

## **AWO TRAINING PART XII**

Divination is only a small part of the task of being *Awo*. The most important task of *Awo* is to nurture, guide sustain and protect the extended family. In traditional *Ifa* culture in Africa the extended family is the training school. Every one in the family has a practical role to play in sustaining the survival of the family and that job comes with commensurate spiritual training. For example the six year olds sweep the dirt in front of the house every morning with tree branches. They sing to *Esu* as they sweep, they learn this skill from the eight years olds. The eight year olds are taught to help gather wood and sing to *Osoosi* by the ten year olds. Everyone is mentor and mentored. Everyone your fathers age is called *Baba* and everyone your mothers age is called *Iya*. All *Baba* and *Iya* have the right and the moral obligation to correct any signs of public expressions of bad character by any child. This is the meaning of the Yoruba proverb it takes a village to raise a child.

In traditional Yoruba culture in Nigeria the families are self-sustaining entities whose structure and function forms a continuous link with the distant past. The job of *Awo* in Africa is to sustain structures that are clearly in place. The job of *Awo* in most places in the Diaspora is to create structures where none exists. This is a daunting and challenging task for which there is little precedent training or clear guidelines. Our elders in Africa have little memory of how their ancestors created extended family where none existed. Our elders in the

Diaspora have only fragmented memories of the extended family as *Ifa* training school. Between this wide divide is many generations of mistrust, disappointment, disillusionment, shame, disappear and deep wounding originally caused by the complete destruction of the extended family during the force relocation of African during the era of slavery.

For the contemporary *Awo* practicing *Ifa* in the Diaspora the question becomes who to turn too for inspiration, where to begin, how to fix something that may well have been broken in their own life. The first thing to consider is this; *Awo* does not personally need to have the medicine or the expertise to fix everything. They simply need to know where that expertise can be found within their own community to solve specific problems. The second issue to consider is this; *Ifa* means wisdom and wisdom is where you find. Not all solutions to all problems need to come from within the *Ifa* religious community. For example AA is extremely effective at dealing with addiction. When someone comes to me with an addiction problem I refer them to AA. I do this because AA has a proven record of effective treatment. If there is a support group as effective with the *Orisa* that solves addiction problems from a uniquely *Ifa* perspective I am not familiar with such an organization. Does that mean we do not guide our family members with addiction problems towards a tried and true solution, I would hope not.

If we break the problem of creating family down to its simplest components I have noticed that each verse of *Odu Ifa* ends with a

blessing of children, long life or abundance. As I gained more experience as a diviner I realized that the overwhelming majority of clients who come to me have only one of three concerns, relationships, health or money, hence the blessing of children, long life and abundance. In the past I have taken a pre-emptive approach to these concerns. Most of the members of my *Ile* (extended family) had no health insurance. Once a month I would have an acupuncturist come to the house and for \$25 per person diagnosis medical problems prescribe herbal remedies and offer energy alignment treatment. Not only is acupuncture very similar to traditional *onisegun* (herbal medicine) it is based on a virtually identical worldview. As a diviner when divination indicated health problems I could refer them to the clinic and the acupuncturist used his own techniques to confirm my diagnosis. One third of my problems were solved as a community elder.

The issue of abundance is more or less predicated on the ability to earn a living, which for most of us is based on access to solid forms of employment. I would have members of the *Ile* meet once a month solely for the purposes of networking. I found that if a person needed work and that if there were at least 30 people attending the meeting connections could be made to find employment within a week. These monthly business meetings were also used to network. We determined who needed help with childcare, who needed help with transportation, who needed help moving, who was short on food, who need a place to stay

while they looked for permanent housing. In my experienced opinion no elder in the Diaspora should attempt to create an extended family unless and until the participants are ready to treat one another as blood family. We would not drive past our mother or father if we saw them living in the street. We would not close the door if our brother sister needed food. We would not turn our backs if our sons and daughters need help in anyway. The tendency in the Diaspora is to sell someone as many rituals as possible then create some pretext for discontinuing any on going relationship to insure the person is not trained and so they are unable to compete in the Ocha market place. I cannot tell you how many people I have met who have ten, twenty as much as fifty thousand dollars worth of rocks in their house and no idea how to use them. My only question is what is the point?

Building extended family is the sacred responsibility of *Awo* and *Awo* cannot do that if the process does not begin at home. The *Awo* and *Apetebi* or *Iyanifa* are the foundation of any extended family. The consciousness of an extended family cannot rise above the consciousness of the founding parents. They set the tone, set the moral compass, become the role models, train the mentors and create the communal goals and aspirations. If the family is based on the notion that initiation into a secret society will make you an effective drug dealer, dealing drugs is all you will every accomplish. If the family is based on creating a safe

place for the manifestation of unconditional love, the elevation of the human spirit will be the net result of your effort.

*Ire*

*Awo Falokun*