

Chapter 4

INTRODUCTION

This chapter shows that in addition to “*ditaola*” natural objects and objects of art or human made objects, natural places or sites are also used in the art of healing by the Zionists. It examines critically the significance of these natural sites in relation to healing. It looks at the theological premise and justification for using these sites in this regard. It shows the significance of these sites in terms of the contest for “*Diremogolo*” and “*Lonaong La Matsieng*” between the Zionists and traditional healers. Lastly, this shows how the use of these natural sites has increased the membership of the Zionist churches in Botswana.

The significance of natural places in the healing ministry of the Zionist Churches in Botswana

In the third chapter of this study I commented that the African peoples consider the universe from a religious perspective. Because in Africa religion enters all areas of life, people feel that many objects and places have religious significance. Some of these objects are natural while others are made by the people themselves (Mbiti 1991:144). Some of them are regarded as sacred, but many others are simply used for a particular religious purpose and occasion, without necessarily being sacred or holy as such (Mbiti 1991:144). Mbiti (1991:144) maintains that there are many belief sentiments, myths, legends, etc, attached to these religious objects and places. But I want to submit that myths are not only about objects and places: they are about everything in life (Mbiti 1991:82, Sitiloane 1986:14). For instance, they may be myths about God, the creation of the universe, the origin of human beings, institutions and values, death, heroes and leaders, kings and chiefs, animals and inanimate things. There are myths about natural forces and objects, various habits of living and the behaviour of things around. There are myths to answer the ‘how’, ‘where’ and ‘why’ questions which people have raised concerning the universe as a whole and man’s immediate life in particular. Thus, in myths there lies a rich wealth of African ideas, beliefs, values, literary expressions and the exercise of human imagination (Mbiti 82-83). Bate (2002 : 105) argues convincingly that the myths are symbolic narratives

which express the major truths of human culture. For instance, Creation stories are good examples of myths. And every culture has its own accounts of the creation.

This is a clear indication of the fact that it is not only the Africans who have a rich wealth of myths, because Setiloane (1986:14) concurs with Bate that every culture has its own fund of mythology. A typical example in this regard is the Hebrew people and the Old Testament which describes them. For instance, biblical scholarship has for about a century now revealed that the much cherished Old Testament story about Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is, in fact, a myth (Setiloane 1986:14). In reality there has never been a geographical place called the Garden of Eden; it never existed, and there were no individuals by the name of Adam and Eve. So the story must not be understood and interpreted literally. Setiloane (1986:14) argues convincingly that this story or myth came into being as an attempt by the Hebrews in a certain geographical area, at a certain time, to fathom the mystery of human origins and the human state. According to the study of ancient near eastern culture all the people of the Mediterranean world of which Israel was a part, had their own myths about human evolution, and everything in the universe (ANE 100-A/104/1999:29-53; Knapp 1988:124-132, 242-265). This, in fact, suggest that every nation in the world has its own wealth of myths about human evolution and the world (Mbiti 1991:82, Setiloane 1986:14).

Batswana, likewise, have their own fund of mythology regarding human evolution and the universe. These myths have helped them, like other nations, through the ages to understand the world around them and to make sense of things around them (ANE 100-A/104/1999:42-43; Setiloane 1986:14-16). It is evident that these myths have shaped the worldview of Batswana as Africans. The implication here, is that myths form part and parcel of human culture. And such myths have been passed from one generation to the other through the ages by the Africans, whose history and way of life was never documented. It is a well-known fact in academic and non-academic circles that the documentation of African history is a thing of recent development. For instance, the book “Orality, Memory and the Past” edited by Phillippe Denis, in essence shows clearly that there is a lot, in African history which was transmitted by a word of mouth, i.e orality or story-telling. The Oral History Project of the School of Theology at the University of Natal, under the leadership of Professor Phillippe

Denis, attempts to deal broadly with the authenticity of this oral history and its documentation. Batswana as Africans, are very religious people and as one has already shown in Africa religion enters every area of human life. It is in the light of this understanding that it is said that it is unthinkable for an African to be irreligious. This implies that religion comprises the spectacles through which the African looks at the world. From the above analysis of myths and what they entail, there is no doubt whatsoever that myth shapes the African's world-view, and so does religion. From this point of view they are one and the same thing, a package.

