

MATARIKI

Talk to Richard Liddicoat, CCC 9 July 08.

1. My understanding of Matariki comes from my family's experience as food gatherers, hunters beginning with the new year with MATARIKI, living with it and understanding its message.
2. You must understand first the life style and social order of the Southern Maori. We were a nomadic people who gathered all the necessities for life, for warmth, for food, for the comforts of life and adornments from nga Taonga o Tane me nga Taonga o Tangaroa the natural resources from land and water, that is fresh water and sea water. Gathering the necessities for survival and life we called mahinga kai - the places where food and the necessities for life were procured and resourced.
3. MATARIKI IS A TOHU, A SIGN. It has four phases, which everyone is familiar with. WINTER SPRING SUMMER AND AUTUMN. It is a star and represents only one component of nature.
4. As I have been a hunter and have led a nomadic life then Matariki must be read in conjunction with other tohu or stars such as Puaka, Kopi, the Southern Cross etc. It has to be observed and understood in conjunction with the tohu (signs) of the moon and its phases, the sun and its phases and for hunters the wind. There are other tohu as well that gives advice/warnings. They come from the birds, the fish and bush. All combined they represent knowledge and guides the hunter towards success. It is an annual cycle that we all live.
5. I take us back a step to look at the social order of the Southern Maori before European occupation to the present from those of us who have lived that cycle and have adopted to change with the advancement of modern technology and changes within the environment.
6. Our traditional social order was based around whanau grouping. Our island was subdivided into what we call wakawaka, equivalent to the suburbs that we see in European settlement patterns.
7. Because of our nomadic existence, each whanau grouping would have many wakawaka for gathering natural resources for their survival. Let us call such wakawaka suburbs or farm for current day thinking and understanding. Our family groups had rural suburbs, seaside suburbs, riverside suburbs, lake suburbs, mutton bird island suburbs, pounamu suburbs and high country suburbs or farms for their survival. Each suburb would provide special skills in the food and ornament gathering journeys. Some would specialise in deep sea fishing some would specialise in night fishing, in preserving the dead and funeral rights, gathering kauru from the High country as well as kereru and weka. Such food was gathered in different times of the calendar year, food for immediate use and a time of the year to preserve such species.
8. Now the MATARIKI RISES IN JUNE but before that it can not be seen for a few days. This was an indication that our people had or were returning home from there ventures around the island.
9. I use my lifecycle and hunting pattern to illustrate my relationship to MATARIKI. In mid May I would be returning home from the Titi Islands having spent the autumn down there, from mid March to mid May. Others would be preserving the tuna or eels for winter use.
10. The rising of MATARIKI is during the time of winter when it is cold, snow and frosts are not unusual. So it is a time for staying home. This is the time to plan the years activities, remember the men may have not taken their wives with them in there hunting forays and could have been away for 4 to 5 months. A time spent with the family as well a time for teaching selected children knowledge of the deities, karakia, whakapapa, tohu and their meanings. The time for wananga. A time for bringing together the head spokespersons of the various families to get agreements through wananga on the year's cycle, paying of debts and implications if for vengeance or for the integrity and honour of the family's.
11. I quote a Tauparapara for you that I use in recognising my family customs to MATARIKI.

<p>Whakapuakina te tatau, te tatau o te matauranga o nga whakaaro, he whitinga te Matariki, hei here ai ki te pipiwharauoa, kui, kui whitihiti ora, kui, kui kia Raki e tu nei, kui, kui kia papatuanuku e takato nei, kui ki mua, kui ki muri, kia rongu mai ai koe te tangi a te manu nei kui, kui whitihiti ora ki te</p>	<p>Open the doors of knowledge and thought as the star Matariki has risen indicating the beginning of the new year for Maori, we bind it to the annual migratory bird the Shining Cuckoo that arrives in the spring. It calls to the heavens above, to our earth mother to the past to the future seeking knowledge</p>
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whai Ao ki te Ao marama Tihei mauriora.	within the universe to provide the necessities of life. May the breath of life be upon us?
Ko te karere kei roto i tenei tauparapara he whakatau kaupapa mo nga tau kei te heke mai, i te wa o te Matariki, whakatinana i te wa o te pipiwharau, kia puawai ou koutou mahi.	The message within this tauparapara is plan for the future during the time of Matariki. Put into action during the time of the pipiwharau, and your plans should blossom.
Te haerenga nga mahi i mua ia koe, kia rite te kete ki te nuinga o te hao.	The journey and work before you is to make the net to fit the catch.

12. Here we see the importance of the universe with the arrival in spring of the shining cuckoo the pipiwharau. Spring is a time to gather the natural resources. Eels are waking up, flounders are beginning to move the whitebait are moving up the rivers, the birds are laying their eggs hence food is abundant. Moving into summer in traditional time's kauru would have been gathered that is the sweetness from the Ti or Cabbage tree. Gathering of rimurapu and making poha to preserve the natural foods, Titi (Mutton birds) Hapuka (Groper), are completed.
13. Approaching autumn, the journey to the Titi Islands is underway. But before the journey south particular Eels are caught and preserved to take with you as koha (exchange of gifts) to your southern relations. The month of February, for the Mutton birders, is their time frame to gather and preserve these eels. Those not going to the Titi Islands would continue gathering and preserving for the winter months.
14. Food from the sea could be gathered all year round. If insufficient food was gathered during the year, the winter period was a time for deep sea fishing. The seas are usually calmer during winter than the summer and autumn. Eels during winter would be sleeping. Those sleeping in waimoenga could be caught by matarau (spear) in large quantities.
15. With a social order of whanau skills barter and trade became the norm. In such a harsh climate as we have in the South no one family had the ability to be skilled at all things hence a division of labour and specialists was the norm among the ancestors. Their skill base is remembered in a saying, "Kahore te wehenga o te aroha ko te hinengaro anake te kai wehe" - Love and regard were not the customs in decision making; it was skills first and foremost. A hunter's life is full of dangers hence those children who displayed a likening to specialist tasks joined a particular wakawaka where such skills were required.
16. Such a custom recognises extended whanau membership and could include people distant in what modern day families are. The occupation within these wakawaka was based on skills and the principles of whanaungatanga.
17. The greatest technology that has been the cause of change is refrigeration. All types of traditional food such as food from wai Maori (fresh water) and from the sea can be processed and frozen hence many methods of preserving in the traditional manner are maintained only by the families who still hunt and gather such foods. Many shell fish were gathered and kept in pits near your coastal villages and used when required, or preserved by using our earth mother to bury them in or preserving them in fresh water.
18. In the whare Mahaanui upon the marae ki Tuahiwi is a tukutuku panel that reflects the four phases of Matariki.