

THE SOURCE
ÌYÁNLÁ
PRIMORDIAL YORUBA MOTHER



ÌYÁLÁJÀ ILEANA ALCAMO

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ÌBÀ



ÌYÁ NLÁ, MORE ANCIENT THAN THE WORLD,
 WHOSE AGE NO ONE KNOWS,
 YOU ARE THE ONE WHO BUILD ALL NATIONS,
 AND WHOM ALL NATIONS HAVE KNOWN,
 YOU ARE THE CORE WHO HAS ALL THE FORCES,
 ALL OF US HAVE RESPECT FOR YOUR GREAT ÀSE.

I HONOR YOU!

DEDICATION

To Ìyá Nlá who makes her presence and essence so available to me, to know and understand the life of existence through all of her diverse manifestations in both the spiritual and material realm.

To Ìyámi Òsun for the legacy of her Àjé energy and for guiding me to find other Ìyálájà to sound in unison to induce the virtues of collaboration.

To Ìyámi Àjé who is the force of creativity and impetus that rises with each sunrise and sunset to bless my children, my husband and I. Thank you, for the legacy in my persona of so many attributes and for guiding me into the correct path that reveals the esoteric and exoteric origins of your existence and your source.

To Eye Àjé the invisible mysterious energy who is the center of the boundary between heaven and earth. Who masters the medicine that protect and heal my children, my husband and I, from the secret expeditions of wrongdoers.

To my husband Olúwo Faponmìlẹ̀ Osuntumíwà Osobiyí, for his continued support, love and respect for me as a woman and as an Ìyálájà, but most importantly for his deep respect and acknowledgment to Ìyá Nlá.



Foreword



"Let our Mother hear our laughter"

A woman is a Sign, but signs are not just words, it also include images, gestures, scents, tastes, textures and sounds — essentially all that is the way in which information can be processed into a codified form and communicated as a message by any sentient and reasoning mind to another. The study of woman is a growing field that produces action and interpretation in an attempt to integrate the findings to restore the view of life and meaning as imminent features of the natural world.

An *lyálájà* covers four important areas such as motherhood, priestess, medicine woman and *lyálàjé* (*woman of essences*) to fulfill their missions of being useful at any level. Many of us woman have come into the way of healing for many different reasons and from different paths. Nevertheless, all of us have something in common; we become enlightened to accomplish our destinies in many different ways. As women, we have the calling, and we chose to respond. When we listen closely, we open ourselves to the calling, meaning that we are prepared to develop the knowledge that is going to guide us to become a door on behalf of existence.

Being an *lyálájà*, an Awo Ifá, and *lyálàjé* is not an easy path to walk. Nevertheless, these paths come with huge responsibilities. A woman, who walks these paths, should ask herself, what is important for her and her family, is it to have mystical and material knowledge in these paths? Is she more interested in performing rituals, spells or curses, or to find the source of wisdom to understand those rituals as well as their purpose and meaning to comprehend such existence.

A woman who is also an *lyálájà*, Awo Ifá, and *lyálàjé* needs to know what her spiritual connection is with Orun (heaven) and Aiye (Earth) in each one of every diverse manifestation inside the creation. We, as

woman, should realize that our physical and spiritual correlation with Àjé energy have been granted to us as a guide to seek how to empower our spiritual development without abusing or altering the balance of existence. Alongside the wisdom of being an Ìyálájà and an Awo Ifá, this Àjé energy gives us, the intellectual approach of matrilineal ancestry, which is an important fountain inside the entire wisdom of the existence.

In this book, I will present some information that was shared with me and some personal experiences about how many different kinds of connection a person can have in order to connect with Ìyá Nlá forces. My hope for the reader is that my discourse will help each one to discover that Iya Nlá, Ìyàmi, Awon Iya Wa, Odu, Eleiye and Àjé are beyond any derogatory "Witch" categorization.

We should remember that the Oracles (*which mean, a source of wisdom, knowledge and prophecy*) exist in every culture. These Oracles help humankind to understand, how to communicate and how to approach the creation. The literature is there, oral or written, to help us find the correct paths that apply to our way of living and belief inside the creation. In other words, these Oracles help us to know the total development of our spirituality as well as many other areas and ways inside existence.



WHO ARE YOU ÌYÁ NLÁ?

A PRESENCE THAT STANDS FOR EVERYTHING,

IN SOME CAPACITY,

IT IS ÌYÁ NLÁ WHO GAVE ASE.

THE SOURCE

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I

INTRODUCTION



Before everything changed for the imposed patriarchal way (*The historical era from the Sixteen to Nineteenth Century, in which the powerful literary trope and warlike patriarchal invasions, wars, and subjugation, to conquer, enslave, exploit, and disempower*), it was the matriarchal rules that granted women such a strong position in the society. The Yoruba nation, since at least from the 1600 century has been in direct contact with Islam and during the 1900 century with Christianity (*according to records*). The Yoruba culture and beliefs have been influenced by these cultures and religious views, in which the strong influences of a gender/sex for God and Allah is a masculine figure. Before the patriarchal way, many ancient societies were more matrilineal. Woman had the power of disposition of how to govern and guide their family, the compound and the territory, not as a way of woman's victory over men, but as an acceptance of a harmonious balance of equal rights in order to build and lead a better society in their compounds by both sexes. During those days, there was a matrilineal line in which children are identified in terms of their mother rather than their father, and extended families and tribal alliances formed along female bloodlines. All through those days, woman had the authority to govern, stabilize society and was always consulted for major matters. Their innate woman's gift as seers coupled with their understanding of nature gave them the wisdom to acknowledge the mysticism of life. It was their respected responsibility to maintain the life force around the compounds. The social, cultural and spiritual order of matriarchal rules was based on intelligent principles, cultivated over

centuries from woman's experiences. A very well reasoned ruling was based in balanced behavior that practiced reciprocal equality, respect for everything, regardless of gender/sex, and age.

The Yoruba nation like other cultures around the world, did not escape the influences of other cultures. Interpretations and translation had strong influences of describing everything from the masculine approach. All cultures started to grab only the masculine approach and rejected the feminine part. All nations started to adapt and adopt concepts from these crossed cultures as a cultural prohibition, or taboo, especially those that had to do with and involved women. No religious practice from around the world including the oracle of Ifá escaped these patriarchal influences during cross-cultural age. Each religious view including the oracle of Ifá was flooded with many of these concepts in which women were excluded from participation in major roles as rulers or head of an Ilé (religious house).

Inside the oracle of Ifá, the topic of *Odú*, *Gbadu*, *Igba Odú*, *Igba Iwa* or *Calabash of Existence*, presents common difficulties to religious followers because of the influences of the internal and external crossed cultures. The exact origin of *Odú* (*do not confuse with the Odú Ifá*) is unknown, but everyone agree that *Odú* is the most venerated secret of Ifá, which have been described as *the Universe, the divine power, created itself and perpetually recreates itself, a creative energy called Aṣe, the Vodun (Òrìṣà) of Ifá*, that no one may comprehend its' total meaning.

Aṣá as *Ifa* is a cosmological practice that not only describes the energies of nature, but the entire philosophical and metaphysical essence of these energies, and how their relationship intertwine and interact both worlds (*the one of matter and the one of spirit*) with all living things. *Aṣá* is the name given to the cosmological practice from the Arara (*Dahomean*) people who are commonly called *Vodoun*. It is described as a tradition that encompasses the intrinsic in every aspect of ones' life and existence. It is to say that from southwest Senegal (*Ancient Ghana*) to Abeokuta in Nigeria, are the origins and development of the *Vodoun* religion, especially the Ewe of Togo (*of whom the Fon are a subgroup*). *Aṣá* is viewed and described as a

divine and efficacious process that maintains the quality of life in a harmonious balance between the two worlds. Lastly, unlike Ifa/Òrìṣà practices, certain women who are called or marked to become an *Aṣá* (*Iyanifa/Bokono*) in the West African *Mami Wata* and *Vodoun* tradition, work directly with *Gbadu* (*Iya Nlá Òdù*).

The Yoruba deities are considered descendants of this creative principle, *Aṣe* energy. For *Ifá* and *Aṣá* practitioners there is no standard "religious book". In the beginning, all narratives had been handed down orally (*which did not preclude omitting something or adding something*) and currently in both ways orally and written, the knowledge that we have in many areas around the world about the Yoruba pantheon are derived mostly by interviewing the *Ifa - Aṣá* priest and priestess often through interpreters which has led to error and misunderstanding since words do not have the same meaning in every culture and territory. Even a didactically skilled religious person(s) from Africa would find it quite impossible to give to another person of Western intellectual background, any adequate explicit idea or information, since each community according to their own language and dialects (*that in their majority is a tonal one*), have different meanings for one word or expression. In other words, many cultures compose the structure of any Continent that allows each individual community (*towns or estates*) to have their own ancestral lineage, training, ethics, regional linguistic, ethnic, spelling, meaning, folk sculpture, folktales, food ways, naming, proverbs, ways of speaking, philosophy and even individual and communal political variations and structures, Africa is not the exception.

The worship system of *Odú* has frightened so many people from different Yoruba communities, who follow the oracle of *Ifá* and *Aṣá*, because its power has been so incomprehensible. The worship-system of *Odú* has been extremely esoteric, since this object of reverence, has suffered so many changes in the process of preparation and beliefs of each community's rules and variety of customs.

The ways of preparing a physical object to worship this Supreme Energy is symbolized from one to various sizes and forms, calabashes, which contains many secret objects and ingredients; (*depending on the place or land where it is prepared*) that represents the existence. In addition, the interpretations of the *Oriki*, *Itan*, *Iwere* and *eses* carry numerous meanings of what Odù symbolizes depending on the geographic, ethnic and local definitions. Here are some meanings of how Odù is viewed and explained:

- "Someone who has eyes everywhere";
- "The supreme justice, who discerns the good and bad";
- "Someone who gives and takes life";
- "Calabash of existence";
- "Someone who is ancestor, ancient, and respected";
- "Someone who has created the world and nature";
- "She who has sixteen eyes";
- "One who created three kingdoms- sea-earth and sky-"; and
- "One who creates itself".

Nevertheless, these meanings differ by their purposes, composition and territory where it is prepared or received.

The topics of Odù are met with ambivalence, which became customary for people who do not comprehend its total meaning. Some Yoruba elders say that Odù is the stronger tip of *Ifá* and *Afá* and has the power to kill its initiates when they get carried away with the power that this entity allows them to use. In addition, many feel that Odù brings danger into the house where it is received, because Odù does not indulge in its keeper; if the person offends it, the person will get punished and can die. The levels of fears inspired by Odù surpasses the normal, and because of these fears the acquisition of Odù has been viewed as extremely serious and had to be vitally considered before, having or receiving it. However, they believe that there are compensation and advantages to possess the energy that it creates a solid link between the person and Odù, and this makes the person superior to others.

Describing and viewing it like this, it is thus admissible to posit a fearful origin and development about Odù. Human Beings should not be fearful when they try to acquire knowledge. Humans have a propensity to seek and understand with rationality the way of life. Its flair for expressing in a creative process makes one to incorporate things that arise from non-understanding. Therefore, the influence of this behaviorism can go beyond imagination and mutations in order to include control devices in any religious narration or literature as part of the transmission of cultural factors. To approach Odù topic that holds contradictions, it is necessary to raise a question, of where the similarities of fear and control factors come from and which kind of cross-cultural influence is going to be used to explain this phenomenon.

In this book, I will present my dialogue concerning the great fear of the unknown that surround this phenomenon. Odù for purposes of discussion is known as *Iyá Nlá*, classified and viewed as the head of *Àjé*. This fear is based on the misinterpreted information that has been passed along of the unknown worship of *Iyá Nlá* and her power. This is viewed as a threat. All cultural and religious practices have its fears of the unknown and *Ifá* teachings are NO exception. Nevertheless, we should understand that without the influence of the power of *Iyá Nlá* (*Odù*) the interpenetration of the oracle, would become powerless. An Awo *Ifá* (*male and female*) force comes from *Iyá Nlá* (*the Creator Mother*) also worshiped by different praise names in addition to *Odù*, *Igba Odù* and *Gbadù*, such as *Iyámi Òsòròngà* (*the Great and Mysterious mother*), *Iyá Agbè* (*Mother of the closed calabash*), *Ere* (*One who has Odù, child of Python or the Mother of the sixteen figures of Ifá, being Orun her seventeenth child*), *Iyámi Wa* (*Our Primordial Mother*).

Inside *Ifá* oracle as one form of *Iyá Nlá* teachings of mysticism embodiment, we can find all disciplines such as philosophy, literature, science, sociology, ecology, psychology, pharmacopoeia, arts, mathematics, laws and witchcraft. When we talk about the mysticism that is inside of these paths, we are talking about the Face and Truth of *Iyá Nlá* and the basis for existence of all things, beyond the past-present and future. The mystical side of *Iyá Nlá* teaches us how to understand

all paths that involve their arts. Are adherents opening doors to the healing ways or harmful ways? However, these arts do not accomplish their functions if the person does not have knowledge, wisdom, understanding and common sense, to understand the meaning of the tools and components that we take from the art of that path in order to make successful changes through the personal interaction with the mystical and natural functions of such components. The mystical teaching of Iyá Nlá through the Odú oracle is about the understanding of balance, action and self-determination between the forces of nature and the channeling energy of the person. This mysticism teaches that to summon supernatural forces can be a double edge knife that will expose all of the incorrect behaviors that the person is trying to hide as well as all the good behaviors that the person harbors. However, it has the alternative that once the person accepts their own ignorance and allows themselves to understand the knowledge that these natural forces bring, and then through the Odú oracle, Iyá Nlá (Odú) would reveal the wisdom to the person.

