Wisdom of Words

Estonia, Lebanon, Turkey
WISDOM OF WORDS

ESTONIA, LEBANON, TURKEY
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Introduction
What is a proverb?
Proverbs from Estonia, Lebanon, Turkey
Proverbs from Estonia
Proverbs from Lebanon
Proverbs from Turkey
Thoughts about the project process
This book was born from the question of how to engage in dialogue between cultures. The Anna Lindh Foundation announced a call for projects dealing with precisely this topic. We at NGO Mondo, Small Project Istanbul and the Development of People and Nature Association from Lebanon attempted to write a proposal that dealt with this question. The answer came easily when our fine colleague Lucia from Turkey suggested that the best way to accomplish dialogue would be through proverbs. This made sense, but none of us could imagine the joy that the landscape of proverbs could bring us. Proverbs live a hidden life, but they are more interwoven with our thoughts than first meets the eye. Cooperation with global education teachers has been very interesting, for the students' impressions as they learned about the proverbs have been expressed through art activities, poetry and photographs. The project has enriched both us and the teachers. It has encouraged us not to break down in the crosswinds of international conflict, but instead to stay humane and hold values that unite people, and to pass on these values in our teaching. It does not matter whether you live on the shores of the Mediterranean or the Baltic Sea: to be human, one has to feel solidarity, and sometimes this is connected to words and nuggets of thought that help us understand our surroundings. If a northerner speaks about the acorn and the tree, a southerner speaks of watermelon and grapes. The context is different, but the content is the same. Sometimes this can be very amusing. We hope that reading this book brings much joy into your day and helps find common ground in the world.

Kristi Ockba, Humanitarian Aid Expert, NGO Mondo
Mari-Kätrin Kinks, Education Expert, NGO Mondo


Kristi Ockba, MTÜ Mondo humanitaarabi ekspert
Mari-Kätrin Kinks, MTÜ Mondo hariduseekspert
ولد هذا الكتاب من فكرة كيفية تعزيز الانخراط في حوار بين الثقافات. أعلنت مؤسسة آنا ليند عن مسابقة للمشاريع متعلقة بهذا الموضوع بالتحديد. نحن في المنظمات غير الحكومية موندو، مشروع صغير إسطنبول، وجمعية التنمية للإنسان والبيئة من لبنان حاولنا كتابة اقتراح يعالج هذا السؤال. جاءت الإجابة بسهولة عندما اقترحنا وسبيلنا لوسيا من تركيا أن أفضل طريقة لإجراء حوار بين الثقافات هي من خلال الأمثال. فكانت هنا المفاجأة أن لا أحد هناك كان بإمكانه أن يتخيل الفرح الذي يمكن أن يجلبه لنا بحر الأمثال الشاسع. الأمثال وحكم تعيش حياة خفية، لكنها تتشابك مع أفكارنا أكثر مما نتصور. كان التعاون مع أستاذة تعليم عالميين ممتعًا للغاية، لأن انطباعات الطلاب ما تعلمها عن الأمثال تم التعبير عنها من خلال الأنشطة الفنية، الشعر والصور الفوتوغرافية. لقد أثرى المشروع كل المشاركين. لقد شجعنا على عدم الالهيار في وسط رياح الصراع الدولي، ولكن على البقاء إنسانيين والتمسك بالقيم التي توحد الشعوب، وبالتالي نقل هذه القيم من خلال تعليمنا. لا يهم ما إذا كنت تعيش على شواطئ البحر الأبيض المتوسط أو بحر البلطيق: حتى تكون إنسانية، يجب على المرء أن يشعر بالتضامن، وأحيانًا ذلك الشعور يرتبط بالكلمات وشذرات الأفكار التي تساعدنا على فهم محيطنا. إذا تحدث مواطن من الشمال عن الجوزة والشجرة، يحدث مواطن من الجنوب عن البطيخ والعنب. السياق مختلف، لكن المحتوى هو نفسه. في بعض الأحيان يمكن أن يكون هذا مسليا جداً. نأمل أن تجلب قراءة هذا الكتاب الكثير من البهجة ليومك، وتساعد على إيجاد أرضية مشتركة في العالم، أحيانًا لا يستغرق الأمر سوى بضع كلمات لفهم بعضنا البعض.

كريستي عقبة، خبيرة في المساعدات الإنسانية، منظمة غير حكومية موندو
ماري كاترين كينكس، خبيرة في التعليم، منظمة غير حكومية موندو

Kristi Ockba, İnsani Yardım Uzmanı, STK Mondo
Mari-Kätrin Kinks, Eğitim Uzmanı, STK Mondo
WHAT IS A PROVERB?

