

African Proverb of the Month January 2008

Nalung'wa naba. (Sukuma)

Nimeumwa na mbung'o. (Swahili)

I have been bitten by a tsetse fly. (English) Sukuma ([Tanzania](#)) Proverb

Background, Explanation, Meaning and Everyday Use

This humorous Sukuma proverb in Tanzania refers to a person who relentlessly pesters another person until he or she pays off a debt. There is a similar Sukuma proverb that says To promise an eye to a blind person meaning that the blind person will pester you until you fulfill your promise.

The proverb also refers to a person who, like a tsetse fly, persistently and relentlessly keeps coming after you again and again until he or she gets what the person wants.

In Swahili there are three words for a tsetse fly: mbung'o, ndorobo, and chafuo. Usage varies from place to place. The most commonly used word is mbung'o.

Biblical Parallels

Luke 18:1-8: "Parable of the Unscrupulous Judge and the Poor Widow."

Luke 11:5-13: "Episode on the Importance of Persistence in Prayer."

Luke 15:11-32: "Parable of the Prodigal Son." The father goes out every day to await the return of his lost son without getting tired or discouraged.

Judges 16: 4-22: "Story of Samson and Delilah." Delilah pestered her husband until Samson told her the source of his great strength.

Contemporary Use and Religious Application

God is persistent in following us and challenging us. See the dramatic poem *The Hound of Heaven* by Francis Thompson.

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat -- and a voice beat

More instant than the Feet.

In turn we should be persistent in prayer. Jesus Christ says: "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him (Matthew 7:7-11). And similarly Luke 11:13: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

We should not get discouraged and despair in times of difficulties. Whether it is war, poverty, sickness, disease, trials, failures, mistakes, weaknesses, limitations, misunderstandings, etc. we should persevere, we should endure, we should be persistent. And in the spirit of St. Paul: "Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9).

NOTE: This proverb was used to describe my assistants/helpers in researching and writing the definitive version of the famous Sukuma myth of the clever young man Masala Kulangwa and the monster Shing'weng'we. It was published by Mathews Bookstore in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in December, 2006 in booklets of 32 pages each in three separate languages:

English: *Tears of Joy: African Story about Heroes and Monsters*

Swahili: *Machozi ya Furaha: Hadithi ya Mashujaa na Majitu*

Sukuma: *Shisoji ja Buyegi: Jigano ja Lishing'weng'we*

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