Through the oracle, we learn the eternal laws of nature and all living things inside the existence, the reality, logic, reasoning and common sense to know the outcome (*positive or negative*) in our every day life, having as a reference past events as an example. Iyá Nlá esoteric and exoteric underpinnings inside the oracle is to keep the truth as a fact into our way of being, if we do all things in the best way we can, as human beings. Iyá Nlá (Odú) teaches through the oracle to investigate things following the guide of previous experiences (tradition) from past events in order to find out what works and does not work according to the era or time that we actually live in order to understand what we are looking for and the possibilities of the outcome. Iyá Nlá's basis teaches us (*human beings*) to surpass the struggles and fears of life, through an organized work (i.e. divination, offerings etc.) with all living things to maintain balance. Iyá Nlá through the oracles teaches us not to be a whimper, complainer or indulger in self-pity. Iyá Nlá's philosophy teaches us to face problems realistically and logically in order to get to the root of the problems to determine the method to solve or eliminate them. Iyá Nlá's viewpoint encourages us to develop knowledge to acquire the wisdom that allow us to question and seek the facts in

order to avoid falling into pragmatism and fictions. Iyá Nlá's system teaches us how to live in reality as individuals that have to fight under somewhat different circumstances through magical transformations to accomplish or acquire results.

In every society around the world, males have been trying to obliterate woman's potential, minimizing her attributes and her wisdom. However, the power of Iyá Nlá that has been endowed through inherited rights to woman cannot be destroyed, no less be ignored. Iyá Nlá's wise knowledge of existence has been manifested since the beginning of time through woman. Notwithstanding this innate power of Iyá Nlá bestowed to woman and men (as children of this Great Mother) allow us to work with her. Once men really start working with Iyá Nlá's energy, they must continuously demonstrate and sincerely have the proper intention, attitude and respect for woman and never be abusive towards woman for their own sake.

OSA MEJI

ODÚ BROUGHT OUT AND BLESSED THE EGUNGUN MASK,
SHE FOUNDED AND BLESSED THE ORÒ SOCIETY,
SHE BLESSED ALL THE ÒRISÀ SHRINES,
OFFER RESPECT TO WOMEN,
IT WAS A WOMAN WHO BROUGHT US TO THIS WORLD,
THE SECRETS OF THE WORLD BELONG TO WOMEN,
SHOW RESPECT FOR WOMEN.



II



Ìyá Nlá and the Oracle

OSE-TURA

ALAKANKANIKA AKAKANIKI, ALAPASAPA-IJAKA'LU,
A BIRD FLEW VIOLENTLY INTO THE HOUSE,
ALAKAKANIKI IS THE NAME GIVEN TO ODÙ,
AKAKANIKI IS THE NAME GIVEN TO IFÁ,
ALAPASAPA-IJAKA'LU IS THE NAME GIVEN TO ÈSU-DARA,
A BIRD FLEW VIOLENTLY IS THE NAME GIVEN TO ÀJÉ.

Even for Yoruba people the concept about Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden, the tree of knowledge, the forbidden fruit and the serpent are well-known stories in which the female is the target of being the source for the creation of sins, temptation and all kind of evilness. This well elaborated propaganda is one of the sources that have blamed females for every malady to the point that men believe that some women could spoil everything because they are Àjé (a witch or a woman who can play negative roles). Under this conception, woman can attack, make another person sick, suck their blood and kill; women's powers are responsible for any tragedy in the first instance. Ironically, the people who talk like that about Àjé's power are also saying that an Àjé can make a man rich and powerful. Accordingly, men have taken quite a bit of advantage of the *Adam and Eve syndrome*, which permeates all religious practices, workplaces, communities and homes. Due to the influential propaganda of this *Eve myth*, we can observe the policy of

separation of the sexes in order to create a strict pattern of divisions and status, where leadership and command positions between woman and men is characterized by male domination. That is to say, with the *Eve Syndrome* in mind, men use it as a strong tool to create sexist separations to support their intransigent arguments of female leadership positions. This *Eve* propaganda gives the idea of the innate superiority of men over woman to back all the changes including the sex image of the creation with a specific male image for God in order to discourage the female image from engaging in domination.

The scriptures of many religious faiths have been transcribed by men who omitted a lot of information or even translated the original meaning in order to dilute any sort of empowerment of woman. Specifically the one that covers the powerful image, energy, symbols, many attributes, skills, intellect, stories, and characteristics associated with female energy. One can only think that the same may be true even in our own Ifá Oracle. For example, It appears that a few Odù Ifá, i.e. *Irete Ogbe*, *Ose Tura*, *Òfún Meji*, *Irete Meji*, *Òfún Idi*, *Irete Olota* (*Irete Owonrin*) among the 256 go into full swing in our era making confusion about woman as its primary objective. It is not logical to say that Ìyá Nlá as the Great/Primordial Mother would forbid her daughters, to work directly with her and to be a representative of Her. Further, it is also logical as a premise, that such "taboo" would be for those who are not selected by Ìyá Nlá to worship and/or even to receive this most precious Energy. In Dahomian sector, Mawu (*Fa- Ifá*) Oracle is personified as Gbadu (*Odu*) who has sixteen eyes and watches over the kingdoms of the Sea, the earth and the sky who lives on top of the palm tree. According to Dahomian scriptures, Gbadu (*Ìyá Nlá / Odú*) was never anyone's mystical or terrestrial wife as described in *Ifa* oracle that Odú was the wife of Orúnmilà.

The dissemination of the oracles from all around the world has been under the control and influence of male interpreters in which the information has been spreading with double intention full of fears about woman being Àjé (witches), in a pejorative way of expression. An example of this can be found in one interpretation of *Irete Meji* where

it states that an Àjé can impersonate an Òrìsà, Irúnmolè, priestess, priest or even criminals and murderers for darkest evil purposes. This type of dissemination can only manipulate people to have fear of women, since this can create from that image a lot of fear making people believe that women have a hidden agenda to use their powers only to cause harm and evil to innocent people. These fears that appear in another interpretation of *Irete-Meji*, talks about the 201 bird-master (*Eleiyé's*) who came to earth with the other 201 Imoles. Another is *Osa-Meji*, that talks about how Iyámi travel inside Òrúnmilà and does not want to come out his body and threatened to eat his inside organs. However, in another *itan* from *Ose-Otura* talks about Òsun (*Oshun*) being the only female among all the deities/Irúnmolès, who came to earth to maintain balance in the organization of earth's existence. Òsun was a female and the males did not invite her to their meetings and task. Òsun used her Àjé powers and spoiled their entire task and plan, for not including her to bring balance in the way it was suppose to be since the beginning. The male Irúnmolès had to ask Òsun for forgiveness and accept that without the inclusion of a woman nothing can go smooth.

The Adja-bird has seen the Ayo bird,
They said, "It is hard to understand things;
Men who eat with five fingers,
It is hard to understand his ways".

Every society and every culture have a intercultural contact of a measurable equation of changes as a dynamic in character, however variable in degrees of changes. Those changes are channeled by the unique human abilities of how to transmit ideas. It is impressive to see through time that the name of Iyá Nlá, Gbadu, Iyámi, Àjé, Odú, Igba Odú, Iyámi Òsòròngà, Òsun, Ere or Eleiye have been a source of fears based on women's authority. It is an indisputable fact that these names have had permanent longevity and this feminine energy is very old, yet immortal. The Eternity of this energy from the 1600s until today, even

for the Yoruba and Daheomian theology, is a conception that is not clearly stated, but it is certainly clear that she has been there before all things as they came into existence.

OYEKU OGBE:

E o mo iya,
K'eyin o ma tun sure puro mo.
E o mo Iya, e o mo Orun,
K'eyin o ma tun sure puro mo.
Eyi f' o d' ifa fun Oriseeku,
T' o so wi pe oun n ree ki Iya-mi.

You do not know the mother,
Stop your impetuous lying,
You do not know Òlórún,
Stop your impetuous lying.

This is the Ifá divination for Oriseeku (child of Ògún),
Who proposed to name the origin of Iyá-mi.

As an Iyálájà, an Awo Ifá, and Iyálàjé, studying and learning the mystical and spiritual side and philosophy of existence, I discovered that to understand the function of the supreme energies, one's should not limit themselves to a physical object (*pots and ingredients*), as a physical human form or self-image. I discovered that people inborn with some kind of connection to these energies, it is then by initiation or rituals, the person would be awakened by these energies of how to work with them in their natural environment. It is erroneous to think that these energies can be stored inside a calabash/pot in order to manipulate them for our own desire or accommodations. The calabashes/pots and the ingredients we place inside are sacred symbols that represent the nature of a specific energy that already exist. The ingredient that has been consecrated in a ritual process is simply one way to intertwine and to connect the person's Òrì with those cosmic energies. Iyá Nlá maintains the balance for harmony in the existence

within and between those cosmic forces and all living things on earth. Being in tune with Iyánlá takes me to a place in which I comprehend that She is the Core that gives meaning and coherence to the whole system. She can manifest in many ways and forms to allow us (*human beings*) to discover how to intertwine with the natural energies that go beyond what we can see at a simple glimpse. Iyá Nlá represents creation, wisdom, integration, and resolution. *"Mo juba Iyá Nlá, afin' ju eye (Reverence to the Great Mother, the beautiful bird.)"*

A Yoruba word to describe a universal concept that represents an evil spiritual force that enforces the earthly and cosmic power at once is, *Àjé*. Through the European and Islamic influence, an *Àjé* concept has been erroneously used as a pejorative definition to define a woman as a witch, (*knowing that the definition for witch means wise*) since the belief is that a woman as the owners of this mysterious force can alter and damage everything in *Aye (world)*. *Witch* as a pejorative term has been used to define the woman as the origin of all earthly existing malice. An Iyá *Àjé* has many different attributes and roles inside any society. An Iyálájà have been bestowed with wisdom, authority, spiritual vision, fertility and the right tools (*àse*), which are the divine components to make transformation into motion. Each culture, have many different ways to describe and classify woman's powers. Everything depends on the point of interpretation, views and ways of practicing in each tribe, community, territory and culture as well from the patriarchal point of definition. Do not forget that there are men who are *Osó (men with some similar power to, but not equal to an Iyálájà)*. Some customs say, that when the name of any *Awon Iya Wa - Our Mothers-* i.e. *IyáNlá, Odú, Gbadu, Igba Odú, Iyámi Àjé, Iyámi Òsòròngà, Òsun or Ere* is pronounced, those who are seated must rise and those who are on foot will make reverence, some as a sign of fear and others as a sign of respect. They refer to *Àwón Iya Wa* as a frightening power, to whom we must appraise, appease, greet, observe with honor to avoid their wrath or red eye.

In Yoruba cosmology, people believe that *Àjé* could bring good and bad. All can be joyful and generous, but can also be moody

and angry, therefore not only help, but also bring punishment to humankind through her destructive force (i.e. when they are not paid necessary respect or when religious or moral laws and behaviors are transgressed). Once people cross those lines they are going to receive the visit of *Àjé's* wrath with sickness, problems, obstacles, blindness, irrational thinking, misfortune, hunger, sickness and droughts. People tell stories and it is believed that *Àjé* can transform themselves into birds, spiders, and cockroaches to spread their harm, but mostly they appear in normal human forms as long they remain unidentified. They also believe that *Àjé's* mischief at night, causing people to suddenly fall sick or even die, making woman barren and men impotent, stealing the souls of young children, and poisoning the harvest and water, when some one in the compound or village has been a transgressor. The name *Àjé, Iyámi* or Woman of the Bird has become known as a sign of fears and calamities. Their fame of Greatest *Eleiyé's* has been associated with the blackout and evil spirits of the night (*they have been referred to as "The Elders, Owners or Guardians of the Night"*).

A comprehensive analysis of what Iyá Nlá (*Odú*) is, nullifies any restraining valuation of who can and who cannot worship her. She is our primordial Mother, the first female principle, symbol of origins, wisdom, integration, evolution and resolution. She created the balance based on complementary pairs, female and male, positive and negative which means, the alternative that symbolize creativity and multiplication, the spiritual growth (life) on one side and destruction/death on the other. She is the first wisdom that represents feminine power and the eternal womb. Among the African pantheon, the power of Iyá Nlá (*Odú*) is very respectful but also very frightening. Iyá Nlá's (*Odú*) energy of wisdom in any representation (*Awon Iya Wa*) is so powerful that her names in any aspect must be mentioned with respect and humbleness.

According to one Yoruba *itan*, it narrates that there were only seventeen *Òrisàs* who arrived from *Orun (Heaven)* to *Aye (Earth)* in the first party, *Òsun* being the seventeenth one. Other *itan (Ifá Verse)* talk about only four, being *Odú (female)*, the fourth one. They also

have other *itan* that talks about Àjé who arrive to earth from heaven. If we analyze these popular names that refer to a major female energy, we can find that they are all discussing the same female energy with different praise names, path, missions, level or ways of manifesting. Here are a few Odú Ifá among 256 that establish this female power.

- **Òsun was the seventeenth one, and the only female, and without the knowledge of Òsun nothing goes smooth (Ose'Tura);**
- **Of how the 201 Imoles named one among them as, Iyalóde of Òtá (Irete-Meji), those who were chosen by her to receive the secret of the Bird have to bring calabashes before her;**
- **Odú, the only female who came to earth with the Aragamago bird (Irete-Ogbe);**
- **Odú, the only female (Osa-Meji);**
- **Eleiye come to earth (Ogbe-Ogunda) (Ogbe-Osa);**
- **How the secrets of Iyámi's was revealed by Eleiye (Irete-Owonrin); and**
- **Iyámi Òsòròngà comes to earth (Idi-Meji).**

We can appreciate that these *itan* in these *Odú Ifá*, talk about the same female attributes or praise names. Iyámi Òsòròngà, Òsun, Àjé and Odú represent the Iyá Nlá synthesis of the feminine strength within all women. As Àjé, or as Iyalóde of Ota (*according to one itan* Ota, *the place where the Irúnmolès arrived the first time*) or as Odú, people like to refer to them as Eleiye (*mother of birds*) and erroneously framed as *Master Witch*. Òsun is the icon not only for women, but also for the act of creation (*Ose- Tura*). Iyámi Òsòròngà is another icon for woman (mysterious cosmic force). Iyá Nlá (Ódú) (*the womb of origins and existence*) is another female icon; She is the owner of the oracular words (*Ose-Oyeku*), from where the Odú Ifá has the name and from where an Awo Ifá (*male and female*) receives the wisdom. The different praise names are paths that are meant to be known as the different aspects of Iyá Nlá (Odú) manifestations. Each one of her

aspects carries the force of *Eleiye*, all have been called Àjé and all have been classified as *witches*.

