

SATYAM TALES

Diggaja

From elephant to super-elephant



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India



Satyam Tales

Commenced on the occasion of World Yoga Convention & BSY Golden Jubilee, 2013

Diggaja is the first in the series of *Satyam Tales* depicting the life and teachings of our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati. Through the medium of these simple narratives, we hear the voice of Sri Swamiji inspiring all, irrespective of age.

Diggaja is the story of a baby-elephant, Vinayak, with a dream in his heart. Circumstances throw him out of his home in the jungles into a chained existence, and he grows up to be angry, vengeful and cynical. Until, one day, Digvijayi arrives into his life, and turns his mind upside down. Vinayak becomes a new elephant. In the final moment of reckoning, he realizes his dream – of becoming a diggaja, Super-Elephant.

This story is a delightful read for children, adults and old alike. It is an invaluable message for those engaged in the world and for those seeking the spirit. This journey is your journey, these challenges are your challenges, and this victory is your victory. It is a story that will touch your heart, give you joy, hope, conviction and, above all, faith. Yes, you too can become a super-being.

—Editor

© Bihar School of Yoga 2013

Published by Yoga Publications Trust

First edition 2013

Reprinted 2018

Printed at Aegean Offset Printers, Greater Noida

Please note:

- This collection of *Satyam Tales* is dedicated to our masters, Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati and Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati, and is the vehicle to bring their spiritual and yogic teachings in an understandable and applicable form into the lives of individuals throughout the world.
- *Satyam Tales* will be exclusively published by Yoga Publications Trust to ensure the accuracy and correctness of the teachings and the context in which they are being presented.
- *Satyam Tales* is a loving offering to all the children and the future generations of the world to remind them of their true nature and inspire them to explore and enhance their own potential.
- We invite all aspirants to share these tales with your group and if you have some tales of your own, we request you to contribute as well. You can also publish these tales in your own language, fulfilling the conditions of YPT, for which you may contact:

Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan, Fort, Munger, Bihar, India 811201

Tel: +91-6344 222430, Fax: +91-6344 220169

Diggaja

In my early days, I would often hear grandma say that one's whole life flashes across the mind's eye during one's last moments. I was reminded of these words as old memories began to fill up the rather vast space of a mind that had finally been de-cluttered of its variegated contents, a mind that was at last at peace with itself. If her words were true then I was certainly nearing the end of my earthly existence. The mortal wounds I was receiving left, right and centre, only served to confirm that surmise. Death was now a foregone conclusion, and yet strangely, it no longer seemed to matter any more, thanks to the training I had received from Digvijayi . . .

(I)

My earliest memories are green, blue and white. Tall green grass rising above my head only to merge into the blueness of a sky whose vast expanse was punctuated by puffy, white clouds. And, oh yes, the white of the snow-covered peaks in the distance as well. Sometimes I wondered how the world would be if these were the three primary colours, and the raging, rajasic red never existed. Would life be more serene and beautiful, perhaps less angry and violent . . .

I was born in the *terai*, the lush grasslands and jungles at the foothills of the Himalayas. Being the youngest in the



herd, I was naturally the most pampered calf. My grandma named me Vinayak, after her favourite deity. Why she adored a half-elephant half-man deity when she could have chosen any from a large pantheon of fully pachydermal personages, remained a perennial source of worry in my younger days.

Mridula was the only one in the herd in whom I could confide my innermost feelings. She was my elder sister and, true to her name, had the gentlest nature imaginable. Many a time did she save me from the chastisements that grandma periodically dished out to errant calves. A whack from her pendulous trunk could hurt for days. Boy, was I glad I had a caring sister on my side, someone I could play with and learn from . . .

(II)

It was Mridula who first told me about the diggajas. Many were the nights we spent on the banks of the Ramganga, looking up at the starlit sky and wondering what it all

meant. Or those wondrous moments, when the setting sun would set the sky ablaze with shades of crimson. Of course, at times like these I would never fail to wonder about the look and feel of sunsets . . . if white replaced red in the schema of primary colours . . . but all that wishful thinking evaporated the day Auntie Bhautiki showed us a prism in her weekly physics class and told us that white is the sum total of all colours. So much for white being a primary colour! Still it was a pleasing thought to hold on to . . .



