



WHAT IS A MARAE?

“Marae are places of refuge for our people and provide facilities to enable us to continue with our own way of life within the total structure of our own terms and values.”

The marae is an institution from classical Maori society that has survived the impact of western civilisation. It is central to the concept of Maoritanga and the Maori cultural identity. Maori oratory, language, values and social etiquette are given their fullest expression on the marae at the tangi and hui (assemblies). The marae is the place where values and philosophy are reaffirmed. It is the only institution where the dignity of the tangi can be preserved and the dead farewelled in the appropriate customary fashion. The marae is sacred to the living, and is a memorial to the dead. For this reason, the marae must be entered in a reverent manner.

The marae is socially integrative in the sense that it fosters identity, self-respect, pride and social control. The marae is also integrative in that all people are welcome as guests. It is one institution where the Pakeha can meet the Maori on Maori terms and come to a better understanding of what it means to have a bicultural society.

THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

A marae complex comprises:

1. The Marae. The full name for the sacred courtyard in front of the meeting-house is Te Maraenui-atea-o-Tumatauenga (the larger marae of Tumatauenga, the God of War). Going on to the marae means entering into an

encounter situation, where challenges are met and issues are debated. All newcomers to the marae must be greeted formally by the tangata whenua (hosts) whether in the warmth of a welcome, in the sadness of a tangi or even in verbal battle on mutual issues. It is the place where people formally come together on a specific occasion for a specific function. It has its procedure and this is referred to below, although it may vary from tribe to tribe.

2. The Meeting House. The marae and the meeting house are complementary and together serve as the focal point for community sentiment. The meeting house is normally the major central building and, in the main, ornately carved. The meeting house has many new names including tipuna whare and whare nui. In nearly all cases it is not only named after an ancestor but it is structured to represent symbolically the ancestor. Thus the carved figure (tekoteko) on the roof top in front represents the ancestor head, the carved angles from the head down towards the ground (maihi) represent the arms, the ridge pole down the centre of the building (tahuhu or taahu) is seen as the backbone and the rafters (heke) reaching from the ridge pole to the carved figures around the walls (poupou) represent the ribs. The poupou are normally carved ancestors representing other tribes. Poupou then function as identifiers in a feeling of belonging. The uprights, normally two holding up the tahuhu, represent connection between Rangi the sky father and Papa-tuanuku the earth mother. While there are other interpretations it follows appropriately that the meeting houses are named after an ancestor. Thus, on entering the house it can be seen as entering into the bosom of an ancestor. It follows also that the interaction between people on the Maraenui-atea-o-Tumatauenga can be and should be significantly different from

the type of interaction which is normally encouraged inside the house. It is believed that inside the house the God of Peace (Rongo) reigns and it is in this atmosphere and under this belief that people are required to interact with one another.

3. The Whare Kai. As the name implies, this is the eating house, the place where the “inner man” is satisfied. The Whare Kai is a separate building, not necessarily as a physical reality but in some cases as a concept or belief. The concept of tapu prescribes where food is eaten and where it cannot be eaten and also where drinks can and cannot be drunk. To the Maori, food is a common element (noa) and the opposite of tapu. Whereas the tipuna whare (meeting house) is tapu (sacrosanct) and food cannot therefore be eaten there, the whare kai is free from tapu — the two are at opposite ends of a continuum.

4. Other Buildings and Structures. Many marae have churches situated nearby. This is significant in terms of the acknowledgement of God as an ever-present dimension in the daily lives of people on the marae. Many marae also have a graveyard (urupa) nearby acknowledging the ancestors as a living dimension of life. An ancestor is commemorated within a building — respects are paid to those who have passed on to the hono-i-wairua (gathering place of spirits) within a whaikorero (formal speech making) reflecting the belief in the merging of life and death that is significant and meaningful for the Maori. People living (te hunga ora) are the result of a combination of the dead (te hunga mate) and the living (te hunga ora). References to these concepts are very frequent in whaikorero. On some marae memorials to a significant ancestor or people who died in the second world war are found to the side of the marae or wharenuui and in some cases a flag pole stands majestically at the side of the

meeting house.

Last, but not least, the ablution block and toilets are placed significantly to the rear of the Wharenuui and the Whare Kai.



*Hutia te rito o te harakeke
Kei hea te komako e ko
Ki mai ki ahau he aha te mea nui
o tenei ao.
Maku e ki atu
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.*

*Wrench out the heart of the flax
Where would the bell bird get its
sustenance.*

*If you were to ask me what
is the most important thing in this
world*

I will answer thus.

It is people, it is people, it is people.

THE HUMAN STRUCTURE

Generally there are two major groups of people on the marae.

