

# Tangihanga

All cultures around the world have their own process for honouring their dead, and Maori are no exception. However, other terms such as hui mate, nehunga and uhunga are also used.

## Kanohi ki te kanohi

"The tangihanga ceremony is a vital part of Maori culture today and demands the attention of hundreds of people. No other ceremony can mobilise Maori people quite as effectively as the tangihanga. They will travel from all over Aotearoa and from as far away as Australia in order to pay their respects to a relative, workmate, or leader of some renown".

The death of a relative or family member, places immediate obligation upon many people. One such obligation is captured in the saying, 'he kanohi i kitea' (a face seen). Nothing can really replace the face of a relative or visitor actually being seen at the tangi. Consequently, most relatives try to attend the ceremony, no matter what the distance.

As a ritual practice, tangihanga is dedicated to the treatment and burial process of those that have passed over into the spiritual realm. Thus, tangihanga consists of kawa and tikanga that ensures that the dead are honoured, cherished, cared for and mourned in an appropriate way and that those left behind (whānau and friends) are protected and nurtured accordingly.

Often a method by which the dead were honoured was through the composition of song. In the following extract from a waiata tangi, we note the beauty of the words as they speak of the love and loss of this high ranking ancestress.

Kei hea hoki rā ngā tai o te uru?  
 Ka ngaro hoki rā taku toko tai pari  
 Taku toko tai timu e tū i waho rā,  
 Turanga hoa i te one tai tapa  
 Whakaputaina rā, ko 'e waka tipi hau,  
 Kia rokohanga atu te au e mahora -  
 E kau i reira, he moana waiwai!  
 Karangi noa rā te rāngai kuaka,  
 Kia tauhikohiko he pari tu waho.  
 I herua iho koe hei makau rawa atu.  
 I tapu i te aha tou uru whaitiwahati,  
 Te homai ai hei mihinga ake  
 Mō Hine i te ao eē?

Waiata Tangi o Ngaro

Where now are the western tides?  
 She is gone, my prop of the rising tides,  
 My prop of the ebbing tides that lie beyond  
 The beaches by the sea, where  
 her companions stand.  
 Go out in a vessel that glides in the wind  
 Meet the current spread before you  
 Then swim, for it is the wide ocean  
 Flocks of godwits are gathering,  
 Moving restlessly on the seaward cliffs  
 You were bound to us, our best beloved  
 Oh why was your fallen head so tapu  
 It was not given to us, who would have  
 greeted you  
 With tears in this world?

The imagery of this waiata tangi paints pictures of Ngaro's greatness, for by her very presence the seas were sustained. Now, in her death, she must travel her last journey westward to Karohenga (the underworld), and to do this, she will board a waka (vessel) to ride an ebbing tide. She will then leave her waka and swim as the migratory kuaka (godwit bird) that journeys west, signals it is time to go.

The passing of Ngaro is well captured by the composer Patu Whakairi, who was skilled at her craft. Not only does she celebrate the mana of Ngaro, but she also instructs this rangatira on how to make her homeward journey. Such inclusions were a natural characteristic of waiata tangi, for the living were obliged to ensure that the wairua of the deceased knew the way home to Orongonui, where Io resided.

This belief was not only valued by composers of waiata but was also expressed in whaikōrero. Moreover, it was the function of māngai kōrero to ensure wairua of deceased were well instructed on paths to travel. As a result, tangihanga were viewed as the most ceremonially complex and important of all Maori gatherings. This was attributed to the great spiritual significance associated with death.

In birth we descend from Atua and in death, we return to Atua to be born again. The wairua returns to Rangitūhāhā, while the tinana or body is given over to Papatūānuku.

