Swanvesha

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Such is life

"Everyone thinks of changing t world, but no one thinks of changing himself"

– Leo Tolstoy

WELCOME TO SWANVESHA

Swanvesha (*Swa-Anvesha*, Sanskrit for *Self-Inquiry*) offers insights, stories, and actionable strategies to help leaders grow and adapt in an ever-changing world. Stay informed, inspired, and lead with purpose.

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TALLY HO

WELCOME NOTES

Folk stories have been told throughout history. This month, we explore a few stories that have been told in many countries with various iterations.

In ***Musings***, the story comes from Slavic and central Asian countries, but there are also versions in Japan and other Asian countries. It's about wisdom that only comes with age and the importance of the old guards in organizations. In ***Novella***, we go to India for a story about a water bearer and his cracked pot. This story is about how flaws are sometimes a thing of beauty. Finally, in ***Corporate Culture***, a revolutionary book that changed business philosophies. CK Prahalad's "*Fortune at the bottom of the Pyramid*"

I am an Executive and Leadership Coach Connect with me on my website www.swanvesha.com for more resources. Or write to me at swanvesha@gmail.com Happy reading.

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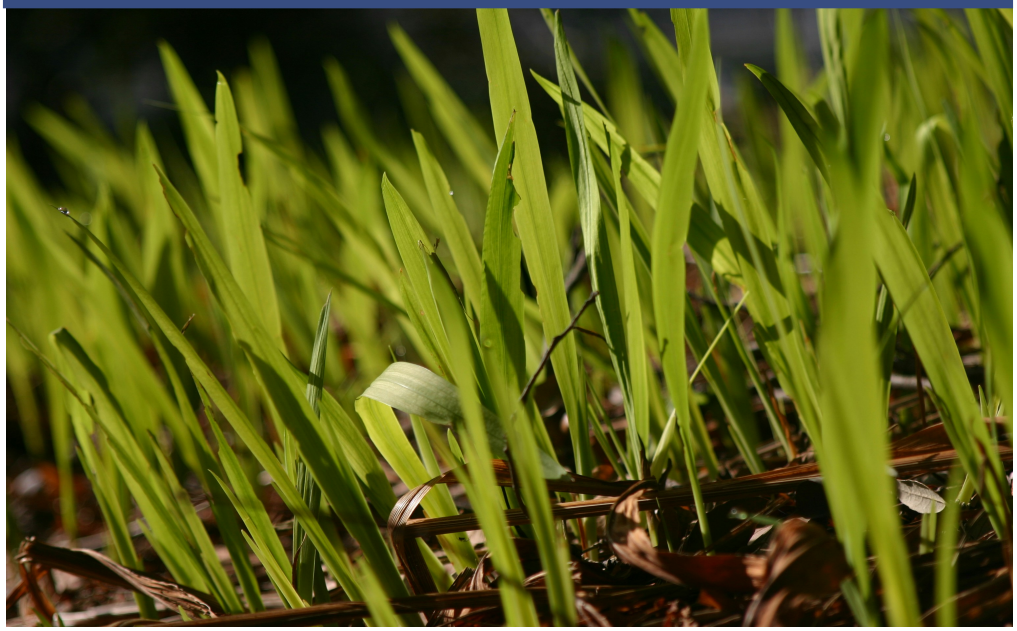
Musings



OLD ROADS – NEW WISDOM

"Once, there lived a king who was young, ambitious, and certain that progress lay only with the new. "Old people are useless," he declared. "They remember the past, but I am building the future." And so he passed a cruel decree: *All the elderly shall be cast out from the kingdom.* The townspeople, fearing punishment, obeyed. But a humble farmer, could not bear to abandon his father. He dug a chamber beneath his barn and hid him there.

That year, a great famine struck. The earth was dry. The granaries were empty. The king's ministers panicked, suggesting taxes, war, and grain from distant lands. Nothing worked. The young farmer, worried for his village, confided in his father.

The old man said, "*Plough the roads*."

"*The roads*?" asked the son, puzzled. "*They're not fields*."

