

# Maori Spirituality and Anthroposophy

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## 1. Beginnings

When I arrived in Christchurch, New Zealand, 16 years ago, I did not meet any Maori people personally and it seemed to me that there was a world I had no access to. Somehow I accepted this as a fact.

However, I enrolled in my first Te Reo (Maori language) class at our school and also attended a talk by Barry Brailsford<sup>1</sup> which made me aware of the Waitaha people, and their tradition of living in peace long before the time of warfare. Some years later, I met Uekaha Taane – now my partner- who, like me, also taught at the Rudolf Steiner School in Christchurch. We began to work together on Maori legends and he began to write songs for my eurythmy class productions of Maori legends.

I attended Uekaha's Kapa Haka (=Maori language and performance) classes and when he spoke of certain concepts, like: "Te Kore" (nothingness, void), or "Ihi, Wehi..." (integral Maori concepts of the inner source of wisdom and connectedness; I = inner and hi = shining light), I was inspired to integrate my own teaching and knowledge of Anthroposophy with the wisdom present in Maori spiritual knowledge. Having trained as an eurythmist (graduating in 1987) in the 'art of the word' and its spiritual implications, I strongly connected with these concepts: they spoke to me.

And thus my journey began... All I have written here is only an attempt, a beginning. My hope is that interest and understanding can take place with respect to both Maori culture and Anthroposophy - or Anthroposophia – the Being

of wisdom of the human being.

## 2. Mysteries and middle Europe

The anthroposophical view of human evolution and history strongly emphasises the changing consciousness of the human being over time.

Rudolf Steiner<sup>2</sup> indicates two "Mystery streams" leading towards Anthroposophy: There are possibly more but for this purpose I focus only on two.

The so called 'southern mystery stream' stems from ancient 'Atlantis' people's migration – forming the 'old Indian culture', followed by the 'Egyptian', 'Greek' and the 'Latin-Roman' culture.

On the other side was the 'northern stream'<sup>2</sup>- the Germanic and Celtic mysteries related in the 'Edda' in mighty images – concerning the downfall of 'Atlantis'.

Both streams have led humanity from the light filled realm of spirit participation into a time of separation and materialistic thinking. Gradually humans became equipped with an 'Ego consciousness' bound to a physical body. (This happened in a more gradual fashion in the 'southern stream', and more dramatically in the 'northern stream').

Our middle European culture carried the traces of both mysteries from the past, e.g. in the "School of Chartres", built on an ancient sacred site of the Druids and teaching the "seven free arts" of ancient Greece. Eventually the school declined<sup>3</sup>.

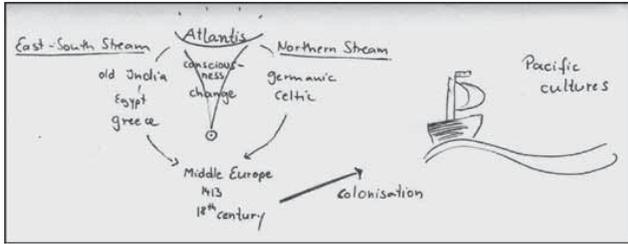
The 15th Century saw the gradual emergence of a new consciousness and in the 19th century humanity arrived deeply within materialism. The spiritual light was extinguished. During this time from 1413 into the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> century, new horizons opened up, European discoveries of new territories were made, which - as a result of "ignorance and deeply materialistic thinking" - caused immense suffering to indigenous peoples in the world (and is still ongoing!).

1 Brailsford, Barry (1989) Song of Waitaha: The Histories of a Nation. Christchurch: Ngatapuwa Trust. ISBN 0958337802

2 Steiner, R Karma of untruthfulness, vol 1 (CW 173) lecture 1 , vol 2 (CW 174),lecture 8, Rudolf Steiner Press

3 Querido, Rene Golden Age of Chartres. Floris Books 2008. ISBN 978-086315672 (also Landau, Otto: Die Schule von Chartres).

