scarlet, golden,  
salmon, and the rare white**  
*'O ka 'apapane, 'o ka mamo, 'o ka nuku 'i'iwi, 'o ka 'āhihi*

**We are blankets of 'ōhi'a forests that extend  
beyond the horizons of my vision**  
*Mai hiki lalo a i hiki luna e waiho nei i hālī'i moku lā*

**It is done with the simple offering of the voice**  
*Ua 'ikea! A he leo nō ia.*

Figure 4. Mele Komo composed for Hālau 'Ōhi'a by Kekuhi Kealiikanakaolehailani.





Figure 5: Hālaiu ‘Ōhi’a students sit on woven *lauhala* (*Pandanus* spp.) mats in their classroom, a transformed seminar room at the Institute for Pacific Islands Forestry in Hilo. Each class meeting includes the creation of the *kuahu* (hula altar) (lower right corner) adorned with *kinolau* (plant embodiments of gods) gathered by students, followed by a discussion of the multi-level significance of the plants. The *kuahu* is the focal point for the classroom setting as it represents a microcosm of the world we endeavor to create as well as a portal for creating and entering into a sacred space where discussions can holistically engage a range of topics.

Photo by Kainana Francisco, used with permission.

In the case of this particular *mele*, the chanter is drawn to the image of the growth cycle of ‘ōhi’a from the spreading of its tiny hair-like seeds to the elements that help those seeds take root. The poem declares that encased in the dried calyx of a single *lehua* (‘ōhi’a flower) (Figure 1) are hundreds of seeds waiting to create forests of ‘ōhi’a blanketing the landscape. Finally, the ‘ōhi’a displays its variety of colored blossoms until each flower’s vitality seems to fade. Through engagement of the *mele* through chant, the participant engages core foundational elements to the deep learning process: *What is my relationship to the elements in the text? How does this relationship connect me to this place that I am requesting to enter? How am I connected to this community of learners entering this place with me? What lessons do I need to learn today?*

There are multiple levels of interpretation for this *mele komo*—the literal and metaphorical, the personal, regional and global, and the biological, emotional, psychological and spiritual. And so, for example, when we ask *WHO are the seeds?* you, as the reader, might guess that the seeds are the image of the ONE chanting, including you as you read the text. As with sacred texts broadly, the seeds, the wind that distributes the seeds, the caress of the earth and sun, the roots, the blooms, and the vision and promise of dark green forests are embedded with multiple layers of meaning that intertwine the chanter, community, and ecological system. One interpretation of this process is that it creates a portal for engaging the multiple relationships that define place. Entering this portal requires that we accept the sacred responsibility of being a contributing member of the larger family, with the promise that assuming



Figure 6: Kumu Kekuhi leads Hālau 'Ōhi'a in learning the hula for Hi'ilawe, a waterfall in Waipi'o Valley, Hawai'i Island, following their field stay in the valley.

Photo by Kainana Francisco, used with permission.



Figure 6: Multifamily and multigenerational members of Hālau 'Ōhi'a planting kalo (*Colocasia esculenta*) in Waipi'o Valley, Hawai'i Island.

Photo by Heather McMillen, used with permission.

such a commitment enriches our experience as resource professionals, but also enhances our capacity to serve the larger family of connections while integrating the many facets of our personal and professional lives.

We believe that the process of creating a *mele komo* has instructional value but also can be transformative. It is our belief that resilience is strengthened by acknowledging, honoring, and stewarding the relationships that define the network or community of elements and beings making up a place. We witness this across our enriched professional activities and encounters. As professionals, we are more effective practitioners when our role is firmly embedded in a larger family context that provides diverse and often ancient sources of stewardship knowledge (Figures 5, 6, 7). We recommend that you, the reader, create a *mele komo* for the places that you and your community engage professionally or personally, just as Kekuhi created the *mele komo* (Figure 4) for Hālau 'Ōhi'a. Here we offer a format, but you can compose your *mele komo* in any format that you choose, written for any place or space you visit.



