

ASIF RAZA

Six Poems  
(From *Festivals of Solitude*)

THE BOTTOM<sup>1</sup>

Plunging into the depths of our ecstasy  
We discern the radiating colors  
Not grasped by us before  
Through which our griefs  
Reveal themselves to us.

Beneath a somber stillness  
A splendid darkness  
Gathers us into its extended embrace.

THE EARTHLY NIGHT<sup>2</sup>

It is the dominion of the earthly night  
The sun is its emissary  
Light them up, the candles,  
The ones that dimly burn.

These gardens, autumn-struck,  
Fall within its domain  
Cast your radiant tears for seeds  
To raise up your own gardens

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<sup>1</sup>“Tah,” from the poet’s collection *Tanhā’ī kē Tebvār* (Karachi: Scheherzade, n.d.), 17.

<sup>2</sup>“Zamīn kī Rāt,” from *ibid.*, 22–23.

From the fertile soil of your dreams.  
These springs with their bitter-tasting waters,  
Belong to its demesne  
Take your eternal thirst along  
And standing at the desert's edge  
Call out to the mirages afar.

**THE EVENING<sup>3</sup>**

The sun has laid his weary head  
Upon the threshold of the fated evening  
The clock strikes its call to all  
So you too,  
Leave behind your pomp and show  
And come back home.

The darkness pries,  
From the clenched fist of the sun  
His last ray of light  
Soundless are the trilling birds  
With their heads buried in their feathers  
Confined to the dungeon of silence,  
The din of the day is quieted down.

With the radiant circle broken  
Arrives the night  
To claim its right  
The moment of reckoning is here,  
You have no choice,  
Come, bow your head and pay your debt.

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<sup>3</sup>“Shām,” from *ibid.*, 18–19.

**THE PROPHET<sup>4</sup>**

Beating its drums,  
The sunless wind,  
Dark forest's legions,  
Roll in waves.  
Audible above the waterfalls  
The lament of a wandering soul.

The growling of the canine,  
With the putrid smell,  
The dark-eyed beast,  
Breaks the stone-tablet upon his knees.

Shawl on his shoulder,  
The prophet motionless,  
Like a heavy stone dropped from the mountain top.

**THE TRAVELERS<sup>5</sup>**

The morning stoops and sternly says  
“Wake up you—  
Whatever you may be called  
The hour of your trial is here again.”

Undertake the lowly journey,  
Once again  
Come down,  
From the dreamy heights of your azure sky,  
To the paltry ground.

The sky above  
And the pallid sun,  
Are travelers too,  
With the caravan that is on its trek  
Get it through your head—

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<sup>4</sup>“Paighāambar,” from *ibid.*, 43.

<sup>5</sup>“Musāfir,” from *ibid.*, 48–49.

All bear the same name here  
So trudge along with all.

See! How the wind is rising!  
The birds carry aloft  
The weight of the skies upon their shoulders  
Yet do not know  
Whither they go.

**THE TREE<sup>6</sup>**

I sought to pull it by its roots  
The tree, to which with love  
I gave as nourishment my blood  
It did not budge.

When I tried to cut it down  
With my jagged saw  
I heard it scream!  
A heartrending scream indeed it was!  
And then I saw  
A fountain gushing out from it,  
Of blood!

The tree, it still stands  
Tenaciously in my backyard.  
It has now sunk its roots  
Deeper into the ground.

Now every day,  
With my face averted in repulsion,  
I offer it my blood  
And pluck, in hatred, from its offering branch  
Its bitter fruit.

—*Translated by the poet*

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<sup>6</sup>“Shajar,” from *ibid.*, 20–21.