

Ori: The Ifa Concept of the Evolution of The Earth

By Awo Falokun Fatunmbi

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Ori

The Ifá Concept of Consciousness

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

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

The four modes of consciousness can be symbolized by a circle sectioned into four equal quadrants. In the literature on comparative religion this symbolic representation of inner experience is called a mandala. In Ifá the mandala of consciousness is symbolized by the circular divination tray. The quartered circle is a universal symbol of the self that appears in virtually every religious tradition throughout history. It is found in the sand paintings of Hopi shamans, the healing circles of Tibetan Buddhist, the temple art of Islam, the stained glass windows of Gothic Cathedrals and the markings on the Ifá divination tray.

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

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

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

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

In psychological terms, air is associated with breathing and our experience of self; earth is associated with survival and our relationships with others; fire is associated with transformation and our ability to vision the future, and water is associated with am biotic fluid and our memories of the past. The four components of

the ori are like spokes on a wheel linking the consciousness of the person to similar patterns of consciousness outside direct experience. This means ori has access to transcendent realms of perception called Orun in Ifá and often referred to as the collective unconscious in transpersonal schools of psychology.

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

The smooth assimilation of the lesson from divination is called ire. The word for resistance to the lesson from divination is ibi. In Yoruba the word ibi means after-birth. Holding on to the placenta after delivery is fatal. The use of the word ibi in the context of divination suggests the person is holding on to thought forms (dogma) that are resistant to the lesson at hand (ire). I would describe ibi as opposition to embracing an open-ended worldview. Ibi is the solidification of dogma. Solidification occurs because letting go of strongly held beliefs is experienced as loss of self. It literally feels like a threat to your physical existence. More accurately it is a spiritual death that lays the foundation for rebirth and continued growth. The death of the old self is frightening and seldom comes without struggle or resistance.

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

If ibi is transformed into ire it tends to become solidified in one of the four quadrants of the Ifá mandala. Someone who is afraid of the future will remain stuck in the past. The most common example is the adult who refuses to grow up, wanting the lack of responsibilities associated with childhood to continue throughout life. Someone who is avoiding dealing with developmental problems will constantly run in search of a better future. I see this manifest when people say my life would get better if only I could win the lottery. Someone who is fearful of being successful in the world can mask the fear by focusing all their attention on spiritual matters. They do this in an effort to justify failure in practical matters by saying success is unimportant. Someone who is obsessed with success could be avoiding dealing with moral and ethical considerations that are part of spiritual development. The avoidance is often rooted in low self-esteem. This leads to the false notion that the problem can be fixed by external forms of gratification.

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

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

If anyone from the circle of support deviates from the norm, they become the scapegoat, someone who is falsely accused of being responsible for the problems of the group. If the scapegoat refuses to submit to the will of the group they are shunned, banned, avoided and demonized. In the process we claim to follow the guidance of Spirit and imagine that Spirit wants us to behave in childish ways. We claim to follow the guidance of Spirit and believe we can control the future. We claim to follow the guidance of Spirit and ignore our financial responsibilities while pretending to be religious devotees. We claim to follow the guidance of Spirit by becoming workaholics justifying the obsession for the sake of the family. *Mo sin Olodumare* means serving God by being appropriate in the moment. Being appropriate in the moment can only happen if we see the world unencumbered by delusions generated by dogma. When any group attacks a member who is not a threat, the group sows the seeds of its own self-destruction. A healthy community embraces diversity of opinions. If you want to understand Ifá as a worldview, never demonize anyone, replace criticism with empathy, replace moral judgment with ebo, replace anger with understanding and replace self-pity with the courage to change.

The fear of change is rooted in a fear of loss of self only when self-perception is rooted in dogma. Discard the self-limiting ideas and the fear disappears. Theologians define dogma as a strongly asserted metaphysical principle. Dogma is commonly associated with religious indoctrination. From a psychological perspective, most individuals create dogma during their

developmental years when their interpretation of life experience is falsely elevated to an inflexible personalized view of the Laws of Nature. For example a child grows up in a family where the predominate interaction with their parents involves the threat of punishment and physical abuse. The inherent need to be nurtured comes in conflict with the reality of pain and suffering. Rather than admit to not being loved, the child decides that love is expressed through violence. Growing up the child will associate with other children who share the same worldview. It is often easier to look for external support of a dogmatic principle than it is to deal with the painful truth at the core of a conflict. As an adult that same child might seek a religious community that sanctions severe corporal punishment of children. The dogmatic worldview gets reinforced by an extended community and is solidified as God's Will while being passed down to another generation.

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

Once an unresolved problem is arrogantly elevated to a dogmatic principle there is no impetus for resolution. If I believe God wants me to be a racist I have no reason to examine racists

behavior. If I believe God made men superior to women, I have no reason to examine my sexism. If I believe God condemns homosexuals, I have no reason to examine my homophobia. Once we invoke God's Will life becomes very simple. The problem is the ori knows we are embracing a lie. The more the lie becomes manifest in the world, the more likely ori will send Esu O'dara on a mission to shake the ibi loose and continue the process of growth.

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

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

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

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

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

would depend on mutual cooperation. Ifá said it was Esu O'dara who would teach them the mystery of abundance. Ifá said they needed to make regular offerings to Esi O'dara to make sure their friendship was not broken.

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

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

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

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

Another of the tools used by Ifá to avoid creating dogma comes from the holy Odu, Osa Tura:

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

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

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

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

If we examine the fable about the encounter with the Klingons we can create a hypothetical example of how being objective works. The meeting with Dank ended in violence, the assumption was that all Klingons are rude and aggressive. The only way this could be verified is if you personally knew every Klingon. An objective analysis would be to say Dank was rude and violent without extending the parameters of your conclusion beyond direct experience. Assuming that all Klingons are violent gives the problem no place to go and provides no basis for resolution. Limiting the analysis to what is objectively known opens the door to a wide range of questions that hold the potential for fixing the problem. Did Dank have a bad day? Did I remind him of someone he doesn't like? Did he have a violent encounter with another

officer from Star Fleet? Did I unknowingly do something to offend him? By remaining open to a number of interpretations and by not becoming locked into self-generated dogma the door remains open to gain a better understanding of Dank the person, a better understanding of Klingon culture and in this instance a better understanding of personal insensitivity. Exploring these options means it will be less likely that the meeting with Gar will start from a defensive posture. On the day the Klingon ship comes to your rescue you will be able to make an objective evaluation about whether or not to accept the assistance.

Ifá culture trains the younger generation in s'otito through the use of a strict taboo against gossip. There are always two sides to every story and when someone is complaining about a perceived injustice there is a tendency to describe the event in self-serving terms. Gossip is designed to get peer support for a dogmatic point of view. In Ifá culture gossip is considered pointless because it carries no possibility of resolution of a problem. In my experience an Ifá elder will only listen to a complaint when both parties are present. If there is no immediate resolution between the parties, the matter is taken to the oracle for guidance from Spirit. Once a problem has been fixed through divination it is taboo to re-visit the issue. Participation in this process is part of the training for becoming an elder. Ifá says; Ika ti ika ka, ko le yamju oro meaning the person who harms others, when they have been harmed, is unable to settle a dispute.

In Ode Remo the Oba meaning eldest father or village chief holds court in the mornings for resolving disputes. Anyone with a problem can ask the Oba and the elders of Ogboni to settle the conflict. If the other party is not present, the Oba will send one of his emese (messengers) to retrieve the other person. Nothing is settled without both parties in attendance. Those who are in dispute direct all their comments to the Oba who seeks the council of his advisors and then makes a final judgment. In many ways it

is similar to a court of law. On a smaller scale the same process is used to settle problems within an extended family. All serious conflicts are resolved openly with both parties and witnesses in attendance. During the process, the participants are admonished to say only what they know, a traditional Yoruba version of the no hearsay rule followed in Western courts of law.

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

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

I believe there is a thin veil of invisible light on the boundary between dimensions of reality. This light can be understood as pure unformed consciousness. The light can be easily molded by human thought. As a result of this interaction there is a global neither world of phantoms shaped by human suffering and despair. In Ifá when this light is accessed in its pure form it manifests as a beam of light coming from the earth and moving towards the sky. This light is called Ela from the elision e

ala meaning I am the light. It is the light of Ela that guides the prayers of an awo when they are in an altered state of consciousness meaning connected with iponri which is the higher self.

