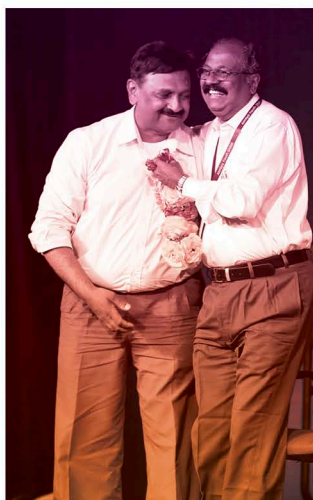
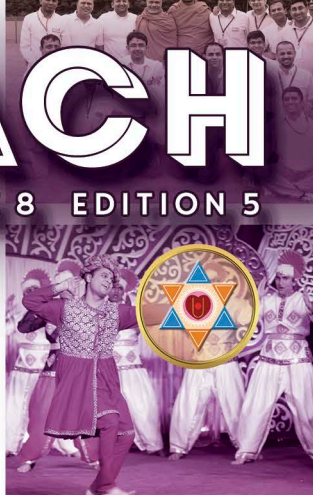


# OUTREACH

VOLUME 8 EDITION 5





# Taking One Step Forward

There are certain events many of us look forward to each year. Some of us look forward to certain sports' championship series while others look forward to social events. Regardless of what these annual events are, we anticipate them because they interest us and we gain enjoyment from them. However, there is one such annual event that inspires us to become better individuals and helps us live a more positive and focused life.

Full of entertainment, excitement, and positivity, this annual event is the *Atmiya* Youth Shibir (AYS). This year's AYS was held on the beautiful, pristine campus of the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown from July 1st-3rd, 2016. There were six saints who had travelled from Haridham, India, primarily to attend this *shibir*! All together, over 1850 people, from all across USA and Canada attended AYS 2016 over the course of three days!

Focusing on the overarching theme, One Step Forward, the AYS featured various speeches, dramas, presentations, videos, and interactive breakout sessions. Each component of the AYS was geared towards helping young minds learn the fundamental techniques to take one step forward each day, both towards their life goals and spiritual goals.

The first session of AYS was on the evening of Friday, July 1st. This session introduced the main theme of the *shibir*, 'One Step Forward.' This figurative step forward exemplifies any action which all the youths would sincerely commit to in order to please Swamiji. This would include something as simple as making personal commitments to refrain from watching movies, to attending weekly *sabha*, to something as difficult as



respecting their parents!

Next, a discourse of Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji was shown in which He shared a variety of motivational *prasangs*. P. Gungrahak Swami gave his discourse in this kick-off session before it was concluded and followed by a delicious dinner. After dinner, a unique 'Career Night' session was held in which the saints provided career and professional guidance infused with spiritual energy. Given that the majority of the youths in attendance were students or young working professionals, this session was truly insightful to one and all.

The following day, Saturday, July 2nd, consisted of an action packed schedule! The day began at 7:00 AM with a grand *samu pooja* in which all youths performed morning *pooja* together with all the saints in the main hall. Invigorated by the *pooja*, everyone enjoyed a delicious breakfast and then attended the morning session. The focus of this session was on imbibing two of Swamiji's favorite Vachanamruts, Pratham-16 and Pratham-18. Along with a cultural drama, saints and youths gave discourses on the importance of keeping our senses pure and keeping an ever-positive mindset and attitude, with one of the biggest takeaways being not to watch movies.



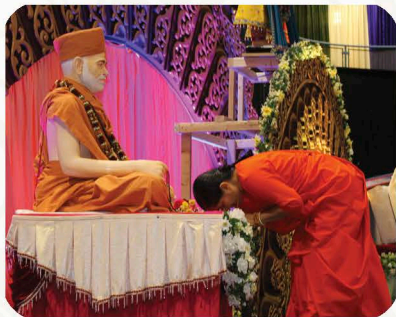
After lunch, the youths engaged in various sporting and recreational activities. It was a great time to relax, interact and connect with other attendees from across the USA and Canada. In parallel, the afternoon





featured a special program for women, led by P. Sarveshwarben, that focused on incorporating spiritual and cultural values in daily life.

