

# Creating High Morale In The Public School WORKSHOP

## Introduction.

*"Things are not the way they used to be."* – Robert Marley in Natural Mystic

*"And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."*

Malachi 4:6 The Bible

So many of our teachers seem united in their judgment that the modern day public school classroom is smitten with a curse; that the spirit, tradition and standards of the past have all but completely been eroded. An entire generation seems to have moved on rather quickly to fashions, norms and behaviors so far beyond the comprehension, never mind the approval of the preceding, that the task to bridge the gap with words to many seem futile.

Yet, bridging the 'generation gap' is the very role of the teacher. Teachers are nexus to the past for the present generation, transmitting the knowledge and standards gained and thus far canonized to the young. A vital role of education is to adequately prepare the young for their participation in the continuing saga of human evolution. We can see why any generation disconnected from that source would be 'accursed'. No tree without roots could stand for very long.

What has seemed to be under-appreciated by many educational professionals is that more important than the transmission of facts and skills in the various areas of the academic enterprise, is the transmission of a sense of worth and value for the Self as well as for the Society and for the Principles that sustain the Social Order.

More important than instruction in Mathematics, Language skills, Science and Sociology, (because by necessity it precedes it) is the spiritual and psychological training in appropriate thinking, disposition and behavior. The latter, we call morality and centers on the skill of conducting harmonious and productive relationships. Where relationships are dysfunctional the transmission of knowledge is most certainly impeded.

For this reason, the moral component of the school curriculum deserves at least as much attention, and merits as comprehensive an approach as the academic component. For this is the parabolic root of our education tree.

Poor general performance in Math and English has been of grave concern to all and pressure has been placed upon our Ministry of Education to come up with viable programs that correct this. Likewise, it is also of grave concern when the morale of public schools degenerates to the extent that violence becomes normative, students demotivated, staff frustrated, pessimistic or nonchalant. Calls have been made for programs to address this.

There has been much talk from both sides of our political fence about Values and Attitudes and a curricular approach to moral and character development. And it would

seem to many that what we need to do to address these concerns in our school is something new.

It appears to me however, that we have failed to realize that part of the daily schedule of just about every primary and secondary institution in our island is already devoted, in theory at least, to instruction in and development of what is now popularly and appropriately called 'Values and Attitudes'. ***This aspect of our schools' program ought to be properly understood as the moral component of the curriculum.***

Of course we refer to the early morning Religious Devotional Exercise, which can either be viewed as trite ceremony, redundant in the 'Information Age' or, properly understood and efficiently exercised, it becomes the very pivot and hub of the school's spirit and culture.

This is the set time to build the Self that builds (or breaks) the society. This is the exercise that sets the foundation for the *reception and processing* of information for the remnant of the day. This is the vehicle available in the primary and secondary educational context for the transmission and preservation of the values of our culture.

Since this component is so vital to the school's overall aim and purpose, how then can it be approached in a frivolous, non scientific / haphazard / almost off handed way? It has been my observation that those schools which have distinguished themselves in maintaining a high morale and an excellent school spirit have this one thing in common – a vital and vibrant religious devotional program which serves as the main vehicle through which the school's vision and values are communicated to every member of the institution.

This has been so whether the school was Catholic, Protestant, Afro-centric or Hindu (and I have observed all the above). A comprehensive religious devotion is the means of building strong self-confidence, character, and high ideals into the spirit of an institution.

It is our primary purpose in this paper to define exactly, what are the common principles and vital factors of a comprehensive program of religious devotion, applicable in any given context of religious affiliation.

Our secondary purpose is to both demonstrate that and how a culturally contextual, non sectarian application of those principles could tremendously contribute to the needs of our public institutions and our society at large as we continue to work out, in the context of deeply divisive sub cultures, our national motto – "Out of Many: One People".

We are at present, a nation in crisis and the challenge we have as an independent nation is to 'take charge' of our own negative psychological conditions, (our spiritual 'baggage') and that of the institutions for which we have assumed responsibility. To do so, we must first understand the subject, (of spiritual cultivation / behavioral science) and master the pertinent skills that the task requires.

The program presented in this paper is based mainly on our own experiences working successfully with students in need of remedial attention in economically depressed communities, but we believe it is applicable in any context as the dynamics of character development are the same for every child from whatever background.

## The Function of Religion *A Philosophical foundation*

Let us begin by examining the words being used in our discourse and the exact context in which we employ them. Firstly, the word 'religion' and 'religious' are used functionally in this work and we never intend for these words to be interpreted in their every day 'structuralist' usage.

