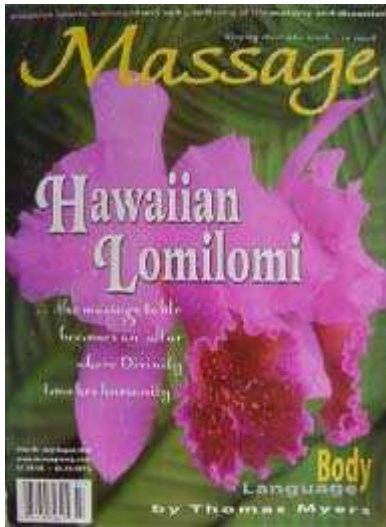


## History of Lomi Lomi



*This article on the history of Lomi Lomi, written by Tamara Mondragon, appeared as the Cover story in the July 2000 issue of Massage Magazine.*

**E**arly visitors to the beautiful Hawaiian Islands were met by a happy, relaxed people greeting them with the now familiar "Aloha" and flower leis. This friendly culture was steeped in ancient spiritual traditions that had been preserved from generation to generation through Hawaiian chants and oral history, and the sacred dance of hula. Most revered were the Kahuna, experts in their chosen profession. Kahuna specialized in areas ranging from stargazing to canoe building; skills chosen in childhood and mastered through training. The Kahuna lomilomi were masters of body manipulation and healing massage. They practiced their ancient art with a deep connection to nature, surrounded by ocean breezes, colorful sunsets and unpredictable volcanoes.

The Kahuna lomilomi were priests who practiced the healing arts with much reverence, love and spirituality. They believed that physical discomfort and disease were the results of suppressed emotions, mental disturbances or spiritual disharmony. The traditional lomilomi healing session began with a thorough investigation into the nature of the dysfunction, as well as prayer, fasting and several sessions in the steam hut. Once the malady was identified, the treatment would often begin with heated stones and herbal poultices. Then the Kahuna would massage and use particular lomilomi strokes necessary for that individual.

One of the common similarities among lomilomi practitioners of old was the power and knowledge they had. That is, their ability to communicate deep to the bones of their patients via their touch through soft tissues, yet being noninvasive and connecting it all with spirit, says Maka'ala Yates, a Hawaiian medicine specialist.

*The lomilomi technique focused on finding congested areas in the body and dispersing them, by moving the palms, thumbs, knuckles and forearms in rhythmic, dance-like motions. Setting the intention for healing, the Kahuna would also utilize prayer (pule), breath (ha) and energy (mana). The practice of lomilomi was common within each Hawaiian community and contributed to a vibrant, healthy society.*

Early visitors to Hawaii noticed and commented on this healing art. In 1803 Archibald Menzies wrote, "A number of natives placed themselves around us to lomilomi and pinch our limbs, an operation which we found on these occasions, very lulling and pleasing when gently performed." In 1819 a Mr. Frecient wrote, "Two females about 40 years old knelt down on each side of me and squeezed and rubbed my limbs with all their might. All the parts of the body were pressed between the hands, going from the arms to the legs and from the thighs to the shoulders. Here it is employed as a means of making people sleepy."

In the 1820's early missionaries to the Hawaiian Islands found the native healers to be accurate in their diagnosis and treatment of illness, and in mending broken bones. They considered the Hawaiians to be heathens, however, and in 1893, after years of political upheaval, the new government outlawed all spiritual traditions, including healing arts, the study of the Hawaiian language, and hula dancing. But the sacred traditions did not die; they were hidden and practiced in secrecy, passed down only within the Hawaiian community (ohana), through "iki maka lihilihi a maka alawa", which means to do by observation and insight.

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The tradition of "iki maka lihilihi a maka alawa" was noted in a Board of Health report in 1896 by Charles Peterson, M.D., who wrote, "The practice of Kahunas (sic) in this district is, I am confident, quietly carried on. The Hawaiians will not expose them, and investigation only elicits falsehoods and assertions of ignorance. Nearly every group has its family Kahuna, and Honolulu furnishes the shrewder ones upon occasion. I have frequently met with the evidence of the presence of these mystery workers, and in the circle about the sick bed, easily noted the one with the power. However under no inducement will they give any knowledge of the proximity of any such. The belief in the power of the Kahuna, although denied, is shared in, I am positive, by all classes of

Hawaiians, some whites, even. I am assured they are allowing their ministrations in their families. The Hawaiian will assent to anything proposed by the foreigner, and at the same time continue his belief in his Kahuna and his ancient gods."

It wasn't until the 1970's that the laws were changed and Hawaiians were free to pursue their native heritage and spiritual traditions, without fear of punishment. This freedom rekindled a flame in the heart of many native people, and led to a resurgence of interest in their cultural heritage.

Hawaiian elders were sought out and questioned about their knowledge, and grass-roots organizations sprang up around them. In 1973, Auntie Margaret Machado, a respected kupuna (elder) from the Big Island, decided to share her family's knowledge by teaching it to anyone who had a sincere desire to learn, Hawaiian or not. She felt it was time for the ancient healing gift of lomilomi to be felt throughout the world. While Auntie Margaret was criticized by many in the Hawaiian community for revealing the secrets of lomilomi, it was through her efforts that lomilomi was brought to the forefront of a resurgence of interest in native Hawaiian healing.

