

The Power Of The Jamaican Proverb

One of the ways in which you can distinguish yourself as a bona fide Jamaican, or at least a true Jamaicaphile, or someone who at least has some solid Jamaican connections, is by the casual integration of Jamaican proverbs in your regular speech.

It gives the user a certain amount of linguistic and cultural power, especially if the person for whom it is intended has no clue of the meaning, or just has an inkling that they are being talked about, without fully understanding what is being said. Trust mi... dat sweet.

So test yourself and see how many Jamaican proverbs you remember. of course there are as many variations of the proverbs themselves as there are proverbs, so you might find a version and your Jamaican friend will want to tell you that "A no so it go".

Here are some proverbs and basic explanations of how they can be used.

A no di same day leaf drop eena water it rot :The seeds of misfortune are often planted long before the misfortune manifests itself. For example, someone who develops health related illnesses associated with obesity may be tempted to see it as a stroke of bad luck. However, obesity does not happen overnight.

A no every kin teet a laugh :This is advice to be mindful of persons who on the surface seem as if they are in your corner, happy with and for you, when in fact they could be stabbing you in the back, and generally working against you.

A no fi want a tongue meck cow no talk : The reasons for certain actions are not always immediately obvious, or seemingly logical. Very often used when one has more information about a situation, than is prudent to disclose. A cow, like human beings, has a tongue. That is therefore not the reason the cow does not talk. There is more to it that meets the eye, or than seems logical or obvious

A no one day monkey want wife : "There will be other times", you say in your state of upset to the person who has dished you dirt after you have given them help and support. You say this because you are certain, that they will need you again, will need to run to you for help, but you vow you will not support them in the same way.

A no so parson get him gown : Manna does not just fall from heaven without some effort on your part. People don't achieve greatness or success from just wishing it, they have to work really hard for it.

A noh every chain yuh hear a rolling calf :Things are not always as they seem, and so it is unfair to make generalizations based on knowledge of an individual, group of persons or situations. Two things, persons or situations that have the same outward appearance, may in fact be very different

A noh every mango got maggige : Stereotypes and generalizations don't necessarily hold true. If you have a dozen mangoes and one has "maggige" (maggots) that does not mean that the other eleven have maggige. You cannot judge a person or situations based on knowledge of a similar person or situation.

A noh everything good fi eat good fi talk : Not everything you know about a situation needs to become public knowledge. Sometimes you need to hold back information, as the releasing of the information might have negative consequences

Ackee love fat, okra love salt : All tastes contend, there is something for everyone. Each person can do his or her thing in his or her own way, as long as it makes him or her happy. All tastes, styles, practices and opinions are valid

All fish nyam man but a shark one get di blame: The person, country or situation about which there is a negative stereotype is likely to be unfairly blamed for the shortcomings and the bad choices or behavior of others. Think about it, if you throw a body overboard, all the fish take a nibble. However the shark bears the bad name for eating people.

All jackass mouth white, yuh noh know which one nyam flour: Sometimes it is difficult to tell who is to be blamed for a particular act, usually bad. All the potential suspects are very similar and there is no outstanding distinguishing character which enables you to point a finger at any one.

Alligator noh fi call pig long mouth :You should not criticize or curse someone or a situation, if it is similar to your own

Alligator lay egg but him noh fowl : If two individuals, two groups of people, two situations, two countries share certain similarities, that does not make them the same.

Ants follow fat, but fat drown ants: Be careful how you overindulge in something you find pleasurable as greed may lead to your certain end.

Back never know di value of ole shut till ole shut tear off: It is easy to forget to show appreciation for something or someone, until it is too late. The something or someone no longer exists, or the ability to make contact has been removed. This is similar in meaning to the English proverb “You never miss the water till the well runs dry”

Bad family better dan empty pigsty: No matter how bad and awful you think your family members are, no matter how you can’t stand being around them, it is better have them than not to have anyone to call family

Bad tings never have owner:When there is success, everyone is quick to boast about the hand (real or imagined) which they played. If someone is successful, lots of persons are quick to say “Oh he’s my cousin.” If however the person is guilty or reprehensible action, the cousins seem to fade into oblivion. In the same way, if a project or an event has failed, no architects or contributors can be found.

Because parrot meck noise dem say a him one nyam banana: Sometimes it suits you to be quiet and not ‘show up your colours’, because if you do you are bound to get noticed. A group may commit an offence, and everyone chooses to pretend they know nothing of it. The one who is most vocal, draws attention to himself and is likely to be blamed.

Before dawg go widout supper him nyam cockroach : When our circumstances change, we must adjust in order to

survive. A dog would not ordinarily eat a cockroach, but if there is no food, in order to survive, he might just eat it. If at one time you were living a life of luxury, and your feeding tree has been cut, then perhaps you have to drive a smaller car, live in a smaller house, eat less expensive food.

