**Significance of Proverbs in Africa and Beyond**

(by Israel Mbagu)

The sayings of Africa are some of the most profound words you’ll ever hear. My mother never fails to throw in a handful of Ibo proverbs to keep in mind and keep me grounded whenever we’re deep in conversations. Take the famous Tanzanian proverb “many hands make light work”. This is a saying that’s been adopted all over the world and encourages people to work together. Another famous example is the Nigerian proverb “It takes a village to raise a child”. These words of wisdom span the globe even appearing in American movies and books. [Proverbs](engtuto.com/proverbs) have had a great influence on the lifestyles of many people, mainly through means of religion and culture. The word “proverb” from the Latin “pro-verbium” (“pro” meaning “in front of” and “verbium” meaning “word”), suggests that a proverb takes the place of ordinary words. The ways in which proverbs vary from people to people demonstrates the differences between cultures; however it’s common for proverbs to show how very similar people really are. A proverb from Southeast Asia demonstrates this factor. The Malay proverb “Give him your foot and he will demand your thigh” is very similar to the British proverb “Give him an inch and he will take a mile.” The value of African and non African idioms and proverbs is far reaching and there are numerous examples of their benefits.

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They share with the world the practical wisdom the people have learned in their way of life. The Zulu proverb “You cannot chase two antelope at once” developed when African people found they could only capture one animal at a time because if they tried to focus on more than one, the animals they hunt would all get away. This practical wisdom of tackling one thing at a time applies to people all over the world not just those chasing after wildlife. Proverbs also provide an understanding of the way of life in Africa. The view on gender roles in Africa is summed up by the proverb from Ghana that says “A woman is a flower in a garden; her husband is the fence around it”. Proverbs help to dispel the belief that a people are barbaric and uneducated for there’s often a stigma surrounding people who can’t speak English and aren’t educated in a typical western manner. When these proverbs are translated it’s easy to see the intelligence and life experience the people possess. It also shows that a society and its way of life aren’t superior to that of another society.

It’s often said that a picture can tell a thousand words and proverbs have the ability to explain a thousand words in one simple sentence or statement. There are many long winded essays, articles and papers on how thinking positively is beneficial. The Tanzanian proverb “One who bathes willingly with cold water doesn’t feel the cold” sums this up in one line. In addition to positive thinking, proverbs tend to be uplifting and inspiring. One such example is the Zulu proverb “You should face your responsibilities squarely; no elephant ever found its trunk too heavy”.

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