



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E5

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1. Who was the Happiest of Them All?

By Sudha Murty

Meenu was upset. She pouted and sulked and would not talk to Grandma. But how can any child be angry with Grandma for very long? Their grandmother was just too loving and affectionate for anyone to not tell her what was wrong.

“Grandma, it’s been three days, and you have not told a story about a king yet!” Meenu grumbled.

Grandma nodded. “It’s true, Meenu. That was my fault; I should have told you a story about a king right away!”

“And I want a good, nice king, who does good, nice things for his people—not horrible things like punishing them and jailing them,” Meenu sat straight and demanded.

“All right, dear. Here’s a king, just as you wanted . . .”

And Grandma began her story. King Amrit loved his people and looked after the affairs of his kingdom well. His minister, Chandan, was a wise man who helped the king in his work tirelessly.

One day, King Amrit and Chandan were taking a walk on the terrace of the palace. The terrace offered beautiful views of the surroundings, and they could see far into the distance. They spotted the weekly market from up there, with people in colourful clothes buying and selling all kinds of things. There was plenty to buy and people had money to buy, too. There were no poor people to be seen anywhere. The king watched with a smile on his face. He was delighted to see the prosperity of his kingdom. Like any good ruler, he was happy when his people were happy.

He turned to Chandan and said, “See how contented my people are. But I want to check this first-hand by talking to them. Tomorrow, summon people from all walks of life to the court, and I will ask them myself how they are doing.”

Chandan was used to the king’s strange requests, so he nodded and went off to carry out this order.

The next day, the king arrived in court humming a happy tune to himself. Seeing all the people gathered there waiting for him, he was even more pleased.

He cleared his throat and said in a loud voice, “I have called you here to ask you a very important question. As your king, I need to know if all of you are contented. Do you have enough for your needs? Do you know anyone who is not happy about anything?”

The citizens looked at each other, thought for a while and slowly came forward to answer one by one. One after the other they all said how happy they were—their kitchens had enough food, their trades and businesses were doing well, and the king had made them feel safe. The farmers had grown good crops and the rivers and ponds were full of fish. What more could they ask for?

The king became more and more pleased as he heard this. Only Chandan, his minister, watched and heard everything with a frown on his face.

Why? What was wrong? Soon he walked up to the king and whispered something in his ear. King Amit’s eyebrows rose in astonishment. Surely, Chandan could not be serious! But he looked at the minister’s face and found no trace of this being a joke.

He turned back to the court and made a most unusual announcement. “I am delighted that all of you have said you are happy. But I want to test this. Tomorrow, I want all the happy people of this kingdom to come and meet me in the royal gardens. But I have a condition. All of you will have to enter the garden from the main gate, walk across and meet me by the gate at the rear of the garden. I will wait for you there. When you enter the garden you will be given a sack each and you can pick whatever fruits or flowers your heart desires.”

An excited buzz broke out among the crowd. It sounded like a lot of fun. No one was usually allowed to enter the king’s special garden. He had planted trees from all over the world in that garden and it was said to be filled with all kinds of beautiful and strange plants.

Right on time the next day, everyone gathered at the gate of the garden. At the time the king had told them, the guards opened the gates and handed out the sacks. Men, women and children started roaming around the beautiful garden. They spotted juicy apples and plump mangoes hanging from trees. They picked these till they saw ripe pomegranates bursting with juice, grapes and colourful flowers no one had seen before. People went about picking whatever they wished for and filling their sacks with them.

But as they walked further into the garden it became wilder, more like a forest, and there they saw trees laden with apples of gold, mangoes of silver and flowers studded with gems and jewels!

Everyone emptied their sacks of the fruits they had collected earlier and started madly filling them up with these precious fruits and flowers. They all forgot that they had said they had more than enough for their needs at home.

Greed took over, their minds and all they could think about was adding more and more valuables to their sacks. The fruits which they had picked earlier, and had tasted to be as sweet as nectar, now lay in heaps around the garden—forgotten and left to rot.

