

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA

SATYAM TALES

Humans and Superhumans

The touch of grace



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India



Satyam Tales

Humans and Superhumans is the sixth 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.

Superheroes are facing a crisis in their personal and professional lives, which the administrators of the elite Academy for Super Heroes are unable to resolve despite their best intentions and efforts. That is when Satyananda Yoga comes into the lives of the superheroes as a whiff of fresh air, and takes them on an unforgettable journey of self-discovery, self-improvement and self-mastery.

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 become a superhero in your own right.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

BIHAR SCHOOL OF YOGA



1963–2013
GOLDEN JUBILEE

WORLD YOGA CONVENTION 2013

GANGA DARSHAN, MUNGER, BIHAR, INDIA

23rd–27th October 2013

Humans and Superhumans

	ACADEMY for SUPER HEROES (An educational institution established by the Society for Promoting Learning and Advancement of Super Heroes) <i>Founder: Dr Anna Bernstein</i>	Address: PO Box 45678, Ashville, Tenisy Web: www.ash-splash.net Email: info@ash-splash.net
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To

28th December, 2013

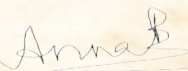
The Paramacharya
Bihar School of Yoga
Ganga Darshan, Fort, Munger

Dear Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati,

On behalf of the Academy for Super Heroes, I would like to convey our heartfelt thanks and gratitude for having consented to conduct a yoga training program for the members of this elite organization. The program was extremely successful and the participants unanimously requested for a follow-up program in the near future. We sincerely hope that our mutual association shall continue to grow in the coming months and years.

Enclosed herewith is an informal account of the highlights and experiences of the program by Dr Ben Tompkins, our training director. We hope that you will find his feedback useful. A detailed report on the program will follow shortly.

With warm regards,


Dr Anna Bernstein,
President, ASH

Encl: Impressions

IMPRESSIONS

My name is Dr Ben Tompkins and I am the director of training at the Academy for Super Heroes (ASH in brief). Before I recount some of my experiences in the recently concluded yoga program at ASH, let me give you a brief background about this institution.

Superheroes have become an integral and indispensable part of modern-day society. Their role in fighting crime and criminals of all sorts is laudable indeed. Yet in the last few decades, a disturbing trend became evident to those who had eyes to see and ears to hear. Superheroes were becoming less effective in preventing acts of crime and terrorism. A group of like-minded intellectuals banded together under the inspiring leadership of Dr Anna Bernstein, a world-renowned criminologist and forensic expert, to brainstorm on this alarming problem. The group realized that superheroes were increasingly facing similar problems



as the general public they were supposed to protect and be the role models for. They displayed dissipated minds, needless aggression, debilitating depression and sometimes even suicidal tendencies.

The group identified the underlying problem to be stagnation. The superheroes had stopped learning and developing. Anything that stagnates eventually rots; with this in mind, an umbrella body called SPLASH (Society for Promoting Learning and Advancement of Super

Heroes) was created to devise ways and means to break this logger jam. After hectic fund-raising and intense lobbying with governmental bodies, decks were finally created to establish ASH. Owing to security concerns I can't reveal the precise location of this Academy, but suffice it to say that it is set in one of the most beautiful places on earth, in a style that blends the best of ancient and modern. It is intended and designed to bring back zest, zeal and zing in the lives of our precious superheroes.

The Academy was started almost a decade ago, yet the expected results were not forthcoming. It was an uphill task to get the superheroes to come here in the first place for training courses. There was great reluctance to submit to such training. To many it seemed a tacit acknowledgement of weakness, which their super-bloated egos were unwilling to accept. Moreover, they were used to a life in the limelight with an abundance of accolades from an adoring public. Living in a communal setting with people who were as super as you, if not more, was a disturbing proposition. It took quite a bit of delicate diplomacy to entice the superheroic gentry to pay us a visit.

Despite all our efforts and the support and backing of several governments, law enforcement agencies and wealthy individuals, the Academy never really took off. Attendance in the training courses was never very encouraging. That is when we decided on hosting a biennial month-long conclave for the entire community of superheroes. We leveraged our government contacts who had some influence with the superheroes, and also arranged for a wide media coverage of the concluding days of the conclave. This stick-and-carrot policy worked in good measure and we were able to attract a sizable percentage of our intended participant base.

