

Getting Deeper into the Root and Source of the Gurdjieff Work

PREFACE

I've thought long and hard about writing this book. It may shock and dismay a lot of people. Religionists may find the ideas sacrilegious. Politicians may worry that what is presented is inciting and dangerous. Scientists will probably find the mathematical explanations naïve, simplistic, and unworthy of further consideration. Even philosophers, the reputed "lovers of truth," may find that these morsels of truths leave a bitter and unpleasant taste in the mouth. However, I would venture to speculate that the ones most perturbed by these ideas will be the pupils of Gurdjieff himself, who may find them a disturbing affront to their comfortable set of beliefs. In any case, my conscience is clear. I have given fair warning that the reader should be prepared for encountering the unexpected as we dig down to the very root and source of the Work.

To those who may be asking: what is the Work? I can only answer that the Work is a divine teaching. Which is to say, what the Work teaches concerns divining. Divining is the art or practice that seeks to discover hidden knowledge of Order, usually by the study of omens or by the aid of supernatural powers. Used as an adjective, "divine" refers to deity, to the heavenly realms. Historically, a diviner functions as a conduit, transmitting the higher immutable heavenly order down to the lower mute(able) terrestrial plane. The doctrine is very old and underpins the established principle of divine right. It is a lineal descent, the hierarchy mandated from on high. The monarch, the servant of the one god, serves as the mouthpiece, conveying the rules of higher Order to the people, the *laws* profiting the whole. The bottom line is the promise of a kingdom of peace and prosperity on earth, reflecting the divine order: Thy Kingdom come on Earth, as it is in Heaven.

The verb "to divine" means to prophesy. The word "divination" derives from the Latin "divinare," and means "to be inspired by a god." The question becomes: which god? In the Old Testament, it means "the Lord thy God," the one with no name, called I AM. This deity is "the inheritance" of the Levites. In the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 18:10-15), the "Lord thy God" tells the Levites

There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth *divinations*, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord; and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto *diviners*: but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do. The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.

The words in Deuteronomy 18:18 go on to state, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."

The words don't mean what we think they do. Or at least they must be taken from a different slant. The "inheritance" concerns the new commandments issued from the "Lord thy God." As the books of Moses reveal, there are *Ten Commandments*. The number 10 hints of a completely different type of code, that is, decimal code. The old code, composed of 1s and 0s, was binary: yes/no; right/left; good/evil. It worked with powers of 2. The number 10, while also formed of 1 and 0, concerns the metric system. The metrics rely on the higher powers of 10, and utilize the expanded units of counting called millimeters, centimeters, meters, and kilometers. Whereas the old system counted by two's (e.g., by I and II, or 0 and I) the new system has the greater potential afforded by the nine ordinal numbers: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9, plus the 0, making 10 numbers in all. Counting in 10s is *higher* on the evolutionary scale, more "human." The system is more complex, harder to learn; the tribe prefers the old ways, wants to revert. A strong leader is needed to keep the new order in force. In the Old Testament, that leader is Moses. The Laws of Moses concern decimal encoding.

The decimal system is the basic counting system of science. It is the language of the logical mind. Ouspensky, in *A New Model of the Universe*, clearly disses the metric system and powers of 10. He reports (p. xii)

In 1793 the Convention decided to replace the existing French measure by one 'natural' measure. After lengthy and complicated 'scientific' activity and research such a measure was acknowledge as being one ten-millionth of one fourth part of the earth's meridian, which was called a metre. There is no direct proof of it, but I am sure that the idea of a 'natural' measure and the metric system was born in the minds of teachers of arithmetic, because it is so much easier to divide and multiply everything by ten, having done away with all other divisors and multipliers. But for all ordinary necessities of life the metric system of weights and measures is far less practical than the old systems, and it weakens to a considerable degree a man's ability to make simple mental calculations, which is very marked in countries where the metric system has been adopted.

His positive tone indicates his preference for this old way of counting, which he calls "the real psychological method created by life and experience because, thanks to different coefficients in different cases a man making mental calculations involving the measurements of several different materials cannot confuse either objects of different denominations or the measures of different countries (should he have to deal with the measures of different countries) because each order of multiplier itself tells him what is being measured and with what measure." The old system, he says, relied upon the measure 16, as in 16 ounces in a pound.

