

## TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE IN OKPE KINGDOM

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MARRIAGE is the process of a union between a male and female during which both enter into a contract to be husband and wife. The families of the couple eventually are involved in the entire process to ensure a successful lasting union.

The process begins with the period of courtship, the length of which varies between individuals involved. When both have eventually made up their minds about each other, the girl then unfolds her love affairs to her mother, to gain her support and necessary advice from time to time.

At a convenient time, the suitor, accompanied by a few friends and relations, approach the girl's parents with drinks, kolanuts and money to inform them of his intention to marry their daughter. On acceptance of the proposal, and, at a suitable time, the formal introduction of both families takes place.

The ceremony begins with the host family welcoming the guests with drinks, kolanuts and some amount of money, usually presented by a spokesman (Otota) of the group. The spokesman of the guests accepts the presentations on behalf of the group. Prayer is said with the kolanuts and drinks according to the religion of those involved (Christian or Traditional religion), using broken kolanuts and some money by the guests is then followed by the announcement of the purpose of their visit, namely: to request the hands of the hosts' daughter in marriage to their son. On acceptance of the requests, the formal introduction of both families takes place. A second presentation of drinks, kolanuts, and money is undertaken as a demonstration of the suitor's appreciation for the acceptance of his request.

Detail of the date and plans for the traditional marriage is later conveyed to the family of the bride-to-be through their spokesman, after due consultation with the spokesman of the groom-to-be. A list of the requirements for the marriage is also given to the groom-to-be through their spokesman.

Thereafter, the spokesmen of both families continue with all the negotiations strictly in accordance with the wish of both families. At the end of the meeting, money, kolanuts and hot drinks are usually offered to thank the family of the bride-to-be for accepting his request. This acceptance fee is known as **'Igho Arhonvberen.'**

The list of items to be provided by the groom-to-be is made available to him and include the following:

- \$ One walking stick.
- \$ One hat.
- \$ One 12-yard decent wrapper "george."

These are to be made available to the father of the bride-to-be on or before the actual date of the marriage.

For the Mother, the following items will be provided:

§ for circumcision (**Igho Osamo**) N200.00 (Two hundred Naira) or more.

§ In lieu of labour pains of the bride-to-be's mother, the sum of two hundred naira or more is provided.

For the Older women (Egwemese) in the bride's family a bag of salt and N200.00 (Two hundred Naira) or more is provided.

For the Youths of the bride-to-be and family, N300.00 (three hundred Naira) or more.

For the Family Members (Ekrun):

§ A jar of palm wine of up to 20 litres. This will be used during the main marriage ceremony during which some amount of money is "sprayed" possibly on all the participants.

§ Some kolanuts and hot drinks.

§ A jar of native brewed gin, 20 litres.

For the Bride-To-Be, the following items are to be presented:

§ 4 or 5 sets of wrapper outfit (George).

§ Head ties to match.

§ 4 to 5 blouses.

§ 2 to 4 pairs of shoes and hand bags to match.

§ A set of jewelry and coral beads.

For the Unmarried Girls in the Family (Egbortor):

§ N300.00 (Three hundred Naira) or more is usually given.

On the appointed day of the marriage ceremony as earlier agreed upon by both parties, the following procedures will be adopted:

§ The traditional marriage ceremony usually commences at 12:00 noon. In the past, the ceremony commenced at about 6:00 p.m. This was probably to allow members of the family who had gone to farm to return and have enough time to get themselves ready.

§ The groom's entourage arrives some minutes before the appointed time.

§ The traditional rites begin by the family welcoming the guest with:

-Money;

-Some 'native' kolanuts only; and

-Assorted drinks.

The spokesman receives these items on behalf of the guests. Thereafter, he proceeds to introduce members of the groom's family to the bride's family, who are also introduced to the groom's family by the spokesman for their family. The leader of the groom's family will now

perform the traditional breaking of the kolanuts presented. This is done by saying prayers for the host's family either in his dialect or a common language. He then breaks one of the kolanuts for use in prayers; first, to the parents of the bride, chiefs and Elders around. The leader of the groom's family will also pray for the groom, his parents and Elders in his entourage. The rest of the kolanuts are distributed to all present.

