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Notes on the religious ideas of the Tswana.
Religion.

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A soul, departed spirits. 'Badimo' are spirits of the dead, children as well as old people. Living people also have souls. But this soul is known by nobody by colour, it is not known how it is like. All I know is that a human being has a soul, if he has no soul then he is dead. The soul enters a person before he is born, when he is born he already has a soul. Even if a person is an adult, sometimes in his sleep, his soul may depart from the body and go to a distant place. You may find a person in his dream being chased by something to a distant place, or being swept away by a river. On waking up, you may hear him saying that he dreamt that he was being swept away by a river or he was being chased by a lion. He will tell you sometimes that he was speaking to his father or mother who is already dead. But a person's soul is invisible, one can only hear it if the person breathes. When he is sleeping also, you will see his stomach swelling, when he is breathing hard. The soul of a male person is very wicked if his children are disobedient to him, his spirit will cause them to suffer on his or after his death. If he possessed stock, his spirit will enter them and they will die in a short time in a most heart rending manner, That is to say, the spirit of the owner is grieved, it has entered in them so that they should die and follow him in order that his children and the people whom he did not like should not own them under any circumstances.

Actual case: Raluka owned very many cattle, but he did not like to brand for and to give them to any of his children, his contention being that they must go and work to earn their own from other people. His children did not do as their father wished. They waited for him to die so that they might inherit his cattle afterwards. His cattle could be kept in two cattle-posts. After his death his cattle followed him in a short space

of time, dying in a frightful manner, and his children sold them as quickly as they could until there were no more left. Today there is not a single child of his who has cattle that were left by their father. They are all poor people. Animals and trees have souls, except rivers and stones. Animals have souls because they grow and walk. You may find an animal sleeping and dreaming as well as breathing, that is how we realise that it has a soul. We realise this actually by the fact that it grows. The trees also grow, they have a soul, their roots and branches grow. Their leaves fall off and grow again; they get dry, that is when they are dead and the soul is out of them. We don't know what happens to the souls of trees and animals when they are dead. We don't know whether they live anywhere else. The soul of a human being lives, it immediately departs from the body when he dies. It goes to the departed spirits but no one knows where the place of the departed spirits is. People who possess cattle kraals are buried in them. The women and grown up children are buried at the river. Others are buried in the back yard. That is why we are not able to say where they departed spirits live. But our belief is that if a male person dies who owns a lot of stock, a beast must be slaughtered, and the contents of its stomach must be poured in his grave. This is done that he may bless these things so that they may continue to live after his death and remain the property of his children. Sometimes if a person is not buried where he likes after his death, his spirit does not rest. Very often if a person dies, he is buried in the grave of his father. That is to say, if he is not buried there, his soul will never have a rest. This is known by the people. Some give instructions as to where they should be buried. Even if a person dies at a distant place, he must be taken to where he desired to be buried. If a person was a thief his spirit enters his generation, his children will steal, if they

don't, one among the children of his children (grandchild) will be a thief, that is to say, the spirit of his grandfather entered in him. The punishment of a man's spirit after his death, if he was a criminal or a thief, falls upon his children afterwards. If you hear that so and so is a thief or see him stealing and causing damage to other people's property, and you investigate the matter thoroughly, you will hear it said that his father or grandfather was a thief. That means now that his spirit is not at rest where it is. But no one will ever know where the spirits go to after death, except the spirits of criminals and thieves. As I have already said, the generation of thieves suffers. A person will steal and cause damage to other peoples' property, the people will also cause him to suffer, but he may not give in and may go on causing damage. The people will be astonished to see him suffering so much without giving in. It is then that the spirit of his father or his grandfather is being judged. If a person was good, his children or his generation will live happily, but I am not certain that that is a recompense of the spirit of the person who was righteous, in my opinion I say, "It is a reward," seeing that the person was so good. But as for the spirits of children, insane persons and fools, I don't know where they go to. That of a woman too if she dies at child-birth (hinderance in the birth) as also a man if he was a bachelor, and those who died in warfare and those who were drowned in rivers and those who died of burns, I don't know where their spirits go. If a person was not buried properly, his spirit does not have a rest, even the place where he is buried causes horror, if you happen to pass there, you will feel horrified although you do not know the cause. It is because the spirit of the person buried there has no rest.

