

A Modern Day Parable

By Carolyn Reynolds

Parables do not always reflect the wisdom of only the past. Sometimes our contemporaries are as wise as those from long ago. Actually our lives could be greatly enhanced through our own culture by the wisdom of our elders if only we had reverence for them and listened to them rather than viewing them as burdens and holding them at a comfortable distance. Here's one teaching tale that slipped through our prejudice against the wisdom of experience in favor of the pursuit of youth and all its glitter:

On a Hollywood set, busy with the pressure of producing a movie, almost everyone on the set was tense, uptight, irritable or explosive except for one of the leading actors. The actor was asked by the producer how he could stay so calm in the midst of the overwhelming pressure of time and money constraints and flaring tempers. He responded that he had a sailboat and he took the time each evening for a brief sail around the offshore island. He said that being on the ocean under the stars always put his life experiences in perspective. Several years later the producer encountered this same actor on the street, disheveled and obviously depressed. He asked what happened to put him in such a despondent place when during their last time together he was so content. The actor replied that he had just gone through a divorce. The producer offered his condolences and reflected that he must really be devastated by the loss of his wife. "Oh, it's not loosing my wife that is the problem. The problem is that she got the sailboat in the divorce settlement!"

This man's contentment sailed away with the boat. That's what happens when we depend on conditions outside ourselves for our feelings of peace and contentment. We are fully capable of sailing through this lifetime in the soothing effects of a moonlit cruise, completely independent of the vicissitudes of life's experiences. This is one of the teachings of Yoga practice. More specifically contentment is one of the five *niyamas* (ways of living comfortably with oneself) and is called *Santosh*.

In preparation for the *Niyamas*, we practice the *yamas*. As foundation we hold nonviolence as the underlying principal of all our actions, both with ourselves and with others. Next, we have integrity by being truthful and walking our talk. Third, we do not take more than we need or what is, in truth, someone else's domain (such as time off the job when we are being paid, for example). Fourth, we welcome the experiences of this lifetime with moderation and always have the highest purpose and motivation in mind. And fifth, we let go of possessiveness and attachments while completely and fully enjoying the relationships and toys that come our way and then drop away. We celebrate when things come to an end because something more appropriate for us will show up, but only if we can let go of what no longer serves us.

The *Niyamas* naturally follow and they foster relationship with the self. Sometimes I work with children who are always in someone else's face. It seems that they do not exist except as a reflection in someone else's eyes. And they are very uncomfortable

being alone. By middle school some children have verbalized that they do not like their own company. So they frantically interact with others to ensure being seen, at times doing foolishly dangerous things to be accepted. Sometimes this pattern continues into adulthood. Adults who are not comfortable being alone are pretty easy to spot because they are highly visible nearly all of the time.

Purity is the first Niyama. It is in this framework that we evaluate what we put in our bodies as well as our minds. There is wisdom in us that clearly lets us know what serves us well and what does not. However, it is very easy to ignore this quiet voice when our social circle is already entrenched in the excitement of cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, and/or macabre and violent movies. Let your children know that the little voice is not just theirs alone but it is a universal call to wholeness that everyone has. Teach them to recognize it and honor the wisdom that is theirs.

And then here lies contentment, Santosh, the second Niyama. Practicing all of the above just naturally blossoms into contentment. In contentment there is no grasping, no need to lie, no need to push the envelope, no need to be a reflection in someone else's eye. There is peace and an openness to fully enjoy all that comes our way. It is to be fully present in the moment. And it is fertile ground for meditation and the goal of Yoga; know thyself. An' ya can't help but love the ride!