As the dates for Conclave 2013 drew nearer, I grew increasingly apprehensive. The overall conduct of the Conclave was my responsibility. It was clear that this was going to be a make-or-break year for the Academy. If nothing substantial was offered to the superheroes, they would lose

what little interest and incentive they had in coming here. Keeping this in view, I lined up an impressive array of self-help gurus, motivational speakers, martial arts trainers, crime experts and Zen teachers, not to mention a whole gamut of recreational and relaxation activities, all designed to give the superheroes the biggest bang for the buck.

A week into the Conclave and I knew none of this was working. Our astute president, Dr Bernstein, felt the same and she didn't pull her punches while conveying her sentiments. I was quite desperate now. I had to somehow salvage the situation one way or the other.

In times of trouble, some turn to God, and others to Google. I happen to belong to the latter category. I went to my desk and turned on my computer. As it booted up, I let out a deep sigh and buried my face in my hands. I desperately wanted to change the course of events unfolding at the Conclave, yet had no clue as to how. It was right then that I heard a pleasant chime. It was the standard

audio clip that my computer plays upon displaying the welcome screen, but at that moment it really sounded like a wake-up call. I peeked through my fingers. A sly, fiery fox was beckoning me. On a whim, I typed 'change the course of events' into the internet browser, and set the giant gears of cyberspace in motion.

A few moments later, I ogled at my googled results. One of them seemed to jump right off the page. It quoted someone named Swami Satyananda saying, "Yoga will emerge as a

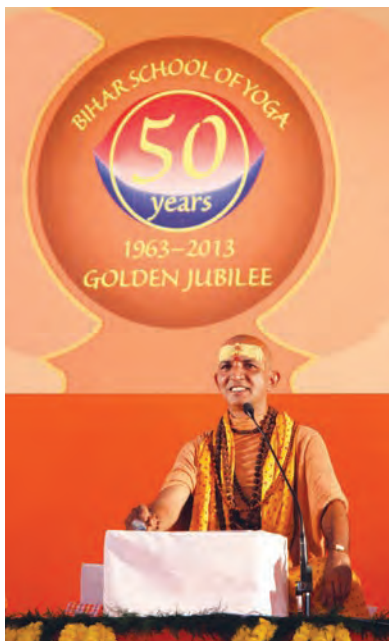


mighty world-culture. It will change the course of world events.” I don’t know why, but I clicked that link straightaway.

The next couple of hours turned out to be a revelation for me. I visited biharyoga.net, the website for the yoga movement started by Swami Satyananda. Although I had heard of yoga, I had been so put off by all the styles and schools which have mushroomed of late, that I never paid much attention. Rather I preferred aerobics, martial arts, Zen meditation and hypnotherapy over yoga. Little did I realize that yoga could offer all that and much more.

Following one link after another I realized I had stumbled upon something special. This yoga school was celebrating its golden jubilee with an international yoga convention and what’s more, the proceedings were being streamed live over the internet. I was hooked for the next few days. As I saw the proceedings of the convention and heard the speakers talk about the positive role yoga has played in helping children, adolescents, addicts, chronic patients, delinquents, executives, cops, war veterans, convicts: practically every section of society, I wondered if this was just the right thing for our superheroes, perhaps the only section still untouched by the comforting caresses of yoga.

The more I thought about this, the stronger my conviction grew, and when on the last day, the chief executive of the convention, Swami Niranjan, exhorted the delegates to hold sincerity, seriousness and commitment as their ideals in the practice and conduct



of yoga, I knew I had to give this a shot. After convincing our governing body, I wrote up an email explaining our situation and our plan for an introductory yoga program for our inmates. I was surprised when I couldn't find an email address to send it to. The institution didn't have an email address! The phone number listed on the website seemed perpetually engaged. It seemed the school wasn't interested in publicizing itself at all!

