

## The Absolute Truth 1

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

May blessings and peace be upon the noble messenger [Muhammad].

Surely, friends, let us praise the King.

Surely, He is merciful and generous.

Surely, humankind ought to know this.

Surely, we should thank Allah, the Sovereign Ruler.

Surely, He alone surpasses all!

Let us pray upon the Exalted One [Muhammad].

May more blessings be upon him, the Exalted One.

May we gain salvation tomorrow [in the hereafter] through the Exalted One.

Let us offer prayers and blessings to the Exalted One,

Ahmad, who surely surpasses all!

Oh, my people, reflect so that you may repent!

I am admonishing you out of love.

Let us follow the right path so that we may escape torments [in the hereafter].

Therefore, listen as I sing, and repent

so that you may surely be saved!

Even if you occupy a high position,

whether you are a ruler or a devout follower,

and whether you are rich, poor, or generous,

if you don't respect the King of the Muslims,<sup>1</sup>  
then you will surely die in ignorance.

Regardless of how numerous your acts of worship are,  
regardless of your piety or saintliness, and  
regardless of how learned you are,

if you refuse to comply with the [just] injunctions of the Sultan,  
you will certainly have no excuse on Judgment Day!

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If you are a leader, be generous.

You have been warned! Do not disrespect [your people].

If you do so, you will be embraced by your people.

If you are a leader, strive to do Justice

so that you will surely enjoy shade tomorrow!<sup>2</sup>

If you become a leader of the people,

then take good care of the rights of everyone.

Listen carefully so that you will not burn [in hellfire].

Anyone who becomes a leader to take advantage of people

will surely be consumed by hellfire tomorrow!

Anyone who seeks a position of leadership

to accumulate wealth or fame,

and associates with unscrupulous people,

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<sup>1</sup> Here Nana Asma'u refers her brother Muhammad Bello (1781-1837) who was the second Sultan of the Sokoto Caliphate.

<sup>2</sup> *Tomorrow* refers to *Judgment Day*, when there will be very little shade and only a few selected persons will enjoy it.

who accumulate wealth in the course their leadership,  
will surely burn [in hellfire]!

Anyone who is interested in having peace,  
in this life and the hereafter should avoid greed.

All those who reject my warning will regret it.

But anyone who becomes a ruler and is merciful  
will be the one who will surely be saved in the afterlife!

Obey your leaders and listen to what they have to say.

Obey them not because they are better than you [but because God elected them].

Obey them, be they good or bad.

Those who reject their leaders because they do not give them favors,  
will surely burn in [hellfire] tomorrow!

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Those in leadership positions should be steadfast and vigorous.

You the people, listen carefully! Do not stray from the right path.

Do not only follow your whims.

Be aware that those who tyrannize the masses for the sake of power  
will surely be tyrannized in the hereafter!

Be trustworthy with people, and stop being deceitful!

Be compassionate with them so that you may be rewarded in the hereafter!

Do not follow those who deviate from the right path,  
or be like farm laborers who are slackers

who, if you hire them, will surely betray you!

Some people have obeyed [God], and they do not transgress the limits  
that Allah has set for them. They have joined the struggle.<sup>3</sup>

Others have refused to obey [God], and instead do the contrary.

Those who roam about the earth to do mischief  
will roam about in hellfire.

When asked to come settle a conflict, some people  
refuse to listen, and they do not consult their leaders about it.

They refuse to take matters to the courts where conflicts are settled.

Those who are bent on creating havoc and spreading malicious lies  
will be surely crying out in the hereafter!

If the judge calls upon you, answer the call!

Refusing to comply is tantamount to disobeying Allah.

Make your way to him [the judge], and do not deviate.

Anyone who refuses to answer the summons of a judge  
will surely be summoned by hellfire!

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[Do not be among those] who get angry and talk back to [the judge],  
or speak abusively, refusing to show respect.

Do not be someone who brags or shows off,  
nor someone who refuses to comply with a ruling  
that a [just] judge has made.

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<sup>3</sup> Struggle here refers to the Sokoto Jihad that was begun by Usman ḍan Fodio, Nana Asma'u's father.

However, if a judge in his capacity to rule,

refuses to follow the right path and oppresses the people,

tomorrow in the hereafter, he will be shackled!