Women who undergo this spiritual force by inheritance or through the help of an initiation and/or ritual process as a way of re-balancing their shattered equilibrium and her Àse, become healers and mediators in both form, spiritual and material. As a rule, it is necessary and a responsibility for an Iyalájé to pass to our female children all these forces and knowledge, as a perfect unity and way of expansion and continuation. This process is a transfusion in which the mother and daughter continue the same spiritual and physical apex of Iyá Nlá (Odú) forces, the one who merges the stage of evolution for the existence.

A verse from Òfún Meji says:

Let us not run the World hastily,
Let us not grasp at the rope of wealth impatiently,
What should be treated with mature judgment,
Let us not treat in a fit of temper,
Whenever we arrive at a cool place,
Let us rest sufficiently well,
Let us give prolonged attention to the future,
And let us give due regard to the consequence of things.

Inside the Oracle of Ifá, the 256 Odú Ifá have 1680 + *itan* which are related to or talk about the manifestation of Iyá Nlá (Odú) in terrestrial forms. Among them, as a reference we can point to these:

- The Odú Ifá Ogbe Ogunda (Ogbe-Yonu) has a narration that appointed Òsun as the leader of Iyámi, since the narration talks about how Òsun transformed herself as a vulture (Àjé energy) and how Òsun makes spells (tapping the Àjé energy);
- The Odú Ifá Osa-Meji, Obara-Iwori, Irete-Meji and Ose-

Otura, also have narrations about how Ìyámi came into the world. Osa-meji has a specific narration that explains how Osa-Meji has been accused of being an Ìyámi, as well as how someone can be saved from the wrongdoers of witchcraft;

- The Odù Ifá Oyeku-Okanran, this Odù Ifá is the one that explained clearly, why humankind has to be on alert, in order to prevent the Ìyámi motherly ways of reprehending them, the agents of destruction; and
- Osa-Meji, talks about one specific event, between Òlódùmarè, Odù, Ògún and Obàtálá, before Òlódùmarè send them to earth, as follows:

Ódù—Oh! Creator, down there Ògún will have the power of war. He has a machete, he has a gun, and he has everything he needs to fight. Obàtálá too has all the qualifications to reach whatever goal he chooses. What then remains for me, the only woman among them? What shall I do?

Òlódùmarè spoke—The power of motherhood that keeps the Earth intact belongs to you. The power of the birds belongs to you. I will give you a large calabash, filled with these things.

Òlódùmarè calls again Ódù and asks—Odù, come back. Do you know how to use them?

Ódù replied—“If humans don’t listen to me, don’t ask my advice, then I will fight. If people ask me for money or children I will be lenient towards them and provided they are not impolite; for if that happen I will take it all back.

Òlódùmarè spoke—“That’s alright with me, but use your power with coolness and not with violence, or I will take it away from you” Because of Ódù, women have the power, for in the absence of woman, men can do nothing.

This is another excerpt among Odù, Obàtálá and the Awo, from the same Odù Ifá Osa-Meji. In this part, it explains how Odù can be in

the sacred groves to Egungun and also freely to the groves of Orò and places where spirits were worshiped. How Obàtálá wore her Egungun costume because he wanted to know and have the power she has. As in all forms of *itan Ifá*, the story does not tell what happened between events, it ends up with Odù sharing with Obàtálá some secrets.

Odù express to Obàtálá—“You can have Egungun, (Odù reveals the secrets to Obàtálá) nevermore will a woman dare to wear the costume in order to be listened to and the power has to be for both (female and male). From this point, nobody, children or old men, will dare to mock women. The power of women is greater. The woman gives life through giving birth, and whatever men may want to do, Woman must help them or they will mess up”

They sang together and Obàtálá said—“That every week everybody must give praise to women for the world to be peaceful, bend your knee, bend your knee for women, for women brought you into this world; women are the Wisdom of Earth, women have brought us into this world; Have Respect for Women.”

(SEE VERSION OF OSA MEJI IN
CHAPTER VII – EXCERPTS FROM ODÙ IFÁ)



III



Imposing the Cosmic Force of Ìyá Nlá

ORISA BI ÌYÁ NLÁ ODÚ KOSI!

IYA LA BA MA A BO!

THERE IS NO DEITY LIKE THE GREAT MOTHER ODÚ!
IT IS THE MOTHER THAT IS WORTHY
OF BEING WORSHIPPED!

Every culture has its own ancient feminine principle figure, which represents the Mother of all things, even the masculine dimension of her own divinity. In multiple cultures, the Mother who is One with earth and sky has many faces, phases, personalities and attributes that represent the principle of supreme authority derived from the land of herself, sometimes symbolically and sometimes embodied by a priestess of the Mother.

The world has different types of traditions, cultures, many theories, many colors, many ideas, many praise names, many heritages, many branches, many paths and many ways of worshipping the connection between the two realms, the material and the spiritual. Through oral teaching, writing, hieroglyphics, dreams, meditation, rituals, culture and folklore, spiritual people are finding their way to have a closer meaningful connection to one of the many spiritual paths of this Supreme Mother.

As an Iyanifa and Iyalájà, I embrace the feminine ancient figure of

my Great Mother Ìyá Nlá (Odú). She is the creator mother, the womb of all origins, is the central formation of the earth and she bestows the creation force of existence at the boundary between spiritual and material realms. Ìyá Nlá (Odú) manifestation does not depend on a specific place, form and behavior to conduct destiny, life and the time of human existence. The most beautiful experience I have embraced was her mysterious ways of manifesting, which stands at the cradle of true beauty that reveals the value of the wide variety of skill, talents, abilities and potency of the woman.

As a spiritual person, I believe that the inhabitant of the spirit world can come to us in an unlimited variety of forms. Some of us resort to different ways or methods to get a close encounter or connection to the spiritual realm. Some people worship the celestial beings and the spirit messengers, some use the human connection (*priest and, priestess*), some worship the human spirits (*the soul of an egungun or ancestors*), some worship the nature spirits (*animals, vegetation and minerals*), and some worship the elemental spirits (*air, fire, water and earth*). In other words, humans respond one way or the other, to the call on the primordial natural feminine essence by mutual correspondences between them and the Mother who has the power to create and nurture life.

I learned through time that people who embrace any ancient spiritual tradition as a universal concept of mysticism regarding the nature of existence and the universe have some factors in common;

- Respect for other people choices;
- There is no requirement that everyone must think and act the same way or believe that it has to be the same way of worshipping;
- There is no universal right or wrong way to understand and worship The Supreme Energy; and
- Every human being has the right to trust their own faith and intuition and the experiences acquired through them by worshipping the personal connection between the spiritual realm with the material realm that leads to a happier and balanced life.

As an Iyálájà, I am very proud to understand and comprehend that Iyá Nlá is a dynamic energy, a giver and taker of life who possesses that vital life force energy that she can transmit to her children. Iyá Nlá is an example of nobleness and good conduct, and is with every probability, the most multifaceted and comprehensive Energy of all. She projects her great energy of care to the continuation of existence and in the combative and objective matters related to existence. She represents the beginning and the end of things, but she leaves the intermediate details and the complications aside, in order for her children to learn from their own experience to grow up, and develop good behavior. We (humans) are the ones who create the affliction from devastation. We are the ones who trespass and our Mother IyáNlá can easily enforce her punishment, but she would rather teach us a lesson, than slay us. Her cycle (*seventeen days to rectify our misdeed*) of judgment, sanction and settlement stands as a warning to encourage us to seek her help, before She punishes. i.e. an equivalent of removing the Àse or the soul, astral removing of the person organ's that will have physical consequences and in the major case the physical decline of the spirit from the body and death.

"Iyá Nlá's Powers further defined":

She is a Penetrating Force of strong and powerful energy. She is the enforcement of cosmic law, that is, the person learns with respect how to channel, will help to open the door of communication with the Cosmic Forces and by her it is which the Divine Plan enters and is declared, as described in this *Itan-Oriki*:

My Mother,
When you are going out,
When you wish to undertake your work,
You inform the owner of the house
That you are coming.
When you come back,
You will proclaim you have arrived well,
You arrive safely,

You will say, Ogboni,
Iyami O!, Iyami O!, Iyami O!
The response, Ogboro,
Hooo! Hooo! Hooo!
All will call three times,
Iyámi responds three times,
She will knock,
She will enter,
She will greet the owner of the house.
When she wants to eat intestine,
When she wants to eat liver,
When she wants to eat arms,
When she wants to eat legs,
She will knock three times,
She will enter to eat the person,
She will eat and eats,
Then she leaves,
After, she feels pity for the person and engages in lamentations
"Oh Iyámi O!, please don't feed on me!
Please Iyámi, don't feed on me!"

Iyá Nlá, as an instrument, is the key to break molds, since she is the vital life force for existence. She is the true essence of life; she is the carrier of a continuous action to create new things as well to destroy them. She carries the energy to the point at which everything is a beginning or an end. She is the energy of origin, causes, creation, initiation or destruction. Iyá Nlá does not carry out or use her power to kill for her own pleasure, she strikes the person who breaks the rules, (spiritual and terrestrial and the balance) governing the universe's existence, then she enforces the cosmic administration of justice. According to the stories the ambivalence of her power is shown in seven trees that represents the seven types of different activities. Three of them she found good, on the other three, she found evil, and on the seventh one, she found both Ōrō energy and Àjé energy. In others words, these trees have powerful medicinal meanings of what Iyá Nlá represents, *justice, harmony, order, reciprocity, balance, propriety and truth* (attributes that every

mother teaches to their children), which can be seen as the seven keys for a human guideline to correct their behavior.

Ìyá Nlá, the first wisdom and the eternal womb that can manifest in different levels are so powerful that her name in any aspect, level or manifestation, must be mentioned with respect and humbleness. All aspects of Ìyá Nlá became as Awon Ìyá Wa (*Our Mothers*) who are the supporters of the world. Ìyá Nlá is primordially an integrating energy who makes herself available to us as a unified body, mind and spirit. Ìyá Nlá galvanizes the cosmic power of the earth with her staff of Àse, to transform, merge, integrate and resolve the opposites to reestablish the communal cosmic balance with the existence of all living being. Ìyá Nlá (*Odú*) is the **basic and most important energy**; she is the essence of the **Source** and the **Core** of everything.

Worshipping Ìyá Nlá's energy leaves enough room for individual interpretation and understanding. The worshiping of Ìyá Nlá's energy, as the mother as the source of life and fertility, has prehistoric roots. The transformation of this energy into a Great Deity of Cosmic Power was and still achieves with the composition of secret ingredients that refer to a principle of balance of cause and effect at work in the universe on a dramatic dimension. How to work with this mysterious energy requires a profound spiritual principle that cannot be easily explained or understood, no matter how one tries to stereotype and/or mimic her, she is the ultimate Order. The most important aspect of Ìyá Nlá's power is her inherent justice of every thought, deed, word and action having an impact on our destiny to our eternal wheel of birth, death and rebirth. Ìyánlá (*Odú*) is not only the mysterious source of existence; she is the very soil, all creating and all consuming. She is thus an echo of the woman warrior's fierceness of matrilineal inherited autonomy.

Her Worship

Ìyá Nlá, also known as Ìyá Agbè (*Mother of the closed calabash*) or Ere (*One who is Odú or the Mother of the sixteen figures of Ifá*), or Ìyámí Wa (*Our Primordial Mother*) have apart from others secrets (*woman who have it know*) has a paraphernalia to work with; such as her staff,

the crown of parrots tail feather (*sign of witchcraft power*) and the fan. Her matrix Apere has inside numerous small calabashes with sacred ingredients. The major ingredients are combined with, eedu (*charcoal or a piece of iron*) symbolized the core and crust of earth, efun (*cascarilla or white chalk*) symbolizing pure heart and cleanness, osun (*camwood*) symbolizing medicine and health, wasewase (*mud or earth from the ant hill*) representing establishment, abundance, queen black ants, queen termites symbolize force and represent fertilization and sand or earth from sixteen roads. Also included are some parasitic ewes, which symbolize the embrace and the balanced union between heaven and earth and female and male. The bird (*symbolic representation of her mystical power*) and a snake coiled with an egg (*symbolic representation*) of her protection from the existence of creation. The grey parrots represent the messenger of Ìyá Nlá who can talk and look down and see everything, reach long distances and high space by flying. The snakes represent the woman's eternal power protecting the continuation of the existence on earth. Also symbolized caution and vigilance -*the snake never sleeps her eyes always see*-. The parrot egg epitomizing the maternal principle of the cosmos that is fragile and have to be protected, with caution, bravery and prudence. Ìyá Nlá's dark cylinder in color, symbolizes her all embracing and comprehensive nature. Dark is the stage in which the mirror of the universe merges; darkness absorbs and dissolves to create existence. Darkness is said to represent the total absence of light that can generate by itself the power of consumption to spark, again signifying the nature of Ìyánlá as the origin of existence beyond any form. Ìyá Nlá's darkness symbolizes the existence of her transcendental metamorphosis to manifest all shapes, sizes, and time.

Ìyá Nlá in many instances has been described as garbed in space or sky clad. In her absolute primordial nakedness, she is free from all covering of illusion. She is Nature stripped of 'clothes' which means, it symbolizes that she is completely beyond name and form, completely beyond the illusory effects of false perceptions. Her nakedness symbolizes her relationship with the transcendental spirit of nature, a representation of a total open heart to illuminate the consciousness, which has been affected by human's imagination. Ìyá Nlá is the bright fire of truth, which cannot be hidden by the clothes of ignorance.

"As the sunsets arrive
 Her spirit into us will melt,
 As a blanket of darkness spreads over her creation.
 A light of burning fire,
 Will clean the mud of the night,
 With her stick to the lids of our sight,
 And became one with all and them
 Forever and ever She will be".

She is full-breasted; her motherhood is a ceaseless creation. She symbolizes the repository of knowledge and wisdom. Iyá Nlá's Apere represents the complete circle of creation and destruction, which is contained within her. She represents the inherent creative and destructive rhythms of the cosmos and everything on earth. Iyá Nlá's Apere with all the ingredients represents "fear not" and a conferring boon symbolizing the secrets of life and Her origin, which is the feminine form of the time. Iyá Nlá's human and maternal qualities continue to define the Goddess for most of her children to this day. In human relationships, the love between mother and child are usually considered the purest and strongest one. In the same way, the love between Iyá Nlá (Odú) and her human children is considered the most closest and tender relationship. Accordingly, Iyá Nlá's daughters have a particularly intimate and loving bond with her.

