



# Peace of Mind: January 2017

## Special Newsletter:

### Overseas Volunteers' Trip

Volume 1, Issue 1

Saman ji Shrutprag-yaji's Gujarati blog link.. Also very soon English blog also available :

<http://www.pomyc.org/blog/>

**We wish everyone a happy and healthy new year ahead for 2017!**

**Inside this issue:**

***A highlight of an experience by students abroad who visited India for a short time. Read about their eye opening experiences.***

## Current Events

### **Saurashtra University 26 December, 2016**

Samanji and his UK friend Graham Dwyer conducted a yoga and meditation class at the campus of Saurashtra University. This was arranged by the Jalsa Group of Rajkot and was participated in by some 60 members of the Jalsa Group.

### **Special Pravachan in Una, 28 December 2016**

A special pravachan to celebrate Bhagvat Katha in Una, near Amreli, was delivered by Samanji. The sponsors of the event made a gift of Samanji's popular publication *Garh Ek Swarg* on the occasion. The gift of the book to those who came to the lecture, which had a focus directly on the subject of the book itself, was made to facilitate concentration of thought, feeling and concern on the importance of family life.

## Upcoming Events

### **Spiritual Interaction Program**

Between 6-15 January a number of spiritual interactive and exchange sessions are planned focusing on sadhana and related spiritual matters.

### **Bhanvad – Gondal and Dhrol School Visits, 17-19 January 2017**

This trip will partly help to cement and augment relations between Bhanvad and Dhrol schools and the POMYC and it will also explore avenues of support for learning based on previously es-

### **Yoga Shibir for Women, 16-31 December, 2016**

Currently, a yoga shibir specifically for women is being conducted by the Peace of Mind Foundation in Rajkot. It started on the 16 December and will continue for 15 days until the end of the calendar year. In addition to yoga postures or asanas being taught and demonstrated, it has a particular focus on women's health.

### **Jamnagar Remote Area Educational School Trip, 1-5 January 2017**

The programme for the remote area of Jamnagar educational trip to schools will take place over a period of five days, beginning on New Year's day. It will involve visits to schools mostly in village locations and will give them the opportunity to engage in activities that support and inspire learning, as well as including spiritual practices.

established connections with the schools in these towns.

### **Dubia Shibir and Abu Dabi Trip, 27 January- 7 February**

Samanji will go to Dubai to conduct a special shibir at the end of Jan, and spend time in Abu Dabi. The shibir organised by Shital Kankaria will take place in her home. Following this Samanji will visit Abu Dabi, meeting other families there as well as supporting them in their spiritual development.

## **Feedback by Meera Shah Rajkot Seva Trip 2016**



Rajkot seva trip 2016 has truly been a life changing experience for me . Reaching out to thousands of children , performing many charitable activities from motivational speaking to the installation of water purifying devices the trip has made me realise how a little can go a long way . Not only did we cover a vast amount of seva during the 10 days expedition we were also able to visit the holly hills of palitana . I have enjoyed every moment of this trip . The amount we covered over the trip was incredible and would not have been possible without Samanji , Graham Dwyer, Pallvi aunty and the other volunteers . Physically going to the outskirts of Rajkot has allowed me to see the huge amount of support that these underprivileged institutes still require . It also allowed the team to bond with the audience which is something I will never forget . In my opinion , the trip has been successful on all levels and I wish to continue such projects in the future .

### **Special Newsletter: Overseas Volunteers' Trip to Rajkot 9-18 December, 2016**

#### **Introduction:**

Four young Jain overseas volunteers came to Abhavalay, Rajkot, the headquarters of the Peace of Mind Foundation, and stayed for nine days, giving talks, taking part in seva activities, as well as receiving personal guidance and spiritual development. The four young Jain women – Mega Mohnot and Ishwa Desai from Singapore and Meera Shah and Rina Shah from London – stayed in Rajkot from 9 to 18 December. Mega Mohnot works as a chartered accountant, Ishwa Desai is an 11th standard student, Meera Shah is a practicing dentist, and Rina Shah is employed in hospitals as a radiographer. Both in Rajkot itself and in a number of neighbouring towns where all the programmes were conducted, the overseas volunteers did extremely valuable work and excelled as a team at all times. As this first visit for overseas young Jains to carry out lecturing and seva work in Rajkot was very successful, the Peace of Mind Foundation hopes that this work will again be repeated in the future. Details of the events which the volunteers participated in are given below.

