

Shree Jalarambapa

A life sketch

By Councillor Dhiraj Kataria
Secretary, Shree Jalaram Mandir, Greenford

Early life

Shree Jalarambapa was born in the town of Virpur near Rajkot, Gujarat State on 14th November 1799 (Vikram Sawant 1856, Kartik Sud 7). Early education was from his mother Rajbai Thakkar who was very religious and was told by Saint Raghuvirdasji, who greatly admired her piety, that her second son (Sri Jalaram Bapa) would be a famous advocate of duty, devotion and good deeds. From Rajbai he learnt respect, patience, self-sacrifice, duty and grace. When very young a visit from a saint was recognised as from a previous life and young Jalaram was divinely inspired and began to constantly chant 'Sita Ram' and to devote his life to God.

There was one significant and miraculous event, which took place, when Jalaram was still a child. An old saint came from Ayodhya. He was on his way to the holy Girnar. He called at Pradhan Thakkar's house and asked Rajabai to bring to him and show him Jalaram, their second child. Even as he was telling this, the child Jalaram came there, leaving his toys with his friends and fell prostrate at the feet of old sanyasi. The latter asked Jalaram, "Do you not recognize me, my son?" As the saint said this, in Jalaram's mental vision, the memory of the whole life of his previous birth flashed itself before his eyes. His eyes beamed with an expression of recognition of the old saint. After the prostration, by the time he raised himself the old saint was gone. But the link had been forged with his previous life, and the chant of '**Ram Nam**', which he used to do without any intermission in his previous life, caught up and started on again as unceasingly as his breath.

Jalaram worked first for his father and later his uncle Valjibhai's business but was criticised by both for his extreme generosity to Sadhus and to the poor. Bapa's desire was to devote himself to God without the ties of family, business or material possessions.

Marriage

Seeing that Jalaram was more inclined towards sadhus and sannyasis his father feared that he would perhaps be a sannyasi himself. So he sought to bind him with the worldly ties. The young Jalaram did not like it. He politely said to his father, "Why do you try to bind me with the worldly ties? I only wish to worship God."

Both his father and his uncle explained to Jalaram the blessedness of a dutiful household, "if we have a household we can offer drinking water to somebody; we can offer meals to a stranger; we can feed doves and sparrows. Even the ants might get their food from our house. All this is a pious work." Jalaram was convinced with the argument of feeding others. At the age of sixteen, Jalaram was married to Virbai, the daughter of Pragji Thakkar of Atkot in 1816 (Vikram Samvat 1872), Virbai Ma proved to be an asset to Bapa in his work among the poor and without her support, encouragement and hard work, he would have found many more difficulties in his path.

The First Miracle

This occurred in 1817 (Vikram Sawant 1983). Virpur is on the way to Girnar, the holy pilgrimage centre, and all pilgrims and sadhus used to make a halt at Virpur for their food and rest. They used to ask for foodgrains at the shops in the village and used to cook their food. One day it so happened, all the other shops were closed. Valjibhai's shop alone was open. Hence all the sadhus and mendicants called at Valjibhai's shop for alms. Bapa was so delighted to see so many sadhus come to him. He doled out to them dal, rice, flour, ghee, sugar oil and many other items, whatever they asked for, as charity. Further when he saw some of the sadhus in torn clothes, he gave away new clothes also from the shop.

Some of the people of the village who were jealous and envious of Bapa because of his uncle's fondness for him, went and complained to Valjibhai who became very furious on Jalaram. He came threateningly to the shop. He said he wanted a complete check to be made in the shop of all the things and materials. Bapa felt frightened and started praying to God to save him from his uncle's wrath. As the uncle went on checking, every bag was full with the contents, there was no shortage of the cloth even. The uncle was amazed, and instead of taking Jalaram to task, complimented him profusely.

How did the above miracle happen? Only because whatever Bapa did, he used to say within himself "**Iswararpanam**". And is it not the duty of the God to protect one who has surrendered himself unto Him, and who saw in all but God alone! From this experience, Bapa would have surmised that Almighty God was protecting him. His renunciation in worldly affairs would have deepened; he would have felt that God's blessing would be with him in whatever he did.

Pilgrimage

All the great saints of India started their life's journey with pilgrimage to holy places. Shankracharya, Vallabhacharya, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Lord Swaminarayan, to name a few, did the pilgrimage of holy places to satisfy their quench for religious knowledge. In this great tradition, Bapa followed.

