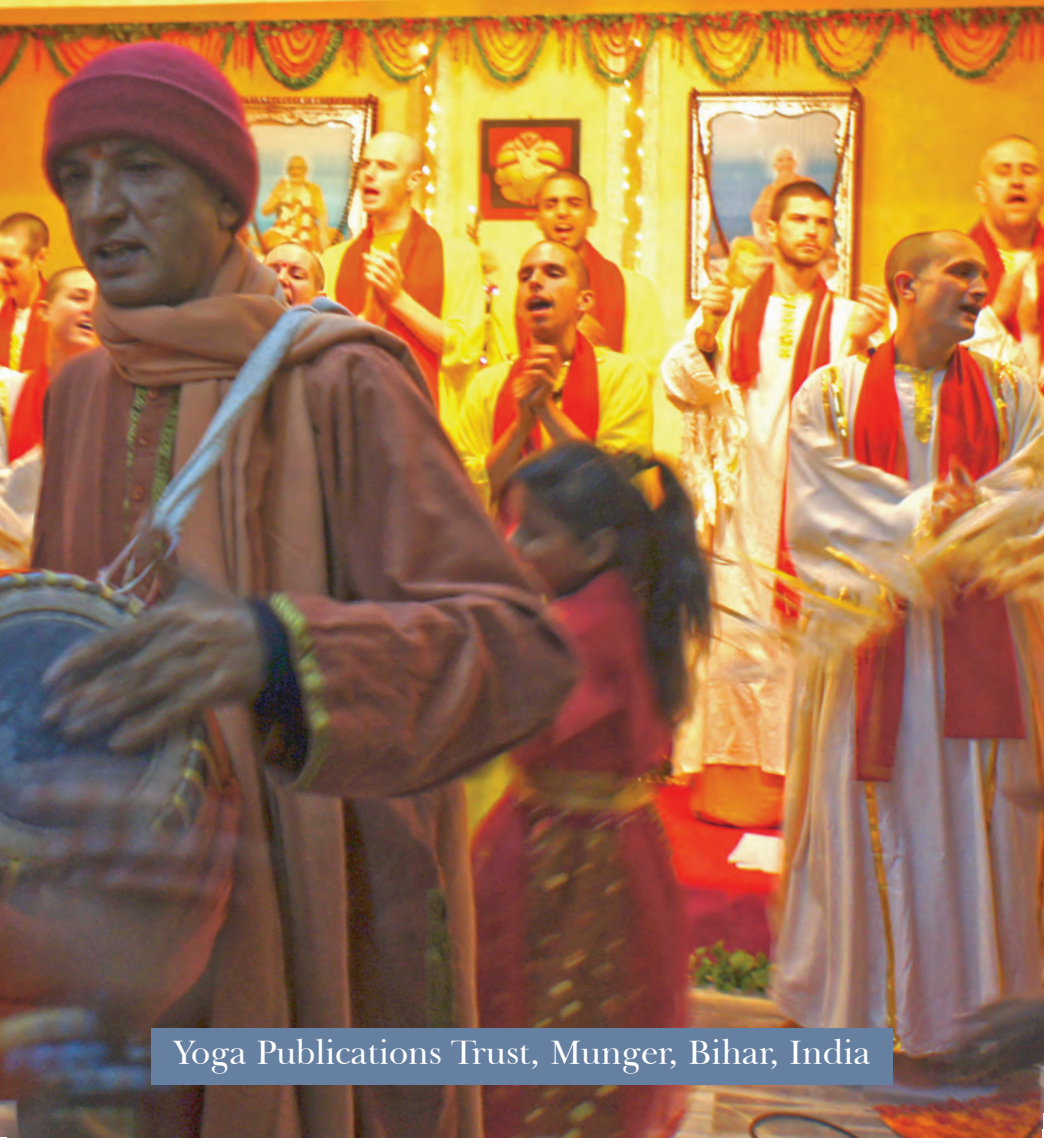


SATYAM TALES

Yoga Unites

From shore to shore



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India



Satyam Tales

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

Yoga Unites is the fortieth 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.

Ravi, who has become a regular visitor at Ganga Darshan, attends the annual Christmas functions. Over two days, students, guests and residents from around the world, gather to celebrate the birth of Jesus. As he becomes part of the program, joins in the carol singing and listens to Swamiji's explanations, he is moved not only by the person who was Jesus, but also by the power of yoga which unites people of all nations and creeds.

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 may also be inspired to discover that yoga can bridge differences and create union and oneness between people . . .

