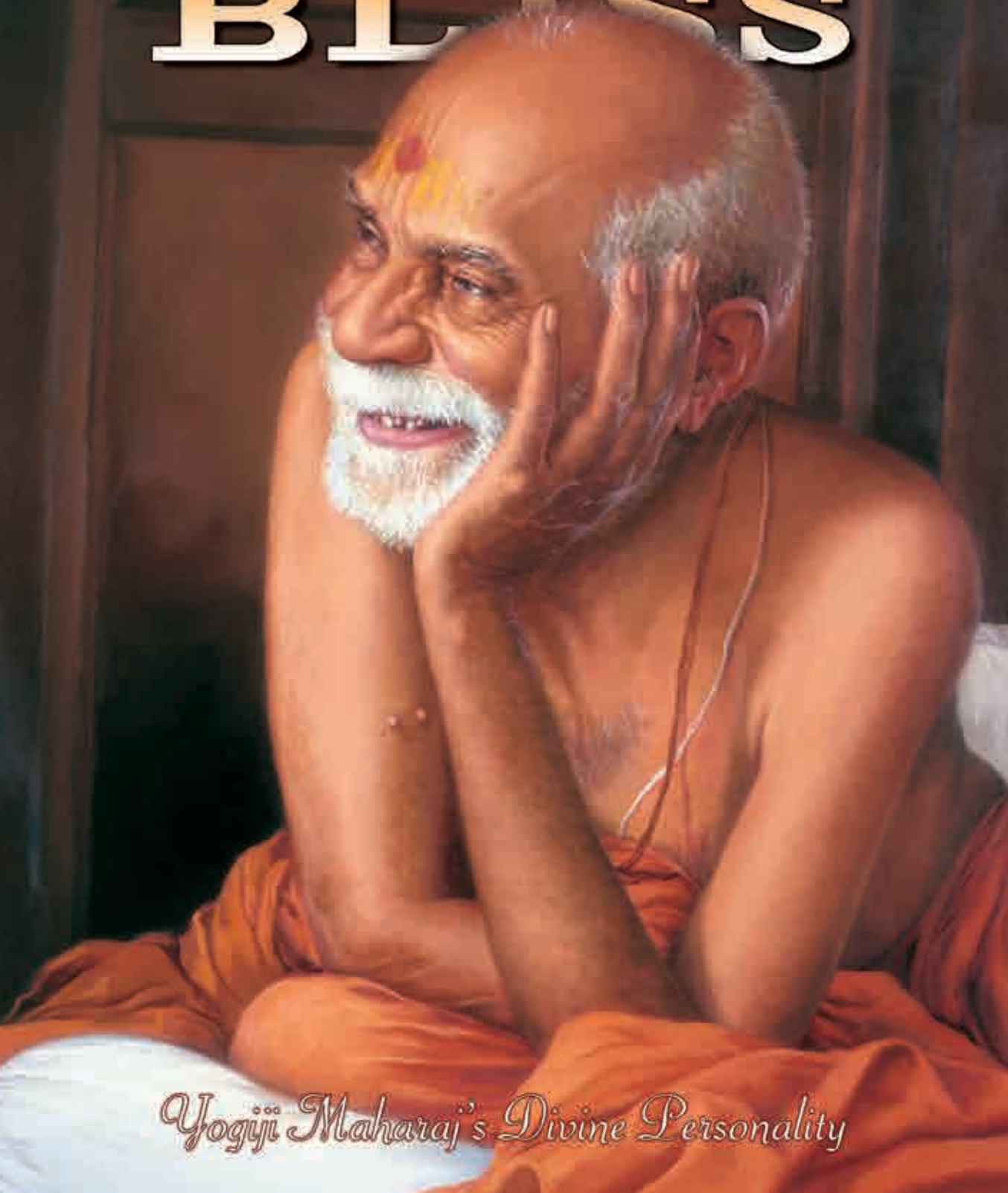


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SWAMINARAYAN BLISS



Yogiji Maharaj's Divine Personality



DIKSHA CEREMONY
14 March 2012, Sarangpur

Swamishri initiated 44 *parshads* into the sadhu-order and 24 youths into the *parshad*-order.

1. Some of the newly initiated sadhus with Swamishri.
2. Swamishri blesses the newly initiated *parshads*.
3. Over 10,000 devotees witnessed the divine atmosphere of the *diksha* ceremony.

Title Cover: Painting of Yogiji Maharaj by Sadhu Krishnaswarupdas, installed at Yogi Smruti Mandir, Gondal.



Akshar Purushottam Maharaj

In April 1978 Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and inaugurated the first issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The bi-monthly magazine serves to enlighten BAPS youths, seniors and well-wishers about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and the Gunatit guru *parampara*. It also seeks to inspire the universal values and traditions of Hinduism to pursue a happy and peaceful life by serving God and humankind.

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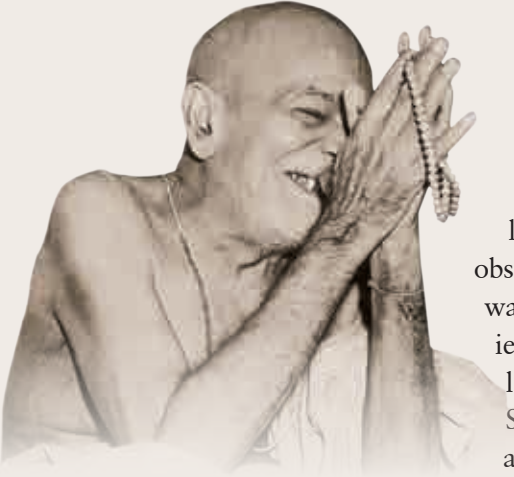
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First Word



Yogiji Maharaj was an incarnation of saintliness. He was a repository of all saintly virtues like faith, love, compassion, humility, devotion and steadfastness in observing the moral disciplines of a Swaminarayan sadhu. He was above all honour and insult, material joys and miseries and mundane enticements. He was totally immersed in love for and devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Shastriji Maharaj. Nothing in this world could possibly separate him or distract him from his sublime spiritual state.

A senior wellwisher, Sadashankarbhai, honoured Yogiji Maharaj in Limdi and opined, “You are a Person of the Millennium [*Yugpurush*].” Instantly, Yogiji Maharaj responded, “No, not at all. I am a servant [*das*].” Swami’s words resonated with humility and regret at the wellwisher’s words. He deeply believed himself to be a servant of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, guru Shastriji Maharaj and all the devotees.

When he was 75 years old and afflicted by many ailments, he uttered from his bed, “Allow me to go and wash utensils.” His attendants restrained him. But moments later, he requested with fervour, “Permit me to wash utensils.” In spite of his health not permitting him to exert in any way, he nourished intense thoughts of doing *seva*.

On returning from an overseas satsang tour in 1970, the descendants of Bhaga Doshi of Botad came to meet Swami in Mumbai. They lavished praises upon his achievements, “Bapa, you have truly accomplished a great feat! Even in the time of Shriji Maharaj our Satsang had not reached beyond Gujarat, whereas you have taken it to London!”

At that time Swami was about to drink milk from a saucer. He stopped immediately and exclaimed, “What are you saying! You should not say such a thing. The Satsang spreads due to Shriji Maharaj’s grace and blessings. Who am I? It is not appropriate for a dog to believe that he is driving the cart while walking beneath it. Thus, whatever glory we have attained is due to Maharaj’s grace.”

In his twilight years, Swami once told the devotees about his daily routine, “In my early years [as a sadhu] I used to wake up at 3.00 a.m. I bathed with water cooled in earthen pots. I used to sing *prabhatiya* (morning bhajans), prepare meals, serve food, wash utensils... I loved and enjoyed those days.” A devotee interrupted, “Bapa, I cannot understand what happiness or joy there was in what you have described. What joy did you derive?”

Swami ecstatically replied, “Guru, I became joyfully absorbed in the bliss of [God’s] *murti*.” This shows that Swami always remembered God in whatever he did. And that was the secret of his joy.

Sometimes, Swami explicitly revealed about his spiritual enlightenment. Many decades ago a serialized article titled “How God Came into My Life” appeared in the *Bhavan’s Journal* magazine published from Mumbai. Several articles had already appeared about the spiritual experiences of great sadhus of India. On referring to them Swami’s attendant, Ishwarcharan Swami, requested him to describe his experiences so that he could write about them and send them to the magazine. Yogiji Maharaj shot a telling smile and said, “I have eternal darshan of God.” For Swami there was no one point of time in his life when he became God-realized – he was an eternally God-realized soul.

(Contd. on pg. 11)

Shri Hari's Grace Upon His Devotees



After arriving in Loya, Shri Hari delivered discourses daily before his sadhus and devotees. He reiterated and emphasized the path of morality for his devotees, and revealed the measure of true satsang...

“YOU HAVE LAPSED MORALLY!”

The next day Shriji Maharaj was presiding over a satsang assembly. He tried to search for Sura Khachar with his eyes, but could not find him.

On enquiring, Natha Khachar, the son of Sura Khachar, replied, “He has gone to his farm and should be arriving shortly.”

When Sura Khachar arrived, Shri Hari asked him why he was late.

“Maharaj, someone stole two of my oxen.”

“Oh, then the contraption of drawing water from your well must have been stalled,” Maharaj replied.

“Maharaj, if it stops then my crops would wilt. So, I stole four oxen from someone else.”

Shri Hari smiled with surprise and rebuked him, “So, you have lapsed morally!”

“But Maharaj, the person who stole my oxen

broke the rule first. You should first reprimand him. I stole only to teach him not to break the law.”

The entire congregation broke into laughter at Sura Khachar’s flawed understanding of justice. Maharaj checked him, “Bapu, as a *satsangi* (devotee) one should not do this. Go and return the four oxen now. You will get back your oxen soon.”

Sura Khachar stood up to obey Maharaj’s command. He told his wife, Shantiba, and son, Nathabhai, to prepare sumptuous food for Maharaj and the sadhus while he was away.

BY MERELY WEARING A KANTHI ONE DOES NOT BECOME A SATSANGI

Shri Hari addressed the assembly on the imperative need for honesty. He said, “A *satsangi*

should never break the five vows (*panch vartmans*). One should so behave that others are impressed and inspired. Otherwise, by merely wearing a *kanthi* (a thread of beads put on during initiation into Satsang) one does not become a true *satsangi*.” After the discourse Maharaj and the assembly dispersed for lunch.

In the evening, Shri Hari went to Sura Khachar’s farm. He saw that water was being drawn from the well with the aid of oxen. The farm hand told Maharaj, “When Sura Khachar returned home after taking four oxen from someone else, his two oxen returned to the farm. So Bapu has gone to return the four oxen he had stolen.”

Maharaj replied, “Because Bapu reverted to obeying dharma, God has blessed him.”

ASSOCIATION WITH SADHUS WILL LIBERATE SATSANGIS

Shri Hari and his devotees had assembled by a well on the outskirts of Loya. A farmer passing by was drawn to the small congregation. He touched the holy feet of Shri Hari and expressed, “Maharaj, these sadhus of yours will get *moksha*, but your devotees will not be liberated because they are sly and devious.”

