

THE FREING OF YAW ASARE

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Introduction

A study of the apprenticeship system in the wayside workshops¹ of Adabraka, Accra was carried out between July 1971 and June 1973. In the course of the study several "freeing" ceremonies, the celebrations which terminate apprenticeships, were observed. One of the most interesting was the freeing of Yaw Asare,² a fitting apprentice at T-K Motors. The events during the ceremony suggest both the socialization and vocational training aspects of apprenticeship in Accra.

By entering an apprenticeship a person undertakes to learn a trade through working for a skilled tradesman. The tradesman, known as the "master" provides for at least partial maintenance of the apprentice in addition to instructing him in the skills of the trade. Learning occurs primarily, however, through the performance of tasks, simple ones at first leading to more complicated ones as the individual progresses. The master receives payments at the beginning of the apprenticeship in recognition of his responsibilities vis-a-vis the apprentice. Once it is recognized that the training has been completed, the apprentice and his family begin to gather the payments required to "thank" the master and formally terminate the apprenticeship.

When he is notified that they are ready, the master sets a time and place for the freeing ceremony which is convenient for all.

The ceremony itself is run by the master and follows the same pattern as the one in which he himself was freed. It was reported that an Ewe freed by a Ga master, in the Ga way, would free his own apprentices in the same way, regardless of ethnic background. The form and content differ slightly for each ethnic group, and among the trades. But the basic elements remain similar: there is a humiliating experience for the apprentice (which might, in normal circumstance, bring a strong emotional reaction); tools of the trade are presented; acceptance into the brotherhood of tradesmen is given; advice is heaped upon the initiate; and accounts of his past conduct are related by the master.

The freeing ceremony can, for descriptive purposes, be divided into two parts. The secret part occurs just before dawn and is attended only by master tradesmen, the apprentice and a few of his kinsmen. At this time, the payments are presented and counted, the guidance and protection of the ancestors invoked, and a ritual performed in which tools, advice, and a blessing are given to the initiate. The second part of the freeing takes place in public. Gifts (including drinks) from friends, relatives

1. The term wayside workshop is used colloquially in Ghana, referring to small craft enterprises which depend chiefly on passing traffic for customers. These workshops are found throughout Accra where, fitters, carpenters, tailors, blacksmiths and other craftsmen have rented, or squatted on vacant plots and corners of courtyards or in hallways.
2. All personal names and all locations have been disguised in respect for the privacy of the people who took part in the study.

and fellow apprentices of the former apprentice, as well as from associates and relatives of the master are announced, the senior guests give speeches filled with advice for the young tradesman. The food and drink part of the freeing payments are consumed by the guests. There may also be a few partly humiliating stunts performed to teach the initiate some aspect of the behaviour befitting a tradesman.

Yaw's Freeing

Yaw Asare arose two hours before dawn on his "freedom day", and awakened his younger brother, who shared the rented room. Outside, asleep in a car which Yaw was repairing for a customer, one of his elder brothers, an unemployed driver awoke and came in to get washed and dressed.

Yaw put on a clean, white shirt and newly pressed pants, took his few tools and the agreement paper, and locked the room. It took them 20 minutes to start the customer's car and keep it from stalling, then Yaw, who has no driving licence, drove with his two brothers to his "cousin's" house in Kaneshie. Here, they picked up a white ram and drove on to the house of an elder sister who joined them, bringing along a large basket of foodstuffs. On the way to the centre of Accra to pick up Yaw's guarantor³, they stopped at the house of Akakpo, a former T-K apprentice who had freed himself a few months earlier. The guarantor, Agbo, had already left and, when they arrived at the master's house, they found him already there, along with Obimpeh, his patrilineal cousin, who has a fitting workshop very close to T-K Motors.

The apprentices who lived with one master, Tamakloe, were busy sweeping the courtyard and washing his car. By this time, the sky was becoming light, and several people were concerned because Kumah, the other master, hadn't arrived yet. A few of his friends drove to Nima to locate the wake-keeping which he was supposed to have attended, but the search proved fruitless. At one point during the search, Tamakloe climbed a tree and broke off several bunches of leaves, which were later used in the ritual. When the search party arrived back at Tamakloe's, they found Kumah had arrived, red-eyed and somewhat inebriated from the wake-keeping.

