

Ifá Theology Volume 3

Warrior Spirit

The *Ifá* Concept of *Ebora*

By

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Introduction

There is a common notion that African Spirituality is a combination of incoherent superstitions and effective methods of invoking spirits to harm others. In my experience these notions are rooted in the deliberate denigration of pre Christian traditions by those who desire to hide political control behind the trappings of religious dogma. These ideas are so prevalent they have affecting the thinking of some who embrace African Spirituality as a viable source

of spiritual inspiration. In particular these ideas have attached to the concept of warrior spirit. This book presents an alternative view.

Working alone at night in the dark invoking harm to others is the path of a coward. The Warrior Spirits of our ancestors were invoked to access courage. They were understood as a source of inspiration because the process of spiritual growth is the single most frightening human endeavor in the history of consciousness. Those who know the mystery of how to use Warrior Spirits to invoke the strength, the will and the determination needed to make internal changes in the way we see our self and the world around us are viewed by their descendants as heroic. Wishing bad luck on another requires no training, no skill, no personal development and no sense of communal empathy. Embracing the heroes journey as a way of life requires a life commitment to a deeper appreciation of our common source, our common heritage and the transcendent desire to find meaning in the on going struggle for survival.

Ifá is the traditional religion of Yoruba culture originally located along the northwestern boundary of the African rain forest. *Ifá* embraces the idea that consciousness is in a constant state of expansion or contraction. In Yoruba language expanded consciousness is called *ori ire* and is believed to bring a blessing of children, abundance and long life. Contracted consciousness is called *ori ibi* and is believed to create infertility, poverty and premature

death. *Ifá* teaches that every moment embraces choice, it is either movement towards *ire* or movement towards *ibi*. The opportunity to move towards a blessing or the opportunity to experience disruption cause by the avoidance of growth is the foundation of the decision making process.

The path of embracing good fortune involves the constant death and rebirth of self-perception. Walking the path of ongoing death and rebirth requires courage. In *Ifá* cosmology the manifestation of courage is called *akin l'ona* meaning the brave man's road or the hero's journey. Courage is the ability to do the right thing in spite of fear. In Yoruba culture doing the right thing involves embracing the concept of *iwa-pele*.

In the past I have defined *iwa-pele* to mean good character and it has that connotation. More specifically the word is an elision of the phrase *iwa ope ile* meaning I come to greet the Earth. In traditional Yoruba culture you only greet an elder or a teacher. The implication of the word *iwa-pele* is that the Earth teaches us lessons needed to develop good character and these lessons include the notion of making the world a better place to live.

Ifá teaches that every step towards elevation and expanded consciousness is met with an equal force of opposition. In simple terms life on Earth means no good deed goes unchallenged. The will to move beyond the forces of opposition and maintain a commitment

to spiritual growth is the responsibility of *Akin* from the elision *a ki* meaning I give praise. The common translation of *aki* is courage and the word is often used to describe traditional Yoruba martial arts. In a cultural context *Akin* is any person who demonstrates the ability to access the courage needed to sustain good character by praising the ancestral notion of developing *iwa-pele*. The implication here is that praising Spirit or remaining in alignment with Spirit requires discipline, dedication and unyielding will power. Linguistically *akin* suggests someone who affirms life in spite of all opposition and challenges. Seldom is it difficult to grasp the right thing to do in any given moment. The challenge is to do the right thing in spite of our fear of the consequences. If there were no fear there would be no need for courage.

The strongest fear we face is the fear of loss of peer support. We live in a consensious reality. We shape our perception of reality by embracing ideas introduced to consciousness by our family and our community. When Christopher Columbus first arrived in the Caribbean the indigenous people did not see his ships anchored off shore because they did not fit their perception of reality. It was the shamans and spiritual guides who first saw the strange shapes moving towards the shore. If you grow up in a community that considers one culture to be better than another you will elevate that idea into theological dogma and assume God created certain people

to be better than others. Racism is always viewed as a metaphysical idea because of the nature of consensual reality and the way we shape our vision of the world.

Ifá is the preservation of the ancestral wisdom in Yoruba culture that gives guidance on how to make the right decisions on the journey towards developing good character. It is a form of consensual reality that gives guidance on how to destroy the boundaries that limit the growth of consciousness. *Ifá* is not a doctrine of belief; it is a way of looking at experience. From an *Ifá* perspective looking at experience includes the possibility of communication with Spirit. Traditional *Ifá* messages from Spirit include visions of the higher self (*iponri*). The perception of *iponri* is a vision of individual potential or personal destiny (*ayanmo*) in full manifestation. According to *Ifá* cosmology we are born good and blessed children (*omo rere*) and choose a destiny prior to incarnation that reflects our essential goodness. *Ifá* has no doctrine of original sin, *Ifá* has no venerated martyrs, and there is no doctrine of intrinsic evil. What Christians call evil is, from an *Ifá* perspective, a lack of alignment with the higher self.

A Yoruba proverb says we become who we are by standing on the shoulders of those who come before us. From the perspective of traditional Yoruba culture, remembering those who came before us is a sacred obligation. Each generation takes responsibility for preserving the wisdom of the ancestors and does so by quoting the

ancestors before expressing a personal opinion. Wisdom is defined as the ability to solve problems and solving problems frequently requires courageous action. In most earth-centered cultures, meaning those cultures that make an effort to live in harmony with Nature, dissemination of ancestral wisdom is the foundation for the methodology used to guide consciousness along the path leading from childhood to maturity and self-actualization. In psychological terms, modeling heroic ancestral behavior initiates the journey towards self-discovery and individualization.

The effective completion of this journey carries the potential for making each one of us a revered ancestor in the collective memory of our descendants. This potential is rooted in the bond of affection between grandparents and grandchildren. In Yoruba culture this bond is called *ifẹ*, which is commonly translated to mean unconditional love. I suspect the word has a broader connotation related to the word *Ifá*. If *Ifá* means the wisdom inherent in Nature, the word *ifẹ* suggests the expression of that wisdom in everyday life. In other words we embrace *Ifá* to express *ifẹ*. From the perspective of *Ifá*, unconditional love is truth (*so tito*), all else is illusion (*ori buruku*). As elders we have a responsibility to teach our children and our grandchildren the truth about their essential nature and to encourage them to pass this truth on to future generations.

This would not seem to be a difficult task. Unfortunately contemporary Western culture encourages competition, greed and distrust. There are literally hundreds of hours of television programming each week dedicated to the denigration of the human spirit. How much programming do we embrace as a culture that elevates and affirms life? Our choices for entertainment are a reflection of our cultural conditioning, which in turn informs our spiritual self-perception. The only spiritually based television is dedicated to the idea of making evangelist rich. Our consensus reality makes no room for alternative scenarios, it is based on the idea that God blesses those who make lots of money and they are manifestations of spiritual development. This notion ignores the reality that there is more than one way to make money.

Ifá says we come to Earth to make it a better place for those who follow us (*ire aye*). Based on the Yoruba belief in reincarnation (*atunwa*), future generations include our own return to the environment we have previously helped shape. This cyclical process is the foundation for both *Ifá* ethics and the *Ifá* view of history. The cycles of life, death, transformation and rebirth on a personal level are reflected in the movement between dynamics and form that characterizes the traditional African cyclical view of history. These are transcendent patterns called *odu* and are experienced as the Source of all consciousness.

The mystery of transcendent cycles is coded into the color of the beads *Ifá* uses to identify *Orisa Eborá*. The phase *Orisa Eborá* is usually translated to mean Warrior Spirit, from the elision *ori sa e ebo ra* meaning the specific consciousness of the Spirits who bring the offering. In *Ifá* spiritual discipline we make an offering when we are in resistance to change. This means we make an offering in an effort to find the courage needed to let go of the old self. It is the courage needed to transform concensious reality into a new vision of self and world.

In *Ifá* cosmology the Spirits or *Orisa* called upon to guide us towards courage are predominately male. That is not because men are more courageous than women. Spirit transcends gender. The search for courage is a movement towards expansion; in *Ifá* symbolic language Spirits who generate forces of expansion are identified as male. The male Spirits or *Orisa Okunrin* who inspire the search for courage in *Ifá* includes *Èsù*, *Ogun*, *Sango* and *Obatala*.

In traditional Yoruba culture the beads worn by *Èsù* are red and black, the beads worn by *Ogun* are red, the beads worn by *Sango* are red and white, and the beads worn by *Obatala* are white. In *Ifá* symbolism black represents a hidden mystery, red is the fire of transformation and white is the light of illumination. Based on the meaning of the color symbols used to identify *Orisa Okunrin* there is a clear progression in the relationship between these Spiritual Forces.

Èṣù as the Trickster brings transformation emerging from the unknown (red emerging from black). *Ogun* as the Spirit who builds civilization is pure transformation (red). *Sango* brings order and justice to the civilization built by *Ogun* (red and white). *Obatala* keeps us humble by maintaining a connection to Source referred to as illumination (white). The deeper mystery is the relationship between each of these male spirits and their female counter part. Without an understanding of this relationship there is no understanding of the Warrior Spirit and the true source of courage. It is the eternal feminine that inspires us to venerate that which is worthy of preservation and praise. It is the Female *Oriṣa* who prompt us to look for the inspiration needed to access courage. In the language of Medieval European symbolism this is the Knight becoming the Champion of the Maiden.

If there is an esoteric relationship between these spirits coded into the color iconography of *Ifá* it is reasonable to suspect there is a link between them expressed in the mythic stores that are a part of *Ifá* sacred scripture. This relationship manifests in a story cycle Joseph Campbell called the hero's journey. In his classic book *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*, the late mythologist showed how the elements of the hero's journey are part of the legends, and folklore of every culture on the planet. They are found universally because they are expressions of the human condition. This book is an exploration of

the hero's journey as it is expressed in the *Ifá* oral scripture of Yoruba culture.

We are blessed in our efforts to understand *Ifá* oral scripture by the pioneering work of *Olori Wande Abimbola*. His book *Ifá An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus* is an in depth analysis of the traditional structure of the verses. *Baba Abimbola* describes eight elements found in most verses.

The first part states the name(s) of the Ifá priest(s) involved in a past divination. The second part states the name(s) of the client(s). The third part states the reasons for the divination while the fourth part contains the instructions of the Ifá priest(s) to the client(s) after the divination. The fifth part then tells whether or not the client complied with the instructions. The sixth part narrates what happened to the client(s) to the joy or sorrow that resulted from the process of divination while the eighth part draws a fitting moral from the story as a whole. At the end of the seventh part, some ese Ifa, there is a

*repetition of either Parts I-VII, or Part I-IV
before the Ifa priest returns to the eight part.*

Ifá An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus

Oxford Press, 1976 Page 43

In my reading of the verses the sixth section is frequently the description of someone's personal heroic journey. It is the descriptions of efforts to triumph over adversity with a recitation of either success or failure in the process. In the hero's journey anything you fix in your life becomes medicine for someone else who is struggling with the same problem. This is the basis for groups like AA. The medicine used by AA is the personal testimony of those who have maintained sobriety. *Odu Ifá* is account of the medicine that was discovered in the problem solving process in Yoruba culture. It is the oral retention of the history of how well a particular medicine was used to solve subsequent similar problems. Here I am not limiting the use of the word medicine to physical illness; I am using the word to describe any process that fixes anything that is broken. *Eborá* are those Spirits who assist in the search for effective medicine. In the language of European spiritual growth this medicine is called a boon. It is the reward for effectively transforming personal consciousness. In *Ifá* the idea of boon is expressed as *ire*.

Hero's Journey

The *Ifá* Concept of *Akin L'ona*

Ifá uses an oral scripture to preserve the wisdom of the ancestors. The oral scripture is an extended poem with two hundred and fifty-six sections called *Odu*. Each *Odu* has between four and a hundred verses. The verses are used as a problem-solving tool giving insight into the cause and effect dynamics that shape a wide range of situations. In Western theological language the verses are mythic stories preserving transcendent principles that can be applied to resolve either inner personal confusion or inter-personal conflict. The stories about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table served a similar function in Medieval Europe as an alternative to the dogmatic principles expressed by the Christian institutions of the day.

When *Odu Ifá* are grouped together in sequences they can be used as a map to guide consciousness through specific areas of personal development. The hero's journey is a particular sequence that takes consciousness through the transcendent cycle of transformation and rebirth. The hero is called to adventure (*Ose ́tura*), takes courageous action in a journey through the wilderness (*Okanran Meji*), discovers sacred medicine (*Okanran Oturupon*), and returns to the mundane world with the newly discovered magic potion (*Otura Ogunda*). This cycle applies to the internal search for courage

needed by both men and women to embrace the challenge of personal development appropriate to each stage of personal growth. It is based on the Yoruba belief that any problem you fix in your own life becomes medicine for someone else. Everyone is mentor to those who are younger, and everyone is mentored by those who are older. The journey is different for everyone and can be expressed in various sequences of *Odu*. The process I am describing here is generic and indicates common patterns and general principles it is not etched in stone as mandatory for everyone.

The cycle of the hero's journey applies to the rite of passage that transforms children into adults and reoccurs at each stage of personal development. This cycle cannot begin until after the individual becomes conscious of self. This stage of the hero's journey is described in the *Ifá Odu* called *Ogunda Meji*

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Ogunda Meji

**recorded by Baba Wande Abimbola*

Orunmila says that on entering a room with a low door, we automatically bow. Ifá says the question is; "Who among the deities accompanies their followers on every journey, without ever

turning back?" Sango replied that he accompanies his followers on every journey, without turning back. They asked him: But what if, after a long journey, walking and walking, you arrive at Coos, home of your fathers and they cook bean soup and make yam pudding and give you kola and a rooster?" Sango said. "After such satisfaction I return home." Then Sango was told that he could not accompany his followers on a far journey without turning back.

The *Ode* describes similar circumstances for each of the *Orisa* (Forces in Nature) and they all admit that they would not accompany the devotee throughout their entire life. The verse concludes by answering the original question.

Ifá said. "Ori alone accompanies their followers on every journey, without ever turning back."

Ori is the Yoruba word for head. From the perspective of *Ifá* spiritual tradition *ori* refers to the full spectrum of human consciousness, it is the integration of both thoughts and emotions. To create a state of mental health (*ori ire*) *Ifá* teaches the importance of placing the head and the heart in perfect alignment and prescribes

personal rituals to diminish any conflict between what a person thinks and what they feel. If someone threatens you while running away there is an obvious conflict between head and heart. If someone says they love you and you never see them again there is an obvious conflict between head and heart. Most time this conflict is subtle and not easily perceived. One of the reasons for using divination is identify areas where this conflict is manifest. *Ifá* spiritual practice is based on the idea that if consciousness expands it attracts good fortune. According to *Ifá* cosmology the *ori* is the final arbitrator of all external human influence from parental guidance, to ancestral spirits who facilitate communication with Forces in Nature (*Orisa*). Resistance to the expansion of consciousness is called *ibi* and *ibi* is rooted in the unwillingness to resolve the conflict between the head and the heart. This conflict usually occurs when we feel something that puts us in opposition to our concensious reality. The person born into a racist community who understands the necessity to transcend this idea is confronted with a serious emotional conflict. Embracing a contrary idea requires courage and where there is no courage there is denial for the need to change.

In traditional *Ifá* spiritual discipline the *ori* is the first Spirit we address in an effort to resolve problems that confront us in the course of the day. There is an *Ifá* admonition that says do not ask the oracle

what the head already knows. *Baba Wande Abimbola* says divination is not a substitute for thinking.

One day I was walking with the *Araba* of Ode Remo. We wanted to cross a bridge but a snarling dog blocked our path. The *Araba* picked up a handful of dirt and marked a symbol on the dirt. He recited an incantation into his hand, and then tossed the dirt into the dogs face. The dog ran off, we crossed the bridge. The *Araba* identified the problem, he knew the solution, and he took appropriate action. No divination was required.

Ifá teaches self-reliance, the ability to integrate the head and the heart to facilitate clear thinking. According to a Yoruba proverb proper behavior creates good fortune.

*You arrive on time, you walk well, you know
how to walk with both feet, and as soon as your
wealth is spread on the ground you arrive to claim it
as your own.*

Traditional Yoruba Proverb

Ifá teaches the concept of *atunwa* meaning every *ori* goes through cycles of rebirth or reincarnation. Prior to each reincarnation the *ori* chooses a destiny and it is our responsibility to discover that destiny and bring it into manifestation. In traditional Yoruba culture

an individual's destiny is identified three days after their birth at a naming ceremony called *esentaye*. Divination at this ritual gives guidance to the parents, the extended family and the entire village on how to support the destiny of a particular child.

Every *ori* organizes information based on its perception of self and world. Perception is a finite view of infinite reality. This means perception is always subject to change. The world of our parents is not the world of our children. We live in a consensuous reality in which those around us shape our ideas about what we see. If our family reinforces the idea that we are a good and blessed person with unlimited potential that is who we will become. If those around us denigrate us in anyway the hex becomes manifest as a family curse.

As children we are dependent on our families for guidance, protection, a sense of security and the encouragement that leads to the development of positive self-esteem. A time comes when we learn the skills needed to separate from our parents and start a family of our own. This shift in communal responsibility carries with it a shift in consciousness. The way this shift is made becomes an important component of how we process change as adults. This shift is the first step in *Akin l'ona*, the hero's journey.

Lesson 1

Ifá spiritual discipline teaches the importance of starting each day by blessing the head. A traditional head blessing used in the morning is as follows;

ORÍKÌ ORÍ

(Praising the Inner Spirit in the Morning)

Èmi mà jí l'ónì o, o, mo f'orí balè f'Olórún.

Now that I am waking up, I give respect to the Realm of the Ancestors.

Ire gbogbo maa'wa'ba'me, Orí mi da'mi da'iye. Ngò kú mọ́. Ire gbogbo ni t'èmí.

Let all good things come to me. Inner Spirit give me life. I shall never die. Let all good things come to me.

Ase.

May it be so

* This is a self-blessing that may be used in the morning as part of the daily prayer cycle.

