

# Poem

by Barolong Seboni



# POEM

We do not need  
These jagged words  
That dig a trench between us  
Each time they are uttered

Those epithets  
the  
Sharp like spokes  
That pierce the heart when spoken

There is no room in my cup  
For these acidic words of sarcasm  
still  
That corrode my sensitivity

These cold and icy terms tossed  
To deaden the heart  
Venomous words  
From your serpentine tongue  
That infect the feeling...

Let us speak, love  
in gentler tones  
timid as the lamb  
is soft  
woolly words  
worn to stand strong against

cold-bitterness of the world

Better still  
let us search in our speech  
for words deep as the soul is

that will spell our thoughts  
in the silence of our smiles

# Background of the poet



- Barolong Seboni born in Botswana 27 April 1957.
- Lived in England and America where he completed MA.
- Has been a teacher and university academic.
- Published several volumes of poetry and literature anthologies.
- He is currently a senior lecturer in English at the University of Botswana.



# General discussion and message

- Rudyard Kipling wrote, 'words are, of course the most powerful drug used by mankind'.
- Seboni seems to agree with this statement as *Poem* is about the power of words.
- Poem deals with :
  - the **tone, intent** and **consequences** of **verbal communication** and specifically **hurtful** and **abusive** words.
- The speaker seems to be speaking to a person he is in love with.

# General discussion and message

- First four stanzas :
- Deal with the nature and painful consequences of harmful communication
- Last two stanzas :
- Show how gentle tones and words can heal and comfort.
- The last stanza: moves even past words.
- The speaker expresses the wish that they can reach a point where words will no longer be needed, where they will be able to express their feelings (of love and caring) without even speaking.

# Structure

- Six stanzas of unequal length written in free verse = no set rhyme scheme.
- Very little punctuation.
- The **first 4 stanzas form one sentence and end on an ellipsis**; it is as if the poet cannot stop or control the negative effects of hurtful words.
- The **last two stanzas consist of a full sentence each and end on full stops**.
- There is continued use of **enjambment** in last two stanzas, but also **more punctuation marks brought in order to emphasise certain ideas**.

# Structure

- **Enjambment = Used in lines 1-4**
- The function is to speed up the reading to emphasize the ferocity of the arguments.
- It also illustrates feeling overwhelmed by this situation, or a steady stream of abusive words



# Type

- Lyric = this lyrical is a short poem written from the first person's point of view.
- Typically, in lyrical poetry the speaker expresses his very personal thoughts and feeling about the effects of words.

# Tone and mood

- Tone changes as poem progresses. :
- The first part (Stanzas 1-4) is an illustration of the destructive effect of words.
- In Stanza 1 and 2 the speaker expresses disapproval of his partner and himself.
- **Tone:** critical, disapproving, indignant, bitter, argumentative and disillusioned as each stanza discusses the devastating effect of negative words on a person.
- In Stanzas 3-4 it is as if he becomes more accusatory of his partner.
- This is further reinforced by the onomatopoeic effect of the repetition of abrupt plosive consonant sounds (jiggered – dig; trench – time; sharp – spokes – pierce – spoken; cup – sarcasm – corrode), which imitates repetitive stabbing and emphasises the violent hurt that words can inflict.

# Tone and mood

- The second part (stanza 5-6):
- **Tone:** gentler, forgiving, compromising, peaceful and appeasing as if the speaker is now trying to convince the reader that words can be used for beneficial and uplifting purposes.
- This message is reinforced by the onomatopoeic effect of the repetition of flowing vowel sounds (tones – cold – soul; silence – smiles), the alliteration of the w-sound (woolly – words – worn) and the repetition of the l-sound (love – lamb – woolly – still – soul – spell – silence – smiles). These sounds are soothing and gentle and illustrate the positive and healing effect of words.

# Language/Diction

- In stanzas 1, 5 and 6 - personal pronouns ('we' and 'us')
- In stanzas 3 and 4 - possessive pronouns ('my' and 'your')
- ❖ Contrast
- ❖ The isolation and victimisation caused by negative words are illustrated in the contrast.
  
