

THE STORY OF B'MENSHKI

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Discussion Starter: Missionaries and Culture.

Can Christianity cross culture? Is it necessary to westernize people to convert them? Do you have to teach them to wear clothes? Do you have to teach them Western ways?

The Story of B'MenshKi.

B'MenshKi came from what was called in those days, "a tribe of naked savages," that lived in a group of villages far back in the jungle. His tribe had very strict laws about contact with outsiders. No outsider had ever entered one of their villages and lived. The elders did not want the people of the Jaku to become contaminated by outside influences.

The tribe was ruled by a brutal chieftain who exerted absolute power. He was power hungry and totally self serving. The chieftain had the support of a gang of henchmen led by the Shaman. If anyone in the village opposed him or dared to question or disobey, they were killed and made an example. The villages were controlled by fear; taught and enforced by the Shaman who was the leader of the Chieftain's hit squad. The Shaman would dress as an animal spirit and stalk and kill his victims on a moonless night. Then the next day he would come to the village as the Shaman performing purification and appeasement rituals and teaching the people that their disobedience had angered the spirits.

When B'MenshKi was about 15 years old, his older sister whom he dearly loved, was called to the Chieftain's hut. Other's daughters from nearby families had been called. Some never returned, some returned raped and brutalized. When the Chieftain's men came for her, the house was struck with terror but they dared not disobey, one family tried that and the whole family was found later, ripped to shreds by panther spirits.

B'MenshKi, mad with fear and anger sneaked out of the hut and followed the men as they took his sister to a secret place in the jungle. There he witnessed the chieftain and his henchmen rape and brutalize his sister. There also he saw the disguises and props which the Shaman used to make his "hits" look like the work of spirits.

B'MenshKi was beside himself and ran into the compound to single handedly stop the men from killing his beloved sister. He was quickly subdued and forced to watch the death of his sister, but he managed to escape as the men tried to kill him too.

He fled into the jungle, the Chieftain and his henchmen in hot pursuit, desperate to kill B'MenshKi to protect their secrets. The pursuit was long and perilous. B'MenshKi narrowly missed being caught as he passed out from exhaustion; bleeding, and near death.

Early the next morning, the missionary found B'MenshKi in the brush not far from the road. She took him to her home, treated his injuries, and saved his life. He lived with her for 5 years. She taught him to wear clothes. She taught him about Jesus. She learned to love him as a son. Her own toddler son nicknamed him Benji.

Benji never forgot his mother or his home. Sometimes his clothes constricted him and he went out in the jungle and shed them for a time. But the love the missionary showed him and her message about the love of Christ, changed Benji. The missionary taught him the importance of evangelism. He learned to quote the great commission in Pidgin. In his mind, he translated it into his native dialect.

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Benji knew of the great love among the people of his village. He had learned of love from his mother and father. He knew the love of family and home. But he knew also of the blackness, fear, and death in his village.

But he had seen the light, the love, that this missionary brought to the fellowship of believers in her village. He had seen how these people, some from tribes that had been sworn enemies for many generations, loved one another. He watched warriors and hunters toil and sweat in the sun like women, to build a place where orphaned children of their enemies could live and grow. He wanted this love for his village; this love that can transform enemies into friends.

It was not clear to B'MenshKi, when he decided to go back, but by the time the day came that he spoke to the missionary about it, it seemed that they both had known it for a long time. The missionary advised him to spend some time in study and preparation before returning. For one more year he studied, memorized scripture, and translated it into the dialect of his village. The missionary helped him with his translations. She helped him to see that words that came from first century Jewish culture must sometimes be translated very differently to apply in a Jaku Village. All during that year he meditated and prayed for wisdom in interpreting the message of Christ to his village.

Then the day came. He took off his clothes for the last time. He put the bone back in his nose. The missionary lay her hands on his head. He too was now a missionary for Jesus.

It was with great fear in his heart, that B'MenshKi approached his village. As he drew near, he slipped from the path and made his way through the jungle. His feet, softened by the years of wearing shoes, hurt him. When he came close enough to see the village, he hid in a thicket. There he sat for a long time staring at the village gate, wondering what was waiting for him on the other side.

