

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

The Bicycle Thieves

A Telling Tale for Kids



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Excerpted from two storybooks that teach moral values based on the yamas & niyamas, Hinduism's twenty cardinal virtues

STORY BY ANURADHA MURALI ❖ ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAJEEV N.T.



THE COLLECTION OF STORIES IN BOOKS ONE AND TWO OF *HINDU CHILDREN'S Modern Stories* was written and illustrated at my request to convey Hinduism's ethical and moral values and basic religious observances, which are the traditional *yamas* and *niyamas*, to a new generation. "The Bicycle Thieves" story is drawn from *Ten Tales about Religious Life*. 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 negative consequences can 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 he is tired because he stays up most of the night helping his ailing grandfather. Several stories encourage children to think about the friends they make, and choose those with similar positive values. The stories follow the principles of Positive Discipline, a system of child rearing that avoids corporal punishment, sees mistakes as opportunities for teaching and lets 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, judging parent upon returning home. Rather, his father reacts in a kindly, loving, thoughtful manner to help his son understand his error, how to make amends and not to repeat the mistake in the future. In many of the world's schools today, ethical and moral values are often overlooked. I hope this set of short stories will provide Hindu and non-Hindu parents alike one means to convey all-important character-building values to their children.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

Four teens, supported by their parents, approach a fire puja being performed by two priests. They are seeking blessings for their studies in the year ahead, knowing the guidance of the devas will keep their minds strong and focused on the challenges of learning so they can excel.



“Silly! Stolen food tastes better! Don’t you know? Come on! Or are you chicken?”

Stung by the words, Nilakantha objected, “I’m not chicken!”

“Come on then! What are we waiting for?” Matching his words with his actions, Rohit ran to the bike, “What luck! It’s not even locked.” Wheeling it to the road, he climbed on the seat and whispered, “Jump on the back!”

Against his better judgment, Nilakantha climbed aboard, and off they rode. Nilakantha was too scared to turn around and see if anyone was watching them.

They rode along merrily till they reached Shanti Grove. Its pine trees were tall and strong, casting a soft shadow on the ground.

The two rode in the woods for a long time. Finally they stopped to rest, and Nilakantha said, “Rohit, we have been playing with this bike for over an hour. When are we returning it? The owner must be pretty worried and upset that it is missing!”

Rohit laughed loudly. “Who said we were going to return it? Do you think they’ll find it funny and just let us go if we give it back to them now? No way!



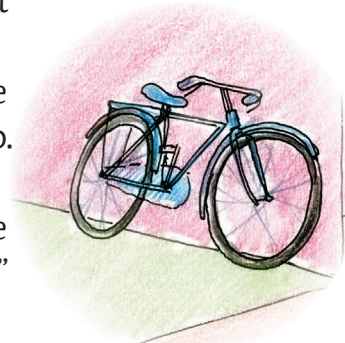
The Bicycle Thieves

Summer vacation was starting to seem long and boring. On the outskirts of Pondicherry in South India, Rohit kicked a pebble down the street a few miles from his home. “There are too many rules. Don’t do this, don’t do that! And when I ask my parents the reason, they say I’m too young to understand! Bah! I’m not young! I’ll be twelve this September!”

Nilakantha watched his friend’s face. “What’s Rohit up to?” A slight feeling of fear tingled up his spine. Nilakantha liked Rohit a lot, though he didn’t always approve of his ways. But then that was what made him exciting to be with! There was nothing boring about him.

Walking down the street, they noticed a shiny blue bicycle leaning against a building. Rohit’s eyes lit up. “Wow! What a beauty! I need to take that for a ride!”

Nilakantha looked with disbelief at Rohit, “Hey! We have our own bikes. Why do you need to ride this one?”





They'll hand us over to the cops, that's what they'll do."

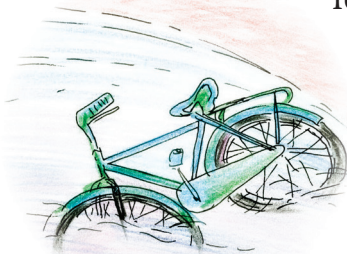
Nilakantha felt his lunch rising up to his throat. He swallowed hard and stood still for a moment. His head felt light and dizzy. Police! What would his parents think? His father would lower his head in shame and his mother would cry. Oh, why had he listened to Rohit?

