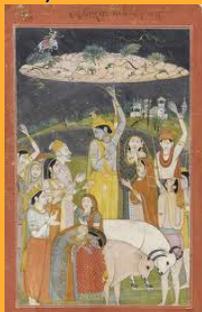




SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- **YUVAK MANDAL**
Sabha every Friday
- **BAL MANDAL**
Classes every Saturday
- **Satsang e-letter**
Every month



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Nilkanth Varni 2
- Vachnamrut 2
- Gambling 3
- How to revise 3
- Chasni 4
- e-Notice Board 4
- Bird with two heads 5
- Marriage vows 5
- Swaminarayan Sampraday 6
- Ravan 7
- Laxmi 7
- e-Fun e-Knowledge 8

Jay Swaminarayan

Diwali greetings



Happy new year



Dhanteras

On this day Dhanvantari, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, emerged from Kshirsagar with a pot of Amrut. Therefore, this day is also known as Dhanvantri Jayanti.

Kali Chaudas

On this day we worship Hanumanji as our Kuldev to protect us from Evil and inauspiciousness. We use oil, flowers, chandan and sindhur. Coconuts, Sesame seed ladus and rice with ghee and sugar are offered to Hanumanji.

On this day, Lord Krishna vanquished the evil King Narkaasur, also known as Bhaumaasur.

Diwali



Lord Rama returned to his Kingdom of Ayodhya after serving fourteen years of exile in the forest. Having defeated the demon Ravana and rescuing his wife Sita, Lord Rama triumphantly returned to the Kingdom of Ayodhya.

On hearing of Rama's arrival the people of Ayodhya were overjoyed and lit the streets and houses with divas. This is the day when good prevails over evil, and the light enters our hearts to show us the right path of virtue.

Jains celebrate this day as the day when Lord Mahavira attained Nirvana. Sikhs also celebrate on this day, because the Sixth Guru Har Gobinji returned to the Golden temple in Amritsar from where he was imprisoned by the Muslim Emperor Jhangir.

On the last day of the lunar year, we light divas and decorate the temple with brightly coloured lights. Rangolis, an intricate artistic design created using bright coloured powders, are drawn at the entrance of homes and temples. Various sweets are also offered to the Lord and served as Prasad. We also worship Laxmi on this day, to make us prosperous.

Nutan Varsh – New year's day (Ankoot)

One day, all the villagers in Gokul had been praying to Indra, the king of deities, and offered him food so he would send rains to help the crops to grow. Lord Krishna said that instead of offering to Indra, you should offer your devotion to Govardhan mountain, as it will be more useful to you. Our cows, which give us milk, graze on its slopes and it protects Gokul from strong winds.

Everyone accepted what Lord Krishna had said. They all went home, prepared many varieties of foods, placed it all at the base of Govardhan Mountain and began to worship it. Lord Krishna was very pleased and he manifested himself as Govardhan. He appeared on the top of the mountain and accepted the prayers and food offerings of everyone from Gokul.

When Indra learnt that prayers were offered to Govardhan rather than him, he became angry, unleashing torrential rains for seven days and Gokul was about to be flooded. People of Gokul prayed to Lord Krishna to help them. He lifted Govardhan and held it on his little finger and asked everyone to take shelter under it. Thus Gokul was saved from the wrath of Indra. From then on, this particular day is also known as Ankoot.

The Ankoot celebrations take place on the first day of the month of Kartik, which is the new year in the lunar calendar.

'Ankoot' is offered to the deities on this day. A wide variety of vegetarian food is traditionally arranged in tiers or steps, in front of the Lord.

Nilkanth Varni (The incredible journey of Lord Swaminarayan)

At the gardens of king Mahadatt



Nilkanth Varni was walking through the forest one day. He arrived at a city called Butolpur, which was ruled by a king called Mahadatt. This king was very religious, and also very kind. He provided food for thousands of travellers and holy men as they performed their pilgrimages.

The king's sister, Mayavati, was kind and generous too. Both the king and his sister arrived at the place where the pilgrims and holy men were staying. As soon as they arrived, their attention was instantly drawn to Nilkanth, as his appearance was eye-catching.

'We would be very happy if you came to stay with us for a while,' said the king to Nilkanth. 'You can stay in one of our bungalows in our gardens.'

Nilkanth agreed to stay with the king, and during his stay, the royal family visited him everyday to hear his stories and religious teachings.

