

**African Proverb of the Month**  
**March, 2002**

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*Nguru iri matugu. (Tharaka)*  
*Mjinga huwa na siku nyingi. (Swahili)*  
*A fool has many days. (English)*

Tharaka ( [Kenya](#) ) Proverb  
Also Gikuyu (Kenya)

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

The Tharaka people of Kenya live in the plains to the east of Mt. Kenya. The plains are a semi-arid scrubland characterized by fragile sandy soils, low rainfall and scorching sun. The people practice subsistence farming and keep cattle, goats and sheep. Due to the fragile soils, low rainfall levels and inappropriate farming techniques, farms yield little produce and the people are generally poor. Probably due to the harsh physical and economic conditions existing in the plains, Tharaka people tend to be short-tempered. Occasionally, little disagreements degenerate into nasty confrontations.

In spite of these general observations, there are many Tharaka people who remain cool in the face of what observers consider to be provocation that requires retaliation. Some of these observers may then ridicule the levelheaded person as a fool. The proverb *Nguru iri matugu* is used by Tharaka speakers in defence of "the fool."

**Biblical Parallels**

The content and especially the spirit of *Nguru iri matugu* have many parallels in the *Bible*. For example in  
*Matthew*

5:5 we read: " The blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth." An amazingly similar parallel is found in

*Proverbs*

12:16 where we are told: "A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult." Finally in the prayer

*Our Father*

we pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

## Contemporary Use and Religious Application

In today's world there is much intolerance. As a result we have witnessed crises and wars that could have been avoided. The spirit of understanding and forgiveness needs to be rekindled in our hearts, our families, our communities, our nations and among the peoples of the world. The real meaning of the Tharaka proverb *Nguru iri mtugu* is that the prudent person who looks like a fool to the unwise lives a long life. The moral of the proverb is that restraint, far from being foolishness, is in fact wisdom. It is a virtue that we need to cultivate in ourselves. The proverb, therefore, contains a precious message which we can and should pass around to create a more tolerant world, a world that values understanding and treasures peace, a world that shuns violence as a means of resolving conflicts and frowns on war as a way of redressing wrongs.

The Christian Churches have been very vocal in advocating peace founded on justice and fair play, tolerance, reconciliation and forgiveness. In line with the Church's crusade for peace, *Nguru iri matugu* is an apt message for congregations.

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