

# Book Review: Spiritual Business

**Spiritual Business is a book that demonstrates how to apply the type of organization that one would want for the efficient running of a business, to all the parts of our lives: Family, Career, Service, Fun, Education, Creative Expression, the dominant attitudes that we wish to maintain in our lives, and then comes up with a way to budget finances for them all.**

*Spiritual Business*, a two-hundred-page book with a shiny, purple cover on which a photograph of an ochre-robed, conch-blowing Caucasian American backgrounded to a playfully kitsch star-filled universe, unfolds retellings of the author, Swami Satyananda Saraswati's serenely magical escapades around the world and especially in India. They are retellings because Swamiji (as he is affectionately called) told these stories verbally to a few who know him, in other words, disciples.

Born and educated in America, Swami Satyananda Saraswati worked in managerial positions for major corporations before beginning to travel the world in the mid-1960s. During his travels, he worked in many countries, studied philosophy and history, and became proficient in numerous languages; he has written several books in English, Bengali, Hindi, and Tamil, he speaks fluent Sanskrit. While in India, Swami Satyananda travelled an unbeaten path into India's interior and remained there for fifteen years, walking across the length and breadth of the Himalayas.

In his own words –

“I bought a camel in the Merakesh Bazaar in Morocco, bought a horse in Herat, Afghanistan, bought a row boat with a sail in Tunis, Tunisia, sold carpets in Mashed, Iran, and became proficient in the rules of the road and a dozen languages with which I used to communicate. I remember being pulled over for a speeding violation in Bulgaria. She was a lady cop, probably in her mid-twenties, who immediately started babbling in Bulgarian. I said, “English?” She said, “Français?” I said, “Espanol?” She said, “Deutsch?” I said, “Italiano?” She said, “Bone, bone!” She said, “500 lira.” I said, “I only have 100, and I have to buy gas.” She ended up taking me out to lunch and she filled my car with gas.

I remember walking into the kitchen of a roadside diner in Kurdistan, Eastern Turkey, lifting up the pot covers to every pot, singing and dancing and pointing, carrying on in such a wonderful pantomime until the cooks had so much fun they fed me for free.

There were so many experiences of driving behind the bulldozer making the road in Western Iran, or crossing 16 rivers in Southern Nepal before we came to the first bridge. The bus driver would just floor the accelerator, put the pedal to the metal, until the bus would crash right into the waters of the rivers, and when the water would come in the door, everyone lifted their feet. Some times we had to get out and push, but most often we made it across, coming up on the sandy beaches on the opposite shore and making our way through jungles and forests until we found the road again.

I camped on the top of Mount Musha in Israel, and found a great Uzo drinking buddy in the philosophizing Abbot of the Santa Katerina Monastery below. I studied Zikkur in the Juma Masjid of Herat, read Talmud at Temple Mount Yeshiva in Jerusalem, studied Pali and Dhamapada in Swayambhu Mandir in Kathmandu.”

– Swami Satyananda Saraswati in *Spiritual Business*.



Gentle, soft and very delicately enriched with the experience of self-realisation, his words inspire the rich tapestry of mythical weavings that his body, mind and soul gleam. Swamiji's contribution conveys inspiration, joy, and the love of one who has enjoyed the experience of spiritual fellowship around the world.

It is through such double-binds that one reads his narrative, the external and the internal interspersed with his bold claims – that being spiritual is about balancing the material and the metaphysical, that real life – from his global perspective – has taught him the incessant channeling of Spirit into Matter and Matter into Spirit.

I shall be honest: I did judge the book by its cover and so too the man. *“An American writing on the essence of Hinduism? What's that?”* my inner voice said. He writes of his experiences in war-torn Lebanon; meeting a mountain family who packed their entire home into their bag

on a horse in the Himalayas; praying to the divine that he could walk across “*the most dangerous street in the world*”; ending up to finally meet Shree Maa, an Indian woman spiritual leader who comes from the Shakta tradition of Kamakhya.



Here is a story told like never before; but before the reader is enveloped by its objective and subjective locations and overjoyed by its heartfelt spillings, we do not tread too much on the ‘spiritual,’ because the noun ‘business’ here means business. Spiritual business refers to how to manage life and the resources necessary for a successful life in such a way that does not afflict the earner.

I wish the guru could have written his beginning nonfiction in more reams of prose that could have become the fiction of literature students. But this is actually a business book – at least as much about business as it is about spirituality. The author has applied business metrics to life, and organized life and the business of life.

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and then comes up with a way to budget finances for them all.

Where most goal setting begins with Finances, the Swamiji starts with the intended uses of the funds, and then thinks about the most efficient deployment of resources to achieve those goals.

While the financial part is complicated to people like me, it ends with a discussion of the true wealth of a family: physical wealth empowers intellectual capital, which in turn enhances spiritual wealth, which leads to the health and satisfaction of all the members of the family. Spiritual capital is India's true gift to the world, and the book starts from the bottom up. It goes up, up and up and reaches a crescendo where the author declares,

“We do not believe the world will end. We believe that the world's population will continue to grow. We believe that the world's standard of living will continue to improve along with technological innovation. We believe that the world's cost of living will continue to increase along with the rise in the standard of living. We believe there will be more young people in the future and that older people will live longer as the standards of living increase.

“Giving these prospects, we expect economic growth to continue. We expect that while share prices will be volatile through many short-term periods, successively higher valuations will be seen over time. Doesn't it pay to be an investor in the future growth of the world economy? There will always be risk. Our goal is to manage the risk intelligently. Successful investing means empowering the companies, which distribute the goods and services, which we believe will help to make this world a better place because of our contributions. We take ownership in our participation, in the sharing of our vision, of an ideal world.”

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