Hawaiian Perspectives on The Matrix of the Soul


As an anthropologist who has been investigating the early stages of human evolution in Africa for more than 35 years, I suppose it was inevitable that my curiosity would draw me toward the evolution of human consciousness.

A series of spontaneous altered states that I experienced in Ethiopia in the early 1970s opened many doors, and the subsequent continuum of visionary experiences that began in Hawai‘i in the 1980s and are recorded in my autobiographical Spiritwalker trilogy opened them even wider. These experiences and the books that followed book drew me into connection with several Hawaiian kahuna elders, and in the process, I stumbled across a piece of treasure buried within the indigenous world—a chunk of knowledge about the nature of the human soul. I bring this information forward as I believe it will be of use to those of us who are shamanic practitioners involved with soul retrieval work... but first a little background.

The Animist Perspective

One of the first anthropologists to turn a sensitive scientific eye toward the phenomenon of spirituality among the indigenous peoples was an Englishman named Edward B. Tylor. In 1871, he produced a book titled Primitive Culture in which he suggested that the foundation for religious awareness was to be found in the concept of the soul.

Tylor perceived the soul as a personal, supernatural essence that differs from the physical body. He proposed that the concept of the soul must have originated from tribal peoples' awareness of the difference between being alive and being dead (in which the physical body is still present but something has departed), or between being awake and being asleep (in which the body is there, but an aspect of ourselves leaves and has dream encounters in another world.)

Tylor called the belief in the existence of the soul animism, and he proclaimed that traditional, tribal cultures extend this concept not only to human beings, but also to animals and plants, and even to inanimate things like rocks and rainbows, mountains and rivers, clouds and storms, planets and stars.

The doctrine of animism asserts that everything in existence is invested with its own personal supernatural essence or soul, suggesting that everything everywhere is conscious and aware (and thus alive) at least to some degree. Having lived and worked for much of my life among traditional tribal peoples who are animists, I know this to be true.

The Three Principias
The quest to understand the nature of the soul (and by association the nature of the self) lies right at the heart of the Great Mystery of existence. The Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras was one of the first in the Western tradition to record his thoughts on the subject, and in the 6th Century BC, he made the observation that each human being is composed of three principle aspects: the physical (body), the mental (mind or psyche), and the spiritual (immortal spirit aspect).

Pythagoras' insights on these three *principias* have influenced the words and thoughts of countless philosophers, spiritual seekers, and healers across the ages, from Plato to Paracelsus, and it could be said that they find expression in our own time as Sigmund Freud's Id, Ego, and Super-ego, and as Carl Gustav Jung's Subconscious, Conscious, and Super-conscious.

The awareness of this triune nature of the self may actually have existed long before Pythagoras however, because we find it among the tribal peoples as well. And it is precisely here that we find something truly interesting. Among many of the traditional groups, there exists the clear understanding that we possess not one, but three distinct souls.

**The Three Souls**

The Lakota Sioux of the Plains Indian cultures of North America, for example, distinguish between a physical soul, *woniya*, a cognitive soul, *nagi*, and a divine spiritual soul, *nagila*. And the Inuit (Eskimo), who traditionally lived as hunters in the circumpolar regions of North America and Greenland, also proclaim that we have three souls—a breath soul that we receive at birth, *anerneq*, a name soul that is given to us after birth, *ateq*, and an immortal, spiritual soul, *tarneq*, that is the true essence of who and what we are. Practitioners of Vodou in the Caribbean understand that we have three souls—the *gros bon ange*, the *ti bon ange*, and the *z'etoile*, and the anthropologist Michael Harner told me years ago that the Shuar (Jivaro) of the Upper Amazon perceive us as having three souls as well.

How many of the indigenous cultures once possessed this comprehension, and to what degree, is not known with certainty. After more than 200 years of assimilationist practices inflicted upon them by church and state alike, much has been lost. The examples just given, however, suggest that awareness of the three souls most likely had its beginnings among the hunting and gathering peoples of antiquity, perhaps tens of thousands of years ago.

