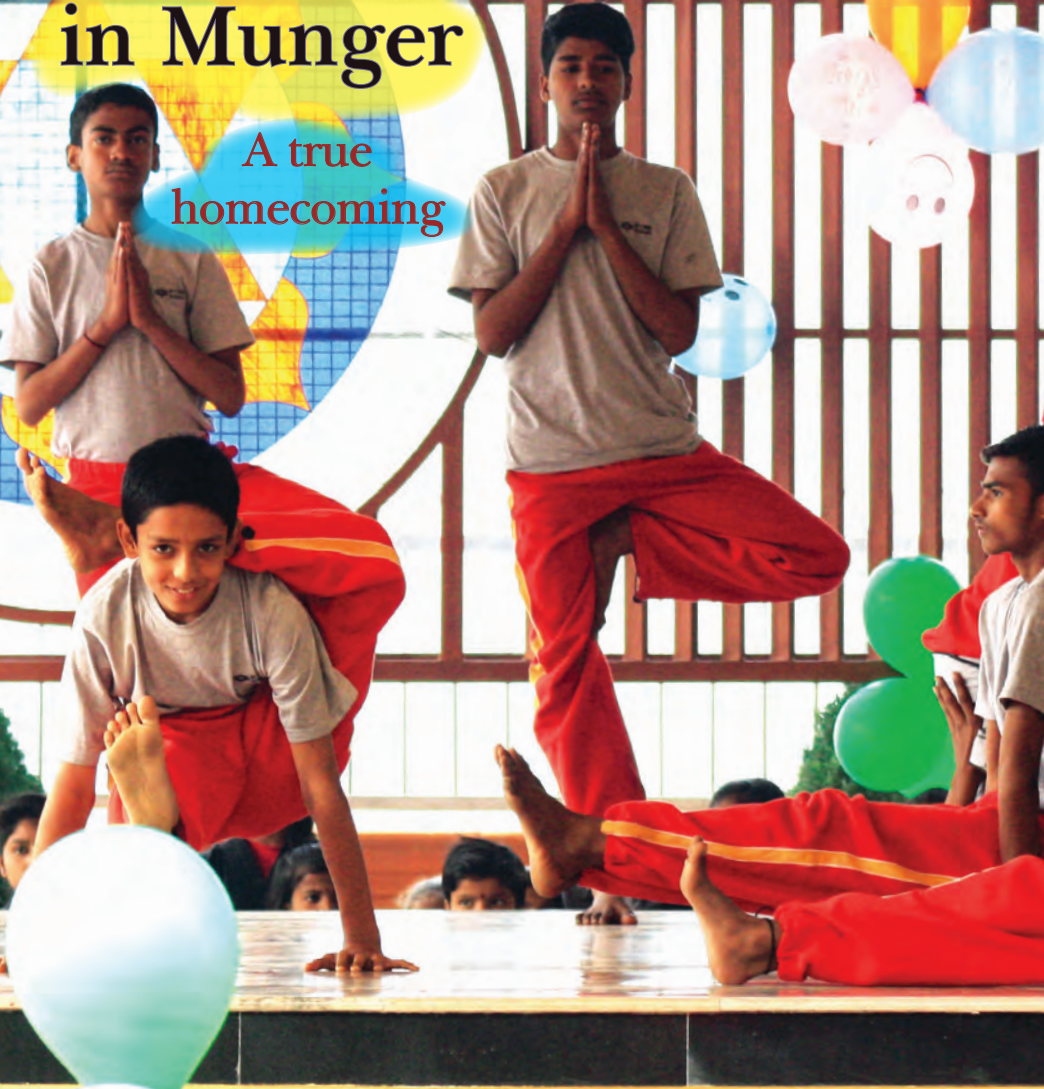


SATYAM TALES

Holidays in Munger

A true
homecoming



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India



Satyam Tales

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

Holidays in Munger is the twenty-eighth 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 boring holiday with an elderly aunt in a small town in faraway Bihar turns into a life-changing event for young Gopal. In Munger, he discovers a whole new world of ancient traditions. With the guidance and wisdom of Swami Niranjanananda, he learns that eternal truths remain inspiring if they are presented with understanding and dignity. Swamiji just did that. And Gopal returns home filled with good intentions which flower in his life, in turn inspiring his schoolmates.

