

SATYAM TALES

Spike the Hedgehog

And his open-heart surgery



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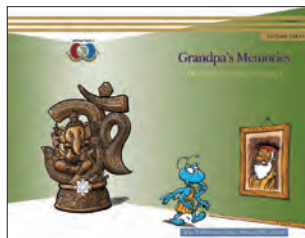
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Spike the Hedgehog

In a land far, far from India lived a little hedgehog. It thought of itself as basically good, kind and tender hearted; it was just a pity that its tender heart was hidden beneath an armour of quills. Needling others with its quills had earned the little hedgehog the nickname Spike. Those who tried to get close were met with sharpness. Not many came twice and most creatures learned to steer well clear of Spike's quills, so it was no wonder that the little hedgehog was often a bit lonesome. At those times it would barricade itself into the garden shed and shed big, hot, silent tears.



In the solitude of its shed Spike had become an avid reader of the old newspapers and magazines that had been stashed away there. It was particularly fond of the travel sections; gazing at the photographs it would travel to faraway places in its imagination. In fact, it was while perusing the travel section of a newspaper that it occurred to Spike for the first time that there was a wider world out there, beyond the garden gate, beyond the fields, and even beyond the woodlands that were visible through the slats in the fence. Spike had never felt the urge to venture outside of the perimeter of the garden. Of what concern was the wider world to a hedgehog that had everything it could want in life: a dry sheltered nest, a big well-kept garden with a plentiful supply of slugs, and a daily saucer of cream.

Spike had everything it could imagine wanting (apart from love and companionship of course) – yet here it was, longing for something it hadn't even known existed, something far beyond the limits of its experience. Not lacking anything gave Spike time to contemplate what it really wanted, and Spike began to wonder about the purpose of its life.

One fine late autumn day Spike emerged into the garden from an afternoon siesta. The air in the garden was fragrant with the scent of herbs: lavender, sage and rosemary. Butterflies with bright-coloured wings were fluttering over the lavender; all else was still. Someone had left a couple of books lying on the grass by the hammock. The cover of the first book depicted a white palace with an airy dome and slender towers and a long rectangular pool leading up to it. The pool reflected the mirror image of the palace. Spike gently nosed its way gently through the pages of the book. The sights and colours and scenes reproduced in the book set its little brain on fire.

On the cover of the second book was the photograph of a man. His eyes seemed to radiate light and he drew Spike's entire and undivided attention. Spike felt a stirring in its heart region; it was as if the man was looking straight into Spike's core, unhindered by the armour of hedgehog quills.



Spike had never seen this man before, but felt a deep sense of familiarity. It became so engrossed in the books that it didn't hear the approach of their owner: "Look at the clever expression in the eyes of the little hedgehog studying my Lonely Planet Guide. Or is it Swami Satyananda that it is mesmerized by? Do you think it's planning a trip to India, too?" Spike shuffled away from the books, pretending to mind its own business, and to have no concern for the photographs that had flooded its mind with new vistas. Swami Satyananda, India! Something about the words spoke to Spike on a deep level.

For the next several days Spike moped around the garden, hoping to catch another glimpse of the books, eating without an appetite, tossing and turning in its sleep, and obsessed with the idea of India. It daydreamed and fretted in turn. It made lists of all the comforts it would have to leave behind, old certainties that it would have to trade for uncertainty if it set out to look for Swami Satyananda, the man on the book cover. It imagined all the dangers that it would encounter on the way, and could not make up its mind to cross the threshold of the garden gate, into the



wider world where India beckoned.

Then one night Spike had a dream. Everything in the dream appeared vivid, with heightened colour and sound and fragrance; Spike's entire body felt charged with an electrical current that ran from its toes to the top of its head. In the dream was Swami Satyananda, sitting cross-legged and completely motionless, with eyes closed,

his whole being emanating light. He was still in a way that commanded Spike's whole attention. After some time, he opened his eyes for a moment, looked into Spike's eyes, then turned his gaze inward. What seemed an eternity passed before he opened his eyes again and nodded at Spike. It was then that Spike noticed that Swami Satyananda was sitting in the basket of a hot-air balloon. Before Spike had a chance to say anything, to ask anything, the balloon rose gently from the ground and disappeared into the clouds.