Shri Hari questioned the farmer, “Patel, has any of our *satsangis* encroached upon or taken away a part of your land or troubled you in any way?”

“No. I dare anyone to do so! But your devotees are like what I said,” the farmer blamed bitterly.

Shri Hari quizzed him further, “Patel, you have a goad in your hand. Throw it into this well.” The farmer did so instantly. Maharaj asked, “Patel, see if the goad is floating on the surface or not.”

“Maharaj, since it is made of wood it floats,” the farmer replied.

Shri Hari then had the goad retrieved from the well, and instructed the farmer, “Now take out the small spike at the front of the stick and throw it into the well, and see whether it floats or not.”

The farmer was befuddled at Shri Hari’s words. He replied categorically, “How can the iron spike float in water? There is no doubt it will sink.”

Finally, Shri Hari revealed to him, “Look Patel! When the iron spike is attached to the wooden stick it floats. Likewise, our devotees will be liberated from the ocean of samsara only through their association with a God-realized Sadhu.”

The answer appealed to the farmer. He bowed in submission at the feet of Shri Hari and uttered, “Maharaj, you have rightfully explained to me.”

After a while, Maharaj asked the farmer, “How many sons do you have?”

“Four.”

“Who is your favourite among them?”

“Oh, I love the youngest the most,” the farmer answered.

Shri Hari smiled and explained, “Patel, I believe my sadhus to be like my eldest son, and my *satsangis* to be like my youngest son. So, I will liberate my devotees first and then my sadhus. Do you understand?”

The farmer realized Shri Hari’s glory and compassion and left feeling happy and enlightened.

Shri Hari was pleased with the idyllic surroundings of Loya. He wished to discourse about his divine form, yoga and *sankhya* to his senior sadhus: Nityanand Swami, Muktanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami and others.

JHINABHAI DARBAR IS UPSET

On 4 December 1820 (Kartak *vad* 14, Samvat 1877) Jhinabhai Darbar of Panchala came to Loya. Every year Shri Hari invariably visited Panchala without fail. But since Maharaj had been unable to visit Panchala the year before, Jhinabhai had come to specially invite him. Maharaj was pleased to see Jhinabhai, and he expressed his resolution to take Maharaj to Panchala. Shri Hari replied, “Jhinabhai, I cannot come to Panchala

now. The senior sadhus have come here to listen to my discourses. Have patience for the present and I'll surely come to Panchala in good time."

Jhinabhai was pained at Shri Hari's refusal. He became quiet and melancholy. Muktanand Swami perceived Jhinabhai's sinking mood. He tried to alleviate his shock, "Bapu, be calm. I will propose to Maharaj again. He is all-compassionate and he will come." But Jhinabhai remained glum. He just could not accept Maharaj's refusal.

That same evening, Muktanand Swami revealed to Shri Hari, "Maharaj, Jhinabhai is very upset today. He said if Maharaj will not come to his house then of what use would it be to stay in it!"

Shri Hari replied, "When one who is distraught offers love born out of bitterness for us, that love or devotion will not last. To become sad because of personal distress is a big loss."

Jhinabhai responded humbly, "Maharaj, when God and his Sadhu come to one's house one should rejoice, and when they don't one should be saddened."

Shriji Maharaj replied, "When God and his Sadhu arrive one should be happy, but when they don't one should not be disheartened. If a devotee smarts on such occasions then he will be at great loss. Thus, one should remain steadfast in one's moral disciplines and happily obey whatever God says. When God instructs one to leave, one should not become sad and upset. If one becomes happy, then whatever happiness God has given in the forms of *prasad*, darshan and knowledge is lost. Furthermore, one's intellect becomes clouded with *tamogun*. Then wherever that person goes, he remains in a miserable mood. Thus, in his state of misery, he is unable to properly abide by God's commands. Therefore, a devotee of God should forever remain pleased and happy, and do bhajan with inner joy. And no matter how bad the circumstances turn out to be, he should not allow himself to be miserable at all."¹

1. Vachanamrut, Loya 1.

Shri Hari's words finally penetrated Jhinabhai's heart and the pall of misery and frustration lifted. He then pledged not to eat any sweet and fried items, and not to wear his headgear (*pagh*) till Shri Hari visits Panchala.

MAHARAJ SANCTIFIES THE VACHANAMRUT

On 8 December 1820 (Magshar *sud* 3, Samvat 1877) Shriji Maharaj was residing at the *darbar* of Sura Khachar. At that time Nityanand Swami offered the Vachanamrut² to Shri Hari. Maharaj went through it thoroughly. Then he took the text and touched it to his head as an act of honour and reverence. Shri Hari's gesture made everyone realize the importance and sanctity of the Vachanamrut. Shriji Maharaj blessed the shastra and approved of its authenticity.³

In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya the Vachanamrut is the principal shastra that elaborates and celebrates, among other things, the highest principle of *upasana* taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is a unique shastra among the wide corpus of Hindu shastras.

During his stay in Loya Maharaj encouraged the young student-sadhus to deliver discourses daily; and that too on Sanskrit texts. Maharaj used to have the *kathas* read by Atmanand, Bhagvadanand, Yoganand, Kapileshvaranand, Achintyanand, Lakshmananand, Daharanand and other sadhus. Maharaj used to teach whoever could not properly pronounce Sanskrit words, or tell Nityanand Swami to help the sadhus. Each day Shri Hari blessed the sadhu reading the *katha* with a garland worn by him. Shri Hari thus encouraged them and advised, "If you study the shastras, your own satsang will be maintained, and then through you the Satsang fellowship will flourish." ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from Gujarati text of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan by Shri H.T. Dave

2. Vachanamrut is a compilation of Shriji Maharaj's discourses by Muktanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and Shukanand Swami.
3. Vachanamrut, Loya 7.

ADHYĀY 2

BĀHMI STHITI YOGA:

UNDISTURBED IN HARDSHIPS

Part 10



Life is like a camel ride. We never know when the next bump will come, like Bhagwan Rama did not know what was going to happen the next morning. Such occurrences are inevitable. We must always be ready to face new challenges. We must have the strength to withstand the new problems that arise everyday. Attaining stability of mind, that is, being *sthitapragna*, is the secret to that strength.

Arjuna was going through a hailstorm of mental unrest. Before his outer enemies could challenge him, his inner enemies had. This was an unexpected challenge, yet there was no choice but to cope with it; there was no

choice but to persevere since he simply had to succeed. The Gita teaches one how to cope and continue, and gives the inner strength to help one succeed. Shri Krishna teaches how one can become strong by giving these precepts on becoming *sthitapragna*.

UNDISTURBED IN MISERIES, UNTOUCHED BY PLEASURES

Shri Krishna Bhagwān says, ‘दुःखेष्वनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः। वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते ॥’ – ‘*Dukheshvanudvignamanāhā sukheshu vigitaspruhaha, veetarāgabhayakrodhaha sthitadheermuniruchyate*’ – ‘One who does not become agitated when experiencing miseries, remains detached even on attaining pleasures, and is free of desires, fear and anger can be called steady minded or *sthitapragna*’ (Gitā 2.56).

A stable mind is a sound basis for good health. A steady mind is directly related to the pleasures and pains we experience every day. Some describe life as a sum of pleasures and pains. Our sadhus have deduced that ‘Life is an ocean of pleasures and pains.’ Pleasure and pain are both very influential. They have a deep effect on our daily lives. Sometimes we are enthusiastic, and at other times downhearted; sometimes we feel excited, and at other times bored – these mood swings are caused by the oscillations of pleasure and pain. However, we can make such an unsteady life as calm as a peaceful lake if we rise above the feelings of pleasure and pain. This is the realm of those who have attained the state of *sthitapragna*. There are no oscillations due

to pleasure and pain, and therefore no mood swings either. There is no agitation, just peace, utmost peace, the utmost peace of Paramātmā.

UNDISTURBED IN MISERIES

No one likes miseries, but they cannot be stopped. Misery is felt due to many things: we may not get something we want; something we do get may not be to our expectations; something we have may be stolen or broken, or somebody may borrow it but not return it; we may struggle to get food; if we do get some, it may not taste good; or we may fall into financial difficulties. There is no end to the problems of running a household. We may have to spend our lives with someone we do not get along with. We may not get to stay with someone we like. We may not be respected in our family. No one loves us. No one cares for us; if they do, they do so unsympathetically. Those who keep in contact, do so for selfish reasons; they just act as if they care about us and love us; they praise us in our presence, but leave nothing unsaid in our absence. Some do not voice it, but hold a deep obstinate grudge. Quarrels, not speaking to one another or even physical harm occur regularly, and there seems to be no end to it. Our trust may be breached.

Sometimes our bodies may no longer be able to perform. We may become subject to one illness after another and our health may not improve. Medicines become a part of our diet. Pills may not have the desired effect and there seems to be no end to expenses.

Sometimes we have no place in society. We are scorned due to poverty or lack of skill. We have to live under someone's suppression. Being mentally exploited has become a part of our lives. Our superiors or partners do not understand our realities; they believe the opposite; they scold us from their position of power without a second thought. We try to explain the truth a thousand times, but the listener is stubborn in his beliefs. Yet, they immediately listen to others, even if they

are completely lying. They always look upon us with a doubtful eye, never even considering to trust us; they trust the unrighteous more.

Even the extremely ordinary work of others may be appreciated and anything we have done, even if it be much better, done with good intentions, or even done as a true favour, never gets noticed. Our efforts are suppressed with sarcastic statements like, 'As if you've done something great!' There is always partiality involved.

No one listens to us. We may not be involved in making decisions that affect us. We may not be treated with respect. We may be insulted or humiliated in public and told, 'You don't know anything.'

This is just a short list of the miseries we may come across in life.

It is important to realize that the above are not just theoretical possibilities, but they reflect reality. These precepts from the Gita reveal how to keep the mind free of agony in the face of these painful realities.

To understand things more let us look at pain and misery from a different perspective. Pain is something physical and the agony in our minds caused by that pain is misery. For example, if one has an accident and suffers from a few bruises, a broken hand or leg or other injuries then one feels pain. However, that pain itself is not misery. Further, if one develops a fever, the body may ache, but that is not misery; it is physical pain. The misery that is experienced following injury or during a high fever is due to the mental reactions to the situation, such as, 'What will happen to me?', 'I'll die!', and other such negative and fearful thoughts. Another example: a sudden loss of job or financial troubles in business will result in hardships, but that is not misery. The mental repercussion in such situations is misery.

Illness may not be prevented, but the misery of illness can be. Job or business problems may not be prevented, but the mental stress can be. Being *sthitapragna* gives this power. It is the tech-

nique that helps to conquer miseries and stress. Shri Krishna begins to reveal that technique with the words ‘*duhksheshvanudvignamanāhā*’. Here, the word ‘*duhksheshu*’ refers to situations that are often labelled as causing misery. In reality, however, whether a situation causes misery or happiness depends on how a person responds to it mentally.

The words of the Gita, ‘*duhksheshvanudvignamanāhā*’, reveal another reality. There is no method for removing misery-causing situations from life. Everyone encounters them, be they a normal person or even the Satpurush. They are an inevitable part of life. The situations may not be avoidable, but the mental response to those situations can be controlled. These words of the Gita clearly indicate that by calming one’s thoughts one can experience peace of mind in any situation.

