



COLLECTIVE
change lab

STORIES OF WHAT IS POSSIBLE
IN SYSTEMIC HEALING

Haumanu. A Healing Approach to Systems



Haumanu

Stories of What is Possible in Systemic Healing: Haumanu. A Healing Approach to Systems

What is it like to be the system changing?

An Invitation to Begin

Welcome.

We warmly invite you in.

Take your time.

Take your breath.

And allow yourself to gently land.

We invite you to come on a journey with us; to enter a paradigm, a worldview that may be different from your own, and experience restorative systems change from the inside. We invite you to sense what being a system changing feels like, and the generative possibilities of inhabiting this paradigm.

Pause...breathe...settle...

Let us start with the beautiful, potent body system: your body—a magnificent evolutionary being that is a holon, a microcosm of the macro world. A universe.

Notice what it is like to approach your body in this way and invite in awe and curiosity for all it holds and its natural abilities—even if you have yet to discover them.

Feel into your relationship with your body—just be gently truthful. Much of that relationship is wired with the distortion of collective trauma—where our bodies are disciplined by normative ideas of size, color, shape and beauty that are internalized deep within us and self-policed. Bodies, we have learned, need to be good, healthy, some view of perfect. They have been suppressed in so many ways.

What is arising? Also notice the good—what is positive about your relationship with your body. Whatever comes up is what needs to be seen—either as a resource or something to be healed as part of collective restoration.

Now, the invitation is to travel more deeply.

What if we told you that your body is earth, not connected to earth, but it is earth, part of the earth's body. It holds all the resilience of your ancestors, there for you to access. And it holds some of the intergenerational trauma from those same ancestral lines—carried in your body waiting to be restored. What if we told you that you are like layers of a cake—with all those layers always communing with the natural world—the stars, the planet, the weather, the fungi, the bacteria, the trees. What if we told you your nervous system is a magical part of you that is always sensing and conveying information to and from the world. It is a highly sensitive instrument that can sense and feel another person, a group, a tree, a part of the earth.

What do you notice? Welcome it all in—any judgement, cynicism or perhaps delight and expansion. You also hold some of the collective protective mechanisms that the system holds toward changing, the resistances to being whole and part of the unified field of life.

What happens if we invite you further into this holistic paradigm, into interbeing, where you can tap into the self-healing mechanism of the biosphere itself! Come with us into thinking and feeling that your body is part of the healing mechanism of the world. If it joins the flow of life and comes out of the illusion of separation, it can be a great healing force for you, us and the earth. What if you could develop all the capacities and intelligences that are your birthright, and reclaim them. We see these as earth intelligence (EI), ancestral intelligence (AI), wairua (spirit) intelligence (WI), love and relational intelligence (LI), somatic intelligence (SI) and healing intelligence (HI) and this all adds up to being a system changing. Imagine, for a moment, that your 20-year older self had developed all these. What might that feel like to you? What might you be doing, being, feeling, seeing?

Now imagine you are with others. A group of people is like a living field, greater than the sum of its parts. When individuals are plugged into the flow of life, a greater flow or coherence arrives in the connective tissue between people, in the energy. The space between us all is living in itself – it becomes a vibrant creative and healing space. In our part of the world the Pacific peoples call it the '-Va-', we Māori call it '-te waa-'. The space and time between us. Feel into the potential healing quality of this. For many of us, groups have been dangerous, but we can create group fields that are healing.

Healing is really a harmonizing or upgrading of hurt or more dense and contracted energies into lighter more creative energies that hold greater potential for change. These fields of people have the ability to transform big wounds from the past that are still circling waiting to be felt, honored, released, updated into potential and brought back into flow. Imagine what this might do if we came together in these ways to turn the wounds of slavery, colonization, patriarchy, ecocide, that continue to haunt humanity, into fresh potential and new kinds of solutions.

Of course, action is also needed, but the action that comes from these fields is more potent as it is fueled by this flow.

*All of this we believe is not the realm of fantasy and is entirely true! New understandings of the mind-body connection and trauma healing, support the ancient wisdom of indigenous cultures. Our lived experience is to be this connected and powerful human that can join with others and help heal and reconnect the world across all its divides. **Without this work, the wounds of the world, which sit outside the tangible realm of measurement, data and control that characterize our current orthodox strategies, will keep circling and creating havoc and passing to future generations.** It is hugely exciting to be able to work in this way—to create collective bodies that learn the art of collective healing of all the horrors of our past and turning this into free, creative, emergent life.*

This is how we approach systems change work. We call it ‘Haumanu.’ We begin by connecting to our bodies, our resourced and re-sourced self and then creating connective fibres between us that can become a container that holds the healing. From here, we unpack our understanding, deliberately shifting the paradigm to begin with the holistic felt experience before engaging with analysis and abstraction.

