



Wisdom Keepers' Stories

The following interview took place in Falmouth, Jamaica during January 2004

Jamaican Revivalists

One of the syncretic forms of religious expression in Jamaica is found in the Revivalists, a mixture of African spirituality and Christianity. They believe in many African religious ideas about spirits, but also believe in Jesus and baptism. Sickness is sometimes attributed to being possessed by a spirit of the dead. Dancing, drumming, and clapping of hands are prevalent in their services and help induce trances for the attendees. Revivalists emphasize communing with the heavenly spirits rather than earthly forms.



Pastor Donald Rivers

Falmouth, Jamaica:

I was 13 when the Lord saved me. At 16, I started to preach. I became the National Youth Evangelist of Jamaica. In 1999, I was put in the hospital because I was unable to move, speak, or hear. I was diagnosed with a brain tumor. They later pronounced me dead, but as they were moving my body out of



Wisdom Keepers' Stories

the hospital room, I woke up, hearing a voice, "You shall not die. You must preach the word of the Lord." I got up and was examined. The brain tumor was gone. I left the hospital and later found out that my family had already dug a spot in the cemetery.

After that experience, I became a more devoted instrument of God. Several days later, I was lying down and saw some angels come down the sky. There was a great white light that shined over my hands. That is how I was made into a healer. He now uses my hands to heal others. God also can show me things about people. I then know what to tell them. I have never charged a person for my services. Now I pastor a Revival Zionist church in Montego Bay called All Nation Revival Church.

We sometimes fast inside the church or up in the mountains. I once fasted for 21 days. I was given some blessed water and a person called an alm bearer watched over me. He prayed for me and took care of my needs. We fast in order to have a spiritual journey. In my first journey, I was walking on a street of gold, guided by two angels. There was a light in front of us. Then, without warning, the light went off and a voice spoke, "Do not fear the darkness, for I am there for you. I am your light."

When we spiritually travel, we see the lines that take you somewhere. I also have seen the ladder and climbed up it. At the top of the ladder, you receive a very powerful vibration. It is felt deep in your body. It makes your body pump, what we call trumping. Something comes up and extends outside of your body. This is explained by the book of Acts, chapter 1, verse 8. "When the Holy Spirit comes up, you shall have power."

There are trumping songs that help bring forth the power. They can take you into the spiritual world. Sometimes you have to help someone guide the spirit. One of the great trumping songs is "Don't Stand in the Way." It says, "I'm on my way to Canaan's Land, Don't Stand in My Way."

There are many different trumps that can lead you to many places. They enable you to see the line that takes you on a trip. When you are trumping, you may jump, shake, and jerk. This comes from the African tradition. You learn to trump in the spirit. When we dance in front of the Covenant, it pleases God.

The first time I felt the trumping was in 1974, about two weeks after I was baptized. I will never forget that experience. It was like a lightning bolt hit me. The power grabbed me and, at first, I didn't know what was happening. My Bishop was an old man in his seventies. He touched my sides and helped me with it. He explained what was happening.

I have my own spirit helper. It was given to me on one of my spiritual journeys. There are angels that



Pastor Rivers



Wisdom Keepers' Stories

help us. And our ancestors can help us. My grandfather and grandmother help me. They come in my dreams. I feel safe because of their presence. When I am trumping in the church, I can feel them being near.

Pocomania and Revival are different forms of spiritual expression in Jamaica. The former involves the Obeah. It involves magic. At midnight they will slay a goat and drink its blood. Sometimes they do bad things to others. They want to harness power to help them have success and make money. They charge people and predict their future. When I went to one of their services, I didn't feel any love, so I left. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. We Revivalists aren't like that. We worship God and serve His will.

Most of Pocomania, Obeah practice, and Mynal practitioners have left Jamaica. There used to be a lot of it, but it is disappearing. Some of them have gone to Haiti. I believe that they did good things in the early days. But in recent times, it became mixed up, forgetting the primary importance of love. Instead, it became seduced by power and making money.

There is only one church in Revelation that God did not rebuke. That was the Church of Philadelphia, the church of love. That is the origin of the Revivalists. It was the smallest church and it has always honored the love of God.

Sometimes when you are in the spirit, you will be told to wear a certain color. That's how you get your robe and the wrap around your head. The pastor may also see it for you. He or she then tells you what you need to wear the next time you come to service.

During a service, a number of people will go into the spirit. There may be two to three people, or as many as fifteen who go into the spirit world. I help them move in the correct way so they go down the right lines, the right paths of spirit. You can walk a narrow path or a wide road. I use both of my hands to touch them and move them, so as to help them walk along the right lines.

Secretary Miriam Davis Lamey

(daughter of founder of United Africa Revival Tabernacle, Falmouth, Trelawny, Jamaica):

My father founded our church. He was a prophet who could look into the future. His spiritual insight was acquired through fasting in the church. He told me stories about his youth. He would walk long distances without shoes and sleep on the pavements. He grew spiritually and eventually founded his church. He passed on in August, 1995.

I used to fast even as a child. God gave me spiritual gifts due to my sincere fasting. One of the gifts is trumping. You



Miriam Davis Lamey



Wisdom Keepers' Stories

can receive a trump when you go on a spiritual journey. There are African, Indian, and other trumps.