The Satpurush has such knowledge. Having this true knowledge is the *sthitapragna* state. It is a true and firm understanding of the form of Paramatma.

A *sthitapragna* person has his mind focused on Paramatma. He has mastered the knowledge that Paramatma is the doer, the destroyer and the liberator. Therefore, even in bad times, his inner calmness is not affected. Even in such difficult situations, he does not blame Paramatma by saying, ‘I have done so much bhakti for you, yet you still give me these hardships?’ He believes each incident to be the grace of Paramatma, since, ‘Paramatma is never the enemy of his servant. Whatever he does is for our good.’

This is why, no matter what event has taken place, such a person can tranquilly take on the next task and not let the previous activity affect the current one.

This understanding is not a futile imaginary thought formulated to wish away life’s problems. Such a person experiences first hand that whatever has happened, is happening and will happen is according to Paramatma’s wish.

We can see this more clearly if we look at a real example.

In the past, Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj has had a heart attack and undergone cardiac bypass surgery. On 19 September 2007, he was undergoing some cardiac medical tests in Mumbai. He was taken into a cabin for the tests. After the tests were over, Dr K.N. Patel came to Swamishri and said, “Swamishri! As Dr Ashwin Mehta (one of India’s leading cardiologists) was leaving after completing your tests, he said to me, ‘Pramukh Swami is amazing! I saw his face before the tests and while he was in the cabin. There was not even the slightest hint of worry on his face. I have treated many great celebrities, be they religious leaders or prime ministers, everyone’s face changes at such times. I have even seen some of them become depressed. But Pramukh Swami’s expressions haven’t changed in the slightest.’ ”

Hearing this, Swamishri said, “We take Thakorji with us, he worries about us, whatever he wishes will happen, he is the all-doer.”

On the early morning of 25 January 1974, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was departing for his first overseas tour as the spiritual guru of BAPS. He was going from Mumbai (India) to Nairobi (Kenya, Africa). Swamishri, along with eleven other sadhus, was given a grand farewell by thousands. Air India’s ‘Gaurishankar’ jumbo jet took off and soon landed in Nairobi.

Hundreds of devotees were waiting at the airport to welcome Swamishri to the African continent with garlands of flowers. Suddenly, there was an unexpected announcement, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his party will not be able to disembark the aircraft. They will have to return to India.” The words of the announcement struck hard. This was heartrending for the devotees of Africa. Many questions began to arise: Why did something like this happen all of a sudden? What about our reputation? Who is behind this foolishness? Everyone began to chatter amongst

themselves. Everyone became agitated. Everyone wondered how Swamishri must be feeling. He, too, had heard the announcement. But his only response was, "As is Paramatma's wish."

He had the same contentment on his face, there was no change in his feelings and he was just as calm. This was a living example of the state of being *sthitapragna* described in the Gita. The officials and observers were more intrigued by Swamishri's understanding of the all-doership of Paramatma than his lack of concern for the humiliation of being turned back.

Even more awe-striking was that Swamishri immediately began to worry about Thakorji's *thal* (meal). His clear and composed actions revealed that for him it was as if nothing humiliating had happened. On returning to Mumbai, he gave everyone so much joy that it was as if they had forgotten completely about the incident. He himself then elaborated upon Vachanamrut Gadhada I 74, "The extent of one's understanding can be measured only in times of some hardship, but not otherwise.... We are the servants of God; so we should be pleased with whatever pleases him.... Moreover, if God seats us on an elephant, we should remain happy by sitting on an elephant; and if he seats us on a donkey, then we should remain happy by sitting on a don-

key;... But in no way should we harbour any joy or grief in our minds, because everything happens by the will of God. So, just as a dry leaf is blown in the air according to the direction of the wind, we should also remain dependent on him and joyfully worship God, not allowing any frustration to enter our minds." The secret to being *sthitapragna* are held in these words. When Swamishri was explaining these words, it was clearly evident to everyone that he was speaking on the basis of his practical application of them in his life.

Due to the difficult situation (i.e., the impending war before him), Arjuna's mind was disturbed. That is why he had asked, '*Sthitapraghnasya kā bhāshā*' – 'O Krishna, what are the characteristics of the steady minded.' Answering with the words '*dubukheshu anudvignamanāhā*' Shri Krishna directed him towards becoming *sthitapragna*.

We too can imbibe this secret in our lives if we remember such divine incidents from the life of the Satpurush. By doing so, we will no longer become agonized in hard times, we will never lose our patience, and we will gradually become more engrossed in Paramatma and fully acknowledge his all-doership. ♦

(Contd. from pg. 4)

Another interesting incident occurred in Ahmedabad. Swami's rigorous daily *vicharan*, regardless of his old age, astonished a seasoned *satsangi* and government lawyer, Hariprasad Chokshi. He asked Swami while holding his hands, "I fail to understand how you can bear such hardships (*bhido*) at this age. Are you Swaminarayan himself or who are you? Explain to me." Swami replied calmly, "It is not like that. I am a servant of all servants." But Hariprasad Chokshi pressed Swami's hands and desperately asked him to reply further. Swami was touched by his inner passion and finally revealed, "The

power given by Swaminarayan is at work."

There are thousands of incidents about Yogiji Maharaj, each revealing different aspects of his divine and extraordinary personality. He was a true sadhu; a real sadhu. And that was why hundreds of thousands found solace in him and experienced the bliss of God by his darshan and blessings. He departed from earth in 1971, proclaiming Pramukh Swami Maharaj as his spiritual successor. Today, countless devotees, wellwishers and dignitaries experience the same divinity and saintliness that Yogiji Maharaj had in the person of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. ♦



“Bhagwan Bhaji Leva”

In all his activities Yogiji Maharaj was absorbed in remembering or worshipping Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Shastriji Maharaj. His profound message of “Bhagwan bhaji leva” – “Worship God” was to liberate all from their miseries and conflicts and bless them with eternal joy.

Four score and seven years ago, on the rock-face of a small county in South Dakota, a giant sculpture was carved out. Featuring some of the greatest presidents in the country's history, Mount Rushmore became an icon recognized even beyond the country's borders. Of the four presidents carved in stone, it is probably Abraham Lincoln whose name is best known. His speech at Gettysburg inspired the country during the American Civil War, and continues to do so today. Perfect in pitch, compact in thought and expression, using a mere 57 words Lincoln stirred the nation like no other man.

This is what separates the great from the rest – their ability to pack a powerful message into a few simple words and their ability to motivate action.

Winston Churchill inspired Britain's soldiers to victory when he confidently thumped, "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender." John F. Kennedy's words questioned our duties, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." And more recently, Steve Jobs speaking at Stanford University in 2005 beckoned us all to "Stay hungry, Stay foolish."

There is no doubt that these messages are influential. Otherwise they would not still be remembered today. Yet, there is something more emphatic about a message born before time. A message that is valid today just as it was yesterday, and will continue to be tomorrow.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in Vachanamrut Jetalpur 5, highlights one such message: "There is nothing greater than worshipping God." You can fight for unity or for power, but to worship God is greater still. Winning the Olympic gold, the lottery or a Nobel Prize are all great feats, but there is nothing greater than worshipping God. Yogiji Maharaj understood this eternal message and that is why he would constantly remind us: "*Bhagwan bhaji leva*" – "Worship God." Just

three words – but they echoed an eternal truth.

"BHAGWAN BHAJI LEVA"

Night or day, young or old, Yogiji Maharaj would take every opportunity to deliver this message of bhajan-bhakti. He often narrated stories and tales in his discourses. One story he often mentioned involved Shri Krishna Bhagwan explaining to Arjun about the long time one had to wait to attain a human body. He would then say that having now attained such a rare human body we should utilize it in the best possible way to achieve *moksha*. In Yogiji Maharaj's famous words this message was, "*Bhagwan bhaji leva*."

BHAJAN – A CHILDHOOD PASTIME

The words "*Bhagwan bhaji leva*" were not mere marching orders for others. Yogiji Maharaj lived and breathed them throughout his life. Right from childhood, Yogiji Maharaj was absorbed in God.

At the local Dhari primary school the deafening bell would signal break time. If you weren't careful, you might get crushed by the stampede of students bustling out of the corridor. Some would fight over who gets to bat. The sore losers would have to settle for bowling or fielding. Not everyone would play cricket though. Marbles were very popular amongst some of the boys. Most children would play fair, but you had to be careful of the seniors. They would cheat or bully and sometimes even steal your whole bag. Amid these and other playground games and pranks, young Jhinabhai would be nowhere to be found. Some children would be enjoying snacks and drinks during their break, but not Jhinabhai. Some would relax under the shade of a tree, maybe even fall asleep, but Jhinabhai wouldn't be there either. So what would he be doing? If you walked around the playground and looked hard enough you might find him. Sitting. Alone. In a quiet corner, meditating on God.

It didn't end there though. After school fin-

ished he would talk to his friends about satsang and the need to perform bhajan-bhakti. He would try and convince as many of them as possible to accompany him to the local Swaminarayan mandir for darshan and *arti*. Once there, he would stay the night. The mandir literally became his home. He would wake up early in the morning, around 4.00 a.m., bathe and perform his puja. Then, he would wake those he had persuaded to stay over and encourage them to read the shastras early in the morning. After *arti* he would ask them do *dandvats* and sing *dhun*. Often they would get fed up, but Jhinabhai was different. He never ran out of steam.

Jhinabhai was especially fond of kirtans. He was always eager to learn and memorize new ones. Whenever he sang, he would become lost in the words. It's no wonder then, that others were naturally attracted to this exceptional child.

When Jhinabhai was seven years old, he had climbed to the top of a neem tree in his village Dhari. His elder brother, Kamalshibhai, saw him and called out, "Jhina! Why have you climbed to the top?"

Jhinabhai shouted back, "I've come to the top to do darshan of Chappaiya! I can see Chappaiya from here! If you want to do darshan, then climb up here and you'll be able to see it too!"

Kamalshibhai couldn't believe what he was hearing, but at the same time he knew that Jhina never lied. Curious, he began to climb. When he reached the top, he was amazed – before his eyes stood the distinct rooftops, trees and lakes of Chappaiya. If he reached out he could probably have even touched them. He thought to himself, Jhina's devotion is profound. How strong must his desire to do darshan of Shriji Maharaj's birthplace be, that Maharaj actually brought Chappaiya, hundreds of miles away, to Dhari?

On another occasion, Puriba took Jhinabhai to a different village to celebrate the engagement of Kamalshibhai. Jhinabhai was disinterested; he was only interested in bhajan-bhakti. When no one was

looking, he ran away to the nearby Ramji Mandir. There, he sat at the back of the mandir in silent meditation. A few hours later it was lunchtime, but he was too engrossed in God to realize. Even when everyone came looking for him, he refused to leave. Such was his devotion, even as a child.

BHAKTI – THE NEVER-TIRING STORY

Swamishri's dedication to bhajan-bhakti was ever fresh and inspiring. It was something that he enjoyed and always gave him happiness. As a result, he never grew tired of it. His eagerness for doing darshan bore testament to his perennial enthusiasm.

