

**THE “PILGRIMAGE “ OF THE DECEASED SOULS TO THE WORLD OF HUMANS –  
AN EXAMPLE OF DEALING WITH TRAUMA OF DEATH IN GEORGIAN  
TRADITION**

მიცვალებულთა “მომლოცველობა” საიქიოდან სააქაოში – სიკვდილის  
ტრავმასთან ბრძოლის მაგალითი ქართულ ხალხურ ტრადიციაში

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**Abstract**

The purpose of my article is to show, on the one hand, what kind of festivals Lipanaali and Jerusalem-toba-Sultakrepa are, and on the other hand, what were the traditional ways of dealing with the trauma of death.

Study showed that both holidays are syncretic in nature. By their Christian stratum, they are associated with Easter and its theological meaning.

As you know, one of the main human feelings is the fear of death. Being in touch with departed souls, having a connection with them and feeling their presence has a deep psychological background. Traditions and religious structures in society enable individual control and manage anxiety through well-established mechanisms. When significant changes take place in society, these mechanisms begin to diminish and collapse.

In my opinion, these changes often severely affect structures formed over the centuries, or severely damage them, so that they cannot positively affect the collective psychological balance. Therefore, the tradition should not be destroyed, but developed, adapted to the new requirements of society and transformed into something new that society needs.

The strong instinct of birth-death-rebirth desperately pushes a person to reunite death with life and find life in death, conditioned by love. With the help of the holidays of "pilgrimage", the call of God and transcendental forces, with the help of mythical images, man tried to open the doors and destroy insurmountable, "delimited" threshold for creating a single entire space of eternal life. In my opinion, to create the third, as according to Jung, is a result of union of opposites.

The study was conducted on the basis of ethnographic materials, ethnological and psychological scientific literature and is an interdisciplinary study.

**Key words:** Trauma of death, tradition, religion, ethnology, psychology

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## აბსტრაქტი

ჩვენი ნაშრომის მიზანია ვაჩვენოთ, ერთი მხრივ, რა ხასიათის დღესასწაულებია *ლიფანალი* და *იერუმსალეთობა-სულთაკრეფა*, ხოლო მეორე მხრივ, როგორი იყო ქართული ტრადიციული გზები სიკვდილის ტრავმასთან გამკლავების.

ორივე ხალხური დღესასწაული სინკრეტული ხასიათისაა. ისინი თავიანთი ქრისტიანული ფენით აღდგომის დღესასწაულს და მის არსს უკავშირდებიან.

როგორც ცნობილია, სიკვდილის შიში ერთ-ერთი ფუნდამენტური განცდაა ადამიანში. ცოცხალთა სწრაფვას ეურთიერთათ მიცვალებულებთან და მეტად მიახლოებოდნენ და შეეგრძნოთ ეს კავშირები, ღრმად ფსიქოლოგიური მნიშვნელობა და საფუძვლებიც აქვს. ტრადიცია და საზოგადოებაში არსებული სარწმუნოებრივი სტრუქტურები ინდივიდს შესაძლებლობას აძლევს კარგად გამოცდილი მექანიზმების მოშველიებით მართოს შფოთი. როდესაც საზოგადოებაში ძლიერი ცვლილებებია, ამგვარი მექანიზმები რღვევას განიცდის. ჩვენი აზრით, ეს ცვლილებები ხშირად უხეშად უსწორდება ხანგრძლივი დროის განმავლობაში შექმნილ სტრუქტურებს ან საგრძნობლად აზიანებს მათ, ისე, რომ ისინი ვეღარ თამაშობენ პოზიტიურ როლს კოლექტიური ფსიქიკური წონასწორობის შენარჩუნების საქმეში. სწორედ ამიტომ, რომ ტრადიცია კი არ უნდა მოისპოს, არამედ საზოგადოების ახალ მოთხოვნილებებთან ერთად განვითარდეს თუ გადაიზარდოს რაღაც ახალში, იმაში, რაც საზოგადოებას სჭირდება.