Ifá spiritual discipline teaches that when we move through the world with resistance to change the *ori* attracts negative emotions

that reinforce the resistance. To break this pattern of resistance *Ifá* makes use of a wide variety of head cleansings. The following *oriki* can be used to clean the *ori*. While the *oriki* is being spoken use the left hand to wipe away negativity. Place the fingers in the center of the forehead and move them across the top of the head down the back of the head and past the back of the neck.

ORÍKÌ ORÍ
(Praising the Inner Spirit)

Orí san mi. Orí san mi. Orí san igede. Orí san igede.

Inner Spirit guide me. Inner Spirit guide me.
Inner Spirit support me. Inner Spirit support me.

Orí otan san mi ki nni owo lowo. Orí otan san mi ki nbimo le mio.

Inner Spirit support my abundance. Inner Spirit support my future children.

Orí oto san mi ki nni aya. Orí oto san mi ki nkole mole.

Inner Spirit support my relationship. Inner Spirit protect my house.

*Orí san mi o. Orí san mi o. Orí san mi o. Oloma
ajiki, ìwá ni mope. Ase.*

Inner Spirit guide me. Inner Spirit guide me.
Inner Spirit guide me. Protector of Children,
my inner character is thankful. May it be so.

* This is a head cleaning that may be used
anytime of the day to clear away confusion.

Ifá teaches that everyone chooses a destiny prior to birth. According to *Ifá* cosmology we forget our choices as we come through the birth canal. It is possible and I believe important to reclaim those memories. Most of us who were raised in Western culture did not have a naming ceremony. We can approach the oracle as adults and inquire about our destiny, but I find approaching the oracle with this kind of question is only effective if we have given it some serious thought. We can do this through what I call a vision quest.

Take a day to be alone in nature. Plan a meditation that lasts from sunup to sundown. Hold the question what would I do with my life if money were no object. I suggest that the question be phrased in this way because in Western culture we have been so conditioned to be “practical” that many people who meditate on this question get stuck on the notional of survival and are unable to penetrate deeper into their *Ori* to discover their essential being. When a vision comes it will be charged with emotion. If you come away from the meditation

with “good ideas” and no emotional enthusiasm you have not connected with your higher self. Keep scheduling a vision quest until you connect with a vision that motivates you to manifest it without hesitation. *Ifá* teaches you cannot create it if you cannot image it and imagination is the first step on the journey toward self-actualization and personal fulfillment.

The Divine Messenger Opens the Door to Self Discovery The *Ifá* Concept of Èṣù

In *Ifá* metaphysics Èṣù is the Divine Messenger the Spirit who allows humans to communicate with Spirit. Èṣù translates the language of Nature into the language of humans and the language of humans into the language of Nature. *Ifá* teaches that everything in Nature has *ori* or consciousness. If you have ever gone to the beach feeling depressed and came away feeling better just by being in the presence of the ocean, then you can say you engaged in some kind of dialogue or communication with the ocean. The translating factor in this interaction is a Spiritual Force *Ifá* calls Èṣù.

The verses of *Ifá* oral scripture are organized through the use of two Quadra grams made up of single and double lines. Single lines represent light, double lines represent darkness. These patterns are two-dimensional representations of three dimensional energy patterns that occur in nature. They represent the polarity between gravity and radiation, the polarity between expansion and contraction.

The energy pattern that incarnates Èṣù is the *Odu Ose'tura*, which appears as follows:

I I
II II
I I
I II

This mark is the symbolic representation of the energy pattern that incarnates the human ability to communicate with Forces in Nature. This *Odu* is used as a magnet to invoke the power of the Divine Messenger.

In *Ifá* Creation Myth, the Universe emerges from the Eternal Rock of Creation called *Oyigiyigi*. In the beginning this Rock separated into the four Calabashes of Creation. These four calabashes interacted with one another to form sixteen sacred principles called *Olu Odu* or the primal principles of Creation. In *Ifá* the sacred number seventeen represents the sixteen primal *Odu* plus *Ose'tura*, which is the seventeenth *Odu* of *Ifá*. This *Odu* has the function of causing the *Olu Odu* to copulate creating the two hundred and forty *Odu* that are generated by the first sixteen *Odu*. This suggests that *Èṣù*, in addition to being the Divine Messenger, is also primal seed of Creation. *Ose'tura* describes the relationship between *Èṣù* and the people of Earth.

Sore throat Takes the good from the plate was the one who cast Ifa for all the people on earth when they were afflicted with illness. Èṣù says that the sacrifice will be

effective if they will do as he says. The people of earth came and sacrifices . . . From that day on, the world began to be good.

Ifá Divination Communication
between God and Men in West
Africa, William Bascom Indiana
University Press 1991, page
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Èṣù as the mediator between Spirit and humans has a key role in maintaining harmony and balance in the world. If humans move to far way from the idea of living in alignment with Natural Law, *Èṣù* as the Trickster causes disruption in the form of illness. The diseases that are most common in large cities are frequently the result of poor planning, poor hygiene, over population and greed. *Ose'tura* is saying humans cannot separate themselves from communication with Spirit without suffering the consequences of their arrogance.

Ifá also describes *Èṣù* as the Divine Enforcer in issues of Spiritual Justice. This means humans cannot behave in a way that is counter to their essential nature without eventually paying a price. *Èṣù* also has a role as the Divine Trickster meaning *Èṣù* can create illusions based on arrogance. Our perception of reality does not

match the objective circumstances surrounding our experience. Èṣù is the Force in Nature that illuminates awareness of this contradiction. This awareness brings us the lessons expressed through Èṣù's role as enforcer of Divine Justice.

Those who implemented the idea of apartheid in South Africa believed racism was a reflection of God's Will. This idea was challenged by the manifestation of Èṣù' through the actions of Nelson Mandela.

Ifá says Èṣù lives in the back of the neck, the crossroads between the head and the heart. In *Ifá* the back of the neck is called *ipako*, which literally means, not disjointed. When we experience tension it is the shoulders and the neck that tighten up. The slang expression "pain in the neck" expresses this idea, as it is understood in Western culture. According to the legends associated with King Arthur the first step towards becoming a Knight involved slaying a demon called a Jabberwocky. This demon was described as living in the back of the neck. Cleaning the back of the neck is an important step during initiation and initiation is essentially an elevation of consciousness or a personal commitment to embracing the hero's journey.

In the role Èṣù as Divine Trickster, most of the anthropological literature identifies the Trickster as a random form of harassment. In some academic literature Èṣù is described as "evil". This description fails to appreciate the sacred function for all Tricksters in all

traditional cultures. The role of *Èṣù* as Trickster is to bring to each one of us the truth that we are all interconnected and interrelated. It is a manifestation of the eternal truth that no one can be totally self-reliant. Once you have the idea that you can handle all your problems yourself you are invoking an encounter with the Divine Trickster. Things occur and we don't have all the answers. We deny our vulnerability by resisting change. Our resistance is shattered and we are left with a feeling of loss of identity. In *Ifá* the Force in Nature that provokes this loss is called *Èṣù*. In traditional Yoruba culture the death of the old self is perceived as a positive experience. It is considered the foundation of all personal growth and elevation. In the Western world identify is frequently associated with religious dogma, the idea that as long as we hold on to our ridged beliefs it does not matter what happens to us.

Èṣù is not some arbitrary, malevolent force that is out to get you if you don't behave. That is the Christian "bogy man" model. The Divine Trickster is a fundamental principle of the structure of reality, based on the idea that if you see an egg that hatches and something comes out with wings, there's a pretty good chance it's a bird. The universe is not arbitrary. Elephants do not give birth to tigers. Humans are essentially good, if we move too far from our essential nature, *Èṣù* brings us those experiences that can potentially lead us back to our essential self. It is the role of the Divine Trickster to

suggest that we might have a personal destiny and that we may have a purpose for being on Earth. To encounter *Èṣù* is to embrace any experience that destroys our self generated boundaries of perception.

When *Ifá* describes *Èṣù* as a Trickster this role is closely associated with the symbolic function of opening doors guiding us to a better grasp of our destiny. *Ifá* elevation (*abori*) is the process of elders guiding the novice up the seven steps of initiation. The elders knock on the door and kick it open, before stepping back. This is the symbolic door *Èṣù* opens; it is not a physical door. Initiation occurs every time we expand our own consciousness. A door opens every time we abandon the safe boundaries of limited self-perception. This can be in the context of a communal ritual, or it can be in the context of overcoming difficulty in the world. The door we are speaking of is the door of personal growth, the door that allows us to see where our perception is short sighted.

Ifá uses a circle divided by an equal armed cross as a symbol or consciousness. This is the exact same symbol that was used by the Knights of the Round Table to describe their mystic journey. Imagine a circle with a cross the size of a baseball. This circle represents the consciousness of a young man the day before puberty. Then puberty arrives and his consciousness is forced to deal with the issues of being an adult, raising a family, and finding a productive role in society. The consciousness of the man who has assimilated these new roles is

represented by a circle the size of a basketball. To get from the baseball to the basketball requires the death of the old self. The boy no longer exists. In symbolic language the door to childhood is closed. In his place stands a man. In symbolic language the door to becoming a responsible adult has opened. This shift in consciousness can only occur if we tear down the parameters of conscious that define how we see our self in the world. Nothing in human experience is more frightening than the prospect of letting go of the old self. Fear causes us to resist change, and prolongs the agony. *Ifá* calls this *ibi* or resistance to change. When the door opens we have a choice to either walk through it or run away. I call those who run away children in adult bodies. Those who walk through the door begin the hero's journey. In the language of European chivalry they begin the quest for the Holy Grail.

When the resistance to change breaks down, we go through a period of death and transformation leading to rebirth. This process always involves walking through a doorway, a portal, or some barrier leading us into the realm of the unknown. This is always true, there is no exception. The process occurs daily if you are conscious of your relationship with *Èṣù*. *Ifá* says once we are initiated, it is our task to re-initiate our self every day to incorporate, assimilate and integrate the life lessons that occur in the world. Otherwise you become stagnant, you regress and the circle that represents the parameters of

your consciousness becomes smaller. Regression takes effort and the effort can lead to emotional and physical illness. Regression is the psychological term for *ibi*. The Knights who failed to discover the Holy Grail were doomed to wander in the wasteland unable to find their way home.

As an alternative to resistance there is a doorway we walk through that gives us an opportunity to leap into the next level of consciousness. The key to unlocking this doorway is the willingness to confront our fear of the unknown. Confronting our fear of the unknown always involves embracing the need for change. Embracing the need for change always requires courage. This is the path of spiritual growth; it is a map of the hero's journey. When you see yourself clearly, you grab yourself by the lapels, you look yourself in the eye and you say, "What do I have to do to take the next step?"

Èṣù is the *Oriṣa* who opens the door for our encounter with the inner self (*ori inu*). Historically, one of the reasons why *Èṣù* tends to be described as "evil" or "negative" is because complacency and security is wrongly associated with Divinity. If you don't like the experience of growth, if you can't handle change, the tendency is to blame the Devil rather than admit to your own lack of courage. If you are unwilling to walk through the door *Èṣù* opens, the common human response is to blame the doorkeeper to shoot the messenger and ignore the message. *Èṣù* as the opener of doors is who we invoke to

confront our fears in the process of self-discovery. The door never opens unless our own *ori* understands there is a need for change. Blaming the Devil puts our consciousness in conflict with itself and this conflict must be resolved for change to occur. The only way to resolve this conflict is to recognize there is no Devil. *Èṣù* appears in response to our need to begin the hero's journey, and that this journey is a joint effort between human will and Spirit guidance.

The key point about this process is that *Ifá* is not about sprinkling *juju* dust over your head and washing away all your problems. If I did have *juju* powder that gives you the courage to confront your fears, every time you have a problem you would come to me and I would sprinkle the *juju* on your head and the problems goes away. What you would be creating is reliance on me, which is codependent and not spiritual liberation. There are not magic bullets. Courage is the only one antidote to fear. The only way to invoke courage is to do the right thing in spite of fear fear.

There is an idea in *Ifá* that appears in every earth centered religion I have encountered. It is the idea that everything is interconnected. If you read all the great mystical writings in literature, they are all about trying to explain how it feels when you experience Universal connection. It's a wonderfully noble and widely recognized idea. But it remains an idea until you really experience it. Those who write about the experience say it is preceded by what I call

the Mother of all Fears. *Ifá* literally calls it "Fear of the Mothers". It is the fear of the total loss of self, which it is, followed by a sense of connection with everything. *Ifá* says we are all children of *Oyigioyigi* the eternal stone of Creation. We are all the eyes of the Creator looking back at Itself. Every message we receive from everyone we encounter is a message from God giving us a greater insight into who we are where we came from and where we are going.

How does this relate to the idea of *Èṣù* as Divine Enforcer? You can only move so far away from the idea of Universal connection before Nature creates counter - balancing Forces (*Orisa*) that guide you back to center. Spirits described by *Ifá* are cultural annotations on universal principles that appear in every culture at every stage of recorded history. *Èṣù* is a fundamental aspect of Creation. To say *Èṣù* has the function of Divine Enforcer means Spirit keeps Creation conscious of its true essence. We can ask about tragedy and premature death knowing these are difficult questions. In *Ifá* there is a belief in a bigger picture where Divine Justice is at work. This perspective is not always clear to human consciousness and for this reason we turn to Spirit for guidance. The symbolic analogy used in *Ifá* is *Ifá Olokun o saro dayo*, meaning the Spirit of the Ocean always provides for those who live in the sea. Every fish living in the ocean has a home and food to eat. The creatures who live in the ocean have figured it out; those of us who live on land are still working on it. The

idea of *Èṣù* as the Divine Enforcer is the idea that Nature provides the answers for those who are willing to look and Nature creates boundaries for those who ignore the answers.

Western science has a discipline called Chaos theory which postulates the idea that things which seem to be symmetrical in the universe have a range of variation when viewed up close. It also postulates that things, which appear random, have a degree of symmetry when viewed at a distance. The issues of justice and injustice, chaos and order are issues of perspective. If you get the big picture, the pieces start to fall in place. *Èṣù* as the Divine Enforcer is who we invoke to get the big picture. During *Ifá* divination the diviners invoke *Èṣù Odara* meaning Spirit of the Divine Messenger who brings division. In this context division means destruction and re-creation of consciousness. You can do things on the short term that feel effective, righteous and ethical that can have long-term negative effects. A southern proverb says the path to Hell is paved with good intentions. Conversely you can do things that seem negative in the moment that end up having positive results. It is *Èṣù Odara* we invoke to get perspective on where we are in that polarity, to expand our consciousness and give us a glimpse of a bigger perspective.

Ifá teaches that the entire Universe is created by the 256 *Odu*, which are primal manifestations of consciousness. These 256 *Odu* create all forms of consciousness because they all emerged out of the

light from the Big Bang (*Oyigioyigi*). Consciousness includes the *Odu Ose'tura*, which incarnates *Èṣù*. Somewhere inside of you *Èṣù* is alive and waiting to go to work. When we pray to *Èṣù* we are facing a rock and we are calling the rock *Èṣù*. In reality *Èṣù* is a part of our own consciousness and we are bouncing it off the rock. Because *Ose'tura* exists elsewhere in the world our prayers can attract other manifestations of the *Odu Ose'tura*. Prayer directed towards a rock creates a convergence of Forces that will allow for dialogue and inspiration from sources beyond our own consciousness. We call this guidance from Spirit.

Nobody in traditional Yoruba culture believes *Èṣù* is a rock. *Ojubo* the word for shrine it is an elision of *oju ebo* meaning look at the place where I bring my offering. The rock is the place we face when we say your prayers it is sacred space created by our intentions. Every traditional Yoruba home has a room specifically for *Oriṣa* (Spiritual representations of Forces in Nature). Individuals pray every morning to the *Oriṣa* in their shrine to support their personal growth and to support their communal responsibilities. This creates a different kind of concensious reality than communities that wake up to the sounds of Jerry Springer.

The thing I did not understand when I went to Africa for the first time was the importance of the extended family in relationship to *Ifá* and *Oriṣa* worship. First and foremost, *Ifá* is the sanctification of the

extended family. The extended family is the training school for *Ifá* and *Ifá* is based on the development of good character. The extended family is an eternal structure that exists forever while different faces evolve into the role of elders within the ongoing family unit. I did not know what a family that works as a school for both spiritual training and the development of trade skills looked like.

The role of grandmother and grandfather are eternal roles within the family that are assumed by subsequent generations. Children are being trained for the day when they become grandmother and grandfather. In traditional Yoruba culture it is assumed that by the time you become a grandparent you have learned the lessons of good character and have become a clear messenger for Spirit.

In traditional Yoruba culture jobs are also sanctioned through initiation. The profession of blacksmith is sanctioned through initiation to *Ogun*. The role of healing female reproductive problems is sanctioned through initiation into *Osun*. The role of herbalist is sanctioned through initiation into *Osanyin*. Divination is sanctioned through initiation into *Ifá*. Within the extended family there are different roles that sustain the well being of the family.

On a communal level there is a sanctification of farming and a sanctification of the role of those who run the market. All these roles fit into an ideal version of how a family and a community functions.

Sanctification means some form of communal blessing, another way of saying initiation. Sanctification is a communal process that identifies certain people as carriers of a particular kind of wisdom.

Superficially, the traditional Yoruba extended family looks like a patriarchy. It is not. The women have veto power over what is apparent in public. There is a balance of power within the structure of community. For example, if you go through an *Ifá* initiation, it looks like you are being initiated by a fraternity of men. But the last thing you do involves a blessing from the mothers. If they do not give them blessing you are not initiated. You have to walk past them to come into the world after the initiation. There is a weave of influences that sustains the eternal structure of the family.

Part of the function of *Èṣù* is to maintain the cohesive fabric of the family structure. *Èṣù* can begin to give you a vision of the big picture. That vision gives us insight on how we can relate as extended family in areas where the family has been damaged. In Africa there is no word for uncle and there is no word for cousin. Anybody your parents age is father or mother. If you don't call them father or mother you are being rude. This is the eternal idea of respect for elders as part of the process of personal development. *Ifá* is one particular vision of how to make the family work. It is a vision constantly transformed by the influence of Spirit.

