



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

The Significant of Adiyè Irana Ritual in Youruba Traditional Burial Rites

Ojetayo Gabriel Kehinde

Lecturer, Department of Religious Studies, School of Arts and Social Sciences
Adeyemi College of Education Ondo, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria

Abstract:

African death and burial customs clearly illustrate the indigenous belief in the reality of the unseen world and the thinness of the veil that separates the living from dead. Elaborate rites and ceremonies are associated with death and burial, and their performance is a duty devolving upon individuals as well as upon community. This paper focuses on the significance of Adiyè-Irana vital and the belief of Yoruba on life after death. It goes o traditional burial rites. It further examined burial ceremonies and provisions for the dead and as his journey to the unseen world. It concludes that death is inevitable; this is one of the Adiyè-Irana. People who eat the fowl believe that one day, the same rite would be observed after their demise, hence the meaning “Adiyè-Irana, kii se ohun ajegbe, meaning: as you eat sacrificial fowl of the dead, yours would also be eaten by some people after your demise.

Keywords: Rituals, burial, dead, rites, fowl, guild

1. Introduction

Death is being defined as “the end of line the state of being dead “(Hornby; 200:299). It is the power that destroys life. Death is something that concerns everybody, partly because sooner or later everyone personally faces it and partly because it brings loss and sorrows to every family and community.

Death is feared everywhere. The perennial problem, which it presents, not only on individuals, but also to societies make it all the more mysterious. (Ugwu and Ugwueye, 2004:57)

Death stands between the world of human beings and the world of the spirits, between the visible and the invisible. It is regarded as a transition from one state of existence to another world. In view of this, great care is taken in burying the dead. The traditional belief is that when the breath of life leaves the person survives death and the soul, the essential person survives death and returns to God.

There are elaborate burial rites and ceremonies, which reinforce the belief that death is only a tradition. Depending on the status of the deceased there may be drumming, singing, dancing, firing of muskets, guns and pouring of liberation and when the corpse is taken for burial, there is sacrifice rites of fowl (Adiyè-Irana) and messages are given to the deceased to be delivered to past relatives of the family.

2. Death

The definition of death is a problematic one due to the present scientific knowledge and advancement in technology. Events which were causally linked to death in the past no longer kill in all circumstances. This is because, without a functioning heart or lungs, life can sometimes be sustained with combination of life support devices, organ transplants and pacemakers. However, at present, in most places the more conservative definition of death is the irreversible cessation of electrical activity in the whole brain, as opposed to just in the neo-cortex has been adopted. For our use in this study, a definition of death can be attempted according to Hornby (2000:299) as “the end of life; the state of being dead”. This means, one is no longer alive or becomes inanimate. Traditionally understood, death is power that destroys life and is feared everywhere. This was why Opoku (1978:134) remarks that “death is regarded as a wicked destroyer, a killer and a curse, which frustrates human effort”. The perennial problems which it presents, not only to individuals, but also to societies makes it all the more mysterious, yet humans live with it.

3. Death as a Natural Phenomenon

Man has a short time to complete his work on earth. Human being is expected to assume his destiny and fulfill the purpose of creation within the time allotted to him; the end of life is death. Physical death is the termination of life and separation of body and soul. It is the disintegration of the human biotic unit. When the machinery of the body for one, or several reasons has won out, broken down, or has developed a fatal fault which does not allow it to function efficiently, the end result is physical death: death is the end of basic unit

man, and he disintegrates into his constituents. Those constituents are in the main three: body, Centrum vitea and spirit...the body, which is itself an integration of hylic units, will bereft of Centrum vitea and spirit, slowly or speedily break down into hylic units of various kinds, which will thenceforward continue in the flux of natural units, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; and the spirit, having been given its opportunity of experiencing and making its choice in this continuum, will pass on to the next stage of its existence... (Vines335).

Berkhof (1949:670) cautions that physical death should not be mistaken to mean cessation of physical life, and death are direct opposite like existence and non-existence:

It is quite impossible to say exactly what death is. We speak of it as the cessation of physical life, but the then the question immediately arises, just what is life? And we have no answer.

