
**STARI IN NOVI RITUALI TER TRADICIONALNE
IN SODOBNE ŠEGE OB SMRTI**

*OLD AND NEW RITUALS – TRADITIONAL AND
CONTEMPORARY CUSTOMS CONNECTED WITH
DEATH*

Ključne besede: Slovenija, pogrebne šege, smrt, verovanje, pogreb, drugi pokop

Življenjska pot povezuje dve med seboj odvisni skrajnosti – rojstvo in smrt. Že ob rojstvu – še več, že ob spočetju vsako živo bitje stopi na pot smrti, torej je življenje že tudi umiranje. Med tema skrajnostma vstopa človek v posamezna življenjska obdobja, na katera lahko bolj ali manj sam vpliva, so odvisna od njegove volje, tako npr. izbira šole, poklica, zakonskega stanu. Posamezne življenjske stopnje pa pomenijo vedno znova prehode v nove skupnosti soljudi in prav v teh prehodih je človek videl negotovosti, tveganja, nevarnosti za tistega, ki je spremenil svoj življenjski stan. Iz take miselnosti so nastale različne šege obrambnega (apotropejskega) značaja. Ker pa vsaka izmed treh glavnih življenjskih stopenj vpliva tudi na širšo okolico, na družino, fantovske, dekliške, vaške skupnosti, se t.i. šege prehoda, »rites de passage«, ki imajo apotropejski značaj, vedno prepletajo tudi s šegami slovesa in s šegami sprejema.

Za človeka, ki veruje v posmrtno življenje, pomeni smrt le prehod v družbo rajnih, vstop v neko boljše, večno življenje. Tisti pa, ki vanj ne veruje, vidi v smrti konec, ki se mu zdi nesprejemljiv. Zato tudi on, še bolj pa njegova okolica, išče tolažbe in se oklepa včasih istega upanja, da je dosegel polnost življenja, da je ustvaril nekaj, kar bo spominjalo na to, da je živel. Verjetno v svoji podzavesti vsak človek veruje v neko višjo silo, ki ima moč nad življenjem in smrtjo; morda ga pred smrtjo le prešine dvom, da obstaja tudi po smrti neko, sicer drugačno življenje, v katerega mora vstopiti pripravljen. Čaka pa ga prehod, v katerem so ljudje slutili mnoge nevarnosti za rajnega in za ljudi, ki jih je zapustil. In prav pri šegah ob smrti, ki so na slovenskem podeželju najbolj ohranile svojo prvotno obliko, si strah in slovo podajata roke. Na eni strani srečujemo strah pred mrličem in pred njegovo možno vrnitvijo, ki bi lahko imela zle posledice za domače in okolico, na drugi strani pa veliko spoštovanje do njega, saj bo po smrti dobil moč nad živimi, postal bo njihov priprošnjik, posrednik med njimi in Bogom. Tako srečamo pri šegah ob smrti in pogrebu prvine, ki sicer izvirajo iz davne preteklosti in je njih prvotni pomen pozabljen ali pa ga danes drugače razlagajo, ki pa so vendarle ostale kot trdno zasidrana navada. O mnogih nam pripovedujejo stara pisna poročila, o njih poročajo

ljudje na terenu, mnogo tega lahko še danes sami doživljamo, opazujemo v vsakodnevnih komunikacijah. Preseneča nas, kako je še živo tisto, kar tako radi imenujemo »vraževerje«, pri tem pa se ne moremo otresti občutka, da ljudje v moč dejanj resnično verjamejo, morda prav zato, ker se zdi smrt nekaj tako dokončnega, težko sprejemljivega in vendar neizogibnega. Velik del šeg ob smrti in umiranju se nanaša na verovanja v duhove, demone (vse to naj bi bile duše umrlih) in vse so obrnjene k misli na obrambo pred njihovim zlim vplivom. Najprimernejše sredstvo je molitev tistih, ki stojijo ob smrtni postelji. Zanimivo je, da poleg pravih molitev za umirajoče ne poznamo nobenih drugih čarobnih formul (npr. zagovorov), kakor jih poznajo ob drugih priložnostih (ob porodu ali nekaterih boleznih). V navadi so očenaš, rožni venec, križev pot in sedem resnic. Obrambno moč pa pripisujejo zakramentalom: blagoslovljeni vodi in sveči (prižgejo jo ob bolnikovem vzglavju), rožnemu vencu, križcem z relikvijami, ki so jih prinesli z božje poti.

Ne bomo se ustavljali in razčlenjevali posamezne šege ob smrti, ob umiranju, trenutku smrti, pogrebu in osmini, čeprav je ljudem slovenskega podeželja še zelo pomemben ustaljen potek dogajanj. Izbrala sem le nekaj tistega, kar se zdi, da je v tem vedno bolj modernem, higiensko urejenem in praktičnem svetu najbolj ogroženo – to pa so šege, ki so od nekdaj povezovalе družino, sosedstvo, vaško skupnost.

Da je nekdo hudo bolan, ljudje na vasi hitro izvedo: manj ga obiskujejo v bolnišnici, če pa leži doma, čutijo kot dolžnost, da pri njem posedijo. Ko zaslutijo, da se mu bliža zadnja ura, se zbere vsa družina, prijatelji in sosedje, da ne bi umrl zapuščen, da bi pokazali, da mu odpuščajo vse zamere, kar naj bi tudi pomenilo, da mu lajšajo smrt.

