

Luhya funeral rites

By Nandemu Barasa, Jan 11 2011



The sun sets on Mzee Wasikhuyu Waswa Photo/Obed Simiyu

The larger Bamasaaba community is yet to come to terms with the demise of one of its elder Mzee Hudson Waswa Wasikhuyu Okhwa Nabai who was laid to rest over the weekend at his Kisawayi home in Misikhu, Bungoma County.

The burial ceremony was attended by hundreds of mourners among them the West Media Limited staff led by the Board Chairman Dr George Masafu and Mr. Cyprian Wekesa, one of the directors and thousands of mourners from across Western Kenya and as far as Uganda.

The late Wasikhuyu died on January 3, 2011 while undergoing treatment at that Lugulu Mission Hospital after developing a stroke in early December.

However, despite an earlier warning by the deceased that his body should not be taken to the mortuary after his death, his body was taken to Nabwana mortuary before his burial.

Nonetheless, even at the mortuary, tradition and culture was not abandoned as the body was accorded high respect, as elderly persons from his lineage talked and pleaded to the corpse to humble as it is taken for burial.



Family members view the body of the late Wasikhuyu Waswa at the mortuary.
Photo/Nandemu Barasa.

On the material day of picking the body from the mortuary, family members, as tradition dictates, divided amongst themselves the belongings of the deceased but did not touch any of his clothes.

Similarly, the family did not allow anybody outside the family to buy any new clothes for the deceased explaining that doing so could prompt him to haunt them claiming he was buried naked.

According to Bukusu culture an elderly man should be brought home from the morgue in the afternoon probably at 3PM to signify the time when he used to come home after toiling for long hours. It is in that same belief that when an aged person dies in the morning, the clan will hold on the information of his death until after noon before they release it.

At the mortuary, traditional prayers are said asking the late to make the journey home easy," We have come to take you home for a very good burial, those of us who are here, love you and that is why we have left everything to come here to ensure we take you home, please make our journey back home easy because you were well known for good when you lived with us, we shall continue loving you even in your death," the dead was told before taking his body home.



West Fm staff led by West Fm chairman Dr. George Masafu (in glasses) pay last respects to the late Mr. Wasikhuyu Waswa.

On the way home, neither can the vehicle carrying the body be stopped on the way nor can the body be moved from one point to another until it reaches home. Similarly, when it is put in the house, even if the roof is leaking, the body is not supposed to be moved to another position as the Bamasaaba believe that doing so would be courting the death of another family member.

They believe that the number of times that the body is moved from its earlier place reflects the number of people who are likely to die in the family.

Initially before the community embraced burial, the dead were thrown in the bushes and left to be eaten by wild animals like Hyenas but since the generational change, the bereaved can now have a view of their beloved for a couple of days before it is interred.

For a polygamous man, his body would move from the last wife to the first one before burial except for in cases where before dying, the man directed which house not to be taken to.

In the late Wasikhuyu's case who had three wives, he had directed that his remains should be buried at the home he would meet his death at and this came to pass as he was buried at his first wife's compound as he was last in her house before he died at Lugulu hospital.



Mourners view the body of the late Wasikhuyu. An unfaithful wife is not allowed to view the remains of his husband according to the tradition and culture of the Bamasaba people of Western Kenya.

As tradition also dictates, the late Wasikhuyu was buried with his head facing the gate. The significance of such tradition is to indicate that the dead is still watching over his home.

Further, the Bamasaba believe that a family man never dies in whole but only his legs thus named after down his generation.

The Bamalicha, under Bamwalie group who are a Bamasaba sub clan in which the late Wasikhuyu was member, after burial, cattle are brought and led to go round the grave as people dance the same way they dance and sing songs sang during Khulicha when boys are welcomed into adulthood after undergoing circumcision.



Cattle go round the late Wasikhuyu's grave as a sign of a new beginning for them after their shepherded died. Photo/Obed Simiyu

Consequently, the animals are not allowed to graze on the burial day so that they can also realize that there is something wrong, and that is the death of their shepherd. According to Mzee Natembeya who is the son of Israeli Khaoya who were the first followers of Musambwa, cows go round the grave to mourn also and also as a sign of a new beginning.

The second day after burial the family goes to the river to bath and start a new life and when they come back they dance and sing around the grave again.

If a the deceased's wife was faithful throughout her marriage then she will climb the grave and dance but if she was unfaithful then you will automatically know because she will not do so.



The late Wasikhuyu's widow dances on his grave signifying she was faithful to him. Photo/Obed Simiyu.

The unfaithful wife is also not supposed to view the body unless they are cleansed traditionally with special herbs. The Bamasaba people always refer to unfaithfulness among wives as *Khulia chimbeba*.

The third day after burial is called the day of *Lufu* which will start by shaving family members beside the grave to signify a new beginning and *Khuswala kumuse* in which a traditional preacher will preach and advise the family accordingly. He will also urge clan members to strive to give birth to the deceased.

The disease which killed the late is also revealed at this point as life history is read a fresh.

The preaching is done in a very sacred way and nobody is allowed to stand or cause any unnecessary movements and disturbances.

Khuswala kumuse is done for those people who have initiated a grandson borne of his son but not daughter and not all clans among Bamasaba do it. Among Bamwalie the traditional preacher sits while preaching and in others it is done while walking.



A family member being shaved during Lufu, to signify a new beginning.
Photo/Nandemu Barasa.

A clear path for the preacher is always created between the bereaved and mourners during preaching and after the session the preacher will decide on what he should be paid but in most cases they ask for bulls like it was with the case with the late Wasikhuyu.

After *Khuswala kumuse* they move to *Lufu* session with the new chairmen where they will discuss on the deceased's wealth from land, wives children, un- paid dowry and household equipment.

They also discuss the deceased's debts and creditors .

The session also nominates a clan member who will be given the duty of looking after the home of the deceased person and that does not mean that he will inherit the wives

Source: Westfm