The evening session included a phenomenal speech by P. Bhaktipriya Swami. He shared numerous inspirational incidents from Swamiji's life, and one of his main points was to keep firm *nishtha* (faith) and emphasized the importance and power of *swadhyay-bhajan* to develop this faith. Then there was a unique Q&A with P. Kishanji. He answered a wide variety of common questions which many youths encounter. P. Kishanji described Swamiji's perspectives in detail on many practical challenges that we may face on a daily basis.



The following morning was the final session of AYS. Two touching video clips from the prior day of Swamiji in Haridham were shown, in which Swamiji expressed His happiness over the wonderful *shibir* taking place halfway across the world in the USA. After an inspirational drama, there were youth speakers who highlighted the importance of doing *bhajan* at night to atone for any sins throughout the day and the importance of living with *Samp*, *Suhradbhav*, and *Ekta*. Then, four saints came on stage to share touching and motivational incidents from Swamiji's life. The AYS concluded with a roaring celebration from all the youths as they all firmly decided to take one step forward each day!

Although Swamiji was not physically present this year at AYS, everyone truly felt and experienced Swamiji's divine presence. Overall, AYS 2016 was a resounding success and like prior years, this year's AYS was bigger and better in every category! Perhaps now, it's time to start planning on attending next year's *Atmiya Youth Shibir*!

# A Special Mahila Program

A special session and Mahila Program for *yuvatis*, organized by *yuvatis*, was held on Saturday afternoon. This was a platform to bring women from all across North America together to discuss various leadership topics and foster cultural and spiritual values. The Mahila Program featured a memorable and enlightening cultural program integrated with dances, dramas, and *yuvatis* sharing their motivating experiences.



Sitting in the front row and gracing the audience with their presence were many *bhenos* from Bhakti Ashram (Haridham, India) including P. Sarveshwarben and P. Sahjibben. They provided tremendous inspiration to all the young women on how to be confident and goal-oriented leaders and how to imbibe Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji's spiritual messages into daily life.

The cultural program, which involved over 150 *yuvatis*, depicted the greatness of Swamiji and the impact He has had on countless lives. One dance performance on the *bhajan*, 'Sahajanand Swami Antaryami,' highlighted the divine encounter one experiences in Bhagwan's presence. Another performance on the *bhajan*, 'Tu Chale Mari Saath,' highlighted the miles that Swamiji traveled in order help devotees walk one step forward towards a purposeful life. Then, a drama titled, 'One Step Forward,' emphasized the necessity of taking refuge in a God-realized saint who can steer us on a positive path.



The program culminated with speeches by several *yuvatis*. They narrated how their life was transformed as a result of engaging in *satsang* and keeping a strong friendship with *bhagvadi bhenos* such as P. Sarveshwarben and P. Anamiben. They also shared their experiences on the hurdles they face and how to practically implement Swamiji's messages within our daily routine.

Due to Swamiji's inspirational messages and personal guidance by *bhenos*, the young women were able to recognize their shortcomings, learn the techniques to overcome them, and take one step forward on their spiritual journey. It was truly a memorable and inspiring program for all the *yuvatis*!



A unique question & answer session took place with P. Kishanji, the *bhagvadi* leader assigned by Guruhari Swamiji for many youths across USA.

**Question:** Swamiji emphasizes the importance of living according to Vachanamrut Gadhada Pratham-18. As youths, how can we develop the same seriousness and drive to live as per P-18?

**Kishanji:** Swamiji knows each and everything we are doing in our day-to-day lives. I have numerous personal experiences of this. From the day we start to firmly believe that Bhagwan and Swamiji are watching my each and every action, we will then begin to develop the alertness to live as per P-18. The more alertness we develop for this, the more Bhagwan will look out for us. The one technique that will help us strengthen this is doing *bhajan* from the very bottom of our hearts.