In vendar že v Stoletni pratiki 1801–1900 pisec svari: *»Če je bolnik močno slab, se ne smejo obiskovavci brez posebne potrebe k njemu pušati, kateri bi pred njim čenčali, neslane pogovore imeli, in ga glušili: ... obilni obiskovalci so mu le bolj v nadležnost, kakor v polajšanje.... v tesni stanici se zrak ... kmalo spridi in skazi, in na bolnika močno vdarja, de težko diha in nekako nepokojnost v sebi občuti, ktera se na vsim njegovim životu razodeva.«* Svetuje tudi, de se *»morajo taki iz hiše spraviti, kateri s svojim jokam ... umirajočim nadlego in nepokoj delajo.«*

Trenutkom umiranja ljudje od nekdaj prisojajo največji pomen za mir bolnikove (in ne nazadnje tudi svoje) duše. Podzavestno je pri ljudeh vedno prisotna misel na dramatičen boj Boga in njegovih pomočnikov svetnikov in angelov na eni in hudobo na drugi strani. Zato je razumljivo, da umirajočega v tem težkem trenutku in nevarnosti polnem položaju ne pustijo samega. K hudo bolnemu pokličejo duhovnika, da ga previdi, mazili in mu prinese *»sveto popotnico«*. V ta namen je imela še v prvi polovici tega stoletja vsaka hiša vedno pripravljene prte, križ, dva svečnika, posodo za žegnano vodo in eno za olje. Vse to je morala k hiši prinesiti že nevesta s svojo balo (nevesta mora misliti tako na rojstvo otroka kakor tudi na svojo in svojih domačih zadnjo uro) in je bilo spravljeno kot nekakšen *»memento mori«* – opomin, da smrt prej ali slej obišče vsako hišo.

V času baroka je bilo nošenje svete popotnice podobno procesiji Rešnjega Telesa: ob odhodu iz cerkve so zvonili, duhovnik je hodil pod *»nebom«*, dva moža sta nosila banderi, dva sta poleg stopala z baklami, eden je nosil luč, drugi je zvončkljal. Ljudje, ki so srečali ali opazili ta spreved, so ob poteh, pred hišami ali na polju pokleknili. Ta baročna scena se

seveda ni mogla obdržati, toda na deželi je še vedno v navadi, da nosi duhovnik sveto popotnico oblečen v koretelj s štolo, pred njim pa stopa mežnar z lučjo in zvončkom. Ljudje še vedno ali pokleknejo ali se vsaj pokrižajo, moški pa se odkrijejo. Da so sosede v mislih spremljali bolnika, dokazuje, da so se (ponekod pa se še) že prej zbrali pred vaškim znamenjem ali ob vhodu v vas in skupaj pospremili duhovnika do hiše umirajočega. Zakrament maziljenja nudi Cerkev svojim vernikom že od prvih začetkov krščanstva. Do visokega srednjega veka je bil poudarek predvsem na prošnji in upanju za ozdravitev in šele pozneje je odpuščanje grehov dobilo svojo težo. Maziljenje se je tedaj imenovalo »*poslednje olje*« – to pa je bilo pravzaprav obremenjeno s slutnjo, da ni upanja na zdravje, da je to, kar še nudi Cerkev na tem svetu, tisto »*poslednje*«, ki izraža dokončnost, konec. To je psihično slabo vplivalo na bolnika, ki je še pri zavesti. Uradna Cerkev je želela to premostiti in je poslednje olje preimenovala v »*bolniško maziljenje*«.

Smrt v fari naznanja mrtvaško zvonjenje. *Navček* ali *cinklenkl cingla*, zapoje, ali, kakor pravijo, premolkne enkrat, dvakrat ali trikrat, na Dolenjskem dva ali tri *štikelce* ali *štuke* zvoní. V posameznih farah, vendar ne povsod enako, že po tem, kolikokrat zvon premolkne, sklepajo, ali je umrl moški, ženska ali otrok. Tam, kjer so imeli več zvonov, za moškega zvonijo s ta velikim, za žensko s ta srednjim, za otrokom pa s ta malim zvonom.

Ko bolnik izdihne, mu najprej zatisnejo oči. To je znak spoštovanja do umrlega, hkrati pa tudi obrambno dejanje, ki naj bi izviral iz strahu pred mrličevim »*hudim pogledom*« – še danes pravijo da bo, če mrlič gleda (ali pa če se smehlja), kmalu še nekdo umrl. To je sicer s krščanskim umevanjem smrti težko utemeljiti. Težko se je odločiti tudi, ali gre tu za predkrščansko verovanje ali pa samo za morebitne slabe izkušnje, ko je ob kaki nalezljivi bolezni, epidemiji umrlo več ljudi drug za drugim. Vsekakor so se taka verovanja pojavljala po epidemiji kuge, ki ji je sledilo nekaj posebnih ravnanj oz. dejanj. Mrtvim so začeli skrbno zatiskati oči in zapirati usta, poskrbeli so tudi, da je bilo vse, kar bi lahko imelo zvezo z živimi, odmaknjeno od ust rajnega (npr. uvezena imena, monogrami na rjuhi, blazini, sposojeni mrtvaški prt, prtiči, obleka itd.). Sledila pa so še druga varnostna dejanja: zbuditi je treba živino (predvsem, če je umrl gospodar), premešati žito, da ne bi izgubilo kaljivosti, odpreti okno, pomesti smeti (duša naj ima prosto pot), izliti vodo iz posod, na Gorenjskem in Dolenjskem rjuho, na kateri je bolnik umrl, takoj namočiti in jo neožeto obesiti (kolikor kapljic je odteklo z rjuhe, toliko duš so rešili), še danes takoj zagrnejo ogledalo, da iz njega ne bi odsevala mrliška bledica, in ustavijo uro, saj se je rajnemu iztekel čas, zato naj se ne muči s štetjem ur in minut, ko bo moral zapustiti domačo hišo. Danes je razlaga seveda drugačna kot nekoč: kropivcem ni treba vpraševati, kdaj je umrl, saj ustavljena ura vse pove. Predvsem pa je treba pogasiti ogenj v peči: ogenj je namreč živa stvar, prasketanje gorečega lesa pa je slišati tako, kakor da jočejo verne duše v vicah. In tudi to ima predvsem praktičen pomen: rajni največkrat leži na parah doma, v t.i. hiši, torej v prostoru, kjer je kmečka peč. Soba, v kateri je *naparan*, pa mora biti hladna, da od mrliča prezgodaj ne pride zadah. Ker pa v peči ne kurijo, seveda tudi ne morejo peči kruha, s katerim postrežejo vsem, ki pridejo kropit. Tako se je ustalila navada, da kruh in pogače iz medsebojne pomoči spečejo sosede.

