



Message From Our Spiritual Head Vaishnavacharya Shri Dwarkeshlalji Mahodayshri

Sarve Vaishnavo ne Nava Varsh ni Shubhkamnao

'2020 was a difficult year that came with many challenges. But it was also a year which has presented us with the opportunity to perform even more *Seva*, *Satsang* and *Manoraths* than ever before. Internationally, we ran so many *Satsangs* and *Manoraths* and even at home we grew our *Seva*. Looking at all the *Satsangs* and *Utsavs*, it felt like the whole year was 12 months of *Adhik Maas* and not a year dominated by *Covid*.

Along with this, when the time to support the community came, we all stood together. All the *Vaishnav Sanghs* internationally, and locally, *VSUK*, *Shrinathdham* and *Vrajdharm Havelis* stood with the community and supported one another, and I congratulate you all for all your efforts. To everyone that supported all these activities as volunteers and *Manorathis*, I send my blessings.

2020 has now come to an end - and it has taught us a lot. It taught us to appreciate family and close relations, and showed us the importance of maintaining relationships. We learned that we can't live on our own and we can't live in a tied condition, without our freedom. 2020 taught us what our true wealth is. We learned that our money was useless if the shops were closed. We saw in 2020 that the only *Dhan* (wealth) was *Bhagwat Naam* (Taking *Shree Thakorji's* name). We learned *Hari Jan Ko Bado Dhan Hari Naam* (the true wealth of *Vaishnavs* is taking their *Hari's* name), and I am pleased to see how much we took *Bhagwat Naam*.

For those of us that lost our close ones this year, I pray to *Shree Thakorji* to accept these souls to His blessed feet, and give the families the strength to cope with their loss. May we start the new year with a new light of positivity. This verse from the *Upanishad* comes to mind:

*asato ma sadgamaya
tamaso ma jyotirgamaya
mrtiyorma amrtam gamaya*

Lead me from illusion to truth.
Lead me from darkness to light.
Lead me from death to immortality.

Perhaps the *Amrut* (nectar) that will take us away from this *Mrutyu* (death) of *Covid* has come toward the end of 2020 in the form of the vaccine. Even in the *Vedas*, in the story of the churning of the ocean, the poison comes first followed by the nectar - in this way toward the end of 2020 we have got some *Amrut*.

The world is heading towards cleanliness, particularly physical cleanliness. However we have to remember that only physical health isn't enough. We need to be clean from the mind, the soul and the intelligence. When there was chaos everywhere in 2020, the activities that temples have done to support people's mental and holistic health is worth remembering. Those that opposed

temples understood the need for such institutions. It is not just hospitals that keep us healthy - yes, they can keep us physically healthy and improve the health of those that are ill. However, to maintain the health of those that are healthy - we need mental and spiritual health and the temples provided that in the form of *Satsangs*, *Bhakti* and *Seva*.

Once again, I pray that 2021 can be a new beginning for us, and may you all continue to grow in your *Bhaav* to serve *Shree Thakorji* and His *Vaishnavs*, and support one another through *VSUK*, as you have done so in 2020.'

1st January 2020 - Welcome 2021 - Krishna leela no Anero Utsav

Leela - Shree Gusainji's Pragatya Utsav

Shree Gusainji's Pragatya utsav is also called *Jalebi Utsav*. This utsav falls on the 9th day of the dark fortnight of the month *Magsar*. This utsav was celebrated by *Shreenathji* himself, as a surprise celebration for *Shree Gusainji - Je Je Shree amusingly says that Shree Thakorji started this practice of surprise birthday parties!* Here on that day, *Shreeji* Himself ordered to prepare *jalebis* on this day to celebrate the birthday of *Shree Gusainji*. From that day onwards, to this very present day on the utsav of *Shree Gusainji*, *jalebis* are prepared and offered to *Shreeji*, which He lovingly partakes. That is why this utsav is called *jalebi utsav*.

On this day, on the various *Baithakjis* of *Shree Gusainji*, the *Vaishnavs* celebrate *AapShree's* birthday by taking the sacred bath and then by filling *Jhaariji* and offering *dhoti - uparna* and *jalebi*, and performing *kesar snaan* and *aarti* and offering *bhet* and then doing *Charan sparsh*. Here also, just like in *Krishna avatar*, where, *Baldevji* was the first born and second born was *Shree Krishna*, *Gopinathji* who is *Baldevji's* avatar was born first and then *Shree Gusainji*, the Lord himself was born second.



SHREE GUSAINJI



SHREE MAHAPRABUJI

In accordance to Shreeji's wish, when the time of incarnation of Shree Gusainji was nearing, Shree Vallabhacharyaji settled down with his family in *Charnaat* which is known as '*Aadhi Daivik Vrindaavan*' in the *Pauranik* Scriptures. On the auspicious day of *Maagsar Vad Navmi* in the *Samvat* 1572, (Friday in the English calendar), under the auspicious star of '*Hasta*' in '*Shobhan Yog*', Shree Gusainji was born.