Spike woke with a start. It was still early and the light in the garden came from the moon. Someone was in the garden. Spike crept out to take a look. In the garden was the woman who lived in the house and had been reading the books about Swami Satyananda and India. She was humming quietly to herself. It appeared that she was about to go on a journey; her backpack was resting against the gate as she waited for her pick-up. This was it. Spike would have to decide quickly. It could either cross the threshold now and enter into an adventure in search of the man whose radiance had captivated it – or it could stay at home for the rest of its life, regretting. Put in those terms the decision suddenly seemed clear. Spike quickly clambered into the side pocket of the backpack: just in time. With one swing of the backpack Spike was over the threshold.

The trip to India was long and arduous for the little stowaway. The backpack was loaded into the hold of an airplane, where it was so cold that Spike went into hibernation. When Spike woke again and stretched its thawed hind-legs to peek out of the zippered pocket, the backpack had emerged into broad daylight in a throng of people unlike any Spike had seen before. The street was alive with every colour under the sun, patched together from the dazzling fabrics that the women wore wrapped around their bodies, the brightly painted houses, and the wares that were on display on the sidewalks. The sounds and smells were overwhelming. The smell of the sewer mingled with the scents of incense and flowers and the odours of food being fried in a vast array of spices. Spike realized that it was ravenous from the journey and thirsty to the point of expiring.

Just then the backpack's owner arrived at a white-columned building and rang the bell. They were admitted into a cool lobby. Spike could see through double French doors into a courtyard with a lush garden and pond. There would be water and plenty of slugs. This would be a good place to rest before deciding on the next stage of the journey. Spike had come this far – all the way to India – without as

much as a shred of a plan. It had followed the fire lit in its heart by the India of the Lonely Planet guidebook and the dream of Swami Satyananda in the hot-air balloon. Things had seemed very clear the moment that Spike decided to cross the threshold of the garden gate, but now doubts and uncertainty crept in, together with the hunger and jetlag. Finding only a few centipedes around the pond, and suffering from indigestion, Spike missed its cosy garden shed and daily saucer of cream. Glum and frightened, far away from home and all alone, the little hedgehog didn't have any idea where to go next.

Spike need not have worried. When the backpack owner settled into a wicker armchair in the corner of the inner courtyard to wait for breakfast to be served, she pulled out the tattered and dog-eared copy of the book with Swami Satyananda on its cover. Spike drew closer to the light emanating from the photograph, feeling instantly strengthened in its resolve to continue with its adventure. At that moment the hotel owner arrived with a breakfast tray and nearly tripped over the little hedgehog. Spike quickly ducked behind a potted plant to avoid detection. The owner of the hotel now noticed the book: "Swami Satyananda. Are you on your way to my guru's place?" Spike's travelling companion said she would be resting in the hotel just for the day and catching the afternoon express train to Jasidih Junction. She hoped to arrive at the ashram in Rikhia by the afternoon of the following day. Spike sighed a sigh of relief; there was no need to plan anything. All it needed to do was make sure it was in the side pocket of the backpack, ready to go, by the time the backpack owner left the hotel.

A day later, after twenty-four hours in motion – bumping from auto-rickshaw to train to auto-rickshaw – the travelling companions arrived in a remote rural village. Small mud-bricked shacks butted into the road in clusters, interspersed between green stretches of fields where women in their rainbow coloured saris were working in the late afternoon sun. Cows were sauntering down the middle line of the rural



road, and the auto-rickshaw had to dodge children at play and goats sunning themselves on the road. At the edge of the village was a compound with high white and ochre walls lining the two sides of the narrow country road. The rickshaw driver stopped in front of a gate leading into the compound, took his payment and departed. Spike peeked up at the sky and the conch and trident above the gate from the side pocket where it was travelling. The backpack owner called out “Namo Narayan,” and the gate was opened for the travellers with a bright “Namo Narayan, welcome, I will show you to your room. Today you can rest and tomorrow you will be given your seva for the Sat Chandi Mahayajna and you can help us with the final preparations.”

Entering the ashram Spike felt a wave of happiness surge



through its little body. There was something in the air, in the ground, in the stones, in every leaf of every tree that made Spike's needles stand on end: a pulsation, a presence, a field of energy unlike any that it had experienced before. The world seemed more vibrant, more colourful than just moments before, as if everything had been repainted with a gold-speckled brush and charged with a higher voltage – even while remaining restful and at peace. It was not at all like the feverish energy of the city that had been exhilarating and exhausting in equal measure. Spike's travelling companion was busy filling in registration forms and didn't notice Spike clambering out of the side pocket to explore this new world.

