

Sufiga o le tuaoi: Negotiating boundaries

(Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi, Head of State of Samoa, Public Address to University of Utah and Utah Community, Utah, USA: September 2011)

It is high honour to be invited to your gathering today and for my wife and I to be given the privilege of visiting not only with your University and community here in Utah, but also with your Brigham Young Universities, both here and in Laie, Hawaii.

I accepted the very kind and generous invitation by the First Presidency of your Church to visit and share with you because I am aware of the significant Samoan Mormon community that resides in America and of the noticeably generous opportunities for support your community offers Samoa and Samoans in terms of humanitarian relief, employment, residency and/or fellowship. I have many members of my family who are practising Mormons and I have been inspired by the way in which they inculcate work ethic and thrift. Both are not easy habits to nurture at the best of times but particularly in this fast-paced life of instant gratification. I am therefore delighted for the opportunity to be able to reciprocate the goodness you have shown to me and the Samoan people.

I wish to share today some reflections I've had on Samoan history, identity, culture and customs. In particular I wish to talk about a concept I raised in a recent keynote address for our National University of Samoa's 2011 Samoa II Conference, called "*sufiga o le tuaoi*".¹ *Sufiga* means to coax, placate, negotiate, canvass and/or persuade. *Tuaoi* means boundary or boundaries. *Sufiga o le tuaoi* refers to the fact and manner of negotiating boundaries. It directs that such negotiations avoid rough or violent language or thought, and privilege gentle and prayerful canvassing, coaxing, negotiating, placating, and/or persuading, particularly when negotiating highly contentious and volatile matters.

Sufiga o le tuaoi suggests a methodology – a manner or quality of thinking and doing – one that draws on the wisdom of *tofa fetala'i* and *tofa saili*. *Tofa fetala'i* is wisdom gained, among other things, through balancing old and new; *tofa saili* is wisdom

¹ See Tui Atua, TTTE. Samoa Conference II, National University of Samoa. Keynote Address. 5 July 2011. Parts of this address have been included in this address.

gained through a constant searching for truth. *Sufiga o le tuaoi* is a concept rich in historical and cultural nuances and meaning. Through an explanation of the *ava* or kava ceremony and *fagogo* (children's bedtime tales), I hope to bring to light these nuances.

The *ava* ceremony is core ritual in traditional Samoan hospitality culture. The *fagogo* was core to Samoan childrearing. Both speak of the boundaries between man and environment, man and fellow men, man and self and man and God. Both teach us about ourselves and our environment and the divine mysteries of both.

Thomas Gray highlights profoundly the dilemma of creation, including of our indigenous knowledges, when he said: "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen / And waste its sweetness on the desert air".² My desire here is to assist in the project of allowing the fullness of the flower of our Samoan indigenous knowledges to breathe notwithstanding the desert air that can sometimes dominate our contemporary lives.

The *tuaoi* or boundaries that we negotiate when we seek to take responsibility for protecting ourselves and our environment from harm are many, but one of the main hurdles to gaining the fullness of human support for adherence to these boundaries or *tuaoi* is cross-cultural mis-communication about what is sacred or *tapu*. *Sufiga o le tuaoi* is a concept that seeks to address this cultural mis-communication. It gently but firmly advocates that the first step in our cross-cultural dialogue is to accept that 1. there are differences in the way in which we view what is *tapu*, and 2. that even with these differences there is shared belief in *tapu* and sacred boundaries or *tuaoi* between ourselves and our environment, between ourselves as people and between ourselves and our God. *Sufiga o le tuaoi* respects differences and appeals to shared beliefs. The *ava* ceremony offers insight into how although our forebears may have understood *tapu* and *tuaoi* differently, they shared a belief in the divine. Let me explain by first unpacking the *ava* ritual.

Ava ritual

² See Thomas Gray's poem, 'Elegy written in a country churchyard'.