დაბადება-კვდომა-კვლავგანახლების ძლიერი ინსტიტუტი თუ მუხტი დაუოკებლად უბიძგებდა ადამიანს მარადიული სიცოცხლისათვის გაერთიანებინა სიკვდილ-სიცოცხლე და სიკვდილშიც სიყვარულით განპირობებული სიცოცხე ეძებნა. „პილიგრიმოზის“ დღესასწაულებით, ღმერთის, ტრანსცენდენტული ძალების მოხმობით, მითოსური ხატების მეშვეობით, ადამიანი ცდილობდა გაეხსნა კარები და გადაულახავი, გამყოფი ზღურბლის ნაცვლად, მარადიული სიცოცხლის ერთიანი სივრცე შეექმნა. ჩემი აზრით, შეექმნა ის მესამე, რომელიც იუნგისეული დაპირისპირებულთა ერთიანობის შედეგად იქმნება.

კვლევა ეთნოგრაფიულ მასალაზე, სამეცნიერო ეთნოლოგიურ და ფსიქოლოგიურ ლიტერატურაზე დაყრდნობით განხორციელდა და არის ინტერდისციპლინარული ხასიათის.

**საძიებო სიტყვები:** სიკვდილის ტრავმა, ტრადიცია, რელიგია, ეთნოლოგია, ფსიქოლოგია

## Introduction

Death is one of the most traumatic experiences in the history of mankind; inevitable, unavoidable, inalienable experience of human life and live nature; inseparable part of a birth, the fear and horror of which is one of the basic instincts of all that is alive and overcome it, however may be possible with the help of another basic instinct – rebirth, giving birth to a new life, which also is eternal rule of nature, which generates life. Perhaps, because of this collision with the inevitability of one's own death and the death of beloved one, there could be only one way to resist - the search for eternal life and rebirth. In my article, I try to show with the help of which traditions and worldviews Georgians tried to gain eternal life and resist the trauma of death, and, on the other hand, how these traditions and mentality influenced a person psychologically, as well as society.

## Methods

The paper is based on the interdisciplinary study of the issue. The study was carried out on the analyses of ethnographic materials and of visual anthropology, scientific literature in ethnology, theology and psychology.

## Results

The study showed that Tushetian folk festival *Ierumsaletoba-Sultakreba* was a memorial festival consisted of three days and dedicated to the departed souls. This festival is closely connected and links to the Svan folk festival of the same character - *Lipaanal*. Both of these festivals are connected with the idea of rebirth and resurrection. The participant of this ritual experiences eternal life and feels contact with their passed by beloved ones that finally alleviates fear of inevitable death and helps to handle, cope the grief of trauma caused by death of beloved one.

## Discussion

The New Year festival for Georgians, as for many other nations, may represent the mythological picture, the mystery of the world creation, the ritualised worldview of the beginning of the world existence. The basis of this worldview can be the belief that death (dead nature) leads the evolution and the existence to the deadlock. Thus, the supreme creature, the Creator of the universe, who gave the birth to the world with the act of creation, must interfere. He, God, must breathe life into the dead, chaotic nature and turn it into the ordered cosmos, which is followed by chaos again. Thus, death is life and life is death. They are the meeting points of the circle, the point where time, action, existence start and end at the same time. So is the New Year itself, which gives birth to life from death and where death is for giving birth to life; the new Year cycle which consists of three main festivals: Christmas, New Year and Epiphany. Georgian word for festival is *dghesastsauli* (lit. the day of miracle). Why it may be a day of miracle? or what miracle this word speaks about? In our opinion it means that the “doors” of visible and invisible, celestial, nether or human worlds are open and there is primordial chaos, timeless and spaceless. Living or dead, celestial and earthly are intermixed, the evil souls are most active and the universe requires order. This crucial period for the universe needs to be ordered by miracle, which is performed by ritual. Thus, on this very period there are the days of creation miracle. As one of the main feast days of the New Year cycle the act of creation is performed on the Epiphany as well. Mythologically on this day one of the four elements - the water, and the underworld are created, which can be very well seen in the Georgian folk rituals. The connections of the underworld and water with the Epiphany bring to the front stage the cult of ancestors. As it is well known, the baptism itself- submerging into the water - spiritual death and emerging - spiritual purification and birth devotedly is linked with the essence of the Epiphany, with the permanent idea of death and life.

