

Mehraab

meh-raab / *adj.* 1. Arch 2. Where one stands seeing the struggle within



Harsh Singh Lohit

Landscape, Ladakh.

For Heaven was filled with gladness for Earth's sake,
Knowing Lord Buddha thus was come again.

The Light of Asia, Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908.





Confluence of Indus & Zaskar rivers, Ladakh.

Our life is shaped by our mind, we become what we think.
Suffering follows an evil thought as the wheels of a cart follow
the oxen that draw it.
Our life is shaped by our mind, we become what we think. Joy
follows a pure thought like a shadow that never leaves..

Changla Pass at 18,000 feet, Ladakh.

The Noble Eightfold Path; it goes straight
To peace and refuge. Hear!

Manifold tracks lead to yon sister-peaks
Around whose snows the gilded clouds are curled;
By steep or gentle slopes the climber comes
Where breaks that other world.

"The Light of Asia", Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908.





Sunrise at Sanur, Bali, Indonesia.

Lo! The Dawn
Sprang with Buddh's victory! lo! In the East
Flamed the first fires of beauteous day, poured forth
Through fleeting folds of Night's black drapery.
Of that high Dawn which came with victory
That, far and near, in homes of men there spread
An unknown peace.

Tomb of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, Delhi.

Mo ko kahan dhunro bande

O Servant, where dost thou seek me?
Lo! I am beside thee.
I am neither in temple nor in mosque:
I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash:
Neither am I in rites and ceremonies, nor in yoga and
renunciation.
If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt meet Me in a moment of time.
Kabir says, "O Sadhu! God is the breath of all breath"

"The Songs of Kabir", Translated by Rabindranath Tagore. 1915





Sunset at Keoladeo bird sanctuary, Bharatpur.

Hard it is to train the mind, which goes where it likes and does what it wants. But a trained mind brings health and happiness. The wise can direct their thoughts, subtle and elusive, wherever they choose: a trained mind brings health and happiness.

"The Dhammapadam", Translated by Eknath Easwaran. 1986.

Spider web at Keoladeo bird sanctuary, Bharatpur.

For now I know, by what within me stirs,
That I shall teach compassion unto men
And be a speechless world's interpreter.

"The Light of Asia", Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908.





Spider web (2) at Keoladeo bird sanctuary, Bharatpur.

In this dark world, few can see. Like birds that free themselves from the net, only a few find their way to heaven. Swans fly on the path of the sun by their wonderful power; the wise rise above the world, after conquering Mara and his train.

"The Dhammapadam", Translated by Eknoth Easwaran. 1986.

Tughlaqabad Fort, Delhi.

There is no fire like lust, no sickness like hatred, no sorrow like separateness, no joy like peace. No disease is worse than greed, no suffering worse than selfish passion. Know this, and seek nirvana as the highest joy.

"The Dhammapadam", Translated by Eknath Easwaran. 1986.



Khirki Masjid, Delhi.

Learn what is right; then teach others, as the wise do. Before trying to guide others, be your own guide first. It is hard to learn to guide yourself. Your own self is your master; who else could be? With yourself well controlled, you gain a master very hard to find.

"The Dhammapada", Translated by Eknath Easwaran. 1986.



Madhi Masjid at sunset, Delhi.

Tirath Mein to Sab Pani Hai

There is nothing but water at the holy bathing places; and I know that they are useless, for I have bathed in them.
The images are lifeless, they cannot speak; I know, for I have cried aloud to them.
The Purana and the Koran are mere words; lifting up the curtain, I have seen.
Kabir gives utterance to the words of experience; and he knows very well that all other things are untrue.

"The Songs of Kabir", Translated by Rabindronath Tagore. 1915.





Madhi Masjid front at sunset. Delhi

S'unta Nahin Dhun Ki Khabar

The Kazi is searching the words of the Koran, and instructing
Others: but if his heart be not steeped in that love, what does it avail, though he be a
teacher of men?

The Yogi dyes his garments with red: but if he knows naught of that color or love, what does
it avail though his garments be tinted?

Kabir says: " Whether I be in the temple or the balcony, in the camp or in the flower garden,
I tell you truly that every moment my Lord is taking His delight in me."

Madhi Masjid front (2) at sunset, Delhi.