4. After Life

After -life is also referred to as “life after death”, the “hereafter”, the “underworld” or the “next word”. The after – life according to *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia (2001:1) is the idea that “the consciousness or mind of a being continued existence often take place in an immaterial or spiritual realm. Deceased persons are usually believed to go to a specific god, based on the actions of the deceased during physical life. Traditionally, it is believe among Africans that the dead go on a journey and that death does not end life. In this regard, Opoku (1978: 137) stresses that; “the present life is seen as a preparation for the after-life where the dead continue to live after they have completed this life”. The after-life in the understanding of African belief does not sever the dead from the living since social and religious interaction takes place between the living and the dead.

5. Death and Burial Rites in Yoruba Traditional Society

Common to all the groups of peoples is the belief that death involves only a tradition from material world to the spirit word. A result of the tradition is the disembodiment of the spirit. The words used for describing the process in Yoruba language is “ku”

As soon as death becomes inevitable, some of the members of the dead man assemble. In the case of an aged or elderly person, joy rather than sorrow characterizes the ceremonies. In the case of young persons, sorrowful feelings are evoked.

When death has occurred an announcement is made euphemistic expressions must be used in the case of a king or a distinguished person. In other cases such expression may or may not be used. Lucas (1970:264) asserts that in Yoruba land, for example, it is usual to say about a person who has just died Ogbere, “he has lifted up himself”.

The first step after death in many parts of West Africa is to turn the corpse face downwards and cover it up. In some cases announcement is made by shouts and lamentations, and this may be done by parading the streets with crying and wailing. The following is an example of a announce the death of any person either elderly person or young person

E-ee paa!!! Oro ooo!!
 Baba or (iya) wa lo loni oo
 Baba or (iya) wa ni an wa oo
 Oti fiwa sile lo oo
 Awa kori mo oo
 O di gbe ree
 O di arin na ko!!!
 Meaning, Alas !!! pangs
 Our father or (our mother) has gone
 It is our father or (our mother) that we are searching for
 We do not finding him or (her)
 Alas!!! Pangs!!!
 We will not see him or (her) again

He or (she) has become disembodied-spirit to be met by paths.

Lucas (1970) argued that sometimes before the find announcement is made, a diviner is called to find out whether death is natural, or unnatural, that is, whether it has been the result of foul play. Should any person be suspected, he or she is asked to prove innocence by means of an ordeal. Among some groups, notably the Ibo and Yoruba peoples, death is often attributed to foul play. If the spirit of the deceased is believed to be in danger, the diviner sacrifice “a goat or a sheep, and carcass to be buried outside the town and deposited at a junction of several roads, the idea being that the evil spirits endangering the spirit of the deceased will thereby be dispersed in different directions.

The next step to be taken is the purification rite-or ceremonies. In African traditional and modern societies, purification ceremony is an important rite.

When this has been done, the corpse is then washed. Great importance is attached to the washing of the corpse, as it is believed that admission into heaven where the holy ones dwell may be otherwise refused to accommodate any dirt left on the deceased and that dirt left on the deceased without proper washing will appear on him when he or she reincarnate.

After the corpse has been washed, it is smeared with white cam wood which later turns red. This is also among the Yoruba and Ibo people. The corpse is then clothed in fine white dress and laid on a clean mat. The lower jaw is tied to the head with a bandage, the hands are clasped and the toes are tied together. Friends and relatives assemble in the house, some may sit near the corpse, fanning away that flies. Others sit in various parts of the compound.

6. Burial Rites

Yoruba people formerly buried their corpse in their house, usually in the room previously occupied by the deceased. This custom has changes considerably. Intermments are now made or don in public commentaries, or in church burial ground or house compounds. Quarcoopome, (1978:124). Opined that provisions for the dead are of vital importance. This belief is strong among West Africans that their departed ones live in the next world almost the same kind of life as they did in the present on. Hence arises the need for providing them with all the necessaries for their comfort and convenience. Cloths, clothes, food, drinks, tools and other objects are put in the coffin or in the grave for the use of the deceased. Kings and persons of high rank, high chiefs require the service of their best loved wife and servants. A good number of them used to be slain or buried alive to accompany their lord.

