



THE SECRETS
OF ISHBAR
Poems on Kashmir
and Other Landscapes
SUBHASH KAK



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by Subhash Kak



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I – SNOW IN KASHMIR	1
1.0 EXILE	2
2.0 REACHING SRINAGAR.....	3
3.0 THE CITY OF FAME	4
4.0 RAINY AFTERNOON IN CHASHMASHAHI.....	5
5.0 UP THE SINDH RIVER IN A DOONGA.....	6
6.0 SNOW IN SRINAGAR.....	7
7.0 CHILAI KALAN	8
8.0 CROSSING THE VITASTA	9
9.0 JOURNEY INTO THE HIMALAYAS.....	10
10.0 ISHBAR EVENINGS.....	12
11.0 PONY RIDE IN THE LIDDAR VALLEY.....	13
12.0 VIEWS OF HARMUKH	14
13.0 MY FATHER IN HAWAII	15
PART II – TEN THOUSAND YEARS OF SOLITUDE	16
14.0 THE FIRE IN THE WATERS	17
15.0 RECORDS OF OUR LIVES	18
16.0 THREADS.....	19
17.0 ASK KRISHNA	20
18.0 THE CONDUCTOR OF THE DEAD.....	21
19.0 A WOUNDED BIRD.....	23
20.0 THE RIDDLE OF ISHA.....	25
21.0 PATANJALI'S SONG	26
22.0 THE HIDDEN PATH UP THE HILL.....	30
23.0 INNER SARASVATI.....	31
24.0 NAMING THINGS.....	32

TABLE OF CONTENTS

25.0 ON HIGH DESERT.....	33
26.0 A SMALL BEGINNING.....	34
27.0 UNCOVERING.....	35
28.0 SEEKING ANSWERS.....	36
29.0 NACHIKETA'S DUAL.....	37
30.0 QUANTUM IMPLICATIONS.....	38
31.0 CHANCE AND NECESSITY.....	39
32.0 A BOY AND HIS DOG.....	40

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I – SNOW IN KASHMIR

1.0 EXILE

Memories get hazy
even recounting doesn't help
I need to look at pictures
or listen to music to remember
and sometimes walking through narrow lanes of my town
a sudden perfume escaping from a window
halts my steps and I am transported
to my childhood years.
What other memories live behind the barred doors?
I hear the girl next door calling out;
I do not answer because her stern father
is watching from the balcony.
Many scents mingle in the courtyard,
the autumn breeze touches lightly on my skin.
Women are pounding grain in the giant mortar,
our hen is guarding her brood
from the mean street mongrel.
And now we glide through a water passage
over pink lilies, reeds, and rushes
against the curtain of sleek houseboats
moored to banks with soft green grass
with willow trees guarding the edge of water
and giant chinars shading higher ground.
Blue kingfishers flash across water
and yellow orioles dart from tree to tree
and now we pass a quince orchard
with blossoms of delicate pink
and a field of brilliant yellow mustard.
We stop at a clearing
where a girl is selling honey
and as we talk the sounds of cows and calves
sheep and lambs
geese and gosling
ducks and duckling
chicken and chicks
children singing tables from a canalside school
men coughing on their hookahs
float by.
The best paradise
is the paradise we are exiled from.

2.0 REACHING SRINAGAR

As the dusty bus crosses the Banihal tunnel
the air becomes scented and zippy
and the passengers break out into a loud cheer.
We strain into the distance
to guess where Verinag might be
to begin tracing Vitasta's course.
At Kazigund we order egg paranthas
and now the driver races through---
Kashmiri songs blaring on the radio---
Khanabal, Bijbehara
the ruins of Avantipura
the saffron fields of Pampur
and then to the kulcha shops further on.
It is quite dark when we reach Srinagar.
We wait in a corner as father gets our holdalls and trunks
and we climb aboard the tonga---
horseshoes flashing in the dark
against the asphalt of the road.

