

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

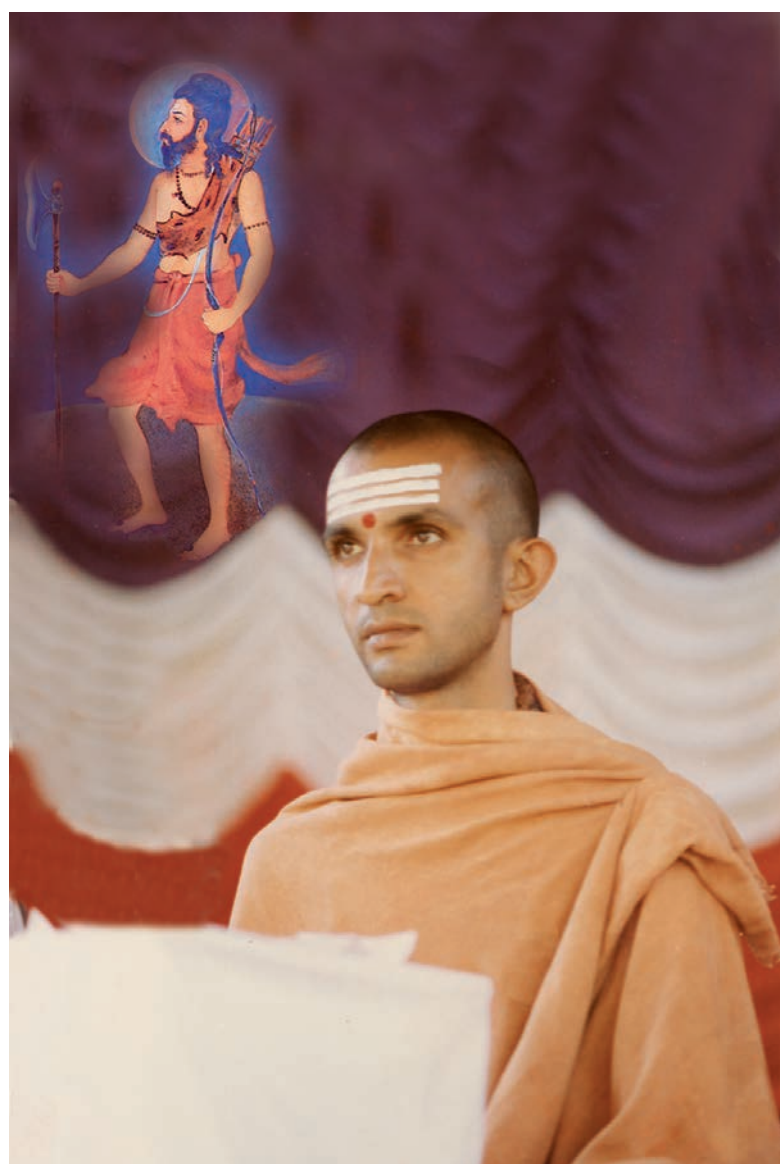
BIHAR YOGA

SATYAM TALES

Lessons for Life

A disciple's ongoing journey

Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India



Lessons for Life

The year was 1971. Swami Niranjan, then a mischievous boy of eleven, was living an idyllic, blissful life in his guru's ashram. The living conditions were by no means easy, yet to be in the company of Sri Swami Satyananda, his guru, was solace, succour and satisfaction supreme.

One fine day, a telegram arrived that would change Swami Niranjan's way of life forever. "Send Niranjan to Calcutta immediately," the telegram commanded. It was signed 'Satyam'. That very night, Swami Niranjan and another resident swami entrained for Calcutta.

At the station, it was none other than Sri Swamiji himself, who came to receive them. After they did their pranams, Sri Swamiji enquired about their travelling account. The accompanying swami handed Swami Satyananda forty rupees. Sri Swamiji asked, "Where are the remaining ten rupees?" He knew that they had been given fifty rupees as travelling expenses. The swami explained that they had eaten ten rupees worth of peanuts along the way as it was Niranjan's desire.