Prvo delo, ki ga store potem, ko nekdo umre, je, da ga umijejo (ne le iz higienskih razlogov, marveč zaradi starega verovanja, da se ne bi hodil nazaj umivat) in oblečejo v obleko, ki so si jo včasih ljudje za smrt hranili vse življenje (pogosto je bila to celo poročna obleka). Mnogokje je še navada (seveda, če človek umre doma), da to delo opravijo zgolj sosedje, saj se domači mrtvega niso smeli dotakniti. Takim sosedom na Gorenjskem pravijo »mrtvi sosedje« in jih tako ločijo od tistih, s katerimi so v *botrinji*, ki velja včasih celo za več kot sorodstvo. Vendar pa počasi tudi ta navada izginja in vse pogosteje rajnega, če seveda umre doma, preoblečejo kar domači sami. (... »Včasih smo pa vsi sosedje hoteli umiti, preobleč, poribat, pare naredit, smo bolj skup držal, sedaj je pa vsak zase ... «). To je že prva sprememba, ki nastaja v današnjem svetu: tistega, ki umre v bolnišnici, domov pripeljejo v krsti, pogosto kar v mrtvaško vežico, če jo fara že ima: s tem pa odpade vrsta šeg. Ljudje, ki še dajo kaj na stare navade, se tega zavedajo in včasih pred smrtjo vzamejo bolnika iz bolnišnice, češ »da bo umrl doma«. Ko pride čas, jim sosedje pomagajo pripraviti mrtvaški oder, ki mu splošno pravijo pare; mrliča torej položijo na pare, *na pravico, na skolkke*. Pokojni leži na mrtvaškem odru sredi hiše, vendar tako, da je z nogami obrnjen proti hišnim vratom. Sklenjene roke mu ovijejo z rožnim vencem, na mizico pred pare postavijo med dve goreči sveči križ, predenj pa skodelico z blagoslovljeno vodo ali soljo in kropilno vejico, oljko, pušpan, brinje, redkeje smrekovo vejico. Ob mrtvaški oder postavijo klopi, da domači in tudi kropilci pri rajnem lahko malo posedijo, predvsem pa so klopi in stoli v sobi za nočno *vahtanje*, bedenje pri mrliču.

Sorodnikom in znancem naznanijo smrt domači sami, k pogrebu pa so nekoč, ponekod pa še danes, od vasi do vasi, od hiše do hiše vabili ali, kakor pravijo, »na pogreb velevali« ali »ukazali« posebni mrtvaški *vabovci* ali znanilci. Starejši moški ali ženska, navadno tisti, ki bo ves čas čul pri mrliču, gre naznanit smrt k sosedom in jih hkrati povabi k pogrebu in k *vahtanju* ali *žebranju* (Koroška). Stara navada je namreč bila, da so prišli na pogreb le tisti sovaščani, ki so bili povabljeni. Če je umrl gospodar ali gospodinja, so velevali na pogreb pri sosedih iz vsake hiše po dvema, če pa otrok, pa po enem. *Vabovec*, ki je v hišo stopil z besedami »K pogrebu sem prišel velevat«, je v dar dobil nekaj prosa, kaše ali moke, kos kruha, pozneje že tudi denar. Čeprav danes skoraj ne velevajo več, pa gre iz vsake hiše vsaj eden na pogreb, kropit pa po nepisanem pravilu vsak, ki je pokojnega poznal; če so bili sosedje med seboj v zameri, v jezi, se v večini tedaj pobotajo. Celó ob zelo hudi zameri, ko na pogreb niso šli, so prišli vsaj kropit.

Pri pokojnem čuje noč in dan posebej najeti čuvar ali čuvarica in za to dobi denar ali kakšen kos pokojnikove obleke. Taki ženi pravijo na Notranjskem, da je »na lučci«, in ker se vsakemu z »*bohlonaj*« zahvali, ji na Dolenjskem pravijo »žena za *bohlonaj*«. Na podeželju največ hodijo kropit zvečer, ko imajo več časa in potem pri mrliču ostanejo pozno v noč ter pri njem čujejo. V Beli krajini so *na varki*, Gorenjci gredo mrliča *vahtat* ali *varvat*, na Štajerskem gredo k njemu *bedet*, Korošci pa *žebrat* (molit), Dolenjci gredo celo »*bel kruh jest*«, sicer pa pravijo bedenju »*mrtvaško vasovanje*« ali nočno vasovanje pri mrliču. Najprej za umrlega in za duše v vicah, predvsem za *tiste*, »*ki brez miru okrog letajo*«, kakor pravijo, molijo, potem pojejo cerkvene in mrliške pesmi (obsmrtnice). Razpoloženje sčasoma postane vedro, pripovedujejo zgodbe, tudi strašljive, se igrajo razne igre (najraje take s kaznimi) in skoraj pozabijo, da so ob mrliču. Ljudsko izročilo namen nočnega vaso-

vanja pri mrliču le slabo pojasnjuje. Ena izmed razlag je, da se tako tisti, ki čujejo ob mrtvaškem odru, sami zavarujejo pred smrtjo, kajti po prastari šegi, ki je vse do danes še niso povsem opustili, mora biti človek na mrliškem vasovanju dobre volje, poleg molitev in žalostnih pesmi pa se oglašajo tudi vesele, mrliški vasovalci se tudi šalijo. Veselo razpoloženje naj bi človeka zavarovalo pred smrtjo, o kateri so verovali, da je zlasti ponoči, ko človeka premaguje spanec, nalezljiva. Ker pa so imele ljudske šege navadno več namenov, so razpoloženje razlagali tudi s tem, da morajo rajnega razvedriti, ker bi bil sicer užaljen, če bi se njegovi sorodniki in znanci z žalostjo ločili od njega.