3.0 THE CITY OF FAME

It was called Sharika's town until the king Pravarasena
moved the capital here from old Srinagar.
An embankment separated the town from the Dal.
This Sathu had orchards of apple trees:
the water flowing to the Vitasta from the Dal
is the Apple River.
The goddess became Sharika in her shape as sparrow
she brought her mountain near the town:
from the Hari Parvat one can see
Haramukh, Mahadeva, and Tatakuti
Nanga Parvat in the north
many vistas of gardens and water.
Near the base is the rock of Ganesh
and old temples that are in incarnations
of a new faith.
On the other side is Gopadri
the hill with Shiva temple atop.
Here we see the river snaking on a side
floating gardens
countless waterways
islands in the lake
the city of fame
of seven bridges
now seized by madness.

4.0 RAINY AFTERNOON IN CHASHMASHAHI

Everyone has heard of the astonishingly sweet
waters of the Chashmashahi spring
and the picnicking families
samovars steamings
or tea being made on primus stove
and young people exchanging glances.
But who has spent days
in rainy August in a leaky house above Chashmashahi?
The water did not stop for a week
and we shuddered in our blankets
in the only dry corner of the room.
The mountain slope and the lake looked desolate
as more bricks of Parimahal were washed away.
I did not understand a word of the relativity book
that I held in my hands.

5.0 UP THE SINDH RIVER IN A DOONGA

It was dark when the doonga arrived at the Apple River
food, stoves, rugs, and blankets were loaded in
the beds were made in the dim lights of kerosene lamps
and soon we lay down to the sounds of the poles against the sides
that pushed the boat
past the shadows of other boats,
watercress and asparagus.
While we listened to stories of the cousins
and some singing of the girls
father called out the stages that were crossed:
passing under the city's bridges we reached Shadipur
and then pushed against the current of Sindh.
The boatmen were up before us next morning
. Ropes were anchored to the boat
and towed from the bank to make the climb easier
.

By evening we were at Ganderbal.
Rented tongas took us to the magic spring of Tulamula.
We set up camp under a chinar tree
and played under the lights to the singing of the worshipers.
We peered into the water to check its colour
to know the future
but layers of flowers prevented this
so we did puja, ate luchis and nadroo fries and rested.
It was a pleasant night.
Voices around us and singing in the distance
made us feel secure. We were oblivious
of the trials that lay before us.

6.0 SNOW IN SRINAGAR

The radio says it has snowed in Srinagar.
The first snow is cause for celebration:
mother lighted the wooden stove in the kitchen
and unwrapped packets of beans and dried vegetables and
fish
to make the feast. And we hurried into the backyard
dragging our wooden slippers through the snow
throwing snowballs until it was time to take
packed boxes of steaming food and gifts
to the neighbours and relatives to spread merrymaking;
and we received similar things in exchange.
After our snowfights were over we watched
from the window the boatwomen hurrying
across the embankment to the kulcha shop
and heard the labourers pushing the overloaded carts
to mutual exhortations
across the slush of the broken pavement.
Down a flight of steps
the samovar was ever ready
with hot moghal chai and sweet kulchas.
In the evening in the big room,
wrapped in blankets over our pherans,
new kangris with painted wickerwork were started,
and as we waited for father to return from work
we listened to grandfather's tales
and the conversation between mother, aunt, and
grandmother
from the kitchen.
The dinner done by the faint light of the electric bulb
we heard the day's accounting
as the thalis were cleaned with saudust and ash.
When my feet were cold
my father took them under his blanket
and warmed them with the warmth of his own feet.
Who knew then that decades later a terror will come to
Srinagar
and I will be unable to see my home where I was born
where we had played cowries on many new snows.
The terrorists want us to bury our past
forget the deeds of our ancestors.
We are banished because we remember
tales that grandfathers told us
because we remember
our story.