It was evident from an early age that Bapa was destined for a spiritual life. At the age of 17, he on a pilgrimage to Hindu holy places. He visited Gokul, Mathura, Hardwar, Kashi, Gayaji, and Ayodhya Uttar Pradesh, Jaggannath Puri in South India and Badrinarayan in the Himalayas. This pilgrimage, from 1816 to 1818, was in the days when there were no trains or cars. To travel such long distances, from the Himalayas to Uttar Pradesh and to South India and back to Saurashtra must have been very difficult for him; a large part would have been done on foot. During this pilgrimage, Bapa had opportunity to meet many sadhus and saints.

Guru

Bapa was looking for a Guru to guide him and he found him in Bhojalram Bapa, a farmer who lived in a village called Fatehpur near Amreli. Bhojalram Bapa, though a farmer, was a saintly person and had composed hundreds of devotional songs which people sing to this day. The guru gave his blessings to Jalaram to start a sadavrat, Bapa's love for his guru was so much that every week he walked forty miles to be with his guru. He would then help the guru to build his small house and Bapa would mix the clay and help his Guru to build his house, with all the intensive labour that was involved.

Military struggles and effects upon people

The lives of the vast majority of people of Saurashtra in the nineteenth century were miserable. In order to understand this, we have to look at the historical context. Gujarat was ruled by the Mughals from Delhi. After the death of Emperor Aurungzeb in 1707, there was a complete breakdown of Mughal power in Gujarat. This led to regular raids by the Marathas from Bombay. In 1674, Shivaji led the first raid ; the Mughal sultan Momin Khan was defeated by the Marathas in 1758. In turn, the Marathas suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of Afghans at the Battle of Panipat in 1761. The Marathas were not good rulers in terms of administration and looking after people. Their yearly raids to collect revenue from the various rulers disrupted the lives of the people. Their expansion in Gujarat had disrupted its economic and social life. By 1820, the East India Company emerged as the suzerain power in the region.

All these wars and the struggle by different powers for supremacy were, needless to say, not in the interests of the people. Saurashtra was divided into 188 separate states during the British time. Proliferation of small states led to misrule, injustice and oppression of people. *It would be accurate to say that, by and large, the Marathas, the East India Company and the princely states were not interested in the welfare of the people.* Because of this, the people suffered. For ordinary people not owning land, to survive and have food was a struggle. In such times, Bapa's feeding centre provided nourishment to thousands of people every month.

Sadavrat (feeding centre)

Throughout the nineteenth century, Saurashtra and, indeed the whole of India, had massive poverty. Eighty years after Bapabapa started the Sadavrat, that other great Hindu saint, Swami Vivekananda, toured India on foot during the 1890's and saw for himself the poverty of the masses. He said *"I have gone all over India on foot and have seen with my own eyes the ignorance, misery and squalor of our people. To reach Narayana (God) you must serve the daridranarayanans – the starving millions"*.

On Monday 18 November 1820 (Vikram Sawant 1876, Maha Sud 2), after obtaining his Guru's blessings, Bapa started his Sadavrat (feeding centre), providing free food to every person, at first to *sadhus* (monks) but later extended to anyone who dropped in. Sada=forever; vrat=oath, promise. This means a promise to last for ever. Bapa started an anna chhetra which was a sada vrat.

This was hard work and was achieved because of hard work on the part of Virbai Ma. The crop had to be ground by means of a large stone. Later Jalarambapa and his wife Virbai Ma worked in the fields neighboring Virpur to grow their own grain. Virbai Ma was as devoted as Jalarambapa to the work of God. When the grain that they had grown ran out Virbai Ma was happy to give up the gold jewellery that she had received from her parents at the time of her marriage in order to provide food to visitors to the ashram. Bapa ran the Sadavrat until he went to heavenly abode in 1881; after his passing, his descendants have continued to run to this day.

Bapa started another Sadavrat at Charakhadi, which was done at the behest of MAHARAJA of GONDAL. This was agreed by BAPA as he would not accept any gifts of land or any jewellery from the MAHARAJA of Gondal. However, Bapa could not refuse the request of SADAVRAT as it was PUJYA BAPA'S *jivan mantra* (mission of life). This sadavrat was discontinued when Bapa left for heavenly abode in 1881.

