Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G20

Adapted and modified by

Kulwant Singh Sandhu

https://learn-by-reading.co.uk

Contents

1. Taraprasanna's Fame

By Rabindernath Tagore

Like most writers, Taraprasanna was rather shy and retiring in nature. To go out amongst other people was an ordeal for him. Sitting at home and writing all the time had weakened his eyesight, bent his back, and given him little experience of the world. Social pleasantries did not come easily to him, so he did not feel very safe outside his home. Others thought him a bit stupid, and they could not be blamed for this. A distinguished gentleman on first meeting Taraprasanna might say warmly, "I cannot tell you what pleasure it gives me to meet you." Taraprasanna would not respond: he would stare, tongue-tied, at his right palm, as if to imply, "It is possible that you are very pleased, but I wonder how I can be so false as to say that I am pleased." Or he might be invited to someone's house one afternoon: his wealthy host might – as dusk fell and food was served – deprecate his own hospitality with such words as, "Nothing special – just our ordinary humble food – a poor man's crust – not worthy of you at all, I'm afraid." Taraprasanna would say nothing, as if it were impossible to disagree with what his host was saying. Sometimes some good-natured person averred that scholarship as profound as Taraprasanna's was rare in this age, that Sarasvati had deserted her lotus-seat to dwell in Taraprasanna's throat. He made no objection to this – choked, so it seemed, by Sarasvati's presence in his throat. He should have known that those who praise a man to his face, and disparage themselves, deliberately exaggerate because they expect to be contradicted. If the person they are speaking to takes in everything without blenching, they feel let down. They are pleased to be told that their statements are false.

Taraprasanna behaved quite differently with the people in his own home – so much so that even his wife Dakshayani could not beat him in an argument. She was forced to say, "All right, all right, I give in. I've got things to do now." Very few husbands have the skill or luck ever to get their wives to admit defeat in a verbal battle!

Taraprasanna lived contentedly. Dakshayani firmly believed that no one equalled her husband in learning or intellect, and she did not hesitate to say so. He would reply, "You don't have any other husband to compare me with" – which made her very cross. Her only complaint was that her husband had never displayed his extraordinary talents to the outside world – had never made any effort to do so. Nothing that he had written had been published.

Sometimes she asked to hear her husband's writing, and the less she understood it the more it astonished her. She had read Krittibas's Ramayana,

Kashidas's Mahabharata and Kabikankan's Chandimangal, and had heard them being recited. They were all as clear as water – even illiterate people could easily understand them; but she had never encountered writing like her husband's, so brilliant that it was unintelligible. She thought to herself, "When these books are printed and no one understands a word, how amazed everyone will be!" Again and again she told her husband, "You should get your writings printed."

"With regard to the printing of books," he replied, "the great Manu has said, 'It is a natural activity for created beings, but abstention brings great rewards.'"

Taraprasanna had four children – all daughters. Dakshayani regarded this as a failing in herself, and therefore felt unworthy of so talented a husband. To be married to a man who produced, at the drop of a hat, such formidable tomes, and yet to have nothing but female offspring, was shameful incompetence on her part.

When Taraprasanna's eldest daughter reached his chest in height, his carefree contentment ended. He now remembered that one by one his four daughters would have to be married, and this would cost an enormous amount of money. His wife said confidently, "Just apply your mind a bit, and I'm sure we won't need to worry."

"You really think so?" said Taraprasanna rather anxiously. "All right, what do you suggest?"

"Go to Calcutta," said Dakshayani, without hesitation or doubt. "Have your books printed, get yourself known to everyone. The money will soon roll in."

Taraprasanna was gradually encouraged by his wife, and decided that what he had written to date was enough to pay for the wedding of every girl in the village. But now a big dilemma arose about his visit to Calcutta. Dakshayani could not bear to let her innocent, helpless, pampered husband go away on his own. Who would feed him, dress him, remind him of his daily chores, and protect him from the various hazards of the world? Her inexperienced husband, however, was equally unhappy about taking his wife to a strange place. In the end Dakshayani engaged a worldly-wise man from the village to go instead of her, giving him countless instructions about her husband's daily needs. She extracted numerous vows from him as she saw him off, and loaded him with charms and amulets; and she threw herself to the ground weeping when he had gone.

In Calcutta Taraprasanna, with the help of his astute minder, published his book The Radiance of Vedanta. Most of the money he had raised by pawning his wife's jewellery was spent on this.

He sent The Radiance of Vedanta to bookshops; and to every editor, however important or unimportant, he sent copies for review. He also sent one to his wife, by registered mail. He was afraid that otherwise it would be stolen by the postman.

On the day that Dakshayani first saw the book, with her husband's name printed on the title page, she invited all the women she knew in the village round for a meal. She left the book open near to where she asked them to sit, and when everyone was seated she said, "Oh dear, who's dropped that book over there? Annada, dear, could you pick it up? I'll put it away." Annada was the only one who could read. The book was put back on the shelf. For a few minutes Dakshayani busied herself with something else; then she said to her eldest daughter, "Do you want to read your father's book, Shashi? Go ahead, child, read it. Don't be shy." But Shashi showed no interest in it, so a little later her mother said crossly, "Don't spoil your father's book! Give it to Kamaladidi to put back on top of that cupboard." If the book had been conscious of anything, it would have felt like the death of Vedanta after such a day of torment.

