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## PRINCIPLES OF CHARACTER FORMATION AND CHILD UPBRINGING IN TIV SOCIETY

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**TERFA KAHAGA ANJOV AND DANIEL ASEER  
KWAGHGANDE**

Department of Philosophy, Benue State University,  
Makurdi, Nigeria.

Email. kanjov@bsum.edu.ng

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### ***Abstract***

*The world is rapidly changing. The product of the changes humans encounter in life has a direct bearing on the structures of society in different ways. Negatively, the values of unity and progress have been affected to the extent that morality does not count as a value. To return to a society in which Tiv people had value for unity and togetherness there is a need to revisit the Principles of Character formation and Child Upbringing in Tiv Society. Sadly enough, the premium in Tiv society is no longer placed on character. What counts is the wealth of an individual. The paper examines the gradual erosion of the value system in Tiv society with a multiplier effect on the children who invariably are agents of social and moral change. New names are used for the baptism of evil. These are; smartness, fastness, and intelligence. Only the people who are weak call for the values of justice, equality, purity, honesty and truthfulness. This assumption has taken the Tiv person into the valley of suffering and death. This study concludes that if we want a healthier society, we must lead by good examples as parents and political leaders.*

**Keywords:** Character formation, child upbringing, society, Tiv, principles, Morality

## **Introduction**

The world we are living in is fast changing. Some of the changes are rather unexpected. A critical look at the happenings in recent times reveals that these are man-made. The custodians of societal values have thrown morality to the winds for no good reason. The cliché is that morality has fallen. Humanity is living in scandalous times. The advancement in science and technology has worsened the situation. The clarion call is to return to the world of the humanities for the critical revitalisation of principles and belief systems.

## **Morality in Tiv**

For more than a century, the belief and cultural value system of the Tiv person has been more anthropocentric than theocentric. The Tiv person looks at his kinsman more intently than he would seek help from God in times of trouble. Assistance rendered to a needy fellow is done with a high sense of satisfaction than it would be done to the gods. This does not in any way render the gods valueless. God is held in high esteem among the Tiv people. However, God who is known as *Aondo* is the controller of the universe. The role of *Aondo* is not taught to a Tiv child in form of catechizing. A child in Tiv society knows that *Aondo* lives in the skies. *Aondo* is often referred to as *ufiaufia* symbolized by lightning. This God is forever powerful. He does not forget good or wrong done to Him or other human beings.

He rewards good deeds but is an avenger of evil deeds. Despite these attributes of God, the Tiv child is made to see man as the centre of every human activity. Martin Anshi (2004:37) explains that: “In the ontological order and

relation, man is in the middle between the supreme spirits Aondo, Takuruku and other lesser but revered spirits/forces like adzov, akombo, tsav, and animals and plants”. As a child who is born and bred within Tiv society, I have come to know *Aondo* (God) not because we were preached into respecting Him. God is all-powerful. The standard for doing that which is right and wrong is found in the way elders live their lives. The reality of God's existence is evident to a child in Tiv culture. Initially, traditional education was taught by novices watching and doing what the parents did.

### **Learning Ostensive Definition**

Generally, virtues of all kinds were taught through the action of others. The commonest way of learning is by watching and doing. For instance, a father is served food by the mother in the hut known as *ate*. He invites all the children in the compound to join him and other elders to share in the one calabash of food. The father, elders and children gather around the calabash of food and dish of soup. The father is usually the first person to cut the food and it is followed the age-grade. Crossing of hands is disallowed during eating. When one person goes to cut food, the rest will be patient to wait for that person to finish cutting the food. After cutting the food, he rolls it up in a smooth ball form. During the rolling of the food, another person can go for a cut as well. Every member in the circle follows this dramatic pattern until the food is finished in the calabash.

There is so much to learn about morality from the way of the Tiv people. The art of sharing food with others explains the high level of hospitality of the Tiv person. It is a well-known fact that the moment food is brought to the hut (*ate*) everyone

including strangers and visitors is free to join in the eating. They do not need to be invited to eat the food. This is supported by a saying in Tiv that *kwaghyan u hen ate lohon iyol na* which is interpreted to mean food in the hut invites people itself. The sitting arrangement exhibits unity and equality among the Tiv people.

