



# A Simplified Beginners Guide to African Traditional Religion with the Axioms of Kemet

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## *African Traditional Religion*

A simplified go-to document that shall the give the reader an overview of the pillars of African Traditional Religion. It also promises to be a book that urges the reader to find out more about African Traditional Religion because it demystifies a religion shrouded in secrecy and persecution from the major religions of the world. The Axioms of Kemet are advices and instructions from Ancient Egypt.

# The Africans for Africa Project

A Non-Profit Organisation, Accra - Ghana

## **A Simplified Beginners Guide to Approaching AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

**With the**

# Axioms of Kemet

**Instructions for Today from Ancient Egypt**

**Edited by, Itibari M. Zulu, Th.D.**

Written by

Kwabena Mawuli Adenyo ©2014 AD

# **A Beginner's Guide to African Traditional Religion**

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# **Axioms of Kemet**

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# **The Africans for Africa Project**

**Africans for Africa** is a Non-Profit Organization in Accra, Ghana. The Project was founded by MAWULI KWABENA ADENYO. The purpose for the creation of this organization was due to the fact that, the founder realized it was necessary for all people of African descent to work together for the betterment of their past, their future and their continent.

**Project Africans for Africa** is a project that aims at creating awareness in the general public through social media and physical interactions. We plan on persuading people by reminding them of their spiritual\* awareness as well as their physical awareness and consciousness of our responsibilities as **Children of Africa**. **Africa** is indeed the salt of the Earth, but it seems we are at loss on finding ways to help our continent. The systems in place do not allow much room for people of African descent to help Africa; therefore we are always going about taking loans, even for the easiest and most common problems. Our bad leaders are also bent on destroying their respective countries to satisfy their own lusts for money, greed and power. Project Africans for Africa, has a carefully planned agenda to provide a way for peoples of African descent to help Africa ease some of the most pressing issues. We are not saying we are looking to nullify foreign aids completely but we hope to get to a point, where we don't have to rely on foreign aids anymore.

*"In the beginning of a change,  
the PATROIT is a scarce man,  
and brave and hated and scorned.*

*When his cause succeeds,  
the timid join him,  
for then it cost nothing to be a PATROIT" ~ Mark Twain*

## Meanings of “African, Tradition-al and Religion” in the context of African Traditional Religion

*African Traditional Religion* can be called or termed **‘African’** because it is *indigenous* and handed down from *generations to generations*. The religion was founded by the **Spirit of Africa**, for Africans. It has been handed down *orally* from generation to generation and is a religion *only practiced by Africans*.

*African Traditional Religion* can be termed or called **“Traditional”** because the *religion*, most at times as is the case, is **infused with the culture of the community**. The **Soul** of the religion, its Traditions, is passed down *orally* through *dance, poetry, music and stories from generation to generation*. Its **Body** can be said to be the materials used for worship, the shrines and the temples.

Before I started writing this book, I used to define “religion, as the tradition that shows us the way to our God and our salvation”. When I finally set down to combine and complete the book, I knew I had to do research in order to bring out the best and more accurate findings to my readers. Throughout this research, I was bombarded with many ideas from many religious leaders, prominent men, doctors and philosophers, some very great, some not so great. After all this I came to realize that everyone has a special way of connecting to whatever gives them the

salvation that they believe their soul needs. The only religion a hungry man needs is food. The only religion a fool needs is wisdom, yet what is wisdom to you could be foolhardiness to another. All these make religion very hard to define, so I did make a string theory of all that I have gathered on the definition of religion. Before I go ahead and do that I will give you 3 examples of the definitions of Religion.

Religion is:

“The attitude or active relationship and actions growing out of that attitude or relationship, towards whatever or whomever an individual and or group of persons take to be of greater value and reality” ~ C.W. Kegley

“The recognition of all duties as divine commands” ~ Emmanuel Kant

“Religion is everywhere an expression in one form or another of a sense of dependence on power outside ourselves, a power of which we may speak as a spiritual or moral power” ~ R. Brown

This is how I choose to define religion myself;

“Religion is the human way of connecting to “**that**” which ***promises or gives us the ultimate ecstasy that we seek or desire***, whether on earth, in another dimension or in another realm.” ~ Adenyo Mawuli, 2014

This ends our focus on the definition of religion now, you are also allowed to come up with your own definition of what religion means to you.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

- The African Traditional Religion has no missionaries, or even the desire to propagate the religion. Followers are very loyal worshippers and, Africans who have their roots in the indigenous religion, find it difficult to turn their back on what their ancestors have tried, tested and proven to work.
- This religion is a religion that is based mainly on oral transmission. It is not written on paper but in peoples’ hearts, minds, oral history, rituals, traditions, shrines and religious functions.
- It has no founders like other popular religions.





## **NANA BULUKU**

**Supreme Deity of the Fon from Dahomey.** In Dahomey mythology, Nana Buluku is an androgynous deity creator of the Universe and all that exists in it. Twins were born to Nana Buluku: the **Moon god Mawu** and the **Sun god Lisa**. Nana Buluku was also incorporated into the Yoruba traditional religion as Yemaja, the female thought of the male creator Ashe and the effective cause of all further creation. Worship of the deity spread to the rest of the world, especially through centuries of captured Africans who were purchased and sold all over the Americas. She is celebrated as Nanã in Brazilian Candomblé Jejé and Candomblé Ketu, where she is **pictured as a very old woman, older than creation itself**; as Nana Buruku, primordial swamp spirit in Orisha tradition. Today the Yorùbá religion, and all its branches, is still practiced by tens of millions of people all over the world and Nana Buluku has an honored place in their faith.

## **Creation in African Traditional Religion**

Heaven & Earth; - African views of creation are many and varied (see Mbiti 1969). Many African myths assume the existence of the world at the beginning and start with the creation of humanity (Evans-Pritchard 1956). Most of the creation myths say that the creation of heaven preceded that of the earth but there is no normative order for the creation of other things (Mbiti 1969). The idea of a creation ex nihilo(out of nothing) is reported in at least three African societies, and there may possibly be others, but the idea seems to have been a rare one (Mbiti 1969).

The Sun and the Moon; - It is common in African Traditional Religions to find a high status given to the sun, and to the moon. The Galla people of Ethiopia say that the sun is God's eye, the Balese people of Congo consider the sun to be God's right eye, and the moon his left, while the Ila people of Zambia believe the sun signifies God's eternity (Mbiti 1969). For the Hahm people of Central Nigeria, there was an ambiguity about the sun: some would say that the sun is God, and others only that the sun manifests God (Kato 1975). This ambiguity is noted among other peoples as well, such as the Ankore (Mbiti 1969), the Ninzam, and others. Despite the ambiguity, modern African scholars reject the term "sun worship" as a generalized descriptive category.

Water is Life; - All African societies depend on rain and value it highly. There are a few societies which "associate God and rain so closely that the same word, or its cognate, is used for both" (Mbiti 1969). Others personify rain as one of the divinities. All groups have different ways of perceiving the rain. In all cases rain is taken as a sign of God's care and providence for humanity and the world. Generally throughout Africa, bodies of water are thought to have major spirits or divinities in them.

Nature and the Spirit World; - "...for African peoples, this is a religious universe. Nature in the broadest sense of the word is not an empty impersonal object or phenomenon: it is filled with religious significance ... God is seen in and behind these [natural] objects and phenomena: they are

His creation, they manifest Him, they symbolize His being and presence... The invisible world presses hard upon the visible: one speaks to the other, and Africans "see" that invisible universe when they look at, hear or feel the visible and tangible world (Mbiti, 1969).

There is a sacral quality to the material universe in African thought. It is not "dead". Mbiti adds that in addition to the five categories of beings, there is a: force, power or energy permeating the whole universe. God is the Source and ultimate controller of this force; but the spirits have access to some of it. A few human beings have the knowledge and ability to tap, manipulate and use it, such as the medicine-men, witches, priests and rainmakers, some for the good and others for the ill of their communities (Mbiti, 1969).

Creation Myths; - One myth from the Fang people of Gabon does have a declaration of the goodness of creation. Nzame, Mebere and Nkwa form a trinity for the Fang. Beier relates it thus:

Nzame made everything: heaven, earth, sun, moon, stars, animals, plants; everything. When he had finished everything that we see today, he called Mebere and Nkwa and showed them his work. 'This is my work. Is it good?' They replied, 'Yes, you have done well.' (Beier, 1966).

Additionally, a word from Ghanaian theologian Kofi Opoku tells us about a maxim from the Akan of Ghana on the goodness of creation, which they put into the mouth of the hawk (sansakroma): "All that God created is good!" (Opoku 1978). Just as often in some African creation myths, however, the world is created as the result of an accident, lending impetus to a fatalistic flavour. Idowu (1962) notes that in the Yoruba story of creation:

The oral traditions say that heaven was very near to the earth, so near that one could stretch up one's hand and touch it...There was a kind of Golden Age, or a Garden-of-Eden period. Then something happened, and a giddy, frustrating extensive space occurred between heaven and earth...One story is that a greedy person helped himself to too much food from heaven; another that a woman with a dirty hand touched the unsoiled face of heaven...The privilege of free intercourse, of man taking the bounty of heaven as he liked, disappeared (Idowu, 1962).

To the Akan, God and men once lived very close together, and men could reach, touch, and feel Him. Then an old woman began to pound her fufuu

regularly, using a mortar and a long pestle. She hit God every time she pounded fufuu, so He moved further and further away from men and went into the skies. This story is probably the most widespread myth in Africa, and it occurs in many differing versions throughout the continent. In some versions, it seems that God leaves at the first hint of noise coming from his floor; in others the woman is warned to desist, yet she continues however in other creation myths, there are no warnings from God.

Other creation stories from West Africa provide more promising material for an ecological ethic. The creation myth of the Ewe people of Ghana relates that it was the smoke from men's fires which got in God's eyes, that angered him and made him withdraw higher and higher into the sky as the fires grew more numerous with the increase of human beings on the earth (Donders 1985)

In a Yoruba myth, the divinities one time petitioned Olódùmarè (Supreme Being) to let them run the creation for a trial period of sixteen years. Olódùmarè replied to them: "you better make it sixteen days at first." The rivers began to choke up with mud and leaves and each day things got worse and worse. By the eighth day things were in such a state that the gods petitioned Olódùmarè to take back the running of the world, which he was glad to do as his nature was forgiving and compassionate. (Idowu, 1973). The story ends with all the divinities singing, dancing and praising the Creator. Similar to other stories which take aim at human pride, though perhaps more humorous, this account seems intended to illustrate that only the creator God has the wisdom to run creation: not even the gods know how to do it, much less human beings.

## **The African Traditional Religious System**

The African Traditional Religious System has the following components: (a) Religious Beliefs (b) Religious Practices

### ***Religious Beliefs***

There are four foundational religious beliefs in the traditional religions arranged in their hierarchical order from lowest to highest:

- (1) the belief in impersonal (ii) (mystical) power(s);
- (2) the belief in spirit beings;
- (3) the belief in divinities/gods and
- (4) the belief in the Supreme Being.