"Don't worry, pal, I have a plan." Saying that, Rohit jumped back on the bike and rode fast to the lake at the center of the grove. Nilakantha ran panting behind him. Suddenly he heard a loud splash. When he caught up with Rohit, he saw the bicycle slowly sinking into the muddy lakebed, a few yards offshore.

"What have you done?" he screamed.

"Stop it! Don't shout! We can't do anything else. Come on, let's go back home."

Back in town, Arumugam, the owner of the bike, came out of the office. The boss's assistant had just told him, "This letter must be delivered to the bank within 30 minutes." Arumugam wasn't worried. He knew he could



get there much faster than that on his new bicycle. The thought of his bike brought a smile to his face. He had wanted a bike all his life, but because of all the other expenses, including looking after his two little daughters, his wife, his sisters and his parents, there never seemed to be enough money. Somehow, with God's blessings, he had finally bought the bicycle, a big accomplishment for a man who had never gone to school.



As he stepped out the door, he suddenly knew the bike was gone. Instinctively, he felt the loss even before he saw the empty space where he had parked it.

He had a second to make up his mind. He could stand there and raise a noise about his missing bike, or he could get the letter to the bank. Duty came first, so he dashed off, with tears dimming his sight.

Arumugam was a simple man who did not even own a watch. He calculated the time of day by looking at the sun. A half an hour had little meaning to him. He walked with quick strides to the bank. The road was





long, and the distance seemed even longer. When he finally reached the bank, he was upset to see the sign, "Closed for the day."

He hurriedly asked a passerby, "What is the time?"

"Ten past one."

Arumugam realized that he had walked for more than an hour!

"When will the bank be open?" he asked the watchman.

"Today's Friday. Won't be open till Monday. Sorry."

Stunned and helpless, feeling a loss greater than the loss of the bike, Arumugam walked back to the office, hanging his head.

"What! You didn't deliver the package?" Mahadevan, Arumugam's boss, cried out.

As poor Arumugam told the sad story, Mahadevan shook his head, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry. He felt his plans crash around him. The parcel had contained his bid for a government construction project. The deadline for submissions was the end of Friday. Because of Arumugam's failure, the bid would never even be considered. This was an important project, and the company had to have it to keep ahead of the hard economic



times.

"You may have cost me my company, Arumugam! I cannot employ you any longer. You are fired."

With slumped shoulders, Mahadevan turned, walked into his office and closed the door. Arumugam left the building in shock, wondering what he would he say to his wife and what would he do. The job was so important to his family.

The next day, at lunchtime, Nilakantha just picked at his food. His father, Srinatha, was explaining yesterday's incident. He had heard about it from his friend who worked for Mahadevan. "Why did the bicycle thieves have to steal that poor man's bike? He saved money for years to buy it."

A few tears rolled onto his plate, and Nilakantha did not try to wipe them. Suddenly, he blurted out, "Appa, I, I stole the bike." Later he wondered what had made him confess; but as he did so a huge weight was lifted from his shoulders.

Srinatha stared at his son as though he was seeing him for the first time.

"You don't mean that!" Seeing the intense pain Nilakantha was in, he softened his tone, "Why, son? Why did you do it?"