## Wairua

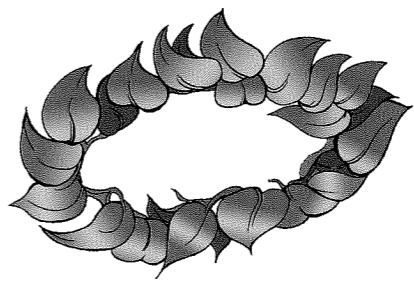
"All through the tangihanga ceremony the wairua hovers, lingers and watches over the proceedings to make sure that the rituals are being done properly.  
 The belief is that if the ceremony has not been conducted correctly, the wairua will not leave, hovering for a long time and bringing bad luck in its wake."

Due to its association with the spiritual world, the process of tangihanga is considered tapu, as are all those touched by death, such as the whānau pani. Therefore, the rituals performed are central to this restriction, designed to ensure that the potency of tapu is sustained.

Tangihanga principal purpose is to:

1. Return to the earth a person who has died (interment)
2. Ensure all funeral rites are undertaken correctly before, during and after burial

"Within the institution of the tangihanga, the purpose is often forgotten and misunderstood. It offers the kiriti mate (whānau pani) the opportunity to be supported and to grieve. It creates an opportunity to farewell the spirit and the soul of the deceased. It rekindles the institution of gifting and the reaffirmation of kinship ties. It offers the opportunity to form new relationships and retell the stories of the deceased and the whānau. It removes the fear of expressing grief". Tariana Turia



### I mua i te Matenga

When a person is terminally ill or dying, friends and family gather around that person (and their whānau) to give physical, emotional and spiritual support. Whānau ngātanga and korahitanga (unity) are unique ways of supporting the person and the whānau pani. Karakia plays a very important role at this time, strengthening the links between the world of the living to that of the person's ancestors, those of the spiritual realm.

A person near death may use this time to express his or her last wishes to whānau and close friends. This may include arrangements of the tangi, distribution of possessions, and tidying up of any unfinished tasks. In pre-European times, a person near death would give an ohāki (last will & testament). This would contain messages for those gathered and absent, and relay any final wishes that needed to be taken care of.



Ohāki  
People paid particularly close attention to the ohāki of an ariki or tohunga. It was believed that a person about to enter the spirit world had a foot in both worlds and was a channel for messages and prophecies.

### A muri i te Matenga

The act of dying is known as whakahemohemo. As soon as a person dies, the tūpāpaku (deceased) becomes a sacred taonga. In all tribal areas, a deceased person is treated like a chief or rangatira. Again, this is credited to the belief that in death we join with Atua.

When death occurs, the kawa of the tangihanga begins, starting with the ceremony of tuku i te waitua or tuku waitua (uplifting of the spirit). This ceremony involves karakia to cleanse and purify a person's waitua and free it from the physical world, assisting its journey to the spiritual world. Amid the grieving of whānau and friends, the tūpāpaku is lovingly, and carefully, prepared. Foroporoaki are usually said and tangi whakahuahua (the tears of mourning and grief) begin.

A member of the whānau pani will notify other senior whānau members and kaumātua to start preparing the marae, and or homestead, for the tangi. If the deceased person has not left any wishes regarding which marae is to host the tangi, whānau members, guided by kaumātua, will choose and notify.

Sometimes, if the deceased person belongs to a number of iwi, hapū or marae, the tūpāpaku may spend time at each, allowing people from individual marae time to grieve and farewell the deceased.

### Tono

The death of a person who belongs to more than one marae can often create debate between hapū and iwi, each wanting to honour the deceased by hosting his or her tangihanga.

The tono is usually undertaken by the mangai korero and family members who claim 'birth' whānau/whakapapa ties. The practice upholds ukaiפו - kinship, social and cultural links to the tūpāpaku. This tikanga can occur at the time of death, and during tangihanga whaikōrero.