Scholars have provided several definitions for proverbs, but in the briefest terms, proverbs are simply well-known popular sayings. More specifically, a proverb is a thought stated in a single, striking, figurative sentence that contains didactic content. Sometimes synonyms are used for proverbs, including the word of the people, folk wisdom, wise words, nuggets of wisdom.

Numerous nuggets of wisdom have come to us through literature. For example, a great number of them derive from the texts of Antiquity and early sacred texts. At first glance, people might think that proverbs are obsolete and worn out, but if one listens carefully to conversations, pays attention while reading the newspaper or following social media, one can often note their use. Even today, proverbs are well suited to enliven speech. They are helpful in everyday life when one needs to render one's statements believable, or simply to provide a witty and amusing solution to a situation. Usually, good proverbs are also linguistically well-crafted and enjoyable. Most frequently the goodness of their sound is expressed in thought repetitions and rhyming at the beginning and end of words. The richness and variety of expression can be seen in how many different versions can be used to pass on the same idea. Various peoples have a proverb to hand for almost every phenomenon or situation. For every one that asketh receiveth!

Of course, the proverbs of different peoples are specifically dependent on their language, locality and local cultural space; thus researchers of proverbs constantly struggle with translating them, and are on the lookout
for suitable equivalents. The Arabic, Estonian and Turkish folk wisdom compiled for this collection shows how proverbs known in various corners of the world and expressed in different languages are more similar in content than we may think. A human remains human, regardless of what part of the world they live in, be it Estonia, Lebanon, or Turkey; whichever language they may speak and whatever their religion. By nature we are more similar than it may seem on the surface, and, to put it figuratively, belief in folk wisdom can provide striking and clever, as well as riddling interpretations for many a complicated life situation. Proverbs continue to reflect the common understandings of our ancestors, the life experience of many generations; over long periods of time they have recorded observations about life, human characteristics, relationships, nature and the environment. In this small book one can find instructive beliefs about good and evil, right and wrong, wisdom and foolishness, assiduity and laziness, speaking and being silent, and much more. It is also very enjoyable to observe how the same idea can be articulated and transmitted in very different ways and variants; conversely, the same proverb may have a number of different meanings. Depending on the situation in which we use a proverb, its meaning is shaped as well.

Where there are words, there is enjoyment.

Piret Voolaid
Senior Researcher, Department of Folkloristics, Estonian Literary Museum
Executive Manager of the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies
ESTONIA
LEBANON
TURKEY
SUUR TÜKK
AJAB SUU LƏHKİ

İKİ KARPUZ BİR
KOLTUĞA SIĞMAZ

الي بيكبر
فشخته بيوقع
A large piece
breaks the mouth

Two watermelons
won’t fit in one seat

He whose step
gets wider shall fall
كثرة الطباخين
تحرق الطبخة

İKİ CAMBAZ BİR
İPTE OYNAMAZ

KAKS KÕVA KIVI
EI JAHVATA HEAD JAHU
The food is burnt when there are many cooks in the kitchen

Two acrobats cannot walk on a single rope

Two hard stones will not make good flour
YALANCININ MUMU
YATSIYA KADAR YANAR

VALEL ON
LÜHIKESED JALAD

حبل الكذب
قصير
The liar’s candle
burns until it is night

Lies have
short legs

The lie’s string
is short
Ağaç yaşken eğilir

Mıda õpid noores eas, seisab eluaeg sul peas
Learning during childhood is like engraving on rocks.

The tree learns when it is young and wet.

What you learn in your youth will remain in your head.
SUUGA TEEB SUURE LINNA,
KÄED EI TEE KÄRBSEPESAGI

LAFLA PEYNİR
GEMİSİ YÜRÜMEZ

كلام الليل
يتحوه النهار
He builds a big city with his mouth
but not even a fly's nest with his hands

A cheese ship
doesn't move with words

What is said at night
is forgotten in the morning
ARMUT
DİBİNE DÜŞER

KÄBI EI KUKU
KÄNNUST KAUZELE

طب الجرة على تعها
بнтطلع البنت لامها
The pear falls
under the tree

The cone does not fall
far from the stump

Flip the jar on its mouth,
and the daughter turns out just like her mother
Kirke Kaisa Kaunis
القرد بعين
امو غزال

KUZGUNA YAVRUSU
KARTAL GÖRÜNÜR

IGA PREESTER
KIIDAB OMA RELIIKVIAID
The monkey is a gazelle
in the eyes of his mother

