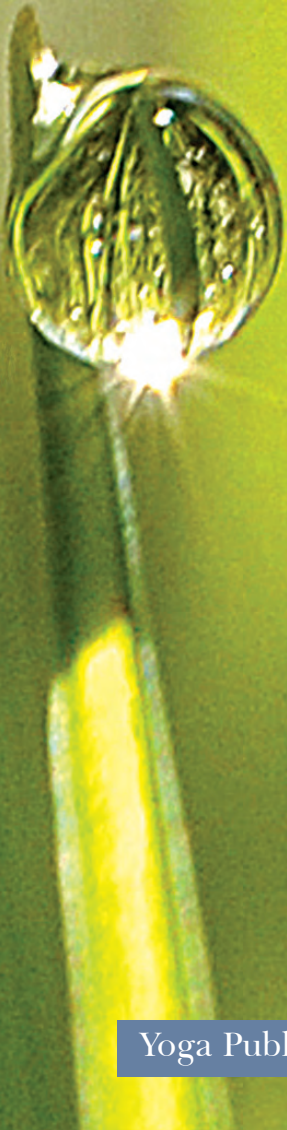


SATYAM TALES

# My Friend Namrata

Not just a blade of grass



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India



# Satyam Tales

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

*My Friend Namrata* is the nineteenth 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.

Ashok and Namrata are best friends, who witness the happenings and events on Ganga Darshan Main Lawn. Sometimes they are active participants, sometimes they set the stage and sometimes they leave the scene to allow others to step forward and show their talents. Ashok and Namrata know what is right and appropriate and inspire us to be simple, humble, always alert and full of joy.

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 live your life like Ashok and Namrata as an example for all.

—Editor

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Published by Yoga Publications Trust

First edition 2015

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:

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# My Friend Namrata

This is the story of my friend Namrata. True to her name, she would not tell it herself. I had to push and pull, but nothing would make her change her mind. I was equally stubborn and kept insisting, “You’ve got to tell your tale. You know so much, have seen and lived through so much. It will be lost forever if you don’t . . .” Finally she agreed.

By the way, I am Ashok Eight. When you exit the Main Building at Ganga Darshan and enter the main lawn through the first entry to your right, and count the Ashok trees, there you meet me, Ashok Eight. I am the one right behind Swami Niranjan when he sits in the courtyard for Sunday satsangs.



All in all we are fifty-four, guarding, protecting the Main Lawn and enjoying life. Without boasting, yet aware of my good fortune, I would say that I have the best spot for I see, smell and hear everything – well, almost everything.

This, however, is not about me but Namrata, my best friend, and her story began one cold foggy winter's day. The Main Building was under construction; hidden behind a scaffolding of bamboo, work was going on like in a bee hive. Everywhere in the ashram, life was busy, geru-clad people moving up and down the steep hill, guests and visitors coming and going. The place was buzzing; there was just so much to do. Swami Satyananda had a mission to fulfil and a vision waiting to become reality. So that foggy day he called some of his swamis, lined them up, gave them each a rusty metal dish and told them to start working. In front of the kutir, which was his residence, there was a gigantic mountain of soil which he wanted shifted in front of the Main Building. For days and days a line of people tirelessly shifted soil from one place to the other. The moment the mountain was gone,



they heaved a sigh of relief thinking that the task was done. After a well-deserved break, when they returned to the kutir for the next instruction, another mountain of soil had been brought by truck and the shifting continued. Again with goodwill, lots of youthful energy and laughter, the soil was carried across and spread out in front of the Main Building.

Once the last truck had gone and the last mountain had been shifted, the next tasks were eagerly waiting. Some people levelled the earth, others took out stones, cleared weeds, cleaned, raked and prepared the ground. Swami Satyananda himself came on the morning of Basant Panchami, the Foundation Day of his mission, and with a bag under his left arm he walked, no, he strode, along the rectangular patch of land, grabbed a handful of seeds from the bag and threw them with an elegant swing over the fresh earth. He knew what he was doing, being an expert at everything he undertook. Marching up and down, muttering his mantras, he sowed the seeds. It was a historic day, the birth of Ganga Darshan Main Lawn. Namrata's ancestors



were born, more than twenty years after the foundation of the Bihar School of Yoga.

