

Taiaroa / Ratana connection

This summary has been compiled for those members of the Taiaroa whanau who do not belong to the Ratana Church but, like me, would like to understand more about the influence Ratana has had on our family.

As far as we know Tamatea Te Waati Taiaroa (my father) was not a member of the Ratana church and would have been only a teenager when the movement was founded in 1920's. However, his brothers Mitai (Mick) and Onewa (Nev) later both married members of the Ratana family and their descendants later became quite influential in the church. Therefore, it is difficult to understand the present-day Taiaroa family without understanding something about the Ratana movement.

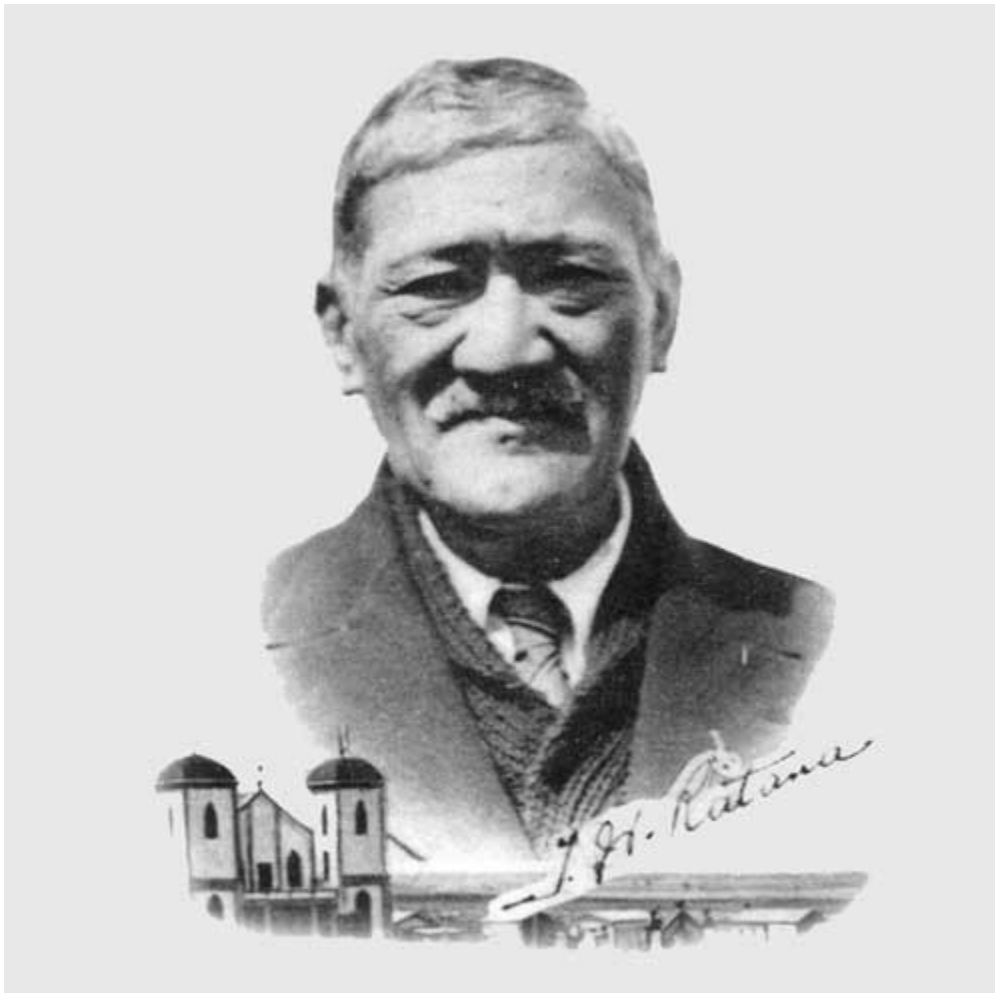
Ratana's aunt, Mere Rikiriki predicted on many occasions from 1912 onwards that another leader for the Maori people would soon arise among them and she told her nephew that a sign would come to convince him of his mission.

This came when Ratana, his wife, and their twin sons were camping on the beach near their home in the Whangaehu-Turakina area south east of Wanganui.

Footnote: (Tamatea's grandfather's(Hoani I) home farm was located on Beach Road, Whangaehu which leads to this beach. It is likely that his father Te Waati (my grandfather) was born here sometime between 1870 and 1876 and that Tamatea(my father) was also born here in 1907.)

On this occasion two whales were cast up on the shore by extra large waves. One was killed by the impact and the other died after struggling for a while...the incident was recognised as holding spiritual significance. In 1918, on the 8 November Ratana was standing on the verandah of his farmhouse looking out to the Tasman Sea, when he saw a small cloud approaching...he experienced a burning sensation and heard a voice speak to him: "...I am the Holy Ghost...I have come back to Aotearoa to choose you, the Maori people....Ratana I appoint you as the Mouthpiece of God...Unite the

Maori people, turning them to Jehovah...” Later the same evening he was visited by an angel who also gave him the message of God: “He was to turn the people from fear of moreporks and roosters, and their belief in atua hidden in sticks and clothing, the relics of ancestors, back to belief in Jehovah....He was to destroy the power of the tohunga and was to cure the spirits and bodies of the people.”



