African Proverb of the Month
December, 2005

Munyal deefan hayre. (Fulfulde)
Avec beaucoup de patience on peut cuire même une pierre. (French)
Patience can cook a stone. (English)

Fulfulde is the language of the Fulbe people who live in many countries in Africa. The basic meaning of this proverb is: With patience and restraint, one can solve even the most difficult problems. One of the key characteristics of pulaaku (the "fulbeness" or the Fulbe way of life) is patience. A true Pullo (singular of Fulbe) person is expected to be patient in all circumstances but it not easy. Sometimes the various challenges of nomadic or sedentary life push the Fulbe people to react quickly or to lose patience. It is in similar conditions that this proverb is quoted to remind whoever is concerned the value and benefit of patience.

This Fulfulde proverb is often quoted when somebody is losing his or her patience, when somebody is about to make a quick decision without thinking seriously and considering carefully all the consequences of his or her actions, when a trial seems to last forever, when there is a risk of revenge, when there is a risk of conflict, or when people are tempted to react violently to a provocation.

Biblical Parallels
Patience is also one of the key virtues in the Bible. God Himself is the God of patience (2 Peter 3:9). In Ecclesiastes it is written that "patience is better than pride" (Ecclesiastes 7:8b). In the New Testament it is interesting to notice that patience is not only one of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), but also a virtue that every Christian must pursue (2 Peter 1:6). Believers are invited to imitate those who will "inherit what has been promised" through faith and patience (Hebrews 6:12). Patience is one of the values that a man or woman of God must pursue rather than the love of money (1 Timothy 6:11).

Contemporary Use and Religious Application

Fulbe people continue to use this proverb as presented in the first section (background, explanation and everyday use). However, as we live in a world where things happen very fast, this proverb deserves special attention. When we push a button we expect light to appear or disappear right away; when we click on a computer icon we expect it to perform a specific task right away. Sometimes human relationships are also treated that way. People lose patience easily. But a society or an individual without patience is like a vehicle without brakes. It is very dangerous to live without patience. In the current global context where terrorist attacks happen almost on a daily basis, there is a high risk of jumping to quickly to conclusions or of making decisions without thinking seriously and of responding inappropriately to the root causes of terrorism. Christians can really contribute to solve this problem if they are patient and if they truly, but tolerantly, seeking deeper and wiser responses to terrorism and to similar problems. Our world needs genuine love, freedom, justice, and peaceful cohabitation between people without consideration of their gender, age, social class, religion, and culture. It takes patient believers who draw their strength from the God of love and patience to make it possible. With God's blessing, there is power in patience.

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