Diagram 1:



### 3. Creation myth and Pacific culture

The following ancient chant, was sung by Uekaha and myself when I first presented the ideas in this article:

- "Ko te po-----** = realm of night
- Ko te po nui-----** = great night
- Ko te po roa-----** = long
- Ko te po uriuri-----** = dense
- Ko te po kerekere-----** = deep
- Ko te po tiwha-----** = expanding
- Ko te po te kitea-----** = unseen
- Ko te po tangotango-----** = intensely dark
- Ko te po whawha-----** = night of holding
- Ko te po namunamu ki tai ao-----** = narrow passage of night
- Ko te po tahuri atu-----** = turning
- Ko te po tahuri mai ki tai ao"-----** = night turning to light

I interpret the above chant as describing a culture which does not seem to contain in its mythologies images which speak of 'separation and spiritual darkness', or of losing the capacity of spiritual 'seeing'.

In contrast, their myths tell us about the journey from the 'Night realms' into the 'World of Light', (into 'Te Ao Marama').

This is one of many chants and the complexities of the 'Night realms', 'Te po' are endless. (Reed, A. W. *Book of Maori Mythology* see Creation, chapter 1)

In the 'Song of Waitaha' Brailsford<sup>1</sup>, we read in chapter 1: "In the Beginning, IO Mata Ngaro, God of the Gods...Creator of all called the Universe into being"...(p 15)

IO is seen as the supreme entity at the beginning of creation within 'Te Kore' (meaning absolute Nothingness, yet everything').

The name of IO appears in innumerable variations within creation chants. These words being chanted evoke the process of creation from the beginning through aeons of time.

The following excerpt of a chant called "Te Whanautaka o te Aoraki" is taught to students (including myself) in a Wananga here in Otautahi/Christchurch. It is a shortened version and would take more than a day to recite in its full form. It begins with the following words:

"Ko IO whatata, Ko IO whatamai (*these words refer to the ceaseless movements of IO upon the face of the waters*)

Ko hekeheke i nuku – The form of Raki was raised on high

Ko hekeheke i papa – The form of Papatuanuku emerged from the depth

Ko IO taketake, ka ahu mai – IO the source of all, begat

Ko te Kore te Kore..." – the absolute Nothingness

IO stays continuously present in the ever unfolding process of creation, indicated by his changeable names and thus lives in each aspect of creation.

The chant 'passes through' the 'Night genealogies' over aeons of time before the beginning of time (see above chant Ko te Po ...).

References are also made to stages of plant development:

"Na te kowhao, ko te pu – from the abyss came the tap root

Na te pu, ko te weu – from the tap root came the secondaries

Na te weu, ko te more – from the secondaries came the hair roots

Na te more, ko te rito – from the hair roots came the shoots

Na te rito, ko te aka..." – from the shoots came the vine...

The image of a mighty cosmic tree appears as the universe is being 'built'. Later it is the God "Taane", one of the offspring of Papa and Rangi who established the heavens using the 'Breaths of IO'.

Reference to the 'Creation story' as we generally know it (the embrace of Ranginui and Papatuanuku) is made – as we progress through the chant – through the words: "... Na te pupuke, ko te hihiri..."- from the swelling came the pure elemental energy..."

The children or offspring within the darkness of the womb of Papatuanuku represent the 'pure elemental energy', stirring and longing for light.

“Among all of this energy and activity... IO was present in the living atua (offspring, Maori Gods). The atua became the many extensions of IO.”(Samuel Robinson<sup>7</sup> ‘Tohunga’ p 24. The same Maori scholar believes that a time has come to welcome a return of greater spiritual awareness of the atua Maori and to establish a new spiritual connection to those forces.

#### 4. Concepts of Maori Spirituality

From the concept of the presence of IO in every aspect of creation it becomes understandable that Spirituality in Maoridom is interwoven into the physical realm; there is nothing ‘only physical’ and all ‘spiritual is concrete!

