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# Mana Wahine ... What does it mean to you?

*The sharing of a pu kōrero by Hinewirangi with Sonia Hibbs.*

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*This is a transcription of the kōrero, which has only been edited to ease the flow of the rārangi.*

Kia ora koutou Korua, Nau mai haere mai ki tenei whare. Mihi atu, mihi atu, mihi atu

Ok. So the question that I've got to answer is what does Mana Wahine mean to me?

Well I suppose one of the things I've got to do first and foremost is to clarify what does Mana mean for me? The word Mana, all my life I've believed that you didn't own mana, you didn't whaka mana yourself, no one does that. In fact mana is given to you by the people and it's the people that say *ko koe te mana o te wahine*, you know, and they acknowledge that you are the one that has mana, because you've done something. You deserved the mana of the people because you've worked for it or you've done something in your lifetime that absolutely has them believe *there's mana in what she says*. Now until the people give you that, you don't have mana. It's not something you own or you give yourself.

The other thing is that for many years I believed in mana wahine, mana wahine, mana wahine and over the years I've absolutely come to understand that mana has linkages. Mana has a link with mana tane. In Māori tikanga, if I was to look at that, really, really well, then I would have to look at mana tane. What does that mean? It links on to mana whenua, mana tangata, mana tamariki, mana pepi. Until I come together with all of those things, and as women that have come from a very violent past, it is really hard sometimes to think of mana tane. But you know even as strong as wahine can become without our tane, we're not whole. I'm not talking about relationships in terms of husband and wife or partnership, I'm actually talking about kawa in a general sense of the marae. Without our tane the marae cannot speak, without our wahine, the marae cannot sing, and speak.

So what do we mean by mana? Is mana a status thing? No, I believe it's about the role that women have, to understand what your role is, you know, and I guess to come through life and to work in a way that helps heal the stuff within, in order to stand in your own mana. It is a long journey of coming to that and so what I think about mana is, mana wahine is, I finally know that my voice is alone, if I'm going to stand in mana wahine, anake.

Then it brings it back to this, (indicating to her tinana) to our tinana and say that I already know and acknowledge that within me stands taha ao, Taha wahine me taha tane that twin gender (two engendered thing), then it comes back to the atua. You know, right back to the atua, because until we start acknowledging that then we don't stand alone within let alone without, outside of us. So in the process of looking at mana wahine, I have to begin to examine my role as a Māori woman. Begin to work within it. You see, the other thing that I found we had to do was to be able to walk in it, not talk in it. Walk within and understand the self really, really well and what my role is. So my first role is obviously as a whare tangata and to begin to walk in the whare tangata and understand what that

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means. Understand that I'm Atua given, therefore I must be Atua driven, right, and I must walk with that Atua. It's taken years to develop, to develop within myself, to understand do I walk within what I talk, do I live how I talk as well, do I live in the knowledge of our tupuna, do I live it? It's not good enough to know these things and that's it, end of the story and when we get home, aah different lifestyle all together. And it's not good enough to just walk like but to acknowledge the mana in our Atua, our tūpuna, our whānau, our whānui of hapu our iwi, it goes bigger and bigger. So you start off with this little central nucleus that is you and you have to learn to develop a you, in order to live within what I think is the Māori world, Te Ao Māori. You know you might have brown skin, you might have Māori features and you might be named Māori, yeah well I have a problem in that, I'm not Māori because that word is a 'pakehified' word that says 'native'. I have to know who I am. I'm Ngāti Kahungunu and I'm Ngai Tamarawaho from Tauranga Moana and I am Ngāti Porou Tamanawhiri.

So if anybody says to me 'Are you Māori?' I'm going well nah, but I'm Ngāti Kahungunu, because what does 'Māori' mean? So you begin your mana that way, you begin to learn about mana that way, those kupu, what does that mean? Who gave us that word 'Māori'? You know colonisation decided that we had to be lumped all into one. We couldn't walk around saying 'Oh no I'm Ngāti Kahungunu, I'm Ngāti Porou, I'm yeah Ngaitamarawaho'. For them [the colonisers] we couldn't walk around like that, they had to shrink it down. And you really had to learn to become political and begin to understand colonisation and the full impact on us, to learn to decolonise from within. There's a whole lot of things you have to begin to do. We walk around with baggage, with kete of rocks on our backs, right? The only kete we should be working with, walking with is ngā kete e toru o te wānanga. That's the only kete we should be walking with on our backs. You know, we walk with rubbish in the whole upbringing of our beings and the impact of colonisation and what that did.