As indicated in this study there are often beliefs, sentiments, myths, legends, etc attached to various religious objects and places. This is also the case with Batswana, according to traditional healers and Zionists (Personal interview 06/07/03): in Gabane village, near Gaborone, there is a mountain named after the village, Gabane Mountain. Some villagers call it "*Diremogolo*"; it is surrounded by the village. The villagers believe that the mountain is a dwelling place for God, gods and ancestors and as a result the place is perceived as sacred. For the villagers the mountain *Diremogolo* symbolizes the meeting point between the visible and invisible worlds, the heavens and earth. Because of this belief anything which seems to interfere with it is quickly resented, and even produces a negative and dangerous reaction from the people concerned. So anything that takes place at *Diremogolo* has a special meaning to the villagers and general public. In fact the Tswana traditional and religious services used to be held at the said place. In a way it is believed to be a miracle mountain. The people of Ramotswa, likewise, have a similar belief about the hill "Lenaong la Matsieng"¹. There are other natural places or features like caves, forests, waterfalls, trees, springs, rivers, etc, which have myths attached to them, and which were used for traditional and religious purposes. The introduction of Christianity to the African continent changed the African way of life to a great extent. The missionaries' tireless endeavors to discourage African traditional religious practices marked the decline, so to speak, in the use of the said geographical features for religious purposes. The traditional healers were the only religious functionaries who were not discouraged by the missionaries from continuing with their prerogative of

¹ Lenaong la Matsieng is a mountain at Ramotswa village on which a footprint shaped hole is found, which is believed to have been made by Matsieng, who was a shepherd thousands and thousands of years ago. Because of this myth, this place is perceived as sacred, and is used for traditional and religious purposes.

healing the sick at the said natural places, because they had been using these places through the ages for their art of healing.

But, matters have changed completely, once the Zionist Churches appeared on the scene. They have also started their art of healing at the said topographical features. Now, the situation has become a contest for these sites between the traditional practitioners and some of the Zionist leaders.

The Theological basis employed by the Zionists for using natural topographical features for healing purposes

As shown above, while traditional healers have used these sites for healing from time immemorial, the Zionists have recently and begun to use them for the same purpose. For instance, churches like Temothuo Apostolic Church, Bagethwa Apostolic Church, Emmanuel Church in Zion, Barongwa ba Morena Christian Church and Bethsaida Apostolic Church are practising healing there. This is a baffling phenomenon, and it has surprised some leaders and prophets from other churches of the Spirit-type Churches. This development astonished even the traditional healers and the general public but at the same time generated much interest, because the Zionists are becoming more and more African in their practices. The question may be asked; what is wrong with the use of these natural places if they are for the good of humanity? It is in the light of this question that the natural sites are appropriated for the art of healing in some Zionist Churches. Now, from the theological standpoint of Gen 1:26-31 and Psalm 24:1, the appropriation and adoption of natural sites for the art of healing by the Zionists is justifiable. For instance, Gen 1:26-31 states clearly that the person made in the image of God is given dominion over the earth. This implies that the person can use whatever he/she wishes for his/her own good, and the good of fellow human beings. Again, Psalm 24:1, says 'The world and all that is in it belongs to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it are His'. From this verse it is evident that the aforesaid natural places, such as mountains, hills, caves, forests, waterfalls, trees, rivers, lakes etc, belong to God; even the people who are using them belong to Him. The implication here is that people who are made in God's image, as shown above, are in his service when they use these natural places for the good of His people, His creation. A typical example in this regard is a miraculous healing story of Namaan, the commander of Syrian soldiers who suffered from leprosy. He was instructed to dip

himself seven times in the river Jordan by the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 5:1-14). The pool of Bethzatha was used for the same purposes. This clearly indicates that these natural sites were used for the good of humanity even in biblical times. It is in the context of this broad and profound theological understanding that the use of the said natural features by some of the Zionists is not baffling but also justifiable and acceptable.