If a person is avoiding transforming ibi they will look for someone else to blame for their problems. If there is no one to blame they will create an imaginary demon that they can claim is responsible for the disruption in their life. If the need to create a demon is strong enough the thought form will take shape and the monster will materialize in the physical world giving apparent confirmation the problem is external and not internal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The idea of mentoring informs the way traditional Yoruba's greet one another. It is considered rude and inappropriate for a younger person to ask an older person how they are doing, or how they are feeling. The reason for this is because in the Ifá mystery school a younger person does not offer opinions or give guidance to an elder. Based on the admonitions of *s'otitio*, asking a person how they are doing carries the expectation of an honest answer. If the older person has a problem the younger person simply is not old enough or wise enough to offer an appropriate

solution based on life experience. If you can't assist in fixing something there is no point in discussing it.

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

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

Exercise

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

- Perception of self
- Perception of self in relationship
- Perception of similar past experience
- Perception of possible implications for the future

Under each reaction list your assumptions. Now review the event and look at your reaction to it minus any assumptions. Keep your list of assumptions on your shrine or white table. Begin to notice how similar assumptions continue to reappear in situation after situation. Take your list of assumptions and burn them in front of your shrine or white table. Take the ashes to the trash. Tell yourself you are discarding all beliefs and assumptions that do not serve you well. Turn around and walk away without looking back. Do this every night eleven nights in a row. This may seem like a simple process, but when a discarded assumption rears its head you will remember the walk to the trash bin and let it go. That is the way the mind works and the reason why Ifá makes use of ritual to transform personal problems. Ritual is an effective tool for reminding the ori a decision has been made. If simply telling yourself to change were effective there would be no need to study any spiritual discipline.

If an assumption remains persistent stand in front of your Ogun pot holding one of his spikes at chest level. Promise Ogun

you will stop making a particular assumption when the spike hits the floor, then drop the spike. In Ifá an oath to Ogun is considered an absolute taboo. If you do not have an Ogun take the oath standing at a railroad crossing.

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

Ritual

The tension caused by unresolved internal conflict creates negative ase in our body and around our heads. Negative thoughts have physical substance in the world and linger around us like dead skin. Ifá has a complex system for cleaning away the negative effects of ibi or dogma. A simple head cleaning involves saying an oriki while moving the fingers of your left hand from the middle of your forehead across the top of the head down the neck the flicking the negativity away from your body. The word oriki literally means to praise the spirit or praise the head. It is the Yoruba word used to described prayers used in Ifá to invoke spirit. I recommend this oriki be used as a part of the Morning Prayer cycle. I recommend memorization so it can be used during the day whenever unresolved internal issues threaten to cause disruption.

Orí san mi. Orí san mi. Orí san igede. Orí san igede. Orí otan san mi ki nni owo lowo. Orí otan san mi ki nbimo le mio. Orí oto san mi ki nni aya. Orí oto san mi ki nkole mole. Orí san mi o. Orí san mi o. Orí san mi o. Oloma ajiki, ìwá ni mope. Ase.

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

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

Learn Oriki Ori

Ori san mi. Ori san mi. Ori san igede. Ori san igede.

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

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

Inner Spirit supports my abundance. Inner Spirit supports my future children.

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

Inner Spirit supports my relationship. Inner Spirit protects my house.

Ori san mi o. Ori san mi o. Ori san mi o. Oloma ajiki, iwá ni mope. Ase.

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

The Yoruba Metaphysical Concept of Ori

By Awo Fategbe Fatunmbi

In Yoruba theology, perhaps nothing is more complex than the metaphysical concept of Ori, variously associated with the physical head (the cranium), personal Orisa, consciousness, destiny, human soul, and ancestral guardian angel. It can be considered as the Yoruba theory of consciousness, or as the Yoruba theory of destiny, or both. In my conception, our Ori is our soul, which contains consciousness (knowledge, wisdom, thought and emotion) as well as our predetermined destiny and is our connection to source as well as all things containing consciousness. Within the mystery of Ori is another mystery, "Ori Inu," our inner self; the divine spark. A third component of the "Ori complex" is the "Iponri" - our higher self. It is our mirror image that resides in Orun, the Invisible Realm of the Immortals.

The Yoruba believe that creation exists on two complementary dimensions: the visible world, called Aiye, the physical universe that we inhabit, and the invisible world, called Orun, inhabited by the supernatural beings and the "doubles" of everything that is manifested in aiye (in Odu there is reference to seven planes in each dimension). These dimensions are not to be confused with heaven and earth. There is not a strict division; they exist in the same space. Aiye is a "projection" of the essential reality that processes itself in orun. Everything exists, exists in orun also. Actually, orun is the reality and aiye the mirror image. It is necessary to understand that aiye and orun constitute a unity, and as expressions of two levels of existence, are undivided and complementary. There is full identity between them; one is just an inverted image of the other (Teixeira de Oliveira). The Yoruba also believe in reincarnation (atunwa), and atunwa is the basis of ancestor reverence. The world is viewed as a continuous cycle of life and death; the universe being a fusion of the material and the spiritual in a rhythmic cycle. there is a constant interaction between the visible and invisible realms (Jegede). All forms of good and evil have their beginnings in orun. There exist supernatural powers that are both good and evil (Abimbola). Our ancestors and Orisa are basically good, although if you are out of alignment with them, it could cause bad things to happen. supernatural powers

that are inherently evil are called Ajoogun. The Yoruba cosmology says that all things have consciousness including mountains rivers, rocks, trees, etc. In order to begin to understand the Ori complex, we must start at the beginning, the Yoruba creation myth.

There are variations to the myth, and in my opinion there really are two separate story lines. One is cosmogenic and the other is political. The two became entwined into the most popular version below. Hopefully, this paper while explaining the concept of Ori, will also help us to better understand the metaphysics of religious discourse; in this case the Yoruba religion.

Yoruba creation myth

Orisanla (Obatala) was the arch-divinity who was chosen by Olodumare to create a solid land out of the primordial abyss that constituted the earth and of populating the land with human beings. Olodumare (The Creator) called Obatala (Chief of White Cloth – meaning the fabric of creation) to Ikole Orun (the Realm of the Ancestors) on the day that he wanted to create dry land on the waters of the Ikole Aye (visible realm). Obatala kneeled before Olodumare and said that he did not know the awo (mystery) of creating land on Ikole Aye. Olodumare told Obatala that he would give him the ase (power) to make land on Ikole Aye (Earth). He descended from Orun into Aiye (the visible realm) on a chain, carrying a snail shell full of earth, palm kernels and a five-toed chicken. He was to empty the content of the snail shell on the water after placing some pieces of iron on it, and then to place the chicken on the earth to spread it over the primordial water by doing what chickens do, which is to scratch at the ground. According to this version of the myth, Obatala completed this task to the satisfaction of Olodumare. He was then given the task of making the physical body of human beings after which Olodumare would give them the breath of life (emi). He also completed this task and this is why he has the title of "Obarisa" the king of Orisas.

The other variant of the cosmogenic myth does not credit Obatala with the completion of the task. While it concedes that Obatala was given the task, it avers that Obatala got drunk on palm wine even before he got to the earth and he fell asleep:

Ogun took all the iworo (gold) and forged a long ewon (chain), which

he flung towards Ikole Aye (earth). Obatala placed his ase (power) in a pouch and began the descent down the ewon. When he came to the last rung, he could see that he was still some distance from the primal waters.

Obatala removed the igbin(snail) shell from his pouch and sprinkled soil upon the primal waters. Then he removed the five toed etu (guinea hen) and dropped it on the land. As soon as the etu reached the soil, it started scratching the ground, spreading dirt across the surface of the primal waters. Seeing the ground had become firm, Obatala removed an ikin (palm nut) and dropped it on the land. The ikin sprouted and became a palm tree. When the palm tree grew to its full height, it reached the last ring of the iworo 'won(gold chain). Obatala was able to step from the ewon to the palm tree. After climbing down the tree, Obatala started to mold humans from the clay in the earth. As he worked, he became tired and decided that he needed a rest. Taking the fruit from the palm tree, he made palm wine and drank until he was ready to return to work. The humans that he molded while drunk did not look like the others, but Obatala did not notice and he kept drinking until he fell asleep. While Obatala slept, Olodumare gave the task of finishing Creation to Oduduwa (sometimes said to be Obatala's brother). Olodumare waited for Obatala to awaken from his drunken sleep and told him that it was taboo for Obatala to taste palm wine ever again. When Obatala saw what had happened to the humans he had created while he was drunk, he agreed to protect all children for future generations. It is said that Orunmila had warned Obatala not to get his clothes dirty, but they got dirty during his drunkenness. It was Obatala who said that he would never again let his White Cloth become soiled. To this day those that worship Obatala say, "Obatala o su n'na ala, Obatala o ji n'nu ala, Obatala o tinu ala dide, Iba Obatala," which means, "The Chief of White Cloth sleeps in white, the chief of the White Cloth awakens in white, the chief of the White cloth gets up in white, praise to the Chief of the White Cloth."

