

## A conversation with guides Confidence and Evans at Ucomeafrik

**Dario:** So when are children usually introduced to voodoo? Are they shown that in schools or are they just taught that from their family?

**Confidence and Dario:** Family.

**Confidence:** Families into voodoo...

**Evans:** We start learning from the house. We start seeing how they are going to the shrine, making prayers, so- we grow into it.

**Dario:** Yeah- you start participating.

**Evans:** Start from a family that is actively into voodoo.

**Dario:** And you both as brothers, you grew up in a family that was actively engaging in voodoo as well so you had a shrine at home and, were you participating in the rituals and things like that?

**Dario:** Oh you didn't? Oh my bad.

**Evans:** We grew up in a Christian-

**Confidence:** -In a Christian family.

**Dario:** Ohh.

**Confidence:** Serious Christians...

**Evans:** Serious.

**Dario:** Oh you guys are Christians. Well I remember you saying that, but- you don't practice voodoo at all?

**Both:** No.

**Dario:** Ohh.

**Confidence:** No, I didn't grow up there.

**Evans:** We didn't grow up with our family.

**Confidence:** Well we have like nothing against it. Like me, I have nothing against like voodoo.

**Evans:** Well me I too- I've started practicing voodoo, I take all their voodoo, I like the artifacts.

**Dario:** Oh okay you collect the artifacts.

**Evans:** Like those stuffs, some of those stuff you got, I have one here.

**Dario:** Oh yeah?

**Evans:** Yeah.

**Evans:** I have one for traveling. You got this one right?

**Dario:** Yeah. I asked him before I bought it, I was a little nervous. Even though I don't practice anything and you know, I was...

**Evans:** Oh I've had this now for about two or three years now.

**Dario:** Oh okay... eyy

**Evans:** From that same guy.

**Dario:** You know I asked...were there any sacrifices like blood sacrifices or anything, he said no-

**Confidence:** There's nothing like that.

**Dario:** -so that's how I felt good enough to buy them.

**Evans:** These ones are just talismans. They've already put in the power in it so you don't need to do anything.

**Dario:** Don't have to add in any other blood.. blood sacrifice...

**Confidence:** They give you like... rings for example, I think... you remember when we went to them they wanted to give you a ring.

**Evans:** They can give you a ring for protection, a ring for fever. For things to just move on well for you, you understand? Anything you do, when you meet people you, people would accept you, that kind of thing. They are rings for that. He can give you a ring for protection, so- depends.

**Evans:** Then the one that requires constant sacrifice is the type that... the one that-

**Dario:** -yikes alright-

**Evans:** -Those guys, they're setting up a shrine.

**Confidence:** They actually... had a shrine, he was getting different fetish from different countries-

**Evans:** -and that's not good, you don't combine fetish from different places-

**Confidence:** -so they had conflict.

**Evans:** Spiritual conflict, so you don't know-

**Evans:** So it's either you focus on one particular fetish, you understand? Because they all have the way they work, they all have their own rules and regulations. So if you are somebody you want to experience fetish and you go here you get fetish, you go to the north to get another fetish, you go here, you end up...

**Confidence:** A bit troubled.

**Dario:** There'll be conflict of interest. Wow.

**Evans:** And all these things are spirits and they work. They are strong spirits but—why I still feel that they are lesser spirits is because we are still the ones that control them right?

**Dario:** Ohh. You consider them lesser spirits to...

**Evans:** No, what I say is that- why should I consider them great when I'm the one that still needs to activate them to work you get?

**Dario:** Right, right.

**Evans:** Because if they give you fetish now

**Dario:** -they need to channel through you

**Evans:** Yes if they give you a fetish now, it can just be there, dormant, until you pour a red oil on it or pour the Schnapps and start telling it what to do. So I think you are still (I feel you I feel you) you are still a God to it.

**Dario:** We're the Gods. So they got it flipped, so we're actually the Gods.

**Evans:** They are just our servants.

**Dario:** I mean it's definitely confusing because we can't see them, so we could feel like they're supernatural. Supernatural things happen, at least in terms of what we can experience through our senses. So we could feel as though they're God-like but in a way they need us you know? To be able to—

**Evans:** —to function—

**Dario:** —be in this world

**Evans:** So I was reading something. I think somewhere in the bible says we are Gods. Human beings, we are Gods on our own, you get? It's just that some of us have not really tapped into our spirituality yet. We don't even know the strength that we have, spirituality strength we have. A lot of people don't know. So... There are a lot of people that are spiritual. They might not even be Christians, some muslims, but they are very spiritual. They do meditations, do different kinds of stuff and they notice it works for them so those ones are tapping into their spirituality but some of us are just living.