And just why would our stone-age ancestors be concerned with the nature of the soul? Because in order to experience authentic initiation, you have to know who you are.

My own shamanic initiation that occurred in Hawai‘i drew me inevitably toward the ordinarily hidden teachings of the *kahuna* mystics. And there, I found this same realization of the existence of the three souls.

**Hawaiian Perspectives**

One of the early outsiders to investigate the spiritual wisdom of the Hawaiian *kahunans* was Max Freedom Long (1890-1971), a schoolteacher who lived in the islands from 1917 to 1931. His ethnographic research, recorded in his books and papers on Huna psychology and religion, have found their way into many published works. It was Long who chose the word *huna* as the name for the Hawaiian spiritual traditions, referring as it does to something hidden or concealed.
Many years ago, I used the word **huna** in conversation with a Hawaiian **kahuna** elder, Kahu Nelita Anderson. She politely waited for me to finish, and then gently corrected me, indicating that the Hawaiian spiritual tradition was not called Huna. "When you hear or see the word **huna** with relation to the Hawaiian religion," she proclaimed with her considerable authority, "you are dealing with an outsider-with someone who has limited knowledge and virtually no awareness of the deep traditions of the **kahuna** mystics." When I asked Kahu Nelita what word was used, she replied "We never had a word for it, but if one were to be used, the term **ho'omana** would be appropriate."

**Mana** is the Polynesian/Melanesian word for power or energy as well as status. When you put the prefix **ho'o** in front of it, the noun becomes a verb, and the word **ho'omana** then means 'to empower' or 'to place in authority.' This term affirms the indigenous perception of the relationship between knowledge and power. It also reveals that authentic spiritual wisdom is a fluid process (a verb) that shifts and changes as it moves across time, not a set of rules or scriptures (a noun) that is fixed and immutable (i.e. the Sutras, the Talmud, the Bible, the Ku'ran, the Vedas, the Upanishads, etc).

The knowledge of the three souls is one of the foundation stones for the Polynesian spiritual traditions. The Hawaiian **kahunos** acknowledged that each human possesses a lower soul (**unihipili**) associated with the physical body, a middle soul (**uhane**) identified with the mental or conscious egoic mind, and a higher soul ('
**aumakua**) which represents our personal supernatural-our higher self or oversoul.

In life, these "three souls" form a unity within and around us that we think of as "the self," yet each is distinguished by its vibrational frequency, as well as by its functions. Correct relationship between them is obviously essential. When there is harmony within and between them, everything works well. When there is discord, there are problems to overcome and surpass. When there is ease within and between them, we are in good health; when there is dis-ease, we experience illness.

These insights reveal that the singularity that we think of as our self is really a mosaic composed of a personal soul cluster. The word **soul** is used here with deliberation rather than **self**, for each soul aspect is a part of the same totality and each ultimately originates from the same source. But as we shall see, they exist in very different states of quality.

Pythagoras would have found this perspective more than interesting when considered in relation to the Greek word **psyche**. In the historical perspective, the Greeks considered the psyche to be the organ of both thought and emotion. From the Hawaiian perspective, however, these two quite different functions are products of two quite separate souls.

### The Oversoul

The Hawaiian word for the higher, immortal, spiritual aspect of the self is **'aumakua**, a term that might be translated as "utterly trustworthy ancestral spirit." It could also be interpreted as "the spirit that hovers over me," revealing why so many perceive it as a benevolent winged being or guardian angel. It can also be considered as 'our ancestor' as the word **'makua**' means parent, and **'au**' means time... our parent in time. It is variously known in the West as the higher self, the god self, the angelic self, the overself, or simply as the oversoul.