Namrata is the lawn, she is the humble blade of grass and this is her story. Of course, she was not



there at the beginning, but over the years the tale has been handed down from father to son, from mother to daughter. It did not take long for Namrata's ancestors to grow, develop, become strong and create the famous plot of green which is the pride and joy of Ganga Darshan. It is the true and humble mirror of the magnificent teachings of this school. We, the Ashok trees, came soon thereafter

and have been best friends with Namrata's family right from the beginning.

Great care was taken to maintain the bright greenness and the healthy lushness. It was protected from the scorching summer sun with layers of palm leaves. Regular weeding sessions were organized, first for the residents and then for the gardeners, and never would water be withheld even in the driest seasons and times. Main Lawn was well looked after, for it was important, an integral part of the integral yoga taught at the school.



When the Bihar School of Yoga celebrated its Golden Jubilee, 50 years of glorious existence, the festivities and celebrations went on everywhere, in every nook and corner of the ashram. Main Lawn was one of the hot spots, though only little was left of it, or rather little was left to be seen. Namrata disappeared; a few patches were visible between Satyam Darshan, the cinema, Satyam Yoga Prasad, the ultimate creation of a bookshop never seen before, and Satyam Baithaki, the darshan pandal. One structure after another came up and covered Namrata.

The result was breathtaking and everybody, or more precisely, the global yoga community, was in ecstatic rapture. “Wows” in every imaginable language resounded, yet nobody paid heed to the one who bore it all, quietly, humbly. Hidden beneath wooden planks and plastic mats Namrata remained the centre, the strong, loyal, invisible hub of the event. During the Golden Jubilee and the painful weeks of preparation, not a single plaintive murmur came from my friend, nothing. Only on a few rare nights a gentle sigh would travel slowly through the air. To be made to disappear like that, unceremoniously, almost ruthlessly, was not easy, for her days of glory were many and grandiose.



People may think, ‘What’s the big deal? Grass is grass and lawn is lawn, and things are meant to happen on top of it.’ That’s true, and over the years so many things did take place on Namrata, yet she was always visible, a part of every event. She was the simple stage for innumerable events as varied as the activities of the Bihar School of Yoga at Ganga Darshan.

Let me give just a glimpse and an idea. I start with yoga nidra, an all-time favourite practice. Have you ever seen a lawn covered with people drifting in and out of the sleepless sleep of Swami Satyananda, knowing that they were safe and supported, both by the master and the ground they were lying on? Have you ever seen a lawn filled with hundreds of people sitting in neat rows of white, yellow and geru, like on the day of Basant Panchami? At that time, Namrata carried these young seekers into their new life of spiritual discovery. Her dedication to the masters and their teaching encouraged them to deepen their own connection. Her faith inspired them to tread the path slowly, steadily and humbly. There was direct contact between her and the sleepless sleepers, between her and the seekers. They could see her, feel her and love her the way they did with the incredible vidya they





were receiving. Namrata was an extension and a reflection of a tradition of three masters, which she cherished with deep reverence. Suddenly to be excluded, hidden, tucked away was a new experience.

Namrata was not only the soft green yoga mat for the many yoga nidra sessions, or the firm foundation for new sadhakas, she was also a real arena for Olympic games, ashram style of course. It was a year of daring innovation and experimentation. Swami Satyananda's spiritual successor, Swami Niranjan was the driving force at the time. He called everyone, young and old, one day and the whole ashram gathered on the lawn. The games were opened to the sound of the conch. Then, without much further ado, fierce





competition in various disciplines filled the arena with tension, suspense, varied emotions and loud cheers.

