

Celebrating Cerno Maawiyatu Maasi

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

May God bestow peace and blessings upon our Master Muhammad.

I give thanks to the One worthy of gratitude under any circumstance

for delivering a year that carried away the likes of Shaykh Maasi.

The Exalted One is to be thanked for whatever He does.

For this reason, I praise He who took away Shaykh Maasi.

Just like there was a year that once took away the Prophet

Muhammad so was there a year that took away this Shaykh of Maasi.

Let's find solace and resolve to lay him to rest

with gratitude and solace in Shaykh Maasi.

For all Your glory, oh God, I praise you.

Your promise is fulfilled, for we have parted with Shaykh Maasi.

How sad! O people of Fuuta, I can't bear to hide this misfortune.

There is no worse misfortune than the departure of Shaykh Maasi.

To the worried and concerned, I won't hide that I am with you.

I've been frightened by the departure of Shaykh Maasi.

When the guardians are nowhere to be found

where would hope be found for the orphans¹ of Shaykh Maasi?

It is You, the Exalted One, that I fear, and not my own demise,

for I know I won't escape that which took away Shaykh Maasi.

¹ By orphans, the poet means all those who benefited from Shaykh Maasi across Fuuta Jalon.

It's for Fuuta that I'm afraid; Fuuta is now darkness,

for it was God's torch that was embodied by Shaykh Maasi.

The dimming of a torch in a moonless night devoid of

stars exemplifies the plight of today's Maasi,

or the hen served as a meal, leaving behind

young squawking chicks, may better capture today's Maasi!

Sure, whatever the Exalted Lord does, the tongues will speak about it.

Indeed, that's why they are all saying: "The Shaykh of Maasi is gone!"

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There is nothing we can do. The dead must be buried,

and that's why Maasi is obliged to bury the Shaykh of Maasi,

Maawiyatu, the saint who exemplified Your religion,

the one You made into an instrument of Maasi.

Maawiyatu, the successor of the Chosen One of Your creation [Muhammad];

he who lived by the Prophet's tradition in the land of Maasi.

He sprinkled knowledge on Maasi, devoted himself to the faith,

and fought unbelief, this beloved servant of yours from Maasi.

He raised the poor, adopted the orphans,

and housed every foreigner in Maasi,

be they guests or settlers, students, or widows,

so long as they all now call home the land of Maasi.

His relatives and distinguished neighbors, among the Fula [Peul]

and the serfs, were all raised by the Shaykh of Maasi.

May God offer him boundless rewards Tomorrow.²

May God's reward match the rank of the spiritual pole³ of Maasi.

The Safar⁴ moon might have conspired

to transport to the hereafter the Shaykh of Maasi.

Praise be to the One who brought me, on Wednesday, to Maasi

to be present at the bedside of the spiritual pole of Maasi.

On a Thursday, when the moon was twenty days old,⁵

I arrived at the home of the spiritual pole of Maasi

to extend my greetings. Cerno Zakaria

entered his room and delivered my well wishes to the Shaykh Maasi.

He returned to say the Shaykh didn't respond at all:

"Still affected by illness is the Shaykh of Maasi."

It didn't take long when he said that the Shaykh was ready to

meet Muhammad from Dalaba who was visiting Maasi.

Afterwards, I would go exchange greetings with him and wish him well.

So, I entered and greeted the saint of Maasi.

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Joyfully, he said: "welcome, my dear friend!

Sore is the state today of your loved one in Maasi."

"I was notified at the time of your arrival.

I couldn't speak yesterday to the people of Maasi."

² *Tomorrow* means in this context on the Judgment Day in the afterlife.

³ The poet used the Arabic word *Qutb*, the short form *Qutb al-Zamān* (The Spiritual Pole of the Universe), the highest rank in Sufism.

⁴ *Safar* is the second of twelve months of the 355-day Islamic lunar calendar.

⁵ This is the twentieth day of the lunar month of Safar.

I rubbed my [sad] face, knowing that God had brought on the imminent.

Never again would I see the Shaykh of Maasi.

I left with my body, but my heart remained watching,

and already mourning this adorable spiritual pole of Maasi.

When Friday came, the Shaykh prepared to leave this world. Then Saturday passed

followed by Sunday which brought to the hereafter the Shaykh of Maasi.

The month of Safar came with thunderous tears.

By daybreak on Sunday, tears rained on the land of Maasi.

Sunday was audacious among the seven days!

All the other days feared the blame of taking away Shaykh Maasi.

