



SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL ROOTS: EXPLORING THE SEVEN-DAY RETREAT IN BETA ISRAEL AND SEMIEN SHEWA PEOPLES' TRADITIONS

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Abstract

This study offers a comprehensive exploration of the seven-day retreat, a central ritual practiced by the Beta Israel (historically known as Felasha) and contextualized within the Semien Shewa region of Ethiopia. The research investigates the practice's deep historical, spiritual, and cultural roots, arguing that it functions as a sophisticated rite of passage integrating ancient Israelite tradition with indigenous socio-cultural needs. The analysis establishes the retreat's foundation in biblical laws of ritual purity (Leviticus), which mandate separation for states like menstruation and mourning. However, moving beyond a purely scriptural interpretation, this paper examines the retreat's role as a dynamic mechanism for managing life transitions, reinforcing community bonds, and preserving a distinct Beta Israel identity amidst external pressures. Drawing on ethnographic work from scholars, the study highlights the practice's profound cultural resilience, noting its adaptation in modern contexts while retaining core spiritual meanings. Furthermore, the discussion reframes the retreat through a contemporary lens, revealing its often-overlooked advantages. The period of seclusion provided a form of mandated physiological rest and psychological reprieve, aligning with modern calls for menstrual leave policies and stress relief. Ultimately, this paper contends that the seven-day retreat is not a relic of legalistic isolation but a vital, living institution. The findings underscore the critical importance of documenting and understanding such indigenous knowledge systems, not only for cultural preservation but also for the insights they offer into holistic well-being, community cohesion, and the enduring negotiation between sacred tradition and a changing world.

Keywords: Beta Israel, Semien Shewa, seven-day retreat, ritual purity, rites of passage, cultural resilience, menstrual leave.

Introduction

Spirituality and culture are often fused to create unique traditions that are important indicators of community identity and tradition. The Ethiopian Felasha (Beta Israel) and Semen Shewa peoples, whose forebears are from ancient Israel, observe a seven-day retreat as one such tradition. This time of seclusion, which has its roots in spiritual and cultural contexts, gives people women in particular the opportunity to think, cleanse, and rejuvenate. The historical and religious underpinnings of this existence, and how these rituals aid in their cultural legacy, are necessary to comprehend this practice.

The Felasha people, sometimes Beta Israel, have a rich history entwined with Jewish customs and have long preserved their identity in Ethiopia (Quirin, 1992). Similar to this, the Semen Shewa group maintains customs that are indicative of their Israelite heritage, such as ritual purity and spiritual retreats. These communities have long followed traditions that connect with the antiquated rituals of their forefathers, modifying them to fit Ethiopia's cultural context without losing their original meaning.

The idea of withdrawing from the world for introspection is not exclusive to the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples; it is a scriptural practice. Periods of seclusion were frequently used in the Old Testament to seek heavenly instruction and for spiritual purification (Leviticus 15). For instance, women in ancient Israelite society were expected to keep their distance from the community during menstruation; this practice reflects broader concerns with ceremonial purity (Wright, 2011). These traditional rituals may be considered to continue by the women of the Felasha and Semen Shewa communities, who observe a seven-day retreat tailored to their particular spiritual and cultural requirements.

These customs help to preserve cultural continuity and reinforce the distinct identity of the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples in modern Ethiopia amid a world that is changing quickly. This study intends to shed light on the relevance of this practice within these communities, emphasizing its role in conserving a distinct history and promoting spiritual resilience, by examining the spiritual and cultural roots of the seven-day retreat.

Ethiopia's Felasha (Beta Israel) and Semen Shewa peoples are distinct groups with strong ties to ancient Israel in history and culture. Through centuries of ceremonial practice that combines religious traditions with Ethiopian culture; many communities have managed to maintain their unique identities. One of these customs is the seven-day retreat, especially for women, which is experiential as a time for introspection and spiritual cleansing. This custom originated with ancient Israelites, who frequently required periods of seclusion for ceremonial purity (Quirin, 1992).

These retreats serve as a cultural distinguishing factor between the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples and other Ethiopian communities, thus reflecting religious observance. The seven-day seclusion practice promotes a sense of community continuity while enabling people women in particular to reestablish a connection with their spiritual lineage. To ensure that these customs are preserved for upcoming generations, there is an increasing need to record and comprehend these practices as these communities deal with modernization and outside pressures.

RATIONALE

This study is motivated by the critical need to preserve and intellectually validate the sophisticated cultural knowledge systems of the Beta Israel community, which risk erosion following their displacement from Ethiopia. The rationale for focusing specifically on the seven-day retreat ritual is threefold. Firstly, it addresses a significant gap in anthropological and religious scholarship, which has often documented this practice superficially, overlooking its deep socio-cultural functions in favor of a purely biblical comparison.

