

The Prentice-Hall
**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
WORLD PROVERBS**

*A Treasury of Wit and Wisdom
Through the Ages*

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Wolfgang Mieder

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Dr. Wolfgang Mieder, one of the world's most renowned folklorists, has written and edited more than 25 books and numerous articles in English or German on proverbs, fairy tales, legends, folksongs, nursery rhymes, and literary topics. Two of his English-language books are *International Proverb Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography* (1982) and *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb*, with Alan Dundes (1981). More recently he edited *Disenchantments: An Anthology of Modern Fairy Tale Poetry* (1985), and the fourth volume of his series on proverb research titled *Investigations of Proverbs, Proverbial Expressions, Quotations and Clichés* (1984) was published in Switzerland.

Dr. Mieder is a full professor of German language, literature, and folklore and also chairman of the Department of German and Russian at The University of Vermont. He studied at The University of Michigan, University of Heidelberg, and Michigan State University, and has achieved a distinguished teaching and scholarly record, including a guest professorship at The University of California at Berkeley.

In addition to lecturing widely on folklore, and in particular, on proverbs, in the United States and Europe, Dr. Mieder is a member of the American Dialect Society, serving on the Committee on Proverbial Sayings, and he was honored to become a Folklore Fellow of the American Folklore Society.

Among the more than 100 articles he has written are papers that deal with the function of proverbs in literature, proverb illustrations from medieval woodcuts to modern cartoons, proverbs used in psychological testing, and innovative proverb manipulations in advertisements. Dr. Mieder is also the editor of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*.



A proverb states, "Proverbs are the coins of the people."

It is to these people of all walks of life, of all races and nationalities, that this collection of the world's proverbs is dedicated in the hope that their wisdom, limited as it might appear, be heeded throughout the world.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank a number of friends and colleagues for their encouragement and support for the preparation of this large collection. I owe many thanks to Daniel Barnes, George Bryan, Heike Doane, Alan Dundes, Sandy Gavett, Betty Hoose, John Jewett, Dennis Mahoney, Kenneth Nalibow, Richard and Francine Page, Veronica Richel, Arthur Schwartz, David Scrase, Robert and Carol Stevens, as well as my relatives, Walter and Lucille Busker, William and Barbara Busker, Walter and Lee Busker, and John and Beverly Skinner. Of particular importance was the diligent and dedicated work that Elaine Scott did for the flawless preparation of the voluminous manuscript. Her commitment and interest in getting the collection completed certainly helped to bring this labor to a fruitful end. Finally, I would like to express to my wife Barbara Mieder my sincere appreciation for making it possible for me to spend hundreds of hours in my study amassing the materials for this international proverb collection. Her continuous interest in and steady support of my many research projects on proverbs have given me the strength to continue with them.

A Preview of the Encyclopedia

This encyclopedia is for: Public speakers, speech writers, journalists, authors, educators, ministers, songwriters, lawyers, humorists, copywriters, artists, counselors, scientists—in short, everybody.

How proverbs can be used: In everyday conversation, journalistic writing, advertising, speeches of all types, in sermons, literature, debates, slogans, songs, legal argumentation, humorous quips, and other forms of human communications.

What proverbs provide: Wit, colorful language, imagery and authority. Proverbs strengthen an argument, help to disprove false statements, emotionalize a speech or article, educate the young pupil or student about people and human nature, and provide a humorous, ironical, or satirical mirror of the human condition everywhere.

Welcome to the Wonderful World of Proverbs

Behold the proverbs of a people.

CARL SANDBURG

The Prentice-Hall Encyclopedia of World Proverbs, the most ambitious work of its type, represents the largest collection available in a single volume. It is unique in that it contains proverbs only—not the sprinkling of quotations, maxims, aphorisms, and common phrases found in many such compilations.

Among the 18,520 entries are 5,000 English proverbs and 4,000 proverbs stemming from the major languages of the world (Anglo-American, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, French, and German). The other half of the collection consists of proverbs from many languages from all continents: African (Swahili, Yoruba, and others); Indian (Hindi, Tamil, and others); Eastern Europe (dozens of languages including Bulgarian, Czech, Serbian, Croatian); Western Europe (Dutch, Basque, Swedish, among others); the Near East (including Egyptian, Lebanese, modern Hebrew); the Far East (Korean, Thai, Vietnamese); and also languages from the West Indies and Oceania. The result is a truly international proverb collection with texts in English translation. While most of the proverbs were located in collections that present them in English translations, a considerable number of them were translated for this collection from major collections in various languages.

