

## Mana

*Te mana o te kupu*

*The power of the spoken word*

*Ko toku mana o tuawhakahaere  
no nga atua*

*Mana is from the beginning of time; it is  
from the gods*

*Te mana o nga toa*

*The prestige of warriors*

*Mana: Authority, control; influence, prestige, power; psychic force; effectual binding, authoritative; having influence or power; vested with effective authority; be effectual, take effect; be avenged*  
(Williams, 1985, p 172)

*Mana is a very complicated matter. There are three kinds of mana: mana whenua, mana tūpuna, mana tangata. Everyone is born with mana whenua - that's the mana you get from being a New Zealander, an American, a Rarotongan, from your land, from your tūrangawaewae. Everyone is born with mana tūpuna - that's the mana you get from your ancestors. Now if your ancestors were of a chiefly line then that mana is yours also. Mana tangata however comes from how you develop as a person, your individual mana. You know we really spoil our babies! They've got mana whenua and mana tūpuna as soon as they're born of course; but it's only later that they develop their mana tangata. So we must nurture them until they can stand on their own mana!*  
(Te Raukura - Maniapoto)

*My mana is my cool.*

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(both items from Roa, 1987, p 37)

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## Mana (Power, Authority, Prestige)

Mana is the enduring, indestructible power of the gods. It is the sacred fire that is without beginning and without end. Tāne ascended by the sacred vine in order that he might retrieve the mana of sacred power of the gods, which was known to the ancestors as the ahi kōmau. Tāne was not successful in his attempt to retrieve the ahi kōmau, but he did bring back to earth the knowledge of how one might acquire this sacred power. When the priestly experts carried out their ritual at the altars on the marae, they would light a fire as a symbol of the ahi kōmau, that is, of the sacred power of the gods. In these rituals, which were performed under priestly direction, it was possible for one to enter the confines of the whare maihi or sacred carved house.

In modern times the term mana has taken on various meanings, including the power of the gods, the power of ancestors, the power of the land, and the power of the individual.

**Mana Atua:** This is the very sacred power of the gods known as the ahi kōmau which is given to those persons who conform to sacred ritual and principles.

**Mana Tūpuna:** This is the power of or authority handed down through chiefly lineage; that is, from the paramount chiefs and others who possessed it. The powers passed down from generation to generation. Those who inherit mana must carry out the various rituals and duties to maintain this power handed down from the ancient ones.

**Mana Whenua:** This is the power associated with the possession of lands; it is also the power associated with the ability of the land to produce the bounties of nature. When the world was created, the gods implanted this procreative power within the womb of Mother Earth. By the power of mana mauri all things have the potential for growth and development towards maturity. There is another aspect to the power of land; a person who possesses land has the power to produce a livelihood for family and tribe, and every effort is made to protect these rights.

There is also an association between mana and the afterbirth or placenta of a person and the land. When a child is born the afterbirth is expelled from the mother. This afterbirth or whenua was the source of nourishment when the child was growing in the womb, and it is a living entity. For this reason it is not appropriate to throw it away carelessly or to burn it; instead, it should be buried in the earth as a sign that the child will continue to grow and develop. In addition, there were a number of other important principles associated with the mana of land, some of which are still applicable today, including; inherited rights, the establishment of fortresses, the power to control and protect, land confiscation, conservation, chiefly status, and sacred burial grounds.

**Mana Tangata:** This is the power acquired by an individual according to his or her ability and effort to develop skills and to gain knowledge in particular areas. For example, a skilled warrior was able to acquire mana through the arts of combat and warfare under the code of law of Tūmataenga, the god of war. Women have personal power in respect of their role in taking care of children and, on the marae, in welcoming and caring for visitors.

There are many more nuances of meaning associated with the term mana, but the broad meanings outlined above distinguish the major usages.

### MANA

Mana as a concept is beyond translation from the Maori language. Its meaning is multi-form and includes psychic influence, control, prestige, power, vested and acquired authority and influence, being influential or binding over others, and that quality of the person that others know he or she has! Mana may be given to whole tribes of people because they have gained a reputation for excelling in some particular area e.g. hosting and feeding visitors.