Domači morajo vse kropilce in mrtvaške vasovalce pogostiti: prinesejo žganje in bel kruh. Le-ta je moral biti za kropilce še pred drugo vojno pri vsaki hiši, če drugače ne, ga je revnejšim »eno peko« (okoli 6 hlebcev) prinesel premožnejši sosed. Kruh so vzeli vsi, mnogi pa ga niso pojedli, ampak so ga nesli domov otrokom. Tako pokojni še zadnjikrat pogosti vse sorodnike, znance, posebno pa siromake in berače in še zadnjikrat pokaže svojo gostoljubnost. Tu se pokaže tesna miselna povezanost med revnimi dušami v vicah in med reveži na zemlji. S podpiranjem revnih se lahko pridobi zasluge za lastno dušo ali za duše sorodnikov. Pogostitev kropilcev se je obdržala še do današnjega časa, tudi tam, kjer rajni leži v mrliški vežici. Arhitekt, ki pozna in sledi navadam ljudi, predvidi tudi ob vežici majhno čajno kuhinjo, kamor domači prinesejo pijačo, kruh in pecivo in v kateri skuhamo čaj, kavo ali vino, da lahko kropilce pogostijo in da se pozimi tudi sami lahko pogrejejo, saj tudi v vežici mrtvega ne pustijo samega. Ni pa več nočnega vasovanja pri mrliču, saj vežico zvečer navadno zaklenejo, po mnenju nekaterih prezgodaj, saj ljudje, ki imajo delo na polju, lahko pridejo kropit šele zvečer. Mrliške vežice sprejemajo zelo različno: starejši, ki še bivajo v svojih starih hišah, radi vidijo, da pokojni leži doma, da so ob njem, da vse poteka po ustaljenem redu po starih navadah. Za mlajše, ki žive že v novejših, modernih hišah, pomeni dejstvo, da ob pokopališču še ni vežice, resen problem, ki ga želijo s samopriskevki in lastnim delom čimprej rešiti.

Mrliča pokopljejo navadno tretji dan. Še v začetku tega stoletja so grob izkopalii sosedje ali pa tisti vaščani, ki so nosili tudi krsto. Orodje so prinesli s seboj ali pa so ga vzeli iz nekdanje *totenkamre*, mrtvašnice, v kateri so nekoč ležali le brezdomci. Pozneje so to navado začeli opuščati in je jamo izkopal kar grobar, včasih cerkovnik, ki je bil tudi grobar. Držati pa se je moral predpisov, kdaj sme stari grob ponovno odkopati za novega mrliča. Na Koroškem je še vedno navada, da kramp in lopato v obliki križa položijo čez izkopano jamo. Pogrebci, pogrebniki so bili še do nedavnega sosedje, vaščani, prijatelji, ki jih je pogosto pokojni že prej naprosil ali določil ali pa so to storili domači po njegovi smrti. Biti pogrebnik je veljalo za čast, naprošeni je užival spoštovanje in naklonjenost in ne pomnijo, da bi to kdo odklonil. Še danes pa morajo pogrebci poznati vsa nepisana pravila in se jih držati. Najprej je pomembno, kako rajnega nesejo iz domače hiše, saj je to prehod od doma v grob in je treba pri tem upoštevati vse šege prehoda, ločitve in slovesa. Z nogami ga nesejo naprej, s krsto prekrizajo vse prage, kar naj velja kot njegovo slovo, po starih verovanjih pa tako ne bi našel prave poti, če bi se po naključju vrnil. Ob vaškem znamenju, križu, krsto položijo na tla. Najstarejši pogrebec se v imenu umrlega poslovi ter prosi odpuščanja za krivice, ki jih je morebiti komu naredil, ter vsem zagotovi, da jim tudi sam odpušča, in prosi, naj zanj molijo. Križu pra-

vijo tudi »kerlejš«, kar pride iz »kyrie eleison« – Gospod usmili se – to ime izvira prav iz te šege. Ne samo, da se je ta šega na deželi ohranila vse do danes, še več, redno smo ji priča tudi na obrobju slovenskih mest, npr. v vaseh pod Šmarno goro, celo v Šentvidu, torej v Ljubljani. Tudi v cerkev (na deželi so skoraj redno pogrebi z mašo, po njej pa je *ofer*) nesejo mrtvega z nogami naprej, niso pa več istega mnenja glede tega, kako ga morajo nesti iz cerkve: eni trdijo, da je krsto treba obrniti, da gre tudi z nogami ven, zopet drugi pa trdijo, da mora ves čas gledati na oltar, saj »nihče Bogu ne obrne hrbta«. Zato se morajo pogrebniiki o tem prej dogovoriti. Dolžnost pogrebniikov je bila, da so prinesli krsto, nosili pokojnika (vozili so ga le, če je bila domača hiša zelo daleč od farnege pokopališča; za vozom pa je po ljudski veri treba iti po kolesnicah, ne iskati bližnjic in se ne ozirati, sicer bo kmalu nov mrlič v hiši) in ga tudi zagrebli. Praviloma so bili štirje, redkeje šest. Dobro je bilo, da so bili enake rasti, saj se je teža tako enakomerno porazdelila. Oblečeni so bili v boljše obleko, po možnosti črno, na rokavih so imeli žalne trakove, za poročene črne, za samske bele. Trakove, ki so jih vedno pripravili pokojnikovi domači, so imeli na zunanji strani. Ko so nosila (*trage*) preložili na drugo ramo, so prestavili tudi trak. Po pogrebu so trakove sneli in jih vrgli v grob na krsto. Ta navada se je v drugačni obliki na Dolenjskem ohranila vse do danes. Črn trak z državne zastave, ki jo nosijo na čelu vsakega pogrebnega sprevoda, prav tako snamejo in ga vržejo v grob.