Sri Swamiji looked at little Niranjan and said, "Niranjan, even if a sannyasin has money, he should always live like a beggar, because the money of a sannyasin is not his to spend. *Voh paisa amaanat hai, sannyasi us amaanat mein khayaanat nahin kar sakti.* "The money is given for another purpose. He is not the owner of the money; he is just the trustee and

cannot spend it on himself.' Therefore, even if you have money, always live like a beggar."

As they accompanied Sri Swamiji to his place of residence, Swami Niranjan contemplated on what his guru had just told him. That terse teaching would eventually become a guiding beacon in his life as a sannyasin.

Upon reaching their destination, Swami Satyananda broke a piece of news that sounded very ominous to the little lad yet to step into his teens. "Niranjan, I'm sending you abroad. There you must teach and learn as much as you can, leading the life of an ideal yogi and sannyasin."

Little Niranjan was flabbergasted. The very thought of separation from his beloved guru was too much to bear. "Gurudev!" he exclaimed, "Doubt, fear and sadness assail my mind at the thought of leaving your loving, protective care. If you send me to these lands steeped in materialism, will I not fall prey to the myriad temptations that swirl there, day in and day out? Gurudev! I am afraid of losing my sense of dharma and being swept away in their current. Please don't send me away, keep me by your side forever."

"No Niranjan, that cannot and shall not be. You have stayed by my side all these years and I have trained you well. Now the time has come for you to be a man and go out into the world, where your destiny awaits. *Apanee khidkiyaan kholkar charon aur se shuddha vayu aane dena, lekin sansarikta ka samarthan nahin karna. Sadhu the, sadhu ho, sadhu rahna, aur veer purush kee tarah jeena.* Keep the windows of your mind open but only let good thoughts in, not the worldly ones. You were, are and shall be a sadhu. Go and face life like a brave man."

The grave tenor of Swami Satyananda's voice conveyed the finality of his decision. Swami Niranjan knew better than to argue. Only recently had Sri Swamiji cleared a disciple's doubts about obedience to the preceptor, and Swami Niranjan himself had penned down those sublime sentiments in flowing verse. Now those very verses began to resound in his ears . . .



*One day Satyam was asked by a seeker
"Tell me Gurudev, which is better?"
"Worship of the master or obedience to his wishes?"
Satyam smiled and replied, "Hear this tale and know yourself."*

In the dying moments of twilight, a small solitary figure was making his way to an ashram atop a picturesque peak. Nimble footsteps deftly sidestepped broken twigs of teak, barely making a sound lest they disturb the evening peace.

The sound of hushed footfall carried over to Sage Jamadagni, the revered rishi, the illustrious scion of the Bhrgu dynasty. Opening his eyes, the sage beheld the outlines of a young boy. Ah his son Rama! A lad of exceeding promise, his pride and joy.

The boy's usually radiant face was today sullen and pensive, the darkness on his face made even Jamadagni apprehensive. "Pray Rama! What brings you here, away from your guru's care?" Yet no answer was forthcoming, just pursed lips and a stony glare.

"Placed in many a great dilemma, it became too much to bear. Forced to go against my ideals, I could no longer stay there,"

Rama mumbled eventually, perplexing his father even more.
“What dilemmas, what ideals? Speak up son, without fear or remorse.”

“Many were the injustices. I’ll but mention the ones that hurt me still.
Once the granary was ravaged by a rat that my guru bade me kill
Ahimsa paramo dharma, non-violence towards one and all
Thus citing the scriptures did I politely refuse the call.”

“And when some enemy spies stormed in to capture our prince
my guru hid him and bade us pretend he wasn’t in the precincts.
Ritam satyam param brahma, to what avail this sacred injunction?
Why lie if God is truth incarnate?” asked Rama with much indignation.

