



## The Naba Zid-Wendé

*Mossi People – Burkina Faso*

In the beginning it was emptiness. There was only the Kingdom of Everlasting Truth, which was ruled by the Naba Zid-Wendé.

Weary of emptiness, the Naba Zid-Wendé created the Earth and, later, the day, the night and time. They created the sun for lighting up the day and to facilitate work, and the moon so that the night was a time for rest.

At first, the Earth had no form and was all Fire, but the Naba Zid-Wendé ordered the Fire to leave the surface of the Earth and go live inside it, so that the Earth would be a habitable place for the beings which they were going to create, and the Fire obeyed. Then, they sent the wind to the Earth to cool it down.

First, to make sure that the Earth was strong enough to support weight, they created the chameleon. Once they were convinced that the Earth's crust was capable of supporting the weight of the chameleon, they created the serpent, to make sure that the Earth was cold enough to be inhabited. When they saw the serpent snaked on the ground without complaining about the heat, the Naba Zid-Wendé created large animals, such as the elephant, the rhinoceros, the buffalo, the giraffe ... The surface of the Earth was strong and cool enough to sustain and allow the life of all.

In the end, the Naba Zid-Wendé created human beings. They created them very black, not only because black is a very strong colour, but also to distinguish them from the sun, which is red, and the moon,

which is white. Finally, they breathed on them and, in this way, gave them a soul, making them the most enlightened of the beings.

The Naba Zid-Wendé welcomed human beings with an immeasurable smile, which became the sky. The sky was held in such a way that you could touch it just by raising your hand. But best of all was that this wonderful sky was edible. Beyond the sky, they created the stars and many other things.

Everything was going well. Human beings had no need to work in order to eat. All the food they needed was at their disposal.

But there came a time when humans, dissatisfied with their fate and driven by their arrogance and curiosity, began to complain to the Naba Zid-Wendé, accusing them of hiding something important under the mountains. So humans started digging the mountains, but they found nothing but a burning layer, which was none other than Fire. And Fire ignited with a great intensity, because he was furious with the Naba Zid-Wendé and jealous of humans. And the flames of Fire rose up to the sky, which, fleeing from the heat, rose to the heights of the stars, to the Kingdom of Everlasting Truth, where the flames could not reach it.

Human beings could no longer feed on sky, due ultimately to their own arrogance. Then, to moisten the Earth again and for human beings to feed, the Naba Zid-Wendé created rivers and streams, plants and trees. And they created flowers, to beautify the Earth, and the aromas of the flowers, so that humans could inhale the perfume of life.

Humans multiplied and, over time, they became increasingly conceited, committing more and more meanness. Concerned about what they saw, the Naba Zid-Wendé made a great lake, and said to humans:

‘Go and bathe in the lake, and you will be purified.’

But the human beings were concerned with other things, so that they did not go to the lake to take that purifying bath, and the Fire took advantage of that opportunity to contaminate the water of the lake with hatred, envy and division.

One day, seeing that humans were not interested in purifying themselves, the Naba Zid-Wendé decided to withdraw their gift, and sent the sun to dry the lake. And it was on the last day, before the lake was entirely dried up, that humans went to take their purifying bath.

The first group of humans who bathed in the waters of hatred and division emerged from them completely white from head to toe. The second group that entered the water came out of it yellow in colour. And the third group came out of the water with a copper-red colour. By the time the last group arrived, the sun had already dried almost all of the lake's water, so that only their feet and hands could get wet in the water. They left there with the soles of their feet and the palms of their hands white, yellow and reddish, while their bodies remained black.

The Naba Zid-Wendé later returned to see their creatures on Earth, and to set about creating one last animal out of clay.

The plants and the animals organised a party to celebrate the arrival of the Naba Zid-Wendé, but the human races were so busy dividing the Earth and enslaving each other, that they did not participate. The Naba Zid-Wendé became very sad, so sad that they forgot to finish their last creature. She started screaming, asking for a head, legs and a tail.

The Naba Zid-Wendé, sunk in sadness, finished their last creature in clay, unwillingly and in a hurry, which is why the turtle looks the way she does. □

Adapted by Sybson Yawo Sema (2019).

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## Comments

The first written adaptation of this story was made by Frederic Guirma in 1971, and he claimed that his ancestors had transmitted it to him.

Regarding West African traditions, in addition to oral transmission within families, it is essential to know the prominent role played by the griots, itinerant troubadours, storytellers, poets,

musicians and depositories of traditions, which constitute a separate caste among the numerous peoples of this region.

## Sources

Guirma, F. (1971). The Naba Zid-Wendé. In *Tales of Mogho* (p. 113). New York: Macmillan.

Railsback, B. (2000). *Creation Stories from Around the World*. University of Georgia. Retrieved from <http://www.gly.uga.edu/railsback/CS/CSIndex.html>.

## *Associated text of the Earth Charter*

Preamble: The Global Situation.- Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened.

## *Other passages that this story illustrates*

Principle 9a: Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.

Principle 12a: Eliminate discrimination in all its forms, such as that based on race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national, ethnic or social origin.