One by one reviews appeared in the papers. What Dakshayani had anticipated turned out to be largely correct: reviewers throughout the land, unable to understand a single word of the book, were mightily impressed by it. With one voice they said, "No book of such substance has been published before." Critics who never touched a book beyond Bengali translations of Reynolds' London Mystery wrote with great enthusiasm: "If instead of sackfuls of plays and novels more books like this could come out, Bengali literature would really attract readers." Men who for generations had never heard of Vedanta wrote: "We do not concur with Taraprasanna Babu on every point – lack of space prevents us from saying where. On the whole, however, our views are in agreement with the author's." On the basis of that statement, if true, the book 'on the whole' should have been thrown to the flames.

From wherever there were libraries or no libraries, librarians wrote to Taraprasanna asking for the book, buying it with their official letter- heads rather than with money. Many wrote, "Your thoughtful book has met a great need in our country." Taraprasanna was not quite sure what they meant by 'thoughtful', but he proudly posted The Radiance of Vedanta to every library at his own expense. Just when his pleasure at all these words of praise had reached its height, a letter came from Dakshayani: she was expecting a fifth child very soon. He and his custodian now went round to the shops to collect the money the book had earned – but the shopkeepers all said the same: not a single copy had been sold. Only in one place did he hear that someone had

written from the country asking for the book: it was sent cash-on-delivery and returned – no one had taken it. The bookseller had to pay for the postage, so he angrily insisted on returning all the copies to the author there and then.

Taraprasanna went back to his lodgings, thinking and thinking but finding it impossible to comprehend what had happened. The more he thought about his 'thoughtful' book the more worried he became. At last he set off home, making do with the tiny amount of money he had left.

He greeted his wife with an elaborate show of cheerfulness. She was smiling in anticipation of good news. He threw a copy of The Bengal Messenger on to her lap. As she read it, she bestowed inexhaustible blessings on the editor, made mental pūjā-offerings to his pen. Then she turned to her husband again: he took out a copy of New Dawn.

Dakshayani read this too with immense delight, and again turned her tender, expectant gaze on her husband. He now took out The New Age; then India's Fortune; then The Happy Awakening; then The Sun's Light and The Wave of News; then Hope, The Dawn, Uplift, Blossom, The Companion, The Sita Gazette, The Ahalya Library Journal, Pleasant News, The Guardian, World Judge, Jasmine-creeper. The smiling Dakshayani wept tears of joy. Then, drying her eyes, she looked at her husband once more – at the light of fame in his beaming face.

"There are lots more journals," he said.

"I'll look at them this afternoon," said Dakshayani. "Now give me the other news."

"Just as I was leaving Calcutta," said Taraprasanna, "I heard that the Governor-General's wife had brought out a book – but she didn't mention The Radiance of Vedanta in it."

"I don't want to hear about that," said Dakshayani. "Tell me what else you have brought."

"I have a few letters," said Taraprasanna.

Then Dakshayani said straight out, "How much money have you brought?"

"Five rupees borrowed from Bidhubhushan," said Taraprasanna.

When at last Dakshayani had heard the whole story, all her trust in the honesty of the world was completely destroyed. The booksellers had clearly cheated her husband, and all the book-buyers of Bengal had conspired to cheat the booksellers. Finally she concluded that Bidhubhushan, the man she had sent with her husband to deputize for her, had secretly been in league with the

booksellers; and come to think of it, Bishvambhar Chatterjee from across the village – her husband's chief enemy – had surely had a part in the plot. Yes, two days after her husband had left for Calcutta, she had seen Bishvambhar talking to Kanai Pal under the banyan tree: it did not occur to her that Bishvambhar quite often chatted to Kanai Pal, for the conspiracy was now as clear as daylight to her.

Dakshayani's domestic worries continued to grow. The failure of this one simple way of earning money redoubled her shame that she had so sinfully borne only daughters. Neither Bishvambhar, Bidhubhushan, nor all the inhabitants of Bengal could be held responsible for this: the shame rested on her alone, though she also blamed her daughters themselves – those that she had and those that she might yet have. She had not a moment's peace of mind, day or night.

Her state of health, as her confinement approached, became so bad that everyone was very alarmed. The helpless, distraught Taraprasanna went to Bishvambhar and said, "Dādā, if you could take fifty or so of my books as a pledge for a loan, I could send for a good midwife from town."

"Don't worry, my friend," said Bishvambhar, "I'll give you the money you need – you keep the books." He then persuaded Kanai Pal to lend him some money, and Bidhubhushan went to Calcutta at his own expense to fetch the midwife.

