

MUHAMMAD IQBAL

Three Poems

THE MOSQUE OF CORDOBA*
(Composed in Spain, mainly in
Cordoba)

Universal chain of night and day, author of
all happening
Eternal chain of day and night, essence of
both life and death;
Endless chain of days and nights, the thread
of two-toned silk
Whence Being's nature weaves its outer
cloak;
Infinite chain of night and day, eternity's
lamenting music
Which Being plays on possibility's wide
scale
You it assays and me it assays: boundless
Chain of night and day, assayer of the
universe.
Death is the destiny of all who are lacking;
It waits upon your failure and upon mine.
Such alone is the truth of your nights and
days.
All wonders of art are doomed to pass away;
The work of the world is doomed to pass.

*"Masjid-e Qurṭuba," from the poet's collection *Bāl-e Jibril*, in *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl — Urdū* (Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam 'Alī & Sons, 1973), pp. 385–93.

First and last will perish; concealed and
manifest will pass;
All trace of old and new will end in
nothing.

But this form shines with the color of
eternal substance
Drawn to fulfillment by a man of God
Whose actions are fired by love's radiance
Love is the essence of life; death cannot
reach it.
Though the age flows furiously and swift
Love's own torrent drowns its momentum.
In love's configuration is not the present
age only
But other eras which no name can compass.
Love is the breath of Gabriel, the heart of
Mustafa;
Love is the Prophet of God, it is the word
of God.
Love's ecstasy gives radiance to the rose's
form
Love is the jurist of the Ka'ba, it is the
commander of armies;
Love is the son of the road, its endless
stations.
Love's plectrum gives melody to the strings
of life;
From love comes the light of life, the fire.

Sanctuary of Cordoba! You spring from love
Love wholly eternal in which there is no
past.
In color, brick or stone, in harp or speech
and sound
Art's wonder shines from the heart's blood.
One drop of blood can make a heart out of
stone
Its voice burns with joy and song.

Your sky lights up the heart; my song fires
the breast
Through you hearts gain presence; through
me, attainment.
No larger than Adam's heart is the exalted
empyrean,
Though the handful of dust knows its limit
in the blue heaven.
What if light attains prostration in form?
It achieves not the passion and melting-
depth of prayer.
I am an unbelieving Indian, yet see my
fervor and longing;
Prayers and blessings live in my heart, on
my lips;
Longing lives in my melody, in my flute
My whole frame is alive with the song of
"Allah is."

Your glory and grace are a signature of the
man of God
Like him, you are glorious and beautiful.
Your foundations are firm, your columns
numberless,
Like date-groves in the Syrian desert;
On your doors and walls falls the Sinai
Valley's light,
Your minarets the high home of Gabriel's
revelation.
The hero of Islam cannot fade: his calls to
prayer
Brought to light the secrets of Moses and
Abraham;
His land is limitless, his horizon boundless
The waves of his sea are the Tigris, Danube
and Nile.
His eras are strange, his stories wondrous;
He brought the message of farewell to the
old order.

Saqi of the cultivated! Horseman on
 passion's field!
 Pure is his wine, noble his sword.
 He is the warrior-hero, his armor *La ilaha*;
 In the scimitar's shadow, his refuge is *La
 ilaha*.

Through you is revealed the believer's secret
 The burning of his days, the melting of his
 nights;
 His high station, his noble thought,
 His delight and zeal, his humility and pride.
 The hand of Allah is the believer's hand
 Victorious, successful, he reveals his works
 and prospers.
 Dust and fire is his nature, a servant with
 the Lord's attributes;
 Independent of both worlds, his heart is
 free.
 His hopes are small, his endeavor glorious;
 His grace enralls the heart, his gaze is
 kind;
 Soft of speech, intense in his quest,
 In battle or in assembly he is pure in heart
 and deed.
 God's servant's faith is the center of truth's
 encircling compass
 And the world before us is but illusion,
 sorcery and shadow.
 He is the goal of wisdom, the fruit of love,
 The warmth of the assembly in the circle of
 horizons.

Ka'ba of the friends of art! Majesty of the
 revealed faith:
 Through whom the Andalusian land is
 revered as a shrine.
 If anything under the heavens approaches
 your beauty
 It is in the heart of the believers alone.

Those heroes of truth! Those royal Arab
 riders!
 Bearers of the “nature supreme,” purveyors
 of truth and conviction,
 Whose sovereignty revealed this wondrous
 secret:
 Poverty is the kingdom of the heart’s
 advocates;
 Whose eyes edified East and West;
 Whose wisdom lit up the road in Europe’s
 darkness;
 Through whose blood the Spanish even
 today
 Are joyous, welcoming, simple and radiant.
 Even now in this land the gazelle’s eye
 roams
 Sinking its arrows into the heart.
 Yemen’s fragrance still fills its breezes;
 The color of Hijaz still brightens its songs.

