

From Lāga; Samoan Oratory. 1987
Tālofata 101

Funeral Speech

(Sāluafata village, 'Upolu, 18 January, 1985)

The funeral speech differs in structure from that of the welcome and wedding speeches. The death of a chief must not be confused with that of an orator, because different words apply for each. A similar distinction is made between elderly people (fathers and mothers of families) and unmarried girls and boys. Orators take great care in the drafting of speeches because of the various customs applicable on the death of Samoans.

The orators firstly prepare, as it were, their path to the deceased, and follow this with their speeches after the recitations and salutations of the sky, using green coconut leaves tied together and carried by the chiefs and orators to the corpse. The orator at the head of the line must remember that there are ten salutations of the sky to be recited during the walk to the house where the corpse lies.

The following is the speech by the orator-chief Inu Sesera delivered at the funeral of the high chief Tagaloa Siosa'i at Sāluafata village, 'Upolu. The speech opens with the salutations of the 'ten heavens' of the country.

I (Introduction)

1. Greetings to the sky, and the sky, and the sky.
2. There is darkness at Pulumautau and 'Olotelē, which is occupied by the boys of the government, the two pandanus leaves, and also the Brother-Chiefs and the Threesome.
3. Likewise, the council is in session at Faleniu and Faletoi, where the senior orator and other orators of Sāluafata live.
4. [This is] the sacred calling of our matai upon Tagaloā.

II (Mornings)

5. Samoa has various kinds of mornings; there are those of happiness and those of sadness.
6. The morning we now have is that of sadness and the shedding of tears.

III (Words of comfort)

7. God's will is a javelin which cannot be deflected, a bullet which cannot be avoided.
8. It is so far in front that it needs no measuring, a stone cast out with a curse, or a spear not about to be thrown.
9. I shall speak humbly and with dignity, like a tree in the valley, as it is said of the Māta'uti'a's sightseeing party.
10. I extend our condolences, and touch the morning star out of grief and sincere emotion.
11. Alas for your chiefly family; he has travelled to the sky.
12. The senior orator who was full of words when we sat together.
13. Where are the kings of the country? The descendants of Sā Tagaloā are in heaven.
14. Where are the servants of God? They have removed their battle-dress, their duties have ceased.
15. Where are the country's principal orators? Their net of oratory is now spread in heaven.
16. Alas, the post of the chief's house which was protected with the spear has now been removed.
17. The garland used for dancing is broken, and the necklace for the chief's son has slipped.
18. The steps of good fortune, also, have slipped.

IV (Presentation of valuables)

19. Words, now, about our coming here today for this funeral. I ask your forgiveness for what your affine has brought:
20. Those [over there] are ten fine mats for the funeral.
21. This [here] is the fine mat which I have kept for many years. It was the customary gift presented to me at the funeral at Fonotī. I have brought it with me [today].
22. Here is one hundred dollars in cash to assist your family's preparations [for the funeral].

V (Conclusion)

23. As to the conduct of the day — the speech will not be prolonged. May it be that, if a warrior falls, another warrior lives.
24. May the sky clear and dark clinging clouds move along.
25. Those, then, are the well-established sacred things, and the unmoved wall.
26. As to the practice of making honorific addresses to the sacredness of the chiefly house — may the chiefly house in its [time of] grief have the fragrance of the 'oli tree.
27. May leaves fallen in the wind be distant from the wake, and may dark clouds swiftly disappear from your family.
28. And may the worship of your village and also [that of] Lufilufi be successful. Long life!

Explanatory notes for Chapter Eleven

1. The expression *tulouna a le lagi*, referring to the sky, occurs frequently in speeches at funerals and burials. Although this present speech refers to only three, a full salutation includes nine, plus a tenth which is the domain of God. In oratory, the nine skies refer to the various types of euphemistic phrases recited on the death of a chief or orator. Over the years, additional texts have been added to the original nine. The present speech does not enumerate these 'skies'. The following is a comprehensive list of such phrases, all referring to the death of chiefs (Tu'i M S 1982:68-70):
gāsolosolo ao — the clouds are moving along
tā'ape pāpā — the high titles are scattered
'ua motu le soa — the partnership is severed
'ua usu le fono — the council is in session
'ua gau le to'oto'o — the staff is broken
'ua tafea le tau'ofe — the boat is adrift
'ua 'emo uila sā — the sacred lightning flashes
'ua pā fāititili — the thunder crashes
taufai sunu'i pito o le lagi — the sides of the sky thrust inward
'ua tō le timu — rain is falling
'ua pō le nu'u — the village is in darkness
'ua gau 'o le sa'a — the container is shattered
'ua tafea moli — the oranges are adrift
'ua māsaesae le lagi — the heavens are torn apart
'ua mafuli le lagi — the heavens are overturned
'ua fati le galu — the wave is breaking