Divine soul

Saints like Bapa have come into the world to do God's work. Bapa is in a long line of saints like Gautam Buddha, Sankracharya, Vallabhacharya, Caitanya Mahaprabhu, Tulsidas, Narsinh Mehta, Mirabai, Lord Swaminarayan, Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vikekananda, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, SaiBaba of Shirdi, Satya Sai Baba, Sant Gyanchand, Sant Tukram, Sri Aurobindo and hundreds of others who have graced the soil of India through the centuries. They do God's work through Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga or Gyan Yoga; or through a combination of these.

In Hinduism, it is taught that according to the Vedas there are essentially four Principal goals of life that one lives: Kama – pleasure; Artha – wealth, status, career; Dharma – duty, righteous-ness; Moksha - spirituality, including liberation.

Every now and then human beings take birth for whom only Dharma and Moksha are focused in their thinking and in their lives. Such souls have no ambitions for themselves; their entire lives are lived feeling the pain of others, helping them to alleviate their pain and in the pursuit of God. Such persons cease to be normal human beings.

The presence of God throbs in the heart of all beings, and a Hindu's aim in life is to realise the underlying unity of existence. Great souls learn to refine and transform the inclinations of the senses, mind and intellect so that the whole life becomes a *sadhana* for attainment of the highest spiritual good. Life is best lived when man and God meet in life, when man lifts himself to the state of Godhead by acquisition of spiritual wisdom. The *jivanmukta* is a liberated soul, even while living. Spiritual Growth and Development have been associated with increasing our Consciousness. Our Subconscious Mind is the doorway to our Super conscious Mind, which is directly linked to our Divine Mind, which taps into the Universal Cosmic Mind. At an early age of around twenty years, Jalarambapa ceased to be a normal human being and became a Divine Soul. Such Divine Souls have achieved Nirvana in their lifetime; they do not have to wait for it in heaven. They have achieved their heaven on earth.

Persons who are enlightened or whose lives are firmly established in truth develop many powers which ordinary people would class as supernatural powers. Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa said that if a person has been very stringent in living a truthful life – meaning: What he thinks he says and what he says he does.. without compromise, without getting caught up in being diplomatic and being steadfast in doing what he says ... then after some years of such practise – whatever comes out of the mouth of such a person will automatically come true. So if he tells a dead person to come alive .. that will happen..

And the Almighty God, who observes His world, takes note of such Divine Souls. He respects them for their Divinity but puts them through severer tests and if they pass His tests, Almighty God then gives Divine Powers. They are able to accomplish extraordinary things which are impossible for normal human beings to comprehend. This writer has personally known in his life two persons with such Divine Powers: one could literally read the thoughts of persons and predict the future and the second can predict the future of persons. And these powers were vested by God in ordinary humans.

He was 20 years old when his saintliness acquired a great fame. There are stories of how he was put to tests for his qualities of patience, endurance, love towards others, his steadfastness of thinking - he did not change under any pressure - he came out of all those tests successfully.

His fame spread and he was regarded and accepted as a saint. People started worshipping him. They came to him for guidance in difficulties, for blessings in real distress and discomfort

God's test

One day, in 1830 (Vikram Smvt 1886), Lord Rama dressed as an old man in the guise of a Sadhu appeared before Jalarambapa, who invited him for a meal. The old man complained that he was old and infirm and that he needed some one to look after him. He asked Bapa to give him Virbai Ma to look after him. Virbai Ma agreed to go along with the Sadhu and Jalarambapa agreed to give away his wife as well. To understand this supreme sacrifice of giving away of his wife, who was the bedrock of the Sadavrat, one has to comprehend that Jalarambapa had given up worldly pursuits of pleasure and material possessions. But when the test came, he had reached such a level of Divinity that he was willing to give away his wife to a sadhu so that she could serve him! This sacrifice was of an extraordinary nature. It is difficult to comprehend for us mere mortals: here was Bapa relying on Virbai Ma to run his Sadavrat and yet when a sadhu, a stranger, came to ask for her, both Bapa and Virbai Ma were willing to please him! Extraordinary but true! Truly, with such sacrifice Bapa and Virbai Ma both showed that they had stopped being ordinary human beings and turned into Divine Souls!

Jalarambapa therefore sent his wife with the old man on his journey. She went willingly. The pair of travelers eventually came to a river. The old man gave Virbai Ma his stick and a bag to hold. he then disappeared. At the same time a voice came to Jalarambapa at his home, saying that it was Lord Rama himself who had come to see if he was as good as people had said. He had proved that he was and could now fetch his wife. The stick and the bag are still on display at the Jalarambapa Ashram in Virpur.

