

Mauri Tau, Mauri Ora: Balancing Mauri for Tamariki Wellbeing



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Drawing upon the wisdom of te ao Māori, this article explores mauri and practices that support tamariki in fostering mauri tau, a balanced and settled life force, and mauri ora, a state of optimal health and vitality. By deepening our understanding of mauri and exploring ways to guide tamariki and whānau to balance their mauri during ngā piki me ngā heke (the ups and downs of life), we can support their holistic wellbeing and healthy development.

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Mauri

Mauri is a life force, an energy, a vital essence, the spark of life. Mauri is a dynamic force within a network of interconnected relationships existing between all things in the physical world.¹

Different interpretations exist about the nature of mauri, its creation, and its influence. According to our tūpuna Māori, it is through mauri that energy, consciousness, and life are manifested,² instilled in humans at birth and leaving upon death. Mauri is the binding life force energy between the body and wairua (spiritual essence). Some iwi believe the source of mauri ultimately originates from Te Kore (realm of potential being), and others from Io (supreme being),⁴ manifested and created in the physical world through the acts of atua (deities), and through the actions of humans.⁵ Mauri can be impacted through positive actions, such as showing manaakitanga (kindness, generosity) to another, as well as through negative actions or conflict between people, which may also affect the mauri within a space or place.⁶ Mauri as an

energy can allow mana (spiritual power, influence) to flow,⁷ instilling a mauri of intentions and vital energy within objects, places and people through mana-filled action.

The many varied understandings of mauri highlight the dynamic and complex nature of mauri in Māori spirituality and wellbeing.⁸

Wairua and Tohu Mauri

Wairua is described in many ways; a spiritual essence, embodying the energies of creation, an unseen and intangible force that permeates all things and connects them to the spiritual realm.⁹ Wairua animates and sustains life. It is the spiritual energy that influences and interacts with mauri, giving it direction and purpose.

A common view is that the energy felt by people in interactions is wairua, and although mauri is an energy, it is not something one feels directly. However, as Hohepa Kereopa explained, “you see the signs” of mauri in life.¹⁰ Therefore, mauri in a state of balance can be observed through tohu (signs) such as robust ecosystems, well-maintained spaces, and healthy and balanced individuals.¹¹

The state of mauri within tamariki might be observed through such tohu as behaviours, expressions of feelings, thoughts, and in their wellbeing, health and vitality. These tohu are literally ‘tohu mauri.’¹²

Observing tohu from the world around us is a natural part of te ao Māori. Being attuned to tohu mauri in the bodies and world of tamariki enhances our understanding of their ōranga (wellbeing), supporting us to foster healthy mauri and wairua.¹³

Mauri Ora and Mauri Tau: Mauri in Balance

Mauri ora can be interpreted as optimal wellbeing, health and vitality. Mauri ora at its peak may be seen through tohu mauri ora¹⁴ (indicators of wellbeing) such as “an enlightened spirit, an alert and inquiring mind, a body that is fit for purpose and free of pain, and engagement with a set of relationships that are positive, nurturing, and mutually beneficial.”¹⁵

As Tā Hirini Moko Mead stated, “When the person is physically and socially well, the mauri is in a state of balance.”¹⁶ On the other hand, an imbalance in mauri can lead to states of pōuritanga (darkness) and poor health. The negative effects of imbalances in mauri may persist across generations.¹⁷

Our tūpuna saw all things as connected, with the energy of one thing able to impact another. A balanced mauri has the effect of nurturing the ōranga of the person—hinengaro (mind), tinana (body), wairua (spirit), and whānau (relationships)—bringing these interconnected parts of a person's being into harmony with the taiao (environment).¹⁸ This holistic approach promotes mauri ora.¹⁹

When the mauri of a person is settled, they are in a state of mauri tau. This is a state of “being in tune with the world.”²⁰ Mauri tau represents a balanced state, where one moves smoothly and harmoniously with the flow of life around them. It is a place of calm, peace, and clarity. While it is of course unreasonable to expect tamariki (or adults for that matter!) to flow harmoniously and smoothly in all circumstances, tamariki can learn ways to rebalance—to achieve mauri tau, through the ups and the downs that life brings. By nurturing and protecting the mauri of tamariki and helping them to observe and understand the tohu mauri within and around them, we can help them find mauri tau and mauri ora.²¹

Mauri Ora Tai Pari

Mauri Ora Tai Pari²² refers to the changing tides of mauri. When tamariki are supported to learn to ‘read the tides’ this helps them to maintain balance and wellbeing, recognising that fluctuations are a natural part of life. Whānau and kaimahi awareness of Mauri Ora Tai Pari can help to guide practices for raising and supporting tamariki that nurture their growth and development as they navigate life's ups and downs.

