

Annapurna Sunrise



Poems from Pokhara and Ghandruk, Nepal

by Dave Thorvald Olson

Village	3
Annapurna Sunrise	5
Buddha Annapurna	8
Holy Donkeys	9
Morning, Pokhara	10
Peaks	12
Say your name softly	13
Flood'd	15
Occasionally Free	18
Rainy Mystery Alley	20
Stupas Over Temples	22

Village

The cook pot is blackened
But you easily clean up the mess
With gritty river mud from your
Stream of consciousness

Wandering up an invisible path
Even the elders don't know it
Chasing a mysterious girl
Named after an ancient poet

I can't see her footprints
But i see her shining eye
In the constellations high
In the blue night sky

My reflection in the mountain lake
Shows me growing worn
But i blink three times quickly
And see that i'm reborn

There's wisdom plainly hidden
On the edge of mountain cliffs
Stories shared by ancients
Round campfires becoming myths
Books don't capture the secrets
For those look in teacups

In these forgotten villages
They're made of bone and marrow
Stubborn as donkey, rugged as buffalo
And giving love like sacred Amma

I always will return here
Fly high like hawk and sparrow
I won't tell you the village name
You find it when you're ready

The maps might give a clue
But not the right directions

You'll only find the magic
By following inner vision

Annapurna Sunrise

A sunrise isn't just a sunrise
Each a unique event
The dawning a new circumstance
Unknown since yesterday

Sun glances off the glaciers
Bells on buffaloes provide the song
Your own personal time lapse
Just remember how to breathe

Jagged peaks like ripsaws
Loom over soft curved paddies
Village with rocky pathways
Laid down in olden days

Ridgeline too high for goats
Who would rather look away
Down valleys filled with grasses
Occasionally a berry

Unaware of their probable fate
Just living for today
You control how long your live
Only how to live well

Each day
lived in anger and greed
Or fill each
with vast abundance

Today is not a photograph
Or another dress rehearsal
For foretold mystic afterlife
In which you are exalted master

You are given gifts each day
Of beauty, challenge and hope
Hard times bring lessons
Even when uninvited

The glowing dawn brings noises
In your tiny universe
Children resist cold washing
While grandma fill steel mugs

Buffalo and yaks are our elder siblings
Calm, strong and helpful
Giving milk and fuel each day
To their people without expectation

Maybe you'll bring them fresh hay
Maybe they'll find some alone
Unimpressed by your shiny toys and colours
Needs kept more elemental
Warmth, food and rest
Content with two as an option

Each house climbs higher
Up the mountain slope
Precarious and sturdy
Chimney's release pungent smoke

The humans slip outside
Tasks to do, gods to please
Receive blessings' beauty
Tomorrow clouds might roll back in
Savour while you are able

Cold water bath for each tiny kid
Strengthen them for future days
Serving other people's dreams
Serve but not servants

Do not mistake diligence with complacency
Free flying hawks and falcons
Wings may look like arms
The clean mind does the actual flying

Politeness is an underrated virtue
Honesty brings respect
Clockwise round the massif
Chanting all the while

Prayer bells go anti counter clockwise
Or is it the opposite?
Spin it wrong, good still comes
When done with right intentions

Buddha on the Porch

There was already a full moon
And a snowy peak behind
Then you read from Buddha
Reminding to be kind

Respect is key to happiness
Giving away is key to wealth
Think good thoughts about others
To enjoy your own fine health

Simple truths from Gautama
About the middle way
Passed down through sutras
Seekers chanting every day

I often wonder how it feels
To sit under a single tree
A seed a day towards enlightenment
The mind roams peaceful and free

In the village i wander
Maybe treading in his step
Humble confident and searching
To the other, offering help

Holy Donkeys

He's walked this path
So many times now
With others much like you
Sandals or rubber boots
Pack filled unnecessarily

Donkey trains bring water jugs
Propane to fuel cook fire
Gee and haw them along the trail
They simply follow the one in front of them

Lead mule walks by intuition and repetition
And even muscle memory
Towards the sun in the morning
Downhill in afternoon

