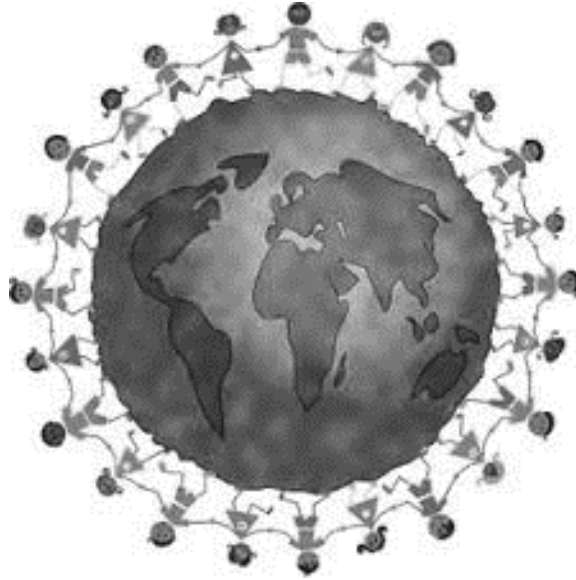


Stories from around the world

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Meena of Nepal

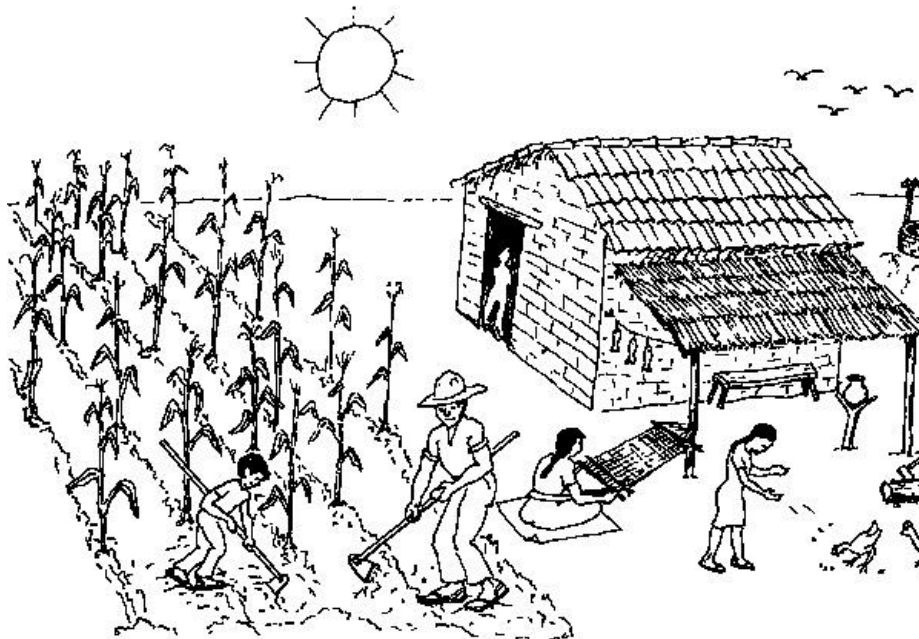
Meena lived on a mountainside in Nepal, a tiny kingdom located between China and India.

The people of Nepal generally short and have brown skin, dark eyes, and black hair. Nearly all of the Nepali people climb mountains. In fact, they have to if they ever go anywhere, because Nepal is covered with the highest mountains in the world.

Like most of the people in Nepal, Meena's father was a very poor farmer. Because their little farm was on the side of a steep mountain, he has to make small terraces of flat land on which to grow his crops. He hoped one day to be able to afford a water buffalo so he would not have to plow and dig the land by hand.

