

Te Whare Tapa Whā and Te Poutama o te Ora: An understanding of relevance

By Ruku I'Anson, 4 December 2025

Te Whare Tapa Whā – Duries (1984) foundational model of wellness is of a house that shelters and protects. Without a stable house, there can be no safe ascent. The four dimensions of Taha Tinana, Taha Wairua, Taha Whānau and, Taha Hinengaro are discussed further.

Taha Tinana (Physical Health) – as the Ground or Papa.

Transformation and change require physical capacity to sustain body performance. Without attention to sleep, nutrition, movement, and bodily rest, transformation efforts collapse. The physical dimension grounds the spiritual work, providing the stamina needed for sustained change. When someone embarks on a journey to break dysfunctional patterns, their physical wellbeing determines whether they can maintain the practice or abandon it when difficulty arises. The nine-day and 27-day cycles of Te Poutama o te Ora require physical capacity to sustain.

Taha Wairua (Spiritual Health) - as the Compass

The spiritual dimension orients the transformation journey. It answers the question: transformation toward what? Without spiritual grounding—connection to purpose, ancestors, the sacred—the nine-element cycle becomes mechanical self-improvement rather than genuine growth. Wairua provides the why that sustains commitment when the pathway becomes steep.

Taha Whānau (Family Health) - as Support

Relational wellness provides the scaffolding for transformation. Attempting significant change in isolation often fails because we need others to witness, encourage, and hold us accountable. The whānau dimension reminds us that transformation is inherently relational—we change within the context of our connections, and our changes ripple through our relationships.

Taha Hinengaro (Mental Health) - as Navigator

Mental and emotional wellbeing determines our capacity to navigate the transformation process with awareness and skill. The Hinengaro dimension enables us to recognise patterns, make conscious choices, regulate emotions during difficulty, and integrate new insights. Without mental clarity and emotional resilience, we cannot work effectively with the nine elements or sustain practice through resistance.

Te Whare Tapa Whā identifies what must be attended to for wellness being relevant and appropriate today. Te Poutama o te Ora seeks to rest on that foundation introducing Tuakiri (self-identity) as an outcome of that base and how that is applied to the spirituality of Iwa (number 9).

As mentioned in my previous blog

“Can this model be integrated with the spiritual rhythms of the universe to create an all-encompassing wellness pathway? And,

“What role does Tuakiri (identity) play in this model?”

Te Poutama o te Ora talks of Tuakiri (Identity) as Integration

Identity coherence allows transformation to stick rather than fragment. As we move through nine-day cycles and encounter different aspects of ourselves, Tuakiri provides the thread of continuity. It answers: who am I becoming through this process? How does this change integrate with my sense of self, my culture, my place in the world?

Identity is a core Pou of this model where the outcomes develop Tū Pūmau (standing firm/consistency), that lead to Whai Hua (bearing fruit/productivity) that in turns gives Tū Māia (grounded stability). Without identity stability, transformation can feel disorienting rather than empowering.

Rhythm and Timing

The nine-day and 27-day cycles provide specific timeframes for working with each dimension. The cyclical nature honours that wellness is not a destination but a continuous process of attention and renewal.

Integration of Context

Te Poutama o te Ora acknowledges that the five core dimensions don't exist in a vacuum, recognising the environment (Taiao), circumstances (Āhuatanga), and influences (Pānga) shape how we see ourselves. The journey acknowledges that transformation is dynamic, nonlinear, and requires active navigation rather than passive maintenance; 'the lived experience of moving through wellness work'.

When we then look to connect that with Wairua (spiritual) frameworks or universal rhythms this elevates wellness from individualistic self-optimisation

to participation in something larger. The spiritual significance of nine-day cycles, the connection to lunar rhythms through the Maramataka, the recognition of completion and renewal—these elements add depth that transcends clinical application.

Relevance for Today: Why This Integration Matters Now

The integration of Te Whare Tapa Whā with Te Poutama o te Ora addresses specific challenges of contemporary existence of fast paced living, and the continual aspirations of managing work and personal time in effective ways.

Modern life fragments attention across countless domains. We manage multiple identities (professional, familial, online), respond to constant information streams, and face ever-expanding demands.

