

Book 1 Youth Questions

1) The Jealous Older Brother

Positive Self Concept

Overview – An older brother has difficulty dealing with the idea that his younger brother is smarter than him. The situation has him losing confidence in himself, and treating his brother poorly. Dad counsels him on staying positive within his own skills, and abilities. The story is an example of how to maintain a positive attitude about yourself and your abilities.

Discussion Questions

1. How did insecurity affect Janaka's behavior and how did it make others feel?
2. Would you like your mother to tell embarrassing stories about you? Why does the mother in the story do it?
3. Worrying uses a lot of time and energy. Can someone really do his best if he spends time and energy worrying about being better than everyone else?
4. If you get better marks than someone else, what should your attitude be about it?
5. Have you ever felt jealous or insecure? Describe the circumstances. What are some recognizable signs?
6. How did Janaka build his confidence? What are some other ways to build self-confidence?
7. Do you think it's more important to be better than everyone else, or to focus on doing your own personal best? What are some societal factors that have people feeling competitive?
8. How does jealousy affect someone's life? Can it ever produce positive results?
9. Can a person have a false positive self-concept? How might that happen? Have you ever observed this?
10. How did Dad's talk help? Who is the person in your life you most likely would go to to talk about something like this?

2) Learning to Get Along

Perceptive Self-Correction

Overview – Two girls are constantly fighting, and when one overhears their parent's concerns, they discuss how they can get along better, with each giving in some. The story shows how an honest look at yourself and your own role in causing disharmony can help you to overcome that same disharmony.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think their parents are so upset about their quarrels?
2. What was the event that started to bring about change? Have you ever had a single event you can recognize as the beginning of a change?
3. Is it smarter to be upset about how someone else behaves, or to focus on improving one's own behavior? Whose behavior can a person actually change?
4. Do you think the girls will be able to apply the same methods to improve their relationships with other people?
5. Is it just part of growing up to fight with siblings?
6. Can anger be worked with it when you're in the middle of it, or is it important to step back?
7. Do you think the parents in the story nagged too much about this?
8. Do you get along better with some people than others? Is that because of you or because of them?
9. What was the worst fight you've ever had with a sibling? Was it resolved? If not, could you still resolve it later, like now?
10. In a relationship, there is usually give and take on both sides. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt like you were the only one giving in some? What could you do about it if the other person is unwilling to do their part?

3) Learning from a Bully

Powerful Self Control

Overview – A boy is bullied on a bus and at school. Since he can't fight back, he starts taking his anger out on his younger brother. With Dad's counselling on self-control, he realizes that not reacting will end the cycle. He uses self-control to not react, and it works successfully.

Discussion Questions

1. Were there parts of this story that seemed unrealistically simple? If so, which ones?
2. Why do you think Easan tried to convince his father that Jothi's behavior at school was the problem?
3. How did Easan's father advise him to stop the bullying? Did that advice work? Why?
4. Why do you think Rohit bullies? What are some factors that create bullies?
5. If you can ignore a bully, assuming that the bullying is fairly extreme, what does it tell you about your self-control?
6. What might you do if the bully is someone closer who is not supposed to bully at all, like a parent or a teacher?

7. How might using self-control in one area of life help you with using it in another area of life? For example, if you can ignore taunting, how could that help you with fasting?
8. Why do teachers ask kids to raise their hands and be acknowledged before speaking? What are the effects in the classroom overall? Can the same principle be applied to understanding all of society?
9. Think back on your life. In what situation do you think you practised the most self-control? What did you do to develop it or enhance it?
10. In some situations, we seem to have less self-control than in others. What are some factors that might be limiting to our self control?

4) The Professor's Challenge

Profound Self-Confidence

Overview – In an architecture class a student who has been trained in carpentry excels, while classmates fail, because of his self-confidence built during childhood. His confidence is compared to other students who didn't have the same kind of practical component in childhood. The story illustrates how self-confidence is built, and then is a helpful personality trait in adulthood.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Dad think it was important to teach carpentry skills to Anand?
2. Why do you think the architecture professor uses a hands-on, down-to-earth approach in his class?
3. Have you ever had the opportunity to learn to do something useful, really well? What is it?
4. How was Anand's confidence built over the years?
5. What was the stark contrast between Jack's and Anand's approach to the door? Have you ever been in a situation where you could say, "No problem", but someone else said, "No way."
6. What is your best physical or hands-on skill? Why are you good at that?
7. What is a skill you would like to learn? How could you go about learning it?
8. How is doing something better than thinking about doing something? (the same 'something')
9. Is it possible to be too confident? What might be a drawback of this?
10. What is the difference between false confidence and quiet confidence? What are some conditions that might lead to someone having false confidence?