- 'ua pa'ū le lā — the sun has fallen
 'ua pa'ū le māšina — the moon has fallen
 'ua māvaevae le 'ele'ele — the earth is cracking
 le malaefono 'ua solivalea e aitua ma tagata — ghosts and people trespass on the malaefono
 'ua tu'u le mālō — the government has been abandoned
 'ua malepe le fale'ula — the shining red house has been destroyed
 'ua motu le 'ula siva — the garland used for dancing is broken
 'ua tā'ape le 'aulafo — the players have dispersed
 'ua gasetoto le māšina — the moon is eclipsed
 'ua malepe le 'ato siva — the basket for dancing has been destroyed.
 A skilled orator is known by the way he uses such expressions in his lament for the deceased.
2. The phrase 'ua lagi is an honorific reference to a village malae or chiefly house which is visited by death, and is common in speech openings at funerals and burials.
 The expression *tama o le mālō ma 'ie e lua* refers to the chiefs Tagaloa and Sagapolutele.
 The phrase *Usoali'i ma le taufia* refers to other chiefs of Sāluafata.
 The term *matua* refers to the senior orator Fineiatalaga.
3. It is uncommon in funeral speeches to incorporate the concept of mornings, and it is noted that the speaker here does not dwell on the topic.
5. The expression 'o le mua e lē fuatia derives from the game of javelin-hurling (*tāgāti'a*): a throw obviously far in front of all others does not need to be measured. In the present context, it alludes to God as the first cause and creator of all.
 'O le ma'a e togi fa'atō is a reference to God's punishment, which Samoans identify in the form of death.
9. The name Mātā'utia is a reference to the Tuiatua Mātā'utia, evidently in relation to his legendary exploits with women.
 Māilo (M S 1972:16) identifies the *tūtafa'itoa* as a morning star.
10. The 'ofu tau — 'battledress' — reference is to a minister's clerical collar, which is removed on his death.
14. The expression 'ua fā'ia o maota refers to titles entrusted to a community or village; in the present context, the orator alludes to ancestors.
16. *Fuifui i tao* refers to the knowledgeable *matai* now dead.
 For an explanation of this line, see the annotation for line 24, chapter 8.
17. The phrase 'i le lagi lea refers to the customary presentation of fine mats, money and other valuables by the deceased's family to

not only the assembled *matai*, but also any *matai* from other villages present at the formal ceremonies. This line apologises for the inadequacy of the valuables presented to the deceased's family.

21. Reference to a fine mat which has been kept for many years is commonly made under such circumstances to indicate that it is the best among the speaker's collection, even though this may not necessarily be so. If it is indeed the best, the bereaved family are deeply honoured, and will reciprocate by presenting it back to the donor, calling it a *tōfa*, a chiefly fine mat.
24. References to the deceased's family's good health and prosperity.
25. This line refers to Samoa's titles and dignities which have been allocated according to custom, and is used here as a reaffirmation of the status quo. The expression *pā le solo* refers to dignities and sacredness not easily destroyed and non-negotiable.
26. Samoans associate the scent of the 'ōli tree with the smell of a house containing a corpse.
27. The phrase *fale osilagi* refers to the role played by women mourners who have kept vigil over the corpse on the night before the funeral; the orator acknowledges the difficulty of such a task.

Interpretation of the funeral speech

This speech illustrates several aspects of Samoan attitudes towards death and the dead. In emotive descriptions and eulogies, the orator typifies much of the true spirit of Samoan oratory. He begins his introduction by referring to the three skies as the destination of the spirits of all the dead. This is followed by a eulogy for the dead chief in the form of a shortened form of the *fa'alupega* of the man and his village. There are good reasons for this. Samoans take great pride in their *fa'alupega*, and an outsider's correct recitation, even if abridged, indicates respect and dignity. Additionally, the deceased's relatives expect those coming to pay their last respects to address the corpse as if it were still alive and listening. The direct and personal approach is also seen in the use of the name of the dead chief's guesthouse and property, and also that of a co-chief with equal status in this village. Line 3 equates the deceased with two *malaefono* (Faleniu and Faletoi): when a *matai* dies, the *malaefono* also, figuratively, die.

The second section deals with the mornings, the speaker briefly noting that these differentiate between happiness and sadness. The comforting words of the oration refer to Samoan customs rich in proverbs and emotive symbols. This section also illustrates the orator's linguistic creativity: examples of individually created expressions are

found in lines 11-12, 14-5, and 18, expressing the status of the deceased and the significance of death itself. Through their status, influence and achievements, the dead are eulogised as an essential part of the ongoing life of a village community.

The fourth section concerns the formal presentation of valuables to the deceased's family, this being one act in the exchange of goods occurring at funerals. The speaker ends in the normal manner, wishing health and prosperity on the local *matai* and the group of female mourners.