

Hindu Children's Modern Stories

• • • **Book One** • • •

Ten Tales About Self-Control

By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Stories by Anuradha Murali

Illustrations by Rajeev N.T.

First Edition

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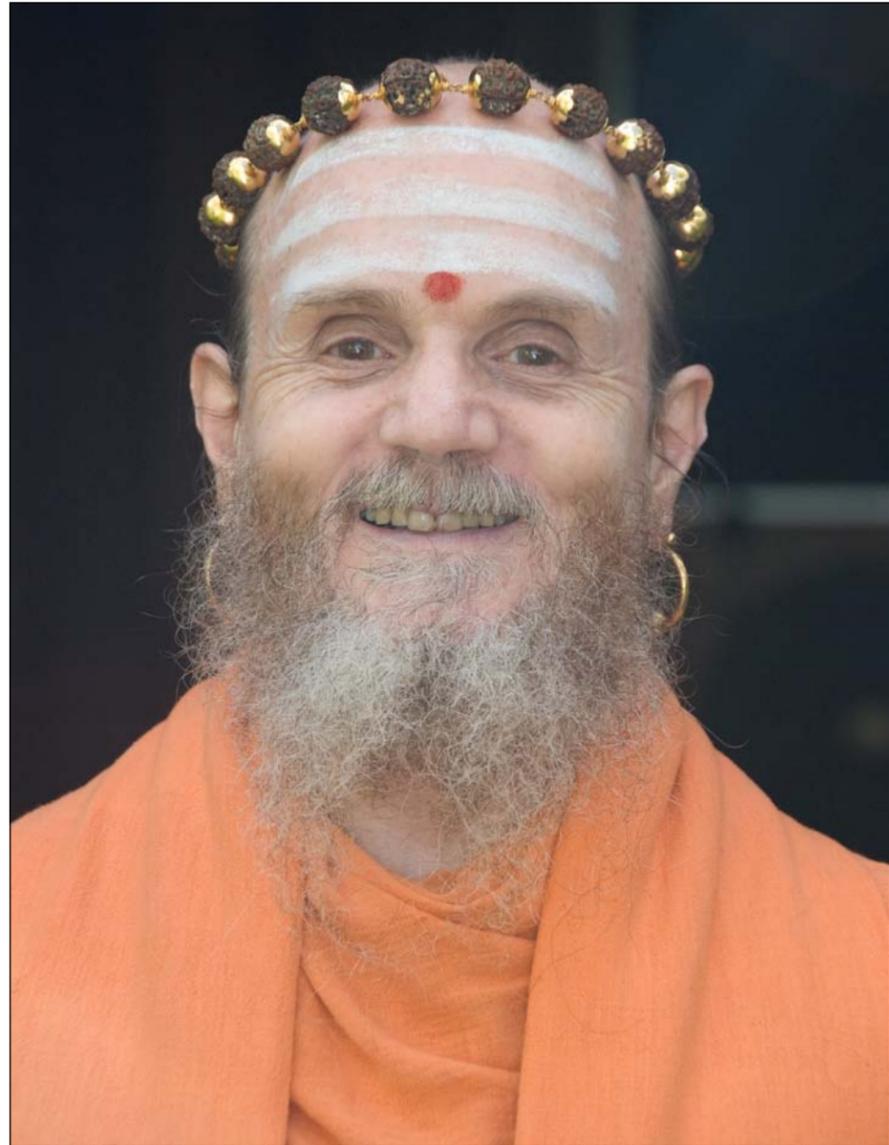
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Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami
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INTRODUCTION

The collection of stories in Books One and Two of Hindu Childrens' 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.

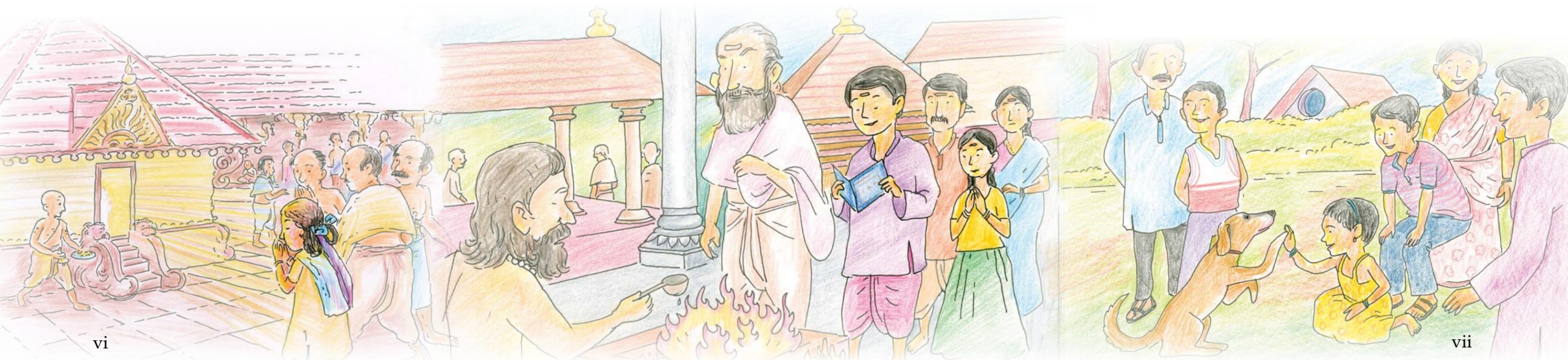
The stories follow the nonviolent child-raising principles of Positive Discipline: avoidance of corporal punishment, seeing mistakes as opportunities for teaching and letting children learn by fully facing the consequences of their own actions.

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.

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How Our Family Became Vegetarians Again

Janaki walked down the road, soaking in the spectacular view of Stone Mountain, even as the sun's rays lit it up like a glowing monument carved by nature. The walk back from school was never boring. She looked at the view, thinking that her home was a lot like the mountain—steady, strong, providing shelter for her and her elder sisters Vani and Reshma.

As the three of them reached home, their mother opened the door and the wonderful smell of fresh dosas reached their noses. Janaki took a deep breath and said, “Ma, I’m hungry.” Her mother gave her a hug and said, “Wash first and come down.”

“Why dosas and not chicken pastries today, Ma?” asked Janaki.

“I just wanted you to taste the excellent chutney and sambar which Sunitha Aunty made for all of you.” Amma looked at the three girls and saw their innocent faces. Janaki, the youngest, was barely eight years old. Vani was twelve and tall for her age. Reshma, fourteen, was already blossoming into a young woman.

“Why does Auntie only make vegetarian food? Can’t she learn to eat chicken like us?” asked Vani, dipping a piece of dosa into the steaming hot sambar.

Amma averted her eyes and said, “You girls know that your grandma was a vegetarian, and your father and I were vegetarians, too, when we were in India. Somehow it is easy to be vegetarians in India, with most of our relatives and friends being vegetarians; but after coming to the US, we sort of adjusted ourselves to American culture, and we began eating nonvegetarian food. All of you, I know, are comfortable with both vegetarian and nonvegetarian food, and we aren’t forcing any particular food habits on you. But there are days when I remember my own mother and I wish I had never started eating nonvegetarian food. My mother was so slim and healthy. Even at eighty, she could see well, hear well and actually take care of herself. I wonder if I’ll be able to do that at her age. Well, enough talk about food. Tell me about your day at school.”

Janaki suddenly said, “Amma, the other day when we went to the temple, the priest was talking to a few children about Mahatma Gandhi and how he was a vegetarian. He was also telling us



something about ahimsa, but I didn’t understand very well.”

“Ahimsa means nonviolence, dear,” replied Amma, as she placed another hot dosa on Janaki’s plate. “Nonviolence means not only being nonviolent in your actions, but also in your words and even in your thoughts and intentions. It means not harming another in any way at all.”

“If that’s what it means, we aren’t practicing it!” said Janaki matter-of-factly.

“Why?” asked Amma in surprise. “We are nonviolent people. Are we fighting, or what?”

“No. But we eat animals, like chicken and lamb. Aren’t we being cruel to them and not practicing ahimsa?”

Reshma tapped her hand impatiently on the table and said, “Drop this silly topic. You enjoy eating chicken as much as we all do. What’s this sudden concern for animal welfare?”

Janaki continued to eat, but her mind was elsewhere. Suddenly, she said, “Speaking of animals, where’s Puli?” The Bengali cat had



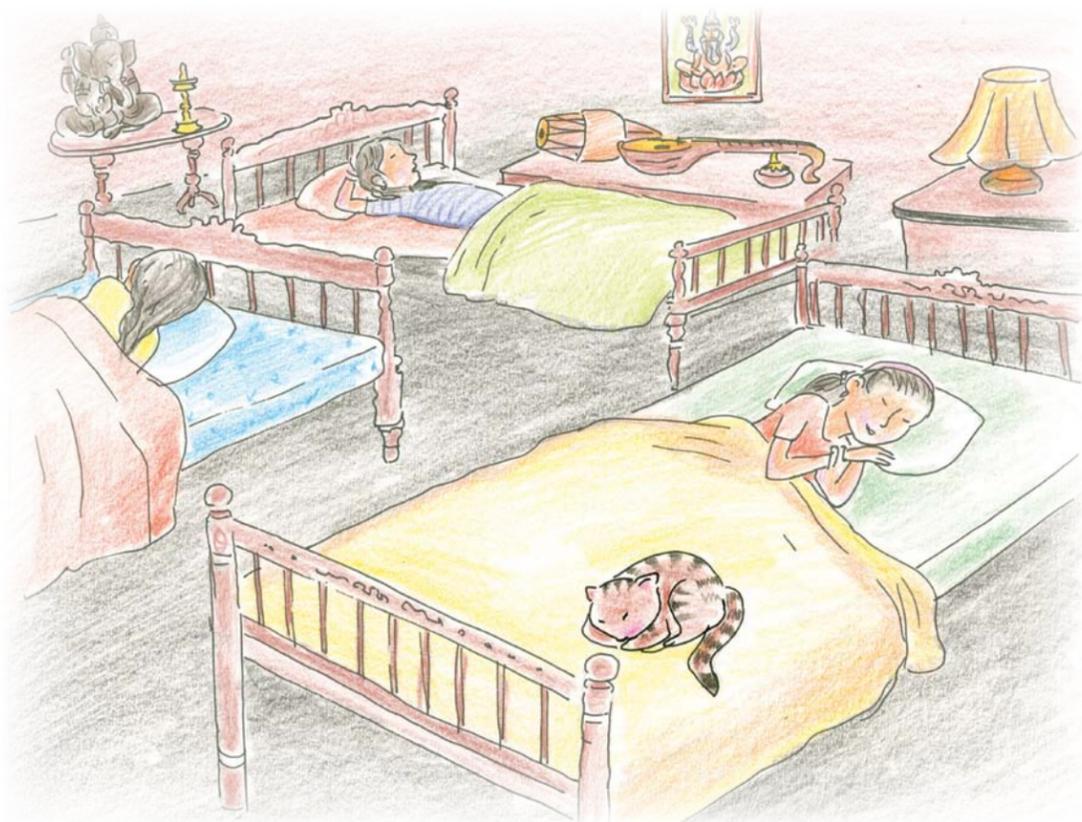
come to their house as a mischievous kitten when he was a few months old and adopted Janaki as his favorite person. Within two years, he had grown into a big cat and spent most of his time sitting on the fence outside the house. His brown fur had black stripes, giving him the appearance of a small tiger, so they called him Puli. That's Tamil for "tiger."



"Puli, where are you?" shouted Janaki. In return, she heard a soft meow. She peeped under the stairway and saw Puli curled up cozily. Janaki lifted the cat and tenderly carried him with her. Opening one yellow-flecked eye, the cat gave her a grumpy look. He seemed to be saying, "Why are you disturbing my royal nap?"

The evening wore on, and towards night, the girls went to the large bedroom which the three shared. The house had space for two more rooms, and construction would begin soon. Reshma walked in and said, "I can't wait to get my own room."

"Once you have your own room and Vani gets hers, this will



become mine, right? And then I can keep Puli with me?"

"As it is, he spends all his time here. Where else does he go?" asked Vani. She looked over at Puli as he lay dozing at the foot of the bed. "He seems to be growing lazier day by day," said Reshma, as she tickled the cat playfully. Purring in enjoyment, Puli stretched his body and settled down in a more comfortable position.

It was a clear night, and somewhere in the distance an owl hooted loudly. In the elm tree near the bedroom, a bird was perched on its nest. The whole atmosphere was one of peace and soft happiness. As Janaki rested her head on her soft pillow, she uttered a prayer of thanks to Lord Siva for giving her so much.

In her dream, she was sharing with the class an essay on "Festivals in India." As she talked about Diwali, she explained the fireworks. Her dream was filled with a demonstration of colorful lights and noise, when suddenly her sleep was disturbed by a different kind of noise. She woke up suddenly, feeling a bit lost and unsure of her surroundings. Janaki looked around at the dark room and tried to figure out what had woken her up. She heard the sound again and felt a sudden chilling fear. It was a strange, ghastly sound! She was now wide awake. She strained to hear the sound, and realized that it was Puli. Yet it was not his usual meowing. Suddenly she wondered if the cat was injured. Springing up, she switched on her bedside lamp, saying, "Puli, where are you?"

As the light came on, her eyes swept to the ground. To her horror, she saw a bright red stain. "Vani!" she screamed, and Vani woke up with a fright. In the other bed, Reshma swung to consciousness. Both sisters came rushing to her, only to stop in their tracks as their eyes took in the blood trail on the tile floor. "Where is all this blood from? Janaki, are you okay?" shouted Reshma. The two sisters rushed to her bed.

"I, I, I think it's Puli. He's meowing in a strange way, and that's why I woke up."

Vani switched on a few more lights in the room and looked around her. Sitting in a corner was Puli, and near his paws lay the biggest rat that Vani had ever seen in her life. The rat lay dead, with blood oozing from its body. As she watched it, she felt her sisters coming up behind her. The three of them stared with horror at the sight in front



of them. Puli looked very proud of his catch, and Janaki exclaimed, "He brought it to share with us! Ugh!"

Hearing the noise, Appa and Amma had come upstairs. Appa took the rat by the tail and tossed it outside. Janaki got a cloth and cleaned up the blood. Puli was upset that his rat had been tossed out and ran after it. The three girls went back to bed in a state of shock. They did not sleep well.

The next evening Uncle and Aunty dropped by for dinner. Out of respect for them, the menu was a vegetarian one. As soon as they walked in, Vani rushed to Uncle and narrated the night's incident. Uncle looked thoughtful as he watched Janaki's disturbed face. Slowly he said, "What's wrong?"

Amma looked with surprise at Uncle and said, "What do you mean, 'What's wrong?' They actually saw the cat tearing up a rat in front of their eyes. You should have seen the blood! And you being a vegetarian, you're asking me what is wrong?"

He looked at Amma and said, "You eat meat! Why are you shocked that your cat eats meat? Your meat is cooked and his meat is not cooked. What else is the difference?"

Amma looked stunned for a moment and then she said rather defensively, "We buy our chicken from the supermarket, where it has been cleaned and packed. We don't see blood dripping all over the place."

Uncle laughed and said, "That is not a satisfactory explanation. You know that the chicken on the supermarket shelf did not appear there miraculously. Someone has killed and cleaned it for you."

Janaki looked at Amma, her sisters and her uncle, and she said, "Uncle, does this mean that we should not eat nonvegetarian food?"

Uncle said softly, "My dear child, human beings have teeth and a digestive system designed to eat vegetarian food. The cat is designed to catch, kill and eat meat. It is not wrong for him to do so to feed himself and his family. But we humans kill animals, cook the meat to make it soft and then we eat it. This is unnecessary. We don't need





to kill to eat. We humans should practice ahimsa, nonviolence, and respect the life of every single creation of God. I realized this early in my life and have been a happy vegetarian, just as my parents—your grandparents—were.”

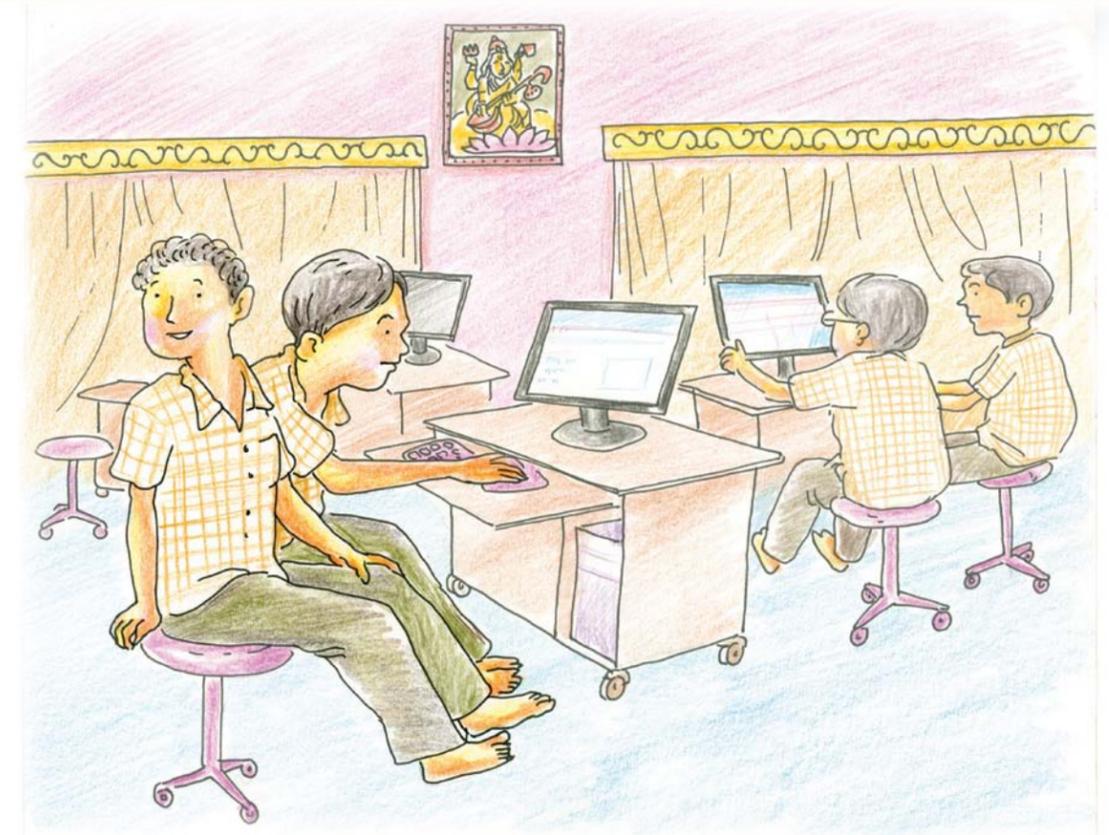
The entire family sat in silence for a few seconds.

Eight-year-old Janaki spoke first, “I think from now on I will be a vegetarian.”

“Me, too,” said Reshma and Vani at the very same time.

Appa looked at Amma, and then at Uncle.

He said, “I knew this day would come. I never felt right about eating meat. From this day on, we are a vegetarian family again!”



Caught in a Friend's Lie

Anand noticed that Jothi's eyes were wandering constantly towards the door and away from the computer project they were there to do. Finally, Anand complained, “Jothi, I also want to go out and play. I stayed back to help you complete your assignment, but you're not paying attention. At this rate, we'll be here all night.”