On Epiphany one of the most mysterious festivals of Georgian folk calendar - *Lipaanali* is held in Svaneti. This is the day when souls of death visit humans on the earth or in *Samzeo*-the world under the sun; the day when dead return to their families; when humans spiritually can meet again their missed, beloved family members. It is a kind of “pilgrimage”, as I call it, from the underworld to the earth; from the realm of death to the realm of living beings.

In Upper Svaneti *Lipanaali* was celebrated between the first Sunday after 5/18<sup>1</sup> January and the following Monday in Kvemo Svaneti on *Bosloba*, in spring. People believed that on this day the souls of the dead visited the families. For *Lipaanali* the family drew various figures, things, crosses, stars, etc. everywhere – on the walls, ware, and furniture with flour mixed in water (or holy water) or charcoal. In some places these were drawn on the first day of *Lipaanali* or *Adgom* (5/18 January), in other places – on the second day, Epiphany. They would put finger in the mix of charcoal or flour with water and draw. This was mainly done by the eldest woman or women of the family. If there was no elderly woman in the family, head of the family (*Makhvshi*) would do this; or the oldest daughter, if there was no head of the family. Later children drew the figures with chalk. Women would draw dots and crosses on the hands and faces of all family members with the mixture of pounded charcoal with water. The eldest woman of the family would also model *batsiki* – ritual figurines of animals from wax or fresh cheese and bake ritual bread.

The Svans believed that *Lipaanali* drawings would amuse the souls visiting the family. Some said that they were useful for the dead. According to others the drawings were made for the reproduction of cattle and family’s property.

This day was called *Adgom* or Easter, because in the Svans’ opinion on *Lipaanal* the dead rose from tombs, as on Easter, and visited their families. For this day the family would thoroughly wash the ware, eat nothing all day, and have wheat porridge – *chanti* for supper. Like religious calendar the Svans would keep heavy fast. Before dinner table was laid with fasting food and candles were lit. Head of the family and all family members stood at the table. The head would list all the dead of the family, ask God for their forgiveness, and ask the dead to bring happiness to the family, not to take any family member, on his part, promised a more abundant table next year. After this the family would kneel together with the head of the family and entreat the God to forgive the sins to the dead. Next day they offered sacrifice. The table was blessed before breakfast and supper every day during *Lipaanali*. On the day when the dead were seen off, the family would get up early, before dawn. Women would bake bread of different shapes, size and function from wheat flour. In people’s belief one type of the bread embodied stairs and was baked specially for the lame dead, to make it easier for them to come down to the earth, another type was children’s ritual bread, a pedestal for them to stand on in this world and see the Lord. The function of the third type of bread is unknown. The table was laid where together with other food the afore-mentioned types of bread, drinks and candles were put. The family members stood away from the table behind the head of the family. There was dead silence at this time. People believed that the souls of the dead were sitting at the table together with them. Only head of the family broke the silence, he addressed the souls and entreated abundance and health for the family, asked them kindly to return next year. On his part he promised those in this world would ask Jesus Christ to allow them sit at his table. Then the family head would go to the table and kneel. So did the other family members. Then everyone would stand up and go to their initial places. The family head would name the deceased close relatives and entreat mercy for them. Then they would kneel again and pray for distant relatives, head of the family would put the table in the middle of the room and asked the souls to return to the other world, begged Christ not to punish the family and not to take a family member away from this world and promised to host him more generously next year. Finally head of the family would noiselessly take the table out. A member of the family would lead him lighting his path. Sometimes it happened that the man walking on the road carried ritual food and a candle. On the way, he spilt milk with

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<sup>1</sup> These two dates indicate two styles of calendar: old and new. The first date is according to the church calendar and the other is civil one. There are 13 days differences between them.

honey on the ground and go down on one knee. People believed that the souls would return to their dwelling. The souls should be seen off before sunrise (Bardavelidze, 1953: 59 -64; 2007:105-106; Ghambashidze, 2011:170-171). The feeling of presence of the deceased was so strong that it was often difficult for the family to part with them. People tell that according to legend in the past people even saw the deceased visiting the family. Once mother “touched” the soul of her deceased son to make him stay in this world. People say that after that the souls do not show themselves to the alive any more.

