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# Yoruba West African Creation Story

In the beginning, before the creation of man, the Earth was covered in nothing but water. Olodumare, God of all Gods, gave Obatala the task of creating solid land. He went to the God of prophecy to ask for advice.

“You will need a long golden chain, a shell full of earth, palm nuts and a chicken.” Obatala scratched his head and started trying to find these things. He went to see all the other Gods and asked them to give him any gold they had. When the gold had been melted down to make the chain he created a hook to put at the end of it. He found a large, round shell with a beautiful pearly surface and put it in the canvas bag he carried over his shoulder. After picking up a palm nut and coaxing a clucking chicken into his bag, feathers flapping, he was ready.

He secured the chain with the hook and lowered the other end slowly down. Cautiously he started climbing down the golden chain, hand over hand. It swung slightly as he moved and he took a deep breath. He got to the end of the chain and realised with horror that he was still a long way above the water. He looked up. The God of prophecy shouted to him, “Tip the sand out of the shell and release the chicken.”

Not knowing what else to do, Obatala wrapped one arm around the chain, gripping it so hard his fingers turned white. He fumbled in his bag and took out the shell. As he did so, sand poured from the shell into the water. At the same time, the chicken, seeing a chance of freedom, escaped from the bag and landed on the sand. It started scratching, scattering the sand around it.

As Obatala watched in disbelief, still hanging from the golden chain, the sand formed dry land whenever it landed. The bigger piles became hills and mountains and the smaller piles became valleys. With a sigh of relief, Obatala was able to let go of the chain and land safely on a hill.

“This spot on which I land from heaven, I name Ife.” Ife became the spiritual home of the Yoruba.

Obatala dug a hole and planted the palm nut, which immediately and without warning grew into a palm tree and scattered more palm nuts across the land, repeating the process. Obatala sat down, having found a comfy spot underneath a palm tree. Days, weeks and months passed while Obatala wandered across the new land he had created.

Obatala soon became very bored and in order to provide some company for himself, he started to make figures out of clay next to the water. Pretty soon, Obatala grew tired and took a break under a palm tree, taking a drink of palm wine that he had made from the tree. The sun was a little too hot and he drank a little too much of the palm wine. When he returned to his task of making clay figures he was not able to concentrate, and most of his figures were deformed. He went to fall asleep under a tree. Olodumare, God of all Gods, sent Oduduwa to find out what was happening.

Obatala was embarrassed when he woke up and realised what he had done. As a result, he forbid any of his followers to drink palm wine. He created more figures from clay, and they were perfect this time. Olodumare breathed life into the clay and figures to create humans.

All might have remained peaceful but Olokun, the spirit of the sea, had never been consulted about the creation of so much dry land. "What have you done to my watery kingdom? How dare you!"

Olokun was furious, and summoned huge terrifying waves to crash over the land, wave after wave after wave. The land flooded and the people fled to the highest hills. They cried out to the gods to save them, and made sacrifices of goats. The god of prophecy heard their plea and cast spells to make the waters retreat and the land reappear. Oduduwa remained on Earth and became Ooni (king) of the Yoruba people in Ife.