Yoga Alliance- Community Sangha- Healing Stories for Adults and Children

MAYA BREUER: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Yoga Alliance Community Sangha. We are so pleased that you've joined us today. My guest today is Len Cabral. He is a magnificent storyteller. Before I tell you more about him, let us just center ourselves by making sure the feet are placed on the earth and that your shoulders are relaxed and we're going to move into a three-part breath where we inhale below the naval, above the naval, and fill the chest and then exhale from the top down. Inhale below the naval, above the naval, fill the chest, exhale from the top down. And you can allow your eyes to close, and just continue this aware and focused breath for the next minute. Noticing the rise and fall of the belly. And let us bring our awareness back into this moment. Slowly allow your eyes to open. And we raise the corner of the lips just a little, and that increases the flow of life force, or prana, within your body. Once more. Lift them up, even if no-one can see you. Do it anyway. It will make you feel good. I'd like to begin with a reading by the great writer Rumi. You are water, we are the milestone. You are wind. We're dust blown up into shapes, your spirit. We're the opening and closing of our hands. You're the clarity. We're the language that tries to say it. You're joy. We're all the different kinds of laughing. Rumi. So I'd like to introduce you to my dear friend Len Cabral. He is an internationally acclaimed storyteller, and he's been telling stories at schools, libraries and museums and festivals all over the globe since 1976. And he and I have been friends for even longer than that. He's a great-grandson of a Cape Verdean whaler and his grandparents immigrated to America from this island off the coast of West Africa. Len's ancestry comes alive in his storytelling. He shares folk tales and original stories, and tales from around the world. He has performed at festivals in Ireland, Belgium, Austria, Holland and Canada and he is the recipient of the National Storytelling Network national Circle of Excellence Oracle Award. He has several books that you can order and he's an excellent resource on how to begin telling stories. I am just pleased to introduce you to storyteller Len Cabral. Welcome, Len.

LEN CABRAL: I want to start off with a story that comes from West Africa. There's a man, his name is Keb Kebo Keba and he lived in this village. Like all the other villages, he was a hard-working man. But he had one major flaw. Kebo Keba was stubborn. In Aruba, Kebo Keba means one who does not Lyn or hear or take advice or suggestions. Now, in this ancient village, at the time on earth these villages were inhabited by people and spirits. And so to avoid any disputes, a law was passed that certain days the spirits would be able to roam the land and all the people would stay home. Well, as you can well imagine, Kebo Keba, he did not believe in this law. Kebo Keba, he went about his business as normal. On the first day that the spirits were to roam the land and people were to stay home, Kebo Keba picked up his who and his Kutla Kutlass and went to his farm and started to till the soil getting ready to plant yams. He worked for a while when all of a sudden he heard voices coming from all around him: Who are you and what are you doing? I am Kebo Keba, and I am tilling the soil to plant my yams. Oh, we will help you. And just like that, 100 whos started to till the soil and in a jiffy all the land was tilled, and
Kebo Keba, he went home. The very next time it was time for the spirits who roam the land and for people to stay home, Kebo Keba decided to go to his farm and plant the yams. And he got there and he started to plant the yams, and as he planted the yams those voices came back and said, "Who are you and what are you doing?" He said, "I am Kebo Keba, and I'm planting my yams." "Oh, we will help you," said the spirits and they came and in a jiffy all the yam plants were planted in neat rows. Kebo Keba went home. Well, the third time that the day came that all the spirits were to walk the land and the people were to stay home, Kebo Keba decided to go and harvest his yams. He got there, and he dug up one yam, his first yam, and he picked it up. Just as he was looking at the yam, the voices called out, "Who are you and what are you doing doing?" He said, "I am Kebo Keba and I'm harvesting my yams." "Oh, we will help you." A hundred hands dug up all the yams and made a neat pile of yams. At that point, Kebo Keba looked at the first yam he picked up and discovered that it was not ripe and it needed more time to mature. As a good farmer, he would have chosen -- picked up a few yams to look at them to make sure they're ripe. But now all his crop was ruined because all the yams were not ripe. Kebo Keba said, "Oh, woe is me, woe is me." He started hitting his head in sorrow. The voices said, "Who are you and what are you doing?" He said, "I am Kebo Keba and I'm hitting my head in sorrow." "Oh, we will help you." And a hundred hands started to hit Kebo Keba's head. And hopefully it knocked the stubbornness out of his head. That's the story about Kebo Keba.