Still delighting in the vibration of the place, Spike found a nice grassy spot and curled up to sleep to recover from the rigours of the journey. On the train and rickshaw it had kept pricking itself to stay awake and alert in the side pocket of the backpack, so that it would be able to make a quick get away if it was discovered. Now, letting go of all effort, Spike had another dream. This time Swami Satyananda surveyed Spike from nose to toe, sending a shiver up its spine, and said, "Welcome home." With that he floated up into the sky in his hot-air balloon and disappeared into the bright sunlight. Spike woke to find the sun already high in the sky, blinding it when it roused itself from the dream. The long sleep and the dream had left a soft whirring sensation throughout the little hedgehog's body, as if it had been connected to an energy source. Blinking its eyes Spike realized it had slept all afternoon, through the night, and well into the morning.

There were people bustling about the previously empty grounds where Spike had found its resting place. They were carrying decorations and flags and baskets of flowers, laying out mats on the ground and setting up rows of chairs to one side. A stage was being erected, and a large black and white photograph was placed at the centre of it. The photograph was of Swami Satyananda, now younger



than on the book cover or in Spike's dream, and sitting at the feet of another man who was wearing a heavy flower garland around his neck and smiling benignly at the camera with the light touching up his high round cheekbones. All around the portrait of the two men were butterflies, dancing and fluttering their colourful wings in a show of affection. Before Spike had time to slip into a reverie, a man carrying a decoratively carved wooden chair onto the stage almost caught the hem of his skirt on Spike's quills. Looking around, the little hedgehog noticed that everyone around was wearing the same dress of ankle-length cloth wrapped around the waist and a long flowing tunic. Not to risk getting its needles caught in anyone's skirts – or bare feet – Spike moved out of the way to a vantage point by a wall.

The ground around the stage was filling up with people, seated cross-legged in orderly rows. There were people from



every corner of the world, speaking softly to each other in words and melodies that Spike had never heard before. As Spike was puzzling over the variety of languages spoken at this gathering, a band of children and parrots and monkeys burst onto the stage. The people on the ground sang and clapped along as the children and parrots chanted and the monkeys kept beat on the mridanga and manjiras. There was joy in the air, palpable even to a hedgehog that had never heard such music before. When the last notes of the kirtan faded, Spike noticed that it had unwittingly been singing



along. The focus of the crowd now shifted to a side stage where a fire ceremony was being conducted. Under a thatched roof, pandits in beards and long white shirts were chanting all the while as they made offerings of flowers and fruit and rice to the fire. Spike could not make out what was being chanted,



but it could feel the sound vibration throughout its body and gradually surrendered itself to the rhythm of the chanting, mentally repeating “swaha” at the end of each phrase that was chanted.

A shadow passed overhead; glancing up at the sky Spike became aware of an eagle circling above. Suddenly alert, its little heart pounding, Spike scampered to take cover. From its refuge under a chair, Spike peered up into the sky again, and saw that the proceedings had drawn not one but nine eagles into an orbit above the fire pit. They were riding the currents of energy generated by the pandits’ worship. Reassured that the eagles had arrived to dignify the proceedings, and would not be swooping down to prey on hedgehogs, Spike pushed the fear out of its heart, closed its eyes again and fell into the stream of mantras. In that stream there was a new kind of stillness that Spike had never experienced before: a stillness at the very core of its being. As if to highlight that inner silence, the whole world around it had dissolved into waves of sound, hedgehog particles vibrating together with human particles, earth particles with tree particles, and air particles with everything they touched.



Then out of the blue, startling Spike out of its reverie, the skies – clear just moments before – opened. Rain poured down in torrents. Spike looked around for cover, in case there was a stampede as the crowd ran for the exits. Instead, it saw that everyone had kneeled on the ground in the ankle-



deep water. Spike too stopped still in its tracks. The sound vibration from the mantras had been joined by another vibration. The hedgehog's heart, up till now fixed in its chest firmly under armour made of quills, started to spin around wildly. Spike closed its eyes to feel more deeply into the spinning; it was as if its heart had started to do back-flips from sheer joy and then grown butterfly wings. When Spike opened its eyes again, there in the centre of the downpour was the man from the dream, Swami Satyananda. Spike renamed him instantly as the Beloved.