Mauri Oho (ranging from a state of alertness and activity to stress and burnout):

Mauri oho is like the incoming tide, where the water begins to rise and gain momentum. This state is crucial and beneficial when tamariki are learning new skills, embarking on new adventures, or facing new challenges. It encompasses the excitement and anticipation associated with new experiences.

Being in a positive state of mauri oho pai²³ can inspire tamariki to be proactive and engaged. It may

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manifest as mauri tū, a state of alertness, courage, resilience and active effort in beneficial activities, such as participation in cultural events, or taking on roles of responsibility within the whānau.

Supportive adults can play a crucial role in encouraging tamariki to channel their energy positively and constructively, including when the going gets tough, or when managing big feelings, such as excitement and nervousness, overwhelm, and anxiety.²⁴

Mauri oho pōuri²⁵ is an extreme state—also known as mauri rere; a state of panic and distress—that can lead to imbalance and negative outcomes. This state is also known as kahupō²⁶—languishing; a metaphoric kahu/cloak that is blinding or separating someone from being able to access their mauri tau and mauri ora.

When tamariki experience prolonged periods of heightened activity or stress without adequate support, it can result in physical and mental health concerns. Recognising the tohu of this state, such

as rising anxiety, insomnia, agitation or aggression, means adults can intervene and provide the necessary supports or kahuāo²⁷—a metaphoric cloak of day/light that can help tamariki return to mauri ora and mauri tau.

Mauri Noho (ranging from a state of reflection and rest to stagnation and disconnection)

Mauri noho can be likened to the low tide, where the water has receded, and everything is calm. During this beneficial state, tamariki may be meeting their needs to rest and recharge, to be quiet, and to reflect and process their experiences. This is especially important after significant social interactions, emotional events, or periods of intense activity. This state is also known as mauri moe (in its proactive form)²⁸ or mauri noho pai.²⁹

However, in some cases, mauri noho can be like a shoreline left dry and exposed for too long. Mauri noho pōuri³⁰ is a troubled mauri noho state—the inactive expressions of mauri moe—displayed in behaviours

such as avoiding social interactions, lack of motivation and low mood. This may be due to a variety of factors such as overwhelm, exhaustion, anxiety, a lack of skills, inadequate support or a mental, physical or wairua imbalance. When supportive adults help to address the needs of the tamariki in a state of mauri noho pouri, they can move towards a healthier state of mauri.

Mauri Tau represents the balanced state of riding the tide, where one moves smoothly and harmoniously with the natural flow of life. It is the space in the middle, where there is a sense of calm, peace, and clarity, and an awareness of both mauri noho and mauri oho. In this state tamariki can navigate their experiences and make decisions with a sense of mindfulness and balance.

One example of where we might see mauri tau in action is in learning to manage ngā-kare-a-roto (emotions) and behaviours which can require support. Supportive relationships ensure that tamariki are not navigating the tides of their big feelings and behaviours alone but are supported by a trusted guide, to observe the tohu mauri³¹ and to return to a settled place. As tamariki grow and develop, they gradually learn to bring balance to their mauri independently.³²

By fostering an environment that supports the natural rhythms of mauri and observing tohu mauri, we can support tamariki to grow and thrive in healthy ways, embracing their potential within the ever-changing tides of life. This approach not only promotes individual mauri ora, but also strengthens the collective

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mauri of the whānau and community, fostering a resilient and connected environment now and for future generations.

Mauri Tangata – The importance of human relationships

Our tūpuna understood that the balance in mauri within individuals could be influenced by others—mauri tangata. They recognised the impact of respect, acceptance, and positive relationships on the lives of tamariki.³³ Dr Rangimārie Rose Pere explained that when a person feels respected and accepted, their mauri waxes (strengthens), but if they feel unaccepted, their mauri wanes (weakens).³⁴ By fostering positive relationships within their whānau, modelling respect and ngākau aroha (empathy, compassion) whānau can help their tamariki develop a strong sense of confidence and resilience, nurturing their mauri, mana, tapu and wairua.



Conclusion

By integrating the wisdom of our tupuna into our lives, we can create environments where tamariki thrive. Tūpuna traditions ground tamariki in their cultural identity and ways of being, and practices based in mātauranga Māori can provide tamariki, whānau and kaimahi/professionals culturally located tools to navigate life's challenges.

