

DYNAMICS OF THE LEVITE FAMILY STRUCTURE



Family

The Levi community has a few similarities to our biblical heritage. Although we have lost our ways for centuries, something has stayed embedded. How we prepare the food we eat, the men's roles in the family, women being submissive to their husbands in everything, how we should care for our children, women keeping themselves solely for their husbands, children respectful to elders, the people are hardworking, and everybody knows their place. These are some of the traditions that were kept alive and passed down from generation to generation, unknowingly continuing the legacy.

How is the marriage process initiated?

The process usually began in a social group from a young age. They rarely started dating until approaching 20 years of age. Once completing school, they focus on settling down and forming a family. In the Levi tradition, it is the men who initiate the dating process. First, he has to go and inquire about the woman with his parents to her parents. Usually, Levite women don't approach men in the affairs of courtship. If a Levite woman approaches a man she perceived as promiscuous; therefore, Levite women are known to be resilient and conservative. Once married, the couples usually live close to their families. That usually happens in the countryside, where the traditional "lakou" form of housing begins (a common courtyard surrounded by a family compound of tiny houses). After the wedding night in my countryside, the groom's parents will inquire if the bride is a virgin. If they found that she isn't, they will send a half-drunken bottle of drink and a piece of bread with a note inside to the bride's parents, indicating that she isn't a virgin and shame her family. In urban areas, the father is head of the household and responsible for earning an income if present in the home. Mothers are responsible for cooking, cleaning, and teaching their children religion and morality.



Sister Channah from the House of Simon Levi

"se de bon ki fe bonbon"

Why do you believe there is such a focus on family in the Levite community?

A Levi proverb says, "se de bon ki fe bonbon" the literal translation of this proverb is: "It is two 'bon' that makes bonbon." In Creole, 'bon' means good/right. When you put these words together, you have "bonbon" which means cookies/sweets. We all like bonbon! Levi believes in every aspect of life, and there must be collaborations. The two should be honest and faithful to each other. Respect, trust, goodwill should be in them. Each side should care for the others' success and commitment. Levi says this proverb when they see two people working faithfully and create a synergy in their collaboration. This proverb teaches everybody to do their part faithfully/honestly/diligently for the family's sake. Levi bases their foundation on family and the importance of keeping close-knit because the integrity of the family is crucial to them. That family becomes a community of like-minded people. In that community, everyone is very involved in each other's lives, including parents, children, siblings, uncles, aunties, grandparents, cousins, and godparents, known as (marin and parin). The "godparents" are usually another set of parents and are very well to do. They typically support the family in the areas of finance, emotion, and society. In some areas, they know everything about each other such as names, siblings, positions, where they are from, and worked, what they have accomplished. They care about what is happening in each other's lives. Exemplary achievements make them proud of each other, while disappointments and setbacks are painful for all of them.

Philippians 2:2

Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord of one mind.

You mentioned before that Levi women are resilient and conservative. What did you mean by this?

Growing up, I was told not to ever be in the midst of boys or men because I will create a name for myself. I was taught to be shamefaced and to completely separate myself from boys or men because anything can happen when you're in their midst. Once something happens, that is it; your life is finished. One of the things that I appreciate most growing up was having watchful parents. I was not allowed to go anywhere without an adult or one of my brothers. My parents told me constantly to keep my dignity, keep my name clean, and keep my self-respect. My body is my treasure, and I was not to bring shame to it because it would bring shame to the family. Therefore, it was my responsibility to maintain that dignity. Since my virginity was my treasure to uphold, keeping it intact was my responsibility. I had to preserve myself for my husband. If I had given up before marriage, I would have given up everything precious and would have no longer been marriage material. Hence, we have to be resilient and conservative because if we don't, the consequences are detrimental. Once a Levi woman gets married, they have to remain faithful even if the husband isn't. The woman always has to maintain their self-respect regardless of the situation.

Are daughters trained to serve a husband from a young age? If so, what is the process?

Definitely! A saying in Haiti goes, "sa founi genyen, se sa li bay pitit li," literally translated to: "what an ant has, is what she will give to her child." The meaning for it is a mother gives what she can to her child. The Levi women believe their daughters should know how to care for their family very young and how to maintain their own house when they're older and get married. A 12-year-old young lady must take over her parents' household chores in Levi's house. Therefore, young ladies start to learn how to cook, clean, serve, and properly wait on their fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, male family members, and visitors at a very young age.

What are some areas in which you see that Levi is becoming more Americanized?

As the years pass by, we see that Babylon is starting to have more of an effect on the people of Haiti. Some Levites are becoming increasingly Americanized in the way they conduct themselves as they are losing the traditional values in which their parents raised them. They are changing their attitude, their way of dressing, they are whoring themselves for money. They are no longer shamefaced, disrespectful to their husband. The feminist movement is trending over there now. The idea of submission is almost elusive. They no longer cater to their husband and have no care for names or self-pervations.

Matthew 24:22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.