The Beloved was walking carefully on the sheets of water that had formed on the ground and sizing up the crowd. He was small and frail, but full of vitality. Instead of fleeing the rain, all those in the crowd continued to sit on their knees, folding their hands in greeting as the Beloved passed by. Spike, along with everyone else, was drenched to the skin but took no notice of the shivering of its body. All it knew was that being in the presence of the Beloved had set its heart spinning, and that it wanted to spend the rest of its life close to this man. As the Beloved turned to go, Spike followed. Above the heads of the crowd, it could see the umbrella held aloft above the Beloved's head and it scurried along as fast as its short legs could carry.



The umbrella came to a small bungalow. As Swami Satyananda entered, a large Alsatian dog bounded to the door to welcome him. The dog wagged its tail, gave a big smile flashing its teeth, and its eyes shone as it licked its master's hands, overjoyed to be in his company again. Spike slipped in unnoticed in the commotion, feeling a pang of jealousy observing the evident pleasure with which the Beloved greeted and stroked the dog. The dog seemed friendly enough, but Spike resolved to remain very still and quiet just in case it did not welcome strangers in the house. Hidden behind the umbrella-stand and barely breathing, Spike suddenly realized that it was shivering uncontrollably from the cold rain. A sneeze started to build up: "Achih". Another one. Spike held it back. But then the force of the suppressed sneeze became unstoppable: "A-a-a-a-a-aaa-cchhhoooo".

The noise seemed deafening to Spike although it was only a small hedgehog sneeze. The dog pricked up its ears and came to investigate, tail wagging in a friendly, trusting way. It sniffed its way around the umbrella stand and came eye to eye with Spike. Tail still wagging and ears twitching up and down in greeting, the dog brought its nose to Spike's to make acquaintance, then let out a yelp and leapt around in pain.



Its nose had met with a cluster of Spike's needle-like quills. At that moment the door opened to let out the tall man who had been carrying the umbrella above the Beloved's head. Spike used the opportunity to bolt through the door.

The rain had ended. Spike shook itself to get the water out of its coat of needles. It was also an unconscious gesture of shaking off the feelings that the encounter with the Alsatian had aroused. Yet even after shaking out all the water, Spike was still kicking itself mentally for what had just happened. In following the Beloved into the house, Spike had overcome its natural reticence and shyness – but once there, instead of basking in the glow of the Beloved's presence, it had reverted to its bristly ways and caused a scandal. The dog had been friendly and well-intentioned, and the fault lay squarely with Spike's own hedgehog nature: a flash of fear, a jolt of jealousy over the intimacy the dog shared with its master, and Spike had cast itself out of the orbit of the Beloved.

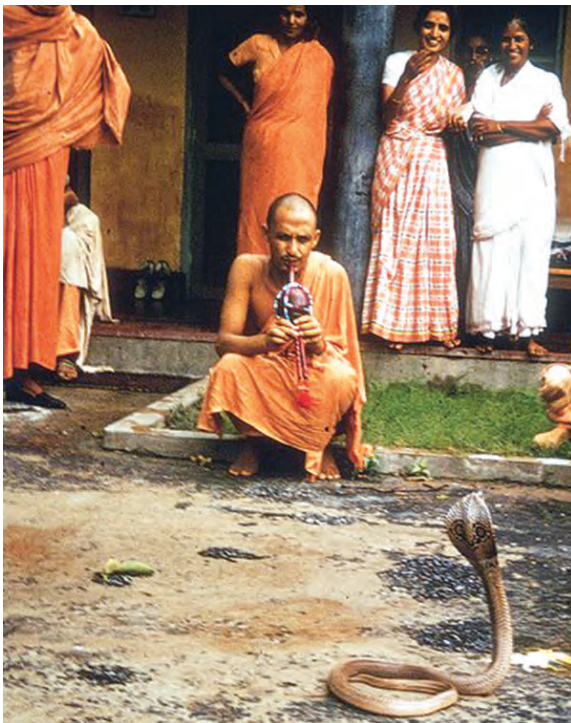
All at once it seemed that this journey to India had been a huge mistake. By leaving everything familiar Spike had thought it could shed its old identity and show the world its good, kind and tender heart. It had felt the stirrings of love

just moments earlier, but already in its first encounter with another living being it had revealed itself in its full hedgehog nature: as a prickly curmudgeon. Spike felt ashamed and suddenly homesick. If only it had stayed in its dry warm shed, enjoying the abundance of slugs in the garden and saucers of cream laid out in the mornings, none of this would have happened, it thought wistfully. Now Spike would not be able to show its hedgehog face around the Beloved again. It could never enjoy the gentle caress of his kind eyes like the Alsatian or the parrots or the children or the monkeys.

