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most important.

- Janet Lane



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Celebrating Ghana's Dead – Christian Ceremonies, Wild Parties, And Voodoo

You haven't partied until you've attended a funeral in Ghana – or, at least, in this region of the country where I've spent the last month. Apparently, celebrating the dead is the main social event that takes place here. They don't do birthdays and I haven't heard mention of a wedding, but I've seen more funerals than I can count.

It is hard to miss them because they are three-day public affairs occupying the village center or some such prominent location to which, it seems, everyone is invited, regardless of their connection – or lack thereof – to the deceased.

A week or so beforehand, fliers are dispersed and large posters are strategically placed around town or at road junctions bearing a somber picture of the deceased, age of death, as well as the particulars of the

event. Things usually kick off on a Friday when the body is transported back to the village accompanied by a convoy of cars, open trucks packed with singers, and a band. Welcomed by mourning relatives on arrival, it is placed in state, as it were, for viewing. The next day begins with a lengthy service, followed by drumming and dance that can last well into the night or even into the following day. Another service, this time at the deceased's church and sometimes with more drumming takes place on the third day. Relatives who have traveled from afar will usually return home at that point, though some may stay for as long as a week.

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Healing Perspectives

with Julian Jonas



I attended two funerals during my stay, tagging along with my host Emperor and his family, and briefly observed a third as well, all on the second day. The first was a Christian observance for a member of his extended family. It began with a pastor or two, a gospel choir accompanied by a very out of tune trumpet and a number of other speakers who went on for a few hours before the drummers and dancers took over for the main event.

Not understanding more than two or three words of Ewe, the local language, during the service my attention was drawn to the handful of village drunks circulating through the crowd. One such fellow, a very short man with a serene smile, seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself as he cavorted around, breaking into dance and greeting anyone who'd look his way. Another angrily strode center stage in front of the speakers, reining abuse on them and actually shouting down the local assemblyman who was about to speak but demurred under the barrage. A third commandeered one of the large drums and pounded it furiously for the entire duration of my attendance. His cadences weren't all that bad, although it did set off a bit of a row presumably with the man whose drum he had appropriated.

After a few hours of enduring the service and a few more observing the dancers, my curiosity as well as family obligations being satisfied, we packed on home. Then the next week, although Emperor himself couldn't attend, he insisted I go with other family members to a non-Christian, "traditional" funeral. As promised, it was a much more memorable affair.

It's easy to get the impression that everyone here is a fervent Christian. People speak openly and often of their devotion, shops and vehicles are adorned with religious slogans, and Sunday mornings resound with the preaching and hymns from the surrounding places of worship. Within a short stroll's distance either way along the road in front of the clinic, there are numerous churches of all denominations: Pentecostal, Evangelical, Methodist, Baptist, Jehovahs, Mormon, Catholic...

For the most part, these are simple structures without adornment; there is no glass in the windows or doors at the entranceway, and sometimes there are no walls as well. The exception is the Catholic mission a stones throw away. Founded by two Italian missionary brothers in the mid-19th century, and still staffed by priests from the mother country (who are patients of the clinic), it is a relatively impressive compound that includes dormitories, a school, and a large courtyard with a crèche-like statue of the Virgin Mary.


I'm out of space, so more next time.



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Julian Jonas, CCH, Lic. Ac. is a homeopathic practitioner and teacher with office hours in Brattleboro, VT, Keene and Lebanon, NH. Contact him at 802-254-2928, via e-mail at jonasjulian@gmail.com or at www.centerforhomeopathy.com.

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