“Alas my son! what a pompous pundit you’ve become . . .
You dare judge your own guru, the embodiment of wisdom!
From where in Aryavarta did you imbibe these ideas so muddled
these half-baked ideals, these theories new-fangled . . .”

“Books? They cannot teach one the truths about life, my son,
On life’s battlefield must those truths be fought for, and won
Forget your scriptures, forget your ideals – just remember!
*Obedience to the parent and obedience to the preceptor
is greater than the highest ideal in the loftiest scripture.*”

“You complain of moral dilemmas! Wait, I shall send you to a guru
who plays with paradoxes and delights in dilemmas!
The peaceful ascetic, yet who wields the fearsome trident
Who showers grace but when aroused is destruction itself.”

“Yes, to Lord Shiva shall I send thee,
for he alone can make you see
the meaning of obedience
and the value of duty.”

Twelve years passed . . .
One day there returned to Jamadagni’s residence,
a handsome youth of dazzling countenance

His body aglow with the lustre of tapas,
his eyes shining with the light of gnosis.

The youth humbly approached and prostrated before the sage,
but lo! Jamadagni stepped back, so consumed was he with rage.
“Dear father! It is Rama who seeketh the dust of thy holy feet.”
The father recognized the son, and wondered if he could do the feat.

“If thou art indeed my son and I thy parent
then carry out my behest this very moment!”
“Gladly O father!” the youth replied reverentially,
“Thy slightest wish is the greatest command for me.”

“Your mother has committed a sin,
unatonable by penance or penitence
Dharma demands one’s life
for such an act of impiety and irreverence.
Delay not! Slay her my son! Falter not as your brothers have done,”
said Jamadagni, handing Rama the *parashu*, his formidable weapon.



Rama hesitated for a fleeting moment, then he remembered,
*Obedience to the parent and obedience to the preceptor
is greater than the highest ideal in the loftiest scripture.*
The parashu flashed . . . his mother lay dead on the floor.
Justice had prevailed, dharma was secure.

“Glory to Shiva! He has forged you well, my son!
Thou art Rama no more, you are now Parashurama,
the Rama of the battle-axe, and many a time shall you raise it
to protect the weak and destroy the wicked.”

Thus it came to be that he who wouldn’t smite a rodent
became Lord Parashurama, a Brahmin knight valiant
The warrior sage who unburdened the earth
of the despotic kshatriya clans, twenty-one times over.

*“I hope you have your answer,” Satyam concluded,
“But lest you think that Lord Parashurama,
the descendant of Bhrigu and Vishnu’s sixth avatar,
was all fire and brimstone, with a heart of stone,
let me mention that he was as devoted
to Renuka, his mother, as he was to his father.
When granted a boon by his father for obeying the difficult order,
what he asked for and indeed got back, was the life of his mother . . .”*

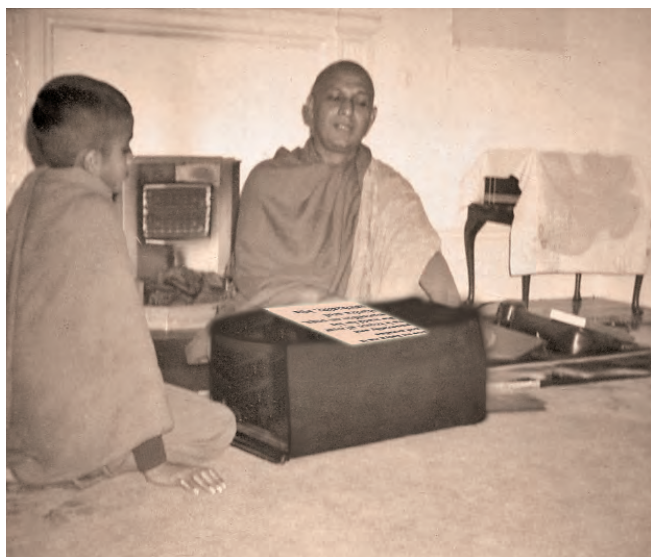
Remembering his guru’s words, Swami Niranjan returned
to the present and looking at his guru, said resolutely, “I
shall do your bidding Gurudev. Before I leave though,
please tell me how to overcome the cravings and desires that
consumerist societies create in the minds of their citizens;
how to manage the temptations that they nonchalantly toss
about hither and thither.”