"To become a being we must go,
 Into Nature's womb.
 We walked into the belly of the bush,
 And been swallowed by the trees.
 But when we come back,
 Joy of rebirth for our mother we will sing."

However, her children should never forget Iyá Nlá's destructive and frightening aspects. Iyanlá may be classified as a frightening, mad, forgetful female energy that can spin the world out of control, but she is after all our Great Mother, which means, we must accept that Iyá Nlá as our primordial mother has the right to correct and educate us

in order to be a better child. To ignore the respect woman deserve and to pretend that one's ego is the center of everything, is to provoke Iyá Nlá mocking laughter and her red eyes. To accept that life has to care for woman without forgoing woman courtesy is to show respect and humbleness to Iyá Nlá. She is a nutrient Mother to her children, not only because she protects us from the way we think and act or from the wrongdoers, and witch crafters but also because she reveals to us her mysterious powerful wisdom to manage earthly life always under her guidance. She releases us from the incredible binding web of ignorance, pretense, and from discrimination against the female aspect.

It is no coincidence that Iyá Nlá blessings through Awon Iya Wa, enables sudden transformation, a turn around of life circumstances. It is a fact, Iyá Nlá Odú holds absolute dominion over humankind and spiritual world including all Orisas. By learning how to serve Awon Iya Wa properly, we can gain knowledge, wisdom, health and wealth on more than one level. Through the Awon Iya Wa interventions, changes can happen around anyone's entire material circumstances in an instant. Such changes are signatures of her Great Source. A fundamental knowledge to understand Iyá Nlá is through the forces of natures. No one on this earth can provide shields against the awesome force of the anger of Iyá Nlá in nature; those manifestations are the result of how much Iyá Nlá (Odú) powers can reach and cover. Iyá Nlá diversified stages became all Awon Iya Wa to control the different levels of the existence in nature. If we have some fears as a sign of respect to Iyá Nlá, we should honor and greet nature, woman and Mother Earth, which are represented by Awon Iya Wa. Iyá Nlá can diversify herself in many manifestation or dimensions that allow Her to have the power to wipe out anyone or an entire community through the activity of natural disasters. Her destructive path is raised, by failure to acknowledge her power or maintain the equilibrium that She created between human kind and the forces of nature, the lack of respect to woman, who transgress her due, and/or altered the balance of existence. Iyá Nlá (Odú), the Iyemole Iyamole (*The Great Mother of the divinities or Mother-Divinity*) is the mysterious First Mother to whom all matters are referred for judgment, sanction and settlement. She has the first right to, and the final say about, since she masters the power of life and death.

Ase d' owo Iyami,
 Ase d' owo Iya,
 Iya dakun gba wa o,
 Ki o to ni, to 'mo.

Sanction belongs to my Mother,
 Sanction is in the hands of the mother,
 Oh Mother, we beseech thee to deliver us,
 Look after us, look after our children.

Resistance and tolerance are two gifts that personify a woman, the same women that have been classified as *witches*. Iyá Nlá are united with all women by the flow of blood who give life, the one who embodies the concept of existence, a female quality that man must understand -indeed emulate- in order to survive.

As previously stated in Osa Meji, Obátálá decreed:

"That every week everybody must give praise to women for the world to be peaceful, bend your knee, bend your knee for women, for women brought you into this world; women are the Wisdom of Earth, women have brought us into this world; Have Respect for Women."

Historical *itans* portray a profound respect for women placing sharp focus on religious and supernatural forces. In fact, in some instances, they were held as high as goddesses because of their alleged awesome power. The Gelede and Efe festival is a tribute to honoring Iyá Nlá, great ancestral mothers and women's life giving powers. This celebration has two parts, a daytime called *Gelede* and a night ceremony called the *Efe*. This festival is held in the market place, which is the center of African women's social and economic activities. One of the most important and special sacred rituals in *Efe* and *Gelede* performances is to the Great Mother, Iyá Nlá. All the lights are extinguished, and a shrine is provided as a center for worshipping her. In this festival, men have to wear masks, feminine dress, baby-sling around their waists, metal bracelets on their ankles, and sometimes wear fake breasts.

It is believed that the performance of these dances neutralize and soothe the negative forces that emanate from Iyá Nlá, who can bring grievous harm, including death to their detractors. In the festival others mask from other goddesses are depicted as representations of Iyá Nlá in earthly form and symbolizing the mystical power and connection to Iyá Nlá.

One chant to celebrate the arrival of Iyá Nlá as the Spirit bird form:

Spirit Bird is coming,
 Ososobi o, Spirit Bird is coming,
 The one who brings the festival today,
 Tomorrow is the day when devotees of the gods will worship,
 You are the one who brought us to this place,
 It is your influence that we are using,
 Ososobi o, Spirit bird is coming.

Another chant to celebrate the arrival of Iyá Nlá as the bearded mother form:

Iyá Nlá come into the world, our mother,
 Queen one will not die like the evil one,
 Ososomu come into the world,
 Our mother the queen one will not die like the evil one."
 "Ososomu e e e,
 Honored ancestor "apake e e e",
 Mother, Mother, child who brings peace to the world,
 Repair the world for us,
 Iyá Nlá brings peace to the world o e.

The masquerades at the *Gèlèdè* and *Efe* festival could be interpreted to amount to Iyá Nlá (*Odú*) worship in order to pamper or appease the destructive side of Iyá Wa and her diverse manifestation through Awon Iyá Wa. Naturally, it reverts to the familiar fetching relationship between the spirits of Awon Iyá Wa and the devotees of each cult. The *Gelede* and *Efe* are rituals that promote the motif of balance and of barrenness. That is why African people greet Iyá Aye (*Mother Earth*).

Iya Aye held its divine authority and represents the maternal principles and fecundation. The Erelu (*female members of the Ogboni society*) are the symbols of good midwives and the one who help to prevent infant mortality.

Ìyá Nlá's wisdom remains an enigma for those who do not understand the diverse manifestations of her in each Awon Iya Wa inside Nature and Earth, who epitomized the maternal principle of the cosmos that carries the exoteric and esoteric expression and manifestations of existence. Understanding Ìyá Nlá (Odú) levels of manifestation serves as a way to pass on the lesson of how to live in balance with others and ourselves. Iya Nlá shares with us valuable teachings that can be used in every day life, not of just the Yoruba people but a worldview. She illustrates the positive and negative, but necessary aspects of her in order for us to learn how to maintain balance. She also reminds us that sometimes destruction must take place if we as human beings do not learn how to govern, our family and community, sharing the authority.

ÈJÌ OGBÈ

Orúnmilà ló di sàbíni,
Mo ló di Sákòsì baràà mi Àgbónnirègún,
Jiji tí mo jí,
Mo bá gbogbo Òmò Irúnmolè,
Níbi tí wǒn gbé ẹ fomi igbín pèrò ilẹ.

Orúnmilà inquires how the situation is,
I respond that it is fine,
Very early in the morning,
I met all Irúnmolè followers,
Where they were performing ritual to Mother Earth.



IV



Archetypes of Ìyá Nlá

The mysteries of Nature and Existence were cultivated and worshiped in a religious custom by the first human ancestors. Through those ancestors, there has been an humanity embodied, and elevated to a heavenly status in order to honor them and to continue their customs. These first ancestors taught their descendents how to understand the exoteric and esoteric form and ways of the invisible forces in order to sustain the continuous dynamics of existence within Nature. These first ancestors became the representative of those invisible spiritual forces and were named by their descendents according to their language, region and culture. The meanings of these names represent the worship of the mysteries of Nature and existence. This human embodiment of the first ancestors helps us to distinguish the diverse aspect and influences of Ìyá Nlá manifestations.

Ìyá Nlá's wise discipline teaches us that if we transcend the consciousness of the physical form we allow ourselves to flow and be nurtured into the essence of Awon Iya Wa (*Our Mothers*) maternal caring. We will be able to access forms, the Forces in Nature and the wisdom of our first ancestors. If we learn how to develop an ongoing relationship within the harmony of creation, we develop the sensitivity of these forces, who assumed the characteristic of a particular Imale or Irúnmolè or first African ancestors that were elevated to the Òrìsà status.

Ìyá Nlá aspects, manifestations, roles, attributes, concepts, or praise names are directly related to her ability and authority to heal, strike or destroy at will. Iyá Nlá, the self-existent energy who gives

life and harmony on earth, endowed her daughters with an inherent attribute of infinite and eternal gifts. The attributes include working with Òrò Egungun, and Eleiye (*the force that gives power and mystical abilities*) in order to intensify cause and effect changes. With these gifts, an Iyalajà is able to meld the terrestrial and astral power to cure, curse or to cause retributive justice on anyone who disrespects woman and motherhood.

The epitome of the pragmatic paths and diversifications honor the cosmological bond with Iyá Nlá. Apart from nature itself, she can be appreciated in any festival that honors female's essences. The Gelede festival whose centered focus is an act of supplication to Awon Iya Wa abilities to bring protection and life. Osogbo's Festival central focus is a celebration to honor, commemorate and eulogize the essences of the female goddess Òsun, whom with her noble strides brought the settlement of Osogbo to her descendants. Both sacred festivities honor Iyá Nlá's sacred womb who gives life. These sacred festivities celebrate the doorway to existence and honor the origin of the biological tools manifested in every woman.

When we truly accept that we do not have all the answers to life's mysteries, we begin to understand the power of faith. Being spiritual or a worshipping person helps us to understand that Iyá Nlá is more than a witch or sorcerer. The different spiritual paths of Iyá Nlá, connects us directly to a personal relationship with her as well as how we choose to live our every day life. That kind of relationship teaches us how to intertwine the concepts of right and wrong and to practice or worship the diverse manifestation of Iyá Nlá.

Everyone possesses the ability to find their path into the divine, inside one of the sixteen crossroads at different times. Iyá Nlá represents the uncontainable forces of existence inside the Cycle of Life, a place that can be found at the boundary between Orun and Aye, or between astral and material realms. Iyá Nlá encompasses all forms and actions of human spiritual and material dominion. She is multifaceted and the essences of riddles. She is our primordial spiritual and biological Mother, which allows HER to respond to any name and form, to move and manifest in all realms.

One from Orun , one from Aye,
Went on outings to bring sunrise and sunset
Where do we meet her?,
We meet her at the crossroads,
We meet her at the crossroads of sixteen roads,
Eight go to Aye,
Eight go to Orun,
What does she hold?
She holds sixteen rivers.

Iyá Nlá, Iyá àgbà, The bearded woman, the Womb of Creation, Womb of existence, the fearful power, the Mother of the closed calabash, the Mother of the gourd, who teach humankind through Awon Iya Wa how to acquire the cosmic knowledge to understand life, balance and the harmony in their life.

Iyá Nlá comes into the world,
Kind one will not die like the evil one,
Iyá Nlá stands up and come home in good time,
Honored mother come and repair the world for us.

The Great Mother has the power for everything to manifest in the world. If Iyá Nlá in any of her diverse manifestation (*Awon Iya Wa*) is annoyed, she can turn the world upside down. The manifestation of Iyá Nlá in every woman implies much more than fundamental female fertility, childbirth, gestation and fecundity. Women possess the secret of life itself, longevity, a special gift to bring human beings into life and to remove them from this world, wisdom of life and knowledge in preparing medicines. The power of Iyá Nlá is superior; she controls and owns the Òrisàs, deities and all *egbe* (secret societies of powerful women who can transform themselves into birds). No Òrisà can do anything, even Oro and Egun society cannot slaughter (*animal sacrifice*) without Iyá Nlá's permission. No Òrisà can help their worshipers and followers without Iyá Nlá's permission even prophecies of any diviner (*woman and men*) will come to naught if the diviner has not assuaged and pampered Iyá Nlá first.

Prudence was the ancient wisdom of Egba,
 Prudence was the ancient wisdom of Ijesa,
 Those who want to enter to the domain of Iya Nlá,
 To travel into the mist of Eleiye,
 They must donning a aworan, òja and iku,
 To enter in the town of the owners of the birds, and survive.

Iyá Nlá occupies an important status of respect and affection because when she is angered she operates surreptitiously to seek out and destroy the wrongdoers.

If you received a dog,
 Give it to Esu.
 If you receive a pigeon,
 Give it to Iyá Agbè.
 If a cult member has offended a woman,
 If any one who is foolish enough to offend a woman,
 Must be prepared to pay the consequences,
 I will give it to Aye.
 If people are treacherous and behave wickedly,
 I will give them to Eleye,
 Who will spread fire on their house,
 That implies a horrific death,
 With their eyes plucked out like shells.

Iyá Nlá is the female sovereignty at the very creation of the world. She is the Iyá *agbá* who posses a positive dimension as a protector, healer, guardian of social order, wealth, prestige and morality. Iyá Nlá is the owner of the intensified and strengthened vital power (*Ase*) regardless of subject matter. Without Iyá Nlá's sanction, rain cannot fall, no healing can take place, plants cannot bear fruits and children cannot come into this world

I come werewere,
 Mariwooo! Aganooo!
 I get up early in the morning,
 I bring dew from the otherworld to Aiye.
 I descend rururururu,
 I come with cudgels, a sheath, and a sword.

Iyámi Òsòròngà represents the great and mysterious cosmic force who reveals the origins of existence that has empowered woman. She encompasses the essence of the terrestrial and spiritual mother who is the re-claimer of the lives she grants and chronological administration of terrestrial time.

If you received palm oil and a rat,
 Give it to Iyámi Òsòròngà.
 The one who makes noise at midnight,
 The famous one that eats in clear farm,
 Who kills an animal without sharing with anyone.

Iyá Ayé, represents the Aged mother, The Mother of the Earth, or Mother Earth or the Center to Existence. She represents the responsible force that ensured and solidified humanity a home, health and productivity. She represents the element that ensures sustenance and fertility of all living things. She heralds the brave and courageous in the terrestrial realm without using a sword or knife. She represents the source of regeneration of life and the origin of the final resting place.

