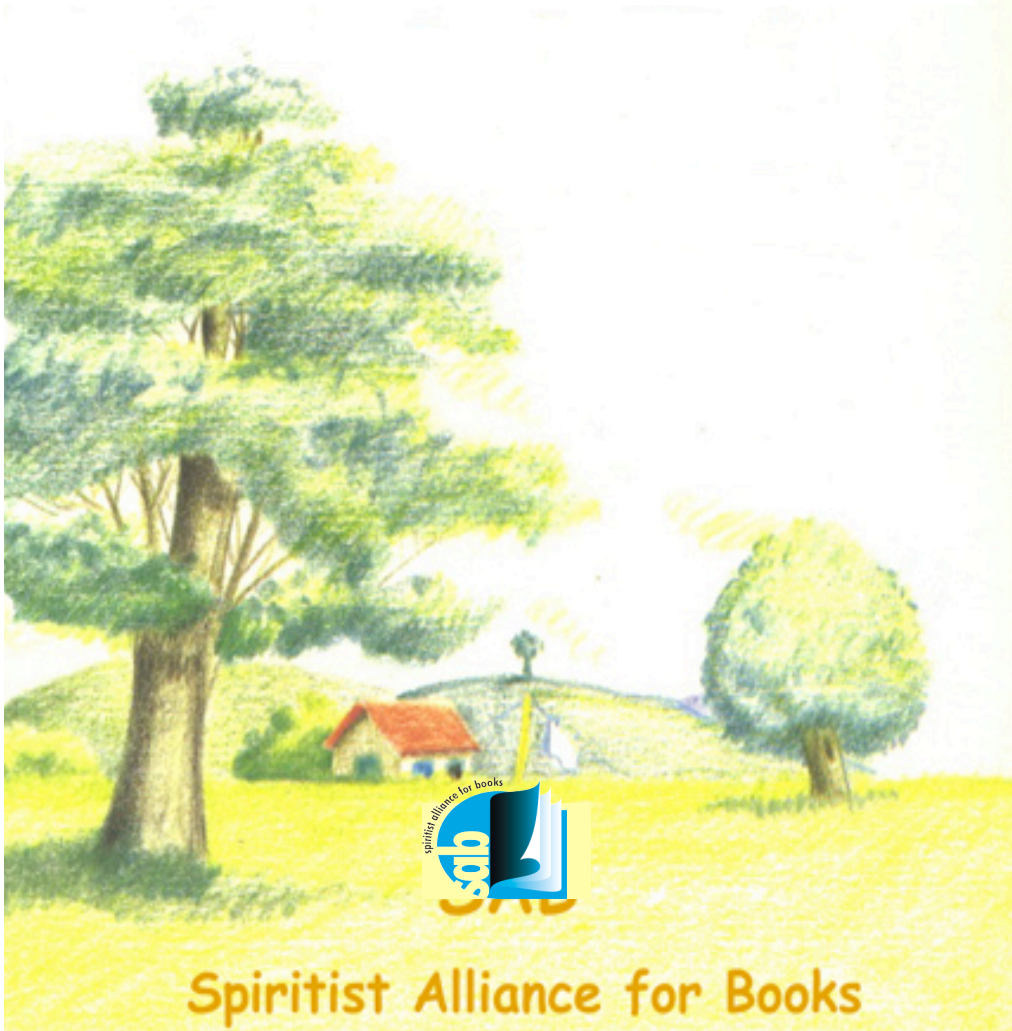


Maria Ida Bachega Bolçone

# Lessons for Life



# LESSONS FOR LIFE

Lessons of my Childhood

**MARIA IDA BACHEGA BOLÇONE**

**Translated by:**

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## **Lessons of Life**

How this book was born.

It all started eight years ago, with the radio program “the Spiritist Life” in Sertãozinho (in the state of São Paulo).

The program had a duration of half an hour, and different people were responsible for the different sections that the program was divided into. Maria Ida was responsible for the section “Gospel Teaching to Children.”

Initially, she narrated during her spot every lesson of the book “And for the Remainder of Our Lives” by Wallace Leal V. Rodrigues, edited by O Clarim.

Everybody liked it. The most interesting part being that despite pleasing the children, the parents were the most touched by it.

As she finished the last few lessons of Wallace’s book, Maria Ida felt very excited about the production of new lessons. And so she began the work...

As she wrote, she dove profoundly into her childhood: grandma’s house, the smell of the wet backyard after the rain, the taste of the fruits obtained from the trees, and the singing of the pigeons by the sunset.

Knowing the children’s universe, being a Science teacher and with her own experiences as a mother, it was easy for her to choose the themes that would continue to fill the hearts of parents and children.

As she finished narrating her stories, the listeners would not tire of calling the studio in admiration: “Can I have a copy,” “Which book is this story in?” “I want to use this lesson in our Gospel at Home ...”

And here it is, my friendly reader. This book, written with the heart, is a touch of love.

In this year, where us spiritists are engaged in the campaign

“Living in Family - Tighten further this Tie,” we now have one more collaboration so that we couples, parents, kids, and family, can have a more intense, harmonious and happy coexistence in the home.

**Kennedy Gomes Martins**

Sertãozinho (SP), August 1994.



# The Seeds

I was a very selfish child. I did not like to share anything with anyone. When I received candies or chocolates, I would eat as many as I wanted, and then I hide the remaining candy in my drawer.

I usually forgot that I had hidden the candies there and, a few days later, upon finding them, they would have already spoiled.

My mother would always tell me not to act this way; however, I did not pay attention to her.

One day, when my grandmother was putting my clothes away in the drawer, she found the drawer full of ants. They were indulging in my candy.

My grandmother, who was aware of my bad habit, didn't get upset with me. After she finished putting the clothes away in the drawer she said to me:

"I need you to help me in the vegetable garden. Come with me, but first, go to the kitchen cabinet and bring the pumpkin seeds."

I obeyed her promptly, and we both went to the vegetable garden. Besides having beautiful fresh vegetables, the soil in two areas was ready for planting.

My grandmother said:

"You are now going to help me sow the pumpkin seeds and take good care of them."

I did that with satisfaction.

At sunset, almost every day, my grandmother and I would go out to take care of the small pumpkin plants, which were growing steadily.

One day, to my surprise, I found the pumpkin plants full of beautiful yellow flowers, some of them even displaying small tender pumpkins.

I was so amazed by the magnificent gift that nature was

freely giving us that I could not hide my great joy and satisfaction. I talked about everything that it represented to me.

My grandmother listened to me attentively and observed my euphoria with a smile.

It was then that she put her hands on my shoulder and said:

"My granddaughter, have you ever thought what would have become of the seeds if they had been forgotten in the cabinet? They would have spoiled and they would not have afforded us this great satisfaction."

\* \* \*

I immediately remembered my drawer and the spoiled candies and blushed in shame. If I had shared the candies with my brothers, they too would have been happy.

This lesson registered deeply in my mind. Whenever I desire to hold on to anything that I do not need, I recall the seeds and before anything spoils, I give them to others, so that they can also participate in my enjoyment.

I also learned that sharing what we have makes us happier, because we are bringing even more happiness to others. If others are happier, the world becomes a better place.



## The Vase

Life in our home had always been peaceful and pleasant. We had never experienced serious problems relating to illnesses, but rather, just a few minor passing colds or small bruises caused by our games and play.

However, I observed people experiencing severe suffering. I had many questions in my mind in this regard and I wanted to discuss them with my mother.

She was darning some buttons on a shirt when I entered the room. I asked her:

“You know mom, I have been thinking about Lucy a lot lately. She was born with that problem in her leg. She has gone through so much surgery and has spent such long periods of time in bed, without being able to play outside. Why wasn’t she born perfect just like I was? Isn’t this unfair?”

My mother placed the shirt on the table, took me by the hand, and asked me to follow her to the porch, where she kept some of her plants.

“Take a look at this plant in the vase. It grew up in a dark place and received very little sunlight,” replied my mother. Notice how its stem is thin and long and can be broken easily. Its leaves are tiny and yellowish. It’s a very fragile plant because it hasn’t received enough sunlight.

“Now, come and look at this other vase whose plant has been receiving light from all sides. How does it appear to you?”

“Oh mom, it’s the most beautiful one among all of them! Its stem is strong and resistant and the leaves are green and luxuriant.”

“You know my daughter, each seed brings within it everything that the plant will turn out to be. When its stem

comes out of the ground, it starts showing what type of plant it will become. The sun makes it strong and the lack of light makes it fragile.

“The same occurs to all of us: When we are born, we bring within each one of us everything we have done in previous lives. It could be that in one of these previous existences, we may have misused everything that God gave us. We may have caused harm to others and because of that our own conscience is harmed.

“We know that the Divine Justice is perfect. God, in His infinite mercy, permits the wound in our conscience to be healed. Suffering is one of the medicines used for this cure. Be aware that suffering is a blessing in a way. It is the light that provides strength to the human being, just like the sunlight gives strength to the plant.

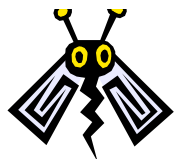
“The reason for Lucy’s suffering is not found in her current life, but rather in former lives, as she was born with a leg handicap. Her suffering is the light she has been receiving to assist in her spiritual growth and heal the wound in her soul. It’s up to us to help her, by comforting her and by giving her lots of love. In this manner, she will feel encouraged to withstand this difficult test. We, in the meantime, can practice the sublime lesson of charity that Jesus taught us.”

\* \* \*

I was satisfied with my mother’s explanation.

God is not unfair.

Each one of us is responsible for everything we do and the consequence of all the good or evil that we do will come back to us.



## The Bug

When I was a child I was very vain and loved to show off. I used to think that everything that I had was better than that of anyone else and always felt superior to my friends. My ideas were more important and I didn't care to listen to what other people had to say. When I went to a party, I liked to receive all the attention to my new dress or to some accessory that I was wearing.

As time went by, my friends grew apart and would rarely come to my home or invite me over to play with them.

At that same time, a girl named Julia moved near us. We became friends. At first, she was very friendly, but soon after she started to grow aloof just as my other friends.

One day grandfather overheard my phone conversation with her. He noticed how I insisted that Julia come out to play with me. However, she excused herself, and said that she couldn't come to my home. When I had hung up, I started to cry.

My grandfather, noticing how sad I was, hugged me and invited me to take a walk with him. We departed as I wiped my tears.

We went to the backyard and walked towards the vegetable garden which grandfather took good care of. He liked observing nature. He could spend hours upon hours caring for his plants and observing the little bugs that lived among them.