Gazing at the orange-red horizon, where earth and sky converge, Mridula would whisper in awe and wonder, “Yonder live the diggajas . . .”

“Excuse me?” I remarked, when I heard that name the first time.

“The *diggajas* are the eight great elephants, who guard and protect the eight quarters. They are the ones who hold the sky up, and the earth down at the edge of the horizon. Without them the sky would collapse and there would be chaos on earth.”

I wasn’t impressed by this mumbo-jumbo. We jumbos are supposed to be quite intelligent animals after all. “This doesn’t sound right,” I countered, “Auntie Bhautiki tells us that the earth is round and so the earth and sky don’t really meet. And if they don’t meet, the question of holding the sky aloft is moot. Besides, if someone were to really try





to hold the sky up, it would be a formidable task, even for these super-elephants you speak of. According to Auntie, a square-metre patch of sky at sea level weighs about ten thousand kilos which means . . .”

“Vinayak,” she sighed, “how many times have I told you that there’s more to nature and this world than

meets the eye. The sky and the earth are just metaphors. A diggaja represents a grand, noble ideal. Something we can all aspire towards. And yet very real and down-to-earth. Accessible in the here and now . . .”

(III)

Such was Mridula’s conviction in the beliefs she cherished that I became a convert quite soon. As an adolescent male calf in an overwhelmingly female herd of fifty or so, becoming a diggaja myself became my all-consuming macho dream. A diggaja represented all the good and grand things in life – strength, sincerity, honesty, bravery, commitment, fearlessness, dharma – verily a knight in shining armour. My favourite was Airavata, the four-tusked white diggaja, the protector of the eastern quarter. Such was his prowess that the powers that be often requisitioned his services as the celestial steed as well. Then there was Kumuda, the protector of the south-west, or Suprateeka, who guarded the north-east. Just to become like them, or better still, one of them, was all I could think of, night and day.

“You still haven’t told me the secret of becoming a diggaja?” I pestered Mridula for the tenth time that week.

“Patience, my dear,” she replied soothingly, having become quite used to my pestering, “Remember what I told



you at the very beginning. Becoming a diggaja has nothing to do with brute bodily strength. It is about training the mind, purifying the heart and, above all, developing faith . . . in oneself and the One Self.”

Seeing my somewhat crestfallen look, she added reassuringly, “Contrary to what you may think, you are making good progress with whatever I have taught you. Persevere and you shall eventually succeed. Today I shall take you to a special place for your next lesson; but never ever forget the basics . . .”

As we gently glided through the shadowy grasslands in the dead of night, she remarked, “And the most basic thing is awareness. Rigorous mental awareness . . .” She was taking me to an old elephant who lived a solitary life on a nearby hilltop. I had never stepped out of the secure confines of the herd before. Now I was experiencing the thrill of adventure as well as a sense of dire foreboding. It was dangerous to separate from the herd, and yet Mridula was willing to take that risk for my sake. As I looked at her, I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude . . .

“ . . . awareness of both the worlds, outer and inner. Only then can you begin to know and harness your latent strengths, which will . . . ”

She abruptly cut short her sentence and raised her trunk into the air. As she sniffed about, I sensed that somehow we were in trouble.

“I smell humans close by. Poachers probably. Who else would be up and about at this hour?” she whispered. “Let’s get to the river and swim across to the other side. And watch out for traps!”

We stopped and turned eastwards; but we had hardly walked twenty paces when clumsy me crashed headlong into a trap that the poachers had freshly laid.

In the pit, I trumpeted aloud in panic. I heard Mridula’s response, and then the other voices. Human. But in their cruelty and bloodlust, less than bestial. I heard the bravado in their voices turn to fear as Mridula trumpeted and charged at them. Then I heard one loud gunshot, and Mridula’s cry of pain. Several more gunshots followed in quick succession. I stopped counting after a dozen. Hurrahs and shouts of glee drowned out the dying sounds of my sister.

I heard footsteps approaching the edge of the pit. A man with a smoking rifle in one hand and a torchlight in the other leaned over. In that moment of agony and anguish, the image of that brutal hunter was forever seared into my memory . . .

