

## THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY ON HEALTH, FITNESS AND SPORTS.

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### Abstract

This study attempts to locate the links between spiritual exercise, physical fitness and good health. We discover that spirituality has a lot to do with the physical world. A sound spiritual mind enhances dynamic health and physical well-being.

This study also advocates that spirituality provides room for better performance by sport men, in terms of conduct, endurance, morals, discipline and fair-play. It can also aid laudable performances in competitions. A spiritually minded person is conscious of his environment and is also considerate with his fellow men. He is not likely to beat the Umpire or Referee.

Two Religions - African Religion and Christianity, were employed as yardsticks for spiritual periscope. They both have practicable spiritual exercises. <sup>border</sup> ~~bordering~~ on sound mind, physical fitness, good health, hygienic living and the total well-being of mankind which when employed naturally makes better sportsmen.

The study sums up by recommending to sports' and health ambassadors, the importance of spiritual exercises to physical fitness and good healthy living.

### INTRODUCTION.

Eminent scholars in the field of physical and health education had said so much about physical fitness and good health. Our concern here is the introduction or suggestion of the role of Spirituality on sports; the place of spiritual exercise to physical well being and sound health. We also know that a school of thought considered physical and emotional well being as pre-requisite for spiritual well being. It is just that it takes a man with inner strength - in terms of spirituality, to stand in the face of crisis and trials that daily invade the life of a man, especially the challenging life style of sportsmen.

From ages past, Religion had always occupied a significant place in the activities and life of a man. For instance, the influence of Greek on modernization cannot be over emphasized. Religion nurture the education, poetry, gymnastics, sculpture, arts, music and architecture of the Greek ( Dalen and Bennet, 1971). Organized and local spotting activities originated with the Greeks. We still remember the twelve major gods that formed the Olympic Council, which guided the destinies of the Hellenic people, with Zeus in charge.

Although the Greek Religion had little direct influence on the morals of the people, it did enrich other aspects of their lives (Elsy and Arrowood, 1940). The Greeks worship the beautiful in man and nature. Their gods were idealized humanity, man with a superior intellect and physical capability. With their natural love for rivalry, the Greek strove to emulate the gods, the super-human

(Dalen and Bennet, 1971). Therefore, for man to excel in what ever he does, for him to attain the peak of physical and health perfection, there is the need for him to employ and utilize those defined and spiritual elements made available for him to achieve maximum benefits by the creator.

Some of these spiritual exercises, as relevant to our discussion are: worship, singing, music, dancing, clapping, prayer, and fasting. We shall examine them from the point of view of the two Religions as earlier mentioned.

### **AFRICAN RELIGION:**

African religion is the indigenous religion of the Africans. It evolved with the people and involves everything about them. It rests on five pillar structure: belief in God, belief in divinities, belief in spirits, belief in ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine.

For the purpose of our objective, we shall concentrate on the "elements of worship" an aspect under a broad section of "sacrificial rites", which spell out some of the spiritual exercises relevant to our discussion. These are worship, music and dancing, prayer and sacrifice.

#### **Worship:**

In the life of a traditional African, worship as an imperative factor stands out prominently (Idowu, 1996). As a deeply religious people, worship for them begins, controls, and ends all affairs of life. They also feel that they are in the presence of there divinity wherever they are whatever they do. The active existence of the divinity is their controlling thought, whether that means for them a constant source of superstitious dread, or a sense of security, which fills them with inward peace.

Worship in the religion of the African is essentially ritualistic (Idowu, 1996) and liturgical (Awolalu and Dopemu, 1979). The ritual follow set, fixed, and traditional patterns. "The way it is done" is the guiding principle whether worship is public or private. These traditional patterns are carefully preserved and systematically followed. Especially is this so because they have acquired magical virtues in consequence of which it is believed that they can only be efficacious when they are correctly conducted.

Worship is therefore a religious exercise, which involves the performance of devotional acts in honour of a deity or divinities. It presupposes a yearning for God and it is a means of glorifying the source, the sustainer and the End of life; it confirms man's acknowledgement of the Transcendent Being (Awolalu, 1979). Who is independent of the worshiper but upon whom the worshiper depends. Furthermore, the need and limitations of ordinary human nature prompt men to seek a divine strength to sustain him in the fulfilment of his destiny here on earth. When man lost the favour of the supernatural beings, it is through worship that he seeks to regain it.