Do they call each other cousins?
Parents, friends or kin?
Or are they a collective without ego
Ritual or sin

A collective hauling comfort
Up to rustic places
Nodding along with the rhythm
Glancing backwards at the faces

Monk chants echo through valleys
Low, soft and precise
Repeated through centuries
Many times every day

Prayer flags are amplifiers
To take noble words higher
Attenuate on a frequency
Improbable to detect by wire

Morning, Pokhara

Farmer calls his cow over
Corralled in a stonewall fence

Mother call child from the door
Time for freshwater bath

Labourers shovel broken bricks off the side
To collide with corrugated tin

Birds call each other puff splendid plumage
To show their biologic worth

The trekking guides ply for hikers
With dreams of high altitude

Cafeman tempts the passers-by
With milk tea and german pastries

Boatman sits quietly with paddle and
Ticket books to play to the lake

The German lady talks more loudly
Still convinced she'll be more understood

Dogs yap at movements as they did all night
Vigilance unnecessary in this dewy dawn

Roosters begin a ritual of announcing another day
repeat if anyone missed, well into afternoon

Trucks honk repeatedly for someone
To come open a metal gate

The black haired girl sweeps stairs
Distinct actions whisking dust before polish

The stupa gazes quietly from atop the hill
Tea houses lead the way to certain peace

The hotel open doors pleased for patrons
But remembering the days before

Annapurna and all the cousins hiding behind clouds and mist
Will only reveal when fully dressed

The lonely man seeks a barber to trim a shaggy face
To reveal a timid smile

Peaks

So many came from overseas
Seeking adrenaline and light
Colored bags filled with dreams and schemes
Forgetting to slow down right

When everyone's a guide
There's no one left to lead
There's power in independence
But more in empathy

Don't underestimate compassion
Cause when walls coming quaking down
If you've given freely
Then you always will be found

Don't think about reaching peaks
Where others have died unfulfilled
Find your own distant summit
Gaze up from the greenest field

Say your name softly

i say your name softly
hear the gracious sound
drift with my breath

i watch the sounds float
above me, towards mountains
over lakes, down rivers, across oceans
to find you when i am far

i voice the sound which
describe you, when i am weary
or afraid in need of a mantra
to strengthen me, to steele me from fear
a protective spell unburned, unheard
too sacred for others

how would another understand
an explanation, halfhearted -
how do i describe you? describe us?
to someone, anyone - in a brief phrase, a stanza, an essay
a poem

how many words required to elucidate
these two searing syllables i say
so i don't say
but i might say,
my grace, my prayer, my hymn, my exultations
my fantasy in times of pleasure
my relief in moments of panic
my security when confused
my homing beacon, signal-fire
my rescue, my escape

shall i say to them
your name loud enough to hear?

so they will assume who you are with an easy
definition, a convenient descriptor?

no i shall and will keep you mine. like Nefertiti's treasure
hidden
known only to the wisest, behind the wall
in Tutankhamen's chamber

like shards of pottery
missing from an ancient grecian antalect or decree
the space between Mile's notes,
the breath between Baker's croon
the noise behind a sonic boom

the she of my story
the only part of me
i protect without mercy
without thought
you are my essential
no compromise will i offer

You are my magician
i willingly climb into the box
to be sawed in two

there and then
i will say your name aloud
fall in with the rhythm
with each saw stroke
confidence from the obscurity
fositied by your powerful hand

i am not ashamed
but also i am not foolish
to trust my treasure
to errant mortals
to those who quickly determine
how to place you by my side

you are not for them
you are for me and for you
and for we to savour us

Flood'd

Home is something i've never known
I only how to go, go far
by train by van by thumb by plane
by my weary legs with viking calves

To be clear from grade 1 through 4
I lived in the same house
near a Guildford forest
now a shopping mall
I built tree forts with abandoned lumber

Explored burned out wreckage across the dirt lane
where i found a rusty hammer
handle charred and reason unseen

Since then, no where longer
than three years
i don't count the places
as i can't determine a criteria
what's to be included
when all is transitory

