



Sabka Maalik Ek

SAI SANDESH

The Official Monthly Newsletter of
OM SAI MANDIR

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Love All, Serve All

HOLI & UGADI/GUDI PADWA SPECIAL ISSUE



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STRANGE ARE THE WAYS OF GOD

BY THE SAI SANDESH TEAM

Strange indeed are the ways of the Lord. It is He who sets the sun in motion, He who makes the world go around (literally), He who makes the wind blow, He who controls the entire universe, and yet He acts as if He does nothing. What a lesson in humility for the ignorant man who thinks high beyond his means and untiringly boasts of his doership for every petty act.

Human life is no coincidence; it is a well-planned culmination of numerous meritorious deeds from past lives, an invaluable opportunity to gain liberation from the ceaseless rounds of birth and death. Yet, despite his intelligence and discriminative ability, caught-up in the golden cage of attachment, man is unable to free himself from bondage. Man is not an ordinary mortal; he is indeed the veritable Madhava. Not realizing this truth, he goes about performing his worldly actions and accumulates wealth as if he were physically immortal.

God in His infinite mercy allows such a person to experience the hardships of this world with the sole intention of empowering him to evolve from his present state to his true nature: divinity. In order to shape gold into a beautiful jewel, it is important to pass the gold through fire. Humans, too, just like gold are subjected to the tests of tough times and painful experiences. The purpose of these experiences is not to hurt the individual, but rather to bless. Sunrise always follows the darkest phase of the night. In a similar manner, good times always follow bad ones.

When bad times knock our door, we are often afraid, hurt, and angry at the unwelcome guest, not realizing the good that lies in store for us. I was once working with a friend who was to interview for his dream job at a leading pharmaceutical company. My first instinct was to suggest the friend to pray to Baba very hard. He did just that. At the interview, however, he fumbled on one question and lost the so-called opportunity of a lifetime. He sounded very upset when he called me; I consoled him to trust Baba as His ways were always inscrutable and beyond the ordinary. The underlying good was covered by the pain of the unpleasant experience, but we both agreed that something nice was in store and Baba had his best interests in mind. God did not

let us down. Within a few weeks my friend was called for another interview with a biotech startup. Needless to say he was hired and his salary, well, almost doubled. That wasn't it, though. The company he had previously interviewed with had suddenly become subject to a series of class action lawsuits; these were huge lawsuits that would have eventually caused his position to be eliminated. Baba not only increased his salary, He also saved him from an inevitable layoff. It was then that we realized the mystery behind Baba's actions.

Divine actions are always shrouded in mystery. It is only God who knows the reasons behind all His actions. Swami Nityananda, a God-intoxicated saint, once visited the house of a lady and hit her head with a stick, for no apparent reason or provocation. The lady was disturbed at this act but kept quiet. After a few months an astrologer visited the lady; when he reviewed her horoscope, he was shocked to find her alive. It turned out that her allotted time of death was at the very moment when Swami Nityananda had hit her. The Swami in His infinite mercy had exchanged her death for a small blow on her head. Isn't that wonderful? Mahaavatar Babaji, the deathless saint from the Himalayas, too, performed a similar miracle once. Once when a group of disciples were in the Babaji's company, He struck one disciple's shoulder very hard with a stick. The other disciples immediately interceded with the words "How cruel!" Babaji calmly explained that the disciple was to die at the very minute he was struck. The blow had been exchanged for his death. The little pain that was caused by the blow had saved his very life.

