A cousin wrote to me with a question: Are we related to any ali`i?

Here is my response:

We are ali`i. We are akua. We all have the potentiality to be what we aspire to be. Our greatest failing is when we compare ourselves to others.

What, for you, is an ali`i? What are the traits of an ali`i?

An ali`i can be defined by ancestry or blood line. An ali`I can be defined by how one carries himself/herself. An ali`I can be defined by the wisdom and knowledge possessed and used. An ali`I can be defined as one touched by the ancestor spirits and aumakua/akua. These definitions change according to the times and circumstances.

By blood line, we come from the line of Liloa through his son Umi from whom Kamehameha (Paea) descends and whose daughter of his first wife comes. These are the lines of the family line from Kohala. I am tied into that specific family through the Lincoln-Bell family line whose daughter, Hannah Lincoln married to Alexander Burgess and bore my father among several other children. The other line where I can not effectively trace is the line of Poka who descends from people of Kohala as well from whom you also descend.

Perhaps not by blood line, but from all indications, Poka certainly carried herself as an ali`i. She was a tall, straight posture, and noble woman, very intelligent, able to quickly take up the modern technology of reading and writing and able to transact affairs in land very early and adeptly. She married Laenui who comes from kona and Laenui hanai or adopted in the Hawaiian style, Poka’s child from Alexander Burgess, her son who is the forefather of our Burgess line.

I have not been able to obtain Laenui’s genealogical line but he is related to others from the Kailua Kona area who also owned property directly above Kailua town. Someday, go to Ahu`ena heiau at the residence and dying site of Kamehameha and look upward on the hillside of Hualailai and you will see Kamehameha’s lo`I kalo field. This is described in a plaque at the Ahu`ena heiau. It is a general area, and in that same vicinity is Keopu II, the site where Laenui and his brother received large tracks of land out of the Mahele. This is for me indication of their coming from ali`i line.

But another way of identifying an ali`I is a more modern way of recognizing the dignity in a person. A modern greeting to an assembly is, `Ano `ai me ke aloha e na hulu manu like `ole. Translated, greetings to you birds of many feathers. In the Hawaiian cultural practice, birds’ feathers carried strong mana and when a cape or cloak was made from such feathers, they carried special mana. Each class of ali`i were entitled to wear a particular bird’s feathers. But those days have passed. Today, the greeting is one of recognizing the “ali`i” in all those who are gathered, wearing the feathers of many different birds. In this way, the speaker elevates the audience to the place of ali`i and in so doing, him/her self to that level as well. What follows should be a kukakuka, a discussion at a serious level of values, morals, and ideas and not merely chatter or gossip.

Look around you and at your ancestors. Who were they? They were all proud, industrious, very intelligent, honorable people. Where did those traits come from? They came from the hands which cradled them and brought them up to be who they were. Some of our ancestors fell off the wagon, largely due to alcohol, and even some turned out to be rotten scoundrels. But those stains are not transferrable to us if we don’t want to take them up. In other words, we have choice and that makes us closer to being akua because we share the ability of choice! Through that choice, we can create our futures. Wow, we are gods! Even in Christianity, Jesus is found saying, “Is it not written, ye are all gods?”

And yet, we must be humble, for the Buddha says, even gods need to be enlightened.

I have rambled too far away from your original question, but because of the seriousness of the question, I did not want to treat it flippantly. These are only my thoughts (opinions) which you can take and leave back as it fits your being.

Aloha `ohana.

Poka Laenui