

ANCESTORS

The Interceders

ANCESTORS: THE INTERCEDERS

Copyright © 2019 Anna M. Asbury

This free ebook may be copied, distributed, reprinted and shared, provided it appears in its entirety without alteration, and the reader is not charged to access it.

Web: chaineddolls.com
Contact: amasbury@twc.com

Introduction

Africa is a continent, made up of different countries. Within these countries are various ethnic groups. Because of this, you can't easily lump everyone's beliefs into the same category. This booklet was put together as a way for me to keep all of my research information regarding the way different ethnic groups view Ancestor Veneration in one place. The sections are brief and written that way to hopefully further my research as time goes on.

I put together this booklet as a beginners resource for Ancestor Veneration from an African perspective. As stated above, it's based off of research I've done, so it does not go into detail on how to set up an ancestor altar or anything regarding offerings. It's basic research information on how different African ethnic groups view Ancestor Veneration. Hopefully, this will jumpstart more extensive research into the topic.

Instead of developing our own culture as a people, we see Western culture as superior to our own and trap ourselves in an inferiority complex. Yes despite hardcore resistance against the Atlantic slave trade, British colonialism, and the Nigerian genocide against our people we ended up losing. Yes our Civilizations collapsed. Yes Nigeria continues to discriminate and oppress Igbo people. We have suffered a lot and nobody shall ever down play that. However, until we remember to honor our ancestors, we will continue on the path of self destruction our enemies have planted for us. - Omenka Egwuatu Nwa-Ikenga

There are as many African religions as there are African peoples. However in their diversity they are one. Whether African religion is based in Central Africa, eastern Africa, western Africa, or southern Africa, the belief in a Supreme Being, superhuman beings, and honoring ancestors are its cornerstones. They point to the same understanding. - Aloysius M. Lugira

Tradition is the way of the ancestors, the manner in which those who lived before once walked and talked, the knowledge and practices that allowed them to live long enough to bestow life upon others. In indigenous cultures, this is crucial to life, because to forget the way life used to be lived is to become endangered. - Malidoma Patrice Somé

Followers of African religion make no distinction between religion and other aspects of their lives. Their beliefs are so closely bound to their culture that religion and culture are one. Religion is therefore not something people do at certain times and in certain places, but it is part of the fabric of living. Although a Supreme Being is above the living, lesser gods, spirits, and ancestors walk beside the living and guide them in the direction they must go. They are sometimes displeased by those who do not heed them. People and gods are constantly interacting through ritual, prayer, and sacrifice, but mostly through the business of living. - Aloysius M. Lugira

The following is a list of things to keep in mind regarding Ancestors.

1. They're a link between their descendants and the spirit world
2. They serve as mediators and intermediaries
3. They offer protection
4. They may reveal remedies for healing
5. They're the keepers of morality
6. They should be consulted on important occasions
7. They're the core of all harmony or disharmony in society
8. They're responsible for both beneficence and afflictions

Most West African peoples hold that after death one must cross a river between the world of the living and the world of the ancestors, so as to be integrated into ancestral spiritual segments of their families. - Philip M. Peek

Ancestors assist the living in court cases, in marriage, in mediations between family members, and in health situations; in return, the living offer ceremonies to feed the ancestors. Libations are usually offered through drink or food because the ancestors are believed to continue to live as they did when they were on the Earth. - Molefi Kete Asante

Among many African people, the descent is through the mother—that is, matrilineal. In that case, many of the ancestors to be revered would come from the matrilineal side of the family. The husband would be a part of the family by virtue of his marriage to the direct descendant. In some cases, the husband may also revere the ancestors of his father. - Molefi Kete Asante

Ancestral spirituality is also a dialogue between the living and the ancestors. Like any kind of communication between human and supernatural beings, dialogue with ancestors is an activity of faith. Making objects, constructing shrines, offering sacrifices—everything that goes along with ancestor veneration—is an attempt to stay in touch with the ultimate source of power. Ancestors communicate with their relatives through dreams, visions, or even misfortune and catastrophic events. - Alisa LaGamma

The ancestors function as guides, warriors, and healers. The guides are our travel consultants on the road of life. They help us to make major decisions, advise us on what to do when and with whom. - Luisah Teish

Reverence to the ancestors is general in Africa. It hinges on the belief in the continuous existence of man after death. Mainly, they are those who while alive made life worth living for their contemporaries and thus enjoyed the good will of the living descendants. They are regarded as deified spirits because they are believed to have acquired extra powers in the land of the dead. With these powers, it is believed that they could intervene in the lives of the living and act as intermediaries between God and men. - Edwin Anaeboka Udoye

In order to crack open something in yourself to allow you to be aware of the presence of ancestors' spirits, you have to walk into nature with your emotional self, not with your intellectual self. You need to open wide your heart so that you can become moist and drink deeply from the emotional echoes that you receive from the frown of a gnarled tree or the twist of a branch. Seen in this way, nature, the dwelling place of the ancestral spirits, is a vast field of grief. - Malidoma Patrice Somé

The ancestors are people who have distinguished themselves on the moral plane. They, are therefore accorded great respect and are held up as models for the living to emulate. They act as a spur to good conduct and the living in turn honor them by offering libations as well as naming their children after them. - Kofi Opoku

Africans believe that those who go before us make us what we are. Accordingly, ancestor-reverence holds an important place in the African belief system. Through reverence for them we recognize our origins and ensure the spiritual and physical continuity of the human race. - Luisah Teish

Black people ignore that their ancestors, who adjusted to the material conditions of the Nile valley, are the oldest guides of humankind on the way to civilisation. - Cheikh Anta Diop

The Akan spirituality is based on tributes paid to the Ancestors. For Kamits, when one dies, there is the separation between the physical body and the energy. The energy joins the other energies in a place called Budtenga - country of the Ancestors - by the Mosse from Burkina Faso. The Zulu call their dead Ancestors amaDlozi, the Malagasy call theirs Razana. - Lisapo ya Kama

The human condition is imperfect and always will be. Sickness, suffering, and death are all fundamental parts of life. Suffering is caused by sins and misdeeds that offend the gods and ancestors, or by being out of harmony with society. - Aloysius M. Lugira