After a few more minutes of Jothi's fooling around, Anand felt his temper rise a bit. He said, “Jothi, focus, or I'm leaving!” Nikhil and Ved, who were the only others in the room, looked up. They were surprised at the sharp tone in Anand's voice. Seeing the two boys looking at him, Jothi flushed and barked back at Anand, “Oh, you think you're a big shot, huh? You know all the answers, and the questions, too. I'll complete it at my own pace.”

“In that case, you will have to do it on your own,” replied Anand. But just as Anand was getting off his chair, Jothi's strong hand caught his



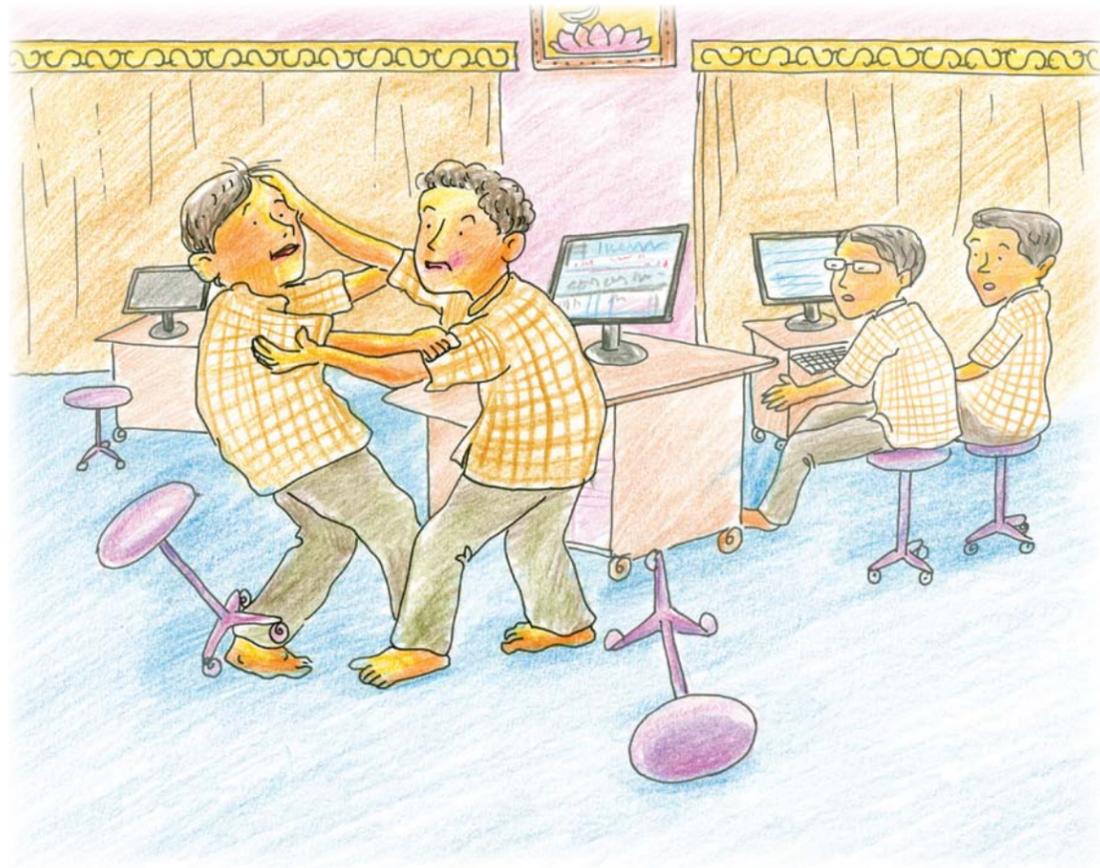
arm from behind. "No, my friend, you can't just leave. Let's wrestle. If you win, you can leave. If I win, then you have to complete my assignment."

Jothi then pulled Anand toward him. Anand lost his balance. As he was about to fall, he tried to grab the edge of the desk. Instead, he caught only some cables and fell hard to the ground. The keyboard came down, landing off to one side of the table. Then, with a loud crash, the computer monitor fell on the floor in front of him.

For a few seconds, there was total silence. The boys were in shock. Jothi was the first to speak: "Get up, you fool. If the teacher sees you lying down like that, we'll be in trouble."

Quickly, Jothi picked up the monitor and put it back on the table. He switched it on, but the monitor seemed to be dead. Nikhil and Ved looked at each other fearfully. By now Anand had gotten up. He said, "Why did you push me like that? Look what happened!"

Jothi calmly replied, "Anand, it was all in fun. This doesn't have to be anyone's fault. When our teacher Mr. Kumar asks, all of you can just tell him that I tripped on the cord and knocked the monitor down."



Anand said, "But that's a lie. That's not the truth."

"So, who cares if it's the truth or not? We'll get in trouble if we tell the truth," replied Jothi.

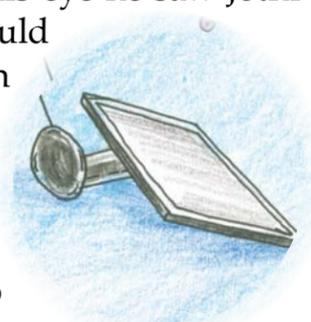
Just then Mr. Kumar walked into the room and asked, "What was that noise, boys?"

Jothi gave a soft smile and said, "Sir, my foot caught the power cord on the floor and it pulled the monitor off the table. I think there's a problem with it, because it won't turn on."

Mr. Kumar looked from one boy to the other. He switched on the monitor, but nothing happened. Turning to Anand, he asked, "What happened, Anand?"

Anand lowered his head. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Jothi staring threateningly at him. Telling the truth would be bad for Jothi. Already the boy had gotten in trouble several times this school year. Another incident, and he could be suspended. In spite of his better senses, Anand said, "It happened the way Jothi just told you, Sir."

Shaking his head, he turned to the other two



boys. They were obviously scared and backed up Jothi's story that it was all an accident.

Jothi smiled broadly and said, "Sir, they say I told you the truth. Do you believe me now?"

The teacher shook his head again and said, "You have to learn to be careful. This computer is valuable. You should take care of it the way you take care of your personal belongings." Saying these words, Mr. Kumar began to walk out of the room, but just as he reached the door, he turned suddenly and looked at Anand. He was quick to notice the way Anand immediately averted his eyes and stared at the wall. Mr. Kumar knew someone was lying.

Anand walked out of the lab room feeling upset and confused. Why had Jothi pushed him down? After all, he had been trying to help Jothi! And then he had to lie for him! Maybe Jothi wasn't such a good friend. This certainly did not feel right.

Anand set off to walk home. The evening sun was slowly setting. The tops of the trees glowed with a bright orange shade. The sunlight reflected on the clear blue lake on the way to his house. He saw a flock



of swans land gracefully on the water. Surely they never had to lie about anything, he thought. Why do people lie? Isn't it easier to speak the truth? Yes, sometimes speaking the truth is scary because you can get yourself in trouble, but at least that will be the end of it. But one lie always seems to lead to another. The problem might be covered up, but inside, deep inside, something will always bother you.

Anand suddenly felt someone walking beside him and turned his head. He saw his father smiling. "Daddy, I'm so happy to see you," said Anand and reached for his father's arm.

The father looked at his son and knew immediately that there was something wrong. He smiled softly and said, "Had a bad day, son?"

Anand couldn't look his father in the eye. How could he tell him the truth? But then if he lied, it would be another lie and soon he would be caught in a web of lies. He trusted his father and decided to tell the truth. He told the story of the day—trying to help Jothi, the wrestling, breaking





the monitor and finally lying to Mr. Kumar.

His father had always been kind and gentle with him. He believed in ahimsa, nonviolence. He had never spanked or slapped his son. The few times he had become upset and spoke harshly to Anand, he apologized afterwards. When Anand misbehaved, his father carefully explained what he did wrong. His punishment was loss of privileges, such as not being able to play with his friends for a week. Anand trusted his father because he was kind and patient.

"Anand," his father said, "I'm proud of the fact that you decided to speak the truth to me. You realized there was no point in continuing to lie. You were wrong to have lied to the teacher. Yes, Jothi is your friend, but you don't need friends who make you do wrong things. You need to stand up for yourself and for what is right. You should not just go along with people who get into wrong situations, say wrong words or do wrong things. There are no excuses for what you have done. For your own peace of mind, you must fix this. You



can start by confessing to your teacher."

As soon as he reached school the next morning, Anand went to the staff room. Mr. Kumar could see Anand was upset and said, "Come here, young man. What's troubling you?"

Anand looked straight at his teacher and said, "Sir, yesterday I lied to you. What really happened was quite different from what we told you. I fell down and in the process pulled the monitor to the floor."

"You fell down? How?" asked Mr. Kumar.

Anand hesitated for a second. He knew telling the truth would get Jothi in trouble, too. But Anand knew his father was right and he could not live with this lie anymore. It just wasn't right. Finally, he said, "Sir, we were fighting. I wanted to go home, and Jothi was stopping me."

Mr. Kumar quickly understood what had really happened. The boys knocked down the monitor during their fight. He said, "I appreciate your coming and telling me the truth. But the fact is you lied yesterday, and that was a mistake. Make sure that this does not happen again."

The tough words were softened by the gentle expression in Mr.





Kumar's eyes. Smiling, he said, "You are a good boy. You have a good value system which will always guide you. But don't make friends with people who influence you to do things which you know are not right. That's my advice."

Jothi and the two other boys were called in to the staff room. Jothi repeated his earlier lie, but Nikhil and Ved confessed the real story. Jothi was not allowed to use the computer room for a month, which meant that he would have to catch up with the others later. Anand and the other boys did not escape punishment either. They were required to spend time after school cleaning the computer room for two weeks.

After the incident, Anand was polite to Jothi. But he no longer considered him a friend and did not spend time with him.

The next year, Jothi was caught in an even bigger lie and was suspended from school. Anand thought, "If I had continued to lie about the computer accident as Jothi wanted, I might have still been his friend. I might have been involved in this new trouble he caused. I could have even gotten suspended like him. My father was right, one has to be very careful when choosing friends."



Ananya and the Teacher's Purse

The school bell rang loudly, telling Ananya that it was time to pack up her books and go home. All around her was the noise of joyous laughter, squealing and shouting as the girls got ready to leave. But strangely, her legs would not move. It was as though her feet were attached to the ground. She slowly put her hand into her pocket and felt the \$100 bill. It was sitting snugly, but to her it seemed like a live bomb. She had not meant to steal the money. She had actually gone to the staff room to ask the teacher if she could borrow Ramya's math notebook. But there was no one in the room. Mrs. Guhan's handbag was lying open on the table. Ananya looked into the bag, and the first thing she saw was the



\$100 bill. Without even thinking about it, she snatched the money and dashed out of the staff room. She ran and ran and only stopped when she was close to a classroom at the other end of the school.

Panting and out of breath, she looked at the money. Now, as the bell rang, she wondered if she should spend the money with her friends or keep it for the Diwali holidays. As she sat there thinking, she felt a light tap on her shoulders. She looked up to see Mrs. Ganesan staring down at her. A terrible feeling of shock and fear filled her body. Mrs. Ganesan beckoned her to come with her. As she followed the teacher, Ananya felt as though she was detached from her body. She wanted to run home and hide in her room. When they neared the principal's office, she felt a strange pain in her chest and almost started crying right there.

The principal, Mr. Rao, came straight to the point. He did not believe in beating around the bush. He demanded to know, "Ananya, did you take some money from Mrs. Guhan's handbag today?"

Looking down at her shoes, Ananya murmured, "No, Sir. I didn't."



For a few seconds there was utter silence. The silence became very loud for Ananya. She feared she had been caught. She looked up and saw that Mrs. Shah had joined the group. The three teachers looked at each other puzzled. Ananya had always been so well behaved in school. Finally, Mrs. Shah said, "Ananya, I saw you taking the money. I was behind the cupboard, and you didn't see me. Confess and hand it over."

Silently, she reached into her pocket and pulled out the \$100 bill. Tears blurred her vision. She knew what the teachers must be thinking about her. She had not only stolen money but had also lied. She dared not lift her eyes and see their disappointed faces.

After a moment's pause, Mr. Rao said, "Ananya, for your own good, I think your parents should be made aware of your behavior today. If we call them here, it will be embarrassing for you. Because this is the first time you've gotten in trouble, I would like you to confess to them at home. Then we will discuss your punishment."

That night Ananya sat down for dinner



with her parents. She saw the world around her collapsing. Oh, why had she done something so stupid? Why had she peeped into Mrs. Guhan's handbag and then stolen her money?

When dinner was nearly over, she said, "Appa, something awful happened in school today." Then she narrated the incident. Outside, a lonely owl let out a hooting sound, and in the distance, a dog barked loudly. All familiar sounds, but today they sounded alien, harsh and scary. In those few minutes, she had wounded her parent's belief and trust in her.

Much to her relief, her Appa acknowledged how difficult it must have been to confess to them and praised her for being such a strong girl. Ananya told her parents she had learned her lesson. Both her Appa and Amma consoled her with hugs and assured her that even though she had made a big mistake, she was still loved.

The next few days went by in a blur. Her parents grounded her for a month, and she had to spend two weeks in detention after school.



But that wasn't the worst of it. The news of the theft had spread like wildfire. Everywhere she went, students whispered behind her back. "There she is, that girl who stole the money," they said. Over and over again, the same words and the looks of contempt. Her teachers used to trust her, but now they were suspicious. Even though she wrote a note of apology and gave it to Mrs. Guhan, she still didn't feel forgiven or right inside herself.

At night, in the privacy of her room, she cried bitterly and prayed. "Siva, everyone hates me and I don't blame them. I hate myself. Please save me. Please make my parents, teachers and friends trust and love me again."

One night, as she wept bitterly before going to sleep, she heard the door opening and she saw the shadow of her mother. "Ananya, are you crying?" she asked softly.

Ananya threw her arms around her mother's neck and continued weeping. She sobbed loudly as she trembled against her mother's shoulder. Finally, the tears slowed down and she lay quietly in her mother's arms.

"It's okay, my child. It's over."





"I'll never do it again, Amma, but it's not over. I did something bad, and today no one respects or loves me. Oh, what can I do?" she asked.

"Ananya, my dearest," her mother replied, "we have forgiven you and the school has punished you. But robbing is a public crime and if you want people to change their mind about it, you need to do a public penance. I suggest you do some hard service at the temple. By cleaning the temple floors, you will erase the bad karma you made by stealing."

Ananya looked at her mother eagerly and said, "I'm ready to do anything! Anything to go back to my old life."

The following Saturday Ananya went to the Siva temple near her house. Standing in front of the altar, she promised, "Siva, I hope you will forgive me for my wrong action. I am going to do penance. From today on, I will come here to the temple every Saturday for a month and scrub and clean the floor."

Immediately after saying those words, Ananya felt a strange peace descend on her, and that night, for the first time in a week, she slept well.

As the days went on, the girls in the school forgot what Ananya had done, but none of them was ready to be her friend again. She sat

alone at lunch and was the only girl not invited for birthday parties.

One Saturday, she was in the temple, cleaning the floor, when a shadow fell across her. She looked up and saw Anjali and her mother. Anjali was one of the best students in the school, and popular as well. Anjali's mother looked at Ananya with surprise. She said, "My dear, you're such a little girl and you're doing so much hard and dirty work!"



One of the pujaris who was watching took Anjali and her mother aside. Even he knew about the theft. He explained, "She's been coming here on Saturday and spending more than four hours cleaning the temple. She's doing penance for stealing the money! I've never seen such a young person do this."

Ananya's face was covered in sweat, and her old salwar kameez was soaked with soap and water. She continued doing her work without looking at Anjali and her mother.

The next day, as she ate her lunch, watching a few crows, Anjali





walked up to her and said, “May I join you for lunch?” Ananya bent her head down and said, “Why do you want to eat with a robber?”

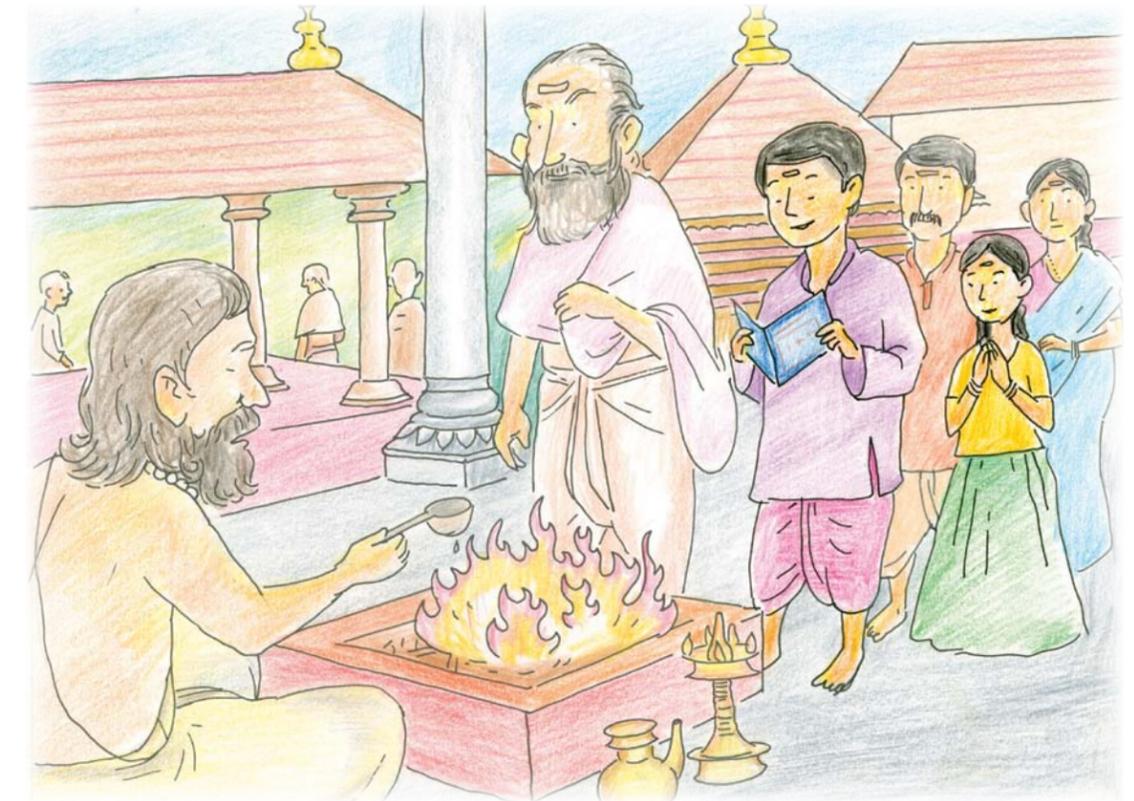
“I am not eating with a robber. I am eating with a girl who has realized her mistake and is willing to punish herself to make up for it. Not many of us are so brave. You have not only realized your mistake but also done a severe penance. I am sorry for judging you.”

Ananya said softly, “Don’t feel sorry for me. I made a mistake and I’m paying for it.”

“Silly! Who’s feeling sorry for you? I want to be friends with you.”

One month after finishing her penance, Ananya sat on her father’s knee. He held her close and said, “My dear daughter, this last month has been very difficult for you, hasn’t it?”

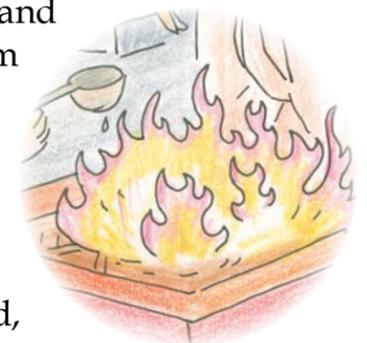
“No, Dad. It’s been my very best month. I have realized the value of being respected and trusted by my friends, parents and teachers. Never again will I do such a foolish thing as steal! This has been a good experience, Dad.” Saying that, she hugged him tightly.



