

OutReach



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“I Completely Forget About My Body”

The most precious thing we all value is our physical body and its health. From eating healthy to regular exercise, we ensure our body's fitness and well-being. We take all the precautions to ensure our safety and physical comforts. But would we ever imagine sacrificing our well-being or even tolerate pain to help others?

The day was April 28th, 1996. Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji was at the 'Haridham' temple (Sokhada, India). In just two days, Swamiji was going to depart for *vichran* (tour) in America. In turn, many devotees eagerly lined up to meet Swamiji, to take His blessings, and to get solutions to their problems.

After some time, several saints were performing acupressure on Swamiji's hands and feet. Suddenly, one of the saints, Brahmavihari Swami, noticed black scars on Swamiji's stomach.

Worried about Swamiji's well-being and health, Brahmavihari Swami took a closer look and realized they were burn marks. Now deeply concerned, Brahmavihari Swami asked Swamiji, “These black scars look like burn marks. How did this happen?”

Swamiji was slightly confused by the question. Upon examining the His stomach, Swamiji realized the presence of black scars, but still did not respond.

“But these scars were not there yesterday. It must have happened very recently. Please tell us what happened.” pleaded Brahmavihari Swami.

Pondering for a moment, Swamiji said, “Maybe, it's because I sometimes do *shekh* (using a heated water bag to relieve pain) on my stomach. If that bag stays in one spot for too long, I get burned.”

Hearing this, Brahmavihari Swami asked, “Didn't you feel your skin burning while doing *shekh*?”

Swamiji very humbly replied, “When I am having a *khangi* (private conversation) with devotees, I listen to their questions and problems very carefully. At that time, I completely forget about my body. I did not remember that I had a bag of hot water on my stomach.”

Swamiji is a selfless, compassionate, and divine saint who lives beyond His physical body. He is so concerned about doing *seva* for His devotees and resolving their problems, that He completely disregards His own health.



Swamiji participating in Holi celebrations and joyfully spreading colored-water.

Holi - More Than Just Colors

Holi is one of the most festive, joyous holidays of the year. Family and friends come together to rejoice, rekindle, and repair their relationships in a very unique manner – by tossing vibrantly colored powder and water on each other. Kids, adults, and youths of all ages take part in this celebration. But the roots of the Holi festival hold a unique significance.

When referring to Holi, the story of Prahlad naturally comes to mind. Hiranyakashipu was the father of Prahlad. Hiranyakashipu was an egotistical king and encouraged people to worship him as a God.

However, his own son, Prahlad, was a firm believer of Bhagwan Vishnu. This made Hiranyakashipu extremely upset. As a result, he repeatedly tried to kill Prahlad. Yet, Prahlad kept firm faith in Bhagwan Vishnu.

One such incident is when Hiranyakashipu tried to burn Prahlad. Hiranyakashipu's sister Holika had a boon that granted her immunity from death by fire as long as she wore her magical shawl.

It was planned that Holika would hold Prahlad and sit in a fire. But at that moment, a great wind blew Holika's shawl onto Prahlad. In turn, Holika burned to ashes while Prahlad walked away unharmed.

The festival of Holi commemorates the victory of righteousness over evil and signifies the importance of prayer. On this day, people generally pray to be filled with such purity and devotion, just like Prahlad, so that God's divine protection is always present.



Cool Fact

You don't just see colors, but you feel them. The **'Science of Color'** describes that different colors have different effects on your mood, emotions, and even urges. For example, **red** and **yellow** are stimulating colors that increase appetite and energy. **Blue** has a soothing effect and encourages creative thinking. **White** symbolizes cleanliness and purity. A **cream** color promotes humbleness and tranquility, while a **saffron** color brings pious and pure thoughts. So next time you are painting your room or simply deciding your desktop background, choose your color carefully!



Laugh-Out-Loud

PUPIL: "Would you punish me for something I didn't do?"

TEACHER: "Of course not."

PUPIL: "Good, because I didn't do my homework."