## Day 1 (9th December)

The seva team travelled with Samanji and Graham to Gondal where programme at two different schools were held. First stop was U.L.D. Girls School, with an audience of 500 students, including head of the school, teachers and trustees. The volunteers gave talks relating to their study and offered helpful motivational tips regarding choosing appropriate professional career pathways. Mega and Ishwa focused largely on their own experiences in education and professionalism and offered inspirational speeches. Meera Shah gave a talk about oral health and provided a demonstration in the practice of how to clean one's teeth effectively, while Rina Shah talked about medical and related careers. In addition, student kits, containing 21 unique essentials for students, and school bags were distributed to students of need at the school.



Next stop was K.D. Bera Girls School. 800 students and staff attended the programme held in the school. Apart from speaking on their specialist subjects, the overseas volunteers took part in a panel discussion with students and were later given a tour of the institution, including the girls' hostel. During the tour, they engaged directly in personal interaction with the female students at the school, which was an event all volunteers were delighted with. Student kits, school bags as well as scholarships were distributed to students of need too. At both of the institutions visited on the first day, all students and school staff spoke with high praise about the good work of the volunteers. All participants greatly enjoyed the event.

## Day 2 (10th December)

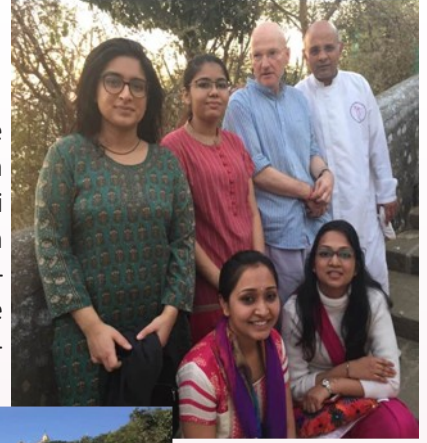
After an eventful day 1, the seva team visited M.D. Mehta Girls School in Dhrol the next day. The overseas volunteers reached out to an audience of over 800 enthusiastic students through their speech. Much needed student kits and school bags as well as scholarships were awarded. These donations were greatly appreciated, not only by the students themselves, but also by the staff who expressed their delight for the support given to their learners. Following this programme, the four young Jain women from Singapore and London travelled to Palitana and stayed overnight in the famous Jain tirth at the Jadavi Bhavan Dharamshala, along with Samanji and Graham.





## Day 3 (11th December)

At the break of dawn, the seva team together with Samanji and Graham made the long climb of 3,600 steps up the large hill in Palitana to the famous Adinath shrine on the hill's summit. The seva team rested in meditation up in the hills led by samanji and performed certain Jain rituals too. After the departure from Palitana, the team visited D.B. Patel Girls School in Atkot. Student kits and school bags again were distributed to underprivileged students at the school, and the overseas volunteers gave warmly received presentations. Following the day's activities at the school they returned to Abhavalay in Rajkot.



## Day 4 (12th December)

It was time for a slight twist in the day's activity. Instead of the usual school visit, the seva team accompanied by Samanji and Graham decided to tour Panjarapole. Panjarapole is a Centre in Rajkot for the welfare of sick, old and diseased animals. In addition to cows and buffalos, many other animals are taken care of at Panjarapole including horses, goats and birds. The seva team together with Samanji and Graham were given full access to the welfare Centre. The compassionate work carried out by the managers and employees of Panjarapole for the welfare of animals which can no longer feed themselves was deeply appreciated by the seva team. They were pleased to see how well the Centre functions and how well the sick, old and diseased animals are looked after at the Centre. After the visit concluded, the Peace of Mind Foundation made a cash donation to the head of Panjarapole in order to aid and support the valuable work being done at this highly commendable animal welfare Centre.



