COMMENTARY

The potential for the use of karakia at the beginning of the restoration process

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Abstract

In pre-colonial Māori society, when a released prisoner or slave was returned to their home people, special karakia were used to remove the negative noa they were under, thus restoring their intrinsic tapu.

The author discusses whether karakia can be used in contemporary times to restore the mana and tapu of modern-day released prisoners to aid them in their journey of rehabilitation. He also questions whether this practice of restoring tapu and the sense of tapu has any use for survivors of sexual crimes as part of their healing.

Keywords

tapu, noa, desistance, karakia, restoration, rehabilitation

Introduction

Te mea tuatahi, he mihi ki te Atua te tīmatanga o te whakaaro nui, rāua ko Tana tama a Ihu Karaiti tō mātou kaiwhakaora. Pai mārire. Tuarua, he mihi ki ngā tini aituā, moe mai rā, moe mai rā, moe mai rā. Āpiti hono tātai hono, te hunga mate ki te hunga mate, Āpiti hono tātai hono, te hunga ora ki a tātou. Nō reira, tēnā tātou katoa.

It was about 7 o'clock in the morning and I was awoken by someone banging on my door. "Anaru come quickly! Do you know CPR? Something's wrong with mum!" I ran outside and there, standing, staring at me with a look of fear and apprehension was a neighbour. He

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had been sent outside to wait for the ambulance but his mother was inside their house and she wasn't breathing. Although I was full of fear myself, I rushed across the road and there she was lying on the lounge floor where it looked like she and the family had spent the night watching videos. There was fear and anguish in the room, no one knowing what to do. There she lay, a much loved mother, a smiling face from our community—the family that loved her standing around hoping against hope. She wasn't cold like a tūpāpaku at a tangihanga, but she wasn't warm like someone who was alive. I had a wee bit of training in first aid, and she had obviously passed away. I had to do something and, like I heard later in a first-aid course, "You can't make someone who is dead, more dead." So I was on my knees, I had laid her out to start CPR, and so began to give her mouth to mouth resuscitation. On that first breath I knew it was hopeless. I am not brave. I was desperate not to have to do it a second time and then I heard the ambulance and I was totally relieved.

The ambulance came, they checked her out and I found out later she had been dead for 3 or 4 hours. I rushed home and washed out my mouth; I felt sure I had tasted death. I rinsed my mouth and brushed my teeth but it felt as if death was on me and I felt that I couldn't drive it from my mind or my body. At that time I was a student at Te Whare Amorangi, the Māori Baptist Bible College in Pukekohe. Later that morning I shared with them all the situation I had just experienced. One of the lecturers took me outside and told me how he had been first at a fatal road accident and so he knew the heaviness that sometimes came with things like that. He told me how someone had prayed for him and how he felt clean again and he wanted to pray for me. By this stage I was desperate. I did not feel clean. I felt contaminated, not by anything personally to do with the lovely whaea I had tried to help, but by death itself. The lecturer was a Pākehā and he prayed in English. Oh the freedom! While a part remained, the natural sadness of loss and wishing to do more and the memory of what I had been through, I felt cleansed of death. I think I must have wept because I felt that I was part of the world of the living again. I felt that I had gone through a process where I was now, to a large degree, in balance with the world.

Today, as I look back on that experience, I can analyse it with a different set of eyes. I can examine it and come to a few conclusions. On reflection I had felt like I had entered into a realm where the physical and the spiritual interconnected on a deep level, and while much of my knowledge is still shallow in many of these areas, my personal experience convinced me that there is something different associated with death. I hate to think what would have been my experience if that man had not been there, right then, to restore me. Maybe in this scientific age having a belief in the power of karakia and prayer/inoi can be dismissed. But, I know what I felt, I know how I felt, but I'll leave the rest of that discussion to the psychologists and theologians. For me, the essential point was this: I needed to be restored, and so the question I want to discuss is—what other circumstances can karakia be used to bring about the beginning of restoration, and the feeling that restoration has begun?

Michael Shirres (1997), in his enlightening book *Te Tangata: The Human Person*, describes two forms of tapu as well as two forms of noa. He believed that contemporary definitions of tapu often short-changed the concept by describing it in terms of something being sacred or under restriction. He preferred to look at tapu as having two elements: the potentiality for power, and its link to the spiritual powers. He also saw two forms of tapu. The first form of tapu is the primary or intrinsic tapu that all humans have. It comes from being descended or created by God or the gods. Whether you believe it is Io, Yahweh or Rangi and Papa, our intrinsic tapu comes from our relationship to them, where "both intrinsic tapu and mana are linked with 'being', with existing. … Everything that is, has its own intrinsic tapu,

tapu which begins with its existence and which has its source in the mana of the spiritual powers" (Shirres, 1997, p. 36).