##### **Meditative Verse, given by Rudolf Steiner:**

**“Seek the truly practical material life, but seek it so that it does not numb you to the spirit which is active in it.**

**Seek the spirit, but seek it not in passion for the supersensible, out of supersensible egoism, but seek it so that you may apply it selflessly in the practical life in the practical world.**

**Turn to the ancient principle,  
Matter is never without spirit and Spirit is never without matter,  
in such a way that we say we will to do all material things in the light of the spirit and we will so to seek the light of the spirit, so that it evokes warmth for us in our practical activities.”**

Rudolf Steiner

The Maori world view is a world system where all things are connected, where everything is part of everything, springing forth from the same source. “It is holistic and cyclic, one in which every person is linked to every living thing and to the Atua <sup>4</sup>.”

In the book; “Tohunga<sup>5</sup>” by Paul Moon we read about a Tohunga’s way of thinking: His name was Hohepa Kereopa, one of the last practising Tohunga’s. “After hours of conversations, it was evident that Hohepa’s world-view – that of a traditional tohunga- was complete and absolute. There was practically no event or circumstance that he was not able to position within his framework of understanding....” “As he (Hohepa)

observed, Western knowledge was like digging a hole in the garden: the deeper you wanted to go, the narrower the hole would become.” and “Hohepa’s knowledge and understanding was above the ground and spread endlessly into the atmosphere...” (p.33)

This system which links everything together is called ‘**Whakapapa**’- Genealogy’. If we look at the word itself so it is made of two words:

“Whaka”: a ‘prefix’ meaning to do, act (process)

“Papa”: meaning ‘Ground’, ‘Layer’

Through ‘Whakapapa’ one can express one’s kinship with the world, describe the relationship between human beings and the rest of nature and explain the origins of animals, plants and landscapes. Whakapapa also means that one is given a place within the world.

In fact, all great wisdom traditions in the world hold as their central thought that humans and cosmos are inseparable, that everything is forever connected with its source<sup>6</sup>. This idea became one of Steiner’s guiding thoughts for founding Anthroposophy.

As ‘Whakapapa’ describes the spiritual threads within the ‘World web’, so is the concept of the ‘**Te Atua**’ (**Maori Gods**) very closely linked here. They are the spiritual forces weaving through the natural world. These are realities constantly referred to and addressed through ‘Karakia’, incantations, ‘haka’ and ‘waiata’. Their guidance was constantly sought in order to survive in the bush, in the ocean, on the battle field....

‘**Atua**’ are powerful energies, creative forces embedded within the natural world. They are closely linked to the ‘elements’ in nature, which are spiritual concepts, but here they are personified and concrete. ‘Te Atua’ are the children of ‘Ranginui’ and ‘Papatuanuku’, and all forms of existence are their manifestations. ‘Reading’ nature precisely meant understanding the language of the Atua as they spoke through the natural phenomena.

Here is an excerpt of a possible whakapapa link:

**Ranginui Papatuanuku**  
**Tangaroa Taane Mahuta Rongomataane Ruaumoko**  
**Fish Birds, trees Peace Volcanoes, Earthquakes**

4 Reilly, M. P. J. and Thomson, J. (eds.) (1999): *Ki te Whaiaao: An Introduction to Māori Culture and Society*. Auckland: Pearson Education, 276pp.

5 Moon, Paul (2003): *Tohunga: Hohepa Kereopa*. David Ling Pub. ISBN: 97809089909177

6 Best, Elsdon (1956): *Spiritual Concepts of the Maori*. (Dominion Museum Monologues) For a view prevalent in the Canadian and North American indigenous people see Peat, D., *Blackfoot Physics*, 1994, Fourth Estate, London, ISBN 1-85702-331-5

Closely related to this concept of ‘Tapu’ is the ‘Mana’ of the spiritual powers. “Ko te tapu te mana o nga atua”. (‘Mana’: prestige, power).