In the Samoan *ava* ceremony there is usually a host and guest party. The host party provides the *ava* roots for gifting and grounding, and as well the *aumaga* or untitled men's guild, who perform the rituals of the *ava* ceremony. Once both parties are seated the spokesman for the host party officially welcomes the guest party and makes reference to their honorifics and the historical and mythological relationships between them. After the brief welcome protocol is finished, a spokesman for the host party invites one of the *aumaga* to collect the *ava* roots. A member of the *aumaga* stands up, picks up a mat and proceeds to gather the roots. He brings them to the guest party and one of the guest party will identify himself as the spokeman by slapping the mat he is sitting on and calling out '*ava*'. Then the spokesman for the guest party will *sufi* the *ava*, which is to talk soothingly about its origin, genealogy, mythology and history. Then he will proceed to *folafola* the *ava*, which is to announce the *ava* and commend its high quality. After this he proceeds to identify the *ava*, naming only those of highest quality. The names used are honorifics reserved for the *ava* of *tamalii* or high chiefs such as *ava latasi* or *ava lupesina*, or for the *ava* of the main orators or *tulafale* such as *ava tugase*. *Ava lupesina* refers to the mythology of the pigeon with nine heads, *lupeuluiva*, which was gifted to Sinalagilagi as a wedding gift³. *Ava latasi*, refers to the mythology of the great Sun of the universe, a progenitor of Samoa and the earth and giver of light, energy and growth.

After naming the *ava*, the guest spokesman will then proceed to offer *ava* to the *aumaga*, which traditionally is ritual courtesy because the *aumaga* is expected to politely decline and respond, '*faaauau le faasoa o lea ua iai Aanoatamalii aua le sua alofi o le tatou aso*', meaning 'proceed with the distribution for we already have *ava* for the *tanoa* [i.e. *ava* bowl]'. Then the guest spokesman distributes the named *ava* roots to the principal chiefs and orators or people at the ceremony. At the end of this distribution he will say, 'what is left we will keep in reserve in case there is need for more *ava*'. All this is part of the *sufi* and *folafola* *ava* sections of the ritual.

After the *sufiga* and the *folafola* *ava* the spokesman for the host party then gives the official speech of welcome. And he is responded to by the spokesman for the guest party. Generally both spokesmen will end by saying, "*tatou alo ava, ua mai vai ae*

³ See Kramer, 1994, v1, p. 78; p. 401.

suamalie ava i le alofa o le Atua”, literally meaning “let us proceed with the *ava* ritual, the water is bitter yet the *ava* is sweet because of God’s love”. Again the connection or *tuaoi* between God and plant is emphasised. Now the *ava* ritual proper begins. If it is a formal occasion the *faasoa ava*, i.e. the master of ceremony will perform one or more of the *ava* chants or *solo o le ava*. The significant moment of the *ava* ritual is when the *faasoa ava* starts clapping – followed by others in the gathering – and calls: “*usi le faasoasoa ae tula’i se soli tamalii ma tulafale*” (literally, I wish to announce that the formal distribution of the *ava* drink is about to commence and I now call on somebody to come forward in breach of the protocols of this sacred gathering and stand in front of the chiefs and orators to distribute the *ava*). Then the *tautu*, i.e. he who delivers the *ava* cup to the drinkers, performs his function according to the *ava* cup name called by the *faasoa ava*. You can tell the *ava* cup of a chief or orator by the intonation used by the *faasoa ava* and by the way the *tautu* delivers the cup. The *ava* cup to a chief or *tamalii* is delivered using, as they say in tennis, a forehand movement; the *ava* cup to an orator or *tulafale* is delivered using a backhand movement.

Before man drinks the *ava* he pays deference to God by first pouring the *ava* liquid from his *ava* cup onto the ground and saying something to the effect of, ‘*Ava lea le Atua, ia faamanuia taualumaga o le tatou aso*’, meaning ‘God this is your *ava*, bless the ritual and our deliberations’. This act symbolises God as priority and acknowledges the connection and boundaries or *tuaoi* between man, plant and earth. The first and the last cup are of equal status. Where the last cup is not given to anyone ritually the alternative is to call out and say that what is left over of the *ava* will be distributed amongst those serving at the back – *o le a faasoa atu i tua nei ona toe*. The ceremony is then closed.

