



## *Bembe Soul Song and Healing Ceremony*

adapted from Alan Cohen

When a woman in the Bembe tribe of South Africa knows she is pregnant, she goes out into the wilderness with a few friends and together they pray and meditate until they hear the song of the child. They recognize that every soul has its own vibration that expresses its unique flavor and purpose. When the women attune to the song, they sing it out loud. Then they return to the tribe and teach it to everyone else. This song is sung at every important event of the child. When the baby is born, the community gathers and sings the child's song to them. Later, when the child enters education, the village gathers and chants the child's song. When the child passes through the initiation to adulthood, the people again come together and sing. At the time of marriage, the person hears their song.

Finally, when the soul is about to pass from this world, the family and friends gather at the person's bed, just as they did at their birth, and they sing the person to the next life.

In the Bembe tribe there is one other occasion upon which the villagers sing to the child. When a person acts irresponsibly or unjustly, they are placed in the center of the village, alone and unfettered. All work ceases, and every man, woman and child in the village gathers in a large circle around the accused individual. Then each person in the tribe speaks to the accused, one at a time, about all the good things the person in the center of the circle has done in his lifetime. Every incident, every experience that can be recalled with any detail and accuracy is recounted. All their positive attributes, good deeds, strengths and kindnesses are recited carefully and at length. The tribal ceremony often lasts several days. At the end, the song is sung again, the tribal circle is broken, a joyous celebration takes place, and the person is symbolically and literally welcomed back into the tribe.

The tribe recognizes that the correction for antisocial behavior is not punishment, but love and the remembrance of identity. When you recognize your own song, you have no desire or need to do anything that would hurt another.

They believe a friend is someone who knows your song and sings it to you when you have forgotten it. Those who love you are not fooled by the mistakes you have made or the dark images you hold about yourself. They remember your beauty when you feel ugly; your wholeness when you are broken; your innocence when you feel guilty; and your purpose when you are confused.