



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G11

Adapted and modified by

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1. The Rarest Pearl in the World

By Premchand

A distraught Dilfigar was sitting and shedding copious tears under a thorny tree. He was the passionate and faithful lover of the beautiful queen, Dildareb, for whom he could lay down his life. He was not one of those lovers who wore perfumes and oils or put on flashy clothes in order to impress their beloved. On the contrary, he was just one of those plain and simple, yet passionate, admirers who wandered in thick forests and scaled high mountains to succeed in love.

Dildareb, his beloved, had challenged him, "If you love me truly and faithfully, then go and travel the world, and bring me the most priceless jewel. Only then will I think that you are truly devoted to me. However, should you fail in your endeavour, don't dare return to this realm, for I shall have you hanged from the gallows." Dilfigar was not given any opportunity to express his emotions, nor was he allowed a glimpse of her beauty for a few moments. As soon as Dildareb made this declaration, the palace guards threw Dilfigar out of the court.

For the past three days, he had been sitting under the thorny tree in a desolate field and wondering about his future course of action. He thought, "Shall I ever be able to find the world's most priceless treasure? Impossible! And, what can it be? Korah's treasure (Egypt's treasure), the elixir of life, the crown of Khusrau, *Jam-e Jam*, the Peacock Throne or the wealth of Parvez (a king of Iran)? No, it's definitely none of these. There must be more precious things in the world than all these, but what are they? Oh God! How can I find a way out of this impasse?"

Dilfigar was at his wits' end (worried and confused). He couldn't think of a way out of the predicament. 'Muneer Shami had got Hatim Tai to help him. How I wish I too had someone to help me! I wish someone was there to tell me what the most priceless jewel in the world is. I might not have been able to obtain it but I would have at least known what it is.

"I can set out for a jewel as large as a pitcher. I can venture out to trace the songs of the ocean, the heart of the stone, the voice of death and such other ineffable entities. But, the world's most priceless jewel! This is beyond the pale of my imagination. I am fit to burst in torment."

The stars showed up in the sky. Dilfigar stood up abruptly and, taking the name of God, set off on his journey. He spent years wandering in exile, facing hunger, thirst, extreme physical exhaustion and wearing threadbare garments while searching for the world's most priceless thing. Thorns made his feet bleed, his body was transformed into a bag of bones, yet he was not able to find the world's most precious jewel, nor did he have any clue as to what it was.

Wandering aimlessly, one day he reached a vast field where thousands of people had assembled. Right in the centre of the assembly sat some venerable gentlemen with beards who seemed to be *qazis* or magistrates. Dressed in huge turbans and flowing gowns, they seemed to be conversing over some matter of grave import. At some distance from the crowd stood the gallows. A sense of exhaustion, as well as curiosity about what was happening made Dilfigar stop there for a while. Suddenly he saw several men, wielding naked swords, leading a prisoner in chains. They stopped near the gallows and the prisoner was released from the shackles.

This unfortunate fellow had the blood of hundreds of innocent people on his hands. His heart had never been moved by any feeling of kindness and compassion. He was known as the Black Thief. The soldiers made him stand on the platform of the gallows and put the noose around his neck. When the hangman was about to pull the plank underneath his feet this wretched criminal screamed out, "For heaven's sake, take me off the noose for a moment so that I can fulfil my last wish." There was stunned silence all around as all eyes were riveted on him. The *qazis* thought it proper not to reject the final wish of a dying man. The wretched and sinful Black Thief was taken off the gallows for some time.

In the crowd, there was a chubby, innocent little boy, jumping about on a stick that he imagined to be a horse. He was so absorbed in the world of his innocent game that he actually believed to be riding a fine Arabian steed. His face was radiant like a lotus and illuminated with pure joy which can be experienced only in childhood and which one cannot forget till the end of one's life. His heart was still untouched by the sordid reality of everyday existence as he played in the lap of innocence.