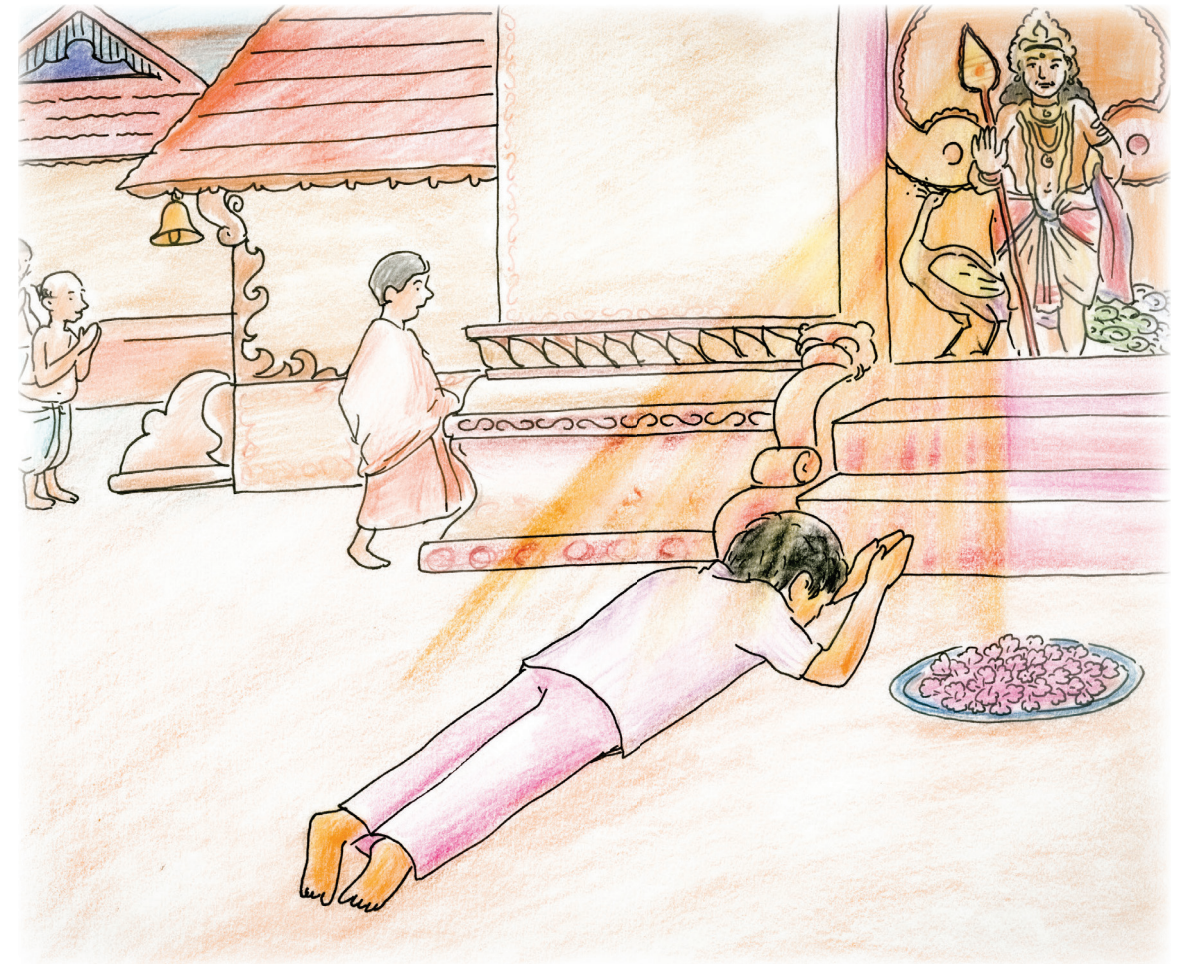
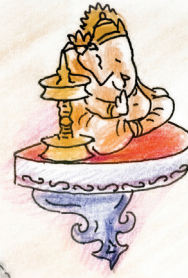
Nilakantha remembered Rohit's face, but what would be achieved by telling his father about Rohit? Sobbing quietly, he confessed, "Appa, it was just for fun. I'm so sorry."

That afternoon, father and son walked up to Mahadevan's office. Arumugam was sitting outside on the step, looking lost, sipping a cup of tea. "My son took your cycle." The very words seemed to age his father.

Arumugam bowed his head, "It is okay, sir. Boys love to ride bicycles. Your son is, after all, like my son!"

Srinatha pulled some bills from his pocket and pressed them into Arumugam's hands. "We are very sorry. Please buy yourself a new bike."

As Srinatha turned to walk away, Arumugam asked, "Sir, can you help get me a new job?"



"Why? What happened?"