— Editor

© Bihar School of Yoga 2020

Published by Yoga Publications Trust

First edition 2020

Printed at Thomson Press India Ltd., Faridabad

Please note:

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

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

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

Yoga Unites

“Hari Om and welcome to all of you, guests, citizens of Munger, and you who have come from all corners of India and from around the globe. A hearty welcome also to the students participating in the yoga trainings at Ganga Darshan. You may wonder why Christmas is celebrated in an institute dedicated to *yoga vidya*, the science of yoga, and is celebrated even on two days.”

Yes, the swami is right. Tonight is the second evening of celebrations. Yesterday, everyone gathered in Jyoti Mandir





where a group of residents sang Christmas carols. I am not Christian, not much of a believer in anything, and may have heard carol singing six or seven times in my whole life. It must have been at a school function or even in a church, invited by Christian friends. I just have some vague memories.

Last night was different. It started with havan, as is the tradition at Ganga Darshan for important programs and anushtanas. Two Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal children



conducted havan to the 100 names of Jesus. I did not know that Jesus had one hundred names. To be quite honest, I do not know much about Jesus. Before the havan, Swamiji told the story of these names:

One day after Sri Swamiji had installed Christ Kutir in Rikhiapeeth, he called everyone at the ashram and said, "Here are one hundred names of Jesus and have a havan with these names. He is the Son of God, and it is befitting to worship him with a hundred names."



The children conducted the havan with so much grace and dignity; it was a worthy tribute to Jesus and our gurus.

There in the packed Jyoti Mandir, flanked by Ganeshji and Swami Sivananda to the right and Sri Swamiji and Ramji to the left, and in the presence of Swamiji, the sannyasins gathered and sang with simplicity, a lot of feeling and beautiful voices. The mandir was vibrating to much more than sound. Carol singing is different to kirtan and mantra chanting. It is a unique part of the Christmas celebration and maybe the part which unites people of all castes, creeds and

nations most easily, spontaneously and for the single purpose of expressing recognition, gratitude and joy.

Joining in the singing, I mentally bowed down to this child, his teaching and inspiration. His one hundred qualities encouraged me to make more of an effort to live at least some of them. With this new feeling and understanding I had gone to sleep last night.

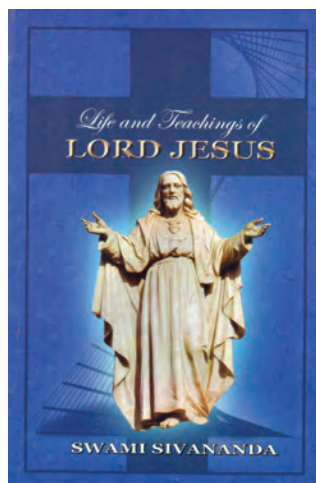
Now the swami spoke to the audience: “For us Jesus Christ is a yogi, a yogi of the highest calibre. We recognize in him the extraordinary being who lived his life not only as a perfect human being, but as a man who did everything to become one with the divine, until he could truly say, ‘I and my Father are one.’ And is this not also the aim of yoga?”

“May I interrupt?” Swamiji said. Dressed in the robes of a Franciscan monk, he exuded the best of East and West:

Yes, for us Jesus is a yogi. He had a deep connection with the Higher Force. Any saint and enlightened being from any tradition, culture or religion believed in and experienced the existence of this Higher Force. Their connection to it made them into saints and sages. Their aspiration was to cultivate that pure, strong and inner connection. The fulfilment of Jesus’ life was the purity of his nature and the connection with the Divine. This is the mind-set of a yogi.



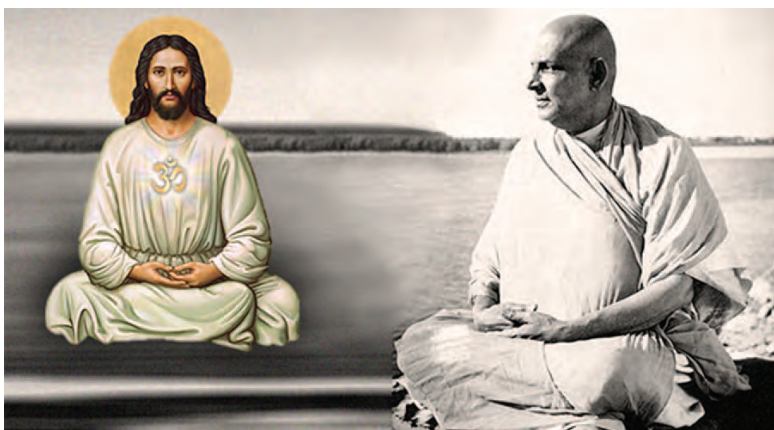
With a grin he nodded to the swami, “You may continue.” The swami did and explained: “In our tradition, all masters have a connection with Jesus. Swami Sivananda even wrote a book called the *Life and Teachings of Lord Jesus*, in which he showed that Jesus was a yogi, that his teachings were pure yoga, combining the branches of karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga. He taught yoga, using the language the people of his time and place could understand. Yogis and yoga



aspirants could always understand him easily, without any conflict, seeing no difference only the same message of peace and oneness among people and with the Divine.”