Although Ouspensky does not say so, the old way of counting was "art" rather than "science," and its practice relied on diviners, who were taught the secrets of binary code. The source of binary encoding is 0s and 1s. The secret art of divining the *source* of the great laws was, as is called *sorcery*. Sorcery relies upon spells, that very word "spells" which implies that the performance of sorcery involves the use of alphabets and words. It is not well known that words and language utilize binary code, 1s and 0s. Training in sorcery involves chanting as an aid to producing psychic phenomena—as well as things like table-turning and mental telepathy and palm-reading, all of which rely on word manipulation.

Sorcerers trained to comprehend the encoding are the priests and priestesses, who rule over tribal matters.

Sorcery concerns magic. Magic and sorcery use symbols, gestures, and rituals which are believed to invoke supernatural forces (or, as some say, to exploit the ignorant). There is black magic and white magic. Either way, the magician knows the universal laws of order. The Order comes from the higher immaterial world of Spirit. The spirit world communicates to the natural world by using the old laws, the binary code. It is man's obligation, his being-duty, to align himself with the divine order; otherwise, in the material world, chaos reigns and things fall apart.

Ordinary man, not knowing the code, must rely on a diviner or (as Deuteronomy says) "a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer." However, the "Lord thy God" of the Hebrews forbids his people to hearken unto such witch doctors. Instead (he tells them), he will "raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee . . . like unto me." It is to this Prophet that the Hebrews must hearken. So the line of prophets begins, just as the Old Testament conveys.

Presumably the prophesized Messiah, the Savior who will lead them out of bondage, is yet to come. Meanwhile, the whole of the civilized world now utilizes the decimal system; and metrics (whose measures are meters-grams-seconds) has become the "spoken language" of the planet; and the "nameless" god of science (who, if I Am not mistaken, will remain that way if the scientists have anything to do with it, thank you) reigns supreme over the whole Earth. The shunning of magic has attained to such a level that even that abominable word cannot be uttered aloud in the hallowed halls of academia.

Hmm. Perhaps the time has come (as the Walrus said to Alice) to speak of many things, including the fact that Gurdjieff was a magician, and the Work he brought into the modern world was for a purpose few have even begun to guess. Gurdjieff's aim, although never overtly stated in so many words, was to *reintroduce the old magical ways into the current world scene*. Furthermore, the root and source of this "new way of Working," which entails the use of practical magic, is none other than the old magic called Voodoo!

The specific information about Voodoo, which I have compiled on the following pages, primarily derives from the monumental and scholarly tome by Professor William Bascom, titled *Ifa Divinations, Communications Between Gods and Men in West Africa*, published by Indiana University Press in 1969. The basic Odu charts are copied directly from his work. The suppositions and conjecture regarding the correlation with the Gurdjieff Work and with science and religion are strictly my own.

CHAPTER ONE



The word “Voodoo” derives from “Vodun,” an African word that means “spirit.”¹ Essentially it was and is a *Great Spirit* religion, and was first practiced in America by African slaves. The slaves were considered more animal than human, and Voodoo, being the religion of the slaves, was at first ridiculed and dismissed merely as superstitious nonsense. However, when it became apparent that the rituals seemed to have strange and magical powers not comprehensible to the ordinary mind, Voodoo soon became a thing to be feared and denounced as evil. Those who practiced Voodoo were “devil-worshippers.” The Church wasted no time in censuring the “Satanic” cult, and practically no effort was spared in the attempts to sweep the savages’ “deplorable” religion off the face of the earth.

There was good reason to treat Voodoo very seriously, for it was linked to political revolutions and social upheavals. For instance, in the 1700s African slaves in Haiti overthrew their enslavers and took over control of the country, and the revolution was believed to be inspired by the Voodoo priests. In the American colonies, those slave owners who relied upon plantation slave labor, fearing a similar revolt, took immediate action to make taboo any expression of Voodoo. As is always the case, the repression did not obliterate the religion, but had the opposite effect. Voodoo merely disappeared from the surface and went underground, where it took deep roots and thrived in secret. Today this ancient religion is practiced by upwards of 80 million people, and is said to be growing in numbers.

Despite its climb in popularity, racial prejudice and ignorance cloud what is known about Voodoo. Lingering suspicions abound about this African spirit religion and its alleged effects upon the material world. Sensationalized portrayals in the media, in books and movies and on television, generally describe it as a cult affiliated with the dark arts, with demonic possession and sacrificial offerings, and especially with satanic black magic.