Òsun represents the Iyá Nlá female attribute whose domains represent the source of life, fertility and abundance, through the fluent waters of Iyá Ayé and blood through the human's veins. Òsun is charged to guard the spiritual and material spheres of life. Òsun is the representation of every Iyá Ajé and the Manly woman in every woman (1). Òsun the female energy possess the power to withhold the vital life force. Her energy is the inspiration to keep existence moving forward. Òsun's female energy can transform into a fierce warrior (*amazon warrior*) when necessary to fight and win any battle or triumph over war. She has a great wisdom of how to prepare *Afose*, in both ways, as an antidote or as a poison. Òsun is charged to make the ebo that keeps alive the connection that bind woman to Iyá Nlá. Through Òsun's life history, Iyá Nlá demonstrated that woman have to be respected, have prestige and be honored. Òsun did not give room for domination or oppression

over females, as she demonstrated when all male Orisas had to accept that nothing can be properly done without the contribution of the woman. Ōsun represents Iyá Nlá's political essence in every woman who is an Iyalajà and Iyá Ajé. Ōsun is the icon of the woman essence, as women who have the power of Eleiye, a female power representing and ruling the economic marketing of their own resources. Ōsun is the manifestation of Iyá Nlá's riddles, her most notable characteristic a deceptive smile and sweetness. Like the honey that can be the sweetest thing, but also bitter, a medicine and also a poison.

If you received coral comb,
Give to Ōsun (Oshun).
Ōsun ordered for descend of darkness,
To catch them in their front and back.
It was with darkness that Ōsun blindfolded them,
This is how woman have power until today,
And have more power than men.

Yemoja represents the Iyá Nlá manifestation that procreates and the sustenance source of food (*ocean*). She is another representation of a warrior woman who knows how to use a sword (*figure of speech and in reality*) when challenged and/or offended. She also knows how to use medicine to prepare *Àfoṣe* (*charms or powder that can cause good and harm*). The movement of the ocean waves represent the mystical dance of the universal cycle of life and Iyá Nlá's disposition to remove or renew life in different ways. No one knows how or where her uncertain movements will develop or end, i. e. tsunami, water tornado, water twister and sea level increase.

May Yemoja of healing waters,
The one who is as effective as salt,
When she is as effective as salt using the healing waters,
She became an ajé, as effective as salt.
She proudly grow long arms and hands for dancing,
And carries the power of transformation beyond understanding.
May there be peace in the salt that brings the power of my mother,
Mother of all sea,
Let there be peace in my soul.

Oya, Iyánsán represents the Iyá Nlá's manifestation of movements and the ability of sudden changes at spheres, life and death (*open the gate to birth, open the gate to be buried, giving and taking the breath of life*). She symbolizes the transformation and transcendence of war. She is another illustration of a warrior woman who ruled the Oyo empire knowing how to plan and to use the proper war implements, but very careful not to abuse the power of immediate disintegration. She represents the forces of instability and the force of the Egungun, which she uses to help society rid itself of instability. The personification of her transgressions and wrath can be appreciated when she unleashes the winds (*whirlwinds, tornadoes, hurricanes, and sand storms*) to clean the atmosphere. Iya Aye soils and punishes human beings with bad behavior.

We must not see Iyámi face,
Who is also called Iyánsán.
She will not let her victims sleep,
She may carry her staff,
She may carry a sword,
She may carry an Egungun,
Whenever her wrath comes out,
Toppling trees upon trees,
And palms falling upon palms,
Dense forests are set ablaze,
And savanna fields are burnt down completely.

Nana Burukú is included here because of her immense popularity in the Ifá / Ōrìṣà community. In Yoruba land, she is known as Nana Búkúú, (*Earth Mother*), in Igbo land she is called Olisabuluwa, (*One who supports the world*), in Akan and Ewe, as Nana Burukú or Nana Bulukú, (*Mother of all deities and the Grand ancestress*).

Depending on the territory, she is associated with the peak of the mountains in which the rivers are born. She has been associated with lakes, swamps and mud. Her wraths are related with extreme changes, witchcraft and serious sickness, especially the ones with the skin. As a warlike force, she influences women, engaging them generally in such pursuits as industry, business and economic independence. She

is a woman personified who pursues purpose with seriousness and determination. Her principal influence is that every society must change their attitude towards the woman figure, (*marriage and motherhood*), which, desirable as it is, constitutes the only option for females in every culture. She is considered an earth force related to health and productivity. It is believed that a man cannot hold her staff.

Nana Bulukú, or Nana Burukú is the primordial creator goddess of the Fon Nation of Benin (*Dahomey*). She represents the symbol of whatever a man can do, a woman can do. She represents women's rights and values inside the creation based on feminine authority to balance the masculine force, not as domination, but of equality. That is to say that Ayizan (*Nanan*) is the human form of Nāná Búrukú. She is described as an ancient grandmother. Her complete body is covered with palm fronds in honor of the palm trees, which she used to create shelter upon earth. She has a woven basket containing ingredients to make medicine such as roots, bark, dirt and herbs, especially the mandrake roots that resemble a human form.

Before there was day,
before there was night,
and before there was a Universe,
All things lived in harmony in Orun ,
located in the realm of Ikode Orun.
The giant egg that sat in the center of Nothingness,
Nāná Búrukú is not a stranger to earth,
She is the mother of earth,
She made heavy thunder,
She created commotion in the roads,
They were shouting her name on the right,
They were shouting her name on the left,
In the center of the earth,
Nāná Búrukú was fighting.

According to Dahomean mythology, Nana Burukú created a cosmic twin with two faces, Mawu, female (*the moon who rules the night*) and Lisa, male (*the sun who rules the day*). It is to say that Nana Burukú delegated Mawu to organize the earth. After Mawu finished her work,

she delegated to her daughter the serpent Aido Hwedo (*Òsumàrè for Yoruba land*) to shape her dominions and that is why the earth have so many forms, high, low and curved places, because of the movement of the serpent. To protect her creation, Mawu ordered Aido Hwedo to curl herself around to hold up the earth. According to Dahomean narratives, Mawu is the one who created earth, the great determiner of the fate of the Fon or Dahomean people of Benin. She was in charge of Nana Burukú oral texts that gave human beings knowledge, wisdom and understanding of existence through the divination system known as Gbadu (*Odu*). Gbadu has sixteen eyes and she rested on top of the palm tree called Fa. Legba (*Esu*) was in charge of opening Gbadu's eyes. When she wishes him to open her one eye, she drops two kernels, when she wishes him to open two eyes, she drops one kernel. Through this procedure, Legba could see what is happening in all three kingdoms and report to Mawu. Since Legba was the only one who understood Gbadu's language, Mawu confided to Legba to find a child of Gbadu to teach the language of Gbadu. It is to say that the child was Minona (*first daughter of Gbadu*), the one who was in charge to teach humans how to use palm kernel to know their fate as an omen of Mawu. Since Legba was the inspector of the world, Mawu decided that Legba should become the intermediary between Nana Burukú, Her, the three kingdoms and human kind.

Odùdúwà (*Iya Odia, Odùdú, Odùdúà*) an origination and transcendent celibate Mother who takes on male attributes. The Dúdú Womb, which means profound depths as a concept that blackness, is the source of origins, indicative of vitality and energy of life.

There are two variants of the story of the origin and gender of Odùdúwà between the Yoruba people. One view is cosmogonist, and the other, political. Some refer to Odùdúwà as the father or progenitor of the Yoruba people and progenitor of all Yoruba Oba's and the first ruler, who came from Mecca. Also related with Obàtálá. Others refer to

Odùdúwà as a female, the Creator Goddess, or the Womb of origins or *Odù ti o da wa* (*self existence personage*) or *Odù-o da uwa* (*"the oracular utterance created existence"*) or by the praise name *Yewajobi* (*mother of all the Orisas and all living things*) who is partnered with Obàtálá. Some suggests that as a male who came from Mecca to mean

that he was the first Oba (*king*) of Ilè Ifé, while folklore suggests that She descended from heaven and became an earth goddess. She is viewed as the creator of human beings of all living entities and the owner of all heads. As a She, is being connected to the earth, to the underworld, the creator of humanity including the sixteen aspects of *Òṣànlá* (*Obátálá*). As a She, is viewed to describe and emphasizes the sovereignty and centrality of *IyáNlá*. *Odùdùwà* has been represented by two gourds tied with a parasite herb, painted in white (symbolizing the union between sky and earth), and it is believed that they contain medicine inside that can blind a person if the gourd is opened without permission.

She (he) made one *dúdú* (black),
 She (he) made one pupa (yellow),
 She (he) made one funfun (white),
 Make me *dúdú*.
 Dye me with my *iwà* first,
 At the dawn of creation.

Iyálóde, means the Mother of the outside, the cosmic affiliation with the spirit of the Eye *Àjé* (*birds*) from where *Iyálàjé* has access to realms, the astral and physical.

Esu, as the connoisseur of dynamism and movement, as the interpreter and inspector of the three kingdoms and human destinies, is a neutral force, the communicator who opens the ways between *Iyá Nlá* supernatural forces and human being.

Today is the day of Baalejo,
 Tomorrow is the day of Ologbun Ayila,
 The day after tomorrow, its aja osupa,
 Whether it will come,
 Or whether it will not come,
 Nobody knows, only Esu.

Esu is the one who appeals on behalf of others,
 Who propitiate others destinies from place to place,
 The Ori that Esu propitiates,
 Such Ori shall last long,
 The destiny that Esu propitiates,
 Such destiny shall live long.

Iyá Nlá is multifaceted and capable of exerting time to create a timeless influence in many ways to let us know her personal relationship with female power. *Iyá Nlá* spiritual impetus influence in woman, is not relegated only to an *Àjé* relationship. It is a parallel position that becomes ritualistic to develop the spiritual forces that transform history to reveal the path of evolution in present times. *Iyá Nlá* is a real cosmic source and force that led to encourage the use of spiritual and ancestral foundation that place *Iyá Nlá* at the center of the ever-evolving matrix of existence inherent in every female.

Iyá Nlá the deity who smiles and frowns,
 The mother who inherent red substance into woman,
 The red substance that can destroy an entire community,
 The red substance that bring existence to evolve,
Iyá Nlá, I invoke at this time and space your presence,
 To put out all the fire of misfortune,
 And to bring peace forever.



V



REMEDIES AND RITUALS

I HAVE A DATE IN THE BUSH.
I HAVE AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE TREES.
I HAVE A DATE IN THE WATER.
I HAVE AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE RIVER.
I HAVE A DATE WITH DEITIES.
I HAVE AN ENCOUNTER WITH NATURE.
BECAUSE I HEARD THIS CALL,
I GOT TO KNOW MY MOTHER.

The utterances, as expressions of the spiritual inner self of an individual possess some *ase* that is fundamental for things to come to pass. *Ase* as an important metaphysical dimension is neither positive nor negative or good nor bad, but rather is an active energy that encompasses both states. The power of the word is a mysterious force that a qualified person can make his/her words come true. A medicine person (*herbalist*) works with the *Ase* in matters, physical and spiritual. The use of *Ase* in the preparation of medicine will suppress an illness on a material level and a cause on the spiritual level. An example of this is, a spiritual herbalist can work with any antibiotic herb and use their *ase* to attack the microscopic "*bodies*" of the invading physical disease, but at the same time the person activates the herb *ase* that carries the dynamic essences of the necessary ingredient as a spiritual healing power. However, in addition as a medicine, many people use a variety of healing techniques, (*i.e. prayers, songs, incantations, etc.*), which employ spiritual energies. The *ase* in both states has been activated to

create a powerful combination to work in both phases, the physical disease that interferes with the spiritual. Both phases have their own merits and limits, but when used together, they have a synergy that makes them much more effective.

There are certain doctrines that preach the use of natural medicine (*good and bad*) to be protective from the wrath of wrongdoers as well from negative energy to appease them or summon them to harm or help. There are certain people who believe they can manipulate their *Ase* to influence *Awon Iya Wa* to put a spell of death, illness or a curse on others for their own personal and selfishness vendettas. I have news for them; death would be an easier route especially for the one who is casting such a spell than to live out one's entire lifetime subject to the wrath of *Awon Iya Wa*. Only one's behavior and intentions are, what *Awon Iya Wa Ase* would be considering before making any execution.

Iyá Nlá Odú is an uncontrollable and independent force. Anyone can make a petition; however, its outcome would be based on *Awon Iya Wa* or The Elders of the Night decision. If a person asks *Awon Iya Wa* or directly to *Iyanlá (Odú)* for intervention to harm someone and that someone is not doing any harm at all, that someone would not be vulnerable to *Ajé* wrath. However, if that someone has put some witchcraft to harm others or have double intentions when performing a spiritual or material task, (they certainly can read it from the person), and more likely than not, they would be exposed in the most negative fashion. The whiplash wrath of *Ajé* is a very painful one; especially to those who have tremendous egos or think they can manipulate or subdue others by their own command or through the services of any spiritual force especially *Awon Iya Wa*. There is no compassion or preference for transgressors and wrongdoers even if they are children of *Ajé*. This is not the result of bad medicine (spells) but the result of people's intolerable behaviors. As an old saying goes, "*You do the crime, you pay the time*".

Awon Iya Wa commands human behaviors; they are directly in charge of earthly or worldly affairs in matters of family, love, happiness, justice, wealth, revenge, finance, and careers. We call upon these spiritual forces from our hearts, summoning them, urging them to respond for *bo bo*, which is "good", to help heal a natural sickness or

gris gris, sickness from the dark arts, i.e. curses, sorcery, black magic. Awon Iya Wa is there for anyone who has good intentions when looking for a solution to a difficult human problem; or who is trying to mend a conflict, the return of a loved one, find a job, make some profitable wealth, have good health, etc, for their own best benefit and without hurting others in the process. Awon Iya Wa are not positive or negative, good or evil energies by themselves, human petitions and desire activates them to work one way or the other, but always with secondary consequences. These powerful mystical forces can bring spectacular gifts and rewards, as well as punishments and nightmares. Àjě's energies are what we know as a divine intervention and justice based on peoples behaviorism. What might appear to be negative in one's life could possibly be a lesson for someone to learn in his or her lifetime. Iyánlá as the forces of the night are supernatural forces that are beyond man's comprehension. Each path represents a powerful manifestation of a spirit that could work on behalf or against the person who summons them or to the people for what they are summoning.

