

Beginning Steps To Traditional Africa

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Let me begin this essay by saying it is very much a journey into the space of the mystic. Growing up in a European society, I have witnessed how this culture often regulates the mystic to the "mysterious" outer edges of human existence (as we understand it) -- almost banished from the everyday reality of our lives. Emphasis instead is placed on tangible, touchable factors that fit within the cultural / ideological understanding of European culture: usually that which can be easily explained by those within the validated roles to explain things to the masses. With certain fundamental aspects of Traditional Africa existing beyond such, the typical response has been to dismiss Traditional Africa or reduce its fullness so that it fits more comfortably within the accepted European cultural paradigm. This conditioning is far deeper than most realize, and probably cannot be seen how deep until one has made significant progress in breaking away from European culture. Clearly, this essay is directed to those who share in such an aim. But first, let me challenge you to embrace a different understanding of the mystic: not as something that begins beyond us and then reaches for or calls to us from beyond our reach. Instead, the mystic begins and within the very space of your every heart beat. In other words, the mystic is everywhere: within the tangible and intangible, within the touchable and the untouchable, within that which we understand and do not presently understand and may never understand. With this realization, our every action (and inaction) is profound as it occurs within the space (or universal space) of the mystic.

With this said, know that some of what I share will not be accompanied with the usual sources used to validate points in essays. Some of my sources will be historical, but some will be experiential (based on my spiritual experience) and some from beyond this realm -- such as guidance received from the Honorables, ancestors, and other beneficent forces. I encourage all who read these words to weigh their relevance for you individually, just as past writing / stories from Traditional Africa did not have relevancy for all who read / heard them. Where there is a relevance, embrace the words and see how they may shape how you approach life. Where they do not, leave the words where they are as they may be awaiting their embrace by someone else.

Also know, this essay is not going to tell you how to live a Traditional African way of life. That is beyond the scope of any essay I would offer, as well as beyond my purpose as a human being. In many regards, this essay seeks to identify some elements of Traditional African ways of life: not to live them as they were lived in the past, but to see how these portents of guidance can inform how we, as people in search of Traditional Africa, can apply them to how we live now. Also, given the depth of conditioning we experience within the presently prevailing European culture, this essay will acknowledge some of the culturally conditioned barriers we must move beyond to begin to see African values in their own light. This is not a *how-to essay* as much as it is a *be-aware-of essay*. To

the extent readers are able to cultivate their awareness into a way of life, we will be able to begin the journey of discovering and manifesting Traditional African ways of life.

Let me also be clear about what I mean by Traditional Africa. I am referring to African civilizations (I'll explain my difference between civilizations and societies later) that existed throughout Africa prior to the conquest and colonization of the African continent. The Arab conquest of mostly northern and eastern Africa and the European conquest of western and sub-Saharan Africa destroyed these civilizations, including many of their records and lineages of oral history and wisdom. Modern African nations are the remnants of these conquests: although some of these nations bear the names and claims to Traditional African civilizations, they do not live as these traditional civilizations did. As a result, many are not reflective of Traditional Africa. Now, in saying this I am not saying that every African nation prior to these conquests operated as beneficent and prosperous civilizations. Neither were such civilizations free from the challenges of remaining in line with the flow of beneficence, a challenge some civilizations failed in fulfilling and sometimes collapsed of their own accord. But when looking at the whole of these civilizations, there is a wealth of lessons present day people can study to guide us on our paths to beneficence.

FROM IDEA TO ACTION

One of the most significant shifts one must make to embrace a Traditional African way of life is the move from an idea-oriented culture to an action culture. Much of European culture exists or is based in the realm of ideas. To give an example, Europe has for the past few centuries been culturally anchored in Judeo-Christian values. Among the most regarded doctrines of this value system is the Ten Commandments ascribed to Moses in the Old Testament of the Bible.¹ One of the most famous of the commandments is "Thou shalt not kill," sometimes translated as "Thou shalt not murder." Despite the clear explicitness of this well known commandment, European nations (including the United States of America) have engaged in a multitude of wars and conquests for centuries, including at least one major war for almost every decade of the twentieth century. Most, if not all, of these wars were sanctioned by churches and other Judeo-Christian institutions. So how can the commandment to not kill or murder be upheld in wars where killing and murder are rampant: where the point of (European) war is to kill enough of your enemies in order to force them to surrender. This question has been handled a number of ways, but all in the realm of ideas. In the European wars to enslave and conquer people of color, the victims of murder and mass killings were considered (in the realm of ideas) to not be human and thus not covered by the commandment. In wars throughout the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age, the enemies (European and non-European) were often considered "heathens" and, consequently, not human in "the eyes of God;" therefore, they could be killed without violating the commandment in the same way livestock could be killed and eaten without being considered a sin. In the Modern era, when war became a normal and expected part of life for Europeans, it was not considered a sin to kill for the "protection of one's nation," such that even

¹ The Ten Commandments are found in The Book of Exodus Chapter 20, Verses 2 - 17 and The Book of Deuteronomy Chapter 5, Verses 6 - 21.

church officials were explicit in saying God was on their “patriotic side” -- even from the pulpit. As a result, another exemption from the commandment to not kill was granted de facto. All these justifications stood as ideas in face of the reality of killing other people, violating the commandment in action.

In the realm of ideas, actual actions can be downplayed even as they violate cherished cultural values. This elevation of ideas over actions while disconnecting actual actions from cherished ideas has created a lot of hypocrisy in European culture. Many ideals (cherished ideas) are proclaimed while social practices (via individual and collective actions) violate these ideas. Thus, the idea of democracy (a government ruled by the people) is praised while in practice (action) a few thousand elected and selected individuals have the sole power to make governmental decisions -- even decisions the mass of millions of citizens disapprove of. Thus, the idea of equality is promoted while blatant inequalities are part of the normal social practices. Thus, the idea of civilization can be proclaimed while many uncivilized things (even by European definitions of civilization) are regular, everyday occurrences in European nations: such as homelessness, starvation, abuse of children and senior citizens, etc. Thus, the idea of America being the richest nation in the world can be boasted while most American citizens will never see a sliver of the concentrated wealth the ruling one percent of ultra-rich Americans retain within their control. And the list goes on and on.