Why have anthropologists, folklorists, and philologists and others bothered to collect thousands of proverbs throughout the world? The major reason is doubtlessly that proverbs are small pieces of human wisdom that have been handed down from generation to generation and that continue to be applicable and valid even in our modern technological age. Proverbs simply defined are concise statements of an apparent truth that have currency among the people because they contain a generally accepted insight, observation, and wisdom. The ancient proverb "One hand washes the other" is as true and applicable today as it was hundreds of years ago; its basic wisdom has been recognized by thousands of people in many parts of the world. This particular proverb mirrors the idea that our actions depend on

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reciprocity, and it expresses it in a short and easily remembered and recognizable sentence. What might take an entire paragraph to explain is expressed metaphorically in this short proverb, which contains in a nutshell the philosophy of the common people.

In nonliterate societies, anthropologists have found that studying the proverbs of a native tribe gives clues to the world view of its members regarding such matters as education, law, business, and marriage. There is no aspect of life that proverbs do not comment on, and in nonliterate societies they serve as rules of conduct and basic wisdom to be adhered to by subsequent generations.

Proverbs survive in more advanced societies where communication is based on various modes of writing and speaking. A cultural or literary historian, for example, can learn a great deal about the age of Shakespeare by studying the use of proverbs in his many plays. A careful reading of *Hamlet*, for example, will show that proverbs are useful as a ready-made linguistic tool in argumentation and persuasion, the effectiveness of which is further increased by creating linguistic puns in the actual proverb application. A few centuries later, one finds Charles Dickens using proverbs with a high frequency to depict the social ills of his time. And Carl Sandburg used proverbs in his poems concerning the American melting pot of various national and immigrant groups. For him the proverbs of the various immigrant groups helped blend the world view of this new society: "A code arrives; language; lingo; slang; behold the proverbs of a people, a nation."

A folklorist or sociologist with a particular interest in immigrants might well study the Hungarian steel workers and their proverbs in Gary, Indiana. Have some of the Hungarian proverbs been translated into English as subsequent generations have become more assimilated into the mainstream of American society? Do the proverbs of the old country still fit all aspects of modern American life? Does only the older generation use them, and how do the young people react today to this ethnic wisdom? These are questions that will help all of us understand members of ethnic groups better. With the increase in the Spanish speaking population in this country, it is important that we attempt to understand its traditional attitudes and social mores. Proverbs reflect such matters in a precise fashion, and an understanding of them will help to maximize meaningful communication.

Anyone interested in languages will, of course, recognize the value in knowing the proverbs of another language. Nobody really masters a foreign language without being able to understand its proverbs and communicate through them. The basic thoughts and opinions of another culture are expressed in them, and only by being able to use them can one hope to gain true fluency and be accepted by native speakers. In modern business and politics the understanding of proverbs plays a major role, often being the key to the success or breakdown of communications. It is a known fact that

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interpreters at the United Nations prepare themselves for their extremely sensitive job by learning proverbs of the foreign languages, since politicians often argue or attempt to convince their opponents by the use of a native proverb. No matter how sophisticated the debate, eventually every heated exchange can be reduced to an emotional war of proverbs.

For this reason, effective public speakers must have a good stock of proverbs at their immediate disposal. Convincing rhetoricians such as Cicero, Martin Luther, Winston Churchill, and Nikita Khrushchev, for example, are known to have been skillful artists in employing proverbs in their speeches.

Even advertising agents have learned to appreciate the traditional value of using proverbs as advertising headlines. Take for instance, a bank ad's "A penny saved is a penny earned," or a health food store's "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." Often the traditional proverb text is varied to catch the reader's attention and to create interest in reading the text of the ad. A proverb such as "Where there's a will, there's a way" can be reduced to the easily recognizable formula "Where there's X, there's Y," in which the X and Y can be replaced by anything the copywriter wishes to express. For example, "Where there's a car, there's a Ford."

