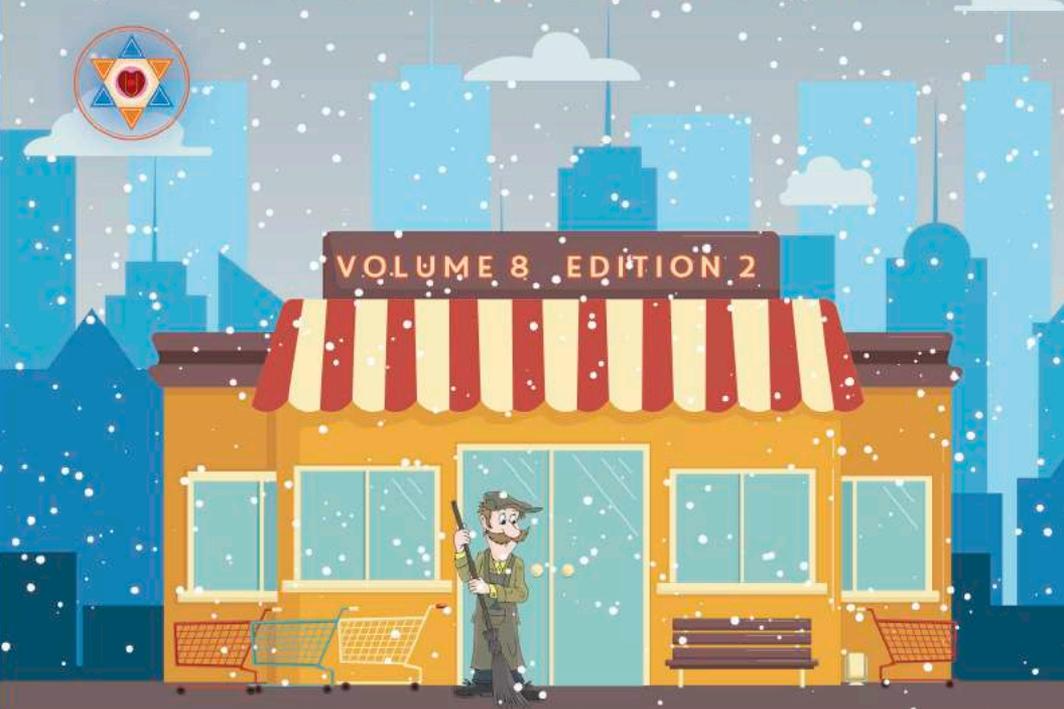


OUTREACH



Something We Can All Do

During the winter of 1998 in downtown New York City, a man was standing outside of a convenience store. The man stood there for about ten minutes. Having nothing to do, the man found a broom and started sweeping the sidewalk in front of the convenience store. Then, the man left.

The following day, the man returned and again swept the sidewalk in front of the store. This continued for several days. The man neither asked nor expected anything in return. The store owner, who never asked the man to perform these acts of kindness, was pleased but hesitated to approach him.

One day, when the temperature dropped well below zero, the man continued his routine of cleaning the sidewalk and shoveling the snow that accumulated. The store owner invited the man inside the store to stay warm.

The man had a natural inclination to help others and stay engaged in some activity. So, he started sweeping the inside of the store and cleaning the coffee tables. The store owner, who felt more comfortable now interacting with the man, offered him a free sandwich and a drink. The man initially declined, but then hesitantly accepted the sandwich.

The store owner curiously asked, “Why did you start cleaning the sidewalk and my store? I did not ask you, nor am I paying you.”

The man then humbly replied, “It is my nature to stay busy and do some sort of activity. I like helping others. While I wait outside for the bus each morning, I thought it would be a good idea to help you.” The store owner was pleased with the man’s earnest reply and offered him a job at the highly profitable store.

