

## **AWO TRAINING PART X**

In the five steps of most *Ifa* ritual perhaps the most misunderstood is the process of feeding spirit, or making *ebo*. When we have cleaned a spiritual object and anointed it is traditional to feed the object. This is commonly but not exclusively done by placing blood on the sacred object. In my opinion this process is a symbolic representation of the fundamental covenant between humans and Creation. Blood is the medium for carrying life and passing life from one generation to the next. It is a fundamental principle of life on Earth that for something to live something else must die. The tree that survives in the forest blocks sun lights to the sprouts in its shadow. Plants die so animals might live; animals die so that other animals might live. All these interactions creating a balance in Nature that sustains continued life. This relationship is usually described in religious terms as a covenant. A covenant is an agreement between humans and spirit based on a common understanding of cosmology and the natural cycles of life, death, transformation and rebirth.

In the Diaspora most *ebo* is done in the manner described by John Mason in his book Four New World Rituals. When I first started the study of *Ifa* twenty-five years ago, this book was virtually the only resource on how to perform basic *Orisa* ritual. It was a pioneering effort by a studied and well informed elder. Mason's books were largely based on instruction from his elders in Cuba and he did a meticulous job of recording their insights.

For the student of African *Ifa* there is a broader spectrum of ritual techniques available for feeding or making *ebo*. Seeing these techniques in Africa can be confusing because most of us are conditioned to see *ebo* done one way. The first and most important aspect of learning how to mark and offer *ebo* is the understanding that there is a wide variation of techniques used in Africa and no one “right” way to do things.

The student of *Ifa* in the Diaspora who has limited access to elders is in a difficult position because most of the texts on *Odu Ifa* list the ingredients for making *ebo* while none of them describe the process for using the listed materials. The only written material I have seen on making *ebo* is in the book *Ifa The Key To Its Understanding* by Baba Fasina Falade. For anyone who wants to learn about the Africa *Ifa* structure of making *ebo* I can only recommend Baba Falade’s book Chapter 9 pages 476-517. (The book is available from Baba Falade through his website which is linked to this site.) This information is an accurate description of *ebo* as I have seen it performed in Africa. I commend Baba Falade for his excellent work in this regard.

Having made this reference there are some generally thoughts about making *ebo* to consider. In some parts of our community I have encountered the notion that if a little blood is good, a lot of blood is better. Feeding a sacred object or making *ebo* is reaffirmation of the fundamental covenant that sustains life. Because it is a symbolic reenactment the amount of blood offered is ill relevant. In my experience in Africa nothing is wasted. When blood is offered to Spirit the animal is eaten as part of the ritual celebration for the elevation of a person or a

group of people. The number of animals used in an offering is not about the amount blood needed by spirit, it is about the number of people who are being fed.

When a bird is used for a cleaning the bird is slaughtered then the wings are removed the carcass and the wings are used to clean, while the rest of the bird is eaten. It is common in the Diaspora to slaughter an animal then dispose of it. Such a practice is unheard of in Africa. The offering to Spirit is considered a shared meal between humans and Spirit. An *Odu* that asks for 16 goats as an offering is not saying slaughter 16 goats and dispose of them. It is saying feed a large number of people.

As a son of *Ogun* who has done many feedings over the years I have learned that when making an offering it is important to approach the ritual from a particular point of view. If you are over sympathetic to the animal you will lack the focus needed to make a clean cut, to dispatch the animal quickly and without needless suffering. If you enjoy the process you are bringing the wrong spiritual energy to the process. The *ori* of the person making the *ebo* needs to be what I would describe as emotionally neutral. It is from a place of being perfectly centered, and perfectly calm that effective *ebo* is made.

When doing *ebo* based on divination it is important to mark the *Odu* on the *Ifa* tray and recite the verse over the marks. When reciting the *Odu* the verse should be chanted or sung as a way of raising ase or spiritual energy. It is common in the Diaspora for *awo* to mark the *Odu*

of the their elders on the tray when making *ebo*. This is a way to call in the ancestral support of a particular lineage.

In African *Ifa* it is more common to mark the *Odu* that support the process of making *ebo*. From right to left I would mark *Ogunda Irete* to insure that *Esu* hears the prayer, the mark the primary *Odu* received in divination or the *Odu* marked on the tray to make a particular thing, then *Ose tura* to take the prayer to the spirit of the vulture who will take the prayer to *Orun*, then *Eji Ogbe* to insure the answer to the prayer is in alignment with the person's destiny. To the left of *Eji Ogbe* you can mark the *Odu* that gives birth to your *Ifa Egbe* rather than mark all the *Odu* of your elders. I repeat this is a way to mark *Odu* during *ebo* it is not the only way. A common variation would be to exclude the *Odu* that came during divination if the *Odu* has negative implications and to replace it with *Eji Ogbe*. No matter what the issue we can always support our prayers with *Eji Ogbe* as an appeal to our highest destiny and the manifestation of perfect alignment between the head and the heart.

In the Diaspora there is a commonly held view that only someone who has gone through a ceremonial presentation of the knife can make *ebo*. In my experience in Africa there is no separate ritual for sanction to use the knife, both *Orisa* and *Ifa* carry an implied sanction to perform *ebo*. If your lineage requires a ritual presentation of a knife that you need to remain consistent with your lineage, this not, however, a universal requirement.

It is also my experience that if a client who is coming for divination who is not a part of an *Ifa Orisa* community their lack of understanding

of the process can negate any positive effect the *ebo* might have on their spiritual elevation. In these instances I generally ask the *Odu* through the use of divination if presenting an *adimu* offering is adequate to facilitate elevation.

*Ire*

Awo Falokun