

Ifa Theology; volume 1

Inner Peace

the Yoruba Concept of
Ori

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Ire
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Introduction

Spirit can't give you what the head won't accept.

Yoruba Proverb

How we see the world informs how we see our self. How we see our self informs how we treat others. How we treat others is a measure of character. In the language of traditional Yoruba religion:

Ayanmo ni iwa-pele, iwa-pele ni Ayanmo.

Destiny is good character, good character is destiny.

This saying means, when your future is unclear, simply do the right thing in the moment and you will be guided towards your fullest potential.

The traditional religion of Yoruba culture is called *Ifa*. The word *Ifa* means wisdom of Nature or that which guides through the process of spiritual growth. *Ifa* is the absorption and integration of ancestral wisdom in personal human experience. *Ife* is the projection of wisdom from the personal to the community. *Ifa* and *Ife* form a polarity with *Ife* being the Yoruba word for unconditional love. This polarity is nurtured and developed in the realm of *ori*. In Yoruba language *ori* is the calabash that contains the head and the heart. The word is frequently translated to mean either head or consciousness. Because

the *ori* embraces both knowledge and wisdom, and because it is a manifestation of both thought and emotion, a better definition would be either the human soul, or the human spirit.

The sacred scripture of *Ifa* asks the question; how do we know we have discovered our destiny? We know because destiny brings a blessing of children, abundance and long life. Destiny is described by *Ifa* as our source of peace and joy; it is a gift of the heart from Spirit. When we contemplate our future how do we know it is our destiny we see? According to the elders of *Ifa*, a true vision of our purpose fills us with passion and longing. When the self and the higher self meet there is moment of recognition. This vision does not bring an end to suffering; it does, however, set the standard for experiencing a sense of balance. *Ifa* says *Ti aba nje ohun aladidun lai je orogbo, onje yio padanu adun re* meaning if we eat sweet things and avoid the bitter kola, all food will lose its flavor.

In 1989 I traveled to Ode Remo, in Ijebu State, located in the southwestern region of the Nigerian rain forest. It was my intention to study the systems of divination, healing and spiritual transformation used in traditional Yoruba culture by the elders of *Ifa*. During five subsequent trips to Ode Remo I was given a glimpse of a spiritual legacy that traces its beginning to a time that predates recorded history. Nigeria is one of the three oldest landmasses on the planet,

evidence of human occupation in the region dates back to the earliest period of human evolution.

Ifa says *Ti ibi ti afe lo ko base pataki, gobgo ona ni pataki* meaning if it doesn't matter where you are going any road will do. I say if it matters where you are going understanding where we came from is a good first step.

For those young men and women who live in Ode Remo, and study *Ifa*, training starts at the age of seven and continues for the next ten to fifteen years. The education involves memorization of 256 verses of oral scripture including the prayers, invocations, songs, dances and herbal medicine associated with each verse. The entire oracle is spoken by the trainees once a year in June at the annual *Ifa Eku Odun* (*Ifa* greets the New Year) and takes four full days of recitation to complete. At the end of each sentence the elders of *Ifa* confirm the accuracy of the spoken word by saying *hein* meaning that is correct.

Seeing fourteen year olds recite complex metaphysical oral scripture without hesitation or confusion is inspiring. Our memory works best when we are children. The verses of *Ifa* are like folder files in a computer, separated by specific topics. In the course of a day when you encounter a problem, you recall the verse associated with the best possible solution and immediately have access to a wealth of information to guide you towards resolution of conflict. In the West we

live in a culture that elevates the opinion of children because they represent a population with disposable income and are easily manipulated by seductive marketing campaigns. I think about the information that filled my head as a young man and watch the children of *Ifa* with a deep sense of longing for what could have been.

In Ode Remo I stayed at the home of my teacher *Araba Adesanya Awoyade*. All nine of his children are initiated into the mysteries of *Ifa*. In the midst of play and household chores, Baba's children would assist him with his responsibilities as chief *Ifa* priest. By watching them it was soon evident that it would be impossible for me to learn all the details, the subtle nuances and overwhelming amount of memorization required to become fully functional as an *Ifa* diviner. Instead, I focused my attention on understanding metaphysical principles, recording prayers, analyzing the structure of various rituals and discussing philosophical concepts needed to interpret the portions of the oracle that are available in print in English. I wanted an overview that would put the bits and pieces of information I had into a larger context.

On my first trip I noticed *Ifa* is taught in the extended family by every age group. Ten year olds teach the eight year olds, twelve year olds teach the ten year olds and so until you become a grandparent. Every one in the *Ifa* community is both student and teacher, mentor and mentored.

Wasu, my first instructor, was nine years old when we first met. I have learned as much from him as anyone who has taught me *Ifa*. Prior to my first visit to Nigeria, I read every book available in English on the subject of *Ifa* and thought I knew something. If it were not for the patience, empathy and wisdom of Wasu I would still be wandering in the dark assuming I was right. He would shift from teaching *Ifa* to throwing rocks with the other kids in front of the house, and then switch back again to assume his duties as a priest. He is both brother and son.

During subsequent trips to Ode Remo I witnessed things that were strange and virtually unexplainable in the conventional language of conversational English. My strongest impression was that the rain forest amplifies the power of the word. All words have power, but the effect of words in a large city, devoid of a natural ecology, is to mute and smother the transforming potential of prayer and positive intentions. In the Ijebu forest I witnessed hunters call birds out of the sky, I saw water buffalo drop to their knees in response to incantations, I have watched wild dogs roll over and go to sleep after dirt was tossed on their head, I have noticed the weather change following invocations to the wind, and I have encountered manifestations of transparent life forms that I can only describe as Spirit Beings.

Between dense clusters of trees, the veil between the visible and the invisible realm becomes thin, especially in sacred groves called

igbodu. The word *igbodu* means womb of the forest, it is one of the sources of the transforming power (ase) used during initiation. In my experience stepping into *igbodu* can open unused portions of the brain. Ase is a resource for unlocking latent human potential. This phenomenon is enhanced when accompanied by initiation. During rituals the natural ase of the earth is guided by the focused consciousness of those performing the ceremony. The combined effect of these two power sources amplifies the ase; the only way to assimilate it is to surrender to the process. In some ways it is similar to body surfing, you can stand and get hit by the wave or you can dive into the curl and let the water carry you to shore.

Exposure to ase is not a figment of an over active imagination. Ase has a very distinct physical feel that affects various parts of the body in clearly recognizable ways. The force itself is spiritually neutral; it is shaped to perform specific functions by the power of prayer. I conceptualize ase as primal consciousness easily guided by words and intentions. Exposure to ase creates an opening for the development of latent skills. *Ifa* refers to this as tickling the ase, a reference to activating unused portions of the human spirit. For example you don't know you can sing until after you hear music.

Oso, the ability to separate perception from the location of the physical body, is an important survival skill in the rain forest. Yoruba hunters use to track their prey, and then find their way back home.

Oso is the prefix of the elision Osoosi usually translated to mean Spirit of the Tracker. The word literally means astral travel to the left, with the left being a reference to the left hand path of Spirit or the path of protection.

In an urban environment this skill has been replaced by the need to read road signs. If a skill is no longer important, it will become inaccessible. If the skill is associated with a dormant aspect of consciousness, none use breeds amnesia. The reliance on oso in Western culture has atrophied to the point where it is barely considered a real component of human potential. My observation is that if the hunters of Ijebu can learn it, anyone can. In times of crisis oso can be spontaneously activated as a survival mechanism. If you are in a position to avoid an automobile accident and suddenly find yourself looking down at the top of your car, the value of that perspective might be lost in your initial confusion over what is happening. Training breeds familiarity.

In the early stages of my study of *Ifa* I was intoxicated by the allure of the mysterious. Oddly shaped energy patterns would appear at rituals in response to highly charged invocations. I experienced internal effects on my physical body that felt like I was hit by a train. On several occasions the force of ase knocked me to the ground. Information seemed to pour into my brain as if it were being downloaded from thin air. I was told if I said certain secret words it

would cause a shift in my consciousness and alter my perceptions of the world around me. I said the words and the shift occurred. Time slowed down, lights flashed in and out of my peripheral vision, shadows scurried across the ground, and natural sounds dramatically increased in volume. I was amazed, fascinated, confused, intrigued, eager to learn and oblivious to my own developing arrogance. The old saying power corrupts usually applies to politics, it is equally true along the path of self-discovery.

In retrospect, the allure of the mysterious became an obstacle to the real work, the work of internal personal transformation and growth. Some fifteen years later, this is what I know; if you use magic to avoid dealing with yourself, you will eventually greet yourself in the street. The only way to fix a problem is to deal with it head on. If you neglect an issue the unresolved contradiction creates bigger problems. Eventually the problem becomes so big it is impossible to avoid. *Ifa* oral scripture refers to the inevitable result of denying internal conflict as an encounter with *Eṣu O'dara*, the-Spirit-of-the-Trickster-who-brings-transformation. *Eṣu O'dara* has the task of snatching the rug out from under your feet just when you think you have everything under control. The message from *Eṣu O'dara* is always the same, when it comes to living in the world the human spirit does not control Nature. The best we can hope for is to be appropriate in the moment. We accomplish

this by living in harmony with the world and through communication with Nature.

The ability to avoid unwanted disruption from the Spirit of the Trickster could be called single point concentration. When I was younger I used to box. I noticed when I got hit in the face the image of the glove pressed against my nose lasted longer than the actual event. If you think the glove is touching you at the moment your opponent is loading up for another strike you are in trouble. The reason for the time displacement is that the image lingers in response to the emotional reaction over getting hit. You think; *oops I'm in trouble*. The thought recalls the memory of getting hit; you create a tape loop of the emotional response and the image that generated the reaction. This is what happens to a fighter who seems to have stopped using defensive skills. The discrepancy between your visual perception and the real time event can become so disjointed that the body reacts by shutting down. In the course of a day this commonly happens when unexpected criticism triggers an old memory. In the blink of an eye your consciousness is somewhere else, oblivious to what is happening around you.

The art of single point perception is not merely a function of the eyes. Staying focused requires the support of the entire body. If the mind displaces itself in time, an element of oso comes into play. Not necessarily a full blown out-of-body-experience, but rather a subtle

separation of the inner spirit from the physical body. When this occurs there is a tendency to place our weight on our toes. Single point perception requires our weight to be on our heels, placing our spine in alignment with the hips and legs. This gives the body full access to the complete range of physical sensations that send information to the brain. Open access is inhibited if we allow internal conflict to interfere with our view of the world.

The purpose of *Ifa* divination is to illuminate internal conflict in an effort to avoid the disruptive effects of self-destructive behavior. Divination is a problem solving tool and not a fortune-telling gimmick. *Ifa* does not make arbitrary predictions; the oracle explains the consequences of specific behavior by explaining the consequences of specific actions. There is nothing magical in telling a person if they sit in a fire they will get burned. If I could do magic and fix all your problems the only result would be you would become dependant on me to resolve conflict in your life.

Ifa training concerns teaching the skills needed for resolving conflict on your own. *Ifa* does not breed dependence, it points towards liberation. Avoiding self-destructive behavior eliminates a primary source of conflict in any person's life. Resolution of internal conflict makes room for the manifestation of good fortune. To those who do not understand the cause and effect consequences of human behavior this process appears to be mysterious. The oracle will not tell you how

to get what you want; it tells you how to get what you need. If you remain stuck chasing what you want, you will miss the lesson. If you believe divination is inherently magical, you will miss the element of self-transformation in the process.

I wrote three books in an effort to share some of the information I received from my fathers and brothers in Ode Remo. The information was very specifically related to the spiritual practice of one small village, in a very large rain forest, on a large continent filled with countless cultures, and religious traditions that preserve a depth of wisdom beyond imagination. As an expression of my arrogance, I assumed what I knew represented the best, the most illuminated, and the most authentic expression of *Ifa* thought and belief to be found anywhere. It took persistent effort to see the extent to which an elevated sense of the value of my training was a result of Western conditioning and not a product of either personal growth or *Ifa* training. The realization made me wonder if I could continue to practice a spiritual discipline that consumed my attention for twenty years. This was yet another encounter with *Eṣu O'dara*. If I thought I could use magic to avoid transformation, not making use of my training was still avoiding transformation.

Resistance to change is the source of what *Ifa* calls *elenini*, self-generated demons that have no existence outside our imagination. Real demons are easy to banish because they respond to the power of

the word. *Elenini* are insidious because they feed on excuses and constantly reconfigure to avoid exposure of their true source. *Elenini* are classic examples of elemental shape shifters. They can only be exorcized by taking personal responsibility for bringing them into being.

It has been ten years since I completed my last book on *Ifa*. It would be safe to say during that time virtually everything I thought I knew about traditional *Ifa* metaphysics has shifted significantly. I suspect in another ten years I will say the same thing about what I think I know today. I have come to understand that the quest for self-understanding is never complete. The best we can hope for is to say I am a better person today than I was yesterday and I aspire to say the same thing tomorrow.