5) Living a Fulfilling Life

Playful Self Contentment

Overview – The story is about two contrasting families. One owns a small business and makes a decent living from it, allowing for some free time and fun. The other, in contrast, is overworked, has high goals in education and wealth, but is bitter and unhappy. The story explores ways to find the happier contented side.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think people learn more from things they enjoy doing, or from things they feel like they "have" to do?
2. What does Uncle Kumar regard as the most important thing in life? Does he seem to think anything else is important too?
3. Discuss the advantages of having a family business, vs. working for someone else.
4. Do you think people who come from poverty are more likely to be like Uncle? If so, why?
5. Do you feel too busy? If so, what could you do about it, if anything?
6. What are some health problems that can result from being overworked?
7. Which family do you think your family is more like? Which one would you like it to be more like? Is it possible to change?
8. What are some societal pressures to go Uncle's way of hard work and more hard work?
9. Do you have a daily down time set aside just for relaxing? Does your family have a weekly time when you all just relax?
10. Where is happiness found? (Sometimes this question can be answered best by listing where it is not found.)

6) How Ganesha Saved Usha

Pious Character

Overview – Usha, a Hindu girl with roots in India recalls her visit to India when she is young, which enabled her faith in Ganesha. In teenage years she begins to question that faith. When a group of friends invites her on a camping trip, she doesn't go because of one girl whom she dislikes. The friends get into a car accident and Usha realizes it was Ganesha signalling for her not to go. The event renews her faith, illustrating how to remember Ganesha, and the Gods.

Discussion Questions

1. What experience did Usha have at the Siddhi Vinayaka temple in Mumbai? Do experiences like this, and the one suggesting she was her own grandmother reincarnated, seem normal, or odd to you?
2. Why did Usha change her behavior in order to fit in with the new friends she meets in high school?

3. How did the family ask Lord Ganesha for a sign to guide their decision? Do you watch for signs?
4. Why did Susan invite Nicole to join them on the trip? Do you have people you avoid for similar reasons?
5. If you have a vision, it is said it may be unwise to share it. Why does this not apply to Usha in this case?
6. What does age have to do with Usha's questioning of her beliefs? Have you ever questioned your beliefs?
7. Did Ganesha use His noose or His goad? Why do you think this?
8. What can we do, even in times of doubt, to keep in touch with Ganesha?
9. How do you know if something might be adharmic, and where can you receive advice for an action you might doubt?
10. Does the concept of a pious character have a range to it, or is it 'either you have it, or you don't'? On a scale of 1 to 10, how pious do you think you are?

7) Little Miss Gandhi

Proficiency in Conflict Resolution

Overview – Amala learns at a young age how to resolve arguments without getting others involved. She gets advice from her mother, and learns to excel at helping people resolve differences. In high school, she encounters friendship evangelism, and then uses her conflict resolution skills to stop the evangelism amongst her close friends. The example illustrates the value of having conflict resolution skills, both in getting along, and in helping others get along.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some reasons Mom wanted the children to learn how to settle their own quarrels?
2. Mom asked Nandi to repeat Amala's words. When Amala had been speaking, do you think Nandi had actually paid any attention and thought about what she was saying? Have you experienced this in yourself?
3. Why didn't Mom just tell Nandi to leave his sister alone? Is it realistic to expect to always have the time to talk it out?
4. Do you think it is right to make friends with someone in order to manipulate their beliefs, behavior, or simply to get something you want from them? Is this real friendship?
5. When was your last sibling fight? (If you have no siblings, think of a friendship spat.) How was it resolved, if it was resolved?
6. Do you think it's realistic for a Christian group to allow a Hindu to speak to them? Could that happen where you live?
7. What might happen if one side doesn't really want to solve the conflict, or doesn't see it as a conflict?
8. Are all conflicts resolved? What else can be the end result?

9. In what ways does a mediator help? What do both sides generally have to agree to before it can work?
10. What happens if one person just gives in all the time to resolve any conflict? Is this true conflict resolution? What could the person who gives in do if it becomes a habit pattern?

