

Should I hide Esu/Ellegua

In my book, **The Way of the Orisa** - HarperCollins Publishing, I tell a story about a young lady who was having trouble finding, and maintaining, the right relationship. She was a highly successful executive who had everything going for herself except marriage and children. Yet, as she would relate to me, every time a new and promising relationship started to "get going", something would happen to make the guy go away.

After a reading at my office one day, we were discussing the problem. " Does it have anything to do with the religion?" I asked. "No," she replied, I really don't discuss it with them, and before they come over, I take my Esu and put him away in the closet."

Well, it became quite clear that several things were going on here. First, as I explained to the client, the very fact that she had not even broached the area of her religious beliefs with someone she was getting close to, indicated either she was ashamed/uneasy about her beliefs, or was simply afraid what their response might be.

"Well, yes," she replied, " you know that most people don't understand what we believe and do. They think it's a scene from the The Believer's. I just want things to be more solid before I explain it to them."

"And what about hiding Esu?" I asked.

" Well, it's the same reason. I mean if they come over for a drink or something, and the first thing they see at the front door is the little stone figure, they're going to ask what it is."

"Do you think there's any connection between what you are doing, and what you aren't discussing and the relationships ending?"

She looked slightly confused, and then blurted out: " Do you mean Esu's punishing me for putting him in the closet?"

Well, over a decade ago when that conversation took place, I might have agreed with that explanation. Today, with more wisdom and experience, I don't.

The whole story was dredged from my memory last week when I received a phone call from an Osun priestess. She is happily married with children. She wanted to know what I thought about "building a little plant garden inside that

she could place Esu in so that their friends or relatives coming to there home wouldn't easily see, and inquire, about the figure."

"No," I answered. "Not for that reason."

Well, Osun's as a rule do not take well to "no." So, she started to argue with me about a "pretty garden," and why it wasn't necessary for her to discuss her beliefs with her friends etc. Suddenly, the decade above experience came flashing back.

Frankly, I don't think I explained it as well as I should. and later, when thinking about it, I thought that the reason might well be that I should do an article on the concepts for everyone to understand. You see, I believe there is a reason for everything, a productive reason, if we are intelligent and thoughtful enough to search it out.

At any rate, for all of you out there who are somewhat uncomfortable in sharing your religious beliefs and practices let me make a few suggestions:

1. If you are going to have a meaningful relationship with another human being, or even a close relationship with friends, something that comprises a meaningful percentage of your life cannot be kept secret.
2. Acquaintances, business relationships etc., have no particular need, or even "right," to know your religious beliefs and practices.
3. Religious beliefs and practices are highly personal and private. Particularly in Orisa worship, where proselytizing (the attempt, or imperative, of converting others to your belief system) not only does not exist, is frowned upon.
4. You would hardly turn to your boss at work and say: " Gee, I know you're Catholic. Could you share your Confessional with me?" So, simply stating that you practice an Earth Based philosophy called Ifa, that originated thousands of years ago in West Africa, is enough.

Why "hiding" it produces negative results.

1. As I stated earlier, the idea of being punished by the energy/orisa because you were failing to show enough respect etc. is appealing. It is also incorrect. That explanation demands that the energies themselves are sentient, human like entities, with specific emotions related to your behavior. And that premise is lock step with the Paternalism of other religions and the continuation of dependence rather than the institution of personal empowerment. Ifa is about personal growth and empowerment.
2. Ifa works because it allows us a rational understanding of what Western Science views as mystical. Ifa allows us to see Oludumare's creation as a whole, and our place within that structure. In correctly identifying those relationships, and learning how to use them, we are able to adjust, improve and guide our lives.
3. Our ability to utilize this knowledge will be directly dependent upon the clarity and confidence with which we view it. Much like the basketball player who enters the "zone", where they know they will make that next shot, so also our solid belief and trust (not faith) in the orisa and their place in the Universal Construct, allows us to produce the best results. When, somewhere within our own core of energy, we feel slightly uneasy about the process, including how others with their fixed Western views may feel about it, we think not about making the shot, but about not missing it. And, invariably, we miss it. Not because we are being punished, but because we are disempowering our energy and ourselves.

Pride is an essential part of successful Ifa practice. Pride in us as individuals. Pride in our family and relationships. Pride in our partnership with the earth we live on. Ifa, with its Original Science understanding of the energies that comprise this matrix, gave us the roadmap and directions for successfully navigating all these paths with good character and personal empowerment. To think that we might lose a friend, or an intimate relationship, because of this is absurd. Anyone who would be judgmental and capricious enough to think less of you because of your pride in who you are and what you are part of has no place as a friend or lover.

Blessings,

Oluwo Philip Neimark

IFA FOUNDATION