The second form of tapu that Shirres (1997) identifies is what he refers to as the "extension of tapu", where a person comes under occasional restrictions. These restrictions can occur at certain times; for example, at birth, upon death, or going to war. They can occur at certain places such as an urupā or entering a marae for the first time. Once those times are over, or we have left those places, we have the opportunity to become noa again; often after such rituals as the eating of kai or the sprinkling of water have taken place. We become noa again in relation to that extension of tapu, whereby we still hold our primary/intrinsic tapu with its usual restrictions, but the extension of tapu has ended.

As mentioned, Shirres believes that there are also two types of noa. At its essence, noa means to be free from restriction, where some states of noa are negative and some are positive. An example of positive noa would be when you have gone through the pōwhiri process and become free from particular restrictions and are free to enter into the different activities there. Another example is when a new wharenui is opened and the tapu around its construction has been removed allowing everyone to enter freely. However, some noa are negative, such as when a person's tapu has been violated, where they become "free from restriction in a negative way and able to be treated as otaota, as rubbish" (Shirres, 1997, p. 45). The primary example that Shirres (1997) uses of a negative noa was in the case of the prisoner who was taken as a taurekareka, a slave. The person became free from the restriction of tapu because his intrinsic tapu had been diminished by the people who held him captive. In this case, most if not all his tapu and mana has been diminished and consequently there are few if any restrictions on and around him and he can therefore be treated as having no intrinsic value. His tapu, and you may like to describe it in this way, his humanity and dignity, is diminished.

During pre-contact times, when inter-tribal feuding took place, once prisoners returned home after being freed, a karakia was said over them which ended their noa status by clearing away the influence of that which had oppressed them. The karakia restored their intrinsic tapu and in so doing restored them to their rightful state of spiritual and psychological balance (Shirres, 1997).

This idea of removing and restoring tapu over an individual is not uncommon to many of us. I remember talking to a kaumātua from my iwi in 1999 who said that his whānau had declared his head tapu and no one was to touch it. This was more than just the intrinsic tapu that all of us have, but, in Shirres' terms, was an "extension of tapu". He did, however, have the power to remove that tapu by performing a karakia so that he could have his hair cut and afterwards he would restore that extended state of tapu, again by karakia. Around that time, I was at a talk given by the late Hohepa Kereopa (H. Kereopa, personal communication, August 1999) at Kirikiriroa Marae where he was discussing the problems with maintaining the restrictions of tapu and noa within hospitals. There are many examples of problems that have occurred at hospitals particularly around food, bedpans, the use of pillows etc. (for examples see West Coast District Health Board, n.d.). Hohepa's perspective, as I understood it, was that if he went into hospital he would do a karakia to remove the tapu, then they could do whatever they liked to him. When it was all over and he was due to go home he would do another karakia to restore that tapu. Here I believe he was referring to his intrinsic tapu, so that the medical staff would be able to do whatever they had to do without worrying about diminishing both his mana and his tapu.

I am a social worker and so ask myself "What does this mean for social work practice?" and "Are their instances within our practice where we can include these type of karakia?" An obvious situation to consider is the karakia to

restore the mana and tapu of a prisoner. The issue was raised by Melanie Stanley, one of my past social work students living in Invercargill with an interest in corrections. She identified that traditionally, once a prisoner returned home there was a karakia to remove the negative noa and restore their tapu. She wondered "how often the tapu of a prisoner is restored in a contemporary setting once they are released back into the community and therefore how much something such as tapu and noa, that Pākehā would dismiss, has an influence on some of the recidivist offending amongst Māori" (Stanley, 2011). She raises an interesting point. Prison inevitably diminishes the tapu and the mana of a prisoner. The Corrections Department has the power over those whom they hold captive. Prisoners are not free, they are required to do as they are told and have to submit to the control of others. From this perspective it is hard to see how their tapu and their mana are not diminished. In fact it can be argued that punishment is a ritual degradation of status where prison inherently degrades and humiliates (Maruna, 2011). Mana in a contemporary sense is complex and sometimes problematic. Some would say many of these prisoners have no mana because of their crimes. Others, particularly those involved in sub-cultures like gang members, may view it differently, where in the eyes of their peers their crimes increase their mana (in this context we are discussing mana tangata, that mana we gain through our own actions and character; see Mead, 2003). Tapu, on the other hand, is less problematic and there could be surely little argument about looking into processes that restore the tapu of a prisoner once they are to be returned to the community.