People believe that soul and God are the same; the soul should be worshipped as God (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6teHhJtd8I>, retrieved in 09.01.2018).

Similar holiday is encountered in the spring cycle of Georgian folk calendar.

On the second Thursday of Lent, *Erumsaletoba* – commemoration day for the deceased was celebrated in Tusheti. Unlike Giorgi Tsotsanidze and Giorgi Bochoridze, Sergi Makalatia refers to first Thursday of Lent as the date for this celebration, which, according to him is the day of *Sultakrepa* (Tsotsanidze, 1987: 88; Bochoridze, 1993:307-308; Makalatia, 1983: 187-188).

In Tusheti on this day every family would bake a big loaf of bread, fry grains (*bichoni*), cook beans, light candles and put a litre of *araq* (vodka) on the table before the sunrise. Commemorative toast for the deceased was drunk with vodka. In people’s opinion the bread for this occasion had to be as big as possible, as it had to be rolled to Jerusalem and open the door of Jerusalem. On the one hand, it “had to reach the dead” and on the other hand, it would help the deceased get to their families and gather there for *Sultakrepa*. “The deceased would see the Sun” and “The deceased would come for *Erumsaletoba*” (Bochoridze, 1993:307).

In the morning, before sunrise, head of the family would walk *bichoni*, bread three times around the hearth, pray for the safe return home and safe coming of the deceased from Jerusalem to the house. After sunrise the table was taken out of the house, the bread was cut and given to everyone (Makalatia, 1983:187). According other source on *Erumsaletoba* the family would cut the bread into two, one part was eaten that day and the other one was kept for *Sultakrepa*. Those who had recently deceased, would cut the bread into small pieces and would distribute together with a bowl of *bichoni* to the neighbours (Tsotsanidze, 1987: 88).

On the same week Saturday *Sultakrepa* (lit. gathering of the passed away souls) was one of the greatest and most important commemoration days for the deceased not only in Tusheti, but in other parts of East Georgian highland regions as well. As far as the holiday was during Lent, each family prepared only fasting food.

According to Dali Giorgadze, who studied *Sultakrepa* holiday in Georgia there is much common between *Sultakrepa* and *Lipaanali*, which as she says was related to the cult of deceased and revival of nature and aimed at ensuring the family's well-being and abundance of crops.” (Giorgadze, 1987: 64-65) We think that people may have had exactly the same attitude to Tushetian *Erumsaletoba* as to *Lipaanali*, which people called *Adgom* or *Aghdgoma* (Easter), as they believed that the deceased would get out of tombs as at Easter and gather in their families and communities.

The study has shown that *Erumsaletoba-Sultakrepa* is one holiday comprised of three days for the deceased (Ghambashidze, 2010:95).

In people’s beliefs on this day of *Erumsaletoba* the door of the other world mystically opened for the deceased via ritual bread or the ritual, i.e. with God’s help and prayed for their safe arrival to their earthly house and gathering in the same house with the alive on *Sultakrepa* day (Makalatia, 1983:187).

We cannot disagree with Dali Giorgadze, who sees the similarity between *Lipaanali* and *Sultakrepa* (Giorgadze, 1987:64-65). If *Lipaanali* was part of the holiday of New Year, beginning of annual calendar, renewal of the world and creation again, *Sultakrepa* is the spring holiday for resurrection and birth-revival. *Erumsaletoba-Sultakrepa* is a syncretic folk holiday in which pre-Christian and Christian viewpoints and beliefs of death-revival, fertility-abundance got interconnected via the cult of the deceased. Got connected with Fast – one of the most basic norms of religious mode of life, moreover with – Lent the preparation period for Easter - one of the most important days in Orthodox Liturgical practice (Bulgakov, 1993:569).