The wretched Black Thief came down from the gallows. A thousand eyes were fixed on him. He went over to the little boy and took him in his arms lovingly. At that moment he was reminded of his own childhood, when he himself was an innocent and healthy child, untouched by the vices and filth of the world: a time when he played in his mother's lap, his father prayed to ward off evils, and the entire family was ready to lay down their lives for him. The Black Thief was so deeply moved by these memories that a teardrop rolled down his eyes - the same eyes that didn't blink at the sight of human bodies in the throes of death. Dilfigar leapt forward to gather that priceless teardrop in his palm. He thought to himself, 'Well, this is certainly the world's most valuable object, for which one could sacrifice the Peacock Throne, the Jam-e Jam, the elixir of life or the riches of Khusrau.'

Happy with these thoughts and pleased with his success, Dilfigar proceeded towards Minosvad, Dilfareb's city. But as he drew closer to his destination, he

began to have misgivings. "If this teardrop, which I consider to be the world's most valuable object, has no value in Dilfareb's eyes," he thought, "then I shall be hanged. I'd leave this world with my desires unfulfilled. But whatever will be, will be - let's see what's there in my destiny." Crossing rivers and mountains, he eventually reached Minosvad. He knocked on Dilfareb's door, wishing to inform her that by the grace of God, he had carried out her wishes and now hoped to kiss her feet. Dilfareb sent for him immediately and from behind a golden curtain, commanded that the priceless object be presented. With a strange mix of fear and hope playing in his mind, Dilfigar presented her the teardrop and related the entire story associated with it in moving words. She listened to the whole story with utmost attention, took the teardrop in her hands, reflected a while, and then said, 'Dilfigar, there is no doubt that you have fetched a precious object, and I appreciate your courage and sound judgement. But this, by no means, is the most precious thing in the world. Go and try once again.

Maybe you will be able to lay your hands on the most valuable treasure this time round, which will result in my enslavement to you for life. I told you earlier that I could have you hanged, but I spare your life because, I think, you have the qualities I wish to see in my lover. I am sure, sometime or the other, you will succeed in your endeavour."

Though luckless Dilfigar failed to please Dilfareb, he took some solace from her encouraging words that made him bold enough to say, "Oh queen of my heart, it is after ages that I've got the opportunity to pay obeisance at your doorstep. God alone knows when I'll get another such opportunity. Wouldn't you take pity at the miserable condition of your admirer who is ready to lay down his life for you? Wouldn't you grant me a glimpse of yourself, which will inspire me to valiantly face the trials and tribulations ahead? One intoxicating glance of your face will help me do what no one has been able to accomplish till this day!"

Dilfareb was annoyed by these flattering words and commanded that the crazy fellow be thrown out of her durbar immediately. The guards promptly pushed Dilfigar out of the court, away from the presence of his beloved.

Heartbroken, Dilfigar shed tears over the heartlessness of his beloved for sometime. Then he began wondering where to go. After endless wandering he had obtained the teardrop. "Which other object can I find that is more valuable than that pearl of a tear?" he thought. "Oh venerable Khizr, you had shown Alexander the way to the well containing nectar. Will you not lead me? Granted that Alexander was the master of the world and I'm just a traveller in exile. You have helped many a sinking ship to touch the shore safely. Please lead me to my destination? Oh exalted angel Gabriel, take pity on this half-dead lover. You are the chosen angel of God. Please lighten my burden." In short, Dilfigar cried for help desperately but no one appeared there to extend a helping hand. Though

weighed down by despair, he finally stood up to begin his journey once again.

Dilfigar wandered about in jungles and desolate fields in all directions. He slept sometimes on frosty mountain peaks or lost his way in frightening meadows, but he didn't have any clue as to what he was seeking. He was soon reduced to a mere skeleton.

One evening as he was lying exhausted on the banks of a river he got up with a start when he saw a sandalwood pyre that had a girl sitting on it. She was dressed in bridal attire and the head of her dead husband lay on her lap.

Thousands of people had gathered around, showering flowers on her. Suddenly, a flame from the pyre leapt towards her. A heavenly glow illuminated the face of the girl at that moment. The flames of the sacred fire touched her neck and, in an instant, her delicate body was reduced to a heap of ashes. A woman had given her life for her lover, and that symbol of true, pure and immortal love of two lovers gradually disappeared from sight. As the people left the scene, Dilfigar quietly picked up the small heap of ashes and secured it in his tattered shirt.

