

## **Te Maramataka as the Rhythmic Foundation of Te Poutama o te Ora Restoring Indigenous Lunar Knowledge within a Nine-Dimension Wellness Framework**

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### **Abstract**

The Maramataka, the traditional Māori lunar calendar of Aotearoa New Zealand, is a connected way of understanding the stars, the environment, food growing, and spiritual life as one whole system. This article explores how its four principal lunar phases align with Te Poutama o te Ora (TPO), a contemporary nine-dimension Māori wellness framework that extends Te Whare Tapa Whā to include digital wellbeing (taha Matihiko), financial wellbeing (taha Pūtea), food sovereignty (taha kai), identity sovereignty (taha Tuakiri), and whakapapa-based interconnection (taha Whakapapa).

Drawing on Mātauranga Māori work that explores healing from colonisation, and research showing that health is shaped by our physical wellbeing, our thoughts and feelings, and our relationships (Smith, 2012; Durie, 2001), this article argues that the Maramataka provides the natural timing structure for TPO. By mapping Te Marama Tupu, Te Marama Kaha, Te Marama Hinga, and Te Marama Mate across the nine dimensions, the article shows how lunar rhythms support holistic wellbeing in ways that Western health systems have not fully integrated. Implications for Kaupapa Māori health practice and programme delivery in Aotearoa are discussed.

Keywords: Maramataka, Te Poutama o te Ora, Māori wellness, nine-dimension framework, lunar calendar, decolonisation, holistic health, Te Whare Tapa Whā, taha Matihiko, taha Pūtea, taha Kai, Aotearoa

### **1. Introduction**

Western systems of health have historically marginalised Indigenous knowledge (Smith, 2012; Durie, 2001). In Aotearoa, the Māori health model Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1985) is a recognised holistic framework of wellbeing, however the

Maramataka remains underused in formal health practice. The Maramataka is more than a calendar. It is a knowledge system of observing the moon and understanding how its phases influence land, sea, food systems, and human energy. For generations, Māori communities used it to guide planting, fishing, ceremony, travel, and rest (Mātāmua, 2017; Keane, 2020). It organised life in rhythm with te Taiao rather than in opposition to it.

Te Poutama o te Ora builds on this holistic worldview. Expanding Te Whare Tapa Whā's four dimensions, TPO includes environmental wellbeing (taha whenua), digital wellbeing (taha Matihiko), financial wellbeing (taha Pūtea), food sovereignty (taha Kai), and dimensions centred on whakapapa, identity, and life purpose. TPO recognises that colonisation disrupted not only spiritual and physical health, but also economic systems, food systems, and social structures (Pihama et al., 2014). This article proposes that the Maramataka provides the natural temporal spine for TPO - the rhythmic infrastructure through which each of TPO's nine dimensions can be activated, sustained, and renewed in alignment with the living patterns of te Taiao (the natural world).

This article seeks to address a gap in the literature through examination of the Maramataka's core principles, its four principal phases, its alignment with each of TPO's nine dimensions, and its implications for contemporary wellness practice in Aotearoa. In doing so, this article contributes to broader conversations about the decolonisation of health systems and the revitalisation of indigenous knowledge as a living resource for wellbeing.

## 2. Cultural and Theoretical Foundations

### 2.1 Mātauranga Māori

The Maramataka sits within Mātauranga Māori — the body of Māori knowledge shaped by long-standing relationships with land and cosmos (Royal, 2009; Marsden, 2003; Walker, 1990). Unlike Western traditions that separate disciplines into categories, Mātauranga Māori sees knowledge as relational and interconnected.

Different Iwi hold regional variations of the Maramataka (Mātāmua, 2017). This local adaptation reflects ecological specificity rather than inconsistency. TPO mirrors this principle by allowing localised, whānau-centred application of shared wellness dimensions.

### 2.2 Te Poutama o te Ora

Te Poutama o te Ora (The Stairway to Wellness) presents an immersion of contemporary methods those of goal setting and programme delivery with the four walls of Te Whare Tapa Whā – tinana, hinengaro, wairua and whanau. A further ‘Pou’ is added that of tuakiri – identity this being the central Poutokomanawa and proposes that restoration of identity enables individuals to become ‘tau’. When we are ‘tau’ our world is ‘tau’.

