

Money & Ifa

Recently, a member of our new Ifa Tools site, posted a message that he would like to list the costs of various initiations on his web site. He thought it would serve to highlight the fraudulent behavior we are all so sensitive to. On the surface, it seemed like a good idea. Yet, upon reflection, it is not.

There are two areas that must be examined when viewing people's attitudes towards the "costs" of ceremonies, initiations and consultations.

First, the overwhelming negative energy that people feel is a direct result of their Christian/Judaic upbringing where they were taught that money and spirituality were mutually exclusive. This is simply an extension of the dichotomy that was drawn between our temporal and our spiritual existence's. A dichotomy, by the way, that has resulted in the schizophrenic behavior of the Western world. Having accepted the premise that the two concepts were inherently inimical, we made our behavioral decisions in each area without regard to the other. So, we created a society where the process of making money had no moral obligation, or relationship, to the welfare of the society itself. It was a stand-alone decision. The results of this thinking - from Three Mile Island to the disappearing Ozone layer - speak for themselves!

This has never been Ifa's position. Ifa has always understood the inherent bond between our temporal and our spiritual behavior. Each exists ONLY in relationship to the other. Indeed, in the sacred Odu **OgundaOsa**, Ifa clearly states: "**Ifa chooses money as his partner.**" The key concept here is: partner. Money, or our temporal existence, must be in partnership with our emotional/spiritual behavior if we are to prosper in a meaningful way.

So, those who automatically bridle at the concept that Ifa priests and priestesses charge money for spiritual services are missing the point. Indeed, the only way the Babalawo or priest, could afford to devote his or her time to learning, growing, accumulating knowledge and Ase', was if the community paid for their services.

Western religion, by the way, operates the same way... only they pretend they do not. They would like you to believe it's free. Yet, if you did not donate, leave bequests, buy memberships or raffle tickets, play bingo or pay tuition at the church/temple run schools, there would be no churches, no priests, and no temples to offer anything. Yet, to continue the masquerade of separating our spiritual and temporal lives, they have constructed this charade that states " money is evil...unless it's given to the church or temple." Ifa, in this, as in every other area, does not ask you to suspend your credulity or common

sense. Ifa believes that the priest can charge for his expertise with as much pride and confidence in his abilities and knowledge as can the doctor, mechanic or farmer who also wants to receive compensation for their work and education.

Second, is the question of **"How much you charge?"** In many ways this seemed the thrust of the Internet Ife members quest. The implication, of course, is that if you charge "a lot," then you are certainly being dishonest or, at the very least, less spiritual. This is nonsense! Few of us would question that Bill Gates has the right to charge more for his consultation than does the individual just graduating with a degree in computers. It would be illogical to suggest that Dr. Michael DeBakey hadn't the right to charge more for his open-heart procedures than a young surgical resident. Certainly we understand that Michael Jordan had the right to a higher salary than most of his peers.

So, **the question cannot be a matter of "how much."** The question must be a matter of expertise, integrity and character. And, if a person of bad character charges \$5.00 for a ceremony, it is too much! If a highly skilled practitioner charges \$500.00 for the same ceremony, it may well be a bargain!

In Ifa, as in Silicon Valley or baseball, there are .350 hitters and .220 hitters. Initiation in no way determines the talent, intelligence, work ethic or character of the person. It only makes it possible for whatever talent and ability and character the individual has to rise to its ultimate level.

Each and every priest must decide their own levels and ways of relating to the people who seek our help. In the case of the Foundation, our costs range from "free" (through the scholarships we give to those worthwhile, but financially unable individuals) to group initiations and ceremonies to bring overall costs down, to higher donations for those able to afford them. That is our approach, but it may not be right for everyone.

The final question about costs must be: **"how do you determine the value, character and knowledge of any priest or priestess."**

Once again, this is a question that can only be answered when you understand that life and spirituality are not two separate experiences. Would you buy one car over another without researching or looking into the comparisons? Would you put your life in the hands of a surgeon you hadn't checked out or got references on? Would you put your child in a day care without carefully examining the safety and reputation of the people who would care for your most precious possession? Certainly not. Well, **the same**

examination and research *MUST* be done with those to whom you entrust your soul!

You must look for the warning signs of the charlatan, con man or simply the priest of bad character. Talk to others who have had relationships with them. Examine their lives and relationships with those around them. See if their Godchildren's lives have really improved. Beware if there is ALWAYS fear tragedy or mishap waiting that can only be avoided by another costly ceremony. Run away from those who would create dependence rather than independence in your life. Leave those who find your body as interesting as your soul.

It is your responsibility. It is your life. And, it has nothing to do with what they charge.

Blessings,

Oluwo Philip Neimark