



D.C. ⇒ Address to Elim Hospital Study Group ⇒  
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8.4.3

## Decision making in the family.

The word decision means settlement of questions, conclusion, formal judgement; or making up ones mind or to resolve.

When we say decision making in a family we mean the conclusion of a problem that has arisen in that particular family. We want to know who between husband & wife has the final word or who is the judge.

In a Tsonga family, people are joined together i.e. husband & wife, by Lobolo. The one that pays lobolo calls the tune.

A family that has not gone through lobolo is not a satisfactory family, it is looked upon as un-natural or as a friendship of a man & a woman who may at any time sever their relationship without anyone of their relatives having anything to say over the dissolution of the marriage unless the marriage took place before the European courts of law.

This brings me to the question of classes of African people of today: (1) we have the Christian Africans, (2) the Country Africans less able to read & write & Non-church goers and (3) The Townsmen.

From some Country Africans as well as from some Town-dweller Africans may <sup>arise</sup> ~~grow~~ the church going ~~some~~ Christian Africans

We shall call country dwellers Group A Christians Group C & Townsmen Group B. These 3 groups though they have many things in common, such as the colour of their skins, the language they speak & perhaps the food they eat their outlook

in life is not altogether similar. I should like to inform some of my listeners tonight that as far as our life is concerned we do not think alike or shall I say, we are not the same. We may have common anxiety but if one is in group A another in group B & yet another in group C. We are different. People in group C especially see things in a Christian way nearly quite different from groups A & B.

In group B there are families which just start from nowhere i.e. no engagement, no marriage ceremonies, no lobolo & no legal rights. Please understand me: not all group B people start families that way but this practice of "vat & sit" is very common in this group. Problems may arise even here.

Children may be born marriages may develop, quarrels, fights, sicknesses may occur, rent questions may make it necessary for the family to vacate the house. The question is: "who decides if any ~~of~~ of these problems arise?" It is a family but ~~I cannot~~ <sup>an informal one</sup> inform ~~the~~ <sup>their</sup> meeting on the question of "decision making" here. It depends ~~on~~ <sup>who decides</sup> ~~of the~~ <sup>if</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>anything happens here?</sup> ~~mother or father is~~ <sup>more influential</sup> I cannot tell.

But in group B there may be families that have started properly i.e. lobolo has been paid, legal rights have been observed. Father & mother may be leading normal life & suddenly something happens, such as illness of one of their children, who decides? Where must the child be sent for medical treatment, to the European doctors or hospital or to African Herbalists? Here both wife & husband consult one another. Here they decide together where to send the child. Sometimes ~~the~~ the in-laws come in for decision making.

since they live together

Here, they are bound to decide together ~~because~~  
If anything happens, or perhaps if the child dies the blame falls upon no one for having chosen a wrong doctor. They have decided together

1 Taking this question of illness again and comparing Group B with groups A + C. We find that the fathers in groups A + B may not be around when <sup>one of their</sup> children falls seriously ill. Who decides where to take the child?

In Group C it is easy. The mother <sup>may</sup> take the child to <sup>the</sup> Hospital. <sup>without waiting for word from husband</sup> She decides. She may inform the husband by phone or by letter.

<sup>on the other hand</sup> The mother in group A calls upon the in-laws <sup>other mother</sup> for <sup>approval before she does anything else</sup> ~~advice~~. If it is a question of operation she must first obtain permission from her husband by telegram or letter. <sup>only</sup> If the husband lives at home, ~~he~~ <sup>she</sup> must decide. <sup>then decisions are easy. He will decide</sup>

I can say that in all labeled women decision is made by the husband. There are exceptional cases where the wife makes the decision. ~~even~~

2 <sup>Coming</sup> ~~then~~ to labels or marriage as another example: <sup>secretly at first</sup>  
<sup>the young man</sup> ~~the boy~~ or <sup>a young woman</sup> ~~the girl~~ may choose a lover <sup>secretly at first</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>will consent</sup> ~~it comes to a day~~ when <sup>they want</sup> engagement takes place. The mother may have known this love affair of her child for a long time. But the poor father is often kept in the dark until that day (engagement day). He may <sup>resent</sup> ~~dislike~~ this coupling but his wife <sup>or</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>relatives</sup> ~~persuade~~ <sup>persuade</sup> him to agree ~~upon~~ until he submits <sup>say</sup> "a va vonake ke!" if he is the father of the daughter. <sup>his own</sup> "Let them be seen!" This means that they must produce some cash or cattle. If they produce something to his <sup>satisfaction</sup> ~~then he is satisfied~~. <sup>marriage is arranged</sup> If it is, that decides.

3 Let us take the building of a house or where to build, who decides? It is the husband who decides. The wife may suggest of course the buying of large quantities of food especially during famine. The husband decides. In many cases the wife suggests.

