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# **Whakapapa and Whanaukataka: relationships in the context of traditional Maori conceptual thought**

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## **Abstract**

The traditional world of the Maori understands relationships in the context of Whakapapa and Whanaukataka (Genealogical Relationships) that exist at the three levels of the cosmic, natural and human worlds, which are inextricably linked. Whakapapa is synergised in both apodictic and scientific truths, which co-exist in a complementary manner. Humanity is viewed as being merely a microcosm of the cosmic realm; the self is viewed as being a reflection of the Universe. Maori culture, then, insists on the indivisible linkages between all things, whether human, environmental, or celestial, which are all viewed as being related.

The inter-relationship between the four cosmic elements of Fire, Air, Water and Earth are synonymous with the micro-levels of the self: the Spiritual Body, the Psychological Body, the Emotional Body and the Physical Body. Maori therapeutic practices insist on the well-being of the person being centred around the mauri (life-force) of inner well-being; the balance of these with each other, with the four environmental elements, and with the cosmos.

At a therapeutic level, then, relationships for Maori refer to the interplay between the archetypal entities that exist within a person's cosmology, and the influence on these by their whanau, social contacts and interactions. In this context, the person understands themselves as existing as a part of the sum total, less important as an individual than the collective whole. It is important for psychotherapists to understand these complex elements when working with Maori clients.

## **Introduction**

The traditional world of the Maori understands relationships in the context of Whakapapa and Whanaukataka. Whakapapa is the genealogical paradigm that consists of three levels: Whakapapa Atuataka (Cosmic Genealogies), Whakapapa

Putaiāo (Genealogies of the Natural World) and Whakapapa Tipuna (Ancestral Genealogies), as outlined in Diagram 1. Whanaukataka refers to the relationships that exist between each of these levels, all of which are inextricably linked.

<b>DIAGRAM 1: THE THREE TIERS OF WHAKAPAPA (GENEOLOGY)</b>		
1.	Whakapapa Atuataka	Cosmic Geneology
2.	Whakapapa Putaiāo	Geneology of the Natural World
3.	Whakapapa Tipuna	Ancestral (Human) Geneology

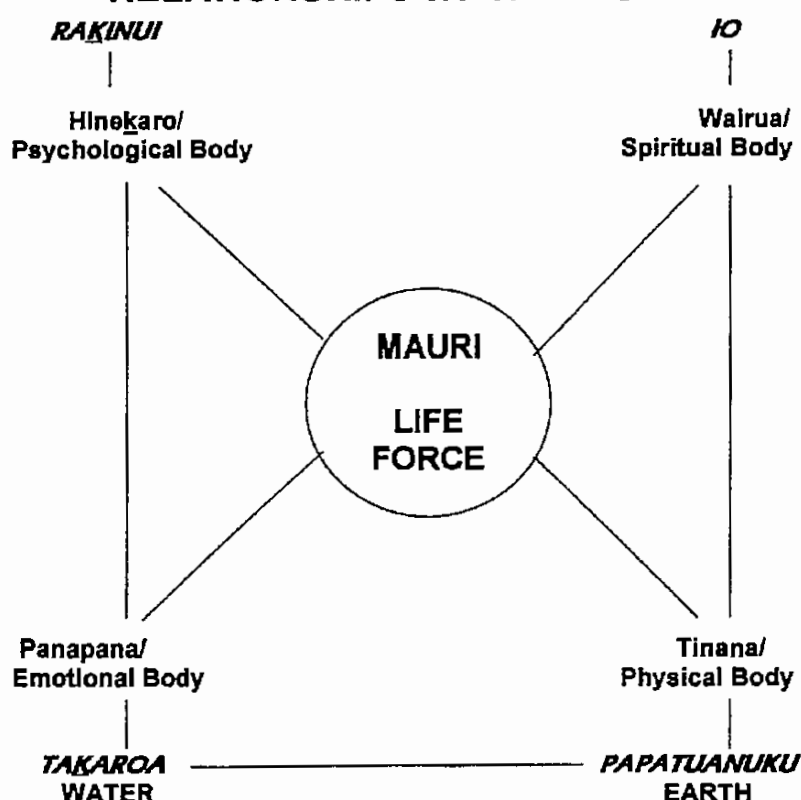
At all levels, relationships derive their meaning from the complex strata of tuakana (senior lineage) through to the teina (junior lineage). Whakapapa is synergised in both apodictic and scientific truths, which co-exist in a complementary manner. At its most basic level, this implies that all things that occur in the world around us are a reflection of archetypal characters and events that emanate from the cosmic realm; essentially the self is viewed as being a reflection of the Universe.