#### **Music and Dancing:**

Music and dancing finds an important place in the worship of the African. The music may be quiet, loud, or noisy; that depends on the kind of worship in which it occurs. It may be just singing, it may be singing accompanied by instruments. Every divinity has a set of praise names ((Idowu.1996), with stories, which are recited about him in

commemoration of his origin, greatness, past deeds, ability and capability.

Dancing is no less prominent during worship than songs. The dances take definite form depending upon the divinities to whom the offerings are made. Most of the dances, except where they are only expressions of religious conviviality, are of fixed patterns and must be done correctly - which foot goes forward first, which movement of the hands and body accompany it, which turn are taken next, and how many times each component of the pattern is to be repeated - all these must be carefully observed. However, the 'speech' of the instruments is often designed to guide the dancers in their movement.

**Prayer:**

The heart and the center of prayers in the religion of Africa is petition. The petitions are largely for what may be described technically as material blessing. They consist usually of asking for protection from sickness and death, gifts of longevity, children, prosperity in enterprises, victory over enemies, protection from evil spirits and of relatives near distance, rectification of unhappy destinies, and abundant provision of material things; blessing on all well wishers and damnations on all ill wishers.

**Sacrifice:**

Sacrifice is a sine qua non in African Religion. It is the essence of the religion as it is of every religion the world has ever known. It is inconceivable to have a religion without some form of sacrifice, however modified or refined it may be. Sacrifice is primarily a means of contact or communion between man and the deity. It is man's way of maintaining an established relationship between himself and his object of worship. What is offered and how it is offered depends upon the nature of the particular cult as well as the occasion of the sacrifice.

While prayer is a vocal or silent appeal to a divinity, with a view to achieving certain ends, sacrifice is an additional concrete method of serving the same purpose. Nobody comes forward to worship without bringing an offering, however simple. The offering may be given daily, weekly, or as occasion demands.

**CHRISTIANITY.**

Christianity is the religion of the followers of Jesus Christ. It is unique for its doctrine of Trinity. We shall consider the spiritual exercises in the light of the following elements: worship, music, and dancing/clapping, prayer, sacrifice, meditation and fasting.

**Worship:**

Unlike African Religion, worship in Christianity embodies all other spiritual exercises. Whether prayer, singing, dancing, clapping, sacrifice or even fasting, they are all part and parcel of worship. Worship opens the spiritual realm for a Christian to God. It grants him access to God and his Heavenly host. It is a divine remedy for every malady. It breaks shackles, removes barriers and lightens the mind of evil machination. It also attracts the dews of heaven upon a Christian, in terms of providence, protection, and promotion.

On the other hand, it does not in any way promote negligence (Farmer, 1943). One requires a lot of self-discipline and constant diligence to worship God, in Christianity. It must be carried out with all sense of awe. When a Christian learns to appreciate God, he

in turn appreciates the creature of His hands - Man (Shafer, 1996).

### **Music and Dancing/Clapping:**

Music and Dancing/Clapping are extension of Christian worship. They are creative manifestation from the heart of a grateful Christian. They also express the joyous, healthy mind of a believer. James in his epistle wrote, "is anyone happy, let him sing" (James 5: 13b).

There is something interesting about music, dancing and clapping when Christian gathered in worship (Anusan, 1989). It has a contagious effect. "There is something medicinal about them", says Alao (1999). They make a troubled mind happy, not just being happy they lead him and link him with God, where his happiness is guaranteed and consolidated (Alao, 1999).

### **Prayer:**

In Christianity, the believer must be in good standing with God before his prayers can be answered. In any act of worship in Christianity, prayer occur several times. It is regarded as communion between himself and God, and of obtaining spiritual well being.

Jesus prays always and teaches his disciples how to pray (Mathew 6:6-7). In casting out demons, in performing miracles, in getting out of difficulties, in all circumstances of life, Jesus shows His followers that they need to pray. It is important in Christianity that prayer must be accompanied by faith. Even if the believer is in good standing with God and does not have faith while praying, he dis-please God (Hebrew 11 6). Prayer is sometimes accompanied with fasting when the adhered is desperate.

### **Fasting:**

Fasting is one of the spiritual exercises in Christendom that is peculiar in nature, in that it should not be announced. It is an exercise to subject the antics of the physical body in order that it might be in a position to be attuned with the spiritual completely. It requires absolute discipline to embark on a fruitful fast in Christianity.

