



# Restoring Mana and Taking Care of Wairua: A Story of Māori Whānau Healing

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Wairua (spirituality) is a central focus in indigenous Māori healing. This article describes Māori healing with a Māori and Samoan family told from the viewpoints of the teenager presenting with depression and suicidal thoughts; her mother; the Māori healer; and the Pākehā (New Zealand European) child and adolescent psychiatrist involved. While elements of the treatment intervention may resemble Western family therapy approaches, the essence of the Māori healer's approach is all about wairua. During the session he explains concepts of mana (spiritual authority), mauri (life force), and tapu (something sacred or forbidden) and the importance of taking particular care of these aspects when a young person may have finely tuned spiritual awareness. In his discussion he outlines how aroha (love) strengthens the mana of the whānau (family), contributing to the healing this young person experiences. These concepts are common to many Pacific cultures and are widely recognised as important components for family healing. With indigenous families for whom spirituality is of paramount importance, successful resolution of family problems may require indigenous spiritual healing approaches. Partnerships between indigenous healers and family therapists or other mental health workers provide an opportunity for indigenous families to benefit from the healing expertise of both indigenous and Western traditions.

**Keywords:** Māori, Samoan, healing, whānau, family therapy, indigenous

## Key Points

- 1 Wairua (spirituality) is a central focus in indigenous Māori healing.
- 2 The article describes Māori healing with a Māori and Samoan family told from the viewpoints of the teenager presenting with depression and suicidal thoughts; her mother; the Māori healer; and the Pākehā (New Zealand European) child and adolescent psychiatrist involved.
- 3 With indigenous families for whom spirituality is of paramount importance, successful resolution of family problems may require indigenous spiritual healing approaches.
- 4 Partnerships between indigenous healers and family therapists or other mental health workers provide an opportunity for indigenous families to benefit from the healing expertise of both indigenous and Western traditions.

## Background

There is increasing recognition in the provision of health services, including child and adolescent mental health services, of the need for indigenous healing knowledges to

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\*\*In the following article, all names of family members have been changed to protect the identity of the family.

be considered alongside Western knowledge when working with indigenous families (Durie, 2009; Meyer, 2003; Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2013; NiaNia, Bush, & Epston, 2017; NiaNia, Tere, Bush, & Epston, 2013; Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, & Bush, 2005). This is in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2008) which asserts indigenous peoples' rights to maintain their own health and spiritual practices. Such practices were historically denied and suppressed by colonial and government authorities in many parts of the world (Durie, 2009; NiaNia et al., 2017; Tamasese, Peteru, & Waldegrave, 1997). As a result, family therapy practitioners may have minimal exposure to the family-focused approaches of indigenous healers, even those active in their local communities.

This paper presents the story of Mana, a 16-year-old Māori and Samoan woman, and the single consultation she and her family had with Māori healer, Wiremu NiaNia. The story is told from the perspectives of four narrators. The first is by Allister Bush, a Pākehā (New Zealand European) child and adolescent psychiatrist, who describes the background to Mana's predicament and the whānau (family) session with Wiremu. The second is told by Wiremu, who undertakes the Māori healing intervention with Allister's support. The third voice is that of Mana and the final narrator is her mother Rangī. Each perspective sheds unique light on Wiremu's approach to addressing the wairua (spirituality) of Mana and her whānau, while also attending to the psychological, relational, and physical dimensions of their situation.

During the session Wiremu takes particular care to explain the meaning of three key concepts that are central to his healing practice. Wiremu's explanations about mauri (life force) and tapu (something sacred or forbidden) are provided later in the article. The concept of mana is a central theme in this healing story and we include a detailed explanation here to orientate the reader. Wiremu has previously explained mana in the following terms:

*Mana* is the spiritual authority, energy or power embodied in a person or whānau that comes from their relationship with Te Kaihanga (The Creator) and other key relationships. It gives them the authority to have control over themselves, their circumstances, and other entities that may be impinging on them. This is very important for people who are having unusual experiences that are spiritual, but might be misdiagnosed as psychosis, such as hearing a voice or seeing something others can't see . . . For these young people, gaining understanding about mana (is) necessary for their healing and reclaiming their wellbeing. (NiaNia et al., 2017)

## Allister

### Introducing Mana

Mana was 16 years old at the time she was referred to our Pacific Child, Adolescent and Family Service (Bush, Chapman, Drummond, & Fagaloa, 2009). Mercy, our Samoan family therapist met Mana and her mother Rangī first and then arranged for them to see my colleague, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, for an urgent assessment in my absence.

Immediately upon my return Mercy and I met with Mana and Rangī. Mana's sporting attire and physicality prompted my first impression that she was no stranger to athletic pursuits. And it took no time at all for me to realise she was undoubtedly

a young person with a mind of her own, unafraid of declaring her lucid opinions. By contrast her sombre expression and the look of melancholy in her eyes led me to suspect that this sadness had been haunting her for some time. It was not until the very end of our session that I had a brief glimpse of Mana's open and engaging smile.

Prior to our meeting, Mercy had explained to me that Mana's father was Samoan and her mother Rangi was Māori. When Mana was in her early primary school years her parents had separated under very acrimonious circumstances. From the age of seven, Mana had lived with her custodial father with fortnightly visits with her mother until four months prior to our meeting. Mercy then briefed me about the outcome of the previous week's interview, explaining that my psychiatric colleague had concluded that Mana had symptoms of depression that had been going on for at least six months. Based on the impact that this depression was having on her life and her degree of despair and suicidal thoughts, she had offered Mana and her mother the option of a trial of an antidepressant treatment called Fluoxetine. After hearing the explanation about depression and participating in a discussion about the pros and cons of medication, Mana, with her mother's support, had decided to proceed with that treatment option.

Once we began our meeting with Mana and Rangi, Mana explained that matters had been increasingly strained in her relationship with her father. This had come to a head one night with a major argument. Mana was so incensed following this that she immediately resolved to move out of his home. Her mother invited her to move in and Mana accepted straight away.

Rangi said that she had been gradually more concerned about Mana's unpredictable moods over the previous weeks, observing that she might seem 'really happy, playful and talkative' at one moment and then all of a sudden she would be 'in a real mood.' Mana explained that she was often putting on a brave face and when that became impossible to sustain, her extreme irritation would show itself. She found it difficult to focus at school and felt drained of energy all the time.

Mana confided that she had always been very close to her only brother Arthur who was six years her elder. She extolled how he had always been there for her when she was a young girl, shepherding her through very difficult times. However, in recent months, she had felt increasingly distant from him but was unable to put her finger on why that would be so. Despite now living in the same household, she was concerned that he was unable to comprehend her dark moods and unpredictable angry outbursts. He would take issue with her withdrawal into her bedroom. He had taken to lecturing her about joining in at family meals at the same time as she found she couldn't bear to face people. Over the previous six months, no matter how hard anyone tried to jolly her along and no matter how hard she tried to placate them, as she said, 'I can't keep my happy face on.' Everyone's efforts to cheer her up were fruitless and this as much as anything else began to trouble her. She began to reproach herself for her crankiness towards her boyfriend Fa'alogu, whom her mother described as particularly tolerant and well-wishing towards her. As time went on she was feeling more and more worthless and finding a way out of her predicament seemed beyond hope.

When Mercy and I met with Mana on her own, she disclosed that in the recent weeks and months she had been 'drowning in bad memories' from the past. She then spoke of the sexual abuse by a family friend that she had experienced many years before as well as times when she had felt caught between her mother and father

during their most conflicted times. She insisted we keep the abuse to ourselves as she believed her mother was unaware of it. She was convinced if she was told this, it could result in a tumult of emotion against her father and right now she knew she couldn't face that.