After extensive writing on the subject of *Ifa* I want to say clearly, I am not an authority and I am far too old to hold any expectation of becoming fully trained. At best I am a committed student who is willing to share some discoveries along the path of learning. It has always been my hope that sharing my exploration of the mysteries of *Ifa* would stimulate dialogue.

I have seen significant increase in interest in African forms of spirituality and a significant increase in the exchange of information over the past decade. The resulting influx of available material has taught me a second valuable lesson; the teacher must always remain

open to learning from the student. To all those students who have become my teacher I say *a dupe pupo*, many thanks.

Sharing information is different than debating who is right. After listening to countless arguments on the question of which lineage has preserved the most authentic expression of *Ifa*, I am of the opinion this debate is pointless. Many of these discussions appeared to me to be a thinly disguised marketing plan; my way is the best and for \$900 I'll prove it. A definitive understanding of *Ifa* is not possible. The reason it is not possible is that the tradition makes no dogmatic demands on the members of its community other than to follow the guidance of Spirit.

The guidance of Spirit is generally directed at specific people in specific communities, living in unique geographical areas with their own complex set of challenges. The end result is that no two *Ifa* communities look the same, they don't follow the same ritual process and a wide range of variation in the specific content of the oracle exists. The variation occurs based on the preserved wisdom of elders who solved problems unique to their time and place.

The demands from Spirit towards those who live in the city are different than the demands from Spirit towards those who live in the rain forest. As of now there are no *Odu* (verses of *Ifa* scripture) that tell us how to diminish the damage caused by nuclear waste. The demands from Spirit towards those who live in a distinct cultural community are different from the demands of Spirit towards those who

live in a multi-cultural community. Virtually everyone who lives in Ode Remo is from Ode Remo and speaks Yoruba. As wise and as gifted as my elders are, they have little experience of the cross-cultural problems that concern *Ifa* devotees in urban America. You can only fix for others that which you have transformed in your own life. This is the principle behind twelve step programs. You also cannot assume everyone is faced with the same challenges in their daily life as the ones you encounter. Making this assumption is called projection. The process of projection makes problem solving impossible because there is no objective view of the issue.

Ifa is dedicated to building good character. If you demonstrate good character in Ode Remo it doesn't matter what you believe, it doesn't matter how your initiation was conducted, and no one cares what it took to get there. Most human interaction is reflective of our true intentions. What you put out is what you get back. If you are living in a hostile environment rather than blame others, examine the source of hostility in you. *Ifa* says *Orunmila so wipe awon om̄o ehin wun ko gbodo fi agbara pade agbar, ti won ba se won ki won joko je* meaning the Spirit of Destiny says his disciples never meet force with force. When they are offended they sit quietly. To sit quietly is to contemplate the source of disruption and consider effective resolutions. Anger and violence are reactionary responses triggered

by the heart alone. Good character is the result of balance between the head and the heart.

As a strategy for resolving conflict blaming others never works. *Ifa* divination offers advice, but there is no verse that gives instruction on how to insure the advice is taken. The good news is that changing our self is always 100% possible and always 100% within our control. It is not possible to change the world because every new generation brings the same set of challenges back to earth. It is possible to meet those challenges with *iwa-pele* (good character) and to learn about your self in the process.

From an existential point of view (based on the observation of human behavior) there are two approaches to the challenge of self-illumination. One is static and rigid; the other is dynamic and open ended. A static point of view is based on the acceptance of a litany of beliefs concerning the nature of reality. Western theologians refer to this perspective as dogmatic. Dogma is the basis of all fundamentalisms in every expression of religious belief known to history. Fundamentalism is the notion that only one particular group has knowledge of the Will of God. According to this worldview all opposing perspectives are considered heresy meaning a manifestation of “evil” or “negativity”. Dogma is the source of the belief that; “my God is better than your God.” The notion of one true God generates arrogance and has become a popular motivational tool for invoking

war. The early Greek philosophers described fundamentalism as the sin of *hubris*, meaning the human conceit of assuming it is possible to fully grasp the Will of God.

Ifa attempts to avoid *hubris* by stressing humility. In *Ifa* the *Awo* (Mystery) of Creation remains forever unknowable. *Olorun*, the Source of Creation in *Ifa* cosmology, has no shrines, no *oriki* (invocations) and no direct involvement in human affairs. The only way to truly know God is to become God. *Ifa* says the child never becomes the parent. In philosophical terms, the finite never becomes the Infinite.

We create dogma every time we make a decision based on unconfirmed assumptions. One day I arrived at the Chicago airport and waited for my luggage to appear on the carousel. I did not see it. I assumed the airline lost my suitcase. I complained to an attendant on floor, I complained to a man behind the lost and found desk. I made intemperate remarks to anybody who would listen. Then I saw my luggage on another carousel that was clearly marked with the number of my flight. Dogma will get you every time. *Ifa* does make observations about the Nature of Creation as it comes into being in the visible world. In my opinion the single, most important, premise upon which *Ifa* is based is the belief that life works.

Ifa says *Olokun ma npese onje fun awon omu okun* meaning the Spirit of the Ocean always provides food for the children of the sea. *Ifa* is based on the belief that if we live in harmony with self and world we

receive a blessing, *ire omo, ire owo, ire agbo ato* (children, abundance and long life). From this premise arises the notion that if my life gets better, your life gets better. The more I am able to care for my children, receive the blessing of abundance and good health, the easier it becomes for others to do the same. How is this possible? It is possible because as my life gets better, I have more resources available to me to assist those around me. Your life does not get better if I spend my time being jealous of what you have and engage in schemes to take it away from you. Any denigration of another is a denigration of self. Fundamentalism in all of its religious manifestations is based on a consciousness of scarcity. Saying I am the interpreter of God's Will is frequently a thinly disguised justification for greed. If you believe scarcity is a Universal Law of Nature, greed is necessary for survival. If you believe abundance is Universal Law, generosity is the inevitable consequence.

My experience as a student of *Ifa* tells me Nature sustains itself from an infinite well of potential. Abundance is the Universal Law of Creation. If this is true I am not dependent on others to create my good fortune. If I tend to the personal issues of self-transformation abundance will find me. No internal change occurs when I am stuck in issues of jealousy, envy and greed. If I waste my time wanting what you have, I rob myself of the experience of learning how to what I need. I have played Jazz trombone for fifty years. For the first twenty

years I wanted to sound like J.J. Johnson and I was always disappointed in my efforts. One day I decided to sound like myself and I have enjoyed playing ever since.

In contrast to a dogmatic perspective, the dynamic point of view is based on a methodology for viewing the world that embraces the possibility of continuous growth and constant change. Western theologians refer to this perspective as *Gnostic*. *Ifa* is not based on dogma; it is a way of looking at the world. It is firmly rooted in the Gnostic approach, meaning it embraces the quest for self-discovery rather than propagates a set doctrine. The word Gnostic is derived from the Greek *gnosis* meaning knowledge of spiritual things or one who possesses a mystical understanding.

A Gnostic point of view is often difficult to describe because any attempt at conceptualization undermines its premise. What can be said about a Gnostic world view is that it embraces the idea that human consciousness is capable of becoming elevated into altered states, opening windows of human perception that allow us to see inter-actions that are otherwise hidden. *Ifa* refers to this shift as *Orunmila wa lona aye* meaning return to the time when the Spirit of Destiny walked the earth. It is also a reference to the praise name of the Spirit of Destiny, *elerin-ipin*, meaning witness to Creation. To witness Creation is to perceive the invisible Forces in Nature that sustain dynamics and form in the visible world. In practical terms this

suggests it is possible to focus our attention in a way that illuminates both a problem and its solution simultaneously.

In my experience meditation on the sacred symbols used to identify the various verses of *Odu Ifa* has the potential to illuminate the polarity between cause and effect. The symbols use single lines to represent expansion and double lines to mark contraction. Every *Odu* has eight sets of single and double lines grouped in two vertical sets of four. If you reverse all the lines on the symbol by making the single lines double and the double lines single you can identify the verse that is the source of the problem described in the original verse. This is a way to begin to understand and grasp the idea of polarity and balance.

Every action in Nature has an equal and opposite reaction. Anyone who has spent time in the forest knows that for anything to live something else must die. The palm tree that comes to maturity wipes out the smaller sprouts in its shadow. The snake eats the rat; the rat eats the lizard and so on down the food chain. Nothing is either intrinsically good or evil. Every yes carries a no. Blessings require a sacrifice. The joy of marriage includes limitations on personal independence. The accomplishment of learning a skill includes the neglect of some other field of study. Ambiguity is the foundation of all experience. Anyone who appreciates the dynamics of Nature, and life in the world, will see the futility of creating dogma. The element of chaos and change makes every conclusion limited and eventually

obsolete. Belief in any doctrine is no guarantee of being appropriate in the moment.

Ifa has no creed and has no commandments. Instead *Ifa* uses divination as a process for communication with Spirit and with the higher self (*iponri*). Divination becomes a source of personal taboo and individual guidance and not a formula for conditioning an entire community. I might need to be monogamous in this lifetime. You might need to be polygamous. One person's taboo has no direct impact on the behavior of another. Divination can be done for an entire community, but that divination is in response to a specific concern. The message for a particular community from Spirit is for a specific group of people and does not extend to other communities.

On occasion someone will ask me to comment on the content of divination from another diviner. I do not think it is appropriate to respond to this question in other than general terms. Divination includes the invocation of Spirit. Interpretation involves messages from Spirit directed to a specific person. Without having been present to hear the intervention of Spirit any comment by me would be uninformed and defeat the whole purpose of divination as a problem-solving tool. I have also noticed that when someone is looking for a second opinion about a particular verse of *Odu* they are frequently looking for confirmation of dogma rather than following the instructions of the original diviner.

In order to embrace a Gnostic perspective it is necessary to consider the possibility that Creation is an emanation from Source and that all things are a reflection of the Ground of Being. Theologians refer to this idea as a covenant with Source, the belief that the Creator reveals Itself through Creation. In *Ifa* emanation from Source is called *Oriṣa* meaning select consciousness. *Oriṣa* is the specific quality of consciousness found in a given Force of Nature.

What we feel and learn in the presence of fire is different from what we feel and learn in the presence of water. The *Ifa* methodology for studying the consciousness of Nature is to first examine the consciousness of self and to see how self reflects larger Forces and transcendent dimensions. It is this methodology that makes the study of *ori* the first step on the journey towards understanding *Awo* or the Mystery of Creation. The complexities of this journey make the study of *Ifa* a continuous process of self-revelation and growth.

This book provides personal exercises and rituals for embracing an open-ended worldview. There are suggestions for coming together as a community to assist in the elevation of those who are going through significant rites of passage. The book ends with a discussion of the positive potential that comes as result of living in harmony with the natural cycles of the earth. Most of this material is based on training from my lineage of *Ifa*. It is not the only way; it is simply a way. Many of the ideas expressed in this book are at odds with

commonly held views about *Ifa*. If my premise that *Ifa* is a way of looking at the world were true, challenging dogma would be in the spirit of our ancestral elders.

At the end of my second trip to Ode Remo I sat down with *Araba* Adesanya Awoyade and turned on the tape recorder. I told him I was going to write a book and asked him if he had anything he wanted to say to *Ifa* worshippers in America. Without hesitation he said, "Tell them if they see something black to call it black and if they see something red to call it red." A bit bewildered I asked him if there was anything more he wanted to say. He said, "Treat me like your father and things will go well for you."

This book is my account of the journey of self-discovery that resulted from attempting to understand what the *Araba* meant by his short message. At the time I thought he was being evasive. Now I think he said it all.

Ire lona iponri atiwo Orun - May the journey of self-discovery bring you the blessings of Spirit.

Ori

The *Ifa* Concept of Consciousness

Ori is the Yoruba word used to describe the vessel that is able to process conscious thought. In the *Ifa* description of *ori* consciousness is an integration of thoughts and emotions. When an *Ifa* elder is admonishing someone to think clearly they will typically point to their heart and not their head. The integration of thought and emotion creates *ori ire* or wisdom. *Ifa* says *Ologbon a d'omugo l'ai l'ogbon-inu* meaning the person who fails to make use of their wisdom becomes a fool.

According to *Ifa*, *ori* has four distinct arenas of perception; we think about our internal experience (identify emotions), we acknowledge our relationship with other people and things (evaluate levels of trust and empathy), we examine the past (access memory) and we envision the future (activate imagination).

The four modes of consciousness can be symbolized by a circle sectioned into four equal quadrants. In the literature on comparative religion this symbolic representation of inner experience is called a mandala. The quartered circle is a universal symbol of the self that appears in virtually every religious tradition throughout history. It is

found in the sand paintings of Hopi shamans, the healing circles of Tibetan Buddhist, the temple art of Islam, the stained glass windows of Gothic Cathedrals and the markings on the *Ifa* divination tray.

In the course of a day the mind flips through the quadrants quickly as a method of processing information. When we encounter new experience, we examine how it feels, we remember similar feelings, and we consider how the experience impacts our relationships and we imagine the effect the experience will have on future events.

