

[Educational Insight: Hindu Children's Modern Stories](#)

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Educational Insight

## Hindu Children's Modern Stories

Excerpts from newly published short stories that teach moral values based on the yamas & niyamas, Hinduism's twenty cardinal virtues

By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

The collection of stories in books one and two of Hindu Children's Modern Stories was written and illustrated at my request to convey Hinduism's ethical and moral values and basic religious observances, the traditional yamas and niyamas, to a new generation. The stories, set in India and America, are intended for children ages ten to twelve, when it is natural to learn about being good. Each story speaks to a single value, for example, nonviolence, honesty, purity or giving. Some stories illustrate the choices a child may face in his or her life, such as lying to cover a mistake, and the pleasant or unpleasant consequences that may result from those choices. They show how the negative consequences may be softened by confession, apology and penance. In other stories the characters model positive, noble behavior, helping others and applying religious principles in real-life situations. In "One Tired Student," children who make fun of a boy who constantly falls asleep in class discover compassion when they learn that he is tired because he stays up most of the night helping his great grandfather get through a severe illness. Several stories focus on the consequences of making the wrong kind of friends. The stories show how a child must think about the friends he or she makes, and choose those with similar, positive values. The stories follow the nonviolent child-raising principles of Positive Discipline: avoidance of corporal punishment, seeing mistakes as opportunities for teaching and letting children learn by fully facing the consequences of their own actions. In "Caught in a Friend's Lie," a boy who has been deceitful at school does not face an angry, critical, judgmental parent upon returning home. Rather, his father reacts in a kindly, loving, thoughtful manner, speaking calmly to help his son understand his error, how to make amends and how not to repeat the mistake in the future. Unfortunately, ethics and morals are ignored subjects in most of the world's schools today. I hope that this small set of stories will provide Hindu and non-Hindu parents alike one means to convey these all-important character-building values to their children. Stories by Anuradha Murali

Illustrations by Rajeev N.T.

## Be Satisfied With What You Have

Yogesh's parents seemed to have no time for him ever since they arrived in Chennai two days ago. His mother jabbered endlessly with relatives, and his father seemed mostly interested in sitting down for meal after home-cooked meal. His grandpa and grandma made a fuss over him; but even though they spoke English, they could not understand his American accent. He knew enough Tamil to communicate. His mother had insisted he learn, but he had never been comfortable with it.

He was not interested in being taken to the beach, nor for ice cream. He wanted to play on a computer, but this house did not have one. He asked his mother to buy one, but Grandpa laughed at the idea and said, "After you go back to the US, what will I do with a computer? This old man doesn't even know how to operate a TV remote!"

Yogesh wished he found it as funny as his grandpa did. Somehow he couldn't help feeling irritated with his relatives. So what if they were in India? Couldn't they be more modern? He could not imagine anyone in the US living without a computer.

One day as they sat together, Grandpa asked Yogesh, "What do you play back home?"

"I play on my Xbox and Nintendo."

"Are they your friends?"

Yogesh groaned, "Grandpa, they are game consoles that you connect to your television and play."

"Oh! Then what about friends?"

"Friends? I have more than 200!"

"200? That's a lot for a young boy!" said Grandpa. "Where did you meet them?"

"On Facebook."

"Where is Facebook? Is that a park?" asked Grandpa innocently.

"Grandpa," exclaimed Yogesh with growing frustration, "Facebook is an Internet social networking site where people meet and interact."

"Without seeing each other?" Grandpa was amazed.

Yogesh offered eagerly, "Yes. You should get yourself a computer too, and make some good friends. There are lots of interesting people out there."

Grandpa grew silent for a few minutes, deep in thought. Then he asked, "Do you like India?"

"Frankly, no! There's nothing to do here. The boys are playing cricket all the time. When I try to teach them baseball, they laugh at me. I miss my games and my computer."

Grandpa suggested, "In that case, instead of being stuck here, I think you should go and see our family's native village. You can stay with your great uncle, my brother. It's a few hours' drive from here."

Figuring that it couldn't be worse than being here, Yogesh agreed. The next day, he got into a hired car and left for the village.

He rolled down the windows, and a warm breeze blew into the car. He watched the passing scenery. Soon the city was far behind them. Green rice fields lined each side of the road their car shared with bullock carts, huge buses and trucks. The green complemented the blue of the sky, and the scene was pretty.