I noticed that many of those little bugs, although they were tiny, were beautiful.

I was listening to my grandfather's comments when I noticed a very different bug in one of the vegetables. It was the most beautiful of all. It was shiny and very colorful, with red, yellow and black spots.

I called out: "Look grandpa! How beautiful this one is!" But as I approached the bug, I sensed a distasteful odor. I put

my hands on my nose and moved away.

Grandpa came closer, looked at the bug and explained:

"This is indeed a beautiful bug. Its beauty certainly attracts attention, but its smell is so bad that we move quickly away from it. There are some people who are similar to this bug: they care for their outer beauty, but are not concerned about their inner qualities. When we see them, we are attracted to their outer beauty, but as we approach them, their arrogance and snobbishness simply move us away from them."

I immediately recalled all my former friends and realized the reason that they were no longer close to me.

"Grandpa, what should I do in order to have my friends back again?"

"You should try to beautify your soul, especially by wearing the perfume of humility."

\* \* \*

From that day forward, I did my best not to belittle or dislike people. I started to listen to what they had to say and to respect their ideas. As the years went by, I became aware that good humble people radiate such a pleasant energy that other people simply are attracted to them, just like a magnet. They gather more and more friends that are attracted to them by their vibration of kindness.





## The Two Stones

During my childhood I lived in a house that had a huge backyard, with trees and lots of space, where my brothers and other children would spend many hours playing.

Often these games would turn into fights. I used to have many arguments with my brother Paul because he was always provoking me. When I became mad, I would break everything that belonged to him. Our fights always ended in tears, and my mother would have to stop her household work to intercede. In spite of her recommendations, new situations would usually arise and new fights would start.

One day during one of our quarrels, I was very upset with his annoyances. When my mother arrived, I started to complain about Paul's presence in our home. I didn't like Paul being my brother. I wished that he no longer lived with us, as I could not stand his aggressiveness any further. He also spoke up and accused me with all types of things.

My mother waited until we had calmed down and asked us to sit on a bench under a fruit tree. She got two stones and asked us to touch them, calling our attention to the sharp points and roughness of their surface. Then she asked us:

"Do you have any suggestions as to how to turn them into smooth and shiny stones?"

At that moment I couldn't think of anything.

She started to rub one against the other and small particles began to fall off.

A little while later the stones started to turn into a rounded shape and becoming smoother.

My mother said:

"If I keep rubbing one against the other, the friction will cause the stones to have a smooth, shiny surface. We can compare these two stones with the relationships between human beings. God put people together in the same family so that by living together day after day, with each one's flaws,

we could polish them away. As a result, the beauty we possess inside us would come out. In order to obtain that, the particles of pride, selfishness and resentment would be eliminated, until the spark of comprehension, forgiveness and tolerance comes alive. I would like both of you to think about this before starting any further arguments."

We were both deeply affected and moved by this teaching.

\* \* \*

From that day forward, we became more aware of our attitudes, and tried to resolve our differences calmly. I took this teaching deep hearted. It was of utmost importance in assisting me to accept the people that I had to live with.

I learned about tolerance and comprehension in relation to others and that the faults of others helps us to learn to live harmoniously and to make us happier, as peace and love continues to grow within all of us.





# The Rain

Since childhood, I have always been searching for the answers to the questions that I had about the world and life. One of the most difficult things to understand and to accept was death. I had met many desperate orphans and various parents who were devastated by the pain of losing a beloved child.

My grandfather had always been a good friend to me. He was someone I could talk to and from whom I received advice during the difficulties of my childhood.

One day I came to him and explained how dreadful the idea of death was to me. I told him that I felt anguish just by thinking that someone in my family could die.

It was a rainy day.

Grandpa took my hand and led me to the window.

“Do you see this falling rain? Where does it come from?”

“It comes from the clouds,” I replied.

“Yes, but how did the water wind up over there, in the cloud?” he asked me.

I must confess that at that moment I didn’t have the answer.

Then grandfather asked me to touch the raindrops. He turned my back to the window and told me to keep my arms outstretched. A few minutes later my hands were dry.

“Where did the water that was on your hand go?” he asked.

“It disappeared,” I said.

“You see, the water didn’t disappear. Small particles of water left your hands and your eyes were not able to visualize them. The water turned into steam, which is now in the air, but invisible to us.

“The water from rivers, oceans, and the clothing that is drying out in the sun, all turns into steam and rise through the air in order to once again become clouds, and

subsequently will again fall as rain, renovating nature.”

“In our existence, something similar to that also occurs. We are immortal spirits, created by God and who will never really die. However, we live in different planes so that eventually we can reach a measure of perfection. That is to say, we need to be born in the material world in order to progress and evolve spiritually. Life on this planet is very limited, after a certain time we will return to the spiritual world. We refer to it as the death of the physical body, but not the death of the spiritual body, since the spirit is immortal. We, as intelligent spiritual beings, after death, start to live an invisible life, so to speak, to the vast majority of the incarnates, but that is our true world.

“All this is God's work, who wished that our evolvement happens in this manner. We spend a certain amount of time in the spiritual world, our eternal world, and then we return in the form of a new body, being reborn on Earth or in another material world, to learn new lessons and to undergo new experiences which are fundamental to our spiritual and moral evolvement.

Just as the water doesn’t disappear and becomes invisible in the form of steam and re-appears as rain, we too become invisible upon our death, but we continue to live in another form of life and we will again return and be reborn as many times as is necessary for our growth in intelligence and love.”

\* \* \*

This explanation freed me from the fear of death. I am no longer disturbed when people I personally know die, as I am now sure that they are simply following the natural course of existence.

I am thankful to God for creating me as an intelligent being and for giving me these infinite opportunities to comprehend the great wisdom that controls our universe.



## The Brush

Once we were neighbors to a family very different from us. They had arrived from a different city, had lived here for a few months and then moved again. The couple's three children were about our age. My brothers and I became friends with them and we soon started playing together.

We noticed their parents seemed uninterested in what their children did. They skipped classes at school many times without a serious reason. Usually, they would play on the street endlessly, and no one would call them back home. They did whatever they pleased.

Since our parents were very strict with time allowed for play, our commitments and attitudes, we also wanted to enjoy more freedom. We thought it was better to live like the other youngsters did.

One day, as we played in the yard, my mother reminded us that it was time to do our homework. We protested. As we complained, my mother gestured in a tolerant and patient way, asking us to follow her to where she was washing our clothes.

There we saw many soaked clothes. Mom picked up a very dirty pair of pants and started to brush it.

"You see this?" she said. "As I brush these pants, the dirt on them comes out, and soon the pants will be clean. If I don't use the brush, it would be very difficult to get them clean.

"Discipline has a similar function in our education. We are all human beings still full of flaws from our past lives. We have a tendency to become accustomed and to continue repeating the same bad habits and mistakes from our previous lives.

"The home is God's blessing for our spiritual improvement. When there is responsibility, understanding and harmony between parents, the children will be guided by

the strong hands of discipline, good example and love. They will learn how to better guide themselves, and feel more secure.

"Discipline, is similar to this brush. It removes our inferior tendencies, making our moral qualities stand out. The same way the brush cleans the pants, discipline will improve the spirit."

\* \* \*

From that day forward, I thanked God for the manner in which we were brought up by our parents and I felt sorry for my three friends, because their parents weren't as responsible as ours.

As the years passed by, my concept on discipline grew stronger.

Our thoughts command our words and our actions. To discipline our thoughts emphasizing goodwill should be our biggest aim in life. If we only have good thoughts, only positive things will come out of us, benefiting all those around us.

There is no greater joy than the one of contributing to the happiness of others.



# The Lemonade

It was a hot summer afternoon. I had already finished my homework when Mary, Christine and Marcia arrived.

They had come to my home to play a very interesting game.

During the game we had to repeatedly call Marcia whenever it was her turn to play, as she was slightly absent-minded. I was getting upset and started to be rude to her.

When the game was over, grandma asked me to pick some lemons off the lemon tree. At that time lemonade would do us good. As we approached the lemon tree in the backyard, I remarked about the pleasant fragrance coming from the tree, as we picked up the fallen lemons from the ground.

Grandma added:

“Lemon, besides being used as a component to many perfumed products, is also a good source of vitamin C, which is very necessary to our body.”

We returned to the kitchen talking about the wisdom of God regarding the work of Creation.

Grandma cut the lemons in half and started to squeeze them to remove their juice. She then got a spoonful of the juice and asked me if I could taste it.

“Of course not,” I answered, “lemon is very strong, too sour.”

Very gently she put the juice in a pitcher adding water and sugar.

“Now try it!” she said.

I sipped it slowly. It was delicious!

We filled the glasses and before taking them to my friends, grandma caressed my hair and said:

“Our words can also be as sour as the lemon. They strike people, causing an unpleasant sensation. Nevertheless, if

everything that we need to say could be dissolved in the water of charity and sweetened with gentleness, people would feel more love and respect, thereby obtaining a pleasant impression of us.”

I immediately remembered how rude I had been to Marcia, and I also recalled about some other incidents where I had had a similar improper behavior.

I hugged grandma and thanked her for helping me to see my flaws and for her kind and wise way of teaching me so many important lessons about life.

We returned to the living room where I enjoyed the lemonade with my friends.

\* \* \*

From that day forward, I was more careful in choosing my words, I tried to speak to people in the same way that I would like them to speak to me: with kindness, gentleness and love.



# The Keys

The clock struck 8 p.m.

My mother had asked us to put our toys away as soon as we had finished playing with them and to get ready for bed. I protested immediately and answered her a little aggressively. The game had become very interesting, and I did not feel sleepy at all I wished to continue playing a little longer.

My dad noticed the way I treated my mother. It was not the first time I had mistreated someone. My poor behavior was becoming more frequent.

When the game was over, my father discreetly called me over and asked me to sit next to him, in the same room where my two-year old brother was playing with a little house that contained four doors and four keys. He was trying to open each small door, but in order to achieve this he would have to choose the correct key.

My father turned to me and said:

“My son, I would like you to observe the simplicity of this toy. We can call to mind many important lessons along with it. When Fernando chooses a key that does not fit the keyhole, he becomes frustrated, he immediately tries another key. When he does open the small door, he becomes exhilarated with the happiness over his success.

“Our relationship with others is relatively similar: when we speak, our words are accompanied by our inner feelings. They are charged with the energy of our emotions.”

“When we are rude to others, they become aloof and tend to keep their distance, and often, they even feel hurt, sad, and unhappy. We notice that a barrier is created, closing in the doors from both sides.