Mana told us of unrelenting nightmares in which she would witness the dying of her loved ones. Consequently, she stayed awake as long as she could to avoid such disturbing intrusions. Mana then began to recount a particularly disturbing dream that she had experienced repeatedly over many years. She told of seeing a man in this dream who would tell her, 'If you give me a part of you, I will give you anything you want.' He would then reach out and touch her heart and she would feel terribly cold inside, 'a feeling of nothingness.' Although she never recalled giving him anything, she had a gnawing suspicion that, 'He had stolen a part of my soul.' Lying awake at night she would be plagued by the disturbing thought that she had given her soul away, stating that, 'It feels like my soul is written off.' She had little doubt that she had brought this state of affairs upon herself, 'because of the selfish choices I've made.' When I asked her to say a little more about these 'selfish choices,' quite unlike her, she was unable to come up with even one exemplar. Still the feelings of emptiness that she associated with the dreams had recently steadily worsened.

When I wondered out loud whether Mana thought there might be some kind of link between such disturbing dreams and her past experiences of abuse, she asserted that there was more to it than just the abuse.

I was struck by Mana's vivid linguistic description of her disturbing dreams and especially the way she talked about the impact on her soul. The spiritual tone to her words made me wonder whether she may have had other spiritual experiences of this sort that might be relevant to her current predicament. When I asked her a little more about this, she hesitated as if considering the advisability of speaking them out loud whereas up until then she hadn't been one to hang back. Then she began to speak in a very forthright manner.

Mana said that she was familiar with the kind of experiences that I was asking about. She made her point by giving me an exemplar from her relationship with her brother Arthur. She said that not only did she feel close to him emotionally over the years but she had also had the experience of foretelling when he was either upset about something or having a difficult day even if she was not in his presence. By now all sense of hesitation was gone and Mercy and I were listening intently. Mana told us that in the past she had other experiences such as an apprehension that there was some kind of 'bad spiritual presence' nearby that was 'not comforting.' She had sometimes seen things like 'black shadows' and intuited that 'Someone was walking behind me.' She was quite unequivocal that she had had times when she could see things that other people couldn't see and this had made her wonder if she had a mental health problem. This was particularly so around the ages of 11 and 12. She described one occasion when she saw a 'blur' going past outside and she turned to her stepmother beside her in the laundry who confirmed that she had seen it as well.

Mana said that she was reluctant to tell her mother about this as she was concerned this would unduly alarm her. Previously when she had told her father about these matters, she later overheard him and her stepmother discussing it. They wondered if it was a 'ghost' she had seen but her father was adamant that they were not to discuss this with her as she was too young to understand this realm. However, Mana was well aware that on her Samoan side there were quite a number of people

in her aiga (family) who were said to have similar experiences and on her Māori side she knew of an aunty and uncle who were also familiar with such phenomena. As we prepared to invite Rangī to rejoin us, I checked with Mana whether she would consider sharing what she had revealed about her spiritual experiences with her mother. She agreed to do so.

Upon her mother's return I asked Mana if she could explain to Rangī about some of the experiences that she had described to Mercy and me. As Mana began to recount a number of these experiences her mother listened with rapt attention. When she had finished, Rangī admitted that she had no idea that Mana had been having experiences such as these. She then spoke of her own aunty who had told her that such occurrences were well known in their whānau (family). As we pondered together the question of whether these happenings might be relevant to Mana's current predicament, I asked Mana and Rangī whether they would be interested in consulting with a Māori colleague who might be able to help us shed light on this. When I talked about Wiremu and described his warm and engaging personal style and his expertise as a Māori cultural therapist and healer, both Mana and Rangī were keen to proceed with such a consultation. I agreed to contact Wiremu and check his availability to meet with the family. In the meantime, Mana said she would continue with her Fluoxetine treatment and Mercy arranged to see her at school the following week to check on her progress and discuss individual therapeutic work.

Rangī immediately confirmed our evening appointment when I rang two weeks later to offer them a time with Wiremu. Given the significance of Arthur in her life, I suggested that they consider inviting him along and she agreed to discuss this with him.

### **Session with Wiremu**

Just prior to the appointment I meet with Wiremu. I tell him Mana's name and that we have concerns that she has been experiencing depression. I mention that Mana has described a number of past experiences that sound spiritual in nature and the family have agreed to meet him in the hope that he might be able to shed light on the nature of those experiences. I make him aware that her mother will accompany her and her elder brother has also been invited. Wiremu's first response is that he is feeling quite sure that she has experienced some kind of sexual abuse in her life. He believes that might be important. I confirm to Wiremu that his assertion has already been verified by Mana, but that she has asked that this not be discussed with her other family members as they are not yet aware of that matter.

It is early evening when the whānau arrive for their appointment. Mana has just returned from a rugby game on the other side of town and I am pleased to see that Mana and her mother Rangī have been joined by Arthur. I welcome them in our reception area and introduce myself to Arthur. After offering them all a hot drink, I invite them to come through to our fono (meeting) room.

Wiremu is already seated in the fono room with a steaming cup of hot black tea. As the family settle themselves into their seats Wiremu greets them and smiles warmly. He first checks with the family to see if they will agree to us starting our meeting with a prayer, and then asks if I might start our hui (meeting) with a karakia (prayer). Following this and a round of introductions, Wiremu seeks to reassure the family about his role as a cultural therapist and the confidentiality of any information they share with us. Mana has explained to me at the last appointment that she thinks

Arthur has little idea about what she had been going through and she would appreciate him knowing more so that he can more appropriately support her. Accordingly I ask Mana if she would like me to summarise some of our recent conversation so that Arthur and Wiremu might hear more about the difficulties that she has been facing.

Mana seems grateful for my suggestion and nods her agreement. I begin to briefly recount my understanding of the distress and despair that have been mounting in Mana's life over the previous few months. I refer to a few of the troubles that have been contributing to her distress, including the impasse that she feels in her relationship with her father. I talk about her relationship with Arthur and how she has previously felt that he was always there for her and had protected her. But now Mana feels it is very hard for Arthur to understand where she is up to. I wonder out loud if it is hard for him to grasp the effect that the depression is having on her life given that he hasn't heard about it directly from Mana. I then speak about my meeting with Rangi and Mana two weeks before in which Mana has spoken for the first time about some unusual experiences in her life. These experiences have led Mana to doubt her own mental wellbeing. Yet the quality of these experiences, as she describes them, have led me to wonder if they might be spiritual in nature. I explain to Arthur that this is our reason for meeting with Wiremu.

It is at this point that Wiremu gently interrupts me:

**Wiremu:** I hope you don't mind me making a comment. As you were speaking Allister, I began to pick up some anxiety or else it could be that someone in the whānau has a bit of a heart problem. I'm picking it up sitting here. I noticed it especially when it came to the talk about your Dad, Mana. Rangi, are you guys still together?

**Rangi:** No.

**Wiremu:** The only reason I raise this is that if we have unresolved issues about our past relationships, our own unfinished business can transfer onto the next generation. Unless we deal with it ourselves, it tends to flow down. Unless you find some closure to the mamae or pain that you have been through yourself, your own children can be affected. Many times a battle between the parents can bring the young ones into it, the ones we hold most dear. Other times the origin of it may be four or more generations back. Because there was no resolution back then, it may flow down the generations. And so the sins of the forefathers may be visited upon the children.

And so there are a number of ways that children can be affected by this. We have an expression, *taukumekume*, which refers to the pulling apart which may happen to children in this kind of situation.

I definitely have felt some stuff with you (looking at Rangi) that has not yet been resolved that might help Mana. So, right or wrong, I thought I would put that out there.

