



In the Lap of Maa Ganga

Parmarth Niketan

An Abode of Peace Dedicated to the Welfare of All



❁ Celebrating 25 years under Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji's Leadership ❁





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Eastern Wisdom for Mind • Body • Soul

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परमार्थ निकेतन

Parmarth Niketan literally means, “An Abode Dedicated to the Welfare of All.” Originally founded in 1942 by the great saint, Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji Maharaj (1901-1965), Parmarth Niketan has blossomed over the nearly 70 years of its existence into the largest ashram in Rishikesh and one of the largest spiritual institutions in India – a world renowned sanctuary of peace, joy, inspiration and spiritual communion for people of all walks of life, from every corner of the Earth. Today, twelve months a year, Parmarth Niketan is full of seekers, pilgrims, devotees and travelers looking to experience the gift, the secret, the Divine Touch that is present in this spiritual center, on the holy banks of the Ganga, in the lap of the Himalayas, in an area called Swargashram, or literally “Heavenly abode”.

Parmarth Niketan Ashram has over 1000 rooms and lush gardens bursting forth in vibrant colors from innumerable species of flowers. The ashram is home to the annual, internationally renowned, International Yoga Festival held every year in March, as well as a wide variety of yoga courses, meditation courses, spiritual camps, kathas (recitations of the scriptures) and many other programs throughout the year.



The main objectives of the Ashram/Trust are as follows :

To provide charitable services to all who are in need. The trust is dedicated to bringing food to the hungry, medicine to the sick, education to the illiterate, shelter to the homeless, and peace to the troubled.



To provide free educational services to children, women, adults and all those pursuing noble education and enrichment.



To provide free diagnosis, medication and treatment for a wide range of medical ailments.



To spread the spiritual and cultural heritage of India based on the principles of equality, humanity and spirituality. For this, there are daily satsang and cultural programs as well as frequent kathas/pravachans and other spiritual/cultural programs.



To provide disaster relief to victims of local, natural catastrophes, including earthquakes, floods, famine, etc.



To protect the sacred natural resources, and cultivate wide-spread consciousness of environmental sanctity.



To provide pilgrims with a place for silence, meditation, sadhana, scriptural study and seva.



To spread interfaith and inter-ethnic harmony.



पारमार्थ

section 01

A Divine, Historic Lineage is Born





Ganga

The crystal clear, blue, rushing waters of Mother Ganga cut through the foothills of the Himalayas, carving out the most sacred river bed in the world. Out of the Mother Glacier more than 13,000 feet above sea level, more than 200 kilometers north of Rishikesh, the Goddess Ganga—daughter of King Himavat, the King of the Himalayas, and Queen Meru, sister of Uma, Bhagawan Shiva's divine consort—is said to have descended upon Earth, an act of grace and compassion to bring liberation to the fallen sons of King Sagara. Lord Brahma, pleased by King Bhagirath's tapasya, directed him to undertake prayers to Lord Shiva who would catch the powerful, intractable force of Ganga's waters in His infinite locks, releasing Her flow from Heaven gently so that She would bring life and liberation to Earth rather than decimation. Thus, Goddess Ganga gracefully departed from Her Heavenly abode and took the form of a flowing river; Lord Shiva released Her from His tresses into seven streams or tributeries, the main one being the river Bhagirathi from the glacier known as Gaumukh, for its resemblance to the shape of a cow's mouth.





Om Jaya Gange Mata, Maiya Jaya Gange Mata...

Joining at Dev Prayag with Her sister rivers Alakananda, coming from Badrinath, and Mandakini from Kedarnath, Bhagirathi becomes known as Ganga—the confluence of these three sacred rivers from three of the holiest sites. Rushing rapidly through curves and bends in the mountains, flowing across the holy fauna of the Himalayas, accumulating mineral rich soil in Her waters, Ganga finally arrives in Rishikesh where Her breadth increases, Her speed decreases and She seems to pause to allow all to have darshan of Her majestic and magical form. The river banks are lined with rocks, softened and smoothed by Her waters, large ones upon which one can sit for hours, medium sized ones which fit perfectly in the palm of one's hand, for holding and meditating upon, and small pebbles, one or two collected by the pious so that Mother Ganga may flow through their home as well. Off in the distance aarti bells ring in one of the ashrams or temples, calling forth the devotees to come and offer their prayers. "Om Jaya Jagadish Hare, Swami Jaya Jagadish Hare..." The sound of the aarti in the temple rides the wind, up and down the river, mingling with the mooing of cows, the vendors' lyrical announcement of the types of vegetables on their cart, and the soporific sound of Ganga's waters washing over the rocks.

This is Rishikesh, a land known as the "home of the rishis." Its alternate spelling of Hrishikesh refers to Lord Vishnu, as Lord of the Senses — it is, therefore, a land in which to conquer one's senses, to conquer the call of desire, to become master of oneself.





Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji

It is the place to which in the early 1940s a revered saint from Shahjahanpur in Uttar Pradesh, named Swami Shukdevanandji came to engage in deep meditation. Rishikesh attracted many saints who are now world renowned as founders of various international spiritual institutions, including Swami Sivananda (Sivananda Ashram, Divine Life Society), Swami Chinmayananda (Chinmaya Mission), Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (worldwide Transcendental Meditation movement) and Swami Rama (Himalayan Institute). It also attracted, over the years, innumerable saints who – although perhaps not internationally renowned – were true powerhouses and embodiments of wisdom, vision and enlightenment, including Swami Rama Tirth and Swami Ramsukhdas, among many others.

So, Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji began coming to Rishikesh to meditate on the banks of Ganga, and slowly began to construct a small place for himself and Pujya Swami Bhajanandaji to stay. Slowly, as more and more devotees came to listen to the wisdom of these masters, more rooms needed to be built, along with a satsang hall and bhojanalaya. Swami Shukdevanandji named these simple, small huts, basic hall and bhojanalaya, “Parmarth Niketan”, an abode dedicated to the welfare of all. He was a saint dedicated not only to his own spiritual practice, not only to his own enlightenment, but to bringing light to others. He was dedicated to doing whatever he could to help the downtrodden – whether physically downtrodden or spiritually downtrodden.





In the early years, Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji and Pujya Swami Bhajananandaji would – in the common spiritual tradition of sadhus – travel to various ashrams and various cities, spreading wisdom, insight, teachings, guidance and upliftment to all whom they touched. In between, Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji would also return to the ashram he had established in Shahjahanpur and Pujya Swami Bhajananandaji would return to his ashram in Mainpuri.

They returned to their Himalayan abode in Rishikesh each summer and during what they established as “Sadhana Saptah” a weeklong spiritual intensive camp taking place each year in the month of Kartik, a tradition which continues to this day.

Their following grew, drawn and compelled by the divine presence of these masters, by their words, by their darshan, and by their mere presence. Slowly, over time, the gathering during the summers and Sadhana Saptah at Parmarth Niketan grew and grew.

As Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji’s vision and mission expanded, he created the Swami Shukdevanand Trust in 1962 which was officially registered and granted tax-exempt status by the Government of India for its noble vision and selfless work for humanity. Additionally, in 1962, Swami Shukdevanandji created Parmarth Ashram in Sapt-Sarovar Haridwar, approximately 25 kilometers downstream from Rishikesh.



*President of India,
S. Radhakrishnan visits Parmarth*



*President of India, Dr. Rajendra
Prasad comes to Parmarth*



*G.V. Mavalankar, first
Speaker of the House of Indian
Parliament, comes to Parmarth*

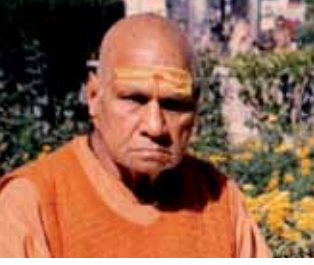
early branches of the family tree of parmarth



Pujya M.M. Swami Shukdevanandji

Pujya M.M. Swami Shukdevanandji had been an exceptionally bright as well as serene and peaceful child. From early childhood we was devoted to Mother Ganga, and he spent much of his youth wandering with his friends, on foot, from one ashram to another, particularly on the banks of Ganga. They would stay in one place for some time, undergoing sadhana and scriptural study, and then continue moving to receive more and more teachings from the saints and sages. When he was offered the land in Rishikesh in 1947, he knew that he was finally meant to stay in one place for considerable time, and hence he built the first kutirs (rooms) of Parmarth Niketan ashram. In 1966 he was given the venerable title of Mahamandaleshwar of the Daivi Sampad Mandal. Today, the flowering tree that Parmarth Niketan has become is due to the purity and the divinity of the seed he planted nearly 70 years ago.

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Pujya M.M. Swami Bhajananandji

Pujya Swami Bhajananandji was born in 1897 in a small village called "Miyaganj" near Kanauj into a pious, religious Vaishnav family. His mother, named Bhagirathi Ji after the Divine Mother Ganga, raised him with deep values and ethics and a strong spiritual foundation.

At the young age of 12 he was blessed by the touch of his first spiritual master, Pujya Swami Premanandji Maharaj, and he spent the next 12 years in intense sadhana under Pujya Swami Premanandji's instruction.

When he later went to the village of Vithur to have darshan of Pujya Swami Ekarasanandaji, who was staying there engaged in deep meditation, he was immediately touched by the saint's divinity and became his official disciple. He was initiated into sanyas by a disciple of Pujya Swami Ekarasanandaji and lived in the ashram in Mainpuri before coming to Parmarth with Pujya Swami Shukdevanandaji. He also continued to travel back and forth between Rishikesh and Mainpuri.

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Pujya M.M. Swami Asanganandji

In 1945 at the age of nine, Pujya Swami Asanganandji Maharaj came to Parmarth Niketan under the guidance and as a disciple of Swami Shukdevanandji Maharaj.

He has acharya degrees in Vedanta and Sanskrit literature, as well as a Master's degree in Sanskrit literature. Since 1960, he has tirelessly served the ashram's Sanskrit Vidyalaya.

He is serving the Swami Shukdevanand Trust as Managing Trustee, gracing all of the projects with His devotion and piety.

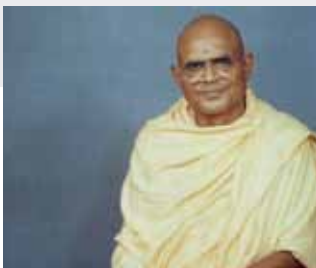
Pujya Swami Asanganandji has been imparting the wisdom of the ancient holy scriptures including yoga to countless number of devotees at Parmarth for many decades.



Pujya Swami Sadanandji

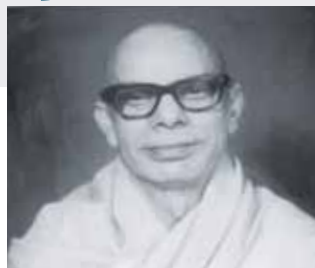
In the very early 1950s, Pujya Swami Sadanandji began to come regularly from Shahjahanpur to Parmarth Niketan in Rishikesh which also had been established by Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji. Pujya Swami Sadanandaji had a bachelor's degree and had served in the government of India railway service prior to taking sanyas. Hence, as someone with both a strong academic and professional background, he lived initially in Shahjahanpur, as it was the educational hub with a degree college and was also the center of the Parmarth magazine publication. While living at Shahjahanpur and overseeing the educational institution and publications, he would come to Parmarth Niketan during the summers and during Sadhana Saptah week.

However, in 1975 he shifted to Rishikesh, where his Guru, Pujya Swami Bhajananandji resided. Pujya Swami Bhajananandji appointed him president of Parmarth Niketan, enabling Pujya Swami Dharmanandji to give more focus to both the Haridwar ashram and also to his innumerable devotees throughout North India to whom he had to continually travel. Pujya Swami Sadanandji, in addition to overseeing Parmarth Niketan, created Parmarth Lok Ashram in Badrinath, high in the Himalayas, at the source of the Alakananda stream of Ganga. He served as President of Parmarth Niketan until his passing in 1986 when he officially appointed Pujya Swami Chidanandji as his successor.



Pujya M.M. Swami Dharmanandji

A young renunciant who had left his home for the spiritual path at the tender age of eight, Pujya Swami Dharmanandji came to Parmarth Niketan in 1954 to live at the feet of his guru, Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji. Originally from a small area called Bulandshahar in Uttar Pradesh, Pujya Swami Dharmanandji had spent his early years as a wondering monk, performing intense sadhana until – as the fruit of his sadhana -- he met Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji. Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji knew that his disciple was truly divine and blessed with not only great vision but also with great spiritual strength and capacity. Thus, in 1962 when he created the ashram in Haridwar he put Swami Dharmanandji in charge. Pujya Swami Dharmanandji also served as the Managing Trustee of the Swami Shukdevanand Trust.



Pujya Swami Vasudevanandji

In the late 1950s, a dedicated and sincere young man from Bareilly came who was given the responsibility of managing the affairs of Parmarth Niketan ashram for Swami Shukdevanandji. He remained at the ashram – looking after everything -- even during the months when Swami Shukdevanandji and Swami Bhajananandaji were traveling and disseminating wisdom throughout North India. A few years later, as Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji's health began to deteriorate, he initiated his disciple into sanyas, gave him the name of Swami Vasudevanandji, and officially made him president of Parmarth Niketan.



1965 saw the mahasamadhi of Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji. However, although his physical body is now enshrined in the “Samadhi Mandir” at Parmarth Niketan, and although his soul departed from the physical body nearly fifty years ago, his spirit remains, continuing to live on, blessing and guiding Pujya Swami Chidanandji as he extends and spreads the arms of Parmarth’s reach further and further, across borders and boundaries of city, state, nation, religion, race and language.

Until 1974, Parmarth Niketan was under the leadership of Pujya Swami Vasudevanandji, while Pujya Swami Dharmanandji looked after the Haridwar ashram and Pujya Swami Bhajanandji served as managing trustee of the Swami Shukdevanand Trust. A decade after the mahasamadhi of Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji, Parmarth Niketan also lost the physical presence of Pujya Swami Vasudevanandji and hence, Pujya Swami Dharmanandji assumed spiritual and logistic leadership of both the Rishikesh and the Haridwar ashrams.

Pujya Swami Chidanandji

In 1969, a young, adolescent renunciant known as Muniji came to Parmarth Niketan as he traveled barefoot and possessionless in the sacred Himalayas from Badrinath down back toward Delhi. Having left his home at 8 years old, Muniji had spent most of the next decade undergoing intense sadhana and tapasya in the jungles, forests and mountains. Years of silence, fasting, continuous meditation and arduous yogic practices had caused the powerful seed of divinity within him to sprout and blossom into a tree of wisdom, vision, insight and spiritual powers far beyond the seventeen years of his physical body. As he took refuge in the ashram for the night, he noticed the young students studying Sanskrit at the Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya at Parmarth. Having left his own academic education while still a young child, for the higher, deeper and more complete spiritual education of the Himalayas, he realized that – now fully established in his spiritual strength – he should return to the academic world and complete that which he had left behind. Thus, he stayed back at Parmarth Niketan and enrolled in the Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya. Despite having never completed, nor even begun, middle or high school, with his mind fully aligned and free from the illusions, obstacles and temptations that affect most, he was able to not only succeed but to thrive in the world of higher education. In fact, his scores consistently ranked amongst the highest in the country.

Muniji was taken under the wing of Pujya Swami Vasudevanandji, who immediately realized that this young sadhu was wise, capable and powerful far beyond his years. Looking into his eyes, Swami Vasudevanandji immediately understood that this young child could see it all and that he would play a crucial role not only in the history of Parmarth but in the history of the world.

In 1974 after the departure of Pujya Swami Vasudevanandji, Pujya Swami Dharamandji initiated him into sanyas and gave him the name Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji.



Pujya Swami Chinmayanandji

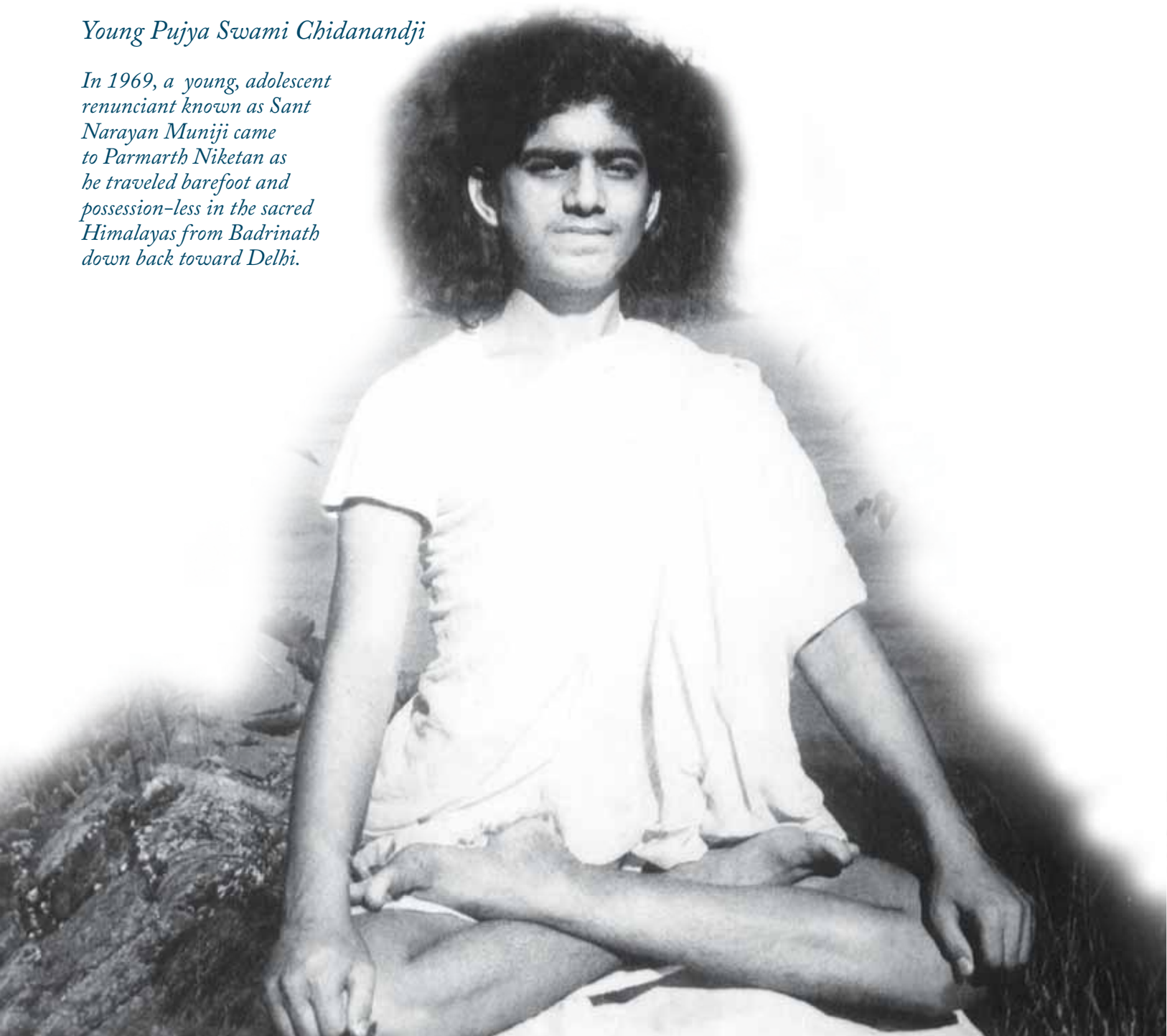
Pujya Swami Chinmayanand Saraswatiji was born on 3rd March 1947 in Eastern U.P. He left his home in 1967 at the young age of twenty years old. From 1967 to 1971 he studied Gayatri and Tantra in Haridwar, Varanasi and Guwahati, and completed his M.A. (Philosophy) and Doctorate (Comparative study of Shankar and Arvinda). He took Sanyas in 1971 from Pujya Swami Dharmanand Saraswatiji and began living at Parmarth Ashram, Haridwar. He served as a Member of Parliament from 1991 and then later in 1998 and 1999. During this time he served on several reputed Parliamentary Committees including the following: Public Accounts Committee, Estimate Committee, Assurance Committee, Member Salary and Accounts Committee, Civil Aviation Committee, Rural and Urban Development Committee, Telecommunication Committee, Central Education Board, Central Sanskrit Board, among others.

In addition to his Parliamentary activities he has held important positions in many social and political organizations. He was the first sanyasi to serve in the home ministry. During this time he worked to help bring peace in the North-East of India, for which he received a Peace Award. Apart from this he has also narrated several books and he has been a frequent writer in National Dailies. He has been serving as the Managing Trustee of the Swami Shukdevanand Trust since 2004.

A Divine, Historic Lineage is Born

Young Pujya Swami Chidanandji

In 1969, a young, adolescent renunciant known as Sant Narayan Muniji came to Parmarth Niketan as he traveled barefoot and possession-less in the sacred Himalayas from Badrinath down back toward Delhi.



Kumbha Mela 1977

The land of Allahabad (or Prayag Raj) is seen as the holiest of the four Kumbha Mela locations, for it is here that the holy Ganga and the holy Yamuna meet the invisible river of the Saraswati. To this sacred Triveni Sangam, people from across the world flock in the millions, in order to submerge their bodies, their sins, their cares and their worries into the convergence of rivers. For much of the year, the Kumbha Mela zone is covered by water. There are no permanent structures. It is only in the dry time of winter that the water levels drop, the land becomes parched and dusty, and the camps are erected for the Mela. It is a feat of unparalleled devotion to see the elaborate tent-camps, complete with electricity and running water, erected in a mere few weeks' time. The barren land becomes a land without a free inch of ground. The eerie quiet melts into the booming sounds of pravachans, blasting from loud speakers set up throughout the area.



સ્વર્ગીય કુળ





For this Kumbha Mela, Pujya Swami Chidanandji and Pujya Swami Sashwatanandji were given the seva of overseeing all the coordination, under the guidance of Pujya Swami Dharmanandji. To make water flow from a desiccated land, to make electricity run where there was nothing but mosquitoes, to provide thousands of guests with accommodation that would block out the raging wind and the near-freezing cold...these are the tasks the two young renunciants undertook.



Their devotion, sincerity and efficiency was rewarded when the Parmarth camp, constructed together with Bharat Sadhu Samaj, was graced by the presence of the Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi. She attended a beautiful function and effusively praised not only the Kumbha camp erected by Parmarth but also the dedication to humanity that the ashram's everyday services showed.

Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi comes to the Parmarth camp

Bharat Darshan Train Tour



In 1978-1979, the saints and nearly 600 devotees of Parmarth Niketan rented out an entire train and traversed the country, North to South, West to East, visiting the holy places. Pujya Swami Chidanandji and Pujya Swami Shashwatanandji were the main organizers for this event.

As Gandhiji had emphasized the importance of the village people, the poor people, and the tribal peoples, so they traveled through small villages, country sides, barren tribal areas, stopping to give the Divine Touch to the local people. They slept on the train in the nights, and disembarked each morning for a quick "snan" [shower] on the platforms. At each station there was one platform which was the snan platform. The men would all just fill buckets of water from the handpump and have their baths in the open. The ladies would gather into tight circles, forming a protective shield with their combined sarees, and each in turn would go into the middle for her bath, while the others shielded her from sight. Then, after having baths, they gathered on the station platform for morning prayers. There, in the middle of the train station, our saints, our yattris, all the local devotees who had come, plus all the people who were in the station at the time, would sit down and sing to the Almighty.

The days were filled with satsang at local temples, at local halls, and – when there wasn't time to go into town – satsang on the sanctified concrete platforms of local train stations.

Sitting or standing, steel thalis in hand, the 575 yattris plus all of their family members ate prasad prepared by the ashram's own cooks. They didn't only feed all the yattris, but they also fed everyone around, everyone who had gathered to hear the pravachan or just to have darshan of the saints, everyone who had come to meet friends and family, or just hungry, needy people at the station. As the scriptures say, "One should never eat alone." This is the glory of Indian culture. You first, me second. First feed, then eat. Pujya Swami Chidanandji says, "Sometimes by the time we were ready to sit down for our meals there was nothing left, or everything was cold. But, the joy was in serving, in feeding so many people. We were not only feeding their bodies, but we were feeding their hearts and souls with divine connection."

Pujya Swami Chidanandji – already a visionary -- realized that it was impossible for 575 people to crowd into one train car and listen to pravachan in the evenings as the train steamed past villages. So, he made arrangements – for the first time ever – for there to be a PA speaker system which broadcast the saints' voices throughout all of the cars of the train. Thus, everyone, sitting comfortably in their own cars, could dwell in the divine message and voice of the Spiritual Leaders.

