

Book 2 Children Ten Tales About Religious Life Questions

1) The Bicycle Thieves

Hri, Remorse

Overview – Two boys steal and destroy a bike. One is more a follower than a leader. When they discover that the owner's livelihood is ruined because of it, one character shows remorse, while the other doesn't. It illustrates how a mature person automatically has remorse, and then can make up for it through penance and apology to the victim.

Discussion Questions

1. Some people manipulate their friends' behavior by daring them to do things, calling them chicken, etc. Are these people good friends to have?
2. Why did Nilakantha's father know the theft was probably Rohit's doing?
3. How did Nilakantha grow in strength from the experience? What about if he had just kept quiet instead of confessing to his father?
4. Are the results of stealing always this dramatic, or is this an extreme example used for effect? Is there always some effect?
5. Why did Nilakantha feel remorse, but Rohit didn't?
6. How can penance help, but doesn't always completely solve a problem?
7. Give an example of a situation in your life when you felt remorse. What did you do to cause the remorse, and what did you do to overcome it?
8. What are some physical signs or body language of someone showing remorse? (Judges notice.)
9. What is the difference between guilt and remorse? Is there a difference?
10. Why is a sincere apology and compensation to the victim necessary?

2) Be Satisfied with What You Have

Santosh, Contentment

Overview – Yogesh travels to India from America. At first he is bored and unhappy. His grandpa takes him to stay in a rural village with an uncle. There he meets other boys who live a far simpler life. After a week playing with his new-found friends, his attitude shifts to one of liking the place. The story demonstrates that a person's contentment has little to do with possessions, and more to do with attitude.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the life Yogesh was accustomed to in the US. Why did that sort of life seem so strange to his grandfather?
2. Why did Yogesh's grandfather decide to take him to stay with Abhiraman for a while?

3. How do you think Mani would feel if he went to the US to stay with Yogesh?
4. When your basic needs are met, does it make sense to want more and more things?
5. Where does food come from? How does the author show that Yogesh doesn't understand this? Do you sometimes forget?
6. Have you experienced swimming in a lake or the ocean versus a pool? Describe the differences. Which would you prefer?
7. Are there things in your life that actually hinder you from feeling content and happy?
8. What was the impact of fresh air and open sky on Yogesh? Do you have opportunities to just go into nature?
9. What are some keys to contentment? What makes you content?
10. How could 'not knowing' sometimes be an aid towards contentment?

3) Tithing and the Family Budget

Dana, Giving

Overview – When two boys receive birthday gifts, Dad counsels them on tithing and budgeting. The story explores wise spending, how tithing is the family's first expense, and how giving is duty. It is a clear example of a family that views giving as a joy rather than a hindrance.

Discussion Questions

1. What is tithing, and why is it important?
2. What were some of the ways the boys' parents learned to save more money? Before they started tithing, were they so careful about their money?
3. The boys' parents were very careful to keep track of where their money was going. Do you think this helped teach the boys how to handle money responsibly? Do you think this was helpful to them as they grew older?
4. If nobody gave, would there be temples? Charities?
5. The story is somewhat critical of allowances, by saying children waste allowances. How could allowances also be a useful tool for learning budgeting?
6. What else can you give besides money? Do you know people who give in other ways? Do you give in other ways? Explain.
7. What actually is money? (Hint: At one time it wasn't invented yet, and people still survived.)
8. How is just being pleasant and cheerful a way of giving?
9. Parents at temples often give coins to their children to place in the hundi. Why do they do this instead of just putting money in the hundi themselves?
10. What is hoarding? Why are some harmful effects of hoarding, both on an individual level, and on a societal level?