There is a pause in the conversation as Rangi takes a moment to digest the implications of what Wiremu is raising. She then says that she has a problem with high blood pressure and she wonders if this is part of what Wiremu is referring to. Mana then speaks up:

**Mana:** It's true. My mum doesn't like my dad.

**Allister:** Rangi, perhaps what Wiremu is raising in some ways may not feel fair to you. Wiremu is kind of suggesting it's still worth healing that unresolved stuff about her

dad, for yourself, in order to free things up a bit for Mana. Is that what you're saying Wiremu?

**Wiremu:** Yes.

**Allister:** Even though it may not feel fair, because you suffered as well. Does that make sense?

**Rangi:** Yep, it does makes sense. Because it's just like she is being pulled between us. I do get that.

**Wiremu:** There is some other stuff I picked up before I came to meet you. I'm hoping it will be ok if we can meet with you on your own Mana, before we finish today.

After Mana indicates her agreement, there is a pause in the conversation and I (Allister) invites Mana to speak a little about some of the experiences that have begun four years before. I suggest that this could help Wiremu understand something about the nature of her experiences. Mana glances over at Wiremu, inhales deeply, and then begins to speak in a very hushed voice:

**Mana:** I remember it starting back when I was 11 years old. At that time, I was feeling quite low in my mood. I started to notice things. My brother had always been around to protect me, but at this time he had started college. So I would be walking to school on my own. As I walked I remember a distinct feeling that someone was there behind me. It was not a good feeling. I'd start walking faster and I would hear footsteps at the back of my head. I would try to turn around to look behind me, but it felt like I was prevented from turning. So I couldn't look behind me. But I could feel the footsteps walking faster behind me. I would then start running for no reason. And it felt like the footsteps would just keep on following me, drawing closer even though I sped up. At one point, I felt something go through me. It was a chilling feeling and it didn't feel at all good inside. I was so terrified I just turned to the side of the road and vomited.

As Mana speaks Rangi and Arthur appear transfixed, as if staring at someone they suddenly realise they hardly know.

**Mana:** I was having really strange dreams as well. I would have the same dream over and over again. In this dream I would see a man and he would come and talk to me. The dream often appeared to be in different places, but each time it would be the same man. He would tell me, 'You can ask me for anything. I will give you anything you want. You just say it.' I would respond, 'Oh, what do you mean?' And he would repeat, 'Just ask me for anything. I will give it to you, but in return ...' and at that point he would reach out and touch my heart. And his touch felt terribly cold. Then he would tell me, 'In return you will have to give me a part of you.' I just kept on having this dream over and over again. I don't ever remember asking for anything. But I started to feel quite empty inside. It was as if he had taken something from me.

I started to see things around our house as well. I was outside with my step mum, and I saw something go past and I turned around to her and asked, 'Did you see that?' She said, 'Oh, see what?' I said, 'Did you see that thing just float past?' And she said, 'Yes I did.' I said: 'What was that?' She replied, 'I don't know.' I went inside and I just freaked out and I said to my Dad, 'Oh my God, I think I just saw a ghost outside.'

I went to bed that night and then my Dad, turned around to my stepmother and asked her, 'What did you say to Mana?' She said, 'I told her I saw it too.' He became angry and said to her, 'Don't say that to my daughter. You're freaking her out. She's just a



kid, you can't tell her those sort of things, you know, she's just a kid, she doesn't understand.' Her response was, 'Well I'm not going to lie to her, because what she saw, I saw it as well.'

**Wiremu:** Do you still experience that sort of stuff?

**Mana:** Not so much. I just kind of try to shut it out. But I often have dreams about people dying.

**Wiremu:** So while it's not as heavy as it used to be when you were younger, you still have dreams of people dying.

**Allister:** Can you say what your thoughts are about those dreams because I understood one of the scary things was that you were worried those things were going to come true?

**Mana:** I once had a dream and I saw my Aunty sick in bed. And later she passed away suddenly from cancer.

**Wiremu:** And you had seen that?

**Mana:** Yeah. I often have dreams about people close to me dying and it makes me feel really uneasy that I know the way they are going to die. I find this very hard. It's not exactly a conversation starter if you know what I mean. I just have to keep it inside of me. These are things I can't talk to anyone about.

**Wiremu:** So have you ever shared that stuff with people in your whānau?

**Mana:** Not anyone. Not until I came to see Allister and talked about it.

At this point Wiremu enquires from Mana as to whether the dreams ever coincide with the onset of her low moods. He then asks about matekite experiences (spiritual awareness) or 'visions or dreams' in the whānau (family). Rangi mentions an incident after the death of her father when her sister had an experience of their father still being present. Mana responds by commenting that members of her father's family were familiar with those kinds of experiences. After this Wiremu begins to offer his thoughts about Mana's predicament.

**Wiremu:** There are two things I think could be relevant here. One is something that has come down the generations. Perhaps somebody took something that belonged to somebody else years ago and it was never replaced. Or there was no restoration or reconciliation. And it could be from your Mum's side or your Dad's side. And so if this has been passed down then this thing could come and hammer somebody in the family now. The second thing is that because your aunty has had that experience and because your dad's family have had experiences like that, sometimes it happens that there is one person in the whānau who has been picked out of the generations to feel that stuff. Most of the time they don't understand what the heck is going on. If there is an entity that is not so good then you can have all sorts of experiences that can be scary. If you have come to the attention of things that we can't see, that go bump in the night, what happens is that because they understand that there is somebody who actually is open to feeling, seeing, hearing, dreaming things, sometimes they come in and start pouring their rubbish down.

I also think that sometimes your low mood is not only from that. But there can also be a door open where stuff can come through and it's hard for Mana to be selective about what she is experiencing. But I will say more about that later. But right now,



I'm getting pretty excited. I can feel something there and I can't wait to put my hand around its neck and pull it out – sorry if that sounds strange! (laughter)

Having offered his initial explanation for Mana's situation as a combination of an intergenerational matter and her degree of spiritual attunement, Wiremu goes on to hint at the possible role that her previous sexual abuse experiences may have had in making her more vulnerable to a negative spiritual entity. He then indicates that he has detected such an entity and that he is intending to deal with it. However, before he does so, Wiremu is keen to help the whānau develop a foundation of understanding that will assist them in supporting Mana and each other in the months ahead.

**Wiremu** (looking at Mana, Rangī, and Arthur): You got any questions?

**Rangī:** Are you saying that it's like a bad spirit that's she's channelled, that's channelled into her ... ?

**Wiremu:** Thank you. Those are some of the words I was trying to find. I'm sorry, I live on the side of a mountain and I'm not flash with words (laughter). Sometimes all the rubbish from the whānau gets heaped upon a person in the family because they are open to that spiritual side. Just listening to her she is very open. And if Mana can learn to shut that door and say 'Get out, no more!' then she can learn to be selective about what she hears or sees.

Because culturally, many people from indigenous cultures around the world are open to stuff like what Mana is going through. It could come from her Māori side or from her Samoa side; it doesn't make a difference. What she is experiencing could come from a number of things. Right now, what I am saying is that this thing is gone! And in order to stop it coming back it's important to learn how to control it. It's about giving you the mana and equipping you with the tools to deal with it. Does that make sense to you Mana?

When Mana doesn't respond initially to his question, Wiremu seeks further clarification from the whānau to see if they've understood his explanation. He checks with Arthur if he is following what he has been saying:

**Wiremu:** I know sometimes I tend to not make sense and yet I know exactly what I'm trying to say. It's just that it doesn't come out the way I mean.

**Arthur:** I'm not sure. I'm just trying to find the words.

**Wiremu:** It's ok. What I'm trying to say, Mana, is that you could be a channel for both sides of your family. What's happened is that there is this evil or bad entity or spirit that is trying to control you.

