



Core Book



WHEATON
COLLEGE
For Christ & His Kingdom

A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR DANIEL NAYERI'S *EVERYTHING SAD IS UNTRUE*

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HOW DO YOU READ A BOOK TOGETHER?

“They would sit in the alcoves of each floor reading to each other and eating sheets from the book of fruit leather. They consumed the pages and were consumed by ideas.” (129)

1. Consider actually reading the book in the same place and time:
 - Have dinner, maybe, and then pass around the book after supper, when people are having dessert. (There should be lots of dessert.)
 - Have your room be the room on the floor where there’s a nightly study break to read the book together. Someone on your floor has done theater or public speaking class or just has that practiced skill of reading aloud like a champ. Let them let their little light shine.
 - Listen to the audio book together while doing some schlepmy chores for someone who could really use a break or help on a big project. (You won’t be sorry to listen to the author read his own work. This book is stellar in audio.)
 - Bring it on your week-long vacation (or fall break at HoneyRock!) and read it aloud by flashlight around a campfire for one hour a night.
2. Uncles and Aunties, gather some of the middle- and high-schoolers in the family. Book club for summer/fall? Or Christmas break book club? Hand out copies like Santa and meet back after New Year’s for sledding, book talk, and hot chocolate with real (or vegan!) whipped cream.
3. Plan with some people in the community or church that you don’t know as well to both read the book and then have dinner. Cook your best recipes, or experiment with new ones, or serve potluck. Tell your funniest and most touching stories all night long over endless pots of tea. Have seconds on the pastry.
4. Two words: book date. #heartemojiheartemoji (Reduces worry about having topics of conversation for that first date, or having nothing to talk about now that you’re empty nesters. Plan ahead to bring the fire and romance with bookish talk.)
5. For the most introverted: trade copies of the book with someone else and ANNOTATE BACK to their marginalia. That is, talk back to their comments with your own annotations, and converse that way.
6. Welcome Strangers: Be obvious about WHICH book you’re reading in a public place. Hold it up so all the nosy co-commuters can see. Tap into that vein of extroversion (however thin a vein!) and chat about it.
7. Come to Core Book events, such as a talk by Daniel Nayeri on October 23 and a panel on writing the life of faith with three memoir writers--Daniel Nayeri, Esau McCaulley, and Beth Moore--on October 24. Gush with your seatmates and say “Hi” in person to the writers whose work you’re thrilling to.

HOW DO YOU TALK ABOUT A BOOK TOGETHER?

“ . . .if you spend time with each other--if we really listen in the parlors of our minds and look at each other as we were meant to be seen--then we would fall in love. We would marvel at how beautifully we were made. We would never think to be villain kings, and we would never kill each other. Just the opposite. The stories aren't the thing. The thing is the story of the story. The spending of the time. The falling in love.” (300-301)

Some people are scared to talk about a book with other people because they worry that there's some technical knowledge required, like if you don't have a sense of the book's Bakhtinian speech genres and heteroglossia or how Freytag's pyramid is in operation, you can't have a response to it. We LOVE technical knowledge here at Wheaton College, and there are SO MANY ways to nerd out with this book as you explore context. Some of our courses teach this book, and are dedicated to exploring it from some of these technical and professional positions: in literature courses, say, and in Humanitarian Disaster courses, in theology courses. And these discussion questions and context materials might be able to help you as well.

But talking about a book can happen in lots of ways that are rich and life changing, both with technical knowledge and without. Over decades of book talking, it seems to me that there are two major principles of bookish conversation that can operate whether or not you're considering the anxiety of influence, chiasmus, and hamartiology apparent in the narrative structure.

1. Open the book when you talk about it--and be on the same page. Bringing a passage you want to talk about, even if you don't know WHY you want to talk about it, can help, both as a starting point and as a touch point. (In the discussion questions below, we refer to a lot of page numbers, just in case you need help finding anything.)
2. Both relate and differentiate. Finding and sharing parallels between the books you read and your own experience can create a sense of shared humanness and empathy. But pointing out the differences can do so too--and sometimes even more powerfully. The differences between your experiences and those portrayed in the book might help you figure out things about the book, about your own life, about other's experiences. How often we might benefit from the knowledge that someone could experience things differently than we have!

