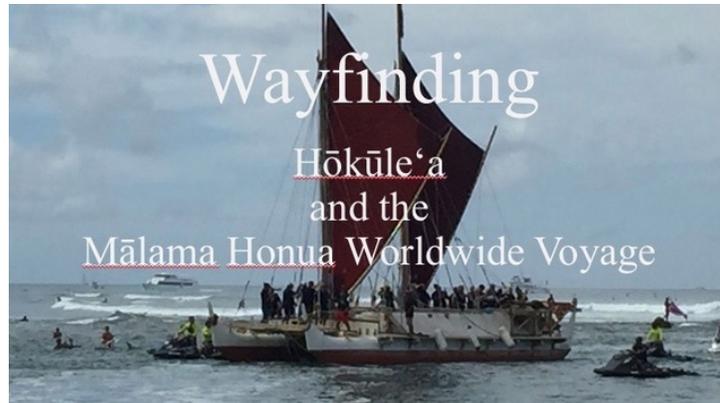


Wayfinding - Hōkūleʻa and the Mālama Honua Worldwide Voyage

*A sermon by Susan Sanford written for the sermon seminar at
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*Photos by Polynesian Voyaging Society, Charlie Chisholm, & Susan Sanford
Mahalo/Thank You to PVS for permission to share their images with you*

In mid-1973, my family moved to New Zealand for a year. I was 16 and New Zealand felt like home to me in a way that nowhere else ever had. I still don't know why. In those days, it felt like the indigenous Maori culture was in the background of much of New Zealand life, with the white, British-derived culture in the forefront. But I was definitely aware of the Maori people, and fascinated by Polynesian peoples in general. The Maori word for New Zealand is Aotearoa, which means "land of the long white cloud."

While there, I heard stories of the ancient and, I assumed, lost art of oceanic voyaging using traditional navigation, or wayfinding. And I remember seeing a huge single-hulled canoe in a museum. The idea that people traveled throughout Polynesia for centuries without modern navigational aids amazed me. Polynesia covers nearly a fifth of the surface of the Earth, and is often described as a triangle marked by Hawaiʻi in the North, Aotearoa-New Zealand in the Southwest, and Rapa Nui or Easter Island in the East.

I've had a long-time fascination with nature and indigenous cultures. So in about 2010, when I learned that wayfinding was alive and well, I was dazzled. In an essay by ethnographer Wade Davis called "The Wayfinders" I learned that since the 1970s, there had been a dramatic renaissance of oceanic voyaging throughout Polynesia.

At the time I was living in New Zealand in the 1970s, knowledge of wayfinding *had* nearly died out. But in Hawaiʻi some people were starting to build a double-hulled oceanic voyaging canoe, or waʻa, based on a traditional design. They were also looking for someone who could teach them wayfinding skills. They found people in Micronesia who still knew how to do it, and a man named Mau Piailug agreed to teach them. Mau was from Satawal, a tiny island in the Caroline Islands of Micronesia. His father and grandfather were navigators before him. Wade Davis writes, "Mau grew up on a coral islet less than 1.5 square kilometers, a third the size of Central Park in New York. His universe was the ocean." The Polynesian revival of voyaging only happened because Mau was willing to share the art and skills of wayfinding that had been preserved in Micronesia.



Hōkūleʻa © 2018 Polynesian Voyaging Society, Todd Yamashita

In Hawaiʻi in 1975, the Polynesian Voyaging Society launched Hōkūleʻa.

The canoe is a double-hulled open-decked catamaran 62 feet long, 20 feet wide, and lashed together by almost 5 miles of rope. It features two large red triangular sails and has a crew of about twelve. In Hawaiian, Hōkūleʻa means "Star of Gladness" and it's the Hawaiian name for the star Arcturus.

Wayfinding uses signs in nature as navigational guides. There are no instruments of any kind. As a naturalist, I recognize this ability as a spectacular achievement. The navigator, or wayfinder, must observe, understand, and synthesize information in stars, wind, water, clouds, light, birds, fish, and more. In addition, there is a huge element of trusting one's intuition, and for many - perhaps all - navigators, a deeply spiritual dimension to the art and science of wayfinding.

How do they do it?



The star compass is a mental model for navigation that allows wayfinders to read wave direction, bird flight paths, and where stars rise and set.