Taking the ashes to be the world's most priceless jewel and excited by his achievement, Dilfigar once again set out for his beloved's abode. This time, as he drew closer to his destination, his spirit soared. A voice within him said that he was going to win over his beloved this time round. It is futile to describe how his imagination ran riot at this thought. At long last he entered Minosvad and reaching the tall gate of Dilfareb's palace he sent word that he had returned victorious and sought an audience with the queen. Dilfareb called in her valiant lover immediately and stretched out her hand to receive the world's most priceless thing. Mustering courage, Dilfigar kissed her sylvan wrist, placed the ashes in her palm, and narrated the story of the ashes in words that would melt any heart. He waited eagerly for the verdict from the lips of his bewitching lover. Dilfareb touched the ashes to her eyes, was lost in thought for a few moments and then said, 'O my devoted admirer, there's no doubt that the ashes you've brought have the power of alchemy to turn iron into gold. They are truly precious. I am genuinely grateful to you for bringing me this invaluable present. Yet there is certainly something more precious than this. Go, find it and then return to me. I pray from the depth of my heart for your success.' Saying this, she emerged from behind the golden curtain, allowing him a glimpse of her beauty and then disappeared from sight. It was like the lightning that flashed for a moment and disappeared behind the clouds. Before he could regain his wits, the guards grabbed him by his hands gently and led him away from the abode of his beloved. For the third time he was flung into the bottomless sea of hopelessness.

Dilfigar was heartbroken. He was now convinced that he had been born to die a failed and unhappy man. "I've no option but to jump off a mountain to my death, with not a single bone left intact to complain about the cruelties of my

beloved," he thought. He got up like someone possessed and clambered up a lofty mountain. He wouldn't have ever attempted such a steep climb in his life but now, his determination to put an end to his life made the mountain appear to be no more than a mound of earth. He was about to leap to death when there appeared an old man, wearing a green robe, a turban on his head and holding a rosary in one hand and a staff in the other. This was Khizr. He said in an encouraging tone, 'Dilfigar, you silly chap, what cowardice is this! You claim to be a lover and yet you do not know that strong determination is needed to succeed as a lover! Be a man and don't lose heart. In the east there is a country by the name of Hindustan. Go there, and your wish will be fulfilled.'

Saying this, Khizr vanished. Dilfigar offered a special namaz of thanksgiving and came down happily from the mountain. Encouraged by divine assistance he began his journey towards Hindustan with renewed courage and enthusiasm.

His journey to the sacred soil of Hindustan was long and arduous. He had to traverse through thorny jungles, deserts with burning sands, deep ravines and insurmountable mountains.

One day, he washed away the exhaustion of his journey in the soothing waters of a stream and lay down to rest on its bank. By evening he reached a vast expanse littered with dead and half-dead bodies without shrouds. There were also some carcasses of vultures and beasts of prey and the entire field was spattered with blood. Dilfigar was shocked beyond measure at this terrible sight. "O God, where have I landed myself?" he moaned. He heard the wails and groans of the dying men in agony, and witnessed the wild animals nibbling at the bones of the dead and running about with lumps of human flesh. Never before had Dilfigar witnessed such a heartrending scene. It suddenly struck him that this was a battlefield, and the corpses strewn about were those of valiant soldiers. Right then he heard someone groaning in pain. When he turned towards the sound he saw a strong and well-built man whose face had turned pale with the loss of blood. Though a stream of blood was flowing from his chest, he had not loosened his grip on his sword. Dilfigar picked a rag, held it on the wound to stop the blood flow and asked him, "O valiant youth, who are you?" The soldier opened his eyes and replied proudly, "Don't you know who I am? Haven't you seen how I wielded my sword today? I'm the son of my mother, and a son of Hindustan!" While uttering these words, his eyes narrowed, his pale face became red with anger and his glowing sword seemed ready to exhibit its might. Dilfigar realized that the warrior had taken him to be his enemy and so he gently replied, "O brave one, I'm not your enemy. I'm just a poor traveller, away from my homeland. Wandering through many places I've strayed here. I'll be obliged if you tell me about this land."

