Selections from
POEMS ON 
THE LIFE OF 
THE PROPHET 
MUHAMMAD 

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The Rider

He’s heeled with no stabbing spurs
who comes across the desert on his Arabian
before he wears his thin Ihram.

And across the whitest wastelands
his horse gallops free, halting at his command
as though reined in by only his love.

Saddle-less it carries him, with a mane
with flanks, that can turn gold, then silver,
combed either by the sun or the moon.

We might be in our graves and far asleep
and still hear its hooves chafing the night sky.

We might be at our labour and go hushed as
horse and master pass by, making our skin tremor.
He once told a youngster riding behind, clinging on behind, his thin arms round Allah’s Beloved,

he once spoke, ‘Put your faith in the Lord of Creation, and fear nothing from death or from life’.
The Cave Contemplation

Before elevated to the maqam of prophethood and revelations tore through him, before Jibreel commanded him to read and the humble of Allah replied ‘I cannot’; at intervals he climbed alone mountain shale, a young man, to contemplate in a cave. How much did he know? It hadn’t been revealed how to make sajdah or ablution and yet he had heart to pray and to wash away the ‘I’ sensing with certainty the One Eternal would approach.
His ascent up the broken face; he must’ve stumbled against beasts, yet continued to seek his way, in mystic absorption divided fanciful from actual. Who instructed him how, with submissive courage rising into who can comprehend where?

Imagine starting devotions, and at once you forget every thing, you put on dedicated garments and every time they slip off, think when you pick up a holy book to read, it turns to ash or you enter a place of worship and it crumbles to nothing.

He passed through that screen – of – nothingness (across it no spider had woven) stepped into a cavity of fleeting echoes and trickling sand; stars looked in, the moon,
shadows carved.
Did known creeds nag? Not a Christian, Jew or an idolater –

what inner sense shifted his feet away from religious trading
what unconscious memory gave him the steadfastness to stick
in darkness, believing Light would come, illuminate the walls?
Yet when it did, he was in shock, desperate, at times suicidal.

Consider you come to a high cavern, for one hour contemplate
passing seventy years of worship. How's that ratio measured?
Your heart's stretched, like a line snapped, yet you have faith
to submit and say, I know nothing until You reveal it, My Lord …
The Snake Speaks…

I desired to see my Creator’s best creature, a Mercy for the worlds.

Waited, believing he’d come to my cave for shelter. Then, I heard

him and his companion deep in my chamber, under my jagged roof.

I saw my chance slinking through a low fissure; but his companion

blocked my way with his bare foot. I bit, careful not to use my poison,

hissed my loudest yet he kept his sole fixed. He shook from my fangs’
piercing, his skin wept. Then I listened and heard the Blessed One’s
voice, *You’re in pain, my friend!* ‘A snake’s bitten me.
I didn’t want to
disturb you’. Rasulullah healed his companion. *Let the snake come out.*

So I appeared my scales their shiniest. *Why have you hurt my friend?*

He could’ve banished me and my kind from existence. His tone implied

he’d hear my story. As salaamu alaikum wa rahmatullah wa barakatu,

Beloved of my Lord, I wanted to see you, but when I reached the hole,

your companion blocked my way. I bit him hard.
I’m sorry I hurt him
but I didn’t strike a Muslim with my worst weapon. Best of Creatures

returned salaams. I, blessed and pacified, in pleasure, curled back into

my hole harmless as a string of beads returning to an old man’s pocket.
Entering Medina

He had unfurled his prayer cloth out across a landscape of no return.
Then rode into the green oasis of Medina, and he let his camel migrate until it found where it desired to lower its haunches; there he stayed.

Flamboyant chieftains of the tribes paraded the way, wishing he’d dismount and reside with them; they vied to host the Apostle of Allah but he allowed a dun creature that had survived the desert to decide.

The one that’d carried him in exile, the wanderer between black tents
Rasulullah honoured and said, you tell me in whose home I should settle my prayer mat, between whose walls, I should worship my Lord.

