



Jay Swaminarayan Makar Sankranti

Makar Sankranti, celebrated on 14th January every year, is a harvest festival in India. The sun moves from the Tropic of Cancer to the Tropic of Capricorn or from Dakshinayana to Uttarayana, in the mid-January.



This is the beginning of the harvest season and end of the northeast monsoon in South India. The movement of the earth from one zodiac sign into another is called Sankranti and as the Sun moves into the Capricorn zodiac known as Makar and hence this occasion is named Makar Sankranti.

It is believed that death on this day brings Moksha or salvation to the deceased. In the Mahabharat war, Bhishma having been wounded, held on to life until Uttarayan set in, so that he can attain heavenly abode at this auspicious time.

All over India, this day is celebrated by flying kites, feasting on the food offered to God and carrying out religious activities.



True penance - tapascharaya

Once there was a sadhu (holy man), who had many followers. Sometimes he used to observe very difficult penance or tapascharaya.

Once he decided to fast for a whole month, only drinking a little water each day. If he broke his fast, he would start again, fasting until he finished the whole month. On Poonam (the day of the full moon), it was the last day of his fast. A poor woman carrying a small baby came to visit him.

The sadhu was very weak and could hardly speak. The woman very excitedly told the sadhu, 'My baby had become very ill some time ago and I had taken a pledge that if my baby recovered, I would bring some sweets and fruit for you to eat on Poonam'.

The sadhu's followers became very angry at the woman and said, 'You stupid woman! can't you see that it is our guru's last day of fast? So stop talking nonsense and come back on another day'. The woman apologised and started to walk away. The sadhu said, 'Don't go. I will eat your sweets and fruit'.

The sadhu ate the food offered by the woman and told his followers 'Don't be angry at this poor woman. I will gladly eat the food and start my monthly fast again'. The woman was overjoyed with tears.

'Her happiness is my reward', the sadhu told his followers.

Be worthy for knowledge - Gnan

Once a rich man asked Buddha to give him the knowledge of enlightenment. Buddha replied, 'I will come to your house tomorrow to have some rice pudding.' The next day, Buddha went to the man's house carrying a pot containing mud and told him to put the rice pudding in it. The man said, 'I can't put this delicious rice pudding in a muddy pot!' Buddha replied, 'This is what I want to tell you. You must get rid of the 'mud' or bad vices you have and become clean. Only then can I put the knowledge in you'.

To gain knowledge, we have to be worthy or deserving. The word for 'deserving person' in sanskrit is 'paatra', which also means vessel. We have to be like a clean, non-leaking vessel, capable of retaining the knowledge given to us.

In one of her bhajans, Panbai says that you should not sow seeds of knowledge and virtue in front of an unworthy person, even if he is a great king. The unworthy person will not understand it properly and use it in bad way to harm others.

'With virtuous persons, virtues remain virtues. On reaching a non-virtuous person, they become faults. (Just like) a river flowing with sweet water, becomes salty on reaching an ocean.' - A sanskrit quote.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Nilkanth Varni 2

Vachnamrut 2

e-Notice Board 3

e-Fun e-Knowledge 4

'I made this letter longer than usual because I
lack the time to make it short'. - Blaise Pascal

Nilkanth Varni (The incredible journey of Lord Swaminarayan)

Nilkanth meets Gopal Yogi



Nilkanth travelled through a dense jungle in Nepal, where many wild animals lived and saw a yogi sitting beneath a tree. The yogi was reciting verses from the Bhagavad Gita. When the Yogi, whose name was Gopal Yogi, saw Nilkanth, he felt attracted towards him and knew that this was no ordinary teenager.

Nilkanth requested Gopal Yogi to teach him Ashtang Yoga, the eight stages of yoga. His desire to practice Ashtang Yog was so great that he promised Gopal Yogi that he would not give up, even if his body perished in the process.

He also studied the Bhagvad Gita whilst staying with Gopal Yogi. Nilkanth learnt Ashtang Yoga as a disciple and after only nine months he mastered it, whereas for others it would require a whole life time of continuous effort.



Near the ashram there were cowherds taking their cows to graze. Sometimes wild animals would come and kill their cows. Gopal yogi asked Nilkanth to help the cowherds and protect the cows. Nilkanth blew a shankh (Conch Shell) which made a loud, resonating sound. The wild animals kept away from the area within which the sound of the shell was heard. Gopal Yogi now realised that Nilkanth had divine qualities.

Pleased with Gopal Yogi's personal efforts, Nilkanth blessed him with the ultimate realisation of his divine form. Totally fulfilled and redeemed, Gopal Yogi left his material body. After personally performing the cremation ritual of Gopal Yogi, Nilkanth continued on his journey. Nilkanth Varni had stayed with Gopal Yogi for a whole year, making it his longest stay at a single place during his seven years of van vicharan (cross country travels).

'Fear has its use but cowardice has none' - Mahatma Gandhi

Vachanamrut of Lord Swaminarayan (Gadhada PP 48)



Who should we not associate with?

In the Vachanamrut Gadhada 1- 48, Lord Swaminarayan said that there are four types of kusangis - someone who is a bad influence on your progress in satsang and leads you astray.

