

The Hawya tribe

There were a tribe of the Hawya in Serae Eritrea, ruled by Dejach De'bul, a strong and feared ruler of Mereb Mellash, about 600 years ago. They were of the Great Belew tribe. He was told that he would have a daughter whose son will crush his rule. When the girl was born, his only child, he had her secluded from the public.

The lonely girl grew up and used to watch people from her window. One day she saw this tall and handsome soldier Ambessajir, and fell for him. He was from far away tribe Selewa from the south, and lived with his mother. She was so obsessed that although he could not come to her home, she had herself rolled with hay and taken to him. The romance did not continue for long when he was discovered and caught.

When he found out who the father was, one of his soldiers, Ambessajir, he had him killed, by burying him shoulder deep and horses running over his head, crushing his skull. This was the highest punishment those days.

At those days, the aristocrats were too feared and had full power over the common man. This daughter of Dejach De'bul, named Mariam Hanna, or Wehadet or We'alet, became pregnant and hid from her father. The son grew up with his mother's tribe.

One day, the chief was sitting outside and saw boys play with a ball game called the Karsa. Dejach De'bul noticed that one boy played very well that the other boys could not wretch the ball from his hold.

He admired this boy and said, to his aide "If this boy could be one's grandson?" The aide found this opportunity to tell his master of the story, and answered, "My Lord, promise us not to be harsh and be understanding. Can you promise me one thing- kidan? (In the old times, when one gets kidan, he is allowed to say his word and not be punished) Dejach allowed him to speak and the aide replied? This boy is indeed your daughter's son".

The chief was so shocked of his not knowing and his daughter had a bastard, and that he knew nothing of it all these years.

But the whole tribe were dissatisfied that their chief had harshly punished their favourite soldier. Dejach De'bul regretted having killed Ambessajir that he forgave his daughter and had the grandson named as his heir.

The son grew up. His mother used to tell him how her father had his father Ambessajir was killed for loving her. Eritrea has still paternal laws. Other kids scolded him of having no father. As a young man, he wanted to vindicate his father.

He felt very sad of his father's being punished this way and thought of revenging his death, and decided to wait for the right moment against his powerful grandfather.

He became a man and married and became strong. His grandfather had come to forgive, liking and thrusting and relied on him. One day, Dejach De'bul, his grandfather was going for a trip, which would take a year.

He appointed this grandson to be his viceroy, and had him swear the oath of loyalty, three times, as was customary. But after a month of his travelling, the powerful grandfather was taken sick and died of cholera, in a far away country. The grandson inherited the whole country.

This became ripe time to revenge his father's death. So he prepared a big feast to all male members of mother's clan, the Hawya. He had a big tent built right by a cliff, known now as Mi-kit-kat Deku.

He had all fine food served. But inside the beer, he had poison, that is, elephant's bile, added to it. All the guests ate and after drinking of the poison felt dizzy, and he had them thrown off the cliff, so that newcomers would not notice. The hill he built the tent is still called Das Hawya.

But, one member of his mother's clan, Gebre Hiwet the blind, had perhaps been suspicious of this grandson. When he came near the tent, he asked his daughter who was leading him, if she could see anyone coming out of the tent. She is to have said the famous words "Das Hawya, zi-atew imber zi-wet-sih aye-re-aynan!" The tent of Hawya, entering only, not leaving do we see. Meaning that she could see them entering the tent of Hawya, but saw no one coming out of the tent.

Gebre Hiwet the blind then cried "This cursed son! He has killed all of my brothers! Quickly, lead me out of here before he kills us too!" And they quickly went away, to flee. The grandson had almost all members killed and then remembered the shrewd Gebre Hiwet the blind. He asked if he had been inside.

When told that he never entered, the grandson realized Gebre Hiwet had been suspicious and had fled. Gebre Hiwet the blind was the only male member of the Hawya tribe to be alive, and he should be killed. In the meantime, having vindicated his father's harsh death, this new ruler proclaimed that his name was Jir Gedela. He may be the father of the Adkeme Melega' tribe.

Soldiers were sent in pursuit of Gebre Hiwet the blind. He had gone some time earlier and being wise, he told his daughter to watch out for horses. When the horse hooves were heard, they hid under a tree. He, being blind, counted the horses' hooves, piling a stone for every horse. After they had passed, the daughter wanted to travel on.

But cautious as he was, he told her to wait until the horses passed, returning. And return they did, having had trouble riding through swampy ground. Then, Gebre Hiwet the blind piled the stones one by one for every horse returning, and all were counted for.

This resting place still bears this incident's name, i.e. a town called Tera Imni, pile of stone, to this day, in Serae. When they decided to rest from their journey, they did so in what place he named Hadire, meaning, I slept the night. When he was surely far away from danger, they temporarily settled in Ma'reba, sunset, which is still called so, in Akele Guzai.

But he missed his home Serae and wandered to a hilly place and continuously asking if Serae could be seen. In this mountain, in now Segeneiti town, at night his daughter could see lights of Serae. He decided that they would settle there, calling the hill Adi Serae, now known as Aserwe Mountain.

There were other tribes already there, the Degera people. They intermingled with them. But they slept in this wild uninhabited mountain.

One evening, a lion that had eaten many goats of the people, roared near them. The frightened daughter cried that they were doomed. The brave blind father told his daughter to heat stones. When the lion came close to them and opened his mouth to eat them, the father had his daughter give the hot stones inside the lion's mouth that when he fell, the father killed him with his spear. He then told his daughter to cut out the lion's eyebrows (Fare) and kept it safe.

The next day, Degera man was shouting words of their bravery, and dancing warriors? Dance, that they had killed a lion. A killer scalps the lion's head and wears the fur around, to show around. All the people assembled and were praising them.