Following the visit to Panjarapole during the day, the young Jain overseas volunteers went to Aek Rang Children's Development Institute, where mentally challenged children are taken care of, managed and taught. After talking to the staff and interacting with the students there, the seva team distributed chocolates as well as toothbrushes and toothpaste to the children at the institute. The seva team thoroughly enjoyed both warm and friendly interaction with the children of the school. Some of the children were not only mentally challenged but had also lost their parents. It was a humbling moment for the seva team to interact with them.





## Day 5 (13th December)

Navyug Institution in the town of Morbi was the venue for the young Jain volunteers' activities in the early part of the day. At this institution, where they addressed B.Sc. college students, inspirational talks were delivered by the volunteers. They were heartily received by the 500 students who took part in the programme. The students were also given an opportunity to put questions to the volunteers, and this resulted in fruitful discussion. As all the talks given had a focus on female identity and education for women, a lively debate took place. Often young women in India do both graduate and postgraduate study merely as a way to secure marriage with ambitious men. However, all the volunteers emphasised the importance of female independence and urged the female students to be fully self-reliant in their study and personal career plans.



In the afternoon, the overseas volunteers went on to Sri Jayaben Kherajbhai Thakrar Andh Vidhalay Blind Girls School, where they gave toothbrushes and toothpaste, as well as soft toys and chocolates. At the school for blind girls they were also shown how effectively the girls learn with the use of Braille in the language of Gujarati. It was a very educational and inspirational visit both for the students there and for the volunteers themselves. The young overseas visitors then went on from there to Virani Munga Behra Shala School and distributed toothbrushes and toothpaste to the children at this institution.



## Day 6 (14th December)

The first institution visited on this day was Ishwarya Government School, located in a small town close to Rajkot city. Despite having extremely dedicated staff, this school had very few teaching facilities and resources for facilitating learning activities, as well as being a very old school building requiring much repair. The head of the school made a special request for the donation of a projector and screen. The Peace of Mind Foundation thus promised to meet this pressing need. At this institution the young Jain volunteers also met with teachers and administrators as well as interacted with the institution's 300 students. Meera Shah gave a well-informed demonstration on oral hygiene. The students staged a heartfelt dance performances for the seva team led by Samanji and Graham.

The volunteers returned to Virani Munga Behra Shala School in the later part of the day and distributed 121 student kits, which were thankfully received by the school children. The volunteers played with the students of the Virani Munga Behra Shala out in the open field for several tireless hours. It was a humbling opportunity to play games such as musical chairs, passing the parcel, Kho-Kho, scissors-paper-stone, monkey, volley ball, etc. with them, where they patiently the rules explained of the games to the volunteers.





## Day 7 (15th December)

Madhapar Taluka Shala Government School, which is located close to Abhavalay, the Peace of Mind Foundation in Rajkot, was visited in the day. Mr. Hariyani who was in charge of this school as well as a total of eight such schools in the region made a special request for woolen jumpers to be provided by the Peace of Mind Foundation. 200 such jumpers were thus purchased and handed out to the children at the school by the overseas volunteers and by Pallaviben Doshi, who gave her time and support at the school. The volunteers also gave short motivational speeches.



Immediately after the event the volunteers' group along with Pallaviben Doshi, Samanji and Graham went on to Janana Shivr Hospital and P.D.U Children's Shivr Hospital. At Janana Shivr Hospital, clothing for women on the postnatal ward were provided with baby clothing and they as well as pregnant women were given nutritional food (specially prepared laddhu). Other materials such as baby pillows, baby blankets and chikkis were also distributed and gratefully accepted by the patients in the nursing rooms.

The young Jain volunteers' group then travelled to Smt. M.J. Malani Khamta School where they addressed a large audience of 1000 students. Meera Shah talked about female health and fitness; Rina Shah discussed personal identity as well as ways of pursuing a medical career; Ishwa Desai focused on how to develop self-confidence; and Mega Mohnot concentrated on lessons to be learned from both East and West, with the East being seen as important in terms of culture and spirituality and the West as offering much in terms of its development of science. Mega Mohnot also drew much upon the Bhagavad Gita in the delivery of her presentation. Following the delivery of the speech, student kits and school bags as well as scholarships were awarded. The programme culminated in an evening cultural event at the school in which the volunteers themselves enthusiastically participated.