An important point to take note of is that in idea-oriented cultures, ideas are held to be more important (sometimes supreme) over the realities people face. And, particularly in societies where the guiding ideas are created by a small elite group of people, ideas can be completely fabricated -- divorced from reality. It is a normal part of modern European culture to proclaim the fulfillment of ideas that are not manifested in the actions of people. But with the idealization (some say worship) of ideas, the reality created by actions is often obscured. *If we approach Traditional Africa from this European cultural approach, we will most likely pursue an idea of Traditional African culture, not a practice (living actions) of it.* This reality is evident in much of the “African-centered” studies of scholars and “cultural activists” educated (and conditioned) in European culture: their scholarship and activism is often an assemblage of ideas about (or imposed upon) Africa, not a wholistic practice (set of actions) of an African way of life. In such a pursuit, any lack of progress in manifesting a living reality of Traditional African ways can be addressed by “new” (or often, recycled) ideas that deflect our attention from our misdirected actions or lack of action.

Based on my studies, I will offer that most Traditional African cultures were action cultures. The core of the people’s way of life was culled from what they did, and the fulfillment (manifestation) of what they did informed what values they held. In this way, actions that yielded beneficence were studied to be understood. This understanding revealed (not imposed or dictated) values: values validated by the beneficence of actions that were encouraged to be repeated because of the beneficence these actions manifested. As individuals collectified their beneficent actions, these groups (or communities) discovered collective values. As the wisdom of this knowledge was shared with members of that group, and sometimes with other groups, a tradition of values formed that served to inform others of the beneficence certain actions held if performed. Thus, from an analytical point of view, every value from this cultural approach must have a set of actions that, when performed, produce the beneficent

outcome of that value. And, for an action-oriented group, the most cherished values will be those connected to actions that can be performed regularly, as these will manifest a regular flow of beneficence.

For example, the act of seeing things as they are (observation) yields the benefit of being able to accurately assess what is before you and learn from it. “To see things as they are” (an action) and “to realize (or acknowledge) reality as it is” (another action) are mystic definitions of truth. The beneficence gained from these actions (i.e., the accumulation of knowledge and understanding through observation) reveals the value of truth -- value meant as something worthy *and* an ideal upheld (you uphold it because it is worthy). This value of truth can then be carried forth to the act of communicating truth as it is (without change) which brings us into the scope of honesty. The act of honesty among people can build the value of trust, which serves to bring people closer together into deeper bonds based on beneficent actions and outcomes. This expansion of benefit and actions can extend further and further until you start to form sets of values based on actions and the beneficent outcomes of these actions. This approach was common among many Traditional African cultures. This same paradigm can be applied to a range of actions: from farming, to forming families and communities, to engaging in trade, to artistic activities, to spiritual practices, etc.

It is only in retrospect that European and Europeanized scholars, from a place of cultural arrogance, interpreted Traditional African values as idea-centered principles, not action-based practices. An example of this is the African-American holiday of Kwanzaa. This holiday, conceived by Dr. Maulana Karenga, is an idea-oriented holiday culled from the celebration of the first fruits of harvest: a Traditional African celebration of an outcome (the harvest) manifested by a culmination of actions performed by humans, animals, Honorables, and other beneficent forces. This outcome was reached by the daily practice of collective work and fulfillment of responsibilities, which Kwanzaa recognizes in its Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles) as Umoja (unity) and Ujima (collective work and responsibility). A successful harvest allowed community members to build an economy based on barter and trade, where a fair exchange was determined by the people themselves; not banks, corporations, or governing bodies declaring the financial value of goods. These practices are reflected in the Kwanzaa principle of Ujamaa (cooperative economics). A successful harvest also allowed people to devote themselves to other self-determined tasks, including various artistic and spiritual pursuits connected to an individual’s purpose for coming into this world. These practices are reflected in the Kwanzaa principles of Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Kujichagulia (self-determination). The appearance of the first fruits of the harvest also reminds people of the importance of trusting other community members² (humans and other beings) will do their part in the performance of collective actions, and of you performing your individual part with care so others may trust you. Such building of trust manifests a traditional practice of faith, which Kwanzaa acknowledges as the principle of Imani (faith). Traditionally, the celebration of these practices are celebrated only when the first fruits appear,

² Note that most communities in Traditional Africa did not allow just anybody to become members of their communities: members were either groomed in the community values (usually from childhood) or proved (through actions) they would uphold the communal values and, thus, could be trusted. So do not mistake this as an advocacy for blind trust: discretion was always used to determine who could be trusted, and it is important to trust those persons.

signaling that the work to produce a harvest was successful and will allow other work that depends upon a successful harvest to continue. If, for some reason, a harvest does not come (which sometimes happened), the celebration of the first fruits is not celebrated. Nor is the celebration tied to specific dates, the first fruits are celebrated when they appear. This is because the celebration is an acknowledgment of an outcome produced by actions. And the sacred regard for this celebration deems it inconceivable to celebrate it if there are no first fruits.

The Traditional African celebration of the first fruits differs greatly from Kwanzaa, which reduces this sacred celebration to a holiday of symbolic ideas. The work of producing a harvest is reduced to idea-oriented principles that are ascribed to one of the seven days of Kwanzaa. And, although the holiday professes that these principles should be lived throughout the year, the reality is the symbolic embrace of these principles is often relegated to the seven days of Kwanzaa by most who celebrate it. In other words, many people who celebrate Kwanzaa do not live (in action) the principles of Kwanzaa as part of their daily lives, and many rarely mention the principles outside the holiday season.

In no way am I trying to bash Kwanzaa or Dr. Karenga. Instead, I am revealing how from an idea-centered cultural approach Traditional African principles (which emanate from actions) are reduced to ideas. Kwanzaa has played a role in my personal evolution toward a Traditional African way of life but it does not meet the measure of being Traditional African. Just as it is appropriate for a baby to crawl until it is able to stand and walk, those who are serious about living Traditional African ways must move beyond former elementary approaches to Traditional Africa: we must move beyond ideas of Traditional Africa to a more mature practice (in action) of living it. I would encourage those who are genuine about celebrating Kwanzaa to embrace the daily practices of growing fruits and vegetables to produce a harvest. Surely, you can learn more about unity, collective work and responsibility, self-determination, cooperative economics, and faith by getting up every morning and working together to: toil fields, care for the growing plants and trees, fertilize crops, and other tasks required to grow food and yield a successful harvest. You can discover a deep appreciation for other beings and forces in nature who contribute much to the successful cultivation of crops. You will also discover a deeper appreciation for purpose and creativity, realizing that without the hard work of growing food these tasks will not be able to flourish. You can move beyond a limited symbolic acknowledgment of these values and embrace an experiential appreciation and understanding of them, an appreciation and understanding cultivated into your being by your own actions. Then perhaps the symbolic celebration of ideas over the course of days between Christmas and New Year's Day³ -- seven days in the dead of winter that were usually granted as vacation time to enslaved Africans in this country -- will seem a bit shallow.

