

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 ﷺ 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.

The Prophet ﷺ and a Child

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.

Sharing

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 some-
thing 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.