

OUTREACH



VOLUME 7 EDITION 5

Healing a Wound with Forgiveness

On the sunny afternoon of July 12th, 1986, a young police officer named Steven McDonald was on duty in New York City. Steven and his partner were patrolling a park to keep watch because of a recent increase in bike thefts.

As they made their rounds, they encountered a group of suspicious boys. When the police officers approached them, the boys started to run. Steven chased them and eventually caught up with them. Steven started asking them routine questions: What are your names? Where do you live? Why did you run?

Just then, he turned and saw one of the boys holding a gun to his head. Before Steven could even react, there was a deafening explosion! An orange flame flashed before him and the bullet struck Steven above the right eye. Steven fell backwards

and a second bullet struck Steven in the throat. As Steven fell to the ground, a third bullet struck him.

For the next 48 hours, doctors and nurses worked tirelessly to save his life. They were skeptical that he would live. Miraculously, Steven survived. But survival came at a hard price. He was paralyzed from the neck down. He would never walk again and would require care 24-hours a day. All his dreams and goals were shattered in an instant!

Steven McDonald is still alive today, but what is truly amazing is his spirit and attitude. Remarkably, even though Steven has had to struggle his entire life, he still found the courage to forgive his shooter.

Steven reached out to his shooter in prison and forgave him. Surprised by Steven's gesture, the shooter fell into tears. Then, Steven expressed his hope that in the future, they can work together to teach youngsters about non-violence.

People wonder how and why Steven was able to forgive his shooter. In response, Steven said, "I forgave the shooter because I believe the only thing worse than receiving a bullet in my spine would have been to nurture revenge in my heart." To forgive someone, even in this situation, is truly remarkable and commendable!

Forgiveness is a process by which someone lets go of feelings like revenge and spite for a particular person who has hurt them physically or emotionally. When you forgive someone, you are letting go of any hostility or resentment you have for that person. This not only makes the other person feel better, but it brings peace within you.

This type of forgiveness is one component of Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji's universal message of Atmiyata. Atmiyata involves living together with harmony in all situations. Atmiyata means to overlook any perceived faults in friends and family members, and instead, to wholeheartedly serve them even if they have made mistakes.

To describe the message of Atmiyata, Swamiji once mentioned an amazing analogy: "If someone were to draw a line on the wall with a permanent marker, how long would that line remain there? [It would remain there for many months or years until someone repaints the room.]"



WALL



SAND



WATER

“If someone were to take a stick and draw a line in the sand on a beach, how long would that line remain there? [The line would probably remain there for a few minutes or hours until the wind and water slowly levels the sand.]”

“If someone were to take their finger and make a line in water, how long would that line remain there? [It would instantly disappear.] In the same way, when your mind becomes like water, it means you have entered into a state of Atmiyata.”

Occasionally, someone may make a mistake or mistreats us (which is symbolized by the line). At that time, if we can instantly forget about it, then that person’s behavior will not be imprinted on our mind. As a result, our positive attitude towards them will remain intact. This type of Atmiyata within the family and with friends will create a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere in our lives. It will bring true bliss and happiness within our hearts.



Most people think that eating right and going to the gym is essential for good health. While true, forgiving someone has invaluable health benefits as well. A study conducted at Stanford University showed that the simple act of forgiving not only made people happier, it made them live longer as well. The act of forgiving reduced headaches, blood pressure, and was shown to reduce the risk of arthritis and even cancer. It is because holding a grudge against others actually disrupts the body’s natural chemistry. So perhaps, consider adding forgiveness into your fitness plan!

Laugh Out Loud

A teacher wanted to teach his students about self-esteem. So, he asked anyone who thought they were stupid to stand up. After a few moments, one student stood up.

This surprised the teacher, as he did not expect anyone to stand up. He asked, “Why did you stand up?”

The student replied, “I did not want to leave you standing up by yourself.”



The Epitome of Unconditional Acceptance & Service

The very first temple built by Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji is located in the small village of Sokhada, near Baroda, Gujarat (India). Ever since its inauguration in 1981, the temple (named Haridham) has been open to anyone and everyone, regardless of their caste, race, gender or religious belief.

Several years ago, a man once came to visit Haridham. While many come to Haridham, this man was quite exceptional. With skin covered in filth, clothing torn and ragged, eyes bloodshot red, and hair that was long and messy. This 50-year old man stood out like no other.

Upon entering Haridham, the man made his way directly to 'Anirdesh' (the building in which Swamiji resides). After taking a quick glance around the main lobby area, he took a seat in one corner of Anirdesh.

His physical appearance undoubtedly made him stand out. Several devotees noticed this strange-looking man, sitting alone in the corner. Even if someone failed to notice him, the dreadful stench of alcohol under his breath would definitely not keep him hidden for too long.

