

WHY THE WASP HAS A TINY WAIST

(As told by Abena at Chakping, Ghana on 16/03/2023)

Introduction

The following story offers insights into the communal spirit of the Konkomba people. It highlights the communal nature of Konkomba funerals and the necessity of teamwork. The story presents a wasp that refuses to join his community during a funeral activity and gets punished as a result. The ultimate consequence is that the wasp is left with a tiny waist in perpetuity.

Story

There lived a certain *ubor* who ruled over an animal kingdom. In this kingdom, the tradition was that whenever one's in-laws had a funeral, everyone would assist the fellow to perform the *kinachuŋ* dance.

One day *sandee's* in-law passed away but when *ulangben* was informed about it, he refused to attend the funeral. Fortunately the other members of the community generously assisted *sandee* in attending the funeral and performing the *kinachuŋ* dance.

In the course of time, *ulangben* also lost his in-law. When he told his community, everyone declined to go and assist him so *ulangben* went alone. He took *kilon*, took the drink he purchased for the funeral, added *ligangaln* and set off for the funeral.¹

When he got closer to his in-laws' house, he broke into song:

(The storyteller intones the chorus and signals to her audience to join in.)

Likpakpaln transcription

Chorus

M gbaa mbiin ee,
Garwa sen ki sen garwa. (2x)

Koin koin koin,
Garwa sen ki sen garwa.

Chak chak lan chak,
Garwa sen ki sen garwa.

Tu le tu le tu le,
Garwa sen ki sen garwaaa!!!

English translation

I've let out a loud cry,
[But] the world flees and flees. (2x)

Koin koin koin,
[But] the world flees and flees.

Chak chak lan chak
[But] the world flees and flees.

Tu le tu le tu le
[But] the world flees and flees!!!

Ulangben's in-laws heard the singing and drumming and concluded that the former and his kith and kin were approaching. Ulangben kept singing as he inched closer:

(The storyteller intones the song and her audience join in again.)

Likpakpahn transcription

English translation

Chorus

M gbaa mbiin ee,
Garwa sen ki sen garwa. (2x)

I've let out a loud cry,
[But] the world flees and flees. (2x)

Koin koin koin,
Garwa sen ki sen garwa.

Koin koin koin,
[But] the world flees and flees.

Chak chak lan chak,
Garwa sen ki sen garwa.

Chak chak lan chak
[But] the world flees and flees.

Tu le tu le tu le,
Garwa sen ki sen garwaaa!!!

Tu le tu le tu le
[But] the world flees and flees!!!

'One wonders how he performed the *tiban* dance,' interjects one of Abena's audience – apparently in reference to the last stanza above, which suggests that *ulangben* danced with some bangles tied around his feet. However, the storyteller ignores her and proceeds with her rendition as follows:

Ulangben soon emerged, whereupon his in-laws realised that he had come to the funeral alone. On helping their son-in-law take off all the musical instruments and the drink he was carrying, they noticed that the weight of the things had compressed his waist into a tiny one.

When someone asks for your assistance in his or her time of need, help him or her. Don't be selfish. *Ulangben's* refusal to help others left him with a tiny waist. He wasn't created with such a tiny waist

Note

1.

In the Konkomba culture, it is mandatory for sons-in-law to send a designated quantity of drinks – usually alcoholic ones such as pito (a local drink brewed from guinea corn) or akpeteshie (a Ghanaian spirit akin to vodka) – to their in-laws' funerals. The drink carried by the wasp in this story is in fulfilment of this custom.

A Glossary of Likpakpahn Words and Phrases

chak chak lan chak:

an ideophone employed by the storyteller to imitate the sound produced

by the ankle bangles the wasp danced with as he journeyed.

kilon (also spelt kilun):

an hourglass-shaped musical instrument with round skin coverings at both ends. Known variously as dondo, tama, dundun, kalungu or lunna across West Africa, it is usually placed under the armpit and struck with a stick to produce music. One can change the pitch or tone of the sound by compressing and releasing the strings connecting the two skin coverings at both ends. This makes kilon suitable for use as a talking drum in some West African cultures.

kinachu:

the cultural dance of the Konkomba people. It is a communal dance that requires the effective participation of a large group rather than an individual. Though mostly associated with funerals, it can also be performed outside funeral occasions such as in church, at social and political gatherings among others.

koin koin koin:

an ideophone employed by the storyteller to imitate the sound produced by the drum ulangben was drumming.

ligangaln:

a cylindrical drum with skin coverings at both ends. It comes in different sizes that determine the sound it produces. The big drum (ligangaln-sakpeln) produces bass or a low-pitched sound while the small drum (kiganganbik) usually produces a high-pitched sound.

sandee:

Likpakpaln word for a bunny or a rabbit.

tiban:

a traditional Konkomba dance performed by male dancers, who rhythmically stamp their feet on the ground. The dancers usually perform this dance with metallic bangles tied around their ankles.

tu le tu le tu le:

an ideophone employed by the storyteller to imitate the sound produced by the wooden flute ulangben was playing.

ubor:

the political head of a Konkomba community. Ubor is usually the eldest male member of the royal family. He inherits that position from his father after the latter's demise.

ulangben:

Likpakpaln word for a wasp.