

Igbo Torah Thoughts

Parashah # 21: Ki Tissa: “When you take”

Shemot / Exodus 30:11-34:35

I Kings 18:1-39

Rabbi Yehudah “Tochukwu” ben Shomeyr

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God. – Exd. 31:12-18

Igbo’s have an 8 day weekly cycle which “Eke Ukwu” is the rest day. Some have speculated that the 8 day cycle came from Jeroboams decrees which would mean Igbo’s are more Israelite than Judean, seeing as Jeroboam rules the 10 Tribes of the Northern Kingdom.

Before the white man came, the Igbo day as the Jewish day is from sunset to sunset.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Exodus 32:

It first must be stated that the Igbos believe in one, all-powerful, all-knowing, pre-existing, indescribable, unseen, invisible God and Creator who is called Chukwu (The Great God) or Chineke (The God Who Creates). A compound name of Chukwu is Chukwu Abiama which means, "The God of Abraham." Is this not also the description of YHWH God of the Jews and Christians?

There are images missionaries found in Igboland which have been mistaken for idols, when in actuality they were images of ancestors, such as Eri, etc. But there were no images found designated as Chukwu or Chineke. Igbo Nri priests have confirmed this by first deeming there is no God but Chukwu Abiama and that the images represent the Igbo ancestors because before the white man, there was no photography and the carved image was the way the Igbo preserved the image and memory of their ancestors. Today, images are not used, because of the advent of photography; photos have now taken the place of carved images in obi's (Igbo shrines). This is similar to the board of names with a light bulb beside each name found in Jewish synagogues today. It is believed that Chukwu heeds those who honor and respect their ancestors who have gone on before to be with Him. Sadly, this has been mistaken by missionaries and anthropologists as idol worship or at best ancestral worship.

Some have mistook the word "Chi," equivalent to the Hebrew word "El" meaning "God," to be one's "personal deity" instead of recognizing that "Chi" means that Chi/Chukwu is personable to them. It literally means "My God." So in other words, Chi means that each Igbo person has a personal relationship with Chukwu.

Chi also brings the connotation of "life" or "life force" and is very much like the Hebrew word for life which is Chai.

True, paganism and false gods have been found among the Igbo but only as a result of being influenced by other tribes which were their neighbors. Even this should cause us to connect the Igbo to Israel because why was Israel exiled out of the Land in the first place? Because of their inclination toward idolatry.

I should also mention here what is in Igboland is called the Ikenga which is likened unto the angels on the Ark of the Covenant or one's own guardian angel. In Judaism, as in Igbo culture, one's home (obi) is considered a temple, modelled after the Tabernacle or Temple in Jerusalem; it is not uncommon to see replicas of what is found in the Tabernacle/Temple such as Menorahs or even images of angels. Angels were in the Temple, In the Igbo obi there is an image called the Ikenga and it is a type of guardian angel mistaken by outsiders as one's personal household deity.

The angels in the Jerusalem Temple were made of aromatic cedar overlaid with gold. The Ikenga is usually made from the ogirisi tree, sacred to the Igbo, which is an aromatic evergreen tree. The Ogirisi are also used as grave markers.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the LORD came, saying, Israel shall be thy name. I Kings 18:31

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 no tool is permitted to be used on them. Most other altars in pagan religions use hewn stone whereas 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.

SHABBAT SHALOM! IGBO KWENU!

Rabbi Yehudah "Tochukwu" ben Shomeyr