GENERAL INFORMATION

Òrìsà & Ìrùnmolè

ÈSÙ

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Babalàwo

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Èsù

The wealth of the community

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Introduction

Láílo làìlò láílo

Adifa fun Orúnmìlà

Baba nlo ree bo jangan jangan da s’ori Èṣù

Ebo won ni o se

O gb’Ebo nbe, o ru’bo

Èṣù ti n ba l’owo

O d’orun re

Láílo làìlò láílo

Èṣù ti n ba l’Aya

O d’orun re

Láílo làìlò láílo

Èṣù ti n ba bi’mo

O d’orun re

Láílo làìlò láílo

Èṣù ti n ba n’ire gbogbo

O d’orun re

Láílo làìlò láílo

Translation:

Láílo làìlò láílo (name of Awo)

Casted Ifa for Orúnmìlà

When he was going to take off all of his life’s problem to Èṣù

He was advised to offer Ebo

He complied

Èṣù, if I don’t have money

It’s left to you

Láílo làìlò láílo

Èṣù, if I don’t have a spouse

It’s left to you

Láílo làìlò láílo

Èṣù, if I don’t have children

It’s left to you

Láílo làìlò láílo

Èṣù, if I don’t have all the blessings of life

It’s left to you

Láílo làìlò láílo

~Sacred Odu Òsá Ogbè (Òsá Èṣù)~

According to the Ifá verse from Osa Ogbe above, when things were difficult for Orunmila, he went to meet Èṣù for a breakthrough. We can see that Orúnmìlà was able to change his bad luck with the help of Èṣù and he received all the good things of life that he wanted. Before we move forward in explaining who Èṣù is, let’s first take some time to explain who Èṣù isn’t. In doing that, I will love to make it clear that Èṣù was misinterpreted as Satan by the believers of Christ. This was probably done out of ignorance, or may have been a conscious act of wickedness just to portray our spirituality in a bad light.

The beginning of misconceptions

Èṣù laalu—laalu is ‘ola ilu’ which literally means ‘the wealth of the community’—is one of the most important Irúnmolè. In Ifẹ̀ẹ̀ṣe, Èṣù occupies a significant role as the keeper of Ase and it may have been due to this that the deity was attacked by colonial forces. Before the advent of Christianity, every household in Yorùbáland had a shrine for Èṣù in front of their house irrespective of the family's main deity.

Now let’s talk about the translation of Èṣù as Satan/Devil by Bishop Samuel Àjàyí Crowther.

Bishop Àjàyí Crowther

Àjàyí Crowther was a Yorùbá linguist born around 1809 in Oyo State, Nigeria. He and his family were captured by Fulani slave raiders when he was about twelve years old. In the early 19th century, the British outlawed the Atlantic slave trade and set their navy to patrol the western coast of Africa to enforce this new law. Before the slave ship that carried Crowther left port for the Americas—where Spain and Portugal still permitted the international slave trade in their colonies, while the British empire and the United States allowed slavery even though they had banned the trans-Atlantic importation of Africans—it was boarded by the crew of a British Royal Navy ship under the command of Captain

Henry Leeke. The crew freed the captives, and took Àjàyí and his family to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where they were resettled by local authorities.

After spending many years outside of Africa, Crowther returned in 1843. Together with Henry Townsend, he embarked on a mission to Christianize Yorùbáland and its environs. They first opened a mission in Abéòkúta, in today's Ògún State, Nigeria. That was where their misinterpretation of Ịṣẹ̣ṣẹ began. Crowther embarked on a project translating the Bible from English to Yorùbá, he chose Yorùbá names for Biblical ones using oro ayalo in the following order:

Joseph - Josẹ̀fu

John - Jòhánù

Moses - Mose

Adam - Adamo

Eve - Efa

Samuel - Samuẹ̀li

David – Dáfídì

However, when it came to the arch enemy of biblical Jehovah, it went thus:

Satan/Devil - Èṣù???