Then as evening came, mustering great courage and driven on by his longing to see those he had loved only in his mind for so long, he entered the village. As he approached the hut of his mother and father, his mother recognized his gait. At first she thought he must be a spirit, an apparition, for she had long since reconciled herself to the death of her son. As he continued to approach, the paralysis of fear gave way to a scream and a dash for the safety of the hut and the protection of her husband and the charms of the house. And when B'MenshKi entered the hut, terror overcame them both and they lay trembling and sobbing in the dust on the dirt floor, covering their eyes with their hands so that the apparition of their son would be unable to suck the light from their eyes.

The blood of many chickens was shed that night. The neighbors who had witnessed B'MenshKi's return spread the word rapidly throughout the Village. Charms were shaken. Chants to defend the houses against the spirits could be heard from every door. In some quarters, plans were discussed to have the Shaman come and purify the site of the hut once the bodies of B'MenshKi's mother and father had been buried and the hut had been burned.

But in the hut, B'MenshKi lay his hands on the backs of his mother and father and told them not to be afraid. He told them he was B'MenshKi and that he was alive. As is true of all good parents everywhere, they wanted to believe, and soon they did. B'MenshKi told them of his narrow escape from the Chieftain and the Shaman and of his years with the missionary. His parents told him that the Chieftain and the Shaman had both been found dead not a month before. Some of the men in the village said they died from drinking a bad batch of hootch that the Shaman had cooked up. The new Chieftain was the son of the old. But he was a young man, not much older than B'MenshKi himself. The new Shaman was a childhood friend of the young Chieftain. B'MenshKi's father called him, "a Shaman with only three teeth on his

friend of the young Chieftain. B'MenshKi's father called him, "a Shaman with only three teeth on his neck," indicating that he was young and not considered a very powerful Shaman.

As the sun came up the next morning, the men of the village came with the Shaman to bury the bodies of B'MenshKi's parents. They fell back quickly when they heard movement in the hut and many of them ran for their lives, when B'MenshKi's mother came out of the door. It took many hours to convince the village that B'MenshKi had returned. B'MenshKi's diary reports that even the third day, there were still children who wouldn't touch him, and older boys who would run past him (probably on a dare from other boys) and touch him to see if he were real.

There was a great celebration in the village. B'MenshKi's father barbequed his largest goat. The goat cooked in the ground for 3 days. There was much dancing, a big bonfire, and many bowls of hootch to pass from hand to hand. B'MenshKi joined eagerly in the festival. He danced all the old dances once again. He listened as the old men told the ancient tales he had not heard in so many years. He tasted again the mush of his youth. B'MenshKi felt again the love of family and home.

When it came time for B'MenshKi to tell a tale of the ancients, he told of a Great Spirit, the Spirit that had made all the other spirits, that had made the spirit of the river and the spirit of the panther, the spirit of the sun and the spirit of the moon. He told of how the Great Spirit had made the first Jaku man and woman. He told how the Great Spirit loved the Jaku so much that he sent his son to live among them many years ago, to teach them to love one another. He told how evil men had been threatened by the Son of the Great Spirit and had falsely accused and killed him. He told how he rose from the dead on the third day and has returned to the Great Spirit.

The story fascinated many but disturbed some of the elders. They had never heard of this Son of the Great Spirit. They suspected that B'MenshKi's contact with the outside had contaminated him. The next day three of the elders met with B'MenshKi and his father at his fathers hut. They instructed B'MenshKi not to tell stories from the outside.

While B'MenshKi was telling his tale around the fire the night of his welcome home celebration, he had seen her looking at him. His mother noticed too. Later that night she reminded B'MenshKi that she was still his betrothed. The rejoicing in her heart and in her family at B'MenshKi's return was nearly as great as in B'MenshKi's family itself, for the death of her betrothed would have meant a life of solitude for her. But B'MenshKi's mother said he could not go in to her as he had never completed the rights of manhood. At the time of B'MenshKi's disappearance, he had completed his training with the spear and was within a few months of completing all of the trials.

