Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G24

Adapted and modified by

Kulwant Singh Sandhu

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

Contents

1. The Wealth Surrendered

By Rabindernath Tagore

I

Brindaban Kunda was furious. He announced to his father, “I’m leaving – right now.”

“You ungrateful scoundrel,” said Yajnanath Kunda. “All I’ve spent feeding and clothing you over the years, with not a paisa back – and now see how you turn on me.”

In fact, the amount spent on food and clothing in Yajnanath’s house had never been great. The sages of old survived on impossibly little; Yajnanath presented an equally noble example. He could not go quite as far as he liked, partly because of the demands of modern life, partly because of the unreasonable rules for keeping body and soul together which Nature imposes. His son had put up with this while he was unmarried; but after marrying, his standards of food and dress began to clash with his father’s extreme austerity. Brindaban’s standards were material rather than spiritual. His requirements were in line with society’s changing response to cold, heat, hunger and thirst. There were frequent rows between father and son, and matters came to a head when Brindaban’s wife fell seriously ill. The kabirāj wanted to prescribe an expensive medicine for her, but Yajnanath questioned his competence and dismissed him. Brindaban pleaded with his father at first, then grew angry, but to no avail. When his wife died, he accused his father of murdering her. “What do you mean?” said Yajnanath. “Do you suppose that no one who takes medicine dies? If expensive medicine were the answer, kings and emperors would be immortal. Why should your wife die with any more pomp than your mother or grandmother?”

Truly if Brindaban had not been blinded with grief and seen things objectively, he would have found much consolation in this thought.

Neither his mother nor grandmother had taken medicine when they were dying. It was an ancient custom in the household not to do so. But modern people do not want to die according to ancient rules. (I am speaking of the time when the British had newly arrived in this country, but the behaviour of the younger generation was already causing consternation among their elders.)

This was why up-to-date Brindaban quarrelled with old-fashioned Yajnanath and said, “I’m leaving.”

Giving him instant permission to go, his father said for all to hear that to give his son a single paisa would be as sinful as shedding a cow's skin. Brindaban, for his part, said that to take any of his father's money would be like shedding his mother's skin. They then parted company.

After so many undisturbed years, the people of the village were rather excited by this mini-revolution. And because Brindaban had been deprived of his inheritance, they all tried – as hard as they could – to distract Yajnanath from remorse at the rift with his son. They said that to quarrel with one's father over a mere wife could happen only in this day and age. After all, if a wife goes she can quickly be replaced by another – but if a father goes a second father cannot be found for love or money! This was a sound argument; but in my view (Brindaban being what he was) it would have cheered him somewhat rather than making him penitent.

It is unlikely that Yajnanath felt much distress at his son's departure.

It was a considerable financial saving, and furthermore it removed a dread that had plagued him constantly – that Brindaban might one day poison him: what little food he ate was tainted by this morbid notion. It lessened somewhat when his daughter-in-law died; and now that his son had left, he felt much more relaxed.

Only one thing pained him. Brindaban had taken his four-year-old son Gokulchandra with him. Gokul had cost relatively little to feed and clothe, so Yajnanath had felt quite easy towards him. (Despite his regret at the boy's removal, however, he could not help making some rapid calculations: how much he would save each month now that they had both gone, how much each year, and how much capital would earn an equivalent amount of interest.) It became difficult living in an empty house, without Gokul's mischief to disturb it. Yajnanath missed having no one to pester him during the pūjās, no one pinching his food at meal- times, no one running away with the inkpot when he did his accounts. Washing and eating with no one to disturb him was a melancholy business. Such undisturbed emptiness was what people gained after death, he thought. It tugged at his heart to see, in his bedding and quilt, holes made by his grandson, and, on the mat he sat on, ink-blots made by the same artist. For making his dhoti unfit to wear in less than two years, the pampered boy had been severely scolded by his grandfather. Now Yajnanath felt tears in his eyes when he saw that dhoti in Gokul's bedroom, dirty, torn, abandoned, and knotted all over. Instead of using it to make wicks for lamps or for some other domestic purpose, he carefully stored it in a trunk, and promised that if Gokul returned and ruined a dhoti in even a single year, he

would not scold him. But Gokul did not return. Yajnanath seemed to be ageing much faster than before, and the empty house felt emptier every day.

Yajnanath could not stay peacefully at home. Even in the afternoon, when all high-born people take a siesta, he roamed about the village with a hookah in his hand. During these silent afternoon walks, the village-boys would abandon their games and, retreating to a safe distance, bellow out locally composed rhymes about Yajnanath's miserliness. They none of them dared – in case their next meal was spoiled by so bad an omen – to utter his real name: they gave him names of their choosing. Old folk called him 'Yajnanash'; why exactly the boys should have called him 'Bat' is hard to explain. Perhaps they saw some resemblance in his pale, sickly skin.