When a chief dies, according to our belief, his spirit does not sleep, it helps his people, it keeps a watch over them. If there is famine, they go to his grave to pray, if there is

sickness, they go to pray there. This means that the spirit of the chief never goes out of the village, it just remains with his people and his children. During drought when there is no rain, people go to the chief to ask for rain, and he will go with the people to the grave to ask the spirit of the dead chief to have mercy upon them. According to our belief, if we pray in this manner, we are rewarded. But we of the Batlhako tribe, are not in the habit of praying like other tribes. Our chiefs have not given us trouble yet, tracing back our tradition, we have seen no evil yet; we have only prayed once for rain, and it rained hard. Ordinary people or servants, their spirits are of no use in the village except in their own huts. When a man dies, he is buried with his assegai or axe, other things are not buried with him. He does not want food, but if he had cattle, a beast must be slaughtered for him, the contents of its stomach must be put into his grave so that he should not trouble his children. Nothing is slaughtered afterwards. The spirit of a male person is wicked. You will notice that after the man's death, his child becomes unlucky. When he summons a witchdoctor to examine him by divining bones, he will say your father's spirit is not at rest where it is. The witch doctor will have to doctor him. He takes earth from the grave of his father and he mixes it with medicines and causes him to be cleansed with this, then he slaughters a beast, takes the contents of its stomach and puts it in the grave. Then things will go on smoothly with him after the witchdoctor has spoken with his father in the manner best known to him.

Actual case: Rasemele had two daughters and one son. The son had nothing to do with his father. His father ~~was~~ owned cattle. Nakedi the son of Rasemele had also nothing to do with these cattle. His father tried to make him know and to take care of these cattle but Nakedi took no heed. After the death of his father, Nakedi became unlucky in all he did. He met

with no success whatsoever. He tried to get hold of one thing but it slipped out of his hands, things were so much against him that he was unable to go on. Later he consulted a witchdoctor to throw divining bones in order to find out what the trouble was, why luck was against him. The witch doctor told him when he examined him with his divining bones, that his father was not at rest, that he was grieved as he (the son) had not acted according to his father's will while he was still alive. The witch doctor told him to go home and get a witch doctor to have him cleansed. Nakadi went straight home and on arrival there he got a witch doctor who examined him with his bones and after having done that the witch doctor told him that he should slaughter a beast, take the contents of its stomach and mix this with earth taken from the grave of his father, and cleanse himself with it, and take it after that to put it back in the grave of his father. Then shall everything go on smoothly with him. Nakedi did so. He slaughtered a beast. The witch doctor took the contents of its stomach and mixed with medicines together with earth from the grave of the father of Nakedi, and had Nakedi cleansed with it. After the cleansing the witch doctor took the dirt which remained after Nakedi's cleansing and all the contents of the stomach of the beast and poured it into the grave of Rasemele. After this all the luck in the world came back to Nakedi. From that time he took care of his sisters and lived in peace with them, he began to take interest also in those cattle which he did not care of before. When the people asked him who had taught him to love his sisters, he said that the world had taught him so.

According to our belief, the spirits of the dead have a powerful influence upon the living, on that point there is no change, it is the whole truth. If we have a person who is very very sick or who has a protracted illness from which he does not recover or die, we pray to the departed spirits for him that he either recovers or dies. On many occasions, when a person is

delirious, we say that he is speaking with the departed spirits, that is, they are speaking with him. We have witchdoctors who pray to the departed spirits, we call them 'Balopo'. 'Balopo' are witch doctors of high rank who pray to the departed spirits for diseases, they sing and beat the drums, shouting and saying, "Oh spirits of the dead". A person will then either recover or die. We believe what they say to be true. There is no one who does not believe them when they pray that the spirits of our dead grandfathers should be appeased. If the spirits of the dead do not have rest, we shall suffer a lot here on earth; that is why the people have learned to pray to the departed spirits not to torment those whom they have left behind.