MAYA BREUER: Wonderful! N CABRAL: I read that story not too long ago, and I thought about the line: People were to stay home. How apropos is that. People were to stay home.

MAYA BREUER: And all the people who won't wear their masks masks too, give them a lesson in letting go and releasing that crazy stubbornness that is many people carry.

LEN CABRAL: Yes.

MAYA BREUER: Len, before we hear another story, I wanted to have you -- this is part of our testimonial series -- to have you just share a little bit about how did you come to yoga? How has yoga helped you through the years? Share that with us.

LEN CABRAL: Well, I came to yoga through you, Maya, because we live in the same community. The discussion I had with you many years ago, when I was having back problems, and you suggested yoga. So I started taking classes from you. I realized that yoga not only was good for my body and posture, but it was also helpful in the type of work that I do, performing, preparing myself to take the stage, preparing myself for rehearsing stories, and also clearing my mind so that I could focus more on stories and language. And the little things. It makes me realize how important words are. Since a lot of my work is in schools, I have to be very aware of the language that I use to encourage growth of vocabulary but also setting out the correct vibe for the listeners. Through yoga, I was able to project my voice more, breathe, take advantage of the breath and the power of breath, which helped me find my singing voice -- not that I sing a lot -- and my chanting. I think that it made me more aware of my body when I wake up in the morning and searching out where there might be some pain or places that need to be more -- that I need to pay attention to to, not just physically but spiritually and mentally. I thank you for that. When you started that yoga men's group, first there were ten of us and it whittle down to a few less and a few less. So the -- I saw the value in it, and also the way that you teach yoga. Just looking at you and how healthy you are, and the importance you put into your words and what you do and how you present yourself and how you present yoga. The stretching helped immensely when I'm telling stories, I tend to be more animated than I am sitting down telling a story. So it helped with my movement. Prior to that I was introduced to tai chi, and so I knew somewhat about breathing and balance, but yoga kind of wrapped that all up for me and made it one so I can incorporate the tai chi that I use at times to the breathing and the yoga movements. I'm really thankful that you exposed me to the powers of yoga.
MAYA BREUER: Thank you, Len. Oh, I love compliments. Thank you. My grandmother used to say to me, "Taste your words, senior is. Taste your words." When I was younger, I used to just sort of say things. I think one of the benefits of yoga has really taught me how to understand deep within what I'm saying. Do you think yoga gives you that pause to taste your words when you're in the schools, when you're teaching mixed groups of ages, et cetera?

LEN CABRAL: I do. Something you just said about -- what your mom said about taste your words, my mom says, "Before you say something, say it to yourself.. It doesn't sound right, swallow it." YA BREUER: Yes.

LEN CABRAL: That was it. If it doesn't sound right, swallow it.

MAYA BREUER: We both remember who Lana Turner was was. She's on this sangha and she says, "Bravo. Fabulous story." Another person says, "Aje Asay O." Thank you. I think we're going to ask you to share another story with us.

