

# THE CONSERVATION OF NATURE: MORE THAN JUST HUMAN SURVIVAL TO THE ZULU PEOPLE

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The Zulu language is particularly rich in its use of idioms related to the natural environment. A sample of these idioms is given and the relationship of environment to language is commented upon.

To many people the conservation of our natural resources means only the survival of human beings. Yet to others it means much more - it means the survival of human beings *plus* their language and culture.

Here I am reminded of the Zulus who have many proverbs in their language which arise from many things that were, and are still, found in nature. This would mean that, besides conserving nature for human survival, the Zulu people must realize that they are also conserving nature for the sake of their language, for if nature is depleted, the same will happen to their language which has been so beautifully formulated by their ancestors through their profound observation and experience of natural resources.

I have listed here some of these proverbs with their meanings.

- *ugwayi nehlabo* = They are great friends. (Lit. it is tobacco and the aloe). Said because snuff is made of ground tobacco leaves and cold ash of dry aloe leaves.
- *injalo iphuma edunjini* = He has taken after the parents. (Lit. the tuber comes out of the parent plant).
- *amankonyane alandela onina* = as above. (Lit. the calves follow their mothers).
- *unonele ngaphakathi okwendlanzi* = He does not show his true nature. (Lit. he is fat inside like a mouse bird).
- *wakhahlelwa indlovu esifubeni* = He is not able to keep a secret. (Lit. he was tickled by an elephant on the chest).
- *ubika imbiba abike ibuzi* = One cannot rely on what he says. (Lit. one moment he reports seeing a field mouse and then he reports seeing a field rat).
- *ukhuni luxala unlotha* = A good parent may have a worthless child. (Lit. a piece of wood begets ash).
- *inkunzi isematholeni* = From the children come future leaders. (Lit. the bull is among the calves).
- *ikhixane elihle ligwala izimpethu* = A pretty girl may be found to have a bad character. (Lit. a fine fig fruit is full of worms).
- *iqaga alizizwa ukunuka* = A person who is critical of others is often unaware of his own shortcomings. (Lit. a polecat is not aware of its bad smell).
- *ungayishayi inhlava ngoju* = 1. Show your gratitude in a fitting manner.  
2. Don't be ill-mannered to those who have helped you. (Lit. Do not strike the honeyguide with honey).

- *ubucwibi obuhle obuhamba ngabubili* = It is a good thing to have friends who warn you in time of danger. (Lit. good waxbills go in pairs).
- *ucilo uzishaye endukwini* = An unfortunate thing has happened unexpectedly. (Lit. the lark has hit itself against a stick).
- *iqhina liphuma embizeni* = He has escaped by the skin of his teeth. (Lit. the steenbok jumps out of the cooking pot).
- *zimbiwe yinsele yazishiya* = A great fortune has befallen. (Lit. The honey has been dug out by the cape ratel and left behind).
- *inhlanzi ishelwe amanzi* = A great misfortune has befallen. (Lit. water has dried up for the fish).
- *yeka amandla esambane sona esimba umgodi singawulali* = Descriptive of futile labour. (Lit. alas for the toil of the antbear which digs a hole and does not sleep in it).
- *inyoni enkulu ingafa kubola amaqanda* = When the head of the family dies things at home seem to go wrong. (Lit. when the big bird dies the eggs become bad).
- *imbila yaswela umbila ngokulayezela* = Do things for yourself. (Lit. the dassie lacked a tail because it asked others to bring it one).
- *akukho nkwal iephandela enye* = Don't expect other people to toil for you. (Lit. there is no francolin which scratches for another).
- *inyoka kayishaywa isibili ikhanda lingakabonwa* = Don't act hastily in situations which might be dangerous. (Lit. you don't strike the body of a snake when you don't see the head).
- *ingwe kayilali nembuzi* = Don't put together things that do not go together. (Lit. a leopard does not sleep with a goat).

I am sure it is not only the Zulus who have such demanding needs or reasons to conserve their natural resources. I believe other African nations have their own unique relationships with nature which make them appreciate and wish to conserve nature, and if these can be brought to light and be put across to the people, the whole subject of nature conservation will be immeasurably enhanced and a greater interest in conservation will be the result.

● **Journal No. 7** will focus on 'Environmental Education and the Natural Environment'. Closing date for contributions is the 30th January 1988.

Journal No. 8 will focus on 'Environmental Education and Museums'. Closing date for contributions is the 30th April 1988.

Articles pertaining to these or any other aspect of environmental education will be welcome.

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