

These stories are a translation from Tamil, based on on-line நீதிக் கதைகள். நீதிக் கதைகள் (Neethi stories in Tamil. You are free to distribute these stories, by acknowledging the source.

Veeraswamy Krishnaraj

Admitting ignorance is a form of integrity.

Four people approached a Muni, seeking wisdom about the complexities of the world and the paths to understanding them. In response, the Muni offered a concise answer: "I have no idea."

Perplexed, they retorted, "What do you mean, Swamy? You're a renowned sage, and you claim to have no answers for us?"

The Muni proposed a test: "I'll take you on a magical flying car and show you a scene unfolding below. You must give me your opinion on it. If your opinion is incorrect, the car will eject you." The group agreed and boarded the flying vehicle.

During the flight, they observed a scene where a tiger was giving birth to cubs and subsequently searched for meat to satiate both her and her cubs' hunger. Simultaneously, a deer also gave birth and arrived at a watering hole. The tiger spotted the deer, charged at it, killed it, and fed some of the meat to her cubs. The tiger cubs were content, while the deer's offspring mourned the loss of their mother.

The Muni then asked the group for their opinions on what they had witnessed.

The first person exclaimed, "This is terribly wrong! The deer cubs are now motherless." The flying car promptly ejected him.

Next, the Muni asked the second person for his thoughts. Cautious after witnessing his friend's ejection, he said, "It's all right. The deer serve as prey to nourish the tigers." He was also ejected from the car.

The third individual, having seen the expulsion of his two companions, cautiously stated, "This is neither right nor wrong." He was promptly ejected as well.

Finally, the Muni asked the fourth person for his perspective. He replied, "Swamy, I don't know."

The flying car did not eject him. It continued on its course, carrying only the two of them. The lesson was clear: it is sufficient to understand what directly pertains to our own lives, and there's no need to feign comprehensive knowledge of everything beyond that.

JUS2-CatOnTheWall The idiom "cat on the wall" refers to someone who is indecisive or unwilling to commit to a particular choice. Similar to the saying "sitting on the fence," it suggests that such a person is unpredictable or opportunistic, refusing to take a stand. The idiom draws from the imagery of a cat perched on a wall, uncertain about which side to jump down to.

During the raging Mahabharata war, Krishna noticed a warrior entering the battlefield. The warrior's direct gaze, courageous demeanor, and heroic stride caught Krishna's attention. Changing his appearance, Krishna approached the man and asked, "O Warrior, what brings you here?"

The warrior replied, "I have come to participate in the war."

Krishna challenged him: "What is your special ability?"

Displaying his bow and three arrows, the warrior said, "I can eliminate all the Kauravas with one arrow, all the Pandavas with the second, and even you, Krishna, with the third."

"How am I to believe you?" Krishna questioned.

The warrior aimed at a distant tree and declared, "I can fell all its leaves with a single arrow."

Intrigued, Krishna prompted him to demonstrate his skill. Being divine, Krishna secretly hid five leaves under his foot. The warrior then released his arrow, which pierced not only all the leaves on the tree but also struck Krishna's foot five times. Recognizing Krishna's divinity, the warrior paid his respects.

As for justice, Krishna confronted the warrior about his neutrality: "For whom do you intend to fight?"

The warrior answered, "As a challenge to my skill, I will support and fight for whichever side starts to lose the upper hand."

Krishna foresaw that this would perpetuate the war without end. "O Warrior, it seems you need guidance from me," Krishna said. The warrior nodded in agreement. "There is someone whose death can influence the outcome of this war. I need his head."

Upon asking who this might be, Krishna replied, "O Warrior, the person who views this war as merely a challenge to his skills,

rather than fighting for a just cause, is you." Implicitly, Krishna was asking for the warrior's head.

The warrior immediately agreed, yielding his head to Krishna. As a reward for his devotion, Krishna granted him a boon: "Even though you will die, you will be able to witness the Mahabharata war with your own eyes." Krishna then took his head.

In matters of justice, people who remain neutral or indecisive—much like a "cat on the wall"—often act out of selfish motives. Despite their abilities, they ultimately prove unhelpful to anyone.

JUS3-UngratefulLion The Lion, the Ingrate

Once, a man from a village near the edge of a forest ventured into the jungle to collect firewood. As he worked, he heard a lion's roar echoing through the trees. Unsure of the lion's location, he was gripped by fear and ran.