The Voodoo priests are adamant that they are in possession of information regarding *the origin and purpose of man’s existence on earth*. I thought of the chapter in *Beelzebub’s Tales*, “The Organization for Man’s Existence Created by the Very Sainly Ashiata Shiemash.”² The story ends by stating that this true information, which in former times was the very basis of man’s highest attainments, has been swept away from the surface of the planet so completely that “even the rumor has failed to reach contemporary beings there that once upon a time such bliss existed.” All that is left are hints that a special “priest-organization” once existed. “But what constituted this priest-organization, how and why it was? . . . is it not all the same to the contemporary beings of the planet Earth what ancient savages did!!!. . .” I was certain that Gurdjieff was directing us toward the true information, the Odu Ifa, and to those who most profit by it, the caste of Voodoo priests.

According to the West African Yoruba tribal peoples, there is Odu, the Great Divine Immensity composed of energy of such magnitude that it remains closed to man’s ordinary observations and experimentations. The Odu is a law unto itself: all one, immutable, whole, a singularity. Described from that unique Gurdjieffian perspective called the “ray of creation,” the Odu is the Absolute of World One.

¹ In the surviving South Germanic and Anglo-Saxon pagan texts, Wóden/Wodan/ Vodun, or Wodun was the Chief of the gods, the one who invented the writing called “runes.” He was particularly associated with magic.

² *Beelzebub’s Tales*, chapter 27, beginning on page 366

The Odu *fathers* sixteen star-children, called “Ifa” (or “Ife”). On the ray of creation, the starry galactic Beings are the rulers of World Three, *all suns*, and find their representation as the syllable “Si” (which stands for *sidereal*, “star”). The names of the 16 Odu *Ifa star children* are listed in the chart below.³

THE 16 STAR CHILDREN, THE IFA

Ogbe	Ogunda
Oyeku	Qsa
Iwori	Irete
Edi	Otura
Qbara	Oturupon
Qkanran	Ogbe
Irosun	Qse
Qwonrin	Ofun

The starry worlds, Si, are in close communication with the Source, the Absolute: Do/Si. The star seed, the Children of the One God, are under the jurisdiction of the three laws of World 3. The “star chart” is of immense significance in Yoruba mythology. Purportedly it names *the 16 original divinities that established life on Earth*. (Note the kinship of “Ife” and “life”).

The Ifa is only one of the three components of Odu. The Yoruba say there are actually three oracles: **Ifa**, **Obi**, and **Merindinlogun**. In other words, from the one Odu arise three different sacramental tools for counting. The Ifa system uses **palm nuts**. The Obi system uses **kola nuts**. The Merindinlogun system uses **cowry shells**. All three of these sacraments (*Ikin*) serve as the *mouthpiece* for transmitting the words. Collectively speaking, this Trinity is the Word, the Divine Word of the Lord.

In Odu divination, the throw is termed “casting the Oracle.” Before casting, the nuts or shells are carefully cleaned and “beaten”; the priest then invokes the higher powers (Orishas, gods and demons) and puts the questions to them. The Orishas answer by influencing how the nuts or shells fall on the mat. If the nut or shell fall mouth up, one mark is made (for instance, I); if it falls with mouth down, another mark is made (the double line, II). All three systems—Ifa, Obi, and Merindinlogun—are based on statistical probabilities, not unlike a game of chance where the throw of the *dice* (singularly, *die*) determines the outcome: once the throw is made, *the die is cast*, so to say.

Let’s look very briefly at the three systems, taking one at a time.

When **Ifa** divination is used, the tools are **palm nuts**, and the process is spoken of as “casting Ifa.”

³ This chart derives from p. 4 of the book *Ifa Divinations, Communications between Gods and Men in West Africa*, by William Bascom, published by Indiana University Press, 1969. Bascom calls it the “dominant order.” He warns that the order may change from lineage to lineage, but the names remain consistent.



Palm Nuts

In the casting process, the sixteen sacramental palm nuts first are “beaten” (rubbed vigorously between the two hands), then they are grasped in the *palm* of the right hand and thrown onto a mat or plate. Depending upon the results of the throw, the diviner makes either a single (I) or a double (II) mark. The process is involved, and the purpose here is not to elaborate upon the complex modes of divination, but merely to introduce the sixteen basic configurations which result after the palm nuts have been thrown.⁴ This principle cast is termed the 16 Principle Ifa of Odu, or more simply, just “Odu Ifa.”⁵

THE 16 PRINCIPLE ODU IFA

Ogbe	I I I I	Ogunda	I I I II
Oyeku	II II II II	Qsa	II I I I
Iwori	II I I II	Irete	I I II I
Edi	I II II I	Otura	I II I I
Qbara	I II II II	Oturupon	II II I II
Qkanran	II II II I	Ika	II I II II
Irosun	I I II II	Qse	I II I II
Qwonrin	II II I I	Ofun	II I II I

The second system, **Obi** divination, is believed to be the oldest form of Odu. Its tool is the sacred **kola nut**, or “*Obi Abata*,” which is composed of four separate segments: the two primary forms of what is: male and female, and their offspring. The two male and two female represent the universal family: the four members of father, mother, son, and daughter.



