

BLACK SPIRITUALITY

Ancient Wisdom to Heal Generational
Trauma

TOP SECRET

Obari Adeye, PhD

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Ancient Wisdom to Heal Generational Trauma

Advanced praise

"First and foremost, there are probably no good English language words to describe your proposed contribution or at least I can't find any words in my vocabulary warehouse. What you have written is more than an expository, descriptive, or narrative essay. This, in my opinion, is an inspired sacred revelatory reflection... This should be shared widely. It is messaging that each reader (in and out of the tradition) will find the message right for where they are and what they need to use to go forward. This work should not, however, be read from beginning to end, just to get it done. It should be read from thought to thought or idea to idea or teaching to teaching, allowing each thought, idea or teaching to upwardly spiral with the reader's spirit, allowing them to realize deeper and higher resonating levels of meaning. Each reader's knowing and knowable spirit will guide this process. This work is a dowsing divining rod."

~

Baba Dr. Wade Ifágbemì Sàngódáre Nobles

Author of "Seeking the Sakhu: Foundational Writings for an African Psychology."

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Prelude

My mother was Christmas.

My father was Kwanzaa.

The African American paradox shaped the spiritual foundation of our home. Resolving identity contradictions is difficult in a nation built on our ancestors' bones. My parents had different perspectives but I didn't experience it as conflict. All I felt was love. They were both right. We blended.

I appreciate the lessons learned and warmth felt growing up in church. During college, however, while studying psychology, I also learned more about slavery and colonization. Then I began to ask more questions about the role of religion in Black life.

As a young adult I identified as 'spiritual not religious' because 'I have no idea' felt less sophisticated. I explored diverse faiths from around the world, searching for points of agreement. I was hoping to discover overlapping principles that could bring us more peace, joy, clarity, and ease. I believe spirituality should be useful in our everyday lives. A few nagging questions persisted along my journey:

- What did Black people believe before the Bible and Quran?
- What was so powerful about our indigenous

spiritual practices that our adversary tried so violently hard to disconnect us from them?

- As the first people, what have Africans learned over the centuries about healing?

Then I met **Baba Ason**. He was wise beyond his years. Baba Ason learned ancient African spirituality as a child from his father Baba Tosu, and his grandfather Baba Medahochi.

Baba Ason had answers to questions I couldn't articulate yet. He was a masterful teacher.

Until his body collapsed. Heart too big.

~~We were supposed to write this book together.~~

We are writing this book together.

Mourning him was difficult. I couldn't simply grieve the loss of my friend. I was also stunned by the void. Vast archives of sacred knowledge suddenly vanished. A library of rare books burned to ashes.

I gather what remains. I pray it's a useful fragment of his treasure. I have collected my notes, thoughts and memories, to honor him while exalting our ancestors. I hope to repair some of the harms caused by persistent detachment from our collective cultural memory.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to share the wisdom of our lineage with my sons.

I hope Baba Ason's children will learn more about their father by eavesdropping on our conversations.

I pray all the children of Africa find healing and strength

by remembering and becoming who we are.

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Introduction

Spiritual books be so serious. Divine manifestations of quantum alignments. Religious books be too judgmental. Academic books pontificate ontology to a narrow audience. Thousands of books have already been written about God. Some claim written by God. Others actually are, but don't claim it.

If you're looking for a book that's got it all figured out, this ain't it. This book asks questions. No confusing riddles. Everyone doesn't have time to meditate on mountains for years. We have real lives, real problems, children to raise, work to do. I try my best to be simple and practical without compromising authenticity or complexity.

This is for the seekers. I see y'all, aligning chakras, saying the Namu Myōhō Renge Kyōs and Namastes. I love it. But let us not forget that Africa has answers too. They call it *New Age* or *Eastern* because we forgot much of it has origins in Africa. And not "forgot" like your cousin's birthday, more like traumatic brain injury. Like it was violently stomped out of your head.