God never does anything to hurt us. All his actions are performed out of pure love. This has been proven innumerable times. Take the instance of Krishna. Once when Krishna and Arjuna were walking, a Brahmin came to seek the blessings of Krishna. Around the same time Duryodhana, too, came to seek His blessings. Krishna blessed both of them. Duryodhana was blessed with immeasurable wealth, while the poor Brahmin's cow died immediately. The cow was his sole means of sustenance. Arjuna, though a great devotee, could not fathom Krishna's divine leela and immediately chided the Lord for being

so harsh on the Brahmin while blessing a wicked one like Duryodhana, who was already so wealthy. Krishna calmly explained to Arjuna that Duryodhana being so wicked would not be able to progress spiritually and hence he had been blessed with excess wealth (excess is always bad), while the Brahmin was dear to Krishna and God wanted him to depend only on the Lord. Now that the cow was gone, he was free to think only about the Lord and progress spiritually. Krishna, in turn, would always take care of his devotees' needs. Lord Dattatreya once performed a similar miracle. He visited the house of one devotee to seek alms. The devotee had in his yard a vegetable tree that provided food for the family. The Lord on his way out uprooted this very tree and threw it out. The lady of the house was very disturbed at this act but the husband calmed her with the wisdom that everything happens for one's own good. When they went to replant the tree they found a hidden pot of gold. The Lord in His infinite mercy had revealed the treasure that would have been hidden otherwise.

History is witness to the fact that the best of inventions and personalities have arisen from the toughest of times. Take the instance of Gandhi. If he were not ill-treated and subjected to racial discrimination, would Gandhi have become the great leader that he eventually turned out to be? Innumerable social causes have a painful experience as the basis of their foundation. I once read about a king was dethroned by his own brother. The pain that the incidence caused was unbearable and the dethroned king resorted to meditation and God for peace. The initial act of mediation turned out to be so fruitful that he started spending more and more time on his spiritual practices. Within a few years he gained enlightenment. The newly enlightened soul returned to his kingdom to thank his brother, instead of accusing him. Had his brother not dethroned him, would he have gained enlightenment?

Situations may sometimes appear disappointing, but the underlying purpose is known only to God and is always for the benefit of devotees. What we need on our part is firm faith that everything that is happening to us is for our own good, a good that we can't see in the present but will surely recognize in the near future.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

DAILY ARATIS:

Kakad Arati	8.00 A.M.
Madhyana Arati	12.00 P.M.
Dhoop Arati	6.00 P.M.
Sheja Arati	8.00 P.M.

SPECIAL BHAJANS:

Every Thursday	7.00 P.M.–8.30 P.M.
Every Sunday	2.00 P.M.–3.00 P.M.

STOTRAS (CHANTING SAHASRANAM, BABA'S 108 NAMES, ETC.): Daily.

ANNADAN (FOOD SERVICE): Daily at temple
ANNADAN (FOOD SERVICE) FOR HOMELESS BROTHERS AND SISTERS: Every Saturday at 1 p.m 29th and 1st Ave. Call 718-461-0454.

PUJA SPONSORSHIP

Archana.....	\$11
Abishekam.....	\$51
Satyanarayana Vrata.....	\$81
Vahana Puja.....	\$15
Annadan.....	\$251

To sponsor pujas, call: (718) 461-0454.

UPCOMING EVENTS

March

Tuesday, Mar. 14: Holi

Thurs, Mar. 30: Ugadi/Gudi Padwa

April

Thursday, Apr. 06: Sri Ram Navami

Thursday, Apr. 13: Baisakhi

Friday, Apr. 14:

1. Tamil New Year

2. Vishu (Malayali New Year)

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna calls upon Arjuna to regard himself as an instrument of the Divine. Every human being is indeed an instrument of God. As such, he should carry out his duties, leaving the results to God. Men have to do their duties; success or failure is determined by the Divine. Do not esteem yourself as the doer. Develop the conviction that the Indwelling Spirit in you is directing you and enabling you to act. - Baba

BEACON LIGHTS

THE LIFE STORY OF SRI JALARAM BAPA

THE SAI SANDESH TEAM



Sri Jalaram Bapa, popularly revered as Jala Bapa or Bapa, was born in 1800 A.D. in the village of Virpur, Gujarat. Bapa's mother, Rajbai, was very fond of serving saints and monks. No saint who visited her doorstep would return empty handed. Jala

Bapa's father, Pradhan Thakkar, was engaged in business.