**Arthur:** Is it like taking advantage of the opening?

**Wiremu:** Yes, that's a good way of putting it. It's able to heap its rubbish and dump it on Mana because she is open to it. And because she is actually a channel for the whānau it may not be so simple to just close off that doorway. I also need to say that sometimes when these things start getting discovered, they tend to play up. They can cause people to not even want to be in here or listen to this or they could cause all sorts of trouble. But there is nothing surer than that before you walk out of here tonight, we can properly deal with what is going on with you.

I (Allister) notice that Mana has been largely silent in the last minutes of the conversation and I am curious about how she is finding it. I wonder if Wiremu's allusions to unseen bad influences might be unsettling for Mana. Yet I also know that

Wiremu is often trying to empower young people by putting potentially spooky things in plain and simple terms.

**Allister:** Mana, it probably matters quite a bit for you to understand what Wiremu is saying.

**Wiremu:** Thank you.

**Allister:** Because the ideas around what he is saying could be a lot more scary than what he really means, so is this freaking you out slightly? Or does it make sense?

**Mana:** No, it makes sense. Wiremu is telling me that I can beat this thing if I can find the mana to kind of control myself . . .

**Wiremu:** Take control. Yeah!

Wiremu goes on to speak about mana (spiritual authority) and carefully defines it for the family. He then talks about the dilemma of being the one in the family who is tuned in to spiritual experiences.

**Wiremu:** If you are that channel, then it's important that you learn how to be in control of that. Sometimes we can't choose who we are or what we become. From family to family, there is always somebody that's picked to look after the whānau (family). It's not really something that is your choice. It just happens. But like I said, at a certain time in your life, perhaps when you are vulnerable for certain reasons, there are things that may choose to come and heap their rubbish down on you and it could come from either side of the family. But I have this really good feeling about you that you have got what it takes and you'll be able to kick its butt once you learn how. Does that make sense?

**Mana** (looking directly at Wiremu): Yes (uttered with some confidence).

**Wiremu:** Good.

At this point I ask Wiremu to say some more about how this all relates to depression. He responds to this by alluding once more to the sexual abuse that he has sensed that Mana had experienced:

**Wiremu:** Can I just talk about my culture at the moment. Even though I might have Samoans or Tongans in my family, I'm not an expert on Samoan culture. But in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world), if we lose something through a tapu (something sacred or forbidden) being broken, then that could be a cause of depression. Tapu is the sacredness of a person's whole being. If somehow that tapu has been transgressed or broken, then that has to be put right. If you want to get someone right, you fix their wairua; you fix that spiritual part of the person and everything else will fall into line. Sometimes we can be robbed of that and it leaves us open. It's as if the doorway has been left open and anything can just pour in. So what we do is we try and close that back up again, by restoring that mana or that authority to take control of what you hear, what you think, what you see.

**Allister:** Normally, you talk about mauri as well.

**Wiremu:** Yeah, people often explain mauri as being about life force. That's one explanation for that word. But mauri is also about relationships. That could be our relationship with our creator or our relationship with our whānau. That's our mauri. Our whānau become our life force. So Mana's mauri includes your support for her. So you can help keep her strong. It includes the creator's relationship with her. All that is

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sacred. And out of that sacredness of her relationship with the creator, she has the mana to have dominion over everything that walks, creeps, crawls, flies. She will have the mana to take control of her circumstances.

(Turning to Mana): As you restore your mana, you will be able to select what you think, what you hear, what you see.

**Allister:** Would that apply to dreams as well?

**Wiremu:** Yep, that applies to dreams as well. Because when we get rid of that thing which is bugging you, then your dreams will come back to normal. And it will help your depression. Something like this that's in control and you're not in control of can cause that kind of rauraru or depression by the way it keeps banging away at you.

Wiremu's comments about the importance of the family relationships remind me of a comment that Mana has made some moments before about how she views her relationships with her mother and brother. This link reminds me of what my Samoan colleagues refer to as a very important relationship in fa'a Samoa (Samoan world view).

**Allister:** Can I just make a comment? Mana and Arthur, I was thinking about your relationship. Mana, you just said that your mum and your brother are a part of you. That is really interesting to me because that's not a Pākehā or Palagi (European) concept at all. It could be a Māori concept. But it's certainly a strongly Samoan concept and there is a name which you both might be familiar with. The name for the relationship between brother and sister in the Samoan culture is 'feagaiga'. Are you familiar with that?

Feagaiga means it's like a sacred covenant. I'm obviously Palagi so this is a bit of an outside view. My understanding is that's the name given to the relationship between brother and sister in the Samoan culture and it later on got taken by the Christian missionaries to mean something else. I understand that the brother and sister relationship is the most sacred relationship in the Samoan culture. I'm just raising this because there is something about the way that you guys are connected which fits with that for me, especially the way Mana has told me you have looked after your sister over the years. Does this make any sense?

**Mana** (looking up to meet my eyes): Yeah.

**Arthur** (nodding): Yes.

While Wiremu responds to a further question of mine about mauri, Mana makes a sudden exclamation:

**Mana:** I'm cold!

As I turn to look at her, I immediately see that she is looking very uncomfortable. Her shoulders are hunched and the colour has drained out of her cheeks. She is clasping her hands together and looks like her teeth might begin chattering at any moment.

**Wiremu:** Are you alright?

**Mana:** I've gone very pale. I can't feel my fingers very well, they're cold!

**Wiremu:** I wish I was pale! Since I arrived back down here in Porirua, everyone has been saying, 'Gee you're black!' (laughter). I tell them it's the sun up in Gisborne. I was actually quite fair before I left here and went back to Gisborne so they were all calling me black today when I went to visit. We are going to deal with that soon Mana

because I noticed what was happening. Like I said, sometimes these things know that their time is nearly up so they start doing things. They try to create a situation or change the mood.

**Mana:** I feel very uneasy!

**Allister:** Is it the same cold feeling that you sometimes used to get?

**Mana:** It's kind of . . . like an angry feeling, yeah.

Wiremu moves his chair a little closer to where Mana is sitting.

**Wiremu:** Can I just feel your hand? Whoa! That is cold! (Pause.) Hopefully it starts warming up shortly.

Despite Mana's acute discomfort, Wiremu is still intent on strengthening the understanding and cohesion and therefore the mana of her whānau, before directly addressing the spiritual entity that he is sure is causing her discomfort.

**Wiremu:** Is there any more kōrero (discussion/talk)? We all know one another now; we can kōrero. This isn't an appointment-type thing; it's a whānau-type thing where we are able to say what we feel and think.

**Arthur:** Could this bad thing that might be around Mana be strengthened by her remembering her past?

**Wiremu:** Yeah, you're on to it.

**Arthur:** So when she thinks more and more about the bad things that have happened in the past, it starts opening more. Is that what you're saying?

**Wiremu:** You've got it. What job did you say you do? (laughing)

**Arthur:** So it is fuelled a lot from her past. Stuff that has happened, stuff that she has seen and heard (pause). I know that Mana has been in the middle of a lot of stuff between Mum and Dad. And she feels torn; she wants to be on both sides.

**Wiremu:** It's easy to pick that up.

**Arthur:** Yeah, so there are the memories; and then being caught in that conflict and things like that are all adding up for her over time, like a chain of events that grind her down. And then this thing takes advantage of her. I just thought I would check that I was on the right path.

**Wiremu:** That's exactly it – torn emotions, torn loyalties. Yeah.

**Arthur:** I can see now that I've had no idea what Mana has been going through. This is why I am here because I want to know and understand. The last thing I want to do is hurt my sister but now I'm afraid I may have been contributing to it. Sometimes, I've been pretty angry towards her. I wonder if I've been fuelling those things that she is going through as well. One reason that I want to clarify things is because I know some of what it's been like for her because I went through some of that too which is why I can relate to it. Does that make any sense?

