

BLESSINGS IN ACTION: THE SAGA OF SELFLESS SOCIAL SERVICE OF SAINT SHRI JALARAM BAPA – VIRPUR, GUJARAT

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Abstract

Shri Jalaram Bapa – believed to be a religious and spiritual saint of the highest cadre, reflecting affection, devotion and selflessness, was born on Monday, November 14, 1799 in a small village called Virpur, near Rajkot in Saurashtra (Gujarat) India. Saint Shri Jalaram Bapa belonged to and reflects the noble spirit of the Lohana community, who are known for their commitment towards charity and sacrifice. Inspired by the noble virtues of Lord Rama, Saint Shri Jalaram Bapa devoted his entire life to selfless service, morality and equality. His selfless service embraced and uplifted humanity as a whole, without any distinctions of caste or creed. During his lifetime, Bapa's sole aim was to feed the hungry, give refuge to the homeless, and provide relief to the afflicted.

He dedicated his whole life to serve and feed everyone, especially the saints and the needy ones. Through his divine miracles and spiritual journey, he made a profound impact and transformative influence on the lives of innumerable people and transformed their lives by spreading love and kindness. He himself was not financially sound but he was able to feed hundreds of people, everyday. He lived a life of simplicity and sacrifice and became a beloved saint and a symbol of humanity in its entirety.

Jalaram Bapa's remarkable ability to miraculously provide inexhaustible amount of food showcases his divine power. That has made him earn the title of "Bapa," meaning father, reflecting his role as a provider and a caretaker. Saint Shri Jalaram Bapa's inspiring story and teachings leave a timeless legacy, motivating future generations to create a meaningful impact on society. The devotees' persistent faith in Bapa is a reflection of their attachment to him and faith in his divine presence and showering blessings.

The virtues of Saint Shri Jalaram Bapa are largely impressive and highly needed to be understood and followed. His life has been dedicated to serve others with love and compassion. Through this research paper, I want to spread awareness and understanding about his simplicity & teachings and the unbelievable miracles which showcases that Jalaram Bapa is still present in the 21st century and his blessings will continue to flow.

Keywords: Devotion, Humanity, Inspiration, Kindness, Miracles, Sacrifice, Selflessness, Virtues.

INTRODUCTION:

The famous quote 'देने को टुकडो भलो, लेने को हरिनाम' (Dene ko tukdo bhalo, lene ko hari naam) highlights the essence of Saint Shri Jalaram Bapa's morals which emphasizes the virtue of Jalaram Bapa's selfless giving and the humility of receiving with appreciation. As giving is a noble act, and receiving with gratitude is like receiving blessings from God, this quote perfectly captures the guiding ideals of his life.

This research study investigates the teachings of Saint Shri Jalaram Bapa and the significance of his remarkable journey. Within the historical and cultural context of Jalaram Bapa's life, we will explore the societal influences that shaped his spiritual development. Born and brought up in a religious family, he followed the principles of Hinduism and learned about the importance of prayer, devotion, and helping others which sparked his desire to serve humanity which directed him towards a path of selfless service and attachment to God. Through a deep analysis, we will ascertain the core of Jalaram Bapa's message which reminds to serve humanity.

The family background of Jalaram Bapa is rooted in Virpur, (Gujarat) India in the amiable and religious Thakkar family. His father's name was Pradhan Thakkar, and mother's name was Rajbai Thakkar. Jalaram Bapa's wife, Virbai, too played a vital role in assisting Jalaram Bapa and she always stood by his side throughout their entire married life. Jalaram Bapa and his wife Virbai were blessed with a daughter named Jamnaben and she too wholeheartedly supported in selfless service and shared the message of love and generosity just like her father. The legacy of Jalaram Bapa has been continued by her daughter Jamnaben, and her persistent devotion for serving humanity became an enduring source of inspiration for their devotees. Jalaram Bapa adopted his grandson, Harirambhai, who later became his direct descendent. Today, Giridhar Bapa, along with his son Jaisukhran Bapa and Raghuram Bapa, lead the revered Jalaram Bapa temple in Virpur, keeping the tradition alive.

Jalaram Bapa's revered guru, Shri Bhojalram Bapa, led him on his spiritual path and gave him invaluable insights. Jalaram Bapa worshiped him with deep devotion and considered him as his spiritual guide and mentor.

EARLY LIFE OF JALARAM BAPA

Jalaram Bapa, also known as the great Bhaktraj Shri Jalaram Maharaj was born on the auspicious day of Savant 1799 in Kartak Sud on Saturday, according to the Hindu Calendar. (Rajdev, 1970) This source captures the essence of the life story of Shri Jalaram Bapa.

Jalaram Maharaj's early life was filled with significant moments that shaped his spiritual journey. At the age of 5, he amazed everyone with his deep spiritual connection towards God. He displayed a unique ability of chanting Shree Ram's holy name and this incident proved as a testimonial to his abiding love and connection towards the almighty. At the age of 16, as per his father's wish, he got married to Virbai. When he was 18 years old, he experienced a life-changing event, returning from a pilgrimage visit of Hindu sacred places. His guru gave him the sacred guru mantra of Ram, which signified the beginning of his spiritual journey and this took a new direction in his life after this divine initiation as he accepted his destiny as a devoted disciple and spiritual seeker. In his immediate family, Jalaram had an elder brother named Bodhabhai and a younger brother named Devjibhai. Once, a saint arrived at their house and requested Rajbai to offer her second son, Jalaram, to him. Despite her initial hesitation, Rajbai eventually consented, valuing the saint's spiritual perception and knowing Jalaram's divine attributes. Jalaram's days were then spent in the company of monks and saints where he learned and continued to practice devotion and compassion. Eventually, he found himself separated from his father's home and seeking refuge in his uncle Valji's shop. Despite the challenges that he encountered, Jalaram's caring and giving nature remained unaffected. (contributors, 2023)

A saint named Raghuvardasji with a group of monks visited Jalaram's village during his childhood and Rajbai (his mother) as per her divine nature, warmly welcomed them and provided them with food and hospitality. Rajbai's devotion impressed the saint so he blessed her second son, Jalaram. Jalaram's horoscope revealed that he would bring sanctity and holiness not just to their family but also to the entire region of Gujarat and this blessing profoundly touched him which led him on a significant spiritual path.

Through his transformative experiences and divine journey, Jalaram headed on a path of unconditional love, sympathy and devotion, which became an enduring inspiration for generations to come.

JALARAM'S WORK AS A SOCIAL REFORMER

Jalaram Bapa was born in a small village named Virpur, located in the heart of Gujarat. A name that would resonate through the ages, embarked on a journey that would touch the lives of countless people and who ignited a wave of bringing societal change.

With the blessings of his guru, Jalaram Bapa and his wife Virbai headed out on an incredible journey to serve humanity and bring about societal reform so they initiated 'Sadavrat' - a lifelong commitment to feed everyone. It got started in Maha Sud Beej Samvat 1876 according to the Hindu Calendar. It was a centre where the monks, saints and the destitute could find food and shelter anytime. 'Sadavrat' served as a refuge for the needy and for pilgrims traveling to Girnar, Somnath, and Dwarka. Initially, they did face food shortages, but his divine intervention seemed to work so people from diverse communities donated food grains and money to the ashram and with the grace of God, Sadavrat ran smoothly and steadily.

The doors of this humble home are still open to all, regardless of any discrimination or beliefs and this has become a place of refuge where the wealthy and the destitute both share meals at the same time. Jalaram Bapa's inspiring life as a social reformer reveals that real greatness is found not in wealth or power but in the ability to change people's lives and uplifting humanity. Their valuable devotion gave rise to the Sadavrat tradition, which has endured for 203 years and this made him earn the revered title of Bhakt Jalaram or Jalaram, the devotee.

The legacy of Jalaram Bapa is still carried forward at the 'Anna-kshetra' a sacred place where food is served for 365 days a year in Virpur. The prasad, or the food provided at the temple, includes typical Gujarati food like khichdi, kadhi, rotla, sabzi, gathiya and bundi. It is consumed by thousands of people daily. Jalaram's work as a social reformer encompasses helping others is a means of establishing a spiritual connection.

One crucial occasion in Jalaram's life occurred when a sadhu brought a divine gift into his life. A beautifully crafted deity of Lord Shri Ram was placed in his hands bringing with it a message of Hanuman's arriving, (Ram's loyal devotee). Lately, the divine forms of Ram, Sita (his wife) and Laxman, (his brother), also manifested and Jalaram's life was filled with the heavenly presence.

