

1. ***A falta de bueyes, se labra con burros.***

Comments: “*Labra*” is the third person singular conjugation of “*labrar*” and should not be confused with the noun “*labra*.” The idea here is that if you do not have oxen one must make due with donkeys. For a similar message, compare this to the Latin: *Si deficit equus, lassus conscendit asellum.* (*If his horse fails, the tired man mounts a donkey*).

2. ***A la luna el lobo al asno espulga.***

Comments: “*A la luna*” lit. “to the moon.” “*Espulga*” lit. “deflea”: it is a verb formed from the prefix “*es-*” (removal) and “*pulga*” (flea). However, render it as “at moonlight.” The idea here is that the wolf has consumed the donkey. This proverb warns us of people who take advantage of others when the opportunity arises.

3. ***A la borrica arrodillada, doblarle la carga.***

Comments: “*Borrica*,” lit. “female donkey.” “*Arrodillada*” is a past participle, lit. “kneeling.” “*Doblarle*” is a compound of “*doblar*” and the indirect object pronoun “*le*,” lit. “double the load to her.” Much like the message of #2 above, this proverb illustrates that others will take advantage of one’s unfavorable situation should it benefit them.

4. ***Año, buen año, dos ruines en un asno.***

Comments: The idea of this proverbial phrase is that an average yield and a plentiful year “*buen año*” come at the expense and health of a donkey, “*dos ruines*.” In other words, sometimes good things exact a heavy toll.

5. ***Asna coja más habrá de madrugar.***

Comments: “*Asna*” is the feminine form of “*Asno*,” lit. “female donkey.”

“*Más*” holds the sense of “even” “*Habrá de*” is a future indicative and takes the infinitive “*madrugar*,” lit. “will have to...” This proverb is applicable to those who are lazy and must fulfill an important obligation: i.e. the lame donkey who gets started much more slowly must rise even earlier so that the task can be accomplished.

6. ***Asno de muchos, lobos lo comen.***

Comments: “*de muchos*” replaces a plural noun, lit. “of many [men].” The idea here is that which belongs to everyone is of little value and is treated as such, lending itself to becoming easily damaged (or in this case, eaten!).

7. ***Asno malo, cabe casa aguija sin palo.***

Comments: Note the rhyme “*malo...palo.*” “*Cabe*” is a preposition, lit. “beside,” and should not be confused with the verb “*caber.*” The idea here is that the stubborn donkey who normally must be beaten to complete tasks walks freely when he is on his way home. Ergo, this proverb can be applied to lazy workers who are enticed to work without a “stick” only when they see the spoils of work in front of them.

8. ***Asno matado de lejos avienta las pegas.***

Comments: When the participle “*matado*” modifies equines, it is best rendered as “chafed.” “*De lejos*” is an adverb denoting distance, lit. “from afar.” Here, “*Avienta*” means “blows/fans.” “*Las pegas*” is a deverbal noun from “*pegar*,” so treat it as “the lashings.” In other words, the injured donkey tends to his wounds at a safe distance from his abusers, and from this point on instinctually avoids behavior that results in more lashings: i.e. pain is the best teacher. Compare this to the saying “A scalded cat even fears

cold water.”

9. ***Asno sea, quien asno batea.***

Comments: “*Asno sea*,” is a nice use of the subjunctive: lit. “He might as well be an ass.” The proverb reminds us that people who criticize others are not only similar to their subjects of vitrol but are, in fact, worse.

10. ***Asno sea, quien a asno vocea.***

Comments: For a similar syntactical structure and message, see #8 above.

11. ***Burra que gime buena carga pide.***

Comments: “*que*,” lit. “that.” The idea here is that those who do nothing but complain and are the least useful are “asking for it.” For a similar message, see #6 above.

12. ***Como arriero sin pollino.***

Comments: “*Pollino*,” lit. “donkey.” The idea of the proverbial phrase is quite literal: to be without the necessary parts. Compare this to the saying, “Like a fish without a tail.”

13. ***Cuando fueres a la villa, ten ojo a la borriquilla.***

Comments: Note the rhyme: “*villa...borriquilla*.” “*Cuando*” + the subjunctive “*fueres*” indicates a hypothetical, lit. “When (if) you go...” “*Ten ojo*” is an indicative command, lit. “keep an eye.” The proverb reminds us to be mindful of troublemakers when in a new place.

14. ***Desconfía del tigre más que del león, y de un asno malo más que de un tigre.***

Comments: “*Desconfía*” is a command, lit. “Distrust the...” Supply “*Desconfía*” for the second half of the proverb, “*y [desconfía]..*” The metaphorical value of this proverb shows us that someone who partakes in asinine behavior can be much more of a formidable foe than those that rely on brute strength: in other words, it is best to be wary of those willfully ignorant.

15. ***Dijo el asno a las coles: pax vobis!***

Comments: The verb “*dijo*” indicates direct speech, lit. “The donkey said...” “*pax vobis,*” is a religious exclamation, lit. “peace be with you” (John 20:19). Just as Christ spoke to the Apostles after his resurrection, the donkey addresses his faithful devotees, the cabbages!