One day, Mayavati's daughters came to take a walk in the garden. Some of the other 'so called' holy men looked upon them with lust, but Nilkanth lowered his eyes and did not look at them at all. When Mayavati heard of this, she was very pleased and asked Nilkanth to stay there with them permanently, and also offered both her daughters' hands in marriage to him. Although this was a very kind gesture, Nilkanth declined and said he could not stay in one place for too long. He left Butolpur that night and carried on with his journey.

When King Mahadatt and Mayarani found out he had gone, they were very upset. They sent their horsemen to persuade Nilkanth to come back to them.

Nilkanth then appeared in front of them in a divine vision and said, 'Do not worry. I will give you darshan every time you think of me. You should concentrate on following Dharma, so when you come to the end of your journey of life, you shall be reborn into Satsang and will meet with me once again.'

Nilkanth Varni stayed in Butolpur for a total of four months.



Vachanamrut of Lord Swaminarayan (Gadhada PP 22)



In the Samvat year 1876, on the fourth day of the bright half of the month of Paush at noon, Shreeji Maharaj was seated on a couch in the hallway of the room facing the east, in the Darbar of Dada Khachar in Gadhada. He wore white garments. A tassel of white flowers hung from His turban and bunches of flowers adorned His ears. He wore a garland of a guldavadi flowers around His neck. Saints and devotees from various places had gathered before Him in an assembly, and the saints were singing devotional songs.

Then Shreeji Maharaj said, "Listen, I want to tell you something." The saints stopped singing and became anxious to hear what he had to say.

Shreeji Maharaj said, "When singing devotional songs with the accompaniment of various musical instruments, like mridang, sarangi, saroda, tal, etc, if we don't remember God, then we might as well not be singing. Many souls in this world sing songs and play musical instruments, but forget about God, hence they do not get peace of mind. Therefore we should sing devotional songs, or recite His names, or chant the names of Narayan, or do whatever we can, but we must always do so remembering God. If we concentrate on God whilst singing devotional songs, but forget him during other activities, our minds will not remain fixed on the divine image of God. Therefore, we must always be thinking of Him whilst eating, drinking, moving, walking and doing everyday activities. Only then we will be able to keep our mind steady while singing devotional songs. And once our mind becomes steady with the divine image of God, it will remain steady even while doing our usual activities. And one who becomes careless in this matter will not be able to concentrate on God even while singing devotional songs. Hence a devotee should vigilantly practice concentration on the divine image of God."

Having said this, Shreeji Maharaj said "Now sing the devotional songs again".

Contentment is the highest gain,
Good Company the highest course,
Enquiry the highest wisdom,
and Peace the highest enjoyment. – Sanskrit quote

You cannot beat a roulette table unless you steal money from it. - Albert Einstein



Gambling – Ruins Lives



You are probably familiar with the famous episode in the Mahabharat, where Yudhisthir, the elder brother of Pandavs is invited to a game of gambling by the Kauravs. Shakuni cheated with unfair dice and subsequently, the Pandavs lost everything. They even put their wife Draupadi on a wager to win everything back. In the end it was decided that Pandavs should go into exile for twelve years and stay in hiding for the thirteenth year.



Some people say that you should gamble on Diwali, as it could bring you prosperity.

This is completely wrong.

Gambling only benefits the gambling establishments in the long run.

In Shlok 18, Lord Swaminarayan says, 'My male and female disciples shall never commit adultery nor indulge in gambling and other such vices.'

Other Hindu scriptures forbid us to gamble. Sometimes a person is introduced to gambling as a pastime or a hobby and then they get addicted to it. Online gambling has become a major industry.

The best thing to do is not to indulge in any type of gambling or gambling games. Investing in stocks and shares could be considered to be a gamble. Here, you are betting on prices of shares to go up or down. You should not have too many 'risky' investments. Most Indian people buy gold as an investment and Dhanteras is considered to be a lucky day to buy gold.

We should do as Maharaj says and not gamble at all.

How to - Revise



With January exams coming up many of you should have started to revise now whether it is for GCSE, A Level or university exams. Everyone revises in different ways and finding one that suits you can be difficult and sometimes stressful, hopefully these tips will help you prepare for your exams.