Religion, etymologically speaking, comes from two roots. The first *re* is the Latin prefix for *again*. The other 'ligion' when traced through its, Latin, Greek and Indo European antecedents all imply the concept of *connectivity*. The Latin *ligare* means to tie, bind or fasten. (This is the same root from which the words 'league', 'ligament' 'logic' and 'legal' are derived.)

Religion, in terms of its function, is *primarily* concerned with linking people **back** to a *source... - the Source* from which the present order (both socially and cosmically speaking) is derived and maintained.

All religions seek to explain the natural order. Its focus of attention therefore *is* the Causes of (Principles behind or gods governing) the scheme of things we experience as our world. The common denominator therefore for all religion *including* (by our definition) science (a religious methodology) and atheism (a religious philosophy) is the *Source* of Life and its order.

All phenomena in space and time have its Source or Cause. And all structure, (material or social) has its organizing principles. The function of religion, we are positing, in every society is a binding / unifying one. Its purpose or intent is to link that society to its Source, its 'Creator'... its evolutionary Principles.

Cause = Principle = god. These words are interchangeable. They are different words, but all point to the same transcendent focus on that Realm of Being which shapes and gives birth to the reality we claim as ours in the material world.

The word used for 'god' in the Hebraic tradition, the Caananite 'elohim', is the same reality called the Neteru by the ancient Kamu (Egyptians), or the 'Orisha' of the Yoruba, the Loas of the Fon (Dahomeans)... It signifies the powers of the universe, the forces of Nature...the principles governing life. They are plural in character, but singular or unified in action.

The ideation and cosmology will differ from culture to culture to be sure, but all are concerned with relating to, and making statements about the Origin of life and society.

Often through superficial thought (no doubt linked to our gaps of historical and religious consciousness) there is argument and confusion over the very **thing** that unites us. i.e. **The Source** of our common existence.

This **First Cause** has been called God, the Creator, the Universal Seed/ Egg, the Big Bang... etc. etc. It has been conceptualized as Person, Mind, as Event, as a primeval particle of matter, as the Primeval Pool of Energy. etc etc.

Many myriad names, religious mythologies and scientific theories have been offered to explain this **Source** of all Existence and bring it within the realm of human understanding.

Although the 'Source' has been perceived in many different ways, the 'Source' is what unites us all as we have all sprang from this Common Beginning as much as each one of us individually had sprung originally from the fertilized egg of our parents.

Every cell in the human body, regardless of how differentiated it becomes from the others in terms of function and appearance, by virtue of the fact of its common source and interconnected relationship with the rest of the body, remains an integral part of a larger unit : Wo/man.

Likewise in the larger Body of the Universe, or a little closer home... in the much smaller Body of the earth, we are one **unit**. We have sprung from one common **Source**. And this central tenet - the common **Source** of life, is the connective **link** between all things in our universe.

'God'/'force'/'principle' ... these are all different words. Jehovah, Allah, Olodumare ... these are all different names. We need to focus on the level of transcendent reality that these words point us to (these names indicate). The reality is not the symbol.

There is a difference between depth (esoteric) consciousness as opposed to superficial (exoteric) consciousness'. The former is needed to perceive the Unity in Life, and the unifying function of religion in the society of man.

Let us use a simple analogy: The Spanish call a tree 'arbol'. Jamaicans call the same phenomena 'tree'. Between 'arbol' and 'tree', which one represents the 'right' name / symbol / word? Obviously, 'right' in this context would mean who is listening as both Spanish people and Jamaicans have conceived a distinct word for the reality we call 'tree'.

The outward **structures** of religion refer both to its organized institutions such as church denominations, Temples/ Synagogues / Mosques / Shrines etc., their administrative hierarchies, bodies of clergy / priests/ priestesses etc. as well as their distinctive established creeds, doctrines, canonized texts and particular modes of worship etc. All these are extremely important, but are not the subject of this paper.

Religion, perceived **structurally**, has gotten a very bad reputation as a unifying and empowering agency in the modern 'secular' state. The many variations that exist and the conflicting and adversarial nature of the stances and positions taken have in fact been often at odds with the goals of the 'secular' nation state, and even now more so, in an age where global political and economic institutions have emerged and gain more and more ascendancy.

In this context of a world whose ethnic/traditional/religious walls are fast disintegrating, many perceive religion.... and race, as notions impeding human progress. Nevertheless, the original purpose of religion is both unifying and essential in harmonizing members of any group by its offerings of a common and consistent worldview (cosmology), and its offerings of communal rituals to reinforce its values, based on its vision.

In order to understand how to apply religious devotion in an effective manner, especially in a public school setting, we must understand what the **purpose** and **function** of religion are (in its abstract or universal context).

