

GREETINGS AND HOSPITALITY

(i) Greetings: The general greeting in Luhyaland is 'Mulembe', which means 'peace'. This is usually followed by the inquiry, 'What's news?'- 'akasingwa' or 'akaboolwa'.

In the olden days shaking hands was done over and over again, like the Bagandado, holding palms and thumbs in alternation for as long as a minute. This type of greeting was usually between friends or relatives who met after parting for a long period of time.

As well as verbal, elders were greeted by saying the words of greeting while raising both palms respectfully towards the forehead, then up and down several times. Women usually greeted while kneeling and half-sitting on their heels; never when standing up.

Sometimes special greetings were used for different parts of the day. For instance, in the morning they said, 'Bushiere'. Sometimes they might say: *Okonee bulayi?* (Did you sleep well?)

During the day they said, '*Akeshiteere?*' or '*Obola orie?*' In the evening it was: '*Bwakheera*' or '*Bwirire*'. The answer to all these was '*Bulayi*' or '*Muno*'.

Younger people always greeted older ones first. Such greetings were for people who often saw one another.

When people had been separated for a long time, for months or years, other greetings were used. These differed in different parts of Luhyaland. Among the western sub-tribes of Luhyaland, particularly those in the Busia District, it was '*Khulikhayo*', or '*Khulikha olukendo*'. This is the greeting they use in Buganda, and perhaps these Luhya got it when they passed through Uganda several hundreds of years ago.

(ii) Hospitality: Within the family, everyone had a right to a share of the food and to a place to sleep. Those who were well off had a duty to help those who could not help themselves with these necessities of life, in the larger family.

The boys slept in a special hut called *isimba*. *Isimba* is still used by young men although nowadays boys can sleep in their parents' house. The younger girls and boys slept in their mother's hut while older girls slept in an old woman's hut called *eshibinzie* where they learnt folk tales and other stories of wisdom.

Strangers, unless they came from an enemy tribe, got food and shelter. It was a sign of ill breeding to refuse a stranger food. Meals were eaten where everybody present could join in; and everyone was to join in without waiting to be asked to do so. In return, every stranger was expected to behave well in the home by observing accepted standards of good behaviour.

RULES OF GOOD BEHAVIOUR AND POL1TENESS

Such rules were many, and varied from place to place. Here we can only mention those common in most places. Some are still observed while others are sometimes disregarded nowadays.

(i) Behaviour at Meals:

- (a) Food was served according to age with the elders given their share first. Also, they washed their hands first.
- (b) When cooking or serving food, one had to be careful to keep the food of 'Abasirasi' apart. 'Abasirasi' are people who do not eat certain kinds of fish or meat because of taboo or disease.
- (c) Spitting or blowing the nose and similar actions were not allowed during meals.
- (d) Children had to sit flat on the ground. They were not allowed to squat.
- (e) It was considered a very shameful thing for anyone to eat while another, especially a child, was looking on; or to eat alone.
- (f) Men ate with men only, including boys of any age while women ate with other women, and young children of both sexes.

(ii) Behaviour in the Huts:

- (a) Married daughters or sons were not allowed to sleep in or to go to the 'lower side' (or 'fire side') of their parents' sleeping hut, or to shut or open its door.
- (b) No girls or women sat on men's stools. No boys or men of any age sat on their father's or uncle's special stool.

(iii) Behaviour towards People:

- (a) Parents may not beat their matured daughters.
- (b) No one may beat or fight his maternal uncle, or any aunt, no matter how young. These and similar relatives were respected to the point of fear in the olden days. This custom is still observed today.
- (c) A great deal of respect was required towards the mother-in-law, and to a certain extent, the father-in-law. In some places one was not to meet his mother-in-law; and, of course, he could never eat with her. This custom is not so rigidly observed nowadays. On the other hand, people were expected to be much freer with their sisters-in-law. (Except in Isukha and Idakho, where they are still treated like parents-in-law).
- (d) All older people were to be respected and given priority by their juniors. For instance, the oldest son always married before other sons, and the oldest daughter before the other daughters. This is changing!
- (e) Young people, however, were encouraged to crack jokes with those they called grandfather or grandmother; also with great-aunts and great-uncles.
- (f) No one may laugh at a lame person.
- (g) One may not beat a person he is chasing if the latter enters anyone's house, or seeks refuge at the back of the pursuer's mother or aunt.
- (h) At a beer party, one may not pass above drinking tubes or people's legs.

(iv) General Responsibility:

- (a) Everyone had a duty to help his neighbour who was in trouble, or to save another's property which was in danger.
- (b) For instance, everyone had a duty to help anyone drowning, or whose hut was burning, or whose crops were being destroyed by animals, and so on.
- (c) Honesty was considered very important. A person, who was not honest, even in small ways, was despised by others, and often he was avoided.

Many of these good rules are unfortunately not so rigidly followed today.

Adapted from: Life in Kenya in the Olden Days: The Baluyia, By John Osogo, Oxford University Press, 1965, ISBN 0 19 644012 2