

**African Proverb of the Month**  
**December, 2000**

---

*Bahana owo gulimu.* (Haya)

*Aonywaye na kufuata ni yule mwenye roho tulivu.* (Swahili)

*A person who is not disciplined cannot be cautioned.* (English)

Haya ( [Tanzania](#) ) Proverb

**Explanation:**

Proverbs offer practical advice, both spiritual and physical, in our daily life. Nowadays, the saying *watoto wa siku hizi* (*children of nowadays*) seems to be more applicable than it used to be long ago.

Let us take the example of AIDS. The united strength of church people, government officials and NGOs to stop this rampant disease has not brought the necessary changes. The Haya people in Tanzania say *Bahana owo gulimu. A person who is not disciplined cannot be cautioned*

. See page 22 of the book

*500 Haya Proverbs.*

One day I was talking with a bride to be who was taking medical examination before marriage. She said that if she is to die she should die once and for all. People seem to play with life as if they are authors of their own lives. Another striking example is when a lawyer, a doctor or a teacher divorces his wife and marries a woman whose husband died from AIDS (or the opposite case). Old people repeat this Haya proverb when they discuss the problem of pregnancies among schoolgirls. You could think that girls would be more cautious when seeing how people are dying from AIDS. Instead of taking care of themselves they dare to play with fire. It is true that a person who is not disciplined cannot be cautioned. Discipline should be applied from childhood. A child who listens will do the same when he or she is grown up. Those people who are ready to follow guidance grew up in a society, which shaped them as they were exposing themselves to it. If you ask why some people don't like to be corrected of their shortcomings they say it is because

*Aonywaye na kufuata ni yule mwenye roho tulivu*

.

*A person who is not disciplined cannot be cautioned*

. That is the meaning of this proverb.

This proverb is well known in many African ethnic groups. The Kerewe people in Mwanza, Tanzania say *Gambilwa ni muntu. A person is one who can listen to counseling.* The Wagita people in Musoma, Tanzania say

*Unu katongelwa anomutima.*

*You can discipline one who has a "heart."*

As the heart is the center of a human being, one has to have a "heart," that is, one has to respond to what is being said in order to be regarded as being alive. Proverbs are challenging, have a listening attitude and welcome counseling from every corner in life.

### **Biblical Parallels**

In Chapters 12 and 13 of the Gospel of *John* we read the story of Jude Iscariot that is a good example of the proverb *Bah*  
*ana owo gulimu.*

"Jesus declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me... It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish. So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do'" (*John 13:21-27*).

In this story what Jesus said didn't affect Judas. He had no heart (mind) to reflect on what Jesus told him. It is said that he did not care about the poor. He was a thief. He carried the moneybag and would help himself from it.

Another example from the Bible is the *Proverbs* 9:7 that states that if you correct a mocker, you make an enemy. But *P*  
*roverbs*  
8:32 says: "Now, my sons, listen to me; listen to instruction and learn to be wise; do not ignore it."

Proverbs in the Bible invite people to receive counseling because even the spirit of God comes to us through careful listening. Proverbs are very meaningful, make one to think properly, enrich cultures and religious language and make one grow in wisdom. They are useful if they are articulated in their own language because sometimes words fail to get the exact meaning. The *Old Testament* shows what is human beings are. Despite all the love of God for the Israelites they were stubborn and didn't repent; nor did they give up their sins until they were scattered all over the earth. In our days we are not better than they are.

### **Religious Use**

Proverbs had a great role (and still have) in our African societies. Besides being recreational and entertaining, proverbs build community. When families came together, they were united in love and grow together as a family and by sharing the same proverbs were encouraged to develop a kind of common spirituality. Proverbs acted as a link. In homilies and talks proverbs such as this Haya proverb can be used in both religious and cultural ways to help bring about personal awareness in one's life.

Proverbs are also group media communication. They are very politely used because they don't pinpoint anybody. They deliver messages to everybody who is ready to listen. As God's children, proverbs bring us together in a spirit of love and grow to maturity.

**Resources:** *500 Haya Proverbs* by Hellen Byera Nestor (Bukoba: North Western Publishers, 1994).

Sister Rita Ishengoma, STH  
Mwanza, Tanzania

E-mail: [rishengomak@yahoo.com](mailto:rishengomak@yahoo.com)