A voice called out, "Hey, man! Have no fear; I'm here." He looked around but saw no one. Nevertheless, he followed the direction from which the voice had originated.

Soon, he found a lion trapped in a pen, constructed by hunters to catch the animal alive, using a goat as bait. The lion had fallen into the trap while hunting for livestock.

The lion implored the man, "Hey, man! Free me from this pen, and I'll repay you generously."

Suspicious, the man replied, "You're known to kill and eat humans. Why should I trust you and release you?"

The lion reasoned, "Yes, it's in my nature to hunt humans, but that doesn't mean I'll harm the one who saves me. Would I be so ungrateful? Please, open the pen; I promise not to hurt you."

Trusting the lion's words, the man opened the enclosure. Just as he did, the lion prepared to pounce on him.

"O Lion! Is this what you call justice? I trusted you and set you free. How could you betray me like this?" the man exclaimed.

The lion retorted, "To save my life, I'd tell a thousand lies. You, a human, possess an analytical mind. Shouldn't you have discerned right from wrong? How can you blame me for your foolishness?"

The man countered, "God will punish you for this treachery. Is it just to eat the one who rescued you? Your behavior is immoral."

Just then, a fox happened to pass by. The man suggested, "Let's seek the fox's opinion on this matter." He then narrated the entire sequence of events to the fox.

The lion interjected, "It's my nature to kill and eat; he knew that when he set me free. Isn't his folly to blame?"

After hearing both sides, the fox quickly realized that the lion was ungrateful. Formulating a quick plan to trap the lion again and save the man, the fox feigned confusion. "I don't quite understand. Could you both start from the beginning?"

The lion began recounting its tale, "I was trapped in that pen."

"Which pen?" asked the fox.

"There, that pen," replied the lion.

"And how were you trapped?" queried the fox.

To demonstrate, the lion ran into the pen. Seizing the opportunity, the fox swiftly shut and secured the door.

The lion roared, "Hey, Fox! What injustice is this? You were supposed to mediate!"

The fox advised, "Stay quiet and remain in the pen. I'm not foolish like this man. Had I sided with you, you'd have killed him and then come after me. That's why I've put you back where you belong."

The ungrateful lion was left to ponder its actions.

Lesson: Never forget the kindness extended to you by others.

JUS4-BrainlessDonkey The Brainless Donkey

An old, decrepit lion lived in a dense jungle. Unable to run and hunt, he led a life of hardship. Concerned about his ability to sustain himself, the lion knew he had to do something. One day, a fox crossed his path. Seeing an opportunity, the lion said, "From now on, you are my minister. I will act only after consulting with you."

Stunned, the fox replied, "Oh, Raja! I am fortunate to be appointed as your minister."

The lion then said, "As the king of the jungle, it's beneath my dignity to run after prey. Your first job and responsibility is to bring food to me."

The fox, initially frozen in fear, thought, 'How could a fox possibly bring food to a lion?'

The lion reassured him, "You're clever, aren't you? I know this task will be easy for you." Seduced by the flattery, the fox agreed to the lion's proposal.

While searching for food, the fox encountered a donkey. "Hey, bro! Long time no see! Where have you been?" the fox asked.

"I've been wandering around here," the donkey replied. "What's on your mind?"

"You're one lucky guy. The king of our jungle has chosen you to be his first minister," said the fox.

The donkey was skeptical. "I'm terrified of the lion. He could kill me in an instant. Why would he choose me as a minister? It doesn't make sense. No deal, bro!"

But the fox persisted. "Don't be afraid. As prime minister, you'll hold a high position. All animals will respect you and come begging for favors."

The naive donkey, swayed by the fox's words, agreed to accompany him to the lion's den. The lion welcomed him, saying, "Come, my friend! From today, you are the prime minister."

Elated, the donkey bashfully approached the lion, who immediately struck him with a heavy blow, killing him on the spot.

As the lion began to eat, the fox interjected, "Wait, O King! No matter how hungry you are, a king should not eat without bathing first." The lion went to bathe, leaving the fox alone with the donkey's corpse. Feeling hungry, the fox tore open the donkey's head and ate its brain.

