

African Proverb of the Month October, 2004

Muceera na mukundu akundukaga o take. (Gikuyu)
Anayetembea na mwenye tabia mbaya huiga tabia hizo. (Kiswahili)
One who relates with a corrupt person likewise gets corrupted. (English)

Gikuyu ([Kenya](#)) Proverb

Background, Explanation, Meaning and Everyday Use

In most African societies, firm foundations to good behavioral conduct are keys to proper maturity to adulthood. This Gikuyu proverb was traditionally used to warn of an association between a person with known questionable social conduct and another young person who has not been implicated in bad social behavior. Hence emphasis was put advice to the youth especially on how to relate in their daily social conduct. The proverb targets the youth's moral conduct; but in larger usage, it refers to all people who are turning astray as a result of influence from corrupted or bad behaved persons.

The assumption of the proverb is peer influence to behavior that sees some young characters easily influenced by others and then indulging in unacceptable social behavior like drugs, irresponsible sexual behavior, etc. which is borrowed from already corrupted persons. The proverb is thus a caution to young people to be careful in their choice of friends as some friends easily leads one astray. In sum, the proverb asks young people to know well with whom they are associating.

Biblical Parallels

The Bible has some important parallels to this Gikuyu proverb including:

Old Testament: There are instances when the Israelites associate with evil doers and this leads them to do evil.

1 *Corinthians* 15:33 "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character."

Proverbs 13:20 "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm."

Proverbs 23:19 "Listen my son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path."

Contemporary Use and Religious Application

This Gikuyu proverb has a lot of contemporary relevance. Given that most of the problems facing the youth today like drug abuse and illicit sex are attributable to bad behavior, the proverb is an important tool in guiding and counseling the youth particularly by parents, teachers, and preachers in handling topics related to youth behavior crises. The proverb thus is an important pointer to the social ills and sociability problems that face the youth's eagerness to explore the world, sometimes on a very uninformed basis. The proverb gives shapers of youth behavior an important starting point in showing limits to peer socialization in general and choice of friends in particular.

NOTE: This Gikuyu proverb is Number 118 on page 68 in *Under One Roof: Gikuyu Proverbs Consolidated* by Gerald Joseph Wanjohi (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001).

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