Again, it is a well-known fact in ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical circles that the Zionist Churches are hybrids of Christianity and African traditional religion; therefore it is not surprising that they are practising some of the things that are also practised in African traditional religion (Steyn 1996:129). The use of natural sites by the Zionists for healing from this perspective is justifiable. Again, owing to the fact that these are churches in which Africans wanted to assimilate more traditional and natural elements, the use of such sites for healing purposes is understandable (Daneel 1991:47-50). Daneel (1991:31) states explicitly that these churches are of African origin, founded by Africans, and as a result they are adapted to the needs, life-view and life-style of the black people. Hence, Mofokeng (1990:47) calls the Zionist Churches the 'principal religious custodians of the African culture and traditional religion'. In these terms, too, it is quite clear that the use of natural features by some of the Zionists indicated above, is perfectly appropriate. The reasons advanced here for the use of natural places in healing are exactly those advanced in regard to the use of *ditaola*, as discussed in chapter three. And the churches which use *ditaola* for healing are those, in most instances, which use the said topographical features. This convincingly demonstrates that the Zionists have adapted the old Tswana traditional healing for their own good, and the good of humanity, on the basis that whatever God has created and made available is justified when it is used for the good of humanity. This is the context in which the appropriation of *ditaola* and natural sites for healing must always be understood, and makes the approach to healing more and more holistic and dynamic in the Zionist Churches. However, this approach to healing by them has caused tension between them and traditional healers.

The contest between the Zionists and Traditional Healers for the use of natural sites for healing purposes.

According to traditional healers at Gabane (Personal interview, 06/07/03), they have used these sites from time immemorial but things have changed completely these days. The Zionists too, now, use these places for healing purposes and as a result there is tension and contest between them and traditional healers. For instance, the Zionist Churches also use the Gabane Mountain or *Diremogolo* for healing purposes. The Zionists go to the mountain very often, in great numbers, to perform their healing rituals and religious practices such as sacrifices, offerings, prayers etc. The congregants of these churches climb the mountain at different angles or points, at different times for different occasions and sometimes one group finds the other already on the mountain. It must be borne in mind that the Zionists are interested in *Diremogolo* because of the myth attached to it, that it is a dwelling place for God, gods, and ancestors, and as a result it is sacred and miraculous in a way, as indicated above. As a result Temothuo Apostolic Church, Bagethwa Apostolic Church, Emmanuel Christian Church in Zion etc, use this mountain as their permanent sanctuary for healing. Because of the perception regarding *Diremogolo*, Temothuo Apostolic Church has erected its Church building at the foot of the mountain so that its members can be closer to it and use it as they want for sacred purposes. This state of affairs shows clearly that the Zionists are now dominating the Miracle Mountain, which is a major concern for the traditional healers who have used it for healing purposes through the ages, and therefore perceive themselves as having a divine right, so to speak, to use the said mountain for healing. They maintain that the Zionists want to monopolize the miracle mountain. This concern was recently raised at the meeting of the Botswana Association of Traditional Healers, where it was resolved that the traditional healers must continue to use *Diremogolo* for their healing purpose in great numbers. The Association's resolution in essence was a recruitment of new and more traditional practitioners to use the mountain for healing, and this is exactly the situation today. The fact that there is a contest between the two groups for the use of the mountain may be seen, for instance, in the fact that from March 2001, the Zionists complained that *Diremogolo* is a holy place but was defiled by traditional healers the in practising their profession. They maintained that the said practitioners have a tendency to leave the used razors for incisions, head-bands, amulets, feathers, half full and empty bottles of medicinal concoctions, medicinal gourds, porcupine skins etc, all over the mountain. They maintained that this is unhealthy and dangerous. Another complaint was that some of the clients of the traditional