It is erroneous that a woman can think that she is unconditionally protected by or assumes that she is automatically shielded from the wrath of Iyá Nlá Odú or any of her manifestation as Awon Iya Wa, because she is a woman. We all get punished as well, and that punishment can be worse on us, since we should know better (Iyá Nlá Odú, what she represents and how she manifests and diversify in different levels and categories). Being a devotee or a child of Iyámi does not excuse or safeguard anyone from being reprimanded or punished by any Awon Iya Wa or by Iyá Nlá Odú. We are an earthly Iyálàjé - woman of substance - who honor the entrepreneurship of our Primordial Mother. We should know how to apply the correction. We should be mediators and educators, to restore the balance and harmony in our homes, community and nature, and be proud of what we are and make who we represent proud.

There is one golden rule in Àjě's world "Use a shadow to find a light, and use a light to hide a shadow". Therefore, be wise and extremely cautious; never abuse the powerful influence of Iyá Nlá Odú when requesting her services or interventions in any manifestation.



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MORNING PRAYER

Ìyá Nlá is not simply the symbol of the different patterns of creation. Ìyá Nlá is per excellence the fertility life force of existence inside the Cycle of Life. A fundamental knowledge to understand Ìyá Nlá in her all manifestations (*Awon Iya Wa*) is through showing respect for the life that is on Earth.

I revere you, ÌyáNlá,
Who moves between physical and astral realms,
The life force of existence,
You the mother of all,
The mother of Olòdù, the sixteen roads of her,
The mother of Odùdúwà the transcendent Àjé,
The mother of Odu Logbo the owner of the delicate eyes,
Who hastens to pass judgment on people who do not use honesty,
To scatter their possessions,
I greet my mother ÌyáNlá who put an Odú pot in the world.
The one who arrange the skull of the dubious for conferences,
You who rolls and rolls on the floor without breaking,
Who have advantage of having powers that the others did not have.

I stop and greet Esu, the neutral force,
As you always teach me.
Èsù, do not tempt me against people; do not tempt people against me,
Èsù, take away from me and my family the activities of the Ajogun
and wrongdoers,
And show me the path that reach the elevation to see our mother.

I revere you, ÌyáNlá Odú,
Through the path of all Awon Iya Wa.
Who are your terrestrial spirits of evolution,
The slippery One with the bird power,
The One who is the source of medicine,
The one who uses the hoe to style her hair,
The owner of wicked bags,
The one who has a stomach to swallow people,

The one whose curse has immediate effect,
The one who eats Orangun without vomiting,
The one who opens her mouth to swallow dubious people,
Do not let me step on you wrongly,
Let me walk on you for long,
Do not let me step on you,
Where it will cause you, injury,
Ase O!

HONORING OUR GREAT MOTHER

If one does not know how to approach Ìyánlá to alleviate discomfort, the simple thing to do is recognize and greet her Great Mother status in one's life by chanting this *Ilan Oriki*.

The woman who blocks the road
And causes man to run,
Who keeps her beard, because of war,
One who in fury causes trouble and chaos,
The powerful and huge mother who cannot be attacked.

Annihilating mother, today I glorify you,
The old bird was not heated in the fire,
The old sick bird was not heated to the sun.
Something private is hidden in the house of my Mother,
I honor you ÌyáNlá Odú, my Mother!

Mother whose vagina intimidates all,
Mother who lays an ambush,
Mother who has pots of food in the house,
All-powerful mother,
Mother who have the Eleriye,
I honor and greet you.

Great mother with who we do not dare to cohabit,
Great mother whose body we do not dare to look at,
Mother of private beauties,
Mother who empties the goblet,
Mother who speaks thick as man,
Great Mother in the top of the Iroko tree,
Mother who goes up high and looks at the land,
I greet and honor you.

Ase

TO RESTORE BALANCE

One way to tap the feminine inner resources and to restore balance more confidently with Ìyá Nlá is by feeding the earth with seven ingredients: red palm oil (*epo pupa*), cool water (*omi tutu*), gin (*oti*), dried mud fish (*eja aro*), honey (*oyin*), bitter kola nut (*orogbo*), and kola nut (*obi abata*) over a mound of soil.

ÌyáNlá the sacred one from heaven,
The Mother of us all,
Who climbs high and look down on Earth,
Who sits high and look low,
The one who molds us all,
I greet you.

Iya Aiye, I call on you,
Ìyámi Òsòròngà, I call on you,
Àjé, I call on you,
Yewajobi, I call on you,
Òsùmarè, I call on you,
Òrò, I call on you,
Òsun I call on you,
Oya, I call on you,
Yemoja, I call on you,
Nana Burukú, I call on you,
My mysterious mothers and I are two in one.

Esu I call on you,
You with eyes like stilled lightning,
Who sit at the sixteen crossroads,
And who kindle fires manrunrun wood with Ìyámi,
I recognize the existence of your inherent pitchfork,
Esu the multidimensional and monodimensional forms,
I greet you.

I have a bird in the house,
I have a bird outside,

When I go on outings,
 Let all good things come to me,
 My mother you give me life.
 I shall not die,
 Esu you give me strength,
 I shall not fall.
 Gracious Mother, lead me to the good place,
 Esu sustain me in the good road,
 Let all good things come to me. ASE O!

PRAYER FOR PROTECTION

It is no coincidence that Iyá Nlá blessings enables sudden transformation, a turn around of life circumstances. The passion and intensity of the power of Iyá Nlá can manifest as creativity and peacefulness to produce abundance and balance between human kind and the forces of nature. By learning how to properly respect Iyá Nlá, we can have good health and gain abundance on more than one path.

Iyá Nlá who live in the deep Forest,
 who grabs and swallows anyone.
 You the breath of life and death,
 Who tears the calabash with the thumb,
 And the intestines of the liar.

Great Iyánlá, the only one who confronts the returning of dead,
 Carry me on your back.
 You who burns like fire in my heart,
 And courageously protects me from wrongdoers.

House rats are very alert,
 Rafters never change their position.
 Me, your daughter, gather here to show respect,
 Save me from death,
 Save me from pestilence.

You, the One who quivers solid trees,
 And the One who employs the truth.
 Who stand at the frontier between life and death,
 Deity, to whom I offer kola-nuts every morning,
 Guards me in all the sixteen crossroad of this world,
 As well in the seventeenth one,
 Gracious Iyá Nlá, lead me to a safe place.

ASE

TO OVERCOME CONSPIRACY, EVILNESS AND MISFORTUNE

If you have a sacred place for worshipping *Iyánlá*, you can perform this ritual in that sacred place. If you do not have a sacred place you can go to the sacred place of any *Awon Iya Wa*, and perform this ritual or under a tree (your back yard or river side). Build a nest of *Iroko* or *Ceiba* leaves (the size of your head), Prepare a mix of pounded (*smash*) baby plantains, snail (*babosa*), palm oil and honey. Put the mixture on top of your *Ori* (*head*), covered with the nest leaves, and chant this prayer:

The great fish hits the deep with its head,
The great rat hits the palm frond with its tail,
The great bird flies majestically to the high heavens,
Is the foundation for justice.

To be happy is my mother's happiness,
My mysterious mother was the one who cast for my *Ori*,
When my *Ori* had no control over wrongdoers,
I call on my Mother and beg her to look upon my *Ori*,
To take away the wickedness and to restore the strength.

For my *Ori* will be able to contain the conspiracies,
Unless, if the nest cannot contain the finger,
For my *Ori* will be able to contain the evilness,
Unless, if the nest cannot filter the water,
For my *Ori* will be able to contain misfortune,
Unless, if the nest cannot contain the birds.

The great fish hits the deep with its head,
The great rat hits the palm frond with its tail,
The great bird flies majestically to the high heavens,
Is the foundation for justice.

PRAYER FOR SUCCESS AND PROSPERITY

Propitiate *Iyá Nlá* from time to time for success, protection and prosperity with cooked yam covered with palm oil.

Iyá Nlá the powerful one,
Who came to Earth to build our home,
Not too long, not too lazy,
You became successful in all you embarked upon.

When you were doing everything but not appreciated,
You advised to offer *ebo* to propitiate you,
Not all of us ignored your work,
I listen to your advice and I complied with this.

We are both looking at each other,
Whom among us can we commend?
You who offered sacrifice for us and was accepted,
You who know how to propitiate my life and existence,
You the owner of the house,
Open the roads of success and prosperity for me.

FOR SPECIAL FAVORS

Boil 17 chicken eggs remove the shell and keep the eggshell on the side. Heat palm oil and cover the eggs. Offer the 17 eggs. With the eggshell, make powder, chant this prayer on the pounded eggs shell and blow to the four cardinal points starting in the West, follow to the east, then North, ending in the South, ask the petition (*on each cardinal point*). Be careful of what you ask for.

Ìyá Nlá, hooo, hooo, hooo!

You the one who sing like a sparrow during the day.

And like an Owl during the night,

Whom I greet with respect.

Ìyánlá, hooo, hooo, hooo!

I call on you.

To pamper me, is my mother of special favors,

To indulge me, is my mother of special privileges,

You who had brought a specially favored Ori to the earth on me,

You who advise me to offer ebo, I will comply.

Ìyá Nlá, hooo, hooo, hooo!

I call on you.

Let the special Ori continue to show me favors,

And let Esu continue to show me fondness,

I have good care to hand you, fresh eggs,

I am begging you to continue to take good care of me,

And continue to bless me with special privileges.

Ìyá Nlá, hooo, hooo, hooo!

I call on you.

PRAISE TO ÒSUN TO RESOLVE CRISES AND CONFLICTS

Òsun as one of the principal manifestations of Ìyá Nlá in terrestrial form can be approached to capture and condense the complexities that involve the ordering of the existence. Through her interactions of benevolence for the conflicts of human beings, she can remove the negative bias. Òsun in the spiritual realm of Àjé has the capacity and competence to make great achievements in a way that surpass the unimaginable. Pound, *Salvia*, *Prodigiosa*, *Siempre viva* and *Ruda* leaves together; mix with soap for bathing

The one who reside in the deep and yet,

Performs various occupations,

The goddess of the sweet waters,

Who uses it to clean bad destinies,

The one who defends someone's cause, beyond expectation.

Òsun the most Gracious Mother,

The untiring defender,

The unseen defender,

The unfailing defender,

The most knowledgeable one,

I come to you.

You the mother who stay on the stage,

And send for kola nut sellers from the market,

You who resides in the deep,

And the one who teach the secrets to the diviners,

For them to do on earth,

I greet and honor you.

My mother Òsun,

The one who has already reached the depth of the hidden secret.

I state my case at your feet.

I state my case before you.

For you to intervene with benevolence,

To wash away this burning fire.

CHARGING ÌYÁMÌ ÒSÒRÒNGÀ

Be advised and warned that you can summon Ìyá Nlá through Ìyámi Òsòròngà with this praise poetry for protection and defense, but if you use this chant as an instrument to attack and the council of the Elders of the Night do not agree with your request, do not expect any manifestation. To avoid backfire, or undesirable consequences, pour *omi tutu* (collected from the rain) on Esu, on the ground and on your Ori; spinning around counterclockwise three times and ask Esu as the guardian of the Ìyá Nlá's sixteen crossroads, to be a mediator between you and Ìyámi Òsòròngà, to be a neutral force and not to spoil your destiny, and to be the defender against enemies and curses, then chant this *itan oriki* for effect healing.

Water quenches fire,
Fire does not quench water,
No fire traces the course of a river,
Any fire that dares trace the course of the river,
It will be quenched completely.

Ìyámi Òsòròngà is a strong and firm Àse on earth and earthly things. Take seventeen atare (peppercorn) and chew it, then take seven raw eggs, rub some palm oil and cover with tree ashes, then break one egg at a time and chant the following poetry.

My mysterious Mother Òsòròngà,
The vulture who kills without sharing,
The dominant force at midnight.
One who devours human livers without vomiting,
One who vacates only when the market closes,
One who terrifies in dreams,
I summon you.
To tap into your powers,
To protect and to defend me –or– (to curse this person),
From the evil attack against my person –or– (bring evilness to attack this person).

To calm Ìyámi Òsòròngà, to insure you do not get hurt in the process, prepare a fruit cocktail, add some Igbin (*snails/babosa*), and shea butter, deposit into a cross road:

Oh! Ìyámi Òsòròngà,
Please allow me to take refuge on you,
I confess to you my ignorance,
The world in which I 'm in,
Is full of negativity,
I am begging you not to turn your back on me,
And let there be calmness between us.

FOR EARTHLY ENEMIES

To overcome the enemies and to avoid falling in a trap, take a fresh fish, cut it into seven pieces, mixed with palm oil, and take it to a forest. Chant this prayer:

An intellectual understands issues,
Whatsoever is being done, is clear only to the doer,
The big rat that steals palm oil fruit,
Should show death into his/her house.

It is you Ìyàmi that has been used in meting out punishment,
And I say nobody would install wickedness as a Queen,
Heavens do not argue with the earth,
When people wake up in the mist of Àjé.

With your protection,
Ajoguns would not arrest me,
And my earthly enemies before they know,
They will be captive by all Ìyàmi.

Suffering will install in their premises,
And good things are going to get spoiled,
No medicinal leaf will be appropriate,
To repair and mend his/her world.

An intellectual understands issues,
Whatsoever is being done, is clear only to the doer,
The big rat that steals palm fruit oil,
Should show death into his/her house.

RITUAL WITH ESU AND ÌYÀMI

Every earthly religion believes that there exist inside the Cosmos a messenger or a spiritual presence that allows humans to communicate signification, pattern maker covenant with the functions as a translator of the languages desires, between humans and the Supreme Forces at any level. This messenger has different names or praise names according to each earthly religion. The Yoruba's people (*East and West*) worship Esu as the messenger between humans and the Supreme Forces. Inside the oracle of Ifá *Ose'Tura*, is the symbolic representation of the energy pattern that incarnates Esu. Esu is the spiritual presences that have the responsibility to enforce Ìyá Nlá's decisions (*judge or arbiter*) since Esu is the overseer control manager of Ìyá Nlá conceptions of all the Ajoguns. The principal function of Èsù as a messenger in any ebo, prayer, or petition, is to enlist the support of the Supreme Forces for whatever one may want to do. Èsù's authority emerge from Ìyá Nlá and as a messenger is a neutral presence that can go either way, reward or punishment.