Swami Satyananda’s face softened a little as he read his
disciple’s innermost thoughts. Had he himself not gone
through these fiery inner struggles in his younger years!
Reminiscing about his own tussles with his mind, Sri Swamiji
began to speak.

“Desire is the fuel that keeps the engine of cosmic creation running. It is the thread with which Maya weaves her intricate web. Subtle is its working and well guarded are its secrets. The secrets can never be explained, only experienced, my son, but you have a sharp intellect and unquestioning faith. I will relate a story. Listen attentively to what I say, and you’ll gain a better insight into the mysterious mechanisms of desire.”

“Once upon a time, there lived in the village of Dehapuri a boy named Manas. Manas was a cheerful and merry boy who spent his time in fun and frolic, in playing and fighting with the village kids, especially his neighbours. On one side of his house, there lived the Bhavana family with their twin daughters, Tripti and Trishna. On the other side dwelled the Tanmatra family with their boisterous set of five children.

Of all his neighbours, Manas enjoyed the company of Tripti the most. She was a calm and caring, warm and well-mannered girl in whose quiet company Manas could pass endless hours. They would walk to the village meadow and watch the cattle and their swishing tails and munching



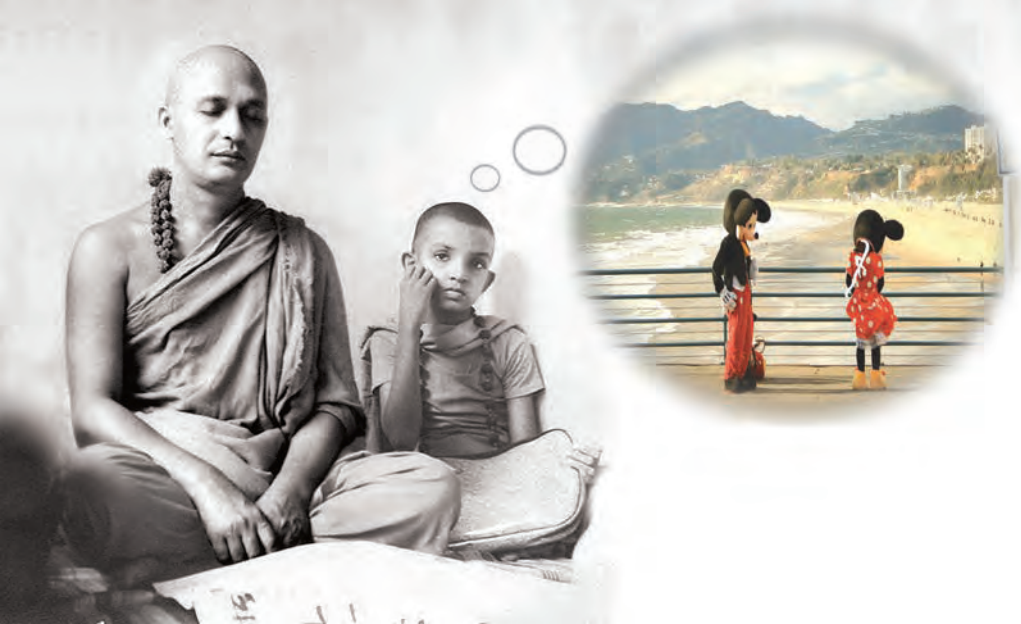
mouths. Sometimes they would sit by the river and watch the herons dive for fish under the gliding currents, whooping with excitement at the sight of one that found its mark. At other times, they would just sing soulful songs and lose themselves in sweet melodies and rhythms.