Occasionally, individuals who have a spontaneous mystical experience or lucid dream will find themselves in
the presence of an immensely powerful and beneficent god-like being. The average person usually interprets this event, and attendant conversation, as a visit from a deity, a mythic spiritual hero, or even 'God,' and of course, we must always acknowledge the possibility that this may be so. But most often, the supra-human visitor and source of that uncommon dialogue is that person's own god-self, their oversoul.

The kahunas understand that our oversoul is always in contact with us, throughout every moment of our life. The ease with which this connection may be achieved reveals that when we are embodied here on Earth, the spirit world is not in some faraway, remote location. The invisible realms are all around us, all the time, and our oversoul can be accessed right here, right now, once we know how.

The kahuna perspective reveals that our oversoul is in constant attendance, carefully watching everything we do, listening with concern to every word and thought, monitoring every choice and decision, silently applauding when we succeed, silently feeling concern when we fail. It never interferes with our life, nor does it ever tell us what to do. This is because the power of individual choice and free will is always honored.

Our oversoul contains within itself all the experiences garnered in our past lives, and thus it possesses all the knowledge of which we ever might have need during our lifetime. It communicates best with us through the medium of inspiration, sending us ideas and hunches, dreams and visions, revealing it to be the source of our intuition.

Through providing its embodiment (us) with intuitive guidance, our personal oversoul serves as our primary spirit teacher. Often when we sit in silence in meditation, a feeling of tranquility may begin to pervade us, filling us with a sense of utter peace. We may notice that if we consider some problem at such moments, the answer to the dilemma usually appears in our mind.

Our oversoul is the source of that feeling of tranquility as well as the origin of the information that arrives in our conscious awareness in response to need. This is why my great Hawaiian friend, the kahuna nui Hale Kealohalani Makua, was found of saying "You will never find a better teacher than yourself."

From the kahuna perspective, the oversoul is also the ultimate source of who and what we are, serving as our personal creator. In this capacity, it is the immortal soul-aspect that resides always in the Upper Worlds, the one that divides itself, sending in an energetic hologram of its essence, a seed of light that takes up residence within our body at the beginning of each new life cycle. This essence contains and reflects the totality of the character that we have developed across countless lives.

The divine breath (of life) that the Hawaiians call the Ha, is the vehicle through which this spiritual transfer occurs. When we are born, we receive our Ha with our first breath, and it remains with us throughout life until we release it with our last.

It is the divine breath that conveys our immortal soul's seed into our new body at life's inception and then carries it back to its oversoul source at life's end—a reincarnational insight that is clearly reflected in the Judeo-Christian traditions that proclaim with authority that God breathes life into form. In Latin, the word for breath is the same as the word for spirit—spiritus. In Hebrew, the word for spirit and breath is also the same—ruach.

For the kahuna, however, it is not some monotheistic, authoritarian, creator-god that breathes life into us, listens to our prayers, and sends occasional messengers to Earth who usually get treated badly. It is our own personal god-self—our oversoul, our 'aumakua—our own immortal spirit soul, who gives us our breath of life,
and the messenger is us.

**The Body Soul**

When the incoming oversoul essence enters a new body at the beginning of life, it encounters a distinct and separate 'body soul' that is already in residence--a composite holographic field derived from both the mother and the father. This body soul (*unihipili* in Hawaiian) is carried by the energetic matrix around and within which the physical body has taken form in the womb of the mother.

On the biological level, when the two gametes, the egg and the sperm, come together and fertilization occurs, this results in a new genetic pattern to which both mother and father contribute. The same holds true at the spiritual-energetic level. The energy of the mother and that of the father are associated with the gametes, and when they merge, they produce a new energetic mosaic that carries ancestral imprints derived from both family lineages.

The first task of the incoming oversoul essence is to achieve a successful meld with the matrix of the body soul. Balance is achieved when this is accomplished, and the new personality of the individual then begins to grow, manifesting quirks reminiscent of both motherly and fatherly ancestors. There are, as well, idiosyncrasies derived from our own personal ancestors--our past selves in former lifetime existing as soul memories recorded within the seed essence derived from our oversoul. The merging of these three ancestral lineages--personal, maternal, and paternal--creates a unique form to our personality for each lifetime.