It is ancestors who intercede in mundane and spiritual life, ensuring fertility, reliable food crops, good hunting, and successful social relations. - Stephanie Rose Bird

Human society is communal. Ancestors, the living, the living-dead, and those yet to be born are all an important part of the community. The relationships between the worldly and the otherworldly help to guide and balance the lives of the community. Humans need to interact with the spirit world, which is all around them. - Aloysius M. Lugira

Writing is one thing and knowledge is another. Writing is the photograph of knowledge but is not knowledge itself. Knowledge is a light that is in man. It is the heritage of all that our ancestors have known, and it is in the germ they transmit to us, just as the baobab-tree is potentially in its seed. - Tierno Bokar

As we walk upon the Earth our feet press against the bones of the Ancestors on whose shoulders we stand. Like most indigenous cultures of the world, Africans believe that those who go before us make us what we are. When we walk on the Earth, we literally stand on the shoulders of those whose bodies have been committed to the soil, the water, and the wind. Our Ancestors influence our lives through heredity and human culture. However, there is an even deeper connection to the Ancestors as active spirits who continue to influence our lives. We humans honor them with altars, music and prayer. They in turn offer us guidance, protection and prosperity. We treat our ancestors with loving reverence. Asking for help from our Ancestors must first be balanced with honoring their lives. In the Orisha tradition, as in many other traditions, we commemorate the work, struggles, and triumphs of our Ancestors. - Oto Omi/Olo Oshun

One way in which we see the strength and resilience of African culture is through many people's honouring of their ancestors. Many Africans believe that all people who die have a special place next to God and that communication with God can only be done through ancestors. - Nombulelo Shange

Dreaming is important in Zulu and most African culture because it is through dreams that communication with ancestors is possible. - Nombulelo Shange

However you built your altar, remember always that it is a door between the world of human beings and the world of the ancestors and the loa. Your ancestors love you. They will come and visit you, accept your offerings, and point you on the way. They will instruct you, protect you, fight for you, and heal you. They will bring you messages through your intuition and your dreams. - Mambo Racine

Akan

The Akan reside in the southern regions of the former Gold Coast region, in what is today the nation of Ghana, as well as in Côte d'Ivoire. Akan culture is matrilineal.

There are two “worlds” or “realms” in Akan cosmology.

1. Samanadzie - Spiritual World
2. Wiadzie - Corporeal World.

Samanadzie is a place for those who die and resurrect as Nananom Nsamanfo (Ancestors). It's headed by NaSaman (Spirit Mother - The Original Woman). NaSaman leads the spirits and has power over them when they're born into the Wiadzie until they reach a certain age. Her male counterpart is Sunsum. He's a spirit (does not take on a form) but transmits his “shadow” to humans when they are born (the soul of man).

...Although the two worlds are the same, the Wiadzie is a reflection of the Samanadzie, the original and permanent home of the Akan... - Anthony Ephirim-Donkor

Because Wiadzie is a reflection of Samanadzie, the corporeal world cannot exist without the spiritual world.

The ancestors form an important part of the Traditional Akan religion. The Ancestors are also known as the Nsamanfo or Old People or Ancient People. They have a prominent place in the thinking and religious practices of our people. Akans believe in life after death therefore when a person's body dies their spirit lives on. The ancestors are feared. At the same time, they are loved and respected; they are believed to be everywhere. They are not approached as gods. The Nsamanfo (Ancestors) are honored and appeased because they are forever watching and protecting us. We believe that they are in close contact with the Supreme Being thus we can call on them for assistance. - Akua Kyerewaa Opokuwaa

The Akan have a “festival” known as Akwasidae which is held in a cycle of every 40 to 42 days and is always held on a Sunday. The purpose is to honor ancestors.

The rites on this day relate to honouring personal and community ancestors. A gathering called Akom occurs in which drumming, dancing and singing are a normal celebration to honour Abosom (lesser gods in the Akan tradition) and Nsamanfo (spiritually cultivated ancestors). Food offerings include special items such as eto (mashed African yam), garnished with hard-boiled eggs. Every Ashanti celebrates this festival. For those Ashanti who do not observe the festival of Odwira, the Akwasidae is very important to commemorate their ancestors. - Wikipedia

BakaLanga

The BakaLanga (also known as Kalanga) are a southern Bantu ethnic group residing in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mozambique and South Africa. Their supreme God is Mwari/Ngwale.

The ancestors are thought to live underground in a land of the dead where they keep watch over the living. If they become upset or feel slighted, they are able to send sickness to the living as a sign of their displeasure. - James R. Denbow

Batswana

The Batswana (singular Motswana, also rendered Tswana) are a Bantu-speaking ethnic group of Southern Africa (Botswana and South Africa). Their supreme God is Modimo and their ancestors are called Badimo, which is the plural form of Modimo.

Among the Tswana-as indeed generally for most Bantu-speaking societies-traditional religious beliefs often inform the events, actions, and practices of contemporary life. Like the air one breathes, religious cosmology and a belief that the ancestors (badimo) participate in the daily affairs of the living are part of the taken-for-granted matrix within which life is lived and understood. Almost all aspects of personhood-success or failure, health or sickness, charisma or repulsiveness, wealth or poverty-are understood to have spiritual dimensions. - James R. Denbow

Because a person cannot come into direct contact with Modimo and remain unchanged, the Tswana have recourse to the badimo, ancestors who act as intermediaries between humanity and the supreme being. Closely involved in everyday life, the badimo function to preserve harmony in social relations and to ensure the fertility of humans, animals, and crops. Their attitude toward humans is basically parental-looking to the welfare of the community as a whole, they seek to correct faults and protect their descendants from harm. In return, they expect tirelo ("service"). The essence of tirelo is the sharing of benefits with others. The badimo are said to love company and are especially gladdened by feasts. Whenever food or beer is prepared, a portion is set aside or poured on the ground for the badimo. This is done to maintain their good favor, for without it, life cannot be kept in proper balance and lived to the full. When an individual has neglected to honor the badimo, the Tswana say that he suffers from bolwetse, a term that covers both physical illness and a range of other maladies. Principally, it indicates that an individual is in disharmony with the spiritual forces (including Modimo) that engender and sustain his existence. - Thomson Gale

According to Thomson Gale, everyone is born with a seriti (can be heavy or light). The seriti “originates from the badimo and is upheld by them, it functions as a spiritual force that knits together social and spiritual relations”.