Whenever Yogiji Maharaj left from a mandir, he always went for Thakorji's darshan. Once, Swami was going from Sarangpur to the nearby village Jamrala. It was 4.00 p.m. and a horse-cart was ready. All the luggage was loaded and everyone was ready to go. However, Yogiji Maharaj was upstairs doing darshan. He came down from the mandir and met a crowd of devotees that had gathered to get a last glimpse of their guru. He visited the bathroom one final time and was about to sit in the cart when suddenly he ran up the mandir steps to get a last glimpse of the *murtis* before leaving. He had been there just ten minutes before. Nothing had changed – the *murtis* were same, adorned in same clothes and ornaments – but Yogiji Maharaj's thirst for darshan was insatiable.

BHAJAN – WHEN YOU'D LEAST EXPECT IT

Swamishri's enthusiasm for bhajan-bhakti was so great that he would find every opportunity to engage himself in it; and if there wasn't one, he would create one.

Yogiji Maharaj was in Mumbai when the tremors from a distant earthquake were felt. The whole Akshar Bhuvan shook for two minutes. Everyone ran into Yogiji Maharaj's room to make sure no harm had come to him. The sadhus mentioned that an earthquake had occurred. Yogiji Maharaj,

in his typical manner said, “The earthquake is telling us ‘*Bhagwan bhaji leva*.’” After an earthquake, a geologist could tell you its magnitude on the Richter scale and Yogiji Maharaj could tell you what message it was conveying – a reminder from Shriji Maharaj to do bhajan-bhakti.

In 1970 Yogiji Maharaj was in Kampala, Uganda. After a long and eventful spiritual tour of East Africa, Yogiji Maharaj was about to depart for London. The sadhus wanted to measure his weight so that they could compare it once he returned to India. They requested him to stand on the weighing scales. Hearing this Yogiji Maharaj questioned, “*Vajan shu karvu? Bhagwan bhaji leva*” – “Why weigh myself. Worship God.”

An earthquake or weighing scales – neither have much to do with bhajan, but because his every pore was singing the tune of bhajan-bhakti, that’s all he could think of. Bhajan was the unifying thread woven through his life.

DHUN AND MALA – LIKE A GUSHING RIVER

A devotee named Himabhai was in Yogiji Maharaj’s *seva*, and he slept in the same room as him. One night, Himabhai woke up and saw Yogiji Maharaj sitting up in his bedroll doing *mala*. Himabhai thought to himself, “I’ll stay awake and see how long Swami continues doing *mala*.” To his astonishment, Swami didn’t stop. Yogiji Maharaj’s marathon *mala* lasted all night.

Another time, Yogiji Maharaj retired for an afternoon rest after taking lunch. The sweltering heat in Gondal made sleeping nearly impossible. A devotee named Mahendrabhai was fanning Yogiji Maharaj. Within minutes, Yogiji Maharaj fell asleep and was soon snoring. The room was silent, but Mahendrabhai could hear something. He looked around to see if he could figure out what the sound was and where it was coming from. He failed to do so. However, the faint sound continued. He inspected further and eventually found its source. From Yogiji Maharaj’s sleeping body, he heard a soft

chorus of ‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan...’ emanating. He was astonished. To be singing the *dhun* while being awake is one thing, but to be singing it while asleep is something quite extraordinary. When everyone heard of this incident they approached Yogiji Maharaj and questioned him about it. Light-heartedly he laughed it off by saying, “I want to grant all of you such an elevated spiritual state.”

Whether Swami was awake or in deep sleep, he never stopped engaging in bhajan. It was so constant that one could easily say that he was bhajan personified.

PRADAKSHINA AND DANDVAT – COME WHAT MAY

Swami’s insistence of doing bhajan didn’t stop there. Even in sickness he was just as resolute in doing bhakti. At the first sign of a cough or a minor headache we are quick to jump into bed. After all, it is nature’s way of telling us to slow down. We welcome the extra rest. However, Yogiji Maharaj was cut from a different cloth.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj was in Gadhada, and severe boils had developed on his left hand. The pain was excruciating and unbearable at times. Often the pain was so severe that it led to immobility of the affected limb. In light of this, the attendant sadhus and devotees insisted that Yogiji Maharaj extend his stay and rest. Swami did stay, an extra seven days in fact, but he did not rest. Every day he would insist on visiting the mandir built by Shriji Maharaj in Dada Khachar’s *darbar* and the surrounding sacred places. Not only that, but he would perform *dandvats* at every spot. Vinu Bhagat (Mahant Swami) counted how many *dandvats* Yogiji Maharaj performed. Every day, Yogiji Maharaj, who should have been resting in bed, would perform around 150 *dandvats*. That’s more than any one of us would do even if we were in perfect health.

Even when his body ached and rebelled, he refused to pay heed. Once, at the age of 76, Yogiji Maharaj developed a high fever. The thermom-

eter read 103 degrees. He was feeling incredibly weak. He couldn't even sit down, yet he insisted on doing his puja. Everyone present tried to convince him that given the circumstances it would be alright if he didn't do *pradakshina* and *dandvats*. With the little energy he could muster, he pleaded, "No, I'll do two, nothing will happen to me." In the end his devotion won. He ended up performing five *pradakshinas* and *dandvats*, when he should have been resting.

On 13 January 1971 Swamishri was in Gondal. There was no *katha* that morning. The previous day's cardiogram had raised some concern, and so Yogiji Maharaj had been told to rest. As usual he brushed off their worries.

However, as he was taking his morning bath he complained of pain in both shoulders and behind the neck. As he got up, he began vomiting. His whole body became weak. Everyone became apprehensive.

"Quickly, lie me down," came the strained plea. Immediately devotees sat Yogiji Maharaj onto a chair and took him to his room. The doctor arrived and began carrying out emergency treatment. He asked Yogiji Maharaj how he felt.

"It pains in the chest."

The doctor took an ECG and it showed a complete heart blockage. Swami had fallen asleep in the meantime. They wanted to perform further tests so they gently woke Yogiji Maharaj.

Swami's first words were, "I want to go for darshan."

Such firm devotion can only be possible with one thought – "*Bhagwan bhaji leva*".

KATHA – THE RHYTHM OF HIS PULSE

Whether Swami was awake or in deep sleep, in sickness or health, he was wedded to bhajan-bhakti. Beyond that, it became his life and breath. Without it, he was like a fish out of water.

Quietly an attendant sadhu once approached Yogiji Maharaj's bed. It was 6.00 a.m. and Swami was still asleep. Usually he would be awake by

4.00 a.m., but today the attendant sadhu let him sleep a little bit later. When the attendant sadhu called out to Yogiji Maharaj, his eyes opened and the first words he spoke were, "Read *katha*."

The attendant sadhu gently informed him, "Bapa! It's 6.00 a.m."

Yogiji Maharaj's face fell. It was as if the whole world had crashed down upon him.

"I missed the *katha*!" came the shocked expression.

His passion for *katha* was on a level beyond our comprehension. Every morning Dr Swami would perform Yogiji Maharaj's routine medical check-up. Today, his heartbeat was above normal – 80 beats per minute. With the extra two hours of sleep one would expect it to be lower. The sadhus asked him why his heartbeat was so high.

Heavy with regret, he answered, "Because I missed *katha*."

We might have had the same reaction as Yogiji Maharaj if we missed a football match or a basketball game – but not for *katha*! Often when we're in *katha* we watch the clock, longing for it to end. Our heartbeat probably rises every minute the *katha* goes over, knowing that it's eating into the plans we made for after *sabha*. This is what makes Yogiji Maharaj unique. Bhajan-bhakti was his life force.

BHAJAN – IN OUR LIVES

"*Bhagwan bhaji leva*" is a powerful message, made even more powerful through Yogiji Maharaj's life. Indeed, his life was his message. Whether his image will be carved into the side of a mountain or not is irrelevant. Eventually, over time, any sculpture erodes away. However, Yogiji Maharaj's incredible passion for bhajan-bhakti has carved a permanent place in our hearts and minds, and through Pramukh Swami Maharaj continues to do so today. We need to follow in their footsteps by keeping the same enthusiasm for doing bhajan-bhakti and mould our lives according to the message of "*Bhagwan bhaji leva*". ♦



Profound Love for Guru

Yogiji Maharaj's deep love for guru Shastriji Maharaj was clearly reflected in his obedience to all his commands and wishes.

In a remote part of the Andes a highland tribe attacked one of the lowland tribes. Even though the attack caught the lowland tribe off guard, it managed to force the highland tribe to retreat. However, in the attack the highland tribe kidnapped a baby from the lowland tribe. The elders of the lowland tribe called a gathering to decide what to do. Finally, they decided that they would send seven of the strongest, fittest and bravest warriors from their tribe to get the baby back. The men set out, travelling night and day until they found

a route to get to the highland tribe. However, at the end of the route, they were faced with a major problem; they had reached a rock face. As they were from the lowlands and they did not know how to climb mountains, it was a dead end. Spurred by their goal, they set out again in search of another route, but again they faced the same problem. This continued for ten days. They finally decided that there was no way they could possibly retrieve the kidnapped baby, and so they decided to turn back in defeat.

Reluctantly, the seven warriors made their

way back to their tribe. On their return, they saw something unbelievable. Walking down one of the mountain sides was the mother of the kidnapped baby. Even more astonishing was that she was carrying her baby nestled in her hands. The warriors could not believe what they saw and ran towards the mother. They asked her, “We are the strongest and best trained men from our tribe, and yet even we could not get your daughter back. How did you manage it?”

She simply smiled and replied, “It wasn’t your daughter.”

This is love. A mother’s love for her daughter can make her stronger, fitter and braver than she could ever imagine. Love is an emotional force that pushes a person’s barriers. Love has the power to brighten up a dull day. Love has the ability to see the silver lining. Love can even conquer the fear of death.

So, if love can make us die for others, can it not make us live for others?

In Vachanamrut Kariyani 11 Shriji Maharaj has given a unique definition of love, “*He who has affection for his beloved, God, will never disobey the wishes of his beloved. That is the characteristic of affection.*”

Maharaj explained that how much we love someone is not indicated by our willingness to fight or die for them, but rather how much we are willing to live for them. Living for someone requires doing what they want us to do. We live for someone by following their wishes and commands, and sometimes this can be harder than death.

CARING FOR DEVOTEES

When we look at Yogiji Maharaj’s life it is clear that he loved his guru, Shastriji Maharaj. He truly lived for his guru by following each *agna*, without expectations and with full conviction.

In 1937, Shastriji Maharaj told Yogiji Maharaj “You must take proper care of these Darbars.” Shastriji Maharaj mentioned this only

once, and from then on, Yogiji Maharaj took on this *seva*. He would enthusiastically make and feed them warm chapattis, lay out their bedding, heat water for them to bathe and even wash their clothes. Shastriji Maharaj only told Yogiji Maharaj once to look after the Darbars, and after that Yogiji Maharaj never had to be reminded. On the other hand, we find it hard to wash our own clothes, but imagine Yogiji Maharaj, a sadhu, washed the clothes of devotees.

