

SATYAM TALES

Grandpa's Memories

About the man who never slept



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India



Sri Swamiji with some sannyasin disciples, including Rishi Nityabodhananda

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Grandpa's Memories

About the man who never slept

*Inspired by the life and teachings of Sri Swami Satyananda
Saraswati and a talk given by Rishi Nityabodhananda at Ganga
Darshan on 13th and 14th October 2013.*

"Grandpa is sleeping again," said little Flo.

"He is certainly snoring loudly," her mother answered, "but how can you be sure that he isn't awake?"

"What do you mean, Mummy?" asked Flo.

"Well, you know that Grandpa has practised a lot of yoga in his life and he says that it is possible for the mind to be awake while the body is sleeping. The yogis call this *yoga nidra* or yogic sleep."

Flo shook her little head so that her feelers swung from side to side and asked, "Do you mean that he can see me doing this?" She lifted her left leg up into the air while balancing on the right and reaching up with her arms as high as she could.

Now Grandpa spoke, "How could I see you, when my eyes are closed, silly, but I can certainly hear you!"

He smiled in remembrance and continued, "Let me tell you a story about a man who never slept and knew everything that was going on around him. His name was Swami Satyananda Saraswati or Paramahamsaji as we called him fondly.



“He lived in a yoga ashram in a faraway town called Munger in the beautiful country of India. I went there a long time ago to be part of a three-year training to learn how to live a good and meaningful life. It was called the sannyasa course.

“That year there were 108 of us starting the course. We were really looking forward to living with Paramahamsaji because we had heard that he was a very special person and a great yogi. He had once said, ‘Yoga is about standing on your own two feet, not on your head.’ Nevertheless, we had high expectations of learning the ancient philosophies, the yoga practices and most important of all, how to manage the mind.

At this stage Flo asked, “What’s a mind?”

Grandpa explained, “It’s that part of you which thinks, remembers, decides and tells you who you are. And more often than not, it gives you a lot of trouble. Therefore we wanted to learn how to keep it quiet and calm, so that we could feel peaceful and happy.

“Anyway, we were a colourful bunch, some of us brown and black, others red and almost yellow. Ants come in many shades and colours, as you know. And we all realized that we would have to work hard, yet the joy and anticipation we felt was overwhelming.

“Paramahamsaji said life should be simple and so would be our training. First, we learned karma yoga, which meant that we had to work almost the whole day! And we had thought we would sit for hours in meditation to attempt to meet the Super-Ant! Or maybe do a lot of fancy six-legged-postures.





“There are many jobs that need doing in an ashram. An ashram is a very clean place, you know, Flo. The yogis say that our room, our home is a reflection of our mind. If the house is clean and tidy, so is the mind. Consequently, every morning all of us had to clean the whole ashram, tidy up every single room, sweep the yard, wash the windows, walls and floors, dust all the surfaces, and so on.

“Some time later, Paramahamsaji taught us the yogic sleep, yoga nidra, which was his favourite and soon ours, too. How we loved having a snooze after lunch! So, Paramahamsaji changed the time of the practice to mid-morning, explaining that yoga nidra as a spiritual practice is to be done with the mind awake and alert and only the body sleeping in deep relaxation.

“It must have been a sight for the gods, all 108 of us stretched out on the floor, 648 legs flopping out sideways, antennae twitching in dreams and most of us snoring loudly even before lunch.

“Paramahamsaji tried everything to keep us awake, sometimes we had to run around the courtyard before yoga nidra, at other times he would tell us very, very loudly to stay awake, or he would suddenly chant *Om* or even have us visualize weird stuff, like elephants in bathtubs, crocodiles sitting at a breakfast table, Santa riding a unicorn and so on.