Now, this leaves one wondering how the two correlate. According to the Bible, Satan was a rebel, an angel who tried to compete with the biblical God. For that reason he was forsaken and chased out of the kingdom God to hell, where he now rules with his own followers. This is a direct contradiction of what Èṣù stands for.

Èṣù in Yoruba belief is one of the most loyal servants of Olódùmarè —the supreme being in Iṣẹṣe, Yorùbá cosmology—neither he nor any of the 801 Irúnmolè ever went against the will of Olódùmarè. They were never in competition with Olódùmarè. This leads us to understand that translating Èṣù as Satan is either an act of deliberate demonization or an act of ignorance which requires immediate rectification. We all need to wake up and realise that Èṣù and Satan are not similar in any way. Let's not forget that Crowther left Africa at a very tender age before returning after more than 20 years, so he had little to no prior knowledge about Èṣù. Also, this was a man who set foot on the continent for one reason alone; Christianization in order to soften the grounds for colonialism. Èṣù has nothing to do with cursing man or turning man against Olódùmarè, he serves as a mediator between us and Ode Orun (Sky World). There is no record in Ifa of Èṣù rebelling against Olódùmarè. Besides, does it not demean the power of the Biblical Jehovah that the omniscient God created something It had not foreseen would rebel and cause trouble for mankind on such a huge scale?

Olúrónbí

African spirituality—in this case Ișẹ̀șe, Yorùbá religion/spirituality—is mainly an open energy which can be used to make or break anybody depending on what the user is making out of it. As good as Èșù is, he also has various manifestations just like other Òrìșà do. In order to establish and further illuminate how important Èșù is to humankind, I will share a popular story among the Yorùbá people. Many Yorùbá today don't even know that the story is from Odu Ifá and some don't narrate the story the right way any more. Let me start with the popular song which goes thus:

Olúrónbí o

Jan-in Jan-in

Ìrókò Jan-in Jan-in

Olúrónbí o

Jan-in Jan-in

Ìrókò Jan-in Jan-in

Olúrónbí j'eje Ewúrẹ

Ewúrẹ Ewúrẹ

Olúrónbí jeje Àgùntàn

Àgùntàn Bolojo

Olúrónbí jeje Omo re

Omo re apon bi epo

Olúrónbí o

Jan-in Jan-in

Ìrókò Jan-in Jan-in

Translation:

Olúrónbí o

Jan-in Jan-in

Iroko Jan-in Jan-in (Expression)

Olúrónbí o

Jan-in Jan-in

Ìrókò Jan-in Jan-in (Expression)

Olúrónbí made a pledge of Shegoat

Shegoat

Olúrónbí made a pledge of sheep

A big fat sheep

Olúrónbí made a pledge of a child

Her child that is light in complexion like palm oil

Olúrónbí o

Jan-in Jan-in

Ìrókò Jan-in Jan-in

The above is what many people sing today but I can tell you that these aren't the right lyrics to the song. After sharing the story with you, I will also share the original lyrics to the song and reveal how important Èṣù's function is to mankind.

Olúrónbí was an attractive fair-skinned lady. She was known throughout the village for her astonishing beauty and her wealth. She was rich but unfulfilled because she couldn't get pregnant, not to talk of giving birth to a child. Olúrónbí tried all that she could and it all proved abortive but she never lost hope.

In the ancient days, there was a particular tree called Igi Ìrókò Agunregejege. Every year, people would visit this tree to request for whatever they wanted. They would make a covenant with Ìrókò, promising that if the tree could do what they requested, they would come back to pay whatever they promised.

Olúrónbí decided to give this a try. She went to visit

Ìrókò even though she didn't really believe in the tree's powers. At the base of the tree, Olúrónbí met many people. Some were making promises to bring a she-goat the following year, others promised sheep. Before approaching the tree to make her request, Olúrónbí was warned to only make a pledge with whatever she was capable of giving. When it was her turn to request and to also make a pledge, Olúrónbí said, "Iroko Agunregejege, all I want is to have my own child. I want people to be able to call me with my child's name, I want you to take me out of barrenness. If you can do this for me, I will bring back the child to use as sacrifice to you."

