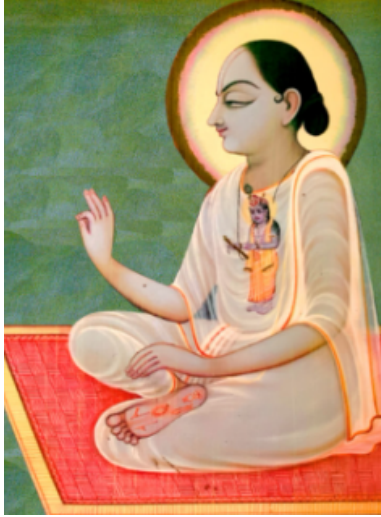




Granth - Yamunashtak

Shri Mahaprabhuji came on this earth with a holy mission to imbibe pure faith and of love towards Shri Krishna in Pushti souls. *Sodash Granth* (Sixteen Doctrines) is a collection of 16 sacred texts composed by Shri Mahaprabhuji which He manifested to empower disciples with the knowledge of Shri Krishna's divinity and greatness. This would then enable them to perform *seva* (selfless service) of Shri Krishna and hence experience *anand* (bliss) that arises from *gyan* (knowledge) and *seva* (service). The '*Sodash Granth*' is also known as '*Vallabh-Geeta*' because it has all the principles of Pushtimarg.



The first volume of the *Sodash Granth* is the '*Yamunashtakam*' which was composed by Shri Vallabh at the age of 14 on the banks of Shri Yamuna at Vishram Ghat in Mathura. This was when Shri Yamunaji Herself appeared in front of Shri Vallabh for the first time. Shri Yamunaji is considered '*Yamuna Maa*' i.e. mother Yamuna by vaishnavs and *Yamunashtakam* is considered to be the *Mangalacharan* (Auspicious Beginning) of the *Sodash Granth*.



Below is a summary description of the *Yamunashtak*:

Shri Yamunashtakam begins by paying respect to Shri Yamunaji by bowing down to her. It then describes Her divinity and therefore, Her significance. Shri Yamunaji is the daughter of the divine Sun and the sister of Yamaji. She descended through the *Kalind* Mountain (Mountain in the Himalayan Region in Uttarakhand, India) to bless her devotees. Her physical state as a river is also very attractive and charming. She is beautiful with pearl-like glamorous sand and lush green garden on both banks and a river full of crystal bright splashing water. This is accompanied by a rippling sound of water flow and a sweet smell.

Shri Yamunaji is the fourth and favourite queen of Shri Krishna and a dear friend of *Padma* (Lotus). Lotus or *Kamal* is also very close to *Laxmiji* (God of Wealth). Shri Yamunaji is served by her dear ones like parrots, peacocks and swans. She is so kind that she blesses everyone including evil spirited people. So, if one prays to her with knowledge and understanding, one shall surely get her blessings. Shri Yamunaji is also the sister of *Yamaji*, the Lord of death. Hence, just by drinking Shri Yamunaji's water, devotees don't have to worry about the pain of death. By taking a dip in Shri Yamunaji, the soul and body of the devotees become cleansed and pious.

In the last stanza, Shri Mahaprabhuji states that one who cheerfully recites all the nine stanzas of the *Yamunashtakam* will be free from all sins and their hearts will be filled with love for Shri Krishna. With that, one will be able to transform their nature and please Shri Krishna with divinity in their hearts.

Utsav - Janmashtami & Nandmahotsav

Shri Krishna's *Janmashtami* (Birth on Eighth day) is one of the most important festivals of the year and is called by various names such as *Shri Krishna Jayanti*, *Janmashtami* or *Gokul Ashtami*. This festival is celebrated on the eighth day after the full moon in the month of *Shravan*. This year, it fell on 7th September 2023. Following this day, *Nandmahotsav* is celebrated with grandeur each year to express of the joy of Shri Krishna's arrival to Nand Gaam. This year, it fell on 8th September 2023. It is celebrated with great devotion throughout and outside of India.