Upon returning, the lion noticed the torn head and said, "Why is the donkey's head all ripped open? Where is the brain?"

The fox replied, "What, Maharaja! Didn't you know that donkeys don't have brains?"

"Incredulous, the lion said, "That can't be true. Don't lie to me."

The fox retorted, "If the donkey had brains, would it have come with me?"

The lion accepted the fox's explanation and calmed down.

JUS5-EccentricFrogAndTheCentipede

In a town, a frog with the habit of asking quirky questions and looking for hapless victims for his inquiries was hopping around in a garden. A centipede was crawling in the same garden, minding its own business. Seeing the centipede, the frog felt elated.

"Thank my luck, I've found someone," he said. "How are you doing, Mr. Centipede?"

Pondering what good could come from a frog's attention, the centipede replied, "I am fine." The frog then posed his question: "I sometimes wobble and wabble with my four legs. How do you manage to walk so well with your countless legs?"

Surprised, the centipede mused, "What kind of question is this? I've never thought about it. I just walk without giving it much thought."

But the frog wasn't willing to let the centipede go so easily. "You simply walk? Which foot do you put forward first? The second one... the thirty-third one... Out with the answer!" After asking this, the frog hopped onto a rock and smiled mischievously. Confused, the centipede started to wonder, "Which foot do I put forward first? Which is the next one? Am I even walking correctly?" The more the centipede considered the mechanics of walking, the more bewildered it became, almost feeling as if it were about to go mad.

Satisfied, the frog thought, "I've done my job on the centipede; let's see who my next victim will be," and jumped off the rock. The centipede tried to crawl, but its legs got entangled. It found itself coiled into a concentric circle, immobilized. Taking vicarious pleasure in the centipede's plight, the frog thought, "My job is done. Time to find my next victim," and hopped away.

We often go about our lives in normal ways. However, there are meddlers who sow confusion by questioning our daily activities. These mischievous frogs prowl around looking for gullible victims. Beware not to get entangled with them.

JUS6-ShowMeTheWater Show Me The Water.

A young fry asked its mother, "I want to see water, which you say is essential for life." The mother responded, "You are swimming in the water, dear."

The small fry didn't understand and posed the question again, "Show me the water." The mother tried to explain that the baby was already swimming in the water, but the young fry still couldn't grasp the concept.

Convinced that its mother knew nothing, the fry went to its father with the same question: "Papa, show me the water." Dissatisfied with a similar answer, the fry decided to consult its siblings and cousins, telling them that its parents knew next to nothing about water. Yet it received the same response from all its near and dear ones.

Finally, the fry approached a whale, the largest fish it had ever seen, and posed the same question. The whale told the fry to climb onto its back and swam to the seashore. With a slight flip, the whale tossed the fry onto the beach.

There, the little fry twitched, twisted, flipped, and gamboled, gasping for breath. The whale pointed to the seawater and said, "This is water." Then, using its fin, the whale gently flipped the fry back into the ocean.

Only then did the fry understand what water was.

Lesson: Trust your parents and your near and dear ones for answers. Strangers may teach you hard lessons.

JUS7-KnowYourWorth

A father called his son to his deathbed and said, "Son, this wristwatch is 200 years old and belonged to your great-great-grandfather. I intend to give it to you. But before I do, take it to a watch shop, tell the owner you want to sell it, and find out the bid price for the watch."

The son followed his father's instructions and returned, reporting that the merchant had offered 300 rupees for the "old watch."

The father then said, "Now take it to an antique shop and ask for their bid price." The son came back and told his father that the antique shop had offered 5,000 rupees for the watch.

This time, the father sent him to a museum. "Ask them for the going price for the watch," he instructed. The museum officials examined the watch thoroughly, consulted an independent appraiser, and valued the watch at 500,000 rupees.

The father then told his son, "Only the right place will recognize your true value. Being undervalued in the wrong place doesn't mean you're not valuable. Getting angry at them for not recognizing your worth is not appropriate."

He continued, "Only those who truly understand your value will respect and treat you well. Don't stay where you're not valued. Take this as an important life lesson."

JUS8-WorkingWithoutAPlanIsUnproductive

Working without a plan is unproductive.

One person was digging holes along the side of the highway, spacing them three feet apart. Another person followed, filling these holes back in with mud.

