

Harness the power of the ancestors

Written by Timothy Houston

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Years ago when my kids were small, I received some excellent advice from my friend and mentor. He told me to cherish the time I had with my children because there would come a day that we would not be able to sit down and have dinner together. As time went on, his counsel quickly came to pass. At that time, I had 4 kids in three different schools, and if you added in the complexity of multiple activities such as band, cheerleading, football, basketball, and track practices, we could hardly find time for a sit-down family dinner. Out of this need came our family's Sunday dinner tradition that has existed in some form or another for the last 25 years. This tradition has now grown to include my 4 children, 10 grandchildren, and extended family and friends.

Family traditions are an important part of our heritage. They have their roots in distant past when the concept and system of family as a unit of society was crystallized. In all ages and in all civilizations, since the ancient time to the present day, families have taken pride in their traditions. From our African roots to our American culture, family traditions have been established to remind us of who we are and where we come from. This is a prerequisite to clearly understand where we are going. Like our language, traditions and customs keep us connected to our common ancestry.

Family traditions must be preserved. Some families like to identify a particular person as the keeper of the family traditions and assign a particular name to the keeper. In West Africa the *griot* is the repository of oral traditions, and is also often seen as something of a societal leader due to his traditional position as an adviser to royal personages. In Mande society, the *jeli* was a historian, advisor, arbitrator, praise singer, and storyteller. Most African villages had their own griot, who told tales of births, deaths, marriages, battles, hunts, affairs, and hundreds of other things. This was their way of keeping their family's traditions, history, and culture alive from one generation to the next.

Family traditions provide a guide for parenting. Meaningful family traditions have always been a valuable tool for parents and elders to carry out the responsibility of raising children and injecting into them social values. Family traditions ensure that the warmth and closeness of a family bond grows. In the modern context, maintenance of and developing family traditions continue to be as significant as they were at the earliest times. Active family traditions and meaningful participation in them help families to avoid what the social scientists call "entropy". An "entropic family" is one that loses its sense of emotional closeness because members neglect the family's inner life and community ties. Without strong family traditions to bind a family together, the children will over time simply drift apart.

Family traditions must be kept alive. Think about your family. What are your traditions? Who is

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the keeper of the flame? You or someone in your family may need to research your family history to discover some of the rich, powerful, and vibrant traditions your fore-fathers used. By this, you will be able to harness the power of your ancestors. Without the aid of computers, telephones, or the internet, they were able to weave a fabric of family traditions that has lasted down through the ages. These traditions will help you to be a better, person, parent, and family member. Great family traditions keep great families together!

Timothy Houston is an author, minister, and motivational speaker who is committed to guiding positive life changes in families and communities. For copies of his book, questions, comments or more information, go to www.tlhouston.com.