Shri Krishna was born on a dark, stormy, and windy night. On the very day of His birth, through his divinity, He opened his parents jail doors and encouraged *Vasudevji* (His father) to take him to *Nandbaba's* (His foster father) home in *Gokul* (place near the banks of river Yamuna in Uttar Pradesh, India). *Vasudevji* safely transported him to *Gokul* by crossing Yamunaji through the night. Here, the residents lovingly addressed Little Krishna with endearing names such as *Yashodanandan*, *Kanha*, *Gopal*, *Kanhaiya* etc. Krishna displayed His divinity right from his infant years through several *Leelas* (Acts or Episodes).

The excitement and joy begins on the days leading up to *Janmashtami*. Preparations for the festival begin much in advance. For instance, Shri Thakorji's *vastra* (clothes) are dipped in *kesar* (saffron) on the *Panchami* (Fifth day) before the *Ashtami* (Eighth day) in major temples including *Nathdwara* (temple in

Udaipur where the *pragatya swaroop* i.e. the self-appeared form of Shrinathji currently resides). Temples and households are decorated with lights and flowers. Vaishnavs fast during the festival and break their fast at a midnight, when Shri Krishna was born. Janmashtami ki *Badhai* (type of *Kirtans* signifying celebration) are also sung before Shri Thakorji. These can be sung as early as a month in advance.



On *Janmashtami*, Shri Thakorji is bathed with *Panchamrut* (Combination of 5 divine elements). It includes yoghurt, milk, honey, ghee and sugar. Shri Thakorji is adorned saffron vastra that reflect the affection that Shri Krishna and Shri Swaminiji share for each other. The *pichhvaayi* (backdrop) is red in colour, a hue that increases the thrill of the joyous mood. Shri Krishna wears peacock feathers and ornaments filled with jewels. A tiger-nail locket is also adorned to guard Him. The conch shell is blown, and Shri Thakorji appears at mid-night. Devotees sing and dance with joy and prepare a variety of *samagri* (food offerings) for their beloved Lord Shri Krishna, who entered the world to shower grace over them.



Sab Mil Mangal Gaavo Maai.... (Raag Dhanashri, Taal Tritaal)

Aaj Laal ko janmdyoshaibajat rang badhai....1

Aanganlepo chowk puravo, viprapadhan laage ved

Karo shringar shyamsundar ko, chovachandan med....2

Sab Mil Mangal Gaavo Maai

Aanand Bhari Nandju ki Raani, phooli ang nasamaai (Chalti)

Parmananddas tihinausar, bahot nyochavar paai....3

Mangal gaavo Maai Sab Mil, Mangal gaavo Maai

Today is the day of extreme joy in Vraj and all the Vrajvasis are saying "Let us all sing the auspicious songs" because...

Today is the birthday of our beloved Shri Krishna. The songs of celebration accompanied by the instruments have painted a picture of love and happiness in the environment

The courtyard has been smeared with sandalwood, the floor is decorated with pearls and the Brahmins are chanting the Ved mantras

Fragrance, sandalwood and all the aromatic materials have been applied to Shri Thakorji after which he has been adorned with beautiful jewels

Nandrani Shri Yashodaji's heart is overwhelmed with happiness due to her son's birthday

Parmanddasji with extreme excitement says that, "I have received lots of blessings on this wonderful occasion"

On the day following Shri Krishna's birth, *Nandmahotsav* is celebrated as it marks the beginning of celebrations in the house of *Nandbawa* and *Yashodamaiya* in *Gokul*. Little Krishna is swung in a *Palna* (Cradle) in temples and at home. Nandotsavis filled with excellent zeal and enthusiasm. Bhakts joyfully sing '*Nand Gher Anand Bhayo, Jai Kanhaiya Lal Ki*' and dance with immense pleasure. It means that the house of *Nandbawa* is cheerful, all hail victory to Shri Krishna. On *Nanadotsav*, milk and curd mixed with turmeric are sprinkled over everyone as they sing and dance within the festive celebration.

Also, on *Nandmahotsav*, Shri Krishna's *Makhan Chori* (Stealing White Butter) leela is recreated; devotees form human pyramids to break a pot of *makhan* (White Butter) tied high up a height which is out of their reach otherwise and distribute this butter amongst friends and family. It is an occasion of joy and celebration for every household.

