



Huna Article

Trauma, Memory, and the Power of Now

A Huna Perspective

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In Hawaiian language there is no past or future tense in the way English usually uses them. Everything is understood through now. What we call the future is spoken of as a possibility that is not happening now. What we call the past is spoken of as an experience that is not happening now. In that way of thinking, the point of power is always the present moment.

That has big implications for how we think about trauma.

These days trauma is often talked about as though it were a fixed thing from the past, almost like an object lodged inside us that keeps controlling our lives. From a Huna perspective, that can be a very misleading way to think about it. In terms of personal reality, both the past and the future are created from the present. We do not experience the past directly. We experience memories now. We do not experience the future directly. We experience ideas, expectations, fears, and hopes, now.

That distinction is important.

A central Huna principle is **IKE — the world is what you think it is**. That does not mean external events never happened, and it does not mean painful experiences are imaginary. It means your lived reality is shaped by the meanings you give to experience, whether that experience was actual, imagined, amplified, or later interpreted through stories, assumptions, or even created memories used to explain present behaviour. In Huna terms, *Ku*, the body-mind, responds to what is accepted, impressed, and repeated, whether or not others would describe it as objectively true. What you think something means affects how you feel, how you respond, and the kind of world you continue to create for yourself.

A memory may sit there for years with very little emotional charge. Then one day someone tells you that what happened was terrible, shameful, damaging, or unforgivable. That is their interpretation of the meaning of such an experience. It may or may not have some validity, but if you accept it, you may start reacting to the memory very differently in the present. The memory itself has not changed, but your relationship to it has changed, now. That new reaction can begin to produce fear, shame, anger, tension, helplessness, or avoidance. Over time, those reactions can become habitual, and the pattern that develops is often what people call trauma.

Sometimes a whole pattern of hurt can grow from a misunderstanding rather than from what actually happened. There is a story of a young man going into surgery who heard the words “You bastard” in his father’s voice as he was going under anaesthetic. He took the words as directed at him, when in fact his father, also a surgeon, had been speaking angrily to the operating surgeon who had refused him access to the OR to watch. Yet the son accepted the meaning he had heard, and over time his close relationship with his father deteriorated until they became estranged. In Huna terms, the reaction grew from the meaning accepted by *Ku*, not from what had actually happened.

So in that sense, trauma is not just what happened. It is also what is happening now in response to what is remembered.

That ties directly into another Huna principle: **MAKIA — energy flows where attention goes**. The more attention we give to fear, pain, shame, or helplessness, the more energy we feed into those patterns. The more we rehearse distress in relation to a memory, the stronger that response can become. What began as an event can turn into an ongoing present-time experience, reinforced again and again by attention, interpretation, and expectation.

That does not mean painful events are unreal, unimportant, or trivial. And it certainly does not mean people should be blamed for suffering. What it means is that the ongoing experience of trauma is not locked in the past. It is a present behaviour pattern involving memory, meaning, reaction, and tension. Because it is happening now, it can also be changed now.

That is the hopeful part.

Huna is practical, and one of its most empowering principles is **MANAWA — now is the moment of power**. If the distress is happening now, then the power to change it is also available now. Not necessarily all at once, and not by pretending nothing happened, but by changing what is going on in the present moment. Healing does not come from fighting the past. It comes from changing our present relationship to memory, meaning, and reaction.

There may be a memory of an experience, and a learned reaction to that memory that has been repeated so often it feels automatic and permanent. After a while it can seem inseparable from the memory itself. But they are not the same thing. The memory is one thing. The conditioned response is another.

Over time, the original source of the reaction may no longer be directly remembered, yet the reaction remains. A person may brace, withdraw, panic, become angry, shut down, or relive distress whenever the memory is touched, or whenever something close enough to the original pattern triggers the same response. Even so, the reaction can still be changed.

Once you begin to see that clearly, a new possibility opens up.

If a reaction is no longer useful, and especially if it inhibits a happy life, it does not have to be kept forever. That fits the Huna principle of **KALA — there are no limits**. In practical terms, no pattern has to be treated as permanent. A person can decide that the old response is not needed anymore, or at least not in the same way. Then the work becomes learning a different response in the present. That may involve calming the body, changing the meaning given to the memory, reducing fear around it, or replacing an old reaction with one that is more peaceful, grounded, and effective.

As that new response is practised, the trauma behaviour changes, now.

Another helpful principle here is **ALOHA — to love is to be happy with**. In Huna, love is not just a feeling. It is a way of relating that allows connection, acceptance, and healing. Suffering does not come from the memory itself. It comes from the reaction to it. Without that reaction, the memory is inert. Meeting memory with more acceptance and less inner conflict can reduce a great deal of suffering. That does not mean approving of harmful events. It means stopping the war inside yourself.

And when that inner struggle begins to soften, the body and mind soften too.

This leads naturally to **MANA — all power comes from within**. A person may have been hurt, conditioned, overwhelmed, or deeply affected by life, but the capacity for change is still within them. Help from others can be valuable, sometimes very valuable, but nobody else can do your inner changing for you. The shift happens when you begin reclaiming your power in the present and directing it differently.

A useful practice is to shift attention (Makia) toward happier memories, or even to create happier experiences in imagination. This is not done to suppress or push away an unwanted memory, but to practise feeling better. From a Huna perspective, this is a practical way of giving Ku different impressions to work with and helping establish more peaceful patterns in the present.

As the present changes, the future changes with it.

This is one of the most empowering shifts a person can make. Instead of living as though the past is an unchangeable force acting on the present, a person begins to recognise that what matters most is the relationship to memory now. The event may remain part of the story, but it no longer has to govern one's state of being. The memory may still be there, but the distress can soften. The body can learn safety again. The mind can become quieter. Life can become less organised around fear and more organised around peace.

A more peaceful now begins to create a different future.

And this is where the Huna principle of **PONO — effectiveness is the measure of truth** — becomes especially important. The question is not whether a theory sounds sophisticated, or whether a label is fashionable, or whether everybody approves of the language being used. The real question is: does this way of relating to memory help? Does it reduce suffering? Does it increase peace, clarity, strength, and freedom? If it does, it has value. If it does not, then however popular it may be, it is not serving well.

This does not often happen instantly. Some patterns are deeply ingrained and may take patience, skill, support, and practice to change. But the principle stays the same: the place where healing happens is always now. Not in some imagined future, and not by trying to rewrite history, but by changing the way we meet memory and experience in the present moment, from within.

That is where freedom begins.

Trauma, then, can be understood not as a life sentence imposed by the past, but as a present pattern that can be transformed. When we develop a new reaction to an old memory, we are not denying the past. We are changing our participation in it now. In doing so, we create a different quality of experience, a different pattern of behaviour, and a different path forward.

The power is in the present, because the present is where life is lived.

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