This distinction in calling tone and style of delivery to *tulafale* and *tamalii* makes the point about the sacred boundaries or *tuaoi* between them and the complementary differences of their roles. The role of the *tamalii* is to assess the wisdom of the long view or the *tofa mamao*. The role of the *tulafale* is to assess the wisdom of the deep view or the *faautaga loloto*. The sacred boundary between *tulafale* and *tamalii* is in the *ava* ceremony captured by the way orators refer to the residence of the *ava* of *tamalii* and *tulafale*. They would say, ‘*le ava sa tofa i le maota*’ when referring to the

ava of *tamalii* (literally the *ava* of *tamalii* who slept in dream dialogue or *moe manatunatu* in his chiefly residence) or ‘*le ava sa moe i le laoa*’ when referring to the *ava* of *tulafale* (literally the *ava* of *tulafale* who slept in dream dialogue or *moe manatunatu* in his orator residence).

The terms *moe* and *tofa* and *maota* and *laoa* are deferential terms used to describe and distinguish the sleep or dream dialogue and the respective residences of orators (*tulafale*) and high chiefs (*tamalii*). Like the oral and arm gestures used by the *faasoa ava* and *tautu*, these terms make audibly visible the sacred *tuaoi* or *boundary* between the *tamalii* and *tulafale*.

An understanding of Samoan cultural rituals such as the *ava* ceremony can be further deepened when participants have insight into its associated mythologies or belief systems. It is instructive to share at this point one version of a Samoan account of the origins of the *ava* in Samoa. This version was told to me by Reverend Kasiano Leaupepe of Fasitoo.

Story of the origins of the *ava* plant in Samoa

There were once two sisters, Ualā and Malomamae. They were responsible for the care of their grandfather, Tuisuga of Fagalii (Fagalii, incidentally, was the place where the LDS originally set foot and established themselves in Samoa). One day Tuisuga craved *tuitui* (sea urchins) and so sent the girls to the sea to collect some for him. Along the way the girls got bored and decided to do something else. When their grandfather found them idling and the basket not yet full, he got angry. He scolded and banished them. The girls left their grandfather and walked towards Mulifanua.

They came across a boat sent by the Tui Fiti (the King of Fiji). The Tui Fiti’s daughter had taken ill and he had sent emissaries to Samoa to find her a *fofo* (traditional healer). The two girls, who held the gifts of *fofo*, decided to help the Tui Fiti’s daughter and boarded the boat. The route back to Fiji from Samoa was not easy and the girls thought that they might die before they could have a chance of healing the Tui Fiti’s daughter. But the skill of the two navigators was such that their boat was able to reach Fiji safely. When they arrived the Tui Fiti was waiting anxiously.

He asked the captain whether they had found a *fofo*. The captain pointed to the two girls who were coming towards them with their basket of traditional remedies, including *vai sami pala*, a fermented coconut concoction. When the two sisters reached the Tui Fiti's daughter, one began to massage the daughter's stomach area, the other helped her to imbibe some of the *vai sami pala*.

In what seemed only a few moments the Tui Fiti witnessed with joy the sudden recovery of his daughter, who was now moving around easily and looking very well. Seeing that their work was done the two girls said to the Tui Fiti that they were now ready to return to Samoa. The Tui Fiti indebted to the two sisters asked them to stay a while. During their stay both of them became his wives. With Ualā he had three children and with Malomamae he had one. Ualā's children, in order of birth, were Suasamiaava (male), Aanoatamalii (male) and Muliovailele (female). Malomamae's child was Saolateteleupegaofiti (male). When orators who subscribe to this version recite the genealogy of the *ava* in the *ava* ceremony, they will recite one or more of these names. In particular, they would make mention of Aanoatamalii, for it is believed that the *ava* plant grew from and is his flesh. In contemporary Samoan oratory, orators use this name as an honorific for the *ava* root. If you examine the name Aanoatamalii closely you will find that it literally means "flesh of a chief": *aano* meaning 'flesh', *a* meaning 'of' and *tamalii* meaning 'chief'.