I want the grand citizens to know I haven’t only come for the rich and powerful, to win wars, disputes, to conquer empires, but as a mercy for orphans, disowned, disabled, the poor and for unprotected hearts.

Beast of burden, crossing impossible terrain, who sniffs hidden water, you without lineage, linked to all creation, carrying light in your eyes who weeps for a lost foal, say from what root my Umma will grow.
The Mosque Builders

We shimmied up the tall palms and cut down with our swords the fullest, wind-sussling leaves for that first mosque’s roof. As our modest structure took shape we looked up and believed all in motion was the hand-skills of One Indefatigable Builder

and we built where the palms were spacious as the Milky Way and utilised their best timber as pillars to support our endless possibilities – we couldn’t gauge what number would come and find entry, how the mud brick walls would need to expand.
He, the centre and cause of all this, was down there labouring, the émigré and Prophet from Makkah wrapped in a red shawl – his arms joined the arms of men thirty years younger than him.

From our leaf-perches we saw the Apostle of Allah as a worker.

When a great palm became a column by which he’d stand and lead the prayers, some say, they could feel that tree’s pleasure.
Sayyida Khadijah

The small one passed like a great one through the city
the man some named the orphan
    vanishing into our surrounding vista.
A lover of beauty and adventure, like a seeker from ancient times. He’d judged between the tribes,
found solutions to dangerous disputes, saving each war-lord’s honour, him with little or no position.
I never heard of him quarrelling or demanding redress,
he held his sword like a balance. It was him who was called on
to preserve peace, straighten the easily misaligned.
Discreetly I’d watched him ride out with my camel caravan and return weeks later with his loads doubled.
I imagined where his sandalled feet carried him; the one whose face was sketched long ago – flowers in his turban, his radiant youth.
His voice gathered people.
I believed there was passion in his eyes, enough to alter
and I’d been informed that he with few supplies climbed a near mountain from time to time questing solitude in a high cave, searching and perhaps praying for the One God. I knew he was no idol worshipper.
I’d seen the Nur in his gentle expression, his longing to help whoever called on him; playing with children in a doorway.
Since I dreamt he was the sun, whose light filled Makkah, I knew I’d have to seek him as my husband.
Saahib ul-Miraj

Best of Creation, the Seal of Prophets, climbed the sky where there was no sky on the warm saddle-less back of a Buraq — why should it not have had a human face who carried the dedicatee of humanity?

On Jerusalem’s angelic Temple Mount he greeted the prophets, leading them in devotion to the One, aligning traditions, and then rose on the joy-weeping Buraq to where his escort, Jibreel said, ‘Sayyid I can go no farther, only human beings, once perfected through that Holy Light, can approach that unapproachable Light. But you, Mustafa, have permission to go nearer, to intercede for humankind.’
What celestial fields did he pass through that cannot be named fields, to approach a throne more expansive than the universe? How did his simple heart muscles remain beating, how did his lungs digest that air?

He mounted the creature of unending faith. And sometime in a cave, the world invading, Muhammad passed on that light and beauty, his heart’s whole mercy-load, to his closest dearest Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, to be threaded – like a sun-ray through clouds – through saintly masters in each generation from every culture. Somewhere in paradise a Buraq paws unseen pasture, in pleasure weeps to recall his ascent to the seventh heaven and his blessed rider.
Water and Wine and Milk

Once on the Prophet’s 🕋 Isra and Miraj he was offered these substances to drink.

He could have chosen water, easily, fluid that rescues the thirsty camel, the substance that washes the body that brings nourishment to orchard and fields, that ripens the barley and signals with a few dates the opening of the fast, the element that falls from the clouds and makes the wadi gleam sweeping off the desert grime like rust and lets the scented wildflowers spring from the land; water ritualised in wudu to prepare the faithful before prayer.