(IV)

For many years, I was a slave to different masters. The hunters sold me to a teak contractor who tried to train me as a lumber elephant. My detestation for humans and their lordship over me however, was so deeply ingrained that I could never do their bidding. No amount of starvation or other direct methods of coercion succeeded in breaking my spirit. Sometimes I would pretend to be docile and follow



the instructions of my mahout for a while and then do something silly, like break a log into two, that would make my owner tear his hair in frustration.

Eventually he sold me to a circus owner who prided himself on his ability to tame the wildest of animals. The same story repeated. Periods of docility followed by acts of defiance. Once, during a house-full performance, our trainer was leading all four of us elephants in what he called the 'elephant train'. Each elephant would walk on his hindlegs with the forelegs placed on the back of the elephant in front. I felt so stupid walking on two legs that when the merry clown came along on his tall unicycle, I discreetly sideswiped him with my tail. When he came crashing down near our heavy, stomping legs and had to quickly crawl to safety on all four limbs, I felt a sense of having evened the score.

Of course, the circus owner didn't look at things the same way. He was already exasperated by my antics. He had my prized tusks chopped and sold off, and then sold me at a bargain price to an erstwhile nawab. Other than getting dressed up dandily for ceremonial parades and taking the nawab's guests on joyrides, there was not much else to do.



This suited me just fine, for it afforded me occasion to resume my spiritual ruminations. Though, I must admit, they were now tainted with a distinct streak of cynicism . . .

This period did not last long either. After the nawab's death, his estate was divided amongst many bickering brethren and descendants. I ended up with one who promptly turned me into a daily wage-earner in the form of a joyride-jumbo for the tourists who frequented the nearby wildlife sanctuary. It was on one such joyride that Digvijayi came into my life.

(V)

I still remember that day vividly. I was quite surly and in no mood to entertain humans. When I saw a group coming my way, I thought, "So they want a joyride, eh? I'll give them a ride they will remember."

Somehow this group looked different. Most of them had shaved heads and wore ochre-coloured dhotis. 'Pretentious monks', I thought to myself, 'swindling common folk with their babble about other-worldly matters.' All these years had instilled so much cynicism in me that I had begun to doubt my own dreams of becoming a diggaja . . .

As the group neared us, my mahout made me kneel down. I did so reluctantly. Just as the first one climbed on top, I stood up with a mighty jerk, hoping to topple him. I was surprised when it didn't happen. 'Must be a sharp fellow,' I thought, and began heaving from side to side to dislodge my lone passenger.

"Stop", my mahout yelled at me, but I was in no mood to listen. "Enough of this servility, today I will settle scores

once and for all . . .” I said to myself.

A quick, sharp whack on my back cut through my reverie like a hot knife through butter. It was accompanied by an equally sharp command in elephant-speak, “Stop.” And I instantly froze. That command had brought all activities to a grinding stop. Not just physical but mental as well.



Yes, my mind had suddenly stopped. No thoughts, no confusion, no nothing. Just a state of being. How long I stayed in that state of limbo, I cannot say, but I came out of that state when another sentence in elephant-speak whizzed through my now empty mind, “How can you dream of becoming a diggaja, Vinayak, when you are so caught up in your own moods and head-trips?”

This sudden mention of a long-forgotten dream opened up a sluiceway of memories, hopes and ambitions. My wonderful herd in the terai, my loving ma and doting grandma, and, above all, the days with Mridula and her fables of the diggajas – everything came rushing back in a torrent of emotions.

‘Who is this person,’ I wondered, ‘who has so effortlessly touched the very core of my being? Is he a human trickster or some divine wizard? Does he mean well or is he ill-intentioned . . . and how does he know my name . . . not just my name but also my most cherished dream of becoming a diggaja?’

“None ever became a diggaja without overcoming the baser instincts, Vinayak. One needs to cultivate courage, fortitude, perseverance, devotion to duty and, above all, selflessness, which you sadly lack at this point in time . . .”

“Who are you?” I bluntly voiced the thought uppermost in my mind.

“Satyam,” came the terse reply.

“Are you a diggaja in disguise?”

“Maybe, maybe not. Depends on your definition.”