**Dario:** I mean honestly- I grew up like you. I was Christian and I knew there was a recent history for my ancestors. And I felt like there is so much blood on Christianity's hands with what they did- to many different people around the world that- I just turned my back on it.

**Dario:** But then I did use art as a way to kind of practice my own spirituality, and sort of connect with the idea that maybe there is a universal collective consciousness. Like we all sort of may have

the same essence, then when we die we could reconnect with and maybe there's reincarnation after and- so a lot of these are sort of- became part of my ideology but the spiritual aspect I think really came from me creating altars and things in my art practice. And through coming here, learning more about ancestors and things- I think that was sort of a missing piece.

**Dario:** Trying to do what I can to reconnect with my ancestors. And from there I became more interested in actually honoring ancestors more and calling upon ancestors to be able to help you through different times and things.

**Dario:** The voodoo part ... Black magic and sorcery and killing an animal, to be able to get good, something positive from it... to me just seems like I'm putting out dark energy into the world to make a sacrifice- to be able to get good energy. And it's hard for me to believe that it's sustainable. It seems like you need to continually sacrifice things and continually act out this dark energy to be able to then harness positive energy. I don't really know, that's just what I can imagine, there's a lot more I need to learn.

**Evans:** Well I feel that for animals, we are Lords above animals. That's why we have to eat them to survive. Plants, we are Lords and Gods over them, that's why we have to use them to survive. So if you are looking at it from that angle then we shouldn't be taking drugs- we should not be eating meat because we are killing the meat to sustain ourselves. So if I kill an animal to get a good energy, it's eventually the same thing.

**Dario:** It is yeah basically and you're still eating the animal-

**Confidence:** -you're not above it-

**Dario:** -so either way you're killing the animal. I'm not. I know...

**Evans:** Either way you're killing it. Well-the way I see it is that we are the superior beings in this life, at this orbit. So these things are at our disposal for use, to edify ourself, if they are not there we will not survive. So we are-

**Dario:** -that's what a lot of Christians believe.

**Evans:** Yes, we are in control and in charge of them. We can't- there's no way we can survive without eating, even if you are vegan you have to eat something. You eat a plant, and plants too has life in it.

**Dario:** It does it does...

**Evans:** So either way...

**Dario:** I think the only thing is that- we don't know if plants suffer. There's no way to be able to tell so honestly it's not even fair to say "Oh they don't have nerve endings, they don't have blood, they don't have..." you know? So if you kill a plant it's not like it harms the plant spiritually but we don't even know that, it could be so...

**Dario:** But you're right, I mean. I think right now I just feel more comfortable like you, maybe having a talisman you know? Something that doesn't have the sacrificial aspect to it I was friends with a Santería priest before though. He used to go around, he would be hired to go and bless certain places with a cauldron, he'd kill chickens and stuff like that, underneath like bars and restaurants and places, that was his job.

...

**Confidence:** Oh yeah no, I was thinking—when you talked about voodoo, there are different things, and it's not all the parts or everything involved that requires sacrifices, or killing goats, or chickens—

**Dario:** —Yeah of course, not all voodoo has sacrifices.

**Confidence:** They are different types of things as well... and there is the Ifa? Where you- you probably know about that too right?

**Dario:** I know the Ife–Ifa people or Ife people?

**Evans:** Not Ife. Ifa.

**Dario:** Ifa? No.

**Evans:** Ifa is our spirituality, it's- Confidence would explain more.

**Confidence:** Yeah so for the Ifa, for example this is still about Odu but it's another part of it, then that's their consultation that they make and that this will tell you about your life, your personal life- like your past, your present and your future. So it's all connecting. And the Ifa will tell you different things that you need to do, like for example—

**Evans:** —Huh we are talking about the Ifa? Your Ifa? mhm

**Confidence:** —So I was thinking those who practice Ifa for example- this is Ifa directly does not really require your sacrifices.