Miracles

There have been numerous miracles in the life of Jalarambapa and only a few have been narrated here. Many readers may find it difficult to understand how Bapa came to have such Divine Powers. With our present materialized senses we cannot perceive anything of the transcendental Lord. Our present senses are to be refined by the process of devotional service, and then the Lord himself becomes revealed to us.

It is confirmed in the Vedas that only devotional service can lead one to the side of the Lord and only devotional service can reveal Him. Divine Souls such as Jalarambapa are at a higher level of communion with the Lord and the Almighty God realizes that such Divine Souls are there to do God's work on earth. So such Divine souls are blessed with extraordinary powers beyond the comprehension of us mere mortals.

It has to be said that other Divine Souls also had and have such Divine Powers. To name only a few: Swami Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Narsinh Mehta, Sri Aurobindo, Sai Baba of Sirdi and Satya Sai Baba all have such Divine Powers and millions of people have been on the receiving end of such powers.

Bapa did these miracles not to impress people but because the individuals concerned were in difficulty and needed his help.

`' Jallah so Allah ' - ' Jalaram is God ' '

This incident occurred in 1822 (Vikram Sawant 1878). There lived a rich Muslim named Jamal in Virpur. Once his ten years old son was ill. In spite of all treatment his temperature did not come down. The doctors gave up hope his recovery. The tailor Harji told Jamal about his own experience , " Jamal, a pellet bow can send a pellet upto three hundred yards, a gun can send a bullet upto a thousand, a tank can send a ball upto ten thousand but the Jalaram Bapa's morsel of food given to the sadhus has its reach upto the door of the heaven . Therefore, take a vow in Jalaram Bapa's name and that will surely save your son from death.

Jamal caught the suggestion and said, " O bapa, relieve my son of the disease. I'll give forty meaasures of grains to your charity house ." It so happened that his son's temperature got down that very night, he opened his eyes, and was saved. Jamal took a cart load of grains to Jala Bapa, paid obeisance to him and said " Jalla so Allah !" (Jalaram is God). One who fails to receive something from god can receive it from Jalaram! Henceforth Jala Bapa became popularly known as " Jalla so Allah" (Jalaram is God). He was twenty two at that time (Vikram era 1877, Christian era 1821).

Dead birds come alive

There were three Arabs in the service of the Thakore of Rajkot. They demanded an increase in wages by four rupees a month. The Thakore refused. So they resigned and started for Junagadh. On their way they hunted a few birds, and put them in the bag they carried on their shoulders. They were passing through Virpur in the evening when Jalaram Bapa saw them. He said, "Please have your meals here and then go."

The Arabs said, "We are Muslims!" Bapa said, "there is no distinction of caste or religion in the court of god. You are welcome here!" Led by Bapa, the Arabs came to his place. Now they remembered that they had the dead birds with them and here was a Hindu temple. What to Do?

As soon as the meals were finished they tried to go away silently, but Bapa said , " You must have been tired ! Have a night halt here!" The Arabs felt most embarrassed. Bapa then touched their bag with his staff and said, Ah ! The poor birds feel suffocated make them free."

The Arabs saw that the bag hanging on a peg had live birds in it. They opened the bag and the birds flew away to the tree nearby. The Arabs were amazed . They fell at the feet of Bapa and asked , "Bapa,shall we get a job in Junagadh ?"

Bapa said, "why, the Arabs serve only one master." The Arabs said, "But the Thakore of Rajkot is not willing to pay us adequately." Bapa said, he will. You asked for four rupees more, but he will give you seven "

It really happened so. Just at that time, a camel-man ,sent by the Thakore of Rajkot arrived there and took the Arabs back with honour. The Thakore had sanctioned an increase of seven rupees in their salary.

The Babul Tree

There lived a peasant family in Kevadara village near Keshod . The head of the family was Nanji Ladani. One day all the members of the family were relaxing under the babul tree at noon after hard work in the field. Suddenly there was a whirlwind and the tree was uprooted . In a split second it would fall on them and there was no time for escape . All were frightened. Suddenly Nanji cried out, "O save me, Jaliya Bapa ." No sooner did he speak these words then the tree stopped falling down as if some one had lifted it above them and gradually every one safely slipped from beneath it. After a few days Nanji came to Virpur and told Bapa of this incident. Bapa smiled and said, "Look here! See what has happened to my back and remove if there's any babul thorn still inside the body !" Nanji saw that there were marks of the thorns on Bapa's back.