7.0 CHILAI KALAN

The pheran, the blanket, and the kangri
barely warmed the bones during the forty days of Chilai Kalan.
The icy air poured in from the drafty windows.
Each bed was like a tent: we slept completely covered.
When the morning broke we heard the sounds from the kitchen
mother making tea on the smoky stove
father saying his prayers after his bath in icy water.
When he had finished it was time to roll up our beds
and assemble around the breakfast sheet.
There was only one blazing kangri.
We took turns to cook the coldest part of the body:
feet, stomach, face, or hands
and waited anxiously for mother to make hot lunch
sitting cross-legged at our book desks
pretending to revise our class notes
or playing cards made out of cigarette boxes.
In the afternoon the washerman staggered in
with the pile of laundry on his head.
And then the middleman with his horoscopes
seeking mother's advice about suitable girls
with discrete gossip about many relatives.
My sisters made countless pots
of kehva and sheer chai.
It was then that I learned to sit still
listening to stories about a hundred different people
perched on my seat wrapped in blankets.
Visitors gone mother began humming tunes
as she did her knitting
and how we longed for spring!

8.0 CROSSING THE VITASTA

As the bus passes by the bridge near the Shankaracharya Hill
I must decide on the way to cross the Vitasta to be at our new home.
Up Lambert Lane past my uncle's old apartment
the Bund is full of tourists on a summer evening
the brides, looking picture perfect in their finery
with hennaed hands, wearing low saris
husbands walking stiffly by
and college girls in groups rushing in and out of stores
hoping to catch the eyes of young men.
Past the houseboats
and the handicraft and carpet shops
where tourists are still buying souvenirs
one last time before they leave next morning.
we sip tea in the courtyard at Ahdoo's.
As the shadows lengthen on the river
we hurry to the landing
and cross the river in darkness.
The doongas on the other side are dimly lit
the beautiful hanji women have suspended their war
of oaths and curses for the night
we carefully pick our way across the steep embankment
through the streets past the chimes of
the silhouetted temple.
The children are doing their homework
father is reading newspaper, mother sends me out
to buy vegetables as a guest will come to dinner.

9.0 JOURNEY INTO THE HIMALAYAS

Remember the embers
the fire fighting sleep
the wind springing up like a ghost violated
the tent beating its elephant flaps
forgotten maps
the waters' easy laughter
you and me
our intimacy.
Must the tramp stamp his way
through the pines
incarnations of our long-lost brothers
they have waited so long
that their memory sleeps.
When they awake
we shall be deep in slumber.
remember
Morning wakes up so languorous
the smouldering fire in flesh
the chant of birds
grass blue with dew
eyelids flutter and a smile
floats across the raw air
let the tin-warming begin
and then the brushing of hair.
Does a mountain talk?
Up the paths on the curves
in the clearings the tumescent earth
and big broken teeth of rock
lie here and there
and beyond the grass and the lichen
of the lower slopes
one can see the meditating face
of the mountain-- eyes closed
noble forehead firm nose
and during rains one can hear
the fremitus in its chest.
Have you bared your body
to some mountain stream
kissed its froth
let it rub your back
and stood free with your friend
in your large bathing field--
how haltingly does warmth return?
And when it has spread
and we are but names again
it is time to tread
the ribbon on the hill.
After the descent of clouds
the rain comes crashing down.
The ponies are shivering wet

their big sad eyes turned inwards
and a brown field mouse is smelling its way
back to its flooded hole.
Will it miss its tribe
and go searching to the river bank?
Seasons work a magic, the roots
clutch and drag at the slipping earth
and join the pine cones and sheep droppings
and scorpions being flushed down the slope.
Why must water fashion and destroy
give strength to lemmings on their last march
the wind dry and freeze
the sun warm and burn
the earth support and inter
why must entropy ever increase.
And yet new forms scream their beginnings
in the muddy bloody spring.
Who will their dirges sing
who will dig their homes in the slush of snow
or make them fires in the clearings in the woods?
That light on the hillside is no star
the shepherd must be talking to his wife
exchanging memories through words and otherwise
for each wears the smells of a hundred days
butter sweat urine other fluids
damp of the earth
curries herbs and smoke
for why should he revoke
and the camp ever so gently breathes.
Do you hear the whine of the darkness
and beard sprouting through the skin?
As the night softly smooths its sheets
no bears around no fearful sound
the body lying peacefully on the ground
why does the mind insist on a second journey
along the path well-trod by our tired limbs.
Fire and air
water and earth
are aplenty on the Himalayas.
Yet the mind rushes over early ghosts
school and father
friends and mother
car and clothes
and makes its way to the mountain hospice.
It is indeed unnecessary:
we are ourselves
we are ourselves
we are ourselves.
we remember.