³ For those who are not familiar with how the days between Christmas and New Year's Day were used during American chattel slavery, please read the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. As an appendix to this essay, I have included Douglass' words on how the slave owners used these days to appease enslaved Africans. This puts the selection of the seven days for Kwanzaa in a more peculiar light, especially since the dead of winter has no relation to an actual time of harvest. Just as these seven days were used to appease the "rebellious spirit" of enslaved Africans, the mainstream commercial embrace of Kwanzaa has certainly diluted (if not misled) a genuine embrace of Traditional Africa by Blacks in America. I have personally questioned why these seven days were chosen, given the history of their use by American slave owners, and Douglass' analysis of this "vacation time" states why.

So, to conclude this section, in seeking to embrace a path into the Traditional African realm our emphasis must be on actions, and particularly beneficent actions as these were the building blocks for the more prosperous and thriving civilizations. This emphasis on action is essential to understanding the other things this essay will address.

THE CONTEXT FOR ACTION

“The context is essential to understanding.” This phrase came to me in the midst of one of my meditations. The understanding of actions change as situations change. For example, in the modern age farming is usually seen as merely a means of producing food for people to eat, often growing the food to sell it to others to make money. In the past, some civilizations saw the act of farming as engaging in a sacred relationship with nature and other beings who are intricately involved in the provision of food: those beings who play a part in providing seeds, sun light, water, wind, soil suitable for crops, air, suitable growing weather, etc. Within this context, the act of farming goes way beyond food and money, but can become a means to engage the universe. Yet, it may not begin that way: farming may begin simply as a means to grow food to eat. But when performed with care, an open mind (not one cluttered with pre-existing ideas), and awareness, the farmer may see the context for one’s actions transform.

To perform your actions with care is to respect your actions. As mentioned above, actions can produce beneficent outcomes and inform our values. With each act having such potential, each act is best performed with the concentration and focus that respects the potential of that act. That we examine our intended outcomes and evaluate the course of our actions to ensure that they manifest what we seek. That we exercise due attention to make sure we are performing actions in an appropriate and intended manner, and to the best of our ability in order to reach our chosen outcomes. For just as wise and properly performed actions can produce beneficent outcomes, unwise and sloppily performed actions (not to mention laziness) can produce destructive outcomes. Thus, carelessness is very dangerous because with a careless person, their every action is a potential danger. This is why one of my cherished sayings has become: “carelessness is more dangerous than stupidity.” Stupidity can be addressed by the study and practice (action) of wisdom, but what can be done with someone whose every action is a potential danger because they are careless?

An open mind is also important in shaping / realizing the context for action. If you press a doorbell a hundred times and every time the doorbell rings, there is a tendency to expect that every time you press the doorbell it will ring. Consequently, with every act of pressing the doorbell you associate an expectation that it will ring even before it does. This is an example of conditioning and may not be so harmful with ringing doorbells, but such an approach with other aspects of living may drastically limit our lives. Most of the time when we perform an act with an expectation of the outcome, we do not examine the act to ensure we are performing it with the best of care. We are also often less cognizant of outcomes of these actions that lay outside what we expect. Awareness of unexpected outcomes may lead to a more evolved understanding of our actions and may be the road that transforms the context of our actions. For if we realize, often after repeated acts, that an action has a

more expansive reach of outcomes than we expected, that act (with this additional realization) can become a more powerful means of attaining a wider range of outcomes. This approach is similar to an unconditioned child's mind: it will perform the same act over and over again, in part, to discover what else this same act can produce. For the unconditioned child, repeated actions are not limited to the same set of expected outcomes, instead a new outcome is always possible. Even if the first ninety-nine repetitions of an act did not produce a new outcome, the unconditioned child will still look for a possible new outcome in the hundredth repetition.

This openness of mind is important to realizing the depth of our actions and their outcomes. So often a fuller expanse of outcomes is only achievable after having performed an act over and over again, not realizing the fuller reach of our actions. Also, such realization will sometimes evolve from one level of maturity to a more evolved maturity that can only be reached after cultivating (and understanding) the previous level of maturity. Thus, we can benefit from always maintaining an openness of mind that examines our actions, their outcomes, and is open to discovering new outcomes from our actions. These new outcomes will sometimes encourage us to continue the scope of actions, and sometimes challenge us to change the course of our actions given the outcomes produced. In this way, our lives should not be relegated to routines with the same course of expected outcomes; instead, our routines are paths subject to change by any discoveries we, with open minds, are open to realize.

Also, when dealing with the issue of an open mind, I must remind the reader of the power of delusion. When moving from an extremely closed-minded approach, it is easy to delude one's self into thinking you have an open mind by having a slightly more open closed mind. The gradual openness of mind may be the path to an open mind; and if that is your way, be sure to not confuse a slightly more open closed mind as being an open mind. I also caution going to the other extreme of a falsely open mind where anything goes. Having an open mind does not mean completely surrendering discretion or a set of values. If your path is the flow of beneficence, the borders of this path can still serve to guide you as you progress to an open mind. These borders can serve their purpose of guidance until you realize there are better borders, if such exists. European culture, which thrives upon closed-mindedness, has obscured the reality of open mindedness. That being so, I would be careful to not use European ideas and cultural values as credible sources about how to be open minded. Cultures that genuinely encourage open mindedness usually promote observation and care as useful tools to explore your individual and unique journey of opening your mind. In other words, there is no blueprint for an open mind.

Awareness is a beautiful companion to an approach of care and open-mindedness. Observation is the bedrock of awareness. A Webster's Dictionary definition of observation is "the act, practice, or power of noticing." This speaks well to a Traditional African approach to observation. The question then becomes: what are the means of noticing? The five senses of sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching are obviously part of these means. For this reason, optimal physical health is essential to a Traditional African approach since one's physical health affects your senses' ability to notice. But the means of perception clearly went beyond these in Traditional Africa. Things that were a normal part of the art of observation in Traditional Africa included: the energy of a thing or event, particularly if it was beneficial or destructive; the dynamics of a thing or event; the outcomes of an event; what beings

were present or absent; what preceded and followed an event or appearance of a thing; how one felt in a situation or the presence of a being (this was predicated on how well one “knew” one’s self and one’s tendencies). Similar to open mindedness, there is no blueprint for the art of observation that applies equally to all beings. It is an art to be cultivated, in part, by the unique abilities and experiences that shape who you are and how you are able to perceive. I want to stress, particularly to those groomed in European culture, to not limit the means of observation to those few ways acknowledged by that culture: there are so many more ways to observe the universe and all that occurs within it (and sometimes beyond it).