All experienced crew members can identify some 220 stars in the night sky.



The most important ones are those low in the sky, the ones that have just risen or are about to set. If you can identify the stars as they rise and set, and if you have memorized where they rise and set, you can find your direction.

Ethnographer Wade Davis writes that among other things:



"Clouds provide clues to the wayfinder - their shape, color, character, and place in the sky... There is an entire nomenclature to describe the distinct patterns clouds form as they gather over islands or sweep across the open ocean.

Light alone can be read, the rainbow colors at the edge of stars, the way they twinkle and dim with an impending storm, the tone of the sky over an island, always darker than over open sea.



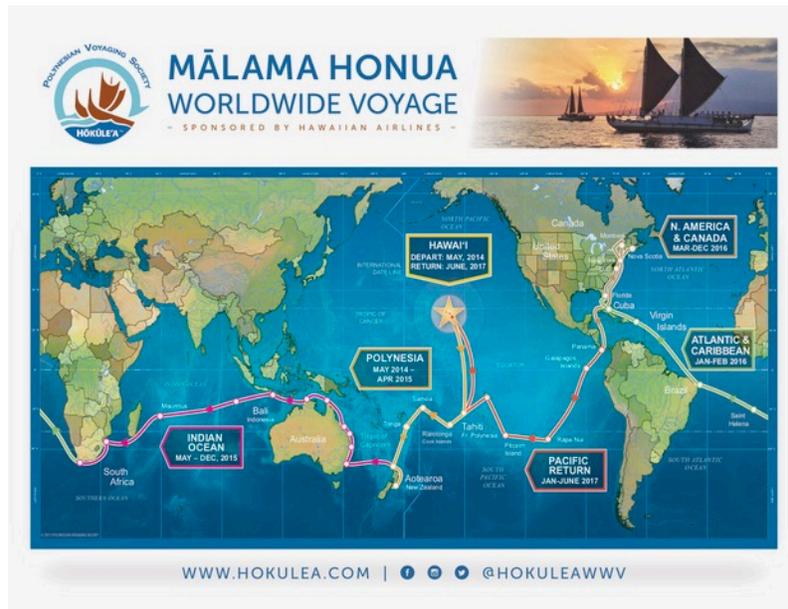
Other signs are found in wildlife... Birds... such as petrels and terns travel fixed distances from their nests, returning every night to (the) land...



(And there is) the ocean itself, including the salinity, taste, and temperature of the water...

Expert navigators... can distinguish as many as five distinct swells moving through the vessel at any given time... (and) the reverberation of waves across the hull of the canoe can reveal an island beyond the horizon, with a pattern as unique as a fingerprint."

The wayfinder sleeps very little on any voyage because he... or she... needs to mentally keep track of where the canoe has been in order to know where it is at any given time.



After traveling around Polynesia for nearly 40 years, as well as making trips to Japan and Alaska, the decision was made to try to sail Hōkūleʻa around the world using only traditional navigation. That decision was many years in coming because of the dangers of such a voyage. But Hōkūleʻa had sparked a revival of traditional culture and oceanic voyaging throughout Polynesia. Could she now spread her mana - her power - around the world?



Susan Sanford and Nainoa Thompson, master wayfinder and President of the Polynesian Voyaging Society in June 2017. Thompson and others graciously posed for photos with supporters and admirers.

As the president of the Polynesian Voyaging Society and master navigator Nainoa Thompson said, “What is more dangerous...the hurricanes, the pirates, the mosquitoes, and the rogue waves? Or...to keep the canoe tied to the dock because you’re afraid to go?”

The Polynesian Voyaging Society prepared for the 3-year Mālama Honua Worldwide Voyage. Mālama Honua means to care for our Island Earth, and the Hōkūle‘a website says that in Hawaiian, Mālama Honua means to take care of *everything* that makes up our world: people, land, oceans, living beings, and our community.

Shortly before they were to leave, something wasn't feeling quite right. Hōkūle‘a was a cultural treasure, her legacy belonged to the children of Hawai‘i. Did the adults have the right to put her at such risk? Nainoa realized that they had not asked permission from the children to undertake the Worldwide Voyage. So they delayed departure and sailed around the Hawai‘ian Islands meeting with young people and asking their blessing. Once this was accomplished, the plan was that Hōkūle‘a would leave Hawai‘i in May 2014 and return in June 2017. A second canoe, Hikianalia, would travel with her for a while, then return to Hawai‘i. Hikianalia is the Hawaiian name for the star Spica, which rises with Hōkūle‘a - Arcturus- at the latitude of the Hawaiian islands.

Beyond learning whether the journey around the world was even possible, there were two more key purposes of the voyage. One was to fully train the next generation of wayfinders and other crew. To accomplish this there would be regular crew changes along the way. In all, 245 crew members. The other purpose was to connect with indigenous people and others around the world who are working to care for Island Earth.

In accord with indigenous protocol, permission to visit was requested from all the native peoples they wanted to meet on the journey. Hōkūle‘a inspired members of the Wampanoag Nation in Massachusetts

to build an ocean-going canoe for the first time in 300 years, because the proper way to greet a traditional canoe is with another one.

As Hōkūle‘a circled the globe, seeking and sharing stories of hope, wisdom, and solution-finding, some questions arose: What could be happening in Hawai‘i during that time to improve the state of things, and to create a sail plan to a better future?

Thus was born the Promise to Pae‘Āina , the Hawaiian Archipelago. The Promise to Pae‘Āina is an environmental initiative that brings together individuals and organizations to actively protect and care for Hawai‘i's environment. How wonderful it would be for Hōkūle‘a to return to a Hawai‘i that was healthier than when the voyage began.

Though I learned of Hōkūle‘a in about 2010, I did not hear of the Worldwide Voyage until it was about half-way done. But from January 2016 on, I followed it with great interest. Each day I received an email update on the voyage, which was always an uplifting moment.

My heart needed that. A loved one had recently died, and the Worldwide Voyage was brilliant and expansive, as he had been.

People have asked me what it is that so excites me about wayfinding. I feel my whole being light up when I think about it. I've spent a long time trying to explain it, to myself and others. Maybe it would be enough to just say that I'm enchanted by the wonder of it.

But there is more. There's the metaphor of finding my way in my own life.

Yet maybe the fascination has largely to do with relationships. Relationships between people, and with the canoe; with cultural identity; and with trust, resilience, love, and the desire to explore. There are the qualities of right relationship - including respect, humility, and sharing. Sharing the journey with fellow voyagers, and sharing what you learn with others.

And there is the relationship with the natural world that is the key to oceanic voyaging. Maybe it's because I've always loved nature, that wayfinding seems like one of the most raw, powerful, and intimate relationships one could have with the natural world.

Back to January 2016 and the Worldwide Voyage. Hōkūle‘a was crossing the Atlantic from South Africa to South America when my sweetie, Charlie, and I started following its progress.

Fifteen months later, in April 2017, an email arrived announcing that the Hōkūle‘a homecoming celebration would begin on June 17th in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. I said to Charlie, "Wouldn't it be neat to be there?" and he said, "Let's go!" So we made our plans.



We learned that there would be tours of the canoe, the wa'a...a chance to actually stand on this amazing vessel. And I wept with joy when I learned that on the last leg of the journey from Tahiti to Hawai'i, two women, Pomai Bertelmann and Ka'iulani Murphy, would be the captain and the wayfinder.

The worldwide voyage required great courage, and the extraordinary commitment of peoples' intellectual, emotional, and spiritual strength. It touched thousands of lives and built bridges of understanding. Nainoa Thompson said, "You make connections you could never imagine until you go."



The homecoming weekend in Hawai'i was magical. Volunteers and crew members were there in huge numbers, along with tens of thousands of supporters.

In 1975, Hōkūle'a was the only voyaging canoe in Polynesia.



But on June 17, 2017, Mama Hōkūleʻa, as some call her, waited for seven of her keiki, her children, to enter the harbor first. They came from several of the Hawaiian Islands, Tahiti, and Aotearoa-New Zealand.



Nainoa has called Hōkūleʻa the "spaceship of the ancestors." As I considered that, I found myself pondering the differences between space exploration and oceanic voyaging. Both require huge commitments of human and other resources. But space exploration is elite and exclusive in many ways. Whereas oceanic voyaging is about collaboration and can include pretty much anyone who wants to volunteer.