Ifa says *Orisiriṣi eḍa lowo le lalẹ yato fun eḍa tojade lowure* meaning at sundown a different person enters the house than the one who left in the morning. The idea of being on a spiritual path suggests that a person is making use of specific techniques to facilitate the integration of new information and new experience. Employing the symbolic language of the mandala, we are widening the circumference of the circle by expanding the calabash of personal experience.

In *Ifa* many of the techniques used to train the *ori* are taught in the form of codes of behavior passed from one generation to the next as cultural expectations and through participation in rituals that reveal the mystery of transcendent symbols. *Ifa* has no monasteries and no universities; the *Ifa* School of learning is the extended family where everyone takes on the responsibility of being a mentor and teacher to younger generations.

When casting the oracle, *Ifa* diviners invoke the four quadrants of the mandala that appear on the divination tray by saying *Iba se ila orun, iba se iwo orun, iba se ariwa, iba se guusu*. The east (*ila orun*) is located on the top of the tray in the realm of the Spirits of air. The west (*iwo orun*) is located at the bottom of the tray in the realm of the Spirits of the earth. The north (*ariwa*) is located on the right side of the tray in the realm of the Spirits of fire. The south (*guusu*) is located on the left side of the tray in the realm of Spirits of water. Some literature on this subject shows the north on the top of the tray based on the ethnocentric notion that African divination trays use the same orientation as AAA maps. In my experience those references are inaccurate.

In psychological terms, air is associated with breathing and our experience of self; earth is associated with survival and our relationships with others; fire is associated with transformation and our ability to vision the future, and water is associated with am biotic fluid and our memories of the past. The four components of the *ori* are like spokes on a wheel linking the consciousness of the person to similar patterns of consciousness outside direct experience. This means *ori* has access to transcendent realms of perception called *Orun* in *Ifa* and often referred to as the collective unconscious in transpersonal schools of psychology.

Ifa divination directs the diviner towards one of the 256 verses of *Ifa* oral scripture. The verse identifies the clients most compelling and immediate spiritual lesson. Once the lesson has been identified the diviner may give the client two symbolic objects (stone and shell) used to determine the orientation of the divination. This process is believed to be direct communication with the client's *ori*. It is used to determine either if the client will easily assimilate and integrate the four components of *ori*, learn the lesson and receive the blessing that comes with expanded consciousness, or if the client is in resistance to the lesson leading to potentially self-defeating behavior. *Ifa* says; *Awon ti won segun ota, ko sohun ti yio fa iberu ota* meaning those who conquer the enemy within have nothing to fear from the enemy without. *Ifa* divination is rooted in the idea of conquering the enemy within.

The smooth assimilation of the lesson from divination is called *ire*. The word for resistance to the lesson from divination is *ibi*. In Yoruba the word *ibi* means after-birth. Holding on to the placenta after delivery is fatal. The use of the word *ibi* in the context of divination suggests the person is holding on to thought forms (dogma) that are resistant to the lesson at hand (*ire*). I would describe *ibi* as opposition to embracing an open-ended worldview. *Ibi* is the solidification of dogma. Solidification occurs because letting go of strongly held beliefs is experienced as loss of self. It literally feels like a threat to your

physical existence. More accurately it is a spiritual death that lays the foundation for rebirth and continued growth. The death of the old self is frightening and seldom comes without struggle or resistance.

Ifa says *Iberu ie fa iku ara tabi ti emi* meaning fear is the parent of premature death. Resistance to change requires full time effort. If you focus all of your attention on ignoring your lessons, there is no time for living in the moment. Failure to live in the moment is extremely dangerous. Learning *Ifa* is a process of embracing modes of behavior that facilitate the smooth transition of *ibi* into *ire*. Anticipating the inevitable emergence of a new self from the death of the old self makes change less fearful.

If *ibi* is transformed into *ire* it tends to become solidified in one of the four quadrants of the *Ifa* mandala. Someone who is afraid of the future will remain stuck in the past. The most common example is the adult who refuses to grow up, wanting the lack of responsibilities associated with childhood to continue throughout life. Someone who is avoiding dealing with developmental problems will constantly run in search of a better future. I see this manifest when people say my life would get better if only I could win the lottery. Someone who is fearful of being successful in the world can mask the fear by focusing all their attention on spiritual matters. They do this in an effort to justify failure in practical matters by saying success is unimportant. Someone who is obsessed with success could be avoiding dealing with moral and

ethical considerations that are part of spiritual development. The avoidance is often rooted in low self-esteem. This leads to the false notion that the problem can be fixed by external forms of gratification.

Divination uses *ebo* to break the bonds of *ibi* or solidified dogma. *Ebo* includes offerings, healings, cleansings, rituals and initiations as ways of freeing the *ori* from self-imposed restrictions. *Ifa* describes this process by saying; *mo'bo Orisa* meaning I make an offering to spirit. If the person is in alignment with their higher self and free from the shackles of dogma *Ifa* says, *mo sin Olodumare* meaning I serve God.

Staying stuck in *ibi* literally deifies the problem. Instead of worshipping Source, we worship whatever it takes to stay stuck. Christians call this idolatry. As an issue of survival we devote all our conscious effort to creating a world that supports our distorted vision of reality by surrounding ourselves with peers who share our limited worldview.

If anyone from the circle of support deviates from the norm, they become the scapegoat, someone who is falsely accused of being responsible for the problems of the group. If the scapegoat refuses to submit to the will of the group they are shunned, banned, avoided and demonized. In the process we claim to follow the guidance of Spirit and imagine that Spirit wants us to behave in childish ways. We claim to follow the guidance of Spirit and believe we can control the future.

We claim to follow the guidance of Spirit and ignore our financial responsibilities while pretending to be religious devotees. We claim to follow the guidance of Spirit by becoming workaholics justifying the obsession for the sake of the family. *Mo sin Olodumare* means serving God by being appropriate in the moment. Being appropriate in the moment can only happen if we see the world unencumbered by delusions generated by dogma. When any group attacks a member who is not a threat, the group sows the seeds of its own self-destruction. A healthy community embraces diversity of opinions. If you want to understand *Ifa* as a worldview, never demonize anyone, replace criticism with empathy, replace moral judgment with *ebo*, replace anger with understanding and replace self-pity with the courage to change.

The fear of change is rooted in a fear of loss of self only when self-perception is rooted in dogma. Discard the self-limiting ideas and the fear disappears. Theologians define dogma as a strongly asserted metaphysical principle. Dogma is commonly associated with religious indoctrination. From a psychological perspective, most individuals create dogma during their developmental years when their interpretation of life experience is falsely elevated to an inflexible personalized view of the Laws of Nature. For example a child grows up in a family where the predominate interaction with their parents involves the threat of punishment and physical abuse. The inherent

need to be nurtured comes in conflict with the reality of pain and suffering. Rather than admit to not being loved, the child decides that love is expressed through violence. Growing up the child will associate with other children who share the same worldview. It is often easier to look for external support of a dogmatic principle than it is to deal with the painful truth at the core of a conflict. As an adult that same child might seek a religious community that sanctions severe corporal punishment of children. The dogmatic worldview gets reinforced by an extended community and is solidified as God's Will while being passed down to another generation.

I refer to the process as deifying an internal conflict. Nazi's believed genocide was God's Will. There was a time when Catholics believed burning witches was God's Will. There are Christians today who believe killing abortion clinic doctors is God's Will. There are *Ifa* priests who believe God hates homosexuals and that women are inferior to men. Every American President who has declared war does so with God's endorsement. Anytime you claim another human being is unworthy of being a part of your community you are invoking what you believe to be God's Will. The only way you can convince yourself you are a prophet is to surround yourself with people who also think they know the Will of God. At this point your personal *ibi* becomes communal *ibi*. Communal *ibi* makes the job of personal transformation

more difficult. Encouraging communal *ibi* is the tactic of colonialism better known as divide and conquer.

Once an unresolved problem is arrogantly elevated to a dogmatic principle there is no impetus for resolution. If I believe God wants me to be a racist I have no reason to examine racists behavior. If I believe God made men superior to women, I have no reason to examine my sexism. If I believe God condemns homosexuals, I have no reason to examine my homophobia. Once we invoke God's Will life becomes very simple. The problem is the *ori* knows we are embracing a lie. The more the lie becomes manifest in the world, the more likely *ori* will send *Esu O'dara* on a mission to shake the *ibi* loose and continue the process of growth.

Unresolved conflict leads to tension and anger. When there is no impetus to resolve the problem the *ori* looks for an alternative means to discharge the frustration and anger. At times this will manifest as passive aggression, the attempt to control the behavior of others by pretending to be victim. To repress the pain of unresolved conflict a person might deaden their senses by turning to alcohol or drugs. If the person is fortunate, they might encounter a mentor. Someone who grew up with a similar worldview, who was able to break the shackles of their self-imposed dogma, might reveal how to embrace a more balanced and holistic interpretation of their experience.

An example that is all too prevalent is the child who is raised to believe sexuality is “evil”. The inability to reconcile dogma with a natural desire can cause a person to obsess on making sure others do not enjoy what has been denied to them. The person might avoid the internal contradiction by becoming self-righteous. They might feel the need to monitor pornography in an effort to protect others from temptation. If the conflict continues they might feel the need to join the clergy to protect their community from “sin”. At some point the power of the contradiction will undermine intention and the person may well become caught in a compromising situation. If the person feels powerless to deal with the internal conflict they will tend to act out their frustration against those who are helpless. At this point in the avoidance scenario they may even convince themselves that pedophilia is an expression of God’s Love.

Ifa divination is a tool designed to identify self-destructive tendencies before others in the community are damaged. Divination cannot work if *Ifa* is merely perceived as fixing a problem by magically manifesting a desired result without taking into consideration the need for personal transformation. I am not saying that magical expressions of will power do not work on a short-term basis. Nevertheless it is important to recognize that it is ultimately self-defeating.

When I was growing up, in the sixties, the Twilight Zone and Star Trek were popular morality plays. In some ways they were the

American equivalent of the stories associated with *Odu Ifa*. Imagine you are on the starship Enterprise. You encounter a Klingon for the first time. His name is Dank. You look directly at Dank not knowing that in Klingon culture looking directly at someone is considered rude. Dank is offended by your gesture and becomes belligerent. A fight breaks out; you get a broken nose. You process that experience by assuming all Klingon's are bullies. Sometime later you meet a Klingon named Gar. You are defensive, your body language signals the message you are prepared to defend yourself, and you get a second broken nose. Your dogma is now becoming solidified. Later on you become stranded in space with no food or water. A Klingon bird of prey comes to your rescue. You refuse the aid because you are convinced it is a trap. In the language of *Ifa*, *ibi* is creating more *ibi* eventually leading to premature death rather than a blessing of long life. You remain stranded never once looking at the consequences of holding on to a worldview that is rooted in a mistake that was originally of your own making.

The negative consequences of holding on to a solidified worldview are described in the story about the two faces of *Esu O'dara*. Two farmers who grew up together were best of friends. When they passed the age of puberty they both went for divination. *Ifa* said they must live on adjacent farms because their abundance would depend on mutual cooperation. *Ifa* said it was *Esu O'dara* who would teach them

the mystery of abundance. *Ifa* said they needed to make regular offerings to *Esi O'dara* to make sure their friendship was not broken.

The two young men could not imagine being separated, they could not imagine being enemies, and they could not imagine living to old age in poverty. There was no need to appease the spirit of *Esu O'dara*. One day *Esu O'dara* came to the farm of the two young men. Their land was separated by a narrow path. *Esu O'dara* walked down the path with one side of his face painted white and one side of his face painted red.

When *Esu O'dara* passed one of the young men said, "Did you see that strange fellow with the white face?"

The other responded, "No he had a red face."

The two men got into an argument that led to a fight that ended their friendship. One of the tools used to break the bonds of *ibi* is humility. From an *Ifa* perspective humility is the ability to consider another point of view and to make no assumptions about that point of view until it can be tested through direct experience. In other words test advice before rejecting it. This requires patience and a cool head. *Ifa* says *Ibinu ko se ohunkohun iwa susu ni ohun gobgbo* meaning anger accomplished nothing; patience is the crown of achievement. Those who possess patience possess all things.

Another of the tools used by *Ifa* to avoid creating dogma comes from the holy *Odu, Osa'Tura*.

Iba se Osa Tura. S'otito s'ododo, s'otito o si tun s'ododo, eni s'otiti ni Imale yoo gbe o.

Speak the truth tell the facts, speak the truth tell the facts. Those who speak the truth are those whom the Spirits will help.

In order to facilitate the daily assimilation of new information and new experience, let us look at just one component of this verse of *Ifa* scripture, the word *s'otito*. A loose translation of the word would be to only state the facts. In the words of psychology, make an objective evaluation of a new event that requires analysis. Stating the facts means make absolutely no assumptions about anything.

There is an *Ifa* story about *Ogun* that clearly expresses the value of *s'otito*. In the olden days *Ogun* served as the village executioner. One day a messenger of the *Oba* brought *Ogun* a man who was accused of stealing the *Oba's* dog. *Ogun* told the messenger he would only execute someone for telling a lie. The messenger said the accused denied committing the crime and saw him do it. *Ogun* cut off the head of the messenger, freed the prisoner and said, "I was the one who stole the dog."