The Hawaiian Pocket Dictionary defines lomilomi as a method "to rub, press, crush, massage, rub out; to work in and out, as claws of a contented cat." Another translation is, "to break up into small pieces." In the early 1900's lomilomi was coined "Hawaiian massage" by the legal system.

"The depth of true lomilomi was virtually limitless in terms of its ability to offer potential for healing to each patient; however, the government of the time had to label it" and put in a category, which is not the Hawaiian way," says Yates. "It is correct to say that lomilomi encompasses a massage, but it is not limited to it. Native Hawaiians say the true definition of lomilomi is reconnecting with spirit."

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While lomilomi is often referred to as a spiritual massage, the technique is also practical and specific. It is, for example, effective in breaking up calcium deposits and lactic acid build-up. This is accomplished by a variety of movements, such as circular thumb strokes that are done in a one-two-three rhythm directly over the area. Knuckle strokes are used on larger, denser muscles in the same rhythm, followed by soothing forearm strokes and hacking.

According to Auntie Margaret, lomilomi has a profound effect on the health and development of the muscles, and the activity of the blood and nerves associated with them. It dilates blood vessels, thus improving circulation and helping to prevent strokes. It relieves muscle spasms and increases the rate of nutrients brought to the muscles by the blood, without increasing lactic acid production. It stimulates the lymphatic system to release waste products, and is useful after injury to ligaments and tendons by dispersing edema. It also restores vitality and heightens metabolism.

"True lomilomi in the right hands gives immediate and long-term results," Yates says.

In addition to lomilomi's physical benefits are the emotional releases felt during and after a session. Recipients of a lomilomi treatment often experience freedom from anxiety, worry, fear and a host of other negative thought patterns. This freedom comes only when the practitioner is aware of their responsibility to the client.

"It is a process that allows the patient to meet the practitioner mid-way in their crisis so healing can take place." Yates says. "It is the lomilomi practitioner's responsibility to guide and treat each patient with right intentions using the correct protocol of treatment based on his/her feelings. The purpose of lomilomi is to bring alignment back to the individual in body, mind and spirit."

During a genuine lomilomi session, the therapist is aligned with divine energy, and keeps his or her heart and mind clear for Spirit to move through them as a conduit for healing energy. Proper breathing and pure thoughts are important. According to the Hawaiians, thoughts contain mana, or energy. When thoughts are combined with touch and breath they are transferred to the receiver. Therefore the therapist's thoughts must be focused on love and healing.

If something has occurred which interferes with the therapist's ability to control their thoughts, then ho'oponopono is practiced. Ho'oponopono is a prayer of forgiveness and of making things right. It must be done if we have harmed another person or ourselves in thought, word or deed. According to Mary Golden, a lomilomi instructor in Colorado, ho'oponopono "is a spiritual practice of making things right with yourself and all others before God. One who truly practices ho'oponopono is one who takes a daily inventory of his or her thoughts. Any intent to harm, any conscious or unconscious attitudes of malice, jealousy, or hatred must be rooted out and replaced with aloha. Aloha is recognizing the divine nature in every living thing."

*"If you want to change anything in yourself you must change the process of thought that affects the materialization of consciousness into different forms of matter and action."*

According to Dane Silva, D.O., a native Hawaiian healing arts practitioner, Ho'oponopono is also used when someone has suffered a serious loss, causing emotional trauma that runs deep into the internal organs. This affects the spirit, and leads to internal imbalance and systemic dysfunction. Unless it is corrected and made right again, a person's thought, feeling and behavior may be negatively affected. Ho'oponopono restores balance and function within the individual, within the family, within the community and within the environment (aina). Based on traditional cultural values and concepts, ho'oponopono has been adapted to work within the fabric of modern society, with each participant observing a specific protocol. By opening one's heart and mind in a supportive group, led by a respected family elder or local practitioner, the practice of healing from within begins.

Lomilomi certification courses are available in Hawaii and on the mainland. Lomilomi training is varied and will be determined by the lineage of the teacher. One can expect months of training and years of practice to truly master the technique. This is due to the mental and emotional clarity and physical stamina required of the practitioner. Many massage traditions teach that the therapist must continually shield him or herself from negativity that may be coming from the client, but lomilomi teaches the opposite. The client is considered to be the vulnerable one, open to and receiving the therapist's energy, positive or negative. Lomilomi practitioners must learn to control their thoughts and trust in their higher selves in order to direct positive healing energy to clients. Dedicated practitioners know that this is a constant process of self-awareness and prayer.

"All things are made of pure consciousness – their limited appearance is the condition of consciousness." Yates says. "Therefore, if you want to change anything in yourself you must change the process of thought that affects the materialization of consciousness into different forms of matter and action." For the Hawaiian medicine person this is the only way to remold one's life."

The old ways of the Hawaiian ancestors are being absorbed into a technological world; however, the original intention of aloha remains. A lomilomi session is a respite from the outside world; a sacred experience where the massage table becomes an altar and divinity touches humanity.

It is a mystical meeting that produces an altered state of consciousness and an incredible sense of well-being of body, mind and spirit, for the practitioner as well as the recipient. For it is in sharing aloha that one truly receives its many blessings.