1. The Tangata-Whenua — the local people who by genealogy and nowadays by association have a turangawaewae (situational identity) to the marae. Their Turangawaewae gives them the right to determine procedures (kawa) on the marae, to determine functions, to define roles on the marae and to enjoy giving hospitality to others. It also prescribes their responsibilities and obligations to visitors. They have the basic task of preparing for visitors, ensuring that they

are well fed and looked after and generally doing all they can to make the hui a success. They contribute to the food supplies, provide the work force for the kitchen, dining room, meeting house and grounds and welcoming visitors. It is the tangata whenua who remove the tapu from the visitors to allow them to become one with the tangata whenua.

The tangata whenua can be subdivided into sub-groups on the basis of their prescribed roles although it is true that roles can overlap.

a. The Young Children. They have free reign over the marae. They can play anywhere on the marae but when a formal welcome is in progress on the marae it becomes out of bounds. It is normal for children to be seen and hopefully not heard but it does not always work out like that. They are valued members of the marae as indeed everyone is. Children belong to the marae and are important. All adults are parents to these children and it is the responsibility of the closest adults to care for them.

b. The Teenager. Again they have free reign of the marae and they learn by experience. However they are expected to carry stools, set and clear tables, serve meals, pour coffee or tea and generally do manual work to ensure that visitors are looked after. In many ways life on the marae can be viewed as a process of roles, beginning as a small child who has freedom all over the marae and then a general apprenticeship starting at the back until finally, when old, right to the front of the marae as a respected elder.

c. The Adults. The adults, men and women, are the workers in the whare kai. The food has to be ordered and delivered, the fires have to be kept (where appropriate), the meals have to be prepared, cooked and served, the hangi has to be built, set down and cooked, the houses, utensils and furniture have to be maintained, the lawns and gardens clipped and maintained and the ablution

block kept clean.

d. The Elders — (Men and Women) — (Nga kaumatua me nga kuia). It is very difficult to know when an elder is an elder in comparison with an adult. It varies from marae to marae, some are exponents of Maoritanga, others are exponents of the Whaikorero. In some districts where there are very few old folk, the younger group of men and women assume the role of the elders. In other areas where the number of elders are greater, the old leaders are very old and the younger ones have to wait in the "wings" during a formal welcome — whereas on other marae they could be leading the welcome.

The mana of the elders is expansive. They are revered by the not-so-old because of their wisdom through experience, their wise counsel, their expertise in nga taonga o nga tupuna Maori (treasures of the ancestors) and their guidance in all things pertaining to the marae and to life in general. Their role as implied in the above paragraph is to "front" the marae, welcome the visitors (the women perform the karanga — or welcome chant — and sing the waiata which relishes each speech), ensure that the kawa (procedure) is strictly adhered to and generally or specifically pass on their knowledge to the young.

2. The Manuhiri — Visitors comprise the second main division in the marae encounter situation. As visitors they take their lead from the established kawa of the tangata-whenua to avoid offending and to show reciprocally the respect that people have for one another. Recognising the reciprocal nature of the marae encounter and the costs such encounters incur, the manuhiri make their contribution not only in respecting local patterns of behavior but also in the form of a koha (support money given by the manuhiri to the tangata whenua).



Ngapuhi meets Arawa, Kawiti and Mita Taupopoki, Rotorua, 1932. (Photo: Auckland Museum.)

MARAE PROCEDURE (KAWA)

1. The Beginning of a Marae Hui

a. Normally the manuhiri wait at the gate entrance (tomokanga) of the marae with women and children flanked closely by the men. This indicates to the tangata whenua that they are ready.

b. The tangata whenua group in front or at the side of the marae. As many of the tangata whenua as possible should do this as an expression of their welcome.

2. Karanga (call) — Normally a woman from the host side calls first to indicate to the manuhiri to move forward on to the marae. This is normally answered by a woman's response from the manuhiri. It is a shrill high-pitched call of welcome and acknowledgement. It can also be an identifying call from the manuhiri indicating where the group has come from. At a tangi where groups follow one another this becomes more crucial.

3. Manuhiri Movement — While the host will stand during the karanga, the manuhiri move forward to the puku (centre) of the marae (about 20-30 metres) in front of the meeti g house. Before the welcome can proceed, the manuhiri must have the tapu (or alien element) in them removed by a traditional ritual.

4. Acknowledgement to those who have passed on — Once the manuhiri have approached some 20-30 metres in front of the wharenuai, they pause and with the tangata whenua bow their heads for two or three minutes in remembrance. Immediately after, the tangata whenua will sit and at a given sign, the manuhiri move to take up the seats provided on the right hand side of the marae, with the speakers sitting in the front row of seats.