Before beard hang long, yuh shave it: This is the classic 'a stitch in time, saves nine' concept. Taking a situation in hand and applying corrective measures early, will save time and effort later, and prevent the situation from becoming untenable and sometimes beyond redemption.

Beg waata kyaan bwile cow skin: Cow skin is a favourite meat of many Jamaican, but it is very tough (remember it eventually becomes leather) and must be boiled for a long time. Usually when you 'beg something' you beg for small quantities, so the little bit of water which you beg is not enough to boil the cow skin. In other words, it is important to have your own stuff, rely on your own resources.

Beggar beg from beggar him never get rich: If you are not in a good space financially and constantly associate with persons of like mind and like circumstances, your fortunes will never change. You can't take advice on money from someone who is always broke and you can't take relationship advice from someone who has had a string of bad marriages or relationships.

Better fi ride a donkey wah carry yuh, dan a horse wah throw yuh: Sometimes slow and steady rather than speed, wins the race. You are better off staying with a situation which gives you results in small increments, rather than opting for one with larger increments of progress, but one which is more risky.

Better waata dash way dan gourdy bruck: It is often better to trade a small misfortune for a much larger one. If you are carrying a gourd of water and you are very thirsty, you are likely to be upset if the water spills. Make sure that in trying to save the water, you don't cause the gourd to break, as it is much easier to replace the water than the gourd, and if there is no gourd, you cannot transport the water.

Big blanket meck man sleep late: Too much of the good life, too much luxury often encourages a kind of laziness. You become accustomed to having others do simple tasks on your behalf. After a while you no longer have the will or the ability to do them for yourself, and laziness sets in.

Blackbud lef him ticks fi go pick fi cow: It doesn't make sense to leave your own affairs untended while focusing on the issues of someone else. So a country which goes into another territory to wage war to solve that country's problems, while neglecting the problems in its own backyard is guilty of 'leffing him tick, fi go pick fi cow'.

Borrow horse ride sweet: While you know the sweet and the sour of your own situation, your own possessions, your family etc, you are likely to only know the sweet, the good and positive elements of that which belongs to someone else. You also don't have the same level of responsibility for that which is not yours. So you enjoy it, sometime's carelessly, because if it gets broken you can give it back. It is not yours.

Bottle weh no have cork belong to cockroach: If you leave something unguarded, without borders, not subject to rules and regulations and it is treated as if it is part of a free for all, then eventually it will have no value, and even the lowest of the low will have free access to it.

Brick pon brick build house: You can achieve your goals by taking small steps, finally getting to your destination by

putting one foot in front of the other. You can actually build a house one brick at a time. If you want to save for a car and you don't have all the money, just start saving. If you have to read a 1000 page document, just start chipping away at the pages, one at a time.

Bucket wid hole a battam have no business a riverside :Your status and condition should be a big factor in guiding your actions. If you are asthmatic, don't go into smoke filled clubs, if you get sunburnt easily, don't go to beach at midday. Know your circumstances, especially your weaknesses and work within them.

Bud fly too fast, fly past him nest: Everything should be done in moderation, take the time to do things properly, going through all the stages and phases. If you move too quickly, try to achieve the goal without going through all the steps, you may miss the mark.

Bull horn never too heavy fi him head: Your circumstances are always such that you can bear them even if someone else can't.

Bush have aise (ears) and wall have yie (eye): Be careful how, when and of what you speak, as somehow, through means unknown information has a way of getting to persons who you don't want privy to what you were discussing

Cheap bargain teck money: This is the concept of 'penny wise pound foolish'. Sometimes the dollar you save from doing something the 'cheap way' means you have to spend more money to do it again, as it was not properly done in the first place.

Chew family bickle, but no bite family story :They say blood is thicker than water, so if you must get involved in other people's family matters, tread carefully. Get involved, but don't meddle or take sides

Chicken merry, hawk deh near : Usually used as a threat. Enjoy yourself… trouble is closer than you think

Chip noh fly far from block: There is usually an expectation of similar behavior or traits (usually negative) that children have as a result of who their parents are.

Clear conscience sleep a thunder: If you have reason to be guilty about a situation or generally about life, you can relax and have no need to fear or worry, even when things are falling apart around you

Cock mout kill cock: Sometimes we are the author of our own demise, our own destruction. Sometimes we give ourselves away, get ourselves into trouble by just talking too much.

Yuh want fi hear some proverbs?

{mp3}alligatorriver{/mp3} ef alligator come out a river

{mp3}everyhoe{/mp3} every hoe have

{mp3}tief{/mp3} tief never love see tief