Olúrónbí said this out of desperation, not knowing that all she said had been accepted. A few months later, she found out she was pregnant. When she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, her baby was the talk of the whole village as everyone was happy for her. The baby was so cute that people rushed to carry her and many young ladies would pray to Ọbàtálá to give them a child as beautiful as Olúrónbí's. As the whole village was happy and rejoicing, Olúrónbí slowly slid in a state of sadness and regret. She had not forgotten the promise she pledged to Ìrókò Agunregejege and the day to fulfil her end of the bargain was fast approaching.

Weeks to D-day, Olúrónbí went to consult Ifa so as to know how to escape from using her daughter as a sacrifice to Ìrókò. They consulted Ifa and the Babaláwo blamed her sternly, telling her that she was the architect of her own problem. Olúrónbí was advised to offer Ebo. The Babaláwo told her that it was only Èṣù that could help her. She offered Ebo with one goat and she was told to go give Èṣt one goat. She complied.

The day came when Olúrónbí was to fulfil her pledge to Ìrókò. On that day, a lot of people were present to celebrate, give thanks and also to pay their pledges to Ìrókò. As people were singing, dancing, those who brought she-goats took their animals forward, placed them in front of Ìrókò and watched the animals disappear. The same thing happened with sheep. Immediately, Olúrónbí saw what was going on, she held her child close and she started singing.

This is the original song:

Olúrónbí o

Gba'ni gba'ni

Iroko gba'ni gba'ni

Olúrónbí o

Gba'ni gba'ni

Ìrókò gba'ni gba'ni

Elewure jejee Ewúrẹ

Ewúrẹ won beleje

Al'àgùntàn jejee Àgùntàn

Àgùntàn won bolojo

Olúrónbí jeje Omo mi

Omo mi apon bi epo

Olúrónbí gba'ni gba'ni

Ìrókò gba'ni gba'ni

Translation:

Olúrónbí

The saviour

Ìrókò the saviour

Olúrónbí

The saviour

Ìrókò the saviour

People were pledging a she-goat

A big fat she-goat

People were pledging sheep

A very matured sheep

Olúrónbí pledged her child

A beautiful baby, light as palm oil

Olúrónbí

The saviour

Ìrókò the saviour.

As Olúrónbí sang, everywhere went silent. Those present started feeling pity for her. Then all of a sudden, a thick deep voice emerged from the tree singing the same pattern of song in reply. The song goes thus:

Olúrónbí o

Gb'omo gb'omo

Emi ìrókò gb'omo gb'omo

Olúrónbí o

Gb'omo gb'omo

Iroko gb'omo gb'omo

Elewure n jejee Ewúrẹ

Ewúrẹ won beleje

Al'àgùntàn n jejee Àgùntàn

Àgùntàn won bolojo

Iwo Olúrónbí, iwo jejee Omo re

Omo re apon bi epo

Olúrónbí o

Gb'omo gb'omo

Ìrókò gb'omo gb'omo

Translation:

Olúrónbí o

The receiver of child

Ìrókò, the receiver of child

Olúrónbí o

The receiver of child

Ìrókò, the receiver of child

You saw people making a pledge of she-goat

A big fat she-goat

You saw people making a pledge of sheep

A very matured sheep

You Olúrónbí, you make a pledge of your daughter

Your beautiful child, fair in complexion like palm oil

Olúrónbí o

The child receiver

Ìrókò, the collector of the child.

Immediately after Ìrókò finished the song, Èṣù collected the child from Olúrónbí's arms.

"When you were making promises, you didn't think of the repercussions. Now you are here crying crocodile tears! Give the child to me and let me use it as a sacrifice to Ìrókò," Èṣù said as he collected the child from Olúrónbí.