I pulled all the strings at my disposal and was finally rewarded with the assurance that the school had found merit in my proposal and an experienced sannyasin would soon be deputed to conduct a week-long yoga program at ASH. I was greatly elated by the news and promptly began making the necessary arrangements, which included extending the Conclave by a few weeks to accommodate the yoga program.

When a chartered jet touched down at the Academy's private airstrip one evening, I was there to receive our esteemed guest. To be honest, I was a little disappointed to see a diminutive, ochre-robed female monk disembark from the plane. I had expected someone more grand and flamboyant.

"Hari Om, I'm Swami Yogamala," she introduced herself cheerily. Later I was to learn that her name meant the 'garland of yoga'. It couldn't have been more apt. She declined my offer of resting the next day to recover from jetlag with a terse remark, "I'd like to start doing what I've been sent to do as soon as possible."

Over dinner I gave her the same rundown as I've given at the beginning of this report. Finally I ended by saying, "The situation here has really hit rock bottom. Especially after what happened yesterday, we are at our wit's end."

"Why, what happened yesterday?"

"We had organized a friendly competition amongst our superheroes. It turned out to be anything but friendly."

"I don't think I understand, Dr Tompkins. How could you have a competition amongst superheroes? They have such different skills and abilities after all. In any case, a

competition is the last thing one would think of in a setting where the goal is to promote cooperation and camaraderie.”

“Well, we do try to make the competition fair, by using a handicap system, somewhat like golf. A ‘stronger’ superhero has to try all the more harder to win. In hindsight, it wasn’t such a good idea as you pointed out. The competition was organized in a knockout format and as the rounds progressed, the tournament became dirtier. The participants began flouting agreed-upon rules of engagement and started hitting below the belt, so to speak.”

“The tournament reached its nadir during the finals. It was a showdown between Superman and Batman, with each one’s sidekicks wildly rooting for their favourite. As per the rules of engagement between an alien and a human, Superman was expected to refrain from using some of his special abilities like flying, laser vision and the like. Of course, as the contest progressed, the rules were thrown to the winds and it became a free for all. So much so that even the match referee wasn’t spared by Superman. The tournament judges, fearing for their own safety, hurriedly brought the match to a close, declared Superman the Conclave Champion, and quickly went about defusing the rising tension.”





“We sent Catwoman to calm down Batman, but he was simmering with discontent. He got himself a gate-pass (which should not have been issued in the first place), went to a pub in the neighbouring town, got himself well and truly drunk and in a state of fatuous inebriation, began painting highly improper graffiti all over town.”

“What kind of graffiti?”

“Well some of it was understandable, considering his state of mind, but the one saying, ‘Superman is Clark Kent’ was inexcusable. That is one cardinal rule we are not supposed to break. We never ever reveal the secret identities of our fellow superheroes. Luckily our staff found out and cleaned up the graffiti before



any damage could be done, but in a sense the damage had already been done.”

“The inmates are now divided into different camps, who don’t see eye to eye with each other. Sometimes I wonder, what is all this animosity and ill-will for? Just for bragging rights as the Conclave Champion! These superheroes may be great in strength, speed, agility and IQ, but they draw a blank in the EQ department. I often privately refer to them as superzeroes. I think the most well-behaved of the superhumans are not humans, but turtles . . .”

“Are you referring to the Teenage Mutant Ninja turtles?” Swami Yogamala asked.

I nodded. Her knowledge of superheroes was impressive.

“What about the ladies? Surely they’d have a better sense of values than the testosterone driven supermales. In our ashram, women outnumber men two to one, and things run all the more smoothly.”

“I wish this were the case here as well,” I said wistfully, “The few superladies we have, more often than not end up flirting with the superheroes and it’s a full time job for us to keep them apart.”

“Hmmm I see. Anyway the Satyananda Yoga system has proved itself time and again in diverse groups and conditions. I don’t see any



reason why it shouldn't work for superheroes. So we start tomorrow at 5 am. That's fine I hope."

"Er . . . ahem . . . the superheroes usually sleep in and don't get up until . . ."

"Too bad for them. They won't be able to do that for the next seven days. Oh and please ask everyone to bring their yoga mats to class. See you then at quarter to five tomorrow, Dr Tompkins. Have a good night."