Sad and dejected – and envious of all the other creatures that were so at ease around Swami Satyananda – Spike felt the first drops of another rainfall. It looked around for a shelter where it could wallow in its misery, like it used to do in its shed back at home. Just as the rain started pouring down once more, it ducked through an open door into a large hall. While the rain clattered on the roof, tears welled up in Spike's eyes and ran down on the floor forming a puddle of self-pity, "Woe, woe is me. Oh what misery to be born a hedgehog. Achih, a-chih, a-a-a-a-chih." When the crying let up a little, Spike looked around in the hall. On the walls all around were grainy, black-and-white photographs of the Beloved in his youth. Forgetting its woes Spike became absorbed by the pictures. Here was one with the Beloved giving a lecture. Here he was practising a yoga posture, holding the toes of one foot with the fingertips of both hands, leg straight and tilting his head back to gaze up at his forehead. There were several pictures in which he sat with legs crossed, eyes closed, contemplating some deep space that lay within.



Then there was an image that drew all of Spike's attention. This one was not hanging on the wall. Someone had left a book open on the floor. In the picture the Beloved was squatting in a courtyard, playing a wooden flute; in front of him was a cobra swaying to the tune of his instrument. Spike had killed and eaten snakes in the garden back at home, but it had never seen anything like this cobra. Several feelings occurred to the little hedgehog all at once: a shiver of fear ran down its spine, intermingled with a feeling of awe at the Beloved's power to enthrall and hold the cobra's attention, followed by a sudden sense of relief. If the Beloved gazed so lovingly into the eyes of a cobra, what did an errant hedgehog have to feel shame for? Spike decided to accept its hedgehog nature and forgive itself for pricking the Alsatian in the nose – at the same time resolving to do better in future.



Over the next days Spike kept going to the grounds on which the chanting and festivities were being conducted, in the hope of catching another glimpse of the Beloved, but Swami Satyananda did not come out to join the gathered crowds. The pandits continued to chant their mantras and make their offerings. Spike felt the syllables and energy of the mantras coursing through its body, wave after wave after wave. It was as if every organ of its little hedgehog body was pulsing to the rhythm of the mantras. The mantras seemed like magical spells and incantations: *Om Aim Hrim Klim, Aim Hrim Klim Swaha*. All of nature tuned in. Spike chanted with the birds, and the birds chanted along with the pandits, until the chanting was like the beating of a collective heart: *Om Swaha, Om Swaha, Om Swaha, Aim Hrim Klim Om Swaha*. Closing its eyes, Spike felt an unfamiliar stillness and contentment flood its very being. Despite his absence, Spike could feel Swami Satyananda in every leaf, every gust of wind and every blade of grass.

When the pandits stopped chanting, the stage would be filled with children and monkeys and parrots dancing, putting on plays and singing kirtan. There were sometimes so many children in the audience that their chatter became deafening and drowned out anything that was happening on the stage. On more than one occasion, Spike had come close to pricking the more noisome of them with its quills, but had reminded itself of the regrets it felt after needling the Alsatian in the nose.

The kirtan and chanting had already started on the final day of the Yoga Poornima festival. Spike was making its way to the grounds where the yajna was being conducted. Out of the door where Spike had followed the Beloved bounded the Alsatian. Spike's mind froze for a moment. Then it regained its senses and squeaked out a thin little "Namo Narayan" to the dog. The friendly Alsatian approached with its tail wagging in greeting. Spike carefully flattened its quills to avoid pricking it in the nose again, then as a further precaution to prevent the dog from sniffing its way

to a poke in the nose, rolled over onto its back and bared its soft underbelly in a gesture of trust and surrender. At that moment the Beloved walked out of the door and sat down in a chair on the lawn. When Spike scrambled back onto its belly, Swami Satyananda looked deep into the little hedgehog's eyes and flip-flopping heart, then turned his gaze inward for a moment, as if searching for something within. After a moment, he said, "You have arrived just in time, Ahimsa. Not everyone has travelled through space and time to be here for this."

