

NEW MEXICAN SPANISH PROVERBS

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The proverb, as we use this term in English—a terse saying widely accepted and repeated by the folk, and characterized by its elements of truth and common sense—is known in Spanish New Mexico as a *dicho*. The word *dicho* means “saying.” The great majority of the New Mexican *dichos* originated in Spain, and constituted an integral part of the culture of the folk that settled New Mexico after the entry of colonists in 1598. These pithy sayings have been in constant use in New Mexico ever since.

The proverbs appearing on the following pages are samplings of a large collection obtained mostly from oral tradition and recorded on wire and tape in the villages north of Santa Fe and in and around Bernalillo County. They are listed alphabetically. A literal translation is given in parenthesis, followed by the appropriate English equivalent:

No se puede repicar y en la procesión estar.

(You can't ring the church bell and take part in the procession.)

You can't eat your cake and have it too.

It is my belief that a collection of this type of folk expression will contribute to a better understanding of the psychology, feelings, and attitudes toward life of the Spanish-speaking people of New Mexico. The italicizing of certain words in the Spanish proverbial statements indicates regional spellings or usages.

1. A buen hambre no hay pan duro.

(There's no such a thing as hard bread when one is really hungry.)

Hunger is the best sauce.

2. A burro dado no se le ve el *cormio*.

(You don't look at a gift burro's eyetooth.)

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

3. A cada capillita se le llega su fiestecita.
(Every little chapel has its celebration.)
Every dog has his day.
4. A donde va Vicente va la gente.
(People go wherever Vincent goes.)
Monkey see; monkey do.
5. A la mejor cocinera se la *ajuma* l'olla.
(The best cook blackens the pot.)
Even a goat slips.
6. Bala que zumba no mata.
(A buzzing bullet does not kill.)
Great talkers are little doers.
7. Bien reza pero mal ofrece.
(He prays well but offers poorly.)
Actions speak louder than words.
8. Bien vengas, mal, si vienes solo.
(Welcome, misfortune, if you come alone.)
It never rains but it pours.
9. Buen abogado, mal vecino.
(A good lawyer, a bad neighbor.)
Good lawyers make bad neighbors.
10. Bueno es culantro pero no tanto.
(Coriander is good but not in excess.)
Every excess becomes a vice.
11. Caballo que vuela no quiere espuela.
(A flying horse wants no spurs.)
Never spur a willing horse.
12. Cada cabeza es un mundo.
(Each head is a world.)
So many heads, so many minds.
13. Cada cosa se parece a su dueño.
(Everything resembles its owner.)
A chip off the old block.

14. Da Dios *almendras* al que no tiene muelas.
(God gives nuts to him who has no teeth.)
Prosperity often comes too late.
15. Da y ten y harás bien.
(Give and keep and you will do well.)
Be liberal, but prudent.
16. Dame donde me siente que yo hallaré donde me acueste.
(Let me have a place to sit down and I'll find a place to lie down.)
Give them an inch and they will take a mile.
17. Del árbol *caído* todos hacen leña.
(Everyone makes firewood from a fallen tree.)
Everybody kicks a man when he is down.
18. De decir a hacer hay mucho que ver.
(There's much to be seen between saying and doing.)
It's easier said than done.
19. De donde relampaguea, de allí ventea.
(Where there's lightening there's wind.)
Where there's smoke there is fire.
20. De escarmentados se hacen los avisados.
(From the experienced the prudent are made.)
Experience is a great teacher.
21. Echando a perder se aprende.
(One learns by spoiling things.)
Experience is the best teacher.
22. El árbol se conoce por su fruta.
(The tree is known by its fruit.)
A man is known by his works.
23. El que nace *pa* panzón aunque lo fajen de niño.
(He who is born to be fat will be fat even if he wears a belt when he is a child.)
You can't change a man's character.
24. El buen padre en su casa comienza.
(A kind father begins at home.)
Charity begins at home.

25. El pescado y el *arrimado* a los tres días apestan.
(Fish and moochers smell after three days.)
Don't overstay your welcome.
26. Fierro caliente batirlo *redemente*.
(The hot iron must be beat suddenly.)
Strike while the iron is hot.
27. Fierro movedido no cría *mojo*.
(A moving piece of iron gathers no rust.)
A rolling stone gathers no moss.
28. Filo de hacha corta pino, no hocico de coyotino.
(The edge of the ax will cut the pine tree, not the mouth of the coyote.)
Actions speak louder than words.
29. Gallina que come huevos, aunque le quemem el pico.
(A hen that will eat eggs will eat them even though you burn her beak.)
Bad habits are hard to break.
30. Gato maullador pobre cazador.
(A mewling cat makes a poor hunter.)
Great talkers are little doers.
31. Guarda los centavos y los pesos llegarán.
(Save your pennies and the dollars will arrive.)
Take care of your pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves.
32. Hablando del rey de Roma y él a la puerta se asoma.
(Speaking of the king of Rome and he appears at the door.)
Speak of the devil and he is sure to appear.
33. Haces mal, espera otro tal.
(You do wrong, expect another wrong.)
As a man sows so shall he reap.
34. Hasta que no lo veas no lo creas.
(Don't believe it until you see it.)
Seeing is believing.
35. Júntate a los buenos y serás uno de ellos.
(Keep company with good men and you will be one of them.)
A man is known by the company he keeps.

