

11.

Pura Pura Tuku Iho

(the seed that has been passed down)

by

Flora Tuhaka

This paper describes a presentation that Flora Tuhaka gave at the 'Just Therapy' conference held in Duncan, B.C. Canada, in November 1991. In this presentation, Flora demonstrated how she works with Maori families who seek her help. For Maori people an important belief is that one must look into the past in order to see into the future. Flora's approach links families deeply into their own cultural values so that they may find a way forward out of their difficulties.

This description of Flora's presentation was written by Carmel Tapping.

175

Tuhaka, F. (2003). Pura Pura Tuku Iho (the seed that has been passed down). In C. Waldegrave, K. Tamasese, F. Tuhaka & W. Campbell (Eds.), *Just Therapy – a journey*. A collection of papers from the Just Therapy Team, New Zealand (pp. 175-179). Dulwich Centre Publications.

Flora began her presentation by explaining a Maori way of life where people lived off the land and took only what was needed from the sea. She spoke of how people hunted, planted and gathered, sharing all their resources with their extended *whanau* (family) and all those who lived around them. Respect was always given to the gods, she said, and the first fish caught and the first fruit or vegetable gathered was given back to the gods in return for a better harvest the following year.

She explained how Maori people were skilled in understanding the natural environment around them; the sun, stars, moon, and the plants and animals. Men and women had their own roles to play and there was a strong sense of community with everyone sharing together, treating each other with kindness and *aroha* (a deep sense of love).

Flora then described the process of urbanisation in the late 1950s and early 1960s, where Maori people were discouraged from building on their own land, and were given government loans for housing in the cities. In these times, cities had plenty of well-paid labouring jobs. She described that, in moving to the cities, the lifestyles of many Maori changed dramatically with much of the traditional ways of living disappearing.

She described how people left the land they owned, the clean plentiful familiar environment that surrounded them, the home of their ancestors. They went to cities where they understood they would be better off.

Maori families were no longer free and easy. They now faced having to pay the cost of their move into the city, paying a home mortgage, higher rates, electricity bills, bus fares to and from work, and having to buy food and clothing. They also had to cope with the everyday difficulties of living in the city. They were not told that everything would cost them money. Many of these families found themselves alone, and were not able to share anymore. As well as being lonely, they experienced the stress of living in an environment that was so foreign to them. It is in this context that many families came for help.

Flora then explained how she works with Maori families. Firstly, it is important that the family understands who they are and where they come from, since these connections are essential elements to the healing process.

When families come to therapy they are greeted in the traditional Maori way. Time is taken to make tribal connections and make links between *whanau* (family) and their extended *whanau*. She then connects herself to the *whanau*

through her extended *whanau*. She then becomes a part of them and they a part of her, according to their *whakapapa* (genealogy). She is then discussing as family rather than as client and therapist.

She explained how Maori people, when looking into their lives, look into their past in order to view their future. They must always look behind to see what's in front, which is quite different from the European approach in New Zealand. Maori look to their *tipuna* (ancestors) for wisdom and evidence for the future. In therapy, the process is the same. Families need to let out the pain of the past, so that they can look with hope to their future.

It is important that the family feels comfortable with the worker at an early stage, as this helps draw out the core of their pain and provides a safe atmosphere for the family to share their story. It is important that the family's *wairua* (spiritual soul) flows freely, as this helps people to tell their stories of pain with confidence that the whole family will be treated with respect.

The *wairua* is living and adapts with time to both physical and social needs. The presence of the *wairua* is recognised in all aspects of Maoridom; behind, in front, beside, on top of the *mauri* (life principle) of their heritage. The *wairua* is inherited from birth and is a difficult concept to explain or teach.

When working with Maori families, it is also important that the *mana* (self-respect/status) of any one person is not lowered too quickly. If the *mana* of one is lowered, the *mana* of the whole family is lowered. If a member of the family has been abusive or irresponsible, care needs to be taken not to shame the whole family while the person is challenged or the family will all resist the work. In a European situation, she observed, you can lower the *mana* of an individual, if they are doing something destructive, without necessarily upsetting the rest of the family, since Europeans are held to be individually responsible, unlike Maori, who share responsibility collectively.

Flora presented some examples of her work, including some video footage of therapy sessions with a family who had given permission for this to be shown, and for extracts to appear here. The father in this family had experienced a very difficult and often abusive upbringing. He had spent most of his adult life inside prisons. On occasions he had been very violent, and had been referred to The Family Centre with his family on this occasion because he had attacked his one-year-old daughter. The mother was very depressed and felt hopeless. The father was eventually imprisoned for this offence.

Many of the points Flora had made earlier were illustrated in her interview with the family. At the end of the interview, she offered a reflection that was deeply imbedded in the values of her own and the family's culture:

We would like to thank you for being so open and honest with us. You had the courage to tell us about some bad and terrible things, and that takes a lot of guts.

Charles, you've obviously made some real efforts to change your rough ways, and you've come a long way. You don't hit like you used to, and you admit your faults now, but, there are still some big problems. For example, even this year you've been firing up with Angela and slapping her around, and you abused Frances by calling her dumb, stupid, and saying to her 'you don't know nothing'. Charles, we would like you to think of your uncle, and other Maori men who have disciplined their lives under pressure. We are thinking of those men who lead the haka (traditional dance usually performed by men on special occasions) or kaia (leader) of the haka. The strong men who have control over their spontaneous feelings. Years of discipline have taught them not to act when they fire up, but to be cool and take time to think. It gets easier with time. You can model on those men. As Maori we know that women and children are sacred. We women give birth to the children and the children give life to (our people) the iwi, they must never be violated. If we don't treat the women and children like the sacred greenstone, then life is worthless like you have experienced, and we know you don't want that for your family.

Frances, we know that you know these things. You made it clear that if Charles ever hit you, that would be the finish. We know this is because women are sacred in Maoridom. We also know that you know that children are sacred. That is why you hurt so much when you have to leave Angela at your sister's. We realise it is difficult for you both at the moment, but we are very impressed with how hard you are trying. We reckon good things will happen if you keep at it.

The reflection was a very moving one because it affirmed a way forward for the family, without denying the violence that had occurred. Furthermore, the images of *haka*, greenstone (the treasured jewel of Maori), and the sacredness of women and children are all well recognised by Maori people. The reflection linked the family deeply into their own cultural values.

After two interviews, significant changes had occurred. Charles had taken on many of the domestic tasks in the household while he was still unemployed.

Frances had begun to feel confident again. The following are two extracts taken from the reflection after the third interview.

Charles, you're treating your children and Frances as though they are sacred. You clean for them, you wash for them, and you cook for them. They are shining like the shimmering greenstone

Frances does not tell you to piss off now. She lets you kiss her. We can see that there is more love.

Flora developed the images in this down-to-earth manner, using the language of the family. It was clear that he was changing and they were moving closer together. At the time of the workshop, the Department of Social Welfare still insisted that the child should not be allowed to return to the family. However, since then, Charles has completed his prison sentence, regularly attended the 'Men for Non-Violence' group, and the family has continued with Flora in therapy. The department has now agreed to the child coming home.

After offering these examples of her work with Maori families, Flora ended her presentation with the words: *He rau aroha tuku iho. No reira, ma te Atua koutou katoa e manaaki.* (A precious leaf of knowledge passed down for generations to come. May God bless you all.)