As each of the spiritual powers identifies with or is responsible for a particular section of creation, so is each of those inherent tapu, e.g. the Kumara has its own ‘Tapu’ because of the source it has in the ‘Mana’ of the Atua ‘Rongomataane’; Tane is God of the forest and so the birds have their tapu in the mana of Taane. Tapu is there in order to preserve the ‘Mana’ (Power) of the Atua<sup>7</sup> (p 100).

There is simply ‘sacredness’ or ‘Tapu’ in each aspect of being, and as Robinson<sup>7</sup> (ibid) expresses: “Tapu is a reality, not just for Maori but for the world at large. For if the tapu of the tiger were not violated then it would not be an endangered species. We have broken the tapu of its restriction and so its mana or the power of the beast has been destroyed. The laws of tapu are in accordance with the natural cycle of the world and universe.”

## 5. Knowledge of nature in ancient Greece

The Greek conception of nature based its understanding on the ‘four elements’ to which Aristotle added a fifth – the ‘Ether’. Aristotle says about it that it is the one which “eternally encircles and encircles...”<sup>8</sup>

In the ancient world system everything in the universe was arranged and related with each other, i.e. Planets, Metals, Organs, Gods... and became part of a “cosmos”. (Greek: Cosmos means ‘order’; whereas Chaos is ‘disorder’).

Frank Meyer<sup>9</sup> suggests in his article that these old spiritual systems have used ‘concrete’ concepts bearing within them images and pictures in order to describe and grasp cyclic processes in the ‘life realm’.

From the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the ‘elements’ disappeared from scientific thinking. Ernst Marti<sup>8</sup> writes: “...When the blue heavenly bow was no longer border of the world, which like an etheric skin comprised the universe into a totality where each and everything had it’s given place, but was replaced with a thinking about the world consisting out of particulars disconnected from each other, the knowledge of the elements disappeared.”

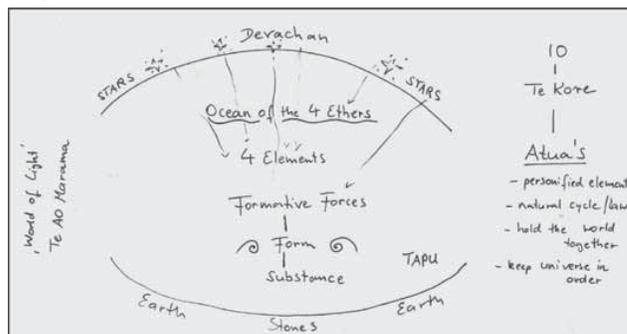
## 6. Anthroposophy

Steiner, with the foundation of Anthroposophy, brought the knowledge of the elements back into his natural science, including a new understanding of the ‘four ethers’.

‘Element’ and ‘Ether’ work together as ‘siblings’, born from the warmth of ‘old Saturn’ and penetrating each other in the realm of the living. Both are spiritual concepts, not appearing as such, as pure principles, however they underly all of nature. In order to create a certain ‘substance’ or ‘form’ the forces of the starry realms are needed (i.e. the planet Mars being originator of the substance of Iron. Dr Frank Meyer<sup>9</sup> refers to this fact in his articles).

Steiner describes in his last Pentecostal lecture that the blue heavenly bow is the border of the world ether, the ‘ocean of the four ethers’. They bear within them the four elements. On the other side of the blue sky are the stars through which spiritual forces penetrate through the elements and ethers, creating substance and form.

Diagram 2:



On the right hand side of the diagram I have attempted to add some Maori concepts which may suggest that there is a similar understanding within both world views. They however do not exactly overlap or mean the same. These concepts must be taken in a ‘fluid’ manner and in no way to be seen as fixed.

Steiner calls the totality of those forces ‘The world word’ which resounds in and through the stars.

## 7. Speech in ancient times

In ancient times the human being was able to manifest the divine spiritual forces living within

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, Samuel Timoti (2005): *Tohunga: The Revival Ancient Knowledge for the modern Era*. Reed Books. ISBN: 978-0790010021.