ATMIYA YUVA MAHOTSAV

DEC
30,31
2014



JAN
1,2,3
2015

Over 100 youths and 100 families gathered to partake in a recent Atmiya Youth Conference held in California! All of them made a firm commitment to attend Atmiya Yuva Mahotsav. Furthermore, they also decided to make a contribution to AYM, which involves inviting all friends and family and making sure they also get showered with blessings in the divine AYM celebration!

"You Illuminated My Footpath, I Will Illuminate Your Mind"

Holi marks a very special occasion in the Swaminarayan Sampraday. It marks the birth of Bhagatji Maharaj, who was born on March 19, 1829 in the town of Mahuva, Gujarat. He lived an inspiring life and became instrumental in propagating the true glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami, collectively known as *Akshar-Purushottam*.

Bhagatji Maharaj (also known as Pragji Bhakt) was born into a simple *darjee* (tailor) family. Therefore, society automatically destined his future as just another simple tailor. But, his destiny instantly changed when he accepted Gunatitanand Swami as his guru.

Pragji's life exemplifies an ideal guru-devotee relationship, which is built on unconditional trust, sincere dedication and wholehearted *seva* (service). Even in insults and dire hardships, Pragji kept unshakable faith and perseverance to please Gunatitanand Swami. As a result, Gunatitanand Swami gifted him with the strength to attain the highest spiritual state of true bliss. But what steps did Pragji take to reach this stage?

One time, Gunatitanand Swami was passing through a mango grove on the temple premises. He noticed the dry mango trees and remarked, "These mango trees will wither away if they are not watered."

The devotees agreed that someone should water these trees, but they all continued onwards with Gunatitanand Swami to the temple. But Pragji realized this as a special

opportunity to please Gunatitanand Swami. So instead of continuing with the crowd, Pragji went searching for a watering pot.

There were 300 mango trees in the grove that required water, but Pragji did not feel discouraged or overwhelmed. He truly felt fortunate for this opportunity to perform *seva* and fulfill Swami's request. Singlehandedly, Pragji fetched water from a distant river and poured four pots of water for each tree!



A devotee saw Pragji drenched in sweat and asked, "Pragji, what are you doing?"

Pragji replied, "Swami was concerned with the mango trees drying up. So I decided to water these mango trees."

The devotee questioned, "But did Swami actually tell you to water these trees?"

Pragji replied, "He did not have to tell me. This was Swami's wish, so I must do what pleases Him."

Pragji not only performed physically-demanding *seva* during the day, but he would stay up until late night, just for a chance to do more *seva*.

In another instance, Gunatitanand Swami gave divine discourses to devotees and went to sleep. After a couple hours, Gunatitanand Swami awoke in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. Unfortunately, there was no candle lamp available.

Pragji was ready to take on a *seva* at any moment. So without any hesitation, Pragji ripped a piece of cloth from his *paagh* (turban) and made a candle lamp. Using light from this candle, Pragji illuminated the pathway and escorted Gunatitanand Swami to the bathroom location.

After visiting the bathroom, Gunatitanand Swami exclaimed, "You ripped a piece of your *paagh* to make this candle lamp especially for me!" Pragji just humbly folded his hands.

Gunatitanand Swami then said, "Oh Pragji, you illuminated the footpath for me. Now, I will illuminate your mind and soul with purity and take you to Akshardham!"

What did Pragji do to receive these immense blessings? Understanding the inner wish of Gunatitanand Swami, Pragji devoted his time, possessions, and physical body in *seva*. Most importantly, Pragji did this *seva* wholeheartedly, without any expectations and with a genuine drive to please Swami.

Performing *seva* with the right intentions is the easiest way to receive the unique blessings of a divine saint. Fortunately, just as Pragji had an opportunity to do *seva*, we also have the same opportunity.

As the celebration of Atmiya Yuva Mahotsav 2015 is just around the corner, Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji has proclaimed that anyone who performs any type of *seva* for this celebration, whether it be physically, mentally, financially or spiritually, will be gifted with truly divine blessings.



Lasting Thought "Every noble thought brings you one step closer to God. These thoughts are like a river, leading to the ocean of divine spirit."

~ Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji