Mauri-Mana-Tapu-Noa

Sufficient has now been said to indicate that the concepts of *mana*, *tapu* and *noa* belong to the very essence of Maori religion. In the heading for this section the words are separated by hyphens because they are in fact a linked complex. My friend and informant, Mr. J. Rangihau of Waikato University, has pointed out to me that in fact I should have shown a four stage complex, thus: *Mauri-mana-tapu-noa.*

Mauri

The *mauri* (life principle) is *te hau ora* (living breath) imparted at birth and signified by the sneeze when the new-born child first responds to its new environment. This *mauri* is the principle of life. It contains the personhood of the individual and might well be described as the 'soul' of the person. It is this that holds a person's *mana*. Should one's *mana* be violated, the *mauri* can be destroyed or lost and death must then ensue for there is no longer a *hau ora*.

Mana

Thus the *mauri* is imparted at birth and *mana* is gained by the *tohi karakia* (birth rituals) recited by the father or by a *tohunga* at that time. *Mana* is open to a variety of interpretations, depending upon the context in which it is used. Sometimes, as in modern Maori society, it is equated with prestige and status, for no one can hold a place of importance unless he have *mana*. However this is understood today as the accord and respect given by the community to one who manifests the gifts of leadership and ability. In this sense the word would mean charisma, yet the person's *mana* gives authority to his utterances.

On an ascending scale of importance *mana* can be tabulated as: *mana-ariki* (chiefly power), *mana-tapu* (sacred power), *mana-ora* (life-giving power), and *mana-atuatanga* (power pertaining to the gods). This *mana* is imparted to the person when, at his birth, the

father (or *tohunga*) recites the appropriate *karakia* to a particular *atua* to endue the child with *mana* for the course in life the child will follow. Thus, the *karakia* might be addressed to *Tangaroa* if the child is to be a fisherman or sea traveller. If it is desired that he be a mighty warrior and leader then the priest of *Tumatauenga* will be asked to invoke that *atua* to impart his *mana*. In this context *mana* should not be understood as 'the power of the gods' for the gods themselves are recipients of *mana*. The gods to whom the *tohunga* appealed were the mediators between the High Gods and the people. Thus *mana-atua* is the gift of the gods. As Best says: "Io was the source of all welfare ... of *tapu*, *mana*, ... all was held within the hands of Io".

Mana, then, could be a gift from the *atua* as has been described. It could come by transference from father to son, or from teacher to pupil. In the latter case a special rite known as *Whakaha* was carried out. In this rite the tohunga-teacher took the toe of the pupil into his own mouth and breathed into it the *ha* (breath) that conveyed his own *mana*. In 1973 an elderly informant related the following incident. After returning to New Zealand from the First World War with an English bride he decided to live in a European way in a European community. As he had been trained in a *Wananga* (Maori school of sacred knowledge) he was imbued with *mana-atua* and before he could live among Europeans he had to be freed from (I quote) his "*mana-Maori*". He returned to the *tohunga* who had first instructed him and at the end of a long period of *karakia* the teacher leaned forward, took my informant's toe between his teeth and breathed in deeply. In this way he withdrew the *mana* originally given.

Mana could be imparted to a *kumara* (sweet potato) that was to be used as the first planting of the season, and was set apart as the talisman of the crop. *Mana* could also be imparted to other inanimate objects such as ornaments and hand weapons, especially when made of greenstone or whalebone. It was considered that these artefacts gained their *mana* from the *mana* of the owner.

Mana could also be transmitted to an object, as when a boundary to a piece of land was marked by a stone or tree. The principal people concerned gathered around the marker and placed their left hands on it while the *tohunga* (priestly expert) said the appropriate *karakia* asking *Rangi* (Sky Father) to impart *mana* to the marker. This ritual was known as *rahui* (a marker warning against trespass indicating *tapu*). Thus a boundary marker would be known as a *pou rahui* (boundary post).

Various terms were used for the nature and function of *mana* in particular contexts. A selection of these is as follows.

mana atuatanga	pertaining to the gods.
mana ariki	inherited by children of chiefs especially the first-born.
mana tapu	sacred power.
mana ora	life-giving power.
mana tangata	human *mana* acquired by leadership, skill, etc.
mana whenua	pertaining to the land which is Earth Mother and progenitor of man.
mana Maori	that which belongs to the Maori way of life.
mana motuhake a te Maori	that *mana* which makes a Maori who he is, distinct from all other people.

A brief definition of *mana* may be attempted as follows. *Mana* is a supernatural force said to be in a person, place, object or spirit. It is commonly understood as prestige, status, or authority — although the status is derived from possessing *mana*. *Mana* can be diminished or lost and so requires protective devices. *Mana* is a dangerous power both to the possesor and to those who come into contact with it; thus certain ritual observances are necessary to prevent harm coming to a community or individual.

Mana, as a supernatural power, carries with it certain problems. The 'power' of *mana* is undifferentiated and dangerous unless it has some controls. Just as a nuclear pile requires insulation to protect the experts, the unwary and the ignorant from radiation, so *mana* has its protective shield to prevent illness or death arising from the dangerous force of *mana*. This system of controls, or shielding, is termed *tapu*.

Tapu

Although *tapu* is normally understood as a prohibition, its function is essentially that of a protective device. It must be emphasised that *tapu*, contrary to popular understanding, is not a curse nor a power in itself. It may be regarded in the same way as those large notices which warn people who approach a nuclear plant of the hazard of radiation. It is not the *tapu* that wreaks harm when breached, but the *mana* which then becomes uncontrolled. This is well illustrated in the following incident which occurred when the writer was at a *tangihanga*. Following the service, as each mourner left the cemetry, a *tohunga* (expert in the sacred) stood at the entrance

holding a cooked potato in his hand. Each person touched this as they passed through the gate. This action cleansed them from any *tapu* attaching to the dead or to the cemetry. The writer, in his first ministerial appointment, felt that by following suit he might compromise his Christian message. Briefly he indicated to the *tohunga* that it was unnecessary to touch the potato as Christ afforded all necessary protection. He was permitted to pass. Later at the *hakari* (funerary feast) he was greeted by the *tohunga* with the traditional *hongi* (greeting by pressing noses). During this, the *tohunga* placed a hand on the writer's shoulder. It was much later that he found biscuit crumbs on his shoulder and realised that the *tohunga* had touched food to the writer's body and thus ritually freed him from the *tapu* of the cemetry. On one level it indicated caring concern for his welfare, while on another it indicated the need to protect the community from inadvertent harm.

The *tapu* concept pervaded the whole of Maori life so that scarcely any aspect of personal or community life escaped some form of ritual restriction. For example, no commoner would knowingly dare drink from a cup of a chief. It had become *tapu* because imbued with the *mana* of the chief. Such restrictions were irksome and, at times, extremely inconvenient but accepted as essential for the welfare of all.

Yet *tapu* is more than a ritual protective prohibition. Like *mana* it pertains to the world of the sacred. *Tapu* comes from the gods even as the Hebrew Decalogue came from Yahweh through Moses. It was more than a substitute for civil law for *tapu* permeates Maori religion and so may be translated as 'sacred', and the content of the *tapu* 'sacredness'. However the word should not be equated with 'holy' in the European understanding when discussing pre-European Maori religion. It is so understood today since the early missionaries used *tapu* to translate 'holy', I once asked a group of young Maoris what they understood was meant by the 'Tapu, Tapu, Tapu' embroidered on the frontal of the altar in an Anglican Maori church. Their response was immediate. The younger children: "ugh", "keep away", "get away". An adolescent: "danger", "Maori hoodoo". A young adult: "Maori humbug". An Elderly man: "What keeps a Maori safe".

These responses should be compared with the comment of Dr. P. Hohepa (p. 114) who writes:

> Although *tapu* is invisible and contaminating, it is neither sinister nor dangerous provided that the *tapu* that adheres to a person who comes into contact with such objects and places is removed as soon as possible afterwards with running water and bread.

Such remarks indicate that *tapu* remains a force acknowledged in a variety of situations in present-day Maori society. Whether the

attempt to conserve the old values is self-conscious, as exemplified in the call of the older generation to the younger, "*Kia mau ki to Maoritanga*" (hold fast to your Maoriness), or an unconscious process, the fact is that the old concepts are present in modern Maori society in a variety of situations. This can be shown in a random selection of common practices where the old value is indicated in brackets.

1. Grace before meals (previously a *tapu* removal rite).
2. Prayer before a public meeting, e.g. a political meeting (*karakia* protecting the *mana* of those present; that *tapu* is removed by the saying of the Benediction at the conclusion of the meeting).
3. Failure to pronounce the Benediction at close of worship (temporary *tapu* not removed. This would leave *mana-atua* unprotected).
4. Blessing of a new house (*tapu* removal and declaring the building *noa* i.e. free from *tapu*, and therefore safe).
5. Churching of a new mother (*tapu* cleansing — a *whakanoa* rite i.e. a purificatory rite).
6. Asking the barber to place cut hair in a paper bag so that it may be taken home and buried in a secret place (*tapu* protection for personal *mana*).
7. Not placing hats on table where food is served (protecting personal *mana*).