“However, when we are affable, cordial, and pleasant, and when we project gentleness in our words, people feel good and approach us. It is a door that is opened to a harmonious relationship.”

I deeply understood my father’s teaching. I hugged him, expressing gratitude for his understanding regarding my faults and for his affectionate orientation, which helped me to overcome these flaws in my personality.

I hugged my mother tighter than usual, as if I were asking her not to be sad with me. Her smile demonstrated understanding, and that everything was ok.

Today I realize that the key of the sentiment expressed through our words can open or shut the door of relationships. I am also aware that we can become happier when we use the key of our good sentiments towards others.



## The Apples

Caroline was a black girl. For a few years she had been my friend at school. She was very smart and a very good student. Her biggest difficulty was in dealing with the prejudice of some of our classmates. Caroline was almost never invited to participate in games during the lunch break and few children would speak to her.

One day I saw Caroline crying in one of the halls at school. Weeping, she told me about her sadness. She had heard unkind comments regarding the color of her skin. Her suffering moved me deeply.

When I went home, during lunch, I mentioned to my family what had happened to Caroline and I said that I would like to help her, but I didn't know how to go about it.

My mother got two apples and called our attention to their color: one was red and the other one was green. She took a knife and cut them both in half, and then she asked me:

“How do they look inside?”

“The same,” we answered.

“Very well! In nature there's something called pigmentation, which gives colors to fruits, flowers and other parts of the plants. Pigmentation also gives color to animals as well as to people. The pigmentation that gives color to our skin is called melanin. White people have less melanin and black people have more.

“These two apples look the same from the inside; the only difference they present is in the color of the skin. You, my daughter and Caroline are alike too. You are only different in the color of the skin. That means, you are different on the quantity of melanin.

“That which is happening in your classroom is that the other children are displaying racism, which has existed in the world for a long time.

“I'm sure that your friends act this way towards Caroline because they are simply repeating a prejudiced behavior pattern, without analyzing whether it's correct or not, whether it has basis or not. The children are not aware of Caroline's suffering,” concluded my mother.

I thought about these words intensely and on the following day I tried to inform my classmates about everything my mother had explained to me.

\* \* \*

Little by little, Caroline began to receive invitations to participate in the games. The sad racist barrier began to crumble and everybody became friends. We later found out that she had a beautiful voice and that we enjoyed hearing her sing at our parties.

Years passed by but Caroline's story made me see clearly that prejudice is responsible for the unhappiness of many people and also that there is no logical explanation for its existence. It is necessary to analyze our attitudes and ask ourselves if what we do is really correct, or, if we are only copying and repeating other people's behavior pattern.

I also learned that as we free ourselves from prejudice, fraternal feelings will grow within us, and that we will eventually collaborate more and more in the formation of a big universal family.



## The Coins

Robert, my oldest brother, was very restless and impatient. He was never calm enough to complete the tasks that he had to accomplish. His anxiety interfered with his schoolwork and his relationships with other people. We noticed exactly how that made him suffer, and frequently it caused him great frustration.

After dinner, we sat around the dinner table, discussing the events of the day. Those hours spent around the dining table were always special to us. We felt an immense joy just being there, together, in an atmosphere of friendship.

One night, dad asked Robert to get three glasses and a bottle of water and asked me to get the yellow safe that contained some coins.

We were curious to see what he intended to do.

He filled up the three glasses of water to the rim, opened the safe and asked Robert to start putting the coins into the glasses without allowing the water to overflow.

Rapidly, Robert started adding coin after coin. When he put the fourth coin inside the glass, the water overflowed.

My father got a coin and carefully put it in vertically in the second glass, he let it drop and it sank slowly to the bottom of the glass. He got another coin and carefully put it in vertically; he gently sank it a little bit, and then let it go. He kept doing that, coin after coin, and the water level started to rise until it reached the edge of the glass. When he put the tenth coin in, it appeared as if the water would overflow. Nevertheless, with ability and without agitating the surface of the water, he managed to add more coins. Incredibly enough, the water only overflowed, after he had added the sixteenth coin.

We were surprised by his ability.

He smiled, caressed Robert's head, and said tenderly:

“My son, you as well are able to accomplish this. It only

takes overcoming your impulse to do things so rapidly. When we overcome our anxiety and inner restlessness, we are able to accomplish many more things. With calm and serenity, our productivity is much greater. If you want to practice, you can even add more coins. Let's try?”

Robert sighed deeply, he tried to control his inner-self and imitating dad's movement, he was able to add ten coins, without overflowing the glass. We clapped our hands at his success.

\* \* \*

That casual game had been a very important lesson for all of us. We noticed Robert's effort to try to control his anxiety, and by doing so he was able to overcome many difficulties in later life.

This lesson also taught us, how important it is to control what is not good inside of us, and everything that damages us.

My father not only had the ability with coins, but also with much wisdom, gave us a great teaching that prepared us for the future.





# The Dominoes

A few years ago, when my brothers and I were young, we spent a summer vacationing at the beach. The days were simply gorgeous! Lots of sun, swimming and playing in the sand. But, to our sadness, one day it started to rain. We then had to play inside the house with the toys that had been put aside, such as: checkers, dominoes, little toy cars, dolls and others.

Anne, unintentionally, stepped on Carl's foot. He had a tendency to become irritable with ease. He pushed Anne away forcefully. She wept nervously, pulled on the tablecloth and Alfred's little car crumbled to the floor into several pieces. When Alfred entered the room and saw his little broken car, he started to argue with Gabriel, thinking that he was to blame. Gabriel tried to defend himself against Alfred's verbal attack, when suddenly, in an abrupt movement hit Andrea with his elbow.

There we had it!! Tremendous confusion in just a few moments!

Uncle Louis, who was a prudent and calm person, realizing the source of the problem, tried to calm all the children.

Once everybody became calm, he asked us to sit around the table. He got some dominoes and patiently started to stand them upright, at a small distance from each other. He placed the pieces in such a way that it appeared as a drawing with many curves.

When he finished, he asked Carl to push the first piece gently. As it fell, the first domino pushed the second one down, which in turn, pushed the third down, this way each piece started to fall pushing the next one.

Nevertheless, in one of the curves, one of the pieces did not hit the following one and the dominoes stopped falling. We wanted to see all the pieces fall. The spectacle would then have been complete; however, uncle Louis called us to

attention by saying:

"Look kids! Only a little push was needed to cause all the pieces to fall down, one by one. Arguments start in the same way: it takes only one person to become irritable toward another, to become affected, and thus upsetting someone else. This way, in a short time, the atmosphere would become one of irritability and everybody would be unhappy. In order for this reaction to stop, it is necessary to act just as the little domino piece which had not been hit by the previous one."

We looked at each other, responding that we had understood the wise lesson. We then returned to play.

\* \* \*

The lesson was very clear, and to this day, I do my best to act just as that little domino which had not been hit by the previous one. When I notice aggressiveness or an offense, I know that the best way to help is to be understanding, to wait for the other person to calm down, and then to discuss the problem.

I learned that it's much better to live in a peaceful happy environment. In order to achieve this, each one of us needs to do his share.





# The Nest

There are instances in our childhood that we will never forget. As time goes by, we realize that they played an important role in our lives.

I remember certain attitudes I used to have because of my lack of patience. As I did my homework or a drawing, for example, if a line was incorrect, I would soon get angry and would throw it away. It gave me a feeling of incapacity. My mother always tried to encourage me to be persistent, but I would wind up giving up when faced with any task that would require patience and dedication.

One morning, as I opened my bedroom window, I saw a hummingbird flying in the garden. Its feathers were blue and green and it was very shiny.

I leaned over the window and kept observing its movements. It would stop in front of a flower, flapping its wings very rapidly, fly down to the ground, pick up a tiny branch and fly up to a pine tree. It would fly down and up, always carrying a little branch in its beak.

Another hummingbird approached the first one and, observing more closely, I noticed that together, they were building a nest.

I called my mom, dad and brothers to witness the beauty of that scene. They were all astonished. In the following days our family discreetly continued to observe the construction of the nest.

One day, at night fall, a strong wind and a powerful thunderstorm surprised us all.

The next morning, we ran out to check on the nest. What a pity! It was laying on the ground.

Soon the sun came up, and the little branches started to dry out. The hummingbird couple started to pick up the little branches flying them to a tree and started to rebuild their nest once again.

A few days later, the nest was ready; it looked like a very deep seashell. Sometimes we could even see the head of the little female hummingbird peeking out of the nest.

She had laid three little eggs.

The first thing I did when I returned from school was to check upon what was occurring with the nest in our garden. We would only peek into the nest when the birds were not present.

On one nice afternoon, what a surprise! The eggs had hatched and the little chicks were out of the eggs. They had their tiny beaks open awaiting the mother hummingbird to feed them.

We were amazed! When my father came home, we broke the news to him. He hugged us and commented:

“Have you ever thought about what would have happened if, on that stormy night, they had given up on the reconstruction of their nest after it had fallen to the ground? How many people, when faced with difficulties give up on their original intentions, leaving behind unfinished the opportunity of accomplishing wonderful things!”

\* \* \*

The wise example presented by those little birds changed my life forever. To this day, when I see a hummingbird, I recall the lesson of perseverance and patience that I have learned, and how I try to reinforce these qualities.

Thanks to a couple of little hummingbirds I have overcome many difficulties in my life.



# The Barrier

It was a nice summer afternoon. We had been fixing our backyard and the contractors were done for the day.

Paul, some other kids from the neighborhood and I were playing in the sand.

My oldest brother Paul was a great companion at games, but he couldn't control his temper if he was contradicted. He accused people unfairly and treated them rudely. Lately, this behavior was becoming more frequent and as a result he was already creating some animosities.

One day, after coming home from work, my father was observing us play in the sand.

We had built a small pond with castles and trees around it. The water flowed through a hose from a faucet.

As our pond was getting fuller with water, we created a small opening, which then allowed the water to flow smoothly, just like a little river. We decided to build a little bridge over our river. Using our imagination we built roads, houses, trees, etc. It was very beautiful!

Suddenly, the dam in the pond broke, causing the water to overflow, destroying everything. We were deeply disappointed and saddened.

My father, who had been observing everything, sat next to us and said:

"We can learn a great lesson from this occurrence. The dam of sand that had held the water could be compared to our will power. There are people with strong will power, who are able to control their inner emotions. They calmly discuss everything they are feeling within themselves. They express their sadness, fears and disappointments. They try to be understood, and have a good relationships with others.

"There are people, on the other hand that easily lose their balance. They have poor control over their emotions. They

speak without thinking and become offensive, hurting those around them."

