

To Daughters of Ashenda from the Queen Mother

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Ashenda is exclusively ladies and young women unique traditional colorful yearly celebration and dignified festival. It is a commemoration to remind people of the special prophetic event that reverses the misconception and taboo cast on female and show the world that women are blessings not a curse. It is in general worldwide women's movement and declaration of freedom that shows the true meaning of feminism. It is the most joyous memorial occasion, a monument that existed since the advent of human creation. This is a heritage that is forgotten by the world at large in which the people who preserve it forgot the world from introducing it. This very short excerpt may bring forth provocative ideas and give an assignment to many anthropologists, social scientists and community development practitioners who wanted to do due diligence research.

I am the queen of the ancient kingdom of Axum which was an extension of the kingdom of Da'amat. I find it timely to send you a message to remind you of the ancient wisdom I left to my people. Many have portrait the image of me and made the perception as if I was a woman of many characters. Some historians even disputed my very existence and doubt whether I had ever really existed in history. The Hollywood film industry unjustifiably gave me a character of someone who seduced the wise king who ever lived, that which repudiated my personal good reputation. Some struggle to own me as if I were theirs with envy, only to have possessed the heritage I had handed down from the past. Others classified me as a worshipper of a "moon god," a lunar deity, a god and a goddess in mythology as it had been practiced in some parts of the world. But none of the above reveal my identity at any coast. I am who I am, clearly who kept the dignity of the people who raised me up.

Dear Daughters, it is unfortunate these days to see you not celebrating Ashenda as you might have wished and as you usually did practice expressing your full joy. I know it is a very trying hour and season. You are caught up and got suffocated in the middle of smoking guns, smelling unpleasant and awful poisonous substance from North to South, and from East to West. It is pity to see you face such incomprehensible archaic personalities who interfere with your anticipated sweet dream and youth experience. But regardless, you stand strong still and breath the joy of your liberty with full power exercising your right to act, speak and think as one wish without hindrance or restraint wherever you are, in the mountains, in the valleys, in the rural and urban areas.

The question would be what is Ashenda? Where did it come from? Do we have any historical evidence to back up our verdict as to what it is for? Why Ashenda? Dear Daughters, I wish you the best to enjoy the liberty of expressing yourself, upholding your upbringings and heritage, without Ashenda being departed from its established course of history. It is obvious Ashenda has so much secularized, having been deviated from the mainline thinking and lost its distinctive meaningful quality. Ashenda is

more than cultural heritage and social gathering. Its holistic approach has to be restored to its norms. At the heart of Ashenda is the gravitational attraction that has a process of reciprocal interconnections of the internal human inner being with that external extraordinary being. Ashenda is transcendental that have supernatural elements and flavors that accompany with it. Let me be clear and upfront to explain more in detail so that you, my daughters may celebrate it with meaningful reason and grasp the basis of its justifiable cause with an objective reality of feminism. True feminism is more than just giving guarantee that allows women to be equal to men. True Feminism is to be different with a unique role in society without one complements the other, it is totally impossible to see the complete essence of being human.

As you may know, women are marginalized in all parts of the world from getting their position they were supposed to hold as members of the official body of society. Back in history from the ancient of days in Eden in creation, Eve was the first to have been tempted to partook and eat the forbidden fruit and gave it to Adam thereafter. Since then, women are considered as someone who brought world catastrophic curse, as the result they were considered as weak, dependent, in-equal, second class and systematically discriminated and dominated in society. However, no one gave an emphasis to the Edenic promise given by God in Genesis to the woman, and the grace that was bestowed on her that nullify the curse. Right inside Eden where Adam and Eve disobeyed, Eve the mother of all had gotten a promise from God almighty (El-Shaddai) that in the years to come “the woman’s seed” from her womb would come and crush the head of the enemy Satan who caused her transgress and lead her to go beyond the bounds of moral principles (“I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise (crush) your head, And you shall bruise His heel” Genesis 3:15). Believing that God would keep his promise, since then, the earnest desire of every woman was to bring-forth that “seed” or “the man child” (a foretold Messiah) to this planet earth to redeem humankind.

You see, I grew up in “Yeha” in the central place of Tigray (Ethiopia) until I became Queen and moved to Axum. I used to celebrate and play Ashenda during my teens as you do to this day. I was even the “Ayni Wari girl” who is at the center of attention of the celebration.



Ayni Wari Bird አቲ

ዓይኒ ዋሪ፤ ዓይኒ ዋሪ ዓፈዬ

ብረሪ፤ ብረሪ

ሀዝብና ከምዘሎ፤ ንገሪ

ቆልዑ አሸንዳ ሹለን፤ ዘክሪ

ታሪኽና ንዓለም አበስሪ

At the center of every Ashenda, there are three very important and interesting elements to remember that are worthy of attention.