“Excuse me, I am interrupting again,” Swamiji had taken the mike, and this time it was the swami who had a grin all over his face. Swamiji continued:

Yes, this is true. Swami Sivananda was a great admirer of Jesus. He wrote a book on the teaching of Jesus showing its



similarities with the teachings of other saints and sages. For instance, Jesus said, "If someone hits you on the right cheek, give him also your left cheek." Swami Sivananda used to say, "Bear insult and injury – that is the highest sadhana." It is the same idea, the same advice, only different words are used. Swami Sivananda used to say, "Be good, do good." He used it to define a divine life. He made these two sentences the aim of every spiritual aspirant. This was also the teaching propagated by Jesus Christ, so that one can open the heart to receive the light of God.



Swami Satyananda had been to a Christian school and knew a lot about Christianity, but never really believed that a man like Jesus could have lived – until he met Swami Sivananda. Then he said, “Living with Swami Sivananda I knew it was possible that a person like Jesus could have existed in this world.” Everyone can try to overcome limitations to connect with the goodness which will connect one with the Divine. Jesus embodied that state of goodness. It is the inspiration of his life that continues to guide millions across the world to tread the virtuous path. Therefore, Christmas is a day of rejoicing and reflection both.



After Swamiji finished, the swami said: “Swami Satyananda had his own connection. When he travelled around the world to fulfil his guru’s mandate to take ‘yoga from shore to shore’, he went to Islamic and Christian countries. Nowhere did he encounter opposition, everywhere he was welcome with the message of yoga. He was able to present yoga as a science, a philosophy, a system which could help people find wellbeing, harmony and balance in life, have a direction and aim, and live with dignity and respect for each other.





“Nowhere was he seen as a religious person, always as a master of yoga vidya. The doors opened wide for him, and he was invited to teach yoga even to monks and nuns. Yoga helped them to become better monks and nuns, practise their own meditation, prayers and rituals with more understanding, and thus become better Christians. Swami Satyananda was able to establish a yoga centre in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in the early 1970s amidst the fighting between Protestants and Catholics. The yoga centre brought the message of peace and yoga, and the students came from both warring sides.”

Swamiji took the mike again. The mention of Northern Ireland must have brought back some childhood memories:

Yes, I was there, I was eleven and living at the yoga centre. There was fighting during the day and at night. People would not leave their neighbourhood; it was too dangerous, except



for the swamis, we could walk safely and were not troubled. Only the children used to tease me singing, 'Yogi bear has no hair', but there was no ill-will against us.

A few years later when I was in Colombia, I taught yoga to nuns who lived in seclusion. I was the only man ever to have entered their cloister. They and above all the official Church had so much respect and trust in Sri Swamiji and his yoga that they allowed me free access, and yoga became part of the nuns' daily routine.

The swami concluded: "You see, in our tradition the masters have a personal connection with the teaching of Jesus and with Jesus as a yogi. Therefore, it is natural for us to celebrate Christmas and strengthen our commitment to become better human beings and strive to have a glimpse of the Divine. And now, let us begin our program with carols. Hari Om Tat Sat."

It was a clear introduction answering many unspoken questions. It was new to me that Swami Sivananda, Swami

Satyananda and Swamiji had a personal connection, though it should not have been a surprise, for all saints and sages come with the mission to help people become better human beings full of kindness for each other; and live, as Swamiji would say, the experience of Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram in their daily lives.

One thought came to mind, yes, in Rikhiapeeth, Sri Swamiji had created a Christ Kutir, had celebrated Christian





mass with priests from Greece and ministers from Australia amidst the proceedings of the Sat Chandi Mahayajna. He had spoken many times about the life of Jesus and his time spent in India. He also organized Christmas celebrations for hundreds of kanyas and batuks of the panchayat. His openness had planted a positive samskara, the seed of union, unity, oneness between people, in these children,





who would certainly never forget the joyful and uplifting Christmas celebrated in the inspiring environs of the ashram.

Yes, unity not separation is the teaching of all spiritual masters of all times. They express the unity according to the needs of the time, the readiness of the people and with their own love for humankind.