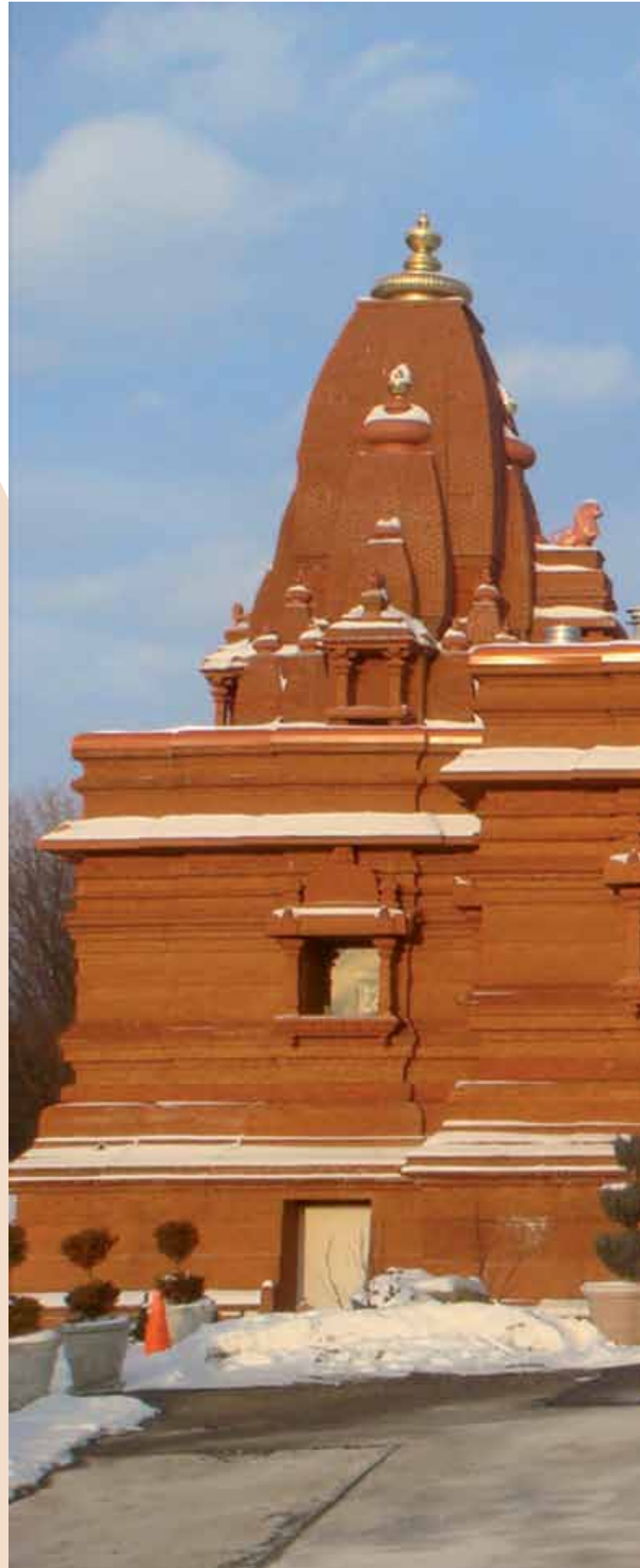






Satsangs throughout India during the Bharat Darshan yatra – on train platforms, in halls and in temples across the country.

Journey Abroad
of Pujya Swami
Sadanandji and
Pujya Swami
Chidanandji
Leading to the
Establishment
of the Hindu-
Jain Temple in
Pittsburgh, USA





In 1980 Pujya Swami Sadanandji and Pujya Swami Chidanandji embarked on a trip abroad, beginning with an arrival into Canada, followed by USA, on the 26th September 1980.

The first place in America the saints visited was Malibu, a luxurious oceanfront community of California's wealthiest businessmen and

Hollywood stars. Their purpose, of course, was unrelated to sightseeing or vacationing. They had been called by a prominent Indian living in the area, Dr. Amarjit Singh Marwah, a successful doctor filled with piety and humility, and a friend of Shri Mohanlal Chopra, a close devotee of Parmarth from Delhi. Dr. Marwah was eager to have his home, his family and the Sikh/Punjabi community blessed by enlightened saints from India.

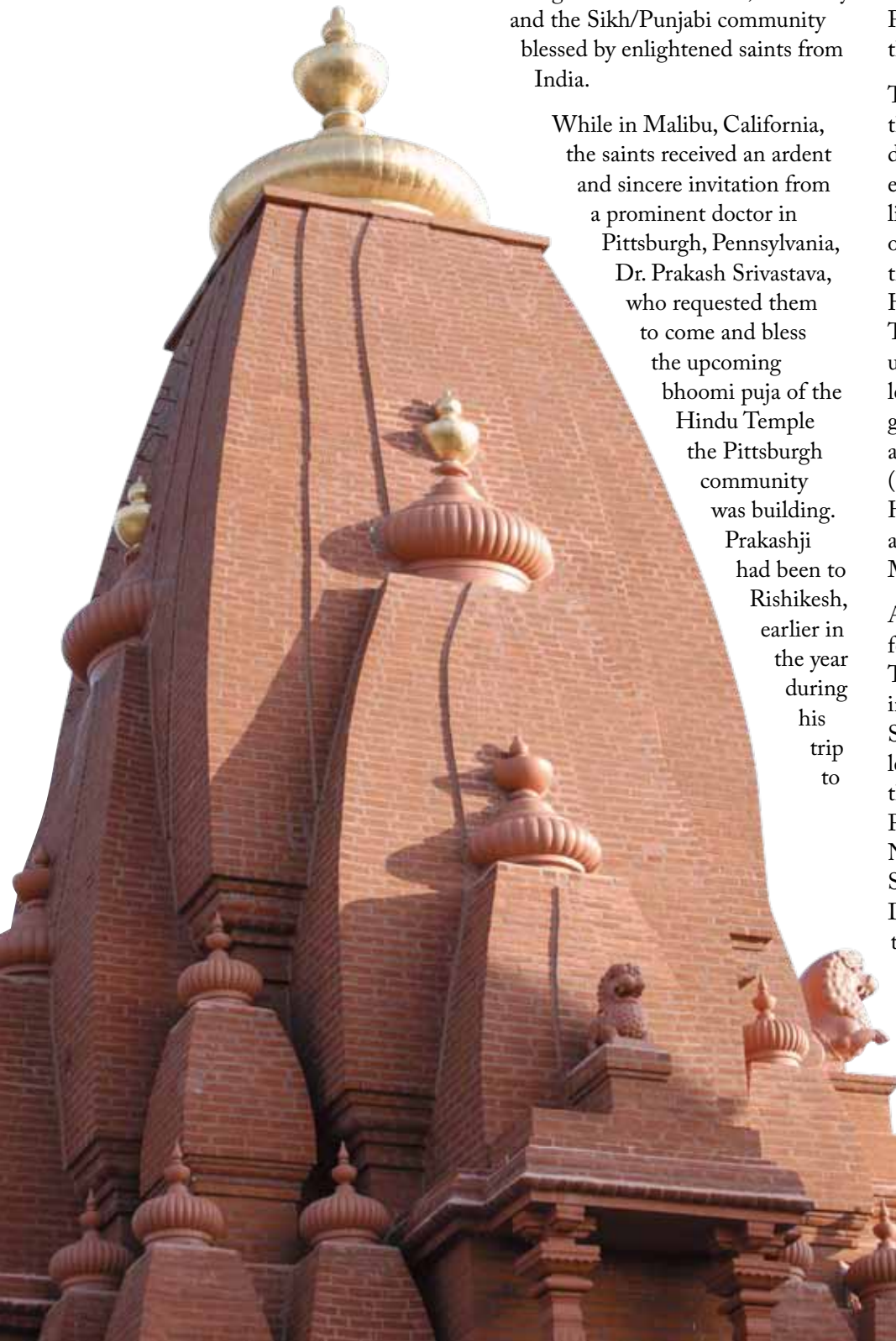
While in Malibu, California, the saints received an ardent and sincere invitation from a prominent doctor in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Dr. Prakash Srivastava, who requested them to come and bless the upcoming bhoomi puja of the Hindu Temple the Pittsburgh community was building. Prakashji had been to Rishikesh, earlier in the year during his trip to

India, and he had gone to Parmarth Niketan. Although he had not met Pujya Swami Chidanandji personally on that visit, he had been told that this was the saint who would be perfect for the role of inspiring and uniting the community as well as guiding the creation of the temple. Thus, when Prakashji found out that Pujya Swami Chidanandji was in America with Pujya Swami Sadanandji he decided they must come to Pittsburgh.

That is how it came to pass that on the auspicious day of Dusshera, the day symbolizing the vanquishing of evil by good, the ground was prepared, literally and figuratively, for the birth of the Hindu-Jain Temple. At the time, however, it was still called the Hindu Temple of North America. The name change would come later, under Pujya Swamiji's guidance and leadership. The bhoomi puja was graced by the presence of the saints as well as Consul General of India. (Please see the separate book on the Hindu-Jain Temple to read more about the establishment of this historic Mandir in Pennsylvania, USA)

Although the saints stayed only a few hours, the impact was profound. The temple trustees and devotees immediately recognized in Pujya Swami Chidanandji the spiritual leadership they were lacking. For the next twenty-one months Dr. Prakash Shrivastava and Prof. Raghu Nath communicated with Pujya Swami Sadanandji and Pujya Swami Dharmanandji, ardently requesting them to send the young, vibrant sanyasi back to Pittsburgh.

Pujya Swami Dharmanandji knew that, although Pujya Swami Chidanandji was ready, capable and definitely the right one for the role, a special kind of shakti (power) would also be required to unite this community and see the temple project through to fruition.



Thus, he agreed to the request, but would not let Pujya Swami Chidanandji go immediately. Rather, he instructed his disciple to undergo a severe and strict seventeen-month Purashcharan Gayatri anusthan (special meditation). Thus Pujya Swami Chidanandji's next year and a half was spent in complete silence, eating only once a day, days and nights filled solely with Gayatri japa, meditation, yoga and evening

walks on the banks of Ganga.

Finally, in the late summer of 1982 Pujya Swami Chidanandji returned to Pittsburgh. Thus it was that he became the founder and spiritual head of the first Hindu-Jain Temple in the world which had its official staphana ceremony in May 1984.

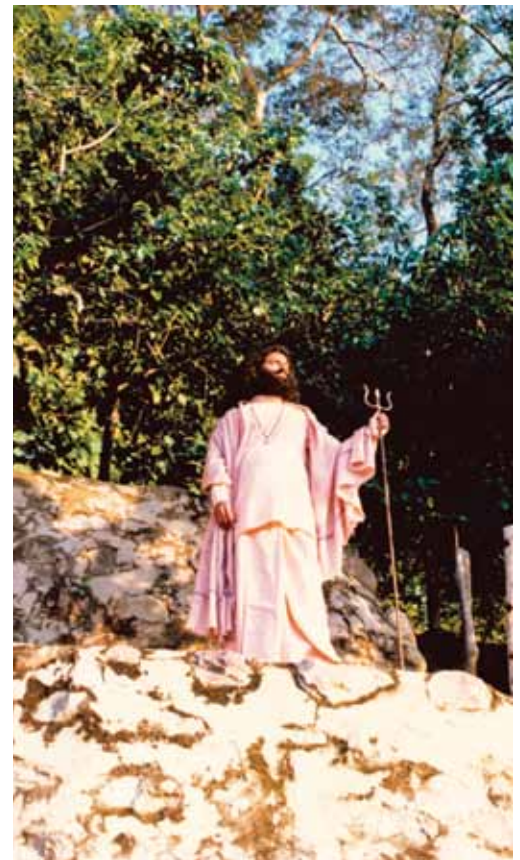


Pujya Swamiji on the boat across Ganga to the ashram in His days of going back and forth between Rishikesh and Pittsburgh for the construction of the Hindu Jain Temple. Never one to waste even a moment, He would continue to review and revise temple plans on the five minute boat ride across Ganga

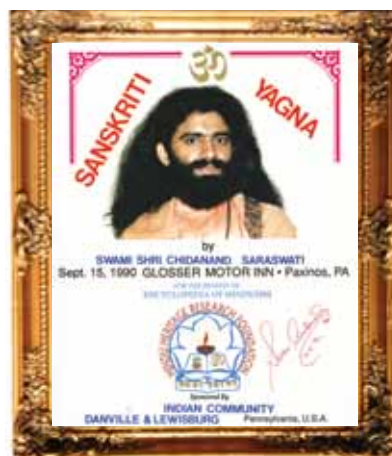
Pujya Swamiji Becomes President of Parmarth Niketan

From 1982 - 1986, Pujya Swami Chidanandji spent a great deal of time in Pittsburgh and other parts of the USA, UK and Europe, guiding the construction and establishment of not only the Hindu Jain Temple but innumerable other temples around the world.

In 1987 and 1988 Pujya Swami Chidanandji founded the India Heritage Research Foundation (in USA in 1987 and in India in 1988), an international, non-profit, humanitarian and charitable organization. Under the banner of IHRF, Pujya Swamiji undertook the compilation of the first Encyclopedia of Hinduism in history, joined by Dr. K.L. Seshagiri Rao, professor emeritus at the University of Virginia, eminent scholar Dr. Vidya Niwas Mishra, and by teams of renowned scholars from across the world. Thus, the years 1987 - 1992 were spent traveling the world, during which time Pujya Swamiji and Dr. Rao met with thousands of scholars at universities and academic institutions in a variety of countries, establishing – finally in 1992 – a core team of scholars under whose leadership the Encyclopedia could truly be undertaken.



Formation of India Heritage Research Foundation and Launching of the Encyclopedia of Hinduism Project



Pujya Swamiji traveled around the world to catalyze the beginning of this divine project and to lead it to a successful conclusion.



From top: Pujya Swamiji and Pujya Bhaishri discussing the Encyclopedia, Pujya Swamiji leading a meeting in his room at the Hindu-Jain temple, a scholars conference in New Jersey for final editing

Top: Hindu Jain Temple and first trustees of India Heritage Research Foundation

Bottom: An event on behalf of the Encyclopedia with Pujya Bhaishri and Pujya Acharya Sushil Muniji.



In 1986, while Pujya Swamiji was in Pittsburgh, he received an urgent call from Rishikesh that Pujya Swami Sadanandji was unwell and that his presence was required. Hence, he immediately returned to India where Pujya Swami Sadanandji and Pujya Swami Dharmanandji made him President of Parmarth Niketan, Rishikesh.

1986 and 1987 saw the mahasamadhis of two pillars of

Parmarth Niketan, Pujya Swami Sadanandaji and Pujya Swami Bhajanandaji. Upon their physical departures, Pujya Swami Dharmanandaji was given the title of Managing Trustee of the Swami Shukdevanand Trust and Presidentship of the Badrinath Ashram and Delhi ashram (in addition to the Haridwar and Shahjahanpur ashrams of which he was already in charge).

Mahasamadhi of Pujya Swami Sadanandaji Maharaj





Pujya Swami Sadanandji's body is carried with great reverence from the holy banks of Mother Ganga to the samadhi at Parmarth Niketan. Revered saints of not only the Parmarth lineage but from across India came to pay their respects to this great saint.



A Divine, Historic Lineage is Born



The year 1991 brought the mahasamadhi, the tragic passing of the physical body, of Pujya Swami Dharmanandji. In honor of his last wishes, Pujya Swami Chidanandji oversaw the delegation of various ashram responsibilities to different saints. He requested Pujya Swami Chinmayanandji, his Guru-brother (a disciple also of Pujya Swami Dharmanandaji's) to look after the ashrams in Haridwar and Badrinath.

Further, the two Guru-brothers, Pujya Swami Chidanandji and Pujya Swami Chinmayanandji, requested Pujya Swami Asanganandji to take over the role of Managing Trustee of the Trust.

Mahasamadhi of Pujya Swami Dharmanandji Maharaj



Revered saints, distinguished dignitaries and devotees came from across the world to pay their humble pranams to Pujya Swami Dharmanandji.





section 02

With the Grace of the Gurus, Pujya Swami Chidanandji and Parmarth Become One

People from All Walks of Life Make Parmarth Their Himalayan Home



With the Grace of the Gurus, Pujya Swami Chidanandji and Parmarth Become One





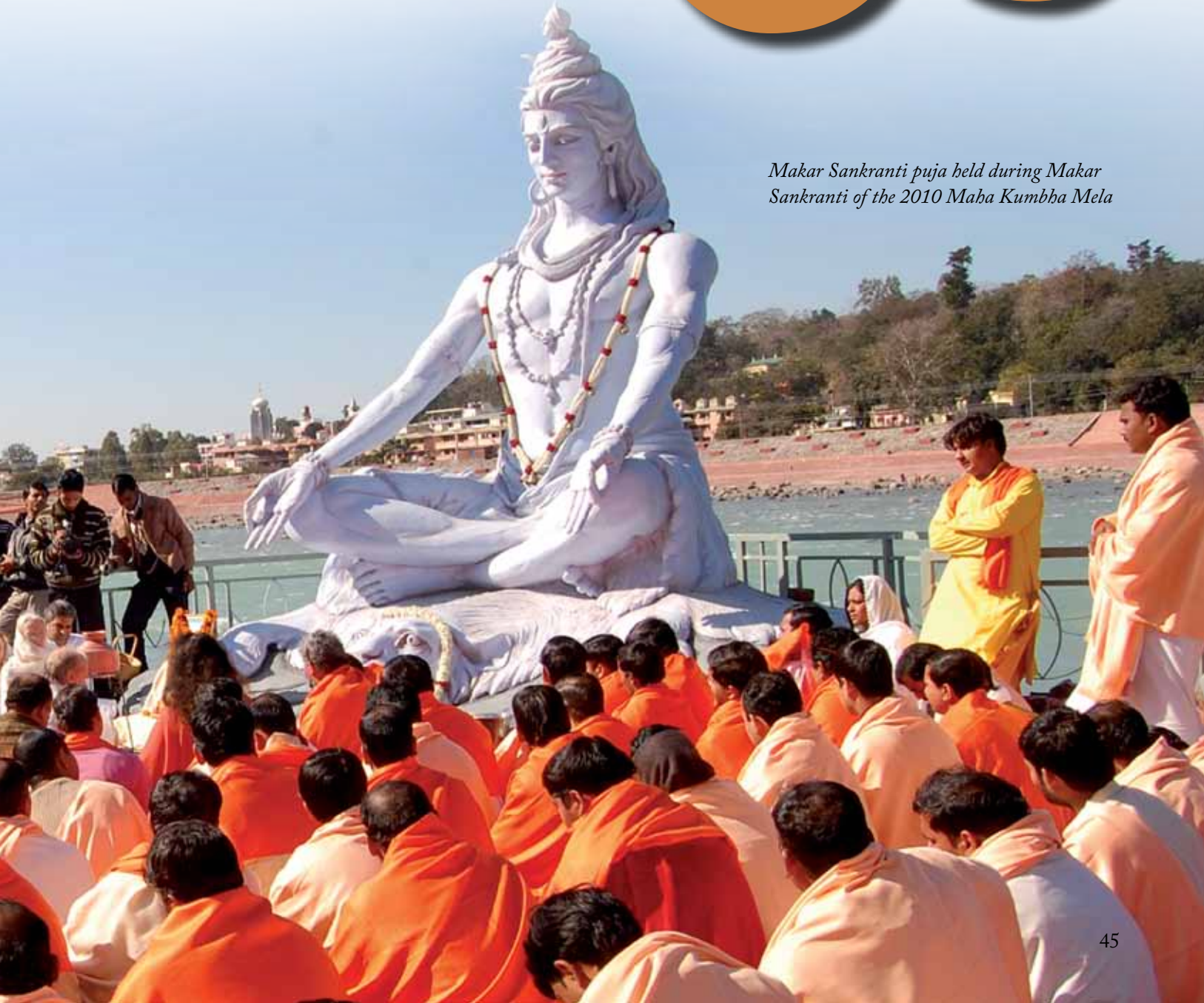
With the Grace of the Gurus, Pujya Swami Chidanandji and Parmarth Become One

OM NAMAH SHIVAY





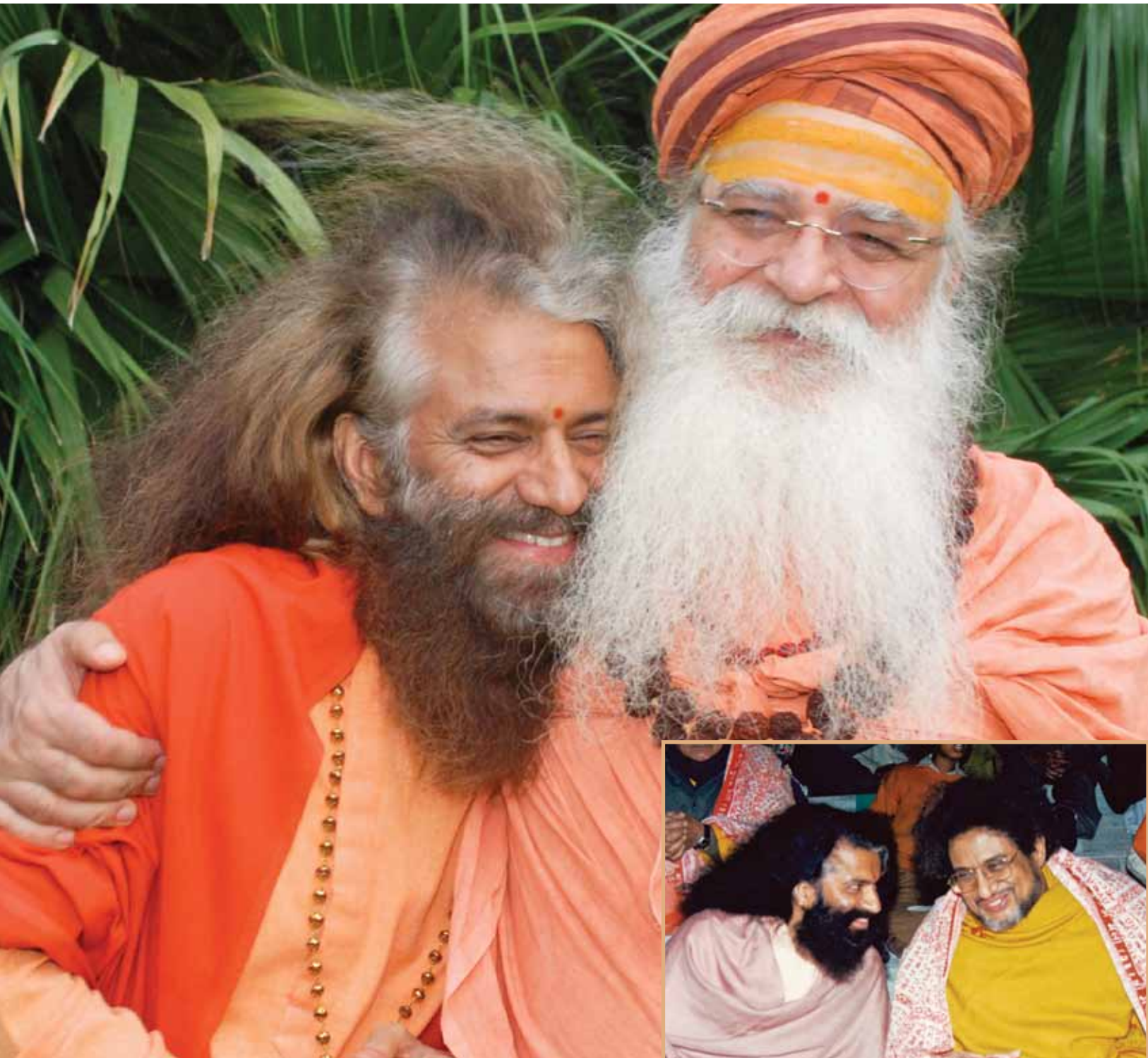
Makar Sankranti puja held during Makar Sankranti of the 2010 Maha Kumbha Mela



With the Grace of the Gurus, Pujya Swami Chidanandji and Parmarth Become One







Pujya Swami Chidanandji with Pujya Swami Gurusarananandji



Dr. Pranav Pandiyaji comes to Parmarth



Pujya Swamiji and H.H. Dalai Lama share a private moment together at Parmarth

Pujya Swamiji is one of the rare spiritual leaders who blends in seamlessly not only with leaders of all the different lineages and traditions of Hinduism but also with leaders of all religions. Although He is a Hindu sanyasi and thoroughly steeped in the Hindu tradition and belief system, He has deep, profound connections with Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism. Some of His closest friendships and spiritual connections have been with leaders of the Jain, Sikh and Buddhist faiths. Further, He is intimately connected with leaders of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions as well. They have all graced the premises of Parmarth with their presence.



Pujya Jaggi Vasudevji comes to Parmarth and shares prasadam with Pujya Swami Chidanandji



Pujya Sant Shri Rameshbhai Oza comes regularly to Parmarth for kathas and other events

“God loves diversity. All names and all forms are His.”



Top Left: Pujya Sri Sri Shankarji at Parmarth during International Yoga Festival.

Bottom Left: Jain monks come to Parmarth on their pilgrimage.

Top Right: Sri Shankaracharyaji Swami Vasudevanandji at Parmarth during the Maha Kumbha Mela in Haridwar

Bottom Right: Pujya Swami Govind Giriji comes to Parmarth to the evening Ganga havan and aarti during his annual kathas in Rishikesh



Pujya Swami Madhavpriyadasji and Pujya Swami Chidanandji with rishikumars of the Parmarth Gurukul. Pujya Swami Madhavpriyadasji regularly leads large spiritual camps at Parmarth.