Secondly, and more profoundly, this research seeks to reinterpret a practice historically viewed through a colonial or external lens as restrictive. By examining the retreat through an emic perspective, we can uncover its intrinsic logic and benefits. A key advantage to be explored is the state-mandated relief and seclusion it provided for women during their menstrual cycle. From a contemporary standpoint, this practice can be understood as a form of culturally sanctioned stress relief and physiological rest. By removing women from demanding physical labor and social obligations, the retreat offered a periodic health respite, allowing for physical recovery and emotional reprieve in a dedicated, supportive space. This aligns with modern understandings of women's health, where reducing stress and physical strain during menstruation is recognized as beneficial.

Finally, analyzing this ritual provides a crucial lens for understanding how the Beta Israel harmonized divine law with human well-being. Therefore, this study is not merely an historical account but a timely effort to reframe an indigenous practice, highlighting its potential health advantages and its role in fostering a resilient community identity.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rich tapestry of Beta Israel (Jewish) history and tradition, preserved for centuries in the highlands of Ethiopia, represents a unique branch of Judaism that developed in relative isolation from the major centers of Rabbinic Jewry. While increased awareness and the community's migration to Israel since the 1980s have brought broader recognition, a significant scholarly gap persists. This gap concerns the in-depth analysis of specific Beta Israel ritual practices that function at the intersection of biblical law and indigenous African cultural systems. The seven-day retreat, a rite of separation and purification observed for events like menstruation, childbirth, and mourning, stands as a prime example of such an under-examined practice.

The problem is twofold. First, while early ethnographic work documented the existence of these rituals, often interpreting them through a purely biblical lens (Leslau, 1951), there has been insufficient scholarly effort to understand their deeper, integrated socio-cultural functions within the Ethiopian context. The existing literature often treats these practices as isolated curiosities or mere strict adherence to Levitical code (Leviticus 12, 15), failing to explore how they operated as a dynamic cultural mechanism for managing life crises, reinforcing social structure, and mediating spiritual states.

Second, there is a lack of focused scholarly attention on how this specific seven-day structure served as a foundational framework for spiritual transition. The retreat was not merely a period of waiting but a structured liminal phase, what anthropologist Victor Turner would classify as a "rite of passage," designed to navigate individuals and the community through periods of perceived ritual vulnerability (Turner, 1969). The physical separation in a *yara gogo* (hut of mourning) was a powerful spatial symbol of this transitional status, a concept that requires deeper analysis beyond its functional description.

Furthermore, the influence of the broader cultural environment of the Semien Shewa region remains an open question. To what extent does this Beta Israel ritual reflect a broader regional pattern of using seclusion for spiritual purposes, and where does it diverge to reflect a distinctly Beta Israel theological worldview? Shelemay (1989) has argued for the need to understand Beta Israel music and ritual within its Ethiopian context, yet this call has not been fully heeded for specific rites like the seven-day retreat.

Therefore, this paper addresses the problem of this ritual's academic neglect. It moves beyond mere description to ask critical questions: How did the seven-day retreat simultaneously embody Biblical purity laws and serve core African cultural needs? What was its role in structuring gender relations and community cohesion? By synthesizing historical ethnography with contemporary anthropological theory, this research seeks to illuminate the profound spiritual and cultural roots of this practice, positioning it not as a relic of legalistic isolation but as a vital, living institution that was central to the Beta Israel's unique religious and cultural identity.

The Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples have a rich cultural history, but the unique rituals that characterize their spiritual lives especially the women's seven-day retreat have received little scholarly attention. Due to this research gap, the importance of this practice is not well understood in Ethiopian society and the communities themselves. There is an urgent need to investigate, record, and examine underlying spiritual and cultural motivations and practices because modernization and cultural assimilation endanger these traditions. The absence of thorough research on this subject makes it more difficult to preserve these customs, which are essential to the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples' ability to keep their cultural identities.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To explore the spiritual and cultural roots of the seven-day retreat practice among the Felasha and Semen Shewa communities.
- To document the specific rituals and customs associated with this practice.
- To investigate how crucial the seven-day retreat is to maintaining these communities' spiritual and cultural identities
- To assess the challenges and threats of this practice in the face of modernization and cultural change.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is significant for some reasons. First, it contributes to the corpus of information previously accessible on the cultural practices of the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples by offering a comprehensive analysis of a specific rite that has gotten little attention. The study bargains important insights into how these communities preserve their spiritual and cultural history by recording the seven-day retreat. This study emphasizes the value of comprehending and defending traditional behaviors in the face of outside influences and has practical implications for cultural preservation initiatives. Ultimately, the research highlights the wider significance of cultural continuity in heterogeneous societies, providing a framework for other groups to adopt and maintain their customs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

MATERIALS

This review paper is based on an extensive examination of previous research on the Felasha (Beta Israel) and Semen Shewa peoples, including historical writings, religious texts, and cultural

studies. It focuses in particular on their retreat practices, both spiritual and social. The principal sources consulted for this review consist of:

Historical books and Religious Scriptures: The Torah and other religious writings, and biblical books, are important sources that shed light on ritual purity and seclusion practices. The seven-day retreat's historical and spiritual underpinnings by these sources.

