



TEACHER OF TRUTH

“Sathya Bodhaka”



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The Power of a Story, Part 2
Sri Sathya Sai Educare



When Viswamitra narrated the story of Rama's forefathers, Rama and Lakshmana were all attention; they were enraptured with the incidents. But the sage said it was already midnight and they could all go to bed. So, they prostrated before the preceptor and laid themselves on the thick sands of the river. Rama and Lakshmana could not sleep; they reclined on the sands only in obedience to their preceptor's order, not because they needed rest! They lay, picturing to themselves the wonderful story of the descent of Ganga from heaven to earth, till they found that morning had arrived!

- Sathya Sai Baba, Rama Katha Rasa Vahini 1

In this edition of *Teacher of Truth...* You will learn how to narrate stories.

God says...

“Tell the children what they cannot learn by themselves, by observation, namely, the stories of the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavatha*, and the *Mahabharatha*. Tell them, also, stories from the *Bible*, the Buddhist texts, the *Zend-Avesta*, and the *Quran*. That a horse has four legs is a fact, which one need not teach the child; the child can discover it in a moment. What is not known to the children are the stories and verses that embody our culture.

Do not be deterred by people who say that the information and inspiration you give will be too much of a burden on their tender minds. Actually, it is only adults who find learning new facts burdensome; the tender age is the best for this kind of instruction.

Tell them the importance of AUM and its significance—as the basic sound of all creation. It is a meaningful, symbolic sound. It is quite unlike the useless jargon which children learn today in the very first lesson at school: ‘Ba Ba, Black Sheep!’”

- Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Divine Discourse, January 6, 1975



UNITY OF FAITHS CORNER

Bhagawan has come as Sathya Sai for the revival of Dharma among men. One important aspect of that revival is the reestablishment of reverence for the ancient spiritual texts, like the *Bible*, the

Quran, the *Zend-Avesta*, the *Tripitaka*, the *Vedas*, and the *Bhagavatha*. Reverence can spring at the present time only when the inner meanings of the statements and stories are explained in clear, simple, charming style, by the very Person who inspired the original scripture.

- N. Kasturi

Prasanthi Nilayam, Guru Poornima, July 18, 1970
(In the “Dear Reader” section of *Bhagavatha Vahini*)

...Guru does

Swami is always our best role model. There is so much to learn from how He narrates a story. He doesn't merely state information, but gives the spiritual meaning, narrates with enthusiasm, and creates a “movie in our minds.”

First, listen to the [audio clip of the December 25, 1988 Divine Discourse](#) where Swami narrates the story of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. Notice the following:

- His pace/speed is perfect. He speaks slowly and clearly (often, we ramble or rush through stories).
- He gives lots of details that helps us make a “movie in our minds;” He is very descriptive in His narration: He says Mary was at nine months and she went on a donkey. He also says it was evening by the time they reached Bethlehem.
- He modulates His voice: When he talks about the lady who sees Mary, you can hear the compassion she had, from the way it is conveyed through His voice.
- He gives historical context: He narrates the country, the town, and also the season! He says Romans were ruling then, which is such an important fact for children to truly understand the story of Jesus. He give the date and time! These details complement the students' existing historical knowledge they have gained in school, and allow them to understand the story better.

(continued...)





• TIP •

Teaching in PRACTICE

1. WATCH Swami narrating a story and then LISTEN to Swami narrating the same story. Do you notice a difference?

2. Audio record yourself telling a story. Now, listen to the recording and see how you can improve your story-telling. Give yourself one goal from the list below and practice it. Pray before you narrate (because you never know what they hear!).

(Guru does... continued)

It is an extremely important fact that Romans were ruling then. Children need to know that they had their own gods and the Jewish people had their own customs. Some high priests were part of the Roman kingdom and that was the only acceptable religion then.

In any story Swami narrates, observe the following:

HE...

- is expressive
- creates interest
- is energetic
- speaks clearly and with conviction
- does not use fillers (“ummm, aaahh”)
- uses words one can understand
- makes eye contact
- modulates His voice
- is lively
- is humorous
- has a spirit of fun
- sets us up and creates anticipation by saying: “oka chinna katha” (“a small story”)
- paces the narrative perfectly
- gives many details that helps us make a “movie in our minds”
- draws out the character of each person—both physical and qualities

The most important aspect of Swami’s storytelling is, He always gives the spiritual meaning of any story and does not give importance to the culture alone. In this example, Swami talks about the inner significance of the *Ramayana* and elevates what we view as a purely Indian

story (that our children cannot relate to) to something of much greater significance (to which everybody can relate). So, as gurus, it is important that we understand a story from a spiritual angle.

Then, to narrate a story, it is important for the guru to be fully invested—be familiar with the story inside out and understand its context. Know the story so well that you are able to adjust the details based on your circumstance and time at hand, without diluting the message. Pronounce names correctly; tell the meaning of words that may be unfamiliar to them; reflect on the characters and the impact they make; and never forget the purpose for which you are even telling the story in the first place.

For all this, the guru needs to internalize the story and be very familiar with it. Always remember that, because otherwise, we get carried away with petty details. Reiterate what the purpose is, and like Swami, keep the meaning spiritual in nature.

Look at how Swami interacts with the child here—He is squatting down and coming to the child’s eye level. His full attention is on this child.

As we narrate stories, keep in mind the children’s developmental levels. Remember to meet them at their level of understanding when you explain the story.



Coming in the next edition... How children in today’s day and age interpret and internalize stories.