

In Praise of the Prophet 1¹

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In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

May Allah bless Prophet Muhammad and may peace be upon him.

O you with good hearing, listen to the word of this young man,
this feeble servant [of God], if you want eternal happiness!

He is the son of Saydu Muhammad,
a young man from the Seleyanke lineage of Fuuta,
resident of Mombeya² and of Sunni obedience,
belonging to the Maliki school of thought.³

I thank my Creator continuously.

May He bless the Prophet [Muhammad] and guarantee his privileges.

I express [in these verses] what is important in Pular
to ease understanding. Listen then, so that you may understand
because a person it is through their mother tongue
that they can understand better the fundamentals [of the religion].

Some Fula are confused about what they are taught
in Arabic and thus remain in uncertainty.

Those who rely upon uncertainty regarding the acts of worship,
insufficient will be their words and deeds.

¹ These pages are excerpts from *Ogirde Malal (The Vein of Eternal Happiness)* of the great poet Cerno Samba Mombeya (1755-1852).

² *Mombeya* is a subdivision (similar to a county) located in the province of *Dalaba* in Guinea about 400 kilometers from the capital, Conakry.

³ The *Sunnis* are designated in Arabic as people of the *Sunna* who follow the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. The Maliki school is one of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence founded by *Malik ibn Anas*, also called imam *Imām Malik*. It is the most widespread school among Muslims of West Africa.

Those who seek clarity without uncertainty

should then read these verses written in Pular of this young man.⁴

Do not overestimate yourself by neglecting and overlooking my writings

because [in your opinion] I am ignorant of the vein of eternal happiness.

Do not look at that! Look closely at my writings!

If it is a corroborated truth, keep worshipping [Allah].

This way you will be saved from being distressed in death

and from being among those asking to return [to earth] to worship better.⁵

The Creator will tell them: "no, that will not happen!"

Having regrets and whining will be useless that day!

A small fly can suck water from a wound,

but a big bird cannot do so.⁶

A bladder is found in the bird's liver,

whereas it is not found in the camel's liver.⁷ It is the same in worship!

When you are an adult, make the first priority your knowledge

of the sacred word before death strikes!

No one should be worshipped but Allah.

He is the one who made Muhammad His messenger.

⁴ Here "young man" indicates that the author was at the beginning of his career.

⁵ Here the poet alludes to those who are regretful for not fulfilling properly their religious obligations in their lifetime and ask Allah to give them a second chance.

⁶ This metaphor means a child may sometimes have competencies an adult may not have. The fly can sit on a small wound and suck the pus, whereas a big bird cannot do that.

⁷ Like the former, this metaphor also shows that a child may possess knowledge and competence. The bird's liver has a bladder, whereas the camel's liver does not. It is an answer to those who say "how can a little child teach us about the straight path, when he was born before us and we are more experienced than he is."

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May He bless and save him (from punishments in the afterlife)

for eternity and may that be widespread.⁸

Know the obligations and the prohibitions,

and what is also allowed by the Great Holder of Power [Allah].

Know the same things about our Prophet [Muhammad].

May Allah save him and assure him eternal happiness.

Anyone who has faith and is ignorant involuntarily

is like a thirsty person who has water in their mouth but is prohibited from drinking!

Such people cannot receive divine punishment because they are innocent.

Their faith protects their life and possessions.

Those who ignore these key matters about Allah and His prophet, listen to me and you will hear

each one of them in my words.

Hurry up and learn them all.

If you neglect them for too long, know that death is approaching,

for Allah has said: "Every soul must taste death!"⁹

Truly, death strikes by surprise.

The bullets of death will strike all generations, and in all seasons,

in the spring and summer, in autumn and winter,

every month, every day, and every hour,

in the daytime as well as in the evening, at sunrise as well as at sunset!

Do not promise anything, for it is not guaranteed!

⁸ Here the author prays for the blessings to extend to Prophet Muhammad's family, companions and all his community.

⁹ See Q 3:185; 21:35; 29:57.

Saying "maybe I could have done this," or " ah! had I known," will be useless.

Those making promises will regret it when death comes first [before the promises are realized].

Regret comes always after it is too late!