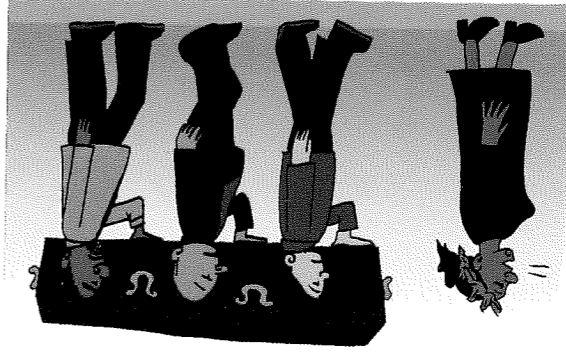
Sometimes, members of one hapū or iwi may physically remove the tūpāpaku and return it to their own marae.

## Whakaeke i te Marae

Tipuna Māori believed that the tūpāpaku should not be left alone at anytime after death, hence the reason why family and friends will accompany the tūpāpaku to and from the undertaker, and onto the marae, or to the place where he or she will lie before burial.

### Entry onto a Marae

When the whānau pani and supporters take the tūpāpaku to the marae, the body is often laid in the hearse feet first, as if he or she was walking. Although the wairua or spirit has left, the body is still a part of the physical world.



## Powhiri

As with all rituals of encounter the tangihanga is no different. The powhiri for whānau pani and the tūpāpaku welcomes the body and the spirit to the marae, acknowledges its journey to his or her ancestors, bids farewell to the ancestors of the deceased, and to all others who have died in between. Finally, it leads the party forward to the whare tipuna, where ceremonies will take place during the tangihanga period. Practices include karanga, whaikōrero and waiata tangi.

## Karanga

The kua karanga will inform the hunga kaimana who, and where the tūpāpaku comes from. This karanga will include words of welcome to the living and the dead of the manuhiri, so that they may be united with the living and the dead of the hunga kaimana.

When the karanga starts, the whānau pani will proceed towards the whare tipuna or meeting house. As they move, the manuhiri return the call with expressions similar to those stated by the hunga kaimana. Tears and wailing of grief are openly shared as the tūpāpaku is carried on to the marae area.

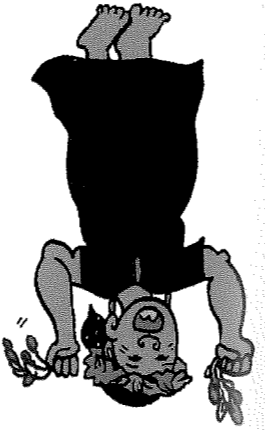
## Parekawakawa

In many tribal areas the waving and or wearing of kawakawa leaves is a commonly seen practice during a tangihanga. The action (waving) represents directing the spirit of the deceased in to the spirit world. This practice is undertaken in combination with karanga from the hunga kaimana.

### Mourning Garments

In the late 1800s, Māori women adopted the custom of wearing black clothes, and continued to do so long after the Europeans had stopped wearing these mourning garments. Many iwi maintain this tradition for tangihanga.

Women also wear wreaths of greenery that are woven from the leaves of particular trees such as kawakawa. This greenery, 'pare kawakawa', acknowledges the presence of Rongo, the spiritual power and Atua of peace.



## Te Wahi tapu o te Tūpāpaku

The placement of the tūpāpaku on the marae varies from iwi to iwi. In earlier times, some iwi built a whare mate or whare-ā-pakura (house of death or lamentation) to house the tūpāpaku and whānau pani throughout the tangi. This protocol was observed to keep the tapu of death separate from the living, e.g. whare tipuna.

Some iwi place the tūpāpaku on the roto whakamāhau of the whare tipuna during the day and bring it inside in the evening. Others place the tūpāpaku in the whare tipuna throughout the tangihanga. On the east coast, the tūpāpaku is brought into the whare tipuna through a window, as their belief is that only the living may enter the whare through its door.

In Northland, the body is placed at the back of the meeting house with the feet facing the door. Te Arawa iwi place the tūpāpaku halfway between the front and the back of the meeting house, on the right hand side.

In most cases, the coffin is left open during the tangi. This is an important part of the grieving process, and enables the manuhiri to touch and informally address the tūpāpaku. A coffin is only closed under specific request by the family, or when advised to do so by an undertaker.