LEN CABRAL: I will share a story. Something I was thinking about this morning and just came up in our conversation about patience. That's another thing I think yoga and meditation teaches us, not only about our words but about patience and our thoughts. So here's a story that also comes from West Africa. There was a poor man and woman that lived in a village, and each day they prayed that the Creator would send them some heavenly gifts. They prayed each day that a heavenly gift would be sent their way. Finally their prayers were answered. They got a message that the Creator was sending them three heavenly gifts and they were to choose one and the other two returned back to the Creator. The three gifts being sent to them, the first was money, the second was a child and the third was patience. Now, money, child and patience came down from the mountains and they walked and they walked and they walked. They walked until they came to a river, where patience walked through the water to the other side of the river and turned around and looked back. And on the other side of the river was money and child. And money said to child, "Child, you should carry me across the water." And child said, "No, money, you should carry me across the water." They argued back and forth who should carry who across the water. Finally, patience turned around and walked back across the river, picked up child and placed child on his shoulder and picked up money and placed money on his other shoulder. And patience walked through the river with money and child on his shoulders. When he got to the other side he loaded them both and they continued their journey to the village of the poor man and the poor woman. Well, when they got to the village, the neighbor of this couple saw them. Now, this neighbor, his name was Abe Neek which means cold in the heart and he was jealous these neighbors Prince receiving the heavenly gifts. When they reached the poor couple's house and went in, they gave them what little food they had and the man turned to the wife and said, "Which should we choose? Should we choose money, child or patience?" And his wife said, "Oh, choose the money, choose the money!." and the man thought, and he thought he would go and ask his friend, his neighbor, A Abe Nook and said, "What should I choose? Money, child or patience?" Abe Nok said choose patience because what's the sense of having a child if you have nothing to provide it with? I would suggest you choose patience. The man went back home and he did choose patience, and money and child walked out of the village and walked by the house and he was happy his neighbor was still going to be poor. Money and child walked to the village until they came to the river and they stopped at the river and money said, "Child, you should carry me across." And child said, "No, you should carry me across." They argued back and forth and finally they both stopped arguing, turned around and walked back into the village to the home where patience was waiting. So you see by choosing patience, that couple got money and child. For, you see, patience is the father of all good deeds. But I am not saying be patient if a snake comes to bite you. Then I say, "Run "Run, run, run!"
MAYA BREUER: Oh, god, that is delightful. Len, where do you get your stories from? Where do you find these stories? Do people send them to you?
LEN CABRAL: Well, over the years, over 40 years I've been buying books as I travel, and some books I have in my bookshelf I bought 40 years ago and since I got when I was up in Montreal and Toronto and some real obscure books that would be difficult to find now that I still have, that I look through, and every now and then I find a story that is -- that needs to be told in the present time. I'm always looking for folklore from around the world, South America to Africa to Cape Verde to Asia, and also European tales. I also write stories stories. I do some personal stories. And I get ideas for stories from reading the newspaper, from talking with people, especially chatting with the elders. There used to be a lot more elders when I was younger. And I get these stories, which reminds me of someone who collected stories from the black community that she grew up in. In the past I've gone to new bedford Massachusetts, which has a large Cape Verdean community community, and spend time talking with the elders in nursing homes and families in the Cape Verdean community. I'd hear many of these Cape Verdean tales that I've heard years ago from my grandmother. So I get stories from other storytellers. We share stories and ideas for stories. I have friends I can bounce the story as I'm working on the story, we can get together and share stories and get suggestions and have a story critiqued by another professional teller. And then sometimes stories just kind of fall in your lap just from talking with people.

MAYA BREUER: I'm going to give you another one. My uncle K, when we were little, he had an apartment on top of our family. We were on the second floor, he was on the third. When he would come back from the racetrack, which was all the time, he would gather us children around and we were very young and we would sit there and he would say, "I'm going to tell you all a story." And he'd start: One dark, stormy night there were three men in a cave. Antonio Antonio said, "Tell us a story." Antonio began, "One dark, stormy night there were three men in a cave. And Antonio said, "Tell us a story." Antonio began, "One dark, stormy night . . ." we fell for that. I mean, we were little and we would be like leaning into this story. Put that in your repertoire.

LEN CABRAL: Yeah, I will. I have my 5-year-old granddaughter living with us now since the pandemic, and every day she wants to hear a story. First thing in the morning, pap or soa or papa, tell me a story.

MAYA BREUER: Storytelling is something that has been vital particularly to the African community. The word Grio, storyteller, comes from our ancestors. When I think about slavery and how there were so many methods for survival, and storytelling was one. And being in circles and sharing. Are you a Grio, Len? What do you think about this storytelling as a way to heal and renew and support our communities?
LEN CABRAL: I think storytelling is very important in healing, in teaching, lessons right from the beginning, captured Africans, the way we shared stories and kept the history alive, because it was against the law to learn to read or write. But stories were kept in our minds, and so they were shared that way. Underground railroad, through songs, through drumming, through dance. But we were able to keep our connections with each other through stories, and we still do. The stories are a way that can heal a community. A story that came to mind just a few weeks ago was when the people could fly. It's a wonderful picture book. It's a wonderful storybook called when the people could fly. A few weeks ago when Richard was shot in Atlanta when he was running away from the police and he was shot, that story, I pictured that man flying. Maybe his body was there on the ground, but he left the planet flying. It reminded me so much of the story if the people could fly, and some of the songs we still have from those days of being in slavery. Sometimes stories come to me in that way, reading a newspaper or seeing something on the TV, on YouTube, reading something in a magazine, hearing a podcast. So how we are
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connected in our stories. Stories from around the world, every culture. Basically, adults told stories because they -- and these stories are basically the same: Don't be greedy. Share. Don't be bossy. Those were the stories that every culture told. They told stories about the stars because they could see the stories. Every culture told stories about the moon because they could see the moon and they made up stories about these things. Basically, stories from every culture, saying don't be greedy, don't be bossy, don't be mean.

