

Veda in Time

A Full-Length Play in One Act

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*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
John 1:1*

*Avoid lip-service, lip-sympathy, and lip-vedanta.
– Sri Swami Sivananda*

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CHARACTERS

VEDA	White female, 30s-40s; a yoga teacher; comes from a wealthy Protestant background; Veda is not her real name
SRI	Male, old; a walnut tree; VEDA's guru; not his real name either
PIGEON	Any age, gender, and ethnicity; costume indicates pigeon
FISH	Any age, gender, and ethnicity; costume indicates fish
CROW	Any age, gender, and ethnicity; costume indicates crow
SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI	Male, an old 42; the 12 th century saint
BASEBALL PLAYER	Male, fit, 20s; White, African American or Latino
ALBERT	Male, 30s-50s; Mexican

The following roles could be divided between two actors:

SAINT FRANCIS' FATHER	Male, 50s-60s; a well-to-do 12 th century silk merchant.
VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA	Female, 60s, white Protestant
PASTOR	Male, over 30, white Protestant
A PERUGIAN	Male, same age as St. Francis
GOAT	Any age, gender, and ethnicity; costume indicates eagle and goat respectively
ESTRELLA	Female, Mexican, same age as ALBERT
ALMITA	Female, Mexican, 13
SAINT CLARE	Female, same age as St. Francis
SMALL TREE / THE VOICE OF GOD	Female, perhaps a voiceover, Veda's voice recorded

THE SCENE

A yoga studio with an enormous walnut tree, SRI, growing in the center.

1. THE WALNUT TREE'S GIFT

(SRI is upstage center. VEDA, left, is chained to an enormous winged heart, which she pulls in a wagon for convenience. It is elaborately decorated with gold leaf, gems, different kinds of fabric. HER baggy yogi clothes by chance make her resemble SRI. VEDA sits in lotus position center stage and chants the Mahamrityunjaya Mantra three times. See <https://youtu.be/7SHpCdqdw3s> for melody and pronunciation.)

VEDA

Om tryambakaṃ yajāmahe sugandhiṃ puṣṭivardhanam

urvārukamiva bandhanān mṛtyormukṣīya mā'mṛtāt

Om, santih, santih, santih.

(PIGEON flies by, exits. PIGEON comes back. PIGEON lands center stage and pecks at things. Enter CROW, interested in what PIGEON is interested in. Enter FISH.)

VEDA

A fish! Surprising.

(FISH swims. PIGEON begins pecking near the heart. CROW follows her.)

SRI

I give all my shade.

VEDA

Yes - thank you, Sri.

SRI

I make a gift of it.

VEDA

I know, it's great.

SRI

For all creatures.

(SRI rustles his leaves and strains to make eye contact with her. VEDA gives in, looks up and smiles at him. He is replenished.)

SRI

So! What kind of class will you teach today?

VEDA

I'm feeling kind of tired. I think it will be something to stir up energy.

SRI

A tree gets its energy from the soil as well as from the sun.

VEDA

Yes – I know –

SRI

So perhaps a grounding practice would be more in order.

VEDA

Well -

SRI

You and I are both trees. I've said that. Learn the way of being a tree, and find yourself.

(VEDA frowns; she lugs the giant heart with great effort. SHE sits down hard.)

VEDA

I sensed the group is feeling pretty low energy too... you know, things going on in the world.

SRI

Emulate the tree in all things. Go back to your roots.

VEDA

Thank you, Swami Sri.

(VEDA watches the PIGEON, CROW, and FISH peck and forage. SRI rustles. SRI rustles impatiently. Finally VEDA looks

up at him, a bit annoyed. SRI receives her gaze and is rejuvenated.)

2. SIVASANA

(VEDA sits at the front of her yoga class in the shade of SRI. Enter BASEBALL PLAYER, who winks at her. Enter SAINT FRANCIS of ASSISI. Each has a yoga mat, a towel, perhaps a bottle of water, and VEDA greets them – clearly her regulars. Enter PIGEON and FISH.)