They are:

- ❖ Kuda-Panthis - cause you to falter in your vartmans (vows) and become impure.
- ❖ Shakti-Panthis - persuade you to consume meat and alcohol which would deflect you from svadharma - a person's own duties according to caste and stage of life.
- ❖ Shushka-Vedantis - cause you to fall from bhakti and upasana - worship of Bhagvan. Such people claim that the Dham, divine abode of Bhagvan and the Murti of Bhagvan are all false.
- ❖ Nastiks - believe that only karmas are real and deny the existence of Shree Krishna Bhagvan. Therefore they lead you astray from the path prescribed by the eternal, sacred shastra.

You should pray to Bhagvan that you never end up associating with any of these four types of people.

'Yoga teaches us to cure what need not be endured and endure what cannot be cured' - B.K.S. Iyengar

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Festivals and Holy days – January 2011



Dhanur-maas ends – Friday 14th Jan 2011

Makar Sankranti – Saturday 14th Jan 2011

Indian Republic day – Wednesday 26th Jan 2011



Ekadashi

Putrada Ekadashi Fast – Sunday 16th January 2011

Shatatala Ekadashi Fast – Saturday 29th January 2011



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

Bhuj Mandir gifts Kutch its first MRI machine



Patients in Kutch, who are experiencing the lack of high quality and life saving facilities, will soon be getting quicker MRI testing carried out locally.

Shree Swaminarayan Mandir Bhuj will be donating an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) machine to Matrushi Meghbai Premji Jetha Hospital and research centre, in memory of Shree NarNarayan Dev Nutan Mandir Mahotsav and the success of its medical camps.

The MRI machine will cost approximately 3.5 Crore Rupees (£500,000 approx).

This important decision to donate the MRI scanner was made in a meeting where Mahant Swami Dharmanandandasji, Kothari Parshad Jadavji Bhagat, Swami Premprakashdasji and other trustees were present. The idea has also been welcomed by leading business men, saints and devotees.

In just a few decades, the use of MRI scanners has grown tremendously. Doctors use MRI scans to help detect and diagnose many serious conditions such as, brain tumours, multiple sclerosis, torn ligaments, different types of cancer and many other illnesses. An MRI scan is the best way to see inside the human body without cutting it open.

Bhuj Mandir have committed all funds for the MRI machine costing 3.5 crore in order to buy the life-saving machine for the people of Kutch. This is part of the temples ongoing charitable efforts for the upliftment of Kutch.



The Medical Camps

These were part of the Bhuj Narnarayan Dev Nutan Mandir celebrations, **successfully treated 35 thousand patients**, many with operations costing thousands of pounds.

The following medical camps were successfully completed.

Nakhatrana: Devashish Hospital - 20/12/2009

Dayapar: Shree Mulji Vidhyalay - 03/01/2010

Kothara: Sheth G.T High School - 24/01/2010

Mandvi: Shree Swaminarayan Sanksardham - 14/02/2010

Dudhai: Shree Sardhar Patel High School - 07/03/2010

Rapar: Shree Leva Patel Kanya Chaatralay - 28/03/2010

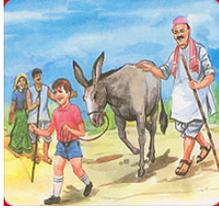
Ghandhidham: 18/4/2010

Bhuj: Shree Kutch Leva Patel Hospital – 16/05/2010

For more details visit www.bhujmandir.org



Pleasing everybody



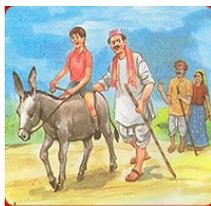
One day a man and his son were going to the market, taking their donkey with them. They met a couple on the way.

"Why are you walking when you have an donkey to ride on?" said the husband, "Why don't you let the boy sit on the donkey?"

"I would like that, help me up father." said the boy. Hearing this, the father let the boy sit on the donkey.

Soon they met another couple. "How shameful of you!" the woman said to the boy, "You should have respect and let your father ride, he must be tired?" So, the boy got down and the father rode upon the donkey. They continued travelling.

"There seems to be no justice in the world", said the next person they met, "why is the father riding while the poor boy is walking?" Hearing this, the boy got on the donkey with his father. As they went on, they met some travellers.



"How cruel of them! They will kill the poor donkey by riding together." cried one of the travellers.

Hearing this, the father and the son got down. Now they decided to carry the donkey on their shoulders. As they did so, the travellers broke into laughter.

The laughter frightened the donkey. It broke free and galloped away.

MORAL: You cannot please everybody all the time.

"One shall never practice devotion to Lord Shree Krishna without observance of Dharma and shall never give up devotion to Shree Krishna for fear of being criticised by ignorant persons." (Shikshapatri verse 39)

Interesting food Facts

- India is the largest producer of bananas in the world, producing nearly 22 million tons each year.
- Cooking is an important part of food preparation. In most cases, cooking transforms the chemical makeup of food, altering its texture, appearance, nutritional properties and flavour.
- Around 70 million people suffer from food poisoning every year and around 7 million of these cases are fatal. Proper food storage, temperature control and preparation is necessary to avoid potentially dangerous bacteria, toxins and viruses.
- Around 8% of children and 2% of adults have some kind of food allergy. This occurs when the body's immune system incorrectly assumes a certain food protein is harmful and attacks it. Most common food allergies include reactions to peanuts and gluten.