

# The Bowl of Light: A Teaching Tale

by Pete Dalton

*He nanea no ka lawai'a kole.*  
It is interesting to fish for kole.  
(It is interesting to gather and tell stories)  
Hawaiian proverb

## Messages Through Metaphors

Cultures throughout the world each have their own unique teaching tales. These stories provide shared narratives which can entertain, fascinate, educate and share values from generation to generation. In modern times we still develop our own teaching tales through a wide range of media including books, film, photographs and audio.

Hawaiian tradition is rich in stories and legends including those of gods and goddesses, nature, ghosts and adventure. There was a strong tradition of oral teaching tales which were shared within family groups and through family lineages. These rich stories and their meanings have relevance for modern day living.

The Hawaiian language abounds with metaphor and *kaona* or deeper / hidden meaning within words and phrases. Metaphors provide an excellent way to share knowledge which speaks to our imagination and allows us to explore ideas in a different way than merely citing facts for our logical mind. Metaphors can captivate and inspire and convey complex ideas in a memorable and often magical way.

## The Bowl of Light

One such teaching tale is the Bowl of Light. This is found in the book *Tales from the Night Rainbow* by Koko Willis and Pali Jae Lee. The authors report that the Bowl of Light was from a tale told by their grandmother, Kaili'ohe Kame'ekua of Kamalo, Molokai, who died in 1931. Their family said they lived in Hawaii before the Tahitians arrived and that much of their ancestral knowledge was influenced by those people. The story provides a lovely example of a metaphor that was part of a particular family's oral tradition. The essential story is as follows:

*Each child born has at birth a Bowl of perfect Light. If he tends his Light it will grow in strength and he can do all things – swim with the shark, fly with the birds, know and understand all things. If, however, he becomes envious or jealous, he drops a stone into his Bowl of Light and some of the Light goes out. Light and the stone cannot hold the same space. If he continues to put stones in the Bowl of Light, the Light will go out and he will become a stone. A stone does not grow, nor does it move. If at any time he tires of being a stone, all he needs to do is turn the bowl upside down and the stones will fall away and the Light will grow once more.*

Variations of the Bowl of Light story are used today as a teaching tale for children and adults alike and its message has relevance for us all today. The symbol of the bowl of light can be used in physical rituals to explore the limitations we have and how we can commit to releasing them.

## Applying the Huna Principles

The seven principles of Huna were passed down as part of another Hawaiian family's oral tradition – the Kahili family of Kauai and these have been presented in a contemporary form by Serge Kahili King. The story of the Bowl of Light provides an illustration of these Huna principles in action as follows:

**Ike: Awareness**

The story teaches us to become aware of how the choices we make can affect us for better or worse. It is valuable to become aware of the extent that your own bowl is comprised of stones or light. Awareness provides the starting point for change

**Kala: Freedom**

We can limit and constrain ourselves to such a point that it is as though we stop growing, we get stuck. When we experience, and hang onto, emotions such as fear, anger and jealousy, it is like we are dropping another stone into our bowl which means we experience less light. We can also free ourselves from such limitations and flourish. We have the ability to release limitations.

**Makia: Focus**

We choose where to focus- either towards empowering feelings and behaviours or away from feelings and behaviours that disempower us. The choice is ours in any given moment.

**Manawa: Presence**

The light is always there, even if at times it seems to be fully obscured by stones. If we so choose, change can be quick and it is never too late to change. We can simply turn the bowl upside down and let go of all the stones and make room for the light.

**Aloha: Love**

Love and heart-centred practices increase our strength and well-being. To love is to be happy with – we experience light to the extent that we focus on *aloha* – light and stone cannot occupy the same space. To the extent that we have light in our bowl, we are connected to our true nature and spirit. We are all connected and our own individual light contributes to lighting the world for everyone.

**Mana: Power**

We have the power to make changes in our life for the better. It is up to us to take responsibility and be the authority in our own life.

**Pono: Effectiveness**

The tale is a metaphor for living effectively. It reminds us how we can be *pono* – in a state of harmony with oneself, others, nature and life itself.

We are truly blessed to have access to so many rich sources of metaphor which can provide guidance and inspiration throughout the adventure that we call life.

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Pete Dalton is an Alakai of Huna International living in the UK. He uses Huna for coaching and empowerment and produces the ***Huna Adventurer's Newsletter***. For more information and to sign up to the free newsletter visit: [www.urbanhuna.org](http://www.urbanhuna.org)