I came across a Facebook post regarding the seriti from the standpoint of the Basotho (Bantu ethnic group residing in Lesotho and South Africa). Seriti is the shadow you cast.

In the Seriti you can read the life story of a person. It is the legacy you leave behind, the consequence of each and every choice you make...To know your Seriti, you need to be true to yourself, you need to be real. Becoming real does not happen all at once, it takes a long time. It does not happen to people who break easily or who have sharp edges. Sometimes your journey to becoming real will hurt, but when you are real you don't mind being hurt because when you become real, it lasts for always. - Seriti Institute

An old Tswana proverb says, " Children are a gift from the ancestors" (Bana ke mpho ya badimo), and during the period of confinement it is believed that the child is "hovering between this life and the realm of the `badimo,' [and so] the `gift' must be acknowledged." Those who see or touch the child during confinement should refrain from sexual activity because that could cause a dangerous condition of impurity known as "hot feet" (maoto a a molelo), which it is believed can be passed on to the baby. - James R. Denbow

The Batswana have an interesting take on how healing works. There’s a term, ditshika (singular tshika) which means “veins”. According to James R. Denbow, there was a priest who made the comment “We believe that the badimo [ancestors] and their spirits live in people’s veins (ditshika). They are what make western medicine work or not. If people resist treatment in the hospital, they would be healed after dancing and praying to the badimo.”.

Dagara

The Dagara trace their origins back to the Gold Coast (Ghana) and are located north of the convergence of Ghana, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire.

In my tradition ancestors are a part of everyday life, you never exclude them, because whatever is happening in your life you know they have a part in it. That is the reason why if you are going through challenges people will say, "Did you ask the ancestors for help?" And you say, "Right, I didn't put them to work." If you really think about our ancestors, how many times do we really employ them? The unemployment line is infinite. - Sobonfu Somé

Fire is the original element of origin, the one that was present at the beginning. Its primal nature is combustion, warmth, vision, and feeling. Its position in the wheel is the south, the underworld, and its color is red. It is the state to which everything eventually returns, the state the ancestors are in. As we walk the earth, we are warmed by the heat of the ancestors coming from the underworld below us. Fire opens the doorway to the Spirit World and allows our psyche to commune with other life present, past, and future. - Malidoma Patrice Somé

*The Dagara make the distinction between the human dead and the human living via the two terms *kpime* (unanimated things and beings) and *vube* (animated things and beings). Both terms become meaningful within the belief context that life cannot be created or destroyed, it can only undergo changes and transformation depending on the processes of embodiment and personification in objects and things. - Alexis Bekyane Tengan*

In Dagara, the ultimate reality is Naamwin (Naa “chief, lord, master” + Mwin “spirit” = “lord of the spirits”).

The spirit ancestors kpime are of central importance within the socio-cultural organization of the Dagara, and are crucial for the overall well-being of the kingroup. They are intermediaries between the living and Naamwin. Normally, sacrifice is offered to Naamwin through the mediation of the kpime, 'spirit ancestors.' The living can have access to the ultimate reality only by way of these spirit ancestors. - Yvon Yangyuoru

Efik

The Efik are an ethnic group located primarily in southeastern Nigeria, in the southern part of Cross River State. They also occupy southwestern Cameroon including Bakassi (a peninsula on the Gulf of Guinea).

The Efik believe there is a relationship between the living and the dead. The ancestors are believed to protect and intercede for the living. This belief is partly manifested in the pouring of libation which is a means of talking to and consulting the ancestors on delicate matters. - Uwem Affiah

Haitian

In Haitian Kreyol, Zansèt yo is the term for Ancestor.

The ancestors, 'zanset yo' in Haitian Kreyol, are ever with a Vodouisant. He/she lives, breathes and acts with the awareness of their presence. The national anthem of Haiti begins, "For the country, and for the ancestors, we walk united...". - Mambo Racine Sans But

Cemeteries in rural Haiti are spiritual centers for the family. The graves of the oldest male and female buried in these cemeteries are spiritually empowered places, where members of the family can seek help from the ancestors and the Vodou spirits. Even some public cemeteries routinely function as churches or temples, places of communal Vodou ritualizing. This spiritual venue includes the dead in the ongoing ritual life of the extended Vodou family. - Karen McCarthy Brown

In Vodou the journey to Power begins with opening to the loa, the ancestors, and to Nature, the spiritual shadow of our material world. We must reconnect with these forces and with the sense of wonder and awe that comes from seeing the world afresh. Only then can we revert to the state of balance and potential we had when we first came into this world and tap back into the unconditioned mind. - Ross Heaven

Fêt/Fête Gede is the “Haitian Day of the Dead”. According to Ross Heaven, it is the “Festival of the Ancestors” and “equivalent of Mardi Gras and the Mexican Day of the Dead”.

People dress up, take to the streets, dance their communion with the ancestors, and, to the wild, lilting music of colorful rara bands, walk in processions to the graveyards where they feed their ancestral dead to honor their spirits and gain their protection for the coming year. It is a time for celebration, for honoring the past, and for preparing for the future, with music, processions, sacred rituals, and spiritual observances taking place throughout. - Ross Heaven

Fete Gede, the Feast of the Dead, is a time when Vodouisants celebrate the ancestral dead, typically held during either or both of the first two days in November. Known as the Festival of the Ancestors, Fet Gede (Fet = Festival, Gede = The Sacred Dead) is the Vodou equivalent of Mardi Gras, the Mexican Day of the Dead, and Halloween, all in one. - Wanda

Haiti Anthem - French Version

For the country, For the ancestors,
Let us march. Let us march united.
Let there be no traitors in our ranks!
Let us be masters of our soil.
United let us march
For the country, For the ancestors.