When a *tapu* restriction has been broken, it is considered that a state of ritual pollution exists. The result of this is that, in greater or lesser degree (depending on the nature of the breach), the offender is in a state of infection that can harm his community.

In describing *tapu*, Tutakangahau, one of Elsdon Best's chief informants, told his grandson (later the Rev. Tawhao Tioke), that *tapu* originates with Io. This *tapu* keeps man within the realm of the human. Tutakangahau's words were, as related by Mr. Tioke:

> *Te tapu i korerotia e Tutakangahau, "Ko te tapu i uwhia e Io ki te tangata.*
>
> *Tapu*, as told by Tutakangahau, was spread out over man by Io as an envelope.
>
> *He pukepuke maunga e pikitia e te tangata;*
> *He pukepuke moana e ekengia e te waka;*
> *He mana, he tihi tangata;*
> *E kore e pikitia e te tangata, he tapu.*
>
> A mountain peak can be scaled by man;
> the waves of the ocean can be surmounted by a canoe;
> but the human summit cannot be scaled by man,
> for man is *tapu*.[6]

A problem in old Maori society, as in most primal societies, was *tapu* restrictions associated with female sexuality in its ritual setting. Women suffered a number of ritual disabilities, especially at the time of their menses, during pregnancy, and both during and immediately after child birth. This was not merely because of the loss of blood, although blood has archetypal significance for a majority of primal people. In Maori society the female genitals are often referred to as *te whare o aitua* (the house of misfortune) and this seems to originate in the variant account for the female element ascribed to *Tiki*. Among other things this has reference to the mythical account of *Maui's* attempt to secure eternal life for mankind by attempting to reverse the process of birth by entering the birth canal of *Hinenuiotepo* (the guardian of the underworld) while she was asleep, and so destroying her. Awakening and discovering what was happening, *Hinenuiotepo* clamped her thighs together and so crushed *Maui* to death. This, in turn, is a sequel to an earlier myth in the *Maui* cycle which relates how *Tane* committed incest with his daughter, *Hinetitama*, who fled to the Underworld taking the name of *Hinenuiotepo* (see Irwin, 1981).

Women have a place in a number of ritual ceremonies, as when a women known as a *ruahine* (past the age of child-bearing) or a *puhi* (pre-pubertal girl) is the first to step over the threshold of a new building. This action removes the *tapu* of building and renders the house *noa* (common, ordinary).

Women had to be careful to avoid stepping over a recumbent male, or food, or standing in the steam of an earth oven. There was a ritual that called for the eldest daughter of a family of rank to step or stand over a male who had lost health and intellectual vigour because he had breached a serious *tapu*. This action was said to restore the sufferer to health, whereas in other circumstances it would destroy him. Is this because of the power of the female sex or is it because of the power of blood that the woman represents and the mysterious connection with creation?

Normally women were free from all *tapu* in carrying out domestic duties. Some, such as the daughters of chiefs, were subject to certain *tapu* pertaining to their rank. All women were required to observe some *tapu* regulations, particularly those regarding *wahi tapu* (sacred places), and those *tapu* placed temporarily on certain areas such as a fishing ground. In those areas not even the gathering of shell-fish was permitted.

The whole question of *tapu* and its connections with pollution, impurity and uncleaness (to mention a few of the terms used for ritual status of a particular kind) is a vexed one. Van der Leeuw (*Religion in essence and manifestation*, 47) says, "To the Maori *tapu* means polluted". Metge (pp. 10, 80-82) says it means

"sacred or unclean according to the context". Freud (quoted in A.L. Kroeber, *Reader in comparative religion*, 42) once wrote of "... the parallelisms between the two aspects of taboo (holy and defiling)". I find Radcliffe-Brown helpful (in Kroeber, *op. cit.* p. 115) when, in describing Kikuyu society, he points out "the word *thahu* denotes the undesirable ritual status that results from the failure to avoid the rules of ritual avoidance". He here uses 'ritual avoidance' for 'ritual prohibition'. If *tapu* is substituted for *thahu* my point of departure from the other writers quoted will become clear. (Cf. also J. Murray, "The Kikuyu spirit churches" in *J.R.A.* 5(3): 1979).

