

YORUBA CREATION

In the beginning, there was only the sky above and waters below, and this was ruled by the mighty Orisha, the council of gods. Olorun ruled the sky above and Olokun was master of all that was in the waters below.

One day, a god named Obatala decided to create dry land. He asked for permission from Olorun and advice from Orunmila, the wisest of the Orisha.

“You will need a long gold chain, a snail’s shell filled with sand, a white hen, a black cat, and a palm nut,” said Orunmila.

Once he had all of these items in a bag, Obatala hung the gold chain from a corner in the sky and began to climb down, down, down.

He kept climbing down down down for a very long, long time...until he finally reached the bottom of the chain.

Obatala poured the sand from the shell into the mist below, and released the hen.

The hen landed on the sand and immediately began pecking and scratching, scattering the sand into all directions.

The sand soon became vast mountains and valleys.

Obatala planted the palm nut ... and soon stood before an entire palm forest!

Obatala was very pleased with his work. He named the land Ife and settled down with the cat to live on his new land.

But after several months, Obatala became bored. He began shaping figures in clay. As he worked, he drank palm wine.

Obatala kept drinking bowl after bowl after bowl, and kept making more and more figures. When he was finished, he asked Olorun to breathe life into his clay people.

The next day, he saw his living, breathing work and he realized that they were all deformed and ugly! In horror, Obatala swore never to drink again and set to work building new, perfect beings from clay. As soon as Olorun breathed life into them, they immediately began building houses and cities.

Obatala became the patron of mankind, and more specifically, the deformed. All the Orisha were pleased with his work.

All except Olokun, the master of the sea, who was never consulted about the creation of the earth and mankind in the first place.

In anger he caused a great flood, which nearly wiped out all of Obatala’s creations. Once the waters receded, everyone took the very sea seriously from then on.

