

Information for Parents

It is well documented that children who have been read to at an early age end up being more successful readers themselves. The intent of these books is to have a shared reading session, followed by a discussion. Similar research shows that discussion of values at a young age also leads to a greater sense of values as an adult. An even greater factor is the presence of positive role models. What a parent does has far greater impact than what a parent says. Although parents might feel it is a good idea to use examples from their own lives, it is probably best to limit this. It's not about you; it's about your child.

We have prepared sets of questions for each story in the new children and youth books. The idea is not only to gain an intellectual understanding of the concepts, but also to learn how each concept is to be applied in life. Reading the book on its own might be of some use, but a better use is to use the stories as a catalyst for a discussion. It is important to make the jump from fiction to real life application, so the questions and discussion should focus on how this applies in daily life. Of course, there is always the possibility in open communication that a child confides in the parent about something they have done wrong. In this case we urge that Positive Discipline guidelines are followed.

The questions have intentionally been ordered from simpler to more difficult. Parents of younger children might just use the first 6 questions, while parents of older children may just use the last 6. The questions themselves are just starting points, and of course each one could lead to many more, depending on individual learning styles, time, and other factors like interest levels. Ideally, discussions like this work best when a real life situation happens. Keep in mind it's not about the story itself, it's about the theme.

One suggestion would be to study each yama for a week for 10 weeks, and the discussion can continue over an extended period of time.

Questions for Book One – Children

Story 1 – How Our Family Became Vegetarian Again Yama – Ahimsa, Non-injury

Introduction – Ahimsa is one of our essential practices. This story provides a backdrop for a discussion on why we are vegetarians, so to add reality it could be used during a meal-time discussion along with a more general discussion on ahimsa, and that vegetarianism really puts it into practice. Another possibility is to use compare and contrast in a store to help rid children of the meat disconnect.

1. What's your favorite food? Why?
2. Why did the family stop being vegetarians when they came to America?
3. Why did the Mom say it was easier to be a vegetarian in India? Do you think this is true?
4. Do you think animals have feelings? How do you know?
5. Why did Puli bring the rat to the girl's room?
6. Why was it okay for Puli to kill the rat?

7. How did Uncle compare the cat eating the rat to the family eating meat?
8. Why do we sometimes not realise meat was an animal?
9. What other reasons were given besides ahimsa for being a vegetarian?
10. If you had a friend who was thinking of becoming vegetarian, what would you say to them?

Story 2 – Caught In a Friend’s Lie

Yama - Satya, Truthfulness

Introduction – Lying is not black and white. There are times when lying is okay such as to protect someone’s life, or for safety. A common example is when children are instructed to tell someone who phones the house their parents aren’t available, rather than not at home. This story provides the introduction to this complex parenting issue.

1. Why could Anand tell his father easier than his teacher?
2. If you were in such a situation, who would you tell?
3. Have you ever had a friend like Jothi? Are you still friends?
4. What do you think might have happened if Anand had continued being friends with Jothi?
5. Have you ever been caught in a lie like this?
6. Do you think Jothi will ever change? What might be an event that gets him to change?
7. What was the role of fear in this story? How are fear and lying related?
8. Mr. Kumar suspected Anand was lying. If you have ever lied to Mom or Dad, did they suspect it? What are some hints that someone is lying?
9. How would being successful at lying make it easier to do it again? How could this hurt a person in the long run?
10. Do you think it is ever okay to lie? If so, when?

Story 3 – Ananya and the Teacher’s Purse

Yama – Asteya, Nonstealing

Introduction – Most young children will steal at some point in their lives, even if it is a bit of change from a parent’s cupboard, or from a sibling. Parents can explore the theme with this story’s example of a much greater theft.

1. If you do something wrong, why is it hard to go home?
2. Anaya was given a break by the principal by him not phoning home. Why?
3. Why do you think Ananya stole the money? What are some reasons people steal?
4. Why does news like this spread? Have you ever had something happen, good or bad, and have it spread faster than you imagined?
5. If Ananya hadn’t have done her penance, how might karma have come around to her?
6. Have you ever wanted to, or actually stolen something. What happened?
7. What was the worst part for Ananya? Did she deserve that?
8. What are some strategies for dealing with the guilt and embarrassment?
9. How does the act of stealing or any adharmic act stick with you if you don’t do something to make up for it?