Anyone who dies in piety and virtue

will be able to answer the questions asked in their tomb.¹⁰

Anyone who dies without knowing that will be tormented,

when they will not be able to answer the questions in their tomb.

Those who are tormented in their tomb will forever be in such a state.

They will burn in hell for eternity and will not receive intercession [of the Prophet].

Those who are saved that day will be saved forever

against punishment and hell,

as our prophet stated. May he be saved

with a salvation that is unmatched.

Those who pronounce the Shahada¹¹ as their last words before dying

are saved from hell and assured eternal happiness in paradise.

They are saved in the land of eternal happiness as soon as

they surrender their soul when the time comes.

They will not be interrogated in their tomb.

This is the fate of those who pronounce these words [the Shahada] at the time of death.

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Having desires or the need to desire anything,

¹⁰ Here the author alludes to the questions of the two angels called *Munkar* and *Nakir* in Islam, who interrogate the dead in their tomb to test their faith.

¹¹ *Chahada* or *Shahāda* in Islam is the following testimony of faith in: *Lā ilāha illa l-Lab* (There is no god but Allah).

having an obligation or getting married,
these fourteen characteristics¹²
are excluded from the attributes of the Eternal Creator.
Believing in these eight attributes, in addition to the twenty ones,
are part of piety.

Allah is omnipotent, decider of everything, and omniscient.

He is immortal and eternal.

He is capable, decisive, and knowledgeable.

He is alive and unique.

These nine attributes are mandatory, be sure about it.

This is a timeless story that began at the dawn of humankind.

The attributes that do not exist [among human beings] since the beginning
are found in the Savior [Allah].

So, do not ever say that he is tired, dominated, lost
or dead when referring to the Almighty [Allah].

He is tired, he has quit; he is lost;

he is dead; he is touchable,

or else he is worried or is an offender,

these eleven attributes do not apply to Allah.

The twenty-two that I mentioned,

are part of the domain of normalcy [whereas Allah is not part of it].

All these fifty points are included

¹² The fourteen characteristics are not mentioned here, but they are found in the last verses of page 4.

in piety and in normalcy.

Let's keep in mind that the other remaining message

comprises sixteen points:

Honesty, trust, and the transmission [of Allah's message]

are the obligations for people who are sent [Prophets].

Keep them away from all that is contrary to these attributes:

lying, treason, and hiding the divine message.

Give the prophets elevated attributes.

Whoever refutes these attributes is a liar.

Believe in all the prophets, in all the angels,

in all holy books, and believe in the Last Day of Judgment.¹³

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If a person sincerely repents his sins through good deeds

done for the sake of Allah, and has unwavering faith,

it is recommended to teach him the profession of faith [the Shahada]. If it is someone sick,

teach it to him before he passes, if he can pronounce it.

If the person cannot pronounce it correctly, he should not say it,

for it is established that whoever distorts the words will be punished,

including anyone who shortens or adds to it [anything else],

or anyone who changes a word when pronouncing it.

My Creator, allow us to pronounce the words [of the Shahada] correctly

at the time of death and during our interrogation [after death].

¹³ Q 2:285.

May you not miss the benefits of my writings because they come from

a young man like myself. Listen well and fetch from the well of eternal happiness,
for the sake of the Prophet [Muhammad], your messenger.

May he be blessed continuously and without interruption!

Know that a fortunate ear is attached

to a fortunate head. They go together.

It is when the body is fortunate that the mind can be fortunate.

My Creator, assure me and assure all Muslims eternal happiness!

Listen to me carefully, I am speaking truthfully

about what can be retained from the substance of these words [the Shahada]:

He [Allah] exists. He is unique, eternal, different from creatures, and is self-reliant.

He is all-hearing. He talks and sees everything. This is the truth.

These following eleven characteristics are not part of

the attributes that belong to Allah.

Keep Him away from any desire, including the desire

to have an obligation of companionship.

These are the three attributes that can be

mentioned regarding [Allah], The One who possesses the best hearing.

Poverty, a beginning, an end,

resemblance to a creature, a need,

to be deaf, blind, mute, or to be

deaf, blind, and mute at the same time are no traits [of Allah].

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He has entrusted to the angel Michael the

distribution of luck with measure.