Kolanuts

The shell below, used in the third system called **Merindinlogun**, is the **cowry**, which looks very much like a mouth with teeth.

⁴ One may find it interesting to recall Heidegger’s word “Dasein,” meaning “thrown condition,” which has to do with words and man’s entrapment in words and language.

⁵ This is called the dominant order of the Odu Ifa. See William Bascom, *Ifa Divinations, Communications Between Gods and Men in West Africa*, pp. 47-8, Indiana Univ. Press.



Cowry Shell

The cowry, or cowrie (plural cowries), is the name for the group of marine gastropods commonly known as sea snails. Not only in West Africa, but throughout the ancient world, the cowry symbolized the Mouth (Oracle) that gave all things their Names. The Egyptians, for example, also held to a Great Mouth that vibrated the worlds into being. Scholars today, apparently unaware of the connection, puzzle over the strange and enigmatic words found in the ancient Egyptian *Shebaka Text*.

The teeth and the lips in the Great Mouth . . . gave all things their names. . . and thus happen every *Word of God* from what his heart thought and his tongue commanded.

In the African Yoruba religion, all three systems rely on the number 16 for divination. All three systems require *hands*.

To divine the Odu requires manual skills. Which is to say, man's skills. Man, unlike beasts, has hands (*manus*) with digits, allowing the use of tools. There are tools, and there are tools. Our modern history books make no distinction. Tribal cultures knew better. To be able to use the tools of Odu requires the skilled hands of a real craftsman, which is to say, a crafty man, one that knows witchcraft. The art of Craft was, in and of itself, considered a gift of the gods. In the days of yore, such interpretation was indeed considered the highest form of art. For the Yoruba and other tribal cultures, it still is.

The Odu interpreters are the oracles (oral, orate, oratorio—that is, words pertaining to the mouth and to the words coming out of the mouth) who serve the hierarchy of gods. For the Aboriginal tribesmen, the mouths were the nuts and shells, whose meaning was deeply hidden and had to be interpreted.

In Greek myth, the interpreter was the “thrice great” Hermes, the son of Zeus and Maia, the child of both heaven and earth (and whose name means “hidden”). Today’s “sorry scientists” (as Gurdjieff called them) downplay and depersonalize any godlike qualities simply by reducing Hermes to “hermeneutics.” In such a way they give themselves the safety of retaining the original definition of “one who is able to interpret the Scriptures,” at the same time hiding from themselves the fact lying “in plain sight” that is, that the scripture and verse that must be interpreted are the hermetic laws of Odu, which alone contain the whole truth.

The Yoruba say that that to interpret the Odu requires knowing a special language.

Gurdjieff told his pupils. “You will see that we use a special language and that, in order to talk with us, it is necessary to learn this language.”⁶ He said that to speak and to understand truth, it is first necessary

⁶ In Search of the Miraculous, p. 22

to learn this special language; that it is not worth while trying to converse in ordinary language because, in that language, it is impossible to understand one another.

Now, as often happens, the members who frequent work groups like to imagine they already know this special language. And since Gurdjieff said that “only when a man has mastered this language, then, with its help, there can be transmitted and communicated to him a great deal of knowledge and information which cannot be transmitted in ordinary language even by using all possible scientific and philosophical terms,” these group members begin summarily to reject, on principle, all scientific and philosophical ideas! And because Gurdjieff said that “the fundamental property of the new language is that all ideas in it are concentrated round one idea, that is, they are taken in their mutual relationship from the point of view of one idea,” these same group members believe they already know this “one idea,” and, “coming back to the body,” they rest content in the pleasant sensation of satisfaction. These seekers of truth tend to regard their mere presence in the group as “working”; and the Work becomes a pastime, a way to make pleasant acquaintances (Fragments, p. 225). The first stage in the Work is to show the “seeker of Truth” that his very “quest” is a lie. “Ivan,” the “false personality,” really doesn’t *want* to know the truth!

