

Your Spiritual Bath



"Using is Believing"

At some point in your journey with Orisha you will come clean.

You will be invigorated, refreshed, renewed. To help this happen you will be given a bath. Probably, many times more than once. This bathing will most likely save your life. You may never notice its profound, mystical effect upon you, especially while bathing; you'll just feel wet and then itchy with bits of leaves flaking off your skin. You will, however, beneath your skin be transformed, cleansed and fortified.

This bath will most likely be made of a deep, emerald green liquid and have a beautiful smell of fresh herbs. Or it may be some other muddled color or smell of something unnameable, perhaps even foul or be otherwise unpleasant. It may smell of booze or cheap perfume. Up here in "el Norte," the North, it will most likely be a bit too cold, given at a tepid, room temperature, and leaving you shivering afterwards. Most people up here don't enjoy these baths that are such a common part of Orisha, Vodun, and Kongo cultures. I thought I'd write to help bring clarity and guidance so that what might just be considered a nuisance by many, both newcomers and veterans in the religion alike, could at least be taken rightly and perhaps better appreciated. For these baths we take are an essential part of our tradition; a deeper understanding of their use is key to unlocking doors to happiness and satisfaction within this house of the Spirit we call home.

In West African traditions before we engage in almost any important intentional activities we bathe, especially for ritual activities. While this may send a message to the self that we are inherently dirty and need to be made clean before anything good can happen to us, and while this can be taken metaphorically on a moral or spiritual level, implying that we are unwashed and by nature evil or unclean, this is not quite what the

Old Folks were trying to tell us when they gave us these baths. Here is a moment where we're best to be careful to not let the "White Man's ways" creep in to our thinking. We can see similarities with the Jewish *mikveh*, Muslim ablutions, and the Christian baptism, yet our spiritual bathing isn't quite the same. With mikveh and Muslim ablutions there's a washing away of physical and/or moral impurities, sins, and in our bathing while we're washing away "sins" we're also revealing a clean, inherently holy body in no need of "salvation." In the Christian baptism we are reborn by the Holy Spirit in the "body" of Christ. In our traditions we know ourselves to already be part of the living body of Orisha and our bathing is to both cleanse that body as well as refresh and beautify it.

In our tradition we are always remaking ourselves, bringing ourselves to newer, healthier and more beautiful ways of living. We don't start with the assumption that we're dirty, evil, or born with sin. We start with the assumption that we were born blessed; we get dirty from hard living in the sweaty world, and we deserve to wash ourselves clean when the day is done and before heading out again. The spiritual bath is just one step, usually one of the first, to begin the process of taking things to a new level and of coming clean and feeling better. Each bath is unique and its formulation is designed to bring a specific quality or effect to the bather. The art of mixing up these baths is one of balancing and complementing the inborn, natural qualities of the person being bathed. So each bath is an attempt to cleanse away certain qualities while attracting others. Thus, to take a spiritual bath requires a willingness to release old ideas of yourself and to enter into something new and unknown. Mystery. The bather rarely knows the ingredients of the bath they are given by their elder. The bath also requires that you get naked. You drop all that's not you and return to just who and what you originally are.

The bath is a prayer lived out in action. It is a prayer to become clean. It is a prayer to be born again, to be fresh and revived. It is a return to the purity of the Forest, to the original Waters that cover the planet; it is a return to the primordial state of blessedness.

Most of the baths are intended to "cool you down" and "chill out" energies in you that are unbalanced, turbulent, angry, fearful or clingy. Other baths, particularly those used in the course of initiations, are "hot" and are made to give you a burst of energy, to transform and propel you into new dimensions. Still other baths are made primarily to cleanse you of psychic junk that is "stuck" on to you, freeing up your natural system from laboring under its weight. We are careful what we bathe in for just as bathing in a lake full of dirty water can wreck havoc on your skin, put infection in your ears, lay waste to your digestive system, so too can taking a spiritual bath which is inappropriate for what ails you. When in doubt, consult an elder or do divination. *Cool is always best.* Never give yourself a "hot" bath. Such baths require the presence of community to work well.

