

Isukha origins and culture

By Nandemu Barasa Omutolometi, June 21 2011

Isukha is a dialect among the Luhya community. Isukha people speak a language called Lwisukha. Elders differ on where Isukha people originated. According to Mzee Richard Muhanda, Isukha people came from Egypt and followed River Nile into Sudan, Uganda before entering the Western part of Kenya where they settled.



Mzee Richard Muhanda, Mrs Priscilla Shikokoti and her husband Peter Shikokoti at their rural home in Shinyalu.

However, Mzee Peter Shikokoti argues that Isukha people did not come from Egypt but there was a man called Sasio son of Muhande who was from the Abanyore sub tribe who gave birth to several sons who formed a new sub tribe called Isukha. Isukha people according to Mzee Shikokoti first settled at a place called Visende with the sons spreading all over the area and later formed clans among Isukha.

Isukha people are also related to Idakho in that the father of Idakho was a brother to the father of Isukha. Sons of Sasio formed among others the following clans Abarimbuli, Abamakhaya, Abamironje, Abasulwa, Abashilukha, Abakhumbwa, Abatura, Abashitaho, Abasiratsi, Abaterema.

Religion

Isukha people believed in the existence of a supernatural being called *Were* also called *Mukoye*. They also called him *Omwami We Mumbo*. There was a special tree called *Mukhumi* where they offered prayers at. Whenever they had famine and drought, they would go to the tree and offer prayers and

sacrifices. And also after the season of harvesting, a thanksgiving ceremony was always organized under the same tree.

They would first pluck all the leaves from the tree and mix it with firewood before lighting a very big fire. Every household was supposed to bring a portion of what they would have harvested and burn it as they believed burning it as offering thanksgiving prayers to their God for the good harvest.

Mzee Shikokoti's wife Priscilla argues that if you failed to participate in the thanksgiving ceremony even after harvesting, the following season you would be unfortunate as you would get little or no harvest at all.

During the ceremony, they were very keen on the direction of smoke because if it did not go straight to the sky they would take it that their prayers had not been accepted and therefore they would go home and arrange for a fresh ceremony.



Importance of lusiola tree

They would repeat every now and then until smoke went direct to the sky. The Isukha people also valued *Lusiola* tree and as such they planted it in every homestead. *Lusiola* tree was used to construct houses and sticks from it were used by elders as walking sticks. They later started offering their prayers and sacrifices around the famous crying stone.

Circumcision

Isukha people just like Abanyore and Idakho learned circumcision from the Nandi. They would circumcise children from the age of sixteen to eighteen years. The say age was really considered because they would only initiate boys who were able to take instructions given to them well.

They would collect all the boys from different homes that were ready to be initiated and put them in one room where instructions were given to them by chosen elders.

A day before initiation, they would be taken to the river very early in the morning where they had to be shaved and washed with Ice cold water. Remember that unlike Bamasaba who smear the initiates with cold mud, Isukha people do not smear the initiates.



The boys would be brought back home but again and remain locked in a room as the last instructions are issued to them before they are initiated.

On the following day, people would gather very early in the morning and start singing a special song that will encourage the boys to face the knife. When the door is opened every boy would already be charged

and therefore will step outside while holding a special stick called *Tsinundu* and rush towards the place of circumcision.

Tsinundu signified their readiness to face the knife with all the courage.

They were circumcised at a nearby bush and there after taken to a special house to be looked until they heal.

If any boy screamed during the exercise, the father would give the circumciser goat as a fine. That initiate who screamed would not be valued in the society but Mzee Muhanda quickly adds that in the same society if someone screamed while being circumcised, he would later be the most fortunate and rich. The initiates would stay for about three months before they were welcomed at home.

On the day they return home, a very big ceremony would be conducted where goats were slaughtered and beer brewed for the people. Songs would fill the air and people feast as they welcome the initiates at home. Later in the evening, every initiate would be taken to his new house built by the father.

The whole ceremony is called *Shisialo* and it marks a new beginning for the initiates. The initiate will no longer be allowed to move into the father's bed room and also he could not be allowed to move anyhow in the father's house. The mother's kitchen would not be a place for him anymore. He would have officially graduated from childhood to adulthood.

Marriage

Marriage was taken to be a good thing among the *Isukha* people and those who married and got married were respected so much in the community. Marriage was meant for procreation and companionship and something ordained by god of *Mukoya* as Isukha called him. That made people who were not in marriage to appear to be cursed in the community.

In Isukha, they had two types of marriages; forced marriage and an agreed upon marriage between the two families. In forced marriages boys would just kidnap a girl when she was collecting firewood or fetching water and run away with her by force. In most cases the girls were taken by force were the most beautiful in the community.

On the other hand if a boy wanted to marry, he would inform parents but they would object his intention. However they would take the boy to the river and ask him to pluck grass enough to thatch his house using hands. If he does it, then it will prove his readiness. In such a case, the clan would organize and let the boys go to take by force a girl whom they valued and who was very beautiful for the boy to marry.

In another type of marriage, when a boy attained the age of marriage, he would tell his parents and give a suggestion of the girl he has identified as the partner. It will then be the work of the boy's parents and the girl's parents to investigate each other to find out if both families are fit to intermarry. Parents of the boy would go to the girl's place and express their intention to have their son marry from that family.

If they agree, a day is set for dowry. Dowry was three cows and five goats. On the day when dowry was to be taken to the girl's place, a ceremony was conducted where beer was prepared and chicken plus goats slaughtered for the visitors. That was the day the girl would be officially married because later in the evening, the girl accompanied by her peers will be escorted to the boy's place. She will be welcomed into the boy's house and her peers return home the same day or even the following day.

They will stay in their house but food will be from the mother's house. Another very important thing to note is that when a girl was found to be a virgin all the beddings would be taken to her grandmother or aunt and a present of a goat given to the mother.

A newly married woman among Isukha people was closely monitored as even ladies would follow her up to the well to fetch water. There was an exam where a girl would be given a very slippery pot to fetch water with but putting on the head determined if the girl was really due for marriage. From the ground, the pot was to be first put on the knee then to the head. However one could also be excused if after the knee, he rests the pot on the shoulder then to the head.

If the girl failed that test then it would taken that she was not ready for marriage. In the event the girl broke the pot, she would just use the route she knows up to her home place and come back with a new pot and chicken as a fine.

The woman would start cooking her own food after giving birth to two or three children. Mrs. Shikokoti says on her side she started cooking when she had given birth to three children. The girl's sister in law probably the married one would prepare cooking stones for the girl before she started cooking her own food. Remember that before she does so she has to go back home and be given millet, cooking pot, cooking stick and a broom among other kitchen items.

Later the couple would organize for a welcoming ceremony where their parents would be officially welcomed into their house. Note that before that ceremony, parents especially the boy's father cannot eat from his son's house.

Source: Westfm