Let me say it took a lot of creative cajoling to get the superheroes to come on time for their first Satyananda Yoga class the next morning.

The class started promptly at 5 am. I introduced the swami to the superheroes and then sat down in a corner, keenly observing the participants. Swami Yogamala was saying, ". . . into a comfortable posture and gently closing your eyes become aware of the whole body . . ." As I scanned the assorted faces in the hall, the response didn't look very encouraging. Most of them seemed to be giggling, snickering or looking just plain bored with the proceedings. Some like Superman were doing the exact opposite of what they were



being told to do. As the class progressed and Swami Yogamala introduced simple asanas like pawanmuktasana and stressed the importance of awareness to a totally dissipated group of yoga practitioners, I could see my worst fears coming true. The superheroes just did not want to learn anything new or improve themselves. They were a lost cause.

Swami Yogamala didn't seem so pessimistic though. As I related my concerns over breakfast, she told

me to relax and not to worry too much. She even outlined a recipe for me to deal with needless anxiety. It was something she called abdominal breathing, taking long, deep breaths through the stomach. As the day progressed, I was impressed all the more by her composure and presence of mind, even in the face of derisive comments and sometimes downright rude behaviour. I was particularly impressed by her prompt and disarming answers to all the



questions put to her. When Wonderwoman asked her if there were any superheroes in the country she came from, just as they had Superman, Batman, Spiderman, He-man and the like here, she promptly replied, “Of course we do. His name is Hanu-man and he is more than all these men put together.”

As we sat down for dinner on the second day, I remarked morosely, “I think it was a waste of time and effort to get you all the way here.”

“I don’t think so. It’s only our second day, remember,” she said with a smile, trying to cheer me up. Then after a long pause she added in a philosophical vein, “In any case, we sannyasins do our work as duty, as an offering to our guru, and don’t let success or failure disturb the equanimity of our mind. This is what karma yoga is about, after all. Don’t your superheroes practise karma yoga as well?”

“Karma yoga?” I’d never heard that phrase before, “Could you describe this concept?”

After she had explained to me the theory and practice of this art, she strongly suggested that the superheroes should



also practise this form of yoga. The more the better. “Swami Satyananda believed that the first step in unlocking one’s creative potential was to keep the mind ever busy. This is why in our ashram, the sannyasins and inmates are busy in karma yoga from morning till night, whereas here I see the superheroes enjoying too much leisure. An idle mind would be the devil’s workshop, would it not?”

“I agree, but if I were to ask these guys to mop floors, clean toilets or chop vegetables, they would leave this place double quick,” I replied defensively.

“You think so because you’ve never tried it,” she retorted spiritedly, “Anyway, it’s up to you. As for me, I’m still hopeful. Even though they may be impolite and asking irrelevant questions, at least they are still engaged. That is what matters.”

It was true that they were getting more cheeky and impolite. I was impressed that she could see the positive side of it all and maintain a positive, cheerful attitude. Just in the last class, she had been giving a brief history of Satyananda Yoga and talking about Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda, the three masters of the

tradition, when Superman asked her rather brazenly, “Well if Swami Satyananda was so great, what were the special things he could do? Could he lift up cars and trucks like me?”

The same question must have been on the minds of many others, for Spiderman piped up immediately in a boasting tone, “Could he spin webs and fight at the same time like I do so well?”



“Could he stealthily glide like a bat in the sky like me?” Batman added.

“Did he have psychic powers like me?” This was from Rogue, one of the mutant X-men.

“Was he skilled in one-on-one combat like me?” asked Wolverine, another one of the mutant X-men, proudly extending and retracting his shiny, metallic claws.

I thought the swami handled the situation quite well. She laughed aloud and remarked, “Well well, this certainly seems to be the most popular question ever put to Swami Satyananda. First it was an Australian TV reporter, then an elephant (see Diggaja, the first Satyam Tale) and now all you superheroes. The short, straight answer is: No. The only special thing about me, he would say, is the ability to stand on my own two feet.”





For once even the loudmouth superheroes were at a loss for words.

