

**SOCIETY OF YOUNG NIGERIAN WRITERS**

**ARTICLES, ESSAYS AND E-BOOKS ON DANIEL  
OLORUNFEMI FAGUNWA**



## Lessons from D. O. Fagunwa

I met D. O. Fagunwa in 1981.

D. O. Fagunwa was born circa 1910 at Oke Igbo, Ondo State. He died in 1963 near Bida, Nigeria.

He was a teacher. My teacher. He was 71 and I was 11 when we met.

Do you remember *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole*? D. O. Fagunwa authored it. I mean *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* made available in English by Professor Wole Soyinka, 1986 Nobel Laureate in Literature.

I was born an unusually reflective child. I grew up in solitude.

Early in my preteen years, when my peers were building mud-houses and rolling tyres on the streets in the sleepy town of Akure, my tender soul was throbbing with a trillion questions.

About 'me' - the mysteries of birth and growth. About being African - the root and essence of being 'me'. About life in Africa - the problems of the continent in relations to the world and the purpose of existence.

My inner being ached. The society could not relieve me. Its glamour, music and wine offered less solace. My belly longed for answers. A mortal sojourn began.

So it was at the age 11 that I found a cobweb-sheltered treasure chest hidden under my maternal grandmother's bed. I was alone in her room. My heart was pumping fast. What could be the content of this chest?

I found diamond. Priceless treasure. I mean, books. Classics in both Yoruba and English. 90 per cent of the English books were the Longman series; *Treasure Island*, *Return to Treasure Island*,

*King Solomon's Mines, Allan Quatermain, et al.*

Then I found D. O. Fagunwa. Rather, the Sage found me. He spent up to 24 months with me. He lived in my house for two years from 1981 to 1982.

On the first night, he taught me from *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* that "... *like the sonorous proverb do we drum the agidigbo; it is the wise who dance to it, and the learned who understand its language. The story which follows is a veritable agidigbo; it is I who will drum it, and you the wise heads who will interpret it.*"

I went on to read *Irinkerindo Ninu Igbo Elegbeje, Ireke Onibudo, Igbo Olodumare* and *Adiitu Olodumare*.

D. O. Fagunwa taught me about life. He pointed the way up to God Almighty and showed me the mysteries of the unknown worlds. He took me through adventure. He lavished me with the beauties of African culture and language.

He taught me the *omoluwabi* principles – the ‘*iwa akin*’ and imperishable values of bravery, courage, discipline, industry, endurance, focus, humility, selflessness, persistence, focus, accountability, time management, fidelity, leadership and service to humanity.

I long to see these *omoluwabi* principles in Nigeria some day soon.

D. O. Fagunwa also taught me the ways of the world, the way of women and the path to happiness. The Sage defined my worldview.

He shaped my perception about service, leadership, women and the Black race. He answered my questions. He left me in the later part of 1982 with a peace of mind.

My quest began. I visited all known bookshops in Akure. Toyin Bookshop, Dims New Era and others I would not readily recollect their names. I was a regular face in one antiquity bookshop

then located beside the Sacred Heart Cathedral on Oba Adesida Road.

In 1986 when I visited my antiquity bookshop, I was abruptly launched into the strange world of Oswald Chambers, Oswald Sanders, Watchman Nee, Richard Baxter, John Milton, William Shakespeare and Geoffrey Chaucer to mention but a few.

It was a rendezvous with Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Sanders' *The Man God Uses*, Watchman Nee's *What Shall This Man Do?*, Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* and *The Canterbury Tales* of Geoffrey Chaucer.

These books were worn with age. They were resold to me but not until the owner queried whether I was studying theology, philosophy or something. Of course, I just wrote my school certificate examinations. He wondered what I would be doing with these books when I could content myself with the Mills and Boon series.

The books were really hard to understand. They stretched my teenage mind beyond comprehension. I laboured to read and was rewarded. My philosophies of life, work, leadership and responsibilities were invigorated through my fellowships with these timeless authors.

I lost D. O. Fagunwa to an inner conflict of ideology in the later part of 1986.

Twenty years later, in August 2006 I found him at the Murtala International Airport when I was returning to Accra from Lagos.

The Sage was 96. He was in the company of the Nobel Laureate. He glowed. I shouted, '*Baba, eyin ni yen.*' The two lecturers from University of Ibadan beside me were bemused and embarrassed at my excitement. As they looked on, I rushed and embraced D. O. Fagunwa.

The quest continues.