

Ginen

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Ginen (also referred to as Guinee or Ian Guinee) is that aspect of the Vodoun religion that establishes a direct link to its African ancestral source. Representative of both a sacred location and spirit force, Ginen sustains the holistic worldview in which precise relationships and interactions take place within the supernatural realm and between the natural and the supernatural.

Vodoun Dogma

An official and creolized religion of Haiti (together with Roman Catholicism), Vodoun was forged by slaves from various Central and West African ethnic groups, particularly those situated in Benin Republic (formerly the Kingdom of Dahomey), Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), and Yoruba communities in present-day Nigeria. As the transatlantic slave trade dispersed Africans to various parts of the Americas and Europe, the initiators and original devotees to Vodoun were those that ended up in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (as Haiti was then known).

Vodoun is etymologically traceable to the term vodu which, in the Fon language of Benin Republic and parts of Togo in West Africa, refers to the hundreds of immortal spirits and deities that the Fon people believe in, communicate with, and build personal relationships with. It is thus apparent that religious similarities exist between the Fon and Vodoun adherent. Vodoun spirits are categorized into two groups: Rada and Petro. Rada is the designation for spirits of

slaves abducted from Arada on the coast of Benin while Petro alludes to those that were added later, largely of deceased leaders in the New World.

Significance of Ginen

A key component of Vodoun's spiritual arrangement and symbolic of a devout African homeland, Ginen is both a revered realm and vital loa. Its sacred city is Ife, which is to Vodoun what Mecca is to Islam. Although an actual Yoruba city of Ife exists in western Nigeria, the Ife of Vodoun is a legendary place, a community of ancestral spirits, where the revelation of the loas was revealed to the faithful. Since Africa is east of the New World, Ife signifies the celestial position of the sun. The faithful gain spiritual strength from Ife; they are sent there through very solemn ceremonies that suggest death, burial, and resurrection. This is much like a baptismal journey, a rite-of-passage in which they are immersed in their cultural and divine birthplace, after which they emerge renewed and empowered.

One such important ceremony is the death ritual that sends the gros-bon-ange to Ginen where it reunites with other spirits and ultimately becomes a loa to be worshipped by family members. Each person's soul is believed to contain two parts – a gros-bon-ange or big guardian angel, which preserve's the individual's life-force; and a ti-bon-ange or little guardian angel, which reflects the individual's knowledge, experience, and personality. The gros-bon-ange leaves when a person dies and has the capacity to unite with other loas in Ginen. It is thus germane to immortality. If the death ritual is not fully accomplished, the gros-bon-ange could become trapped on earth, bringing misfortune to surviving family members.

Beyond a locale, therefore, Ginen is also one of the beloved spirits or loas in Vodoun, referring to the spirit force that emanates from Guinea. Like the several loas that exist in

Vodoun, this one also has a special role, which is to eternally connect the Vodoun worshipper to his or her ancestral and religious roots, and to ensure rest, immortality, and deification in the afterlife.

Conclusion

Ginen reinforces Vodoun as an African-based religion and philosophy, and complements the concept of a sacrosanct structure that confirms the interconnectedness between diverse spirits and diverse powers. Also spelled *Voodoo*, *Voudou*, or *Vodun*, Vodoun is thus a religion of power, creation, and enigma, and acknowledges a worldview that embraces philosophy, medicine, justice, ritual, healing, and other rich sets of belief. About 6-10,000 years old and with a membership of up to 60 million, Vodoun continues to thrive to different degrees in the Caribbean, Africa, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Columbia, Mexico, and many other countries in Latin America. Its attributes are evident in practices labeled variously as Obeah, Santeria, Regla de Ocha, Umbada, Lukumi, Candomble, La Regla Lucum or Orisha, and rely on systems and mediums that are common to native African religions, including drumming, chanting, singing, dancing, animal sacrifice, and spirit possession.

-- Philip U. Effiong

Further Reading

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