7. Adiyе-Irana Ritual and Other Funeral Sacrifice

The sacrificing of fowl usually fowl with black feathers for the departed soul is purposely to wade-off evil spirits that may hinder the smooth journey of the deceased from the mortal world to the spiritual world. It is believed that there are a lot of evil spirits on the way of the departed soul; the fowl (Adiyе-Irana) is sacrificed to clear the way.

In Africa traditional religion, there is an absence of the concept of hell or concept of eternal damnation this is why Africans make adequate provisions to appease spirits that could hindered the journey of their deceased and make room for the spirits world where the spirits of the dead one go and continue to live in clans and villages as they lived in the material world.

The feather of the fowl are pulled out and thrown along the road as sacrifice when the body of the deceased person is carrying from one place to another mostly from one village to the other for burial. The feathers of the fowl are thrown along the road with dirge (sorrowful songs) by those that carry the corpse. Aromolaran (1978:84) buttress this point by saying that the man who holds the fowl and scattered the feather use to be in front and leads the dirge while those that carries the corpse chants the dirge after him; usually, the use to be at the back of the man who leads. When they reached where they are taken the corpse to, the fowl itself is carried to a three paths- cross road (Orita-Meta) where they will kill or slaughter the fowl, eat the flesh. This is done after the burial of the dead person.

Another way of carrying out the ritual is that fowl with black feathers would be slaughter by the grave side after the deceased had been buried the blood of the fowl should be poured on the grave that carried the corpse will frayed the fowl and eat it by the grave side.

The ritual has three significances. Number one, to clear or wade-off evil spirits that may hinder the smooth journey of the deceased to heaven (Orun). Number two, to remind people that death is inevitable, we must all die, hence the meaning: Adiyе-Irana kii se ohun ajegbe. Meaning: as you eat my own fowl, others will equally eat yours when you died. Number three, it tells us that there is life after death. The deceased person knew that such ritual was performed for him or her when he or she enjoys smooth and peaceful journey to heaven. Traditions say it here after, the deceased will show his appreciation by thanking the people that conducted the ritual for him.

The purpose of killing and eating of the fowl at the cross-road is to forbid untimely death in the deceased family, relations, friends and the entire community.

8. Funeral Sacrifice

Apart from Adiyе-Irana ritual sacrifice, Arinze (1970:41) discusses funeral sacrifices which are also practiced in Yoruba traditional society. At funerals many animals are killed: goats, ram, fowls, e.t.c not all these acts of killing are sacrificial. At funerals, some sacrifices are made to the ancestors to ask them to accept the spirit of the deceased into their company, to overlook any of his past misdeeds, and to show the ancestors that the living had good relations with the deceased and nothing against his future happiness.

The main aim of Adiyе-Irana ritual is to clear evil spirits on the way of the departed soul so that he can proceed to the world beyond directly. We have discussed about Adiyе-Irana ritual and funeral sacrifice, we shall consider funeral guilds and discuss extensively on Egungun guild.

9. Funeral Guilds

There are guilds in Yoruba land which perform funeral obsequies, especially for their deceased members. The chief ones are the AdamuOrisa, the Egungun, Ogoni and Oro guilds. For this study, we shall focus only or Egungun guilds.

10. Egungun Guild

The Egungun ceremonies clearly illustrate the firm belief of the Yoruba people that the soul lives after death and if funeral obsequies are properly performed it goes to the abode of spirits and is endowed with the power of revisiting his earthly home and relatives.

In the house of the deceased, the mourning relatives are assembled, a person who acts as Egun has hidden in a room. One of the mourners strikes the ground three times and cries out and shouts Baba, baba, baba! Damilohun oo (that is, father, father, father! Answer me!) from the room comes an answer in Egungun voice and all present there will be comforted and filled with joy that the spirit of the deceased through not seen is indeed present with them.

After this, there will be sharing of food and drinks, thus, performs an act communion with the deceased. Lucas,(1970:271) interestingly notes that this ceremony is regarded as reality, but actually it is only children and simple-minded persons that will fail to realize that it is mere practical demonstrations of beliefs. Nevertheless, the ceremonies usually proved to be source of comfort to the bereaved family.