Apodictic truth is knowledge that cultures organize into their mythological, cosmological and cosmogonic world views. Apodictic truth is represented in symbolism, and encompasses the spiritual essence which has been given form and shape in the human world, and named 'culture'. The Maori culture, then, insists on connecting all things to each other as related entities, whether human, environmental, or celestial.

The four cosmic elements of Fire, Air, Water and Earth are represented in Maori cosmology respectively as Io (The Creator), Rakinui (Sky Father), Takaroa (God of the Sea) and Papatuanuku (Earth Mother) respectively. The inter-relationships between these four elements are synonymous with the micro-levels of the self: the Spiritual Body (Fire), the Psychological Body (Air), the Emotional Body (Water) and the Physical Body (Earth). These are demonstrated in Diagram 2A.

Maori therapeutic practices insist on the well-being of the person being centred around the mauri (life-force) of inner well-being; the balance of these to each other, in terms of the four micro levels of the self, and in relationship to the three worlds as depicted in the cosmic, the natural, and the human dimensions.

**DIAGRAM 2A: THE FOUR COSMIC ELEMENTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE SELF**



Therefore, relationships in a Maori context cannot be established or maintained unless one's world view encompasses the whole of our cosmic reality; the whole of the natural world and everything that occurs in it; and the whole of humanity itself. To disconnect from each other as human beings is to disconnect from the universe itself, from the natural world and all our kin that exist within it (fish, animals, birds, mountains, trees and rivers). It is also to disconnect from the physical and spiritual powers and forces of energy. Disconnection and dislocation leads to spiritual contamination or pollution; this inevitably brings sickness and death. This is in direct juxtaposition to the concepts of hauora and aroha, which refer to fullness of existence, the breath of life; being at one with the Creator Source.

At a therapeutic level, then, relationships for Maori refer to the interplay between the archetypal entities that exist within a person's cosmology, and the influence on these by their whanau, social contacts and interactions. In this context, the person views the self as existing as a part of the sum total, less important as an individual than the collective whole (refer to Diagram 3). Likewise, traumatic experiences that impact on the individual also have an impact on the collective whole. It is important for psychotherapists to understand these complex elements when working with Maori clients.

### **Relationships from a mythological perspective**

The following narrative about Maui-Tikitiki-a-Taraka (commonly known as the ancestor Maui) demonstrates an example of tuakana (senior) and teina (junior) concepts within whanaukataka (relationships), the linking of dimensions and playing out of the indivisible interconnectedness of the cosmic, natural and human worlds.

Maui-Tikitiki-a-Taraka (Maui) was conceived by his mother, Taraka, and born prematurely. In today's vernacular, Maui was still-born. Taraka took Maui and, in her grief, cut off the topknot of her hair, placing Maui into the tresses and tossing him into the ocean. Maui was claimed by the taniwha (spiritual guardians) of the oceans. As part of their aroha for Maui, the taniwha nurtured him, imparting to him their respective baskets of knowledge.

