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"Boy-Child"

Dear Friends,

In the not too distant past, less than 20 years ago, there was not a school in the village of Akrampa. At that time the entire education of a child was left to his parents or relatives. Now most of the children receive this education, along with going to school. I'd like to give you a bit more detail of what that kind of education would look like for the Akrampa child, in a rural setting of the Ghanaian community. This will focus on the male child.

The Akrampa boy-child belongs to a community that is basically an agrarian (of land and farming) one. His father and predecessors worked the land, and if he didn't go to school, he also, of necessity, would become a worker of the land. This would make him dependent on what the land produced. His 'classroom' is the farm, the land on which his father has been working. His father and others working the farm are his teachers. His tools are the land, a cutlass, a hoe, and an axe. The cutlass is his primary clearing and cutting tool: to clear the land of weeds and stalks so it will be open for cultivation. The hoe is used to uproot any stumps and make mounds, while the axe is for felling trees. All of these are manual implements and require huge physical strength and energy.

Over time, the boy child will learn and progress through stages until he 'graduates' with his own parcel of land from his father, or any other relation. There is nothing like a boy-child opting for some other vocation: the father is a tiller of the land (and a hunter) and he takes after him. He will also produce the same crop that the father has been producing. This will most often be cassava, a tropical plant with starchy roots, or tomatoes, plantain, etc.

As mentioned in last month's article, this education with his father begins when the boy is between five and seven years old. Sometimes the father may start teaching him as early as three years old, if the boy's stature and physique is ample enough to carry items to accompany the father to the farm. The boy does not, however, start cutting weeds or clearing the land until the father can determine that it is safe for him. Even then, he will always stay with the boy. The boy would be allowed to be by himself when he is about twelve years old and has gained sufficient experience and the know-how.

When the boy is about eighteen years of age, the father will cut a piece of the land for him, or help him get his own from elsewhere. From this age on, the father is only a distant 'consultant'. In fact, some young men actually relocate farther from the father/family, even traveling miles away from home to establish himself after 'graduation' from his father's classroom. If he needed to acquire his own land, the father is obligated to provide the resources for the young man to come into his own possession.

In the typical, traditional home, a small ceremony is held to signify that the boy has become a man. On that occasion, family and elders will gather and pour libation, asking 'the gods' to bless him and set him on the path of prosperity. From this time on the young man will now begin organizing himself to start his own generation, to marry, having established his own home and vocation.

Blessings, Pastor Ben