If we examine the fable about the encounter with the Klingons we can create a hypothetical example of how being objective works. The meeting with Dank ended in violence, the assumption was that all Klingons are rude and aggressive. The only way this could be verified

is if you personally knew every Klingon. An objective analysis would be to say Dank was rude and violent without extending the parameters of your conclusion beyond direct experience. Assuming that all Klingons are violent gives the problem no place to go and provides no basis for resolution. Limiting the analysis to what is objectively know opens the door to a wide range of questions that hold the potential for fixing the problem. Did Dank have a bad day? Did I remind him of someone he doesn't like? Did he have a violent encounter with another officer from Star Fleet? Did I unknowingly do something to offend him? By remaining open to a number of interpretations and by not becoming locked into self-generated dogma the door remains open to gain a better understanding of Dank the person, a better understanding of Klingon culture and in this instance a better understanding of personal insensitivity. Exploring these options means it will be less likely that the meeting with Gar will start from a defensive posture. On the day the Klingon ship comes to your rescue you will be able to make an objective evaluation about whether or not to accept the assistance.

Ifa culture trains the younger generation in *s'otito* through the use of a strict taboo against gossip. There are always two sides to every story and when someone is complaining about a perceived injustice there is a tendency to describe the event in self-serving terms. Gossip is designed to get peer support for a dogmatic point of view. In *Ifa* culture gossip is considered pointless because it carries no

possibility of resolution of a problem. In my experience an *Ifa* elder will only listen to a complaint when both parties are present. If there is no immediate resolution between the parties, the matter is taken to the oracle for guidance from Spirit. Once a problem has been fixed through divination it is taboo to re-visit the issue. Participation in this process is part of the training for becoming an elder. *Ifa* says; *Ika ti ika ka, ko le yamju oro* meaning the person who harms others, when they have been harmed, is unable to settle a dispute.

In Ode Remo the *Oba* meaning eldest father or village chief holds court in the mornings for resolving disputes. Anyone with a problem can ask the *Oba* and the elders of *Ogboni* to settle the conflict. If the other party is not present, the *Oba* will send one of his *emese* (messengers) to retrieve the other person. Nothing is settled without both parties in attendance. Those who are in dispute direct all their comments to the *Oba* who seeks the council of his advisors and then makes a final judgment. In many ways it is similar to a court of law. On a smaller scale the same process is used to settle problems within an extended family. All serious conflicts are resolved openly with both parties and witnesses in attendance. During the process, the participants are admonished to say only what they know, a traditional Yoruba version of the no hearsay rule followed in Western courts of law.

Removing assumptions from self-analysis is at the foundation of the *Ifa* concept of self-transformation. Such rigorous self-examination is an essential process for those who aspire to learn divination. To take one example, the verses of *Odu Ifa* make frequent reference to the possibility of good fortune coming from a significant stranger. Using our hypothetical example, if the diviner has a bias against Klingons, the Star Fleet explorer who comes for divination will not be told to welcome the rescuer from a Klingon bird of prey.

There is an aspect of *ibi* that periodically showed up during divination that took me some time to fully understand. It involved the appearance of *elenini* meaning disruptive elemental spirits. At first it was not clear to me what exactly was meant by elemental spirit. Over time I developed a theory based on experience and observation. It may or may not be true and is impossible to prove because it involves a particular theory about the structure of reality. The theory helps me dispel *elenini* so at the very least it is a good working hypothesis.

I believe there is a thin veil of invisible light on the boundary between dimensions of reality. This light can be understood as pure unformed consciousness. The light can be easily molded by human thought. As a result of this interaction there is a global neither world of phantoms shaped by human suffering and despair.

If a person is avoiding transforming *ibi* they will look for someone else to blame for their problems. If there is no one to blame they will

create an imaginary demon that they can claim is responsible for the disruption in their life. If the need to create a demon is strong enough the thought form will take shape and the monster will materialize in the physical world giving apparent confirmation the problem is external and not internal.

The current psychological literature on demonic possession has gathered convincing data that shows childhood victims of trauma create the phenomena as a form of protection. If you are being attacked by an adult the best defense is to seek the aid of a monster. Behind every Satanic possession is a wounded child.

In *Ifa* this phenomena is called *elenini*. Real Spirits always respond to the power of the word. If you tell *Egun* or *Orisa* to leave, they leave. *Elenini* does not respond to the power of the word. The more you try to dispel it in a ritual context the stronger it gets. If a ritual exorcism is effective, the old *elenini* is replaced by a new manifestation far more powerful than the original.

The only way to destroy *elenin* is starve it to death. By this I mean you have to slowly work away at the internal conflicts that feed the spirit.

The only person who can destroy an *elenini* is the person who created it. This won't happen until the person is ready to accept responsibility for the real problem. If you try and banish an *elenini* in a ritual context the person who created it will view the ritual as a threat to their

identity, they will resist the process by attacking you. There is no easy solution to this problem. My best recommendation is to refer the person with the *elenini* to a mentor, someone who has effectively transformed the real issue. The *ebo* or ritual cleansing ends up looking more like a twelve-step program than an offering to spirit.

It is my hope that as our communities gain more insight into this particular issue; we can share information on effective resolution. Far too often I see the manifestation of elemental spirits given inappropriate credibility by the extended family and this is extremely disruptive because it can infect an entire community making everyone distracted by the problems of one person. The pattern becomes especially dramatic if messages from the *elenini* are given the same weight as messages from spirit.

The whole concept of the extended family as mystery school is based on the concept of mentoring. If you are teaching someone who is younger than you the idea is that you have gone through whatever experience the student is struggling with, as a result you can give them the benefit of your life lessons. In simple terms anything you have fixed in your own life can be used as medicine for someone else. *Ifa* says; *W'otun w'osi l'owq fi m'mo saka* meaning the right hand cannot wash itself without support from the left hand.

The idea of mentoring informs the way traditional Yoruba's greet one another. It is considered rude and inappropriate for a younger

person to ask an older person how they are doing, or how they are feeling. The reason for this is because in the *Ifa* mystery school a younger person does not offer opinions or give guidance to an elder. Based on the admonitions of *s'otitio*, asking a person how they are doing carries the expectation of an honest answer. If the older person has a problem the younger person simply is not old enough or wise enough to offer an appropriate solution based on life experience. If you can't assist in fixing something there is no point in discussing it.

In *Ifa* culture it is not acceptable for a younger person to tell an older person what to do by claiming the message came from spirit. A message from spirit directed towards a particular person would be taken to the person's elder for evaluation before being delivered to the intended recipient.

One day I was walking through Ode Remo in the middle of the afternoon. It was very hot. I noticed that everyone but me was inside, in the shade, keeping cool. I decided it was time to return to the *Araba's* house. On the way home I got sick. A grandfather came out of his house and asked me how I felt. I told him I had an upset stomach. He went back into his house and I continued walking. When I reached the place where I was staying there was a box of stomach medicine on the front porch. The grandfather asked me how I was feeling because he was in a position to fix the problem. How that medicine got to the house before I did, I will never know.

Exercise

Sit in a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Examine two new experiences that occurred in the course of the same day. Analyze your reaction in each of the four modes of thought and write them down.

1. Perception of self
2. Perception of self in relationship
3. Perception of similar past experience
4. Perception of possible implications for the future

Under each reaction list your assumptions. Now review the event and look at your reaction to it minus any assumptions. Keep your list of assumptions on your shrine or white table. Begin to notice how similar assumptions continue to reappear in situation after situation. Take your list of assumptions and burn them in front of your shrine or white table. Take the ashes to the trash. Tell yourself you are discarding all beliefs and assumptions that do not serve you well. Turn around and walk away without looking back. Do this every night eleven nights in a row. This may seem like a simple process, but when

a discarded assumption rears its head you will remember the walk to the trash bin and let it go. That is the way the mind works and the reason why *Ifa* makes use of ritual to transform personal problems. Ritual is an effective tool for reminding the *ori* a decision has been made. If simply telling yourself to change were effective there would be no need to study any spiritual discipline.

If an assumption remains persistent stand in front of your *Ogun* pot holding one of his spikes at chest level. Promise *Ogun* you will stop making a particular assumption when the spike hits the floor, then drop the spike. In *Ifa* an oath to *Ogun* is considered an absolute taboo. If you do not have an *Ogun* take the oath standing at a railroad crossing.

Get to the point where you are able to go through this process in the moment. Being objective is the first step in a series of steps that will transform the way you perceive yourself and experience the world. None of the other steps will work unless this step is firmly internalized and becomes second nature.

Ritual

The tension caused by unresolved internal conflict creates negative *ase* in our body and around our heads. Negative thoughts have physical substance in the world and linger around us like dead skin. *Ifa* has a complex system for cleaning away the negative effects of *ibi* or dogma. A simple head cleaning involves saying an *oriki* while

moving the fingers of your left hand from the middle of your forehead across the top of the head down the neck the flicking the negativity away from your body. The word *oriki* literally means to praise the spirit or praise the head. It is the Yoruba word used to described prayers used in *Ifa* to invoke spirit. I recommend this *oriki* be used as a part of the Morning Prayer cycle. I recommend memorization so it can be used during the day whenever unresolved internal issues threaten to cause disruption.

*Orí san mi. Orí san mi. Orí san igede. Orí san igede.
Orí otan san mi ki nni owó lowó. Orí otan san mi ki
nbimo le mio. Orí oto san mi ki nni aya. Orí oto san
mi ki nkole mole. Orí san mi o. Orí san mi o. Orí san
mi o. Oloma ajiki, iwá ni mope. Ase.*

Inner Spirit guide me. Inner Spirit guide me. Inner Spirit support me. Inner Spirit support me. Inner Spirit support my abundance. Inner Spirit support my future children. Inner Spirit support my relationship. Inner Spirit protect my house. Inner Spirit guide me. Inner Spirit guide me. Inner Spirit guide me. Protector of Children, my inner character is thankful. May it be so.

Make a commitment to your self in front of either your *Ogun* shrine or a railroad crossing. Promise *Ogun* you will not engage in gossip, at all ever. Instead decide to deal directly with any person who causes you upset. Make the commitment for one month then objective consider whether or not the direct approach is more effective.

Ara

The *Ifa* Concept of the Physical Body

The Yoruba word *ara* refers to the physical body and all the internal organs. According to *Ifa* scripture, shaping the physical body is a joint effort between the Spiritual Forces known as *Obatala*, *Ajalamopin* and *Ogun*. *Obatala* is usually translated to mean King of the White Cloth. The symbol of White Cloth represents the power of light to transform itself into matter. Light is a Primal Force in Nature. Everything that exists is described by both *Ifa* and Western science as an expression of the unlimited potential of light to alter itself into the fundamental building blocks of the visible world. Most elements are created by second-generation stars that form complex atoms and send them hurling out into space. Science calls this phenomenon a supernova. *Ifa* refers to it as *Irunmole* meaning the beard of the house of light.

Ifa cosmology (science of the structure of Creation) is based on the belief in a teleological universe. Teleology is the metaphysical theory that evolution is guided by conscious design. *Ifa* teaches that everything in existence has its own unique form of consciousness or Spirit. In its primal form, consciousness is described as the spark (*ase*)

of *Obatala*. This means light is the primal manifestation of consciousness in the Nature.

To describe something as conscious suggests the ability to make decisions. The current study of light particles, forming the basis of quantum physics, indicates light particles do not conform to cause and effect models of behavior. Physics describes the reaction of light particles in terms of a range of probabilities. Anything capable of generating a range of reactions to stimuli is capable of choice, and the ability to choose is the primary definition of consciousness.

There is another curious quality about atoms. If sub-atomic particles separate from an atom, they will travel large distances in different directions. If one particle hits an obstacle and changes directions, the other particle will have a simultaneous reaction. Science considers this phenomenon very strange. Physics explains it in terms of an invisible link between all things. The link occurs in an invisible fifth dimension outside the boundaries of time and space. *Ifa* calls this invisible dimension *Orun*. *Ifa* teaches that everything in Creation is linked to the *iponri*. The *iponri* of an individual is linked to the *iponri* of a specific *Orisa*, which is linked to the specific *iponri* of a specific *Irunmole*, which is linked to a specific *Odu*, which is linked to Source or *Olodumare*. These relationships are symbolized by the mat and the sacred *Ifa* knot seen on the hats worn by *Ifa* diviners.

In the personal realm, *Ifa* teaches that *ase* guides the transference of human potential from one generation to the next through the process of *atunwa* or reincarnation. Our *iponri* continues to be reborn and grow while maintaining its original identity. The *iponri* is carried by light seated at the core of human consciousness and linked to the consciousness of Spirit. Light as Primal Matter contains the blueprint for all of Creation. Human consciousness has the potential to access this blueprint and retrieve information necessary to sustain life. The consciousness of light is not different than the consciousness of the human spirit; Light Consciousness simply expresses itself through a different medium.