Scholarly papers and Books: To comprehend the socio-cultural backdrop of the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples and their distinctive traditions, peer-reviewed papers and books on Ethiopian Jewish history, cultural anthropology, and religious studies are examined.

Studies on the Felasha and Semen Shewa communities have yielded first-hand narratives of rituals, customs, and the significance of spiritual retreats in these societies. This research is essential to comprehending lived experiences and cultural implications.

Historical and Cultural Records: Documents about the customs of the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples are examined from historical archives, museums, and cultural preservation organizations. The history and present state of the seven-day retreat practice are traced to these materials.

Secondary Literature: Studies on analogous practices in various communities and cultures are included here to offer a comparative viewpoint that puts the seven-day retreat in a more global perspective.

METHODS

The review employs a methodical technique to examine and combine the information gathered:

Search and Selection of Literature:

A thorough search of academic databases (such as JSTOR and Google Scholar) and library catalogs was done to locate relevant content. Terms such as "Felasha," "Beta Israel," "seven-day retreat," "ritual purity," "Semen Shewa," and "Ethiopian Jewish traditions" were used.

Works that particularly explore the cultural and spiritual practices of the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples, as well as comparative studies that provide insights into comparable behaviors in other contexts, were included in the inclusion criteria.

Sources that did not undergo peer review had no relevance to the topic, or provided speculative interpretations without academic support were disqualified according to certain standards.

Data Extraction and Thematic Analysis:

Relevant data was taken from the chosen sources, with particular attention to subjects like the seven-day retreat's historical beginnings, religious importance, cultural customs, and present state. The recurrent themes, differences, and crucial details about the practice across several sources were aimed at the thematic analysis.

Comparative Analysis:

To emphasize the differences and similarities between the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples' seven-day retreat practice and comparable rites in other cultures, comparisons were made. This comparative study aids in placing the practice in a larger perspective related to cultural identity and ritual seclusion.

Synthesis of Findings:

The results of the theme and comparison studies were combined to create a comprehensive understanding of the seven-day retreat practice. The synthesis highlights the cultural, spiritual, and socio-historical dimensions, offering insights into its significance for the Felasha and Semen Shewa tribes.

Assessment of Difficulties and Prospects for the Future:

The assessment of these communities' struggles to maintain the seven-day retreat practice, especially in light of industrialization and cultural integration.

The report ends with suggestions for more investigation and possible approaches to cultural preservation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Academic publications and articles are a great place to learn about the religious and cultural customs of the Felasha (Beta Israel) and Semen Shewa peoples. The literature that is currently available examines several facets of these communities' customs, most notably their distinctive seven-day retreat which functions as a time for ritual purification and spiritual meditation.

Historical and religious context

The historical and religious background that shapes the seven-day retreat is one of the main themes in the books. Despite their geographical and cultural isolation in Ethiopia, the Beta Israel community has maintained many ancient Israelite customs, according to Quirin (1992). The observing periods of ceremonial purity, which dates back to biblical rules in Leviticus where isolation was mandated for those deemed ritually impure, demonstrates this continuity of tradition (Wright, 2011). According to Quirin's research, the Felasha community upholds these customs not only as a way of preserving their culture but also as a way of preserving their unique spiritual identity in a largely Christian country.

The seven-day retreat stands as a prime example of this continuity. Its core principle is deeply rooted in the biblical laws of ritual purity (*tahara*) as outlined in the book of Leviticus. These texts mandate periods of separation for individuals in specific states of ritual impurity, such as after childbirth (Leviticus 12) or certain bodily fluxes (Leviticus 15). As Wright (2011) elaborates, such states were not seen as sinful but as conditions that temporarily separated an individual from the sacred sphere of the community. The Beta Israel interpretation and application of these laws, however, were notably stringent, reflecting a priestly tradition that placed a premium on holiness (*kedus*) and communal purity.

Consequently, as Quirin's research suggests, the Beta Israel upheld these customs for reasons that transcended mere legalistic observance. The seven-day retreat functioned as a powerful marker of their distinct spiritual identity. In a land where they were a religious minority, the rigorous maintenance of purity laws, including physical separation in designated huts (*yara gogo*), visibly and ritually demarcated them from their neighbors. This practice was a daily-lived assertion of their claim to be a holy people, a living testament to their ancient heritage. Therefore, the retreat was far more than a ritual; it was an act of cultural resilience, a tangible link to a sacred past, and a continuous reaffirmation of their unique covenant in a foreign land.

Cultural significance

The cultural importance of the seven-day retreat among the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples has been further elucidated by ethnographic investigations. According to Kessler (1985), these customs are ingrained in these communities' social structure and operate as rites of passage that strengthen ties to the community and cultural identity. The retreat is a period for introspection, both alone and with others, and it is important for women. According to Kessler, these customs have assisted the Felasha community in preserving a strong sense of identity in the face of assimilation pressures and outside influences. Salamon (1999) emphasizes how these rituals are modified to fit modern environments while maintaining their essential spiritual and cultural meanings, which reflects this cultural resilience.

