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BOOKS

Kids' Korner

At last! Books that teach boys and girls values but don't bore them to death

By Tara Katir, Kauai

In our annual quest for Hindu children's storybooks we have delved through volumes of alluring catalogs, dazzling web sites and countless magazine advertisements. Our diligent search was rewarded with an array of well-written and beautifully illustrated Hindu storybooks for children and young adults. Again, as last year, the best are American and English productions by both Hindu and non-Hindu writers. But the Karadi Bear Tales audio books from Tulika Books and Sky Music (reviewed last month) indicate India is capable of the best in production values. From ancient fables retold in modern prose, to a straight-talking book about celibacy, these publications will capture the imagination of children, and give young adults some food for thought on how they choose to live their lives. And for moms and dads, I think the books will keep your interest even when your children beg you to read them over and over again.

Come along for a stopover in India's magnificent Ranthambhore National Park in India and meet the Amazing Mallika (30 pages, Marsh Media, us\$16.95) by Jamie Parkison

and illustrated by Itoko Maeno. This is a beautifully crafted story of a little girl tiger who learns to control her anger. Mallika's adventures begin when she is infuriated by her brother's unfair play, then teased by trouble-making monkeys and finally suffers feelings of inadequacy--familiar everyday events and emotions of children everywhere. The little tiger's lack of self-control gets her into trouble, but with her mother's help Mallika learns a life-changing lesson. She understands that she can control her emotions instead of being controlled by them. Maeno's gorgeous watercolors capture the austere beauty and grandeur of Ranthambhore Park--from ancient banyan trees and crumbling palaces to elegant animals. In addition, colorful end-papers give readers supplemental information regarding India's geography and the people, plants and animals featured in the book. An outstanding addition to any classroom or family library.

Through the gentle art of storytelling, the philosophical truths of the Sanatana Dharma have been passed down through the generations. Fables teaching ethics, the love of family, the joys of friendship, leadership and the wisdom of adhering to dharma, have artfully captured the attention of audiences for thousands of years. Supreme among these classic tales is the collection called Panchatantra. It was recorded in Sanskrit from the oral tradition in about 200 bce, and eventually entered many of the world's cultures--in the West as "Aesop's fables." A charming modern version of these wonderful animal tales is the set of six books, *The Timeless Stories* (30 pages, Samhita Enterprises, us\$13.67 each) by Kumuda Reddy and John Emory Pruitt. Meet Shifty Jackal, Lion King Red Rash, Budhu the village weaver and the two clever hares, Able and Long Ears. Colorful illustrations enhance the engaging animal adventures while they teach the "art of practical life." Great books to read

to young children.

An additional collection of ancient fables can be found in Buddhism's Jataka Tales. Dharma Publishing presents a beautiful series of twenty-one Jataka Tales (32 pages, Dharma Publishing, us\$7.95 each). Celebrating the power of action motivated by compassion, the fables impart the wisdom of wise conduct. Adorning each page are Rosalyn White's elegantly colorful illustrations portraying ethereal animals, princes and sprites in graceful motion. In "The Magic of Patience," Buffalo suggests, "To practice patience you need a real rascal to help you. It's no use practicing on gentle and kind creatures, for they require no patience. What you need is a good monkey. Would you like to use mine?" These books are an outstanding addition for home or classroom, guiding us to a more peaceful approach to living.

If you have children between nine and twelve, you may want to peruse *A Treasury of Wise Action* (153 pages, Dharma Publishing, us\$11.95), which contains twenty-two Jataka Tales told for young adults. These stories will delight you by their humor, amaze you with their creative solutions to everyday challenges and provide a surprise ending or two. Rosalyn White's elegant line drawings lend themselves well to these lovely tales.

A provocative tale of angelic helpers, a King's army, a mischievous demon and an inspired girl is told in the adventure of Mala, a *Woman's Folk Tale* by Gita Wolf, illustrated by Annouchka Galouchko (31 pages, Annick Press, us\$6.95). In a drought-stricken village, three gypsy women

arrive singing of the demon who swallowed the rain seed. The King's army and others try to retrieve it, but everyone fails. Inspired by a vision of devonic helpers, a young girl's offer of assistance is rebuffed because she is not a boy. Disguised by her heaven-based friends and armed with a magical mirror that reflects her true identity, she outwits the demon and returns with the rain seed. Galouchko's colorful and vibrant paintings will transport you into Mala's adventure as she learns it's not who you are that's important, but how you use what you have to accomplish your goals.