These foundational religious beliefs are essential to understanding African Traditional Religion.

### **The Nature and Structure of African Traditional Religion**

- The belief in the impersonal powers is expansive and pervasive.
- It is also equally true of the belief in the spirit beings.
- However, the third component, which is the belief in the divinities or gods, is not as pervasive and expansive as the first two components.
- The fourth and most important and pervading component, is the belief in the Supreme Being

The basic theological system, which was developed from these four fundamental beliefs, is summarized by Steyne: " ... the world is essentially spiritual and the material and the spiritual are totally integrated. Man needs power from outside himself to control his

environment. Life's purpose is to seek and maintain the balance and harmony that result in success, happiness and security. To do this man must deal with the spirit powers correctly. Thus by rites, rituals and liturgies, he must impress and manipulate spirit beings to produce success, happiness and security" (Steyne, 1990:39).

## **Belief in a Supreme Being (God)**

The works of African scholars for the past three decades have established the fact that Africans have a concept of a universal God and the Creator (Idowu, 1962; Mbiti, 1975). It is not clear whether all the Traditional Africans did or do worship this Supreme Being actively.

Idowu calls the Yoruba traditional religion "diffused" monotheism. This means that the Yoruba had originally a "monotheistic" religion, but as the religion gradually decayed over the centuries, the rising proliferations of the divinities were overshadowing the earlier monotheistic beliefs and practices of the religion. Even with this definition of "diffused" monotheism in the Yoruba religion, coupled with similar notions scattered across the continent of Africa, the overwhelming facts do show that, even though Africans generally have awareness and belief in the Supreme Being, the truth is, it is not known whether the Supreme Being was exclusively worshipped by traditional Africans. Yet is common knowledge that the African divinities and the ancestors, who are the lesser beings, have been actively involved in the everyday religious life of the traditional Africans. They directly receive sacrifices, offerings and prayers offered by the traditional Africans. In some traditional African societies, the Supreme Being was not actively involved in the everyday religious practices of the people though they (the people) are conscious and aware of the Supreme Being throughout a religious practice; however the divinities, the gods and the ancestors were actively involved. In

Most parts of Africa, the Supreme Being is usually mentioned in prayers, songs and in some religious ceremonies both at the beginnings and at the end.

Traditional Africans believe in a Supreme Being, who is "above the lesser" divinities and the hierarchy of beings. This belief has its profound theological influence upon the traditional African. The Supreme God, who is above the lesser gods, seems "not to be intimately involved or concerned with man's world. Instead, men seek out the lesser powers to meet their desires" (Steyne, 1990:35). This leads man to turn to the impersonal powers, the divinities, the gods, the ancestors and the spirit beings for help. The Supreme Being in African Traditional Religion is creator of the Universe and this Supreme Being is in a continuous state of creation. Therefore in the infinite wisdom of the Supreme Being, energy, ether or spiritual force, has been placed in the elements and in other realms for the use of man to heal, generate, invent and to enjoy and to face life with, so that each can be able to accomplish their purpose on earth and to know and feel the vibrations of the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being is not always bothered with human affairs but reverence and respect is paid to the Supreme Being on special days, almost every day and mostly mentioned at the beginning of prayers. The Traditional African will call on the Supreme Being through the impersonal powers, before asking for a favor from the Deities or a Lesser God, because it is firmly believed that the Supreme Being is judge of all and is omnipresent; therefore they seek to be blessed or favored by the Supreme Being, to plead on their behalf in their dealings with Deities and Lesser Gods since all powers belong to the Supreme Being, and other Spirits can only help or interfere in human affairs when they are permitted to do so by the Supreme Being.

*"The worship vodoun, of the ex-Danxomè (Dahomey in French, or Benin of present day. danhomé: "in the entrails of the Snake"), is at the origin of all voodoo cults. Benin, a West-African country known not only as the cradle of the traditional Voodoo but also to have played a great part in the fight against colonial establishment"*

## **Belief in Many Divinities**

African Traditional Religions in some parts of Africa have an elaborate pantheon of divinities. But there are exceptions to this general observation, especially in Southern Africa and some parts of West Africa. Some African ethnic groups do not seem to have divinities, while some were known to have no special shrines or worship places designated to the divinities or to the Supreme Being. However, the Yoruba of Nigeria are known for having several hundreds of divinities.

African scholars for the past three decades have changed certain perspectives and even the definition of African divinities (Idowu, 1962; Mbiti, 1975). Some African scholars no longer accept the term polytheism (worship of many gods). They prefer the term "divinities" or "deities" to "gods". The debate on whether African "divinities" were worshipped as "gods" or whether they were only "intermediaries" or "mediators" is inconclusive. Some have argued that "Africans do not worship their divinities nor their ancestors, but God". In this argument, a view is being held that sacrifices, offerings and prayers offered, are not directed to the divinities or the ancestors, as ends in themselves, but are directed ultimately to God.

African divinities are many and each has its specific area of influence and control. Some of these divinities were originally mythological figures in some African legends and primordial histories and cosmologies, while some were tribal heroes or heroines. Divinities covering different aspects of life, society and community were usually established, such as divinities of the sea or the waters, rain, thunder, fertility, health or sickness, planting or harvest, tribal, clan or family deities. African divinities took the forms of mountains, rivers, forests, the mother earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, and ancestors. The plurality of the divinities with



their varying powers, influence, hierarchy, territoriality, even within one ethnic group or community, says a lot about the African religions, worship, beliefs and practices. This leaves an open door for religious accommodation, tolerance, assimilation and adaptation within the traditional religious thought. This was what gave room to the introduction of other religions like Islam from the Arab merchants who were here first for trade and Christianity from the Europeans and the British.

*“Voodoo is a traditional monotheistic organized religion of coastal West Africa, from Nigeria to Ghana. Benin and Nigeria: Vodun or Vudun (Fon language) Togo and Ghana: the Ewe language Vodon, Vodoun, Voudou, etc.”*

## **Belief in Spirit Beings**

The influence and impact of the belief in spirit beings upon the life of a Traditional African

Traditional African concepts of reality and destiny are deeply rooted in the spirit world. The activities and the actions of the spirit beings govern all social and spiritual phenomena. The spirit world can be divided into two broad categories:

- (1) non-human spirits and
- (2) the spirits of the dead.

Non-human spirits are regarded in hierarchical order in accordance with their kind and importance, depending upon their power and the role they play in the ontological order in the spirit world (Oji, 1988:17).

First in the hierarchy is the Creator, then the deities, object-embodied spirits, ancestors' spirits and other miscellaneous spirits that are non-human, comprising of both good and harmless spirits and evil spirits. Man stands between this array of spiritual

hosts in the spirit world and the world of nature (Ikenga-Metuh, 1987:125-144).

*“Spelling: Vodun (capitalized) denotes the religion. vodun denotes the spirits that are central to the religion. Note that “Voodoo”, is the most common spelling in American popular culture”*

### ***What Constitutes the Spirit World in Traditional African Religion?***

What constitutes the spirit world is summarised below in the words of Kato (1975:36-41):

- 1) The whole world is full of spirits;
- 2) the abode of spirits are numerous, such as the silk cotton tree, baobab tree, sycamore tree, burial grounds and other places;
- 3) The spirits are classified into two categories, the bad ones and the good ones;
- 4) A firm belief in reincarnation;
- 5) A belief in and practice of exorcism or spirit possession;
- 6) A belief in life after death, future reward and future punishment;
- 7) Evil spirits are always associated with Satan (Kato, 1975:36-41);
- 8) spirit possession.

In defining the religious worldview of Africa, Mbiti stresses the fact that the spirit world of the African people is very densely populated with spirit beings, spirits and the living-dead or the spirits of the ancestors (Mbiti, 1969:75). The spirit world is the

most pervasive worldview. Contained within it are the spirits, the ancestors and the Supreme Being or God (Ikenga-Metuh, 1987:103-179).

There is a very close relationship between the **spirit beings** and the **mystical or impersonal powers and forces** described in the previous section. This realm of the supernatural operates mystical power, magic, witchcraft, sorcery and many others. The spirit world or the realm of the supernatural is, in a sense, a battleground of spirits and powers that use their mystical powers to influence the course of human life. These mystical powers can be designated as positive or negative, good or evil, which may bring blessings or curses.

If man only knew how to master and control the realm of the supernatural, the world would be a much happier place. Belief in the mystical powers as described already, the spirit beings behind them and the human quest to control or influence them had produced a variety of specialists such as medicine-men, rainmakers, mediums, diviners, sorcerers, magicians and witches. Superstitions, totems, taboos and rituals grew out of such beliefs.

For safety and protection in a world dominated by the spirit beings and powers, one needs a spiritual compass for guidance and practical efforts for control, protection and security through religious rites, reverence to ancestors, symbolic totems and regulative taboos, rituals, superstitions, customs and specialists. For guidance and protection in life, one needs some, if not all, of these.

As we have already observed, in the African traditional religious thought, spirits are believed to dwell or inhabit certain trees, rocks or mountains, caves, rivers, lakes, forests, animals, human beings, the skies, the ground and other sites, carved or moulded objects, charms and amulets.

The spirit beings are usually divided into two categories:

- (1) the spirits of the dead elders (the ancestors) and
- (2) the non-human spirit beings.

The ancestors are close to the humans and serve as their custodians. All spirit beings are endowed with certain powers and they apply these powers upon the humans for their good or for their harm. Because some spirit beings are malicious, capricious and sometimes benevolent, man must be wise in his dealings with the spirit beings. They can easily be angered, provoked or injured by the humans and so man requires tact and wisdom in dealing with them. In dealing with both the impersonal (mystical) powers and the spirit beings, man needs human specialists who have gained experience and access to these two types of mysteries to help them live a successful life and acquire good human well-being. These spirit beings can be "manipulated" to serve the humans or vice versa.

This belief, just as in the case of the previous one, has a theological basis. Africans must recognize and study this very theological basis of the Traditional African belief in the existence of spirit beings. The religious and social role and function of this belief in the spirits must be thoroughly studied and understood.

*"We only fear what we do not understand ~ Unknown"*

## **Belief in Impersonal (Mystical) Power(s)**

The belief in the impersonal (mystical) power is dominant and pervasive in African Traditional Religion. The whole of creation, nature and all things and objects are consumed with this impersonal power. This impersonal power is what Edwin Smith called **mysterium tremendum**. This same power has been given

various names, such as, **mana, life force, vital force, life essence** and **dynamism**.

In African Traditional Religion, the source of this impersonal or (mystical) mysterious power is not always known, but it is usually attributed to the activities of higher "mysterious" powers, whether personal or impersonal that either generates or deposits such powers in things or objects. The potency, efficacy and the durability of such "inhabited" impersonal powers varies from object to object. Some objects are said to be inherently more power induced or "imputed" than others, that is, they are more naturally endowed with powers than others are.

The manifestation and the use of the impersonal powers are related to the practices of medicine men and women, diviners and seers who use natural objects, plants and animals for medicine, magic, charms and amulets. Some specialists believe that mysterious powers imbedded in things or objects can be extracted for specific uses. Mystical and mysterious powers can be transmitted through certain object media or by pure spiritual means. Mystical powers can be sent to specific destinations for an intended good or evil. Mystical powers can be contagious by contact with objects carrying or mediating such powers.