1. **Failing to prepare is preparing to fail!** Start revision approximately two months before the exam. This will give you plenty of time to ask for help, in a stress free environment on topics you are unsure about. Cramming the night before the exam will not help whatsoever.
2. Make sure you drink at least two litres of water a day. 80% of the brain is made up of it. Always take a bottle of water in the exam it will come in handy.
3. Increase your mental agility and improve your memory by choosing the right foods.
 - a. Make sure you're eating a diet rich in a mix of **wholegrain foods**. One study found that women who increased their folic acid, vitamin B12 and vitamin B6 intake showed an improvement in recalling information compared to women who were not taking a supplement.
 - b. Binge **on blueberries**. Research from Tufts University in the United States and published in the Journal of Neuroscience suggests that blueberry extract can improve short term memory loss. They are widely available, so there's no excuse!
 - c. Bet on **broccoli**. A great source of vitamin K, which is known to enhance cognitive function and improve brainpower.
4. Make sure you get a good night's **sleep** every night during the revision period (don't waste time on Facebook) Revising when tired is unproductive and a waste of time.
5. **Motivate yourself**. Look at the long term goals that you have set yourself in life. With the current economic climate grades mean everything if you want to get a decent job. Do you really want to earn a minimum wage for the rest of your life?
6. Remind yourself that this will only last a couple of months. You have got the rest of your life to socialise with friends and play the latest Fifa game.
7. Also, it is a great way to get out of doing the housework :D



The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives. - Robert Maynard Hutchins

How to - make Chasni (sugar syrup)

It is that time of the year when we make lots of sweets. Making chasni (syrup) for different sweets is often part of a recipe.

In Indian sweets, the syrups are of different strengths, according to the dish it's used in. The syrups are a one, two, or three thread consistency (*1 tar, 2 tar, or 3 tar chasni*). The thread technique is very useful to get the desired strength of the syrup for a particular dessert.

Time: 20 minute

Ingredients: (you need to adjust according to the item being made)

2 cups sugar

2 cup water

Preparation:

- Mix the sugar and water in a thick-bottomed saucepan. Boil it on a medium heat.
- Keep stirring and remove any froth formed on the surface using a spoon.

Testing the consistency

Keep stirring and testing the chasni for its consistency. To do this, take out the spoon and put a drop in a plate. When the drop slightly cools down, touch it with your forefinger. Now touch your thumb and forefinger together and pull apart gently. Confirm the consistency as following.

Consistency of the Chasni

When you pull your forefinger and thumb apart gently,

- If a single thread is formed and breaks immediately, then it is **half-thread consistency chasni**.
- If a single thread is formed and does not break, then it is **one-thread consistency chasni**.
- If two threads are formed and do not break, then it is **two-thread consistency chasni**. A drop of this syrup when dropped into cold water forms a soft ball.
- If three threads are formed and do not break, then it is **three-thread consistency chasni**. A drop of this syrup when dropped into cold water forms a soft ball.

Note that to increase the threads of the chasni, you need to continue boiling the syrup. When the desired consistency is reached, remove the saucepan from the heat.

e-Notice Board

www.swaminarayanwales.org.uk

Festivals and Holy days – November 2010



Dhanteras – Wednesday 3rd November 2010
Beginning of Diwali celebrations



Kali Chaudas & Diwali – Friday 5th November 2010
Please think of safety with fireworks!



Ankoot (New year's day) – Saturday 6th November 2010



Bhai Beej – Sunday 7th November 2010

Tulsi Vivah – Saturday 20th November 2010



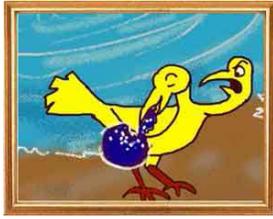
Ekadashi

Rama Ekadashi Fast – Tuesday 2nd November 2010
Dev Prabodhini Ekadashi Fast – Wednesday 17th Nov 2010



Yuvak Mandal Sabha - every Friday (7:15 – 8:30) in Cardiff temple
Bal Mandal Classes - every Saturday (6:15 – 6:45) in Cardiff temple
Seva (Clean/Maintain Temple) – every Saturday from 8:30am

The bird with two heads



Once a bird named Bharunda lived on the banks of a lake. He had two heads, but one body. One day, as the bird was wandering on the bank of the lake, he found some fruit, which was very sweet and delicious. One of his heads mumbled, 'What lovely fruit. I'm so lucky and God must have sent it for me.' After hearing this, the second head said, 'Please let me taste the fruit you have found as you seem to like it so much.'

The first head laughed and said, 'Both of us have the same stomach, so it doesn't matter whether I eat it or you eat it'.

The second head was disappointed at this action of the first head.

The next day, the second head found a poisonous fruit and told the first head, 'I hate you because you did not share your fruit with me. I will eat this fruit and poison you.'

The second head said, 'You fool, if you eat that, both of us will die because we both have the same body.'

The second head ignored his warning since he was filled with anger and could not think properly. He ate the poisonous fruit and both died.

Sharing of a good thing with others is always good. Hate and anger will ruin you.



