

2022 Patanjali Class 23½

7/6/22

With several absences, we held an intimate ‘Review’ session. No notes were taken, but a few of the readings were worth sharing.

We opened with Will Hornyak’s Independence Day blessing. (I’ll tuck my old *Interdependence Day* in Part II, in case you’d like to reread it.)

### Scheherazade: Breaking the Spell of Madness

The mythic storyteller Scheherazade healed the heart of a sultan gone mad and changed the course of an empire by telling stories for 1001 nights. Her feat offers ideas for navigating dark times with imagination, wiles, wit, courage, humor, patience and persistence.

#### The Story Briefly Told and Five Considerations

Upon discovering that his wife had betrayed him, a powerful sultan determined never to be betrayed by a woman again. From that day forward he wed a maiden every day, slept with her one night and had her beheaded at dawn. His power was absolute. Three years passed in this way.

Scheherazade was the eldest daughter of the vizier, the chief minister of the sultan. She had been widely educated in the arts and sciences and was a repository of myths, fables and fairy-tales from the oral traditions of China, India and the Middle East. Because of her entitled position, her life and that of her younger sister Dunyazade had been spared, and the two had been somehow kept unawares of the atrocities. But when Scheherazade learned of the

sultan's wicked practice she offered herself as the sultan's next bride.

"That is madness!" Scheherazade's father told her. "I forbid it."

But Scheherazade persisted. "I know a way in which I might live, and if I do so I will gladly become the ransom for the lives of my sisters."

She was wed to the Sultan. On their wedding night, with the sword of doom hanging over her head, Scheherazade asked:

"O sultan, my husband, if it would please you I wish to tell you a story."

Now the sultan had heard no stories in a long time, save for the story of his own anger, rage, grief and pain.

"Proceed Scheherazade. I would perhaps be entertained by a little tale."

He had no idea that Scheherazade was a master storyteller who recited poems and lifted her voice in song as well.

In no time, Scheherazade carried the sultan across the threshold of once upon a time into a magical world. As the night wore on he was enchanted by countless characters, vivid scenes and intricate plots. It was as if light and air had entered the room of a mind and heart long shuttered by pain and sadness. It was as if rain fell upon the ground of a soul long dry and parched stirring dormant seeds to life.

Hours passed in their chamber in this way until Scheherazade neared the dramatic conclusion of a story: "The sun gleamed upon the blade of the sword about to be swung to execute the good and beloved merchant."

"But oh, look my Lord!" Scheherazade said pointing to the window of their bedroom chamber. "Just as the sun gleams upon the blade of the sword in our story, so the sun the gleams in our window, for the dawn has come and with it the hour of my death

and so I will not be able to finish this story which I'm sure you would agree has a most surprising and remarkable conclusion."

The sultan appeared to have just awakened from a dream. He had been deeply entranced by the tale and he slowly recovered himself and looked about. He seemed surprised to find himself in his bedroom chamber beside his new wife for in his imagination he was still far, far away.

Now the sultan faced a dilemma. For he did not want to risk being betrayed by this woman and having his heart broken again, but he did want to hear the end of the tale. And even more so, he wanted to travel again with Scheherazade into that realm of imagination where he felt free from the spell of his own pain and madness. He straightened, eyed Scheherazade sternly and said:

"I will grant you one more day of life Scheherazade, so you may finish this little tale, but mark my words: tomorrow will be the last day of your life."

She bowed to him and said: "You are good and great, just and kind my sultan and I thank-you for one more day of life."

She returned and finished the story the next night, but began another. And of course she was unable to finish that tale as well by the next dawn. And so she was granted another day of life, and another, and another, and another.

As you may know, with a sword of death hanging over her head each night, the brave and wise Scheherazade told stories for 1001 nights to the sultan. The stories were profound and ribald, enchanting and alarming and filled with the pulsing, throbbing, wild and colorful stuff of life. And in time the countless tales opened the sultan's mind to countless ways of seeing, being and thinking. He saw the world through the eyes and felt the feelings through the hearts of many characters, foolish and wise, good-hearted and wicked, conniving and courageous. In time he saw himself and the world clearly again and began to rule justly once more. In time the many threads of the stories seemed to weave

together the torn fabric of his spirit, to heal his heart and restore compassion and kindness to his soul. And in time, well, we've run out of time, but I will finish the story on another occasion and I'm sure you will agree it has a most surprising conclusion!

There is much to glean from the story but here are five considerations from my own thoughts.

1. The sultan's rage and grief had imprisoned him in a single story of pain. We can all be reduced to a mono-narrative when overwhelmed by loss. But, the old saying goes, "A zealot has only one story, but a wise person has many." Scheherazade fed the impoverished imagination of the sultan with the soul food of many tales from myriad traditions.
2. Scheherazade told stories with a sword of death hanging over her head each night. She disarmed the sultan night upon night with beauty, awe and wonder. The most trying and risky times recall to us the medicine we carry and the gifts we bring for healing and renewal for the larger community.
3. Scheherazade worked only at night, when the sultan was close to sleep and near to the dream-time. Had she confronted him directly about his atrocities it would have meant her death. Somehow she understood that the sultan had lost his capacity to dream or envision a future any different from his present. Her stories re-seeded his imaginative life.
4. The nightly ritual of storytelling ushered the sultan into a timeless realm of unfettered imagination and possibility. Scheherazade remembered and told tales that helped the sultan remember forgotten parts of himself. As the saying goes: "Every

day sing, dance, tell stories and be silent. These are the healing salves of the human spirit." Anon.