In the above interpretation, Oduduwa is the founder of the Yoruba people, nothing more, nothing less. However, in the first interpretation there is no Oduduwa. If we look at Odu, we will find mention of a feminine Oduduwa. If we analyze the name Oduduwa it is obvious that we have the word "Odu," which means womb and

always is used to express the mystery of the feminine principle. Then we have "dudu" which means black or dark; and "iwa" which means character. So what we get is "character of the mystery of the dark womb." The dark womb being the source of the feminine principle, so something like "manifestation of the dark principle." It seems then, that this female entity at some time was made into the male progenitor of the Yoruba. Could this have happened when the matrilineal system was changed to patrilineal? Whatever the case may be, the making of land is a symbolic reference to the founding of the Yoruba kingdoms, and this is why Oduduwa is credited with that achievement. Oduduwa's progeny were sixteen in number and became Kings. So Oduduwa was the first king of the Yoruba nation and founded Ile Ife, the ancient capital, creating a succession of kings all related to him. Again, this version incorporates history into the creation myth. It establishes the divine nature of the founder Oduduwa. Some say that before the time of Oduduwa, the story did not involve Obatala getting drunk and Oduduwa finishing the job. However, as interesting as this debate may be, it really isn't important to the discussion of Ori.

What is important is the symbolism. The chain is representative of Ogun. How can Obatala get to earth? Ogun opens the way. Ogun pushes the creation to evolve, to move forward. Obatala arrives at Ile Ife and starts cutting his way through the brush, but can't do it with his silver cutlass – the metal is too soft. So Ogun takes over with his iron cutlass. the five toed hen represents Osun. Five is the sacred number of Osun, the Yoruba Goddess of love, fertility and abundance. In the early stages of evolution, diversity is created on the surface of the earth through the interaction, combination and re-creation of the basic elements. This diversity is an expression of the fertility and abundance manifested through the power of Osun. The palm nuts (ikin) represent Orunmila. Obatala can create the land, but needs Osun to "fertilize" it, and Ogun to create civilization. However, Ogun cannot create a polity. For this we need Orunmila, who brings the ethical foundation for society. These Orisa, in combination, represent unity and a balance of forces. Unity and balance (in a cosmos of dualities and diversity) become the central paradigm of Yoruba metaphysical thought. In Awo Fatunmbi's words:

“The world begins with one ... the one that is formed through perfect balance between the powers of expansion and contraction, light and dark, ... the balance between the masculine and feminine powers ... and that one is a microcosm of all that is...”

In addition, the palm nuts grow into the palm tree (the sacred palm of Ifa) that Obatala descends. Within the religion of Ifa, the palm tree is regarded as the sacred tree of life. Most earth-centered religions designate a particular tree to symbolize the transformation of all things as they progress through the cycles of birth, life, death, and rebirth.

Here is an excerpt from Falokun Fatunmbi on Obatala and the metaphysics of the creation myth:

Obatala is the Spirit of the Chief of the White Cloth in the West African religious tradition called “Ifa”. The word Obatala is the name given to describe a complex convergence of Spiritual Forces that are key elements in the Ifa concept of consciousness. Those Spiritual Forces that form the foundation of Obatala’s role in the Spirit Realm relate to the movement between dynamics and form as it exists throughout the universe. According to Ifa, dynamics and form represent the polarity between the Forces of expansion and contraction. Together, these Forces create light and darkness, which in turn sustains and defines all that is. Ifa teaches that it is the interaction between light and dark that generates the physical universe, and it is Obatala who brings this interaction into Being.

The power of Obatala is described by Ifa as one of the many Spiritual Forces in Nature which are called “Orisha”. The word Orisha means “Select Head”. In a cultural context, Orisha is a reference to the various Forces in Nature that guide consciousness. According to Ifa, everything in Nature has some form of consciousness called “Ori”. The Ori of all animals, plants, and humans is believed to be guided by a specific Force in Nature (Orisha) which defines the quality of a particular form of consciousness. There are a large number of Orisha, and each Orisha has its own awo (mystery).

The unique function of Obatala within the realm of Orisha Awo (Mysteries of Nature) is to provide the spark of light that animates consciousness. To call an Orisha the "Chief of the White Cloth" is to make a symbolic reference to that substance which makes consciousness possible. The reference to White Cloth is not a reference to the material used to make the cloth, it is a reference to the fabric which binds the universe together. The threads of this fabric are the multi-leveled layers of consciousness which Ifa teaches exist in all things on all levels of Being. Ifa teaches that it is the ability of Forces of Nature to communicate with each other, and the ability of humans to communicate with Forces in Nature that gives the world a sense of spiritual unity. It is the understanding of this ability which gives substance to the Ifa concept of good character, and it is Obatala who guides us towards developing this understanding.

Ifa teaches that all Forces in Nature come into Being through the manifestation of energy patterns called Odu. Ifa has identified and labeled different Odu which can be thought of as different expressions of consciousness. But because consciousness itself is generated by Obatala, every Odu contains an element of Obatala's ase(power).

In metaphysical terms, this means that all of Creation is linked to Obatala as the Source of Being. Ifa teaches that all forms of consciousness contain a spark of ase (spiritual power) from Obatala, and it is this spark that links everything that is, to its shared Beginning. Western science teaches that all of Creation evolved from the light produced during the primal explosion at the beginning of time. Ifa teaches that all Creation evolved from the White Cloth of Obatala's robe.

Keep in mind that Orisa and other entities featured in Yoruba myths, itan and Odu bear deep philosophical connotations that begin at the level of the metaphysical, descending into the aesthetic and then epistemological through to ethical meanings and, eventually, to positive or negative social effects (it is easy to get caught up in the personalities themselves). Individual metaphysical phenomena come together as a unity of substances in a universe of relativistic existence (Okunmakinde). This idea is expressed in the

most compelling part of the story; the Snail Shell full of earth-dust. In the Odu Okanran Ogunda there is another version of the creation myth that is not well known. In this version, it is Orunmila who carries the snail shell full of the substance which creates land upon the primordial waters. The Snail Shell was taken from the seat of Olodumare and given to Orunmila with the authority to create the earth. In the process of creation, Orunmila dipped his hands into the snail shell and took out measures of earth-dust (this dust is called Oro, primordial matter, and the word of God) with which land was created on the primordial waters.

Odu Osa Ogunda

There-were-no-living-things

Was the priest on earth

That-which-was-suspended

But-did-not-descend

Was the priest in heaven

All-was-just-empty-space

With-no-substance

Was the priest of Mid-Air

It was divined for Aiye and Orun*

When they both exited

With no inhabitants

In the two empty snail shells,

There were neither birds nor spirits

Living in them

Odumare then created himself

Being the Primal cause

Which is the reason we call Odumare

The only wise one in aiye

He is the only cause in creation,

The only wise one in Orun,

Who created humans.

When He had no companion,
He applied wisdom to the situation
To avert any disaster.
You, alone,
The only one in Orun
Is the name of Odumare
The only wise one,
We give you thanks,
The only knowing mind,
You created man.
Listening to one side of an argument,
You judge, and all are pleased.

Ase

In another verse from Osa Ogunda, it says, “Iri tu wili tu wili la fi da ile aye, la bu da ile,” which means, “Dews pouring lightly, pouring lightly, was used to create the earth world in order that goodness could come forth into existence at once.” The dew drops are particles of Oro – primordial matter - contained in the snail shell (in the creation myth oro is the earth that Obatala was carrying when he descended down the chain). Once empty, the shell remains as the representation of the base of causation from which matter derived. The “goodness” speaks to eniyan – human beings. Eniyan translates as “the chosen ones.” This suggests that all humans have been chosen by Olodumare to continue bringing goodness to the earth. The oro then melted and was suspended in mid-air (referred to in the above Odu verse as the “priest of mid-air”). Oro then dropped (from Okanran Owonrin);

Oro gbe nu agba gbin kin

Oro ku

Oro ke

Oro gi

Oro la

Oro to ja ninu agba o tobi bi agbe

A dia fun Oro-oro oro
Nigba un o ri enikan ba soro
Mo gba ngbin
ase

Oro, the cause of great concern for the wise and experienced elders
It sounds, “Ku” (making the heart miss a beat)
“Ke” (as a ponderous object hitting the ground)
“Gi” (making the last sound before silence)
and “La”, with a loud cracking sound is transformed into a new
state called “Ela.”