**Dario:** You know, it almost sounds like a psychic reading or something like we have in the west.

**Evans:** Hm for me, what it is, we believe that everybody has an Ifa abi? That Ifa is what tells you how your life or your destiny is, do you understand?

**Dario:** Everyone in society has one? So you both also see an lfa?

**Evans:** We don't see an lfa, you have (one)- abi?

**Dario:** Ohh so it's not a person you go see, it's not like a priest.

**Confidence:** We believe that everyone has an lfa- that lfa is what the time means, what your destiny is or would be.

**Dario:** And how do they guide you?

**Confidence:** –so it's like–

**Evans:** -you can go and read, they can read your lfa, do you understand? they can read your lfa for you.

**Dario:** Oh that's the priest you were seeing... they are the lfa

**Evans:** That is the lfa priest who will read your lfa.

**Dario:** Got it. And they'll tell you- what your destiny is?

**Evans:** Yeah. This and this, you know the thing is– if not because of the fact that the Christianity and Islam has taken over...place. There are so many–we are very spiritual people–Africa is a very spiritual place, you understand?

**Evans:** So normally if you are born, they are supposed to read your lfa first thing, and know what kind of food you should be eating. The kind of- There are some children that are not supposed to be eating some kind of food because that is your lfa. For instance some people are not meant to be eating snail(s). Some are not meant to eat pork. But because nobody has read their lfa for them they don't know, they eat it, they don't know it is affecting them spiritually. Do you understand?

**Evans:** So if- people practice lfa, when they give birth to their child, they read- they go and consult and find out the- do's and don'ts for this particular child.

**Evans:** -This one, when they read they might say ah. They might see that this child is not meant to eat snails, or is not meant to drink alcohol all through his life, you understand?. Maybe if he drinks alcohol he is going to spoil- you understand?

**Dario:** Right.

**Evans:** So I'm feeling that, because of the fact that Christianity and Islam has taken over a whole lot of things, we have waived that spirituality- and a lot of people are going through some things now that probably they wouldn't have gone through if they were going to read their lfa. I don't know if you get my point of view.

**Dario:** Yeah I do. No, that totally makes sense.

**Evans:** So for instance now, alcoholics, I'm very sure that if probably they are going to read their Ifa, they might have told them to avoid alcohol when they are

**Dario:** -cause they'll probably have a dependency to it

**Evans:** -yes cause -they would not be able to control themselves when they are -going to start taking alcohol, you get it?

**Dario:** Yep. Wow. And virtually everybody in society sees an Ifa or? You both see one or?

**Evans:** They have people that practice it, you understand? Or it is believed.

**Dario:** Oh sorry sorry, see an Ifa PRIEST, like most people have one?

**Evans:** Most people if you believe in it, you can go and visit an Ifa priest, wherever they do visit an Ifa priest wherever there-

**Dario:** Do some people- are some people skeptical? Do they not want to take one person's point of view like one priest? Do they see many priests just to see if there's consistency?

**Evans:** No no no no- Your Ifa priest will be the same thing that here- an Ifa priest in Benin will read the same thing an Ifa priest in Nigeria would read for him.

**Confidence:** The same.

**Dario:** Wow. So it's not even worth like- ok wow.

**Evans:** There's nothing, no skepticism about it. It's a strong spiritual something, you understand? They take a whole lot of regulations. If they read your Ifa for you, these people are very principled, you understand? They seriously obey a whole lot of- they live with their principles. If you believe in it you have to- if you go against it, you see that things will go wrong for you. Either your business will not be functioning (well) or your health- you get it.

**Dario:** Yeah. So do you ask specific questions when you see an Ifa priest or do they just tell you?

**Evans:** Yeah sometimes they can do a general reading for you. When they give birth to a child, they can do just a general reading and let the parents know what the child should avoid- when later in life, if- you are having some issues or you want to find out something, maybe you want to make a journey or you want to make a trip somewhere, you can go to consult your Ifa priest, do you understand? And they can tell you what some works to do, you get it.

**Dario:** And what- do they also sometimes give you fetishes or do they subscribe or prescribe some

**Confidence:** They will only give you fetishes when you get initiated. But sometimes they can tell you that the Ifa- might be recommending you to get this initiated. Then if you get initiated you will receive the fetish.

