Mana

Williams' *A Dictionary of the Maori Language* lists eight meanings for mana, providing the following possible translations:

I . Authority, control
2. Influence, prestige, power
3. Psychic force
4. Effectual, binding, authoritative
5. Having influence or power
6. Vested with authority
7. Be effectual, take effect
8. Be avenged.

These translations, however, do not describe the source of mana nor how mana is upheld and maintained. That, after all, is not the job of a bilingual dictionary. The result is an unfortunate distortion of the real meaning of mana, which is inextricably based in the spiritual realms of the world.

The Rev. Maori Marsden, in his article `God, Man and Universe: A Maori View', defines and discusses among other matters the concepts of mana and tapu. For him,

> Mana in its double aspect of authority and power may be defined as 'lawful permission delegated by the gods to their human agents and accompanied by the endowment of spiritual power to act on their behalf and in accordance with their revealed will'. This delegation of authority is shown in dynamic signs or works of power.

He goes on to warn:

> Authority and power in this sense must be clearly distinguished since it is clear that to exercise spiritual power outside the limits delegated is to abuse the gift, and results either in its withdrawal or in that power running rampant and causing harm to the agent and others.
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> A simple analogy will make the distinction [between power and authority] clearer. A person approaches a traffic crossing and the lights turn red. He has power to cross but no permission. The lights turn green but his car stalls at that moment. He has permission to cross, but no power. His car starts and the lights remain green. He has both authority and power to proceed (Marsden 1975: 1 19).

There are many different types of mana and many aspects of it as it manifests itself in everyday life. For example, all living things, animals, trees and plants, fish and birds, as well as human beings, are imbued with a mana of their own, a mana implanted by the gods. So also are many inanimate objects such as meeting houses and mountains which are personified and addressed in Maori as ancestors and relations.

The terms mana atua, mana tupuna, mana whenua, mana tangata, mana moana and mana Maori motuhake are also heard frequently and are being

referred to increasingly by the Waitangi Tribunal in its reports. These are different types or aspects of mana and can be described, albeit very briefly, in the following way:

Mana atua is the very sacred power of the gods which is given to those persons who conform to sacred ritual and principles.

Mana túpuna is authority and power handed down through chiefly lineage.

Mana whenua is the mana that the gods planted within Papa-túã-nuku (Mother Earth) to give her the power to produce the bounties of nature. A person or tribe who `possesses' land is said to hold or be the mana whenua of the area and hence has the power and authority to produce a livelihood for the family and the tribe from this land and its natural resources. One means of ensuring that mana whenua is upheld and enhanced is to return the pito or whenua (afterbirth) of a child to his/her ancestral lands at points specifically designated for the purpose. But the most powerful means, once the spiritual element has departed from a person (i.e. the person has died), is to return the human body to the úkaipõ, the place from which his or her true sustenance and being came, that is, his or her ancestral lands. This is perhaps one of the main reasons why tribes will fight to have a body returned to his or her own ancestral lands for burial. Furthermore, the greater the person's mana, the bigger the fight, especially if the person has ancestral rights in more than one tribal area.[4]

Apart from these aspects, every effort is made to protect and uphold mana whenua, not only from loss of `possession' of the land, but also from despoliation by careless exploitation. Mana whenua is a gift from the gods and always remains with the tribe of an area. The imposition of European title, for example, cannot remove mana whenua from a tribe.

The Resource Management Act interprets mana whenua as meaning 'customary authority exercised by an iwi or hapú in an identified area'. Like Williams' dictionary it falls far

4. The continued misunderstanding by the majority of New Zealanders of this very important aspect of Maori society has been a cause of great sadness to Mãoridom, especially when open derision of the custom is carried out by an uninformed news media.

short of the real meaning by not incorporating any reference to its spiritual basis.

Mana tangata 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.

Mana moana is the equivalent of mana whenua as it applies to the sea and its resources.[5] The two forms of mana overlap considerably since the land is considered to extend well into the sea, while the sea's effects impinge some distance inland.

The term mana Maori motuhake is a term that encompasses all of the above elements, but serves to point out that mana is something which applies to the Maori people of Aotearoa and to them only, It also points to the fact that with such mana, Maori people are imbued with the eternal right to live under their own mana and hence determine their own way of life as they themselves see fit to choose.

Tapu

The Rev. Maori Marsden discusses tapu at some length, not least to dispel some misconceptions about the concept held by early missionaries and anthropologists. He describes it thus:

> The Maori idea of tapu is close to the Jewish idea translated in the words 'sacred' and `holy', although it does not have the later ethical connotations of the New Testament of moral righteousness.
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> It has both religious and legal connotations. A person, place or thing is dedicated to a deity and by that act it is set aside or reserved for the sole use of that deity. The person or object is thus removed from the sphere of the profane and put into the sphere of the sacred. It is untouchable, no longer to be put to common use. It is this untouchable quality that is the main element in the concept of tapu. In other words, the object is sacred and any profane use is sacrilege, breaking the law of tapu.
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> From a purely legal aspect, it suggests a contractual relationship has been made between the individual and his deity whereby a person

5. In the debate which arose out of the Crown declaring it had extinguished Maori fishing rights by allocating quota and fisheries company shares to Maori, the term 'mana moana' has become much misused and misinterpreted. However, the process of change of meaning of words is very long and slow and in this case is unlikely to be successful because of the depth of meaning of the word 'mana'.

> dedicates himself or an object to the service of a deity in return for protection against malevolent forces and the power to manipulate his environment to meet needs and demands. (Marsden 1975: 119-120.)

Te Rangihiroa (Sir Peter Buck) in his book *The Coming of the Maori* recounts how as a child he was taught the practicalities of tapu. He comments, `Thus the fear of tapu was inculcated early and remained late' (Buck 1950: 359).

It is the laws of tapu which play the most influential role in regulating Maori society. It was for this reason that the tribal experts in the laws of tapu, the tohunga, were outlawed by the colonial government (under the Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907) in a rather vain attempt to gain complete and absolute control for the government over Maori society. The laws of tapu still hold in Mãoridom today and their violation continues to bring disaster, pain and injury to the transgressors. Events of this nature have occurred in recent times for Te Whãnau Moana, with the greatest difficulties occurring as nonMaori developers ignore warnings. In particular, wãhi tapu, places that have been set aside as tapu, have been desecrated and violated. Furthermore, kõiwi that were found were not properly treated. Te Whãnau Moana accepted that much of what was done was done out of ignorance, although developers were most unwise not to heed the warning of those of their workers who were Te Whanau Moana themselves. It was therefore most important for the developers concerned to participate in the process of rectifying the transgressions of tapu through a hohou rongo (cleansing and restoration of peace) ceremony of karakia (ritual prayer).