

A selection of poems from the anthology

A KALEIDOSCOPE OF STORIES

MUSLIM VOICES IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY



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IN MEMORY

DANIEL ABDAL-HAYY MOORE

1940 – 2016

ABDALHAMID EVANS

1951 – 2018

OMAR JOHN NEMETH

1998 – 2018

SHAHBANO ALIANI

1967 – 2019

Shukr bil-Lisan

(Thankfulness of the Tongue)

Rashida James-Saadiya

In the middle of the night
when you need God most
may the sky unfold and pull you closer

May the ache of uncertainty drift away
and the ocean within your chest, spill from your eyes
For wherever there is darkness
there is light and wherever there is light
there are angels waiting patiently to hold your hand

So that you may know
the beauty of heaven and earth
the tenderness of wisdom

By the moon which brightens
and the pen that shall record

Let it be written in bone and marrow
stitched in the breath of patience and prayer
be certain of nothing except the existence of God
For every star is a prophecy

May you become a descendant of light
May the thread of faith run through your hands
May your prayers be heard
and your voice raised in gratitude
May your feet be planted firmly
and guided only by the way of love
May you walk with those who embody grace
and whenever you are lost may this path
bring you home, again and again

In the middle of the night
when you need God most
may the sky unfold and pull you closer

The Orphan's Song for The Kaaba - *extract*

Novid Shaid

It's like the Sun heating up all space
And the people, the planets, orbiting with haste
It's like the sky on a darkened night
And the pilgrim stars shining around it so bright
It's like a magnet that our Lord has fixed
And humanity crowds and encircles it
It's like the heart beating silently
And the blood flows around it eternally
It's like mighty Saturn, darkened, flattened into a cube
And the ring of pilgrims beautify the view.
It's the House of God, and He loves His guests,
And He answers all who make sincere requests

Wishes for Friends

Yasmine Ahmed-Lea

Yes we got married
In my living room
Lavender and peonies
Everywhere everywhere
My mother was
The real queen
No her knight
In shining armour
Was not there
His face reflected
In the rose water and candles
Glittering before me
Whilst I wept
Silent tears of
Everything everything
Into the pool

No I did not know him
For years and years
Even on that day
My acceptance was silent
A mere nod in the direction
Of a council
Of elders
But they say souls meet
Light miles before time
Where we were all together
In the covenant of promises
That can never be broken
By solid gold hearts
Yes only my beloveds
Were there
Both fortunate and
Less of fortune
Those who had lost all
But had still
Everything everything
Shared with me
In that day
Of course I wish
I could see all of you

My soul mates digital
And my soul mates far beyond
The borders
Of my mind
No I didn't
Spend the wealth of
Countries and pearls
Unwilling to buy myself
Into happiness
Everything everything
Went according to His plan
All I wish now
Is that for my fellow human
That your feet be wed
In garlands of lotus
And saffron
And the perfume
Of companionship
Be it this world
Or the next

And often we cry and argue
And often we shout and sigh
And often we walk apart

But

everyday everyday

I still call him

My best friend

Linguistics and Lost Languages

Mariam Akhtar

we're discussing dates
(not the failed ones
and not the sweet ones either)
my aunt pronounces - note not mispronounces
calendar as calundhur
and as her young daughter mocks her
my heart stutters and stirs with anger
I ask her how many languages she can speak
she replies one
but is blessed to be able to understand two
I remind her of how beautiful her mama's brain is
this magic that occurs
where she can switch
between two sets of letters and sounds
and maybe sometimes in the transition of translation
her mouth may soften

and what comes out may be rounder than intended
because she's a woman with a hard face but a soft heart
from a culture and a long line of tradition
that feeds people endlessly and selflessly
all the irony in the world is not lost
on a family of a lost language
one that's invisibility manifests its presence
in conversations like this

guardian trees

Idris Mears

whether the tree was planted
and staked with intention
or whether it was a wild sapling
destiny pushed through
the undergrowth of the norwich cemetery
i don't know
but God knew and God knows
the branches spread a shade
of peace over my companions
and God knows us each
and our resting places
and i hope to lie under it too
or under another of the guardian
trees of paradise
in paris or constantia or abu ayyub
or on the mountain top
under the cork oak beside the great *qutb*

trees watered by the mercy of centuries
as in my short time i have been rained on
by the blessing of the water
i drank at the breaking of the fast
the joy of the water i swam in
the cleansing of the water
i used to prepare for prayer
and in course the water used
to wash me for the grave