STORIES OF JALARAM'S LIFE

The devotional poem "Jalaram Shatbavani" glorifies the life and deep insights of Shri Jalaram Bapa. In Gujarati, the term "Shatbavani" means "true essence" or "divine attributes." The poem captures the core of Jalaram Bapa's teachings and the traits that he exhibited as an illustration of true spiritual enlightenment and selfless devotion

to serve humanity. The verses capture the virtues he portrayed like kindness, sympathy, humility, and selflessness. Jalaram Bapa encourages people to keep striving for one's justice, mercy, and live simple in one's own life. (Manudas)

The poem emphasizes the significance of Jalaram Bapa's presence in Virpur's holy land. Throughout the verses of "Jalaram Shatbavani" depicts the sacredness and spiritual environment where Jalaram Bapa resided and carried out his noble deeds. Devotees can connect oneself with Jalaram Bapa by reciting and reflecting on this poem, and can find inspiration to cultivate these qualities in their own life. 'Jalaram Shatbavani' also addresses the transformative influence of Jalaram Bapa's presence, divine blessings he showered upon his devotees and miracles attributed with him experiencing the sense of peace and heavenly ascent.

Jalaram Shatbavani is the collection of verses which narrates the storyline and teachings of Saint Shri Jalaram Bapa. Within these verses, there are several important instances that demonstrates the attributes and impact of Jalaram Bapa:

1. The Miracle of Feeding the Hungry:

One instance illustrates Jalaram Bapa's exceptional capacity to feed numerous people with scarce resources available. Even though he had insufficient quantity, he miraculously arranged meals for everyone present who came to seek his blessings, which indicates his selflessness and divinity.

2. Healing the Afflicted:

Other incident highlights the compassion and healing power of Jalaram Bapa. It narrates how Bapa cured the afflicted people, who approached him for blessings and offered them comfort and relief. As his touch is believed to be having the divine healing power, he always spread faith and hope to those in need.

3. The story of a devotee's prayer:

The poet describes how a devotee sincerely prays to Bapa for his rescue and his prayers were heard and answered because of his true devotion. He found consolation and right direction in Jalaram Bapa's divine presence. This incident illustrates the strength of praying and showcases intimate bond between Jalaram Bapa and his devotees.

4. The acts of compassion and kindness:

The verses vividly describe the instances where Jalaram Bapa showed compassion and kindness. His selfless acts, serving the needy and providing shelter to the homeless and offering support reflects his strong commitment to help others also inspire those around him.

THE PRESENT TIMES:

Jalaram Jayanti, the birth anniversary of the revered saint Jalaram Bapa, is celebrated with great joy and devotion throughout the world. One of the significant aspects of this celebration is the unique tradition observed at the Virpur temple. People gather during this time to celebrate Jalaram Bapa's birthday as well as to remember his selfless deeds of kindness and service. Since February 9, 2000, the temple trustees have made a remarkable initiative to no longer accept any gifts in cash or kind. This decision was made in order to make sure that worshippers come to the temple to receive blessings, join in the prasad (blessed food), and depart positive feeling. (Yagnik, 2011)

Since its inception in 1992, the temple trustees have maintained the tradition of feeding the poor and needy everyday. Devotees come to seek blessings and receive the divine grace at the temple, acknowledging their belief in Jalaram Bapa's spiritual presence. They express their deep gratitude and seek Jalaram Bapa's help for divine direction and protection through the act of offering.

There are several types of daan (donations) which includes Shabdadaan (kind words charity), Budhhidaan (knowledge sharing), Arthadaan (monetary donation) and Samayadaan (donation of one's presence and attention). Notably, Jalaram Bapa strongly believed in the practice of Anndaan, (the donation of food) as he understands the vital significance and the impact it has on individuals and communities.

CONCLUSION:

India is known as a land of saints, prophets and monks. Each part of the country has a story to tell and a saint to bow down to. One of them, Saint Shree Jalaram from Gujarat, is known for his devotion, selflessness and the virtue to help and feed the needy. The more we know about the divinity of the land, the more we understand the concepts, traditions and culture of the land. The present paper is just one of the ways to bring to light, the stories of the life of Jalaram Bapa. His divine grace resonates throughout the state and he is revered not just by the community of Lohanas, but by people across the communities and religions, regardless of the geographical borders.

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