**Question:** How can we forgo our own strength and intellect, and take the strength from *bhajan* as Swamiji likes?

**Kishanji:** First and foremost, Swamiji says to do *bhajan* out loud in order to drain out any unnecessary thoughts. Second, do *bhajan* until we get tired. Third, we can do *bhajan* with the following faith and understanding - 'I have been admitted to the best college [*satsang*] in the universe. and Swamiji, who is impossible to attain in this universe, I have so easily attained. As a result, He will surely eradicate all of my deficiencies and ensure that I will complete my spiritual journey.' It is with this utmost faith and trust in Swamiji that we want to do *bhajan*.

**Question:** Swamiji has mentioned in many speeches that a youth tends to have a lot of *huhato*. What is *huhato*?

**Kishanji:** Swamiji has said that *huhato* is the consciousness of one's actions. It is a type of arrogance that naturally builds as a result of our capabilities and skills. This *huhato* develops for anyone, whether it is in our professional life, social life or spiritual life. The reason that this *huhato* exists and continues to grow is because we do not believe from the bottom of our hearts that all the success we are getting in our lives is due to the grace of Bhagwan. The solution to overcome *huhato* is to dwell into *prasango* of *Gunatit Purusho*



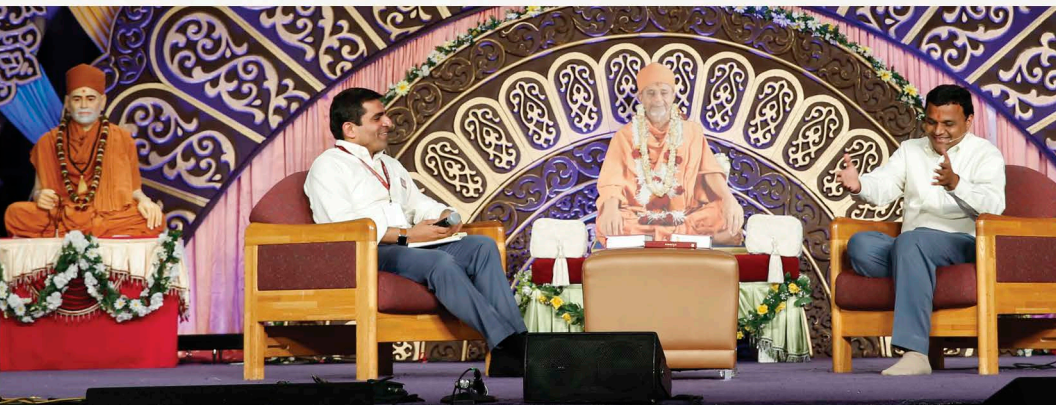
that relate to their humbleness. Set aside 10-15 such *prasangs* for oneself, and think over one *prasang* per week. In this way, one will slowly recognize the *huhato* in one's action and speech, and gain the strength to overcome it.

**Question:** How can I build an unshakeable and utmost sambandh (spiritual relationship) with Swamiji?

**Kishanji:** In Vachanamrut Gadhada Pratham-58, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says to continuously imbibe the virtues of Bhagwan and His saint. What does this mean? We can strive to continuously imbibe the virtues of Swamiji. If we sit down and think, 'If Swamiji was not in my life, who would have given me all of this guidance? Who would I have turned to in my darkest times? Who would I have turned to for the answer to my prayers?' In this way, we can continuously think over and appreciate what Swamiji has done for us and is doing even today. We are forever indebted to Swamiji. If we make sincere prayers with this understanding, Swamiji will make us instrumental in His divine service.

**Question:** After this *shibir* finishes and when we go home, how can we continue to have this same joy, enthusiasm and drive to please Swamiji?

**Kishanji:** Just this morning, Swamiji called me for the sixth time this weekend from India, asking specifically about this very *shibir* and the youths who have joined. Swamiji is very happy to hear that we attended this *shibir*. Furthermore, He gave an extraordinary blessing to all of us. He said, "Please have each youth in attendance make one strong commitment, 'I will not watch movies.' If they make this one commitment, then Bhagwan will fill their lives with utmost joy and He will personally ensure that they complete their spiritual journey."