As we transition in this article now to a more left brained approach to Haumanu, try to stay connected to your felt sense. We need your connection to yourself—your presence with whatever feelings are arising—to be the space for new capacities to arrive. This is how we rewire the resistances to, and misbeliefs about, a more connected worldview that our collective culture has built up over hundreds of years. A disconnected worldview, propagated via imperialism, colonisation, globalisation, and capitalism, has held sway for too long. Disconnect equals trauma—the inability to feel what needs to be felt and metabolised—and trauma has led the way in our world.

Trauma needs to be healed, not followed. It is not a wise guide.

As we live through this time where our old systems are breaking down and we do not yet have new ones to replace them, we all need to get connected and rerooted really quickly. In that reconnection we believe new solutions will arrive from the connective tissue of collective intelligence across the human and more-than-human world.

Welcome to Haumanu.



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So What Is Haumanu and How Does It Work?

Haumanu is an approach to systems change that blends Western knowledge with “mātauranga Māori,” the Indigenous knowledge system of Aotearoa (New Zealand), which spans Māori knowledge, culture, values and world view. Angus Macfarlane called this blending “He awa whiria”—a “braided river” approach—combining the strengths of two distinct world views as equals into a workable whole. The team contributing to the development of the approach has both Māori and European ancestry, and we bring these ancestral threads and ways of knowing to the work.

We call this approach Haumanu, because in Māori it means “to revive, restore to health, rejuvenate.” (See the appendix to this case for a glossary of kupu Māori, or Māori terms.)

Tried in Aotearoa and globally, Haumanu takes a holistic approach where systems healing is integral to systems change. Haumanu comprises a framework, process models and capacity development to weave collective healing and restoration into our systems.

Haumanu has been working with groups for many years—prototyping, refining, developing. These include:

- A collective of leaders from public, private and NGO sectors learning how to work in this way and grow their capacity as individuals to lead Haumanu in their teams.
- Teach For All global leaders including this healing systems approach in their work.
- An NGO focused on domestic violence building capacity for the work.
- A decolonizing leadership program for white people embodying their role as the system rewiring itself.
- A group of accomplished facilitators across cultures learning to facilitate Haumanu in their cultural context.
- A long-term healing circle healing the polarization over COVID-19 and the vaccines.
- Various other shorter programs.

The development of the approach has been largely funded by Foundation North in Aotearoa, through the Centre for Social Impact, with some additional funds coming from partner organizations and communities of practice.



What Is Involved on a More Practical Level?

In this work, we intentionally step out of the more dominant Western orthodox paradigm and into this holistic paradigm, just as we did at the beginning of this article. We teach this approach in experiential and embodied ways, so that it does not remain in the abstract. We orient toward relationality and love between all parts of the living world, seeing this as fundamental to the change we need to create as humanity.

We are the system rewiring itself. We are not separate from our systems, we are our systems, so as we move out of harmful ways of being and toward restoration, we restore ourselves and the systems of which we are a part. This occurs at multiple scales, from individual, to group, to community, to society—each is a microcosm of the larger whole.

In doing the connective and relational work, the container of connection—the group—becomes a healing field that can hold, and heal or integrate, past hurts, allowing fresh possibilities to arrive. **Once healing is included, more creativity and innovation becomes available in the collective for the solutions we need.** Systems healing happens when we are connected to the healing part of life. Life wants to live fully—this is evident when we look to our ecosystems for how they restore themselves. The earth herself is part of the biosphere trying to heal itself; she and us are part of the self-healing mechanism of the world.

If we start our solution making or strategizing from disconnect from the earth and each other, we will give birth to more disconnect; system outcomes reflect the paradigm that underpins them. Haumanu works to connect to the earth and each other as the primary resourcing and holding of the work; many solutions that are interconnected flow from that. We start in the paradigm of wholeness so as to give birth from wholeness to achieve more wholeness. This requires a re-sewing, a rethreading of the relational fabric between us, and a re-rooting into the living planet and the flow of life itself.