He then turned to Ìrókò and said, "This is a human, we have to perform every rite and cut off the baby's head before giving it to you."

Èṣù put the child on the floor in between his legs and picked up a knife. Èṣù then pushed the baby back, hiding it and instead brought out the he-goat Olúrónbí used as a sacrifice earlier. Èṣù performed his trick, cut the head of the goat then wrapped it with a white cloth and stretched it forward to Ìrókò. Ìrókò collected the head to confirm what was inside.

"What? This is a goat's head," Ìrókò exclaimed upon discovering Èṣù's switch.

“Remember, the collector of the head will never collect the head twice. Once you’ve already collected one, it’s a taboo for you to collect another,” Èṣù said to Ìrókò.

And so, Olúrónbí was able to return home with her baby.

Èṣù, being the intermediary between humans and other deities, was able to use his influence to help save the life of Olúrónbí’s daughter. This is what Èṣù represents to the Yorùbá people and that’s why he’s called Èṣù laalu—ola ilu meaning ‘wealth of the community’. It is Èṣù who the community benefits from.

Èṣù is a pure neutral energy that doesn’t interfere in the decision-making of humans, like many are already inclined to believe. You make your decision whether good or bad and Èṣù is the force that will ensure you get the appropriate result for the decision you made. Èṣù doesn’t care about being loved or liked, Èṣù only cares about being right. It’s important that we all understand and come to terms with the fact that we are responsible for our actions and that we should always be ready to face the consequences.

The different manifestations of Èṣú

Èṣù Ìjà: This is one of Èṣù’s manifestations whose energy can be channelled for personal/community defense. People channel this facet of Èṣù to either fight

on their behalf or fight those who wish to do others harm. Èṣù Ìjà is used as a form of strong protection against external forces.

Èṣù Ifá: This is the Èṣù that comes with our Ifa as the keeper of Àṣẹ and an intermediary between humans, the Irúnmolè/Òrìṣà and Olódùmarè. Èṣù Ifa is only received alongside Ikin Ifá or Òrìṣà focal points to grant Ase to the activities carried out at the shrine when one is fully initiated to Ifá/Òrìṣà. As we know, Orúnmìlà and Èṣù always work hand in hand. That's why when one receives their Ifá, they will also receive their Èṣù.

Èṣù Agb'Ebo: Any Babaláwo who is practicing and doesn't have this Èṣú at home is not yet complete—only and unless this Babaláwo is not offering Ebo or doing Ìpèsè. Èṣú Agb'Ebo is the Èṣù which we take Ebo (sacrifice) and Etutu to after it has been accepted. This Èṣù is very important in any Babaláwo's home. It is usually located in front of the house or in an open area in the home. Most times when Èṣù is to be fed, this is the type of Èṣù we feed.

Èṣù Alaje: This is one of Èṣù's manifestations that works for financial stability. As the name implies, Èṣù Alaje—Alaje meaning he who possesses money/wealth—this Èṣù helps to keep the financial aspect of one's life stable.

Èṣù Ìsó’lé: Back in the days, there was nothing like human security guarding each compound. We used our spirituality to safeguard our home and properties and that is the function of this Èṣù. Èṣù Iso’lé is the energy of Èṣù we use in safeguarding our homes and property. It is manifested in a way that requires us to set a time where the Èṣù will come out at night to secure our home, by not allowing evil doers and thieves gain entrance. If an unwanted fellow or unauthorized individual should enter the compound of the house at an odd hour of the night, Èṣù Ìsó’lé will beat up such a fellow and throw him out of the compound. I have had a personal encounter with this particular Èṣù so I can defend its efficacy anywhere.

Èṣù Oja: Èṣù Oja means Èṣù of the market. This kind of Èṣù is located at a corner of the market. It is the energy of Èṣù that watches over the market and those who are buying and selling. It keeps the atmosphere peaceful when rightly propitiated.

