

Awo Training - Part 1

There is a common misconception that Awo does not go into possession. It is true that Awo generally do not go into possession while dancing for Orisa during public rituals. The reason they do not do this is not because they can't, but because they have a communal responsibility to guide and protect those Orisa initiates who have a fundamental connection to a particular spirit.

The process of Tefa or Ifa initiation is taboo to discuss. It is not taboo to discuss the metaphysical concepts related to the transformation of the initiate. Ifa initiation occurs as a result of the invocation of the sixteen meji Odu on the ori of the initiate. This invocation is followed by the invocation of the seventeenth Odu called Ose'tura. (In order of seniority Ose'tura always appears out of sequence). The invocation of Ose'tura causes the copulation of the meji Odu resulting in the procreation of the two hundred and forty Omo Odu. The experience of having the Omo Odu born in the ori of the initiate produces an altered state of consciousness called Elerin - ipin meaning Witness to Creation. It is this experience in the initiation process that gives the initiate a glimpse into the inner nature of Odu. This experience also gives the initiate the ofo ase needed to invoke the 256 verses of Ifa scripture. The ability to invoke Odu is what makes an Awo either a father (Babalawo) or mother (Iyanifa) of the secrets. If an altered state of consciousness, commonly referred to as possession, were not needed to invoke Odu then there would be no need for Ifa initiation and everyone would be born an Awo. The notion that Awo do not go into an altered state of consciousness to invoke Odu is disconnected from the reality of the ancient discipline and practice of our Egbe ancestors. The fact that the idea is so wide spread within our community is an indication of the extent to which the training of Awo in the Diaspora is in real crisis. Every society, every initiation, every elevation, and every ritual that supports and sustains traditional Yoruba religious culture is rooted in Odu. This means Awo has the ofo ase to invoke everything and to become anything. Rather than have a shrine room filled with pots for the 201 Irunmale, Ifa uses a single tray, marks the Odu of a particular spirit then invokes both the Odu and the Spirit who speaks through that Odu. We are given this ability as part of our sacred responsibility to preserve the tradition. The experience of having Odu born in Ori is the basis for externalizing that experience.

Anywhere you find an Awo with an Ifa tray you have the potential for re-creating the universe (Elerin - Ipin) meaning the potential for re-establishing any aspect of the tradition that may have been lost or destroyed for any reason. In areas where the tradition is alive and well, the tradition is primarily carried into the future by Orisa initiates. This does not mean that Awo abandons its responsibility to reclaim that which has been otherwise lost.

Anyone who is experienced invoking Odu will tell you that you cannot effectively manifest the ase or spiritual power of a particular verse without becoming aligned with the ase manifested in the verse. This alignment can range from being touched by it, to becoming two headed (meaning both possessed by it and conscious of self) or by becoming completely absorbed by the ase (full possession).

During the course of my career as an Awo I have been told I can't give Orisa, I can't give Egun, I can't give Iyaami. I say if any of these manifestations of Spirit are rooted in Odu, if I have been taught the Odu, if I have been taught the oriki and if I have been taught the inner secret of the pot, then as Awo I can transfer the ase. If I am in a community that has Orisa there is no need for me to give Orisa. The fact that there is no need for me to give Orisa does not mean I can't give Orisa and it does not mean I should not know how to give Orisa. There is a difference between the way Ifa gives Orisa and the way Orisa gives Orisa. In very simple metaphysical terms that the initiated will understand; Ifa gives birth to Orisa from the tray, Orisa gives birth to Orisa from the pot. When Ifa gives birth to Orisa it is to establish lineage. When Orisa gives birth to Orisa it is to sustain lineage. There is no Orisa born outside of Odu which means there is no Orisa born outside of Ifa.

I appreciate the fact that the ideas I am expressing here are outside the common understanding of Ifa that is prevalent within the Diaspora. Twenty years ago when I first started to study Ifa there were fewer than a dozen Awo in America, and there was little or no access to Awo in Africa. The difficulty in receiving training and the difficulty in having access to elders will inherently breed misconceptions. I am suggesting that my training and my experience is contrary to common belief about the role and function of Ifa and that it is time to consider alternate views on the subject as a basis for proper training. The collective confusion about Ifa makes the task of studying Ifa difficult for overwhelming numbers of Awo who have returned from Tefa in Africa and want to seriously study the sacred technology that will allow them to serve effectively as Awo. Without the component of altered states of consciousness the discipline of Ifa is reduced to the intellectual exercise of interpreting passages of scripture found in a book. Awo has a responsibility to interpret Odu but the intellectual ability to interpret Odu has very little to do with the more important responsibility associated with the ase

needed to transform ibi (misfortune) in ire (good fortune). The ability to fix problems through the invocation of Odu is directly related to the ability of the diviner to place components of their ori (consciousness) into the land of the ancestors (Orun) the place where physical reality is ultimately transformed. The ori can only make contract with alternate realities from an alternate state of consciousness, commonly known as possession.