So tonight again sannyasins, guests and students gathered in the second floor hall for a presentation of carols from around the world. The first was a German song from medieval times, describing Mary walking through a forest of barren, thorny trees, carrying the child Jesus in her womb. Wherever she passed, the trees started flowering with beautiful roses. This reminded me of the birth of Lord Buddha when lotuses bloomed in the lakes. When Divinity incarnates on earth, the laws of nature change and bow to the will of the Divine.

The next song was a Chinese version of *Silent Night, Holy Night*. It was one voice that rang clear through the second floor hall and filled all with awe. For none would have ever heard this familiar carol in Chinese. The young woman could not refer to any tradition or samskara, yet she conveyed that something extraordinary had happened that night, or as Swamiji had said last night:

These beautiful carols invoke in me the feeling of reaching out to something existing beyond this world we live in.

The group of Bulgarian residents and guests danced a typical Christmas dance, and South American guests with guitars and flutes expressed the joy of the night in their own manner.



Then it was the moment for the choir to come forward. Sitting at the back I had my eyes closed and listened. They sang with so much heart, skill and talent. The last song was in Latin and everyone was invited to join in with the 'Gloria, Gloria'. So I did, with all the might of my voice. After the carol had come to an end, I said to myself, 'This must be what is meant by the spirit of Christmas'.

The songs had filled every heart with the two-thousand-year old feeling of joy and wonder. It didn't matter if you knew about Jesus, were a Christian or not, for heart is heart and the same in everyone all over the world.

There must have been at least one dozen nationalities in the choir. It was awesome: Bulgarian, Spanish, Australian, Swedish, Russian, French, Persian, Colombian, Brazilian, Serbian, Greek and Indian, of course. There were moments I thought, 'This can't be true'. It was unbelievable and all happening in a yoga ashram somewhere in Bihar.

I looked around at the audience. Yes, among the guests too there were Jains and Parsees, some may be devotees of Krishna, Rama, Siva, Ganesha, or Ma; there was the family of the local Iman; the nuns of Notre Dame Academy in Munger had come. Among the students, some were Christian, some Jewish, two students were Buddhists from Japan, some may not belong to any faith, sect or religion. Maybe people from fifteen or more countries were gathered and Indians from as many states. This meant nothing, for all of us were caught in the 'spirit of Christmas', the spirit of union, of belonging and living together with kindness. Yes, the second floor hall was a world on its own, a model world of tolerance, goodwill and harmony. After the last song, Swamiji spoke:

Swami Sivananda describes so clearly what Jesus and Christmas mean to any spiritual aspirant. He says that when we have spiritual aspirations and recognize the spiritual ideal, then that is the birth of the baby Jesus in our life. From this birth onwards we begin to live life with purity, faith in divinity, mercy, compassion, love, selflessness, desirelessness,

prayerfulness. This is a life of earnest yoga and sadhana, of self-restraint and simplicity, of unbroken serenity and peace, balance of mind, unflinching courage in the face of all opposition, and perfect dedication to God through the service of man. This is the spiritual message for us to live within ourselves and to celebrate as Christmas with others. These are the words of Swami Sivananda who shows us our journey from the birth of spiritual aspiration to the sadhana which is necessary to reach the goal of unbroken connection with the Divine.

While he spoke, the children of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal got ready to enact the nativity play. They did it with lightness, seriousness and joy. With simple costumes and gestures, they told the story of Bethlehem. Swamiji also was planting a samskara, the samskara of tolerance and acceptance. He gave the children the experience that Divinity takes birth on earth with different names at different times. Ramnavmi, Janmashtami and Christmas are celebrations of change. The children have the opportunity to imbibe these celebrations, thus learning the lesson of unity and oneness, a lesson we adults should also learn. At the end of the play, Swamiji took to the mike, for he obviously wanted to add something to what he had said earlier:

In Jesus life, every action, every interaction, every sentence was a learning experience for everyone. Time was not wasted in his life in entertainment, loose living and talking. He did not waste or while away time. This is another sign of sages, saints and enlightened beings – they use every moment for the welfare of others. Jesus had that quality. His nature, his personality, represented the perfection of yoga. For Sri Swamiji he was a yoga master, a siddha. We honour Christ the yogi. Spirituality is not confined to any belief. It is the discovery of the best, the most positive and uplifting in oneself. When the positive is discovered and the life is uplifted, then there is only simplicity, innocence, joy, happiness, compassion and right action. That is the fulfilment of yoga and the fulfilment of life.