10.0 ISHBAR EVENINGS

Evening brings you to the magic circle of its sound:
the chirping of chicks, hens clucking,
the little stream jumping down the rocks,
the alarm in the koel's call,
the muffled footsteps of young girls
the clang of my grandmother's wooden sandals
as she shuffles up the incline,
the ringing bells from the altar,
the repetition of holy names,
and the deep call of the boatman
that echoes from the hilltops.
Sweet, warm smells from the bakery waft up
and we are served sugared green tea
with cinnamon, cardamom and almonds
sitting on rugs in the verandah facing the altar.
The lake begins to prepare for repose
as the last shikaras slide on the surface
punctuated by the dull sounds of the oars.
On rainy evenings the water sloshes down
along new channels from down the hill's slope
and spouts out of a thousand little crevices on the surface
bringing the boil from the secret chambers of the mountain.
And I wobble on my wooden sandals
over deep mud
to get the corn for our chickens
shivering as the cold wind gathers
under my loose shirt.
In the sacred spring the fishes
prance unperturbed,
and the crows linger forlornly
on the ancient stones.
Birds, fishes, animals on the slope
have no regrets
they fear only for their survival,
we are burdened by our old memories.

11.0 PONY RIDE IN THE LIDDAR VALLEY

Across the wooden bridge
through fern trees
the pony walks on the outer edge of the track
a hairbreadth away from the foamy torrent.
We passed gujars
on the way to high pastures
camped on trackside clearings.
Young boys herded goats,
skipping amongst the rocks
they hawked goat-milk cakes.
Beyond the camping ground of Aru
we followed the stream's course
through smooth grassy slopes
full of wild flowers
till we reached the snowbridge
of Liddarwat.
A lone butterfly
had accompanied us.

12.0 VIEWS OF HARMUKH

There are many views of Haramukh:
every point in Kashmir
shows a different face.
We went to Wangat
near the ruins of the ancient temple
we camped in the clump of walnut trees,
by a babbling brook,
and readied for the mile-high climb.
Before the morning mist had melted
we took the vertical sheep track
around wild rose and fern
resting at each step
until hours later we came by the birch trees.
At the end of the climb
Haramukh rose to the left
dressed in ice
and we marched to the Gangabal lake
pilgrimage to forefathers.

13.0 MY FATHER IN HAWAII

The gardens in Kaimuki recall childhood dreams:
water, sand
black crater of diamond head
like the mountain over the Dal Lake
and the little stream behind the apartment
seems like the shrunken Apple River
the fence preventing the exploration
of the lock in its way
before it meets the big water.
The park atop St. Louise Heights
with its pine trees
cool breeze
and the bowl of Manoa at our feet
like the clumps of trees
beyond the clearing of Gopadri hill.
Walking up and down the hillside above our home
was like a little pilgrimage
to the goddess of the isles
a sister to the sparrow goddess
of our old city.
We searched for him
on Haleakala
asked goddess Pele
who breathes fire and lava
drove over the winding mountains of Maui
searched again in the beaches at Lanikai
amongst the surfers at Waikiki
at the reefs of Hanauma bay
on the warrior boat
pulled by synchronized oars
returning past sunset.
The children are dazed
grasping hands
and a wail---
deeper than sorrow or regret---
emerged from the hollow of my heart.
My mother cried for months and said:
A light joined another light
in Hawaii.

PART II – TEN THOUSAND YEARS OF SOLITUDE

14.0 THE FIRE IN THE WATERS

1.

In the bowl of the mountain valley
after the arctic storm
the pipes are frozen
and the electric wires are down
we wait

 expectantly
for the day to warm
peeping through the heavy air.

2.

I see the farmer's daughter
walk up the ribbon on the slope
a pitcher atop her head
perfectly balanced as she walks
from the spring to her home.

3.

On that frigid wintry day
the fire in the belly of the spring
is another sign of life.

4.

Inside the hospice
friends pour
fiery arrack
or light tea
our spirits are low
so we warm our bodies.

5.

Later, we walk to the pond
the surface of this bowl
is a frosted mirror
our reflections are shadows
but we recognize
a glow.