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. Perhaps you can also begin to imbibe positive samskaras . . .

—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.
- 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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Holidays in Munger

My essay

The title of my essay is ‘Holidays in Munger’, and it is about my summer holidays. A few words about me: I spent most of my life abroad and had come to India only a few times to visit relatives. I always felt a bit odd, a stranger rather than a family member coming home. Last year my family returned to India to stay and settle down.

At my new school I did rather poorly in my Hindi and Sanskrit exams, naturally; so my parents asked my aunt Sita to help me out with a bit of coaching and guidance. Now retired, she had been a school teacher all her life and was only too happy to help. During the long train journey, I tried to accept the logic and purpose of this undertaking, which was not that easy as I missed my old friends and life a lot. Clearly, I was not overly thrilled, yet two weeks seemed a fair investment to improve my Hindi, at least that was how I reasoned to myself, ‘Look Gopal, it’s only for two weeks and you do want to do better in your exams next year. So just relax, get on with it and make the most of it’.





“Gopal, Gopal! Baba re, baba re, how you have grown! Such a tall young boy! Welcome, welcome, no, no – *swagat hai, swagat hai!*” My dear aunt did not waste a minute and started her mission right there on the platform. As we drove into town and I tried to answer her thousand and one questions, I noticed that there was hardly any traffic in the streets, the shops had not opened, yet people were coming out of houses, narrow lanes and from around almost every corner, laughing and chatting. Among them in little groups were children, all dressed in bright red track suits, boys and girls, my age and half my age.



I asked my aunt if there was a festival in town. “No, no, not festival, more than festival, it’s yoga day, *yoga diwas*, the International Day of Yoga, *Antararashtriya Yoga Diwas*. Gopal you are just like Ravi, you have come too late. But don’t worry, next year you’ll make it and you’ll be on time, just like Ravi. I will give you his story to read, it is so beautiful.”

I did read *City of Yoga* and it really was a good story. It explained the people I had seen early that day in the streets; otherwise I could not have made head or tail of it.

The next morning, I woke up with more than a fright. Used to my radio-alarm and the latest hits, it was the thundering sound of the conch that ended my night’s rest. Aunt Sita announced her early morning pooja and reading of the *Ramayana* with the deep call of the white shell. She was a dedicated member of the Munger Ramayan Mandali, as I was told at breakfast along with an invitation to join her in the morning and on Saturdays for the weekly group chanting at the ashram.



Indeed, I had come to Munger, a small town on the banks of Ganga, in the state of Bihar. My aunt had a tough schedule worked out for me, but she was fun and I learned with a lot of laughter. Mr Singh, her elderly neighbour, assisted her. A regular visitor, he wanted to know about the places I had lived in and the life I used to lead abroad. Needless to say, all in Hindi, and he was instructed to correct each and every one of my mistakes.

He also took me around town to see the sights: we went to the Fort area, to the Ganga and the spectacular new bridge; we saw the gigantic white building of the world famous Bihar School of Yoga towering into the blue sky, and we went to Chandisthan, a peculiar little temple dedicated to Chandi Ma. Mr Singh promised to take me across the river to visit Sita Charan, a temple where Sita's footprints can be seen. He told me proudly of the history of the city from the most ancient times of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, to the times of the Moghuls and Britishers, up to the modern era of the 'City of Yoga'. I was surprised to find so much extraordinary history in such an ordinary small town.



The days went by quietly. When I had finished my exercises I would watch movies, Hindi movies of course, or skype with my friends. Just when I started to feel that it was all a bit too quiet and a touch boring, my aunt announced with great excitement, “The Guru Poornima program starts today at Paduka Darshan. Let’s get ready and go.” I had no idea what she was talking about but keen for change I went along gladly. It may sound strange, yet since then I am a different person, or at least a person who wants to be different. It was amazing.

