

Mo-ninum Ritual

T'BOLI, SOUTH COTABATO PROVINCE, SOUTHERN MINDANAO ISLAND, SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. *This is the grandest of the wedding rites of the T'boli, rooted in the belief of spiritual healing through wedding celebrations. It literally means the "feast of making wine" from sugarcane. It is a day of feasting and drinking of wine and a celebration of propitiation, soul cleansing and renewal of spiritual life.*



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A T'boli woman demonstrates how a mo-ninum bride uses the t'nalak during the ritual.

THE MO-NINUM, the last of a series of wedding feasts, is a set of six ceremonial and reciprocal feasts where two families take turns in being host and guest. This reciprocal arrangement may last two to seven years. This is the most significant ceremony of the people of Lake Sebu. It involves wealth distribution, repaying of social debts and redistribution of goods that are received among participants, including relatives. A major feature is the construction of a huge *gono mo-ninum* (mo-ninum house) that may measure 25 to 35 meters long and can accommodate up to 250 people. This takes place in both the bride's and groom's communities when the moon is at its fullest.

The mo-ninum house is partitioned with the musicians and dancers in one end where numerous *t'nalak* cloths are hung (called the *tabu lowoben* – the true body of the house). This is where the *beligal* actually takes place, contiguous with the central post of the house (*tudblungon*). *T'nalak* are hung on three sides of the *lowo*, the central area of activity where a row of six gongs are suspended. This forms a sectioned off portion of the house called *lukas*, where the audience is seated. Behind the row of gongs are mandatory ritual objects: a rattan counting device that indicates the days remaining before the *mulu* or ceremonial climax; a decorated shield; a double-headed drum; an earthenware wine jar and a length of rope through the floor to a tethered fighting horse from the bride's side.

The activities begin after the evening meal. The *sebelang* ensemble (gongs, drums, percussion sticks and dancers) begins to perform. The performers consist of a female dancer, a male drummer and his accompanist on percussion sticks. At first, they perform tentatively, then the woman dancer touches the drum with both feet as a sign of respect for the spirit custodian of the drum (*fus afus*). While the gongs play, she waits for the drum ensemble to begin and dances *madal*

tabu (true dance). When the drummer pauses to rest, she continues but in jest. She soon stops and so does the ensemble. She picks up the *begelung* (boat lute) and begins to dance the *madal begelung* (lute dance) to her own accompaniment.

During a lull, a young girl may go to the dance area and begin to dance. She will also be accompanied by a drummer. This sometimes leads to a contest of skill and endurance between the drummer and the dancer. After this performance, gong playing follows. Then a company of older people may sing the *T'boli* epic, *Tudbulol*, into the wee hours.

The entire cycle is completed in six harvest seasons, that is, in six years. The first grand *mulu* of a wedding feast is held at the bride's house. The cycle of setting the actual celebration will take two months from the start of the *fet buteng* or the night when the rattan knotting was done at the bride's house to officially start the celebration. The cooking, singing, dancing, exchanging of gifts and dowries, and healing of the sick usually take four days at the bride's house first, and then the following year at the groom's house.

Mo-ninum is celebrated when there are families whose sick kin are in a state of *benabung* – a sickness that cannot be cured by herbs and other forms of medicine. This is determined by a ritual specialist as an illness caused by spirits enraged by acts of the ailing person, or due to a violation of taboos, e.g. renegeing on dowries, etc. In this healing ritual, the spouse is called upon to renew his wedding vows and offer gifts to appease the spirits. Only the ritual specialist of the ethnic group is anointed to perform the ritual of absolution of the soul of the sick person.

Before the mo-ninum is called, the family of the sick must first perform other forms of healing rituals in various stages. The first is called *sentengeb* which is done by offering

cooked rice and an egg, together with water and betel-nut to the spirits. If this does not work, the *ketdu* is done. It entails the offering of all edible living creatures found in lake water: crabs, shrimps and snails cooked with rice. If the sick is still not cured, a third grand healing ritual is performed.

The *nesol be tonok* (literally, make hole in the ground) calls for the offering of live chickens. The family constructs a decorated bamboo booth where the sick is placed. The healer dances around the booth with the live chickens in his hands, all of which will be butchered, except for the hen which will be fed to bring back the soul of the sick. If this still fails, the ritual specialist declares that the sick is in a state of *benabung*, which now requires the celebration of a mo-ninum to cure the person.

The first step is to set the date for the *sogu*, the prayer ritual to petition the gods to heal the sick person with the promise to comply with all the taboos asked by the sacred ritual. A prayer called *olu* is said by the ritual specialist and the members of both families of the bride and groom. They say, "*Ni kun bol bekobem desen ani mo me ninum be lawoben*" (Let his sickness be cured as we vow to celebrate mo-ninum for his body).

During the *sogu*, both families exchange their *kimu* (wealth). A *kefilan*, *bolo* or sword, is handed by the groom's family to the father of the bride; a *t'nalak* cloth is handed by the bride's mother to the mother of the groom. While handing down the *t'nalak*, the bride's family says a prayer petitioning the spirits to cure the lingering illness of the groom or the bride. Both sides say this prayer alternately: "Now we exchange this *bolo* and cloth as a vow to celebrate mo-ninum". All the couples who vowed to join the mo-ninum give gifts to the *tau bak* (host), also called the *olu*, aside from the prayers. It is taboo not to give gifts to the *tau bak* before the start of the mo-ninum. Two ritual specialists conduct the *sogu* ritual, one for each side of the family.

With the *sogu* finished, the celebration of the mo-ninum is announced. There may be several sets of marriage couples. The couple who first vowed to conduct the mo-ninum is designated the *tau bak*. They are assigned to call the attention of those who are suffering from the state of *benabung* to join. The husband becomes the leader of the grooms' group, while the wife becomes the leader of the brides' group. Each of the families holds meetings of their own to determine dowries and others.

Two houses will be built: one for the grooms at the place of the groom, the other for the brides at the host bride's residence. The houses will have to be spacious enough to accommodate more or less 300 persons. Taboos are observed during the construction of the houses: materials should be cut during the full moon; if someone dies during the cutting, the construction has to be postponed until the next full moon; when a member goes hunting and obtains a catch (for example, a wild pig), it is not a good time to butcher it. The laying of eggs of chickens at night is also a bad sign.

The *mungkul* is the ritual done next to determine the fate of the people who will live in the mo-ninum house during the celebration of the healing ritual.

During the building of the houses, all the parties involved begin planting root crops, rice and sugarcane. They also raise chickens. This takes eight to twelve months. The sugarcane planted must be in large quantities for the making of sugarcane wine. The only varieties of sugarcane allowed is the *noko-temonon*, which is used as posts of the *meligey* (house of food) and called the *datu* of all sugarcanes, and the *noko tebelow*. They also raise fighting horses which are valued as wealth for dowries. Horse fights are done after the end of each ritual. Every family recites a planting ritual for a good crop, after which a rooster and two heads of chicken are offered during the ritual dedicated

for mo-ninum. This activity is repeated each year. After the first year, a date is set for another mo-ninum. Then the planting, raising and other preparations are done for the next festivity.

The serving of wine is done on the fifth year of the mo-ninum – this delay allows the sugarcane to mature and be ready for preparation. Sugarcane is harvested eighteen months after planting, but mo-ninum wines must be harvested during the flowering stage – at twenty-four to thirty months old. The wine is done on the fifth or sixth year to be assured of an adequate amount of wine. The fifth year is the last celebration at the brides' house while the sixth year is the last one at the grooms' house.