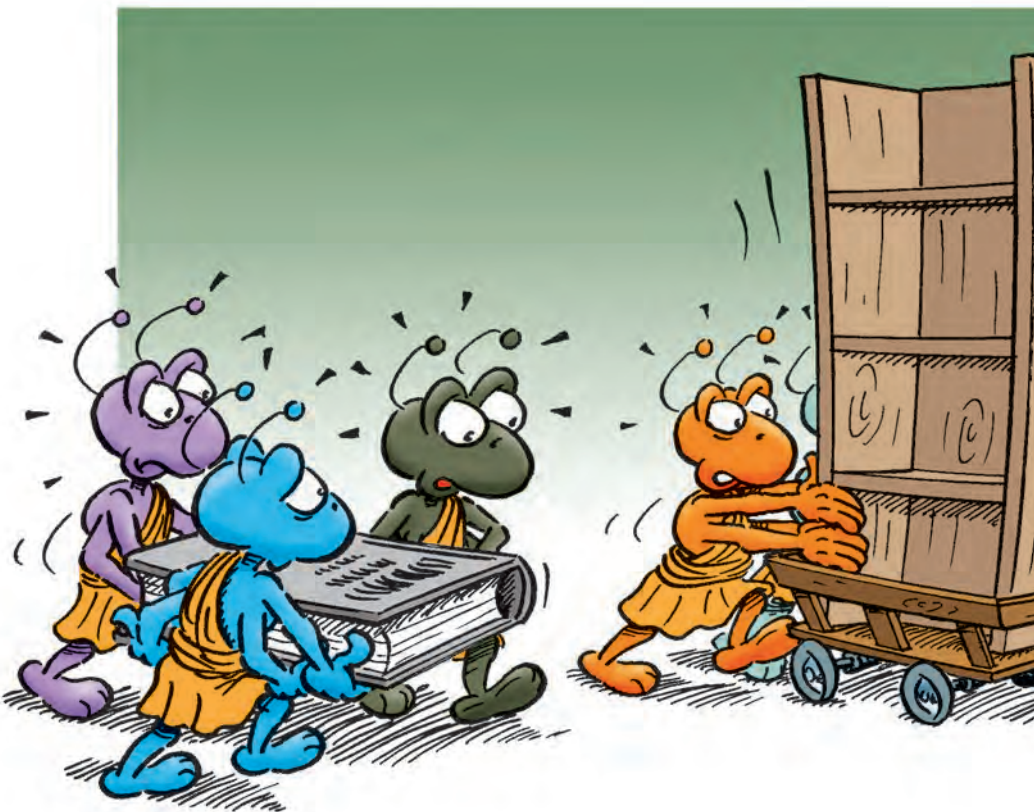
“But all to no avail, we just couldn’t stay awake. No wonder really, by then we were already doing ten hours of karma yoga every day, even Sundays! He would say that we should practise to be more like him, he never slept! But we couldn’t do that, not then and some of us never.”

The day the akhanda-jyoti went out

“There is a place in the ashram called Jyoti Mandir. *Jyoti* means light or flame. Inside this hut is a light that never goes out, it always burns. It is called the *akhanda jyoti* and every night someone needs to refill the oil. At one stage, maybe it was the fourth month, it was my friend’s turn. He was then called Tut, but now you know him as Uncle Gyan.

“So he had to refill the oil daily before going to bed. This meant going down to the kitchen to get the oil, going to the office to get the key, unlocking Jyoti Mandir, refilling the oil, locking the mandir and finally returning the oil and key.