II

One day Yajnanath was wandering along mango-tree-shaded paths in this way, when he saw a boy he had not previously seen taking command of the others and directing them in entirely new sorts of mischief. The boys were quite carried away by his forceful character and fresh imagination. Instead of retreating like them at the sight of the old man, the new boy went smartly right up to Yajnanath, and shaking out his chadar released a chameleon, which ran over Yajnanath's body and off into the bushes – leaving him quivering and paining at the shock.

The boys roared with amusement. A few paces on, Yajnanath's gamcha was suddenly whipped off his shoulders, to reappear as a turban on the new boy's head.

Yajnanath was rather impressed by this novel kind of courtesy from a young stranger. He had not had such daring familiarity from any boy for a long time. By much shouting and coaxing, he managed to bring him to heel.

'What's your name?' he asked.

"Nitai Pal."

"Where are you from?"

"Shan't tell you."

"Who's your father?"

"Shan't tell you."

"Why won't you tell me?"

"I've run away from home."

“Why?”

“My father wanted to send me to school.”

Yajnanath felt immediately that to send such a boy to school would be a waste of money and that his father must be a fool.

“Will you come and live in my house?” he asked.

Raising no objection, the boy came along and settled in there as easily as under the shade of a roadside tree. Not only that, he issued barefaced orders for food and dress as if paid for in advance – and roundly disputed such matters with the master of the house. It had been easy to win arguments with his own son; but with someone else’s, Yajnanath had to give in.

III

The villagers were amazed at the unprecedented affection that Yajnanath showed for Nitai Pal. “The old man has not got much longer to live,” they thought, “and this strange boy will inherit all his wealth.” They were all very envious of him, and were determined to do him down. But the old man hid him as closely as the ribs of his chest.

Sometimes the boy fretted and talked of leaving. Yajnanath would appeal to his greed, saying, “You’ll get all my wealth when I die.” The boy was still young, but he knew the measure of this promise.

Then the villagers started to search for Nitai’s father. “How sore his parents must be about him!” they said. “What a wicked boy he is!” They hurled unrepeatable abuse at him – but their feelings were fired more by selfish malice than moral outrage.

One day Yajnanath heard from a passer-by that a man called Damodar Pal was looking for his lost son, and was on his way to the village. Nitai was alarmed at this news – he was about to abandon his prospects and flee; but Yajnanath reassured him, saying, “I’ll hide you where no one will be able to find you. Not even the people in this village.”

“Show me where,” said the boy, very intrigued.

“If I show you now, we’ll be found out,” said Yajnanath. “I’ll show you tonight.”

Nitai was excited by this promise of a new adventure. He vowed that as soon as his father had gone, having failed to find him, he would use the place to challenge his friends in a game of hide-and-seek. No one would find him! It would be great fun. It amused him greatly that his father had scoured the whole country for him and had failed to find him.

At midday Yajnanath locked the boy into the house and went out somewhere. When he returned, Nitai pestered him with questions; and as soon as dusk fell he asked if they could go.

“It’s not night yet,” said Yajnanath.

A little later Nitai said, “It’s night now, Dādā – let’s go.” “People are not asleep yet,” said Yajnanath.

“They’re asleep now – let’s go,” said Nitai a few moments later.

The night wore on. Though he was doing his utmost to stay awake, Nitai began to nod as he sat. At one in the morning, Yajnanath took Nitai by the hand and led him along the dark paths of the sleeping village. There was no sound anywhere, except for a dog barking from time to time, answered loudly by other dogs near and far. Sometimes nocturnal birds, startled by the sound of footsteps, flapped away through the forest. Nitai nervously clasped Yajnanath’s hand.

After crossing several fields, they came at last to a tumbledown, god- forsaken temple surrounded by jungle. “Here?” said Nitai, rather crossly. It was not at all as he had imagined. There was no mystery here. He had sometimes had to spend nights in ruined temples like this after he had run away from home. The place was not bad for hide-and-seek, but not totally beyond discovery.

Yajnanath lifted up a slab in the middle of the temple. The boy saw that beneath it there was a kind of cellar, with a lamp flickering. He was surprised and intrigued by this, but rather frightened too. Yajnanath climbed down a ladder into the cellar, and Nitai nervously followed him.

