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**KOD NAS SE KAŽE...**



**WE TEND TO SAY...**

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**PREDGOVOR**



**PREFACE**

Moje upoznavanje sa balkanskom kulturom je došlo sa zakašnjenjem jer sam Srpkinja rođena u Severnoj Americi. Sa dvanaest godina selim se sa porodicom u Čačak, mesto rođenja mojih roditelja. Tada je krenulo približavanje srpskom poreklu. Kako sam odrastala, ljubav prema našoj tradiciji i kulturi je rasla i želela sam da upijem što više informacija. Ne samo da sam sebe htela naoružati znanjem, već sam i s drugima to znanje htela da podelim, jer sam smatrala da sve to ne dobija zasluženu pažnju. Provela sam veći deo života u inostranstvu i imala sam mnogo susreta sa strancima kojima sa morala da objašnjavam fenomene srpskih verovanja i tradicije. Zašto je promaja kod nas smrtonosna? Zašto ne smete izlaziti iz kuće s mokrom kosom? Šta je rakija i koja su njena lekovita svojstva? Ovo su samo neka od pitanja koja sam imala priliku da čujem dok sam živela u inostranstvu i primetila sam da mi nikada nije dosadilo da na njih odgovaram. Zapravo, želela sam još. Moj entuzijazam je bio zarazan. Imala sam sreću da fakultet završim u Sijetlu, gde sam stekla mnoga prijateljstva sa ljudima iz celog sveta koji su bili veoma zainteresovani za ono što imam da kažem o Srbiji. Kada sam diplomirala, odlučila sam da se preselim u Čačak, gde je ljubav prema našim običajima začeta, i dala sam sebi zadatak da svetu predstavim čari balkanske tradicije. Nisam lingvista, nisam istoričarka, niti profesorka. Samo sam umetnica koja se zaljubila u svoje poreklo i želi da to vikinje svetu na sav glas.

Ova knjiga je skup svakidašnjih fraza sa kojima smo ovde svi upoznati, ali retko ih kada cenimo. Raznovrsno poreklo, sjajna igra rečima i fantastična doza humora, sve su to elementi ovih izreka koje vam predstavljam, sa svoje tačke gledišta, u ilustrovanoj formi. Dobro došli na jedno edukativno putovanje kroz balkansku kulturu!

As a Serbian woman born in North America, my introduction to Balkan culture came later in my youth. At the young age of twelve, my family relocated to a small town in Serbia called Čačak, the birthplace of my parents. This is when I started learning about my Serbian heritage. As I grew older, my love for our tradition and culture grew and grew, and I found myself longing to absorb as much information as I could. Not only did I want to learn more but I wanted to take that information and spread it to the world. I wanted to take that love and share it with others around me because I strongly believed it wasn't getting the attention it deserved. I spent most of my life abroad and had several interactions with people where I had to explain the phenomenon of Serbian tradition and beliefs. Why is *promaja* (draft) deadly in Serbia? Why shouldn't you leave the house with wet hair? What is *rakija* and what kind of healing properties does it possess? These are just some of the questions I've heard during my time abroad and I found I never got tired of answering them. In fact, I longed for more. My enthusiasm was infectious. I was lucky enough to land the opportunity to complete my Bachelor's degree in Seattle, where I formed many close relationships with people from around the globe, who were all very interested in what I had to say about Serbia. Once I graduated, I decided to move back to Čačak, where the love began, and made it my mission to introduce the world to the wonders of Balkan languages and culture. Not only did I want to spread my message to foreigners, but I also wanted to remind my people of the beauty and creativity our language holds, because it seems we have forgotten. I decided to dedicate all my time and effort to the revival of Balkan tradition. I am no linguist, I am no historian, I am no professor. I am just an artist, who fell in love with her heritage and wanted to shout it to the world.

This book is a collection of everyday phrases we here are all familiar with but rarely take the time to appreciate. A variation of origins, incredible wordplay, wittiness and a hefty dose of humour, are all elements of these expressions I am presenting to you, from my point of view, in illustrated form. Welcome to my educational journey through Balkan culture.



