I looked around
And what did I see?
A big green decorated
Christmas tree.
With ornaments and lights
And a star at the top,
All the townspeople in awe
Had to stop.
I looked around to see again,
And everywhere,
I saw snowmen!
The one closest to me had
Acorns for eyes
And a carrot for a nose,
Can he smell those Oreos?
Raisins for a mouth
And sticks for his hands,
He’s almost there,
He’s lookin’ grand!
Hat on head
And scarf around neck,
Now he’s perfect,
Not a wreck!
This time when I turned my head,
“Unless you’re swimming, you cannot stand on the gutter, young lady,” instructed the referee at the side of the pool.

“Actually,” I said, somewhat embarrassed, “I’m swimming in the next event, but I don’t start off the blocks, I start from the gutter.” Having only swum for 2 years, and this being less than one month into my first season on the swim team, I knew that starting off the blocks would be a problem for me. Maintaining one of the best swimming teams in Missouri for many years, my high school was notorious for having excruciating sessions in the pool. During the beginning of my first season, I often cringed at the thought of going to practice as the school day ticked away.

Frustrated, I would often contemplate why I was swimming if I could not even dive off the blocks to start a race. After further reasoning, however, I realized that I wanted to improve myself, and that overcoming my fear of learning to dive off the blocks would be equivalent to qualifying for the State competition. I decided to undergo muscle pulls, a soda-free diet, chlorine-infested hair, and less time to do homework for the next four months to better myself as an athlete.

Tuesdays and Thursdays were the worst. Those were the days when we would dive off the blocks for an hour of non-stop sprinting. Unlucky for my coach, I was in the outside lane closest to where he observed us. I should have brought him some soap and shampoo, since nearly every time I got up to dive, he got a shower from my belly flops. After practice, the rest of the team would go and lift weights while I worked on my dive with our assistant coach, Dave.

My freshman and sophomore years were successful not only because I became a faster and more powerful swimmer, but because I also learned how not to belly flop. During my junior season, though, Dave gave me advice that stuck with me:

“It’s all about gravity,” he explained. “Your center of gravity has to be right dead in the middle. If you lean too far in front, you’ll plop into the water like a canon ball; too far behind, and you’ll fall backwards on the concrete and break your neck.” Great, I thought. No pressure whatsoever.

“Think composure,” he continued, “as silly as it may sound, think of yourself as a fish slicing through the water instead of focusing on the individual positions of your body.” A bit eccentric, but I nevertheless followed his advice. That season, I perfected my dive, dropped time in all my events, and earned something greater: the respect of my coach for all my hard work. The little steps I took the years before, suddenly became second nature to me. For the first time in my athletic life, I saw first hand that my best effort had paid off. I had suffered many black bruises on my thighs from slapping the water too hard, but in the end, they symbolized my perseverance more than anything else. My fear of diving off the blocks had been overcome with practice, determination and learning to be in control.

It was only after I had faced my hidden fear, that I overcame it. I also learned that like my initial inability to dive, more difficult hurdles would emerge in my life. My confidence in my ability to overcome challenges was both boosted and personified in the swimming pool. Although the water from atop the starting blocks appears to be deeper, it no longer seems as intimidating as it did when I was fearful of diving off the blocks and into the unknown depths of the pool.

“You’re up next,” informed Sarah, one of my teammates. I climbed up onto the block, and got into the starting position. Out of the depths of the water, I saw a figure cloaked in a brown robe “The force is strong within you,” he affirmed. Seconds later, I felt myself slice the hydrogen bonds that had held my fear intact for so long.
Introduction to the Rig Veda
Compiled by Vrunda Prabhu and Katy Walker

The Vedas are the earliest recorded works of man’s spiritual quest distributed in four main books, viz., the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Saama Veda and the Atharva Veda. There are about 20,000 mantras or metrical verses in all the Vedas. The Vedas are said to reveal Truth in its infinite dimensions, Virtue in its eternal potentialities and Benediction in its everlasting blessedness. The Rig Veda has 10,589 mantras called Riks.

The Rig Veda has many teachings, some of which are:

1. The soul is eternal and distinct from the body. It had a life before the existing body and will have a life after the existing body.
2. Life is a gift of God and must be lived with gratitude and faith.
3. A conscious effort must be made to cultivate the virtues of life.

The Rig Veda has hymns to various deities, while it also affirms the unity of Reality. Reality is considered one and indivisible, and this one Supreme Reality is praised in all the hymns of the Rig Veda. The plurality of the deities is on account of the different functional aspects of the One without a second. Thus, two remarkable aspects of the Rig Veda are: its concept of "ekam sat" or One Reality from which, mankind springs; and its artistic integrity or the internal relationships between the whole and its parts.