Based on the idea of *Èṣù* as Divine Enforcer, *Ifá* teaches the ethical notion that if your life gets better my life gets better; if you suffer, I suffer. This idea requires an examination of the possibility that jealousy is inappropriate, competition is inappropriate, gossip is inappropriate, back biting is inappropriate, diminishing anyone verbally is inappropriate and denigrating any particular group of people is not consistent with the ethical principles of Divine Law.

When you find yourself experiencing these emotions there is transformation work that needs to be done. It's not hard to identify and it's not hard to recognize. The problem is taking those emotions and transforming them into something worthy of praise. This requires spiritual power, the ability to place yourself so perfectly in alignment with the Forces of Nature that surround you that your life becomes constantly transformed. Again, spiritual power is not sprinkling *juju* on your head, it is assuming a position in relationship to Nature that becomes transformative simply because you are a conduit for the essential balance of Nature Herself. In India it's called *darma*; you get blessed by the elders by sitting in their presence and they don't have to say anything. It's all about having a real experience of spiritual power. In Taoism it's called *chi*, in Shinto it's called *ki*, in Hinduism it's called *prana* and in *Ifá* it's called *ase*. This is real power that feels a certain way and the essence of ceremonial work within *Ifá* is to unlock this power. If you are unable to unlock spiritual power on your own,

being in the presence of those who can is of value. *Ase* will become unlocked within you merely by being around it. At that point what you call it is profoundly irrelevant because at that point you will know what it feels like and will be able to access it for use in personal growth.

The hero's journey involves an encounter with *Èṣù* who pushes us beyond the complacency of our normal boundaries. This encounter places us in unfamiliar territory where there is a profound sense of panic, confusion and fear. The only way to successfully interact in this unfamiliar place is to expand our consciousness, to change our perception of self and world. Expansion of consciousness always involves the death of the old self, an experience of the source of the fear of the unknown. In simple terms the encounter with *Èṣù* is a call to courage. The call to courage is a call to do the right thing in spite of our fear it is an exploration of those Spiritual Forces that guide us towards elevation and renewal.

At its core our encounter with *Èṣù* is an acknowledgement that we can translate the language of humans into the language of Nature and we can translate the language of Nature into the language of humans. Once this translation occurs there is no guarantee that communication will occur. If Spirit is to hear our prayer our voice needs to be heard in the Realm of the Immortals. According to the *Odu Ose'tura* it is the vulture that takes our prayers to the land of Spirit. The vulture is the avatar of the *Orisha Osun* who is the Goddess

of the River and the Source of abundance on Earth. She is the Source of abundance because there is no life without fresh water.

Traditional *Ifá* acknowledges the relationship between *Èṣù* and *Ọsun* every time an offering is made as part of an appeal for guidance and clarity. Part of the offering goes to *Èṣù* and part of the offering goes to *Ọsun* in her role as messenger for *Iyaami Osoranga*. Feeding *Èṣù* is the responsibility of the men of *Ifá*. Feeding *Iyaami Osoranga* is the responsibility of the women of *Ifá*. If the men and women of *Ifá* do not work together to make an offering there is no effective communication.

The failure of men and women to work together in *Ifá* in the Diaspora has created what I call the paper tiger syndrome. Diviners convince their clients that have none existent problems so they can sell them ineffective remedies. The effectiveness of this con is based on the ability to scare people into believing the problem is real. If you understand the dynamics of consensious reality then it becomes clear that this syndrome has nothing to do with *Ifá* spiritual growth or the effective resolution of real problems.

Lesson 2

The hero's journey leads to an increase in personal power. Every increase in personal power requires an increase in spiritual protection. *Ebora* are the *Oriṣa* we turn to for spiritual protection. The *Ebora* traditionally include *Èṣù*, *Osoosi* and *Ogun*. The traditional process for making the *Ebora* varies from region to region in Nigeria and has an even wider range of variation within the Diaspora. Sanction to make warriors traditionally requires initiation. We can make symbolic representations of the *Ebora* to aid us in the hero's journey until we are able to receive fully concentrated *Ebora* from initiated elders.

To make a symbolic *Èṣù* start by purchasing a coconut. Every coconut has three small circles on one side. These circles resemble two eyes and a mouth that form the face of the coconut. Place a white cloth on a small table. Light a candle and place it on the table

next to a clear glass of water. Ask your ancestors for guidance while painting the coconut. Traditionally Èṣù is either red and black or black and white. Rub palm oil on the coconut after it is painted. Place the symbolic Èṣù on a plate that is covered with dirt. In the Diaspora it is traditional to place the Èṣù near the front door.

When the Èṣù is completed as the Spirit of the Divine Messenger to place you on the hero's journey, to guide you towards your highest destiny.

For those who have a consecrated Èṣù use the following *oriki* to invoke the Spirit of the Divine Messenger. The *oriki* are presented here in their short form used as a daily greeting to Èṣù.

ORÍKÌ ÈṢÙ ORO

(Praising the Divine Messenger of the
Power of the Word)

Èṣù Oro mà ni kò. Èṣù Oro mà ya kò. Èṣù Oro f'ohun tire_
sile. Ase.

The Divine Messenger of the Power of the Word causes confrontation. Divine Messenger of the Power of the Word do not cause me confrontation. The Divine Messenger of the Power of the Word has the voice of power. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈṢÙ OPIN

(Praising the Divine Messenger of Boundaries)

*Ajibike, owuru ja s'ogun, isele, afaja b'Òrun be enia eleti
gbofo, gb'aroye. Ase.*

One who is saluted first, fighter who heals better than medicine, one who carries a dog upon his shoulder like a baby, one who has perforated ears to hear all prayers. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ ALAKETU

(Praising the Divine Messenger of Alaketu)

*La ro Alaketu aki Alaketu. Èsù Alaketu orí mi ma je nko o.
Ase.*

You who see Alaketu without going to Alaketu. Divine Messenger of Alaketu guide my head towards my path of destiny. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ ISERI

(Praising the Divine Messenger of the Morning Dew)

*Èsù Iseri ganga to lojo oni. Mo fikú mi ro sorun re. Aye le
o. Ase.*

The Divine Messenger of the Morning Dew who owns this day. I place my life in your care. The world is a difficult place. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ GOGO

(Praising the Divine Messenger of Full Payment)

Èsù Gogo o, Orí mi ma je nko o. Èsù Gogo o, Orí mi ma je nko o. Ase.

Divine Messenger of Full Payment; guide my head on the right path. Divine Messenger of Full Payment; guide my head on the right path. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ WARA

(Praising the Divine Messenger of Personal Relationships)

Èsù Wara na wa o, Èsù Wara o. Èsù Wara na wa ko mi o, Èsù Wara o. Ase.

Divine Messenger of Personal Relationships brings me good fortune, Divine Messenger of Personal Relationships. Divine Messenger of Personal Relationships brings me good fortune, Divine Messenger of Personal Relationships. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ IJELU

(Praising the Divine Messenger of the Drum)

Èsù Ijelu, Èsù Ijelu, Èsù Ijelu o gbe yin o. Elegbeje ado.

Èsù Ijelu, Èsù Ijelu. Ase.

The Divine Messenger of the Drum, the Divine Messenger of the Drum. May the Divine Messenger of the Drum protect the Owner of a thousand gourds. The Divine Messenger of the Drum, the Divine Messenger of the Drum. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ JEKI EBO DA
(Praising the Divine Messenger who
Sanctions Life Force Offerings)

Oo reran re. Oo reran re. Èsù Jeki Ebo Da oo reran re.

Oo reran re. Ase.

He looks upon the offerings. He looks upon the offerings, the Divine Messenger who Sanctions Life Force Offerings, looks upon the offerings. He looks upon the offerings. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ AGONGON GOJA
(Praising the Divine Messenger of the Wide Belt)

Èsù Agongon Goja, ereja. Èsù Agongon Goja 'lasunkan.

Èsù Agongon Goja ola ilu. Ase.

The Divine Messenger of the Wide Belt collects offerings from the market. The Divine Messenger

of the Wide Belt gives us wealth. The Divine Messenger of the Wide Belt is the wealth of the town. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ ELEKUN

(Praising the Divine Messenger of the Hunters)

Abimo tunmobi. Èsù Elekun mo be mi. Iwo lo bi lagbaja to fi dolori buruku. Ase.

One who pushes and pushes again. Divine Messenger of the Hunter do not push me. Do not push me towards misfortune. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ AROWOJE

(Praising the Divine Messenger of the Ocean)

Èsù Arowoje okun nu ni o si o ki e lu re ye toray. Èsù Arowoje b'omi ta 'afi. Ase.

Divine Messenger of the Ocean, I will greet you for as long as there is water in the sea. Divine Messenger of the Ocean let there be peace in the sea. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ LALU

(Praising the Divine Messenger of the Dance)

Èsù Lalu Obembe nijo. Èsù Lalu logemo Òrun. Ase.

The Divine Messenger of the Dance is a Master dancer. The Divine Messenger of the Dance is the indulgent child of the Invisible Realm. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ PAKUTA SI EWA
(Praising the Divine Messenger who
Creates and Destroys Beauty)

*Èsù Pakuta Si Ewa má ya kò. Èsù Pakuta Si Ewa má yà
ka nda. Ase.*

Divine Messenger Who Creates and Destroys
Beauty do not confront me. The Divine Messenger
Who Creates and Destroys Beauty has removed all
confrontations. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ KEWE LE DUNJE
(Praising the Divine Messenger Who Eats Sweets)

*Koo ta Èsù Kewe Le Dunje l'ore. Èsù Kewe kii gbe logigo
lasan. Ase.*

Take a gift to the Divine Messenger Who Eats
Sweets. The Divine Messenger Who Eats Sweets
supports nothing without an offering. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ ELEBARA
(Praising the Divine Messenger of the Warrior)

La royó aki loyo.. K'a ma sese are'le tunse. Ase.

You who see Oyo without going to Oyo. If we have an accident, the chief of this house rectifies it. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ EMALONA
(Praising the Divine Messenger of Any Means)

Èsù Emalona o jẹ yeye o. E ma fagbunwa s'ire. Èsù Emalona o ma fe yeye o. Ase.

Divine Messenger of Any Means is no laughing matter. Do not mock him. Divine Messenger of Any Means dislikes levity. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ LARÓYÈ
(Praising the Divine Messenger of the Spirit of the River)

Èsù Laróyè, K'èru ó ba onímímí. Onímímí n'imu mi Èsù Laróyè nfi. Ase.

Divine Messenger of the Spirit of the River, find a place for my burden. I salute the Divine Messenger of the Spirit of the River with all my heart. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ ANANAKI
(Praising the Divine Messenger of the Past)

Egúngún Olomo. Èsù Ananaki abebi, baba dun sin. Egúngún Olomo. Ase.

Ancestor masquerader of children see the Divine
Messenger of the Past, the true Spirit reincarnated
Ancestor masquerader of children. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ OKOBURU
(Praising the Divine Enforcer)

Èsù Okoburu gbe eni s'ebo loore o. Èsù Okoburu gbe e.

Eni s'ebo loore o. Ase.

The Divine Enforcer rewards kindness for those who
make offerings. The Divine Enforcer rewards him.
He rewards kindness for those who make offerings.
May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÈSÙ ÒDÀRÀ
(Praising the Divine Messenger of Transformation)

*Èsù, Èsù Òdàrà, Èsù, lanlu ogirioko. Okunrin orí ita, a jo
langa langa lalu. Ase.*

Divine Messenger, Divine Messenger of
Transformation, Divine Messenger speaks with
power. Man of the crossroads, dance to the drum.
May it be so.

The Path of Clear Vision

The *Ifá* Concept of Òsòòsi

In traditional Yoruba culture there is an *Orisa*, or Force in Nature called Òsòòsi. In the Diaspora it is commonly spelled *Ochosi*. Some writers who speak about Òsòòsi make the false claim this *Orisa* is no longer worshiped in Nigeria. Òsòòsi remains widely venerated in *Ifá* in Africa where it is known by a variety of names including *Lagua*.

Looking at the word Òsòòsi, it is very simple to translate by separating it into two words. Òsò is the word commonly used for sorcery. In *Ifá* the concept is not pejorative. Òsò is the ability to astral travel. Anyone who has the ability to go out of their body has the ase (spiritual power) of Òsò. Parapsychologists call this ability OBE (out of body experiences). Òsò in Yoruba refers to out of body experiences that are invoked intentionally. Moving out of your body with deliberate intention using invocation, as the trigger is part of the spiritual discipline and training for Òsòòsi initiates. Òsi means left. The literal translation of Òsòòsi is sorcery left or out of body to the left. That does not mean anything specific in English, but it is a clear reference in *Ifá*. Traditional Yoruba divination uses a wooden tray

divided into four guard rants. The right side of the tray relates to what has manifest in the present. The left side of the tray relates to that which is hidden. Right in the Yoruba language is *otun*, and left is *osi*.

Odu Ifá (sacred scripture) has a right and a left component. The marks of the *Odu* are a mandala. The simplest way to look at *Odu* is to consider the right side represents what is happening in the physical world in the present. The left side represents what is happening in the invisible world in latent potential. The left side usual represents that which has not yet come into Being. *Ifá* is based on the belief that all things that come into Being exist in potential in the Invisible Realm. This is identical to the Platonic idea of ideal forms. The clearest example of this polarity would be conscious verses unconscious. What you think is the problem and what is really the problem becomes an important question in the process of divination. The analogy applies to every realm of Being. When it rains the weather is caused by the conjunction of invisible pressure fronts. Electricity is seen by its effect not its source. The examples are endless.

We get some sense of *Òsò̀̀sì*'s essence by examining the *oriki* or praise poems used for invocation. In *Ifá* any symbolic reference to the left hand is speaking about the latent potential of Spirit as Guardian or Protector. Those Spirits that are described as right handed bring illumination, elevation and inspiration. Yoruba language

is rich with elisions and metaphors. An elision is when you take a phrase and run a number of words together to make one word. When phrases are run together to form the name of a Spirit, the words used are referred to as the *oriki* or the true name of the Spirit. The word *oriki* is from the elision *ori ki*. *Ki* means praise, it also means opening. *Ori* means consciousness or head. The translation is praising the head, or opening the head, or opening the mystery that illuminates the head. *Oriki* as a form of praise poetry describing the inner essence of Spirit. The *oriki* of an *Orisa* is used both for invocation and to grasp the inner mystery of the Spirit.

The *oriki Obalogara bata ma ro* describes *Òsòòsi* as the chief hunter who overcomes fear. *Àrà l'èmí n f'Òsòòsi dá* says the body and Spirit of the left handed astral traveler is invocation. *Ode ata matase* is usually translated to mean the hunter who never misses, but the word *matase* is an elision of *mata ase* meaning magical power. This suggests that *Òsòòsi* has some special ability related to hunting. This special ability is OBE used to locate animals in the forest. *Onibebe* means owner or guardian of the riverbank. *Osolikere*, *Asa la ko gbo ogùn*, *Odide mataode*. *Odide gan fi di ja* the magician of the forest uses a hawk to collect medicine and uses the spotted parrot to guide me beyond hear.

Òsòòsi clearly means having an invisible influence through the use of altered states of consciousness. Yoruba's refer to this ability in

British English by saying, "being a lefty". When I first heard that phrase it took me a while to understand what they were talking about. I finally figured out it meant the ability to effect things without being seen.

A popular song for *Òsòòsi* says *Òsòòsi ire, ode mata ode mata*. The song says Sorcerer of the left hand, brings good fortune, spotted medicine of the forest. Spotted medicine is put in tattoos or skin scarification called *mata*. Scarification is caused by peeling back the skin, putting a piece of sand under the top dermal layer along with some form of herbal medicine. The medicine is called *ajabo* from the elision *aja ebo* meaning the dog brings the offering. Dogs are considered messengers of *Orisa*, so *ajabo* is the medicine that is put in the *mata* to improve communication with Spirit. You make *ajabo* by gathering the herbs appropriate to what you are trying to accomplish. There are herbs for cleansing, for protection, for illumination, herbs to improve your memory and herbs to cure and herbs to cure illness.

The way *ajabo* is made is to burn the leaves so they are black and ground into powder with a mortar and pestle. *Ajabo* looks like gunpowder when the process is completed. Initiates say the prayers and invocations that enhance the intrinsic quality of the herbs on the powder which is placed in the incision or *mata*.

In traditional Yoruba culture *Òsòòsi* is worshiped by hunters and is associated with the ability to track game and locate rare plants in

the forest. For this reason Òsòòsi is frequently referred to as the Spirit of the Tracker. The Yoruba trackers in the rain forest speak of the ability to walk and to look with their right eye seeing straight ahead and their left eye seeing an aerial view from the top down. They speak of the ability to do this simultaneously. This is an important tool for tracking in the jungle. The rain forest is filled with green trees to the horizon in every direction. It's very easy to get lost. If you didn't know the area, if you don't have the skills associated with Òsòòsi the rain forest can be an unforgiving environment.

Òsòòsi as the guardian of the tracker teaches astral travel as a tool for both locating things of value in the forest, specifically herbs and game. In my opinion this skill is not magic. It represents the optimal end of a particular potential that is latent in all of us. Because there is not much call for this skill in the West, the potential remains underdeveloped.

The question then becomes, what is the Spiritual significance of Òsòòsi in the contemporary urban world and what role does the Spirit play along the hero's journey? Let's consider the *Ifá* symbol of the cross in the divination tray. It is, among other things, a map of consciousness. The purpose of *Ifá* divination is to balance all the elements of consciousness. The outer rim of the circle represents the sum total of a particular individual state of consciousness. The four

quadrants created by the cross in the circle represent the elements of consciousness in a state of balance.