The karakia that Stanley referred to is one reprinted in Shirres (1997) and begins with the words "Waea te noa i a koe" and is included in full at the end of this article. It was used to restore a person's intrinsic tapu to its full extent once they were released from being a prisoner and/or a taurekareka. In the situation that Stanley suggests there are some logical problems. If we accept this, are we saying that prisoners, by being in custody, have lost all rights to be treated as if their tapu and their dignity remain intact? My 21st-century mind would like to think that a large vestige of their intrinsic tapu and therefore their dignity remains, particularly from a human rights and social justice perspective. There can be nothing to gain from dehumanising someone in prison and it would be counter-productive anyway as nearly all are eventually returned to the community (Vasiljevic & Viki, 2013). This shows the difficulty in trying to apply traditional concepts to somewhat different, but possibly parallel, contemporary contexts. Having said that, it is logical to ask whether a process involving karakia could be useful as part of the process to contribute to their restoration and rehabilitation once they are returned to the community.

One of the criticisms of what are referred to as Anglo-American societies (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) is the poor job done reintegrating prisoners back into society and turning them back into citizens (Maruna, 2011). Maruna (2011) argues that one of the problems is the absence of significant rituals that return prisoners back to the community, where they are restored to a status of being part of the community again. Rituals are an important part of human society and used to acknowledge groups or individuals going through some form of transition (Maruna, 2011). They can be used to signify the start of something such as a wedding at the beginning of a marriage or the end of something as in a graduation or a committal at a funeral, and as such, rituals can be accompanied by deeply felt emotions and meanings. The processes leading up to imprisonment are highly ritualised. The arrest, the reading of rights, the laying of charges, the trial process, including swearing on the Bible, and the sentencing are all formal and ritualised. Entering prison has its own rituals, including processing and the strip search. What is not done well is when prisoners are released. There is rarely any process or

ritual that symbolically reintegrates a prisoner back into society (Maruna, 2011). Workman (2013) gives an example of a hapū member in the 1950s who had been sentenced for dishonesty offences involving the local marae. Upon release a pōwhiri was held for him where he was brought back into the community and restored to his previous position as secretary/treasurer, much to the ridicule of the local Pākehā population. However, the process that allowed him to reintegrate back into the community then also allowed him to make restitution (that is, he was able to return far more than was taken). One of the key points of the story was that the ritual of the pōwhiri contributed majorly and publicly to his reintegration into his community, which led to this process of rehabilitation and restitution. This was not done by naīve do-gooders out of touch with reality. It was about creating an opportunity to encourage the process of turning one's life around so that the prisoner is no longer a threat to society (now referred to as desistance) (Workman, 2013).

As a society, New Zealand needs to find culturally appropriate ways of reintegrating prisoners back into the community so they have the opportunity to contribute back to it. If we declare that people cannot change and our system of stigmatisation continues assuming they have not, it can be far more difficult to maintain the changes they may have endeavoured to start (Maruna, 2011).

Victims of crime

For many years the karakia "Waea te noa i a koe" has interested me as it restores tapu and mana in the eyes of the individual and in the eyes of the community. I first remember seeing this karakia performed after a young man had taken his own life and I have also heard of it being used in the tragic deaths of other young men. I have often wondered if it also has use for the victims of crime. Rape in particular is a crime against the body, against the hinengaro and against the wairua of the victim. These people have been treated with contempt as if they were not tapu, as if they were something to be used, as if they were common or even otaota, and often rape survivors will identify that feeling (Kingi & Jordan, 2009). I wonder if restorative forms of karakia may be useful in this situation to begin the path towards restoration, to assure them and remind them that although there may be things that are difficult to restore such as innocence, freedom from fear, etc., nevertheless, their tapu can be restored.

Many writers talk about the effect of rape on a person's mana and how the restoration of their mana is seen as an important part of their recovery (Hamilton-Katene, 2009; Joseph, 1999; Kingi & Jordan, 2009; Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2009). However, mana and tapu co-exist where one is affected by the other. The loss of mana, or potential loss of mana, has occurred because the tapu has been violated. The victim has been treated as if there was no restriction around them, as if they were a taurekareka to be treated at the whim of the powerful and so, arguably, primarily it is their tapu that first needs to be restored. Even if mana was the issue, the restoration of mana first requires the restoration of tapu (Tate, 2010).

There are a number of acts that are considered to diminish the intrinsic tapu of both the victim and the perpetrator, including child abuse, violence, sexual abuse, rape and incest (Tate, 2010). These acts violate the mana of the victim but also diminish the perpetrator's own mana. While there is a need for the perpetrators of these crimes to come to terms with this, in the end, the priority has to be for the victim so that there is a restoration of tapu and a "sense of tapu" for both survivors and their whānau (Kruger et al., 2004). There is evidence that a person who is the victim of sexual crime is far more likely to be abused by a partner because of the lack of belief in their own self-worth, is more likely to be involved in increased sexual risk taking, and will be at risk of facing a multitude of possible physical, emotional and psychological

challenges (Herbert, Hill, & Dickson, 2009; McLaren, 2008; Ministry of Health, 2001).

