

## Sisinini: The Luhya ceremony of remembering the departed

By Nandemu Barasa, March 3 2011



The grave of the Late Mzee Waswa Wasikhuyu and his family in the background during his memorial ceremony. Photos: Obed Simiyu

Forty days after the burial of the late Hudson Waswa Wasikhuyu Okhwa Nabai, hundreds of people turned out for the traditional memorial ceremony at his Kisawayi village home of Misikhu in Bungoma County to celebrate the life and times of the elderly leader.

The late Wasikhuyu was a very resourceful elder in the cultural program *Lumasaba* that is aired on *West Fm* every weekend from 1:30pm to 4:00pm in company of *Ekhutu* (tortoise) and *Ekhaniafu* (chameleon). According to the *Bamasaba* culture, the 40<sup>th</sup> day after burial of the deceased, relatives will gather at his home for a traditional ritual called *sisinini* (shadow).



Close family members and friends of the late gather at his home.

The deceased's brother had to organize for beer to be brewed in his own home and also select a goat that is slaughtered during *sisinini* then it is carried together with beer to the deceased's home

where it is served all night to relatives but on the following day, they should not be still at the compound by sunrise.

The late Wasikhuyu could explain so well how to prepare beer but you cannot believe if I inform you that he had never tasted beer since he was born. Before he passed on I once shared with him why he could not take beer and yet he knew how it is prepared so well, he answered; “the doctor does not have to suffer from a disease for him to treat it well”.

Due to this no beer was prepared during his memorial but those who attended were served with beer bought from another place. Unlike now days where people from all corners attend *sisinini* commonly known as *Kumbukumbu*, initially, this ceremony was only attended by relatives of the deceased.

*Sisinini* was only done if the deceased was a married man or woman and strictly who had children. *Bamasaba* people believe that if somebody dies, his or her spirit will stay at his home place until the day of *Sisinini* where it is prepared to join the ancestral world.

Note that there were no calendars and therefore *Bamasaba* people used the appearance of the new moon and also counting stones that were put in guards to find out the day of *Sisinini*.

It was also on the day of *Sisinni* that the deceased's belongings, in this case traditional attire were taken and kept safely awaiting for another ritual to take them to a new person.



At Wasikhuyu`s place people gathered at the fire place and the bereaved were advised fully and encouraged to take heart and accept to have lost their beloved one.

After this rite, we shall later have another ritual known as *Khumala Silindwa* which replaced *Kamakumba*. I will inform you more when we get there but briefly the ritual

involves smearing the grave with clay. This ritual signifies welcoming the deceased fully into the ancestral world and is done by an elderly woman.

Source: WestFM