For the forefathers, For the country
Let us toil joyfully.
When the field is fertile
Our soul strengthens.
Let us toil joyfully
For our forebears, For our country.

For the country And for the forefathers,
Let us train our sons
Free, strong, and prosperous,
We shall always be brothers.
Let us train our sons
For the country And for the forefathers.

For the forefathers, For the country,
Oh God of the valiant!
Take our rights and our life
Under your infinite protection,
Oh God of the valiant!
For the forefathers, For the country.

For the flag, For the country
To die is a glorious deed!
Our past cries out to us:
Have a seasoned soul!
To die is a glorious deed,
For the flag, For the country.

Haiti Anthem - Creole Version

For Haiti, the Country of the Ancestors
We must walk hand in hand
There must not be traitors among us
We must be ourselves's unique master.
Let's walk hand in hand
For Haiti can be more beautiful.
Let us put our heads together
To Haiti on behalf of all her ancestors.

For Haiti on the behalf of the Ancestors
Let us mow, let us sow
Let us sit in the soil's strength
It has given us food
In stumpled ground sends wheels
With joy must provide ground
Mow, water, women and men
Must we come to live only by our arms' strength.

For Haiti and for the Ancestors
We must be courageous
People are not born to serve others
That is why all mothers and all fathers
Need to send children to school
To learn to know
What Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe, Petion
Did to take Haitians from under the white's rope.

For Haiti on the behalf of the Ancestors
Let us raise our head and look above
For everyone to ask the Lord
To grant us protection
For bad angels we diverted
For we will march in the right path
For liberty be liberty
May justice spread over the country!

We have a flag like all people
Let us love it, die for it
It was not a gift from the whites
It was our Ancestors blood that was shed
To hold our flag high
Let us work together and focus
For other countries to respect it
This flag is the soul of every Haitian.

Hausa

Hausa is the largest ethnic group in Africa. Their traditional religion, Maguzanci, is mainly practiced by the Maguzawa (“those that ran away from Islam”), a subgroup of the Hausa. They are also the original Hausa speakers.

I’ve come across two terms which means ancestors.

1. Kāka (singular), Kakāne (plural) - “grandfather, ancestor”
2. Kakaninku - “your ancestors”

There is a world of spirits that are more or less inimical to human beings unless propitiated. They are called Bori, and are a mixture of ancestors, jinn, local deities, and marabouts. - Jangare: Haj Ali Glimpses the Mythical City of Spirits

There’s not much information on ancestor veneration from the Hausa. A lot of their traditional spiritual path has been intermingled with Islam. A lot of their spirits have been combined with the Djinn.

Igbo

The Igbo are an ethnic group native to the present-day south-central and southeastern Nigeria. Ndichie (those of old) are the ancestor spirits of the Igbo. Ala ndi mmuo/àlà mmúó is the land of the spirits (ndi mmuo means “invisible beings”).

The Igbo world is divided into several interconnected realms, principal among them being the realm of the living, the realm of the dead or of the ancestors, and the realm of the unborn. Individuals who led an honorable life and received a proper burial proceeded to the ancestral realm to take their place among the ancestors ("Ndichie"), who are separate from the Alusi. From there they kept a watchful eye on the clan and visited their loved ones among the living with blessings such as fertility, good health, longevity, and prosperity. In gratitude the living offered sacrifices to them at the family hearth, and sought their counsel.

- Wikipedia

There are two categories of ancestors; 'ndi mbu na ndi egede'. 'Ndi mbu' belonged to the great, great ancestors. The progenitors and earliest generations are in this group. Some have been forgotten while some are still known, but generally, all are revered. 'Ndi egede' were those who joined the college of ancestors recently and people who knew them are still alive. The shrine dedicated to ancestors is called 'Ihu Nna-Nna onyi ha or Ihu Ndichie. They are prayed to or invoked. They are not worshipped as gods but only invoked to mediate on the affairs of their families.

- Edwin Anaeboka Udoye

The Igbo traditional religion is known as Odinani (“located within the one god”).

Ndebunze, or Ndichie, are the deceased ancestors who are considered to be in the spirit world, àlà mmúó'. In Odinani, it is believed that the dead ancestors are invisible members of the community; their role in the community, in conjunction with Ala, is to protect the community from epidemics and strife such as famine and smallpox. Ancestors helped chi look after men.

- Wikipedia

Igbo cosmology consists of three worlds.

1. Eligwe/Igwe - Sky/Land Above where the Supreme God (Obasi/Chukwu/Chineke) resides
2. Elu Ala/Uwa - Middle Land/Earth - “the world of man”.
3. Ani Muo/Ala Mmuo/Okpuru Uwa - Ancestral/Land Underneath/Land of the spirits - “the world below”. This is an invisible world.

The ancestors as well as other spiritual beings inhabit the invisible world and from there they influence the activities of human beings and other things in the world. - Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu

The ancestors form the spirit world known as “the ancestral spirits” (ndi mbo, ndichie, nna nna anyi ha). Ancestors appear in dreams, visions, and as it is told, sometimes physically to a close relative to convey in fact instructions or advice, a process by which revelations are imparted. - Patrick E. Iroegbu

Jur

The Jur people of Central South Sudan consists of the Beli and Modo ethnic groups. It's believed they originated in Central African Republic and traveled with the Bongo/Baka ethnic group. Both the Beli and Modo, from what I've come across in my research, have the same beliefs.

Boko'ba is the name they use for God. The dead are known as Boberti which means "people of the earth". Not sure if this term is also used for ancestors. They also believe in "heavenly beings" called Bomitaro. The Bomitaro are superior to the Boberti.

Spirits can enter the dead, MARINYI, and cause sickness in the living if sacrifices are not offered. Sins of the ancestors can cause sickness in the living. - Ron Hart

If the rules are broken, BARIJOKO may allow ancestral spirits to cause sickness. - Ron Hart

Malagasy

Madagascar is an island country situated in the Indian Ocean, off the southeastern coast of Africa. The term for ancestors among the Malagasy is Razana. Their religion is termed Fomban-razana.