By this time it was almost 6.00 a.m. Yaw Asare, his elder sister, his brother, his guarantor, Obimpeh, and the two masters, went into Tamakloe's hall and sat down. Yaw himself kneeled on the floor at one end of the room, facing the wall. In front of him on the floor, spread out on green leaves, were his tools and a calabash of corn flour mixed with water. Beside this was a bottle of DZOMI (red palm oil). There were two kinds of leaves, the smaller ones, which Tamakloe picked from the tree, are called ANYATSI, which is a species traditionally used in building a fence around a fetish house. The longer leaves were AVENYA; they are herbs considered to have the power to expel evil.

Tamakloe examined the drinks, and foodstuffs, and he verified all the quantities. Then the guarantor handed him thirty cedis in cash, which he carefully counted. Kumah then squatted down in front of Yaw beside the tools and leaves, picked up the calabash and began stirring the contents with his thumb. He poured a libation, saying:

3. A guarantor often plays an important role by providing a "personal surety" of the sincerity of the youth just entering an apprenticeship. This may be a parent, guardian, senior relative or friend who, on behalf of the apprentice discusses apprenticeship terms with the master, is a party to the agreement and puts up some or all of the money for the payments. The guarantor sometimes shares in the youth's maintenance and is the one who is approached should the apprentice run away, misbehave or become ill.

"Our great grandfathers, we call upon you; great grandmothers, we call upon you. The old great fitters of Accra, known and unknown, we call upon you all. Today we are freeing Yaw Asare. Anyone who is here who says he will have no peace, no job to do, no drink, no children, then drink the drink I am pouring down for you and be intoxicated against this very person. But there should be peace with those who wish him peace, prosperity in job, happy marriage and children.

We don't know the enemy; you know the enemy. Anyone who does not wish him a long life should knock his foot against a log and fall down and die. Let him die freely. There will never be peace if an enemy is around. Peace for those who want to lead a just life and to work hard; theirs is the water."

Tamakloe then repeated the same actions, saying the following:

"Amen. I shall continue what has already been said. Great old fitters, the late Mr. Vira, Mr. Tofio and all those who are no more, I can't remember all. All great fitters who passed away leaving the job for us to do. People like Mr. Michael (Kumah's master, who arrived later) who gave us the skill and we have given to our son also. Let him work hard, with strength, with peace, and with patience, but let him get work to do and do it with peace. We are freeing him today. We are not freeing him because of anything bad; he stayed with us with good manners he worked humbly and faithfully.

We thank his parents that they suffered and brought drinks to come and free their son. We thank them very much that they are not shamed by their son and we too, we do not shame them. We bless him; let work be prosperous. May God bless him. We admit him with both hands into our midst; let the great fitters of Accra bless him . . .

We are giving him a spanner; let it be a good day. Anywhere he goes and there is a lorry which has been broken down for a long period, even for ten years, and cannot move at all; if he touches it with his spanner, let it spark and move away!"

Continuing to speak, Tamakloe poured the DZOMI over the tools and leaves, which he then lifted and placed in Yaw's outstretched hands.

"We are not giving him this spanner to break doors with; it is for work. Work is done with the hammer also. Pliers are used in holding things, and in tightening things firmly. You do not take a spanner to go and do goldsmithing; it does the work of fitting. The hammer is an object without a hole inside. Do not let anyone see your weak points; work hard with strength and faith. So then, on this, his freeing day, the spanner and all these things are given to him. Let him work with prosperity."

Kumah then stood up and continued with some advice.

"Respect your master's wife and do not chase her. You will go astray if you go chasing your master's wife. If you see something of your master going wrong, you should run and inform him about it so that he must take care of himself. That is how a boy and his master should be. Even if you are forced, you should not go and be a ruffian in the town. You should work with faith.

Put forth your hand quickly so that I lay down the spanners into your arms. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven (counting out the spanners into Yaw's hands, again). I give you spanners; I give you them on a good day. To put them under a bed and then be a ruffian in town—we are not for that! Take care of them. All people will add to them."

