

What Is a Totem?

Shona transcript:

Mutupo ndingati chinonzi mutupo chinhu chaunoera. Kana ndichiti kuera, ndingati chinhu chaunotarisa as sacred kwauri zvichingobva nemhuri yako. Mutupo inoshandiswawo zvekare kwandingati kuidentifier kuti uri wekurudzi rupi, unobva kupi, kumusha kwako ndekupi. Ndizvo zvimwe zvinhu zvinoshandiswa nevanhu kuita yandingati self identity nevanhu kuZimbabwe. Saka kana ndichitarisa nyaya yemutupo ndingati pane nyaya yandingati mhando dzemutupo dzandinoziva dziriko. Kune mutupo yakaita sekuti munhu anenge achiti ndinoera shoko, mumwe anoti ndinoera shava, mumwe anoti ndinoera moyo, gumbo, zvinongobva nekuti anoera chii. Ndingati mizhinji yacho inobva pazvinhu zviriri, sekuti moyo negumbo, zvinhu zvinowanikwawo pamuviri wemunhu kana kuti mhuka. Kazhinji vanhu vane mhuka dzavanoera kana kuti vamwe vanoerawo zvinhu zvakaita sana moto zvinongobva nekuti uri kunzvimbo ipi yaunobva. Saka ndingati pakura ipapa pane mazita anodaidzwa vanhu nawo. Sekuti munhu anoera moyo. Kuvakadzi anenge achinzi ahh vamamoyo. Munhu anoera shava anenge achinzi ahh vachihera. Kana kuti kuvarume anenge achinzi ahh Museyamwa zvinongobvawo nevamwe vachiti Mhofu. Vamwe vachiti mhukahuru. Ndingati vana mhukahuru vanenge vachiera nzou. Saka zvinongobvawo nekuti unoera chiii. Kunotovawo nemazita anopihwa munhu avanotodanwa navo kuti ahh ndivachihera ava, ahh ndivampofu ava kana kuti ndivamadube.

Chekutanga chinooaffecter mutupo pamararamiro edu emazuva nemazuva ndingati pane nyaya yeukama. Mutupo ndingati unoshandiswa kuti vanhu vakwanise kubatanidza ukama. Ndingati senge inini kumhuri kwangu sekuti mai vangu vanoera shoko, baba vangu vanoera shava, ndinobva ndatoti ndikaona munhu anoera shoko ndinototi kana ari murume ndinotofara ndototi ahh muri sekuru vangu. Ndikaonawo kana ari mukadzi ndinototi ahh zvamuri mai vangu because mai vangu vanenge vachiera mutupo wakafanana sekuti shoko. Zvimwe wo ndikasangana nemurume anenge achiera shava kana ari murume ndinototi ahh zvamuri baba vangu. Kana tiri vezera rimwe ndinototi ahh zvamuri bhudhi vangu. Zvimwewo ndikasangana nemukadzi ndinoti ahh zvamuri tete vangu. Kana kuti ndinototi ahh zvauri sisi vangu kana munin'ina vangu zvichingobva nezera remunhu iyeye.. Zvimwewo ndikasangana nemunhu anoera. zvinhu zvinotowanikwa mumasociety kwaunogara kwese. Nyangwe panga pasina kana kuzivana, zita renyu rekupedzisira risina kana kumbofanana but kana mukapinza mutupo unoona vanhu vava kutofara vava kutoshevedzana kuti ahh zvamuri tete ahh zvamuri mbuya kana kuti zvamuri sekuru. Ndozvimwe zvinoshandawo mutupo.

Chechipiri mutupo unogona kukanganisa nyaya dzekuroorana. Ndingati zviya zviya patsika dzedu vanhu vane mutupo umwe chete havatarisirwi kuti varoorane. Kana uchiyera Shava haukwani kuroorwa nemurume anoera Shava. Kana uchiera Shumba haukwani kuroorwa nemurume anenge achiera Shumba. but well zvinotenderwa zvazvo murume anozongoti paya paanenge ava kubvisa roora kana kuti pfuma inoenda kumusha