The oro that drops from the elderly is stupendous
It was divined for Oro-oro oro

Who did not have anyone to communicate with and he started
groaning

Ela is part of the Orunmila complex. Orunmila can be considered
the anthropomorphic representation of Olodumare’s wisdom -
"ogbon", knowledge – "imo", and understanding – "oye"; the most
powerful particles or elements in the earth-dust or droppings.
Orunmila’s connection to Ori is fundamental to the Ori complex. He
is “Eleri Ipin”, the deity of fate. He was present at the moment of
creation, and thus knows the fate of every Ori. He acts as the
mediator between a person and their Ori through his ability to
speak the words of Ifa as they relate to the individual Ori and its
destiny. Ifa is the Oracle. Ela is that invisible energy that moves
between the oracle and Orunmila, and between Ori and Olodumare
– the umbilical cord. Ela is Oro after it hits the primordial abyss.
This means that the substance of creation, when it passes from
Orun to the visible realm undergoes a change; it becomes “physical”
or “manifested.” Oro, as primordial matter, has an innate urge to
communicate:

HOORO, HOO-RO! (Ogbon, Imo, Oye, descend!)

Olodumare made HOO

(Ogbon, Imo, Oye)

HOO

descended to become Hoo-ro

Ela made Oro digestible and useful to human needs

Ela is the manifestation of the primal urge to communicate. It is the link between human and God; human and human; and human and the universe. This extensionistic conception, prevalent in all religions, is Oro, which manifested is Ela. Its individual manifestation is Ori. The Snail can be viewed as the principle of natural extensionism which forms a basis for that which can be seen and that which cannot; the physical Ori (your skull), and Ori-inu (consciousness, soul). There is a Yoruba phrase, Ori-Ooro, which means, "head at dawn," dawn being the beginning obviously. Thus, at one level of meaning, that is as oro being the earth dust in the snail shell and each ori having it's small pinch within it, we can say that Ori is Oro, and Oro is Ori:

Ori lo nda eni

Esi ondaye Orisa lo npa eni da

O npa Orisa da

Orisa lo pa nida

Bi isu won sun

Aye ma pa temi da

Ki Ori mi ma se Ori

Ki Ori mi ma gba abodi

Ori is the creator of all things

Ori is the one that makes everything happen, before life happens

He is the Orisa that can change humans

No one can change the Orisa

Ori, the Orisa that changes the life of man with baked yam
(abundance)

Aye, do not change my fate

Ori do not let people disrespect me

Ori do not let me be disrespected by anyone

My Ori, do not accept evil

This extensionist concept (from God to human), that our Ori is

composed of a portion of Oro (each Ori receives a portion with its own special combination of elements contained in the earth-dust – oro - from the snail shell, thus each ori's individuality), is further elucidated in the sayings, "Ori lo da ni, enikan o d'Ori o" (It is the Head that created us; nobody created the Head), and, "Ori eni, l'Eleda eni" (one's Head is one's Creator), and also in the following oriki:

Ori lo da mi

Eniyan ko o

Olorun ni

Ori lo da mi

Ori is my Creator

It is not man

It is Olorun

Ori is my Creator

Olodumare made Hoo, which is comprised of three of the most powerful elements contained in the "earth-dust" sprinkled from the Snail shell – Ogbon (wisdom), Imo (knowledge), and Oye (understanding). "Ro" means descend, as in the chant, "Ela ro, Ela ro, Ela ro." It is said that Olodumare created Ogbon, Imo and Oye as an intermediary force for creating more beings. IT tried to find a place for them to live, but they came back to IT, humming, and Olodumare swallowed them. They hummed inside IT for millennia, so IT had to get rid of them. Olodumare ordered them to "ro" descend, saying, "hoo-ro." Oro, the solid matter, melted and was suspended in mid-air like jelly. Oro then dropped and "la" - cracked into a new state called E-la, or Ela. Orunmila functions in the Ifa divination complex as the embodiment of Ogbon, Imo, and Oye. Ela is the recognized authoritative source of communication and explanation of the nature of Olodumare and all ITs creation (Abiodun). Oro is "God energy" as it exists at source (Olorun). As Obafemi Jegede says, "Ela is the descending force or energy, which brings everything into reality. Hence the word oro means that which descends, while ela is the power which makes it explicit."

Okanran Meji:

Ta lo ko wi?

Ela lo ko wi

Ta lo ko so?

Ela lo ko so

Ta wa ni e npe ni Ela?

Hoo to ro na

Ni a n pe ni Ela

ase

Who was the first to speak?

Ela was the first to speak.

Who was the first to communicate?

Ela was the first to communicate.

Who is this Ela?

It was the Hoo which descended

That we call Ela.

Oro again is the word of "God," which created the universe. This is a central tenet of Ifa; the power of the spoken word. Some use Oro and Ofo interchangeably, but I see oro as the overall energy of sound and ofo as incantations. According to Obafemi Jegede, a word spoken into the atmosphere can travel for two hundred years before becoming extinct. Incantations travel across space to do what they were sent to do quickly. Sound travels at 340 meters per second. Every sound has weight (ro) "ki, ku, ke" as it reverberates; what we call transcendental vibration. Incantations are used by awo to manipulate physical and non-physical forces to actualize a desire for self or others (2010) . Ofo can be used for good or evil purposes. In odu Eji Ogbe we are taught that both good and bad experiences in our lives are interconnected in fulfilling our destiny.

In Odu Ogunda Ogbe, we find more references to Snail and Oro:

He Made Divination for the Snail in Orun

Aba she kere mu legun, Odifa fun ibikunle to ma nu kan kunle ara le

The-umbrella-tree-is-short-when-young-but-a-little-later-it-will-become-taller-than-the-roof-of-the-house. That was the name of the

Awo who made divination for Ibikunle, when she was single-handedly going to populate her house by herself (Ibikunle is a praise name of the Snail and it means the one who produced enough children to fill her house). She was advised to make ebo with hen, rat and fish. She made the ebo and began to produce children to fill her house.

He Later Divined for his Friend Oro

Okon kpoki, Erigidí kpii, adita fun Oro nijo ti Oro wo orun kenge kenge.

One-sharp-sound and one-loud-sound are the names of the Awos who made divination for Oro when he was so ill that he thought he was going to die, (notice the snail is referred to as she and oro as he) when he was looking forlornly at Orun from his spot hanging in the air. He was advised to make ebo with eko, akara, rat, fish and a hen. After preparing the ebo, the Ifa priests told him to carry it on his head (ori) to Esu's shrine. He was further told that on getting to the shrine, he was to back into it and incline his head backwards in such a way that the ebo would drop on the shrine (acknowledging Esu as that liminal space between orun and aiye, dark and light).

As soon as he allowed the sacrifice to drop on the Esu shrine, while still backing up to Esu, a voice instructed him to stretch his hands and feet (hands and feet working in unison; alignment with destiny) forward. First, he stretched out his left limbs and next his right limbs (with Esu's help, he makes the transition from the invisible plane to the visible plane. Left limbs darkness, right limbs light). The moment he did that, the disease (ibi) that had afflicted his body to the point of incapacitation suddenly disappeared. From the shrine, he began to dance and sing towards the house in praise of the Awo. The Awo praised Ifa, and Ifa praised Olodumare. When he began to sing, Esu put a song in his mouth:

ljo logo ji jo, erigidi kpii, erigidi.

ljo logo ji jo, erigidi kpi-kpi-kpí, erigidí.

He was singing in praise of Orunmila and his two surrogates for the miraculous healing he had just experienced.

In the ese (verse) above regarding Snail, we see that Snail is also known as Ibikunle, "the one who produced enough children to fill

his or her house.” This is a praise name. It refers to the the Snail’s role in creating everything in the universe, in this case the earth including humans. In the verse following the one about snail, regarding Oro, we find in the names of the Awo, reference to the sounds of Oro dropping and becoming Ela.

