

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 108: Futurama. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons. If you want to support HANZ go to patreon.com/historyaotearoa. Last time we talked about the all-important concept of tapu and the people in Māori society that helped navigate it, the tohunga. Today we will discuss more about the practicalities of religion, specifically karakia, divination, mākutu and magic.

Matakite is commonly translated to divination, which is basically the fancy term for seeing into the future but matakite are also the people who practiced divination or as Best put it, had the gift of second sight since it could also encompass seeing the dead or other supernatural beings. Mata means, among other things, surface or eye and kite means to see or to perceive or discover so the idea of a second sight or maybe a sixth sense isn't too far off. Divination could come in a number of forms from just simply interpreting signs seen out in the world to performing rituals with the specific intent of asking an atua what the future held. The god could then respond by speaking through the tohunga, though more often than not the gods would sing through him. Otherwise, they could make some sort of sign in the natural world, all of which the tohunga would explain the meaning of. A particularly powerful tohu was rakutia or closed sun. "At midday there was darkness, and the stars were seen. After two hours perhaps of darkness, daylight returned." Which as you might guess probably describes an eclipse of some kind. Other tohu could include sneezing while eating as a sign that a visitor or some news would arrive soon or if the right arm spasms during sleep, that was good luck, if the left it was bad luck. Some people would hear noises in the bush similar to the sound of a European deathwatch beetle, a tapping or clicking sound, which was related to death of either the person who heard it or someone they knew. The position of the stars and planets could also indicate various things, such as Venus' position relative to the moon would indicate if a besieged pā was going to be taken. Some Europeans believed that matakite used ventriloquism to trick people into thinking it was the gods that were speaking or just to enhance their 'performance'. They also thought there was an element of hypnotism but Best says there isn't really evidence for this.

One way to conduct a divination ritual was to drop sticks or fern stalks onto the ground and interpret how they fell or the marks they left in the ground. Such as using one stick to represent a friendly taua and another stick to represent the enemy. They would then be thrown to the ground and depending on how they landed, such as one stick on top of the other, that would indicate how the battle would go. Other ways to do it would be to put two sticks into the ground upright and tie a stick horizontally across them. The tohunga would then take another stick with a lock of hair on it that belonged to a chief or someone else important and wave it across the sticks while reciting a karakia. What they were looking for was how the hair moved and whether it touched the horizontal stick, as this would then tell them the fate of a taua in their forthcoming attack. These were relatively simple methods and more complicated ones could be used depending on the importance of what they were trying to find out.

Sometimes a tohunga, through matakite, would identify a papa. This is an item or items or even a few people that if destroyed, captured or just seen would lead to victory. This would lead to some taua and individuals making what would otherwise be odd strategic choices in battle in order to fulfill those conditions. One story from Tuhoe was that to win a battle a waka needed to be seen and a specific man clad in red needed to be killed. In another case, a tree needed to be seen and a "fair headed person" needed to be captured. In this case they failed, they got too eager and killed the person instead of capturing them, resulting in the attacking taua being routed and chased into the mountains. In some cases the tohunga would explain that should the taua follow his instructions, or rather those of the atua he communed with, they would definitely succeed but the tohunga himself was guaranteed to be killed. So sometimes the tohunga would go into a battle knowing that they

were going to die but in exchange their people would be guaranteed victory. Heavy stuff! Of course, they would sometimes predict the deaths of others which was always a bit dangerous, such as in one case where a tohunga predicted the death of a Pākehā colonel and got caught trying to poison him.

Dreams were also an important way to predict the future, such as if a man dreamt of human skulls on the ground with feathers, it was a sign his wife would conceive soon. The type of feathers on the skulls would also indicate the sex, huia for girls, kotuku for boys. Dreams were a key form of matakite and many tohunga said they spoke to atua while they were asleep. Best claims that the gods talked to them in dreams, and possibly during their waking hours in a “whistling tone of voice”. He suggests that this is the reason Māori didn’t whistle and why they didn’t like hearing Europeans do it.

What’s interesting is that someone who could predict the future via dreams was known to have rata rather than matakite, so a distinction was made between the two types of divination. This is possibly because dreaming wasn’t exactly like trying to see or predict the future, it was the wairua, the soul, leaving the body and seeing things that couldn’t normally be seen. Matakite wasn’t done by the wairua leaving the body so it was distinct and different.

