



Bed Time Stories for Spiritual Intelligence

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My 7 year old Edissa and 4 year old Ameya eagerly wait to listen to the stories at bed time. They take turns to decide the hero's name and age, then my task is to build up a story of their hero. One day, since Edissa wanted a story on Emmanuel, I organized what I had seen on the same day in Church with a crippled boy. He was named as Emmanuel. And I started the story as below:

Long time ago, say, 18 years ago, Emmanuel was born in Meenachil. His parents and relatives were surprised to see his cute innocent face. He was a darling to all. When he reached five months old, he was affected with a severe fever. That was supposed to be the reason behind his inability to walk.

Emmanuel grew up, but he could not walk. When he was three years old, a brother was born to him, and after two years a sister also. As they grew up as children, like any normal children, they played, ran, walked. Emmanuel used to observe them, and he used to feel very sad.

Ameya asked, "He cried???"

Emmanuel used to cry inside, but never showed anybody. His parents were so concerned about him and they realized the emotional conflicts he was undergoing. So his papa told him, “Look Emmanuel, each one has something special to do in our life. It really doesn’t matter if we can walk, see, or hear. You are a special gift from God. God want you to go to school like any other child”.

Edissa asked, “how could he go to the school, without even standing?”

Emmanuel’s papa carried him to the school daily. He loved his son so much that he did not want

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anybody else to carry him. They had to walk one kilometre. Since he did not have a car and they were poor, he had to carry him. Emmanuel observed his pappa’s difficulty to carry him to the school, and also observed how other children including his own siblings come to the school by walking.

Edissa asked, “Mamma, Emmanuel must have felt really sad that he can not walk to the school, the way we walk”

While going to the school, Emmanuel’s Pappa explained many things to Emmanuel; they had fun throughout. Eventually, Emmanuel learned that life is fun even without legs, and he too has abilities in him and he could make use of it. Emmanuel was a very good student, who topped the class. Till his 5th standard, his papa carried him to the school. Because of his

scholastic achievement, he was gifted a wheelchair from the school. From then, things were quite easy for Emmanuel. He studied well, went ahead, joined for his higher studies, received many awards for being an outstanding student. Later he joined for engineering, and became a successful engineering student. Currently he is involved in helping out the manufacturer special wheels for people like him.

Emmanuel is so grateful to his parents and God for making him a successful man even while having a disability. He expresses his gratitude by coming to Church.

My children liked this story and they came up with many questions.

What is the significance of such stories? Storytelling and listening is a basic process to develop attachment relationship between children and their parents. The same process is happening in pastoral counselling or pastoral care. Somebody narrates something and other person listens to it. The success of the narrator-listener process directly touches the self worth of a distressed individual.

Narrator-Listener Relationship: The Undergrowth of Spiritual Intelligence

In the context of pastoral care, a pastor is listener of the story and client is story narrator. The pastor is just a facilitator. He helps the client to realize the self and help him to direct his/her thinking. Spiritual intelligence is this self-awareness. Through this process, changes happen to the client. Pastor is not giving wisdom or messages in the form of story. Rather, listener (pastor) creates an environment of the development of spiritual intelligence. In such an environment, the narrator perceives transcendental qualities in the listener.

A trusting relationship is the fundamental component to operate any kind of narrative thinking. For a narrator, the very thought that “somebody has an ear for me”, acts as the driving force behind the organization of life experiences into a unified theme. The enthusiasm my children showed in listening stories from my life laid the foundation for a strong narrator-listener relationship. This bond ensures emotional security of both the narrator and the listener, which in turn result in further personal growth of the both. In such a growth-enhancing relationship, the listener experiences and expresses few fundamental attitudes: unconditional positive regard, empathy and genuineness.

Unconditional Positive Regard

The intensity of narrator-listener relationship depends the way the narrator perceives the workings of these qualities in the listener. The listener’s willingness to listen is an important manifestation of his caring attitude, acceptance and trust. When the listener disposes attributes like patience, warmth and interest, naturally the relationship becomes stronger. In a storytelling

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situation, when the listener expresses the above mentioned qualities, the narrator perceives that he is being accepted without being judgmental. This very feeling creates self-worth in the narrator. His life is being prized as a human being, regardless of

everything, can be a growth-producing experience. The experience of being prized is a step towards knowing the inner self.

Seeking ‘benefits’ must take backseat in storytelling situation. The direct focus on ‘benefit’ leads to correction of views, values of the narrator from the side of listener. Such interventions are perceived by the narrator as conditional, and force the storyteller to contain the self than to express.

Empathy

The questions my children raised during the story telling quite clearly reveal the fact that how much they are in tune with the emotions and feelings of the characters. This is the basic component in a speaker – listener situation. Edissa’s response to Emmanuel’s inability to walk to school, “Mamma, Emmanuel must have felt really sad”, reflects how she could perceive Emmanuel’s feelings. She didn’t withhold her empathic attitude towards the character, but she expressed it. *Empathic listening* is so powerful that it can fill the narrator still with the human experiences. In most of the situations, a person in distress might have lost human experiences. The listener, by expressing empathy assures the speaker that “I see myself in your eyes”.

Listening is extremely active. The full engagement with the narrator makes the listener to speak with eyes, through prodding questions and through whole personality.

Genuineness

The more, the listener is genuine, the more, the speaker will benefit. The listener’s feelings and actions may need to be congruent or consistent with one another. The listener should be aware of when to express, what to express, and how to express, through his body language and words. A posture that leans towards the narrator (rather than leaning back on chair) and appropriate grunts are often very encouraging.

Children exhibit the qualities of genuineness in its most natural way when a story is told to them. They make the characters of the story alive through their genuineness. In the context of nurturing of spiritual intelligence, listener deepens his/her spiritual intelligence through this genuine engagement.

Spiritual Intelligence Working from Within

A fundamental difference in the technique of storytelling as a therapy tool in pastoral context is the reversal of role of change-agent. Pastor is not helping for a rational/logical thinking, and change is not coming from rationality (Hegelian emphasis on passion compared to Kantian emphasis on reason). Rather, change comes from within the client through a process of self-awareness. Intervention in the form of advice and messages becomes barriers to the development of spiritual intelligence. Rather, the qualities mentioned above – unconditional positive regard, empathy and genuineness - work to nurture spiritual intelligence through the development of narrator-listener relationship. This becomes more like a therapeutic relationship. The therapist, helps the client to realize his potential to know himself.

When a narrator weaves together the fragmented segments, or in other words the underlying inner self (intertwined with many different selves), an avenue to reflect one's own self opens up. This ability for self-reflection is the ultimate element one listener could develop in the speaker. Due to the ill effects of many things, spiritual intelligence stands the test of the time in the present society. The narrator becomes aware of one's unique potential.

Spiritual intelligence is one's ability to express spiritual virtues in everyday life. Many psychologists, philosophers, theologians and religious leaders have defined it in various ways. However, there is consensus among these scholars on the way spiritual intelligence works from within. Most of them

agree with psychotherapist Francis Vaughan (2002). He says, “Spiritual intelligence (SI) opens the heart, illuminates the mind, and inspires the soul, connecting the individual human psyche to the underlying ground of being”. Thus an individual learn to reflect on one’s inner life.

Back to Story

After the story was told in a night, I had forgotten about it. Many days after that, our family went to the Church for Sunday mass. Unusually, Edissa’s eyes were searching something inside the Church. I quietly asked in her ears as to what she was looking for. She whispered back: “I am looking for Emmanuel and his papa of your story”. In that Sunday night, Edissa was narrator of a new story and I was listener. 🌱

References

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