Motels for months
uninvited couch surf for a season
roommates unwanted
a parked van for happy nights

Years when tents and tarps
out-counted a solid roof room
I can light a fire in the rain
just can't put it out

Communes, communities and rest area
wooded campout national parks
thwarting eviction by limitations
by rangers claiming beachlands
as their authority

Destinations not near as important

as the ways and the means
frankly i'm not particular
but partial to somewhere calm
of transport conveyance
public or private not as interesting
as dirty or clean
and most often importantly
slow, or at least not deliberately swift
though speedy and secure will suffice

Some ramblers love airports
the commotion and details
I shut off senses and try to avoid
conversations with strangers
who looks like me
give me the awkward lost ones
the folks fumbling through
not the seasoned jaded sharpy
others can interrupt train tables
whereas i can only figure
north, south the town is leave
and when it might arrives
if overnight, make sure stops after 9
when the coffee shops are open
workers on their way
i'll pause to fill a cup with cream
stir in too much sugar
for false hope and energy

I wrote instructions for other to hitchhike
must add a disclaimer to ensure no damage
can't be held responsible for randomness
rushing highway onramps, just hold a sign

While a freighter stateroom is ideal
an empty cabin might have to do
to peer out the porthole
and see the same sea each day

Fringed by sand or trees or
ports requiring approval
inky stamps are a weakness
and to think 100 years ago

a passport was rather absurd
of course you are from elsewhere
present yourself
because they already know you are here
commit to your cover story
whether lies or truth indifferent

Just become who you say
before it catches up with you

Occasionally Free

My half life
Is the better part of me
up to you entirely
which half you want to see

Stolen library books
Or loud guitars
I exist
Somewhere in between

Diamonds and dungaree
Top floor hotels
Or a flophouse squat
Something in a middle path
On a train or out to sea

Weirdness follows along
Wherever i wander and roam
Tiniest palm islands
Or festival jamboree

Trails up mountains
Without a map
Trying to get lost
Cities with no language
Means or currency

My skills are entirely impractical
Sitting in patio cafes
Writing letters to loves i never knew
And drinking watery tea

I've minted banknotes on vellum
Carved ink stamps in balsa wood
And manufactured clandestine postage stamps
Printed in Singapore

Who will you choose when we meet
Out here on the globe

Will you recognize my face
As a friend or
Consider me an enemy

Three miles sideways
Just a couple of pals
Perhaps a lover and a best friend
Rotating walk-on characters
In a dramatic documentary comedy

Will you cast me in yours
If i perform well in your required auditions?

Scars from stingrays
A list of broken bones
Initials carved on noble trees
Scrapbooks full of secrets

I've heard of something called a home
But not sure where i left it
You ask me where i'm from "from"
I ask you where we are

Observe the world with binoculars
But a monocle shows more clear
Usually hidden behind dark glasses
To hide my joyful tears

Shortwave radio brings me
News from a decade or four ago
Explorers gone before me
Charting meandering paths
Pointing the longest way
To warmth and mystery

Maybe i can be the one
Who inspires or perhaps
Breaks you out of everyday
You are whoever you choose
As though i know
When reality suggests
I know a little except
How to be occasionally free

Rainy Mystery Alley

For reasons i don't understand myself
I dream of downtowns i will never visit
I prefer to exist in tiny villages with a
Efficient post office, perfect cafe and bakery
Next to a bookshop with stationary
Fresh pencils and inky pens
But when i try (i only try) to sleep
Rocked by tracks or waves
Or a simulation of above
I am high collared coat and
Woolen scarf
Lost in a city i am unsure about
Devoid of guidebooks or expectations
Tucking down alleys so narrow
I can touch each side
Intuition leads me to a diner or bar
With 8 seats or less
A barman asks me to finish a top-shelf bottle
So he can finally restock
Entirely impolite not to oblige
A lady en route to work asks my nervously
And tells me her real name without request
Immigrant dishwasher asks for 5 for a smoke
On the rainy stoop
Favorite music i've never heard
Faded enka ballads, and low fado bass notes
From the Arco hotel.
When i leave, only the lights gently undim,
As a gracious hint
Misty rain invariably falls
I steady with a cane rather than an umbrella
Which simply neglects the senses
Of acute tactility
Neither warm nor chill
Wool and silk release a fragrance
Of countryside hounds
And afternoon farm toil
The trousers are pressable to show again
A crisp crease and a scarf doubles as a hint

