

BBC Learning English

6 Minute English

Funeral fit for a king



NB: This is not a word for word transcript

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- Chris:** Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Chris.
- Rosie:** And I'm Rosie.
- Chris:** Rosie, have you ever heard of the island of Tonga?
- Rosie:** It sounds familiar, but I'm not too sure where it is.
- Chris:** It's a small South Pacific island, near New Zealand. The people of Tonga are in **mourning** this week as their King, George Tupou V, recently died.
- Rosie:** That's very sad news. Has the funeral taken place?
- Chris:** Yes it has. And he was a popular king too. We'll hear just how popular he was in the report, but before we hear it, I have a question for you about kings and queens – or **monarchs** as they are sometimes called.
- Rosie:** I'm fairly good with history, so let's see if I can get your question right.
- Chris:** Who has been the longest-serving monarch in Europe?
a) Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom
b) King Afonso I of Portugal
c) King Louis XIV of France
- Rosie:** I know Queen Victoria served for a long time, so I think I'll go for A, Queen Victoria.
- Chris:** OK. Well, we'll find out the answer at the end of the programme. But let's go back to our story about the funeral of the king of Tonga.
- Rosie:** I'm surprised to hear that they still have a monarchy in Tonga.
- Chris:** Yes, it's the only monarchy left in the Pacific Ocean, and it is spread across nearly 200 islands. About 100,000 people live there.
- Rosie:** So the king ruled over almost 200 islands – that's a large area. It must have been a big funeral.
- Chris:** Well, let's hear BBC Correspondent Duncan Kennedy's report from the funeral. You'll hear him mention 'the late king' but he doesn't mean that he was late for the funeral does it?
- Rosie:** No, here the word 'late' means that he has died. So when Duncan Kennedy describes George Tupou V as 'the late king' it just means the king that has died.
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Chris: OK, let's take a listen. See if you can hear who also took part in the ceremony.

BBC Duncan Kennedy:

1,000 pall-bearers took part in the ceremony to carry the coffin of the late king during the funeral ceremony. Hundreds of foreign dignitaries and thousands of other mourners were present at the Christian burial service, many wearing woven ta'ovala grass mats around their waists.

Rosie: The report mentioned that 1,000 **pall-bearers** took part in the ceremony. A pall-bearer helps to carry the coffin. But a thousand people, how did they all manage that?

Chris: The coffin was passed along the organised group of people, so they **took turns** to carry the coffin.

Rosie: And a thousand people to carry the coffin means he really was quite popular.

Chris: Well, when he first became king in 2006, he wasn't so popular. Many Tongan people protested for democratic reform which led to riots in which eight people died.

Rosie: Following these protests the king then chose to reduce his powers and let his country have democratic elections for the first time in 2010.

Chris: So he is credited with bringing democracy to Tonga. He helped **to reform** his country.

Rosie: And he even lost some of his powers when he introduced these reforms.

Chris: Yes, in a traditional and conservative country like Tonga, he achieved a lot in a short amount of time.

Rosie: He was also an interesting character, wasn't he?

Chris: He was. Some people even called him **eccentric** – which means he had some unusual habits. See if you can hear what the next clip mentions about one of his unusual or eccentric habits...

BBC Duncan Kennedy:

King George is credited with bringing democracy to Tonga, a country with a population of 100,000 spread over nearly 200 islands. And although he was criticised for spending too much time out of the country his other characteristics, like driving around in a London taxi endeared him to many of his people.

Rosie: So he drove around Tonga in a London taxi? That is quite odd.

Chris: He also wore a **monocle**, a piece of glass you wear over just one eye. Wearing a monocle is quite unusual these days – most people wear glasses over both eyes.

Rosie: But being eccentric isn't really a bad thing is it?

Chris: No, not necessarily. As the report mentioned, the king's unusual characteristics endeared him to many people.

- Rosie:** And to be **endearing** means you are regarded with affection. So he was liked for his unusual characteristics.
- Chris:** Yes, absolutely.
- Rosie:** Now that he has died, will they keep the monarchy in Tonga?
- Chris:** Yes they will still maintain a monarchy. His brother will become the new king. He's also called George, so he will become George VI.
- Rosie:** So a new monarch will **ascend** the throne.
- Chris:** The late King George V of Tonga ruled for six years, but going back to the question I asked at the beginning of the programme, which European monarch served, or ruled, for the longest amount of time? Was it:
- a) Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom
 - b) King Afonso I of Portugal
 - c) King Louis XIV of France
- Rosie:** Ah yes. I said Queen Victoria.
- Chris:** You said Victoria. And you were wrong I'm afraid. The correct answer was B, Afonso I. He ascended, or took the throne in the year 1112 and died in 1185 after a **reign** of 73 years.
- Rosie:** It rained for 73 years?
- Chris:** No, no. To reign - R.E.I.G.N. - or to rule for a period of time. So he ruled Portugal for 73 years.
- Rosie:** That's a long time. I can't imagine doing the same job for 73 years.
- Chris:** It's a very long time if you consider that in those days most people did not even live beyond forty years of age. So on that note, Rosie, please could you remind us of today's words?
- Rosie:** Of course. They are:
mourning
monarchs
pall-bearers
took turns
to reform
eccentric
monocle
endearing
ascend
reign
- Chris:** Thanks very much Rosie. And that's all we've got time for today. Bye for now.
- Rosie:** Bye.

Vocabulary and definitions

mourning	a period of expressing grief
monarch	king or queen
pall-bearers	people who helped to carry the coffin at a funeral
took turns	one at a time
to reform	to change, to improve
eccentric	unusual, odd
monocle	a piece of glass worn over one eye to improve vision
endearing	attracting affection
ascend	mount or climb
reign	period of rule

More about Tonga:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-16197014>

Read and listen to the story online:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17520251>