Orunmila was a historical prophet. In my opinion it would be appropriate to consider Orunmila a deified ancestor. The Spirit of Orunmila, the Spirit that touches an Ifa initiate when they are effectively invoking Odu is not the Spirit of Orunmila, it is the Spirit of Ela. The word Ela literally means I am light from the elision e ala. The ability to become one with the Spirit of Ela is the ability to use ori as a portal between the visible world and the invisible world. When an Awo is in an altered state of consciousness the thing that passes between dimensions is pure unformed ase symbolically referred to as ala or white light. As this ase comes from Ile Orun to Ile Aye through the ori of the diviner it takes shape and is formed by the ofo ase inherent in the oriki spoken by the diviner while in an altered state of consciousness. If this were not true anyone could go to a book look up the Odu figure out what it meant and fix the problem. There is an element of Awo or mystery in the divination process and the mystery is related to the ability of ori to detach from the physical body.

If my understanding of the role and function of an Awo is accurate, the first step in the training of an Awo is to make sure they have direct and easy access to the spirit of Ela. The question becomes how is this done? In my lineage every four days the Spirit of Ela is invoked in front of the Awo's Ifa. Every sixteen days the Awo of the community come together and invoke Ela collectively as part of Egbe ritual. There is regional variation in the number of days and how often the egbe meets. What appears to be generally true is that individual Awo spend personal time and collective time enhancing their relationship with the Spirit of Ela. There are various ways to do this. If you are blessed with access to an elder who is teaching you Ifa follow their guidance and ignore my instruction. I am giving instruction on a way to do it based on the urging of Spirit. My sense of our current social situation is this, if we do not enhance our connection to Spirit and if we do not elevate our effort to receive guidance from Spirit we are going to be faced with serious problems for which our current understanding of Odu will be inadequate preparation for the fundamental task of transforming ibi into ire.

Four Day Prayer Cycle

Place the bowl of ikin used for divination on the mat in your shrine room. Take the ikin from the bowl one at a time. As you take the ikin from the bowl touch them to the top of your divining tray, then touch them to the center of the divining tray then touch the ikin to your lips. As you are making these movements say Eji Ogbe mo ko ki o to, Oyeku Meji mo ko ki o to, and on through the sixteen meji. When he removed the seventeenth ikin from the bowl say Ose tura mo ko ko o to and place the ikin on the tray. Roll the ikin in you hands while doing the oriki to Ela.

Ope ni fun Olorun.

Gratitude to the Owner of the Realm of the Ancestors.

Iba Olodumare, Oba ajiki.

I respect the Creator, the King we praise first.

Mo ji loni, mo wo'gun merin aye.

I awake today and I see the four corners of the world.

Iba Elawori, agbegi lere, la'fin ewu l'ado, eniti Olodumare ko pa'jo eda Omo Oluworiogbo.

I respect the Spirit of Purity, he who carves the cloth at Ado in the form of a sculpture, the one whose date of death has not been changed by the child of the Chief Priest who made all the Heads that exist in Creation.

Ela omo osin. Ela Omo Oyigiyigi ota omi.

Spirit of Manifestation, child of the Ruler. Spirit of Manifestation, child of the offspring of the Stone in the Water.

Awa di oyigiyigi. A ki o ku wa.

We ourselves become manifestation. The stone that birthed the Spirit of Manifestation will never die.

Ela ro a ki o ku mo, okiribiti. Ela ro (Sokale) Orunko Ifá.

The Spirit of Manifestation has descended to Earth, we die no more. This is the name we give to Destiny.

Entiti ngba ni l'a. Nwon se ebo Ela fun mi.

He is the one who saved us. We have made sacrifice to the Spirit of Manifestation.

Ko t'ina, ko to ro.

He is of no substance. He is too small to be thought of.

Beni on (Ela) ni gba ni la n'ife, Oba - a - mola.

Yet He delivered the Immortals from all trouble, the Chief for whom to know is to be saved.

Ela, Omo Osin mo wari o! Ela meji, mo wari o.

The Spirit of Manifestation, Son of the Ruler, I praise you. The Spirit of Manifestation, the Spirit of Manifestation, I praise you.

Ela mo yin boru. Ela mo yin boye. Ela mo yin bosise.

Spirit of Manifestation praise the sacrifice that opens the way. Spirit of Manifestation praise the sacrifice that brings life. Spirit of Manifestation praise the sacrifice that proceeds work.