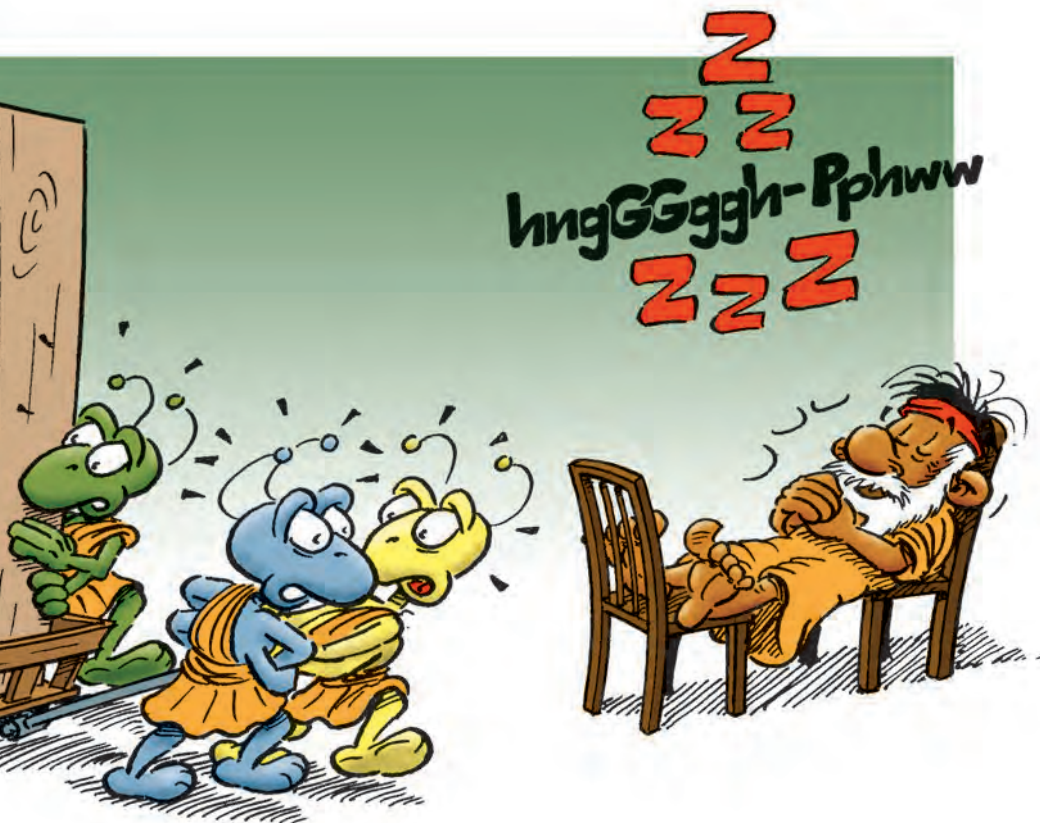




“One night we had a celebration. They gave us coffee for dinner, we chanted, drummed and had fun for most of the night. I forget what the occasion was, but I do remember the coffee. I think we even had a piece of chocolate cake that night. Anyway, I was one of the first people up the next day and as I went to sweep inside Jyoti Mandir, I noticed that the non-stop flame had stopped. Oh dread, what a catastrophe!

“I swiftly ran to get Gyan up and see what we could do. Maybe we could quickly add oil, put a lighter to the lamp, and none would be the wiser, or so we hoped.

“Fortunately, the room was already open and I knew the little ant in the kitchen quite well, no problem there. So we did just that.



“That very night during satsang, when Paramahamsaji talked to us, as he often did in the evenings, he suddenly said, ‘Dark nights don’t only happen when there is no moon.’ And he looked straight at Gyan. To this day I can’t imagine how he found out.”

Moving the library

“One day,” said Grandpa, “we were moving the library. Again. We did this at least once a week, another favourite way of Paramahamsaji to keep us busy. You know, Flo, keeping busy is good, when it is done with awareness; it helps to focus the mind and keep it from giving us trouble.

“First, we had to take all the books out of the cupboards and carry these to the other side of the ashram. With each

trip we had to walk right past Paramahamsaji who was sitting outside his office on a plastic chair with his feet resting on another one. He was snoring loudly the whole time. Once we had emptied all the cupboards, we had to move them to the other side as well past Paramahamsaji snoring. Then we put them into the new library, replaced all the books carefully and locked them. Exactly at this moment one of the older, brown-ant-sannyasins would appear and say, “Paramahamsaji wants the keys now.”

“But how did he know that you were finished, Grandpa?” asked Flo.

“Paramahamsaji knew everything, Flo, he just knew. He was so aware even when his body was asleep; he always knew what was going on. Even when someone got up at night to go to the toilet and forgot to turn the light off again, Paramahamsaji would remind him the next morning, so that he wouldn’t forget another time.”

Is there enough for me?

“In the ashram we had to take turns serving the food. Sometimes it was my friends’ and my turn to serve dinner. At the end of an already long day, we had to sit behind these big pots and give food to everyone coming in. Three of us served for half an hour and the other three during the second half.

“Those cooks really couldn’t count, you know. I don’t remember now, who was in charge of the kitchen in those days, but every night they would say something like, ‘You can give five buns the first time and as many as people want the second time.’ Same for the soup, and the dessert or whatever other thing there might have been.

“Of course, all the ants were really hungry after the long hours of karma yoga and would take and eat as much as they could, so when the cooks came to check on the food ten minutes later, they saw that it was nearly gone and many more hungry ants were standing impatiently in line. Hurriedly they changed the instructions, ‘Give three

buns the first time, same for the soup and no seconds on the sweets.'

"Every night on serving duty, I would worry about how much food we would be allowed when it was finally my turn to eat or if it would already have run out. By the time our thirty minutes of serving was up, often all the bread was gone, each ant only got one sweet thing – and you know how we ants like sweets – in any case, never mind about the soup, it was horrible anyway. Sometimes more bread was expected, but wasn't quite ready yet, but this meant waiting some more and then we only got two pieces or so. It would make me feel so hungry to think I was only getting half as much as the other ants that didn't have to serve! This happened most nights. 'Why didn't they learn to count or cook enough in that kitchen,' I would complain angrily to my friends."