Pujya Sri Shankaracharyaji of Kanchi Kaam Koti, Pujya Swami Jayendra Saraswati Swamigal, comes to Parmarth



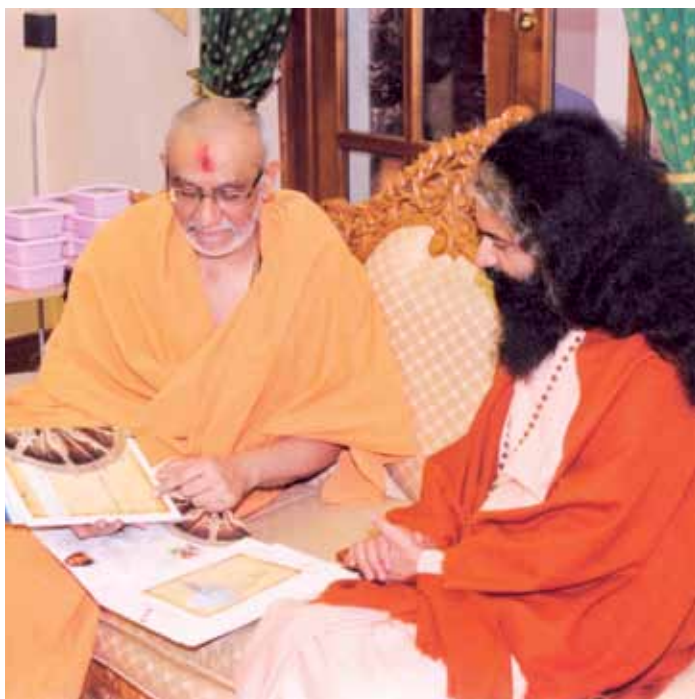
Pujya Swami Pujya Swami Kalyan Devji Maharaj, came to Parmarth at the age of 125 years



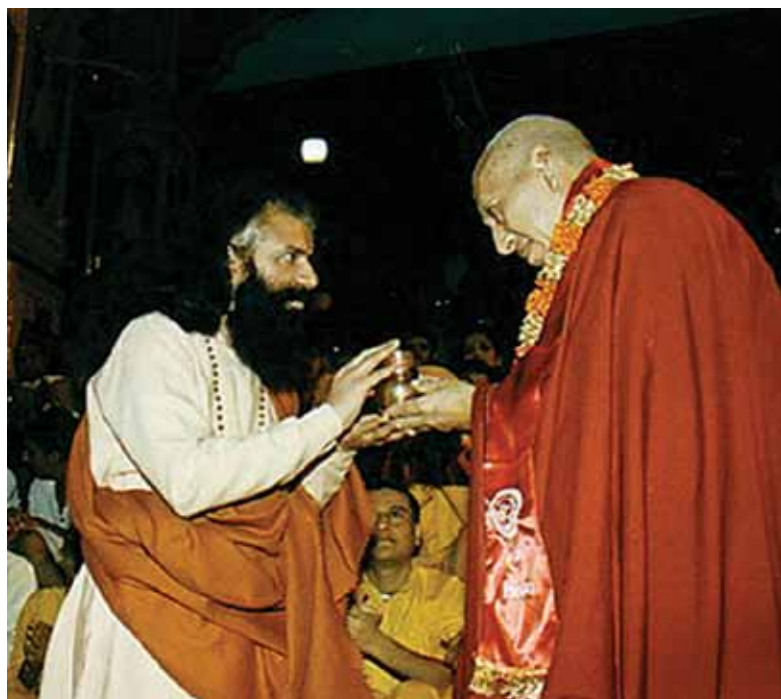
Pujya Swami Dayanandaji, Pujya Swami Avdhesanandaji and Pujya Swami Parmatmanandaji come to Parmarth during International Yoga Festival



Pujya Sivaya Subramuniaswamiji, founder of Hinduism Today magazine, and Pujya Acharya Palaniswamiji at Parmarth Niketan



Pujya Swamiji with Pujya Atmaswarup Swamiji of Akshardham Temple, New Delhi



Pujya Swami Chidanandji presents Gangajal to Prof. Samdhong Rinpocheji, former Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile



Middle: Rabbi David Rosen, eminent and well-known leader of the international Jewish community and his wife Sharon Rosen sing Shabbat prayers on the banks of Ganga.



Bottom: Ekhart Tolle and Pujya Swamiji together during Ekhart's course program at Parmarth



Pujya Swami Satyamitranandaji speaks during Pujya Sant Shri Rameshbhai Ozaji's katha at Parmarth

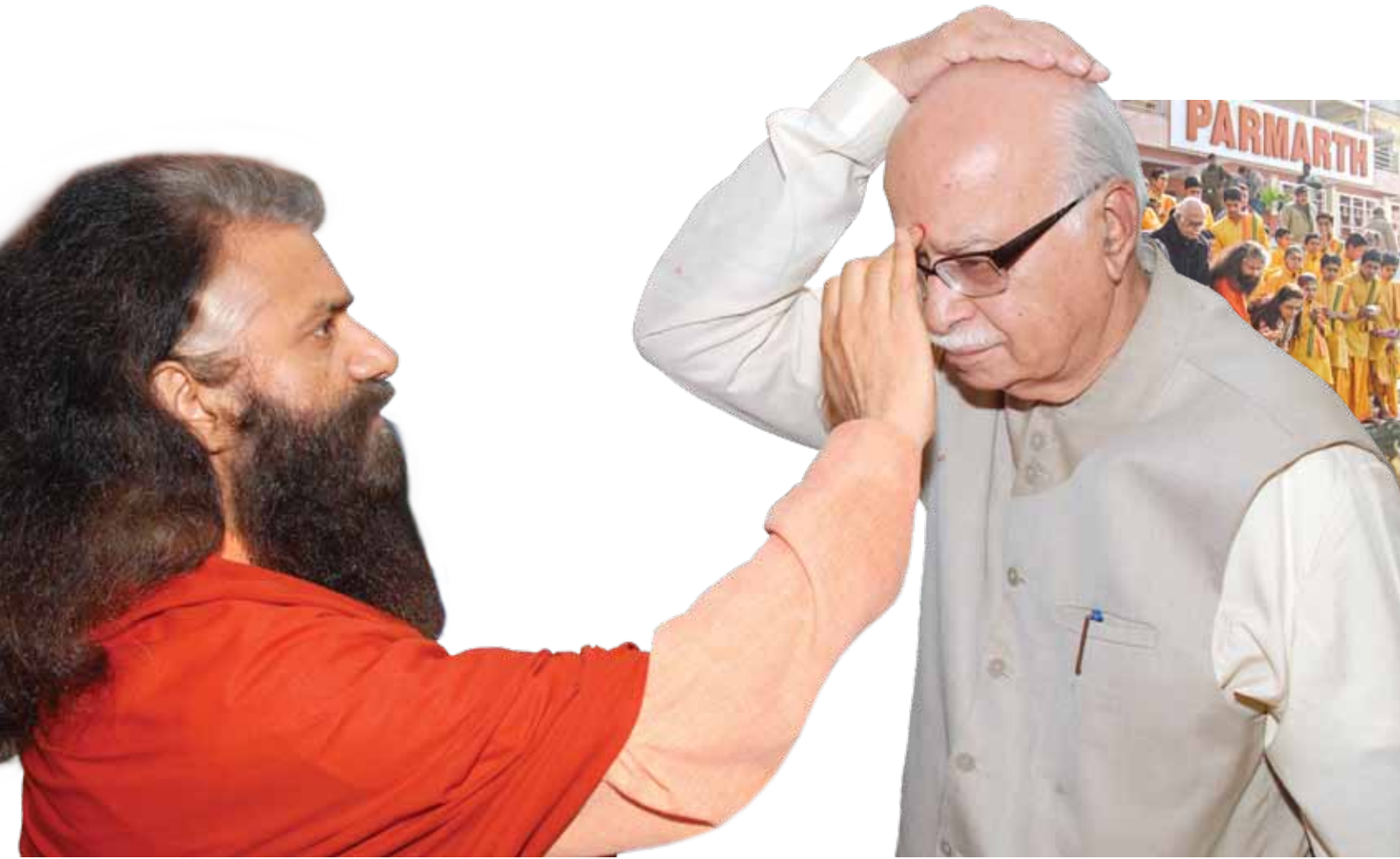




**“Make every day a holy day; start every day with prayer.
Fill every day with prayer. End every day with prayer.”**

AUM

With the Grace of the Gurus, Pujya Swami Chidanandji and Parmarth Become One



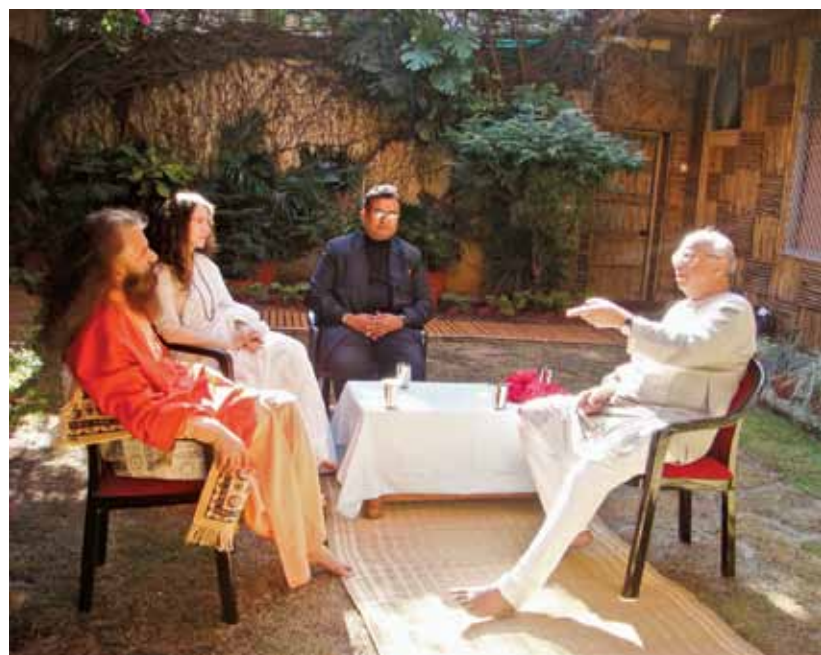
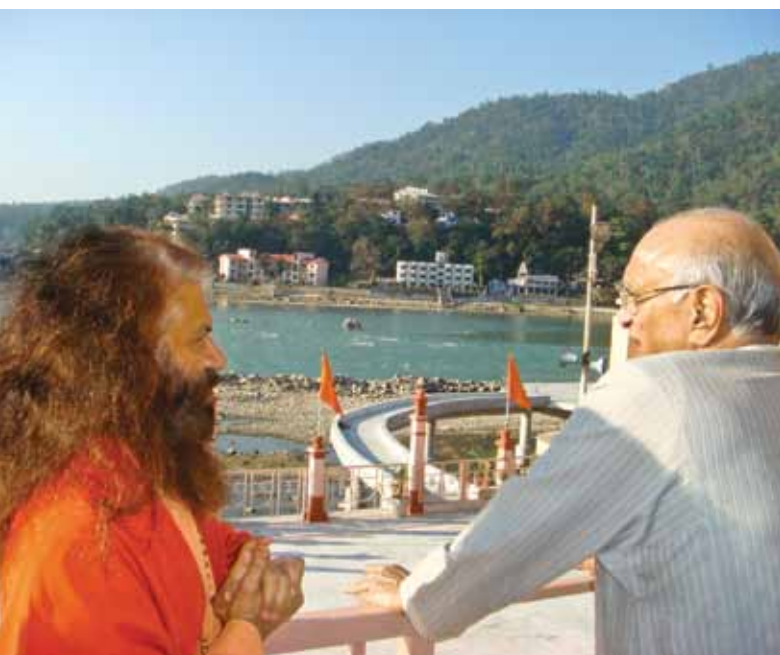


Beautiful soul Shri L.K. Advani, former deputy Prime Minister and longtime head of the BJP Party comes regularly to Parmarth Niketan with his family to bathe in the divine darshan of Mother Ganga, to perform the sacred aarti and other puja ceremonies and to have satsang with Pujya Swamiji. Whenever he comes, he actively participates in various aspects at the ashram, including feeding meals to the rishikumars, distributing clothes to them and even having screenings of his daughter Pratibha's films on different spiritual topics.





Shri Mohanlal Mittal, father of Shri Laxmi Niwas Mittal, known as the King of Steel and the founder of Ispat Steel is intimately connected with Pujya Swamiji and Parmarth. Health and time permitting, when he comes to Delhi, he tries to make a visit back home to Rishikesh, to the banks of Mother Ganga and to have Pujya Swamiji's darshan



Parmarth Niketan Ashram has attracted people from every walk of life since its inception. However, over the last few decades, as the depth and breadth of Parmarth's activities, events and humanitarian work have expanded exponentially, so have the number and variety of visitors to the ashram.

Pujya Swamiji's teachings, His inspiration and His guidance are of such great, universal value that they apply to people of all walks of life, from all religions, from every corner of the Earth.

Therefore, the last few decades have seen innumerable high profile, renowned guests at the ashram. These range from high level politicians, to Bollywood and Hollywood celebrities, to internationally famous industrialists. However, whenever any of these people come, they come not as VIPs but rather as humble devotees of Mother Ganga, offering their sincere obeisances to Her holy waters, performing Her sacred aarti, taking a holy bath and absorbing Her divine peace and serenity. They sit with Pujya Swamiji, discussing not politics or finance, but rather inquiring deeply into the nature of the human spirit and how they may move forward on their spiritual paths.



Shri Laxmi Niwas Mittal and Smt. Usha Mittal perform sacred Shiva Abhishek puja at Parmarth



Shri Vinod Mittal, brother of Shri Laxmi Niwas Mittal, and his wife Smt. Sangeeta perform sacred Shiva Abhishek during their stay at Parmarth

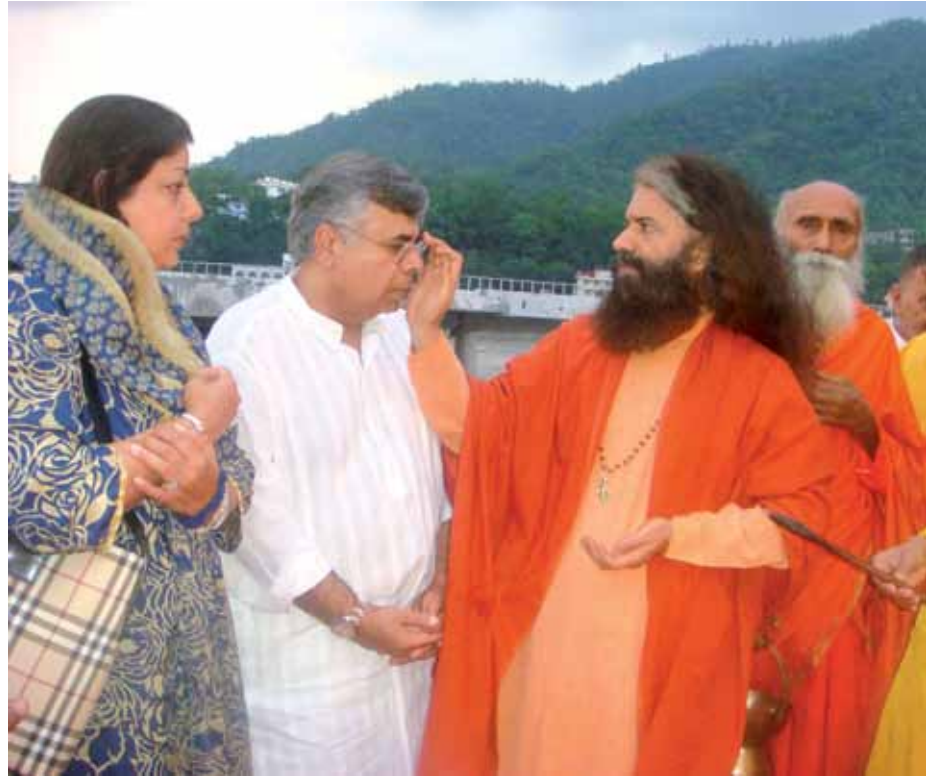


The Hinduja family -- world renowned as great, international industrialists -- come regularly to Parmarth for family events, personal spiritual retreats and baths in Mother Ganga on auspicious occasions.



***Top Left:** The Centenary Celebration of Shri P.D. Hinduja, the patriarch of the Hinduja family, was celebrated at Parmarth in December 2001*

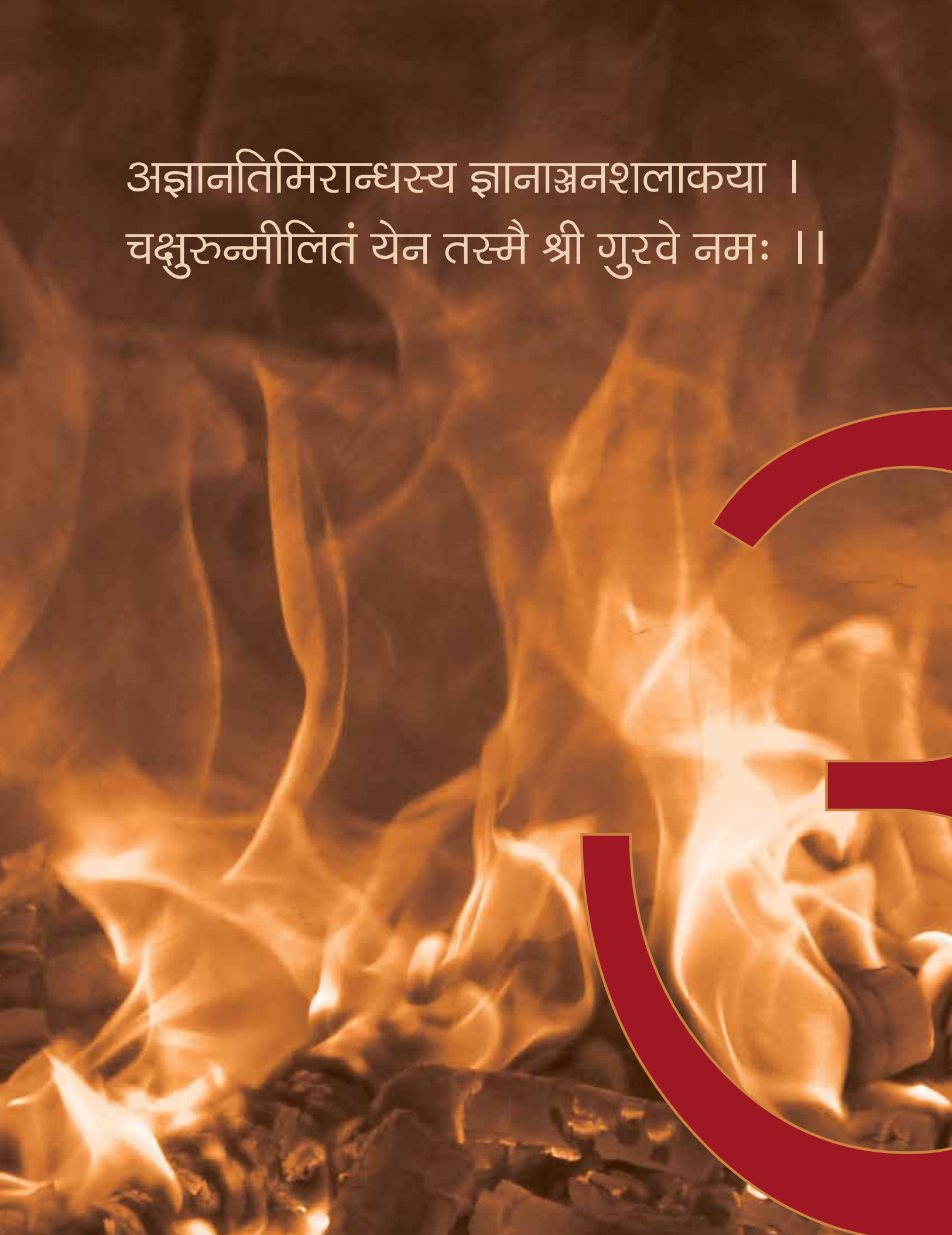
***Bottom Left & Right:** Shri Ashok and Smt. Harsha Hinduja perform puja of the sacred kalpavriksh tree at Parmarth, whenever they visit.*



Top: Pujya Swamiji blesses Shri Ashok Hinduja

Bottom: Pujya Swamiji blesses Shri S.P. Hinduja on his birthday which he celebrated with all of his brothers and family at Parmarth

अज्ञानतिमिरान्धस्य ज्ञानाञ्जनशलाकया ।
चक्षुरुन्मीलितं येन तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥







Left: Ramanand Sagar embraces Pujya Swami Chidanandji upon his arrival at Parmarth



Right: Smt. Hema Malini performs the holy Ganga Aarti

Bollywood and Hollywood at Parmarth

Several Bollywood celebrities have also made Parmarth their spiritual home, coming to recharge their batteries or to perform sacred sanskaras (important rites of passage). They come to shed the costumes, the masks and the roles, and to bathe in the spiritual divinity of the holy land.

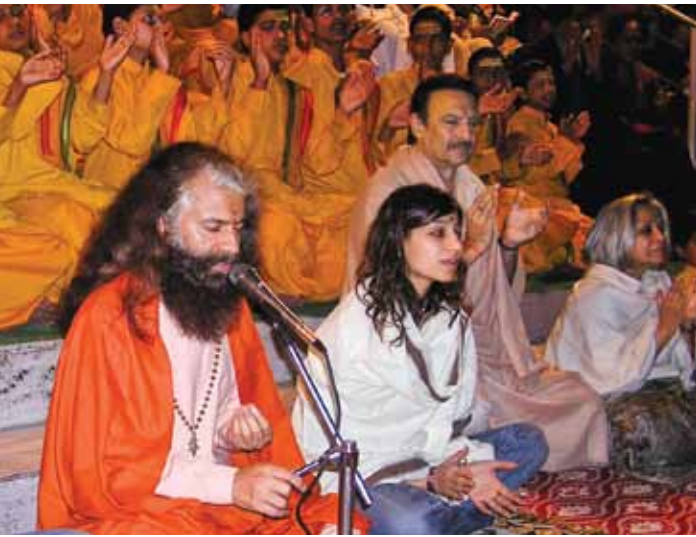


Smt. Hema Malini performs the holy Ganga Aarti



Sanjay Dutt performs the Ganga Aarti

“If you never want to be cornered in your life, make sure to have a spiritual corner in your heart and your life.”



Vivek Oberoi and his entire family are regular visitors to Parmarth, ever since Vivek first was brought to Parmarth by Subhash Ghai, during the filming of Kisna



Sanjay Dutt and family perform the sacred puja before the immersion of Shri Sunil Dutt's ashes in the waters of Mother Ganga



Hollywood actress Uma Thurman and fiance Arki Busson lose themselves in the spiritual glory of Pujya Swamiji's sankirtan following the Ganga Aarti



Top to Bottom:

Hollywood actress Uma Thurman and fiancé Arki Busson

Famous kirtan singer Krishna Das and Pujya Nani Ma perform Ganga Aarti

चिन्मयं व्यापियत्सर्वं त्रैलोक्यं सचराचरम् ।
तत्पदं दर्शितं येन तस्मै श्रीगुरवे नमः ॥

Salutations to the divine and noble Guru through whom one can realise God, He who pervades everything, all that is sentient and all that is insentient, in all realms of the universe.

FOR MAY 2024





Shri Arjun Lulla (Eros Entertainment) and his family perform Ganga Aarti on the auspicious occasion of his 75th birthday



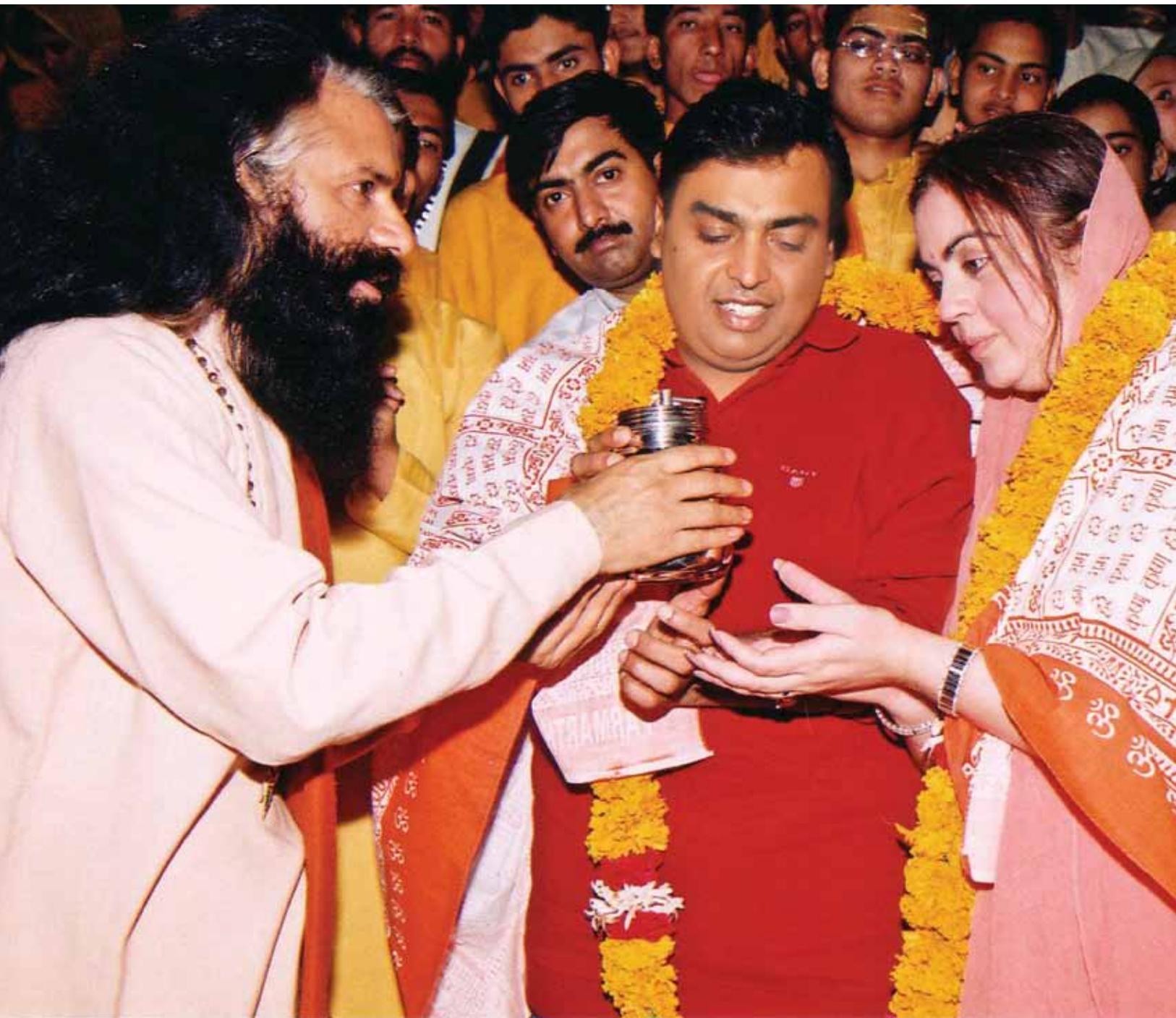
Pujya Swami Chidanandji blesses Smt. Kokilaben Ambani (wife of late Shri Dhirubhai Ambani)

Divine Birthday on the Banks of Ganga

Shri Kishore Lulla and Shri Sunil Lulla, heads of Eros Entertainment (one of the biggest producers of Bollywood movies, TV, music, etc.) brought their beloved and respected father Shri Arjun Lullaji to Rishikesh to celebrate his 75th birthday.

