THE HOPE YATRA
A Journey of Help & Healing in the Himalayas

H.H. Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji
JUNE 2015 NEWS SPECIAL

Pujya Swamiji makes Historic yatra of giving, caring and sharing in the service of God and Humanity

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Enabling Self-Sufficient Lives for Disaster Widows
Darshan at Holy Kedarnath
A Beautiful New School in the Flood-Devastated Himalayas
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www.washalliance.org (Global Interfaith WASH Alliance),
www.projecthope-india.org (Project Hope), www.divineshaktifoundation.org (Divine Shakti Foundation),
www.ihrf.com (India Heritage Research Foundation)
Throughout the world, the act of pilgrimage represents a sacred journey of body, mind and soul, which enriches lives as travellers walk towards the vistas, holy places and people that symbolize the heart of spirituality. In the spring of 2015, HH Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji, Sadhvi Bhagawatiji and many caring souls set forth on pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Kedarnath, giving back through acts in service to God and humanity—from opening a beautiful new school to helping disaster-impacted widows to earn livelihoods— with nearly every step. In these pages, we invite you to walk with us as we re-live this divine journey to the holy Himalayas.
Historic Inauguration
A New Day Dawns for Flood-Impacted Children With The Launch Of Uttarakhand’s First “Green” Elementary School

Brightland International School, which was completely destroyed in the floods of 2013, has been rebuilt by Divine Shakti Foundation, Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh, led, guided, blessed and inspired by Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji.

The new, eco-friendly campus was inaugurated on the 31st May by Hon’ble Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, Shri Harish Rawatji, Hon’ble Minister of Drinking Water and Education, Uttarakhand, Shri Mantri Prasad Naithaniji, Hon’ble Minister of Agriculture, Uttarakhand, Shri Harak Singh Rawatji with Pujya Swami and other dignitaries and guests. The newly-rebuilt school will serve hundreds of children within its beautiful campus.

Divine Shakti Foundation’s project of building the Brightland School was generously supported by Mahavir Seva Sadan, Kolkatta and was implemented locally by SEEDS, India, led by Shri Manu Gupta and his team.

(continued on next page)
A special peace prayer and homage was led by Pujya Swamiji during the Brightland International School Inauguration in memory of the thousands of departed souls in the Uttarakhand flash floods of 2013.

Among the unique features of the school are eco-friendly bio-toilets and WHO-approved bio-sand filters for clean water.

This project in addition to basic academic education, will also provide:

- **Bio-Toilet Sanitation Facilities**: to provide adequate sanitation with an eco-friendly technology that can help preserve and protect our environment

- **WASH Education and Awareness Programmes**: highlighting the importance of maintaining and improving clean water, sanitation and hygiene facilities not only in schools but in all communities throughout the Himalayan state as well as throughout India.

- **Disaster Management Training**: proper disaster management training and drills with students and teachers will be carried out to ensure students and teachers are prepared in time of emergency.

- **Green Education Programmes and Activities**: such as regular tree plantation drives during the monsoons, adequate solid waste management, trash segregation and recycling and awareness campaigns

- **Livelihoods skills training** programmes utilizing the school space in the afternoon, after the school day, so that women of the local communities are empowered

- **Encouraging renewable energy utilization** by exploring and providing solar panel and other feasible green technologies to sustain daily energy needs

- **Promoting Yoga and Holistic Well-Being** in all schools as well as ensuring that a majority of the food available to the children is fresh and organic

Additionally, there was the presentation of the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programmes, including fruit tree plantations, being implemented by Divine Shakti Foundation, the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance and Ganga Action Parivar in 11 other schools of the Rudra Prayag region.

**Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji**, President of Parmarth Niketan (Rishikesh), Founder of Divine Shakti Foundation and Ganga Action Parivar and Co-Chairman of the Global Interfaith WASH
Pujya Swamiji warmly lauds the Hon’ble Chief Minister, Shri Harish Rawatji’s, great dedication and commitment to education and thanks him for gracing the Brightland school inauguration.

Pujya Swamiji welcomes Hon’ble MLA of Kedarnath, Smt Shaila Rani Rawatji, and appreciates her tireless efforts towards rehabilitation of the Kedarnath, Agyustamuni Region.