Medina Baye is Calling

Sukina Pilgrim

Here we lay
Our prayer rugs
On the ground
Like a picnic blanket
And feast on worship.
We swallow *salawat*
Like grapes -
The sweet juice
Trickles
Down
Our
Throats.
Here we sit
Swaying gently
As His names
Wash over our bodies.
H e a v e n i s o u r c a n o p y

The *Maghrib* sky
Is transforming into *Isha*
And there is something
So magical
In witnessing
The first stars
Arrive.
Here
The villagers
And travellers alike
Gather to recite
Utterances so light
They sail to heaven
Under angelic wings.
Our voices weave
Into a golden tapestry -
The breath of the faithful
And of the grateful
Make marks
On our hearts
That will never leave.
Here
Our guides glide
Through the streets

Like clouds in the sky
And rain beauty
And piety
Upon us -
Our palms are open
As are our hearts
Fertile
And fragile
And we never leave empty handed.
Here I dress
Like a woman from the Sahara
Where the veil is thin
Between this life
And the hereafter
Here.

The Night of Salvation

Nimah Ismail Nawwab

The long sleep has dissipated
the sick heart has begun to throb
with each verse, *tasbeeh*, opening

The long sleep is banished
as the heart begins its new phase
with each phase of the moon
with each new month and its advent
with the new pages on the tablet of the soul

The long sleep has been annihilated
as the thrumming of the awakened heart
soars with the spirit ever upward
to The Beloved
on a heavenly journey of blessings
with every *niyyah*¹, every prayer, every vision of beauty

1 intention

The long sleep is fully cured
of all barricades, impediments, veils
on the Night of Salvation²
the cured heart, cured soul takes off
journeying encompassed with ultimate *Mahabbah*

The long sleep is routed out
as new beginnings beckon
and the Night of All Cures calls out
and the invigorated heart unfurls
its awakened state heralding the dawn of secrets
beyond the known spheres to the unknown
as the veils are unveiled.

2 The Night of Salvation – Mid Sha‘ban also known as the Night of al-Bara‘ah

Eid al-Adha 2019

Ray Lacina

Pretty much everyone is sick after hajj
as you come home to a house that suddenly feels
like a foreign country
and drop your bags inside the door
you're snuffling maybe, maybe coughing
maybe just getting over a fever
that had you sleeping on the long flight home
that you maybe felt coming on as you packed your bags
or made your final circuit
around the House
maybe you felt the trickle leaving Mina
or during the last few days there
getting used to not wearing the clothes that once
had been so you
to not being in ihram
after days in that sacred state
lifted with the cutting of your hair

you likely felt fine at the final stoning
and even if you felt a little trickle, a little
woozy
that final denial of the darkness
would feel like a seal of all that's gone before
just as the first stoning days earlier felt
like the beginning of the end
after the long night on the open plain
where you gathered stones then slept out under the sky
the lights
exhausted but light after the long day's standing
at Arafat
but more so
before your Lord hands lifted or cupped or covering
your face
to capture your tears
impossible to believe that just that morning you woke
in your tent in Mina
a galaxy away
where you had readied yourself for just that moment
walking through the sudden city
hearing every language
seeing every color of skin
now wrapped in white

all different
all the same
with no contradiction
at this place you came to walking, or came on the train
they'd added since your last time
leaving Makka after the running between the hills
the first circling of the House
in your freshly wrapped *ihram*
put on just hours before maybe
on the plane or maybe
as you paused at the *miqat*
looked over your shoulder at the parking lot
but not at the parking lot
but rather at the journey that brought you there
from the life you'd put on pause
the days in and days out of it
the long years that all led
to this
the many Eids you'd celebrated hoping
exactly
for this.