There is too the mana that has been vested and passed down to the senior-most person - in most cases the first born of each generation that is descended from an illustrious ancestor. Though primogeniture is the customary preference, where rangatira can see outstanding leadership qualities in a younger person they may bestow mana on a more junior person than the eldest. People who have and hold this type of mana are not always seen in the public eye, but are often consulted and approached within the privacy of their own immediate kinship group. Today, people from other cultures sometimes approach Maori people, who appear to be carrying leadership roles within the formal context of the Marae-atea, only to be told to approach someone else who is working quietly

behind the scenes. People familiar with this type of mana have little or no difficulty recognising or "feeling" it within other people.

People outside the senior descent-lines can also be given mana in consequence of certain gifts or outstanding qualities they may have. These qualities may be evident in uplifting the whanau, hapu or tribal group they may belong to. One cannot always assume that because a Maori person has acquired status in the western world that she or he has mana in the Maori world. Some of the officers from the Maori Battalion, who returned back home to their Maori communities after the Second World War, had to come under the leadership and recognised authority of men who had once been under their command in Europe.

Mana can also be given to charismatic people. That is, to a person with the ability to influence a whole range of others, including hapu, to join together as one cohesive unit prepared to share every possible resource and skill that they would normally keep within their own whanau. Charismatic leaders of this nature have sometimes been a real threat to traditional leaders. This type of mana does not automatically pass on to the charismatic leader's spouse or children.

The psychic mana that is vested and passed down genealogically is the type of mana that can help people become relieved of tapu and give spiritual protection to their kith and kin, or to other people who may turn to them for help. The mana of such people is highly respected and valued. It is very seldom challenged even by those people who have received other forms of mana from their own kinship groups. This mana is most effective when they are within their own papakainga and on their own turangawaewae. The following instance will illustrate the point:

Four rangatira went into another tribal area to discuss land issues and while there decided to challenge the mana of their hosts. One of the visiting rangatira decided to withdraw when the head person of the host group reminded the visitors of the main reason for their visit. The rangatira who withdrew told the author that his three kinsmen took ill on their return home and died within six months, leaving three of their hapu devoid of their most senior person.

Mana permeates the ethos of Maori life in very subtle ways and is associated with aroha and utu (reciprocity). An individual or group will reciprocate anything they receive, whether it be good or bad, because of the challenge such an act represents to the concept of mana. While members of a whanau may quarrel and bicker amongst themselves, uniting together to keep their mana intact in dealings with people outside their kinship group is of paramount importance.

## The meaning of mana

By Chris Winitana

*There are more cautionary notes in Maoridom dealing with mana than you could shake the proverbial stick at. It is a source of both personal and collective strength, pride and identity. Mishandled, it becomes the bearer of shame, ridicule and embarrassment. If mana allows us to walk tall, then it also casts a long shadow - humility.*

*To write about mana can be likened to picking blackberries: it's not a job for the barefooted, the fruit is sweet but fragile, and don't upset your neighbour - stick to your own patch. In other words, draw on your experiences, not those of others.*

*Chris Winitana, journalist and student of Maoritanga, is a blackberry picker from way back.*

- Waihoroi Shortland

I was 11 years old when my tuakana, elder brother, thrashed the living daylights out of me. It was my first no-holds-barred hiding. I don't remember what started it or what happened past the wild flurry of punches, but I've never forgotten it.

Mostly because of what my father did as I was being pushed, shoved, punched and kicked around the front lawn. He just sat there on the porch, rolled a Tasman Dark smoke, watched and waited.

In fact, it was he who prompted my normally docile brother to get stuck in to me - once and for all. I was always getting smart. Pushing him just far enough.

"You've got to learn sometime and it may as well be now." was all the old man said.

And that was my first painful lesson about mana.

It taught me how far my mana, in terms of my own family, extended. My brother the same - though I think he already knew.

It taught me you don't cross mana. You don't ignore it, or try to sneak around it. You simply pay courteous respect to it - whether you like it or not.

That might mean such trivial dues as having to give it the biggest eel of the night's tincan lantern-light catch. Or seeking its assent before speaking at a hui.