kwemukadzi anobva abvisawo nemombe inonzi Chekaukama. Mombe iyi inobvisa ukama kuti zvavanga vari vemutupo umwe chete nyangwe zvavo vana baba pasina kana dzinza pasina kana ukama huripo, vanobva vanenge vachicheka ukama uhwu kuti hamusisiri hanzvadzi nehanzvadzi asi mava murume nemukadzi. Saka ndiko kucheka ukama ikoko kuti mune mutupo mumwe chete. Asiwo plus nyaya yekuti mazuvano zvinhu zvava kuita zvichichinjawo, saka vezera redu isusu vemugeneration yedu isusu vamwe vava kuita vasingazvitarisawo. Zvava zvinhu zvavasingatarisizi Uye nenyaya yekuti kwakaita eh religion yakapinda mukati mevanhu, pane vamwewo vane makereke avanoenda asingatenderi nezvenyaya dzakadaro saka havatombotauri nezvezvinhu zvakadaro. Uyezve hazvisi zvinhu zvavanotarisa kunyangwe zviya vaviri vakadanana, vashoma vanobvunzana. Variko asi vashoma vanobvunzana vasati vapinda pakudanana kuti iwe unoera chii, ini ndinoera chakati zvinhu zvava kutobvunzwa pava paya pamwe wavakuda kutondoroora munhu otanga kuti ahh gara zviya mutupo wako ichii. Ndozvava kuitika mazuvano. Zvasiyana nakudhara.

English translation:

I would say that a totem is something that a clan or family believes in. This is something that is considered sacred. Totems are also used to identify where one is from, as well as their family origins. These are some of the ways that people in Zimbabwe use to self-identify. So, in terms of totems, there are different types of totems: for example, *soko*, *shava*, *moyo*, *gumbo*. Usually totems are derived from either animal body parts such as *moyo* [heart], or *gumbo* [leg], or the actual animal. Animals are more popular as totems but you can also find people whose totems could be fire. For every totem, there is a name that goes with it, for example, for those whose totem is *moyo*, the women are called *mamoyo*. For the *shava* totem, the women are called *vachihera*, and the men are called *museyamwa* or *mhofu*; some call them *mhukahuru*—*mhukahuru* is a title for those of the *nzou* [elephant] totem. So, every title depends on your totem. These titles are names that people use, such as *chihera*, *mpofu* or *madube*.¹

The most important aspect that is shaped by totems is our relationships. I would say totems are used to bring people together and to form relations. For example, in my family, my mother's totem is *shoko* and my father's is *shava*. So if I meet someone of the *shoko* totem, if they are a man I will say, "Aah, you are my uncle." If I meet a woman, I will say, "Aaah, you are my mother too," because she shares a totem similar to my mom's, say *shoko*. Also, if I meet a man whose totem is *shava*, I will regard him as my father. If we are of the same age, I will say, "Aah, you are my brother." Sometimes if I meet a woman, I will say, "Aah, you are my aunt," or I will say, "Aah, you are my younger or older sister," depending on their age. This forming of relationships is common in many places where we live. Even if the people did not know each other before, or even if your surname is different, if you bring up the totem, people will instantly connect, and

¹ People usually use these titles when they meet at more social gatherings such as funerals, weddings, or when they are meeting someone for the first time. It is a way of establishing a rapport. These titles are officially used during the customary marriage ceremonies too.

they will begin to call each other by titles that show relations such as aunt, grandma, or grandpa. These are some of the ways we use totems.

Secondly, totems can negatively affect issues of marriage. I would say according to our traditional customs, you cannot marry someone who shares your totem. If your totem is *shava*, you cannot marry a man from the *shava* totem, or if your totem is *shumba*, you cannot marry a man with the *shumba* totem. But, sometimes there is a way of dealing with this if people of the same totem decide to marry. When the man pays the bride price, he will need to pay an extra cow which is called *chekaukama*. This cow will neutralize the totem relations that exist even if the two families are not related by kinship. This will cut the relationship of brother-sister by totem, and the two can be husband and wife. So, this is what it means to cut the relationship if people of the same totem want to marry. But things are now changing, those of our generation might not pay close attention to this, also because of the powerful religious beliefs. There are some religions where people do not believe in totems and do not even talk about such issues. Also, it is not something that people think about asking when they are in a relationship or courtship. There are some who ask, but they are not very many. Many of them eventually ask when they are about to get married. So, this is what is now happening these days. It's quite different from what used to happen a long time ago.

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