

## Meditative Story Transcript – Rohan’s Meditation #3 for Season 3

“Three love stories, by Rohan Gunatillake”

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**ROHAN GUNATILLAKE:** It was my wife’s birthday recently, so this is a meditation in honor of her. It’s also *about* her. So Lucy, if you’re listening, I know this is probably making you cringe. But I promise it’ll be okay.

And dear listener, I think a good place to start is telling you about the moment I realized I was going to ask her to marry me.

My wife and I are heading to Austin, Texas, for the South by Southwest conference and festival. We’re both excited. Starting in Glasgow, we change at Heathrow and get on a much bigger plane out to Austin. I recognize a couple of people I know from my old life in London who are also going over for SXSW. I suspect most of us on the plane are.

I always enjoy taking off. My hands in my lap, my feet planted firmly. Breathing.

Feeling the smooth metallic surface of the buckle around the seat belt, this symbol of safety.

Close to my belly and the gentle rhythm of breathing.

The physicality of what it’s like to accelerate along the runway.

The vibrations of the cabin and the always surprising moment when we lift off and are just supported by the air.

Noise movement people and calm.

Just breathing.

It’s a long flight, the best part of eleven hours.

The first couple of hours is the standard mix of people working, watching films and reading, but now after the first meal there is sleepiness in the air. I can feel it too.

And that’s when it kicks off in the row behind us. A young girl, maybe only three or so, starts having a meltdown. I doubt she signed up for being trapped in a plane for so long, and while the parents are trying hard to soften her, it’s not working and they too are tightening up.

The dry, circulating air is filled with tension. It’s now been almost ten minutes of pretty much nonstop screaming. A flight attendant comes over. Then more of the cabin crew. And then they all give up and go sit down in their little spot in the back of the plane, pour themselves a bad coffee and close the curtain.

There’s a particularly grumpy chap on the other side of the aisle from me, and I can hear the exasperation of his inner monologue erupting and escaping through a series of uncontrollable noises. I’m worried he’s about to get up and start making even more of a scene; I feel his

energy rising. I get the strong sense he's going to stand up, and I sink even deeper into my seat. Wanting to hide from it all, the tantrum and the tension.

So when I realize that Lucy has swiveled round and is chatting to the girl I'm caught off guard. And I suspect the girl is too. Lucy is asking her about her trip, whether she's excited to be going to America, how funny it is to be on a plane. All in her beautiful singsong voice, as if they'd met in a park on a warm day, not in the heat of this tense tin can. She's animated. And eventually the girl is too.

The care and the love and the talking to the girl softly and as equals, as if they were the only two people in the universe, completely punctures the situation. The parents look at each other in a bit of confusion but Lucy keeps talking to the girl. They start playing peekaboo through that little gap between the seats. The whole thing only takes four or five minutes, and after that the girl settles down completely.

Lucy swivels back and I pretend to have been dozing through the whole thing. My breath soft and shallow, my eyelids resting. But there is a small smile. I'm completely, completely in love.

The day before we get married, I crush myself with my own car. It's as stupid as it sounds.

We'd set up our wedding over a weekend near where Lucy grew up on the South coast of England. And before the main ceremony on the Sunday, the Saturday was to be a more informal day with games, food, just hanging out. There is a lot to do and I pop back to the house where we are staying to pick something up. When I slam the trunk down to close it, I realize I've not put the emergency brake on properly, and the car starts moving slowly forwards down the sloped gravel drive towards the front of the house.

For some reason, I run all the way round to the front of the car to try and stop it, full-on. It is probably the least wise of all the available options. Everything happens so quickly. Before I know it, I have a ton and a half of Volkswagen Golf pinning me against the brick wall of the house.

My mind is racing. I don't think I've broken anything yet but this is not a situation that I, or my blood supply, really wants to be in. I'm in the middle of the countryside with no one around. I call out. After ten minutes of yelling, an elderly lady who happens to be passing by hears me through the hedges. She has only a minor freak-out when she comes through and sees me, and thankfully has the presence of mind to fish her hand into my pocket and call the emergency services using my phone.

When Lucy arrives, there are already five or six emergency vehicles in the driveway. And as shaken as she is, she also tells me that it's going to be okay. I believe her. And it is.

I'm glad for all my meditation training as I corral all my diminishing energy to deal with the pain of the pressure.

I am experiencing really difficult sensations. But I'm able to be aware of the sensations as they are, instead of getting caught in the stories associated with them. I feel the pressure of the weight on my thighs, not the worry that the car is wrecked.

Aware of the hardness of the brickwork behind me, not the panic that the weekend might be ruined. By deliberately placing my attention in this way, and staying at the level of just what the

physical feeling is like in the body, I prevent my mind from spinning out into the narratives about what is going to happen as a result of the accident, and how I am quite clearly the worst groom ever.

But I'm breathing with what is happening. Knowing what the breath is like. Letting my mind rest in the body.

And I'm grateful for Lucy, yes, for the support in the moment but mostly for letting it go afterwards. It may be the most foolhardy thing I have ever done, but once it is over, it is over. By some minor miracle, I walk away from the car with no lasting damage. Barring, perhaps, the slightly lower regard you now hold me in. And the wedding goes beautifully.

Five years after that weekend in Dorset, we're in the kitchen. It's four in the morning and Lucy is in full-on labour. We'd planned a home birth but having not quite completed our house renovations in time, the kitchen isn't quite finished. I've put up some fairy lights and bits of paper to mask the plasterwork.

Despite being in the middle of Glasgow, our house is a pain to find via GPS and it's a fairly comic scene as I leave a contracting Lucy to go outside in the dark to try and find the midwife who's come out for us.

After a very long five minutes, I eventually spot her. And as soon as she comes in, she's a master. She tunes into Lucy, gets the vibe and in a very low key way supports Lucy without taking control. Think Yoda but a midwife. I make her a cup of tea to be useful.

The idea of tantric practice has in pop culture been reduced to something about sex and Sting. But if you study the tantric schools classically you'll know that it's actually about visualizing the divine and using that to flip yourself into high insights.

But I don't need to visualize it because it's right in front of me. Lucy and the midwife, working together to bring a new world into being. I'll never know what the experience was for her, but I know what it was for me. The witnessing of divine making energy, Lucy channeling something much vaster than herself but absolutely herself at the same time.

And when the baby comes, we call her Sophia, after the Hagia Sofia in Istanbul, which we visited the day after we got engaged. A space of wonder, holiness and human creation.

So to finish, let's do our own tantric practice.

And bring to mind a quality, an archetypal quality if you like, that you are working towards in your life.

Wisdom. Love. Playfulness. Steel. Stability. Wildness.

Allow it in.

From the head to your fingertips. Through the body. Throughout the body.

As Lucy channeled her beautiful her-ness in the birthing pool at the bottom of our stairs.

Channel your quality into your you-ness.

Notice what arises.

Give it a name.

Here in Scotland we're starting to emerge from lockdown.

And it's a moment of great shift for us and those across the country.

And for all the restrictions we had to endure, I'm glad they were with Lucy.

Thank you, Lucy, for being you, and for putting up with me.

And thank *you*.

Wherever you are, go well and stay safe.