The national motto of Jamaica is “Out of many, one people”. The entire Caribbean echoes with this theme, which as yet represents an aspiration much more than a realization of our peoples. Our schools can help to energize this grand call to unity, but only if they can apprehend the **process... i.e. The process of becoming one**) This requires a focus on the prepositional *links* between the ‘many’ and the ‘one’. (i.e. ‘out of’).

Both words together imply religious and historical consciousness. They imply consciousness of the **process of becoming**.

In order of actual chronology, it was *Out of one many people* came. And by understanding that historical process, we perhaps might be able to invert the reality, and ‘see’ how the ‘many’ are indeed ‘one’.

Religion links the ‘one’ to the ‘All’, and the all to the ‘One’ by nature of its focus on connectivity, relationship, and the principles of causation. In fact, it is this **link** that we call ‘Justice or Righteousness’, which true religion mainly centers on.

It is a deeply historic and profoundly religious consciousness that holds the key to the regeneration of the spirit and culture of our people.

Those who confuse the language of religious symbolism (which is diverse) and the central truth of that diverse symbolism (which is one) ... that there **is** a common Source of Life) will only serve the purpose of maintaining the gaps of consciousness that allow individuals to go unrestrained against the order of social and cosmic life.

Those who are grounded, however, (both intellectually as well as in the fabric of their spiritual / psychological conditioning) in the central truth of religion (that we are all organically connected through one common Source) will have the ability to master the effective use of religious symbolism in order to create / invoke the consciousness that will allow individuals to enter into harmonious and productive relationship within the society and the cosmos.

Where there is proper religious instruction and practice, the group is effectively linked with its source (evolutionary principle/s) and thereby experiences wholesome community and cultural continuity. With this link fractured, the disintegration of the social fabric ensues as its energizing and harmonizing principles are lost, forgotten and therefore invariably disregarded and contravened. Chaos starts.

There are several reasons this happens. The reasons for the breakdown of religion or religious values (understood within the parameters of our definition) in a society and its institutions can however be broken down essentially to two:

1. A lack of religious **understanding** - i.e. *Awareness* of and appreciation for the Principles (or Causes) that give place to, govern and support the life expressions in the cosmic and social scheme.
2. A lack of religious **experience** - i.e. The *feeling* of connection to and sense of relationship with (dependence on /interaction with) these Life Principles.

### **Bridging the Gap** *A Pragmatic approach*

We have made bold pronouncements on the role of religion in society that may resonate with persons of varied religious persuasions. Yet let us now proceed cautiously to treat with religious understanding and experience.

While many may indeed concur with our general pronouncements on the existence of the *gap* and the cause for it, we may need to broaden our ability to see this gap through eyes untainted by the prejudices sometimes associated with a structuralist approach to religion. We all strive for unity. This is true. But how is this to be achieved?

Exactly what do *we* mean by religious understanding? Whose version constitutes understanding? And even moreso: What type of religious experience is legitimate? And what types are illegitimate? And is there even a possibility, given the wide cross-section of opinions, to arrive at consensus?

The cloud that immediately covers this debate has forced many wise thinkers, and even devout believers, to admit that it is better for all that affairs of State and Religion be decidedly separate.

While it seems that we are not likely to imitate our Northern neighbors in the apparent mistake (to us) of the almost paranoid avoidance of things religious in the public school system of the USA, an unfortunate result stemming from the honest protest of minority religious groups (mostly atheistic) objecting to the bigoted imposition of sectarian religious symbols in a cosmopolitan setting where respect of differing opinions ought to be afforded all members; we nevertheless need to be very mindful of the lessons that their particular experience can teach us.

Bigotry will be resented. Unity cannot be produced *and* maintained by psychological subterfuge and domination. (It matters not who is doing the domination – Atheists, Christians, Muslims etc.) How religious values are presented, institutionalized and maintained is essential to their common acceptance and longevity among a group of people.

We here in Jamaica who have more churches per square mile than any other nation on earth, may well think that we are in a different category altogether than the U.S.A. But let's not fool ourselves. The U.S. represents one of our main cultural influences.

We seem to have grasped, intellectually at least, the need to adopt a position of cultural pluralism in our schools while yet emphasizing the worth and common values of a variety of approaches to religious expression.

Not that we have not had our own institutionalized prejudices, (e.g. Our past *and present* attitudes to Rastafarian children). The point is that in the public school, as in all state sponsored institutions, religious language must be inclusive. It must be sensitive to the positions of all the members of the group.

Religious ***broadmindedness*** however, must not replace religious ***devotion*** or commitment. It is a lack of religious commitment that led to the moral vacuum that gave

place to the Columbine massacre in the States and that is responsible for the too oft reported violence in our own schools.

It is persons of profoundly religious convictions that have been the leaders, movers and shakers in our own social evolution- e.g. Nanny, Garvey, Marley. (Maroon, Catholic, Rastafarian).