It is no accident that our best attempts to be spiritually inclusive often omit Africa. Listen closely the next time someone preaches a *one God* concept — "Whether you call him God, Buddha, Allah, Yahweh..." (always him). Too

many people of African descent cannot recall one African name for God. There are thousands. When forgetting is institutionalized, remembering is medicine. For spiritual unity and strength, we must re-collect our memory. We have been *dis-membered* so we must *re-member*—connect again. (Okay, there may be a few riddles.)

I'm in kindergarten with my study of African spirituality. Yet I know more than most Black people I encounter. I'm writing this for them...*for you*? Someone practicing the tradition for decades might find this elementary. It takes some audacity to write a book about something I know so little. I'm writing this as a student, sharing what I've learned so far. I am in the discovery part of my journey, still searching. I'm not sure this is the kind of mystery with a big "aha" at the end. Not sure it has an end. What I do know is no one flinched when I used the word *kindergarten*. Everyone knew how to pronounce it and to what I was referring. What a strange German word to be so familiar with.

We are immersed in European culture and spirituality. I was fully adult before I realized how much whiteness consumed my everyday life. At the time, I lived on Jefferson Drive. I could not go home without a daily reminder of terrorist Thomas. We count the years based on a Roman calendar. I was born during the month named after a Roman god of war. I carry tiny shrines honoring the enemies of my ancestors in my wallet as currency. When I look to the sky the names of constellations and planets are European. The days of the week... Statues in the park... Names on buildings...

White people have created an ecosystem that makes us routinely pay homage to their gods and ancestors. I can't say my own name without singing a praise song to the enemies of my family. Part of what makes American slavery so successful is a complete reconfiguration of the minds and culture of a people. Full emancipation requires reclaiming what was taken from us.

But they didn't take everything. No one stripped us of our humanity.

They tried.

Yet, here you are, despite it all, reading a book about African spirituality.

That's immortality.

The gods of your ancestors are alive and well. You think those deities stopped existing because you forgot their names?

You can take the African out of Africa, but we still playing our drums.

Pouring liquor out for our homies.

Improvising our music.

Rapping our proverbs.

Braiding our hair.

Honoring our heritage.

Based on scientific measure, a yearning for Africa should have been obliterated. After outlawing our rituals and calling them evil, punishing us for speaking our

language, removing Africa's historical contributions and replacing them with images of poverty, child soldiers, famine, and corruption, we should have all turned our backs on Africa. How can it be, that my parents searched through a book of Swahili names when I was born, then I added a Yoruba name after being initiated into a traditional African spiritual system by a high priest who was born in Gary, Indiana? How?? What type of power could have withstood such an onslaught? How can that power continue to elevate us?

My approach to spirituality is very intellectual, a little more head than heart. My hunger to figure things out motivates me more than the cathartic experience. It's a stubborn childlike curiosity that sometimes leans a tad cynical. I didn't come to African spirituality wide-eyed and bushy tailed. Baba Ason encouraged my shrewdness, said **"it makes a more attentive diviner."** Others find relief in turning their brain off, submitting to the flow of spiritual experiences. That is difficult for me.

I've never been fully comfortable with religion. Even when it's African I'm not a very good devotee. I trust God but have a hard time with people. If I say anything critical of religion I intend no disrespect, certainly not to God, ancestors and other spiritual powers. My problems are with human shortcomings.

People disrupt divine inspiration. When God communicates a pure truth, like a new car driving off the lot, it depreciates value the moment it is interpreted by a human brain. Then it's translated to be received by another human brain. Things get lost. Leaning on faith to

fill the gaps can be a beautiful practice in humility. Faith can also be manipulated, taking advantage of those who yearn for the security we associate with “knowing.”

You don't have to give up Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or anything else to practice African spirituality. It may be your destiny to be Christian, Muslim or Buddhist. We need good, kindhearted, freedom fighting, ancestor-venerating folk dispersed everywhere Black people be at.