5. In these times, when independent thought and freedom of choice seems to narrow each day, Scheherazade reminds us that we are not alone, that emissaries of imagination and wisdom abound, that magic is ever afoot and that seeds of healing and renewal lie within us all. May we remember on this day to scatter them far and wide.

A Blessed Day of Independence to All!

Will Hornyak

July 4, 2022

Copyright © 2022 Will Hornyak Storyteller, All rights reserved.

This led to a fine discussion of current affairs and the relevance of yoga. Narayana Guru weighed in, with his Nirvritti Panchakam. Nirvritti (no mental modulations) is what you get from chitta vritti nirodha, (their restraint).

Five Verses on Final Emancipation  
(trans. Nitya Chaitanya Yati)

- 1) What is your name? Your caste? Your work? Your age?  
From questions such, when one is free, he gains release.
- 2) Come! Go! Don't go! Enter! What are you seeking?  
From questions such, when one is free, he gains release.
- 3) Departing when? When arrived? Whither and even who?

From questions such, when one is free, he gains release.

4) I or you, this or that, inside or out, or none at all,  
From such cogitations, when one is free, he gains release.

5) To the known and the unknown equalized, without  
difference to one's own or to that of others, even to the name  
of such indifferent,

From all such considerations, who is freed, he himself  
becomes the one released.

Our closing meditation reading was a fabulous essay by  
Brian Doyle, which I include in its entirety because you would all  
love his essay collections and his novels, all imbued with the  
kindness, clarity and enthusiasm so perfectly expressed here.  
Treasures to have standing by on your book shelves.

### The Final Frontier

IT IS THE RARE SOUL who remembers particular lines from  
scripture for reasons other than professional advancement or  
private absorption, but I remember even as a child being totally  
riveted by the odder blunter saltier lines in *The Greatest Story Ever  
Told*—the ones that made me elbow my wry patient dad, like *be  
kind to your father even when his mind goes*, or the ones where the  
Christos isn't so much godlike as he is a rattled guy, such as when  
he whirls and shouts *who touched my clothes?!*, after he *felt the  
power leave him*, what a phrase!

And one of those lines for me has always been *blessed are the  
poor in spirit*. I heard that for the first time as a child, of course, at  
Mass, late in the morning, drowsing between my alpine dad and  
willowy mother, in a pew filled with brothers seated with parental  
buffers so as to reduce fisticuffery, and like everyone else I was

puzzled and nonplussed; wasn't the whole point to be *rich* in spirit? How could you be bereft spirit-wise, but get a backstage pass to the kingdom of heaven? What was *that* all about? Was that a major serious printer's error no one had noticed all these years? Was it supposed to be *pear* in spirit, or something artsy like that?

Diligent schoolteachers subsequently explained the phrase to me, and my gentle wise parents explained it, and learned university professors explained it, and able scholarly writers explained it, and I got the general idea, that the word *poor* there is better understood as *humble*, but *humble* never really registered for me, because I was not humble, and had no real concept of humble, until my wife married me, which taught me a shocking amount about humility, and then we were graced by children, which taught me *a stunning* amount about humility, and then friends of mine began to wither and shrivel and die in all sorts of ways, including being roasted to death on Sept. 11, and I began, slowly and dimly, to realize that humble was the only finally truly honest way to be, in this life; anything else is ultimately cocky, which is either foolish or a deliberate disguise you refuse to remove, for complicated reasons perhaps not known even to you.

Of course you do your absolute best to find and hone and wield your divine gifts against the dark. You do your best to reach out tenderly to touch and elevate as many people as you can reach. You bring your naked love and defiant courage and salty grace to bear as much as you can, with all the attentiveness and humor you can muster; this life is, after all, a miracle, and we ought to pay fierce attention every moment, as much as possible.

But you cannot control anything. You cannot order or command everything. You cannot fix and repair everything. You cannot protect your children from pain and loss and tragedy and illness.

You cannot be sure you will always be married, let alone happily married. You cannot be sure you will always be employed, or healthy, or relatively sane.