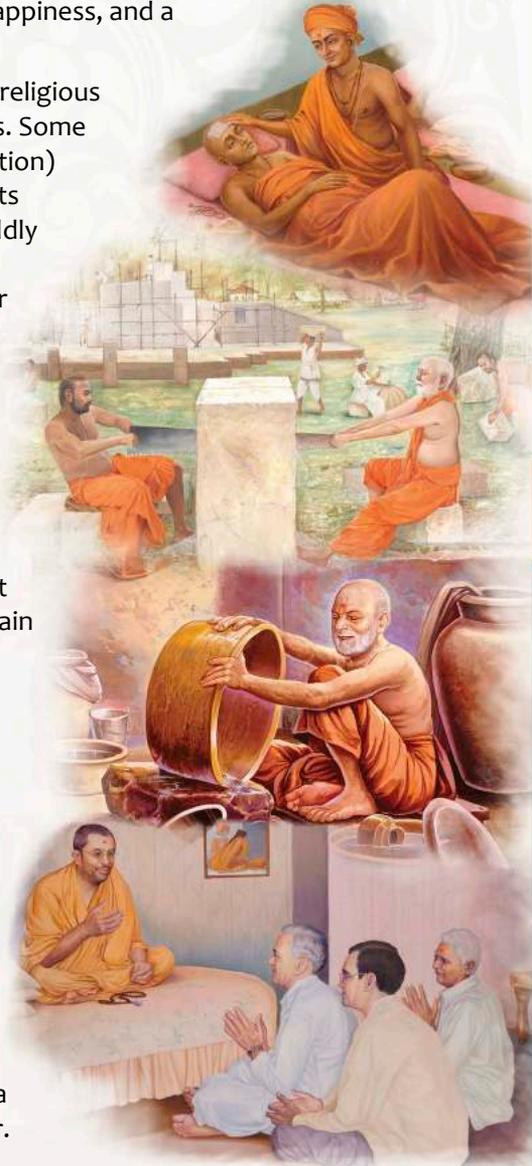
Due to the man’s selfless and helpful nature, he received shelter, food, and eventually became the co-owner of the profitable business. In the same way, if we put forth an effort to do something to please Bhagwan, He can gift us with countless blessings in return. These blessings include positive thoughts, a tension-free mindset, inner happiness, and a family filled with Atmiyata.

To attain these blessings, spiritual and religious organizations describe various techniques. Some spiritual sects promote bhakti (pure devotion) as a means to please Bhagwan. Other sects promote vairagya (detachment from worldly pleasures) or ahinsa (non-violence), while others promote becoming gnaani (scholar in the scriptures) as a way to please Bhagwan.

But in the early 1800’s, Bhagwan Swaminarayan described one simple and universal technique. It is called seva. Seva means to engage ourselves in the service of Bhagwan, His mandir, and His devotees. It is one of the easiest and most practical ways to please Bhagwan and attain His blessings.

The amazing aspect of seva is that anyone can do it. There is no age or gender barrier, no requirement for special skills or talents, and no need for wealth or knowledge. All a person needs is a pure intention and sincere drive to please Bhagwan. Hence, each and every person has the same opportunity to engage in the various types of seva and reap equal benefits.

There are many types of seva that a person can perform. A person can do seva financially by donating money to a mandir.



A person can do seva mentally by thinking about the virtues of others. And perhaps the easiest way a person can do seva is physically. Doing seva at the mandir or doing seva under the guidance of a local leader is the most convenient way for youths.

If we take some time from our weekly routine to engage in seva, Bhagwan has guaranteed us that unimaginable and divine blessings will soon follow. We just need to take that first small step.

Giving can make you happier than getting! Many experiments have been conducted in which a group of people are given money. Then half of them were required to spend it on themselves, while the other half were required to spend it on other people or donate to a charity.

Contrary to their own expectations, the half who spent the money on others or donated consistently felt much happier and got more pleasure out of the experience. An MRI of their brains revealed more activity in the happiness center of the brain.



Cool Fact

A doctor walked into a patient's room with bad news. He told the patient, "I have reviewed all your reports twice and it seems you only have a few more hours to live. There is nothing more I can do. I am sorry."

The doctor continues, "Is there anyone who you would like to meet? Perhaps a family member or a friend?"

After a long pause, the patient replies,

"Yes, I would like to meet another doctor."



