

# DUTCH PROVERBS

## COPY AFTER PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER

In front of us, a village square is teeming with hustle and bustle. But a closer look reveals that the people depicted are engaged in quite strange activities: One is hanging his coat to the wind, another is casting roses before swine. One man is sitting on burning coals, another bangs his head against a brick wall.

It quickly becomes clear that these are not real events, but proverbs. Do you discover any others?

The painting depicts over a hundred different proverbs as illustrations. In his original 'proverbial painting' Pieter Bruegel the Elder translated proverbs into images and thus made them (more) accessible.

Bruegel's pictorial inventions - peasant dances, genre scenes, large hidden object pictures and landscapes - had a lasting influence on the painting north of the Alps that followed him. They were repeatedly imitated, varied or simply used as inspiration. This painting, for example, is a free variation of the original painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (now in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin).



1. To have the roof tiled with tarts (To be very wealthy)
2. To marry under the broomstick (To live together without marrying)
3. To stick out the broom (To have fun while the master is away)
4. To look through one's fingers (To turn a blind eye)
5. There stand the wooden shoes (To wait in vain)
6. To lead each other by the nose (To fool each other)
7. Fools get the best cards
8. To crap on the world (To despise everything)
9. The topsy-turvy world
10. It depends on the fall of the cards
11. The die is cast
12. To shoot a second bolt to find the first (To repeat a foolish action)
13. When the gate is open the pigs will run into the corn
14. To play on the pillory (To attract attention to one's shameful acts)
15. Two fools under one hood

16. To have toothache behind the ears
17. To shave the fool without lather (To trick somebody)
18. To be pissing against the moon (To waste one's time on a futile endeavour)
19. Here hangs the pot (It is the opposite of what it should be)
20. To hang one's cloak according to the wind
21. To toss feathers in the wind (To work fruitlessly)
22. Put out the fire before it comes out of the roof
23. To recognize a bird by its feathers
24. To gaze at the stork (To waste one's time)
25. To try to kill two flies with one stroke (To be efficient)
26. To fall from the ox onto the rear end of an ass (To fall on hard times)
27. To wipe one's backside on the door (To treat something lightly)
28. To go around shouldering a burden
29. It hangs like a privy over a ditch (It is obvious)

30. To tighten the shoulders (To make an effort)
31. They both crap through the same hole (They are inseparable comrades)
32. To throw one's money into the water
33. Sharks eat smaller fish
34. To fish behind the net (To miss an opportunity)
35. If I am not meant to be their keeper, I will let geese be geese (Do not interfere in matters that are not your concern)
36. Fear makes the old woman trot
37. To not care whose house is on fire as long as one can warm oneself at the blaze
38. Good soldiers don't fear fire, also: Are you a warrior or a peasant?
39. A wall with cracks will soon collapse (Anything poorly managed will soon fail)
40. To be unable to see the sun shine on the water (To be jealous)
41. Everything, however finely spun, finally comes to the sun
42. To crap on the gallows

43. It is easy to sail before the wind
44. To see bears dancing (To be starving)
45. To hang one's cowl on the hedge (To discard something without knowing whether it will be required later)
46. It is ill to swim against the current
47. The pitcher goes to the water until it finally breaks
48. The broadest straps are cut from someone else's leather (One is quick to another's money)
49. To hold an eel by the tail (To undertake a difficult task)
50. What can smoke do to iron? (There is no point in trying to change the unchangeable)
51. To get the lid on the head (To end up taking responsibility)
52. To fry the whole herring for the sake of the roe (To do too much to achieve a little)
53. The cap stone (To cover something up)
54. To be a pillar-biter (To be a religious hypocrite)

55. Never believe someone who carries fire in one hand and water in the other (To be two-faced)
56. To be able to tie even the devil to a pillow
57. The scissors hang out there (They are liable to cheat you there)
58. To find the dog in the pot (To arrive too late)
59. To sit between two chairs in the ashes (To be indecisive)
60. The sow pulls out the tap (Negligence will be rewarded with disaster)
61. To bang one's head against a brick wall (To try to achieve the impossible)
62. To put your armour on (To be angry)
63. To always gnaw on a single bone (To continually talk about the same subject)
64. To be a hen-feeler (To be very miserly)
65. To be armed to the teeth (To be heavily armed)
66. To bell the cat (To carry out a dangerous or impractical plan)
67. Shear them but do not skin them

68. To carry out the day out in baskets (To waste one's time)
69. One winds on the distaff what the other spins (Both spread gossip)
70. One shears a sheep, the other shears pigs (One has all the advantages, the other none)
71. To be as gentle as a lamb
72. To hold a candle to the Devil (To flatter and make friends indiscriminately)
73. To confess to the Devil (To reveal secrets to one's enemy)
74. The pig is stabbed through the belly (A foregone conclusion)
75. She puts the blue cloak on her husband (She deceives him)
76. To fill the well after the calf has already drowned
77. The Fox and the Stork dine together (Two deceivers always keep their own advantage in mind)
78. The meat on the spit must be basted (Certain things need constant attention)
79. There is no turning the spit with him (He is uncooperative)

80. To sit on hot coals
81. Two dogs over one bone seldom agree
82. To tie a flaxen beard to the face of Christ (To hide deceit under a veneer of Christian piety)
83. To cast roses before swine (To waste effort on the unworthy)
84. To have the world spinning on one's thumb (To have every advantage)
85. To have to stoop to get on in the world
86. To put a spoke on someone's wheel
87. To stand in one's own light (To behave contrarily to one's own happiness or advantage)
88. He sticks to himself (Seeking advantage)
89. To pull to get the longest end (To attempt to get advantage)
90. He who has spilt his porridge cannot scrape it all up again (Once something is done it cannot be undone)
91. To be suspended between heaven and earth (To be in an awkward situation)

92. To fall through the basket (To have your deception uncovered)
93. To keep the hen's egg and let the goose's egg go (To make a bad decision)
94. Everyone sees through their own glasses (To have one's own view)
95. To yawn against the oven (To attempt more than one can manage)
96. Love is on the side where the money bag hangs
97. To be barely able to reach from one loaf to another (To have difficulty living within budget)
98. A hoe without a handle (Probably something useless)
99. To look for the hatchet (To try to find an excuse)
100. Here he is with his lantern (To finally have an opportunity to show a talent)
101. A hatchet with a handle (The whole thing)