**Shri Harish Rawatji, the Hon’ble Chief Minister of Uttarakhand** said, “I congratulate Pujya Swamiji on the inauguration of the Brightland International School. I also urge Pujya Swamiji to help us rebuild Uttarakhand on a large-scale, providing safer housing for thousands who are still without homes and create livelihoods by strengthening our spiritual-cultural tourism as well as agriculture.”

**Hon’ble Minister of Education and Drinking Water, Shri Mantri Prasad Naithaniji**, personally visited the actual campus and commended and supported the efforts. He was enthusiastic to work with Divine Shakti Foundation and Global Interfaith WASH Alliance to implement WASH education and awareness in all schools.

**Hon’ble Minister of Agriculture Harak Singh Rawatji** said,”Pujya Swamiji has always been there for us in times of great need. Today He is taking yet another step to help us by inspiring the rebuilding of so many schools in the Rudraprayag area.”

**Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati, President of Divine Shakti Foundation and Secretary-General of the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance**, said, “It is such a great joy for Divine Shakti Foundation to open this school. By providing excellent education as well as the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene programs to the youth from this sacred land and the flood affected areas, not only is the name of the school Brightland, but their entire future and the future of their families and communities will be Bright. When their future is bright, they share the light and then the future of the entire state becomes bright.”

Also present at the occasion were **Shri Dinesh Shahra, Managing Director of Ruchi Soya**, Shri Bharat Mitra, Founder-President of Organic India, Kiran Bali, Global Chair of United Religions Initiative, delegates from all around the world, including countries such as USA, Australia, Austria, Canada, Israel, England, as well as Rishikumars of Parmarth Gurukul and many others.

Divine Shakti Foundation’s sister organizations, Global Interfaith WASH Alliance and Ganga Action Parivar, will work hand in hand to implement and sustain the green programmes and activities mentioned above.
Pujya Swamiji speaks about the historic pledge taken by the Hon’ble CM, Hon’ble Agriculture Minister, Bharat Mitraji and Shri Dinesh Shahraji to create a multipurpose agriculture training centre.

Young Tanvi and Tilak Mehta speak about their extraordinary experience to the Brightland School and offer their respects and gratitude to Pujya Swamiji’s vision and selfless service.

Pujya Swamiji, Sadhviji, Bharat Mitraji, Dinesh Shahraji and DM Rudraprayag discuss the plans to visit affected regions and address key challenges in the region.

An adorable young student at Brightland International School, who has now been given an opportunity to regain access to quality education.
Joy at a Newly-Rebuilt School
Pujya Swamiji and Dignitaries Visit Brightland

A visit to the actual site of the Brightland International School, a short 150 metre trek from the main Chandrapuri market road, was made prior to the grand inauguration of the school at the Indoor Stadium in Agyustamuni. Pujya Swamiji, Sadhviji and Hon’ble Minister of Education, Shri Mantri Prasad Naithaniji made the inaugural visit with Bharat Mitraji, members of the SEEDS team and many others.

The teachers and students were thrilled to welcome their special guests and gladly escorted them with drums and horns all the way up the trekking route. They were also deeply touched by Pujya Swamiji’s inspiring words and joined Him in a pledge to keep their school and their community clean and green. A very special tree plantation took place as a symbol of their green pledge and the students promised to take care of and nourish the sapling in eager anticipation of the next time that Pujya Swamiji visits.
In addition to construction of the Brightland School, Divine Shakti Foundation, Ganga Action Parivar and the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance have also pledged—under Pujya Swamiji’s leadership and direction—to bring water, sanitation and hygiene programmes, including bio-toilets, biosand water filters, WASH education and more, to many other schools in the Kedarnath Valley.
'Green school' inaugurated in Kedarnath region

PTI

Brightland International School, which was destroyed in the 2013 floods in Uttarakhand, has been rebuilt with an eco-friendly campus.

Two years after the devastating flash flood tragedy in Uttarakhand, a first-of-its-kind 'green school' has been inaugurated here at Chandrapuri.