Ratana, who was of Ngati Apa and Ngati Raukawa descent, was born to an Anglican father and Methodist mother. At the time he received his revelation he was aged 45.

In the months that followed, the news of Ratana’s vision spread...and people began to come to meet the new prophet. As more and more

moved their homes to be near him a town sprung up around the family farmhouse, and the settlement became known as Ratana Pa in order to distinguish it from the man.

Footnote: (This township of Ratana Pa is only a few kilometres from the Beach Road family farm).

At Christmas 1920 large numbers of visitors, some attracted by his healing work, swelled the settlement to a total of 3,000. Services held at this time included members of all the Protestant churches and the Catholics...Ratana, himself proclaimed that he merely pointed the way, that he was the 'mouthpiece', or Mangai, of God...the prescribed path was one of faith, repentance, and the rejection of the ways of the past.

During 1921 he travelled NZ preaching his message and conducting a mission of healing. In 1924 he led a party to England to bring notice of the wrongs suffered by Maori to the British Crown and Government. The group also travelled throughout Europe, Japan and again in 1925 to America, Canada and Mexico.

Footnote: (This explains why a Japanese bishop, Juji Nakada, visited Ratana in 1928 for the opening of the Ratana Temple and probably gave his name to Nakata(Nev's son) whose full name is Juji Nakada Taiaroa (my first cousin) and who still runs one of the stores at Ratana Pa today.)

At first the established churches supported Ratana's work as he was instrumental in bringing large numbers of previously disillusioned people back to Christian beliefs. Between 1925 and 1927 the Ratana church was separately registered and doctrine and practices seemed to be contrary to the teachings of the orthodox churches which then declared that church members could not also be members of the Ratana movement. Whilst some families and groups left to rejoin their previous churches the membership of the Ratana Church grew.

In 1936 census figures showed that almost twenty per cent of Maori claimed to belong.

Ratana's mission had two aspects: the spiritual was symbolised by the first of the two whales which died without a struggle on the beach; likewise by Arepa(Alpha) one of the twin sons, who when Ratana announced that his spiritual mission was completed in 1928, even though he was a young man of eighteen, recognised that his life was over, and after a long illness died in 1930...

...the material work, was symbolised by Omeka(Omega), the other twin son; and also by the second whale which had thrashed around on the beach for some time before dying...and therefore represented the conflicts between the Movement and the rest of society. This centred mainly on the promotion of recognition of the promises included in the Treaty of Waitangi. This included a long campaign to have Ratana candidates elected to the four Maori seats in Parliament. The first was elected in 1932 and by 1943 all four seats were held by Ratana members, a state that continued for twenty years until 1963. As a result of a political alliance formed earlier by Ratana with the Labour Prime Minister Michael Savage these MPs always supported the Labour Party.

Footnote: (Well-known Ratana MPs of this time included three members of the Ratana family, two of the Tirakatene family, two of the Paikea family, Koro Wetere, Matiu Rata and even today Tariana Turia and Mita Rinui)

When Eruera Tirikatene succeeded to the House in 1932, he took Omeka into the debating chamber in order to show that the material aim was now accomplished. The second twin's purpose being then completed, he went to bed and died that November.

The Mangai himself died on 18 September 1939 having passed on the responsibility for the church to his eldest son, Tokouru.

It seems Ratana saw himself as inspired in the biblical sense, yet not possessing any divinity of his own. Followers did try to interpret some of his statements as if he was another Christ despite Ratana's denials. There was a spiritual basis to the movement rather than political... "First let us unite in the Father, and then we shall unite in the land," he replied when asked to involve himself in the land issue.

The movement retained the prevalent Maori belief that the race was connected with the ancient Israelites....Ratana had been told in his vision, that the Maori were the new "Chosen People"...the ones to bear the name of Jehovah in this new age...consequently they referred to themselves as the Morehu(the Survivors or Remnant)...in the same way that the Israelites condemned the practices of the past so Ratana insisted that the people give up all recourse to traditional religious notions and rites...he visited sacred sites and destroyed their sanctity...he deliberately avoided adhering to Maori social customs such as marae etiquette, the hereditary class system, and the lengthy tangihanga; and refused to allow any Maori carvings to be incorporated in buildings associated with the church...the future of the people was seen in the adoption of European ways rather than in the retention of their own.

In his healing work Ratana's emphasis was on faith in God...his method of effecting a cure often involved obtaining a confession from the sufferer that his complaint had a traditional cause....and thousands obtained cures from a great variety of ailments. It is said that when later in his life, greater expectations were placed upon him by his followers, he lost his healing powers.

