

**African Proverb of The Month**  
**September 2008**

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*Entagambirwa esabala bw'aibumba. (Haya)*

*Asiyehambilika hujabiri mto kwa mtumbwi wa udongo mfinyanzi. (Swahili)*

*A stubborn person sails in a clay boat. (English)*

Haya ( [Tanzania](#) ) Proverb

## **Background, Explanation, Meaning and Everyday Use**

The Haya are one of the ethnic groups in Kagera Region in Tanzania. This proverb is used to conscientize people who are self-centered in their own ways of doing things. It is used to point out the danger of disobedience. The following story (found in our online "African Stories Database") depicts how disaster occurred in one of the villages as a result of disobedience:

Once upon a time a man married a beautiful maiden. The mother-in-law saw to it that the maiden learned the customs and traditions of the family. After a week the mother-in-law brought the maiden to a secret place in the house and showed her a big pot that was closed tightly with a big lid. The maiden was forbidden to open it and was told never to go near it. The mother-in-law insisted, "Never, never touch the pot!" "Yes, Mama," she replied.

The maiden was amazed as she watched the pot replenish itself with water as the mother-in-law commanded. The family never had to fetch water from the lake like all the other villagers. It happened that one day the mother-in-law was away and was late to return home. There was no water for cooking. "Why can't I fetch water from the pot?" the maiden asked herself. "Let me try to open the pot." She went to the secret place and as soon as she touched the pot it shattered into many pieces. The water began to flow out of the pot and didn't stop. The maiden called "*Mulanjuna! Mulanjuna!*" ("Help! Help!"). but nobody came.

Through a mysterious power, the mother-in-law sensed that someone had disobeyed and touched the pot. She hurried home and at her arrival, she noticed the water flowing out of the pot. She had a hoe that had a magic power. She took it from a skin-purse she always carried and running towards the flood she cried: "*Oite akalo osige akandi! Oite abalo osige aband!*" ("Kill one and spare the others!")

The maiden had already drowned and the house and their field were covered with water as well. The mother-in-law stopped the water where she placed the magic hoe.

The villagers gathered in shock to watch the lake that had no outlet. They named it Ikimba. The Haya Proverb *Entagambirwa esabala bw'aibumba* (A stubborn person sails in a clay boat) was remembered by all who passed by. Lake Ikimba that killed the maiden is still there today as the

result of the maiden's disobedience.

## **Biblical Parallels**



Two of the outstanding Bible chapters are *Genesis 2* and *3*. To quote some verses:

### *Genesis 3:6*

“Then the Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it. He told him, ‘You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is evil. You must not eat the fruit of that tree. If you eat it, you will die that same day.’”

### *Genesis 3:6*

“The woman saw how beautiful the tree was and how good its fruit would be to eat,

and she thought how wonderful it would be to become wise. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, and he also ate it."

These bible passages from Genesis' creation account tell the story of Original Sin. We are all sinners from our birth because of this. This sin on the part of God's first man and first woman is clearly presented as the result of disobedience rooted in arrogance. Adam and Eve forgot who they really were, who God had created them to be, and so they disobeyed Him.

They had been created in the likeness of God, but they desired to be something they were not. They desired to be "like gods" (*Genesis 3:5*). Whenever we sin we forget who we are.

It was a free gift from the mother-in-law to the maiden, the gift of having water for free without having to work for it. But through disobedience, the maiden lost everything including her own life. *A stubborn person sails in a clay boat.*

In the great plan of salvation God sent his Son Jesus who humbled himself, took the form of a human being, was born of woman, and died on a cross so that through his own obedience, reconciliation would be achieved for all people. Now we are children of God through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

St. Paul states in his letter to the *Romans*: "What shall we say then? Should we continue to live in sin so that God's grace will increase?" (*Romans 6:1-2*). Certainly not! We have died to sin. How then can we go on living in it? Faith in the Law of the Lord is stressed in

*Psalm*

119:1-2: "Happy are those whose lives are faultless, who live according to the law of the Lord. Happy are those who follow his commands, who obey him with all their hearts."

We read in *John's Gospel*: "'Why do you not understand what I say?' Jesus asked. 'It is because you cannot bear to listen to my message. You are the children of the devil, and you want to follow your father's desire...Whenever the devil tells a lie, he is only doing what is natural to him'" (*John 8:43-44*).

## Contemporary Use and Religious Application



What does this story mean to us today? This is the story of real life and it represents what is happening today in our midst. Some people undertake important jobs without caring about the various outcomes. Others want to be called heroes just by boasting about themselves and by following their own thinking. But every successful strategy can be accomplished by following laws and by obeying rules. Yet instead we hear about people dying from accidents that could be avoided. We see many kinds of revolts because of ignorance of ethics and regulations. These always end in trouble. For example, there are people who build houses in alleys during the dry season. But when the rainy season comes their houses are swept away and their properties are lost. We see our people dying with HIV/AIDS. It is not because they have not been told but because they choose to "open the forbidden pot." They disregard the good advice and guidance of having one husband/wife and abstaining from sex before marriage.

We hear much about corruption everywhere. This is a huge problem in African countries. This is selfishness and self-centeredness rooted in arrogance, a root of many sins and evils. *Entagamb ilwa Esabala bw'aibumba*

(  
*A stubborn person sails in a clay boat*  
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**NOTE:** This proverb is explained in Proverb Number 249 on page 35 in *500 Haya Proverbs* by

Hellen Byera Nestor (Bukoba: North Western Publishers, 1994).

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