The impersonal powers can be used for both good and evil. The life of a traditional African with **this belief** in the impersonal powers is at the mercy of the **benevolent or wicked users** of the mystical powers at their disposal. **This belief** is very much reflected in the traditional religious practices and behavior.

As stated earlier, the belief in the impersonal (mystical) powers is dominant and pervasive among traditional Africans. This belief has a theological basis and must be understood that there is a reason for Traditional African religious beliefs in the existence of mystical and mysterious forces. The religious and social role and function of this belief can be thoroughly studied and understood.

- 1) What do Traditional Africans feel about the pervasive and dominant presence of the mystical and mysterious powers and forces?
- 2) What is the nature of this traditional belief in the mystical, mysterious powers and forces and its total influence and impact upon man in Traditional Africa?
- 3) What are the religious practices and behavior that do accompany support and reinforce (a) this belief and (b) feelings generated by this belief?

What attitudes, rituals, rites and ceremonies have Traditional Africans fundamentally developed from this belief?

Religious beliefs, feelings, practice and behavior have roots and basis. The traditional conception of mystical and mysterious powers has deep theological roots which are taught to a chosen few, either chosen by the wise men or by the Spirits themselves.

*“The moon moves slowly, but it crosses the town ~ Ashanti Proverb”*

## **Hierarchy of Spiritual Beings**

The traditional religious worldview conceives of all spiritual beings in their hierarchical order. The Supreme Being is the highest and the greatest. The lesser beings, such as gods and divinities occupy a lesser position, but higher than the humans do. The authority, power, influence and legitimacy of spirit beings depend upon their position within the ontological order of beings. Spirit beings, by virtue of their positions and roles within the ontological order,

(1) dispense and control the activities of spiritual and mystical powers and forces and

(2) influence morality and ethics of the human societies.

Traditional Africans respond to these spirit beings according to their place of hierarchy, power, influence and role. Religious values, activities, practices, morality and ethics are accorded to each spirit being in proportion of his position of authority, power, influence, territoriality and legitimacy. Thus, in traditional religious worldview, spirit beings are graded. This has great consequences on the traditional conception of morality and ethics (Ikenga-Metuh, 1989:243-259).

This theological concept in traditional religions has a great influence upon how traditional Africans define the role and function of the Supreme Being, lesser beings, divinities and ancestors in an African community.

We now turn from examining the foundations of religious beliefs to the foundations of religious practices.

*“We will water the thorn for the sake of the rose ~ Kanem”*

### **Religious Practices**

Religious beliefs do beget corresponding religious practices and religious behavior. The five inter-related and integrated religious beliefs examined in the previous sections have established the theological basis of the traditional religious system. These beliefs have manifested in corresponding religious practices, which we are going to describe in brief. The traditional religious system is

informed and motivated by these religious beliefs and their corresponding practices, behavior and feelings.

The foundational religious practices in the traditional religions are:

- (1) The practices of establishing links, relationship and close ties with the cosmic mysterious, mystical and spirit powers and forces;
- (2) The practices involving various religious and social rites, rituals (sacrifices and offerings) and ceremonies;
- (3) The practices of establishing various spiritual and mystical communications with the spirit world and spirit beings and
- (4) The religious and social practices of relating to the various activities of the traditional African specialists

This is a simplified book so in this book, we are not going to differentiate between what is strictly religious from what is strictly social or what are prohibitions and abominations or taboos from what are acceptable social and religious norms, practices and behavior.

*“Hope is the pillar of the world ~ Kanuri”*

## **Establishing Links and Relationships with Cosmic, Spiritual and Mystical Powers**

In his quest to establish links and relationships with cosmic, spiritual and mystical powers and forces, man in traditional Africa has developed a variety of religious and social practices, rituals and ceremonies as means of achieving this quest. There are two types of religious and social practices that are used in traditional



Africa in order to establish links and relationships with the cosmic, spiritual and mystical powers and forces:

(1) Through the means "of exercising control" over the world of the mystical and spiritual powers and

(2) Through the means of restoring cosmic and spiritual harmony/balance.

Why is it necessary for man in traditional Africa to seek to establish links and relationship with the mystical and spiritual powers and forces? In the first place, **what** do these spirit and mystical powers have to offer man in traditional Africa? What are those spiritual and mystical powers that man is searching for? What does he use these powers for? Secondly, what are the **means** of establishing these links and relationships? How are these means acquired? From whom and where can these means be acquired? Do they have rules and regulations? What happens if such are broken?

These probing questions are necessary in understanding the deep and hidden theological foundations of religious and social practices involving cosmic spiritual and mystical powers and forces. The two means of linking and communicating with the spiritual powers and forces in traditional Africa are presented below.

*"For news of the heart, ask the face ~ Guinean Proverb"*

### ***Means of Exercising Cosmic, Mystical and Spiritual Control***

In his quest to exercise cosmic, mystical and spiritual control over his world, man in traditional Africa has developed a variety of religious and social practices, rituals and ceremonies. The means

of acquiring or having access to these powers and forces are many. Each is governed by its own set of rules and regulations. The means becomes very important because it sets its own rules and regulations, which must be followed faithfully. The means determines the religious behavior and what rites, rituals and ceremonies must be performed so that the desired end can be achieved. The means controls behavior, practice and even to some extent, feelings and expressions. In the recent past centuries coming to the present industrial age, there was a rise in benevolent men who had access to this mystical and spiritual powers, These benevolent people who became custodians of the powers that grant and distribute the needed **powers** become all-powerful while those that receive them become slaves or devotees.

What if those who have the privilege to distribute the needed powers and forces are in themselves "wicked" and "evil"? (Little knowledge is dangerous). That describes the danger which man in traditional Africa faces in his quest and pursuits of spiritual and mystical powers. What would he not do in order to gain access to mystical and spirit powers? And what would he not do in order to control, retain and keep on using such mystical powers and forces?

Cosmic, mystical and spiritual control can be exercised through the practices of:

- (1) Incantations and power of words;
- (2) The power of symbolism;
- (3) The power of magic;
- (4) The power of charms;
- (5) The power of fetishes or "juju" and

(6) The power of witchcraft and sorcery (Steayne, 1990).

The condemnations of some of these practices is prevalent in the African Traditional Religions some prohibitions and some abominations. Even though the society or communities might condemn some of them, the potency and powers usually manifested in this area are powerful. Man cannot deny their existence, but rather condemns their practice and use in a wrongful or selfish manner.

The theological issue here does not lie in the prohibitive act of its condemnation, but rests in two things:

- (1) The belief in the usefulness of such powers and also the belief in the means and practices of obtaining power and
- (2) The act of self-giving or the giving of oneself to the authorities or entities that lie behind these powers.

A thorough theology does address:

- (1) These powers and, if obtained, what will they be used for?
- (2) Which practices, behavior and feelings are involved as means of obtaining the desired powers?
- (3) The act of self-giving or selling out of oneself, the act of bowing down to worship the giver who is a subject, or a reflection or a representation of the Supreme Being of certain particular qualities of the Supreme Being.

These powers seem to be usurping the central place of God in the life of Traditional African man but it cannot, for the African has a firm belief in the Supreme Being. All these spiritual beings were created by the Supreme Being for a purpose, as Jesus, son of Sirach, the supposed writer of the Ecclesiastes states in the scripture of the Christians, clearly and emphatically that “There is

a time for war and time for peace, a time to die and a time to be born, it also states that God created the good for the good days and the wicked for the evil days, the Supreme Being knows why the Spirits are to be involved with humans affairs and help them to fully enjoy life as mortals.

*“Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable ~ Bondei”*

### ***Means of Restoring Cosmic and Spiritual Harmony***

Man's delicate dealings with the cosmic and spirit powers and forces have certain rules and regulations. And these become manifest in certain religious practices. Man is aware that many things do go wrong and not all his expectations and needs are always met. And when things go wrong and expectations and needs are not met, there must be something wrong. Things can be corrected through reconciliation, restoration and the making of peace. Cosmic and spiritual harmony can be restored through the practices of (1) sacrifices and offerings/gifts and (2) taboos (Steyne, 1990).

The spirit beings who dispense powers to man are still in charge of the spirit world even when things go wrong. It is the humans who have to do something so that harmony, peace and fellowship can be restored.

- What types of offences, or wrongs, violations and sins do humans commit against the spirit world or the spiritual order?
- If wrongs are admitted, what fears, feelings or guilt do they generate?
- Who gets hurt when the humans sin or go wrong?

- Why is maintaining cosmic harmony and order necessary for man?
- What specific religious practices, sacrifices and offerings are effective in acts of reconciliation and peace making between the humans and the spirit world?

The African Traditionalist has to address these theological issues and provide “sensible and guided” solutions to them.

*“A single bracelet does not jingle ~ Congo Proverb”*

## **Practices Relating to Rituals and Ceremonies**

Ritual practices are many, depending upon their functions. There are rituals that are communal with fixed annual seasons, hence ceremonial in nature. There are others that are private or do not have any fixed annual calendar, but are practiced as needs arise. Rituals and ceremonies play very dominant religious and social functions in African Traditional societies.

Traditional rites, rituals and ceremonies all have their foundational beliefs and theological basis. The purpose for such practices must be ascertained. The totality of what is involved in practice must also be ascertained. Rituals and ceremonies do have their accompanied practices, rules and regulations. These practices, rules and regulations become the means of linking Traditional Africans with the spiritual powers and forces. Beginners in Traditional African Religion must examine what religious practices, rules and regulations and what spiritual powers and forces are solicited.

Theological models of approaching and addressing the traditional religious practices, rituals, festivals and ceremonies have been

well developed in the Old Testament (Pentateuch) and the New Testament (apostolic teachings). It is known in the circle of African Scholars that most of the works in the Bible were borrowed from ancient African Traditional Religions. We shall learn more about that on another day.

*“By going and coming a bird weaves its nest ~ Ashanti Proverb”*

## **Practices Relating to Spiritual and Mystical Communication**

There are various practices of spiritual and mystical communication with the spirit world, such as

- (1) dreams,
- (2) visions,
- (3) vision quests and
- (4) divination and ordeals (Steyne, 1990).

The desire to communicate with the mystical and spirit powers has its basis in the traditional religious beliefs and religious practices.

Why is communication with the spirit world so important?

With whom is this communication done, and why?

What are the means of communicating with the spirit world?

What is the content of this communication and what is it expected to achieve?

To truly understand the practices of Spiritual and Mystical communication in African Traditional Religion:

(1) The means of communication must be examined in terms of its theology;

(2) The content of communication must also be examined in terms of its theological import;

(3) Who is being communicated to? Both the act and the means of communication and their means of reception must be examined theologically.

Is all communication in the traditional beliefs and practices directed to God or to the lesser beings?

Why has man chosen to communicate with the lesser beings rather than God?