The preliminary step in the Work is to see that one does not already know the truth; and the next step is to recognize that, although one *says* he wants to know the truth, in reality one has no desire to put out the effort necessary to learn this special language. In that regard, the pupils are like the ancient Hebrews: they prefer to remain passive, content in the old ways. Learning the language of truth is one of the most difficult things on earth. One must study a great deal and for a long time; the wish alone is not enough. As Madame de Salzman said, it is a science: it has to be decoded. Even Ouspensky, schooled in mathematics and philosophy and called by some “an unsung genius,” admitted the difficulty. He said that Gurdjieff’s method of exposition of the ideas was “little by little, as though defending or protecting them from us.” In almost every talk there was the fundamental idea of man’s mechanicalness: that “man cannot “do.” In the dialogues between Gurdjieff and his pupils there were apparent contradictions that led to many misunderstandings and wrong conclusions.

It's not surprising, given the enormity of the task. Even the priests were liable to stumble, be confused by the seeming contradictions. But as Gurdjieff himself stated, only then,

when a man has mastered this language, then, with its help, there can be transmitted and communicated to him a great deal of knowledge and information which cannot be transmitted in ordinary language even by using all possible scientific and philosophical terms.⁷

The special language was reserved for the high-ranking Elders, the few who had attained the status of “initiate.”

As Bascom reported, to be able to comprehend the language, the Ifa diviners must undergo two very difficult initiations, in the course of which they receive their “two sets of hands,” each hand able to hold

⁷ Fragments, p. 70

in the palm sixteen palm nuts. The *First Initiation* continues until the pupil is released to practice divination on his own. "In Ifa it is maintained that a diviner must know at least four verses for every figure, or a minimum of 1024 verses, before he can begin to practice professionally on his own."⁸

The lowest grade of diviners are called "elegan." These *elegan* "shave their heads completely, and for this reason they are sometimes referred to as *ajarimodi*, meaning 'those who shave their heads but do not tie (their hair)' (a-ja-ori-ma-di)." ⁹ I immediately thought of early photographs of Gurdjieff, his head completely shaved. Presumably, having finished his initiatic training at the Sarmoon monastery, he was then released into the world to begin his own Odu Ifa Work.



G. I. Gurdjieff

The diviner's reputation is *earned by work*, not by the number of verses he can recite. His success is determined by how well he can accomplish favorable results for his clients (make them recover from alcoholism or drug addiction, for instance). Still, there is a great deal of superstition attached to the poetic incantations and, for the majority the recitings of the diviner serve as strong hypnotic suggestions. The client, placing himself under the effects of this verbal craft, must be able to trust his diviner, much as a patient must trust his hypnotist.

What is this verbal craft work that, once entrusted to the initiate, can communicate hidden knowledge and information? Surely this "special language" of words concerns the 16 Ifa whose names are listed on the "Star Chart."

Sixteen Principal Odu Ifa of the Oyo			
Ogbe	I I I I	Ogunda	I I I II
Oyeku	II II II II	Qsa	II I I I
Iwori	II I I II	Ika	II I II II
Odi	I II II I	Oturupon	II II I II
Irosun	I I II II	Otura	I II I I
Iwonrin	II II I I	Irete	I I II I
Qbara	I II II II	Qse	I II I II
Qkanran	II II II I	Ofun	II I II I

⁸ Bascom, p. 71

⁹ Bascom, p. 81

Look at this table of 16 Principle Odu Ifa. The source is the Voodoo priests of the Oyo State in Nigeria. I have copied this Oyo table directly from the article in Wikipedia.

According to the information provided (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binary_code), in 2005 UNESCO selected this special language to be included in the “Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.”

That is all well and good, except that some of the names (words) have shifted internally and do not match up with the order of the Yoruba “star children” in Bascom’s chart. Which source is the more reliable: the academic’s or the witchdoctor’s? Bascom himself laments the “uncertainties” and “variations from diviner to diviner,” and states that the order of the Ifa is “by no means certain” (p. 4). “Although the dominant order accounts for half of the total number of lists analyzed,” he writes, “twenty-one other rankings have been recorded” (p. 47). There are no absolute standards, and the various tribes vie among themselves as to the modifications in the organization of the Ifa. Is there, or is there not, a “proper” order? How would one know? The rankings appear to be completely subjective. Who is the final authority? Who is the master in charge? Who is the final arbiter if there are disputes? No one knows. Even the diviners themselves seem conflicted.

The problem is that words, by their very nature, are very tricky, and can shape-shift into something else, even become their opposite, in the blink of an eye. For example, some interpreters of Ifa have analyzed the 16 seed patterns as follows.