Despite the time and effort Yogiji Maharaj spent serving them, the Darbars did not always show appreciation. Once in Gondal, some Darbars complained to Shastriji Maharaj about Yogiji Maharaj’s frequent absence in the assembly, and suggested that he should be reprimanded for this. Shastriji Maharaj told them, “Only if you are willing to give up eating warm chapattis, can Jogi come and sit in the assembly.” Despite the Darbars’ complaints against him, Yogiji Maharaj continued to serve them wholeheartedly, since it was his guru’s wish. He sacrificed his own interests for those of his guru. This was only possible because he truly loved his guru.

SEVA AND BHAJAN

This love for his guru was unconditional and borderless. That is why if Yogiji Maharaj was told to do *seva*, he would do it, but if he was told to do bhajan, he would do bhajan with the same enthusiasm.

In 1937, a devotee from Ahmedabad, Nandulal Manchharam, had insomnia. He had tried many different remedies, but none had worked. Shastriji Maharaj knew about his problem, so one day he gave Yogiji Maharaj an *agna*, “Stay with Nandulal and engage in devotion.” After this Yogiji Maharaj and another sadhu went to stay at Nandulal’s home. From morning to evening they would engage in devotional activities: *arti*, spiritual discourses, singing devotional songs and more. All of this continued every day for an entire month until Nandulal’s insomnia was cured.

For anyone whose love was conditional they would instantly question their guru about how insomnia can be cured simply by doing bhajan. Yet Yogiji Maharaj unconditionally loved his guru, and as a result, he was able to live for him. That is why he followed this *agna* for an entire month without questioning.

SURPASSING THE BURDEN OF TIME AND HABIT

Yogiji Maharaj's love didn't end there. His love for his guru transcended consequence as well as time, and it provided the patience to persist for 18 long years.

In 1930, Gandhiji met Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Nirgun Swami in Navagam. Gandhiji asked Shastriji Maharaj for blessings that he succeeds in his movement for an independent India. Shastriji Maharaj blessed him and announced, "From today Jogi Maharaj will do *malas* so that by your efforts India gains independence." From that day, Yogiji Maharaj turned 25 *malas* every day for over 18 years.

Turning 25 *malas* every day for eighteen years totals to 164,250 *malas*. Only when a person has true love for guru, can he have the patience to follow such an *agna* for 18 years.

Yogiji Maharaj never thought twice when told to do anything by his guru. He never thought about the consequences or how long it would take. His motivation was his love for his guru. To what extent did this love take him? For the sake of his guru, Yogiji Maharaj even followed commands that seemed contradictory.

During his travels in 1936, Shastriji Maharaj arrived in Advaal and decided to stay in the village for several days. One day, a devotee named Bapubha wished to feed Shastriji Maharaj and his sadhus. He arranged for a meal of sweet chapattis (*puranpoli*) for the sadhus. By midday everyone finished eating. However, later that day at around 4.00 p.m. Yogiji Maharaj arrived. He and the sadhu accompanying him were observing a waterless fast for that day. When Shastriji Maha-

raj came to know of this, he called Yogiji Maharaj and said, "Consider your fast to be over. I want to feed you today." Without a second's hesitation Yogiji Maharaj took the *puranpoli* from Shastriji Maharaj and ate it, but the sadhu who had come with him did not break his fast.

We think most of us would have acted in the same way. We would have eaten as well, but for a different reason. For Yogiji Maharaj to break a fast was unheard of. Unlike the rest of us, he enjoyed fasting, since it was a way to please God and discipline the body.

As a young sadhu, travelling from village to village under the scorching summer sun or even in bad health, he would eat only once a day and observe a fast once every three days. Fasting was part of his routine as much as eating is part of ours.

Even in 1965, at the age of 74, Yogiji Maharaj told his sadhus in Mumbai, "Seeing that all of you have observed a waterless fast on *ekadashi*, I am also motivated to perform a fast. Please let me join you in observing a fast. If we all do it together it will be okay. I have been thinking about this for the past three days."

Fasting for Yogiji Maharaj was enjoyable. He looked forward to the days of fasting. We can say that he loved to fast. However, he loved his guru much more. For anyone with such a strong inclination for fasting to have to break a fast at 4.00 p.m., when most of the day has passed, is a difficult compromise to make. He could reason, "What is the point of eating now?" To break a fast would seem pointless. However, since Shastriji Maharaj told him to eat he did not think twice. His guru's *agna* was more important.

IN WORD, ACTION AND EVEN THOUGHT

For Yogiji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj's wishes dictated his actions. There was not a moment where he acted or even thought contrary to his guru's wishes. It was as if he had offered his mind to his guru. Not a single thought was his own.

(Contd. on pg. 31)

“Mane nānāmā nānā satsangino abhāv koi di
āve nahi...Brahmni murti dekhbu.”

“The faults of even the most junior of
devotees never arise in my mind...
I believe them to be divine.”

‘AGE OF MIRACLES’

The 21st Century is a century that has been named the ‘Age of Miracles’ by *Reader’s Digest*. After looking at the mesmerizing technological advancements and progress that man has made, one cannot deny the fact that this century is truly a miraculous age. From man landing on the moon and the success in sending robots to Mars to building a 50.5km double track railway service 250 feet below the English Channel with perfect precision, man has been able to transform what seemed intangible dreams just decades ago into physical realities. Travel has become faster and more comfortable and geographical boundaries seem to have dissolved, bringing people closer together and making the world a much smaller place. Communication to anywhere in the world has become a normal occurrence that happens at the speed of light; with the simple click of a button, unimaginable amounts of information has become accessible in nearly every corner of the world.

Yet, even amidst all these immense advancements in comfort and convenience, man has failed to advance in finding contentment. Alongside technological progress, emotional struggles such as frustration, tension, and depression have exponentially escalated causing detrimental consequences, such as, crime, violence, suicide and divorce. Man has progressed from living in caves to living in skyscrapers and mansions; from travelling in bullock carts to travelling in a Mercedes Benz and jumbo jets; from doing physical labour to running international multi-billion dollar companies. However, even though technology and

Glory for All

Yogiji Maharaj saw his guru in all. And that is why he revered everyone, even those who had insulted or assaulted him. He always preached to see the good attributes of others. This was one of the secrets of his spiritual calmness and joy.

the accessibility to facilities have increased, happiness and inner satisfaction have not followed. By simply observing the lives of financial giants and world renowned celebrities, one can clearly conclude that happiness does not merely rely on material possessions, but it depends on something much more subtle – an individual’s state of mind.

POSITIVE THINKING: THE LIMIT

A person’s state of mind, and as a result, his experience, is dependent upon his thinking or attitude. William James, a pioneering American psychologist and philosopher in the mid 19th and early 20th century, agrees when he states, “Human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.” This is a concept that has evolved into what is commonly known as positive thinking.

Even though positive thinking enables a person to sometimes experience happiness even in absence of material possessions, it still has limited potential. Positive thinking is based on principles that constantly change. Because a person has to compel himself to see the positive in the circumstances that surround him, his mentality and experience fluctuate along with the changing environment. Secondly, even if the circumstances surrounding a person have absolutely no positive aspect, that person still has to force himself to remain optimistic by assuming that there must be some positive side to the situation. Thus, many times, in positive thinking a person has to forcefully believe in something that may not always be true. It is a concept based more on assumption than reality.

But in Satsang, there is a perception, an understanding that brings an individual on a much higher level than positive thinking. This perception does not require imagination or assumption and it brings an individual up to a realistic level that is independent of the people or the circumstances that surround him. This perception and level was clearly seen in Yogiji Maharaj’s life.

YOGIJI MAHARAJ: FROM THE OUTSIDE

Yogiji Maharaj’s entire life was filled with indescribable hardships. From suffering countless illnesses to tolerating ruthless abuse, the hardships that Yogiji Maharaj encountered were severe enough to emotionally move and bring tears to anyone’s eyes. Every day was a chance for Yogiji Maharaj to protest and complain. Every day was an opportunity for Yogiji Maharaj to be miserable. Yet, not one second passed by where Yogiji Maharaj experienced even the slightest bit of despair. He permanently lived in a dimension that was far beyond positive thinking or what the outside world could even conceive. He was at a level that was absolutely free from fluctuations.

How was this possible? It was because his perception was dependent not on mere assumptions, but on something that was real. In addition, it was based on a constant principle that was not subject to change, despite the continuous fluctuations that occurred in his external surroundings. Yogiji Maharaj often revealed this principle when he would explain, “*Brahmaswaruppanāno ānand ek kshana paṇ molo padvā devo nahi*” – “Never let the joy of your *brahmaswarup* realization wane for even a second.”

PERCEPTION

There are three different levels of perception that people possess. The first level of perception is physical – a perception that most people possess. It stops at the exterior qualities of an individual: the way that person looks, talks, walks and behaves. Hence, they base their conceptions on what they see from the outside. Consequently, their conceptions continuously change along with the changes that occur in that person’s exterior.

The second level of perception is interior, which only few people possess. Their perception is able to penetrate the exterior and reach the internal qualities or character of another

person. But when the qualities of that individual fluctuate, so do the thoughts and feelings towards that person.

But the third level of perception is divine. This type of perception is so powerful that it penetrates both the external appearance and the interior qualities of an individual and reaches the divinity that each soul possesses. That is why Tulsidas has stated:

*Tulsi jyāke mukhanse, bhule nikse Rām;
Tāke pagki paheniyā , mere tanki chām.*

Tulsidas says that if the word ‘Rama’ unknowingly escapes a person’s mouth, I would use my skin to make shoes for that person. In return for a simple action, how is such an extraordinary level of sacrifice even imaginable? It is because wherever that person looks, he does not see the same person we see or even their inherent qualities or flaws. He only sees divinity. He sees Rama. This was the perception that Yogiji Maharaj possessed.

Yogiji Maharaj’s perception pierced through everything and stopped only at God residing in each individual. His perception was based on a principle that never changed. Thus, the blissful experience that Yogiji Maharaj had based his perception remained steady. From any other person’s point of view, even though Yogiji Maharaj was surrounded by difficult circumstances or by people who had obvious faults, to Yogiji Maharaj, he was constantly surrounded by and submerged in divinity. As a result, Yogiji Maharaj was able to experience ‘*Brahmaswaruppanāno ānand*’ every second of his life.

Once Jetha Bhagat (Sanatan Swami) asked Yogiji Maharaj, “Swami, I am your disciple. Why do you call me guru?” Yogiji Maharaj stated, “I believe everyone to be *gunatit* and see Maharaj in everyone. That is why I acknowledge everyone as ‘guru’.” It was this perception that eclipsed all the flaws and drawbacks that any individual possessed. His perception focused on the divinity of that person due to his relationship with

God. Consequently, Yogiji Maharaj never had *abhav* or took *avagun* (fault) of anyone. This was the reason that elevated Yogiji Maharaj to such a high spiritual altitude and allowed him to experience constant bliss.