Ifá expresses the idea of balancing the components of consciousness by referring to the relationship between the *ori*, meaning consciousness, the *ori inu*, meaning the inner self and the *iponri* meaning the higher self. While making the link between the inner self and the higher self we begin to understand the great expansive nature of human potential. In New Age language this process is called centering. Aligning the *ori inu* and the *iponri* is the preliminary step in the movement towards the altered state of consciousness commonly called possession. The word for possession in Yoruba is *ini* which translates to I am, so rather than being possessed by something other than yourself, you are getting in touch with who you essentially are. Once you get in touch with your inner self, that becomes a magnet for similar forms of energy in the universe and that is when possession occurs. You can be in touch with your inner self and not connect with Spirit. When you do connect with similar forms of consciousness in the universe there is a surge of spiritual power (*ase*) and a feeling of elation.

How does centering relate to the hero's journey? *Ifá* says the *ori* that leaves the house in the morning is not be the *ori* that comes home at night. This means that in course of any given day you are going to learn something and you have to integrate new experiences

into a balanced consciousness. Most of the time what we learn does not require a complete death of the old self so it is a relatively simple process. For example an increase in the price of gasoline is usually stored as information. Encountering a Being from another planet would likely require a radical reconstruction of our perception of the universe we live in. There are levels of difficulty in the process of the integration of data.

When we encounter *Èṣù* and *Èṣù* throws us into the realm of the unknown our consciousness turns to the question of finding our way home, finding the shortest path towards the newly formed *ori inu* looking for a way out of confusion, and pain. It is in this moment that we can turn to *Òsòḍisi* for guidance.

Ifá says after initiation we initiate our self every day. That means every time your consciousness expands, the person who was alive the before dies and is reborn as someone more intelligent. This becomes the ongoing challenge of *Ifá* spiritual discipline, the death of the old self and the birth of the new self with unyielding consistency. *Òsòḍisi* keeps us moving towards greater wisdom, better character and deeper insight into self and world by showing us the shortest route to the new self.

The circumference of the circle that defines an individual's consciousness goes through a major expansion at puberty. This kind of leap in development can be confusing and stressful. There are two

ways to travel from the centered consciousness of a child to the centered consciousness of an adult. One is to travel in a straight line from center point A to center point B; the other is to explore the infinite ways that we can avoid traveling in a straight line. Avoiding a straight line means allowing you to resist the process by either avoiding the challenge of becoming an adult or by refusing to face the fear that comes with an increase in communal responsibility. Avoidance is impossible to sustain and always leads to crisis. At the moment of crisis we look to *Òsòòsi* to give us a vision of the shortest route to the elevation needed to make the transition from old self to new self.

Malidoma Some defined community as any three people who get together for a purpose. The purpose of a spiritual community is to support each other's spiritual growth. The purpose of *Òsòòsi* is to support the idea that moving from center point A to center point B can occur smoothly and efficiently by traveling in a straight line, by going directly to the heart of the matter. This all sounds simple and clear, but Malidoma says humans are the least intelligent forms of consciousness on the planet because we can find all kinds of good reasons why the shortest route won't work. Psychologists call this resistance. In the Yoruba language resistance is called *ibi*. The word *ibi* means afterbirth. When a fetus is in the womb the placenta is the source of life. After the child is born if the cord to the placenta is not

cut the placenta becomes toxic and the child dies. *Ibi* is the inability to let go of aspects of a former stage of development that need to be abandoned to insure personal growth. *Ibi* is the foundation of all religious dogma. The purpose of dogma is to create unyielding concensious reality. This in turn creates a serious conflict between what we want and what we need. Spirit always guides us towards what we need.

The purpose of invoking Òsòòsi is to get a clear vision of the straight path, or the shortest path to the next stage of development. When you do *Ifá* divination part of what is revealed is the shortest path of elevation. Òsòòsi is an important factor in almost any divination experience. Òsòòsi's ase or spiritual power is assisting you in the transformation process by giving you signs along the path. If you resist change by getting drunk Òsòòsi will show you the road to sobriety.

What tends to happen is that people will take a problem and will do what I call deify it. They will say everybody else who comes to *Ifá* gets their problem solved, but my problem is so unique it has no solution. Again this is a manifestation of *ibi*. There is no solution to the problem, because the idea is etched in stone in the *ori* of the person who is resistant to change.

When you are dealing with Òsòòsi on a real direct personal level, the shortest path is the ability to cut through those rigid ideas

that limit our perception of who we are. Anytime you have the idea you can't accomplish something, or have an idea that diminishes your sense of self, it is *Òsòòsi* we invoke to find an alternative vision. Anytime you deify a negative, the circle of your consciousness gets smaller. You regress rather than grow. Regression takes effort and eventually leads to suffering and illness. The reason regression takes effort is because you have to constantly distort your perception of reality to conform to your negative self image. This effort never works. Things can happen to challenge your negative self-image and rather than integrate it into your consciousness and grow, you don't see it, you distort it. Think about how often you have held on to an idea that is self destructive, that caused you to miss some manifestation of good fortune. Think about how it kept you from moving towards a goal because it was more important to hold on to the negative self-image than to embrace good fortune. An obvious example would be drug addiction. The only way I can get through the day is to get high. That becomes your deified concept of yourself. Everyday you hold on to that idea your objective perception of who you are and who you could become diminishes. On some level we all do this.

With *Òsòòsi* we begin to look for alternatives to what psychologists call dysfunction and what *Ifá* calls possession by *elenini*. In *Ifá* cosmology *elenini* is a self invoked and self generated demon.

Self created demons are the hardest to banish because they have no real existence. No matter what you suggest as a diviner the person is convinced your suggestions will be ineffective. If you do something effective a new *elenini* appears more clever, more insidious and more devious than the one before. As a diviner when you encounter *elenini*, you know you can't kill it; all you can do is educate it, try and convince the *elenini* that it is not real.

The *Ifá* concept of *Orun* is often poorly translated to mean Heaven. I believe *Orun* is more accurately translated to mean the invisible dimension. There are invisible light rays that have an observable influence on visual reality. If we make a horizontal line that represents the spectrum of light, the top end is ultra violet and the bottom end is infrared. Western science tells us we look at the light spectrum somewhere in the middle. This means there are vibrations of light on the lower end and on the higher end of the spectrum that we cannot see. *Ifá* teaches the idea that the realm of Spirit or invisible influences exists on the upper and lower spectrum of light as well as in multiple dimensions of reality. This means we can say that there is an invisible dimension that helps shape the physical dimension. The science of Quantum Physics tells us we live in a ten dimensional Universe where there are invisible influences beyond the spectrum of light. In my opinion this is what *Ifá* means when it speaks of *Orun*. It is not heaven, it is not pearly gates, it is a invisible

dimension of our physical environment that has substance, effect and real power to shape and influence the world we see.

Òsòòsi is the ability to project our *ori* or consciousness into the invisible realm. In this realm we have access to the spectrum of time beyond the present moment. This means we can see the future, and we can see those influences that affect our destiny. When Èsù pushes us into the realm of the unknown it is Òsòòsi who gives us the vision of the road home. In *Ifá* the road home or *ile l'ona* is a symbolic reference to reclaiming our center the place of balance between the head and the heart.

What is it that allows us to leap beyond time? In normal states of consciousness we are controlled by gravity, time and substance. If we have a different field of gravity and a different sense of time, we would be looking at a different frequency along the spectrum of light. When you have Òsò the ability to go out of your body, then the first thing you are doing is liberating yourself from the effects of gravity. In addition to being able to go into the forest and see things in the physical realm, you can also glimpse the invisible realm that shapes life on Earth. It is my belief that the really wise and adept masters of *Ifá* including the adepts of Òsòòsi see those dimensions of light that literally structure physical reality. If you can physically enter this dimension you can see these invisible influences and you can affect them in ways that will appear to be magic to those who are unfamiliar

with this realm. Your actions will appear miraculous. They are not. You simply have access to commonly unseen spectrums of light. If you don't know how a car works, the work of a mechanic can seem like magic.

In *Ifá* there are two ways to enter the invisible realm. One is through the use of *eiye* which is the spirit of a dead bird used to pull yourself out of your body. The other is through invocation of *Òsòòsi*. *Ifá* has its own tradition of elementals and little people and they are associated with *Òsòòsi* who function as guides in the invisible realm. They are generally described in one of two forms. One is as small people who look like regular people in terms of their proportions; except they're less than a foot tall. The other form is what I call little fur balls tiny round animals covered with hair.

When these spirits appear visually and spontaneously out in the forest it becomes a matter of caution. Prior to their appearance there is usually a flash of light similar to the flashbulb on a camera. When you get into the upper regions of the light spectrum time and space become distorted. If the fur balls appear and you follow them you can literally disappear and reappear somewhere else. This is not far different from the description of UFO abductions. I'm not sure what we call Alien abduction isn't an interdimensional phenomenon rather than an outer space phenomenon. The point is *Òsòòsi*'s helpers are taking you into the invisible realm and this is a long and well-

are transparent, they are tactile. If you reach out and touch it then there is a sense of physical interaction.

Òsòòsi initiates have the ability to go into possession with the spirit of animals. In the West this is called shape shifting. When you go into possession with the spirit of an animal you don't necessarily look like the animal to other humans. You feel like the animal to other animals, it is a vibration shift. This is an important tool for hunting. If you are able to go into possession with the spirit of an animal, then you have the ability to blend in with those animals in the forest. In this state you are able to communicate with animals and call them to you. Hunters with this ability frequently go into the forest and retrieve game without using weapons.

Because Òsòòsi has the ability to go into the invisible realm Òsòòsi can identify the invisible spirits of the land we live on. In Africa Òsòòsi is used to identify that which is indigenous to Africa. When you have a displaced Òsòòsi, in the West, you have some fundamental issues to resolve regarding the use of ritual technology in a new environment. The first problem is to identify those plants that can be used in a ceremonial way. They may not be the same the plants you would use in Africa. It is possible in the invisible realm to go into dialogue with plants. You can ask what effect the plants will have on human consciousness. One of the functions of Òsòòsi is to identify the function of various aspects of the ecological support system. Herbs

and plants are an essential aspect of *Ifá* worship. When you go to the market in Nigeria there are booths that have hundreds of different kinds of tree bark. Each sample has a specific function and a name that reflects the function. Beyond the plant realm, rivers, caves and mountains have specific spiritual functions that can be determined through the invocation of Òsòòsi.

When we build *Igbodu* in the Diaspora the first task is to identify the natural source of the particular power that you are working with. You don't go to the ocean to worship the spirit of the river and you don't go to the mountain to worship the spirit of the desert. If you have thousands of miles of flat forest it may not be readily apparent what forces are strongest in a particular area. It may not be apparent what the spiritual use of that land was in the past. The Catholic Church was notorious for building churches on the sacred sites of indigenous people. Africans in forced exile were much more respectful. They invoked Òsòòsi to discover how the land was used before they arrived. They invoked Òsòòsi to discover the name of the indigenous spirits of the land and they honored them in conjunction with the *Orisa* worshiped by their ancestors. Òsòòsi was invoked to insure nothing was done in conflict with the traditional indigenous uses of the land. If you want to honor the Spirit of the place you are standing on right now, one way you find out what was here is to invoke Òsòòsi and have Òsòòsi bring back the information. Òsòòsi will

insure you are not invoking Spirits whose power conflicts with those Spirits already present which would neutralize their effectiveness. If you invoked the Spirit of Fire in a place used to invoke the Spirit of Water you might negate any spiritual power you are trying to generate.

One of the big unwritten chapters in American history is the relationship between Native Americans and African Americans, especially during forced exile and the period immediately after the Civil War. Many Africans moved to Oklahoma and Florida. When two cultures get together they exchange ideas. The relationship between herbs and the land as it was preserved in Native American spirituality was assimilated into traditionally African spirituality as it was practiced in the Diaspora. It is my belief that *Òsòòsi* played a significant role in this assimilation process. *Òsòòsi* was a spiritual mediator in the blending of these two traditions. The Language of *Orisa* in Cuba is a mixture of Yoruba, Spanish and Native American dialects. That is a telling combination forming its own dialect called *Lucumi*.

The exploration of *Òsòòsi* is not, in my opinion, limited to life on this planet. The Dogons of northwest Africa have a ritual they do every 51 years to celebrate the elliptic of the dark star that travels around Sirius. They have been doing this ritual for thousands of years. They have mapped the orbit of Sirius and its companion star

and they celebrate the cycle of the orbit. The first time the companion star to Sirius was seen by a telescope was about ten years ago. It is invisible to the naked eye. The Dogon is either a remarkable coincidence, or they received the information from extra terrestrials, or they have highly evolved use of out of body perception. There may be no way to accurately trace the history of this ritual, but the skills associated with Òsòòsi might provide a clue.

The Yoruba folklore of the Diaspora says Òsòòsi owned a magical parrot. In some regions of Nigeria parrots are taught ofo ase which are words of power used for invocation. When these words are spoken by a parrot there is no concern that the invocation will be infected with negative intentions. One day Òsòòsi went hunting because there was no food in his village. When he returned home Òsòòsi discovered his parrot was missing. Using his magic arrow he shot it into the air and prayed that it would strike the person responsible for the disappearance of his bird. The arrow struck and killed his mother. There is implied within this story a caution against using the power of Spirit indiscriminately.

In my lineage Òsòòsi has two manifestations Òsòòsi Okunrin meaning the male aspect and Òsòòsi Obinrin meaning the female aspect. Òsòòsi Okunrin is used to trigger out of body experience in an effort to explore the external world. Òsòòsi Obinrin is used to trigger an internal examination of self. Working in tandem the two aspects

Before you can begin a spiritual journey, you have to come face to face with your inner self. If you are not face to face with your inner self you are in a state of *Èṣù ni ba ko*, or in proper Yoruba *Èṣù ipako* the Spirit of the Trickster blocks my growth. According to *Ifá* anyone who is not centered has tension in the back of their neck. This is the place that links the head and the heart. When the head and heart are in conflict we are stuck in a fragment of our consciousness attempting to deify our limited world view. Once you are thinking the same thing you are feeling, the head and the heart are in alignment. When you experience balance you are no longer possessed by a fragment of your consciousness; you are potentially able to experience the ase that comes from the symbolic center of the *Ifá* tray. You are at a place where you can open the door that will allow you to step on the path.

Understanding the path or getting a sense of where the path is taking us is the function of Òsòṣi. For me the best way to communicate with Òsòṣi is by meditating in an inspiring place in Nature. Take any question that is a source of confusion and sit with the question from sun up to sun down in a place of tranquility. In Native American spiritual tradition this is commonly referred to as a vision question. I recommend holding the question and fasting as a way to find our link with Òsòṣi as guide to the invisible realm. Ask the question, then notice when your mind wanders and ask the

question again. Issues of intense confusion can make us ineffective in the world. In the West we are not accustomed to giving yourself permission to contemplate spiritual growth. If you ask Òsòòsi to give you a vision of the path out of confusion, if you are willing to ask the question and confront your fears, the prayer will be answered.

For those who have received an consecrated Òsòòsi with *ebora* can use the following *oriki* to call the Spirit of the tracker.

ORÍKÌ ÒSÓÒSÌ OKUNRIN
(Praising the Spirit of the Tracker)

Olog arare, agbani nijo to buru, Òrìsà ipapo adun, koko ma panige. Ase.

Master of himself, Wise one who gives blessings,
Spirit of sweat togetherness, divination guides the
hunter. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÒSÓÒSÌ OKUNRIN
(Praising the Spirit of the Tracker)

Àrà l'èmí n f'Òsòòsi dá. Àrà nì n f'Òsòòsi dá. Ase.

Invocations are my stock in trade with the Spirit of
the Tracker. Invocations are the stock in trade of
the Spirit of the Tracker. May it be so.

Learning the art of astral travel is difficult without a teacher, but not impossible. The Western literature on remote viewing is a similar phenomenon. The books on remote viewing can give the serious student of *Òsòòsi* the beginning tools for developing this important spiritual tool. Remote viewings involves projecting your consciousness to a specific location then describing the smells, the sounds, the impressions and the feelings before attempting to focus on specific details. The exercises in the books on the subject allow for the student to practice skills, which I believe, are latent in all of us.

Clearing Away Obstacles The *Ifá* Concept of *Ogun*

Èṣù throws us into the unknown destroying the self-imposed boundaries created by dogma and complacency. Every spiritual quest is a finite effort to grasp an infinite mystery. The effort remains for an

unreachable goal. To know God is to become God and *Èṣù* is a constant reminder of the folly of such an effort. What is possible is a shift in our consensious reality, an expansion of our understanding of self and World. *Ifá* calls this expansion the revelation of the *awo* or mystery of *Oriṣa*. In *Ifá* cosmology *Oriṣa* are the knowable fingers on the unknowable hand of the Creator. Once you are convinced you know everything you are unconsciously invoking disruption from the Spirit of the Trickster. Loosing our perception of self and world is the single most frightening moment in human experience. Loss of self results in sheer terror from head to toe. In our panic to recover from the pain, confusion, and panic caused by the loss of cherished beliefs we encounter *Èṣù* at the crossroads, meaning we have a choice. In *Ifá* the choice is between *ire* and *ibi*, the choice between progression or regression, enlightenment or resistance to change.

Those who choose *ibi* can never convince themselves they have made a wise choice. Instead they surround themselves with like-minded people and go through the daily ritual of looking for the external affirmation that will heal the deeply felt wound of uncertainty and insecurity. Those who choose *ire* struggle with confusion in an effort to find a way out of the wilderness.

Òsòḍsi gives us a vision of the path leading from confusion to clarity. If it does not matter where you are going any path will do. If you are determined to expand your consciousness in the journey

towards grasping your personal destiny then the direct path is preferable. The direct path involves accurately identifying the problem then finding the most efficient solution. In my experience as a diviner I am convinced that ninety percent of any problem solving process is accurately identifying the real source of a particular conflict. If your car will not start because the carburetor is broken you can change the muffler fifty times and the carburetor is still broken. When a person is confused about the source of a problem they get stuck in a cycle of making the same mistakes over and over again. If you loose five jobs in a row because you are chronically late for work blaming the boss does not fix the problem. After the source of the problem becomes clear the solution is not complicated. Too often we turn to divination and the oracle in hopes of finding a "magical" solution to a problem we do not want to face directly. This approach never works, ever.