Ela speaks through Owe (proverbs, Odu, oriki, chants, ofo ase, etc.), and Aroko (coded symbolic messages- drums, sculpture, dance, song, poetry, etc.). Owe is the horse of Oro; if Oro gets lost, Owe is employed to find it. It is the Spirit of Ela who gives an awo the ase to invoke Odu and all the Spirits who manifest through the oral scripture of Ifa. The historical prophet Orunmila was an incarnation of the Spirit of Ela and the alignment of Ori with Ela is known as "returning to the time when Orunmila walked the earth." This alignment occurs as a result of consistent attention to the Ifa discipline of chanting oriki (Fatunmbi). Oro as the word of God, or in scientific terms, the big bang. Owe is how we as humans imitate that “word.”

Oro as the power of the word, the big bang or sound and vibration. Again, oro is used interchangeably by some with "ofo" (incantation, also called igede). Ofo vitalizes and focuses thought, intent and will power with sound in order to create. It is the babalawo or Iyanifa who use ofo to shape unformed ase - Ela - into physical reality. A major part of the training of an awo is in the use of incantations as expressed in Odu Oturupon Meji:

Bi o ba maa ko fa

Ki o ko fa

Bi o ba maa ko igede

Agba to ko fa

Ti o ko igede

Ko maa ranti ojo kan iponju

Ko maa ranti ojo kan pasan

ase

If you want to learn Ifa

You must learn Ifa

If you want to learn incantation

You must learn incantation
An Ifa priest versed in divination
Without the knowledge of incantation
Should remember the day of trouble
Should remember the day of intimidation
ase

The following chant is another form of oro; in this case, to put the priest in alignment (possession) with Ela:

ORÍKÌ ELA

Ifá ló l'òní, Ifá ló l'Òla, Ifá ló l'òtounla pèlú è

Ifa is master of today, Ifa is master of tomorrow, Ifa is master of the day after tomorrow

Òrúnmilà lo nijó méréèrin òòsá dá'áyé

The Spirit of Destiny is the master of the four days created by the divinities

Èlà mo yìn burú, Èlà mo yìn boyè, Èlà mo yìn bosise

Spirit of Purity I praise the offering that opens the way, that brings satisfaction and that works on my behalf

Èla rò. Èla rò. Èla rò

Spirit of Purity descend, Spirit of Purity descend, Spirit of Purity descend

Mo júbà o, mo júbà o, mo júbà o

I praise you, I praise you, I praise you

Òrúnmilà mo pè. Òrúnmilà mo pè. Òrúnmilà mo pè

Spirit of destiny I call you. Spirit of destiny I call you. Spirit of destiny I call you

Ifá mo pè. Ifá mo pè. Ifá mo pè

Ifa I call you. Ifa I call you. Ifa I call you

Ifá ji o Òrúnmilà, bí olo l'oko, ki o wá lé o, bí olo l'odo, dí o wá lé o

Ifa awake. Spirit of Destiny if you go the farm you should come home, If you go to the river you should come home

Bí o lo l'ode, kí o wá lé o. Mo júbà o. Mo júbà o. Mo júbà o

If you go the hunt, you should come home. Homage, homage, homage.

Ase

May it be so

Initiated priests have the ofo ase (power of the word) as expressed in Odu Ogunda Meji:

To o n'to 'luwo

To fe n'to jugbona

Ase ale

Ase owuro

A dia fun Arugbo

Abi ewu ori ke ke ke

Ko ta ko ra

O gbe iwo ase re dani

Won ni o lo so

O lohun o lo so

Won ni o l'aje e

O lohun a l'aje e

Won ni ee ti ri t'ohun fi nsoro

Ti nfi nse

O ni e o mo pe ohun awo loso

Ohun awo loro, ohun awo lase

ase

To speak and what is spoken becomes a reality belongs to the ori of the Ifa priest

To implement what is spoken belongs to the secretary (jugbona)

Order of the night

Order of the morning

Performed Ifa divination for the old man

With gray hair all over his head

Ifa did not buy nor sell

He holds his horn of ase
He was accused of wizardry
He said he wasn't a wizard
He was accused of witchcraft
He said he was not a witch
They asked why does he predict
And his predictions come to pass?
And he answered that the voice of the diviner is wizardry
The voice of the diviner is a divine seal of potency
ase

The concept of interactionism is central to Yoruba belief along with extensionism. Interaction between physical and non-physical forces. As stated earlier, Yoruba cosmology sees the rhythmic cycle of life and death as a fusion of the material and spiritual worlds, both occupying the same space. Extensionism, the belief that all things have consciousness and are connected, and interactionism, the belief that the physical worlds are in constant interaction with the non-physical worlds form the twin pillars of our tradition. Ori is central to the metaphysics of extensionism and Oro is central to the metaphysics of interactionism.

At this point, I believe we need to clear up the various names used to speak of "God." We find in Odu three different names: Olorun, Olodumare, and Osumare. According to Baba Falokun, Olorun from the elision olo orun meaning spirit of heaven. Olodumare from the elision olo odu osumare meaning the spirit of the rainbows womb. Osumare the rainbow meaning the spirit of light in the world (other interpretations are possible but point to the same ideas).

Olorun - the original inspiration for creation.

Olodumare - the portal through which creation becomes manifest.

Osumare - creation itself.

In Ifa these three spirits are called sky dieties and are considered manifestations of a single unknowable mystery.

The Ori complex

As we continue with the Yoruba creation myth, we now come to the

creation of human beings. Obatala, who is equally referred to as Orisa-nla, is said to have been charged with the responsibility of sculpting the human beings - "eniyan" and designing only the body: hence his appellation a-da-ni bo ti ri (he who creates as he chooses). After finishing his work, Olodumare then breaths emi (life force) into the body. The eniyan then proceeds to Ajala-Mopin (Ajala Mopin from the elision aja-ala-mo-opin, meaning, "the dog of light brings me mystic vision"), also known as Irunmole to o nmo ipin (the divinity who moulds ipin). Ipin is that portion of oro, the "God-matter" apportioned to each Ori by Ajala-Mopin. Ipin is destiny. In Ajala's "shop," the eniyan (person) selects for himself his ipin (portion), commonly referred to as Ori-inu (inner head). Presumably, the choice of heads (Ori) is based on what one wants to accomplish in the coming lifetime. This Ori-inu or ipin is the individual's chosen destiny. There is some variance in this part of the myth. Some say you get your Ori from Ajala but then go to Olodumare and tell IT what you want to accomplish in this lifetime, and the deal is sealed. Some say that humans obtain their ipin (portion, destiny) in one of three ways; by kneeling down and choosing it, a-kun-le-yan (that which one kneels to choose), by kneeling to receive, a-kun-le-gba (that which one kneels to receive), or by having his destiny apportioned to him a-yan-mo (that which is apportioned to one). Others, myself included, believe akunleyan, akunlegba and ayanmo are component parts of Ori-Apere. ("one half" of Ori) Regardless, all acknowledge the Yoruba belief in predestination and also establish the belief in Ipin (portion) as a person's destiny which he chooses during his pre-existent state. It is this destiny that is seen as metaphysically constituted in Ori-inu (inner head), and it is this that man comes into the world to fulfill. This belief manifests itself in the maxim, "Akunle-yan ni ad'aye ba" - the destiny chosen is that which is met and pursued (Abimbola).