Flo said, "But it really isn't fair if you get less than the others!"

Grandpa responded, "That's true, Flo, but then one night during satsang Paramahamsaji said, 'Fair and unfair are relative.' And I suddenly understood how lucky I was to have warm, cooked meals three times a day, even if I would have liked a little more sometimes, but many other animals don't even have one good square meal a day. Now that truly isn't fair, is it?"

Flo shook her little head so that her feelers swung from one side to the other. "But how did Swami Satyananda know what you had been thinking?"

"Yes, he always seemed to know exactly what we were thinking about. He really was an extraordinary being. There was another time when we had lots of sweets. A rich elephant devotee had given us many cartons full of delicious sweets. Mmmm, did they taste good, I remember it to this day! And they looked good too, pink cookies, blue sugar balls, pink and brown delights, how happy we were! This went on for almost a week, it must have been Easter or Christmas. Anyway, on the last day all leftover sweets were put out and we could take as many as we wanted. Oh, we ate and ate.



Nobody ate any potatoes that night, nor rice. We only stuffed ourselves with chocolate and biscuits and the other treats. I do admit I felt quite sick afterwards. You know what I mean, don't you, Flo?"

"Yes, like that time when I ate too much ice cream on my birthday," laughed Flo.

"Exactly. And I don't know how Paramahamsaji did it, I don't know how it is possible at all, but I swear when I went



past the big Ganesha statue, it burped and as I came around the corner and walked underneath Swami Satyananda's picture, it winked at me!"

"A picture can't wink, Grandpa!" interjected Flo.

"But it did, I am sure of it. And not only that, in that moment I realized that Paramahamsaji knew all about how much we had eaten."



Sleeping teachers

“At one stage Paramahamsaji asked me to teach the yoga nidra class. He said it was time to move to the next stage. I had wanted to learn a special meditation technique during that time and was getting up pretty early to practise and wasn’t pleased at all with the new task. Now I was going to miss out on my lunchtime sleep! How was I going to get in two to three hours of meditation practice if I couldn’t rest during the day? Of course, I didn’t say anything and at the appointed time I sat on Paramahamsaji’s seat in the sadhana hall and taught yoga nidra. You have to speak quite slowly and deliberately, not too loud and not too quiet, just right, so that the other ants can really relax or, as truth will have it, fall asleep. I felt pleased with myself, thinking I am a wonderful yoga teacher already and

believing myself to be doing a really good job . . . when I suddenly woke up! I had fallen asleep too!”

“But how can you teach a class if you are sleeping?” doubted Flo.

“I know, I know, right you are, little one. You cannot. I must have been dreaming that I was teaching. Anyway, there was still so much snoring going on, that I don’t think any ant had noticed that I had stopped speaking. But that night . . .”

“What did Sri Swamiji say? How did he know?” Flo interrupted excitedly.

“Well, I really don’t know how he knew, but that night he came right up to me and asked, ‘Do you think you will manage to stay awake tomorrow? Maybe you better get some sleep instead of doing fancy meditation practices,’ and walked away. Of course, I did as he had suggested, got more sleep and from then on stayed awake whenever I was teaching classes.”

Falling asleep again

“Oh, that reminds me of another little story about falling asleep. One night we were chanting the sacred mantra *Om*.”

“What does that mean, Grandpa?” asked Flo, fascinated.

“It means we sit with our legs crossed, our hands resting on the knees or in the lap, our eyes are closed and we keep singing A-U-M . . . It’s a concentration practice to focus the mind on this sacred sound and the idea is that when the mind is concentrated on one thing, it can’t worry or be angry.”

“And it can’t give you any trouble, right Grandpa?” cut in Flo wittily.

“Exactly,” responded Grandpa in good humour. “Anyway, I must have fallen asleep, because when I woke up, the lights were out, I was alone in the meditation hall and the hall was locked. I had to climb out of a window, and of course leave it open, to go to bed.

“That night, I had slept really well and forgotten all about it the next day. As I was sweeping outside during



morning cleaning, I noticed a flash of light, like some twinkle reflected off a shiny object and when I looked up, I saw Sri Swamiji grinning in his sleep. I went around the corner to continue my work, and there was another flash, and I thought I saw Sri Swamiji disappear around a corner. When the third flash came, I understood immediately that Sri Swamiji knew that it had been me asleep in the hall last night and leaving the window open.”