Naturally, there is a vast array of different recipes and procedures for these baths. Most of these baths medicinally address changing the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual state of the person being bathed so each bath is carefully prepared according to tried and true methods. The secrets of their concoction are guarded by elders and learning to prepare the baths is part of the esoteric inheritance learned over the course of one's initiation and training as a practitioner. What I give here are some of the basic and most common steps in taking a "spiritual bath" as I've found them in the American diaspora of African spiritual and medicinal traditions. Obviously, my training in Candomblé and Umbanda have shaped much of my understanding of the "how to's" of making, giving and taking these baths, so if you're practicing one of the other traditions you will want to check in with your teachers about what's best for you.

First, I want to make sure that you know how to take one. There's a way to do it. Learn up.

How to Take Your Spiritual Bath:

"Really, you just need to get wet. Water itself is an Orisha. Just take a bath, let go of all that troubles you and take in the clean freshness of the water. It's such a simple blessing. That's all you really need to do."

--Iya Marinete Martins de Souza

Despite the inherent, divine simplicity of bathing, in our traditions we've developed certain technologies to deepen and elaborate the natural benefits of getting wet. Regardless of the complexity of the instructions and recipes which follow, don't forget that you live on a planet covered in water; whether it's liquid, ice, vapor, fog or rain, you're soaking in it. You're always bathing, always blessed. The real intentions of these instructions and the traditions which inform them is to create a specific mindfulness that enhances the natural healing of bathing. Please don't, like so many in the traditions, lose track of this blessing as you learn all this mumbo-jumbo that follows.

The instructions I give here are default, follow them unless told to do otherwise. Sometimes you will be told to do things differently than what I'm telling you here, as I said above, there are a variety of different baths and thus also a variety of ways to take them. Follow the instructions given to you to secure the best effect. Nevertheless, in general, do the following:

Leave the bathroom as you found it or better. Before and after all else, don't leave the bathroom messy. As the host of many Orisha rituals I cannot count how many times I've gone into the bathroom after everything was over to find a big, nasty, difficult to clean mess in and around the bathtub. Rude. Please, be mindful while taking your bath to be considerate of those who follow you. Clean up after yourself! When you've finished

with your bath; rinse out the tub; throw out any remaining soap, raffia, leaves or other traces from the bath; make sure the floor isn't wet and also, double check to make sure you're not leaving personal items behind you to become lost or disappeared.

2) Listen carefully to instructions you're given. The person giving you the bath will most likely explain to you what you're to do and it's important to take the bath properly to get its best effect. Often as not there are specific things they'll tell you.

The most common instruction will be about whether you should wash yourself from the "head down" or from "the neck down." You'll be told whether to include washing and bathing your head or not. Please, listen to this.

No one ever seems to listen to these instructions. During clean up I'm always looking at the mess left behind and deducing how the person took their bath. Inevitably, I see that they did not follow the instructions given them. When I was younger this upset me, now, with age, I've learned: somehow, regardless of quality or of how they're taken, the baths still seem to work. So frustrating to see that all my propriety, craft and know-how seem to mean little to Orisha; people taking my baths get better even when they do it backwards, or even *fake* taking the bath. *"What a fantastic doctor is Orisha! You take the medicine Orisha gives you all wrong and still you are healed! You don't even take it, you refuse the blessing, and still you end up blessed!"*

3) Get naked. There are two schools of thought here. *One goes like this:* Remove all your clothing and jewelry, hair ties, etc. EVERYTHING. Remove all rings and piercings. Many people feel uneasy about removing wedding rings. (If your marriage is over because you take off a ring for 5 minutes, well, you may want to meditate on what that really means for you.) *The other line of thinking goes:* take off everything that you don't wear all the time. *Leave on* wedding rings, piercings, etc. if you wear these consistently, night and day. In my experience, *either way seems to work just fine.* Nonetheless, personally, I'm more of the first school. There is something blessed about removing everything from one's person, of being truly naked. Just you, unique, having and needing nothing other than the universe which surrounds you. Once you're sufficiently naked proceed with the next step.