It was evening when they reached Nattrampalli, a little village outside Vellore. The car bumped down a narrow side road for at least a kilometer, then stopped. They got out near a cow shelter. Outside the barn, a white cow mooed at them loudly. Yogesh peeped around the side and saw a small calf grazing on tender grass.

A short distance away, he saw a whitewashed house with a little lamp hanging outside. His great uncle, Abhiraman, came out and paid the driver.

"Son, welcome home," he said with a toothless smile.

Yogesh walked into the house. His grandpa's home in Chennai was spartan, but it was a palace compared to this place. There was absolutely nothing here. No sofa, no dining table--no furniture whatsoever, except for a cane bed, a few mats and some large gunny bags filled to bursting with grains.

He ran out to get back in the car, but to his dismay, it was disappearing into the distance. A tear rolled down his cheek. How he hated this! Why had he agreed to come? Why had Mom let him go, knowing what it would be like?

"Where's the bathroom?" he asked Uncle.

"Bathroom? Come with me," replied Abhiraman, and took him to a roofless room through which the moon shone down.

He didn't remember the rest of the evening. He had fallen asleep, sad and upset, on the simple cane bed.

In the morning, a tender breeze blew in and woke him up.

"Uncle, where's the shower?" Abhiraman led him to the well and showed him how to bring up buckets of water to pour over his body.

Yogesh found that he was not as upset as he had been yesterday. "Well, this is a different way to bathe," he thought, "but it works."

He returned to the cottage, where his uncle was holding a glass of frothy milk for him.

"Where do you buy milk, Uncle? Is there a supermarket nearby?" asked Yogesh hopefully.

"There are no shops here. We produce our own food. The milk is fresh from our cows. Do you know how to milk a cow?"

"No..." replied Yogesh.

"Well, then, it's time to learn." Yogesh soon found himself sitting on a short stool next to an 800-pound cow.

Milking the cow was not easy but, Yogesh had to admit, it was fun. He was actually starting to enjoy himself!

In the distance, he saw a boy around his own age who was leading a small herd of goats. Shyly he walked up and introduced himself, using the best Tamil he could muster. The boy, Mani, had dark skin, a mop of curly hair and shining white teeth.

Within a few minutes the two felt like old friends. Mani asked, "Do you want to see some of the things we do here in the village?"

Yogesh felt a surge of excitement. "Sure! I'd like that," he said, thinking of the stories he will have to tell his friends back in the US.

As Mani herded the goats forward with a sturdy stick, they set off on a path between green paddy fields. Soon they came upon a coconut grove. Mani climbed up a tree and threw down a tender coconut. Slipping back down, he chopped an opening in the coconut and gave it to Yogesh. "Drink this!"

Yogesh drank it eagerly. "This is the sweetest tasting water on earth! Wow!"

Next Mani guided them to a hill where a group of boys were playing. Mani called out to them, "Come and meet Yogesh; he is from Bombay!"

Yogesh shot back, "Not Bombay! USA!"

"It doesn't matter. For us, both are the same!"

Yogesh laughed at the statement and suddenly felt lighthearted. These boys had a simple and easy view of life. In their company, he began to relax.

They climbed the hillock and ate wild berries. They swam in the lake on the other side, and Mani dug up some kind of root vegetable and roasted it on an open fire. When the sun started nearing the horizon, they headed back home.

When they reached the house, Uncle Abhiraman was standing outside with a worried look on his face. But when he saw Yogesh's excitement, he smiled and called him in for supper--freshly cooked rice with sambar and fried potatoes. Mani said goodbye and herded the goats to his family's home. Hungry and tired, Yogesh ate heartily.

That night, as he lay in the cane bed, he watched the stars outside twinkling merrily, and he saw a few fireflies behaving like stars on Earth.

The next morning, after bathing at the well, he milked the cow--with more than a little help from Uncle--and collected some vegetables from the garden.

Soon Mani came for him. Today Yogesh asked permission, "Uncle, may I go out with Mani this morning?"

"Certainly! Have a good time together."

With a big "Thank you!" the two set off to the hillock. This time, the boys wanted to play some games. They taught him marbles and kabaddi. He found that playing marbles was difficult, but kabaddi was easy for him. He enjoyed scuffling around on the ground, pushing, pulling and tugging. It was a bit like tag, but with a lot more

running, plus you have to hold your breath for part of it.

