

The Swaminarayan

EDUCATION IS THAT WHICH LIBERATES

Dear Parents, Guardians, Pupils and Friends,

Theme for next week

The theme for next week is “**Learn to Forgive.**” I have written about it in the newsletter. I hope you find it of interest.

The Prize Day

It was a fitting event in honour of a remarkable man, who graciously walked amongst us for so many years without too much fuss...Here is the tribute speech I gave in honour of his memory as requested.

“When we are young, our dearest wish is to be accepted by those around us. It is a desire that is so inextricably woven into our genes that it invokes a sense of insecurity, a feeling of isolation which leads to sadness and self-doubt, should we ever feel rejected. History, however, judges differently. It revels in the glory of individuals who choose to break out from the popular path and pursue the unexplored. They are not afraid to stand out, make mistakes, ask questions, they don’t trust the accepted norm, are fearless in the face of adversity, even if it means being alone, the one voice that is prepared to stand up and stand out in a crowd, and say that they have got it wrong, that they have not thought their arguments through clearly. They are the creators, innovators, the future leaders, fearless in pursuit of excellence. Their normal has not been created because it has not yet been imagined.

Yogiji Maharaj was one such sant. As a young child he was not afraid to do what was right even if it was not the most popular amongst his peers. When his friends played on the dirt fields of his village, he would be found sitting in the corner turning the rosary. He was an untamed visionary, bold, brave, fearless in what he thought possible. And what a grand vision it was too, of grand marble and stone temples the likes of which history could not have imagined, hospitals, universities, and inevitably, a school, because there too he knew the way to the heart of a child – with love and play. He would often cry out in assemblies, they are our future. A jolly man with an infectious croaky voice, it resonated with the way of a child. It was his wish that there should be a school adjacent to the marble temple he imagined in London. And it wasn’t just a school that he imagined, but a boarding school. What a vision, because he would not have known that all the great public schools in the UK having Boarding Houses linked to them. At that time BAPS was just entering its twenty-first year, short of funds to bring his vision alive.

Yet throughout that time, Pramukh Swami listened, and made mental notes. He was a disciple of infinite faith in his Guru: A Guru’s words should never prove false, he would cry. There is no greater service to a Guru than to carry out his every command, he often said in assemblies. It is a quality we observe in all the best students of the Swaminarayan School who are always respectful of the knowledge they receive from their teachers.

Yet for Pramukh Swami, there was no greater joy than to guide a lost soul towards God, a staunch believer in never abandoning one’s birth religion, a principle we embrace within the TSS community in the way we welcome all faiths who are prepared to sympathise with our ethos. There is not a single

student sitting in the hall today who fails to appreciate the value of going to Darshan upstairs whenever we have our assembly at the Mandir. We see them rushing in from their registration at school, and then inevitably ask: 'Is there time to go upstairs, sir?'

Pramukh Swami would have been proud of all them for putting God ahead of them. He was the inspiration behind starting every lesson in our thirty lessons week with a prayer. All the teachers understand the focus it instilled in our children. Visitors are instantly impressed by the calm atmosphere within the school. I remember after having observed a lesson of a very senior teacher once after we implemented the strategy and commenting, 'You didn't start your lesson with a prayer.' While my comment received a mild apology, I can still remember his reaction when he next walked into my room after having followed the guidance: 'I don't know what it is, Mr Manani,' he said, 'but it really does work. I have never seen them settle down so quickly.' With God in front, the Swaminarayan School has no limit to what it can achieve.

An inspirational leader, Pramukh Swami led from the bottom – his inverted pyramid the west discovered almost fifty years after he implemented the strategy in BAPS. Leadership to Pramukh Swami was not about dictating instructions from the top but about mucking in, being prepared to do things that no one else wants to do. About giving others a chance to take leadership and supporting them in their development. Pramukh Swami would not have seen any difference between sitting as the chair of a meeting or sweeping the floor, or for that matter washing dishes, as he demonstrated the very day he was anointed as the President, the Pramukh, of BAPS. He taught us that the greatest quality a leader needs is humility. A Headmaster should not think it is beneath him to drive the minibus to take pupils to clubs or pick up litter.

I am often known to say to prospective visitors, that The Swaminarayan School is not about buildings, but about the people who reside in them. While important, the lack of facilities has not stopped us from giving the experience of a lifetime to our pupils. You should only spend a week in the senior school to find out.

You see, in this country, we are all obsessed with bricks and mortar. Pramukh Swami grasped the essence of this uniquely British obsession in creating this magnificent Mandir, and said so, that the stones in this Mandir will turn people towards God. While the Swaminarayan School may not boast the finest buildings, we can surely say, that the hearts of these little gems sitting amongst us today are surely worthy of note, and if we are patient enough, one day it will all come together.

As we say our farewell to our beloved founder, former pupils and long serving teachers of the school will never forget their special moments with Pramukh Swami when he visited London. As Pujya Anantiyogi Swami said, how after completing the morning Puja in this same hall, he exited through the side door on my right to find us all standing in the corridor to greet him. He always made sure he followed the line of TSS students to give his blessings. Though standing behind people, I could never understand how he somehow always managed to find me every morning, raised his hand and summoned me forward to give his blessings. It was his way to say to us all, you are mine. The photograph you see at the back of the programme was taken on one such occasion. He gave us love and blessings without asking for anything in return. It is very difficult to understand why he chooses the way he does. He can see things that we cannot, nor should we try to, but trust in the words of such noble souls. He sees the purity of our hearts and showers his grace accordingly. It is not for us to question but to accept his wish and follow it blindly. While we have turned away from paying too much attention to League tables, you should know that we are the only ISA School amongst a host of

old public schools with all the resources we cannot boast. Yet we do so much more than they can ever hope to imagine. Through the blessings of God and Guru, we have students working in every major multinational you can think of, with professions and specialisms as diverse as the prospectus of a university. This is the miracle of Pramukh Swami who blessed these same students when they stood with their hands bowed in the corridor.