Through careful observation with an open mind, one can realize a deeper depth to one’s actions. With a watchful, alert observation, one can spot the obvious and subtle clues that indicate an action has a yet unrealized component to it. By following these signs, one can use such an action to discover a more expansive reach of the action. And this deeper reach may transform your understanding and the context of your actions...

The context of our actions leads us to our purpose: the why of why we are and what we do. What one’s purpose is or should be is not something I feel can be adequately addressed in an essay. The search for and understanding of one’s purpose is among one of the most intimate of personal journeys one can take, usually with many roads available for such travel. Too often we look for guidance regarding our purpose by looking outside of ourselves -- this is not to be totally dismissed but should not be overly relied upon. A cornerstone to realizing one’s purpose is coming to know one’s self in the context of the time and place one exists in. Let me share this as something to reflect and possibly meditate upon: if your heart were a candle in a completely dark room, what would the light of your heart’s candle reveal with its illumination? This question can be very helpful in exploring what your purpose is and should be -- which are not always the same. And even the scope of purposes will vary among people and groups: for some, their purpose may be very specific in action, such as to write poems. For others, their purpose may be to make a contribution to an outcome (such as uplifting the spiritual consciousness of African people), leaving to the individual a range of ways to contribute to this outcome (be an artist, a spiritual teacher, a traditional healer, a community organizer, etc.) The specificity and scope of one’s purpose will vary from individual to individual, and do not confuse the most clear and specific purpose as being “the best:” in the history of humanity, some of those who best fulfilled their purpose(s) had obscure purpose(s). But regardless of the scope and manner of purpose, those that were fulfilled were almost always fulfilled through action.

Purpose should be examined on individual and group / communal levels. Where there is harmony, one’s individual purpose(s) is compatible with the purpose(s) of the group(s) / community(ies) one is part of. In many Traditional African civilizations, this spiritual science was perfected to the extent that they usually attracted to birth those spirits whose individual purpose(s) was in accord with their communal purpose(s) -- do not confuse this with conformity. This differs very much from many modern societies where a hodge podge of individual purposes, often conflicting, are born in the same society creating “natural” tensions and conflicts that play out as normal social interactions. Often the social dogma deems one has to fight to fulfill their purpose(s), that life is a struggle: an acknowledgment of the conflict born by the collection of people with conflicting purposes in a society

with limited resources to fulfill such purposes. From a Traditional African perspective, this is seen as a sign of societal immaturity: that people would choose to construct and sustain a societal structure geared toward causing conflict when the opportunity to structure *societies* (more than one) that do not lead to such conflicts exists. This is one of the reasons Traditional African civilizations were full of distinct communities, even among the same people. Such social organization allowed individuals to be in situations where the fulfillment of their purpose(s) supported the fulfillment of the purpose(s) of others in their group(s) and the fulfillment of others' purpose(s) (individually and collectively) supported the fulfillment of your individual purpose(s). In such a group setting, a continuous flow of beneficence regarding the fulfillment of purpose(s) can be established. And what establishes this flow is action, particularly actions performed with a deeper depth and reach.

Imagine the benefit of a young child, whose purpose is to be a singer, being raised in a family of individuals whose purpose is also to be singers. And that this family of singers lived in a community where their purpose was welcomed as part of a communal purpose of being people of the sun (the light that reveals itself). Within this community there were singers who sung songs about the sun, written by poets who wrote words commemorating the sun as informed by scientists who studied the laws of the sun that was further honored in art by other artists who creatively conveyed this wisdom. Now compare the fate of this same young child if it grew up in a society where the prevailing communal purpose was to make money (attain wealth). Or if this same young child grew up in a society with conflicting prevailing purposes such as to make wealth, to spread religion, to dominate and oppress others, and (for kicks) to glorify egotistical expression through art. I think most would agree the most beneficial situation for this child (as well as any adult with such purpose) is the first, especially when the Traditional African practice of interacting with other communities would expose this young child to other groups with other purposes. Hopefully you can see how matters of exploring one's purpose(s) are connected to community, which is what the next section examines.

Traditional African societies also realized the importance of people discovering their "intended" purpose(s) as it relates to the well-being of the individual and the community. Imagine if your (physical) heart thought its purpose was to digest food instead of pump blood throughout your (physical) body. Not only would the heart suffer, the entire body would suffer and possibly die if the heart did not set itself to its "intended" purpose in a reasonable amount of time. The same can be said about other key body parts: the non-fulfillment of their purpose hinders the body's ability to operate efficiently and maintain good (beneficial) health -- and, in some instances, can lead to suffering and death. Most people acknowledge the importance of this reality in terms of the community of their physical body yet ignore this principle when dealing with the society they are part of. And for Traditional African societies, the physical body was but one among other human bodies: the energetic body, the spirit body, the mind body, the emotional body, the experiential body, etc. The realization and fulfillment of the purposes of these bodies is essential to good health. And the same principle applies to the health of societies, communities, and civilizations.

In closing, I want to encourage readers to maintain the same openness of mind regarding one's purpose that one would benefit from having toward one's actions. We need not set things in stone when they can be set in spirit, which is more fluid and willing to transform to address changes and

new directions. As a young boy, I was set from an early age to pursue a career of law and politics. Fortunately, I had the openness of mind to accept the challenge presented to me by beneficent forces to instead embrace a path of art. In retrospect, I saw that many of the things I sought to achieve in law and politics, I could more beneficently attain through art. But there were also some things regarding my purpose that only came to my realization when I progressed upon the path of art. Even as an artist, my purpose (and thus work) has changed over time with my continued growth and understanding. Although some things remain consistent in being part of my purpose, the whole of my purpose has shifted and evolved many times over the course of my life and will probably continue to do so.

COMMUNITY

European culture usually defines community as a group of people living in the same area, having the same or similar social classification, or having shared or similar interests -- even if these persons are strangers. In many Traditional African civilizations, beneficial relationships were the cornerstones upon which communities were built. As follows, respect was a baseline for the building and sustenance of community, because without respect it is nearly impossible to have a beneficial relationship with someone. As relationships involve a give-and-take interaction, sharing is a regular component of Traditional African communities: the sharing of thoughts, Ma'at⁴ (especially love), teachings, goods and material things, experiences, work and responsibility, and so much more -- the sharing of life. The cultivation of such beneficial relationships often resulted in the mutual embrace of collective responsibility, especially when people realized the collective benefit attained far outweighed what could be attained through individual-based efforts.