The Ori complex is comprised of three parts; the Ori – consciousness and destiny; Ori Inu - the Inner Self; and Iponri - the Higher Self. Much has been written regarding the concept of Ori. I break it down using the theory of extensionalism, which simply states that humans are connected to God in some manner; that there is communication; that we are in fact extensions of God. This idea is common to most metaphysio-religious systems. In Yoruba thought we have the concept of Oro. At the level of the individual,

the concept is expressed in the Ori complex (or soul complex) – an extensionist construct that explains the interaction between tangible and intangible existences. As Orun and Aiye exist simultaneously in the same space, so does the human soul in the form of Ori-inu and Iponri. Matter-mass which makes the transition from orun to aiye through the snail shell produces a double existence. The fragments or portion that a person receives (ori-inu) from Ajala-Mopin in his or her Ori is brought with the person to aiye, the visible realm and to Ile (earth). The original stays in orun. This original is called the Iponri or Ipori. It is our Iponri that allows blessings to flow from “above.” No Orisa can bless us without permission from our Ori. Why? Because our Iponri is our real self, our beginning and our end. Anything we wish to manifest in life, must be created by our Iponri first in the invisible realm, where all things are created before manifesting in the visible worlds. Thus the popular chant from Odu Ifa:

Ko soosa

Ti i dani i gbe

Leyin Ori Eni

No divinity

Can help, deliver, or bless one

Without the sanction of one’s Ori

Our wishes, wants, fulfillment of needs, prayers, etc., must originate in orun before they can manifest in aiye. Our Ori, the third component of the Ori complex, serves as our individual “Ela,” that which connects our dual selves that exist simultaneously in the invisible and visible worlds. Ori is that intangible substance that is the extension, the communication, across the divide. That is why we portray Ori as our personal Orisa, because Ori carries our prayers and communicates our wishes to our Iponri. In this way, our Ori is like an Orisa pot. It is our connection to ase. This is why Ori is the first “Orisa” to be praised; it is the one that guides, accompanies and helps the person since before birth, during all life and after death, assisting in the fulfillment of his or her destiny. Thus the praise name Ori-Apesin - one who is worthy of worship by all. It is said that a person’s Ori, besides being the source of ire, is the only Orisa that can and will accompany one to the very end:

Bi mo ba lowo lowo
Ori ni n o ro fun
Orii m, iwo ni
Bi mo ba bimo l'aiye
Ori ni n o ro fun
Orii m, iwo ni
Ire gbogbo ti mo a ni l'aiye
Ori ni n o ro fun
Orii m, iwo ni
Ori pele
Atete niran
Atete gbe'ni k'ooosa
Ko soosa ti I da'ni I gbe
Leyin Ori eni
Ase
It is Ori alone
Who can accompany his devotee
to any place without turning back
If I have money, it is my Ori I will praise
It is my Ori to whom I shall give praise
My Ori, it is you
All good things I have on Earth
It is Ori I will praise
My Ori it is you
No Orisa shall offer protection
without sanction from Ori
Ori, I salute you
Whose protection precedes that of other Orisa
Ori that is destined to live
Whosoever's offering Ori chooses to accept

let her/him rejoice profusely
Ori the actor, the stalwart divinity
One who guides one to wealth, guides one to riches
Ori the beloved, governor of all divinities
Ori, who takes one to the good place
Ori, behold the good place and take me there
Feet, behold the good place and accompany me thereto
There is no divinity like Ori
One's Ori is one's providence
My Ori, lead me home
My Ori, lead me home
Ori, the most concerned
My skull, the most concerned in sacrificial rites
Ori, I thank you
Ori, I thank you for my destiny
My skull, I thank you for my destiny
Ori I thank you (mo juba)
Ase, ase, ase o!

As the “personal Orisa” of each human being, our Ori is vital to the fulfillment and happiness of each man and woman; more so than any other Orisa. More than anyone, it knows the needs of each human in his or her journey through life. Ori has the power of Ela, to pass freely from Orun to Aiye and vice versa. It exists on both dimensions:

Ire gbogbo ti ni o nii
N be lodo Ori
A lana-teere kan aiye
A lana-teere kanrun
All the good that I am expecting is from my Ori
He who makes a narrow path to aiye
He who makes a narrow path to orun

What at first glance seems like a very complicated theology, when we gain an understanding of the metaphysics within the mythology, reveals a simple metaphysical principle; the principle of causation. The ability to create in Orun, and have it manifest in Aiye; like Oro becoming Ela. Awo is the development of this ability; either through our Ori, through Orisa, ancestors, etc. Others have expressed the concept of Ori. One explanation worth quoting is by Babasehinde Ademuleya:

"The soul, to the Yoruba, is the "inner person", the real essence of being – the personality. This they call "ori". The word "ori", in contrast to its English meaning as the physical "head", or its biological description as the seat of the major sensory organs, to the Yoruba connotes the total nature of its bearer. A critical study of the term in Yoruba belief reveals the intrinsic meaning and value of the object it is identified with – that is, the physical head – and carries with it the essential nature of the object associated with it – that is the man. To the Yoruba, the physical "ori" is but a symbol – a symbol of the "inner head" or "the inner person", the "ori-inu" (the inner head). Ori in Yoruba belief occupies the centre of sacredness, and how it is conceived is embedded in the Yoruba myth concerning the creation of man and the role played by his creator, Eledaa (He who created). The Yoruba word for man – eniyan – is derived from the phrase eni-ayan (the chosen one)."

... a wa gegebi eniyan, ...

a wa ni Olodumare yan

lati lo tun ile aye se,

Eni -a yan ni wa...

we as human beings,

we are the God's elect,

designated to renew the world,

We are the chosen ones.

Human beings are called eniyan (the chosen ones) because they are the ones ordained "to convey goodness" to the wilderness below Olorun. In other words, divinity abides in humanity, and vice versa.

Let us now consider the Ori-inu. The African idea of the soul has

been conceived and described in different ways. In Yoruba, the idea of the transcendental self, or soul, has been difficult to express in English. Some have called emi soul. Emi is invisible and intangible. This is the life force breathed into each human by Olodumare. Not to be confused with eemi, which is simply breath. Emi is what gives life to the body. When it ceases, life ceases. A Yoruba would say about a corpse, “emi re ti bo” - his emi is gone. Another word sometimes mistaken for soul is okan, which literally means the heart. For the Yoruba, the heart is more than an organ that pumps blood. It is from where our emotions emanate, and the locus of psychic energy. But it is not soul. For me, the soul is Ori-inu, that portion of the “God-stuff” from the Snail that comprises the “inner person,” the real essence of being. If Ori is the mystery of consciousness, then Ori inu is a mystery within a mystery. Ori inu is the elusive inner core of knowing. It is the focus of initiation to get to that “place.”

Regarding life-force (emi), that which Olodumare bestows on each individual and an integral component of each Ori-inu, it is known as ase (pronounced awshay). Emi is the life force, but it is made up of ase. Ase is a concept almost as complex as Ori. Ase is a component of the life force breathed into each human being by Olodumare; it is spiritual power; it is the power to create. Pemberton describes it this way:

"Ase is given by Olodumare to everything – Gods, ancestors, spirits, humans, animals, plants, rocks, rivers and voiced words such as songs, prayers, praises, curses, or even everyday conversation. Existence, according to Yoruba thought, is dependent upon it; it is the power to make things happen and change. In addition to its sacred characteristics, ase also has important social ramifications, reflected in its translation as “power, authority, command.” A person, who through training, experience, and initiation, learns how to use the essential life force of things is called an alaase. Theoretically, every individual possesses a unique blend of performative power and knowledge – the potential for certain achievements. Yet, because no one can know with certainty the potential of others, eso (caution), ifarabale (composure), owo (respect), and suuru (patience) are highly valued in Yoruba society and shape

all social interactions and organization. Ase inhabits the space (shrine) dedicated to Orisa, the air around it, and all the objects and offerings therein. As stated by Pemberton, ase pertains to the identification, activation and use of the distinct energy received by each thing in its original portion. The efficacious use of ase depends on the ase and knowledge, the awo, of the one who attempts to harness it. The power of the word is an important part of harnessing ase."

The day Epe was created
Was the day Ase became law
Likewise, Ohun was born
The day Epe was invoked
Ase is proclaimed
Epe is called

But they both still need Ohun (to communicate)

Without Ohun (voice), neither Epe (curse, the malevolent use of ase), nor Ase can act to fulfill its mission. This is why ase is often likened to "a-je-bi-ina" (potent and effective traditional medicinal preparations which respond like the ignited fire (ina). Je (to answer), da (to create), and pe (to call). Iluti is the power of the Orisa to respond to our call – "Eborá to luti la nbo" – we worship only deities that can respond when consulted (Abiodun). One of the main goals of Ifa/Orisa devotees is to build up their personal ase. The goal of every babalorisa, iyalarisa, santera, santero, iyanifa and babalawo (collectively called Awo), is to not only build up their personal "quantity" of ase, but to develop the ability to tap into the ase of other beings and objects in order to use it. However, it must be understood that, according to Yoruba belief, women are born with the ability to access ase (that doesn't mean they know how to use that ability). This power inherent in women and the secret of the womb, is called "aje." Men, however, must develop this ability through initiation.

In the words of awo Falokun Fatunmbi;

"Awo need to develop the ase necessary to transform ibi (misfortune) into ire (good fortune). They must possess the ability to effect change in the visible world by manipulating

forces in the invisible world. “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 Aiye through the Ori of the diviner, it takes shape and is formed by the ofo ase [oro, power of the word] inherent in the oriki spoken by the diviner while in an altered state of consciousness.”

