

A two-year-old boy was playing in a village when he fell deep inside a rabbit hole. The boy's parents were worried as they could not find him and frantically called out his name. They heard their child crying from inside the rabbit hole, but as they tried to call him out, he got scared and moved deeper into the rabbit hole. The desperate parents then called the villagers for help, but all efforts were futile. The boy continued to cry, trapped inside the rabbit hole.

A saint was passing by and everyone approached him for help. The saint advised that small children from the village be gathered and given toys to play with near the rabbit hole. The villagers at once took up the wise saint's advice and brought their kids to play near the rabbit hole. On hearing the laughter and joy of the small children, the little boy slowly stuck his head out from the rabbit hole. Upon seeing his young friends, the boy jumped out of the hole and happily joined the fun.

Like the little boy stuck in the rabbit hole, we often get stuck in situations beyond our control. These situations may have arisen due to our base natures, judgmental attitudes, or bad luck. We desperately wish to escape from the rabbit hole, but we choose to remain stuck and cry at the same time. Our loved and dear ones, like the parents and villagers, try to help us, but we hold our natures and attitudes very close to our hearts and thus do not understand what they are saying.

At such times, God Himself descends upon the earth. He becomes like us and comes to us, only to take us out of our miserable situations. In the Hindu culture, one such auspicious day is *Chaitra Sud Naum*, celebrated as *Ram Navmi* and *Hari Navmi*, which marks the birth of Bhagwan Ram and Bhagwan Swaminarayan, respectively. On this pious day, Bhagwan Ram descended on this earth in *Tretayug* many centuries ago to establish *Dharma* and maintain peace. However, in *Kaliyug*, mankind was once again stuck in the rabbit hole and the Supreme form Bhagwan Swaminarayan descended on this earth in human form to protect His devotees and to make them truly happy.

So the one question we have to ask ourselves is, have we truly become His devotee?



This edition of the Outreach will show that by accepting His refuge, God is in our constant remembrance and protection.

In The Face Of Adversity Footprints of Life

There once lived a man who always prayed to God. One afternoon, while lying on his bed, the man had a dream like no other. In this dream, he was walking along the coastline on a beach and as he walked, he saw scenes from his life flash across the light blue skies. In each scene, when he looked down,

he noticed footprints in the sand. Gazing down at the deep impressions in the wet sand, he further noticed that there were two sets of footprints, side by side. Without a doubt in mind, he knew the other footprints were those of God, his one and only savior throughout life.

As the scenes of his life flashed across the open skies, he noticed something odd. His heart started to beat faster as he tried to contemplate the meaning of what he was seeing. Lost in thought, the man could no longer hold back his tears and he cried out, "Lord! Is what I am seeing really true? I just saw the path of my life flash before my eyes, and I could see the footprints I left along the way. And beside my footprints were yours, you were with me. But..."

The man was now full of tears, and was barely able to speak, but softly continued, "But at times, I saw only one set of footprints, and I noticed that those were the times I really needed you! Those were the low periods in my life, where I was suffering from anguish, sorrow and defeat. Lord, how could you leave me when I needed you the most?"

With His gentle and compassionate touch, God wiped away the man's tears and replied, "My precious son, how can I ever consider leaving your side? You are dearest to me; I have never left you, not even for a fraction of a second! Those times when you see only one set of footprints, in those dark moments of your life, it was those times when you did not have the strength to march on. My dear son, it was at those times that I carried you in my very arms!"



Saras Ek Sahajanand

The Rescue of Naja Jogiya

Fellowship. During the appointment ceremony, Sahajanand Swami requested for two *vardans* (boons) from Ramanand Swami, which remain unparalleled in the history of the Guru-disciple relationship.

The first vardan: "If my devotee is to suffer the pain of a scorpion sting, then let me suffer a million-fold more pain in each pore of my body, but spare my devotee from suffering."

The second vardan: "Even if there are seven consecutive famines, my devotee should never suffer from the lack of food or shelter."

In this way, Bhagwan Swaminarayan took upon Himself the sins, pain and suffering of His devotees!

One such example is the story of a devotee named Naja Jogiya. Living in the village of Bhojra, Naja was an ardent devotee who was immersed in the worship of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. However, Vasur Khachar, the head of Bhojra village, had a deep hatred for Bhagwan Swaminarayan and His devotees. One day, Vasur Khachar's men captured and imprisoned Naja. Threatening Naja, Vasur Khachar said, "If Bhagwan Swaminarayan was truly God himself, then he will come to save you. If he is not here by tomorrow morning, I will break your legs!"



When faced with a difficult situation, who do we turn to for salvation? How do we gain the strength and courage to face the situation? For Naja, his life was threatened, but his sole refuge was Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He immediately resorted to remembering Him and chanted the 'Swaminarayan' mantra.

At this time, Bhagwan Swaminarayan was actually hundreds of miles away in the village of Visnagar. But God is always listening to the heart-felt cries and prayers of his devotees. Be it a hundred miles or a thousand miles, no distance is too great when it comes to protecting His devotee!

The inner cries of Naja Jogiya reached Bhagwan Swaminarayan and at once, He left the village on his mare, Manki. Even though it was raining heavily at that time, He trudged through the weather and crossed two flooded rivers on His way. Bhagwan Swaminarayan reached Bhojra early in the morning, in order to rescue His devotee! Seeing Bhagwan Swaminarayan early in the morning, Naja Jogiya was filled with joy. A wave of emotions pierced Naja's heart as he gazed at the Supreme standing before him.

Upon hearing of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's arrival, Vasur Khachar was shocked! Vasur Khachar tried to attack and capture Him, but the almighty Bhagwan Swaminarayan simply raised his hand and placed Vasur Khachar into a trance. In the trance, Vasur Khachar saw the pain and anguish one would suffer in hell due to sinful deeds and malice. On seeing the agony, Vasur Khachar shook with fear and fell to Bhagwan Swaminarayan's feet. Vasur confessed all of his crimes and sins, and vowed not to harass the people of the village. He went on to become a devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.



"God is always with his devotee. God is in support of his devotee every second, twenty-four hours a day...second to second to second!" - Guruhari Swamiji

Life is full of twists and turns, and ups and downs, but prayer is a means to stay in constant communion with God. A wholehearted prayer is the simplest and strongest bond between a devotee and God. It is through prayer that a devotee strengthens his or her faith in God. But often times, prayer is used as a spare wheel to pull us out of trouble, when it is really a steering wheel that directs us on the right path throughout life. By accepting God's utmost refuge, God constantly remembers and cares for us, whether we realize it or not!

Lasting Thought

"There is no greater endeavor than to accept the firm refuge of God. For such a devotee, all endeavors have been achieved and there is nothing else left to accomplish. And God uplifts even the vile, transforms a sinner into a pious devotee, and compassionately cares for all those who surrender to Him."
- Gunatitanand Swami, *Swami Ni Vaato (Prakran 1 - Vaat 140)*

Cool Fact

Suffering from a head-ache or back-ache? Medical experts point to meditation as a promising cure. In fact, a recent study found that brief meditation sessions helped reduce pain intensity by 40 percent and pain unpleasantness by 57 percent! So before you reach for the medicine cabinet, consider harnessing the power from within!

LAUGH OUT LOUD

PATIENT: It's been one month since my last visit and I still feel miserable.

DOCTOR: Did you follow the instructions on the medicine I gave you?

PATIENT: I sure did. The bottle said, 'Keep tightly closed.'