The potato-spoon race and the sack race had many athletes and potatoes tumbling and stumbling. (A note to human rights activists and environmentalists: no one was injured and the potatoes were still fit to be sent to the kitchen.) Only those athletes who made it to the finishing



line were qualified to enter the third challenge, the three-legged race. It was a wild race, but all done in good humour uniting joyous losers and winners. Being yogi-aspirants, the sportspersons knew about the balance which was expected of them – in success and failure. The last event was the ashram marathon, up and down the hill, with or without huffing and puffing, followed by the final 108 rounds on the lawn.

It was a sight to behold, and Namrata was there holding, supporting and totally happy to contribute to the science of yoga. At Ganga Darshan everything has meaning, a purpose, an aim; nothing is done randomly or carelessly. The Ashram Olympics were a pilot project, a test case and trial run for other Olympics. The insights, parameters and analysis of the ashram games were conveyed to the Sports Authority of India who eagerly flocked to Munger to learn and integrate the yogic components into their sports discipline. The results were astounding, both nationally and internationally.

On another occasion, Namrata became a busy market place, a real bazaar. That was when Swamiji auctioned off his hat collection, showing everyone the many hats he was able to wear, the many roles he was able to play – yet always true to himself. It was fabulous to see these weird hats on people's heads, and their attempt to fit the hat. Swamiji had told them that wearing a bowler hat did not make anyone a gentleman. He liked to explain this point with the following story:

“Once a farmer had many donkeys and large fields. Every night he would put the donkeys in the field to graze and to rest, and every day he would make them work hard. One day there was a drought and



there was no more food for the donkeys. So, at night, in order to feed his donkeys, he would put them in someone else's field and by morning time collect them and bring them home. The other farmers soon became wise to this and started to scare the donkeys away whenever they would stray into their fields. The donkeys suffered because they had not enough to eat.

“So the farmer bought some tiger skins, and when night came he put the tiger skins on his donkeys and let them free to wander in the fields. The other farmers were ready with their sticks to scare off any donkeys that strayed into their fields, but when they saw tigers they quickly ran away. Then suddenly in the distance, another donkey brayed. All the donkeys lifted up their heads and start to bray. Now who has seen tigers bray? Naturally, all the villagers came back and scared the donkeys away. The moral of the story is, ‘once a donkey, always a donkey’, no matter what garb you wear.”

These teachings did always exist, but they needed a platform which would take the message out into the world, and this platform was my friend.

In the winter, Namrata became an open camping ground with tents pitched here and there, big ones, small ones, triangle shaped, igloo shaped, red, blue and yellow. It



seemed that every model on the international tent market found its way to Ganga Darshan. Swamiji used to sit inside, work hard, meet guests, have satsang, protected and yet available to all. Simplicity is one of the tradition's hallmarks, not pomp and splendour. Swamiji conveyed that message by preferring the tent to any of the golden thrones offered to him. Namrata loved those winter months when she was so close to Swamiji, and Swamiji loved to be with her, softly stroking the little blades, gently pulling out any unwanted weeds, and sometimes even trimming her overgrown curls with a lawn-mower. They simply adored each other.



One of our favourite lawn events is the annual Children's Day, the Bal Yoga Diwas. The children of *Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal*, the Children's Yoga Fellowship present what they have learnt over the past months: chanting, conducting havan, presenting karate and asanas, giving speeches in superb Hindi and English, and performing many dances, classical as well as modern. It is an amazing show and Namrata and I discuss for days afterwards the children, their skills, talents and awesome self-confidence. We were thrilled to host these youngsters, for where else but here with us



would they have found the grounds to express their creativity safely and freely?