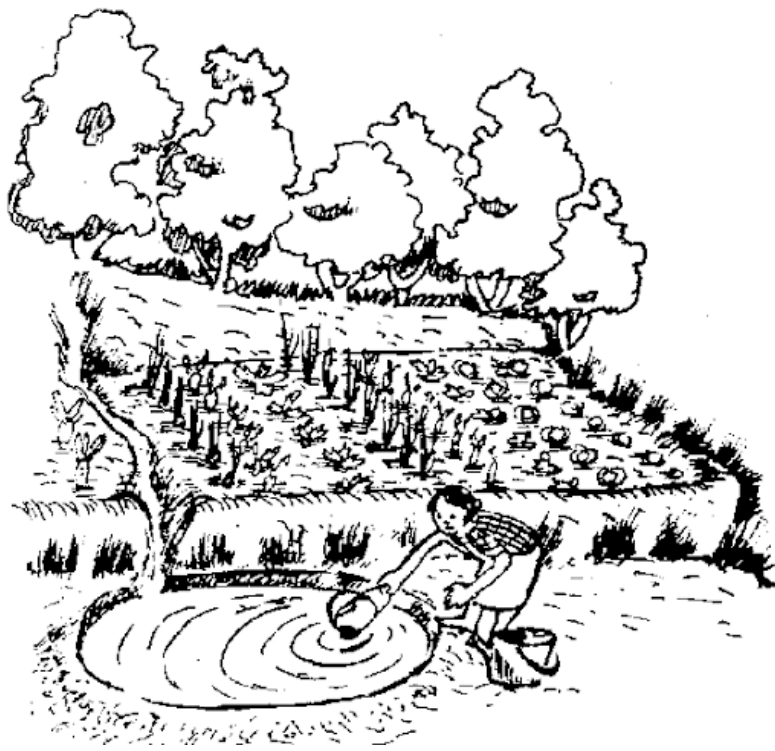
Meena's house was made of bricks covered with a mixture of cow dung and mud. The straw roof had to be replaced every few years to keep out the monsoon rains.

The lower story of the house was just one big room with a campfire in the middle. At night Meena slept on a straw mat near the fire. The whole family always slept in the same room together.



As the morning sun climbed slowly over the mountaintops, the chickens would be put out of the house amidst a flurry of feathers and cackling and clucking. To prevent wild animals such as mongooses, tigers, or jackals from eating them, they were kept in the house at night. At dawn each morning, having taken care of the chickens and started a fire, Meena and her sisters would go down the mountainside to fetch water.

At the local water tap the girls filled their large, handmade clay pots, then carried them slowly back up the trail to their home. This would be the family's water supply for the day.



Having fed the goats, Meena would go out to gather cow manure from different mountain trails. The manure, which is considered "clean" because it comes from "holy" cows, would be then mixed with mud and spread on the floors in Meena's house. This is the way Nepalis wash their floors. To put cow dung on the floor is called "lipnu."

Meena's family cooked over a campfire every day right inside the house. Her father and brothers were responsible for bringing the firewood which they cut up with big Nepali knives called kukuris.

At breakfast time entire family sat on the floor and ate with their fingers. Meena's family could afford only two meals a day — eating rice, lentils (like split peas) and spiced vegetables at each meal. Two or three times a month they could eat meat with their meal and occasionally they could afford fresh fruits or eggs. Meena had never eaten cake, or ice cream, or candy bars.

After meals Meena washed the dishes outdoors by the side of the house. Instead of soap she used ashes from the fire to clean them.

Some evenings Meena played with her friends. Since none of the children had toys, they made up various group games to play. All the families were very poor — most of her friends did not have shoes and most could not afford to pay the 75-cent fee each week in order to attend school. Only a few of the more fortunate ones would ever learn to read and write.

But many evenings the children were too busy to play. They worked in the fields, or helped grind wheat to make flour, or watched the younger children while mother cut grass off the steep mountainside for the cows.

Meena helped her father on the farm. As he plowed the ground by hand, she would break up the clods of dirt behind him. In Nepal, farming is a family affair.

Every day Meena prayed to a small bronze god. Prayer time is called "puja." Puja means 'worship' in the Nepali language. Meena prayed to a small bronze god in her house, and during the week she often went with her sisters to the village Hindu temple. There she would give a few coins or a handful of rice to the ugly stone idol. She had always been taught that these man-made idols are really gods and that they would be angry with her if she did not worship them often. These gods looked very mean and ugly, and deep down in her heart Meena was afraid of them. Of course, she would not tell anyone, but deep down inside she did not really believe that God is a bunch of cold, hard statues. But... these are the only gods she knew about.

Meena was afraid of growing up. Nobody remembered just when she was born, so she was not sure of her age. But she knew that when she is about fourteen her parents would make her marry a man she had never met before. She would have to live with his family then and wash the clothes and cook the food for the whole family. Would the man and his family treat her well? Often, she worried about that.

Also, she was afraid of growing old because she did not want to die. Though her life was not very happy, the thought of death was terrifying to her. "What happens after death?" she wondered. "Since life was so difficult and unhappy, is there a possibility of happiness after death? If so, how can one find out about it?" These were unanswered questions that she thought about often.

It was a happy day for Meena when her "Daju" (big brother) returned from serving in the army. He had been gone two long years — the first member of her family to travel away from their village. The experiences he'd had and the sights he had seen while in big cities were so exciting to hear about!

He showed Meena an army boot and explained, to her surprise, that nearly all the people in big cities wore shoes or boots made of leather! ("What wealthy people must live in cities!" Meena thought to herself.) He told her of a big white box with a door on one side. The inside, he said, is actually cold all the time. He told her how, when placed in the box, food is kept for days without spoiling. She was amazed at such a magical device called a refrigerator.