*“He who asks questions, cannot avoid the answers ~ Cameroun Proverb”*

## **Practices Relating to Traditional African Specialists**

Traditional Africa has a host of specialists who are professionals in their various disciplines, such as

(1) priests,

(2) medicine men and women,

(3) diviners, mediums, sorcerers, witches, wizards and midwives.

Each profession has a set of beliefs, rules and regulations, practices and rituals. Each profession must be examined in terms of its theological foundations, practices, moral and ethical foundations. Some of these professionals and specialists use mystical and spirit powers, some ordinary human ingenuity and wisdom, while some are cheats or deceivers. How these powers are acquired and used must be examined theologically.

*“When you follow the path of your father, you walk like Him ~ Ashanti Proverb”*

### **Philosophical Foundations in Traditional Worldview**

We have identified four basic philosophical foundations in a traditional religious worldview. These four categories were outlined by Steyne in his study of **animism** (1990). It has hereby been adopted and developed into a comprehensive and coherent philosophical system and worldview, which has enhanced substantially our definition and interpretation of the African traditional religions and cultures. These categories are classified as:

- Holism/organism which is governed by the **Law of Harmony**;
- Spiritualism which is governed by the **Law of the Spirit**;
- Dynamism/power-consciousness which is governed by the **Law of Power**;
- Communalism which is governed by the **Law of Kinship**.

The four foundational religious beliefs discussed in the previous sections with the above four categories in the philosophical foundations, do have a combined effect in producing "a powerful



and pervasive" religious and cultural worldview which dominates and influences the Traditional African thought. The philosophical foundations complement the theological foundations of the previous section. From the philosophical foundations we can also develop the traditional "moral laws" within the traditional worldview.

*"Hurrying and worrying are not the same as strength ~ Hausa Proverb"*

## **Holism/Organism: the Law of Harmony**

This is a holistic or an organic view of the world, which is governed by the **law of harmony**. The **law of harmony** simply means "a state of agreement or peacefulness". The Traditional African seeks to live in harmony and to balance his life in a harmonious and peaceful existence with his entire world and especially with the spirit world.

The terms **organic or holistic** are similar. An **organic** view sees the whole world as "a complex structure of inter-dependent and subordinate elements whose relations and properties are largely determined by their function in the whole". A **holistic** view sees "the organic or functional relation between parts and wholes" that constitute's the whole world (**Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary**, 1977). Steyne uses the term **holism** as "a philosophical term for the view that life is more than the sum of its parts". He defines the concept in the following way:

"The world interacts with itself. The sky, the spirits, the earth, the physical world, the living and the deceased all act, interact and react in consort. One works on the other and one part can't exist nor be explained without the other. The universe, the spirit world

and man are all part of the same fabric. Each needs the other to activate it" (Steayne, 1990:58).

How does an African Traditionalist see himself and relate to his world with this organic or holistic view of life? From this conception, man stands face to face with the "physical", the "material" and the "spiritual" dimensions of his world. He interacts with them and they in turn interact with him. Steayne observes that man

(1) "feels at one with his world and his world mystically reciprocates" and

(2) he does not differentiate or draws "distinctions between the physical, material or the spiritual"; "between the sacred and the profane"; between "the secular and the religious"; between "his profession and his community responsibilities"; "they are all knit together in a whole" (Steayne, 1990:59).

The concept of **nature** is related to that of the **impersonal or the mysterious powers** as well as to **the spirit beings**. Nature is defined as "this visible material world or universe, comprising both living and non-living things, visible and invisible powers, plants and animals, the inanimate and the natural phenomena, like lightning and thunder, all centred around man. The spirit world is all the same tacitly understood as inclusive in nature" (Oji, 1988:15). Nature is created by the Creator. Nature, man and the spirit world constitute one fluid coherent unit, hence, the conception of the traditional African worldview as a unity. It is not a confused world of non-integrated parts. Life, in general, is holistic and remains mysterious.

It becomes clear that the African holistic/organic view of the world is governed by the **law of harmony**. Here, we come face to face with a tradition and a knowledge that is not a specific religious belief, but a philosophical worldview that is expansive and covers

the totality of life, both in the human world and in the spirit world. A Traditional African worldview is a worldview that is all embracing and puts everything into one basket:

- (1) the mystical and mysterious powers and forces;
- (2) the spirits, gods, divinities and
- (3) the Supreme Being.

And all of these categories of the spirit beings demand man's attention. Man, on account of this has developed all kinds of religious practices, rituals and ceremonies as means of serving and meeting man's needs. Furthermore, he employs all kinds of means to communicate with each one of these spirit beings, where and if possible. He employs the services of many specialists and religious practices that can effectively link him up with the spirit world.

The African traditional religions and worldviews do not have creeds; they do not have to be learnt, but caught, passed on and lived. This is a pervasive religious worldview with a dominant and powerful influence on man in traditional Africa. One must understand this traditional religious **holism/organism and its pantheistic tendencies**. These aspects are felt very strongly in the traditional conception of the mystical, mysterious and spirit powers and forces, which must be lived with in **harmony/balance**.

The philosophical **law of harmony** deals with the theological questions of reconciliation, restoration, reverence, awe, sense of wonder, the accompanied sacrifices and offerings, ceremonies, rituals and worship. Moral and ethical questions are also raised in the area of a relationship between the humans and spirit beings.

How do humans and spirit beings relate to each other and under what moral laws?

With whom and what should man seek to live in harmony, in peace, in fellowship and communion?

*(Not to know is bad, not to wish to know is worse – Nigerian Proverb)*

## **Spiritualism: The Law of the Spirit**

This is a spiritual view of the world governed by the **law of the spirit**. This law reflects the preponderance and the dominance of the **spiritual reality** in the traditional African beliefs and worldviews. The whole of creation is filled to the brim with the powers of the Supreme Being (Supreme Spirit) in the form of the dominant and pervasive presence of the impersonal powers and forces, spirit beings, many divinities and gods. Thus, "this world in essence is spiritual rather than material" and "life is saturated with supernatural possibilities". Steyne describes this view further by saying: "Everything in life can be influenced by and responds to the world of spirits. Whatever happens in the physical realm has a spiritual co-ordinate and, likewise, whatever transpires in the spiritual realm has direct bearing on the physical world. Man is related to and dependent upon the unseen. For this reason all of life is to be understood spiritually. The correct response to any situation is spiritual, whether the matter is a family affair, sickness, or ceremonial practice" (Steyne, 1990:59).

This religious worldview is called **spiritualism** and it is pervasive and dominates the entire life of man. The reason for this spiritual pervasiveness and dominance is stated thus: "The whole universe is interconnected through the will and the power contained in both animate and inanimate objects. Everything man

is, does, handles, projects and interacts with is interpenetrated with the spiritual. His socio-cultural structures, down to their finest details, are under the control of the spiritual powers or forces. Nothing in man's environment escapes the influence or the manipulation of the spirit world. The world is more spiritual than it is physical and it is spiritually upheld. If life is affected by spirits, then it is of utmost importance to maintain good relations with the spirits and secure their favor" (Steyne, 1990:37).

Steyne used various concepts and terms to describe the traditional religious worldview. In traditional religious worldview, the "question of meaning" in life is dominated by the spiritual emphasis. "Life's questions and answers revolve around the spiritual rather than the physical". It is on account of this spiritual view of life, that "when personal resources fail, religious specialists will divine and supply satisfactory meanings". Traditional Africans both recognize and understand this quest for meaning in the everyday happenings of life and would want to find out what lies behind every incident in life, such as "catastrophes, natural disasters, disease, untimely death and the other exigencies of life". One must look "beyond the obvious" in order to find the spiritual "reasons" or causes in life. Because "the unseen is present in all phenomena".

*"The young cannot teach tradition to the old ~ Yoruba Proverb"*

## **Dynamism/Power-Consciousness: the Law of Power**

This is a dynamic/power-conscious view of the world governed by the **law of power**. The dominance of the impersonal, the unseen and the unpredictable spirit powers and forces in the world, make man to search and look for **power** which can help secure him in

this world, where **fate, evil, uncertainty and death** abound. Steyne describe **this power-consciousness** in the following words:

"Life's essential quest is to secure power and use it. Not to have power or access to it produces great anxiety in the face of spiritual attacks, uncertainty and the very rigors of life. \*A life without power is not worth living ... Power offers man control of his uncertain world. The search for and acquisition of power supersedes any commitment to ethics or morality. Whatever is empowering is right" (Steyne, 1990:60).

\*I disagree with Steyne about Traditional African Religion from this point in the quote, however since I am picking this reference from another article and not the main book, it is ethically right that I reproduce the exact quote as it was in the article and then add my views. Not all Africans, have or had some sort of spiritual power or knowledge yet they believed their life was worth living before they were carried away in the same ships that brought the Church and the Bible to the continent. So I find some parts of this quote from Steyne untruthful about African Traditional Religion. If someone thinks or says "A life without power is not worth living ... Power offers man control of his uncertain world. The search for and acquisition of power supersedes any commitment to ethics or morality. Whatever is empowering is right" (Steyne, 1990:60). I would say that person is more Caucasian or Arabian than African.

Also power offers the spiritually subtle African protection and offers the spiritually cardinal/dominant African an enforcing will. It is not true that the search for acquisition of power supersedes every and any commitment to ethic and morality; it is rather the search for a Traditionalist African's purpose in life that supersedes almost all commitments but not all, because traditional Africans have a commitment to their family, their friends, their communities and themselves. Most at times we lost our loved ones who fought

and died for us in wars, there are traditional Africans who are very selfless and even with all this spiritual knowledge and power, did not set out to go and use it to subdue other people and enslave them. Therefore it is not true that the Traditional African religious man's search for spiritual power or power itself supersedes any commitment to ethics or morality, it is not true that "whatever is empowering is right", but the truth is this; Human beings will always remain human beings and there will always be wicked people, which is why it is important for an African Traditional religious person to seek a verifiable source of power for spiritual protection.

What is this power? Where does it reside?

Where can it be obtained? By what means?

How can it be used? Upon whom?

Where? For what purpose?

*All these questions must be answered ethically and morally in the use of any sort of power.*

Many terms are used variously to describe this **power**, such as **life force, vital force, life essence and dynamism**. **Power** can be obtained by "ritual manipulation ... in the form of sacrifices, offerings, taboos, charms, fetishes, ceremonies, even witchcraft and sorcery" (Steyne, 1990:60). There are also other means for obtaining this power:

"The power may also be secured by the laying on of hands or by encountering a spirit being, either directly or through ritual means. The power may be transmitted through contact with persons of superior religious status or by using clothing or something previously associated with such a person. \*How it is secured is a

secondary concern. It must be acquired whatever the cost" (Steyne, 1990:60).