He could have grasped the wine, though forbidden, how can it be unlawful when your Lord offers it as red as a favourite
wife’s cheeks, blushing as though dawn
with mysterious early light, or twilight’s
afterglow, marking beginnings and ends?
Wine, sacred, with its intoxicating flames
that the heart feels in deep love, longing
for its Lord’s embrace. Fire that rushes
through a warrior’s limbs as he prepares
to confront death. And passion that wins
over fear that gives a taste of paradise.

He chose milk with which she-camels
suckle their calves, and yet is given on
in rich generous streams to nurture men.
Milk, that nourishes the young in ways
no water can, the white substance that
calms fire that can destroy in its excess;
the gift that shows a husband’s wish for
forgiveness before he approaches and
makes love with his wife; the creamy
pool that suggests purity, the promise
to please and be at peace, that soothes
the cries of the newly born, as if a new faith.
One day, you asked a child ‘how are you?’ and heard of his distress, which you half-guessed by his eyes. His pet bird had died and the boy was in mourning for that timorous being who’d chirped and quivered through the household and had become a close friend.

You (May Allah’s blessings and peace be upon you) shifted your attention from duties and adult dialogue to that tearful child. ‘What did you call the creature?’ you asked in respect. Everything must be named as if that minor was another Adam in his little paradise,
now invaded by grief. The boy replied it was a secret.
You, Habibullah smiled giving out a mellow chuckle.
The toddler grinned to possess a secret on a Prophet.
Under his arms you lifted him up on your knees and hugged him and unravelled how it was in this world – that the bird’s fate was ours and, of course, your fate.
Seclusion

Muhammad is praying in the courtyard of utter night, nothing disturbs, preparing for his farewell pilgrimage. If he sleeps one hour, he awakes, makes ablution and gives the same weight of time to prayer, before he rests, he carries his nation and stands facing the Ka’ba, until his ankles swell, orientates his desire toward that place. ‘I have two sides,’ he’s revealed, ‘one facing the world the other, Allah’. He communes with the unknown: the farthest stars, white moon, hidden sun, are known to him.
They’re elements of The One’s creation, Death’s another.

He supplicates, submits in sajdah, then stands once more.

In gentle faith in his night seclusion with familiar silence, he struggles in the way of Allah, struggles inward aiming past columns and arch-ways of the self to attain the heart.

Time and time again he enters deeper in complete sincerity.

If there’s distance – ocean, mountain snows, desert dunes - there’s also furnace of love, yellow amalgam of emotions.

This the true archery – not the outer target but inner peace - what’s loosed into those infinite depths can’t be recovered but by Allah, The Restorer, The Limitless One, The Truth.

He never imagines he’s on so excellent terms with the One
that he can neglect Allah. He is Zikrullah, who remembers before dawn’s blush the Creator, His Angels, His Emissaries.
What would this world be like, if he forgot? No one in any house knows how much they depend on his night prayers.
Khadijah’s Passing

Blood bonds came to nothing.
All protectors having failed them except Allah who truly defends.
One loss followed another.
He mourned her in barren land.
The nights of coldness shocked him and chill winds reminded of his lost wife and shared affections, his strongest believer and friend.
The sweet one who never doubted who lifted the heavy cover off when he shook in fear of his visions, who gave up her genteel life, her jewels and her authority to him, submitted totally to follow his steps into the unknown territory of Allah’s Sublimity and Wonder:
that small beginning, where’d it lead? When his prophethood was too fresh terrifying and beautiful, and final as death she was his comforter.

He wished she could have lived, his first love, dearest of beginnings, and travelled to the sheltering oasis.
We shared the same simple vessel when we made our ablution (it was never broken or chipped). You often stressed – not to appear too adorned or idle with the rich.