This is a ritual that should be the *last resort* to perform and if it is necessary after being exhausting other means to overcome your enemies if they are still annoying you.

Be warned: If the use of this chant is for a personal vendetta, you must remember that Esu works in both ways (judge or arbiter and punish or reward) it may backfire if you are not seeking justice for the right reasons.

Bring Esu outside and place it under a big tree put some drops of Adin (*black oil*) on Èsù's head and epo pupa (*red palm oil or corajo*) to Ìyámi in the ground (*epo pupa for Ìyámi represents an exchange for blood*) and cover Esu with some lyé igún (*vulture's feather*) and chant the following:

A healthy man dies, life disappears,
A healthy man dies and leave his work behind,
It is begging that we have to beg to Ìyámi.

Before she will tell us the day that we would not survive death,
Men wake up in the midst of witches,
And sleeping within death's reach,
It is inside Ajoguns that men sleep and wake.

When a baby cries,
It would call out the mother,
There is no one that would not enter into the Mother Earth's
stomach,
When the men offended Mother Earth.

They should sacrifice to Esu the child of Ìyámi,
At the ground of crossroads where the nocturnal meetings are held,
For his predestine day of death would maybe change.
Listen! O! Èsù!
You are the messenger of Ìyámi,
You are the child of two snakes,
That dart about and over the leaves,
You, the small source in appearance,
With a full essence of wisdom,
I come to you, for your brotherly counsel,
By your leaves, Ìyá Nlá,
By your permission, Ìyámi,
I seek your warmonger authority through Èsù,
Esu, follow my enemies,
Wherever they go, you must follow and punish them.

Once finished take a bath with Omi ero;
Piñon Botija (*Curcas curcas*) - protection and prevent negative forces
or back fire;
Rasca Barriga (*Espadea amoena*) - to clean negativity;
Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) - Protection against witchcraft;
Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) for purification and protection against
unexpected consequences; and
Ori - Shea butter.

If your conscience does not leave you alone and you want to
release the person(s) from this spell.

Bathe Esu with the omiero and shea butter (*to calm down*) and say,
"Esu please stop this mission",

Take that omiero in which you bathe Esu and drop it on the spot you
previously offered the epo pupa for Ìyámi and cover the spot with
Laurel leaves, and say "My mother allow me to calm you down, and I
am begging you, for your forgiveness for bothering you with my fast
temper".

Burn the feathers with cinnamon (*a natural purifier*) and blow into the
air the dust that came out from the feathers and say "I release (person-
s name) from this spell.

FOR PERSONAL PROTECTION WHEN WE ARE AT SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL WAR

Build a nest, put seventeen raw eggs (brown color is preferred), and cover with epo pupa and chicken feathers. Between 6 PM and 7 PM, go to a forest and between two trees dig a hole and place the nest inside, and chant this:

My Mother *Ìyánlá*,
Strange people with evilness and war,
Are trying to oppress me,
I come to you, asking help to bind them.

The war of who envies me, be quenched!
The war of who like to curse me, be quenched!
The war of my enemies, be quenched!
The war of my adversaries, be quenched!
The war of sickness, be quenched!

My Mother *Ìyánlá*!, remove their teeth,
My Mother *Ìyánlá*!, slap their faces,
My Mother *Ìyánlá*!, slap their mouths,
If they don't listen to your warning,
And stop their contempt towards me,
Swallow them, piece by piece and one by one.

When finished take a bath. Lick some shea butter and put some over your face and head for protection and coolness.

TO CHASE AWAY AJOGUN (death, disease, lost, paralysis and evil-doers).

Clean your body with rooster feathers and put into two baskets, add on top of the feathers yam-flour. Put one basket in the front of the house and the other in the back of the house. Give warm epo pupa to Esu.

Ìyá Nlá you are the one to cover me,
Just as the feathers wrap up your skin,
Just as your feathers cover up your children,
On the day all the Ajoguns are coming to seek me,
You are the one to cover me.

Ìyá Nlá, I'm begging you to send *ajá ọ̀sùpá* (moon's dog),
To guard my house and to punish those who,
Want to harm me (family),
You the owner of the deep pit,
Into which one rolls and dies.
Do not allow them to hear the *Ọ̀gbingbin* (bird sings),
They are the ones who use derogatory language against you.
They are the ones who summon Ajoguns to hunt me (my house,
my family).

Death, disease, lost, paralysis and evil-doers does not eat yam-flour,
Their mouths becomes stiff,
And their jaws will lock,
All the Ajoguns who wanted to attack me,
Can no longer succeed.

Ìyá Nlá you are the one to cover me,
Just as the feathers wraps up your skin,
Just as your feathers cover up your children,
On the day all the Ajoguns are coming to seek me,
You are the one to cover me.

Give bean cake to *Ìyá Nlá* as an offering to have peace.

CHANT FOR PROTECTION AGAINST CALAMITIES (That came from Wrongdoers)

The Awon Iya Wa forces hold absolute dominion over humankind.
No one on this earth can provide shields against the awesome force of
Awon Iya Wa manifestations in the forces of nature.

Gbegbe is not lost in the bush,
Odidere does not die in search for food,
Aluko does not die in the process of dying its feather,
Agbe does not die in its mission of dying its feather,
A bird does not miss its flying path,
A river does not miss its running course.

A pigeon is always honored,
A dove is always comfortable,
A hatching-hen sits majestically,
A word spoken to the earth by Ìyàmi always is obeyed.

It is over, it is gone into oblivion!
Evil forces of the world cannot overcome me!
It is vanished!

TO BRING GOOD LUCK

A ritual offering of two fish and palm oil to ÌyáNlá, for her to give
permission to all the spirits responsible for bringing prosperity and
good luck in some ones life. Smoke tobacco while the ritual is being
performed.

*ÌyáNlá Wa,
Allow that at any business I set my foot into,
That business will become a business of riches,
That any path which I pass through,
Will become a busy main road,
Any house, which I enter with smiles,
Such house will be filled with happiness,
Any currency that I have,
Will multiply in abundance.*

*ÌyáNlá Wa allow now with this tobacco fume,
The spirits of good luck, success, prosperity and good fortune,
To come to me from every direction.
ÌyáNlá Wa allow with this tobacco fume,
That the spirits in charge of good luck, successes, prosperity and
good fortune,
Always be with me.*

SOME EWÉS (HERBS)

Awon Iya Wa (Our Mother) is an expert herbalist. Here are some popular Ewes to be used for help.

Amuyinu / Egele (*Euphorbia convulvodes*, *Euphorbiaceae*)

To avoid unexpected or expected natural strike and from the ritual made by wrongdoers.

This Ewe is good for camouflaging to avoid the eyes of sickness and death. It can be used as a bath or protective charm, as well as to protect the house especially during epidemic times and when mortality is at risk and at a high level around one's area.

Aye (*Morus Mesozygia*, *Moraceae*)

For all kind of protections (*good and bad*) especially when one wants to keep the good fortune around and avoid any unexpected contradiction.

Agemokoun (*Laggera alata*, *compositae*)

For protection against curses, diseases and any kind of malicious spell from wrongdoers.

Aidan or aridan (*Tetrapleura tetraptera*, *mimosaceae*)

For release or to break a tie (bind), curse.

Arunsansan "goat weed" (*Ageratum conyzoides*, *compositae*)

To bring happiness to home and between family.

Ajekobale (*Croton amabilis*, *Euphorbiaceae*)

For calmness especially when things around the house, place of work and family members are distressed.

Efirin Oso (*Haslundia opposita*, *libiateae*)

For appeasement and smoothing ambience, house or a person who has been influenced by negativity.

Tanaposo (*Mirabilis jalapa*, *Nyctagimaneae*)

To destroy a ritual made by wrongdoers as well as to destroy the wrongdoer and to destroy the negativity that was created by that attack.

Oyoyo (*Corchorus Olitorius*, *Tillioceae*)

To bring content and acceptance especially during a time of work interview, moving to a new area or meeting important people.

TREES WHERE THE ENERGY OF THE AWON IYA WA RESIDES

Iwo tree – *Orogbo* (*Garcinia kola*, *Guttiferae*) for long life, happiness, well-being, good fortune and good omen.

Arere tree (*Triplochiton nigericum*, *Sterculiaceae*) to destroy things, good and bad

Ose tree (*Adansonia digitata*, *Biombaceae*) to grant good things

Iroko tree (*Chorophora excelsa*, *Moraceae*) It is recommend to use for meditation before any deliberations, since this tree and all the parts can be used for provoking accidents, for tiding and to create negative situation.

Iya tree – (*Daniellia Oliveri*, *Caesalpiniaceae*) **Be careful** when using this tree(similar to the Iroko Tree) since it can be used for meditation before any deliberations, and used for exterminating, destroying or overcoming witchcraft or destroying the person who made the witchcraft.

Asurin tree (*Erythrophelum guineense*, *Caesalpiniaceae*) is a neutral tree that can go both ways, good or bad; anything that one is thinking about or wants to accomplish will manifest, will come to pass. *'Be very careful what you wish or use it for'*

Obobo tree (*Ficus platyphylla*) is the tree of forgiveness . The use of any part of this tree can resolve conflicts and bring peace. It is good to resolve any worldly, community and family member conflicts.

Sausage Tree (*Kigelia Africana* or *Kigelia pinnata*) and **Calabash or Gourd Tree** (*Crescentia cujete* *Bignoniaceae*) both trees are good for protection from violent storms. It is a symbol of fertility not only for woman but also for projects.

Palm kernel (*Elaeis guineensis*)

To smooth tense situations, to alleviate headaches



VI

WIWO IGBO ÌYÁ NLÁ

ENTERING THE SACRED GROVE OF ÌYÁ NLÁ

As any religious practice, the worship of Iyá Nlá also has an induction process, which consists of spiritual and material cleansing for initiation (after being tested by Iyá Nlá perhaps for many years and she is completely satisfied with the level of attainment), We must know that each house or Ile is the product of personal cumulative experiences and accomplishment. Each house (*Ile*), tribe, family, society and community is unique. Each one bears their identity of the particular past, present or future and this uniqueness is from where their praise, songs, dance, poetry of lineages, descendants, creativity of cultures and behaviors emerge. However, it is very important that people understand that each path and each realm possesses its own embrace, experiences and levels. Therefore, the personal experiences gained from these paths and realms are independent but at the same time dependent on a personal level of spirituality that allows the person with an open and receptive mind to approach the concept and embrace new dimensions. I will not expose details but here are some ideas:

It consists first; of consulting the Oracle to find out what level and what will be used in the cleansing process before entering the Sacred Grove. To find out the items including *tumored gourds, a lot of salt, beads, cowries, huge amount of palm oil, drinks, cloth, different soil*, among them, that are required in the ceremonial process. Second, the rituals that involve propitiations of Esu and Awon Iya Wa. Then the process prior to initiation of cleansing and preparation can take days even weeks, all depends on what the Oracle reveals. Once the previous process is complete, before entering into the Sacred Grove,

there are additional prerequisites. This process is conducted at sun down. The person's body, Orí and tongue must be propitiated with special offerings. After that, the person should be seated on the ground at the west side of the entrance. This is performed to give the person a chance to meditate and place oneself in a receptive state of mind and heart for the occasion. The person shall participate in the first personal and symbolic ritual that requires a process of interrogation: This is an example of such process.

- 1) What do you seek?
- 2) **I seek existence.**
- 1) Existence? What existence?
- 2) **The existence of the Sacred Iyá Nlá.**
- 1) Are you ready to be awakened to the truth-value of Iyá Nlá?
- 2) **Yes.**
- 1) Will you deliberate extensively before exercising any decisions?
- 2) **Yes, I will deliberate.**
- 1) Those who awake Iyá Nlá must seek for the balance of the existence. Will you seek for this balance?
- 2) **Yes, I will seek for balance.**
- 1) Those who receive Iyá Nlá must show wisdom... Will you seek this wisdom?
- 2) **Yes, I will seek wisdom.**
- 1) Have you brought all that one must give in order to receive the awakening of Iyá Nlá?
- 2) **Yes, I brought everything.**

Therefore, on and on, this interrogatory can be extended.

The third part once the interrogatory is finished and everyone is satisfied and approves the answers, the person is being told to chew some mixture (*secret ingredients*) clean their eyes with some special herbs that are hanging on one tree, before entering the Sacred Grove. Once the person is inside the circle, the Elder Iyalájà will say:

Iyá Nlá Wa descends to the earth!
Iyá Nlá wag be! (*Great Mother comes into life*).

Then everyone (*including the person*) praises Iyá Nlá by honoring and greeting her with this chant:

Iyá Nlá Hoooho,
Iyá Nlá Hiihihi,
Iyá Nlá Sogbooo Sogbooo,
Iyá Nlá sato, sato,
Kele Kele sogu sogu,
Ooogbo ayiwo,
Iyá Nlá wi da'ji.

Iyá Nlá, la u kpe!
Great Mother, save us!
Our Mother, have you arrived safely, welcome back,
Our Mother, may we remain in this life a long time.
Save us, guard us in peace.
We wish to become old on this earth.
Great Mother, may we be blessed in this life.

Then the last and most important part is when the Chief Iyalájà (*Iya un*), who is the head of the society, starts to chant some other special chants to address Iyá Nlá and all the Awon Iya wa, expressing the purpose of being summoned. Later some offerings are presented and the person is ceremoniously introduced to Iyá Nlá and for the first time can see what is inside. Then with some specific sacrifice and the process for installing the physical representation of Iyá Nlá (*this process takes various days and nights*), each calabash recipient contains different secret ingredients and each one have a designated mission and path. During those days and nights, the elders narrate many stories. The elders explain the entire process, and prepare the person on how to embrace the path. Once the entire process is finished and everything is well placed where they belong, the Great Calabash of Iyá Nlá is sealed with some secret natural cord that symbolizes the union and balance between earth and sky. After all the rituals and ceremonies are complete, the celebration begins with a lot of songs, dance and food.

When you called me the first time,
 I had been doing a task for the apa tree.
 When you called me the second time,
 I was providing service for the iroko tree.
 But when you called me the third time,
 I answered you in a clear resounding voice.
 Now that you have finished calling me, go home.