VEDA

Welcome! Welcome. You're here for the class?

(PIGEON and FISH nod.)

Great. Have you done yoga before?

(PIGEON and FISH nod and arrange their mats, etc. Enter CROW.)

Well! We've got a lot of newcomers today – wonderful! Have you done yoga before?

(CROW nods and finds a place for his mat. SRI seems to pose, striking different dramatic walnut tree positions. VEDA bows to SRI.)

Thank you, Sri, for providing your wisdom and your guidance... thank you for the shade you always give so generously... thank you for being my guru and teaching me everything you know, and well, just for your support.

(Impossibly gentle.)

I like to start off the class in sivasana, which is corpse pose.

(BASEBALL PLAYER and SAINT FRANCIS get into sivasana. PIGEON, FISH, and CROW can only do pigeon, fish, and crow pose respectively. These may or may not be the literal yoga poses, but when they do them they transform into beautiful

sculptures of the animal. Perhaps these characters are played by dancers or actors with a dance vocabulary.)

Basically you lie on your back... allow all the tension to flow out of you... let your hands and your feet fall out to the sides... and just relax and breathe. In through your nose. Out through your mouth. As you inhale, your chest and your belly expand out... as you exhale, your belly flattens and presses against your spine...

(VEDA catches sight of PIGEON, FISH, and CROW out of the corner of her eye.)

VEDA

Okay... So we're starting out with corpse pose...

(PIGEON, FISH, and CROW ignore her.)

My guru, Sri here, taught that the hardest thing for Americans to do is relax... really even harder than the so-called challenging poses... and so... corpse pose... to start.

(The three rebels do not respond. VEDA gets up. SHE squats near PIGEON.)

So, sivasana is lying on your back, like a corpse... what you're doing is actually pigeon pose.

(PIGEON doesn't reply.)

Do you mind if I make an adjustment?

(VEDA tries to bend PIGEON into the lying-flat-on-your-back pose. PIGEON pops back into pigeon pose.)

Oh. My. Okay, so it's on your back. Your -

(VEDA laughs nervously. SHE gets up and decides to work on FISH instead.)

You're really, really close - you just need to - your hands should be flat on the floor by your sides. It actually looks like you're doing fish, and what we want to do is sivasana -

(VEDA tries to guide FISH's hands out from under her back and FISH collapses – only to snap back into fish pose. VEDA turns her attention to CROW.)

And that is crow, really not even close to sivasana – here – it's like this.

(VEDA touches CROW on the shoulder but he is unmoving, even when she applies pressure. HIS balance is amazing.)

Wow! Ahem.

(In her impossibly gentle, most soothing yoga instructor voice.)

I know everyone has probably come to yoga by way of different styles...

(To FISH.)

What is the kind of yoga you studied, if you don't mind me asking?

FISH

Yoga is fish pose.

VEDA

It's – well, there's more to it than that.

CROW

Yoga is crow pose.

VEDA

Okay.

PIGEON

Yoga is pigeon pose.

(VEDA suddenly feels very bothered by the chains hanging from her wrists, and besides, she is nearly at the end of their length.)

CROW

Your guru was wrong.

VEDA

Well – wrong is a strong word – but –

(CROW peers skeptically at the heart.)

VEDA

Ha! Yes, sometimes I wonder how I ended up with such a big heart, too...

CROW

Or such a heavy one.

PIGEON

You will have to find out how to get rid of it.

VEDA

What? Ha – that's ridiculous.

FISH

You will.

(FISH continues impassively in fish pose.)

VEDA

No! I disagree. We all need to open our hearts and grow them to be big as possible – not get rid of them!

(Pause.)

PIGEON

But why are you chained to it?

(VEDA notices for the first time that a large padlock chains her to the heart. PIGEON, CROW and FISH concentrate on their poses. VEDA scoffs.)