The story ends with the last testament of Aanoatamalii. His dying wish was that he be buried in the area of his home where he spent most of his life serving, i.e. the *valusaga*. This is the place where his *tautua* or service, that of *gasese* i.e. service associated with preparing food, was conducted. The *valusaga* was also the place where Samoan families would make their compost. It was where the leaves described as *tauveta* (i.e. leaves used to cover the *umu* or earth oven, usually from banana trees, *taamu* plants and large vines) are put, together with taro and other root crop scrapings known in Samoan as *valuga o talo ma isi mea mata*, were accumulated and organically broken down. This was our traditional compost mix. We would use this to help fertilise our soil. This was where Aanoatamalii wanted to be buried.

Aanoatamalii instructed his family that if a plant were to grow where he was buried, they were to look after it because the plant was he. Once he was strong enough they

were to take him, i.e. the plant, to Samoa. His family promised to do so. After some time his sister Muliovailele saw a plant with some shoots or *tolo* growing where they had buried Aanoatamalii. She declared, “*Ua toe ola mai Aanoatamalii* (Aanoatamalii has come back to life)!” As promised to her brother she then dug him up and took him to Samoa, the original land or roots of their mother Ualā. They settled in Vailele, next to Fagalii. The *malae o le Niniva*, literally the Niniva village green, in Vailele was so named because when rats came across the *ava* plant and ate its roots, they became *niniva* or unwell by intoxication. According to Vailele and Fagalii history, the name records the place where the *ava* first grew.

One of the moral underpinnings of this *ava* story for Samoans is that one’s *tautua* or self-less service accrues blessings from God. The people of Samoa, especially the descendants of Ualā and Aanoatamalii, receive blessings for the *tautua* of Ualā and Aanoatamalii to the Tui Fiti. The *ava* plant, as the reincarnation of Aanoatamalii, continues his *tautua* to Samoa. Through the *ava* plant Samoa and Fiji are bonded.

Another moral underpinning is that humility is a prized chiefly quality. Aanoatamalii as the son of the Tui Fiti had rights to the grandest burial site Fiji could offer. Instead he wanted to be buried at the humble site of his service, the *valusaga*. Moreover, the muscle relaxant properties of the *ava* plant has a calming effect on those who consume the *ava* drink. It makes them less disposed to confrontation and violence and better able to *sufi finagalo*, i.e. to negotiate in a humble way for an accommodation of opposing opinions. This was and is the legacy of Aanoatamalii and the *ava* plant. Traditionally when chiefs and orators got together to decide contentious issues an *ava* ceremony would open the meeting. When they engaged in the *ava* ceremony and drank of the *ava*, this legacy was revived.

Our traditional stories of the *ava* plant and our performance of the *ava* ceremony offer evidence of a Samoan pre-Christian theology, value system and culture that prized recognition of boundaries or *tuaoi* between history and mythology; man’s spiritual and physical selves; man and nature; fellow men; and man and God. In order that our performance of these ceremonies are more than empty or token gestures, we must understand and believe in the sacredness of each part, and how each reflects our identity and history as Samoans. The *ava* ceremony and its mythological roots give

insight into the meanings of the saying *sufiga o le tuaoi*, and also into what Albert Wendt might have meant by his eloquent lines,

I carry willingly the heritage of my Dead
my children have yet to recognise theirs.
Someday before they leave our house
Forever, I'll tell them: 'Our Dead
are the splendid robes our souls wear'.⁴

The only time that I have heard the word *sufiga* used in Samoan discourse outside of the context of people is when it is used in conversation with the *ava* plant. In understanding the story behind the word we understand the nuances of the word. Thus the answer to why we use the word *sufi* when speaking to the *ava* plant is... because we are in conversation with more than just an *ava* root, we are in conversation with a person (Aanoatamalii) and his genealogy.

Your Church has a reputation for being one of the top recorders worldwide of family genealogies. Samoans pride themselves in being able to recite from memory their family *gafa* or genealogical histories back at least five generations. But we are fast losing this skill as our society becomes more reliant on machines to help us remember and as extended families no longer find the time to meet. I want to talk briefly about the significance of family before moving onto the *fagogo*.