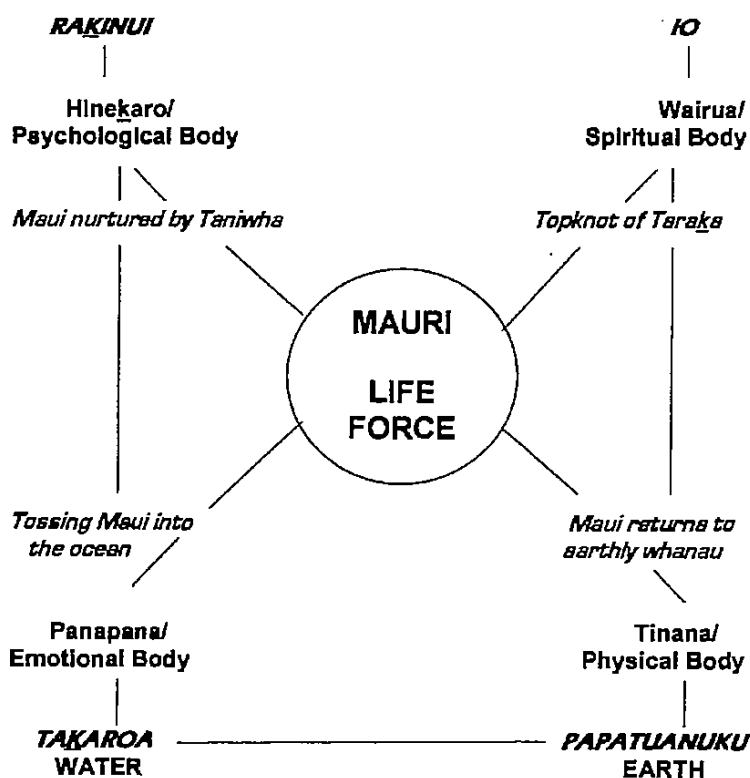
Eventually Maui returned to his earthly whanau (family), his mother and his older brothers. Upon his return, Maui was questioned by his mother (who did not recognise him) as to the origin of his identity. He responded by declaring that he was, in fact, her own son. When Taraka realised who Maui was, they shared a mutual embrace, and their tears of sorrow and joy intermingled.

Once reconnected with his earthly whanau, the teachings given to Maui and his experience of being reared as a child by the taniwha of the ocean were given full effect. Maui first demonstrated his unearthly qualities, and the principles underpinning his childhood nurturing, through making connections between his mother and father. He observed that each night, his mother would go to the centre pole of the house and disappear underneath it into obscurity. Maui followed his mother into the underworld and there met his father. In order to avoid immediate recognition by the beings of the underworld, Maui changed his appearance, utilising various forms of birds, including the Kahu (Hawk). Having met the members of his earth whanau, including his mother, father and his older brothers, Maui then set about sharing with them the qualities and attributes imparted to him through the teachings of the ocean taniwha.

### **Whakawhanaukataka: interfamilial links and relationships within this narrative**

The symbolism of the Maui story can be seen in Diagram 2B. Taraka took Maui and wrapped him in her topknot. Symbolically the topknot represents fire, and the constants within the cosmological matrix of the universe. Taraka tossing Maui into the ocean symbolises a rite of passage from the cosmic world to the natural world, facilitated through the medium of water; the aquatic

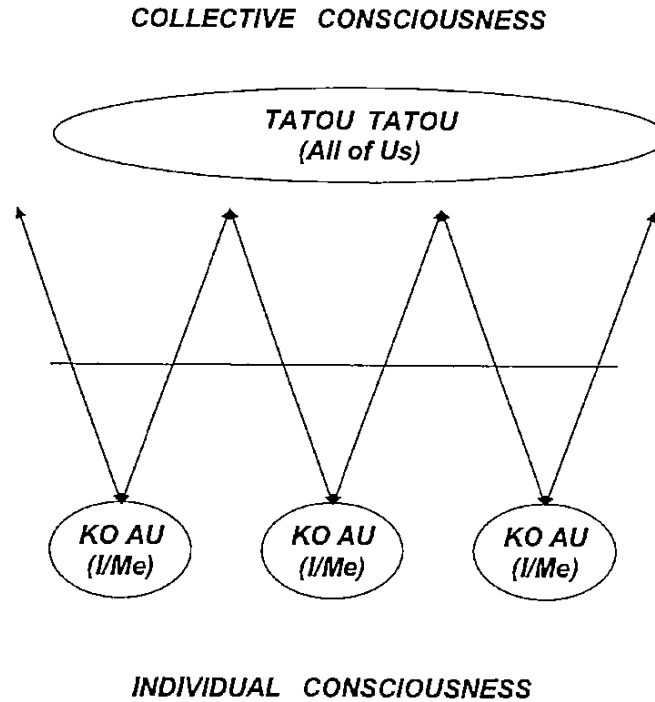
**DIAGRAM 2B: THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE STORY OF MAUI, THE FOUR ELEMENTS AND THE SELF**



symbolism of the birthing waters. Maui being nurtured and schooled by the taniwha represents the hau, or breath of well-being, which manifests in the human world as a person’s breath, in the natural world as the wind, and in the cosmic world as ether, which comprises the elements of the physical life-force which Maori know as the mauri.