- The personal pronouns used in the first and last stanza: plural and inclusive and indicate collectiveness – we are not alone
- The possessive pronouns are singular and depict how negative words and stereotyping can isolate and victimise people.



# Title

- Unexpected and unconventional:
- **A poem = purest form of communication.**  
The poet hopes for this type of communication in his personal relationships
- **A poem = open to different interpretations and so is communication.**  
The poet reminds himself to keep an open mind and accommodate other perspectives as well
- The poet might find it **easier to express his emotions in written form** and not verbally because it is not as confrontational

**CAN'T YOU TAKE A JOKE?**

Yes, I know I just made you feel 2 inches tall, but why are you calling me out on that?

Of course I did, but maybe I can make you forget...?

**I NEVER SAID THAT**

Why are you questioning my right to abuse you 24/7?

**I AM YOUR MOTHER!**

**YOU MUST HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD**

You got me, I meant every word!

**I WAS JUST TRYING TO HELP**

I was manipulating you, but that's not the point

Seriously, can we get back to me abusing you some more?

**CAN WE MOVE PAST THAT?**

**THERE YOU GO, BLAMING ME AGAIN.**

I know this is my fault, but let's make sure you blame yourself.

He is starting to tell people the truth about me, better discredit him.

**HE IS CRAZY**

**WHY DON'T YOU TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT YOURSELF?**

**SHE IS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF YOU**

She is helping you see the truth about me, better remove her from your life.

I know exactly what you are talking about, but let's see if I can convince you it never happened.

**I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN!**

# Theme

- The effects of verbal communication – negative and positive.
- The lack of proper communication has a negative effect on people and their relationships.
- Words should not be used to divide hurt and humiliate people; but instead it should be used to draw people closer.

# Vocabulary

- jagged = pointy, sharp, serrated
- trench = furrow, ditch
- epithets = It is a negative label or hurtful name-calling  
Examples = idiot, ugly, fat, stupid, useless
- spokes = wire rods connecting the centre of a wheel to its outer edge





# Vocabulary

- acidic = acid erodes away strong metals and burns and is painful when it comes into contact with the skin
- corrode = to gradually destroy something by using a chemical reaction or to make something weak by causing gradual damage



# Vocabulary

- tossed = hurled away, flung, thrown out without respect or thought of the consequences
- venomous = containing venom that might kill
- serpentine = snake-like
- timid = tentative, careful
- spell = signify, indicate, demonstrate

# Vocabulary

Note the difference in vocabulary

## Stanzas 1-4:

jagged  
sharp, spokes  
pierce  
acidic, corrode  
cold, icy  
deaden, venomous

## Stanzas 5 – 6:

gentler  
timid, lamb  
soft, woolly  
deep words  
soul still  
silence smiles

# Stanza 1

## Words divide



# Things not needed in relationship:

- Words that hurt/ damage
- Insulting words that hurt and penetrate the heart.
- Cold and distant conversation
- Poisonous or treacherous words

Apostrophe

Both speaker and listener guilty

Includes reader of poem too

Universal

**Metaphor = hurtful words compared to sharp, pointy objects. Both inflict painful injuries, physically or emotionally.**



1. We do not need

2. these jaggered words

Jagged changed to jagg

ered = sharp, protruding edges

\* Present tense:  
Struggles currently

Typography = Uneven lines imitate jagged edges

Long, narrow, ditch used by soldiers to protect from enemy attack  
\*severity of argument  
\*relationship like battlefield

**Personification: words are like people who dig a ditch as a barrier**

3. that dig a trench between us

4. each time they are uttered

**It happens often**

Words spoken

**Metaphor: words are compared to a barrier because hurtful words can create distance, making communication difficult..**



# Stanza 2

## Words hurt

Words to describe person –  
negative label

5. those epithets

6. sharp like spokes

7. that pierce the heart when spoken

Centre of feelings

Personification = words stab, slice, puncture  
Strong verbs that indicate force, violence, pain – the  
words are killing the feelings of the person spoken  
to

**Simile:**  
insulting words are  
compared to sharp  
spokes from a wheel  
used as a weapon to  
stab and kill.





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# Stanza 3

## Words damage

\*Speaker  
seems  
resentful

Metaphor – cup refer to his daily life/character. Becomes a metaphor for the things he has to put up with.