There is never a dull moment for Main Lawn, but I need to mention one more event which to us is something truly special. It also happens every year in the Yajñashala at the time of Basant Panchami, when the yoginis come to conduct havan, pooja and aradhana of Sri Yantra. Then we just soak in the sound of the mantras, the colours of the flowers, and feel blessed to be who we are. The vibrations infuse the whole environment with something divine. The essential teaching, the messages and celebrations happen right here. BSY, yoga and Namrata are inextricably interwoven and simply inseparable.

I completely forgot to mention the first great gathering, which was another golden jubilee: the golden jubilee of Swami Satyananda's renunciation, which happened in 1993. At that time, Namrata's ancestors were not covered and hidden, but were present, up and about for all to see and tread on. That was when the Yajñashala was used for the first time for the vedic Sudarshan Yajna, propitiating

Vishnu, the sustainer of the universe. After that, the kumbha abhisheka of Swami Niranjan was performed. Swamiji was bathed with the waters that had been collected from oceans, rivers and tirthas and that were charged with the mantras chanted during the yajna. The abhisheka was performed as recognition of Swamiji as successor to Swami Satyananda. It was a simple, unforgettable moment.



The celebrations had been inaugurated by Swami Niranjan and Swami Chidananda of the Divine Life Society by lighting the flame of yoga above the dancing musical fountain, which commemorates Sri Swamiji's achievements. The memorial was a column with Sri Swamiji's pictures on all sides, a bowl on top and fountains to both sides. When on special occasions music was played, the water in the fountain started changing colours and shapes according to and along with each note. It must have been a miracle of the latest technology for we never figured out how it was done. It worked for bhajans, stotras, ragas, and even western music. Over the years the fountain and memorial column went through a few



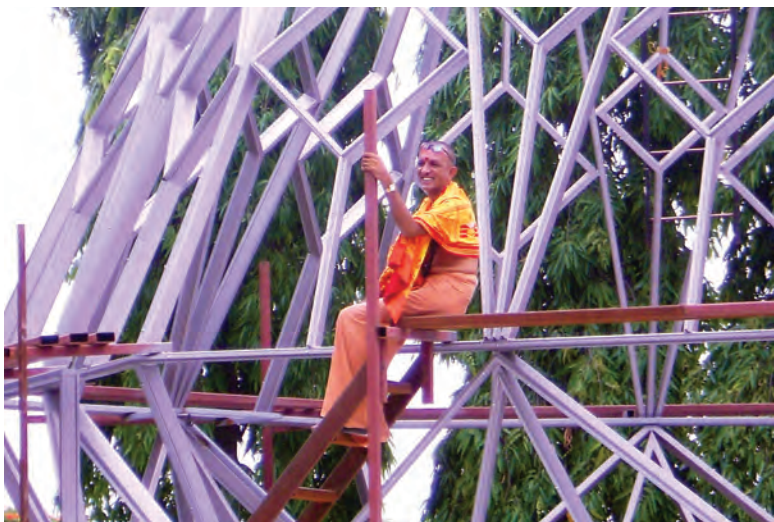


transformations; pictures were changed, the bowl on top was painted, then covered in gold, then surrounded by big pink plastic leaves. People from all over the world came and marvelled at the wonder of splashing and gurgling colours high up in the air.

After a while the shows stopped, and the memorial was left to itself . . . until one day, the fountain was noisily dismantled and only the monument remained. Namrata and I were disappointed for we loved to watch the show, the flow of different lights and colours, and listen to the sound of water. It was always a special moment when it happened. However, with the passing of time, we forgot about the old fountain, until again on a cold foggy winter's day, the sound of heavy hammering filled the air. In the grey of the thick mist, we could barely make out the two workers thrashing away. They kept at it for days. Bricks and concrete bits and chips were flying around until nothing was left but a heap of rubble. The monument had gone. More workers arrived and immediately put up a green screen. Now we were left in the dark, behind the screen. Our curiosity frustrated, we watched workers coming and going, carrying something in

and something out. Actually, this now becomes my story for a bit, as Namrata could not see anything. I, being tall, could peek over the screen. At regular intervals, I informed my friend of what was going on.