5. Whaikorero procedure — There are two methods by which the speakers interact.

a. Tau ututu — Speakers alternate, with the tangata whenua beginning and finally ending after the speakers have alternated. The Waikato tribe including Ngati Raukawa use this method.

b. Paeke — All the tangata whenua speak and then all the manuhiri speak. The very last speaker is always the tangata whenua. This is normally the method used in the Ngapuhi, Tuhoe, East Coast tribal areas. In both methods the tangata whenua will have the final say outlining the next movement and inviting the manuhiri to come forward and hongiri. The hongiri involves pressing noses together either once or twice.

6. Whaikorero Format — While there are specific variations there is a common pattern. The following is a pattern of a whaikorero of a visiting speaker. The host speaker follows the same format except that he rarely addresses the house but emphasises a warm welcome.

a. Tauparapara — Introductory salutation, a chant, which can be for identification or an uplifting statement or

a mood setting posture to arrest the listeners. It indicates a wish to speak.

e.g. Ka tangi te titi The titi is calling

Ka tangi te kaka The kaka is calling

Ka tangi hoki ko And I wish to call
au

Tihe Mauriora Behold there is life

b. Mihi to the marae, the house and those present — The marae and the house is personified to the extent that the visiting speaker may connect himself with the hosts through their genealogy or through some common interest.

eg: Te whare e tu nei The house standing here

Te marae e The marae lying
takoto nei here

Tena korua Greetings to
you two

Nga hau e wha People of the
four winds

Nga iwi e tau People gathered
nei here

Tena koutou Greetings to you
katoa all

c. Mihi to the Dead (hunga mate) — In the mind of the Maori there is an inextricable intertwining of life and death — a continuous whole, a sequential movement in which the dead are remembered, greeted and mourned by the hunga ora (the living).

eg: Nga mate, nga The dead, the
aitua afflicted
o koutou ara o both yours and
matou ours
Ka tangihia We lament for
e tatou i tenei them
wa at this time

Haere, haere, Farewell, farewell
haere farewell

d. Te Take (The reason for gathering) — Mention is now made of the reason for the visit.

eg: Karanga mai i Call us to seek the
a matou e whai treasures of our
nei i nga taonga forebears
o nga tupuna

e. Te Whakamutunga (The Conclusion) — The conclusion of a whaikorero finishes with a song (a waiata). The mana of the speaker is always enhanced if his speech is backed by a suitable song or chant. Women and men may accompany a speaker in singing a waiata. A speaker may after the waiata finally summarise the greetings to all and indicate the next action.

eg: No reira, ka piti Therefore the
hono tatai hono dead
Te hunga mate to the dead
ki te hunga mate The living to
Te hunga ora the living
ki te hunga ora Greeting and
Tena koutou welcome to
katoa you all.



7. Presenting a koha (money gifts) — Normally the last speaker on the manuhiri side presents the koha. A koha is an amount of money collected from the manuhiri. It is money of love and respect to the tangata whenua for their impending hospitality. It is used to offset the costs of accommodation, foods, electricity, laundry expenses, breakages, and an additional amount for any further development the local people may wish to make on the marae.

It is normally the prerogative of the manuhiri to decide how much to give and an assessment can be made on the basis of how much it costs to accommodate people per day for the number of days they are staying. It is also the obligation of the manuhiri to lay a koha down no matter how long the visitors remain even if it is for one or two hours. The moneyed society around the marae is not built on aroha and the marae requires financial support to maintain it.

Many schools have not appreciated these points and consequently local people have had to take from their own pockets to offset the costs. To increase the mana of the manuhiri it should be remembered that the assessment of the size of the koha should err on the liberal side. The koha, in an envelope, is laid down in front of the manuhiri on the marae. Ensure that it has coins in it so it will not blow away. Do not put your prized mere down on it, as has been done, because you are presenting the mere as well to the marae.

A local person will pick it up. It is normally accompanied by a chant of gratitude.

8. The Hongi — The tangata whenua then will indicate to the manuhiri to come in a certain direction, in line, to shake hands and to hongi. Generally the left hand is placed on each others shoulders and in the case of the Raukawa tribe for instance it is two presses of the nose. In other areas it is one nose press, eg Taitokerau. In any encounter situation the hongi brings all the senses into close contact — the touch, the sight, the hearing, the smell and even as a total whole the taste of human contact. The formal welcome and reply protocol are over and the tapu has been removed from the outsider.