Then Gebre Hiwet the blind asked audience to the chief and was granted so. He said that if the braves had indeed killed the lion, where the lion's eyebrows were. Surprised, the people noticed the lion's eyebrows were missing. He then pulled out the eyebrows and claimed he himself had killed the lion. He was much hailed.

They said that if this blind man were brave with his handicap, what strong sons he would rear. For this bravery, he was given land to farm, presently known as the Hawya land, south of Segeneiti town, and a girl, from the Injen (look below) house of Degera village, for marriage. But the girl refused to marry a blind man.

Time went by. They were the only survivors of the Hawya tribe. Without him, there will be no more descendants. He had to bear more children. The only female with him was his own daughter.

He proposed that as they were to perish without descendants, she, his daughter should bear him sons. The daughter was very shocked. He explained. But still, what would the villagers say of this scandal! The father said that people would talk for a short while and forget. To prove so, he told her to go to the market naked, but wearing a hyena's hide.

When she went to the market as he said, all people gathered around her sneering and laughing at her. Returning home, she told her father of what had happened. The next week, he told her to repeat with the hyena skin again. She did so. Some cried that the crazy one had come, saying "Is not she from last week?" and were less curious to see her. The third week in the market, nobody bothered her saying is that same crazy one.

Her father now made her understand that people tend to not care after a while, and they lived as husband and wife. She bore him three sons. It is also said that a Degera woman with beady eyes was given to him and she bore him three sons but died.

With his sons from the Degera woman, and these 3 present ones, he settled in the land the Degera people had given to him. They had given him land so they would not quarrel with him over land ownership later. And the land was called Ad Hawya after his tribe's name. The Degera man who gave him the land was called Zena Gabriel. One son went to Agame.

One to Hazemo, three settled in Segeneiti, and two went further to their land of origin, in Serae. Gebre Hiwet divided his land equally to all his sons, like they were all from one mother. Two of his sons went to his ancestral country to see.

When the two sons arrived in their father's village, water was scarce with no rainfall for a long time. One of the sons struck his stick on the ground and water gushed out that their horses drunk enough. The villagers who were watching them curiously, happily drew plenty water to their homes. The village elders were astonished of this water. When told of these two strangers, they knew they must be Gebre Hiwet's sons.

They followed them to Segeneiti and begged them to return to Serae. The villagers asked for forgiveness and begged them to settle there, and they agreed to return after the seven years the community re-divided lands of Segeneiti.

Their former lands and wealth were returned to them. But fearing another ambush, those who returned did not settle in one village, but spread around. They are found in Ad Gawel, Adi Hayo, and Ad Hawya of Serae villages.

Now the clan have spread to other areas too, like Ad Zewabo, Wekerti and Enda Emmanuel villages. About 40 years ago, the Hawya, with the initiation of Aboi Berhane Gurumu (of Hawya tribe in Segeneiti, he told me of this meeting) met in Segeneiti and had a feast in Asmera. Hawyas from Wekerti and Inda Emmanuel were with them. But they did not continue after that. (Other tribes also ceased to meet when the Derg time came and it was too dangerous to move around). Enda Emmanuel village is mostly from the Hawya. In Segeneiti town there are several dozen farmers of Hawya now.

The Injen clan.

The Injen are from the sons of Akele Guzai. They were the branches of the father, Negus (chief) Asha Golgol, son of Negus Zerubabel, son of Amanadab ca 32 generations ago. It was Zena Gabriel, son of Negus Asha Golgol who was given this name of Injen. They live in Degera, near Segeneiti.

The legend goes on saying that a man, Kentiba Welde Gabriel, also called negus Zera Yakob, went to Abyssinia. He had a pretty and young wife, whom he left with his mother. His younger brother, Zena Gabriel, was also living with his mother.

One day, his mother noticed that the son, Zena Gabriel was more than flirting with his brother's wife. The mother talked of it to him, but he was too much taken by this young wife. Then one day, the mother decided to stop this scandal.

She covered the young wife with cloths and put a Mesfe' decorated head cover, on the girl's head. She called her son Zena Gabriel and asked him to promise - kidan, placing his hand on the head cover.

He did not know that the girl was under the cloth. His mother insisted he promise her without knowing what the reason was, and the son was obliged to do so. She made him repeat the promise words three times, "arketai ariktela" After he did so, she uncovered the wife, which shocked him. But he had already promised and should not break his promise.

But as time passed, he could not control his passion and broke his mother's promise. The sister-in-law became pregnant with Zena Gabriel. This was a mortal shock to his mother and all clan members. A brother can inherit his brother's wife only when the brother dies.

The disgusted mother cursed her son in front of his clan. She said "may your descendants be outcasts from us and never intermarry with our descendants May no relatives eat your funeral feast. She did so by dragging the promise cloth in the ground showing all of her curse.

So, he was forever banned from his people. His descendants are known as the Injen. No one from the Tsena Degle tribe ever intermarried or ate their meat until some decades ago. This was publicly done so with a big feast in the 1950s led by priests and all ate together, and let their children marry from both sides.

Earlier, reconciliation was tried and they ate meat together. One man claimed blood gushed out of his healthy teeth eating Injen meat and all others spotted out their meat. Nowadays, very few and only the elderly still do not eat Injen meat. And the curse is only in funeral time. The Injen have married from tribes outside Tsena Degle.

His brother the Kentiba Welde Gabriel either from the first wife or another one had at least one son, called Degiat Semere, and grandfather of Degiat Guma.

I have heard this story numerous times; some good tellers were Aboi Sahlezgi, Aboi Berhane Gurumu, Aboi Keshi Tesfa Mariam of Segeneiti and the best historian, Abba Fiseha Tsion Barnabas of Asmera, and Adei Kedusan Habtezgi in Asmera.

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