This set of discussion topics is meant to be like a buffet table: pick what looks good to you and dig in with those around you. Click on any of the topics below for passages and questions that will help fuel your conversation.

WHAT COULD WE TALK ABOUT?

TRUTH

“How can you explain why you believe anything? So I just say what my mom says when people ask her. She looks them in the eye with the begging hope that they’ll hear her and she says, “Because it’s true.” (196)

This book is called *Everything Sad is Untrue (A True Story)*, but then it opens with the statement, “All Persians are liars and lying is a sin.” Given that the author identifies himself as Persian, he’s in a bit of a pickle.

Does it matter to you when a story is true? Which do you like better, true stories or made up ones? In what senses is this a true story? In what senses is it made up? How does MEMORY play into truth and fiction in the book?

Consider when the book talks about its own truthfulness, on page 353 in the author’s note. Read it out--how do you respond to this method?

Consider different standards for truthfulness: “beyond reasonable doubt” (burden of proof for American criminal courts), “reasonably likely” (Britain’s law’s burden of proof for refugee accounts of their lives).

Some parts of *Everything Sad is Untrue* are made up (like the story of Ellie, pages 122 through 130). To what extent do these made up parts offer truth? What truths do they offer?

The book mentions a common Oklahoma kids game and ice-breaker, “Two Truths and a Lie” (250). Play it for a few minutes: Each person shares three statements, two of which are true and one of which is a lie. What does it offer you in understanding of truth/fiction? in understanding what it means to get to know people and believe people when they are talking to you about their own stories?

Christians considering truth have a rich scriptural witness to truth and truthfulness: “Do not bear false witness” is in the Ten Commandments; “You desire truth in the inmost parts” says the psalmist; “What is truth?” Pilate equivocates; “I am the truth,” says Jesus; Paul exhorts believers to speak the truth in love in Ephesians; John’s apocalyptic vision declares that liars are those who end up in the lake of fire and brimstone in Revelation 2. How do these scriptural passages about truth affect your understanding of this book’s approach to truth? If Christians believe Jesus’s words that truth is a PERSON, how does that form our understanding of truth telling in stories?

DANIEL AND YOU

“Trust me, reader.

I love you with all my heart, but you just don’t know.” (301)

This book reaches out to the reader personally and deliberately in situation after situation, to make a connection:

- On page 1, the narrator says “If you listen, I’ll tell you a story. We can know and be known to each other, and then we’re not enemies anymore.”
- On page 16, it gets more intense: “If you give me your attention--I know it’s valuable--I promise I won’t waste it with some ‘poor me’ tale of immigrant woe. I don’t want your pity. If we can just rise to the challenge of communication--here in the parlor of your mind--we can maybe reach across time and space and every ordinary thing to see so deep into the heart of each other that you might agree that I am like you. I am ugly and I speak funny. I am poor. My clothes are used and my food smells bad. I pick my nose. I don’t know the jokes and stories you like, or the rules to the games. I don’t know what anybody wants from me. But like you, I was made carefully, by a God who loved what He saw. Like you, I want a friend.”
- The narrator reminds us that he is with us at various points, like when he’s telling the story of Aziz and says “You can already feel it, can’t you, in all this happiness, that some horrible darkness perched outside the houses watching Aziz.”
- The author’s note begins, “Hello, Reader” on page 353.
- Heck, even the acknowledgements section has something for you, which I won’t quote here, because you should look it up yourself.

Were there moments you felt really close to the narrator? Were there moments that you had parallel experiences to the narrator? Make yourself think of a few and share them with those you’re talking to--take the time to find some.