With their Christian layer the afore-mentioned two holidays, are related to Easter and its essence in people's belief in the case of *Lipaanali* and calendarly as well, in the case of *Erumsaletoba-Sultakrepa*. However, proceeding from the theological meaning of Epiphany one cannot be granted the eternal bliss and rebirth without killing old Adam in Christ via Baptism.

Why was the other world in Jerusalem for the Tushetians? In our opinion such viewpoint may be related to the tomb of Jesus and his resurrection; the story from the Gospel when Jesus rolled away the stone and rose from the dead; that after resurrection, by going down to Hell the Lord smashed its doors and released, saved the souls of the dead. What the miraculous emanation of the Holy Fire every year at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem on Great Saturday reminds of. Besides, the deceased interred next to Jesus Christ in Jerusalem created united realm in the other world, where they are granted eternal grace of the Lord. Here we should remember Eliade's reference to the story of St. Ambrosius of Milan, when he interred his brother beside the saint hoping that holy blood would seep through the saint's body and water him (Eliade, 1977: 18-19). People believed that after three-days' "journey" or "pilgrimage" (Turner, 1977: 24) the resurrected souls gathered in their houses on the third day of *Erumsaletoba* i.e. the second Saturday of Lent to participate together in the festive ritual when the "doors" of this and the other world were open; to defeat death by the ritual and experience eternal life.

The strive of the alive to communicate with the deceased, come close to them and feel these connections has deep psychological meaning and roots. First of all it should be said that fear of death is known to be one of the fundamental feelings of a human. Fritz Riemann wrote: "It is an illusion to think that we can live without fear. Fear is a part of our existence and reflects thoughts about the inevitability of death." (Riemann, 2014:13) Sigmund Freud wrote, that it is impossible for a human being to imagine his/her death. Psycho-analysts used to say, that "in the unconscious everyone of us is convinced of his own immortality." (Freud, 1957: 286) According to Joseph Rheingold fear of death comprises the fear of non-existence and particularly destruction. The latter evokes alarm in human. Death is not thought of, but is imaginatively portrayed and sensed. For an individual the images and emotions attach meaning to death. Rheingold mentions that there are certain ties between death and love. For instance, reconnect with those whom one loved when he was alive, or sacrifice oneself to the homeland, family, friend, ideals. Consideration of the fact that man is mortal, is painful not only because he expects death, but also because this is what will happen to his dear ones, or even when a stranger dies. A man cannot tolerate death, because he wants his dear ones to be immortal. Death cannot break the faith of love. Rheingold refers to Berdyayev where he notes that a human has a burning desire to return life to everyone who he loved. Parting makes human interpret death as a catastrophe, which is relieved by the hope of meeting the dear ones in the other world. C.G. Jung wrote that, those who think that life after death continuous, are more sensible, sensitive and calm. Jung also adds, that those myths and dreams, which speak about afterlife, are our inherited compensatory fantasies; that the whole life of a human being longs for immortality. He also believed that, at least one part of the psychic does not follow the rules of time and space (Jung, <https://www.holybooks.com/on-life-after-death-by-c-g-jung/>, retrieved 6.04.2020).

The fear and meaning of death has many sides for a man. Thus, in this paper proceeding from the research issue we will touch upon the religious aspect with a few words. According to Rheingold the only hope that life is insured in time is the hope that death does not mean disappearance, but is the beginning of new existence; the one which maintains the feeling that he is a personality. "It is true that faith in God, unselfish love, knowledge of nature's laws, ascetic mode of life and their philosophical interpretation does not annihilate fear, but helps to overcome it and possibly, even helps to use it in our favor" – Riemann notes and adds that "The only way is to fight against fear, and call for the opposite forces, such as courage, confidence, endurance, hope, obedience, faith and love in ourselves." (Riemann, 2014:13) However, Rheingold also notes that religion, e.g. Christianity, reinforced the fear of death and possibly actually initiated the fear of life in the other world. As some say (Hall, 1896:147) religion soothes man's fear of death, but more often aggravates it. Others think that fear is not natural and it emerged due to the religion of certain kind.