From a recent blog

“We've read the books about habits, listened to the podcasts about purpose and followed...[others]...who seem to have it all figured out. And yet, something still feels fragmented. We're managing pieces of ourselves rather than experiencing genuine wholeness...The exhaustion isn't from lack of effort...What if the issue isn't that we need *more* tools, but that we need a different kind of map altogether?” (IAnTeMo.com, p.1).

In this regard Te Poutama o te Ora sees bridging the benefits to Digital Wellbeing and Money Healing as being natural fits.

Disconnection from Natural Rhythms

Contemporary life operates on artificial time—the relentless pace of work weeks, the always-on nature of digital connectivity, the devaluation of rest and seasonality. An example of this is where businesses schedule meetings over

lunch breaks, sending the message that personal wellness is not a priority, and neither are healthy eating habits. We live increasingly disconnected from lunar cycles, seasonal changes, and biological rhythms. This disconnection manifests in sleep disruption, hormonal imbalances, burnout, and a pervasive sense of being out of sync with us.

Integrating the Maramataka (Māori lunar cycles) within Te Poutama o te Ora reconnects personal transformation to natural time. The nine-day cycles echo ultradian rhythms observable in biology. The 27-day cycles approximate lunar phases. The emphasis on completion and renewal mirrors seasonal patterns. This isn't nostalgic return to pre-modern life but intentional reclamation of rhythms that remain encoded in our bodies despite technological acceleration.

In this regard Te Poutama o te Ora sees bridging the benefits to Disconnection of the Puku or reclaiming our Puku wisdom as a further natural fit.

Identity Crisis and Cultural Displacement

Globalization, digital culture, and social media create unique identity challenges. People navigate multiple cultural contexts, online and offline identities, rapid social change, and often feel unmoored from cultural roots.

For Māori and other indigenous peoples, there's the additional challenge of cultural reclamation after colonization. For everyone, there's the question: who am I when traditional identity markers (geography, occupation, religion, family structure) become fluid?

The explicit inclusion of Tuakiri, looks to directly addresses this. It recognises that identity work is not luxury but necessity, not automatically achieved through family connection (Whānau) or spiritual practice (Wairua) but requiring its own attention. Engaging with this framework might involve reclamation of cultural practices and, whakapapa exploration. For others, it might involve integrating multiple identities, clarifying values, or developing coherent self-narrative.

Mental Health Crisis

In my work as a practitioner on a mental health crisis platform has shown how mental health has reached crisis proportions, particularly among young people. There is a clear need for wanting alternatives to medications although those have their rightful place following diagnoses of mental illnesses. In saying that I have found there is disconnection, lack of purpose, unhealthy environments, fractured relationships, and identity confusion.

What then can be done to bring back that connection within their lives, in a way that complements medical interventions but enables the journey to broader wellness. Mental health (Hinengaro) exists in relationship to physical health, spiritual connection, family support, identity coherence, and environmental conditions.

Te Whare Tapa Whā grounds wellness in relationship—to whānau, to ancestors, to community, to the sacred. Wellness emerges from connection. Te Poutama o te Ora looks to extend this grounding by offering a framework that requires no products, no expensive interventions, no commercial infrastructure. It can be practiced by anyone, anywhere, guided by ancient

wisdom. The emphasis on cyclical practice over linear achievement moves away from wellness being a commodity that must be attained. There's no end point where you've "achieved wellness" and can stop. There's no product that will shortcut the journey. There's only continuous engagement with the dimensions of life, over and over, in spiral rather than straight line.

There are practical applications to distinctive challenges:

- Encouraging manageable cycles for engagement
- Assisting reconnection to natural rhythms while remaining practical
- Addressing identity complexity without reducing identity to a single dimension
- Situating mental health within a holistic framework rather than isolating symptoms
- It bridges personal and environmental wellness

Perhaps most significantly, it honours indigenous wisdom while demonstrating universal applicability.

The question remains: will this integration prove useful in actual practice? The answer can only emerge from lived experience—from working with clients, exploring collective wellness, from individuals engaging with the nine elements over repeated cycles.

Theory provides possibility; practice reveals truth.

What becomes clear, however, is that contemporary wellness challenges require more than incremental adjustments to Western medical models. They require frameworks that address the whole person within context, that honour cyclical rather than linear time, that reconnect rather than further fragment.

Te Poutama o te Ora uses western methodologies and interweaves the components of Te Whare Tapa Whā to offer such an approach. By connecting the requirements of both worlds, it enables us to move to wholeness that accommodates both demands, not as replacements but as our integrated self.