We live in a holographic universe meaning every part of the world is a reflection of the rest of the world. *Ifá* teaches that everything in Nature has consciousness. This means the solutions to our problems are all around us all the time. Human consciousness is created in a way that makes it possible to project our thoughts anywhere, any time. Human consciousness is transcendent meaning we can search the universe for solutions to any problem. In the Western world this ability is generally called imagination and

imagination is often considered one step away from daydreaming and foolishness. Imagination is actually the key to unlocking the ase or power of the Spirit of the Tracker. If you can imagine a solution to a problem you can implement the solution. If the solution is effective you can validate your vision. If you want a house and you cannot imagine it, the house will not be built. Vision always precedes manifestation.

If you are stuck making the same mistake over and over again, any alternative action brings you closer to the solution if for no other reason than the simple fact that you have new information on what does not work. *Ibi* or resistance to change is rooted in the fear of failure. It is possible to live in a community where failure is severely denigrated and it is possible to live in a community in which failure is supported as part of the learning process. If we are afraid of failure we are embracing a self-imposed negative that is a serious impediment to self-discovery. We fear failure because we fear public ridicule. Holding on to that fear can quickly and easily become a full time job. The single most effective methodology for making progress along any spiritual path is the ability to admit making a mistake. Every spiritual discipline I have encountered in my life is plagued with self-styled experts who never make mistakes. Òsòòsì as a Spiritual Force in the Universe says own your mistakes, learn from your mistakes consider alternative actions.

When you see where the path is leading *Ifá* says invoke *Ogun* to clear away the obstacles. *Ogun* transfers the vision of *Òsòòsì* from the realm of possibility to the realm of reality. That is why *Èsù*, *Òsòòsì* and *Ogun* are grouped together as *ebora*. Their interaction is the fundamental *Ifá* paradigm for personal growth. Every experience brings the potential for increased personal growth, even when the experience gives us a clear understanding of what not to do in the future. The confusion generated by the process of personal growth is the frequent confusion between what we want and what we need. *Ebora* always bring us what we need. If you waste time asking *ebora* to bring you what you want you are only delaying your encounter with *Èsù*. The more you delay this encounter the more disruptive it becomes. Demanding that Spirit bring you what you want is a train wreck waiting to happen. It is our job to recognize the blessing that comes when *ebora* brings us what we need. It is our job to recognize the blessing even when it comes on the heels of what appears to be great personal loss. If you are in a bad relationship, working in a dead end job, living in a polluted environment with the support of an extended family that apposes your growth the road to self discovery only starts after you lose your job, your relationship, your home and your peers. The alternative is to repeat the same mistakes over and over again. Repeating the same mistakes literally invokes misfortune. It is the source of bad luck or what *Ifá* calls *ori ibi*. Bad luck is not a

curse from the Creator. Bad luck is a self-generated failure to embrace change. *Ifá* defines good luck as being in the right place at the right time with the right people with the personal resources to take advantage of an opportunity. Good fortune does not come to you by giving candy to a rock. We make offerings to Spirit so Spirit will guide towards self-revelation.

The relationship between the *ebora* is a description of the fundamental structure of consciousness itself. This description is not limited to human perception. It contains clues for grasping the basic structure of the visual carbon based universe. The paradigm is rooted in the structure of *ori*. The stories associated with *Èsù*, *Òsòòsi* and *Ogun* are expressions of the symbolic language used by *Ifá* to describe the inner workings of the unknowable knower. The relationship between these three primal Spiritual Forces is an expression of the relationship between the inner self, the self and the higher self in the process of transformation and change. All personal growth moves through the cycles described by *Ifá* as *awo ebora* or the mystery of those who take our offerings to the Immortals. Life, death, transformation and rebirth is the way of the world.

The Nigeria mathematician Dr. Oyibo recently offered a solution to the problem of unified field theory. This problem has plagued science since the time of Einstein. Unified field theory is a mathematical formula used to describe the interrelated nature of all

things. In an interview Dr. Oyibo said the inspiration for his solution to this problem came from the elders of *Ifá*. Exactly, the Universe is hydrogen atoms going through the process of life, death, transformation and rebirth. Stars are huge furnaces that transform hydrogen into the spectrum of elements. Fire creates diversity, water creates stability, air sustains life, and life returns to its source. Our consciousness reflects this cycle because it is born of Creation. Consciousness did not become manifest in the world with the birth of humans it came into Being at the moment of Creation of the Universe. Everything is Spirit looking for a glimpse of Source.

If you read the traditional religious literature from Africa closely you will discover there is a very ancient, wide spread, cross-cultural reverence for the Spirit of Iron. In Yoruba culture this Spirit is called *Ogun*, north of Nigeria you will sometimes find the Spirit of Iron called *Ogu*, and other similar sounding spiritual names. Throughout West Africa there is a tradition of making the profession of blacksmith a sacred vocation. There is also extensive indications these trade skills represent a cross cultural interaction that stretches between the Middle East through Africa and across the ocean to South America. I am referring to interaction that clearly predates the voyages of Christopher Columbus.

Ile Ife is the sacred city of *Ifá*. One of the prominent sacred sites in Ile Ife is *Oranmiyan's* staff. In Ile Ife *Oranmiyan* is considered an

ancestor of Sango the Spirit of Lightning. The staff is made from stone and is conservatively dated by anthropologists to be eighteen hundred years old. Near the top of the staff is the symbol of a trident made from iron nails. The nails are believed to be as old as the staff. The nails show no indication of rust. Modern technology is unable to make iron nails that do not rust. The mystery of West African blacksmiths includes the knowledge of how to alter the atomic structure of iron so there is no erosion. The gold found on statues in ancient Egypt was electro plated meaning it was molded through the use of electricity. The gold is itself appears to have been artificially produced. Academics ignore these anomalies because it challenges dogma. As a group academics are profoundly resistant to taking the hero's journey. Conscious reality dies hard.

The ability to alter the structure of reality is a function of sound. This is the basis for the *Ifá* belief in the power of prayer. The mechanism for smelting iron ore in traditional Yoruba culture is based on the effective use of the power of the word. *Ogun* blacksmiths who work with iron consider incantations to be an essential part of their tool making technology. The invocations of the initiate affect the quality of the metal being processed. This exact same idea was used to make the samurai swords in ancient Japan. Steel that is tempered by words is a manifestation of the reality that everything in the visible universe has consciousness.

Russian scientists have confirmed that DNA can be altered by sound. This is the basis for the African notion that prayer is an effective tool for healing the physical body. The hieroglyphics found on temple walls in Egypt talk about genetic engineering and the deliberate effort to transform the vessel that holds human consciousness. These texts have been dismissed by those who reject the notion that sound can transform matter. Rejecting an idea does not mean it is not true.

Òsòòsi brings us a vision of a better life. *Ogun* has the task of implementing that vision. The word *Ogun* is difficult to translate into English, but we have some indication from the word *oogun*. The letter O in Yoruba is used to indicate owner, or one who possess something. The letter O is also used to suggest someone or some Spiritual Force has mastered a particular mystery of Creation. The word *oogun* also means medicine. So in a sense the word for medicine is owner of *ogun*. I am using the word medicine to mean sources of both physical and spiritual transformation. If we can look at medicine as something that attacks illness, or as something that restores vitality I believe it is a reasonable translation. In a sense you have *ogun* as the suffix of *oogun*, suggesting it is the source of vitality or the source of aliveness. In my opinion this gives us an indication that *Ogun* is a linguistic reference to the will to survive. You could also say survival of that which asserts its own will to make a place for itself in the world.

English does not have a single word that expresses this idea, but it is a commonly understood concept in *Ifá* that is associated with the Spirit of *Ogun*.

There is also an element of aggression implied in the word *Ogun*. In nature there is competition for the available resources. To become successful in the realm of physical survival vitality and assertiveness are required. If we take this idea and see how it relates to the concept of medicine we can get some sense of the origin of the word in metaphysical terms. The theological concept of *Ogun* is related to the idea of survival through assertive and aggressive action directed towards maintaining physical life in the visible universe. It is the idea that large trees diminish the possibility of survival for smaller trees. Every animal in the forest is potential food for other animals. The ability to stalk and slaughter food is an essential element in the ecology of the forest. If the cheetah did not attack the Zebra, the Zebra population would destroy the savannah.

In the human realm *Ogun* represents the shift from hunter-gatherer consciousness to the collective effort to create civilization and the direction of resources towards specific groups of people. To put the idea in bio-chemical language we are talking about testosterone. It is what I would call the dynamic, assertive, aggressive, expansive quality in Nature Itself which is expressed by the Spirit of *Ogun*. This is an observable Force in Nature that only

becomes destructive when it is out of balance with the nurturing, contractive qualities associated with Female Spirits. The admonition in *Ifá* to speak *ori tutu* or with a cool head is an admonition to keep the spiritual power of *Ogun* under control so that it is only released in appropriate circumstances.

When *Ifá* scripture speaks about *Ogun* it is often in reference to blacksmiths and toolmakers. This is a symbolic perspective because it suggests one person figured out how to make use of iron technology and now we are deifying that person. *Ogun* is the collective consciousness of anyone who ever worked with tools. *Ogun* is also a primal manifestation of assertive energy as a Force in Nature. I call *Ogun* the Spirit of Iron because it is the common translation of the word and because *Ogun* is the Spirit who is honored by traditional Yoruba toolmakers but *Ogun's* influences is not limited to the methodology of tool making.

Historically the urge for survival led to the development of hunting, and to the development of marking time. The value of marking time was the ability to anticipate a shift in the seasons and to develop adequate protection for cycles of harsh weather eventually leading to the ability to plant crops. We are talking about primal motivational forces in the development of human consciousness leading to the development of civilization. Hunting and gathering food only supports a limited population. As extended families grew in size

the need for alternative strategies developed. The ability to recognize seasonal change and the ability to use this information as a basis for farming represented a huge shift in consensious reality for life on the planet.

The mysteries associated with *Ogun* are related to both the sacred art of hunting and the sacred art of tool making. The ritual initiation for *Ogun* worshippers typically takes from one to three days. Initiation is not training; it is merely permission to study. Those *Ogun* initiates who have a destiny to learn hunting must go through an apprenticeship with *Oya*, the Spirit of the Wind and the Guardian of the animals of the forest. This training involves learning the altered states of consciousness associated with *Òsòòsi* and learning the rules of conservation and animal care associated with *Oya*.

Combining the skills of the blacksmith and the hunter, advanced students of *Ogun*, are able to go into the forest with a knife and make a rifle. They cut bees wax to make a mold, dig iron from the soil, retrieve flint from the river bed, use bamboo for a stock and make powder from chicken dung. Those who master the art of *ofò ase* use invocations to call animals out of hiding, to place them in temporary paralysis and bring them home without the use of weapon. I have seen *Ogun* initiates slaughter water buffalo by whispering in their ear. These skills seem strange and unbelievable to western urban dwellers that have no need for these skills in order to survive in the city. They

represent latent potential in all of us that only becomes manifest when the need arises.

I believe the historical genesis of the human relationship to *Ogun* emerged out of the tradition of men as hunters and women as timekeepers. This is a separation of gender roles that was likely established for practical reasons. Women on their cycle leave a scent that is easily detected by animals. At the same time the cycle becomes a built in clock. Hunting and time keeping were separated by gender as a matter of practical convenience. The point is there is no indication in this separation of functions that men are better than women. There is simply an indication of aptitude making certain tasks easier to accomplish. *Ifá* cycles are based on a four-day week. The days are monitored by tying and untying knots on a string, which is part of the divination set. The four-week is a cycle within a cycle leading to the sixteen-day invocations for communal good fortune and the ninety-one-day cycle invoking good fortune for the change in seasons.

We get another indication about the genesis of our understanding of *Ogun* by looking at the symbolism used to represent *Ogun* in the Diaspora. *Ogun's* is usually seat in an iron pot with three legs, wrapped with a chain and filled with spikes. There is usually a knife and maybe some tools in the pot. What do these things represent? With the pot, we have the symbolism of the womb, and we

also have the idea of three legs. Three is symbolic number of *Onile* or Mother Earth. *Ifá* says that whenever two *Awo* (diviners) meet three are always present, the third being the Earth Herself. Three symbolizes the relationship to the Earth this gives us the symbol of the womb supported by the symbol for the Earth a clear indication of the relationship between masculine dynamics and feminine form.

The pot is surrounded by a chain. In *Ifá* the chain is used as symbol for the link between Heaven and Earth, a link that is sustain by the genetic chain of DNA. There is a piece of red cloth around the pot which is filled with iron spikes. There is some scientific indication the rust on the iron deposits at the bottom of the ocean created bacteria which became the source of the first single cell life forms on Earth. This would be the beginning of evolution and the basis for *Ogun*'s praise name *Oguntobi* meaning *Ogun* is the Father of all. The seed of life in the womb of the ocean is now symbolized by the iron spikes in the iron cauldron of *Ogun*. In the pot iron spikes or tools symbolize sperm in the womb. The female component of *Ogun* is diminished in the West. What is used to consecrate an *Ogun* pot is *irosun*. This *irosun* is red powder from the cam wood tree. In Yoruba the word *irosun* is sometimes used to refer to menstrual blood from the elision *ire osun* meaning good fortune that comes from the guardian of the head which I would interpret to mean genetic inheritance from our

ancestors. If you are putting red cam wood powder on the *Ogun* pot you are symbolizing the primal procreative drive for survival.

In the sacred city of Ile Ife there is an *Ogun* shrine in the place of the *Oni* who is the Spiritual leader or King of traditional Yoruba culture. The shrine to *Ogun* has three large pyramid shaped meteorites. In ancient Egypt these stones were called *Benben* stones and were placed on top of obelisks to represent the original seed of life on Earth. The ancient Egyptians and Sumerians believed human life originated on Mars. The word Cairo is the Coptic word for Mars. The People of northeast African who migrated south and formed a single empire under Shake Zulu call themselves Kea Zulu meaning we came from Mars. Before Islam the Kasbah Stone in Mecca was used as a communal ancestor shrine by various cultures that passed through the Sahara desert as part of extended trade routes. The stone is a huge meteorite in the shaped of a woman's reproductive organ and was original used to symbolize the Mother of all humanity. Now the stone is used to symbolize Allahat the female aspect of Allah. In the last decade the research at NASA regarding Mars shifted from asking the question is there life on Mars to asking the question is there still life on Mars. In a story that has gone largely unreported, Islamic clerics have sued NASA for trespassing on their ancestral land. The mystery of *Ogun* clearly transcends the

development of tools and reaches back to fundamental mysteries of Creation at the beginning of the development of life on Earth.

In the *Ifá* Creation Myth, *Ogun's* initial effort to create civilization failed due to an excess of aggression. Civilization is saved through the efforts of *Orunmila* who teaches *Ogun* the principles of good character. I believe this is a historical memory of the fact that unchecked procreative, aggressive behavior is not the optimal principle for social organization. We have the idea of ethical judgments tempering the pure unbridled aggressive nature of *Ogun* as a Spiritual Force in Creation. The story about *Orunmila's* relationship with *Ogun* does not mean that *Ogun* is "evil," it doesn't make *Ogun* "bad," it doesn't make *Ogun* the "Devil," it doesn't make *Ogun* a "Blood thirsty warrior." It does make *Ogun* part of a bigger picture, in which the issue of balance becomes important. Every aspect of the wheel must play its part fully.

When *Ogun's* power, or *ase* is needed; it needs to be fully expressed in its essence to find its proper place in the world. One of the ways this is done in traditional Yoruba communities is to allow the elders of *Ogun* to make life force offerings. In many Yoruba communities there is room for specialization. You can have a ceremony for *Oya* (the Spirit of the Wind) and when it comes time to make an offering of a goat, an initiate of *Ogun* can be called in to make the cut. After the offering is made the *Ogun* initiate might leave

the ceremony. I am speaking about what is commonly called "animal sacrifice." The word "sacrifice" is a Christian term; the word in Yoruba is *ebo*. Sacrifice does not translate to *ebo*. *Ifá* does not sacrifice animals. Animal sacrifice suggests the animal is killed and discarded. The *Ifá* concept of *ebo* is to provide a feast for the family or the community. When you live in an environment that depends on domesticated animals for food, the slaughtering of an animal is always a sacred act, just as hunting was a sacred act when communities depended on hunting for survival. The concept is universal and the denigration of the tradition is myopic. Once a year the Pope offers a sheep as a sacrifice to re-invoke the power of the Mass. The difference is that the Pope is rarely demonized in the way African spirituality is commonly diminished.

In traditional Yoruba communities, the *Ogun* initiates slaughter domestic animals, and hunt those wild animals that are a part of the diet. They sometimes specialize, so not every *Ogun* initiate necessarily does both. All *Ogun* initiates are trained in the spiritual discipline of preparing sanctified food, meaning food that is blessed during the preparation and consumption. The process is similar and in many cases identical to the preparation of *Kosher* food as described in the Old Testament. *Kosher* food means food that has been blessed as part of preparation process. The key element in the preparation of sacred food is assuming a position of emotional detachment. Too

much empathy for the animal makes slaughtering the animal impossible; any enjoyment from the process is spiritual inappropriate. There is only position acceptable to an *Ogun* initiate while making *ebo* and that is one of perfect alignment between the inner self, the outer self and the higher self.

When you go through a rite of passage, or a personal transformation, it is the *Ifá* belief that the more people who pray on your behalf, the more likely it will be that your prayers will be heard. In order to get a lot of people to support your spiritual elevation you feed them. On the day you announce you have a new child you feed the community. On the day you announce you have made a commitment to move from being a child to an adult, you feed the community. On the day you announce your intentions to sanctify a personal relationship you feed the community. On the day you mourn the passing of a revered elder you feed the community. After the feast no one in the community will allow you to ignore your commitment. I tried for thirty years to give up a tobacco addiction. One day I swore an oath to *Ogun* to the end the addiction. I feed fifty people and made a public announcement regarding my intentions. I broke the addition completely that day.

