



## The Gods of Ancient Hawaii

The gorgeous islands of Hawaii do not only have an amazing environment and natural beauty, but are also rich in ancient culture. This intriguing belief system of gods is still practiced by the people of Hawaii today.

For centuries, the beautiful and scenic Hawaiian Islands were ruled by religious priests, or Kahunas, who used the ancient system of kapu to rule the Hawaiians. Kapu was a strict religious system of law set by Hawaiians that defined actions that were appropriate or inappropriate for the different social classes of Hawaiians. This gave the kahunas a great deal of power, since the punishments for breaking the kapu is usually extremely serious, sometimes even human sacrifice, or death. One of the most serious and significant kapu was the worship of the gods. This religious history of Hawaii may very well be the reason behind Hawaii's rich and intriguing culture of gods. However, two centuries ago, Kamehameha II, the king of the Hawaiians, abolished the kapu system along with the kahunas. Many of the religious Hawaiian temples, or heiau, were also burnt to the ground; however this ancient system of gods is still worshiped by some Hawaiian's today. Most of the island's people were converts to Christianity after the arrival of Missionaries from Boston in 1820. But before the missionaries... Hawaii still flourished.



Hawaiian 'mythology' is very similar to that of the Greeks. Many ancient religion systems were based around such a system, and are found often in India, Indonesia, China, Macro/Micro Polynesia, Polynesia, Hawaii, and even in Native American systems of the Americas.

The four main Hawaiian gods were Kane, Ku, Lono, and Kanaloa. Kane was the creator, therefore the god of life and everything that was associated with life. Including water, sunlight, and the winds, Kane was also the king and father of all Gods. Ku represented men, war and fishing and also required his own temples, priests, and human sacrifices for worshipping him. Lono was the god of peace, wisdom, fertility, wind and rain. And finally, here is the interesting story behind Kanaloa. According to the Tahitians Kanaloa was much like Kane, the creator of the men and the world itself. When the Polynesians took over Kanaloa was made in to the brother of Kane with Kane as the creator. And then finally, the arrival of the Christians, and missionaries influenced the Hawaiians to better fit the Christian beliefs by creating Kanaloa as the Christian devil.

Here is the introduction to the Hawaiian mythology. Hawaii was first a lifeless, vacant, enormous land, except for the spirit of the god Keawe. Keawe brought order and created the sky by opening its calabash, a white flowered gourd, and flinging the lid in to the air, unfolding to become the great sky. Keawe then picked up an orange disk, hanging it on the sky creating the sun. Keawe then created the two gods, Na Wahine representing women, as his daughter, and Kane, representing men as his son. Kane is also known as Eli and is described in great detail in one of the Hawaiian's well known creation chants, named the Kumulipo. These two gods were then parents to the rest of the Hawaiian gods, including Ku, Lono, and Kanaloa. I've noticed that this Legend has a close resemblance to Genesis in the Bible.



## The Gods of Ancient Hawaii (cont.)

There was also a god that each man worshiped according to his profession called an akua. Potters, fishermen, hunters, and farmers, ect. , all had their own specific gods. However, a priest or idol keeper called a kahu-akua prayed for the loyal family. The king of Hawaii would also be able worship and honor the god of war, Ku, by ordering a ceremony for the construction of a sacrificial temple, or a luakini heiau. The ceremony included a gruesome sacrifice of the human being during the construction of the luakini heiau.

Hawaiian families each had its own aumakua, a family god and symbol, similar to guardian Angel and the clan symbols of the Indians. An aumakua was a dead ancestor of one's family. The bones of the ancestor was stripped from the flesh and prepared in a ceremony and then kept safe by the family. The dead ancestor would then become a god him or herself and would be able to guide its descendents in time of need. This quote by a Hawaiian scholar, named Mary Kawena Pukui clearly explains what aumakua is and represents, "As gods and relatives in one, they give us strength when we are weak, warning when danger threatens, guidance in our bewilderment, inspiration in our arts. They are equally our judges, hearing our words and watching our actions, reprimanding us for error and punishing us for blatant offense." An aumakua is able to take a form of an animal including fishes, birds, cats, dogs, elephants, ect. Any descendent of the aumakua is said to be able to instantly recognize their aumakua, no matter what form it takes.