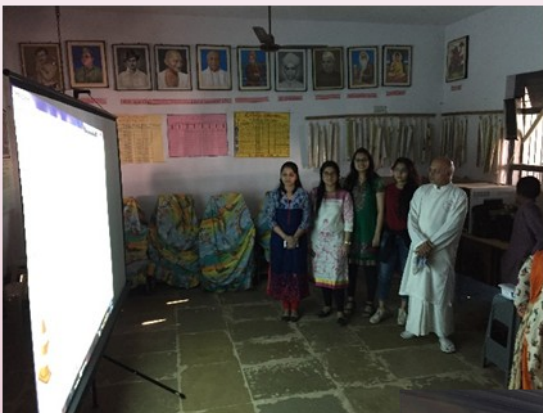


## Day 8 & 9 (16th & 17th December)

On the two final days the young Jain female group not only returned to Ishwarya Government School, where they observed the installation of a new projector and screen and handed out an additional gift of 200 notebooks; they also went back to the Aek Rang Children's Development Institute to see the newly installed fully functional RO Plant (water purifying device). Soft toys were also presented to this Institute to each of the children.

Food hampers to over 25 families of need; comprising of ghee, jaggery, rice, flour, turmeric powder, chili powder, oil, sugar, salt, coriander powder, dates and pulses were distributed in Abhavalay.

The final two days, however, were largely concerned with matters of personal spiritual work and development. In addition to performing meditation and yoga under the guidance of Samanji on a daily basis in Rajkot, special satsangs and classes catering to the youths were held in the last two days. These satsangs and classes had a particular focus on spirituality and included an assessment of seva in terms of its importance and merits. The discussions held by Samanji also gave the young Jain group an opportunity to put questions to him about matters of personal growth and about how to do sadhna effectively. All members of the visiting group greatly benefited from these activities.





As a final remark it is important to emphasise again how much of an achievement the whole nine day overseas visitors' trip to Rajkot was. The young Jain volunteers inspired all the children they came into contact, as well as class teachers, heads of schools and trustees at all institutions visited. The lectures and demonstrations that they delivered were at all times educational, motivational and enjoyable. All the institutions greatly benefited from the wonderful seva donations. The overseas group carried out their tasks diligently and conscientiously. It gave the volunteers themselves an invaluable experience too and helped them to develop in ways both practical and spiritual.

To the four volunteers who came from Singapore and London, the Peace of Mind Foundation is very grateful indeed. It is also especially thankful to all the individuals and groups who provided funds for the nine day educational and seva programme, making it all possible, particularly the Singapore Jain Religious Society (SJRS) and the Young Jains of Singapore (YJS). Thanks to Jayantibhai, owner of Atul Auto in Rajkot, for making this seva trip journey comfortable by providing a car with a driver. Since the overseas volunteers' trip to Rajkot was such a great achievement, as already indicated, the Peace of Mind Foundation wishes to conduct similar activities and events again soon, enabling it to continue the good work initiated by the young Jain overseas volunteers.





# Feedback by Mega Mohnot



Rajkot seva trip will remain my most memorable and fulfilling trip thus far. It was an experience never like before where we visited schools/ college, institution for children with disabilities, government hospitals and animal welfare organisation.

However prepared we were, there was an anxious feeling of uncertainty as to what was in store for us. A trip to Rajkot with Peace of Mind Foundation led by Samanji and supported by Dr Graham Dwyer was a first of its kind from Singapore and London. However, the overwhelming welcome by Samanji, Graham, Kirtibhai Doshi, Pallaviben Doshi and Maansi Doshi swept us off our feet. It took us less than a day before them, together with the other members of the seva team became a part of Peace of Mind family. All our needs were carefully taken care of. We had access to WiFi in the ashram, the rooms were clean and mosquito free, the toilets were westernised with water heater and sufficient amount of soap with tissue rolls, the bed with comforter was comfortable and most importantly, the food prepared by Pallavi aunty was beyond delicious. It felt exactly like home in the ashram, except for the fact that we would be eating twice as much in the ashram.