In Maori terms, mana is what makes the world go round. Wars have been fought over mana, but mana can stop wars too.

Like one of my tipuna, Te Rurehe. He was a fighting chief of Tuhoe, the Urewera bush tribe renowned for their lavishness in dishing out food, dishing out treasures and, especially, dishing out death.

Te Rurehe, who lived about 300 years ago, was famed as an exponent of the taiaha - a long staff weapon.

One day he was caught alone near the Star Lake, Waikaremoana, by a battalion of Ngati Kahungunu soldiers out to settle a score over another case of trampled mana.

Out numbered 400 to one, he had a choice to make: die, run or simply see who had the most mana. Deciding on the latter, he calmly lifted his war apron, exposed himself and urinated in front of the enemy.

Satisfied that he had made the right impact, he yelled out to them: "You have now seen the taiaha of Te Rurehe. Do not come forth, for its mana will kill you."

Nonchalantly, he turned around, broke wind and walked away. Fearing the double-edged threat of Te Rurehe's mana, not one of the 400 was game to have a go.

It doesn't matter how you look at it, mana underpins everything.

But mana has many faces. It could be the power and authority you're given because it's known that you can prove your point. It could be the charisma, the aura that you have. The respect you conjure up. But the Maori equation used to decide how much mana you have differs from that of the Pakeha.

You may be a rubbish man from Monday to Friday, but the cook at the local marae during all the weekend hui, feeding hundreds of people at a time. As cook you are upholding the very mana of the marae in exactly the same way as the more obvious marae speakers who greet the visitors out the front.

There's no mana in flash words and no kai. The fact you have little mana in the Pakeha world as a rubbish man is of no bearing.

From the other side in, you could be a businessman who drives a Mercedes, lives on Mortgage Ave and has a lot of Pakeha mana. Yet when you go back to your marae you're the dishwasher and rubbish man. Your Merc is parked out the back with Zephyrs and Holdens.

In Maori terms, your mana comes down to how well you care for your family, subtribe, tribe and canoe. Ultimately, other people.

My grandfather, Pateriki Hura, had mana.

His epitaph, written by his tribe as their final words to him, reads:

*Te murau a te tini.*

*Te wenerau a te mano.*

*Te manu tioriori.*

Literally, it means they thought of him as the "dread of the multitudes, the envy of the thousands, the entrancing sentinel bird" of Ngati Tuwharetoa in the central North Island.

Every time we mokopuna went back to his and nana's place at Taumarunui, we'd tip-toe around him in awe. And when he wasn't sleeping in his chair - the one we weren't even allowed to look at - he was in his office doing something.

That "something", I found out later, was sorting out land hassles, law hassles and tribal hassles. He'd stopped working in the Pakeha 40-hour-a-week sense at about 40, just to troubleshoot on anything and everything to do with Tuwharetoa firstly, and Maori matters secondly.

It was only last year, nine years after his death, that I was allowed into his office. And there it all was. His life's work. Land court records, law books, statutes, files - dozens and dozens of them, on every piece of land he had anything to do with in Tuwharetoa.

Forestry. Lakes. Legal wrangles. Waitangi Tribunal matters. Fighting laws that threatened lands and waterways. Tuwharetoa's huge timber potential. The seeds were sown in that office.

Majestic Tongariro was covered in cloud the day he died in November 1980.

Thousands came to his three-day tangi at Waihi Village, the home of the Tuwharetoa subtribe Ngati Turumakina on Taupo's western shores.

I remember the cars lined up tip-to-bumper along the five kilometres of road from the marae to the cemetery up the Kakaramea Hill. And the speeches and songs that drew pictures of koro and made him breathe again.

I knew that Gaga (that's his mokopuna's nickname for him) belonged to the chiefly lines of Tuwharetoa, the House of Te Heuheu, but I didn't really know what that meant.

Until this tangi.

Besides whatever mana he was conferred with by the tribe for his works, demeanour and persona, he had another sort of mana. An inherited mana accrued from all his tipuna down the Heuheu line, starting with his great-great-grandfather, the founder - Te Heuheu Herea.

The present paramount chief, Sir Hepi Te Heuheu, is the absolute holder of all that mana by direct inheritance father to son.