- feeling responsible for a death you didn’t mean to cause
- being bullied
- awkward social interactions
- siblingness
- cultural difference from those around you
- feeling like you might having to work hard to prove your humanness to others, and it might not work
- situations of suffering and shame
- young, unrequited love
- experiences of a new culture and language
- relationships with parents

What moments did you feel very distant from or different from the narrator? Daniel says at several moments things that he expects that you don’t know about his experience:

On page three, he says “That doesn’t mean anything to you, probably, if you even bothered to pronounce it. I could have said, ‘on the road to skip-this-word-you’re-a-dumdum-stan,’ and it’d be the same.”

On page 208, when he says “You probably don’t know this, but Oklahoma is called Tornado Alley, and also the Buckle of the Bible Belt, which means it’s a great place to hide.”

Was the narrator right about your knowledge or about what is meaningful or meaningless to you?

The book is narrated as if to the middle school class of the narrator--a class full of young Oklahomans. Not everyone who reads this book will come from that position--in fact, there are a limited number of 12-year-old, Oklahoman readers, for sure. Does the making of that audience so limited allow you to separate yourself from the audience? Where did you feel DIFFERENT from the audience?

Daniel shares his feelings of guilt or shame at several moments: about the bull (8-9), about the baby owl (118-119), about Ali Shekari from the camp in Italy (295-296). How do you respond to those moments of confession? What did you want to say to Daniel then?

Now, with your group, maybe only when you feel really comfortable or courageous, or when things are in a lull and you can’t get anything going, conversation-wise, read the section that goes pages 60-62, that begins “Imagine you’re evil” and ends “And you can feel good and go to the mall and go back to being evil.” How did you respond to that section after and in the midst of the care for the reader that the narrator has offered? DID you imagine that you are evil when you read it? If you did, did anything come of that imagining? If you didn’t, can you, right now, with your group? What comes out for you? Are these things that you feel inclined to share about?

IT'S SO CONFUSING!

“Mrs. Miller says I have “lost the plot,” and am now just making lists of things that happened to fill the space.” (300)

This book isn't divided up into chapters. The narrative brings together mythic Persian lore, multiple versions of folk tales and tales from 1,001 Nights (“every possible version exists somewhere,” the text claims, on page 58), family history, small bits of distant memory, and slightly altered stories from middle school. Is it deliberately made like that? Is the writing just bad?*

One friend of mine, an exceptionally fine reader and scholar, read the book in small bits and so kept getting lost, kept asking, “What? Who? Where? Are these real people? Or is this a story?” He told me he kept having to reread to figure it out.

In your group, try and reconstruct the bare-bones plot of the story of Daniel and his family. Help each other fill in the bits you've forgotten/missed. Now, talk about this as a group: how does your reconstruction differ from the story's shape in the book? How would the book be different if it WAS told that way? Would it appeal more or less? Would it be more or less true?

Say you consider that the form might be intentional--what does the arrangement of those materials in just that way make you feel about the story being told here? Compare that to your feelings about the book.

(If this is confusing, this set of questions, it might help to focus on a particular part of the book to help you focus the conversation. That is, if you spent some time talking about Ellie's story, on pages 122-130, you might consider in particular the little interjection of the 5th grade classroom's opinion on fruit leather on pages 126-127. What does that particular going back and forth between Ellie's story and the classroom do to the meaning of the story? What does it change/add?)

There's a moment on page 300 where Mrs. Miller, Daniel's teacher, says that he has “lost the plot” (on pages 300-301), but he responds that “she is beholden to a Western mode of storytelling that [he does] not accept.” What's “a Western mode of storytelling”? How does this story differ from it?

The story that Daniel's dad tells in Daniel's class 326-327 takes a long time to explain--about Rostam in real life and Rostam in storyland. How does Daniel's comment “Yeah, it does [take a long time to explain]” offer something to the conversation?

*Consider two conversations. In one conversation, the group declares that a book is **BADLY MADE/WRITTEN** and everyone mostly just enumerates what they don't like. In another conversation, the group considers that the way of its making is a **FEATURE, NOT A BUG**, and everyone describes the **IMPACT** of the style/content/arrangement/form on the reader's feelings/experiences. What's the value of each conversation? What are the valueS behind each type of conversation? Is one better than another? Why?”