Pujya Swami Chidanandji blesses Kishore Lulla (Eros International)





Shri Mukesh and Nita Ambani come to Parmarth with their family and perform the divine Ganga Aarti

Pujya Swamiji's messages, teachings and divine touch show people how to remain balanced, stable and grounded in the midst of the inevitable fluctuations in business and success. "Let the stockmarket go up and down," He says. "But you should not go up and down." A brief reprieve, a short personal spiritual retreat at Parmarth – whether hours or days – recharges our spiritual batteries and re-anchors us to the Divine.



अज्ञानतिमिरान्धस्य ज्ञानाञ्जनशलाकया । चक्षुरुन्मीलितं येन तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

I bow down to the divine Guru who has opened my eyes, which were blinded by the darkness of ignorance, with His divine touch of light and wisdom.



Divine souls Vasantbhai Patel and Mohanbhai Patel from Mumbai come home to Parmarth with their families to perform sacred puja.



The entire Munjal family (Hero Honda) comes to Parmarth to celebrate the 80th birthday of Shri Brij Mohan Munjal



Yash Birla's birthday is celebrated at Parmarth. Yash and Avanti and their family come to Rishikesh several times a year, to spend time in sadhana on the banks of Ganga, to attend the aarti and to sit in Pujya Swami Chidanandji's presence

parmarth niketan



Decision Makers come to Parmarth for Divine Inspiration

A wide variety of renowned national and international decision makers and policy setters – including presidents of countries, high court and supreme court justices and other leaders – come home to the banks of Mother Ganga where they receive inspiration and upliftment to continue bringing justice, integrity and righteousness to India and to the world.

Late Shri L.M. Singhvi, Justice Giridhar Malaviya and Vachaspati Upadhyaya, Vice-Chancellor, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Sanskrit Vidya Peeth perform Ganga Aarti at Parmarth

Honourable former Chief Justice of India Shri R.C. Laboti comes with his family to Parmarth



Late Shri Narendra Mohan, MP and head of Dainik Jagran newspaper and Late Padmasbri Pandit Vidya Niwas Misra together at Parmarth

Central Government Minister of Tourism, Shri Subodhkant Sabai lights the inaugural lamp for the Ganga Aarti with tourism ministers of all the northern states at Parmarth.



Former President of India, R. Venkataraman, comes to Parmarth to take part in the divine Ganga Aarti

President of Mauritius, Shri Anerood Jugnauth, comes to Parmarth and later said it was one of the highlights of his trip to India.



Shri Harish Rawat, Central Government Minister of Labour & Employment, comes home to Parmarth for inauguration of Hanumanji murti

“God loves diversity. All names and all forms are His.”



Ayurveda Conference at Parmarth Niketan. Lamp is lit by Pujya Swamiji, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, Shri Narayan Dutt Tiwariji, Education Minister Shri Narendra Singh Bhandariji and renowned Vaidyas



Former Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri Vilasrao Deshmukh comes to Parmarth and performs puja of the sacred kalpa-vreksh



Smt. Najma Heptullah, Vice President of the BJP, comes to Parmarth Niketan



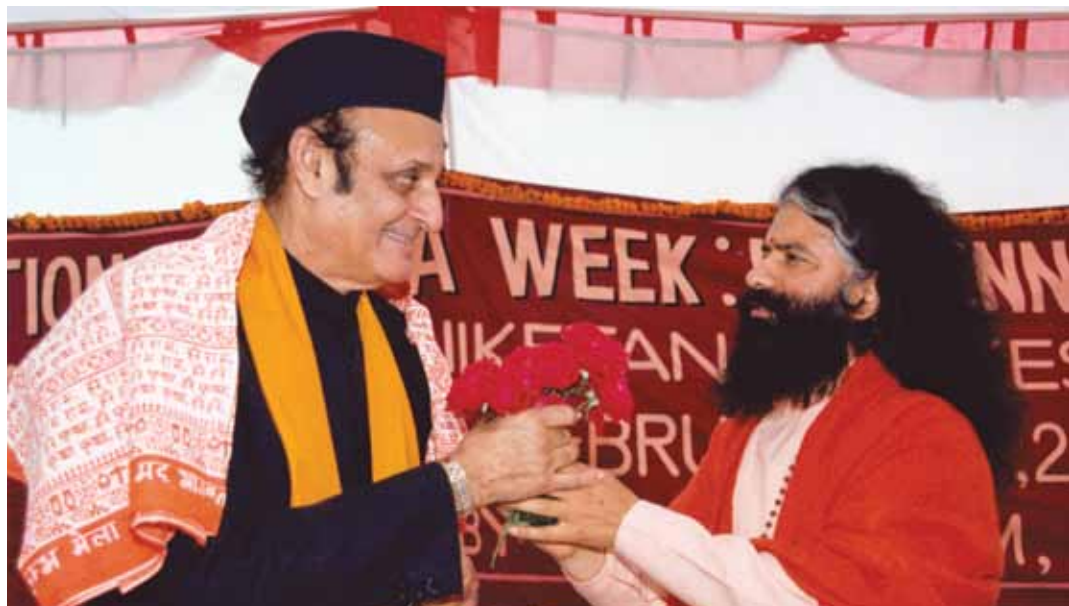
Renuka Chowdhury comes to Parmarth when she was serving as Minister of Tourism, Government of India, with Uttarakhand Tourism Minister Shri TPS Rawat and Tourism Secretary Shri N.N. Prasad



Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Shri Shivraj Chauhan comes to Parmarth



Chief Minister of Goa, Shri Digambar Kamat, comes to Parmarth



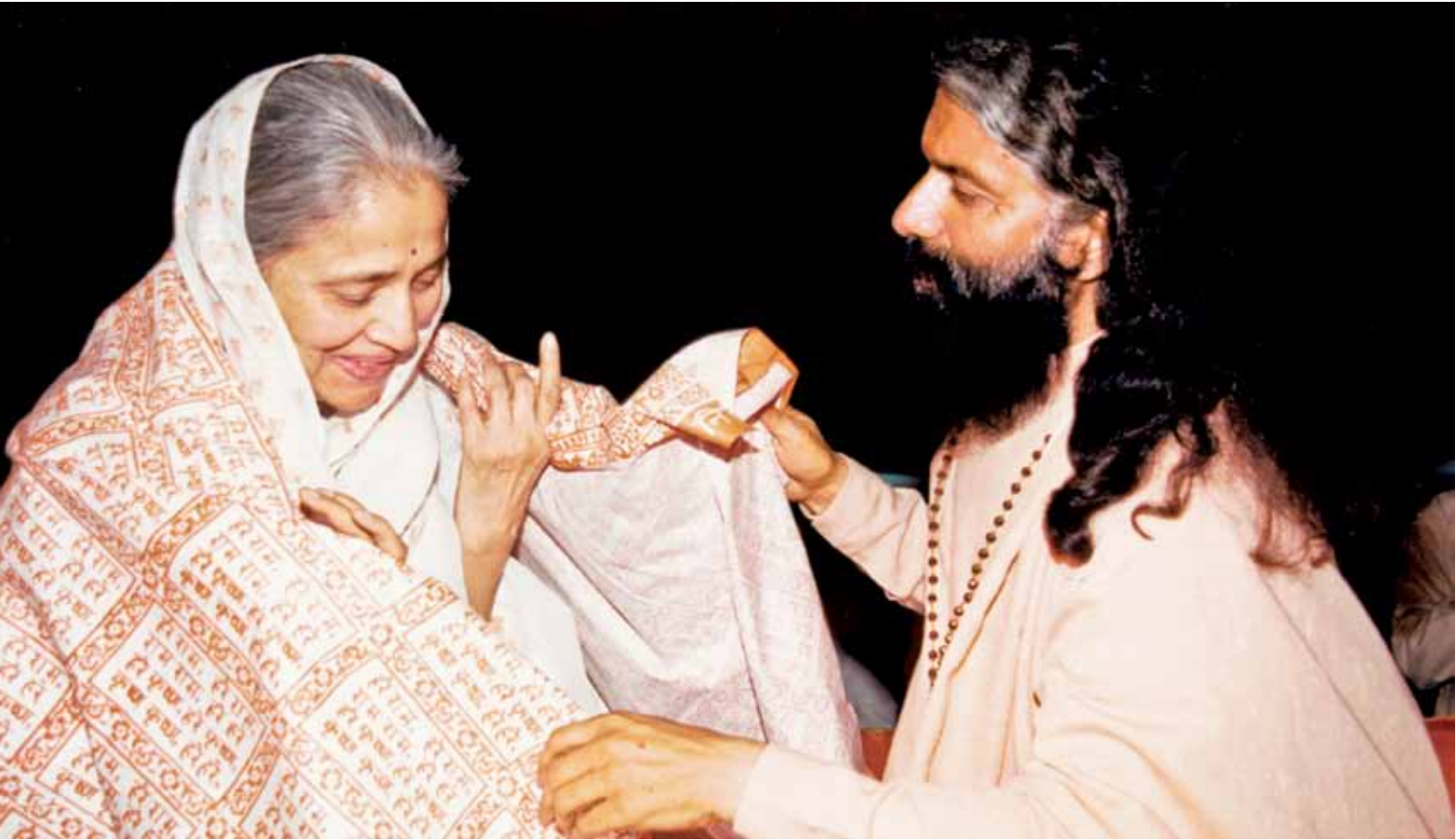
International Yoga Festival inauguration by Dr. Karan Singh



The Governor of Tamil Nadu (and former Governor of Uttarakhand) Shri S.S. Barnala comes to Parmarth and performs Aarti. Also seen is Gurudev Singh a renowned spiritual teacher of the Kundalini yoga lineage of Pujya Yogi Bhajan.



Shri Balmiki Prasad Singhji, the Governor of Sikkim and K. Sankaranarayanan, former Governor of Nagaland come to Parmarth and perform Ganga Aarti



Smt. Indu Jain, head of the Times of India group receives a sacred shawl from Pujya Swamiji as a blessing



Honourable Chief Justice of Delhi High Court, now Justice of Supreme Court of India, Shri Mukundakam Sharmaji comes to Parmarth



Former Governor of Uttarakhand and current Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Shri B.L. Joshi performs the purnabuti of havan at Parmarth with Pujya Swamiji

Honorable former Governor of Uttarakhand, Shri Sudarshan Agarwal and Honorable former Chief Justice Supreme Court of India, Shri Venkatachaliah come to Parmarth and perform Ganga Aarti



Padmavibhushan Smt. Sonal Mansingh and Maulana Wabiduddin Khan Sahib receive sacred Ganga jal from Pujya Swamiji



Shri M.M. Lakhera, former Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, current Governor of Mizoram, and well known Ayurvedic vaidya Devendra Triguna perform aarti at Parmarth

section 03

The Garden Blossoms Under His Divine Touch



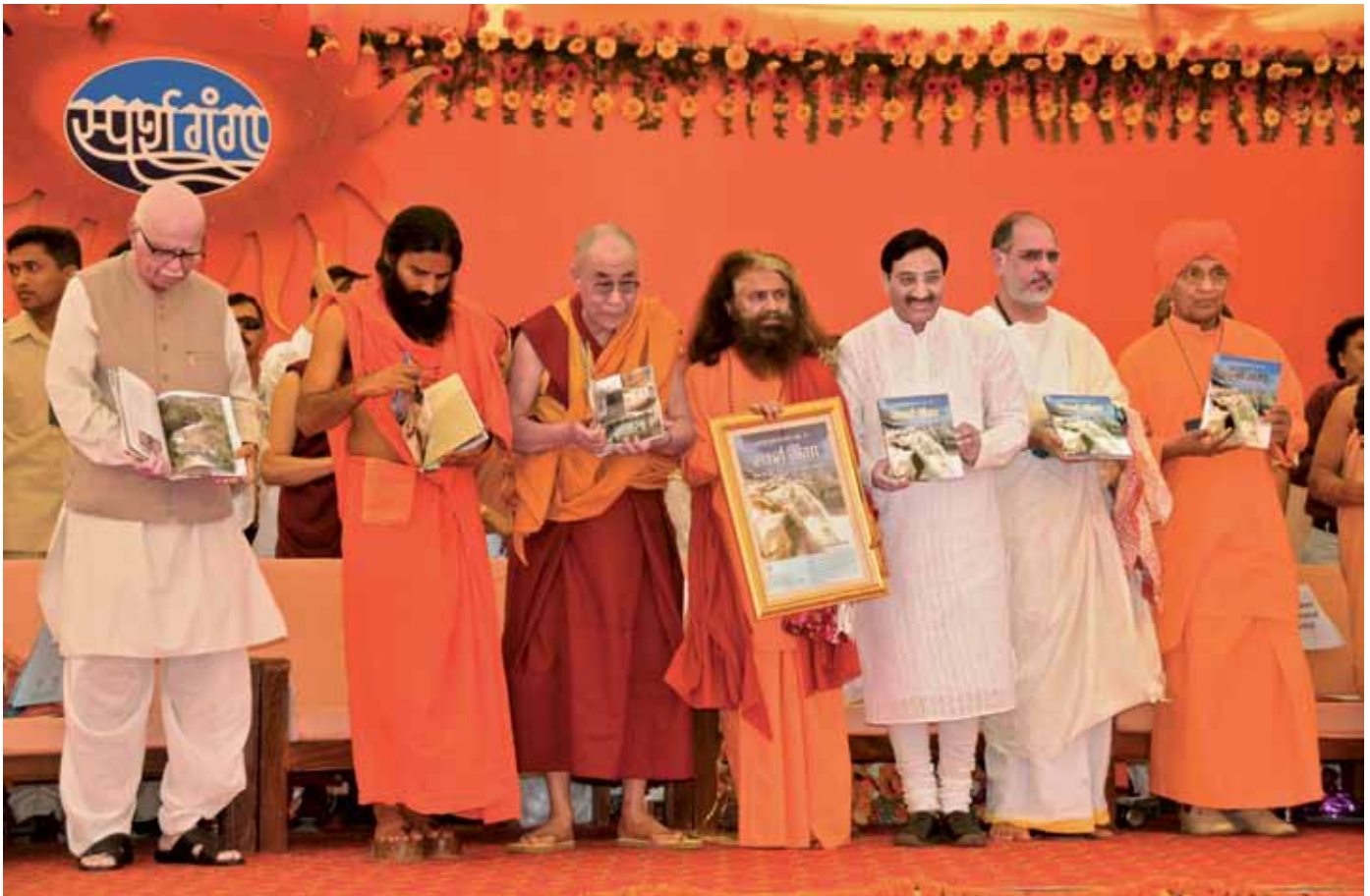


A Glimpse of Major Functions at Parmarth

On the 4th April 2010, during the sacred time of the Maha Kumbha Mela, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and innumerable revered spiritual, national, social and political leaders came together at Parmarth Niketan to launch the Ganga Action Parivar and for a special Sparsh Ganga program. The two days' function — on behalf of the Ganga Action programme and for the preview of the Encyclopedia of Hinduism — was graced by the presence of Swami Gurusharananandji, Swami Ramdevji, Swami Avdheshanandaji, Swami Divyanand Teerthji, Sant Shri Morari Bapuji, Sant Shri Rameshbhai Ozaji, Mahant Ravindra Puriji, Swami Agniveshji and many other saints as well as leaders of various religious traditions including Roopchandra Muniji and Father Dominic Emmanuel. It was also attended by Shri L.K. Advaniji, Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, Shri B.C. Khanduriji, former Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Shri Ramesh Pokhariyal Nishankji, Bollywood star Vivek Oberoi and many others.







Book on Sparsh Ganga released at the launch of the Ganga Action and Sparsh Ganga function. Left to right (above): Shri L.K. Advaniji, Swami Ramdevji, H.H. Dalai Lama, Swami Chidanandji, Shri Ramesh Pokhariyal Nishankji, Sant Shri Rameshbhai Ozaji, Swami Agniveshji. (Below): His Holiness the Dalai Lama addresses the gathering expressing his great support for Pujya Swamiji's Ganga Action Pariwar programme and urges everyone to join hands and be part of it.





*Top: Everyone raises their hands to take the pledge to keep Mother Ganga clean and to join the Ganga Action Parivar;
Below: Ganga Aarti performed at Parmarth by H.H. the Dalai Lama and all the revered dignitaries and guests*



Pujya Swamiji and Pujya Swami Ramdevji at the Krishna Janmasthami celebration of the Divine Bhagawat Katha held in 2009 on the banks of Ganga, delivered by Pujya Sant Shri Rameshbhai Ozaji



Pujya Swami Govind Giriji delivered beautiful Bhagawat Katha at Parmarth in September 2010.

Shobha Yatra of the Katha on the first day



Pujya Swami Chidanandji delivers his inspiring discourse in the Katha about the true, deep meaning of the Bhagawat and how to implement it in our lives





Parmarth Niketan hosts the Parliament of Religions (Sarva Dharma Sansad) conference. Pujya Swamiji is convenor of Sarva Dharma Sansad. Top: members of Sarva Dharma Sansad plant a tree of peace at Parmarth.

Bottom: Sarva Dharma Sansad conference at Parmarth. Pujya Swamiji, Pujya Acharya Lokesh Muniji, Father Dominic Emmanuel, Pujya Swami Agniveshji and many other revered leaders of the different religions come together to discuss a several-point agenda for the betterment of India.



Pujya Swami Gurusharananandji Maharaj brought the delegates of Samvada to Parmarth Niketan for their annual interfaith scholarly conference on various issues of national and international importance.

Pujya Swami Chidanandji is Convenor of the Sarva Dharma Sansad (Parliament of Religions). Sarva Dharma Sansad had a large meeting at Parmarth in which leaders of Hinduism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity and Sikhism came together in a divine spirit of brotherhood to discuss how they can join hands in eradicating various evils of society, including female feticide, infanticide, caste-based discrimination, etc.





Swaminarayan Shibir at Parmarth



Parmarth Niketan has had the honor and joy of hosting large Swaminarayan spiritual camps, headed by Pujya Swami Madhavpriyadasji. Nearly 1000 saints and devotees come together for these divine camps





The BJP celebrated their Women's Morcha (Committee) Conference to which all the BJP women ministers and committee heads from all over the country came together with the special guest of Smt. Sushma Swaraj. The Conference was organized and presided over by Smt. Kiran Maheshwari, the National President of the women's morcha. Hundreds of women leaders from all over India came to Parmarth Niketan for the three-day event which was inaugurated by the Honorable Chief Minister of Uttrakhand.



The Garden Blossoms Under His Divine Touch

The Hinduja family has celebrated the centenaries of their beloved father, Shri Parmanand D. Hinduja and their beloved mother Smt. Jamuna P. Hinduja at Parmarth Niketan, with their extended family and friends. Each event has been a several-day program, filled with spiritually inspiring and uplifting activities.



Pujya Swami Chidanandji is committed to unity. Unity of East and West and unity of North and South. For this reason, He arranged to have a South Indian style temple built at Parmarth Niketan so that all the South Indians who come to Rishikesh to have the darshan of Mother Ganga can also worship in a temple of their own style. The temple was constructed and officially inaugurated in May 2001 during an elaborate week-long ceremony





Top: The Congress Party Women's Platform had their national conference at Parmarth Niketan

Bottom: The first volume of the Encyclopedia of Hinduism (published by India Heritage Research Foundation), ready for publication, was ceremoniously unveiled by the saints during Pujya Bhaishbri's katha in Rishikesh

The divine Shiwji ghat in Ganga at Parmarth has been the scene for not only puja and prayers, but also for special cultural performances, including a team of spiritual dancers from Indonesia



Pujya Swami Chidanandji is committed to helping bring health of the body, mind and spirit to all of the ailing humanity. To that aim, He has hosted several large conferences on Nature Cure and Ayurveda.



Ayurvedic Conference - graced by the presence of the Governor of Uttarakhand, Shri Sudarshan Agarwal and world renowned vaidyas.



At the millennial Ayurveda Conference, Pujya Siri Singh Sahib Yogi Bhajanji also graced the occasion with his presence and blessings.





Tree plantation program at Parmarth and the All-India Nature-Cure Conference in 1994



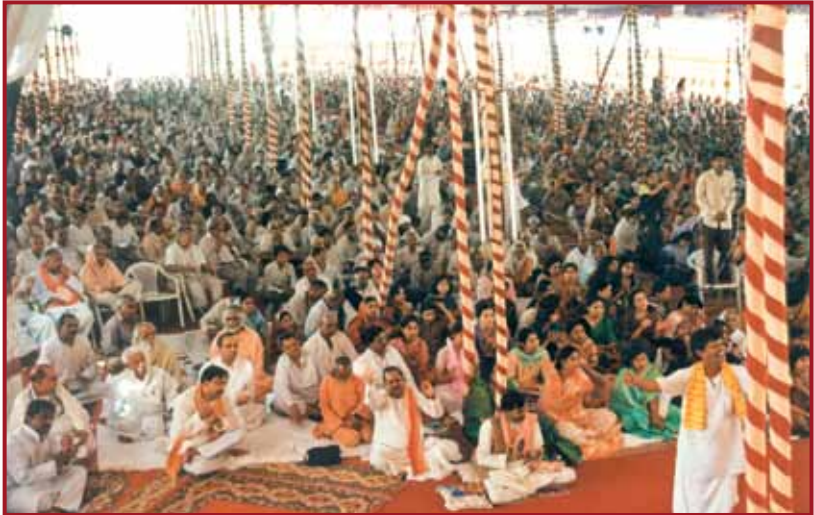
Kumbha Mela 1998 - Pujya Sri Shankaracharyaji Swami Vasudevanandji comes to Parmarth and graces the Katha delivered by Pujya Bhaishri



Lighting of the Lamp at the All India Nature Cure Conference at Parmarth Niketan, by Pujya Swamiji with the Governor of Uttar Pradesh (the state in which Rishikesh was prior to 2000 when Uttarakhand was formed), Shri Motilal Vora and Smt. Nirmala Deshpande.

Maha Kumbha Mela - 1998 in Haridwar/Rishikesh, celebrated by Bhagawat Katha delivered by Pujya Sant Shri Rameshbhai Oza at Parmarth Niketan





Hanuman Jayanti and Shiv Ji Puja

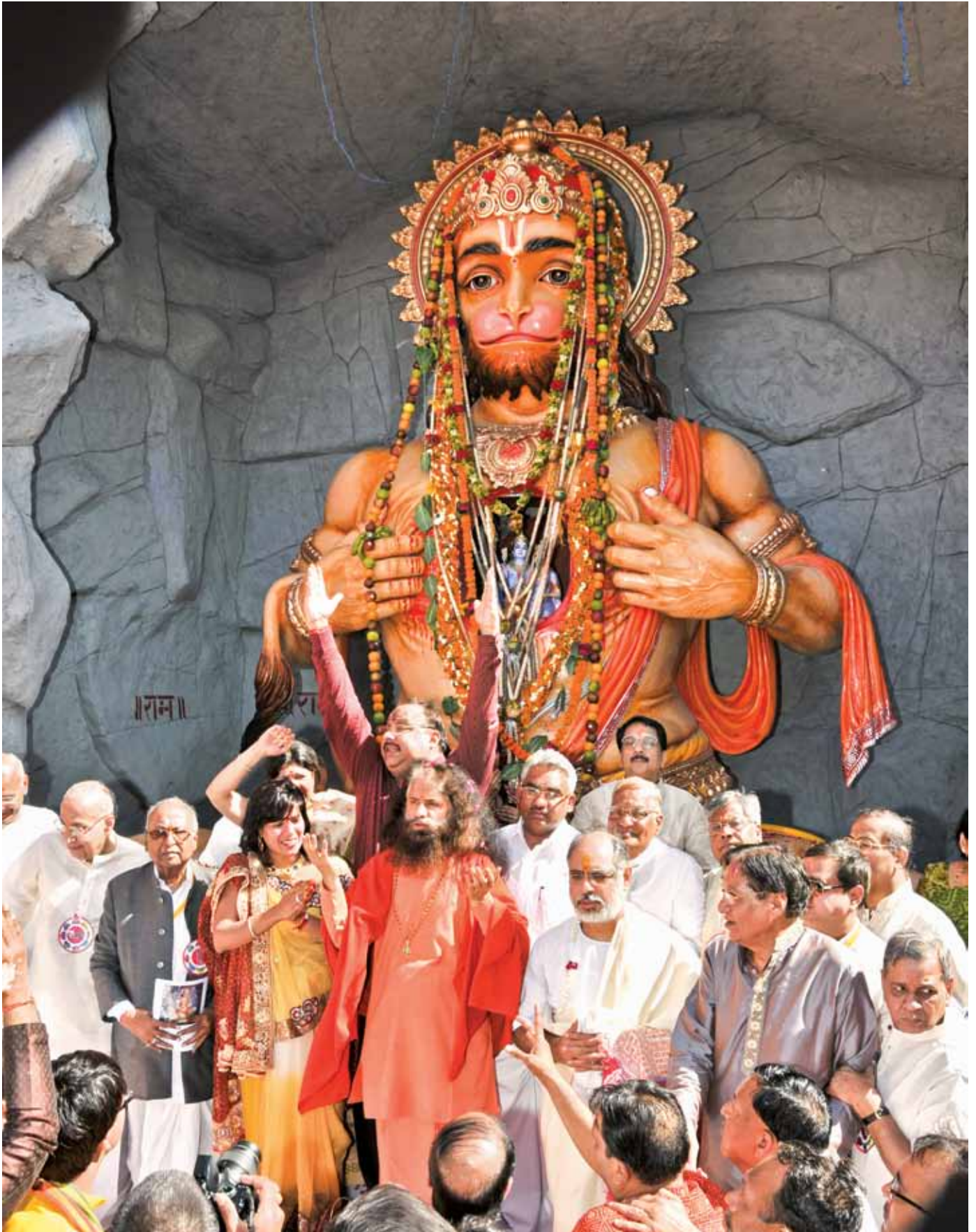
From the 16th - 21st April, 2011, Parmarth Niketan Ashram, Rishikesh, Himalayas, had a special Hanuman Jayanti Mahotsav (a Divine Celebration in honour of Hanumanji), under the leadership, guidance and blessings of Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji, the President of the Ashram, Pujya M.M. Swami Asanganand Saraswatiji and many other revered saints. The ashram celebrated the inauguration of a new, huge twenty-seven-foot Hanumanji murti on the banks of Ganga at Parmarth. They also inaugurated a beautiful Shiv Linga created out of 125,000 rudraksh beads!!! It took the artist 12 years to create and it was gifted to Parmarth to be installed on the banks of Ganga. Now, Parmarth is home to the divine Shankar Bhagawan (with form) and the divine Shiv Linga (formless/all forms)....There was a five-day Hanumat Katha delivered by Pujya



Shri Rameshbhai Oza, and a large sant sammellan with revered saints from Haridwar and Rishikesh coming to give their blessings and words of wisdom.