The leader of the groom's family proceeds to open one of the hot drinks, pouring some in a glass and he prays for the host's family members in the traditional or Christian form, depending on the religion of the families involved. Some of the drinks presented having been served to all present, the remainder is to be taken home by the visitors (that is the groom's delegation). Having completed the entertainment of the guests, the spokesman for the groom's family will rise to explain the reason for their mission, which is, to seek the hands of one of their daughters in marriage. This is preceded by the presentation of money, some hot drinks and kolanuts. After this, all other items brought by the groom's delegation for the ceremony will be presented to the bride's family; they include: Bag of salt, Hot drinks, Wine, Beer, Malt, a Tin of native gin "**Ogogoro**," palm wine, usually for praying for the couple.

Most importantly, consent of the bride's family is sought for the marriage to be carried out. The groom's family is requested to identify their choice while other young veiled girls are presented, flanked by young women singing and dancing. This is carried out until the real bride appears. She is immediately identified and received by the groom's family members amidst cheers and jubilation.

The groom, as requested by the bride's family, is then presented to them. Following the question as to whether or not the bride knows the groom-to-be, and if she accepts to be his bride. If the answer is in the affirmative, she is then made to sit on the lap of the father-in-law to be or his representative, who in turn sits her on the groom's lap, after sitting and raising the bride simultaneously counting eight before doing so on the ninth count. This is followed by cheers, singing and dancing and presentation of money to both couple by the groom's family members first, followed by all others and finally the groom, who proudly covers his bride with a gift of money.

Prior to this event, necessary presentations of the various gifts for the bride's mother, youths, etc., as previously enumerated would have been effected. All those concerned express their satisfaction with the gifts given them. Payment of the bride price follows. This amount is normally made known to the groom's family during the earlier periods of consultation. This amount varies between places in the Okpe Kingdom, usually forty naira only. Payment is preceded by the bride's spokesman publicly announcing a large sum of money as bride price. The groom's family spokesman responds by presenting money and a bottle of gin (**Igho Ebremu**) normally required to determine the bride price. The groom's family members humbly kneeling, beg for a reduction in the amount announced. The process is repeated until the third time when the real amount is reached. This is accepted by loud cheers of gratitude and jubilation by them. The sum is publicly announced by the bride's spokesman.

After presentation and acceptance of the bride price, the bride's father returns part of the bride price to the groom's family in lieu of all the services expected from their son-in-law to them forever.

### **THE ACTUAL MARRIAGE**

The process begins with the couple kneeling before the parents of the bride. The bride receives prayers, blessings, good wishes and advice from them using palm wine in a traditional 'native cup' of calabash. The bride's father announces to the hearing of all present that he has from that moment given their daughter named so-and-so to the groom as wife. He then offers a short prayer for the couple and for the members of both families.

This part of the ceremony is very important and significant, and it is regarded as the climax of the marriage ceremony "**mueyon gwotore**" failing which, no marriage exists. The palm wine in the calabash cup used for prayer is passed by the bride to the groom, who drinks first before herself. An appreciation by the groom's parents is shown by the presentation of a bottle of drink in the traditional way. Thereafter, a female member of the bride's family will be mandated to take the bride to her husband.

In the evening of the same day, accompanied by some of the groom's family members, the bride is 'escorted' to the husband's home where a lavish reception party is usually organized to receive her. Before stepping into her new home, the bride's feet are washed with cold water by a female member of the in-laws. Thereafter, the bride and her entourage are officially welcomed in the traditional way. Prayer is said by the leader of the group who places the bride on the father-in-law's laps. He in turn does the same while handing the bride to her husband, in the usual way amidst cheers and jubilation.

The significance of this exercise is to demonstrate the fact that the bride is given to both her husband and in-laws while symbolising the union of the two families involved.