<sup>8</sup> Marti, Ernst (1984): *The Four Ethers: Contributions to Rudolf Steiner's Science of the Ethers, Elements-Ethers-Formative Forces*. Schaumburg Publications, Incorporated, ISBN 9780935690026.

<sup>9</sup> Meyer, Frank (2010): The Healing Power of Metals: as Anthroposophic medicine – our connection to the metals and the planets. Info 3 September 2010. <http://www.info3.de/c5-style/index.php/magazin/info3/archiv/2010/september/metalle-planeten-mensch/>

him. In passing from the Greek to the Latin-Roman culture, something 'living' in speech, something eminently concrete changed into abstraction, the element of inspiration disappeared from speech. In order to express how man has his roots in the Universe the names of the 'Alphabet' were spoken consecutively. A living awareness of spiritual forces was expressed through speaking sounds. Possibly only the initiated priests would have had conscious knowledge of this. "Alpha": The human being who experiences his own breathing"... (p 2) instead of being just an abstract 'A'.

The same is expressed when we learn from the Nordic-Germanic mysteries through Steiner<sup>10</sup> that the 'Runes' are the archetypal image of the 'world word' which was perceived and initiated. The runes expressed in the physical form what are in reality images of etheric creative forces.

## 8. Te reo

In the following I want to suggest how spiritual inspiration lives in the Maori language, in Te reo Maori, 'Te reo Rangatira'. (Rangatira: Chiefly, noble 'ranga': to weave)

Already in the first pages of the "Song of Waitaha"<sup>11</sup> (p 12) we read how each word was part of the intricate web of life, where each word was tapu. This was said only about the purest stream of knowledge which needed to be kept free of errors in order to not disturb the pattern. Only the 'Tohunga', skilled in reading the patterns of life, were entrusted with this knowledge which tied the life of the people to the movement of the stars and seasons.

If an indigenous language dies (as so many have) then a particular connection with the world disappears. Therefore knowledge of the natural environment and universe and how to live in harmony within it – which is encoded in the language – will also disappear.

At a universal level 'reo' represents the voices of the elements. For example manu, rakau and other forms of mauri have their own reo and vibration. "Te reo is the key to unveiling the ancient mauri." A human definition of 'te reo' is language. (p 1 of Pounamu Kahuraki<sup>11</sup>).

A recollection of great personal significance to me is the following example of 'non mainstream

teaching' that I once received from Tameaho, a teacher, trained from very early age on to become a master in the use of Maori weapons and therefore the language.

It seemed that my listening opened up his speaking and a conversation unfolded, flowing into the theme of 'te reo'. I was given no answers as to what a particular word meant, rather I had to find the answers myself, manoeuvring through his questions put to me. I will explain this: For example we looked at the word "Wairua": meaning 'spirit' as we know. However this was not the answer. What is "Wa"? - endless time or space. The letter 'A' was contemplated with the question whether it came from within or without? 'I' meaning: inside, within and 'AI' being 'stillness'. 'Rua': the 'shaking of creation', when the two opposite forces moved, and there we have before us the word 'Wai rua'. All these are images contained within the one word. That means that in order to grasp the totality of the meaning one would need to be aware of each of those aspects at the same time! Another dimension of awareness is asked for here in order to grasp a totality like this.

I learnt from Tameaho that, "Each word, each syllable, each sound in te reo is spiritual". From the spiritual concept came the 'naming of a thing' when it expressed its meaning most adequately on the physical plane.

For example the word 'Mahi': 'Work', however—: 'ma': pure and 'hi': shining light. This can throw a shining light on our word 'Work' and what it truly means in its essence.

The word 'Mahara' means 'Memory'. However if we take a look at the root meanings of the syllables we find: 'Ma': pure, 'Ha': the breath and 'Ra': sun energy or pathway to the universe. Such an approach, to find meaning in these three words, will help explain the word 'Memory' on a much deeper level.