16. ***Dijo el asno al mulo, tira allá, orejudo.***

Comments: Again, we have direct speech much like #15 above. Render “*Tira allá,*” as “Get out of here.” Here, the joke relies on the irony of the donkey thinking he is superior to the mule. Compare this to the English saying: “The pot calling the kettle black.”

17. ***El asno, aunque sea manso, el diablo tiene sobre el rabo.***

Comments: Note the rhyme: “*diablo...rabo.*” There is a nice subjunctive here: “*aunque sea manso,*” lit. “although he seems meek.” “*el diablo*” is the direct object in the clause. “*Sobre el rabo,*” lit. “on the tail.” The idea here is to not be fooled by the donkey’s appearance; he is mischievous and troublesome because the devil has a hold of his tail.

18. ***El asno chiquillo, siempre borriquillo.***

Comments: This proverb is marked by its stylistic feature of the consonant

rhyme of the Spanish diminutives “*chiquillo...borriquillo*.” The diminutive “*borriquillo*” creates a sense of redundancy: in other words, if it looks and acts like a donkey, it is a donkey. Not only does this proverb infantilize those to whom it is applied, but it also reminds them that they cannot change who they are. For three similar variants, see #4 on [Animal Proverbs #1](#).

19. ***El asno no anda, sino con la vara.***

Comments: It is implied that the donkey does not walk freely: “*El asno no anda [con libertad], sino con la vara.*” Render “*Sino con*” as “but with.” See #6 above for a donkey who walks without the stick! The metaphorical value of the proverb reminds us of the perpetual punishment to which donkeys are subject. This saying can make us reflect on the way in which we treat non-human animals: alas, the poor donkey!

20. ***El burro que más trabaja, más pronto rompe el aparejo.***

Comments: “*que*,” lit. “that.” “*Aparejo*,” lit. “packsaddle.” Here the idea is to not work too hard, so that one does not burn out too quickly.

21. ***Ir al cielo con los burros.***

Comments: “*Ir al cielo*,” lit. “To the heavens.” The idea here is that this refers to something idiotic or something that will never happen. For a similar message, compare this to the Latin joke: *Cum asinus in tegulis ascenderit* (when the ass climbs the roof tiles).

22. ***Mulo o mula, burra o burro, rocin nunca.***

Comments: “*Rocin*” is an archaic word that is best rendered as “useless horse” In this proverbial phrase, donkeys and mules (for once!) are elevated in status when juxtaposed with their more regal equine counterpart.

23. ***No es de seso traer el asno en peso.***

Comments: Note the rhyme: “*seso...peso.*” “*no es de seso,*” lit. “It is not reasonable.” “*en peso,*” lit. “in weight.” In other words, do not try to outdo the donkey in what it does best. Compare this to the English saying, “Do not bite off more than you can chew.”

24. ***Tener más orejas que un burro.***

Comments: Render “*más orejas que*” as “larger ears than.” This saying is applicable to those who act foolishly. Compare this to the jab at long ears in #16 above.

25. ***Si cantas al asno, te responderá a coces.***

Comments: “*coces*” is a plural noun that means “kicks [of an animal].” The idea here is that the donkey is “unappreciative” of this kind gesture. The proverb pokes fun at the person singing to the donkey: the donkey is just being a donkey! For a Latin parallel: *Si cantes asino, crepitus tibi reddet ab ano.* (If you sing to a donkey, he’ll return a fart to you from his bum!)

26. ***Un asno rasca a otro asno.***

Comments: The idea here is that compliments shared among mediocre people are of little value. Compare this to the Latin: “*Asinus asinum fricat.*” (*The ass scratches an ass!*)

27. ***Un asno viejo sabe más que un potro.***

Comments: “*potro,*” lit. “colt.” The idea here is quite literal: with age comes wisdom.

28. ***Un rey ignorante, es un asno cargado de oro.***

Comments: “*Cargado*” is the past participle of “*cargar*,” “laden.” Here, the proverb takes a jab at rulers who, no matter how decorated in gold they are, are still jackasses. Compare this to the Aesopic fable “The Jackass in Office,” in which a self-important donkey that carries a religious totem supposes that the people who are worshiping the relic are worshiping him.

29. ***¡Vuelta la burra al trigo!***

Comments: Render “*vuelta*” as “return.” The idea here is that a stubborn donkey keeps returning to the same wheat field, over and over. This, then, is used when expressing annoyance. Compare this to the English phrase: “Stubborn as a mule.”

30. ***Yo que te estrego, burra de mi suegro.***

Comments: “*Yo que*” is a phrase, “to think that I.” Note the assonance: “*estrego...suegro.*” That said, “*de mi suegro*” is not important for its metaphorical value. The idea here is that someone is accosting a donkey for not being thankful for the “rubs” that were given to him. This proverb, then, serves as an insult to those who are ungrateful.