Ajala-mopin assists *Obatala* in the task of creating consciousness by molding each head while it is forming in the womb. This does not mean the shaping of the physical structure of the skull; it means that the role of *Ajala-mopin* is to shape the invisible vessel that holds latent human potential. It is *Ajala-mopin* who gives us the tools to access our personal destiny.

Ogun's role is to build the physical body, particularly the limbs. There is no direct translation for the word *Ogun* usually translated to mean Spirit of Iron. It may seem odd to associate Iron with physical development. Both *Ifa* cosmology and Western science agree that life on Earth began at the bottom of the Ocean. When the hot rock from the core of the Earth broke through the Ocean floor, it cooled and

solidified. It was the rust from these deposits that provided nourishment for the first life forms that appeared on the planet. Western Science calls this biological evolution. *Ifa* calls it the virility of *Ogun* mingling with the fertility of *Olokun*, the Spirit of the Ocean, different language, same idea.

According to *Ifa*, the same Spiritual Forces that transformed minerals into single cell life forms have an active role in shaping the physical body. *Ifa* makes extensive use of rocks as religious icons. Rocks are the parents of biological life forms; they are literally our eldest ancestors. This is a universal idea, Peter is the rock of Christianity, the Kabah is the foundation of Islam, Hindu temples venerate stones called Lingum and Yoni, Celtic Druids built the stone formations of Europe and Native Americans consider crystals sacred.

The process of shaping the human form gains additional assistance from the Spiritual Forces *Ifa* calls *Alaanu*, *Oloore*, *Sungbemi*, *Magbemiti*, *Saaragaa* and *Ejujiri*. *Alaanu* means The Merciful One. *Oloore* means The Owner of kindness. *Sungbemi* means Be Closer to Me. *Magbemiti* means The Power of My Heart. *Saaragaa* means The Storage Place of Uniqueness and *Ejujiri* suggests it is the foundation of inner strength. Each of these Spiritual Forces is linked to the caldron of *iponri* and helps create the wide diversity of human traits that manifest in the human spirit through the structure of the human body.

Obviously keeping the body healthy is a part of any journey towards self-discovery. *Ifa* is used as a diagnostic tool for monitoring health and some diviners specialize in the healing arts. The issue of nutrition is important but not always apparent. Ode Remo is a farming community. Extended families share common garden plots they depend on for food especially the staples of yam and corn. There is little if any processed food in the rural diet and limited access to sugar. The community eats natural healthy food because it is the only option.

In urban America we have easy access to food that does not support health. Being conscious of diet is step one on the spiritual journey. At *Ifa* naming ceremonies that typically occur within the first weeks of a child's life, the newborn baby is introduced to yam, honey, salt, and palm oil. Each of these foods is blessed prior to being fed to the baby. In this simple ritual the community is making a commitment to *ara alafia* the physical health of the returning ancestor.

It is common during divination for *Ifa* to identify food taboos. There are generally two reasons for a food taboo. If a person worships *Obatala* they might receive a taboo against eating *igbin* meaning snail. In Ode Remo snail is part of the staple diet used in every day cooking. The taboo means the person does not eat snail as food, but does use snail as medicine for ritual purposes. If and when you eat the food sacred to your *Orisa* eating the taboo food becomes part of the invocation process for possession.

Divination might identify a food taboo for purposes of health. If a latent medical condition is identified, certain foods can activate the disease. *Ifa* can also identify certain foods that act as medicine to heal a particular illness and this becomes an admonition to eat specific things. Usually when food is used as medicine it is cooked in palm oil and the diviner will do incantations called *igede* directly on the food so the power of prayer is ingested.

Exercise

Sit in front of your ancestor shrine. If you do not have an ancestor shrine place a white clothe on a small table. Place a glass of water and a candle on the table. Light the candle. This is a mediation exercise. I find it is best to mediate wearing white clothing. The color white deflects outside influences making it easier to stay focused on your internal process. Dark cloths attract external influences causing distractions and a loss of concentration. Sit with both feet on the floor with slight pressure on your heels. Rest your forearms on your thighs with your palms up at the knees.

Imagine narrow beams of light entering both feet and both hands. Imagine the beams of light connecting at your heart and moving up towards your head. Imagine the beams of light moving out of your forehead just above the nose. Imagine the beam of light

splitting and connecting with the feet of your parents. Imagine the light passing through their body and coming out of their forehead to connect with their parents. Image the light connected to your grandparents, connecting to your great-grandparents. Imagine the light connecting to your entire lineage. Imagine the light going all the way back to the time the first humans walked the earth in Africa. Imagine the light moving back in time to connect with our ancestors who existed prior to the evolution of human life. Imagine the light moving back in time to connect with the first sea creatures that left the ocean to live on land. Image the light moving back in time to connect with the single celled life forms at the bottom of the ocean. Imagine the light moving back in time to connect with the elements that formed the earth. Imagine the light moving back in time to connect with the Sun. Imagine the light moving back in time to the first generation of stars that gave birth to our galaxy. Imagine the light moving back in time to the moment of Creation. Feel the unbroken connection between everything that was, everything that is and everything that ever will be. Know that you are a part of the manifestation of the Eternal Mystery. Allow yourself to notice the feelings generated by the sense of connection to all of Creation.

Ritual

If the mediation created a positive response, there is value in reconnecting to those feelings. *Ifa* associates elevated states of consciousness with power words called ofo ase. The repetition of ofo ase is designed to invoke and reclaim the original experience.

If we start the day in a bad mood it is very difficult to rise above it. If we start the day with a feeling of hope the day has a way of fulfilling that expectation. Daily morning prayers are an essential aspect of *Ifa* spiritual discipline. Consider starting your day by saying Ope ni fun Olorun meaning my blessings come from Source. Use the prayer as a trigger for feeling connected to Source. Feeling supported by the Universe carries a different energy than feeling victimized by those around you. Knowing your blessings come from Source allows you to become receptive to the possibility of *ire omo, ire owo, ire agbo ato*, the blessing of children, abundance and long life.

A more complete version of the prayer of praise if as follows:

Ope ni fun Olorun. Iba Olodumare, Oba ajiki. Mo ji Loni. Mo wo'gun Merin aye.

Thanks to the Owner of the Invisible Realm. Praise to the Creator who we praise first. I wake today. I behold the four corners of the world.

After thanking Creation for providing the Mystery of a new day, it is traditional to bless your own head. An Example of a head blessing used in the morning is as follows:

Èmi mà jí lónì o, o, mo f'orí balè f'Olórún. Ire gbogbo maa'wa'ba'me, Orí mi da'mi da'iyè. Ngò kú mó. Ire gbogbo ni t'èmí. Ase.

Now that I am waking up, I give respect to the Realm of the Ancestors. Let all good things come to me. Inner Spirit give me life. I shall never die. Let all good things come to me. May it be so.

Egbe

The *Ifa* Concept of Emotional Guidance

Egbe is frequently translated to mean heart. Many *Ifa* concepts are based on the idea that what appears in the physical realm is supported by its counterpart in the invisible realm. A key to understanding the language of *Ifa* is the use of two different words to describe what in the West might be considered single phenomena. For example, the physical organ that pumps blood through the body is called okan. Within okan is a power center that regulates the flow of emotion called egbe. Because the English language has no words to make this distinction both words are generally translated to mean heart.

The word egbe is also used to refer to a religious collective. When used in this context, the meaning is similar to the English expression, the heart of a group. The multiple uses of the word egbe reflect the *Ifa* belief that Forces in Nature reappear in different realms of being. The invisible Spiritual Force that supports the heart of an individual also supports the hearts of a given community. That support extends to the hearts of all the members of the community living and dead. The inference here is that the person and the group has ancestral support. Part of the process of making effective use of

emotional guidance is the ability to distinguish between feelings generated by ancestors (*Egun*) and feelings generated by direct personal experience (*ori*).

The concept of *egbe* is based on the belief that spiritual power is drawn into the body through various power centers that regulate the flow of vital interaction between self and world. These power centers are collectively referred to as *awuje*. They are similar to the Yoga concept of charkas. In *Ifa* the power centers draw energy called *ase* from the invisible realm. The word *ase* is usually translated to mean may it be so, especially in the context of prayer and invocation. The word also means primal power in *Ifa* cosmology.

In the mandala of *ori* the quadrant dealing with emotion is often the most disruptive, calling our attention to an experience that requires special attention. The holy *Odu Osa'Tura* speaks of *s'otito* and *s'odido*. *S'otito* translated to mean state the facts or be objective. The word *s'odido* means tell the truth. This becomes a tricky word to translate in the context of the *Ifa* worldview because of the expectation that *Ifa* worshippers want to avoid the trap of equating personal truth with the Divine Will of God.

The *Ifa* admonition to state the facts and tell the truth means explain what happened without embellishment, then identify and take responsibility for how you feel about what happened. It is important to understand that: the correlation between what happened and how

you feel about it is not The Truth, it is your truth. Notice with the component of how you feel, it is possible for personal truth to change. What made you angry today could make you laugh tomorrow. Knowing this keeps personal identification of truth from becoming rigid. A fluidity occurs that allows for change, opening the door to compassion, empathy and forgiveness. Dogmatic truth ignores those feelings in an effort to build consensus.

If you don't want to resolve a conflict with another person and if you don't want to be viewed by the world as someone who is unfair the only alternative is to denigrate the other party. This behavior is based on the failure to distinguish between *iwa-pele* (good character) and *owolowo* (reputation).

Good character involves doing the right thing. Reputation is what others think about you. Good character is based on living in harmony with transcendent principles. Reputation is based on appearances and efforts to control opinions. Good character recognizes itself in others, making reputation irrelevant. I have a motto I use to make this distinction; your opinion of me is none of my business. As long as I know I am doing the right thing, I don't care what other people think. Personal growth requires confronting real issues, not be adjusting behavior to accommodate consensus and peer group approval. Misery loves company and when you experience joy misery gets angry saying you can't be happy as long as my life is a

mess. Every time you make a major breakthrough in self-awareness your circle of friends goes through a shift. Those who are threatened by your growth will either disappear or pull you down. The choice of what direction we take remains in our own hands.

Telling your truth can be described as being able to objectively describe an event, and to fairly evaluate how you feel about what happened. The problem in telling the truth is that communication is subject to distortion based on peer pressure to conform, and on a desire to avoid shame. There is a tendency to soften the truth if we don't want to cause disruption; furthermore, there is a tendency to use truth as a weapon in order to avoid taking responsibility for our actions. We avoid responsibility by inflicting pain and creating distance.

In order to avoid internal conflict, the emotional reaction to new experience needs to be identified accurately. For example, if your parents did not protect you from the sexual abuse as a child, you might have reason to be angry with them and you might feel the anger is inappropriate because of social conditioning. This conflict will cause the anger to be suppressed. It takes physical energy to suppress anger but if the anger is not released it will be transformed into either physical or mental illness. The most common way to discharge what is considered inappropriate emotion is to displace it. As a child you are angry with your parents and you are doing everything possible to

suppress your anger. A younger sibling does something wrong. You explode at the sibling venting what may be legitimate anger at what was done coupled with the unexpressed anger towards your parents. Displaced anger is the first step in what can become an unending web of distrust, resentment, and guilt.

If the anger is effectively discharged the work is not over. The anger can become replaced by a sense of self-pity and the self-pity runs the risk of becoming dogma. Self-pity looks like this; I had a problem, I have dealt with it and the problem means the rest of my life is doomed. This form of *ibi* is at the root of what *Ifa* calls *elenini*. The imaginary demon called the-rest-of-my-life-is-doomed will attract very real *egun* (ancestor spirits) who feed on disaster. The *egun* feeds on an unhealthy and inappropriate need for sympathy. This need will hover around the person attached to the *elenini* causing the person to act in inappropriate ways. The disruption is a plea for sympathy and attention. I call this an invitation to a pity party. If the invitations are accepted you run the risk of staying stuck. If the invitations are ignored you have a change at elevation and cleansing. Throwing a pity party and having no one show up is as painful as it gets. Working through that pain is the only way to remove the negative influence of the *elenini*.

We can take the mandala used to map the components of *ori* and create a secondary mandala to chart the range of emotional

responses to new experience. There is a polarity between love and grief, and another polarity between joy and anger. Love is grounded in self-love, which then becomes projected outward. Grief is the result of love lost, either through separation or death. Joy is an elevated sense of enthusiasm and anger is an emotional response to an action that is perceived as unfair.

The first step in accessing personal honesty involves accurately identify, as well as fully feeling each of these emotions. If we understand that the purpose of emotion is to call our attention to the need to reintegrate the *ori*; if we understand we are not our emotions, and if we understand that our emotional response need not control the integration process, we can look at how we feel, experience our emotion fully and move on to the important work of learning the lesson.

Exercise

In my experience as a diviner low self-esteem, and self-denigration is one of the most common forms of *ibi* I encounter among men and women seeking guidance from the oracle. In Ode Remo, where I study, the community acknowledges accomplishment; there is a strong sense of family and a healthy doze of self-love evident in the members of the *Egbe*. Consequently I am of the opinion that the ritual work prescribed by the traditional verses of *Odu Ifa* are not always

adequate to resolve the issues that arise in the Diaspora. Offering after offering can be made to Spirit, prayers can be spoken with sincerity and integrity but if the person with *ibi* is stuck in the dogma of low self-esteem the ritual work remains ineffective.

Pick one night a week for six weeks to devote to this process. Make it the same night each week. Sit in front of your ancestor shrine or white table and say I am a good and blessed person three times. Take a tablet and write down all the mind chatter that comes up in opposition to your statement. If you stay focused all the forms of self-doubt, self-loathing, and self-denigration that have become your personal dogma will come to the surface. Right down each negative judgment separately and number them as they come up.

After your list is complete take a spiritual bath. Place honey in the water and read aloud each of the negatives. Wash your entire body as you dispel the effect of dogmatic judgments. Following the bath return to the ancestor shrine or white table and write affirmations based on the list of negatives then burn the list of negatives. Read the affirmations in the morning after doing *oriki*.

Continue this process for six weeks. You will notice that each week there is a shift in the list of negatives; some concerns will disappear and stay gone, some will persist week after week, while new concerns come and go. The negatives that appear each week are firmly entrenched reflections of your personal dogma. My

recommendation for dissolving solidified dogma is to work through the book *Homecoming*, by John Bradshaw. The exercises in this bookwork best if they dare done with a partner. The person should not be someone you are related to or in a relationship with. A friend who will be honest works best. This is difficult work so do not rush. My students who have been through this process typically take up to a year to work through the material. Take time between each segment and do not rush the work. Transformation requires time, effort and patience.

Ritual

Being objective requires courage. It requires the courage to face the possibility that you may have made a mistake, the courage to admit that your assumptions might be incorrect, and the courage to remain open and trusting in a situation similar to the one that did not go well.

Again *Ifa* supports the need to be objective through the use of invocation. In this instance the invocation of courage is spoken into a cup of palm oil. After saying the *oriki* breathe in the cup and say ire to pronounced e-ray toe. Drink the palm oil whenever you feel challenged by the need to be honest.

*Aiya ki if'odo. Aiya ki if'olo. Aiya enu ona ki if'onile.
K'aiya mi ma ma mo. K'eru ma ba mi mo o. Ase.*

The mortar is never afraid. The grindstone is never afraid. A householder never fears the doorway. Let me know longer be afraid. Let me have no fear. May it be so.

Another *oriki* that can be used to invoke courage is as follows:

*Orí mi yé o, jà jà fun mi. Èdá mi yé o, jà jà fun mi.
Ase.*

Inner Spirit please fight, fight for me. Creator please fight, fight for me. May it be so.

Ori - Inu

The *Ifa* Concept of the Inner Self

Ori is the mystery of consciousness, and *ori-inu* is a mystery within a mystery. It is the invisible self within the self, or to use the Yoruba description it is the self that dances in front of the mat. In this context the mat is a symbol of the unity of all Creation. *Ifa* teaches that even after we have accessed the center point of our being, the source of individual consciousness, there is a deeper inner layer that remains illusive and unknowable because it is the source of knowing.

It is one of the goals of various *Ifa* and *Orisa* initiations to reveal the *ori-inu* to the *ori*. This part of the initiation process is symbolized by *Osun's* mirror, the *ase* (spiritual power) used to invoke self-illumination. It is also the reason for the taboo against iyawo's (the newly initiated) looking into mirrors. Once you have seen yourself fully you run the risk of losing yourself in a mirror until the inner self is easily accessible.

The ancient sages of *Ifa* made a very thorough analysis of the elements that form the total self. They have distinguished between the elements that unite to form the *ori-inu*, including *Atari*, *ipako*, *apari-inu*, *ori-apeere*, *Akunleyan*, *Akunlegba*, and *Ayanmo*. A study of these components and their functions provides a key to understanding

the link between the consciousness of the individual and the consciousness of Spirit.

Ipako

The *Ifa* Concept of Balance Between Head and Heart

The *ipako* is located at the base of the skull where the head joins the neck. *Ipako* literally means don't decapitate. In the Diaspora this power center is often referred to as *Esu ni ba ko*. The neck links the head to the body and the mind to the heart. If there is no alignment between head and heart, there is no access to elevated levels of consciousness.

The ability of the *ori* to receive the ase of *Orisa* is a function of the inner resonance of the *ori* itself. In other words the ase of a particular *Orisa* that exists in the consciousness of a particular individual can attract the ase of the same *Orisa* as it exists in the world. This can occur as a visionary experience, as trance possession and as strong intuition. One is not regarded as better than the other, they simply have different ritual functions.

In the language of psychology there is a right brain, left brain polarity in human consciousness. The right brain is emotional, intuitive and empathetic, while the left-brain is objective, rational and analytical. *Ifa* describes this relationship as the polarity between *ori* (head) and egbe (heart). If you place a mandala around the head and the heart, the spine and the shoulders form a cross dividing the circle

into quadrants. The center point of the circle is *ipakò* loosely translated to mean don't cut off the head, or don't block access to the head. I interpret *ipakò* to be the symbolic location of *yangi* meaning the crossroad. In *Ifa* cosmology *yangi* is the place where three roads intersect, it is the home of *Eṣu* (The Divine Messenger). The three roads of *yangi* are not located on a flat one-dimensional surface. Imagine a sphere with a cross through the center at the equator. Imagine a third line passing through the center of the equator from both poles. The two roads at the equator symbolize balance between the head and the heart. The road through the poles symbolizes connection to Spirit.

Ifa describes *Eṣu* as living at the crossroads. *Eṣu* exists as a Force in Nature; access to *Eṣu* exists in latent potential within the invisible dimension accessible through *ipakò*. *Ifa* oral scripture describes *Eṣu* as the Door Keeper. *Eṣu* stands at the door leading to the road that links, *ara*, *egbe*, *ori*, *ori-inu* and *iponri*. *Eṣu* is further described as the Divine Messenger, the Spirit with the *asè* to translate the language of *Orisha* (Nature) into the language of humans. This is a symbolic reference to the ability of *iponri* to access information from outside the direct experience of *ori*. This is a key point in understanding the *Ifa* concept of personal transformation. It is not just about resolving personal conflicts. It is about resolving personal

conflicts and learning how to live in harmony with invisible Forces that shape and guide the destiny of the entire planet.

When personal desires are elevated to the status of message from spirit, we are not invoking communication with spirit we are invoking an encounter with *Eṣu* as Spirit of the Trickster.

Exercise

The task of maintaining balance between the head and the heart is a life long challenge. In traditional Yoruba culture discipline for maintaining balance between the head and the heart is the primary function of ritual dance. Malidoma Some in his book *Of Water and The Spirit* says that dance in traditional African culture is a diagnostic tools used by the elders to monitor the spiritual development of members of the extended family. In my own experience working with various *Ifa/Oriṣa* communities I find it is possible to learn to identify specific types of physical and emotional problems by watching a person dance. It is also possible to get a good sense about when a person is ready for initiation by watching their physical movement in response to the sound of the drums.

Becoming an effective medium is frequently a result of initiation moreover initiation is essential a process of clearing emotional debris from the physical body so that the body can be an effective lens for transcendent forms of consciousness. When transcendent forms of

consciousness are present at a dance ceremony the *ase* or spiritual power emanating from the mediums has a disruptive effect on anyone who is holding on to unresolved conflict, or who is suppressing un-experienced emotion. The disruption literally tears down the tension used to resist resolution of a particular issue. It is not uncommon for someone who is in possession with *Orisa* to trigger a regression in another participant in the dance ceremony. A regression is a return to an earlier time in a persons life for the purpose of fully experiencing the emotion associated with a suppressed trauma. This type of release can be healing and transforming if the person is guided towards full resolution of the conflict. This response to *Orisa* possession can also be described as Spirit breaking down the walls of resistance and cleaning away the effects of *ibi*.

For those students of *Ifa* who are not part of a community that holds regular dance rituals, I recommend enrollment in dance classes. The style does not have to be Yoruba. Maintaining a clean connection between the head and heart requires good physical conditioning and is dependant on being able to move the body in a relaxed manner. The expression “pain in the neck” is a direct reference to the physical tension that occurs as a result of stress and it occurs right at the *ipako*.

Ritual

In traditional Yoruba extended families, even those families that embrace Christianity or Islam, ancestor reverence is an integral part of daily ritual. Students of *Ifa* who are interested in learning and understanding altered states of consciousness are encouraged to start this process by assimilating the tools needed for effective communication with the ancestors. In the Diaspora some *Ifa* lineages do not encourage students of *Ifa* to become mediums. As a member of *Egbe Egungun* (Society of ancestral mediums) in Ode Remo I know that some of my *Ifa* brothers are effective ancestor mediums. For me personally accessing the wisdom of the ancestors is an essential element of both self-discovery and inherent in the ability to function as a diviner in extended families.

Alignment with ancestor spirits is important on a personal basis because it is essential to learn to distinguish between emotional reactions to situations that are coming from a personal source of experience and reactions that have an ancestral legacy. When children experience either severe physical or sexual abuse, they inadvertently learn to leave their bodies as a defense against pain and suffering. The ability to leave the body can lead to the child becoming an unconscious medium. Out of control mediums often develop because an ancestor spirit has chosen to protect the child. This is a positive connection until the child becomes an adult and is no longer in danger of abuse. If the adult who has gone through this experience is

unaware of the phenomena that are occurring around them, they will experience memory loss, clumsiness, and will engage in inappropriate responses to social situations that remind them of childhood trauma. Anyone in this situation will not be able to fix it by reading a book. I do believe that anyone who makes regular prayers to their ancestors will be guided to those teachers who can move them through the elevation needed to become an effective, conscious, medium. For this reason I recommend the construction of an ancestor shrine combined with regular prayers to the ancestors as a part of the process of aligning the head with the heart. If you are part of an *Ifa* or *Orisa* community follow the traditions of your lineage. For those who are not part of a lineage I make the following suggestions.

Ifa teaches that the power to effectively invoke Spirits comes as a result of initiation and the training that is sanctioned by initiation. The exception to this rule is *egun* (ancestor spirits). In *Ifa* there are ancestor initiations (*egungun, isegun, ato*), but everyone is believed to have the power and the ability to communicate with the spirit of those blood relatives who have passed beyond this life. Communication with your own ancestors is a birthright. At times this communication can simply involve remembering a revered ancestor and making use of the memory as a basis for making life decisions. In many ways ancestor communication is an extension of the training and wisdom we receive from our parents. *Ifa* says you cannot know who you are if you cannot

call the names of your ancestors going back seven generations. Remembering names is more than reciting a genealogy, it is preserving the history of a family lineage and the memory of those good deeds that allowed to the family to survive and create a home for the continued cycle of reincarnation (*atunwa*).

In Yoruba culture it is common for the uninitiated to make direct contract with ancestor spirits. The most prevalent process of communication is through dreams. Communication also occurs during participation in annual ancestor festivals. Because such festivals are not common in this country, *Ifa* worshipers in the West have created several viable alternatives. Using these alternative methods, the first step in the process of honoring the ancestors is the construction of an ancestor shrine used as a focal point for prayer and meditation.

There are a number of traditional African methods for building an ancestor shrine, some of which are very complex and require personal training. For example it is common in traditional Yoruba culture to bury revered ancestors under the floors of the family home. The tomb of the ancestor is the foundation of the ancestral shrine. For those who do not have access to lineage elders, I recommend the ancestor alter be constructed with minimal elements. Once the basics are in place, the ancestors can be contracted directly for guidance on further additions to the shrine. When you are in communication with the

ancestors they will tell you if they want specific items brought to the shrine.

Place a box or table in the spot selected for the construction of an ancestor shrine. Cover it with a white cloth, and then place a fresh glass of water and a white candle on the surface. Photographs and drawings of relatives and historical figures may be placed either on or near the altar. Ancestor reverence is practiced to that we may benefit from the wisdom of those who have come before us. Simply seeing the image of inspired ancestors can serve as a subliminal reminder of the contributions they have made. Respect for the ancestors is a part of most earth-centered religions. Many of us come from mixed ancestry, and within our lineage there likely to be a wide range of religious belief and practice. In *Ifa* there is recognition of the diverse spiritual influences that have made positive contributions to the quality of human life. I have seen ancestor shrines in Africa with pictures of Buddhist, Islamic and Christian prophets. There is no need to limit the spiritual influences that are represented. All that is required is a grasp of the universal principles that have been expressed in a wide range of cultural and historical forms. If you have pictures of ancestors place them on the altar. If your ancestors were devout Muslims place a copy of the Koran on the altar, if they were Christians place a copy of the Bible on the altar, if they were Buddhist place a statue of the Buddha on the altar.

When the shrine is in place, stand in front of it and light a candle. The first statement that should be made to the ancestors at your altar is a commitment to regular use of the shrine for mediation and prayer. I call this type of agreement self-regulated discipline. It does not matter how often you agree to make use of the shrine, what is important is that you live up to your agreement. It is better to commit to one day a week and keep the commitment than to commit to every day and break the agreement. You are establishing a connection with the ancestors, telling them when you will be available for communication enhances the connections. The white cloth, candle, water and pictures can be thought of as an electron magnet that draws ancestor spirits to the altar. The current that drives the magnet is the prayer directed towards the altar. If you only turn to your shrine in moments of crisis, the current will be weak. If you charge the batteries on a regular basis, the spiritual connection will be strong, making communication clear and accessible.