We work unashamedly with love as one of the most transformational energies and a necessary component for people to feel safe and held enough in order to be a system transforming. We tap into all the intelligences outlined above, turning them on and fine-tuning them. Together they combine to form systemic intelligence. **Developing this systemic intelligence is fundamental for people in the more orthodox white Western worldview if we are to evolve a healthy, connecting, and loving world.**



A key element of the work is an understanding of the autonomic nervous system, which provides a strong foundation to help people build a literacy for what is happening in them, and for what they need. This is the body-mind connection that has been overridden through a dominant worldview that is based on the underlying idea of (separate) mind over matter. It is also the way trauma arrives through our bodies to be healed—both individually and intergenerationally. We see the sympathetic zone of the autonomic nervous system as the healing zone, as an activation from the past trying to be received, felt, seen, and heard to release itself. It needs the ventral vagal zone onboard in order to achieve the integration needed for healing. The ventral vagal zone enables our systems to move out of activation and come back into a place of wholeness and connection. The sympathetic zone is the place from which we can collaborate well. It is the place from which we make change. **If we, instead, make change from the activation zone, trauma often leads the change; we want to heal trauma but not lead with it or follow it.**

Working in this way enables us to work with power dynamics and come into our connected places, integrating the parts that keep perpetuating inequity and violence. We work with “mana orite”—a Māori concept of shared power, where all parts of the system allow their intrinsic power that is about their medicine or purpose in life, rather than the power-over currently perpetuated in systems.

Haumanu work is depth work, requiring us to step out of conventional frameworks of systems change that address what is external to us (working on the world), and to include what is internal (working as the world). It is transferable to any culture, but needs to work within that culture and with the localized connection to place, country, earth.

It is important that this work is not another opportunity for assimilation and marketability within the very system we are trying to change. Let us not make it easier than it is, or quicker. It is a long (and fulfilling) unfolding journey. Let us not also make it harder than it is. It is natural work; it is natural to have these intelligences; it is natural for groups to come together in circle to heal together. It is just that in many parts of the world, we have lost touch with these natural intelligences. We are in need of deep remembering, and recovery of our interconnected selves, our bodies and our hearts.



The beautiful thing is that we do not need to separate healing as a special activity. We can bring it into the way of working so that we clear the trauma as it arises in us, in group fields, in work, to release creativity, joy, innovation into creating the solutions we so need in this time.

Two models underpin the approach. One is a systems model that depicts a forest (see the appendix) and includes the layers of a system that need to be worked with:

- Life force and flow
- Connection
- Trauma integration
- Power and paradigms
- Structures, policies and processes
- Evaluation and symptoms

The other is a process model that helps groups prepare for the work. There are eight spheres in this model, each building the capacity for the next; each has a number of tools and suggested processes to help systems navigate these steps (see the appendix). These spheres are:

- Taonga – resource and re-source
- Papatuanuku – connect to earth
- Kotahitanga - connect to each other
- Haututu – dismantle superiority structures
- Kaupapa – setting intentions and refining focus
- Haumanu – healing processes
- Whakatipuranga – create, generate, proliferate
- Poutama – continuous learning

Evidence for the impact of healing in systems change is more qualitative than quantitative. In Māori we measure “tohu” for this work, or signals or signs that show us what is happening in the work. Each person involved creates their own set of tohu, and as a system we also often have collective tohu. We also use “Holographic Epistemology: Native Common Sense,” an evaluation outlined by Manulani Aluli Meyer, a native Hawaiian.

A series of webinars for local and international audiences on the approach have been placed on various websites, including the Collective Impact Action Summit. An article demonstrating qualitative evidence has been developed for the Stanford Social Innovation Review and, after positive responses, is awaiting final publication approval. The Haumanu approach has also been incorporated by current masters’ students in their thesis development.

Systemic Transformations

Here you will find highlighted some of the systemic transformations that were achieved through the Haumanu approach and how they align with the six conditions of systems change [framework](#).

Mental Models: Haumanu deliberately starts with mental models because they impact everything. It introduces a holistic paradigm—an interbeing connected place—even if people can't feel it, they are invited in. The approach explicitly identifies the white Western worldview and highlights the difference in paradigms to help build the ability to switch to a more holistic view. Participants together agree to a set of practices that enhance the Haumanu intelligences and these help lead to this ability to paradigm switch. Most participants report a change in how they work. Participants, especially women, feel empowered. Haumanu changes the way people relate and how they navigate where they relate from.

