

Death

1. Facing the realities of death
 - a. Omens of impending death (e.g., Akamba of Kenya: Screech of an owl when someone was already sick)
 - b. In Africa, death was only rarely seen as natural.

By far the commonest cause [of death] is believed to be magic, sorcery and witchcraft. This is found in every African society, though with varying degrees of emphasis; and someone is often blamed for using this method to cause the death of another. . . . The curse is something greatly feared in many societies, and a powerful curse is believed to bring death to the person concerned. The living-dead and spirits are another cause.

Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 155

- i. The Akamba always sought out the medicine man (who in turn went to the ancestral spirits) after death to discover the cause. The term for death in kiKamaba is *kikw'u*, from a verb meaning "to be called"--death was seen as being called (or snatched away) from life (Gehman, African Traditional Religion, p. 62-3).
 - ii. Likewise the Shona went to the diviner to determine the cause of death (Gelfand, The Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona).
2. Functions of funeral rites (Hiebert, Cultural Anthropology, 169-70)
 - a. Disposal of the body
 - i. Often only designated people could handle the body, such as the son-in-law of a married man (the Shona; Gelfand, The Spiritual Beliefs of the Shona, p. 41)
 - b. Preparation of the spirit of the departed for its new existence
 - i. Provide food for the spiritual journey
 - ii. Integrating the spirit into "ancesthood" (generally done only for those who were married and had children; those who die single do not make the ancestral grade since there is no one to remember them)
 - (1) The more powerful the person was in life, the more important and elaborate the ritual to initiate ancestor status.
 - (2) The Shona of Zimbabwe have a ceremony two or three months after the death. In this ceremony, the people go to

- the grave and bring the spirit of the departed back to the home (Gelfand, The Spiritua Beliefs of the Shona, p. 43)
- (3) The Ndebele of Zimbabwe have the ceremony one year after the death (Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, p 151).
- iii. Assure the departure of the dead (so that ghosts don't hang around past their time)
 - c. Channel the expression of grief and provide comfort to the survivors
 - d. Restore balance in the social relations because of the gap left by the death
 - e. Provides an explanation for death by reaffirming cultural belief system(s)
3. Post funeral rituals: **The day of the dead** (Nutini, "Pre-Hispanic Component"): (Mesoamerica): Among Roman Catholics, the most significant religious day after Christmas and Easter.
- a. "The folk manifestations of Todos Santos (All Saints) extends well beyond the traditional feasts of All Saints Day and All Souls Day as practiced in orthodox Catholicism and in most regions of Mesoamerica it acquires significant
 - i. social,
 - ii. economic,
 - iii. demographic,
 - iv. and even recreational dimensions.
 - b. Todos Santos is a time of
 - i. homecoming,
 - ii. remembering, and
 - iii. propitiating the dead,
 - iv. cementing and intensifying one's kinship and *compadrazgo* (ritual kinship) relationships, and
 - v. sacralizing, albeit temporarily, interpersonal relationships on a community-wide basis.