If a judge changes the law [arbitrarily],

then he has surely become a nonbeliever!

Tell all your people to rely on the law.

Whether you are a local ruler or an Imam,

do not stop them from using their knowledge of the law.

Leaders who prevent their people from relying on the law

will surely be sent to hellfire tomorrow!

Oh, my friends, we have been warned to be disciplined.

Let us hear this so that we may surely earn salvation.

Let us not bypass the law on procedural grounds.

Leaders who break Islamic laws [for their benefit]

will definitely be held accountable in the hereafter!

Those who break their promises and engage in deception,

along with those who look down upon God-fearing people, should repent.

Such people have committed the gravest of all sins.

Those who befriend them will be severely punished.

They will all be certainly enslaved by hellfire!

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There will be no salvation in the hereafter for those practicing witchcraft,

unless they repent from this practice!

Some are evildoers,

others seize land and then show off their power!

They will surely be held accountable on Judgment Day!

There are those who hike up prices,

and those who fund their celebrations through evil means.

There are others, I'm telling you, like those

who consume the assets of the treasury!

Tomorrow, they will surely all be consumed by hellfire!

Likewise, thieves in the countryside

together with those in cities who steal and hide,

those who break into houses and take away everything,

and those who embezzle and hide away what they've stolen,

they will all surely be exposed tomorrow!

When you come to the place of struggle,<sup>4</sup> listen to the leader!

Know that the struggle is for the sake of Allah, so do not forget that

those who deceive their fellows and confiscate [their properties],

and those who use violence to steal from others,

will certainly be violently punished in the hereafter!

When a town is conquered, avoid oppressing the locals.

Verily, it is not acceptable to oppress conquered people.

Yet, there are those among us who do just this,

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<sup>4</sup> Reference to the Sokoto Jihad.

and there are also those who confiscate war bounties from their rightful owners.

Hellfire will surely burn all of them!

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Definitely, do not hide war booty

taken from battle. It must be taken to the ruler.

Yet, there are those who hide what they have taken [in battle]!

Those who refuse to abide by the rightful distribution of war booty,

hellfire will surely be their reward!

When you are successful in a battle,

it is permissible to have captives, but you should follow the leader's injunctions.

Yet, some people here do not comply with the rules [of war].

There are lawbreakers who take advantage of women captives in violation of the rules.

Surely, they will all be thrown into hellfire!

Avoid injustice, even if it is as insignificant as a ring!

Do not steal from people who are on the way to market.

It is not good to take back a gift, no matter how insignificant it is.

Likewise, those who are not trustworthy, tomorrow

they will certainly not be trusted.

You have been warned to stop engaging in oppressive behaviors

so that you may receive forgiveness from Allah, the Merciful.

You should refrain, do you hear? It will lead you to enjoy delicious meals [in the hereafter]!

Those who assault and rob people in the roads, even if they were Muslims,

trust that they will surely burn [in hellfire]!

You should study continuously so you may be knowledgeable,  
which makes a human being honorable.

Do not live among those who are ignorant  
and those who confiscate properties in Muslim communities.

Tomorrow, they surely will all go to hellfire!

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Some are only interested in worldly pleasure, including goge music.<sup>5</sup>

They refuse to follow the right path leading to the light,  
and they persist in their sinful path.

They perpetuate their evil acts, including snatching people's properties in marketplaces.

Those are the ones that hellfire will certainly snatch away in the afterlife!

Those who are envious, tomorrow  
will be put in hellfire when it is at its hottest temperature!

When they are put there, they will quickly be tormented.

Also, the adulterers who chase after women,  
tomorrow they will all surely go to hellfire.

Oh people, I am warning you so that you may wake up!

Continue to fear God and weep [as you think about the ordeals of the afterlife].

Did you hear me? This is the truth, no doubt about it!

Local leaders who insist that the zakat [obligatory alms] be given [to the poor]

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<sup>5</sup> *Goge* is a large one or two-stringed fiddle, with the body constructed of a gourd and played with a bow.



will be saved from the torments of the afterlife.

There are some with no spiritual insight.

They are lost because they do not seek knowledge.

They should seek knowledge so that they may know the right path.

Those who sleep [with their wives] according to their whims and not in turn,

hellfire will surely be their reward!

Those who refuse to repent will surely be burned! You hear?