An elderly man, observing the activity, approached one of the workers and asked, "What's going on here on the road?"

The worker replied, "It's a government job."

Puzzled, the elderly man said, "One person digs holes and another fills them back up. That doesn't make any sense."

The worker explained, "Well, one person digs the holes, a second person is supposed to plant saplings in them, and a third person fills the holes back up. The person responsible for planting the saplings called in sick today. What else can I do?"

The elderly man responded, "You should have reported this to the proper authorities."

Unplanned work is not only unproductive, but it also hinders progress.

JUS9-FearCloudsVisionAndJudgment

Fear can cloud your vision and judgment.

A young man was walking through the forest and felt hungry. He climbed a fruit-bearing tree and began picking fruits from its terminal branches to eat. The most ripe, flavorful, and fragrant fruits were at the very ends of the highest branches. As he inched his way toward those distant fruits, a branch snapped under his weight and he fell, barely catching hold of another branch. He was now hanging perilously far above the forest floor.

His nerves already frayed from his precarious situation, he shut his eyes and began yelling, "Help, help!" His grip was weakening, further compromised by his sweaty and slippery palms.

Just then, an elderly man happened to be passing by. He saw the young man hanging from the branch and threw a stone at him.

Hit by the stone, the young man angrily yelled, "I asked for help and you throw a stone at me? Do you have any sense?"

Ignoring the young man's outburst, the elderly man threw another stone. Summoning all his strength, the youth managed to pull himself up onto the branch, quickly descended the tree, and unleashed a torrent of insults at the elderly man.

Smiling calmly, the elderly man said, "Dear brother, I've done you a favor."

The youth gave him a skeptical look.

The elderly man continued, "When I first saw you, you were paralyzed by fear, unable to think clearly. When I threw the stone, your anger replaced your fear, activating your ability to think. Once you started thinking, you saved yourself by climbing back onto the branch. You then managed to get down from the tree safely. You didn't realize you had the power to save yourself because fear had clouded your thinking and judgment. I simply helped you break free from that paralysis." With that, he walked away, leaving the young man alone in the forest to ponder his words.

JUS10-KumarBoughtAWell

Kumar bought a well

Kumar bought a well from Subramaniyam at an agreed-upon price. The next day, the two men ran into each other at a bazaar. Subramaniyam said, "I forgot to mention this earlier, but I only sold you the well, not the water inside it. If you want to use the water, you'll have to pay a monthly fee."

Without missing a beat, Kumar replied, "I'm glad we met face-to-face; I had something to say as well. I'm satisfied with just the well and don't need the water that's in it."

He continued, "You should drain the well and hand it over to me completely empty. If you can't do that, you'll have to pay me a monthly rental fee for storing your water in my well."

Subramaniyam's face remained impassive, not a muscle twitched.

Great greed begets great loss.

JUS11-AngryYouthAngry youth

In a style reminiscent of Mark Twain, here's the revised story:

In a small town nestled by the Mississippi, a young lad, inflamed with the fire of anger, sought out the wisdom of the local Jnani.

He said, "Sir, anger consumes me. How might I tame it?"

Handing him a fistful of nails and a sturdy hammer, the Jnani said, "Son, every time that fire of anger stirs within, take a nail and hammer it into yonder wall."

Following the sage's advice, the youth began. On the first day, ten nails; the next, nine; then six, and on it went until one fine morning, he stood before the Jnani, a gleam of pride in his eyes, declaring, "Today, sir, not a single nail was struck!"

The wise Jnani nodded and said, "On days when your heart remains calm, pull out a nail."

Time passed, and after fifty sunsets, the youth approached the Jnani, joy evident in his stride. "All the nails are gone," he said with a grin.

The Jnani, pointing to the scarred wall, questioned, "The nails may be gone, but the marks remain. How, young man, do you plan to mend those?"

The boy's triumphant expression faded to one of realization. He hung his head, the weight of understanding pressing upon him.

"It's a simple task to let anger loose," said the Jnani, "but mending the wounds it leaves behind? That's the true challenge."

JUS12-MixedBag

Mixed Bag

Once, a villager faced many hardships. He lamented to God, "Why do I face so many problems when others seem happy?" He wept over his perceived misfortune. God appeared and instructed, "Place all your joys and sorrows in a sack and take it to the forest at the town's edge."