Below is the meaning of the hymn, Altar 1 from the Rig Veda as explained by Dr. R. L. Kashyap:

Hymn 1.1: The first hymn to Agni – Adoration of Agni
Rishi: Madhuchchandah

Whether man is aware of it or not, his life is a constant flow to the Gods of universe, to the divinities above him. His energies of body, life and mind stream towards these greater powers and in turn receive nourishment and strength from them. When man is awake to this phenomenon in himself and participates consciously in this interchange, it becomes a sacrifice, a self-giving. And this sacrifice is the appointed means for the growth of man into Godhead, for the manifestation of God in humanity.

In this sacred session, the heart-seat of the soul, is the altar, vedi; the being of man is the sacrificer, yajaman; all movements of life are the oblations, ahuti; and the mounting flame of aspiration for the Divine is the fire, agni, in which all is cast for transmutation and acceptance by the supreme godhead.

God Agni, the Deity who presides over the material fire is invoked as the summoner of the Gods, to come with them and take seat on the altar of the plenitude of the powers of the consecrated soul.

What’s This??
Vellore S. Adithi
Third Grade, Ridgeway Elementary School
And
Vellore S. Arthi
Eighth Grade
West Jr. High School
VEN PONGAL

Ingredients:
- 2 tsps. Cumin seeds
- 1/3 c. Ghee
- 2 tsps. Cashew nuts
- 2 c. Rice
- 1 c. Moong dal
- 1 tsp. Peppercorns, cracked
- 1 inch Piece of ginger
- Salt to taste

Directions: Wash rice and dal. Mix rice and dal, and put in pressure cooker with 7 cups of water, and cook till very soft. Peel and mince ginger. In 2 tbsp of ghee, fry cumin and cracked peppercorns, later adding cashews. Fry till cashews are golden brown. Add ginger, remaining ghee, salt and cooked rice-and-dal mixture. Let it cook together until it bubbles. (Add ½ cup water if it is too dry) When serving, you might like to add a tsp or so of ghee on each person’s plate. Serve with eggplant masiyal or tomato gotsu. (Masiyal and gotsu are thick sauces)

TOMATO GOTSU

Ingredients:
- 4 Large tomatoes
- 1/4 c. Oil
- 1/4 tsp. Fenugreek
- 1/2 tsp. Mustard seeds
- 1/4 tsp. Asafetida
- 1/4 tsp. Turmeric
- 1 tsp. Fenugreek powder
- 4-5 Green chilies

Directions: Cut tomatoes into 1/2 inch cubes and mince green chilies. Heat oil, add mustard seeds, and when they begin to sputter, add asafetida, fenugreek and turmeric powder. Add chopped tomatoes, chili powder, salt and green chilies. Stir occasionally, and cook till tomatoes are soft and the oil rises to the surface.

Answers to “What’s this?”

A) The back view of a woman bent over scrubbing the floor
B) An aerial view of a man in a sombrero frying an egg
C) A tennis racket from a tennis ball’s point of view
D) The back view of a bald man reading the paper
E) A submarine’s periscope and its reflection
F) The side view of a plate in a dish drying rack

Bal Sandesh needs your help!

We welcome submissions of all types (reports, poetry, short stories, artwork, puzzles, jokes etc.). Work can be submitted to the Editor or the Parent Advisors. We prefer electronic version of the submission (e-mail or diskette). Artwork can be submitted on paper. Older kids interested in volunteering to serve on the editorial/production team should contact the Editorial Staff or the Parent Advisors.

Sudama

By Vellore S. Adithi

Once there was an old Brahmin named Sudama. He was a childhood friend of Lord Krishna. They were classmates and fellow students of the great Rishi Sandeepan. Many years passed. Krishna defeated his wicked uncle Kamsa and become the king of Dwarka. His old classmate Sudama grew up to be well read and knowledgeable. However, he was very poor. He and his wife lived in a shack and wore tattered clothes. Many days they went hungry. Then one day his wife asked him, “why don’t you go ask your friend Krishna for some help?” Sudama was reluctant to do so, but after being persuaded by his wife, he finally agreed to visit Krishna. It was the custom to take a gift when visiting the king, so Sudama requested his wife to give him something as a gift for Krishna. Since they were very poor, Sudama’s wife could only find a handful of beaten rice (poha), which she wrapped up in a cloth. As he walked to Dwarka, he thought of Krishna and their childhood days together and quoted “Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya.” As soon as Sudama neared the palace, Krishna saw him from afar and bounded out to greet him. He was overjoyed to see his old friend. When they stepped into the palace, Krishna jokingly asked whether Sudama had brought a gift for him, well aware that he had. Sudama shyly gave the rice to Krishna. Krishna ate the rice with great relish. They talked on and on about their childhood memories. Soon it was dark. Krishna requested Sudama to stay the night and he did. The next morning Sudama bid Krishna farewell and went back home. On the way he was happy thinking about the warmth and kindness with which he had been treated. He never got round to asking Krishna for help but was very happy to have spent time with his childhood friend.

When he got to his house, a palace stood in its place. Thinking that he had lost his way he turned around to leave, when his wife came out dressed in fine clothes and jewels and greeted him. Then he realized that this was Krishna’s gift to him. Sudama and his wife offered praise to the Lord. They lived a pure and happy life thereafter.