The innate urge to communicate contained in Oro and manifested as Ela is observable in ritual. The importance of Esu cannot be overstressed, as it is Esu who determines the efficacy of any ritual, from iwure (prayer), to chanting Odu verses (oriki ire), to ebo and to initiation ceremonies. Esu is in a powerful position as one’s good fortune or bad depends on what he “reports” to Olodumare. A hierarchical structure emerges in divine communication. Even if Esu carries the message of an Orisa to Olodumare, Olodumare will check with one’s Iponri (higher self, twin soul in Orun) to see if it has the desired ire (good fortune) asked for by the person. If the person’s Iponri says yes, then Esu delivers the message to the original Orisa who made the request on behalf of the person. Esu facilitates the movement from orun to aiye as he is the line in between them. Esu and Ela are inseparable.

Another aspect to divine communication is the use of color. The use of color against color creates a mathematical equation. This graphic design uses symmetry, rhythm, emotion, and balance. The Yoruba word for this is “iwontunwonsi” (moderation). An example would be the white and red of Sango. The red signifies raw power, and heat. The white coolness and wisdom. Sango is balanced, moderated – iwontunwonsi – through color. This concept is expressed in the following Yoruba saying derived from Odu: “Efun ewa osun l'aburo” Beautiful lime chalk (white) is camwood's (red) senior (Mason). The Yoruba metaphysics of extensionism, is a somewhat complicated structure of divine communication, but a close relationship between all involved (Ori, Esu, ancestors, Orisa, etc) insures its efficacious nature.

In addition to controlling the release of ire (good fortune), our Iponri determines the Odu under which we are born, which in turn determines which Orisa energy a person will live under in the particular life in question (Orisa are born in Odu). When we tell Olodumare what kind of experiences we want to have in a lifetime, we are choosing experiences that will help us hone our souls; we want to work on our weaknesses, so as to do our part in the elevation of our collective ancestors (egun). Thus Olodumare will place us under the influence of the particular Odu/Orisa that will best provide us with those experiences in a way that ensures lesson learned.

The concept of personal taboos (ewo) in Ifa/Orisa is related to our dual existence (ori-inu as double of iponri) A person should not ingest or have anything to do with the particular elements (including colors) that make up his or her ipin, ori-inu (Opefeyitimi). These ewo are contained in the Odu of our birth. It is through divination that we learn what we need to know about our Ori, our destiny, taboos, potential pitfalls, dangers, etc.

For further explanation of Ori-inu, ase, and Iponri we return to Baba Falokun Fatunmbi:

In Yoruba psychology, consciousness originated from lae-lae (i.e. eternity)—the mystical source of creation. This idea is part of a body of thoughts on the structure of being and of the universe, and these thoughts are referred to as Awo (i.e. mysteries). These ideas were formulated at the dawn of Yoruba civilization, and were contained in 256 verses each known as an Odu. Knowledge of these ideas was kept away from the public domain and guarded jealously by the priests of Ifa (the Yoruba religion). They were only passed on via oral tradition from one priest to a descendant priest. It is only recently that some of these ideas have started to be written down by Yoruba scholars.

According to Awo, a part of which is paraphrased above, everything in the universe was created from the ontological tension between the opposing forces of expansion and contraction, light and darkness. The contracting forces are centripetal in nature, and therefore absorb light, and the expanding forces are centrifugal and so generate light.

To the Yoruba, light comes from darkness and darkness from light. Both are seen as an expression of ase, a spiritual potency sustaining all of creation. In human beings, the seat of ase is located within ori-inu (i.e. inner head), which is the spiritual consciousness of self and the home of the unconscious mind. The balance of opposing energies in ase generates a spherical pattern in consciousness. This is symbolized by the circular format of opon-ifa, a divination board used by priests to restore alignment between ori (i.e. the physical head, also the seat of the conscious mind) and iponri (i.e. the super-soul, imbued with eternal life, which resides in orun). This board is essentially a map of the polarities of forces in consciousness.

Referring to the opon-ifa model of the structure of consciousness, ori is to the south, opposite iponri in the north. To the east is ara (i.e. the body) and to the west is emi (i.e. breath of life). In the centre of these forces is the inner head (ori-inu). It is the home of the unconscious mind and the seat of destiny.

It is believed that, just before birth, every ori negotiates an agreement with Olorun (i.e. God—literal translation is owner of the sky), outlining their goals for that lifetime. At birth the details of this agreement are removed from the realm of conscious thought and hidden in the unconscious domain, within the inner head (ori-inu) and iponri in heaven. One's destiny, therefore, is to remember the original agreement and work towards achieving those goals. Any deviation from these goals creates a misalignment between iponri and ori and results in disease. Healing is sought through divination, a process of remembering and of realignment with destiny.

This is a very lucid explanation and worthy of including in its entirety. What we want to accomplish through divination and in our daily lives, is the balance of the four quadrants which intersect at Ori-inu, the center spot on the opon Ifa. It is worthy to note at this time that the Ori-inu is also the interstice of all Orisa. Obatala (the arch-divinity) came down the chain with the Snail Shell. Ogun not only took over where Obatala left off, but also works alongside Ajala-Mopin. Ogun, carves the faces of the Ori's after Ajala moulds them, including the eyes, which are then "activated" by Esu, who

also activates the facial muscles, in effect giving us the emotions. Remember also, that Esu is the “membrane” between darkness and light. Ogun’s relationship to Ori is found in still another Odu verse from Osa Meji:

Ori buruku ki i wu tuulu
A ki i da ese asiweree mo loju-ona
A ki i m' ORI
oloye lawujo
A da fun Mobowu
Ti i se obinrin Ogun
Ori ti o joba lola
Enikan o mo
Ki toko-taya o mo pe'raa won ni were mo
Ori ti o joba lola
Enikan o mo

A person with a bad head (Ori) isn’t born with a head different from the others

No one can distinguish the footsteps of the madman on the road

No one can recognize the head destined to wear a crown in an assembly

Ifa was cast for Mobowu,

Who was the wife of Ogun

A husband and a wife should not treat each other badly

Not physically, nor spiritually

The head that will reign tomorrow,

Nobody knows

The participation of Obatala and Ogun in creation is attested to by the fact that most of the ese Odu about creation are found in Odu’s containing either Ogbe or Ogunda or a combination of both (Ogbe is the Odu that incarnates Obatala, and Ogunda incarnates Ogun).

Oshun is the “owner of the beaded hair comb,” and the Orisa of hair stylists. Besides adding to the power and beauty of the human face

and head which is the focus of much aesthetic interest in Yoruba culture and art, hair-plaiting carries an important religious significance in Yoruba tradition. The hair-plaiter (hairstylist) is seen as one who honors and beautifies Ori, the “pot” for Ori-inu. One’s head is taken to be the visible representation of one’s destiny and the essence of one’s personality. It is believed that taking good care of one’s hair is an indirect way of currying favor with one’s Ori Inu. Thus, the Yoruba have created a wide range of hairstyles that not only reflect the primacy of the head but also communicate taste, status, occupation, and power, both temporal and spiritual.

The Ori inu is comprised of three parts which are accessed through our ori. The first spot is our forehead which is what many refer to as the third eye. The second is at the top of the head which connects us to our iponri and Ela, and the third is at the base of the skull which connects head and heart, a condition necessary for attaining elevated levels of consciousness. It is through the base of the skull that one connects with Orisa (goes into possession).

Yoruba religion focuses on the worship of the Orisa because of the belief that they act on behalf of Olodumare, who is too exalted to be approached directly. Yet Olodumare is indirectly involved in the day-to-day life of an individual through his/her Ori Inu. This is why it is of central importance to maintain balance and harmony between the three components (ori, ori-inu, iponri) of the Ori complex. This preoccupation overrides any worship of any Orisa, and even of one’s ancestors. In the past, every adult Yoruba had an Ori pot or an ibori, which is kept inside an ile ori (house of the head). It is encased in leather and adorned with as thousands of cowrie shells.

Many people consider the Yoruba concept of Ori as fatalistic. If one’s Ori contains one’s destiny, which is pre-determined in Ajala-Mopin’s workshop, then how can it not be fatalistic? If every activity we engage in on earth has been pre-ordained at the point when we chose our ipin-ori (portion or lot) with Ajala-Mopin before coming into the world and cannot be altered, then how is it not a fatalistic theology?