The question is: How do you both restore tapu and a sense of tapu? Kingi and Jordan (2009) reported that over 80% of rape survivors at the time of their research, even after counselling, did not feel that they had recovered or been healed. They identified the need for ongoing counselling and support for the survivors of sexual crimes because the act of restoration and healing is ongoing, and in some cases may never completely heal. Restoring tapu and the sense of it might be an ongoing process, but it may be that karakia can play a major role in initiating and supporting that process.

The karakia "Waea te noa i a koe" has been used in a variety of different ways including sudden death (Shirres, n.d.), suicide, and as an important part in the restoration of relationships in the hohou rongo peacemaking process between a perpetrator and victim (Tate, 2010). Traditionally, however, the karakia appears to have been used unilaterally to restore the tapu of someone who has had their inherent tapu diminished or removed. While the use of the word taurekarekatanga, or slavery, in the karakia may be problematic because of its modern connotations, it might be possible to substitute a different word, such as hereheretanga, for imprisonment, or a word signifying that someone's mana or tapu had been trampled or violated.

Conclusion

In this brief article I have tried to take very complex traditional concepts to one particular practice and see how they can make a difference to Māori living in the 21st century. Melanie Stanley's question about why we don't use karakia to restore the tapu of our modern-day prisoners on their release is a valid one. Could it make a difference, no matter how slight, to our imprisoned whānau, showing them that they are people of value with mana and tapu, in the hope that it may add positively to their rehabilitation?

I have raised the question as to whether this process of restoring tapu could also be of use to help in the healing of survivors of sexual crimes. It may seem intuitive, that by restoring tapu and the sense of tapu it may have the potential to contribute to the healing process, and that while there are many things that cannot be restored, this is potentially something that is worth considering in the future.

How do you restore mana? There is not a simple answer, it depends on the hara, it depends on the victim and their whānau, and it depends on the offender and their whānau and whether the process is acceptable. How do you restore tapu? Is it too simplistic to say by karakia? Of course I am not naïve enough to think that karakia is a cure-all in these situations. For me I still had to deal with the emotions and the memories and there were things I still needed to work through, minor though my own incident is compared to the trauma that many go through. But, my tapu was restored, the balance started to return and the feeling of peace within myself came back.

Waea te noa i a koe
Waea te noa i a koe,
waea te hau i runga i a koe,
waea te taurekarekatanga i a koe.
Ko te mumu te āwhā, tēnei ka horo.
Ka horo te hau otaota i runga i a koe.
Ko Tiki i āhua mai i Hawaiki.
Ko te mauri tēnā i kawea ai
te tokomauri o te tapu, tapu nui, tapu whakahirahira,
he mauri nō Rongo ki te whai-ao.
Tihē mauri-ora. Tō kōiwi ka horo.

Clear away the noa from you,
Clear away the spirit which is upon you,
Clear away from the state of being a slave.
The storm rages. This clears it.
The force upon you that makes you rubbish is cleared off.

You are Tiki formed in Hawaiki.
That life-force brought [to you] is the manifold life-force of the tapu, of the great tapu, a highly important tapu.
It is a life-force from Rongo, leading to the dawn.
Breathe living spirit! Your bones are cleared.
The forces over you are made noa.

(Shirres, n.d., paras. 1–2; Shirres, 1997, p. 45)

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Glossary

The following terms are translated using the meanings as they were used in this article. Many of these words can mean much more than how they are translated here.

hara	crime
hereheretanga	imprisonment
hinengaro	mind
hohou rongo	to make peace
inoi	prayer
Io	highest Māori deity
iwi	tribe, nation
kai	food
karakia	prayer, incantation
kaumātua	elder
mana	power, prestige, esteem, status
mana tangata	recognition we gain due to our own actions and character
marae	local tribal base, traditional gathering place
noa	free from restriction
otaota	rubbish
Pākehā	New Zealanders of European ethnicity
Papa (Papa-tū-ā-nuku)	the earth mother
pōwhiri	welcome ritual
Rangi (Ranginui)	the sky father
tangihanga	mourning rituals/ ceremony
tapu	sacred, under restriction, the potentiality for power
taurekareka	slave
taurekarekatanga	slavery
tūpāpaku	corpse
urupā	cemetery
wairua	spirit
whaea	an older woman in the community
whānau	extended family
wharenui	meeting house

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