A lot of what matakite involved was reciting karakia. Of course karakia was present in almost every facet of Māori life and most people would know at least a few simple ones that pertained to their daily activities. Best says karakia has a broad definition “a charm, a spell, an incantation, an invocation. Any simple form of words, no matter how puerile it may be, uttered in order to avert ill fortune, to secure good luck, to render one disastrous, skilful, to cause a child's kite to fly or top to spin, all were termed karakia, as also were invocations to the Supreme Being.” So karakia could range from long elaborate prayers to simply a two-word phrase that someone says when they stub their toe, kuruki whakataha. This consists of the word meaning ‘to become powerless’ and the word meaning ‘to put to one side’. Which to me possibly translates to mean something to the effect of “that really hurt but I’ll walk it off”. A slightly more complex karakia could be someone with a stomach ache repeating “Tell xyz I have a stomachache,” The idea was to say the names of any rangatira or tohunga they knew who could then contact their tīpuna, tribal gods or anyone else in the spirit world who could stop the demon or spirit from causing the stomach ache.

As mentioned, everyone would know a few karakia as it pertained to them and their life, many of which we have covered in previous episodes. Kids would know some that they would recite during games or to stop it raining, wrestlers knew some that would give them strength and weaken their opponent, fishermen or fowlers would know some to say over their hooks, nets and spears so they could catch better and so on. “Tree climber and traveler, paddler and planter, bushman and bather, all possessed their private budget of charms. No man so lowly, no calling so humble, but it possessed a few necessary charms.” Of course, there were those only known by tohunga which were more complicated and more tapu but remember a tohunga wasn’t just a priest, a tohunga could be in nearly any sort of profession and as such they knew medium level karakia for usually one or two different areas, like fishing, trapping, war, agriculture, carving or weaving. The highest level were those practiced by the cult of Io which were only known to the tohunga ahurewa, the highest ranked of the spiritual tohunga. Some rituals performed by the most tapu tohunga were performed in public and seen to be significant and important functions to life, such as those conducted during planting or Matariki, but the most tapu rituals were done behind closed doors and only with a few people present. These most tapu rituals were usually where Io’s name was invoked.

Well, I say they invoked Io’s name but that may not be strictly true. What’s interesting about any karakia regardless of level is that atua were rarely directly invoked or appealed, that is they often

weren't mentioned by name. Sometimes just mentioning them in an abstract way, such as saying 'the children of the sky and earth' was enough to gain some of their mana, which could then be used to achieve the speaker's goals. What makes this even more interesting is why Māori believed this abstract speaking worked and by extension how karakia worked at all, "A Māori karakia was an incantation or charm, a form of words which was effective simply by its own innate virtue, without reference to the state of mind of the person using it, and without the interventive assistance of any superior power giving its effect" To break that down, karakia and Māori religion in general was quite indirect. The karakia didn't need to be directly related to or talking about the event it was being used for, the words had meaning and power all on their own. Te Ao Māori is a world of words, of language, it's part of the reason why Te Reo is considered a significant taonga today. It's not just the way to communicate, without a written word, it's the way to pass on knowledge, history, law and science. It makes sense then that a culture that relied so heavily on its oral language believed that speaking those words had an inherent power. Though Best adds that someone did need to have mana for those words to matter so there was a somewhat base requirement there. Sometimes recitals of whakapapa would be part of a karakia or wider ritual, the idea being that naming people of import would add mana and power to whatever they were doing. They may also recite the whakapapa of the universe before it was created, those entities/states of Te Pō.

Karakia could be spoken in a rhythmic way with the more tapu ones spoken with "Careful delivery and modulation of tone". Often invocations to Io or the Big Six were made with a "smooth rhythmical, long continued flow of words, maintained as long as the reciter's breath held out." Usually this was a one-person job but for particularly tapu karakia it could be done by two tohunga, with one going on for as long as he could and the second picking up where he left off so that there wasn't a break in the speaking. Since a break, mispronunciation or other such faltering could result in real world disaster. A number of early European explorers saw Māori perform karakia where they would talk in "a long, solemn and cadenced speech". Specifically, when they came aboard their ships, striking the ship with a small green branch, the idea being that they were removing any evil spirits and other bad stuff from the vessel, since it and the people on it were very unfamiliar.