### Whare mate or whare-ā-pakura

In pre-European times, some iwi believed that the only way to remove the tapu of death from a building was to burn it to the ground. As a result, people who became seriously ill were moved to the temporary whare mate. This building was then burnt after the person died.

Once the tūpāpaku has been placed on the marae, the whaikōrero begins amid the wailing, crying and grieving. Oratory is directed as if the person is alive, upholding the memories and connections of whānau, past and present.

The whaikōrero usually opens with a tauparapara or whakatarauki (proverb). The māngai kōrero then speaks to the deceased in a poetic and symbolic way, acknowledging the sacredness of death and the special status of the tūpāpaku. The following is an excerpt of a whaikōrero typical of tangihanga. Here, you will note the structure of discussion, as well as the references made directly to the deceased.

Whaikōrero  
An Acknowledgement

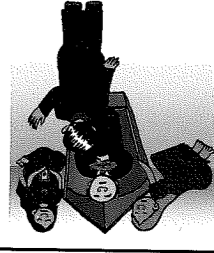
E koro Tawhiao  
Hoki watua mai ki runga i o marae e  
Ki o koutou maunga karangaranga  
Ki Pīrongia, ki Kakepuku, ki Karioi e,  
Ki te maunatarapu, ki Taupiri e,  
Ki te taumata okiokinga o te Kahurangi  
O Tawhiao  
Return in spirit to your open places  
And to your echoing mountains,  
To Pīrongia, to Kakepuku, to Karioi  
Return also to the sacred mount, Taupiri  
On whose summit rest the illustrious

The māngai kōrero will also acknowledge those who have recently died, and state the relationship between those people. They will also express sadness at the loss of the person, and will finally greet the whānau pani, extended family, friends and guests. Each whaikōrero finishes with an appropriate song.

Generally, members of the whānau pani do not speak or reply to speeches during or throughout the tangihanga. Some Waikato areas do not allow members of whānau pani to speak on the papae tapu for twelve months following the death. If manuhiri are from a separate iwi or hapū, they will present a koha to support the emotional, spiritual and physical burden of the whānau pani.

When whaikōrero is completed, manuhiri hongī the hunga kāinga to share mana, mauri and tapu, making everyone as one people. This clears or neutralises the tapu (spiritual restrictions). Some iwi complete this cleansing process by washing their hands.

The whānau pani, however, remain tapu until the deceased has been returned to Papatūānuku (buried).



In most areas, only the women sit by the deceased. The widow, immediate family from the parents down to the grandchildren sit to the left of the body and the rest of the whānau pani sit on the right hand side.

Caring for the tūpāpaku

In traditional times, tangihanga went on for weeks, especially when an ariki or rangatira (chief) died. This allowed relatives and other iwi time to travel to the marae to pay their respects. The longest recorded tangihanga was for King Tawhiao in 1894, which lasted for two months.

At the time, Europeans thought that holding a body for this long posed a health risk, particularly during an epidemic, and passed a law that limited the length of tangi to a maximum of five days. Modern technology and the improvement of transport continued to reduce the need for holding tangihanga for such a long period.

O-matenga

In tipuna times, some iwi believed that a person needed food and water to sustain them for their long journey after death. This food was known as o-matenga. Weapons and prized possessions were also placed beside the body while it lay in state, although this was more likely to happen if the deceased was a chief. The weapons armed the deceased for the taua moa (sacred fight) on his way to the world of spirits. Sometimes, slaves were also killed to serve the chief in the spirit world.

It is generally accepted that the first day of the tangi is for whānau and locals. This tikanga provides space for whānau to spend time with the tūpāpaku before other mourners arrive. The second and proceeding days are for people from elsewhere.

The whānau pani remain by the body throughout the three days of a tangi. This ensures that the body and soul are kept warm, which again assists the spirit on its journey. The tūpāpaku is never left alone.