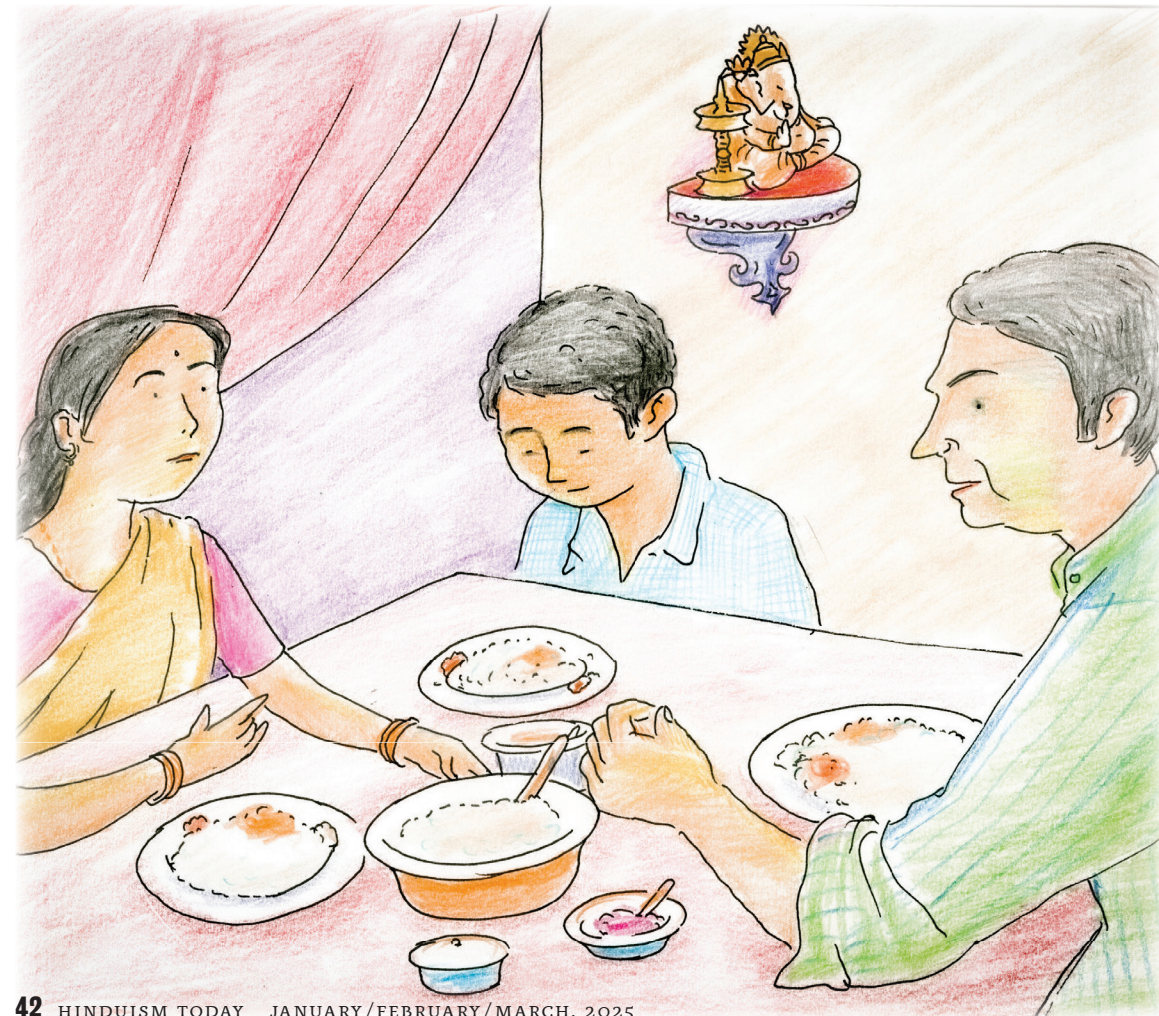
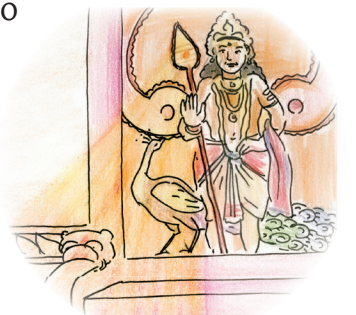
Arumugam explained that he had been fired for failing to deliver the package.

"Oh, no!" Nilakantha thought, "Not only did I steal his bike, I cost him his job, too!" His mind wandered to the scene of the bike sinking into the lake.

"Ok. Let's go," he heard his father order sternly.

The rest of the weekend was a storm of tears and remorse for Nilakantha. But with the remorse, there arose a new strength of character, which his father did not miss. On Sunday evening, father and son sat outside the house watching the sunset. Srinatha spoke, "Son, I know you too well. You could not have done this on your own. Who was with you? Was it Rohit?"