**Dario:** Okay. And that is initiated in voodoo or initiated in a specific religion?

**Evans:** Initiated in Ifa.

**Dario:** In Ifa, got it.

**Evans:** Do you understand so-

**Confidence:** There is something that they call Odu for example, and when you get initiated they will give it to you. And it's believed to protect you as well when you do things you have to do... There is something, a kind of ceremony that you have to do- they might give you instructions about it and that protects you. People get it- I know someone for example, he has it and he, years ago he had an accident, but when he had an accident it was something very very serious and he could have passed away (from it) but he just don't know how it happens that... nothing happened to him. He did not even get injured, or nothing. But when he went home he saw that the Odu he got broke. So it was believed—it's kind of the shock he will have received

**Dario:** –right, the adrenaline–

**Confidence:** –has been transferred.

**Evans:** –to that Odu.

**Evans:** And the spiritual traditional religion too is... Every part of Africa has something peculiar to them, you understand? There is the God of Ogun, the God of thunder, there are people that worship the God of thunder. People that worship the iron. They all have their own initiation ceremonies, they have their own styles. Their own do's and don'ts. Some people worship snakes, some people- their own spirituality, their own... This thing is snake...Python.

**Dario:**... and rituals

**Evans:** Yeah so there are rituals that are directed towards that like... (17:10-17:52)

**Confidence:** The river God, Oshun.

**Evans:** Some people worship the river. There is one that is very popular in Nigeria, see there is a place called Osun.. (Oh yeah Osun). So now they have this river (Oshun is there), river goddess. Yes. So it is a very strong something.

**Evans:** They always have a festival, and there are some children that are born- now so if some



people get married they can't give birth, so they go to the river goddess and ask for a child. So if the goddess gives you a child, that child is dedicated to that river- to the river goddess. There are a lot of things that child is not supposed to eat.

**Evans:** And every time the child is supposed to come for the festival- sometimes they could be there and-

**Confidence:** -in a trance-

**Evans:** -and they will be in a trance. You see it live. (-18:41) Even small kids or are adults who are from the-

**Dario:** While in a trance, will they be possessed or will they-?

**Evans:** Yeah, they will get possessed.

**Dario:** They'll take on the-like Oshun will be

**Evans:** -no they're just like possessed, they want to go into the river.

**Dario:** Got it.

**Evans:** Yeah so people around always hold them. If not- they run into the river and if they get into the river-

**Dario:** They will drown?

**Evans:** -you will not find them, yes.

**Evans:** So the river goddess has been giving people children so if you go to request a child from the river goddess, you will dedicate the child to the goddess. So they will tell you things that you shouldn't let the child do. And from popular testimonials they say people who get married to those kinds of children, or girls that are... from the goddess- things are always moving on well for them, that they always bring good luck.

**Dario:** Oh okay, so they're popular, a lot of people want to be with somebody with someone who's maybe-

**Evans:** Then sometimes some people you know, Christianity has made some people... they're shy- they're like, looking at them as fetish, you understand?

**Dario:** Oh yeah.

**Evans:** So people are scared- scared of interacting with them, but spiritual- traditional people don't care.

**Evans:** And you also believe that you don't hurt them. You don't promise and fail them.

**Dario:** What about like the Ashanti religion and some of those- do they also have an ife or?

**Evans:** Ashanti religion? Ashanti? They also have their own—in Kumasi. They have goddesses too, they have one river goddess, it is called Antoa. They worship that too. So they also have their own way- they practice their own traditions. So every kingdom, every tribe has its god, has its shrine, has its fetish. So the Ashanti kingdom now, they have their fetish, they have like how they- when it's time for installment of the king, they definitely have a shrine where they go to ... that make sacrifices, procedures and things. The same thing in Ghana, same thing in Nigeria, in Benin, every other place.

**Dario:** In Mali, Senegal, Gambia?

**Evans:** Everybody has their own voodoo, own fetish. It's only that sometimes you will notice that it is related, do you understand? The way the whole thing is done. It's always- you just notice a similarity in every procedure you understand? If you go to the north and they are consulting their Gods- it always takes similar fashion, the way it takes in the South, you understand? It always goes with a schnapp, it goes with oil you know? There's always something basic, cola nut

**Confidence:** --some coffee shells

**Evans:** You see, so it's always basic, there is a basic thing about the consultation.

**Dario:** Do they think that the river goddess from the Ashanti kingdom and Oshun are one of the same, just different translations of it?