Similarly, effective use of the proverb "Don't ask a man for a favor before he has had his lunch," was the basis of Time, Inc.'s Fortune Research Subscriber Census Card requesting information on readers' business interests and responsibilities.

In like manner, a high school principal's newsletter quoted the Chinese proverb "One kind word will warm three winter months" in reporting the outpouring of support and love for the school after a field-house break-in and loss of expensive equipment jeopardized the football team's schedule. Suffering and cruelty were mercifully replaced by hope and inspiration.

These are only a few examples of how proverbs continue to be of significance and practical use. In a world getting smaller through new technological advances almost every day, communication with new individuals and groups of people increases steadily. Each individual is, however, to a certain degree preprogrammed by the traditional proverb stock that continues to be handed down from generation to generation. At the same time, new proverbs are still being added to this repertoire, as can be seen by a relatively recent American coinage "Different strokes for different folks." An individual somewhere in this country used this sentence first; it was then picked up by others because of its basic underlying wisdom and its easily remembered structure and rhyme, and it slowly gained currency. This process was speeded along by the fact that the proverb became a title of a popular recording and a television show. By now this "wit of one" has become "the wisdom of many," and it is doubtlessly one of the most popular American proverbs. While such new proverbs are added to our basic stock, older ones may drop out since they no longer reflect newer attitudes. But a

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basic stock of proverbs remains in any ethnic or national group, and they continue to be effective expressions of the varied experiences of mankind everywhere.

Among the proverbs in this work are many of ancient origin, but which became current in the English language as well as many of the European languages. The Latin proverb "*In vino veritas*" exists, for example, as a direct translation in the English as "In wine there is truth," in French as "*La vérité est dans le vin*," in German as "*Im Wein ist Wahrheit*," in Italian as "*La verità è nel vino*," in Spanish as "*En el vino está la verdad*," and so on. Such universal proverbs are listed in the present collection as belonging to the English language without referring to the dozens of languages into which they have also been translated. For this reason, there are no specific references in this collection to ancient Greek, Latin, or Biblical proverbs.

Just as a proverb that is listed as belonging to the English language might also be found in several other European languages if it was translated from an ancient Latin proverb, for example, it is possible to find a proverb in this collection with a Spanish language designation, although it also exists in Portuguese or another Romance language. It is extremely difficult to ascertain in such cases in which language the proverb did in fact originate. This is particularly the case when two languages are linguistically and geographically very close, as is the case with Spanish and Portuguese, German and Dutch, Danish and Swedish. To ascertain the definite linguistic origin of each proverb in this collection would have meant hundreds of individual historical searches, literally one analysis for each proverb presented. This obviously could not be done, and for this reason each proverb received only one linguistic reference to that language in which it is particularly well known.

The organization of this collection follows that of the major scholarly compilations. The proverbs are arranged alphabetically according to key words and then are consecutively numbered. Under each key word (usually the noun-subject of the proverb), the texts are alphabetized as well, so that each proverb can be found easily and quickly. By looking under any key word, the user can discover what the Japanese, Russians, Spaniards, or whoever, say and think about adversity, behavior, dog, fidelity, honesty, law, love, merit, opportunity, payment, security, teacher, virtue, woe, youth, and countless other topics. This comparative aspect of the arrangement of proverbs makes this collection of the world's proverbs interesting and fascinating for everybody. There is a proverb for any and every situation, occasion, or condition!

Following the proverbs themselves is a sizable bibliography on proverb scholarship and other collections for further study or entertainment.

Proverbs are the true voice of all the people. *The Prentice-Hall Encyclopedia of World Proverbs* should have a universal appeal no matter what the cultural, societal, intellectual, professional or ethnic background

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the reader might have. It contains wisdom for everyone for every possible situation, for proverbs reflect the joys and sorrows, the fortune and misfortune, and the good and the bad of everyday life. The proverbs contain a basic philosophy of life or world view, which, though expressed in different metaphors, shows that common people around the world believe in mankind's desire to live a good and decent life. And despite the pessimistic attitudes in some of them, there appears to be present a certain pragmatic optimism in the majority of proverbs. They seem to say that "There is nothing new under the sun" and that "Hope springs eternal." By listening to and reading the proverbs of people of other nations, we might well come one step closer to understanding their frustrations, dreams, and wishes.

Wolfgang Mieder

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