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MOTHERS IN THE BIBLE DIALOGUE WITH WICHI MOTHERS

Who are the Wichi?

The Wichí people habitate the Chaco plains, where the surface is almost entirely flat. In this immensity every topographic feature, even a low elevation or depression, is highlighted with a name.

For the Wichi people, vital life crises are childbirth and bereavement. Life crises also include menstruation, defined as "a failed delivery". After giving birth, or in the case of menstruation, "just blood" - women should stay inside their homes because the shed blood has a fishy odor. In the same way, the bereaved should not leave the area of their home until decomposition of the corpse of the dead relative is complete - a period of three months during which they are considered infected with the foul odor of the deceased. In other words, those who are embeded with the smell of death should not come in contact with the outside world.

When reaching puberty, teenage girls go through a rite of passage, either individually or in pairs, to become women. This initiatory rite is a period of reclusion that usually extends throughout the month that separates the two menstrual cycles.

Locked in a shack, the teenager is "invisible". Today, with the adoption of four-walled houses, girls are hidden behind a blanket hanging on one corner of the house. At night she is allowed to sleep outside but she has to go back before dawn. The company of an old woman also contributes to the longevity granted by the rite. Her presence is the only social contact during isolation

During this time of abstinence she is dedicated to the braiding of chaguar. It is the archetypal Wichí occupation that symbolizes the link that joins the society of men to women. According to the narrative, it was by a rope of chaguar that the first women descended from heaven to access the terrestrial world of men.

Hannah חנה

Hannah - חנה - means "graceful or favored." Chanukah חנוכה one of the Jewish festivities derives its name from Hannah. She was Elkanah's wife and lived in Ramah. Elkanah אלקנה name means "the powerful".

Hannah was Elkanah's first wife. He married afterwards another woman named Peninnah, at that time it was common for a man to take a second wife when the first was barren. It has been always very important to the people of Israel to bring offspring, and Peninnah filled this need, however Hannah was always the woman he loved more.

Peninnah had several children but Hannah did not. This was the reason why Hannah was oppressed by Peninnah, who even called her as her "opponent".

When the day came that Elkanah offered sacrifice, all of them went together to Shiloh and that was the time when the two women shared the table with Elkanah, in one single tent. During the rest of the year each woman lived in her own tent. Elkanah, who was in charge of distributing the food rations, always gave Peninnah his wife, all his sons and daughters, to each his part. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because it was she the one whom he loved more. This irritated Peninnah who took care of pointing Hannah out, that she had no children. Hannah was angry and sad and did not eat....

This happened year after year; when they came to the temple of Shiloh. Elkanah her husband said to her: "Hannah, why are you crying? Why do you not eat? And why is thy heart grieved? Do not I mean more to you than ten sons?"

And Hannah arose after they had eaten and drunk at Shilo; and Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the temple, while she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed. She begged moving her lips passionately but without uttering a word. Hannah prayed: "If you remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a son, then I will give the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head. "

As she continued praying, Eli was watching her mouth.

But Hannah spoke with her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; Eli thought she was drunk. Then Eli said, "How long wilt thou be drunken? Digest your wine."

And Hannah answered and said, "No, Sir; I am a woman hurt of spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; because the abundance of my complaint and grief have spoken so far. "

Eli answered and said, "Go in peace, and the Mighty One of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast done. " And she said, "Let your maidservant find favor in your eyes." So the woman went her way, and ate, and was no more sad. They woke up early, and all of them returned to their home in Ramah.

And Elkanah went to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. It happened, when the time was, that Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord, my son was born." Afterwards Elkanah went to Shiloh with his family to offer the yearly sacrifice and his vow.

But Hannah did not go , but said to her husband, "I will not go until the child will be weaned, to take you and he may appear before the LORD, and there abide forever". And Elkanah her husband said to her "Do what seems good to you; tarry until thou have weaned him; only to fulfill the Lord with your word."

The woman stayed, raising her son until she weaned, this occurred during the first 3 years of his life.

After she had weaned him, she took him with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him to the temple at Shiloh. And killing the bull, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, "Oh, my lord! Your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying. For this child I prayed, and the Lord gave me what I asked. I therefore dedicate him; his life, is for the Eternal."

After Hannah dedicated Samuel to the temple, she visited him every year when she came up to Shiloh with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice (the Passover) and brought him a tunic, mantle or dress, that she probably made in the course of each year to take for her child. Wearing it, Samuel felt perhaps closer to his mother, or was simply a gift of great value to both. She did this every year. After at least a little over ten years, Hannah conceived more children; three boys and two little women. Finally Hannah's consecration transmitted to their children, especially Samuel, who became one of the prophets.

About Hannah's death there are no Biblical records, and she is never more named in the Torah.

Colophon

This book is a unique piece.

The base is a woven plant fabric made of **chaguar** by the Wichi mothers in northern Argentina.

The Hebrew characters printed by hand on nylon and canvas are fragments of the story of Hannah.

The support structure of the book is made of wood by Fernando Diaz.

The realization was made by Mirta Kupferminc assisted by Estela Ivkovic.

The book was finished in Buenos Aires in May 2014

Note from the author

Through the story of Hannah I raise a question about the meaning of motherhood for me.

While I understand that in biblical times concepts of life were very different, I like to say that today, as a woman of the 21st century, and post-Freud, I believe that Hannah is very far from my own maternal feelings.

I do not think that the possibility of conceiving a child is enough to turn a woman into a mother. I rather think that strongest in Hannah was her narcissistic desire to fulfill her wish of conception, thus she devoted her child to the temple before he was born.

I feel that the daily care and freedom of choice offered to a child, is the biggest maternal challenge.

Mirta Kupferminc