Policies: Changes range from introducing well-being plans that help develop the capacity for healing within the system, to creating antiracism policies, to policies that require people to undertake some education to better understand Indigenous narratives of history.

Practices: In the Haumanu approach, the way people meet together changes. Participants shift from being always “on” and seeing everything as urgent, to a digesting and sensing pace. Many educational and experiential programs emerge as participants learn to slow down to allow the metabolizing and healing of trauma that flows through the system.

Resource Flows: The most striking resource-flow change was to the agreement and funding by the government, of a 3-year program around this way of working to support young leaders in the domestic abuse area, within an extensive and complex system.

Relationships and Connections: The Haumanu approach reduces isolation and increases connection for participants. “We now have a place to bring our failures,” one participant said.

Power Dynamics: One powerful system shift over a 2-year journey with Haumanu: The process is co-led with shared power between a Pākehā woman and a Māori man. Through their paradigm-switching familiarity and skill (see the appendix), Indigenous people are well equipped to lead this approach; most white people are less so.



Some Side-Benefits of the Approach

Participant's well-being increases

In all the journeys, people report how they understand how to resource and re-source themselves and come out of their trauma responses and into a more essential place in themselves and how much this helps their wellbeing. Many embark on a new set of rituals and practices they put into their life as life journey commitments.

Preparing to engage in being an activist for change from a new place

Many who undertake the journeys are already social and environmental change makers and leaders. The work they see has enabled them to create change from a place that connects rather than polarises and increases entrenched views.

Increased collaboration & collaborative leadership

Once people understand trauma and become aware of when they are in their essential place and when operating from trauma, they have tools to manage relationships in a different way and use tension as growth and clear the relational space to ensure better collaboration.

'It is like a homecoming' a participant said

We now have a place in us to come home to and to our connections as part of the natural world. This sense of belonging is a deep healing process that helps create rooted solutions rather than those based on the trauma that is trying to be healed.

Re-wiring of deep intergenerational collective traumas

Many participants realise that they are a system rewiring, and know how to see and work with the threads of patriarchy and colonisation that weave through their own systems to harmonise them and build new neural pathways and intelligences around connection to earth, ancestors and the flow of life.

Feeling the wairua and currents to flow with

Many develop a greater sense of the emergent – an ability to see what is trying to emerge from a group and themselves and follow those currents. They develop a 'flow of life' literacy enabling presence and awareness to grow in the group field around what is trying to happen.

Some important aspects needed for implementation:

Facilitators who:

- feel called to healing, group spaces, group field-making and magic; this needs to be in their river of purpose.
- have an understanding of trauma and the ability to hold trauma in love as it arises without wobbling or collapsing into fear.
- have explored at some depth their own privilege, power, superiority and wiring and their own disconnect from the earth.
- have capacities of being able to connect to earth and to ancestors, as we can't open these fields nor access them in a group if we can't open them in ourselves.
- have an ability to read a field, to sense what is happening and what is needing to happen, to know what is arising and when to slow and when enough is enough for integration.
- know not to push through or do too much to serve their own pressure to achieve or prove value.

Resources available:

- Most resources sit on the Centre for Social Impact website – www.centreforsocialimpact.org. These include models, videos of participants, webinars and articles.
- Slide decks of resources, models and processes for implementing Haumanu.



Closing

This work is not for the fainthearted, it is for the full-hearted and requires a dedication to building the capacity in individuals and groups to be able to work in this way. All the capacities, though, are natural to humans, we are born with them. We have just forgotten many of them and need to turn them back on.

It is also empowering and exciting work that enables people to feel and return to their own wholeness as individuals, cultures and groups. We have seen the way it catalyzes agency, becoming irresistible to those who engage with the approach.

