

Igbo Torah Thoughts

Parashah #4 Vayeira “And He Appeared”

Gen. 18:1-22:4, II Kings 4:1-37

Rabbi Yehudah “Tochukwu” ben Shomeyr

In Genesis 18 we see Igbo traits so strongly in Abraham’s actions. I suppose I should say in the Igbo we see strong Abrahamic traits. What am I speaking of? Hospitality!

In 2010 speaking for the first time before Eze Chukwuemeka-Eri and his cabinet in Obu-Gad, Aguleri, one of the first things I said before them was that one can tell a child of Abraham by the hospitality in which they show. For I have never truly knew what hospitality was until I spent two weeks in Igboland.

I practically a stranger to Igbos I just met for the first time, treated me like a King, as if I had known each of them personally their whole life, as if I were family. I was always put up in the best rooms of the best hotels, given the choice seats where ever I went and was always served the best food the people and the land had to offer. My belly was never empty I never had to take out my wallet even once. Even in vehicles I sat in the “owners corner.”

I was in the villages where some folks did not have shirt or shoes and yet they give me a chicken for dinner!

I was embarrassed when I inadvertently found out how much the people spent on my stay. It was not enough that they showed great hospitality, it would have been enough but they dressed me, gave a far and a staff and made me a chief!

The proof of their hospitality was the many kola nuts I brought home with me.

And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat. – Gen. 18:6-8

This passage may not mean very much too many if you do not understand what took place before the LORD came to visit Abraham.

Recall that three days prior, upon the LORD's command Abraham circumcised himself and his whole household. The third day is the most painful (Gen. 34:25) yet when the LORD came, Abraham did not say, "Sorry, I am in too much pain to present a kola nut to you." No! The passage says that despite the pain and discomfort he "hastened," he hurried, he ran, he went the extra mile to show hospitality. Then, to top it all off, he, not any of his servants, stood by and waited on his guests (v.8).

Take note that this all took place under a tree (v.8) which in Igboland is a place of honor, a place where elders, Igwe's and Eze's sit.

Abraham received a message that would make any Igbo man beam with pride; he was going to have a son.

Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither. – II Kings 4:10

This is akin to the structure of an Igbo compound. Until the white men came an Igbo compound was set up just like that of an Israelite compound. Every person had a separate obi (home) from that of his wives and his wives had their own separate obi with their children. This is just like Sarah having her own tent (Gen. 18:6,9, 24:67) and Rebekah hers (Gen. 25:15). Also to be noted is that it was not unusual for an Igbo man to have a separate place in which he entertained guests just like Abraham (Gen. 18:1,6,9)

In Igboland a guest in one's compound would have his own place to stay just as Elisha did at the compound of the Shunemite woman.

SHABBAT SHALOM! IGBO KWENU!

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