Karakia and any rituals they were part of were most often done in the early hours of the morning, though there were a couple exceptions such as ones done in relation to war. The idea behind this was that in the morning your stomach would be empty, thus you would be more capable of performing the ritual due to not having anything noa inside you. Feasts were often the conclusion to an important ritual, which also usually was preceded by fasting during the ritual itself. Again, food is noa, it counteracts tapu so it makes sense that you wouldn't want to be noa during the tapu ceremony but you would want to remove that tapu afterwards. Dancing was common in both the rituals themselves as well as the feasts, usually accompanied with singing. Rivers and streams were a popular place to perform rituals, usually with the person being fully submerged at the critical point as the water was meant to insulate the person against malevolent forces.

Fire was also an often-used tool in ritual and ceremony. Items would be thrown into a fire after it had been made tapu, usually by way of karakia. This would sometimes reference Māui specifically, given his story of taking fire from Mahuika. Depending on the ceremony the fire itself could be named differently, Best recording 28 different names for tapu fires, the names usually being ahi (Te Reo for fire) followed by the name of the particular ritual. There were fires for divination, to give men going to war courage, bring good or bad weather, rendering enemies weak or faint hearted, during an exhumation of bones, protect crops, injure people or just fires for cooking food during feasts or special occasions for very tapu people, like ariki or tohunga. Hangi could also be used in place of ahi tapu as well. In these fires, other than wood, anything from kumara or birds to the

hearts of enemies could be burned. Once the ahi tapu had fulfilled its purpose, it wasn't uncommon for the tapu to not be lifted until after it had burned away and as such it was an offense to trespass on those places. Māori also practiced fire walking to give some rituals more prestige, though by the sounds of it, in the Māori case, the fire was a big semi-circle hangi as opposed to other similar practices throughout Polynesia.

Perhaps a more unusual item of karakia, matakite and ritual in general was hair. Since the head was the most tapu part of the body, hair appeared in a few different ceremonies and other religious capacities. In fact, the cutting of the hair was a rather tapu event. Tuhoē would cut hair at a specific point in a stream or at a specific pool that was designated for tapu tasks like this. Cutting hair could also be part of larger ceremonies and was often one of the last things done during a ritual. Why this was though, Best is unable to say. It was common for hair to be cut once a year on a designated day during Matariki. It was a big event with people from all over the region gathering in one place to watch or take part. Potentially there were up to a thousand viewers coming along to see Doug get his perm. During the ceremony an obsidian knife would be made tapu via karakia before the hair was cut. Afterwards the hair might be laid onto a tūāhu or some kind of altar. Until the ceremony was over everyone would fast and no fires would be lit, except for one which would be used to burn the cut hair. This obviously varied from region to region and was not practiced everywhere. Additionally, people who got their hair cut with this amount of fanfare were most definitely people of high rank, mana and tapu. No one is coming out to see me get by bi-monthly shave. Another custom was to cut off all the hair except for one lock as a sign of mourning. This was popular in particular with widows who would cut their hair as short as they could and sometimes singe off the rest with fire. Where the final piece of hair was left could depend on a few different factors, such as if it was in relation to the death of a child, the hair would be left on the right side if it was a boy and on the left side if it was a girl. Again though, this varied a lot between hapū and iwi. The way hair was actually worn was in a top knot and in some cases, a cord made from the plaited hair of a killed enemy would be used to tie it up, sometimes with huia feathers if the person was a rangatira. In the same vein, hair from an enemy was often taken back to the pā after a battle to allow the tohunga to perform various rites and ceremonies over it, particularly in relation to stopping the defeated enemy from being able to seek utu.

Cook and many other early European explorers recorded finding human hair tied to trees or tucked into crevices between rocks, possibly as a way to hide their hair from malevolent forces who would certainly use it for evil magic. However, Best says it is likely that there was something else going on here otherwise instead of hiding it they would have just burnt it, so perhaps it was thought something bad would happen if it was burnt or the need to hide it was more related to a connection to the earth. As you might have guessed, hair was a popular medium to use in relation to mākutu, given its tapu relation to the head. Mākutu translates into witchcraft, sorcery or black magic, as such, hair could be used to injure, dull the senses or otherwise generally do bad things to someone. However, mākutu could be employed to do things like find thieves and punish them so it wasn't always just cause of some malicious, senile wizard doing it for fun. Sometimes it was just mundane stuff.