During slavery, some of the village priests voluntarily boarded ships because it was their duty to maintain traditions and protect people. Our European captors were so weak they often targeted young people for enslavement. Youth typically have less advanced knowledge of the spiritual systems practiced by their village. The youth did their best, in their new dreadful homes, to retain the fragments they could. When older African priests survived the journey to the Americas they were better able to preserve spiritual customs. They practiced rituals in secret. Sometimes hiding in plain sight as Catholic priests or Christian preachers. Many Black people today will receive ancient African wisdom easier when filtered through a more familiar modern religion.

The power of any spiritual framework practiced by Black people is enhanced by strengthening its connection to Africa. Being more African is compatible with every belief system. That's the benefit of being first. This wisdom is already in you.

You may recognize some of the African spiritual principles as similar concepts taught by the Quran, Bible or Buddha. But don't forget the timeline. I share many

characteristics with my father because I got them from him. The plot line similarities between the ancient Kemetic story of Heru and the relatively modern story of Jesus are more than uncanny; one is more likely to come from the other.

The goal is to grow a little more each generation.

My grandparents raised children who were proud of their Blackness. So my parents put their children in African dance and drum classes. My father legally changed his name from Anthony to Thabiti. I was raised in African-centered institutions but still took 30 years to pray to God by an African name. Now my sons, both before age 10, knew who Elegba is.

No need to denounce your religion. Just add a little more African to it, bit by bit. If things start to feel incompatible, then cross that bridge. Remember, this is a journey. Be gentle with yourself. We have come a long way to get here.

Most people grow up believing what their grandparents believe. Historically, when a population's belief system shifts quickly, violence was involved. An individual is more likely to adopt a new belief system voluntarily as an adult. Most Black Americans won't be exposed to African spirituality as a child. Baba Ason was unique. His grandfather was a prominent African spiritual high priest named Baba Medahochi. Baba Ason was born into this. My experience is more common, a reluctant adult bumping into African spirituality later in life. Our perspectives sometimes clashed because I had doubts Baba Ason never had to consider, not unlike many others with strong

belief systems reinforced since childhood. No judgement. Neither better nor worse. The combination of me and Baba Ason's vantage points broadened both our ideas about sharing African spirituality with curious Black people.

African spirituality is nowhere near having churches on every other block. The communities that study African traditions are usually small and isolated. It can be difficult to discover the secret knock to gain entry. I was fortunate to find a back door and my life has been forever transformed. More than chants and candles, I gained immense appreciation for the profound analysis of our ancestors. I am in awe of the many practical solutions offered by ancient ideas to modern problems.

For the descendants of African ancestry who have not had an opportunity to reconnect to the spiritual teachings of your lineages, this book is my humble offering.

1



Baba Ason

I call him Baba Ason. He has many names – Nyansanu Gbehanzin Ason Zannu Ajinaku, to begin with. He was one of the smartest people I ever met. I could feel my mind expanding during our conversations. We would talk for hours, in the car on the way to pick up birds, before and after rituals, visiting his home while our children played. I often felt selfish, like this stuff is too good to keep to myself. I avoided studying from other teachers until this book was complete. I wanted to create as pure a tribute to him as possible. This book is one step away from the oral tradition. Much of my writing comes straight from his mouth to my notepad, to your eyes. Whenever possible I include his exact words in bold.

This is the bio he gave me before his final public lecture:

Baba Ason Ajinaku is a third generation traditional Afrikan priest and diviner. He has been trained and

initiated as a Babalawo, Olorisha, Hungan and Alagba since childhood. Fluent in Yoruba and Fongbe, Baba Ason Ajinaku has taught and lectured at schools and universities across the country for almost 20 years. He is an author, an artist and co-founder of Whirlwind Publishing Co., which specializes in literature for children about Afrikan traditions. Baba Ason Ajinaku is also a master drummer of West Afrikan, Haitian, Afro Cuban, and Afro Brazilian music. Baba Ason Ajinaku is a husband and father who resides in Chicago, IL.

I pray you now reside in these pages. You agreed to write this with me, can't let an inconvenient obstacle like death break a promise. You taught me how to construct shrines with wood, clay and cowrie shells. Well, this is my shrine for you. It is both object and living testimony. I pray your intangible essence fills the space between each word, to consecrate all who read as sacred beings one step closer to their destiny.