Marriage vows Dharma, Artha, Kam and Moksha



There are four purusharthas or objectives we have to fulfill as human beings. These are:

- Dharma (righteousness) – Carrying out your duties towards your family and mankind and being righteous and religious. Live according to the duties as suggested by the scriptures.
- Artha (wealth) – Work towards acquiring wealth by going to work or doing business etc.
- Kaam (enjoyment of sensual and other desires) – Fulfil of noble desires and wishes.
- Moksha (salvation) – Work towards gaining salvation by way of Bhakti and pleasing God. Moksha means absence of Moha or delusion.

In the vedic wedding ceremony, we go around the holy fire four times and take vows to achieve these four purusharthas, **together**. This is why the bride and groom are tied together by sari and cloth when they go around the fire. This signifies that they have to achieve these purusharaths together.

The word 'together' is very important. When going round the fire, the couple is promising to achieve these four objectives together and cooperate with each other. Problems arise when both husband and wife try to achieve these four objectives separately. If they both carry out their religious and other duties separately, then they will not achieve desired results. Making money separately would not work; they could acquire more by co-operation.

Getting enjoyment separately would be a recipe for disaster. If the husband or wife goes out and has enjoyment on their own, the marriage becomes unstable and the vows are being broken.

The partners could become unfaithful, jealous, angry and stressful because of this and the children could suffer as well.

Working to attain Moksha together would make it easier for the couple. If the four vows are kept properly and the couple work towards achieving the four purusharaths simultaneously then they would achieve them easily and the marriage will be a happy one.

Swaminarayan Sampraday



Lord Swaminarayan manifested Himself at *Chhapaiya*, a small village, 20 kms. north of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, on Monday, the ninth day of bright moon of Chaitra of Samvat year 1837, April 2, 1781 A.D. at ten past ten at night.

At the age of eleven, he began a seven year pilgrimage across India, adopting the name *Nilkanth Varni*. He settled in the state of Gujarat at the age of 18.



At the age of 21, he took over the Uddhav Sampraday (Which later came to be known as Swaminarayan Sampraday), with the blessings of his Guru Sadguru Ramanand Swami. He initiated more than 500 saints to spread the pious Sampraday.

To achieve ultimate redemption he taught the "Swaminarayan" Mahamantra.

From this point onwards, he was known as *Swaminarayan* and regarded as an incarnation of God by his followers. The Uddhav Sampraday became known as the *Swaminarayan Sampraday*.



The Swaminarayan Sampraday consists of Ahmedabad (North diocese) and Vadatal (South diocese) Gadis. Shree Laxmi-Narayan Dev (Vadatal gadi) and Shree Nar-Narayan Dev (Ahmedabad gadi) are the only two Gadis established by Lord Swaminarayan Himself. The temples of both gadis are located all over India and around the world.

The Sampraday stems from the Ramanuj school of thought and accepts that the knowledge of Jiva, Ishwar and Maya will lead to ultimate redemption.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, an incarnation of the Lord Supreme is the most recent of the Lord's incarnations as stated by the Skand Puran. The followers of the Swaminarayan Sampraday comprehend with Ramanuj's teachings and accept Bhagwan Swaminarayan as their chosen incarnation to meditate upon. One unique fact is that Bhagwan Swaminarayan was the only incarnation to establish a sect which guaranteed ultimate redemption for the followers.

The beauty of the sampraday is found within the setup devised by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, namely the 5 entities which ensure the system of ultimate redemption. These are the Temples/deities, Scriptures, Acharyas (Spiritual Leaders), Saints and finally the devotees. With all these, he gave a small but significant Code of Conducts with only 212 verses, The Shikshapatri, and the nectar of spiritual discourses performed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, The Vachnamrut.

To preserve the purity in the religion, he devised five basic codes of conducts for Devotee namely; not to steal, not to eat meat, not to drink, not to commit adultery, not to follow impurity. Codes for holy men are Nishkam (Lust-less), Nirlobh (Greed-less), Nissenh (Attachment-less), Nisswad (Taste-less) and Nirman (Ego-less).

Thus, in a short span of 49 years, He revived Hinduism, glorified spiritual values and founded the Swaminarayan faith and left for His Divine Abode, Akshardham.

Mahatma Gandhi commented that 'In India, there are so many religious sects, but the Swaminarayan sect is praiseworthy, pious, pure and attractive. I have a very high regard for this sect'.

Separate temples for ladies and gents

In India, the Swaminarayan temples for men and women are separate, so that they can worship god without the distraction of the opposite sex.