Everything I had heard and read regarding the heritage of India and the things I knew other people do, like pooja, mantra chanting, singing kirtan and bhajan, doing havan, performing abhishek and aradhana – it was all there, made alive, and I was in the midst of it. It felt like being transported to another age, the age of scriptures, of sages, saints and rishis, of gods and goddesses. It was eerie, natural and unbelievably comforting, all at the same time. The eyes were feasting on a magnificent display of colours, the ears were bathing in the sound of Sanskrit, and unknown fragrances pervaded the whole area. Fortunately, the sophisticated sound system, the halogen lights and the majestic awesome triple-tent reassured me that I was not time-travelling in some time-machine; no it was all happening in the twenty-first century on the banks of Ma Ganga. And those same children who had been laughing and chatting in the streets of Munger the day I had arrived were again everywhere doing everything and enjoying it thoroughly.





Then my auntie's guru, Swami Niranjanananda Sarawati, spoke a few words with simplicity, clarity and ease, yet I could not grasp everything. When we got back home, I went straight online and discovered a whole new world, at least new for me. That night I spent reading, looking at pictures and watching and listening to satsang, programs and music on Youtube. I discovered Satyananda Yoga, the masters of the tradition and their incredible lives. Definitely, Swami Niranjan was no jungle rishi or sadhu in an icy cave.

Over the next three days, I received the same information live with feeling, with insight and humour as Swami Niranjan spoke on Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda and how they truly lived their teaching every day, every moment. I have to mention here that my two weeks with Sita auntie had come to an end and in order to attend the whole Guru Poornima program, I had to extend my stay for another ten days. I could not believe it myself, but here I was immersing myself by my own choice into a world that boggled and opened my mind.

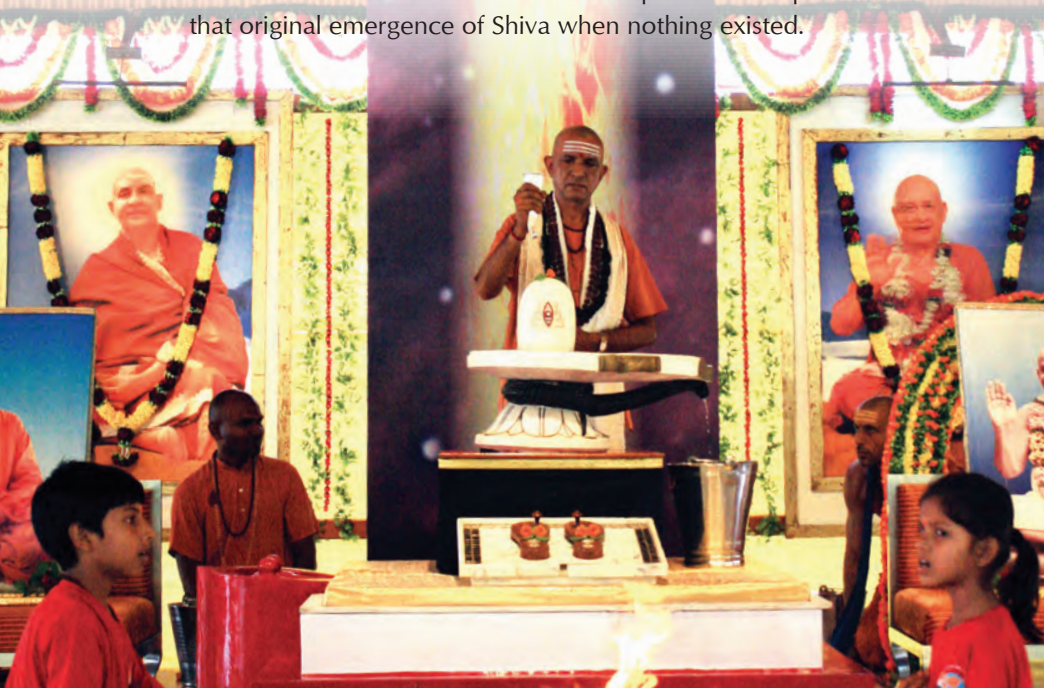
Swami Niranjan brought alive the beginning of creation from the all-pervading consciousness to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, who manifested as a pillar of fire. He had hardly

finished telling the story, which many may know but was new to me, when he announced the end of that same creation:

The famous astrophysicist Stephen Hawking says that humanity can survive only another 200 years on this planet before it becomes extinct. It is less than approximately 300 years since the industrial revolution and in the next 200 years we will be extinct. So our contribution to this Earth has been 500 years of exploitation and greed. Prior to that humanity has survived because there was a balance between material aspirations and spiritual awareness.