The preparation of the wine is the most tedious of the rituals. This starts on the fourth year to allow the wine to ferment and be ready by the fifth year. This is prepared at the grooms' house. A small place is built for winemaking near the house where there is accessible water supply for the cleaning of the sugarcane before pressing. Inside the house is a sugarcane press made of two pieces of wooden slabs from the *kebalul* tree, an endemic hardwood. No other species of wood is used. The lower slab is about two meters long while the upper one is four meters. There is a taboo against the breaking of these wooden slabs. These are tied with unsplit rattan because split rattan is taboo. In case these taboos are broken, a healing ritual must be conducted to appease the spirit of the tree and prevent harm from coming to the families involved. The sugarcane juice is kept in large earthen jars. The juice is left to ferment for at least one to three months. Thus, winemaking must start at least six months before the grand feast.

When the houses are built, the women start weaving t'nalak cloths needed for the rituals. The weaving can be done only in the mo-ninum house. It takes three months to finish a cloth 24 inches by 12 meters long. The participating brides weave cloth for their husbands' pants. The host bride weaves a cloth for the *eben belol* or t'nalak sling bag for rice to be sown during

the ritual, solely for the ritual practitioner's use. The other brides are not allowed to weave sling bags. During the weaving period, husband and wife are to abstain from sex. The weaving period ends when the mulu or wedding is set. A skilled weaver is elevated to the status of *libon-boi*, princess.

When the two houses are built (the brides' and grooms'), traditional wares, musical instruments and implements are brought into the houses before the start of the *mulu t'nonggong*. These include a traditional drum of deerskin, a gong, earthen jar (to stock in the traditional wine from sugarcane and native palm) and traditional plates (to be used during the *tebule heligo*). The absence of these may cause illness.

First year mulu

The mo-ninum starts with the tying of the rattan knots (*mowol buteng*) which are used in counting the days of the celebration and the days in between the first and the next celebrations. The start of preparations is signaled by the fet buteng. The groom's party ties the knots at the mo-ninum house. This time, the bride's party goes to the groom's house and prepares simple food for the ritual.

Both parties will then agree on when to start the first mo-ninum party (mulu) at the brides' house. When the date is set, the grooms will start tying the rattan knots equal to the number of days (as a calendar) they would wait for the occasion. After the knotting is done, the brides' party will bring one set to the brides' house for the ritual specialist to use in counting the days. The mowol buteng is sacred. It must be wrapped in a t'nalak skirt, placed inside a gong and slung carefully when brought out of the house. It is taboo for a knotted rattan to fall out of the gong. If this happens, a ritual will have to be done to appease the spirit of the rattan. A knot is loosened for each day that passes. The last knot to be unloosened will be the day of the mulu.

After the fet buteng, both families and the ritual specialist would have agreed on the date

to start the grand feast. The preparations are done in accordance with the schedule prepared by the ritual specialist. Any deviation is taboo. The fet buteng is done after each celebration to set the date for the next one.

The wedding feast starts when all preparations are done and the weaving of the t'nalak cloths are finished. The ritual specialist officially announces the start of the actual celebration. This is usually done during the harvest season of rice and lasts for four to six days at both the grooms' and brides' houses. Usually, the mo-ninum is celebrated in the months of August to October when the rice harvests are in during the new moon until full moon. The complete mo-ninum cycle is six grand celebrations: three at the brides' house and three at the grooms' house, alternating until the cycle is completed.

The first mulu celebrated at the brides' house usually lasts for one day. Simple food is prepared such as *lubed*, which is sticky rice wrapped in *doun lekek*, a kind of tree leaf. Ordinary rice is wrapped in *lemenge* leaf. Only fish and chicken are prepared. Pork is taboo. Sugarcane is cut into pieces (a foot long) and offered to all participants, instead of sugarcane wine.

Arrangements of dowries are then discussed. The brides will offer their dowries to the grooms' party. This arrangement is called *los*. The brides' los are heirloom pieces, embroidered dresses (*kegal nesif*), *malong*, *denoli* or t'nalak tube skirt, or cloth. The grooms' party will select from among the dowries and all concerned will discuss how much they will have to give in return on the next mulu. This will start the discussion on when the next mulu will be held. The rest of the day is spent dancing, singing, eating and horse fighting.