**We suggest your *mele komo*:**

1. Speaks to the broad and specific beauty of the place.
2. Speaks to a process or an overall image.
3. Uses specific names that communicate that you KNOW the space. Feel free to use early or different place names if they are available/known, for example, Lononuiākea is an older name for Hawai'i Island.
4. Includes a personal image that connects you to a space, allowing for chosen words to convey multiple layers of meaning.
5. Is conceived as providing limitless potential for learning from a place.

**Exercise 1. *Mele Komo*.**

Here we provide a simple structured approach for creating a *mele komo*, followed by an example from Tokyo. Compose your *mele komo* relying on this template. GF=geographic feature (e.g., river, falls, mountain, bay, etc.).

**Line 1:**

Aloha \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_!  
(Name of the GF) (Describe it, and use larger geography/older name)

**Line 2:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Acknowledge 1-2 neighboring GFs and their relationship to the GF in line 1)

**Line 3:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Request entry or access) (Explain why you are there)

**Line 4:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Conclude with a humble thought for continuum)

**Line 5:**

***A he leo wale nō!***

(Pronounced *Ah heh leh-oh vah-leh noo*. It means "the voice is the offering." This line is optional, but by using another language, we trick the brain into the novelty of it, and therefore are more willing to participate.)

## **Mele Komo for Tokyo Bay**

*Aloha Tokyo Bay, glorious Edo of Honshu!*

*Where the Edo and Sumida Rivers meet.*

*Please grant us access to your shores, so we may clean your banks,*

*So that WE may exist in health.*

*A he leo wale nō!*

After you compose your *mele komo*, go to your place, engage the place with aloha as you would a beloved family member, share you *mele komo* with your place, and when you finish, pause silently, and observe. Be aware of a subtle breeze, the call of a bird, a splash, a drizzle, a sense of ease, or a shift of energy. Congratulations on creating and using your own sacred text! The power of the *mele komo* process can be enhanced when shared amongst your community, personal, and professional, from elders to children.

## **Sustaining and Being Sustained by our Relations**

Fundamental to discussions of sustainability and resilience is engaging in the question of how we relate to all phenomena around us and to one another with all of our peculiarities. As professionals engaging in holistic (mind, body, spirit) approaches to our professions, we can consider the miracles of mirror neurons, the magic of feeling a deep sense of belonging, our connection to dark matter, the love of a parent, the procreation of sea cucumbers, neuroplasticity, or the existence of any other wonder of life—regardless of our understanding of these phenomena. In doing so, we are more effective in the work we do to protect, restore, and steward the places where we live and work. All of this is possible when we trace a direct relationship to these and other miracles.

Indigenous epistemologies posit that we are all family, where family extends beyond the human species to include all living and nonliving components of a system—what has been described as kincentric ecology (Salmón 2000). Also implied is the idea that family members are connected through sacred, reciprocal relationships that embody heart-felt responsibilities: care, sacrifice, respect, support, love, and protection. This notion of familial relationship to everything and everyone recognizes that life fully lived requires that the extended family experiences well-being to the fullest extent possible.

Recognizing we are family because we are related biogeochemically (we are all derived from the same source materials), evolutionarily (we are all part of the same family tree of life), and cosmologically (we all share elements of our creation stories) calls us to be responsible for one another. Within this framework, all members of the family have names, and so the human need to derive sustenance from the larger network of family members is treated

carefully and thoughtfully. In the process of being sustained by our relationships (when we drink water, collect from our gardens, gather protein from our reefs, or harvest wood and fiber from our forests), we are asking for a sacrifice by those family members so that we might be sustained. And so honoring in the spirit of exchange the “acquisition” of resources, the taking of a life, the gathering of plants, the removal of minerals, even the breathing of air, requires humility and gratitude grounded in our dependence on the deep aloha provided to us by our relationships with the sustaining world around us.

To highlight this notion of extended family, we ask the question: Who is your father, mother, or great grandmother? When you respond to this question, what is the feeling that comes with your answer? Is there a feeling that arises from the deep genealogical, physical, physiological, emotional, psychological, and spiritual history of relationship to that person, whether personal or learned from a story? What does it mean to answer the questions: Who is your water? and Who is your mountain? and have the answers elicit a similarly rich sense of belonging, of intimate familiarity and gratitude, of familial obligation, versus feelings associated with object ownership, use, or management? This shift is central to cultivating stewardship of the intimate, reciprocal relationships that define our place in the world and who we are as members of the larger family.

