

Igbo Torah Thoughts

Parashah #7 Vayetzei "He went out"

Gen. 28:10-32:3, Hos. 12:13-14:10

Rabbi Yehudah "Tochukwu" ben Shomeyr

Ancient Igbo's like ancient Israel were polygamist and as Jacob sought refuge from the wrath of his brother, so does Igbos in crisis return to their maternal relatives.

Gen. 28:5, 29:13-14

It is traditional for an Igbo in a dangerous, critical or troublesome situation to flee to his mother's home. It is called "Nwadi Ani" in Igboland and we see this tradition played out in Chinua Achebe's novel, "Things Fall Apart" in regards to the main character Okonkwo.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Just as there were cities of refuge in the Land of Israel where priests dwell, so too there are towns such as; Aguleri, Agukwo, Nri and Arochukwu are considered cities of refuge one who takes refuge there must reside in for seven years.

Again, Prof. Achebe in his book, "Things Fall Apart" draws this to the reader attention when the main character Okonkwo sought refuge in his mother's hometown and returned after seven years.

There is even a saying in Igboland regarding the city of refuge of Arochukwu, “Adi ejie rao na anya oma.” Which translated means, “Those who go to Arochukwu, do so under emergency.”

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Gen. 28:1

It is said that Igbo liturgy cannot end without the parent blessing the child, and in Judaism, Jews liturgically bless their children as well, every Sabbath.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. – Gen. 29:18-20

Marriage in Igboland as in Israel has many different facets and stages that are very detailed. I will stick with the basic principles shared by Israeli and Igbo alike.

G.T. Basden, who spent 20 years among the Igbo said of the Igbo and marriage, “The degrees of affinity in the matter of marriage are even strictly adhered to, or rather, they are more meticulous than those set forth in the Levitical code.” He also said, “Marriage is a most important event in the Ibo’s life. From the time that

boys and girls are capable of thinking for themselves, marriage is set before them as the object to be attained... Celibacy is an impossible prospect. Unmarried persons of either sex, except in special cases, are objects of derision, and to be childless is the greatest calamity that can befall a woman. Hence a very high value is set upon marriage.” - “Among the Ibos of Nigeria” pg.68

Igbos who are not married are not taken seriously in Igbo society.

The prerequisites for marriage for the Igbo and the Hebrew, is financial stability and to build one’s own house.

Until recently in Igboland, Igbos did not marry outside their Tribe and faith. Again, simple commentary on how string western influence has been upon Nigeria to erode the traditional and Biblical foundations of Ndi Igbo.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. – Gen. 29:26

Times are changing due to the influence of the West, but traditionally in Igboland the older sister is married off before the younger, if not, it is looked down upon by the community.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Gen. 29:22-23

The traditional Igbo wedding takes place in the evening just like the tradition was for Abraham's family and kin (Laban). This also testifies to the Igbos Hebraic origins.

In Judaism the vows are exchanged under a chuppah, a prayer shawl turned into a canopy and in Igboland, Igbos exchange vows under a canopy as well.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

And she said to her father, Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched but found not the images. – Gen. 31:35

This would be a good time to mention here the laws of purification found in Lev. 15:19-24, 28-30.

In Igboland a woman lives apart from their husbands nor cooks for them or enters their husband's quarters when she is menstruating just as in our Scripture passages above.

"In Igbo land, a woman who is menstruating holds a special stick to indicate that she is mens-truating and therefore unclean, this is a sign to people that she is unclean, and hence could defile anyone who comes close to her." – pg. 28 Our Roots: Igbo Israel Heritage – Caliben I.O. Michael

As in Israel, So in Igboland.

O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath. – Hos. 13:9-11

Despite the presence of Eze's and Igwe's and other paramount rulers in Igboland; an Igbo saying persists that says, "Igbo's have no King." Meaning none but Chukwu Abiama (The God of Abraham).

In desiring to be like the nations around them, Israel asked for a king and Igbos also installed kings and thus in that sense became more like the neighboring peoples. Both proved disastrous for Israel and Ndi Igbo. However, a double redemption came despite the desire to be like the other nations. 1) Messiah came from the Kingly Davidic Line and 2) Whenever Kings of Israel obeyed and served God wholeheartedly they prospered and when they served themselves Israel often fell and was driven off by persecution or exile. Similarly when Igbo rulers serve Chukwu Abiama (God of Abraham) for the people, Igbos prosper, but when they become corrupt the Igbo people suffer economically as well as persecution of Ndi Igbo by surrounding peoples like the Hausa.

SHABBAT SHALOM! IGBO KWENU!

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