At this point you may spend some time remembering those relatives and those role models who have influenced the way you see yourself and the world. Begin to examine influences from the past you want to reinforce and influences from the past you want to diminish. Start to identify the positive character traits with specific ancestors. The qualities of courage, honesty reliability and creativity can all be strengthened through inspiration from those who have demonstrated

these qualities in their lives. As you develop this connection with the ancestors, you will be able to call on them in the course of a day when the need for those desired qualities arises. Simply remembering how a particular ancestor would have handled a particular problem is a very effective form of ancestor communication. In Yoruba culture remembering is everything.

As the end of your first session in front of the ancestor altar end your meditation by saying,

Mo dupe Ori Egun, ase.

I give thanks for the wisdom of the ancestors,

May it be so.

Ile

The *Ifa* concept of extended family

In Ode Remo if you ask an elder a question, they won't start by giving you an opinion. Their first response will be to recite *Odu*, tell a proverb, share some expression of ancestral wisdom, and then offer a personal comment. In America everybody has an opinion about everything and we are brought up to believe there is value in being opinionated. The question becomes why is there so much emphasis on ancestral wisdom in *Ifa* culture?

Ifa says we come to earth to develop good character. The Yoruba word for good character is *iwa-pele* from the elision *i wa ope ile* meaning I come to greet the earth. There is an entire worldview embraced by the notion that human beings are born and come into the world for the purpose of greeting the earth. You greet something when you are in relationship to it. Greeting the earth means we are in communication with the earth. There is a Yoruba proverb that says if you urinate in your drinking water the water becomes undrinkable. Here in America we have polluted our water to the point where it is causing cancer and birth defects. That says something about our relationship with the earth.

I went to Ode Remo for the first time in 1989. One of many unexpected observations was the fact that *Ifa* is taught through the sanctification of the extended family. Sanctification means making sacred. In practical terms related to family it means everyone in the community has a job, everybody gets spiritual and practical training to advance to the next job, and everybody has a responsibility to train those who are younger. The six year olds sweep the yard in front of the house and sing to *Eṣu* asking him to keep disruption from the door. The ten year olds help gather wood asking *Osoosi* to guide them to a fresh supply. The fourteen year olds walk to the river for water singing to *Oṣun*. *Ile awo ni ile ara* meaning *Ifa* is a mystery school and the school is a family. The school is not a monastery up on a hill, it isn't some secret place in a cave, there are no classrooms and you don't receive a certificate on graduation. It is the structure of the family that is transcendent, not the faces of the particular people who fill positions of leadership at any given time.

Five years ago I became a grandfather. I told my friends in America and their reaction was indifferent. If you have a child you know that the moment your child is born your life changes forever. You can think about things that happened before you had a child but you cannot reclaim the feeling of not being responsible for your child. This feeling has a tremendous impact on how you see yourself in the world and changes again when you become a grandparent. At the

moment your grandchild is born you start thinking about legacy. Both of these experiences are biological rites of passage, significant life changes that require a shift in self-perception. In America it was no big deal. I did not tell anyone in Nigeria I was a grandfather. On my next visit to Ode Remo they immediately started treating me like *babagba* not *baba*, grandfather not father. When you are a grandparent you eat first, you sit first, people give you a chair, and you have specific responsibilities and privileges.

I have made five trips to Ode Remo. On each trip the age group I studied with was a little older. The trips occurred over a fifteen year period and as I grew in understanding Wasu grew in age. He is now an adult with his own family. During each subsequent trip he was able to teach me more because he learned more.

On my last trip to Ode Remo the young men of *Egbe Ifa* sat me down on the mat. They said they wanted to test me to see what I learned over the years. These young men practiced *Ifa* in the community, they are fully trained, I was extremely nervous. They asked to perform divination. They asked me questions about how I do initiations. No one said anything. Following a long silence Abiodun said; "Falokun I want to ask you a question. If you answer the question correctly we will answer any and all of your questions."

Not much pressure there, I thought.

Abiodun continued, “I want to know if you know the difference between *tefa* and the *hajji*.”

Tefa is *Ifa* initiation; the *hajji* is the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca.

Ode Remo is approximately 30% Christian, 30% Moslem and 30% traditional *Ifa*. Each community has its own district, sacred sites and market place. The elders of Islam doing sand cutting which is a system of divination using the same marks as *Ifa* but using the Koran as its sacred text. Many of my *Ifa* brothers practice *Ifa* along with one of the other religious traditions in the community. I was relieved because I believed I knew the answer to their question.

I said, “The difference between *tefa* and the *hajji* is that during *tefa* the elders speak Yoruba and during the *hajji* the elders speak Arabic.”

Abiodun smiled and started teaching me things I had never heard discussed before. As I said earlier, in Ode Remo it does not matter how your initiation was done as long as you exhibit good character. After twenty years of study and after the test, the *Araba* of Ode Remo gave me permission to initiate my own students into the mysteries of *Ifa*. It felt like a graduation. The concern of these young men was clear. They wanted to make sure the lineage of Ode Remo was accurately represented in my part of the world while at the same time they honored and respected other traditions from other parts of the cultures. In the words of Abiodun, “I want to make sure you are

able to seat *Ifa* well in your home town.” We bridged a very wide gap and were able to shift positions as was appropriate. During the course of the day, as a grandfather, I am treated as an elder in the egbe. When it came time to study I was treated as a student.

When in Ode Remo it is important to pay close attention to what is going on around you. There is no such thing as someone who is an elder in every circumstance. The *Araba* is the senior priest in Ode Remo and for most spiritual work he is considered the chief. During *Ogboni* rituals the *Qbatala* initiates become the chiefs. One of my younger *Ifa* brothers is also an *Ogun* priest and one of the community blacksmiths. During *Ifa* rituals he treats me as an elder. When I go to his home to buy a knife I treat him as an elder. The entire situation involving deference to elders is fluid and depends on what is taking place in the moment. The only way to know for sure who is in charge of a given situation is to notice how those involved greet one another and to notice who is asking questions and who is giving instructions. I might be a really good trombonist, but that doesn't mean you want me to fix your car.

There is a title in the city of *Ile Ife* called *Araba*, which is the chief *Ifa* priest in Yoruba culture. That is a position that is given to a qualified person chosen from within a small number of lineage families who are part of one extended family. The title has existed for thousands of years. The men who hold that position change every

thirty or forty years. The body that sits on the divination seat of the *Araba* changes every few decades, but the chair, the title, the qualifications for being given that chieftaincy remains unchanged. The job comes with expectations of behavior and the need to fulfill specific responsibilities. In most traditional extended family positions of leadership, if there is no one qualified the chair remains unfilled. The sanctity of the title remains undiminished.

The easiest way to understand the concept of the sanctification of the extended family is to know that the family comes together to celebrate rites of passage. Whenever a baby is born the child has a naming ceremony. *Esentaiye*, the ritual to mark this rite of passage literally means my foot travels to earth.

The function of childhood is to develop a strong healthy body (*ara*) and to learn the skills needed to transition into becoming an independent adult. At *esentaiye* an *Ifa* diviner introduces the infant to *omi* (water), *epo* (honey), *atare* (guinea pepper), *obi* (cola nut) and *orogbo* (medicine). Each of these foods is considered a staple in Yoruba cooking and essential for the development of a strong body and good health. In addition each of these foods has a religious function as an offering to specific Spirits. The elder blesses the food and places a small amount on his finger before pressing it to the baby's lips. This is done to insure the child has a positive introduction to food.

During the ceremony, divination occurs that is used to determine the child's name. Most traditional Yoruba names have spiritual significance. Carrying a particular name publicly acknowledges the social responsibility indicated by the name. Divination will also determine the child's personal destiny as it relates to career and spiritual obligations. Using this information the parents are able to provide an education that is compatible with the child's potential.

At the naming ceremony the elder invokes *Eji-ogbe* the first verse of *Odu Ifa*. This verse speaks of perfect alignment between head and heart, perfect alignment between chosen destiny and actualized destiny. The baby starts life with an invocation of its highest potential and the entire extended family comes together to support that prayer. If the child is born in a family of *Ogun* worshippers, and is tracked for *Ifa*, the child will live with the *Ifa* family because the family is the school. This is not a big problem because chances are the *Ifa* family lives across the street. The children play together most of their free time; it's just a question of where the child spends the day light hours. A Yoruba proverb says *Om̩ ebi e̩lomiran lo ma ndi om̩ mi* meaning another family's child often becomes my child.

While the children are growing up they have the opportunity to participate in the various *Egungun* (ancestral society) celebrations that occur throughout the year. Ancestor reverence usually occurs within a specific extended family that honors the memory of important relations

on an annual basis. These celebrations frequently involve the enactment of historical events that teach a particular lesson considered essential for building good character. It is through the use of living myth that the children begin to internalize the principles of *Ifa* that are believed to guide each person towards fulfillment, transformation and enlightenment.

At puberty age and development is pushing you to understand what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. In America puberty as a significant rite of passage is generally ignored. Imagine what it would be like to be guided through this difficult period in a ritual context receiving guidance from your grandparents. In terms of the man's rite of passage one of the most common problems I encounter, as a diviner is the contradiction of adult men acting in immature ways, children in adult bodies. Men who never received guidance from their elder fathers often test their uncertainty and insecurities in self-destructive ways. The problem is magnified in single parent families with no father figure unless there is a father figure in the extended family. There is no such thing as an orphan in Ode Remo. Every adult male your father's age is called *Baba* and treated accordingly.

One of the key concerns of every young man is whether or not he will have the courage to defend himself and his family as an adult. Most traditional male puberty rites include an extreme test of courage.

Following the test, the elder males define manhood and give admonitions on the appropriate and inappropriate uses of violence. They might say *Eni ti o mo irora ko le je ojo* meaning the person who knows caution may not be a coward. Then they will likely offer examples of why this bit of ancestral wisdom is true based on their life experience. Another example would be to say *Eni ti lo mo isasehin yio mo isegun* meaning the warrior who knows how to retreat will know defeat. Both of these proverbs are designed to teach the young men the lesson of creating boundaries around their ability to properly defend their family. One of the attractions of gangs in an urban environment is that they do provide a test of courage. What is missing is the guidance from elders.

In Yoruba the puberty rite is called either *Akoko ti okunrin dagba tan* for a man or *Akoko ti obinrin dagba tan* for a woman. The phrase means the season when a man or a woman reaches maturity. At this point the *ara* (physical body) is nearing full development and the *ori* shifts from dependence on the parents to the need to self-actualize and find independence.

Discussion of the exact content of *Ifa* puberty rites is taboo. The reason for the taboo is too insure that no one going through the rite can anticipate the experiential component and miss the lesson. It is permitted to discuss the psychological transformation that occurs during the process. For both young men and young women the first

stage of the ritual involves bonding with the father or mother, then separation. Puberty rites are generally conducted by grandparents because the point of the ritual is to disconnect from the parents in a positive way. The parent cannot be the instrument of this separation.

As the young adult makes plans to enter a trade and start a family it is common to commit to some form of spiritual initiation that will assist and support the individual's social role. For example; wood carvers worship *Ṣango*, blacksmiths worship *Ogun*, healers study *Qsanyin*, market women honor *Oya*, textile artist honor *Oṣun* and farmers place a shrine to *Orīṣa Oko* near their crops. Frequently both the initiation and the skills associated with a craft are passed from generation to the next in a single biological family. There is no set time when initiation into *Awo Orīṣa* is supposed to occur. Depending on instruction from divination this rite of passage can occur at almost any age.

A person's profession is not the only factor that is used when making the decision to commit to a particular spiritual initiation. The final determining factor is always the *Odu* that incarnates the *ori-inu*. Traditional Yoruba religions has a wide range of societies and the spectrum of choices shifts with the landscape as different environmental concerns require allegiance to varying Forces in Nature. For example a community located along the *Oba* River would worship the Goddess *Oba* rather than the River Goddess *Oṣun*. In the Diaspora

the tendency is to have one initiation and to typically receive five *Orisa*. In traditional Yoruba culture it is more common to have a number of *Orisa* initiations receiving one *Orisa* per initiation.

