

Cultural Anchor

By The Edith Kanaka'ole Foundation

The Birth of Hawai'i, the Place

The *ka'ao*, or sacred records, of the Hawaiian people inform us that the place and space known as Hawai'i are themselves island descendants of Wākea (sometimes translated as "Sky Father) and Papahānaumoku (literally, the firmament or wide place who gives birth to islands, also referred to as Papa, the creator goddess of Hawai'i), who conceived and gave birth to the islands of Hawai'i.

Wākea has many other meanings, two of which speak to the "immensity of our celestial dome." Another refers to "the zone of Kea." Kea refers to "enlightenment" and "progeny." Kea, in simple terms, translates both as "white," a color associated with spiritual enlightenment and the white of "male procreative fluids."

Hawaiian creation chants inform us that Papahānaumoku is an extension of *Haumea* (the-red-sacrifice). *Haumea* is the lava itself, which, after spewing into the atmosphere of Wākea becomes the solid foundation for living. This intercourse between Wākea and Papahānaumoku also produced the mountain child we know today as Mauna Kea. Mauna Kea is both female and male. Mauna Kea's physical manifestations of rock, soil, water and ice, are female attributes; his elevation establishes his maleness, as it brings him closer to the celestial seat of his father Wākea. The equitability of this female-male distribution establishes Mauna Kea as sacred and creates the *piko kapu*, or sacred center, of the island.

The Birth of Hawai'i, the Native Being

The *ka'ao* also informs us of the birth of Hawai'i, the native being. Wākea and Papahānaumoku also gave birth to Komoawa and Ho'ohōkūkalani. Komoawa is both son and high priest of Wākea. Together with Wākea, Komoawa and Ho'ohōkūkalani established the ancient *kapu* system to regulate human impact on the islands that are the sacred children of Wākea and Papahānaumoku.

Ho'ohōkūkalani means the "creator of stars." She, in union with Wākea, becomes the celestial womb from which Hawai'i the original native being takes root, gestates, and is born into a sacred landscape. Yes, the Hawai'i native, is the descendant of the celestial bodies, the stars themselves. And this moekāpi'o, or coming together, of Ho'ohōkūkalani and Wākea, is the primordial union that inserts the Hawai'i native into the sacred parabola of life between the stars and the earth. The *kuahu* or shrine to this "arching reality" is Mauna Kea. At birth, the native being is born into a system that ensured the longevity of the reality of environmental kinship we know as Hāloa.

For this reason, Mauna Kea is sacred. Mauna Kea is where heaven, earth and stars find union. Not just any heaven, but Wākea, not just any earth, but Papahānaumoku, and not just any constellation of twinkling lights, but Ho'ohōkūkalani, whose children descend and return to the stars.

Mauna Kea ka Piko o ka Moku

Mauna Kea is "*ka piko o ka moku*," which means "Mauna Kea is the navel of the island." Understanding the word *piko* may give a deeper understanding of why Mauna Kea is the *piko*, or navel, of the island.

In terms of traditional Hawaiian anatomy, three *piko* can be found. The fontanel is the *piko* through which the spirit enters into the body. During infancy, this *piko* is sometimes "fed" to ensure that the *piko* becomes firm against spiritual vulnerability. For this reason, the head is a very sacred part of the anatomy of the Hawai'i native. To injure the head of someone can mark the beginning of a long feud that may go on for generations, hence the need to refrain from insulting the head of a person.

Mauna Kea Comprehensive Management Plan

The second *piko* is the navel. This *piko* is the physical reminder that we descend from a very long line of women. The cutting of this *piko* is done with ceremony. And when the stump of the *piko* falls from the belly, the *piko* “relic” is cared for and put in a location that will be beneficial in protecting the future role and function of the child. Should this *piko* be lost or eaten by a rat, it is believed the child will become a wanderer or a thief. Therefore, the bellybutton *piko* was sealed either in rock or sunk to the bottom of the ocean or placed in the lava to protect it. The care of this *piko* ensured two things: the healthy function of the child and the certification that the child is a product of a particular land base.

The final *piko* is the genitalia. The genitalia are the physical instruments that enable human life to continue. The health of all *piko* ensures that the life of the native person will rest on an axis of spirituality, genealogy and progeny. The absence of one or more *piko* will prevent an entity from becoming whole or complete.

When we understand the three *piko* of the human anatomy, we may begin to understand how they manifest in Mauna Kea. Mauna Kea as the fontanel requires a pristine environment free of any spiritual obstructions. Mauna Kea as the umbilicus ensures a definite genealogy of indigenous relation and function. Mauna Kea as genitalia ensures that those who descend from Wākea (our heaven), Papahānaumoku (our land-base) and Ho‘ohōkūkalani (the mother of constellations) continue to receive the physical and spiritual benefits entitled to those who descend from sacred origins.

Thus, Mauna Kea can be considered the *piko ho‘okahi*, the single navel, which ensures spiritual connections, genealogical connections, and the rights to the regenerative powers of all that is Hawai‘i. It is from this “world navel” that the Hawai‘i axis emerges.