Religious knowledge of itself is **not** empowering. Faith (clarity of vision and purpose, creativity and confidence) which comes through commitment to religious principles, is.

Where public schools manifest low morale, signs of a crisis of faith, then spiritual resources (persons and programs) must be drawn upon to strengthen that Link.

Who should those persons be and what would be the nature of those programs in the context of culturally plural and religiously heterogeneous public institutions?

That might be difficult to conceive only again if we are trapped in thinking of religion as a choice amongst systems of thought rather than a universal human enterprise in developing 'depth consciousness' i.e.. (spiritual understanding... understanding of causes and principles).

Religion can only be beneficial to society if it is empowering. It can only be empowering if it is sincerely believed and sincerely practiced. In short, inclusivity or religious tolerance must not lead to superficiality or religious compromise.

An honest sharing of convictions is possible that allows the group to assess its needs and the strengths of its members and vice versa and to pragmatically link both through a process of sharing that might well evolve into a new understanding of life – which is the true purpose of human community.

The best persons to teach and represent appropriate values and attitudes to the young, so that they will be understandable, credible and useful, are those persons not only intellectually aware of religious ideas, but are also deeply *emotionally involved* with community and *devoutly committed* to community sustaining principles.

Inclusivity & conviction, breadth and depth in passion and in expression will certainly motivate positive change in any darkened atmosphere. But we also must clearly understand that religious values cannot be 'taught', as one teaches Math.

Those arguments for a curricular approach to the teaching of Values and Attitudes (replete we imagine with text and tests) are at best misinformed. If one thinks that human personality is constructed solely on the basis of syllogistic logic, then one is very far indeed from appreciating the dignity of Being and consequently the mystery of Becoming.

Religious rhetoric addresses only one part of the equation- i.e. religious **understanding**. The tools that affect religious **experience** or the lack of it, lie not in the employ of words or sermons or philosophies (though these are admittedly important). The technology of religion lies in **ritual** and **ritual celebration**. Religious truths are not just taught, they must be 'insperienced' and constantly invoked.

This is done by the mechanism of the **ritual** - The marriage of an **idea** with a corresponding **action** which makes it concretely apprehendable to the participants. Even more important than the internalization of religious ideas and ideals, is energizing these truths in the human spirit.

We call this 'empowerment' or 'motivation'. This is done by the marriage of both 'religious idea/truth' (moral value stated as religious doctrine, reinforced by ritual action) with a strong and positive emotional charge in **rituo-cultural celebration** (worship).

Again here we would have to have a refined definition for 'culture'. Culture is akin to historico-religious consciousness. Etymologically it is linked to group consciousness through the root 'cultus' and evokes the notion of worship.

Worship, coming from the Old English Worthship (*Weorscipe*) speaks of worth / value / priority. Worship is in fact the appreciation and application of a Body of Principles (normally epitomized in a person, animal or object and the iconic stories associated with them).

When a group gets together in celebration of *who they are* and *what they esteem* is what we call worship /cultural celebration.

This is the vehicle of the transmission of spiritual values. Whatever is celebrated is energized. And whatever a people collectively and continuously energize and empower is what continues amongst them and as them. (*We become* what we worship.)

To firmly grasp the above concepts is to gain deep insights into the necessarily ritualistic and ceremonial functions of religion. Cosmologies and axiologies mean nothing until they are internalized. It is the deep internalization of religious truths / beliefs which make them powerful factors in human experience. We have a way of saying 'belief kill and belief cure'.

While some erroneously use this proverb to trivialize the nature of beliefs, its most obvious intention is to sacralize the function of beliefs in terms of experience. Ie. Our experiences issue from our beliefs, therefore, our beliefs are more substantial, or rather causal with reference to our experiences.

As modern science comes full circle (Quantum Theory) in its observations at the microcosmic level to verify this proverb that raises spirit (consciousness) to the level of priority and primacy in explaining material phenomena, we need now to correct our academic approach which has an archaic mechanical science informing our preoccupation with the material world and our belief that this world is more valid than the ideal or spiritual one.

The psychological realms of mind and thought, intention and attention that have been the domains of theologians, religious thinkers, philosophers and spiritual practitioners for centuries now beg to be understood by the common modern educator in order for her / him to successfully interpret and navigate through these times of change in both the realm of material social structure, as well as in its underpinning ideas, values and beliefs.

A good place to start is in understanding that most human behavior is informed from a much deeper plane than what we would imagine as conscious thought and decision. It is this subconscious realm, programmed with images, memories, emotions and values that we

have to access and understand to be able to grasp the dimension that religion informs and empowers. We can access this dimension through ritual and celebration.