practitioners leave their old clothes all over the place after being healed. This, in most instances, happens with people who have experienced misfortunes in their lives, such as those who have just been released from prison, widows, widowers, job-seekers, young men and woman desiring marriage etc. The implication here is that such people go through ritual purification and cleansing from every scrap of ill fortune. Hence, they leave their old clothes where the rituals take place. But all these complaints of the Zionists about the defilement of the holy place are perceived by the traditional healers in turn as an excuse by the churches to monopolize the miracle mountain. From March to June 2002, this tension got completely out of hand that these groups were threatening each other that an intervention was needed. The government through the Ministry of Home Affairs which is responsible for the registration of Churches and religious organizations and Ministry of Land and Local government, intervened by urging the two groups to solve their problem amicably. It stated clearly that if the groups fail to deal with the matter amicably it would be forced to fence the place thereby making it inaccessible to anyone. This government intervention, to a great extent, made the groups to have some degree of tolerance. .

The same kind of conflict is seen between the Zionists and traditional healers of Ramotswa village over the hill commonly known as “Lenaong la Matsieng”; which is also a place of miracles, so to speak, with a long history and myths attached to it. It issued by churches such as Bethsaida Apostolic Church, St Mark Christian Church in Zion, St Phillip Church etc, for healing purposes. The traditional healers, likewise, use it for the same reason. The Zionists here, again, accuse the traditional healers of defilement of the sacred place, and the traditional healers also perceive this accusation as an excuse by the Zionists to monopolize the hill. This competition for the said hill is reflective of how important it is for the healing purposes of both groups. However, competition has not yet started between these two groups regarding the use of other places such as waterfalls, caves, forests, rivers, lakes etc, for healing purposes. The reason for this is that the majority of traditional healers are not using the said natural features as they use Diremogolo and “Lenaong la Matsieng”. The implication is that the Zionists use waterfalls, caves, forests, rivers, springs, lakes without seeing traditional healers as often as they do at the above said places. Hence, the Zionists dominate or feel that sense of ownership of the said sites for their healing ministry. This adoption of traditional healing and the use of natural places in this regard is

remarkable and impressive to the other Zionists, Mission Churches, and the general public in Botswana. It is a completely new way of doing things in the history of the Zionist Churches in the whole of Southern Africa, which is not only puzzling but also attracts many people from other churches and the non-Christian environment. Today, some Zionists are debating the wisdom of following this new trend of appropriating the traditional healing for their own good, as stated, not all the said churches are doing this. And, from the look of things, as time goes on other Spirit-type Churches, which are not necessarily Zionists, are going to follow suit. But, whatever the case may be, as long as this is for the good of humanity, will be justifiable. What matters most is that the approach to healing is more and more holistic and dynamic, as indicated in this study.

Phenomenological approach to healing by the Zionist Churches

It is a well-known fact in ecclesiastical circles that healing is a distinctive feature of the Zionist Churches. Their success in this regard lies in their holistic approach to healing. Healing in most instances begins with diagnosis of ailments, which is done by divination through the Bible. This is a process of detecting the course of the disease, problems, troubles, misfortune, etc, (Amanze 1998:178): the healer, who is in most instances the prophet, begins the divination by reading a scriptural passage for the purpose. Thereafter, he begins to prophesy to find out from God the cause of the disease, troubles, misfortunes etc, befalling his patients (Amanze 1998:178, Makhubu 1988:77). In cases where *ditaola* are juxtaposed with the said procedure of divination, like Temothuo Apostolic Church, Bagethwa Apostolic Church or Emmanuel Christian Church in Zion, the prophet, who in most instances is also a herbalist, diviner or traditional healer, receives a revelation from God through the ancestors about the cause of his patients' problems. Wherever the use of *ditaola* is involved, according to the above churches, the ancestors play a significant role. Once the nature of the disease is revealed by the prophet-healer to the client, its treatment is also prescribed, which always depends on the nature of the disease in question and the revelation by God through the ancestors. The art of throwing *ditaola* and the position in which they lie plays a significant role in revealing the nature of the issue. Sometimes even the response of the patient during divination plays a crucial role in this regard. The

following methods are fairly common for those Zionist Churches which practice healing at natural topographical sites.