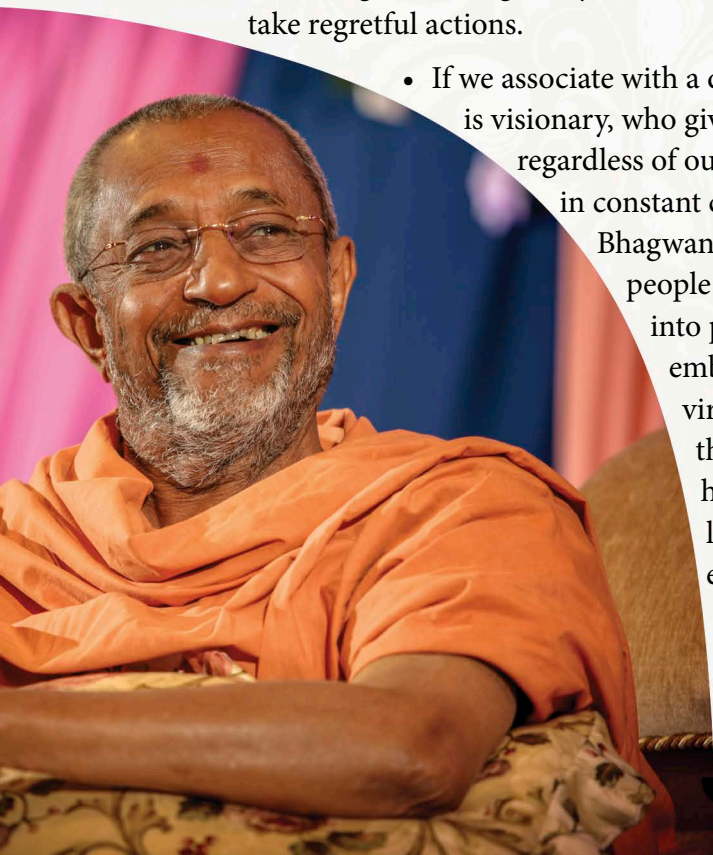


# Divine Messages from Swamiji

Throughout the three-day *shibir*, Guruhari Hariprasad Swamiji showered the youths with inspirational words in the format of videos. Below are highlights from Swamiji's discourse.

## Friday Evening Session

- Do not throw away your mind and body. By watching movies, eating meat, or chewing/smoking tobacco, we are staining our mind and body. We are covering the true spirit within our soul.
- We must walk away with this one thought: 'I really want to experience true happiness in life.' It is our base natures that are preventing us from becoming happy and only by associating with a *Gunatit Sant* can we overcome these natures. Only then can we experience true happiness.
- We must never allow a ghost to enter our body. If we see inappropriate things, if we listen to negative talks, or eat immoral food, then the ghost of negativity will control us and cause us to take regretful actions.
- If we associate with a divine saint who is visionary, who gives unending love regardless of our mistakes, who is in constant communion with Bhagwan, who can transform people with sinful natures into positive individuals, embodies each and every virtue, and who is beyond the limitation of a human body, then our lives will truly become enlightened.





## Saturday Morning Session

- To protect our Hindu culture, to teach the discipline of a man and a woman, to teach *vivek*, to remove *adharma*, to protect *dharma*, and to uplift a soul from the dirtiest pit and make it divine, that is why we have *shibirs*. Through *satsang*, your body will become a mandir and you will feel happy in life.
- Nobody can cheat God, regardless of where we are. We should have the understand of what we can eat, what we can look at, what we can say, and what kind of thoughts we should have.
- I am against movies because mankind does not have the strength to choose to eat, see and hear only positive things. They have the intelligence to know what is right and what is wrong, but who will give them the strength to make the right choices at the right times? Only a true saint can give us such strength.