Ogbe: existence, infinity	Ogunda: set, anchor, cement
Oyeku: non-existence, void	Qsa: unlink, detach, release
Iwori: expansion	Irete: pull, attract, love
Edi: contraction	Otura: push, repel, hate
Qbara: waking up, responsiveness	Oturupon: compile, assemble
Qkanran: sleep, indifference	Ika: sustain, hold in place
Irosun: flow out	Qse: initiate, organize
Qwonrin: cage up	Ofun: disrupt, break apart

Other diviners interpret the Ifa words far differently. The differences in interpretation have been known to cause conflict, skirmishes, and even out and out warfare among the various tribal cultures. It is not inaccurate to say that words and war are intimately related! Knowing how to interpret correctly was, in and of itself, considered a gift of the gods.

In the days of yore, to prophesy the future with accuracy was considered the highest form of art. For the Yoruba and other tribal cultures, it still is. The Odu interpreters are the oracles (oral, orate, oratorio—that is, words pertaining to the mouth and to the words coming out of the mouth) whose work is to transmit the prophecy. The oracle knows the *special language* of Odu. The high priests of Odu are *the masters of words*. Knowing the proper words, a master (mage) can incorporate a particular *psalm* or *proverb* for any given situation, thus bringing extraordinary supernatural powers to bear over the ordinary natural field of manifestation.

The belief that the mage exhibits supernatural powers dates far back into prehistory, and some form of magic practice can be found in cultures around the world, including India, Egypt, the Amazon, Africa, Australia, and pagan Europe. The powers of the magi are threefold: to (1) enchant, (2) read omens, and (3) cast spells. Chanting, reading, and spelling, the *domain* of the mage, are in his *hands*. Literally, he holds the tools in the palms (or is it psalm?) of his hand.

Using the powers inherent in words, man lords it over the rest of creation. Man, the master of words, can *do*. By means of words, he can *image* anything he desires, can bring into being anything he chooses. He is, in short, a creator, a godlike being.

It is precisely this ableness to create, to bring things into being with words, affording unlimited magical powers of doing, which so alarmed the Elohim. As Genesis 11: 6-8 states, ““Nothing will be restrained from them, which they have *imagined* to do . . . Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth” (Gen. 11: 6-8).

For one in the Work, the idea of “scattering” is intriguing. For instance, we pupils in the Work are told that it is the astral substance, or “I,” which has been “scattered in the body.”

In that regard, it is interesting that scientists studying the physical organ of the human brain, watching the flickering lights indicative of manifestations of mental activity, recognize that this thing we call *consciousness* appears to be scattered over the various structures within the brain. There is no single location for consciousness. Instead of one single I, there are many small I’s.

About the many I’s Gurdjieff said they all call themselves “master” and none wants to recognize another.

Each of them is caliph for an hour, does what he likes regardless of everything, and, later on, the others have to pay for it. And there is no order among them whatever. Whoever gets the upper hand is master. He whips everyone on all sides and takes heed of nothing. But the next moment another seizes the whip and beats him. And so it goes on all one’s life.¹⁰

The word “beats” called to mind the way the Yoruba priest *beats* the palm nuts before the throw. I was suspicious that Gurdjieff “many I’s” were actually hints about the various ways of casting the 16 words inside the chart of the Ifa Odu.

On the following pages are the rather detailed and somewhat technical descriptions of how I taught myself to “read” the Ifa charts. As I said earlier, the explanations come from my own personal investigations. The views do not necessarily reflect the ideas of Bascom, nor are they copies of others’ ideas extracted from articles on the Internet. Presented here is my own research, the result of hard work, somehow miraculously accomplished by brain far inadequate to the task, and a body worn out by lack of sleep, both overrun by a tyrannical determination to succeed no matter what the cost.

¹⁰ *Fragments*, p. 53

I used Bascom’s enumeration. That is, I used the equivalents. In his book, he shows various ways of describing the numbers: (1) as 1111 and 2222, or (2) as 0000 and XXXX, or as I and II, but never as 0000 and 1111. Since “divination” first and foremost depends upon the *throwing* of the palm nuts; and since the results of the throws are a type of binary encoding; therefore, in the following table (which follows both Bascom’s numeration of the Ifa names, and their order from 1 through 16) I took the liberty of including an extra column which gives the commonly-used binary numeration of 0s and 1s.

Step One: My method was simple: where there was Bascom’s I, I used a 0; where there was II, I used a 1. I modestly titled the revision “Mitzi’s Table 1.”

