

African Proverb of the Month
January, 2005

Ma'di a erwa ni Ma'di. (Ma'di)
The cure of the Ma'di is Ma'di. (English)

Ma'di ([Sudan](#) , [Uganda](#)) Proverb

Background, Explanation, Meaning and Everyday Use

The Ma' di people live in northwestern Uganda and in the southernmost end of the Sudan. The Ma'di are a Sudanese speaking people, classified as the Ma'di -- Mom group. Linguistically and culturally the nearest neighbors to the Ma'di are the Lugbara who live in the West Nile Region of Uganda. Also they are related to the Logo and the Keliko in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Mum and Avukaya in southern Sudan.

Among the Ma'di, and nearly in all clans, you find one or two medicine men or women (healers) whose task is to mediate between humans and the sacred. The healers attend to physical ills and often act as moral guides too. They often prescribe rituals and known herbs to treat diseases. Some of these herbs have names like *Alomi*, *Guru*, and *Mazabi*. For instance, the ritual may be A

jeka

which means the washing of the stomach that is a reconciliation rite.

What I am pointing out is that the Ma'di seek the first solution to their problems from within their familiar environment and their tradition or culture. For example, a crime committed in the village will first be solved by the elders of the clan. If they fail to find any solution, they will then take it to the government court as a final resort. Or if one is suffering from headaches and other pains, they will first administer *Guru* or *Alomi* to the patient. The Ma'di are convinced that all issues or questions -- whether social, political, cultural -- have their solutions and must be sought first from within the society. Thus

Ma'
di a erwa ni Ma'di

Biblical Parallels

The value of this proverb is echoed in the *Gospel* passage which says: "If you are to go with your opponent before a magistrate, make an effort to settle the matter on the way; otherwise your opponent will turn you over to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the constable, and the constable throw you into prison" (

Luke
12: 58).

Contemporary Use and Religious Application

Usually in Ma'di culture whenever a proverb is given, or cited, you do not give the application. It is up to the receiver to try and figure out its meaning. In that way the proverb performs its task of transformation and formation. For the sake of our audience who may not know the Ma'di culture, this Ma'di proverb can be applied to the following themes:

- Inculturation: It can be used by a theologian who wants to explain about evangelisation and the urgency to make the Word of God have real, authentic meaning for the people. The theologian citing the proverb will encourage his listeners to think for themselves and find out for themselves the meaning of the church's teaching and the Word of God.

- Development: Most development projects are planned and simply implemented from above by the government. The user of this proverb during a meeting of elders in the village will encourage them to seek to be part of the solution of their own developmental programs.

- Relationships: Disputes do occur among people, sometimes among family members. When this proverb is used, it encourages the feuding members to seek settlement in the traditional court, not in the government court where sentences are harsh.

- Personal: I may find myself in a difficult situation, for example, in my marriage. A friend may come and use this proverb to encourage me to seek help from elders or from someone else. He is reminding me that alone it is going to be difficult to settle my problems.

NOTE: Additional material by Issac Kiyaka on Ma'di Proverbs can be found in:

1. Le'jo Ekwi Ma'di ti si ri i." A collection of Ma'di Proverbs. St. Paul Major Seminary, Khartoum, Sudan, 1993.

2. Kernels of Wisdom. A Book Project to fulfill the requirement of Masters of Arts in Pastoral Counseling, Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, USA, 2002.

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