Then with their sacks filled right to the top, the citizens made their way to the rear gate of the garden where the king was waiting. But what was this? To their astonishment they found a raging stream stopping their way. Water gushed down from behind some rocks and rushed over pebbles and big boulders through the garden. The stream was narrow, but the current was strong. There were no boats to take the people across. The only way was to swim. But how could they swim with such heavy sacks filled with gold and silver fruits?

The people stood by the stream for a long time scratching their heads. Then one young man did what they all knew needed to be done. He simply abandoned his sack by the stream, waded into the water, and then swam across to the other side.

Slowly the others, too, followed his suit. Sadly, some wailing in distress, they left their sacks filled with what they had thought was the riches of a lifetime, and dived into the stream. Then they walked up to their king—wet, unhappy and angry.

King Amrit and Chandan watched them trudge up in their soaking clothes.

Chandan had a small smile on his lips, while the king looked sad. When they had assembled in front of him, he said, “When I asked you yesterday if you were happy with your lives, all of you said you were contented and did not need anything more. Yet, today I can see the sadness on your faces when you had to leave behind the riches you had gathered in my garden. If you were really happy with your lives, why did you gather the jewel fruits, and why are you so sad now?”

Everyone looked down, ashamed of their behaviour. Only the young man who was the first to cross the stream after leaving his sack behind seemed to be unconcerned. Chandan spotted his cheerful face in the crowd and beckoned him forward. Then he asked, “Tell me, and are you not sad you had to leave behind so much of wealth that suddenly came your way?”

The man said, “I didn’t pick the jewelled fruits and flowers. I had picked some of the lovely, tasty fruits and eaten my fill. In my sack, I had kept some others for my little daughter who was at home. I had thought she would enjoy these tasty apples and mangoes. But when I saw there was no other way to go across the stream, I did not think twice about leaving my sack by the river. My little girl can get tasty fruits from some other garden. But, I am so happy the king let us all wander around his garden, looking at the trees and plants and animals. He is a great king for having created this place of beauty, and it was a pleasure walking around there.”

Finally, a smile appeared on King Amit’s face. Chandan turned to him and said, “Your Majesty, I hope you now realize that people’s contentment does not end with having enough food or money. They also need to be truly happy inside. Only then will they not be swayed when they gain or lose wealth. That is a lesson that everyone—whether a king or a commoner—needs to remember.”

The king nodded, as did his subjects. This was a lesson they would not forget in a hurry!

“Did you like the story, Meenu?” Raghu asked.

“Oh yes,” Meenu nodded. “But I liked the minister more than the king!”

“That’s true, Meenu,” Grandma agreed. “Kings did need intelligent ministers to show them the right path sometimes. Remember Akbar had Birbal, and Krishnadevaraya had Tenali Rama? Why just kings, we all need someone to tell us if what we are doing is wrong. It could be our parents, grandparents, teachers or even our best friend. The important thing is to listen to them and change our ways when needed.”

2. Guru Nanak Dev Ji

Guru Nanak founded Sikhism. Sikhism is one of the youngest religions. He became the first Sikh Guru and his spiritual teachings laid the foundation on which Sikhism was formed. He pleaded for liberalisation. He condemned slavery and racial discrimination and said that we all are equal.

Guru Nanak was born in 1469 AD in Talwandi, 40 miles away from Lahore. Now his birthplace is called Nankana Sahib. His father's name was Mehta Kalu and his mother's Mata Tripta. His elder Sister's name was Bebe Nanaki. In the year 1487, Guru Nanak married Mata Sulakhni, and they had two sons, Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das.

As a child, Guru Nanak was of a contemplative and serious nature. He loved spending time with sage and religious people. He studied Hindi, Sanskrit and Persian.