Mitzi’s Table 1

0000	1	Ogbe	I I I I	0001	9	Ogunda	I I I II
1111	2	Oyeku	II II II II	1000	10	Qsa	II I I I
1001	3	Iwori	II I I II	0010	11	Irete	I I II I
0110	4	Edi	I II II I	0100	12	Otura	I II I I
0111	5	Qbara	I II II II	1101	13	Oturupon	II II III
1110	6	Qkanran	II II II I	1011	14	Ika	II I II II
0011	7	Irosun	I I II II	0101	15	Qse	I II I II
1100	8	Qwonrin	II II I I	1010	16	Ofun	II I II I

Inserting the column of binary numbers, as it turned out, immediately brought into stark relief the fact that Bascom’s enumeration (1 through 16) was arbitrary and confusing, having no correspondence to the actual numerical values expressed by the 0s and 1s. The logical next step would be to make the two columns match.

To make the decimals correspond to the binaries seemed like a simple enough process. It wasn’t. There is no number 0000 in binary coding. The binaries begin with 0001. This makes the binary number 16 contain five digits: 10000. If the assumption is that our “world” is composed of 4-ness, then this five-digit number is too large: there is “no room in the Inn” for this number. Already we had encountered two problems: the one because things were too “small” (0000); the other because they were too “large” (10000). Hmm, wasn’t this the same problem experienced by the physicists when trying to unify the fields of the very large world of general relativity and the very small world of quantum mechanics? The two realms were too far apart, to disparate, to be joined together into one whole system. The word generally used to describe the situation is “incommensurate.”

In order to fit into the Ifa “four-dimensional timeframe,” both the “head” and the “tail” need cutting off. It is a common theme in myth and nursery rhyme, and in religious stories, as well. The question of why such a strange “sacrifice” is necessary now finds logical answer. The reason is: so that what formerly were the two separate lines, the binaries and the decimals, can now operate *in series*. The sacrifice ensures *that the separate parts can “work together.”*

Once the inner parts shift, the new alignment allows the mechanism to function as a parallel processor.

Older: "n" Newer: "n+1"

		1	0000
0001	1	2	0001
0010	2	3	0010
0011	3	4	0011
0100	4	5	0100
0101	5	6	0101
0110	6	7	0110
0111	7	8	0111
1000	8	9	1000
1001	9	10	1001
1010	10	11	1010
1011	11	12	1011
1100	12	13	1100
1101	13	14	1101
1110	14	15	1110
1111	15	16	1111
10000	16		

Step 2: Using the "n+1" column of numbers, it becomes a simple matter to replace Bascom's enumeration of the Odu Ifa with the actual corresponding ordinal numbers; so that now the words, the decimals, and the binaries match. The Ifa word-names are demystified, made more concrete. I called this Mitzi's Table 2.

Mitzi's Table 2

0000	1	Ogbe	I I I I	0001	2	Ogunda	I I I II
1111	16	Oyeku	II II II II	1000	9	Qsa	II I I I
1001	10	Iwori	II I I II	0010	3	Irete	I I II I
0110	7	Edi	I II II I	0100	5	Otura	I II I I
0111	8	Qbara	I II II II	1101	14	Oturupon	II II I II
1110	15	Qkanran	II II II I	1011	12	Ika	II I II II
0011	4	Irosun	I I II II	0101	6	Qse	I II I II
1100	13	Qwonrin	II II I I	1010	11	Ofun	II I II I

On the single Odu chart there are now *two different systems* that can understand the words. They can "talk together." We might personify the two systems as the Heavenly Father (the binaries 1 and 0), and the Mother Goddess (the decimals 1 through 16).

Unfortunately, another problem confronts us. While the "Father's" lineage may be clearer, more orderly, the "Mother's" lineage certainly is not! The decimals, as they stand now, really make no sense. In fact, the schematic is chaotic. There is no particular rhyme or reason. One intuits that the order is there, *potentially*, but somehow needs to be organized. How to do it, *actually*? Two possibilities come to mind. But before we make any changes, first take note of one interesting observation in Table 2. Do you see how, in the left hand column, there are already three pairs: 1 + 16, 10 + 7, 4 + 13, all which sum to 17? The one anomaly is 8 + 15. Looking at the right-hand column, we notice that it does not fare as

well. Only the last two numbers, 6 + 11, sum to 17. Still, it would not too difficult to *exchange* these two boxes. Let's proceed with this next revision.