I think we ready for this. #UnapologeticallyBlack is trending. There must be some cosmological explanation for Black Girl Magic. Young people are shouting 'Ase!' as they march in the streets. We need more Yoruba words and concepts to add to our arsenal. Some of the Black people discovering their ancestry want more than the DNA percentage. The aesthetics of Africa are cool, we also need the values and wisdom.

I've seen beautiful shrines thrown away with garbage. So I erect this book shrine for you. Made of indestructible ingredients. A pinch of the perseverance soaked in the Georgia dirt where you and Baba Medahochi rest. Some

blessings from our grandmothers and grandfathers. Your unmistakable wisdom. A teaspoon of my personal adventures. Blood already shed. The inevitable victory of Africa. All held together by a pure undying love for Black people. For the divine manifestations of quantum alignments.

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2



Framework

[- grounding principles -]

Africa is big. And old. Ten thousand books about African spirituality would miss important details. African-Americans can feel particularly lost in the vastness of Africa without connection to a specific nation or ethnic group. We benefit, however, from such a vibrant diaspora living in our bones. Our ancestors were forced to mix, giving us birthright to many different parts of Africa. It affords a bird's eye view. A meta-analysis.

The most frustrating part about being a new student of African spirituality is constantly hearing someone else is doing it wrong. I feel pressure to decide who to believe, who is more credible. It starts to feel like any other religion. There are sects, regional differences, personalities, and power struggles. The differences cause division and

weaken our collective power. The devil is in the details. Baba Ason emphasized the common principles first. Before getting into specific rituals and dogma he made sure we were clear about the underlying similarities across African spiritual systems.

Most disputes about “who is doing African spirituality right” are about authenticity. Baba Ason urged us to also consider effectiveness. **They can have all the beads, say all the African phrases, wear the most elaborate garments, but did it help you? Is your life better?** Are Black people free?

Baba challenged the notion that we always had to travel to Africa for the most authentic rituals. The best spiritual practice is most applicable to your particular circumstances. **You can visit a part of Africa that well preserved their traditions and ask an advanced priest to help free your family from a system of mass incarceration, and that priest might ask, “What is a prison?”**

The goal isn't to recreate ancient African societies in modern America. We must adapt to changing contexts. If we can't go back to Africa, we can still go back *through* Africa, culturally and ideologically, to best help us wherever we are. There are unique problems faced by Blacks in the United States that rituals developed in Cuba, Benin or Brazil are not designed to address specifically. Does that mean we can make up anything we want? No. There is still wrong information. Study and discernment are still necessary. Preferably under the guidance of (flawed) elders and within (imperfect) communities.

The separation of church and state is not an African concept. Much of what we know about African spirituality comes through the Yoruba people based in the country we now call Nigeria. Their system was preserved, adapted, and shared across the Americas and Caribbean for centuries. You may hear someone say they “practice Yoruba” referring to a religion, but it is actually the name of the ethnic group. **Their spiritual practice was so ingrained into everyday life and culture there is no separate word in their language for a religion.**

Social and political contexts inform spirituality, and vice versa. I was taught a version of African spirituality that emerged from a Black Nationalist and Pan-African political perspective. It is as much about healing as it is about fighting.

Technically this belongs in the faith-based section of a bookstore, but it’s really about science. We think of science as hardcore objective, but scientific theories evolve, and scientists disagree. Science demands evidence. I prefer my religion like that. You should experience results. I don’t desire anyone have faith in the ideas I share just because I wrote them down. I’d rather you consider the information, internalize it if it makes sense, apply it to your life in ways that are useful, and continue to study other perspectives.

My goal isn’t to convince you to believe in OYA, the ancient Yoruba Goddess of Transformation. Instead, to the extent you believe you are breathing, or that there is wind, I learned that some of our ancestors used the name OYA as an Organizing Principle of breath and wind. If you

believe that things change, the Yoruba people used the label OYA to describe the entity understood to be the Energetic Coordinator for change.