I listened to the stories of Te Heuheu and got an inkling of the feelings borne by the tribe to the tangi. The images conjured up in their mind as speakers spoke and singers sang.

And understood in my heart, not head, that Te Heuheu's mana could move the stars, cause thunder and lightning, even change the very colour of greenstone.

They sang Herea's death song. Herea, who took paramount chieftainship of the tribe after beating another contender, Wakaiti, in single combat with a pointed staff, pouwhenua. Herea, who tried to bit Wakaiti's head to debase his mana to that of a slave.

And the song of Mananui, Herea's son, Te toka tu moana - the sea-held, immovable rock that no wave dared break over. Mananui, who succeeded to the throne through his inherited mana and ability as a war general and caretaker of his people. And who was gifted the godlike mana and powers of his tohunga priest uncle Taipahau, after biting the right ear of the old warlock as he lay on his death bed. That was the act that got him the name Mananui - Big Mana.

(Taipahau it was who blasted and withered the healthy leaves of a titree before the disbelieving eyes of Bishop Selwyn. That was just a little show of the mana of his gods. In death, Taipahau sealed himself in the rock wall face you see just as you turn off the main highway into Waihi. Pakeha using earthmoving machines tried to smash down that face to lay the road there. Not surprisingly, it wouldn't budge.)

I listened to my koroua read the 70 or so ancestral carvings in Waihi's meeting house, Tapeka. I watched old biddies hongitaki them; others just cry and hug them.

There was the trickster Tama Te Kapua, the captain of Te Arawa canoe, the canoe which carried Tuwharetoa's tipuna from Hawaiki. It was he who tricked and all but kidnapped the Tainui canoe's tohunga chief Ngatoroirangi so that the mana of Te Arawa might be elevated more than the others.

It was he who tried to steal from Tainui the thunder mana of landing first at Aotearoa. On Te Arawa's arrival they found a whale stranded, beached and tied to a nearby tree. Seeing the mana of the moment slipping away, Tama Te Kopua made another rope, roughened it to make it look old and used, tied it to the whale and buried it under the other. When Tainui turned up to collect their whale, the debate started. All in the name of mana.

There's Tia, the finder of Lake Taupo whose land claims form the basis of Ngati Tuwharetoa's mana whenua, their right to be where they are.

There's the man Tuwharetoa himself, whose physical beauty and prowess led him into marriages, elopements and illicit rendezvous - from one of which sprang Tutanekai, of Hinemoa and Tutanekai fame.

And Rereao, a grandson, who agreed to give his daughter in marriage to a man he had just buried alive, head above ground, in a hangi.

Also Pikihiua, a priestess, whose mana was such that warriors going into battle first crawled beneath her legs to keep them safe under tapu.

All these tipuna were there the day koro died, their collective mana the magnet which drew the people. A celestial mana. A spiritual mana. A land-derived mana. A deeds mana. A knowledge man. And, at the everyday level of conduct, a mana that expresses itself in humaneness, justice, caring, giving, sacrifice.

A mana that makes grandfathers fight tooth and nail over land. Over language retention. Over values. That makes them cry with pride when they see their mokopuna doing the haka. And mad when they see the All Blacks debauching it. And cringe when the Pakeha tongue slurs through Maori words. Shake the head in disbelief over having to get a fishing licence for Lake Taupo.

It's a mana that makes Maori people walk the length and breadth of Aotearoa. Take umpteen days off to go to tangi. Leave our jobs during the week to wash thousands of dishes at marae over the weekend. Lead two lives - a Pakeha one for sustenance to stay alive. A Maori one for sustenance to live.

It doesn't matter that you may have been born in a dirt-floored shanty and been uneducated, as koro was. Mana comes through hands-on commitment to your own people.

Its tests are your own actions.

Its testers, the people around you.

As a kaumatua once said: "It's not easy being Maori today. You've got eight hours to earn money to live, eight hours to sleep to live and only eight hours to do all that living. As yourself. A Maori.

"We must have a lot of mana to have got this far!"

*No reira e koro!* Return to the veil! The dread of the multitudes. The envy of the thousands. My sentinel bird!

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