Tirth - Girirajji

Once Shri Swaminiji i.e. Shri Radhaji requested Shri Krishna to create a divine place for their *leelas* (acts) near Vrindavan. Shri Krishna then started thinking of ways to fulfil Her request. At that moment, the *prem rasa* (nectar of love) from Gopi's love for Shri Krishna manifested physically from Shri Thakorji's heart. This physical manifestation began taking a solid form that gradually expanded to cover a large area. In that, several cascades, waterfalls, trees, etc. were present. Within some moments, it expanded to several miles and developed into several ranges, to become a spectacular large mountain. Various divine beings took the form of birds and animals like parrots, peacocks, cows, and deer's, and appeared on the mountain so they could be present with Shri Thakorji in His *leelas*. The mountain was also full of white crystals and looked gorgeous, studded with gems like diamonds, sapphires, emeralds etc. Inside of the mountain resided all six seasons at the same time. There were two loving homes for each season. One home was full of flowers and other one full of jewels. The splendid homes inside had all the facilities for various *leelas* (acts) of *Yugal Swaroop* (Young Couple) of Shri Thakorji and Shri Swaminiji. It was called as '*Shatshrung*' meaning something that is entirely developed and is flourishing. Shri Radhaji was immensely pleased.

This beloved mountain which is today known as Mount Govardhan or Girirajji and situated in *Gokul* (place in Uttar Pradesh, India) was originally situated near Dunagiri mountain and is considered to be the son of Mount Dunagiri. Dunagiri also known as *Dronachal Parvat* is the one of the high peaks of the Chamoli District Himalayas in the northern Indian state of Uttar

Pradesh. At that time, Mount Govardhan was of very huge expanse (80 km long, 20 km high and 50 km broad). Because it was so beautiful and flourishing, Rishi Pulastya was pleased with it and wanted to take it along with him to Varanasi (City near Ganga river in the northern part of India). At that time, Girirajji told Pulastya Rishi that wherever it is placed once, Shri Girirajji shall reside there. On the way, Girirajji increased His own weight, becoming so heavy that Rishi Pulastya had to place the mountain down in *Gokul*, after which it would not budge. This is because Shri Girirajji really wanted to reside in *Gokul*, where Lord Shri Krishna spent His childhood. Rishi Pulastya felt tricked because the mountain would not move again, Rishi Pulastya cursed the divine mountain, saying that it would reduce by the size of a mustard seed each day. Since that day, Mount Govardhan is reducing in height and is now just 100 feet tall.



The *leela* of Lord Shri Krishna holding the Mount Govardhan on the little finger of His left hand when He was just 7 years old for 7 days to protect the *Vrajvasis* (Residents of Vraj, area near river Yamuna in Uttar Pradesh, India) from heavy the rain by the wrath of Lord Indra is one of Shri Krishna's most significant *leelas*. Also, later in the 15th century C.E., our beloved Shrinathji appeared from Govardhan Parvat, the same time when Shri Mahaprabhuji also appeared on this Earth.

Hence, Shri Girirajji holds utmost importance in Pushtimarg. Shri Krishna was the first one to do the *poojan* (spiritual ritual) and *parikrama* (circumnavigate) of Shri Girirajji, which was then followed by Shri Mahaprabhuji and Gusainji, who also offered milk to Shri Girirajji. This ritual is followed even today. Mount Govardhan is in present day Jatipura which is 20 kms away from Mathura Uttar Pradesh, India.



The *parikrama* (circumnavigation) can be done in either of the following ways:

- i. On Foot – Barefoot, singing kirtans and reciting *Ashtakshar Mantra* i.e. “*Shri Krushna Sharnam Mamah*”
- ii. *Doodh Dhara* – In addition to above, a pot of milk is carried with a small hole at the base such that milk is also continuously flowing
- iii. *Dandvati* – This isn't done on bare foot, but by doing *sashtang dandvat* (prostrate) along the whole path. This takes longer than both of the above.

It is said that every *Vaishnav* (followers of Pushtimarg) must do *Govardhan parikrama* (circumnavigation) at least once in their lifetime and experience the bliss of being present in the beloved land of Lord Shri Krishna.



Getting to Know Youth Group Members

Name: Prem Popatiya

Committee Role: North London Rep - Identifying Vaishnavs who are in the area and connecting them to the Vaishnav family.