The Traditional African approach to community respects the unique reality of the individual. This differs from the European approach to community which proclaims to honor individuality but only accepts those who conform to prescribed social types: for example, the athlete - jock, the pretty boy / sexy woman, the tough guy, the intellect / philosopher, the geek / nerd, the politician, the cut-throat entrepreneur, the devout religious person, the "artsy" type, etc. If one does not conform to a prescribed social type (or accepted hybrids) that alone can be a basis for social exclusion and persecution. Thus, such a person is often denied the opportunities and social resources to cultivate and share their individual gifts. Traditional African civilizations embraced a different approach: the whole of the community was culled from the individuals that engaged in beneficial relationships to comprise that community. These civilizations were more observant of factors modern societies ignore and, thereby, paid more attention to people and things being in their "right" (more beneficial) place. For example, it usually would not be to the best benefit of a flame of fire to be in a place of all water, the risk of being extinguished is great. Also, for the flame to grow and explore its power as a fire in such a place may pose a risk to the water. A "better" (more beneficial) place for the flame would be one where there are more flames of fire, where the flame could be supported by other

⁴For those not familiar with a full understanding of Ma'at, I refer you to my Essay on Ma'at. It is posted for free at: < www.blueantelopeproductions.com >.

flames in exploring what it means to be fire. This level of social organization (as discussed above regarding purpose) was practiced even to pre-conception (in the womb), such that communities (through regular ritual and practice) would cultivate themselves to more strongly attract spirits (to be manifest as babies) who would more beneficially fit in their communities. But even when this goal was not achieved, much was done to cultivate these “different” persons to remain aligned with their purposes until the time was “right” for them to move to a place that more beneficially fit their purposes. This differs from the European approach that emphasizes conforming such a person into a role acceptable to society, even if just as a facade that conceals their socially unacceptable characteristics. The push for conformity has even resulted in the pursuit and destruction of “different” persons who sought to create their own communities outside of the reach and control of mainstream society.

Many Traditional African societies realized the benefit of having a multitude of beneficial communities for the diverse range of purposes humans come into this world to manifest. No one community could most beneficially serve all people with their varying purposes. Honoring this realization, many very different communities could live in close proximity without conflict and engage in beneficial, cooperative relationships to form communities of communities. The benefits derived from this practice were so immense that it allowed groups of societies to mature to a state of civilization.

This is a good place to explore the difference between society and civilization. I define society as a group of people who live in an organized state. Organized can be quite basic and not necessarily formal, but it is something that does not happen or continues to exist by chance. Societies usually have identifiable community leaders or persons of importance, whether they are people elected or selected to perform certain roles (such as community spokesperson) or are persons imposed as rulers. You can usually decipher community institutions that provide relevant services, institutions that operate formally or informally. There are also at least one set of recognized communal norms, something as simple as greeting (or in many parts of modern America, not greeting) others as you pass them by. It is a quite basic form of people “living together” and not necessarily by choice: the existence of enslaved persons in a society is an example of this.

Civilization, in its most basic form, goes (at minimum) a step further than society. Most would agree that you cannot have a civilization without having a society but there are differences as to how cultures define a society that matures to the level of civilization. European culture usually defines the markers of such maturity as: the development of a written language, scientific and artistic achievements, and the formation of a (formal) government -- and in the Modern Age, technological means has been added as a marker. Many ancient African societies achieved these markers in their own way, simply by living together. Some of these societies had no need for written language given the intense development of their oral language and the great care given to keeping oral history. These societies also had great artistic and scientific achievements, even if European culture did not acknowledge them as such when they did not conform to European concepts and understanding. And many African societies had communal governance by all the members of a community: although not always as formal as European governing bodies, these communal forms of governance were often just as or more effective in addressing the concerns of communities. So in many respects, ancient African

societies met the European measures of civilization; but through the use of written history and cultural validation, European scholars often denied such recognition to so-called “primitive” and “native” Africans. My point is not to seek or give credence to the European standards of civilization, but instead to show that what Europe designated as a crown of civilization was a normal part of many African societies, our basic form of living together. In realizing this, you may see why what Europeans still triumph as civilization is nothing more than society to me, and why the Traditional African measures of civilization went beyond this which was a basic form of living together in ancient Africa.

Civilization, from a Traditional African approach, is a maturation of the reality of community. As stated above, community is built upon beneficial relationships. When a society moves from being a community to a community of communities, that society is approaching the threshold of civilization. It usually begins with the state of the community one is part of and the cultivation of that community to manifest an abundance of benefit from the relationships within that community. In this way, that community can “come with something in hand” to the table of forming beneficial relationships with other communities, particularly those who also attained such a level of communal maturity of benefit. But do not limit community to just human beings: ancient African sciences have long acknowledged and honored the communities of other beings in nature and the universe. Their careful observation noticed the communities of plants and trees, communities of animals and birds, communities of spirits and forces of nature, communities of beneficent beings, and the communities of the Honorables. By forming a community of communities with these, the benefit of one’s community could be exponentially increased -- but a community could not approach other beneficial communities empty handed and expect them to form a community of communities with them.

Other elements of the maturation of community were also present in Traditional African civilizations. There was always a great level of respect in civilizations as such is essential to building and sustaining beneficial relationships. The sharing of Ma’at made the quality of people’s lives beautiful and profound with great depth. The sharing of teachings created expansive schools that often captured a wide range of learnings from diverse groups -- although these schools were sometimes informal. The sharing of work and responsibility resulted in great achievements that immensely benefitted the communities in that civilization. Also, when a “different” person was born in a particular community, that community often had relations with other communities with different purposes in that civilization. Consequently, when it came time for that person to find a “better” place, that process was sometimes more easily fulfilled if such a place were another community within the community of communities that comprised that civilization.

Within Traditional African civilizations, the measure of their fulfillment of being civilized was not the wealth and power of a select few (elite or rulers), but the collective welfare of the whole. For example, although America is presently viewed as the richest country in the world, a person from a Traditional African civilization would see America as poor. Why: because there are homeless people on the streets. Such a person would ask: “How can a country claim to be rich when it has people sleeping on the streets without shelter? If the country is so rich, such people should not be lacking homes.” This reflects a *communal perspective of we* in which the benefits of a community / society are used to truly benefit all, not the masquerading of benefits culled to an exclusive group being

represented as reflective of all -- including those denied the opportunity to access those benefits.