**Wiremu:** Sure.

**Allister:** Mana, do you want to respond to Arthur? Because what he is basically asking is, 'What can I do at this moment to help you?'

**Mana** (shaking her head, seemingly confused): I'm really sorry I didn't hear any of it.

Wiremu NiaNia et al.

**Allister:** It's ok.

**Arthur:** It's ok.

**Allister:** Am I right Arthur that one of your questions is, 'What can I do that might help Mana given that everything is connected?'

**Arthur** (turning to look directly at his sister): I'll paint a picture for you, Mana. You come home every day and I'm always trying to get everyone close together so we have more family time at home, eating at the table sort of thing. I didn't understand until now why sometimes you just go to bed because you feel tired. Oh my gosh, here I am pushing you, giving you shit all the time, telling you 'Come and eat at the table,' and you go, 'I'm way too tired.' You know Mana, I didn't know what you were going through!

By this time tears are running down Arthur's cheeks. Mana has turned towards him. She remains hunched over, hugging her own shoulders as if trying to warm herself against the chill that I can't feel. It's not clear from looking at her how much of Arthur's words she has taken in. Nevertheless, she looks into his eyes and responds to her brother:

**Mana** (in a barely audible whisper): I love you.

**Arthur:** I know you do.

By this time they both have tears streaming down their faces.

**Allister:** We have plenty of tissues here.

**Arthur:** Sometimes I feel like I'm this big strong fella and that you should be like me. But I didn't know what was going wrong; what was going on in your head. I just didn't know what was happening. I'm sorry. I just want to know what is happening so I can help. So we can all help.

**Mana:** I love you and I know you can love me. It's ok.

**Arthur:** I'm sorry.

**Allister:** It's important to have a tangi from time to time. That's really important stuff you said Arthur.

**Wiremu:** It really is because that's that life line, that life force that we talked about. What I see before me shows me the kaha (strength) of your family. As you said Arthur, your misunderstanding could sometimes be an opportunity for that thing to get inside because you misunderstand the reason why. But the more you fellas come together as a whānau, the harder it is for that thing to stick around. Your discussing it and declaring your love has just gone and made it so that we put another nail in that little thing that I can see sitting just slightly behind Mana. Putting a little nail in the blinkin' thing . . . and helping you get ready to kick it out. Ka pai. That's really neat!

By this time Arthur has pulled his chair over to be closer to his sister. Mana is still hunched over but she is looking intently at Arthur at times and there is a renewed sense of sibling intimacy between them. Wiremu begins to describe a process by which the family might be able to address unresolved current or intergenerational matters which he names as whakawetewete. He re-emphasises that anything useful that he might be able to contribute is really not coming from him but is from his source, 'our creator.'

At this point, I ask if it is still necessary to have the individual time with Mana. Wiremu initially responds that it might not be required but Mana requests that we go ahead and meet with her on her own. Rangi and Arthur are in support of this and I show them out to our reception area and offer them another hot drink.

On my return as I close the door, Mana is already speaking to Wiremu.

**Mana:** I still feel something cold . . .

**Wiremu:** It's going to go, it going to go alright. You're too important. I looked at you when I first saw you tonight and it was clear to me that you have got a gift. It's something that we don't always choose, but you know it's just about gaining more understanding and about learning to be more in control. I would like you to have a think about finding some way over time to release all the things that people have done to hurt you and even times when you've done things to hurt others. Putting some of them down on paper can be a start. Some things are very hard to forgive especially what you've been through. But spiritually, if it can be forgiven and released, then you will be able to see big giant steps forward.

When Allister talked to me this afternoon and told me I was meeting you, straight away I felt that there was something that happened to you when you were quite young that was important. When I spoke to Allister he said that you had already told him about that but it would be better for us to talk with you alone.

I picked up that it was someone quite close who did this to you. I think that some of your depression may relate to this. As I said before, tapu is about the sacredness of who you are. When a young person is abused, that is a breach of tapu. When that happens to you, you really don't have any say in that. That mana has been taken away from you. So we need to restore that mana to you.

**Allister:** Wiremu is always really clear that you are in the driver's seat and I have the same philosophy about that. It's really important that you are in charge especially when it comes to something like abuse. So I wouldn't expect you to talk about any of it if you didn't want to. But if there's something that you want to ask Wiremu about or anything that you want to say to him, you're welcome to. I know you often have a clear mind about certain things, eh?

**Mana** (a smile slowly breaking over her face): Yes.

**Wiremu:** I try not to smile too much because I've got heaps of teeth that are not there! (laughter) (Turning to Allister): She's laughing and showing all her teeth! (laughter) (To Mana): Show off! (laughter all round). Sorry! (laughing)  
Want to kōrero about it?

**Mana:** I don't really know what there is to say. Um . . . What you said about my mana being stripped from me. I used to feel that God didn't love me, like why would he do this to one of his children? But I know it wasn't God that did that to me. It was someone close to our whānau that did it. I guess that's what hurt the most.

**Wiremu:** Yeah.

**Mana:** Your whānau is meant to be the ones who . . .

**Wiremu:** Protect.

**Mana:** Excuse my crying . . .

**Wiremu:** No, don't be sorry.

**Allister:** We've got heaps of tissues.

**Mana:** Sometimes I feel like it's changed me because I feel like I have to keep this wall up all the time. It's quite hard for me to open up to people. Coming to see Allister, I realised that it was enough. It's starting to affect who I am as a person. So it's time for me to just open up about it.

**Wiremu:** Choice!

**Mana** (leaning forward with her elbows propped on her knees as she wipes tears away): Yeah.

**Wiremu:** Because I think that for us it's not about who it was. It's about how you feel.

**Mana:** Mmm.

**Wiremu:** And you being able to express that? If you can begin to do that, it starts to cut away the thing that hinders you and keeps you in that depressed place. Because you're bringing it out in the open. And they say that the voice has a spirit of its own. When you talk about something and bring it out into the open it can be judged. Believe you me, God did not intend for that to happen. God has given us free will to choose whether we do things. So whoever it was who did it took your right away to say 'Yes or no.'

And so an important part of your healing is about restoring your mana so that you are in a position to go back and say, 'Well, actually, I don't want to feel this way. I don't want to be dreaming like this.' And so that's what I mean about restoring to you the tapu and the mana. They are yours by right. So the fact that you are able to express it, get it out, that's part of that healing. Even being able to write it down. And at some point we would do what we need to do to release it spiritually. To give it away so it's no longer your burden to carry. Does that make sense?

**Mana** (looking intently at Wiremu): Yes.

**Allister:** Mana, anything else you want to ask Wiremu about?

**Mana:** (At this point Mana frowns and touches her temples on both sides with her fingertips.) I've got this real sharp pain. It's like going through my head. And my shoulder.

**Wiremu:** Pain? You know that thing I said about when something has to leave. It starts to cause problems. It's gonna go! Because it's going to have to leave shortly, it will do all it can to hang in there. Right now, it's trying to hide. So it does all sorts of things. I think this one in particular has quite a bit to do with your abuse. That is why it's able to keep going bang, bang, bang to such an extent. You see if Arthur hadn't come on board he would be still thinking, 'Look at that, why can't you come to the table, not being sociable . . . trying to rip the family apart?'. And for him too it was a release to be able to say, 'I love you and I'm sorry that I didn't understand.' That's another nail in that thing!

(Wiremu reaches for Mana's hands and holds them gently but firmly as he looks kindly into her eyes.)