Hearing this, the wounded soldier replied gently, "If you are a traveller, come and sit by my blood-spattered body because this little patch is all that is left of my land, and which no one can snatch from me except death. It's a pity that you've arrived here at a time when we are unable to extend you a fitting welcome. We've been robbed of the land of our forefathers and we are homeless. But now we've shown our enemy how fearlessly a Rajput lays down his life for his motherland. The corpses you see strewn around are people who were put to death by my sword. Though homeless, it provides me some satisfaction that I die on the enemy soil." He plucked the rag from his wound and said, "Why have you stuffed this rag here? Let the blood flow, why stop it? Should I live to be a slave in my own country? No, it's better to die than to live such an ignominious life. There can't be a death more glorious than this."

The brave soldier's voice became feeble, his limbs slackened, and the plentiful flow of blood gradually became an intermittent trickle. Finally, his body turned inert, his heart stopped beating, and his eyes closed. Dilfigar thought all was over when the man spoke again softly, "*Bharat mata ki jai!*" While he said this the last drop of blood oozed out from his body. A true patriot and son of the soil had fulfilled his duty towards his motherland. Dilfigar was deeply moved by this spectacle and he was convinced in his heart that this last drop of blood was, without doubt, the most precious thing in the world. He promptly took in his hand the last oozing drop of blood which was the envy of the reddest ruby. Wonderstruck by the Rajput's valour, he set out for his home country. After a long time, facing many hardships, he once again reached the doorstep of the beautiful queen Dildareb and sought an audience with her.

Dildareb immediately ordered him to be brought before her. As always, she took her seat behind the golden curtain and said, "Dilfigar, you've taken a long time to return this time. Where is the most priceless jewel in the world?"

Dilfigar kissed her henna-decorated palms, placed the drop of blood on one and movingly narrated the details associated with it. He had barely finished speaking when, all of a sudden, the golden curtain was pulled apart to reveal an assembly of beautiful maidens in which each damsel was more bewitching than Zuleikha, the legendary beauty. Dildareb was sitting in full splendour on the golden musnud. Dilfigar was dumbstruck by her glorious beauty and stood there like a statue. Dildareb rose from the throne, took a few steps forward and warmly embraced him. The court singers broke out in a song of celebration and the courtiers offered gifts to Dilfigar. They made the couple, the sun and the moon, sit side by side on the throne. When the song ended, Dildareb stood up and, with folded hands, addressed Dilfigar, "My very devoted Dilfigar, God has heard my prayers and made you return successful and victorious. From this day, you are my lord and I'm your slave."

Saying this, she asked for a diamond-studded box to be brought, from which she took out a plank. Engraved on the plank was written the following in letters of gold, "That last drop of blood shed for the freedom of one's country is the most precious gem in the world."

2. Are Examinations Necessary?

The examination is a formal test that students take to show their knowledge and intelligence of a particular subject to obtain a qualification within a specific time frame. Examination results give teachers feedback to know how well the students have understood the subject. Good results, not only encourage and motivate students but also make teachers as well as parents happy and proud. The effort of a teacher is only rewarded when their students achieve decent grades; the credibility of a teacher towards the profession is also judged through the success of examination; therefore it is a must for teachers that their students are well prepared for exams; and as a result, the students can take full advantage of the exam system.

Exams have many merits: they make students work harder because students want to achieve top grades; they demonstrate the level of knowledge and performance of a student; they create a sense of competition among students which makes them work even harder and put more effort. Furthermore, excellent exam results bring awards and scholarships. Standardised examination results provide important data to make comparisons of students' success among different types of schools: government, government-affiliated, and private. However, there are many defects in the examination system.

The purpose of education is to prepare and equip students with the knowledge and skills so they can develop properly for their future – after education, they are competent academically, ready for employment, and become good citizens. Unfortunately, the current education system does not cater for this: students do not learn to acquire knowledge, rather they only study to pass their exams with good marks. Teachers are also under pressure to deliver a prescribed curriculum, nothing beyond that; if they don't focus on exams, their own reputation is at stake. However, teaching as well as learning methods need to be overhauled.

