

TOPIC: FUNERAL

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INTERVIEWED:

SUBJECT: CEREMONIES DONE WHEN A PERSON DIES

If a chief of a village dies, all the elders of that village will come together and have a meeting. They will discuss what has to be done and how, in the funeral ceremony. They will also discuss the sending of the message to all the villages. If a commoner dies, the relatives will do the informing of the dead, but the chief got a special people whose duty is to carry the message to every village concerning his funeral.

The moment the chief dies, and it had been known, everyone in the village will stop with their normal work and go at once to prepare for the funeral.

Men will start building shed outside the chief's place and women started preparing food. The close relatives of the dead will stay indoor, not allowing to touch any outside work. Elders will at once go to the meeting house.

People were stopped to go freely and make noise in respect to the dead. All things would be ready before other villagers will come to present their gift to the relatives of the dead.

When all the elders have decided what has to be done, the leader of the elders will call all the people, and also to show or tell them, their resolution. People and elders will start doing their duties accordingly. A cattle have to be killed to cater for the visitors and the relative attending the ceremony. People whose duty is to dig the grave will at once go on their way.

After the grave had been dug, the funeral or burial will be done. People will come back to the ceremonial arena, where the close relatives of the dead will present and offered a TABUA to the people attending the ceremony if they could stay a bit longer until the fourth night. The people will receive the TABUA in agreeable to the request offered.

After the fourth night, there shall be a big ceremony of food-sharing among the people attending the funeral ceremony. A cattle and pig will be killed, dalo and other fodd crops will be available. All there food will be provided solely by the close relatives of the dead. After the sharing of food, a tabua is presented to the close relatives of the dead to make a TABU or promise for a certain period of time in respect and to commemorate the dead. Everyone will be forbidden to drink yaqona or smoke for this period of time. Some will keep this TABU until the tenth night. These people who are involve in the TABU will prepare a feast and Fijian material, and offer them to the close relatives of

the dead, informing them that the TABU or promise had come to an end. Now they are free from that TABU and they can proceed on with their normal life.

This ceremony to end the TABU is often and typical in the olden days, to be held in the 100th night. People who is involved in the promise will bring their black clothes (i.e. which they always wore during this period of time) and present it to the close relatives of the dead. They will offer a TABUA and present reels of clothes, drums of kerosine, mats and food in this ceremony. Soon after this, people who are forbidden to drink yaqona can do so then. If a person died and it is decided that his body will be buried the next day or two, the relative or close neighbour will assist in the running of the ceremony. For example, they will cook a big pot of fish and assist in the preparation of the tea.

This is well noted by the families of the dead. The leader of the mataqali or clan will do all his best to see that everything is there and be done in the funeral ceremony. Sometime the family of the dead, sat without doing any catering, because of the help which has be shown by the mataqali or clans in the village.

- Could you tell me the meaning of TONI?

The meaning is that women who is the close relative of the dead, will not or TABU to TONITONI in the house where the corpse is. They will be served by the relatives of the dead. This also shows that the close relatives had been assisted

by their families or neighbours in the running of the ceremony.

- What is the meaning of BOUTA?

The BOUTA **is** the house in which the dead-body is resting. Everything which is forbidden is initially from the house where the corpse is. There is a punishment called the ORE which is laid on someone who allows or break the TABU. This punishment or ORE is given by the close relatives of the dead person. Sometimes people in the house, meant to break this TABU meaningly. The punishment laid will be something which is first just needed in the house or in the ceremony as a whole.

This punishment or ORE will be something as a helping hand in a sense. This breaking of TABU will only occur if the end result will be of assistance to the relations of the dead. When punishment is laid upon you, it should be carried out in a faithful and whole-heartedly manner. When your offerings, as a punishment is presented, the close relative will accept it and thanks-giving words will come in return.

- Could you tell me, are all the ceremonies which you have mentioned is carried out by our ancestors in the olden days or? Yes. All are done from the beginning. Some of the ceremonies which our ancestors used to do in the funeral ceremony is not practised by us today. Every little ceremony is done

in a ritual and sacred manner. All are in a very respected and formal manner.

In the olden day when a person died, the body is wrapped around by thick mats and kumi and tied around with a piece of rope. The grave is dug deep and made with very great care because this era coincide with cannibalism. It is believed that body can be stolen.

Sometime there are two graves to be dug. When the body is brought to its grave, the close relative will stopped it there and take the body again to another grave which the people of the village knew nothing of it. The body have to be buried and be guarded too.

- I heard that there are different kind of graves dug in the olden days, is this true?