Some of the language and concepts may be new, but they describe truths existing long before (and after) we decide to believe them. At one point you didn't know about photosynthesis. It existed anyway. An English word with origins in Greek language to describe a phenomenon that is true regardless of belief.

Baba Ason was patient with my inquisitive mind. I had annoyingly detailed questions that I would not ask a medical doctor. Baba Ason once told me to make a plate of my father's favorite food, place it at my altar, then sit, talk and eat with Dad. But I'm like, "How he gone eat with no mouth? Will I see the food disappear? Should I talk out loud? How do I know he can hear me? This feels silly." But let a doctor prescribe me a pill. I might google it—maybe. Or look for a natural version and trust whatever corporation labeled it 'homeopathic.' I don't ask detailed questions about where my taxes go. A dentist, chef, or electrician can flash a license or degree and I figure it's legit. Why so much resistance to information presented with an African aesthetic? Do certain accents sound more intelligent? What does professional look like? I eventually had to reckon with an uncomfortable truth – I had learned to trust the authority of America. The myth of white supremacy won.

The cliché remedy is to keep an open mind. But the task is more daunting. We must maintain active awareness that our minds have been trained by a culture that

permeates everything. I'm aware of it as I write, every word meticulously evaluated. I was sad two paragraphs ago when I didn't have an African phrase for *vice versa*. So please read carefully. If something sounds odd, don't dismiss it too quickly. Give a little room for the possibility that all our filters have been compromised.

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3



Language

[- for lack of a better word -]

Writing this in English feels like betrayal. I apologize to my ancestors for continuing to speak the language of our adversary. Learning an African language wouldn't be much better, unless I immerse myself in a different culture for years. Otherwise, I'm just using different sounding words to express the same worldview. It's not enough to say Olodumare means God in the Yoruba language. I still maintain the same conceptualization of the God idea I was already taught. Olodumare is the closest approximation to what English speakers refer to when we say 'God.' But they don't mean the same thing.

Conceptualization matters most, but language is still important. Our ability to master this imposed tongue well

enough to liberate ourselves from its power is a testament to the brilliance of Black people. We should also use African language as often as meaningfully possible. Power is embedded in indigenous incantations. Language is spellbinding—*abracadabra*. Saying the exact same words our ancestors said takes us back through what our captors labeled “door of no return.” That was the door our ancestors exited before enemies boarded us onto the torture ships that brought us out of Africa. They called it the door of no return because their intent was to remove us from our cultural foundations forever. To never return to our language again. To never pray to our Gods again. African language is a time travel. Speaking our native language simultaneously says thank you to our ancestors and fuck you to our oppressors.

I didn’t always enjoy religious settings. I got tired of loved ones damning me to eternity for disagreeing. I still loved the music and community and found great benefit from attending diverse spiritual events, especially after I realized they were saying the same things. I’ve gained tremendous insight during sermons by pastors, rabbi’s and imams. I would filter out the “you’re going to hell” part and focus on the lessons. It became even easier after studying African spirituality.

African cultural remnants of worship in Black churches emerged so clearly after experiencing a few traditional African ceremonies. The rhythm, chanting, dancing, and spirit possession are all very African. But even the concepts. The phrase “born again” is exactly how a person would describe being initiated into the Yoruba religion. When I hear “there’s a blessing in the storm” I think about

OYA. Since I learned about the Yoruba deity Obatala, the father of all the other gods, I replace His name in the sentence when someone begins a prayer with “Father God.”

Another phrase I hear often, “child of God,” is very consistent with African spirituality. In the Yoruba tradition you will hear people refer to themselves as “Omo Ogun” or “Omo Yemonja,” which means child of a particular aspect of God. I am a child of Shango, or Omo Shango, who is the aspect of God that governs authority. He is known as **the King of the principle of Kingship itself**. I think of Shango when someone refers to Jesus as the King of Kings. Admittedly, it’s a tad rude to be in someone’s house of worship translating their experience to fit my own spiritual understandings, but the goal is solidarity not superiority. Plus, it’s much more disrespectful to erase an entire people’s spiritual system and replace it with an edited version, so I don’t feel that bad for making a few re-adjustments.