**ZA NJIH SE KAŽE...**



**THESE PEOPLE ARE SAID TO BE...**





# Možeš na 'leba da ga namažeš

**Varijacije:** duša od čoveka.

**Upotreba:** Način na koji se opisuje fina osoba dobrog srca.

Kada uzmemo da analiziramo ovu rečenicu, ubrzo se nameće sledeće pitanje: kako i kada je hleb postao merilo za nečiju dobrotu? Hajde što stranci ostaju u čudu, nego deluje kao da ni mi sami ne znamo odakle i kako je nastalo ovo poređenje. Jedno je sigurno: naši ljudi *mnogo vole* hleb. Ne, ne mislim da ste me dobro razumeli. Mi *obožavamo hleb*. Jedemo ga uz *sve*. Bajat hleb? Ne postoji jer je *cela celcata* vekna već nestala samo par sati nakon kupovine. Ukoliko, *božemesačuvaj*, iz nekog razloga sutradan ipak ima jučerašnjeg hleba, *greh* ga je ne jesti. Bog nam je dao prženice. Jedemo hleb uz meso, udrobljavamo ga u supu, jedemo ga uz testenine. Alergija na gluten *ne postoji* u našem vokabularu.

Čini mi se da sam bar donekle dočarala ulogu hleba u našem narodu. Moguće je da hleb, zbog njegove presvete prirode, poistovećujemo sa osobom dobrog srca. Ne bismo valjda nešto ružno i pokvareno mazali na hleb, zar ne?



**English equivalent:** he/she's a good egg.

**Literal translation:** you can spread him/her on bread.

Perhaps an example sentence is needed in order to truly unpack this expression. One might say: *Toliko je dobar, možeš na leba da ga namažeš*, meaning: He's so nice you could *spread him on bread*. While this might explain the use of the expression, I don't think anyone, not even us Serbs, fully understands why spreading someone on bread is the bar set for determining someone's kindness. One thing is for certain: Serbians *love* bread. I don't think you fully understand what I just said there. We *worship* bread. We eat it with *everything*. Day-old bread? Doesn't exist because the *whole loaf* is gone within hours of purchasing it. If for some reason there is leftover bread the next day, it is a *sin* not to eat it. God gave us french toast for a reason. We eat bread with meat, we dunk it in our soup, we eat it with pasta. Gluten free *does not exist* in our vocabulary.

Ok, now that I've got my point across, hopefully you understand the importance of bread. Considering the holiness of bread, perhaps that's the reason why spreading someone on it is synonymous with someone being kindhearted. You wouldn't spread something rotten on something you consume on a daily basis, would you?



# Bije ko Sveti Ilija

**Upotreba:** Bilo je zanimljivo istraživati ovu izreku. Čula sam je samo nekoliko puta jer mi se čini da se više koristi van mesta gde sam odrasla, ali je svakako popularna.

Hajde malo da se pozabavimo Svetim Ilijom. Ukratko, on je praktično jednak Zevsu među srpskim svecima. On nas asocira na grmljavinu i gromove i definitivno je neko prema kome imamo strahopoštovanje. Zeznut tip. S obzirom na to da mu puno ime (u narodu) glasi Sveti Ilija *Gromovnik*, nije ni čudo što je tako. Imajući to na umu, kada napolju grmi i seva, neko će verovatno reći: *ala bije ko Sveti Ilija!*

No, to nije jedini način na koji možemo koristiti ovu izreku. Ako je neko prilično vešt u nekom sportu (najčešće), možda ćete reći da *bije ko Sveti Ilija*. Može se, takođe, koristiti da opiše osobu kojoj nešto generalno dobro ide.



**English equivalent:** non-existent.

**Literal translation:** hitting like St. Elijah.

This expression was an interesting one to research. I've heard it only a handful of times, because I believe it is more popular outside of where I'm from, but nonetheless, frequently used. I find that most expressions that mention a saint do not have an English equivalent, so let's get to unpacking the use and meaning of this one.

In order to do that, we need to talk about St. Elijah. In short, he is basically the Zeus of Serbian saints. He's all about those thunderbolts and lightning and he's definitely someone you respect out of slight fear. He's pretty hardcore. I mean come on, his full name is believed to be Sveti Ilija *Gromovnik*, translating *roughly* to St. Elijah *Thunderbolt*. That in mind, if ever you find yourself at home during a thunderstorm, someone might exclaim: *it's hitting like St. Elijah!*

Now, that's not the only way we use this expression. If someone is really good at something, usually in sports terms, you might say they *hit like Sveti Ilija*. The word *hit* as in *killing it*. A friend of yours might be really good at volleyball, so you'd say *bije ko Sveti Ilija* to express that. Basically, it's used to describe a person who excels at something.

