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I REMEMBER....

I remember the time I was a robe...
 And a special Greek body I did adorn,
 As the preferred clothing of Greeks of old;
 With pride, a philosopher extra-ordinaire.

He used to call me "Armor" and chuckle,
 "But I'm not as hard-headed as you", I'd chide;
 With his ways with words, debates he'd tackle.
 Socrates made me proud, as did all Greek
 worlds.

His passion for answering questions with questions,
 A certain "Socrates Method" it helped define,
 His 'love of wisdom' would lay foundation,
 And Western Philosophy, did it help frame.

During meditations and in solitude I bore,
 The frail Siddhartha, as the mat below.
 I couldn't fathom his purpose, nor his goal,
 But descend I would, into trance though,
 Experience then, bliss and peace serene.

At times I was tempted to squeal and yell,
 But, control my temper, and discontent I hid,
 Even while bearing his weight for long spells.
 Thus, avoid needless distraction I purposely did.

When Buddha in sermons, preached to mendicants,
 I would join then the chorus of devout chants;
 Fresh in my mind remain some teachings:

"Be free of the past, be free of the future,
 Be free of the meantime, be transcendent.
 When your mind is completely liberated,
 You no longer undergo birth and old age"

"For those who are always courteous and respectful of elders,
 Four things increase: life, beauty, happiness and strength."

“Giving truth surpasses all giving;
 The flavor of truth surpasses all flavors;
 The enjoyment of truth surpasses all enjoyments;
 The destruction of craving overcomes all misery.”

“There is no fire like lust, no chain like hate;
 There is no snare like folly, no torrent like craving.”

“Let us live most happily, possessing nothing;
 Let us feed on joy, like the radiant gods.”

“There is an unborn, an un-originated,
 An unmade, an uncompounded;
 Were there not, there would be no escape from
 The world of the born, the originated, the made, the compounded.”

I was the quill that guided Shakespeare,
 Through the perilous waters and high tide,
 Of the Tempest and Lady Macbeth’s ire.
 “It’s all much ado about nothing”, I’d jibe.

Show William what he’d like to be or not to be,
 And for Mark Anthony, construct great oratory
 Conjure up oodles of new words did he,
 Offering to generations, to use “as you like it”

How well he understood human nature!
 The shrew, the wicked Jew, King Lear,
 The characters were etched, in his mind clear;
 But to pen, on me the quill, William would lean.

Now it’s all a mist, a midsummer night’s dream.

I was a palette, of some artists grand,
 Then in ecstasy, I watched art take place;
 Vermeer, van Gogh, Varma and Rembrandt,
 As perfection they strove for, and to please.

In museums and galleries, interest they generate,
 But there were trying times, with Picassos and Dalis,
 Generations have veered off course, to emulate;
 With abstraction, art they well-nigh managed to kill.

Now that the insanity holds much less sway,
 So once again enjoy I can, being a part of talent;
 Safely may we declare, the joy of art is back to stay.
 Be proud of being a brush, an easel or again a palette.

Joy was mine, and pain in like measure,
 Sharing Ludwig's struggles with deafness.
 Both the good times and bad, do I treasure;
 Soaring heights and sinking deep abysses.

To this day how, I couldn't explain,
 From Hayden, Handel, Bach and Schubert,
 He managed to meet, nay beat competition!
 With each new piece did he soar abreast.

Emperor, Fur Elise, and Moonlight sonata,
 Concertos for piano and violin, and symphonies.
 Oh! How I love his symphonies; all near perfect,
 Six, nine, five and three, in that order, all divine.

I bow my head in awe, as I wonder how,
 A deaf magician could accomplish such feat!
 The accolades, worship of fans and their wow,
 Makes me his violin go prostrate at his feet.

I remember when I was Gandhi's sandals,
 Through speeches, walks and Satyagraha spells,
 And endure with dignity, the many trips to jail.
 Tears I would shed, with the weight of his toil.