STORYTELLING

“Every story is the sound of a storyteller trying to stay alive.” (59)

One review of this book calls it a love-letter to storytelling--and it has lots of references to myths, legends, and histories within its own narrative--not to mention the extolling of Persian poetry.

The central example of this story-telling love is the book’s reliance on the conceit of the 1,001 Nights and to the mythic figure of Scheherazade, who is telling stories all night every night to save her life and the lives of the women of her country.

Why do you think Daniel identifies with Scheherazade? What are the risks of his story telling? How is he telling stories to save his life? To save the lives of others?

On page 300, the narrator says, “The point of the Nights is that if you spend time with each other--if we really listen in the parlors of our minds and look at each other as we were meant to be seen--then we would fall in love. We would marvel at how beautifully we were made. We would never think to be villain kings and we would never kill each other. Just the opposite. The stories aren’t the thing. The thing is the story of the story. The spending of the time. The falling in love.”

Share an experience where you heard some stories or told some stories. To what extent did it work like the above description? Do you want it to? What would need to happen to make it so?

The library is a help and haven for Daniel in the book--as is the librarian!-- but also the contents of libraries receive attention: “When I tell people my stories, about the hero Rostam or the size of pomegranates from the orchards on my Baba Haji’s land, the villages in stone pillars, Orich candy bars, or anything that happened to me, they never believe me. There is no evidence in their libraries” (131). Discuss.

On page 76, the narrator says, “To explain love, I have to tell you three stories: The first is the myth of Khosrou and Shirin. The second is the legend of Aziz and her husbands. The third is the history of how I broke my thumb at my mom’s church.”

Throughout the ensuing section, the narrator retells stories and then experiments with ascribing lessons to the stories: “The lesson here is that you can fall in love with a story you have in your head” (79) or “The lesson here is that your happiest memories can become your saddest all of a sudden” (83) or the big long section about love on pages 85-86, which includes the gem “there’s a lot more to love than smooching.” But when the stories get closer to home--family stories and then personal ones, it’s harder to find the lesson: “Maybe the lesson is that you never know the damage you might do, when you’re trying to help. Or that a feud is a profoundly stupid thing. // There is no lesson maybe” (96).

Think about the whole book. Is there a lesson? Are there lessonS?

Think about stories in general: DO stories have morals? How do they work in us? What are stories FOR? Give some other kinds of examples from your reading about how certain stories have impacted your life.

NB: Want some further reading on this subject? Consider the following:

Beyond the Story by Christina Bieber Lake
The Future of the Word by Tiffany Eberle Kriner
Nourishing Narratives by Jennifer Holberg
On Reading Well by Karen Swallow Prior

FOOD! (AND CULTURE)

“So I tarof, which is good manners, pick up the sloppy sandwich, and smile and go, “Mmm, that’s good. Really tasty.” Looks a little like fesenjoon too, which is a positive trait . . . fesenjoon. The dish we had at my house with the chicken and walnuts and pomegranates. They look similar’s all I’m saying. Of course they taste different.” (191)

Tracing the mentions of food in the book is definitely a way to get SERIOUSLY hungry. It might also be a way to consider the question of how the narrator presents cultural differences and builds cultural bridges. Consider some of the following food passages and use them to help you think about what in particular is offered to the reader about the cultures represented:

42-43: American foods the Nayeris discovered vs. Iranian foods that the Oklahomans discovered

97-103: Church BBQ

144-145: school lunch and the difference between guests in America and guests in Iran

154-156: what Daniel cooks and what his mom cooks for their nightly feasts

185-195: Kyle and fesenjoon and sloppy Joes

246-248: the banquet at the prince’s house in Dubai

286-2289: dinner at the refugee camp

327-329: Baklava in class

ALL THE PAGES: side references to cream puffs (and their American counterpart, Twinkies), chickpea cookies, buttery saffron rice, a parsley bunch the size of a basketball, Pringles, Orich bars/Mounds bars, kebab, dates dipped in yogurt, cardamom cake, rosewater, saffron, roasted tomatoes, etc. etc.*

*Everyone will understand if you need to cook and eat excellent recipes during your conversation about this book! Need one for Fesenjoon?