Here we offer a methodology that helps us to reimagine and attune ourselves to all of our family members and processes, human and otherwise, within those systems. To exercise this concept of environment as family, we will adapt a basic Hawai’i genealogical format from one of the cosmologies of Hawai’i. Traditionally, *mo’okū’auhau* (genealogical chant) were recited to introduce oneself to a community. *Mo’o* is the notion of continuum and the *mo’okū’auhau* conveys our interconnections over space and time. Hālau ‘Ōhi’a students have used this format to introduce themselves to Kīlauea crater on one of our field trips and to introduce themselves at our public, community sharing of what we have learned together in the class. Use the format below to create your genealogical chant including the relatives in nature that sustain you.

## Exercise 2. *Mo’okū’auhau* (genealogical chant)

\_\_\_\_\_ is the \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_,  
(name of grandparent\*) (gender \*\*) (name of where they are from)

\_\_\_\_\_ is the \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_,  
(name of other grandparent\*) (gender \*\*) (name of where they are from)

born from their union was \_\_\_\_\_.

(name of parent\*)

\_\_\_\_\_ is the \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_,

(name of parent from above\*) (gender \*\*) (name of where they are from)

\_\_\_\_\_ is the \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_.

(name of other parent)

(gender \*\*)

(name of where they are from)

born from their union is \_\_\_\_\_.

(your name)

My beloved land is \_\_\_\_\_.

(name of the place you call home)

\_\_\_\_\_ is the name of my \_\_\_\_\_, our bodies mingle.

(name and identify a geologic feature of your home - mountain, valley, plains, etc)

\_\_\_\_\_ is the name of my \_\_\_\_\_, our blood mingles.

(name and identify a water feature of your home - ocean, river, stream, lake, spring, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ is the name of my \_\_\_\_\_, our energy mingles.

(name and identify a prominent landscape feature of your home - plant, animal, mineral, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ is the source of my water, our spirits mingle.

(name the source of your water)

### ***Ola ka 'ohana!***

(Pronounced *Oh-lah khaa oh-hah-nah*. It means "life to the family." This line is optional, but by using another language, we trick the brain into the novelty of it, and therefore are more willing to participate.)

\*The ones you name can be those who raised you. They need not be biological grandparents or parents. Another option is to substitute the entire section with: "I am \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_, and my beloved land is \_\_\_\_\_."

\*\* Identify the gender as you see appropriate. In Hawaiian language, these are *kane* (male), *wahine* (female), and *māhū* (male-female, both genders, between genders).

And, born is your *mo'okū'auhau!* You can use this to introduce yourself to a place, to a community group at a meeting, or the audience at a conference before you give a talk, especially if the talk or meeting is with native or indigenous people of an area. While this represents a standard introduction protocol

for much of the world, this format is different for professionally trained managers who typically emphasize agency or organization affiliations over family and other living features of places. Broadening introductions allows community groups to know you and the places you care about and allows you to better know members of a community. This also presents an opportunity to introduce the ecological systems in an area from a more kinship based perspective. This way of contextualizing people as a part of and not apart from the landscape begins to attune ourselves to Hawaiian epistemology. Over time, or as the setting requires, you may expand your genealogy, the range of environmental family members identified in your introduction, or other features of your relationship to a place. Resilience begins with knowing yourself in relationship to those around you, and so strengthening resilience means building or enhancing the depth, intimacy, and quality of relationships, and in so doing elevating the well-being of the community.

### **Seeing Our Own Reflections in Our Local, Regional, and Global Communities**

For our final conversation of this chapter, we introduce the possibility of our relationship to sacred texts and mythological creation stories (hereafter “stories”) as another portal to strengthen relationships, well-being, and resilience. Just as scientific theories and mathematical equations are globally recognized stories of our wonderings about the physical and biological universe, oral histories, legends, and poetry contain globally recognized stories about physical and emotional-spiritual universe. The messages, images, and characters of these stories can be so potent to our individual and collective psyche that the cultural phenomena of Christmas and Easter, Hanukah and Rosh Hashanah, Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, Diwali and Holi, Wesak and Hanamatsuri, etc., persist in their modern day form because their images—global, communal, and personal—still have deep relevance in our lives.