Why would you provide a feast in a ceremonial way? This is based on the idea of reaffirming our covenant with Creation. When a priest of *Ogun* slaughters a goat, he precedes the gesture by saying

may the spirit of this goat reincarnate as food to feed my family in the future. You are acknowledging of the interconnected relationship between all things in Nature. It is not about the blood. The blood is the seal to the covenant. There is a mistaken notion in the Diaspora that the more blood you use, the more the power you raise. In Africa they return the blood to the Earth. When the blood is placed in the Earth it has regenerative value, like fertilizer. The elders take a feather and dip the feather into the blood in the hole and touch the feather to the shrine being fed. Quantity is not a factor. There are variations on this process, the point is food is being prepared for the community, the blood is incidental. The act of reaffirming our covenant with the Spirit only requires a small amount of blood. It is the sincerity of the ritual act that carries the power and not the quantity of blood. The notion that massive amounts of blood have some positive spiritual value is an idea that was created in Hollywood to justify obscene special effects. The extent to which the *Ifa* community in the Diaspora has embraced this idea is a testimony to the effects of media conditioning.

There is another aspect of a life force offering that is essential to understanding the *awo* or mystery of *Ogun*. Based on the *Ifá* belief in reincarnation, animals pass into the realm of the ancestors. We pray directly to the animals so our prayers may be taken by the animals into *Orun* or the invisible realm. *Ifá* teaches the idea that everything in

the World has consciousness and that Spirit can communicate with all things. *Ifá* also embraces the idea of psychometry. If I touch your shoes I can tell where you have been during the day. Your prayer against the head of the animal transfers that message to both Spirit and to those who share in the meal. *Ebo* is the process of giving our prayers physical substance in the community and in the realm of the ancestors.

When you make a ritual offering you are dealing with the power of *Ajala* the Yoruba word for warrior. The word *Ajala* is an elision of *aja ala* meaning dog of light. In *Ifá* a dog is a messenger to Spirit like the Nimbus in Egyptian culture, it is not a derogatory reference. When you say you are a dog of white light, you are saying you are a messenger of ethical conduct. In the act of making *ebo* or offerings you become *Ajala*. You become the vehicle in which ethical conduct is incarnated. Light in *Ifá* is associated with the idea that everything is connected. To experience light in its primal manifestation is to have a mystical experience that allows you to feel your connection with all things. This experience comes into Being in the *Odu Otura meji*. There is no *Ajala* without a manifestation of *Otura meji*. *Ala* is a symbolic reference to mystical vision. *Aja* is a symbolic reference to the ability to remain connected to spirit to reinforce your original mystic vision with information relevant in the moment.

The *Ifá* concept of *Ajala* includes the component of mystic vision and the *Ifá* concept of *Ogun* includes the component of *s'otito s'odido* meaning state the facts tell the truth. In the Yoruba folklore associated with *Ogun* there is a story about *Ogun* working as an executioner for an *Oba* or king. Someone has stolen one of the *Oba's* goats and the *Oba's* messenger has accused a specific suspect who the messenger claims he saw take the goat. The messenger brings the suspect to the palace for execution. When the messenger arrives with the suspect *Ogun* decapitates the messenger saying it is taboo to lie. I know the suspect is innocent because I stole the goat. The mystery of *Ogun* becomes finding a place that will open a portal for truth. In *Ifá* unconditional love or *Ifé* is the only truth, all else is illusion or *ibi*.

In traditional Yoruba culture an oath is sworn on a piece of iron in honor of *Ogun* as guardian of the truth. In contemporary judicial courts in Nigeria witnesses who swear to tell the truth have a choice between a Bible, a Koran or a piece of iron. Telling the truth, meaning be honest with yourself and others is the first step towards solving a problem because honestly holds the possibility of accurately identifying the source of confusion, and disruption.

A traditional *oriki* for *Ogun* says:

*Ba san ba pon ao lana to. Bi obi ba pon ao
lana to. B'orogbo ba pon ao lana to.*

Cut down the obstacles on the road.
When the cola nut is ripe it opens the
road. When the bitter cola is bitter it
opens the road.

*B'yay yay ba pon ao lana to. B'eyin ba pon
ao lana to. Da fun Ògún awo.*

When the fruit is ripe it opens the road.
When the palm fruit is ripe it opens the
road. The Spirit of Iron gives you his
secret.

*Ni jo ti ma lana lati ode. Òrun wa si is salu
aiye. Fun ire eda. Ase.*

Dancing outside opens the road. Heaven
comes to earth. For the benefit of all
people. May it be so.

This invocation is a metaphorical plea to *Ogun* to remove any obstacles that stand in the way of personal growth. For example the transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by the necessity to tell the truth. Children often lie to avoid punishment from adults. Past puberty this strategy can have drastic negative consequences for

anyone who is trying to find their place in the world. If you are stuck in the idea that deception is a way to avoid problems you will bring childish behavior into your adult years. Those who engage in deception have a tendency to blame others for their problems. If you think others are the source of trouble in your life and you invoke *Ogun* will create experiences that will bring the real issue into focus. Put simply *Ogun* will cause the lies to be exposed until the lesson that honesty is the most effective way to resolve conflict becomes apparent.

On a personal level the invocation of *Ogun* is a plea for abundance and according to *Ifá* spiritual discipline abundance comes as the result of the development of good character. It is *Ogun* we call on when we are ready to remove the self-delusional influences of hate, greed, envy, jealousy, confusion and arrogance that stand in the way of embracing personal destiny.

At times the determination to solve a problem can lead to confrontation with others. When peers who are afraid of personal change see some else begin the journey of personal development and growth they do everything possible to shame, intimidate and harass the person into staying stuck in old patterns of behavior. When ever we experience growth our circle of friends change. Some will support our growth others will not. In my experience we often get support

from those we least expect, and those who we assumed would be at our side frequently disappoint us.

The Yoruba folklore in the Diaspora about *Ogun* includes a story describing *Ogun Alara* the king of the village of *Alara*. One day *Ogun* took a trip to the forest to hunt and to enjoy his solitude. He hears great commotion in the village and quickly returns home. As he approaches the village he sees that it is under attack. Taking his machete *Ogun* protects his community and drives away the intruders. When the battle comes to an end *Ogun* is covered in blood. The people of *Alara* do not recognize him and fear his gruesome appearance. They ask *Ogun* to leave. *Ogun* cleans his face and asks the people why they do not recognize him. Feeling profound disappointment *Ogun* returns to the forest. The people of *Alara* beg him to come home and resume his position as king. *Ogun* hurls his cauldron into the air and when it lands on earth it creates a deep hole. *Ogun* tells the people of *Alara* if they ever need him to defend the village they can summon him by pulling on the chain around his iron pot.

As a son of *Ogun* and as a life long student of the martial arts there have been occasions when I have needed to protect my family and friends through the use of physical violence. On these occasions those who I protected were horrified and intimidated by my actions even though they were justified and effectively protected them from

injury. This is a common and understandable reaction that is difficult to resolve. The unasked question is this; if you could hurt others could you hurt me? There is no easy answer to this question, but it is clear to me that part of the mystery of *Ogun* involves addressing the issue head on. Part of the failure to heal Combat fatigue syndrome after the Vietnam War was the failure of the country to come to terms with this question as it applies to those who go to war. The question becomes even more difficult when in retrospect the reasons for going to work are subject to debate and deeply divisive disagreements.

Ogun initiates have their own style of martial art called *aki* meaning brave or courageous. The art uses wrestling techniques coupled with *ofo ase* used to disable or incapacitate an opponent. At the annual *Ifá* festival in Ile Ife the young men of *Egbe Ogun* engaged in a huge wrestling match. The last man standing wins. It is the daughters of *Osun* who do the *oriki* and sing the songs that bring the competitors back to normal non-aggressive states of consciousness. This is a communal ritual process based on a transcendent understanding of the forces of survival and aggression. For the women of *Osun* to be effective in their support of the combatants who are returning to normal consciousness they must before the ritual without judgment and without fear. This ritual is based on the understanding that within *ori* we find a place of balance between the head and the heart. Balance gives us a sense of self and world.

Balance puts actions into perspective. Balance creates the potential for transformation and change.

It is *Èṣù* who disrupts our sense of complacency given us a vision of self and world beyond our immediate perception. The disruption of *Èṣù* throws us into a world of fear, confusion, panic and dread. Through the invocation of *Òsòḍisi* our higher self can guide us to a vision of the path that will lead us out of darkness and into the light. When the steps we need to take are clear it is *Ogun* who gives us the will power and determination to actually walk the path.

Ogun the hunter, *Ogun* the toolmaker, *Ogun* the guardian of truth, *Ogun* the warrior are all expressions of the desire to transform vision into manifestation. The task of manifestation is always preceded by the need to transform self, the need to shift our perception of who we are and what we can do. This process is tempered by the concerns of *Oya* and *Qsun* who keep the uncontrolled aggression of *Ogun* in service of the greater good. The mystery of *Ogun* is the mystery of accessing both the courage and the healthy self-esteem needed to get something done.

Lesson 4

Anyone who wishes to speak to *Ogun* can take two railroad spikes and tie them together in a cross with red string or red yarn. Those who a traditional *Ogun* pot may use the following *oriki* as invocation to the Spirit of Iron.

ORÍKÌ ÒGÚN

(Praising the Spirit of Iron)

*Ògún Awo, Onile kangun kangun Òrun. O lomi nil feje we
olaso nle fi.*

The Mystery of the Spirit of Iron, The Spirit of Iron
has many homes in the Realm of the Ancestors.
The water of the Realm of the Ancestors surrounds
us, it is our abundance.

Imo kimo 'bora, ègbé lehin a nle a benbe olobe. Ase.

Wisdom of the Warrior Spirit, come guide my
Spiritual Journey with a strong hand. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÒGÚN
(Praising the Spirit of Iron)

Ògún okúnrin ogun ató polówó ikú. Eni tí somo éniyan dolólá.

Spirit of Iron, the powerful one, sufficiently great to avert
death. One who makes humans prosperous.

*Eni Ògún kò gbè bi eni tí ko róbì sebo. Gbigbé ni o gbè mi bí o ti
gbe Akinòrò ti ó fi kólé olá. Ase.*

One who is not enriched by the Spirit of Iron will find it
difficult to get sacrificial kola - nuts. Spirit of Iron enriches
me as you enriched Akinòrò and made him an eminent
man. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÒGÚN
ONÍRÈ
(Praising the Spirit of Iron, Chief of Onírè)

Ògún Onírè o. Ògún Onírè oni'rè. Òkè n'al kílénhin ìrè. Ire lona.
Ase.

Hail the Spirit of Iron, Chief of Onírè. Spirit of Iron, Chief of Onírè guardian of good fortune. The great mount that stands behind good fortune, bring us good fortune. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÒGÚN
ÌKÒLÉ
(Praising the Spirit of Iron from Ìkòlé)

Ògún Ìkòlé oni're onile kángun - kángun òde Òrun ègbé l'ehin,

Spirit of Iron from Ìkòlé owner of good fortune, owner of many houses in the Realm of the Ancestors, help those who journey,

Ògún Ìkòlé, Olumaki alase a júbà. Ase.

Spirit of Iron from Ìkòlé, Chief of Strength, the owner of strength, I salute you. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÒGÚN
ELÉMONA
(The Spirit of Iron from Elémona)

Ògún Elémona na ka nile. Ògún Elémona kobokobo, alagere
owo,

The Spirit of Iron from Elémona points his finger from his home. The Spirit of Iron from Elémona, the whipper, the owner of money,

*O*sibiriki, *a*lase *a* júbà. *A*se.

The one who bursts out suddenly. The owner of power, we give you thanks. May it be so.

ORÍKÌ ÒGÚN
AKÌRUN

(Praising the Spirit of Iron from Akìrun)

*O*jó Ògún Akìrun, *Sí lo, Sí lo, Sí lo, ni ma se aiyé. Ipé npé jú a si kùn fé fún.*

On the day the Spirit of Iron from Akìrun is angry, there is always disaster in the world. The eyelashes are full of water.

*M*o rí fàájì *r*e. *A*se.

I have seen your merriment. May it be so.

Communal Guidance

The *Ifá* Concept of Sango

Èṣù unexpectedly places us in the realm of confusion by collapsing the boundaries of a finite worldview. *Òsòḍì* gives us a vision of the methodology for reconstructing a new worldview based on a vision of unlimited horizons. *Ogun* brings us out of confusion and despair by using *Òsòḍì*'s vision as inspiration to fix real problems. *Ogun* fixes problems by first transforming our image of self. Transforming our image of self is the essence of spiritual growth. *Ifá* says anything you fix in your life becomes medicine for someone else.

In the language of the Grail Quest, the Knight finds his way out of the wilderness and brings a boon back to the castle. In the Grail Romances the boon is usually a magical sword, cup, plate or rod. These symbols are found on Tarot cards and they represent the healing power of earth, air, fire and water. We use the sword (air) for better understanding, we use the cup (water) for increased empathy, we use the rod (earth) to integrate thought and emotion and we use the shield (fire) to protect our self from negative thoughts and habits.

In the language of *Odu Ifá Obatala* and *Oya* are Spirits of Air, *Yemoja*, *Olokun* and *Ọsun* are Spirits of Water, *Ogun* and *Onile* are Spirits of the Earth and *Sango* and *Aganju* are Spirits of Fire. The medicine that is given to initiates by each of these Spirits is the result

of the revelation of *awo* the unveiling of a previously unknown dimension of self and world. The interaction between human consciousness and the consciousness of Nature has unlimited potential for revelation, inspiration and transformation. The gift of new medicine occurs as a result of the destruction of old boundaries, ineffective dogma, unproductive ideas, biased opinions and fear based actions. Understanding any aspect of the mystery of Creation always involves a call to courage, because the loss of self that precedes revelation is the single most frightening event in human experience. Our comfort with old images of self and world cause human consciousness to engage in fierce resistance to the elevation that comes by engaging in the hero's journey. Letting go of the old self involves a fear of the unknown that infuses every cell in our body with a sense of dread and apprehension.

Those who successfully complete the hero's journey add to the collective wisdom of a given culture. They serve as role models and mentors for the community and in the language of *Ifá* they become deified ancestors for future generations.

In *Ifá* scripture after *Ogun* clears a path to build a city, the task of organizing the community falls to his brother *Sango*. Most of the folklore associated with *Ogun* and *Sango* in the Diaspora characterizes them as having a hostile adversarial relationship. In traditional Yoruba culture this antagonism is not evident. If we examine the

color symbolism associated with *Ifá* Warrior Spirits the mystery of their relationship becomes clear. *Èṣù* is associated with red and black symbolizing expansive spiritual power emerging from the darkness of the invisible realm. *Òsòṣì* is multi-colored symbolizing the infinite possibilities manifested in every moment of Creation. In traditional Yoruba culture *Ogun* is represented by the color red representing pure expansive energy. *Sango* is represented by the colors red and white symbolizing the idea of expansive energy conditioned by mystic vision.

After *Ogun* resolves an internal conflict we turn to *Sango* for guidance on how to integrate the transformed self into the communal realm. Traditional Yoruba culture has strict codes of conduct designed to facilitate the smooth integration of wisdom into the extended family. For example a younger person never asks an older person how they are doing. The assumption is that the question would be answered honestly and the younger person would not have the wisdom or resources needed to assist the older person with any problems in their life. In other words the hero's journey of a grandparent includes the experience of being a parent, but the hero's journey of the parent has no wisdom associated with becoming an elder. The path from baby to child, from child to adult, from adult to grandparent and from grandparent to ancestor is marked by significant encounters with *Èṣù*. Every stage of development requires

a major reorganization of consciousness. This task is supported by communal rites of passage, but the task of walking the path remains a solitary challenge.

At times rites of passage occur innocently and spontaneously as expressed in the story about Sango visit to Ijebu. As a young man Sango was raised in the woods and knew nothing about life in the city. One day Sango decided to leave the forest and walked until he approached the edge of Ijebu. The people of Ijebu were plagued by a leopard who was attacking the children. The elders of Ijebu cast *Ifá* and the oracle said a great hunter would approach the city and rid the area of the dreaded leopard. Sango entered the city to find a large crowd welcoming him to their homes. The elders of Ijebu asked him if he would hunt the leopard. Because Sango had never seen a leopard he quickly agreed. The elders of Ijebu asked Sango if he needed a weapon to hunt the leopard. Looking around the compound Sango asked if he could have one of the cudgels used to pound yam into flour. Sango took the large stick and climbed a tree to take a nap. While he was sleeping the leopard passed under his tree and made a loud roar. Startled by the sound Sango woke up, fell from the tree and accidentally hit the leopard on the head with the cudgel killing the animal without further struggle. On that day the people of Ijebu made Sango their king.

In this story Sango solves a problem based on innocence and lack of understanding. It is a rite of passage. Sango was raised alone in the woods. Coming out of the forest is a symbolic expression of Sango's relationship with *Ogun*, clearing a path from the forest to the city. Whatever internal conflicts Sango needed to resolve on the journey towards Ijebu shift in juxtaposition to his relationship to a new environment. This is the first challenge when re-entering the mundane world after completing the hero's journey. Personal clarity and growth need to be positioned in the context of communal responsibility and expectation. The expectation of the people of Ijebu was that Sango was a great hunter. Because we live in a consensuous reality expectation can transform the physical world. Sango was successful in his challenge because the people of Ijebu expected him to be successful.

In traditional Yoruba culture the extended family is the training school for spiritual growth. You graduate from the school when you become a grandparent. At this point in the life cycle you have learned the important life lessons associated with raising a family, protecting your community, and becoming skilled in a specific profession. As an elder your responsibility is to teach the younger generations, to share the experience of your boon, to become a role model and mentor for the problems you have fixed in your life, to preserve the legacy of

your medicine for your descendants. This is done through the art of blessing those who look to you for guidance.