Vadivel’s Special Vow

Vadivel was just twelve years old when he took his brahmacharya vrata at the temple in his guru’s ashram. He memorized the vow, and studied all the hard words: *volition* means free will, *chastity* means to abstain from sex; *sublimate* and *transmute* means to change a lower energy into a higher one; and *betoken* means to be a sign of. The ceremony was held during the ashram’s weekly early morning fire worship. With his guru, parents, relatives and friends looking on, he recited:

“I, Vadivel, seek the blessings of God, Gods and guru as I declare of my own volition my firm intention to live a pure and virtuous life, and now take this brahmacharya vrata. I vow to value and protect purity in thought, word and deed, and chastity in body, to sublimate and transmute the sexual energies and the instinctive impulses of anger, jealousy, greed,

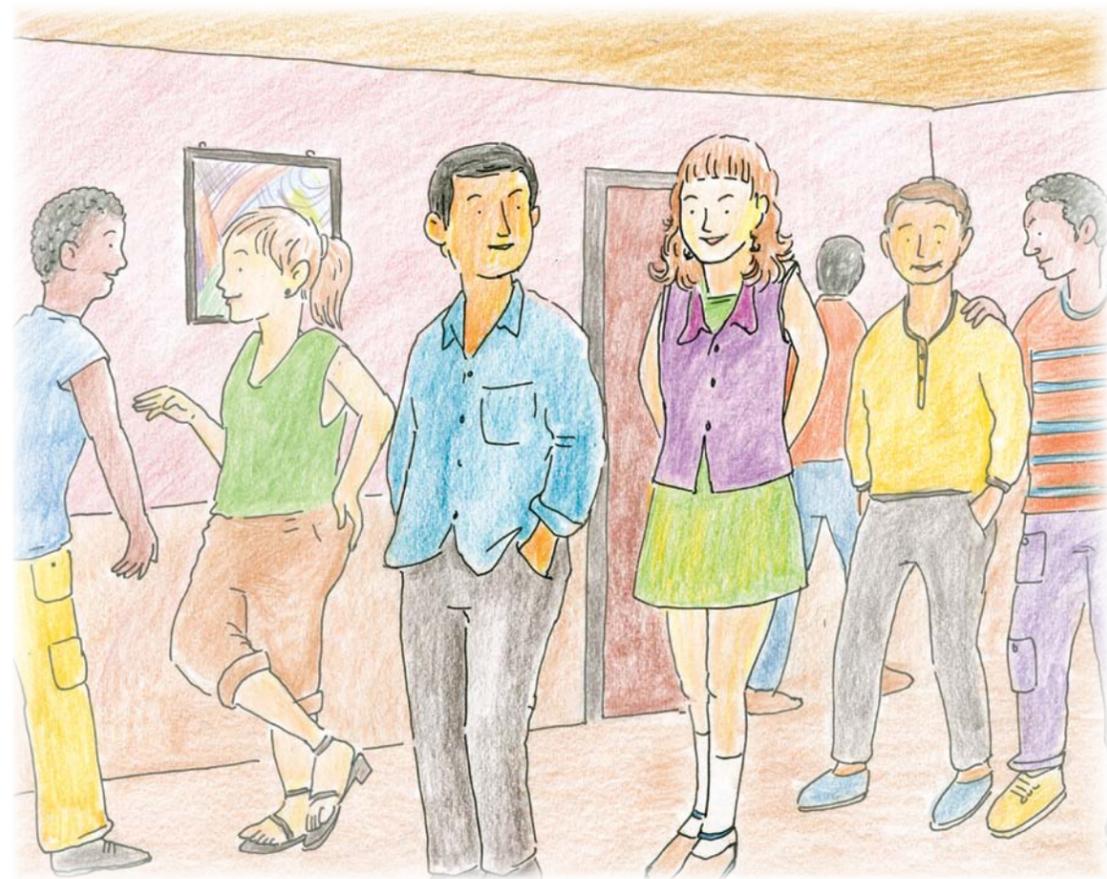


hatred and selfishness. I promise to remain chaste and pure until marriage and wear this sacred brahmacharya cord around my waist to betoken this solemn oath. At such time that I marry, I promise to marry a Saivite Hindu virgin by arrangement of both families and with the blessings of my guru.”

At the conclusion of the ceremony, his guru tied a white cord around his waist for him to wear all the time as a reminder of his vow. He would only remove it permanently when he married. It was easy for Vadivel to take the vow—his parents insisted he do so, and besides, he did not even like girls then! His sister Anbu, just a year younger than he, took her vow at the same ceremony.

Now was the time for study, his father explained, not for finding a girlfriend. This all made sense to Vadivel, and things went along fine until he was 16. He was a top student in his class at one of Houston’s best schools, and his sister was also near the top of her class.

But then things changed. He could never forget the first time he met Amelia. Mostly he had Indian friends, as there were so many Indians that lived in Houston, Texas. Amelia was different from the



Indian girls. She was just so cool, he thought, especially when she talked baseball with him—that was his favorite sport. She actually knew more about baseball than most of the boys in his class. And this was in Texas, where baseball is taken very seriously!

They would chat after class about the recent games and who might make it to the World Series. He would call her up or text her about a game in progress. These phone chats and meetings started to become frequent, and he found himself spending a lot of time with Amelia. Vadivel just thought of her as a good friend, maybe even his best friend.

Then one day, his little sister Anbu, now 15, said, “Hey, Vadivel, don’t forget that you have taken a vow!”

Blushing, he retorted, “Why are you reminding me of that now?”

“You know why!” she replied, leaving the room.

Confused by his feelings, he went for a long walk. He realized that Amelia had become more to him than just a friend. Amelia, he knew, had not taken a vow of celibacy. She clearly wanted a closer relationship. She would hold his hand, and last week gave him a tight hug. But what about him? He had taken a vow in the temple in front of

God, his guru and parents. Vadivel knew that the vow was for his own good, and that it would not be right to break it.

That week, his report card arrived, and his father noticed that his grades had dropped drastically. Vadivel, who had so far gotten A's and just one B, had gotten a C in French, a language he was really good in! Vadivel tried to casually shrug it off, blaming his interest in sports and other activities. But his father would not accept that excuse.

"Vadivel, you have forgotten that you have taken the brahmacharya oath. You are spending too much time in Amelia's company, and that has resulted in this."

"No, Appa. Don't blame Amelia. It has nothing to do with her," he shot back.

Appa was quiet for a minute and then said, "That's fine. I could be wrong about Amelia. But I want to give you some advice. This is the time in your life for studying. A time will come when the right girl will be there for you to marry, but this is not that time. At your age,



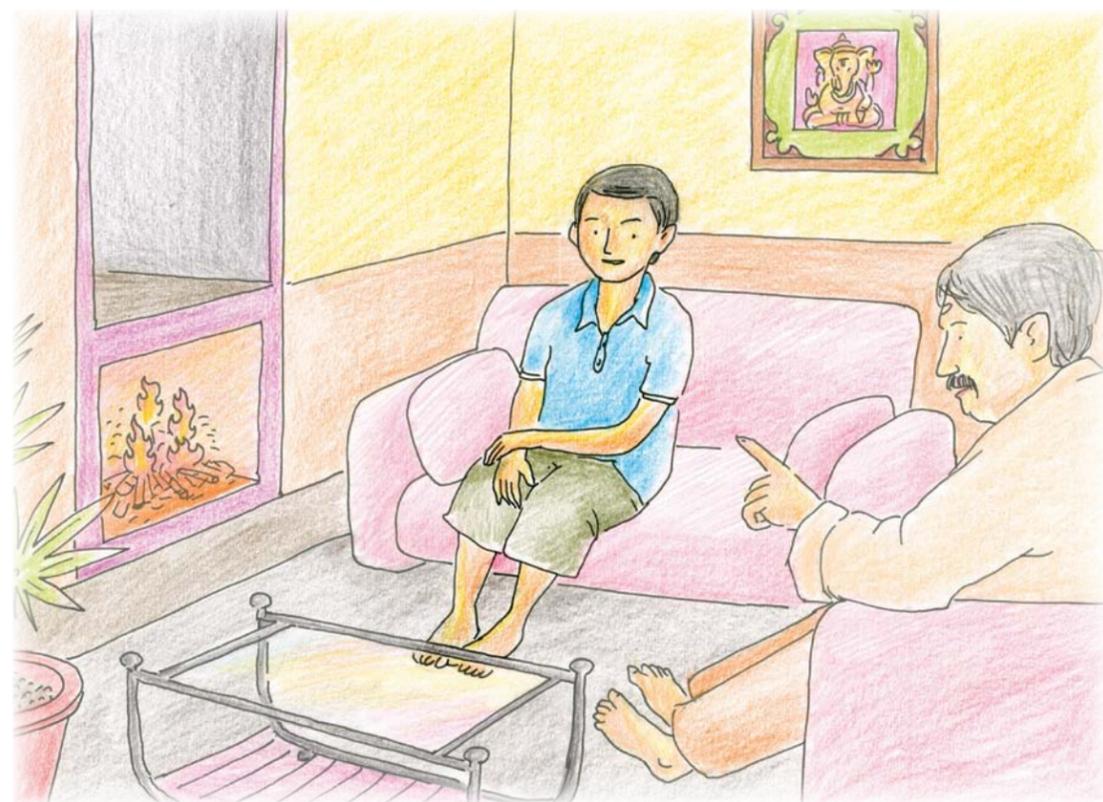
your spiritual energy should be going into your studies. It shouldn't be going into a close friendship with a girl. Every time you are on the phone with her, you are losing important study time, and that is why your grades are suffering."

"She is just a friend, Appa." Vadivel said softly.

"In which case, you need not stop meeting her. But instead of meeting her alone, meet her with a group of friends. Avoid a one-on-one relationship, as otherwise you may end up breaking your vrata."

The next day was the first of the two-week Teen Sex Education classes given each year as part of the health studies course. Vadivel knew it was a controversial class. Some parents felt the class should not even be taught in the school. Children could only attend, in fact, after getting their parents' written permission. He had talked it over with Appa, and they had decided it would be good for him. As it turned out, Amelia was in the same class, which included boys and girls.

The teacher started off by asking, "How many of you have taken a vow of chastity?" Eight hands went up among the 22 students, and then Vadivel's, making nine. He was surprised to see he was not





alone in taking a vow to not have sex before marriage. It was obvious Amelia was surprised that he was one of the nine.

The other eight students with vows were all Christians. Three were Catholics, four were Southern Baptists and wore “chastity rings,” and one was a Seventh Day Adventist. That was Scott, whom Vadivel knew because Scott was also a vegetarian. Each student was asked to explain why they had taken the vow and what it meant to them. Vadivel gave a convincing speech on the Hindu view of chastity and marriage. His words reminded him of why he valued his vow. And hearing the other students talk about their vows showed him it was not just something his family thought was important.

At lunchtime that day, he walked to the cafeteria, where he often met Amelia. Reaching her table, he pulled up a chair and looked at her for a moment. He then said, “Amelia, I hope what I am about to say won’t upset you too much, but I think it is important for both of us. I know you didn’t realize I had taken a chastity vow. It doesn’t mean we can’t continue to be friends, just the way we are. It really is best for both of us, as we need to focus on our school work right now.”

Amelia stared at him for a few seconds and then she said, “I

thought we were growing closer. What’s happened to you? And what is this chastity thing about? I’m not one of *those* girls, but who waits for marriage these days anyway?”

Vadivel looked down at the table and then looked at her again. This time he looked directly at her and said, “There is absolutely no doubt that we are growing closer and you are growing more important to me. That is exactly why we need to keep our distance. This is not the time for a serious boy-girl relationship. I hope you understand that. This is a time to study hard and build a strong foundation for the rest of our life. I have to go to class now. I’ll meet you at Joe’s place on the weekend.” He walked off quickly.

Vadivel went to class and, for the first time in months, focused on what the teacher was saying.

The weekend party was fun, with all his friends gathered around, discussing the baseball team’s performance. Then Amelia walked in, hand in hand with Dennis, the star shortstop on the baseball team. They casually walked past Vadivel, Amelia barely noticing him. She didn’t say anything to him the rest of the evening.





Vadivel left the party early, his heart heavy. He knew that he had made the right decision—already he was doing better on quizzes, but that could not take away the pain he felt in his heart.

When he returned home, his father asked, “What’s wrong, son?”

“Nothing, I guess. Amelia seems to have forgotten me. She ignored me at the party and spent all her time with Dennis.”

Then Anbu came in and loudly declared, “She dumped you!”

“Anbu, be kind,” Appa scolded softly.

Vadivel turned to Anbu with tears in his eyes and replied slowly, “Not really. I was the one who stopped the relationship. Still, it hurts.”

“I’m sorry, Vadivel,” Anbu offered quietly, “I should take this as a warning for myself.”

His father put his arm around Vadivel’s shoulder and said, “Son, Amelia is a good girl, but her priorities in life are different from yours. She wants to have fun now. When you said no, she found someone more willing. When the time is right, you will find your life partner, someone who will be your wife and your best friend, too. Till then, have fun—the right kind of fun, which in your case is studying and playing.”



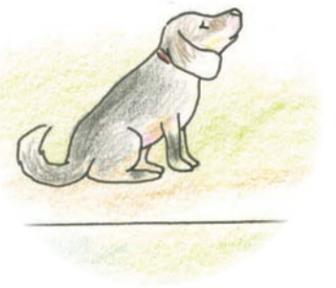
How a Puppy Taught Chandran Patience

It was a hot summer day, and Chandran was looking forward to using the afternoon to throw a ball around with his cousin Abhinav. As the car drove into the driveway, a distant barking sound became louder. As he got out of the car, a small beagle dog came running towards Chandran, wagging his tail. Chandran bent down to pet him when he saw Abhinav come running from behind the house. “Sit! Stay!” he said, and immediately the beagle sat down and did not move.

Chandran was surprised. He hadn’t seen a dog that obeyed orders like that. He said, “Hey, Abhinav, is this your dog? What’s his name?”

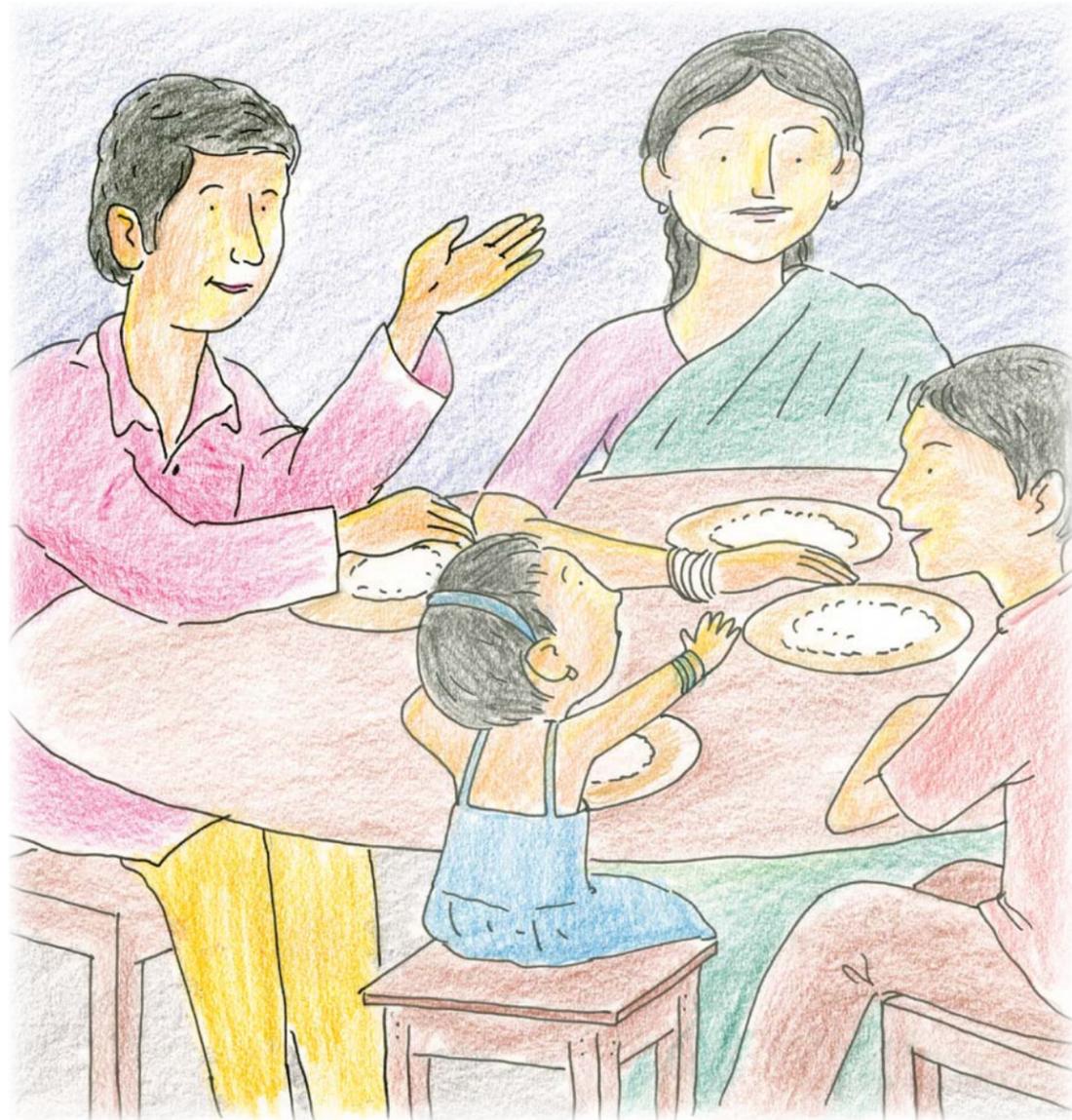
“Snoopy—after the most famous beagle of all, in the Peanuts cartoons. He’s just one year old.” Abhinav petted the beagle, who was still sitting obediently.

“Watch,” said Abhinav. He motioned to



Chandran to follow him, and the two turned and walked away with their backs to Snoopy. After about 50 feet, they looked back. Snoopy was getting a bit unhappy, but still hadn't budged an inch. Abhinav raised his hand, beckoned to the dog, and shouted, "Come!" Snoopy jumped up and ran to Abhinav. When he was about five feet away, Abhinav ordered, "Sit!" and Snoopy immediately sat down. Abhinav stepped up to him, patted him on the head and said, "Good dog." Chandran was impressed.

"That's not all he can do," Abhinav said, "Watch!" This time Abhinav didn't speak at all, just pointed at the ground, and Snoopy sat



down. Then he motioned with his palm downwards, and the dog laid down. Finally, Abhinav made a circular motion with his hand, and Snoopy rolled over. "Good dog," he said, and Snoopy jumped up.

Chandran asked, "How do you get him to do all that?"

Abhinav shrugged and explained, "Time and patience—lots of patience! My uncle gave Snoopy to me, and at the same time a book on dog training. He explained that a trained dog is more fun to have; and it's more interesting for the dog, because he knows what you want him to do. Snoopy can sit, stay, come, roll over, play dead, shake hands and fetch. Now I'm teaching him how to jump through a hoop."

All the way back home, Chandran's mind was on the little beagle who was such a good friend for Abhinav. He never seemed to get tired, knew all sorts of tricks and was always ready for a game. How he would love to have a friend like that!

That night, as Chandran sat down for dinner he asked, "Appa, can I get a dog, please?"

