

# Thousands gather for National Voodoo Day

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OUIDAHA, Benin — Thousands gathered Tuesday on a beach to celebrate Benin's once-banned Voodoo, slaughtering animals and welcoming revelers from Brazil and the United States whose slave ancestors took the religion to the Americas centuries ago.

At a ceremony in Ouidah, 25 miles west of the commercial capital, Cotonou, Voodoo high priestess Nagbo Hounon Gbeffa sacrificed a goat, a rooster and a chicken as divine offerings.

"I'm very moved," said Faith McDouglas, a 37-year-old nurse from Omaha, in the U.S. state of Nebraska. "I've understood many things regarding my origins, because I'm a descendant of slaves."

Voodoo originated in West Africa and holds that all life is driven by spiritual forces of natural phenomena like water, fire, earth and air that should be honored through rituals that include animal sacrifices. There are no zombies or pin-skewed dolls here, but followers believe they can communicate with divinities and spirits by putting themselves into a trance.

Countless Africans were shipped into slavery from the West African coast, taking with them Voodoo, whose cults still survive in the Caribbean, Latin American and the American South.

The annual celebration "is an occasion for us in Ouidah to remember the hundreds of

thousands of blacks deported to the Americas as slaves," said Albert Dossou, a member of the Daagbo Hounon family, which traces its lineage to a 15th-century Voodoo chief.

"It is always a pleasure for us to see them make the pilgrimage to the land of their ancestors," Dossou said.

Pamella Jonqueira, a Brazilian living in Portugal, said she'd come to Ouidah to make a documentary about Voodoo. "I've been able to glean some really beautiful images, but most importantly, I feel the need to initiate myself in Voodoo."

In Benin, the religion was repressed and then banned during incumbent President Mathieu Kerekou's first 18-year stint in power, which ended in 1991. Kerekou's Marxist regime believed the rites went against the socialist work ethic.

But the religion, practiced by an estimated 60 percent of Benin's 7 million people, was impossible to suppress and the government inaugurated National Voodoo Day in 1996, giving the religion an official place here alongside Christianity and Islam.

Benin is considered the West African capital of

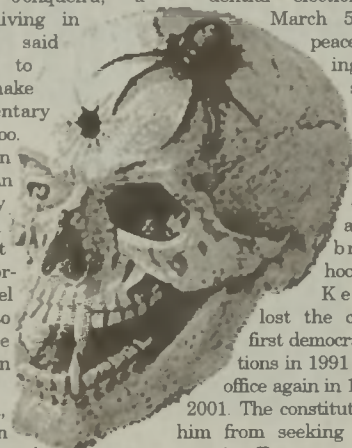
Voodoo, and every year, hundreds of revelers, believers and curious tourists from as far away as Haiti and the United States attend the festival along with thousands from Benin itself.

After Tuesday's animal sacrifice, Gbeffa, the Voodoo priestess, prayed for presidential elections due March 5 to be peaceful, saying they should be held "in an atmosphere of tolerance and brotherhood."

Kerekou lost the country's first democratic elections in 1991 but won office again in 1996 and 2001. The constitution bars him from seeking another term in office.

Benin is not alone in Africa in having a history of suppressing local religions. In Zimbabwe Monday, a senior High Court judge urged Zimbabwe's government to ease colonial era restrictions on the practice of witchcraft, state-run radio reported.

Many Zimbabweans retain strong beliefs in the healing power of spirit mediums—known as n'angas, or witch doctors—along with the role of ancestral rites in the nation's cultural life, Judge Maphios Cheda said at the opening of a new judicial year.



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January, 2006 Newsletter - Part II  
 J.M. Little, Teacher

"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." (Gal. 3:23) A sinner under Holy Spirit Conviction is shut up unto himself and under the law and with his hard heart of unbelief. He cannot trust Christ because he does not know Christ. He cannot believe on Christ because he does not know Christ! I would you preachers and teachers knew that great truth! A few of you do. But the great majority does not! You tell the awakened sinner: "It is up to you now. God has done the electing and it is up to you to do the believing." A man here in North Carolina told me that years ago when I was under Holy Spirit Conviction. When you tell a sinner to just trust Christ, accept Christ, or that it is up to you, that is making the sinner supreme! How can the sinner trust Christ when he does not know Christ? He cannot! You ask the question: "Then Bro. Little, how is the sinner saved?" Hold your seats now! I am going to tell you how I was saved and how every sinner is saved. "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, TO REVEAL HIS SON IN ME ...." (Gal. 1:25, 16) An awakened sinner, like the one who called me last night, is shut up with a hard heart of unbelief. No sinner can believe someone he doesn't know. An awakened sinner cannot trust Christ because he does not know Christ. The only way a sinner can trust Christ is for Christ to be revealed to his heart. When this revelation comes, the Holy Spirit gives the awakened sinner faith to lay hold of Christ as his Lord and Saviour. Until this revelation takes place, the sinner is utterly helpless to believe on Christ. You are shut up in unbelief until this revelation comes. It is the blessed Holy Spirit who reveals Christ to the sinner's heart. Apart from the REVELATION by the Holy Spirit, the sinner cannot believe Christ because he does not know Christ!

# Helping the homeless brings Jewish and Muslim girls closer together

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

UNION CITY, N.J. — What started out as a modest effort to raise money for a homeless shelter has blossomed into a triumph of understanding and goodwill that managed to overcome centuries of conflict

between two of the world's most antagonistic groups.

A group of 10 Muslim and 10 Jewish girls has been meeting since May to help set up a shelter for homeless families. But the teenagers got much more than they bar-

gained for: a genuine understanding of each other's culture and religion, and the realization of things they

Please see HELPING/5B

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