

KOTAHITANGA

Kotahitanga is the value of solidarity. It refers to the cultural imperative to work for the common interest of the group. It is a way of enhancing whanaungatanga. The well-being of the whānau, hapū, iwi, waka and Māori people relies on the strength and support of all working for the common good. (Henare)

Unity was fundamental to Māori traditionally; they lived in close-knit communities and worked together and planted food together. Such was the nature of the shared economy envisioned by King Tāwhiao when he instituted the poukai (economic order) amongst the Waikato people more than one hundred years ago. The purpose of the poukai was to provide for the needs of the poor, the widowed, and the orphaned, and to foster tribal unity. A special feast and gala day were organized on a marae and people belonging to the local tribal groups would bring their offerings to be shared with those in need.

In addition, the success of the poukai indicated the support of the people for the King Movement and its appointed leader. Poukai are still held each year at more than thirty venues¹ and the present Queen, Dame Te Atairangikahu, makes every effort to attend all of these functions and to support Māori developments both within her tribal area and nationally.

Ever since the arrival of Pakeha, Māori people have endeavoured to bring about the unification of all tribes in New Zealand. In 1835, for example, a conference was held in the Ngapuhi area to address this important issue and, even though there were a number of disputes and differences between tribes remaining from earlier times, people were willing to set them aside in the interest of the common good.² Again, in the 1850's, an endeavour was made to appoint a Māori King. It was discussed among many tribes, with the final outcome in 1858 that Potatau Te Wherowhero was appointed as the first Māori King (for the Tainui area only).

Many whakatauki (proverbs) refer to the importance of unity:

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| 1. <i>He iwi kotahi tātou</i> | We are now one people (attributed to Hobson on 6 Feb 1840) |
| 2. <i>Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi engari he toa takitini</i> | My valour isn't that of the individual but of the multitude. |
| 3. <i>He o te kotahi, nō te tokomaha</i> | The fault of one is the fault of all (reflects on all) |
| 4. <i>He waka eke noa</i> | A canoe for all (possessions are shared) |
| 5. <i>He ora te whakapiri, he mate te whakatakariri</i> | Strength in unity, defeat in anger |
| 6. <i>Ki ngā whakaeke haumi</i> | Ally yourself with those who have already banded together |
| 7. <i>Mā pango, mā whero, ka oti te mahi</i> | When workers and chiefs work together, work is soon done |
| 8. <i>Ko koe ki tēnā, ko au ki tēnei kiwai o te kete</i> | You at that, me at this end of the basket (and it can be carried) |
| 9. <i>Kaua e rangiruatia te hapai o te hoe; e kore tō tātou waka e u ki te uta</i> | Don't paddle some of you with one stroke, some with another, our canoe will not reach the shore |
| 10. <i>Kotahi Te kohao o Te ngira, e kuhuna Te Miro whero, Te Miro ma, te miro pango</i> | The needle has only one eye but it can be threaded with red cotton, one cotton, black cotton (different colors together) |

▲ Many cultures have proverbs relating to unity; what is one that you particularly like from your own culture?

▲ How relevant to the Council are these sayings and ideas about kotahitanga? why/why not?

Henare, Manuka (1988) in 'Nga Tikenga Me Nga Ritenga O Te Ao Maori: Standards and Foundations of Maori Society' in *The April Report: Future Directions. Volume III, Part One, Associated Papers*. Wellington: Royal Commission on Social Policy, p 24

Barlow, Cleve (1991) in *Tikanga Whakaaro: Key Concepts in Maori Culture*. Auckland: Oxford University Press, pp 56-58.



Treaty Resource Centre
He Puna Mātauranga o Te Tiriti

¹ The map of 'Tribal Territories of Tainui' handed out in Korowai Tuatahi lists most of the poukai marae.

² This gathering was of the Confederation of United Tribes to consider the Declaration of Independence.