Practices associated to grieving

In pre-European times and even today, the young female members of the whānau pani cut all or part of their hair and, in some cases, women were known to scratch their body and rub the marks with ink. These acts symbolised their grief for the deceased.

Pō Whakamutunga

The night before the day of burial is called pō whakamutunga or pō whakangahau (night to celebrate). This night is a time given for everyone to pay final tributes to the deceased. It is a time to recall good times, and to celebrate a person's life and achievements. On this night, the floor is open to speak, sing, tease, and tell stories or jokes.



The Nehu is the day of burial. This day marks tikanga and kawa associated with solidifying the final, earthly resting place for the tūpāpaku. Practices include karanga, burial ceremony, karakia, waiata and/or himene, farewell speeches (informal) and cleansing rituals using water on departure of urupa.

Iwi in most areas close the lid of the casket early in the morning or at least before visitors arrive for the service. This avoids any delay in the proceedings. In some areas, however, the closing of the casket is part of the funeral service.

Most areas have a service for the deceased on the marae, though some may take the tūpāpaku to a church. When the service is concluded, whānau members carry the casket from the marae, either directly to the urupa (cemetery), or to the hearse, depending on distance. A karanga is performed to poroporoaki the deceased as he or she physically leaves the marae for the last time.

Burial

Traditionally, tūpāpaku were treated differently according to the kawa of the iwi and the status of the deceased. In some areas, common people and slaves were either buried in the earth, or dropped into the sea. Tūpāpaku of ariki and rangatira were often wrapped up like an Egyptian mummy and placed on a platform or atamira in an urupa or tree. The tūpāpaku stayed on the platform until all the flesh had disintegrated, and only the kōiwi (bones) were left. This process took about two years.

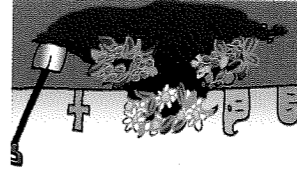
Some northern tribes buried their dead standing up in the ground until all the flesh was gone from the kōiwi. European law and Christian concepts now ensure tūpāpaku are buried six feet underground.

In some areas, the hunga kāinga perform a karanga from within the urupa. This karanga calls to the deceased and the whānau pani, acknowledging that this will be the final resting place. A kua supporting the whānau pani issues a reply.

Some iwi along the east coast do not permit people with jewellery, food or other personal items, to enter the urupa. This is due to the belief that the tapu of death is so strong that everything must be cleansed with water on departure from the cemetery. Alternatively, some people choose to remain outside the urupa for this very reason.

Whatever the practice, the focus is thereafter given to the papa wairua (grave), where a service for the burial is performed. Following this, close friends or family members are given an opportunity for final farewell speeches and/or waiata.

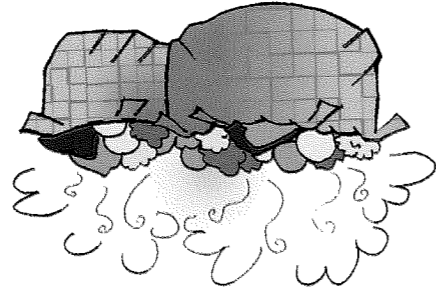
The gravediggers then begin to fill the grave, which signals the time for all to return to the marae area where those that remained await. Some people repeat the cleansing ritual of water on departure of the urupa, again aiding the removal of tapu.



After the Internment / Burial

The whānau pani are bought back onto the marae with the exchange of karanga similar to the process of powhiri. They are then seated either inside the meeting house, in front of the meeting house, or on the paepae. At this point the whaikōrero of the hunga kāinga is simply to welcome the whānau pani back to the world of the living. The whaikōrero is followed by karakia to whakanoa (neutralise) the tapu from the whānau pani and all those gathered.