4) The Milk Miracle

Astikya, Faith

Overview – Using historical fiction as the genre, this story explores the Ganesha Milk Miracle of 1995. Using some historical facts as well as author creativity, it demonstrates the profound faith that Hindus have in their Gods. The Milk Miracle was a powerful example of how God works, and how Hindu enthusiasm was enhanced.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the things Revati loves about attending the Ganesha puja each morning?
2. What happened to the milk in the spoon? Why did the pujari want to try offering the milk himself?
3. Why do you think the miracle happened all over the world? Does this prove Ganesha is not only in one place, but everywhere He is worshiped with sincerity and faith?
4. Do you need to have these kinds of miracles to keep your faith? How does a miracle help?
5. What single experience in your life has added the most to your faith?
6. If there were no outward miracles, would there still be faith?
7. How does feeling shakti, or divine presence, develop faith?
8. How does knowing millions of people believe in Ganesha and other Gods help in your faith?
9. Some people lose faith when 'bad' things happen to them. Why do you think this happens? Have you had doubts?
10. Have you ever felt Ganesha's presence unexpectedly? Was there a sign? How did this add to your faith?

5) Praying For Ganesha's Help

Ishvarapujana, Worship

Overview – When Dad loses his job because of economic downturn, daughter Vasuki worships Ganesha with religious zeal for a period of months, always praying for him to get a job. Finally Dad does get a new job. The story illustrates the power of prayer, and is an example of how dedicated committed steady worship is central to the Hindu faith.

Discussion Questions

1. How is being fired different than being let go because of the economy?
2. How did Vasuki's faith and prayers help maintain Appa's determination to keep searching for a new job?

3. Was it easy for Vasuki to make a garland and worship Ganesha every morning before school, month after month, regardless of the weather? Do you think her prayers were made more effective by her determination and consistency?
4. When reading this story, could you feel your own shrine room?
5. What was Ganesha's sign that everything was going to be okay? Do you watch for signs?
6. What do you do for worship? What is your favorite puja flower? Variety of incense?
7. What is your favorite personal way to worship God? Where? When? Is it fun for you?
8. Do you ever ask, "What would Ganesha say if He was here?" and then imagine His answer?
9. There is internal and external worship. What's the difference?
10. Why is it important to be a 'doer' of worship as well as a 'watcher' of worship? Which do you prefer?

6) Treating Guest as God

Shravana, Scriptural Listening

Overview – During a week of rain, Valli and Seyon get bored, so their mother gets them to work on memorizing verses from the Tirukural. When guests come, they learn, in a very practical way, how some of the verses can be sensibly applied to life. The story is an example of the effect scripture should have on our daily lives.

Discussion Questions

1. Some things, like technology, change rapidly from one generation to the next; but do you think that is true of things discussed in the Tirukural, such as the proper way to treat guests?
2. Have you ever visited someone who made you feel like you were not welcome right then? How does that feel?
3. How many verses did you predict each child would memorize? Is exactly 50 couplets each realistic for a week? How many do you think you could memorize?
4. Why did Amma make it into some sort of a game, and promise a reward? What teaching strategies would help you memorize verses from the Tirukural?
5. Some ancient scriptures have all but disappeared. The Tirukural hasn't. What does that say about the Tirukural?
6. What other scriptures do you use? Are the writings of Gurus scripture? To whom?
7. Why are indexes and glossaries useful for Hindu scriptures, especially these days?
8. What is your favorite scripture? Why?
9. What is a scriptural quote you have memorized? Why do you think this particular one stayed with you?

10. A new trend is to carry a small electronic device full of bhajans, scriptures, and more. How might this be a beneficial tool? Could it also be detrimental? How?

7) Understanding Through Experience

Mati, Cognition

Overview – A boy finds \$5 and keeps it. Later he watches a man look for it, but he still doesn't return it. Then later someone steals \$20 from him. As this is happening, he is learning from the Guru about karma. A much deeper understanding of karma happens from his experience. The story provides an example of how having an experience directly related to a spiritual concept will enhance the person's understanding.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever found money? What happened? If not, do you already know what you would do if you did find some?
2. Under what circumstances might you just keep the money?
3. Is it ever OK to take something that is not yours?
4. Have you ever done something you knew was not right? How did that make you feel?
5. Have you ever had your karma come back very quickly, like Jaykumar's did, so you recognize what you did to create it?
6. Is it possible that you can understand something without experiencing it? Is there more than one type of knowledge?
7. What experiences might enhance belief in the Gods?
8. Which is better to understand a country: living in it, or reading a book about it? Why?
9. What might be some signs of a person speaking from book knowledge versus direct knowledge?
10. Is there body language attached to cognition, or the lack of it? Describe this body language.