VEDA

Well. I don't know – I mean – ha – I'm committed. So?

I'm committed.

(Returning to the front of class.)

Anyway. Our hearts are important. They are.

Annnnd... exhale...

3. ST. FRANCIS IN PERUGIA

(SAINT FRANCIS is fighting in the army against Perugia. HE is taken prisoner. Everyone else in his battalion lies dead on the stage. The Perugians defecate on the bodies. THEY stick corncobs up their butts.)

SAINT FRANCIS

(Chained up, to his Perugian captor.)

Why are you fighting?

PERUGIAN

You people from Assisi took our stuff.

SAINT FRANCIS

Don't you have your own stuff in Perugia?

PERUGIAN

Yes, but we want your stuff. You have these nice fields. And grapes. And olives. And we would like those. Not to mention, gold.

SAINT FRANCIS

(Groans.)

PERUGIAN

Why are you fighting?

SAINT FRANCIS

Because my father made me.

(When the Perugian isn't looking, SAINT FRANCIS escapes and runs away. HE gets back into sivasana.)

4. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

(VEDA tidying the yoga center. Enter PIGEON.)

VEDA

Oh – hello, Pigeon! I'm glad you're back. We don't actually have class today, though.

PIGEON

That's okay.

(PIGEON practices pigeon pose on their own.)

VEDA

Well – great!

(SHE tries to focus on cleaning, but is thinking about PIGEON.)

VEDA

You know... it doesn't seem like I have that much to teach you, Fish, and Crow.

PIGEON

I know.

VEDA

I like that you're here, though! Don't get me wrong.

PIGEON

I like that I'm here too.

VEDA

Oh, good.

PIGEON

You're Protestant, aren't you?

VEDA

What?! Yes – Well – ha – not anymore. I left that as far behind as I could.

PIGEON

Ah.

VEDA

(Defensive.)

I know I'm not Hindu by birth. I can't help it. I'm just trying to be a better person. My friend Polly told me I was being very colonial, and –

PIGEON

Never mind –

VEDA
I did study with a swami for two years, and he was Swedish -

(Enter VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA.)

VEDA
(To the audience.)
This is a flashback.

VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA
Stacey!

VEDA
(Age-regressed to 11.)
Yeah, Mom?

VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA
Look what I've got.

(VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA pulls a bolt of metallic gold fabric out of a shopping bag and holds it up next to VEDA's giant heart.)

VEDA
Wow!

VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA
Is that what you were looking for?

(VEDA examines the gold fabric critically, and how it goes with other colors on her heart.)

VEDA
Yes... yes! Thanks, mom!

VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA
Everyone's going to think it's so pretty.

VEDA
I know.

VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA
I bet you can't wait to show it off at school - everyone will be looking at it.

VEDA

I know. It really is the best heart of anyone's. Everybody says that. Some people try to criticize it, but they're just jealous. Even Rodney says it's the best one when I'm not around.

VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA

That's my girl!

VEDA

It's not as nice as yours is.

VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA

Sure it is! Mine's a grown up one, so of course it looks very nice. But yours almost looks like a grown up made it. That's why it's the best one at your school. I bet I could bring yours to the university and people would think I made it.

(VEDA is flattered into a loss for words.)

VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA

You can bring it along to Instructions. Are you ready to go? — hey, you haven't even gotten dressed yet!

VEDA

Um — well —

VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA

Um — well- ?

VEDA

Well, I wasn't really feeling very well...

VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA

And yet, you seemed to recover miraculously when you saw that gold fabric.

VEDA

Can't I stay here and work on my heart instead of going to Instructions today? Just for today?

VEDA'S MOTHER GLORIA

You're eleven years old, Stacey. Do you think you have all the time in the world? I mean, if you were in a parochial school, like I was, you would get Instructions every single day. Then you could afford to miss one. But since you only do this on Sunday... you can't be sick.