# Nada umire poslednja

**Upotreba:** Svesna sam da je ovo izreka latinskog porekla, ali svakako sam izabrala da je ilustrujem jer kod nas može da se interpretira na vrlo zabavan način. Znamo da je u ovom slučaju reč *nada* misaona ili apstraktna imenica. Ali, reč *nada* može biti i vlastita imenica, odnosno srpsko žensko ime – *Nada*. Međutim, ispravite me ako grešim, nika-da nisam upoznala ženu ispod šezdeset godina, a da se zove Nada. Vrlo je učestalo ime kod naših baka. S tim na umu, kada kažemo *Nada umire poslednja*, možemo zamisliti jed-nu opaku baku, koja i dalje bije, živi život punim plućima sa devedeset i ne planira u sko-rije vreme to da promeni. Iako je većina njenih prijatelja otišla sa ovog sveta, *Nada* i da-lje nastavlja da kida.

Možda je ovo najgora fora svih vremena, ali mene je slatko nasmejala.



**English equivalent:** hope dies last.

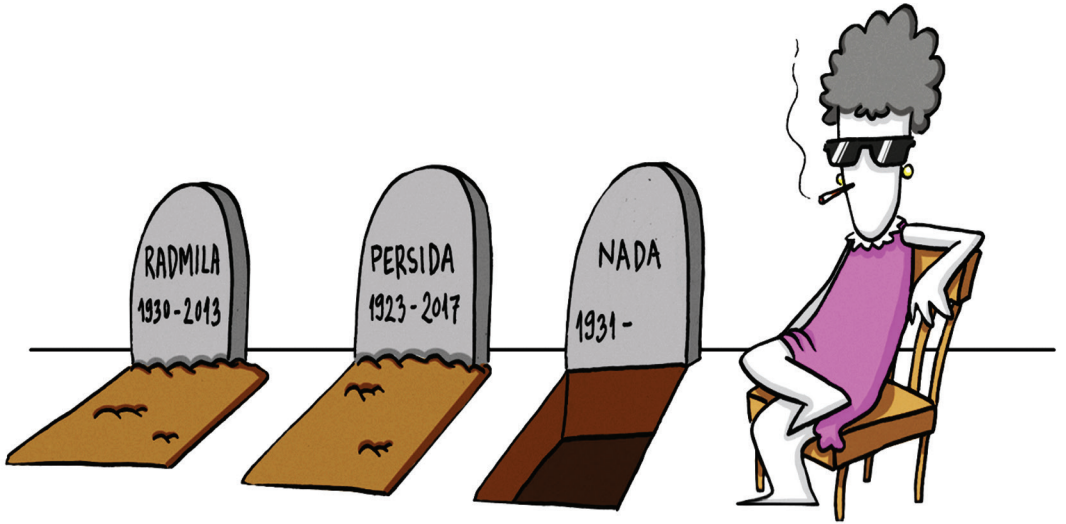
**Literal translation:** hope dies last.

I know this is a Latin proverb but I chose to do it anyway because it is secretly a pun/dad joke.

There is no need for me to explain the literal translation because the equivalent is just that. Now, there's nothing funny about *hope dies last* when you say it in English. *But* say it in Serbian and it's kinda funny depending on how you look at it.

The word for *hope* is *nada*. Nada is also a female Serbian name, just like Hope can be a name in English. However, correct me if I'm wrong, but I've never met a woman under the age of sixty named Nada. It's pretty common among Serbian grandmas. So, when you say *hope dies last* in English, I think of the Latin origin and motivational context of the proverb, but when you say *nada umire poslednja*, I think of a tough grandma named Nada, who's still livin' the life even at the age of ninety-something. She's still going strong even though most of her friends have kicked the bucket.

This may be the worst dad joke of all time, but it made me giggle.



# Kum nije dugme

**Upotreba:** Sigurno sam čula ovaj izraz *sto* puta. Uvek se nasmejem i klimnem glavom, ali kada je došlo do toga da napišem prikaz uz ilustraciju, shvatila sam da nisam imala pojma šta zapravo ova rečenica znači. Bila sam potpuno zapanjena i osećala sam kao da mi je ceo život laž, pa sam, naravno, pozvala majku, sva uplakana, i pitala je zašto *kum nije dugme*?

Uloga kuma u Srbiji je mnogo intenzivnija nego na Zapadu. Kod nas kuma biraš kao svedoka na venčanju i da ti krsti dete. Kum je neko ko nije u krvnom srodstvu, već ga sami *birate*. Neko će čak reći da je odnos sa kumom mnogo jači nego sa rodbinom. Znači, kada kažemo da *kum nije dugme*, mi u stvari govorimo da nam je ova osoba preko *potrebna* u životu. Kuma ne možemo zameniti kao što menjamo dugme koje nam otpadne sa košulje. Greh je posvađati se sa kumom. Dajete ime svom detetu? Zovite kuma. Slavite slavu? Zovite kuma. Ne smete ni da *prđnete*, a da ne javite kumu. Majka mi je rekla da su kuma *onomad* birali iz susednog sela da bi ga vidali samo oko dva puta godišnje i na taj način izbegli neku potencijalnu svađu, jer to je...šta? *Greh*.