In 1475, Nanak's sister got married to Jai Ram and moved to Sultanpur. Nanak wanted to stay with his sister for a few days and hence went to Sultanpur and started working under the employer of his brother-in-law. During his stay in Sultanpur, Nanak would go to a nearby river every morning to bathe and meditate.

One fine day, he went to the river as usual but did not return for three days. It is believed that Nanak went deep inside the forest and stayed there for three days. When he returned, he looked like a man possessed and did not utter a word. When he finally spoke, he said, "There is no Hindu and no Musalman." These words were the beginning of his teachings which would culminate in the formation of a new religion. Guru Nanak realised that all humans were the children of God and all divisions of creeds, castes, gender or colour were false. This made Guru Nanak determined to travel home and abroad to spread the message of God.

Guru Nanak travelled across South Asia and the Middle East to spread his teachings. He advocated the existence of one God and taught his followers that every human being can reach out to God through meditation and other pious practices.

During his first journey, Guru Nanak covered most parts of present-day India and Pakistan. This journey lasted for seven years and is believed to have taken place between 1500 and 1507 AD.

In his second journey, Guru Nanak visited most parts of present-day Sri Lanka. This journey too, lasted for about seven years.

In his third journey, Guru Nanak travelled through the difficult terrains of the Himalayas and covered places like Kashmir, Nepal, Tashkent, Tibet and Sikkim. This journey lasted for about five years and took place between 1514 and 1519 AD.

He then travelled to places like Mecca and most parts of the Middle East, in his fourth journey. This lasted for about three years. In his fifth and final journey, which lasted two years, Guru Nanak focused on spreading the message within the region of Punjab. He was accompanied by Bhai Mardana on most of his journeys. It is estimated that Guru Nanak covered a staggering distance of 28000 kilometres by foot.

Guru Nanak denounced all forms of ritualism, ceremonialism and superstitions that existed in the society. He taught people three principles: meditation, honest earning and sharing your wealth with others.

He also warned people not to clutch to ordinary human traits, such as lust, rage, greed, attachment and conceit (collectively known as the 'Five Thieves').

After travelling extensively for about 25 years, at the age of 52, Guru Nanak settled at Kartarpur. There he re-joined his family and continued to preach from there. Eventually, he breathed his last in 1539 and merged with eternity.

Guru Nanak is one of the most important religious figures to have contributed to women's empowerment in India. Guru Nanak appealed to his followers to respect women and to treat them as their equals. He said a man is always bound to women and that without women there would be no creation on earth.

Guru Nanak wrote more than 900 Shabads (Hymns) during his lifetime and they are all included in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

There is, but only one God.

3. Grammar Page

Masculine and Feminine Nouns

- Masculine nouns are words for men, boys and male animals.
Feminine nouns are words for women, girls and female animals.

| masculine | feminine | masculine | feminine |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| boy | girl | nephew | niece |
| man | woman | king | queen |
| father | mother | prince | princess |
| son | daughter | emperor | empress |
| brother | sister | wizard | witch |
| husband | wife | actor | actress |
| grandfather | grandmother | policeman | policewoman |
| uncle | aunt | waiter | waitress |

- Many nouns are used for both males and females. They are called **common gender nouns**.

| | | | |
|---------|--------|-----------|-----------|
| teacher | baby | doctor | scientist |
| pupil | parent | astronaut | president |
| child | cousin | dancer | manager |

- With animals, there is one general word for the animal and special words for the male and the female. Sometimes the word for the male animal is the same as the general word. Sometimes the word for the female animal is the same as the general word.

| animal | masculine | feminine |
|---------|-----------|----------|
| rabbit | buck | doe |
| horse | stallion | mare |
| sheep | ram | ewe |
| pig | boar | sow |
| chicken | rooster | hen |
| duck | drake | duck |
| cattle | bull | cow |
| goose | gander | goose |
| fox | fox | vixen |
| tiger | tiger | tigress |
| lion | lion | lioness |