The Shortcut to Clean Your Mind

Performing seva to please Bhagwan gifts us great benefits. If we perform seva, then Bhagwan will undoubtedly give us the winning lottery ticket in the form of constant positive thoughts and a spirited attitude—we will be free of any mental misery and debt from our sins.

There are countless individuals who have experienced the powerful benefits and gifts from performing seva. Hiteshbhai is one such devotee who received unimaginable blessings from Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji.

The year 1992 marked the 100th birthday of Swamiji's guru, Guruhari Yogiji Maharaj, who was born on May 23rd, 1892. To commemorate this historic occasion, Swamiji organized a mahotsav (grand celebration), called Yogi Shatabdi Mahotsav, at the Haridham mandir in India. It was going to be the very first time that tens of thousands of devotees would gather at Haridham for a mahotsav.

The preparation started several months prior to the mahotsav. Everything ranging from stocking grains, planning the mahotsav grounds, arranging for accommodations, and countless other seva was being performed by hundreds of devotees.

One seva was especially daunting - cleaning sewage and waste water. Usually, all the drainage water collects in a specially dug hole, which is periodically cleaned. It was decided that the gutter would need to be cleaned before the mahotsav to ensure that it did not overflow during the mahotsav.

Hiteshbhai and five other devotees volunteered for this seva. They would have to go inside the pit of dirty water, which came up to their necks. The waste water emitted a horrific and intolerable smell. There would also be mice, insects, and mosquitoes in that area.

They would rotate every 15 minutes. Two people would have to go inside the water and collect the water in pails. They would pass the pails to two sevako standing at the inside edge of the water. Those two would then pass the pails to two people standing outside the hole. This continued for several hours, and eventually, the drainage water was almost cleared. They were almost finished.

Just then, Swamiji was passing nearby on the Haridham campus. He asked the assisting saint, "Where is this smell coming from?"

The assisting saint replied, "It's coming from the drainage water. The covering of the drainage water has been opened and is being cleared."

Swamiji asked, "Who is inside the pit clearing the drainage water?"

The assisting saint replied, "There is a very reliable army of devotees who happily volunteered for this seva."

Swamiji's face lit up with happiness. He started walking towards the drainage. Seeing Swamiji, the six devotees came outside and stood in a line for His darshan. Their clothes were filthy, wet, and emitting an unbearable stench.

To suppress the stench coming from their clothes, another devotee used a hose to wash them off. But the terrible smell was very apparent. Swamiji was extremely pleased with their efforts and seva! He could not contain His happiness.

Swamiji walked over to the six devotees, who were still drenched in smelly water, and gave each of them a hug for several seconds. Swamiji's saffron robes become wet with smelly water, but He did not care. He was extremely pleased with their dedication!

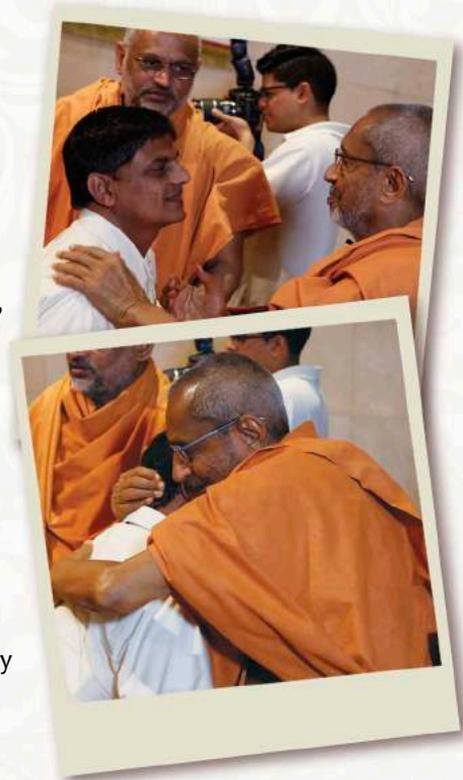
The saint responsible for overseeing the preparation for the mahotsav said to Swamiji, "This water drainage had not been cleaned in two and a half years. But now that this drainage is cleared, we will not have any problems during the mahotsav. It will not overflow. It is great that they cleaned this gutter."