15.0 RECORDS OF OUR LIVES

What do we do with our memories, do we trust them completely, or do we make recordings of each moment we live, and keep a diary for all thoughts? Then we can audit each recall, and if we should forget or get amnesia, we can go back to the books and relive our days moment by moment refresh any period of choosing. But what if someone should steal my memories and take my past for his own? Will the thief become my twin or can I sue him for faking his past? But what if he believes his new memories completely? And how can I be certain that my recordings are accurate and not transposed with some other? How shall we find the truth or does it matter whose memories these are anyway? On the other hand, if we trust our memories and accept that we do suppress moments of youthful indiscretions how do we know that what the others say about us is false? Maybe, we broke the law several times so is it best to own up and confess? Can memories return prompted by the dreams of others or be dredged up by clever psychologists? Are we responsible for our memories? Should they be all nice and clean? Can we borrow or buy good ones? And if memories don't matter, then how do we define ourselves? How is our responsibility measured? If our memories are forced by those around us, how much of credit is theirs? Where is our freedom?

16.0 THREADS

When feelings are reasoned
the pain of no-feeling
soaks you
the pain
of no-feeling mocks you
and your organs burn
your cells melt
in that acid.
Ah must one burn
in one's own fire?
A question is best answered
by another question.
I have had the same dreams
for ten years
same images have haunted me
same fears oppressed.
Yogin sits at the balcony
trying to tell the passersby
she is lonely
through telepathy.
Did I hear her right?
I must examine the dregs of her tea
see her picture in a mirror
measure her shadow
read my mantra a million times
over her hair
yes she is full of desire
but soon she will tire.
A silent shriek shakes me up
I see the wraith of the village pig
I rush to the slaughter field
where the pig lies feet bound mouth muzzled
his screams rend the air
the four ape-men in loin-cloth do not hear
they are sharpening their knives
to make meat for their wives.
I fast this evening
but instead of communion with the pig's soul
I let my thoughts roam
till they stop by Anand's daughter
sixteen year old worshiper at my temple.
She is onyx to my touch
so I tell her of mysteries
of being and emptiness.
I have so much of desire
that desire itself is my fulfillment.

17.0 ASK KRISHNA

Why must one choose between
heaven and earth
balance yin and yang
and knowing maya yet desire
why can't one be both
here and there
please this and that
be calm and angry
and if that cannot be
why not be neither here
nor there?

Trishanku did it.

We are alive in spite of ourselves
we have seen torsos breathing
for legs arms eyes ears
smell speech
do not make a man.

We just exist

we cannot perceive ourselves.

Let us not try lifting mounts
on little fingers.

It is futile

speaking of our nature

ask Godel.

Death swallows the earth

death swallows the hearth

the earth buries the dead

the dead haunt the earth

the earth gives birth

like serpents in one circle

cycles are endless.

Ask Krishna Buddha Abhinav Gandhi

or ask the beggar in the street

or ask me.

18.0 THE CONDUCTOR OF THE DEAD

1

I am not what I look
I am my ghost.
When I was dead
my soul was rejected
in heaven and hell
and finally driven
to the refuge of my bones.

2

We are beautiful for we die
Once time had halted its flight
one moment was a thousand years
I was dust, O I was an idea
how I longed to be again in flesh
for I haven't felt enough
not enough
and when my frozen body thawed
with the stirrings of life
it was ecstasy.

3

And speech was born of silence.
Freedom may be a prison
yet stillness does not revel
in stillness
does not revel
in the throbbings of a heart
but who wants beauty
so let me sing a song
let me roll a stone
let me chime a bell.

4

I drink defeat everyday like my breakfast milk.
This morning when I awoke
blots of white sunlight dotted my room.
I scattered my night clothes all around my bed
yet the plates on the table
were neatly arranged
the furniture in the room
was all in its proper places
our house in the town was

...

I could not eat my breakfast.

5

The birds fled when I came
I had no knife
and I offered seed with my hands
the birds still kept away
and my arms got tired and I let go.
The scattered grain sprouted plants

with little white flowers---
what a harvest of lilies.