Moving into today's world, we have a modern tale based upon a real event, the Hindu diaspora. *Lights for Gita* by Rachna Gilmore and illustrated by Alice Priestley (21 pages, Tilbury House, us\$9.95) shows how an immigrant Indian family living in Canada's cold winter can celebrate Divali without the warmth of extended family and old friends. A winter storm brings snow and ice, the electricity goes out, and Gita's celebratory spirits fall as many of her new friends are unable to attend the family's festivities. Through these challenges, Gita discovers a deeper meaning of Divali, more than parties and fireworks. As golden flames bring soft light into the darkened room, she learns one can bring light, happiness and love out to the world from within oneself. Priestley's enchanting pastel illustrations capture the love and solidarity of this sweet tale of Divali in a new land.

Festivities and sacred rituals from around the world are splendidly portrayed in *Celebrations! Children Just Like Me* (63 pages, DK Publishing, us\$17.95) by Barnabas and Anabel Kindersley [see inside front cover for four sample pages]. Traveling to 25 countries to record 12 months of the world's

diverse and colorful celebrations, the Kindersley's showcase 24 celebrations from Earth's cultures in this outstanding work. Rites range from the pre-Christian Europe's pagan ritual, known today as May Day, marking the arrival of spring, to Sri Lanka's Esala Perahera, honoring the Sacred Tooth of Lord Buddha in elaborate processions, to India's enthusiastic frolic of Holi. Each two-page spread provides a detailed presentation of one celebration. Informative photographs capture children wearing traditional costumes along with special foods and implements used to celebrate each festive occasion. An additional delight are captioned photographs showing the authors and the many children from around the world in the creation of this special publication. This is an outstanding presentation of how cultures around the world honor and celebrate life's sacred moments. A commendable, easy-to-follow book that should be in every home and classroom for helping children learn tolerance and respect for traditions disparate from their own.

For young adults we have a straight talking, no hold's barred book, *Cool and Celibate? Sex or No Sex*, by Dr. David Bull (136 pages, Element Children's Books, us\$4.95). This pro-celibacy book covers tough topics such as being gay, having a crush, pregnancy, birth control and sexually transmitted diseases like HIV and herpes. It's an explicit presentation, geared to 90s realities.

The frog on the cover tells you this isn't your normal book on reincarnation. *And Now For My Next Life*, by James Sasse (79 pages, Element Children's Books, us\$4.95), is neither complicated philosophy nor cutting-edge research. Instead, it's a humorous and informed explanation of samsara written for

youth ages nine to twelve. For a "show me" kind of person, there's even a quick questionnaire to establish your skeptical level.

Stumped by the latest occult reference in your favorite TV show? The Encyclopedia of Mind, Body, Spirit and Earth by Joanna Crosse (160 pages, Element Children's Books, us\$24.95) was written just for you, and your curious and cool teens. Whether it be akashic records, bioenergetics, black cats, wadjet eye or warlocks, you'll find the explanation in this comprehensive encyclopedia of all things New Age. Aboriginal beliefs, chakras, homeopathy, Chinese horoscopes, death rituals, life force, Zang--they're there too. Replete with glossary, index and oodles of colorful illustrations, this is an entertaining book for ages nine to twelve.

Publishers: DK PUBLISHING, INC., 95 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10016 USA www.dk.com; ELEMENT BOOKS, INC., P.O. BOX 830, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 01966 USA; DHARMA PUBLISHING, 2910 SAN PABLO AVENUE, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94702 USA; TILBURY HOUSE PUBLISHERS, 132 WATER STREET, GARDINER, MAINE 04345 USA www.tilburyhouse.com; ANNICK PRESS, DISTRIBUTED BY FIREFLY BOOKS, INC., P.O. BOX 1338, ELLICOTT STATION, BUFFALO, NEW YORK 14205 USA; SAMHITA ENTERPRISES, 183 SAINT PAUL STREET, ROCHESTER, NEW YORK 14604 USA; MARSHMEDIA, P.O. BOX 8082, SHAWNEE MISSION, KANSAS 66208 USA.