The way teachers impart knowledge to students is outdated. The mode of teaching is one-way traffic. The teacher dictates notes and the students copy them without questioning. The students have their own troubles too: the way they learn - they only study hard when the exams are looming close; they tend to learn by heart; cram too much near the exams; they try to learn by rote or by repetition – which is only half learning. Lack of resources also plays a big role.

Like a car mechanic can't fix a car without tools the same goes for teachers. Most of the government and low-standard private schools don't have the modern infrastructure for teaching: smart classrooms; access to the internet; libraries; tutorial systems; counselling for students; the list goes on and on. There is a lack of human resources as well: not enough qualified teachers; those who are qualified still lack essential teaching skills – reception (gaining attention), expectancy (learning objectives), retrieval (recalling prior learning), selective perception (presenting the stimulus), semantic coding (providing learning guidance), responding (reward - well done and so on), reinforcement (provide feedback), and so on. The examination is not the only yardstick of success.

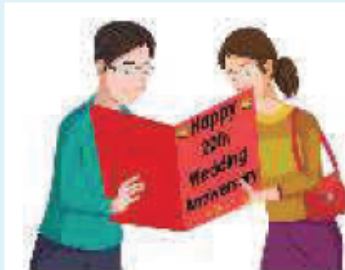
Continuous assessment - students' performance is continuously assessed throughout the year. Open-book tests and periodic tests are often used in vocational courses. Vocational courses are where students develop particular skills for particular jobs, e.g. to be an electrician or a plumber. However, England had a modular exam system only a few years ago: one subject was divided into six modules and students took exams twice a year – a two-year course had four exam sittings – students were allowed to re-sit their modules and for some modules, they could sit four times. Because some students kept re-sitting their modules again and again, this system has been scrapped now, and is replaced by two or three exams at the end of two years.

3. Grammar Page

Unit
11

how long have you (been) ... ?

A Study this example situation:



Dan and Kate are married. They got married exactly 20 years ago, so today is their 20th wedding anniversary.

They **have been** married for 20 years.

We say: They **are** married. (*present*)

but How long have they **been** married?
(*not* How long are they married?)
They **have been** married for 20 years. (*present perfect*)
(*not* They are married for 20 years)

We use the *present perfect* to talk about something that began in the past and still continues now.

Compare the *present* and *present perfect*:

- Paul is in hospital.
- but He's **been** in hospital **since Monday**. (= He has been ...)
(*not* Paul is in hospital since Monday)
- We **know** each other very well.
- but We've **known** each other **for a long time**.
(*not* We know)
- Do they **have** a car?
- but How long **have** they **had** their car?
- She's **waiting** for somebody.
- but She **hasn't been** waiting very long.

present
he is
we know
do they have
she is waiting

present perfect
he has been
we have known
have they had
she has been waiting

past

now

B I've known / I've had / I've lived etc. is the *present perfect simple*.
I've been learning / I've been waiting etc. is the *present perfect continuous*.

When we ask or say 'how long', the continuous is more usual (see Unit 10):

- I've **been learning** English **since January**.
- It's **been raining** **all morning**.
- Richard **has been doing** the same job **for 20 years**.
- 'How long **have you been driving**?' 'Since I was 17.'

Some verbs (for example, **know** and **like**) are not normally used in the continuous:

- How long **have you known** Jane? (*not* have you been knowing)
- I've **had** these shoes for ages. (*not* I've been having)

See also Units 4A and 10C. For **have**, see Unit 17.

C You can use either the continuous or simple with **live** and **work**:

- Julia **has been living** in this house for a long time. *or* Julia **has lived** ...
- How long **have you been working** here? *or* How long **have you worked** here?

But we use the simple (**have lived** etc.) with **always**:

- I've **always lived** in the country. (*not* always been living)

D We say 'I haven't (done something) **since/for** ...' (*present perfect simple*):

- I **haven't seen** Tom **since Monday**. (= Monday was the last time I saw him)
- Sarah **hasn't phoned** for ages. (= the last time she phoned was ages ago)