His father paused for a minute, then said, "I don't have a problem getting you a dog, son. But do you know that having a pet comes with responsibilities?"

"Responsibilities?" asked Chandran.

"Of course," Appa replied. "You have to feed him, bathe him, take him for walks and—most importantly—you have to be kind and loving to him."

Chandran felt a surge of excitement building within him. The way his father was talking indicated that he might allow him to get a dog.

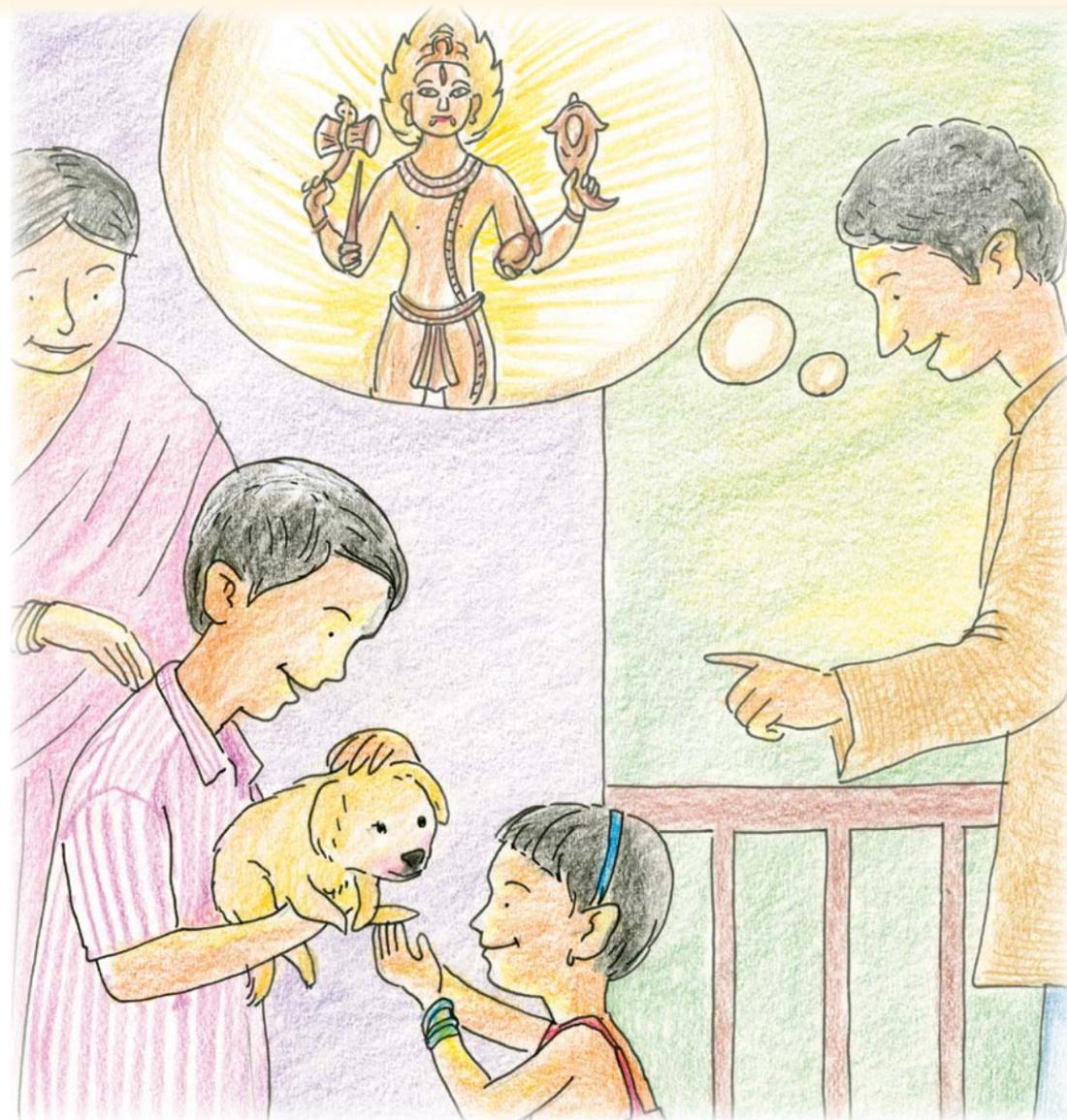
Hurriedly he promised, "Appa, I'll do all that and more."

Chandran and Appa explored the various kinds of dogs. They finally settled on a golden retriever. They are a smart breed that is good with children. They had to consider Chandran's three-year-old sister, Meena. A golden retriever is a big dog, so if small children play roughly with him, no one is likely to get hurt.

The eight-week-old puppy that Appa brought home Sunday morning hardly looked like he would grow into a 70-pound dog. Chandran took the puppy in his arms.

"Appa, what shall I call him?"

"How about Bhairava, which means the form of Siva who has a dog



for a companion?" suggested Appa.

Bhairava had the most beautiful eyes and was very happy to meet Chandran. His mom had told him that one day he would have his very own human friend.

The first two weeks was all about house training. Retrievers are extremely smart, so it didn't take long for Bhairava to understand that he should stand by the back door when he needed to go outside.

That accomplished, Chandran decided to start leash training. This was pretty simple. He took the dog for a walk, and each time the dog stopped, he pulled gently on the leash to get him to come along.

The goal was to teach Bhairava that Chandran was going for a walk, and he was coming along. Bhairava was not taking Chandran for a

walk and stopping whenever he pleased! This training let Bhairava know in a kindly way who was boss.

After a couple of weeks of leash training, Chandran was ready for something more difficult, the "sit" command. Unfortunately, Bhairava wasn't.

With the dog on the leash, Chandran faced him, pointed at the ground and commanded, "Sit!"

Bhairava just looked at him. Chandran pushed down on Bhairava's hindquarters, the part of the dog's back above his hind legs, to make him sit. Bhairava stood up immediately, and Chandran pushed again.

Appa, who was watching all this, counseled, "Now, be gentle and patient with him. If he becomes afraid of you, it will be much harder to train him."

Unwillingly, Bhairava sat. Chandran let go of his hindquarters and, in the split second before the dog stood up on all fours again, called out, "Good dog!"

Appa and Chandran had studied the different methods of dog training. Some people train their dogs by rewarding them with food when they do the right thing. Others punish them for doing the wrong thing. Still others praise the dog for doing the right thing. Chandran decided he wanted to just use praise. He did not want to bribe the dog with rewards or hurt him with punishments. This is how he was being raised himself, and he thought it should work for Bhairava, too.

On it went, ten minutes a day: "Sit!" pushing down his hindquarters and "Good dog!" This training made no sense at all to Bhairava, who thought he should sit down when he felt like it and not when someone told him to. But finally, after about twenty training sessions, Chandran said, "Sit!" and Bhairava sat down all by himself. Chandran was really happy, and hugged the puppy.

After this, the sessions got easier. Bhairava, being a smart dog, soon got the idea of "sit." After all, if his friend Chandran wanted him to sit down, he was happy to do so. Of course, he'd only sit down for a few seconds, so the next

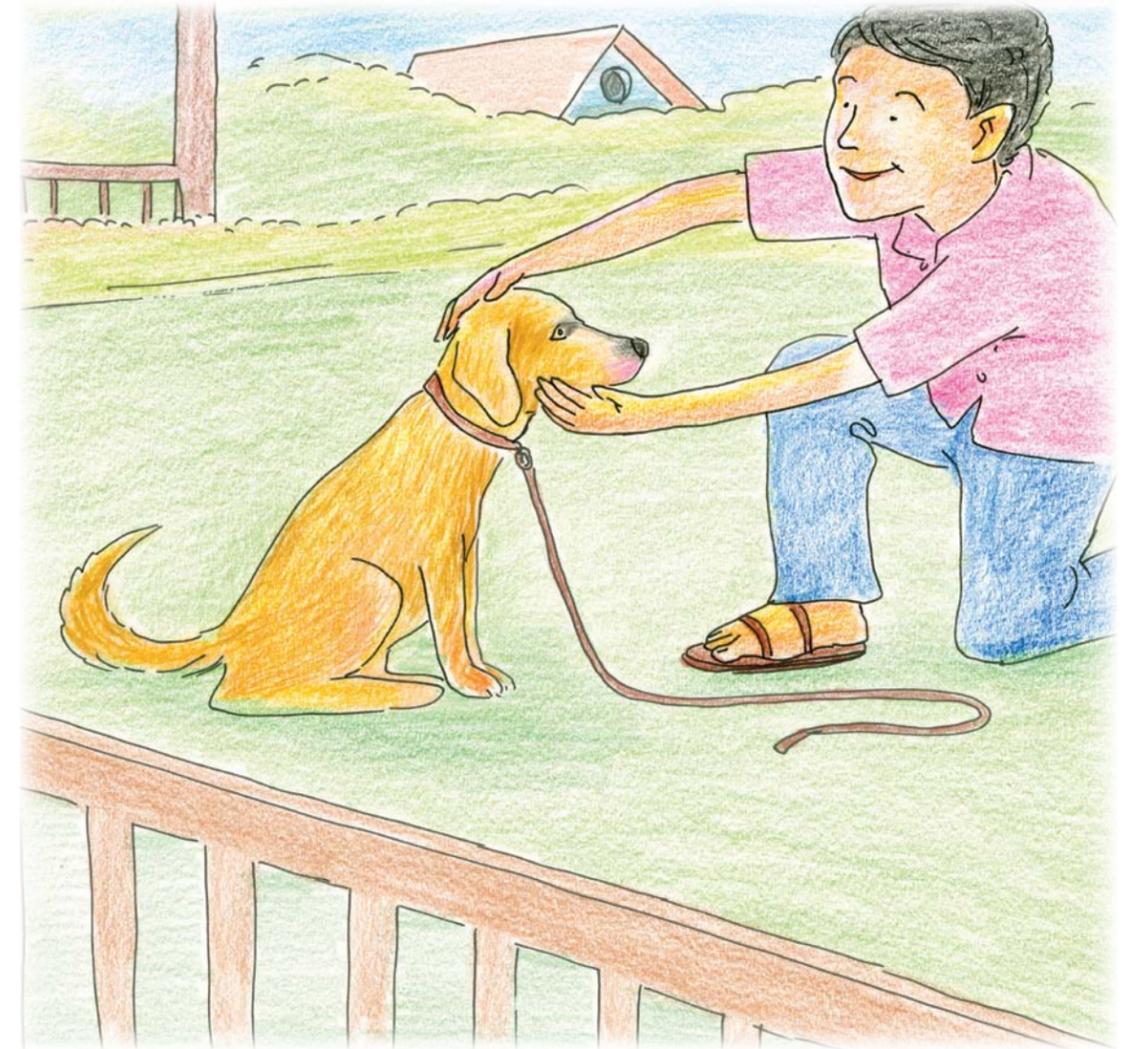
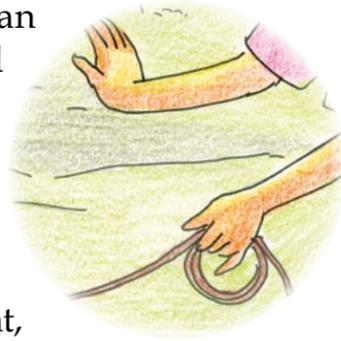


command to teach was “stay.”

This was even harder than “sit.” Chandran would tell Bhairava to sit, and Bhairava would sit. Chandran would say, “Stay!” and put his palm out toward the dog, like a policeman stopping traffic. Then he’d back up several steps. Bhairava would get up to follow him. Without saying a word, Chandran would pick him up, take him back where he started, repeat, “Sit! Stay!” and then walk away again.

This went on for days. Chandran was getting frustrated. So was Bhairava, who just didn’t understand why he wasn’t allowed to follow Chandran—wasn’t that what all that leash training was about?

“He just won’t obey,” Chandran complained to Appa.



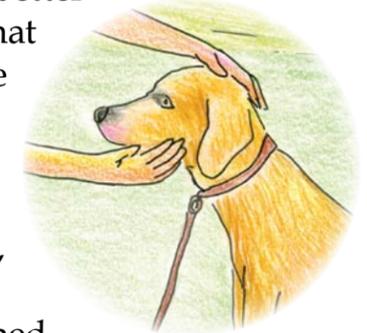
“Patience, patience,” replied Appa. “We humans have been training dogs for thousands of years. Keep trying and one day it will work.”

As with “sit,” suddenly one day Bhairava stayed put when Chandran told him to “stay!” and walked away. Chandran went back to him, said, “Good dog!” and petted him on the head. They kept at this for another two weeks, until Bhairava stayed every time he was told to. Somehow the training made them better friends. Bhairava knew at least a bit of what Chandran wanted him to do, and this made him more secure.

Chandran showed off Bhairava’s new skills to the family, and everyone was impressed.

Three-year-old Meena tried, “Sit down, Bhairava,” but nothing happened.

“Just say ‘Sit!’ Meena, nothing else,” explained



Chandran.

“Sit!” said Meena, and Bhairava sat down, to Meena’s great excitement. In fact, after that, Appa had to ask Meena to stop telling the dog to sit until the training was done. Meena wanted to do it over and over again. Bhairava found that quite annoying, but he understood Meena was just a puppy herself in the human world. He never, ever growled at her, even the time she yanked on his ear, which really hurt.

After “sit” and “stay,” Bhairava learned “come,” “lie down,” “shake hands,” “high five,” “roll over,” “fetch” and even “play dead.” Chandran learned how to be patient. It was a lot of fun for both of them.

During the winter holidays, Abhinav and his family came to



Chandran’s house for a visit. After a long, leisurely lunch, everyone relaxed outside on the patio. Chandran called for Bhairava, who came bounding up. Bhairava was no longer a puppy. In fact, when he stood on his hind legs, he was as tall as Chandran.

Chandran ran him through all the commands.

Meena came up to Bhairava while he was sitting. Their noses almost touched, as they were about the same height. She raised her right hand, reached toward the dog and said, “High five.” Bhairava lifted up his big right paw and gently touched Meena’s raised hand. This sent her into a fit of giggles, and everyone clapped.

Abhinav congratulated Chandran, “Well done, Chandran. Bhairava is a real show dog!”

Chandran smiled and said, “It’s all thanks to you and Appa. You explained when Bhairava was a puppy that he wasn’t going to learn right away. It would take practicing the commands over and over



again in a kindly way. Now I have not only trained my dog, but learned the value of patience as well. I can accomplish anything with discipline and patience!”

Bhairava already knew how to be a dog—his mom had taught him. So whatever this “patient dog training” business was about, he was just happy to spend time one on one with Chandran—happy human, happy dog.

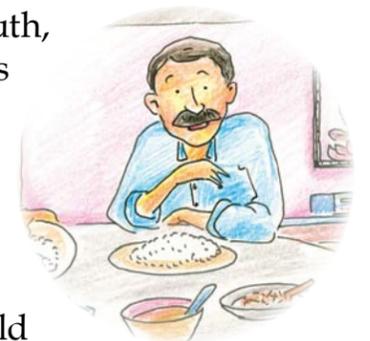


The Steadfast Vina Student

As she did every night, Amma switched on the iPod when the family sat down for dinner. Melodious Carnatic music flowed through the room creating a peaceful atmosphere. The music blended with the kitchen sounds and the conversation around the table.

Once Amala asked her mother why she played music during dinner. Her mother smiled, “My dear, a meal should not be limited to just placing food in the mouth, chewing and swallowing it quickly. A meal is the time we gather as a family. Dinner is the last meal of the day, so we are often tired, sometimes stressed out, depressed or annoyed. Music helps to mellow our moods and put us in a calm state of mind.”

Amala’s brother Ananta loved music. He could



easily pick out the sounds of the different instruments. He noticed that the vina especially makes a divine sound. He asked, "Amma, can you tell me more about the vina?"

His mother smiled and said, "Where should I start?"

Amala, who loved stories, shouted, "At the beginning!"

Mother began, "The vina is as old as the *Vedas*. In early times, all stringed instruments were called vina. While there were several such instruments in the ancient world, the Indian vina is one of the oldest. It is mentioned in the *Rig Veda*. The earliest vina had a curved body made of bamboo. Closely related to the vina is the vana, which has one hundred strings."

"A hundred strings? How could one person play that?" Ananta cried.

Amma replied, "Two people played it together."

"Are there different types of vinas today?" asked Amala.



"Yes, there are many. The Saraswati vina of South India is one of the foremost concert instruments. The latest form of vina is the Raghunath vina."

Ananta had heard enough. He was eager to learn the instrument.

Their mother gladly agreed. She learned that Pundit Subramaniam, a well known vina player, was teaching in their area. He was happy to accept the two children as his students.

A week later, on a Friday, Ananta came back excitedly from school. The lessons were scheduled for five in the evening, and he was eager to begin. He quickly got ready and reminded Amala it was almost time to go. Amala looked at the clock. It was nearly five. At 5:30, her friend was to call her with news regarding a birthday plan. She had completely forgotten about the vina classes. Oh, no! She would miss her friend's call. But never mind, she truly loved to join



Ananta in his games and activities; and if he wanted to learn the vina, she would learn it along with him. The two left in time to reach Subramaniyam's house at 5:00 pm sharp.

His home was filled with the fragrance of flowers and incense. Pundit Subramaniyam was sitting on a carpet in the music room, his fingers moving swiftly over the strings of a vina. When he saw the children, he beckoned them in and, with a smile, invited them to sit on the floor. Ananta was awestruck at the music that flowed from his hands. Would he ever be able to play like that? He pictured himself in a white kurta, performing in front of an audience. He was rudely shaken out of his daydream by his sister, "What's wrong with you? Pundit is calling you!"

The teacher gave the two of them smaller vinas to use in the class.



He also advised them on the kind of vina they needed to buy.

As they sat in front of the master, a few more students walked in. Ananta looked at a boy who must have been around fifteen and a girl of around twelve. Ananta was twelve, and Amala was ten.

The classes began, and the children learned how to hold the vina and how to pluck the strings.

The next day, Ananta went to the music shop with his mother and picked one vina for them to share.

As the days passed, Ananta's eagerness to learn grew. He hated it when the one hour of class was up and they had to leave. Amala found the class okay, but she was not all that enthusiastic about it.

As soon as they returned home, Ananta spent another hour practicing what had been taught that day. He found that this gave him the chance to see where he was weak in his technique, so he could ask his teacher for help in the next class.

Amala was not inspired to spend so much time practicing. She had other hobbies. At the moment, she was busy stitching a frock for her



doll. It was her habit to jump from one project to the next, never really completing anything.

The weeks merged into months, and soon the two children had finished six months of classes.

It was a rainy evening when the teacher announced that next week there would be a live performance at which he wanted his students to accompany him.

Ananta felt a tingling sense of thrill. Here was his chance to perform on stage! He eagerly waited as the teacher announced the names of those who would accompany him.

"I would like Amala, Rekha, Ragini and Suresh to play with me," the master exclaimed.

Ananta lowered his head. Tears were threatening to fall. His mouth suddenly was as dry as sawdust and his heart felt like a stone. How eager he had been, and yet the teacher had left him out!

He lifted the vina, and, like in a trance, began playing. The sadness in his heart flowed into his fingers and a divine music flowed out.

Subramaniyam gestured to the others to be still, and the entire class listened in complete silence. It was a simple tune, as the vina takes many years to learn. But still, even so early in his training, Ananta could put feeling into his notes.