In the eyes of the stars are your earth and
 sky;
 For centuries, alas, the *azan* has not
 sounded in your air.
 In which valley, at which stage is
 Love’s hardy caravan, whose fruit is
 madness.
 Germany has witnessed the tumult of
 religious reformation
 Which left nowhere any trace of the old
 order.
 The church elder’s purity was revealed as a
 sham
 And the frail vessel of thought sailed away.
 The French also have seen a revolution
 By which the Western world was
 transformed.
 The descendants of Rome, elders in worship
 of the past
 Grew young again through revival.

Today, such anguish feeds the Muslim spirit
It is a Godly secret beyond the tongue's
utterance.

Let us see what rises from beneath this sea
Whether the sky's azure changes color!

In the mountain valley the cloud is sunk in
twilight red
The sun has left its trace: a heap of rubies of
Badakhshan.

Simple and soulful is the song of the
peasant's daughter
The heart's boat flows with her flooding
youth.

Running waters of Kabir! On your shores
One is watching the dream of another age.
The new world is yet hidden in the veil of
fate;

In my eyes its dawn has shed its veil.
Should I lift the veil from the countenance
of thought

Europe could not bear the heat of my songs.
Life without upheaval is death
The soul of nations is the clash of
revolution.

Like the form of a sword in the hand of fate
Is the nation which ever measures itself.
All forms are incomplete without the heart's
blood;

The song is imperfect without the blood.

PIOUSNESS AND LICENSE*

The story of a Maulvi I shall relate
My wit, I should admit, is no blank slate!

*"Zuhd aur Rindi," from his collection *Bāng-e Darā*, in *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl*
—*Urdū* (Lahore: Shaikh Ghulam 'Alī & Sons, 1973), pp. 59–60.

Renowned he was for his Sufistic ways
 High and low deferred to this initiate.
 Islamic law, he'd say, hides in mystic depth
 Like meaning, beneath what words seem to state.
 His heart's cup ran over with pious wine;
 In the dregs omniscience lay in wait!
 Of his miracles he would freely boast
 His following might thereby escalate!
 A long time he lived in my neighborhood:
 An old bond between saint and reprobate!
 He asked of a friend of mine: "Of Iqbal,
 That dove in meaning's box-tree, please relate:
 How well does he follow Islamic law?
 Though better than Hamdani's his verses rate
 Hindus aren't infidels to him, I hear;
 Does philosophy bring tolerance so great?
 There's a little Shi'ism in his nature
 I've heard him praise Ali, and exaggerate!
 Music, he thinks, is a part of worship:
 Does he mean our faith to calumniate?
 Mixing with loose women brings him no shame
 An old habit our poets perpetuate!
 He'll sing at night and read scripture at dawn
 A secret here, I fear, I can't penetrate!
 But I've heard from my disciples that his youth
 Like the white dawn, is immaculate.
 What a sum of contradictions is Iqbal
 His heart a wise book, his nature insatiate
 Versed in impiety and Islamic Law
 Like Mansur on Sufism he'll expostulate.
 The essence of this character escapes me
 Is it some other Islam he'd originate?"
 In brief, he span out his prosy sermon
 Spicing with verbal art what he'd narrate.
 In this city word soon spreads everywhere;
 I've heard my friends also join this debate.
 Once when this pious man met me on the street
 This old matter surfaced in our tête-à-tête.
 "My critique was fueled by love," he said,
 "And my duty Islam's path to inculcate."

“And I have no objection,” I returned,
 “We’re neighbors: you’ve a right to remonstrate.
 My head is bowed in deference to you
 Humility has aged my youth of late.
 That my real nature perplexes you
 Does not your omniscience inculcate.
 My own gaze reveals me to be obscure
 My thought’s sea is too deep for *me* to translate.
 I too would see Iqbal, and in this loss
 Of self have wept for my estranged state.”
 Iqbal too is a stranger to Iqbal:
 And this is no jest; by God the most great!

A NEW TEMPLE*

I’ll speak truly, Brahmin, if you’ll not take
 offence:
 The idols of your temples are grown old.
 Enmity between you and your people those
 idols have bred;
 Aggression and war the Muslim preacher
 has learnt from God.
 Wearied, I deserted temple and mosque:
 Both the preacher’s sermons and your
 fables.
 You sought God within images of stone;
 For me, every grain of the dust of my land
 is god.
 Come, let the curtain rise once more of our
 estrangement
 Let the scattered elements reunite and
 dissolve all schism.
 The heart has long been a deserted dwelling:
 Come, let us build a new temple in this
 land!

*“Nayā Shivākā,” from his collection *Bāng-e Darā*, in *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl—Urdū* (Lahore: Shaikh Ghulām ‘Alī & Sons, 1973), p. 88.

Let our sanctuary be the highest in the
world:
Let its pinnacle reach the hem of the sky.
In the morning we'll rise to sing those sweet
chants
And offer love as wine to all who would
worship.
Strength and peace fill the worshippers'
song:
Salvation, the soul's end for humankind is
in love.

—*Translated by Rafey Habib*