We continued talking for a long time about the dam and the comparison illustrated by my father.

As nightfall neared and our friends went home, Paul approached me and said:

"You know sister, I had never stopped to consider that most of the things I said could be as destructive as the broken dam. I'm going to try to control myself and my words, so that everything that comes out of my mouth can be harmonious and calming just as the little river was."

My mother came to the door and called us inside; it was time to take a bath. There was a delicious aroma coming from the kitchen. Dinner was almost ready.

\* \* \*

I felt happy as I entered the house remembering the importance of strengthening my will. Would it be weak or would it be as strong as the dam?



# The Beehive

We don't usually recognize that not everything is correct. That's what used to happen to me for a long time during my own lifetime.

I would never allow my mother to give away the toys or clothes that I no longer needed. As a result my closet was packed with items that no longer fit me. When my mother insisted that I should give those items away because they could be useful to some other children, I would react forcefully and not permit her to do so.

My father, who was an agronomist, used to give technical support to many farms. One day, he invited me to go along with him. He was going to check up on some orange trees at a large orange grove.

When we arrived, we were greeted by a delightful scent of orange flowers. There were no oranges on the trees, but the trees were full of flowers. The bees were flying from flower to flower, collecting nectar and pollen (that yellowish powder taken from the flowers).

"That's how flowers are fertilized," explained my father, "and in time they develop into fruit."

The little feet of the bees were full of pollen, which they would take to the beehive where they make honey and wax.

My father pointed out the beehive, and from a distance I noticed the intense activity of thousands of bees. He told me that at the same time they were useful in the production of fruit, they were also procreating, thereby making the beehive grow larger, and filling the honey-comb with honey.

Suddenly a question came to my mind, and I asked him:

"What happens when the beehive gets full of honeycombs and honey?"

"They create a new queen, abandon the prior beehive and go somewhere else to start a new hive," said my father.

"And what do they do with all these honey-combs they

have worked on so hard to create?" I asked.

"They are no longer of use to them, but they are very useful to us. You already know the importance of everything that the bees produce," said my father.

My father looked at me and continued asking:

"Have you observed that the bees do not have an attachment to their beehive?"

I immediately recalled my own closet full of things that I no longer needed. It was time for me to allow other people to take advantage of so many useful things that were becoming old to me.

I told my him what I was thinking. He hugged me and said something that I will never forget:

"My daughter, nothing really belongs to us! God lends us everything so that we can grow in knowledge and in love. It is necessary that we learn to use our personal property with intelligence, wisdom and detachment. The personal attachment to property makes us selfish, and selfishness make us unhappy. When we give what we have to others, we lessen their sufferings. Never forget that! There is no greater joy than making other people happy!



# The Water Wheel

I lived in a big city during most of my childhood. As a result, spending a few days in the countryside was a great pleasure to me.

We loved the freedom that nature offered us. We could run, play and explore extensively all the wonders of the world.

When we visited the farm, our family resided in a house where the household tasks were divided among all. Each one would take part in the chores so that we did not overload our mother with work.

None of us liked to waste time performing those tasks and there was always a lot of complaining. One would protest that he had already done the same task the day before. The other would complain that it wasn't his turn.

Those complaints occurred frequently, which contrasted with the calm atmosphere that nature offered us. It also disturbed the harmonious vibration of the house.

One afternoon, when we were very tired of playing outside, we approached mom, who was sitting by the creek reading a book. We sat next to her and observed an old water wheel. The water fell from a hill into the wood boxes of the water wheel, as they filled up and became heavier the wheel would turn over.

The rotating movement was transmitted to some mechanical equipment, which would force the water to flow into a reservoir at the top of the water wheel. We noticed the smooth sound made by the falling water. The water droplets that reflected the sunlight were shining just like little crystal balls.

My sister Julia, a very sensitive girl, said:

"Mom, look how beautiful all of this is! The water is accomplishing a very important task, and at the same time, is providing us with a pleasant and beautiful sight. It's so good

to be sitting here, listening to its humming sound and observing its harmonious movement!"

"Children," added our mother, "Nature reveals to us the great wisdom of God. It affords us so many lessons! We should be sensitive enough to notice and to learn.

"Within our home, we can also live this lesson of beauty and harmony. If each one of us does his share of the tasks with love and responsibility, everybody will feel much better, and the home atmosphere will be more pleasant.

"Notice how the water offers itself for the work and continues on without asking for anything. True charity is also like this: do your best to others joyously, without expecting any reward."

We felt peace increasing inside of us. We hugged our mother and apologized for our indifference. She seemed to be praying when she smiled and calmly continued:

"Lord, in the presence of so much harmony and peace, allow us to be more receptive so that we are able to feel Your presence more and more during every moment of our lives. May we always have the opportunity to be useful and collaborate in the work of goodness."

The sun was now setting. We returned home very happy for those moments. Within each one of us, there was a strong resolution to do the very best we could at whatever task we had to accomplish.



# The Flight of the Butterfly

Something happened in my childhood that affected me deeply. My grandmother became very ill, and it turned out to be a terminal disease, which eventually took her life.

We were extremely shaken up. My brothers and I could barely withstand how much we missed her. Our grandmother had been a very affectionate and active participant in our lives; I cried incessantly and desperately asked that she be able to return to us. Our separation hurt me incredibly.

Mom and dad tried every possible way to console me and help me to accept what had occurred.

A Sunday stroll helped us to better understand the reality of losing a loved one.

We visited a small farm where we enjoyed swimming and playing. In the afternoon we visited a forest that was in the neighborhood. A very colorful caterpillar that was eating leaves from a bush attracted our attention.

Dad said the caterpillar was about to reach the phase when it becomes a cocoon and later transforms into a butterfly.

“What would the butterfly look like?” I asked.

“In order for us to know, we would have to follow its development carefully. I have an idea. Let’s place it in a container, add some leaves and stems and take it home,” said dad.

And that’s what we did.

The next day, the caterpillar started weaving a silky thread, attaching itself to a stem, and became motionless. A week later, we noticed some movement in the cocoon. The skin had broken apart and something started to come out of it. It was a butterfly breaking free. At first, its wings were bent. Soon, the wings started to stretch out and to expand, displaying beautiful yellow, red and black colors.

The caterpillar, now a butterfly, stood motionless for a few minutes then it started to fly. As the container was closed the butterfly hit its side and started to struggle.

We felt sorry to see the butterfly struggling in its desire to fly away, but at the same time we wanted to keep it. We discussed what would be the best thing to do. Should we keep it or set it free?

We concluded that the butterfly had attained a new way of life and that we didn’t have the right to withhold it from flying away.

Dad, who was listening to our conversation, said:

“The butterfly’s case can be compared to a very important facet of our lives. You already know that when the body loses its vitality, the perispirit frees itself and starts to live a different phase of life in the spiritual world. Our soul leaves the worn out body, just as the butterfly did when it shed the cocoon cover and flew away.

“You thought it was unfair to keep the butterfly in captivity, didn’t you? When a loved one returns to the spiritual world, due to the death of the physical body, we should not hold them back through our desperation, our rebellion or our non-acceptance. We are all linked through a chain of affection, the spirit of the deceased one can suffer because of our inconformity, thereby making it difficult for this spirit to control his emotions and to re-adapt to the new life.

“By freeing the butterfly, we will allow it to return and to fly around us again. In a similar way, Jesus also allows our loved ones, to return to visit us and to communicate with us through our dreams or through a medium.

“In order for this to occur, we need God’s approval, but in addition, our emotions must be under control, well balanced and in harmony. We will be able to achieve this balance through prayer and also through the consolation of the Doctrine of the Spirits, which affords us the understanding of life in the spiritual world.

“Death does not constitute the end, but rather the beginning of a new phase of life.”

\* \* \*

From that day forward, it became clear to my brothers and me, that our grandmother had not abandoned us. In fact, we realized that she needed to receive our good vibrations and understanding of her new existence.

In our prayers, we tried to transmit our love and serenity to her and a content feeling has returned to our hearts.





## Wastefulness

I was brought up with all sorts of comfort. We weren't exactly a wealthy family, but we didn't lack anything. Nevertheless, I had a bad habit. During meals I would fill my plate over, and a good amount of food would wind up in the garbage. My mom always reminded me to help myself to the amount of food that I felt I could consume; however, I never paid too much attention to her requests.

Every morning my grandfather would go out for a walk. Sometimes I would go along with him. One day he told me that we would be going to a very special place.

We left town and walked on a road that was not very busy. We noticed that the grass was wet from the morning dew; the pure air coming from the woods produced a sensation of well being and lightheartedness in us.

Suddenly, we felt a strong unpleasant odor, and soon thereafter some children's voices were heard.

"What is that smell?" I asked.

"Come and take a look," said grandfather.

We walked for a while and came upon a lot completely covered with the city's garbage. There we notice a woman, whose face displayed weariness and suffering. We also witnessed some children in rags searching through the garbage and setting aside whatever seemed to be of use and importance to them.

That scene shook us. My grandfather noticing my reaction, said:

"You have the great fortune of coming from a happy and comfortable home. However, we cannot overlook those people who do not even have the bare necessities of life for survival.

"God created nature perfectly. Earth's resources are sufficient to feed and supply all of its inhabitants with

dignity. But the amount of food wasted is excessive! There is wasting not only of food, but also of some other resources that our planet offers. If we truly love each other, we should utilize everything that we have for the benefit of all. In this manner there would be no one living under the condition we are now witnessing.

"Our own personal garbage, if properly recycled, could be re-utilized intelligently. If we were conscientious enough to realize that everything God offers us should be used harmoniously with nature, we would never destroy His creation by polluting the planet."

My grandfather's words were very clear to me. He continued:

"The selfishness that exists within all of us, does not allow us to see the solution. Humanity has been facing great problems but the solution to these problems lies within each of us. If each one of us did his share in the construction of the general well being, the world would achieve PEACE much sooner, and each one of us would, thereby, have his rights guaranteed."

At that moment, I realized that the big changes in the world should commence from within us, with small efforts. On that very day, I stopped wasting food. I commenced studying more about nature and the magnificence of God's work. I started to understand nature better and to use everything it offers us with intelligence and love for the benefit of all creatures. With this knowledge, the concept and understanding of the word fraternity broadened within me.



## The Door Game

For a time, in our youth, my brother Paul and I were indifferent and undisciplined regarding our homework.