In the same vein, a Traditional African person would look upon the technological advancements of Europe (including America) with distaste. Why: because their technological advancements create excessive amounts of waste that harm and destroy the communities of humans, animals, birds, plants, trees, and other components of nature. As stated earlier, the Traditional African approach to community is based on beneficial relationships, and one cannot honestly claim to have a beneficial relationship with someone or something you harm and / or destroy. For Traditional Africa, the above "nature" communities were integral parts of Traditional African civilizations. Continuing in this vein, European civilization (particularly in its Modern Age) would not meet the Traditional African measure of civilization. Why: because the continuous proliferation of conflicts that constantly manifest into violence and wars are a normal part of European civilization. One cannot honestly claim to have a beneficial relationship with someone or something you are constantly engaging in conflicts (particularly violent, armed conflicts) with -- the constant presence of conflict is usually a sign of an absence of benefit. The constant barrage of wars of the past few centuries within "European civilization" and the consequential destruction of these wars would be seen as obvious signs of societal immaturity. (Note: even some European philosophers and religious leaders have made similar statements about their own nations and civilization.) But even the day-to-day conflicts that consume the lives of most who live in European societies -- conflicts among family members, neighbors, co-workers and workers for competing companies, fellow citizens, diverse groups, etc. -- are, in the eyes of Traditional Africa, signs of societal immaturity.

So from a Traditional African perspective, since civilization is a maturation of community, one can make the statement that the purpose of community is to become (mature to being) a civilization. That from the point in which people start to live together (form a society), we should be continuing to progress toward the attainment of civilization. But the attainment of civilization is not rooted in permanence: what is attained must be sustained to not be lost. This lesson was lost to a number of Traditional African civilizations in which the children who inherited the fruits of prior generations cultivating benefit did not continue the work of sustenance (let alone, continued development and maturation of benefit). As a result, civilizations degraded -- sometimes gradually, other times very quickly -- to regress to societies in which benefit was replaced by conflict, decay, and human immaturity (by Traditional African measures). Sometimes civilizations regressed to a state of society to then return to the road to civilization, an ebb and flow of regression and maturation. Such a fate is not one I wish to emulate being that the road of continuous, unending benefit is available. For this reason, I hold dear to my heart the saying: that after (attaining) benefit, there is the benefit of (sustaining) benefit, continuing on to eternity...

Let me close this section with a few words about control. This has become a predominant way of enforcing social norms in European societies, particularly when dealing with social problems. Although such an approach may sometimes produce "beneficial" results, this is often achieved by destructive means. Control tactics usually seek to concentrate (or further concentrate) power into the hands of a few at the expense of disempowering those who are to be controlled, even if this state of being controlled is cited as being beneficial: you will be safer / protected, this approach will resolve a long

standing problem, etc. Traditional African civilizations tended to avoid dealing with problems via control because they realized the benefit of acting from one's place of strength -- and Traditional African cultures did much to cultivate and develop the (individual and collective) strengths of their people. When people act from the place of their strength, they are able to achieve great things, things sometimes not foreseen until they manifest from the action of strength. In realization of this reality, very rarely would Traditional African communities do anything that disempowered others, even one's enemies (as rare as such was in civilizations built upon beneficial relationships). Any challenge could be faced from a place of strength, even if greater challenges called for people to work with others who had complementing strengths to resolve those challenges -- an opportunity for unity. With such an approach, even if the problem was not solved, if people acted from their strength something beneficial was likely to occur. The strength of our ancestors (when alive as human beings) was so powerful, that their strength may seem to dominate without any act of domination or imposition on other people's will -- that is how strong they were. But let me also warn people to not seek to act from a place of strength without first cultivating and developing your strengths...

COMMONLY PROCLAIMED MISCONCEPTIONS

Our ancestors will recognize us as their children by our actions, not physical characteristics and beliefs. They may look upon us and say: you look like us, but we don't know you because your ways are foreign to us.

Who has heard that when a Black person dies some people say "that person has joined the ancestors?" Or referred to someone who has reached old age as elder simply by virtue of their age? Or even heard the phrase "the god of our ancestors," implying that there is one god for all people even if this god is referred to by different names? These are among some of the most widely spread misconceptions about Traditional Africa, even in face of available evidence that clearly contradicts these positions.

Let me start with the elder and ancestor misconceptions. In Traditional Africa, human life was seen as a journey to be made through various levels of maturity. From an infant, one was expected to grow to become a child. From a child, one was expected to become a young adult. From a young adult, one was expected to become a mature adult. From a mature adult, one was expected to become an elder. From an elder, one was expected to become an ancestor. And sometimes, for the really ambitious, one could mature to become an Honorable. But lo and behold, all expectations are not met; and just as with any journey, if you do not make the travel you will not arrive at various destinations. The destinations of these human stages are achieved through beneficent action and the corresponding outcomes of such actions that evolve a person to mature to become something more than what they previously were. Thus, a baby who does not learn to eat, crawl, walk, talk, play and sing will continue to be a baby. In Traditional Africa, some babies may become children at the age of one, others at the age of five or six. This transition was not based on age or the mere passage of time, it was based on the development of the individual. This same rule of development applies to all

transitions of human stages from infant to ancestor.

So for the child, the challenges of this stage included playing -- but not play in the sense it is understood in the modern age. Whereas play in much of modern Europe is devoted to entertainment and having fun, there was a deeper purpose to play in Traditional African societies. Many of the games, as entertaining and fun as they were, explicitly taught children the lessons of the people they were born into. For example, a common children's game in European society such as Simon Says would go beyond merely developing the listening and awareness skills of children; in Traditional African, this game would include skills that mirrored activities adult members of the community utilized. The game would also infuse historical knowledge that presented lessons relevant to the present the children were preparing to embrace. Even Traditional African counterparts to "fairy tales" and "nursery rhymes" were instead stories, songs, and poems that provided lessons and information that, once remembered, could be practiced as presented to fulfill adult responsibilities and sensibilities. As a result, after years of play a child was ready to become a young adult: one ready to embrace the responsibility of performing acts required to sustain and grow the community. Traditional African societies were usually very successful in having most children mature to this stage of being young adults.

The maturation of young adult to mature adult was one of degrees. Mature adults grew to take on more responsibility in performing necessary acts to sustain the community. And, if they were successful, they would sometimes "discover" new or more effective ways to support the community's quest to grow and mature. Thus, mature adults became more vital (through action) to the community's evolution and maturity as well as becoming very skilled and reliable in performing the necessary acts of communal sustainment. This path, usually cultivated through years of action, *sometimes* led one to the path of the elder: one who not only performed these acts but was able to teach them to others in a way where they will be able to continue the community's evolution. This point is very important, because an elder did not teach in a way that limited the community's progress to past achievements. If the extent of your teaching is that it binds others to what already has been learned, your students will be less inclined to discover what has not yet been realized. Also, teaching was not bound to merely the lecture and classroom methods prevalent in Europe: there are many ways to successfully convey lessons to students that constituted teaching in Traditional Africa -- including some ways that are specified to particular students. I am reminded of an African parable I once heard roughly translated (due to the difference in cultural outlooks), but it states: wisdom only lives the lifetime of three generations before passing on its place to its heirs. This speaks to not writing anything in such a permanence that it cannot be changed. It does not go to the extreme of saying everything must be changed: a counter-position encouraged by those who seek to control people through educational institutions that write their teachings in stone (unchangeable lessons from the past). Instead, the parable speaks to an openness in teaching and learning that leaves ample room for students (not only teachers and experts) to discover new things to be learned and applied. From this understanding of the elder, you may see why I am utterly disgusted when people, claiming to be African-centered, extol the title on someone simply because they are old or have been involved in an activity (say drumming or social organizing) for a long time. The accumulation of experience or passage of time does not enable you to teach in such a way described above. And in Traditional

Africa, if you could not teach in such a way, you were not an elder.