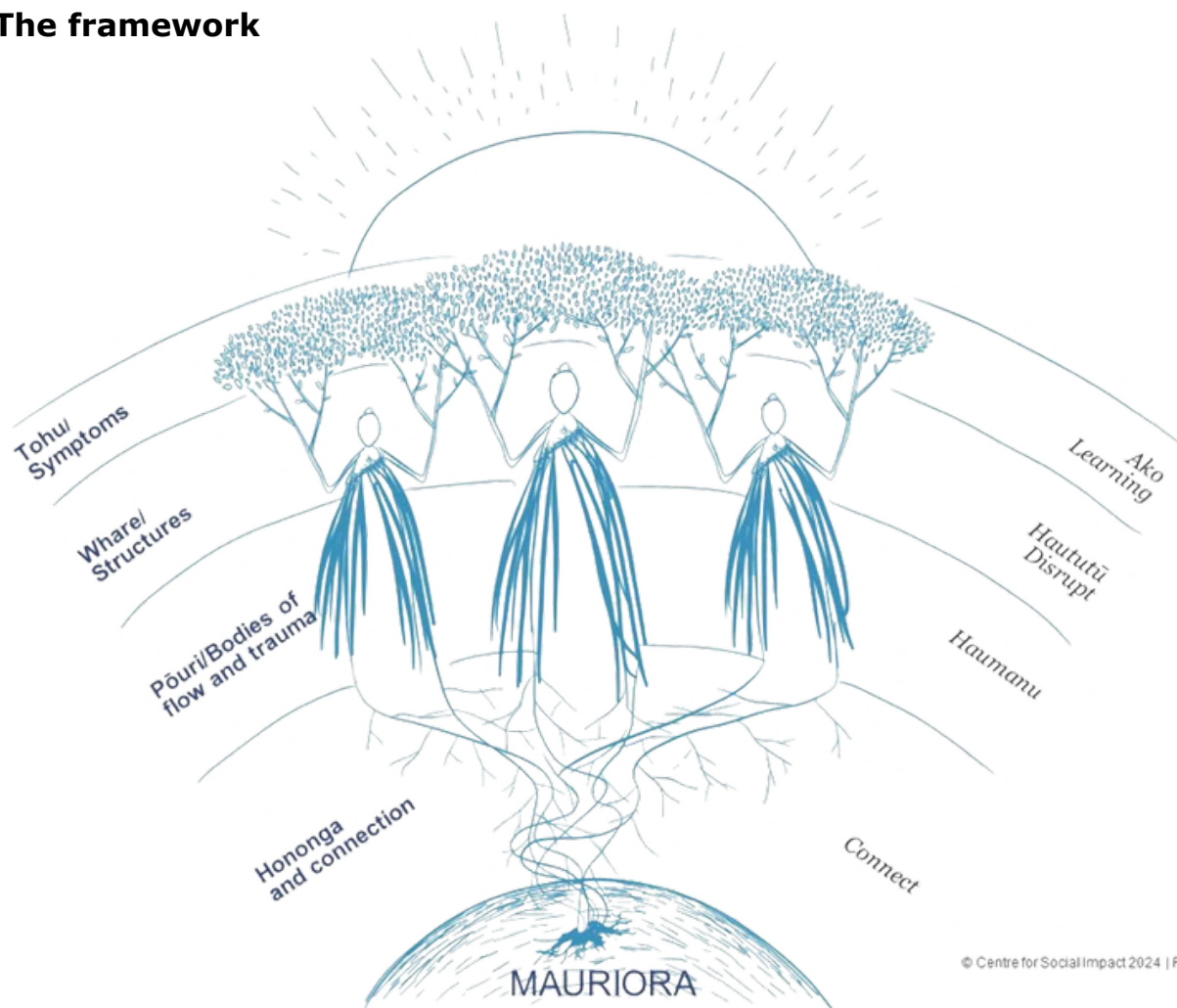
It is vital that the work is centered in the land and cultures in which it is operating and works with rituals and ways of connecting that come naturally to that group. Haumanu has trialed this work with people from many different cultures and has been amazed at the connections that can occur. We'd love you to be part of this beautiful healing work.

Appendix

The Haumanu framework and process model in more detail

The model, below, depicting a forest, works with the layers we see are needed for change, encompassed in an ecosystem.

The framework



Going from the bottom up:

Mauri ora – mauri ora (life force and wellness) is the purpose of the work and we use practices designed to help us operate from this interbeing place in the flow of life.

Hononga/connect – we bring people together who want to work in a different way – who want to address collective trauma as it arises and include healing and restoration in their day-to-day work. We build the connective tissue of groups that will enable the layers of work.

Mamai/haumanu – trauma stores in our bodies and in the earth; it blocks the flow of energy through our bodies and through the collective. We work in groups to surface, acknowledge and process collective and intergenerational trauma. The usual way of operating is to avoid, ignore, project or repress difficult issues and feelings, or to try and 'think' our way through them. Instead, a restorative approach can just become a way of working, as a trauma response or trigger arises, we slow down, we resource ourselves and the group to meet it, and we feel it together.

