

Tikanga

What is tikanga?

Tikanga are the principles that govern appropriate conduct and dictate correct behaviour in a situation. The framework of mana Maori is built with the rules and plans, customs and methods which are aspects of tikanga. (Henare)

Tikanga are the customs and traditions that have been handed down over time. 'I nga wa o mua' translates as 'from the times in front', but this phrase refers to the 'past' in te reo, not the future. Therefore, the past is always in front of us, there for guidance.

Tikanga come from tika, things that are true, and not teka, things that are false. Each iwi has different tikanga, what is tika for them, because it is based on what they see in their own past. Today, tikanga is often influenced by other cultures' views and perspectives.

(<http://www.maori.org.nz>)

In its most basic form, tikanga can be described as general behaviour guidelines for daily life and interaction in Maori culture. Tikanga is commonly based on experience and the learning that has been handed down through generations. It is based on logic and common sense associated with a Maori world view.

While these concepts of tikanga are constant, the practices that give effect to them can vary between iwi and hapū. For example, the way in which one hapū greets and welcomes visitors may differ from another's practices. However, both will ensure that they meet their responsibilities of manaakitanga to host and care for their visitors.

(<http://www.korero.maori.nz/forlearners/protocols>)

For Māori, Tikanga embodies history and future, right and wrong, caution and expediency, courtesy and reprimand, survival.

"In its most basic form, Tikanga is the set of guidelines to follow. It is the blueprint of how we operate to ensure the survival of Mokopuna, the generations to come" says kaumatua and Māori elder Ben Hona. "Tikanga is the simplicity of how our people lived, the laws handed down to us through all time. Really, it is our very integrity."

Tikanga was not the decree of one person, one ruler. It was based on the experience and learning of many and always with the good of the people at heart. In the Whakarewarewa Valley, for example, Tikanga dictates that hot pools be used for cooking, never for bathing. It is simply a case of hygiene, a precaution against the spread of disease.

"The first rule of thumb of Tikanga is logic and common sense" says Ben. Tikanga is more than custom. Customs can change. Tikanga is binding and still followed by Māori tribes today. But like a country that has overarching laws adhered to differently by different states, tribes across New Zealand also apply different aspects of Tikanga.

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What may work for one may not be necessary for another. Those living by the sea, for example, will have different approaches to food gathering than those living in the mountains. This is not a division. Rather, Tikanga celebrates the unique qualities of tribes, promoting and preserving the rich diversity of an entire culture. It is strict yet embedded in the very fundamentals of courtesy, reminding all to take care for another and the environment. "Tikanga is that immovable peg in the ground. It is the foundation that cuts through everything we get caught up in" says head carver, James Rickard. "The world is changing fast but our Tikanga will always guide us. It is easy to teach and lean here because the guidelines have been in place for hundreds of years. They don't change." (http://www.tepuia.co.nz/related_topics/tikanga.html)

Why is it important?

It is what makes Maori culture distinctive.

It permeates all aspects of life, setting codes of conduct for all types of situations – from interacting with people, to preparing medicine, gathering food, building marae, performing kapa haka and every other aspect of daily life.

Rights of the group and individual, authority and control are determined by tikanga, i.e., that which is correct. (Henare)

All cultures have etiquettes guiding people's behaviour. Despite this, even in our own cultures it is common to experience moments when we may not be completely comfortable with a particular situation or know how to react. Participating in a different culture takes time and patience. If you are unfamiliar with tikanga, learn as much as you can from as many sources as possible. Learning about tikanga will enrich your experiences with the culture and improve your ability to participate fully.

(<http://www.korero.maori.nz/forlearners/protocols>)

REFERENCES

Henare, Manuka (1988) in 'Nga Tikanga Me Nga Ritenga O Te Ao Maori: Standards and Foundations of Maori Society' in *The April Report: Future Directions, Volume III, Part One, Associated Papers*. Wellington: Royal Commission on Social Policy, p 27