Do not accuse Your Creator of taking back

what He had offered you in privileges and well-being,

since taking back what you had already offered someone

is like a dog that vomits and eats what it has vomited.¹⁴

In this world, He [Allah] will provide Muslims

and non-Muslims alike the luck He has predestined for them.

But in the afterlife, there will be rewards and punishments.

The way luck searches for its man

is harder than the way one looks for the cause of death!

No matter how ephemeral one's life is,

one will benefit from all his luck before dying.

Before you were created, Allah had already decided it.

He had predestined you with luck and the cause of your death.

A friend cannot increase your luck.

Nor an enemy can diminish it. This is for sure!

When your time of death comes, it will neither be in advance

nor delayed, not even for a twinkle of an eye!

No one can create, give life, or kill [besides Allah].

No one can save you from misfortunes, bring you luck,

bless you or banish you in the afterlife [but Allah].

Ingenious, capable to accomplish anything tirelessly,

¹⁴ This metaphor means that it is an insult to tell a person he took back what he had offered you, let alone to tell that to Allah. In this context, the message that is conveyed is that when one loses a possession, a privilege or a loved one, they should not complain or accuse Allah of taking it away because everything belongs to Him.

He is omnipotent before all creatures.

Do not boast about your own lineage or your words and wealth,

because everything has a beginning and an end in this world.

Where are the prophets and the old kings?

Whether they were non-Muslims or Muslims, they were all taken away by death.

Do not boast about worshipping Allah too much

or having a lot of knowledge.

Know that it is Allah who grants eternal happiness.

We seek refuge in Allah against misfortune,

and against a tragic end and any alteration of our faith in Him.

Know that Barsisa, Balaam, Iblis have the certitude of burning in hell.¹⁵

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My Creator, replace our sins with

mercy, privilege, resilience,

and by the intervention of your chosen prophet.

We hope to have eternal happiness,

and we seek refuge in your servant,

our beloved leader, Muhammad, the savior.

Multiply your blessing and your protection upon him

¹⁵ *Barsisa* or *Barş is ā* is a saint whose three brothers had asked him to look after a sick woman. Under the influence of Satan (*Iblis* or *Iblis* in Islam), *Barş is ā* seduced the woman. After he found out she was pregnant, *Barş is ā* killed and buried her body to hide the evidence of his crime. However, *Iblis* reveals the murder to the woman's brothers. *Barş is ā*, panicked, and succumbed again under the influence of the devil, renouncing God in exchange of safety, only to be mocked by Satan as taught by the Quran (59:16): "I am free from you. I fear God, the Lord of the worlds." In Islamic sources, the story of de *Balaam* or *Bal'am* occurred during the journey of the Israelites in the plains of Moab, East of Jordan at the end of the 40 years of wandering, sometimes before the death of Moses and the crossing of the Jordan. *Balaam* was also a scholar close to God that Satan had seduced and deceived.

indefinitely and without interruption.

When you commit a sin, regret your act and ask for Allah's forgiveness.

Repent immediately, and do not even waste a blink of an eye!

Repentance is based on sincere intent.

Repent and this will be useful to you.

If you utter the words of repentance without a sincere intent,

you must repent for the words you have uttered.¹⁶

This is reported in an authentic hadith from our Prophet,

peace be upon him. The one who sits on sin should be afraid!

If you don't know who that is, it is the person who planned to sin

and refused to repent,

and later committed the sin he intended

and continues in that manner until his death.

Anyone who awaits his old days to repent

is certainly exposed to a tragedy [for he can die any day]!

When you repent, stay away from sins,

and return everything you acquired illicitly!¹⁷

[Dying without repenting] is like trying to return curdled milk to its original fresh nature,

or trying to find a camel in a hole as tiny as that of a needle!¹⁸

It is Ahmad [Prophet Muhammad], peace be upon him, who teaches us

¹⁶ To repent in Islam, one must formulate the intent and pronounce the words *Astaghfiru l-Lāb* (*May Allah forgive me*). However, if someone pronounces these words without a sincere intent, he or she is regarded as a hypocrite.

¹⁷ In Islam, Allah will not forgive the injustices or prejudices done to others.