“For Swami Satyananda, it was much more important to be truly human than superhuman. The day he left home and hearth to embark on his spiritual quest, he wrote a letter to a close friend and signed off with these words, ‘Dear friend, this is my last letter to you. The next letter will only come when I’ve become a true human being.’ Soon he found his master, Swami Sivananda, a giant amongst men, whose towering personality overshadowed all the tall Himalayan peaks around.”

A hushed silence had descended upon the hall.

“And do you know what Swami Sivananda used to say? ‘A real hero is not one who stands against bullets or risks his life in hazardous attempts or fights battles, dives into oceans and climbs high cliffs, but he who subdues his senses and overcomes his mind, he who recognizes the supreme unity of life and casts aside dualities and desires. To achieve this is the duty of man: this is the immortal message of the sages.’ I hope you superheroes are listening and giving these

priceless words the attention they deserve.” Swami Yogamala was expounding on a subject which was clearly very close to her heart.

“That may all be very well,” drawled Batman, “But where does yoga, and where does a monk like you come into the picture?”

“Swami Sivananda could foresee the problems that men, and supermen, would face in the future and he gave his disciple, Swami Satyananda, the mandate to spread the science of yoga, a most effective and practical tool to deal with these problems. Swami Satyananda accepted the mandate and spread the message of yoga far and wide. ‘Yoga is one of the holiest mantras of humanity and it is going to be the foundation of future world communities. It is a culture for humanity,’ this is how he would describe his vision of yoga. For him yoga was a system that benefitted body, mind and spirit – the whole being of the practitioner, and his clarion call to all his disciples and students was:

‘Impart knowledge of yoga. This is the best form of charity, because it removes ignorance and all kinds of suffering.’ It is in pursuance of this directive that I am here amongst you today . . .” She had ended the class on that note, and for the first time I saw the superheroes troop out of the hall in a silent, orderly manner.

“Paucity of awareness is the fundamental problem,” Swami Yogamala brought me out of my reverie with her clinical analysis of the whole situation, “This is what we try to address in



Satyananda Yoga through the simple yet effective practices of asana, pranayama, relaxation and meditation. These practices influence many deeper layers of personality which are inaccessible otherwise. Mantras are a very good tool as well. Do you think I could get them to chant the Gayatri and Mahamrityunjaya mantras in the morning class tomorrow?"

"Mantras!" I sputtered over my coffee, "Surely you realize that this Academy is a secular institution, and we can't have any overtly religious practices here."

"You are mistaken, my dear Ben. Mantras have nothing to do with religion. They are pure sound vibrations that directly affect the deeper layers of the human psyche. Nothing could be more scientific than this."

"I see your point, but I can't make any assurances. I will refer the matter to our governing body, but by the time they come to a decision, the course might have ended."

She shrugged her shoulders, "No harm in trying."

I looked around the vast cafeteria and saw all the superheroes supping at the dining tables. The swami was trying her level best to help these people overcome their limits and achieve greater heights. I resolved to help her in helping them, and for the first time in many years, invoked God instead of Google for success in my resolve.

"Amen!" I mumbled at the end of my short, silent prayer, and slowly opened my eyes, only to see a small, hooded figure dart in through a side-entrance. He climbed on top of one of the dinner tables, much to the angst and amazement of its occupants, and shouted in a loud voice, "All ye self-styled superheroes! I dare any of thee to come up and fight me. I'll show thou to be the hopeless, spineless creature that thou really art."

A collective roar of indignation erupted from all the tables. Plates and glasses were shoved aside, chairs pushed back and all superheroes rose to their feet in unison. Superman, as the Conclave Champion, was the first to speak up, "How dare you disturb us at dinner-time, you hooded hoodlum!" Then looking at the others and

inflating his chest in a show of bravado, he said , “Ladies and gentlemen, please get on with your dinner and leave this puny upstart to me. I’ll make sure you get some good entertainment tonight at his expense.”

Prophetic words indeed, except the entertainment turned out to be at Superman’s own expense. As he charged towards the stranger, lo and behold! he began to increase in size and strength. He quickly ducked to avoid Superman’s first blow and his return punch landed straight on Superman’s chest, sending him crashing through the tables!