The mahotsav was concluded with a special Shiv Stuti dance performance by Arushi Pokhariyal, the daughter of the Honourable Chief Minister of Uttarakhand. The crowds were bigger than ever before, and there was not a room available in any ashram or any hotel in all of Rishikesh. Thousands and thousands of people came from all across India and even from abroad to take part in the celebrations.





Installation of Hanumanji murti on Hanuman Jayanti of April 2011 during the special Hanumat Katha delivered by Pujya Bhaishbri







On the 10th April, 2011, at the holy time of Navratri and Rama Navami, the new Shankar Bhagawan murti on the banks of Mother Ganga was officially inaugurated by Pujya Shri Morari Bapu and Pujya Swamiji with thousands of devotees from around the globe.





PARMARTH

section 04

Parmarth

A Heavenly Abode Dedicated
to the Welfare of All

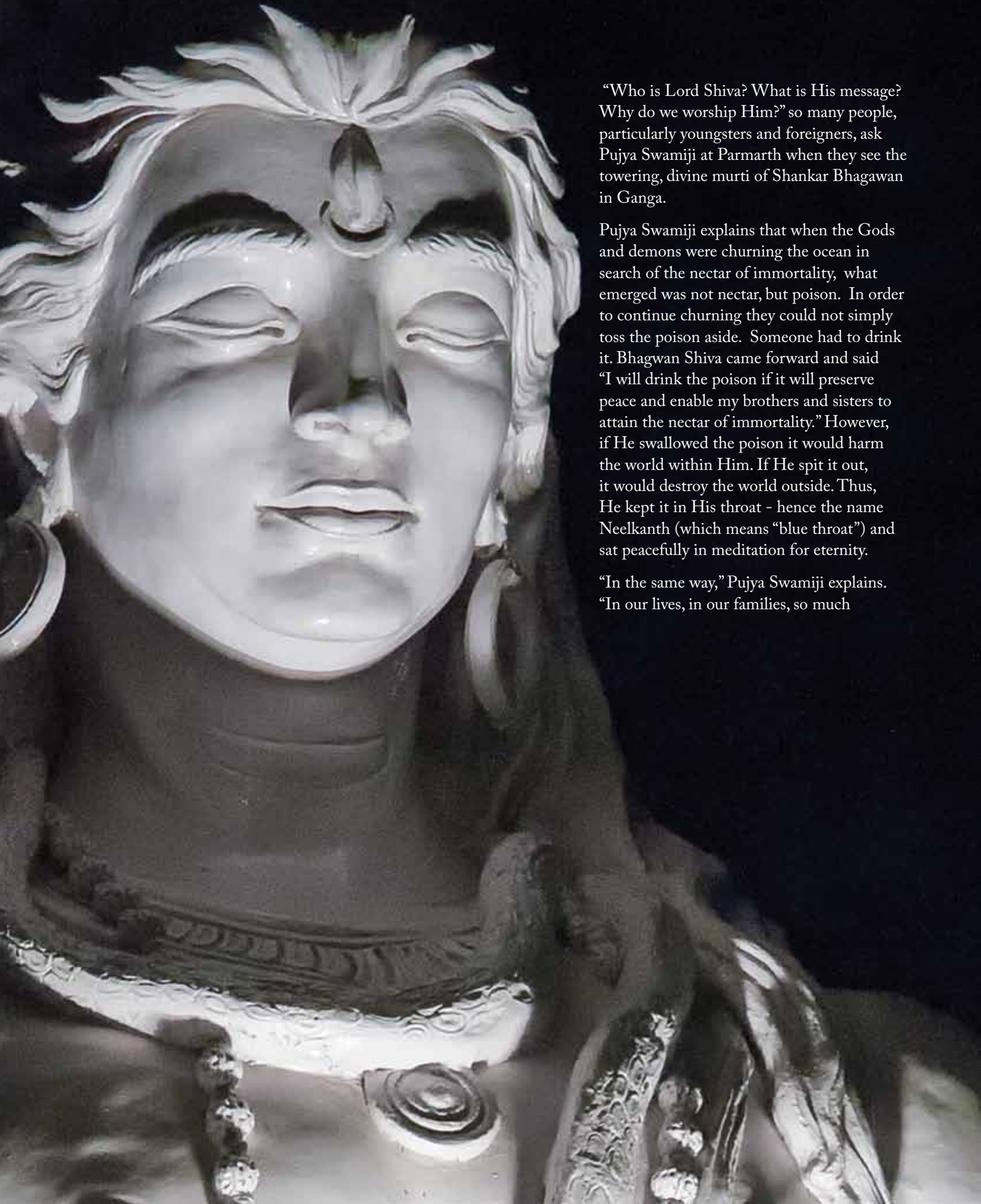


The Ashram Now

Parmarth Niketan today has blossomed into a sanctuary known across the globe. Where there used to be very pronounced “high” and “low” seasons, with summertime being bustling and wintertime empty, today the ashram is full twelve months a year. Groups from dozens of different countries come annually or bi-annually for retreats in yoga, meditation, ayurveda or just to recharge their spiritual batteries. Each year, wing after wing has to be renovated and expanded to accommodate the burgeoning crowds. Innumerable websites, guidebooks, coffee-table books, blogs and travel guides include Parmarth as one of the most prominent spiritual institutions in not only India but in all of Asia. This is due to Pujya M.M. Swami Asanganandji’s holy presence and Pujya Swami Chidanandji’s divine vision and ceaseless quest to create a true oasis of peace, bliss and spiritual communion.







“Who is Lord Shiva? What is His message? Why do we worship Him?” so many people, particularly youngsters and foreigners, ask Pujya Swamiji at Parmarth when they see the towering, divine murti of Shankar Bhagawan in Ganga.

Pujya Swamiji explains that when the Gods and demons were churning the ocean in search of the nectar of immortality, what emerged was not nectar, but poison. In order to continue churning they could not simply toss the poison aside. Someone had to drink it. Bhagwan Shiva came forward and said “I will drink the poison if it will preserve peace and enable my brothers and sisters to attain the nectar of immortality.” However, if He swallowed the poison it would harm the world within Him. If He spit it out, it would destroy the world outside. Thus, He kept it in His throat - hence the name Neelkanth (which means “blue throat”) and sat peacefully in meditation for eternity.

“In the same way,” Pujya Swamiji explains. “In our lives, in our families, so much

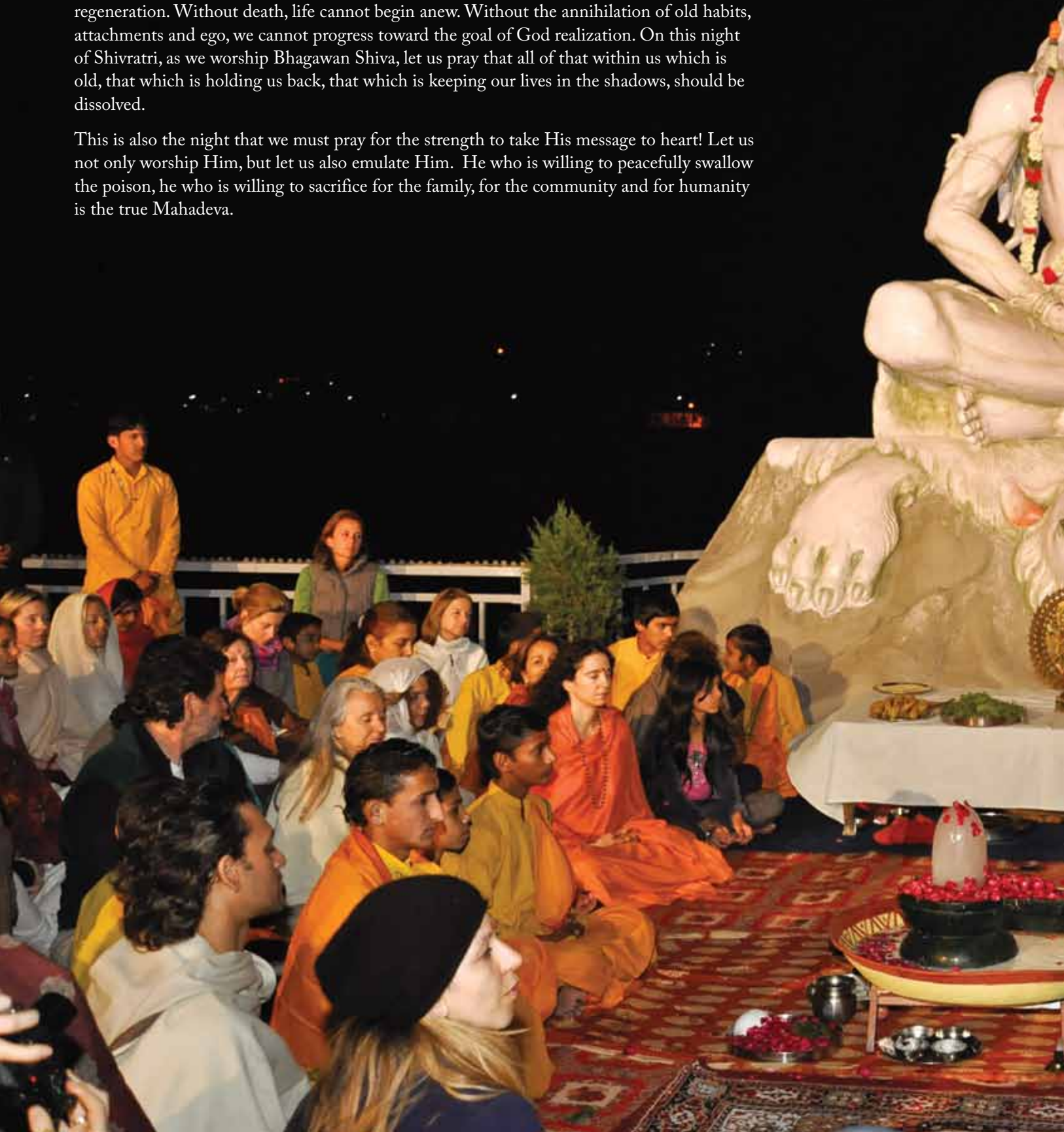
poison emerges. We wait and wait for the divine nectar to emerge, but it seems that only poison comes. Poison always comes before nectar. However, we must never get discouraged. If the Gods and demons had forfeited the churning at the sign of poison, it would have been a tragedy for humanity. Similarly, we must always have faith that the nectar *will* come. We must be willing to churn and churn, no matter what comes - be it poison or nectar.

Bhagwan Shiva went to the Himalayas, to the land now called Neelkanth to meditate after He drank the poison. The message is that when poison emerges in our lives, the secret is to meditate! You don't have to go to the Himalayas. Just create your own Himalayas, wherever you are. First, be the one to accept the poison. Be the one to sacrifice, apologize and concede humbly. Then go, sit and meditate peacefully. This is not weakness, but divine strength."

FAITH

In the Divine Trinity, Bhagawan Shiva is the one who dissolves that which is old and impure in order to make room for a new creation of that which is pure and divine. Lord Shiva annihilates our egos, our attachments and our ignorance. It is destruction for the purpose of regeneration. Without death, life cannot begin anew. Without the annihilation of old habits, attachments and ego, we cannot progress toward the goal of God realization. On this night of Shivratri, as we worship Bhagawan Shiva, let us pray that all of that within us which is old, that which is holding us back, that which is keeping our lives in the shadows, should be dissolved.

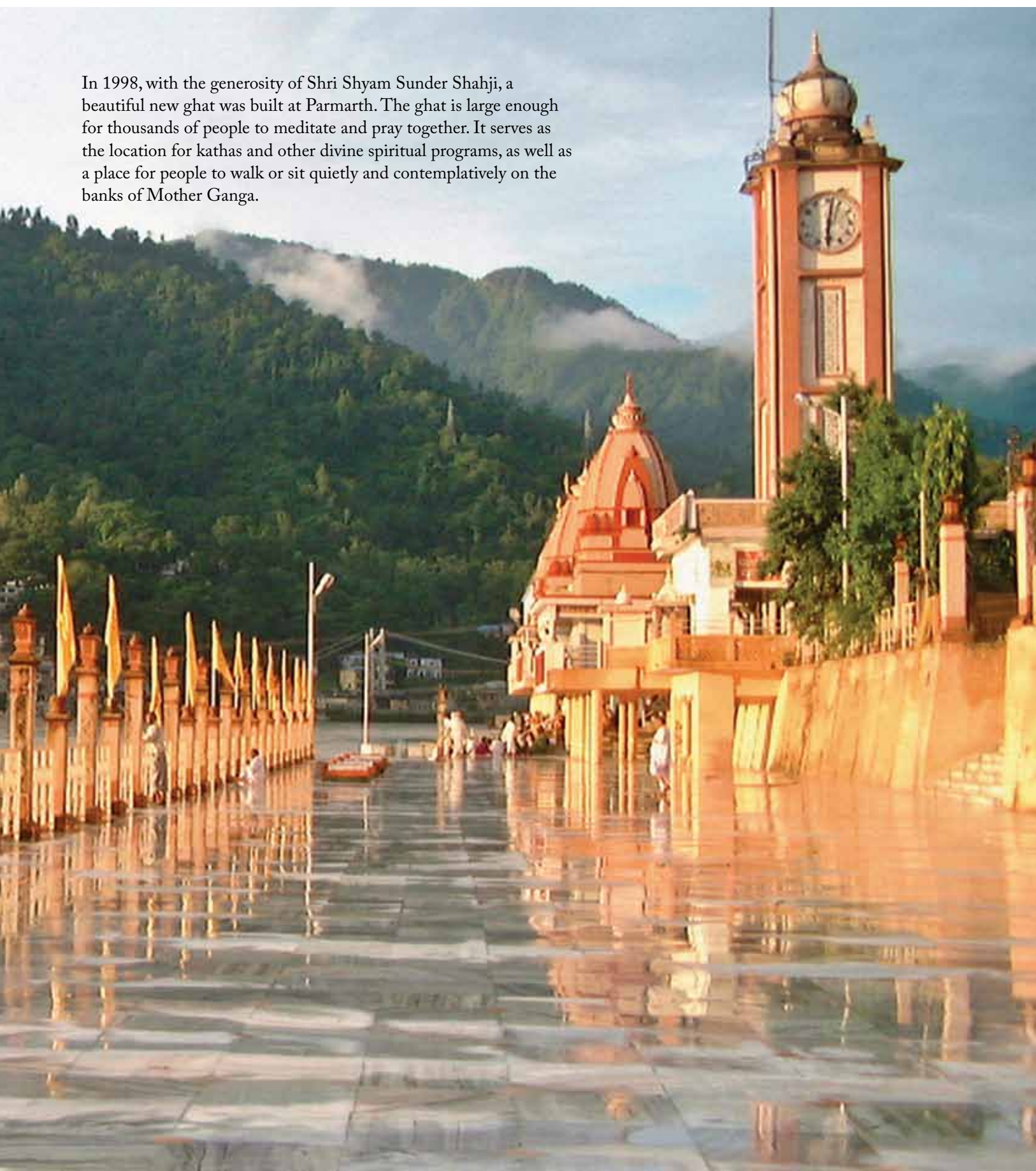
This is also the night that we must pray for the strength to take His message to heart! Let us not only worship Him, but let us also emulate Him. He who is willing to peacefully swallow the poison, he who is willing to sacrifice for the family, for the community and for humanity is the true Mahadeva.







In 1998, with the generosity of Shri Shyam Sunder Shahji, a beautiful new ghat was built at Parmarth. The ghat is large enough for thousands of people to meditate and pray together. It serves as the location for kathas and other divine spiritual programs, as well as a place for people to walk or sit quietly and contemplatively on the banks of Mother Ganga.



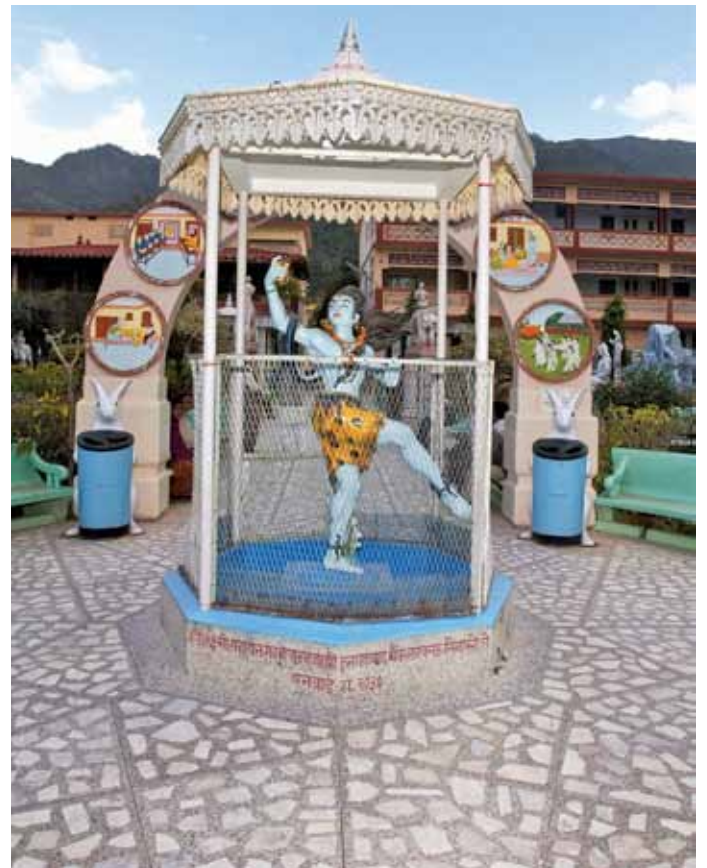






The rishikumars of the Parmarth Gurukul are not being trained only to be priests or acharyas. Rather they are being trained to be true cultural ambassadors, carrying with them the divine sanskaras and message of Mother Ganga, wherever they may go and whatever they may become.









“Come to Nature. Be with Nature. Change your Nature,”
says Pujya Swami Chidanandji. Under His leadership, Parmarth Niketan has become a heavenly oasis in which people can truly get in touch not only with nature outside, but with their own divine nature, inside themselves.



section 05

A Healing Touch

Creating Peace Out of Pieces

"Put the reins of your life in God's hands. Let Him be your chauffeur. Let Him drive your life."







humanitarianism परमार्थ

Parmarth literally means "Dedicated to the Welfare of All."

True to its name and true to Pujya Swami Chidanandji's mission and motto of life "In the service of God and humanity," Parmarth runs a wide variety of charitable and humanitarian programs and projects.

Food for the hungry, medicine for the sick, education for the illiterate, housing for the homeless and hope for the downtrodden -- Parmarth aims to serve the needy in whatever capacity possible. There are two types of needy people who come to Parmarth. There are those whose needs are logistic, basic, physical. They are hungry. They are homeless. They are sick. They can't afford to care for their children. For these people Parmarth provides a wide range of programs and charitable services. Pujya Swamiji fervently believes that if a man's stomach is empty, or if he is burning with fever or if he cannot feed or educate his children, then one must address those needs before trying to teach this man meditation or philosophy. On the other hand, there are increasing numbers of pilgrims who come who have more than enough to eat, who have degrees hanging on their walls, who have not one home but several homes and closets full of clothes. Yet, despite it all, something is missing in their lives. They are searching, seeking, yearning for divine connection. Their stomachs are full but their hearts are empty. Thus, it is for them that Parmarth runs all of the spiritual programs - the yoga and meditation classes and courses, discourses, satsangs, kathas, prayers and pujas, and divine Ganga Aarti.



health care

There is a charitable clinic on the premises of the ashram, providing free testing, first-aid and medicines for minor/common ailments on a daily basis. There is a pathological laboratory and also a dispensary on site as well as a permanent, resident doctor and nurses. On a frequent and regular basis throughout the year, the clinic serves as the location for free medical health camps organized by Parmarth.



These camps are multi-disciplinary and include surgical eye camps (in which hundreds of patients receive free cataract operations with the latest phaco technique and modern lenses), urology, internal medicine, pediatrics, ob-gyn, acupressure, ayurveda, homeopathy and much more.



Dedicated teams of doctors travel from across India and across the world to come and serve their sisters and brothers who are ailing in the sacred Himalayas. Further, the camps sometimes travel into the Himalayan villages, bringing care to the doorstep of the needy. At a recent camp, a team of nearly 30 doctors, nurses and volunteers came from USA and traveled to several Himalayan villages, treating thousands and thousands of villagers. These mobile camps are continuing to increase in frequency and in services provided.

Parmarth Niketan would like to extend special gratitude on behalf of the thousands of patients who have received free diagnosis and treatment to the divine doctors who travel each year to the banks of Mother Ganga to perform selfless seva. These doctors include, but are definitely not limited to: Dr. Purnima Roy (Australia), Drs. Jay and Shailja Chaturvedi and the entire Australian surgical team, Dr. Anshuman Kapoor (Chandigarh, India), Dr. Abhay Nene and Hinduja Hospital Multispecialty team (Mumbai, India), Dr. Shashi & Ashok Marwah (USA), Dr. Jaya & Ramesh Shah (USA), Dr. Avinash Lele and Ayurvedic team (Pune, India)



gurukul



In India today there are thousands and thousands of impoverished children in the villages and cities. Some are orphaned. Some are partially orphaned. Some have parents who are simply not able to provide for themselves, let alone their children. Simple shelters with food, beds and babysitters are not sufficient. These children need not only to be fed and sheltered — they need to be educated and trained so they can be productive members of society. They need to be inculcated with values, ethics and spirituality which will make them torchbearers of Indian culture.

Their education includes the following essential components: (1) a full, standard academic education, (2) training in the ancient Vedic knowledge and traditions, (3) a moral and value-based education which is crucially needed in modern society.







The Parmarth Gurukul provides nearly 200 young impoverished, disadvantaged boys with a basic academic education as well as intensive Sanskrit and ancient Vedic texts. Their days are filled with yoga, meditation, Vedic chanting, reading of scriptures, mathematics, seva and special programs designed to infuse their lives with essential values and ethics. They are not only getting a full academic education, but they are also being trained to be cultural ambassadors, carrying with them—wherever they go—the deep values and culture of honesty, integrity, purity, piety, dedication and selflessness.



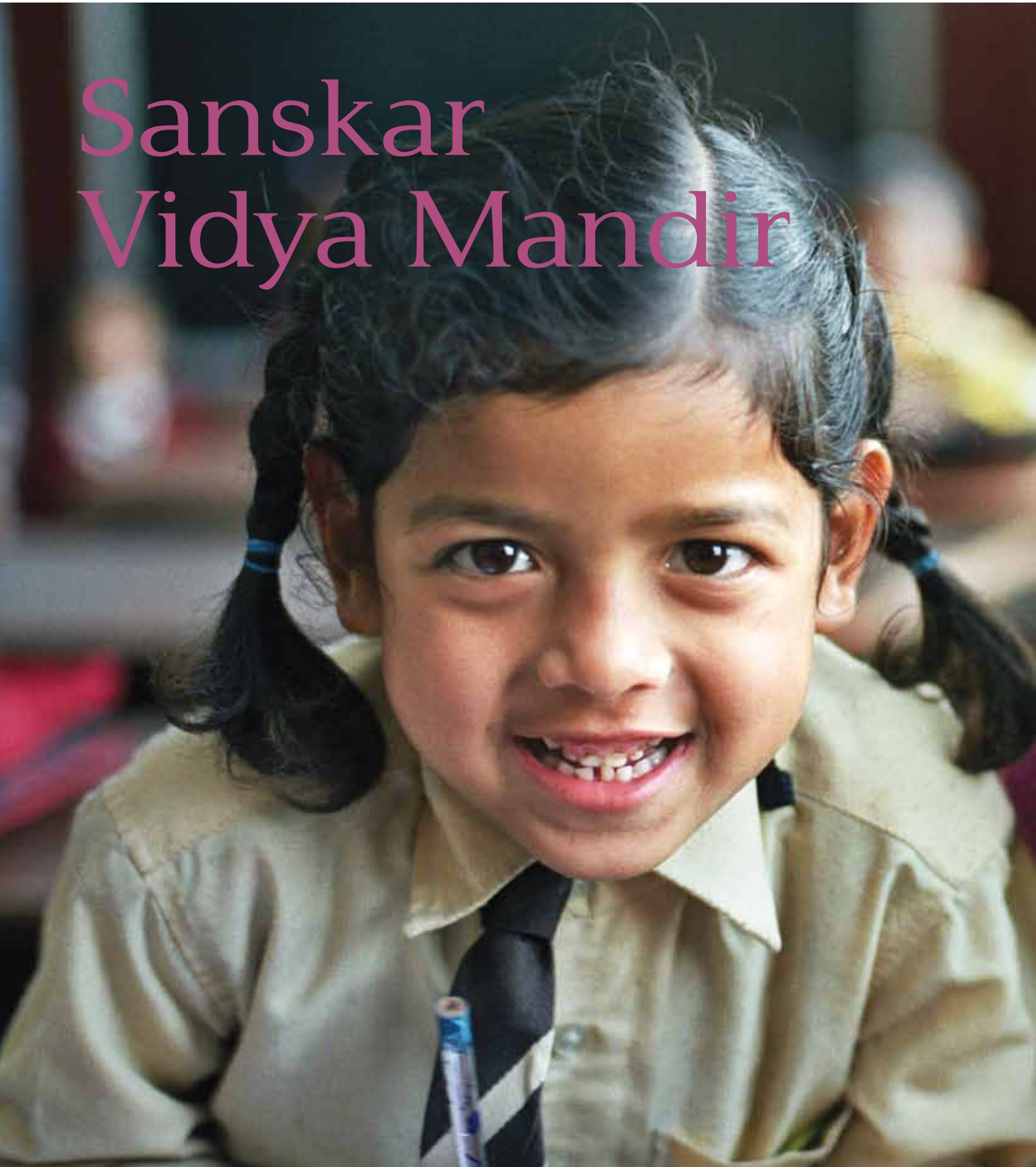


The rishikumars' days are filled with modern academic studies, including computers as well as mastery of the Vedic texts, ancient and timeless practices of yoga, meditation and sandhya, as well as regular spiritual pilgrimages to sites in the Himalayas and even in Tibet.





