

QUESTION :

IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG IN ANSWERING TO TOTEMS NAMES (MITUPO)?

ANSWER

Yes, there everything wrong in answering to totems especially after examining the origins and purposes of totems mostly in Shona and other African cultures. The sad thing is that even in the Body of Christ, people call themselves by their totem names in their quest to ostensibly preserve their culture and maintain cultural identity.

We must know at the outset that God is willing to overlook the past sins of ignorance, including believing and answering to totem names, provided that we repent of them.

Ac 17:30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

(NKJV)

1Ti 1:13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

(NKJV)

Lu 23:34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots.

(NKJV)

This includes the sin of answering to totems and the like. When we get born again, we will know the truth and the truth will set us free.

Joh 8:32 "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

(NKJV)

The verse suggests that understanding the truth, particularly the truth about God and Jesus, leads to a freedom that is not just physical, but spiritual and liberating. Believers in Christ have freedom and Apostle Paul urges us not return to the bondage of past practices or beliefs.

Ga 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

(NKJV)

This highlights the liberating nature of faith in Christ, setting believers free from the constraints of the law and other systems of bondage including answering to totems. This is also a call to remain steadfast in this freedom and not to be swayed by external pressures or

internal doubts. Very often believers buckle under pressure when their parents give them totem praise names and do not stop them for fear of offending them. Luke 9:26 says:

Lu 9:26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.

(NKJV)

The verse above emphasizes that those who publicly deny or are ashamed to acknowledge Christ and His message will be similarly rejected by Him when He returns in His glory. It is a warning and a call to boldness in one's faith, urging believers to stand firm in their commitment to Christ, even in the face of opposition or ridicule.

Galatians 5:1 is also a warning against returning to the old ways of life, emphasizing the importance of remaining in the freedom that Christ has provided. Some believers don't mind being called by their totem names when they meet their relatives at funerals or weddings and this is wrong in the eyes of God.

What Are Totem Names?

Totem names, often referred to as *mitupo* in Shona culture or *izibongo* in Ndebele culture, are clan identifiers used among many African societies. These names are inherited from ancestors and serve as markers of lineage, family history, and identity. Each totem is often associated with an animal, object, or natural element, believed to symbolize the characteristics of the clan or its founding ancestor. For example, some common totems in Zimbabwe include:

- **Shumba (Lion)** – Symbolizing pride, bravery and leadership.
- **Mhofu (Eland)** – Representing humility and provision.
- **Dziva (Water)** – Associated with wisdom and fluidity.
- **Soko (Monkey or baboon)**-Associated with pride and playfulness

So, each time you answer to a totem name, you are indirectly saying that God made a mistake in creating you in His own image.

Ge 1:27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

(NKJV)

Totems play a significant role in traditional ceremonies, including marriage negotiations, greetings, and praise poetry (*madetembedzo*), where people are praised using their totems.

It is general practice that people sharing the same totem cannot be married because they are related in a way, they share the same ancestry. But the Bible is very clear that we all came from Adam and Eve.

Ac 17:26 "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

(NKJV)

They are also used spiritually in enforcing collective captivity and witchcraft. It is easier to capture a large group of people for these purposes compared to using individual names.

Why Are Totem Names Not Good for Believers in Jesus Christ?

From a biblical and Christian perspective, totem names can pose spiritual concerns for believers in Jesus Christ due to the following reasons:

1. Totems Have Ancestral and Spiritual Significance

Many African totems are linked to ancestral worship and traditional spiritual beliefs. The Bible warns against engaging in practices that honour ancestors or spirits apart from God.

- Deuteronomy 18:10-12 warns against divination, spiritism, and calling upon the dead.
- De 18:10 "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 "or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. 12 "For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you.
- (NKJV)
- Exodus 20:3-5 commands believers to worship only the Lord and avoid idolatry.
- Ex 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,
- (NKJV)

2. Identifying with Creation Rather Than the Creator

Totem names associate people with animals, rivers, and other elements of creation rather than identifying them as children of God. The Bible teaches that our identity is in Christ, not in traditions of men.

- *2 Corinthians 5:17* – “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”
- *Romans 8:14-15* – Believers are led by the Spirit of God and are called sons of God, not by earthly or ancestral names. *Ro 8:14* For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. *15* For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."
- (NKJV)

3. **Spiritual Bondage and Generational Curses**

Many traditional practices linked to totems involve rituals, praise poetry, and ancestral reverence, which can open doors to spiritual bondage. By taking on a totemic identity, some unknowingly continue in ancestral covenants rather than the freedom found in Christ.

- *Colossians 2:8* – “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”
- *Galatians 3:13* – “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”

4. **Totem Practices Are Contrary to Christian Unity**

In Christ, all believers are united as one body, regardless of their earthly lineage. Totem names reinforce divisions by emphasizing family or tribal distinctions rather than the unity of believers in Christ.

- *Galatians 3:28* – “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
- *Ephesians 4:4-6* – “There is one body and one Spirit... one God and Father of all.”

What Should a Believer Do?

A Christian who desires to fully follow Christ should:

1. Repent if you have ever believed and answered to totem names.
2. **Renounce Totemic Identity** – Acknowledge that your true identity is in Jesus Christ, not in your clan or ancestral lineage.
3. **Stop Using Totem Praise Names** – Avoid participating in praise poetry or rituals that exalt totems.

4. **Take a stance for Christ and refute any attempts to make any associations between you and your past totems.** Tell people categorically that you know longer answer to totems. Let everyone that you associate with know that!
5. **Declare Your Identity in Christ** – Confess scriptures about being a child of God and reject any ancestral ties that do not align with biblical teachings.

2Co 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

(NKJV)

Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

(NKJV)

Joh 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

(NKJV)

Ga 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

(NKJV)

Col 2:10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

(NKJV)

1Co 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

(NKJV)

Ga 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

(NKJV)

1Co 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

(NKJV)

6. **Pray for Deliverance** – Ask God to break any spiritual bondages linked to ancestral totems and to set you free from generational influences.

Ob 1:17 "But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, And there shall be holiness; The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.

(NKJV)

7.

Conclusion

While totems are a deep part of African heritage, for believers in Jesus Christ, they can be spiritually problematic as they promote ancestral ties, traditional beliefs, and identity in creation rather than in Christ. As Christians, we are called to leave behind worldly traditions that contradict the Word of God and embrace our new identity in Christ alone.