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## Ka Mate

# Ka Mate



## The Origins of *Ka Mate*

*Ka Mate* was composed by the Ngati Toa chief Te Rauparaha, descendent of Hoturoa, captain of the Tainui canoe, born 1760s at Kawhia, died 1849 at Otaki.

The story of the composition of *Ka Mate* is well known within the oral histories of Ngati Toa and Ngati Tuwharetoa, the two iwi (tribes) most associated with the haka's origins.

During a period of imminent conflict against the powerful Waikato and Ngati Maniapoto iwi, Te Rauparaha journeyed from Kawhia to seek alliances with other tribal groups, one of those being Tuwharetoa who lived in the Lake Taupo region.

When he arrived at Te Rapa, which is located near Tokaanu he was told by Te Heuheu, the Paramount Chief of Tuwharetoa that he was being pursued by a war party from Ngati Te Aho, who wanted revenge for a previous incident involving Ngati Toa.

Te Heuheu directed Te Rauparaha to go to Lake Rotoaira to seek the protection of his relative Te Wharerangi.

At Lake Rotoaira, Te Wharerangi reluctantly agreed to assist Te Rauparaha and as the war party closed on their quarry guided by the incantations of their tohunga [scholar/priest] he instructed Te Rauparaha to climb into a kumara pit and for his wife, Te Rangikoea to sit on top. By combining the spiritual qualities of a woman ("the Noa") and of food, Te Wharerangi was able to weaken the tohunga's power.

When the pursuers arrived, Te Rauparaha could feel the power of the incantations and is said to have muttered "**Ka Mate! ka mate!**" under his breath (Will I die!) and "**Ka Ora! ka ora!**" (or will I live!) when the Noa reduced the incantation's effect. These lines were repeated many times coinciding with the waxing and waning of the tohunga's power until eventually Ngati Te Aho were convinced by Te Wharerangi that Te Rauparaha had escaped towards Taranaki. It was then that he finally exclaimed "**Ka ora, ka ora! Tenei te tangata puhuruhuru nana nei i tiki mai whakawhiti te ra!**" (I live! I live! For it was indeed the wondrous power of a woman ("the Noa") that fetched the sun and caused it to shine again!)

"**Upane, kaupane**", means "to line up in abreast or in rows", as one does to perform haka.

One could imagine his joy at not only eluding certain death by a mere whisker, but also coming out of the dark kumara pit into the light of day – "**Whiti te ra! Hi!**"

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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

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