Ela poke. Eni esi so wa soro odun. Odun ko wo wa sodun.

The Spirit of Manifestation has appeared. The friend has returned for this year's festival. The celebration returns.

Iroko oko. Iroko oko. Iroko oko.

I come Iroko oko. I come Iroko oko. I come Iroko oko.

Odun oni si ko. Ela poke. Ela ro. Ela ro. Ela ro, ko wa gbu're.

The celebration has returned. The Spirit of Manifestation has appeared. Holy Spirit descend. Holy Spirit descend. Holy Spirit descend, prayers to accept.

Ela takun wa o. Ela ro o. Eti ire re. Ela takun ko wa gbu're.

Holy Spirit with string descend. Holy Spirit descend. Be the ears of our prayers. Holy Spirit with string descend to accept our prayers.

Enu ire re. Ela takun ko gbure. Oju ire re.

Hear the lips of our prayers. Holy Spirit with string descend to accept our prayers. Hear the eyes of our prayers.

Ela takun ko wa gbu're. Ela ma dawo aje waro. Ela ma d'ese aje waro.

Holy Spirit with string descend to accept our prayers. Holy Spirit with lips of blessing embrace us. Mighty Spirit with lips of blessing embrace us.

Atikan Sikun ki oni ikere yo ikere.

From door to door remove the hinges.

Ipenpe'ju ni si'lekun fun ekun agada ni si'ekun fun eje.

He who removes the hinges opens the eyelids for tears.

Ogunda'sa, iwo ni o nsilekun fun Ejerindilogun Irunmole.

The Spirit of Iron, the Spirit of Wind, the Spirit who opens the door for the Immortals.

Ela panumo panumo. Ela panuba panuba.

Holy Spirit resounding. Holy Spirit rebounding.

Ayan ile ni awo egbe ile, ekolo rogodo ni awo ominile.

Near the crack in the wall where the elders meet, Peace ascended to Heaven and did not return.

Eriwo lo sorun ko do mo. O ni ki a ke si Odi awo Odi.

Upon blockade the Priest for blockade is called to Earth. He asked us to call upon the Priest of Peace.

O ni ki a ke si Ero awo Ero. O ni ki a ke si Egún osusu abaya babamba.

Upon the shrub thorns he asked us to call. Upon the blockade we call the Priest of the Blockade.

A ke si Ero awo Ero, ke si Egún o susu abaya babamba a ni eriwo lo si Orun ko de mo, won ni ki Ela roibale.

Upon the thick shrubby thorns we call, to Heaven calmly ascend. Holy Spirit descend.

Ela ni on ko ri ibi ti on yio ro si o ni iwaju on egun.

The Peace of the Holy Spirit said; "I have nowhere to descend."

Eyin on osusu agbedem 'nji on egun osusu, awo fa ma je ki'iwaju Ela gun mori on tolu.

I find the front filled with thorns, I find the rear and the middle filled with thorns.

Òrúnmilà ma jeki eyin Ela gun mosi Olokareme Òrúnmilà ma jeki agbedemeje la gun Osusu.

The humans appealed to the Spirit of Destiny to pray to the Great Spirit of Manifestation.

Ela ro. Ifá ko je ki iwaju re se dundun more on tolu.

Holy Spirit descend. Remove the thorns from the front and rear.

Ela ro. Ifá ko jeki eyin re se worowo.

Holy Spirit descend. Remove the thorns from the middle.

Ela ro. Ela ni'waju o di Odundun.

Holy Spirit descend. At the front place of Peace, the Holy Spirit becomes manifest.

Ela ni eyin o di Tete. Ela ni agbedemeji o di worowo. Ase.

At the rear place of Peace, the Holy Spirit becomes manifest. At the middle place of Peace, the Holy Spirit becomes manifest. May it be so.

When the awo has completed oriki Ela the ase accessible through ori can be shape shifted to express the ase of any Odu or Orisa. At the very least this is a time to prayer for personal transformation an elevation and a time to pray for the good fortune of the extended family and the entire community. My recommendation based on my experience is that saying this oriki every day places the ori in solid connection with the Spirit of Ela. After a year of daily practice, the oriki can be done on the four day cycle without any diminishment of access to ase. It is also my experience that when Ela is present Spirit announces itself by singing the oriki which is why oriki are chanted. Singing an invocation creates a opening for Spirit to emerge. It is also my experience that chanting oriki is most effective when the words are spoken slowly and the vowels are exaggerated stressing the tonal qualities of the words. It is the ase that comes from the ori of awo while chanting oriki Ela that serves as the spiritual catalyst for transforming ibi into ire.

Awo Falokun Fatunmbi

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