The raven thinks
its child is an eagle

Every priest praises
his own reliquaries
ÜHEKSA KORDA MÕÓDA,
ÜKS KORD LÕIKA

İKİ DÜŞÜN
BİR SÖYLE

فكر قبل ما
تحكي
Measure nine times,
cut once

Think twice,
speak once

Think before
you speak
تهم بعلم
الحمار

HARJUTAMINE
TEEB MEISTRIKS

İŞLEYEN
DEMİR İŞİLDAR
Repetition teaches a donkey

Practice makes perfect

The working iron glows
RAHU ROOGA
ON SŐJASKI

HER ŞERDE BİR
HAYIR VARDIR

خبز ناشف في زمن السلام خير
من اللحم في زمن الحرب
Even in war there is the food of peace.

There is good in every evil.

Bread that is dry in peacetime is better than meat at the time of war.
كل شيء بوقت١ حلو

SAKLA SAMANI
GELİR ZAMANI

IGA AEG KÜSİB
OMA TÖÖD TAGA
Things are good in due time

Hide hay, its time will come

Every age demands its own work
Ateş olmayan yerden
bla nara

Ma'ni Dik'an
bla nara

Ateş olmayan yerden
duman çıkmaz

Kus Suitsu,
Seal Tuld
There is no smoke if there is no fire

Where there is smoke, there is fire
KUIDAS RAHVAS,
NÕNDA RIIE

ÜZÜM ÜZÜME BAKA
BAKA KARARIR

من عاشر القوم اربعين
يوماً أصبح مثلهم
As the people, 
so the garb

The grape grows darker 
together with other grapes

Whoever lives with people 
for forty days becomes like them
ÜLE ENDA VARJU
EI SAA HÜPATA

AYAĞINI YORGANINA
GÖRE UZAT

ع قد بساطك
مد اجريك
You can't jump
over your shadow

Stretch your feet according
to the length of your quilt

Stretch your legs
according to your carpet
Kingitud äädik on magusam kui ostetud mesi

Bedava sırke baldan tatlıdir

قالو شو أطيب من العسل
قالو الخل ببلاش
The gift of vinegar is better than bought honey

Free vinegar is sweeter than honey

They asked: what is better than honey, they said: free vinegar
ESTONIA
LAPSESUU EI VALETA

A child's mouth does not lie
Disease comes with horses and goes with oxen
PADA SÕIMAB KATELT — ÜHED MUSTAD MÕLEMAD

The pot berates the kettle, both are black
IGA HEATEGU LEIAB TASU

No good deed goes unpunished
ÄRA HÕISKA ENNE ŌHTUT

Do not cheer before evening
VAGA VESI, SÜGAV PÕHI

Still water runs deep
HUNDID SÖÖNUD, LAMBAD TERVED

The wolves have eaten, the sheep are whole
ETTEVAATUS ON TARKUSE EMA

Caution is the mother of wisdom
LEBANON
مش كل مين صف صواني صار حلواني

Not everyone who makes dessert dishes become a confectioner
بحكيكي يا جارة لتسمع الكلمة

I talk to my neighbor so that my daughter-in-law would hear
الجمل إذا شاف حرسبته
وقع و كسر رقبته

If the camel saw his hump,
he would fall and break his neck
ضربيني و بكى
سبقني و اشتكي

He hit me and cried,
then he surpassed me and complained
He who has no past has no future
إذا حبيبك عسل
ما تحسه كله

If your loved one is honey,
do not lick all of them
ألف كلمة جبان ولا كلمة الله يرحمه

To be called a coward is a thousand times better than being dead
الاعور بين العميان ملك

In a blind crowd,
the one-eyed man is king
TURKEY
GÜNEŞ GİRMİYEYEN
EVE DOKTOR GİRER

The doctor goes to the house
which the sun does not enter
GÜLME KOMŞUNA
GELİR BAŞına

Don’t laugh at your neighbor,
the same thing will happen to you
ACELE İŞE ŞEYTAN KARIŞIR
The devil gets involved in the rush
Patience is bitter and its fruit is sweet
Öfkeyle kalkan zararla oturur

Who starts out with anger sits down with a loss
AÇ AYI OYNAMAZ

A hungry bear doesn't play
A goat also has a beard
PARAYI VEREN DÜDÜĞÜ ÇALAR

Who pays the piper calls the tune
THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PROJECT PROCESS

Forbidden fruit is always the sweetest. I think this proverb is closely connected with the life of every person, because one must often refuse from something or limit oneself in some way.

