The Parable of the Student and the Stars

Years ago, there was a student. This student was very studious – as students should be! This student was also very eager. In class, every time the teacher asked a question, this student was the first one ready with an answer. Soon, the teacher observed that the rest of the class would sit quietly – they had come to feel that their answers were not as good as the over-eager student’s.

One day after class, the teacher took the student aside. First, she commended the student for studying hard and always being prepared to answer questions in class. Then, she explained her problem – the rest of the students in class were becoming hesitant to participate. They were sitting quietly and letting the over-eager student answer every question. “How can I help?”, the student asked. “When you come to class tomorrow, there will be a notecard on your desk.”, the teacher said. “It will have three stars on it. Every time you answer a question, place a circle around one star. When all of your stars are circled, you must remain quiet for the rest of the class.”

At first, the student would quickly use up all the stars. Then, the student learned to use the stars more carefully, answering only those more difficult questions that the rest of the class could not answer. Soon, the student looked forward to hearing the answers from the rest of the class – in fact, some of their answers were better than the ones that the student would have given. One day, after class, the student came to the teacher’s desk, smiling, and said, “I have one star left!” The teacher smiled back. “Would you like me to add it to your three for tomorrow?”, she asked. The student thought for a moment, then said, “No, ma’am. Three stars are enough!”