B'MenshKi's father met with the elders of the village and they decided that B'MenshKi should complete the rights of manhood, taking up the process where he left off. They pierced his lip and they pierced his foreskin. Then when the time of the hunt came, he went with the men and the other young boys. Perhaps because he was older and better developed, he made his kill on the first day of the hunt. He skinned the animal leaving the top of the head intact and connected to the hide. Then he dressed the carcass in the traditional way. He removed a large tooth and made a hole in it. That night he took his turn at the ceremonial dance, wearing the animals head on his with the skin trailing over his back. He felt the blood of the creature, still wet on the inside of the skin as it stained his own. He stood proudly as the chief elder of the village draped the leather thong with the tooth on it around his neck. B'MenshKi's father's heart swelled with a pride he thought he'd never get to experience when the elder said the traditional words which translate something like "May the teeth of your head have many children on your neck." (A reference, I assume to the fact that as the men got older they lost their teeth but had teeth from many hunts around their necks.)

Two nights later the signs were right and when the proper herbs and potions were prepared, he went in to his betrothed and there on the mat in her parents hut, the two of them began to learn to love each other. Many times he went to her when the signs were right until finally, to the particular relief of both their mothers, it became apparent that she was pregnant. Now if the child is a boy, they can be married, they thought.

Many times, as they sat together and talked, B'MenshKi spoke to B'Angshi about the Great Spirit of Love, that is greater than all spirits. And he taught her to pray. Many times he spoke to his mother and father of the things he had learned about the Son of the Spirit of Love, and his mother learned to pray. But B'MenshKi learned to live the life of a servant too. If a family was repairing their hut, B'MenshKi would be nearby to cut or carry limbs or to hold or tie the twine. If a hunter was preparing a carcass, B'MenshKi was there to lend a hand. The children knew and loved his playful ways. His happy smile became known all over the village and his presence brightened each day.

As B'Angshi's belly grew with the child, B'MenshKi felt the baby move. He listened and thought he heard it drumming. As she continued to grow, they both became excited in anticipation of the birth of their beautiful boy. While B'MenshKi could not begin construction of their hut until the boy was born, they had already selected the site and discussed the orientation of the door. The site was not too far from the water so B'Angshi would not have to carry the water too far, but it was far enough for safety.

Then the day came and B'MenshKi sat on a mat in front of the door to her parents hut, as was the place of the betrothed, while the women tended the birth. As he waited and prayed he thought of the lingering touch as B'Angshi left him to go into the hut. And then he heard the anguished cries of the women. His heart stopped as he listened intently and made out the word "female." His heart sank for they could not be married until she bore him a son.

Traditionally when the first born child was a female, the betrothed would leave the mat and not see his betrothed until after the baby had been disposed of. But as B'MenshKi sat, numbed by disappointment, he remembered how the child had moved under the warmth of his hand against her belly. He remembered the teachings of the missionary, that God loved all the children. He wished to see the child.

B'MenshKi went in to her. One of the older women was horrified and fled, but the others seemed to understand as he held his newborn child and talked to its mother. It was sometime in that moment that he came to the decision. Over the next hours he talked to B'Angshi about it and they prayed together. It frightened her, but as she held her child, she wanted more than anything in the world for B'MenshKi to be right. "We must not allow this child of ours to be killed," he told her. "I will begin construction on our hut tomorrow and we will be married." B'Angshi nursed the baby girl.

B'MenshKi's mother was frightened, but in a peculiar way, she was also proud of her son. She calmed B'MenshKi's father and after a time, he too gave his reluctant support. B'Angshi's mother was terrified.

Word spread rapidly through the village that B'MenshKi had violated the ancient traditions. Some were quietly sympathetic, especially some of those who had experienced the pain of having a first born daughter. But many who heard of it were simply scared. Scared that the anger of the spirits would destroy them all.

When word of what B'MenshKi had done reached the village where the new Shaman lived, he was particularly disturbed. He went in to the hut of the young Chieftain. He told him he had been worried about this B'MenshKi for some time. Since the boy had spent so much time living on the outside he was afraid B'MenshKi had been contaminated by outside influences. The Chieftain and the Shaman decided that the Shaman should pay a visit to B'MenshKi's village.

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When the Shaman arrived, the hut had been completed and B'MenshKi and B'Angshi were married and living there with their daughter. B'MenshKi met the Shaman at the door. He did not invite him in. Instead they sat on the mat in front of the hut, in plain view of all the villagers. This made the Shaman very nervous. B'MenshKi noted the three teeth on his neck. The Shaman told B'MenshKi that he had angered the spirits and endangered himself, his family, and his village. B'MenshKi told the Shaman that the Great Spirit that had created all the other spirits would protect him. The Shaman said he knew of no such Great Spirit that could protect a man as foolish as B'MenshKi, and as Shaman if there were a Great Spirit he would certainly know His name. B'MenshKi told him that His name was Love. B'MenshKi selected the Jaku word for the love a parent has for a child. The Shaman warned B'MenshKi sternly and left, but as he walked back to his village, his embarrassment turned to anger and B'MenshKi's steady strength and unfrightened manner seemed more like defiance. B'MenshKi went into the hut and he and B'Angshi prayed fervently for protection and guidance.