Ethnographic research clarifies the profound cultural significance of the seven-day retreat among the Beta Israel and Semien Shewa peoples. Kessler (1985) established that these customs are deeply embedded in the social fabric, functioning as critical rites of passage that fortify community bonds and cultural identity. For women, the retreat provides a structured period for seclusion, serving as a time for both solitary introspection and collective solidarity. Kessler argued that such practices have been instrumental in helping the Beta Israel maintain a distinct identity despite external pressures and threats of assimilation. This cultural resilience is further evidenced by the community's ability to adapt, as Salamon (1999) observed, with these rituals being reinterpreted in modern contexts while preserving their core spiritual and cultural meanings.

This ethnographic evidence positions the seven-day retreat not merely as a custom, but as a dynamic socio-religious institution. Its function as a rite of passage, as described by Kessler (1985), aligns with Turner's (1969) concept of liminality, where individuals enter a transitional state outside normal social structures to be reintegrated with a renewed status. The retreat, therefore, creates a sacred liminal space that manages both biological and social transitions, transforming potential personal crises into events that reinforce communal order. Furthermore, Salamon's (1999) observations on adaptation demonstrate the practice's agency and resilience. It is not a static relic but a living tradition whose core purpose, maintaining sacred boundaries and identity, allows it to be strategically reconfigured. This ensures its survival not just as a memory, but as a continuously relevant pillar of cultural identity, even as the community navigates new geographical and social landscapes like migration to Israel.

References

Comparative Analysis

Comparative research provides important context for understanding what makes the seven-day retreat practice special. Shelemay (1989) investigates how other Jewish communities, especially those with roots in ancient Israel, have comparable ritual isolation practices. Shelemay draws attention to the fact that the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples' interpretation of the seven-day retreat is exclusively Ethiopian, having been influenced by the fusion of Ethiopian customs and Jewish religious law. Shelemay claims traditions highlight the Felasha community's flexibility and tenacity in maintaining their identity in shifting historical conditions.

Challenges and Future Directions

The literature also discusses the difficulties the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples have in maintaining their traditional ways of life. Kaplan (1992) asserts that the survival of customs such as the seven-day retreat is endangered by the growing impact of modernity and the demands of cultural absorption. According to Kaplan's research, there's a chance that these traditions will disappear from future generations if there aren't coordinated efforts to preserve and record them. A

similar concern is expressed by Marcus (1995), who calls for a greater scholarly emphasis on maintaining Beta Israel traditions as part of a broader effort to encourage cultural diversity in Ethiopia.

In conclusion, the academic literature provides a comprehensive understanding of the seven-day retreat of the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples. These studies highlight the practice's profound theological and historical roots, its importance in preserving cultural identity, and the difficulties it faces in a world that is changing quickly. The literature provides a nuanced perspective on this significant heritage by referencing different sources, including historical texts and anthropological studies, and emphasizes the necessity for ongoing research and preservation efforts.

EXTRACTION AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The literature review on the seven-day retreat that the Felasha (Beta Israel) and Semen Shewa peoples undertook has shown numerous important themes. The practice's cultural relevance, historical roots, and current difficulties are all revealed through thematic analysis. Results from a range of academic sources lend credence to these themes.

Historical origins and religious significance

The Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples have a profound religious and historical tradition including a seven-day retreat. According to Quirin (1992), the practice is reminiscent of ancient Israelite ceremonial purity and seclusion norms described in biblical writings like Leviticus 15. These writings prescribed periods of seclusion for those deemed ritually impure; the Felasha society has maintained and modified this tradition. This perspective is further supported by Wright's (2011) comprehensive analysis of the biblical laws regarding ritual impurity and their influence on subsequent Jewish traditions.

Cultural continuity and identity

For the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples, the seven-day retreat practice is an essential symbol of cultural continuity and identity. Kessler (1985) highlights that the retreat is a cultural ritual that strengthens ties to the community and the individual and a spiritual practice. Salamon's (1999) research echoes this subject by examining how the practice preserves a unique cultural identity in the face of modernization and assimilation pressures.

Resilience and adaptation

The resilience of the Felasha and Semen Shewa people is demonstrated by their capacity to adapt the seven-day retreat practice to contemporary settings. While similar activities are observed in other Jewish communities, Shelemay (1989) points out that the particulars of the retreat's shape and significance in these Ethiopian communities represent a distinctive fusion of Ethiopian customs and Jewish religious law. This flexibility demonstrates the tribes' capacity to maintain their cultural legacy while adjusting to shifting sociocultural environments.