Na Jane Sahab Kaisa Hai

I do not know what manner of God is mine.
The Mullah cries out aloud to Him: and why? Is your Lord deaf? The subtle anklets that ring on the feet of an insect when it moves are heard of Him.
Tell your beads, paint your forehead with the mark of your God, and wear mated locks long and showy: but a deadly weapon is in your heart, and how shall you have God?





Dargah of Nizamauddin Aulia at sunset, Delhi.

Jo Khuda Masjid Vasat Hai

If God be within the mosque, then to whom does this world belong?
If Ram be within the image which you find upon your pilgrimage,
then who is there to know what happens without?
Hari is in the East: Allah is in the West. Look within your
Heart, for there you will find both Karim and Ram;
All the men and women of the world are His living forms.
Kabir is the child of Allah and of Ram: He is my Guru, He is my Pir.

"The Songs of Kabir", Translated by Rabindranath Tagore. 1915.

Sultan Garhi masjid, Delhi.

Pray not! The darkness will not brighten! Ask
Nought from the Silence, for it cannot speak!
Vex not your mournful minds with pious pains!
Ah! Brothers, Sisters! Seek
Nought from the helpless gods by gifts and hymn,
Nor bribe with blood, nor feed with fruits and Cakes;
Within yourself deliverance must be sought;
Each man his own prison makes.

"The Light of Asia", Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908





Sultan Garhi masjid (2), Delhi.

"The traditions examined in this volume reflect a remarkable double-movement. On the one hand, one clearly sees their interaction with, and embeddedness with in, particular sub-cultures of South Asia, such that by the end of our period {1750 AD} Islam had become as Indian as any other religious tradition of the subcontinent. Yet, at the same time, one sees their connectedness with a world wide religious community..."

"India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750", Richard M Eaton. 2003.

Khirki Masjid, Delhi.

Learn what is right; then teach others, as the wise do. Before trying to guide others, be your own guide first. It is hard to learn to guide yourself. Your own self is your master; who else could be? With yourself well controlled, you gain a master very hard to find.

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Begumpuri Masjid, Delhi.

I'll tell you the truth, O brahmin, if I make so bold.
These idols in your temple - these idols have grown old.
From them you have learned hatred of those who share your life,
And Allah to His preachers has taught mistrust and strife;
Disgusted from your temple and our shrine I have run,
Now both our preachers' sermons and your old myths I shun.
In shapes of stone you fancied God's dwelling-place: I see
In each speck of my country's poor dust, a deity.
Come, let us lift this curtain of alien thoughts again,
And reunite the severed, and wipe division's stain:
Too long has lain deserted the hearts' arm habitation:
Let us build in this homeland a new temple's foundation!
And let our shrine be taller than all shrines of this globe,
With lofty pinnacles touching the skirts of heaven's robe:
And there at every sunrise let our sweet chanting move
The hearts of all who worship, and pour the wine of love:
Strength and peace too shall blend in the hymns the votary sings,
For in love lies salvation to all earth's living things.

"Naya Shivala", Mohammad Iqbal (1873-1938).



Khirki masjid (2), Delhi.

I looked upon every Cross, in every Church
 yet He was not there.
 I went to the temples of India
 and the shrines of China
 yet He was not there.
 I searched the mountains of Herat and Candahar
 yet He was not there.
 I scaled the distant peak of Mount Qaf
 only to find
 the empty nest of Phoenix.
 I visited the Ka'be
 but He was not in the sacred site
 amidst pilgrims young and old.
 I read the books of Avicenna
 but His wisdom went beyond all the words.
 I went to the highest court,
 within the distance of "two bow-lengths,"
 But He was not there.

Then I looked within my own heart
 and there I found Him -
 He was nowhere else.



Tomb of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, Delhi.

It is easy to see the faults of others, we winnow them like chaff. It is hard to see our own: we hide them as a gambler hides a losing draw. But when one keeps dwelling on the faults of others, his own compulsions grow worse, making it harder to overcome them.



Offerings at Gunung Kawi, Bali. Indonesia.

Then the World-honoured spake: 'Pity and need
Make all flesh kin. There is no caste in blood,
Which runneth of one hue, nor caste in tears,
Which trickle salt with all; neither comes man
To birth with tilaka-mark stamped on the brow,
No sacred thread on neck. Who doth right deed
Is twice-born, and who doeth ill deeds vile'.