1. Ayni Wari girl – ዓል ዓይኒ ዋሪ
2. Estihina – እስቲሂና ሲሲና
3. The idioms and riddles of songs – ማህሌተ ቕኔ

Ashenda has a very powerful meaning, and it is far beyond wearing a piece of parchment of grass called “ashenda” that are wore by ladies of Ashenda around the waist for decorative purposes during the celebration. Ashenda has more meaning than the legendary interpretation of biblical figure Jephthah, a prince who made a hasty vow to sacrifice anyone who ever first received him with joyful expression of songs after he won a battle, unfortunately at the end of the story, it was found out to be his virgin daughter who was on the front line of the singing girls to receive the fate.

Ashenda is celebrated in many parts of Ethiopia and Eritrea. It is called “Ashenda” in Tigray and “Shaddai” in Agew region. Ashenda comes from the two words called “El” and “Shaddai.” It is one of the most precious seven names of God that expresses his characteristics. “El” means God and “Shaddai” means Almighty, thus, El-Shaddai means God Almighty. It appears 12 times in the Bible, 10 in the Old Testament mostly in the book of Job and 2 in the New Testament. If the argument I am bringing forth becomes a matter of dispute, the Book of Job uses the name “Shaddai” many times, and admonishes us in a metaphor with an idiom: “And the Lord said to Job: ‘Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty (“Shaddai”)? He who argues with God, let him answer it’” (Job 40:1–2).

So my daughters, you don’t need to be shy away to call Ashenda with its true meaningful name “El-Shaddai” or as the Agew people call it “Shaddai” (Almighty) to this day. What is El-Shaddai mean any way, and what connections does it have with a woman? The other associative meaning of “Shaddai” in Hebrew is the word for “breast.” It shows the feminine character aspect of God, which is to mean that ElShaddai is “the breast-feeding God.” Shaddai means breast, nourish, multiply, care,

fruitfulness. El-Shaddai literally means, “The Many-Breasted God,” or the God who provides and sustains, the giver of Life who draws us close to himself and nourishes us to the end. It is to make known the character of “motherhood heart” of God. It is a blessing to know God as El-Shaddai. The ladies who celebrate Ashenda are called “Daughters of Ashenda (ጃልዑ አሸንዖ),” to be specific they are called “Daughters of ElShaddai (God Almighty)” (ጃሉዑ ኤልሻዳይ).

The central elements of the celebration are the three aspects of values mentioned above. I told you that I used to be the Ayni Wari girl (ጻል ዓይኒ ዋሪ). My daughters, please note that without the above three elements mentioned, Ashenda (El-Shaddai) is meaningless, worthless and it would become another game play that comes and goes around every year with merely simple social gathering that has never had relevant footprints of the past.

Let me explain the three valuable elements of the celebration:

1. Ayni Wari girl – ጻል ዓይኒ ዋሪ

Right before Ashenda celebration season occurs, the Ayni Wari girl (ጻል ዓይኒ ዋሪ) had to be chosen first from among the community of ladies. She is the Queen of the day and the celebration. She has to be not more than 12 years old girl. Strong lady has to be chosen to carry her on her shoulder. The lady has to hold firmly her two feet while the Ayni Wari girl standing on top of the lady’s shoulder standing straight courageously as they all dance up and down, especially when they play the special dance of the day, “Estihina.” Why is the Ayni Wari girl so important and special in this occasion? She is so special because she represents all the ladies as a token, for the anticipated “seed” or “man-child” (the coming Messiah) that would be born and crush the head of the enemy and liberate humanity was through a woman. Ayni Wari is a special colourful bird that shows up during the ashenda season which comes once a year during the month of July to September (new year month) and disappears thereafter. The bird is known for its beauty and splendor. It is a singing bird too. It has very beautiful and powerful eyes that can perceive wide angle and observe anything from far off.



It was amazing to see ladies carrying the Ayni Wari girl standing on the shoulder as they dance. The ladies of El-Shaddai (God Almighty) or Ashenda sing the Ayni Wari songs with full energy and joy as they declare to the world that they are a blessing not a curse.

2. Estihina – እስቲሂና ሲሲና

The second important element of the celebration is the special dramatic dance called “Estihina” which has never been played in other occasions but only designated to this event. What is “Estihina?” Why is it played for? “Estihina” is a very special dance and songs played with a special bit of break of tempo. The ladies of Ashenda move their hand up and down from breast to womb as they jump, up and down with a rhythm together. They repeat the lyric “Estihina Sisina” (እሰይ ንሕና ሰሲንና) as they jump, up and down. It is a mystery, and it is very prophetic dance; it is unlike any other songs sung on other occasions. Moving their hands from breast to womb in a rhythm with jumping, up and down, they are declaring a prophetic utterance that they are a blessing and not a curse. They leap and dance with joy for the fruit of their womb, the “seed,” the “man-child,” or the “Messiah” to come who was the Edenic promise of Genesis that would be born was the one who would redeem the world. They dance with exuberant and exceedingly in great pleasure repeating “Estihina” song with special rhythmic dance for he is their reward, and it was he whom they give as a gift and offer back to the world. What an amazing! This is not coincidence or just normal and another ordinary cultural event.