Consider stories such as Christ, the Hindu trinity, the Buddha, Great Spirit, Turtle Island, Pele’s migration, Amaterasu Omikami, and the Dream Time. These stories are rich legacies about humans and their responsiveness to their environments, their readiness in adapting to changes, and the heroics and resilience represented in the reciprocal relationships among people and their environments (a concept that is akin to feedback loops in resilience theory). These stories and many more are embedded in and so shape our awareness and subconscious about how we relate to our world. They also shape how we respond to change because their messages, images, and themes are both ancestral and acutely relevant to continually changing contemporary contexts.

This multilayered relevance plays a critical role in supporting resilience because these stories contain an immense longitudinal data set describing humanity's relationships to ourselves, our communities, and the world around us. Our universally rich heritage includes information about: the best of climates and the worst of climates; the adaptability or extinction of a species; surviving and then thriving in the face of floods, volcanic eruptions, fires, storms, earthquakes, war, pest invasion, drought, hunger, and so on; the communion between human, animals, and plants; the effect of the environment on our life ways, and everything in between. Indeed, stories teach us about the nature of being and the nature of being in relationships. They can inspire us to be expansive, and they can induce introspection. Stories can be seen as personalized lessons about people's worldviews, perspectives on the land and how people are connected to their land, why their belief systems are the way they are, and who is important in their lives and lands. With a deep engagement of stories, these universal questions can be deciphered and interpreted. Reading (or listening to) these stories therefore requires flexibility and adaptability. We see it as a valuable practice because tapping into their dynamic teachings can enhance our understanding of place, of relationships, of relationships to place—all building blocks to enhancing resilience. Thus, our final conversation here will focus on a process for accessing these stories and their multiple meanings. To do so, we focus on the sentient *ki'i*.

*Ki'i* literally translated means "reflection," and so *ki'i* can take the form of anything that might be reflected: an object, a person, a concept, etc. The general approach for deciphering *ki'i* centers on the question: *what do the ki'i in this story have to teach me?* In Hālau 'Ōhi'a, our learning process is structured around recognizing and learning from three categories of *ki'i*: *Ki'i Ākea* (meta- or universal images), *Ki'i Honua* (macro- or regional images), and, *Ki'i 'laka* (micro or personal images). These elements help us to interpret and connect to stories at global, regional, and personal levels.

***Ki'i Ākea*** are the archetypical or universal images found in a society's most important stories. From alpine slopes of the Himalayas to Amazonian rain forests, from Ubud to Milfordhaven, from the Salish to the Tuwharetoa, *Ki'i Ākea* capture universal themes relevant to all cultures across the ages: sacrifice, rebirth, transition, transformation, death, birth, mother earth, sky father, journey, gender roles, sibling relationships, wisdom, darkness, etc. Due to both the universality of many human experiences and the effects of large-scale migration and cultural diffusion, *ki'i* can convey the same or very similar meanings across stories, regardless of their origins (cf Cajete 1994). Associated meta-images can belong to the collective unconscious and are represented by certain characters, elements, or situations in a story. Some examples of *Ki'i Ākea* could be: moon, sun, grandfather, warrior, teacher, etc.