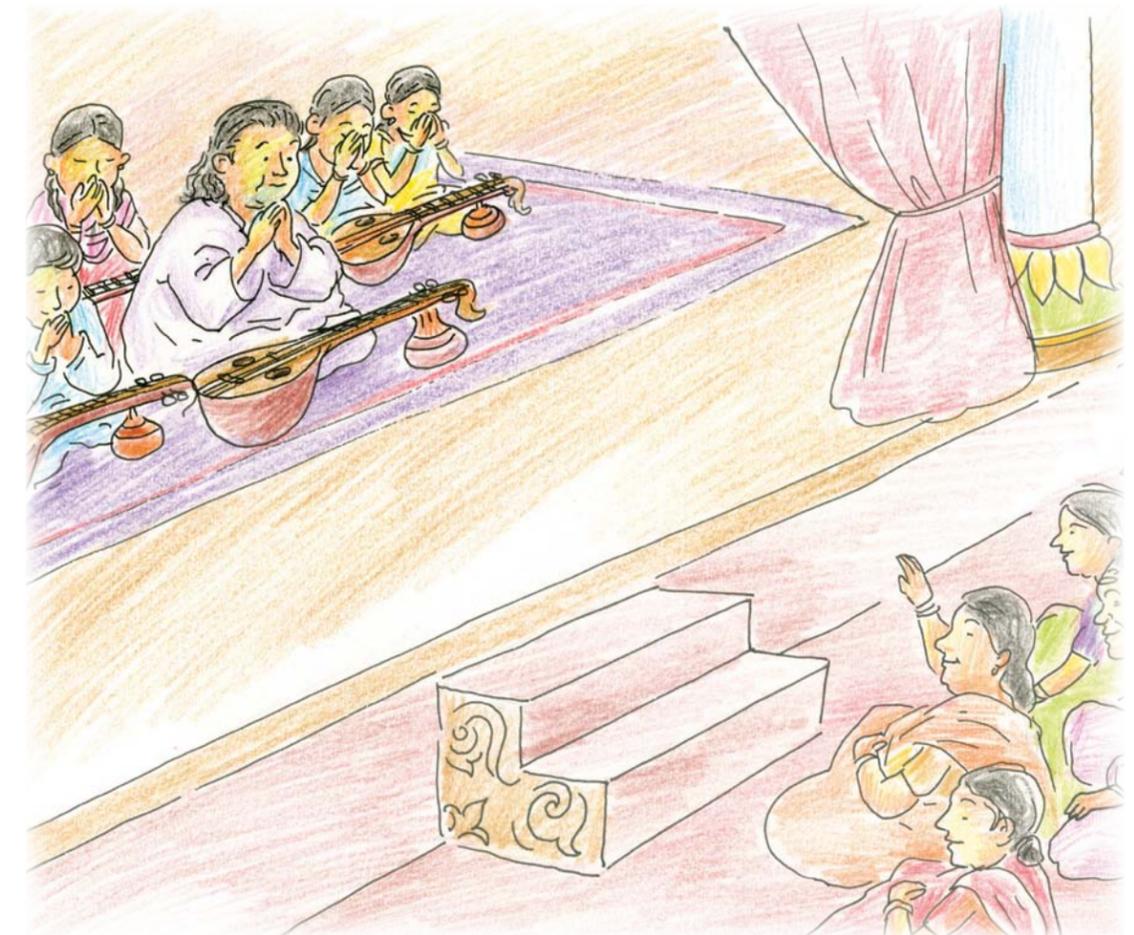
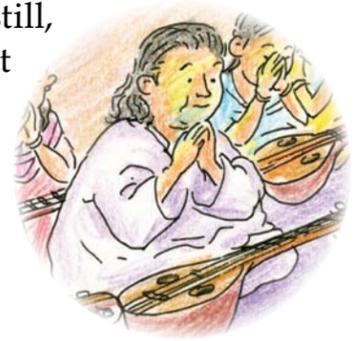
Several minutes passed, and slowly Ananta realized that he was not hearing anyone else. His eyes snapped open to see the class staring at him.

Subramaniyam smiled at Ananta, "I was making an announcement, and before I could finish, you began playing. In a way, that was good. Your music only confirmed my decision."

The teacher paused and looked into Ananta's face.

Ananta felt his heart beating fast, "Have I not learned enough to accompany you, Punditji?"

Subramaniyam smiled proudly, "Silly child, I was going to announce that I would like you to play a solo."

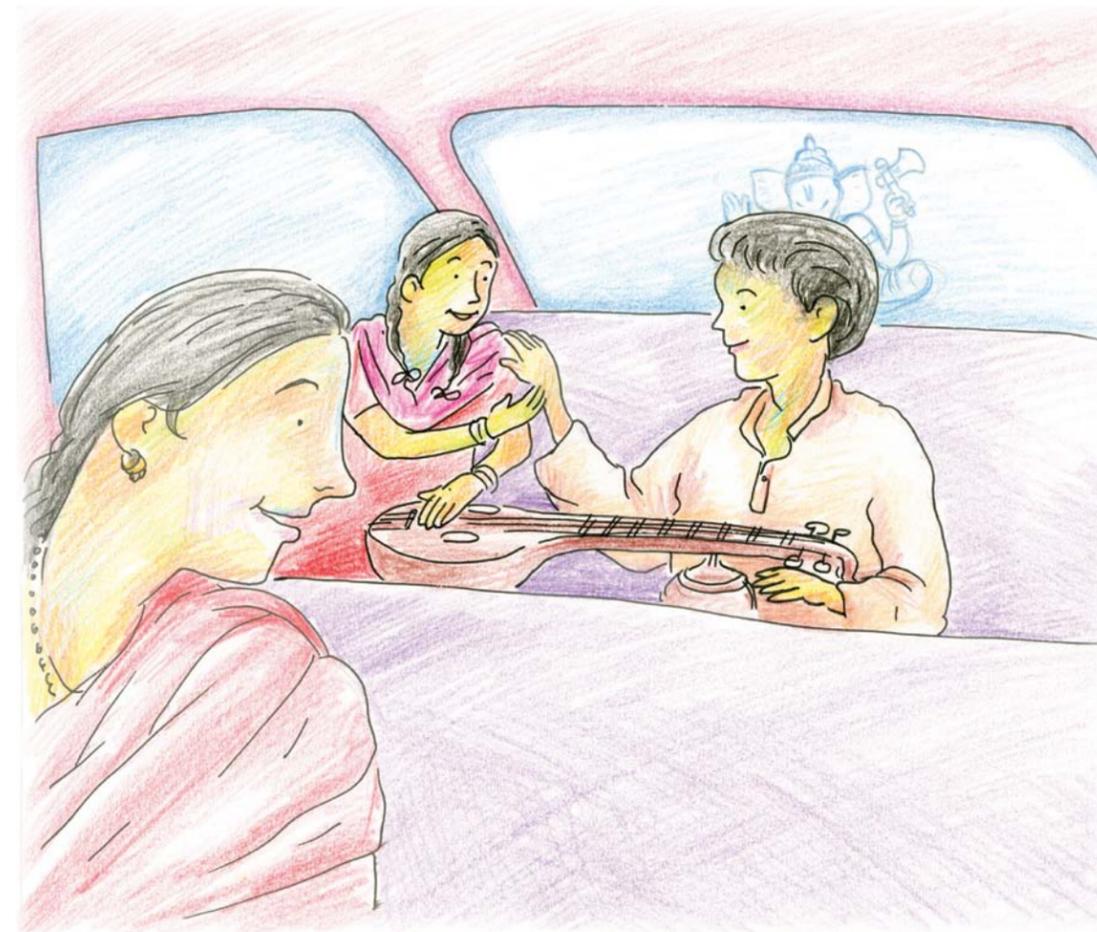
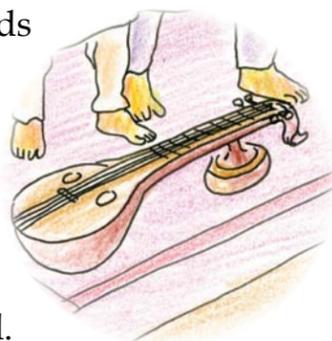


Ananta felt as though a thousand sweet birds were chirping around him. He sat still and gazed at the ground. This time he did not stop the tears of joy that flowed out. Finally he stuttered, "Thank you. Thank you so much."

On the day of the concert, the children huddled in the dressing room. Outside they could hear people talking and moving around. Amala walked to the stage, parted the curtains slightly and peeked out. More than five hundred people were sitting in the auditorium. She knew their parents were out there somewhere.

As the gong sounded, Amala, Rekha, Ragini and Suresh assembled around Pundit. As they played, divine music flowed out to the audience.

Amala's mother and father watched their little daughter playing. "Why isn't Ananta there?" asked Appa softly.



"I don't know. They were both mighty secretive about the concert. They just wanted us to come, and they wouldn't give me any other information!" she smiled.

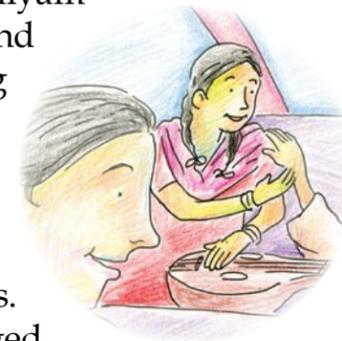
"Wasn't Ananta practicing enough?" asked Appa.

"I don't think that's it. You know, it was only Ananta who really practiced. Amala is always busy with her dolls one day and something else the next."

"Yes," nodded Appa, "that's true."

As the concert neared its end, Subramaniyam cleared his throat and announced, "Dear ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce a budding master to all of you today. He has just begun his training, but please listen to him before I say anything more."

Ananta walked on stage and sat down in front of the microphone. He looked out at the sea of faces. He picked up the vina, and soon all the faces merged



and disappeared as his fingers flew over the strings. The music flowed sweetly.

When he finished, there was pin-drop silence. Then the audience stood up and gave him a thundering applause.

Once the sound of clapping quieted, Pundit Subramaniam came back on stage. He put an arm around Ananta's shoulders and said, "This young man is Ananta. He came to me six months ago. His eagerness to learn, dedication and practice have resulted in what you all heard today. I want to congratulate the boy and wish him the very best."

Ananta felt tears flowing down his eyes. The tears wouldn't stop, even when his parents hugged him. As he sat in the car on the way home, he noticed that Amala was unusually quiet. Ashamed that in his moment of joy he had forgotten to praise his little sister, he said, "Amala, you played so well tonight!"

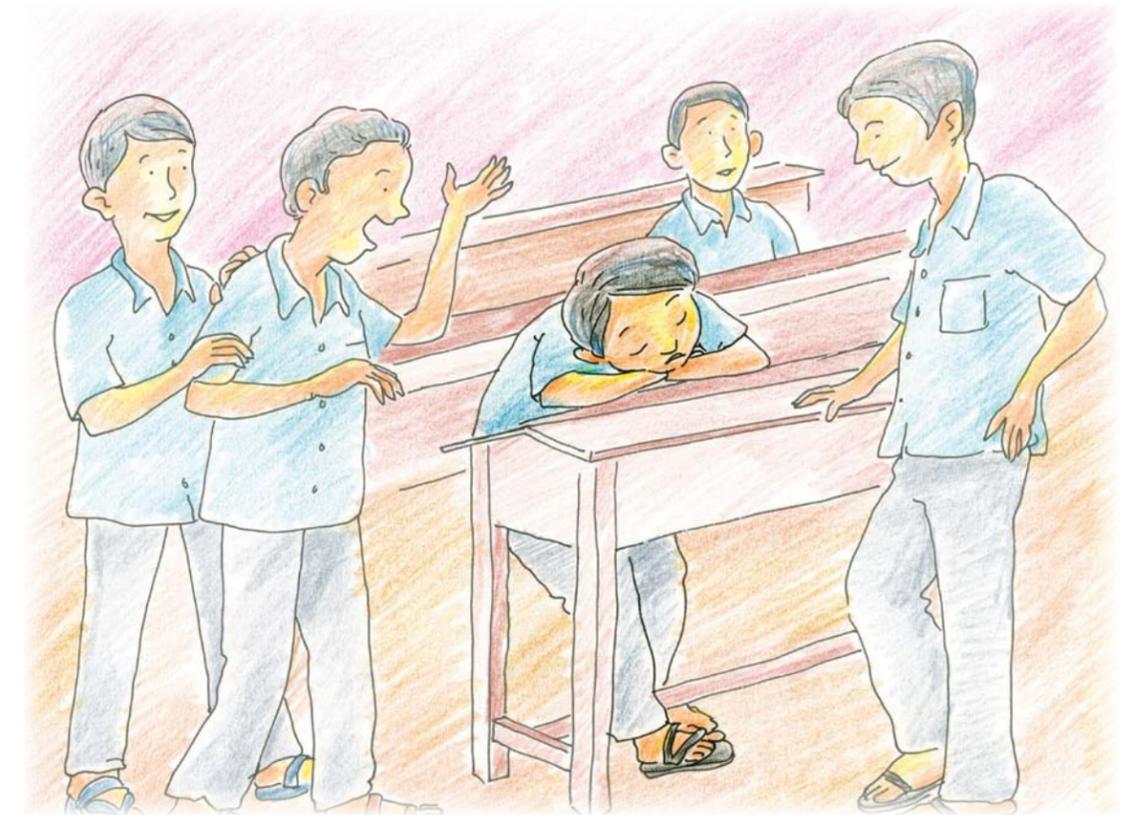
Amala caught her brother's hand, "Ananta, you deserve the applause you got today. If only I had practiced more!"

Ananta patted her hand and said, "You can do it, Amala."

"Yes. I will practice really hard from today onward."

Amma laughed, "It looks like I will have to buy one more vina now."

The children chuckled, and in the distance a temple bell sounded loud and clear, a blessing for their new undertaking.



One Really Tired Student

Arun, what are you doing? Don't you know this is a classroom and not your bedroom?" Arun heard the voice and opened his eyes in surprise. The voice was replaced by loud laughter. To his embarrassment, he saw a group of boys standing around him. Confused and not sure where he was at first, he tried to focus. Again he heard the voice, "Arun, wake up. This is your English teacher." In spite of his drowsiness, Arun realized that it was only Ekanath disguising his voice and trying to mimic their teacher. As soon as Ekanath said those words, the boys once again laughed loudly.

Jogesh did not like the other boys mocking Arun. He barked at Ekanath, "Leave him alone. You are not always awake in class, either."

Arun was embarrassed. He had not meant to fall asleep, but it had been happening regularly all week. He pushed himself through the group of boys and ran to the washroom. The



cold water he splashed on his face woke him up. In the mirror, his ten-year-old face showed dark circles under bloodshot eyes. Shaking his head in dismay, he slowly trudged back to class.

His English teacher was just outside the classroom. She was surprised to see him in the hall. "Come inside, Arun, we are about to begin." Pausing for a moment, she observed, "You look so tired—are you getting enough sleep?"

"Yes, Ma'am," he said, without much conviction.

"Well, then, let's get started."

And so it continued. Day after day, Arun felt drowsy. No matter what precautions he took, he could not stop his eyes from closing. Ekanath and the other boys teased him nonstop. They gave him a nickname, "Sleepy."

Arun ignored the teasing, but wished the boys would be friends with him. They did not include him in any of the games. Some even

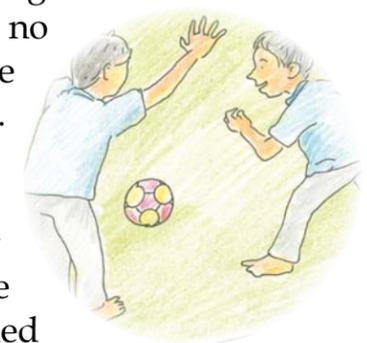


moved away when he approached. No one wanted to associate with Sleepy. And no one asked why he was so tired.

As the semester neared its end, Arun sat late one night completing some notes. The light in his bedroom attracted a firefly, which was spinning around recklessly near the light. He shooed it away and continued to write.

A few blocks away, Ekanath looked with dismay at his math book. He had not completed his homework and knew he would be in deep trouble with the teacher. The date for submitting the assignment had already passed. There was no option—he had to stay up and complete it. He reached for his iPhone and called Mithun. Mithun's mother answered the phone and grumbled that Mithun had gone to bed.

He then called Girish, Raj, Rajiv and finally Jogesh. Girish and Rajiv had already gone to bed. Raj lived too far away. Jogesh scolded

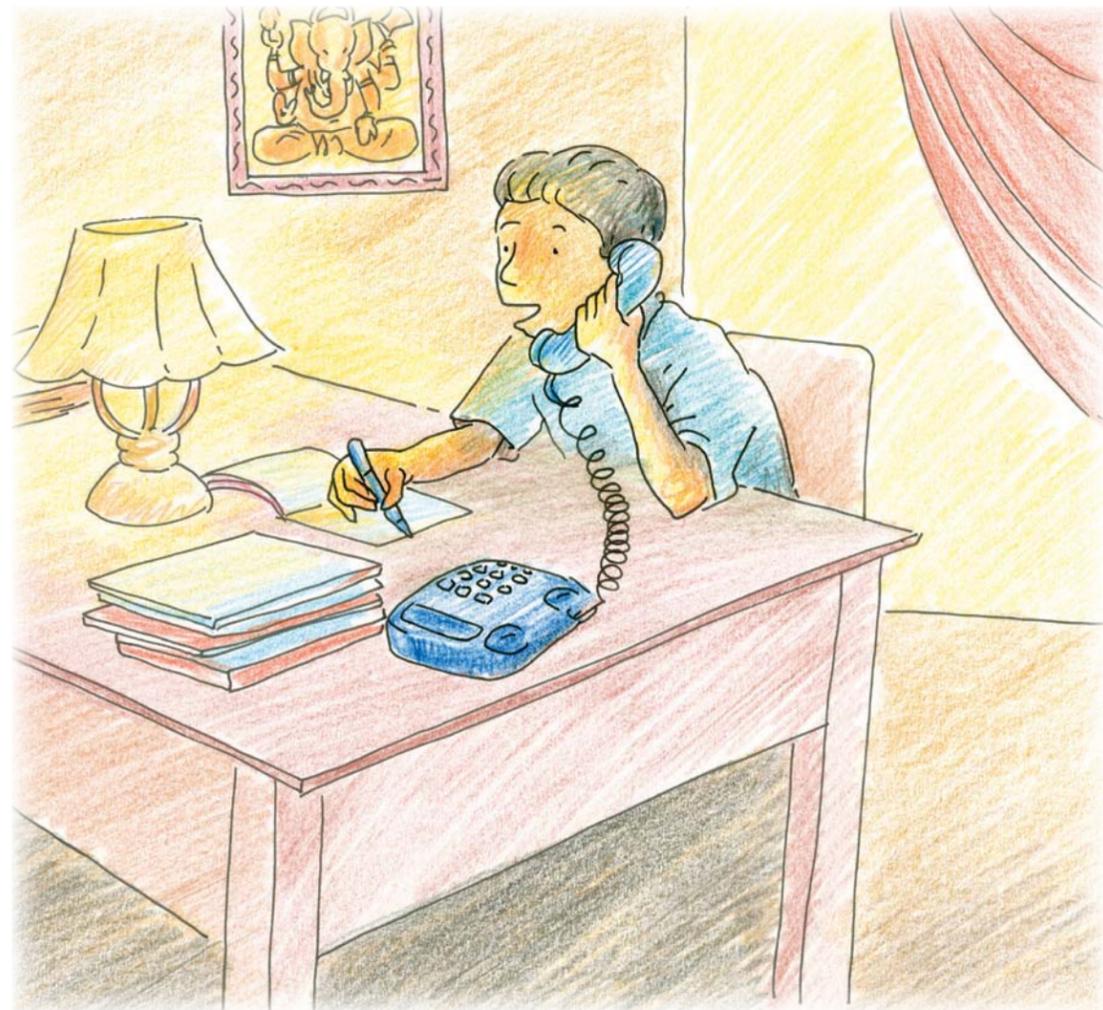
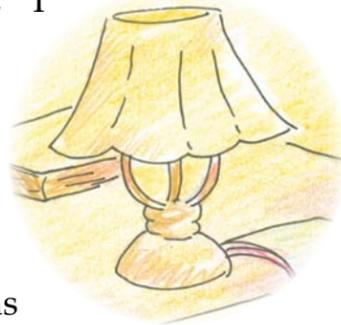


Ekanath for teasing Arun in class, and added, "I don't even want to lend you my notes!"