This holistic approach is further conceptualised across nine interconnected dimensions and seeks to address the deepest dimension of identity, purpose and whakapapa-rooted wholeness:

- Taha Whānau/Whakapapa (relational wellbeing)
- Taha Tinana (physical wellbeing)
- Taha Tuakiri (identity and purpose)
- Taha Wairua (spiritual wellbeing)
- Taha Hinengaro (mental and emotional wellbeing)
- Taha Matihiko (digital wellbeing)
- Taha Pūtea (financial wellbeing)
- Taha Kai (food sovereignty)
- Taha Whenua (environmental wellbeing)

TPO frames wellness challenges — including financial precarity, digital over-dependence, nutritional inequity, and environmental disconnection — as forms of colonisation requiring active resistance, cultural reorientation, and systemic healing rather than personal failure or individual deficiency (Came, 2014; Pihama et al., 2014). This framing is consistent with the Maramataka's historical function as a system that organised communal life in resistance to disruption and in alignment with principles of reciprocity, sustainability, and cyclical renewal.

## 2.3 Historical Context

Early ethnographic records documented the depth of Māori astronomical and ecological knowledge (Best, 1922), though often through colonial interpretation (Smith, 2012). Suppression of language and land access disrupted Maramataka transmission and constitutes what Pihama et al. (2014) have termed epistemic violence: the systematic undermining of indigenous knowledge systems as part of broader processes of cultural erasure. The contemporary revitalisation of the Maramataka must therefore be understood within this historical context as an act of cultural sovereignty and epistemological resistance — precisely the orientation that TPO embodies across each of its nine dimensions.

## 3. The Four Principal Lunar Phases

The Maramataka structures the lunar month — approximately 29.5 days in duration — into a sequence of named nights, each carrying specific guidance for activity. These are commonly grouped into four principal phases, each with distinct energetic characteristics and practical implications for the dimensions of TPO (Mātāmua, 2017; Keane, 2020).

### 3.1 Te Marama Tupu — Waxing Moon (Tamatea Āio)

This phase follows the new moon and is associated with increasing light and energy. Traditionally, it was considered favourable for planting and beginning new ventures. Agricultural research similarly notes lunar influence on plant growth (Thun, 2003; Spiess, 2011). Beyond agriculture, the waxing moon represents a period of expansion, creativity, and initiatory action, making it well suited to beginning new projects, establishing social relationships, and physical exertion.

#### **TPO alignment:**

- Taha tinana — physical activity and building strength
- Taha Pūtea — initiating financial plans
- Taha Matihiko — creative and digital output

This is the phase for building — in body, in community, and in the practical structures of daily life.

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### 3.2 Te Marama Kaha — Full Moon (Te Rākaunui)

The full moon phase — designated Te Rākaunui in the Maramataka — represents the apex of the lunar cycle, a time of peak energy, illumination, and community gathering. Traditionally, the full moon facilitated large-scale communal activities including harvest, ceremony, and the sharing of knowledge across hapū. The heightened visibility of the night landscape during this phase also supported navigation, fishing, and extended travel.

#### **TPO alignment:**

- Taha whānau — connection and celebration
- Taha wairua — ceremony and karakia
- Taha kai — sharing food and abundance

The full moon calls individuals and their community into fullness — into the expression and celebration of what has been cultivated through the preceding weeks.

### 3.3 Te Marama Hinga — Waning Moon (Tangaroa)

As lunar energy diminishes across the waning phase, the Maramataka prescribes a corresponding shift in human activity toward consolidation, reflection, and healing. Named in reference to Tangaroa, the atua (deity) of the sea and fish, this phase was traditionally associated with particularly productive fishing conditions — a claim supported by contemporary marine biology research on tidal behaviour and fish feeding patterns (Tollefsen et al., 2000). From a wellness standpoint, the waning moon represents an ideal window for restorative and cathartic practices: rest, meditation, therapeutic intervention, and emotional processing.

#### **TPO alignment:**

- Taha hinengaro — emotional processing
- Taha whenua — environmental observation and care
- Taha Pūtea — reviewing finances

This is the phase for inward movement — for reviewing what has been lived and preparing for renewal.

### 3.4 Te Marama Mate — Dark Moon (Ōmutu)

The dark moon phase — the final stage before lunar renewal — is perhaps the most spiritually significant in the Maramataka. Designated Ōmutu, this phase is associated with Tapu (sacredness and restriction), preparation, and the quietude that precedes regeneration. Traditionally, it was a time for spiritual practices, internal reflection, and attending to matters of whakapapa. Physical activity was generally discouraged, and the focus turned toward inner renewal and the clearing of energetic and relational debris.

### **TPO alignment:**

- Taha wairua — deep spiritual practice
- Taha hinengaro — release and healing
- Ninth dimension — identity and purpose

This phase provides cultural grounding for practices such as fasting, digital detoxification, financial fasting, and contemplative retreat.