Posebno skrb za umrlega nam kažejo tudi šege in navade, ki se odvijajo po pogrebu doma ali na pokopališču. Tisti, ki niso šli na pogreb, so doma pospravili mrtvaški oder, odprli vsa okna, razmetali stole, vrgli rjuhe in mrtvaške prte v vodo in morda celo sežgali žimnico. Ker so verovali, da mora vsak umrli prvo noč stražiti vse mrtve na pokopališču, zanj po pogrebu najprej zmolijo, predvsem zato, da ga to prvo noč ne bi bilo strah. Še danes pa se drže stare šege pogostitve sedmi ali osmi dan po pogrebu. To gostijo imenujejo sedmina ali osmina, pravijo ji tudi *karmina*, *korbina*, *trbina*, in jo pripravijo domači pokojniku v čast in spomin. Danes je ta mrtvaška gostija navadno takoj po pogrebu in ji pravimo pogrebščina. Povabijo vse, ki so bili na pogrebu, predvsem pa *vabovce*, čuvarja, nosače krste, grobarja, cerkovnika in seveda duhovnika. Preden posedejo, eden izmed njih glasno moli pet očenašev za pokojnikovo dušo. Na nastanek sedmine ali osmine je vplivala črna maša zadušnica, ki se bere za pokojnega sedmi oz. osmi dan po pogrebu. Prav tako so na uvedbo sedmine vplivale ljudske molitve, ki so jih na pokojnikovem domu opravljali sedem oz. osem dni zapovrstjo. O tem poroča že Valvasor iz 17. stol: »Pri pogrebih je ponekod ... navada, da dado precej po pokopu samo nosačem jesti. Nato prihajajo osem dni zapovrstjo v hišo tisti, ki so šli za pogrebom, in tudi tisti, ki so nosili truplo, ter polože v sobi na mestu, kjer je ležal mrtvec, dve voščeni sveči križem druga na drugo, ju prižgo na vseh štirih koncih ... pokleknejo in molijo, dokler sveči čisto ne pogorita... Nato gre vsakdo po svoji poti domov. In tako delajo osem dni. Zadnji, t.j. osmi dan, pa jim je treba dati kaj jesti. Tedaj je pokojni prav pokopan.« Poročila o tem se vrstijo vse do današnjih dni. V Beli krajini so še pred vojno »sedmino molili«, na Gorenjskem celo devet dni, na Dolenjskem še danes hodijo k družini umrlega molit osem dni vsak večer, osmi dan je zadušnica, potem pa jih pogostijo. Iz vsega tega lahko sklepamo, da so sedmine ali osmine z mrtvaško gostijo v bistvu zaključne molitve za umrlega. Zavedati pa se moramo, da je sedmina oz. osmina samo po svojem

imenu in po času vršitve mlajša, iz krščanskega srednjega veka izvirajoča šega. Kot mrtvaška gostija izvira namreč iz prastarih časov in je zadnji ostanek staroslovanskih mrtvaških obredij.

Ob koncu pa omenimo še posebno šego, ki je danes splošno manj znana in vendar je ponekod na Koroškem še živa: s posebnimi šegami je namreč združena skrb za kosti, posebno za lobanjo in večje kosti tistega pokojnega, v katerega grob nameravajo pokopati drugega mrliča. Vse kosti je namreč treba zbrati, jih umiti in zavite v prt ob novem pogrebu položiti nazaj v grob. Šega umivanja in zavijanja kosti nas spominja na drugi pokop mrliča, ki ga poznajo mnoga prvotna ljudstva zunaj Evrope.

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DEATH CUSTOMS IN THE SLOVENE COUNTRYSIDE

Helena Ložar-Podlogar

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Key words: *Slovenia, funeral rites, death, beliefs, funerals, repeated (double) burial*

The path of life links two interdependent extremes: birth and death. When it is born, even at the time of its conception, every living creature starts on the path toward death - one can also say that living simultaneously implies dying as well. Between these two extremes man enters different stages of life which he or she is able to influence to a certain degree: the choice of school, profession, marital status, and so on. These individual stages in one's life denote rites of passage, transition to a new community, to a different group of people. Man has perceived these passages as especially uncertain, risky, and dangerous for the one experiencing them. Such notions resulted in a number of different customs with a defensive (apotropaic) character. And since each of the three life stages (birth, marriage, death) affects others as well, for instance one's family, communities of young men, young women or fellow villagers, these so-called apotropaic »rites de passage« are always closely linked to the customs of departing or of welcoming another human being.

For those who believe in the after-life death merely denotes a transition into the community of the dead, into a better, eternal life; non-believers perceive death as the ultimate end. Since the latter find this hard to accept they, and even more those around them, seek solace, clinging to the hope that they had lived a full life, having created something to remember them by. It is probably in man's subconsciousness to believe in a higher power which governs life and death, and possibly a trace of doubt enters a person's mind before dying, hoping that even after death there might be a different life into which one must come prepared. But such a person is about to undergo the transition which many find equally dangerous for the deceased as well as for those left behind. Death customs and rites which have been preserved most in the Slovene countryside reflect the interconnection of fear and departure. On one hand there is fear of the dead and the possible return of the deceased which could prove fatal for the family or other villagers, on the other a great respect for the deceased who is believed to attain power over the living after

death, becoming the mediator between them and God. Death rites thus contain elements from ancient past whose original meaning has long been forgotten, or is now explained differently, but which have remained and are practiced as a firmly grounded habit. Many are described in old texts or by oral sources, or seen in practice, in everyday communications. It is surprising how what is sometimes labelled "superstition" remains alive, and one cannot help but think that people really believe in the power of these acts - maybe even more so because death seems something truly final, hard to accept, and yet inevitable. Numerous death customs contain the belief in ghosts and demons (represented by the souls of the deceased) and strive to protect against their evil influences. The most appropriate protection thus represents the prayer of those gathered around the dying person. It is interesting that aside from the genuine prayers for the dying other magical formulas (invocations) used on other occasions, such as birth or certain illnesses, are unknown. People usually say the Lord's Prayer, the rosary, the seven gospel truths, or do the stations. The protective power is contained in the sacramental character of the last rites: holy water and candles lit at the head of the dying person, the rosary, the crucifix with relics brought from a pilgrimage.

There is not enough room to dissect and explain each death custom - the process of dying, the moment of death, the funeral, the funeral repast. But those living in the Slovene countryside still greatly value the traditional, firmly established course of events. I have chosen a fragment of what seems to be the most endangered in our ultra-modern, hygienic world of order and practicality - that is the customs which have bound the family, neighbors, and the village community from time immemorial.

