

A New Initiate Speaks Out

As I became involved in IFA, there seemed to be a series of three steps to be taken. The first step is a belief in IFA to accept the premise of a benevolent universe. Second is to accept if it isn't logical, it isn't true. And third is acceptance of responsibility for one's own actions. One cannot grow in IFA without acceptance of all three things.

An acceptance of a benevolent universe is a primary requirement in IFA. Everything is based on this belief. IFA is unlike other religions where believers live under the fearful yoke of a universe that wants to crush them. Why would God have created man and the universe if the only lot of man were suffering during his life? In IFA, we believe he would not. This does not mean there will never be any sadness or loss in our lives for one cannot appreciate the joy without the sorrow. Instead, it means we should live in joy and happiness knowing God is not setting up in heaven with a cosmic fly swatter waiting to slap us down. In addition, IFA gives us the tools to reduce the depth of the sorrows we face and to raise the intensity of our joys. With IFA, none of us is doomed to 'live lives of quiet desperation' as Thoreau described in Walden. IFA gives us the power to take what might have been a disaster and make it a turning point in our lives to move on to new and better things. Through IFA, we learn to determine what we need to do to fulfill our destinies while living with good character.

Next, we must accept that if it isn't logical, it isn't true. Other religions seem to thrive on asking adherents to believe things so illogical that if any group other than a religious one asked people to accept them, they would be laughed out of existence. Even those of us who have studied non-Euclidean geometry where parallel lines actually do meet have trouble accepting some of these ideas. But because it is a religion that asks us to believe these things, many go blindly forth and accept them. Many people rationalize their tolerance by saying they just overlook those parts of the religion and accept the other parts of it. In IFA, we do not have a mix and match religion where you pick one from column A and two from column B. IFA is totally logical and requires its adherents to act and think logically.

Which relates to the third tenet: we are responsible for our own actions. Years ago, everyone studied Civics in school addressing things like social responsibility and civic duty. Unfortunately, schools have dropped these things from their curriculum. Somehow, over the last 40 years, it has become socially acceptable to put the blame for things we do on everyone but our selves. We are never at fault and often claim we are victims of society when confronted with our unacceptable behavior. Society now has a duty to bear the responsibility for everyone's behavior. Even our religions encourage us to have someone higher in the church (and therefore closer to God) make our decisions for us and guide us in how we should act. IFA teaches us we are adults and must be responsible for what we do. It says we must live our lives with good character if we are to reach our destinies. The Babalawo and Iyanifa can only tell us what ebbo we should offer to what energy to make the best of life but they will not accept responsibility for our actions. We must examine our own actions and desires to determine if they reflect good character before we act on them. IFA is very much a religion of the here and now; it does not deal with rewards to be received after we die dependent on how we lived our lives.

It was while watching Joseph Campbell on the Power of Myth for the 2nd time that something he said brought about an epiphany. Bill Moyers asked Mr. Campbell if he were a man of faith and he replied he did not need faith as he had experience. All of a sudden, a light went on for me and I saw a fourth tenet I must accept. IFA does not require faith; it gives us experience. Religions that require faith do so because they promise only suffering in this life with the joy and reward to be found in the next world after death. IFA does not promise we will have joy after we die and suffering while we live; it says we can have the joy right now. Each of us receives the experience when we make the ebbo to the energy and see the results. Did we get that new job offer after we worked with Esu? Did someone new come into our lives or our current relationships improve after we gave honey to Osun? This is the experience we have that makes faith unnecessary. Why would we need to wait for the next life to be better when IFA has given us the tools to make this one as good as we want it to be? I was born in Missouri, the 'show me' state and I will always take an ounce of experience over a pound of faith any day. What about you? Do you want the experience of a full life now or do you want to have faith life will be great after you die?

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