Here’s Samin Nosrat’s recipe!

<https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1020224-khoresh-e-fesenjoon-persian-chicken-stew-with-pomegranate-and-walnuts?smid=url-share>

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

“The greatest American hero is Logan Wolverine, who is also an immigrant (from Canada) and who can heal from anything.” (153)

Up front, the book says, “If you give me your attention--I know it’s valuable--I promise I won’t waste it with some “poor me” tale of immigrant woe. I don’t want your pity. If we can just rise to the challenge of communication--here in the parlor of your mind--we can maybe reach across time and space and every ordinary thing to see so deep into the heart of each other that you might agree that I am like you” (16).

How does this book tell the tale of refugee experience and immigration? Would you agree that it’s not “some ‘poor me’ tale of immigrant woe”? What sort of tale is it, then, about refugee experience and immigration?

How does the literary form of the work inflect or color the portrayal of refugee experience?

Daniel and his sister are A+ students at everything, and the book makes this abundantly clear. And their (and their mother’s!) commitment to schooling in the refugee camp is especially powerful (309-311). How do you respond to their achievement? To Sima’s heroism, unstoppable perseverance, and excellence?

POOP

“To know the truth about yourself, you have to know if you can eat tornadoes for food and shovel a mountain of poop.” (241)

There are a lot of poop stories in this book.

- Khosrou’s hand in a sewer: 50-52
- Various national cuisines and poop: 174
- Bathrooms in Iran vs. Bathrooms in the US and in historical France: 175-179
- Kyle, sloppy Joes and poop: 185-195
- Poop Trench Digging: 238-241
- Pooping pants in Dubai: 255-258
- Mrs. Miller calling out the poop stories: 272-273

What’s THAT all about?

THEOLOGY

“This is the kind of thing you live your whole life thinking about probably.” (217)

Daniel Nayeri’s books for young people are acclaimed for their artful engagement of big picture, ultimate, enduring questions in accessible stories. There are a lot of theological questions to choose from in this book: the character of God; theology of sin (hamartiology); the nature of Christianity; the theology of the church (ecclesiology); theology of hope (eschatology) among them. You can use these sub-topics to talk through particular enduring questions, or you can just start with what stood out to you. What does this book have to say about the life of faith, especially in the context of this family’s experiences? What does it say TO YOU about the life of faith?

GOD

“At their worst, the people who want a god who listens are self-centered. They just want to live in the land of do-as-you-please. And the ones who want a god who speaks are cruel. They just want laws and justice to crush everything.” (217)

Everything Sad Is Untrue does not hesitate to take up theological conundra, such as the old saw, “Could God make a rock so big He couldn’t lift it?” on pages 74-75. Did you ever have that conversation before? Have it now! Then, analyze your conversation: what were you really talking about? What did your conversation reveal about yourself and your conversation partners?

In your group, discuss the central passage in which the theology of God is raised, the “god who speaks” / “god who listens” section on pages 216-217 and at the bottom of 223. Talk about your experiences of God, growing up, or your training. Which was more emphasized? Got any good stories on this point? Which vision of God dominates your consciousness now? Which vision of God would others see in you?

Consider the passage on page 329, when Mrs. Miller is the one who speaks or listens. What does it mean that Daniel applies these words to HER, not just God?

Consider the passage on page 333, when the reader is the one who speaks and listens. To that point, is reading a way of being like God? How so?

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

“In Iran, if you convert from Islam to Christianity or Judaism, it’s a capital crime. . . Probably because Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are sister religions, and you always have the worst fights with your sister.” (195)

“She has all that wealth, the love of all those people she helped in her clinic. They treated her like a queen. She was a sayyed.