**English equivalent:** non-existent.

**Literal translation:** the godfather is not a button.

I've heard this expression *thousands of times* and always nodded or laughed in agreement, but when it came to writing a description to go with the illustration, I realized I actually had not a single clue what it was referring to. I was utterly *bamboozled* and felt as though my entire life was a lie, so naturally, I called my mother in tears asking her why *the godfather is not a button*.

The role of a godfather here in Serbia seems much more intense than in the West. You see, a godfather is someone you *choose* to be a witness at your wedding (which is the role of the best man in western culture), also to christen your child. A godfather is someone who didn't just happen to be blood-related to you, no, you *hand-picked* him. One might even say *kumstvo* (godfather relation) is stronger than actual blood relations. So to say that the *godfather is not a button* is to say that you *need* this person in your life. The godfather cannot be replaced, the way one might replace a button that has fallen off their coat. It is a sin to have a falling out with the best man/godfather. You're naming your child? Call the godfather. You're having your *slava* (saint day)? Call the godfather. You mustn't so much as *fart* without the godfather knowing.

My mama also told me that, back in the day, people chose godfather's not from their own village, but like two villages over, so that they would only see each other around twice a year (very infrequently) and in this way avoid any potential argument because that is...what? A *sin*!







# Beži ko đavo od krsta

**Varijacije:** beži glavom bez obzira.

**Upotreba:** Kada se nađete u neprijatnoj situaciji, iz koje želite što pre da se izvučete, može se reći da *bežite ko đavo od krsta*. Možda se nalazite u nekom baru sa vašim prijateljima i neka sredovečna osoba kreće da vam se nabacuje. Možete reći da ste pobjegli od nje *ko đavo od krsta*. Ili da prvo sačekate da vam plati piće? Šalim se. Šalim se.

Možda su bolji primer za neprijatnu situaciju oni ljudi koji po gradu dele letke. Jure za vama, maltene vas vuku za rukav i viču: da li mogu oduzeti *samo* pet minuta vašeg vremena??? Uvek bežim od tih ljudi *ko đavo od krsta*. Manite me se! Razumem, samo obavljaju svoj posao, ali znate šta? Alergična sam na letke i nepotrebne ljudske interakcije.



**English equivalent:** he/she ran out of there like a bat out of hell.

**Literal translation:** running away like the devil runs from the cross.

I would say this expression is pretty self-explanatory. The literal translation is pretty much all you need in order to understand when one might use a phrase like this.

In any case, there's not much breaking down to do here. When you're in a situation where you want to *gtfo*, you might use this expression to describe just how much you wanted to *get the hell outta there*. For instance, when I'm at a bar, *minding my own business*, and some middle-aged man comes up to me and starts hitting on me, I might say I would run away from him like the *devil runs away from the cross*. Not until he pays for my drink though. Kidding. I am kidding.

Or maybe even a better example: you know those people that hand out leaflets around town? The ones who chase you and ask for just five minutes of your time? Yeah, I run away from those people *like the devil runs from the cross*. Miss me with your marketing ploys. I get it, they're just doing their job, but guess what? I'm allergic to leaflets and unnecessary human interaction.



# Meša babe i žabe

**Varijacije:** meša jabuke i kruške.

**Upotreba:** Iz kog razloga je neko odlučio da isproziva bake zarad ove izreke? Nisam baš najsigurnija. Nikada ne bih svoju baku mešala sa žabama. Ja svoju baku volim.

Iako engleski ekvivalent takođe ukazuje na mešanje dve potpuno različite stvari, po mom mišljenju, ne deluje tako. Jabuke i pomorandže su u istoj kategoriji: voće. S druge strane, babe i žabe su sušta suprotnost, te je kod izraza *mešati babe i žabe* razlika više naglašena. Mada, moram priznati da se nekad i uočavaju sličnosti.

U svakom slučaju, bilo je nezgodno ilustrovati ovu izreku. Nisam mogla da smislim dovoljno bukvalan način da prikažem reč *mešati* u ovom slučaju. *Mešati* u ovoj frazi znači *zameniti* za nešto drugo, ali sam se ipak odlučila da ovu reč interpretiram u smislu *mešati* supu. Na kraju, okrenula sam se onome čemu se stalno okrećem kada sam u čorsokaku: hrani. I tako je nastala ova čorba od babe i žabe.