The technology of ritual is the means by which we form our character, put simply. It is character, that subconsciously held accumulation of ideas, beliefs and values, that shape disposition and attitudes; that determine for the most part human behavior and human experiences.

One sermon is not likely to erase or affect years of subconscious programming in contrary values. One should not expect persons whose backgrounds and past have been shaped by contrary forces to suddenly comply with and accept or even understand conflicting values.

What religion does, through its ceremony and rituals is to program the psyches of all its devotees with similar information. This allows for cohesive and harmonious interaction.

What are needed are those persons with the gift of intuition, who can clearly discern the subconscious terrain of an individual or group.

- What principles characterize the behavior of a particular group or individual?
- What kind of ideas and values promote these principles? How do they contribute to/inhibit the spiritual development, harmony, productivity and growth of the group / individual ?
- What principles need to be introduced to maximize the group's / individual's development and well being?
- What are the most powerful methods of invoking those particular principles into the context of the group's / individual's thought life and social interactions?

These questions can only be answered by persons firstly whose experience in the realm of understanding and interacting with ideas /values and attitudes has equipped them to both 'see' this realm very clearly as well as prepared them to act so as to affect this plane of being intentionally. I.e. Their training would have to be spiritual / psychological.

Those responsible for the conducting of religious worship need to be equipped with both an understanding of what are the specific spiritual/ psychological needs of the community; as well as an understanding of *how* to use ritual to initiate this higher consciousness in its members.

Generally speaking, negative attitudes towards self or society indicate what areas of spiritual principles /religious truths need to be mastered or where psychological development needs to be encouraged.

Rituals must then be designed to incorporate these lessons as symbolic, participatory and repetitive action. These lessons must thereafter be celebrated in song, drama, dance, speech, art, spectacle and the other associated ways mentioned at the end of this section. This is taking an active role in the *re-creation* of the human spirit, an activity clearly understood in former times to be exactly the role of the teacher/ priest/ess.

Can we conceive of a school system in these modern times that not only can be the incubator of a new inclusionary world view allowing us to tolerate the crucible of a world whose traditional partitionary walls are melting away, but also a bastion of and anchor to the Standards and Ideals that led to the great achievements of the past, a pyramid in the desert pointing the way to the highest pinnacles of human attainment, a chamber of initiation into the mysteries and depths of the indomitable human spirit?

Or must we accept crumbling standards as an inevitable scenario of social anarchy, predicted in the eschatological doom scheme of a deity that is anxious to 'smite the earth with a curse'?

We believe the answer to that question lies solely with us. We suggest the following guidelines to all who would choose to have hope in blessing the future generations by revealing to them the 'ways of the God of their fathers'.

## **Structuring the format and content of Religious Devotional Exercise in School**

For any religious exercise to be complete it must have **three** components :-

1. **Didactic** - *expository or demonstrative of some spiritual theme.*

2. **Participatory** - *Ritualistic, some action which symbolizes the theme.*

3. **Celebratory** - *the theme must be expressed artistically invoking joyful exuberance.*

The first component speaks to **understanding** moral principle. The second to remembering and **internalizing** moral principle. The third to **energizing** or becoming motivated to practice moral principle.

Let's look further at these categories with the view of examining the context for their application in a school setting:

### **1. The didactic component**

- a. Virtues and vices are habits of being – attitudes. Our moral code informs us which is which. The purpose of spiritual instruction is in fact to make the divide clear by linking attitudes (internal causes) to experiences (external outcomes).

Proper religious instruction promotes virtuous behavior and inhibits vicious behavior.

Without much controversy, it must be noted that in most modern heterogeneous societies, there is not necessarily consensus on moral vision. People have different views on what is right from wrong.

That there are areas of moral confusion need not negate that there are also areas of moral consensus, nor that moral clarity (properly understood as the desire to understand the working of the cosmos and the self and appropriately align with such understanding) is not the genuine desire of all.

Nor does the latter affirmation deny that there can be pathological impediment to the achievement of what is commonly desired.

There is a wide enough circle of consensus to allow a canon of virtues to be identified.

For public schools, these virtues can be identified in the Jamaican MAP – our motto anthem and pledge. The national covenant states our ideals. These ideals can be supported

from whatever sectarian religious establishment that the school or its leadership may be aligned with.

Virtues have at their core the intrinsic worth of each individual, their thoughts and feelings; and equally the intrinsic worth of the social context out of which each individual springs, and the historic processes (material and psychic) that gave shape to the society.

Once virtues are identified, building these virtues into the character and spirit of the institution and all its participants is the aim of the program of religious devotion in the school.

A long term, systematic, approach is needed. Neither a city nor a character is built in a day.