\*Most at times there is a passage/passing on of knowledge or items of powers such as talismans or clothes from certain ancestors to specific people, born or unborn. When the person is of age to receive their gifts and continue the works of the one ahead of them, they are guided by the elders in the family, or someone with the knowledge of handling such situations is called to perform rites in order to make sure it is acquired securely. Also at times, the spirits themselves guide the person to the place they want him and get the person to touch what will transform them into knowing who they are, their purpose and why they were chosen. There were cases in the recent early 90's, when I was in the primary levels of education and in my community, it is widely known that dwarves do come to pick people, took them away to teach them secrets of nature in the shrines of wisdom and bring them back as great healers, medicine men and great spiritualists. Even in such cases where the spirits come and take a child into the spirit world with the shortest period being 3 days, the child always acknowledge that they were cared for very well, and guided very well into the secrets of nature.

Another dimension worth paying attention to is how **power** can be handled. It is "transferable to anything and anyone". "It permeates everything, though unequally." The primary objective of this power is for it "to serve man's purposes". How does this **pursuit of power** affect

(1) morality and ethics and

(2) the relationship between the humans and the spirit beings and forces?

*("The Eyes believe themselves, the Ears believes others, but the Heart knows the Truth – African Proverb")*



## **Communalism: The Law of Kinship**

This is a communal view of man and the world governed by the **law of kinship**. The African communal concept is close to that of the organic/holistic view of the world which has been treated above. Man is a community. The world is a community. The community is man in relationships: to the human world; to the world of nature and to the spirit world. Community is defined in terms of "how man in relationships relates to the world around him".

Man is not an individual, that is, living in a state of independence, but he is communal, that is, living in a state of relationships and interdependence. This communal conception of man defines how:

- (1) he becomes a member of community/society;
- (2) he relates to other human beings in community;
- (3) he relates to the spirit world and
- (4) he relates to nature and the world.

Man lives not only in terms of this communal relationship, but also in terms of his communal attitude towards them all. It is not human beings alone that are in community, but they are also in solidarity with the world of nature and of the spirits as well as the ancestors. Man as an individual does not live in terms of himself, but in terms of the human community and nature. Man is not independent, but dependent. Man does not claim personal rights and freedom, but fulfills communal obligations and duties. Van der Walt, in his two books mentioned earlier (1994 and 1997) has given us a satisfactory definition of African **communalism**. African **communalism** "stresses the **human community**". Van

der Walt listed the characteristics of African communalism as: "communal self-respect"; "interdependence"; "survival of the community"; "group assurance"; "co-operation and harmony"; "affiliation" and "shared duties". He lists about 40 characteristics of African communalism in contrast with Western **individualism** (Van der Walt, 1997:29-44). These characteristics are what Steyne calls the "practice of community" and also "man understands community holistically".

But what is the basis of man's communalism in Africa? What is the basis of man's living in relationships to the world around him? The African concept of community or communalism is derived from kinship. **Kinship** in this context refers to family relationships rooted in a progenitor or an ancestor. The relationship is defined in terms of the physical and blood linkage to the progenitor or the ancestor. The community takes its roots or beginnings from this human origin (physical and blood source) and a network of relationships are built around this ancestral nucleus.

The unifying factor and the stronger bond of relationship of a given people is created by the fact of a blood-relationship. Having a common progenitor(s)/ancestor(s) or origin strengthens kinship/blood ties. This is what defines affinity, loyalty and obligations to a "blood-community" by all members.

*"What a child says, He has learned at home ~ Nigerian Proverb"*

## **Kinship as Foundation of a Community**

As it has been stated earlier, kinship system forms the basic social unit and general social organisation and the community revolves around it. It regulates and orders the life of a community/society on a kinship basis. The most powerful principle

of social organisation is the concept of "brotherhood" derived from "blood-relationship", which are characterised by kinship affinity, loyalties and obligations of relatives. This regulates social behaviour and attitudes and orders social interaction in society among relatives and persons. Religious and social norms and codes of behaviour, attitudes and practices guide social interactions of kinsfolk and also how kinsfolk are to relate to outsiders and strangers.

## **Man in Community**

There are two views of man in community:

(1) man's understanding of his place, position and status in community which helps to integrate and conform him to the community and

(2) man's understanding of his actions, activities and behaviour which helps to integrate and conform him to the community.

Starting with the first view, Steyne (1990:61, 62) listed the following concepts of man in community:

- Man "relates not only to people, but to almost everything else";
- man "does not see himself as an individual but believes that his real life is in community with his fellows";
- man "believes he is incomplete and inadequate without" his fellows;
- man "needs the support of the community and only feels normal when he is in relationship with it";

- man fears "a broken relationship between persons of the same group" and this can "be termed sin";
- man "is integrally related to his community" and he becomes "a full member of society" by undergoing several "rites of passage" in his lifetime;
- "without ancestors and their influence in life, man loses both his focus and reason for being" and "life without ancestral focus is empty and meaningless";
- "the belief in reincarnation provides communities with a link to the past through its ancestors and a link with the future through the unborn";
- the community "sets parameters of the normative in life", because "community is designed for harmony" and for this reason, everything must be done to maintain this harmony;
- "idiosyncrasies, withdrawal or undue publicity are feared" and man "as a member of society conforms emotionally and intellectually to societal customs or pressures" and "he accepts these with little or no objection";
- "diversity or non-conformity is costly to the community and may signal the activity of evil spirits" and "there is overt and covert pressure to conform to community norms".

With the second view, Van der Walt (1997:31-34) lists about 40 African characteristics of "man in community". We cannot mention all of them but select only a few:

- a high regard for the group elevating it above the individual;
- like people (socially centred);
- inclusive attitude;

- security;
- dependence on people;
- intense, strong personal relationships;
- strong group pressure;
- individual initiative is not appreciated or encouraged - good human relations are a priority;
- co-operation;
- great degree of uniformity;
- **duties** towards the community are emphasised;
- the law has to restore social harmony - **restitution** is important;
- dialogue: decisions have to be taken with the approval of the group and every body has the opportunity to air views;
- modesty, compliance, pliability, willingness to compromise - character traits which lead to peaceful co-existence with one's fellow man;
- marriage is compulsory for all, needs the consent of the community and is intended in the first place to engender children;
- strong bonds with the **extended** family (many brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers).

This, however, does not exhaust all that has to be said about man in community. More will be said about man in his relationship to nature, the world of the spirit and the human world.

*“Knowledge is like a garden, if not cultivated, it cannot be harvested ~ Guinean Proverb”*

## **Man as Integral and Conformable in Relationships**

The community acts on man to integrate him, while man acts to conform himself to the community. Both activities are normative in nature as explained by both Steyne and Van der Walt in the previous section. The integration and the conformity of man are not only to the world of the humans, but also to the world of nature and the spirit world. This is what theological and philosophical foundations help him to achieve, as examined in the two previous sections.

"Becoming a member of a community" is the most basic social principle of understanding man in relationships to others. It is in the process of becoming a member of a community that man becomes a person or an adult. This process of becoming either (1) a member of a community, or (2) becoming a person/adult is usually done through "rite and ritual". Steyne states that "man's comings and goings are tied in with the spirit world. Birth, life and death are not accidental events. Man is psychologically akin to spirits and life must be understood spiritually" (Steyne, 1990:64).

Man is not only intimately related to

(1) the spirit world, but also to

(2) the community of the ancestors, who now live in the past, as well as to

(3) the unborn.

The life of the community of the living is controlled, maintained and protected by the community of the ancestors. The human community, therefore, is a community of relationships between

(1) the ancestors, the "living-dead",

(2) the living and

(3) the unborn descendants.

The communal life in this kinship system is "ancestrally chartered". Steyne observes that outside of this ancestral kinship "there lies no possibility of life" and "personhood is meaningless apart from" these ancestral kinship and relationships (Steyne, 1990:64, 65).

"Man is only man in relationship, as he participates in family and community life". One of the most important kinship relationships of man is **marriage**.

"Marriage is more than a physical relationship. It has eternal consequences. Not to marry is to cease living now and in the hereafter. Marriage establishes essentials in life and in death. Begetting children guarantees eternal life. Not only do children provide for the reincarnation of the ancestors, they also sustain the ancestors through prescribed rituals such as sacrifices and offerings" (Steyne, 1990:66).

Man lives also in relationship to the spirit world, which explains his "everyday experience". This intimate relationship to the spirit world "is reflected in his every system of thought and action". Steyne describes both man's relationship to the spirit world and to the kinship community in these words:

"His behavior is ordered by the spirit world. If the spirits will it, the circumstances will be good. But malevolent forces may also exercise control. Generally, man seeks to harmonize with his world. In order to do this, every behaviour pattern is conceived of in terms of kinship relations. He must maintain specific patterns of conduct, fulfill expected social roles and conform to societal

values. Any disregard of these has spiritual ramifications. Every effort must be made to avoid giving offence to the spirit world. Kinship provides ideological identity and also security. Within the kinship community there is a moral obligation and each individual is expected to conform to custom. To break relationships or disregard custom is to sin" (Steyne, 1990: 66, 67).

Man's morality, ethics and accountability are to be understood in terms of his relationships to

(1) the spirit world and

(2) the kinship community.

Basically, "man is the product of what the family, the clan, the tribe and the spirits have made him". If a man steals what belongs to another, the thief is brought before the elders, he with the help of his family will be fined and matters will return to as they were. In the case where the thief cannot be made out, the spirits are consulted for their help and sometimes, the spirits are asked to punish the thief.

Besides his relationship to the spirit world, his kinship relationship with the ancestors and fellow humans, man is also related to **nature**. John V. Taylor is quoted as saying: "No distinction can be made between sacred and secular, between natural and supernatural, for Nature, Man and the Unseen are inseparably involved in one another in a total community" (Steyne, 1990:68).

The spirit and mystical powers and forces "which can be used for either good or bad" inhabit the world of nature. In his relationship to the natural world, man seeks to understand the spiritual and the mysterious powers that lie behind natural phenomena. For this reason "animals, plants, rivers, rocks, mountains and heavenly bodies may all carry messages" which he has to decipher.



Man relates to nature by **totemism**: "In totemism certain taboos apply to the totem animal(s) and/or plant(s). Totem objects are not to be killed, spoken of by name, eaten or even looked at in some cases. They elicit feelings of brotherliness. They are believed to have souls of similar nature to man's. They may be emblematic of abstract and emotional attitudes claimed by a group of people" (Steyne, 1990:70).

The belief in totemism sets apart some animals or plants for certain kinship affinity, religious or medicinal purposes. The potency, value and efficacy of each are determined by its nature, which can be rated or qualified among others. Animals and birds for sacrifices, objects for offering and the ritual or the ceremonial sites or groves are also carefully selected depending upon their religious value and efficacy. Nature provides man with a vast array of contact points with the world of the spirit.

For instance if there is about to be an extinction of certain species(plants or animals) due to certain human activities that can be stopped, the spirit world tells the mediums who in turn talks to the proper authorities to totem the particular specie, and the human activities which was bringing about the problem becomes a taboo. Of course all of this is also governed by the law of power. Man acts to bring harmony to his community.

*"Silence is also Speech ~ Fulfude"*

## Spirit Beings

Generally, theologians and scholars have classified the African world of the spirits into **four** broad categories of **beliefs**:

- belief in the Supreme Being (God);
- belief in the lesser divinities/god;
- belief in the ordinary spirits;
- belief in the ancestors.

