

WOMEN IN IFA: CAN THEY PERFORM?

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In Ifa, we have two different kinds of women, these are the "**APETEBIS**" and the "**IYANIFAS**".

Apetebi is a common name for all 'Babalawos' (Ifa Priests') wives and whether a woman has knowledge of

Ifa or not does not determine this title, but a woman is qualified to be one if she marries to a Babalawo. This word '**Apetebi**' was derived from 'Odu-Ifa Obararete', Chapter of Ifa apostle when Orunmila gave his daughter from his leper wife (He met this woman during one of his spiritual journeys and since Orunmila does accommodate everybody, she has to marry the woman) to one of his Ifa students and pronounced that she is an Apetebi, that is 'Omo ti a pa ete bi' meaning 'a child that was born after you cure the mother of leprosy', because he cured the woman of leprosy and since then women that marries to Babalawo have been named and being called 'Apetebi'.

'Iyanifa' on the other hand is a title or common name for any woman that undergo the training of Ifa knowledge, an Apetebi can also become an Iyanifa if such a woman undergoes Ifa training, that is to say, not all Apetebi are Iyanifa but many Iyanifa are Apetebis since they usually marries to Babalawo. The word Iyanifa was derived from 'Iya-Onifa', that is 'mother in Ifa or Ifa priestess', the mother here does not mean that the person should be an old woman since the 'Baba' (Father) in 'Babalawo' or 'Babalufa' (Father in Ifa) is being used to identify young and old Ifa priests.

And in Ifa society, we have many Apetebi but few Iyanifa only for the fact that it take years to learn or study Ifa, in fact it takes between ten and fifteen years to become a full fledge Babalawo which exclude the training one would have got from his father between the tender age of four to ten. It is also of good importance to mention here that the long years of training would be with one's godfather otherwise known as 'Baba-Awo', that is, one would need to be staying and living with him for that long period. Having said this, it is therefore found difficult for women or would be Iyanifa to undergo such a long years of training only because of the time that need to be devoted for such a training and for the fact that women have rapid development than men which make them to get marry earlier than men, they can't go for such long years of training, that is to say, marriage is another factor while women are not being found in Ifa circle, even their responsibilities as wives can not permit them the role of priestess. For these reasons, Iyanifa are very scarce to find in Ifa community, though we have them but they are very small in number.

Now the question, can women in Ifa really perform? The answer to the question is YES, THEY CAN, only that there is difference in their roles and these roles are also limited. Apart from her roles as a wife, the role of an Apetebi in Ifa started from daily and weekly cleaning of the Temple, morning and evening devotion whereby she pray at the shrine of Ifa either personally or jointly with the household, an Apetebi can make the five day libation known as 'OSE' whereby she give kola nuts to Ifa and make prayer, and if anything is requested by Ifa through such libation, an Apetebi can also give such thing to Ifa if it is just like additional kola nuts, food, scotch, honey and things like that but if it is a blood of birds or animal, she would need the help of a Babalawo because of the needed invocation that has to do with verses of Ifa.

But in the case of Iyanifa, she can go to some extra level in addition to the above mentioned roles, even in the performance of these roles, she will be able to confidently support herself with Ifa verses to which Apetebi may not. Iyanifa can attend gatherings of 'Babalawo' whether administrative or spiritual (except in the area of "ODU" , a deity that's forbidden for women to see) where she do have says and also chants Ifa verses where necessary because she can identify and chant praise name of all the two hundred and fifty-six 'Odu-Ifa' which she must have perfectly memorized during her training. Iyanifa do attend to clients spiritually and also give counseling to them like her Babalawo counterpart, but she cannot be as conversant or competent like him because of the above views which may not allow her to go to some extra length in her training, but that is not to say that by here being married to a babalawo and being in that environment that she still would not learn. I am sure she would.