The three components applied methodically over a duration of time, will invoke depth consciousness. But a new theme every week or day, rituals applied without method, or focus, defeat that purpose.

b.) The method of delivery will have bearing as to who and how the 'lesson' is received. Let's learn from Sesame Street and the Deejays. Youth prefer comedy & dramatized storytelling to 'sermonizing'. Using language and images popular with students communicates mutuality of respect. Digital media is the current context of communication globally. Attention to the modality of delivery matters.

c.) The character of the person/s presenting the information must be general approved by all members of the institution.

d.) Inclusive approaches which allow for student participation in the presentation and processing of information will obviously be superior to the podium / plebian divide.

## **2. The ritualistic / participatory component**

Under this category falls all such phenomena as uttered gems/proverbs/selections from sacred scripture/affirmations of creeds, etc. ; as well as most of what we call 'school tradition'.

Repetition is a modality of internalization. Whatever action is performed repeatedly, which contains symbolism that points to some spiritual truth or reality; or whatever words are repeated continuously, through speech or in song, which contains spiritual truth or point to some aspect of moral principle, these are what we refer to as participatory rituals.

By continually doing or saying something, we internalize its symbolism unconsciously into our spirits/ psyches. However we can be much more creative with this than just using the archaic 'memory gems' option – which has limited value.

We are targeting the subconscious here, not the conscious; so, the symbolic value of colors, shapes, icons, animals, trees, herbs, body postures, times and moments (solar,

lunar and stellar positions) scenes and places, elements, odors, sounds, foods, etc., must be considered in order to compose the best metaphoric representations of the themes being focused on.

Rituals can be simple acts or complex, coordinated participatory events. Rituals can directly target the conscious mind with explicit information. Rituals can bypass the conscious mind altogether by focusing on symbol and metaphor.

A simple example of creativity in ritual:

At one school while focusing on the theme, “unity”, the staff and students created a novel little ritual to invoke the energy and understanding of this Theme. At meal times, the classroom benches would be rearranged in the form of a circle. This shape we know symbolizes unity. Before anyone partakes of the meal, all would be required to stand in a circle, around the benches, with hands connected in a doubled fist. (popular amongst the boys) All would then simultaneously chant a revised version (theirs) of the popular psalm (made popular by the DJs) “How good and how pleasant it is for brethren and sistren to dwell together in unity”.

That ritual built up the consciousness of the oneness of the school community more effectively than a thousand sermonettes on the subject ever could.

A useful and innovative assignment would be to :-

1. Consider a theme
2. Think about associated songs, movies, colors, shapes, trees, herbs, times, scenes, elements, odors, sounds and foods.
3. Employing each relevant category, compose a ritual which as far as possible integrates all these elements.
4. The first time the ritual is performed, the value un focus should be stated explicitly. Afterwards, these other elements can be used to invoke or reinforce the theme, even without there being any necessary explicit statement.

a) Rituals must effectively “act out” (symbolize) the principle of the lesson.

b) They must be agreed on rather than imposed. The greatest kind of dynamism is released when the individual spirit is allowed to participate in its own direction.

c) The chain is as strong as its weakest link. Those who would tend to shy away from participation in collective rituals are the most important key in experiencing the power of collective rituals:- They must not be coerced to participate.

- They must be consulted.
- They must be honored.
- They must be given the lead.

An example:

In one inner city school setting I had the privilege to visit, where the morning devotional exercise was geared around 'respect', the need was cited to ritualize our initial encounters each day.

The traditional "good morning" is a ritual designed to reinforce respect for all in the community, whether we know them personally or not. To say "good morning" implies goodwill to all. The group showed no enthusiasm to this greeting nor the one suggested (by me): - a greeting in an African language (I direct an African Centered School).

When the suggestion was put forward by a student to employ the popular Rastafarian "Blessed Love", while making the triangular handsign of the Trinity ( a popular Rastafarian symbol), everyone became enthused. (Capleton the popular DJ that popularized these expressions hailed from that area.)

Needless to say, we experienced a measurable increase in expressions of respect and in general consideration after that.

### 3.) **The celebratory component**

This is not really a separate aspect of the previous two, but rather an atmosphere to be invoked every time the sacred 'space' wherein all religious and ritualistic exercises are to be carried out. This emotional charge allows for the deep internalization and storage in the subconscious of all the activities and words to be enunciated in that space. (This is behavioral training or motivational programming and serves the equivalent purpose of the 'bone' given the dog who has just 'sat' on command.

The psyche is exposed to a particular idea while simultaneously the emotions are charged with positive feeling. This becomes associated in the mind which begins to associate the principle learned with positive emotion. Therefore the person will be (or eventually become) internally motivated to follow the principle.