Much wisdom is contained in Proverbs or 'Whakatauki', i.e.: "Kua mau to iro"? - meaning: "Have you found your 'enlightenment'? 'Iro' means: 'Maggot'. "What has a maggot to do with enlightenment?" one could ask! A word "Whakairo" may be helpful here, meaning the act of 'carving'. It is the act of 'revealing', bringing

10 Steiner, Rudolf (1921-12-18): *The Alphabet* <http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/19211218p01.html>

11 Kahuraki, Pounamu (2000): *Wanaka Handout for Maori in Public Service* Copyright 2000- 00 Jade Associates.

out the essence, just as a maggot is working itself through the wood. Our looking is directed not so much on the 'thing' itself, but rather on the surrounding of what is created and revealed there.

'Aroha': - meaning 'Love', on a human level, however the words 'aro' (being present), and 'ha' (the 'breath of God') indicate the following: "Being in the presence of the breath of God".

I hope to have been able to convey to the reader, through just these few examples how the use of this language is not only truly beautiful but also non-judgmental. The language is still used today in this pure, 'uncontaminated' form (ie. in 'Karanga', Incantations) and thus allows access to the 'Tipuna' (ancestors), into the spiritual realm.

All conduct of 'being', surviving and living in harmony with nature is encoded within the language and handed down orally over many generations in the past. In my opinion a new respect for the language needs to be present and I hope this article can contribute to this.

'Te reo Maori' is an inclusive and holistic language; it embraces and contains many layers and dimensions beyond just one specific meaning.

Another well known 'whakatauki' which expresses the deep relationship between humans and nature:

*"Hutia te rito o te harakeke  
Kei hea te komako, e ko?  
Ki mai ki ahau  
He aha te mea nui o te ao katoa  
Maku e ki atu ki a koe -  
He tangata  
He tangata  
He tangata"*

*If the centre shoot of the flax were plucked  
Where will the bellbird fly?  
You tell me  
What is the most important thing in this world?  
I will tell you -  
It is people, people, people*

John Patterson (1992) writes that the Maori language is the embodiment of a spiritual dimension of life: "Therefore, the taonga, our Maori language, as far as our people are concerned, is the very soul of the Maori people."<sup>12</sup>

## **8. Conclusion and future outlook**

Language is only one example of how knowledge has come forth again, injected back into the culture. Maori have undergone an arduous journey: from being punished speaking their own language to being assimilated into mainstream 'Pakeha' society. The results are clearly before us today!

While this essay is focused mainly on a philosophical-spiritual aspect I would like to emphasise that it could be seen as a foundation for anyone's further research with indications of where to go from here. Many concrete suggestions are outlined also in the thesis of Bridie McLoughlin<sup>13</sup>.

On a personal note: through having entered this world and some of the deeper aspects of Maoridom I found it resonating within myself like a reminder of my own past, evoking distant memories. Anthroposophy has revealed itself as a support and providing a compatible way for meeting and hopefully understanding some of this culture's treasures a bit more.

I am deeply grateful to have met some important people in my life who have been generous enough to give me a little insight into their world. He mihi aroha.

I finish with a whakatauki:  
*Kia hora te marino  
Kia whakapapa pounamu te moana  
Kia tere te karohirohi  
I mua i to huarahi  
Ara nei a ake tonu ahi"*  
*May the calm be widespread;  
May the sea glisten like greenstone  
Shining on your path  
Now and always.*

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*No reira, tena koutou katoa* ♦

12 Patterson, J (1992) Te Taiao, (Waikerepuru and Nga Kaiwhakapumau, p 202).

13 McLoughlin, Bridie (2007): Rethinking Maori Empowerment within Steiner Education. Masters thesis, University of Wellington.

**Glossary:** Tapu: sacredness. Mauri: Life forms, Life energy. Pakeha: Pa: touched by, Ke: different from, Ha: Breath. Rerenga Wairua: Cape Reinga, rere: fly, wairua: spirit.