Firstly, praying for the sick during the service is a common method of healing which is practiced by almost all the Zionist Churches, including the aforesaid churches (Amanze 1998:179, Anderson 1993:71-72). But the difference is that most of the prayers for healing are made in the mountains and at other natural places. In the said churches, prayer services are only conducted at certain times during the day. For instance, prayers for healing cannot be said from 12 o'clock, noon until 3 o'clock in the afternoon. It is believed that this is an awkward time, so to speak, for the ancestors to listen to people's prayers, because at this time they are normally resting and as a result they cannot pay any attention to prayers. In fact, it is appropriate to state that nothing must be done in relation to healing at this time of the day. This emanates from the African way of life in the traditional situation, where traditional healers do not practise their profession at this time of the day. They do not even go to the veld or bush to dig up their herbs, at this said time. It is believed that doing so could seriously affect the efficacy of the healing medicine and annoy the ancestors. Other taboos of African tradition include the fact that burials or funerals are not, and cannot, be conducted this time, water cannot be fetched from rivers, dams or pools, lobola (Price paid by the bridegroom for the bride in African culture) cannot be negotiated and so on. Hence it is quite understandable why healing is not practiced these hours by the said Zionist Churches. This clinging to the old way of doing things and taboos in itself accounts for the uniqueness of these churches. This is not surprising when one considers that the Zionist Churches of which the said churches are hybrids of African traditional religion and Christianity as their two constituent components (Steyn 1006:129).

The implication of this analysis is that healing can be practised at any time of the day except for the above-mentioned period of time, and indeed members of Temothuo Apostolic Church normally go to *Diremogolo* early in the morning on Sundays, especially in summer, for healing services. Their church building is at the foot of this miracle mountain, as indicated in this chapter, therefore it is easier for them to climb the mountain in the early hours of Sunday morning because they normally hold a Saturday evening church service which lasts until the following day. On the mountain

healing takes place while the morning breeze moves the flowers, while the birds are singing with excitement in the trees. This is a completely different atmosphere in which healing takes place, it is in which every individual who participates in the service feels that he or she is part and parcel of nature. The healing service commences by everyone singing a hymn softly while facing to the direction of sunrise. Then, the prophet-healer lights his candle and asks the congregation to do likewise. This is followed by a moment of silence, after which the prophet leads the congregation in prayer after closing his eyes to link with God, the Creator of the universe (Psalm 24:1).

Thereafter, he asks the congregation to pray for those who are sick, before the laying on of hands commences. In most instances these prayers are said in a soft and orderly way. Strangely enough, at such services people are not emotionally charged as they often are during other services. So this kind of service is characterized by seriousness and a consciousness of the presence of God on the miracle mountain, who can do his miracles of healing through the ancestors. This emanates from a strong belief that God and the ancestors listen attentively to people's prayers and requests therefore there is no need to shout at them while praying. The laying on of hands is done very gently but firmly, rubbing the painful parts of the body in such a way that the patients feel relieved. The healing techniques are in most instances performed to the satisfaction of the sick. Thereafter, they are given the 'blessed' or 'holy' water to drink, which is the tap water mixed with '*sehwasho*' and prayed for, by the bishop or prophet-healer. The prophet-healer will then announce that those who were treated, but feel that they still want some more treatment or special attention, should visit him at the church during the week. And the service will conclude with the singing of the favourite chorus "Be still and know that I am God" which in their view assures them that God and the ancestors from the miracle mountain have heard their prayers and requests for healing, and which is followed by the benediction.