The living and the dead, are according to the Malagasy, “members of the same family,” there is “continuity of life.” A much-quoted proverb expresses the transcendental family union, “Living in the same house, dead in the same tomb” [Velona iray trano, maty iray fasana]. The deceased ones who have become razana [ancestors] are not absent, “they shall still be with us, those who have gone home” (Ratrema 1985, p. 95), and therefore they continue to fulfill their duties [adidy]. - Øyvind Dahl

Although practitioners of Fomban-razana do believe that the human soul continues to live as a spirit when the body dies, they do not believe in the Christian concept of heaven or hell. They believe in the existence of a Spirit World - seemingly a parallel dimension to the human world - where the fanahy of each family live together on the traditional land of that particular family. - Manie Bosman

Fanahy are spirits of the dead ancestors (razana). According to Malagasy Dictionary, the term means “the mind, the seat of thought, anxiety, or care; care for, thoughtful concern; tact, disposition, character, intelligence, knowledge; the soul, the immortal part of man, the spirit; an attitude or temperament”.

Zanahary being too far away, it is the Razana, that is to say the dead ancestors, who act as intermediaries between men and Zanahary. The reason is that the living man being animated with energy, when he dies, there is separation between the matter (flesh/bone) and the energy. The dead’s energy survives and the defunct becomes therefore divine. Death is thus seen in Madagascar as the transition to the divine state, the crossing to the land of the unseen, called Budtenga among the Mossi. - Lisapo ya Kama

Zanahary is god among the Malagasy. He is inaccessible, which is a common belief among the majority of the ethnic groups in Africa.

In the Malagasy pantheon first place is reserved to the principal god from Indonesia: Zanahary or Andriananahary in the coastal regions, Andriananitra (perfumed lord) in the interior. He is the most powerful divinity; he created the world, formed society and bestowed customs. He is the first god invoked in prayers, but he is too distant. To reach him, men seek the intercession of secondary gods or djinns - of the waters or of the forest. The spirit of the ancestors is also invoked: prayers are addressed to the Vazimba, masters of the land. Forests, rocks, great trees, all can be places of worship. - D. T. Niane

Malagasy people make offerings to the ancestors by pouring alcohol on the ground so that it can get to where they are buried. It's called libation. - Lisapo ya Kama

The practice of libation is done throughout Africa and can be traced back to ancient Kemet.

Mosse

The Mossi (pl. Mosse) people reside in Central Burkina Faso.

Ancestors are believed to have reached a better world from which they can influence life on earth. They can help or punish their descendants depending on their behavior. Ancestors are also the judge that have the power to allow a descendant to enter the “pantheon of the ancestors”. If an ancestor chooses to deny entrance, the soul of the disavowed one is condemned to run at random for all eternity. Because of their beliefs, Mossi swear by their ancestors by the land; when they do so (which only occurs in extreme situations), it is more than symbolic - it is a call to imminent justice. - Wikipedia

Nguni

The Nguni is a group of Bantu peoples residing predominately in Southern Africa (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland). The group is broken up into three subgroups:

1. Northern Nguni: Swazi, Zulu
2. Ndebele Peoples
3. Southern Nguni: Xhosa, Thembu, Bomvana, Mpondo and Mpondomise.

The common term used for ancestors among the Nguni is Amadlozi.

Amadlozi are governed by a superior galaxy of senior ancestors known as amathongo. The latter are believed to be the primary custodians of umsamo or isigodlo, the Zulu people's physical and spiritual centre. Although one may be linked to those elders who preceded them, not all of them are categorised as amadlozi in a positive sense. For example, a great maternal or paternal aunt or uncle who was known to have always been evil in their life time is not accorded the real status of idlozi (singular for amadlozi). This does not mean that this person is necessarily cursed or pushed aside, but rather they don't become the central figure when family rituals and sacrifices are being made. An ancestor who left a family and was known for evilness and so on, is often seen as idlozi elibi (evil ancestor). Therefore such an ancestor becomes an ancestor by virtue of blood ties only, but for all intents and purposes, has a diminished status in the world of the living as that of the living-dead. - Dr. Velaphi Bhedindaba Mkhize

Even though Amadlozi is a term sometimes used for ancestors, it means something completely different. Ithongo (singular of Amathongo - Ancestral Spirits) is a dead person whom the Nguni believe is not dead but alive in the land of the Ancestors (Kwela Baphansi). The Idlozi (singular of Amadlozi) is a spirit who possesses a person to become an "African Uhlanya (healer)".

Amathongo are part of us, and people who happened to live with us on this earth. When we bury the dead, we are only burying the body, but not the spirit because the spirit continue to stay with us and they stay at their special place called Umsamo, an African Ancestral Shrine. - Dr. Velaphi Ka Laphuzi 'V.V.O.' Mkhize

When I looked up the term “uhlanya” I found it translated as “lunatic”. Traditional healers among the amaZulu is termed inyanga. So I’m not sure if uhlanya is a similar word, has another meaning, or if the site where I got the information is incorrect (used the wrong word).

The word for ancestors in IsiZulu is “ithongo” and the plural is “amathongo”. “Ithongo” is derived from the word “ubuthongo” which means sleep. In isiZulu, sometimes, when we refer to the dead we say “Abalele”. Therefore “amathongo” are those who live in the world of the sleeping. But this is more of a figure of speech and an indication of their physical resting state than their spiritual state. On the contrary, they are actually considered to be “very much alive” because in African belief system, and as we have seen earlier, life is eternal. If life ended in the physical world, then it would have been a huge waste. - Msizi Isaac Moshetsi

Serer

The Serer are a West African ethnic group residing in Senegal, Gambia and southern Mauritania. They were a matrilineal ethnic group (not sure if they still are or not since the majority now practice Islam). Their traditional religion is known as fat Roog (“the way of the Divine”). Ancestral spirits are called pangool (fangool - singular) and symbolized by the serpent (two coiled snakes). It’s against Serer religion to kill a snake.

The Pangool play a crucial role in Serer religion and history. In a religious sense, they act as interceders between the living world and the supreme being Roog or Koox. In a historical sense, the ancient Serer village and town founders called Lamanes were believed to be accompanied by a group of Pangool as they travelled in search of land to exploit. These Lamanes became guardians of Serer religion and created shrines in honour of the Pangool, thus becoming the custodians of the Pangool cult. - Wikipedia

There are two types of Pangool.