This sitting arrangement does not reduce the respect the younger ones accord the elders even when eating. A child that breaks the rules of the game of eating food by not following the rhythm of cut and wait is identified as a greedy child. It will be very difficult to appoint such a child into any leadership position. A person who washes his hands after his elders finishing washing theirs is termed a humble person. When meat is involved during eating, each person is given his share of a piece of meat. Somebody may decide to cut from the small piece and add to one or two persons, not because he has a bigger chunk of meat, but in the spirit of there is love in sharing. This action is interpreted that such a person will be a leader one day.

Unfortunately, there is so much change in the way of living and doing things in Tiv society in recent times. This change is accompanied by a change in the method of instilling morals in the younger generations. There is almost a transvaluation of the value system in Tiv land. A wealthy Tiv man was respected only if the source of his riches is known to have come from the farm. Anyone who acquired questionable wealth is not given recognition, not to talk about respect. Today, farming which is the mainstay of wealth in Tiv land is discarded for thuggery. The Tiv people who were known to be truthful, sincere, and honest are almost gone and the few that are left are not

respected, recognized, and cherished by the younger generation.

In recent times, nobody wants to know the source of the wealth of a Tiv person. All that is expected of one who is good is to display high affluence even if the wealth is not shared with others. There was a saying in Tiv that *or u mimi kera ka inja ga, or u mimi sar naira* which means a man of truth is no longer character, a man of truth is the naira. Traditionally, the Tiv people are ontologically linked with one another through the value of truth (mimi) and nothing else can come in between them. No doubt, the pride of the Tiv people is measured by their degree of truthfulness in words and deeds. This brings out the value of metaphysics in society. You are taught not to discriminate about your kinsman.

Total loyalty was demanded from the children. A child was supposed to be obedient, humble, and slow to speak. Such qualities were related to the children in stories like when a woman went to the farm with her two sons, the elderly child was stubborn and could always challenge the parents at every slight opportunity, the second child was humble, obedient and always willing to listen to the parent. He was also able to read the signs from his parents. One day the three of them were on the farm and some men particularly “Udam” people came looking for a head of the Tiv people to cut for the burial of their chief as it was customary. The Udam men with sharp knives and machete entered the farm. They were also hungry and decided to ask the Tiv woman to roast yams for them to eat. The woman knew they were in deep trouble. She obliged and roasted the yams.

When the yam was roasting, she went to the men and told them that there was no water. She asked if they would allow her to send one of her children to go and fetch water from the nearby stream, the people agreed. So she called the elderly child to send him to get water and immediately he retorted, “I will not go. You should send the younger son of yours”. She called the younger son and he came, then she gave him instructions to go and fetch water so that their visitors would drink after eating the yams. She added the remaining instruction by winking twice. The younger child understood that he was not to return for they were in trouble. The child left the farm.

After a while, the woman went to the men and told them that her stupid son has refused to return. She requested that she should be allowed to go and get water and the boy. Her request was granted. When she left them, she joined the child and both of them ran home. When the Udam people realized that they were tricked, they rose and cut off the head of the stubborn son, took their roasted yams and left the farm

### **Living on Borrowed Culture**

Somebody who knows you should confidently predict your character. There should be no confusion about the identity of a Tiv person. For instance, when you meet a Tiv person in a restaurant in London, you will know him by his eating habits. He enjoys using his fingers to roll pounded yams. He can finish a whole calabash of pounded yam with a piece of meat using the *ukauka* method of chewing meat and adding balls of pounded yam. Our dress code has drastically changed from the use of traditional *anger* (black and white stripes) cloth to the wearing of tattered jeans and short skirts. At the death of a loved one, kinsmen and women come to console the bereaved

with food items and even cooked food is brought for the bereaved family so that visitors from very far places can be assisted with food to eat.

Tiv people have borrowed so much from other cultures. The behavioural patterns adopted do not add value to the already existing values in Tiv land. They have contributed to the rapid crumbling of the cultural values in Tiv society. For instance, celebrating the dead was not part of Tiv culture. Today, when a person dies, so much money is used for food and drinks. The people who do not have money are made to go out and borrow. This new way of life has caused hardship and increased poverty in the land. Again, the attitude of worshipping wealth was not known among the Tiv people. In recent times, to have money without a good history is in vogue. Everything you want to do is possible if you have money. Money becomes the key to human problems. You can win elections. You can command thugs to kill a perceived enemy. These are the factors responsible for the erosion of morals in Tiv land.