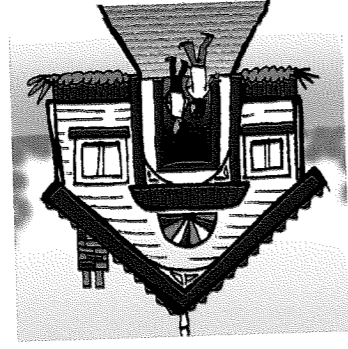
Once the whakanoa process is completed, the dining hall (whare kai) is ready to receive the guests, a karanga will be performed to invite everyone to take part in the hākari. The partaking in the hākari is part of the process of lifting of the tapu from whānau pani, and creating a process of noa for those who have participated in the nehunga. It is also a time when thanks and honour is paid to the ringawera and kaimahi, and poroporoaki is delivered by those who need to depart.



Takahi Whare

The last act in completing tangihanga process is takahi whare (tramping of the house). This can take place either before or after the hākari, depending on the distance of the grieving family's papa kāinga (homestead) from the marae.

This tikanga blesses and removes the tapu of death from the home and belongings of the deceased, and any other place they may have been living before they died. Practices include karakia and the use of ceremonial rituals including water. It is also part of welcoming the whānau pani back to their home.



Traditional Concepts

The tikanga of hura kōhatu originated from an older practice that tīpuna Māori referenced as hahunga. Hahunga involved the removal of the dead to a selected spot where the tūpapakū was left to decay. Family members returned a year or more later to gather the bones of their dead. These were then washed with appropriate rituals, and prepared for final burial processes.

Those chosen to undertake this task were not only skilled in their craft but also astute in their working of the divine. Once complete, a state of tangi was adopted by those involved. The kōiwi were carried back onto the marae ātea to undergo the full rituals of pōwhiri. This included the entombment of nga kōiwi to their final place of rest, which was often places such as caves, trees, crevasses, and cliff faces that were difficult to access.

This was important particularly if the kōiwi were that of an atiki, which demanded that the body be hidden very carefully to prevent anyone from finding and desecrating the site. Weapons and other prized possessions were often left with the kōiwi to watch over and protect them.

Thereafter, the whānau regrouped to complete the rituals of hahunga which also involved feasting, or kai hakari, which was sometimes intertwined with elaborate entertainment.

With the advent of a colonial government (New Zealand Constitutional Act 1857) various tikanga were prohibited. Hahunga was one such victim. This resulted in nga kōiwi being gathered from wahi tapu all over the country and buried in urupa. However, tīpuna Māori were innovative in their adaptation, for it was by this very process that hahunga was transformed into the practice of hura kōhatu.

Instead of 'lifting the bones' what was now practiced was the 'lifting of the veil'.

Known in different areas by various terms such as hura hanga kōhatu, hura pōhatu, and whara kōhatu or te rā waitua, hura kōhatu serves the same ancient purpose as hahunga in that, it seals the final resting place of an individual and keeps nga kōiwi safe from desecration.

Contemporary Ways of Honouring the Dead

Hura kōhatu occurs about twelve months after the tangi. It is a way of sending the waitua of the deceased on the final leg of the journey. It also marks the end of the period of mourning for the whānau pani, and, in cases of the widows or widowers, releases them to re-marry if they choose to. When the gravestone is ready to be unveiled, a date is set, invitations are sent out and newspaper advertisements placed.

Kawe Mate

Kawe mate lasts for a period of twelve months and literally means carrying the death. Kawe mate is a period of tapu for a pouaru (widow, widower).

Kawe mate is a time of healing, during which the whānau pani remain totally committed to the love and memory of the deceased. It allows families to mourn the absence of their loved ones and support others in their grief.

During this period it involves the whānau attending other tangihanga, taking with them the memory of their deceased relative. Photographs of the deceased are sometimes used to symbolise their spiritual presence and memory.

On completion of the twelve-month period, the iwi and whānau mutually agree to clear the tapu restrictions. Karakia are used to release the kawe mate status, allowing those involved to live a normal life.

Nowadays, one or two members of the whānau pani will remain in mourning for the twelve-month period.