She <sup>decides</sup> ~~suggests~~ even what to cook, when to cook, and where to cook. She decides also when to make beer or when to kill a fowl, but a goat, and ox or a pig, the husband decides.

The hiring of who to plough the fields depends upon who can pay. If the wife has her own cash she may hire people to come & plough her fields without waiting for the decision of the husband.

Differences of opinion <sup>or disputes</sup> between husband & wife may be settled by parents, grand-parents or respected friends.

If in the family the father has died or the mother is no more & if there is a male child in the family, he takes the place of the parents in deciding what is what provided he is held in respect by his younger brothers & sisters.

as far as schooling of children is concerned both parents or even one of them may decide, or the child itself may force its way to school but for circumcision school the father decides.

The acquiring of property depends upon who has the cash. If the father has money he can decide to buy poles & build a house or he can buy a house. If the wife has cash she can fill the house with furniture to her heart's content without waiting for the husband to decide what to buy, but in many cases both husband & wife discuss the matter & decide together what to buy.

Small items such as sugar, meat, bread, tea, the wife, being responsible for the pot, decides.

On the whole I must say that the Isonga people follow the 'Patriarchal' form of authority where the male is the head of the family, the un-married as well as the married female is sub-ordinate to some male, such as her father, her brother, her husband even her son, if he is old enough to take responsibility of making decisions.

On the whole, the father is the one who decides



## Sometimes

The term *Kokwani* may be used in addressing any <sup>other person</sup> ~~one~~ who <sup>may be</sup> as old as your own *Kokwani*. It is a term of respect, but should be used to very very old people otherwise you may find yourself offending someone especially if he/she is as old as your parents. *Sikha* people we address them as *manana* or *Yatana* as if they were your own parents. 'Father mother' or *Makweshu* meaning brother or sister, though not your own *Kith + Kin*.

Your father's sister is *hahani*, now called *auntie*. These days younger generations call mother's sister *auntie*. But this term prevails more in urban areas than in the country.

Some people call <sup>their</sup> ~~your~~ mother's brother "*malume*". <sup>malume</sup> ~~malume~~ is the one to whom you can confide ~~all your secrets~~ <sup>(if provided)</sup> (if he is not a babbler)

You can call his wife *antie* or "*khata malume / Kokwane*."

You are free to pick any fruits from his trees. You may even chase a fowl & kill it if you like. Some kill even a goat. The *malume* may grumble but he will not hate you for it. You may take anything from his house & unless he begs you & explains you that the thing you have taken is really something <sup>he</sup> cherishes, you may have it.

This is the only person you are free with including you grannies of course. If you have sense you should not overdo things because your *malume* is your best friend.

All his daughters are regarded as mothers to you & all his sons *Uncles* (*Kokwani*) that is where *Uncle* comes in best.

Your sister-in-law is *NAMU* and your brother-in-law *NAMU* or *mmkhwana*. "*Swaar*" in Dutch these day both brother & sister-in-law are addressed as "*Swaar*" by the more <sup>urban</sup> sophisticated blacks. But the country people still stick to *NAMU*.

Your father's brother is called "ompie" by the more Europeanised Africans whilst the country people stick to Makwavo-wa-tatani.

These days you call your sister as "Sesi" + your brother as "Buti" especially if they are older to you. Children know only these terms whilst older people call Sesi "Daduwethu" derived from Zulu meaning my sister. "Mtakababa" also Zulu meaning brother or simply "makwethu" for both sister + brother.

You may "vungunya" your sister-in-law or she may "vungunya" you, but not your other-in-laws. Vungunya means joking by words or physically (not hard of course)

## = Decision making in the family =

Because of rapid social changes that are taking place now-a-days things are not static in this country.

People are gradually coming closer & closer every day & with it comes the changing of customs & habits of speech & food & apparatus & travelling means. The African of today is no longer the African that lived 50 years ago.

Because of migratory labour system, because of education & civilisation & <sup>because of</sup> Christianity, the pattern of life as lived by older generations of African people has changed & is going on changing.

Copying from one another is taking place daily. The life lived in towns is gradually influencing the whole country so much so that many families do not know what pattern of life should be followed.

People today are struggling for existence. Each family manages its own affairs in its own way while God is for all.

The question posed here is "Who makes decisions in the family?" This question can be answered only in general.

Let us take one particular example, say

### (A) "Illness" of a child.

Sometimes, because of migratory labour the father is in town, the mother has remained at home with the children. One child falls seriously ill.

~~The child is sick~~ she needs treatment. Who decides?

If it is the family of un-educated people & if the child is seriously ill & if she must be operated upon will the poor woman decide? She will not, for fear that the husband <sup>may</sup> ~~will~~ object to it so she must phone the husband who must decide.

Even to take the child to Hospital she must obtain consent from her in-laws first before going to Hospital otherwise there may be trouble. Here the husband or the in-laws must decide.