'Ahimsa', thought Spike, 'Is that my name?' The name seemed to fit and sent a tingle up and down Spike's spine as it was spoken by the Beloved. There was a deeply familiar ring to the name, as if it had been Spike's real name all along. Tears of gratitude rolled down Ahimsa's cheeks and running off its pointy nose. The Beloved was saying, "Don't mind the tears. People don't know this but what I do here is open-heart surgery. You have a tender heart, Ahimsa. Don't camouflage it with fear and jealousy and aggression and selfishness." Sniffing and snuffling Ahimsa turned away to regain its composure; by the time it turned back Swami Satyananda was up on his feet and heading for the crowds and onto the stage for what would be his final satsang. Ahimsa followed as fast as its short legs would carry. There the Beloved was, already up on the stage, full of vitality, gesticulating and making the crowd roar with laughter even when he was scolding them.

Swami Satyananda beamed at the crowd from his seat, but his greatest affection was reserved for the flock of little girls who flew up onto the stage in their vividly coloured dresses and sparkling bangles to perform a classical Indian dance. He clowned with them by imitating their hand gestures and sideways glances. The Beloved's delight at being surrounded by all these twittering, chattering, giggling, naughty little girls was so evident that Spike was pleased that it had resisted the urge to prick the more bothersome of them. 'Ahimsa', thought Spike again, tasting



its new name, ‘Ahimsa, Ahimsa.’ It no longer mattered that it would never be able to soar like the eagles, sing like the parrots or play the mridanga like the mischief-making monkeys. With a full and open heart, Ahimsa was happy to be a hedgehog.

Most people left the ashram the following day, after the end of the yajnas. Ahimsa enjoyed the quieting down of the ashram and the gentle waves that still filled the air from the havan and mantras. The entire environment felt purified. Now that there were fewer people around, Ahimsa spotted its old travelling companion again; the backpack owner had stayed on too. Wrapped in a blanket in the chilly early morning mist, she was lining up to get into the hall with the black-and-white photographs. Sneaking in at the tail-end of the queue, Ahimsa would hide under a bench and peer out to see everyone stretching their limbs to instructions from a teacher: “Interlock your fingers and raise your hands above your head, palms facing upward. Breathing in, come up on your toes and stretch your arms up.” Later they would lie on their backs and raise their legs, hands holding up the



small of the back, while being instructed to visualize hot nectar flowing through a cooling centre in their throats and then surging through the crown of their heads. Ahimsa remembered seeing the Beloved in that pose in one of the photographs, legs at an angle that seemed to defy gravity.

Ahimsa too tried to bring its body into vipareeta karani mudra, but found the ratio between its paws and back unsuited to the pose. Similarly, the other practice the Beloved had been photographed doing, the one where he held the toes of one outstretched leg and tilted back his head to look into his eyebrow centre, defied hedgehog

physiognomy. But Ahimsa enjoyed sitting still in its hiding place under the bench, all the way at the back, when the hall reverberated with *Om, Om, Om*, everyone still and focused, tracing an inner pathway with their minds.

Just as things in the ashram seemed to have fallen back into their normal groove, three days after the end of the yajna, everything changed. All the students gathered in the hall for class in the early morning darkness as usual, but there was no teacher and no teaching. Instead, there was a recording playing on a loop. Ahimsa could make out the end of each section of chanting: *Om Tatsaditi Srimad Bhagavad Gitasu, Upanishatsu, Brahmavidyayam, Yogashastre, Shri Krishna Arjuna Samvade*. Everyone sat silently, expectantly, waiting for something to happen, for satsang perhaps, or for something to be announced or explained.

On the stage was a photograph of the Beloved that had not been there before. A thought flashed into Ahimsa's mind: 'Was it possible, was the Beloved no more? Yet how could that be? Just three days earlier he had been boisterously mimicking the dance movements of the girls on stage and making the crowds laugh at his antics.' Just then one of the women from the class whispered a question to a passing swami. In answer, he nodded his head towards the photograph and in a voice that was barely audible whispered back, "You can make your final pranams to him now." She got up and prostrated herself in front of the chair that held Swami Satyananda's picture. Nothing else was said. Everyone remained seated in their places digesting what had come to pass, each in their own way, while the recording of the *Bhagavad Gita* played on. Ahimsa remembered the Beloved's strange turn of phrase: "Not everyone has travelled through space and time to be here for this."