THROUGH THE EYES OF YOGIJI MAHARAJ

The bliss that Yogiji Maharaj experienced was based on the greatness he had for other devotees. This understanding of greatness was not simply a belief or a thought that offered emotional comfort. It was an understanding that was based on that individual’s connection with God and his guru. Once, in Bhuji, Yogiji Maharaj told a group of youths, “When I speak of the names of devotees who had met Shastriji Maharaj and remember them, I experience peace.” The peace that Yogiji Maharaj experienced in his heart wasn’t based on the individuals themselves, but it was based on the connection that those individuals possessed with Shastriji Maharaj. Because this relationship with his guru never fluctuated and remained constant, Yogiji Maharaj’s experience of peace remained steady, unwavering.

Not only was Yogiji Maharaj able to see the relationship that those devotees possessed with Shastriji Maharaj, but he was able to actually see Shastriji Maharaj in all of them. In 1957 in Rajkot, Swamishri was having breakfast on the top floor of a mandir. After drinking a little *ukalo* (hot milk) and eating some *mamra* (roasted puffed rice), Yogiji Maharaj immediately stood up and exclaimed, “Let me serve. I see Shastriji Maharaj in everyone.”

Similarly, in 1964 in Ahmedabad, sadhus were eating ice cream one night. They offered ice cream to Yogiji Maharaj. Politely refusing, Swamishri smilingly said, “Do you want to keep me healthy?” Then immediately Swamishri casually made a remark that revealed his divine perception, “Shastriji Maharaj is eating within everyone.” The secret of Yogiji Maharaj’s experience of constant bliss and eternal peace

was simple – he was able to see his guru Shastriji Maharaj in everyone.

The extent to which Yogiji Maharaj understood the greatness of other devotees was unimaginable. During the All-India Special Train Pilgrimage in 1956, all the devotees went to visit Shri Arvind Ashram in Pondicherry. Only Yogiji Maharaj, another sadhu, Vinubhai and Jashbhai remained on the train. At that time Swamishri said, “Let’s do *pradakshinas* of this train.” The train had 18 long carriages. After doing one-and-a-half *pradakshinas*, Yogiji Maharaj began offering prostrations. Jashbhai asked, “Who are you offering prostrations to?” Swamishri answered, “I am doing *dandvats* to the devotees.” “But not one single devotee is present. Everyone is at the ashram,” Jashbhai explained. Immediately and enthusiastically Yogiji Maharaj replied, “But their luggage is here!” The guru of thousands, a person to whom even great scholars and professors bowed their heads to was doing *dandvats* to the luggage of ordinary devotees, simply because of their relationship with God.

As Yogiji Maharaj’s understanding was based on a relationship that was never subject to change, he was able to retain the same level of reverence to those whose flaws were obvious. One afternoon in Gondal, Gunvantbhai complained about one youth to Yogiji Maharaj, “Bapa, he doesn’t do *seva* and he smokes.” Swamishri responded with a question that left Gunvantbhai dumbfounded. Yogiji Maharaj asked, “Have you had Shastriji Maharaj’s darshan?” “No,” replied Gunvantbhai. “He has had the darshan of Shastriji Maharaj. He is older than you. You should understand his greatness.”

The climax of Yogiji Maharaj’s perception was when his belief in the greatness of those who had continuously troubled him did not waver. In 1952, in Bochasan, on the night of Guru Punam, Yogiji Maharaj was going to sleep. Vinubhai, along with other youths, were massaging his feet. Vinubhai had mild ill-feelings towards one

of Yogiji Maharaj’s *sevaks* due to his recklessness and irresponsibility. Sensing his feelings, Yogiji Maharaj stated, “Vinubhai, that *sevak* has done a lot of *seva* of Shastriji Maharaj. We have obtained a holy *sevak*. I should do his *seva*.” Even though that *sevak* had harassed Yogiji Maharaj and had compelled him to tolerate, all his faults became insignificant as a result of his association with Shastriji Maharaj. Hence, Yogiji Maharaj’s perception had penetrated through all the painful situations that the *sevak* placed him in and focused on the divinity he possessed.

When a person’s perception is able to reach the inner divinity within everyone, he is able to experience constant bliss. This experience of bliss is independent of his external surroundings or of the people he interacts with. This level is not simply a concept or belief, but it is a reality that could be seen throughout Yogiji Maharaj’s life.

BECOMING ONE

Even though we have never been and never will be compelled to suffer the same severe circumstances that Yogiji Maharaj did, why is that we are unable to experience the same level of happiness that he experienced? The answer is simple: it is because there is a vast difference between his perception and ours, resulting in a great differential between his experience and ours. Once we adopt Yogiji Maharaj’s way of perception; once we are able to see the divinity that everyone possesses – his experience will become ours. Thus, when our surrounding circumstances are unfavourable, when the people we interact with fail to meet our expectations, or when the faults of others seem to be intolerable, our experience of bliss will still remain constant – independent of all these external factors. Even amidst a situation that would naturally disturb others, we would still be able to retain stability and our inner happiness. Perhaps this is why Pramukh Swami Maharaj often states, “Only when we are able to see God in everyone can we experience the bliss of God.” ♦



YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S ATMANISHTA

Yogiji Maharaj was a self-realized Sadhu. Out of his realization of his own atma, he was able to tolerate pain, discomfort and insults. Nothing could disturb him from his experience of inner bliss.

Would we feel upset if someone embarrassed us, especially in front of our friends? Would it annoy us if we stumbled into a fall and ended up with a few scratches? Would we throw a tantrum, or at least feel aggravated, if our favourite item on the menu wasn't made in the way we liked? Would it sadden us if the clique we belonged to forgot to invite us to a group outing? Then there are the more troublesome problems we encounter in life, such as, illnesses, financial instability, disunity in the family, domestic violence, a death in the family, and others. In short, life is full of

problems, and they often disturb us.

However, unlike the rest of us, our guru *parampara* has remained stable even under the most troublesome circumstances. They have not allowed unfavourable situations snatch away their constant state of bliss. Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj reveals this unwillingness to allow circumstances to dictate happiness in the Yogi Gita when he states, "*Potāno Brahmaswaruppanāno ānand, kshan pan molo padvā devo nahi*" – "Never let the joy of your *brahmaswarup* realization wane for even a second."

“BELIEVE YOURSELF TO BE AKSHARRUP”

These are not just words, but a reflection of personal experience, evident through countless instances in Yogiji Maharaj’s life.

In 1938 Yogiji Maharaj was in Gondal. In haste Baldevcharan Swami accidentally spilled ghee onto the floor. It was a time when ghee was a luxury that was not often available. Nirgun Swami passed by and noted the spilt ghee. Baldevcharan Swami’s hands began trembling; Nirgun Swami would surely be upset with him he thought. At a distance Yogiji Maharaj watched as the plot unfolded and immediately stepped in. Before Nirgun Swami could scold Baldevcharan Swami, he revealed that he himself had accidentally spilt the ghee and that Baldevcharan Swami was not to be blamed. Baldevcharan Swami stood in awe as Yogiji Maharaj took the blame upon himself.

“Nirgun Swami tells you off frequently,” Hakabhai commented to Yogiji Maharaj. “How can you tolerate it with such a smiling face?”

Yogiji Maharaj laughed while nodding his head and replied, “Guru! We should believe ourselves to be Akshar, then we won’t believe anyone to be inferior or greater than us.” He then continued, “So, Hakabhai! If you believe yourself to be *aksharrup*, all these things [being ridiculed and scolded] would become meaningless.” In just a few words, Yogiji Maharaj revealed his secret for tolerance.

“WHAT MISERY IS THERE IN ATMANISHTA”

Such an understanding not only has the ability to make one immune to mental disturbance, but also to physical pain. In 1940, Swamishri was in Gondal. He was unable to eat anything because he had developed an infection in his bottom lip which caused his entire lip to swell. Devotees took Yogiji Maharaj to Dr Devshi’s clinic. The doctor inspected the swelling and hesitantly revealed that he would have to take the pus out. He warned, however, that the treatment would

cause excruciating pain.

“Squeeze the pus out,” Yogiji Maharaj said confidently, “I will tolerate the pain.”

The doctor used tweezers to remove the pus. For twenty long minutes he kept squeezing and wiping the pus off Swami’s lips. Beads of sweat broke out on the brows of the doctor and those who had come with Swami. However, Swami remained unmoved.

The procedure finally came to an end leaving the doctor mesmerized. The doctor declared that it was nearly impossible for anyone to tolerate the pain like Yogiji Maharaj had, and that, too, without being sedated. Throughout the twenty minutes, Yogiji Maharaj did not grimace or utter a sound in pain even once.

When asked about the pain Swami responded “Guru, what misery is there in *atmanishta*.”

To tolerate pain caused by some ailment is unavoidable. However, when circumstances result because of another’s negligence or ignorance, this pain often becomes not only physically, but also mentally unbearable. Yogiji Maharaj’s divine state (*atmanishtha*) also gave him the ability to tolerate this type of suffering with a smile.

Once in 1957 Swamishri was in Gondal and preparing for his afternoon rest. He had developed pain in his back and so Keshubhai, a railway-station master at the time, had arrived in Swami’s service. He was gently rubbing medicine on Yogiji Maharaj’s back when Govindbhai from Rajula also entered the room. Seeing that Keshubhai was serving Swami, Govindbhai asked whether he could take the opportunity to rub medicine while they massaged Yogiji Maharaj’s aching feet. Vallabhbai, another devotee in Swami’s service, and Keshubhai agreed to Govindbhai’s request.

Govindbhai rubbed the medicine for about ten to fifteen minutes. Yogiji Maharaj then turned his head back and asked in a low voice why there was a burning sensation. The devotees

checked and noted that there were spots of blood on Swami's back.

Govindbhai was a stone mason by profession, and his hands were rough because of the hard labour that he had performed over the years. When he rubbed the ointment on Swami's back, Yogiji Maharaj's delicate skin broke because of Govindbhai's coarse hands. With a heavy heart Govindbhai apologized, "Bapa, I rubbed my rough hands against your back with too much pressure," Govindbhai continued mournfully, "I ended up doing more harm than good."

"Does the *atma* experience pain or suffering?" Yogiji Maharaj asked. "Let the feelings of the body remain with the body. Don't be upset."

Yogiji Maharaj not only remained calm, but also dissolved Govindbhai's guilt. How is it even possible to make someone who has such an understanding ever miserable? Even another's suggestions to misery were thwarted by his *brahmaswarup* realization.

THE SECRET TO CONSTANT HAPPINESS

Once, in 1961, Yogiji Maharaj was in Mumbai recovering from an illness. "Bapa, your illness is intense," Gunvant Dani commented. "You must be really miserable?"

"What misery does the *atma* have!" Yogiji Maharaj replied firmly. "The body's pain remains with the body. With Shastriji Maharaj's blessings, I don't believe that I'm suffering."

"Bapa, you should take care of your body," the doctors advised.

"I don't know how to do that," Yogiji Maharaj said. "In fact, I haven't known how to do that from the beginning. There is no happiness in caring for the body. I enjoy the bliss of Maharaj's *murti*. Maharaj takes care of my body."

Having revealed the deepest of spiritual principles, Yogiji Maharaj turned to his side, closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Realizing himself to be *atma* was an understanding and experience that Swami always had.

Even in the middle of the night, he did not abandon this spiritual wisdom.