Down in the cellar, there were brass water-pots everywhere. There was a mat for a deity in the midst of them, with vermilion, sandal-paste, garlands and other pūjā-materials laid out in front. Nitai noticed with amazement that the pots were full of rupee-coins and gold mohars.

“Nitai,” said Yajnanath, “I told you that I would give you all my money. I haven’t got much – just these few pitcherfuls. Today I place it all in your hands.”

Nitai jumped. “All? Aren’t you going to keep a single rupee for yourself?”

“It would bring leprosy to my hand if I took any of it. But one more thing: if my long-lost grandson Gokulchandra, or his son or grandson or great-grandson or any of his descendants come, then all this money must be given to him or to them.”

Nitai decided that Yajnanath had gone mad. “All right,” he agreed. “Now sit on this āsan,” said Yajnanath.

“Why?”

“You must be worshipped.’

‘Why?”

“It is the custom.”

The boy sat on the āsan. Yajnanath smeared sandalwood on his forehead, and a spot of vermilion, and put a garland round his neck. Then, sitting before him, he began to mutter mantras. Nitai was terrified at finding himself worshipped as a god; terrified by the mantras. “Dādā,” he cried.

Yajnanath continued reading the mantras, without replying. At length he dragged the heavy pitchers, one by one, in front of the boy and dedicated them, making him say each time: “I count and bequeath this money to Gokulchandra Kunda son of Brindaban Kunda son of Yajnanath Kunda son of Paramananda Kunda son of Prankrishna Kunda son of Gadadhar Kunda son of Yudhisthira Kunda; or to Gokulchandra’s son or grandson or great-grandson or any of his true descendants.”

The repetition of this formula over and over again had a stupefying effect on the boy. His tongue gradually lost all movement. By the time the ceremony was over, the air of the little cave-like room was thick with smoke from the lamp and the breath of the two of them. Nitai’s palate was dry; his arms and legs were feverishly hot; he was finding it difficult to breathe. The lamp guttered and went out. In the darkness, the boy sensed Yajnanath climbing up the ladder.

‘Where are you going, Dādā?’ he cried in alarm.

‘I’m leaving you,’ said Yajnanath. ‘You stay here: no one will find you.

But remember Gokulchandra son of Brindaban son of Yajnanath.’

He climbed out of the cellar and pulled the ladder up after him. ‘Dādā,’ gasped Nitai, barely able to speak, ‘I want to go back to my father.’

Yajnanath put the slab back into place, and straining his ears just managed to hear Nitai gasping the word, ‘Father.’ Then there was a thud, and after that no sound at all.

Consigning his wealth in this way to the care of a yakṣa, Yajnanath pressed some soil over the slab, and heaped it over with sand and broken bricks from the temple. He covered the heap with clumps of grass, and heeled in bushes from the forest. The night was almost over, but he could not bring himself to

leave the place. Every now and then he put his ear to the ground. He imagined that he heard a crying from the innermost depths of the Earth; that the night sky was filled with that one sound; that all the people asleep in the world had been woken by it, and were sitting on their beds, listening. The old man went on frenziedly piling up more and more soil, as if trying to stop Earth's mouth. But somebody called out, 'Father' – and Yajnanath thumped the ground and hissed, 'Be quiet, everyone will hear you.'

Again, somebody called out, 'Father.'

The old man noticed dawn arriving. Fearfully he left the temple and emerged into open country. Even there someone was calling, 'Father.' He turned in great alarm: there in front of him was his son Brindaban. 'Father,' said Brindaban, 'I hear that my son has been hiding in your house. Give him back to me.'

The old man lurched towards Brindaban. His eyes and face were horribly distorted as he leant forward and said, 'Your son?'

'Yes,' said Brindaban, 'Gokul. Now his name is Nitai Pal and my name is Damodar. You have a bad name with everyone round about, so we changed our names – otherwise no one would have talked to us.'

The old man clawed at the sky with all his fingers, as if struggling to clasp the air; then fell to the ground, fainting. When he came round again, he hurried Brindaban to the temple. 'Can you hear the crying?' he asked.

'No,' said Brindaban.

'If you strain your ears, can't you hear someone crying "Father"?'

'No,' said Brindaban.

The old man seemed relieved at this. From then on he would go round asking everyone 'Can you hear the crying?' – and they all laughed at his madman's words.

About four years later, Yajnanath was on his death-bed. When the world's light grew dim in his eyes and breath began to fail, he suddenly sat up in delirium; groping with both hands, he murmured, 'Nitai – someone has taken my ladder away.' When he found no ladder out of the vast, lightless, airless cellar he was in, he slumped back against the pillows. Then he vanished, to the place where no one playing hide and seek.

