

THE SACRED PLACE

This was the place. In the old days, if a fugitive reached here, he was safe.

It was a holy place.

The King had put up a wall – a great wall of black stones, high and wide – it is still there.

If you could reach that wall, you were welcomed in, because that was sacred ground,

Guarded by the Gods – whose images are still there.

It has all been restored, with a safe place for the turtles, too, and the sense of peace is right there.

Even the tourists walking round look subdued and respectful – as if they knew this was special,

Not to be violated, not to be disrespected.

It felt good just to be there. Just to know it was there

Just to know that somewhere in the world the old ways were not forgotten.

Earlier in the same day we had encountered a different kind of spirituality.

A Christian church, painted inside by the missionary, with scenes from the Bible, to teach the illiterate natives the truth.

And one scene was the feast of Belshazzar, with the ominous words written on the wall in letters of fire, and Belshazzar looking appalled and condemned

And one scene was Jesus on a mountain wrestling with Satan, and Satan was whirling through the air, thrown down by the mighty arm of Jesus

And one scene was Hell, with fire and brimstone, and people being punished for their sins, and a great Devil in charge.

And I couldn't help noticing the difference

Between two kinds of religion: Two kinds of spirituality

So that in one place I felt at peace

And in the other place it felt more like war –

An endless war with no result in sight

And I remembered the old slogan from John and Yoko years ago – “War is over, if you want it!”

And I don't know the truth of all this

I just know which of the two places I preferred.

JOHN ROWAN, February 2012