And she’s poor now.

People spit on her on buses. She’s a refugee in places people hate refugees . . . And she’ll tell you--it’s worth it. Jesus is better.” (197)

On pages 195-199, Daniel describes his mother’s conversion to Christianity. How does he represent Christianity there and what it is as a religion? Which key passages/parts from the rest of the book develop your sense of what Christianity is and what it means to the narrator or to the characters?

The description of Christianity in this book takes its place in the context of Sima’s background in Islam, and in particular the religious and cultural category, “sayyed” on pages 179-185. How does the work’s choice of particular details to mention about the history of Islam affect the portrayal of Islam and the portrayal of Sima’s conversion and its consequences?

How does the book handle religious difference in the story, overall? What are some key passages that emerge for you?

CHURCH AND DISCIPLESHIP

Consider the representations of churches and congregations in the book--underground churches (Pastor Pike and the congregation in Jolfa, pages 202ff), missionary churches in Dubai (259), Italian churches (291), Oklahoman churches (the church picnics (96-103), the love of miracles in Sima’s story (220), the baptism of Daniel’s father(331-336).

There are a few passages where people’s discipleship--that is, how they follow Christ--is described. For example, the underground church (pages 202-206, 217-218), Jim and Jean Dawson (329-330), “who were so Christian that they let a family of refugees come live with them until they could find a home, and who made them sandwiches with Pringles chips, which is the best chip any place has to offer and means you’re welcome,” Sima during that one church service (333). How do you understand discipleship? How does this book’s portrayal of discipleship help develop your understanding of what it means to follow Christ?

MIRACLES

“Why would I make up miracles about paperwork?” (220)

Daniel’s mom describes their escape from Iran as a time of three miracles--pages 220-231. When Daniel retells the story, he presents it as possibly difficult to believe, bringing up his Dad’s questions, his classmates’ questions, and so forth. How does THAT particular choice--to tell about the miracles through conversations with skeptics (and even to assume the reader might be skeptical)--affect the book’s take on miracles? Do you have experience with miracles? Tell some stories! Then, reflect on how you described them--what did the storytelling bring up for you? What was it all about, that time of miracles?

SIN

“Imagine you’re evil.” (60)

This book has a nuanced theology of sin--what theologians sometimes call hamartiology. It mentions sin right at the beginning, on page 1 in a standard Christian way as what Daniel’s mom says, “everyone has sinned and needs God to save them.” Very Romans 3:23.

But it adds a little more to this idea RIGHT AWAY, building on how sin seems to be more than what you meant to do.

- “Poets,” says the text (maybe Daniel’s dad?), “don’t even know when they’re lying. They’re just trying to remember their dreams” (1). What does that even MEAN? Is POETRY wrong? Bonus points for bringing up (or looking up!) Plato’s Republic on this point. MORE bonus points, though, for quoting lines of poetry in your discussion.
- In Daniel’s memory of the bull’s death, Daniel wonders if readers have ever felt like he did when the bull looked at him, the feeling “where you realize it’s your fault that something beautiful is dead and you know you weren’t worth the trouble” (9). The baby owl incident (114-119) is another one of these moments, though this time, Daniel himself pulls the trigger: “That was the second innocent thing I killed, if you count the bull. // And that was before I even turned five” (119). To what extent does our intention matter in what counts as sin, in our responsibility for sin?

On pages 60-62, the text takes another stab at thinking through sin and evil, using various hypotheticals:

- a person who simply IS evil, doing evil all day and liking it, whether in actions or in words
- a person who laughs while others do evil or otherwise assists those doing evil by preventing evildoers from having to take responsibility
- a person who witnesses evil without doing anything to stop it or counteract it
- a person who could have done something good, but doesn’t [note the nod to the Book of Common Prayer’s confession: “we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed; by what we have done and by what we have left undone”]
- a person who feels okay about what they’ve done and not done because they compare themselves favorably to other, worse persons

How often do you personally think about these sorts of situations as sin? How often do you think your communities, congregations, places of engagement think of these sorts of situations as sin?