“You must be if you could so effortlessly still my elephantine body and mind. What else can you do?” I asked, my awe and reverence for the stranger growing with each passing moment.

“Nothing that could be deemed singularly significant.”

I decided to take the bull by its horns and unravel this mystery. “Can you fly in the sky?” I asked directly, remembering Mridula’s stories about Airavata flying through Akashganga.

“No.”

“Can you walk on water?”

“No.”

“Can you . . .”

“Come on Vinayak,” his response cut my next question short, “away with these pointless questions. You remind me of a pesky Australian reporter who once started a similar barrage of questions about the siddhis I had.”



I found this comparison to a biped, that too a dunderhead reporter, rather insulting. Nonetheless, I swallowed my pride and ventured to ask, “And what was your reply?”

“I told him that the only siddhi I had was the ability to stand on my own two feet.”

My agonizing circus days flashed before my eyes. For a quadruped to have that ability was indeed a siddhi!

“Don’t worry. It is not my intention to teach you that siddhi. You have done enough of that during your circus days,” he quipped, as if reading my thoughts, “but I will definitely make you stand on your head.”

It was only much later, when my attitude towards life had been turned topsy-turvy that I realized the import of what he had said back then.



“I’m afraid I don’t quite follow you,” I replied and then added, “Master.” The sheer force of his personality had totally subdued my rather overgrown pride, and inspired a sense of humility that surprised even me by its presence.

“I am not your Master,” he said dismissively, “*Gaja samajhe gaja kee hee bhashaa*. Your Master will come later . . . when you are ready . . . to be a diggaja. I am only here to give you a little push along the way.”

“How may I address you then?”

“Satyam.”

“That’s too short a name to do full justice to your grand personality.”

“How about Swami Satyananda Saraswati?”

“That’s too long,” I complained.

“Well, then, you come up with one.”

“How about Digvijayi, the all-conquering hero? You certainly seem to be worthy of that grand title.”

He laughed aloud and I took it as a gesture of acceptance.

(VI)

“You know Vinayak,” Digvijayi remarked, as I leisurely carried him along a meandering path in the woods, “your



life reminds me of the story of a kaupeen that my master, Swami Sivananda, was fond of relating.”

First, comparisons with pesky humans, and then with human underwear! It was too much for my pride to swallow in one day. “What do you mean?” I replied indignantly.

“Don’t take this too seriously,” he said with a slight tinge of sarcasm, obviously enjoying my discomfiture, “the kaupeen is just a symbol for an instinct that’s common in most of us. The desire to shirk our responsibilities, to run away from our karmas.”

Somehow the phrase ‘running away from karmas’ struck a deep chord within. I was all ears now.

“Once a kaupeen grew fed up of the duty that it had to perform day after day for its owner. One day, when the owner had washed it and put it out to dry, the kaupeen decided it was time to move on to better prospects. With the next gust of wind that came its way, the kaupeen flew off the clothesline, and for the next couple of hours exulted in its new-found independence.

“That independence was short-lived though. As soon as the wind died and the kaupeen returned to terra firma, an old, naked sadhu chanced upon it and immediately cried out, ‘Aha, exactly what I needed.’ He promptly tied the kaupeen around his waist and merrily went his way. As for the kaupeen, it was a classic case of ‘out of the frying pan and into the fire’.”

The import of the story began to dawn upon me, as the last few years of my life flashed through my mind. Isn't that what I had been doing too?

"Isn't that what you've been doing too, Vinayak, resenting and running away from situations that life presents to you for your own growth? And when you are unable to escape from a situation, instead of doing the best you can, you begin to wallow in self-pity and direct your negativity upon others!" Digvijayi remarked, echoing my own thoughts. That was really an uncanny ability he had.

"A diggaja is made of stronger stuff, my boy, much stronger stuff. He has to shoulder great burdens and responsibilities, for which he may have to suffer greatly, but he does it gladly, for that is his nature. To be like a giant banyan tree giving shade and shelter to others, even as the scorching rays of the sun burn up its leaves or pelting hail smashes through its branches. No, a diggaja cannot turn his back and run, as you've been doing all along.