6

The last phoenix
sailed serenely to the fire
to burn
to turn into ashes
and rise again
youthful and chaste.
As it neared the fire and closed
its eyes for the plunge
it felt itself rudely swept
away--its throat firmly squeezed
that sure was no rebirth--
someone had cut its wings.
The phoenix still lies
at the same place
unmoving, unfeeling
not alive, nor dead
its life is in its eyes
that slowly move
and scan the skies.
The fire nearby
is long extinguished.

7

I sat on the railing
warming my bones in the winter sun.
On my eyelashes the sunbeams broke
into a million gossamer globes
and soon ants were crawling all over the place.
They came floating in
like the fragrance of death
and ate through my desires.

19.0 A WOUNDED BIRD

1

You said I was a bird with a broken wing. I am afraid that when you have nursed me to health I might fly away.

2

The sadness in your eyes haunts me. When you have given me life and I take my lonely flight (Can I help that?) will it not break your heart? Why do you breathe life into me, when it will be the death of both of us?

3

Do not grieve at my stony face. My heart warms to your every smile, every touch. I almost feel the strength to fly. Shall I get well and lose you?

4

That I love you is clear since I ask you for nothing. I would love you even if you went away leaving my wing bleeding.

5

I feel guilty that my condition made you interrupt your play. No, you have hung around me for many days now, stroking my feathers, dressing my wounds. Can I ever repay you?

6

You have whispered in my ears that I look so weak and wan that you must help me. And what patience! I haven't spoken, you still console me with your beautiful words.

7

Don't you realize that you are wasting your youth on a bird with shrivelled limbs when your garden is full of handsome admirers? They know many clever games to amuse you.

8

I admit I have called you sometimes with my cries.

9

In your absence your image has lain with me. The shadow of your soft hand has warmed my feathers in the cold nights.

10

Shall I get well and live with
you in a gilded cage woven
by your deft fingers
or shall I paint your form
on these rocks before I fly off?

20.0 THE RIDDLE OF ISHA

All that moves has a secret:
the spirit envelops the bones
and when you yield
you win without greed.
Regrets of a hundred years
weigh us down
unless we know the dance.
We are led to darkness
if we don't recognize the image
we saw as children.
That which never stirs
is very swift
we can't chase it down with thoughts
it will stop when one stands still.
It moves and moves not
its eye surrounds
reflects
overpowers with its magic.
This is a strange walk
to the darkness of the vault
and when we soar
the darkness beyond
the horizon in the west
is more intense.
If one could journey
to the secret of the smile
pleasures will come
without the seed of sorrow
detachment will fall
without emptiness.
Can we jump
beyond the golden disk
remember the deeds
there is
no other.

21.0 PATANJALI'S SONG

1. The First Season

The first season is the provocation to gather
and to fly
we shall yoke our bones
to see the centre of cyclones
eye to eye
Five winds stroke and roar
and bathe the life on our green
the plants bear different fruit
their beginnings were similar though.
At night the cry is enclosed in voidness
when the eye remembers.
The season mellows into a warm glow
the leaves rustle to the breathings of the earth.
My equus shakes for me to stroke it to get still
it has no wish to drink
I know we have to stop to think
as we streak through the woods.
There is another gait when we glide
when I am going with the wind.
My friends break their horses differently
but we are all expert horsemen.
You may ride hard or mild
if you have learned from the master gamesman.
The master rides unconcerned
perfect in his knowledge of the season
and its moods
he fills the green with his music
and word.
We know the harmony of our journey
as ripe fruits fall
and a chill creeps upon us.
We run along for warmth
the lake is almost still
breathing with its waves.
We feel the pleasant warmth of the season
the light of joy
we have seen the dream of the sun
we know the lesson of the evening
we have heard the music of the dance.
The reins float
flowing with the movement of the horse
like fish in the wake of a powerful ship.
How pure is our memory now
how beautiful are the flowers
small and big orchids
a tribute to the gardener's art.
The winds are hushed now
the season in its golden prime
the grass is green with gloss

if this was once a desert
the first flower must have bloomed in awesome glory.