L. Kobedi.

Ancestor worship: The spirits of the dead bring happiness to the living. If a person has children who obey him, when he dies his spirit will rest in peace towards them and they will live in peace. Their transactions will be prosperous because of their being happy. He will protect them in all their undertakings, and they will have abundant corn and a lot of cattle. But these spirits are given nothing, they are only thanked by being remembered when one is ill. It is then that one says, "Spirit of my father or mother rest in peace". But if a person died while he had been displeased by his children, his spirit never rests peacefully towards them, they too never live in peace, they will be poor, and eventually they will have to get a witchdoctor to treat them and to speak with the spirit of their father or mother as Kobedi has explained in the previous paper. That is to say, the spirit must of necessity have a beast slaughtered for it in order to appease it and to pray to it so that it may have a rest. Sometimes it rests or sleeps for ever and at other times it wakes up after a few years. When it finds its children dead, it enters the children's children. People get surprised and fail to understand what the matter is with the children as they grow. Sometimes it enters

them when they have become adults. They too must get a witch doctor to pray for the blessing of the spirits of their dead to be bestowed upon them.

Actual case: At one time Makgaritlhane neglected his parents. After the death of his father, Makgaritlhane began to suffer, he attempted this transaction and that without success. Later he went to a witch doctor to ask him to find out what the matter was with him. The witch doctor told him that the spirit of his dead father was not at rest and that no other witchdoctors except those of high rank (balopo) could manage to help him. Makgaritlhane consulted these and after he had told them his complaint, they got ~~xxx~~ a beast and slaughtered it and had him cleansed with the contents of its stomach. They prayed to the departed spirits on his behalf in the night time. The next day they took the contents of the beast's stomach to his father's grave and threw them over it. From that time, things went on well with Makgaritlhane. He thrived in cattle and corn. Later, after Makgaritlhane's death, he left two sons behind, Ramenyatso and Mohalake. The spirit of his father woke up and found him dead, the only remaining people being his children and their children. One child of Ramenyatso became a delinquent who did not obey his father. When Ramenyatso had him examined by witchdoctors, they said that his grandfather's spirit was not at rest and was awake. They told him that his father Magaritlhane did not obey his father and that was why the spirit had visited this child. Ramenyatso then began to get a witch doctor to cure his child. His father's grave (Makgaritlhane's) did not exist any longer because he had been buried in the cattle kraal. But the witch doctor did manage to cure him and eventually caused him to be in good terms with his father. The people who pray to the dead spirits are the highest witchdoctors. They slaughter a beast and beer is brewed. This beer and this beast are announced at the beginning as belonging to the departed spirits. The witch doctors of high rank are the first

to drink this beer and to eat the meat before the other people. They take beer in a drinking vessel and mix it with medicines and then take it to a place only known to themselves. On their return, they then begin to drink this beer and to eat the meat. Then the people will begin to eat the meat and drink the beer. Sacrifices to the departed spirits are made twice a year, at the time the people commence to plough and shortly after harvesting. Of course each person prays at his own place and makes his own sacrifice with his doctor. As far as the food is concerned of course, he invites his friends so that when the doctor finishes praying to the departed spirits, they must be given the food until none is left. Then they will disperse. While they are eating, they go on saying, "Rain, rain, let the departed spirits be well disposed towards us so that we may reap abundantly. They enjoy the big feast. If a person goes to plough a field for the first time, he must brew beer and get a witch doctor to pray for the seed to thrive. Our belief is this that anyone who has his own witch doctor, should not enter the fields of others when they are ploughing and when reaping the kaffir corn. If he is seen, it is a serious offence because he may cause destruction to the kaffir corn of others. If he wishes to see the owner of the field, he should shout his greeting whilst he is outside the field and wait upon the owner of the field to say, "Come in or to go to him". He will then say what he wants.