"Exactly," the old man replied. "*For years, traders have traveled those paths — sacks bursting, spilling grain as they passed. Those roads were once dirt, not stone. The soil remembers. Plough them. Water them."*

The farmer obeyed. Along the dusty roads, barley and wheat began to sprout. The villagers followed, and soon, enough grain was harvested to feed the kingdom. The king summoned the young man and asked how he had come by such wisdom. When he learned the truth — that the idea came from a man he had ordered to die — the king was silent for a while and then he said, "*I see now that wisdom does not grow overnight. It is stored in the hearts of those who've lived long. From this day, let the old be honoured. For the kingdom without memory is a kingdom without hope."*

Innovation and tradition are not enemies. In every system — corporate, political, or cultural — there are "roads" where wisdom has been spilled and forgotten. Smart leaders don't just plough forward. They also plough the past.

Photo by Jacob Stone on Unsplash

Novella

THE CRACKED POT

In a quiet village in India, a water bearer worked for the local king. Each day, he carried two large pots slung on either end of a sturdy wooden pole balanced across his shoulders. One pot was perfect — smooth, symmetrical, and always delivered a full portion of water.

The other pot had a visible crack running down its side. By the time the bearer reached the palace, half the water had leaked out. This went on day after day, year after year. One morning, the king's counsellor noticed the crack and raised a complaint. "*This man is wasting royal resources*," he told the king. The water bearer was summoned for an explanation.

"*Did you know that one of the pots had a crack?*" the king asked.

"*Yes, Your Majesty,*" the man replied.

"*Then why did you not replace it?*"

"I knew about the crack," said the water bearer calmly. *"So, I scattered flower seeds along that side of the road. Each day, the leaking water nourished the path. For two years, I've picked those blossoms to decorate your palace tables. We've never lacked water — and now we have flowers too."*

In organisations, not all systems are perfect. People have gaps, processes have flaws, and tools aren't always seamless. The instinct is to fix, replace, or discard. But sometimes, what looks like inefficiency is a hidden strength waiting to be harnessed. What if the "crack" is an unconventional thinker? Or a legacy process that slows things down — but brings depth, connection, or culture? It's often not about sealing every flaw, but asking: Can we plant something valuable here? After all, some of the best innovations — and the most human workplaces — bloom along the overlooked path.

I once knew a senior Risk leader no longer keeping pace with emerging tech. His metrics were slipping, and by conventional standards, he seemed replaceable. But the organisation saw something else: deep understanding of legacy systems and ongoing litigations — knowledge not easily replaced. They kept him as an advisor. He wasn't the perfect performer anymore, but his "crack" held quiet strength. His presence brought insight, stability, and value — not visible on dashboards, but vital in times of crisis.

Photo by Constantin Panagopoulos on Unsplash

Corporate Culture

FORTUNE AT THE BOTTOM OF PYRAMID

A lot of management books come and go. But every once in a while, one shifts the lens entirely.
C.K. Prahalad's The *Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid* did just that.

We're often taught to focus on the top—top-line growth, top clients, top talent. But what if the real opportunity lies elsewhere? What if the **most overlooked people and places** hold not only the greatest potential for impact, but also for innovation?

This book made a bold argument: *"The poor represent a resilient and value-conscious consumer segment."*

Prahalad wasn't romanticizing poverty. He was showing us what **inclusive capitalism** could look like—long before it became a buzzword at Davos or in ESG boardrooms. Instead of asking, how can we help the poor? He suggested that "*When the poor are treated as consumers, they can drive innovation and productivity.*" The book is groundbreaking because:

- It challenges conventional thinking
- It reframes the poor as consumers and innovators
- It suggests that profits and purpose can co-exist
- It has concrete case studies and real-world innovation.

Many companies have brought this philosophy to life. Aravind Eyecare provides free or low-cost cataract surgeries. Unilever India enabled rural women to distribute personal care products. Grameen Bank gave collateral-free loans to low-income women. Casas Bahia built trust by selling goods on credit to Brazil's poor. CEMEX's Patrimonio Hoy helped families build homes through affordable materials and microcredit.
Over time, others like Reliance Jio, M-Pesa, and Danone have embraced this model. And it's not just in emerging markets—Western companies like TOMS and Warby Parker have shown how affordability, scale, and purpose can coexist.

This book is important even today, when we see income inequality spiraling, aspirations become an addiction, and the world becomes increasingly integrated. Companies must find ways to find the fortune at the bottom of the pyramid, because the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is already taken.