Having said all these, there is a question of whether an Iyanifa can use 'OPELE' (divining chain) or not, somebody we call an Iyanifa has to be special and should be different from other priestess who use cowries to divine, there is nothing that stop or forbidden an Iyanifa from using 'Opele' because she already has the knowledge during her training, and going by what Ifa says in 'Odu-Ifa: 'Oturupon-ayeku', Chapter 183 of Ifa apostle, using 'Opele' is **not** even a taboo for an Iyanifa to hold as some people are claiming. In this Odu-Ifa, we got to know how Orunmila went to a warfront with all other 'Orisa' and the war was so tough and the news of the war got home that people were dying and the 'Orisa' were being molested, when the news got to Orunmila's home, thinking that he might have been killed or injured, his son, 'Amosunlaka' collapsed while 'Osu-n-leyo' his wife was so worried, not knowing what to do and since it is said that a lantern can not see its bottom, she went to 'Aboseere tii bodu' an herbalist who proclaimed that Orunmila will never return, more worried and crying she went to the house of 'Abope tii baaya', another non-Ifa priest that also claimed that Orunmila will never return, although both of them did this out of envy because they see Orunmila as being a threat to their spiritual work and they have being looking for ways of getting him out of the way. 'Osu-n-leyo' was coming home with sorrow and sadness when she met 'Esu odara' who advised her to go to 'Opele' at 'Onko', that she can find out and know the condition of her husband from 'Opele', she went straight and quickly casted 'Opele' where it was revealed that Orunmila whom they claimed will never return is already on his way back home, the 'Opele' advised her to make sacrifice known as "Ebo" of three male fowls, a jug of palm oil, sixteen cowries and two fresh eggs, the 'Opele' advised further that the 'ebo' after the performance should be taken to 'Esu odara' also known as "Elegbara" (remember it was the 'Esu' that advised her, so this may be in appreciation of that advice and also to seek 'Esu's' support), and that after placing the 'Ebo' in front of 'Esu odara', she should knock one of the eggs down and when she get inside, the second egg should be knocked down too. She quickly make the ingredients available and sent for one of her husband's student who assisted in performing the sacrifice (don't forget we say a lantern can not see its bottom and we can also see how far women can go in Ifa). Osu-n-leyo did as 'Opele' instructed and when she knocked the first egg down in front of 'Esu odara' and when she turned back to leave for home, she started hearing the sound of gong (Agogo) and Ifa songs being singing to lead her husband home, she quickly ran inside to complete the other part of the 'Ebo' by knocking the second egg down as 'Esu' advised, and when she did this, her son 'Amosunlaka' who collapsed came back to life, 'Osu-n-leyo' was so happy and singing in praise of the 'Opele' to meet her husband thus:

"Opele	Awo	mo	ni	o	o,
Opele		Awo	mo		ni,
Aboseere			tii		bo'du
E	n		seke		e,
Opele		Awo	mo		ni"
and					
"Opele	Awo	mo	ni	o	o,
Opele		Awo	mo		ni,
Eke	l'Abope		ti	n	b'aaya
Opele Awo mo ni"					

meaning:

"Opele	you	are	such	a	true	priest,
Opele	you		are	so		wonderful,
'Aboseere			tii			bodu'
You		are		being		unfaithful,
Opele	you	are	such	a	true	priest"
and						
"Opele	you	are	such	a	true	priest,
Opele	you		are	so		wonderful,
'Abope		ti		n		baaya'

You are not loyal,
Opele you are such a true priest"

Therefore, from this Ifa verse we know that using 'Opele' is never a taboo for women since we can find out that 'Osu-n-leyo' who is an 'Iyanifa' did not only touch but used 'Opele' to find out what was a puzzle to her, we still have many more verses of Ifa that lend credence to or support the claim.

What we found out is that women cannot touch, use or go near 'Opele' during their menstrual period, not only that, the findings also revealed that they cannot go near Ifa or any Orisa during this time, even the Yoruba belief claims that any African or traditional medicine touched by women during this time become powerless, so women are advised not to break this taboo and that all should join hands to respect it with all other Yoruba tradition.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, what our people (men and women of nowadays) in Ifa, especially those at the diaspora should avoid is attending to clients with 'Opele' since they don't have the training just because of the language and long years needed for its training, their 'Opele' can only be used to confirm YES or NO on puzzling matters and they should always liase with their godfather regarding readings. **REMEMBER YOU ARE TAKING ANOTHER PERSONS LIFE IN YOUR HANDS.** Another important issue I would like to address here is that of IFA INITIATION that is being used by our people in the diasporas to determine who a BABALAWO or IYANIFA is, it has to be stated here that being initiated **does not qualify one** to be a Babalawo or an Iyanifa, and as explained above, one would need a long period of time, even years to study Ifa before such a person can be known and called a Babalawo or an Iyanifa, the Ifa initiation one undergo is to maintain ones life and also to correct some mistakes one might have made in the process of the choice of destiny (for more information on this, read "DESTINY AND IFA INITIATION" written by the author of this write up) that is to say Ifa initiation is just a rebirth that each one of us needed to begin a new life, it does not name one a Babalawo or an Iyanifa, it is only the study that can qualify one to be a Babalawo or an Iyanifa. It does not mean that a person that has ifa cannot make or allow someone to give offering to ifa on behalf of that person, but that is offerings. Lastly, it is also of importance to note here that Ifa initiation can be done at any age, it may be at tender age before one go for Ifa training or after and that is even why we have some Babalawo who did their Ifa initiations or after they graduated from their Ifa training.