Once you begin to understand, you know you can get angry, you can start blaming, you can get all of those things about what colonisation did to us and yes it did do that to us. But it's time to step out of that role and to walk in another role, but into what other role? That's part of the learning, of reaching out for what I think is our natural heritage from the Atua, you know! And, like I said, I had to walk in the whare tangata and thoroughly understand how I was created in the story of Tāne and in his search for the wahine or the ira tangata.

You see how can I talk about mana wahine in terms of my growth, when even in the whare tangata it speaks about Tane. It not only speaks about Tane, it talks about Tawhiri-matea, who gave us our lungs. It talks about Rongamaraero, who gave us our puku, our intestines. It talks about the māreikura and the apikura who gave the 12 denzein men, who sit at the gate of the 12 heavens that gave us our ability to think anything. Therefore you cannot separate mana wahine and mana tane because my very being was put together by the 71 sons of Papatūānuku and Ranginui. My very soul was put there by them and in fact, there is only Papatūānuku who offers the uku, the clay at Kurawaka to create the shape and form and it is the mārei-kura, the kuia that sit at the 12 heavens that offer me my Ahuru Mowai, my uterus, my birthing house. Outside of that ngā tane, ngā Atua tane create me, so I cannot for anytime separate that whole mana wahine from mana tane. When we do separate that, then we get into the danger of pakeha feminism and while I think that feminism is great, as a place for pakeha women. I don't down that at all, but it has no role in my life, just because I'm Maori or I'm Kahungunu, I'm all of those other

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things. We have an incredible model of well-being within it and for the struggle of our lives as wahine, and let me say that wahine have struggled through every aspect of their whare tapawhā, in rape and incest. And sometimes in that depth of despair, there is no honouring of our men, honouring of our sons, honouring of our fathers, our uncles, our brothers. There's no honouring of them because of our own depth of pain. But once you reach through the healing process and begin to forgive yourself, you begin to forgive them and koina, te mana o te tane, whakahokia te mana. The wonderful thing about wahine is that we have the ability to do so, if we choose, to do the healing process and forgive ourselves and then them.

In doing this work, and in order to heal me, I had to begin to work with other women, to help heal them and to really discover the korero of our tupuna in order to talk it, first and foremost, just talk it, just talk it out aloud so you can hear it. If you don't, you don't apply it in your lives at that time, in the first instance. But as you talk more and more and develop more and more, you begin to walk with it, it becomes part of you, it is you. The easiest way I found to heal was to help heal others, because then you found processes that would help you do it better.

So all my writing and all my art and all that I do was part of my healing process and I have shared that with other women, a lot, over the years so that it would facilitate them to have a look at themselves and do the puzzles (processes?) themselves. If I could touch one life a year, then my work is being done.

The other thing is that I had to come to terms with was men. I've been celibate now for 33 years but I have a tane and he is the most gorgeous tane, who understands where I'm at. But he taught me about me, he taught me the beauty of men, he taught me that not all men were like that, alright, he taught me to reach out to him and he taught me to love. Koina te mana o te tane. It is that kind of teaching and partnership that I've been learning for the last 23 years and the healing process is almost through.

But it doesn't matter who loves me. In order to give back as a woman, I needed to teach in prisons. I needed to teach men and I have worked for the last 15 years teaching men in prisons. I teach them through a therapeutic programme, through taonga puoro, Maori musical instruments. I teach them through tikanga kawa and learning how to whaikorero as a healing process. It's been a journey of forgiveness for me. Cause you know they're real ratbags, aye, they're real shocking our men (chuckle). But I have the privilege none the less of working with them and it's a privilege. It's a privilege to each day look at these men that rape, men that do hurt to children, incest and paedophiles. To walk with our common thieves, our 'P' users, our P deliverers all of those that do those things, to help them walk in another pathway. Some will and some won't. I mean, but if one comes out of that walking in his own strength, then again Koina te mana.