In 1969 Swami had once again arrived to Mumbai. One night, Yogiji Maharaj woke up to visit the restroom. On his way back, Niranjan Swami and Gunvantbhai both held Swami's hands and guided him to his bed. Yogiji Maharaj suddenly paused and placed extra pressure on their hands. "Gunu Bhagat, I am experiencing a lot of pain," Yogiji Maharaj revealed.

Suddenly changing his tone, Yogiji Maharaj continued, "What misery does the *atma* have! The body experiences suffering. If you believe yourself to be *atma*, then there is no misery." With just a few words, it seemed as if Yogiji Maharaj had displaced all of his pain. Soon after, he lay down in his bed and fell asleep.

TESTED BY TIME AND TIDE

Believing himself to be *atma* was Swami's secret to overcoming any difficulty. This understanding was his "*Brahmaswaruppanano anand*." Whether these difficulties be of sickness, caused by others, or extreme conditions in which he did *vicharan*, it was this singular thought that dissolved them. His *brahmaswarup* happiness overshadowed any discomforts, especially those he faced during his seemingly ceaseless *vicharan*.

Once, in 1957, Swami left from Sarvarkundla at 4.00 p.m. to go to the village Sejan. The dust and winds made the commute almost unbearable; however, to please devotees in Sejan he made about fifteen *padhramanis*. Thereafter, he left for another village named Bhamodra. A small procession was scheduled on the outskirts of the village, followed by another series of seemingly endless *padhramanis*. Swami eventually left to return to Savarkundla at one in the morning. His entire body was caked in dirt and each limb was aching. On the way back to Savarkundla devotees from the village Piyava approached Swami and requested that he grace their homes. Seeing that the devotees had

been waiting in the freezing cold for Swami to arrive since 9.00 p.m., he could not resist. His words brought tears to their eyes. Forgetting all discomforts Swami told them, “How can we not come to your town, when you have waited for us in this cold. Even God would have to come.” Swami pleased each devotee and finally arrived to Savarkundla at 2.30 in the morning. Despite a day of travelling and intense fatigue, Swami’s enthusiasm and bliss remained unchanged.

In 1964, ten days of a similar type of *vicharan* bears testament to the same unshakable enthusiasm. In a mere ten days Swamishri visited 24 villages in the area around Bochasan. Despite the lack of facilities and the extreme cold, he readily took part in the mini-festivals that were celebrated in each village that he visited. For hours on end he bore chilling winds silently while sitting in the satsang assembly. As if this were not enough, there was always a long list of *padhramanis* wherever he went. Despite these conditions he always had a smile on his face and never once complained about the situation he was in. He would meet the last person with the same genuine interest and care as he had met the first.

In 1967, Swami revealed his never ending spirit in Mumbai by stating, “After Shastriji Maharaj returned to Akshardham we travelled constantly for sixteen years. Because of your devotion we have stayed here for two months; otherwise, we would travel from village to village despite sickness, fever and fatigue – they were nothing. If someone would say, ‘You will fall sick,’ I would reply with enthusiasm, ‘Nothing will happen.’”

This eternal bliss that he experienced was the result of his unwillingness to give up the *brahmaswarup* happiness that he always experienced. This was that happiness that allowed him to endure not only discomfort and fatigue, but also inconvenience, with a smile.

INCONVENIENCE – WITH A SMILE

In 1944, a few days after the full moon of the month Vaishakh, Swami went to a village called Mirsapura. There, along with several other sadhus and devotees, he performed *seva* till late in the night. One night, after performing *seva*, he sang the *cheshta* and then went to bed at around 11.30 p.m. He searched the mandir for a location to sleep, but there was no place vacant. There wasn’t even a blanket to spare, and so he went out into the field, spread his *gataryu* (upper garment) on stacked hay and lay down to sleep. He felt something moving underneath, but he didn’t pay attention to it. Throughout the night he woke up three times to check what was moving underneath him, but because it was pitch black he couldn’t see anything. Each time, he went back to sleep. In the morning when he picked up his upper garment that he had slept on, a large black snake emerged and slithered away.

Remembering this event in 1968 in Gorana, Yogiji Maharaj revealed, “We went to Mirsapura. There was no place to sleep. There was also a shortage of blankets. I slept on a heap of dried grass, but there was a snake underneath. In Ghoghavadar I also slept in the open. The place was infested with mosquitoes and ticks, but I slept as well as I would have slept in a large mansion. Whether it is a small hut or a large mansion, it should be the same. We should become like what Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Loya 10.” In very few words Swami revealed the magnitude of his *brahmaswarup* bliss. Facility or unavailability, all become one for him.

Whether it be sickness or health, pain or happiness, convenience or discomfort, no circumstances could disappoint Yogiji Maharaj. The reason for his unchanging ability to experience constant bliss in any situation was his ability to experience *brahmaswarup* happiness. Let us join in his experience by imbibing this understanding in our lives. ♦

Yogiji Maharaj's Youth Training Camps



This year, 2012, marks the 60th anniversary of the BAPS Youth Wing established by Brahaswarup Yogiji Maharaj in 1952. As part of the celebrations an adhiveshan will be held in June involving all BAPS centres from throughout India. To encourage the youths to participate and prepare, a special demonstration of the various competitions was presented in the Sunday satsang assembly in Ahmedabad on 24 March 2012. At the end, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami addressed the 5,000 youths and parents who were present. A translation of his speech is presented here.

Among the activities which Yogiji Maharaj liked very much and encouraged were *adhiveshans*, *shibirs*, *gosthis* and *katha-varta*. He had a great inner desire that our traditions become firmly engraved in the lives of children and youths. All these activities, such as, memorizing shastras, elocution, *seva* and other things are not ordinary activities. The Adhiveshan [being held to celebrate 60 years of the BAPS Youth Wing] is not like other competitions which are held elsewhere. It is a spiritual event and a chance to perform *seva* and *bhakti* as per the wish of Yogiji Maharaj and

Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The main reason why Yogiji Maharaj began these activities is so that spiritual knowledge and understanding become an integral part of our lives and that we become *ekantik bhaktas*.

Throughout his life Yogiji Maharaj was always engaged in doing *seva*. In his early years, he would wake up at 3.00 a.m., and throughout the day, upto midnight, he would be constantly engaged in *seva*: cooking, washing utensils, cleaning and discoursing. Yet, even amid such a hectic and arduous schedule he would memorize passages from the shastras. He had memorized

all the Swamini Vatos, and during his discourses he would recite them from memory and explain them. He also memorized many Vachanamruts and kirtans. He did this despite his extensive daily workload.

A special feature of his life was that he was always engaged in singing bhajans and reciting memorized passages while he performed his duties. So, he wished that we all, too, develop this habit. That is why he encouraged the youths to memorize Vachanamruts, Swamini Vatos and kirtans and to recall them while performing any activity. His wish was that we think about these words, discuss them and introspect.

He did not hold *adhiveshans* as an exercise to show off one's memory power or intelligence; they were held to help one become more spiritual.

During school and college vacations youths accompanied him in his travels to the villages. He firmly insisted that they memorize Vachanamruts, Swamini Vatos, *cheshta*, *chosath padi*, *thals* and other kirtans on bhakti and the glory of the Sadhu by Muktanand Swami, Nishkulanand Swami and others. In this way, he gave the youths understanding, knowledge, ideas and the technique for introspection.

Youths would join him during their vacations with the intention of travelling to the villages and having fun. But as soon as they arrived, Yogiji Maharaj would engage them in *seva* and memorizing.

Yogiji Maharaj was such an expert teacher that he would split the 30 to 40 youths who had come into groups, select a leader from each group and assign different tasks to each group.

In the villages, the youths were required to do many things: cook, wash, fetch water from a well, clean, memorize and sit in the assemblies. Yogiji Maharaj would so arrange that the groups rotated through the various activities.

Many of the youths did not like memorizing, because they had just finished their exams and

so were tired of studying. So, they would often just leave and return home, while the others who were enthusiastic and *mumukshus* stayed. Everyone knew Yogiji Maharaj was very caring and kindhearted. However, he strictly, yet lovingly, gave such solid training to the youths, guiding them to perform *seva* and memorize.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj was in Jharola in the Kheda district. In the morning he was scheduled to go on *padbramanis* (home visits) in the village. So, the youths got ready to accompany him, thinking that it would be fun and relaxing. However, Yogiji Maharaj told them to stay behind and memorize Vachanamrut Gadhada II 51 while he was away.

The youths had no choice and, reluctantly, they stayed behind to memorize the Vachanamrut. After about three hours, Yogiji Maharaj returned and tested the youths. Then he picked up a *ghantdi* (small bell) and told them (in reference to the topic of the Vachanamrut they had memorized), "If by the command of the Satpurush you just ring a bell then you are behaving as the *atma*. So, by following my wish and memorizing this Vachanamrut you have behaved as the *atma*."

Just think, to behave as *atma* is a very difficult thing – even many rishis have not been able to reach that state.

This is Maharaj's promise to us: that by following the wish of God and the Satpurush enthusiastically and with faith, we truly gain great benefits.

Yogiji Maharaj used to say that Gunatitanand Swami, in his final three years in Junagadh, daily had Vachanamrut Loya 17 read. It is a very important Vachanamrut and was narrated by Shriji Maharaj with the following incident of Allaiya Khachar: Shriji Maharaj asked Muktanand Swami who was the best among the devotees. Muktanand Swami first mentioned the name of Dada Khachar, then he said some other names. Since his name was not mentioned, Allaiya Khachar

became so angry that he prepared to draw his sword to attack Muktanand Swami! However, Shriji Maharaj perceived the situation and praised Allaiya Khachar, thus calming him down.

Shriji Maharaj also talks about the need to tolerate, be humble and other important topics in this Vachanamrut.

When we became sadhus we were staying at Akshar Bhuvan in Mumbai. Once Yogiji Maharaj instructed us to memorize Loya 17. Only by memorizing it can we develop an awareness of Maharaj's principles and act accordingly. This is a long Vachanamrut and so, in jest, some sadhus would say that it is not Loya but *lodha* – metal (meaning it is very difficult). Even then Yogiji Maharaj insisted that we all memorize it.

He also told the sadhus to memorize the third chapter of Swamini Vato, and he showed his blessings on those who did so. There are many essential principles presented in it: on becoming *brahmarup*, free of faults (*nirdosh*) and divine.

In this way Yogiji Maharaj insisted on memorizing Swamini Vatos and, also important bhajans which contain very inspiring messages that motivate us, give inner strength and sustain us in Satsang. They help us to solve any small or big difficulties in our lives.

So, the Vachanamruts, Swamini Vatos and kirtans contain countless great nuggets of wisdom. This is so because they are the talks of manifest God and manifest Aksharbrahman, Gunatitanand Swami. And the kirtans describe the glory of Maharaj and Swami and their teachings. Thus, these are not ordinary talks; they are not worldly talks; they are divine talks. And the more we listen, analyze and contemplate on them, the more we benefit. Such is the immense power latent in each word and in each idea.