4) Wash yourself. Back in the day, before running water was common in Orisha houses, we'd haul water from the well or river to wash with; there would be two buckets waiting for you in the *balué*, bathroom, one with fresh water and the other with the *omiero*, or cooling herbal concoction. You'd wet yourself using a modicum of fresh water, then scrub with the soap and rinse off carefully as to not run out of clean water. In the tropics, the water is always cool or room temperature.

Nowadays, most of us are blessed with indoor plumbing and bathing is a much easier experience. Start your bath by turning on the water and then scrub yourself using

the soap and scrubber given you. Up here in the north warm and hot water are the norm for bathing, still, I recommend using water as cool and tepid as one can tolerate as this will help your body adjust to the upcoming herb bath, which is most likely at room temperature or below. If you wash with warm or hot water you will have a most shocking experience when you douse yourself with the cold herb bath. Trust me. Cool is the way to go.

If you're in a colder climate and would like to make ritual bathing more comfortable I suggest turning up the heat in the bathroom and other areas so that the cool bath feels like a relief rather than a punishment. Or, alternatively, accept that part of spiritual growth is uncomfortable by nature and use the chilliness of African spiritual bathing as a way to push yourself into greater strength, tolerance and fortitude. It really is a small thing, even if it's excruciating in the moment. Remember, what is overwhelming now will leave you strong, solid and steady later, ready for anything.

However you go about it, start by getting completely wet. First, wash your hands, head, and then the rest of yourself with the raffia scrubber and piece of soap you were given. Lather up the soap with the raffia. Scrub yourself down. Make sure you get every part of yourself, pay attention to wash the undersides of the feet and the back of your neck. Be careful not to get the black soap in your eyes as that it really stings if you do. When you've finished scrubbing, set aside the raffia scrubber and soap. Rinse all the soap off.

Now you are clean, cleared of whatever old realities which were holding you back. You are free of all the psychic dirt that was making you heavy, dull, and cloudy. Naked, clean, clear. Free to move into a new life like a baby fresh from the womb.

5) Bathe. Pour the herbal bath prepared for you over your body. Let it soak in. Wallow in it. Enjoy this brief moment. We are taught that the "blood" of the herbs is full of the power of each herb was given by Olodumare; the sap of each has a particular quality or essence that is released into the bath. Let it flow into you and revive you, just as blood flows into a limb that has gone numb from being slept upon or from too long with no movement. You are being imbued with new potentials, new possibility. *"Live the medicine."*

Some folks like to just pick up the bucket and let themselves have it in one big splash, others like to ladle out the bath and pour it each part of themselves in turn. However you go about it is fine, whatever works for you.

Important: You will most probably be told to use the bath either "from the head down" or "from the neck down." Most "hot" baths, baths made with hot or activating leaves or ingredients, are only taken from "the neck down," meaning you only put the bath on you from the neck down, washing your body but not your head. This is because the intention with a "hot" bath is to work a change upon your physical and emotional self while leaving your spiritual self (Ori, Kpoli, Camatuê, head) cool and unchanged.

One never wants a “hot head.” If you’re told to take your bath from “the head down” this is most likely because the bath is “cool” and will help bring your whole being into a state of equilibrium and leave you feeling “cool,” relaxed, calm, centered, “chillin’.” Most of us, especially here in the city or industrialized, commodified, consumerist world, live far from the forest, and are thus always running “hot,” hassled, embattled and anxious all the time. Most of our baths, and really, most of our entire practice of Orisha, have the intention of helping us make a return to the cool.

Dress yourself. After you’re done bathing, but without using a towel to dry off, while still wet, put on a fresh change of clothes. Most baths are intended to be left on the skin, so towels are forbidden. Stand and let yourself dry in the air. Or just put your clothes on and let them soak up the juice. As you dress you resume being yourself in the world and re-enter your life. You’ve made your change through your bath. Carry it with you.

In case you forget: **Leave bathroom as you found it or better.** (Review #1 above.) Be mindful: what good is it to improve yourself and your own situation if it leaves a mess for others to deal with? What good is it if you take a long time to bathe while others are still waiting? Selfishness only leads to more self, and thus loneliness. What leads to eternal life and well being? What leads us to the arms of community and to perpetual support and shelter? Caring for others as if they were yourself while caring for yourself as if it were another. “*Alaafia!*”

7) Ask the blessing of whoever made your bath for you. We always ask the blessings of our elders at the end of any ceremony, ritual or important activity. If you made the bath yourself, give thanks to your teachers even if they’re not present physically. An expression of gratitude “seals the deal.” You have completed your spiritual bath.

