

## **Women & Ifa**

by **Iyalawo Falomo** and **Iyalawo Olufadeke**

There is a basic wisdom and logic to the universe. It is Oludumare's gift to us that He constructed it in a way we could understand. Unlike the rest of His creations, we have little instinct to survive. Our survival and prosperity depend, in great measure, on our understanding our place and connection within this universe. Ifa, and Orisa worship, are proven paths for understanding these relationships.

Within the construct of the universe we have all observed the profound differences between male and female energy. Too often, this understanding has led to the faulty conclusion that: the energies are, and should remain, inherently separate. Wrong! The correct observation is that the continuation of almost all life forms depend on these energies working together. Certainly there are things that female energy does better than male energy. Equally certain, there are things male energy can accomplish more effectively than female energy. Yet, the ultimate truth is that there are a host of things that, when each energy combines with the other, that can be addressed and accomplished at a level impossible for either energy in its separate form. It is this ultimate Truth that demands that women be initiated as Ifa priests. While women cannot see Odu, they can perform all other functions of an Ifa priest. And, when they work at this level, hand in hand with their male counterpart, the accomplishments geometrically expand. They are not seeking to become Babalawo. As is pointed out by Falomo in her writings below, they are seeking and fulfilling their role of Iyalawo. And the combination of the Mother Of The Secrets and the Father Of the Secrets completes a union as basic and profound as the two halves of the calabash that represent our universe!

At Ola Olu we teach inclusion. We also recognize the inherent individuality of each initiate. Becoming an Iyalawo does not compress one into a certain pattern of behavior or emotional response. Rather it allows the individual energies of that individual to express in a profound spiritual manner through the path they have chosen. The following two essays reflect those differences.

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## Finding One's Way To Being An Iyalawo

by **Iyalawo Olufadeke**

Looking back, it is appropriate that my initiation ceremony was the most beautiful and profound experience of my life. Shared with my husband - by my side as " the Oluwo" - and our eight year old son as my sweet support. I was also surrounded by the care and love of our shared 23 year old son and two other wonderful Babalawos. Their love and blessings reflected the memories of all the times I had blessed them in my previous role as Ogun Priestess. Their willingness to give of their energy in this ceremony of such consequence - the first female Iyalawo initiated at Ola Olu - I felt was not only for me, but for Ola Olu as well.

In retrospect, for the past 10 years I operated somewhat independently from my husband - I did my Priestess work with great love and joy - and every time I did, I felt so grateful that Oludumare had blessed me with the gifts of healing and energy and that Ifa had shown me the path for expressing them.

In our Prayer room, I had always arranged my Orisa on the left side. Philip's were always on the right side. Our families Orunmila's occupied the center. Yet, the next morning after my initiation - in the midst of much cleaning up - I got the message to put our Orisa next to each other! As I have learned to listen and do what I hear, I went right in to do the rearrangement. Our Obatalas now sit side by side, as to our Osuns, etc. The message seemed quite clear. "We are now a team in a more profound and active way." While there are parts of the initiation process that involve Odu that I cannot participate in, I am completely involved with the whole.

After the incredible energy surge of the ceremonies, the shifting process began. I must say that this interim stage isn't all that comfortable. Many new layers were coming up for me to deal with. Some lay at the very core of my existence. Pieces that were down so deeply - pieces that I needed to address, fix and integrate in order to become truly whole. They do, and have, come together. Ifa insists on it and then shows you the way to do it. And, as I've told all we have ever initiated, a rebalancing takes place, a shift from what was to who you are to be on this new path.

Finally, I want to express that this feels like the first time I've really understood myself to a level I never touched before. I always knew it was there - and had to be gotten to - I was just afraid to go there. It is also the first time in my life that I could understand how to truly stand side by side with a man - as close to being balanced and becoming one as never before. After 19 years of

togetherness it's the first time I am totally sharing me with him. Maybe more marriages and relationships could work - maybe more families could be happy together with a quality to their lives they never dreamed possible. Maybe more children could be truly whole.

That is my/our work and goal. To make Ola Olu an oasis of personal power and growth. Not simply for individuals, but for families, children and friends. On my new path as Iyalawo Olufadeke, I think we can accomplish this.

***Blessings...***  
***Iyalawo Olufadeke***

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## Thoughts Of A Woman In Ifa

by **Iyalawo Falomo**

I was never more surprised--though not totally surprised, as when I realized Orunmila wanted me to be a priestess of Ifa. After several years of devouring Ifa and Orisa books, I was aware that Iyalawos existed, though not in great numbers. I had not given much thought to the possibility that Ifa would be my path--at least not so soon; I had simply envisioned living in harmony with my Osun energy.

I had received my Icofa. It contained only two Ikin, as a reflection of the diasporic interpretation. Nevertheless, my Ita indicated that I would be a "good Godmother and many would come to Ifa through me." The Babalawo could not tell me exactly how this was likely to manifest. Six months later circumstances existed that caused me to seek another Babalawo. I decided to go to Baba Afolabi Epega, noted Nigerian Babalawo and co-author of The Sacred Ifa Oracle. Upon seeing my Icofa he laughed, saying that nothing could be done with only two Ikin; he told me I needed to complete the hand (16 Ikin). I felt angry that I had paid for what amounted to a gender biased minimization of Orunmila's powerful energy.

It was two years later that destiny brought me to Ola Olu. During the time since I had my hand of Orunmila completed, I began receiving clear energy and a loving bond between that energy and myself developed. Of additional comfort was the fact that Iyalawo Olufadeke had recently received her Ifa initiation. I felt heartened that together we would be able to offer a safe and

rational haven for women to experience the path of Ifa and Orisa without the societal gender based limitations that are so prevalent.

Following my initiation I was able to present my sensitivities on the issue of whether I had become a "female Babalawo" or, as I insisted was the case, had become an Iyalawo. I felt that using "Babalawo" to include both men and women would negate the woman's energy because the word Babalawo, by its construction, is specific to men; (2) use of Iyalawo as a gender specific for women, as Babalawo is for men, would acknowledge the critical balancing role for both energies in the practice of Ifa. Babalawo Fagbamila has agreed, and all women initiated at Ola Olu as Ifa Priests will be known as **Iyalawo!**

It is my goal, based on my experiences before and after finding the Ifa Foundation, to learn, understand and share the wisdom of Ifa consistent with the Foundation's principles of inclusion and balance.

**Blessings...**

**Iyalawo Falomo**

IFA FOUNDATION