The hair didn't always have to be from the victim though, in one case a person plucked some of his own hair and dropped into a drink that was about to be consumed by the victim as a karakia was spoken. Hair could also be used to placate taniwha "I was in my canoe at Tawhitinui, fishing for maehe, when I heard a strange sound, and two great waves came rolling in from the lake. Also, I heard two loud reports like unto that of the cannon of the white man. Then I knew that the taniwha was angry. O friend! Quickly I plucked from my head a hair and cast it into the water, reciting at the

same time a charm whereby to render the demon harmless and to calm the rolling water.” The hair also didn’t always need to be from the head, it could also be from the armpits, legs, abdomen (if you were hairy enough) and even the genitals.

Hair is actually used in a huge number of ways like when encountering a lizard on the road, some hair would be burned in an ahi. Or by putting a hair into the mouth of the first catch of fish and releasing it, which would help in getting good fortune in future catches by imparting some of that person’s mana to the fish and was kinda like an offering to Tangaroa. Hair has been discovered in carved figures with umbilical cords and deposited at the edge of a rohe or some other important place though Best doesn’t explain why this was. On the East Coast of Te Ika a Māui, a messenger would cut off half of his hair and cover that space in red ochre. When he arrived to deliver his message, it would be immediately understood what he was there for, to seek aid in war. Those from Tuhoe who entered the whare wānanga would have their hair cut at the wai tapu as another tohunga would recite a karakia. People of Takitimu would use hair to impart the mana of a priest on a new whare wānanga when it was erected. When a seasons teaching ended, each pupil would bury some hair and saliva to prevent the students from being affected by evil magic in the future. Hair was also used in exorcisms, joining the hair from the tohunga and the patient together and putting them in the patients mouth. When the demon was exorcised, it would do so via this piece of hair. A ritual called maunga hirihiri, involved taking some hair to a mountain and offering it up to call upon the aid of tūpuna. The idea being that those ancestors would have been buried in the mountain ranges they were offering up to.

If you were listening closely there you may have picked up that I mentioned saliva. And boy, can I tell you about spit. Saliva was used a lot in ritual, ceremony and mākutu, much like hair was. Saliva could also actually be used to reverse mākutu. In one case in the early 19th century a European bought a comb from Māori but since the comb had touched someone’s head it was tapu, so he spoke a karakia over it and spit on his fingers to run them over the comb, thus removing the tapu. In one ceremony to find out if someone had been affected by mākutu, a tohunga had the victim spit in his hand then slapped it on his right cheek and “saw the wizard on his left side”. Another ritual would be performed to kill this wizard but if the victim wished to save them then the tohunga would need to spit on their forehead. If a man wanted his cheating wife to return to him, he was told to spit into a shell and give it to a tohunga who would manipulate it “in a very extraordinary way”. In a similar vein, spitting on a weapon was a common way to weaken any enemies that the wielder may encounter in the coming battle. Another way to deal with a lizard that you encounter would be to kill it, spit on it, cut it into pieces and burn it to stop any evil stuff happening. On a wider cultural level, spitting in general was done when there was “danger in the air”. So, if someone was suspected to be the victim of mākutu they would be encouraged not to eat or swallow saliva as the curse would enter via the mouth. Or it could just be when there was heavy tapu in an area, such as opening a tapu hangi, a woman was careful not to swallow.

Rituals over women who were about to give birth varied depending on the rank of the woman and the rank of the child. First born kids, particularly males, would have the most tapu karakia and rites performed over them whereas people of much lower rank would only have a simple karakia or perhaps nothing at all. When women of rank were to give birth they would move to a specially made whare on the outskirts of the settlement, which was usually destroyed after she left. This was called the whare kōhanga, which literally translates into birthing house but effectively means nursery or maternity ward. A similar practice of isolation was performed if someone was sick. In some cases, the woman only went into the new house after the child was born, in which case it was called the whare kahu, where they would remain until the tapu was lifted from them. This separation was so