- On page 256, Daniel toys with the idea that his having to dig poop trenches in Oklahoma is sort of deserved because of his having pooped his pants as a child in Dubai, an incident that seemed like the straw that broke the camel's back for his mother on one awful night. Now, he was just a child, and bodily functions are excusable, to say the least, so why does this moment get related to his thinking about sin/consequences/responsibility?
- On page 273-4, Daniel's teacher calls him on avoiding some of the most painful parts of the story. He lists a few: where he worries that it's his fault that his mom gets abused by Ray--that she married him because he's a necessary father figure for Daniel; the parts where he grieves all that he's lost that can never come back, especially his failures of memory; the great fear that he is the flaw in the Persian rug of the story. How do our FEELINGS of shame and guilt and loss play into our understanding of what is sinful?
- On pages 289-290, Daniel confesses to stealing peaches at a refugee camp and to lying to Mrs. Miller. He worries that his lies (which he senses Mrs. Miller sees through) will cause Mrs. Miller to think all immigrants are liars. But Daniel specifically says--and the sentence is on its own line!--"I'm telling you now." What are your responses to hearing all Daniel's confessions: bull, owl, peaches, no-lunch-cover-up, hiding-dad's-lackluster-English-speaking-ability, crying over a broken ball, wasting our time? What should a person say when someone confesses to them?
- On page 344, while announcing Sima, Daniel's mother, as the hero of the story, the narrator declares that her behavior, her unstoppable belief and sacrificial love, made all the difference: "Not Hercules. Not Rostam. Not Jean Claude van Damme could protect and love as Sima, my mom, who was our champion, and who--like Jesus--took all the damage so we wouldn't have to." How does *Everything Sad is Untrue* figure the antidote/solution/redemption for the problem of sin? (Other passages to consider: the epigraph from Dostoyevsky; the hope passage on 346-347, the transformation of the bull story into a sheep story, on pages 350-351).

HOPE

“What you believe about the future will change how you live in the present.” (347)

The book has several passages that deal with last things. There are circumstantial last things that involve a great deal of loss: counting of the last and lost memories, the last Orich bar Daniel eats, or the last time Daniel sees Ali Shekari, the realization that Daniel will never see some family members again. But, not only THAT sort of last thing shows up, but also what some people call eschatology, or the theology of hope: those last, ultimate things.

Here are some examples:

- The book opens with an epigraph, a very famous passage of future Christian hope from The Brothers *Karamazov*.
I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage, like the despicable fabrication of the impotent and infinitely small Euclidean mind of man, that in the world’s finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, of all the blood they’ve shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened.
- Describing Sima’s conversion, seeking to explain it for a skeptical crowd, Daniel says, in the ultimate profession of Christian hope for the coming of the last day:
It’s true.
Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.
This whole story hinges on it. (197)
- The book’s title, *Everything Sad is Untrue*, refers to J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, in *The Return of the King*, when Sam and Gandalf reunite after everything is over. Their reunion is a great moment of hope--a true hope!--that now the adventure is over, now that the ring is destroyed, everything sad will come untrue. On page 232, the narrator describes reading it, crying, just before going out into a tornado.
- During the tornado, Daniel confronts the danger with prayer--the passage describing his prayer refers to hope in God beyond the end of life.
I thought of my Baba Haji as I braced against the roof of the house.
I prayed to God I would see him again.
It won’t be in this life, so it has to be wherever God puts us.
I prayed that even though I was Christian and he was whatever he was, I prayed that God would still let him hold me once we’re both dead.
Reader, I think he heard me.
I think He’s a God who listens as if we are his most important children, and I think He speaks to tell us so. (237)

Why does this book, so concerned with a story that DOESN’T end, Scheherazade’s network of intertwining, neverending stories, concern itself with these final, ultimate things like this? These resolutions? What is its vision of Christian hope? What hope does it offer the reader, that is, you?