**Wiremu:** They're warming up. Honestly, Allister, if you had felt her hands before, they were frozen as if they had just come out of the fridge. They are starting to warm up for some reason. A lot warmer than before. Oh! I've got black hands compared to yours! (laughing)

**Mana:** My hands are normally brown; they've just gone pale all of a sudden.



**Wiremu:** It's because they were frozen cold. Would you be ok if I karakia (pray) for you now?

After Mana agrees, Wiremu holds Mana's hands and starts to karakia for her. Following his karakia, Wiremu enquires about Mana's experience of meeting with him.

**Wiremu:** How are you feeling about the process? Strange? I mean you don't think I'm too strange?

**Mana:** No!

**Wiremu** (laughing): That's good! One day I want to be able to see you playing rugby on the TV and I'll say, 'I know her!' (Mana now begins to laugh herself.)

**Wiremu:** Are you pretty serious about your rugby?

**Mana:** Yeah, well, aunty used to play rep rugby for her region, so . . .

**Wiremu:** Oh really? Awesome!

Bringing this conversation to a halt, Wiremu suggests that I invite Rangī and Arthur back into the room and then proceeds to ask their permission to do further karakia. Following Wiremu's karakia for the family, the session is over.

### **Progress after the session**

I arranged with Mana and her mother for a follow-up meeting three weeks after the session with Wiremu. However, Mana rang to cancel that appointment but left a message with Mercy that things were going well. We eventually met up six weeks after the session. There was a lightness to Mana's countenance that was immediately obvious to me. In addition, there was a warmth and ease in her exchanges with her mother. Mana spoke in a relaxed manner about feeling closer to Arthur in recent weeks. When I invited her to reflect on the session with Wiremu, she recalled it as 'not easy' for her but ultimately helpful. She reported that her mood had been definitely better since that evening and she had no more thoughts of ending her life. Her old motivation and energy had returned and she was focusing better at school. Mana told of sleeping well once again. Significantly there had been no return of the disturbing dreams that had troubled her for so long.

As her psychiatrist, I was mindful that her session with Wiremu had been about four weeks after she had commenced taking antidepressant tablets and this is a common time for such treatment to help young people feel quite a lot of relief from their symptoms of depression. When I enquired about the medication, Mana casually explained that she had stopped taking the tablets after seeing Wiremu as she had decided that she needed to tackle this herself. While her renewed feeling of wellbeing had been sustained throughout the six weeks since stopping the tablets, I speculated that the medication may have had a beneficial effect for her as well as the session with Wiremu. I suggested that we could monitor things together to ensure that her good progress continued.

While Mana's overall sense of wellbeing continued over the year, she reflected on times in which she would become very angry and even enraged with peers who were bullying others. With her forthright style, she would feel compelled to intervene and sometimes this would lead to confrontations at college. We

discussed this in the light of her courage, preparedness to speak out for what she believed in, and well-developed sense of justice. I raised with her the possibility that her previous experiences could have a role in this. Perhaps witnessing conflict between her parents many years before or her experiences of sexual abuse could be contributing to the vehemence of her responses. Mana considered that was certainly possible. However, on balance, she didn't think that her past abuse experiences were interfering any longer with her relationship with Fa'alogo or her life in general. She felt pleased that she had been able to discuss those experiences with her partner and immediate family. As such, she decided that she wanted to get on with her life at the current time without going back to address those matters specifically in therapy. She felt confident that should the need arise at some later point then she would be willing to find a therapist that she could trust to address that with.

At the time of publication of this article, it is six years later. Mana continues to thrive and is working full-time. She and Fa'alogo have recently been planning their wedding. She has had no further problems with depression and continues to have spiritual experiences which don't generally trouble her.

## **Wiremu**

### **First session with Mana, Rangī, and Arthur**

One of the important things for me in that first session I had with Mana and her whānau (family) was the reconciliation that she had with her mother and especially with her brother, Arthur. She always had a strong bond with him. Of course both Mana and Arthur have their Māori side and their Samoan side. Now I don't consider myself to be an expert when it comes to Samoan culture. However, I expect spiritual matters have been important for both sides of their family. And because Arthur hadn't been on board with what was happening for her, it may have been enough to cause a gap, a negative space, where these negative spiritual entities can get a foothold. But when they were able to reconcile, it reinforced Mana's ability to push those things away. Their wairua was already connected beforehand, but the misunderstanding between them during that time may have widened that gap which these negative things could squeeze through. However, coming together in that reconciliation is like a protection for Mana and for the whānau.

Any problems in the family can affect the wairua (spirit) of the whole whānau. We are all interconnected and wairua is not constrained by time and distance. So if something is affecting my whānau member hundreds of miles away, I may feel it. Straight away I will get on my phone to my whānau to find out what's happening. And that's not just me. Lots of us have that experience.

In a similar way, I picked up that Mana had experienced sexual abuse before Allister told me about it. Allister may not have even mentioned her name but somehow the intention of talking about her was enough. And so I was given a perception at that moment that related to her wairua. In this case it was a thing of the heart. A guilt and pain thing. I don't know why she would feel guilty but I did feel that. I expect that's a common response even though it's not their fault. It's like I can feel something resonating or vibrating in my chest. Sometimes it's elsewhere. As soon as I feel that, I'm confident about what it means. It's not

something I ask for. It just happens. The wairua is very reliable like that. So if I can discern that, it's obvious that the sexual abuse has affected her wairua. It's affected her heart.

Of course these kinds of experiences affect the whole person. This kind of abuse is a violation, a betrayal. It's a breach of tapu (something sacred or forbidden). Her mana (spiritual authority) has been stripped away when her personal authority, her ability to say 'no' was taken away from her. Relationships are almost always damaged in the wake of that. So her mauri (life force) is affected by the damage to those relationships. Most young people will feel isolated and unable to trust adults or others around them. Mana talked about feeling like God didn't love her anymore. So that's also affecting her mauri. All these aspects are interconnected with wairua (spirituality). Even though Mana tried not to tell anyone for so long, she can't keep it just in her hinengaro (mind). Depression is not just a hinengaro thing. It comes out in tension in her body so that the tinana (physical body) side is affected. Her relationship side is affected as well and she gets grumpy and snaps at her Mum. The wairua is naturally interconnected with all these three. If even one of these quadrants is out of plum, then it affects all four. They go together.

For me, the wairua side is the basis for all the others. It's the foundation. So any healing has to start with the wairua. And that applies to depression. With Mana, we can make sense of her depression easily when we know what she has experienced. Depression comes from hopelessness. If you've been robbed of your mana and awful things are happening to you that you can't stop, it's obvious that you could become depressed. What might not be obvious for some people is what's going on in the wairua side.

When I talk about *tuku iho*, I'm talking about things flowing down the generations, good and bad. In Mana's case, when I detected that negative spiritual thing with her, I was immediately wondering how long it had been there. For Mana, it was possible that it was a recent thing. But I think it is much more likely that it had been around the family for a long time. From what she said, there was evidence it had already been around her for some time. Often these things have been in families for generations. I would say that if they have been around then even before we were born they will have known we were coming. They know what makes us tick. What sets us off. Even before the abuse this thing could have been around Mana. But it may not have affected her because her mana was strong. Or the wairua of the family would have protected her. Then the sexual abuse that Mana experienced would have damaged that wairua and her mana and made her more vulnerable to this thing.

As I said in the session, her spiritual awareness could also make her more vulnerable to it at the time due to her openness. And if these things know that someone is going to be a help to someone else along the line then they will try very hard to hinder that. But ultimately her awareness can protect her. It gives her the ability to address the spiritual entity, by being aware of it, recognising its nature and saying, 'I know who you are and I can stop you right here!' So by empowering Mana and her whānau to understand and deal with it, we can protect the next generation.