It took me a few deep breaths to connect Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and Stephen Hawking, the beginning and end of the world, yet I loved every bit of it. Then Swami Niranjana explained the pillar of fire that was represented with a high-tech image on stage:

This pillar of fire on the stage represents the first manifestation of the cosmic potential in form of energy. The second manifestation of that cosmic potential is the form of mantra. So the first form of manifestation of the potential is fire, prana or energy. The second form of manifestation of this potential is nada, vibration, the sound *Om*. The third form of the manifestation was the form of Shiva. The pillar of fire represents that original emergence of Shiva when nothing existed.



Now this was awesome. I had never heard anything like it, but I knew it was true and that it was all written in ancient scriptures. Swami Niranjan did not invent some wild story of creation; no he just told the story in a beautiful way.

On the third day, my aunt kept waving to me trying to catch my attention. We were sitting separately, ladies on one side, gents on the other side. So during one of the kirtan chanted by the BYMM children we met outside the pandal. “I want you to meet Ravi, the journalist. He is here,” Unable to control her excitement she went up to a tall, slightly overweight man, and said, “Raviji, I would like you to meet my nephew Gopal. He has come to Munger for the first time and he has read your stories (see Satyam Tale 21, *The City of Yoga*, Satyam Tale 24, *Glory to a Rishi* and Satyam Tale 26, *Yoga Everywhere* – Ed).” Ravi was charming. He said, “You know Gopal, when I came for the first time I said to myself ‘never again’, and now look at me, I take every opportunity to be here. It is my second home and the people of Munger are my second family. I feel at peace and I learn to be happy. Now let’s go and sit down, satsang will start.”



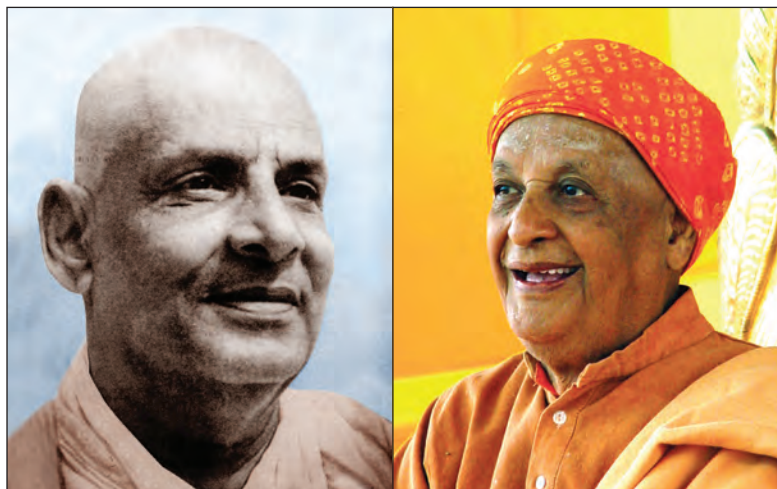
Swami Niranjan summarized what he had spoken about the previous day and continued:

The Shivalingam in front of the pillar of fire is white. Shiva was not black. Shiva was not brown. Shiva was not red. Shiva was not yellow. Shiva was white. His body was like the whiteness of camphor, *karpuragauram*. The Shivalingam represents the unmanifest identity and the Shiva with Ganga in his matted locks, in meditation smeared with ashes on his body represents the manifest human form.



This Shiva, the universal consciousness, is the first guru, the original guru, *adi guru*. All knowledge of humanity from beginning until now has come from this Shiva consciousness. This knowledge, *vidya*, is the gift of Shiva to humanity. He was the fountain of knowledge and he gave us the material and spiritual sciences to develop. Vidya is a combination of knowledge and skill.

I don't remember if my mind was still or racing at a 1000 miles an hour. I wanted to take it all in, this new world or should I say this new take on the world. Swami



Niranjan outlined the sequence of gurus, from Veda Vyasa and other enlightened beings to Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda. They all guided human civilization ‘on the path of progress and peace by harmonizing and balancing material aspirations with spiritual awareness’. If I say that all this was food for thought, it would be a silly understatement – it was so much more.