Rheingold notes that different cultures can be characterized as cultures that ignore death accept or reject it. Traditionally religion dictated the setting to the society. Due to various reasons (development of

technologies, wars.....) contemporary society became atheistic. The issue of death became a taboo for the people oriented to terrestrial life - the theme which should not be avoided or hidden. Today death is treated with reverent fear. In Fulton's (*Fulton, and Geis, 1962*) opinion, such state was determined by the changes in culture. Today, instead of traditional ignorance of death (belief in other world life), it is denied. Rheingold notes that in Tillich's (Tillich, 1952) opinion the breakup of absolutism, development of liberalism and democracy, technical civilization provoked alarm. What was and is characteristic of an individual, became universal. This process emerges in the society when the usual structures of governance and faith are falling down. When such structures exist in the society an individual can manage alarm via well-experienced mechanisms. When the society undergoes strong changes, such mechanisms do not exist anymore (Rheingold, 2004). I think that such changes often grossly damage the structures created over a long period of time, so that they cannot play a positive role in maintaining collective mental balance. This is why tradition should not be lost but should develop with new needs of the society or grow into something new, what the society needs. "...we have to see that twice so far in this century there has been a regression, brought about by the forces of evil in two world wars, which is a slap in the face for our age with its faith in progress. Under these circumstances we will have to look carefully at our faith in progress. Do we want to end up or should the world continue to get better and more perfect all the time? Better, that is, in the sense intended by those who believe in progress. We have to balance faith in progress with our duty to the past. People do not just live for the future but also from the past. The false Blut and Boden romanticism of the criminal period should not fool us into thinking that there is not genuine link to once's homeland and ancestors which is more than nostalgia for the "good old days". Thus, for example, we must stop the destruction of the European countryside through speculative development, and youth must be taught the traditions of history. A progress paid for with losses would indeed amount to a step backward"- writes Karl Heinrich Fierz (Fierz, 1991:393-394).

No culture considers death as mercy. It is a phenomenon born by a negative creature or resulted from a certain negative occurrence. However, death brings a new, spiritual state to a person and puts him in a new dimension. Death is the second birth, but unlike the first one, second birth should be realized through the ritual. The deceased should get a new identity through the ritual. Also via the ritual, his body should be treated so that it could not make a negative influence on the living by means of magic. As Eliade notes after being interpreted as a transition from one state to another death became paradigmatic model of all significant changes in human life. But, since after death a mortal is born for the second time and this time becomes the soul, this process, this spiritual transformation is manifested with the symbols and images associated with birth, rebirth, the resurrection. But as Eliade says all these rituals clearly show the love to the vitalized body and incarnated life. Eliade also mentions that we cannot understand the essence of death if it is not linked to any new form of existence (Eliade, 1977:15, 16, 18, 20).

Though the inevitable proof of afterlife and immortality of soul does not exist, but there are experiences that made us think about it. On the other hand, the death is a joyful event. "In the light of eternity, a mysterium coniunctionis" – wrote Jung (Jung, <https://www.holybooks.com/on-life-after-death-by-c-g-jung/>, retrieved 6.04.2020).

The strong instinct or impetus of birth-death-renewal uncontrollably shoved a human to unite death-life for eternal life and seek love-driven life in death. Via "pilgrimage" holidays, calling up transcendental forces, mythical images a human tried to open the door and create the unity of eternal life, instead of the insurmountable, dividing threshold; in my opinion, in accordance to Jung, create the third, as a result of union of opposites.

"For the first time in my life, this evening I was an inviter from the church. It is snowing a little. We have heard from the elderly that it would necessarily snow on this day; because our nobles would not walk on the dirty road. It was such a magic when my relatives asked the Lord to let Madonna lead the souls of the nobles that had gone to the other world. Then I walked down the road to the house with a lit candle and imagined that they were really following. Then I remembered that I had to talk, it was not so easy, but I

tried it. What strong faith our ancestors had! Without doubt, they believed that they were really coming. I believe it too".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The story told by ethnologist Madona Chamgeliani, head of the NGO "Lidbashi", 2018 *Lipaaanali*, Lakhuzhdi village.



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