Villagers quickly learn of somebody's illness. While they do not often visit the sick in the hospital, they do feel obliged to go and spend some time with them if they remain at home. When it is felt that the time of death is approaching, the whole family, relatives, neighbors, and friends gather at the deathbed to show that old grievances have been forgotten, to make the dying feel less lonely, and to ease the moment of death.

And yet the author of an article in *Stoletna pratika 1801-1900* (1801-1900 Perpetual Calendar) warns his readers: *»If the sick person is very weak, visitors with no specific need should not be allowed to chatter around him, to talk nonsense, and to deafen him... he perceives such a multitude of visitors more of a burden than a relief... the air in a small room soon becomes stale and the sick person starts breathing heavily and feels somehow ill at ease, which is reflected by his whole body.«* The author further advises to chase » ... out of the house those whose crying bothers and disturbs the dying person.«

Since time immemorial people have felt that the moment of dying is of the utmost importance for the peace of the dying person's (and, last but not least, of their own) soul. Unconsciously they think of the dramatic fight of God and his helpers, the saints and the angels, with their evil opponent. It is therefore understandable that they do not leave the dying person alone in such a troublesome, dangerous situation. They call for a priest to administer the last rites and to provide the dying with the »sacred provisions«. As late as the first half of the 20th century each house always kept ready a few tablecloths, a crucifix, two candlesticks, a container for holy water and another one for oil. All of this had to be part of a bride's dowry (since the bride who comes to live in

her bridegroom's house has to think of the birth of a baby as well as the final hour of her family – and indeed her own – as well), and was kept more or less at hand as a symbolic »memento mori« – a reminder that sooner or later death visits each and every household.

110 In Baroque the carrying of the sacred provisions was similar to the Corpus Christi procession: church bells sounded when the priest left the church walking under a canopy, two men carried banderas, two carried torches, one held a light, another chimed the bells. People who chanced upon this procession kneeled on the ground, be it along the village paths, in front of their own houses, or in the fields. While it is understandable that this Baroque custom could not have been preserved into the present, it is nevertheless still a habit that the priest bearing the sacred provisions is dressed in funeral robes with a stole, is preceded by the sexton carrying a light and a small bell, and that those who see them still kneel or at least make the sign of the cross, the men taking off their hats. Since the neighbors accompanied the deceased in their thoughts they used to – or they still do so – gather by the village crucifix or by the entrance to the village and then accompany the priest to the house of the deceased. The sacrament of anointing the sick has been available to believers since the very first years of Christianity. Until the High Middle Ages it emphasized primarily the plea and the hope for recovery, only later it shifted toward the absolution of sins and was named »the last rites«, implying that there was no more hope of attaining health again, that what the Church still had to offer was the very “final” act in this world. Since this aspect of finality disturbed the person who was still conscious, the official Church wished to avoid this negative, final aspect and renamed this act the »annointment of the sick.«

In the parish the death of a villager is announced with the chime of a death bell. The bell, called *navček* or *cinklenkl*, chimes or, as people say, »pauses« once, twice, or three times. In Dolenjsko it sounds two or three *štikelce* or *štuke*. Though this differs from parish to parish, villagers are able to recognize by the number of pauses whether the deceased was a man, a woman, or a child. If a parish had several bells, the largest chimed if the deceased was male, the middle sounded for female parishioners, and the smallest one for a child.

When a person dies, those around him first close his or her eyes. This symbolizes respect for the deceased, but is simultaneously the protection from the »evil eye« of the deceased; the notion that another person will die soon if the eyes of the deceased are open, or if the dead person is smiling, is still alive. It is difficult to establish whether this belief is consistent with the Christian notion of death or not; is it a remnant of certain pre-Christian beliefs, or simply the result of negative experiences from the past when people died one after another had there been an epidemic. At any case, these beliefs started after an epidemic of plague which was followed by a series of specific acts. The eyes and the mouth of the deceased had to be carefully closed, people also took care that anything which might have been connected with the living (i.e. monograms on the sheets or pillows, a borrowed death cloth, smaller tablecloths, clothes, etc.) was removed from the proximity of the mouth of the deceased. This was followed by other protective acts: the cattle – especially if the deceased was the master of the

house – had to be awoken, wheat had to be remixed so it would not lose its capacity for germination, a window had to be opened to set free the passage of the soul, all water had to be poured from containers. In Gorenjsko and Dolenjsko the sheet on which the dying had lain had to be soaked in water immediately, then hung to dry without wringing any of the water out (each falling droplet namely represented a soul saved from hell). Even today, a mirror which might reflect the deathly pallor of the deceased is covered, and the clock in the room is stopped since the deceased has run out of time on this earth and he or she should not strain to count the hours and minutes before leaving the home. There is a different explanation of this act in the present, of course: those who come to pay their respect need not ask when the deceased died, they can see it from the clock. It is very important to extinguish the fire in the oven; the fire is namely a living entity, and the crackling of the burning wood sounds like the crying of the faithful souls in purgatory. There is a practical reason for this as well: the deceased most often lies on a catafalque at home, in the so-called *hiša* (house), that is in the room with the oven. Since the room with the deceased has to remain cool lest the corpse starts to smell, there is no fire in the oven. And since there is no fire in the oven in which bread is usually baked, those who come to pay their respect cannot be offered bread. It is therefore customary that neighbors organize themselves and bring freshly-baked bread and cakes.