For Superman to be at the receiving end of a thrashing was something totally new. The stranger seemed to grow



stronger every second and matched Superman punch for punch. He even outmanoeuvred Superman at each superpower that he put to use.

In the meantime, I was busy trying to figure out the stranger's identity. I took his picture on my smartphone and uploaded it to our SCUD (Super Criminal Universal Database) server. The SCUD search returned a blank. We were dealing with a new villain here. I uploaded all his specs to the SCUD server hoping to find some chink in his armour and the right superhero to tackle him.

As I looked up from my phone, I saw the stranger deliver one flooring blow to Superman that knocked him cold. There was total pandemonium in the hall, until Batman stood up to challenge the visitor.

What followed for the next hour or so were replays of the duel with Superman. The fellow seemed to change size and shape at will, adapting himself to his adversaries and feeding off their strength and vigour. Batman caught the hoodlum by his shirt collar but he just sneered, as if daring Batman to hit him. This only infuriated Batman but before he could land a punch on his sneering face, the stranger had freed himself



and landed a bone-cracking punch on Batman instead.

One by one the stranger was knocking each of the superheroes who came to fight him senseless. The ones still standing had shivers running up their spines. Suddenly a loud hurrah emanated from their direction. I looked up and saw Spiderman swing down from the ceiling. Obviously he was trying to use brain



instead of brawn. He sneaked up onto a tall lamp right behind the stranger, who had by now grown to monstrous proportions, and heckled him. As soon as he turned around, Spiderman zapped his famous web at his face, hoping to entangle and disorient him.

Alas, Spiderman's strategy didn't work. The stranger tore off the web in an instant and let the full force of his wrath loose upon Spiderman. By the time he was finished, poor Spidey could hardly stand on his feet.

My attention had been so riveted on the bizarre drama unfolding before my eyes that I had totally forgotten about my dinner companion. I looked in her direction, half-expecting to find an empty chair. Who wouldn't want to run for safety in the face of such a bone-crushing monster? I was surprised to find her sitting calmly, watching the whole episode with a



bemused expression on her face. The swami was certainly walking her talk.

By now all the remaining superheroes were cowering behind whatever cover they could find amongst the mass of broken tables, chairs and china. The stranger was walking up and down, roaring and bellowing, daring anyone to face him. And then the strangest thing happened. Swami Yogamala suddenly stood up and walked straight towards him. Panic seized me and I called out, “Stop!” But she kept on walking.

She stood in front of the stranger and looked him straight in the eye. Then she sat down in one of the meditative postures she had been teaching in her classes. I was in the middle of a panic attack by now. If anything untoward were to happen to her, which seemed a certainty now, what would I say to her guru and to Bihar School of Yoga? All of a sudden, her advice on abdominal breathing flashed through my brain. I tried it then and there, and sure enough, felt much better. This was a godsend for I could observe each and every detail of the amazing thing that transpired next.

The moment Swami Yogamala sat down calmly, the stranger seemed to diminish perceptibly in size and stature. He bent over and sneered at her, “Won’t you hit me?”

“I don’t think so. But you may hit me if you wish. I promise I won’t retaliate.”

Whoosh! The stranger shrunk even further. No matter what challenge, taunt or insult he threw at her, she remained calm and composed, and he kept on getting smaller and weaker, until he was so small that she picked him up and put him in the shoe-bag she always carried with her (for some strange reason, she always insisted on taking off her footwear before entering the eating area).

For a second, everyone’s jaw dropped in amazement. Then, as if on cue, they broke out in a thunderous applause. The swami had achieved what none of the superheroes could. She finally raised her hand and they all came over to sit down in a circle around her. When the clapping and

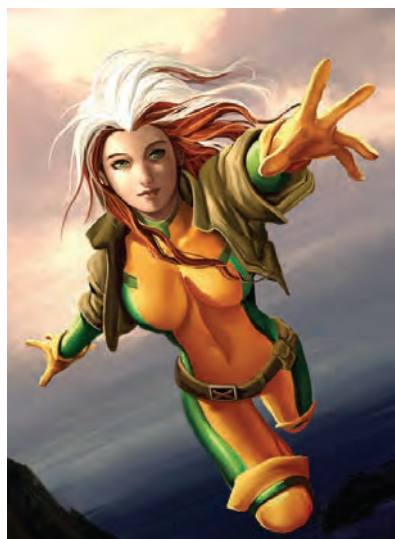
cheering had died down, she said, “I don’t think I deserve all this adulation. I just put into practice some small precepts that my guru, Swami Niranjan keeps hammering into us.”