All the modalities that express the spirit of celebration can and should be used to open and close religious exercises: - Song, Dance, clapping, applause, jumping, shouting, music, noise etc.

Unfortunately, religious exercises have all too often been associated with a spirit of tedium, boredom or discomfort — (having to stand still in a line in the morning sun for half an hour). With a proper understanding of the human psyche, it is not hard to see why whatever might be said in that time is ignored, mocked or objected to by young males brimming with testosterone.

They do however understand the spirit of celebration. (And this explains why much to the chagrin of many a teacher, boys who can't remember a word from Shakespeare might

nonetheless memorize every line of Lady Saw or General Degree). [It's not their fault that the DJs have a better understanding of the human spirit than does the Literature teacher.]

Equally important, **never allow disciplinary matters or any negating exercise or words to share the same space as your celebrations.** Keep it positive!

## Planning to Celebrate

In the initial stages, until through joyful and abandoned celebration, the creative energies of the individuals within the school community are released (in music and poetic composition) and acknowledged; to solicit a joyous response to the various ethical themes, popular culture from outside will have to be excavated for appropriate artistic expressions of positive ethical values.

And these exist a plentiful enough. And in fact, the search for these itself, (which should best be done in dialogue with the students, who usually are the ‘masters of these arts’), should lead to the process of cultural evaluation which could only be an enlightening exercise for both student and teacher (you see, the power of cultural influence is not generally on the level of conscious reasoning).

- a) a list of songs can be drawn up and listed under applicable themes. These songs should be sung repeatedly, to enforce the theme, as well as be discussed.

Music soundtracks or a live school band (electronic instruments and drums etc.) of course enhance the singing 100 fold.

An example of such a list :-

### I. Self Confidence and self esteem

- I believe that children are our future (Greatest Love) Whitney Houston
- Hero - Mariah Carey
- My generation will make the change - Ziggy Marley
- If I Believe in me - Sabrina Williams

### II. Persistence/ Determination/ Faith

- Persistence is to try
- Lord give me strength — Luciano
- Lift up your head and hold it up high — Everton Blender
- Miracles (When You believe) Mariah Carey /Whitney Houston (Prince of Egypt)

### III. Reciprocity

- Everybody want to raid the barn — Anthony B
- etc.

b) Whoever conducts this component of the devotional exercise must be themselves effervescent and expressive in the realm of artistic expression (singing, dancing etc.)

c) Spontaneous artistic expression must be encouraged, not frowned upon by school hierarchy. This sends a message to the young psyche that dance and singing are not 'socially' acceptable. Of course no one is stupid enough to buy that. Young people will then just create their own society and culture without care for the approval of the 'establishment'. This is what creates the distance or gap of generations. Let us celebrate *together* and restore the old pathways.

d) Celebration is not only about noise and movement. Stillness and silence are not only enjoyed by the old but by the young as well. Meditation- the un-coerced sitting still in quiet contemplation for up to 15 minutes of unbroken, undisturbed solace is an equally powerful expression of the spirit of celebration. Having experimented with young people from rural to urban communities, I have found that once properly introduced, this practice is particularly enjoyable amongst students (quite opposite to the notion that young people can't sit still). The reverse is true. In most cases, after a group has been instructed in meditation, I find that it is I who gets impatient or restless and breaks the silence first. The students seem to have a great capacity for / need of or just plain enjoyment of protracted silence. (And only one or two might 'lose it' and fall asleep!)

All the senses can participate in celebrating a spiritual theme :

- **Speech** - e.g. affirmations, shouting, poetry, mutual storytelling,
- **Hearing** -e.g. music (yes sound systems etc.), Celebratory noise, listening to Nature or to silence;
- **Sight** - e.g. drama, dramatic productions, light spectacles, special decorations
- **Touch** -e.g. embraces, movement e.g. upraised hands, or other hand actions, etc. feeling the wind on one's skin
- **Smell** - e.g. aromas, the use of incense etc.

Perhaps we are just a paradigm shift away from realizing what a profound effect upon our very way of life (culture) the programmed use of rituals and the deliberate and informed celebration of our ethical values can have. Yes, we have evidence that this methodology is extremely effective and transformative when conscientiously applied. It is transformative for all who participate in the rituals.

One of the chief joys I have in planning and executing worship programs along the lines suggested here, is that each such focus is for me a consciousness expanding and character developing experience. I would wish to do it for that reason alone.

My paradigm of the world is that it is pretty much a mirror of my inner-self. Each project that deals with 'fixing' some problem that appears to be 'outside' of myself, I actually view as an opportunity to adjust some hidden inner conflict or block within myself.