The deceased is first washed (this is not only due to hygienic reasons, but also because of the old belief that otherwise he or she would be returning to get washed) and changed into the clothes which were often saved for this very occasion throughout one's life; these are often the very same clothes one got married in. If the deceased died at home it is usually customary that this is carried out only by neighbors since the family is not allowed to touch the deceased. In Gorenjsko such neighbors are called the »death neighbors« to differentiate them from those who are the family's godparents; godparents are namely frequently more valued than relatives of kin. But this custom is slowly disappearing and the deceased is now often changed by the family. (»All the neighbors used to come to wash and change the corpse, scrub the floor, assemble the catafalque. We used to stick together while it is each on his own now«). This is the first change in the present times: whoever dies in a hospital is brought to his or her home in a coffin or often even directly to the funeral chapel if there is one in the parish; a number of customs are thus rendered obsolete. Those who still value the old usages are aware of this and frequently bring the dying person from the hospital so that he or she can die »at home«. Their neighbors help them prepare the catafalque, usually called *pare*. The corpse is placed on the catafalque (also called *pare*, *pravica*, *skolke*) in the middle of the *hiša*, with his legs facing the door and with a rosary in his hands. A little table with two burning candles and a crucifix in the middle is placed in front of the catafalque. In front of the crucifix is a cup of holy water or salt and an aspergillum, that is a twig from either an olive, box or juniper tree, only rarely from a fir tree. The catafalque is flanked by benches so that the family and visitors can pause for a while, but mainly they are needed for the wake at night.

Family members inform (»na pogreb velevati« or »na pogreb ukazati«) their relatives or acquaintances by themselves; in the past – and in some places still today – this task was

performed by the so-called death announcers (*mrtvaški vabovci*). *Vabovci* went from house to house, from village to village, inviting people to attend the funeral (*na pogreb velevati*). An elderly man or woman, usually the one who will keep the wake by the deceased, goes to neighboring houses, announces the death and at the same time invites them to the funeral and the wake (*žebiranje* in Koroško). It was customary in the past that only those who had been specifically invited attended the funeral. If the deceased was either the master or the mistress of the house, the invitation was issued to two people, but only to one if a child had died. *Vabovec*, who stepped into a house announcing »I have come to summon you to the funeral«, received some millet, groats, flour or a piece of bread (later money) as a reward. Even though this custom is not practiced any more, at least one person from each house comes to the funeral. According to an unwritten law all who had known the deceased come to sprinkle holy water on the corpse. Those neighbors who bore a grudge or who had quarreled with the deceased for some reason, usually reconcile at that moment. Even when their resentment is so fierce that no one attends the funeral, they always come to sprinkle holy water on the corpse.

A hired man or a woman stays with the deceased night and day; as a reward he or she receives either a piece of the deceased's clothing, or money. In Notranjsko it is said that such a woman is »*na lučci*«, while in Dolenjsko, where such a person thanks each visitor with the words »*bohlonaj*«, (God bless you), this woman is called »*žena za bohlonaj*« (the *bohlonaj* lady). In Slovene villages people usually come to sprinkle the deceased at night when their daily tasks are mostly done. They stay late at night, keeping the wake. In Bela krajina they are »*na varki*«, in Gorenjsko they call the wake »*mrliča vahtat*« or »*mrliča varvat*«, in Štajerska people come and sit up (*bedijo*) with the dead while in Koroško it is said that people go to pray (*gredo žebirat*) by the corpse. In Dolenjsko people even say that they go »to eat white bread«; but keeping the wake is more frequently called »*mrtvaško vasovanje*« or »*nočno vasovanje pri mrliču*«. During the wake the assembled first pray for the deceased and for the souls in purgatory, especially for those who »wander around with no peace«, as they say. Then they sing church and death songs, and when the mood gradually brightens they tell stories, also scary ones, and play different games, almost forgetting that they are keeping a wake. Folk tradition has not explained the motive of this nightly vigil. One of the explanations maintains that in such a manner people protect themselves from death. The ancient custom of being merry during the wake, of singing merry songs alongside the sad ones and prayers, and of cracking jokes has persisted into the present. It is believed that high spirits protect a person from death which is supposed to be especially catching at night when man is apt to succumb to sleep. Since such customs usually contained more than one meaning, one of the explanations for such behaviour is that people need to cheer up the deceased lest he took offence at his relatives and neighbours taking leave from him in sadness.

The family is obliged to offer schnapps and white bread to every visitor (who is called *kropilec*, *mrtvaški vasovalec*). Even before World War II each house had to serve white bread on such an occasion; if the family could not afford it, a more affluent neighbor brought them a »batch« (about six loaves). All visitors accepted the bread, but many took it home to their children. In this manner the deceased treats his relatives, acquaintances and especially the poor and beggars, for the last time, manifesting his

hospitality. This reveals the close connection of poor souls in purgatory with the poor on Earth. By giving to the poor one can acquire merits for one's own soul or for the souls of one's relatives. This gesture of hospitality has been preserved to the present, even if the deceased lies in a funeral chapel. Those architects who are familiar with people's customs design a small kitchenette alongside a funeral chapel into which the family brings beverages, bread and cakes, and in which they make tea, coffee, or serve wine for those who have come to pay their respect. This is also a place where in winter the family can warm up during their vigil by the deceased. At night, however, the chapel is locked, much to the chagrin of many who feel that this occurs much too early for the farmers who work in the fields till dusk and are therefore able to come only later in the evening. The feelings concerning such funeral chapels are ambivalent: those who still live in their own, original houses, prefer that the deceased remain at home until the funeral so that they can keep a constant vigil and ensure that everything takes place according to old customs and firmly established traditions. If a cemetery does not yet have a funeral chapel, younger people who live in modern houses perceive this as a serious problem and try to solve it as soon as possible by collecting financial contributions and by donating their own labor.