Step 3: To revise, we simply *exchange* Qse and Ofun (6 and 11), moving them from the right to the left side, with Qbara and Qkanran (8 and 15), which are moved from the left side to the right. I termed this additionally-revised chart Mitzi's Table 3

Mitzi's Table 3

0000	1	Ogbe	I I I I	0001	2	Ogunda	I I I II
1111	16	Oyeku	II II II II	1000	9	Qsa	II I I I
1001	10	Iwori	II I I II	0010	3	Irete	I I II I
0110	7	Odi (Edi)	I II II I	0100	5	Otura	I II I I
0101	6	Qse	I II I II	1101	14	Oturupon	II II I II
1010	11	Ofum	II I II I	1011	12	Ika	II I II II
0011	4	Irosun	I I II II	0111	8	Qbara	I II II II
1100	13	Qwonrin	II II I I	1110	15	Qkanran	II II II I

Now the entire left-hand column of Ifa follows an orderly pattern:

$$\begin{aligned}
 1 + 16 &= 17 \\
 10 + 7 &= 17 \\
 6 + 11 &= 17 \\
 4 + 13 &= 17
 \end{aligned}$$

But the right-hand column is a mess! At first glance, it appears to be hopelessly unsalvageable. But wait! It doesn't take rocket science to see that, if reordered in a certain way, the remaining eight numbers (2, 9, 3, 5, 14, 12, 8, 15) likewise form into two sets of 34, or four sets of 17.

Step 4: *Exchange* the boxes, shift them, so that a new re-grouping of the eight numbers occurs the right-hand column, thus:

$$\begin{aligned}
 2 + 15 &= 17 \\
 9 + 8 &= 17 \\
 5 + 12 &= 17 \\
 3 + 14 &= 17
 \end{aligned}$$

Mitzi's Table 4

0000	1	Ogbe	I I I I	0001	2	Ogunda	I I I II
1111	16	Oyeku	II II II II	1110	15	Qkanran	II II II I
1001	10	Iwori	II I I II	1000	9	Qsa	II I I I
0110	7	Odi (Edi)	I II II I	0111	8	Qbara	I II II II
0101	6	Qse	I II I II	0100	5	Otura	I II I I
1010	11	Ofum	II I II I	1011	12	Ika	II I II II
0011	4	Irosun	I I II II	0010	3	Irete	I I II I
1100	13	Qwonrin	II II I I	1101	14	Oturupon	II II I II

Thus the sixteen decimal numbers, *forming two's*, result in eight pairings. ("Forming Two's" is the title of one of Gurdjieff's Movements). Each pair sums to 17, for a grand total of 136.

$$\begin{aligned}
1 + 16 &= 17 \\
10 + 7 &= 17 \\
6 + 11 &= 17 \\
4 + 13 &= 17 \\
2 + 15 &= 17 \\
9 + 8 &= 17 \\
5 + 12 &= 17 \\
\hline
3 + 14 &= 17 \\
\hline
136
\end{aligned}$$

The number 136 is the summation number of the sixteen Odu Ifa:

$$1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8+9+10+11+12+13+14+15+16 = 136$$

The 16 Odu form into four quadrants, each quadrant adding to 34. I picked four colors: blue, red, black, and yellow, for the four regions.

Mitzi's Table 5

0000	1	Ogbe	I I I I	0001	2	Ogunda	I I I II
1111	16	Oyeku	II II II II	1110	15	Qkanran	II II II I
1001	10	Iworì	II I I II	1000	9	Qsa	II I I I
0110	7	Odi (Edi)	I II II I	0111	8	Qbara	I II II II
0101	6	Qse	I III II	0100	5	Otura	I II I I
1010	11	Otun	III III I	1011	12	Ika	II III II
0011	4	Irosun	I I III II	0010	3	Irete	I I II I
1100	13	Qwemrin	III III I I	1101	14	Oturupon	II II I II

$$\begin{aligned}
1 + 16 &= 17 \\
10 + 7 &= 17 \text{ sum to 34} \text{ upper left quadrant} \text{ blue} \\
6 + 11 &= 17 \\
4 + 13 &= 17 \text{ sum to 34} \text{ lower left quadrant} \text{ red} \\
2 + 15 &= 17 \\
9 + 8 &= 17 \text{ sum to 34} \text{ upper right quadrant} \text{ black} \\
5 + 12 &= 17 \\
3 + 14 &= 17 \text{ sum to 34} \text{ lower right quadrant} \text{ yellow}
\end{aligned}$$

By the way, be advised that one of the Gurdjieff Movements is titled “Blue, red, black yellow.”

The four colors are indicative of the four races of humanity: the red race (Amerindian), the black race (African), the yellow race (Asian), and the “blue” race, hinting of the “Aryans” whose home was destroyed in a great cataclysm (and perhaps of the “blue-throated” Shiva, god of destruction, as well).

Thus do the 16 Odu Ifa charts reveal a universe formed of complementary pairs of 17s whose summation number is 136, which, by theosophical addition, sums to 10, and which, at the root and source, is dual, both 1 and 0.