Trishna was the very opposite of Tripti. Though the twins looked alike, it was easy to tell them apart from their dress and mannerisms. If Tripti was a plain dresser, Trishna was a dandy. Where Tripti was shy and reserved, Trishna was loud and garrulous, to the point of being obnoxious. Trishna was a wild and hyperactive girl who knew how to get her way, and to Manas' great misfortune, her favourite pastime was harassing him! She would hide his books and distract him in his studies, call him names and irritate him no end.

In reality Trishna was a coward at heart. She would never dare harass him unless he was alone. Manas' encounters with Trishna had an oddly repetitive character. One moment Manas would be enjoying Tripti's company and the next instant she would excuse herself for a while. A minute later, who would show up but Trishna! She would pull at his hair, upset his toys, make faces at him and tease him until he would get terribly upset and cry out loud for help. Invariably, some of his buddies from the Tanmatra family would come to his rescue and Trishna would take off at their sight. With a Tanmatra kid to comfort and console him, could Tripti be far behind? She would hurry over as well and calm him down.

One day, something strange happened and it burst the bubble of Manas' idyllic existence forever. He had been sitting with Tripti by the river, enjoying the sights of a beautiful sunset. Suddenly Tripti muttered something about an important errand at home and hurriedly got up. Promising to return in a few minutes, she rushed over the stone bridge leading into the village. Manas leaned back on a tree trunk, skipping stones over the glistening surface, looking up every now and then for Tripti's return.

A flash of light from the river suddenly caught his eye. Looking in that direction, his eyes patched together a



strange sequence of events from the reflections emerging from the gliding currents. The falling of a white shawl, the donning of a bright red one, the shaking loose of flowing black hair, the sound of someone putting on anklets. As he looked up towards the source of the reflected images, he saw a banyan tree on the other shore and the figure of Trishna, in flamboyant red, emerging from behind it!

As her figure drew nearer, his eyes latched onto a little white cloth hanging loosely from her hair. Had he not presented a white friendship ribbon to Tripti just a few minutes ago, and had she not asked him to tie it on her braid himself? And now that very same ribbon was hanging from Trishna's billowing hair! As much as his mind revolted at the implications of this train of thoughts, there was no running away from the inescapable conclusion . . .

Tripti was Trishna! There never were any twins, no caring Tripti, no cunning Trishna, just one schizophrenic girl switching from one role to another. Argh! The perverse fraud perpetrated on him all along. Was there anyone left he could trust now? Whom to trust and whom to love? His whole world came crashing down in those moments. No, there was nothing real in this desert of mirages, nothing stable and

solid on this tossing sea of pleasure and pain. The truth lay beyond. Utterly disgusted with the deceit and the falsehood, he walked out of his village in search of the real truth, never to come back again.”

Sri Swamiji remained silent for what seemed like an eternity to Swami Niranjan. Then in a voice brimming with compassion and care, he continued:

“Manas is none other than your mind, Niranjan, and Trishna represents the desires and temptations that constantly nag it. The Tanmatras are the five sensorial experiences that the mind desperately seeks out, when overpowered by desire. As for Tripti, what does she signify? Satisfaction, pleasure, happiness; but what are these emotions really? Nothing but relief. Yes, relief from the tension of a nagging, unfulfilled desire. A welcome break from the continuous sapping of energy by the swirling thought currents of the nagging desire in the subconscious mind. We poor deluded humans, not knowing any better, perceive this momentary interruption in the sapping of vital energy as an energy rush, an emotional high! This feeling of relief, this emotional high, only reinforces the illusory association between the sensorial experience, the Tanmatra, and happiness, Tripti.”