Challenges and threats

Many obstacles stand in the way of the seven-day retreat's preservation, chief among them being modernization and cultural integration. Kaplan (1992) discusses how these external pressures pose a threat to the survival of conventional habits. Marcus (1995) emphasizes the necessity of recording and assistance to guarantee the perpetuation of these cultural rites for upcoming generations. These worries highlight how crucial it is for academic institutions and local communities to work together to support the continuation of these customs.

Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis of the literature reveals a comprehensive understanding of the significance and challenges of the seven-day retreat. It was discovered that the following motifs were present:

Historical Continuity: The retreat's historical and theological roots are well-documented, demonstrating a strong link between traditional Felasha and Semen Shewa ceremonies and ancient Israelite practices (Quirin, 1992; Wright, 2011).

Cultural Identity: The practice is essential to maintaining shared identity and community. It provides a way to preserve a distinct cultural legacy in the face of outside influences (Kessler, 1985; Salamon, 1999).

Preservation and Adaptation: Cultural resilience is demonstrated by the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples' ability to modify the retreat practice to fit contemporary circumstances while maintaining its essential meaning (Shelemay, 1989). **Modernity's Challenges:** The threats to traditional traditions posed by modernity and cultural assimilation underscore the necessity of proactive preservation measures (Kaplan, 1992; Marcus, 1995).

Regarding the given literature, this theme analysis offers a detailed perspective of the seven-day retreat practice, highlighting its historical origins, cultural significance, and preservation challenges.

ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Through participant narratives and firsthand observation, ethnographic analysis offers a comprehensive understanding of cultural practices. The seven-day retreat is an essential part of the social and spiritual identity of the Felasha (Beta Israel) and Semen Shewa peoples, not just a custom. This talk examines the ethnographic research on this practice, highlighting its significance for preserving cultural integrity, personal spiritual development, and community harmony.

Community Cohesion and Identity

The significance of the seven-day retreat in promoting communal harmony among the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples has been demonstrated by ethnographic research. Kessler (1985) asserts that this period of isolation is a rite of passage that fortifies bonds with the community and the group's identity. Women participate in deeply ingrained cultural rituals throughout the retreat, including prayer, meditation, and group meals. Through sharing experiences that validate their common heritage, participants in these events enhance their sense of community and belonging.

Salamon (1999) documents how the retreat offers a structured opportunity for spiritual refreshment and communal participation and support to this perspective. Women take advantage of the retreat to renew cultural connections, engage in traditions, and prepare for their responsibilities within the community. This method of cultural reinforcement helps to maintain traditional beliefs and practices in the face of external challenges.

Individual Spiritual Growth

Additionally, the retreat is essential to each person's spiritual growth. Shelemay (1989) asserts that the time spent alone enables people to engage in introspection and spiritual renewal. This practice stems from the conviction that distancing oneself from everyday existence yields greater

insight and a closer relationship with the divine. According to the ethnographic testimonies, participants frequently leave the retreat with a stronger knowledge of their individual and group duties and a revitalized spiritual commitment.

Rituals that signal the conclusion of the isolation period are frequently associated with the personal transformation that occurs during the retreat. These customs represent a person's emotional and spiritual rejuvenation and are intended to help them reintegrate into the community. This retreat component is essential for sustaining spiritual development and people keep making meaningful contributions to the community.

Cultural Preservation

Ethnographic research demonstrates the importance of the seven-day retreat for cultural heritage preservation. According to Kaplan (1992), the retreat is a physical manifestation of the theological and historical foundations of the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples. These communities that modernization and other influences do not erase their cultural heritage by upholding this practice.

Incorporating traditional customs into contemporary environments is another way to maintain the seven-day retreat. Some groups have incorporated modern communication techniques into their retreats so that participants can continue to practice ancient rites while staying in touch with the outside world. This adaptability demonstrates the community's commitment to preserving its traditional heritage while tackling the challenges of modern life (Marcus, 1995).

Challenges and Adaptations

The ethnographic investigation also identifies practice-related difficulties. The seven-day retreat is one of the traditional customs that could be eroded by increased modernization and cultural integration. According to Kessler (1985), there may be a decrease in the continuity of practices as newer generations become less likely to engage in customary rituals. Some communities are tackling these problems by implementing cultural preservation programs and teaching initiatives that guarantee the tradition is upheld (Salamon, 1999).

These modifications demonstrate the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples' tenacity in preserving their traditional ways of life. By combining traditional customs with contemporary needs and preserving their legacy while adjusting to a changing world.

The seven-day retreat among the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples is revealed to play a crucial role in maintaining cultural integrity, fostering personal spiritual development, and maintaining community cohesion through ethnographic investigation. The practice shows how traditions are adapted to meet contemporary concerns while preserving cultural heritage and the index of the community's identity and resilience.

Synthesis of Findings

The Felasha (Beta Israel) and Semen Shewa peoples undertake a seven-day retreat. The results from the anthropological and academic literature on this practice offer various comprehensive insights into the activity's historical roots, cultural importance, and current issues. This synthesis uses a variety of sources to give a coherent picture of how this ritual works in different societies.

