

## Granth - Yamunashtakam



The Yamunashtakam is the first of the Sodash Granths (16 doctrines written by Shri Mahaprabhuji) and was written in 1549 when Shri Mahaprabhuji was 14 years old. As it is the first Granth in the Shodash Granth, it is seen as a *Mangalacharan* (auspicious beginning). The context behind the granth is that Shri Mahaprabhuji was in Gokul and was unsure about the location of the Thakurani Ghat and Govind Ghat as they were both on opposite sides. At this moment, Shree Yamunaji appeared and guided Him by pointing out the different Ghats to Him. She appeared as a 16-year-old Goddess, the form seen in most *Chitrajis* (photos) today. Shri Mahaprabhuji, at that very moment composed the Yamunshatakam Stotram in praise of Shri Yamunaji. This took place on the day now known as Thakurani Teej.

The Yamunashtakam consists of nine verses. The first eight of these are in praise of Yamuna Maa and the ninth describes the fruits of reciting the Yamunashtakam. The benefits of reciting the Yamunashtakam include: *Krupa* (grace) of Shri Yamunaji which enhances love of Shri Krishna, the purification of sins, the removal of obstacles in devotion, a divine body fit for seva and many more.

The Yamunashtakam starts by bowing down to Shri Yamunaji and describes the beauty of Her form as a river, which is understood as her *Adhibautik Swaroop* (her physical form on this earth). It then moves on to describing her *Adhyatmik* (spiritual) form as a Goddess who grants wishes and accepts prayers. Finally, the Yamunashtakam talks about Shri Yamunaji's true divine form, her *Adhidaivik* form of being the beloved of Shri Krishna who graces all His devotees. Therefore, through the Yamunashtakam, Shri Mahaprabhuji reveals the three main forms of Shri Yamunaji and gives us a way to praise and glorify Shri Yamunaji.

The power of the Yamunashtakam is clearly demonstrated through the story of Kishori Bai, a dear Vaishnav of Shri Gusainji. She was blind, paralysed, and was losing her memory and due

this was unable to do Seva. Initially her sister came to care for her daily, but slowly stopped doing so. Thus Kishori Bai, searching for divine refuge kept reciting just half a *Shloka* (verse) of the Yamunashtakam which she remembered. On hearing just the half shloka which she recited with true love and devotion, Shri Yamunaji started to take care of Kishori Bai daily under the guise of her sister. Kishori Bai was only informed that Shri Yamunaji Herself was caring for her when Shri Gusainji came to visit Kishori Bai and told her. This shows how powerful the Yamunashtakam is and additionally how graceful Shri Yamunaji is.

## Ekadashi

The principle behind Ekadashi is not just to fast, but to increase one's faith and love for Shri Krishna. The reason for observing a fast during Ekadashi is to minimise the demands of the body and to utilise our time in performing *Seva* (service) for Shri Thakorji.

A month in the Hindu calendar is split into 2 fortnights, the first fortnight is called Shukla Paksh and the second fortnight is called Krishna Paksh. Ekadashi is the eleventh day of the fortnight in a lunar month.



Fasting helps one to control their senses and mind through self-discipline. It begins at sunrise and ends at sunrise the following day. An Ekadashi fast in its simplest manner can be carried out by refraining from eating grains, beans, lentils, certain spices, and certain vegetables. Typical fasting foods include fruits, nuts, milk, ghee and certain root vegetables such as potatoes and cassava. Not only food, but also sleep is supposed to be reduced, so that we have more time to spend with Thakorji.

Shri Mahaprabhuji has given *Agya* (Instruction) to perform all Ekadashis, so as Vaishnavs we must try our best to carry out this instruction.

## Tirth - 84 Bethakji

Shri Mahaprabhuji, whilst getting ready to leave this world, told his devotees not to fear as he will continue to reside eternally in several ways, allowing his devotees to experience him always. He mentioned that he would always reside in his Bethakjis, therefore as Vaishnavs it is incredibly important for us to understand the importance that these Bethakjis hold.



Shri Mahaprabhuji travelled the length of India thrice to fulfil his mission of reconnecting divine souls to the service of Shri Thakorji and the path of Pushtimarg. During these travels, any of the places in which he resided and

preached on texts such as the Shrimad Bhagwat, Bhagvad Gita or the Ramayan are known as Bethakjis. There are 84 known Bethakjis within India. In each of these 84 places, small shrines have been built to commemorate the presence of Shri Mahaprabhuji, as well as the story which they represent. These 84 Bethakjis are located from Rameshwaram in the south to Badrinath in the north, highlighting how far he travelled.