The first thing to consider is that Ori is divided into two parts; Apari-inu (represents character) and Ori-apere (represents destiny). So far we have only considered Ori-apere. This division into two

parts is why, at the beginning of this paper, I said, “It can be considered as the Yoruba theory of consciousness, or as the Yoruba theory of destiny, or both,” and is the source of much confusion regarding the Ori complex. As stated previously, Ori-apere, the half that consists of destiny, consists of three elements: a-kun-le-yan (choice), a-kun-le-gba (freewill) and a-yan-mo-ipin (destiny)

Akunleyan were choices you made at the feet of Olodumare regarding what experiences you wanted on earth. For example, how long you wanted to live, what kinds of successes and failures you wanted, the kinds of relatives, etc. Why not choose to be the only child of wealthy parents? Because life is not measured on how comfortable it was, but on the degree of honing of the self that was accomplished; The continuing quest for perfection; the elevation of soul. Akunlegba (notice legba in the phrase) is the element of free will. The freedom to make choices while on earth. Watch out, Esu/Legba is watching! Akunlegba also relates to those things given to us to help us fulfill the choices made in Akunleyan. Ayanmo is that part of our destiny that cannot be changed. For example, day of death, our sex, the family in which we are born, etc. But even here, in Ajala-Mopin’s domain, we make a choice as to which of the Ori’s we want. It is when coming into the world, when we pass through omi-igbagbe – the water of forgetfulness; the boundary between orun and aiye (Esu), that we forget our chosen destiny.

These concepts show that although there is some determinism involved, there is plenty of room for one to influence one’s fate. There is another element called ese. Ese literally means “leg,” but in this context means “strife,” “hardwork,” or “struggle.” Ese introduces the principle of human agency:

Opebe the Ifa priest of ese (legs)

Divined for ese on the day he was coming from Orun to Ile (earth)

All the Ori’s called themselves together

But they did not invite ese

We will see how you will bring your request to fruition

Their meeting ended in quarrel

They then sent for ese

It was then that their meeting became successful

That was exactly as Ifa had predicted
No one deliberates
Without reckoning with ese
Opebe, the Ifa priest of ese
Cast Ifa for ese
On the day he was coming from Orun to Ile
Opebe has surely come
Ifa priest of ese
ase

This principle is further elucidated in a verse of EjiOgbe:

"Do your work"

"I am not working"

This was the Ifa cast for the lazy person

He who sleeps until the sun is overhead

He who relies on that which is possessed through inheritance
exposes himself to suffering

If we do not toil and sweat profusely today

We cannot become wealthy tomorrow

"March through the mud"

"I cannot march through the mud"

"If we do not march through the mud

Our mouths cannot eat good food"

These were the declarations of Ifa to the lazy person

He who possesses strong limbs but refuses to work

He who chooses to be idle in the morning

He is only resting for suffering in the evening

Only toiling can support one

Idleness cannot bring dividend

Whoever refuses to work

Such a person does not deserve to eat

If a lazy person is hungry, please let him die

Dead or alive, a lazy person is a useless person

Human agency is a central part of Yoruba theology. Besides not working hard, another path to failure is that in which a person, not knowing their destiny, will work against it, thus experiencing futility even if working hard. This is why we turn to Ifa through Orunmila – Eleri-ipin, for guidance as to whether or not one is on the right path. However, one is free to make use of ese (hardwork) and ebo (sacrifice, offerings) – which requires freewill – to change their fortunes. Since Ori is limited to one’s material success – nowhere in Odu does it say that Ori pre-determines moral character or personal ethics - it does not affect all our actions. Although we come into the earth with either a good Ori – olori-rere (owner of a good Ori) – or a bad one – olori buruku (owner of a bad Ori) – an individual’s destiny can be changed through the help of spiritual forces such as Orisa, Egun, etc. Ebo is a form of communication between the natural and supernatural realms, and involves the establishment of a reciprocal relationship with those forces. One’s destiny may also be affected by the Ajoogun - malevolent forces. In addition, there is a concept called “afowofa”, were one is the cause of one’s own problem. Such actions are empirically observable. So a person is held responsible for those actions for which he is the cause, but attributes to his Ori those which transcend him (Balogun).

Orunmila lo dohun a-dun-hun-un

Emi naa lo dohun a-dun-hun-un

Orunmila ni begbe eni ba n lowo

Ba a ba a ti i ni in

Ifa ni ka ma dun huun-huun-huun

Ori elomii mo

Ori eni ni ka maa dun huun

Orunmila ni begbe eni ba n n’ire gbogbo

Ba a ba a ti I ni in

Ori eni ni ka maa dun hun-un

Orii mi gbami

Mo dun huun aje mo o
Orii mi gbami
Mo du huun ire gbogbo mo o
Ori apere
a-sakara-moleke
eni Ori ba gbebo re
ko yo sese
ase
Orunmila said complaint, complaint, complaint...
I said it is all complaint
Orunmila said if ones colleagues are rich
If we are not yet rich
Ifa said we should not complain
To another person's Ori
We should complain to our own Ori
Orunmila said if one's colleagues are getting
all the good things of life
If we have not got...
We should complain only to our Ori
My Ori, deliver me
I complain of money to you
My Ori deliver me
I complain of all the good things of life to you
Ori nicknamed Apere. Nicknamed A-sakara-moleke
Whoever's offering is accepted by their Ori
Should really rejoice.
Ase

Orunmila's involvement in the Ori complex cannot be overstressed. One of his praise names is "A tori Eni ti ko sunwon se" - One who reforms bad heads. In Odu Ogbe Ogunda, Ifa says there were seven duties one had to perform before he left orun for aiye or ile:

1. Divination
2. Performing of Ebo
3. Job distribution and giving of Ewo (taboos)
4. Digging the pit of loss
5. Removing the rag of poverty
6. Wishes
7. Choice of Ori

According to the Ifa verse, these duties takes place at four different locations. Perhaps relating to the four parts of the opon Ifa. These duties together comprise ipin – destiny. However, we forget our destiny on the way out of the birth canal. This makes it extremely difficult to complete our destiny. However, Orunmila, as Eleri-ipin (witness to destiny) through Ifa, can help us make the necessary corrections in our lives to get back on path. In addition, as we are making our way from Orun to Ile, the Ajoogun try to take things from within our ori.

In Ogbe Ogunda, IFA says:

A grinder makes three works

It grinds yam

It grinds indigo plant

It is used as a lock behind the door

cast Ifa for Oriseku, Ori-Elemere and Afuwape

When they were about to choose their fates in the domain of Ajala-Mopin

They were told to make ebo

Only Afuwape made the ebo requested

He, consequently, had ire gbogbo (all good fortune)

The others lamented, they said that if they had known where Afuwape had gone to choose his Ori

they would have gone there to choose theirs

Afuwape answered that, even if they had chosen their Ori's in the same place, their fates would still have differed

Only Afuwape had shown good character. By respecting his elders and doing his ebo, he brought the potential blessings within his destiny to fruition. His friends Oriseku and Ori-Elemere had failed in showing good character in refusing to make ebo and, because of that, their destinies were altered. The most important influence on one's destiny is one's character and personal ethics – iwa. Iwa pele, or iwa rere, good or gentle character. That's why the Yoruba say, "the strongest medicine against curses and spells is iwa pele." It is through adhering to the ethical standards of Orunmila that we can achieve spiritual growth. These ethics are embodied in two concepts, Iwa-pele (good or gentle character) and Ori-tutu (coolheadedness or wisdom). It is through the development of these two attributes, improvement at the personal, social level that we can improve at the spiritual level, which, according to the Yoruba, will elevate our collective ancestors, our entire lineage (Egun).

Here we come to the end of the philosophical movement from the metaphysical meaning descending into the aesthetic and then epistemological through to ethical meanings and, eventually, to positive or negative social effects, which effect the metaphysical in a unifying cycle. The ethics of iwa pele. If your life is a mess, before blaming witchcraft, family, or co-workers, examine your nature, your character. If you are selfish; if you are arrogant, if you are disrespectful, no amount of ebo will fix your problems. If you give happiness and share your possessions, if you are humble and thoughtful, you shall receive. Eniyan, the chosen ones, to bring good into the world. This is the social effect, which brings us full circle back to the metaphysics of Oro.

Ayanmo ni iwa pele; iwa pele ni Ayanmo

Destiny is character; character is destiny

Ifa a gbe e – May Ifa bless and be with you

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