10. If a classmate of yours stole some food because they were hungry (from poverty) what could you do about it?

Story 4 – Vadivel's Special Vow

Yama – Brahmacharya, Divine Conduct

Introduction – This is a very personal topic, and how it is approached may vary from place to place. Parents should be very open about discussing sexuality, and yet because of age differences in maturation rate, (For example, the onset of menses in girls can range from age 9 to 14, all considered within the normal range.) any talk of sex drive will be basically meaningless until the onset of puberty. After that point, the child, because of personal experience, has a much better idea. It is also important to get the point across that brahmacharya applies to more than sexual purity.

1. What is a vow? Have you taken any, or do you plan to?
2. Besides abstaining from sexual relations, what else does brahmacharya include?
3. Do you think it is easier to be a good student if you are not distracted by other things? How is 'time well spent' an appropriate phrase for this story?
4. What is your favorite sport or activity, and have you ever talked to a member of the opposite gender about it?
5. Have you ever met someone like Amelia?
6. Do you think members of the opposite sex should be avoided altogether?
7. Do you know others who have taken this vow? How can they be supportive, or how can you support them?
8. This story was written in Texas. How is human sexuality taught in your school?
9. How might watching certain television shows make this vow harder? Which shows? Do you or your family purposely not watch these shows?
10. Why do wise Hindus dress modestly?

Story 5 – How a Puppy Taught Ananda Patience

Yama - Kshama, Patience

Introduction – Nobody has unlimited patience, so this is not the intent. The intent is to demonstrate to the child that they should be able to use as much patience as they are capable of, and that with small steps, it indeed can be cultivated. Of course personalities will vary considerably.

1. After reading this story, would you like a dog?
2. What method did Chandran use to train his dog—punishment, rewards, or praise?
3. What did Chandran not see at the beginning with regard to Abhinav and his dog?
4. Do you think you could train a dog? Why or why not?
5. What is an example of something you accomplished that needed a lot of patience?
6. What is the activity in your life you lack patience for the most? Have you ever given up on something because of it?

7. Can you think of any time in your life where you were like the dog, and someone else was like your trainer?
8. "Experience is the greatest teacher." What things can we do to select the right teachers?
9. Do you think this is true? "With time, patience, and effort, you can do anything."
10. What are some things we can do to cultivate more patience?

Story 6 – The Steadfast Vina Student

Yama – Dhriti , Steadfastness

Introduction – In instilling a sense of steadfastness in a child, it is important to focus on accomplishments. Reflect on what your child has done, in part, because of his or her steadfastness. Also demonstrate how the lack of it can lead to little being accomplished, but that with proper strategies like 'chunking' this can be changed.

1. What's your favorite musical instrument? Why?
2. What instrument (choose another one if you have one) would you like to learn? Why?
3. Did Amala practice as much as Ananta? Why do you think that was?
4. At the end of the story, Amala says she's going to change. Do you think she will be able to?
5. What activity do you do that involves the most will power?
6. Which is harder, applying steadfastness to an activity you enjoy, or one you don't enjoy?
7. What is something you have accomplished already that involved working steady?
8. How does practicing at the same time of day in the same place help with steadfastness?
9. How might keeping track with a chart or tally help?
10. If you **had** to practise for an hour a day on something and you could decide your own schedule, what would your schedule be? (Examples might be 4 15 minute periods, 2 in the morning, 2 in the evening, ... or an hour straight right after school.)

Story 7 – One Really Tired Student

Yama – Daya, Compassion

Introduction – Showing compassion for someone often has to do with the ability to look beyond a behavior to the cause of the behavior. So shift is away from a judgemental "Person is behaving badly" to a more reflective and compassionate, "Why is Person behaving badly?" This is often not obvious. A simple example is bullying, where a bully is that way because he was or continues to be bullied at home. There are also many undiagnosed physical, learning or social disabilities in children. This story shows how a boy gained a better understanding of a friend's temporary disability.

1. Have you ever teased or seen others tease someone the way the boys were teasing Arun? Describe the situation.
2. How does being tired affect concentration?
3. What are some other reasons for being tired all the time?
4. Have you ever been so tired you didn't feel like doing something, but were able to do it anyway?