8. there is no room in my cup

\*No space for hurtful words in his life.

\*Acid eats into substances until there is nothing left - burns

9. for these acidic words of sarcasm

Metaphor – sarcastic words that hurt feelings compared to acid

10. that corrode my sensitivity

Metaphor = destructive words erode ("eat") away at a person's being, making a person permanently lose hope and their joy for life.



**SARCASM:**  
the ability to insult  
idiots without them  
realizing it.



# Stanza 4

## Words kill

Metaphor – ice compared to harsh words. It hurts, freezes ability to feel or show feelings and completely removes any kind of feelings.



11. these cold and icy words tossed



Metaphor –  
Shows lack of  
respect,  
intention to  
hurt.

12. to deaden the heart



Climax = words can kill

penetrating  
breathtaking **bitter** chilling  
suffocating fresh frightening  
**painful** shattering  
aching clean **biting** fun bone brutal pure unrelenting  
burning numbing refreshing

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[www.themindjournal.com](http://www.themindjournal.com)



How to Heal  
After the Cruel Words  
of a Toxic Person

By Liz Carethers

*Liz Carethers*

Allusion: Biblical reference to snake and Garden of Eden= lies, deceit, betrayal, evil.

Metaphor – effect of abusive words compared to damaging effect of snake bite. Inflicting pain and damage. Harmful and deadly.

13. venomous words

14. from your serpentine tongue

Contaminate

15. that infect the feeling...

Ellipsis creates pause – reader can think about the death that words can cause. Indicates something has been omitted. It also creates a break for the next stanza which changes focus.

## Stanza 1 -4:

- **Enjambment- Speaker overwhelmed by steady stream of hurtful words.**
- **Tone: bitter, sad, disillusioned**



**In last two stanzas speaker changes focus from negative to positive words. Comforting language as well as the effect it will have on their relationship.**

- **Unite them**
- **Make it easier to face destructive world**
- **Enable them to have healing thoughts that will result in healing words.**
- **Will no longer be necessary to express feelings and emotions – able to communicate by a look or a smile.**

# Stanza 5

## Gentler tones

Wants to work together to solve problem

S-alliteration-imply caring attitude

**Apostrophe – he is speaking to someone, wanting to work together**

16. Let us speak, love

Consonance – Links ideas of gentleness

17. in gentler tones

18. timid as the lamb

19. is soft

Lack of courage

Refers to tone- gentle

**Simile = a gentle tone of voice/words are compared to a shy lamb. Biblical connotation = vulnerable, symbol of forgiveness and sacrifice**



Metaphor = kind, gentle words are compared to warm woolly winter jerseys or socks – protection, safety, care.

20. woolly words

w- and s-alliteration emphasise the softness of the words

21. worn to stand strong against the

wrap/cover oneself in soothing words. Will keep one warm and protect against the cold.

22. cold-bitterness of the world.

Metaphor = harsh world with all its problems and difficulties is compared to bitterly cold winter.



# Stanza 6

## Deeper words

23. Better stil

Even better suggestion

Combined effort

24. let us search in our speech

Spiritual part of person-real  
inner being and character

25. for words deep as the soul is still

**Simile = Meaningful words are compared to a  
soul at peace – calm, without evil**

S-Alliteration – creates calm,  
soothing, relaxed atmosphere



Personification: These words personified that they can express our thoughts and silence. Will more clearly spell out what they are thinking

26. that will spell our thoughts

s-alliteration slows the poem down and creates a calm effect – like “shhhh”

27. in the silence of our smiles.

Sibilance-  
creates soft and  
peaceful  
atmosphere

Even smiles ( without words) are preferable as they will demonstrate positive thoughts /attitudes



**silence** and **smile** are two powerful tools. **smile** is the way to **solve many problems** and **silence** is the way to **avoid many problems**.

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