A good friend is better than money in the coffers. This proverb also has everything to do with life, especially in relation to today's world: useful connections play a major role in every area of life. Also, good and responsible friends can always help and provide support.

Two heads are better than one. This proverb is always to the point, particularly when we are talking about globalisation, for when two people cooperate, the likelihood of bringing a good idea to life increases.

I think all three proverbs certainly teach us something, and make people wiser, because they have deep meaning and lead to a never-ending process of self-development.

Alesja Baranova, Narva Pähklimäe Upper Secondary School, Grade 12

Working with proverbs through art is quite a bit of fun – children can be creative and analytical at the same time. Their work has a clear goal, but they can approach it in their own way and through a technique that is familiar to them. What certainly weakened the outcome was the distance learning. As a teacher I cannot keep my eye on what is being done, and for that reason the results were weaker than they would have been in contact learning. There were also limitations in the use of materials. Those who understood and
applied themselves achieved a good result. However, I am sure that the more students analyse something – in this case, proverbs – and the more they do this in a way that is unfamiliar to them, in a completely different, sometimes uncomfortable media, the better they are able to understand and notice similarities. I believe that those who accomplished the three-in-one task based on the specificities of the countries found many things our countries had in common.

Ergen Kandar, art teacher, Tallinn Upper Secondary School of Art

As the situation in the world has caused our students to face new challenges through distance learning and made them give more thought to health and healthy lifestyles, we decided to find Estonian proverbs connected with health and learning. A large number of these occurred to the students right away, but as they also had the chance to use the Internet, our list came to include some that I had never heard of before. Some were new versions of old proverbs, and in the course of discussion we eliminated them; we decided that the book should include only those proverbs that are immediately understandable for Estonian readers. The second argument was that it might be more difficult to find matches for newer proverbs among those from Lebanon and Turkey. And so, we listed 15 proverbs. After we had received the proverbs from our cooperation partners, I gave them to the students to discuss without providing explanation about the content. It was their task to try to understand the content of the proverbs only on the basis of translation. At first the assignment seemed complicated
to some students, and many thought they had misunderstood something. However, in a fun and supportive atmosphere the students soon began to share their thoughts boldly. In the course of the discussion, we tried to find Estonian equivalents to the proverbs. It turned out that in many cases we could not find Estonian-language proverbs with exactly the same content. In other cases, there were many matches to a single saying. When we had worked through all the proverbs, we decided to select the funniest and most interesting Turkish and Lebanese sayings, but some students decided to choose those proverbs that made them sad.

Maila Midri, teacher, Tallinn’s 32nd Upper Secondary School, students of the 7th grade

Students now look at the world from a somewhat different perspective and notice proverbs in new places. For example, a student reading Otfried Preussler’s *Krabat* recently remarked enthusiastically that on page 44 he had found a proverb: “The morning is wiser than the evening.” Some proverbs called for more pondering. For example, don’t fly higher than your wings can carry you. One boy said that he wanted to draw a picture of this, but that he completely disagreed with the meaning. People always say: “May the wind be at your back!” and “Think big”, and now here we have a proverb that calls us to fly low.

Rita Järve, teacher at Viimsi School
As part of the “Proverbs for Parleys” project, two workshops were conducted in order to collect the proverbs.

The first workshop started with filling in the attendance sheet, welcoming the participants and explaining about the project activities and objectives. This was followed by an icebreaking activity to introduce the participants and get to know their different backgrounds. As the activity started, the participants were given a couple of minutes to write down the proverbs they prepared, then they shared the sayings by writing them on the flipchart. Once all the participants were done, each participant explained the meaning of the chosen proverb while the others provided their input and discussed the meaning and background of each proverb. The purpose of the activity was to collect different proverbs from participants. After a small break, the participants were divided into three groups. Each group chose two proverbs to draw on a sheet of paper to play a guessing game with the other teams. After guessing the proverb, the meaning of each saying was explained.

