



## *Inner Harmony*

by Jon Kolkin



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### **Commentary**

What is a portrait? According to conventional wisdom, a portrait is chiefly a photograph of a person's face. Its purpose is to show us what someone looks like. Perhaps that is true, but for many (me included) what people *do* is far more interesting than what they look like. In my way of thinking, these photographs by Jon Kolkin are as much a portrait as an image that showed us the subject's face.

One of my favorite quotes (the source of which is now long lost from memory) is: *It is one thing to show us what someone looks like, but a far greater thing to show us a little bit about who they are.* Of course people are primarily what they *think* and what they *do*, but showing what someone thinks in a photograph is an unsurmountable challenge. Showing what they do is a challenge that feeds directly into photography's wheelhouse.

But of course photography's great strength and its great weakness is its ability to capture the moment. A single image is not an action. It might hint at an action, but it doesn't manifest it. Consider just the upper image in this pair. What is happening? Well, he could be flipping the page over. He could be placing a page down. He could be picking a page up, moving it to the side, peeking at the pages underneath, inserting a new page in the sequence, etc. In truth, we simply do not know. We know he is doing something, but if we need to know what that is, we are left to guess. Our guess might lead us to a variety of misinterpretations.

Now add the second image to our "portrait" and we start to understand. He appears to be wrapping the sacred texts with care. His action becomes clearer — at least we think it does.

But what if we reverse the sequence of these images and place the lower one on the top? The action changes to unwrapping the texts and then flipping through as he reads them or searches for something in the text.

Showing what someone *does* is a function of multiple moments in a specific sequence.

I often use this simple idea when I'm photographing in the field. Am I showing what they *look like*? Then my task is to find the best angle and point of view to show the important visual aspects. There is usually one best image. Am I showing what they are *doing*? Then my task is to find the sequence that demonstrates the changes over time. These two tasks likely use different techniques, and possibly even different equipment. In fact, the tools and techniques that work for one objective are often the exact opposite of the tools and techniques that are required for the other. Knowing your objective makes it much easier to be prepared with the right camera, lens, settings, and composition.