I Want to Say Your Name

Shahbano Aliani

i want to say Your name
over and over again

over and over
and over again

in words carried by Love
rising like a spiral
from the core of all being
in my being

i want to say Your name
with heart-breaking tenderness
and call You by the million names
of endearment and beauty
ever uttered, by anyone

i want to say Your name

and tell you i love You
over and over again

over and over
and over again

until i have
spent all my words
all my tears
all my strength
all my breath

until i can
think no more,
say no more
breathe no more

be no more

and in that stillness
finally hear
walls, doors,
floors and ceilings

grains of sand,
blades of grass

sky, clouds,
trees and air
all speaking only
of You
and love for You.

I . 6 I 8

Fikasophy

Just like the Golden Ratio
Nothing is coincidental
Everything is God's Divine Intervention
“*Kun fa yakun*”

If tonight is the night,

I've mentioned your name for a thousand months

The universe echoes Your Name on my behalf for
a lifetime.

You!

Hu!

You have touched me

Joel Hayward

I could boil an egg in my hand
and melt asphalt with footsteps
as I walk to You, O Lord

O I will run

I am aflame

I have seen Your kingdom
in a bright blue dream
in sagging clouds before rain
in the slippery birth of a foal
in the eyes of mercy

My heart is aflame

I heard You call

in breaking waves
in the wide ocean's silence
in the cry of gulls

in an echo in my heart

Like a Giant Mosque

Yahia Lababidi

Moments when a great silence descends
like a creature of the depths
say, a noble whale swimming through us
—vast and transfiguring everything

Within this experience of grace,
all is like a giant mosque
constructed of crisscrossing
beams of benevolent light.

The City

Asiya Sian Davidson

In the city I walk entranced
I hear the hammer on the anvil
I press crushed petals to my lips
and every door holds the image of a sacred map
radiating circles and diamonds and stars
every house opens onto a
wellspring

in my room at night
I feel the pull of my heart
rise through the roof
and flow out through the
Cosmos

the ceiling is twenty metres high
I inhale with the *fuqara*
who gathering
in the garden of oranges

at that very minute
chant of
Life

unable to get there by foot
in the night alleyways
I stay home
in the room
in the centre of the
Universe

the city is made of the pure heart
of Being
its labyrinth laneways
artisans and traders, men and women
have scaled the sky on the rope of God
and brought His vision back
so that it echoes in every
courtyard

the full moon
rising over the fountain at *fajr* time
and the *adhan* calls
echoes in the dark of the
universe city

the same *adhan* that calls in my own heart
five times a day

I am the *qamariyya* of Sana'a
I am the warm sand fashioned into mud in Tarim
I am the fountain sweeper calling
'*Marhaba Hajja*' astonishing me,
expanding me in welcome
the olives that grow before the rise of the Rif
seed bathed in the light of the first creation
I am that light too

it would be easy to
stay for several lifetimes
in the city in the heart of the universe
cradled by eternity
rolling over in love
each day and each minute
a portal to the
moment

and this is why
we must live somewhere else
so far away
in the city that is not a city
in the buildings that have no heart

post-structural distortions
whose curves give way to jagged
and disjointed brokenness
where flat streets call our souls into heedlessness
and to hear the *adhan*
requires a dedicated
will

Emergency Room

Murtaza Humayun Saeed

They rolled me in

Now repeat after us, they said

I was all ears

Say: I breathe in the truth, I exhale out the falsehood,

I breathe in the light, I exhale out the darkness

What What?

Look please focus, time is short

Ok ok ..

So what are you waiting for?

I am, I am, Ok look, I breeee-athed and ex-

haaaaaale-d

Now say: The void I feel is the effect of the

abandonment by false gods,

peace is only possible with saying Allah Allah

Look, umm, an injection or tablet will do fine, I mean,

to take away the pain

We are trying to get to the root cause, don't you see?