Nilakantha kept quiet, and his father knew he was right. "I thought so. I will speak with Rohit's father. And son, I know you had to go through this incident to realize your strength. You will never again be weak enough to fall

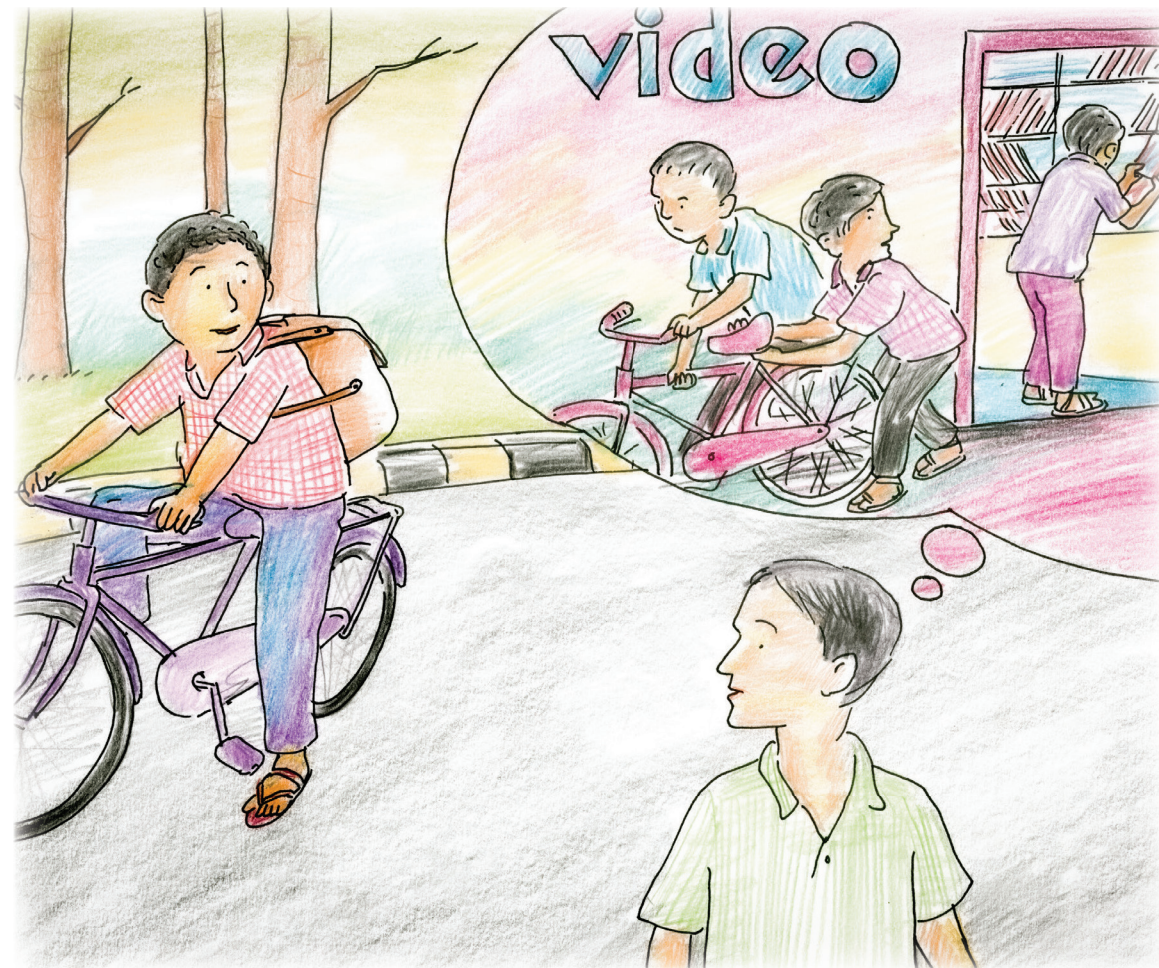


into wrongdoing. I see how much you have regretted stealing, and I know you will never do such a thing again. I am proud of how you have benefitted from the experience.” Srinatha hugged his boy tightly.

Monday was a busy day. Srinatha took Nilakantha with him to be present as he talked to the bank manager and then with Mahadevan. Like most stories where “all’s well that ends well,” this story, too, saw everything being cleared up. Thanks to Srinatha’s influence, the bank accepted Mahadevan’s late proposal. Arumugam not only got his job back, he was given a raise for his selfless attitude which had made him walk to the bank instead of going to the police to report the theft of his bicycle.