You know mana is also very much a kin to mauri. The mauri of things, you know the life force. You see I think that half of our people are walking around half dead. Dead to themselves, dead to their culture, dead to their tikanga, dead to their kawa and dead to their own sacredness, their own sacredness about themselves. They are so half-dead that if I can bring them back to life by sharing with them and let me tell you, as a teacher I'm only a door opener.

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I don't know it all, but what I do know is that it is still not mine, it belongs to tupuna. It's a model they sent down, it's a legacy, it's a rich inheritance for our children and I so want that for my kids. I so want that for my babies that, that beautiful inheritance that is ours. So you go and plant the rongoa forest at the back of your house, so that our babies live in rongoa and know there's kauri growing out there. How many babies grow under the tall beautiful things of kauri, every tree mānono, akeake, kawakawa you name it, it's out there in their little environment. It's in your home, you live in mana, the mana of tupuna that's what I'm talking about, the mana of tupuna. You can go in my bathroom and look at the mana of that tupuna, you can go in my toilet and listen and read the words of our tupuna. You see mana rests within you. So therefore mauri is linked, the mauri or the life force of ngā taonga katoa, ngā pakiwaitara, ngā pikitia, ngā ngā all of those you know, te reo.

You see, you can hear the birds, you know (birds chirping in the background), now those birds weren't here before. Why? Because it was just grass. I don't want my babies to grow up like that. My babies have helped me grow this little forest in the back of our yard, they know the plant life. I mean, before we used to grow kai, they're all big now and they can grow kai at their own place. But it's about knowing and becoming fully immersed in living it. It all intertwines with living it and then somebody comes along and they look at your garden and they go 'Ooh nga rongoa, aah pena te mana'. They come in to your whare and they go (gasp) 'Wow! look at that tupuna, koina te mana'. Therefore you do not take the mana for yourself. See this whole place I live in has the mana of the tupuna and boy, that's why we eat out here, because I can't, you know, can't eat with those taonga in there, in that house, you know, it's about that. So what is mana wahine to me, nothing, but mana atua, mana tangata, mana whenua all the roles that I play within and it doesn't mean I do it because of personal mana for me, no. But if I'm talking about you, 'Oh koina te wahine rongonui', you know, she's the one with the mana. Aah but for me, we don't whakamana ourselves, let the people speak of you.

All I know is this, that when I have passed and gone, I will have left the most beautiful legacy for my children, in my writing I develop myself, because why? Not because I want to be the cleverest you know, not like that. But my mokopuna will say and he has said 'Oh Nan you so clever, aye Nan you clever' me koina, te mana, my mokopuna is placing that on me, that I'm so clever. Do I need to say 'I'm clever'? Nah, the kids tell you that, the babies tell you that. They tell you the truth. I'll take it from a baby anytime more than I will from an adult, cause with an adult I'll say yeah what you want? You know, what you need just come to it. The kids don't mix, the truth is the truth. They even tell you, you fat aye Nan? And I say oh yeah baby I am too, you know living in truth, living in real.

So in summary, if you can make head or tail of all this, mana links with mana tane and mana wahine, together. Never teach it on its own, because without each other, it's dead, half dead, yeah? But it links in with mauri, the life force and you know very well, without our tane there is no life force given to us, our whare tangata, right? It's empty. It links all together. You must bring balance back, balance, the lesson of the Tapawha. It will tell you that on a personal level and on a traditional level, on an individual level, on a whānau level, on all of those. Now I might mana my children, some of them you know, who are doing very well. So as I say good things, I'm sending mana to them. So you see mana rests in others, it doesn't rest in you. They give it to you as a koha, as a gift, because you walk in it, because you live it. Don't just know it, live it and let it emanate from you, from all around you. Let

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it be alive in your whare, your whare tupuna is your own house, you live in yeah, so treat it like a whare tupuna. Its not just at the marae that our whare tupuna is there, we carry that in our own house. Have a look at your own whare and identify if your whare is a whare tupuna, not just at the marae. So if you're living it, our children grow up in a balance, our children grow up in Te Ao Māori then really well but also very strongly in Te Ao Pakeha, because we have to walk that road, we have no choice. We have a choice though to walk in Te Ao Māori, choose it and live it. Kia Ora!

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