All I knew was that for the next ten days of our trip, we will be giving back to the society in some form or the other. We will be living the days selflessly and for once waking up to work for others and not ourselves. Our daily schedule was jam packed with programme after programme. We were hardly in the ashram during our ten day trip. Our day began as early as 6.30am and would easily stretch until 11pm.

Even though there was minimal breathing time during the day, the euphoria from daily meditation and yoga led by Samanji, interacting with hundreds of students daily and inspiring them in a way we can, witnessing the joy on students face when they received student kits/ school bags/ soft toys/ chocolates/ tooth brush/ tooth paste, feeding the sick/ diseased animals who are no longer capable of feeding themselves, visiting government hospitals to witness a humbling sight of gratitude on the faces of women when they received baby clothing and katlu (laddu), distributing food hampers to less fortunate families and spiritual conversation with Samanji kept us energetic throughout the day. There was something so magical about “seva” which filled us up with greatest of joy and happiness, thanks to which we didn’t even realise how our 10 day trip ended so quickly.

There was a sense of realisation that happiness is not only related with material possessions. The kids from an underprivileged background were happy and had great respect for learning. The students of deaf and mute institution were beaming with joy and energy. The children who were mentally challenged always carried a smile on their face. However simple their lives were, they choose to be happy.

Our climb in Palitana, up to the shrine of Adinath and the 10 days spent with peace of mind family leave me with unforgettable memories. As they say, it is the company which makes the experience memorable. I was blessed to have with me Ishwa Desai, Meera Shah and Rina Shah, together with Samanji and Graham, without whom the trip would never be complete. Heartfelt thanks goes out to Pallavi aunty for making me fall in love with Gujarati cuisine.

Overall, the 10 day overseas volunteer Programme was well planned and executed. Every day had a new adventure attached; touching educational, spiritual and service aspects. This trip was very humbling and energising for all the volunteers. It was an unforgettable trip for which we would love to come back again.



## Feedback by Rina Shah

Shrutpragya Samanji has been a favourite with the young and the old at the many shibirs I have attended in Singapore when I used to live there. This year, it was the first time I attended his shibir abroad in London. During this time, he mentioned an initiative by the youths in Singapore where they were going to visit the outskirts of Rajkot and do some charity work for the less fortunate. Having wanting to go for such an initiative since a young age, I immediately signed up for this Rajkot seva trip.

I have visited Rajkot many a times but never have I seen Gujarat in this aspect. The many schools, institutions for children with various disabilities, shelter for sick animals and government hospitals was a complete contrast of the Gujarat I had seen all these years. Being familiar with the Peace of Mind Foundation, Samanji and Dr Graham Dwyer was a comfort zone but there were jitters when it came to imagining the various institutions we were going to visit and the students' reactions to us.

This 10 day trip was an intense but definitely enriching one for me and I am sure for many among the 8000-10000 students we reached out to. This trip helped conquer my fear of public speaking as we went to as many as 2 schools every day with at least 500-800 students each and we 4 volunteers gave the students a talk on our insight of education as we have individually seen it in all our years. A radiographer by profession, I spoke to the students about the wish I had as a young girl to perhaps one day study in the UK which is known to be a country known for its education and my education history from Singapore and UK. Besides that, I shared with them the importance of holistic learning which I believe all students should follow and learn the different skills from many various activities like sports where they learn teamwork and volunteering where they learn to be selfless and to put others before themselves, just to name a few. I also spoke to them from the perspective of a married woman as to how a girl should always aim to work after marriage, contrary to the narrow views many of the families in the outskirts might have. In doing so, I strongly believe that each and every girl can create an identity for themselves. To emphasise this point further, I explained to them the difference in today's world where men look for a women who can walk side by side with them and not behind them which is still the view of many earlier generations.