Despite his reluctance to live a householder's life, Jalaram Bapa was married to Virbai at the very young age of 16. His only passion, however, was to perform selfless service. In order to continue doing so, he separated from his father's business and stayed with his uncle, Valjibhai, who had a great liking for the young lad. The young man's desire to withdraw from marital life was graciously accepted and supported by Virbai. She even followed the young saint on a pilgrimage.

At the age of 18, Jalaram Bapa resorted to Sri Bhojalram from Fatehpur as his guru. He was given the *Guru Mala* and mantra in the name of Sri Rama. With newfound spiritual vigor and his guru's divine blessings, the young Bapa started a *Sadavrat* (feeding center), where he would feed all the poor and needy day and night. Single-handedly, the saint performed this most selfless service with the help of his wife Virbai. Hundreds were served in this manner.

Selfless service and the continuous chanting of God's name was the only *sadbhava* followed by the Bapa. Soon, his fame spread far and wide and many considered him to be a veritable incarnation. The general environment in Jala Bapa's days was one of communal disharmony; despite the widespread discord, he fed and served all communities without distinction.

While things were continuing in this manner, once, three Arabs, in the service of Thakore of Rajkot, demanded a wage increase by four rupees a month. The request was refused and the Arabs, unhappy with the treatment, resigned the service

and set out on a journey to Junagadh. On the way they hunted a few birds and stored them in their shoulder bags. When they reached Virpur, Bapa invited them for meals. The Arabs protested with the argument that they were Muslims; Jalaram Bapa, however, contested that in the court of God there was no distinction of caste or creed and that they could have their meals without hesitation. The Arabs had their meals in the temple but were embarrassed at the thought of carrying dead birds. The omniscient saint read their thoughts and touched the bag saying that the birds were feeling suffocated. Surprised by this statement, the Arabs opened the bag only to find live birds that flew off in an instant. The guests were wonderstruck at this miracle and immediately fell at the feet of the divine host. They requested Bapa for a job in Junagadh itself, but Bapa said, "What is the need for a job in Junagadh? The Arabs serve only one master." At that very minute a camel man arrived on the scene declaring that he was sent by the Thakore of Rajkot. He had come to take the Arabs back as the Thakore had agreed to increase their wages to seven rupees.

As days went by, the number of people visiting the *Sadavrat* increased manifold. In order to continue feeding the large retinue, Mother Virbai had to sell all her ornaments. She performed many such sacrifices with utmost zeal.

Numerous miracles started happening to the devotees and followers of Jalaram Bapa. Once a tailor named Harji had been suffering from stomachache; his well wishers advised him to chant the name of Jala Bhagat. Within a week the patient recovered from an incurable disease. From this time onward, the saint was named Jalaram Bapa, a name that spread far and wide, sparing no boundaries. In Virpur, there lived a rich man by the name Jamal. Once his ten-year-old son was ill. The best of treatments failed to give him any relief; recovery, it appeared, was nowhere in sight. Jamal resorted to the name of Jala Bapa and his son soon recovered. From that time Bapa was known as "Jallah so Allah."



The King of Dhrangadhr was once going on a pilgrimage to Somnath. On his way, he was stopped by Jalaram Bapa with the following words: “You cannot leave this place without taking prasad.” Pleased with this hospitality, the king offered a flour grinding mill at the feet of the saint.

Bapa performed numerous miracles and cured the most incurable diseases. Once, a priest, who was suffering from paralysis for over 15 years, approached Bapa for help. He was advised to worship God and feed the poor. Needless to say, the patient soon recovered.