On the last day as we left Paduka Darshan, Mr Singh asked, “So Gopal, are you ready for the yoga class that starts tomorrow as part of the Chaturmas program? I’ll pick you up at 6 am tomorrow morning. Your aunt will give you a blanket, won’t you Sita.” Needless to say, I was game.

The next morning, we stood in line outside the gates of Paduka Darshan. We were not the first ones to arrive, for many had come even earlier, blanket, towel or real yoga mat under the arm. Young and old, slim and not so slim, sporty type and more lazy type, all had gathered for something extraordinary. The gates opened at 6.45 am and everyone was guided into the tent in an incredibly orderly fashion and seated in neat lines, women to the right, men to the left. We were seated in one of the last rows. Mr Singh had brought his grandson along who was fast asleep, lying between us.



At 7 am sharp the class began and was, by the way, streamed live. Swami Niranjana sat in front of a picture of Sri Swami Satyananda, in the background were the two fabulous glass yantras of Shiva and Shakti, and next to him on either side two of the BYMM children were gracefully and expertly demonstrating the various asanas.

We were taught the three mantras: the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, the Gayatri mantra and a mantra comprised of the 32 names of Ma Durga. Swami Niranjana explained the sankalpa for each mantra and why they should be chanted early in the morning on waking up. In the state between being fully awake and fully asleep, the mind is most receptive and should receive positive input. Here I was producing those same Sanskrit sounds which just a few days ago had sounded so strange yet had entered every cell of my body and being.

Then Swami Niranjana started with the hatha yoga class. The yogasanas were simple yet doing each one for fifteen times was an experience that took me into the body and out of the body. Maybe it sounds strange, but I learnt and experienced that in yoga we can use the body to go beyond the body. And that's what we did at Paduka Darshan.

After the yogasanas we shifted to pranyama and, being a first-timer, I discovered a new dimension of myself, I mean my breath. I don't think I ever knew that I was breathing, leave alone how. At the end, we were all lying down and were taught how to relax. To relax does not mean doing nothing, on the contrary it means doing everything with full awareness. After the class, refreshed, recharged and relaxed, we were guided out again in an orderly fashion.

I would like to add a little anecdote which illustrates how relaxed the class was and how generous. Mr Singh's grandson would not sleep for long. He would wake up slowly to the sound of the mantras and be wide wake for the asanas. He copied the men and boys around him and then went on his own venture. When we did surya namaskara and were in the position of *parvatasana*, the mountain pose, he tried to crawl under as many mountains as he could. Nobody did mind, and some of us stayed a bit longer in the posture just to offer this little boy another mountain to crawl under. When we did *sarvangasana*, the shoulderstand, he used his grandfather's legs to climb as high as possible and poor Mr Singh had to stay in the posture until the boy decided to slide down again. Of course we all had a good laugh. The toughest test was during *eka pada pranamasana*, a balancing pose on one leg. He would walk in front of us and make faces or crazy movements to make us laugh and lose our balance. Of course, Swamiji saw everything, yet he generously allowed it to happen because we were family and it was a family coming together to learn about *yoga vidya*, the science of yoga. Naturally, this does include dealing not only with oneself but also with a little boy.

Every evening we returned to Paduka Darshan, and as the sun set over Ganga, musicians, singers and dancers gave their best to add to the enchantment, for Swami Niranjana's Chaturmas program included song and dance. I did not know that music could transport me from the here and now to somewhere else. With the sound of what is called spiritual music, the music of the bhakta, I discovered what music was



meant to be. I knew that the hits of my radio-alarm had very little to do with it.

Swami Niranjan said that the real, original purpose of music is not entertainment, rather it is something subtler:

Music is the most beautiful way to connect to the most beautiful feelings we have and to the most beautiful presence in us and in our life, to the presence of the divine.

I understood now why my grandmother used to chant in the mornings and evenings in her room. She wanted that connection and she wanted to have it through music. I also started to look at Sita auntie's morning sadhana with different eyes.

I attended the first week of the two-month Chaturmas program, and, believe it or not, I was sad to leave. I had met an India unknown to me and I wanted more. I wanted to understand, experience and live at least a little bit of the vast treasure of this spiritual heritage.

On the long train journey home, I felt that my true homecoming had just begun, and here I end the essay on my summer holidays.”

