

Could a kahuna's liturgy have wrought these changes?

By Darrell Sifford — Tuesday, 2 December 1980 Philadelphia Inquirer

I'm not even sure why I agreed to the interview — except that I was curious. After all, how many times in your life do you have a chance to meet an honest-to-goodness kahuna?

No, it's not a typographical error. I really talked to a kahuna. That's a Hawaiian word that literally means "keeper of the secrets," but that among Hawaiians commonly refers to a spiritual teacher and healer of what ails us — either physically or psychologically.

So there I was, with my notebook and pen, and there she was, Mornah Simeona, a grandmotherly looking woman in a white cable-knit sweater and gray flannel skirt, the daughter of a member of the court of Queen Liliuokalani, who was the last sovereign of the Hawaiian Islands.

Mornah, who has lectured at the University of Hawaii, was in the Philadelphia area for a weekend workshop in what was described as "Hawaiian metaphysics," and was then due in Baltimore for a lecture at Johns Hopkins University.

What exactly does she do — not as a lecturer, but as a kahuna? Well, although her English is as flawless as a radio announcer's, I had trouble grasping what she was saying. Essentially, it seemed to come down to this.

We tend to be haunted by our old fears, emotions, ideas and reactions, which contribute not only to present-day psychological distresses but also to physical illnesses — since many illnesses can be "attributed purely to the pressures we create." A kahuna's role is to help us dredge up and erase the garbage that is polluting our existence — in much the same way that we would retrieve and kill useless information stored in a computer.

Now that doesn't sound too unreasonable, does it? Obviously what must happen, if anything really does happen, is that we feel better after a session with our kahuna because we expect to feel better- It's the old placebo effect, about which Dr. Herbert Benson, the Harvard cardiologist, has written extensively and for which modern medicine finally is beginning to show some respect.

Well, Mornah hadn't heard about the placebo effect but, after it was explained, she said that it wasn't a factor, since some of those with whom she dealt really had no grand expectations. For some, it was just another pause in their endless search for happiness and fulfillment.

But the strange thing, Mornah said, was that the search inevitably was abandoned after they met with her — because their problems went away. Besides, she said, she could help people she never even met — by working through those who came to her.

All that was required, she said, was an appeal to the divine creator of our choice “through the divinity that is within each person ... who is really an extension of the divine creator.”

The liturgy she said, goes like this:

“Divine creator, father, mother, son as one ... If I, my family, relatives and ancestors have offended you, your family, relatives and ancestors in thoughts, words, deeds and actions from the beginning of our creation to the present, we ask your forgiveness ... Let this cleanse, purify, release, cut all the negative memories, blocks, energies and vibrations and transmute these unwanted energies to pure light ... And it is done.”

This appeal is called ho’oponopono, and can be identified with just about every religion, Mornah said, because “in every faith there always is a portion (of the liturgy) in which we ask forgiveness of those we offend ... But we go beyond that ... to family, relatives, and ancestors ... because possibly some of the problem stems from a grandfather who chopped off somebody’s head in another century.” That which we expel is transmuted into “pure light,” she said, because otherwise, “we would pollute the atmosphere” with our discarded garbage. “But as pure light, it does not contaminate.”

At the instant that she utters “and it is done” the transmutation takes place, she said, and “the computer automatically erases” the garbage that has been stored for ... who knows for how long?

The great thing about the system, she said, is that it is “simple, workable and infallible ... and anybody can do it, from the very young to the very old.” It is, she said, “difficult for a lot of intellectuals to comprehend” because it’s so simple, but it really is infallible- Didn’t I have some problem that I’d like for her to work on?

Well, how in heaven’s name was I going to write anything from this interview? People would think I was crazy — and I wouldn’t blame them. But, OK, Mornah, anything to go along with the program. Things have not been too good with my older son, Jay, since my divorce — and things certainly have been sour with my former wife. How about it, Mornah?

“Divine Creator, father, mother, son, as one ... If I, my family, relatives and ancestors have offended.”

Not long after that the interview ended, and I forgot about it. After all, I had a plane to catch to North Carolina, where the lawyers were tying up a final piece of business left over from the divorce.

Jay is 22, and last winter, when I had seen him for the first time in three years, he kept at arm's length, told me that he never could regard me as his father, that we perhaps could be friends — but not very close friends, because we didn't have much in common.

The other night we'd finished dinner in a restaurant — he and I and my younger son, Grant. After Grant had driven off to go back to his college campus apartment, Jay and I climbed into my rental car and started to leave the parking lot. That's when Jay turned down the volume on the radio and told me that he now felt differently toward me.

"I know you love me," he said. "And I really need that. I want you to know how much I respect you, how much I admire the person you have become."

The next day, I met with my former wife and, after the lawyers had departed, she told me that she wasn't bitter any more, that what happened probably had been for the best and that both of us probably had grown as a result of it.

Each of the conversations immediately struck me as drastic reversals from previously staked-out positions. It was strange, I thought, that they should take place within 24 hours.

It wasn't until I had returned to Philadelphia and was shuffling through my backlog of work that I ran across the notes from my interview with Mornah Simeona, the kahuna.

Mornah, you didn't ... did you?