8) Making Divine Vows

Vrata, Sacred Vows

Overview – Two children witness a wedding and have some questions about it. They ask their mother, and she explains the various parts. She explains how the marriage ceremony itself strengthens the bond between husband and wife and helps build and strengthen families and society. The story uses the marriage vow to illustrate the power of taking vows in our religion.

Discussion Questions

1. How big are the weddings where you live?
2. How does a traditional Hindu wedding (with its homa fire, priests' chanting, music, flowers, fancy clothing, great crowds of people and delicious food) help the bride and groom to feel the importance of their wedding vows?
3. Why is it important that the married couple really feel and understand the importance of their vows?
4. Why might the marriage vow be somewhat hard to understand at age 11?
5. Did you learn anything about a wedding from this story? If so, what?
6. What is the difference between a promise and a vow? Is there any difference?
7. How would fulfilling smaller promises in childhood help a person to fulfill larger ones in later life?
8. Are there temporary vows? (As opposed to lifetime vows, like marriage) Give an example. Have you ever made one, and accomplished it? What did that do for having the sense that you can accomplish things?
9. Are your parents or any other people you know under any vows besides marriage? What are they?
10. What is a reason for taking a vow publicly in front of friends and relatives, or at a temple?

9) The Power of Japa

Japa, Recitation

Overview – Two children, Chandran and Chamundi, notice their father chanting *Aum Namashivaya* and get into a discussion with him about japa. He teaches them how to chant *Aum* and explains initiation into a mantra from a Guru. Over the years Chandran stops his practice, but Chamundi continues. Chandran notices how she is calmer than him and then resumes his practice. The story explains and illustrates the benefits of doing japa.

Discussion Questions

1. Appa teaches the children how to prepare for doing japa. What did he tell them to do, and why do you think each step is important?
2. The children asked their father about it. If you don't understand some aspect or practise about your religion, do you ask someone for an explanation? Who do you ask?
3. Do you do japa? When? Where? What is your favorite time and place?
4. As a young boy, how did Chandran overcome distractions and establish a strong habit of doing his japa daily? Why did he stop?
5. What are some reasons people stop religious observations? Have you? If so, why? Is it 'bad' to stop?

6. Do you find it easier to think clearly when you feel calm and peaceful, or when you feel worried or upset?
7. Japa can be done silently. Under what circumstance might this be a good way?
8. Why is the Guru necessary for certain mantras?
9. If you didn't have your mala with you, but felt like doing japa, what would you do?
10. Do you think japa could be overdone? If so, how would you know?

10) Kavadi at Batu Caves

Tapas, Austerity

Overview – As a child, Arvind witnesses kavadi at Batu Caves in Malaysia. When his cousin Raj undertakes to perform it, Arvind takes a keener interest. His doubts disappear and his understanding of the ritual increases. The story is an example of how Hindus use austere practices to clear their minds of guilt, develop will, and more.

Discussion Questions

1. Is kavadi common where you live? Have you ever seen someone performing kavadi as Raj did? What did they tell you about the experience?
2. Do you ever perform austerities, such as occasionally fasting for a day, or doing a set number of prostrations? Do you like the feeling of control?
3. Have you ever been so focused on something that you did not notice physical sensations, like your foot has fallen asleep or someone has spoken to you?
4. Have you ever done any penance? (What are some other common penances?) Have you done kavadi? Will you, or would you?
5. When you have done things you wish you hadn't, what do you do to soften the karma you created?
6. Why do you think kavadi bearers have friends around?
7. Raj said he offered one bad deed to Murugan with each hook that was placed in his body. How do you think it would feel to release so many bad deeds in one day?
8. Why might a non-Hindu look at kavadi with shock, dismay, or curious fascination?
9. How would successfully doing penance affect a person's will power?
10. Who should determine what penance or the severity of penance? Why?