Dear Swamiji

I wish you a very happy New Year. I am sending you the essay I wrote last summer after my holidays in Munger. I got top marks and had to read it out in front of the class. I am the same Gopal of the essay. I want to thank you for everything.

I don't know much about the concept of guru and until I came to Munger I never gave it much thought. I liked what you said on Guru Poornima:

The guru does not teach meditation and does not teach yogasana and pranayama. The guru teaches a way to live life in the right manner.

So when I was back home I not only wanted to do better in my Hindi and Sanskrit exams but do better in my life. I decided to change or at least try to change my lifestyle, attitudes, habits, ideas and myself. I follow the sadhana you give every year on the International Day of Yoga to people and especially to the citizens of Munger. With my APMB book next to me, the memory of your classes, and the desire and determination to get it right, I practise almost every day. Here is what I do in the morning:

Three mantra sadhana

TTK – ten rounds

Surya namaskara – six rounds

Eka pada pranamasana, as long as possible, each leg

Shavasana with abdominal breath awareness

Nadi shodhana pranayama – ten rounds

On Sundays I do more asana. I like to experiment and explore my capability. So I do asanas like chakrasana, dhanurasana, paschimottasana, and even mayurasana. It is great fun and a challenge at the same time. I always thought I was the sporty type as I am good at games but I discover stiffness everywhere in my body. More than improving the flexibility in my body, I love to use the asana to focus, become centred and calm. By doing the asana the way you taught, I feel I can bring head, heart and hands together which makes me feel great.

When I come home from school, I do, or to be honest, I try to do a yoga nidra, a quick one more like a power nap. It is the most difficult time for me because I want to do so many things – like check my mail, chat with friends, watch TV. Then I have to do my homework, have dinner, be with the family – you know just the normal stuff. So to go to my room and lie down is quite a challenge, or as you and yoga would say ‘It is a discipline.’

It may be hard to believe but it is true – the children of BYMM inspire me to do the right thing and become more organized, less lazy and whimsical. They are so disciplined, they behave in the correct manner with such natural ease and they have skills which I am sure they have acquired through hard work and continuous effort. I know I am not a member of BYMM but I can try to follow their example.

With my daily sadhana I fare better at night. I do the Review of the Day with suggestions of improving certain situations and encounters. Then I do *trataka*, *antar mouna* and one mala of *Om*, as I don’t have a personal mantra. I like to end my day like that, it really closes the page of the day and when I wake up in the morning I am ready and eager to turn another page of a new day.

On Sundays, after my attempt on advanced asana, I do my spiritual diary for the week. I have a check list on regularity for sadhana and school work. The second entry is the practice of what you taught during Guru Poornima in regard to being spiritual. The way you defined spirituality was really novel and had nothing to do with being holy or saintly:

To be spiritual does not mean that you are thinking about God all the time. It means that you are able to express the positive qualities which are within you. The absence of like and dislike and being friendly are the two qualities which emerge from a mind which is pure and spiritual.

It sounds simple, but my spiritual diary is filled with a week’s worth of likes and dislikes, and moments of moody, grumpy or sour behaviour. I know what I want and I will

keep trying and if you don't mind I'll add – with seriousness, sincerity and commitment.

What might be interesting for you, even though you don't know me, is that all my marks in all subjects have gone up over the past five months. From being somewhere in the middle, I am now among the top ten of my class. Besides, I don't miss my old life anymore and I have made new friends. They accept me and I accept them. No more moping about the past. What Sri Swamiji said is slowly coming true for me:

Yoga is a science by which you become powerful enough to put your ideas into practice.

So definitely, I am more at ease with myself and more happy – all thanks to you, Shiva, the pillar of fire, Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, the music of bhaktas, the children of BYMM and the magic of Paduka Darshan. Of course I don't understand why and how things happen. For the moment that's all right; whatever happens it is taking me in the right and in a good direction.

Swamiji, do you make New Year's resolutions? I made three for this year: 1. continue with my sadhana, 2. learn *Hanuman Chalisa* by heart and add it to my daily sadhana, and 3. come again to Munger to meet you.

So thank you, thank you for everything. I am looking forward to coming again to Munger, maybe in my next summer holidays. Hari Om!

Yours sincerely,
Gopal



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