Higher and higher the construction went, without a care in the world, as if it was saying ‘the sky is the limit’. It went on like that up and up, until one day, a shiver ran through my trunk, my branches trembled, my leaves stood on end, and I almost fainted. I could barely call out to my friend, “Namrata, help! It’s taller than I am. It is the tallest of the Ashok trees.” I was in shock. Nothing had ever come close to the height of any of us Ashok trees. Something outrageously novel was being created right in front of us, in our midst. Nobody knew what this construction site was all about, but of course everyone had an opinion. Namrata and I shook our heads in disbelief, had a good laugh and kept listening. Suggestions ran wild: a spaceship, a temple, a new bird cage, a gravity remover, a high-tech sound studio, a bookstall. People have opinions. The two pool-like pits on either side of the tower were too small for people to swim in, and Namrata suggested something for goldfish, lotus flowers or extra





storage space in case the bookstall was the answer.

For weeks I witnessed and duly reported ferocious activity behind the screen. The famous Delhi design and construction team came, stood around something and took pictures. Swamiji came and left. Namrata and I were puzzled. Once the structure of metal beams stood erect and solid, white polished marble tiles were placed around it, steps rose on two

sides, next to the goldfish-or-lotus-pond-or-bookstall-storage-space. The ashram electricians took their turn and with their cables and light bulbs added what obviously needed to be added. I watched in awe and silence. More was to happen, for large sheets of glass were carefully transported across the lawn to be even more carefully inserted into the metal structure. And not just glass – coloured glass – white, blue, red and pink with flower engravings. Namrata and I shook our heads. This could not be true; a new reality was emerging, something otherworldly so to say. Maybe the spaceship was the answer? We were at a loss, for from the first foggy winter's day until the glorious day of the inauguration nine months later the hush-hush secrecy was maintained and guarded – this alone a novelty for the chatty environment of the ashram.

The day was fixed, or rather the night of the day. On the Sannyas Diwas of Sri Swami Satyananada, Saturday, 12 September 2015, at 6 pm, Ganga Darshan time, in the auspicious presence of Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi, the symbolic veil was lifted and there it was, for all to behold–Chhaya Samadhi. Namrata and I looked at each other, then at the marvel in front of us, then again at each other. What

to say after nine months of suspense? Nothing on earth or in all the heavens had prepared us for this. Speechless, with tears in our eyes, we did pranam, knowing that this was a historic moment in our lives, the life of Ganga Darshan, its residents and guests, and the world. Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram had come to stay on Main Lawn.

Pooja was held inside, pandits chanted mantras, then they did abhisheka of the Shivalingam and Sri Yantra in front of everyone, and an atmosphere of pure bliss descended onto Ganga Darshan. Swami Satsangi put so much feeling into just a few words and Swamiji spoke and sang from the core of his heart. Then the most spectacular light show followed. It was the colours of the universe which appeared and disappeared leaving everyone to deal with a totally new experience for the eyes of the body and those of the soul. Tender sounds of water caressed the ears. Finally, everyone was invited to enter the Chhaya Samadhi. A line of people entered in wonder and sheer amazement at what they were witnessing. Exiting, some sought the solitude of their rooms, others lingered around, all trying to come back to planet earth and Ganga Darshan Main Building Lawn, which would never be the same again – that much was crystal clear to everyone.

Slowly buildings were being locked, lights went off, and only the blue light around Sri Swamiji's samadhi was shining brightly, spreading a soft purple glow through the diamond into the dark sky. The ashram settled for the night. I, on the other hand, did not manage to settle down to anything. I was restless, tossing and turning my leaves in the gentle breeze,



watching my breath and counting sheep – to no avail. Sleep would not come. At last towards midnight, I could bear it no more and sweetly whispered, “Namrata, are you sleeping?”

“No,” came the answer, “and you?”

“No, I am talking to you.”

“That’s true Ashok, you are a wise tree.”