How to Make a Spiritual Bath

There are some basic ingredients and equipment you’ll need to follow the old, classical traditions. Most of these are now easy to obtain here in the United States due to increased international trade and immigration. If, however, you can’t find them, substitute what you can for something similar at hand or go without. Your bath will most likely be just fine. You can find these items at a good African or “tropical” food market, usually kept behind the counter with pharmaceutical or beauty supplies. If you don’t have access to such a market you can find these things online, usually at even better prices. Nonetheless, I try to support local, small businesses owned by real people.

Also, while many of the ingredients and traditions around spiritual bathing may seem strange or exotic to you, in most of West Africa they are just the common, “down home” way of taking an ordinary bath. Again, our tradition is really just “mindful

housekeeping," the building appreciation of "things as they is" by re-living the ways of ancestors passed.

The only essentials are 1) good, clean water, 2) fresh leaves, and 3) a hopeful attitude. The rest can, in truth, be improvised, skipped, substituted or even invented.

Primary Ingredients:

Omi - Water

The water used to make a spiritual bath is important as that it is the primary, primordial ingredient of any bath, its foundation. The preferred water for most baths intended to work with the power of the Orisha is that from a spring, well, or river. Some source of clean, natural water is best. Obviously, in most urban settings using fresh water direct from a natural source is highly impractical if not pretty much impossible. Tap water becomes the most common substitute. I keep a bottle of water drawn from a spring on hand to "cap off" tap water I use, ritually infusing it with a least a drop or three of "live" water.

Some recipes call for vary specific types of water to be used drawn from particular sources. Rain water, ocean water, dew, or water gathered during a certain phase of the moon or at a particular time of day are common stipulations found in the old recipes.

The following items are common things used in classical baths made in Africa and in the more conservative traditions of the diaspora. Most are specifically West African in origin and are imported to the Americas. In Candomblé tradition, for example, these items are both imported and often grown or fabricated in Brazil as well and constitute part of the cultural heritage of Africa common to Brazilian culture. It's felt that using them "keeps us African," and that the best ingredients are those which are imported from "the coast," (West Africa) because they bring with them the axé of the Motherland. I recommend using quality ingredients, whether African or made elsewhere, preferring "fair trade," handcrafted over industrial and commodified, and raw over refined. I feel that this not only helps "keep us African" but also helps keep us more fully human, connected more closely with the Nature, other people and their labor which sustains us, and ultimately, to purity of body, mind, action, and soul.

Ose Dudu- Black Soap

The people of West Africa have been making soap since time immemorial. Most of the soap has a dark brown to black color, although some of it has a lighter, amber tone. Regardless of color it tends to be called "black soap." In Yoruba it is called *oṣe dudu*, "black soap." Its texture is also highly variable, from liquid to coarse, dry chunks. Most

often a firm yet pliant, smoother, blacker colored soap is what we use for spiritual baths. The soap is manufactured from local ingredients found in Africa...the ash from palm fronds, banana skins, coconut or palm nuts, and red palm oil. Sometimes shea butter and other oils are also added. Each soap maker seems to have their particular recipe and technique for making the soap. The black soap has an unmistakable, earthy smell to it which leaves when rinsed off. The same technique of soap making was taken to Brazil in colonial times, nonetheless, it's the imported, African soap which is treasured by traditionalist Candomblecistas and the faithful children of Umbanda. In Cuba castile soap, which is white and made from olive oil, came to replace the black soap from Africa, although, most contemporary Lukumi in the U.S. now use African black soap.