**English equivalent:** you're mixing apples and oranges.

**Literal translation:** you're mixing grandmothers and frogs.

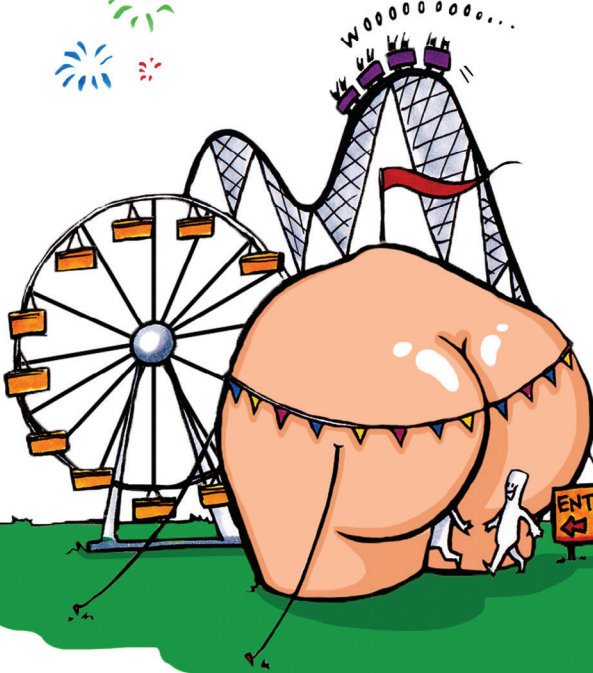
Why someone decided to target innocent grandmas for the sake of this commonly used phrase, is beyond me. I for one would *never* mix my granny with a frog. I love my grandmother.

Although the English equivalent means you're *mixing* two completely different things, it doesn't really seem that way in my opinion. Apples and oranges are both in the same category: fruit. However, *meša babe i žabe* refers to two completely *different* things, hence the comparison of grannies vs froggies. Although I must admit, I've seen cases where the resemblance is uncanny.

In any case, I had a tough time figuring out how to go about illustrating this one. I legit assembled a committee (consisting of my parents and brother) in order to come to a consensus. I couldn't figure out the best way to depict the word *mešati* or *mixing*. The intended meaning here for *mixing* is like *mistaking* one thing for another, but I opted for an alternative interpretation which is *mixing* as in *stirring* a pot of soup. In the end, I turned to the thing that I always turn to in times of need: food. And that's how this grandma and frog stew came to life.



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## U dupe na vašar

**Upotreba:** Naš narod je radoznao. I to *poprilično* radoznao. Ne daj Bože da živite u malom gradu kao ja, gde vam komšije znaju šta radite, šta ste ručali, da ste pre neki dan raskinuli sa dečkom, da ste se vratili kući u dva po ponoći...itd. Verovatno znaju i kada obavljate veliku nuždu. Toliko radoznali! Tako, kada vas komšinica po ko zna koji put pita: gde si pošao/la, možete reći: *u dupe na vašar*. Ovaj odgovor koristite samo ukoliko želite da osramotite roditelje, jer će komšinka zasigurno zvati kevu da prijavi ponašanje njene ćerke.

Ukratko, kada počnu da vam se penju na živce svi ljudi koji zapitkuju i sve žele da znaju, možete iskoristiti ovu izreku da ih učutkate. Bar privremeno. Malo je kreativnije nego da naprosto kažete: šta te briga?

Ova izreka ukazuje na direktnost našeg naroda. Zaista smo *bez dlake na jeziku*. Nije nam nikakav problem da kažemo baš ono što mislimo.

Upozorenje: nemojte koristiti ovu izreku kada odgovarate roditeljima. Osim ako se niste uželeli dobrih batina.



**English equivalent:** non-existent.

**Literal translation:** I'm going to a fair in a butt.

To aid my explanation, I must reveal the question to which this expression is a response. We Balkans are a nosey bunch. And when I say nosey, I mean *nosey af*. God forbid you live in a small city like I do, in which case your neighbour knows what you do, what you ate for lunch, that you recently got dumped, that you came home at 2:00 am last night...etc. Your neighbour probably knows what time you take a shit. *That nosey*. So, when your nosey ass neighbour asks you where you're going for the *umpteenth* time try this expression on for size: "I'm going to a fair in a butt." Use this response only if you wish to disgrace your parents because you best believe this neighbour will be on the phone with your mother the second these words come out of your mouth.

Basically, when you're tired of people constantly asking you what you're doing, where you're going, you might use this expression to shut them up. Temporarily. I suppose the equivalent could be: "What do you care?"

This expression shows just how blunt and direct we Serbians are. A typical Serb usually has no problem blurting out exactly what's on their mind.

Warning: Do not use when speaking with parents. Unless you want a quality ass-w-hooping.

# Sadržaj



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