

A MAN SHOULD LOVE HIS WIVES EQUALLY

(As told by Uninkpel Gmasimboon at Chakping, Ghana on 16/03/2022)

Introduction

The story below calls into question the ability of a man to love all his wives equally in a polygamous marriage. The story presents the political head of an unidentified Konkomba community who marries three wives but does not love them equally. However, the wife that eventually gives him the greatest joy, though short-lived, is the very wife he loathes. As the narrator states at the end of his narrative, the story condemns discrimination while promoting unconditional love for all, especially in polygamous homes.

Story

‘My story goes like this ...,’ Gmasimboon announces to his audience.

‘Ehen!’ responds the audience, after which the storyteller proceeds thus:

There once lived a certain *ubor* who had more than one wife. Unfortunately, he did not love one of them as he did the others. One day, he sent the wife he disliked to fetch water from the river. When the woman got to the river, she found something called *kijabakr*.

On seeing the woman, the thing said: ‘Touch me and find out what happens.’ The woman obliged and brushed the thing with a stick, whereupon the thing started singing::

(But before the storyteller can intone the song, one of his audience chips in with some information the storyteller omitted:)

‘Meanwhile *ubor* had sent the woman to fetch water so that he could take his bath and sit in council,’ the audience points out.

(The storyteller welcomes this additional information and integrates it into his narration as follows:)

All this while that the woman was at the river, *ubor* was waiting in the *kinakuɔk* for her to return with water so that he could take his bath and sit in council. Now, when the woman touched the thing, it broke into song:

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

Likpakpaln transcription

Duur ‘baa duur ‘baa,

Kaa see ‘baa kaa duur ‘baa.

English translation

I touched someone; I touched
someone,

Unaware that no one touches the

Duur 'baa duur 'baa,
 Kaa see 'baa kaa duur 'baa.
 M daa maa loor;
 Maa gaan ni.
 M daa maa loor;
 Maa gaan ni.
 Taa taa 'finn nju -
 Ki finn nju, ki finn nju.
 Taa taa 'finn nju -
 Ki finn nju, ki finn nju eee!!!

other.
 I touched someone; I touched
 someone,
 Unaware that no one touches the
 other.
 I've bought my car;
 [I don't discriminate.
 I've bought my car;
 [I don't discriminate.
 Step all over (and) wash the rear -
 And wash the rear, and wash the rear.
 Step all over (and) wash the rear -
 And wash the rear, and wash the
 rear!!!

On hearing the song, the woman started dancing. The thing kept singing its song:

Likpakpaln transcription

Duur 'baa duur 'baa,
 Kaa see 'baa kaa duur 'baa.
 Duur 'baa duur 'baa,
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And... *(The storyteller is interrupted again by another person from the audience before he can complete this sentence.)*

'The woman broke into a dance,' interjects this audience.

'... and the woman broke into a dance and failed to return home,' Gmasimboon confirms and resumes his narration:

After waiting for a long time, *ubor* sent another of his wives - the second one,

for he had three wives – to ascertain what had caused the other wife’s hold-up at the river. On reaching the riverside, the second wife stood on a hill and called out angrily:

‘Why are you idling while *ubor* is waiting for you even as a lot of people have arrived at the palace to see him?’

The ‘unloved wife’ then told her co-wife, ‘Touch this thing here and see what happens. Touch this thing here and see what happens.’ The second wife did as her colleague asked, whereupon the thing broke into song again:

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And wash the rear, and wash the
rear!!!

On hearing this, the second wife also broke into a dance. (*The second person who interjected earlier, simultaneously says the last bit of this sentence with the storyteller – obviously interested in the fact that the two women danced to the thing’s song. This time, however, Gmasimboon ignores him and continues his rendition as follows:*)

Consequently, the second wife also failed to return; so *ubor* had to send his last wife. On reaching the riverside, the last wife called out angrily to her co-wives. The two wives then invited her to touch the thing the first one had found at the river. When she did, the thing started singing again:

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Step all over (and) wash the rear -

And wash the rear, and wash the rear!!!

ubor waited for the return of his wives to no avail. As a result, he finally went on horseback to find out what had held them up at the river. When he got there, he scolded his wives for their behaviour. The wives then told him to touch the thing the wife he loathed had found. On doing so, the thing burst into song again:

Likpakpaln transcription

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ubor also broke into a dance. But while dancing in excitement on his horse, the horse accidentally stepped on the thing and destroyed it.

Therefore, when you have wives, you have to love them equally. Never discriminate against any one of them on grounds that she isn't a good wife.

'Hear! Hear!' a female from the audience reacts to the moral lesson or advice Gmasimboon gives at the end of his tale.

A Glossary of Likpakpaln Words

kijabakr:

Likpakpaln word for an aquatic creature indigenous, perhaps, to West Africa. There is no readily available English equivalent/translation.

kinakuok:

a round room that serves as the main entrance to a typical Konkomba house. It has two doors at both ends to serve as the passage in or out of a house. It also serves as a place for relaxing or hosting visitors/guests. In ubor's palace, kinakuok usually has a stage or a raised platform where ubor sits to hold meetings and perform other functions. Thus, kinakuok can assume political significance rather than being a mere passage or a place for hanging out or playing host to visitors. Within this political context, kinakuok can be used as a synonym or a metonym (in literary speech) for ubor or the authority of ubor. It is therefore normal for a Konkomba to say that 'Kinakuok has spoken' – meaning, 'Ubor has spoken.'

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.