

## The Ghanaian (Akan) View of Health - part 4

Dear Friends,

This article is the concluding part on the subject of how Ghanaians view health. If you have missed the beginning of this series, (July-Sept.) you can find it online at the First Lutheran website. In this series I have tried to give readers an overview of the Akan (people group of Akrampa) concept of health, processes of diagnosing and treatment, and to establish the important factor of how health is tied to their cultural beliefs and practices. In July I explained specifically about the 'African Traditional Religion', a non-Christian system of faith in a Supreme-Being that provided the 'balance between the visible and invisible world'. This faith has the general belief that other factors, including, and especially the spiritual, are involved when one gets sick.

In conclusion, I'd like to specify some of the details of this 'fetish' or non-Christian belief system, and how in contrast, taking the Gospel of Jesus into the village of Akrampa is changing those beliefs. The African Traditional Religion 'way of life' is a balance of the spiritual and the physical, with the material circumstances as an indicator that all is well regarding both the spiritual and the physical. And health is a perfect indicator of material prosperity, that the spiritual and physical conditions are being adhered to, which therefore provide the evidence of balance. To a large extent, the philosophical mindset of the Akan, has expression in the South African phrase, "I am, because we are", which simply describes a condition where the individual's well-being is dependent on the general well-being of society at large. So, when one gets sick in a community like Akrampa, it becomes a major interest and concern of almost everybody in the community. Another occasion for this mind set affects even seemingly private things like marriage and family. For as long as a particular group of people share a common language/dialect in any particular geographical location, the individual cannot say he/she exists solely by himself/herself.

Take Akrampa, for example, with reference to one of the women who was helped to recover from tuberculosis in 1999. The entire community was concerned about her plight because the local god had declared that it was a curse pronounced over her life, and if it was not appeased, not only her immediate relations but also other family members of their clan would also be touched by the effects of the curse. It was understood as something that could affect both their spiritual and physical circumstances, and ultimately, their material prosperity. In a simple sense, if she didn't appease the gods (spiritual) her health condition (physical) was going to get worse, and she wasn't going to be able to go to the farm and work to produce food for the home, and sell the surplus at the market (material). If her family also failed to appease the gods they could also be infected, and they could also lose their health and not be able to work as a result.

The inroads being made by the Gospel of Jesus Christ have entirely changed the circumstances of the people of Akrampa. Fear of the unknown and the uncertainty surrounding their existence has completely been minimized. Though the natives still understand the significance of the gods in their culture, the need to depend on them for spiritual protection and physical well-being is no longer an issue. In cases where they believe there is a spiritual connection with their health, they consult the Christian God, Jesus and trust Him for healing. They also believe that Jesus blesses hard work for material prosperity.

When someone gives their life to Jesus they are made to understand that a complete and total disengagement from the fetish gods is best for him/her. The confidence created among the people is growing and is being extended to the children as they attend our school. In school the children are taught the Christian faith daily. They have worship every day, and devotions once a week. We have by the Grace of God been able to become God's instrument in providing a holistic faith that is more reliable than the local gods. God be praised!

Blessings,  
Pastor Ben