The ancestor stage goes a step beyond elder. As ancestors are looked upon as guides to the living, the teaching element of eldership is essential. But the measure of becoming an ancestor goes further: that you lived the beneficence of what you taught, in essence, to become it; that the lessons of your life be a living example for those who are to experience life after you. In this way, your memory is worth upholding beyond the reach of generations who met you, that these generations preserve and share the story and lessons of your life for generations to come. By these generations hearing of you, they will know to call to you to assist them in their life challenges. And by the beneficence of you becoming (in spirit and more) what you taught, you will attain a life beyond human life and, thus, be alive (in the ways of ancestors) to assist those who seek your assistance. Many Traditional African cultures spoke of how this attainment of ancestral life was to be measured after human life. I am most familiar with the Kemetic Weighing of the Heart. Here, the heart of one who has passed through the Realm of the Passed Ones is measured to see if it balances the scale with the Feather of Ma'at. The scale measures one's purity, and if your heart is pure enough (made pure through how you lived) to balance with the Feather of Ma'at, you are able to enjoy eternal life and join the ancestors. If you have not attained such purity in human life, your heart and life force are devoured by Am-mit to no longer exist. Other Traditional African cultures have their own manners in which one's life is assessed to determine whether they become an ancestor. Also, many of these traditions state that one who has joined the ancestors will, in a way of their own choosing, relate their successful arrival in the ancestral realm to the living. This differs greatly from the practice of some people on earth who, in ignorance of the actual fate of a deceased person, will declare that by merely dying someone has "joined the ancestors." Such misinformed declarations tend to come from people socialized in European / Judeo-Christian cultures that often eulogize all who die (including people who committed evil) as on their way to heaven. Even this contradicts the Judeo-Christian teachings that state only after "God" decides the fate of humans on the Judgement Day will "good souls" be allowed entry into heaven. Just as this social practice contradicts with Judeo-Christian teachings, those who proclaim deceased persons as joining the ancestors without actually receiving notice of their arrival confuse Traditional African understandings of the ancestors.

Relationships with the ancestors are not an one way street where the ancestors give guidance unconditionally to the living. It is a partnership. And part of the living humans' duty to the partnership is to put into action the guidance that is received. This requires an openness of being, a clarity of observation, humility, and a commitment (and sometimes courage) to act on what is shared. I do not exaggerate when I say that a single instance of not acting on ancestral guidance can result in the ancestors (or some ancestors) refusing to ever share guidance with you again. Partnerships also incorporate relationships, and will benefit by doing those things that build and grow beneficent relationships. Also know, the ancestors have a keener sense of observation than most humans will ever develop in their lifetimes, so any attempt to deceive the ancestors is usually you just deceiving yourself. It is through the beneficent cultivation of partnerships with the ancestors that Traditional African civilizations developed the means to cultivate partnerships with the Honorables.

I hesitate to define the Honorables because no definition can capture the full scope of who these

beings are. European culture usually interprets these beings as gods, although this title is flawed in many ways -- particularly that gods are to be worshiped and the Honorables totally reject such a relationship with humans. Honorables, like the ancestors, seek to form partnerships with humans (and other beings). On their end, Honorables usually bring some form of provision that is necessary or very helpful to the beings / communities they form partnerships with. And it is because of this great provision humans choose to honor them (and, thus, the title: Honorable). Such provisions may include air to breathe, water, land, rain, protection, fertility, manifestation of a harvest, magic, knowledge previously unknown teachings, etc. Honorables may ask for any number of things in exchange for what they provide: that recipients live beneficently (which manifests Ma'at which sustains some Honorables), that recipients keep the Honorables in their awareness, that recipients ascribe to certain actions, etc. Partnerships with the Honorables can be formal and with a group of people, as well as personal and sometimes intimate. They are living beings who share an interdependence with humans and, therefore, seek not to be supreme or hold power over humans as many gods and deities in the European religious / spiritual systems do. Those who provide their share of what is expected in the partnership are able to interact with Honorables from a place of equanimity. And from such relationships, much has been learned about life in this universe which otherwise may not have been discovered by human means alone.

Following the path of this understanding, and the reality that humans rely on various provisions to live, it follows that the spiritual systems of Traditional Africa were systems of many Honorables. This differs greatly from Europe's emphasis on an one supreme God who provides everything. Although some Honorables were able to offer various types of provisions, they usually excelled greatly at providing one or a few things. Thus, communities with many provisionary needs saw the wisdom of forming partnerships with many Honorables who excelled in greatly providing specific things. Now, as with any set of relationships, people may find greater favor in one relationship over another and, therefore, cherish that one over others -- just as I cherish my relationship with my wife over other human relationships I have. And this cherished relationship may be celebrated and honored with more zest than shown for other relationships. In this way, a particular Honorable may become identified as "the Honorable" of a particular group -- but this should not discount the partnerships that group has with other Honorables who provide other provisions. European scholars and scientists have often misinterpreted this dynamic to see a favorite Honorable of a group as their form of the "one supreme God." In rare instances, some Traditional African societies embraced a system of an one supreme Honorable, but such groups were seen as going against the collective Traditional African understanding of the universe whose proofs can be explored and proved through meditation and observation of nature. In other rare instances, some people in Traditional Africa sought to consolidate power among (and over) other humans by infusing the attributes of many Honorables into their chosen Honorable and then holding that Honorable supreme over others. This not only goes against the understandings of Traditional Africa, but is an act for power not in accordance with the ways of spirit.