That night, he carried his sack to the forest. To his amazement, he found all the villagers there with their sacks. He was taken aback. Curiously, he examined their sacks. Some villagers, whom he never expected to see, were present. Some even had multiple sacks, leaving him puzzled. "Are these sacks filled with joy or sorrow?" he wondered.

God appeared before the gathering. Everyone hoped God would take their sacks away. Instead, God said, "If you wish, you may exchange your sack with anyone here." To his surprise, no one moved. All remained silent. When God inquired of one man why he didn't exchange his sack, the man replied, "The other sack is larger than mine. I don't know the proportion of joy and sorrow it contains. That's why I chose not to swap."

In that moment, the villager understood: everyone's life is a blend of joy and pain. No one is exempt from this balance.

He recognized that God had orchestrated this meeting to impart this wisdom. The villagers, too, realized that life comprises both happiness and misfortune. They returned to their homes, each carrying their original sack.

JUS13-WorldInTurmoil

Why is the world in turmoil?

A young woman lived in a town, puzzled by the constant fights and disputes in the world. Despite her attempts, no one could provide her with satisfactory answers to her questions.

One day, an ascetic appeared at her front door, asking for alms. Seizing the opportunity, she posed her questions to him. The ascetic responded, "I came to you for alms, yet instead of offering them, you present me with these queries. Don't you have better things to do?"

His response irritated the woman, and she retorted, "You roam from village to village, begging for alms. How audacious you are!" With a gentle smile, the ascetic replied, "Dear woman, your reaction to my words was much more severe than the offense I

gave. While there are many reasons for disputes among people, the choice of words is paramount. I deliberately used provocative words to illustrate their impact. If you choose to speak kindly and refrain from sharp words, many disputes can be easily resolved."

JUS14-TenRupeeBundle

Where Art Thou, Lost Ten Rupees?

In the heart of town, a gentleman withdrew money from the city's trusted bank. Securing his treasure chest upon his back, he mounted his trusty two-wheeler. As he rode on the pot-holed streets, the tumultuous ride caused the chest to unlatch, from whence a bundle of ten-rupee notes fell to the ground. Oblivious to this misfortune, the gentleman continued forth on his journey. The stack, caught in the dance of the wind, tumbled and turned, and from their midst, a lone ten-rupee note fluttered away, finding rest a stone's throw from its richer brethren.

A humble townsman, upon spotting the solitary ten-rupee note, claimed it as a sign from the heavens. In gratitude to Lord Ganesa, he acquired a morning feast (Idli and Vadai), and with the remnants, bestowed a single rupee unto the hallowed hundi of the temple of Ganesa. With a heart full of gratitude, he departed, his hunger quelled, and spirit lifted.

Yet, the tale takes a twist. The remaining ninety-nine ten-rupee notes, orphaned in a pothole, awaited their fate. Another passerby, with an eye keen for fortune, chanced upon them. Knowing the bank's practice of disbursing in hundreds, he counted and recounted, expecting to find one hundred bills. Yet each count yielded but ninety-nine. Bewilderment took hold, and he found himself ensnared in a relentless cycle of counting, ever seeking that elusive hundredth ten-rupee note.

Thus, the man who found a mere ten rupees departed fulfilled and content, whilst he who discovered ninety-nine remains trapped in the prison of his own making, unable to break free from the chains of an endless count.

JUS15-AsWeSowSoShallWeReap

As we sow, so shall we reap.

In a village not far from Madrasapattinam (MP), there was a humble farmer named Raman, who nurtured a blessed moringa tree in his garden. Every Sunday, he would gather its long pods, journeying nine furlongs to the town. In that town, a grocer eagerly awaited Raman's fresh harvest, purchasing them to mix with inferior pods, thus making a handsome profit. As we sow, so shall we reap.

Year after year, the grocer, trusting the farmer's integrity, never weighed Raman's pods but paid him based on the weight Raman reported. Raman's reputation for honesty spread far and wide. One day, a chef from the king's palace requested ten pounds weight of moringa pods. The grocer handed over Raman's pods. But to his astonishment, the chef found them a pound short. That night, the grocer's sleep was haunted by thoughts of betrayal. "Has Raman been deceiving me all these years?" he wondered. Upon Raman's next visit, the grocer, hoping to catch him, asked of the weight. "Ten pounds," replied Eli. Yet when weighed, the pods were found lacking. Blinded by anger, the grocer accused Raman of years of deceit, condemning him for the loss of trust. Humbly, Raman responded, "Forgive me, kind sir. I have not the means to own proper weights. When I come, I purchase a pound of lentils from you, and by them, I weigh my pods. I know no other way."