MAYA BREUER: Don't lie.
LEN CABRAL: This is what happened when so-and-so did this. Don't be like so-and-so because he did this. Be nice, be kind. Every culture. That's the important part for me for storytelling, is that all peoples have these stories, no matter where our agreed, great, great ancestors came from. We're still telling stories. We're doing something our great, great ancestors have done. There's not many things we can say we're still doing that our great, great ancestors have done, except eat and drink. But we tell stories. That's the connection we have with our ancestors, and that's the importance of sharing stories, because stories do heal. Stories are -- they unlock the door to understanding.

MAYA BREUER: And stories create change. That's another thing. I want to read you what Jordan McLeod says. What a beautiful soul. Great to be part of this sangha. What a delightful Friday. Master storyteller. She's referring to you. And James says, "Believe me, it is a story, that of what our universe is and how a yogi can live in it as a physical entity to tell a story, that being that the story isn't actually a story at all but a slip between multi-verses where each universe is actually completely fixed and never actually does anything. The illusion is that created by the consciousness that slips in time through infinite multi-verses, believing we have free will, but in fact it is all frozen at each precise moment. Is this the Maya, the cosmic illusion that we are actually here when in fact we are not? We seem to have an ability or free twill make a decision in that conscious consciousness to decide which of the infinite multiversities we move next to. This can be important to create happiness or not." That was very interesting interesting. I think all we can say is we hear you, James. Laura says, "Thank you. This has been such an enriching experience. This is so awesome. This sangha has my 13 and 11-year-old listening to, and they love it. Thank you both." So we are achieving what we attempted to achieve today, which is to bring together adults and children in our sangha. I'm wondering if, within the art of storytelling, is there a prayer? Is there a prayer that you can share with our audience? We have two minutes remaining. Something that likens itself or leans toward being a prayer that we can share with our listeners?

LEN CABRAL: There are so many things I could say about storytelling, the importance of storytelling. But, you know, when you are listening to a story or someone is sharing a story, they're sharing love with you, and the importance of listening to the elders in the community, in our families. It is said that when an elderly person passes on, it's like a library burning. So we need to listen to them, capture those stories. I say to the youth, because they're so ready to record, so able to record with their phone, with other things that we didn't have at our disposal when our grandparents were of age, they can record their grandparents, and some of them may have great grandparents. By recording these, you have something -- first of all, it will make your parents really proud of you. I'll tell you that much. It's important that we have these memories of our ancestors, because they speak to us even when they're not here with us physically. I feel mine each day.

MAYA BREUER: Absolutely. So that in itself is a sweet prayer, because we can think of our ancestors when we listen to stories, as if they come Someone said I am sitting at the Mediterranean Sea and listening to your beautiful stories and the wisdom you share with us. Thank you for this early Friday evening. Another friend says, "such beautiful stories, I could
listen all day." And then we have thank you both for your uplifting energy and light. It's been a pleasure to have you with us Len Cabral, my dear friend. I am so happy I have had an opportunity to see you. Could you share your books with us.

LEN CABRAL: I have a book called "How the Rabbit Lost its Tail." It just came out in January and it can be ordered through my website. It's a picture book, it's a how-to story about how the rabbit lost its tail. We also have a how-to storytelling book published by Neil Shuman and it's probably in many different libraries and it can also be ordered through me or through Neil Shuman the publisher out of New York. It is for beginning storytellers, advanced storytellers, teachers and educators and anyone interested in early childhood development.

MAYA BREUER: And so many thanks coming in. Someone says "I miss stories being told to me. Thanks so much." Someone says "I am here in Australia in the bush near winter, very cold near Byron Bay." Just so many wonderful appreciations, Len. Let us bring ourselves to a quiet place as we bring our palms in front of our hearts and bring this wonderful sangha with Len Cabral to a close and we will close with the beautiful sound of om. Inhale with me and chant om. Peace, peace, peace. I honor the light within you.