Historical and religious foundations

Ancient Israelite traditions of the seven-day retreat practiced by the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples. According to Quirin (1992) and Wright (2011), the ritual cleanliness laws of the Bible,

particularly those found in Leviticus, have influenced the practices of these Ethiopian Jewish communities. These texts highlight the retreat practice's historical continuity and similarities to ancient Israelite purification and solitary practices. In contemporary Ethiopia, this link highlights the upholding of ancient religious principles.

Cultural and social significance

A thorough understanding of the retreat's cultural and social significance can be obtained through ethnographic research. Research by Salamon (1999) and Kessler (1985) demonstrates how the practice enhances personal identification and communal bonds. The retreat is a rite of passage, symbolizing momentous shifts in people's lives and encouraging community and belonging. These findings demonstrate that the retreat is an important social ritual that supports the preservation of the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples' cultural fabric in addition to being a religious observance.

Resilience and adaptation

These groups' resiliency is demonstrated by their capacity to modify the retreat practice for contemporary settings. Shelemay (1989) points out that although other Jewish communities follow comparable customs, the retreat's particular adaption in Ethiopia represents a special synthesis of regional cultural factors and Jewish religious law. Modern technologies and techniques used in the traditional retreat show how these groups adapt and maintain the practice, making it sustainable and relevant in today's environment.

Kaplan (1992) and Marcus (1995) delve deeper into the difficulties brought forth by modernity and cultural absorption. They show that although customs are under attack from outside forces, it is vital for the communities to adjust and record these customs to ensure their continued existence. This synthesis emphasizes the need for cultural support and education to maintain these traditions in changing sociocultural contexts.

Challenges and Preservation Efforts

The summary of results emphasizes the difficulties the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples have in maintaining the seven-day seclusion. Younger generations' declining engagement is a major concern, according to Kessler (1985), however, Salamon (1999) emphasizes the importance of educational initiatives in addressing this problem. Documentation and promotion initiatives are essential to ensuring the relevance of traditional customs.

Overall, historical, cultural, and adaptive perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of the significance and goal of the seven-day retreat. The findings demonstrate the practice's lengthy history, its value in promoting personal spirituality and group cohesion, and the ongoing efforts to preserve and modify this significant cultural legacy.

RELATING THE SEVEN-DAY RETREAT PRACTICE TO ASTRONOMY AND ASTROLOGY

The seven-day retreat practiced by the Felasha (Beta Israel) and Semen Shewa peoples has an intriguing relationship to astrological and astronomical concepts. This retreat comprises a period of isolation for spiritual and cultural objectives. The retreat's connections to astrological and astronomical cycles can shed light on its significance and wider consequences, even though it is primarily a cultural and religious activity.

Astronomical Cycles and Ritual Timing

Many cultures have traditionally combined astronomy with ritual practices, frequently scheduling religious and cultural rites according to celestial cycles. The lunar cycle is common in many ancient societies and can be linked to the seven-day retreat followed by the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples. For instance, some phases affect diverse ritual activities within the lunar month and have an average length of 29.5 days (Davis, 2002).

The technique may represent knowledge of time cycles like those employed in antiquated astronomical traditions within the framework of the seven-day retreat. Similarly, the religious observances were timed by the phases of the moon, the seven-day period may represent a whole cycle of spiritual rebirth and cleansing. This link highlights how prehistoric societies such as the Felasha and Semen Shewa incorporated their knowledge of natural cycles into their cultural and spiritual rituals (Needham, 1959).

Astrological Symbolism and Personal Reflection

Astrology has long been used to analyze and make sense of individual and societal experiences of celestial bodies and their impact on human affairs. From an astrological perspective, the seven-day retreat might be interpreted as a time of deep introspection and metamorphosis, similar to the astrological idea of "lunar returns" or other major astronomical occurrences that are thought to impact individual and planetary fates (Tarnas, 2006).

Significant astrological events, like the repositioning of some celestial bodies, are believed to indicate stages of a person's development and evolution. The seven-day retreat, which allows participants to reflect on their individual and group responsibilities in the context of a larger cosmic order and receive spiritual rejuvenation, may achieve a similar goal. The idea that certain seasons are better for spiritual awakening and personal transformation is emphasized by this astrological analogy (Campion, 2008).

Cultural Integration of Astronomical and Astrological Beliefs

The Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples are not the only ones whose cultural rituals incorporate astrological and celestial beliefs. Numerous cultures have used celestial observations to inform their religious and cultural rituals. For example, the movements of heavenly bodies provided the basis for the calendrical systems and spiritual activities of the ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures (Grimal, 1981; Kramer, 1963).

The seven-day retreat may be an example of the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples' larger cultural trend of coordinating spiritual activities with astronomical and natural cycles. This alignment reinforces the assumption that human experiences are tied to celestial phenomena by bringing perceived cycles of the cosmos into harmony with individual and collective activity (Van der Leeuw, 1938).