It is important to state here that the belief in the spirits, that is, all the four categories mentioned above, dominates pervasively the African continent and its traditional religions and worldview. Even though they can be classified hierarchically, the levels and the quality of their differentiation and distinctiveness are fluid. This is so because of the profound influence of the **traditional religious worldview** outlined in the previous sections.

The philosophical foundations as earlier stated do have a profound influence on the religious beliefs, practices and behaviour. As we have observed, the traditional African hardly distinguishes "between the spiritual and the physical modes of existence". This very conception in the traditional worldview is very important to our understanding of the African Traditional Religious beliefs and teachings about the spirit world, especially the unity between the spiritual and the material. This social fact is very important to our understanding and interpretation of the Africa Traditional Religion and its cultures.

*"You have 3 friends in this world, Courage, Sense and Wisdom ~ Fon Saying"*

## **Glossary**

**Organisation**; *group: a group of people identified by a shared interest or purpose, e.g. a business.*

**Descent**; *ancestral background: the connection somebody has to an ancestor or group of ancestors.*

**Awareness**; *knowing something: having knowledge of something from having observed it or been told about it.*

**Conscious**; *concerned with something: aware of and interested in a particular topic (often used hyphenated in combination) i.e. fashion-conscious or health-conscious.*

**Indigenous**; *belonging to a place: originating in and naturally living, growing, or occurring in a region or country.*

**Infused**; *mixed; a part of, well immersed, intensely mixed.*

**Community**; *people in area or with common background: a group of people who live in the same area, or the area in which they live.*

**Ambiguity**; *doubt about meaning: a situation in which something can be understood in more than one way and it is not clear which meaning is intended.*

**Impetus**; *push: the energy or motivation to accomplish or undertake something*

**Olódùmarè**; *Supreme Being in Yoruba tradition.*

**Monotheism**; *belief in single God: the belief that there is only one God, as found in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.*

**Diffused**; *make something less intense: to make something, especially light, less bright or intense, or become less bright or intense*

**Proliferation**; *increase greatly: to increase greatly in number.*

**Divinity**; *quality of being God: the quality associated with being God, a god, or a goddess.*

**Ancestor**; *distant relation somebody is descended from: somebody from whom somebody else is directly descended, especially somebody more distant than a grandparent.*

**Hierarchy**; *formally ranked group: an organization or group whose members are arranged in ranks, e.g. in ranks of power and seniority.*

**Theological**; *about theology: relating to, using, engaged in, or typical of theology.*

**Impersonal**; *lacking human traits: having no human characteristics or personality.*

**Omnipresent**; *always present everywhere: continuously and simultaneously present throughout the whole of creation.*

**Manipulate**; *control somebody or something: to control or influence somebody or something in an ingenious or devious way.*

**Pantheon**; *all deities of specific religion: all the deities of a people or religion considered collectively.*

**Intermediary**; *go-between: somebody who carries messages between people, or tries to help them reach an agreement.*

**Primordial**; *existing first: existing at the beginning of time or of the development of something.*

**Cosmology**; *study of universe: the philosophical study of the nature of the universe.*

**Assimilation**; *learning process: the integration of new knowledge or information with what is already known.*

**Phenomena**; *plural of phenomenon; Phenomenon in philosophy is an object of perception: something perceived or experienced, especially an object as it is apprehended by the human senses as opposed to an object as it intrinsically is in itself.*

**Ontological**; *from ontology; ontology is the study of existence: the most general branch of metaphysics, concerned with the nature of being.*

**Miscellaneous**; *composed of varied things: made up of many different things or kinds of things that have no necessary connection with each other.*

**Reincarnation**; *rebirth of soul: in some systems of belief, the cyclic return of a soul to live another life in a new body.*

**Exorcism**; *driving out of evil spirits: the use of prayers or religious rituals to drive out evil spirits believed to be possessing a person or place.*

**Possession**; *state of being controlled: the condition of being controlled by or appearing to be controlled by a supposed supernatural force or a strong emotion.*

**Pervasive**; *present everywhere: spreading widely or present throughout something.*

**Reverence**; *respect felt: feelings of deep respect or devotion.*

**Malicious**; *deliberately harmful: motivated by or resulting from a desire to cause harm or pain to another.*

**Capricious**; *given to sudden changes: tending to make sudden unexpected changes.*

**Benevolent**; *kind: showing kindness or goodwill.*

**Dynamism**; *theory of forces: a philosophical or scientific theory stressing the role of dynamic forces in explaining phenomena, especially by interpreting events as an expression of forces residing within the object or person involved.*

**Symbolism**; *system of symbols: a set or system of symbols.*

**Animism**; *1. belief that nature has soul: the belief that things in nature, e.g. trees, mountains, and the sky, have souls or consciousness 2. belief in organizing force in universe: the belief that a supernatural force animates and organizes the universe 3. belief in existence of separate spirit: the belief that people have spirits that do or can exist separately from their bodies.*

**Coherent**; *logically or aesthetically consistent: logically or aesthetically consistent and holding together as a harmonious or credible whole.*

**Holism**; *philosophical theory: the view that a whole system of beliefs must be analyzed rather than simply its individual components.*

**Spiritualism**; *philosophy emphasizing spiritual nature of reality: the philosophical doctrine that all reality is spiritual, not material.*

**Communalism**; *allegiance to ethnic group: a greater loyalty to an ethnic or religious group than to society in general.*

**Dimension**; *level of reality: a level of consciousness, existence.*

**Preponderance**; *dominance or superiority: dominance or superiority in force, importance, or influence.*

**Kinship**; *human relationship: relationship by blood or marriage to another or others.*

**Progenitor**; *ancestor: a direct ancestor of somebody or something.*

**Idiosyncrasy**; *quirk: a way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is peculiar to an individual or group, especially an odd or unusual one.*

**Restitution**; *restoration: the return of something to the condition it was in before it was changed.*

**Malevolent**; *wanting to cause harm: having or showing a desire to harm others.*

**Totemism**; *use of totems: the use of totems as symbols of kinship.*

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# **Axioms of Kemet**

Instructions for Today from Ancient Egypt

Edited by

**Itibari M. Zulu, Th.D.Amen-Ra Theological Seminary Press,**

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## **Dedication I**

This work is dedicated to people and intuitions that promote peace, truth and justice.

## **Dedication II**

My children: Akiba K. Zulu, Itibari M. Zulu, Jr., Togba K. Zulu, Kadiatou N. Zulu. My grandchildren: Avonte D. Webb, Ashanti K. Surrell, and Simone F. Zulu.

## **Preface**

This volume is a selected introductory literary interpretation of ancient Kemetic (Egyptian) literature organized in thematic sections based on literal translations of the Medu Neter into English, self-consciously organized to bring a new audience to the splendiferous wisdom of ancient Kemet.

Upon reading this anthology, one is encouraged to juxtapose the self-evident truths, ethics and moral questions of yesterday to the ethics and moral questions of today.

For those who have read my contribution to Kemetic thought in Exploring the African Centered Paradigm, this volume is a continuation of that process involving the placement of African thought and ideas at the center of human consciousness.

## **Introduction**

This work (originally set for a book in print) highlights the self-evident and recognized truth of ancient Kemetic literature that place life in a contextual paradigm. Thus, in fifteen sections and 254 entries, one can obtain insight into some of the most important literature in history.

The central instructions in this collection are the Instructions of Amenemope, the Instruction of Merikare and the Instructions of Amenempe [100 entries], with the Instruction of Ptah-Hotep, representing perhaps the best moral instruction to survive antiquity passed from parent to child to facilitate peace and good governance.

The mission of this collection is to provide discourse for a progressive Kemetic axiology that can inform our reality as we place good values, respect, and key principles of human culture at the head of our consciousness. I hope the good words presented herein will encourage you to approach Kemetic literature with a new excitement that will spark a full investigation into the dynamics of ancient Kemetic literature. Peace and blessings,

Itibari M. Zulu, Senior Editor, The Journal of Pan African Studies.

# Axioms of Kemet

*Truth and Wisdom from Ancient*  
*Egypt Instructing*  
*Today.*

## Instruction of Merikare

Royal instruction and testament attributed to Khety III (a.k.a. Kheti, Akhtoi) given to his son Merikare who ruled during the tenth dynasty of the first intermediate period (2130-2040 BCE) at Henen-nesut.

**Justify yourself in the presence of God....**

**...a good disposition is heaven, but to defame the ill-disposed is dangerous.**

**Be skillful in speech, that you may be strong ....**

**...the strength of the tongue and words are braver than  
all fighting....**

**...a wise person is a school for people of influence....**

**Copy your forefathers, for their work is carried out through knowledge, and endure in their writings.**

**...even an expert can become one who is instructed.**

**Do not be evil, for patience is good....**

**...make your lasting monuments in remembrance of your love.**

**...give thanks for your goodness, and your health will be good....**

**Respect the great; keep your people safe; consolidate your frontier and your patrolled area, for it is good to work for the future.**

**Show respect for life....**

**Wretched is a person who has bound the land for selfishness....**

**...the Lord of the Two Lands will live forever....**

**Make your influential leaders great, so they can execute good laws....**

**...one who is rich in house will not be one-sided, for they do not lack, and they own property....**

**Great is the great one whose great ones are great....**

**Speak truth in your house, so that people of great influence will respect you....**

**Do justice so that you may live long on earth. Calm the weeper, do not oppress the widow, and do not oust a person from their family property....**

**Beware of punishing wrongfully; do not kill, for it will not profit you....**

**The soul comes to the place it knows, and it will not overstep the ways of the past; no magic can oppose it, and it will reach those who give it water.**

**Do not put your trust in length of years, for some regard a lifetime, as an hour....**

**...a person survives after death, and past deeds are laid before the person in a heap.**

**Existence yonder is eternal, and one who complains of it is a fool, but for those who attain it, they will be like a god yonder, striding forward like the Lords of eternity.**

**Multiply your opponents as neighbors and see your town full of newly settled folk.**

**Make your influential leaders great, promote your warriors, increase the rising generation of your retainers, equip them with knowledge, established lands, and endow the cattle.**

**Do not distinguish the son of a person of rank from a commoner, but take a person as a friend because of their actions, so that every craft may be performed....**

**Construct a fine monument to honor God, for whoever does it, their name will be remembered.**

**...be discreet concerning the mysteries, enter into the sanctuary quietly, eat your bread in the temple, richly provide for the altars, increase your revenues, and add to the daily offerings, for it is a profitable matter for whoever does it....**

**...maintain your monuments in proportion to your wealth, for a single day gives to eternity, an hour does well for the future, and God is aware of all who serve.**

**Do not destroy ancient buildings with destruction....**

**...it is good to act on behalf of posterity.**

**Be kind to those who are weak, and satisfy yourself with your own bread and drink.**

**Granite comes to you without hindrance; so do not destroy someone else's monuments.**

**Be inactive about the violent person who destroys altars, for God will attack those who rebel against the temple.**

**The soul goes to the place it knows, and does not stray on yesterday's road.**

**Beautify your mansion in the West; embellish your place in the necropolis with straightforwardness and just dealing....**

**...more acceptable is the character of the straightforward person than the ox of a wrongdoer.**

**...God is aware of whoever serves....**

**Provide for the people --- the cattle of God, for heaven and earth were made at their desire.**

**...God knows every name.**

**Instruct yourself, so that you may rise up....**

**...do not kill anyone who approaches you, but favor him or her, for God knows them.**

**Instill your love into the entire world, for a good character is remembered....**

## Instruction of Hardedef

Hardedef (a.k.a. Hardjedef) was one of the important men (also a prince) of wisdom and calm judgement of the fifth dynasty; his teachings were famous in antiquity. The instruction is brief; however, it is one of the earliest preserved instructions.