The ultimate sacrifice. Once, an old *sadhu* came to the ashram. He was served meals. The *sadhu* refused the service and instead asked for someone to care for his ailing body. Bapa offered to help but the *sadhu* asked for his wife instead. The selfless saint immediately requested his wife to accompany the guest. Virbai and the monk were walking across the river, when the *sadhu* requested her to look after his bag and staff, while he attended to nature’s call. With this request, the recluse immediately disappeared in the bushes, nowhere to return. Virbai Maa waited until sunset but the old man did not return. She started weeping in her anxiety. In reality God had come in the form of a *sadhu* to test Jalaram Bapa’s devotion and detachment. Bapa had not hesitated to perform the ultimate sacrifice.

Jalaram Bapa, like all saints, set an example by practice. He did the work of the ashram by himself and performed even the most menial of tasks without any hesitation or shame.

Once, the daughter-in-law of a farmer in Virpur went to the village of Roopvati. She lost her precious nose ring; feeling helpless, she took a vow of offering a coconut in Bapa’s temple. On her return to the village she went straight to the ashram and started weeping. Seeing her condition, Bapa took the coconut from her hand and broke it before the idol of Rama. Wonder of wonders, the nose ring came out of the broken coconut.

Another devotee, Amarchand Sheth of the Jodia Port, was returning from Basra with a loaded shipment. On the way, there was a huge storm that threatened to sink the entire ship. As a hole

had developed, water began to fill the ship. Feeling threatened, he chanted Bapa’s name, saying, “Oh, Jaliya Bapa save me! I will send the entire shipload of rice to you!” The water stopped entering the ship in the most mysterious manner; the storm subsided as well. After reaching the port, however, he thought the rice would be expensive and sent inferior rice to the ashram instead. The compassionate saint, however, did not mind this and sent a message to the devotee saying, “Greet him with God’s name and tell him that the vow was for the shipped rice. Never mind, my *sadhus* will eat coarse rice with love ... well, tell the *sheth* to return the toothpick from the shirt which blocked the hole in his ship.” Hearing this message, the sheth at once rushed to the port, searched the ship, and found a cloth in the hole. It was Bapa’s shirt with a toothpick in it. Repenting for his previous action, he sent to Bapa other sacks full of best quality rice.

Once a devotee of the Bapa wanted to go on Pilgrimage to bathe in Ganga-Yamuna. Bapa asked him to sleep in a bed near the gate of the *ashram* for that day. While the devotee was resting, he was suddenly awakened at mid-night. He saw two women in white attire with pots of water on their heads. The women emptied their pots in the ashram’s vessel and disappeared. The next morning, Bapa spoke the following words: “You are fortunate as you saw Ganga and Yamuna with your own eyes! You see they, too, are eager to serve *sadhus* who come here. Now, do you still want to go on the pilgrimage?” The devotee said, “No, all the holy places are here itself.”

Innumerable such miracles were performed. Dead were revived, sick were healed, and countless were fed—and are still being fed at Virpur. The saint responds to his devotees needs to this very day.

Bapa left his physical body at the ripe age of 81. The work that he started is still being continued by his devotees. Even today if you visit Virpur, you will not be allowed to leave the *ashram* without meals.

Swami always stresses on the importance of *seva*. Jalaram Bapa’s life is a living testimony of the power of selfless service. Jai Jalaram!

MERE ADULATION IS POOR ADORATION

OKA CHINNA KATHA

Akbar was one of the greatest Moghul Emperors. He was a lover of mankind and respected the great and pious souls of all religions.

He had heard about Guru Nanak's reputation and about his attempts to unite the Hindus and the Muslims. He desired to welcome and honor the saint in his court, so he sent word to him through his minister, paying his respects and requesting him to grace the royal court. Guru Nanak replied to the minister, saying, "I shall only respond to the call of God, the Emperor of Emperors, and shall enter only His court."