36. La ausencia borra los recuerdos.
(Absence erases memories.)
Out of sight, out of mind.
37. La cabra siempre tira al monte y el indio a lo *colorao*.
(The goat always makes for the woods and the Indian goes for red things.)
What is bred in the bone will not out of the flesh.
38. La casa quemada, acudir con el agua.
(The house burnt down, run to it with the water.)
To shut the barn door after the horse is stolen.
39. La *uciosidad* es madre de todos los vicios.
(Idleness is the mother of all vices.)
Idleness is the nurse of vices.
40. Madre pía, daño cría.
(An indulgent mother rears a harm.)
Spare the rod and spoil the child.
41. Mal que no tiene remedio lo mejor es aguantarlo.
(The best thing to do with an ill that has no cure is to endure it.)
What can't be cured must be endured.
42. Malo vendrá que bueno no te traerá.
(It must really be bad if it does not bring you some good.)
It's an ill wind that blows nobody good.
43. Manda y hazlo y serás bien servido.
(Command and do it yourself and you will be well served.)
If you want a thing well done, do it yourself.
44. Ni un dedo hace una mano ni una golondrina un verano.
(One finger does not make a hand nor one swallow a summer.)
One swallow does not make summer.
45. Ninguno se emborracha con el vino de su casa.
(No one gets drunk on his own wine.)
Home delights are never sweet.
46. Niño que no llora no mama.
(The child who does not cry gets no milk.)
The noisiest wheel gets the most grease.

47. No acaricies al gato sin ponerte guantes.
(Don't pet the cat without putting on your gloves.)
An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
48. Obra empezada, medio acabada.
(A work begun is half finished.)
Well begun, half done.
49. Ojos que no ven, corazón que no siente.
(What the eyes cannot see, the heart cannot grieve for.)
What the eyes see not, the heart rues not.
50. Ojos que te vieron ir no te volverán a ver.
(The eyes that saw you leave will never see you again.)
An opportunity lost cannot be redeemed.
51. Olla que mucho *jierve* sabor pierde.
(A pot that boils long loses its flavor.)
Familiarity breeds contempt.
52. Olvidar la injuria es la mejor venganza.
(Forgetting the wrong is the best revenge.)
The noblest part of revenge is to forget the offense.
53. Pájaro viejo no cae en el lazo.
(An old bird does not fall into the trap.)
Old birds are not caught with chaff.
54. *Pál* enfermo que es de vida, 'l agua es *medecina*.
(For the patient who is to live, water is medicine enough.)
A strong constitution is the best medicine.
55. *Pál* santo que es la misa con un repique basta.
(One ring of the bell is enough, considering the saint for whom it's rung.)
For a little child a little mourning.
56. Palabras y plumas el viento las lleva.
(Words and feathers are carried away by the wind.)
Actions speak louder than words.
57. Panza llena, corazón contento.
(A full belly, a happy heart.)
Happiness is a full stomach.

58. Para un ladrón, otro mejor.
(For a thief, another and better thief.)
Set a thief to catch a thief.
59. Querer es poder.
(To desire is to be able.)
Where there's a will there's a way.
60. Quien a fea ama, bonita le parece.
(He who loves an ugly woman thinks her beautiful.)
Love is blind.
61. Quien a tu casa no va, de la suya te destierra.
(He who goes not to your house does not want you in his.)
Who stays away from your house does not want you in his.
62. Quien anda con casada tiene la vida prestada.
(He who goes around with a married woman is living on borrowed time.)
Don't go around with a woman unless you can go two with her husband.
63. Quien bien baila, de boda en boda anda.
(He who dances well goes from one wedding to another.)
A good dancer is very popular.
64. Río cruzado, santo olvidado.
(Once the river is crossed the saint is soon forgotten.)
The danger past, the saint forgotten.
65. Rodando, las piedras se encuentran.
(Stones meet as they roll along.)
It's a small world.
66. Rogar al santo hasta pasar el tranco.
(Pray to the saint until the threshold is crossed.)
The danger past, the saint forgotten.
67. Sal de tu casa y ven a la mía y pasarás amargo día.
(Leave your home and come to mine and you will have an awful time.)
Be it ever so humble, there is no place like home.
68. Salvar los pennies y malgastar los pesos.
(To save the pennies and waste the dollars.)
To be penny wise and pound foolish.

69. Santo Tomás; ver y creer.
(Like St. Thomas: seeing and believing.)
Or seeing is believing.
70. Se espantan los muertos con los degollados.
(The slain become frightened with the beheaded.)
The pot calls the kettle black.
71. Tal el amo, tal el criado.
(Like master, like servant.)
A chip off the old block.
72. Un grito a tiempo saca un cimarrón del monte.
(A shout in time gets a stray animal out of the woods.)
A stitch in time saves nine.
73. Un mal llama a otro.
(One ill calls up another.)
Misfortunes never come singly.