Second year mulu

For the second year, the mulu celebration is held at the grooms' house. The grooms' party prepares simple food, similar to those prepared by the brides during the first mulu, including the footlong pieces of sugarcane. Dowries are

discussed. This time, the los will be paid to the brides, commensurate to the dowries they received and as agreed upon during the mulu at the brides' house the first year. Usually, the dowries offered are horses and other large animals, gongs, kefilan, betel-nut, *klintangs* and/or appliances. Land is never offered as dowry; this is taboo. Another set of arrangements for the exchange of dowries is agreed upon at this time. When all these are done, the rest of the day is again spent dancing, singing, horse fighting and ends with a fet buteng. The ritual specialist, together with the party of the brides, will do the rattan knot tying of the grooms' part, equivalent to the number of days agreed upon to hold the third celebration at the brides' house. The mowol buteng will again be carried with care to the house of the brides.

Third year mulu

The third year is celebrated at the bride's house, but this time, with more people joining in the celebration. Simple food and chicken are served and still no wine. Dowries, los, from the brides are again offered, and the settling of previous dowries is also taken up. The chants and songs express challenges on payment of dowries or exchanges of bargaining of dowries. Each party will have its own singers/chanters, with performances judged by crowd responses. Arrangement of dowries takes longer now. The whole-day affair ends with the usual mowol buteng, tying of rattan knots and its careful transport to the grooms' house.

Fourth year mulu

The fourth year feast is done at the grooms' house with the sugarcane wine served for the first time. The ritual practitioner presides over the ritual of wine tasting. This ritual is a feast in itself. The people indulge in food, horse fights and wine tasting. The ritual specialist starts the tasting by filling his bamboo cup and offering the first toast. Having said his ritual prayers, he fills all the cups of the grooms and men present for a mass toast. The men judge if the wine is ready for drinking or not.

The dowries are given in exchange of los the grooms received from the brides.



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T'boli women as they are today, in vestiges of the past and a touch of the modern, while being audience to a social event.

Payment of previous dowries is discussed and arrangements for the next set are again laid down by the brides' party. The festivities continue with revelry and ends with the fet buteng and its transfer to the brides' house.

Fifth year mulu

The fifth mulu is the last mulu to be done at the brides' house. This lasts for three to four days depending on the availability of food and sugarcane wine (wine tasting takes place a day before the actual mulu at the brides' house). Before the drink fest (*temilow*), all the grooms and their relatives sleep at the brides' house. For the tasting ritual, the groom's party goes home to the grooms' house with their relatives, as well as the brides', to participate in the activity. All the wine is brought to the brides' house for drinking and from then on, the making of wine becomes a continuous activity. Feasting and horse fights last throughout the day.

At this time, the brides and their relatives prepare food for the setting up of the melige (the house of food), inside the brides' house.

The night after the wine tasting, all the men and the brides go home. If there are ten couples joining the mo-ninum, ten houses of food will be prepared. Each bride will be assigned a place by the ritual specialist. The melige, is made of sugarcane as posts and sticky rice wrapped in a sacred leaf called *lekek* as roof. Cooked rice with pots of chickens are placed inside the booths. Roasted chickens are hung around the booth for the grooms' party to bring home after the mulu. Each of the booths has an earthen jar full of sugarcane wine for the grooms and relatives to drink.

This is the last celebration where the dowries by the bride's party are discussed. This time, the brides' families help each other cope with the dowries given to the grooms' party. The singing and chanting is done as a form of debate called *tenolu lebewen*. Apart from exchanging and arranging dowries, some families talk about arranging the marriage of their children. The mulu ends with fet buteng with the mowol buteng transferred to the grooms' house.