**Find fault with yourself, before another person does.**

**If you want excellence, establish a household with a strong wife, and children.**

**Beautify your house, and make excellence your place.**

**Although death is bitter, life is exalted, and the house of death is for life.**



# Instruction of Amenemope

The Instruction of Amenempe was compiled about 1100 B.C.E. with the promising heading of Beginning of the Teaching for Clearing the Mind; Instruction of the Ignorant and for Learning.

The Instruction of Amenempe represents the beginning of an instruction for life (a guide for well-being) in thirty chapters outlining the principles of official procedure, and the duties of the courtiers.

The Instruction informs one how to refute an accusation, how to reply to an accusation, and how to set straight paths in life.

The Instruction can assist one to: prosper on earth, settle their heart in a chapel, stay clear of evil, save themselves from the talk of others, and how to become a person who is respected because of good speech.

The Instruction asks one to take time to listen to what is being said, give their mind to interpretation because it will be profitable (when put in the heart) as it rest in the shrine of their insides and remember that,

The Instruction act as a lock in the heart, and when a storm of words come, one will be ready to articulate.

The Instruction say that should one spend a lifetime with The Instruction in the heart, they will find good fortune, discover words to be a treasure house of life, and their body will flourish upon earth.

The concluding section asks one to remember the proceeding section, because it pleases and instruct, and is the foremost of all books that purify the ignorant. Thus, the books should be interpreted and explained by a teacher or a scribe who is experienced, and finds self-worth in being an attendant at a royal palace.

**Beware of stealing from a miserable person, and raging against a cripple.**

**Do not stretch out your hand to touch an elder, nor snip at his or her words.**

**Don't let yourself be involved in a fraudulent business....**

**Do not get tired because of being interfered with, or of answering a question on your own.**

**...stop and think before speaking.**

**Do not get into a quarrel with an argumentative person, or incite with words....**

**Proceed cautiously before an opponent, and give way to an adversary....**

**Sleep on a decision before speaking... for a storm come forth like fire in hay....**

**The hotheaded person in the temple is like a tree grown indoors, it can only put forth roots for a moment....**

**The truly temperate person sets self apart, like a tree grown in a sunlit field that flourishes and doubles its yield as it stands with sweet fruit and a pleasant shade to reach its end as a statue.**

**Do not take the shares of the temple by violence....**

**Do not be greedy, you will soon find overabundance....**

**Do not take a temple servant in order to acquire the property of another....**

**Do not say today is the same as tomorrow, or how matters will come to pass? When tomorrow comes, today is past....**

**Fill yourself with silence, and you will find life, and your body will flourish....**

**Do not displace the surveyor's marker on the boundaries of the arable land, nor alter the position of the measuring line....**

**Do not be greedy for a plot of land....**

**Take care not to topple over the boundary marks of the arable land, not fearing that you will be brought to justice....**

**...to make yourself prosper, take care of the Lord of all....**

**...do not trample on the land of someone else, for his or her good order will be profitable for you.**

**...plough the fields, and you will find whatever you need....**

**Better is the bushel that God gives you than five thousand deceitfully gotten....**

**Better is poverty in the hand of God than riches in the storehouse....**

**Better is bread when the mind is at ease than riches with anxiety.**

**Do not set your heart on seeking riches, for there is no one who can ignore destiny and fortune....**

**Do not set your thoughts on external matters, for every person there is an appointed time.**

**Do not exert yourself to seek excess, and your wealth will prosper....**

**If riches come to you by theft, they will not spend the night with you. As soon as day breaks, they will not be in your household....**

**Do not be pleased with yourself with riches acquired through robbery....**

**When you rise, you will offer to God and say, "Grant me prosperity and health", and you will be given the necessities for life, and you will be safe....**

**Set your good deeds throughout the world so you may greet everyone....**

**Keep your tongue safe from words of detraction, and you will be loved among the people....**

**Do not accuse a person, when the news of an escape is concealed.**

**Do not fraternize with a hot-tempered person, nor approach one to converse.**

**When a person's heart is upset, words travel faster than wind and rain.**

**Do not address your intemperate friend in unrighteousness....**

**Do not converse falsely with a person, for it is the abomination of God.**

**Do not separate your mind from your tongue....**

**You will be important before others when you are secure in the hand of God.**

**Do not covet the property of a dependent, nor hunger for his or her bread....**

**Do not covet the property of an official....**

**...do not fill your mouth with food, extravagantly....**

**Do not deal with an intemperate person, nor associate yourself with a disloyal party.**

**Do not witness a false statement....**

**Do not enroll someone who has nothing, nor make your pen be false.**

**If you find a large debt against a poor person, divide it into three parts. Release two of them and let one remain. Make those actions a path of life and you will pass the night in sound sleep, and in the morning, you will find good news.**

**Better it is to be praised as one who is loved, than one who is the owner of a storehouse of wealth....**

**Better is bread when the mind is at ease, than riches with troubles.**

**Do not exert yourself or pay attention to a person who says, "take a bribe" ...**

**Do well, and you will attain influence.**

**Do not unbalance the scale, make the weights false or diminish the fractions of the grain measure....**

**If you see someone cheating at a distance, you must pass him or her by.**

**Do not be greedy for copper or adore fine clothes; what good is one cloaked in fine linen, when they cheat before God.**

**Beware of robbing the grain measure to falsify its fractions....**

**Do not act wrongfully through force....**

**Do not enter into a secret agreement for a deceitful or fraudulent purpose with a grain measurer, nor play with the seed allotment....**

**Do not go to bed fearing tomorrow, for when daybreaks, what is tomorrow?**

**God is success....**

**The words that people say pass on one side, and the things that God does pass on the other side.**

**Do not say, "I am without fault," nor try to seek trouble.**

**Be strong in your heart, make your mind firm, and do not steer with your tongue....**

**The tongue of a person is the steering oar of a boat, and God is the pilot.**

**Do not enter the council chamber in the presence of a justice of the peace and then falsify your speech.**

**Do not go up and down with your accusation when your witnesses stand readied.**

**Tell the truth before the justice of the peace; for fear that they may gain power over your body....**

**Do not corrupt people of the law, nor put aside the just person....**

**Take not the gift of the strong, nor repress the weak for the strong.**

**Justice is a wonderful gift of God.**

**Do not falsify the oracles on a papyrus and thereby alter the designs of God.**

**Do not claim to yourself the might of God as if destiny and fortune do not exist.**

**Hand property over to its rightful owners, and seek a life for yourself....**

**Do not say, I have found a strong protector and now I can challenge a person in my town.**

**Do not say, I have found an active intermediary, and now I can challenge whom I hate.**

**Empty not your soul to everybody....**

**Do not diminish your importance....**

**Do not circulate your words to others or fraternize with one who is too candid.**

**Better is a person whose knowledge is inside than one who talks to their disadvantage.**

**One cannot create, only to destroy....**

**You cannot know the plans of God or perceive tomorrow.**

**Sit yourself at the hands of God, and your tranquility will cause them to open.**

**If you are satisfied with false words, enjoy yourself with your saliva, and look at the cup in front of you to suffice your need.**

**If a noble is important in office, it is like the abundance of a well when it is drawn.**

**Do not listen to the accusation of an official indoors, and then repeat it to another outside.**

**Do not jeer at a blind person nor tease a dwarf....**

**Do not taunt a person who is in the hand of God, nor scowl if there are errors.**



**People are clay and straw, and God is the potter....**

**How fortunate is the person who reaches the West, and safe in the hand of God.**

**...take as a friend for yourself someone compatible....**

**When you see someone greater than you, and attendants following the person, respect them.**

**The strong arm is not weakened when it is uncovered....**

**The back is not broken when one bends it....**

**Better is the poor person who speaks sweet words, than the rich person who speaks harshly.**

**A pilot who sees into the distance will not let a ship capsize.**

**Do not blame someone older than you disrespectfully, for they have seen the sun before you....**

**As a young person, respect the elder, let him or her discipline you, and let them find fault with you while you are quiet. Then when you come before the elder in the morning, you will receive bread freely.**

**God loves those who care for the poor....**

**Do not turn people away from crossing the river when you have room in your ferryboat....**

**If a steering oar is given you in the midst of the deep waters, bend back your hands to take it up.**

## Advise to the Youthful

Excerpts from the Papyrus Anastasi V, 8, 1-9, 1 via translation and commentary by Ricardo Caminos (1954) in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (Simpson, 1973, p.344).

**Do not give your heart to pleasures....**

**...converse with those more knowledgeable than you....**

**Exercise the office of a judicial official, for it will be an advantage in old age.**

**Persevere in action daily, and you will gain mastery....**

**Do not spend a day in idleness....**

## Instruction of Ptah-Hotep

Ptah-Hotep (a.k.a. Ptahhotep) was a man of wisdom and calm understanding, a high officer-official to King Izezi (2380-2342 BCE) of dynasty five, and the author of the oldest morally instructive text to survive complete from ancient Kemet.

The precepts of Ptah-Hotep represents the beginning of the arrangement of the good sayings spoken by the noble Lord, the divine father, the beloved of Ptah, and the son of the King to the first-born of Ptah-Hotep to instruct the ignorant in the knowledge of the arguments of good sayings. The sayings (messages) are organized based on the idea that it is profitable for the person who hears them and a loss to those that transgress them.