Sanskar Vidya Mandir





“Don't worry about giving your children cars. Cars they will buy on their own. We must worry not about giving them cars, but about giving them sanskaras!”

On the premises of Parmarth Niketan ashram is a free, charitable school called Sanskar Vidya Mandir, providing quality education to approximately 200 young, indigent boys and girls. Originally opened to serve as a place for free education for the children of the ashram sevaks, it quickly blossomed and burgeoned and became one of the best free schools in the area. Hence, today, children come from kilometers away to attend school here. Classes run from nursery up through eighth grade, with plans to include junior high shortly.









As part of their education, the children also receive uniforms as well as sweaters in the wintertime.







Cow Care

In Indian culture the cow is revered as holy and sacred. Mother Cow is seen as one who gives nourishment and nurturing not only to her own offspring but to all. Cows milk feeds not only baby calves but it provides humanity with milk, cheese, yogurt, ghee and other nourishing substances. However, tragically, today one sees stray cows wandering aimlessly on the streets and in the marketplaces, eating garbage. Therefore, under Pujya Swamiji's guidance and inspiration, Parmarth is engaged in cow welfare programs. This includes the cow home at Parmarth, in which approximately 75 cows are kept with love and care. Further, Pujya Swamiji has undertaken a large scale program to remove the wandering cows from the roads and marketplaces -- between Haridwar all the way up to Lakshman Jhula -- and give them a safe, comfortable place to live. This project is currently in the planning phases and is expected to come to fruition shortly.





Bhandaras

From the very beginning, Parmarth has always been committed to providing for those in need. Whether it's medical care for the sick, shelter for the homeless or food for the hungry, Parmarth is dedicated to service of humanity. Hence, bhandaras (free feasts) are a regular feature at the ashram. Each day hundreds of people – rishikumars, brahmacharis, sadhus and others in need – are fed by the ashram. Frequently when people perform sacred pujas or celebrate auspicious ceremonies, they also choose to follow that with a bhandara to feed the needy. In those cases, large bhandaras are held – sometimes in the main hall and sometimes on the Ganga ghat – where hundreds and hundreds are fed.









The rishikumars at the Parmarth Gurukul are being trained to be true cultural ambassadors, and part of that is to become torchbearers of service. "Give first, take second. Feed first, eat second," they are taught. Hence, each day at the bhandaras, the rishikumars first feed the others and then eat themselves.

section 06

Sanskaras

Sacred Rites of Passage
at Parmarth





sanskaras

संस्कार

According to Hindu tradition, the **Sanskaras** are essentially the “**rites of passage**” that a person passes through in life— from conception to death. However, any definition in English falls short of the deep significance and meaning of the Sanskaras in the lives of Hindus. A closer definition is the word “sacrament,” for a sacrament implies an outward celebration or ceremony symbolic of an inward growth, change or grace. The sanskaras refer to the main religious/spiritual purificatory rites and rituals for sanctifying the body and mind, such that growth may be positive, progressive and smooth.



Each sanskara has a particular ritual and puja associated with it. The proper, pious completion of the ritual associated with each sanskara ensures that the crucial lessons of each “rite” are learned and that the next stage of life can be successfully entered.


There are 16 main sanskaras, four of which are performed with great piety, devotion and tradition on the banks of Mother Ganga at Parmarth Niketan.



mundan

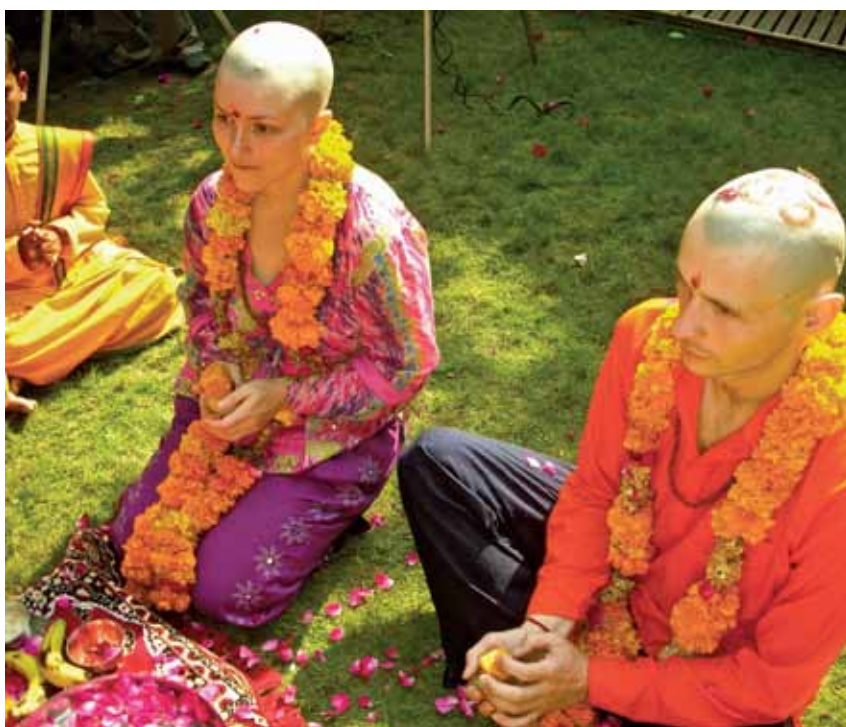
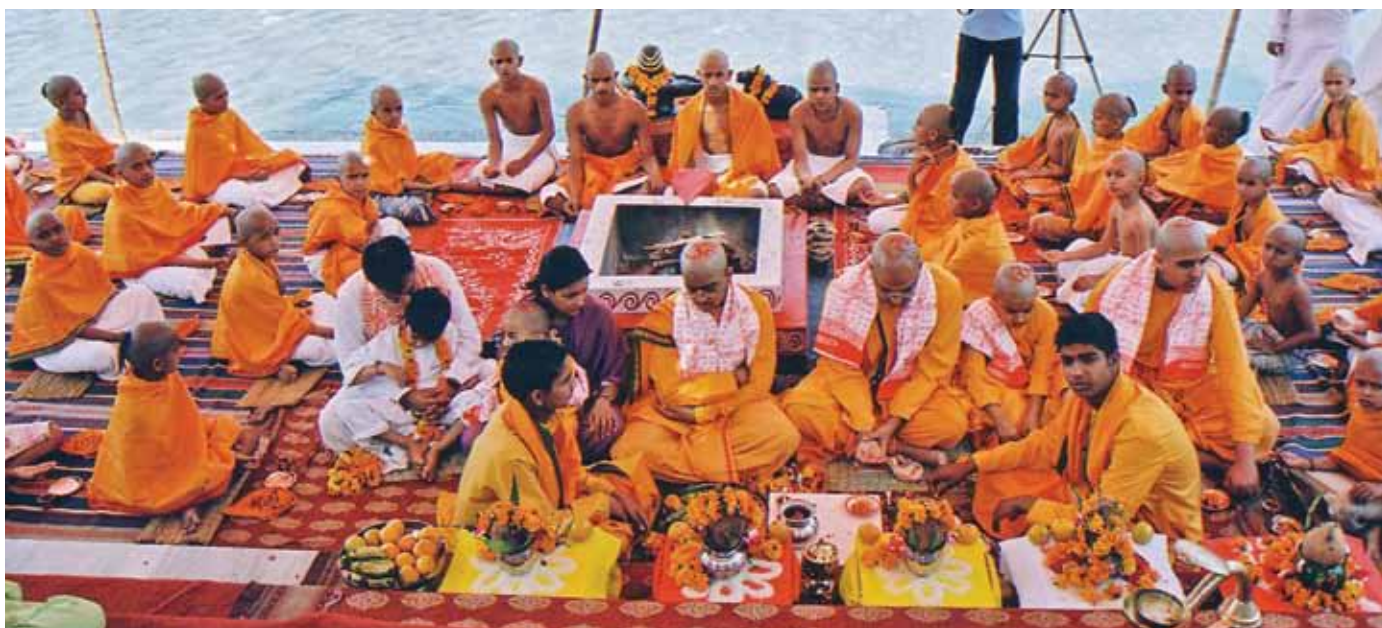
Mundan (the first hair cut)

This sanskara is performed typically during the first or third year of age when the child's original, first hair growth is shaved, frequently leaving only the shikha on the top/in the back. According to the sages, the hair from birth is associated with undesirable traits from past lives. Thus at the time of the mundan, the child is freshly shaven to signify freedom from the past and moving into a true new birth and new life. It is also said that the shaving of the hair stimulates proper growth of the brain and nerves. The chudakarana sanskara is also said to bring long life to the recipient and it is performed as a special ceremony in most homes, particularly for young boys.



On the banks of Mother Ganga, in Rishikesh we have a special chudakarana sanskara/mundan ceremony. In this ceremony, the special Vedic mantras and prayers are chanted by trained priests, acharyas and rishikumars. The young child is shaven clean on the banks of Mother Ganga and the hair is then symbolically offered to Mother Ganga. The child and his/her family then perform a sacred yagna ceremony and the divine Ganga Aarti





People come from all across the world to have this sacred rite of passage performed on the banks of Mother Ganga. Typically, according to most Indian traditions, it takes place within the first years of life. However, for those who have never had this ceremony performed, it's never too late! Numerous people, particularly foreigners, have come to Parmarth for their mundan as a way to embark on a new phase in life, to have a metaphoric new birth, to shed the old and make room for the new.

upanayana

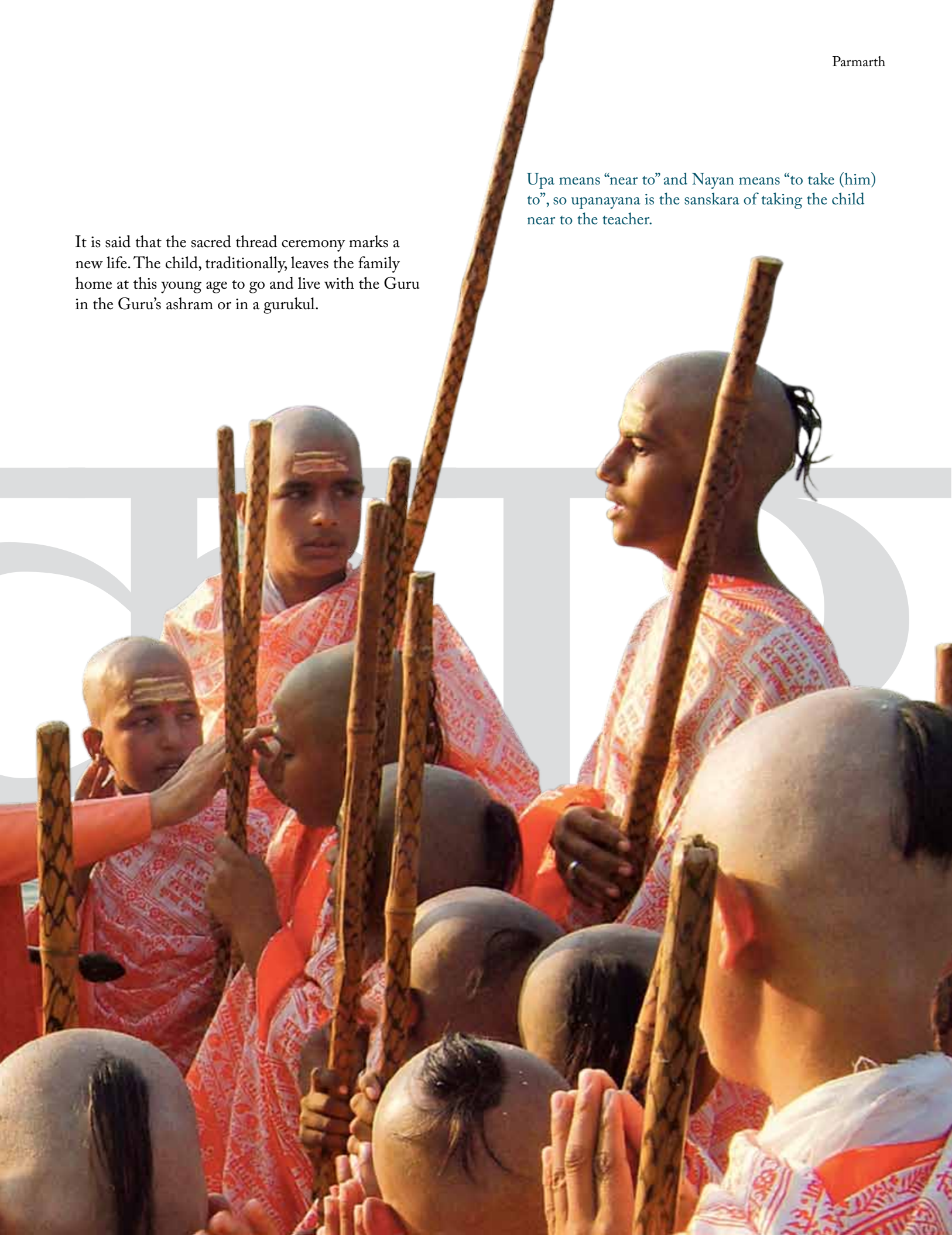
Upanayana or yagno pavit (sacred thread ceremony)

This is essentially an initiation ritual. The child is initiated into the study of the sacred Vedas. It marks the transition from the infantile stage of play to the serious stage of study and sadhana. The upanayana sanskara typically takes place around the 8th year of a child's life; however, some receive it as early as 5 and some as late as 12. To many, it is regarded as one of the most important sanskaras of childhood. Further, it is considered such an essential sanskara that most traditions concede that, however late it may be, the sanskara should still be performed.



It is said that the sacred thread ceremony marks a new life. The child, traditionally, leaves the family home at this young age to go and live with the Guru in the Guru's ashram or in a gurukul.

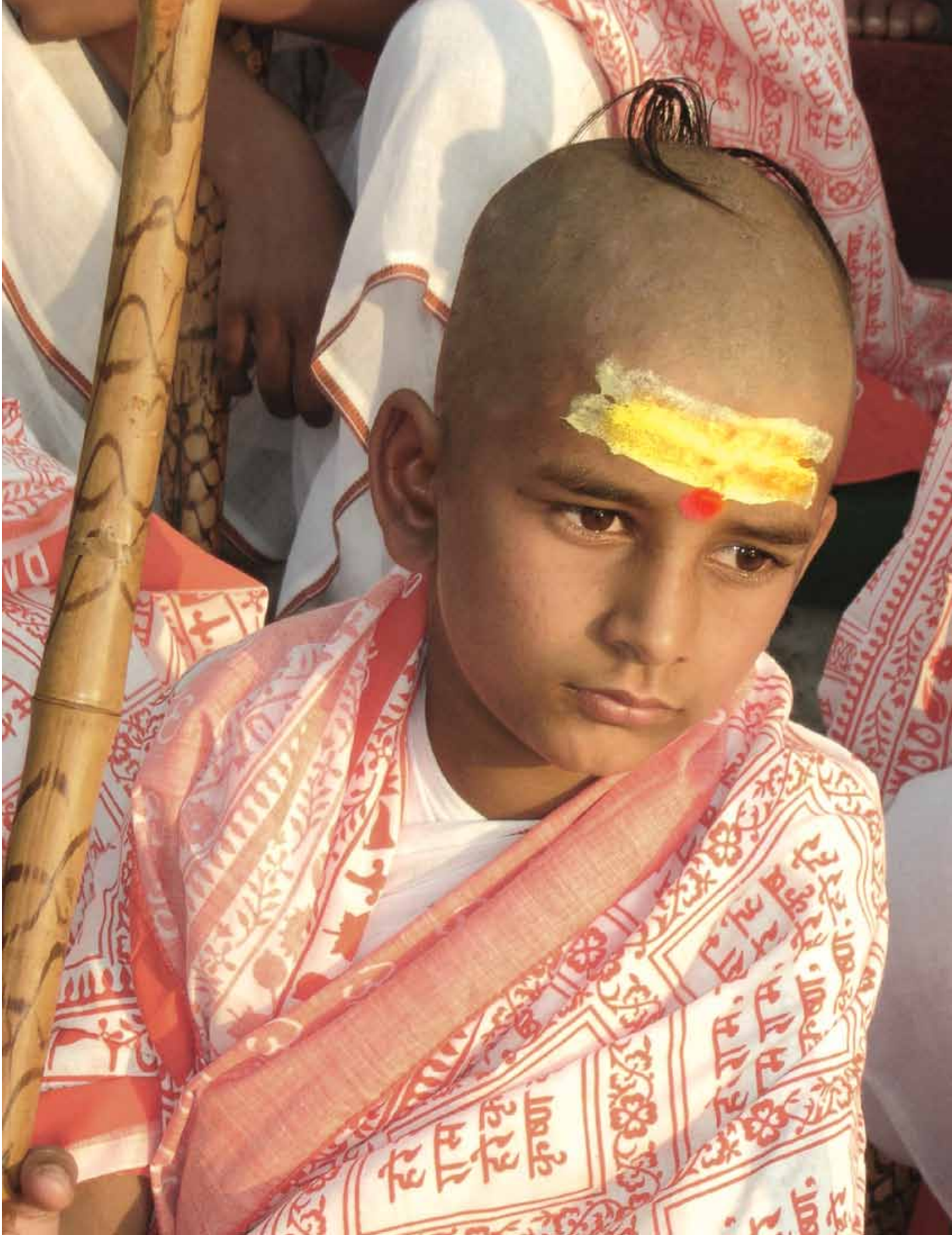
Upa means "near to" and Nayan means "to take (him) to", so upanayana is the sanskara of taking the child near to the teacher.



At the sacred thread ceremony, the child enters the brahmacharya stage of his life—a time of celibacy and complete immersion in his studies and spiritual growth.



The three strings of the janoi denote the three gunas - sattva (balance, light, purity), rajas (passion, excitement), and tamas (darkness, sloth, impurity). Their significance is that the wearer must be above the three gunas, must transcend the bondage of the three qualities of life. They also remind the wearer that he has three debts in life: to the seers, saints & rishis, to his ancestors and to God. The three strings are tied in a knot which is called the brahmagranthi and it symbolizes the united trinity of Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Sustainer) and Shiva (the Dissolver).







The sacred thread ceremony is performed at Parmarth Niketan quite frequently, and people come from all over the world to have this important sanskara performed on the holy banks of Mother Ganga. The ceremony is conducted and overseen by trained priests, acharyas and rishikumars, and the final, sacred Gayatri mantra is whispered into the child's ear by Pujya Swamiji.



marriage

In Hindu tradition, marriage is not only a ceremony, but it is truly a sacrament. It is not a marriage of bodies, but a marriage of souls. It is not a marriage for only a few years or a few decades, but rather it is a marriage for at least 7 lifetimes.



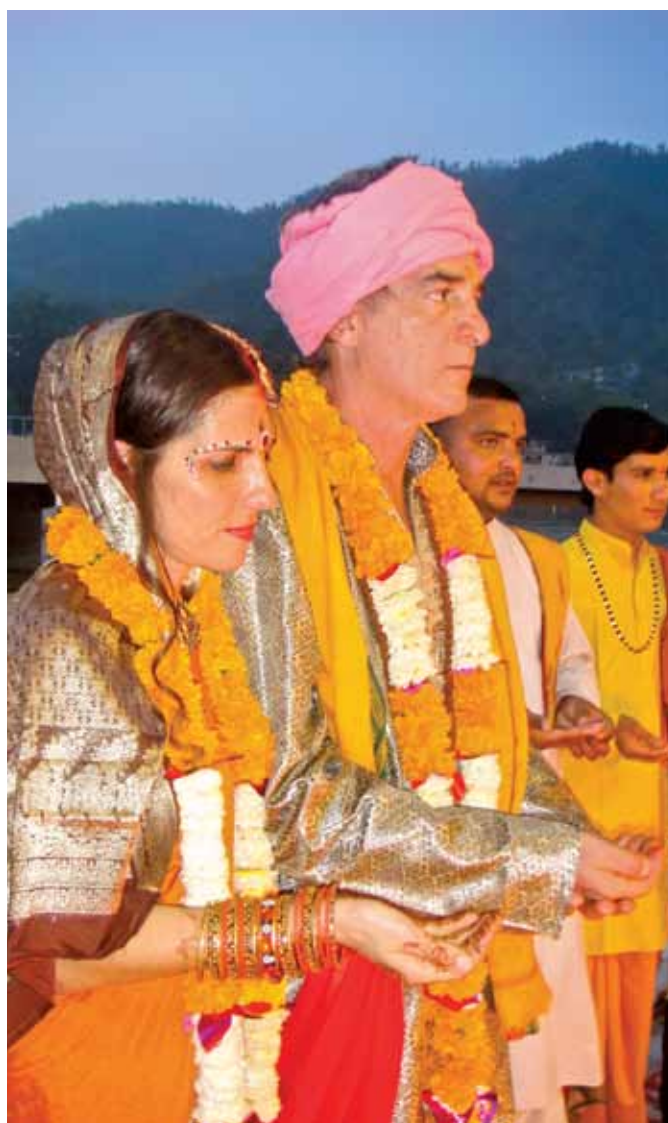
A wedding marks not only a marriage of bodies. Rather it marks a marriage of souls. As the bride and the groom stand beside each other, they are not only taking each other's hand into their own. They are also taking each other's hearts and each other's lives into their own.

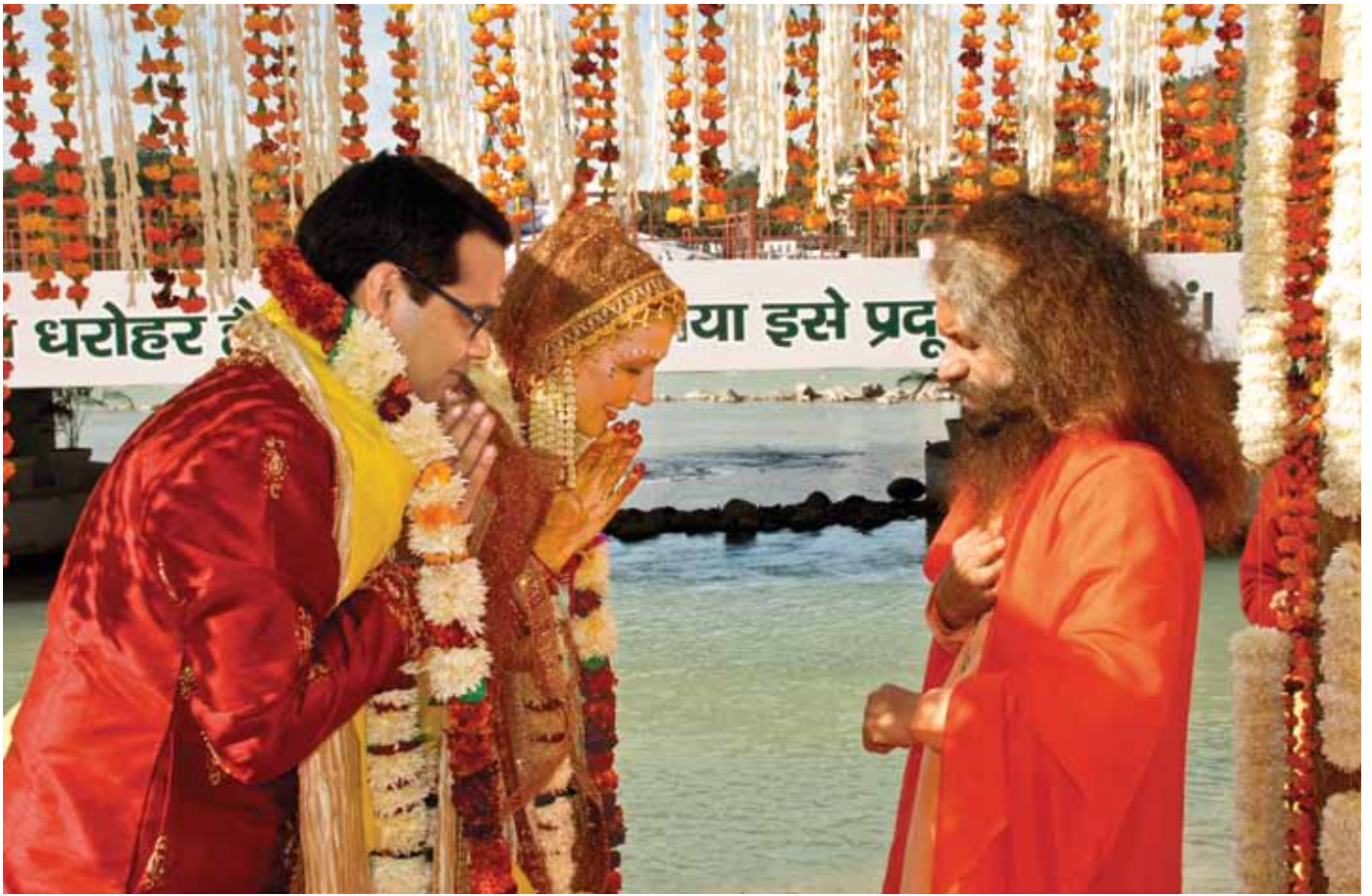






On the holy banks of Mother Ganga, at Parmarth Niketan we perform sacred weddings. Different arrangements are made depending on the couple, their family, and their tradition. Weddings are sometimes elaborate and large, sometimes intimate and small, sometimes complex and deeply religious, sometimes simple. But each marriage is sanctified by the power and the presence of the holy Mother Goddess Ganga and the sacred Himalayas, as well as the divine energies of the saints, sages and rishis who have performed their meditation and sadhana in this holy land.







ash immersion

The Hindu holy scriptures say that to immerse the ashes of a loved one in the holy waters of Mother Ganga is to release their soul from bondage and to help their spirit progress toward liberation. It is, therefore, every family's deepest wish to perform this sacred final rite for their loved ones. People travel from across the world to Haridwar, Rishikesh, Varanasi, Allahabad and other holy cities in order to immerse their loved ones' ashes in Ma Ganga's holy waters.