Once I had detected the negative spiritual entity in the room with us, I had no doubt that I would be able to deal with it. It's a confidence I have in my source. I've learnt that if something has been shown to me then it has been shown for a

reason and it can be healed. I'm not saying that arrogantly. I'm saying that with confidence. Because it's not me that addresses it. It's not me that does the healing. It's my source.

Once I had detected that thing, it was of no consequence to me. I have no respect for things like that. Before addressing it I wanted Arthur and Rangi to be on board so that they could understand more about what had been going on for Mana. By building their understanding and faith and by giving them the tools and knowledge to deal with it, I knew that they could gain that authority over it and we would thereby strengthen the mana of the whole whānau. My hope was that they would be less afraid of it. I also wanted to empower Mana to know that she wasn't crazy. Then they would all be in a stronger position to deal with it.

Looking back to that session, there are a few matters that I would like to comment on. Later in the session Mana began to feel very cold. It was quite uncomfortable for her. I have no doubt that chill was from the negative spiritual thing that was with her. These things can present in different ways. Sometimes people can become suddenly cold and clammy, but other times they could be hot, burny, and uncomfortable.

When Mana showed me how cold her hands were, I held her hands and could feel that. I did that to reassure her that it was ok, to build confidence in her. At those times I often make light of the situation. Some people might wonder why I would do that when it looks very serious. I wanted to keep her light-spirited about it while at the same time showing that thing that I'm not afraid of it and it is of no consequence.

The key moment for me was when Mana professed her aroha (love) for Arthur and he did likewise. There was a shift at that point. That negative thing was not based on love and it definitely didn't like that. As far as I'm concerned, love overcomes. It has power over these kinds of things. This kind of aroha is the essence of healing.

Later on in her own account, Mana talks about her body aching all over the day after our session. That doesn't surprise me, although it doesn't always happen. People have different ways of reacting to what has happened. I know some who have cried for days afterwards. Some people have had pain in different places. Some people have experienced flu-like symptoms. The way I think of it is that when that thing departs, it leaves a void. Its ugliness is still clinging on; the particles of it are still around briefly. It's angry about being kicked out; so perhaps it tries to do some damage on the way out. I would think that in parting it had to endure a lot more pain than that. So what you are picking up is the residue of that. We all work through it in different ways.

When you look at Mana now, she is thriving. There is no doubt in my mind that that thing may still be around her. That is now of no consequence. Because she's stronger, it can't do anything. Mana knows what she wants and knows where she is going in her life.

### **Mana looks back**

It's now two years since I first met Wiremu but I can still remember that evening really clearly. I remember back then that the spiritual things I was experiencing put a lot of weight on me. I was confused at times about what was reality and what was my imagination. That got me overanalysing things. Sometimes I thought I was going

a bit insane, hearing things and seeing things. I definitely felt like there was something wrong with me because I believed I was the only one who could see and hear those things.

Before that meeting, I was excited to meet Wiremu. I had this idea that perhaps he would be my quick fix for whatever was going on. I was hoping that he would be able to do something to help me figure out the spiritual experiences I was having. I trusted what Allister had told me about him.

But when we got there and joined Wiremu in the room, to my surprise, I began to feel really uncomfortable. Even though I could feel this warm aura from him, strangely it was as if there was something inside me that seemed to get me really agitated. I knew it was a safe environment. I knew I should feel comfortable around him but hearing him talk I just started feeling angry for no reason. I couldn't figure out why. Something inside of me didn't want to let go. Thinking back now the best way I can make sense of it is that it was almost as if there was something there that felt threatened by Wiremu.

The more he would speak to me the tighter my body would get. Later I noticed that my hands were freezing. It felt like my whole body was shutting down, much like how hypothermia might feel. I couldn't really focus on what he was telling me and felt I wanted to leave. It wasn't anything he was doing or saying. There was something in me that just didn't want to be there.

By the time he did his karakia, as well as feeling very cold, I felt like something was gripping on to me tighter and tighter. It felt as if there were hands around my neck choking me. It was covering my ears, trying to stop me from listening. I knew that the talk with Wiremu was going to help me but I had to keep repeating this to myself. Listening to his voice made me feel sick inside. I felt as if I had an octopus with all its tentacles really tightly wrapped around me.

When Wiremu did the karakia, I struggled to hear him and focus on what was going on. I felt I had earmuffs on, blocking his voice with this eerie white noise sound. Sometime during his karakia, I suddenly began to feel this awful pulling feeling as if someone had just yanked off this octopus that had been wrapped around my head.

Once he had finished, I was relieved. But by the next day, I felt the pain I might expect if some of my bones were broken. It was as if a cast had just been removed and your first step forward is very painful and uncomfortable. It was almost as if I had been assaulted but when I thought about it, I had been fine after my rugby game. I've had plenty of experiences of being hurt in a game, but this wasn't like getting tackled or the pain sustained after falling over; this was aching all over my body.

My body was so sore the following day, my mother had to stay home with me. I went to sleep about 10 o'clock that night and woke the next day after 3 o'clock in the afternoon. I hadn't slept soundly for months. I tried to get up the next day and I couldn't move. The next few days I just slept and slept. Suddenly I realised, 'Yes I can sleep!'

During that session, Wiremu restored my mana in a way that gave me more confidence. He enabled me to feel like I could trust in myself. I realised that the only person who was going to get rid of these things or that had strength over myself was me! Wiremu made me aware that if I was going to get better, I was the only person who could make that happen.

When he talked about mana, it made sense to me from my upbringing. I had learned about mana from my Mum and Dad and from my schooling. At the time, I didn't have much belief in myself even though I was a strong-minded person. Now I can see that believing in yourself is one of the strongest things that you can do as a human being. He also helped me begin to hope that things were starting to get better already.

After meeting Wiremu, I thought that if a few words of his can make a whole lot of things better and different in my life, then think about all the things I can do for myself! During that whole session, Wiremu didn't say much at all. He did explain a few things and helped my understanding. However, those few things he did say helped me begin to believe that I could do this myself.

One aspect of that was that I decided to stop my antidepressant tablets. Even though Allister suggested I keep taking them, I felt I didn't need them any longer. After that session with Wiremu, I decided that if anyone is going to make me better, I needed to do it myself. Not these drugs. It made me think of those endorphins that Allister talked about; when you go for a run and it gets those endorphins moving through your brain. After seeing Wiremu and thinking about what he said about reclaiming my mana, I realised that I wanted to pull myself out of that depression myself. I have nothing against medication and I think it can be very important for some people but for me at that time, I just decided I needed to do it my way. That was part of me taking charge of my life.

The session with Wiremu really helped my depression. Even though talking with Allister and Mercy had helped me reflect on things, when I first met Wiremu it was like the curtains in my room were still closed, even though it was a sunny day. After meeting Wiremu, I felt like those curtains were wide open and I could see the sun again. Something definitely had shifted. I felt like a massive rock which had been blocking the flow of the water had shifted and now all the water could just flow again.

I could trust that Wiremu had experience in these spiritual sorts of things. That made me feel in myself that I was not crazy. That was so important to me. I had been starting to think to myself, 'Oh my God, I'm mental,' 'I'm going crazy,' 'These things aren't actually real,' 'They're not actually happening to me.' I'm the kind of person that, if someone believes in me and if I believe in myself, that's all I will ever need. A lot of it was reassurance that, 'Yep this is happening to you.' It was a relief to me that he was able to detect something there. I thought, 'Yes! Someone believes me and they can tell it's there too! I'm not going crazy!'

A lot of Wiremu's comments were not directed towards me. They were directed somewhere else, at something else. When he was talking to me, sometimes I could tell that he wasn't looking at me. He seemed to be looking past me, at something just to the side of me or behind me.