All you can do is face the world with quiet grace and hope you make a sliver of difference. Humility does not mean self-abnegation, lassitude, detachment; it's more a calm recognition that you must trust in that which does not make sense, that which is unreasonable, illogical, silly, ridiculous, crazy by the measure of most of our culture. You must trust that you being the best possible you matters somehow. That trying to be an honest and tender parent will echo for centuries through your tribe. That doing your chosen work with creativity and diligence will shiver people far beyond your ken. That being an attentive and generous friend and citizen will prevent a thread or two of the social fabric from unraveling. And you must do all of this with the certain knowledge that you will never get proper credit for it, and in fact the vast majority of things you do right will go utterly unremarked. *Humility, the final frontier*, as my brother Kevin used to say. When we are young we build a self, a persona, a story in which to reside, or several selves in succession, or several at once, sometimes; when we are older we take on other roles and personas, other masks and duties; and you and I both know men and women who become trapped in the selves they worked so hard to build, so desperately imprisoned that sometimes they smash their lives simply to escape who they no longer wish to be; but finally, I think, if we are lucky, if we read the book of pain and loss with humility, we realize that we are all broken and small and brief, that none amongst us is ultimately more valuable or rich or famous or beautiful than another; and then, perhaps, we begin to understand something deep and true about humility.

That is what I know: that the small is huge, that the tiny is vast, that pain is part and parcel of the gift of joy, and that this is love, and then there is everything else. You either walk toward love or away from it with every breath you draw. Humility is the road to love. Humility, maybe, is love. That could be. *I* wouldn't know; I'm a muddle and a conundrum shuffling slowly along the road, gaping in wonder, trying to just see and say what is, trying to leave shreds and shards of ego along the road like wisps of litter and chaff.

--Brian Doyle, Collected in *One Long River of Song*, Back Bay Books, 2019;

“Space: the final frontier,” is the line that opens each episode of the early Star Trek. TV series.

## Part II

Speaking of the Starship Enterprise, of Star Trek:

### Interdependence Day

Before starting any enterprise we must first become free of all our oppressive dependencies. Independence is a necessary first step to healthy interdependence, but it is not an end in itself. This preliminary stage is celebrated in America on the Fourth of July, commemorating its Declaration of Independence from monarchy and religious oppression. But we have allowed the step to become a snare, substituted the means for the end. We have gone overboard about independence, which when taken to an extreme can produce isolation and encourage dominance of those whom we are independent of. Our imagined independence from nature, including many parts of the human race, has abetted aggressive policies sometimes even approaching genocide. Not just in

America, but everywhere. It is therefore essential to distinguish between independence and interdependence.

Who of us imagines that we can live without the assistance of others, and that this extends far beyond our immediate circle of friends and relatives? A very small flight of imagination shows us how little we actually provide for ourselves and how vast a treasure trove is flowing toward us from all directions. Goods and foods from every corner of the world are moving our way, produced by people, transported by other people, and delivered to our feet by still other people. People who we will never meet are guarding our security, planning for our future, and building and maintaining our cities. Air and nutrients are being processed invisibly by our cells without our slightest thought. Plants are respiring oxygen so that we may continue to breathe. Oceans are evaporating moisture so that rain and snow can provide humans, animals and plants with year-round water supplies. The sun is bathing us in light and warming the planet to a comfortable temperature. It is not even too hard to imagine that the animating principle of our bodies is some form of blissful energy that is almost entirely unknown to us. So our apparent independence comes at the tail end of a long series of dependencies. All of us in fact are totally interdependent entities.

There is a paradox here. The belief in independence encourages selfishness, while awareness of interdependence is expansive. Selfishness looks like the pathway to wealth but it is actually the road to poverty. I often think of the Great Depression of the 1930s, which was a time of building schools, public buildings, roads and infrastructure, and compare it to the boom years of the 1990s, when schools and infrastructure fell into ruins, roads degenerated and public buildings were given away as gifts to private corporations.

Our interdependence needs to be acknowledged, but our mesmerization over independence often elbows it out of the way.

Independence has become another form of dependence, a cliché which blocks our understanding. Just as Laura Ingalls Wilder's daughter carefully removed the many references to government assistance from the manuscript of *The Little House on the Prairie* series, we continually reenergize the myth of independence by denying our interdependence. My wish for all you dear friends around the globe is to always remember how much we need every bit of what there is, that by trying to keep it for ourselves we lose it, but by sharing we all gain immeasurably.

Scott Teitsworth  
July 4, 2011

Added in 2018:

## PROTEST

by Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1914)

To sin by silence, when we should protest,  
Makes cowards out of men. The human race  
Has climbed on protest. Had no voice been raised  
Against injustice, ignorance, and lust,  
The inquisition yet would serve the law,  
And guillotines decide our least disputes.  
The few who dare, must speak and speak again  
To right the wrongs of many. Speech, thank God,  
No vested power in this great day and land  
Can gag or throttle. Press and voice may cry  
Loud disapproval of existing ills;  
May criticise oppression and condemn  
The lawlessness of wealth-protecting laws  
That let the children and childbearers toil  
To purchase ease for idle millionaires.

Therefore I do protest against the boast  
Of independence in this mighty land.  
Call no chain strong, which holds one rusted link.  
Call no land free, that holds one fettered slave.  
Until the manacled slim wrists of babes  
Are loosed to toss in childish sport and glee,  
Until the mother bears no burden, save  
The precious one beneath her heart, until  
God's soil is rescued from the clutch of greed  
And given back to labor, let no man  
Call this the land of freedom.

\* \* \*

Bill sent this today, as pertinent to our discussion:

<https://www.lionsroar.com/the-inspiration-of-the-dalai-lama/>