Swamiji has cultivated an extraordinary understanding in all His saints and devotees: anyone who steps foot into Haridham is divine and extremely worthy. As such, no one attempted to turn this man away or kick him out of Haridham.

Soon after, Swamiji entered the room. The man immediately ran to Swamiji and fell to His lotus feet. He then stood up and started to converse with Swamiji. Swamiji was overjoyed to meet and interact with him! Then, as the man poured out his troubles, Swamiji listened and comforted him.

After 5-10 minutes, Swamiji asked a nearby devotee to call P. Kothari Swami, the senior-most saint in Haridham. Swamiji instructed Kothari Swami, "Give this man all the help and assistance he needs! He is in the middle of an unfortunate situation. We must make sure he does not experience any form of disturbance in his social well-being."



After comforting him, Swamiji told the man to go with Kothari Swami and that everything would be okay. All the devotees and saints were truly amazed to witness such an interaction. But at the same time, they were confused.

One devotee then asked, “Swamiji! This man had no apparent sense of decency, he is not even in *satsang*, and his mouth smelled of alcohol. Yet, you were so naturally and calmly listening to his every word, face-to-face. You even gave him everything he needed. Throughout the entire incident, there was not a single moment when your facial expressions showed the slightest distaste. In fact, you showed joy in talking with him! We do not understand; how is this possible?”

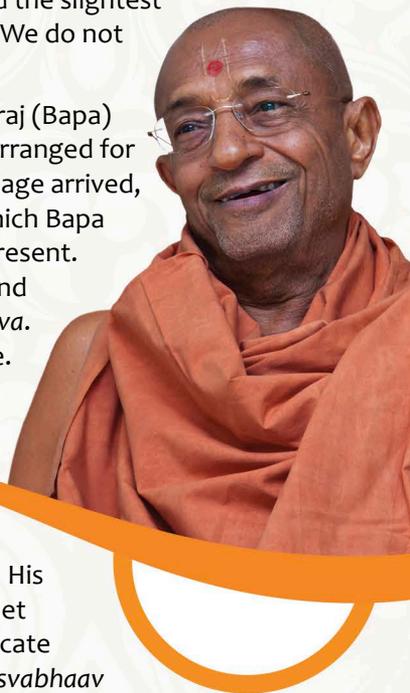
Swamiji then said, “Listen. One time, Yogiji Maharaj (Bapa) was visiting the town of Vasana. The devotees had arranged for Bapa to come in a horse carriage. But when the carriage arrived, there was no arrangement for a stool or stairs by which Bapa could climb down. At that time, this very man was present. Seeing the situation, he immediately fell to the ground and offered his back as a stool. Bapa accepted his *seva*. Bapa stepped on his back to climb off of the carriage. At the time, I was also present with Bapa.”

Blessing us with a lifelong message, Swamiji continued, “In a situation where there was no arrangement made for Bapa, this man offered his body for *seva*. He ensured that Bapa faced no burden. So now, if this man is faced with a burden in His life, and he is in need of our *seva*, then why should I let him suffer through such burdens? I must act to eradicate the burdens from his life! Rather than looking at his *svabhaav* (inherent nature), why not instead look at and admire the *seva* he did for Bapa?”

This incident give us an extraordinary glimpse into Swamiji’s life. It is evident that Swamiji’s vision is not focused on a person’s misbehavior. Instead, Swamiji completely disregards their faults and wholeheartedly serves them.

Swamiji’s *Atmiyata* with us is truly extraordinary! Countless people approach Swamiji to confess their mistakes and sins. Yet, Swamiji’s divine vision towards them does not change. He completely overlooks these mistakes and sins, and instead, selflessly offers them assistance and spiritual advice. He is willing to serve anyone at any time regardless of their previous actions or behavior!

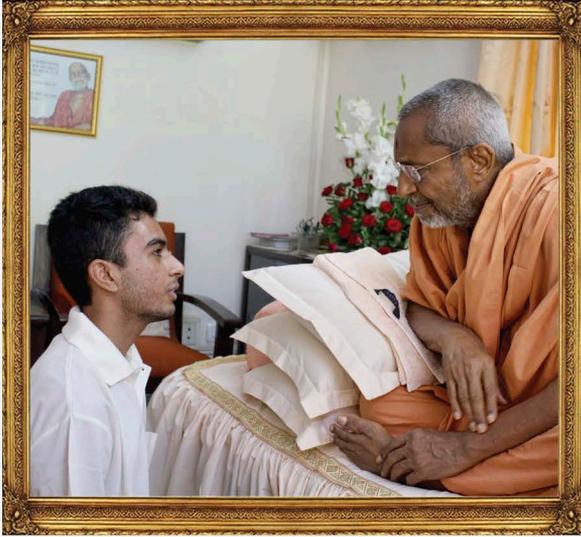
There is plenty to learn from Swamiji’s virtuous life. If a friend or a family member behaves rudely or makes an innocent mistake, perhaps scolding them is not the best way to respond. Rather, treating them as *Bhagwan*’s children by forgiving and offering our support is a better approach. By incorporating this type of *Atmiyata* into our day-to-day routine, we will receive Swamiji’s blessings and experience the true joy of *Atmiyata*.