I prefer praying in pictures, not words. Which sounds odd until you consider hieroglyphics. (That was a tough decision, using the more accessible Greek name ‘hieroglyphics’ instead of ‘mdw nTr’ the true name of the language used by ancient Egyptians. I did it again, chose to say Egypt versus Kemet. It’s a constant compromise.) Before I eat a meal, I close my eyes, lower my head, and take a deep breath. It looks like I’m reciting a silent prayer, but I’m actually trying to avoid words. I may put my hands over the food to feel the warmth or energy. Then I conjure an image of a farmer harvesting the ingredients of my

meal. I create pictures in my mind of things I'm grateful for—family, safety, health, memory. Then I focus on the principle of gratitude itself, submit to the feeling of it. I seek awareness of that sensation throughout my body until the words slowly evaporate into light. I wish there was a better way to describe it. Maybe it's more accurate to say I pray in intention.

Communication between humans is 20% verbal and 80% nonverbal. Why would we expect communication with spirit to be based on words? Those images on TV were misleading, a (white male) god in the clouds speaking with a big booming voice. When I become an ancestor and have other options, I wouldn't dare speak to my children in English. If all my sons need to do is make a plate of food that opens a portal for me to send messages, I hope they do it. My dad doesn't visit me in my dreams often. I don't hear his voice in the clouds. But I know he communicates with me. We interact in more subtle ways—whispers, feelings, visions—while experiencing activities he enjoyed. Those moments when I'm contemplating a dilemma and suddenly get a clear insight. When I almost merge into a lane not seeing another car or bike, and I catch it just in time. When I get an urge to jump out of bed and go to an event that turns out to be exactly what I need. When I become mysteriously overcome with comfort or peace or joy. Those are moments when my dad, other ancestors, gods or spiritual beings are “speaking to me.” I try to be quiet, present, and aware enough to listen.

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Ancestors

I remember the exact moment it clicked. I pulled into my driveway one afternoon with my then three-year-old son asleep in the car. I quickly ran into the house, leaving him strapped in the car seat. I returned moments later to find my son woke and wailing. He thought I left him. I was offended. I lifted him from his car seat, held him firmly at eye level and spoke directly into him. “Boy, I will never leave you!” I could feel him hear me. The word *never* hung in the air. I really meant ‘never.’ I didn’t mean when I die. I meant in any form, no matter my state of being. I will always love, protect, and guide my sons. Death will not break our connection.

I imagine my dad held similar sentiment about his children. But here’s the real power: I already pledge that same commitment to any children my children have. I cannot imagine skipping an opportunity to help any child that comes from my sons, forever. If that’s true going

forward, could it also be true backwards? For generations, back to the first people on the planet? It's almost too much to fathom.

Before that moment with my son, I had a superficial understanding of ancestors. Mostly symbolic. I knew it was important to honor them. I had t-shirts and posters with Malcolm X and Rosa Parks. I had poured libations and called out their names. But it was ceremonial. I hadn't truly considered them still being here in real time. Why not? Based on everything we know about Harriet Tubman why expect her to rest in peace?

Marcus Garvey was clear, "In death I shall be a terror to the foes of African liberty." Don't call Nat Turner if you not ready to do what he did. Ancestors will ignore you if you keep calling them to help you do misaligned work. Someone murdered while fighting for justice might not be interested in your prayers for peace.

Excessive focus on famous ancestors is also misleading. The history books only document a tiny percentage of the Black healers, organizers, educators, and institution builders who made contributions to our uplift. The assemblage of ancestors to which we have access is infinitely larger than the names we know. Our fascination with celebrity can limit our imagination of the afterlife. When someone like Kobe Bryant dies, artists create images of him being welcomed into heaven's gates by Tupac, Biggie, and Nipsey Hussle. They may not have had any type of relationship while alive, but something about the image of celebrities hanging out in heaven is comforting. Kobe Bryant was much more likely

greeted by his great-grandmother and other family ancestors that were guiding and supporting his success.