As for the second workshop, the participants were divided into two groups to match Lebanese and Turkish proverbs. The first group had the Lebanese proverbs, and the second the Turkish ones with the English translation written on the back of the sheets. Each Lebanese proverb holder had to guess which Turkish proverb matches theirs by asking for hints. This activity helped to identify the Lebanese and Turkish proverbs that are similar to each other. After a small break, the participants were divided into three groups. Each group was handed a multiple choice questions sheet with Estonian proverbs and hints in English. The participants had to choose the Lebanese proverbs matching the Estonian ones.
The purpose of the first workshop was to collect proverbs while expanding the participants' knowledge about Arabic, Estonian and Turkish proverbs. As for the second workshop, the approach was to identify the similarities between the proverbs in different languages and then explore the resemblances of the sayings and the meanings behind the various proverbs. Proverbs are considered to provide common ground in a society. Not only do they connect the residents of a certain country, but most importantly they bond different generations on a deeper level. Proverbs are an instrument that help to profit from the wisdom of the past and pass it on to the present and then the future. As such, they are a powerful tool for maintaining the experiences of past generations. Thus, the timeless wisdom of the proverbs brings comfort to an individual that other people have gone through similar experiences and learnt from them. Discovering and exploring Arabic proverbs on a deeper level, in addition to learning about sayings in Estonian and Turkish was an enlightening experience. The Estonian and Turkish proverbs opened our eyes to other societies. The similarities between the proverbs highlighted that different societies across the European-Mediterranean region do share experiences and encounters. The lessons learned over times, across generations and countries are the same around the world. Consequently, we can benefit from proverbs to fortify the relations between cultures, since they are a reflection of the thoughts, lifestyles, character and beliefs of a society.

Alissar Aziz, Development for People and Nature Association
A few words from the facilitators of Turkey...
Proverbs – the judgments and experiences of the preceding generations based on long trials, expressed in the form of wise thoughts or advice and incorporating stereotypes. These sayings are meant to characterise different cultures and can provide rich hints for interpretation. In this context, we can say that the solidarity of Turkey, Estonia and Lebanon in the project guarantees intercultural knowledge transfer in the workshops. It was really an unusual, challenging and instructive process for children to work with the proverbs of their own culture, as well as to try and interpret the advice and discourse of societies they did not know. We think that getting involved in this process from start to finish is a new and different experience for everyone involved in the project.

The project includes three workshops with two different children's groups in total. We progressed by trying different methods such as verbal expression, discussion, brainstorming, painting, storytelling and prediction. Our workshops were held online with meetings on the Zoom platform. If we would have had the opportunity to do it face to face with large groups, we could have gathered more ideas and involved children in a much more fun and active process.

Trying to find common categories for proverbs in their own language/culture, such as being thrifty or greedy, not hurrying, made children think about what was important for the previous generations.

During the workshops, discussing proverbs from Estonia and Lebanon, trying to guess their meanings and cultural contexts, helped children to develop an understanding about these countries and to meet the other culture through proverbs. The abundance of Lebanese proverbs similar to Estonian
versions led children to think about the intercultural relationship, whereas the words describing the nature and geographical location of Estonia ignited curiosity about the country in children from other countries. Especially those who heard Estonian for the first time wondered about the pronunciation and emphases of the language.

On the one hand, we, the workshop leaders, reconsidered the proverbs we use in everyday language and how these developed during our process. At the workshops, children provided examples of proverbs that even we do not use very often. We both talked about our own culture and history, and discussed proverbs from Estonia and Lebanon. Sometimes when we came across proverbs that we could not understand or wondered about, we asked our partners in other institutions for explanations. We thought about how we could explain the proverbs that seemed different to us to the children. We were surprised that there are proverbs that have the same meaning in different languages. Sometimes the translation of a proverb was not enough, so we listened to more detailed explanations from our friends whose native language was Estonian or Arabic. In other cases, when we understood better in what context these particular proverbs were used, we were able to discover connections with Turkish versions. We think that such a cultural dialogue is instructive and fun for adults as well.

Seda Usluoglu, Didem Kalafat from Small Projects Istanbul
Melda Akbaş, Gökçe Baltacı from Tarlabası Community Center
The Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures (ALF) was officially established in April 2005, and has its Headquarters in Alexandria, Egypt. Recognised as a unique institution, it fulfils an intercultural mission to promote knowledge, mutual respect and exchange between the peoples of the region, in the framework of the EuroMed Partnership. The Foundation works as a Network of 42 national Networks, gathering over four thousand civil society organisations, playing the role of a facilitator to bring people together, promoting dialogue between cultures, nurturing shared universal values, supporting the participation of citizens in building open and inclusive societies, and fostering the human dimension of the EuroMed Partnership. Its policies and programmes are scrutinized and endorsed by an intergovernmental Board of Governors, and an Advisory Council guides its strategic developments. During the last fourteen years, the ALF has affirmed itself as one of the most significant regional institutions for dialogue and civic participation in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

www.annalindhfoundation.org

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