Brightland International School, which was completely destroyed in the floods of 2013, has been rebuilt and the new, eco-friendly campus — which was inaugurated by Chief Minister Harish Rawat — is now ready to open its doors to students.

The rebuilding of the school was undertaken as part of the 'Project Hope' initiative of the Rishikesh-based Divine Shakti Foundation.

"Eleven other schools are being rebuilt in Rudraprayag and we will be working actively to ensure the same provision of sanitation, green projects, and WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) programmes," Chidanand Saraswati, President of Parmarth Niketan (Rishikesh), founder of Divine Shakti Foundation and Ganga Action Parishad and co-Founder/chairman of the Global Interfaith WASH Alliance, told PTI.

"Students and the faculty will also be trained in disaster prevention and response," he added.

Among the unique features of the school are eco-friendly bio-toilets and WHO-approved bio-sand filters for clean water.

"We have also focussed on solid waste management, consciousness of our carbon footprint and active engagement as regards proper disposal and utilisation of trash by segregation and recycling," added Bhagwati Saraswati, president of Divine Shakti Foundation.

She said that the school building would be used after class hours for holding livelihood skills training for women and members from the surrounding communities.

As for the students, apart from the curriculum, they will also be trained in Yoga and holistic well-being.

Keywords: Green school, Brightland International School, Uttarakhand 2013 floods, eco-friendly campus, bio-toilets, bio-sand filters, solid waste management, recycling
A first: CM opens eco-friendly school at Rudraprayag

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

MAY 31
Chief Minister Harsh Ram Rai today inaugurated the first eco-friendly school reconstructed by the Divine Shakti Foundation and Parmarth Niketan Ashram at Rudraprayag. The school was washed away by the floods of 2013.

The school was washed away during the floods and was one of the worst-hit schools. The school was later reconstructed and reopened in 2014.

The school was inaugurated by Chief Minister Harsh Ram Rai, who expressed his satisfaction over the efforts put in by the Divine Shakti Foundation and Parmarth Niketan Ashram.

The school, which was earlier located on the banks of the Ganges, has been shifted to a new location away from the river to ensure the safety of the students.

The school was designed with green energy options to help reduce the carbon footprint of the school. The school also has solar panels and windmills to generate electricity.

The school has been equipped with modern facilities such as computer labs, libraries, and sports rooms.

The school was inaugurated in the presence of eminent educationists and politicians, including Shri Bishan Singh, the former Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, and Dr. P. K. Tripathi, the former Chief Minister of Jharkhand.
The newly completed livelihoods centre was the next stop in Pujya Swamiji and Sadhviji’s yatra to Kedarnath, where they met and spent time with the beneficiaries. Several of the women, who had lost their husbands in the floods, were so glad to have gotten a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. As Pujya Swamiji said, “along with weaving sweaters, shawls and many other garments, they were also weaving their lives with hope and healing.”

Divine Shakti Foundation built the center in the wake of the tragic floods and has provided all of the machines for the women to work on. DSF has also joined together with Mandakini Women Weavers of Garhwal and Panchachuli Women Weavers of Kumaon, Jagdish Stores, Organic India, Global Interfaith WASH Alliance (GIWA), Ganga Action Parivar (GAP) and many others to engage and reach out to hundreds of women, unemployed youth and their families in the Kedarnath Valley. Divine Shakti Foundation’s Triyuginarayan Centre is located 25 kms from Kedarnath, the sacred site which was most devastated by the Uttarakhand floods. Special thanks to the Emami Foundation for its generous contribution toward this center.
Darshan at a sacred temple in nearby Triyuginarayan, where it's said that Shiva and Parvati were married before the holy fire.
परमार्थ निकेतन ने जगाई जीवन जीने की उम्मीदें

परमार्थ निकेतन ने कार्य बुर्जी एवं महिलाओं की ओर से तैयार की जा रही उन्म का निरीक्षण करते हए सवर्ण निरंतरता।

जबरदस्ती, द्वारजीत शर्मा: महिलाओं ने परमार्थ निकेतन विभाग की ओर से तैयार की जा रही उन्म का निरीक्षण करते हए सवर्ण निरंतरता।

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Pujya Swamiji and Sadhvi Bhagawatiji visited the massive Rambara landslide location—where an entire town and large chunks of mountainside were completely wiped out—with Hon’ble Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Harak Singh Rawatji and District Magistrate of Rudraprayag, Dr. Raghav Langar.