What I do: Learning music production and Indian classical music

What I enjoy: Singing kirtans, composing music, talking, laughing and eating

Something I couldn't live without: My Harmonium, Tabla, food and talking to my best friend

Favourite food/colour/person, etc.: Food - traditional Indian food, Colour - Blue, Person - My Best Friend

Fun fact: Big Foodie, especially sweet dishes

What I love about Pushtimarg: Singing kirtans in front of Vallabhkul and Thakorji, listening to the leelas of Shri Thakorji

What I'm looking forward to with the youth group: Forming friendships and doing seva together

What I enjoy about the youth group: Friendship, performing seva together, achieving new goals and targets



Did you know?

Q - Why is Tulsi Mala (Holy Basil necklace) called 'Kanthi' and always worn in the neck?

A – Every person's body is divided into two parts: *Mastak* (Head) and *Dhad* (Torso). The part that connects these two is the *Kanthi* (Neck). There is *Gyan* (Knowledge) in the head and *Karma* (Actions) in the Torso. To keep these actions and knowledge both full of *Bhakti* (Devotion), there is *Bhaktiroopi Kanth* (Devotional Neck) and hence we always wear it around the neck and call it *Kanthi*. Every single one of our thought and deed must touch *Paramatma* (the Lord) in the form of 'Kanthi' before it goes out to anyone. This is the specialty of a 'Vaishnav' (Devotees of Pushtimarg).

Q – Why do we do *Apras* (maintain purity) when doing *seva*?

A – *Apras* in simple terms signifies *Shuddhi* i.e. purity. In our scriptures, it is said that you should serve someone with the qualities they possess, and as Thakorji is *pavitra* (pious), we must also serve him with full purity. This purity should not only be from outside i.e. just taking a bath, it should also be from within. Just like a doctor maintains cleanliness when he goes into an operation, we should maintain cleanliness when we go into *seva*, cleanliness of mind, heart and body, to serve Shri Thakorji.

Q – Why is Shri Thakorji's *Mukut* (Crown) slant or bent and not straight?

A – The bent crown suggests that Shri Thakorji is inclined towards His *Bhaktas* (devotees). It also reflects the quality of Humility in Shrinathji.

Past Event Description

Sodash Granth Saptah Mahotsav - Aug 2023

The Sodash Granth Saptah Mahotsav was held between 12th to 18th August 2023, hosted by Vaishnav Sangh of UK in the divine presence of Vaishnavacharya Shree Dwarkeshlalji Mahodayashree (Kadi, Ahmedabad) at Harrow Leisure Centre, Harrow, London.



The 16 sacred texts or the *Sodash Granth* were composed by our beloved Shri Mahaprabhuji. They are a form of sixteen Divine Ornaments that adorn the hearts of the *Vaishnavas* (followers of Pushtimarg). This event enlightened us about the immensely valuable principles and knowledge that these texts hold. On the occasion, the stage was beautifully decorated with sunrise amidst mountains and a river blooming with lotus flowers where Shree Mahaprabhuji was seated and, in His presence, we were all blessed with the *Vachnamrut* (divine words) of our beloved

words) of our beloved Jeeshri. Every attendee was blessed with immense knowledge from Jeeshri.

The *Granth*s (scriptures) were beautifully presented in original text with Gujarati and English translations and their meanings. Each day began with offering *Tilak* and *Malaji* (or flowers) to the *Granth*s. There were different *Manorath*s (Celebrations) everyday including Kunj Manorath, Daan Leela 56 Handi Manorath, Nand Mahotsav, Rasiya Gaan and Fulfaag Manorath.

Also, the *Granthotsav* was celebrated with great grandeur as the Youth group walked throughout the hall with the flags of *Granth*s who were also supported by all the *Vaishnav*s with the flags. It was a spectacular representation of Jeeshri's vision to bless each and every household with a copy of the *Granth*s.



Kirtans were sung throughout, further elevating the experience. Every day, *katha* (typically story, but here refers to the event) was followed by *Prashad* (food offered to Shri Thakorji).

A massive thank you to all the Trustees, Volunteers, Caterers, Manorathis and the Donors to make this event such a memorable experience.



Upcoming Events

- Navratri at Shrinathdham Haveli:

Details/Register at bit.ly/navvillas

- Diwali:

12th November

- VSUK Vaishnav Youth Group Monthly Satsangs:

*Online through **Zoom** (Date/Time TBC)*

- Sanjhi Seva at Shrinathdham Haveli:

*Contact **Reema Kotecha: 07711 299 800***