8. The Value of a Hug

Parental Closeness

Overview – Raj has what he thinks is a normal family, a mom who stays home, and two parents that get along. He doesn't realize it until he moves away to go to school and hears about other peoples' situations. By contrast, the story illustrates how parental closeness and love leads to happier lives for all around.

Discussion Questions

1. Why didn't Raj's mother work outside of the home? What are some advantages of stay-at home Moms? What are some disadvantages?
2. This story illustrates the two extremes. What are some other situations that would fall between these two?
3. How does time spent together increase the bond between people?
4. Raj's friends often come over to his house after school? Do you have friends come over after school? What basic human need does this show?
5. At what age do children begin realising there are different parenting styles, and relationships that what they are brought up in?
6. Why did Raj change his attitude about hugging his father?
7. Do you think divorce is a good way for parents to settle their differences? Can any karmic challenge be avoided by refusing to face it? When might divorce be the best solution, if ever?
8. Who do you think is more likely to have a successful marriage, Raj, or David? Why?
9. What are internet matching sites, and what are some advantages and disadvantages? Do you know any couples who met this way?
10. What is your personal intention if you get married, for Mom to stay home, or not? What has brought you to this conclusion, or are you still undecided?

9) Ravi Meets Jasmine

Prejudice Free Consciousness

Overview – Ravi is an Indian immigrant living in the US. Although his parents teach him not to be racist, when he meets Jasmine, a black student, at university, those teachings are tested. Ravi falls in love, and wants to have a love-marriage. Despite the many difficulties to

overcome, the story illustrates how maintaining a prejudice free mind helps in for longer term harmony all around.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Uncle Shankar was so opposed to everyone in the world who wasn't a Tamil Brahmin? What is the source of such bigotry?
2. If husband and wife have similar upbringings, they will usually have fewer misunderstandings and conflicts. Do you think Ravi's upbringing is more similar to that of an American-raised girl or one raised in Tamil Nadu?
3. Why do you think it was so important to Ravi's parents that he marry a girl of their choosing?
4. This story seems to be only about Jasmine learning Ravi's culture. Do you think Ravi is also earning Jasmine's? Should he be?
5. If you know someone who is tough on the street, or a bully in school, and also a different race than you, is it racist to avoid them?
6. If you have bigotry or racism in you, and you recognise it, what can you do about it?
7. Are there bigots in your life? How do you relate with them?
8. Are you expected to marry within your own race? Religion? What are your personal ideas on it? Do they differ from your parent's?
9. If friends of yours make racial slurs, do you stay silent, or confront them? Why?
10. What factor that could include prejudice (gender, age, race, religion, language, looks) is the most difficult for you to work on within yourself? Why?

10) Making our Marriage Work

Preserving Commitments

Overview – This story is a continuation of the last story. Done in first person, Ravi reflects back on how his marriage worked out, the problems, the solutions. It contains hints and ideas on how to understand and get past the rough spots in a marriage. The strategies could be applied to other commitments, like job contracts, or vows to a lineage.

Discussion Questions

1. Love is a very powerful emotion, and powerful emotions can cloud our thinking. Have you ever been influenced by emotion to do something against your better judgment?
2. Sometimes people remain silent for months about something that bothers them—just getting more and more upset until they explode in anger. Do you think Ravi and Malli's first argument was entirely caused by his tossing his coat on the chair?
3. Sometimes, even when we are not upset, we try to ignore warnings about something we really want to do. (Desire—wanting—is another powerful emotion.) Is it wiser to

ignore warnings or to take them seriously and consider how the problems can be minimized or even solved?

4. At first, Ravi undervalued the astrological advice. Why should he have listened more to the warnings, and to Guruji's advice? Do you pay heed to astrology?
5. The pair seemed overconfident from love. Have you ever been overconfident, then surprised at failure?
6. Some people say it's not who you marry, but also when you marry. What is the meaning of this? What does it say about maturity and taking on commitments?
7. A word for a more simple commitment is a promise. How would not breaking simple promises (like promising Mom you'll take the garbage out, being punctual, doing homework) throughout childhood help when bigger commitments like marriage come along?
8. Do you know people who often break commitments? How well are they liked?
9. What are some other strong commitments in life, especially religious life?
10. What is a commitment to yourself? Have you made any, and have they been difficult to follow? How can making a commitment to yourself be a training tool for commitments regarding others?