

not be understood. He had learned only too well how to keep his head down. This was New Zealand in 1974. My nannies listened to dad as they were far from home and were respectful of Pākehā sensitivities at the time.

In recent years our family has travelled back home to the Wairarapa for *tangi*. If there is enough notice of when the body will be taken from the undertakers to the *marae*, we can usually get most of the family together to meet up along the way and arrive as one group. This makes it easier for the home people to welcome us onto the *marae*. Their speakers and singers of the *waiata* can rest between groups arriving. The deceased person is referred to as the *tūpāpaku* or *taonga* (treasure) and the bereaved family, the *whānau pani* (orphaned family). The body lies in an open coffin in the meeting house surrounded by *whānau* who take turns to sit or lie beside the loved one.

As each group arrives, there are speeches making the connection between the *tūpāpaku*, the things they did in life and the wider Māori world. Tribal chants or *waiata* embellish the conversations. *Karakia*, ritual prayers, mark the transitions of the day – from the start of the day, meal times in the *whare-kai* (dining room), to the evening service and close of the day.

The night before the burial is reserved for everyone to celebrate the life of the *tūpāpaku*. Funny stories are told, sometimes little dramas are performed, as well as *kōrero* (speeches) which are sometimes critical of the deceased. It's an "open mic" night and very cathartic, especially for the *whānau pani*.

The burial day usually begins with more visitors arriving, a service and then the burial. Usually *whānau* members dig the grave the night before the burial and fill it in after.

After the burial everyone is invited back to the *marae* for a sumptuous *kai* and the *whānau pani* are encouraged to re-join the land of the living. ■

TANGI - LIFE AFTER DEATH

Aotea te Waka
Whanganui te Awa
Kaiwhaiki te Marae
Tongariro te Maunga
Makareta Takahia Tawaroa
raku ingoa
Tihei mauriora

Most iwi (extended kinship groups) have their own understandings about the journey that our *wairua* (spirit) takes in death. Many *iwi kōrero* (speak) about the *wairua* travelling to Te Rerenga Wairua at the top of the North Island. From there the *wairua* leaps into the ocean and travels to distant Hawaiki. References to *hui-nui-te-po*, the Goddess of the Night, who travelled to an underworld of light and peace, are as common as "haere ki te ao marama", to enter into the world of enlightenment.

Hoea ra tō waka ki Hawaiki nui, Hawaiki roa, Hawaiki pāmamao. This *kōrero* was part of a speech to a notable Māori scholar who died recently. It is wrapped in metaphorical language with allusions to geographic places of significance, traditional places that the spirits of the dead travel to. It farewells the deceased as they canoe toward the ancient, distant homeland of Hawaiki, where their ancestors reside. Death acknowledges those who have departed and in whose footsteps we follow. We acknowledge those who have already gone. My mother used to tell me: "Without our old people we would not be here today." Many of our people, even our *rangatahi* (younger generation), live much closer to the spirit world than to the so-called "real world", happily accepting the presence of ancestors in close proximity.

At a recent *tangi* I heard "*haere ki te wa kainga*" which speaks of going to a home that will last. And "*haere ki te kainga tuturu*" which speaks of going to one's true home.

I learnt early as a child, that death is an important part of life, that there is nothing to fear because we are returning to our ancestors who are waiting for us. Some even come when we are still alive. When my big sister was on the precipice of death, she asked me: "Who are all these people?"

I told her to go towards them.

My late cousin, Morvin Anatipa Simon, was a prolific composer of *waiata* (song), *whakataukī kōrero* (proverbs) and *karakia* (prayers or chants). He shared the *kōrero* below with me in the latter part of his life.

Tangihia

*Tangihia ko nga mate huhua nei,
Kua riro atu ki te rangi, ki te ao Marama e,
Kore mutu te aue o te Wairua,
Ki a ratou kua wehe arohaina.*

Let us join together and respect our innumerable dead, who have passed beyond the veil to eternal enlightenment, where the unceasing lament of the soul persists, for those who departed being loved and cherished.

*E te hākui, mākūkū tonu nga kamo,
E kore e warewaretia,
O tauira, o mahere o te ora,
Whāia tonutia e mātou.*

Our dear revered elder, our eyes are still moistened with sadness. How can we forget your example, or the conducted order of your life, Something we are still trying to emulate.

*Tuohu nei ko o maunga kōrero,
(tāne) Pātuki nei ko te Mānawa ki a koe e.
Toitū te whenua mo āke nei,
Nei mātou, ko Te Whānau
E tu whakaiti nei e, moe mai e te koro e!
Whakangaro atu ra ki nga ringa o Te Atua!*

Your tribal mountains, Indeed pay homage to you, as do we, your children and grandchildren as we present ourselves in humility. Sleep well with our fondest farewell! ■



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