The agony or pangs of separation from the Lord which Shree Vallabh was constantly going through, came to an end when Shree Gusainji (Lord Krishna himself) was born. This *Pragatya* or incarnation of the Lord in the form of Shree Gusainji has been very correctly described by Gopaldas in the Third *Aakhyaan* (of Shree Vallabh *Aakhyaan*).

Shree Vallabh very enthusiastically celebrated the birth of Shree Gusainji by following all the practices of Ved Karma and by giving away *Daan* (Alms) to the befitting and duly honoured them. On the 12th day, Barahi, or the naming ceremony day, the child was named Shree Vitthalnathji. This was so because on the day of Shree Gusainji's *Pragatya*, a Brahmin bearing the *Jhaanpiji*, with the *swaroop* of Shree Vitthalnathji arrived at the doorstep of Shree Vallabh's house. The Brahmin said that he was instructed by Shree Vitthalnathji to take Him to Shree Vallabh's house to be served there by Shree Vallabh. Saying this, the Brahmin presented Shree Vitthalnathji's *swaroop* to Shree Mahaprabhuji and also requested Mahaprabhuji to accept him as a disciple. Accepting this as the Lord's wish, Shree Vallabh kept the *swaroop* in His place of worship and took the Brahmin as His disciple. In this manner, the Lord was united with Shree Vallabh, both as His deity (*swaroop*) to be revered, as well as in the form of a child. So, the child was named as Shree Vitthalnathji.



Je Je Shree thus instructs us not to differentiate between Shree Gusainji, Shree Mahaprabhuji and Shree Thakorji. This is also highlighted in the 84 Vaishnav Varta of Damlaji, where Shree Mahaprabhuji instructs Damlaji to see Shree Gusainji not as His son, but as His own *swaroop*.

Shree Gusainji Param Dayal ki Jai!

Basics Of Pushtimarg : Thakorji na Ashta Sakha (Thakorji's 8 devotional poets)

Shree Guainji is known for adding 3 pillars of Seva in Pushtimarg, as follows:

- *Raag* (*Paads* - Bhakti Sangeet / devotional music)
- *Bhog* (Food lovingly prepared for and offered to Shree Krishna)
- *Shringar & Vastra* (Dressing up Thakorji with beautiful clothes, headwear and jewellery adornments).

Of these, *Raag* (i.e. Paad) is considered a rich and important tradition in Pushtimarg. The *Ashta Chhap* or *Ashta Sakha* poets were the eight devotional poets of Shree Thakorji who composed and sang *paads* (songs or poems) for him.

Shree Thakorji's seva is performed during the 8 darshan times according to the various seasons and days of the year. During each of these eight darshans, Shree Thakorji's *Ashta Sakha* sing various *Paads* with different *Bhaav* (sentiment) accordingly. (The darshans are *Mangla*, *Shringar*, *Gwal*, *Rajbhog*, *Utthapan*, *Bhog*, *Sandhya Aarti* and *Shayan*)

Four of the *Ashta Sakhas*, namely Surdasji, Kumbhandasji, Krishnadasji and Paramanandasji were the disciples of Shree Vallabh. The other four, Govindswamiji, Chhitsuamiji, Nanddasji and Chaturbhujdasji were the disciples of Shree Gusainji. Surdasji is the most famous amongst the *Ashta Sakhas*, and he composed 125,000 *paads* during his lifetime (108 Years).

The *Ashta Chhap* poets' poetry/songs (*paads*) are extremely special because they are purely devotional reflections (*bhaav*) of their personal experiences with Shree Krishna. By Shree Thakorji's grace, their souls were experiencing an eternal blissful union with Shree Krishna and they eternally participated in His divine *leelas*. They composed and sang the *paads* at the same time that they had *darshan* of the *leela*, hence the very vivid and meaningful recitations that we have the benefit of even today. For each *leela*, they composed the most appropriate *paads*, and the *paads* have been integrated with every one of the eight *darshans* of Thakorji and even after 500 years, these *paads* are still sung in Pushtimarg Havelis.

Worldly poets create poetry from the power of their imagination (*kalpana*), and the semi-inspired devotional poets create poetry from their perception (*bhavna*) of the sentiments and experiences sited by other self-realised beings through their scriptural writings. The *Ashta Sakhas* however, created poetry from their full comprehension and personal experience with Shree Thakorji in His *leelas*.

Thus, in all the *paads*, there is '*Cheet-astat pravanam*', which means that these kirtans and *paads*, when sung in Seva, bring our minds (*cheet*) into *seva-bhaav* and in turn our hearts get fully attached (*hraday-bhaav*) to Shree Thakorji and we experience the *bhaav* of His *leelas*. At that moment in Seva, we experience *param anand* - ultimate bliss.