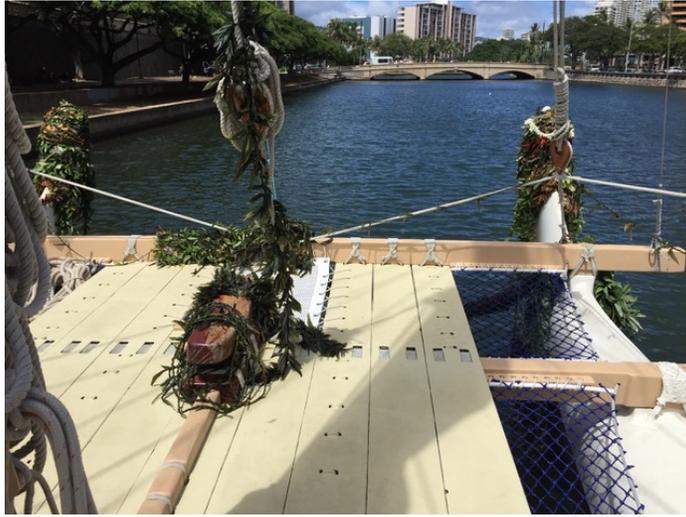


Teacher Holly Sargeant-Green with food her students grew, dried, and packaged for the Hōkūle‘a crew.

On homecoming day I found myself next to teacher Holly Sargeant-Green. Her students had grown food in their Mala'ai, which literally means "food garden," at Waimea Middle School, then dried and packaged it for the Hōkūle‘a crew. She herself is involved with Makali'i, the canoe from the Big Island of Hawai'i. We discovered that we had both attended the University of California Santa Cruz and gone through the same natural history program there.



That weekend, it was deeply moving to stand on the deck of Hōkūle‘a...to touch her...



to try to imagine life on board...and...



to imagine all she means to now several generations of Polynesians and others.



I'm a white lady in her 60s in California, and *my* life has been changed and inspired by Hōkūle‘a and wayfinding. My world, my universe, feel bigger and brighter.



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The Hawaiian word for "Thank you" is "Mahalo." Since the Worldwide Voyage, Hōkūle‘a has been voyaging around the Hawaiian Islands on the Mahalo Hawai'i Sail.

And beyond myself, I wonder how the qualities of right relationship and respect inherent in oceanic voyaging can inspire us as individuals and a Unitarian Universalist congregation to undertake our own meaningful voyages.

Hōkūle‘a is a vessel. She needs people and nature to have meaning. People dreamed her into being...with energy and materials from nature. People take her to sea. And Hōkūle‘a has, in return, been a glorious tribute to the ancestors, and given people a profound sense of purpose and belonging.

My family has completely lost connection with our own indigenous ancestors. So I'm deeply grateful to all who have maintained and revitalized traditional cultures, and to the Polynesian people for embracing and reclaiming the magic and wonder of wayfinding and sharing it with the world.

Perhaps Hōkūle‘a and wayfinding feed that thing in me that yearns for connection - deep connection - with both nature and something indigenous...that desire to live in vibrant community with people and the rest of the natural world.

Nainoa Thompson said, "Everything you need to navigate is in nature. The question is, can you see it?" And I would add, can you hear it and can you feel it?

If we think of ourselves, UUCM, and Unitarian Universalism as vessels, how can we draw upon the wisdom of nature and the ancestors to be master wayfinders to a future that is characterized by respect and collaboration?...harmony and balance?



One day I did a meditation in which I invited a conversation with the spirit of Hōkūle‘a. I asked what she wanted me to know or understand. What I perceived her saying in response was this: "It's not about me...it's about what people see as possibilities for themselves...and the whole world."



So I wonder, "What do we need in order to sail courageously into the open ocean of our lives and communities? And how can we all Mālama Honua - care for Island Earth?"

I know I'm still on that voyage of discovery. How 'bout we go together?

More about
Wayfinding & Hōkūle‘a

www.hokulea.com
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The Wayfinders by Wade Davis

Mahalo to...
Polynesian Voyaging Society
Bill & Jeanne Sanford
Charlie Chisholm
Rev. Makaanah Morriss
Rev. Kevin Tarsa
& the Unitarian Universalist Community of the Mountains Sermon Seminar 2018