

# Creation

When *Te ao marama* (*Te ao tu roa*) has emerged, then is related the myth of *Ranginui* and *Papatuanuku*, the primeval parents, who dwelt in the lowest of 12 heavens named (according to the *Takitimu* tradition) *Ranginuiatamakau*. Below *Ranginui* lay *Papatuanuku* who represents planet earth, and below her lies *Rarohenga* (the Underworld) which is the realm of the spirits, ruled over by dread *Whiro* who represents darkness, evil, death.

The myth relates that *Ranginui* (the Skyfather) looked down upon *Papatuanuku* and, loving her, descended and mated with her. Locked in deep embrace they produced numerous progeny (in some accounts 70 in number) all of whom were male. These offspring were imprisoned between the primeval parents in stifling darkness. Faint glimpses of light filtered in and the children became restless and anxious to escape to the world of light (*Te ao marama*). After much discussion among the brothers some agreed to force the parents to release them if *Rangi* and *Papa* would not agree to setting them free. Those sons (some 28 in number) made a number of abortive attempts to escape. *Tumatauenga* considered the most effective means would be to slay the parents but the others disagreed. *Tawhirimatea* refused to take part any further and this had later repercussions. Finally *Tane* lay down on *Papa*, bracing his feet against *Rangi* and extending his arm against *Papa*. Upside down and struggling fiercely, with the brothers giving support as they were able, the reluctant parents were inexorably forced apart. Finally separated, *Rangi* became the Sky Father and *Papa* the Earth Mother. Following the forcible separation, *Rangi* and *Papa* grieved for each other, *Rangi's* tears becoming the rain and *Papa's* the rising mists.

Following the emerging of the children of *Rangi* and *Papa*, there began a period of strife between the liberated brothers. This was a prolonged and fearsome struggle for supremacy over each other and when it was ended six brothers ruled over the main departments of the universe.

*Tawhirimatea* elected to remain with his father and sought to punish the others for their cruelty to the parents. He became the god of winds and hurricanes as he sought out each brother in turn, striving to destroy him. The remaining brothers took refuge in different parts of the world.

*Tangaroa* fled to the seas for refuge where he became the ruler of the seas and fishes. As *Tangaroa-whakamaui* he regulates the tides.

*Tane* took refuge in the forests and became god of trees and birds. He represents life, prosperity, welfare and sunlight and has the title *Tanenuiarangi* (great *Tane*, son of *Rangi*) for he is chief of the gods. As god of forests and birds he is given the title *Tanemahuta*.

*Tumatauenga*, the fiercest of the brothers, was not overcome by *Tawhirimatea* and became god of war and strife. *Tumatauenga* strove to obtain supremacy over *Tanemahuta* after subduing his other brothers, but failed.

Two brothers, *Haumiatikitiki* and *Rongomatane*, took refuge in the earth (*Papa*), *Haumia* becoming god of uncultivated foods, and *Rongo* god of agriculture and god of peace.

According to the account given by Sir George Grey (p. 5)<sup>5</sup>, *Tawhirimatea* remains in permanent opposition to his brothers as ruler of winds and hurricanes. *Tangaroa* rules over the fish of the seas, *Rongomatane* over cultivated foods, *Haumiatikitiki* over those foods derived from fern roots, etc., *Tanemahuta* over forests and birds, and *Tumatauenga* has dominion over human beings.

Earlier reference was made to *Whiro* and the myths tell of his attempts to overcome *Tanenuiarangi*. He failed, however, and retired to the Underworld. Here there is a dramatic portrayal of the struggle of darkness against light, where *Whiro* personifies evil, darkness and death, and *Tane* light and life.

Thus in the mythological stories there are given explanations of the opposition between sky and earth, the struggle for existence in a hostile environment, and a rationale for the continuing rivalry among human beings.

## Creation of Humankind

The children of *Rangi* and *Papa* were of the gods and therefore immortal. It is usual to refer to these beings as *atua*, normally translated as gods, but the Maori word carries the idea of 'power'. The children of *Rangi* and *Papa* are really secondary beings. For example, in the account given of *Tane's* ascent to *Te Toi a Nga Rangi* (the uppermost of the 12 heavens) to secure the baskets of esoteric knowledge needed for the survival of human beings, it is clear that the heavens were peopled with many supernatural beings. These also are *atua*, superior to the children of *Rangi* and *Papa*. Elsdon Best (1924: 63) says:

Such supernormal beings ... we generally term "gods", though the term is not always appropriate. Some of these beings may be classified as

tutelary deities, as “parents” or “originating powers”; others as “demons” or evil spirits. Even the lowest types were supposed to be helpful to man, if placated in a proper manner. The only ones who were persistently evil ... seem to have been Whiro and his myrmidons of the lower world.

The baskets of knowledge referred to above were three in number. The first was *Te Kete Tuauri* (the basket of most sacred knowledge) which contained the *karakia* (ritual) concerning the primeval parents, and those controlling the matters desired to be performed by the children of *Papa*. The second basket, *Te Kete Aronui* (the basket of good) supplied the knowledge of love, sympathy, peace-making and all things which benefit mankind and the environment. The third basket, *Te Kete Tuatea* (the basket of evil) contained the knowledge of all evil things, dissensions, strife among men and gods (Best 1976b: 103).