Seeing the world in this way, I never think that the problem is "out there". 'Out there' reflects 'in here'. This doctrine of Parallelism of the spheres is as old as human society... beginning with the \* Hermetic (Tehutian) principle of "AS above, So below". And mirrored in the Gospels as "on earth as it is in heaven" or in such pronouncements as the Golden Rule.

\* Tehuti (in Greek, Hermes) in Kemetic (Egyptian) mythology was the original philosopher, who bequeathed the gift of writing and the discipline of science to the world.

In whatever form we learn to see the world like this, it commits us to positive thought / speech and action as an instrument of changing undesirable situations.

In answer to the question, "What on earth will we do about the Public schools' standards?" Let the answer be, " Let's celebrate!" Celebrate every heavenly / divine principle that is still holding us together. Celebrate the principles that have upheld our predecessors. Let us celebrate! & Recreate!

## **The Organizational / Psychometric Dimensions of the Enterprise**

Q. 1 What ought the areas of moral focus to be ?

A. We recommend 2 approaches :

a) A committee of 3 persons consisting of Guidance counselor, Senior Teacher, Vice Principal or Principal is designated to propose a list of virtues that need to be established in the school character. Perhaps the easiest way to do this is to make an inventory of vices perceived to be observed amongst students and staff of the institution. Convert them to their corresponding and opposite virtues and prioritize them in order of their perceived importance.

b) Use a moral guideline e.g. St Paul's Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22); Yvonne Coke's Jamaican MAP; The Nguzo Saaba by Maulana Karenga (Afro centric) etc.

Q.2. How much time should be allotted to each virtue ?

B. At least one school term.- 3 months. Perhaps it might be decided afterward that a particular theme should be repeated.

Q. 3 How should one plan or decide on the activities for any one term ?

A. A planning committee of 3 should be appointed based on the following criteria :-

- a. the persons must have grounded characters
- b. they should be non judgmental, 'easy to be entreated', approachable personalities
- c. they must enjoy the popular respect of both the student population as well as the staff administration

This committee is then charged with the planning of the term's devotional exercises in accordance with the guidelines presented earlier on in the paper. Members should share the responsibilities of coordinating the events and activities during devotion as well as assessing the success of these events and activities.

Q. 4 What are the criteria for assessing the success of the program ?

A. Another committee should be appointed for evaluation of the program. These persons should include those teachers with the gift of criticism. Those with sharp powers of observation and unsentimental, analytical minds.

Their task is to clearly define, based on the particular virtue being emphasized in a particular term, observable, therefore measurable behavioral patterns that typify the virtue expressed on the individual as well as group plane. (e.g. Straight orderly queues, rising in the presence of authority, neat classrooms etc. etc.)

They should then devise a system of assessment as the school moves gradually towards these recommended behavior patterns, powered by the motivational techniques recommended in this paper. They should present their recommendations at the start of the program and should meet once a month for their assessment. The same committee should make recommendations to the planning committee as seen fit.

## Glossary of terms with specialized meaning: -

**cultural celebration** – Celebration of the values (by necessity moral / religious/spiritual values) that cause a group to cohere and assume its specific identity. By this means, new members are programmed with these same thought processes and paradigms of value. This is the ‘motor’ of cultural reproduction.

**culture** - coming from the root ‘cult’ implying group consciousness. Sharing the same root with ‘cultivate’ connoting the ‘nurturance’ aspect of group consciousness.

**evolutionary principles** – the energies and conditions that give form to and sustain the character of group identity.

**gods / powers / energies / forces / causes** – interchangeable terms referring to the phenomena that gives shape to the order of things manifest in the world. Interchangeable terms for Source / Creator - generally personified in religious conception.

**moral** – Dealing with morés. Right and wrong implies intention and direction ... therefore related to individual / group consciousness and cosmology.

**moral principles** – these are the statement of logic informing group behavioral norms.

**psyche** – Greek term implying spirit as mind, particularly subconscious mind. Root of psychic / psychiatry / psychology etc.

**religion** – can be seen abstractly as dealt with in this paper as a universal human enterprise in cultivating or connecting with ‘depth consciousness’... or concretely as the institutionalization of group cosmologies.

**ritual** – acts, often executed repeatedly, soaked in symbolism and evocative of cosmic truths / energies / forms, that directly program the subconscious mind without conscious acknowledgement. Method of mind programming, used in religion to supplement the teachings imparted on the conscious level. Powerful tool for the internalization of ideals.

**Source** – another epithet for God / Creator / Supreme Deity or Being / Most anterior Cause

**spiritual** – coming form the root spiral, having the connotation of spinning , therefore circular, cyclical, therefore linked to ritual... by implication that which is vibrational / energetic / supportive of matter. Implies movement / energy / essence / vibration / character / influence

**theology** - The study of and attempts at articulating the nature of the divine / the Ideal.