Let us look right in Genesis how El-Shaddai promised about fruitfulness prophetically declaring: ‘May God Almighty [El Shaddai] bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers...’ (Gen. 28:3). ‘I am God Almighty [El Shaddai]: be fruitful and increase in number’ (Gen. 35:11). It goes even further deeper with specifics in the holy scripture saying ‘By the Almighty [El Shaddai] who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts [shadayim] and of the womb [racham]’ (Gen. 49:25). That is the reason the ladies wave their hand from breast to womb, from womb to breast as they leap, accompanying with it the “Estihina” (እሰይ ንሕና) style dance. What an amazing occasion, and without “Estihina” there is no true meaning of Ashenda or El-Shaddai celebration.

The consummation of the “daughters of El-Shaddai (God Almighty)” (ጥላው ኤልሻዳይ) is fulfilled in the gravitational attraction and the reciprocal interconnections of the internal human inner being with that external extraordinary being. That is why we say Ashenda (El-Shaddai) is transcendental that have supernatural elements and flavours that accompany with it. Seeing prophetically to the fulfillment of this Messianic event, David the psalmist three thousand years ago focused his attention, centered on God, expresses gratitude, admiration, joy and praise and concluded with these words: “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24).” That day is the day of the Lord’s presence “Emanuel.” The desire of every woman is to become that woman and only one who would bring forth the promised “seed” that comes to the world and that is why the

“Daughters of El-Shaddai (God Almighty)” (ቸሎ፡ ኤልሻዳይ (አሸንዳ)) sing “Oh laddy Ayni Wari, Ayni Wari (አቲ ዓይኒ ዋሪ፤ ዓይኒ ዋሪ)”.

It is with this in mind that the laddies of El-Shaddai (Ashenda) move their hand from breast to womb and from womb to breast, jumping up and down in rhythm singing “Estihina Sisina” (እሰይ ንሕና፤ እወ ንሕና). Actually, the words have changed over the years and the modern lyrics have lost their true meaning and deviated from their original footprints.

ስቲሂና ስቲሂና ስቲሂና

ኳላላና

ስቲሂና ሳላላና

ስቲሂና እንተበልናየን

ስቲሂና አቤናና

ስቲሂና ስቲሂና፤

ስቲሂና ሲሲና

Well, honestly, the lyrics of Ashenda has changed over the years and it really has to be rewritten to reflect its true meaning and historic footprints.

እሰይ ንሕና፤ እሰይ ንሕና

እሰይ ንሕና፤ ሰሲንና

እወ ንሕና፤ እወ ንሕና

እሰይ ንሕና፤ ሰሲንና

yes we are,

yes we are

yes we are,

we blossom

Oh ya yes we are,

yes we are

yes we are,

we blossom

ሰሲንና means to blossom, to increase, to be fruitful, to be a blessing.

Estihina Sisina has changed over the years while its true meaning is "እሰይንና ሰሲንና " (yes oh ya, we are and we blossom).

3. The idioms and riddles of songs – ማህሌተ ቕኔ

The third elements is the idiomatic song of the celebration. It is accompanied with songs full of riddles in which women transmit their message and their wisdom. It is also a song of praise to El-Shaddai (God Almighty) who keeps his promise to formally chosen a woman to be a blessing to the world. The ladies of Ashenda have to wipe out the rubbish and shameful lyrics from their songs that desecrate the giver of the celebration.

እስተሂና ላሎይ ላሎይ
እስተሂና ላሎይ እስተሂና
አዋልደይ ሎሚ ዕብዳ
ላዕላይ ሰማይ ዶ አለዎ ሜዳ

Who is “Lallo” in the first place? “Lallo” is an idol god of songs, who used to be worshipped in some parts of Southern Tigray and some parts of Eritrea as remembered in oral traditional history. Ladies have to come up with some new lyrics and riddles of songs with their wisdom transferring to the generation that reflects the footprints of their heritage (ማህሌተ ቕኔ) (Richly in all wisdom, teaching and

admonishing one another in psalms and hymns (Col.3:16)). Thus, the laddies of the celebration with their Ayni Wari girl are all called Daughter of El-Shaddai (God Almighty)” (ቆሎ-ዑ ኤልሻዳይ). Woman, you are a blessing and full of wisdom.

Dear daughters and sisters, I wish you happy Holy day wherever you are in all parts of the world. This is an excerpt from the book called “The Queen” and you will find many valuable wisdoms in it very soon when you read it.



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