There are specific Seva (service) which Vaishnavs are able to perform when going to Bethakjis. Unlike Havelis, at Bethakjis Vaishnavs are allowed to serve their beloved Mahaprabhuji. One can enter the Bethakji in a state of *Apras* (cleanliness) and can perform the service of *Jhari*, as well as *Charansparsh*. In *Jhariji* seva, the *Jhariji* (water container) is filled and offered to Shri Mahaprabhuji. One can also perform *Charansparsh* (touching the feet of the Bethakji). There are sixteen *chinhas* (symbols) on the soles of the feet of Shri Mahaprabhuji which are the combination of the chinhas of Shri Krishna and Shri Swaminiji. A Vaishnav can also recite certain *paath* (prayers and doctrines) at a Bethakji. There are three main paath to be performed at a Bethakji - the *Sarvottam Stotra*, the *Sfurat Krishna Prem Amrut* and finally the *Vallabhashtakam*.

## Notable Bethaks

Whilst all of the 84 Bethaks are incredibly important and are associated with a specific *Leela* (pastime) of Shri Mahaprabhuji, there are two in specific which are significant to the development of Pushtimarg: the Bethakjis of Govind Ghat and Anyor.

During his first journey throughout India, Mahaprabhuji arrived at Govind Ghat, Gokul on the banks of the river Yamuna. At this Bethakji, Shri Krishna appeared in front of Shri Mahaprabhuji and told him that that he would accept any *jeeva* (soul) who Shri Mahaprabhuji gives *Brahmasabandh* to. This event took place on the day of Pavitra Ekadashi and the Bethakji of Govind Ghat is therefore remembered as a place where one of the most important events in the history of Pushtimarg took place.

The second Bethakji in Anyor marks the residence of Sadu Pande, a significant Vaishnav. Shri Mahaprabhuji was given instructions by Shri Thakorji to come to Vraj where he would reveal his full *Swaroop* (form) out of the Govardhan mountain and establish his Seva in the world. Shri Mahaprabhuji rushed to Govardhan and stayed at the house of Sadu Pande thus making his home a Bethakji of Shri Mahaprabhuji. It was at this site that Shri Mahaprabhuji and Shri Thakorji met for the first time marking the *Pratham Milan*. After this first meeting, Shri Mahaprabhuji established Shri Thakorji's Seva, making this Bethakji incredibly significant.

## Diwali Mela

The Diwali Mela on the 5th of November was an incredible success, one of the first events organised by the youth, Kishor, and Balpushti members - it has set a new standard for our events.

We had hundreds of families join us for a day full of fun and festivities - and they all left at the day feeling so excited by what we had to offer - games, stalls, food, competitions, performances and so much more.

The level of thought and detail put into every area of the Seva has been nothing short of inspirational.

We hope the youth keep up the wonderful teamwork in serving our VSUK community and fulfilling Prabhu's Manoraths in this way.



## Monthly Youth Satsangs

Every month, the VSUK National Youth Group come together for a Satsang on a Sunday morning via Zoom. Each month, we look into a Tirth, an Utsav and a Granth as well as recite some of the Nitya Niyam Stotrams.

- For the **Tirth** we look into the importance of the holy place, the stories and faiths associated with it and see what Vaishnavs do there
- For **Utsavs** we see the significance of the Utsav in Pushti Marg and how this is celebrated in Haveli's and homes of Vaishnavs
- For **Granth**s, we are looking at who created the Granth, the reason for creating the Granth and an overview of the teachings of the particular Granth

These Satsangs are a great opportunity to connect with young Vaishnavs of similar age from across the UK, who have similar questions as yourself about our religion but don't know where to ask or who to approach. By joining these Satsangs you would be able to get answers to your queries as well get an opportunity to learn about Pushti Marg and the teachings of Shri Mahaprabhuji.

## Did you know?

**Q - How many times did Shri Mahaprabhuji do *Parikrama* of India (travel all of India)?**

A - Shri Mahaprabhuji did *parikrama* of India 3 times

**Q - Who was the first disciple to receive *Brahmasabandh* Diksha from Shri Vallabhacharya?**

A - Damodardas Harsaniji (Damalaji) was the first disciple of Shri Vallabhacharyaji to receive *Brahmasabandh* Diksha

**Q - How will *Bhagvat Bhav* (Love towards God) increase for a Pushti soul?**

A - Love towards *Prabhu* (God) will increase for a Pushti soul by procuring the knowledge and *Mahatmaya* (Importance) of the *swaroop* and *seva* of Shrinathji.