¹⁸ These two metaphors mean that someone who dies without repenting is unforgivable, just like it is impossible to turn curdled milk into its liquid nature as fresh milk before its fermentation or finding a camel in a hole as tiny as that of a needle.

the following regarding those who repent before their death:

Anyone who sincerely repents while sick,

before their last breath will have eternal happiness.

If people repent before sunset,

they will be free from sin as the day they were born.

It is not allowed for a sick man to divorce [his wife].¹⁹

If he does, the woman must leave with her share of the inheritance.

Whoever dies of grave illness while married,

his wife is entitled to the inheritance, if he dies before divorcing her.

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However, if she has been married in order to get some inheritance,

in that case, she will not even inherit a needle.

But this condition is only valid when the man dies from that illness.

If he is cured in the meantime, the woman will be entitled to the inheritance,

because whether they consummated or not their marriage,

they stayed together and remained married.

If a sick woman is married, and her husband dies,

the woman will only be entitled to a dowry, but she cannot inherit.

If the sick woman dies before her husband, the husband is entitled to the inheritance

and the dowry will not be returned to him.²⁰

If the woman is divorced while her husband is gravely ill,

¹⁹ Here the author talks about incurable diseases. Some men divorce their wives (sometimes under their family's pressure) to deprive them from their inheritance.

²⁰ This rule is only valid when the marriage is consummated. Otherwise, the dowry will be returned to her, and the man is not entitled to the inheritance.

she is entitled to the inheritance, if the husband dies from his illness.

If he recovers²¹ and people witnessed it,

and he relapses and dies, the woman is not entitled to the inheritance.

If it is the woman who dies before, the husband who divorced her is not entitled to inheritance,

whether their divorce was partial or in effect,²²

unless he divorced her partially during his illness.

Whoever dies during the period of emptiness, the latter is over.

Any woman who announces her engagement during the vacancy period is immediately free from it.

It is so when she accepts a marriage proposal [during the vacancy period].

If she has intimate relations with a man during her vacancy period,

they must be separated and must not marry each other.

A prohibition cannot legitimize what is lawful,

like committing adultery for the purpose of getting married.

If they sincerely repent and the vacancy period is over,

one cannot stop them from marrying each other.

Someone who courts a woman during the vacancy period,

and proposes a dowry, the marriage will not be valid.

All of this is forbidden in the book of Allah [the Quran].

Anyone who denies it is on the path of being cursed.

If one of them [the man or the woman] is aware of it,

the dowry must be given [to the woman] and the marriage must be voided.

²¹ If the husband is cured from that grave illness publicly before relapsing.

²² After her husband's divorce, the woman undergoes a waiting period of three months called '*Idda*'. During this time, the husband can change his mind. But past this period, the divorce is effective, according to the Maliki school.

The one who says that the dowry was given because they had sexual intercourse
is the person who relies on what is authenticated.

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If she wants to make herself beautiful, she can do it in front of witnesses.

When she is mourning [widowhood]²³ or in her waiting period [for the divorce],
making herself beautiful in that period
as if she was married is not recommended.

The divorcee must have her daily expenses

and her own room during the vacancy period.

Anything allowed in marriage is allowed between the man and the woman during the vacancy period,
except having sexual intercourse or flirting.²⁴

Anyone who ignores or does not know about [the procedures of marriage]
must avoid presiding over them.

Anyone who has four wives and divorces one of them to marry another one

during the vacancy period of the other [divorced] is considered the husband of five wives.²⁵

In this case, the divorced wife will leave with her belongings,
whether the divorce is temporary or final.

If someone tells you "I give you my daughter in marriage" and you agree, before the vacancy
period of the divorced woman ended; you are regarded as if you have five wives.

Whoever has good intentions and talks about it with your accord, the marriage is considered valid.

²³ The woman is not allowed to get married within her 4 months, 10 day mourning period.

²⁴ What the author means here is that between the husband and the woman he partially divorced, it is recommended that the woman observes the vacancy period at her husband's home, to encourage reconciliation. Intimacy between the two is considered reconciliation and puts an end to the vacancy period.

²⁵ Since a man is only allowed four wives under Islamic law, a man with five wives is breaking the law of Allah.

