

A Day in the Life ... Cultural Practices: Marriage - Part 2

Dear Friends: In my last article (February) I began to tell you about the practices of marriage among the people of Ghana called the AKANS, the ethnic group that the people of Akrampa belong to. If you missed part 1 - you can read it on FLC's website.

After the "knocking fee" has been accepted, the young woman's family would set a date agreeable to both sides on which the marriage ceremony would take place. The date is always chosen on the traditional day when nobody goes to the farm & when almost everyone is in town and at home. In the community of Akrampa that day happens to be Friday. Preparations for the event would start days ahead. This would include cleaning the house where the event would be held, weeding around the house & procuring items to cook for the guests. Tradition says that the family of the young woman will feed the guests that come to the ceremony. In the days before the event people come with gifts of plantains, cassava, vegetables, meat from the bush, chickens and goats. On the morning of the ceremony, as early as 3am, the men begin slaughtering the animals & setting up the place where the guests will be received. The women begin cooking so that by the time the ceremony starts almost all of the women will be present to participate: to sing, dance & entertain.

Tradition expects that the family of the young woman will be seated and waiting for the young man's family to come - this is usually between 10am and noon. After pleasantries have been exchanged, the head of the woman's family invites the representative of the young man's father to do what he has come to do. In our tradition, the father of the man needs not to be present at the ceremony. He 'sends' to get a wife for his son and waits at home to receive a report from his representative of what has transpired. The first and most important thing is to present the "bride price". More recently the "bride price package" comes with a ring and a Bible, but it didn't years ago. In the package will be a suitcase of dresses and other ladies items for the young woman with the prearranged amount of money to seal the transaction. The Father & Mother of the bride receive money and textile material in appreciation for being good parents. Money is also given to the bride's brothers. And in the traditional way money is also given to the community to thank them for providing a conducive environment to help bring up the young woman.

When all of this has been completed, through the father's representative, and the bride's family has accepted, they now ask for the young man to be presented for all to see. Then the young woman is sent for, and she enters wearing a piece of cloth (veil) covering her face. She will stand next to the young man and he is invited to 'unveil' his bride and declare whether or not she is the correct young woman. When she has been acknowledged, her name will be called three times, each time asking her if her family (Father) will accept the things brought as dowry. She would respond in the affirmative, indicating her desire to marry the young man and consenting to the marriage. After the young woman has given her consent, the eldest male in the family, known as the EBUSUAPANYIN (clan/family head) is invited to say a 'prayer'. Traditionally all are seated during these exchanges. The 'prayer' is the pouring of libation (using alcoholic beverage) with the invocation to the gods and ancestors, and incantations on the gifts. He does this while standing.

After the 'prayer' the couple, now seated together, in the center of the gathering, and facing the elders, are given pieces of advice by elders, friends, and well-wishers, in that order. Then comes the feasting and merry making, with music by invited players, or in modern times, the music system hired for the occasion. Interesting to note, there is no set time for this celebration to end, it is allowed to go on till the last person leaves. This kind of ceremony is now normally referred to as an ENGAGEMENT, but in the minds of family and the community, the couple is 'properly' married. After this ceremony the couple moves in together to live in the man's house and begin their lives as husband and wife. Later, sometimes the next day, or within 6 months, depending on the couple's social status, the event would conclude in a church for a holy matrimony ceremony.

Blessings - Pastor Ben

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