Of elegance and distracts from leather boots,
Muddies atop polish from a dirt road monsoon of
The non-fiction chapter of erstwhile reality

Stupas Over Temples

The pigeons eat the flowers
Donated to the Gods
Who despite their omnipotent powers
Request your spare change patronage

Tree trunks striped red and white
To accessorize the bark
Stumps carefully manicured
To delineate the park

The temple sits tiny
On a smaller island
Generations of monk picnics
Right there i imagine

Pollinate the land
With gravel, brick and mortar
Golden jewels removed
To keep throngs in order

Buy pellets to feed the fish
Clearly reincarnated from royal kin
And Buddha who slept there
Next to the Gentlemen's room

Hindus dotted foreheads
Don't mind another deity
Add to a pantheon of excess
Room for another at the party

But i've a question for you Gautama
As you neighbours choose to call ya
Do you really need these golden replicas
Numbered in the millions?

Buy one for the dash of your motorbike
Tattoos however are not appropriate
Unless ordered with compassion
And expressed demand and tribute

Temple something like a treehouse
The good man and i constructed in our youth
With a stack of forgotten lumber
Cut and stacked and rough hewn

Assembled with silver spikes
Forged with iron ore
Appropriate for railways
Too heavy for anything more

Thatched roof is replaced now
By hammered corrugated tin
To make the rain a mighty symphony
When monsoon comes again

The rain keeps in the bells in time
In a random time signature
Attached to roofs and railings
Brass glinting with the overture

Ducats for your blessings
Or else they don't get heard
Gongs to amplify your wishes
Coins to mend your wrongs

Gautama grew in this very neighbourhood
"Check your privilege" he'd be told
Born to a royal line
Mistaking protection for being bold

Excess and exuberance
Feasting every night
Got it out of your system
Not sure if that's alright

So you left your wife alone
I think about your baby boy
Hearing stories of his deadbeat Dad
Our seeking, simple peace and joy

Begging for enlightenment
And a pen to write it down

Seven truths and a middle path
Graceful smile, never a frown

Handed down through centuries
Ringed with gold and clay
In the shadow of a pagoda
Another one up the way

Seagulls stand watch
As the lakeside traffic guards
Tiny boats ignore their warnings
Landing on the yard

Might not be enough i fear
As rumours emerge from sky
Over shortwave transmission static
All i hear are lies

These transmissions suggest a plot
Chaos in other lands
This peace you speak about
Is it readily at hand?

Do they meditate before the fly
The plane over mountain passes?
Or just check off the list
Clean dirty bifocal glasses

Roads fully wandered
Pilgrimages to their western homes
Eighty eight sacred sites
Or a walk to touch old bones

Venerated by authority figures
Who say we're all the same
Capable of great compassion
Empty condolences are benign

Gentleness when it suits the times
Actions sequestered under words
Rituals, routines and rote memorization
Gather the flock into passive herds

Untempered by the fires
Which burn from hardwood planks
Chiseled, hewn and quartered
Identity lost in clumsy stacks

You wear your robes to designate
Dedication to the clerics
Who's chosen to keep the keys
To the sepalcure intact

In your dusty mausoleum
They gently lift the lid
Drill a hole for observation
By generations of the dead

Proud and dedicated experts
Misquoting scripture fibs
Left to interpretation
Offering explanation for what you did

They are mocked for being born
Apparently an inopportune time
Reviled for dependencies
Very intelligence undermined

Greedy forebearers mistaking
Letters for actual meaning
Scratching lines to define their times
Exaggerations on page gleaming

It's easy to be you i suppose
Born with all all the gifts
Times of abundance and plenty
Enough so you can drift

