

The Plum Stone

Tekst/illustrasjoner:

Tilrettelagt av Anne Schjelderup, oversatt fra en norsk versjonen av fortellingen gjengitt i «Lesebok», Steinerskolen i Vestfold, Tønsberg 1988/Clipart.com

Filosofiske spørsmål:

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Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910) is one of the most famous Russian writers. In 1860 he started a school for children on his own ancestral estate "Yasnaya Polyana" near Tula in Russia. Among other things he wrote many stories for children, stories that are still read in Russian schools. Here we present one of these stories: "The Plum Stone" (translated from a Norwegian original printed in "Lesebok", Steinerskolen i Vestfold, Tønsberg 1988).

One day mother had bought some plums that she wanted to give to the children after dinner. She had put them on a plate and placed it on the table in the dining room.

Vanja, who had never tasted plums before, just walked around and smelled them. He wanted very much to taste one, and he looked at them all the time.

When he was finally alone in the living room, he couldn't hold himself back anymore. He took one plum, and quickly put it in his mouth.

Before dinner mother counted the plums, and found that one was missing. She told father about it.

When they were seated at the dinner table, father said; "Now, children, is there anyone here who has taken a plum?"

The children all answered: "No".

Vanja blushed, but he answered "No", like the others.

Then father said: "The fact that one of you has taken a plum is bad enough, but the worst thing is that there are stones in plums, and if you don't know how to eat the plum and end up swallowing the stone, you'll die before the evening. That's what I fear the most," he finished.

Vanja turned pale and cried out: "I didn't swallow it! I threw it out the window!"

Then everyone started laughing, everyone but Vanja. He cried.

Topics for philosophical conversations

1. Mother had bought the plums for the children only, not for herself and father. Was that too kind of her? Would you say it is possible to be too kind towards another person? Have you been too kind sometimes? How do you know when a person is being too kind?
2. It is actually not true that you will die if you swallow a plum stone. Father told a lie. But because he told this lie, and because Vanja believed every word of it, Vanja came up with the truth and admitted it was he who had taken the plum. Does this show us that it is sometimes all right to use a lie?
3. Perhaps Father knew from the very start that it was Vanja who had eaten the plum. Perhaps

he told the lie about the plum stone just to make Vanja confess what he had done.

Why is it so difficult to confess the wrong we have done? Is it because we are afraid of the punishment? Or is it because we are afraid of losing our pride? Why are people proud? Are animals proud too? Are children proud? What is pride?

4. Do you think it was silly to make all that fuss just because one plum was missing? Do you steal if you taste a grape in the supermarket? If you breathe the air that belongs to your friend? Or is the air something nobody owns? What kinds of things cannot be owned by a person or a group of persons? The earth? The moon? Other people's thoughts?
5. This story was written over 100 years ago. At that time people were not used to the kind of luxuries we have today, so plums were not everyday food. Children today probably eat much more chocolate than Vanja and his friends ate plums. Is it better for people to live in luxury or to live in poverty?