The significance of family

One of the strengths of the Mormon Church is its emphasis on family. I read a slogan written on your online LDS genealogy related websites. It said "Genealogy because families are forever".⁵ This emphasis on the forever-ness of family resonates with our Samoan beliefs in the ongoing connection between the living and the dead. When Polynesians look for evidence of genealogical connection social anthropologists and linguists have provided us with some very interesting findings. Take for example the Samoan word for family which is "*fanauga*". In Samoan this term refers to both the

⁴ See Albert Wendt's poem 'Parents & Children'.

⁵ See <http://www.ldsgenealogy.com> and http://www.fact-index.com/c/ch/church_of_jesus_christ_of_latter_day_saints.html. Both websites were accessed 30 August 2011.

narrow idea of a family connected by blood and the broader idea of a people or nation. The same term has similarities in Maori language.⁶

The root word of the Samoan term *fanauga* is the same as the Maori term *whanaunga* and that is *fānau*, said with a long first vowel, and commonly understood to mean: “to be born”. Reverend George Pratt⁷ suggests that the terms *fanau* and *fanauga* can be used both to refer to the specific act of child-bearing as in *fanau mai* (to be born forthwith) and to the grouping of offspring or close loved ones as in *o la’u fanau* (i.e. my children – literally or figuratively). This is in line with Patu Hohepa’s explanation of *whanaunga* and *whanau* as extended family and as consanguine and affinal kin, as well as adopted kin.⁸

Dame Dr Joan Metge, in her recent book *Tuamaka: The challenge of difference in Aotearoa New Zealand*⁹ notes that when the term *whanau* is said with a short first vowel, it means “incline, bend down” rather than “to be born”. This is interesting because at first I thought that this was not the case for Samoan. On closer analysis, I am inclined to think that perhaps such a meaning may have existed. In examining the terms *fanau* and *fanua* I explored the possibility that they are abbreviations of a longer term or phrase. One of the great rules in Samoan articulation, in both speaking and singing, is that words must have fluency in both thought (i.e. meaning) and intonation (i.e. rhythm and melody). Many Samoan words have their origins in a longer term or phrase. A good example of this is the term *tuāoi*, which we raised earlier.

When you ask what is the *tuaoi* in our relationship as *fanauga*?, you impose a particular way of thinking about boundaries, a way of thinking that is tied up in the meanings of the term *tuaoi*. To get at this way of thinking it is necessary to understand the phrase to which the abbreviation belongs. This is implicit in the word itself – *tua-o-i*, which when elaborated further means – *i tua atu o i e le au ai lau pule ma lau aia*” (literally meaning, your rights and authority do not extend beyond this point). In this case boundary or *tuaoi* is measured not by the boundaries of my

⁶ The discussion offered here on *fanauga* draws on that offered in my keynote address for the James Ritchie Memorial Lecture, University of Waikato, Hamilton, 23, February, 2011.

⁷ See Pratt, 1893, p. 150.

⁸ See Hohepa in Tui Atua et al, 2007, p.56.

⁹ See Metge, 2010, p.86.

authority or rights but by where yours or those of the other in the *tuaoi* relationship at hand, ends. The Samoan terms *fanau* and *fanua* may well be abbreviations in a fashion similar to that of *tuaoi*.

In thinking about the possible origins for the term *fanau*, I am drawn to the suggestion of a link between it and the terms *faanaunau*, *faanau* and *faananau*. These terms variously speak to the process of ‘being born’ and/or of bending or breaking something. It is not farfetched to read into the meaning of *fanau* ‘to be born’ the idea of *faanaunau*, for in order to give birth one must first have some desire to give birth. Moreover, the image of a woman bending in childbirth is not beyond imagining. And, the breaking of a woman’s waters when in labour is augury for an impending birth. Furthermore, when it comes time for the child to be born there is a process of *vaevae manava*, where the link between the child and mother is broken, i.e. the umbilical cord is cut. The child now born becomes part of the group of *fanau* or children of the family, village and nation, the other meaning of *fanau*. It is in this frame of reference, i.e. of birthing, that the term *fanua* also finds relevance.