2. The Garner's Rites

Gautama bends at the wheel
clearing the spokes
of dirt, grease, rust, mud and rain.
Dust courses about at the prayerfield
blurring the shine of the car's top
crows caw
and fire leaps up beating against fire
the wood crackles.
The wheel moves like a windmill
turned by the fire
the garners walk on the circular track
grinding the earth into fine dust
beating their drums
keeping in step with the turning wheel.
Dancing is the first rite
the shaft turns
a little faster now.
The fire leaps up and crawls about
visible and beyond the flame
observed by the priest in his crystal
it changes colour
as the rites go on.
The meaning of the song lies not in words
the singer does not know the language
he has given the breath.
He now quickens the steps
he is the seven time master
of the tournament
of the eight fold dance.
The first figure is moving back and forth
lightly gliding.
The second is to swing neatly
without impeding other dancers
who may shake after their own fashions.
The dancer sees his own movement
form a pretty ripple on the wave
his step appears to force the others
the energy unimpaired
movement flowing by its nature.
The ballet's intensity increasing
the steps in harmony
faces showing ecstasy
bodies springing over the ground
music is the master now
with its invitation to flying.
The postures hang in the air
like a galloping horse reined in
the double causes no torment.

The beat of the drum is unceasing
and the dancers float about
with the wheel's revolutions.
There is a lessening of the burden of the bones
the flesh is fit for gathering
each garner is like a strong machine
poised for the flying leap.

3. The Song Of Power

A shape emerges out of the leavings
and a current courses through the form
filling him up with power.
Other shapes now arise
each glowing in translucent palpitation
with an unhurried elegance
their speech is forced
by their inner power
it is loud and clear
their breathing deep.
Forms change
as currents find new channels
like water bursting when it is dammed too long
like trees growing and shedding leaves
driven by their inner warmth.
The shape utters many animal sounds
sees own birth
knows the constitution
of life
and lo here he becomes unseen
moving and listening like the air.
He knows when he will kiss the worms
his face shows intense feeling.
He is strong like an elephant
he sees afar
he has the knowledge of the earth
of the stars
of their motions.
He knows the centre of desire
he can cease hunger
he can sit unmoving.
He sees his brother within him
truly he has power
he has solved the puzzle of the mind
of the taste of pleasure
of its essence.
There are more diversions.
He can change his shape
float on water
become luminescent.
He has heard the sound of his heart
he can fly
emerge in his pristine nakedness

refine his strength
to adamantine hardness.
He is a great athlete
master of his body
he can move it like his mind
he mirrors things.
Power has many attendants
and many demands.
Can we measure the pulse of power
know its pace and form
all its moods
its aloneness?

4. Flying

Happiness is a bird flying.
The gardener has grafted peaches on the appletree
the fruits hang side by side
the birds feast on them together
the same ants walk them.
Birds are flying away
at an unchanging height
sometimes they vanish in the haze
sometimes they look like foils
Flying in echelons.
The leader looks like the last
each held in position by the formation
always between two movements
fixed while moving.
Fixity to flying and back to fixity is the law
but rest and motion are mysteries
the bird flies
yet it moves not.
Only space flows
for a bird cannot see itself
and reflection can have more reflections too.
The lonely bird takes its place in the flock
its position so well defined
so much combined
that the flock is like one flying monster
later the bird is again alone.
Clouds may trick our vision
the lonely bird cares not for hazards
no sleep assails its limbs
its flight is full
its flight-field the sky.
A speck in space
soon free of its companions
perfect master of its flight.

22.0 THE HIDDEN PATH UP THE HILL

Autumn leaves and broken branches cover this path
and it breaks off at several places
winding around huge rocks
and over little streams
where one must jump over mossy boulders.
At the end of the climb
is a bowl-like depression
with the softest grass---
sheltered by a huge canopy of branches
extending beyond the rock edge.
I have spent many afternoons at this cove
breathing its jasmine air
listening to the pigeons
and the gurgle of the rivulet.
The explorers have heard of this cove,
they are looking for diamonds
they will blast their way up.
They will never find it.