11. Conclusion

Adiye-Irana ritual is a metaphorical expression that reminds the Yoruba people that is inevitable, we will surely die one day and that death is not the final end of man. It is only a transition from the physical world to the spirit world, and the deceased is only making a journey from the earth to another place in the traditional buy and funeral arrangements.

Adiye-Irana ritual is very necessary and important. The blood and the feather of the fowl are efficacious to drive away ghosts or evil spirit that may want to prevent the deceased from having a peaceful and smooth journey to heaven.

The whole perception of death and hereafter in Africa cosmology is predicated upon the existence of human life. For African they believe fervently that life does not end in the grave and that life, whether here or in the hereafter is but a continuum.

12. Recommendations

Elders in Yoruba society should help to maintain our cultural values rather than embracing foreign culture which would not benefit our incoming generation and the entire citizenry.

For our culture, traditions and society to get its recognitions outside Yoruba land, our life especially those in academics should not relent in publishing academic materials like text-books, journal and periodical for people to read.

To maintain a balance society, both moral and cultural development aspect must be addressed; no one aspect should be emphasized more than the other.

13. End Notes

1. Hornby. 2000. 6th edition, defines death as the end of life, the end of being dead.
2. C. Ugwu and L.Ugwueye. 2004. African Traditional Religion: a Prolegomenon. Lagos. Argued that death is feared everywhere. The perennial problem, which it presents, not only on individuals, but also to societies make it all the more mysterious.
3. C. Ugwu and L.Ugwueye. 2004.
4. J. Lucas. 1970. Religions in West Africa. Opined that after corpse has been washed, it is smeared with white cam wood which later turns red. The method is practiced in Yoruba and Igbo societies.
5. T.N.O. Quarcoopome. 1978. West African Traditional Religions. Ibadan. Says provision for the dead is of vital importance. This belief is strong among Africans.
6. T.N.O. Quarcoopome. 1978. Aromolaran and M. Oyebami. 1978. Akomolede Ijinle Yoruba, Iwe-Keta. Ibadan. Submits that adiye-irana (sacrificial fowl) usually the fowl with black feather in rare occasions fowl with white feathers is sacrificed as the corpse is taken for burial.
7. Aromolaran and M. Oyebami. 1978,
8. F. Arinze. 1970. Sacrifice in Igbo Religion. Ibadan. Posited that at funerals, some sacrifices are made to the ancestors to ask them accept the spirits of the deceased into their company.
9. E. Aneke 2012. The Socio-Religious Significance of sacred cow and horse in funeral rituals among the people of Nsukka Sub-Cultural Area of Igbo land. Submitted that there are a lot of rituals that are brought to bear in connection with the last rite of passage which are burial and funeral rites.
10. J. Mbiti. 1975. Introduction to African Religion. London. Is of the opinion that in West Africa, great care is taken in burying the dead. There are elaborate burial and funeral rites

14. References

1. Aneke, E.C. (2012). The Socio-Religious Significance of Sacred Cow and Horse in Funeral Ritual among the people of Nsukka Sub-Cultural Area of Igbo land. (Unpublished Seminar Paper Presented to the Department Of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka).
2. Arinze, F.A. (1970). Sacrifice in Igbo Religion. Ibadan: Ibadan University press.
3. Aromolaran, A. and Oyebamiji, M. (1978). Akomolade Ijinle Yoruba, Iwe Keta. Ibadan: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Limited.
4. Awolalu, J. O. and Dopamu, P.A. (1979). West Africa Traditional Religion. Ibadan: Onibonjo Press and Book Industries.
5. Hornby, A.S. (2000). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 6th edition, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
6. Lucas, J.O. (1970). Religions in West Africa and Ancient Egypt. Lagos: the Nigerian National Press.
7. Madu, J.E. (1997). Fundamentals of Religious Studies. Calabar: Franedoh Publishers.
8. Ogunbowale, P.O. (1970). Asa Ibile Yoruba. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
9. Opoku, K.A. (1978). West African Traditional Religion. Accra: Feb. Ltd
10. Berkhof, L. (1949). Systematic Theology. Michigan: Banner of Truth Press.
11. Ugwu, C.O and Ugwueye, L.K. (2004). African Traditional Religion: A Prolegomenon. Lagos : Merit International Publication.