Although he washed his clothes at the well every day, his new jeans were soon a dirty brown color. His t-shirt, too, looked like it had seen better days. But Yogesh couldn't care less.

What amazed him the most was that everyone in the village was happy. When he arrived, he had thought, "This is a such a poor village." But after a few days, he couldn't figure out what they were missing. They had good, fresh food, they had comfortable houses, they had the beauty of nature, and they had each other. Nobody felt they needed computers, TV, Internet, or even iPhones. They were totally content.

The next few days passed quickly in a similar fashion. Soon it was time to head back to Chennai. Yogesh decided to give a gift to each of the boys. They flocked around him as he dug into his bag for things to give away. He gave his watch to Mani. "My goodness!" Mani shouted, "This is beautiful. Thank you. I don't really need it, since I can tell the time by the sun. But it looks good, and it makes me feel like a man."

To Sagar, one of the kabbadi players, he gave his best pair of sneakers. To little Varendra he presented his hand video game. The boy tried to put it in his shorts pocket, which was torn, and the console kept falling out. Yogesh wasn't really sure what Varendra would do with it, but at least it would be a souvenir of his visit.

As Yogesh watched the car approach, his uncle and a few villagers came and stood by him. Yogesh turned to Abhiraman, "Uncle, thank you for everything. Thank you for teaching me how to milk the cow and thank you for teaching me that I don't need expensive gadgets to be content. These have been the happiest few days of my life."

Varendra was beginning to cry, and Mani looked like he too might shed a tear. Yogesh hugged Mani, "I will come back next year to see you. I promise! I will write letters from America, too."



As the car neared Chennai, Yogesh realized that he had not even thought of his computer for a week. He didn't miss his games, and he felt no need to check up on his 200 Facebook friends.

All the relatives were waiting to greet him as the car pulled into the driveway. Yogesh jumped out and hugged his grandpa. "Thank you for sending me to our native village. It was the greatest experience of my life. I was so happy there, and now I know I can be happy anywhere!"

## Contentment: A Real Treasure

From the teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Contentment, *santoshā*, is the second *niyama*. How do we practice contentment? Simply do not harm others by thought, word or deed. As a practitioner of *ahimsa*, noninjury, you can sleep contentedly at night and experience *santoshā* then and through the day. Contentment is a quality that everyone wants, and buys things to obtain--"Oh, if I only had my house redecorated, I would be content." "A new wardrobe would content me, give me joy and serenity." "To be content, I must have a vacation and get away from it all. There I can live the serene life and have joyous experiences."

The dharmic way is to look within and bring out the latent contentment that is already there by doing nothing to inhibit its natural expression, as *santoshā*, the mood of the soul, permeates out through every cell of the physical body. Contentment is one of the most difficult qualities to obtain, and is well summed up within our food blessing mantra, from the Shukla Yajur Veda, *Isa Upanishad* invocation, "That is fullness. Creation is fullness. From that fullness flows this world's fullness. This fullness issues from that fullness, yet that fullness remains full." This joy we seek is the joy of fullness, lacking nothing.

Life is meant to be lived joyously. There is in much of the world the belief that life is a burden, a feeling of penitence, that it is good to suffer, good for the soul. In fact, spiritual life is not that way at all. The existentialist would have you believe that depression, rage, fear and anguish are the foremost qualities of the human temper and expression. The communists used to have us believe that joy and serenity as the outgrowth of religion are just an opiate of the people, a narcotic of unreality.

The Semitic religions of the Near East would have us believe that suffering is good for the soul, and there is not much you can do about it. The Saivite Hindu perspective is that contentment is a reflection of centeredness, and discontentment is a reflection of externalized consciousness and ramified desire.

Maintaining joy and serenity in life means being content with your surroundings, be they meager or lavish. Be content with your money, be it a small amount or a large amount. Be content with your health. Bear up under ailments and be thankful that they are not worse than they are. Protect your health if it is good. It is a valuable treasure. Be content with your friends. Be loyal to those who are your long-time, trusted companions. Basically, contentment, *santosha*, is freedom from desire gained by redirecting the forces of desire and making a beautiful life within what one already has in life.

The rich seeking more riches are not content. The famous seeking more fame are not content. The learned seeking more knowledge are not content. Being content with what you have does not mean you cannot discriminate and seek to progress in life. It doesn't mean you should not use your willpower and fulfill your plans.