He did his deeds without seeking fame,
 And he paved the way to all who'd gain,
 Mandela, Walesa and Martin Luther just to name,
 "Children of Gandhi", Time magazine would opine.

The pearls of wisdom Gandhi pronounced,
 I enjoy perusing those from time to time.
 His sayings are many and guided his populace;
 Here for your enjoyment I'll jot some lines.

"An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind"

“Whatever you do will be insignificant,
But it is important that you do it.”

“Happiness is when what you think, what you say,
And what you do are in harmony.”

“We must become the change we want to see in the world”

“I am prepared to die, but there is no cause for which
I am prepared to kill.”

“The only tyrant I accept in this world is the still voice within.”

“The good man is the friend of all living things.”

“A man is the product of his thoughts;
What he thinks, he becomes.”

“There is more to life than increasing its speed.”

I was the horse of a Macedonian Prince,
Who set out to conquer all in sight.
For, Persia’s Darius to India’s Porus,
Laid down their swords rather than fight.

I used to caution, “Have some humility,
Young age makes you forget your mortality”.
Yet, ignore did he my advice to avert calamity,
For forge ahead he did, to suit his vanity.

But, proud was I when Alexander built,
Then filled the August buildings with books,
Scholars and scientists of well-repute,
Then found their home and they flocked.

No land you conquer, raze and plunder,
With fondness would they ever remember,
As when you return, in solid lumber,
You pay back to those you conquer.

Once I was the proud shaft in Jesus' hand,
 The humble, charismatic young preacher.
 In his long walks through the desert land.
 Gatherings from afar, came in drones to hear,

I remember well the miracles and parables;
 Preaching to friends and foes, poor and rich,
 Lessons in life with their eternal principles,
 In my mind to this day they're etched.

Prostrate lay a woman in a scene, my favorite,
 Gathered crowd intent on throwing stone.
 But to sin-less among them, Jesus exhorted,
 To throw the first stone; and there was none.

Stone throwers left; prostitute was spared.
 He then told the sinner to go, sin no more.
 Down my spine do shivers this seared;
 By fine example did Jesus win over.

Yet, he was nailed, impaled and crucified,
 With a crown of thorns thrust in mock hail.
 This story had been told and rehashed;
 From many sources I heard, grisly details.

At that terrible hour, his time of need,
 I wasn't there and guilt I feel in me deep!

Once I was a shining sword, I do remember,
 Of a fierce warrior, who would be Emperor.
 On this fighter, accolades had history shower,
 For his humanity and wisdom, not for valor.

For to Buddha he turned and as disciple,
 Conquering lands without waging war.
 He would win the hearts of his people.
 The gentle religion's tenets, Ashoka spread afar.

Through India and then foreign states,
 Emissaries and teachers did he send.
 Fondly is he remembered by his subjects,
 Even today, as in erstwhile India.

Lay me to rest he did, his friend of old
 And from a distance I watched, events unfold.
 This enlightened ruler built pillars for edits,

Hospitals, inns, water wells and roads,
All across India and then far abroad.

I fondly remember when I was a notebook,
Of an English genius; and notes I fervently took;
On gravity, calculus, and motion had me spooked.

Mundane may be the events in sight,
But to Newton the insights were instant.
Like why apples fall and white light splits,
Into colors of rainbow resplendent.

In astronomy, math and physics, tall he stays,
The intimate strokes in my pages are still,
Insights into calculus and motion's laws.
Classical notations for all students to hail.

During months of isolation of this recluse,
Many a time I said, though lackadaisically,
“Why don't you relax, have fun like other youth? “
I didn't quite want him to leave me, though, really.

When I was a student of a venerated teacher,
Doodling in earnest, the nuggets we hear,
Nuggets of “Confucius say”, generations revere.

The pearls of wisdom this master strung,
With their meaning just as true today,
And more words of wisdom than any, bar none,
Offering guidance to the people of his day.

The master wants to spell in his genre,
So stop I must and goose bumps I share
With you the reader.