Sixth year mulu

This is the final stage of the cycle of the celebration of the mo-ninum. It is held at the grooms' house. The event lasts from three to four days. Here, all rituals of the mo-ninum are celebrated.

The *kadaw mulu*, the wedding feast day, is the most awaited day of all the days. In the early morning of the grand feast, the host bride pounds the rice to be used by the ritual specialist for the sewing ritual. Only the host bride does this.

As the sun rises, the brides, relatives and their beautifully adorned horses march to the grooms' house led by the ritual specialist. The groom's party joins the procession. The women carry the bamboo poles for the house of blankets and the t'nalak pants they have sewn for their husbands.

While the procession is going on, there is revelry. All the taboos are recited by the participants. Warnings are set and instructions from the ritual specialist are stated. On this day, the house of plates, the house of blankets and the ritual for casting of the taboos of the t'nalak are done. The house for the food would have already been set by the brides and the grooms to accommodate all the food being prepared for the occasion.

Tebule heligo (The house of plates) – When all are gathered in front the mo-ninum house, the ritual specialist starts the ritual of setting up the *tebules*.

The *tebules* are of two kinds. One is the heligo or “the house of plates,” made of six bamboo posts (*keling* variety) and three bamboos (*lasak* variety) as trusses, put up by the grooms a bit farther from the house. The cutting of the bamboo poles for this house has a sequence. These are cut more or less eighteen days before the Grand Mulu. First, three posts of the *tebule heligo* are cut. Eight nights must be counted using rattan knots before the other set of three bamboos for the right side of the *tebule* is cut. Three bamboo poles will also

be cut for the sides and the top trusses of the house after observing another eight-day interval.

All the china porcelain placed shall be tied to the roof. On each of the bamboo posts are the spears tied in an ‘x’ form with a scarf tied like a flag on each spear. On top of the plates, a mat is prepared to provide the canopy for the house of plates. Later, the fully decorated booth will be carried by the grooms near the mo-ninum house. The carrying of the booth is a form of ritual.

Tebule Kumu (The house of blankets) – While the *tebule heligo* is being set up, the women are also setting up the second type of *tebule*, the “house of blankets”. Following the day of the gathering of the *lekek* leaves, the men will cut the *seben* on the *lasak*, a bamboo variety required for the posts of the *tebule kumu*. The men will cut many poles to hang the t'nalak cloth woven by all the brides. This is all done in one day. The taboos, as instructed by the ritual specialist during the cutting, must be observed. The poles must be brought by the brides to the grooms' house on the day of the Grand Mulu. About six poles are needed to set up the posts of the *tebule kumu* and another three will serve as its trusses. This must be assembled a few meters away from the house. Hung on the posts are small pieces of t'nalak cloth.

Meeting of the *tebules* – When all the *tebules* are set, the grooms carry the two booths on their shoulders to an area designated by the ritual specialist near the mo-ninum house.

During the procession, a set of dancers perform the *temelek* dance between the two booths. Two pairs of dancers from the grooms' and brides' sides perform the dances respectively. From upstairs, a woman will dance to meet the coming dancers and then they dance together where the booths are placed. From here, a pair of dancers will call for a competition to dance. There, the *soyow* or the warrior dance is performed where two men

with shields and kefilan do the ceremonial hacking dance. Whoever falls down is a loser. The winning dancer is interpreted to have won and is allowed to marry the women dancers. Both parties are represented in the warrior dance. When both houses are settled, the dancers kiss each other as a pact of peace after the invitation to fight in a dance.

Ritual of the meko lii kumu – Casting away of the taboo of the t'nalak blanket.

When all the tebules are already on the ground, the ritual specialist of the brides is the last to go down the house. He brings with him a sling bag which is actually a tube skirt made of t'nalak called *denoli*. The bag contains four pieces of *blongon* or cooked rice wrapped in a sacred leaf, while four pieces of these are left upstairs. He also brings down the right thigh of a roasted chicken, an *anahaw* leaf (*odol*) and a tiny jar filled with sugarcane juice. The other parts of the chicken are left upstairs. The specialist slings the *denoli* with care.

