

Igbo Torah Thoughts

Parashah # 18 Mishpatim: "Judgments"

Shemot/Exodus 21:1-24:18

Rabbi Yehudah "Tochukwu" ben Shomeyr

In **Exodus 20:12, 21:15, 17** and Deut. 5:16 we read that it is forbidden upon pains of death to hit or strike a parent. As in Israel, so in Igboland, parents are seen as an extension of God's rule and influence and to physically hit a parent is an abominable thing. It is like unto the sin of cursing or blaspheming God.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Exd. 21:1-2

Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them. If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.

This has always been a practice in Igboland and in recent history too! Right after the Biafra War and it help many Igbo to survive and get back on their feet.

Jeremiah in 34:8-22 the Prophet scolds Israel for not keeping this law.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Exd. 21:12, Num. 35:16-21

There is no refuge for one who intentionally commits murder, he is fair game to be hunted down and killed by the victim's relatives. Prior to colonial rule in Igboland this practice was adhered to.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Exd. 21:13, Num. 35:9, Deut. 4:41-42

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.

Exd. 22:2

If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him.

In the past thieves in Igboland if caught were burned or stoned to death.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Exd. 22:5

If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution.

This law in Igboland only differs in that retribution is monetary in nature and not in produce of the Land.

Exd. 22:9-12

For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whom the judges shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour. If a man deliver unto his neighbour an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, no man seeing it: Then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good. And if it be stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof.

As in Israel, so in Igboland, this law also has been practiced among the Igbo, long before missionaries came.

Exd. 22:10-12

If a man deliver unto his neighbour an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, no man seeing it: Then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good. And if it be stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof.

This law is followed in Igboland, but in more recent times, likely due to the westernization of Nigeria, verbal apologies suffices in some situations.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Exd. 22:22-24

Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

I have also witnessed firsthand, publically, Igbos coming to the defense of a widow or orphan being ill-treated or harassed by others. I have even witnessed a lame Igbo rise to the defense of a poor woman whose antagonist was a large healthy young male.

Exd. 23:9

Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

The above Scriptures show how an Igbo receives guests into his home, with amenities to refresh oneself and food.

Hospitality; out of all the Igbo traditions, this one has remained intact and is still universally practiced among Igbo's everywhere, even in the diaspora. It serves as a gesture of thanksgiving to Chukwu (God) and ones ancestors as well as a show of hospitality to visitors. The Kolanut in Igboland is THE symbol of hospitality and is broken as Jew break challah bread. It opens many social events from receiving guests, to religious and tribal meetings. If a Kolanuts, which are used in the ceremony of hospitality, are unavailable chalk is used. Chalk powder is rubbed on the hand of the visitor to express honor and goodwill and patterns, thought to be Paleo-Hebrew or Hebraic symbols are drawn on the floor. Nzu (white chalk) is used to decorate the body of leaders and dancers.

If the Kolanut is broken in homes the host or oldest male member of the household breaks the Kolanut and in a public or communal type of setting, the eldest male person officiates the Kolanut ceremony.

Once the Kolanut is broken it is pasted to next of kin oldest to youngest and then to guests in midst.

There is meaning and symbolism read into it. When a Kolanut is broken by how many lobes of the nut comes from the initial breaking of the kola. If it naturally breaks into three lobes the Kolanut is not eaten. Could this perhaps be linked to the mystical number three in Judaism, referring to the three pillars of the three main emanations of YHWH, Messiah and the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit)?

After the Kola or Chalk hands are washed and usually a drink or meal is served.

I, having been to Igboland twice thus far and can testify first hand to the gracious hospitality shown to me. I was welcomed in such a way that I felt as if I was a famous celebrity of king!

“This is very natural to Igbos and well ingrained in their culture and tradition. Both friends and foes have commended Igbos for their exceptional hospitality and accommodating spirit... Abraham had the habit of welcoming strangers. Among the Igbos, the use of Nzu (white chalk) and oji (kola nut) to welcome visitors is common practice. Oji is oriko (igba ndu – covenant) sort of, while Nzu is total acceptance and peace.” – pg. 68 Our Roots: Igbo Israel Heritage – Caliben I.O. Michael

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Exd. 23:10-11

And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard.

The Sabbatical or Shmita year as it is known in Judaism the Igbos practice as well. They farm the land for six years and let it lay fallow the 7th year. Some places in Igboland cultivate for 4 years and allows the land to rest on the 5th year.

As in Israel, so in Igboland.

Exd. 16:23, 23:12, 31:15-17, 35:2-3, Lev. 23:3

Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed.

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.

SHABBAT SHALOM! IGBO KWENU!

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