“I hear and I forget;
I see and I remember:
I do and I understand”

“If you enjoy what you do,
You'll never work another day in your life.”

“Waste begets self-will;
Thrift begets meanness;
But better be mean than self-willed.”

“When not in office, discuss not politics”

“Of such as are eager, but not straight;
Shallow, but not simple;
Dull but not truthful, I will know nothing.”

“To go too far is as bad as to fall short”

“Feel kindly toward everyone,
But be intimate only with the virtuous.”

“What you do not wish done to yourself,
Do not do to others.”

“The well-bred are dignified but not pompous;
The ill-bred are pompous but not dignified.”

“Recognize that you know what you know;
And that you are ignorant of what you do not know.”

“If there be righteousness in the heart,
There will be beauty in the character.
If there be beauty in the character,
There will be harmony in the house.
If there be harmony in the house,
There will be order in the nation.
If there be order in the nation,
There will be peace in the world.”

“The superior man is modest in his speech,
But exceeds in his actions.”

“Virtue is not left to stand alone,
He who practices it will have neighbors.”

“Where-so-ever you go, go with all your heart.”

My stint as the sari of a saintly woman,
In Calcutta was to me as much inspiration,
As it did to most around the Nation;
And Mother Theresa lives on as an icon,

She shines in history not for brain nor brawn,
But in caring for the destitute and the hopeless,
And as icon of devotion and compassion;
For the sick and forlorn she did so selfless.

Many were nights, she would sob,
 In solitude, and shed silent tears;
 With the terrible sights she saw in her job,
 And I'd join in her sorrow, to share.

I know not how, she kept her cheer,
 But day by night she kept on and on.
 Hard pressed will one be to find another,
 With just as much compassion in their bones.

Delight did I as albums for a naturalist duo,
 With pride and honor, guarding in my pages,
 Dried and preserved items for all tomorrows;
 Ideas they proposed remain gems for the ages.

“Survival of the fittest” and “natural selection”,
 Ideas they proposed and form the foundation,
 In human thought and ingenuity, a sheer revolution.
 Scientists delight in this “Theory of Evolution”.

Alfred Wallace and Charles Darwin win my wow,
 Conclusions from observations that they drew,
 The world over, scientists, thinkers now avow,
 Is but a marvel of understanding nature anew.

Explain why creatures in caves and ocean depths,
 Lose their vision but fake eyes they still retain;
 Why in snakes are vestiges of legs they lost,
 Yet, by slithering, locomotion they maintain.

Spiders mimicking flowers in need to hide,
 Moths that splendidly on tree barks blend,
 How insects mimic twigs, or droppings of birds;
 And all the myriad mimicry that in nature abound.

How birds lose wings and take to solid terrain,
 Likewise mammals glide, then take flight;
 Fish use fins to walk, before legs they fashion,
 And then find land their destined habitat.

When mammals left land to oceans to wade,
 Transition they made to swim, abandoning legs.
 Mammals with pouches, a land mass made,
 And some with fur, beaks and laying eggs!

Finches find niches and change their beaks,
 So much, family resemblance soon they break.
 Evolution has Oh! Such a mysterious streak!
 My hat I tip to the pioneers' intuition's reach.

I remember my trek to a lofty monument,

Where these words I found, inscribed in granite:

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth,
On this continent, a new nation,
Conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition,
That all men are created equal...”

A thundering voice pierced my ears,
Before I could decipher more lines:

“Lad, from where in this land do you hail?”
Startled, I looked and saw the statue stare.
“But I didn’t know you breathe and spiel!”
“Aren’t you made of stone and steel?”

“Ah! That’s what I do most times,
But in good company such as you bring,
I find words, and of modern times, a glimpse”

“Why did you let our nation into civil war descend?”
Many moons have this question ravaged my mind.
Sporting a tortured look, calmly the President said;
Nay, murmured: “that is what I agonized over, lad”;
“A good answer to that question... I wish I had”.