When the brides and grooms are gathered, the ritual specialist spreads the *anahaw* leaf on the ground and puts on it the wrapped cooked rice, the chicken thigh and the earthenware jar with sugarcane wine. To cast away the taboos of the t'nalak blankets, the weavers are called to fall in line and step over the food offerings going toward the east. The brides sit around the specialist forming a circle from east to west, with the specialist at the center. The specialist pinches an amount of cooked rice with a pinch of chicken and puts it into the bride's mouths for them to eat. Other brides out of the specialist's reach pinch cooked rice and meat on their own. The grooms eat on their own too. For the men, the specialist would take their babies and place them on his lap for a second as a form of offering.

He then instructs all the weavers to offer their baskets of t'nalak cloths, which the specialist's assistant (*tau mogoi*) pulls out one by one and hangs on the *tebule kumu*. The hanging of the t'nalak shall again be in accordance with the sequence determined



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The weaving of the tie-dyed t'nalak abaca textile is one of the prominent features of this extended grand festival of the mo-ninum.

by the specialist. Those who do not follow the instructions faint and are healed by a specialist with herbs.

The specialist slices the sacred *anahaw* leaf and distributes these among the women. The number of slices received depends on the number of baskets of t'nalak brought. Each of the brides lay down offerings such as small knives, bracelets, embroidered blouses, working bolo, t'nalak tube skirts and other valuables on their *anahaw* leaf. Every woman is requested to dip her fingers on the sacred sugarcane wine. After everyone has eaten, the specialist places the bone of the chicken thigh to his mouth then slices it in small particles. He distributes the bones to all the men with the belief that these will bring them good fortune. The cooked rice is left uneaten and must not be brought up to the house.

After this, the specialist sings the *malak lang*, the sacred song which is sang only during this part of the feast:



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Dressed for a festival, T'boli women travel on the best means of movement through the mountains, wearing the typical ornated cloth-draped hats

Alah lang se seben
Tebe Esman
Tebe Landayaw
Ne Matutung Kibang
Ne mele Kanan
Ne netalu, ni sen benukaga
Nemo-u ni Len-ganay u
Olon sembet te lagan
Olon gesool lagan
Tengonem ko denalangu
*Mebaga Ubo Kebulan**
Mebaga Ubo Kebulan
Nin dou gel denalang
Denalangan be ni beteken layaw
(betek kumu)
Olon Sembet te lagan
Olon sembet te beluhan
Tengonem ko denalang u
Mebaga Ubo Kebulan

(Song for the bamboo pole [*seben*])

Late Esman
 Late Landayaw
 And the Mt. Matutum mixed white and black
 And the stone, river

I lay down this weave with
 spotted white design
 I made this design woven
 Could hardly touch the lagan
 It is halfway to touch the lagan
 Do you know what I learned?
 'Mebaga of Ubo tribe, Kebulan her name
 'Mebaga of Ubo tribe, Kebulan her name
 This is what I used to learn
 I learned the design layaw, the T'boli t'nalak
 blanket
 It almost can't touch the lagan
 It only touched the beluhan
 Do you know what I learned?)

(*Kebulan Mebaga of the Ubo, a nearby ethnic group)

After the *malak lang*, the host bride goes upstairs to perform the sowing of rice ceremony. The specialist invites everyone to go upstairs. While they are doing this, the host throws rice at them. All the people upstairs eat the remaining rice and chicken used during the ritual, pinching the morsels in small amounts. The host groom slices the roasted taro (a special variety called the *keleb tayu*, hence this

must also be planted as part of the mo-ninum preparations), which he dips into the sugarcane wine and distributes among the grooms. After eating the taro, all the grooms put on the t'nalak pants woven by their respective wives. After the rituals upstairs, the host will gather the thrown rice and bury this in a place where no one can come near. When the host returns, all the grooms go downstairs to tighten up the tebule heligo and bring it up to the mo-ninum house. All the brides fix up the tebule kumu to bring the t'nalak cloths upstairs.