Fanua as placenta provides the oft-quoted image of something that nurtures and protects new life. This image is embodied in the use of *fanua* as the term also for land. While I am leery to suggest any further meanings to the term *fanua* given the paucity of evidence at hand, I could not help but be intrigued by possible linkages between the suffix *nua* in *fanua* and *nuanua* meaning rainbow.

Through this brief exploration of the etymologies of these Samoan words and phrases we catch a glimpse not only of the interconnectedness of Polynesian cultures and histories but also of the richness of each specific Polynesian culture and how each adds unique colour and vibrancy to our rainbow of human languages and cultures. In fighting for the status of Polynesian languages in Aotearoa New Zealand, my friend Dr Pita Sharples, Maori anthropologist now politician, recently stated in the New Zealand media that ‘language is the window into my soul’¹⁰.

¹⁰ See Media Statement issued 9 August 2011 at <http://pacific.scoop.co.nz/2011/08/my-language-is-the-window-to-my-soul>. Accessed 31 August 2011.

In this sense words and stories can carry the soul of a people and *fagogo* do just that. As bedtime stories for the young they not only excite their imaginations but also teach them about the soul of their elders and their culture. Telling *fagogo* was common practice in earlier times. *Fagogo* time was a time of bonding, sharing, teaching and learning between elder and child. In these stories the oldies would convey moral beliefs using terms and events idiosyncratic to Samoa and a Samoan way of thinking. A really good teller of *fagogo* would have children hanging on to every word and wanting more. This image of children yearning to be fed or hungry for knowledge is captured by metaphor in the word *fagogo*. Let us explore *fagogo* very briefly.

Fagogo

The term *fagogo* is an amalgamation of the words *fagaga* and *gogo*. *Gogo* refers to the noddy tern sea bird of Samoa. *Fagaga* means to nurture a school of eels or brood of chickens, pigs or pigeons and derives from the word *fafaga* meaning to feed. Tongan orator and social anthropologist Hufanga Okusi Mahina tells me that the Tongan term for legend or myth is *fananga*. In elaborating on this Hufanga pointed out that the Tongan term *fananga* is also used to refer to a body of refined and sacred knowledge or skills passed over successive generations by word of mouth, usually in the form of a whisper. Whisper in Tongan is '*fanafana*'. The idea of whispering our legends is not present in our Samoan term for legend or myths. Our Samoan ancestors seemed to prefer use of the metaphoric images offered by the *gogo*, especially the image of them feeding and nurturing their young. *Fa* marks the imperative of feeding as in *fafaga* and of feeding a brood as in *fagaga*, while *gogo* provides for the type of feeding promoted (i.e. teaching and learning). The coming together of the two words *fagaga* and *gogo* to form one new word – *fagogo* – offers scholars opportunity to learn of how Samoans tended to coin words. Fully understanding the cultural nuances of such words depended heavily, however, on whether the scholar knew what a *gogo* bird looked like, what its habits were and where it lived.

There are two kinds of *gogo* in Samoa, the *gougouli* and *gogosina*, the black and white *gogo*. In early times, the *gogo* was an everyday feature of Samoan life. Their feathers were used as snares for fishing. They would be used by fishermen to guide them to

certain schools of fish. It was well known amongst good Samoan fishermen that the *gogo* and the bonito would eat the same kind of small fish. If the fishermen wanted bonito they would follow the *gogo* in hope of locating them. It was also well known that the *gogo* would fly about 20 miles out to sea during the day and always return home at night. If a fisherman or other seafarers got lost at sea, they would look for a *gogo* to help get them back to land. These were some of the practical lessons the *gogo* offered our ancestors.

The image of young *gogo* yearning for food provided a visual picture easily translated into metaphor for the hunger and discipline required for the teaching and learning of our young. When young *gogo* were fed by their parents the scene was of frenzied hunger. This frenzy was because young *gogo* were usually left in the nest for some time while their parents went out to sea to find food. When they returned the young *gogo* would be so hungry that they would cackle incessantly, sticking their beaks out in anticipation.