When we returned to our home from school, we would have lunch and usually meet up with a group of children from the neighborhood to play. We had agreed with our mother and father at a specific time to commence doing our homework; however, we usually arrived late and would conclude only a portion of our homework. Therefore, we started to get poor grades. Our slow progress in the school work and the worry and sadness it caused my parents made us feel bad.

It was about that time that our Aunt Martha came to visit us, bringing us a gift.

It was a very interesting game! It was a big box not too deep, covered with a clear plastic lid, containing obstacle courses. These obstacles consisted of small doors. In one of the corners of the box there was a small stick attached to a spring that propelled a small ball to hit the doors, open them and go through. These doors were in different sizes; some were wider, others narrower.

Whoever was able to get the ball through the doors more times scored the greatest number of points.

My dad came to view our new toy and noticed the difficulty we were having while aiming and hitting the narrow door. When the game was over he said:

“Kids, this game reminds me that the gateway to bad habits and irresponsibility is larger and much easier to enter. Nevertheless, it’s much more difficult to fulfill our obligations and practice the Christian virtues than to make this little ball go through the narrow door.

“I have noticed your satisfaction when the ball goes through the narrow door. The same occurs in our lives. We

feel great joy when we are able to overcome our difficulties through our own efforts. Most of the time, the road to irresponsibility is sad and causes us to taste bitter defeat.”

My father’s words caused us to recall our homework and we were able to recognize how easily we were crossing through the large door of irresponsibility.

From that day forward, we changed the direction of our lives. We put more emphasis into fulfilling our obligations. Every time we were asked to do something, we would analyze it to see if it would be good or bad. If we perceived that it was wrong we did our best to avoid going through the large door once again.

With this knowledge we realized that we could build our own future through our accomplishments in this present life.





# The Sweetsop

I truly enjoy my school and everything I have learned there. Mrs. Nicole, my teacher, has told us that there is a right time for everything. When she was going to teach us a new lesson, she would ask us to concentrate on her explanation, because our joking and idle conversation at the wrong time would be disturbing to everyone.

Lately, one of my classmates has not been able to follow Mrs. Nicole's advice, and his joking has often distracted the other students.

One day we were paying close attention to the explanation of a new math problem when this colleague, using a straw, blew a small piece of rubber band striking Mary. It caught her by surprise and by gesturing abruptly, she distracted the other children who broke into laughter.

Mrs. Nicole stopped the explanation and waited until the class had become silent again. She then opened her purse, picked out something from within, and showed it to us, and inquired:

"Who is able to tell me what fruit this is?"

Almost everyone raised his hand, but Rita was the one who answered:

"That fruit is called a sweetsop. It contains many round black seeds as well as a very delicious white pulp."

Mrs. Nicole cut the fruit with her hands and called our attention to the fact that each seed, along with the white pulp surrounding it, occupied its place neatly inside the fruit. She explained that the white substance around each seed does not mix with the white substance of another seed, even though they are side by side.

She continued the explanation by saying:

"Look children, notice that the layer covers the seeds forming a unique whole fruit within the fruit. Nevertheless, inside the fruit, each seed loosens easily, because each seed

has its own individual space. We can compare our classroom to this fruit. We are united because we have many friends and we are interested in learning many things together. However, each one of us is a unique person who should be respected. The freedom each one of you has to enjoy your play ends when your classmate's right to learn commences.

"You were all paying attention to the explanation, and in just a few more minutes, you would have learned to solve the math problem. Joking at an inappropriate moment infringes upon the rights of others to learn. I am fully aware there was no intention to cause any harm. Many times, we do not realize the consequences of our actions. This way, before doing something, let us ask ourselves if what we intend to do, will or will not interfere with something or harm someone.

Mrs. Nicole's words were not reprimanding or rude; on the contrary, they reflected the convictions of someone who loves to teach.

I spent time thinking about what I had just learned and this made me recall the teaching of Jesus, when he said: "Do unto others what you would have them do unto you." A new concept of freedom came to my mind:

**I SHOULD ONLY ACT OR DO SOMETHING WHEN  
IT WILL NOT CAUSE ANY HARM TO ANOTHER  
PERSON.**



# The Soccer Ball

I used to be a very stubborn boy. I always insisted on doing what I was not supposed to do, and then I did not want to be held responsible for my misbehavior.

My mom, in addition to spending most of her days caring for the household activities and the children, had just decided to take up pottery painting. She became enthusiastic over each piece that she painted. It was exactly around the time of my birthday, and my father had given me a soccer ball. I liked the gift very much, particularly because it had my favorite team's emblem painted on it.

One afternoon, my mom and I were in the terrace. I was playing with my ball and she was painting a vase. In order for her to complete her work, she had to wait for the first layer of paint to dry out. She placed the vase on a table and asked me to continue playing in another area.

She left the terrace and went to prepare some snacks for us.

Stubborn as I was, I continued to play with the ball in the same area, imagining that I would be able to control the ball's movements completely. But, the ball hit the top of the table, rolled over in the direction of the vase and touched it lightly. Luckily, the vase did not break.

When I picked the ball up, I noticed that it had a paint mark on it, right next to the team's emblem. I rushed to get the paint washed away so that it would not stain the ball. Although I had washed the ball as hard as I could, I was not able to remove the stain.

When my mom saw the vase, she noticed that the paint was lighter in the area where the ball had touched the vase. She asked me if I had done it. I immediately replied "no," and added that perhaps the kitten had done it.

My lie did not surprise my mom. She sat on one side of the table and asked me to sit on the opposite side. She picked

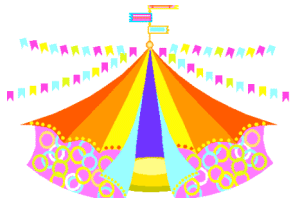
up the ball and while holding it, asked me:

"Can you see your team's emblem?"

"No," I answered, as it was on the other side of the ball.

"Look son, even though you are not able to see it, the emblem is engraved on the ball. Our conscience is similar to this. Everything we do is engraved in our mind, even though other people cannot see it. When our thoughts and actions are good, we engrave in our mind beautiful and harmonious acts, like this emblem. When we act incorrectly, our conscience also registers them, just like this paint spot over here. After we act inappropriately, it is difficult to erase it from our mind. It is necessary to do many good deeds in order to start erasing these spots from our mind.

This lesson also became engraved in my mind. From that day forward, I started to think before I acted and analyzed whether it would be a good or a bad action. I also began to notice the many happy people I met along the way. They were the ones who occupied their time doing positive things, thereby creating a clean, harmonious and peaceful conscience.



# The Circus

There was a time during my childhood that I did not want to attend school. I spent hours with a book in front of me, and trying to solve a math problem was like torture to me.

I always managed to avoid completing my homework. As a result of my indifference my parents were constantly worrying about me. They tried to pass onto me the importance of studying as a preparation for my future, but I felt that it was absolutely unimportant.

I thought that it would be much better if my life could only involve playing with my toys and having fun.

One day a circus came to town. The tents were set up very close to my home. My friends and I were very excited. We spent hour after hour observing the workers setting up the tents.

Finally, opening night had arrived! Three brothers on the trapeze, the clowns, the jugglers, the acrobats and the animals were an amazing sight for us. Nevertheless, the one that caught my attention the most was a young man riding a bicycle. He would disassemble it while still doing incredible things. At the end, he was riding the bicycle on only one wheel. The public applauded his ability with a standing ovation.

“How nice the lives of those artists must be!” I thought. “Everything seemed like so much fun, so much happiness!”

The next day, the canvas around the circus was rolled up, allowing us to see the artists while they practiced.

I noticed that the young man who had been riding the bike had spent hours practicing jumps and different movements. When he was through, he was very tired and came to sit next to us. We started to talk to him and asked him many questions. He told us that he was practicing a new act on the one wheel bike and because of that he had to

spend long hours at work and in concentration. In order to keep fit, agile and accurate in his movements, he had to observe great discipline in his daily life along with the required daily physical exercise. It was a tremendous sacrifice, but he wanted to improve his talent more and more each day.

I arrived home thinking over everything that involved around those great artists. Circus life did not occur by the sheer magic of the spectacle that it appeared to be. In order to be able to accomplish those wonderful feats, the artists had to commit themselves to great sacrifice and dedication.

When I returned home, I found my mother busy baking a cake. I looked at her seriously and said:

“I am going to devote myself more to my studies and I will be good at the profession that I choose.”

I saw a glow of happiness on my mother’s face. Today, I am an engineer, and I am thankful for the opportunity that I had of meeting that artist. Besides being able to do incredible feats on one wheel, he was also able to provide us with lessons of love and dedication to work.



## The Drops of Ink

During a summer vacation, we spent a few days at the beach together with my uncles and cousins. We were a total of twelve cheerful people spending time together, having fun and taking part in all the wonders that nature could offer us.

Our relationship was marvelous for the first few days, but little by little arguments started to occur. These arguments caused the ambient to become unpleasant.

My uncle Albert, who constantly participated in the children's games, told us to sit down around the table and asked Paula to bring us four glasses of water. Then, he brought four little bottles containing different colors of ink.

He added a drop of black ink into one of the glasses and asked us to observe what would occur. The ink made waves inside of the glass spreading throughout the glass, and a few minutes later the whole glass of water had turned dark gray.

Next, he added a drop of red ink into a second glass. The ink spread entirely throughout the water. Into the third glass he added blue ink, and into the fourth, he dropped green ink.

We watched the four glasses with their colorful contents, without understanding what was occurring. We looked at uncle Albert seeking an explanation.

He sighed deeply, while making himself more comfortable in the chair. He made a gesture with his fingers pointing to his own head and in a very serious manner, began talking to us:

“Children, our mind commands our lives, our words and our actions. Thoughts always originate in our mind before we pronounce any word or take any action. Thoughts spread all over space in the same manner that the ink blends in the water. Our thoughts, as well as our words and actions, spread and directly affect other people.”

Displaying calm and wisdom, he explained:

“With my free-will I chose the different colors and

dropped them into the water. We as well, choose the thoughts, words and attitudes we wish to express. Just as ink can come in different colors such as black, blue, red or green, our thoughts can also have different tones, including aggressiveness, resentment, grief, revenge, revolt or sadness; or, our thoughts could also come in beautiful colors representing peace, joy, cordiality, patience, respect, etc.”

“Children,” concluded our uncle, “each one of us is responsible for the tone of color that we add to the environment. Good thoughts of fraternity and joy can only do us and those around us good.”

We understood perfectly well what uncle Albert meant. His words affected us deeply, and we all commenced to pay closer attention to the influence we could exert over the environment surrounding us. It became easier to start being more tolerant with one another, to pay careful attention to each other's thoughts, words and actions.