The funeral usually takes place the third day after death. Even at the beginning of the 20th century the grave used to be dug out by neighbors or by the pallbearers. They either brought the necessary tools with them or borrowed them from the so-called *totenkamra*, a funeral chapel which was used only for the homeless. When this custom started to disappear later on, the grave was dug out by gravediggers or sometimes by a sexton who also doubled as a gravedigger. But he had to adhere to the rules prescribing when an old grave could be uncovered for a new corpse. In Koroško it is still customary to form a cross with a pick and a shovel and place them over the freshly-dug grave. Until very recently the pallbearers were usually neighbors, fellow villagers, or friends who had been asked or appointed to do this by the deceased beforehand, or were asked by the family of the deceased. It was a great honor to be a pallbearer; such people were highly esteemed by the community and nobody ever refused this task. But the pallbearers have to be familiar with and strictly obey all the unwritten rules concerning this task. Since this denotes a transition from one's home to one's grave and the customs of such a transition, separation, and farewell have to be strictly obeyed, it is extremely important how the deceased is taken out from his house. His feet have to face forward, his coffin making a cross over all the thresholds in the house. This denotes his leaving, and according to old beliefs he would thus be unable to find the right way home should he accidentally return. By the village crucifix or a chapel the coffin is placed on the ground. Speaking for the deceased, the oldest pallbearer bids farewell, asks to be forgiven for any wrongs the deceased may have done to anybody, gives an assurance that the deceased forgives any injustice done to him, and asks all around him to pray for the deceased. The village crucifix is also called »kerlež« – from *kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy) – and was named after this very custom. The custom has not only been preserved in the countryside, but is also practiced on the outskirts of Slovene cities, for instance in villages at the foot of Šmarna gora, and even in Šentvid, thus even in Ljubljana. The deceased is then carried into church (in the Slovene countryside funer-

als almost always have a mass and an »ofer« – offering – afterwards) with his feet forward, but opinions differ as to how the corpse should be brought out of the church. Some say that the casket has to be turned around so that the deceased leaves the church with his feet forward as well, while others feel that the deceased should face the altar throughout the ceremony, since »no one should turn his back to God«. The pallbearers therefore have to agree on this beforehand. It was the pallbearers' task to bring the coffin, to carry the deceased (the coffin was driven only if the home of the deceased was quite far from the parish cemetery; according to the popular belief mourners have to follow the cart stepping into the cart track, avoiding any shortcuts or looking back; otherwise the house of the deceased will soon be struck with another death), and to bury the coffin. There were usually four pallbearers, only rarely six. It was advisable that their height was roughly the same so as to evenly distribute the weight. They were dressed in their Sunday best, in black if possible, with mourning bands which were black if the deceased had been married, or white if the person who died had been single. These bands, always made by the family of the deceased, were worn faced outward. When the palls were placed on the other shoulder, the band was always repositioned accordingly. These bands were later taken off and thrown on the top of the coffin in the open grave. Though in a different form, this custom has been preserved up to the present in Dolenjsko: the black band from the state flag, which is carried at the head of every funeral procession, is likewise taken off and thrown into the grave.

Customs taking place at the home of the deceased likewise reveal a special concern for the dead. Those who did not go to the funeral dismantled the catafalque, opened all the windows, scattered all the chairs, threw the sheets and the funeral sheets in water, maybe even burned the mattress. Since they believed that everybody who died had to watch over all the dead in the cemetery, after the funeral they first prayed that the deceased would not be scared. The old custom of organizing a funeral repast the seventh or the eighth day after the funeral is still practiced. The repast, called *sedmina* (the seventh day) or *osmina* (the eighth day), but also *karmina*, *korbina*, *trbina*, and prepared by the family, is to honor the deceased. Nowadays this usually takes place immediately after the funeral and is called *pogrebščina*. All who came to the funeral, especially *vabovci*, the person who was hired to keep the vigil by the dead, the pallbearers, the gravedigger, the sexton, and of course the priest, are invited. Before they all sit down somebody says five Lord's prayers aloud for the soul of the deceased. The origin of *sedmina* or *osmina* is connected to the requiem mass which takes place on the seventh or the eighth day after the funeral, but also to the prayers performed at the home of the deceased seven or eight days in a row. These are mentioned in Valvasor's book »Die Ehre des Hertzogthums Krain« from the 17th century: »In places it is customary that only the pallbearers are given food immediately after the funeral. Those attending the funeral as well as the pallbearers then come to the house eight days in a row. They position two wax candles in the form of a cross, light them on all four ends, place them on the spot where the deceased lay, kneel down and pray until the candles burn out. Then they return home, but repeat the process for eight days. The final, eighth day, they have to be given food. Only then the deceased is buried properly.« Reports on this custom date into the present. Before World War II such prayers (*sedmino moliti*) usually lasted seven

days in Bela krajina, in Gorenjsko even nine days, while in Dolenjsko people still come to the house of the deceased to pray for eight consecutive days, and are offered food after the requiem mass on the eighth day. This leads to the conclusion that such funeral repasts really represent the final prayers for the deceased. We do need to be aware, however, that their name (*sedmina* or *osmina*) reflects a more recent custom originating from the Christian Middle Ages. The funeral repast namely originated in the antiquity and represents the last remnant of Old Slavic death ceremonies.

Let us also mention a special, nowadays less known custom which is still practiced in some areas of Koroško: a ceremonial concern for the bones, especially for the skull of the deceased in whose grave another corpse is about to be buried. All the bones have to be carefully gathered, washed and then replaced into their grave wrapped in a piece of cloth. This custom of rinsing bones and wrapping them in a cloth is similar to the second burial of the deceased known among numerous native peoples outside Europe.

SOURCES AND LITERATURE see page 107

BESEDA O AVTORICI

Helena Ložar-Podlogar, mag., raziskovalka, samostojna strokovna sodelavka s specializacijo. Diplomirala je iz etnologije in nemškega jezika s književnostjo na Filozofski fakulteti v Ljubljani, se dve leti podiplomsko izpopolnjevala na dunajski univerzi (Institut für österreichische und vergleichende Volkskunde) in magistrirala iz etnologije. Dela na Inštitutu za slovensko narodopisje Znanstvenoraziskovalnega centra pri Slovenski akademiji znanosti in umetnosti in sekciji za ljudske šege in igre. Glavno področje njenega delovanja so šege življenjskega kroga (knjiga in več razprav). Je dolgoletna urednica slovenskega dela pri mednarodni strokovni reviji *Demos*, *Internationale ethnographische und folkloristische Informationen*, in urednica za slovenski del *Internationale volkskundliche Bibliographie*. Je urednica *Traditiones*, Zbornika Inštituta za slovensko narodopisje.

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