Nilakantha knew that while his father and Arumugam had forgiven him for the incident, and he had made amends by helping to get Arumugam’s job back, he still needed to do penance for his crime.

He had always been taught that life’s actions, good or bad, come back to us.



That Friday he gathered 108 flowers in a basket and went to the temple. As he had seen his father do, he prostrated 108 times before Lord Murugan and offered one flower with each prostration. It took almost two hours. As he got up from the 108th prostration, he saw a white light enter his heart and felt a great rush of kindness and forgiveness. It seemed to come from the silver Vel in the hand of Lord Murugan. He knew then that he was free from the ill effects of his action.

Srinatha talked to Rohit’s father, and the two of them shared the cost of the bike. Rohit had to confess to stealing the bike, but he felt no remorse; he only regretted getting caught. The idea of doing penance never occurred to him. He would just be more careful next time, and surely not choose Nilakantha as a partner!

Vacation ended and school was back in session. Nilakantha was worried about how Rohit would behave toward him. They were not really friends anymore. They had not been together since the day they took the bike. He was surprised one day when Rohit showed up late for school.

The next morning, while riding to school, Nilakantha saw Rohit walking along the familiar pathway. “Rohit, where’s your bike?” he asked as he stopped to give him a ride.

Rohit scowled, “Someone stole it. I left it outside the game parlor, and when I came out, it was gone. Cursed luck!”

Yes, it seems two boys had taken his bike for a joyride and then thrown it in a ditch in hopes of not being discovered.



Other Fun Stories in the Series

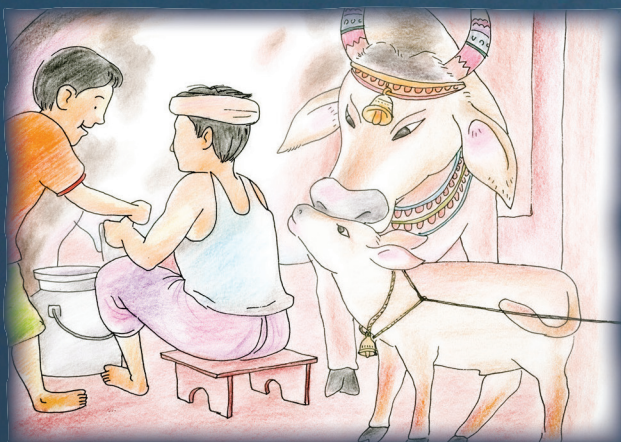
Below are previews of four more stories in which children encounter challenging situations that are familiar to them. The stories illustrate the power of worship, contentment, karma, faith and more, while highlighting the purpose and value of applying religious principles in daily life.

The Creators

The stories in the two books of *Hindu Childrens' Modern Stories* was written by Anuradha Murali of Bengaluru, India, an award-winning creative writer, author of *The Coconut Cutter & Other Stories* and *Wingless* (Sishti Publications, New Delhi). The were illustrated by Rajeev N.T. of Vuthiri, Kerala, India, an award-winning illustrator for children's books and creator of several cartoon strips.

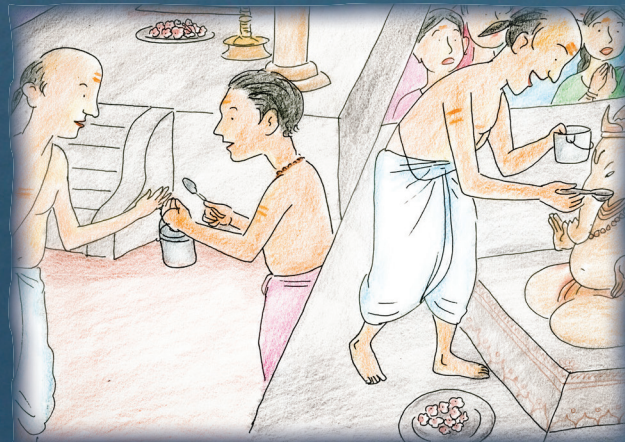
Where to Obtain the Books

Book One, Ten Tales About Self-Control and *Book Two, Ten Tales About Religious Life* are each 84 pages long and profusely illustrated, available as hardcover and as e-books through Amazon.com and Apple's iBookstore. Books include a narrated CD. Order at minimela.com or through Amazon.com.