This lesson not only allowed us to have a more enjoyable trip, but also inspired me to live more harmoniously with those around me. We are happier when we collaborate so that others can be happier, as well.



## Weeds

I often recall a few events from my childhood that became deeply engraved in my mind.

Our family was quite poor, and my father had to struggle to make ends meet. For this reason, my mother would help by working as a housekeeper for other families.

My grandfather had a vegetable garden in our backyard. One of my tasks was to pick the vegetables and sell them in the city.

I recall one morning being late in going to the city, and then having to go over a wired fence, I got my old and worn out pants caught and ripped. At that point, I could no longer return home to change for I was already late and I would have wasted too much time, so I decided to go on.

I met a classmate in one of the streets, and when she saw me, I noticed she was looking at the tear in my pants.

On that same afternoon, when I got to school, I saw her whispering to the other classmates, who looked at me and started to laugh. I blushed.

The situation got worst when one of the boys approached me and said:

“Hey you, ripped pants, can I borrow your sharpener?”

A feeling of resentment was growing inside of me, but I could not react. I began to wish for revenge. I could not think of anything else but on how to get even after my humiliation.

My grandfather noticed that there was something wrong. He asked me why I looked so sad, angry, and in such a bad mood, and why I was not talking to others. I told him what had happened, and how I was planning to get revenge.

He put his hand on my shoulder and took me to one of the corners of the vegetable garden. He pointed to some weeds growing among some lettuces and asked:

“If we don’t pull out those weeds, what is going to happen?”

“We know grandpa that weeds grow fast and will wind up killing the lettuce plants.” I replied.

My grandfather, very concerned, looked at me and said:

“If we don’t pull out the weeds of hurt pride from within us, we will allow grief, resentment and the terrible thought of revenge to build up inside of us and kill every good quality that we possess. You have been a good, happy and responsible child. These qualities fill the heart of your family with joy and hope. But lately you have been filled with sadness and resentment.”

Tears came to my eyes. I hugged my grandfather and I understood the importance of forgiveness. When we do not forgive others, we become unhappy, and worse, we make those who love us unhappy as well.

Suddenly, I felt sorry for my classmates, because they are wasting their time criticizing others.

Great joy and peace filled my heart; a feeling that I had not experienced in a long time.



## The Companions

Even as a little child, Bill was intelligent and had keen observation. During his first years in school, he noticed that some children were behaving differently than the way his parents had taught him to. He observed children taking things that did not belong to them, saying white lies and having other improper attitudes.

In spite of their incorrect behavior, the children acted so naturally that Bill started imitating them.

It didn't take long before his mother noticed these changes. He started to be rude to others. He took his brother's belongings without permission. He would lie about having done his homework. These signs started to concern his parents.

One afternoon, when Bill was playing in their huge backyard, his father Mr. Albert picked up a hoe and asked his son to help pull some yucca roots from the ground.

Immediately, the boy went to his father and both started to remove the soil surrounding the yucca tree. Soon thereafter, the roots became visible.

While Mr. Albert pulled and moved the plant to loosen the roots, Bill would pull them out and set them aside.

They were talking joyfully, when Bill said:

"Dad, look how interesting the whiteness of the roots against the darkness of the soil! How can the yucca root be so white inside and yet be embedded in the impurities of the soil?"

Mr. Albert replied:

"That's because the root draws only the nutrients that it needs, which are water and mineral salts. It is as if the root were able to filter the ones that are responsible for its own nourishment and growth. Did you know my son that our lives are somewhat like that? God put us on this Earth, so that our actions enrich us with the experience the

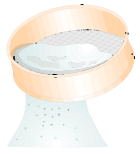
environment has to offer us. The richness we store within us is made of knowledge and morality."

After a brief pause, he concluded:

"As you are able to notice, there are many people around us who still do not act according to the Divine Laws of love and charity. It is up to us to decide whether we should follow their example or not. The whiteness of the yucca root is determined by a natural principle. Our interior purity can only be achieved through our constant effort to act with kindness."

These words had a deep effect on Bill. From that day forward, he became more vigilant and more aware of the influences received from the outside world. He was now conscious that life is the work of God and that we were created to live harmoniously with his work. God wants us to be happy and happiness can only be achieved by living righteously.





## The Three Sieves

Quite often during my early school years, we were asked to do our homework in a group. Usually the group would meet at my home. On those occasions, we would discuss various subjects in addition to the topic chosen by the school.

Once, my mother entered the room exactly when we were having a discussion about an unpleasant comment I had heard from a friend.

My mother took notice of what we were discussing. She interrupted us politely and asked us to go to the kitchen with her. She brought three sieves, wheat flour plus a bowl out of a cabinet.

She added some wheat flour to the sieve that had the largest holes. The wheat flour flowed through and very easily fell on the second sieve whose holes were smaller. She sifted it a little bit and the flour went through into the third sieve, which had the smallest holes. Again, she sifted the flour and again it passed through it falling into the container. Finally, she put a lid on it and said that the flour would be safe against any strong wind that could have blown it.

We found that to be very strange and looked at each other without quite understanding what she was doing.

Mom looked at us intensely and smiling at me, she gently said:

“Daughter, let’s pretend that the flour represents the comment about your friend that I overheard. Before commenting about it to others, let’s pass it through the three sieves. The first one stands for truth. Are you sure that what they told you is really the truth?”

A little embarrassed, I answered I was not sure. I had merely heard some comments.

“If you are not sure, the information went through the holes and fell into the second sieve, which stands for charity. Is this something that you would like someone to say to

others about you?”

“No! Of course not!” I answered.

“Then,” she said, “your story has just fallen through the holes of the second sieve and fell into the third one: reasoning. Do you really think it is going to be useful and therefore necessary to pass this information along.”

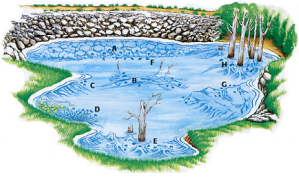
“Honestly, on second thought, I don’t think there’s any need to pass this information along,” I answered.

“Very well! Just as the wheat flour went through the three sieves and was kept safe in a closed bowl, protected from the wind, the comments that you heard, after being rechecked through Truth, Charity and Reasoning should also be kept within you. This way, you will not allow the wind of gossip to spread slanderous information, which would cause your friend even greater suffering.”

I meditated over everything that my mother had taught me. I had never realized the great responsibility that our words have and how much they can help or harm someone.

Before gossiping idly I recalled and started putting into practice the three sieves, Truth, Charity and Reasoning, by asking myself: Is what I heard true? Would I appreciate someone saying the same thing about me? Is what I heard really useful to pass along?





## The Pond

My grandfather was wonderful to me during my childhood. He was an ordinary man, not a learned person, but very wise about life. He cultivated the land on his small farm and used to say that through living with nature he had learned great lessons in life.

I had been a restless and nervous child, and I would argue with my brothers and classmates over any insignificant reason. I was aware that my behavior was disturbing to others, but I was unable to control myself.

My grandfather helped me to view life in a different manner. On a Sunday morning at the farm, he invited me to go fishing with him. I was happy with the invitation. We got the fishing gear together and started to walk in the direction of the pond. As we walked, my grandfather called my attention to the sweet odor of the grass, which was still wet from the morning dew. We noticed the smooth flight of a butterfly searching for food in every flower and we heard the birds singing harmoniously.

All that beauty and harmony affected me intensely.

When we reached the pond, nature was even more exultant. The water was completely still and the pond resembled a huge mirror reflecting the landscape. The trees reflected beautifully on the water. The sky was light blue and the clouds appeared to be painted in a pinkish tone of dawn. Even a gathering of birds flying in the sky seemed to be floating on that mirror.

All that peace affected me.

My grandfather, noticed how happy this beauty had made me, and said:

“My grandchild, there are so many people living as if they had an untamable hurricane within them? They become very aggressive and are unable to calm their emotions. By reacting in this manner, they are only damaging themselves

as well as affecting those around them. They are unaware that they too could cultivate calm within themselves just as this pond. They are living without analyzing or reflecting about themselves. They live as though they were the finished product, complete and not requiring any modification. It is a true fact that we can modify our inner self. God created us to live in harmony and to be happy. As a gift, He provided us with this wonderful nature that surrounds us. With a little bit of sensitivity, we can appreciate this peace and make it part of our inner-selves.”

My grandfather’s words were of great wisdom, and I absorbed them as the sound of a soft song.

I came to the conclusion that the happiness of that moment was in sharp contrast to the unpleasant sensations that I had experienced on those occasions of confusion and nervousness. I sought to reach a more intense balance within me and to particularly remain in tune with nature.

As time went by, I developed more control over my aggressions and I became immersed in a balance of harmony and peace that God surrounds us with.



# The Marble

Newspaper reports have a tendency to cause parents apprehension. Drug consumption, in addition to being on the rise, has also been reaching school children. The news also reported that it was necessary to alert children about the dangers that they are exposed to. For this reason, schools should include educational programs with explanations and information on this subject matter.

After dinner, my family would engage in conversation by the table. On such occasions, we were able to get answers to our questions. It was on one of those evenings that Marcelo, my oldest brother, asked about the damaging effects that the use of drugs could have on people.

My father asked us to follow him to our storage room in the backyard. On the top of a cabinet, far from the children's reach, there was a plastic container filled with a yellow liquid. He said that it was muriatic acid, which is very dangerous. Anyone handling it must be extremely careful.

My dad chose a piece of white marble from our stone collection, and he placed it over a table. He then poured a few drops of this acid on the polished surface of the marble, and immediately we saw an effervescent foam. He explained that the acid was reacting to a component substance of the marble called carbonate. That foam contained carbonic gas, loosened and foamed due to the alteration taking place in the marble.

All of that was very interesting!

After a while, he washed the piece of marble and let it dry. We noticed that where he had dropped the acid, the surface had turned rough and there was a clear spot.

As my father observed our interest and curiosity, he continued:

"My sons, drugs of any kind, in addition to giving pleasure, can also cause internal spots in the body of

whoever uses them. They affect and create lesions in various organs, particularly in the nervous system. These lesions are irreversible and have no cure. They cause continuous harm to the function of an otherwise harmonious body. They also have a noticeable effect in the person's behavior. Sometimes the user becomes more aggressive, in some cases more apathetic and depressed. Sometimes this person has hallucinations and is incapable of recognizing his own reality. The user becomes a slave to the addiction of the drug and is no longer free. He lives chained to the objective of securing his next dose. When he is no longer able to get the drug, he undergoes tremendous crises caused by pain and desperation."

