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Ray

Re: DIE & OLA: Two Deep Cultures in Hawai`i

Aloha Ray:

This is a short note to follow on our earlier discussions, both at the Daihonzan Chozen-ji and at the Aloha Tower, on the underlying currents taking place in our Hawai`i today.

The real conflicts, contests and controversies in Hawai`i are not between our multiplicity of races, between the rich and the poor, the Republicans and the Democrats, the city and the country folks, the highly educated and the poorly educated, or the supporters of one form or another of "Hawaiian sovereignty". They are instead between the deep cultures of our people now living in Hawai`i.

Why "deep cultures?" Because these are cultures or patterns of living found below the surface of our society, in the depth of the subconscious of our people, unspecified yet forming what we accept as normal and natural. Deep cultures are expressed by people everywhere. It can be found in the formal treatment of the environment, in the philosophy and practice of education, even in the treatment of health and healing, in the ways we eat, talk with one another, and handle personal relationships. It's not the "Hawaiian culture" with its hula dancing and its ukulele, steel guitar and slack key playing, or the "Haole

culture" of cocktail parties and operas and waltzing the night away. Those surface cultures along with the local Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, Filipino, Samoan, Korean cultures, etc. have become integrated into the deep cultures in Hawai`i.

Let's examine two primary deep cultures in Hawai`i. The first is Haole deep culture. (Remember, I'm not talking about a "race" of a person. For those unable to separate the racist tinge to the term Haole, they can call it Occident instead.) This is the deep culture whose roots reach into North America and into Europe. The three pillars of that deep culture is founded upon concepts of Domination, Individualism and Exclusion, easily remembered by the acronym DIE. In Hawai`i, that deep culture is easily found in the formal/legal systems of the society.

We could examine this DIE culture by an exploration in Hawaii's system of social control - the judiciary. There we have a system of controlling societies conduct, divided generally into two areas, the civil and the criminal proceedings. Both are developed around clear concepts of domination, individualism and exclusion. The battle fields are the courts, the battles are the trials, and the victor wins a judgment. Domination is the name of the game. The interest addressed are the individuals, the parties to the litigation. There are exceptions, but generally, not at the trial level. On appeal the appellate court may peek into broader questions of societal good. But even here, such courts are usually limited to a very individualistic approach to rights and the law.

The American "Bill of Rights" is another reflection on the heavy emphasis on individualism and a battle over who should dominate, as between government authority and individual freedom.

If we examined the way we do business in the formal Hawai`i system, we find the very language of business being those of DIE. We hear of one or another dominating the market, beating the competitor, and developing a business atmosphere of "us" or the "company" as opposed to the competition.

In our schools and universities, we could also find a multitude of conduct reflecting the DIE deep culture.

There is also "Hawaiian" deep culture with its three pillars of `Olu`olu, Lokahi, and Aloha, easily remembered by the acronym OLA¹. Rather than Domination, `Olu`olu means compatibility, creating a relationship of comfort or comfortableness, of working with one another with a high degree of respect and trust, even though the other "side" may be a competitor. Rather than Individualism, Lokahi stands for the collective effort, many hands working together (Laulima) to reach a common goal. Rather than Exclusion, Aloha instead calls for a continuing inclusiveness nature of society, where there is a constant attempt to bring into the fold of one's life, people or things that may appear different, unusual, or new.

We can see the practice of OLA in the way we work with one another in the informal system, how we try to avoid confronting situations, how we try to ease around direct conflicts, how we try to create comfortable relationships with one another, even though the other may be a business, political, or social competitor. In business, we try to look out for the other guy as well, to be sure that we don't drive the competition out of the market, to care about the difficulties they are having and if possible, to lend a hand. In politics, we try to highlight our positive positions more than demeaning the other position or personalities who support them. We tend to hedge when speaking of ourselves and our "personal accomplishments". (We make bad politicians in that sense.) In social life, we try to be pleasing, even to those we are not in harmony with. (First, we try avoidance.) In place of domination, we have `olu`olu.

When we practice OLA, we experience the concept of lokahi. We find that we enjoy joint efforts, like working together for friend's party, or a community campaign, or a class project. We tend to be more sharing and actually enjoy the act of giving, and in the giving, forming relationship. We become concerned about the group, the team, the family, the `ohana, the

¹ OLA in the Hawaiian language means life or health.

broad society. We remove ourselves from the individual standing alone and see ourselves as part of collectives.

When we practice OLA, we experience that inclusive aspect of Aloha. We tend to bring into our "circles" as much as we can, always trying to accommodate and finding a space or a place for someone else, something else, a new idea or a whole philosophy. We accept paradox and remain comfortable, usually paying no attention to the fact that in another mind set, they would appear contradictory.

The ways we drive our automobile, how we eat, talk with one another, treat our spouse and children, cook, slaughter animals, fish . . . all of those various activities are expressions of our deep cultures imbedded in our being.

Hawai`i's deep cultures are more than just interesting possibilities for anthropological debates or points of curiosities for water-fountain chats. The deep cultures of our society actually operate as the guiding force for the direction of our future. Let's take, for example, the question of Hawaii's environmental policy. If those who make decisions over such a policy follow a Haole deep cultural concept, the environment will be treated from a "domination, fragmentation" approach. Man has the right, (some would even argue, the responsibility) to conquer, dominate and subdue the environment. The value of the forests is to be measured only in terms of its utility to the human population. Likewise, the ocean, the streams, the sky, the plants and animals, the winds, etc. Alterations to the natural elements are accomplished without any second thought, the first and only thought being, the "good" of man (usually measured in the singular sense and by the male gender.)

A Hawaiian deep cultural concept would approach the environment from a kinship and a unification approach. The `āina and the kai, the land

² There's a story that when the Dalai Lama saw the game of American volleyball being played on American television, he broke down in tears. In Tibet, the game is played with both sides trying to keep the ball in the air for as long as possible and he could not understand the idea behind the American style of trying to have the opposing team fail to maintain the ball in flight.

and the ocean would be treated as ohana, family. The cutting down of plants or the fishing in the ocean, may or may not incorporate ceremony, but in the doing, there is certainly a sense of reverence, of operating within and of performing a special, sacred task. The operator of a tool uses it and applies it to the environment by creating within him/her self, a relationship. He feels the mood and the spirit of the tractor, he can tell when he is pushing it too hard, or not enough. He feels the contours of the earth and the spirit within those contours. He may not be able to explain it, but those feelings are there deep inside.

I don't mean to write a book and apologize for being more exhaustive than I had originally intended to. I would be very interested in hearing from others on these concepts of deep cultures and identifying different ways of expressing them in Hawai`i, such as how we practice healing, how we treat different religions and belief systems or the implications on an economic system. I look forward to talking with you again.

Aloha `āina,

Pōkā Laenui
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cc: Keiko Tokunaga, Institute of Zen Studies