We want to save your soul!

Soul? I insisted I have a burden like feeling on
my chest

Look, keep repeating, this is the real medicine:
The silence will no longer haunt me, the door will
always be open if I'm listening

The door? I coughed

The door through which there is no fear, no
competition, no blindness, no selfishness

I wouldn't mind that

Then be brave, get up from this bed of laziness
pray in your obligatory prayers for the Mystery of
Allah to be revealed to you

and pray in your sunnah prayers for the Mystery of
Muhammad, peace be upon him, to be revealed
to you

I took a few deep breaths and sensing some of the
weight lift from my chest,

I got up and walked out of the ER, a changed man.
He is Ar-Rahman, He is Ar-Raheem

He knows that this much I can manage
to remember Him and so be at peace,
but I can't keep from getting ill
serving the false gods of our days.

Muzdalifa

Abdalhamid Evans

You've drunk from the Fountain
 You have been on the Mountain
 Now don't get lost in Muzdalifa

You've kissed the Black Stone
 It's time to pick up stones
 Just don't get lost in Muzdalifa

It's just a stepping stone
 So go pick up your stones
 And don't get lost in Muzdalifa

You'll taste the Great Relief
 Can cut off all your grief
 Just don't get lost in Muzdalifa

Soon it will all be clear
 A stranger in the mirror
 Just don't get lost in Muzdalifa

Just make a rough bed

Try and lay down your head

And don't get lost in Muzdalifa

This night will go by

Just get some shut-eye

And don't get lost in Muzdalifa

You've nearly made it through

To relief you never knew

Just don't get lost in Muzdalifa

You called from the Great Plain

Where the Mercy falls like rain

Just don't get lost in Muzdalifa

There's knowledge in your bones

Just go pick up your stones

And don't get lost in Muzdalifa

A Muslim Death

Asma Khan

I want to tell you a story that you may not have heard before.

This is not about swarms or is it hordes of displaced Mohammedans

escaping terrible violence at the hands of their savage countrymen

nor is it about the vengeance and pain of those who cannot make peace with a corrupt world where thousands die yet are instantly forgotten nor of those who seek redress, their misplaced anger at human imperfection shrouded in the blood stained clothes of yet more dead.

It's not about analysis and half truths and agendas and votes and hand wringing liberalism.

You see, this story I wish to share is far too subtle to sell newspapers, too complex to explain why the ghettos you malign do in fact thrive

with hidden life, behind red bricks fountains and
gardens

it's a carpet of intermingled, ancient dyed wools
from many lands that was woven in such a pattern
that no soundbite could describe it, for this tale is
eternal, breathed outside of Time itself.

It is a story of a man dying, having made peace with
his life, surrounded by the prayers of those he
loved, of sacred beauty piercing a prosaic room,
of angelic presence at a bedside and unspoken
witnessing,

it is relatives washing the body with dutiful care,
prayers and visits from friends for days
with food cooked for a grieving family

no questions asked

it's about comfort and sweetness in the sharing of
dreams of their loved one

in a sincere quest to remain connected to him as he
makes his journey into an astral sphere... to the
land where 'the joy of which no eye has seen' awaits
of hundreds filing past and blessing a body unknown
to most of them except as human with the same
origin and return

of a unity felt with the Universe as auspicious rain fell

on his grave from a cloudless sky
of Love being witnessed by those left behind in all its
many forms
until there are no more tears just a sweet surrender, a
ripening within

It is a story of a grave visited and prayed over after his
morning surgery by a son each Friday because he
wishes 'to draw near'
and of other families doing the same and an echoing
peace that radiates from beyond this nameless patch
of Yorkshire land.