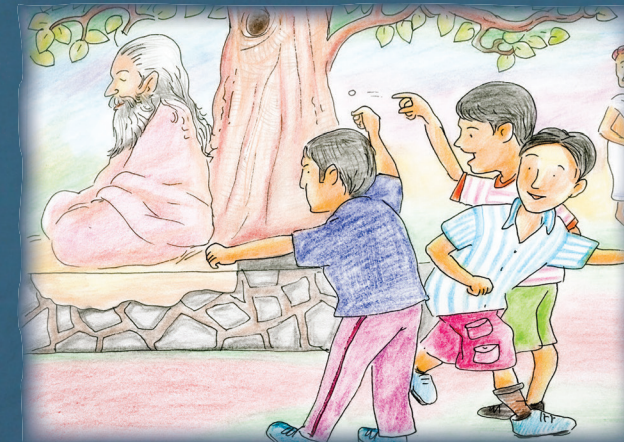
Be Satisfied with What You Have

Yogesh, visiting his grandparents in a village in India, is frustrated by the lack of modern comforts and longs for his video games. After spending time with his great uncle and the local village children, he begins to appreciate the simplicity of rural life. Learning to milk cows, play traditional games and live without technology, he discovers happiness in unexpected places. By the time he returns to the city, he is transformed, realizing that true contentment doesn't come from material possessions but from connecting with others and enjoying life's simple pleasures.



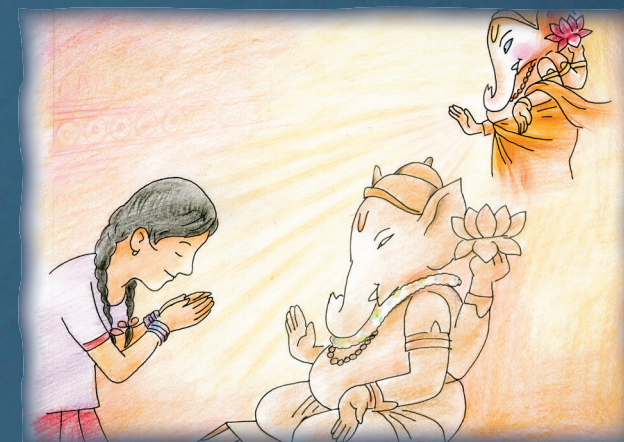
The Milk Miracle

In 1995 Revati experiences a miraculous event when Lord Ganesha drinks milk offerings at her local temple in Delhi. The miracle quickly spreads across the world, with similar events reported in temples from India to the U.S. and Kenya. Devotees flock to offer milk, and even though hundreds of gallons are given, barely any is spilled. Revati and her mother, along with many others, offer milk to Ganesha and are overjoyed to witness the miracle firsthand. Although skeptics claim it to be capillary action, devotees are convinced of its divine nature. The event, covered by media worldwide, reinforces the faith of countless people, including Revati. She reflects on the power of faith and the wonders that arise when the divine intervenes in everyday life.



Understanding through Experience

Jaykumar learns the law of karma firsthand after finding a \$5 bill on the ground and choosing to keep it, even though he knows its owner is searching for it nearby. A few days later, he brings \$20 to school to buy books, only to find it missing from his bag. During a class on karma and cognition, Jaykumar realizes the connection between his actions and the loss he suffered, understanding karma as a direct cause-and-effect law. Seeking redemption, he returns to the bus stop where he found the money, spots the man, and confesses, giving the money back. The man praises Jaykumar's courage in admitting his mistake. Jaykumar's guilt is relieved, and shortly after, his stolen \$20 is returned anonymously. The events solidify his understanding of karma.



Praying for Ganesha's Help

Vasuki overhears her parents discussing her father's job loss and worries about the family's future. To help, she turns to Lord Ganesha, her family's beloved Deity. Each morning before school, she gathers flowers, makes garlands, and prays to Ganesha for her father to find a new job. As weeks pass, his job search remains unsuccessful, and the family grows more anxious, but Vasuki continues her worship, even when her fingers are pricked by thorns while gathering roses. Eventually, her dedication is rewarded. Her father not only finds a new job but one that pays better and offers more responsibilities than before. Her faith in Ganesha deepens as she realizes the power of consistent, sincere devotion in times of hardship.