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## **BAPS YOUTHS EXEMPLIFY VALUES, CULTURE AND HERITAGE THROUGH VIBRANT CELEBRATIONS**

“Take care of your children more than you take care of your wealth”. This is the message that His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj tirelessly conveys to parents. He goes on, “The essence of child development is Health, Education and Values”, and it is precisely this sentiment that was echoed during three different celebrations by BAPS youth forums in New Jersey in the divine presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The diverse and exciting programs combined anecdotes, dramas and dances to convey the importance of spiritual and moral values to all ages. The whole event was planned and executed by a team of BAPS saints and youths. Some of the young saints have been born and raised in the United States, and can identify what afflicts the youth of today. With the fusion of modern technology and traditional values, coupled with their western upbringing anchored with Eastern values they are an ideal vehicle to mentor other youths. The first day focused on the issues facing high school and college students. Issues such as how to resist peer pressure and addictions were discussed. Luminaries such as Ravindranath Tagore and Nelson Mandela were held up as examples of holding onto one’s conviction even in the most adverse of circumstances.

There were special programs catering to the very young as well. Prior to the event, scores of them indulged in paintings and drawings to show their love for their heritage and one banner proudly displayed, “We are the pride of India”. Music and dance is never far away for the young at BAPS, and they put on a display to show the varied and vibrant dance customs from different parts of India. But there was more fun to come. There were games galore, and Pramukh Swami Maharaj joined the young by participating in the fun.

Naturally sections of the event emphasized the necessity for children to imbibe moral, educational, spiritual, and cultural values for a well-balanced life. A combination of speeches and dramas highlighted the importance of respecting parents, keeping good company, daily prayer and studying hard. Peer groups in the form of children and youth assemblies have proved to be one of the most effective ways to develop these virtues for the last 50 years.

The event concluded with a message from Pramukh Swami Maharaj for young parents on the need to understand the issues facing second generation of Indian Americans and how to build better families by striving for a balanced life to meet the aspirations of the young and yet maintain culture and spirituality for the benefit of their children.

### **About BAPS**

The Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a worldwide socio-spiritual organization in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, is dedicated to community service, peace and harmony. Founded on the pillars of practical spirituality, BAPS strives to care for the world by caring for societies, families and individuals. Through a number of medical, cultural, educational, environmental, social and spiritual activities, BAPS endeavors to produce better citizens of tomorrow, who have very high esteem for their roots - the rich Indian culture. Its 9,000 centers including more than 5,000 youth centers across the world support these activities of character building. Under the guidance and leadership of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, BAPS aspires to build a community free of addictions and that is morally, ethically and spiritually strong.

### **About Pramukh Swami Maharaj**

His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has inspired millions of devotees across the world to lead a God-conscious, character-centered life. As the present leader of BAPS, he travels from village to village, continent to continent, inspiring people of all ages to center their lives on moral values and sound judgment. He emphasizes the importance of family harmony, community service and spiritual progress among others. Representing the essence of Hinduism, his compassion for humanity, universal wisdom and striking simplicity have touched many world religious and national leaders.

For more information on BAPS and further details of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's North America schedule and program, please visit <http://www.swaminarayan.org>.