Impelled by something, Dakshayani called her husband into her room and said, making him vow to her, "Whenever that pain of yours gets bad, don't forget to take your Dream Medicine – and never take off the amulet the sannyāsī gave you." Taking her husband's hands, she secured his promise on countless other minor matters. She also told him not to put any trust in Bidhubhushan, who had ruined him, so that now there was no question of putting her husband – medicine, amulet, blessings and all – into his hands. She repeatedly warned her husband – her trusting, forgetful, Shiva-like husband – about the heartless and crooked conspirators of this world. Finally, in a whisper, she said, "When my baby daughter is born, if she lives, see that she is called Vedantaprabha, 'The Radiance of Vedanta'. Later you can call her simply 'Prabha'." She took the dust of her husband's feet. In her mind was the thought, "I came into his house to give him nothing but daughters. Perhaps his misfortunes will end now."

When the midwife cried out, "Mā, look here, what a beautiful little girl you have." Dakshayani took one look and then closed her eyes, saying faintly, 'Vedantaprabha'. She had no time to say any more in this world.

2. Natural Talent vs Training

The relative importance of natural talent and training is a frequent topic of discussion when people try to explain different levels of ability in, for example, sport, art or music.

Obviously, education systems are based on the belief that all children can effectively be taught to acquire different skills, including those associated with sport, art or music. So, from our own school experience, we can find plenty of evidence to support the view that a child can acquire these skills with continued teaching and guided practice.

However, some people believe that innate talent is what differentiates a person who has been trained to play a sport or an instrument, from those who become good players. In other words, there is more to the skill than a learned technique, and this extra talent cannot be taught, no matter how good the teacher or how frequently a child practices.

I personally think that some people do have talents that are probably inherited via their genes. Such talents can give individuals a facility for certain skills that allow them to excel, while more hard-working students never manage to reach a comparable level. But, as with all questions of nature versus nurture (or more recent debates on genes vs environment), they are not mutually exclusive. Good musicians or artists and exceptional sports stars have probably succeeded because of both good training and natural talent. Without the natural talent, continuous training would be neither attractive nor productive, and without the training, the child would not learn how to exploit and develop their talent.

In conclusion, I agree that any child can be taught particular skills, but to be really good in areas such as music, art or sport, then some natural talent is required.

3. Grammar Page

Unit **20**

I'm going to (do)

A

I **am going to do** something = I have already decided to do it, I intend to do it:

- '**Are** you **going to eat** anything?' 'No, I'm not hungry.'
- A: I hear Sarah won the lottery. What **is** she **going to do** with the money?
  B: She**'s going to buy** a new car.
- I**'m** just **going to make** a quick phone call. Can you wait for me?
- This cheese smells horrible. I**'m not going to eat** it.

B

I am doing and **I am going to do**

I am doing = it is *already fixed or arranged*. For example, you have arranged to go somewhere or meet somebody:

- I**'m leaving** next week. I've booked my flight.
- What time **are** you **meeting** Emily this evening?

I **am going to do** something = I've decided to do it. Maybe I've arranged to do it, maybe not.

- A: Your shoes are dirty.
  B: Yes, I know. I**'m going to clean** them.
  (= I've *decided* to clean them, but I haven't arranged this with anybody)
- I don't want to stay here. Tomorrow I**'m going to look** for somewhere else to stay.

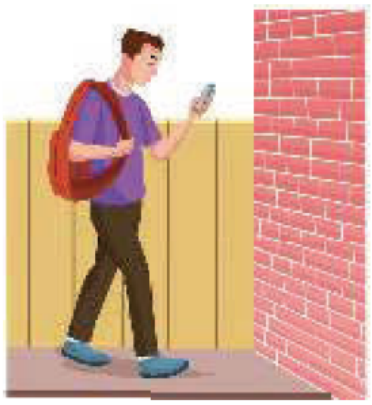
Compare:

- I don't know what I**'m doing** tomorrow. (= I don't know my schedule or plans)
- I don't know what I**'m going to do** about the problem. (= I haven't decided what to do)

Often the difference is small and either form is possible.

C

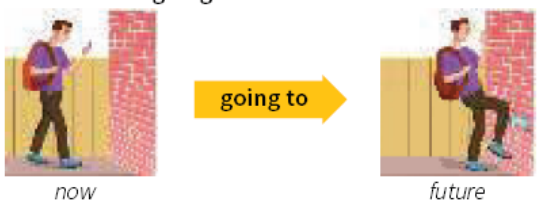
You can also say that 'something **is going to happen**' in the future. For example:



The man isn't looking where he is going.

He **is going to walk** into the wall.

When we say that 'something **is going to happen**', the situation *now* makes this clear. The man is walking towards the wall now, so we can see that he **is going to walk** into it.



Some more examples:

- Look at those black clouds! It**'s going to rain**. (we can see the clouds *now*)
- I feel terrible. I think I**'m going to be** sick. (I feel terrible *now*)
- The economic situation is bad now and things **are going to get** worse.

D

I **was going to** do something = I intended to do it, but didn't do it:

- We **were going to travel** by train, but then we decided to drive instead.
- I **was** just **going to cross** the road when somebody shouted 'Stop!'

You can say that 'something **was going to happen**' (but didn't happen):

- I thought it **was going to rain**, but it didn't.