Maui returning to his earth whanau acknowledges the diversity of archetypal characters and events made salient through the reunification of Maui with his mother, older brothers (tuakana) and father. Reunification was made complete on three levels, acknowledging again the indivisible planes of interconnectedness between the cosmic, natural and human realms. Maui declaring his link to his whanau (family) not only acknowledges the specific forms their archetypal characteristics were expressed in; it also consolidates the linkages between the cosmic, natural and human realms. Maui following his mother and subsequently meeting his father symbolises the tracing of the seen and unseen within the feminine and masculine dimensions of time and space. Beyond time and space we return to ‘watea’ from whence, in Maori conception, we all originate. This link, born of fire, is symbolically conveyed through Maui assuming the form of the Kahu (Hawk), connecting at a cosmic level to the Lining of the Universe (Te Kahu o te Aoraki).

**DIAGRAM 3: INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS**



In this respect by returning to his earth-based whanau, Maui was conceived and birthed for a third time. In the context of this third birthing, we see already the indivisible interplay of the cosmic, natural and human dimensions.

This narrative also informs us that, within each level, whether we refer to the cosmic birth, the natural world birth, or the human birth, the experience is in itself traumatic. The Maori paradigm acknowledges that experiential existence in the three different realms is structured, exemplified by Maui moving from the one to the other via the different modalities of space and time. The mauri (life force) that gives balance, meaning and purpose to all of this is the ‘Maui’ within each of us. When we are structured in form and capacity we are balanced, and therefore have Maui operating in balance within us. Conversely, when we are unwell we are mauiui: without internal balance, without external connection. Without purpose and direction our world becomes distorted and contaminated.

**Implications for psychotherapeutic practice**

From a Maori perspective, then, trauma permeates the cosmic, natural and human worlds, and impacts upon the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical bodies, thereby creating an imbalance, a distortion in the mauri. The extent of the impact of the trauma needs to be assessed according to the four bodies, and the elements associated with each body, within the context of the three worlds (refer to Diagram 2A).

The reference point for the ebb and flow of relationships determines the extent of Maui (symbolising wellness) and its juxtaposition to the polar opposite of Mauiui (symbolising illness). When making assessments from this paradigm, the appropriate interventions then become self evident. The question asked of Maui is that which is still being asked of us today: Ko wai au? Who am I? If we do not know the appropriate response to this question, regardless of which cultural paradigm we are working within, then the effectiveness of any assistance we can offer to someone within another cultural context is in doubt. Unless practitioners understand what the cultural norms and paradigms are within their own culture, how then can they understand the same in anyone else's? How can a relationship be established between therapist and client that will address the deep-seated issues that the client comes seeking assistance with? To understand our client within a cultural context, we must first understand our own cultural context. Only when we know who we are, will we begin to develop a deeper understanding of our relationship to others at a human, natural world and cosmic level.

For practitioners of psychotherapy, it is important to understand that what I have discussed is, in Maori terms, a cultural norm. However, on a continuum where clients are identified in relation to that cultural norm, one must understand that often the impacts of colonisation have distorted the world view that I have outlined in this paper, to the point that many Maori today are so colonised that they do not understand this traditional world view. Unfortunately, many of them also do not understand the 'Pakeha' world view either; in fact, the world view often adopted by Maori people consists of the worst of both cultures.

Cultural form and shape is different in different contexts. It is expressed in a unique way through the minds of those who created, developed and evolved what we understand to be the cultural norms of today. Therapeutic models will be of absolutely no use if they do not touch the deep spiritual essence of the client's being. The basis of the deep-seated mysteries of the mind's structure need to be understood in order that the therapist can comprehend the emotional expressions that are tell-tale signs of imbalances that manifest themselves physically in the body. For Maori, holistic therapy and healing begin with the spiritual; either the spiritual well-being or spiritual contamination of the individual, of the environment, and of the cosmos itself. The challenge for therapists when dealing with Maori clients is how to embrace the apodictic modalities of truth while at the same time determining the appropriate scientific modalities for these applications.