

## The Birth of a Bible Translator



Samy Tioyé

“My training at the Home for Bible Translators was planned by God to equip me for a better work. Today I can read my Bible in Hebrew without difficulty. I can translate confidently from Hebrew into my mother tongue.”

## **The Birth of a Bible Translator**

Samy Tioyé's parents didn't weep tears of joy when he became a Christian. They beat their 13-year-old son, burnt his Christian literature, and chased away his friends. Other childhood friends rejected Samy because of his newfound faith.

Samy's family is part of the Lobi people in West Africa. More than one million Lobi people are scattered throughout the northeastern border of the Ivory Coast and the southwestern edge of Burkina Faso. His parents immigrated to the Ivory Coast from Burkina Faso in the 1960s. They raised Samy in their native tongue, Lobiri, and the traditional religion, which included idol worship and animal sacrifices.

Young Samy practiced this religion until his karate instructor invited him to a Christmas Eve service. Samy received Christ as his Savior on the night believers around the world celebrate Jesus' birth.

When Samy turned to Christ, his father turned to the local witch doctor. The witch doctor used an idol, called a juju, to cast spells on him.

"The witch doctor tried to change my mind, but he couldn't. This was a real testimony to my family," recalled Samy Tioyé.

Samy endured this harsh treatment for two years, and then God intervened. Samy's father said the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him not to mistreat his son anymore. His father accepted Samy back into the family

and gave him the freedom to serve God. (Many years later, Samy's father turned to the Lord ten days before he died.)

As Samy matured, he felt a burden for the Lobi people. Did they know the Lord? How many believers were there? Samy wanted to return to Burkina Faso and see his family's native village. That desire influenced his decision to go to college in Burkina Faso.

Samy wanted to study Psychology, Sociology, or Library Sciences. Instead, the school authorities told Samy to study linguistics. Few undergraduates learned linguistics because it required them to study indigenous languages and literacy training. Samy didn't know what he would do with a linguistics degree, but God did.

Samy completed a Bachelor of Arts and a Master's degree in Linguistics. His thesis was *Numbering and Oral Calculation in Lobiri*. Then he began a professional career teaching French.

Midway through Samy's first teaching year, he received a letter asking for his help. A pastor started a project translating the Bible into Dagara, a language similar to Samy's native tongue, Lobiri. Would Samy join the team? Samy had not been looking for a job. He loved teaching young people, and he did not know the pastor. He put the letter aside without considering the request.

At the end of the school year, Samy came across the letter again. "This time it disturbed my peace. I knew God wanted to show me something."

Samy didn't want to miss God's leading, so he began to pray. He returned to the capital city during the summer break and worked for the National Bible Translation Organization.

One day, Samy overheard a conversation. "They were talking about a letter they had written and how they had never received a reply. They had written to a man named Samy. They were talking about me!"

Everyone but Samy seemed to be amazed at the Lord's leading. They made an appointment for him to meet the language program manager that afternoon.

Samy walked into the room and the coordinator said, "Okay, now that you have entered my room, know that you have been called to do this job. We were waiting for you to come"

Samy couldn't say yes. He didn't know the Dagara language. He didn't know what would happen to him if he left his job. He prayed all summer. Peace finally came when he surrendered the matter to the Lord. He resigned his teaching position on October 8, 1996.

"You're crazy," his boss said.

Samy's father had similar thoughts. He couldn't understand why his son would quit a good job. "You're getting into something with no idea where it's leading you."

"I could not reassure my parents. I was going by faith."

The National Bible Translation Organization sent Samy to the Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Kenya. After two years of hard work, he earned

a second Master's degree in Translation Studies. A surprise visit from Samy's director revealed the plan God had made for Samy. Samy was sick and was admitted in the hospital for several days when the director came to see him.

"I've got good news," the director said. "We're sending you back to your own people."

As a young man, Samy had dreamed of sharing the gospel with the Lobi people, not knowing they already had a vibrant Christian community. They even had two New Testaments translated by missionaries, but no one had ever translated the Old Testament into Lobiri. No one, that is, until Samy. Church leaders from that area Samy never met had asked for his help.

Samy began a noble career as a teacher, but God had planned something even better -- to bring the written Word of God to his own people.

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Samy is a graduate of the Home for Bible Translators: *"It can be very difficult for nationals to translate the Old Testament. They encounter words, concepts and other things that that they have never seen or don't even know. Even if you have a theological background, it can be difficult. I knew I needed more training in Biblical Hebrew. Modern Hebrew has helped me acquire the Biblical Hebrew vocabulary. As I read the word of God in Hebrew, I can feel the language flowing in my soul. The very first day I stepped into the Home for Bible Translators, everybody was standing at the door waiting to welcome us as if we'd known each other for decades. I felt at home among my brothers and sisters.*

*The Home is a very special place. It's a place of love and kindness, where people care for one another. There are Africans, Asians, Americans, and Europeans, but we are one in Christ.*

*Being away from home is not easy, however the Home for Bible Translators becomes your second home where you find love, care and rest. I felt more secure in Israel than walking the streets at home. Without exaggerating, I personally felt that Israel must be one of the most secure places in the world. Israelis know they have enemies. Therefore, they take security so seriously, that as you walk in the streets of Jerusalem, or travel within the country, you fear no evil. You have such a peace. The new generation of African translators will be those who can translate the Bible directly from Hebrew to their mother and father tongue.”*

For more information about Samy Tioyé's ministry, you can e-mail him at [Samy.Tioye@negst.edu](mailto:Samy.Tioye@negst.edu), or [samy\\_tioye@sil.org](mailto:samy_tioye@sil.org)