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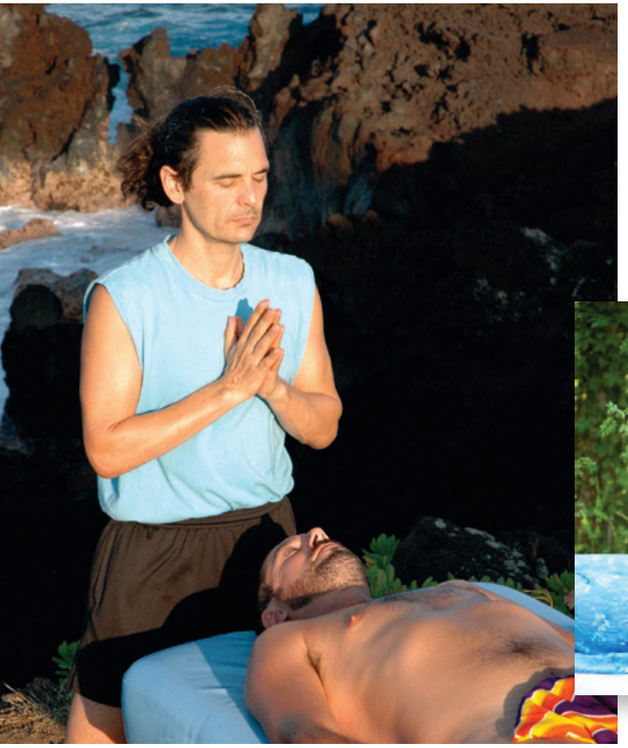
## The Art of Lomilomi

# Hawaiian Healing

by Phyllis Hanlon

Dane Kaohelani Silva thought he was meant to be an engineer, until one night more than a quarter century ago. While studying for college, he heard a young woman cry out for help. When he located the woman, he touched her hand and she immediately calmed down. Unbeknownst to Silva, the woman was about to attempt suicide. This experience made Silva realize he was destined to follow a different career path, one that evoked his traditional Hawaiian healing knowledge. Like many native Hawaiian people, Silva first learned *lomilomi* from his father and grandmother. Today, Silva is a lomilomi instructor and practitioner.



COURTESY OF SACRED LOMI

Lomilomi is the ancient Hawaiian system of healing, traditionally passed down from one generation to the next. Each Hawaiian family embraced its own healing system rooted in prayer, according to lomilomi instructor Donna Jason, who co-founded Sacred Lomi with Tom Cochran to teach lomilomi through workshops and retreats. The arrival of Captain Cook to Hawaii in 1778, which heralded a wave of European exploration and exploitation many Hawaiians would say has never ceased, nearly obliterated this sacred system.

"At that time, healing with prayer was outlawed, [but prayer] was the whole fundamental premise of how the people worked," Jason says. "They couldn't separate prayer from their [healing system]."

Fortunately, some fundamental lomilomi practices survived and are being kept alive.

## Practitioner preparation

"The foremost preparation is, the heart and mind must be as one with *Ke Akua* [the creator]," says Haunani Hopkins, president of the Hawaiian Lomilomi Association (www.hawaiilomilomi.com). "The potential lomilomi practitioner does not choose this path. Ke Akua chooses the practitioner.

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"Hawaiians have always had a deep connection with God and trust God as the source for wisdom, and there is a strict protocol and a deep trust and connection to the source for wisdom in all of the healing practices," she adds.

According to Hopkins, a practitioner must develop a spiritual ear. She says, "This involves praying and listening for guidance and wisdom from the higher power while you are working on a [client], for a greater insight on the deeper problems that most likely are stemming from the spiritual self."

The journey to becoming a lomilomi practitioner is rooted in forgiveness of self and others, says Gloria Coppola, a lomilomi practitioner and teacher in Osprey, Florida. "When we're a clear conduit and opened up, our intuition heightens and the gifts flow," she says. "The mind and the body work together."

"Hawaiian healing is not just about bodywork," Coppola adds. "It involves living your life in *pono*, everything in harmony."

## A lomilomi session

Lomilomi sessions usually begin and end with prayer; some practitioners also chant. A session might then commence with massage, a steam bath, salt scrub or herbal coaching, Coppola says.

A lomilomi session might also involve a combination of energetic techniques, approaches practiced traditionally by Hawaiians and called something else today—for example, polarity therapy or craniosacral therapy. In some cases, practitioners use gentle, rocking motions, shaking or vibration to loosen muscles, or access acupressure points to create more space in the body.

While strokes may incorporate what looks like Swedish massage, forearms are used more than hands. No matter the type of stroke, practitioners incorporate breath throughout a lomilomi session to keep energy flowing in both themselves and their clients.

"Some [practitioners] might do stretching, while others might heal with shells," Coppola says. "Lomilomi is a lifestyle. You have to have constant gratitude, patience and harmony, and be a part of *ohana*."

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## One fundamental Hawaiian principle is all beings have value and are to be honored.

It is important for lomilomi practitioners to maintain their equilibrium, so Cochran and Jason make a practice of working on each other at least once a month.

"This resets our awareness of whether we are in alignment with our own life and body. We let go of what's not true," Jason explains. "The best way to learn lomilomi is to participate [in receiving it]."

Engaging in Hawaiian healing is tantamount to entering a temple, says Cochran.