1. Human - canonized after death
2. Non-human - ancient sacred places with vital spiritual energies, personify natural forces

Many Pangool are spirits of early ancestors who had died. They represent both Pangool of the paternal line (pangool o kurcala) and those of the maternal line (pangool o feen yaay). These ancestors guide and protect their descendants. Many Serer families have a master of the cult who knows how to evokes the ancestor. The earlier Pangool were not human beings, but superior beings created by Roog at the time human beings were created. They were believed to have been created by the divine in order to help human kind. It is for this reason why the terms Pangool and Nguus (Serer word for genie) are sometimes used interchangeably. Because some Pangool are linked to Serer lineages, only the head of the lineage schooled in the rituals can make a libation to the relevant Pangool or Fangool (the ancestor). - Wikipedia

These ancestral Pangool could be called on by their descendents or those who lived in their lands to act as a conduit between the living world and the world of the divine. They tend to live within the sacred trees, sacred waters, or in tombs and shrines erected for other spirits, ancient kings, or important families. Among these, Pangool tend to be divided up based on how well they are known to the people. Those with names which are known to only a single person may become a personal guardian of that person, while those with names known to whole regions may watch over that region in the same way. Some, lost to time, still carry on vital functions but are known more for their actions than for who they really are. - Jeremy Varner

In Serer religion, the concept of reincarnation (ciid in Serer language) is linked to the Pangool, the ancient Serer saints and ancestral spirits. Only the Pangool (singular: Fangool) have the capacity to reincarnate depending on how they have lived their previous lives on earth. About 10,000 BCE, the ancient Serers depicted rupestral engravings of the Pangool on the Tassili n'Ajjer, represented by "man" and coiled "snakes" (the symbol of the Pangool). Henry Gravand suggests that this era marks the development of Serer religion and the concept of ciid (reincarnation). In Serer religion, everything has a soul. The soul is immortal and must make its way to Jaaniiw (the sacred dwelling place of the soul or the afterlife). It is only those who have lived good lives on earth according to Serer religious teachings, whose souls will be able to make the necessary journey to Jaaniiw. It is from this group that are canonized as Pangool, called upon and venerated. These Pangool have the capacity to reincarnate and intercede with the Divine (Roog, the Supreme Deity in Serer religion). - Henry Epps

The living a "good life" is a common theme across various ethnic groups as a requirement for ancestor veneration. With the above quote, I'd like to know how the Serer know which souls have made it through to Jaaniiw. Does it start with an ancestor reaching out to them?

Shona

The Shona are a Bantu ethnic-group residing in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Zambia. Their supreme God is Mwari/Musikavanhu. In Shona, ancestors are “part of the human family”. They have a ceremony known as Bira (an all-night ritual) in which they call on their ancestors for guidance and intercession.

According to Shona tradition, the afterlife does not happen in another world like Christian heaven and hell, but as another form of existence in the world here and now. The Shona attitude towards dead ancestors is very similar to that towards living parents and grandparents. - Wikipedia

ANCESTORS are part of the human family in Shona culture. They are not God or gods according to the Shona. They are not saints or deities according to Shona worldview and culture. They fear God and worship God directly together with the living. If the matter concerns a drought, they join the living and pray together to God directly to ask for abundant rains and a bountiful harvest. - Dr. Vimbai Gukwe Chivaura

The correct word for `ancestor' in Shona is `tateguru'. To be a tateguru or ancestor in Shona has nothing to do with being dead or alive, or being a saint or daemon. It also has nothing to do with being old or young, or being a man or a woman. A male or female child, who is born today and belongs to the lineage of the founders of the Shona people, is a tateguru or ancestor, not a child. Its age does not take away its status as tateguru or ancestor of the Shona people. Also, a tateguru or ancestor, in Shona, does not change his or her personality or reputation, whether he or she is dead or alive. - Dr. Vimbai Gukwe Chivaura

With the above quote in mind, I've come across another term that is also used by the Shona for "ancestors". That term is vadzimu. The community of ancestral spirits is called nyikadzimu.

The vadzimu (ancestors) play a critical role in protecting living members from bad spells such as chronic illnesses as well as in the healing processes of those with illness...Africans understand illness as an imbalance between the human world and the spirit world. Ancestors play a critical role in the healing process. - Vincent Mabvurira

The vadzimu have their own hierarchy. Family spirits take care of the needs of their clan while to regional and national spirits called makombwe and mhondoro) are responsible for duties at those levels.

The vadzimu influence the day to day lives of their descendents. They give and take, reward and punish, protect or leave you vulnerable. The vadzimu work together with other spirits that are not related to them and these are called mashave or spirit of a non-ancestor. The most popularly known are njuzu (mermaids and mermen) and hombarume (hunter). Although are bad mashave such as of witchcraft, only good mashaves come at the invitation of mudzimu. - Mbuya VaChinjanja Muroro

Turkana

The Turkana (they refer to themselves as Ngiturkan) are a Nilotic people indigenous to the Nile Valley. They currently reside in Turkana County in northwest Kenya. Their Supreme God is Akuj.

As is a common belief throughout Africa, the Turkana believe that upon death, the souls of the deceased go to the sky or else near to God. This does not, however, cut them off from their human relatives, who continue to hold that the living-dead are near to them and can be approached through prayer, libation and offerings. Thus the living-dead act as intermediaries between men and God, or between men and important, but more distant, forefathers. - Jens Finke

The Ngikaram are the “good” ancestors. They can be temperamental. If forgotten, they can become angry and cause their ancestors to have diseases. These can be cured by establishing a relationship with the ancestors.

Each day, one must seek to find the blessings of life–water, food, livestock, wives, children–in a manner that appeases the ancestral spirits and is in harmony with the peace within the community...It is only through proper relationships with God (Akuj) and the ancestors, proper protection from evil, and participation in the moral economy of the community that one can be blessed. - Wikipedia

Yorùbá

The Yorùbá are a Niger-Congo ethnic group of southwestern and north-central Nigeria, as well as southern and central Benin. Their traditional spiritual path is known as Orisà-Ifá.