The inauguration of a new International Memorial Garden (Śmriti Van), which will contain indigenous and sacred trees planted in memory of the departed souls from the tragic 2013 floods in Uttarakhand, was also performed.

The area will be developed as an eco-tourism location where people can be with Nature, as well as be inspired to protect and preserve the environment...and in so doing, abate natural disasters and save countless, precious lives.
रामबाड़ा में विकसित होगा केदार स्मृति वन

*अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्मृति गाहन के रूप में किया जाएगा विशिष्ट समारोह*

संस्थानी, स्थानांतरण: परमार्थ निकेतन रामबाड़ा के पास आयुष्मान ने भोजपुरी लोगों की बारे में केदार स्मृति वन के विकसित की घोषणा कियी। परमार्थ निकेतन के प्रमुख रामबाड़ा स्मृति वन में मनाने हैं। आयुष्मान ने यह घोषणा की कि वह समस्त भारत में बाल नवीनता के क्षेत्र में निर्माण करेंगे।

रामबाड़ा के पास स्मृति तार में स्मृति का पौधा रोवण करने द्वारा स्मृति वन का दृष्टिकोण बनाया।

*38 लाख रुपये की लागत में तेंदुआ किया स्थापना*

रामबाड़ा: नवं 2013 में मैंने आयुष्मान देखा रामबाड़ा के आकृतियाँ से वह बालवान दीर्घदूरता है, तब तक स्मृति वन का व्यवस्थापन भी हुआ है। रामबाड़ा स्मृति वन का पौधा है। स्मृति वन के लिए का माहौल बनाया जा रहा है। रामबाड़ा के पास स्मृति वन का व्यवस्थापन स्मृति वन का दृष्टिकोण बनाया।

*परमार्थ निकेतन रामबाड़ा के पास आयुष्मान में माना गया लोगों की याद में स्मृति वन विकसित किया गया*
Pujya Swamiji and Sadhviji visited a small village by the name of Jyuri (block Agustyamuni, district Rudraprayag), high in the mountains from Rudraprayag which is a typical, exquisite yet impoverished mountain village, with Hon'ble MLA Kedarnath, Shaila Rani Ravatji.

Medicinal herbs, roots, fruit and vegetables grew plentifully and organically. The villagers poured their hearts out to Pujya Swamiji and Sadhvi Bhagawatiji about their challenges and concerns as well as the great need for proper education as well as access to higher education for their communities.

Pujya Swamiji and Sadhviji, deeply touched and saddened by the challenges that the community faced, promised their support and plan to engage companies like Organic India and Ruchi Soya to scale-up these efforts. Stay tuned for more on these plans, and visit us at www.DivineShaktiFoundation.org.
Sadhviji and the Hon’ble MLA of Kedarnath, Smt Shaila Rani Rawatji, share a warm, loving embrace in the village of Jyuri.

Pujya Swamiji is shown local medicinal plants and herbs, growing in abundance in the village.
A New Vision for the Agustyamuni Training Centre

On route back to Rudraprayag-Sangam, Pujya Swamiji and Sadhviji were invited by Hon’ble Smt Shaila Rani Rawatji to visit a newly opened training and employment centre in Agustyamuni, Rudraprayag.

Upon seeing the centre and meeting the women, they planned to scale up and standardize the services to meet international standards as well as improve the training with the help and support of Bharat Mitra and his Organic India team playing a major part in training and development of the centre.

To learn more, visit us at: www.DivineShaktiFoundation.org
A beautiful Ganga Aarti was organized at Rudraprayag Sangam, at the confluence of the Alakananda and Mandakini rivers. The Aarti was led by Pujya Swamiji, the first time after the tragic floods two years ago, and brought together the local community and local administration.