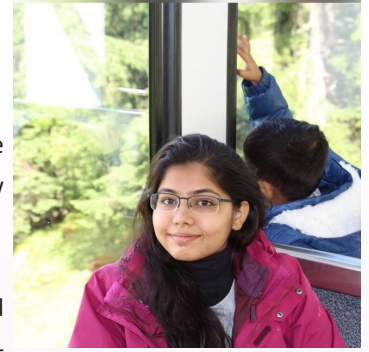
A big eye-opener for me in this trip was when I learned that in Gujarat, there is no female radiologist which I found rather puzzling. Science is not a field pursued by many girls. We visited a BSc College for girls and that sincerely got me really happy that there are institutions like this which encourage girls to excel in the field of Science and am hoping such learning institutions expand in the next few years.

The institutions for children with various disabilities, shelter for sick animals and government hospitals which we visited was a humbling experience. It just reiterated how one can be so happy without having material possessions. For these children, just playing outdoors with a ball gave them so much happiness and it showed me that one should make the most of what we have.

This experience was my first of many to come. Knowing how we, as a team, could give the students so much happiness and inspiration by sharing our experiences and thoughts with them was such a rewarding experience. We donated sweaters, scholarships, school kits, school bags and a water filter amongst many other things but seeing the excitement and joy the students had when they met us would be the most priceless moment for me from this Rajkot Seva Trip 2016.



# Feedback by Ishwa Desai



The Rajkot community service trip was the first of its kind for me. I have done community service before, but such outreach programmes, especially in my home country was a completely new experience.

Over the course of 10 days we were going to be visiting a number of schools, institutions and other charitable organisations; hoping to do some charity and aid the student's educational experience, not as classroom teachers but as advocates of the real world. Prior to the trip, my teammates (Mega Mohnot, Rina Shah and Meera Shah) and I had spent a lot of time preparing for our speeches in the schools and colleges. But for all of us all those preliminary thoughts and notes went for a toss when we were standing in front of the 500 students of Navyug B.Sc. and B.Ed. College

It was truly a terrifying experience for me, standing on a stage with all those expectant faces staring at me. I had no idea what worldly wisdom I could give them that they wouldn't know themselves, all of them being older than me. So I did the only thing I could think of at that point, urging myself not to run away screaming: I talked to them about a situation every student was familiar with, a problem that every person faces: lack of confidence.

I found it kind of ironic, that I was talking to them about confidence while my own knees were shaking under that table. But that is what confidence is, isn't it? It's knowing how scared you are to do something, but doing it anyway. I talked about my own experiences, because in that moment all of them and I were in the same boat.

To my surprise, it worked, they listened and after the programme was over, many of them came up to me and told me that I had inspired them. They all felt that if someone younger to them could be confident enough to stand in a completely unknown place and talk to completely unknown people about confidence, so could they. It is honestly an amazing feeling, that moment when someone tells you that you have inspired them.

In every school that we went to, we were treated like celebrities by the students; after we had finished our talks, they all wanted to meet us and shake our hands. They all wanted to get our phone numbers and addresses so that they could write to us. Needless to say, all of us were astonished and a little embarrassed at the attention and respect they showered us with. For us going to these schools and talking to the students wasn't that big of a deal. At one of the schools, I even asked a girl why they thought it was such a big deal to them, she replied saying that no one who had visited their school had taken the time to actually talk with and listen to what they had to say, and because we took the time to do that, this would be an unforgettable experience for them.

The visit to Aek Rang Children's Developmental Institute for mentally challenged girls was an unimaginable sight where we saw a bare structure of the school with minimal facilities. They didn't have clean water, or basic furniture and appliances or security. And the building in which the school was based, was only just given to them by the government, its inauguration occurring on the previous day. My eyes welled up with tears thinking that if this condition was what they considered better than their previous situation, I didn't even want to find out what setting they were in before.

It is down-heartening to think that these girls coming from completely rural areas of Gujarat have so little exposure to the world that they consider what we have done a huge generosity to them. After realising this, I have made a vow to myself that I would continue coming back to Rajkot and doing these kind of outreach programmes there. These experiences reveal to all of us, the sheer amount of things we have to be grateful for.