Wander deserts for forty minutes
Watch ants under banyan trees
Inspire other seekers
But ignore their basic needs

Contributions pay for paint
And brooms to sweep around
The roughage from the recluse

Leaves untidy on the ground

You should have asked a forester
Why the leaves don't fall anymore
The reasons arrive in chaos
Organic detritus feel the soil

Now we float towards
Lofty goals to celebrate
World peace in a land
Promised to be great

Swept away by murder
Just like all the rest
Reasons and justifications
Undermine the best

Rough wove robes on one side
Spangled uniforms the other
Both beholden someone
Who doesn't know their name

Be ready for inspection
Whether tomorrow or another life
Sins tip scales to one side
Subjectivity to the left

Omission defined as fuzzy
Commissions paid in full
With interest for all involved
Who tabulate the score

They mock themselves
For their own award
Chastise their own guilt
By associations with thuggery
Voted in last night

The writ will be fastened
To the iron gate out front
Read by the one in the proper hat
Privy to the blues
Abusing your only right

Growing up your forgotten son
Never sent a gift
Say "no" to all requests
For favours, tickets and forgiveness
Haunted with jaundiced fright

We float away now
Let the current take us there
Alas a lake lacks a tidal force
Of gravity's easy pull

The solution seems obvious
Construct another dam
To harness all the carnage
And catch the beavers unplanned

Diligent workers unrequited
Unprepared for the transmissions
Of coded words, plans and ruses
Written in jest spontaneously

So the lodge is interrupted
By unexpected turmoil
Flee to hide among the trees
Until it all blows over

The rooster crows
Though times well past noon
Boats land on sand nearby
A tea shop on the trail
Before walking clockwise round

A pagoda is the goal
So you kick the roundest ball
Paddle in two directions
To see which one falls

Two teas before the stupa
Looming over the lake
Shortchanged by the storekeeper
Who didn't close the gate

The hinge is rusty now
And conflict might breakout
Over a dirty bill
Made in a hidden tenement

Each one authenticated by hand
Printing pressed with hubris ink
To create current currency
To exchange for surveyed land

Cold store with warm whiskey
Drink up before you go
The clinicians won't allow inebriation
Since you've signed the pact

An edict to obey the rules
Made for someone else
When all you seek is shelter
Protection from the wind

Light a beedie and sit still
With a yak milk tea
On a short dry fit rock wall
Absence of masonry

Chairs sit empty
Under an iron roof
Paint peels but signal is strong
To notify of sacred gifts

Alerts of imminent tremors
Which shake brick houses down
Two cups of sugar ruin a ton
Of Roman cemented lime

Aqueducts replaced by distilleries
Mistresses for wife
Secrets written in large block print
Hidden in plain sight

My boots are made of leather
Though i swerve around the cows
Riprap assembled by ancients

Who decided on a stroll

My walking stick is not made for distance
Just enough to clear the rocks
To a higher vantage point
To observe encroaching fogs

Mountains obscured by smoke
Or maybe its too clear
Annapurna wants to hide her flank
From invading prying eyes

A blue Buddha stands alert
In a meditative trance
Hardened by decades
Since the last repaint

A bandage over your third eye
From where the spear tip pierced
Injecting new found wisdom
Cultured pearls of intelligence

His hands tough and wrinkled
Accustomed to a paddle
To match his purple hat
Contrasts the grey beneath

Tickets to return you
To the lakeside garden
Where dancers might amuse you
Before the band begins to play

Songs olden you suspect
Though proof remains elusive
Ankles strong in sandals
Ready for a trip

Heft your only rucksack
Holding essential things
Until the weight reaches critical
Arches your slender back
The stupa is forty five minutes uphill
Downhill, an hour and a half

Seems Siddharta borrowed
Soggy Neptune's trident
Only for a while
Prepared to protect the masses
From rogue waves
And endless toil

Massif high and foreboding
As though chiseled by neanderthals
From black obsidian rock
Into a jagged rustic tool
Sufficient to skin an ox



Photo: Bob Olson

© 2017 Dave Thorvald Olson
More: daveostory.com