Listen to this admonition so that you may benefit from it.

Do not hide this admonition from anyone, and do not break family ties.

Also, husbands who refuse to be fair in the rotation among their wives<sup>6</sup>

will surely be thrown [into hellfire] tomorrow!

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Some people make their livelihood by confiscating other people's property.

Some wait in hiding in order to steal.

Others wrong people while pretending to be good people.

Those who use charms to bind their husbands or to distance them from other wives

will certainly be bound up in the afterlife!

Tomorrow, some will go to the hellfire of Sa'irā,

others to Sijjīnu, and others to Saqarā.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Here, the poet is referring to an act of injustice that some polygamous husbands practice when, instead of strictly adhering to the agreement reached by the spouses – say the husband will spend X number of nights with wife A, and equally with wife B, he spends more nights with his 'favorite' wife. Islam forbids this.

<sup>7</sup> These are different types of hellfire.

They will all be driven to the fire,

along with the women who go out without good reason.

They will surely not escape hellfire.

Creditors who make their debtors miserable,

or women who wrong their co-wives,

they are all warned to get rid of their bad behaviors!

Likewise, wives who are always finding fault with their co-wives,

tomorrow they will surely be burnt by hellfire!

There are evildoers who organize themselves in groups

so that they can perpetuate their evil acts.

They organize themselves in groups to attack people unfairly.

Also, those who practice magic, thieves, and the wicked,

tomorrow they will surely be sent to hellfire!

These admonitions are meant to wake you up

so that you can prepare for where you are headed tomorrow!

Stop begging for favors!

Tomorrow, the relentless beggar will surely find his face

scraped clean of flesh!

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You are enjoined to be kind at all times.

Be merciful to all your fellows, and generous.

Those who wrong others, have wicked intentions,

and sow dissension among relatives

will surely be set on fire and burned!

Those who continuously commit sins

should repent! Also, those who neglect knowledge

are of no benefit to society.

Likewise, malicious gossipers who sow dissension among Muslims --

They and paradise? Never, ever!

Those whose generosity is just a show,

there will be no reward for them, given their intentions.

There are others who, if they do not get what they want,

pretend to be pious so that people will offer them money.

All of them will surely burn!

Have you heard this sermon, my people?

It is to wake you all from sleep

so that you may all repent. Do you hear me, fellow Muslims?

All that I have said to you is the truth.

Allah's mercy and the Prophet's power of intercession are true!

I have completed what I have to say, oh people. You've heard the truth!

May you take this truth to heart.

Truth is what this is about, and you have all heard the truth!

Let us all repent, oh people, because anyone who truly

repents will surely be saved [in the hereafter]!

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I implore you to accept this poem with five-verse stanzas, whose completion date is based on the migration of the Messenger [Muhammad to Medina] using the Ramzi dating system.

I expanded the original poem with comments so that it may be better appreciated.<sup>8</sup>

I completed the composition of the poem following the Ramzi dating system:

Take note, the completion date is surely Jamu Rushdi [AH 1247/1829 CE].<sup>9</sup>

I will praise the Messenger of Allah here in my life

up to the time when my death comes.

It is thanks to him [the Messenger] that I am on the right path.

Let us all thank God and let us pray

upon Muhammad, who surpasses all!

It was the Shehu [Usman ḍan Fodio] who composed the original poem.

Nana rendered it into Hausa and changed its form.

Isa [Nana Asma'u's brother] also added to it.

He did this in Hausa so that you could understand the meaning,

and so that you may surely hear this warning!

This poem ends here thanks to Allah's assistance.

May the peace and blessings be upon our Messenger, Muhammad.

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<sup>8</sup> The original poem, which consisted of two-verse stanzas, was authored by Usman ḍan Fodio. Nana Asma'u expanded it using a poem with five-verse stanzas called *Takbmis*, thus adding new materials to the original.

<sup>9</sup> Nana Asma'u uses a code that is difficult to crack. Our best interpretation is that she used a chronogram called Ramzi to date the poem. Each consonant in the word *Jamu Rushdi* has a numerical value:  $J = 3$ ;  $m = 40$ ;  $r = 200$ ;  $sh = 1000$ ; and  $d = 4$ . This means AH 1247 which corresponds to 1829 CE.

May Allah's blessings and peace be upon him.