Making friends

“You wouldn’t think so now, but I used to be quite arrogant and I had a problem with stupid ants. As you know, I went to university and have several degrees, and it used to really get to me when I thought that other ants behaved illogically or seemed stupid or couldn’t count or read. Of course, Paramahamsaji knew all this and he put me in the kitchen for morning cleaning. The cleaning in-charge there was one of these really silly yellow ants, only interested in painting

her antennae and generally looking sleek and glossy. I know for sure that she never went to school and couldn't read. And she was put in charge of me! She was going to tell me what to do and how to do it!

"Every morning for many months I had to clean this one door, and she would insist that I move the cleaning cloth this way and not that way. I never could understand the difference, but eventually I learned to manage my anger and just cleaned that door as best as I could. Of course, as soon as I had learned to do that, I was given a new morning cleaning job and a new challenge.



“Within the situation, it certainly wasn’t any fun, but the wonderful result is that these days I can accept every type of ant as another ant, literate or not. In this way Paramahamsaji would slowly teach us to be more tolerant and understanding.”

The outing

“Another time towards the end of the second year, some friends and I had been given permission to go into town to buy some warm clothes, which we really needed for the coming winter. Our main motivation, of course was to eat and buy a lot of sweets and biscuits, especially chocolate, because our ashram food was very simple, as was everything else. We had been given our gate passes . . .”

Flo looked blankly at Grandpa, who explained speedily, “A gate pass is a little piece of paper that allows you to leave the ashram. It needs to be handed to the gatekeeper otherwise he will not open the gate and you can’t go out. The ashram uses this procedure to know who is safely inside and who is still expected to come.

“As I was saying, we were walking through the big gate to leave the ashram and just outside we saw Bindu and his group sweeping the entrance road. When I saw the red dust floating everywhere, I understood that Bindu’s beautiful tan, which I had admired for some time, didn’t come from the sunlight at all but from the dust and dirt on the roads. Anyway, we had walked maybe ten metres down the road, when we were called back inside the ashram. Our trip into town had been cancelled. We were told to go and see Paramahamsaji straight away in the dining room. We were pretty angry and at the same time a little scared, why did he want to see us? How had he known? As we entered the dining room we saw two big mats spread out on the floor. Cups of hot chocolate were arranged on them and in the middle stood a huge plate full of cake, biscuits and chocolate. ‘Come, eat and enjoy,’ said Sri Swamiji, ‘This is what you really wanted to go into town for, isn’t it?’”

Silence is in the mind

“Sometime into the sixth month, Akhandamurti and I had been working together for several weeks in the publication department of our ashram. We were checking the print on every single page of hundreds of boxes of *Kundalini Tantra*, one of Paramahamsaji’s early books. This work requires some concentration because anything could be wrong in those books – page numbers could be out of order or missing, pages could be upside down, the print might be smudged or simply not be there, and so on. So, we were supposed to view each page attentively and bookmark those with mistakes.

“I could not believe it, but Akhandamurti talked non-stop. *Akhanda* actually means non-stop, quite funny really. I don’t know which side of the big anthill he was from, but he talked all day long, without a break, about nothing really, and the worst was his accent and strange singsong melody. It was all definitely most annoying. Soon I wished that I could use my antennae to close my ears, so I wouldn’t have to listen to him any longer. I got so annoyed that even when I just heard his voice at lunchtime, I would go and sit somewhere far away.



“Eventually, I didn’t even want to go to karma yoga any more, dreading his presence and voice. We used to call this a ‘head-trip’, when some negative thought got stuck in your head and you kept thinking and worrying about it. And I certainly had one of those head-trips about Akhandamurti. I don’t know how Paramahamsaji knew, but . . .”

Excitedly Flo interrupted, “But you know that he knew everything!”

“Yes, true. So, one day soon after this had started, he got me to move my mattress into Akhandmurti’s room. Now I had to sleep there and be with the talking ant day and night. I couldn’t believe my bad luck. Three nights after moving into his room, when he started to talk in his sleep, I almost strangled him. But then I remembered that Paramahamsaji always knew about everything and so I didn’t strangle him.”