Ose dudu has the quality of carrying away the worn out, grimy, broken, and impure in our lives; it grabs ahold of stinky sweat, dirt, and dead skin and leaves us smooth, fresh, and ready. Emblematic of the alchemical qualities of the color black, it is transformative, deep, and mysterious. It represents, in its absorption of filth, the power of entropy to transform us, even as we may struggle against it, as it stings our eyes and tingles the skin. (Be careful not to let black soap get in your eyes. Youch!) While black, the color of earth, night, and unconsciousness, ose dudu, leaves us clear, free, awake and aware. Alchemically, the soap can be seen as representing the progress of the human soul: starting with the "red" of palm oil squeezed from the forest, adding the stark wisdom of ashes it becomes "black" and then, when we put it into action, it lathers up "white," leaving us clean and clear, and thus reveals the full round of the three magical colors of the Yoruba, *red*, *black*, and *white*. Pupa, dudu, and funfun. Birth, death, rebirth.

Iko - Raffia

The Yoruba word for raffia is *iko*. Scrubbers for washing are wound together from several strands of its fibers. Just take 5 or 7 pieces of raffia and wind these together. You can tie it if you want, but when the raffia gets wet it usually starts to bunch up, get frizzy, and wind itself together. It grabs hold.

Iko is our sponge, it "hooks" onto dirt and pulls it off. It bunches up and holds together and thus draws into it all the material and psychic gunk that's stuck onto us. The raffia scrubber is Nature's power to absorb, remove, catch hold and carry away. There's something about the multiple strands twinning together that reminds me of the way all beings exist in and as themselves yet have a greater existence through the apparently random and disorganized interaction together. Nature is like this, even as its parts work towards one end they achieve another; even as it moves in chaos it makes order. As it gets messed up and gunky, it scrapes clean and leaves smooth.

In Vodun raffia is associated with tenacity and poverty; it is indigenous, of the earth, strong and unbreakable. Before the luxury imports of cotton, raffia was all there

was to weave into clothing; today only the poorest of the poor use raffia. Raffia belongs to Obaluaiyê in Brazil. Transformative spirit of earth, corruption and healing, Obaluaiyê is covered in elaborately crafted clothes when he dances in public, reminding us of his humble origins and his oneness with the organic processes of the Earth.

Be sure to throw out the raffia scrubber with the left over black soap when you're cleaning up after your bath.

(Iko should not be confused with *mariwo*, which adorns and guards holy places and is worn by Ogun and sometimes Oya; mariwo is made from the sprouting leaf of a palm tree, preferably the Oil Palm, not raffia.)

Good raffia can be found at many craft stores here in the USA. Choose plain raffia that isn't dyed. If you can't find raffia use a loofa sponge. In a pinch, the raffia can be dispensed with and just scrub down using the black soap.

Ewé - Leaves

After the water herbs are the most important ingredient in your bath. The herbs carry the curative powers of the Forest; each has a particular, individual quality and essence that it brings. We choose them carefully and seek out the best for our rituals, especially for the bath. Herbs gathered from the wild are considered best, then, almost as strong, are herbs you've grown yourself, while herbs bought from the store will do when there are no others. We use fresh leaves for the bath, never dried. Make sure they're not wilted, brown or rotting. Use the leaves, don't bother with the stems or stalks, especially if they're not tender.

One must be cautious when selecting herbs for a bath. A thorough knowledge of both African herbs and herbs local to your area is necessary before you can safely gather and use herbs. Imagine if you didn't know what Poison Oak looks like? Imagine if you chose it for your bath? Learn your herbs. Herbs are your the best teachers; everything you can know about the Spirit(s) the herbs can teach you.

To make an herbal bath following African tradition you can place the selected leaves in a basin, trimming off the stems and unusable parts. Pour a good amount of pure, fresh water over the leaves. Depending upon the type of bath the type of water used varies. Spring, well, rain, river, ocean. Or tap. I usually try to let it come to room temperature before starting. Be careful not to pour in too much; you don't want it splashing over the sides when you're working the herbs.

I try to keep a stash of water from a clean, pure natural source. I add a splash of this to on top of tap water when I have to use it. I feel like it crowns the tap water and reminds it of its holy origins, just as your bath will do the same for you.