**Be not arrogant because of what you know, and deal with the ignorant as with the learned....**

**...good words are more difficult to find than an emerald....**

**If you as a leader decide on the conduct of a great number of people, seek the most perfect manner of making your decisions so that your conduct may be without blame or fault.**

**Justice is great, invariable, and assured....**

**To throw obstacles in the way of the law is to open the way for violence.**

**The limitations of justice are invariable....**

**... provide sustenance for those in the lap of peace....**

**...one who perverts trustfulness in order to repeat only what produce pleasure in the words of every person, great or small, is detestable.**

**...do not boast in the house of your neighbors....**

**Be active during the time of your existence, and do no more than is commanded.**

**Do not lose the daily opportunity of increasing the qualities of your house.**

**Activity produces riches, and riches do not endure when it slackens.**

**If you are wise, bring up a son who will be pleasing to Ptah. If he conforms his conduct to your way and occupies himself with your affairs, as is right, do to him all the good you can; he is your son, a person attached to you whom your own self has begotten.**

**Give orders without hesitation to those who do wrong....**

**Keep an eye on those who enter announcing a secret....**

**Declare your line of conduct without hesitation....**

**If you are a leader setting forward your plans ... perform perfect actions that posterity may remember....**

**If you are a leader of peace, listen to the discourse of the petitioner.**

**The way to obtain a clear explanation is to listen with kindness.**

**If you desire to excite respect within the house you enter**

**... keep yourself from making advances to a woman, for there is nothing good in so doing.**

**If you desire your conduct to be good and preserved from all evil, keep yourself from every attack of bad humor.**

**Be not of an irritable temper in regard to your neighbors; better is a compliment that displeases, than rudeness.**

**If you are wise, look after your house; love your wife without alloy. Fill her stomach, clothe her back; these are the gifts to be bestowed on her person. Caress her, fulfil her desires during the time of her existence; it is a kindness that does honor to its possessor. Be not brutal; tact will influence her better than violence; . . . behold to what she aspires, what she aims, and what she regards. Open your arms for her, respond to her arms; call her, and display to her, your love.**

**If you are wise, sitting in the council of your Lord, direct your thought toward the wise.**

**To speak in the council is an art, and speech is criticized more than any other labor....**

**If you are powerful, respect knowledge and the calmness of language.**

**Command only to direct....**

**Let not your heart be proud and vain to the point of arrogance, nor let it be mean.**

**...the gift of affection is worth more than the provisions that cover your back.**

**Let your love pass into the heart of those who love you....**

**If you have become great after having been little ... know how not to take advantage of the fact....**

**Do not plunder the house of your neighbors, or seize goods beside you.**

**If you aim at polished manners, call not one whom you accost.**

**Converse with a person, but don't annoy the person.**

**Enter a discussion only after leaving time to saturate the mind with the subject of conversation.**

**If ignorance displays itself, and gives you all opportunity to disgrace, treat the person with courtesy, and proceed not to drive one into a corner....**

**Let your appearance be cheerful during the time of your existence.**

**Know those who are faithful to you when you are in low estate.**

**The wise is satisfied by knowledge....**

**The son who accepts the instruction of his father will grow old....**

**When a son receives the instruction of his father there is no error in his plans.**

**Train your son to be a teachable man....**

**...teach according to the words of the wise.**

**Let your thoughts be abundant....**

## Instruction of Kagemni

Kagemni was a high official of fourth dynasty king Snofru (2613-2589), and the father of Khufu. His writings are contained in the Papyrus Prisse at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, France.

**The cautious person flourishes, and the exact person is praised....**

**...the innermost chambers are opened to one of silence.**

**...gluttony is an abomination....**

**...water quenches the thirst, and a mouthful of melon supports the heart.**

## Songs of the Birdcatcher's Daughter

Excerpts from the second cycle of the Papyrus Harris 500 (circa 1280 B.C.E., New Kingdom) in the British Museum, London.

**Balance my love with your caring.**

**Delight me with the air of your life giving....**

## Instruction of Pepi

The Instruction of Pepi (2246-2152, BCE) aims to teach the duties and perquisites of a professional writer with directions on how to avoid things that would interfere with learning and proper public conduct befitting a public official.

**...give yourself whole-heartedly to learning....**

**Nothing is as valuable as education....**

**Be serious and act with dignity.**

**Do not broadcast words that should be secret....**

**... speak no hasty words while sitting with a person who is belligerent.**

**Do not speak falsely of your background.**



**...avoid unguarded speech.**

**...it is good to study many things so you may learn the wisdom of the great.**

**...you can educate children as you walk in the footsteps of the wise.**

**Step out on the path of learning--- the friends of humankind will accompany you.**

**Praise God for your father and mother for placing you and your children's children on the pathway of the ever- lasting.**

## Prophecy of Neferty

The Prophecy of Neferty (a.k.a. Neferti) tells of his summons to the court of King Snefru of the fourth dynasty to entertain via good speech. When asked to speak of the future, Neferty eloquently prophesies the fall and rise of the nation.

**Do not hold back! Set it before your eyes that you may stand against what rises in your presence.**

**Justice shall rise to her throne....**

## Testament of Amenemhat

The instructions of a King to his son that dates to the reigns of Amenemhat I and Senusert I of the twelfth dynasty in the first half of the twentieth century BCE.

**...harvest an abundance of good fortune.**

**...be aware of those who can't prove themselves and are not true in their heart....**

**...advance a person of little means, like a person of means....**

**...good never comes to one without truth....**

**...shield the wisdom of an upright heart....**

## Hymn to the Nile

Sayings from the Middle Kingdom (2040-1650 BCE), attributed to Kherty in the twelfth dynasty. The persons of intellect and understanding in the New Kingdom (1551-1080 BCE) praised these writings as the best of all Kemetic writing.

**Each eye shines with moisture by the means of God, and all are rich through flooding kindness.**

**God illumines those in darkness and light their way....**

**All writing belongs to the word of God....**

**Came back to Egypt, and bring your benediction of peace...**

**One cannot eat precious stone and be nourished, he or she must first have food, and then, prosperity will follow.**

# The Leiden Hymns

Excerpts from hymns (a.k.a. The Leiden Hymns to Amun and Thebes) from the fifty-second year of the reign of Ramesses II (1279-1213 BCE) [a.k.a. Ramses II] during the New Kingdom that express the theology of ancient Kemet in 1238 (the hymns were named after a city in The Netherlands).

**Each city stirs into life on the breath of an invisible God...**

**The sun ship of infinite journeys sails on course, through the sky, with a cheering crew....**

**God is a master craftsman, yet none can draw the lines of God's plan.**

**God is skilled in the intricate ways of the craftsman, and the first to fashion self into perfection.**

**God loosens the knot of suffering, tempers disease and cures without ointments...**

**God will save those loved, and walk with them though the underworld, to free them of debt....**

**...breezes are soft for one who calls upon God, for the call rescues the wind....**

**God is a God of mercy, and mild in dealings....**

**God protects what is good in the world, and is ready to take those that falter behind....**

**God is final, an ineffable spirit....**

**God's word can kill or perpetuate, for all unfold by means of God's word....**

**The mind of God is perfect....**

**The appearance of God shines on humankind and mirrors the sum of the world.**

## Prayers of Pahery II

Pahery II was the treasurer and mayor of El-Kab and Esna who lived during the eighteenth dynasty. The inscriptions in his tomb provide a description of what life after death was thought to be like.

**Your likeness is among those in heaven while you receive your offerings on earth.**

**Goodness is yours when you perform it....**

# The Harper's Song

The Harper's Song (a.k.a. The Harper's Song for Inherkhway) outlines chants of a harp player-lyric poet that sat by the tomb of Inherkhaway (circa 1160 BCE) and urged the dead and the living to live life with vigor and vitality.

**Care for your works in the realm of God so your seat in the afterlife will be splendid.**

**...spend your days joyfully and do not be weary with living.**

**Do not allow you heart to be troubled during your sojourn on earth....**

**... seize the day as it passes.**

**Do not grieve, whatever problems come, let sweet music play before you....**

**Be an upright person, a just and true person, a patient and kind person, a person content with life, a person who can rejoice and not speak evil.**

**Let your heart be drunk on the gift of Day until the day comes when you anchor.**

# The Eloquent Farmer

These excerpts purports to depict events during the reign of King Khety II of dynasty ten (2050 BCE) when a farmer is robbed by a bureaucrat. During the trial of the bureaucrat, the passionate oratory of the farmer was recorded.

**The greedy person will come to no good, his or her seeming triumphs are only but moral failure.**

**Do whatever opposes injustice.**

**Do whatever opposes deceit.**

**Do justice for the Lord of justice.**

**...when good is truly good, it is priceless.**

**... justice is forever....**

**Speak justice, do justice, for it is powerful, far-reaching, and it endures.**

**There can never be an excess of high standards, nor should there ever be a mean act to reach the humblest inhabitant of the universe.**

# Chronology: Ancient Kemet

Early Period

**Dynasty 1-2 circa 3030-2665 BCE**

Old Kingdom

**Dynasty 3-6 circa 2665-2155 BCE**

First Intermediate Period

**Dynasty 7-10 circa 2155-2040 BCE**

Middle Kingdom

**Dynasty 11-12 circa 2040-1650 BCE**

Second Intermediate Period

**Dynasty 13-17 circa 1650-1551 BCE**

New Kingdom

**Dynasty 18-20 circa 1551-1080 BCE**

Third Intermediate Period

**Dynasty 21-24 circa 1080-655 BCE**

Late Kingdom

**Dynasty 25-30 circa 664-332 BCE**



# Glossary

**Axiom:** *a self-evident truth; universally accepted principle or rule.*

**BCE:** *Before the Common Era, Before the Christian Era.*

**Dynasty:** *a succession of officials from the same family.*

**Kemet [a.k.a., KMT, The Black Land, Ta-Merry]:** *the ancient name of Egypt.*

**Lord of Justice (a.k.a., Ma'at or Maat):** *a phrase used to characterize the attributes of justice, truth, order, righteousness, goodness, balance, propriety, reciprocity, and harmony.*

**Lord of the Two Lands:** *a reference to the king of Kemet who ruled in the north and south.*

**Medu Neter [a.k.a., Mdw Ntr, Mdw Netcher, and Mdu Nter]:** *the Kemetic name for what is now widely known as the hieroglyphs via Greek influence.*

**Necropolis:** *a cemetery or burial ground of ancient Kemet, the name literally means 'city of the dead'.*

**Oracles:** *individuals who deliver wise pronouncements for the divine.*

**Osiris:** *a deity of ancient Kemet; the son of Geb (earth) and Nut (sky), a deity representing resurrection and how one can overcome death and enter a peaceful afterlife.*

**Papyrus:** *a plant used as a writing material in ancient Kemet.*

**Ptah:** *a creator deity of ancient Kemet that created the universe through thought and speech.*

**West, the:** *the symbolic name for the land of the dead in ancient Kemet wherein one crosses the Nile to the west bank to participate in a good and vigorous afterlife. (Therefore Lord of the Two Lands could also mean Lord of the mortal world and the afterlife)*

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## **About the Editor**

Itibari M. Zulu is the senior editor of The Journal of Pan African Studies, vice president of The African Diaspora Foundation, provost of instruction and curriculum at Amen-Ra Theological Seminary, Los Angeles; a librarian at Mesa Community College; a Ph.D. candidate at the Union Institute & University; editor of Africology: A Concise Dictionary (2007), editor of Authentic Voices: Axioms and Quotations from the African World Community (2002); author of Exploring the African Centered Paradigm: Discourse and Innovation in African World Community Studies (1999); formerly executive director of the Los Angeles Black Book Expo; formerly head librarian at the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies Library & Media Center at UCLA (1992-2006); formerly an adjunct librarian at the Los Angeles Public Library; provisional director of the King-Luthuli Transformation Centre Peace Library and Distance Learning Centre (Johannesburg, South Africa), and African and African American Studies editor for MultiCultural Review literary magazine. He holds a Th.D. in African world community theology (Amen-Ra Theological Seminary), a M.L.S. in library and information science (San Jose State University), and undergraduate degrees in African American Studies (California State University, East Bay; Merritt College).