It is at this point and with the inevitable meal to follow that the tangata whenua and manuhiri merge as one and become the whanau (family) of the marae for the

occasion. They are therefore addressed in the meeting house as the whanau and all that the word "family" implies especially in terms of interpersonal relationships.

Even in welcoming newly arrived visitors thereafter they are considered as part of the tangata whenua and they assist in the welcoming of further arrivals.

It must be stressed, however, procedure on any marae is governed by local marae or tribal kawa.

9. The Place of Women at a Traditional Welcome — On most marae but not all, the women do not speak formally. They are the first to be heard in the karanga and in a sense of accompanying the speaker with his waiata they are the last to be heard.



(Photo: Auckland Museum.)

MARAE VALUES

The marae has a set of values and a philosophy and the physical, procedural and human structures reflect this philosophy. The following are features of this philosophy.

1. Turangawaewae — Literally this means a place to stand — a foot-stool indicating rights and obligations to a certain place.

It is a situational identity that gives a person through his genealogy or association, a right to say humbly "I am monarch of all I survey". Thus it is determined by place in association with the tribe (iwi) or hapu (extended family). Turangawaewae sets a home base on a marae which can give, for instance, the right to a person to speak as a tangata whenua within the confines of a tuakana/teina relationship (ie normally an elder brother has precedence over a younger brother or a father over a son or an elder over a younger person). Turangawaewae then can assist a person to say with confidence "I belong".

It is noted that there are many Pakeha people who, through association and relationships, can confidently say "I belong".

2. Whanaungatanga — This term

means extended kinship ties. All those people who belong to the marae can trace their whakapapa (genealogy) to the marae and the ancestor it portrays. They have rights to stand and speak but they all have obligations to maintain the marae and the mana of the marae is upheld by their obligations. The term is extended also to course members while they are at the hui. It is normal to address the members of the hui as a family, eg: "Kia ora te whanau".

The concept of whanaungatanga also has an historic dimension in that the house is normally named after an ancestor of the tribe. It extends even further by "poupou" (carvings against the wall) depicting ancestors of many other tribes to which visitors can relate.

3. Manaakitanga — the relationship between people is one of caring and sharing — of helping one another as a family.

4. Aroha — As an extension of manaakitanga is the concept of love in its widest sense. It can mean respect, concern, hospitality and the process of giving. Thus every person is concerned for and respects the rights of others. The children then, become the children of the marae and guidelines are not normally set for their behavior by the biological parents but by the adults in close

proximity.

Aroha is reflected in the way that the tangata whenua volunteer to provide hospitality, in the way that the manuhiri become part of the tangata whenua and share in the normal duties of the day and more importantly in the way that people relate to each other. The essential element in interpersonal relationship is aroha, respect, friendship and care.

5. Wairua (Spirituality — not religion) — While there is an important relationship between life and death, so there is also a crucial relationship between man and God. Traditionally and today the Maori acknowledges the wholeness of life in which God is ever present. On the marae, the Karakia (church service) is conducted in the morning and in the evening. They pray for blessing, guidance, care and protection in all things for all people during the day and night.

Karakia on the marae is ecumenical and any lay person who so wishes can conduct the service.

Note: the hymns and appropriate modern songs which express prayer can be sung and the service can be conducted in any language or a combination of languages.

6. Mauri (ethos, life force, life essence) — Mauri applies to animate and inanimate things, eg mauri o te whare, mauri o te whaikorero, mauri o te taniwha o te awa. Each thing or person has a mauri and the sum of its or his or her characteristics reflects a personality or a mauri. Thus the mauri of the marae is reflected in its life force and its personality. To illuminate its mauri it must project and practise those values which it believes in.

7. The Respect for Elders — All elders are to be respected, cared for and acknowledged. They are respected for their life experience; they are respected for their knowledge; they are respected for their wise counsel and they are respected because they have been responsible for the on-goingness of life.

8. Maori Language — In some ways the larger society can be hostile to any language other than English. The marae is one place where Maori is the major language though not the only one. On a marae, the use of Maori by the Pakeha is enjoyed and the respect that a Pakeha has shown merely by learning is reciprocated by the increase in mana of that person. Maori language is valued by the Maori people because it is born out of the culture Maori people want to express. Its beauty is not only in its sound, but also in its symbolism, its rituals, gestures and presentation and its freedom within the Maori situation to be expressed in sung poetry, in speech making, in chants, and in the haka.

These are some of the values that are more obvious. There are a number of others, the discovery of which can be the prize for any interested person who desires to pursue knowledge further.



*Hotunui panels at Parawai
(Photo: Auckland Museum.)*

from: Awataha Marae

Awataha Marae Inc.

Northcote, Auckland

[n.d.]



Turangawaewae Pa, 1985.