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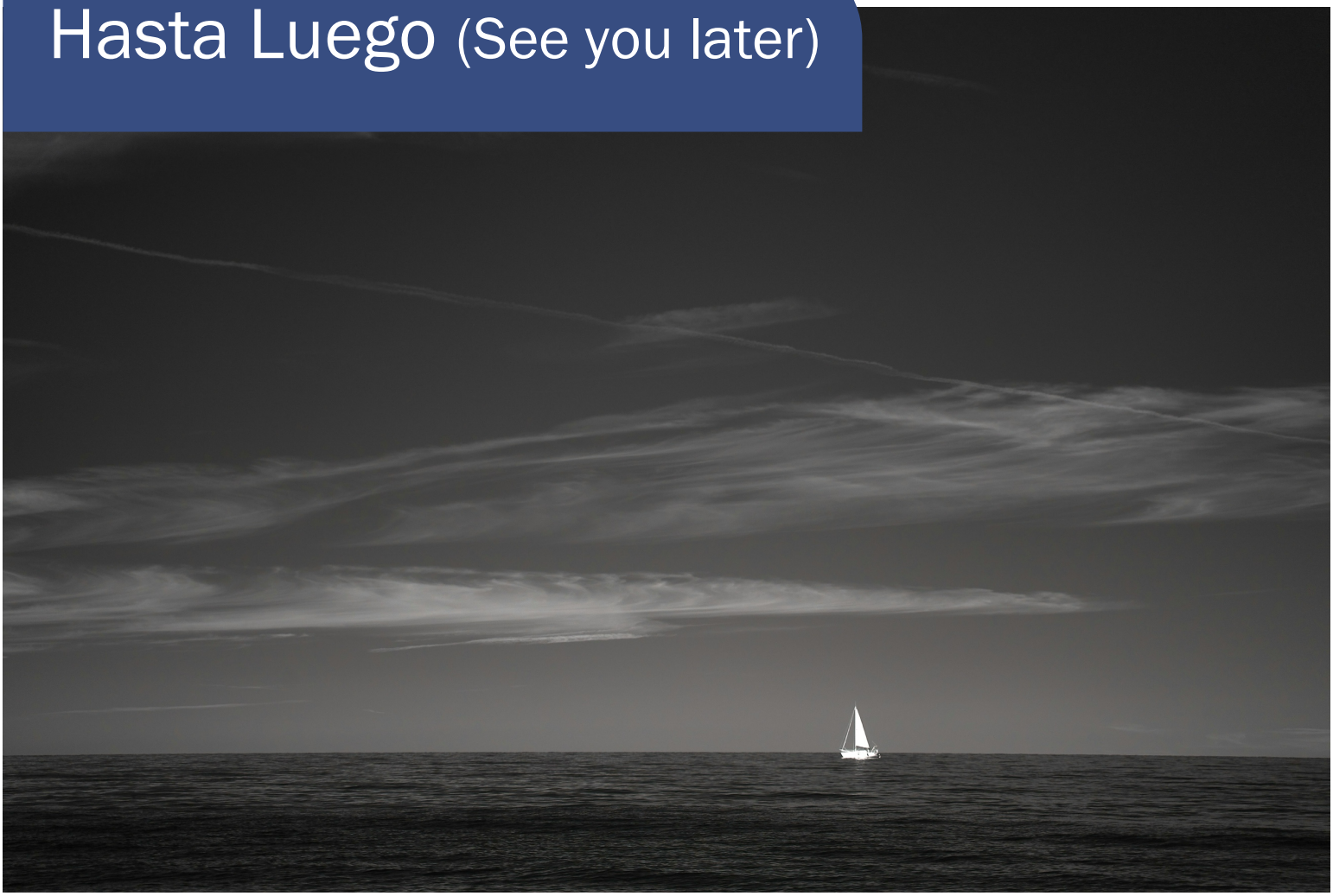
Hasta Luego (See you later)



THANK YOU

Thank you for reading my newsletter. I hope you enjoyed it. As we wind down, here's something lighthearted.

There were four employees: Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody.
A small task needed doing.
Anybody could've done it.
Everybody thought Somebody would.
But in the end — Nobody did.

Such is wordplay.
And such is life.

Stay well and stay safe.

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