

If we have inner wisdom
And we do not apply it
We shall become fools
If we have innate strength
And we fail to exert ourselves
We shall become lazy drones
This was Ifa's teaching to
People who do not walk with
the wise ones...

- Holy Odu IdiOwonrin

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Speaking of Curses

The only way to achieve authentic happiness and to experience true spiritual power is to make some kind of meaningful contribution to the world around you. To do so, you absolutely have to organize your natural gifts and talents into a unique set of offerings – both spiritual and earthly – that allow you to make a profound impact on your friends, family and community. Because your natural gifts and talents are unique to you, your impact will naturally be equally unique, and will thus redefine some aspect of your environment. Perhaps your impact will be breaking a family cycle. Or maybe you will demonstrate a new approach to conflict resolution in your community, or streamline some process in your place of work. Either way, your ability to experience happiness and actual power means that you will create some kind of change to your environment. Hopefully, it will be an improvement. The irony is that this level of personal impact is difficult to sustain once a person reaches what he or she considers a comfortable position in an established role (i.e., wife, babláwo, husband, olorisa, manager, oloye, etc). So at the time that you have the most resources to create change, you are also least likely to actually do so. This is the Comfort Curse.

The Comfort Curse

The first profile of someone effected by the Comfort Curse is the “I got mine, don't worry about his” strategy. Here, individuals find success through focusing on their core spiritual practices: participating in more rituals, receiving more initiations, and learning more about the religion. Priests and priestesses might additionally take to aggressively pointing out the weaknesses of their competitors in order to attract more clients and encourage deeper loyalty amongst their

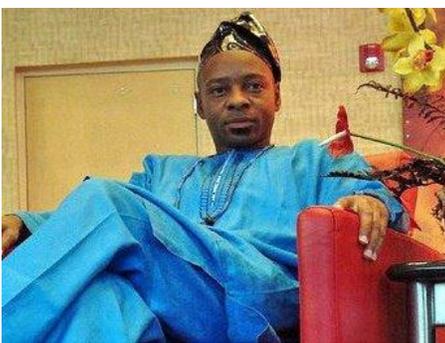
existing god children. For both the laity and priestly, however, the objective of all these tactics is to improve one's condition by increasing spiritual power, building financial stability and satisfying personal desires. This is an unspoken, but proven strategy, not only in the òrìsà community but in the larger society as well. The problem is that everywhere that we see people applying the "I got mine, don't worry about his" strategy, it inevitably leads to:

- A paralyzing fear of "coloring outside the lines", or doing anything that requires original thought.
- A failure to see obvious opportunities unless they are dictated by "leaders."
- A bias against any initiative or individual that represents a challenge to the status quo. Teaching, for example, is seldom practiced in this context for fear that an educated population will compromise the priestess' income.
- A collective tendency towards silos and Balkanization (i.e., Lukumi vs. Traditionalist, òrìsà vs. Ifá, and any other combination of identity politics that obsessively divides the devotees into adversarial camps).

The second profile of someone battling the Comfort Curse is the "No money, no honey" syndrome. The market teaches us that cost defines value. And the more comfortable we become, the more we concern ourselves with getting the most value out of everything we do. Conventional wisdom says that the more something cost, the more valuable it is. Likewise, the more money we can make from an endeavor, the more valuable and worthy it is. Even more precisely, the constant pressure to funnel money towards meeting the needs of day-to-day survival is very intense. In the short term, the only thing that makes sense is the "sure" thing. In this light, trying something new is relatively risky, expensive, and likely to create short-term financial loss. Money definitely matters. But it does not define value. In order to properly determine the value of something, we must also include the environmental and spiritual ramifications of where it comes from, how it's used and where it goes once we dispose of it. This overlapping impact is what really defines the value of any object or activity.

The deep question we must answer is how do we, the ritual specialists, help the people to achieve authentic happiness and to experience true spiritual power in the face of these obstacles? In my experience, I find that it helps to have a strong, well-informed strategic vision of what I do, who I serve and why I do it. It also helps when my client – no matter how comfortable she is – is able to articulate an actual problem or disturbance in her life. Necessity is the mother of creativity. Crisis conditions force us to reexamine our comfort zone and the basic assumptions that keep it in place. But even in the absence of a real problem, I have seen that is always advantageous to create a certain amount of "artificial crisis" that will nudge my clients towards continuous improvement. As Will Rogers said, even if you're on the right track, you'll still get run over if you just sit there."

In my work today, Òrìsà Lifestyle Agreements help me to continuously urge and enhance real, life-changing innovation in the lives of the people I serve. This, to me, has never been more essential. Being aware of the Comfort Curse is the first step.



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What is clear is simple. What is simple gets done. Assess, Transform & Sustain (ATS) is a step-by-step process for solving problems as well as achieving goals, from healthy living to loving relationships, to spiritual enlightenment.

1. **ASSESS:** The power of accurate Assessment cannot be overstated. Most importantly, Assessment allows you to define and even anticipate what you need to do in order to minimize threats and maximize opportunities on the journey.
 2. **TRANSFORM:** Based on the clear direction outlined during Assessment, now you can focus your efforts on "doing the work". Knowledge is potential. Action is power.
 3. **SUSTAIN:** With the "heavy lifting" done, personal rituals will both energize your highest aspirations and stabilize your environment.
- Through ATS anyone can enjoy a life of continuous improvement.