The art of blessing is the foundation of traditional Yoruba greetings. When a younger person meets an older person the younger person says *alafia* meaning I come in peace. The older person responds with the blessing *Se alafia lowo*, meaning may peace bring you good fortune. When a younger person greets an elder in *Ifá* the younger person says, *a buru a boye*, meaning I take my negativity from the earth. The elder responds with the blessing by saying, *a boye a bosise* meaning I take your negativity and transform it with Spiritual power.

In Western culture the literature on child development is clear that the most effective, and efficient method to guide behavior is verbal affirmation of positive behavior. In my travels throughout the *Ifá/Oriṣa* communities I find the biggest difference between traditional African extended families and Western extended families is the loss of the ability of elders in the Diaspora to bless family members.

Part of the consensuous reality in the United States is the belief that compliments are a sign of weakness. There is a serious dysfunctional need in many communities in the Diaspora for elders to “put people in their place”. This inappropriate behavior gives the elder a temporary feeling of superiority based on the ability to diminish and denigrate someone else. This foolishness usually takes

the form of an argument over some real or imagined expression of lack of respect. Elders who engage in this form of disruptive behavior sustain their communities based on fear of shunning, the threat of violence (hexing) and the use of shame and guilt to control behavior that conforms to the dogma of those who have placed themselves in imaginary positions of power. The use of these tactics is not consistent with traditional Yoruba spiritual home training. The use of these tactics is described by sociologist as "Fascism". I would encourage anyone who encounters these behaviors in a community that calls itself *Ifá/Orisa* to speak the truth and to communicate loudly and clearly the message the Emperor has no cloths. Respect is earned, anyone who needs to demand respect through the use of threats is functioning at the developmental level of a nine year old. For those who looking for elders to guide them through the rites of passage leading to becoming a grandparent choosing someone who engages in childish behavior may not be a good choice.

In traditional Yoruba culture *Sango* is a deified ancestor meaning he is a historical figure who has been elevated to the status of a Force in Nature. The ability of the historical *Sango* to transform his life is associated with the Spirit of Fire because fire transforms everything it encounters. The historical *Sango* unified the eastern borders of the Yoruba Empire at a time when Islamic slave traders from East Africa ravaged West Africa in search of forced labor. From

the city of Oyo Sango created an effective defense in an area where the central African rain forest merges into the grasslands of the Central African savannah. Sango's army made effective use of horses and the double-headed ax to rapidly move between the rain forest and open terrain. In terms of a hero's journey Sango was unable to ignore the devastation to his community caused by the slave trade. He transformed his feelings into effective action. His action is an expression of the *Ifá* proverb that says, if your life gets better my life gets better and if you suffer I suffer.

The legends associated with Sango in the Diaspora tell the story of the days after Sango unified his kingdom. They describe Sango as becoming bored with the extended period of peace. To amuse himself Sango asked his brothers *Timi* and *Gbonga* to fight a duel. The brothers challenged each other to a drumming contest. Unimpressed Sango demands they fight each other. The brothers engaged in a *juju* battle hurling curses. Unimpressed Sango demands they fight each other. *Gbonga* who is the older brother and who has a moral obligation to protect his younger brother offers himself as a sacrifice. *Timi* reluctantly kills *Gbonga*. At the moment of his brother's death Sango was filled with shame and ran into the forest where he hung himself. Sango was discovered by his wife *Oya* who said *Oba ko so* meaning the king is not dead. In that moment Sango went to live with *Obatala* where he protects his kingdom by hurling lightning at those

who do not treat others fairly. The red and white symbolizing *Sango* becomes the pure white mystic vision of *Obatala*.

This simple story is filled with metaphorical references to fundamental issues in the development of a Spiritual Warrior who has successfully completed the hero's journey. It is the function of *Ogun* to facilitate internal transformation during this process. Once successful transformation occurs the methodology for accessing the tools needed to change behavior can be taught to others. The effort to teach life lessons to others takes us out of the realm of *Ogun* and into the realm of *Sango*.

Gbonga is a praise name for *Ogun*. In the story about *Sango's* abuse of power *Gbonga* finds the courage to offer himself as a sacrifice rather than commit the taboo of killing his brother, or disobeying the king. *Sango* immediately understands the lesson being taught to him by *Ogun*. *Sango* understands that his arrogance caused him to act inappropriately. He learns the lesson and takes appropriate action. In traditional Yoruba culture the coronation of a new king can only occur after the funeral of the former king. If a Yoruba King loses the confidence of his constituents the only way he can be replaced is if the King commits ritual suicide to open the door for his successor. In other words *Ogun* taught *Sango* the lesson of humility. Once *Sango* realized his arrogance was inappropriate he took action in the real world to fix the problem and to repair the

damage done to his community by his self centered behavior. The damage to the community was the loss of trust in his ability to rule fairly.

Ogun shows us the truth about our self. *Ogun* gives us the strength and courage to change behavior, to become a better person, to commit to the principles of good character and responsible behavior. The lessons learned in the process are the basis for effective organization of the family, the extended family and the larger community. Traditional Yoruba home training is designed to support the hero's journey and to bring revelation to those who engage in the struggle to reinitiate or expand their consciousness everyday.

The relationship between *Ogun* and *Sango* is transcendent, the resolution of social conflicts that emerge from their relationship changes in every generation as new conflicts develop. The threat of slave traders is replaced by the social injustice caused by racism. Different issue, requiring the same ability to access the courage needed to transform self and world.

When I grew up in the sixties the cultural icon of the hero was the loner, who never expressed his emotion, who never asked for help and was able to resolve his problems through the use of violence and intimidation. This image was deliberately created by the media as a way to solidify the status quo. The hero as loner does not create

effective alliances for social change. The hero who never expresses emotion has no sense of inner truth and is easily manipulated. The hero who never asks for help learns to suffer in silence. The hero who solves problems through the use of violence and intimidation is easily convinced to support war and acts of aggression without examining the underlying issues that create global conflict. This notion of the hero is so ingrained in Western consciousness that it has infected much of the theological thinking in many *Ifá/Oriṣa* communities outside of Africa.

The story about *Sango* committing suicide is a solid foundation for examining the cultural conflict between African spiritual discipline and Western religious dogma. The traditional title for the ruler or King of Oyo is *Alafin* meaning one who holds the light. The *Alafin* in traditional Yoruba culture is the chief of *Ogboni* meaning owner of wisdom. *Ogboni* is the traditional judicial court for settling disputes. The job of the *Alafin*, the *Oni* of Ile Ife and the twenty-one *Oba* of the old Yoruba Empire was always the same protect and serve the community. On a smaller scale the task of these elders is the same as any elder who tries to support, sustain and nurture a family or an extended family. This task is symbolized by the bird on the crown of the Yoruba kings. Birds are the symbol of female power. Why would traditional Yoruba culture use a female symbol to represent the notion of male kingship?

Mothers have the ability to connect with the immortals through the portal of their own reproductive organs. This portal is called *Odu*. When a woman's egg becomes fertilized by sperm the portal to the realm of the ancestors opens creating a path for an ancestral spirit to be reborn as a child. Women maintain the ability to open this portal after giving birth to children. It is not uncommon for mothers to have an invisible connection with their family. A mother knows when her child is sick, depressed, or in danger. This intuitive connection is nurtured in most earth-centered cultures. In Yoruba culture this ability to connect is called *Aje*. This word is frequently mistranslated to mean witch. The word witch in English originally meant wise woman. *Aje* is the power passed from mother to daughter to protect and nurture members of their family even when the members of the family are not in close proximity to the mother. This power can be abused but it is fundamentally neutral. It is an aspect of the structure of consciousness itself and the attempt to demonize this power does nothing more than limit human potential.

The purpose of most male initiations is to give me the same ability that women inherent as a birthright. At ceremonies to honor *Sango* in Oyo one *Sango* initiate is usually designated as the *elegun* meaning the medium for the Spirit of *Sango*. When a man is chosen for this ritual position, he dances for *Sango* dressed as a woman, wearing a traditional woman's hair weave. This is a symbolic gesture

that has nothing to do with sexual preference. Male elders who have positions of responsibility in traditional Yoruba extended families are expected to develop the skills associated with *Aje* to effectively take responsibility for the well-being of the family.

There are only two ways for an elder to relate to an extended family. The traditional Yoruba view is that the elder serves the community. In Europe the idea was developed that the community serves the elder. The traditional Yoruba model is based on the idea that the elder has an intuitive connection to the extended family and will use that connection to solve problems before they become manifest in the world. In pre-colonial times the Yoruba kings were kept in isolation in a constant state of possession. Only trusted attendants who would not disrupt the connection to spirit were allowed to speak with the *Oba*. Maintaining connection to spirit was not the basis of some kind of dictatorship. This connection was used to anticipate problems that were brought to the council of elder mothers and fathers for resolution. The *Oba* only spoke in public to announce the consensus between the grandparents. Offering opinions not based on consensus was considered a capital crime. When the British Colonized Nigeria they outlawed the elders council so they could replace the traditional kings with political patronage.

The notion that the people should serve the king led to the European notion of the Divine Right of Kings. This right simply meant

the King could force his will on his subjects without fear of the consequences. In ancient Greek theology this was known as the sin of Hubris, the notion that personal will was identical with divine intention. The sin of Hubris always leads to disaster. The belief in the divine right of kings led to World War One and Two. The divine right of presidents is taking the United States down a path that cannot end well.

In the Diaspora the European model of leadership has replaced the traditional African model as the norm. Frequently the elders of an extended family frighten the members of their community into believing they need some expensive ritual work to avoid a real or imagined impending disaster. This approach to leadership is silly, inappropriate, non traditional and ultimately unproductive. It is the job of *Baba* and *Iya* to anticipate problems and to fix them before they become manifest in the world. A male elder is only effectively doing his job when the community is running smoothly without disruption, chaos, panic, jealousy competition and greed. Connection with the higher self can generate connection to all the members of your extended family. This connection is similar to what woman describe as their bond with their biological children. If you are a *Baba*, or an *Iya* and if you are doing divination for yourself and your family every four days, if you are meeting with members of your *egbe* every 16 days to do divination for the benefit of the extended family, if the

entire family is meeting every 91 days to invoke good fortune for the up coming season very few unexpected surprises of a disastrous nature are going to come your way.

Having advanced warning means you can place your *ori* in the realm of the Immortals and ask for guidance so that misfortune does not disrupt your family. *Baba* and *Iya* are only doing his job when there are no problems. If *Baba* is busy doing rituals to fix what is broken he has failed in his position of leadership. Just as *Sango* failed in his position as king when he asked *Timi* and *Gbonga* to fight.

A king who serves his community can only sustain a connection to spirit by engaging in proper behavior, developing good character and maintaining a healthy appropriate relationship with his mate and the elder mothers of the extended family.

Lesson 5

A meditation with *Sango* is very effective in front of a fire. If possible find a place in nature where you can safely build a fire from sundown to sunup. Make a survey of the problems you have fixed in your own life. Evaluate the way in which you attempt to share the life lessons of your experience with others. Try honoring the taboos of traditional Yoruba culture for a month without exception. At the end

of the month take an objective look at any shift in the quality of your life and the quality of your relationship with others. The taboos as I understand them are as follows:

1. Never gossip, that is never say anything negative about someone who is not present to defend him or herself.
2. Do not offer assistance to an older person unless the person makes a specific request.
3. Do not offer an opinion unless one is requested. When possible preface an opinion by quoting the wisdom on the ancestors.
4. Do not demand respect earn it.
5. Do not speak in anger.
6. Do not hold on to feelings of jealousy, envy and greed.
7. Do not use threats of violence or hexing in an effort to intimidate others into sharing your dogma.

Those who have received *Ifá* or *Sango* can use the following invocations when speaking with *Sango* in front of a fire.

ORÍKÌ SANGO

(Praising the Spirit of Lightning)

*Kawo Kabiyesile, etala mo júbà, gadagba a júbà.
Oluoyo, Etala mo júbà, gadagba a júbà. Oba ko so,
etala mo júbà, gadagba a júbà.*

Hail to the Chief, it is thirteen times that I salute you. Chief of Oyo, it is thirteen times that I salute you. The Chief who has not died, it is thirteen times that salute you.

*O o gborann mi dun dakun mo ya mi. Aremu njo o
buru igba nii gbope*

Please defend me, do not reject me. Aremu at difficult times the climbing rope encircles the palm tree.

Oko ibéji eletimo, ojú eri eri ó là orun garara.

Guardian of twins, Master of knowledge, brilliant eye, who splits the skies.

*Oni laba jinijini ala a li ase atata bi okunrin a dugbe
ekun oke.*

Owner of the thunder bag, owner of the bag filled with power, seasoned warrior.

Agbangba li ojú agada o gbe iná wo ile eke.

Storm on the edge of the knife, He carries fire on his head into the house.

Tútú tútú ni kí o jé kí a máá rí. Maa jé ki owó ikà ó tè wá o. Báni ségun òtá o.

Let us experience the calm and gentle things of life. Save us from wicked people. Help us defeat out enemies.

Bá mi wo omoò mi. Maa jé ki n àrin fi esè sí. Maa jé ki n sòrò fi enu ko.

Help protect my children. Guide my footsteps. Prevent me from committing offences by the words of my mouth.

Jámujámu pò léégùn, Sàngó o o pò lòkunrin. Ase.

The Spirit of Lightning is a powerful Ancestor. The Spirit of Lightning is a powerful man. May it be so.

Mystic Vision

The *Ifá* Concept of *Obatala*

Ifá has no dogma. The wisdom of the ancestors is a consciously growing body of wisdom based on observation and experience. *Ifá* does teach the development of good character as a way of interacting effectively with self and world. In traditional Yoruba culture initiates into the mystery or *awo* of *Obatala* have the sacred responsibility of preserving those codes of conduct that the ancestors used to facilitate

the hero's journey. Chief FAMA in her book Fundamentals of the Yoruba Religion Orisa Worship describes these codes of conduct as they appear in the *Ifá Odu Ika funfun*. These codes are set up as taboos. Those who honor these taboos will receive a blessing of long life. In traditional Yoruba culture a blessing of long life means the person has fulfilled their destiny. They have taken the hero's journey they choose for themselves in the time between incarnations. The taboos are as follows:

1. They must not call yam, yam that is, they must not say what they do not know. Commentary: our community plague with elders who would rather make something up than admit they do not have the answer to a question. No one is expected to know everything that is why we build community. If you do not know the answer to a question *Ifá* says say you do not know the answer and make some effort to ask someone who has the information that is required.

2. They must not call special beads, special beads, that is, they must not perform anything for which they do not have the basic knowledge. Commentary: do not perform rituals that you have not been trained to perform. In *Ifá* our elders make the determination when someone is ready to do something and they give us permission. Too often those who

are newly initiated decide they are ready to become independent, cut off all communication with their teachers and do work they are not fully qualified to perform. Ultimately this approach undermines the credibility of the self styled elder and results in great harm to those who innocently come for guidance.

3. They must not call a parrot a bat, that is, they must not mislead people. Commentary: the most common violation of this taboo is the endless arguments over who way is the best way. This is a variation on the notion that my God is better than your God. The disputes over the question of whether, *Lucumi*, *Santeria* or traditional *Ifá* is correct are pointless. The effectiveness of ritual is based on the integrity of the participants not on the mechanics of the process.

4. They must not say *iroko* leaves are *oriro* leaves, that is, they must not deceive people. Commentary: this a taboo against the paper tiger syndrome, the tendency in some communities to make up non existent problems and sell useless rituals solutions that appear to be effective because the core problem was an illusion.

5. They must not try to swim if they are ignorant of swimming, that is, they must not claim wisdom that they lack. Commentary: those elders who claim to know everything suffer

from the false notion that this is an impressive marketing ploy. Ultimately it does not work because the day always comes when the elder needs to prove their claims.

6. They must be humble and never egocentric.

Commentary: this admonition established the difference between those elders who believe the community should serve them and those elders who understand their responsibility is to serve the community.

7. They must not enter Akala's house deceitfully,

that is, they must not be treacherous. Commentary: entry into a traditional Yoruba home without permission creates the impression of ill intentions. *Ifá* says that even giving the impression of treachery is taboo.

8. They must not use sacred feathers for

cleaning after using the toilet, that is, they must not violate

personal taboo. Commentary: every initiate has personal

taboos based on the divination done during their initiation.

Taboo is not designed to inhibit behavior; taboo is designed to

create positive boundaries in which appropriate behavior

becomes automatic. For example a taboo against drinking is a

taboo against potentially self-destructive behavior.

9. They must not defecate on sacred *Ifá* food,

that is, they must not break taboo. Commentary: in addition to

personal taboo there are general taboos that are able to an *egbe* or society of a particular Spirit. Honoring the taboos of an *egbe* creates trust and trust is the foundation that makes ritual work effective.

10. They must not urinate inside the traditional factory for making palm oil, that is, not to break taboo. Commentary: this is a reference to honoring the general taboos that regulate the community and the culture. For example deference to elders is an unspoken obligation that rarely appears in divination because it is fundamental to the entire extended family and taught as part of general home training.

11. They must not take a walking stick from the blind, that is, to respect the weak, to respect the feeble and be nice to them. Commentary: this is a manifestation of the *Ifá* idea that if you life gets better my life gets better and that if you suffer I suffer. Protecting the unfortunate is also part of the discipline of learning humility. It is a way of counting our blessings and protecting our self from committing the taboo of arrogance.

12. They must not take walking cane from an old person, that is, to respect and be nice to the elderly. Commentary: in traditional Yoruba culture the old and the young are considered close to the Immortals. The young

because they are recently arrived on earth from the land of the ancestors and the old because they are making preparations for returning to the realm of the ancestors. Both the young and the old are considered messengers of Spirit. To treat them kindly is to remain open to Spiritual guidance.

13. They must not take Ogboni's wife, that is, to respect moral laws. Commentary: in traditional Yoruba culture promiscuous behavior is considered disruptive.