If a guy spends his whole life on the corner drinking, when he leaves that's all he'll know. He won't turn into a guru in the afterlife. He can come back and try again.

Some people just die. English uses the word 'ancestor' for everybody who dies, another reminder of language limitations. Baba Ason taught several African words that are rough equivalents of 'ancestor.' **Ashe-She (means 'progenitors of progenitors'). Ara Orun (means 'citizens of heavens'). Damballa-Wedo is the collective of ancestors so old we don't remember their name. Petro is a cosmic and ancestral deity that includes countless pantheons of divinities and countless ancestors, African and Native American. Every single one that was mutilated becomes Petro.**

Baba Ason most often used the Yoruba term '**Egun**' or '**Egungun**' (he described the distinction between them, but I honestly don't understand it well enough to explain). Egun is more accurately translated in English as elevated ancestors. Egun go through processes to become something more than someone who happens to die. Egun hold a higher status and responsibility. Egun are the ones doing work in the spiritual reality on our behalf. We typically call the names of recent ancestors, our grandparents or popular figures who made valuable contributions in the last few generations. **Those are babies in the realm of Egun.**

There are lots of spirits moving around. They want attention and status. They interact with us regularly. They

can attach themselves to you and share messages, especially when you allow them access. Those are not all Egun. Some are just wandering spirits. Someone can legitimately hear spirits, become possessed, catch the Holy Ghost, and none of it be helpful. Many spiritual entities are not connected to any advanced insight. Some are not concerned with your best interest. How do we know the difference?

Baba Ason and other indigenous priests offer divination for discernment. Divination is a process of communicating with the highest spiritual wisdom. It takes years of study and initiation rituals to become qualified. When done right, divination is like speaking directly to God. But what does done right mean? Depends on who you ask. In any circumstance it requires human interpretation. Sometimes diviners disagree. All of which makes your personal relationship with family lineage ancestors of utmost importance. Your personal Egun can make up for human error. Your Egun can guide you to the right teachers. Egun help you sort out conflicting info. Egun are most interested in your well-being because you elevating to the highest potential of your destiny (or not) impacts them.

The reason we continuously return to this physical realm is to learn lessons that elevate us in the spirit realm. **When we impact other people's lives positively it improves our conditions in our spiritual home. When you help another person achieve their highest purpose, that person's ancestors are grateful and will also support you. We come here to experience joy so that spirits we**

are connected to can be at peace. We come to experience pain and test our patience.

Wisdom is acquired that we carry as currency to the next realm. There are some exchanges that can only occur through experiences in this reality. Every return is an opportunity for growth. Science calls it evolution. A quantum physicist would say the universe is constantly expanding. Baba Ason describes it as our participation in the continuity and perpetual increase of Supreme Being.

Cycles are the most enduring design structure in the universe as we know it. Cycles run your body, the weather, and the stars. You are spinning, rotating and your blood and breath is circulating right now. Why would life and death be different? A feedback loop of returning ancestors is part of human design. Therefore, it must have existed since the beginning of human history, during the earliest days of African civilization. But then there was The Great Disruption. Chattel slavery warfare. A crime against humanity. The Maafa. (which means “Great Tragedy” in the Swahili language). Or Maangamizi (which means “intentional annihilation or genocide”)

As survivors of the Maafa, we have additional dynamics to consider. We have particular obligations to our ancestors due to the extensive traumas they survived. Think for a moment about your darkest days. You may have experienced moments you didn't think you could endure. Yet here you are. You chose to survive despite. Perhaps for no other reason than hope. If you could make it through the night, there may be new light in the morning. Now imagine an ancestor during the Maafa, being

violently punished for reading, tortured for practicing an African ritual. Now here you are, reading about African rituals. You are the light in their morning.