It is the ancestors who have interpreted and revealed the words of the universal construct. They have actualized the ashe in regards to psychological and cultural expression. They have uncovered the inherent divinity and spirituality of human existence. The ancestors provide the ethics and world views of the tradition. Adherents to the tradition abide by the ancestral wisdom in order to develop themselves and the culture. Ways of behavior to ensure a good life are primarily ancestral statements. It is a good life which leads to a good death. A death which leads beyond the gate and is life everlasting. - Baba Ifa Karade

Àse (pronounced Ah Shay) is a Yorùbá term meaning “power, command, authority”. It’s the power to make things happen and produce change. A component of the life-force breathed into humans by Olodumare, existence depends upon it.

Ashe is such a powerful and mysterious word that it really is untranslatable. It is partly a spiritual command, and it is very desirable during divination because it enables smoother contact with ancestors and spirits. - Stephanie Rose Bird

Alaashe is a person who learns how to use the àse to willfully effect change. According to Baba Ifa Karade, the Alaashe “provide examples of right living as handed down by Yoruba ancestors.”

One of the many teachings of the Oloye Ifa Karade are a brilliant set of guiding principles to assist Ifa Practitioners in embracing the way of life of our Yoruba ancestors. The name of the principles are The Alaashe. Grounded in Ifa spirituality and indigenous consciousness, the Alaashe are simple yet profound teachings that encourage humans to coexist in harmony and sustain a path of continued spiritual growth. - Oloye Ifa Karade

There are seven Alaashe principles.

1. Ifarabale (Composure)
2. Owo (Respect)
3. Suuru (Patience)
4. Eso (Caution)
5. Imo (Knowledge)
6. Ogbon (Wisdom)
7. Oye (Understanding)

In West Africa, the Yoruba people intentionally create woods, called sacred groves, as places to honor deities and as consecrated grounds, revered by ancestor spirits. These ancestral groves are called Igboro-Egun. -Stephanie Rose Bird

According to Stephanie Rose Bird, Igboro-Egun means “Grove of the Ancestors”.

In Yoruba/Santería cosmology, ancestral spirits are part of the invisible realm but are also present and active in the lives of their children. Ancestors are either blood or "religious" relatives who, after death, have become part of "Ara Arun," or the residents or people of heaven. However, they are still present among and are able to give counsel to and provide protection to their living relatives. - Ennis B. Edmonds

There are two different terms, depending on where you live (Motherland or in the diaspora) for ancestors. Egun, which means “bones”, is the collective representation of the Ancestors for some. For others, the term refers to ancestral spirits who are not necessarily specific to one’s own family. The term Eégún is mainly used in Yorubaland and means “ancestral spirits”.

The hidden power of women is better understood when we examine the way it is related to Eégún, the ancestral masking tradition in Yorubaland. The word Eégún refers to the concealed power of ancestors. Pierre Verger has suggested that Eégún may have belonged originally to women. Eégún is also used as a euphemism for female genitalia because they are hidden. The clitoris in particular is traditionally regarded as possessing "concealed power" which women can use to accomplish whatever they desire. Additionally, it is noteworthy that Yorùbá tradition privileges female triplets (ato) when it comes to holding high positions in the secretive and male-dominated Eégún (for deceased ancestors). - Joseph M. Murphy

There's also another term, Egungun, which means something different.

Egungun, ancestral spirits, are deceased elders who appear during festivals to celebrate with living members of their lineages. - Joseph M. Murphy

Sources

Affiah, Uwem and Jayne Owan. [*A dramatic analysis and interpretation of the Ekombi dance of the Efik people of Nigeria*](#), International Journal of English Research, Volume 4, Issue 1, January 2018, pp. 25-32.

Asante, Molefi Kete. *Encyclopedia of African Religion, Volume 1*, Sage Publications, Inc., California, 2009, pp. 47-53.

Beaujardière, Jean-Marie de La. [*Malagasy Dictionary and Encyclopedia of Madagascar: Everything known about all Malagasy words*](#). [Accessed: 23 January 2019].

Bird, Stephanie Rose. *A Healing Grove: African Tree Remedies and Rituals for Body and Spirit*, Lawrence Hill Books, Chicago, 2009, pp. 6, 51.

Bird, Stephanie Rose. *The Big Book of Soul: The Ultimate Guide to the African American Spirit*, Hampton Roads Publishing, 2010.

Bosman, Manie. [*Fomban-razana: Malagasy Traditional Religion*](#). [Accessed: 20 January 2019].

But, Mambo Racine Sans. [*The Ancestors In Haitian Vodou*](#), Africa Speaks. [Accessed: 23 January 2019].

Chivaura, Dr. Vimbai Gukwe. [*The Shona worship God directly, not through ancestors, The Patriot*](#), 14 May 2015. [Accessed: 24 January 2019].

Dahl, Øyvind. *Meanings in Madagascar: Cases of Intercultural Communication*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999, pp. 26-27.

Denbow, James R. and Pheny C. Thebe. *Culture and Customs of Botswana*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 2006, pp. 37, 43, 181, 208.

Edmonds, Ennis B. and Michelle A. Gonzalez. *Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction*, New York University Press, New York, 2010, p. 95.

Ephirim-Donkor, Anthony. [*African Religion Defined: A Systematic Study of Ancestor Worship among the Akan*](#), University Press of America, 2012.

Epps, Henry. [*Afterlife*](#), Lulu Press, 2012.

Finke, Jens. [*Turkana-Religion and Beliefs*](#), Blue Gecko. [Accessed: 4 May 2019].