### Hawaiian Healing & Spiritual Terms

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| 'Ai pono | Eating well |
| Aloha | A combination of *alo* (life) and *ha* (breath) given by the creator |
| Ho'oikaika | Strengthening the body |
| Ho'omaha | Rest |
| Ho'omanawanui | Patience |
| Ho'oponopono | Making things right with friends and associates through forgiveness and self-responsibility |
| Huna | The secret wisdom hidden within each of us; we are given our *huna* at birth, and need to discover it in order to fulfill our life purpose |
| Impono | Seeking the right wisdom |
| Inu wai | Drinking water |
| Kahuna | Keeper of knowledge |
| Kaiaulu | Community care |
| Ke Akua | Higher power; creator; source |
| Kokua | Caring for each another |
| Kumu | Teacher |
| La'au Lapa'au | Hawaiian medicine |
| Lokahi | Balance and harmony |
| Lomilomi | To knead, press and squeeze |
| Mele | Chant and music |
| Nana I ke kumu | Look to the source; trust in God |
| 'Ohana | Family; mankind; community |
| 'Ohana nui | Big or extended family, including friends |
| Pule | Prayer |

—Sources: Haunani Hopkins and Gloria Coppola

"What we have found is when an individual realizes the sacredness of their own being and connects with their soul's truth, which holds their core values, they learn to live in deeper reverence and integrity because they want to be true to their own soul," he says. "This work can access a realm beyond linear time."

One fundamental Hawaiian principle is all beings have value and are to be honored, Cochran says. "The more one learns to value themselves, the more capable they are of valuing all beings," he adds.

Hopkins says lomilomi practitioners need to embrace humility and surrender control. "The true healers never boast of their own ability to heal," she says. "They give the honor to a higher power."

### Ancient and modern

Silva says the intake process combined with initial touch help lomilomi practitioners identify imbalances in clients.

"The more you know about the body, the better you are able to treat the person," he says. "Although intuition is powerful, you should look and see, listen, be quiet, smell, ask questions and get a history."

Practitioners need to remain open to all possible means of addressing both physical and emotional issues in their clients, including referring to other health care professionals, Silva adds.

"It's important to learn the extent of a [client's] problem and then do everything you can to help," he says. "The first treatment may not be effective, so you just try something else.

"A successful healer doesn't go into an initial session with preconceived ideas," Silva adds. "There may be a deep emotional blockage. You might involve the [client] and [the client's] whole family in therapy. It could become an intergenerational experience."

When he shifted his focus from engineering to Hawaiian healing, Silva continued his studies in a number of health disciplines and became a health educator, herbalist, chiropractor and practitioner of traditional Hawaiian, Chinese and Tibetan medicines, with a foundation in bioscience.

### Client-driven practice

Regardless of technique, lomilomi practitioners always embrace the philosophy of creating a sacred space for clients, based on their clients' intent for the experience.

"It seems some of us [practitioners] go through life-changing experiences for a reason," Hopkins says. "The reason is to become more compassionate for other people and their issues."

According to Jason, herbs, bodywork, sticks, stones and prayers are external actions. "The intention behind the action is holding sacred space and honoring the client," she says.

Cochran adds, "You need to go inward and feel who the client is inside. You need to find a way to invite the person in and find out what the person needs from you. You are not trying to make something happen at this moment."

One thing that differentiates the wise healer from the novice is awareness and understanding of the client's culture, Silva says.

"It's important for those with a Western perspective to increase their cultural awareness and competency," he says. "If you want to treat Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese or Filipino [clients], you have to learn their culture. You have to understand the [client]." Nonjudgmental evaluation and understanding will help determine assessment, treatment and an ongoing care plan, Silva explains.

### Peel away layers

Anyone desiring to remain true to traditional methods of lomilomi should seek a teacher who has been approved by the Hawaiian Lomilomi Association's Kupuna Council, Hopkins says, because some people have capitalized on lomilomi's popularity and diluted its potency.

Lomilomi was not taught to non-Hawaiians until Auntie Margaret Kalehuamakanoelu'ulu'uonāpali Machado (1916–2009) opened a lomilomi school in the early 1970s, according to her obituary in *The Honolulu Advertiser* newspaper.

"Auntie Margaret used to tell her *haumana*—students—that lomilomi was 'touching the body with a loving touch,' encouraging them that 'if your hands are gentle and loving, your [client] will feel the sincerity of your heart and the love of God will flow through you,'" her daughter Nerita Machado said in the obituary.

When teaching non-Hawaiians the art of lomilomi, Silva instructs them to put all their knowledge on hold while they study lomilomi, so their knowledge does not block transmission of wisdom.

"Don't forget what you know—just put it aside for the purpose of learning," he says. "The healing comes through the hands. When you put your hands on someone, you can tell what is happening."

Cochran says Western practitioners must experience the work to learn it.

"Up until quite recently, the Hawaiian culture was an oral tradition, which means the wisdom was passed down from individual to individual through connection and experience," he says. "The work was embodied rather than memorized. This is how [Jason and I] teach and how we recommend learning."

By receiving, practicing and discovering lomilomi, students peel away layers of perception and protection that block true presence and authenticity, Cochran adds.

"This process cultivates an inner environment where students can access higher wisdom and guidance, heal emotional and ancestral patterns and be effective guardians of their innate gifts," he continues. "In turn, students learn to hold sacred space for their clients."

Phyllis Hanlon is a freelance writer. Her specialty areas include health and medicine, religion, education and business. She regularly delights in the joys of massage, and has written many articles for *MASSAGE Magazine*, including "Beyond Basic Basalt: New Tools Build on Stones' Success" (November 2013) and "Hands-Free Massage: Save Your Body and Your Career" (February).