One thing Daju related really troubled Meena. "Our religion is not the only one in the world," he had said. "I heard of another which follows only one God. Unlike our gods, that God is loving and kind to people. Someone said He made a way for people to go to heaven and actually live at peace with Him when they die."

Meena yearned to hear more about this religion. Could this be the answer to her inner longings? Was this the way to really know God? "Tell me more," she said anxiously. "What is that Way?" But Daju had not heard any more. He did not know the Way. Meena was left with a hungry heart — desiring to know how to find peace, to know the truth, but with no one to tell her.

One day Meena's brother convinced their parents to allow Meena to go with him to visit the big city. While they were buying food in the market place, they met two girls, about the same age as Meena. They soon made friends and the girls explained that they were from an orphanage. Their parents had died, but they had been brought up under the care of Christians, who taught them about the way of Jesus, God's Son.

Because of the civil war that lasted for years there are a lot of orphans in Nepal. Now many children live in orphanages where they receive a Christian upbringing and can study at school in their local language. But there are still many orphans in need of safety, food and education.

Meena asked her new friends many questions and knew in her heart that she wanted to follow Jesus. Life as a Christian would be difficult, because her family would not understand. Also, the government has made it illegal to talk to others about the Christian way. This means that Christians who openly share the Gospel can be imprisoned. Many Christian churches have been closed. But about 1.5% of Nepal's population are Christian and many more are finding Jesus.

One Christian pastor said, "I read all the different religious books, but when I read the Bible, I found the answers to my questions."



<https://www.wholesomewords.org/children/misscc.html>

Manuel of Brazil

Manuel was a little South American Indian boy who lived on the banks of the Amazon River in Brazil. His father was chief of the tribe. Their home was a hut built on high stilts with a roof made of palm leaves, and they had a little farm back in the jungle.

One day Manuel sat on a big log on the bank, dreamily looking out over the broad river. Grandmother had taken the canoe and gone across the water to visit a friend. Father and Mother were at work on the farm.

Manuel was too young to have many worries, but one thing did make him afraid at times. He would hear his people talk about the "river spirits." They did not know much about them, but it was commonly believed they captured people and made them their slaves.

This morning as Manuel sat and dreamed, he became aware of a rumbling and a great movement beneath him. The log began to move toward the river. It was a small landslide, and before Manuel could flee to the safety of the bank, he found himself carried swiftly into the great stream.

Terrified, the poor boy clung to the log and screamed and cried for help. All the while the powerful current was carrying him swiftly downstream. Fish nibbled at his toes, submerged branches struck him as he was swept along, till he was sure the "river spirits" were trying to get him. As he clung to his strange boat, many thoughts went through his mind and he asked himself where would his soul go if the "river spirits" captured him. In his terror he held on more desperately, and two hours went by.



In the meantime, Manuel's father, hearing the boy's cries, had rushed to a neighbor's farm and borrowed his boat. Heading downstream he paddled as fast as he could, hoping to find his boy still alive. By and by he thought he could see a speck on the river far on ahead which might be his son, and he paddled on with renewed energy and hope. Several hours later he caught up with the swift moving log to which Manuel was still clinging bravely.



Oh how great was their joy as he pulled alongside and lifted Manuel into the boat, safe at last! Then they headed for home.

"Tell me, Father," said Manuel, "where would my soul have been if the "river spirits" had got me? Where do we go when we die?"

"I do not know, my son," was the only reply.

Manuel asked many people that question during the next three years, but no one could tell. Then one day some strange people came to visit their tribe. They were not dark-skinned as the Indians were, but white. Manuel's people learned that they were missionaries, and soon they began to teach them some strange and wonderful things out of a black book they carried. They spoke about God who lived in heaven, and about His wonderful Son who came down into this world and died for all men everywhere — even Indians.

The missionaries invited all who would come to the Sunday school to learn from the great and wonderful Book. Manuel went and thought how marvelous it would be to possess that Book for himself. Then he was thrilled one day when the missionary offered a Bible to anyone who could recite the names of the 66 books of the Bible by heart. The missionary thought this would take the Indian children a long time, but what was his surprise the very next Sunday to hear Manuel say them off perfectly. To be sure he got a copy of the Book and then he set about to learn how to read it. All the while the boy listened carefully to everything the missionaries said and searched his own Bible for himself.