A deeper comprehension of the seven-day retreat practice's cultural and spiritual significance can be gained by connecting it to astrology and astronomy. The possible correlation between the practice and astrological and lunar symbolism highlights how natural and celestial phenomena impact spiritual and cultural traditions. This discussion demonstrates how ancient behaviors continue to represent humanity's deep connection to the universe and highlights the larger context in which such rituals are located.

INTEGRATING THE SEVEN-DAY RETREAT PRACTICE

Combining conventional Jewish rites with the seven-day retreat that the Felasha (Beta Israel) and Semen Shewa peoples follow offers an intriguing look at how religious and cultural rituals

change and adapt within various Jewish groups. This conversation examines the similarities and differences between the seven-day retreat and popular Jewish customs, emphasizing commonalities and distinctive modifications.

Biblical Foundations and Ritual Purity

Jewish customs and the seven-day retreat of the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples are rooted in biblical precepts about ceremonial purity. The retreat coincides with ancient Israelite traditions found in Leviticus, which require people deemed ritually impure to spend time apart (Wright, 2011). Similarly, ceremonial seclusion and purification are associated with traditional Jewish traditions, such as the Niddah period (the monthly separation period) (Shulchan Aruch, 1960).

There is a common thread in the idea of separation for cleansing, showing how diverse Jewish traditions respect similar principles of ritual cleanliness despite differences in their rituals.

Rites of Passage and Spiritual Renewal

Similar to other Jewish rites of passage, the seven-day retreat entails moments of intensive spiritual introspection and renewal. For example, sitting Shiva is a seven-day period of grieving that follows the death of a close relative. It entails solitude brooding with the departed and working through grief (Cohen, 2006). Shiva is a mourning ceremony, but the retreat is also a time for spiritual rebirth and cultural reaffirmation; both emphasize personal and societal renewal through different religious perspectives.

Lunar and Astronomical Influences

There is a link between lunar and astronomical cycles in different Jewish rites and the seven-day retreat. The seven days of the retreat might represent a similar awareness of natural cycles to the lunar-month-based Jewish calendar. The Jewish calendar has several lunar-phase-related observances, including the new moon celebration Rosh Chodesh and other holidays that coincide with lunar cycles (Tishby, 2007).

This alignment with lunar cycles emphasizes how, although with distinct emphasis and methods, both traditions include cosmic rhythms in their ritual observances.

Adaptation and Modern Contexts

The Felasha and Semen Shewa people's seven-day retreat is remarkably flexible, just like traditional Jewish customs have changed throughout time. For example, Shabbat has been modified by contemporary Jewish communities to accommodate modern lifestyles while upholding the fundamental values of rest and introspection (Peskowitz, 2005).

Similarly, the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples have shown cultural adaptability and resilience by introducing contemporary aspects into their retreat rituals. This flexibility shows a larger trend in Jewish traditions, whereby traditional customs are reinterpreted to make them applicable in evolving circumstances.

There are similarities and variations between traditional Jewish traditions and the seven-day retreat practice of the Felasha and Semen Shewa peoples. The retreat's unique adaptations reflect the Jewish practices change throughout different communities. Its parallels with biblical regulations on ritual purity, rites of passage, and lunar influences show shared elements in Jewish traditions. This comparative viewpoint provides insights into the dynamic character of Jewish practices and deepens our understanding of how cultural and religious rituals are maintained and modified.

SCIENTIFIC ADVANTAGES OF THE SEVEN-DAY RETREAT PRACTICE FOR WOMEN

There are several proven benefits linked to health and well-being that the seven-day retreat practice, particularly when followed by women, can provide. Although it has historically been seen via a religious and cultural lens, contemporary health viewpoints can also recognize its potential advantages. Here is a debate backed by research on the potential benefits of such behaviors for women's health.

Stress Reduction and Mental Health

One of the retreat practice's major psychological benefits is the period of separation from everyday commitments and tensions. Studies reveal that times of introspection and relaxation, like those spent on retreats or engaging in mindfulness exercises, are linked to lower stress and anxiety (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Spending time alone reflecting on oneself can help reduce mental exhaustion and elevate mood (Goyal et al., 2014).

Enhanced Mental Clarity

Improvements in emotional control and mental clarity can sometimes result from isolation periods. Research suggests that by offering a disciplined setting for introspection and emotional processing, these activities may aid in lessening the symptoms of anxiety and depression (Rosenbaum et al., 2014). Women in these retreats may benefit from increased resilience and mental clarity, which improves general well-being.

Physical Health Benefits

A getaway includes a reprieve from everyday stresses that can result in better-quality sleep. Sleep patterns are known to be adversely affected by stress and anxiety (Lund et al., 2010). The retreat practice may help restore regular sleep cycles and enhance the general quality of sleep by lowering these stressors. Increased immunity and improved cognitive function are only two health advantages of getting enough sleep (Walker, 2017).

