

Kabir – selected poems

1. Allāh-Rāma¹

Allāh-Rāma, I live by Your Name:
show me Your mercy, my Lord.

If Allāh resides inside a mosque,
then whose is the rest of the land?

Hindus claim His Name inhabits an idol:
but God can't be found in either place.

The southern country is Hari's home,
the west is Allāh's camping-ground.

Search your heart, your heart of hearts:
that's His abode, that's His camp.

The brahmin fasts once a fortnight,
the qādī fasts for Ramadan.

Each devotes eleven months to himself,
then looks for rewards in a month of fasts.

Why go off to Orissa for ritual immersions?
Why bow your head in a mosque?

You're a crook at heart, you pretend to pray:
why go all the way on a hajj to the Ka'ba?

These men and women, the whole lot of them,
are nothing but Your forms.

I'm a child of Rām-and-Allāh,
everyone's my guru-and-pir.

Kabir says, listen, o men and women:
seek shelter with the One and Only.

Repeat His singular Name, you creatures: for only then
will you be able to cross life's ocean.

¹ *The Weaver's Songs*, 129–130.

2. The Simple State²

Listen, you saints –

I see that the whole world is crazy.

When I tell the truth, people run to beat me up;

when I tell lies, they believe me.

I've seen the pious ones, the ritual-mongers –

they bathe at dawn.

They kill the true Self and worship rocks –

they know nothing.

I've seen many masters and teachers –

they read their Book, their Qur'an.

They teach many students their business tricks –

that's all they know.

They sit at home in pretentious poses –

their minds are full of vanity.

They begin to worship brass and stone –

they are so proud of their pilgrimages, they forget the real thing.

They wear caps and beads, they paint

their brows with the cosmetics of holiness.

They forget the true words and the songs of witness

the moment they've sung them –

they haven't heard news of the Self.

The Hindu says Rāma's dear to him,

the Muslim says it's Rahīm.

They go to war and kill each other –

no one knows the secret of things.

They do their rounds from door to door,

selling their magical formulas –

they are vain about their reputations.

All the students will drown with their teachers –

at the last moment they will repent.

Kabir says, listen you saintly men, forget all this vanity.

I've said it so many times but nobody listens –

you must merge into the simple state

simply.

² *The Weaver's Songs*, 161–163.

3. The Final State³

The ineffable tale
 of that final simple state:
it's utterly different.
It can't be weighed on a scale,
 can't be whittled down.
It doesn't feel heavy
 and doesn't feel light.
It has no rain, no sea,
 no sun or shade.
It doesn't contain
 creation or destruction.
No life, no death exist in it,
 no grief, no joy.
Both solitude and blissful union
 are absent from it.
It has no up or down,
 no high or low.
It doesn't contain
 either night or day.
There's no water, no air,
 no fire that flares again and again.
The True Master permeates
 everything there.
The Eternal One remains
 unmoving, imperceptible, unknowable.
You can attain Him
 with the Guru's grace.
Kabir says, sacrifice yourself
 to the Guru,
and remain ensconced
 in the true community.

³ *The Weaver's Songs*, 101–102.

4. Mosque with Ten Doors⁴

Broadcast, oh mullah,
 your merciful call to prayer –
 you yourself are a mosque with ten doors.
Make your mind your Mecca,
 your body the Ka'ba –
 your Self itself is the Supreme Master.
In the name of Allah, sacrifice
 your anger, error, impurity –
 chew up your senses, become a patient man.
The lord of the Hindus and Turks
 is one and the same –
 why become a mullah, why become a sheikh?
Kabir says, brother,
 I've gone crazy –
 quietly, quietly, like a thief,
my mind has slipped into the simple state.

5. The Song⁵

Who will be sheriff in a town littered with meat
 where the watchman is a vulture?
Mouse in the boat, cat at the oars;
 frog sleeping, snake on guard;
bull giving birth, cow sterile,
 calf milked morning, noon and night;
lion forever leaping
 to fight the jackal.
Kabir says, rare listeners
 hear the song right.

⁴ *The Weaver's Songs*, 121.

⁵ *The Bījak of Kabir*, 95.

6. Stand firm

I said to the wanting creature inside me:

What is this river you want to cross?

There are no travellers on the river-road, and no road.

Do you see anyone moving about on that bank, or resting?

There is no river at all, and no boat, and no boatman.

There is no towrope either, and no one to pull it.

There is no ground, no sky, no time, no bank, no ford!

And there is no body, and no mind!

Do you believe there is some place that will make the soul less thirsty?

In that great absence you will find nothing.

Be strong then, and enter into your own body;

there you have a solid place for your feet.

Think about it carefully!

Don't go off somewhere else!

Kabir says this: just throw away all thoughts of imaginary things,

And stand firm in that which you are.⁶

⁶ *Kabir: Forty-Four Ecstatic Poems of Kabir*, 14.

Shorter poems

A drop is merged into the ocean,
that everyone understands.
But how the ocean is contained in the drop,
that, o my friend, only a rare man can comprehend.⁷

(būd samānā sindhu me / jānat haī sab koe / sindhu samānā būd me / būjhe birlā koe)

Wherever my eyes turn,
I see His illumination!
O my friends, when I reach out to touch it,
I too become part of the illumination!⁸

(lāli mere lāl kī / jit dekhaū tit lāl / lālī dekhan maī gayī / maī bhī ho gayī lāl)

O seeker, know the One
and the essence of all things would be known
to you.
But if you are ignorant of the One,
all learning is a mere illusion.⁹

(je wo ek jāniyā / to jānyā sab jān / je wo ek na jāniyā / to sabahī jān ajān)

The musk is held in its pod,
yet oblivious of the source of fragrance,
the deer wanders all over the forest in its search.
O seeker, the Holy One too dwells within.
How unaware we are of Him!¹⁰

(kastūrī kundali basai / mrig dhūḍhe van māhī / aise ghaṭi ghaṭi Rām hai / duniyā dekhe nāhī)

⁷ *The Vision of Kabir*, p. 185.

⁸ *The Vision of Kabir*, p. 183.

⁹ *The Vision of Kabir*, p. 190.

¹⁰ *The Vision of Kabir*, p. 194

Moving within limits: man.
Moving without limits: saint.
Dropping both limits and no-limits –
unfathomable thought.¹¹

One entered all,
all entered that.
Kabir entered knowledge.
No duality.¹²

If I say one, it isn't so.
If I say two, it's slander.
Kabir has thought about it.
As it is,
so it is.¹³

This is the big fight, King Ram:
let anyone settle it who can.
Is Brahma bigger or where he came from?
Is the Veda bigger or where it was born from?
Is the mind bigger or what it believes in?
Is Ram bigger or the knower of Ram?
Kabir turns round, it's hard to see –
Is the holy place bigger or the devotee?¹⁴

¹¹ *The Bījak of Kabir*, 189.

¹² *The Bījak of Kabir*, 272.

¹³ *The Bījak of Kabir*, 120.

¹⁴ *The Bījak of Kabir*, 78.