In the divine "Ash Immersion" program at Parmarth Niketan, pure, traditional, pious puja is performed as the final rite. The sacred rites are performed on the banks of Mother Ganga, according to ancient scriptures, by trained priests, brahmacharis and rishikumars.

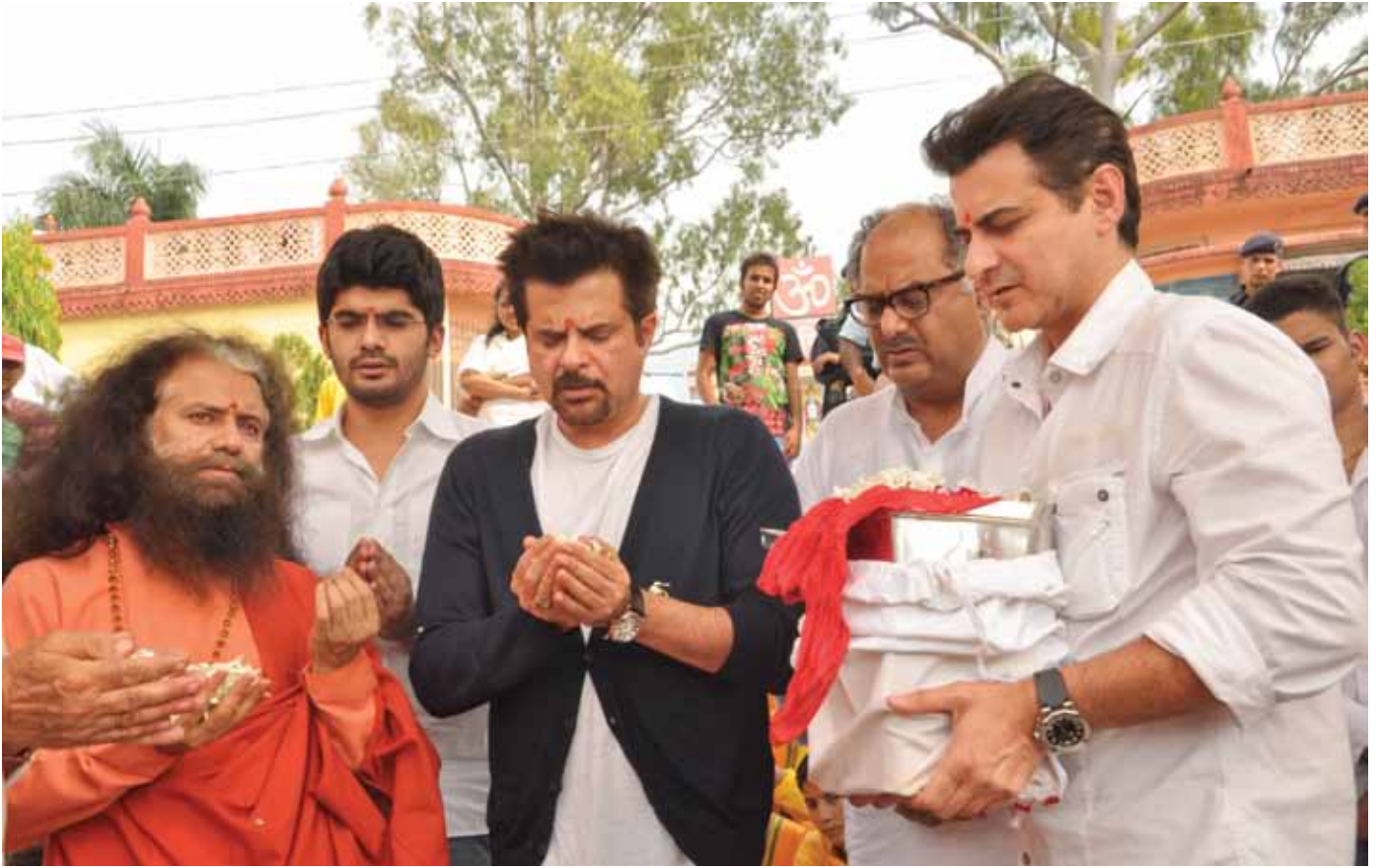
The asthi visarjan puja (ash immersion) is just as important for those who are living as for the departed. Coming personally to the banks of Mother Ganga to perform the ceremony not only ensures that the departed soul will attain peace in the abode of the Divine, but it also bestows great peace and solace to the loved ones left behind. The dark veil of grief lifts and the light of acceptance, understanding and peace begins to shine on the faces of the bereaved during their stay in the ashram.

The puja is also performed frequently by the priests, brahmacharis and rishikumars at the ashram on behalf of loved ones who cannot travel all the way to Rishikesh. People send ashes by post to the ashram and, at an auspicious time, the puja is performed on their behalf, with great sanctity and sacredness.





Bollywood celebrity, Sanjay Dutt, Priya Dutt, M.P. and their whole family came to perform the ash immersion for their father Shri Sunil Dutt



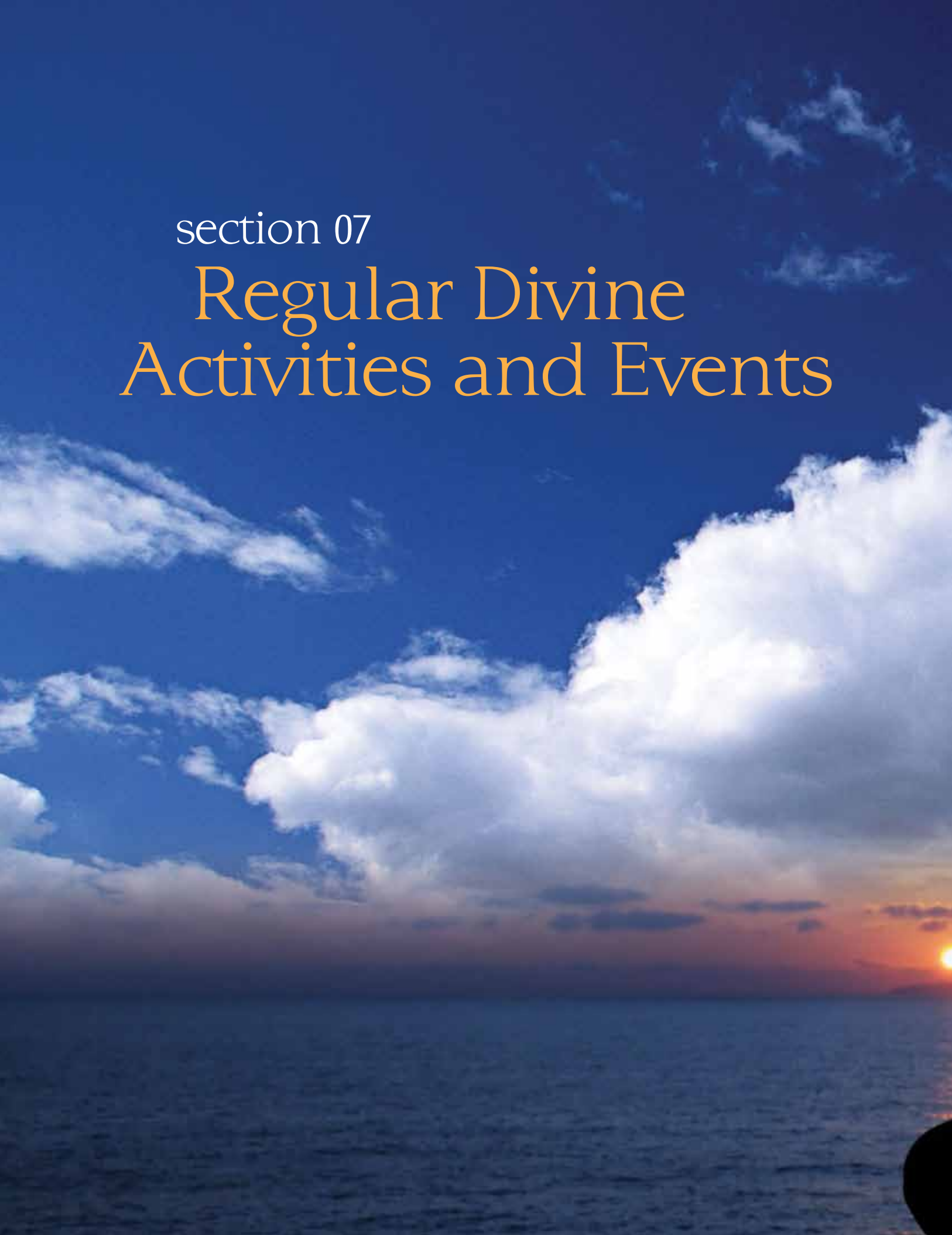
Bollywood celebrity Anil Kapoor and his family came to perform the ash immersion of their father Shri Surinder Kapoor





section 07

Regular Divine Activities and Events





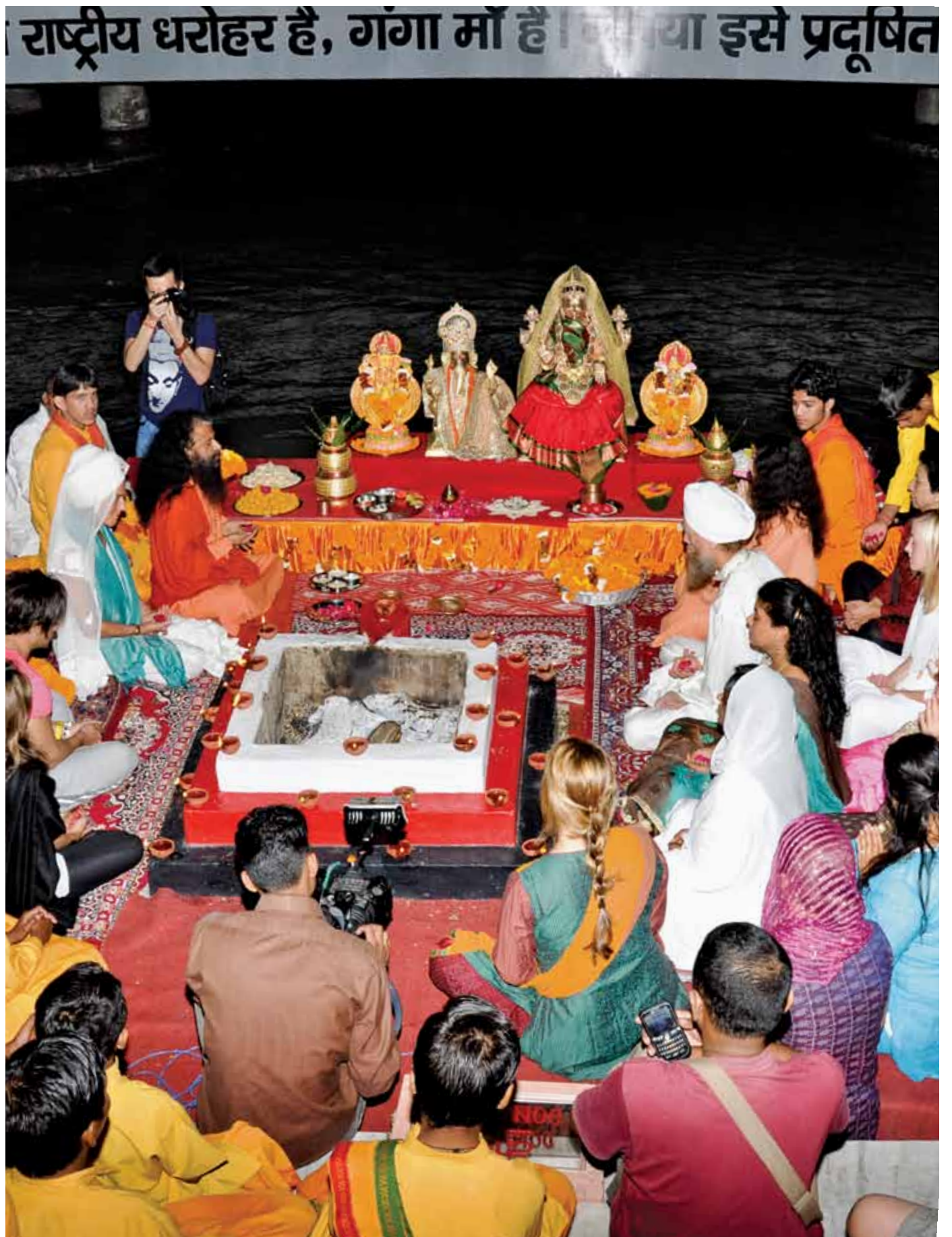


Diwali

Diwali marks the Festival of Light. At this divine time we line our homes, our rooms, our offices and our streets with brightly shining oil lamps. The brightly lit lamps signify the people of Ayodhya's love for Bhagawan Rama and their joy at his return. On this day, however, Pujya Swami Chidanandji reminds us that we must light not only beautiful lamps in our homes, but we must also light the lamp in our hearts. The significance and symbolism of the Diwali lamp is that we must allow the Light of the Divine to burn away all our impurities so that our hearts are filled with nothing but light and love.

At Parmarth Niketan, Diwali is celebrated with a sacred Maha Lakshmi puja in which we pray not only for external or material success and prosperity, but in which we pray for the true, real wealth of internal peace and spiritual upliftment. Following the sacred puja, the rishikumars and other children who are visiting revel in the festivities by lighting sparklers and fireworks on the Ganga ghat.







Shivratri

Mahashivratri marks the night sacred for the worship of Bhagawan Shiva. Bhagawan Shiva is the dissolver that which is old and impure in order to make room for a new creation of that which is pure and divine. Lord Shiva annihilates our egos, our attachments and our ignorance. It is destruction for the purpose of regeneration. Without death, life cannot begin anew. Without the annihilation of old habits, attachments and ego, we cannot progress toward the goal of God realization. On the night of Shivratri, as we worship Bhagawan Shiva, we pray that all of that within us which is old, that which is holding us back, that which is keeping our lives in the shadows, should be dissolved.

At Parmarth, Mahashivratri is celebrated with sacred Shiv abhishek puja on the banks of Mother Ganga, in the lap of the divine Shankar Bhagawan murti, accompanied by the chanting of holy mantras and prayers. “Chidananda Rupa Shivo ham Shivo ham” devotees chant until the last rays of moonlight merge into the rising sun.



Baisakhi Prayers

Every year, Baisakhi is celebrated at Parmarth Niketan with sacred baths in Mother Ganga. It marks, for many, the beginning of the New Year and is a time that Hindus flock to the banks of Ganga to begin the New Year with a purifying bath in the waters of Mother Ganga. During the time of the Maha Kumbha Mela it takes on special significance as it marks the final main bathing day of the Kumbha. During the Maha Kumbha Mela of 2010, Pujya Swami Chidanandji led devotees from around the world in sacred prayers and then in a divine bath in Ganga.







Ganga Snan

It is believed that a bath in Mother Ganga washes away lifetimes of sin and all accrued karma, freeing one from the chains of the past and purifying one in body, mind and spirit. However, Pujya Swami Chidanandji always reminds us that the bath in Mother Ganga must lead to a change in our hearts and a change in our actions in order to really purify us. Hence, when we bathe, we pray not only for Her to cleanse us of sins past but also to purify our minds and hearts such that we may not repeat the same mistakes in the future.

Sometimes baths in Mother Ganga are private, personal and solemn. Sometimes they are times of great festivity and exuberance. During the Maha Kumbha Mela and on special holidays, baths in Mother Ganga take on a divine energy, particularly when one has the blessing to bathe at the time of the revered saints.

When Pujya Sri Sri Ravi Shankarji came and had his sacred Kumbha Mela snan at Parmarth Niketan with Pujya Swami Chidanandji, it was a time of unparalleled festivities in the waters of Mother Ganga.



Ganga Dussehra

Ganga Dussehra is celebrated with great sanctity and devotion at Parmarth Niketan. We worship Mother Ganga as truly the Divine Mother, flowing forth from the Himalayas, carrying life, purity and liberation in Her waters. Each morning we bathe in Her waters as the sun begins its ascent over the Himalayas, and each evening we sing her glories in the Ganga Aarti, as the sun's last rays dance in Her waters. In June, at the time of Ganga Dussehra, we celebrate Gangavataran, the day that She descended upon Earth. We gather together in prayer, thanksgiving and joy for Her presence in our lives.

This holiday has taken on even greater significance in recent years as the holy river has gotten more and more polluted and Her very existence is threatened more and more. Now, on this holiday, not only do we offer Her our prayers, our thanks and our worship, but we also pledge ourselves to doing whatever we can to maintain her flow aviral (free flowing) and nirmal (clean and pollution-free).





Pujya Swamiji offers prayers to the waters of Mother Ganga as part of the ceremony of Ganga Dusshera



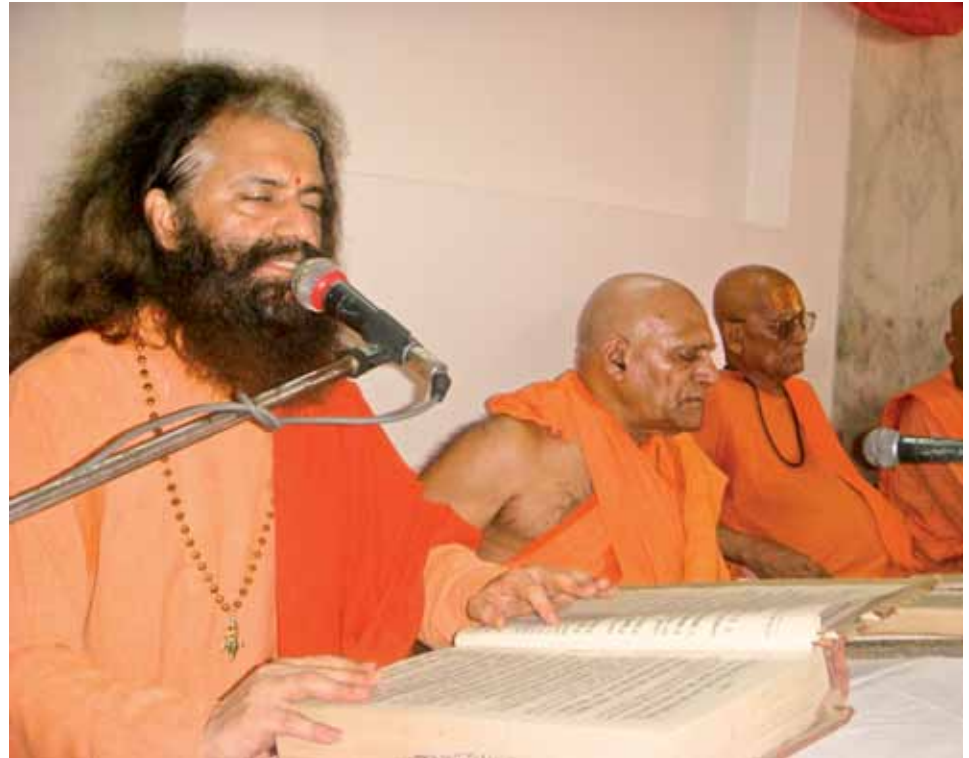
The Ganga Dusshera celebrations include chanting sacred stutis and prayers to Mother Ganga by the revered saints.



Guru Purnima

Each year, as the monsoon rains bathe the parched Earth with life-giving water, so we give thanks for the Guru who quenches the thirst of our hearts and souls.

Guru Purnima is celebrated each year, typically in July, with great devotion. Devotees flock from across the world to come and pay homage at the feet of their beloved Gurus. At Parmarth, Guru Purnima marks the beginning of a five-day Ramayan paath, ending on the anniversary of the mahasamadhi (Nirvana Mahotsava) of Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji Maharaj. Twenty-four hours a day, continuous Ramayan paath is chanted in honor of the divine Gurus who -- in life and after they have left their bodies -- bring light to our lives.



Rakhee

Each year on the full moon day of the month of Shravana (August - September), Indians across the world celebrate Raksha Bandhan or “Rakhee,” the holiday in which brothers and sisters -- whether by blood or by heart -- re-avow their loyalty to each other. On this day, sisters tie sacred threads around their brothers’ wrists, symbolizing their love and affection. In return, the brother promises to protect his sister and to always be there for her. Raksha means protection or security and bandhan means a bond or relation. Thus, Raksha Bandhan symbolizes the bond of security and protection between brothers and sisters.

In Indian culture, the world is one family. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) is a fundamental tenet of Hindu belief. So, on Rakhee, girls and women tie the sacred bands on the wrists of all the boys and men with whom they share a bond of love, whether the fraternal tie is actually genetic or not.

At Parmarth Niketan, the female sevaks tie rakhees on the wrists of all the rishikumars, reminding them that, although their biological family may be back in a small mountain village, they have a new family of sisters here at Parmarth.



International Yoga Festival

The annual International Yoga Festival takes place at Parmarth Niketan Ashram every year from March 1st-7th. The festival is jointly organized by Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board and Parmarth Niketan Ashram.

Since the first year Parmarth Niketan Ashram and Uttarakhand Tourism organized the International Yoga Festival in 2001 (previously it was organized with Uttar Pradesh Tourism in 1999 and 2000), the festival has grown each year in size and scope. The Festival typically draws between 400-500 participants from nearly forty countries across the world, including Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, Pakistan, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, the United Kingdom the United States, and many more.

Participants describe their experience at the Yoga Festival as “uplifting,” “loving,” “transformative,” “powerful,” “blissful,” “enlightening,” and “inspiring,” among many others. Participants thoroughly enjoy having access in just one festival to such a diverse range of yoga disciplines and world-renowned teachers, as well as meeting so many like-minded fellow yogis and seekers from all over the world.

The event features world-renowned teachers such as Shiva Rea, Gurmukh Kaur Khalsa, Manousos Manos, Dr. David Frawley, Kishan Shah, Sadhvi Abha Saraswati, Deepika Mehta, and many more. The week-long festival offers approximately twenty classes a day which students can choose between, spanning many disciplines and branches of yoga. During the course of the week, participants have the opportunity to experience the following types of yoga and disciplines:

- Kundalini Yoga
- Iyengar Yoga
- Ashtanga Yoga
- Vinyasa Yoga
- Nada Yoga
- Reiki
- Sukshma Yoga
- Power Yoga
- Yoga Therapy
- Meditation
- Bhakti Yoga/Kirtan
- Power Pranamayam
- Yoga nidra
- Jivamukti Yoga
- Deep Yoga
- Odaka Yoga
- Shinto Yoga
- Kriya Yoga





For participants of the yoga festival, the week is more than just a learning experience. The yoga festival is a chance to imbibe the sacred science of yoga at its source, in the holy land of the rishis on the banks of Mother Ganga. In addition to the international teachers, the International Yoga Festival hosts some of India's leading saints and spiritual leaders, including H.H. Pujya Sri Shankaracharya, Bhanpura Peeth (Swami Divyanand Teerthji), H.H. M.M. Pujya Swami Asanganandji, H.H. Pujya Swami Chidanandji, H.H. Pujya Swami Dayanandaji, H.H. Pujya Sri Sri Ravi Shankarji, H.H. M.M. Pujya Swami Veda Bharatiji and many more. Students have the rare blessing to receive satsang and the divine words of each of these spiritual masters.



Further, Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji is committed to karma yoga and putting into practice the principles of yoga in real life, in service to the world. Therefore the Festival also includes “yoga off the mat.” Participants participate in various seva activities, a highlight of which is always the large clean-up along the banks and waters of Ma Ganga in Rishikesh.

Another special event that takes place at the International Yoga Festival is the Yoga Aid Challenge. In this event, participants from all levels of ability gather to complete 108 sun salutations, taught by 12 different teachers in 12 different styles, each teacher leading 9 rounds of sun salutations. This event truly symbolizes the unity of yoga.

In addition to the events and courses that happen throughout the days of the yoga festival, participants also have the opportunity to participate in various cultural events during their stay at Parmarth Niketan Ashram. On several nights, music and cultural events complement their experience. Uttarakhand Tourism organizes entertainment, with a troupe of dancers, musicians, and singers performing traditional Garhwali cultural songs and dances for the festival attendees. On other nights children from the Parmarth Gurukul perform traditional dances from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab and other states.

In addition to enriching culture programs, participants of the International Yoga Festival also participate in traditional Indian cultural and spiritual events. Each night, students take part in aarti along the banks of Ma Ganga. Participants feel the aarti ceremony to be “magical and full of energy,” “very moving,” and “emotional.”

By living at Parmarth Niketan Ashram, by being in the presence of so many of India’s greatest spiritual masters, students are able to completely immerse themselves in the ancient culture and spirituality of yoga and of India, a priceless gift that can only be received here in this beautiful land along the banks of Ma Ganga. Participants use words to describe Parmarth Niketan Ashram such as “magical,” “breathtaking,” “peaceful,” “supportive,” and “inspiring.” One participant described Parmarth as “a stunning example of a true ashram...it lives the truth of the teachings and is always in service.” Another participant simply wrote, “It is home.”











The International Yoga Festival is graced, not only by the presence of hundreds of participants from dozens of countries around the world, and not only by renowned, respected yogacharyas, but also by distinguished dignitaries and political and national leaders. Clockwise from top: Former Chief Minister Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishankji addresses the inauguration; Pujya Sri Sri Ravi Shankarji comes and blesses the gathering; yogasanas are practiced on the banks of Ganga; Pujya Swami Ramdevji, Pujya Swami Chinmayanandji and Shri B.L. Joshiji the former Governor of Uttarakhand and current Governor of Uttar Pradesh join Pujya Swami Chidanandji in lighting the inaugural lamp.