In Jamaica, there are both Revivalists and followers of Pocomania. Some people incorrectly mix these two groups up. We do dress alike with our colored robes, but part of their church floor is made of dirt. In our services, we only use water with flowers and other sacred things. I haven't been to a Pocomania service, but I have been told that they are less interested in serving God and more interested in gaining power to make them rich and successful.

When people in the church get a trump, the church leaders place their hands on their bodies to help them move in the correct way. That way we help them to go down the right line. When you trump, it goes through different changes. It miraculously changes on its own. You go from one rhythm and movement to another. It's amazing. One trump is like a stomp, while another is more like a dance. The stomp is from Africa. When you rock in a forward and backward motion, it is from Jamaica. We call it going to different stations—going to the Africa station and then going to the Indian station, Jamaican station, and so forth. It's the best feeling to trump.

When you travel, you might get the gift of trumping, of song, or knowledge of healing. People sometimes get the spirit and fall to the ground. When they go to the spirit world, they receive a special song if they are lucky. When they wake up, they share the song and everyone is happy. Most people in Revival are very poor. Other denominations and religions look down at us. They fear us because we can discern things and they don't feel the spirit. Some of these outsiders say we are working witchcraft or Obeah. Whenever someone doesn't know the spirit, they often criticize others who do have it. This is actually spiritual jealousy. If you have the spirit and see someone else with the spirit, it should make you happy and cause you to rejoice.

Women have the power in our church. They understand the power of pain and love. That is the source of our connection to God. It is very rare for men in Jamaica to feel the spirit the way our women do. But I think all people, men and women, of all colors, are starving for spirit. They are waiting to know how wonderful it can make them feel.

I go to my stepmother when I need help. She has received the gift of discernment. When I receive a vision, I go to her to talk about it. I trust her intuitions and understanding. She once went to the United States and couldn't find a church that was really alive. She felt that she had to hold back her spirited expression during the services. It was like she was going to burst. It is different in Jamaica. Here she is in her spiritual home and can really let go of herself and feel the spirit.

Pastor Viris Smith

Falmouth, Jamaica:

Thirty-one years ago I first went on a fast that sent me on a spiritual journey. My family belonged to the Baptist Church, but on Saturdays I would go with my godmother to Revivalist services. I started having dreams of a plane going overhead. It would stop and I would jump up and hold on to its wings. Then it would take me somewhere. When I finally told my aunt about these dreams, she replied, "You have a Revival calling. These aren't dreams, but something more true." She went on to explain things to me.



Wisdom Keepers' Stories



Pastor Smith

In my adolescence, I challenged a Revivalist pastor, criticizing what he preached. He asked me why I would criticize a child of God. I immediately started to feel a cold temperature come over my body. And my body started contracting, like I was in childbirth. I was in pain and then I heard the pastor say, "My Bible tells me that thou should not squelch the spirit." He took me by my hand and we started dancing in the spirit.

People were singing a song and by the third verse, I was gone. I went into some kind of trance. When I came back, I felt drunk. I remember the pastor saying, "You have such a wonderful calling. You will travel to different places. You will be able to tell people things about their lives. This is a wonderful calling."

Since that day, I have followed my calling. It's a gift from God. Some people fail to accept their calling because they are afraid of what others will say about them. But it is the only way to true happiness.

Years later, I felt an anointing during a service. My body felt a change and I traveled in the spirit. That's when I learned that I needed to wear a turban. I started wearing it because it, too, is part of my worship and my calling. Whenever I go to church, I wear my turban.

Again, if you have a calling, follow it. Don't pay attention to what other people say you should do. Revivalists are revived from dead works. If you move from what isn't good to what is spiritually good, then you are a Revivalist. You know it because of how good you feel. Nothing else can make you as happy. There are vibrations that come on you and make you feel wonderful. You can be immediately transformed by spirit.

Sometimes when you are full of the spirit, there is a feeling that you aren't really here. You are taken somewhere else. These journeys are wonderful. I love to feel that. Sometimes other religious people get jealous of our experiences. That's when they say bad things about us, making fun of how we worship.

Revivalists are full of love. There is no jealousy among us because we are one body. We support one another and visit one another's churches. The other denominations don't understand us and are sometimes cruel to us with their gossip and stories. In the old days, the Revivalists used to visit everyone, bringing food to one another. We all took care of each other. It brings a good feeling. We still try to do this today.

I have received many different trumps. Sometimes I wonder where they are coming from. I get moves no one has ever seen. There are times when my arms are pulled back. At other times, there is so much spirit that I dance on my toes. I feel no weight. It's like I am floating.

We are all human and there are times when we get downhearted. But the difference is that when a



Wisdom Keepers' Stories

Revivalist falls, we know where to go to bring ourselves up. It is a wonderful way of living.

I once was sitting and went out of myself. I went into the spirit world and saw someone with a bolt of cloth. He kept pulling the cloth and then he held it up. It was yellow. He added it to another piece of magenta cloth. I realized that he was showing me a special turban. I then dreamed of a dress to go with the turban. I made the spiritual uniform. Whenever I wear it, I can't control myself under its anointing. It's that powerful! There are times that I am afraid to wear it. It is so powerful that it draws down a strong anointing on me.

When we get a spiritual direction, we must follow it. We shouldn't shrug it off and say that it just came from the mind. We must learn to follow these directions. There is no other way to live. "Trust and obey, there is no other way."