A shipment saved

Amarchand Sheth of jodia port was returning from Basara with a loaded shipment . On the way there was a storm in the sea . The ship was developed a hole at the keel and it was being filled with water. Amarchand cried out for help . "O Jaliya Bapa , save me! I will send the entire ship loaded with rice to you. In mysterious way the water stopped entering the ship through the hole and the storm was also subsided . The ship was safely anchored at the port. Now the merchant thought " The rice in the ship is costly. I need not send it to the ashram. An inferior quality of rice will equally do for the wandering mendicants!" Thinking this he sent the sacks of coarse rice in carts. Bapa took the rice and entertained the cartmen for a few days with love.

On the day of departure the cartmen said, Bapa, 'do you have any message for the sheth?'

Bapa said, 'Greet him with God's name and tell him that the vow was for the shipped rice, but never mind, my sadhus will eat the coarse rice with love. Then, after a pause he hesitatingly said, "Well, tell the sheth to return the tooth-pick from my shirt which is blocked the hole in his ship."

Hearing this message from the cart men the sheth at once rushed to the port, searched the ship and found a cloth in the hole. He stretched it out and found that it was Bapa's shirt with a tooth-pick in it. The sheth repented now, "Fie upon me! I have deceived Bapa." On the same day he sent to Bapa other sacks full of best quality rice.

Heavenly Abode

On Monday 18 November 1878 (Vikram Sawant 1935 Kartik Vad 9) Virbai Ma died and thereafter Bapa fell seriously sick. He suffered from piles. Bapa passed away on 23 February 1881 (Vikram Sawant Maha Vad 10). His work carries on. Such Divine souls appeal to the Divinity which is present in all human beings, who are inspired to continue his work of love and compassion for all living beings. His grandson Shri Hariram Bapa took over charge in 1881 and arranged a large gathering of one lakh (one hundred thousand) sadhus who were all fed. It is said that at this gathering there came a great sadhu from unknown places. He bowed to all other sadhus and went straight into the storeroom. He then took a 'ladoo' from there, came out and crushed the 'ladoo' in a power. He spread the powder all around and went away saying "Let this store never get dry." The sadhu could not be traced. On that occasion, in 1881, many

of those present conjectured that the Lord himself came in the guise of the sadhu to give his blessings to the Sadavrat.

Sadavrat Continues

After Bapa's passing, his grandson Hariramji Maharaj ran the Sadavrat, followed by Girdhar Ramji Maharaj. Today the centre is run by his grandson Shri Raghuramji. The great tradition established by Jalarambapa continues. There are Jalaram Mandirs in many other parts of India including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. There are Jalaram temples in many overseas countries. Even today, those who face difficulties and do "manta" in the name of Bapa find that they get their desired fruits.

Virpurdham

Bapa's gam Virpur has become an important town for devotees from all over India and outside India to visit. People come daily in thousands. Virpur has become an important pilgrimage centre. There is the Sadavrat, Bapa's Samadhi, schools, hospitals and other centres built in Bapa's name, providing service to the people of Virpur.

Conclusion

One hundred and twenty-nine years after Bapa's passing away, one is struck by the fact that here was an enlightened Lohana saint who, at the young age of twenty years, had become a Divine Soul. He had achieved what the Upanishads describe as salvation from all the evils and difficulties of human life. Human liberation or release (*moksha*) is relationship with absolute bliss by overcoming the attachment to all that is not divine (*maya*). It is clear from many episodes of Bapa's life, particularly when he agreed to give away Virbai Ma to a *sadhu* (monk) that Bapa had reached that level of bliss and serenity which only comes to one who is devoid of *maya* (attachment) and who has, in this life, achieved *Moksha*. He achieved that at a relatively young age of twenty years. He took on the problems of the dispossessed, extended his humanity to them, fed countless over a period of sixty-one years and in this task Virbai Ma gave him all the support. Even the Almighty God gave him Divine Powers; it is said that Bapa used to prepare food for a few dozen people only, but that hundreds were fed from these. The food was always there, no matter how many turned up!

Just as a small lamp lights a whole room, Bapa lighted the path for all generations to come. He showed what a Divine Soul can achieve in life and what an example he can set to others. He showed what an inspiration a truly selfless person can be to millions of human beings. He showed a path of salvation to us; he appeals to the Divinity in all human beings and holds a mirror to us against which we can compare our conduct and relationships with our fellow humans and other living creatures, for Bapa had love for animals as well.

Note: Anyone wishing to copy this article, or parts thereof, should write for consent to: info@jalarammandir.co.uk, with a copy to the author: dhirajkataria@hotmail.co.uk