“You eat something nice, say a chocolate, and feel happy. The feeling of happiness actually reinforces the idea in your mind that ‘chocolate = happiness’. At a subtle level, it creates and nurtures a craving for chocolate. When you next see or think of a chocolate, this mental association makes your state of contented happiness, Tripti, disappear, and want or Trishna, reappear. A vicious

cycle indeed! Tripti and Trishna are two sides of the same coin, Niranjana, two colours of the same chameleon. They are the two endpoints between which the mental pendulum oscillates continuously.”

“The way out is to be ever alert, ever watchful. The subconscious mind is a bed of smouldering embers. Watch out for the ember that bursts into sparkling flame, for that flame is Tripti! Look carefully and ferret out the underlying ember, the hidden Trishna. At the slightest sign of the state of ‘happiness’, search within for the desire whose fulfilment brought about this happiness. Then, using the double-edged sword of *viveka* and *vairagya*, discrimination and dispassion, root out the desire. Niranjana, always remember, misery is the price one has to pay for pleasure! And a heavy price indeed. *Sukh to vah vaaruni hai jise peekar hum apna param dhyeya bhool jaate hain aur amrit-pad se vanchit rah jaate hain*—Pleasure is the wine which leads us astray and deprives us of the real nectar of life.”

“But what if the desire proves too strong?” asked Swami Niranjana after a moment’s contemplation.

Sri Swamiji smiled, “If *viveka* and *vairagya* falter in the presence of strong desires, just surrender to your guru or ishta and pray deeply for redemption from the desire. A heartfelt prayer never goes unanswered, my son . . .” Sri Swamiji’s succinct reply was the final benediction to his disciple.

Grasping the true import of his guru’s allegorical story, Swami Niranjana bowed in deep gratitude to him and with an unwavering mind and a resolute heart readied himself to face the world, both outer and inner. The world would throw at him challenges and temptations galore, that he may imbibe fully the lessons learnt at his guru’s feet.

THE LESSONS BLOSSOM

In the months that followed, Swami Niranjana had his first glimpse of formal schooling. As much as he would have liked to remain outside the conditioning confines of contemporary

classrooms, state regulations dictated otherwise. A minimum level of education was compulsory for all children. At first, his school authorities were at a loss while deciding what grade he should attend. They tentatively put him in a grade based on a rough assessment of his learning and skills. To their dismay, in less than a month he was way ahead of the other pupils in his grade. Thus started a ritual of monthly promotions until Swami Niranjan had practically finished high school in less than a year.

Unknown to him, his stellar academic performance had set off a chain of events that would soon present him with his first major enticement: an offer to continue higher studies at Oxford, the Mecca of western academia. The offer was alluring indeed. If he accepted, he would probably become the youngest graduate of Oxford, not to mention the ensuing fame, recognition, career, money and luxury.

Unable to decide on the matter for himself, he wrote to his guru seeking advice. The guru's reply was crystal-clear. "It is your decision which you alone have to make. From my side, you are free to choose whatever path you deem fit. If you wish to earn a university degree, get a cushy job, raise a family, then so be it. My blessings will always be with you."

Reading the reply, Swami Niranjan understood his guru's unspoken message, "Learn to stand on your own two feet and take your own decisions." Remembering what his guru had said about desire and lure, he brought out the double-edged sword of viveka and vairagya. 'Why did I come to my guru in the first place? Was it not to serve him and his mission of yoga and sannyasa? Will my university degree help me in this pursuit or detract me? If it is the latter, then to what avail all this learning?' Did not the venerable Adi Shankara emphatically declare in his *Gurvashtakam*:

*Shadangaadivedo mukhe shaastravidyaa,
kavitatvaadi gadyam supadyam karoti.
Guroh paadapadme manashchenna lagnam,
tatah kim tatah kim tatah kim tatah kim.*



“One may be well-versed in all branches of learning, one may be a gifted poet or orator, but to what avail all that knowledge and talent if one’s mind is not devoted to the feet of the guru.”