LEARNING FROM OUR FRIENDS

By only adjusting a few words in our vocabulary, we can naturally develop strong *Atmiyata* with those around us. Particularly, there is a word that many people commonly say, and Swamiji urges all devotees to avoid this word. One such instance involves a youth named AAtmiyabhai.

Aatmiyabhai lives in the USA (Clifton, NJ) and Swamiji has been spiritually nurturing him from a young age. Due to Swamiji's guidance, Aatmiyabhai moved to India in 2004 when he was in the 5th grade to study at a premier boarding school called Atmiya Vidya Mandir (AVM).



Swamiji truly cares for all the youngsters at AVM and visits them frequently. In 2008, Swamiji arrived at AVM and met with the students. In fact, Swamiji went to the living quarters and personally visited each room and spent time talking to the students. Swamiji reached Aatmiyabhai's room and sat with the students in the room. One student asked

Swamiji, "How can I study well to get good grades and score above 90 percent?"

Swamiji replied, "The simplest way to achieve good grades is by becoming *Atmiya* with everyone." After seeing their confused faces, Swamiji continued, "If we become *Atmiya* with everyone, then we would never take *abhav* (think negatively) of anyone, and as a result, our mind can remain focused on studies." A negative mind tends to remain engaged thinking about the faults and misdeeds of others, and such a person is unable to study well.

Then, Swamiji told the students, "In order to achieve this [*live with Atmiyata*], there is one technique. Do not call anyone *tu*, but instead, call them *tame*."

It seems like a simple request, but then Swamiji explained its significance, "If we start calling everyone by *tame*, then our *vaani no vivek* will improve automatically. You might feel okay telling someone, *tu gando chhu* [you are dumb], but if you tell someone *tame ganda chho* [polite way of saying 'you are dumb'], you would feel awkward and would back-track on what you said. So, regardless if someone is older or younger than you, please start calling everyone by *tame*."

It is truly amazing that Swamiji engrains these seemingly trivial, yet absolutely essential moral values in the hearts of youngsters! Living together with *Atmiyata* is a stepping-stone for true happiness. The easiest technique to begin to foster such *Atmiyata* is by respectfully calling everyone by *tame*.

Four Questions to Ask Yourself

If you find it difficult to forgive someone, ask yourself:



What can I gain by holding a grudge towards someone?

Almost always, the weight of holding onto a grudge is so heavy that it disrupts our entire lifestyle. Forgiving can release that grudge and makes us feel happy and fresh.



Whatever they did, is it still worth being angry?

Generally, the passing of time helps heal our emotional wounds. In hindsight, the situation may not have been as serious or bad as it initially seemed.



Have I ever made this same mistake in the past?

Chances are yes. Knowingly or unknowingly, we have all made mistakes, and these mistakes probably brought great stress to others around us.



How easy is it for Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji to forgive someone?

It is very easy! Dwelling into the inspirational lives of these Gunatit Purusho provides an instant source of strength to forgive and transform our vision to see only virtues.

Lasting Thought

“*Atmiyata* is something that cannot be purchased from the market. Compared to the happiness that you experience by living with *Atmiyata*, the happiness from any and all materialistic things is like garbage.”



~ Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji

1965 -
2015



ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय

The auspicious day of October 10th, 2015 was truly historic. It marked the 50th year of Swamiji's *bhagvati dixadin*. It was on this day, 50 years ago, when Yogiji Maharaj gifted mankind by offering saffron robes to Prabhudasbhai, initiating Him into sainthood, and naming him Hariprasad Swamiji.

During this auspicious initiation ceremony, Yogiji Maharaj uttered words of blessings:



○ "In the village of Dhaban, Bhagwan Swaminarayan held a big *yagna* and initiated Gunatitanand Swami into sainthood. In the same way, we are initiating Prabhudasbhai into sainthood today.



○ Now that Prabhudasbhai has become a saint, he will inspire thousands to become *ekantik*.

○ Prabhudasbhai will be become happy, He will instill true bliss and happiness in others and take countless to *Akshardham*."

In this way, Yogiji Maharaj revealed Swamiji's true glory. There are no amount of words in the universe that can do justice to describe Swamiji's grace, glory, *bhedo*, and all He has done for us! A million bows of appreciation to Hariprasad Swamiji!

