

ciated with loneliness or loss, or what the European might call pathological grief.

Fijian Feast

The body of a deceased member of the Fijian community will be prepared by the women, except in New Zealand where it is usually prepared by the mortuary. The head of the deceased is left uncovered and members of the family may kiss the head by way of farewell. The funeral, usually within a day or two after the death, is of a Christian format. There will be speeches and anecdotes told about the deceased which touch on both positive and negative aspects.

After the burial it is customary to hold a large feast. This may last up to a day, depending upon the status of the deceased. Food and money to assist with this are brought by the mourners, and the generosity is often so full that the family may make gifts to the mourners. These gifts have special significance and are called *Dubua*. The mourners dress in black during the bereavement period. Life returns to normal in the Fijian community not after any formal announcement, but when the feast has died.

Maori Tangihanga

Many bemoan the loss of the traditional *Tangihanga*, which has had many of its aspects replaced by Christian ceremonies. However, there are basic elements which do remain. Wailing remains the ritual method of expressing grief, and laceration has disappeared. The intricate formalities of the Maori welcome and calling to the *marae*, the eloquent speeches to the dead and the singing of laments also remain.

The corpse may lie in an open coffin in the meeting house so that the visiting mourners can see the face of the deceased. In some areas it is customary to greet the corpse with the *hongi*, the formal welcome. The *Tangihanga* last for three days, during which time the visitors live in the meeting house and are fed by the kinsfolk of the deceased. The time before the burial is spent in talk, in song and in making speeches, as well as in debate over where the body should be buried.

Memorial Unveiled

The mourners disperse after the burial, but in modern Maori culture there may be an additional ceremony called the *Poowhakamoemoe* or *Takahiwhare*. The purpose of this is to remove the *tapu* of death from the residence of the deceased. The people attending this ceremony are principally kinsfolk who have borne the greater part of the work of the *Tangihanga*. It appears to be a more friendly and relaxed occasion lasting any time from

one night to two or three days, in which the participants eat and drink together and recall the less flattering situations in which the deceased had a part. They will also discuss affairs of immediate, local and family significance.

Tapu Removed

A year after the *tangi*, some regions will hold an unveiling of a memorial gravestone, which is a final token of love for the deceased. Invitations will be sent out to those who attended the *tangi*, with a date set for the unveiling. Such unveilings are often during long weekends. At Easter, for example, many communities in Northland hold mass unveilings of up to ten stones at once, following this with football and basketball competitions. The setting for this anniversary ceremony is similar to the *tangi*, except that the coffin is replaced by photographs of the deceased. Again, there will be the ceremonial calling on the dead and weeping as guests enter the *marae*.

Speeches recall the events in the life of the dead person and of his *tangi*, and after discussion among the elders, a favourite grandchild or niece of the deceased may be chosen to unveil the tombstone. This will be at eleven o'clock in the morning, when a black cloth is removed from the memorial stone. There will be a dedication service, and the group then returns to the *marae* for a feast. It is significant that this ceremony represents the last obligation which the community has to the deceased. It is also personally significant to the widow of the deceased, who after this anniversary ceremony is considered free to marry again.

Healthy Grieving

It is suggested that these data speak for themselves. In particular the following points emerge which are relevant to an understanding of not only Polynesian bereavement patterns, but also to the western or European responses to death. The New Zealander with European background has something to learn from his neighbours.

With minor exceptions, the Polynesians people practice open awareness when death is expected in a family and community. This would appear to allow for more healthy anticipatory grieving than is customary in death-denying western culture. The verbal farewells that are made possible and the passage of goods between the dying family member and his relatives serve to bring to a psychological completion the active life in their midst. Again, this is in sad contrast to the unfinished nature of many relationships which are recounted by European New Zealanders who experience difficulties in bereavement.

In general, the Maori, Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island, Niuean and Fijian cultures show a religious resignation

about death, with the view that "he has gone to better things" mitigating against the sharp pain of loss. The decline of traditional Christian religious adherence in western culture may be hypothesised as constituting the loss of such a protective psychological buffer. Conversely, it is common for the devout westerner to employ his religious beliefs to offer rationality and emotional solace in times of bereavement.

The most striking finding in surveying Polynesian behaviour in bereavement is the almost overwhelming involvement of the community in both the funeral itself and in supporting the family before, during, and after the funeral. It is difficult to over-emphasise the significance of this support for the bereaved member. It is said that there is no such thing as a bereaved Polynesian — only a bereaved people.

An aspect common to all the cultural groups considered was that of the opportunity for formalised catharsis which is provided by the bereavement ceremonies, for the benefit of the family and of the community. The elaborate speeches to the deceased about his or her life and times are a further psychological completion of the relationship with the loss it must now bear, as well as a re-affirming of the community structure and function. It is significant that these speeches extend much longer than the funeral service itself. They also give an opportunity for any member of the community who wishes to publicly express his grief and respect for the deceased. The Irish wake, with its story-telling and drinking, could be seen as a western equivalent in some respects. This fact, along with the reality of the body on display to the bereaved, and the physical contact which is encouraged, appear to be focal in diminishing the likelihood of pathological denial, which is so common in western bereavement.

Finally, this survey has left its European authors with not only a sense of the differences between European bereavement patterns and those encountered in our Pacific cultures, but also with a sense of the commonalities that exist among our behaviour in grief.

On the one hand it is suggested that by knowing more of the cultural expectations of other peoples, we may be more able to offer a sensitive understanding and support. On the other hand, it has been found that elements of Polynesian bereavement patterns exist at least in part, in western behaviour patterns. Thus, to understand the New Zealander who is Maori, Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islander, Niuean, or Fijian, is to understand more about the New Zealander.

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