The ashram had been quiet and empty in the intervening days after everyone had packed up at the end of the yajnas. Now it filled up again, instantaneously, as if the passing of the great soul was known in the surrounding villages and all over the world the very moment it happened. The swamis who

had been on stage with the Beloved during the yajnas could be seen everywhere making arrangements, eyes shielded by sunglasses as if the glare in the air that had been left behind by the departed was too much to take in directly. They worked indefatigably, during the day serving food and washing the feet of the devotees flooding back into the ashram; at night they could be seen by the opening in the ground into which the earthly remains of the Beloved would be placed. Solemnly circling above that place of burial to mark the passing of the Beloved's soul were the eagles, round after round.

The little hedgehog was determined to keep vigil as long as the Beloved's body was still above ground, but in the quiet of the kutir where the body sat in lotus pose, Ahimsa found itself rocked to sleep. It dreamt of a vast night sky and heard a voice calling its name. It looked up. There, shimmering in the starlight, was the Beloved. He laughed a silvery laugh, "So, Ahimsa, it is time to say goodbye. The light is within you. Work hard. Be good. Do good. Serve, love and give. When



you learn to serve others, you will know that my surgery has been successful – and you will uncover your tender and open heart.” With that the Beloved rose higher and higher into the sky, just like in Ahimsa’s earlier dream of the hot-air balloon, lifted by a force beyond the stars. As he soared high up into the sky, the fabric of the universe parted to receive him.

“Serve, love and give, and you will know that my surgery has been successful,” Swami Satyananda’s words still echoed in Ahimsa’s ears when it woke from its dream. Ahimsa didn’t yet know how to serve, but it was sure it would find a way. The shape of the Beloved seated in the lotus pose in the dark kutir seemed to nod its farewell. Rubbing its eyes Ahimsa stumbled out into the cool of the early evening. On the threshold it tripped and fell. As it tumbled down the stairs it landed on the feet of the young woman whose backpack it had travelled in all the way from the garden where the journey had begun. She looked at Ahimsa in surprise and said, to no-one in particular, “Look, a hedgehog. It has the same clever expression in its eyes as the hedgehog that lives in the garden shed back at home.” Ahimsa closed its eyes, hoping to escape being seen.

Then it dawned on her, “Why, of course, you little stowaway. I remember you looking wistfully at my books about India and Swamiji. Well, if you want to come back home with me, you can travel in the cabin in style.” So the two travelling companions left Rikhia, to begin the rest of their lives, taking their Beloved’s memory with them in their hearts. Ahimsa, for the first time in its hedgehog life, had a friend. Licking its lips after a saucer of cream it would sidle up to her,



carefully exposing the soft underside of its belly to her caresses. Day by day it grew more confident in its new identity as Ahimsa. It began to practise non-violence in thought, word and deed, until it was friendly with all the foxes and squirrels and frogs, and even with the snails and snakes that it no longer killed and ate.

Meanwhile, even a hedgehog could sense that in the wider world it was a time of turmoil. Everything that had previously been concealed – both good and bad – was coming to the surface: hidden treasures along with corruption, fraud and sleaze. While Ahimsa's new friend toiled to serve others fleeing war or poverty or otherwise in distress, Ahimsa found its own little hedgehog way to serve, love and give. Clearing out its shed it turned it into a place of retreat. Young hedgehogs came from far and wide to hear the cautionary tale of Ahimsa's heavily armoured heart, and to learn the yoga of love in order to avoid getting their arteries blocked in the first place. Ahimsa's heart swelled with peace and contentment, and every time it looked up into the night sky, it sensed the presence of Swami Satyananda shimmering there, just beyond the visible universe.



SATYAM TALES 15





Satyam Tales

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

Spike the Hedgehog is the fifteenth 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.

A little hedgehog named Spike is shunned by all because of its sharp quills. One day it happens to see a photograph on the cover of a book and is immediately attracted by its magnetic quality. It hitches a ride to a faraway land to be in the presence of what it calls the Beloved. The many experiences that Spike undergoes there eventually bring out the tender heart hidden beneath that forbidding armour of quills.

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 undergo open-heart surgery like Spike and allow the softer qualities of your nature to unfold.

—Editor

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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.
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