In times of trouble, appeal is made to the dead, they are called out by names so that they should remember us and not cast us away. When a person prays, he calls, "Spirit of my father, be well disposed towards me and have mercy upon me, the world is up against me." These are the prayers they say, even those who come to visit them say, "May the spirit of your father be merciful upon you. Let the spirits of your dead be merciful unto you." When we remove our abode from a place, we do not inform the dead, we presume that they go with us to where we

are going. When people have a quarrel too, we do not call upon the spirits of the dead to come to our help. If a person has lost his relatives by death, it was he who said I now need my relatives. It is then that he calls upon the spirits of their dead to help him in his difficulties. We never forget the graves of the dead or to place people who watch them. We buried our dead, the young, the women and men who had no cattle in the river, and men who had cattle in the kraals of their cattle. Our belief in burying them in the cattle kraals was that they should pour down their blessing upon the cattle in order that they should increase and not die out. I don't know the reason for those we buried in the river. We do not go to the graves frequently after burying people there unless we want anything from them, as we might do when a witch doctor wants earth from them. Also when the spirit of the dead person has no rest, it is then that a witch doctor should go to pray to the spirit to rest in peace.

Sacred objects: There are trees which are never touched. Even if they are dry, they are never carried away for firewood. Our belief is that if they can be used for firewood for people to sit round their fire, a man's cattle will produce males only. These are the trees: Mmilo (a species of fruit tree), môrêtôlôga. The fruits of these trees are eaten and they are very sweet. As for things such as those which the people keep, or those which they have made for themselves, there is nothing that is concealed even cattle or any other animals. Witchdoctors are the only people who have things that should not be handled by people because they are the people who talk to the departed spirits. Every witch doctor possessess divining bones with which he works. Things like the horns containing medicinal charms, these things are those used by witch doctors only and nobody else. When he is doctoring and when he prays for a person to the spirits of the dead, he takes out a charm out of his horn and mixes it with other medicine; he smears his hands

and rubs his face with it. He then begins his job and continues until he has finished.

Supreme deity: Right from our creation, we have no God, we have the demi-gods of our fathers. These demi-gods are the spirits of our fathers, they have the power to help us and to punish us if we did not please them during their life-time. However, we have no God who might have been the creator of all things. But what I know definitely is the spirits of our fathers which indeed have power to punish and to bless their children. If the children did not obey a father or a mother neither of their spirits will have a rest. These children will always have hardships in this world because of the spirit of their father which will not be at rest. They will not keep cattle, they will not get kaffir corn from the lands and perhaps they may have no offspring, or their children will not live. They will at last have to get a witch doctor to plead on their behalf and it is then that the spirits of the dead will rest and good luck will return to them. Before this spirit has had happiness, the children will suffer a great deal. The witch doctor also when he throws his divining bones in an examination, he never picks on a different spirit, it will always be that of my father, who has no rest and who is grieved where he is. The witch doctor must first give me medicine, and pray to the spirits of the dead on my behalf, so that I may be happy on earth. What the witch doctors say is believed by us, they know the depth of the earth and not the ordinary person. Everyone who has his own kraal has a witch doctor who does the doctoring for him. This is the witch doctor who prays to the spirits of the dead for him, that they may rest in peace and it is the same doctor which watches over him. All the undertaking he wishes to effect must be authorised by his doctor. He has implicit confidence in this witch doctor as far as praying to the departed spirits on his behalf so that they may not molest him and so that they may pour their blessing upon his undertakings. When a witch doctor helps

in one's transaction, he keeps on saying, "May the spirits of your dead fathers be well-disposed to you and cause your undertakings to be blessed". After this the person concerned will then begin to carry on with his work, doing it in the way he desires. He will have no fear whatever may happen.

Other spirits: There are no spirits that live in such things as trees or in the water. No one ever speaks about them. But there is another soul in the animals as well as in the human beings, but this is a belief the womenfolk have. It is this that if a woman see an animal or a human being, and gets terribly frightened, she will have a child born to her who resembles that animal or the human being who frightened her. This is an unchanging belief.