Several nights later, B'MenshKi was awakened by sounds of someone moving outside the hut. He got up quietly and grabbed his spear. As he stepped out of the door, he surprised three figures, dressed in panther costumes, the costumes he had seen so many years before, the night his sister was killed. The figures hesitated a moment at his unexpected appearance and then lunged at him with their knives. B'MenshKi, using his spear as a club, landed a good solid blow on the side of the head of the first figure. As the figure staggered back, B'MenshKi grabbed the panther head and pulled it off revealing the surprised face of the Shaman. "Now leave our village, Shaman of three teeth," B'MenshKi shouted. The two henchmen, surprised by the unexpected resistance and the fact that their leader had been exposed, fled into the night. The Shaman followed. B'MenshKi took the panther head into the hut with him and he and B'Angshi knelt in a prayer of thanksgiving.

In the morning, some of the villagers came to see what had happened. Some had heard the commotion in the night and feared the worst. B'MenshKi and B'Angshi were still asleep when a neighbor saw the bloody panther paw prints which the Shaman and his men had been carefully placing on the rocks on the path leading to the hut when they were surprised by B'MenshKi. The neighbor let out a tremendous scream which wakened B'MenshKi. He ran outside in time to see several villagers running toward his hut.

The villagers were first frightened and then relieved. One neighbor pointed to the paw prints. "We thought the panther spirit had come in the night to kill you," he said.

"The panther spirit did come in the night to kill us," B'MenshKi replied, "but our God, the Great Spirit, protected us and saved us from the evil men who tried to kill us." And then B'MenshKi told the men what happened and showed them the panther head he had taken from the Shaman. He told them how he and B'Angshi had prayed and the Great Spirit had given him courage and strength to drive away the Shaman and his henchmen with a spear.

Word spread rapidly through the village and to the other villages as well. The people said that B'MenshKi had brought a Great Spirit back with him from the outside. The Great Spirit was stronger than the panther spirit. It had protected B'MenshKi from certain death when the panther spirit had attacked. People came to B'MenshKi wishing to know more about the Great Spirit, to learn the spirit's name. B'MenshKi taught them. He told them that he did not bring the Great Spirit to the village, but that the Great Spirit had been in the village all along. When they asked him what the Great Spirit wanted them to do so they would not anger Him, what sacrifices they should make, he taught them that the Great Spirit does not ask them to do anything. That the Great Spirit loves them just as they are. He taught them that the Great Spirit wants all the people to love Him and to love each other the way He loves the people. He taught them that the Great Spirit is sad when the people fight and hurt one another. He taught them that

taught them that the Great Spirit is sad when the people fight and hurt one another. He taught them that the Great Spirit had sent His Son to live among the people to show them how to love one another.

Some came asking B'MenshKi to make them charms for the Great Spirit that they could wear or tie on their children's heads or hang in their huts to bring them protection from sickness, accident, and dark spirits. B'MenshKi taught them that the Great Spirit will not always protect them and that the Great Spirit cannot be controlled by charms or chants or prayers. The Great Spirit only teaches them to love one another and to comfort each other and take care of each other. He taught them that the Great Spirit only wants them to know the truth, and when they know the truth about the dark spirits, they will fear them no more. And then he told them about the panther costumes and the Shaman's deception.

When the Shaman heard these things, he was very angry. This B'MenshKi must be stopped. The Shaman traveled to all the villages. At each stop he told the people that B'MenshKi was lying. That the panther head B'MenshKi was displaying to everyone had been stolen from a hunter in another village. He took one of his henchmen with him on these visits. This man swore that the panther head was his, that he had seen B'MenshKi holding it up and recognized it as the one stolen from his hut. The Shaman warned the people in each village of the dire consequences which would befall them if they did not stop listening to the teachings of B'MenshKi. About this time, two families from different villages, who had been to see B'MenshKi, were massacred. Bloody panther paw prints were found all around, and in both cases the Shaman had been spending the night with many witnesses in celebration and revelry in another village.