Once you have the herbs and water in the basin ask permission of the Owner of the Forest, the Spirit of the Leaves to work with the leaves. If you know songs for the leaves feel free to sing them or simply talk to the water and leaves asking for their powers to “let loose” and join together in your bath. Talk to the Spirit and ask for cleansing and empowerment, ask to be allowed to return to your fuller integrity as a being in the biosphere. As you’re talking, begin to rip the leaves apart in the water. Grab them between your hands and pull them apart. Start grinding them against each other using your right hand over your left, as if you were scrubbing laundry. Hold them half under the water so that the juice of the leaves flows into the water. Continue scrubbing until the leaves have been completely torn apart; render them down to bits smaller than half the size of a dime. Make sure you’re using enough herbs to make the water a deep, dark green. Usually, if you’ve filled the basin loosely with herbs it’s more than plenty.

When you’ve got the herbs torn down and the water a nice green pull your hands out and rub them against each other above the basin to remove bits of herb stuck to them. Don’t wash them. Rub them against each other or rub them onto yourself. You want to hold their energies in the bath or into yourself. Don’t waste what is precious.

Your bath is ready. It now only needs to be strained and diluted. Put fresh water in the bucket. With either a gourd or cup push into the basin in such a way as to draw out the liquid while leaving behind most of the actual leaves. Or, alternatively, you can pull it out with the gourd or cup and pour through a strainer into the bucket, returning the remaining leaves in the strainer to the basin. Traditionally, the basin isn’t moved until all the bath needed has been drawn from it. This gesture is to honor the Owner of the Forest; it says, “We come to you, the eternal and unmoving; leave us steady and centered for it is us who move about, who come and go, often so lost in the world.” In the Forest, despite its wilderness and fearfulness, we can take refuge.

In Yoruba tradition, as found in the Americas, an herbal mixture such as this described above is usually called *omiero*; a maceration of herbs in fresh water it is used for a wide range of ritual purposes considered spiritually refreshing. In the Yoruba homeland such is called *agbo*. In Brazil the term *agbo* is only used for herbal mixtures that include animal ingredients and is thus considered hotter and more transformative than *omiero*, which, lacking “hot” animal blood and other elements, is considered cooler and more stabilizing. In Yorubaland, *omiero*, which means, literally, “calming water,” appears to refer to cooling herbal mixtures only, and also, more commonly, to the liquid inside the shells of giant snails, *igbin*, used for food and rituals. In Vodun traditions in Brazil cooling herbal concoctions are called *porrum*, while in Kongo and Angolan traditions they are called *amaci*.

Be careful to test out herbs and other ingredients to make sure you're not allergic to them. Caution! Study your herbs, make sure you don't accidentally include any herbs with toxic, narcotic or entheogenic qualities, you may end up further from your trouble than you'd like.

Perfumes, Beverages, Blood, and Other Ingredients

Sometimes other ingredients than herbs and water make their way into a particular spiritual bath. The inclusion of such things depends upon the traditions and recipes one is following in making the bath. I've seen almost anything remotely liquid make its way into the concoction of various baths, some I've found quite disturbing. Some of these ingredients have longstanding use in the traditions, while others are the "invento" or inventive additions of more modern, creative practitioners. More common ingredients used include: animal blood from animals used in sacrifices, alcoholic beverages, various perfumes, tinctures and essential oils, as well as common household items such as honey, molasses, vinegar, etc. In the magical realm of spiritual medicine both the medicinal qualities of things as well as their emotional or imaginal qualities are utilized to gain the necessary spiritual "juice" to empower a bath. All I can say is know your tradition, learn from an experienced teacher or be ready for some harrowing effects on your epidermis and/or psyche.

Ikoko or Igba - Basin or Calabash

Traditional herbal mixtures are made in an *ikòkò*, a wide-mouthed clay bowl or pot or an *igba*, a large calabash or tub. In the diaspora enamel or, more recently, plastic basins are used. A basin or tub is called *bacia* in Brazil and a *palangana* in the Spanish Caribbean. It's best to have a particular basin or bowl set aside used only for making herbal concoctions or baths. Traditionally, plain white basins are the preferred. Obviously, in a pinch, you use what you have.

The basin, called the "a *Princesa*," "the Princess," in some northeastern Brazilian Catimbó traditions, represents the great womb of Mother Nature, especially the waters which surround and permeate the planet. In the curved and fluid depths of Nature are all things blended, broken down and remade, born anew in myriad forms and infinite, unique instances. Generally, the basin is treated with care and gentleness and once a batch of herbs have been blended in it the basin isn't moved from where it sits until all of the blend needed has been used. These respects are reflective of the basin's correlation with the great regenerative force of our Mother the Waters.