"The Light of Asia", Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908.



Tomb of Isa Khan, Humayun's tomb complex, Delhi.

My world! Oh, world!
I hear! I know! I come!

"The Light of Asia", Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908.

Ruins of monastery, Sarnath.

Then Sorrow ends, for Life and Death have ceased;
How should lamps flicker when their oil is spent?
The old sad count is clear, the new is clean;
This hath a man content.

"The Light of Asia", Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908.





Candles at Dharmarajika stupa, Sarnath.

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Candles at monastery, Sarnath.

Thus the Buddha spoke to his father Shuddhodhana. "Father, which is the greater ruler: he who rules a kingdom through power, or he who rules the whole world through love? Your son, who renounced a crown, has conquered all, for he has conquered an enemy before whom all bow. I have brought you a treasure no other can offer: the Dharma, an island in an uncertain world, a lamp in darkness, a sure path to a realm beyond sorrow.

"The Dhammapadam", Translated by Eknath Easwaran. 1986.





Offerings at Dharmek Stupa, Sarnath.

Going about with matted hair, without food or bath, sleeping on the ground smeared with dust, or sitting motionless – no amount of penance can help a person whose mind is not purified. But one whose mind is serene and chaste, whose senses are controlled and whose life is nonviolent – such a one is a true Brahmin, a true monk, even if he wears fine clothes.



Offerings at Gunung Kawi, Bali. Indonesia.

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Make all flesh kin. There is no caste in blood,
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Buddhist monastery and village, Ladakh.

'My world! Oh, world! I hear! I know! I come!'

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Khirki masjid (2), Delhi.

I looked upon every Cross, in every Church
 yet He was not there.
 I went to the temples of India
 and the shrines of China
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Rooftop of Hemis monastery, Ladakh.

The Prince Siddartha sighed. 'Is this,' he said,
'That happy earth they brought me forth to see?'

"The Light of Asia", Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908.

Buddhist chorten, Ladakh.

All the effort must be made by you: Buddhas only show the way.

"The Dhammapadam", Translated by Eknath Easwaran, 1986.



Dharmekh stupa, Mrigadaya (Deer Park), Sarnath.

For now I know, by what within me stirs,
That I shall teach compassion unto men
And be a speechless world's interpreter.

"The Light of Asia", Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908.



Ancient sculpture, Sarnath.

Those who recite many scriptures but fail to practice their teachings are like cowherds counting another's cows. They do not share in the joys of spiritual life. But those who know few scriptures yet practice their teachings, overcoming all lust, hatred, and delusion, live with a pure mind in the highest wisdom. They stand without external supports and share in the joys of the spiritual life.

"The Dhammapadam", Translated by Eknath Easwaran. 1986.





Bodhi Tree, Sarnath.

The Bodhi-tree (thenceforward in all years
Never to fade, and ever to be kept
In homage of the world), beneath whose leaves
It was ordained the Truth should come to Buddh:
Which now the master knew; wherefore he went
With measured pace, steadfast, majestic,
Unto the Tree of Wisdom. Oh, ye worlds!
Rejoice! Our Lord wended unto the Tree!

"The Light of Asia", Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908.

Dharmekh stupa, Mrigadaya (Deer Park), Sarnath.

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"The Light of Asia", Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908.





Sculpture, Sarnath.

*Sabba papassa akaranan;
Kusalassa upasampada:
Sa chitta pariyodapanan;
Etaṃ Budhanusasanan.*

Evil swells the debt to pay,
Good delivers and acquits;
Shun evil, follow good; hold sway
Over thyself. This is the Way.

"The Light of Asia", Sir Edwin Arnold. 1908.



These photographs were part of the solo *Mehraab* exhibition, at *Gallerie Alternatives* in Gurgaon, Haryana. April 2005.
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*"My heart was sick: I turned away both from
the temple and the Kaaba,
From the sermons of the preacher and from
thy fairy tales, O Brahman.
To thee images of stone embody the divine
For me, every particle of my country's
dust is a deity.*

*Come, let us remove all that causes estrangement,
Let us reconcile those that have turned away from
each other, remove all signs of division."*

"Naya Shivala", Mohammad Iqbal (1873-1938)