The very next instant he had made his decision. Oxford’s loss would be yoga’s gain.

Over the next few years, Swami Niranjana worked tirelessly to spread his guru’s vision and mission of yoga. He taught, lectured and established many centres and ashrams in various countries of Europe

and South America. In 1976, his destination was Australia, where his guru was conducting an international yoga convention. As he was leaving Bogotá, people gave him donations to deliver to Sri Swamiji, which he packed away, then got on the plane and began his journey.

The route of the flight was from Bogotá to Chile, Chile to French Polynesia and finally from French Polynesia to Australia. As the plane landed in Papeete, French Polynesia, a huge storm broke out. No flights could take off or land for the next three days. Everyone who had the means went to a hotel and the airline provided them with coupons. Since he was on a cheap ticket though, the airline would not provide Swami Niranjana with any accommodation. So for three days and two nights he stayed in the transit lounge of Papeete airport, drinking only water and tea.

When he arrived in Australia and handed the Colombian donations to Swami Satyananda, and told him the story of his travels, Sri Swamiji asked him with a certain degree of

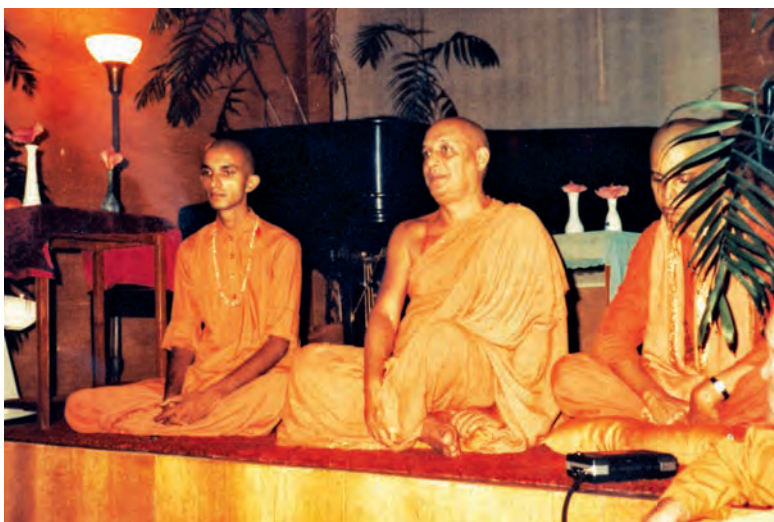


surprise, “You had the money, so why didn’t you use it?” He answered, “How could I? The money was given to me by the devotees of Colombia to give to you. *Is amaanat mein main khayaanat kaise kar sakta tha?* I was only the postman and therefore I had no right to use even a single cent of that money. Did you not tell me once, ‘Even if you have money, always live like a beggar’?”

Swami Satyananda only nodded his head by way of reply, but inwardly he was happy and proud that his disciple had so wonderfully taken his teaching to heart.

Years passed. Swami Niranjana continued to propagate his guru’s mission in India and abroad. In 1980, he reached the shores of the United States of America, short on money but rich in enthusiasm and energy. Within a year he had crisscrossed the country twice, preparing the ground for his guru’s upcoming visit. When Sri Swamiji finally arrived in 1982, his visit turned out to be extremely successful.

Buoyed by the success, Swami Niranjana returned to his mission with renewed vigour. There was tremendous demand for classes and seminars from all over America, and soon yoga centres were running in many towns and cities. Swami



Niranjan had successfully negotiated the acquisition of a sprawling one hundred acre plot of woods in West Virginia, where he planned to setup a flourishing Satyananda ashram. Then right before Christmas, a telegram arrived.

Return to India by 16th January positively.