The body soul is partially analogous to the unconscious or subconscious mind in Western psychology. From the *kahuna* perspective, this self-aspect performs much like a faithful servant in that it does what it is told. In the West, an appropriate analogue might be the inner hard drive of a computer, and this becomes quite obvious as we review how the body soul functions.

For example, the entire operation of the physical body is under the direct control of the body soul. Our hearts continue to beat and we continue to breathe without our having to think about them because our body soul is responsible for these functions. These physiological processes include, by association, our biological drives (evolutionary software) and our innate, instinctual impulses (ancestral imprints).

As our personal inner hard drive, one of the body soul's primary functions is memory. In this capacity, it serves as the repository from which all personal records of our life experiences can be accessed. These include, by association, all our habitual and learned behavior (programming.)

The body soul is also the source of our emotions and feelings, revealing why it is often referenced as the emotional body. It is through emotional response to our life experiences that the body soul communicates with our composite soul cluster/self, telling 'us' what it likes, as well as what it dislikes. In this sense, the body soul will never lie to you. It's that 'gut-feeling' that will always tell you how it feels--about this family member or that friend, about this job or that life opportunity.

The body soul actively and continually observes the outer world in which we live, as well as the inner worlds in which we think, feel, and dream. As the body's mind, it uses its five senses to gather information, revealing it to be our perceiver, as well as the interface between our 'self' and reality-at-large--both inner and outer.

As that interface, the body soul functions as the sender and receiver of all psychic experience as well as
shamanic experience since it is also the self-aspect through which connection with the spirit worlds is achieved. That inner portal through which our spiritual helpers and teachers can be accessed in the subtle realms is located within it, much like a modem built into a computer. It is through the body soul that we achieve connection with all that exists beyond the self, including, of course, our immortal self aspect—our oversoul.

The body soul can reason, reaching literal, deductive conclusions that are based on direct experience. These may be logical or illogical... but you only put your finger in a candle flame once. The body soul remembers what works, as well as what hurts, and in this sense, it is programmed to respond in a way that enhances survival. It is in this manner that we can grow, acquire new skills, and become more than we were.

With relation to healing, the body soul is the self-aspect that is programmed to repair the physical body when we suffer a wound or become ill, revealing it to be our inner healer. It restores us by reading the genetic code recorded on the molecular template of our DNA, and by following the "energetic blueprint" carried by the matrix within and around which the physical body is formed.

These two patterns, biological and energetic, are in relationship. They come to reflect each other, and together, they create the overall personal pattern that is essential to the maintenance and restoration of the physical body. This pattern is necessary because the body soul is not creative, and it needs this blueprint to follow in making repairs. This is why the indigenous peoples know that all illness begins with distortions of our energetic aspect. Any strongly-held negative emotion or feelings, or memories of extreme trauma will distort the pattern.

Finally, like a good computer (or faithful servant), the body soul obeys orders. It does what it is told to do, and it functions best when it is given clear directives by the middle self or mental soul, the aspect that Western people often call the ego.

**The Mental Soul**

Between the oversoul seed-essence and the bodily soul, a third self-aspect takes form in response to our life as we live it. This is the middle self or mental soul (*uhane* in Hawaiian), the intellectual aspect of us that thinks, analyzes, integrates information, and makes decisions.

This is the 'Ego' as described by Freud, and the 'Conscious Mind' of Jung. It functions as our overall chief executive, our inner CEO, and as such, it is the source of our will forces and our intentionality. This is our rational mind that develops during childhood and then possesses full reasoning powers during adulthood.

It is also the source of our creative imagination and our intentionality through which it can produce/intend/create new ideas and thoughtforms of things or goals that it wishes to experience or achieve. Considered together, these functions reveal the mental soul to be our creative, intellectual, rational decision-maker and inner director—a self-aspect that evolves and changes as we grow in knowledge and experience throughout our life.