"And a diggaja must be able to forgive and forget, so he can flow with the meandering currents of the river that we call life. His mind should be strong enough to withstand all the blows that life throws at him, without losing his poise or his smile. And look at you, allowing your swinging moods to take complete possession of you. Yet you dream the impossible, of becoming a diggaja! *Bhai vaah! Gaanth girah mein kauri nahin, aur miyaan chale lahore . . .*"

Each word was like an arrow finding its mark.

"I can understand a sister's loss. Yes, it was tragic, but that is no reason to carry a chip on your shoulder for the rest of your life, to despise the whole of humanity for the follies of a few.

"Still, nothing is lost. It is never too late to return to your destined path, never too late to wake up to your true potential. Become an ideal karma yogi. Always remain cheerful and optimistic, not sullen and downcast like you are now. You know what, I'll throw you a challenge. If you can remain happy, cheerful and positive throughout the twenty-



four hours that make up one full day of your life, rest assured that you will become the diggaja you've always wanted to be . . .”

A lone, silent tear rolled down my eye. It trickled down my trunk, and just as it was about to reach the tip, something made me raise up my trunk in salute. Perhaps it was an unconscious act of anointing Digvijayi with that diminutive drop. Gajendra, the famous elephant-king

of yore at least had a lotus to offer to his saviour, but the teardrop was all I had. Yet it was accepted by Digvijayi. Even though from all outward appearances, he had entered into a state of deep meditation . . .



(VII)

Digvijayi stayed with me for another couple of hours. He taught and told me many more things that are too personal to be shared. Finally, it was time for him to go. He was a man of action and didn't drag such moments.

"I am leaving now, Vinayak. If you can follow my instructions, then yours is the earth and everything that's in it, and what's more, you shall be a diggaja, my friend."

He raised both hands in a benevolent gesture of blessing. And I saluted him with my trunk.

Soon, the most magical time of my life came to an end. Digvijayi's companions were waiting for him. In a jiffy, he dismounted, got in the waiting car, and in a few moments disappeared from sight altogether.

Yet Digvijayi would not, could not, disappear from my heart. He remained there as a bright flame of inspiration that kept on goading and guiding me on my path.

My temper tantrums disappeared, and were replaced by an unending enthusiasm to involve myself fully in all my tasks and perform them to the best of my ability. All the while maintaining a keen witnessing awareness, and a memory of the eventual goal that I had to reach. *Drashta bhava*, that's what Digvijayi had called it. And he had told me to do each task as if I were doing it for the first and last time in my life. Words are insufficient to describe the sea-change that this brought about in my attitude and outlook towards life.



(VIII)

Years passed. I became a prized elephant in areas near and wide. I did many different things in many different places. Finally, I ended up as a joyride elephant once again in a forest reserve somewhere in central India.

It was my daily endeavour to put into practice whatever Digvijayi had told me years ago. Excellence in whatever I did had become my creed. So had the cultivation of a rigorous mental awareness. And every day I made a sincere attempt to live up to the twenty-four challenge that Digvijayi had thrown my way on that fateful day.

Each day would begin with a morning bath in the nearby river, followed by rides for different groups throughout the day. It was on one such day that the unthinkable happened. It had been a wonderful day. The joyous exhilaration that swept my being at the time of my sunrise bath had stayed with me throughout the day. Nothing could sway me from my state of serene equipoise.

At night, my mahout let me out to wander a while. It had become a regular habit. I would roam about in the jungles,





meet other wild elephants at the various watering holes, share experiences and help them in whatever small way I could. For some reason they all looked up to me, although I was a ‘pet’ in their lingo (a ‘pet’ is what a wild elephant calls his domesticated counterpart).

That night, as I walked through the jungle, I could feel the presence of Digvijayi more than ever. He seemed to be smiling amidst the twinkling stars of the night sky, whispering through the leafy trees, laughing amongst the gurgling currents of the brooks. My heart was filled with overwhelming gratitude for the guide who had come at such an opportune time in my life.

Lost in thought, I didn’t register the presence of humans until I was almost upon them. It was the night hideout of a bunch of poachers. I would have ignored them and gone on my way, had it not been for the stupid, startled reaction of one of them. He was pointing a loaded gun right at my head.

