

Sup-ok
by Kristine Kawi

Back when I was a teenager in high school, I had a big lump at the back of my head. It was painful, and I kept wondering where I got it from.

I thought that maybe I bumped my head against a part of my bed while sleeping, but then I would probably have woken up, and would remember it. Or maybe, I just wasn't sure.

Whatever the reason, I really wanted to get rid of the pain and discomfort it caused.

But it would just not disappear.

I had heard of a faith healer in *Bab-bey*, who appeared to be most respected and prominent in the area. She was an old woman called *Ikit* Fakukad. Such was her reputation that even foreigners came to see her, and be healed by her.

So one day, I decided to visit her, hoping she could help me. At that time, I was totally unaware of what faith healing or *sup-ok* consisted in, of why, how and when these were appropriate methods, and did not know either about any of the related traditions. My elders certainly knew that well, but not me.

When I reached Ikit Fakukad's place, she invited me to come in, and asked me to sit. She asked me a few questions, examined my lump, and soon started a healing ritual.

While continuously massaging the lump and keeping her hands on my head, she bent forward to her waist from a sitting position, then cried, and sneezed, and finally got back to her sitting position. She repeated this ritual for several times, and it took me a while to understand that the crying and sneezing were actually key to the whole healing process.

Having massaged my head and rubbed the lump with oil for a long time, alternatively sitting, then going on her knees to cry and sneeze, she came to stop to show the ritual was finished.

Then, she declared that my lump was due to my late grandfather visiting me and telling me off about something I have failed to do.

To my surprise and distress, my lump became extremely painful for all the rest of the day, far more than it had ever been before. And I wondered whether it was actually healing.

However, the next day when I woke up, the lump stopped swelling and the pain had diminished. It soon completely healed without the need of any chemical medicine.

I told my mother about all this, and she asked whether I had brought Ikit Fakukad, a kilo of meat or of *tinapa* (smoked fish), as was expected.

Unfortunately, I had not; as I did not know that this was the practice. And I really regretted it. I realised that, despite her apparent healing powers, Ikit Fakukad never asked for money, but that I still should have brought her something for her services.

This is the tradition, which I am glad to know about today, but which I also wish I could have known before, as I would then have brought the missing kilo of tinapa that was probably expected from me.

Even today, I recount this story to my Western friends to their fascination. I have to stress that I am not a very superstitious person. But my story certainly happened.