He paused for a minute to allow us the opportunity to observe the profound alteration the acid had made on the sensitive marble, and then he concluded:

"Nevertheless, what many people do not know is the extent of the damage that the use of drugs has on the perispirit. You already know that the perispirit is our spiritual body, which is the denser envelope of our spirit after the physical death of the body. This perispirit is marked and damaged by the use of drugs. At one point there can even be profound deformities in this perispirit. These inner wounds cause extreme disturbance to the spirit in the spiritual world. There, the sufferings continue. Death does not free the drug user from the torturous world that he has subjected himself to. His freedom can only occur with his mental renovation and the abstinence of the drug," he said.

We were left thoughtful, as we had not yet been aware of the seriousness of this subject. From that day forward, I became more aware about anything that could suggest an invitation to the use of drugs.

I felt a deep feeling of sorrow inside of me for all those who, through ignorance or foolishness take a leap into the terrible and destructive world of drugs.



## The Pin

I often remember my mother working on her sewing machine. Quite often, right after completing her household chores, she would commence to sew us clothes. She did these chores with much pleasure.

I liked to sit close to her and to observe her gentleness and agility in cutting, arranging, joining together and sewing the fabrics.

During those hours we talked about our daily occurrences. Those were tender moments spent with her which affected me deeply, and time that I will never erase from my heart.

One day, I came home very sad and worried. Mom noticed that I was upset as soon as I walked into the sewing room. She asked me what had happened.

“You know mother, I got a low grade in the English test.” I said.

“Have you asked yourself why? Didn’t you understand the subject matter or you didn’t study enough to learn it properly?” She asked.

“I don’t think I dedicated as much time as I should have in order to learn it thoroughly. I occupied my study time with other things. Now I regret it and it bothers me. I don’t like to feel this way,” I replied sadly, almost in tears.

My mother looked at me thoughtfully but she did not have a disapproving look. I noticed she was searching carefully for the best way to help me understand the seriousness of the situation that I had created due to my indifference and negligence.

She took an elastic band and a pin out of the drawer. She stuck the pin in one end of the elastic and closed it. Instead of using it to sew the sleeve she had been working on, she turned to me and said:

“Do you think it would be easy for me to sew this elastic

without the pin?” she asked.

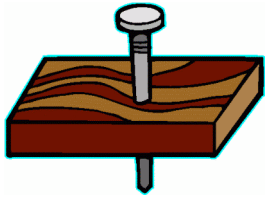
“No,” I answered. “The pin is a solid, rigid piece, with which you can pull the elastic out easily.

“You must have observed,” she continued, “that the pin perforated the elastic, securing it firmly, making it possible to pull the elastic through the sleeve. Well, the sufferings we undergo in life are just like pinpricks in our souls and in our conscience. You said that you feel sad and you concluded that your carelessness was the reason for your failure. You feel bothered by the pain in your heart that causes you to rethink your actions; and so I ask you: What have you learned from this?”

“I have learned that we ourselves are responsible for our own suffering and that from now on, I do not wish to go face a similar kind of situation,” I answered.

“I will tell you something else,” continued my mother, “suffering is the strong lever that causes us to change our attitudes many times, just as the pin pulls the elastic along the fabric...”

The years went by and on many occasions I could reconfirm this great truth: Our mistakes, whether from the present life or from our past existences are the cause of our pain, and suffering is the bitter remedy that cures our moral imperfections.



## The Nail

During my childhood, when I started to attend my first study classes of the Gospel for children, I did not understand why they could be so important in my later life. For this reason, I was not always interested in participating in those classes.

One day, I agreed to play soccer with my friends, without realizing that the time of the practice would conflict with my class. I went to my mother and asked her whether I could play soccer instead of going to the class. She said she would consent only if the soccer practices could be postponed. This way, I would be able to accomplish both programs. I would be able to obtain the doctrinaire knowledge that would feed my soul and to practice sports that would strengthen my muscles and body.

I knew I could talk to my friends and change the time of the game; however, I decided to protest. Couldn't I, every now and then, miss one class? I thought.

I kept insisting in order to see whether she would change her mind.

My father was in the yard fixing a wooden gate that separated the orchard from the paved area. He overheard my conversation with my mother and he noticed my unwillingness to attend the Gospel Class. He called me over to him. He was working with a hammer, nails, pliers and some other tools. There were many pieces of wood scattered on the ground. He picked one of them up and said:

"This is pinewood, it is very smooth. I am going to hammer a nail into the wood and then I am going to ask you to try to remove it. This one is a piece of mahogany, a much harder and resistant type of wood. I am going to hammer a nail into this one too."

He gave me the two pieces of wood and I got the hammer. The nail was removed easily from the pinewood; but, the other nail, despite my efforts, I could not get out.

My father observed my movements, handling the hammer without much ability, and then he said:

"Son, the teachings of Jesus constitute the greatest heritage that parents can leave to their children. A child, whose foundation is based on the lessons from the Gospel grows up strong and secure, knowing how to defend himself better against the dangers he encounters. He is able to confront difficulties with more stability. The Gospel's knowledge is comparable to the mahogany with its fibers that hold the nail firmly, making it difficult to loosen. On the other hand, the nail in the pinewood represents those without Christian morals. They can perish easily when facing the biggest difficulties that life presents."

I could understand perfectly well the reason that my parents had been so insistent that I attend these classes. In the future, I would like to be similar to the nail in the mahogany: strong, secure, knowing how to face the relationship with the world in a Christian fashion.

As the years passed by, I came across situations that could have been regrettable had it not been for the fact that I had received that early orientation during my childhood.

In my prayers, I thank God for having been allowed to be born in a Christian home, and I thank my parents for having been so wise to provide me with an education based on charity and love for others. Today I know that this is the way to find intimate peace and true happiness.



# The Grains of Rice

Peter's life has been a difficult one. He was born with one leg shorter than the other.

When he walks, he needs to tilt his body to the right. He would like to play soccer very much, but since he has difficulty running, he is not accepted in the game.

Lately, he has been the target of unkind jokes and nicknames. All of these jokes and nicknames are like stones that are thrown at him. It has made it very difficult for him to accept his physical limitations.

One day, at school, as he went to the blackboard to solve a math problem, he overheard a classmate calling him by a rude nickname and was also told to move out of the way, so that the blackboard could be seen.

Mrs. Angela noticed that Peter had tears in his eyes. She had already observed how disrespectful his classmates had been towards him. She waited for Peter to finish the exercise, and return to his seat. Then she said to the class:

"Today we are going to have a lesson in observation. You know we have to observe everything around us closely; if we look carefully, we are going to notice things that had previously gone by unnoticed."

She opened a jar containing grains of rice and distributed a few to each student. She asked them to observe the grains carefully and then to make comments. We were all surprised by what we saw. Some were light in color, some dark, some of them were pale, and others shinier. There were long grains as well as short ones. Some were imperfect and broken in different ways.

Mrs. Angela said:

"Many times our inattentive eyes are not able to notice the details of objects that we visualize daily. It is even harder to explain the reason why these rice grains look so different from one another. In order to learn this, it would be

necessary to have a more concentrated study on the subject.

You will observe that people are different from one another. Some are perfect and some have physical limitations. There are tall and there are short people; intelligent and mentally challenged. Some people have white, black or yellow skin. Some have black, red or blond hair. There are so many differences that it would be impossible to enumerate them. In order for us to comprehend why we are different, it is necessary to study life in depth. One thing we can be sure of: God is our Creator, as well as the Creator of everything that exists. He is the supreme intelligence. Everything in His creation has a purpose that sometimes we cannot perceive because of our ignorance of His laws. We should have deep respect for everything that is created by God, and for all the people around us without regards to their appearance. We must consider that people are worthy by their quality and virtues as human beings, not by their appearance."

Mrs. Angela did not need to say another word. We had understood her message was in reference to Peter and that we should all have respect for him.

From that day forward, all jokes and nicknames began to disappear from our classroom. Previously, we had not realized that the jokes, although not always intentional, were hurting someone.

In that class, I learned how important it is to evaluate life as created by God and to consider carefully if what we are doing benefits or hurts someone.





# The Yeast



Mary is a 9 year-old girl. Although very young, she has had to endure great suffering.

She lives in an orphanage along with forty other children.

In the orphanage, she receives care, love, and comfort from the many good-hearted people who dedicate a portion of their time working at this charitable institution. Nevertheless, during her early years, Mary went through difficult moments in the shack where she had lived with her four brothers. Her mother was a widow and was usually sick.

Quite often in the orphanage, Mary sits quietly in a corner of the room, feeling sad and completely oblivious to what is going on around her.

Mrs. Elaine, observing the child's suffering, asked her to help her in the kitchen.

Mrs. Elaine used to go to the orphanage every day to assist in cooking lunch for the children. On one afternoon, she was baking some sweetbread. Mary was very interested and attentive to what the skilled lady was doing. She asked her what it was that she was dissolving in the milk.

"Yeast," she said "it makes the dough rise, turning smooth and light," she added.

"What if you don't add yeast?" asked the girl.

"Without yeast," answered the generous lady, "the bread won't rise, the dough turns hard and looks strange."

Mrs. Elaine kept on adding flour and mixing the dough, but at the same time, she observed the saddened, curious eyes of the girl. Then, she asked:

"What were you thinking about when you were sitting in the corner of the room?"

"I was thinking about my mother. I miss her so much. Everybody likes me here, but..." said the child.

Two thick tears appeared in her eyes.

"Do you know how to pray?" asked the lady.

"Yes, I do. Mrs. Angela taught me in Gospel Class."

"Very good," continued Mrs. Elaine. "Praying makes us feel stronger when facing the problems that we have to go through. As we pray, we express our feelings to God, and we become in tune with Jesus and the Superior Spirits. From them, we receive strength and courage to confront our lives with greater patience and resignation. Just as the dough becomes lighter because of the yeast, through prayer we may feel inner peace, comforted with a ray of hope within us."

Mrs. Elaine hugged Mary and said:

"You know, my little girl, no one is ever alone and abandoned. There are protective Spirits that assist all of us. Through good thoughts and prayers, we are in tune with them and we always receive good intuitions that help us to find the best path to follow."

The kindness inspired by Mrs. Elaine made Mary happier and the two of them started to roll the dough into two little pieces of bread.

In this way, protected by kind hands, supported by the Gospel's teachings and strengthened by prayers, she was able to grow up and overcome the many obstacles in her difficult life.