But this rule is contradicted by the writings of Tuhfa and Shaykhu Khalil.

With or without the dowry,

the marriage is valid and can be consummated.

But if he gives you only the girl, without your agreement,

you must give a dowry to validate the marriage.

Therefore, those who officiate marriages without knowing the rules are warned

to not confuse an engagement with a marriage.

The requirements for someone officiating a marriage are as follows: he must be

a free person, a believer, and an adult.²⁶

Otherwise, he must not officiate any marriage since it will not be considered valid.

One must follow someone who fulfills the requirements for officiating a marriage.

Those who are informed know that these words can be found in:

Al-Risāla, Tuhfa, Shaykhu Khalil [works from the Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence].

If an orphan girl or a divorced woman is forced into marriage,

the marriage should be annulled with the woman's agreement, even if they are minors.

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The first version is from Imam Malik.²⁷ Ibn Al-Qasim

is the author of the second version.²⁸

The third version is found with Imam Al-Asbahani.²⁹

²⁶ According to the author, a slave, a nonbeliever, a woman or a child (minor) cannot officiate a marriage.

²⁷ The Maliki school is one of the four Islamic schools of jurisprudence founded by *Malik Ibn Anas* also called *Imam Malik*, born in 94 AH and deceased at age 84. It is the most famous school among West African Muslims.

²⁸ *Ibn Al-Qasim* or *Abdul Raḥman bin Qasim* stayed with *Imam Malik* for 20 years, and he is as esteemed among the followers of the Maliki school as *Imām Muḥammad bin Ḥasan al-Shaybānī* is among the followers of the Hanafi school.

²⁹ *Imam Al-Asbahani* or *Imām Al-Aṣṣ bahānī* or *Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣṣ fahānī* (d. 430 AH/ 930 CE) was a Persian scholar of the *Shāfi'i* school and transmitter of the hadith (traditions associated with the Prophet Muhammad).

And it is corroborated by Imam Ashab in a fourth version.³⁰

Let the widow in mourning not use perfume or deodorant,
even for a death or a pilgrim.

Any widow who dies during her mourning period
can be sprayed with perfume before her burial because her mourning period has ended.

The women in mourning do not wear jewelry,
like shining jewelry that is not black.

She can braid her hair, shave her navel hair, massage herself [with lotion],
shave her armpits and brush her teeth.

Nothing else is forbidden for her, except
the innovations below that must be prohibited:

Widows in mourning can do laundry without a problem.

Scheduling them a time to do so is a bad innovation,
or saying they should do laundry only on Fridays and Mondays,
or cover their heads with special headscarves when mourning.³¹

Anyone who dies with these practices [contrary to Islamic rules] while mourning
has died in shirk [associationism] and risks going to hell.

If the widow is a young woman who does not wear a headscarf,
she should not wear it and must observe her mourning without using makeup.

Regarding widowed slaves with or without children,
they should not observe the mourning period. One should only ensure they are not

³⁰ He was a student of *Imam Malik*.

³¹ In some communities, it is said that women who are mourning must only do laundry in the early morning, on Mondays and Fridays, and that they must wear special outfits. According to the author, all these traditions are forbidden in Islam.

pregnant.

This is because it was not their husband who died,

but someone entitled to be intimate with them, their master.

Any [widowed slave] who sees her period can only have sexual intercourse one month later.³²

If she has not yet begun seeing her period,

or if she is in menopause, she should wait for three months [before having sexual intercourse].

After this period, if you [the master] want to marry her, she will be free.³³

If you want to have sexual intercourse with her, it is licit.

But a marriage will not be valid between the two of you.³⁴

If she is pregnant or has a baby,

the vacuity period does not apply to her, to verify if she is pregnant or not.

God does not impose the vacuity period [in this case],

since old potable water and fresh potable water are both licit.

³² To check if she is pregnant or not.

³³ In this case, she will no longer be your slave but your wife.

³⁴ After the death of their master, slaves are shared in the inheritance. It is about the man who inherits a slave, in this case. He has the choice between emancipating and marrying her or regarding her as a slave. If he chooses the second option, he is entitled to have sexual relations with her, but the marriage will no longer be valid between them.