All the brides are instructed to keep their woven t'nalak in their respective baskets and bring them up to the house for the ritual called *temenes kumu lem abi*.

During the ritual, the specialist takes the baskets of cloth from each bride and hangs them one by one on the east side of the house and the west side where the hearth is located. This is done in sequence based on their confirmation in joining the mo-ninum during the announcement and invitation done by the tau bak. It is taboo to do otherwise.

The bride's family will then serve the groom's relatives and visitors the betel-nut chews in a ritual called *mamak* or the chewing of betel-nut. Dancing continues. No lunch is served for the day except for the food hanging at the meligey.

Harvesting of the meligey (House of food) – The meligey “is loosened” after the betel-nut chewing ritual. The ritual specialist is given a share of the food from each of the booths set up by each of the brides' families inside the mo-ninum house, preferably the food close to the earthen jar of sugarcane wine. The participants in the mulu eat only part of the meligey as the rest is reserved for the next day.

The seket uda (Horse fights) – All the horses of both sides are directed to a

designated place by the specialist. After the tebule ritual, the people begin to cook the first supper. While they are cooking, the others will say that the horses must begin to smell each other. This begins the horse fights. The horses of the host couple must fight first. The horse fights last until dinner time.

The tenolu libewon (The singing and debate) – At night, the dancing continues while the cooking is going on. After dinner, the singing and debate called *tenolu libewon* starts. The song is about the bargaining of dowries and the bride price. It is also dedicated to the sacred jar called *lebewon* that is filled with wine.

The brides' party usually reminds the grooms' party of their incomplete dowries, challenging them to give this before the mo-ninum ends. This continues until the wee hours of the morning.

The kesekas tau mulu (The farewell party)

The second day of the grand feast is still a day of merriment. Cooking, eating, singing, dancing and horse fights continue. After lunch, the ritual specialist performs the farewell ritual for the grooms' and brides' relatives and visitors. The grooms and brides stay on to continue the exchange of dowries and bride price.

The feast for the tau bak (The host)

The second night of the grand feast is dedicated to the host family. The other participants offer their tokens of gratitude in the form of food and gifts, such as a horse, a sword, gong, t'nalak cloth and others.

The mewas lem-el (Washing in the river)

The last day of the grand feast is the cleansing ritual done in the river. This is believed to cast all taboos away so that every participating family will lead a normal life after the ritual is over. All the participants go back to the brides' mo-ninum house to do the cleansing ritual.



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The brides and grooms are instructed by the ritual specialist to prepare a pair of red and black abaca fibers in balls. They use natural dyes. The red is from the roots of the *loko* tree while the black comes from the leaves of the *kenalum* tree.

At the river, the couples place the fiber balls in a basin of water. They then wash their faces and other parts of their body with the water from the basin. After the washing, the balls are thrown into the river to be carried away by the current so that evil fortunes will not affect the couples and their families. The throwing of the balls cast away all the bad fortunes and omens of the mo-ninum. Then they all go back to the mo-ninum house.

After the washing ritual, the specialist instructs the people to fall in two lines: one for the grooms and their families and the other for the brides and their families. The ritual specialist stands in front of the lines, and as

each person passes him, they are given the *kuloy* leaf on their heads. This is a variety of a shrub that looks like a *talabib* (a kind of weed) flower. The *kuloy* serves as a charm to protect them from illness.

When everyone has gone back to the mo-ninum house, the ritual specialist gets all the offerings and ties them with his herbs and medicine.

The cleansing ritual is usually done in the morning of the last day of the celebration. This is to ensure that the participants will not be drenched by rain. In Lake Sebu, rain usually comes in the afternoon. In case the last day is rainy, the cleansing is postponed for the next day or when the sun is up.

Lake Sebu Tourism Office