Creating an environment of acceptance and support is crucial for maintaining a healthy and balanced mauri. Positive relationships and supportive environments help tamariki navigate through life, learning to return to a state of mauri tau. Through mauri tangata adults show aroha towards tamariki, helping them navigate towards mauri ora.³⁵

Endnotes

- 1 Marsden, 1998; Durie, 2001; Ngawati et al., 2018
- 2 Royal, 1998
- 3 Milroy, 2006, as cited in Ngawati et al., 2018; Mead, 2016
- 4 Pohatu & Pohatu, 2011
- 5 Hohepa Kereopa in Moon., 2005; Ngawati et al., 2018, p.31
- 6 Hohepa Kereopa in Moon, 2005
- 7 Royal, 2007
- 8 Marsden, 2003; Royal, 2007; Penehira, 2011
- 9 Maclean, 2018, cited in Ngawati et al., 2018; Marsden, 2003; Mataira, as cited in Ngawati et al., 2018; Mead, 2016 Taurua & Taurua, 1986
- 10 Maclean, 2018, as cited in Ngawati et al., 2018, p.8
- 11 Maclean, 2018, as cited in Ngawati et al., 2018
- 12 McLachlan & Ngāpō, 2024
- 13 McLachlan et al., 2024
- 14 McLachlan & Ngāpō, 2024
- 15 Durie, 2015, p.4
- 16 Mead, 2016, p.57
- 17 Hohepa Kereopa in Ngawati et al., 2018
- 18 Durie, 2001; Mead, 2016; McLachlan & Waitoki, 2022
- 19 Durie, 2001; Durie, 2020
- 20 Smith, 2019
- 21 McLachlan et al., 2021
- 22 McLachlan & Waitoki, 2022
- 23 McLachlan & Ngāpō, 2024
- 24 McLachlan & Ngāpō, 2024
- 25 McLachlan & Ngāpō, 2024
- 26 McLachlan & Waitoki, 2022
- 27 McLachlan & Waitoki, 2022
- 28 Penehira, 2011
- 29 McLachlan & Ngāpō, 2024
- 30 McLachlan & Ngāpō, 2024
- 31 McLachlan & Ngāpō, 2024
- 32 McLachlan et al., 2021; Te Poutāhu, 2024
- 33 Jenkins & Harte, 2014
- 34 Pere, 1994
- 35 McLachlan et al., 2021; Te Mauri Tau., 2021; Te Poutāhu, 2024

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Glossary of Māori words:

atua – Ancestor of continuing influence; deities or spiritual beings that have control over particular domains of the world.

hinengaro – Mind; mental and emotional aspects of a person.

kahuāo – Cloak of daylight; metaphoric protection representing guidance, support, and awareness.

kahupō – Cloak of darkness; metaphoric state of languishing, representing confusion, disconnection, and imbalance.

mana – Spiritual power, influence, prestige, status

manaakitanga – Kindness, generosity, and support; the act of caring for others.

mauri – Life force or vital essence that animates and sustains all living things.

mauri moe – Often synonymous with *mauri noho*, representing a continuum from a proactive and positive state of rest and recharge through to a troubled state of inactive stagnation and disconnection.

mauri noho – Settled or resting life force; a state of calm and rest.

mauri noho pai – Positive state of rest and recharge.

mauri noho pōuri – Troubled state of stagnation and disconnection.

mauri oho – Activated or alert life force; a state of activity and engagement.

mauri oho pai – Positive state of proactive engagement.

mauri oho pōuri: Troubled state of stress and burnout.

mauri ora – State of optimal health and vitality, with balanced and flourishing *mauri*.

Mauri Ora Tai Pari – Concept reflecting the changing tides of *mauri*, indicating the natural fluctuations in emotional and mental states.

mauri rere – A state of panic and distress.

mauri tangata – The impact and influence of relationships on an individual's *mauri*.

mauri tau – Balanced and settled life force; a state of harmony and peace.

ngā piki me ngā heke – The ups and downs of life; fluctuations and changes experienced.

ngā-kare-a-roto – Emotions; inner feelings and emotional states.

ngākau aroha – Empathy, compassion, kindness, and love; a deep and genuine care for others.

ōranga – Wellbeing; overall health and life balance.

taiao – Environment; the natural world and surroundings.

tapu – Sacredness and spiritual restriction; something set apart due to its sacred nature.

Te Kore – Realm of potential being, the void.

tohu mauri – Indicators of the state of *mauri*, observable through behaviours, emotions, and physical health.

tūpuna – Ancestors.

wairua – Spiritual essence; the unseen force connecting all things to the spiritual realm.

whakapapa – Genealogy; the layers of ancestral lineage connecting people to their ancestral heritage, including connections beyond people to the natural world and *atua*.

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