From the foregoing discussion we can see that a person, group, place or object that has been declared *tapu* is a source of potential danger, whereas the person or group that has breached a *tapu* is actually infected by the dangerous powers thus released. The infection, as it were, is already working harm. The matter would be clearer perhaps if the Maori language had a word equivalent to the Kikuyu *thahu* to describe the status of a person who had rendered himself ritually unclean. No Maori, of course, has any problem in understanding the situation; it is the European observer who is bewildered.

There were some *tapu*, such as those associated with a high chief or a notable *tohunga*, from which the consequences of ignoring the restrictions could not be escaped. As an illustration of this consider the following story. In 1941 I witnessed at a graveside the throwing of a new mattress, a suitcase full of good clothing, tools and a rifle into the top of the lowered coffin. The grave was then filled in. In reply to my question the reason given was that it was a mark of respect. I doubted this, and later an old man explained that it was to prevent any evil (*makutu* = spell) that had been on the deceased from doing any further harm. All his possessions were *tapu*.

The following incident was then related. A young local man had died and about one week later his eldest child began to sicken. The district health nurse could discover no reason for the boy's lassitude and his health deteriorated further. A *tohunga* was called in and he enquired about the father's illness. It appears that the father had angered someone in another district and a curse was placed on him. He had sickened, just as his son was now sickening, and had eventually died. The child had taken a new shirt belonging to the father and worn it. The *tohunga* said that he could do nothing to help except at grave danger to himself, and this he was unwilling to risk. Ultimately he gave in to the pleading of the relatives. He took the sick child on a horse-drawn sledge away from the village to an isolated bush area. The next morning the horse, led by the lad now completely recovered, returned pulling the sledge on which the *tohunga* lay. My informants told me that the necessary *karakia* had

delivered the boy but the effect of the breached *tapu* had fastened on to the *tohunga* who was now gravely ill. In two days he was dead. The dynamics of the situation were that the lad by wearing his father's shirt had breached the *tapu* and now the consequences of that *tapu* took effect upon the *tohunga*. While the initial death came from a form of *makutu* (curse or ill-wish), the second death was related to the uncontrolled *mana* that had been set loose in the original encounter. The *mana* of the one imposing the *makutu* was greater than that of the one who sought to nullify the effects.

Tapu, then, is the term for ritual prohibitions that always accompany *mana* as protection for the possessor of that *mana* and of those liable to come into contact with it. *Tapu* is therefore associated with the sacred since *mana* comes from the gods. The breach of *tapu* renders the offender ritually vulnerable (unclean) and liable to serious illness, misfortune or even death. These consequences can normally be averted by the appropriate special purificatory rites.

A definition of *tapu* could be as follows: *Tapu* is a word to describe ritual prohibitions and restrictions to protect individuals and the community from the potency of *mana*. It also refers to the danger that exists from evil spirits which can attack a person or a community when the restrictions have been ignored. *Tapu* is considered to be a warning of danger to a person, family or community. To break a *tapu* renders a person or community ritually unclean and in danger from supernatural agencies. Associated with *tapu* is fear of *makutu* (an ill-wish or curse) which is believed to be capable of causing disaster, illness or death. A person who has the capacity to place a *makutu* on another must possess the necessary *mana* to do so. This indicates that *mana* is a neutral power that may be used for good or ill.

Any person who has broken a *tapu* prohibition is considered liable to serious misfortune, illness, madness or death. He or she is contaminated and becomes a potential threat to the well-being of the community or the immediate family.

Tapu is also the word used to denote the sacred.

Noa

We are now in a position to investigate the rituals that provide purification from the results of a *tapu* that has been breached, and which provide for the lifting of *tapu* (as with a returned war party, a woman following child-birth, or the *tapu* pertaining to death). The opposite to *tapu* is *noa*. The word means 'common' as opposed to 'sacred'. Thus, that which is *noa* is ordinary. The rituals associated

with making a person or thing *noa* are termed *whakanoa*, i.e., cause to be ordinary. This is the opposite of sacred and so is sometimes referred to as 'profane'. The problem for the member of Maori society was how to cope with the consequences of a breach of *tapu* so that his *mana* would not be diminished or lost, nor his *mauri* destroyed by the invasion of malignant spirits. Furthermore he was concerned to find a way so that he could once more participate in the ordinary life of his community. The various rituals of *whakanoa* accomplished this.

Noa and *whakanoa*: rituals of purification.

Noa in its literal sense is 'not *tapu*'. It is that which is common or ordinary. When *noa* is used in adverbial phrases it indicates 'free from restrictions, without limits', as in *puta noa i te ao* (to go out into the world as far as desired).