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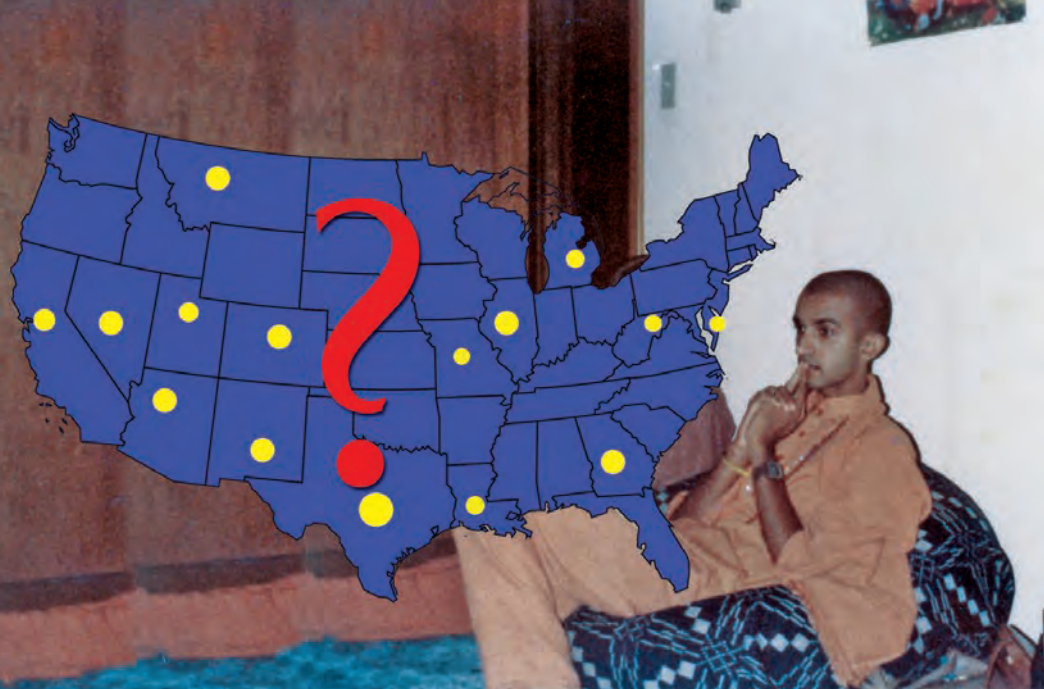
Assume Presidentship.

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Swift action necessary.

Swamiji.

Swami Niranjan looked at the telegram and thought about all his grand plans, the eager expectations of sincere aspirants, the compelling commitments. Taking care of all those loose ends would take weeks, if not months, and his guru was expecting him to wrap up everything in a week, that too in the middle of the Christmas season when all offices and businesses were closed! Anyone else in his shoes



would have said as much to his guru, or even asked him to reconsider his decision, given the extenuating circumstances.

Swami Niranjan, however was of a different calibre altogether. His mind would not even dream of venturing along such a faith-eroding chain of thought. Rather, an old memory instantly flashed in his mind, “Obedience to the preceptor is greater than the highest ideal in the loftiest scripture.” At once his decision was sealed. He would be to his guru what Parashurama was for his father. Come what may, he would wind up all loose threads and be in Munger where his guru wanted him to be.

The guru’s lessons had not gone in vain. They had been fully grasped, assimilated and expressed by a most worthy disciple, who had taken his guru’s teachings not as mere words, but lessons for life . . .



Satyam Tales

Lessons for life is the fourth 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.

Imbibing the lessons and teachings of the guru and manifesting them implicitly in one's life is the quintessence of discipleship. This is the very ideal which the young boy in this story aspires towards. Even in the face of tempting opportunities and grave challenges, he stays true and loyal to his guru and follows the guru's injunctions unswervingly.

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 perfect the art of discipleship.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

BIHAR SCHOOL OF YOGA



1963–2013
GOLDEN JUBILEE

WORLD YOGA CONVENTION 2013

GANGA DARSHAN, MUNGER, BIHAR, INDIA

23rd–27th October 2013

SATYAM TALES