that the woman and baby wouldn't come in contact with people that grow food just in case the noa nature of food make her less tapu in her current state. Karakia could also be used to help with the birth itself, especially if it was turning out to be a particularly difficult one, often invoking the name of the moon who is heavily linked with women, pregnancy and menstrual cycles. Karakia were then said after the baby was born and during the cutting of the umbilical cord so that the child may become "intelligent and clever, to endow it with a clear mind." The umbilical cord, called an iho, would be either buried somewhere or put into the hollow of a tree at the edge of the rohe. Sometimes the same tree would be used for multiple children and so it would have red ochre smeared on it to indicate as such. Sometimes a tree was planted on the spot where the iho was buried and the growth of the tree would indicate if the child would grow to be healthy. When the baby was a month old and "strives with its hands to reach its mother's breast", two fires would be made, one for the ariki and the other for the atua. Aruhe would be cooked in the fire and a karakia said. The aruhe would then be taken from the fire and waved over the child with more karakia before the aruhe is buried in a sacred place. The mother would do a similar action, touching another aruhe to various parts of the child's body, also burying this one after she spits on it. Depending on the iwi, the father and grandmother may also get involved with this ritual. Other times the aruhe would be eaten instead of buried, the action being called kai-katoa i te tamaiti, the eating of the child all over. If, during this ceremony, one of the women of the ariki's family is missing, a figure made of 'weeds' was made and stuck in the ground to represent her. Up until this point the child was considered very tapu and wouldn't have been able to be held by the rest of the family other than the mother and possibly father but after this ceremony the child is no longer considered tapu and is able to be embraced by the wider whānau.

There were also naming rights which may or may not involve a baptism of sorts where a twig or hand was dipped into the water of a stream with the water sprinkled over the child, the family and anyone else gathered. These rituals varied a fair bit but the general gist was that the baby was named, imparted with good health and wellbeing and dedicated to Io or Tūmataunga. In the case of Tū, Best says that dedicating a child to him was because he is the god of war but I wonder whether it was more due to Tū being the creator of man and in most of the myths his presence is usually an allegory for humans as a whole. A child could also be dedicated to Rongo to endow them with qualities of art, culture and cultivation, so perhaps it was related to war and peace around what issues that the tribe was currently facing.

Generally, before you make babies though there would need be marriage. Shortland says that the brothers of a woman have the most say in who she marries, rather than the parents or herself. There wasn't exactly a marriage ceremony in the same way that Western Christianity would recognise. However, there was some ritualised meetings of the soon to be weds and a marriage feast would be held to solidify the whole thing. During the feast a tohunga would say some karakia to ward off evil influences from the couple and ensure a long and happy union. As we have talked about in the past, a powerful rangatira or ariki might have multiple wives, some of whom have land. As such, the women would stay where they were to administer the land while their husband moved between his wives. Chiefs would also often have concubines from lower class families. As with marriage, there were karakia for courting someone, in some cases used to overcome a woman's distaste for a man. This would involve taking a small object, speaking some words over it and placing it underneath the woman's pillow. In another form of this ritual, a miromiro (tomtit) would be used if the woman was some distance away, say the next kainga over or further. The miromiro would fly to her and land on her head, making the woman get up and head straight to the person who spoke the karakia.

Just like there were karakia if a woman cheats on her husband, there were karakia for when a man strays from his wife. The woman would be taken by a tohunga to a stream in the evening and they would be sprinkled with water as a karakia was spoken. Then she would see “the shadowy form (wairua) of her husband standing beside her. The woman was then told to go home, that all was well and that her husband would soon be with her.” The tohunga would then despatch a bird to find the husband. Naturally, there were also rites around divorce, called a toko. In some cases this involved taking the wife to a stream to remove her affection for her husband, again sprinkling water over her and also touching her “as though picking something from it, but brought away nothing immaterial”. Often the separating of Rangi and Papa was invoked and “the nettles and trees and plants of the forest are called upon to cause the woman’s skin to be as “quills upon the fretful porcupine” in the presence of her husband - That is, to cause her to dislike him” This ritual could also be performed over both the husband and wife if they both agreed. Divorce was said to be fairly common, with women either being set aside by their husbands for various reasons, war between his tribe and hers or other outside factors. Although it was very very rare for incestuous marriages to occur, it was pretty common to have a man married to two sisters, sometimes as a result of the death of the man’s brother meaning he was obligated to marry his brother’s wives to ensure they were cared for.

Next time, is going to be a pretty heavy discussion around death, funerals and what happens to the soul after it leaves mortal realm. It’s potentially going to be a fairly intense episode but death is a key part of life and so it is something we will try to cover with the respect it deserves.

If you want to send me feedback, ask a question, suggest a topic or just have a chinwag you can find my email and social media on historyaotearoa.com. You can also find helpful resources there like transcripts, sources and translations for some of the Te Reo Māori we have used. You can help support HANZ through Patreon, buying merch or giving us a review, it means a lot and helps spread the story of Aotearoa New Zealand. As always, haere tū atu, hoki tū mai. See you next time!