“But history credits me with emancipation;
 Slaves you do not see nor slave masters.
 Gone too are gloomy days of segregation;
 I see blacks climbing ladder of success faster.”

By now curious were people and some asked,
 “Who are you talking to? Are you going crazy?”
 “Don’t you hear the President?” I muttered.
 Quickly did I realize, private was my conversation,
 Meant only for my ears, the chosen one.

I waited, until all were gone and then asked:
 “Who do you think did best since you were President?”
 “Oh! I think the two Roosevelts, and may be Bill,
 Despite his problems, Clinton meant well”.

“How about our current Bush? What’s his score?”
 Lincoln heaved a sigh, betraying teary eyes,
 “See our prestige decline, around the globe?
 Do you think another President have dealt this one?
 Would diplomacy be the last choice with another one?”

He continued: “Kid, when you become President,
 Remember these words: Diplomacy first,
 In the real world, choose not war but peace
 And democracy shan’t be thrust on any populace”.

Leaving the monument with a heavy heart,
 I thought to myself: “My country, my dear,
 How I wish Lincoln were President, here today!”

Aryabhata I was my hero in Math and Physics,

I know, because I was the dry palm leaf he used.
 And in the field of astronomy, a sheer genius;
 “Aryabhata” his grand treatise, on me he inscribed.

Arithmetic, Algebra, Trigonometry, Plane and Spherical,
 Calculations of pi, and of triangles and circles’ plots,
 Power systems for large numbers, and decimals.
 There were no nooks of mathematics he mastered not.

Without counsel of calculators and computers,
 In his head he measured earth’s circumference;
 He saw heavens racing around us and concluded
 Correctly, the role of earth’s rotation did he deduce.

The eclipses and the elliptical orbits of planets,
 He explained, a millennium before Europeans.
 Place value system, his keystone gift to maths,
 As is his gift to all, Midnight as the start of days.

Now I reminisce, with a chill down my spine,
 This genius prodigy I helped to etch and display.
 This Indian genius who will with ease win
 Nobel prizes aplenty, if he were alive today!

Of all incarnations I've been through,
 Most fulfilling by far is the most recent;
 It helped foment a revolution all anew,
 The computer age and the Internet.

I was the keyboard some pioneers prized,
 Luminaries like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates;
 Before the advent of touch screen and "mice",
 Faithfully did I serve, help create computer craze.

'Hardware' and 'software', 'dial-up' and 'broadband',
 PCs, Macs, Laptops, iPods, iPhones and iPads;
 How we've seen these come and grandstand,
 And become every day items and then fads.

To typewriters and typists, good-bye we bade.
 Power today to compute whatever we ask,
 Too to travel the far corners of the globe,
 Are packed in cell phones that multi-task.

"Cyber space" is a human knowledge hub,
 Just a screen you touch or tap a keyboard.
 "Internet" is a pet name, and "world wide web":
 In whatever name, this truly is one to behold.

Search engines, URLs, websites, and dot coms,
 Emails, "texting", chat rooms and video conferencing.
 This multi-faceted system, so destined for stardom,
 Barely have we scratched the surface

More new words have entered English Dictionary,
 Thanks to this computer age and its young adherents.
 "Pfishing", "Google-search", "Key word search",
 Are but some, but new words continue to parade.

Mega companies have been born and fledge,

Google, eBay, Amazon, Facebook to name some,
Websites in Millions and Libraries of knowledge,
You want to search a topic, just click and roam.

Such is the power of this new milieu,
However, equal potential this has for evil;
As nameless, faceless, characters lie low
To cheat, rob, misguide and corrupt like devil.

I had pleaded with Jobs and Gates;
We hate to say, to secrets good-bye.
Once you post an item on the 'net'
It's like an open book for all to eye.

We've seen devastation 'viruses', 'malware'
'Trojans' and all other incarnations of evil bring.
Yet, for good or bad this revolution is here to stay,
The job for us is to take care like off-spring.