

Nana Asmā' u: Admonition¹

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In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. May Allah's blessings be upon the Gracious Messenger. Poem of Asmā' u, daughter of Shaykh 'Uthmān. May Allah be pleased with both.

I am grateful to God, the Merciful

who created me, the Majestic and the Compassionate!

The only One, He alone, and no one other than Him is powerful!

He has no beginning, for He is the inventor of everything!

Who hears me truly and sees me?

It is the One who knows the unknown, knows me, and the Most Patient and Forbearing!

Know that He hears without ears,

and sees without eyes. Understand this!

Believe in Him and trust in Him.

Truly, there is no ruler other than Him, the Most Merciful!

Also believe in Muhammad, His Messenger

so that you may become faithful and at peace!

Stay away from unlawful innovations and follow the traditions of the Prophet.²

This will suffice for you to reach Paradise!

Repentance purifies the servants [of God]

so that they are saved from the sins that lead to Hellfire!

¹ An English translation of this poem by Nana Asmā' u also appears in *Collected Works of Nana Asmā' u: Daughter of Usman 'dan Fodiyo (1793-1864)*, edited by Jean Boyd, and Beverly Mack (Michigan State University Press, 1997), pp. 242-246. There it is entitled "A Warning, II." Boyd and Mack's translation and the one we offer here are complementary. Theirs highlights the gender dimensions of the poem and ours highlights the Islamic aspects.

² The author uses the Arabic word *bid'a*, meaning unlawful innovations, and *sunnah* which means the traditions of Prophet Muhammad.

Purify yourself through ablutions and ritual cleansing³

so that once on the bridge over Hellfire your body will feel no pain!⁴

In case of illness, you may perform dry ablutions⁵ because Allah, the Most High,

the Glorified One, has given privileges to His servants, and He is All-knowing!

Those whose deeds are most pleasing to the Supreme Judge, Allah,

are those who intended their deeds to please the Almighty!

Let us all seek from Allah, the Lord,

forgiveness and approval; for He is the Magnificent!

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The Everlasting does not die!

He lives forever and permanently exists!

Oh people, please listen to my preaching,

and heed my warnings!

Oh people, let's all repent, for repentance

is the doorway to God, the Most Merciful!

Give alms as required and give more to the needy as you wish, and pray

in accordance with the injunctions of the leader [Muhammad].

Remember Allah in your morning and afternoon prayers,

and wake up at night to stand and pray!

Know that loving the Quran is really loving the Lord, the Most High,

and His Messenger. Hold tightly to the Quran every day!

³ The Hausa *wankan janaba* refers to the ritual bath known as *ghusl al-janaba* that is required after sexual activity.

⁴ Here the author refers to *al-Ş irāt*, the bridge over Hell that human beings must cross to enter Paradise.

⁵ The Hausa word *taimama* (from Arabic *tayammum*) refers to the use of earth or sand for ablutions when there is no water available or when a person is sick.

You have heard about the true path that leads to Allah,

know that whoever follows it is on the path of righteousness!⁶

Women, take heed: Refrain from leaving your homes unless absolutely necessary!

Obtaining food and seeking after education are valid reasons for leaving your homes.

The faith requires that you seek knowledge.

Thus, when a woman leaves her home to seek knowledge, she violates no prohibition.

Therefore, I urge you all to repent and be compliant with your marriage rules,

and follow your husbands' lawful decisions.⁷

Cover yourselves⁸ and fear Allah,

and do not put yourselves at risk of Hellfire!

Whoever rejects [these injunctions] will receive no pleasant reward!

Her reward from the Merciful Lord will be unfortunate!

I have composed this poem of admonition

so that it can be useful to the Muslim community.

I have ended it with gratitude [to Allah], and I pray that His blessings and peace

be upon the Prophet and all his companions forever!

Calculate the completion date of the poem using the Ramzi or migration date of the Prophet,

the bringer of good news so that we may all benefit from his generosity!⁹

⁶ Here the author uses *ṣ irāt al-Mustaqīm*, which means the straight path or the path of righteousness, as taught by the Quran and Prophet Muhammad.

⁷ Here Nana Asmā' u, like her father, reiterates the necessity for women to seek knowledge, especially religious knowledge. She encourages wives to leave their homes and seek knowledge, and tells them that doing so is not prohibited by Islam. She also urges women to follow their husbands' lawful decisions, suggesting that husbands who deny their wives the right to seek knowledge are violating Islamic teachings.

⁸ That is, dress modestly, wearing a veil.

⁹ Here it seems that Nana Asmā' u is asking the reader to figure out the date she completed the poem by researching her life and using the Ramzi dating system or the date of the migration of Prophet Muhammad to Medina (622 CE), an endeavor that will bring Prophet Muhammad's blessings to the reader and herself. Boyd and Mack's translation indicates the completion date of the poem to be AH 1273 (1855-1857 CE).

Praise be to Allah, the One

Blessings upon His beloved one [Muhammad]