Detoxification and physical healing can be aided by physical relaxation and seclusion from environmental contaminants. Although the retreat might not specifically focus on detoxification, the chance for physical rest and the decreased exposure to everyday ecological stressors might aid in the body's natural healing processes (Miller et al., 2010). For women, who frequently balance several responsibilities, this kind of retreat might be helpful for physical healing.

Hormonal and Reproductive Health

Hormonal equilibrium can benefit from rest and stress-reduction periods. Hormones linked to menstrual cycles and general reproductive health is known to be upset by prolonged stress (Gordon et al., 2013). The retreat may aid in more stable hormone levels and better menstrual health by offering a time of less stress and mental relaxation.

Enhanced Emotional Regulation

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and other menstruation-related problems can be effectively managed by retreat practitioners, who can also assist with emotional management. Research indicates that practicing mindfulness and reducing stress may help with PMS symptoms (Kreitzer & Koithan, 2014). Improved control over emotions via the retreat could aid in these problems.

Social and Relational Benefits

Retreat participation can improve interpersonal relationships. It is commonly recognized that social support enhances mental health and general well-being (Cohen, 2004). The retreat's emphasis on spiritual and communal rituals can create stronger bonds and networks of social support, which is good for mental and emotional well-being.

Empowerment and Personal Growth

Additionally, the retreat can be a time for personal development and empowerment. Women may experience increased self-esteem and personal empowerment through structured environments for introspection and spiritual growth. These outcomes are critical for general well-being (Snyder et al., 2006).

For women, the seven-day retreat practice has been shown to reduce stress, balance hormones, improve emotional regulation, and increase sleep quality. These benefits are supported by psychological, physical, and health-related research, which reveals how these ancient practices can improve people's health and well-being today.

The traditional seven-day retreat, when viewed through a contemporary lens, reveals significant advantages that align with modern understandings of workplace well-being and women's health. Globally, there is a growing recognition of the need for menstrual leave policies, with countries like Japan, South Korea, and Zambia legally mandating one to five days of leave. These policies acknowledge that for many individuals, menstruation involves physical discomfort and cognitive changes that can impact productivity (Gharib, 2023). Granting leave allows for physiological rest, helping individuals return to a stable, more productive state. The Beta Israel practice, though spiritually motivated, functionally provided this exact form of mandated rest, offering a cyclical pause from physical labor. Furthermore, the retreat's structured seclusion can be reinterpreted as a powerful, culturally-sanctioned mechanism for stress relief and mental respite. In today's fast-paced world, the value of such periodic, intentional disconnection is increasingly supported by research on preventing burnout and promoting mental health (Hülshager et al., 2014). The practice created a dedicated temporal space free from social and domestic obligations, facilitating a form of digital detox and contemplative rest long before these concepts became modern wellness trends. Thus, this ancient tradition offers a profound, pre-existing model for managing cyclical health and well-being, demonstrating how indigenous knowledge systems can provide innovative frameworks for addressing contemporary challenges related to health, gender equity, and sustainable work-life balance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The seven-day retreat that the Felasha (Beta Israel) and Semen Shewa peoples participate in is a powerful example of how religious and cultural traditions promote personal spiritual growth, cultural preservation, and collective identity. This custom has its roots in ancient Israelite customs and demonstrates how ceremonial purity laws have persisted and been modified for modern situations.

The retreat's adherence to biblical ritual purity practices emphasizes how persistent these customs are. Through observing a time of seclusion and introspection, the peoples of Felasha and Semen Shewa preserve an essential connection to their religious and historical heritage. This practice shows both a spiritual rejuvenation tool and a symbol of cultural identity, demonstrating the resilience of ancient rituals in a modern context.

The adaptability of the retreat practice, particularly the way it integrates modern elements, reflects a broader tendency in Jewish traditions. Similar to how modern Jewish customs have changed to accommodate modern lives, the seven-day retreat has also developed to meet new needs while holding fast to its fundamental ideas. This flexibility guarantees the practice's ongoing significance and emphasizes how fluid cultural rituals are.

Modernization and cultural assimilation provide obstacles to the practice, endangering its viability. Support, education, and documentation are necessary for the practice to continue. These challenges highlight the need to take proactive measures to ensure the traditions are maintained and appropriately adjusted for future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sustaining the seven-day retreat practice requires ongoing investigation and recording. Extensive research incorporating historical analysis, ethnographic observations, and modern modifications might offer insightful information and encouragement to keep the practice going. Collaborating with community members can help researchers achieve appropriate portrayal and understanding.

The Felasha and Semen Shewa communities can guarantee that the next generation comprehends and values the retreat practice through educational initiatives. These programs must highlight the retreat's historical, cultural, and spiritual components to assist the youth in creating a sense of continuity and identity.

Its function in cultural preservation can be reinforced by promoting community involvement and engagement in the retreat practice.

Gaining a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the seven-day retreat can be achieved by investigating links between it and other Jewish rituals.

The practice's continued relevance can be ensured by promoting its adaptation to modern environments.

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