**Evans:** Well there are different translations of it or they might be- the Antoa goddess is not like the river goddess of ashanti the way it works, you understand? The way the one in Oshun works is different from—

**Dario:** Okay, and they don't have the same food restrictions and things like that?

**Evans:** No no no no.

**Dario:** Is it like a specific river that Oshun dominates?

**Evans:** Yes, yes it is a specific river.

**Dario:** And that river is specifically in Nigeria?

**Evans:** Yeah.

**Dario:** So people here in Benin or Togo maybe don't practice...

**Evans:** No no no no, except (if) you want, you can travel to that place and get initiated (hmm) and become a part of them.

**Confidence:** You mean Oshun?

**Evans:** Oshun yeah.

**Confidence:** Ah, then here too as well...--they call them Mami Wata--yeah, that part? is here too.

**Evans:** I think, there are people- they call them, they are here

**Confidence:** --It's called Mami Wata--

**Dario:** Mami Wata?

**Confidence:** Yeah.

**Confidence:** The- people in Benin and people in Nigeria so it's almost-

**Evans:** Yeah so it's almost- The traditions are almost similar. Benin and Nigeria (have) a very tied culture.

**Dario:** -Cause they were the same people weren't they?

**Evans:** When we go to the Abomey Kingdom, you...want you to listen to the talk? Very well, you would understand the relationship between Benin and Nigeria. You'll see that there is a whole lot of-

**Dario:** --overlap.

**Evans:** Yes.

**Dario:** I mean- they were the same people right? They just--

**Evans:** Dahomey. Yes. Dahomey Kingdom. Benin Kingdom.

**Confidence:** There is even a city in Nigeria that is called Benin.

**Evans:** Yeah so they took- Benin took permission from that city before they named each Benin. You understand--you see?

**Dario:** They must've been able to get their permission--they must've felt a kinship.

**Evans:** So when they're doing a lot of festivals here they must invite people from Benin- the Yoruba, the Yoruba people always come for their festivals.

**Dario:** It must've been hard when you know, when the colonizers came and just divided up the land arbitrarily.

**Evans:** You see? You see? That is what we're always saying these guys were strategic. The colonizers were very strategic

**Dario:** --they knew--

**Evans:** They knew that's why they were called divide and rule, divider and conquer. Once you're

able to break these people, disintegrate them. So why do you think you will have Nigeria that is speaking English, then you have Togo, Benin speaking French? Then you now have Ghana.

**Evans:** So you imagine these two countries were speaking English in between, you could have seen how strong how unified it would've been but now there is a vast difference between Benin and Togo's form of administration with Nigeria and Ghana. Nigeria and Ghana have something similar in administration, but different from Benin and Togo. So they are right in between and you, causing...

**Dario:** So I just imagined... when it comes to imperialism like I imagine the countries like say Britain is just trying to take up as much of the land as possible. But maybe they were working with France to allow France to be able to divide and conquer—

**Evans:** —divide and conquer yeah—

**Dario:** Wow.

**Evans:** Just check it if you see that lots of the ... countries, you see two ... countries, you see one French country in between.

**Dario:** That's—that's crazy.

**Dario:** Yeah. You know the Caribbean, I mean- the Asians and the Puerto Ricans and the Cubans and also Brazil, like that Santería culture is, it's big. You know a lot of them.. there are people initiated with Oshun or dedicated to Oshun.

**Evans:** Yeah during the festival a lot of people come from Brazil—they come from all over the world like Caribbeans, they come- those that have their roots they come for the festival. It's always a very big festival, very very huge. A very big festival. They even have a public holiday for it in that state. Almost two days, they don't go to school, everything is dedicated.

**Dario:** I was wondering if a lot of them come out here because otherwise, they're pretty far away from the river and far from where the original culture came from.

**Dario:** Are you familiar with the jab jabs at all? They're really a Caribbean carnival fixture They wear horns, and- wear black paint and stuff. And—you see, my mom—she was Christian so she doesn't really know too much about some of these things. And anything that looks demonic she just- she shies away from so she didn't know about why the jab jabs do what they do. But that's just something that I think Christians and the islands kinda assume like that's something to do with the African religions, maybe traditions but- you haven't heard of the jab jabs here right.

**Evans:** No.