

This Maori story explaining the origin of nature and humanity was compiled by Sir George Grey in the 1840's and 1850's when he was British governor of New Zealand. Faced with the need to communicate with Maori tribes then in rebellion against British rule, Grey compiled the tales to which many chiefs alluded in their negotiations with him. Grey's compilation was published in Maori in 1854 and in English in 1855.

The Separation of Heaven and Earth

All humans are descended from one pair of ancestors, Rangi and Papa, who are also called Heaven and Earth. In those days, Heaven and Earth clung closely together, and all was darkness. Rangi and Papa had six sons: Tane-mahuta, the father of the forests and their inhabitants; Tawhiri-ma-tea, the father of winds and storms; Tangaroa, the father of fish and reptiles; Tu-matauenga, the father of fierce human beings; Haumia-tikitiki, the father of food that grows without cultivation; and Rongo-ma-tane, the father of cultivated food. These six sons and all other beings lived in darkness for an extremely long time, able only to wonder what light and vision might be like.

Finally the sons of Heaven and Earth decided something must be done. Tu-matauenga, the father of fierce human beings, urged his brothers to slay their parents. However, Tane-mahuta, the father of the forests and their inhabitants, argued that they should separate their parents, making Rangi the distant sky over their heads and Papa the earth close to them like a mother. After long debate, the brothers agreed to this plan, except for Tawhiri-ma-tea, the father of winds and storms, who was distraught at the idea of separating their parents. The other brothers nonetheless proceeded with their plan.

Rongo-ma-tane, the father of cultivated food, rose and struggled to separate his parents, but he could not do it. Tangaroa, the father of fish and reptiles, also struggled but could not tear them apart. Haumia-tikitiki, the father of food that grows without cultivation, had no better luck at separating their parents. Tu-matauenga, the father of fierce human beings, likewise failed. Tane-mahuta, the father of the forests and their inhabitants, slowly rose up and struggled, but with little success. Then he put his head against the earth and, with his feet against the skies, slowly pushed them apart. His parents cried out in anguish, asking how their sons could do this, but Tane pushed and pushed until the sky was far above. As light spread across the earth, the multitude of humans that Rangi and Papa had parented were revealed.

Tawhiri-ma-tea, the father of winds and storms, was furious that his brothers had so cruelly separated their parents and thrust their father away. Tawhiri-ma-tea followed his father and hid in the sky and plotted his revenge. Soon he sent down storms and squalls and fiery clouds and hurricanes to punish his brother Tane-mahuta, the father of the forests and their inhabitants, breaking off the tall trees and leaving the forests in shambles. Likewise the storms swept down on the oceans of Tangaroa, the father of fish and reptiles, and piled up waves and generated great whirlpools. Tangaroa, frightened by the havoc in oceans, dove deep to escape Tawhiri-ma-tea's wrath.

Tangaroa abandoned his two grandchildren, the father of the fish and the father of the reptiles. The fish and reptiles were left not knowing what to do, and they debated how to escape the storm. Finally, the reptiles fled to the land and hid in the forests, and the fish fled for refuge to the sea. Tangaroa, angered at the reptiles' desertion and the forests' willingness to receive and protect them, now struggled with Tane-mahuta, the father of the forests and their inhabitants, who in turn fought back. Thus Tane provided the canoes, spears, and fish-hooks from the trees, and nets woven from fibrous plants, to capture the fish of Tangaroa's seas, and Tangaroa's waves attacked the shores of the forests, washing away the land and all the life it holds.

Tawhiri-ma-tea, the god of winds and storms, also lashed out at his brothers Haumia-tikitiki, the father of food that grows without cultivation, and Rongo-ma-tane, the father of cultivated food, for their role in the separation of his parents and exile of his father. However, Papa, the earth-mother whom the brothers had taken as their home, clasped up Haumia-tikitiki and Rongo-ma-tane and held them close in her to save them from Tawhiri-ma-tea's fury.

Only Tu-matauenga, the father of fierce human beings, withstood Tawhiri-ma-tea's wrath as the winds and storms attacked. Tu-matauenga was impervious, having planned the death of their parents and having been abandoned by his brothers on the Earth. When Tawhiri-ma-tea's gales finally subsided, Tu-matauenga began to plan his revenge on his cowardly and weak brothers. First he turned to Tane-mahuta, the father of the forests and their inhabitants, both because Tane had abandoned him and because he knew Tane's offspring were increasing and might ultimately overwhelm Tu-matauenga's human progeny. Taking the leaves of the whanake tree, he made them into snares and hung them in the forests, where he caught Tane's offspring and subdued the forest. Then he took on Tangaroa, the father of the seas and its life, and with nets he dragged Tangaroa's children from the seas. With a hoe and basket he dug up the children of Haumia-tikitiki, the god of food that needs no cultivation, and Rongo-ma-tane, the god of cultivated food. He dug up all kinds of plants and left them in the sun to dry, to gain revenge on those two brothers.

Tu-matauenga, the father of fierce human beings, thus consumed all his four brothers on Earth, and they became his food. Only one brother, Tawhiri-ma-tea, the god of winds and storms, remained unconquered, and to this day his storms attack human beings on both land and sea in revenge for the rending of Heaven and Earth.

George Grey, 1956, *Polynesian Mythology* (ed. by William W. Bird): Christchurch, Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd., 250 p. (BL 2615.G843p 1956)

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