I waved my trunk dismissively and with that innocuous little action, the gun fell from his hands, and his body sank to the floor. As he fell, he shouted aloud in anger and surprise.

His voice triggered a wave of emotions inside me. It was the same hunter who had killed my sister years ago. Elephants have indelible memories and there was no mistaking this person's identity. Anger and rage surged through my veins as I saw the very same person lying before me, who I had killed over and over again in my oft-repeated fantasies.

I raised my left foot and slowly brought it over the man's head. My only thought was to crush it out of existence. His shrieks and cries only served to heighten my fury. I would have surely carried out my intention had I not glanced at the heavens above for a second.

There I saw Digvijayi's twinkling eyes and his mischievous smile, as if mocking me for having failed in the challenge he had thrown me years ago.

I lowered my foot back to its place. It was not worth it. My covenant with Digvijayi was far more precious than the short-lived thrill of petty retribution. I wouldn't let my sublime mood be tainted by baser emotions, come what may.

The things that then came my way really tested my mettle. As soon as I had lowered my foot, the hunter hastily scrambled to his feet, assembled his men and they began attacking me with whatever they could lay their hands upon. Guns, spears, axes, they all began spilling my blood. Still I did not retaliate.

As my battered body crumpled to the ground, my whole life flashed through my mind. That's when I remembered grandma's words and realized it was the beginning of the end . . .

(IX)

Not quite though. As I counted my last breaths, something extraordinary happened. Amidst a flash of blinding lightning and deafening thunder, a majestic white elephant materialized out of thin air. One mighty puff from his majestic trunk was enough to send all my tormentors scurrying away in fright.



“Who are you?” I managed to mumble, thinking them to be my last words.

“They call me Airavata,” came the booming reply.

“Airavata the diggaja!!!”

“Indeed.”

The next instant he raised his majestic trunk up in the air and sprayed me with a cool stream of water. Instantly, my wounds filled up and I felt reinvigorated as never before!

“The last time I did an abhisheka with the waters of the celestial Ganga, it was on a dark little boy, some five



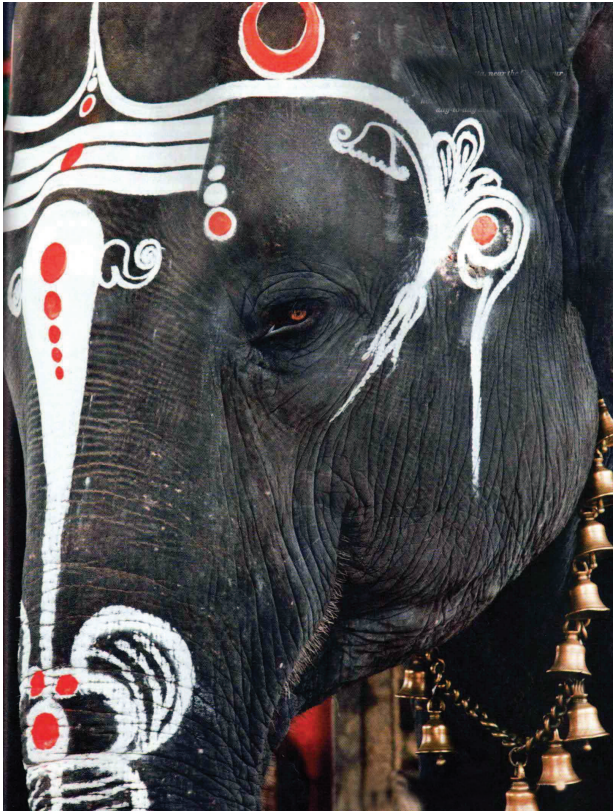
thousand years ago. And look, millions still worship him to this day. Wonder what the effect of this abhisheka will be,” said Airavata with a smile.

I didn’t know what to say. A long-held dream of meeting a diggaja had come true, in this most unexpected of ways. Words were superfluous now . . .

“You have passed the acid-test, but there’s much more to learn. Come, follow me,” commanded Airavata, ascending majestically into the night sky.

“Where?” I asked, unwittingly raising a foot up in the air. And lo! I was airborne as well!

“To become a diggaja . . .”





SATYAM TALES 1