### **Erosion of Morals in Tiv Society**

Every human being is indeed gifted with reasoning. Reason tells us that whatever one sows, it is that which one is going to harvest. A mango tree cannot produce banana fruits. The majority of the people have changed because of partisan politics. We uniquely speak one language but we are severely divided by the way we think. Roy Clive Abraham (1934:6&7) and Gbenda (2005:26) have attested to this unique feature – the “mother tongue” which gives the Tiv people the privilege of “one unified language”. If we can remain united as one, no enemy can destroy the Tiv person. The road to a united front is found in the confidence and boldness of a Tiv person. As far as

the Tiv man is concerned “No one is better than the Tiv person”. The Tiv person used to be his brother's keeper. An ordinary quarrel between a Tiv person and a non-Tiv person is greeted with support from his kinsman against the other. It does not matter who is at fault.

This is the spirit of brotherhood which has died a long time ago. Commenting on the spirit of brotherhood, Eugene Rubingh (1969:60) wrote:

*One's genealogy is important to the Tiv as securing one's place in the tribe. The sense of corporate responsibility is great because of the common ancestry of the group. Each individual has a stake in the woe and weal of all; in fact, the individual is submerged into the group with whom he is identified.*

Today, the seed of individualism has been planted in the hearts of Tiv politically minded leaders. The ills of individualism are tormenting, the choice is in our hands: either to change the status quo ante or allow it to remain. Tiv people are the only ones that can hurt themselves in terms of character formation. So much is needed to achieve a good character.

### **Self-Discipline in Tiv Culture**

On discipline, the Tiv believe that *ka u kimi la aeren u ken won ye*. This is translated to mean that it is what is inside of you that will enable you to act appropriately. The motive is that morality is an inside job. The same parents can have many children, but different moral character for each child. It can be inferred that the character of a person has origin from the womb. If a child is to be moral, formal education does not matter. They are endowed with traditional wisdom. Where



bad habits are observed, inculcation of good moral values should start at a tender age. The Tiv person believes that “*ka koom kon u ombor ga*” which means, you cannot straighten a dry wood.

A child cannot be said to be mature because the person is tall and huge. To be enlisted as an adult in the community, a male child is tested with the art of digging heaps in the yam farm. The male child is asked to dig *dechi* which is the central row of heaps in the farm. The ability to make a line with straight heaps shows that the young man is mature enough to marry a wife. This is because marriage is for adults who are mature at heart, who are calm, tolerant, and humble. He becomes a beacon of morality for his children. The Tiv person does not say, do what I say, but do not do what I do. They prefer to practice what one preaches and preach what one practices. There are different ways of learning. We have identified that which is by watching and imitation. The second way is by story-telling.

Progressively, the habit and character formation were usually done through what Keil (1979:20) refers to as “story-telling or tale-telling”. Keil (1979:57) which oftentimes, “amuse and create laughter”. The story of a criminal who stole a chicken or goat can be told to children to deter them from growing up to be thieves. Whenever a person stole a chicken and was caught red-handed, the chicken would be tied around his/her neck and such a person was stripped naked and made to go round the village square or market square on a market day. The children go behind jeering at culprit and calling him/her derogatory names.

This is the worst punishment to any Tiv person. In fact, for

many Tiv sons and daughters, the shame of going about naked is worse than death. When a thief is caught he is put to go around the market square practically. The practical formation of character “inja” in the child was the goal and pride of every parent. It was not given to a child in a hurry. It was gradually handed down through consistent practice and with full examples from the teacher or parent. One would think this fits best in Latin saying *nemodat quod non habet* which means “you cannot give what you do not have”. Parents and leaders who are corrupt cannot fight corruption in society. Only those who live above board in practical terms can humble corruption to its knees.

### **Conclusion**

Character formation in children is a very delicate thing to do in life. The good efforts of parents who persevere by their exemplary lifestyle are rewarding. When a child grows up wayward, the blame is squarely put on the shoulders of the parents. This is not always the case. The whole process of character formation and child upbringing is gradual. Parents must learn to give time for the well-being of the child.

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