Their quiet duty to something greater ennobling their
day, comforting them with a sense of being led and
connecting them to great souls who have gone before
through a unifying practice

It is a story of a heart expanding, wisdom training,
beauty seeking, secret joy revealing, transforming
way of life

You see, it is an honour, this faith of ours, this precious
treasure, it's not a 'fable of the men of old' to be
replaced by a New World Order

It is our truth, our first and last love, just Islam

Beginning the Prayer

Daniel Abdal-Hayy Moore

from the poetry collection *Facing Mecca*

I stand facing Mecca
the house all around me
parallel with everything
hands up to my ears
the Prayer begins

Hands across chest
time-space capsule surrounds me
no god but Allah
all Other forgotten

Here's eternity's signature
signed through space
with severe strokes

Parallel lines on the prayer mat
past actions cast behind me
trees in linear groves

stand straight in the Prayer in
this world
bend from the waist
into the Next

There are parallel lines
to the limits
past the
edge of the
earth are darknesses
the body stands straight then
prostrates
what does it bow to but
Absence

Absence that is a
Presence
we can't see with our bare
eyes but know
eyes don't see Allah's Presence
physically
but are themselves
proof by
pure seeing

His Absence Alive in the air
we prostrate in parallel lines
we stand straight with
 angels in the prayer line
rows of Mediterranean Cypresses
 tall silhouettes against white sky
favorites of foggy graveyards

We stand with
 arms at our sides
against the
 beating chests of our
 turmoils
clasping left wrist with right hand
eyes half-slitted
 not staring
Gaze made to
 fall on the
inside
last actions done
 cast behind me

Dead while alive
standing still
 concentrated

by praying

From the
Next world we
rise into

This one

Dates or Milk

(RAMADAN 2017)

Medina Tenour Whiteman

It's not about food or water
dates or milk
we aren't leaning towards breakfast
waiting for the moment when our throats
will lose that rasping texture
dragging ourselves forward
to be reunited with the world

If they ask, say
we're swinging back on our heels
longing for this emptiness to bloom
a season longer
ravished by the flavour of a nothing
that fills without substance
floods without a drop
cleans without scrubbing

illuminates without fuel
nourishes without a single crumb
grace invited in by intention
the cook that delights by turning off the flame
makes it joy to feed others
without needing to share in the gift
because the gift of this presence
beats anything that can fit into
the bowl of a human hand

Supplicate - 25 Ramadan 1440

Saraiya Bah

weeping willows
bow but never break.
as do these sisters
who never break
as they bow to
their Maker.
their concern is
the here and now.
the moment where
fears, desires and dreams
crystallise into deeds.
supplications scooped
in henna tinted hands
made to The One
who commands us
to yield to His Oneness.
Who weathers storms

to strengthen the roots
of those who bow.
their branches graze
the masjid floor.
create ripples in Persian rugs.
their *duas* rustle wordlessly
to frolic in the domes covered
in sacred geometry.
how glorious that
devotions can manifest
in a multitude of ways.
how glorious is Al Musawwir
to fashion mercy in these
precious days.
they never take a break
as they bow.
they alternate from
prostration to circumnavigation
of their *tasbih*.
at times, tears carve tracks
on cheeks the hue of mahogany.
shoulders shudder from
swallowed grief.
not wanting to wail

as they weep.
yet they still don't break.
just supplicate.
and bow.
and wait.
and bow.
wow.

Prior To Fajr (Kerala, S.W. India)

Paul AbdulWadud Sutherland

Clingy night smothers every bird song.
A lorry's stretching moan on the empty road
honed-winged cicada subdued at this hour
a solo passenger jet ploughs the stars.

By the two-sided wide-open window
I'm sat, listening for the earliest crackle
from the yard a pre-dawn cockerel's call.
My bare feet settled on the shiny floor -
a natal coolness like a scent from nowhere
and floral gaps in high fronds stay in stasis.

The cockerel's, then the human-voiced *adhan*.
I wait and when I hear will go and shower off
this heat, dress and smooth on my white turban
prepared to sink my forehead at *fajr* prayer -
honour Muhammad in the month of his birth.

Haikus for the Divine

Tazmin H. Uddin

I.

You are the Writer
of my being. Teach me to read
Your signs around me.

II.

Your name to me is
an elixir of love. It
seeks to consume me.