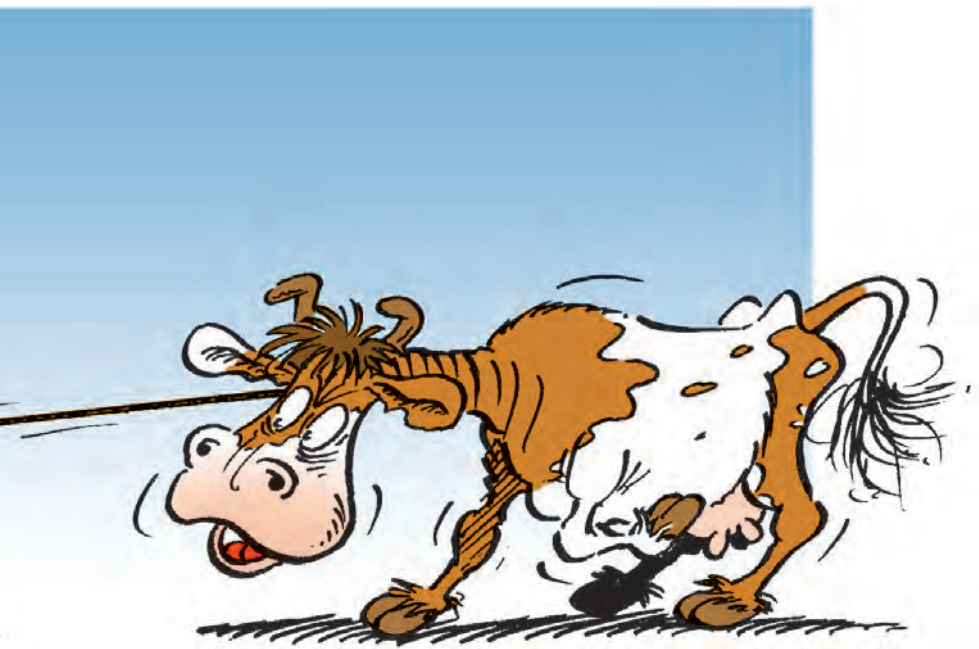


“But why did you have to sleep next to that talking ant?” asked Flo, perplexed.

“Because Paramahamsaji was teaching us not to be disturbed by anything. He often said things like, ‘There is no noise in the world, there is no silence in the Himalayas’ to make us understand that these attitudes are in our minds, and not to blame the other ant.”

“Did you make peace with this Akhandant, Grandpa?” Flo enquired.

“Yes, eventually. It took me a long time though. After many months I managed to block out the noise of his voice and not to react to it any more. And strangely enough, from then on, he had longer and longer times without talking. Soon after, he moved to another part of the ashram and I didn’t see much of him from then on. I wonder what he is doing now.”



The village

“One morning,” continued Grandpa, “this must have been towards the end of our three-year course, Paramahamsaji came to breakfast and said to us, ‘There is a family of moles in the next village several kilometres away, with five children who are cold and don’t have any milk to drink because their cow died a few days ago. And worst of all, their home was destroyed by a flood last night.’ He gave us some money to buy blankets and a cow and then sent us to this village. It took us quite a long time to get there, because the cow was hungry and kept stopping for some grass, and it was pretty hard for us to pull it back on to the path!

“Eventually though, we got to the village. Night had descended and with it the cold of winter. We didn’t have to look long before we saw five shivering mole children sitting near a fire and eating some rice. Just rice, nothing else. The parents couldn’t believe it when we gave them the cow and blankets and started digging the foundations of a new home. They kept asking us how Sri Swamiji had known that their cow had died. We just smiled and said, ‘He knew’.”

“That was very nice of Sri Swamiji to give those moles blankets and a cow for milk,” smiled Flo.

“Yes,” stated Grandpa, “he really used to enjoy giving things to others, to make them happy, to bring a smile to their faces.

“And now, my little one, it is time for your sleep. See if you can keep your mind awake for a little while and let your body rest completely. Body asleep, mind aware . . .”

The contribution of Bernd Natke (www.natke.info) for all the illustrations in the book is gratefully acknowledged.

SATYAM TALES 8





Satyam Tales

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

Grandpa's Memories is the 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.

An ant named Flo is keen to know all about the training that her grandfather received in the ashram of his guru, Sri Swami Satyananda. Through the different events and experiences that he underwent in the company of Sri Swamiji, Grandpa paints a vivid picture of the wonderful way in which a realized guru imparted the discipline of discipleship to novice aspirants.

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 learn and imbibe the invaluable lessons that ashram life offers in abundance.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

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Published by Yoga Publications Trust

First edition 2014

Printed at Aegean Offset Printers, Greater Noida

Please note:

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

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