“Namrata, do you think this is all a dream?”

“No, no. It is as real as real can be. You heard what Swamiji said, ‘This is a symbol of a disciple’s dedication and love’. That is real, isn’t it? Look at Main Building. That crazy piece of architecture is also the symbol of love and dedication that Sri Swamiji had for his guru, Swami Sivananda. Nobody knows the intricacies, the mystery and secrets of Main Building, and only Swamiji now knows the secrets of Chhaya Samadhi as he is the sole architect, the 108 per cent architect. You heard him speak.”

“I did. Did you notice how the people when they were inside wanted to go around Sri Swamiji’s photo and not leave the diamond?”

“Yes, that was because they thought they were in Rikhia where there is also the beautiful blue light on the white marble and where one does parikrama of the samadhi sthal. The picture here is of Sri Swamiji from his Rikhia days, so naturally people felt transported, not realizing that they had their own samadhi now in Munger. In Rikhia the photo is from Sri Swamiji’s time in Munger; so you see: two places, two times, one soul, one spirit.

“Swamiji said that in Rikhia there is the open sky above the samadhi sthal, and in Munger there is the multidimensional universe of the diamond. Yes, he said diamond. The diamond is translucent purity which reflects everything unquestioningly, and the diamond is also unflinching firmness which does not budge from the path of righteousness and the goal of sankalpa. Sri Swamiji embodied these qualities, yet there is more to it and him. This Sri-Swamiji-diamond is surrounded and supported by the soft petals of the lotus flower.”



“Yes, I saw the golden lotus petals on the marble floor all around the diamond. This lotus is eternal, not like the ones we thought would float in the little pools.”

“Sri Swamiji’s love is the untainted softness of the lotus. That is what Swamiji said: maryada and prem, Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, perfection in behaviour, action and being, and unconditional, all-embracing love, as lived by Sri Swamiji.”

“Namrata, I feel dizzy; diamond and lotus, lotus and diamond! Oh, and the song. Do you remember the song Swamiji sang so beautifully tonight, one of Swami Sivananda’s and Swami Satyananda’s favourite songs? Let’s sing it together.” Quietly without waking anyone in the ashram we sang the song of of consecration:

Take my life and let it be  
 Consecrated, O Lord, to thee.  
 Take my hands and let them move  
 At the impulse of thy love.  
 Take my moments and my days  
 Let them flow in ceaseless praise.  
 Take my feet and let them be  
 Swift and beautiful for thee.  
 Take my voice and let me sing

Always, only, for my king.  
Take my lips and let them be  
Filled with messages for thee.  
Take my silver and my gold,  
Not a mite would I withhold.  
Take my intellect and use  
Every power as thou shalt choose.  
Take my will and make it thine,  
It shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart, it is thine own,  
It shall be thy royal throne.  
Take my love, my Lord, I pour,  
At thy feet its treasures store.  
Take myself and I will be  
Ever, only, all for thee.

“Ashok, this is the most heart-and-soul-stirring song I have ever heard. It is the song and sound of the diamond and lotus. Let’s make it our sankalpa. As we live our life around the Chhaya Samadhi, we shall remind each other to strive towards fulfilling this sankalpa with every day and every breath, with sincerity, seriousness and commitment, the way Swamiji wants us to live our lives.”

We were both overwhelmed by the beauty of this pledge. Silently, we did pranam again; this time it was infused with meaning and boundless love. The first rays of the sun broke the darkness of the night. Dawn brought hope and joy, a bright future. That morning we knew: Namrata, Ashok and Chhaya Samadhi are one. To receive the inspiration and blessing of the Chhaya Samadhi seekers will have to discover their own faith and humility, they will have to shed the leaves of their cares and worries, and live like a simple blade of grass.



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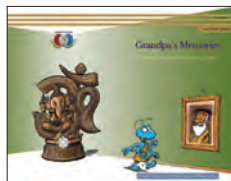
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