It does mean you should not become upset while you are striving toward your goals, frustrated or unhappy if you do not get what you want. The best striving is to keep pushing along the natural unfoldment of positive trends and events in your life, your family life and your business. Contentment is working within your means with what is available to you, living within your income, being grateful for what you have, and not unhappy over what you lack.

There are many frustrated souls on the path who torment themselves no end and walk around with long faces because they estimate they are not unfolding spiritually fast enough. They have set goals of Self Realization for themselves far beyond their abilities to immediately obtain. If people say, "I am not going to do anything that will not make me peaceful or that will threaten my peace of mind," how will they get anywhere? That is not the idea of *santosha*.

True *santosha* is seeing all-pervasiveness of the one divine power everywhere. The light within the eyes of each person is that divine power. With this in mind, you can go anywhere and do anything. Contentment is there, inside you, and needs to be

brought out. It is a spiritual power. So, yes, do what makes you content. But know that contentment really transcends worrying about the challenges that face you. Santosha is being peaceful in any situation. The stronger you are in santosha, the greater the challenges you can face and still remain quiet on the inside, peaceful and content, poised like a hummingbird hovering over a flower.

Santosha is the goal; dharma, good conduct, remains the director of how you should act and respond to fulfill your karma. This goal is attainable by following the ten Vedic restraints: not harming others by thought, word or deed, refraining from lying, not entering into debt, being tolerant with people and circumstance, overcoming changeableness and indecision, not being callous, cruel or insensitive to other people's feelings. Above all, never practice deception.

Don't eat too much. Maintain a vegetarian diet for purity and clarity of mind. Watch carefully what you think and how you express it through words. All of these restraints must be captured and practiced within the lifestyle before the natural contentment, the santosha, the pure, serene nature, of the soul can shine forth. Therefore, the practice to attain santosha is to fulfill the yamas. Proceed with confidence; failure is an impossibility.

## Other Fun Stories in the Series

Here are previews of six more of the booksâ twenty stories in which children will encounter challenging situations that are familiar to them, tales of stealing, lying, injuring others and more. The stories illustrate the power of worship, chanting, penance, taking of vows and other religious practices, while highlighting the meaning, purpose and value of applying self control and religious principles in daily life.

### Where to Get the Books

Book One, Ten Tales About Self-Control and Book Two, Ten Tales About Religious Life are each 84 pages long and profusely illustrated with pastel pencil art by Rajeev N.T. of Kerala. The books are available as hardcover (ISBN 978-1-934145-08-1 and 978-1-934145-09-8, \$29.95 each) and as e-books through Amazon.com and Apple's iBookstore. All versions except Kindle include the audio. Order at [minimela.com](http://www.minimela.com) or through [url=http://www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)]Amazon.com[/url].

## How Our Family Became Vegetarians

One day at the dinner table, while enjoying chicken sambal, Janaki, age eight, starts asking difficult questions about why Auntie is a vegetarian and their family is not. Through the course of the story, she realizes that it is wrong to eat animals, decides to quit, and the family joins her in the decision.

### Ananya and the Teacher's Purse

Normally a good girl, Ananya steals \$100 from a teacher's purse and is caught. She must then confess to her parents and deal with the regret, remorse and the shame. She does heartfelt penance, cleaning at the temple, to make up for her mistake and regain the respect of the community.

### Vadivel's Special Vow

At 12, Vadivel took a vow to remain celibate until marriage. Reaching age 15, he becomes obsessed with Amelia. His sister reminds him of the vow, seeing that Amelia is interested in more than just holding hands. Vadivel struggles with his instincts and finally reaffirms his commitment.

### Praying for Ganesha's Help

Vasuki, whose father has lost his job, promises to worship Lord Ganesha daily in their shrine to help him find employment. Inspired by his daughter's devotion, Dad searches even harder, and after weeks of interviews finds a new job to support his family, better even than the one he lost.

### Treating Guests as God

Valli and Seyon respond selfishly to the unexpected arrival of Aunt Hema and her family. After reflecting on the wisdom of the scripture they have been studying, they open their hearts, treat their guests as God and discover the joy that comes from making others happy.

### Penance at a Cave in Malaysia

Young Raj prepares himself a month in advance for Tai Pusam, eating just one meal a day and sleeping on the floor. One the day of the festival, he carries kavadi at Batu Caves and has his skin pierced with small spears as a penance. His friend Arvind, afraid at first, learns lessons of devotion and purity.