The minister conveyed this message to the Emperor. Akbar's respect for Guru Nanak increased and so he sent word again to meet him at the mosque at least. Nanak consented and did come to the mosque at the appointed hour. Both Akbar and Nanak were welcomed by the mullah with due honor. According to the custom, the mullah should say the prayers first, so he sat on his knees and prayed loudly. Nanak laughed aloud. All the muslims in the temple got angry but dared not say anything because of the emperor's presence. Then Akbar sat on his knees and prayed. Nanak laughed even more loudly this time. The atmosphere in the mosque was becoming tense. The faces of the devotees became red and their lips twitched. Akbar controlled them by way of a silent gesture. Both of them came out. Akbar questioned Nanak with all humility: "Oh revered one! May I know why you laughed loudly during the prayer session? Does it become of you"?

Guru Nanak replied, "Oh king, how could I withhold my laughter when I could clearly see that neither the mullah nor your majesty were thinking of God while praying. The mullah was thinking of his ailing son and you were thinking of the pair of beautiful Arabian horses that were gifted to you. Is it worthy of either the mullah or your majesty to call that prayer? Is it not hypocrisy"? The mullah and emperor sought pardon from Nanak and thanked him for opening their eyes.

Remember, prayer is not just a string of words of praises to God that are to be recited mechanically. It is an earnest attempt to awaken and arouse the divinity within us. We should say prayers with full concentration. What matters is the feeling, not the voice or words. "Mere adulation is poor adoration."

DEVOTEES' EXPERIENCES

I was pursuing an MBA program from 1998 to 2000. Despite acing all the subjects with straight A's, accounting was always my weakness. One night, just a day before my accounting exam, I was serving in the temple.

It was a busy time and a lot of work had to be accomplished by morning. By the time the tasks were completed, it was late night and I could not study for the test.

The next morning I got busy helping a disabled devotee. It was almost afternoon by the time I finished with him; it was then that the realization dawned on me that I had not finished studying for the test that was to be held that very evening.

I tried my level best to prepare in those few hours. As I approached the exam hall nervously, my fears were further intensified. To make things worse, there was a question on the test for 25 points. It was an accounting problem that I was not familiar with.

Had I not answered that question, I would have surely failed the test and lost my scholarship. Not knowing what to do, I prayed to Baba for help.

Most surprisingly, the accounting professor left his desk that very minute and, leaving all students, came straight to me. He pointed to the very question I was struggling with and quietly solved it for me. I was in shock because the professor was a very strict disciplinarian, one who had historically never helped students in this manner.

As I look back upon the incidence, I realize that it was Sai Maa who had answered my call for help and saved my grades and also the scholarship that depended on my academic performance.

THE FESTIVAL OF HOLI

Holi, the festival of colors, is marked by the arrival of spring and is celebrated on the day after the full moon (mostly in March). There are different versions of stories that describe the origin of this festival; some even attribute its significance to celebrating good harvests and fertility of the land. There seems to be some general consensus, however, on the story that describes the victory of good over evil.

The story centers around an arrogant demon king, Hiranyakashyapa, who disliked his son worshipping Lord Vishnu, and not the demon king himself. What ensued were relentless attempts to defeat the young boy and his faith. The king ordered the execution of the boy on several occasions and yet failed each time because the boy's beloved Lord was protecting him on every occasion. Frustrated with recurring defeats, the king finally requested his sister, Holika, who had the boon of being immune to fire, to jump into fire with Prahlada on her lap. The demoness had on several prior occasions come out of fire unscathed and hence jumped at the opportunity to prove her loyalty to her brother. Wonder of wonders, the Lord protected Prahlada this time as well and Holika burned to ashes while he came out of the fire unharmed.

Holi is also considered to be a symbolic reenactment of this story and bonfires are lit in every nook and corner of the country. Offerings of coconut and sweets are made in this fire and the victory of devotion is reminisced every year.

The colorful festival, which follows the next day, also finds a strong association with the divine love of Krishna and Radha and is celebrated with much grandeur in the holy cities of Vrindavan and Mathura—the two cities that were the dwelling place of Lord Krishna's avataric career.