Oh Sunday, how audacious you are!

You dared to sneak in at dawn to take away our Shaykh Maasi!

In the company of the capable, one could accomplish great feats!

This might have been why you acted the way you did, taking away Shaykh Maasi.

Oh Sunday, why didn't you allow Fuuta to persuade you?

You could've accepted to be persuaded and leave Shaykh Maasi alone.

Oh Sunday, now you fulfilled the wish of the other six days,

for it's you who took the Shaykh of Maasi away.

You've given him a break from medicine and relapses,

delivering to the city of eternal health the Shaykh of Maasi.

A messenger from the Lord [God] cannot be challenged.

Surely, He sent you to take away the Shaykh of Maasi.

The dead stand to benefit from prayers,

charity, and invocations. So, let's offer them to the Shaykh of Maasi.

No one can blame you [Sunday], for you were merely executing an order.

But I feel distressed and must weep for the loss of the Shaykh of Maasi.

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When the Angel of Death first arrived, he found a sad scene.

He paid his respect and wept for the saint of Maasi.

The army accompanying him all wept and lamented,

saying: "how sad it would be to extract the soul of the Shaykh of Maasi!"

But, in compliance with the Lord's irreversible decree,⁶

the Angel gently retrieved the soul of the Shaykh of Maasi.

The Angel of Death told him: "O Shaykh of Maasi

every soul must taste death. So, accept it, Shaykh of Maasi!

It was I who was appointed to take away your soul,

and to pass it to other angels bound for the Throne of God.

Don't be afraid of the journey towards your only Lord.

It's your Master who sent him, answer the call Shaykh Maasi."⁷

The angels, the humans, and jinns wept as did earth⁸

and heaven for the departure of Shaykh Maasi.

The fauna and flora, trees and rocks, and everything,

including the sky and the Throne of God all wept Shaykh Maasi.

The earth wept for losing our Shaykh

⁶ Here the poet used the Islamic phrase *Kun fa yakun* (*Be and it is*). The phrase alludes to the fact that God's method of creation and triggering events has no anthropomorphic equivalence of using a tool, a material or mechanical means. The meaning is simply put: "Be, and it becomes" as in "Let there be light, and there was light" in the Book of Genesis 1:3.

⁷ In this context, *The Throne of God* (عرش), which is akin to the "Kingdom of Heaven," is the metaphorical locus of divine power occupied by God and surrounded by deceased human prophets and angels.

⁸ The speaker in this line has now changed over to the author.

as the hereafter rejoiced and welcomed Shaykh Maasi.

The weeping continued among faithful men and women.

Even the faithless and hypocrites wept for the loss of Shaykh Maasi.

The living ones wept and lamented

for he was a blessing to all, the Shaykh of Maasi.

On Friday, the twenty-ninth day of the month,

I paid a visit to the resting place of the Saint of Maasi.

There, I came upon a land filled with loneliness,

even though Maasi had a large population.

I left on Saturday, returning to the land of Dalaba.

I kept on weeping about the Shaykh of Maasi.

I heard some people praying and thought about their prayers,

only to realize some did not really know the Shaykh of Maasi.

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I heard some say: "May God forgive

the sins committed by the Shaykh of Maasi!"

It's given that God has favored some above others,

and among the favored, He favored Shaykh Maasi!

There are some whose sins will never be recorded.

They are role models like Shaykh Maasi.

There are those whose sins will be recorded,

and their subsequent good deeds will erase⁹ their sins so they resemble Shaykh Maasi.

⁹In Islam, sins – much like good deeds – are recorded by angels. Acts of repentance and subsequent good deeds can be credited against past sins. In this context, the term "erase" refers to the process of commuting or pardoning a sin.

The Prophet said that the act of teaching can erase

sins, and many are those who studied with Shaykh Maasi.

He also said that a believer who teaches for an hour qualifies for

a reward worth a single month of teaching, just like Shaykh Maasi.

He said that a believer who teaches a full day

will be rid of a year of sins, just like Shaykh Maasi.

To those who prayed so that his good deeds may outweigh his sins,

how could they think his sins might have outweighed the good deeds of Shaykh Maasi?

To those who ask God to forgive his sins,

sins couldn't be attributed to Shaykh Maasi!

And to those who hope for his interrogation¹⁰ in the grave to last only for seven days,

what's there to ask Shaykh Maasi?

He might be asked about the profession of faith [there is no god

but God], which was exemplified by the Shaykh of Maasi.