As the months went by, Manuel wanted to become a follower of Jesus. He asked the missionaries how to do this, and how glad they were to tell him that the Lord Jesus had died to put our sins away upon the cross, that He had taken the punishment we, and now God forgives every one that believes in Jesus. The Book said, "Whoever received Him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God." John 1:12

With a heart overflowing with thanksgiving, Manuel opened his heart and received the Lord Jesus as his Saviour that night. A wonderful peace filled his soul. He knew that the river spirits could never have any power over him because Jesus, whom he now worshiped was greater. He also knew that he would always be in the care of Jesus, both now and when he died.

Sometime after, both his father and mother, his grandmother and his sister, all became followers of Jesus, and great was the rejoicing in that happy family.

When Manuel grew older, he preached to his own people the wonderful news of a Saviour who died for people everywhere.

Tomi's Prayer

Just outside the gate of the little Japanese town was the shrine of the Kishibojin god, and every morning, often before it was light, a girl of twenty could be seen throwing herself before the god in earnest prayer. Sometimes she poured cold water over her body as she prayed; sometimes she cut off strands of her hair and offered them to the god. Tomi felt that she must have her prayers answered, so she tried in every way she knew to make the god hear her. Still her prayers were not answered.

Each day, when her prayer was over, she would leave the shrine, go to the factory, work hard all day, and then go home to care for an invalid father and two small children. Tomi was always tired, even in the morning when she went to pray.

Things had not always been so hard. Her mother had died when she was just a little girl, but she had had an elder brother who was kind and who cared for the home. Then her father was taken ill and her brother began to do many things that were not right. He drank alcohol, and was in a bad way when he came home. Finally, after he had struck a policeman, he ran away from home to get rid of paying a fine, leaving his wife and two small children to be supported. Soon his wife ran away also, and so Tomi had her father had the children to care for.

For what was she praying so earnestly? She was praying that her brother might become a good man, and return home to make the last days of his father happy ones. It seemed as if the Kishibojin god might give her this one request. At last, she decided that she must make the promise which was the last resort of those who prayed. After she had made her routine for prayer and sacrifices one day, she said to the god:

"If you will make my brother a good man, I offer up before your shrine both my body and soul."

But the brother did not come home, and still Tomi prayed. One night Tomi was invited to go to a meeting which was being held for the factory girls by visiting missionaries. She listened with great interest as the missionary told of the Saviour, the Loving Friend who cares for all our sorrows. She thought of her brother and wished this Great Friend could help her to find him. She longed to have someone care for her. The next night Tomi again went to the meeting, and soon she was so much interested in Christianity that she wanted to ask the missionaries how she could become a Christian. But one thing held her back—her vow to the Kishibojin god. What would the god do to her if she did not fulfill her vow? Could she forsake the god? Had she not promised to give body and soul to him when her brother came home?



Yet as she reasoned with herself, she found herself wondering why the god had not answered her prayer. Perhaps he did not want her body and soul. Perhaps she did not please him. It was a big problem to her.

One day she went to a Christian Japanese pastor ask him what to do. She told him of her hard home life of the unhappiness of her father, and the wickedness her brother. She told him how many things she had done to please the Kishibojin god and of the final vow she made. The pastor listened to her story and then said that he had come to see that an idol could not answer prayer, and that he felt she could become a Christian and still pray for her brother. For many days Tomi thought the matter over, afraid to leave the idol god, yet eager to know more of Christ. Finally, she made her decision and a great new happiness came into her life as she was baptized and joined the church, and her new friends in that church joined her in praying for the lost brother.

One day, not many weeks later, word came that her brother had been found, that he had tried to commit suicide when he had been trapped by the police, and that he was very ill. Tomi went to him; she was kind to him; and as soon as he could be moved, she brought him back to the home again. He paid his debt to the police. He stopped drinking. And at last, he began going to the Christian church with Tomi, having made up his mind to be a better father to his little children.

In the town where Tomi lived, people had noticed that the girl, whom they had long admired because of her fine spirit when things were so hard, was becoming more beautiful in character. Little by little the story of her change from worshiping the Kishibojin god to the Christian God became known, and the villagers watched to see if the new god would bring her brother home. When he finally returned, changed his ways, and joined the church, they felt that a miracle had happened, and they wanted to know more of this new faith. So Tomi became the center of a new interest in Christianity.

Several years have passed by since she became a Christian. She found that she was not content to be ignorant, for she wanted to give the Bible to others; so she began to study. She asked to be allowed to work for her board in one of the Mission schools so that she could study the Bible in her spare time.

"If God wants my life, he will supply my needs," Tomi said to her friend. "God answers prayers, as I well know, and now I am praying for an education."

<http://www.temkit.com/13-Missionary/World%20Mission/40%20stories.pdf>