Swamiji smiled and gave blessings to the devotees, "Now that you have cleaned the waste water from this gutter, Bhagwan will clean your antahkaran—He will clear away all the dirt covering your soul, and make you truly happy." The devotees were speechless after hearing such blessings!

Then the saint said, "Swamiji, there are hundreds of devotees engaged in various sevas all across the Haridham campus in preparation for the mahotsav."

Swamiji, with a divine smile, said, "Go to all the devotees who are performing seva, pat them on the chest, and tell them that they also received these same blessings. Tell them that their mind and soul will be cleaned and purified!"

People can try innumerable things to eradicate the negative thoughts and vibrations from their hearts and minds, but it is next to impossible. But, by simply engaging ourselves in seva, we can be gifted with a fresh, positive mind. We can be gifted with a clean soul and inner happiness!



Learning From Our Friends

Performing seva together as a group is truly rewarding. Not only does it help unite everyone, but the spiritual benefits are immense. One such example is of the Parmanand Group. The Parmanand Group consists of high school and college students who were born in America. They had an opportunity to perform seva at the Atmiya Youth Shibir in 2015 held at the University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

A few weeks before the shibir, the Parmanand Group were given the seva of constructing a small exhibition. They happily accepted this seva considering it to be their great fortune. Everyone had only one goal: to build the best exhibition to please Guruhari Swamiji.

After much planning, in which everyone contributed, they decided to build a mini airplane model (about 40 feet long and 10 feet wide) filled with messages and smrutis from Swamiji's life. They had to go school, college or work during the daytime, but they would gather every weeknight and weekend. Fully engrossed in this seva, many were sleeping only a couple of hours each night.

Before starting their seva, everyone would get together and do five minutes of bhajan. Moreover, many tough situations and questions arose in which the entire seva project could have been cancelled. But by relying on bhajan and Bhagwan's strength, and by putting even more hours each night, this seva continued and they made all the preparations.

A couple of days before the shibir, the members of the Parmanand Group arrived on site to assemble their airplane. Working non-stop for the next couple of days and nights, they finished constructing the airplane exhibition with fine detail. It was called Bhulku Airlines. Throughout the three-day shibir, almost a thousand attendees visited the exhibition and were inspired by the messages.

One afternoon during the shibir, Swamiji, Himself, visited the exhibition and was extremely pleased. As Swamiji exited the airplane, He showered words of blessings, "For the youths who took part in constructing this Bhulku Airlines, their journey towards becoming a true bhulku of Bhagwan will now progress twice as fast."

Spending a few weeks together to engage in this seva invited Swamiji to shower them with truly divine blessings. If we engage in seva with harmony and a pure intention, we too can receive Swamiji's divine blessings.



5 Benefits of Volunteering for Seva

Taking time to volunteer and perform seva has amazing benefits that will help you in your daily life.



Teaches you new skills because you are exposed to a wide range of unique activities and tasks.



Helps you stay active both physically and mentally because the seva may be multi-dimensional requiring you to get out of your comfort zone.



Improves your social skills because a lot of seva is performed in groups wherein interactions and coordination is routine.



Fills empty spaces on your resume because volunteering time for seva at the temple is appreciated by others and demonstrates a well-rounded character.



Makes you experience inner happiness because it is very satisfying to know that doing anything to please Bhagwan will reap infinite returns both socially and spiritually.

Lasting Thought

Seva is one of the primary pillars of this satsang. As a result of doing seva, Bhagwan will become happy and shower blessings upon you so that you get an endless supply of joy, bliss, and happiness.

~ Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji



A Divine Glimpse

During Swamiji's tour in Australia, He was in a car traveling to a devotee's home. With the car window rolled down, a group of youths made a prayer to Swamiji, "Please make us *das-na-das*."

Then Swamiji replied, "Your drive to pray to become *das-na-das* is excellent. But how do you know if you are on the path of becoming *das-na-das*? The first step is to speak respectfully with your family members, and never perceive any negativity in their actions. We fail because of our stubborn, ego, and jealous natures. The more we increase our *dasatva* and engage in sant samagam, the faster these vices will be eradicated. Then, we will be able to experience the true bliss of *dasatva*."

~ February 2016

