

# Tissue

by Imtiaz Dharker

The speaker in this poem uses tissue paper as an extended metaphor for life.

This is quite a complex idea and the poet gives examples of how paper is important to all aspects of human life. Concrete examples are given of how paper is used in receipts, maps and architect's drawings, and there is also the imagined use of paper to create buildings.

Furthermore, the speaker gives real life references to the spiritual use of paper in religious books, in particular the "the Koran".

Each of these examples is connected to important aspects of life: religion, money, food, buildings and journeys. The effect of this connection is to highlight the fragility and delicacy of life.

Emphasises its fragility. The light is also a religious reference to truth and God (Allah)

Despite its fragility, paper has the power to change and record our memories

Paper that lets the light shine through, this is what could alter things.  
Paper thinned by age or touching,

Clear connection to human skin which thins with age - highlights the delicacy of human life..

Contrasting ideas: delicate nature of paper versus paper's power to change things.

Religious book - further supporting the idea that the "light" being Allah or God having the power to change things.

the kind you find in well-used books,  
the back of the Koran, where a hand  
has written in the names and histories,  
who was born to whom,

A sense of wisdom - could suggest that as we age, skin, like paper, become thinner and we gain wisdom to "alter things"

Paper used to record our lives and memories - its value in our lives

Alliteration - smoothed and stroked  
emphasises how are paper records our past  
memories. Verbs show tenderness and how  
these memories are cherished - these actions  
cause the paper to become worn.

the height and weight, who  
died where and how, on which **sepia** date,  
pages **smoothed and stroked and turned**  
**transparent with attention.**

Noun- sepia is a  
drawing or  
photograph done  
with a brownish  
colour. Early  
photographs used  
this process

Structure - poem is  
written using irregular  
quatrains. Free verse and  
enjambment is used to  
give the poem an  
unsteady rhythm - as if  
to mirror the fluttering  
of tissue paper

## Imagined use of paper as a building material

Buildings would be at the mercy of greater forces such as the weather - emphasising the instability of life.

If buildings were paper, I might feel their drift, see how easily they fall away on a sigh, a shift in the direction of the wind.

Complex idea - links the idea as an important aspect of our lives - buildings (homes)

Noun - the power  
of paper to  
record our  
national borders  
- links to our  
identity

Shorter sentence adds emphasis. Maps  
are a metaphor for our life's journeys  
and the direction we will take.

Maps too. The sun shines through  
their borderlines, the marks  
that rivers make, roads,  
railtracks, mountainfolds,

Use of list emphasises the variety  
of life choices - routes we can make

Verb phrase is  
optimistic and  
represents the  
positive life  
choices we can  
make

Concrete examples of paper  
- receipts for life essential  
foods.

Paper to record our financial  
transactions. Money and security  
are important aspects of life

Fine slips from grocery shops  
that say how much was sold  
and what was paid by credit card  
might fly our lives like paper kites.

Simile - again emphasises how are lives  
are not always in control. External  
forces affect us. Modal verb "might"  
highlights the uncertainty of life and the  
"kite" represents the journey our lives  
will take.



.  
Another concrete example - paper used to  
create plans for buildings

An architect could use all this,  
place layer over layer, luminous  
script over numbers over line,  
and never wish to build again with brick

Repetition - layers  
of paper represents  
the different layers  
of skin

Abstract noun  
- pride and  
noun phrase "a  
grand design"  
alludes to the  
idea of God  
creating man in  
his own image  
and His love  
for mankind.  
Links to the  
religious and  
spiritual theme  
of this poem  
and ideas  
introduced in  
the first  
stanza.

Again - the power of paper is seen as a source  
of light. It's transparency is something delicate  
and beautiful

or block, but let **the daylight break**  
**through** capitals and monoliths,  
through the shapes that **pride can make,**  
**find a way to trace a grand design**

This stanza suggests that life is a wonderful  
structure and something of beauty.

The delicacy of tissue represents the fragility of life and that it can not last.

Clear reference to paper as human skin - a living organism made up of skin tissue.

with living tissue, raise a structure never meant to last, of paper smoothed and stroked and thinned to be transparent,

Repetition of verbs to represent the love and care of the architect as he builds his grand design - could this represents the love and care of God?

Repetition of the word 'transparent' emphasises the idea of skin thinning with age as we come to the end of our lives. Highlighting how transient life is (fleeting/temporary)

The final transformation of paper into skin. Metaphor highlights the essence of human life.

turned into your skin.

The spirit of human beings can outlast even things like buildings that seem permanent but which have collapsed.

This line is separate from the rest of the poem. The enjambment from the last stanza adds to the flowing, delicate nature both of paper and of the human lives the poet compares the tissue to.