## Sunday Morning Session

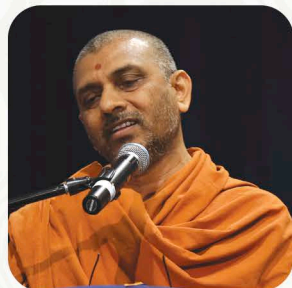
- By attending weekly *sabha* and keeping friends with saints and leaders, Bhagwan gives you three things for free:
  - ▷ *Nischinta* – A worriless and fearless life. Everyone has infinite amounts of worries; who does not want to become worry free?
  - ▷ *Shubh vichar* – An endless flow of positive thoughts.
  - ▷ Last birth – We will become free from the cycle of life and death. For this, engaging in *satsang* is inevitable.
- Give your leaders, saints, and *bhagvadi* the right to tell you your mistakes. Make such a friendship that they can immediately tell you your mistakes and correct your path. If you have this friendship you'll become happy in all aspects of life: socially, at home, and spiritually.
- If we make a firm decision to strengthen our friendship with four great friends and two saints, then, without us even realizing, all of the virtues will be ours, all our negativity will disappear, and any stubbornness, ego, and jealousy will be eradicated.

# Inspirational Words from Inspirational Saints

In attendance at AYS were several saints who Swamiji sent from India especially to give guidance to the youths. In the course of the AYS, these saints shared many inspirational *prasangs* and guidelines to live a pious and joyful life in accordance to Swamiji's liking.

## P. Dharmakishor Swami

- ✿ Because Swamiji is not here, everyone starts to say that now they get to relax more but what we really have to understand is the fact that Swamiji is with us at all times, if not physically, then definitely within our hearts!
- ✿ One devotee asked Swamiji how he can become *Atmiya* with others. Swamiji told him to tell everyone in the mandal, "Become das with each other and remember the slogan, '*Koi Atmiya bane ke na bane, pan he Prabhu, mane Atmiya banavshoji*', then they will enter into *Atmiyata* and *Suhradbhav*."



## P. Gungrahak Swami

- ✿ Swamiji is a visionary saint who can see beyond these walls and forecast our future. Whenever He offers us any advice, we must put our mind and intellect aside and follow His advice. Then we will avert any misfortunes in life and reach unimaginable heights, both socially and spiritually.
- ✿ There was once a family that constantly argued and fought. The youth in the family came in contact with a few friends who introduced him to weekly *sabha*. In a few short months of attending *sabha*, the youth's life drastically changed and he completely lost his angry nature. Realizing that their child now responded with humility and respect in the midst of any family arguments, the entire atmosphere of the household became positive.
- ✿ We could be living together in one household, but if we cannot tolerate





each other's natures and personalities, then arguments will become common and life will seem burdensome. But if we understand Swamiji's messages of *Atmiyata* and ask Him for strength, only then can we overcome our deficiency and live in true harmony.

### P. Anandsagar Swami

- ✿ Whenever we feel depressed or feel we do not have the strength or memory to study well, make a wholehearted prayer and do *bhajan* for 15 minutes. Swamiji is always listening. He will undoubtedly give us immense strength.
- ✿ Swamiji once said, "A youth can become whatever he/she desires, however, three things are a must: 1) attending weekly *sabha*, 2) strong friendship with saints and *bhagvadi* leaders, and 3) sincere prayer and *bhajan* at night."
- ✿ If we do not waste a single second in our life, then that is considered *seva-bhakti* for Swamiji.



### P. Bhaktipriya Swami

- ✿ Coming to the temple regularly is essential to remain connected with Bhagwan and experience true peace of mind.
- ✿ A youth came to the temple after eating non-vegetarian food and felt really guilty. He felt from within that he should stop eating it, but lacked the strength. After openly confessing to a saint at the temple and after performing *bhajan* in front of *Thakorji*, his mind became peaceful and the thought of eating non-vegetarian never arose again.
- ✿ Throughout the *shibir* we all must have decided to take one step forward everyday by engaging in various techniques. However, there are two very important things to try to follow. First, make all arrangements to attend a weekly youth *sabha*. And second, develop a strong friendship with *bhagvadi* leaders at the temple such that they can show you your mistakes at any time.