Ekanath glanced at the clock. It was close to ten, way past his bedtime. With a grimace he realized that he had no other choice but to ask Sleepy. He wondered if Arun would lend him his notes. "I'd better not call him 'Sleepy.' He is probably as mad at me as Jogesh is." But it was too late to worry and guess at what might happen.

Quietly sneaking out of the house, Ekanath thought he would just go by Arun's house. "Since the boy sleeps in the daytime, maybe he will be awake at this hour."

The lane to Arun's house was silent, except for the familiar sounds of night creatures. Nearing the house, he saw that a light was shining



in Arun's room. "Just as I thought. He sits up at night and then sleeps in class. What a story I will have for the boys tomorrow." "Better not laugh," he thought, "I'm about to ask him for a favor." Putting a serious expression on his face, Ekanath crept up to the side of the house and peeked in the window. Inside, he saw Arun bent over a notebook writing briskly. Ekanath tapped on the window and gestured to Arun to open it.

Arun was surprised to see Ekanath, but, honestly, he felt happy, too. Maybe the boys were finally tired of teasing him and they would be his friends! He opened the window, and Ekanath tumbled in. Plunking himself on a chair, he said, "Hey, sorry to barge in so late."

Arun smiled, "That's okay. I was awake anyway."

"Do you always stay up at night to study?" asked Ekanath.

"No... Not to study but..." He barely completed the sentence when the sound of coughing reached their ears. Arun got up quickly, saying,



“I’ll be back in a minute,” and rushed out.

Ekanath followed him out the door and stood by quietly. In the room across the hall he spotted an old man in a bed. He knew that the man was Arun’s great grandfather who was almost 90. Ekanath watched as Arun rubbed his great grandfather’s chest and lifted up a glass of water for him to drink. The man, sick and exhausted, sipped the water and fell back on the bed. “You are so kind. Every night you miss your sleep because of me. God bless you.”

Arun’s mother usually took care of her grandpa, but she had caught the flu a week ago. His father was off on a business trip. Arun had decided to help great grandpa to give his mom more rest. So whenever Grandpa woke up coughing, Arun would hurry to his side to calm him so his mother would not be awakened.

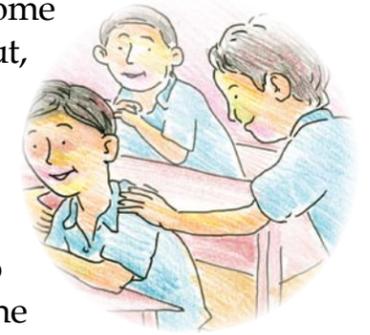
Grandpa explained, “I know your mother is tired from taking care of me in the daytime. You are so unselfish to watch after me at night.”

“Hush, Grandpa, don’t tire yourself. You will start coughing again. Go to sleep. I am awake and close by—in the room across the

hall. Call me if you need anything, and I will come immediately.” Saying that, Arun hurried out, almost bumping into Ekanath. Embarrassed he whispered, “Grandpa is not well.”

Ekanath felt a strange tightness in his chest. What he had just witnessed surprised and shamed him. He had no idea Arun was so selflessly helping his family. And how terribly he had behaved toward his friend, not knowing that Arun was tired as a result of caring for his great grandfather! And not only had Ekanath been mean himself, he had encouraged the other boys to be cruel as well.

Lowering his head, he wished Arun good night and slowly walked



back home, wondering why he had never given thought about why Arun was sleepy in class. Reaching his room, Ekanath stayed up for two more hours and struggled through his homework alone.

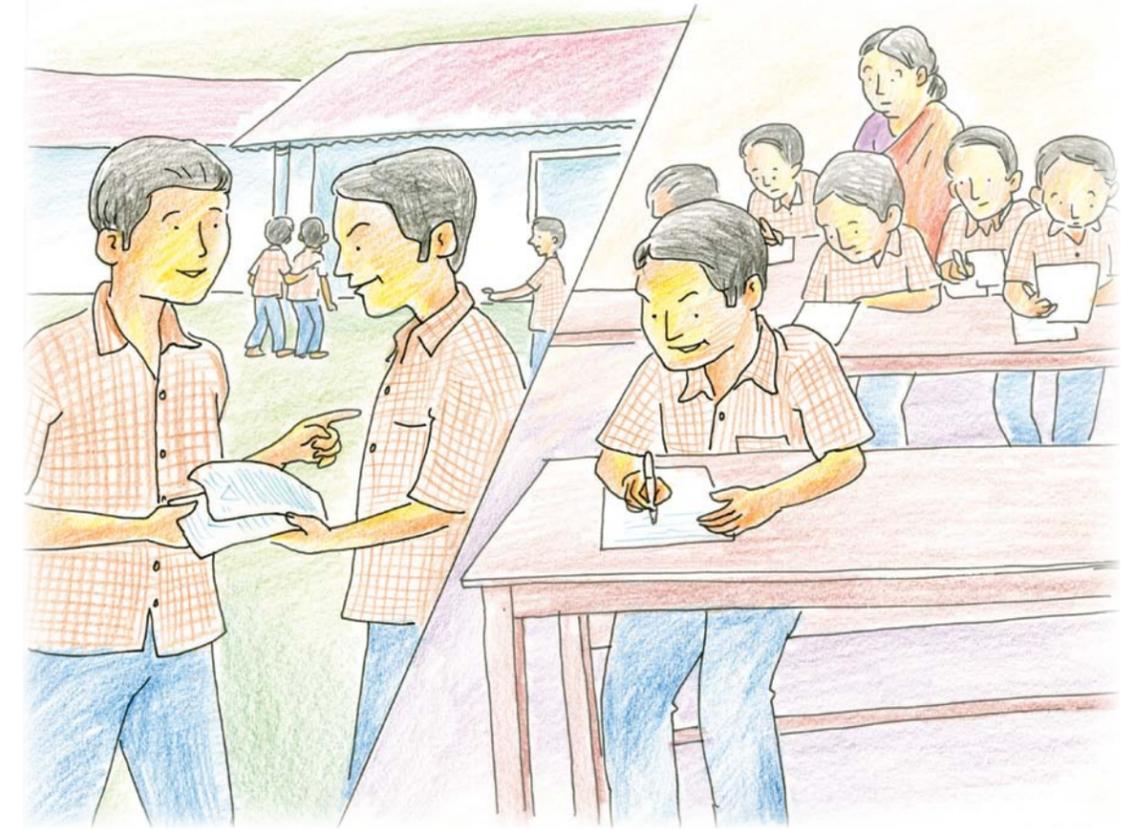
The next morning was a bright, clear day, with birds chirping in the trees. Arun had gone to bed really late, only to wake up twice more to help Grandpa. He walked into the classroom, his body stiff in anticipation of the teasing he expected to receive. But strangely, today all was quiet. He looked around. All the children stood in silence. As Arun gazed at them, Ekanath walked up and explained, "I told everyone why you are so tired these days. We're sorry for all the teasing."

Arun smiled, "Hey, forget it! I didn't mind, really." Of course, he did mind, and it meant a lot that they were not teasing him. "Besides, my mom is getting better, and my dad is coming home in a few days. I should be back to normal soon."

"If only we had the kind of compassion you have," Ekanath blurted, "we would have tried to find out why you were so tired. Instead, we teased you. We hope you will forgive us."

Hearing Ekanath's words, the children all gathered around Arun. One patted him on the back, another gave him a chocolate bar and a third just apologized, "I'm sorry, too."

Arun was happy to have his friends back and didn't feel sleepy any more. Finally, school would be fun again.



Honesty: the Best Policy

Ganesh gazed at the paper in amazement. Not for the life of him had he imagined that Kartikeya would actually get him a copy of the algebra test! "How did you do it?" he asked Kartikeya, his eyes shining in delight. Kartikeya tried—and failed—to look humble. Smiling slyly, he said, "It was easy, dude. I hacked our math teacher's computer password, and there was the test staring at me!"

Ganesh gave Kartikeya a grateful look and said, "You did it for me?"

Kartikeya replied, "We're pals, aren't we? I know how badly you want to get into the honors math class. If you can just get in, I'm sure you will do well."

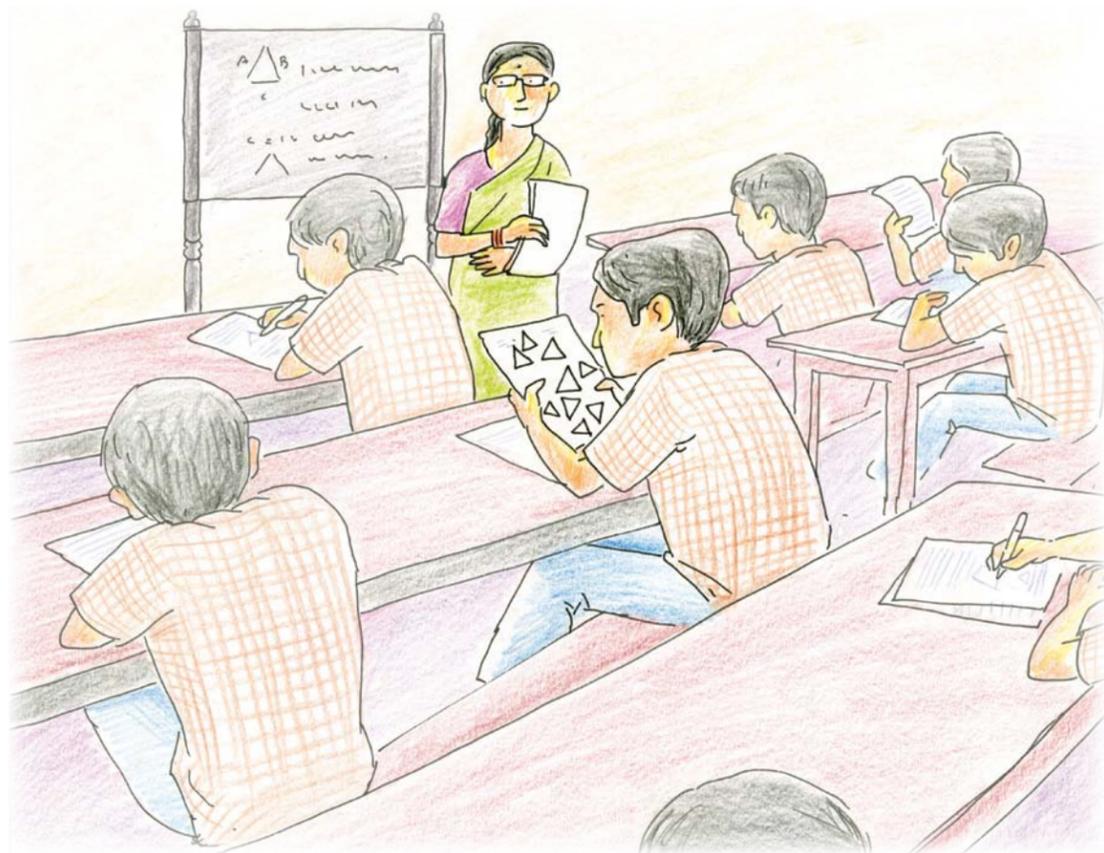
The next day, the teacher presented the test—the same as the one Kartikeya had given him—and Ganesh breezed through it.



As he walked out of the classroom, a soft warm wind blew. Ganesh felt carefree and happy. It seemed his luck was changing for the better. Just beginning four years of high school, he wanted to get into the honors program, because that counts a lot towards getting into a good university. The first honors class was in geometry and algebra. He wasn't very good at math and, even more of a problem, he hated doing homework. He didn't want to risk taking the test cold, so he urged Kartikeya to help him cheat.

The next month went by swiftly. All too soon, classes began. Ganesh sat near Ramesh, who had been his friend since childhood. The first day was on geometry, on the basics of triangles. It was not hard, and Ganesh did well. But then the classes got harder, and the teacher was assigning four to six hours of homework a week. Ganesh hated cutting his playtime to do it. His sister had taken the same class last year, so he found her homework and copied it.

At the end of the week, the first surprise test came around. Ganesh stared at the difficult geometry questions. He had no clue how to answer them. He whispered to Ramesh, "Do you know what all this is about?"



Ramesh gave him a puzzled look, "All this was in the homework—didn't you do it?"

Ganesh felt a strange tightening feeling in his stomach. He began feeling sick. He had cheated on the test to get into the class, and now he was cheating on the homework. Looking down, he tried to recollect what the teacher had said on the types of triangles, but he hit a blank. Luckily, at that moment, the principal walked in to introduce a new teacher. As they continued talking, the bell rang, and Ganesh slipped out of the room.

The next week, as he sat down, Ganesh hoped there would not be another surprise test. He shuddered when the teacher walked in and announced, "Today's quiz is on basic algebra, the same material you studied for the entrance exam. You should have no problem with it."

But Ganesh had cheated on the entrance exam and did not know the material. His head began to hurt. As he looked down at the paper, the letters and numbers seemed to be swimming. He could only answer half of the questions.

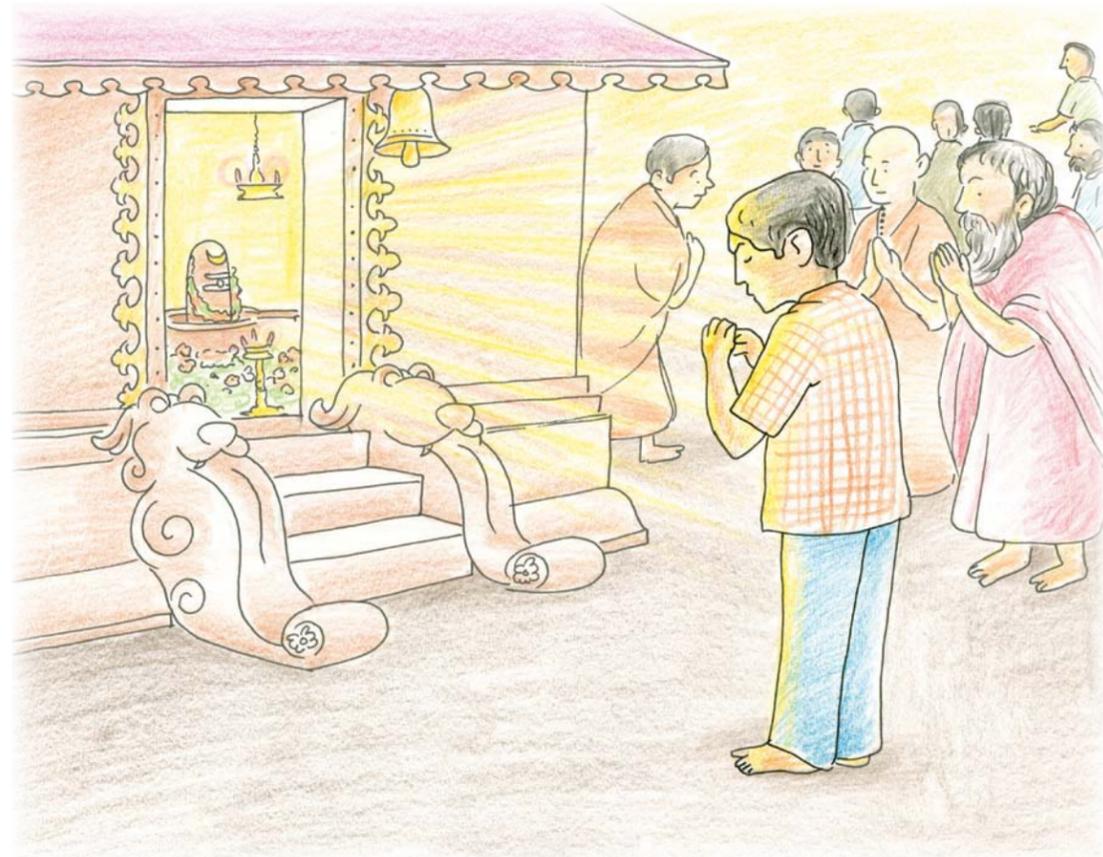
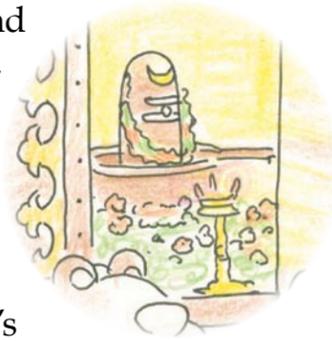
Sweating heavily, he wondered if the teacher would suspect something when she saw his half-filled answer paper. The fear of

being found out increased his fear, and his head began to ache even more. Within a few minutes, he handed in the test paper and rushed out the door.

As he walked blindly around the school lawns, he bumped into Kartikeya, who grabbed his hand and said, "Hey, Ganesh, how are you, dude? Haven't seen you for so long! How's geometry? A breeze, eh?"

Ganesh admitted painfully, "Kartikeya, I'm very scared that I'll be found out. In almost every class, the teacher is giving us tests. The last test covered some of the same topics as the entrance test. I'm clueless, and I have a gut feeling that the teacher will soon find out I cheated. I'm so worried! What should I do?"

Ganesh couldn't bring himself to mention he was also copying his sister's homework from last year. Hurriedly Kartikeya advised, "Ganesh, you have no choice. You just have to study like crazy now to keep up with the rest of the class."



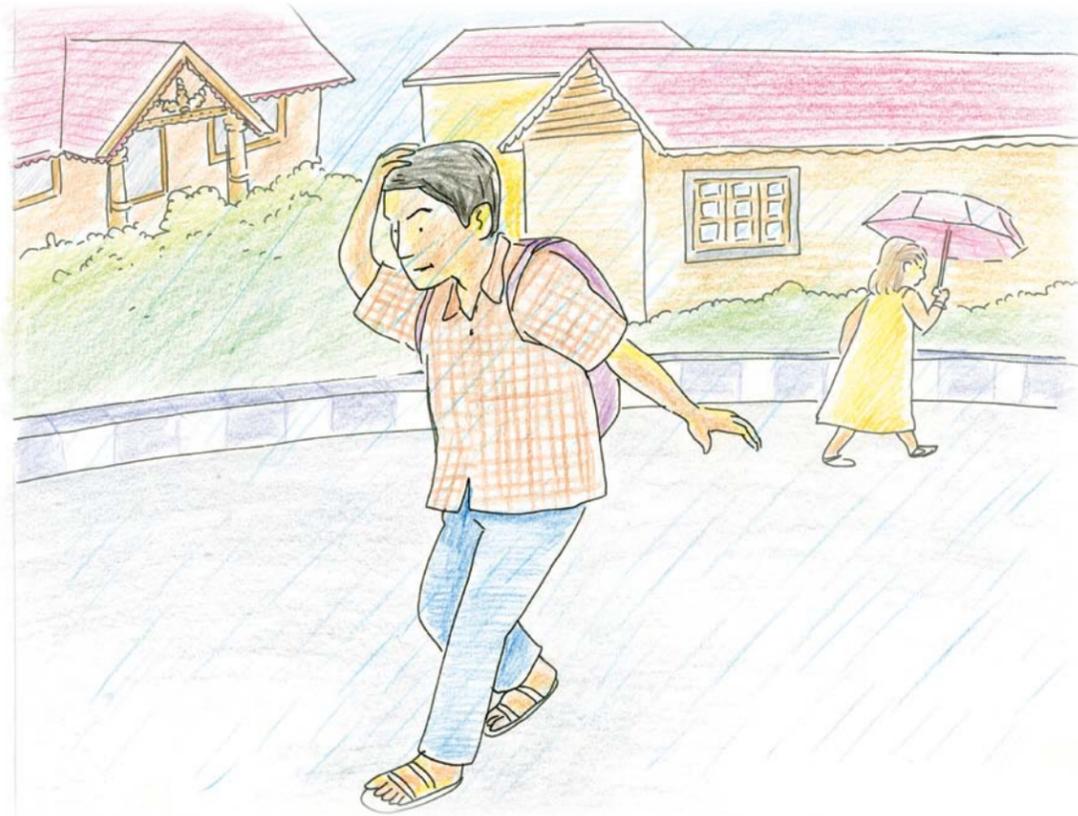
As he walked home, Ganesh stopped outside a Siva temple. The evening puja had just begun, and the sound of temple bells echoed inside his heart. He walked into the temple, his feet feeling heavy and his heart miserable. As he neared the shrine, he could not face the Deity. Instead he bent his head and closed his eyes. Suddenly he heard a voice, "Ganesh, you are not scared to face me. You are scared to face yourself, and that is bad. Why do you continue to do something you know is dishonest? Can't you just stop?"

"Yes! Yes! I will stop this!" He opened his eyes to see people staring at him and he realized that he had spoken out loud.

He looked at the Deity and prayed. As he walked out, Ganesh felt like a changed person. A weight was lifted from his shoulders.

In the next class, the teacher handed out yet another test that Ganesh had no clue about. He knew his game was up. He waited till the class was over and the students had all left. He then walked up to the teacher, "Madam, haven't you wondered why I've been doing so poorly on the tests? I'm even missing questions on the algebra that was covered in the entrance exam."

Mrs. Mahesan was a wise, mature lady with soft grey eyes. She looked steadily at Ganesh, "The principal is aware that my computer



was hacked. The computer systems manager is looking in to it. But no, I did not suspect you. I just thought that you had probably forgotten what you had studied. It happens sometimes, you know.”

“Well, I have to confess that I never studied for the entrance exam. I got the test answers from a friend and memorized them.”

Mrs. Mahesan realized her next few words would greatly impact Ganesh, perhaps even for the rest of his life. She reflected back to her own teenage children at home, trying to imagine how she would like their teacher to treat them. She knew she should not harshly scold this boy, who now had the courage to confess. It seemed to her that he had already suffered for his actions. But it was also her duty to be strict.

“Ganesh, I admire your courage in coming forward and confessing. But you know this means you will be dismissed from the class. I cannot let you stay on, knowing that you cheated to get in.”

The boy stared down at the floor. His feet in their sneakers looked huge and awkward, and that’s how he felt in front of this petite teacher. “Yes, Madam. I understand.”

Ganesh walked home that day without even feeling the rain pelting down on his head. His dream of passing honors math had ended, and

with it, perhaps, his chances of getting into a good university. Now he had to face his parents, because he knew the principal would have told them he was being dropped from the class.

Nearing his house, he slowed down until he was almost standing still. The elm tree at the corner of his street sheltered his bare head, and yet the pouring rain managed to escape the leaves and drench his face and head. He wished that he had not let his ambition blind him and lead him to cheat. He wished he could turn the clock back. He wished for many things, but now there was nothing he could do. He felt helpless, and tears rolled down from his eyes.

Finally he pulled himself together and shuffled into the house. His mom, greeting him at the door, helped him dry off and fed him dinner.

Then she announced, “Your father is waiting for you in the study.”

Ganesh slinked into the study. As his father looked at him, Ganesh felt that somehow Appa had aged considerably since he had seen him that morning. How hurt he must be!

“I am so sorry, Dad.”

His father beckoned him forward, “Son, even if you want something badly, you should never resort to being dishonest to get





it. I don't want to give you a lecture. I know you have realized your mistake. All I want you to do now is to study for the entrance test and get in the honors class on your own merits."

For the last month, Ganesh had felt happy to be in the honors class; but that happiness was not real—it felt like stolen happiness. The thrill of cheating was momentary, and it had left him feeling guilty and uneasy. As he sat in front of his father, he was struck by how much pain his act had caused his parents. His friends, too, would now come to know what had happened. Kartikeya, who had stolen the test for him, was also in trouble.

Ganesh had not won by cheating. Actually, he had lost. But today, after speaking to the teacher and then to his father, Ganesh felt a change coming over him. He promised himself that he would never again stoop to dishonesty, never again cheat to get ahead.

Six months later, Ganesh took the test again and passed. The first day of class, while walking on the cobbled pathway, he recalled the happy way he had walked six months ago. Today he strode confidently, without burdens. In his heart, he knew that it was not only the entrance test that had been a challenge. He had faced one of life's challenges and passed it, too. He had learned the value of honesty.

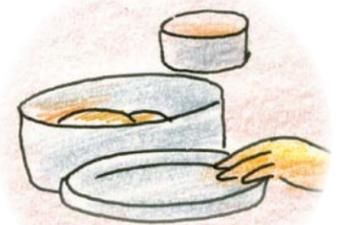


Defending Vegetarianism

Sanjiv loved school. It was a place to learn, play and most of all to interact with his friends. His sister Deepa, on the other hand, didn't mind school, but she really preferred vacation time. During the holidays, she got a chance to travel all the way from Los Angeles to India to see her grandparents. Both of them liked the system of education which allowed them to learn and explore subjects without having to endlessly prepare for exams, like she had seen her cousins in India do.

However, what dampened Sanjiv's enthusiasm was John's constant teasing of Sanjiv about his vegetarian diet, "Hey, there goes our vegan!" Sanjiv corrected him, explaining that since he drinks milk, he is a vegetarian, not a vegan.

One day, in the cafeteria during break time,



Deepa opened her lunch box. Inside were three delicious soft rotis with pickles and vegetable curry. Sanjiv had already dived into his box and grabbed a roti. No sooner had he started eating when John came to their table, "Wow, that looks weird! What is it?"

Deepa flushed in embarrassment, "That's my lunch!"

"No wonder you look so puny and pale. You should be eating a plate of chicken and fries, you know!" John snorted.

Deepa shot back, "If that is what you like, go ahead. I have never eaten chicken, so I can't possibly develop a taste for it now."

Sanjiv piped in, "You know we are Hindus, and Hindus don't generally eat meat."

"Why not?" John asked. "Why on earth wouldn't you eat chicken or lamb? They are delicious!"

"Our religion believes that it is wrong to slaughter animals for our own enjoyment. It earns us bad karma. But leaving religion aside, I really don't want to eat nonvegetarian food."

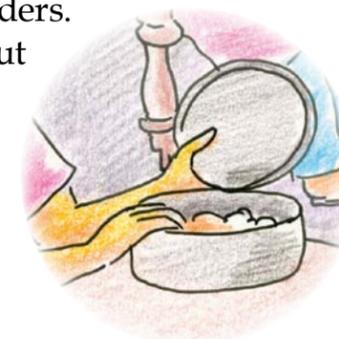
"Well, I don't follow a religion," John replied, "but my parents, who



are Christians, teach that God meant for us to eat anything we want of what He put on this Earth. So their religion says it's OK. I believe we should do what is best for all people and for our planet. I don't think there is anything wrong with killing animals for food, if we are not cruel about it."

Sanjiv liked being a vegetarian, and he did not understand why John made such a big fuss over it. No doubt John was a bit of a bully, and criticized Sanjiv at every opportunity. In the baseball game, if Sanjiv did not play well, it was because he was a vegetarian and did not get enough protein. During wrestling class, Sanjiv was teased for his slim frame. Sanjiv pointed out that lots of great athletes are vegetarians—runners, gymnasts, even body builders. They get plenty of protein without eating meat! But John refused to listen to any such talk.

A change came for Sanjiv when a new boy arrived in school, Robert. He was not a Hindu, but he was a vegetarian. John started bullying



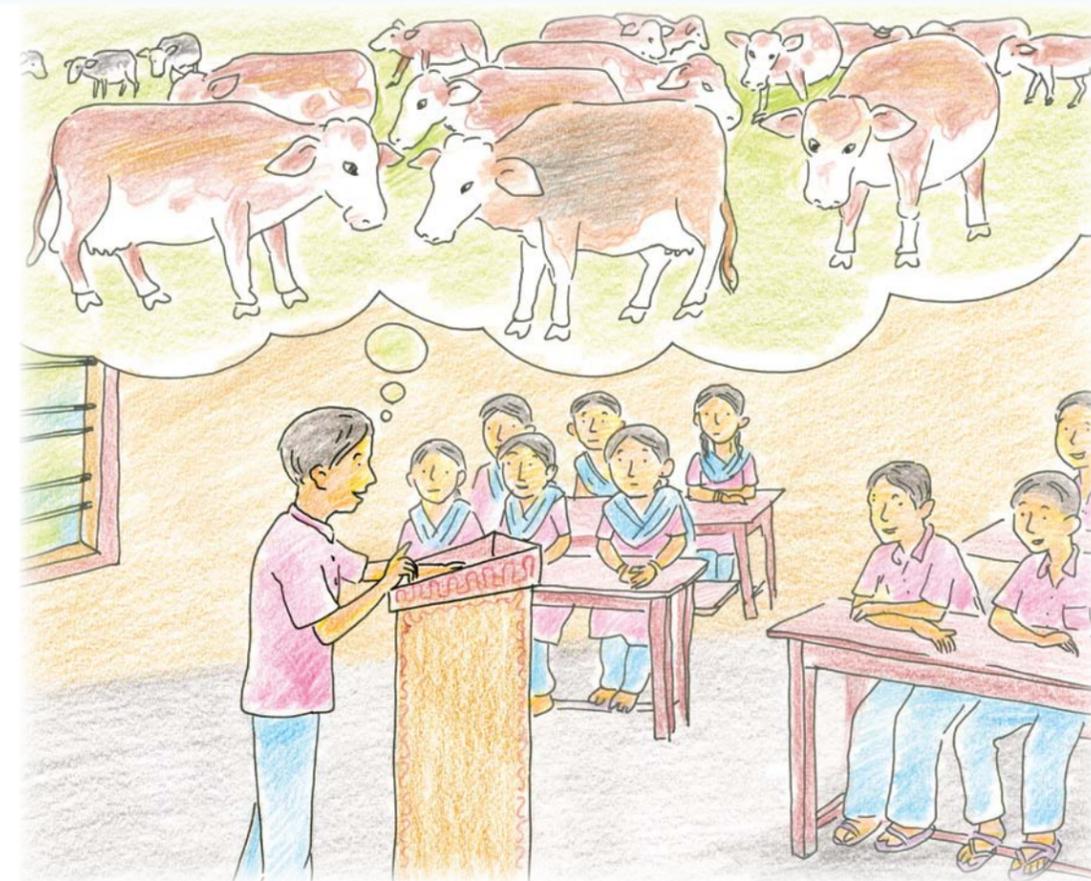
him, too. "Enough is enough," thought Sanjiv, "I'm going to find a way to stop this."

That afternoon when John entered the cafeteria, Sanjiv called out, "Hey John, come and taste this samosa."

"Not for me, friend!" retorted John, "Give me something that moves. You will never convince me your vegetables are better than my meat."

Sanjiv saw his opening. "Perhaps not, but I think I can make a pretty good case. Instead of continuing to squabble about this, let's have a real debate. I will talk on the advantages of a vegetarian diet, and you can speak about the advantages of a nonvegetarian diet. Let's do it in class, in front of everyone. If I win the debate, you will never again tease me or any other vegetarian in this school. If you win the debate, I won't object to your teasing anymore, but I'm not about to start eating meat!" Sanjiv said with a smile.

A date for the debate was fixed, and the class took a lively interest, as did the teacher. The students were aware of the ongoing argument

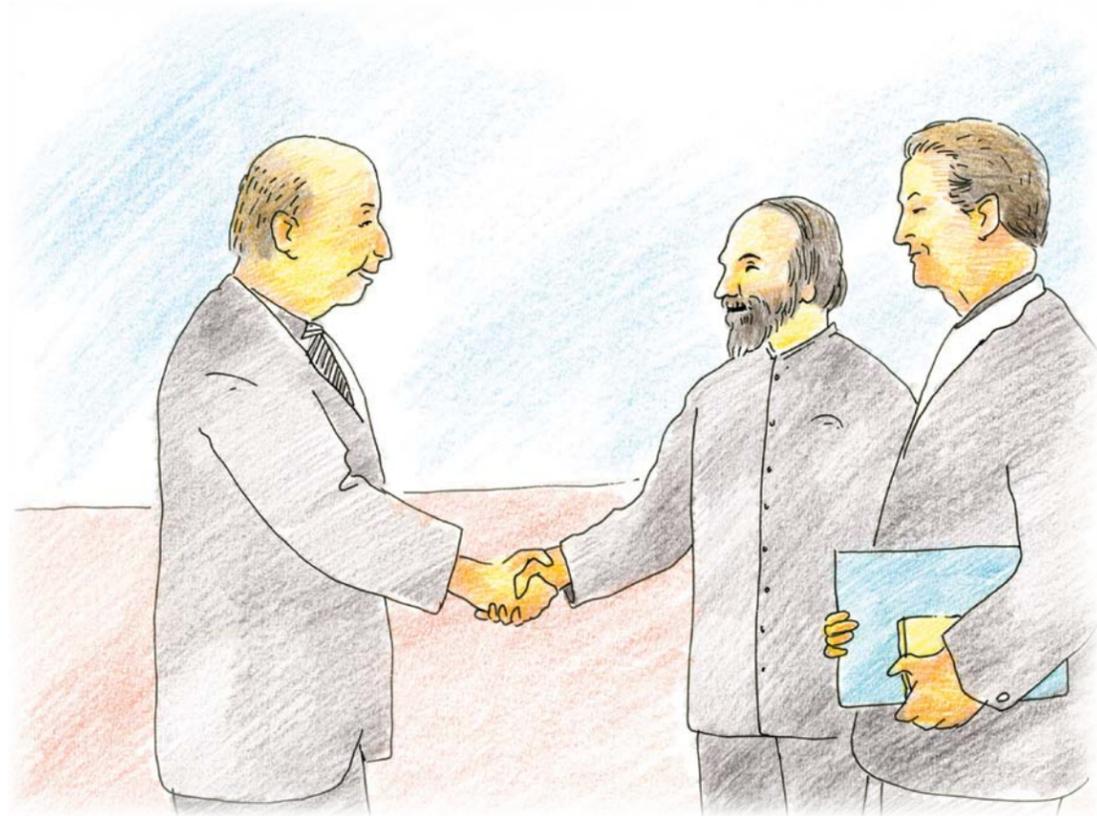


between the boys, and they wondered who would win.

The teacher called John to come first and talk on his topic. John walked to the front of the classroom. His blonde hair was combed back neatly and his clothes were neatly pressed. He was a handsome boy, and an example of perfect fitness, one of the healthiest boys in the school.

John smiled at the class and said, "Anyone who has eaten fried chicken will agree with me that chicken tastes really yummy. So do pork and beef. Keeping our taste buds aside, which I know is very difficult"—John paused and grinned at the students—"nonvegetarian foods are rich in protein. I don't know if you are aware of this, but nonvegetarian foods have a natural content of Vitamin B₁₂, which is not found in plant foods. Fish are a rich source of calcium, and for growing children calcium is extremely important for healthy bones. A protein-rich diet gives us strength, and it is with this strength that man has continued to exist and evolve over so many thousands of years. Haven't we all heard the age-old saying, 'Survival of the fittest?' To survive in this world, there is no room for weakness. Nonvegetarian food gives us that strength. We all know that lions





attack deer. Has anyone heard of a deer attacking a lion?" Laughing, he said, "Nonvegetarian food is for the lions here. The others can eat grass." John sat down.

As though in testimony to John's words, Sanjiv became even more aware of his slim frame as he walked to the podium. However, he knew that slimness is not an indication of weakness. His great grandmother was ninety-eight years old, and she was in fine health. She had never eaten nonvegetarian food. But, their neighbor, a plump meat-eater, had dropped dead at 52 of a massive heart attack.

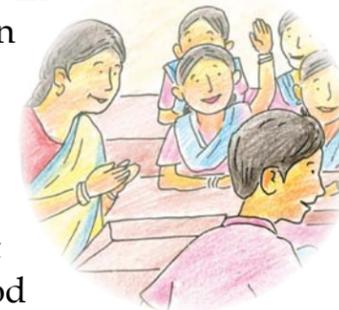
Sanjiv began, "It is true that the Stone Age man ate all kinds of meat to survive in his very harsh environment, and this has continued to this day. However, Stone Age man was not worried about global warming. Today, we are not only physically evolved, we are also spiritually and intellectually more evolved. My religion, Hinduism, says that it's wrong to kill another living creature except in self defense, as this earns us bad karma. Having said that, I understand that not all of us here are Hindus."



Therefore, I would like to add two more points in favor of a vegetarian diet. One, nonvegetarian food is not healthy; and two, raising animals for meat is a major contributor to global warming."

John, who until then was feeling he had the upper hand in the debate, was suddenly not so sure. He understood that nonvegetarian food can lead to obesity and high cholesterol—both bad for us. But global warming? In spite of himself he blurted out, "That can't be right. How can meat eating contribute to global warming?" As he voiced the question, John, for the first time that morning, became serious. He was an eager environmentalist. In fact, his entire family tried to live in a way to protect and preserve our planet. His father drove a hybrid car, and at home the children made a practice of conserving electricity.

Sanjiv nodded, "In the year 2007, a Hindu, Rajendra Pachauri, won the Nobel Prize for Peace, along with Al Gore, as head of the United



Nations Food and Agricultural Organization. When Dr. Pachauri discovered that growing meat for food contributes 18% of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, he became a vegetarian.”

Sanjiv paused and then continued, “Do you know how much that 18% really means?”

When there was no response, he said, “It’s more than all the pollution caused by cars and trucks in the world!”

The students were shocked. There was silence for a moment, then loud applause.

The class concluded that Sanjiv’s argument was better. After the teacher summarized the arguments, John came up to the front of the class to congratulate Sanjiv.

John felt ashamed of his bold and critical remarks about vegetarians. In a bid to make amends he offered, “Sanjiv, you have given me a lot to think about! I never heard this stuff about global warming! How about I come over to your place one of these days for a nice vegetarian meal? I’m sure your mom is a great cook.”

Sanjiv grinned, “For a second there I thought you had forgotten the conditions of the debate and were going to make another smart-aleck remark. I’m glad we have put this behind us. Yes, please come over to my house. You will be amazed by my mom’s vegetarian cooking. It’s much more than carrots and celery.”

The two boys laughed and walked out together. Sanjiv was confident he was the last vegetarian John would insult.



A Friend’s Bad Influence

The first day of each school term was always exciting for Ranjit. He liked school and looked forward to learning new subjects. He wore the new clothes his mom had bought for him, he had his notebooks and study materials all neatly arranged in his backpack and had set up his study corner in his room at home. He approached the first day of school with a mix of uncertainty and excitement. Sitting in the third row of his 6th grade classroom, Ranjit looked around for Shailesh. The bell rang and, as the teacher appeared, Shailesh came rushing in. Ranjit hissed, “Come, Shailesh. Sit beside me.”

Shailesh grinned and plopped down into his seat.

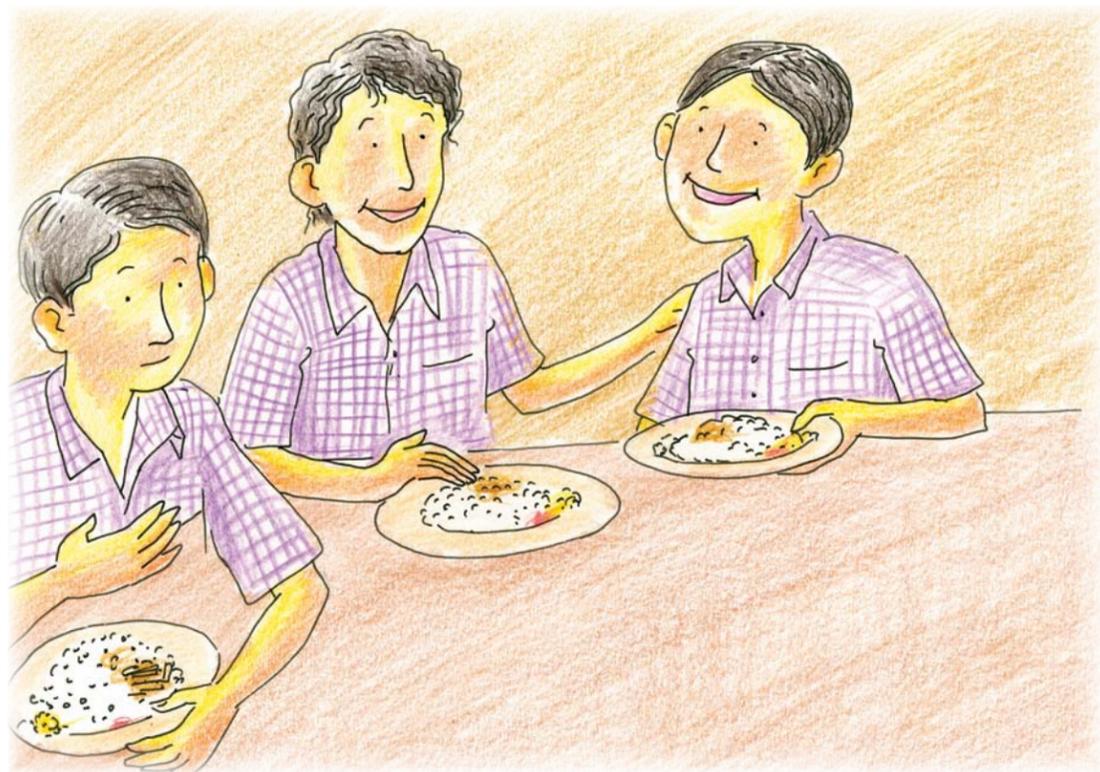
The teacher, Mrs. Sivan, wished them good morning, then said, “Children, let me introduce a new boy who has joined our school this year.” She beckoned a boy who was seated just behind Ranjit. Tall and lean, with a mop of curly hair, he walked up casually to the front of the class, “Hi, I’m Ravi. Ravi means the sun—and believe me, I’m sure to bring sunshine and fun into your lives.” He smiled broadly. Most of

the students took a liking to him right away.

Ranjit, however, felt a strange uneasiness. Something about Ravi was not right. He seemed too sure of himself. Over the next few weeks, it became clear that Ravi liked to have fun at the expense of others. For example, one day he let the air out of Mahesh's bike tire, knowing that Mahesh had to rush home for his younger sister's birthday. When Mahesh was on the verge of tears, Ravi walked up and offered to take him home on his bike. From then on, Mahesh hung around with Ravi, not realizing that it was Ravi who had caused him the trouble in the first place.

In class, Ravi constantly whispered about Mrs. Sivan. Some of his remarks were really funny. The children sitting near him had to work hard to not break out laughing. Ranjit enjoyed the jokes some of the time, but Shailesh was really getting hooked on Ravi. One rainy day, Ravi didn't turn up at school. The whole day, Shailesh complained how boring it was without Ravi and how much he missed him.

Just a month into the new term, Shailesh insisted Ravi sit with them at lunch. Shailesh and Ranjit had been best friends from third grade, and neither had ever invited anyone to join them. All the other

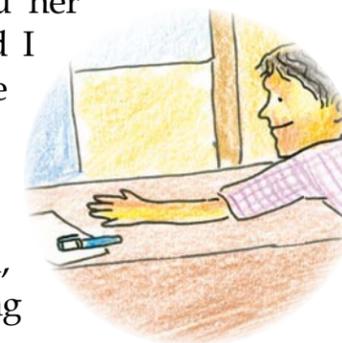


children were casual friends. They would meet over a game of cricket or during swimming practice, but during lunch it was always just the two of them. Now Shailesh wanted Ravi to join them every day. Ravi talked nonstop at lunch. Ranjit started to miss the days when he and Shailesh could enjoy lunchtime alone.

One day in class, while the teacher's back was turned, Ravi snuck up to the front and snatched her pen. Everyone knew the pen was her prized possession, a gift from her father upon her college graduation. The class saw him doing it. Some smirked and others shook their heads and motioned with their hands for him to put it back. But Ravi just grinned and ran back to his seat.

As the bell rang, Mrs. Sivan, looked around her desk and murmured with a frown, "Where did I leave my pen? Maybe it's in the staff room!" She hurried out with a worried look.

Some of the children giggled loudly. Taking that as a sign of approval, Ravi stood up and bowed humorously. Shailesh laughed and said, "You are sure bold. How did you think of doing



that? You know she won't drop the matter. Once she is sure it's missing, she is going to grill all of us."

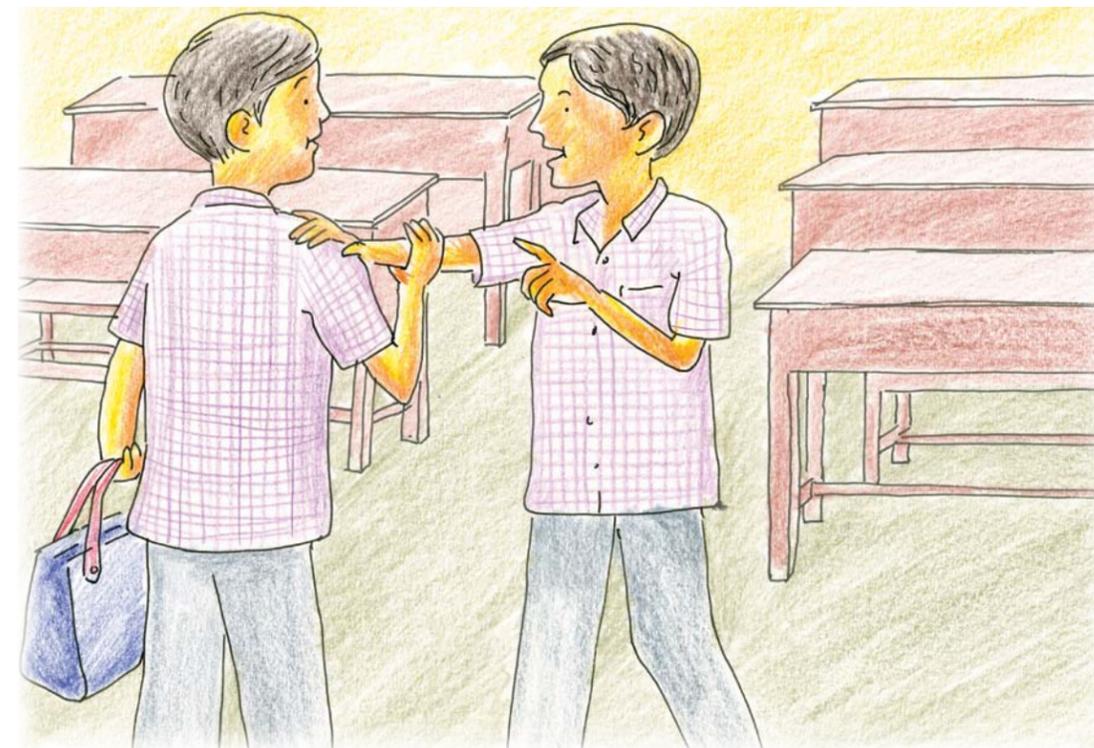
Ravi grinned, "Let's face that when it happens."

Ranjit's eyes did not move from Ravi. After class he secretly followed him out of the school. He watched Ravi put the pen into a paper bag, then drop it on the road and walk off. In another moment, a passing vehicle would run over it.

It was one thing for Ravi to play up to the class by stealing the pen in front of everyone. But this was entirely different. Now Ravi was attempting to destroy the pen the teacher valued so much. "That's just plain mean," thought Ranjit. "He should have found a way to give it back." Ranjit dashed onto the road and picked up the bag.

"What kind of person is this Ravi?" Ranjit wondered as he walked back to school. But he would deal with Ravi later. First, he had to relieve Mrs. Sivan's anguish.

When he reached the staff room, she was sitting nearly in tears. "Madam, here is your pen. It had rolled under the table." That was a lie,



but Ranjit was not brave enough to turn Ravi in.

Her face brightened, but her smile quickly changed to a frown when she saw the sweat on Ranjit's face. He looked like he had run a mile. She knew something was not right. She didn't think Ranjit had stolen the pen, but she wondered how he had really found it. "Thank you, Ranjit. I would be a very proud parent if you were my son." Her mind turned to Ravi. She had suspected him from the beginning.

The next day, Shailesh was about to rush out of class to catch up with Ravi, but Ranjit caught him. Shailesh stopped and turned around.

"One minute," Ranjit blurted out, "I need to talk to you. You spend too much time with Ravi. I, too, like his jokes and think he's really funny. But you need to watch out. He's really not a nice person."

Shailesh was offended by this chiding. "Hey, why are you giving me a lecture? I like Ravi. I think he's fun to be with. He and I have lots more fun than you and I ever did. You need to chill."

Shailesh took off after Ravi, leaving Ranjit very irritated.

The next day the teacher came in with a sad look. She stared at the students and said, "I never believed that this class is capable of something like what happened yesterday."

A quiet panic swept over the room. Several children lowered their





heads. Shailesh stole a glance at Ravi, who was sitting straight up, staring at Mrs. Sivan. She returned his look and asked, "I wonder if you know who took my pen, Ravi? I would like you to come and meet me after class."

Without thinking, Shailesh spoke, "Why Ravi? It could have been me!" He said the words in a whisper but the teacher heard him. She looked at Shailesh for a moment and then turned towards the blackboard and continued the class.

Ranjit approached Shailesh after school. "You fool! You could have gotten into trouble with the teacher today! She kept quiet because this is the first time you have behaved badly. But the next time you talk back like that, you'll be in for it. Remember what the *Tirukural* says, 'As water changes according to the soil through which it flows, so a man takes on the character of his friends.' A swami once told me that means just as water running through red soil turns red, so will being friends with a dishonest person make you dishonest."

Ranjit looked at Shailesh with real concern, but Shailesh just laughed, "Remember my words, Ranjit? You really need to have a bit of fun in your life. I need to go. Ravi is waiting for me."

As Ranjit walked home, he had a strange feeling that something

bad was about to happen. He felt this way once before, and the next day his dog fell ill. Softly he whispered a prayer, "Lord Ganesha, please keep Shailesh out of trouble."

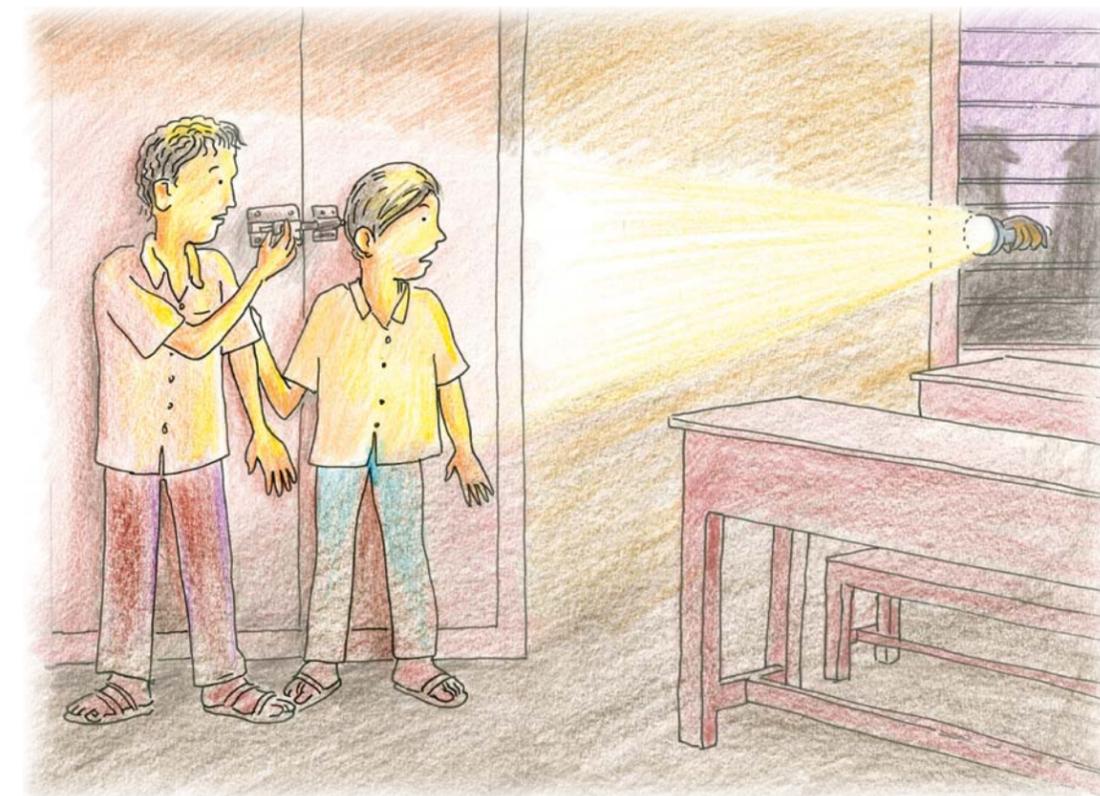
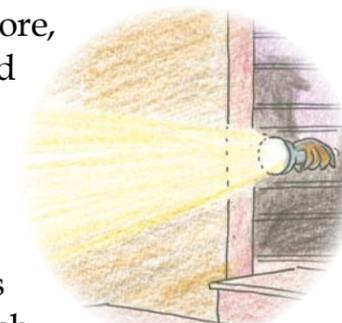
That night he slept restlessly. Once he thought he heard police sirens. In the morning he woke up still feeling tired. The moment Ranjit reached his first class, Mahesh told him that Ravi and Shailesh had been picked up by the police for trying to break into the school last night. Neither was at school today.

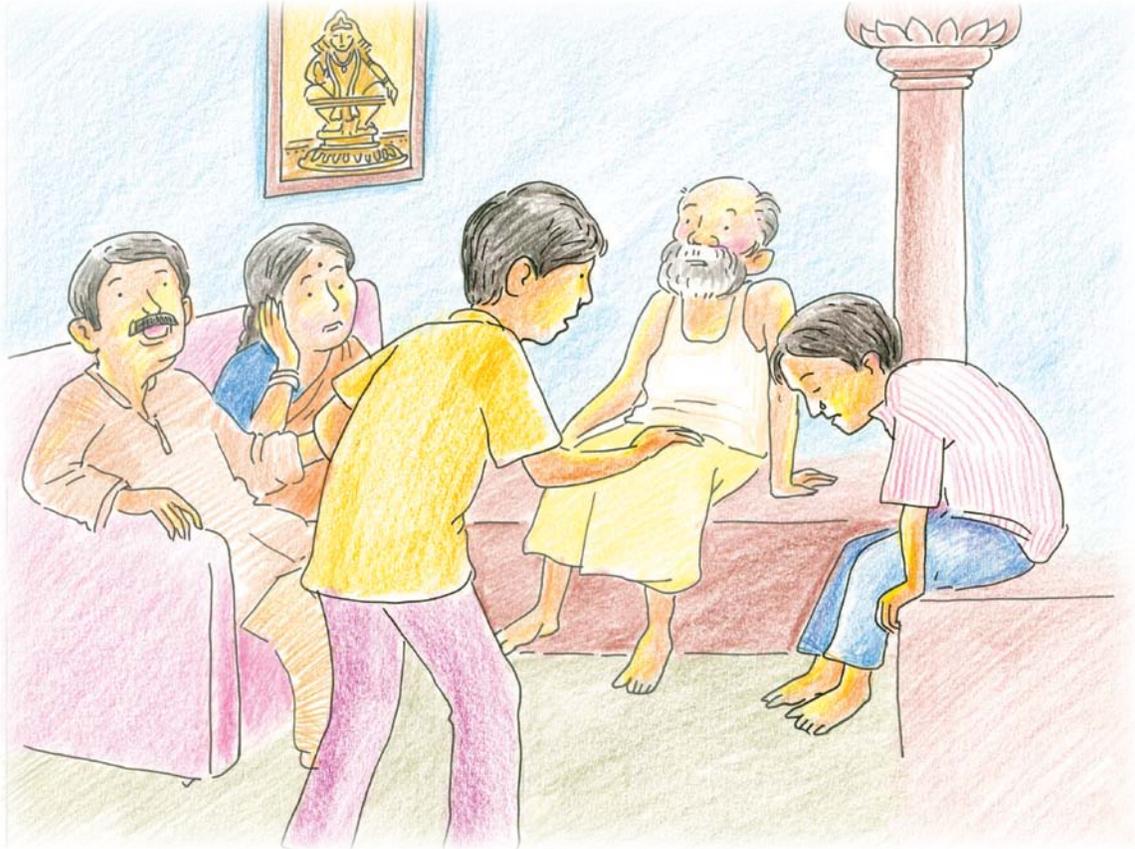
After school, Ranjit rushed to Shailesh's house. Shailesh was sitting in the living room with his father, mother and grandparents, staring down at his feet. It was obvious he had been crying. Walking in, Ranjit asked, "Shailesh, are you okay?"

The boy's father glared at Ranjit, "Of course, he's okay. But we aren't! Why did he break into the school? Now he could be expelled!"

Ranjit turned to his friend, "Why did you do it?"

Shailesh held back his tears, "Just for the heck of it. Ravi said it would be a lot of fun. But as soon as we got in, the guard dog heard





us. We barely managed to run into a classroom and lock the door before the dog caught up with us. He barked outside the door until the police came. They thought we were there to rob the place, or maybe steal test papers. I told them we were just having some fun, but they didn't believe me. Our parents had to come to the police station to pick us up."

Shailesh's voice broke and he starting crying.

Ranjit said, "Didn't I warn you to keep away from Ravi? He's bad company for you."

Shailesh hung his head, "Now I know, but I had started to think like Ravi. I believed we could do anything we wanted to. Now look at the trouble I'm in. I'll be lucky if I don't get suspended from school. You were right to warn me. While I was waiting for my parents in the police station, your verse from the *Tirukural* kept replaying in my mind. I remembered another one, too, 'What matters in making friends is not having fun, but a stern rebuking when friends go astray.' When you told me I was wrong to be friends with Ravi, I thought you were just jealous of him. But you were being a real friend. You've never let me down. I've been such a fool!"