VII



Excerpts from the Odú

In this section, the following excerpts tell some stories of how Iyá Nlá (Odú) is evoked in the rites of the Oracle. A complex ritual that among others things, ratifies the great reality of the feminine authority in the hierarchy of the existence, denoting that the Great Mothers withhold the secrets of the cult.

(It is the author's opinion that for this section, certain sentences have been omitted for the ease of properly interpreting the message).

OSA MEJI

"Osa is rich, makes a lot of noise,
the sound of the bell reaches earth"
were the ones who cast for Odu on the day
that she descended to Earth, and also
for Ogun and Obatala, among whom
Odu was the only woman.

"What will happen when we arrive on Earth?" They ask
Olodumare answered:

"Whatever you want to obtain in life,
I will give you the power to do so,
in order for the world to become a good place."

Ogun marched in front, Obatala followed,
and Odu lingered behind.

Going back she asked:

"Oh Creator, down there Ogun will have
the power of war. He has a machete,
he has a gun, he has everything he needs to fight with.
Obatala too has all the qualifications
to reach whatever goal he chooses.
What then remains for me, the only woman
among them? What shall I do?"

Olodumare spoke: "The power of motherhood
that keeps the Earth intact belongs to you.
The power of the Birds belongs to you.
I will give you a large calabash,
filled with these things.

Odu, come back. Do you know
how to use them?"

Odu replied:

"If humans don't listen to me,
don't even ask my advice,

then I will fight.

If people ask me for money or children,
I will be lenient towards them, provided
they are not impolite;
for if that happens I will take it all back."

"That's all right with me,"
the Creator said, "but use
your power with coolness and not
with violence, or I will take
it away from you."

Since that time, because of Odu,
women have the power to always say what they want,
for in the absence of women men can do nothing.

Odu came to Earth.

All groves sacred to Egungun she entered freely,
also the groves of Oro.

All places where Spirits were worshiped
the woman showed herself.

Then she put on masquerader's cloth
and went out in the open.

There was nothing she did not do in those days.

Obatala went to Ifa, said:

"Hey! The Creator gave me authority on Earth,
but this energetical woman takes everything over.
'There is no place where she does not go.'"

Ifa comforted Obatala

and prescribe snails for Obatala's ori

And advised Obatala to offer the fluid from the shell to Odu

Obatala sacrificed snails to his Ori,

and offered the fluid from the shells to Odu

In the meantime it was so that when Odu said:

"Don't look!", and people still looked,
they went blind.

Odu drank and her stomach calmed down.
 "Oh, I have discovered delicious food,
 snail fluid is sweet, snail fluid is sweet."
 And so Obatala gave her
 all the snails she wished.

"All the things I have,
 all the things I do"
 I will share it all with you," Odu replied.
 Obatala went with her to the sacred grove
 And put the costume of Egungun and went outside.
 Odu stayed where she was and sent her Bird,
 to go sit on the masked one's shoulder.
 From that moment on, all what Egungun could do
 was because of the power of Birds.

When Obatala as Egungun had done everything
 he came back to sacred grove, and greeted Odu.
 "You can have Egungun, but the power you used will be our
 property, Odu said,
 From now on only men will go out as Egungun.
 But nobody, children nor old men,
 will dare to mock women.
 The power of women is greater.
 Women give life through giving birth,
 and whatever men may want to do,
 women must help them or they will mess up."

So they sang together, and Obatala said
 that every week everybody must praise women,
 for the world to be peaceful.
 Bend your knee, bend your knee for women,
 for women brought you into this world;
 women are the wisdom of Earth,
 women have brought us into this world;
 have respect for women.

ANOTHER OSA MEJI

Praise to Osa Meji!
 The one who poison internally
 Goes on to consume intestine,
 The one who bite on the hearth,
 As if it were a bee sting
 Insatiable Shiny wings is Our Mother
 The one who keeps midnight food in her cupboard
 On the day, She were coming into the world from heaven.

She carried covered calabashes.
 A calabash-power, to kill and eat
 A calabash-power, to kill and sell
 A calabash-power, to kill and grow rich
 On the wreckage of accomplishment
 Work of the hands
 Wings shall despoil.

People should bring to me, the proper secret materials
 For make a pact with the winger eater
 If they don't want my quarrel on the village.
 And praise to Awon Iya Wa!
 Don't let Our Mother fight with us
 On account of these things, you bring to me.

OSE OYEKU

One who offends the Dead dies the death of the disgraced.
 Praise Ose-Oyeku.
 She said, Thou Odù who sits with Apere,
 Make an offering,
 They say; why must we make an offering?
 She said, because of your children you must make an offering.
 She said that they should offer (...)
 She said that they should prepare (...)
 She said that they should prepare (...)
 Odù needs the offering.

Its was then carried out for her,
 Odù who sits with Apeere.
 They said Thou Odù
 She said, She would become aged, she would become an old
 person.
 She said It will be said that her head will be completely white,
 That she will become very old.
 They said that she would remain in the world,
 She said, That she is not going to die soon.
 Thee, Odù did not die,
 Odù is in good health.

As time passed, Odù became very, very old.
 They had to ask Odù for the guiding word.
 Even when she was of an advanced age.
 Odù called all of her children.
 She said You are my children
 She said, Old age had settled upon me,
 She said, If they wished to seek the word from her
 She said, She must go to find a thing that will replace her,
 to which they could speak.

Odù went. Odù returned,
 She called all of her children together,

At this time, Odù was in a calabash.
 The messengers together decided
 upon the response given by the calabash.
 The messengers are four in number (...)

Odù said that it is her calabash what they cut.
 They had cut two calabashes into four parts,
 They said that they had cut them.
 Odu said, Together beat your chest with your hands.
 She said, She wished that all the people,
 Would give their hands to her departures
 That they would give their hands to things decided,
 That the children and the children of the children,
 Would ask to hear the words that she was going to speak,

When she had spoken.
 They took the calabash
 They said that they would carry it for Odù.
 She said that it should be placed in her Apere.
 She said, If her children wished to worship it, they should invoke
 her
 She said, Thus they will be able to worship the Odù calabash,

She said, All things they will ask of this calabash.
 This calabash is made for them.
 They said, we would not fight with them.
 It will become Odù calabash today.
 She said, All things that her descendants ask of it,
 These things they will receive.
 If it is wealth, they ask for,
 She will make it for them.
 She said, When my children call for me,
 I will respond from the interior of the calabash,
 Because she has become, ancient.

She had spoken thusly.
 Odù accepted she became four calabashes.

She said, Her descendants will not die in infancy,
 They will live to old age.
 She said that they should worship the calabash along with the
 Apeere.
 These four calabashes are what they will always praise.

She said, the four corners of the world are in the four calabashes.
 Odù said, If her descendants worship her Apeere,
 They will be worshipping her,
 She said, The things that they ask of it will be for good.
 She said, If they worship the calabash of efun,
 That they will be worshipping her also, she will respond.
 She said If they worship the calabash of camwood, she will
 respond,
 She said, If they worship the calabash mud, she will respond,
 She said, If they worship the calabash of charcoal, she will
 respond.
 She said, But if they have already brought the Apeere,
 She said, you, all of you children, it is that, that you worship,

That you must come to worship in one body
 That which has been placed in the Apeere.
 When they know that they will enter into her shrine,
 That they are going to worship her,
 They will take sacredly prepared water.
 They will rub their eye.
 Then it may enter into the house of Odù.

It can go to see gbadu.
 They will call the Apeere, Igba Odù.
 They call the Apeere the House of Odù.
 She said that her descendants would come to worship her,
 In the body of the calabashes, she has placed in the Apeere.
 Her descendant will worship Odù in this place.
 From this day, we worship Odù in the interior of Apeere.

If her children wishes to worship Ifá,

It will go into the sacred forest
 If the person does not first propitiate Odù in her Apeere
 It will accomplish nothing.
 Odù will not know that the person has come to worship her.
 Odù will not know that her child has come.
 Odù has said that all of her descendants who come into the sacred
 forest
 They must first propitiate Her, the wisdom inside the Apeere.

OSE OTURA

Under one of Iyá Nlá praise name, Òsun, who came to earth at the time of creation, became the most influential one. She demonstrates to the males that without a female Àse (power of life force) their mission could not succeed. According to many *itan Ifá*, all the Odù were derived from Òsun. Òsun is identifiable as the seventeen Ikin in the Ifá divination system; she takes charge and directs all Ifá divination procedures.

Komu-n-koro is the diviner
Who cast divination for the sixteen Odú
Who were coming from heaven to earth
A woman was the seventeenth of them
When they got to the earth
They declared the grove for Oro
Oro's had his own space
They declared the grove for Opa,
Opa's abode was secure.
They prepared a grove for Egun,
Egun had a home.
But they made no provision for Òsun.
Also known as "Seegesi", the preeminent hair-plaiter
with the coral-beaded comb and the *Eyẹ* (bird).
Osun, decided to wait and see.
How they would carry out their mission successfully.
Osun sat quietly and watched them.

Beginning with Eji-Ogbe till Ofun Meji
They all decided not to countenance Òsun in their missions.
She, too, kept mute,
And carried on her rightful duty,
Which is hair-painting.
She had a comb.
The Odú never knew Òsun was an Àjé.
When they were coming from heaven,
Òlódùmarè chose their keeper, and this was a woman.
And because all other Odú left Òsun out,

Nothing they did was successful.

They went to Egun's grove and pleaded to them,
That their mission be crowned with success.
They went to Oro.
"You are the only one who frightens death and sickness,
Please help drive them away".
Healing failed to take place.
Instead, epidemic festered.
They went to Ose and begged him
To let the rain fall.
Rain didn't fall.
Then they went to Òsun.
Òsun received them warmly,
And entertained them.
But shame would not let them confide in Òsun.
Whom they had ignored.

They then headed for heaven,
And made straight for Òlódùmarè.
Who asked them "Why they came".
They said it was about their mission on earth.
When they left heaven,
And arrived on earth
All things went well;
Then later things turned for the worse,
Nothing was successful.
Òlódùmarè asked,
"How many of you are here?"
They answered, "Sixteen".
Òlódùmarè asked,
"When you were leaving heaven, how many were you?"
They answered, "Seventeen".
Òlódùmarè said, "You are all intriguers.
That one you left behind
Why, don't you often consult with her?"
They replied, "it was because She was only a female among us"

Òlódúmarè said, "No, it should not be so!
 Òsun is a manly woman"

Òlódúmarè said,
 "Boribori, their diviner in Iragberi,
 Is a divination apprentice of Òsun
 Egba, their diviner in Ilukan,
 Is a divination apprentice of Òsun,
 Ese, who is their diviner
 In Ese Ijebu Ere,
 Is a divination apprentice Òsun.
 Atomu, their diviner in the town of Ikire,
 Is a divination apprentice Òsun.
 Òlódúmarè said,
 What you were ignorant of
 Is what you know now.
 Go back into the world
 And consult with Òsun
 In whatever you embark upon,
 Whatever you lay your hands on
 Will continue to call Òsun

Then they returned to Òsun,
 And addressed her, "Mother, the preeminent hair-plaiter
 with the coral-beaded comb and the *Eye*.
 We have been to the Creator
 And it was there we discovered that
 all Odú were derived from you
 And that our suffering would continue
 If we failed to recognize and respect you
 All the Odú wanted to appease and please Òsun.
 But Òsun would not go out with them.
 Instead, Òsun told them that the baby she was expecting
 might go out with them,
 But even that would depend on the gender of the baby.
 For she said that if the baby she was expecting
 Turned out to be male,

That male child would go out with them.
 But if the baby turned out to be female,
 She (Òsun) would have nothing to do with them.

THEY ALL PRAISED ÒSUN THUSLY:

Orangun's, goat that moves about the fence,
Orangun's, cock (rooster) that stays on the top of the palm tree
She is both at home and in the forest.
All eminent people in the earth
Join us to shout praises to the Gracious Mother Òsun,
The Honorable One, the Sovereign who
Knows all the secrets of the cults,
However, never discloses them.

If we worship our Gracious Mother Osun,
Osun, the One who is the custodians of the mysteries.
And accept our ignorance's,
She reveals to us the secrets.
She reveals good instead of evil
And not reveal evil instead of good!

One who has a store for brass in a big shelf,
One who generously appeases her children with brass.
Our Mother, she who accepts corals for ritual offerings.
Ota! Omi! Edan!
Awura! Olu! Agbaja!
The ever-present counselor at our decisions
Is our Gracious Mother, Òsun

Note:

The four powerful messengers of Òsun, which are mentioned above,
are:

- 1) *Boribori* = over comer (helps Òsun to overcome the other deities)
- 2) *Egba* = paralysis (paralyzes them)
- 3) *Ese* = big or grievous harm (cause them a lot and serious losses)
- 4) *Atomu* = the captor (stopped and ruined all the activities from the others deities for refusing to consult Òsun)



Glossary



- Afoṣe* – (charms or medicine pounded to powder that can cause good or harm)
Àjé – pejorative definition for witch
Ajogun – belligerent enemies of man considered to be the messengers of Esu
Arun – disease
Aásàn – power to curse
Àwôn Iya Wa – Our Mothers
Aworan – mask (*a requisite attire for performance in front of Iyá Nlá Odú*)
Àyàjo – power of incantations
Egba – infirmity
Egbe – societies
egbe orun – spiritual/heavenly mate
Eleiye – Àjé -witch
Epe – curse
Ese – sin
Esu – more or less, a neutral force between man and the divinities
Ewon – bondage
Eye Àjé – invisible mysterious energy

- Ìbà* – reverence
Iku – death, also a leg rattle (*a requisite attire for performance in front of Iyá Nlá Odú*)
Itan – myth, legend
Ìwà – character, characteristics
Iwere – Prayer
Iyá àgbà – old and wise woman

Iyalàjà – spiritual mother
Iyalàsè – mother in the shrine, the highest priestess, the head of the society
Iyá Nlá – Ancient Mother, Oldest mother, Primordial Mother, Great Mother,

Ofo àse – power to pray effectively
Ofo – loss
Ója – head tie (*a requisite attire for performance in front of Iyá Nlá Odú*)
Òpàgà – staff
Oran – trouble
Oriki – praise poem

Vodu – Òrìsà



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