Next, he might be asked to say that Muhammad is the Messenger

of God, which was already exemplified by the Shaykh of Maasi.

Anyone who questions this must repent quickly

and become a student and disciple of Shaykh Maasi.

To those who had asked God to spare him the darkness of the grave,

how might darkness creep up to a light like Shaykh Maasi?

To those who had asked God to grant him smooth crossing across *Şirat*,¹¹

¹⁰ Here the author refers to *Munkar* and *Nakir*, the two angels who question the dead in their graves.

¹¹ In Islam, *al-Şirat* is a bridge with the thickness of a hair filament or a blade that everyone would have to cross before entering heaven. Crossing the bridge is said to be challenging for sinners, and some might fall off the bridge into the pits of hell located below the bridge.

the blade-like *Şirat* will pose no challenge for Shaykh Maasi.

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He will just fly over it, and will fly over it with his disciples,

crossing every obstacle. Such is God's promise to Shaykh Maasi.

His loved ones won't stand trial on Judgment Day,

all of this is due to the greatness of Shaykh Maasi.

Together, they will fly over on the shoulders of the angels

propelled by their wings along with the likes of Shaykh Maasi.

Recitations of Lazim litanies suffice as dinner, just like *Wazifa*¹²

sufficed for the *Suhur*¹³ of Shaykh Maasi.

His lunch was made up of granting litany to new disciples,

and in so doing, the earthly burden was lifted off Shaykh Maasi.

To those who pray that God send him to heaven,

know that God had already made that promise to Shaykh Maasi.

The angels are saying: "Oh God, fulfill

the promise You made to Shaykh Maasi."

They are saying: "My Lord, fulfill it for all who were faithful

and carried out good deeds, like Shaykh Maasi."

Oh God, I rejoice with all You have willed.

It is You who showed me the departure of Shaykh Maasi.

I submit to every one of your verdicts, including

those destined upon me. I now let go of Shaykh Maasi.

¹² *Lazim* and *Wazifa* refer to the recitation and prayer sessions of members of the Tijaniyya Sufi order.

¹³ Pre-dawn meal that Muslims eat before embarking on the dawn-to-dusk fast.

Grant me the option of praying for the Shaykh,

accepting each prayer and delivering them to the Saint of Maasi.

It is our duty to implore the Exalted

to approve all worshiping engaged in by Shaykh Maasi.

May the Lord fulfill His promise and multiply his good deeds

and bring Shaykh Maasi to Firdaws [the highest Heaven].

May the Lord raise him above

the ranks of Shaykhs comparable to Shaykh Maasi.

Oh God, forgive the one who gave birth to the Shaykh,

for it is rare in Fuuta that one gives birth to someone like Shaykh Maasi.

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Oh Lord forgive the parents of those who gave birth to our Shaykh,

and all his ancestors who had settled in Maasi.

Multiply their good deeds for his sake,

and supplement, with your kindness, the blessings of Saint Maasi.

Reward exponentially future generations

who were deprived by destiny of ever seeing Shaykh Maasi.

I have thought it through, searched in every direction,

but I found no one left who is like Shaykh Maasi.

Reward his earliest teachers for initiating the best of the best,

educating the one who later became the Saint of Maasi.

Multiply the rewards of all those who had taught him,

and enabled the Shaykh of Maasi to acquire his vast knowledge.

Multiply the rewards by every letter he ever read

thousands and thousands of times, and offer all to Shaykh Maasi.

Multiply the rewards of the Shaykh for everything he intended

to achieve up to the day he left Maasi.

Multiply the rewards for all that he read and wrote,

and offer them as gifts to Shaykh Maasi.

Reward abundantly everything he said, even when You disapproved it;

I beg for your forgiveness, for the sake of Shaykh Maasi.

Magnify what he diminished or inadvertently emphasized,

but please do forgive the Shaykh of Maasi.

Multiply all that he has said and all that he has done,

accept them all and offer them as rewards to Shaykh Maasi.

Multiply his religious injunctions, what he encouraged

and discouraged and offer them all as rewards to Shaykh Maasi.

Your mercy towers above everything.

Therefore, we implore You to grant it to Shaykh Maasi.

I have been briefed on his enduring work and legacy,

for I have summarized them here. Let me now pray for Shaykh Maasi.