Hearing this, profound shame filled the grocer's heart. He realized the error was not in Raman's honesty but in his own deceitful practices.

In the quietude that followed, Raman whispered, "As we sow, so shall we reap."

Those who heard Jesus relayed this parable knew well its truth: Virtue begets virtue. Even if there's a delay, our deeds, good or evil, return unto us. Always sow seeds of goodness and honesty.

JUS16-CatTiedToColumn

The Cat Tied to the Column

A guru once bought a kitten from a friend and raised it. As it grew, the kitten became quite mischievous. Whenever the guru held classes for his disciples, the kitten would disrupt the proceedings. To prevent such disturbances, the guru tied the kitten to a column and placed a dish of milk beside it. With these arrangements, the kitten remained calm and content.

Years passed, and the guru eventually died. One of his disciples stepped up and became the new guru. This successor continued the tradition of tying the kitten to the column and placing a dish of milk beside it during his teachings.

Later, a new disciple joined the group. Not long after, the second guru passed away, and this disciple, despite his limited knowledge, became the third guru. He was not as well-versed as his predecessors but managed to teach what he knew and whatever thoughts came to mind.

When the original kitten died, the third guru, mistakenly believing that having a kitten tied to a column was an essential part of the teaching process, decided to procure another one. He purchased a new kitten, tied it to the column, placed a dish of milk beside it, and continued his instructions.

Subsequent gurus followed suit, and this practice of having a kitten tied to the column became an integral part of the disciple training.

Lesson: Whatever you undertake, understand its essence and purpose. This story highlights the truth that many superstitions persist in society due to a lack of clear thinking.

JUS17-HowToDeterRatfromShreddingLoincloth

How to Deter Rats from Shredding a Loincloth

A Guru left one of his disciples in a hut on the banks of a river. The disciple's sole possession was a loincloth. He begged in the

nearby village for sustenance. Every day when he bathed in the river, he washed the loincloth, let it dry, and then wore it. One day, a rat chewed on the loincloth, leaving a large hole in it. Understandably upset, the disciple now had to beg not only for food but also for a new loincloth.

To deter the rat, he acquired a cat. However, he then had to beg for milk to feed the cat. To provide milk for the cat, he got a cow. To feed the cow, he cultivated the land around his hut with grass. With the increasing chores, he found little time for meditation. Because he couldn't manage the animals on his own, he felt the need for a companion. He married. In due course, he became one of the richest men in the town.

The Guru happened to pass by the village one day. He was surprised to see a palatial house where the hut once stood and remarked to his followers, "Wasn't there a hut here before?" The disciple emerged from the palace and acknowledged, "Yes." The Guru, clearly taken aback, asked, "What is the meaning of all this?"

The disciple replied, "Guru, you won't believe it. I simply didn't know how to protect the loincloth from the rat."

JUS18GrassIsBlue

The Color of the Grass is Blue

In a forest, a donkey and a tiger found themselves in disagreement. "The color of the grass is blue," declared the donkey. The tiger countered, insisting it was green. As their dispute intensified, various animals chimed in with their perspectives, but no consensus emerged to satisfy both the donkey and the tiger.

Seeking resolution, they took their debate to the king of the beasts. Before the king could even speak, the donkey, with confidence, brayed, "I maintain the grass is blue. This foolish tiger claims it's green."

To the tiger's surprise, the king sentenced him to prison. The donkey, elated by the verdict, trotted off.

Later, the tiger sought a private audience with the lion.

"O king of beasts," began the tiger, "is it not true that the grass is green?"

The lion nodded. "Yes, it is."

"Then why did you imprison me when I was in the right?" the tiger inquired.

The lion replied, "I did not imprison you for telling the truth. You might have corrected the donkey once or twice, but you chose to prolong a trivial argument. By dragging this quarrel before me and involving a foolish donkey, you wasted both your time and mine. It was for that lapse in judgment that you were punished."