When someone you love experiences a great victory or sorrow we can often vicariously feel their joy or pain. Our ancestors remain alive inside our bodies. It is the spiritual extension of empathy. When you rest, you must rest on behalf of those ancestors forced to work sunup to sundown. Hug and kiss your babies a little extra, for children sold at auction blocks. Savor meals that aren't someone else's scraps. Choose your own names. Play your drums. Sing. Dance. Worship freely. Seek joy to repair the vast sorrows. Our ancestors re-live these experiences through us—in real time. You have a great-great-great-grandmother looking over your shoulder right now, behind your eyes. Tracing. Every. Word. You. Read.

Does this sound spooky? Every indigenous brown people on Earth have similar concepts of 'ancestorhood.' Them all being wrong seems more far-fetched. I suppose it's possible that we pop up out of nowhere then decompose into dirt. Sometimes the Higher Power talk feels like it's just for our comfort. I understand atheists and agnostics, especially when resisting God concepts manipulated by power structures. But this ancestor stuff makes rational sense to me. Especially since having children.

Forget the God part for a moment. What would happen if we brought ancestor worship back into our culture? It would be an extension of elder veneration, which we also lost, or which was also taken from us. Which we allow to

stay gone. It has become more popular for the younger generation to make references to ancestors, but you can't skip the elder reverence part. If you set up an altar to talk with your grandparents as ancestors, they will remember that you were too busy to sit and listen to them while they were alive.

Convincing Black people to worship their ancestors is difficult, in part, because language gets in the way. Many of the words carry baggage: 'ancestor worship,' 'rituals,' 'spirituality.' When I say worship it doesn't mean replace God. It's not about tambourines, arms stretched out or prostrating. Worship embraces humility and ritual. I don't mean ritual like lighting candles and chanting. Rituals are deliberate repeating patterns of behavior. Brushing teeth is part of your morning ritual. Ancestor worship asks, "How do we incorporate patterns of humility into our daily lives that acknowledge those who came before us?"

Calling it spiritual might also be distracting. Spirit sounds like ghosts. But it's really about the unseen. Science tells us there are sight and sound frequencies that our senses cannot detect, like UV rays or dog whistles. There are unseen realities that impact our daily movement. I never met your great-grandmother, but I know she existed without ever seeing her. Your existence is my proof.

The stretch for many is the idea of talking to ancestors in real time. That's when it gets too mystical. When you read Maya Angelou or W.E.B. DuBois you might not consider that communicating with ancestors. Could we say interacting with them? Either way, remembrance counts. If all Black people do is spend more time

remembering and studying those who came before us, we would be much further along. We should tell more stories to our children about elders and loved ones who have transitioned. That alone is full of medicine.

You ever think about your obituary? What do you want people to say about you when you're gone? No one wants to be forgotten. We want people to remember our best moments, to tell stories of our accomplishments. If you have children or if you have impacted others, they might gather your photos or writings or print out your tweets and display them somewhere in their house. When they miss you, feel sad or have a difficult day, they may go to that spot and sit quietly, remembering good times. They don't have to call it a shrine or altar. They might feel more comfortable calling it a memorial. It all counts. The physical object—shrine, altar or memorial—is only a reminder, to pause and reflect.

Remembering is the minimum. I want my children to continue my work, as I strive to continue my father's work. Applying humility, study, discipline, repetition and courage to continue the work of Egun is the highest praise we can give.

5



God Concept

Olodumare is Supreme Being. The originating mystery. Everything, everywhere. Male, female, both, neither, all. There's never any visual representation. Never a physical shrine. There's nothing you can offer It but your character, which you do for yourself. No one owns It or has special claim to It. There is never anything outside of It. Always continuing, never a finishing point. There is no direction you can pray to Olodumare and be incorrect. Because of that we will never have an argument. When someone speaks of a jealous or vengeful god they are describing a lesser entity than Olodumare, an aspect of Olodumare. Trying to understand the total infinity of Olodumare is like the oldest man telling a baby about its life. The baby won't understand but a tiny portion of it. Now magnify that by something that has no beginning or end.