In the olden days when a dead body is carried out, it is said to have a SIII or bath in a pond nearby. The corpse is then taken to the pond and to be submerge. In the pond of water there is a grave or hole in which the corpse is laid. Sometimes people escorting the dead body to the pond, meet their fate too. They are ambushed and killed when they come to the pond. The more they came, the more they are killed.

It was during the time when cannibalism existed and this kind of happening is normal during that time. The name of the cave or grave in a nearby pond is called the QARA SUI

(skeleton cave) where all skeletons of human being are found. Sometime this cave is used as the consulting place for our ancestors.

- As for the dead bodies, is there any body ointment done to the corpse?

When someone dies, the body at once is wrapped around in a cloth called the MASI KUVUI. After a few hours or day, some people will anoint the dead body with an oil called the YASI or REREGA. This anointment will be done if the dead body is watery or water started to flow continuously. This anointment will make the body smell nice. This two oil is a nice strong smelling body ointment.

As for the YASI, it is squeezed throughly by both hands and evenly spread all over the body. The REREGA is to be cooked with the coconut oil and mixed with the softer DIIO.

- I heard that some people who had died come back in a form of a spirit to their relatives; Could you tell me more about this?

Our elders in the olden days believed that if the spirit of the dead person comes back to life, then it meant that his death is not a proper one or he must have died by some wicked spell done unto him by someone. His life on this earth have been shortened by someone else's power.

If a woman gave birth to a child and died, people will put the branch of the VUDI (banana) to the grave of the woman or mother of the child. It is believed that this prevents

the mother's spirit in searching for her child - the alive one. It is believed that the TABALA NI VUDI (the branch of the banana) is acting as her child. The mother's spirit will think that her child is the banana branch lying beside her in the grave.

- Does this mean, that the above thought still prevail today? I believe some place still practised this belief. Even today some women will take some pawpaw and this be buried together with the dead body. It is believed that when the pawpaw rots, the person who caused the death of the buried one will die at once then. This will occur accordingly if their presumption is correct.
- What does it mean, when the spirit of the dead person appears continuously, every now and then? Because of this, the close relative of the dead person will go to the grave and speak to his spirit not to come back to the village and be a nuisance to the villagers. They'll ask him to stay in his own place which had been given to him to rest grave. The close relatives will also warn him that if he ever comes back to the village, they will come back to his grave and pierce a long stick through his grave. Through all these spoken words by the relatives, the spirit will never go back the village. It is believed that by piercing a grave, you are stopping the dead-person's spirit from wandering around.

This are the thoughts of our elders; but, some people of today still believed in it. This will be done only if the spirit is seen around the village. If the spirit keep on coming back to the village despite of the warning, the close relative of his, will pierce his grave - thus to keep the spirit back in the grave.

- It is interesting to know what the elders do; is there anything else you want to say?

In ceremonial occasions, TABUA is often used. The tabua got its DARODARO. It also got it QARAQARA(facing) to the chiefs of the village. When words spoken is done or delivered while the TABUA is at hand; the words should be delivered in a very respectable and ritual manner. A TABUA(whale's tooth) got a rope or string tied around the end signifying the friendships ties binding the people. This shows that people sitting in the ceremony, when the TABUA is held forth are all one and no one is a stranger.

If a big ceremony is to be held, big TABUA too should be shown forth. This also goes for wealth such as mats, kumi and other Fijian materials.

If a funeral ceremony is done, people will be coming bringing TABUA and other Fijian materials such as mats, kumi and food to present it to the close relative of the dead person, showing their last gifts of offering to the dead person who had just passed away. This ceremony of presenting is called

the REGUREGU. The materials and items taken inside the dead person's house will still be called the REGUREGU(kissing).

- The person who is the mouth-piece; does he have to be proud of what has been offered or...?

The spokesman should at all times mentioned that, they had brought and presented little amounts of everything. In doing so, the spokesman should at all times degrade them and say forth the worthless effort shown to the relatives of the dead.

In response the close relatives will accept their offering and say that what they had received is really big and great. The close relative will also thank the people of their great effort which has been shown by the great offering presented.

All the gifts presented will be taken into the house where the BIKABIKA(sitting) is done. The receiving of the gifts and its thanks-giving words is the duty of the MATA NI VANUA or spokesman of that village.

The king or TUI NI VANUA will only receive the TABUA presented. He will only say or mention the place and thank the people for coming. The king speech is short. The MATA NI VANUA will continue from there and confess everything out in a ceremonial manner. The spokesman will take every care in the outlining of his spoken words.

The exchange of this words and that will keep the word of the ceremony. That is all about the funeral ceremony.

THANKS.