When you poured from that pitcher the stream was crystal. Your sensitive hand encircled its handle, your ring gleamed tenderly. I poured for you and its lip shimmered with jewels as the liquid plummeted. And then plunged for me. What did you think and feel, my husband, when we shared that tiny oasis
in our home? I can’t tell you what I sensed. Let me
whisper: my
heart grew quiet and free, jealousies I bore were
washed away.
You brought water from al-Suqya, the sweetest
you could find.
I gave you the well of love. Sweetest I could find
only for you.
Soon, other hands will pour water on my broken
body, prepar-
ing it for burial at al-Baqi. I’m in panic, my Miftah
ul-Jannah,
may your hand grasp one of these skinny fingers as
I depart,
softly as you once gripped that vessel’s slim
handle. I hope
against all my fears to share once more paradise
with you.
Abd-Allah Ibn Umm Maktum

He knew I could speak what I couldn’t see when he asked me to call his Umma to prayer (taking my hand, leading me to the exact spot). Could speak more beautifully because I couldn’t watch the words rise from my lips and doubt their wonder. Better not to be able to inspect when addressing, as if I was in touch with the Eternal. I required a sense in darkness, listening and feeling, by vibrations of language, the Shahada. He, the kind, Khateeb ul-Umam, realised the strength in my flaw. He recognised behind a vacant stare there existed store-rooms of secrets, the way he spoke of orphans and the disinherited as if they were connected to something far bigger and truer than blood relations.
At times he quietly echoed, hummed my words. He’d spoken, ‘In this world I see myself a way-farer, who barely belongs.’ Naturally he saw how these eyes that concealed could give more intensity to a tongue to tremble it with love for the One, my Cherisher, who gave me breath but not sight. And I sensed that the Messenger in drawing me from my void to use my voice to summon was saying: be grateful for what Allah gives, for what He seizes and gives again.
An Interlude

From riding into Medina, until his death, he has but eleven years to secure a kingdom for Islam.

Whose heart and limbs quake to receive the message who aches and loves so much to receive from Allah?
‘I know nothing but what my Lord sends,’ he says laying mud bricks for his mosque one on top of each.

From his entry until his death, he has eleven years to build a lasting kingdom, a foundation for Islam.

Dimmest ribbons in the east are lightening to pink believing souls awake and start gathering for Fajr,
and the Belovéd of Allah slips from the embrace of his red-cheeked love before leading the prayers.

He has eleven years, from his entry to his death, to love a kingdom and teach the pleasure of Islam.

And young girls play in the dust; they’ve known the sorrows of desertion since this world began. And down, the most courteous of Allah, joins them although the horns of battle sound not far away.

His entry to his death, he has eleven years to nurture a kingdom, a safe home for Islam.

He’s harried the enemy across the desert plains, ambushed their caravans and taken their jewels. He must attack their castles, cut down the proud palms until each tribe submits, throwing down their arms.

He has eleven years from his entry to his death to conquer a kingdom, a lasting foothold for Islam.
He’s come as mercy. He wishes the people faith, to reside at peace and share the produce of the land.

But his opponents are sly, they tear up agreements; they have justified their hate, poisoning his meat.

From his entry to his death he has eleven years to win a strong kingdom, a calm well for Islam.

How will the new day grow? The wasted land give fruit? From where will the sweet light come? Across drifting sands the patient Muhammad comes,

his gracious being surrounds each Bedouin’s tent.

From his entry to his death he has eleven years to give health to the land, and breath to Islam.

He’s removed his war-garb to wear a soft turban, and he calls all the people to the mount of Arafat. He wishes to speak before he goes to the Sublime what he says is – ‘be kind, to each other … be kind’.
From his entry to his death he has eleven years to give a message to the world, a voice to Islam.
A Song for the End

If I must lie down under the stars
rest my turban on my camel’s neck
let it be between sweet jalil and idhkhir
then I may fall asleep for a thousand years
not wake till the land’s greened-over with mercy.

If I must be indoors to keep the fierce
wind out, let it be under a roof of idhkhir
where all the cavities are fragrant with jalil
then a love-scent breeze may take me beyond
wars of this world to a palace of unbroken peace.

If I must lose my footing in the desert
then let it be among those delicate grasses.
I may have no water, yet the sun may not burn
I may lose everything but the love of Muhammad …
Angels send blessings and peace upon him.