***Ki'i Honua*** are the themes or images that are shared by a community, a geography or national group. The *Ki'i Honua* are in fact those images that reflect how and why Henua Enana people, Japan people, Hopi people, or Ni'ihau island people relate to the world the way they do; it is a shared worldview shaped by a shared geography. Cosmopolitan megacities also have *Ki'i Honua*. In New York City, these might include yellow cabs and the subway, Carnegie Hall and Alvin Ailey, bagels and pizza, the coastline and skyline, or Harlem and Wall Street. Individual neighborhoods within New York could even have *Ki'i Honua* that are specific to them, but also resonate with their larger community in diaspora. For example, hip hop in the Bronx or musicals in Time Square. When assessing the *Ki'i Honua*, one asks: For which community am I decoding the *Ki'i Honua*? The *Ki'i Honua* contracts the universal themes described above to engage a national, regional or even community context. *Ki'i Honua* are also useful for individuals who belong to the same occupational or religious communities. For instance the scythe and mallet is a popular image recognizable by the construction industry, while the medical/healing profession recognizes the image of the Asclepius or serpent on a rod. The *ki'i* in these cases is both the symbol, and the meaning behind the symbol. The *ki'i* or the image/theme suggests our relationship to the story at different scales. Some examples of *Ki'i Honua* images could be: ocean, tools of an occupation, seasonality, *kalo* (taro), *wa'a* (canoe), turtle, journey. We can even apply this concept to our own agencies where *ki'i* might include loyalty, team work, retirement, promotion, etc.

***Ki'i 'laka*** are your own images, the reflections resulting in personal messages to you from the authors of a text. *Ki'i 'laka* are the most evasive because they are often neglected, and so our own capacity to engage this *ki'i* may be atrophied if our practice of self-reflection is irregular. Readers may also assume that the hero, villain, or other image in a story is simply entertaining without recognizing it is related to their personal experience. However, these micro-images include all the facets of the personal self, composed of personal themes that have grown out of our personal experiences, intuitive processes, and interpretations of the world around us; they are our most powerful allies for learning about and being in the world. *Ki'i 'laka* puts our existence into perspective, and they help us decipher our own spirits, because both text-based and oral forms of a story provide opportunities to engage and see the self in the story. The *Ki'i 'laka* can be the same images as the *Ki'i Ākea* and *Ki'i Honua*, but you relate to them on a personal level. On the other hand, the *Ki'i 'laka* can just be that one image or one theme that resonates with you because of your current life happenings.

The *Ki'i* reflection process is most useful when we begin to look at different stories around the globe, so we encourage you to share and learn the

stories from your own places, and to read and listen to stories from other places. The images in stories, songs, and legends connect people globally. Even if you are not from that place, you can still find your own connections to these places, people, and culture by finding their connections with stories of people and places you do know, and with your own genealogical connections to those places. Our resilience is heightened when we come to know the rest of the world through their great stories. As our final exercise, Exercise 3, we encourage you to choose a story and productively engage it by identifying the three levels of *ki'i* within it, focusing in on the *Ki'i 'laka* or personal images that stand out to you in that story. The story can be one that you know well or one that is new to you. Ask yourself the questions: *What does this ki'i have to teach me? What message does this story have for me? Why is this song showing up now?*

The *ki'i* (Figure 8) help us to see that our greatest challenge is to ask ourselves the right questions, the questions that will allow our spirits to interact purposefully with our immediate surroundings, our surroundings in our past or in distant areas, and perhaps most foundationally, with ourselves. If we allow them, *ki'i* can help us meet our greatest challenges with better questions because they are images created and recreated over and over by centuries of life experts and the wisdom of a

billion stars, a billion births, and a billion deaths. By connecting to the stories that make up our daily lives, we are better able to engage the often complex and deep lessons in these stores to increase our ability to form and maintain sacred kinship relationships globally, regionally, and personally. Collectively, when a community engages stories in this way, we strengthen our collective ability to respond to and care for our communities and environments.

We are at the end of our message to you. If you found any of this useful, we are happy. If you are ever in Hilo, Hawai'i, during a Hālau 'Ōhi'a session, we welcome you to visit us at the Institute for Pacific Islands Forestry (contact Christian or Kainana). Our sincerest aloha to you!

### Examples of Stories to Explore for Their *Ki'i*

Pele and Hi'iaka (Hawaiian)  
Papa and Wākea (Hawaiian)  
Turtle Island (Native North American)  
Skywoman Falling (Potawatomi)  
Sedna Goddess of the Sea (Inuit)  
Elohim or Yahweh (Christianity and Judaism)

*These are just a few suggestions.  
Please search out others.*

Figure 8: Examples of stories to explore for their *Ki'i*.

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The content of this paper reflects the views of the author(s), who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the information presented herein.

