

Igbo Torah Thoughts

Parashah # 20: Tetzaveh (You are to Order)

Exodus 27:20-30:10

Ezek. 43:10-17

Rabbi Yehudah "Tochukwu" ben Shomeyr

Knowing that the Tribe of Levi has been dispersed and scattered amongst all the 12 tribes during the Babylonian and Assyrian Captivities one may wonder, "Are there Levites amongst the Igbos or Gad?" That is a very good and valid question; one we can only speculate on because if Gad did leave prior to the Exodus of Moses, the Levites may not have known or operated in their priestly capacity prior to Adonai's revelation to them at Sinai, therefore a portion of Levi may not have left with Gad's son Eri, his brothers and their other companions. If Eri and the others left after the Exodus of Moses it is likely some from Levi did go with them. Either way it is speculated that some of Levi did travel with Gad's sons because there is a priestly cast among the Igbo that preformed sacrifices and ministered among the people. But this question will remain unresolved until officials come and test for the Cohen Gene in the DNA of the priestly caste of the Igbo. To date I am unaware of any test such as this being performed. But it wouldn't surprise me at all if the Cohen Gene is found among the Igbos.

Levites not having an inheritance in the Land (Num. 18:21, Deut. 10:8, 18:1, Josh. 13:14, 33) was a Tribe without home except in the Tabernacle/Temple. Thus Levi lived amidst every Tribe of Israel and we see were coveted as personal and household priests (Judges 17). So it is entirely possible for Levites to have traveled with Eri or other Gadites during other Gadite and Israelite migrations throughout history to be found in Nigeria among the Igbo. Perhaps some felt their journey would be blessed if they have a son of Levi with them.

The Nri Priesthood functions in much the same way as the Levitical Priesthood but it is questionable whether the Nri are Levites, seeing as the Nri come from Eri's son (a Gadite) Menri, that is unless his mother was a Levite, but then again this would not show up in a DNA test because the Cohen Gene is passed down by the father. Perhaps it was Levites that instructed Mneri and the Nri clan in the Levitical ways. Regardless of Nri being Gadites or Levites, for them to function as Levites it would not surprise me to find Levitical blood somewhere among the Igbo.

It has greatly disturbed me to see Igbo who acknowledge their Hebraic lineage succumb to the childish pressure to imitate their older brother Judah. It baffles me why some Igbo see the need to try and dress like the Orthodox Jews in the west when their own cultural dress is more Hebraically authentic than that of the Orthodox Jews in the West who adopted their dress from 17th and 18th century Europe. Perhaps for some it is an issue of acceptance in some official recognized capacity by the Orthodox Jews that cause some Igbo to dress in that fashion. It is foolish to think that they will be accepted on such outward and materialistic merit. They have as much chance being accepted by the Orthodox Jews as what some would call a "nerd," would be accepted by the school "jocks" simply because they dress like them. In both cases of the Igbo and the nerd, in the eyes of the Orthodox Jew and the jock, they are seen as pathetic want-to-be's.

I firmly believe and have encouraged to Igbo to reclaim their cultural dress as it is more authentic than that of the modern Jew today. The robes are like that Israelites use to wear in ancient times, the red chieftain cap and the red and black striped stocking cap serves as one's kippah (yarmulke) or head covering and the ojo, the fringed shawl of the Igbo carries the same weight and meaning as the Jewish Tallit (prayer shawl Num. 15:37-41).

Deut. 22:5

This law, like many others is not so much enforced today as in the time before the colonial westernization of Igboland. But 1930's Anglican missionary G.T. Basden, who spent 20 years among the Igbo noted the distinct difference in dress between men and women.

Remy Ilona in his book, "The Igbos: Jews in Africa" pg.73 tells us that the Igbos have always worn a tallit like garment and have always worn caps and that Igbo women, unlike those of others tribes have always been very modest and covered themselves, specifically their chests with a wrap.

The passage in Ezekiel deals with the altar and Igbos too had altars in their worship:

In the Torah we read of the Patriarchs building altars of earth and natural stone to sacrifice unto YHWH. Such altars in Igboland are common and are called "Okwu Ani." They are maintained by hand and not tool is permitted to be used on them. Most other altars in pagan religious use hew stone where as Jews and Igbos use natural uncut earth and stone to construct their altars.

A 12 stone altar exists in the middle of the Niger River in Aguleri where Eri, son of Gad is said to have crossed and it can be seen during the dry season when the water levels are lowest. Recall in Joshua 4 where a 12 stone memorial altar was erected in the middle of the Jordan.

Leviticus goes into great detail regarding various offerings, drink offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, all of which are practiced to some degree among the Igbo.

As In Israel, so in Igboland.

Leviticus 6:4

Though this deals with the responsibilities of the Levitical priesthood, Israel was considered a nation of priests and so common Israelites voluntarily took upon themselves priestly rituals in daily living. This is an example of but one of them that the Igbo practices as well.

Igbo's consider it an obligation, mandatory to remove ashes from the previous days fire before one kindles a new one. If not, the holiness or purity of whatever is cooked on the old ashes is thrown into question.

As In Israel, so in Igboland.

SHABBAT SHALOM! IGBO KWENU!

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