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[Oh Lord], multiply his blessings by the number of words

between the Alif of "Al-ḥamdu" and the Sin of "Nas."¹⁴

Multiply his blessings by all the written books, from here

¹⁴ The first chapter of the Quran, *Al-Fātiḥa* (The Opening), starts with the Arabic letter *Alif* (ا) and the last chapter of the Quran, *Al-Nās* (Human Beings) ends with a *Sīm* (س). Thus, we assume the author's message is from "beginning to end," or from A to Z.

on earth to the heavens and offer them all as rewards to Shaykh Maasi.

Multiply the number of his injunctions and prohibitions,

and offer them as a reward to Your beloved Shaykh Maasi.

Multiply every consonant therein, vowels, emphatic consonants,

and long vowels and offer them all as gifts to Shaykh Maasi.

Multiply his good deeds that no one else but You know,

and offer them all as gifts to Shaykh Maasi.

Offer the equivalent of God's protection of forty thousand

of His servants as rewards to the Shaykh of Maasi.

May the angels who are never sleepy nor tired

and don't rest be made servants of the Saint of Maasi.

I implore the Lord to protect those who cut the umbilical cord

and washed Shaykh Maasi for the first time,

as well as those who washed him for the last time,

and properly covered, transported, and laid Shaykh Maasi to rest,

and anyone who did anything insignificant

or significant for the Saint of Maasi.

[My Lord], let every wish of those who wish him well, even if it is extraordinary,

be fulfilled for the sake of Your Shaykh Maasi.

Accept the wishes of those whose contribution was to give their children

as aides to the earthly wives of Shaykh Maasi.

To the in-laws who offered wives

to Shaykh Maasi, may God fulfill their wishes.

I ask You, O God, to fulfill every wish

that they have for the sake of Shaykh Maasi.

O Exalted Lord, among them were those who offered gifts,

in gratitude to the Shaykh of Maasi.

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I implore You to protect them from their fears and worries,

for they rely on You just like Shaykh Maasi.

Among them are those who worked for the Shaykh.

Some of them died earlier and have been followed by Shaykh Maasi.

He had blessed them, buried them, and prayed for them.

May they not be held accountable, thanks to Shaykh Maasi.

I urge the living to fear and repent,

if they happened to have wronged Shaykh Maasi.

If they had wronged him with their words, repentance would suffice.

If they had wronged him with deeds, they must give charity on behalf of Shaykh Maasi.

I received a message asking for help from Neene Maari¹⁵

who called upon God and prayed for Shaykh Maasi.

I ask the Exalted to inspire me with the right formula for a prayer

that is fitting in the hereafter for Shaykh Maasi.

Ensure that those who use the formula and those for whom they pray

receive intercession in the hereafter from Shaykh Maasi.

I ask, O God, for more of Your blessings to be showered upon

¹⁵ This could be the name of one of Shaykh Maasi's wives or a senior female member of the community of Maasi. The Fula word *Neene* (mother) is a respectful and honorary title for wives of religious figures and for important senior women in Fuuta Jalon communities.

the appointed successors of Saint Maasi.

The prayer formula consists of I'ādha,¹⁶ Basmala,¹⁷ followed by a prayer upon

the best of creation.¹⁸ Read these for Shaykh Maasi.

Reciting a chapter like Al-Ikhlās¹⁹

eleven or twelve times suffices when paying a visit to Shaykh Maasi.

Also recite Āyat al-Kursī²⁰ with the intent

of being blessed and blessing Shaykh Maasi.

The prayers need not be made at the actual cemetery.

[By using the prayer formula], wherever you are, you can pray for Shaykh Maasi.

The End

May God, the Creator, Owner of Maasi,

Oh my Lord, make every moment satisfactory.

Our God, bestow your boundless blessings upon on our Master Muhammad.

Written by Ahmad Julde, son of Alhaaji Muhammad Ramadan.

¹⁶ This is the abbreviation of the Arabic formula for protection against Satan: "I seek refuge in God from Satan, the outcast."

¹⁷ This is the abbreviation of the Arabic formula which means "In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful."

¹⁸ This refers to the Arabic formula, which means "Our God, shower your peace and blessing on the prophet Muhammad, his family, and his companions."

¹⁹ See the Quran, Chapter 112. *Al-Ikhlās* means the "Sincerity" or the "Declaration of the Oneness of God." It is the second shortest chapter of the Quran that explains the fundamentals of the monotheistic theology of Islam.

²⁰ This is the "Verse of the Throne of God." See the Quran, Chapter 2 (*Al-Baqara*, "The Cow"), verse 255.