I could definitely feel something about his presence that told me he was tuned in to spiritual things and what was going on for me. He seemed intrigued. He was interested. From the first moment I walked in I could just tell. I'm really attuned to feeling the aura of a person. People who are tuned in spiritually give off a different vibe to other people. I can tell someone who believes me from someone that doesn't. I can tell when I meet people if they are a good person or not. Sometimes I can recognise someone who has bad intentions just from how they feel to me and I'm pretty vocal about those things. So in meeting Wiremu for the first time, I could tell that

he was a good person and that he knew about spiritual things, and he was detecting something around me that I also felt was there.

Wiremu's karakia (prayer) made a difference. I felt that a massive burden had been lifted off me. I felt different immediately; I felt light and relieved. When I vent about things, I feel better but for me this was different. It was as if a whole lot of things had been lifted off my chest. I felt like jelly. I felt really relaxed and sort of wobbly but as I said before, by the next day I was aching all over.

By the end of the session I felt I knew Wiremu, as if I was in the presence of a comfortable family member. His presence was so warm which put me at ease. I felt really safe by the end compared to how I felt at the beginning. Afterwards I felt so relieved that I had decided to meet Wiremu.

### **Rangi**

I enjoyed meeting Wiremu. He had a certain way about him that made me feel at ease. He would say things that would lighten the atmosphere when it was starting to get a bit intense. However, there were some things he brought out that really shocked me. I knew Mana had been depressed but I had no idea that those spiritual things were happening for her. Even though I know quite a few people who are in tune spiritually and I would often go to my uncle about those matters, I was really surprised when Wiremu explained what was happening. I could tell he is really in tune with wairua and it was good to meet someone who could help Mana get through that.

One thing I was really happy about was seeing my two children talking again. Once we left the session with Wiremu, we sat in our car in our driveway at home for over an hour and we all talked. It felt like a breakthrough. There were tears and we all shared things that we hadn't been able to talk to each other about for a very long time.

### **Discussion**

This article provides an in - depth description of a Māori healing session with a Māori and Samoan young woman and her family. While Mana's depressive symptoms met the criteria for a major depressive episode from a Western psychiatric perspective and the prescription of an antidepressant was an attempt to address this using a physical intervention, her disclosure of prior sexual abuse experiences suggested that psychological trauma could have been contributing to the genesis of her distress. A family systems approach could also have highlighted the unresolved conflict between her parents as a further factor in her emotional turmoil. Nonetheless, her Māori healer Wiremu NiaNia offered the family a very different therapeutic paradigm focused on wairua (spirituality).

Durie (1998) has articulated a Māori model known as *whare tapa whā* in which four dimensions of wellbeing are compared to the four walls of a house; namely *taha wairua* (spiritual side), *taha whānau* (relational or family side), *taha hinengaro* (psychological side) and *taha tinana* (physical side). This holistic approach requires that each side be considered in order for wellbeing and balance to be restored; however, wairua is viewed as the most essential element (Durie, 1998).



In order to assist the whānau (family) in their understanding of key concepts relating to wairua, Wiremu took time during the family session to explain Māori concepts of mana (spiritual authority), mauri (life force), and tapu (something sacred or forbidden). The young person at the centre of this story said she was familiar with the concept of mana from both her cultures and described the application of this understanding as an important breakthrough after meeting Wiremu. Furthermore, she chose Mana as her pseudonym for the publication of this article. The word mana is found in 26 languages across Oceania (Mila, 2016). The relational nature of this concept from the viewpoint of Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) is illustrated in Wiremu's description of the moment when Mana expressed her aroha (love) for Arthur. From Wiremu's perspective this had the effect of strengthening the mana of the whole family and was a necessary part of healing the wairua of the whānau. This understanding about the importance of aroha for families is conveyed in the following whakataukākī (proverb):

*Ma te aroha ka ora te kāinga, ma te riri ka hinga.*

A house filled with love will withstand whatever comes; a house filled with strife will fall.

(Whakataukākī, proverb)

Aroha is the Māori word for a term common throughout the Pacific, which Mila (2014) defines as 'not only love, but ... compassion, sympathy and mercy.' Forty-three contemporary Pacific languages contain their own versions of this term. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi (2009a) has referred to the following Samoan proverb to explain the need for a family's discipline to be based on love rather than fear:

*E leai se gaumata'u na o le gaualofa*

What you do out of love endures, what you do out of fear will not.

In Samoan culture, this is particularly important when it comes to the relationship between a sister and brother, as was noted in Mana's family session. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese (2009b) has stated:

Harmony presides in this relationship when the special character of the relationship is respected. This sacred relationship between brother and sister is often referred to as *feagaiga*.

In the Hawaiian context, Meyer (2003) has described how the concept of aloha is central to the indigenous Hawaiian family healing process known as ho'oponopono. She quotes Mary Kawena Pukui:

*Aloha mai no, aloha aku;*

*o ka hubū ka mea e ola 'ole ai.*

When love is given, love should be returned;

anger is the thing that gives no life. (Meyer, 2003)

This proverb expresses the spirit of peacemaking at the heart of this reconciliation process.

While the aroha expressed between the siblings may have strengthened the mana of the family, Wiremu was also focused on the nature of Mana's relationship to her

own spirituality. In Wiremu's description of the concept of mana at the beginning of this article, he refers particularly to the situation faced by young people who are having spiritual experiences. Similar types of experiences have been described by a number of authors (Bush & NiaNia, 2012; Moon, 2003; Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2013; NiaNia et al., 2013, 2017; Royal, 2003; Waldegrave, Tamasese, Tuhaka, & Campbell, 2003). Such experiences can be distressing, and could be mislabelled as psychotic but in Māori, Samoan, and other indigenous contexts may be considered to represent possible signs of a spiritual gift (NiaNia et al., 2017; Tamasese et al., 1997). Wiremu has referred to the following whakatauākī:

*Mā te kite ka mōhio, mā te mōhio ka kitea he oranga.*

By the seeing, one will have knowledge; by that knowledge, one will find an answer.

(Whakatauākī, proverb (NiaNia et al., 2017))

This proverb refers to a particular ability in which a person may use their spiritual awareness in the service of others. Wiremu has previously defined two related expressions in te reo Māori (the Māori language) that refer to such abilities:

To me, matekite is the ability to see sickness in people, or something in the wairua that may be disturbing them, or seeing people who have already passed on . . . Matakite is generally used to describe the ability to see beyond the here and now. But for me, it refers to foresight, the ability to see something before it happens. Often these abilities go together. (NiaNia et al., 2017)

## Conclusions

For those indigenous communities in which spirituality is of paramount importance, successful resolution of family problems may require indigenous spiritual healing approaches. Usually such expertise will be outside the professional capability of family therapists or other health professionals. Partnerships between indigenous healers and family therapists or other mental health workers provide scope for indigenous families to benefit from the healing expertise of both indigenous and Western traditions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In other jurisdictions such as the US, Canada, and Australia, a 16-year-old's disclosure of this information would have necessitated mandatory notification to child protection services. In New Zealand there has been considerable debate over the last two decades about the merits of mandatory reporting and at the current time, there is no statutory obligation to notify. However, many agencies such as ours have their own policy of mandatory reporting for abuse disclosures for young people aged 15 and under. From age 16 years and older, it is common practice to encourage disclosure to the relevant authorities to facilitate investigation of the allegations, however due to the potential distress that the young person may face during the legal process, the final decision about whether to notify is left to the young person and their family.

<sup>2</sup> Whakawetewete refers to a Māori ritual that Wiremu often suggests to whānau, which is intended to resolve conflict, hurt, or transgressions between people.

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