

On Taking Things Personally: A Huna Perspective

by Pete Dalton

He 'olina leo ka ke aloha.

A joyousness is in the voice of love.

(Love speaks in a gentle and joyous voice, not in harshness or gruffness).

Hawaiian Proverb



The Hawaiians have a particular type of instrument – the nose flute (*‘ohe hano ihu*), a bamboo instrument which is played using the breath from the nose. It is considered to be a symbol of blessing and a symbol of *aloha* as it is believed that the breath from the nose is purer than the breath from the mouth. This is because the mouth speaks and with speech comes the opportunity for criticism.

The phrase ‘taking things personally’ seems to pop up a lot. This often relates to experiences of criticism and judgement. In this piece I examine this idea from a Huna perspective. What does it mean when considered in the context of Huna philosophy? Here are some reflections in no particular order.

Taking What Others Say Personally

People can often be accused of taking things personally in situations when someone has reacted negatively to a comment that someone else has made. Perhaps it was not the intention of the person who made the comment, perhaps it was....The intention of the person who made the comment can have some effect. If, for example, the person making the comment intends it to affect the recipient negatively, perhaps it is a critical comment or an angry comment, then it is possible that it will have a negative effect.

The reaction of the recipient is dependent on a number of factors. One is their *conscious* choice in how to interpret the comment – the meaning they attribute to it. If they choose a negative connotation, or believe and accept the comment, then that can affect them negatively on an emotional level and in other ways.

This is the effect that was experienced in the receiving of a curse. In Hawaiian tradition the *kahuna ‘ana ‘ana* practiced black magic which included placing curses on people, often considered to be –“praying them to death”. The words used in the curse itself had no intrinsic power. The power came largely from the recipient’s beliefs. If the recipient believed

that the curse had power then their *Ku* (body/mind) would act accordingly. Of course, the pre-existing expectations of the power of a curse and of the *kahuna 'ana 'ana* and the associated prestige that such sorcerers had, contributed to building up the expectation in the power of the curse and therefore gave it more likelihood that it would be accepted.

It is interesting that we can be negatively affected by comments that have not had any negative intention behind them too. This is because we have chosen to give them a negative meaning. This pattern of misunderstanding someone else's communication and subsequently feeling bad when that was not the intention plays out all too often.

At a *less conscious* level our *Ku* can take on particular patterns and may take on a negative pattern intended from a comment. Whether our *Ku* does this, or not, is dependent on a number of factors including: our inner power; self-esteem; strength of focus; stored memory patterns; emotional condition and memory associations; and the relationship of the speaker to the recipient. It is for this reason that even silent criticism aimed at someone can have a negative effect on them.

Taking What We Say to Ourselves Personally

If we look at this from a different perspective, we can consider that we can take what we say to ourselves (or think to ourselves) personally and it will have varying effects. An example of this is when we have self-critical thoughts and these have a negative impact on us physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. It is often ourselves that we are most unkind to. If we spoke to other people how we sometimes talk to ourselves we probably would not expect to have many friends!

There are other ways that our *Ku* takes things personally. As our *Ku* does not have the same concept of separation than we often have at a conscious level, in a sense your *Ku* takes everything personally. For example, if you see an attractive person and feel envious and then make some snarky critical comment in your head about her or him, your *Ku* could get the message that it is not ok to be attractive. When we criticise or judge others we have a negative effect on ourselves. Criticising others creates tension and weakens us too. This parallels the notion that when we point to (judge) someone there are three fingers pointing at us.

Is Everything Personal?

All of this is hardly surprising when we consider that a fundamental principle of Huna is that everything is connected, in a sense it is 'as within so without'. When looked at from that point of view, we can consider that everything is 'personal'. Of course, the extent of the effect of one thing upon another depends on their relationship. For example, the effect on you of someone else's experience who lives far away, or storms or sunspots may be less than minimal depending on your relationship to these specific people or things. However, we are all connected and have the potential to affect things to a greater or lesser extent.

So what does all this tell us? Here are just a few things to stem from this:

- It is useful to remember that you don't exist in isolation and that your thoughts and words can affect you and others. Everything is connected.
- Consider whether there are times when you could be more compassionate and kind and less critical to yourself and others.
- Strengthen your sense of self belief – know that who you are is just fine, you are worthy, deserving and good enough. This makes it less likely that you will take other people's judgements 'personally' in a negative way.

- Could you take more opportunities to bless and appreciate people and things in your life? Blessing is the antithesis of cursing and criticising (and the antidote to it). For example, instead of being envious of admirable things in other people, if you proactively praise those features and qualities and there is more likelihood that your *Ku* will think there is a pattern to be emulated and work to that end.
- Ensure you take genuine compliments personally. Some people find it difficult to take a compliment from another person, however genuine and deserved it may be. This can be due to lack of self esteem or self belief. One way of contributing to that is by taking on board the good things people say about you, you owe it to yourself to do so. It feels good....if you let it.

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