The superheroes were dying to know the secret of her success and were hanging on to every word she spoke. “The first and foremost thing, which you all should have guessed by now, is awareness. Swami Niranjan keeps reminding us swamis to perform a RigMARole, the role of Rigorous Mental Awareness, for it is only through keen awareness that the mind is able to perceive the underlying reality of things, a reality which is otherwise clouded by countless complexes and conditionings. It was only through keen awareness that the reality of the stranger became apparent to me. He was none other than the personification of our own anger . . .” and then turning towards me, added, “No wonder your SCUD search turned up a blank, Ben. Make sure that you add him as enemy number one in your database.”

“All of you tried to face the anger head-on and subdue it. A negative trait can never be eradicated in that manner. The more you fight it, the stronger it becomes until it totally overpowers you. This is where Swami Niranjan’s instruction of *pratipaksha bhavana*, conquering a vice with its opposite virtue, comes in handy. Anger can be conquered by peaceful humility, hatred by compassion, jealousy by magnanimity and greed by dispassion. If you can put these simple principles into practice, rest assured you will be transformed into genuine superhumans . . .”

The transformation that this incident brought about in the superheroes had to





be seen to be believed. All of them showed up for the morning class the next day and that too, fifteen minutes before the scheduled start. All of them were vying for places close to the stage and were eager to help out in any way they could. We had to finally draw lots and set up a daily roster of duties. Rogue (the most eager of them all) and Wolverine were chosen as the female and male demonstrators and Superman became the

class assistant that day. As I walked through the hall, I could hear Swami Yogamala's words in my ears. "... awareness means living in the moment, being fully aware of the present, and that is the real yoga. In order to cultivate this quality we must begin with the basics. Please focus your complete attention on your toes. We will begin with the practice of *padanguli naman*, toe-bending . . ."



As I observed the participants inside and outside the classroom, I could appreciate the sea-change in their behaviour. Gone was the bluff and bluster, the desperation and the depression. It was replaced by an attitude of helpfulness, humility and humour. So much so that when the swami was conducting a *trataka*, i.e. candle-gazing session,

and realized that she had forgotten to bring matches, her able assistant, who happened to be Superman that day, quietly lit a candle in a corner with his laser eyesight and unobtrusively passed it on to her! In their spare time, the superheroes would keep asking us for karma yoga. Even our president was taken aback when on an afternoon stroll through the campus she saw Spiderman wiping windows and Superman cleaning toilets! And when on the last day of the course, which happened to be a full-moon day, the participants insisted on having a chanting of the Sundarkand in honour of the Indian superhero, Hanu-man, I knew that Satyananda Yoga had touched the deepest core of their being and won their hearts totally and irrevocably. What could be a more fitting tribute to the biggest superhuman of us all, Swami Satyananda, whose birthday also happened to fall on that very day!

The next morning we all bid an emotional farewell to Swami Yogamala at the airstrip. As she entered the jet and the door closed behind her, memories of the last few days, and plans for the future flooded my brain. I stood in a limbo for a few moments, trying to deal with this onrush of mental chatter. As the jet thundered





down the runway, the chatter only seemed to increase in intensity, but as soon as the jet lifted gracefully into the sky, it felt as if a veil had been lifted off my mind as well. Suddenly the mental chatter was replaced by one clear thought, a statement of Swami Niranjana's that Swami Yogamala had quoted as the course drew to a close: "Life is not in the past or in the future, it is eternally in the present. Such life can be found through yoga because yoga awakens the eternal present. Let the known go so that the unknown can manifest. Let the dead go so that the living can live. This is the theme of yoga."





SATYAM TALES