Functions of Èṣú

Let’s look at an Ifa verse in *Òyèkú Òdí:*

Oyekundi kundi kundi

Adifa fun Èṣù Òdàrà

Eleyi ti o j’oye Ojude

Ebo won ni o se

O si gb’Ebo nbe Oru’bo

Nje Latopa latopa

Èṣù gongo

E l’owo, E bi’mo

Èṣù gongo

E s’owo, e j’ere

Èṣù gongo

Eni s’Ebo loore

Èṣù a gbe

Latopa latopa

Èṣù gongo

Translation:

Oyekundi kundi kundi (name of Awo)

Casted Ifa for Èṣù Odara

That will be the important force at the forefront

He was advised to offer Ebo

He complied

Latopa latopa

It’s Èṣù

You have money and also have child/children

It’s Èṣù

You did business and it was prosperous

It’s Èṣù

Latopa latopa

It’s Èṣù.

~Sacred Odu Oyeku Odi~

Èṣù is to be seen and described as the karmatic force of the universe. Èṣù is the link between man and the spirit world to the Yorùbá. He is a strong deity, one who has to be pacified so that he shows us the good side of life and moreover, he does not allow trouble or evil to be done to us.

Let us objectively look into the function of Èṣù who is a fierce god, like Thor or Sango but not evil like Hades. In

Yorùbá belief, Èṣù has to be constantly sacrificed to because he is the one between us and the other deities. Èṣù has the power to intercede on behalf of humans to other Òrìṣà and can also look away if the offending mortal refuses to perform sacrifice to ward off evil. Èṣù does not cast evil, he merely performs his duties while ensuring that no man is unjustly attacked by evil. At the same time, anyone who has done wrong must pay for his wrong deeds. That is why even when someone is initiated to Ifa, after receiving their Ifa they will be given their icon of Èṣù, and the same goes for other Irúnmolè too. If you visit some shrines in Yorùbáland, you will see that each deity has their Èṣù beside them—like Èṣù Ifá, Èṣù Ṣàngó, Èṣù Ògún and so on.

There are eight forms of evil in Ifá philosophy; Death, Pestilence, Loss, Paralysis, Trouble, Curse, Bondage and Iniquity. All these eight are under the supervision of Èṣù according to Olódùmarè who placed Èṣù in that role so as to monitor their activities. These eight are always trying to hinder the progress of man and this is why any sacrifice or rites performed on earth to ward off evil must have Èṣù's Àṣẹ in it through reciting Odu Ówónrín S'Ogbè—the odu of Èṣù. Even when one is advised to offer Ebo, refuses to listen to advice and that leads them into trouble, Èṣù will be the one to help take the person out of the tribulations if Èṣù is well propitiated.

Oríkì

Èṣù láàlú

Ògiri òko

Okiri Oko

Bákaré àjàgbó

Abáni wóràn bá ò rídá

Ebora burúkú tín jé láátopa

Aréyinjú lógun lo

Ayigbin!

Oba nílé Kétu

Ọkùnrin dúdú Ilé Ijelu

Aduro ti Elebo n’ijo ogun le

Ègbè léyìn elébo

Enini leyin eni-o-koro-Odumare

Èṣù máse mí

Òtá mi ni kí o se

Translation:

Èṣù, the wealth of the city

The big and strong stone

The hawker of penis

Bakare, the fair fighter

He creates crimes to implicate those who look for it

He who possesses eyes that are capable of chasing away bad forces

Ayigbin!

King in the city of Ketu

The strong black man of Ijelu town

The confidant of those who appease

The support behind those who make sacrifice

The antagonist behind those who refuse Olodumare's messages

Èṣù, please, don't turn against me

It is my enemy you should turn against

Things we can use to best feed Èṣù

- Obi (kolanut)
- Ọtí (gin/alcohol)
- Ẹyẹlé (pigeon)
- Àkùkọ (rooster)
- Àkàrà (fried bean cake)
- Òbúkọ (he-goat)
- Àgbò (ram)

Èṣù's taboo is adin (palm kernel oil).

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