23.0 INNER SARASVATI

A river named Sarasvati
dried up four thousand years ago
in the plains of India
when the rubble of earthquakes
blocked its path.
The priests took their chantings to another ford
and declared
that the old stream still flows underground.
There is another Sarasvati
that flows through our minds
irrigating the inner landscape.
Will the faith and anger of the believers
dry up this river?

24.0 NAMING THINGS

We seize things and name them
but the names keep slipping away.
What goes
is the cow
the earth
the sun and the moon
the rays of the sun.
Each name hides a story.
Are these stories like dreams
accounts of other worlds?
Or are they forgotten tales
that bubble up in the chambers
of our memories.
Words soar
nesting secretly
with their mates.

25.0 ON HIGH DESERT

It was a summer evening
the sun had set
we were still many miles
from our camp
in the high desert.
The moon was full
and the cacti shimmered in the pale light
until we saw two eyes
peering from behind the bush.
One eye of the wolf shone fiercely
the other was calm.
We drove on over canyons
and through ancient mountains
till we reached Taos
still connected to its Indian roots
and we saw a temple
to a flying hero.

26.0 A SMALL BEGINNING

We wish our creations
to have sensations.
But can a robot smile?
And style is soon exhausted
words become vacuous,
like the clangings of a rock
in a jar,
the soul in the picture escapes
when you see it often enough.
Parrots talk
apes rage
pigeons find their homes
across wide seas
snakes slither
elephants remember.
Robots merely repeat
words and images fail.

27.0 UNCOVERING

In our beginnings
is our meaning hidden.
But our coverings
hide us from ourselves.
The end of our journeys
is to see ourselves
in our true form.
Sleepy
with the warmth of the covers
it feels easier
just to watch
to know and not to be the one
who gets transformed.
The king saw Urvashi
by the lightening in the sky.
Disrobed
she could not be caught;
this is what the king found.

28.0 SEEKING ANSWERS

Never ignore
The gatekeepers of secret spaces;
they demand homage.
Each survival
rests on some
destruction
excepting that of endless images
spawned between mirrors.
If you seek answers
hold on to the rope:
you might gain a life.
The seed carries the tree's secrets.
The world is a game
of information and paradox.
Gods and women love
what is mysterious.

29.0 NACHIKETA'S DUAL

Sorrowing for his father
Nachiketa fasted for three nights
and his dual spoke:
There is a path
narrow as a razor's edge
that leads to a landscape
where the sun does not shine
nor the moon and the stars
nor these lightnings
and much less this fire.
Here is an upside-down tree
with the leaves resting on the ground
climb it to the roots
till you find the seed.
Take a chariot for your journey
the driver will know the answer.

30.0 QUANTUM IMPLICATIONS

Crawling the tear between being and becoming
our exertions create vibrations
that ease the path
and change time past.
If the past is made of stone
how can there be any freedom
in our becoming?
We make history when we observe
the slashing of the fabric
of time past and time future
opens the window on freedom.
Connections bind us
from time to non-time
beyond the seven sounds
of rivers
bells
brazen vessels
wheels of carriage
croakings of frogs
rain
the echo in the cavern.

31.0 CHANCE AND NECESSITY

Time or nature, chance or necessity?

Ripened by time

driven by nature

harried by fate

we seek our meanings.

The inner eye is fixed

where the fire is rubbed

the wind is checked.

The snarer rules alone---

there is no second---

it is a living presence

grasping without hands

hasting without feet

in different forms---

a dark blue bee

a green parrot

with red eyes.

What is the chance

that one can roll up the sky

like a hide?

32.0 A BOY AND HIS DOG

The boy hunted with his faithful dog.
They sought spaces beyond the jungle
stamped new trails
swam in forest ponds
chased birds across flowering pastures
winked at death.
Why should I be afraid, the boy asked.
Alive, we think about the time
when we are no more
when the roses have been replaced by silk
when the earth has lost its fragrance
when the shadow has fallen.
We are the walking dead.
He played with guns
and he died of a gunshot.
At the funeral his mother consoled
the mourners on their own losses.
The dog searched for the boy everywhere
and with each new day he became weaker.
His life ebbed out
with the eleventh moon.
The mother took the body at night
to the cemetery
and buried it
next to the boy.