

THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE MAASAI



The Maasai are one of the best-known tribes in Africa. Their natural territory is between southern Kenya and northern Tanzania, where they continue to preserve the nomadic spirit and live faithful to traditions.

Within its curious and almost picturesque idiosyncrasy (for Westerners at least) the way in which men and women relate to each other is striking, always within a markedly patriarchal context in which the latter nevertheless enjoy certain licenses.

Their marriage is usually agreed when they are still infants, always attending to material and economic reasons, without forgetting the aesthetic ones. They are not prohibited from having relations before marriage, while they live in the father's clan, but in return they are inevitably subjected to mutilation upon reaching puberty, under the pretext of making them valid for marriage and procreation. The Maasai man uses some bells to let the woman know that he wants to marry her, which he rings as many times as her father owns head of cattle.

On the wedding day, the Maasai woman, wearing her shaved hair, adorned with colored towels and white beads, leaves for her future husband's house from her father's, who blesses her by spitting milk on her neck. At this point, getting married is an irrevocable decision; Masai belief says that if she repents and retraces her steps, she will turn into a common stone. Along the way she is entertained by women from the village, who give her calves and goats, and once she arrives at the man's house, he gives her sour milk from a gourd to drink, which constitutes the crowning moment of the ceremony. Once the wedding is consummated, the woman becomes part, as one more possession, of the man's patrimony.

The Maasai can marry as many women as he deems appropriate (it is a society that tolerates polygamy and even promiscuity), as long as he can support all of them. Nor is it frowned upon for the Maasai woman to have extramarital relations with men of the same age as her husband, under the condition that she keeps him informed, and he consents to this because as he grows older, he becomes aware that he cannot satisfy all his wives.

It is always intended that the woman becomes pregnant as soon as she marries, and all sexual relations between spouses are forbidden until the children are born. The man is also forbidden certain privileges, such as visiting the birthing hut during the first ten years or eating at home until the child learns to walk. But it is the woman who ends up paying the greatest penances after the marriage; although the most veteran of the harem has certain power over the others, she has to suffer, like the rest, certain humiliating situations. It is a tradition that the groom's family receives her at the first meeting with insults and dung (as an allegory of the hard life she is undertaking and the need to strengthen her character), and during her years of marriage, due to the objectification she suffers, she can be lent by her husband to any friend who is passing through the village and needs to satisfy some venereal need.

Based on the text above, answer the following multiple-choice questions:

1. "Cutting consists of the partial or total removal of tissue from the female genital organs, particularly the clitoris" Under what pretext do the Maasai perform this practice with women?
 - a) So that the Masai woman is valid for marriage and procreation.
 - b) So that the Masai woman can acquire more respect in the tribe.
 - c) So that the Maasai woman can work and study.
 - d) So that the women of the tribe can leave their parents homes.

2. The Maasai are a tribe that inhabits Kenya and Tanzania. To which continent of the world do the Maasai belong?
 - a) Europe
 - b) Oceania
 - c) Asia
 - d) Africa

3. The Maasai belief says that if the woman regrets marrying, she will become:
 - a) A woman that nobody will want
 - b) A woman who is not well regarded by the tribe.
 - c) A common stone.

d) None of the above.

According to the text "*Marital Relations of the Maasai*" answer true or false:

1. Maasai women are subject to male dominance within a strong patriarchal society and their role is based on caring for children and maintaining the home.
2. The Maasai can marry as many women as he deems appropriate (it is a society that tolerates polygamy and even promiscuity), as long as he can support all of them.