How well the mental soul directs depends on the beliefs it has accepted as so. If the mental soul believes itself to be powerless, one’s life may be experienced in the role of victim. However, if it believes itself to be powerful, we will have a quite different life. When beliefs about reality at large are accepted as unalterable facts, then the mental soul cannot categorize them as belief systems and may be quite ineffective when
confronted by the belief's effects.

For example, when a person believes they have an incurable illness, they may actually succumb to their belief rather than to the disease. It was Paracelsus, the Renaissance physician and alchemist, who said: "The fear of disease is more dangerous than the disease itself." The mental soul is the chooser, however, and it can decide whether to respond to the negative emotions, whether to follow them through, or whether to reject them. In this sense, it is obvious that a good working relationship between the middle mental soul and the lower body soul is essential. And as many mainstream philosophers have observed, there is currently a major split in the Western world between the higher mind (mental soul) and the body (body soul).

The mental soul is the master; the body soul is the servant. As our inner chief, the mental soul is motivated by order and tries to steer us successfully through the hazards of everyday life. It accomplishes its goals through directing the activities of the body soul that serves as its enabler. The body soul thus responds to the directives of the mental soul. And with luck, things work out.

The Self

In summary, what we think of as our "self" is actually a composite, a matrix, a personal soul cluster composed of three functionally distinct soul aspects.

On the physical plane of existence, we perceive through our body’s senses, conditioned by our anticipation of the future as well as our memories of the past. Through the vehicle of bodily consciousness, we experience the everyday world to which we respond with emotions and feelings. The body soul collectively expresses our personality and perceives subject and object as separate. It is motivated by pleasure, moving toward things, people, and experiences that it likes, and moving away from those that it doesn't. Like a good servant or personal computer, it follows the orders given to it by the mental soul.

The mental soul (or conscious mind) expresses the intellect and its higher aspirations. It is the source of our will forces and works through intelligence to create forms of expression on the physical and mental planes of existence. The conscious mind thinks in extended space and time, gaining knowledge, true individuality, and illumined understanding through its powers of discernment and discrimination. It recognizes the union of subject and object, rather than seeing them as separate, and it functions as the inner director and decision-maker, and as such, it is motivated by understanding and order.

Our oversoul is the spiritual source from which we emerge at birth and to which we return at death. This is the "god-self" who listens to our prayers and responds to our needs. It is the wise being who serves us as spirit teacher and advisor during life, and who communicates with us best through dreams, visions, ideas, and through the medium of intuition. This is our immortal self-aspect that provides us with access to the collective knowledge and experience of all our past lives, pooled into one holographic field. It is who and what we really are (there), continually growing, increasing and becoming more in response to the choices we make in our lives on the physical plane (here).

This is the self-aspect that my friend Frank DeMarco calls ‘the guys upstairs’, reflecting its true nature as a matrix or composite of all of our past lives/personalities through which we have become who and what we are now. This process of never-ending change began a very long time ago, and it will continue as we pass through life after life after life during our long journey across eternity.
Further Reading:

A partial list of important works on Hawaiian thought might include:

- Laura Kealoha Yardley, *The Heart of Huna* (Honolulu, HI: Advanced Neurodynamics, Inc., 1982);
- Samuel Manaiakalani Kamakau, *Ka Poʻe Kahiko: The People of Old* (Honolulu, HI: The Bishop Museum Press, 1991);
- Marth Beckwith, *Hawaiian Mythology* (Honolulu, HI: The University of Hawai‘i Press, 1970);
- Serge King, *Kahuna Healing* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1983);
- Rima Morrell, *The Sacred Power of Huna*;
- Hank Wesselman, Spiritwalker Trilogy- *Spiritwalker* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995);
- Hank Wesselman, *Visionseeker* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2001);

I am indebted to all these authors, from whom I have liberally borrowed concepts, percepts, and ideas, as well as ways of organizing this extraordinary materia.

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