After this, talk of the Great Spirit seemed to die down among the people. The Shaman once again saw the fear in the eyes of the people when he warned of disobedience. He felt more secure in his power. But B'MenshKi continued to teach. Not as many came now, but those who did were sincere in their desire to learn. He taught them to pray.

One day a man came to B'MenshKi from another village. The Chieftain had sent for his daughter. She never came back. When the man went to the Chieftain's hut to ask about her, the Shaman had warned him to stay away or be killed. B'MenshKi told the man the story of his sister. They wept and prayed together and then they made a pact to stop the Chieftain and the Shaman. There had been other families whose daughters had been raped or killed. Some of them would stand with them as well.

One day a messenger from the Chieftain came to B'MenshKi's village. He went to the hut of one of B'MenshKi's closest friends and instructed the family to prepare their daughter as the Chieftain would be sending men for her. B'MenshKi called the men of the pact together. For two days they waited and when the Chieftain's men came, they met them outside the village with their spears. After many threats and shouted orders which the men of the pact ignored, the Chieftain's men returned to the Chieftain's hut without the girl.

B'MenshKi and the men of the pact patrolled the village all night for three nights. On the third night, they came: dressed as panthers. There were 10 of them. B'MenshKi was not afraid. He had encountered these so called panther spirits before. But some of the men with him trembled and nearly fainted; trying to believe these were men dressed as panthers and not real panther spirits as they had been taught from childhood.

As the panthers entered the ring of the village in the darkness of a moonless night, B'MenshKi uncovered the fire and poured the fat they had collected, on it. The sudden flare of flame startled the panthers and they rose up on their back legs, exposing human legs and feet. This gave the men courage. They rushed the panthers and drove them from the village, capturing several panther head-dresses in the process. When the panthers were gone, the men knelt in prayer thanking the Great Spirit for the cunning, courage,

and strength that came from a commitment to love and defend each other. B'MenshKi did not hear of any more daughters being called to the Chieftain's hut for the rest of that year.

That summer there was a severe drought in the land. The crops that the women had planted withered and died. The game that the hunters prized, either died or moved with the rain. There was very little food in the villages. Panthers and other predators were seen very near the villages and a child that strayed from home after dark was killed near one of the villages. B'MenshKi and the people of the pact prayed. The Shaman blamed B'MenshKi and what he called "the great evil spirit" he had brought to the villages of the Jaku from the outside.

When the people asked B'MenshKi why the Great Spirit would not answer their prayers for rain, he taught them once again. He taught them that the Great Spirit will not always protect them from trouble but that in times of trouble they must strengthen each other in love. He taught them to share the little resources they had and to work together to extend them as far as possible.

The people of the pact who lived in another village, were very discouraged and very hungry. B'MenshKi collected a bit of corn from his village, not from what his people could spare, but from what they were willing to sacrifice, and prepared to take it to them. He said goodbye to B'Angshi and the child, who was now about three years old. He told them he would stay in that village for a day or two and teach the people and then he would return.

When the Shaman heard that B'MenshKi was staying in the village, he immediately began going from house to house calling the men to come to the ring. The Shaman's henchmen were passing out spears and hootch. The Shaman made a long speech to the assembled mob in which he accused B'MenshKi of being the cause of all their troubles. When B'MenshKi heard the noisy crowd coming toward the hut, he knew they were coming for him. He told the family he was staying with to hide and went out to meet the crowd. By the time B'MenshKi realized there was no talking to this mob, it was too late to escape. He tried to run but they took him, beat him and killed him.

When B'Angshi heard the news she wept bitterly. But the men and women of the pact came to her and comforted her and prayed with her. They swore to never give up until the Chieftain, the Shaman, and all their henchmen were no longer able to hurt the Jaku. In every village where the death of B'MenshKi was told, it made the people bold to speak against the abuse and atrocities of the Chieftain and the Shaman. The fraud of the Shaman had been exposed. In two years, the Chieftain, the Shaman, and all their families were removed from power and a new Chieftain was selected. The new Chieftain was a God fearer and a man of the pact whose first born was a daughter and who had married after the custom established by B'MenshKi.

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