## **4. The Maramataka Across the Nine Dimensions**

TPO's nine dimensions are not merely parallel domains of wellness but an integrated ecology in which each dimension both informs and is informed by the others. The Maramataka provides the temporal architecture through which this integration can be practically enacted — a living calendar that assigns appropriate activity to each dimension according to the energetic character of the lunar phase. This section examines how the Maramataka's cyclical intelligence applies across each of TPO's dimensions.

**Taha tinana – Physical Wellness:** The Maramataka's differentiation of high-energy phases (Te Marama Tupu and Te Marama Kaha) and restorative phases (Te Marama Hinga and Te Marama Mate) provides a culturally grounded template for periodising physical training, therapeutic interventions, and occupational demands. Align activity and rest with natural cycles. This approach resonates with research demonstrating how energies, performance, and recovery fluctuate in rhythmic patterns partially captured by the 24-hour circadian model (Roenneberg, 2012; Foster & Kreitzman, 2004). The Maramataka offers a natural sequencing principle for movement practices, physical challenges, and rest periods that honours the body's indigenous rhythmicity.

**Taha hinengaro – Mental and Emotional Wellness:** The waning and dark moon phases of the Maramataka create culturally legitimate containers for mental and emotional processing — for grief, reflection, therapeutic engagement, and the integration of lived experience. Within TPO's approach to taha hinengaro, which frames mental health challenges as responses to systemic disruption rather than individual pathology, the Maramataka provides a non-pathologising explanation for the ebbs and flows of emotional availability. It is possible to use lunar phase awareness to time therapeutic interventions, group processing sessions, and individual reflection practices in ways that work with, rather than against, natural energetic cycles.

**Taha wairua – Spiritual Wellness:** Perhaps the most elemental alignment exists between the Maramataka and taha wairua. The full moon and dark moon phases carry the highest spiritual significance in the Maramataka — the former associated with communal ceremony and the expression of collective spiritual life, the latter with Tapu, ancestral connection, and deep inner work. TPO's understanding of spiritual wellness — which includes connection to whakapapa, relationship with atua, the practice of karakia, and attunement to the sacred dimensions of life — finds in the Maramataka a natural temporal guide for when and how spiritual practices can be most meaningfully engaged. The Maramataka can be utilised in spiritual practice by embedding it within the rhythm living cosmos rather than reducing it to personal preference or schedule availability.

**Taha whānau / whakapapa – Social and Relational Wellness:** The Maramataka has always been fundamentally communal — its knowledge was held and practised collectively, its guidance shaping the shared rhythms of hapū life. TPO's dimension of taha whānau, which positions relational health as inseparable from individual wellness, finds powerful resonance here. The full moon phase, with its emphasis on gathering, celebration, and the sharing of resources across community lines, provides a rhythmic structure for whānau connection that resists the isolation and individualism that colonisation has intensified. The Maramataka offers a framework for scheduling whānau hui, community celebrations, and shared activities in ways that align with natural relational energy.

**Taha whenua – Environmental and Ecological Wellness:** The inclusion of this wellness dimension reflects the inseparability of human wellbeing from the health of

te Taiao. The Maramataka is, at its core, a system for reading and responding to ecological signals — the state of the moon, the behaviour of birds and fish, the readiness of soil and season. The Maramataka provides not merely metaphorical alignment but practical guidance: when to tend gardens, when to fish, when to rest the land, and when to observe and listen. Integrating Maramataka awareness into taha whenua practices reconnects people to the rhythmic intelligence of their environments in ways that support both personal and planetary wellness.

**Taha Matihiko – Digital Wellness:** This wellness dimension acknowledges that technology now mediates a significant portion of contemporary life, with profound implications for attention, identity, relational depth, and mental health. The Maramataka's periodic designation of Ōmutu — the dark moon as a time of digital detoxification and restorative withdrawal from outward activity — provides a culturally grounded rationale for cyclical digital fasting that goes beyond individual willpower or behavioural intervention (Carroll et al., 2020). The Maramataka provides a template for scheduling digital sabbaths, periods of reduced screen engagement, and technology-free communal gatherings that are experienced not as deprivation but as alignment with indigenous temporal wisdom.

