

Letter from Africa

by Riley & Duncan Murdock

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In one of our previous letters (*cf. May 2005*) wrote about animism, which is the main religion here. Do you remember anything about animism? Animists

believe that all kinds of spirits are actively involved with humans all the time. People either cooperate with these spirits to avoid trouble or try to manipulate them (get the spirits to do what they want) by doing sacrifices. For them, everything that happens has a spiritual reason behind it. Because these spirits are unpredictable, and often downright mean, animists have a hard time believing that there is a perfectly good God out there. Animists bring their religion into all of their life's activities. We need to show them that Jesus can be a part of their everyday lives and can take away all their spiritual fears. They need Jesus in every field they plant, every trip to the market, every soccer game. As one missionary put it, "Animists don't want just to hear Christianity. They need to smell it, taste it, and touch it." Pray for us, that we can help the Christians here to live in such a way that Jesus will be felt and seen in every part of their daily lives.

Do you know what cultural differences are? They are things people from different cultures do



Digging up weeds

differently from each other which are not necessarily right or wrong, just different. For example, when you see someone you know as you walk into a room, what do you do? Americans usually smile and say hello, or if it is a good friend you might hug him or her. In France, people kiss each other on the cheek.

In Asian countries, people bow to each other. In African countries, people shake hands. There is not a right or wrong way, just different ways. But you can get in trouble if you are in a country and you don't know what the correct thing to do is in a certain situation. And you might also get very irritated or frustrated with people in another country when you don't understand why they are

acting the way they do. My mom and dad have had to explain this to us. One thing I have gotten disappointed about is the way it seems people don't tell the truth. I might ask someone to play with me, and he will say "Ok, I'll be right back" but he never comes. Dad told me that this is because they think that telling me "no" will be too discouraging. Here is another example: Sometimes, I walk onto our front porch when my dad is meeting with someone. I might have a toy or a cookie in my



The boys with friends

hand. The visitor often asks me to give him what I have. I used to get upset about this. Then my mom explained that people don't really want what I have, they just want me to offer it to them. Once I began doing that, I



Boys in hammocks

saw that they would either smile and just say "no thanks" or take it, then give it right back. Mom said the best thing to do is just play along with people.

Like if someone says they want me to marry their daughter, I just say OK. Then everyone laughs and that is the end of it. Learning to live with these cultural differences is part of being an Ambassador for Christ.

I have also learned that people have funny superstitions. Funny to me, that is. For example, you are not supposed to whistle at night because that will attract snakes. Children are not supposed to eat eggs because that will make them grow up to be thieves. If a baby puts his foot in his mouth, it means an uncle will die the next day. It is bad luck to sing when an old person eats,

when you are cooking or when you are carrying water. Whoever is cooking is not supposed to greet anyone. All the tribes here have what they call a



Boys weeding the garden

"totem" – that is, an animal they can't eat. Each tribe has a story of how this animal saved their ancestors at one point. For example, one tribe, the Kountemba, was being chased by another tribe. The Kountemba warriors ran into a cave to hide, and a big python covered up the entrance so the enemy could not get in. To this day, the python is a sacred animal to the Kountemba. It is easy to laugh at other people's superstitions because they seem so silly to us. But it is not Christ-like to laugh at others' fears.

We need to help them see that God can take away all our fears.



Bridget feeding our duikers

Animists bring their religion into all of their life's activities. Can we learn something from this?

Do you live near or go to school with anyone from a different culture? Can you imagine that they might be having a confusing time getting used to your culture? Reach out to them, try to learn about how they do things, help them understand how Americans are, and be an Ambassador for Christ!

Can you think of any superstitions that Americans have? How about the things that supposedly mean bad luck, like the number 13, walking under a ladder, breaking a mirror, and seeing a black cat? Where do superstitions come from? Do you notice how most of them are based on fear? Do you have any fears in your life that you need to take to the Lord? How many verses in the Bible can you find that say "fear not"?