14. They must not take a friend's wife, that is, not to betray a friend. Commentary: trust is the hardest element in a relationship to fix once it is broken. The way to maintain trust is to be honest and to keep your word.

15. They must not go behind and discuss secrets, that is, not to betray trusts. Commentary: this is a clear expression of the taboo against gossip.

16. They must not disrespect or make love to a *Babalawo's* wife. Commentary: this means honor the sanctity of another person's family. If an *awo* is responsible for the health, happiness and well-being of the extended family attacking his immediately family has negative consequences for the entire community.

In the *Ifá* Creation Myth *Obatala* climbs down a chain from the realm of the Immortals to the realm of life on Earth. The chain is

symbolic of the double helix form used as the structure of DNA. The journey to Earth is a reference to the emergence of hidden or latent potential into the realm of physical reality. When you are in the womb you carry unfulfilled potential, and after you are born that potential begins to manifest. *Ifá* is very clear in its description of the womb as the passageway between the realm of the Immortals and Earth; it is the passageway that allows for reincarnation or *atunwa*. This passageway is called the blue river as a reference to the color of blood inside the human body.

In the sacred language of *Ifá* the manifestation of any hidden, or latent potential is described symbolically by as the journey from *Ikole Orun* to *Ikole Aiye*. *Ikole Orun* means, greeting the House of the Immortal Realm. *Ikole Aiye* means, greeting the House of the Earth. When Yorubas speak of *aiye* they are speaking of the crust around the surface of the Earth, not the whole Earth. The word for the entire Earth is *Onile*. *Aiye* is described in *Ifá* as the meeting place between the visible and the invisible dimensions.

The *Ifá* concept of *Ikole Orun* is much closer to what physics calls the fifth dimension. *Ikole Orun* exists all around us. It is part of the invisible spectrum of light. Humans only see a small band of light in the middle of the total range of frequencies. If you were able to do something that would allow you to see the full spectrum of light you would see the invisible dimension. Opening our eyes to *Ikole Orun* is

the purpose of initiation into the *awo* of *Orisa*. The *Ifá* reference to *ala* in the word *Obatala* is a reference to the full spectrum of light. As we progress along the hero's journey our vision of light increases. Those who are able to see the invisible dimension say it is a reality that is co-existent with us. When you see it, you can interact with it in a very direct way. You can see conflict at its source and resolve problems before they become manifest in the physical world or *Ikole Aiye*.

If you go to Africa and the elders start talking about entering *Orun* and coming back to *Aiye*, you get a sense they are talking about something very real and very tangible. In some places in Africa there are gateways or portals into the fifth dimension where people walk through the portal and disappear from sight, then reappear through the same opening. These openings are called *Odu*, when they occur naturally in Nature they are called *Igbodu* meaning womb of the forest.

Obatala came from *Ikole Orun* to *Ikole Aiye* by climbing down a chain with a seashell, a guinea hen, sand and *ikin*. He poured the sand on the waters, and then he dropped the hen on the Earth. The hen started scratching the sand and made the first land mass. This land is called *Ile Ife*. The words *Ile Ife* means House of Love. It is a reference to the first land mass and it is the name of the sacred city of *Ifá* which is currently in *Osun State* in Nigeria. According to *Ifá* Earth was created by the House of love. This means Love is the foundation

of all visual reality. The job of Creating Ile Ife was joint effort between *Obatala* and his wife *Yemo*. The Forces of Contraction and Expansion come together as Male and Female Spirit to Create the House of love. It is the same conjunction of Spirit that we turn to in our effort to sustain the original intention of our place of Origin.

Lesson 6

Sit in front of a small table covered with a white cloth, a candle and a glass of water. Contemplate the meaning of *Obatala's oriki* as a source of inspiration for developing good character.

ORÍKÌ QBÀTÁLÁ

(Praising the King of the White Cloth)

Qbanla o rin n'erù ojikùtù s'èrù.

King of the White Cloth never fears the coming of Death.

Qba n'ile Ifón alábalàse oba patapata n'ile ìrànjé.

Father of Heaven forever rule for all generations.

O yó kelekele o ta mi l'ore. O gbà á gírí l'owo osikà.

Gently dissolve the burden of my friends.

Give me the power to manifest abundance.

*O fi l'emi asoto l'owo. Oba igbò oluwaiye rè é o
kéè bi òwu là.*

Expose the Mystery of Abundance. Father of
the sacred grove, owner of all blessings
increase my wisdom.

*O yi 'àála. Osùn l'àála o fi koko àála rumo. Oba
ìgbò.*

May I become like the White Cloth. Protector
of White Cloth I salute you. Father of the
sacred grove.

*Ení sojú semú. Òrìsà ni ma sìn. A - dá - ni bóit rí.
Òrìsà ni ma sin.*

He makes eyes and noses. It is the Spirit of
Light that I shall serve. He who creates as
he chooses. It is the Spirit of Light that I shall
serve.

Ení rán mi wá. Òrìsà ni ma sin.

He who sends me here. It is the Spirit of
Light that I shall serve.

*Bàntà-banta n'nu àlà, ó sùn n'nú àlà. Ó jín'nu àlà.
Ba nlá oko Yemòwó,*

Immense in white robes, He sleeps in white
cloths. He awakens in white cloths.
Venerable father, Yemo's consort,

Òrìṣà wù mí ní bùdó. Ibi re l'Òrìṣà kalè.

Spirit of Light delights me as he is in state. It
is a delectable place where the Spirit of Light
is enthroned.

*Ikú tí iba ni ígbale folá ran ni. Aláse os so
enikansoso digba eniyan.*

The powerful one who dwells with a person
and makes them prosperous. The head chief
who can multiply one into two hundred
people.

*So mí òrùn, so mi digba. So mi òtò - lé - l
égbèje eniyan. Ase.*

Multiply me into four hundred, multiply me
into two hundred. Multiply me into one
thousand four hundred and sixty people.
May it be so.

Iba Orisala osere igbo, iku ike oro.

I respect the Spirit of White Light, the
Messenger who brings goodness to the forest,
and power that overcomes death.

*Ababa je'gbin, a s'om̩ n̩ke agbara, a wuwo bi
erin, Oba pata - pata ti nba won gb' ode iranje.*

Immortal Father who eats snails, child of the
Ancient Ones, bringer of the Mystery of
Mystic Vision, Chief of all things that exist in
the World.

Ala, ala. Niki, niki Oni panpe ode orun

The king whose every day become a feast,
Owner of the brilliant white cloth,

O duro lehin o so tito, Oro oko abuke,

Owner of the chain to the court, He stands
behind persons who tell the truth

*Osagiyan jagun o fi irungbon se pepe enu, A ji da
igba asa*

Protector of the handicapped, *Osagiyan*
warrior with a handsome beard

Ti te opa osoro, Orisa Olu I fon.

He wakes up to create two hundred civilizing
customs, King of Ifon.

Lasiko fun mi li ala mun mi ala mu so ko.

Grant me a white cloth of my own.

*Aláàbáláàṣe, ata - ta - bí - `akún, Orìsà sò mi di
eni iyi, sò mi di eni èyè.*

One who gives suggestions and also gives
commands. One who is very powerful. Spirit
make me an honorable person

Iwen ti iya ko ola, a ji nte ibi.

Word that transforms grief into joy.

Obàtálá Obàtìsà, Òrìsà aláṣe igàn baba oyin.

King of the White Cloth, King of all the
Immortals, the Spirit with authority, Who is as
precious as pure honey.

Orèrè yèlú àgàn wò.

The Immortal who gives children to those
who are barren.

Atú - wón - ká - nib - i - tí wón - gbé - ndáná - iró.

The one who scatters those who are
conspiring to do destructive things.

Àbùdí Olúkànbé.

The Immortal with inexhaustible strength.

Ire omo, ire owo, ire agbo ato. Ase.

Bring me a blessing of children, abundance
and long life. May it be so.

Embracing Destiny The *Ifá* Concept of *Orunmila*

On the hero's journey *Èṣù* shatters our complacency, throws us beyond the boundaries of our dogma and reminds us that human consciousness is a finite perspective trying to grasp an infinite reality. *Òsòòsì* takes the situation handed to use by *Èṣù* and imagines the next step on the path to deeper and wiser perceptions of self and world. The vision of an alternate universe remains dormant as latent potential without the actions of *Ogun* who accesses the courage needed to make that which we imagine manifest in the world. The ability to manifest change has an impact on our self, our family, our community and ultimately the world we live in. The ability to effectively teach those who are younger than us, the ability to be an elder, a role model and a guide is the domain of *Sango* strategist, protector of family and champion of those who suffer from unfair treatment and injustice in the world. To insure that the power of *Sango* does not corrupt our consciousness, allowing ego to replace

divine inspiration, *Obatala* as judge of *Ogboni* and guardian of good character insists that we remain humble. Even in humility the proper action is not always easier apparent so we speak directly to the Immortals through the use of divination. The art of divination is taught by those who are initiated into the mysteries of *Orunmila*. The word *Orunmila* is frequently translated to mean Heaven is my salvation. I think it would be better to translate the elision *Orun mi ala* as the Invisible Realm of the Immortals brings me light.

The Yoruba *ala* is not the simple light of illumination. *Ala* is a primal Force in Nature. *Ala* is pure unformed consciousness. *Ala* enters the physical realm from the invisible realm through the portal of *Odu*. The structure of Egyptian temples and the structure of Yoruba *Ogboni* Temples is exactly the same. There is an outer court for the community, an inner court for the initiates and an inner sanctum for the elder initiate. At certain times of the year *Ala* enters the inner sanctum of the temple as pure unformed consciousness. Only those who have successfully completed the hero's journey are allowed to step inside the inner sanctum because *Ala* takes the form of the consciousness that is present to greet It. This is the primal boon of the hero's journey, it is the ultimately gift from the land of the Immortals to the land of the living. It is the knowledge that *Ala* can be shifted into anything through the use of the power of the world. Those who have completed the hero's journey use the power of the

world to serve the community. Those who have not completed the hero's journey will be tempted to use the power to serve themselves. This choice is the basis of the Western concepts of good and evil. Choosing to serve the community is a choice to live. Choosing to serve self is a choice for the opposite of live or evil. In the Grail Romances when the Knights are on the threshold of finding the Grail, they are asked the question, who do you serve? In the language of *Ifá* standing before the Grail means bowing in front of *Odu* when the portal between *Ikole Orun* and *Ikole Aye* is open. When this portal is open those who greet the light are expected to ask for a blessing of children, abundance and long life. This is the primal responsibility of all those who are initiated into the mysteries of *Orunmila*. In that moment when our consciousness merges with *Ala* we become sons and daughters of *Ela* from the elision *e ala* meaning I am the light.

To effectively become the light requires age appropriate completion of the hero's journey. Now I want to reveal the great secret of the hero's journey. Everyone who has completed this journey has the same revelation and comes to the same conclusion. Despite what you see in the media, despite the denigration of academics and despite the popular bias and distortions of the truth, the *Ifá* concept of Warrior Spirit is not based on the idea of invoking ancestors for the purpose of harming others. The revelation at the end of the hero's journey is this; life is only fulfilled if we take

responsibility for our destiny. You cannot and will never embrace a sense of personal fulfillment if you blame others for your problems. *Ifá* teaches the idea that we choose our destiny between reincarnations. This means every problem we encounter is a lesson of our own choosing. We choose the lesson because in the on going process of reincarnation we are ready and able to integrate the lesson into our *ori* into our consciousness of self and world. We integrate these lessons on the journey towards revelation. The revelation is this we all come from Source. We are all the eyes of the Creator looking back at itself. We embrace the descent of spirit power from *Ikole Orun*, to *Ikole Aye* by embracing the Light and guiding from *Ikole Aye* back to *Ikole Orun*. Because consciousness can never be created or destroyed all it can do is evolve. In order for human consciousness to evolve *ori* needs a home. In Yoruba we call this home *Ile*. Our job as humans is to make our home a better place than when we first arrived. We make *Ile* a better place by greeting the Earth and having the humility to ask Her what she wants. In Yoruba the phrase I come to greet the Earth is *iwa ope ile*. In shortened form the elision of the words *iwa ope ile* becomes the Yoruba word for good character or *iwa-pele*.

Lesson 7

Those who greet the Earth begin the hero's journey. Those who have preserved the wisdom that comes from success completion of the hero's journey have preserved the core messages delivered by *Onile* the spirit of the Earth. These messages are preserved in *Ifayabale* from the elision *Ifa Iya Baba Ile* meaning the wisdom of the Mothers and Fathers who have greeted the Earth.

IFÁIYABLE

Mo gba Edumare gbo, eni oni eni ana eni titi lailai, eniti gbogbo Irunmole ati Igbamole.

I believe in the Creator, the Owner of Today and the Owner of Yesterday, the Owner of All Days to Come.

*Nwari fun ti won si npa ase re mo, Olupilese ati eleda
ohun gbogbo ti a nri, ati eyi ti a ko ri.*

He to whom all the Immortals pay homage, and for
whom they exist to know his laws and commands,
Originator and Creator of all things discovered and
yet to be discovered.

*Mo gba Orunmila barapetu Elerin Ipin, Ibikeji
Olodumare Alafogun Ajejogun.*

I believe in the Spirit of Destiny, the Great Witness
to Creation, Second to the Creator and Owner of
Medicine that is More Powerful than Medicine.

*Obiriti ap - ojo Iku da, Odudu ti ndu ori emere, Agiri Ile
Ilogbon, Oluwa mi ato ba j'aiye gbo.*

The Immense Orbit that fought the day of Death,
the One who Regenerates Youth and Creatures of
Bad Luck, He who is Perfect in the House of
Wisdom, the All Powerful who Saves.

*Mo gba awon ojise gbo, mo gba Ela mimo gbo bi, Iko ti
Odumare nran'se.*

I believe in the Messengers, I believe in the Holy
Spirit of Manifestation, Who is the Messenger sent
by the Creator.

*Mo gbagbò pe iranṣe ni Eṣu nṣe mo gbagbò pe imisi
Oḃa t'aiyeṣe ni nṣo ni di ojṣe.*

I believe that the inspiration of the most Purative and Corrective Chief proceeds from the Messengers.

*Mo gba Akoda ati Aseda gbò bi, emi imo ai oḃon
aiyeraiye.*

I believe in Akoda and Aseda, the Soul and Spirit of Knowledge and Wisdom since the beginning of Time.

*Mo gbagbò pe ilana ti awon ojṣe fi leḃe nipase imisi emi
Oḃa t'aiyeṣe yio ran ni lowo lati ri ona iye.*

I believe that through the teachings of the Messengers the inspiration Spirit of the most Purative and Corrective King of the world descends and ignites and spreads from his hand in order to light the way of life.

*Mo gbagbò pe agbafa ti o ti inu agbara wa mbe lara
awon iyami.*

I believe that this power within power exists within the society of wise women.

Mo gbagbò pe etutu ni a fi ntun aiye se.

I believe that it is by propitiation and atonement that the world is made.

Mo gba ijoriwo awo agbaiye gbo.

I believe in *Ijoriwo awo Agbaiye awo* of the Universe.

Mo gba ilana iweri awo bi apere atunbi.

I believe in the teachings of *Iwere awo* as the guide to regeneration and renewal.

Mo gbagbo pe igbala wa mbe ninu iwa rere.

I believe that salvation exists in the exhaltation of good character.

Mo gbagbo pe emi enia ki nku.

I believe that the Soul of Humans does not die.

Mo gba atunbi gbo.

I believe in regeneration and reincarnation.

Mo gba ilana iwosan gbo.

I believe in the Holy Principles of Healing.

Mo gbagbo pe jije onje imule yio mu ni po si ninu lfe ara.

I believe that the cleansing foods of the covenant are plentiful among the kindred of lfe.

*Mo gba ilana igbeyawo gb_o ati pe o t_o o si y_e ki t'ok_o
t'aya.*

I believe in the sacredness of the principles of marriage and that it is honorable for men and women to always be in sober conduct.

*Wa ni airekoja nigbagbogbo ki Edumare fi ese mi mule
ninu igbagb_o yi. Ase.*

At the feet of the Creator I drink Earth and make Covenant in this faith. May it be so.

Appendix

Yoruba Pronunciation

There are twenty-five letters in the Yoruba language, seven vowels and eighteen consonants.

The vowels are A E E I O O U. The marks under the letters E and O create different sounds from the letters E and O, without the marks. Any mark under a Yoruba means you add an H sound to the letter. Marks are found under E, O and S.

The Yoruba alphabet with English words that have the same sound or intonations.

A (ah)	Sounds like the A in Ark
B (bee)	Sounds like the B in Bee
D (dee)	Sounds like the D in Deal
E (ay)	Sounds like the E in Eight
<u>E</u> (eh)	Sounds like the E in Egg
F (fee)	Sounds like the F in Feel

G (gi)	Sounds like the G in Give
GB	No English equivalent
H (hee)	Sounds like the H in Hill
I (ee)	Sounds like the I in Bee
J (gee)	Sounds like the J in Jeep
K (kee)	Sounds like the K in Keep
L (lee)	Sounds like the L in Leaf
M (mee)	Sounds like the M in Milk
N (nee)	Sounds like the N in Nil
O (aw)	Sounds like the O in Odd
<u>O</u> (oh)	Sounds like the O in Oh
P (pi)	Sounds like the P in Pit
R (ree)	Sounds like the R in Read
S (cee)	Sounds like the S in Sea
<u>S</u> (Sh)	Sounds like the S in Sheep
T (tee)	Sounds like the T in Tea
U (oo)	Sounds like the U in You
W (we)	Sounds like the W in We
Y (yee)	Sounds like the Y in Yield

Yoruba language is tonal meaning the relative pitch of letters effects the meaning of the word. There are three basic tones used in Yoruba that be described as *do re mi* or the first three notes of the

tempered scale. Normal speaking voice would be *re* an accent slanting from left to right would be *mi* and an accent slanting from right to left is *do*.