**Taha Pūtea – Financial Wellness:** The inclusion of taha Pūtea responds to the reality that financial insecurity is one of the most significant and systematically overlooked determinants of Māori wellbeing — a consequence not of individual failure but of structural dispossession and ongoing economic marginalisation (cf. Came, 2014). The Maramataka provides a natural rhythm for financial practice: the waxing moon phase for initiating income activities, investment, and new financial plans; the full moon for abundance practices, generosity, and communal resource sharing; the waning moon for reviewing, consolidating, and ensuring sustainability; and the dark moon for financial rest, reflection, and releasing financial anxiety. This temporal structure supports the development of financial literacy and practice within a culturally meaningful framework rather than an imported Western paradigm.

**Taha kai – Food and Nutritional Sovereignty:** The Maramataka's most historically documented application is in the domain of food — the timing of planting, harvesting, fishing, and food preservation according to lunar phases in ways that optimise yield and honour ecological reciprocity (Mātāmua, 2017; Thun, 2003). The dimension of

taha kai extends beyond nutritional adequacy to encompass food sovereignty, cultural food practices, and the healing of the relationship between Māori communities and their food systems — a relationship severely disrupted by colonisation and its attendant poverty, land alienation, and the replacement of traditional foods with processed commodities (Reid & Robson, 2007). The Maramataka restores a temporal intelligence to food practice — connecting growing, harvesting, preparing, and sharing food to the living rhythms of te Taiao in ways that nourish taha tinana, taha wairua, and taha whānau simultaneously.

**Taha tuakiri – Whakapapa, Identity and Purpose:** The ninth and integrating dimension addresses the deepest layer of human wellbeing: one's relationship with whakapapa, with one's core identity, and with a sense of purpose that extends across generations. This dimension cannot be adequately addressed through linear therapeutic protocols or scheduled interventions; it requires a container of sacred time. The dark moon phase of the Maramataka — Ōmutu — provides precisely this: a regularly occurring period of Tapu, deep reflection, and ancestral attunement that holds space for questions of identity and purpose to surface and be heard. This phase represents the cyclical renewal of the self's deepest foundations, ensuring that growth in all other dimensions remains rooted in whakapapa and identity rather than displaced from it.

## **5. Digital Integration and Revitalisation of the Maramataka**

The emergence of digital Maramataka tools — including mobile applications, online platforms, and interactive calendars — represents a significant development in the revitalisation and accessibility of this knowledge system. Proponents argue that digital tools can democratise access to Maramataka guidance, extending its reach to urban Māori communities with limited access to traditional knowledge holders (kaumātua), and supporting transmission of ecological knowledge to younger generations accustomed to technology-mediated learning (Lee, 2018). However, digitisation requires careful governance to avoid appropriation (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016; Smith, 2012). The CARE principles for indigenous data governance (Carroll et al., 2020) provide a relevant framework for ethical digital stewardship.

The specific intersection of the Maramataka with taha Matihiko dimension is particularly generative: a digital wellness tool that incorporates Maramataka phase

awareness could offer participants personalised guidance across all nine dimensions in synchrony with lunar rhythms — thereby using digital technology not to create new patterns of disconnection but to reweave participants into the living cadence of te Taiao. Such an application would represent a direct expression of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) in the digital domain.

## **6. Implications for Health Practice**

The Maramataka represents one of Aotearoa's most profound indigenous contributions to the science and practice of human wellbeing. Institutional racism continues to limit Māori health frameworks within mainstream systems (Came, 2014). Integrating the Maramataka into TPO strengthens culturally grounded, decolonised practice and aligns with He Korowai Oranga (Ministry of Health, 2014).

Maramataka provides a non-pathological, culturally grounded framework for understanding fluctuating energy states or mood as rhythmic rather than pathological. This shift restores dignity to lived experience and situates wellness within ecological context.

## **7. Conclusion**

The Maramataka remains a living system. Integrated with Te Poutama o te Ora, it provides a cyclical structure for physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, environmental, digital, financial, and identity-based wellbeing. This article has argued that the Maramataka, far from being merely a historical artefact or cultural curiosity, provides the natural temporal spine of Te Poutama o te Ora — the rhythmic infrastructure through which each of its nine wellness dimensions can be authentically activated, practised, and renewed in alignment with te Taiao.

The four principal phases of the Maramataka — Te Marama Tupu, Te Marama Kaha, Te Marama Hinga, and Te Marama Mate — offer a temporally structured framework for aligning human activity with natural rhythms in ways that support each of TPO's nine dimensions. Such an integration could constitute a culturally grounded congruent model for holistic wellness.

Future research should examine outcomes of Maramataka-informed TPO programmes and ensure the design of Kaupapa Māori digital tools that integrate both the Maramataka and the nine-dimension TPO framework.

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