# The Spider's Web

I used to have difficulties in my relationships with my friends, and I would feel hurt by any minor incident that might have occurred while we were playing. I would leave them alone and continue mulling over what had occurred. It would usually take me days to get over the resentment and feel like being with my friends again.

My mother, who understood me very well, tried to talk to me about this. She suggested that I be forgiving, in order to break free from that inner constraint and to return to play with my friends. It seemed that the longer it took me to change, the greater the pain I felt inside of me.

It was exactly on one of those days that my mother called me out to see a spider's web amidst some plants in our garden. I noticed how all the threads crossed in the web's center forming rays that would be attached to the stems of the plants. Then, other threads created larger concentric circles which became bigger and bigger as they moved away from the web's center. This way, all the threads were connected looking like a web.

My mother noticed how interested I was, and asked:

"Do you know why the spider makes the web?"

"No," I answered spontaneously.

"The web is a trap. If an insect is flying carelessly and hits the web, it will be caught and later will become the spider's meal," she answered.

I found everything quite interesting, and my mother, in her tender manner, continued:

"Just as the web's threads are connected, the same occurs with our thoughts, which flow through space and are in tune with those people who think as we do. These connections of thoughts occur among the incarnate souls as well as the discarnate spirits. These connections strengthen our ideas and similarities. If we have harmonious and happy thoughts,

we will be in tune with happy and emotionally balanced people and we will feel even better. But, if our thoughts are of resentment, sorrow or sadness, we will be in tune with those who think as we do. Grief will become stronger within us, deepening our sadness and holding us captive to our own web of thoughts."

It did not take me long to realize what was going on inside of me. As time went by I understood why my grief was intensifying, instead of diminishing. Having resentment makes us unhappy; our inner pain increases as we indirectly tune in with the thoughts of those who also feel the same way.

From that day forward, it became very clear to me that forgiveness is a wonderful thing. Jesus, who loves us and wants to see us happy, has been showing us the way for a long time. He teaches us that forgiveness frees us from our inner sufferings, being the only way to achieve happiness and peace.



# The Puzzle

When I was young, and having come from a Spiritist family, I used to attend Children's Gospel classes. There, I had learned about the importance of reincarnation, that is, to be reborn on many occasions in new bodies in order to achieve our personal spiritual progress. In this manner, as we go through a new existence in a new body, we go through new experiences. We improve our knowledge and feelings, until we finally reach the stage of a pure Spirit.

As I entered school and time went by, I noticed that children from other religions had a different understanding of this subject. Some friends of mine even denied the possibility of reincarnation. I was confused by this difference of opinion.

One night, as usual, our family was gathered in the living room. My father read the newspaper and my mother fed my youngest sister Lucy, while Gabriel and I worked on a puzzle.

I recall that I asked my parents why we believed in reincarnation while other religions denied, or misunderstood it. What was the truth?

My father thought over my questions for a few minutes, and then he picked up a piece of the puzzle and asked:

"By looking at this piece by itself, would you be able to view the complete picture of the puzzle?"

"No," we answered, all together.

"Very good! By looking at just one piece, you may be able to imagine the picture in different ways, and only when you start adding the pieces to the puzzle, does the picture start to appear. You will only have the complete picture, when all the pieces are put together."

Dad stopped for a few seconds, and then concluded:

"There is only one God. Truth is also just one. Because

we are all creatures in the process of evolvement and we still have a lot to learn, God allows us to visualize the truth little by little. We still do not have enough awareness to understand it entirely. That's the reason why each one of us can only see part of this Truth, as if they were pieces of a puzzle. There are various reasons for different understandings. There are different degrees of spiritual evolvement in people. But, one day will come in the future, when everyone will be able to understand this truth in its entirety, and everyone will have the same belief. On this day, there will be only one flock and just one shepherd, as Jesus said."

We continued talking and playing for a little while longer. However, my father's teaching was very clear to me and it helped me to understand many situations that I had confronted in my life.

I learned that God respects the freedom he gave us in order to act and think. For this reason, it is essential that we respect the point of view of others. We should never think that we alone hold the truth. We have to understand that we still have a lot to learn in life.

In this manner, a deep respect for my friends and for other religions grew within me. The important thing was not to worry about the different interpretations in the philosophical or religious areas, but rather, to practice the teachings of Jesus: "to love God above all things, and to love others as ourselves, building a more fraternal and harmonious relationship with one another."



# The Garlic Clove

I have always been a very sensitive person. I remember that as a child, when I was reprimanded or criticized due to my misbehaving, it was as if someone had hit me. These comments struck me so deeply that I would spend a long time thinking about them and developing thoughts of sadness and resentment within me.

One morning, as I played with my cousins in my aunt's house, she criticized us rudely for getting the floor dirty with paint. We soon cleaned up the mess, but deep inside I condemned my aunt's attitude. I belittled my imprudence considering the mess had not been so severe as to receive such recrimination. Today, however, I am able to understand that my aunt could have had other reasons to be upset.

However, that day I felt truly hurt due to my aunt's harsh words. I returned home feeling sad and didn't talk to anyone. I spent the whole day in a bad mood and with a scowled face toward all my family.

Mom was worried because of my behavior. She had noticed that I was concerned about something, which had been happening quite often.

She was starting to fix dinner when I entered the kitchen looking for a glass of water. Taking advantage of my being there, she asked:

"What seems to be the matter, my daughter?"

"There is nothing wrong mom," I answered.

"I have noticed that there is something on your mind. Don't you want to tell me about it?"

"OK," I answered. "I'm going to tell you what's going on."

And so, I told her everything that had happened during the morning.

My mother listened to me attentively, while peeling some garlic cloves which were one of the condiments for the food

she was preparing. She looked at me and said:

"Notice that there is a strong aroma when I squeeze the garlic cloves. Not only this aroma fills the air, but also my hands get impregnated with it for a long time. Something similar occurs to people in relation to what they think and do," my mother said.

"Listen very carefully," she continued:

"Just like the garlic clove releases its essence, people release their thoughts and feelings, through words and acts. The same way the garlic aroma was impregnated in my hands, other people's thoughts and actions can become impregnated in our minds. If we keep on fueling these thoughts, they become part of us. And what is even worse, my daughter, we wind up doing the same thing that we now criticize and we therefore do not become better."

"Do you mean, mom, that when we condemn somebody else's behavior and become attached to the idea of grief, resentment or revolt, we are blocking out our clarity and feelings for renovation?"

"Exactly!" said my mother.

The bitter memory of the day came back to mind, and I had caused it myself. At that very moment the true meaning of words *understanding* and *forgiveness* expanded within me. If I had understood and forgiven my aunt at the very first moment, I would not have been saturated with negative feelings and my entire day would have been happier, just as I became happier the moment after my friendly conversation with my mother.



# The Pigeons

Many things that occurred during my childhood are still very clear in my memory.

I recall perfectly how every day, as I returned from school, I would pass by a square garden where there were many pigeons.

The gardener, Mr. Robert who was also the maintenance man, would stop working on the plants in order to feed the pigeons. There was so much love and kindness, radiating from that humble hard working man.

Many times, my friend Charles and I would spend a long time observing the movements of the pigeons, the beauty of their feathers and the harmony of their flight.

Once we engaged in a conversation with Mr. Robert regarding the pigeons.

“Poor pigeon! Look at that one with a hurt wing. It’s going to be impossible for it to fly toward freedom with a broken wing.”

After spending a few seconds thinking he continued:

“How many men also have one of their wings broken!”

Chico and I looked at each other and simultaneously exclaimed:

“Men, with wings?”

“Both of you go to school and have already noticed that humanity has amassed much scientific knowledge; but selfishness and the lack of noble feelings stand in the way of this knowledge being applied to improve the quality of life of all creatures. Very few people take full advantage of it. In order for man to fly in the direction of true freedom, it is necessary that he has two wings: one wing of knowledge and the other of love. Both should be well developed. It appears that one of his wings is broken because of his pride and selfishness. That is why the great majority of people are not able to fly toward the true happiness they long for so much,

even though they have all the material things they need.

Many years went by before I was able to thoroughly understand the depth of the gardener’s words. Today I have this teaching as my motto. I feel that I need to instruct myself constantly. Love must continue to grow much deeper within me, so that I can fly higher in the direction of spiritual freedom.



## The Spring

Compared to the average family, mine is a large one. We are seven in total; mother, father and five children. My father works for an automobile plant and his earnings are just enough to provide for the family needs.

My mother's occupation consists of a total devotion to our household affairs and caring for the children. Overloaded by the household chores, she seldom has time to spare. Since we could not afford to have a housekeeper, my mother usually asked our help. On those occasions, she would always encounter some protest in response to her requests. One of us would complain that he could not help because of feeling tired; another would reply that he had a physical education class to attend; and another would complain that he had helped on the previous day. The complaints continued to multiply.

One day, right after dinner, while we were still sitting around the dining room table, the subject came up again, but nobody was willing to help her with the dishes, giving the same old excuses.

My father observed everything and while we were still seated, he went to his toolbox and brought back a small spring. He asked each one of us to pull the spring apart and then let it loose.

The spring was passed to each one of us. We pulled it and loosened it.

When father had it back in his hands, he pulled it strongly. The spring was stretched in a way that it never reverted to the original flexibility that it had. We were all paying close attention to him. He looked at us seriously and said:

"My children, the elasticity of the spring has limits. When it has to endure strength beyond its limit, it loses its elasticity and gets out of shape. Just as a spring cannot endure excessive pressure, we human beings as well, cannot

endure excessive work or worries. When a person is overloaded with physical or mental work, this person can become imbalanced and stressed out, making it more difficult to relate to others. I would like you to realize that your mother has been overloaded with work. She keeps the house organized, she takes care of our clothes our food, and also takes care of you, giving you guidance for life."

We looked at mom; she smiled kindly, even though her eyes showed a natural weariness from the hard work of the day. She deserved and needed our assistance.

Millie was the first one to speak:

"From now on, we are all going to help our mother. I had never thought about how important our small collaboration could be. Why don't we share the tasks?"

We all agreed with her. From that day forward, we started to do small household chores, conscious that we were alleviating the excessive strain of a person very dear to us, and returning harmony into our own lives.

The concept of the words love and work broadened in our innermost being. We no longer thought merely of our selfish interests or our personal self. We began to understand the need of the family and its union. A great feeling of solidarity began to swell within all of us. This way, we assisted in everything that we could in order to make our home a happier and more harmonious place.

### Maria Ida (The Author)

Maria Ida Bachega Bolcone was born in Sertãozinho (SP), on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1947. She obtained a degree in Biological Sciences in the University of FFCL and Ribeirão Preto.

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