If one was to make a log of Honorables in Traditional Africa, the list would surely reach the thousands, if not millions. Yet, this mass diversity of Honorables was rarely cause for division and conflict given the level of respect for others that served as a baseline for Traditional African life: respect for other

humans, respect for other beings, and respect for what lays beyond our understanding and chosen ways. Most Honorables were known only in specific regions where they provided provisions. For example, there is no global or universal Honorable who provided rain all over the world; instead there are thousands of local Honorables who provide (or bring) rain to the specific regions they have formed partnerships to serve. In this way, spirituality is a localized and personal practice, not a system to be extended over far reaches (for the purpose of control?). And only a few Honorables, usually through sharing among groups involved in trade, were known over wide-reaching areas, usually possessing a provision (or power) that was not available through local Honorables (an example is Auset, a.k.a. Isis, known for her exceptional “magical” abilities).

The conquest and colonization of Africa by the Arabs and Europeans targeted the spiritual systems of Africa as part of their oppression. Much of the Traditional African spiritual systems has been destroyed, and what was allowed to continue was forced to conform to the Arab / European concepts of an one supreme God who is to be worshiped. I will discuss this topic in a future essay, but to briefly state why this was done: it is easier to control people when you have them worship one God and you present yourself as the representative of that God. This resulted in a non-fulfillment of the partnerships Africans had with their Honorables. And, just as with the ancestors, when humans do not honor their part of the partnerships (for whatever reasons), the Honorables will withdraw. This further weakened African people who were already being oppressed by Arabs and Europeans. The challenge for us in this day and age is to develop into beings who can attract the attention of the Honorables and then form partnerships with them that we will diligently honor and fulfill. The emphasis is on us being serious and ready because, if we are not, the Honorables will not even turn their faces in our direction.

CONCLUSION

This essay in no way attempts to cover the wide expanse of approaching a complete understanding of Traditional Africa. Instead, it offers a few points to consider if we are serious about discovering and embracing this sacred path. Much of the Traditional African understanding has been destroyed by foreign conquest, and that which lingers has often been misinterpreted or forced to conform to foreign cultures. My aim with this essay has been to share things about the direction we can take, and then leave the specific steps of the many paths we will explore to those who will make such a personal journey. We should not seek to resurrect the past as it was in that time -- if Traditional African cultures had continued from then to now they would not be exactly as they were back then. Our cultures and approaches were fluid and malleable to the specifics of the present, and it is important that our approaches embody this. Surely, there is enough in this essay to assist those who are committed in breaking away from the limits European culture has placed on us, to embark upon the sacred journey of observing and learning what nature, the ancestors, (and maybe) the Honorables hold out to us.

Blessings to those who embark on this journey, may your (beneficent) actions contribute to a beneficent fulfillment...



APPENDIX

The below text is taken directly from the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. The excerpts are from Chapter Ten. The entire book is in public domain and can be found on the internet. The below text was obtained at the Project Gutenberg website at:
< <http://www.gutenberg.org> >.

The complete web address for the narrative is:
< <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23/23-h/23-h.htm> >.
Note: this address may change if the website is updated.

My term of actual service to Mr. Edward Covey ended on Christmas day, 1833. The days between Christmas and New Year's day are allowed as holidays; and, accordingly, we were not required to perform any labor, more than to feed and take care of the stock. This time we regarded as our own, by the grace of our masters; and we therefore used or abused it nearly as we pleased. Those of us who had families at a distance, were generally allowed to spend the whole six days in their society. This time, however, was spent in various ways. The staid, sober, thinking and industrious ones of our number would employ themselves in making corn-brooms, mats, horse-collars, and baskets; and another class of us would spend the time in hunting opossums, hares, and coons. But by far the larger part engaged in such sports and merriments as playing ball, wrestling, running foot-races, fiddling, dancing, and drinking whisky; and this latter mode of spending the time was by far the most agreeable to the feelings of our masters. A slave who would work during the holidays was considered by our masters as scarcely deserving them. He was regarded as one who rejected the favor of his master. It was deemed a disgrace not to get drunk at Christmas; and he was regarded as lazy indeed, who had not provided himself with the necessary means, during the year, to get whisky enough to last him through Christmas.

From what I know of the effect of these holidays upon the slave, I believe them to be among the most effective means in the hands of the slaveholder in keeping down the spirit of insurrection. Were the slaveholders at once to abandon this practice, I have not the slightest doubt it would lead to an immediate insurrection among the slaves. These holidays serve as conductors, or safety-valves, to carry off the rebellious spirit of enslaved humanity. But for these, the slave would be forced up to the wildest desperation; and woe betide the slaveholder, the day he ventures to remove or hinder the operation of those conductors! I warn him that, in such an event, a spirit will go forth in their midst, more to be dreaded than the most appalling earthquake.

The holidays are part and parcel of the gross fraud, wrong, and inhumanity of slavery. They are professedly a custom established by the benevolence of the slaveholders; but I undertake to say, it is the result of selfishness, and one of the grossest frauds committed upon the down-trodden slave. They do not give the slaves this time because they would not like to have their work during its continuance, but because they know it would be unsafe to deprive them of it. This will be seen by the fact, that the slaveholders like to have their slaves spend those days just in such a manner as to make them as glad of their ending as of their beginning. Their object seems to be, to disgust their slaves with freedom, by plunging them into the lowest depths of dissipation. For instance, the slaveholders not only like to see the slave drink of his own accord, but will adopt various plans to make him drunk. One plan is, to make bets on their slaves, as to who can drink the most whisky without getting drunk; and in this way they succeed in getting whole multitudes to drink to excess. Thus, when the slave asks for virtuous freedom, the cunning slaveholder, knowing his ignorance, cheats him with a dose of vicious dissipation, artfully labelled with the name of liberty. The most of us used to drink it down, and the result was just what might be supposed; many of us were led to think that there was little to choose between liberty and slavery. We felt, and very properly too, that we had almost as well be slaves to man as to rum. So, when the holidays ended, we staggered up from the filth of our wallowing, took a long breath, and marched to the field,—feeling, upon the whole, rather glad to go, from what our master had deceived us into a belief was freedom, back to the arms of slavery.

I have said that this mode of treatment is a part of the whole system of fraud and inhumanity of slavery. It is so. The mode here adopted to disgust the slave with freedom, by allowing him to see only the abuse of it, is carried out in other things. For instance, a slave loves molasses; he steals some. His master, in many cases, goes off to town, and buys a large quantity; he returns, takes his whip, and commands the slave to eat the molasses, until the poor fellow is made sick at the very mention of it. The same mode is sometimes adopted to make the slaves refrain from asking for more food than their regular allowance. A slave runs through his allowance, and applies for more. His master is enraged at him; but, not willing to send him off without food, gives him more than is necessary, and compels him to eat it within a given time. Then, if he complains that he cannot eat it, he is said to be satisfied neither full nor fasting, and is whipped for being hard to please! I have an abundance of such illustrations of the same principle, drawn from my own observation, but think the cases I have cited sufficient. The practice is a very common one.