There are other spirits of animals but these are those used by wizards. They call them 'diphiri mesoko'. They are spirits which the wizards send ~~x~~ when they are going to bewitch or those which they ride when they wish to go to a certain destination. Diphiri mesoko (magical hyenas) are animals. The wizards transform them with their medicines in order to become magical hyenas, that is to say, they no longer want food, and they never get hungry also. When he rides it, it will run at a speed that will surprise the people. When it runs, it glides in the twinkling of an eye and reaches its destination. The magical hyenas are kept by the wizards in places only known to them. Nobody would ever have any knowledge of their ~~x~~ whereabouts and existence except themselves and their witch doctors. These spirits are not very well known, few people only know about them.

Sacred places: We have no sacred places, there are two however which are not sacred but astonishing. There is a place where soil is dug which the women smear grain baskets with. What is surprising in connection with this soil is that, where it is dug, there is no hollow. After the digging has taken place, the hollow closes up. The soil is dug by women who mould pots, they are the people who know about it. The spot where this soil

is dug is called the 'Matlhorro soil'.

Another place is at the 'Madimatle Hole'. It is where iron is dug. It is not known who dug this hole. Iron was dug only by smiths and they were the only people who went there. On arrival there, they threw something into the hole and then began digging the iron. The thing that was thrown into the hole was left there that means, it was a gift to the owners of the hole and they knew what they had to do with it. Every one who was a smith had to give out something if he wished to dig iron, and had to throw the article into the hole before digging. I don't know what happened if one did not give out anything. I only hear the talk that one should drop in something in order to be able to dig. In connection with the 'Madimatle Hole', we heard the people of the olden times saying that there are people at the bottom of it, but when we ask how they saw them, they say they don't know how they saw them, they merely say that they also heard their fathers telling them that. They say that if a person enters this hole he will never be able to come out. He will lose sight of the way by which he entered. They say that if you pay a surprise ~~ix~~ visit there, you will hear bellowing of cattle, a person calling out or singing and a cock crowing. We don't know who saw these things we only hear the stories told; we have not been there to see the hole, this hole is near Thaba Zimbi mountain and it is there where the iron was dug.

Obsession and Possession.

Ghosts are spirits which have no proper sleep, which still long to go back to where they came from. This means that after death the person concerned was not buried properly in the manner he desired or he died without having time to tell the people of his property that is in possession of others. In that case the dead person always gives those who are left behind trouble or anyone who may go to where he is buried. One does not often see a ghost or ghosts. If a person sees one, it means a bad omen. But one may see a ghost, but it does not follow that one is going

to become a lunatic. One may only get a fright. It does happen sometimes that one gets very ill when frightened by a ghost, so much so that witch doctors are brought to cure him. But for one to be ill is not a matter of common occurrence. Such ~~xx~~ a person is one that may be said to be unlucky. What is known about a ghost is that if it is seen, that is a bad omen. The one who sees it will get news of death. That is what is known about a ghost.

There are other spirits ~~x~~ which go into some people, they say these are the spirits of dead people. If they enter into a person you will find him talking to himself sometimes he just becomes delirious. A person gets ill sometimes and you find him talking to himself. He may swear at the people or run about all over the country. When the spirits of the dead enter a person, it is alleged that it is when he dreams of the dead. It is said that he will keep on dreaming about them until he gets a fright. When the spirit of the dead has entered a person, that person is doctored by witch doctors who know that it is the spirits of the dead and who can pray to them. They cure the people according to their knowledge. It is not often that you find people whom the departed spirits have entered. There is a certain tree known as 'Motlhatlhabadimo'. If a person dreams about the dead spirits, the people cut its branches and make a pillow with them for the person who dreams about the dead, this sometimes makes him to dream no more about them. If he continues to dream about them, a doctor is procured to cure him, he will then get cured, otherwise he will become insane.

Spirits and powers in objects: No spirits can enter objects which have no life in them, as it enters animate objects like cattle, human beings and animals. The wizards have failed in making use of inanimate objects, if I am not mistaken. The hyenas (diphiri mesoko) which they make use of are animals, they do not use stones and water. The hyenas (diphiri mesoko) are possessed by wizards, they are the only people who use them with