The way the *gogo* masticated and regurgitated food for their young also reminded our ancestors of how they would make little dumplings out of the food they chewed (i.e. *mama*) to feed their own children. These images of feeding *mama* to young children offered another visual metaphor that underlined the Samoan saying: ‘*ai a le tagata i le mama o lona matua*’ [literally meaning, ‘the young feeds on the masticated dumplings of his parents’]. The message here is that parents play a fundamental role in the nurturing of their children; they are and should be their first educators, they are responsible for feeding them food that would sustain them physically, mentally and spiritually. In watching their parents go out to fish and return with fish, the baby *gogo* learns a work ethic. They learn about what they need to do in order to be fed.

In observing the life of the *gogo* my elders found inspiration in the way young *gogo* learnt to discipline their bodies to go without food for a long time, at least compared to other birds. The message they took here is that our wants and needs can be temporarily denied and that that denial can discipline you to appreciate what you need when you get it. This practice of denial is central to the Samoan principle and practice of *anapogi*, i.e. ritual fasting and prayerful meditation, which was used by fisherman and other guilds to discipline their minds, spirits and bodies in preparation

for the challenges of their work. The belief behind *anapogi* is the same as that which underpins Christian meditation and contemplation rituals. It offered practitioners mental and physical protection against the harshness of natural and social elements.

When observing how birds protected their young, Samoans would note how the *gogo* would build their nests on the stable parts of very high trees. This they deduced kept predators unable to fly or climb so high away from young *gogo* while the parent *gogo* went off for hours to find food. Part of the nurturing role of parents includes making sure our children are protected from harm. The honorific name Matuamoepo alludes to this protective practice of mother birds.

In Asau, the orator Fao is honorically known as the Matuamoepo of Tupua. The name carries the message and image of a mother pigeon protecting her young from predators and the elements at night. Matuamoepo is literally, the mother pigeon [*matua*] who does not sleep [*moe*] at night [*po*]. The name is a riddle and for those unfamiliar with the regimen of pigeons it will test them. For those who are the meaning of the name will be obvious.

Each of these lessons drawn from the *gogo* are embodied in the *fagogo*. *Fagogo* are not only meant to entertain us, they are meant to teach us and we are meant to learn. They are meant to make enough of an impression so that we will want to come back for more. They are meant to remind us that our conversations with nature are as fundamental to our physical, mental and spiritual sustenance as are our conversations with ourselves and ultimately with our God.

When I watch the way the *gogo* protects, nurtures, bonds and keeps his family together, despite all the changes we've caused to his environment, I can't help but to wistfully ask what it is that allows him so. As our societies develop and we become attached to our modern conveniences, we seem to find it hard to make time to converse with nature and with ourselves in the kind of prayerful meditation and contemplation that enables a negotiation or *sufiga* of opinions and boundaries whereby the *tofa mamao* [long view wisdom] and *faautaga loloto* [deep view wisdom] of our forebears can preside.

One of the most fundamental conversations with nature that we are losing, if we haven't already lost, is the ability to read the stars, the weather, the birds, the seas, the animals and plants. Today we rely on broadcast news from overseas to tell us if it will rain tomorrow. Today it is more likely that the television or the ipod will be feeding our young, than the stories or *fagogo* of grandparents. While change is a constant in life, so too are those verities that make us proud to be Samoan and to be human. When we lose the desire to constantly search for those verities, to search for the universal meanings in *fagogo* such as that about the *ava*, we run the risk of creating what Hone Tuwhare called 'the radiant ball', that is 'no gallant monsoon's flash', 'no dashing trade wind's blast'.¹¹

The implication of Hone Tuwhare's cry of pain in his poem *No Ordinary Sun*, to which the phrases I just read belong, is that something must be done to restore our conversation with nature, to revisit and re-energise those traditional or indigenous beliefs and practices that can protect and restore health in our environment and more particularly in our souls. We, as humans, pushed the button that created 'the radiant ball' and so we, as humans, have a responsibility to think about how to avoid doing it again.