Whare (structures)/Haututū (disrupt) - systems change work in this framework looks at the structures at play and how they affect mauri or life force. The strategy at this layer is to 'haututū' – to disrupt, advocate, undo and let go - and the energy is of fire and activism. In our organisations and contexts, we can ask what can be stopped, what can be changed and what can be started from an interconnected and holistic paradigm? We work to notice when we have gone back into separation and disconnection and pause, so that we can reconnect.

We look at the systems or processes we can change or let go of now, and what will take time and how this can begin. We explicitly work with power here and aim for 'mana orite' – shared power, equal power, looking to dismantle the inner and outer structures that create superiority.

Tohu/symptom – Ako/deep learning - across all layers of the framework is an 'ako' or learning focus, where deep reflective processes are threaded through the group's work. We employ a developmental evaluation approach, creating feedback loops to shape the work as it goes (Patton, McKegg, Wehipeihana 2016). 'Tohu', or signs of progress and change, are sought or observed, to guide adaptation.

Much of the current work of systems change occurs in the top two layers of this framework – focusing on the symptoms created by systems and changing the structures that are the most visible face of systems – especially policies, legislation, rules and practices. Trauma will keep running the show until we get to the deeper levels, creating from a place of connection rather than disconnection, and healing collective hurts along the way together.

Āta - a process model for deep change



We created the process model above to help people and organisations to apply this thinking in a practical way. It has a flow but is not a neat or linear process. We call it Āta, a reference in Māori to the slow and deep work of relating. Each stage has a toolbox of processes that groups can experiment with, adapt or use as inspiration for their own creation from their own culture.

The model is for when we are specifically working with a collective trauma field such as our environmental crisis, patriarchy or colonisation. We have also adapted it for organisations to use when triggers and trauma fields arise in the normal processes of working together.

The process model resources and readies people for the work; builds connection and coherence within the group involved; uses a process for the group to collectively feel and integrate the collective trauma or issue to be restored; generates the new and the conditions to bring the new into being; and aims to embed this way of working and continuously learn about and strengthen the approach.

Skilful facilitation by at least two people is required to hold and lead the process. Facilitators and participants need to feel adequately resourced for the work (grounded, calm, present, safe), and to 're-source' ourselves if we don't.

- **Taonga/resource and re-source** – we draw on group and individual practices that help people access the ventral vagal, building connection and safety for people to relax into. Examples of processes include using karakia (sacred prayers) waiata (song), sound, movement, touch, identifying and doing what resources us.

- **Papatūānuku/reroot** – we bring in the earth and our connections to earth to keep us grounded and connected to earth. Examples of processes include bringing places people love into the room through visualisation or going outside to do sensing activities. Also we encourage people to make friends with a tree, that helps them create a live relational connection with the earth..
- **Kotahitanga/unity** – we build coherence and unity within the group. Examples of processes include different ways of introducing the parts of yourself to each other, presencing your exact state, bringing the essence of you to meet others' essence, play, vulnerability, attunement and co-regulation processes.
- **Haututū/letting come apart** – we look at what needs disrupting, letting go, what is not working or disconnected that needs to be changed. Examples of practices include trigger mapping, rewiring processes, understanding how white superiority and human superiority work in our body systems and institutions, reflection, understanding the roots of the white western orthodox worldview and paradigm switching. We also work with power here, and how to return to a relational context where power and love are one, rather than separate.
- **Kaupapa/set intentions** – we set intentions for what we are wanting to work with, getting clear on purpose. Examples of processes include creative practice, meditation, somatic feeling of the intention for the group to work with. Here we also work with consent to a deeper level by getting clear on what everyone agrees the intention of the work is and the motivation we are coming from.
- **Haumanu/restoration** – we connect to a collective trauma field in the room and each person presences how that trauma field arises in them, while others listen. As part of the sharing the restorative medicine for that trauma usually arrives. We digest, we stay connected to our bodies and to each other, we support, we co-regulate, until it feels like that trauma field or wave has moved through – for now. We debrief on how that felt for everyone and how they feel now.
- **Whakatipuranga/generate** – we create, we generate, we proliferate from the creative energy and flow that usually follows a trauma digestion process.
- **Poutama** – we learn, we capture, we document, we evaluate.