The organisation of the Ratana Church was similar to the established churches...the running of affairs was in the hands of a synod, committees, and registered ministers who were ordained and wore brightly coloured robes of blue, white, purple, gold and red similar to those worn by the priesthood of the Hebrews.... Services consist of hymns, reading from the scriptures, prayer and addresses. Weddings, baptisms and funerals are marked by set services...Holy Communion is not observed as a regular practice... Church buildings resemble their Christian counterparts...one difference was the addition "We believe that Mr T. W. Ratana was inspired and that through the Holy Spirit was appointed the Mangai of God to the Maori people," to the usual statement of belief in God, Christ and Holy Ghost... angels also play a larger role in the Ratana belief...they also have the notion of saints; the three children of the Mangai were given this status after their death... Arepa(Alpha) and Omeka(Omega), the sons who symbolised the spiritual and material missions, together with Hamuera, a younger son whose death at age seven in 1934 represented the "Annihilation of Tohungaism"...

Ratana celebrate the usual holy days but also the anniversary of Ratana's birthday, 25 January, and his receipt of revelation on 8 November.

A code of belief and behaviour drawn up in 1921 contained the following:

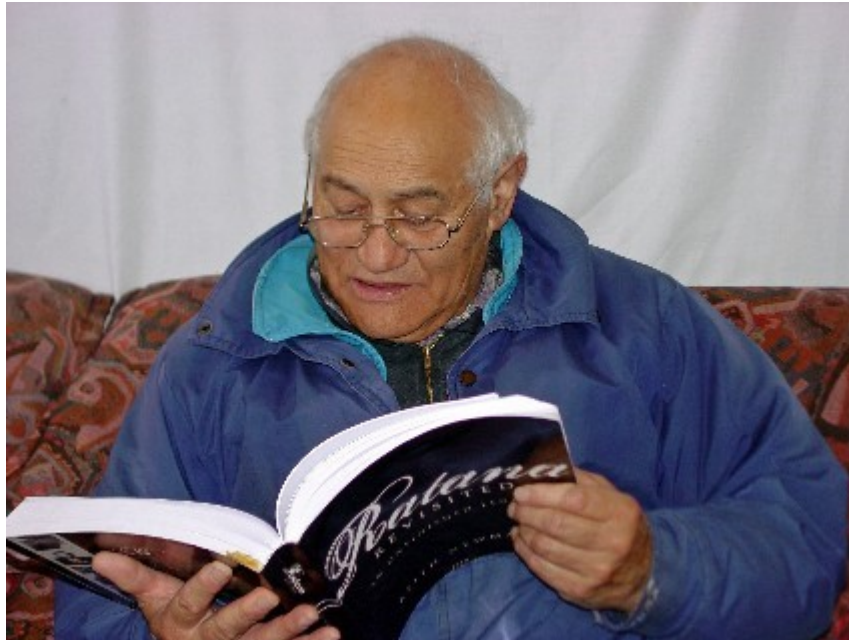
1. Obedience to Ratana's message
2. Acceptance of absolute faith in the Christian God.
3. The renouncing of all Maori superstitions.
4. All who are not baptised will be baptised forthwith.
5. That marriage be more sincerely honoured.
6. That greater care should be taken of children who should be wisely fed and tended.
7. That people pray for power to eschew intoxicating liquor
8. That cigarette smoking among children and women nursing infants be discontinued.
9. That prayers be held in every home.
10. That the duration of the tangi be curtailed.
11. That people should retain membership of churches founded on Christian faith.
12. That even if Ratana himself should fail, he has now shown them the right way.

A Presbyterian historian wrote of the Ratana movement: "Since the early spread of the Gospel in New Zealand, there has been no other spiritual awakening of Maoridom to compare with this. Many Maoris whose religion had been purely formal were seized with intense religious conviction...Hundreds of Maori men who had been hopeless slaves of alcohol were suddenly transformed and liberated from their bondage. The moral stimulus of those early days of the Ratana movement was more wonderful even than some of the marvellous physical healing which undoubtedly took place."

When Tokouru died it was expected that Rawinia(Uncle Mitai's wife) would become the Tumuaki or President of the Church but she turned down the offer. At this time, the members of the Ratana family only were qualified to appoint the Tumuaki. In succession Mrs Iriaka Ratana, Te Puhi Aotea and Reo Hura all members of the Ratana family held the office of Tumuaki. In 1993, Sel Raniera was the first

Tumuaki elected by the people and he has since been succeeded in 1999 by

Harerangi Meihana (Harry Mason), who coincidentally is both a member of the Ratana family (his mother was Rawinia Ratana) and the Taiaroa family. He is Uncle Mitai's son (my first cousin).



Harerangi Meihana—President of Ratana Church

The Ratana Church in the latest census numbers 50,000 among its followers. This would be approximately (percentage) of the Maori population. In the recent reunion held in Turangi I would estimate more than a third of the participants were “morehu”—followers of the Ratana belief. In Ratana Pa today more than (percentage) of the population of the total township of(numbers) would be related to the Taiaroa Family.

(Need to get Soraya/Andre to check or provide these numbers.)

This is a summary of an extract from “Mana from Heaven” by Bronwyn Elsmore, A Cenury of Maori Prophets in New Zealand, published by Reed, 1999 which also acknowledges the biography of Ratana by J. M. Henderson published in 1972 and discussions with *Andre Meihana (Aare’s son)*.

Mervyn Taiaroa, January, 2002.