The inaugural lamp is lit by Pujya Swami Chidanandji with international yogacharyas and Shri Madan Kaushikji, Minister for Tourism. (bottom) Spiritually elevating discourses are given during the week, to touch the participants with the true meaning of yoga.





*Top: Pujya Swami Dayanandaji graces the Festival with his inspiring and profoundly deep and wise lectures.
Bottom: Evening satsangs are held where participants have the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers.
Pujya Sri Shankaracharyaji and Pujya Swami Chidanandji's evening satsangs are regular highlights.*



During the Maha Kumbha Mela of 2010, on the holy day of Shivaratri which fell during the Yoga Festival, special Shiv Namaskaras were offered at the feet of Shankar Bhagawan.



Cultural song and dance events performed by the rishikumars of the Parmarth Gurukul are a great highlight of the week.



Nirvana Mahotsava

The anniversaries of the mahasamadhis of the pillars of Parmarth are celebrated each year with great reverence. Pujya Swami Dharmanandaji's Nirvana Mahotsava is celebrated on Falguni Shukla Ashtami. Hundreds of revered saints and mahamandaleshwars come to offer respect and homage in the memory of this divine Guru.

Yoga Classes and Courses

Every day at Parmarth Niketan there are numerous yoga and meditation classes. These range from hatha yoga to Yoga Nidra to special meditation classes. Some of the classes are in English, for our frequent Western guests and others are in Hindi. Also there are frequent yoga courses camps including Beginners Courses, Intensive Courses and Teachers-Training Courses. People come to these classes and courses for a day, a week, several weeks or even for months to immerse themselves in the great ancient healing wisdom of yoga. The students are blessed to receive not only excellent instruction in basic practices of asana and pranayama, but also to receive the full richness of the yogic tradition, including meditation, Vedic chanting, philosophy, spiritual discourses and the opportunity to participate in a wide range of spiritually inspiring and uplifting rites and rituals.





Sadhana Saptah

Every year, during the auspicious time immediately following Diwali, from the 9th of Kartika Sukla to the full moon day of Kartika (in October or November), a sacred sadhana week is held. Sadhana Saptah has been an annual ritual at Parmarth Niketan since the very early days of Pujya Swami Shukdevanandji and Pujya Swami Bhajananandji. During this week-long program, conducted in traditional Hindi, classes in yoga, pranayama and meditation are taught under the patronage of Pujya M.M. Swami Asanganand Saraswatiji and Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji.









section 08

Life as Prayer

The Divine Happy Hour
of Ganga Aarti



The evening Ganga yagna and Aarti have put Parmarth Niketan on the global map! One frequently hears Parmarth referred to as “The Ganga Aarti wali ashram” and Pujya Swamiji referred to as the “Ganga Aarti wale Swamiji”. Ganga Aarti officially began in 1990s and was initiated by Pujya Swamiji for two distinct reasons, one of course being the obvious – to ignite the fire of devotion and love for Mother Ganga in the hearts and minds of all those who come. The other reason, though, was more complex. Since Pujya Swamiji had come to Rishikesh, and presumably for much time prior to that, the banks of Ganga were used as a toilet.







Early morning, one could look out as the first rays of light danced off Her flowing waters and see – in addition to the divine brilliance of the sun sparkling along the ripples – rows of people, squatting on the rocks, where the water met the shore, taking care of their morning bathroom duties. Pujya Swamiji had tried, in various ways, over the years to convince people, to educate them, to urge them and coax them *not* to use the banks of the sacred river as a toilet. However, tragically, the project was not as successful or as quick as Pujya Swamiji had hoped. Hence, He searched for an alternative way to prevent people from defecating into Ganga's water. As He was planning for the new Ganga Aarti, He realized that this would also serve as the perfect antidote to the problem of people using the banks of the river as a toilet. If He could establish aarti as a regular ceremony, and turn the rocky area into a beautiful ghat, then people would, naturally, stop going to the toilet. No Hindu, regardless how desperate he or she might be, would *ever* go to the toilet in a place where they performed prayers. No one would empty his bowels on the floor of a temple. Hence, if He could turn the banks of Ganga into a temple through the evening performance of yajna and aarti, not only would it bring great spiritual upliftment to the area, but it also would have the added benefit of preventing people from using that area as a toilet. Thus began Pujya Swamiji's mission to initiate Ganga Aarti up and down the banks of Ganga and to convince as many ashrams as possible to turn their riverfronts into temples. Pujya Swamiji has been the inspiration and founder of Ganga Aarti in Varanasi (on the eve of the turn of the Millennium with H.H. the Dalai Lama and numerous other saints), Allahabad, Badrinath, Gangotri, Uttarkashi, Rudraprayag, Kanpur, and Jwalapur.

The Ganga Aarti at Parmarth Niketan draws between hundreds and thousands of visitors a day, from all cultures, all languages, all religions and all walks of life. Regardless of one's religion or ability to understand Hindi or Sanskrit, the power of the aarti is universal. Ganga Aarti transcends the borders and boundaries of language and culture, diving straight into one's heart, carrying one to Heaven.

Ganga Aarti



Ganga is not only a river. She is truly a Divine Mother. She rushes forth from the Himalayas as the giver of life, carrying purity, bliss and liberation in Her waters.

Ganga is not only water. She is nectar - the nectar of life, the nectar of liberation.

She is a source of inspiration to all who lay eyes on her ceaseless, boundless, rushing current.

She irrigates not only our farms, but also our hearts, minds and souls. She is the Mother Goddess - giving freely to all with no discrimination, hesitation or expectation.

Her waters purify all who bathe in them, all who drink from them. In fact, She is the remover of contamination. They have done scientific studies and have found that no bacteria or virus can grow in Her waters.

Each evening as the sun's last rays reflect off the boundless waters of Mother Ganga, we gather for Ganga Aarti. This divine light ceremony is filled with song, prayer, ritual and a palpable sense of the divine. Aarti is the beautiful ceremony in which diya (the oil lamps) are offered to God. Aarti can be done to a deity in the temple, it can be done on the banks of the Ganges to Mother Ganga, or it can be done to a saint. It is performed to God, in any manifestation, any form, by any name.

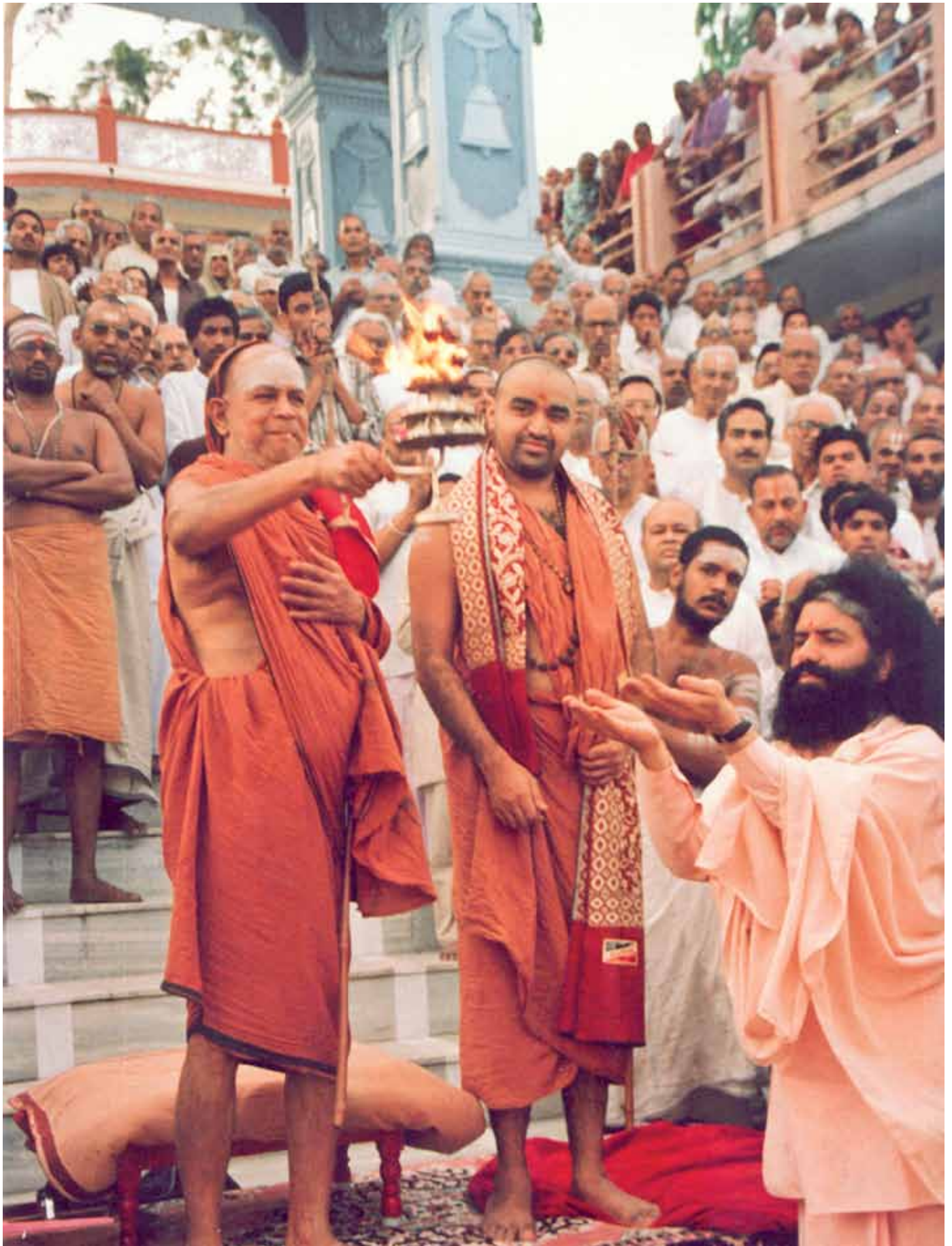




The essence of the aarti ceremony is that all day long God offers us light – the light of the sun, the light of life, the light of His (Her) blessings. Aarti is a time when we say “thank you,” and we offer back the light of our thanks, the light of our love and the light of our devotion.

One of the meanings of Aarti literally is “remover of pain.” There is nothing inherent in the name of the ceremony that says which form or name of God it should be performed to. It should be performed to the Divine Remover of Pain in our life.

Ganga Aarti is a time in which we break free from the normal stresses and strains of everyday life, and gather together in joy, reverence and peace. As the bright yellow sun dips into the water and the reflection of its rays brings tears to our eyes, we are filled anew with a deep sense of bliss, reverence and spiritual connection.







Ganga Havan/Yagna

The havan is one of the most common rituals in Indian culture. Havan is, in essence, a purifying ritual. Just as fire purifies everything it touches, so we perform yagna that our lives maybe made pure. But who is the true fire, the divine fire, the divine purifier? God. So, as we place the offerings into the flames, we simultaneously and symbolically offer all our “impurities” – our anger, our greed, our jealousy, our grudges, our pains – and we pray to God to make our lives as pure as the ghee we pour into the flames.

Also, the yagna reminds us to give, and give and give. At the end of the mantras and shlokas chanted by the priests, it says, “Idam Na Mama.” This means, “Not for me, but for You.” It reminds us that everything we do in life must be for others, for God, for the world. This is the root of yagna and the root of happiness in life.

We sit around the yagna to remind us to keep God and purity in the center of our lives. In life we so frequently want to be in the center, in the spotlight. The yajna reminds us that our role in life should be on the outside, keeping God/Divinity/ Purity in the center, and we should just offer and offer and offer, offering every breath, every word, every thought, every action to the Divine.



The flames of the fire always rise higher and higher. Even if one dug a hole 200 feet in the ground and lit a fire, those flames would go up. Regardless of how windy the day, how strong the storm, the flames – even as they get blown around – always move higher and higher. The reason is the source of fire is the sun; hence fire is always trying to return to its source. The source of water is the Earth, the ocean. So, no matter how high one takes water, even to the top of the tallest building, that water will always flow downward, back to the Earth, to the Ocean, to the Source. In the same way, as we watch the flames of the fire rising higher and higher, closer and closer to their source, it reminds us that in our lives also, no matter how much we feel we've been dug into a hole, no matter how stormy or turbulent our lives may be, we must continue to rise higher and higher. Our source is the Divine, and therefore, we must always rise closer and closer to that Divinity.



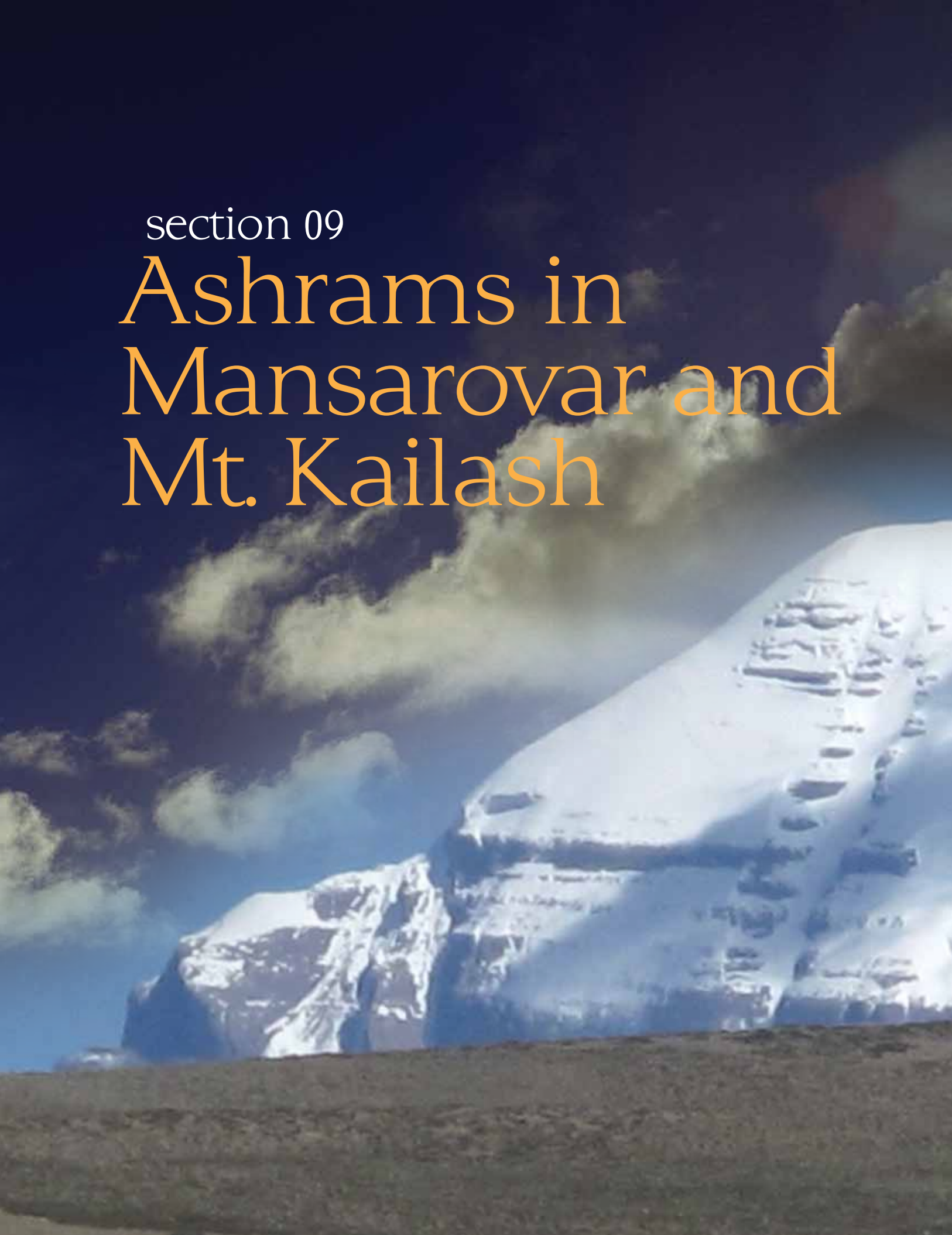
The seeds of the yajna ceremony, the “ahuti” which is offered into the fire represent the seeds of our ego. On a spiritual path one of the first aspects is always the annihilation of the ego, the surrendering of the ego, for the ego is one of the greatest obstacles on the path to the Divine. If one plants a seed in fertile ground, waters it, enables the sun’s divine light to shine upon it, that seed will sprout. Later it will grow and blossom into a large tree. To uproot a tree is very difficult, if not impossible. The seed represents our ego. The things that nurture and nourish our ego are success, praise, achievement.... However, the answer to being egoless and progressing on the spiritual path is *not* that one shouldn’t succeed or achieve or that one should not be praised. The answer is how to deal with the seed of the ego so that it doesn’t grow into a tree which is impossible to uproot. If one takes a seed and roasts it, even briefly, in a fire, then that seed will never sprout. Regardless

of how fertile the soil, how bright the sun, how nourishing the rain, that seed can never flower or blossom or become a tree. Thus, in the yajna fire, we offer the seeds as symbols of the seed of our ego. We let it get “roasted” in God’s Divine Fire. Then, regardless of how much we succeed, how much we achieve, how much we are praised, that seed of our ego will never sprout and will never become a hindrance on our spiritual path.



section 09

Ashrams in Mansarovar and Mt. Kailash





Mansarovar

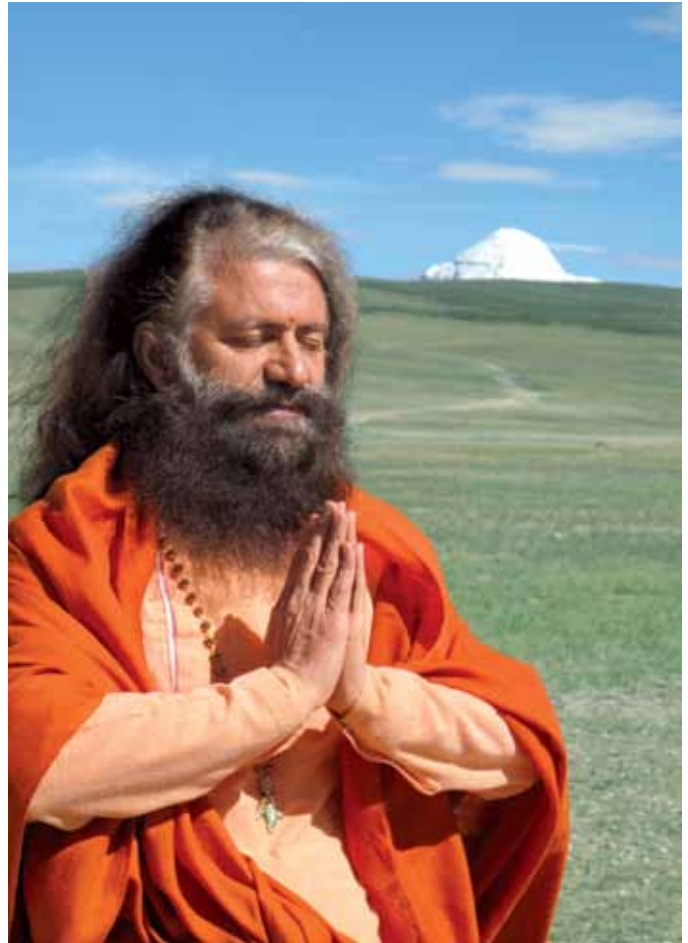
In 1998, on Pujya Swamiji's first yatra (spiritual pilgrimage) to the sacred land of Lake Mansarovar and Mt. Kailash in Tibet, He saw the dire absence of any facilities. He vowed to create indoor lodging (ashrams) as well as medical facilities for pilgrims and local people. In July 2003, we inaugurated the Parmarth Kailash-Mansarovar Ashram on the banks of Lake Mansarovar, the first ashram ever in this holy land. There are 20 rooms with 5-8 beds each. Additionally there are 2 large halls for katha, meditation, satsang and also which can serve as an additional dormitory. There is also a medical clinic for local people as well as pilgrims.

In 2004, a team of nearly 40 doctors and medical assistants traveled from USA in the first free medical camp in Mansarovar and Mt. Kailash and plans are on for annual free medical camps.



In June 2006, we inaugurated the Parmarth Kailash-Mansarovar ashram in Paryang, Tibet. Paryang is a small village, en route to Mansarovar, and it is the last place where all yattris have to spend the night prior to reaching Lake Mansarovar. Prior to our ashram, there were no proper facilities at all, and not even any running water. Now, the Parmarth ashram has 25 beautifully furnished rooms (doubles, triples and larger rooms). There are also 2 large halls for puja and satsang or to serve as a dormitory, and one hall for dining. Further, there are full bathrooms with running water and even showers with hot water!

The ashram is already a great boon for the town, as we hired local people for the construction and trained them in masonry, carpentry and painting. The ashram is run and maintained also by local Tibetans. Further, proceeds from the ashram go back into the community for education, health care and other projects.



Pujya Swami Chidanandji at Kailash

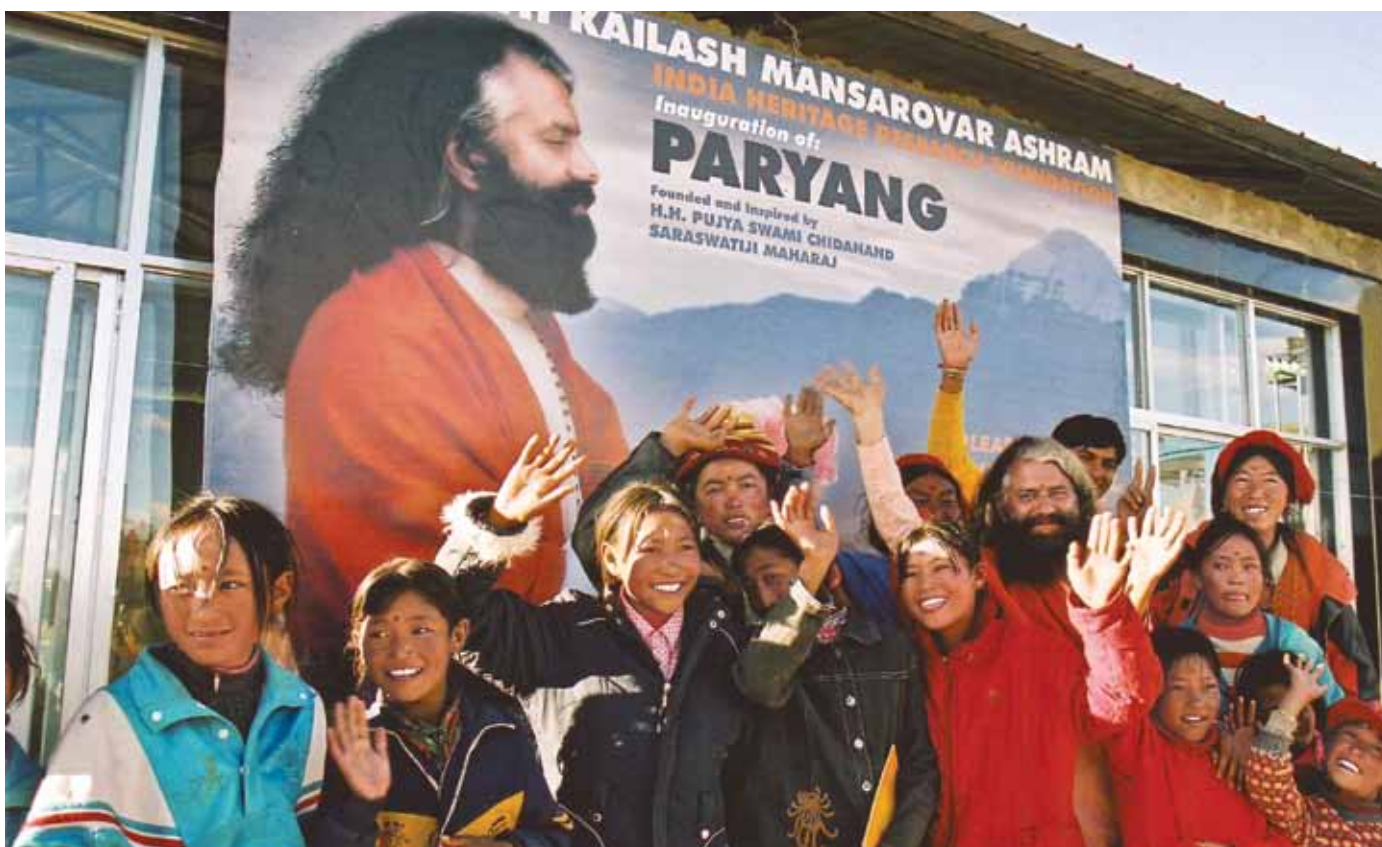
Parmarth Kailash-Mansarovar Ashram in Paryang





Hall at the Parmarth Kailash–Mansarovar Ashram in Paryang, which is used for satsang, meditation and also as a dormitory if required

Pujya Swami Chidanandji with the local children of Paryang, Tibet





Parmarth Kailash-Mansarovar Ashram at Dirapuk on Mt. Kailash

Now, the third Parmarth Kailash-Mansarovar ashram has been inaugurated in Dirapuk, at a height of nearly 17,000 feet, on the sacred Mt. Kailash parikrama route. Dirapuk is the place where all yatris who are undertaking the parikrama spend their first night, 20 km beyond the starting point. It is the location from which the darshan of Kailash is the closest, clearest and most spectacular. The ashram is double-storied with nearly 50 rooms as well as a hall and dining facilities. All rooms face Mt. Kailash. In September 2009 Pujya Swamiji officially inaugurated the Dirapuk ashram, with over 150 yatris from around the world as well as local Buddhist monks and dignitaries & officials of the Tibet Autonomous Region

Lake Mansarovar





Parmarth Kailash-Mansarovar Ashram at Dirapuk on Mt. Kailash



Acknowledgements

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