While we have continued to shine with his blessings, I know his one overwhelming wish was always to mould the character of the children with love and inspire them to reach for the very best that they can achieve. It is work that will never be complete, because the moment we think we have reached our goals, we cease to improve. It is the reason for our existence. TSS is already a great school but we can even be better by implementing the wishes of Pramukh Swami without ever doubting his words. I have every faith that under the guidance of Param Pujya Mahant Swami, we will uphold the torch that he has lit and enable us to send students out into the world who would have done any parent proud. As such, it is fitting that one of our former pupils by the name of *Yogesh Patel*, has returned to us as *Anantiyogi Swami*, who has given up his life in the service of others. It is a fitting epitaph to Pramukh Swami's legacy on an auspicious day of Ekadashi. I am aware that some of you might worry that we will turn more in this direction. You should not worry because the road to service and God are only meant for a select few.

We have decided to dedicate this Prize Day to the special memory of our Guru and Founder. I, for one, cannot remember a day without Bapa exerting his quiet influence upon us all, slowly perfecting us in his own tender way, so that in good times or bad, in success or failure, we would neither feel too exhilarated nor too disenchanted, leaving everything to God like he has always done. He taught the students to pray and work hard, because God always helps those who strive selflessly. We will remember his gentle smile, his soothing hand reaching to bless, a caressing stroke; his ability to look beyond our human frailties, his abiding faith that all will be fine. They are rare selfless souls who come, fly with the freedom of a bird, no boundaries, no borders, the whole world is their child; they soothe the wounds, they share in our successes so that we can live our lives without losing hope, so that we do not forget the path to God...He was truly the purest soul of the school, the world, an inspiration to us all and will always remain so. May God bless all of you."

Learn to forgive

Think

Nobody in this world can claim that they have not been harmed by another person. Whether we like it or not, all of us have weaknesses and imperfections that sometimes leads us to make mistakes, such as saying something harsh to someone, cheating, lying or taking advantage of other people's goodwill. Yet people have great strengths as well. A person can do ten good things but when they do one thing wrong we will quickly forget about them and only remember the bad thing. We will resent them for it and hold a grudge for a long time over that one error.

Feel

I have seen long standing friendships destroyed because one friend has said something hurtful to the other, and all the good times they have shared since they were very young are forgotten because of it. We could argue that they weren't really good friends anyway because if they were they would have apologised, forgiven each other and moved on.

Do

It isn't easy to forgive when the scar is still fresh because we feel hurt, let down and want to teach them a lesson. I would urge you not to spoil your relationship with someone who has been a long-standing and good friend to you. It will only hurt you. Instead, sit down and talk to them about it and you will be surprised at how it becomes something so trivial that before you know it you will both be

laughing about it. Say sorry, shake hands, hug and forgive. It takes a generous heart to forgive, forget and move on.

Duke of Edinburgh Diamond Anniversary Dhruvi Patel writes...



Prince Philip introduced the Duke of Edinburgh Award in 1956, as a means of keeping soldiers fit after the end of the war. Women were also given permission to take part on the award, three years later. Last week on Thursday, there was a service held in Westminster Abbey, in honour of the Award's Diamond Anniversary. This service had many elements, such as speeches, singing and prayer readings. I was honoured to be chosen by Mr. Pinto to represent the school and read a prayer that I had written. Not knowing who was going to be there I had a great shock to encounter the Queen herself! She was sitting three rows away! The Queen!! I could almost touch her! The Duke of Edinburgh and the Earl and Countess of Wessex were also there. So close, yet so far. The celebration started after the service was over. Only about 20 of the 2000 guests were invited for lunch in the Jerusalem Chamber and I was one of them. There we met, talked to and were praised by Phillip Schofield, and the Earl and Countess of Wessex. I got my picture taken and shook hands with the Queen's son. Now that's not something that happens every Thursday! If you want to listen to the Earl of Wessex's address, then go onto the Westminster Abbey website

(<http://www.westminster-abbey.org/>) and scroll down to the 'Latest Podcasts'.

What an amazing experience. I have been truly humbled by this opportunity and it spurs me on to become a DoE ambassador. The Award Scheme has opened my eyes to a multitude of experiences and I am truly grateful to the school, my parents and all of the teachers who have helped me along the way.

Diamond Anniversary Duke of Edinburgh Award Celebrations with H.R.H the Queen.

Mr. Pinto writes...

Last week was a momentous time for a certain student who represented the school at the Diamond Anniversary Celebrations of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Programme at Westminster Abbey. Dhruvi Patel in the Lower 6th and one of our deputy Head girls led a prayer at Westminster Abbey as part of the celebrations. I have received glowing praise from several dignitaries who were present commenting on how very impressed they were with Dhruvi's articulate and eloquent prayer and who in their eyes had represented the school with great honour. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity for her and incredibly impressive for a Young Person to stand up and speak in front of the Royal family and large numbers of V.I.P's. In attendance was Her Majesty the Queen, His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh and Their Royal Highnesses the Earl and Countess of Wessex.

The service included a reading from the CEO of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Peter Westgarth, a word from Phillip Schofield and inspiring testimonies from Duke of Edinburgh's Award holders. The special event reflected on the activities of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and reiterated the impact it has on the lives of young people

Yours sincerely,

Nilesh Manani