Whakanoa is a compound of *noa* with the causative prefix *whaka*. It then means 'to make ordinary' or 'common', and so indicates the removal of all restrictions. The term is used to refer to *tapu* removal, as when a section of the sea and adjacent shore has been declared *tapu* following a drowning and the period of prohibition is ended. It also means the appropriate ritual to nullify the breaching of a *tapu*, whether accidental or deliberate. In this context *whakanoa* is understood as a ritual of purification or conciliation. The idea of conciliation refers to the situation of the one who has broken a *tapu* prohibition. (Such a one, as we have seen, is then in personal danger of falling sick or even of dying and is also a source of infection or supernatural harm to the family or community.) The ritual renders the person *noa*, that is, free from the effects of breaching the *tapu*. Thus the person is restored to the community. A *karakia whakanoa* (observance of a purificatory ritual) in the former case frees those concerned from the prohibitions and abstentions (not being permitted to fish or gather shellfish) imposed by the *tapu*. In such a situation a person, place or object that has been declared *tapu* is a potential danger, whereas the person breaking the *tapu* is actually infected by the dangerous powers of *mana* thus released. The infection, as it were, is already working harm.

As we have shown, when a *tapu* has been breached the person or group becomes ritually unclean and action must be taken to nullify the possible *aitua* (evil consequences) and to restore the offender(s) to *noa* status. The *whakanoa* rituals varied according to the nature of the violation. For a simple infraction it might be sufficient for the offender(s) to touch a piece of cooked food (being *noa*, cooked food is antithetical to *tapu*), or to wash the hands in water (running water is always presumed *noa*). The more serious

breaches called for more complicated rituals such as visiting a particular *tuaahu* or an *ahurewa* (sacred place) with a *tohunga* to carry out the necessary rituals. Sometimes *wai tapu* (sacred water), usually a special spot in a running stream, would be chosen. Other infractions might require the use of an *ahi tapu* (sacred fire). In all cases the ritual required *whakihara* (confession), recital of the ritual *karakia* with some appropriate action, and finally a declaration by the *tohunga* of absolution.

One such occasion I witnessed took place at a fast running stream where the *tohunga* questioned the offender to discover the exact nature of the offence and elicit the offender's verbal confession. The offender was then instructed to give the *tohunga* a penny and to throw another penny across the stream. As these actions were carried out, the *tohunga*, in a rapid monotone, recited the appropriate *karakia whakanoa*, concluding by scooping water from the stream and sprinkling the offender. The ritual concluded by the *tohunga* saying "*Kua noa koe*" (You have been made *noa*).

In another case the *tohunga* received the pennies from several people who had come to him privately to discuss their problems. In company with anothe *tohunga* he took the pennies away to a secret place where they were placed in an *ahi tapu* (sacred fire) and burned. Later, when the fire had cooled, the pennies were recovered and buried, again in a secret place known only to the *tohungas*. Sometimes in such cases the pennies are not buried but placed in a glass jar and stored in a cemetery.

A number of terms were used for a variety of *whakanoa* rituals. The most usual is *karakia pure* (purificatory rites), a general term for ritual cleansing for *tapu* transgressions. The term covers both the deliberate breaching of *tapu* or the removal of *tapu* as in the case of a new building. While a simple washing in water over which the *karakia pure* had been recited would be sufficient for inadvertent transgressions, those breaches which were deliberate required more elaborate rituals. The deliberate breaking of a *tapu* was considered to be a challenge to the *mana* of the gods, and there was every possibility that death or madness might eventuate. In such circumstances a *tohunga* with great *mana* would be called upon. He would arrange for a special *umu pure* to be prepared. The *umu* refers to a *hangi* (earth oven/steam cooking) wherein a special item of food, preferably a *kumura*, was placed. When cooled the *kumura* would be placed on the person's head and on other parts of the body. Just as undirected *mana* could be released by contact with that which was *tapu*, so contact with that which was *noa* could neutralise that *tapu*. The person was then cleansed and *mana* restored to its proper sphere.

Normally the majority of such rites were carried out on an individual basis (by the *tohunga* for the person concerned), and only

in public if a family or community were involved. An example of the latter would be the *karakia takahia whare* (ritual for trampling a house). This ritual was carried out after a funeral when the family were taken back to their home and a ritual of prayers and actions were carried out in each room of the house to cleanse away the *tapu* of death and any malign influence. The favoured time for such rituals was just as dawn was breaking, while the participants were still observing the night fast. Even today this is observed in general, although the *takahia whare* is held at a time to suit the family.