The other healing services of the same church which are held from 3 o'clock in the afternoon to 12 o'clock midnight and thereafter, are spirited and boisterous. They are characterized by loud prayers, rhythmic singing, dancing, shouting, clapping of hands and drumming. The prophet-healer is also, in most instances, noisy because he is believed to be in an altered state of consciousness in which he is linked with God, the

Holy Spirit, and the ancestors. The laying on of hands, which is an integral part of this healing ritual, is not at all a gentle activity, as physical force is often applied when necessary in the form of hard slapping by the prophet to dislodge the evil spirit which possesses the patient. This hard slapping is sometimes performed on different parts of the body, for example, shoulders, back, arms or forehead, to dislodge the evil spirit. The same method can be used to conduct the Holy Spirit into the person (Williams 1982:128-129, Oosthuizen 1989:88). And healing takes place in this boisterous situation and emotional atmosphere. Sometimes after healing, depending on the nature of the illness, misfortune, trouble or success, the client is advised to perform a specific ritual to propitiate the ancestors, to thank them for good fortune, or to combat sorcery and witchcraft aimed at him or her. Again, depending on the divination, prophecy or diagnosis and treatment, of the person is advised to go to the graveyard to pray to his/her ancestors to venerate and propitiate them. In cases where rituals involve sacrificing animals the following are normally recommended: a goat, sheep, cow or chicken, for healing and the propitiation of the ancestors. After healing, the sick are given appropriate advice and everyone is given the 'blessed' or 'holy' water to drink even those who are not sick. The belief is that water is a primary symbol and an important element of healing. But I would like to make clear that though churches such as the Bagethwa Apostolic Church, Emmanuel Christian Church and Bethsaida Apostolic Church, operate in similar fashion, there are certain differences.

For instance, Bagethwa Apostolic Church, which also uses *Diremogolo* for healing purposes, prefers to perform healing rituals in the morning and at night. Seemingly, the morning breeze, the flowers and the sounds of birds welcoming a new day have a tremendous impact on patients, as already indicated in this study, causing them to feel that they are part and parcel of nature. The other healing services are conducted at *Diremogolo* from 12 o'clock midnight on Saturday until Sunday morning at 10 o'clock. The difference between the above said churches and Temothuo Apostolic Church is that they do not have any healing service from 3 o'clock in the afternoon like the latter. The former have their public healing services on Sunday morning from 10 o'clock to quarter to twelve, while the latter holds it on the same day from 3 o'clock. This supports the point that the methods of healing vary from church to church although they share certain overall features (West 1975:92). The midnight service meant for healing, takes place when *Diremogolo* is bathed in pale moonlight, and in

the still of the night when everything is quiet and peaceful, when the heavens are listening, so to speak, the healing rituals are performed by the bishops, prophets and prayer women.

The tranquility of the mountain always adds meaning and significance to the healing rituals. Comparatively speaking, this healing service is the same as that conducted by Temothuo Apostolic Church for healing purposes on Sunday mornings in many respects. As already indicated above, it is the kind of service at which the principal healer, or any healer, does not go into an altered state of consciousness: everyone is conscious everybody is conscious right through the service to its end. The laying on of hands is a gentle but firm activity while the singing is soft but powerful and meaningful. The service is very orderly and the healing rituals are performed to the satisfaction of the sick in most instances. However, on occasion must these churches also have spirited and boisterous healing services, as indicated above.

All these churches operate in a similar fashion when it comes to healing the sick. The churches, which use the hill called 'Lenaong la Matsieng' at Ramotswa Village, do almost exactly what the churches in Gabane do. The most observable difference among the churches is found in the treatment of sicknesses like possession, barrenness, sore feet and mouth sores. For instance, Bagethwa Apostolic Church treats any case of possession by an evil force in the caves, while Emmanuel Christian church and Bethsaida Apostolic Church prefer to deal with ritual of exorcism at the forests. Temothuo Apostolic Church mostly treats cases of evil possession on the mountain like all other diseases but there are a few cases of the same sickness or disease that are dealt with at the caves. It seems to me that the extent to which one is possessed determines the place where one treated, at the mountain, or at the caves by this Church. All these churches which practise exorcism, believe that this kind of healing has to take place away from the patient's residence. The belief is held that when it is done at a distance these evil spirits will wander in the caves, forests, mountain etc, and will not go back to torment the person again. Other sicknesses like barrenness, sore feet and mouth sores, as indicated above, are also treated at the said places including waterfalls, springs, lakes, rivers, forests etc. This approach makes healing more and more holistic and dynamic, and this has made the churches more and more successful in the area of healing