5. Have you ever been surprised to find out something about somebody, like Ekanath was? Explain.
6. Have you ever had a classmate with a secret condition, perhaps medical, or otherwise, and your opinion changed when you found out about it?
7. This story is about a situation that is temporary. What might be a situation that is more permanent?
8. Why would it be important to share this kind of information with teachers? (For example, if you had a recent death in the family, and were feeling down.)
9. When we have information about someone, why might it be important sometimes to share that information, but also how it could be important sometimes to not share the information?
10. If you see something 'wrong' with someone, what are some ways you can explore the cause?

Story 8 – Honesty, the Best Policy

Yama – Arjava, Honesty

Introduction – This story deals with cheating in school, but the concept is applicable in much broader ways such as in business dealings, like not telling the whole truth in selling a car, or bribery. The intent is have children realise that for spiritual progress, honesty is indeed the best policy, as not only do you have to carry the burden of knowing you cheated, but also you can't avoid the law of karma.

1. In the story, why did Ganesh cheat? Did it accomplish the original goal?
2. How did the whole episode help him have a more honest look t himself?
3. What are some of the physical symptoms that came about because of Ganesh's dishonesty?
4. If Mrs. Mahesan would have done nothing about it, what would this have told you about how much she cared for him?
5. Have you ever cheated, felt like, or had the opportunity to cheat? Assuming you didn't, why didn't you?
6. How does the likelihood of being caught relate to cheating? Would you cheat if you absolutely knew there was no chance of ever being caught?
7. If you witnessed a close friend cheating, what would you do about it?
8. Why do computer users and companies recommend strong passwords? What does this say about society?
9. If your parents help you with your homework by doing your work for you instead of asking leading questions, how is this like cheating?
10. These days you can purchase exams and essays on the internet. It is easier to get away with it as well. Besides getting caught, what might be a more dire consequence of this situation?

Story 9 – Defending Vegetarianism

Yama – Mitahara, Moderate Appetite

Introduction – Although this story is about defending vegetarianism, the theme is moderate appetite, so the questions focus more on that. The key is ‘everything in moderation’ and includes a lot more than just eating. A parent may want to discuss working too hard, spending too much time on the internet or video games as all part of living a balanced life.

1. What is Sanjiv's solution to John's incessant teasing?
2. Do you think you could take on an issue at school the way Sanjiv did?
3. In your class at school, are there any others with special diets? If so, what are they?
4. How much does your school discuss food?
5. Moderate appetite means no eating too much or too little? Which of the two, eating too much, or eating too little is more of a problem where you live?
6. Have you ever felt like you ate too much? Besides feeling full physically, how else did it make you feel?
7. Do you know anyone you would consider obese? Have you ever watched them eat?
8. As Hindus, it is customary to say a ‘Thank You’ style prayer before we eat. How might this help with moderate appetite?
9. How does fasting occasionally help teach us to be moderate in eating?
10. Besides food, what other aspects of life are there that we might have an appetite for? How does mitahara apply to this?

Story 10 – A Friend’s Bad Influence

Yama - Saucha, Purity

Introduction – This story is about virtuous conduct and avoiding people that might befriend you, but not be acting virtuously, so a child could be led astray from dharma. Parents want to teach although we love everyone as Siva, how we select friends is conducive to our spirituality.

1. Why do you think Ravi stole the pen?
2. Have you seen people behave in a similar way as Ravi? What did you do about it?
3. What main personality trait made people like Ravi?
4. Why didn’t Shailesh take Ranjit’s advice?
5. Have you ever followed someone into trouble and later regretted it?
6. Have you ever misjudged someone in your life, the other way around, where you thought they were acting poorly, but then when you got to know then, they were really nice?
7. Do you think a real friend would ever keep quiet if he saw his friend heading for trouble? What would a real friend do?
8. How can you tell the difference between gentle mischief and being downright mean?
9. Do you know people who have some positive traits, but some negative traits. How do you determine if you should befriend them or not?
10. People all behave the way they do for reasons. What might be some reasons that Ravi behaves the way he does? Is there anything we can do to help the Ravis in our lives?