Colored powder and water are tossed around on this day, accompanied by marvelous processions, folk dances, and general gaiety. Young and old, alike merge into the colors of the festival, forgetting all differences of caste, race, gender, and social status. All, it appears, get colored in the color of joy.

The festival starts on the night of full moon when bonfires are lit on street corners, symbolically

cleaning the air of evil spirits and bad thoughts, personified by Holika. The next morning streets are filled with people running about coloring almost every visible person.

The festival is celebrated all across India but Mathura, Vrindavan, Nandagaon, and Barsnar have their own unique style for celebrating this festival.

Wish you all a Very Happy Holi!

**SAI SANDESH,
ON BEHALF OF
OM SAI
MANDIR,
WISHES ALL ITS
READERS A
VERY HAPPY
HOLI. MAY THE
LORD'S
BLESSINGS
BRING PEACE
AND JOY ON
ONE AND ALL.**

TEMPLE JOURNAL



**MAHASHIVARATRI CELEBRATIONS SUNDAY,
FEBRUARY 26, 2006 TO MONDAY, FEBRUARY
27, 2006**

Children's Corner

Story on Lord Rama continued...

When Hanuman reached home, he quickly went to Lord Rama, informed him about Sita, and gave him the necklace given by Sita. When Lord Rama saw the necklace He burst into tears and said, "Hanuman, you have done what no one else could have done. What can I do in return?" Hanuman humbly prostrated and sought Lord Rama's blessings.

Later Sugriva, Lord Rama, and the whole monkey army discussed a strategy to bring back Sita. But the main difficulty they faced was to cross the ocean. The news reached Ravana that Lord Rama and his monkey army were preparing to cross the ocean. King Ravana quickly called his cabinet and sought their advice. They unanimously decided to fight Lord Rama's army. Vibhishana, King Ravana's brother, was the only one who was against the idea. He requested King Ravana to return Sita to Lord Rama and seek forgiveness. Ravana disagreed and asked him to leave the kingdom.

So, Vibhishana went to meet Lord Rama and asked for forgiveness. Rama asked him to join his army and promised to make him the king of Lanka.



Lord Rama decided to build a bridge with the help of the army of monkeys. He prayed to the Ocean God to stay calm while building the bridge.

The bridge was built in five days by the monkeys and the army finally crossed the ocean to reach Lanka.

Once they reached Lanka, Rama sent a messenger to Ravana and asked him to return Sita with honor or fight the army. King Ravana got very angry and ordered the messenger to leave immediately. The messenger returned to Lord Rama and described King Ravana's reaction to the message.

The next day Lord Rama ordered the army of monkeys to attack. The battle continued for a long time and when King Ravana's army was losing, Indrajeet, Ravana's son, took charge of the army. Indrajeet had the power to fight invisibly.

He shot arrows at Lord Rama and Lakshmana and serpents tied the arrows together so that they could not move. The monkey army panicked. Suddenly, Garuda, the king of birds, enemy of the snakes, appeared and all the snakes slithered away, releasing Lord Rama and Lakshmana.

When King Ravana heard about it, he came to the battle field and shot his powerful missile called shakthi at Lakshmana. Lakshmana fell down on the ground. Seeing this Lord Rama came to the forefront and challenged King Ravana. During the fight between King Ravana and Lord Rama, King Ravana's chariot was badly damaged and he was seriously injured. He looked helpless so Lord Rama took pity on him and asked him to get some rest and resume the battle the next day. In the meanwhile, Lakshmana regained consciousness. To be continued....

Courtesy:

<http://www.indolink.com/Kidz/Stories/ramayana1.html>

AN APPEAL

Devotees are requested to generously contribute toward the development of the temple. Devotees can make their checks payable to: **Om Sai Mandir**

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Behalf Of Om Sai
Mandir, Wishes All
Its Readers A Very
Happy Ugadi/Gudi
Padwa. May The
New Year Bring
Peace And
Prosperity On One
And All.**