There are also categories of fasting. There is the intermittent fasting, and there is what they call 'dry fasting'. This is a kind of fasting that the observer embarks upon, without food (sometimes with water), until he achieves his goal.

### **Sacrifice:**

Sacrifice in Christianity differs completely to what obtains in African religion. In Christianity, the adherent is the 'living sacrifice' (Rom. 12:1). If a Christian's life is unpleasing to God, there is nothing he brings, in form of tangible offering or sacrifice that is acceptable to Him. Hence a Christian must live what he professes. This requires absolute self denial.

### **Meditation:**

Meditation in Christianity means digesting and brooding over the word of God - the Bible. It means taking the wordings as they are, allowing them to sink into his being, and putting them into practice. For this to be effective and have positive influence over the life of the believer, there is need for diligent study of the word of God. Meditating upon God's word is intended to transform a Christian's life, so that he in turn affects his community for the best.

All the evidences discussed above with regards to spiritual exercises, as presented by the two Religion have striking similarities, although with varying emphasis. As a general rule it is clear that for these exercises to be meaningful and effective, they have to be engendered by a belief in and appreciation of the power and position of the divine. They also require constant discipline from the adherents. These spiritual exercises must be done in a spirit of purity and total submission to the will of God. It is only then that they will be efficacious in the lives of those that observe them.

### **RELEVANCE OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISES TO SPORT, PHYSICAL FITNESS AND GOOD HEALTH.**

The Religions, generally recommends spiritual strength rather than the brute force. Worship, music, and meditations tames and eventually lock-up the beast in man, while they release and expose the angel and virtues in him. The mind of man is so vulnerable to external forces (unseen), which directly or indirectly influences his actions. He therefore stands to be in control of his emotions, passions, feelings, and appetite when he allows the divine elements to be part of his lifestyle.

There are certain benefits that attend his character, health and speech, when he cultivates the habits of engaging in some of the spiritual exercises mentioned earlier. There are: self-discipline, self-control, good conduct, sound mind, good manners, good health, healthy physique, seasoned utterances, bridled passions, controlled emotions, endurance and humility and long life.

Any person that delights in engaging in sport of physical fitness requires spiritual exercises. Prayer brings down Gods presence into a man's life. The individual is ~~the~~ conscious of his behavior and conduct when in the midst of people. He is mindful of doing things that will displease God. Christianity, one of the religions under-studied here, enjoins man to prefer others to himself. He refrains from doing things or actions that could hurt other people. This kind of person will obey the instructions of the Umpire, referee, instructor or arbiter. He will not slap the referee on the field.

In addition, meditation on the word of God, seeking to be in good relationship with Him naturally brings about a change in attitude. He does not want to defile himself, by engaging in excesses and bad activities which are naturally unhealthy for his physiology. He also run away from hard drugs which can destroy his career, especially if he/she is a promising talent. These spiritual exercises also enable the sportsman to bridle his appetite. Certain diet are not only healthy for physical fitness but inviting to the body. The self control that comes with being exposed to these spiritual energies enhances the choice to say 'no'.

Spiritual exercises also aid mind alertness in that once the mind is freed of sinfulness, it is less burdensome. It can now operate within the realm of purity, which has rubbed on it by divine interaction. He also learns fast when instructed by his health/fitness instructors or coach. His sense of judgement and discretion in discharging his role are not in doubt. He therefore performs creditably well.

Humility and regard for elders and others are some of the virtues that spiritual

exercise brings out of sportsmen. It will be difficult for them to falsify their age and documents. They will not abscond when taken for international tournaments. Since they know that they do not have to be slave to the dollar or pounds sterling, but that God is preparing their prosperity.

Dancing and clapping, apart from the spiritual blessings that accompany them in the right atmosphere, also build and strengthens the hands and body muscles as they can last for hours each time. They are both physical and spiritual exercises.

Above all, they also keep this individual that has learnt to embrace and practice them out of trouble and danger. He is also protected from unnecessary spiritual attacks. We have cases of sportsmen suddenly dropping dead, while in competitions. In other words, they aid longevity.

## CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, we have attempted to bring across the roles of spirituality in sports, physical fitness and good health. We have tried to also bring out some of the benefits, derivable from engaging in these spiritual exercises.

Education has its focus in developing in every nobleman, action and wisdom. Religion combines the two with developing spiritual consciousness. It is our hope that by the time these suggestions are imbibed, we shall witness less of destruction of lives and properties in our communities. When it starts from the sportsmen, the fans and the spectators have no option but to emulate.

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