In the Swaminarayan temples outside India, there is normally a partition between male and female devotees.

"With his divine light, he enlightened the hearts of several people, took away the bad habits and vices of backward people, included non-Hindus in Hindu religion, encouraged the literature, music and arts, promoted non-violent 'Yagnas', directed the way of pure devotion and divine knowledge. He was the tutor of Bhagawat-Dharma and the preacher of the principles of Vyasji." - *Shri Kishorlal Mashruwala*

Ravan – disguised as a Sadhu



In the Ramayan, when Ravan wanted to kidnap Sita, he put on the saffron coloured clothes of a holy man and came asking for food. Ravan sent the demon Marich in the form of a golden deer, to distract Ram. Sita wanted the deer so sent Ram to get it. Laxman stayed behind to protect Sita.

As Ram drew his arrow, Marich called out to Laxman in Ram's voice. Laxman knew that it was Marich calling, but Sita who thought that Ram was in danger forced Laxman to go and help Ram. Laxman drew a circle of protection around the hut and told Sita that she will be safe as long as she does not cross the line. Ravan, in his disguise as a sadhu, came to kidnap Sita but saw the circle of protection and knew that he will not be able to cross it.

He called out to Sita, 'Please give me some food'. Sita came out of the hut with some food but stayed inside the circle Laxman had drawn. Ravan said that he could not accept the food if she does not come out of the circle. Seeing that it was only a holy man, Sita ignored Laxman's instructions and crossed the line, stepping out of the circle. At that instance, Ravan changed into his original form, kidnapped Sita and took her to Lanka in his flying craft.

Ram then went to Lanka, and with the help of Hanumanji and his army, defeated Ravan and brought Sita back to Ayoudhya.

Sita got kidnapped and suffered because she did not listen to Laxman. She crossed the line which is sometimes referred to as Laxman Rekha. Laxman represents vairagya, which is dispassion, detachment, or renunciation. If we have attachment to the world, then our Bhakti or devotion is likely to be kidnapped by false sadhus or gurus.

We have to be vigilant and not let anyone kidnap our Bhakti towards God. There are so many different organisations and people who are out to convert us to their belief and most of the time, the people who do the converting disguise themselves as holy or religious people. They are converting you to become one of 'their' devotees. This is what Ravan did.

Most of the times the false sadhus will try to convert you by saying that your form of worship and God is wrong and theirs is the right one. They will give you lots of respect and make you feel very important, but we must not be fooled by these petty tricks. If we do get kidnapped or converted by the false sadhu then we would have to suffer as Sita did and would delay us in our salvation.

Laxmi



There are different terms used for wealth:

- 'Dhan' - When used for one's own self
- 'Alakshmi' - wealth used for sinful purposes
- 'Lakshmi' - wealth which is used for others
- 'Mahalakshmi' - wealth which is used to please God

We perform Lakshmi Pujan from the wealth we have obtained is a result of God's grace and for this we thank him on this day. On Diwali, homes and temples are cleaned and rangoli designs are displayed at the entrances and doors and windows are lit with lamps to welcome Goddess Laxmi.

e-Fun

e-Knowledge



Spot 12 differences.
Answers at the bottom
of the page.



Jokes

A man went to the temple to pray to Lord Shiva daily, and would ask for one million rupees everytime he prayed. One day Lord Shiva appeared in front of him and said, 'I am pleased with you. I will give you whatever you want'.

The man asked for one million rupees. Lord Shiva said, 'Go home and you will find the money'.

There was also a thief in the temple. He had come to pray before he started his work. Lord Shiva said to the thief, 'I will also grant you a wish. What do you want?'

The thief said, 'Just tell me where that man lives and I'll do the rest..'

Interesting Facts

No piece of normal-size paper can be folded in half more than 7 times.

Blueberry juice boosts memory.

When cats are happy or pleased, they squeeze their eyes shut.

The elephant is the only animal with 4 knees.

$111,111,111 \times 111,111,111 = 12,345,678,987,654,321$.

An olive tree can live up to 1500 years.

Elephants are the only mammals that can't jump.

The Himalayas cover one-tenth of the Earth's surface.

Spot the difference answers:

1. Apple; 2. Bird; 3. Window; 4. Finger; 5. Eyes; 6. Pocket; 7. Tie pin; 8. Patch on trouser; 9. Belt; 10. Flower; 11. Shoes; 12 Bug

If you have any interesting facts, stories, jokes, or feedback for our next issue of Satsang e-Letter, please email them to us at sstym@swaminarayanwales.org.uk