- Gale, Thomson. [*Tswana Religion*](#), Encyclopedia of Religion, 2005. [Accessed: 17 May 2019].
- Hart, Ron. *African Traditional Religion in South Sudan*, 2014.
- Heaven, Ross. *Vodou Shaman: The Haitian Way of Healing and Power*, Destiny Books, Vermont.
- Iroegbu, Patrick E. [*Healing Insanity: a Study of Igbo Medicine in Contemporary Nigeria*](#), Xlibris Corporation, 2010, pp. 131-155.
- [*Jangare: Haj Ali Glimpses the Mythical City of Spirits*](#), Oxford Reference. [Accessed: 23 January 2019].
- [*Jur \(Beli & Modo\)*](#), Gurtong. [Accessed: 17 May 2019].
- Kama, Lisapo ya. [*The Religion of the Akan people*](#), African History, 8 January 2018. [Accessed: 4 May 2019].
- Kama, Lisapo Ya. [*The Religion of the Malagasy*](#), African History, 19 January 2018. [Accessed: 4 May 2019].
- Kama, Lisapo ya. [*Why do Africans Venerate Ancestors?*](#), African History, 18 January 2018. [Accessed: 20 January 2019].
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. "Causality in African Ontology", *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Volume 2, Issue 1*, 2014 February.
- Karade, Baba Ifa. [*The Handbook of Yoruba Religious Concepts*](#), Weiser Books, Massachusetts, 1994, p. 74.
- Karade, Oloye Ifa. [*The Alaashe*](#), Karade National Archive: A Legacy of Yoruba, Ifa & Orisa Theology. [Accessed: 21 January 2019].
- LaGamma, Alisa. [*Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary*](#), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2007, pp. 79-82.
- Lugira, Aloysius M. *African Traditional Religion, Third Edition*, Chelsea House Publishers, New York, 2009, pp. 16-17, 25.
- Mabvurira, Vincent. *Influence of African Traditional Religion And Spirituality In Understanding Chronic Illnesses And Its Implications for Social Work Practice: A Case of Chiweshe Communal Lands In Zimbabwe*, University of Limpopo, 2016, p. 51.

Mkhize, Dr. Velaphi Bhedinadaba. [*African ancestors and Amadlozi*](#), South Africa. [Accessed: 20 January 2019].

Mkhize, Dr. Velaphi Ka Luphuzi. [*The ancestors: Amathongo*](#), Archive & Public Culture, 27 July 2010. [Accessed: 23 January 2019].

Moshoetsi, Msizi Isaac. [*Black People and the Five Pillars: A Beginners Level*](#), Partridge Africa, 5 February 2016.

Murphy, Joseph M. and Mei-Mei Sanford. *Osun across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess In Africa And The Americas*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 2001, p. 24, 59.

Muroro, Muya VaChinjanja. [*Shona Traditional Religion Explored*](#), The Financial Gazette, 16 January 2014. [Accessed: 17 May 2019].

Niane, D. T. *General History of Africa, Volume IV: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century*, Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd., London, 1984, p. 612.

Nwa-Ikenga, Omenka Egwuatu. [*Honoring your Ancestors*](#), 26 January 11. [Accessed: 20 January 2019].

Omi, Oto. [*Egun/The Ancestors*](#), The Yoruba Religious Concepts. [Accessed: 17 May 2019].

Onilu, Chief Yagbe Awolowo. [*Ashe = Mysterious Powers...*](#), Heritage - The Vision Continues, 5 October 2015. [Accessed: 21 January 2019].

Opoku, Kofi Asare. *West African Traditional Religion*, EP International Private, 1978.

Opokuwaa, Akua Kyerewaa. [*Traditional Akan Spirituality*](#), The Africentric Eye, 2001. [Accessed: 4 May 2019].

[*Pangool*](#), The Seereer Resource Centre, 2013. [Accessed: 23 January 2019].

Peek, Philip M. and Kwesi Yankah. *African Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, New York, 2004, pp. 2-4, 1006.

Shange, Nombulelo. *Shembe religion's integration of African Traditional Religion and Christianity: A sociological case study*, Rhodes University, July 2013, pp. 31-32, 40-41.

Somé, Malidoma Patrice. [*The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community*](#), Penguin Putnam, Inc., New York, 1999, pp. 54, 124, 169-170.

Somé, Sobonfu. [*The Seen And The Unseen: Spirituality Among the Dagara People*](#), Cultural Survival, March 2009. [Accessed: 21 January 2019].

Teish, Luisah. [*Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals*](#), Harper Collins Publishers, California, 1985, p. 68, 80.

Tengan, Alexis Bekyane. *Of Life and Health: The Language of Art and Religion in an African Medical System*, Berghahn Books, 2018, p. 48.

[*The Meaning of Seriti*](#), Seriti Institute, 28 January 2013. [Accessed: 17 May 2019].

Udoye, Edwin Anaegboka. *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts Between Christianity and African (Igbo) Traditional Religion Through Inculturation*, LIT Verlag Münster, 2011.

Ukwamedua, Nelson Udoka. [*The Ontological Status of 'The Living Dead' in Post Modern Africa: A Discourse in Existential Metaphysics*](#). UJAH Volume 19, No. 1, 2018. [Accessed: 20 January 2019].

Verner, Jeremy. [*Alternative Mythologies 6F - The Serer*](#), 30 March 2015. [23 January 2019].

Wanda. [*10 Things We Learned about Fete Gede "Haitian Day of the Dead"*](#), L'Union Suite, 1 November 2017. [Accessed: 18 May 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [*Akan people*](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 23, January 2019. [Accessed: 23 January 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [*Akwasidae Festival*](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 24 January 2019. [Accessed: 4 May 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [*Alusi*](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 13 November 2018. [Accessed: 20 January 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [*Amadlozi*](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 17 January 2010. [Accessed: 20 January 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [*Kalanga people*](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 22 April 2019. [Accessed: 17 May 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [*La Dessalinienne*](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 11 November 2018. [Accessed: 23 January 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [*Mossi people*](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 6 September 2018. [Accessed: 4 May 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [Odinani](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 28 August 2018. [Accessed: 23 January 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [Pangool](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 22 September 2018. [Accessed: 23 January 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [Shona people](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. 13 January 2019. [Accessed: 24 January 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [Tswana people](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 16 May 2019. [Accessed: 17 May 2019].

Wikipedia contributors. [Turkana people](#), Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 5 January 2019. [Accessed: 4 May 2019].

Yangyuoru, Yvon. [*Dagara Traditional Cultic Sacrifice as a Thematization of Ultimate Reality and Meaning*](#), University of Ghana. [Accessed: 23, January 2019].