Koroba or Garawa - Bucket or Pail

It's also good to have a bucket set aside for carrying the bath from the basin where you've blended it to the bathroom where it will be taken. Usually, only a portion of the herbal mixture is added to pure water held in the bucket to make a bath for someone. The herbal mixture is thus "decanted" or diluted into the water in the bucket. The herbal mixture is added to water; water, however, is never added to the bath once its been made. The bucket too shares in the associations with water pots and calabashes and it too reminds us of the renewing, redemptive power of Mother nature, yet the bucket also reminds us of our *seeking*, our reaching deep into the well for life-giving water, the long haul carrying it back home and our ability to hold on to what we've found. Nature's healing must be chosen, sought out, carried, cherished and the so the willful and diligent bucket becomes your ally.

It's always well mannered to rinse out the bucket when finished taking your bath.

Ori - Shea butter

Òrí, shea butter, puns with *Orí*, the head, consciousness. Shea butter is called *banho de ori* in Brazil, "head bath." It's usually sold in yellowish or grey white chunks or blobs. It's generally solid at room temperature but softens to oil when rubbed or heated. In Africa and throughout the African diaspora shea butter is used to oil the skin and keep it supple and prevent dry skin or "ashiness." Those of us with deeply pigmented skin are prone to dry skin, especially outside of the tropics, and such dry skin can not only become unsightly but also downright uncomfortable. Especially after using black soap and bathing in herbs the skin can be left dry and sensitive. Shea butter is our traditional go to in combat flakiness.

Ashiness is evil. Emollient is good. Good religion is like shea butter. Ori, head, consciousness, shea butter, smoothes out what is rough and flaky in us; sealing in what is moist, cool, and healthy, it leaves us shining.

Shea tree and its products belong, obviously, to the Orisha Ori as well as Obatala, Oshala; it's considered *funfun*, white, and has a cooling, soothing nature bringing longevity and suppleness.

Shea butter can be applied after your bath, before dressing, on all parts of the body, especially the arms, legs and other extremities which are prone to get ashy. Shea butter is also good for the head, obviously, and it's good to use when you're feeling hassled and stressed, burnt out. Rub into the back of your neck, your "third eye," and the temples of your brow.

If you can't get ahold of shea butter it can be substituted with cocoa butter, which is what was used in Cuba back in the day for rituals. Personally, I prefer using cocoa butter even though it isn't quite as effective as shea as a moisturizer, it smells delicious and feels more refreshing to my skin. Cocoa butter, *kòkó*, has associations with Obaluaiye and Oya. In a pinch, any pure oil or lotion can be substituted as well. Try

coconut or almond oil, especially for folks with Oshala. Some old folks use palm oil. (I avoid lotions with lanolin or castor bean oil as these can be ewo or taboo to some.)

Bathing in Natural Bodies of Water

Another form of spiritual bath used in our traditions is that of making a pilgrimage to bathe in living waters. Many of our communal rituals and also rituals of initiation involve making a trip to a spring, a well, a river or the ocean to bathe. These baths are considered powerful and profound, especially when full ritual proceedings are undertaken to capture the natural power of the Spirit manifest in beautiful, strong places in Nature. Care should be taken however when bathing in public or out alone in the wilderness, obviously, as that one's involvement internally with the Spirit can expose you to both social and natural, physical dangers. Be especially careful bathing in the ocean...rip tides, sharks, etc. can give you an unexpected and most ultimate transformation.

Cleanliness is next to godliness

I hope these notes can help you to not only bath properly but also assist in comprehending the deep teachings of our tradition which can sometimes just wash over us, leaving us clean yet sometimes still just as confused and clueless as before. Don't worry. Understanding isn't always everything. Even if you don't know what you're doing, if you've "done it right" or not, your spiritual bath will help you. Orisha will love and support you. Even if you're dirty.

Olomi o! Iya Ominibu!
Asá o! Ewé Osanyin!