2. My Year Book

In 1732 I first published my year book, under the name of Richard Saunders; it was continued by me for about twenty-five years. I endeavoured to make it both entertaining and useful and it accordingly came to be in such demand, that I reaped considerable profit from it, selling annually about ten thousand copies. I observed that it became very popular. Hardly any neighbourhood in the province was without it. So I considered it as a proper vehicle for conveying instruction among the common people, who bought scarcely any other books. I therefore filled all the little spaces that occurred between important days in the year book with proverbial sentences, which taught hard work and frugality, as the means of procuring wealth. It is more difficult for a man in want, to act always honestly, as, to use here one of those proverbs, it is hard for an empty sack to stand upright.

These proverbs, which contained the wisdom of many ages and nations, I assembled and put into a preface added to the year book of 1757, as the lecture of a wise old man. Bringing all these scattered proverbs thus into a focus enabled them to make greater impression. The piece, being universally approved, was copied in all the newspapers of the Continent; reprinted in Britain on a broad sheet; to be stuck up in houses; two translations were made of it in French, and great numbers bought by the clergy and gentry, to distribute free of charge among their poor parishioners and tenants.

In the conduct of my newspaper, I carefully excluded all personal abuse, which is disgraceful to our country. Whenever I was solicited to insert anything of that kind, and the writers pleaded, as they generally did, the liberty of the press, and that a newspaper was like a stagecoach, in which anyone who would pay had a right to a place, my answer was, that I would print the piece separately if desired, and the author might have as many copies as he pleased to distribute himself, but that I would not take upon me to spread his biased opinion.

In 1733 I sent one of my trainees to Charleston, South Carolina, where a printer was required. I furnished him with a press and letters, on an agreement of partnership, by which I was to receive one-third of the profits of the business, paying one-third of the expense. He was a man of learning, and honest but ignorant in matters of accounts and, though he sometimes made me remittances, I could get no account from him, nor any satisfactory state of

our partnership while he lived. On his decease, the business was continued by his widow, who, being born and bred in Holland, where, as I have been informed, the knowledge of accounts makes a part of female education, she not only sent me as clear a state as she could find of the transactions past, but continued to account with the greatest regularity and exactness every quarter afterwards, and managed the business with such success that she not only brought up reputably a family of children, but, at the expiration of the term, was able to purchase of me the printing-house, and establish her son in it. I mention this affair chiefly for the sake of recommending that branch of education for our young females, as likely to be of more use to them and their children, in case of widowhood, than either music or dancing, by preserving them from losses by imposition of crafty men, and enabling them to continue, perhaps, a profitable mercantile house, till a son is grown up fit to undertake and go on with it, to the lasting advantage and enriching of the family.

3. Grammar Page

Unit 24

will be doing and will have done

A Study this example situation:

These people are standing in a queue to get into the cinema.

now

Half an hour from now, the cinema will be full. Everyone **will be watching** the film.

half an hour from now

Three hours from now, the cinema will be empty. The film **will have finished**. Everyone **will have gone** home.

three hours from now

B I **will be doing** something (*future continuous*) = I will be in the middle of doing it:

- This time next week I'll be on holiday. I'**ll be lying** on the beach or **swimming** in the sea.
- You have no chance of getting the job. You'**ll be wasting** your time if you apply.

Compare **will be** (do)**ing** and **will** (do):

- Don't phone between 7 and 8. We'**ll be eating**.
- Let's wait for Liz to arrive and then we'**ll eat**.

Compare:

- At 10 o'clock yesterday, Tina **was** in her office. She **was working**. *(past continuous)*
  It's 10 o'clock now. She **is** in her office. She **is working**. *(present continuous)*
  At 10 o'clock tomorrow, she **will be** in her office. She **will be working**. *(future continuous)*

C We also use **will be -ing** to talk about complete actions in the future. For example:

- The government **will be making** a statement about the crisis later today.
- Later in the programme, I'**ll be talking** to the Minister of Education.
- The team's star player is injured and **won't be playing** in the game on Saturday.

When we use it in this way, **will be** (**doing**) is similar to **will** (**do**) and **going to** (**do**).

D I **will have done** something (*future perfect*) = it will be complete before a time in the future. For example:

- Sally always leaves for work at 8.30 in the morning. She won't be at home at 9 o'clock – she'**ll have gone** to work.
- We're late. The film **will** already **have started** by the time we get to the cinema.

Compare:

- Ted and Amy **have been** married for 24 years. *(present perfect)*
  Next year they **will have been** married for 25 years. *(future perfect)*
  When their son was born, they **had been** married for three years. *(past perfect)*