That is why Indians never felt that Christ was some alien who had come into their culture. They always recognized Christ as an enlightened being, one among the other Indian gods, gurus and avatars. Indians see him as a person who through trials, effort and difficulties attained enlightenment and became a luminary of the modern age.

Suddenly the lights went off, and I could hear the tipping of tiny feet. Then to the sound of the song *The Man from Galilee*, the lights went on and shone brightly on the famous



Blue Brigade, dressed up as gorgeous angels in shimmering blue dresses and silvery wings. Last time I had seen them, they were swinging brightly coloured umbrellas in front of an international audience with the message of 'Save Water, Save Life'. Tonight they were little angels dancing to a song of faith and trust. What a fantastic way to begin life as a member of the Blue Brigade and imbibe everything Swamiji has to offer. Happy, radiant and flapping their silvery wings they flew away in all directions and out of the second floor hall. This was my cue.



“Ho, ho, ho,” my deep Father Christmas voice thundered through the hall. Big cushion-bellied in the red suit, with a flowing white beard, I came dancing right in front of Swamiji.

“Welcome dear Father Christmas, we are so happy you have come to visit us.”

“Swamiji, I am also very happy to be here and meet your guests, students and residents. I think I have enough in my bag for everyone. May I distribute what I have brought?”

“Yes, of course.”

“I’ll start with you Swamiji. Here’s your Christmas prasad.”

I gave Swamiji a big bag of presents. As I walked to my spot, which had been indicated during the rehearsal, I heard



whispers, “Who is he?” “I think it is Ravi, the journalist from Patna.” “The one who is retired now?” “The one who ran the IDY in Switzerland last year?” “Yes, you are right, it’s him; he also came for Guru Poornima.”

Swamiji called out to me, “Wait Father Christmas, before you begin, there is one more thing I want to say:

In the Christmas celebrations we remember a moment in history when a higher consciousness descended in the body of Jesus. The goal of everyone's life is to attain that higher state where the beauty of life can express itself. That beauty of the effulgent, creative, harmonious life makes a person a complete, whole being. It involves a change of attitude, a change of mind and perceptions. The aim of any spiritual effort is to attain that purity, connection and love which identifies one with all aspects of the created universe. It is expressed through seva. In the Bible it is said that by helping others you help God. Sri Swamiji said the same – when you feed others you feed God; when you give water to a person, you are also quenching the thirst of God who is in that person. It is by doing good that you yourself shine, and that is the way to God. I wish you all a very Happy Christmas, and Father Christmas, please, continue . . .”

I did pranam to Swamiji. My beard slipped down over my chin and the cushion tied to my belly made it really difficult to get up. Without much ado, like a seasoned Father Christmas, I fixed the beard and pushed the cushion in its right place and as requested continued on my mission. All received prasad to the sound of joyous kirtan and dancing angels who had returned to meet Father Christmas. A beautiful evening, a beautiful day was coming to end, but I was sure that the inspiration I received would last a lifetime.



Yes, it had been a long day, starting in the morning with another birth celebration in Satyam Vatika. It was a yogic dedication, remembrance and connection to Sri Swami Satyananda. It started with havan to the thousand names of Sri Swamiji, followed by *Satyam Chalisa*. Then Swamiji spoke:

Today we celebrate two birthdays of two yogis, our guru Swami Satyananda and Jesus Christ. They both represent the qualities of a yogi. Both had the energies of a benevolent power which brings grace, beauty, truth and happiness into our lives. That is the nature, character and identity of the sixth element, the guru tattwa, which was embodied, came alive and became effulgent in the lives of Christ, Mohammed, Buddha, Mahavira, Swami Sivananda and our own guru Sri Swamiji, in whose life each and every moment has been inspirational and selfless.

So today, try to live purity in your mind, in your heart, in your actions. Show kindness to all, compassion to all. Have happiness within, a smile on the face and a wink in the eye whenever you look at anyone.

There was silence for a while. We all wanted to understand Swamiji's request and live it fully and wholeheartedly. Then Swamiji asked for a kirtan. For two hours kirtan dedicated to Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda and to guru in general filled the air not only of the garden but the whole ashram, and I am sure the sound went beyond the boundary walls. The music connected everyone to the guru – a person, a quality, an idea, an inspiration. There was love and longing in every note and drum beat. I sang and clapped and saw that my friends did the same. We were happy and felt connected to each other, to Sri Swamiji and to Swamiji.

Thank you to all the gods, goddesses and angels, thank you to the sages, wise men and saints of all times, and thank you Swamiji for creating this opportunity to experience that beyond the many, the difference and diversity there is only the one teaching, message and path of love.



SATYAM TALES 40