The Mormon Church, alongside many others, has been right there in the fight to protect our environment. Your recent pilot initiative to build more environmentally friendly church buildings using solar panels, tankless water heaters, high-tech insulation, motion sensor lighting, low-water landscaping and preferred parking for electric or other environmentally friendly vehicles, will go a long way in this fight if successful. Often it just takes one person or group to put their hand up and say "we'll take the first step", for others to follow. As your Church Bishop and Senior Administrator H. David Burton stated in his comments on this initiative, the fight to take responsibility for our environment is an exercise in constantly re-evaluating where we are in our "responsibility to the community, responsibility to the environment and responsibility to good stewardship of this finite land and ground that the Lord has blessed us with".¹²

¹¹ See Hone Tuwhare's 1964 'No Ordinary Sun'.

¹² See online article titled "Mormon Church Building Construction Going Green" by Jennifer Dobner at <http://www.greenbuildingfocus.com/default.aspx?id=2045>. Accessed 31 August 2011.

The Mormon Church has been exemplary in taking the lead in this environmentally friendly church building initiative and I commend you for that. Let's hope that many other Churches will follow. Our Churches have a significant role to play in helping to *sufi* the *tuaoi* between man and environment. They offer more than just places of religious instruction, they offer, like the *gogo* and *ava*, role models for good work ethics and prudence and food for the soul, i.e. a practical theology for remembering why we should protect that which is *tapu* or sacred to us.

When in September 2009 Samoa faced its worst natural disaster in living memory, the loving contribution of the Mormon Church and its members to Samoa during our recovery will never be forgotten. Many of your members gave selflessly of their money, time and other resources. In fact, two of your Samoan members Joe Keil and Lani Wendt Young were directly responsible for pulling together and publishing a highly sought after book on the 2009 tsunami that affected Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga. The book titled "*Pacific Tsunami: Galu Afi*"¹³ weaves a loving and lasting memory of the stories of those who survived, those who didn't and those who did all they could do to help, during and afterwards. This book was a labour of love and can offer a bridge of hope for those seeking solace from pain and suffering. I have no doubt that Joe's and Lani's strong faith motivated them to initiate and complete this gift.

When tragedy happens we are quick to blame God or seek revenge and are often slow to forgive. *Sufiga o le tuaoi* encourages, pleads, coaxes us to take time to see God's love, compassion and forgiveness. It gives us a methodology for appreciating the beauty of those flowers that seek to bloom in the fullness of light despite the harshness of their environment. In remembering our ancestor's *fagogo* about the *ava* for example, we learn and teach of a way of living and believing that gave them and us identity, faith, hope and a sense of community, both in being Samoan and in being part of God's *fanauga* or family.

Conclusion

¹³ See Lani Wendt-Young, 2010.

The stories I have shared today about the *ava*, the *fagogo*, and *fanauga* are stories that are ultimately about love. They describe in a particularly Samoan way what is essentially a universal message about the forever-ness of love: the love of Aanoatamalii for his mother; the love of grandchildren and grandparents; the love of family.

American novelist Thornton Wilder in his novel, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*¹⁴, makes a poignant point about love and loving. In it he talks about a bridge that collapsed because of the weight of a fully loaded carriage. On arrival at the bridge the people in the carriage found it to be faulty but decided to tempt fate for they would not part with their possessions. Thornton Wilder in musing the fate of death and the meaning of living writes:

“But soon we die, and all memory of those five will have left Earth, and we ourselves shall be loved for a while and forgotten. But the love will have been enough. All those impulses of love return to the love that made them. Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning”.

To *sufi* or negotiate the boundaries or *tuaoi* of religion, culture, custom, history and identity there is really only one bridge and one meaning that survives, that is the bridge of love – God’s love. God’s love shines through all our clutter and pettiness and links what is good in us. It gives us meaning and helps us to see past our differences. It pleads gently that we join together in the common purpose of respecting our sacred boundaries or *tuaoi* and take proper responsibility for protecting this earth we share. This love is the bridge that is forever.

Soifua.

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¹⁴ See Thornton Wilder (1929).

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