As the offspring of *Rangi* and *Papa* were all male, the Maori account of creation next turns to the search for the female element by *Tane*. There are three main elements in Maori cosmology: the *ira atua* (divine element), the *ira tangata* (human element), and the *uha* (female element). In seeking the *uha*, *Tane* produced trees, birds, insects and a wide range of natural phenomena including monster reptiles, but always the female element eluded him. Finally he enquired of Earth Mother who bade him go to the beach *Kurawaka*, and there gather the red earth into human form. This, with the aid of his brothers, he did. They made a figure resembling themselves. *Tane* then breathed into the form *hauora* (life-giving force) and it stirred, sneezed and breathed and woman had entered the world. Following purification rites to remove the *tapu* of creation, *Tane* named this first woman *Hineahuone* (earth-formed maiden).

*Tane* now mated with *Hineahuone* and she conceived and bore a daughter, *Hinetitama*. Subsequently, *Hineahuone* bore *Tane* a further ten daughters and it is from these that humankind (*te ira tangata*) is descended. The myth then relates how *Tane* took *Hinetitama* as his wife who gave birth to a daughter, *Hinerauwharangi*. Later, *Hinetitama* had a great desire to know who her father was, so she enquired of her husband. *Tane* was embarrassed, yet had to supply enough information for her to discover the truth. Finding that her father was also her husband, *Hinetitama*, in shame and distress, fled from the world and descended to *Rarohenga* (the Underworld) thus leaving *Te Ao Marama* to dwell in the world beneath the world. Here she became *Hinenuitepo* (Great Hine of the night), the goddess of death. Since then she has guarded the entrance to the realm of death to welcome her children who, being formed of the earth, are not immortal (Best 1976b: 121-130). A synonym for death, *Te Whare o Aitua* (The

House of Misfortune) is frequently used in speeches during funerary rites, but this same phrase is used also for the earth and for the female vagina. In this account, then, we find the linking of the ancient prohibition of incest with death, and the assertion of woman as inferior to man.

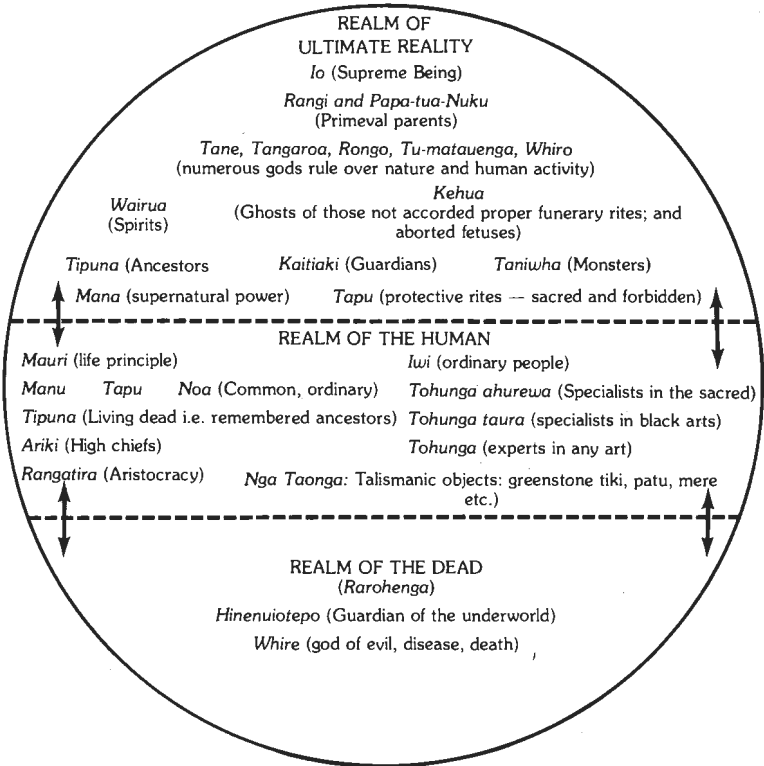
In *Maori religion and mythology*, Vol. 1, Elsdon Best gives the account of creation in great detail, with a number of variant accounts. In the outline above, the chief version has been followed, but notice that in some accounts *Tiki* is given as creator of woman. Most likely this is an alternative for *Tane*.

It is now possible to introduce a schematic diagram of the Maori world-view (see Diagram 4) that illustrates what has been described.

The three-tier system is shown with arrows indicating the interpenetration of the sacred into the mundane world. It will be seen that *mana* and *tapu* are represented in both the Realm of Ultimate Reality and the Realm of the Human. In the Human Realm there is interposed the word *noa*. This refers to the rituals associated with purification associated with the *tapu* that protect *mana*. *Mana* comes from the supernatural world and operates in the mundane world. The diagram illustrates Joan Metge's comment that the values and sanctions of Maori society were derived from a spiritual conception of the universe and that the Maori believed in a pantheon of spiritual beings with supernatural powers. The question of whether *Io* as Supreme Being was an invention of post-European contact will be dealt with below under the heading "Gods, Demons and Ghosts".

# Maori Cosmology

An outline of Maori religion and world view.



These three realms are not closed systems; they interpenetrate each other. When put together they give us a cosmic picture which constitutes the primal world-view of the Maori.

Diagram 4