Pujya Swamiji inspired them to pledge and plan to organize Ganga Aarti at the sacred confluence on a regular basis, for this the Divine Shakti Foundation provided them with new musical instruments and sound systems as well as many other necessary items to start the Ganga Aarti. The once beautiful Sangam Ghat, a popular pilgrimage site, was washed away in the floods of 2013 and so Pujya Swamiji planned with local administration for the restoration and recovery of the popular pilgrimage site.

During the Ganga Aarti, Pujya Swamiji commended Dr. Raghav Langar, young District Magistrate of Rudraprayag for his vision and dedication to his region and Dr. Raghav pledged to work together with Pujya Swamiji in His green vision for Rudraprayag.
Divinity at Dev Prayag
A Green Pilgrimage to Where Sacred Rivers Meet

A glorious stop along our Green Yatra was at the sacred town of Devprayag, where the holy rivers Alakananda from Badrinath, Mandakini from Kedarnath and Bhagirathi come together to form the National River Ganga. The Alakananda and Mandakini join in Rudra Prayag, and then that confluence travels down to Dev Prayag to join with the sacred Bhagirathi. During the visit to Dev Prayag, Pujya Swamiji planned for a beautiful centre in this prominent pilgrimage site, which would serve to promote and preserve the local culture and heritage of the area, improve and strengthen eco-tourism as well as provide basic facilities such as clean water and adequate sanitation facilities.

Members of the yatra also took part in special pooja along the banks as well as snan in the holy waters of the river. Deeply inspired, Bharat Mitra led the group in a beautiful song of unity and love, which emphasizing the truth that we are ONE- one light and one soul. Therefore, we should reflect Oneness in Action.
Near the conclusion of Pujya Swamiji and Sadhviji’s recent yatra to Rudraprayag, devotees gathered together in prayer, divine chanting and meditation at the beautiful Shri Vidya Dham in Guptakashi.

Exemplifying the spirit of Yoga in Action and Yoga off the mat, Pujya Swamiji also met with several local leaders, most prominently, the MLA of Kedarnath, Smt Shaila Rani Rawatji, to discuss solutions to meet the challenges of that region. Pujya Swamiji was especially requested by the Hon’ble MLA to focus on diversifying and strengthening vocational skills training.

They discussed setting up a multi-purpose vocational training centre for agricultural training in organic farming and methods of agro-ecology as well as other skills such as food processing. They also discussed the need to have computers and improved WASH facilities in all schools, amongst many other projects and initiatives. Pujya Swamiji pledged support for these programs through partnerships with Organic India, Ruchi Soya and other industries and organisations.
A visit to the sacred Kedarnath temple, led by Pujya Swamiji and Sadhviji, was a powerful and deeply transforming experience. Pujya Swamiji commended the efforts of the Government and said that just as they had been successful in getting Uttarakhand back on its feet, He urged the people of Garhwal to also get back on their feet and support these efforts to ensure that such tragedies are not repeated, lives are saved and the rich spiritual-cultural heritage of this sacred land is retained for all.

With hundreds of devotees lining up for darshan, one could still see signs of the devastation, as JCBs and volunteers continued to work to remove the rubble and boulders left behind from the disaster as light snow came falling from the sky.

With the grace of Bhagawan Kedarji and with Pujya Swamiji’s blessings, all devotees had the opportunity to sit and perform a sacred Abhishek puja of the divine deity in the mandir. For nearly a full half hour, we poured water, milk, ghee and honey, placed sacred sandalwood and rice on the divine natural Linga of Lord Shiva.

The first snowfall in many days occurred just during our puja, so that we had several extra divine hours in the sacred land, waiting for the weather to clear for the helicopters. The priests were so thankful for Pujya Swamiji’s blessings to bring much-needed snow onto the mountain.

During Pujya Swamiji’s visit He also met with the SDM of Kedarnath and planned in detail with him and his team ways in which we could bring the sacred pilgrimage of Kedarnath on the world tourism map, while retaining the divine and deeply transformative nature of the pilgrimage. They discussed the challenges and obstacles as well as the solutions and plan of action. The local administration, priests and volunteers were incredibly inspired by His visit and were eager to work together to bring this divine vision to fruition.
The divine rock that some say miraculously saved the Kedarnath Temple by blocking the torrential river and diverting its fury away.