Tamakloe then took the calabash of flour and water and stood beside Yaw, jokingly telling him to kneel lower, because he couldn't reach (Yaw is tall and Tamakloe is very short). The next words which he spoke were punctuated by his taking a sip

from the calabash and ("Piearh!") spraying the mixture at Yaw and then pounding with his hand the place sprayed on Yaw's body. This was done, first to the top of the head, then to the chest, then to the back. It was repeated several times on Yaw's head, and, with the final statement, Yaw received a full blast right in the face.

"We are giving you spanners; work with them. We are not giving them to you, to break somebody's door. We are not giving you the spanners to be kept under a bed, while you go and be a washman. Piearh! There should be peace in your mind. Your brain should be open to understanding. Piearh! There should be peace in your heart. Respect your father and mother. Piearh! Today we are leaving you to go into the city. You go into the world. You should work and earn your own living. Today all the world is for you. Take care of your parents. Be hard working. The money they spent on you, you are going to repay it. It is your debt and you will pay it in its place. It is a debt they have given you.

All things are in their place—fine. Piearh! We give you spanners in the names of great fitters. Kumah and Tamakloe are giving you spanners with righteousness. You have stayed with us peacefully, take the spanners and do the same. The work that one chooses is what one does. You have learned your work and finished successfully. Take these spanners and work with them. Don't go and break doors with them. Work with them and help your family. Don't marry, though woman should stay with man. But work and have something down before marrying a wife. Piearh! I give you spanners."

While Tamakloe was speaking, Kumah interjected several times to add something, or to repeat a phrase in chorus. Kumah then stood over Yaw, and performed roughly the same ritual.

The masters explained that the leaves possessed great power and that words said over them were rendered very potent.

The atmosphere relaxed while the power of the leaves was explained. Tamakloe poured schnapps (the first appearance of alcohol) in a glass and it was passed around. This part of the freeing ceremony was now completed and everyone moved out of the small room to sit on chairs ranged in a circle under a tree, outside.

As the sun rose higher, more guests arrived and drinks were served. In the meantime, four of the T-K apprentices slaughtered the ram, and cut it into pieces. The women present began cooking the food.

Three senior fitters arrived, and each one took Yaw back into the room away from the guests, blessed him and sprayed him with the liquid from the calabash. The most distinguished of these senior fitters was Mr. Micheal, Kumah's mother's brother and his former master. Yaw reported later that when he went into the room with Mr. Michael, the following happened.

"He drank some of the mixture and sprayed it into my face saying that, if I went into the world, people would pour water into my face, people would slap me in the ear, people would do me all sorts of harm, but I should not retaliate. I should do as he himself has done."

Back outside, Yaw sat bare-chested under the tree surrounded by the guests. One of Tamakloe's "cousins" acted as master of ceremonies. All who had advice to offer were given the floor and Yaw stood solemnly listening. Drinks presented to him were consumed by all present. After everyone had eaten, the advice continued, accompanied by phonograph music. Different people stressed their own particular themes. A devoutly Catholic uncle of Yaw gave a long speech about the importance of following Christian teachings. The older relatives and tradesmen spoke mainly of respect for one's elders. A young mechanic just returned from abroad stressed versatility and continued learning. Tamakloe told everyone about Yaw's working habits

and mentioned a few of his faults. He made Yaw take part in a humiliating demonstration of how it was necessary to work within the rules laid down for the trade. Another fitter warned that frugality was essential to achieve success.

By noon all advice had been given and the gathering began to break up. Yaw and his relatives thanked and shook hands with Kumah, Tamakloe and the other guests; and then everyone departed, including the two masters, who were driving to Koforidua to tow a customer's car back to Accra.

Descriptions of freeing ceremonies by other tradesmen were very similar to the ones observed. All used AVENYA leaves, although sometimes in a slightly different way. In some, it was reported, dew on the AVENYA leaves is used, and the blood of a slaughtered ram or fowl is sprinkled on the initiate's feet. The elements of initiation, advice and celebration were always present.

It is obvious that the kind of advice given to the apprentice on his freeing day is aimed at producing a responsible, productive citizen as well as a skilful tradesman. The freeing reinforces actual experience in the workshop, where co-operation and respect for authority are basic to work organization.