The literature on *Orisa* written by anthropologists tend to oversimplify the concept of *Orisa* failing to appreciate that Spirit is a multi-dimensional presence exerting influence in various realms of being. According to *Ifa* cosmology, Creation comes into manifestation through the *ase* of *Odu*, the spiritual power of primal energy patterns. *Ase* descends from *Ikole Orun*, the Invisible Realm, to *Ikole Aye* visible world. *Ifa* scripture makes reference to various *Orisa* manifestations as follows:

1. *Imole* - The House of Light (stars)
2. *Irunmole* - The Beard of the House of Light (starlight)
3. *Igbamole* - The Calabash of the house of Light (planets)
4. *Orisa Orile* - The Spirit of a Nation
5. *Orisa Ilu* - The Spirit of a Community
6. *Orisa Idile* - The Spirit of a family
7. *Orisa Ori* - The Spirit of a person

When speaking of *Orisa* the meaning of the word is conditioned by context and sphere of influence. The process of worshiping a

particular *Orisa* involves the use of natural elements combined with invocations designed to place the *ori* of the individual in alignment with the *ori* of Spirit. For example the natural element used to attract the *Orisa Sango* is fire. The sacred fire is located in a sacred grove called *igbodu*. The site of *igbodu* is determined through divination based on the principles of *gede*, an *Ifa* system of astrology. *Ifa* teaches the power of a sacred space is increased through the use of *oriki* the words of power associated with initiation and possession couple with *ijo* the sacred dances that align the body with *Orisa*. Simply walking into *igbodu* will cause a shift in consciousness, which is why it is taboo for the uninitiated to enter the sacred groves. The concern is that the *ori* of the uninitiated has not been tempered to receive the infusion of *ase* and can run the risk of becoming disoriented, confused and worse.

In Yoruba the word for possession is *ini*. The word for medium is either *gun* or *elegun*. Because of the blatant distortions of possession in the media, the purpose and function of *elegun* has been denigrated by sensationalism. When a community comes together to praise a particular *Orisa* one of the elders is designated as the medium for a particular ceremony. The *elegun* prepares by fasting, the head is cleaned with herbs associated with the *Orisa*, and they will eat food that is sacred to the Spirit and taboo form them to eat other than in anticipation of possession. The person who is chosen places them self

in alignment with the *Orisa* saying *oriki* in front of their personal shrine before joining the public ceremony.

Reaching a level of possession where the medium is able to speak with the voice of Spirit is called *ojuran* meaning opening your eyes to ancestral lineage. The reference to ancestral lineage includes the human family of initiates into a particular *Orisa* and the natural elements that predate human evolution. *Ojuran* is used as an oracle for the extended family insuring that potential problems are anticipated and asking for the blessing of children, abundance and long life. Beyond the level of *ojuran* is an altered state of consciousness called *Alasotele* meaning Light from Source. Mediums able to reach this level of alignment with *iponri* often articulate information that is important enough to add to the oral scripture of *Odu Ifa* so their wisdom may be shared with future generations. Beyond *alasetele* there is the altered state of consciousness called *lai-lai*. This is a visionary state primarily for the benefit of the medium. *Lai-lai* is the experience of being connected to source.

The next rite of passage is marriage; the whole family comes together to sanction a relationship. Marriage is taking responsibility for the care of the children. In traditional Yoruba culture there are arranged marriages and there are polygamous marriages, but there are no single mothers. If you father a child the community will insist that you take responsibility for the care and development of your

descendants. *Ifa* will arrange marriages, that are part of their communal function, but no marriage will be sanctioned unless there are clear resources for care of the children. In a polygamous marriage the management of resources for the care of all the children in the extended family is the responsibility of the eldest wife. This is to insure that no jealousy develops as a result of the husband playing favorites.

When your children have grown and have children you have in a sense graduated from *awo ile*, the *Ifa* mystery school contained within the extended family. Grandparents become full time teachers and the final arbitrators of disputes. During my initiation I was surprised to see that the younger men of the *egbe* did most of the ritual work. The grandfathers who were present during my initiation sat outside the inner circle watching, making sure the ritual sequence was performed correctly. In an oral tradition this is the only way to insure the tradition is passed from one generation to the next without loss of content. If the grandfathers did all the ritual work and something happened to them, the tradition would be lost. There are certain key elements of the ritual that are performed by the eldest men, but they are not complicated and not likely to be forgotten.

For both men and women the transition from adult to elder frequently involves a shift in communal obligations. In traditional Yoruba communities the adult men have the responsibility of

protecting and defending the extended family. This responsibility includes providing food and shelter as well as developing skills for physical protection. In general it is the responsibility of the adult women to care for the children, process food raised on the family farm and to sell surplus at the market. This arrangement works well in a rain forest environment, but I would not consider it a tenant of faith. Different arrangements work in different circumstances. As grandparents the men take on less responsibility as protectors and spend more time with the children. The elder women spend less time with the children and learn the skills need to be spiritual warriors. In this way everyone shares the same responsibilities, just at different times in their life cycle.

The final rite of passages is crossing over, returning to the land of the ancestors or *Orun*. *Ifa* funerals involve levitating the dead three days after the person expires. In Western culture there is a popular religion based on the dogma that this has only happened once in human history. In Nigeria it happens every day. During an *awo's* funeral the dead body is re-animated for a short period so the deceased can say a final farewell to family and friends. This is true for every *awo* who has a traditional *Ifa* funeral. There are different ways this is done. Some funerals use *Egungun* (mediums) to speak for the ancestor, some animate the bodies under a shroud and others have the body sit up and speak using a medicine called *obesilo*.

It is common in Western forms of *Orisa* worship to assume *Ifa* is a patriarchal religion that primarily relies on the power and influence of men. This is not my experience in Ode Remo. Every aspect of *Ifa/Orisa* represents a blending of male and female Forces of Nature guided and directed by both men and women. The society of women known as *Iyaami* meaning my mothers, have access to the keys to open the veil between the visible and the invisible realms. The way they do this is taboo to the uninitiated, and not even remotely noticeable to the casual observer. In terms of the inner secrets of *Ifa* ritual, the hidden influence of *Iyaami* is present in every *Ifa, Orisa* and *Egun* initiation. It is a factor in making the offerings or *ebo* prescribed by divination and is an aid in most forms of trance possession.

The ritual relationship between men and women is a manifestation of *irepo* meaning blending together. Teaching the communal responsibilities expected of each member of the community at each stage of their development creates *Irepo*. Once a skill is learned the person who becomes adept passes the skill on to the younger generation. This communal obligation is an externalization of the inner process of developing *irepo* in the individual *ori*.

In *Ifa* the symbol of the circle inscribed with an equal-armed cross is used to represent the *ori*. The top of the circle represents spiritual influences, the bottom of the circle represents the influence of survival needs, the left side of the circle represents the influence of the

ancestors, and right side of the circle represents movement into the future. It is possible to become stuck or obsessed in one of these quadrants to the exclusion of all others.

Becoming stuck is usually the result of a strong belief in a self-limiting dogmatic worldview; in *Ifa* this is called *ori-ibi*. Being off center means the various aspects of self described by *Ifa* are not harmonious balanced in a state of *irepo*. The process of becoming unstuck is described as *mo bo Orisa* meaning I make offerings to Spirit. Using the symbolic imagery of the circle, balancing the four quadrants free from any self-limiting dogma places the *ori-inu* in the center of the circle where it guides consciousness between quadrants in a free flowing manner appropriate to the moment. The process for remaining at the center point is described as *mo sin Olodumare* meaning I serve the Creator. Remaining at this center point is the key that unlocks mystic vision and builds a bridge between the visible and invisible realm. It is the goal of *Ifa* discipline and the foundation of an *Ifa* worldview.

When *ori-inu* is seated firmly in the center of *ori* the circle expands as a result of new experience that comes with the aging process. This constant expansion creates the need for daily re-adjustment and attention to the ongoing shift in communal responsibilities. Rites of passage assist the person in this process while maintaining the transcendent elements of community and family.

When I first traveled to Nigeria to study *Ifa* there were fewer than a dozen *Ifa* worshippers from America who received training and initiation from Africa. Since then the numbers have grown substantially. The problem facing the next generation of *ifa* devotees is how to accommodate training in a culture where there is as of yet no fully functional *Ifa* extended family. By fully functioning I mean places where children can grow up in an *Ifa* family environment and grow into maturity with both training and support. In Yoruba culture families and family structure is thousands of years old. In America families are young, increasingly dysfunctional and rarely does an entire extended biological family share a common traditional African faith.

There is the additional problem of trying to integrate *Ifa* with an older *Orisa* tradition that has become accustomed to worshipping Spirit without the support of *Ifa*. Spirit has a way of showing serious devotees the solution to problems that are unique to a given social and historical circumstance. There is no easy answer to any of these questions and ultimately the solutions will manifest with the same kinds of diversity of practice that I see in Nigeria.

The following recommendations are based on my experience having started a number of *Ifa* families around the country. They are recommendations only, they are not part of any set doctrine, they are not mandatory for the worship of *Ifa*, and they should be modified by common sense and guidance from Spirit.

Start by meeting once a month as an extended family. Begin each meeting with a check in. By that I mean have each member of the family share their concerns and announce their accomplishments during the previous month. The first step in establishing a sense of trust needed to create an extended family is the ability to network. Like in any family someone might want help moving, someone else might want childcare, and there may be a need to assist with a person who is ill. Everyone in the family can make a commitment to store extra food for anyone in need. An assessment can be made to determine if there are extra rooms among the family members to insure no one goes homeless. Information can be shared about food co-ops, inexpensive health clinics, free legal advice, trustworthy mechanics and competent tax consultants. The needs of an urban family are different than the needs of a rural family. Evaluate those needs and come familiar with the available resources. Networking is also effective for those who are seeking employment. If you are looking for employment and you are in a room with thirty people, someone in the room will know someone who has a job. Every time I have tested this theory I have been proven correct. It is an effective tool, use it.

If no one in the extended family is initiated start by studying ancestor reverence. There are a number of good books that give specifics and if you do no more than pray for guidance you will make

progress. As the family grows it is possible to organizing the members into *egbe* or societies with specific functions. In the beginning there may be two groups, a set up committee for ritual and a food committee for making sure meetings and ceremonies include a meal.

If the family is large enough there might be value in meeting once a month with everyone, then meeting once a month in specialty groups focused on a particular area of study. For example there can be an *Ifa* study group, an *Orisa* study group, and an *Egungun* (ancestor reverence) study group. I would also recommend the formation of a men's society and a women's society. These groups should focus on peer support for personal development. I strongly urge any newly formed men's group to buy the book *Home Coming* by John Bradshaw and do all the exercises over the course of a year. With that foundation they will be in a position to organize rites of passage for the young men in the family. As these groups become competent allow them to take leadership in communal rituals periodically during the course of the year. If a family relies on one or two people to do everything, several things happen. First the leadership gets worn out and ineffective and second no one else gets an opportunity to learn leadership skills.

I have done a significant number of initiations over the years and I always stress one point before starting; every task from washing the dishes to calling Spirit is equally important. Every task must be

performed from a place of being centered and from a place of loving support for the person being initiated. If you can't leave all your stuff at the door don't participate. An initiation is a tremendous infusion of ase. Whatever you bring to the ritual will be amplified by that ase. It's like a computer program, garbage in, garbage out. Illumination in, good fortune for everyone.

Sometimes the first impression of the *Ifa* is that the amount of study needed is overwhelming and it is easy to get discouraged and loose interest. If you are starting a new family and want to know what to do get together and pray for one another. As the family becomes more competent consider implementing the *Ifa* prayer cycle. The cycle run every four days. It works like this; there are *oriki* to greet Spirit in the morning, following the *oriki* with prayers asking for personal guidance and good fortune. Every four days say a full set of *oriki* to whatever Spirits you have received through initiation, including warriors for those who are not fully initiated. For those who have no *Orisa* or *Ifa* concentrate on speaking with your ancestors. Following the *oriki* say prayers for the benefit of your entire biological family. Every sixteen days people in the extended family with the same initiations should meet and do collective prayers for the well being of the entire community. The prayer cycle creates a web of *Ifa* for the protection, guidance and well being of everyone involved. Anyone who has been a part of a community that regularly prays for the collective

well being of the other members of the community will tell you the process is nothing short of miraculous.

Here is my final recommendation. Network outside the extended family. In my lifetime African based forms of worship have come more and more into the open and have grown exponentially. There is a rich fabric of choices, and a wide variety of rites available. Respect the ritual integrity of other lineages and other cultural expressions of African based spirituality. Show this respect by stopping the debate over which system is best, which system is the most authentic and which system is the true voice of Spirit. All of that is useless dogma and nothing good can come of it. Instead look for places where there is a common ground. At the very least we all should locate two points of compatible interaction; first we should be able to come together to defend out right to religious freedom, and second we should be able to come together and collectively pray. Frequently we pray by singing and dancing and when possible we should collectively support this ritual process. However, when I say come together to pray I mean just that. If you are in a room with thirty people and if they will co-sign your prayer by saying *ase*, amen, praise Allah, ja or right on, your prayers will be heard by the Immortals because it is *ori* that links us to Source and it is Source who answers our prayers. It is this connection that gives us a sense of inner peace.

Ire
Awo Fa'lokun Fatunmbi
Egbe Ifa Ogunti Ode Remo

(Back Cover)

Awo Falokun Fatunmbi is initiated into *Egbe Ifa* Ogunti Ode Remo. He founded the Awo Study Center (www.awostudycenter.com) to assist in the training of *Ifa* and *Orisa* initiates in the Diaspora. He has written eight books on his experiences studying with the elders of *Ifa* in Ode Remo and continues to write training material for those interested in learning the sacred technology of traditional Yoruba religion.