This was Yogiji Maharaj's way of engaging the youths in satsang. Since the satsang we practice does not merely include coming to the mandir for darshan or performing morning personal puja. These basic daily *niyams* are to be

observed, but the purpose of this *gunatit* wisdom is that we understand Shriji Maharaj's and Gunatitanand Swami's teachings in our lives, and what they expect of us. Only then can we become true *ekantik* devotees worthy of attaining Akshardham.

Often, people think that Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and, today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj endeavour and travel among us only to build mandirs, celebrate festivals and carry out other such projects; but they are all secondary. Their primary and most important objective is that we contemplate upon and understand this wisdom and sincerely practice it in our lives to become *ekantik* devotees.

This is the purpose of their travels among us. So, through these competitions in the *adhiveshan* youths become trained in understanding spiritual wisdom.

When people sing film songs, others praise them, but such songs are of no spiritual benefit. In contrast, these spiritual talks make us eligible for Akshardham. Such talks recited from the heart and mind have the power to transform us spiritually. For this reason, Yogiji Maharaj began these activities.

From 1954, Yogiji Maharaj used to write in his letters to devotees in Africa to hold *adhiveshans*. As a result, *adhiveshans* were organised in Kampala, Jinja, Mombasa, Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam or other major centres. The youths there did not know Gujarati and had no knowledge of our traditions, but to train the youngsters Yogiji Maharaj inspired and guided the devotees through letters.

In this way, Yogiji Maharaj insisted on these activities. In 1969, the first national *adhiveshan* in India was held in Atladra. Yogiji Maharaj inaugurated the *adhiveshan* and at the end presented awards to the prize winners.

Then in 1971 an *adhiveshan* was organized in Gondal. Yogiji Maharaj would encourage everyone by saying, "We want to gather 5,000 youths

to participate.” So, we prepared the invitation for the occasion and read it to Yogiji Maharaj in Gondal. However, we had forgotten to mention Pramukh Swami in the invitation, so Yogiji Maharaj told us, “You have not written Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s name. Write that the *adhiveshan* will be held in Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s presence.” Nobody could have anticipated at the time about what was to happen. Shortly after, Yogiji Maharaj passed away to Akshardham and then the *adhiveshan* was, in fact, held in Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s presence.

Yogiji Maharaj had tremendous enthusiasm for holding *adhiveshans* and *shibirs*, and engaging in discourses so that we all develop true understanding and become true *ekantik* devotees, earn Maharaj’s and Swami’s blessings to achieve the ultimate goal of human life. This is the spiritual objective of these activities; they are not for worldly gain.

So, all parents seated here today are especially requested to encourage their sons and daughters to memorize these talks, contemplate on them, understand them and imbibe them in their lives. In this way they will become trained and obedient. They will develop good character and serve you. By engaging them in these activities

(Contd. from pg. 19)

In 1943 Shastriji Maharaj arrived in Atladra on Poshi Punam. It was the day that celebrated Shriji Maharaj initiating Mulji Sharma into the sadhu-fold and naming him as Gunatitanand Swami. To celebrate this festival in the presence of their guru, sadhus and devotees from all over Gujarat had come to Atladra. On the day of the festival, during lunch, Shastriji Maharaj asked everyone what their plans were after the festival. When he asked Narayanswarup Swami, he answered, “Swami, we will be going to Ahmedabad.” Shastriji Maharaj then asked Yogiji Maharaj, who immediately replied, “Whatever you say, those are my plans.” Hearing this Shastriji Maharaj became extremely pleased and

their time is used constructively and their latent abilities flourish.

Once, when Yogiji Maharaj was in Mumbai, a devotee brought his 18-year-old son to him. The devotee complained that his son’s behaviour was mischievous and undisciplined and that he was out of control. The devotee requested Swami to improve his son. Yogiji Maharaj said to the devotee, “Once buttermilk becomes sour it is not possible to sweeten it. Your son has become sour, so how can he be sweetened. You have brought him here now when he is 18 years old, but you should have brought him from childhood and engaged him in bhakti, *seva* and *katha*. At this age his improper ways are set, so it is difficult to correct him.”

By involving your children in the *adhiveshan*, their time will be used constructively. Don’t think that this is a waste of their time and will disrupt their studies. It is good that they study, but to sustain that study these (spiritual) thoughts are essential. No matter what qualification a person gains, but if he lacks character and values, he may harm society.

By participating they will all earn Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s inner blessings. ♦

said to Narayanswarup Swami, “Naranda, you must learn this quality from Jogi Maharaj.”

Yogiji Maharaj’s love for his guru can be summarized in this one incident. Even something as simple as what to do next, was determined by his guru. He had simply given the reins of his life to his guru. This is the epitome of true love. This one statement shows the extent to which he lived for his guru. Any *agna* – small or big, whether it was related to *seva*, bhajan or austerity, whether it was for one month or eighteen years, whether it made sense or not – was followed because he loved his guru. It was this love that he wished to share with us when he revealed, “*Bhagwanma charnarvind sant, tema priti rakhvi.*” – “The Sant is like God’s holy feet. One should have love for him.” ♦

DOWN MEMORY LANE

1952-2012

BAPS Swaminarayan Yuvak Mandal, Mumbai

To commemorate the year-long 60th Anniversary Celebrations of BAPS Swaminarayan Youth Activities (1952-2012), the milestone events of the birth and development of Mumbai Yuvak Mandal have been presented here. In forthcoming issues, the accounts of other mandals will also be similarly presented.

Mumbai is regarded as one of India's leading modern cities. It is renowned as the financial capital of India and the hub of the Indian film industry. Amid its spiraling materialistic profile there remained the need to ignite a flame of spirituality for the BAPS youths.

That special moment dawned by the grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who through Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj introduced the true *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam. His first visit in 1932 ushered in the BAPS Satsang in Mumbai. Then from its fledgling state it flourished through the colossal efforts of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj.

In the history of the development of satsang in Mumbai, the growth of the Yuvak Mandal and Bal Mandal have taken great strides. After

Shastriji Maharaj concluded his work on earth in 1951, Yogiji Maharaj continued his legacy. In 1952 he established the BAPS youth activities wing (Yuvak Mandal) in Mumbai. The humble beginnings were initiated with only ten youths. Today it has mushroomed into thousands of male and female youths and volunteers. For two decades it was nourished by Yogiji Maharaj and then over the last 40 years it has been inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Due to its socio-spiritual activities, many *satsangi* youths have achieved success in their careers, have been groomed into BAPS volunteers and some have renounced their mundane life to become sadhus.

The story of Mumbai Yuvak Mandal, since 1952, is a memorable journey, based on the reminiscences of many senior devotees in Mumbai. We thank Shri Rameshbhai M. Dave,



Members of the first Bal-Yuvak Mandals, 1954, Mumbai. (Standing, first left, is Dr Swami as a youth, prior to taking sadhu *diksha*.)



Mumbai youths performing *raas* in a competition in 1955.

an erstwhile member of the Yuvak Mandal established in 1952, and Adarshjivan Swami for this account.

1952 The historic establishment of the first BAPS Yuvak Mandal took place in Mumbai on Sunday, 18 November at the instruction of Yogiji Maharaj. At that time the youths assembled every Saturday from 6.00 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. The eminent scholar and devotee, Shri Harshadbhai Dave, discoursed and provided guidance to the weekly youth assembly.

1953 Through Yogiji Maharaj's inspiration the Mumbai Yuvak Mandal prepared, for the first time, a handwritten volume of articles in only 20 days. After the conclusion of a special train pilgrimage of India by Yogiji Maharaj and devotees in Mumbai, an assembly was held at Sundarabai Hall. During this assembly members of the Yuvak Mandal, Shri Kishorebhai Dave, Arunbhai Dave (Ishwarcharan Swami) and others presented a handwritten volume of articles named 'Jnanyagna' to Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. On that occasion Yogiji Maharaj expressed his joy and instructed that the youths bring out such a volume once every year. Subsequently, youths wrote articles, poems and

drew illustrations for each volume.

1954 With Yogiji Maharaj's instruction the BAPS Bal Mandal activities was first started under the wings of Mumbai Yuvak Mandal.

1954 With Yogiji Maharaj's regular annual visits to Mumbai, lasting from one month to a month-and-a-half, he would take the youths to the Sanstha's farm for a night's stay and discourse to them. He also encouraged them to join him in his satsang travels during their school and college vacations. Subsequently, the membership of the Yuvak Mandal increased.

1955 Prior to Yogiji Maharaj's satsang tour to Africa he presided over a seven-day camp (*shibir*) for youths in Mumbai. Sixty youths participated at that time.

1955 On 28 January 1955, Vasant Panchmi, the first *adhiveshan* (convention) was held in Atladra for youth members of all centres in Gujarat. It was called 'Shri Akshar Purushottam Akhil Yuvak Mahamandal Pratham Adhiveshan'. Pramukh Swami Maharaj presided over the *adhiveshan*. In that a 'Central Working Committee' was formed and a Shram Shibir (Service Camp) was organized shortly after. From 23 to 29 May, a seven-day satsang camp was organized in Atladra with Pramukh



Mumbai Yuvak Mandal helped in arranging and conducting Bal Mandal assemblies and recreation.



From 1962 the Yuvak Mandal assembly came to be held at Akshar Bhuvan in Dadar under the guidance of educated sadhus.

Swami Maharaj as its chairman. The main agenda included speeches and elaborations on the Vachanamrut by senior sadhus and devotees. In all, 226 youths participated in the camp. The BAPS Volunteer Corps was established during the camp, with Balubhai Brahmabhatt (T.T. Saheb) as its leader. Food and lodging for the youths was provided by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The Mumbai youths also performed *seva* during the construction of Atladra mandir stairs (on left side) from foundation to finish. Discourses and question-answer sessions during the seven-day camp were held four times a day: morning, afternoon, evening and night. The main speakers were Harshadbhai Dave, Khengarjibhai Chauhan and Arjunbhai Mistry.

1956 Sixty youths from Mumbai offered their services during the 65th birthday celebration of Yogiji Maharaj in Sarangpur. At that time the second Akshar Purushottam Youth Adhiveshan was held. The Mumbai youths participated with enthusiasm.

1956 Yogiji Maharaj regularly wrote postcards, instructing satsang and *yuvak* mandals to conduct weekly and Sunday assemblies.

Over three to four years he wrote many thousands of postcards to Satsang centres. Thereafter cyclostyled copies were published from Mumbai. It was called 'Swaminarayan Satsang Patrika'. Initially, from 5 December 1956, about 150 *patrikas* (newsletters) were printed and sent to all *mandals*. This service was shouldered by the Mumbai Yuvak Mandal.

1960 During his second satsang tour to Africa Yogiji Maharaj instructed that a second summer spiritual camp (*jnan shibir*) be held in Mumbai. He wrote a detailed letter as to what programmes to include and appointed Harshadbhai Dave as the leader. As part of the *shibir* programme 63 youths travelled from Mumbai to Atladra, Vadodara, Napad, Anand, Sokhda, Aasoj, Nadiad, Ahmedabad, Gondal, Bandhiya, Manavadar, Sardargadh, Rajkot, Dangra, Bhadra, Gadhada, Sarangpur and other sacred places. For 30 days the youths of Mumbai and other centres did *seva*, discussed spiritual topics, offered bhakti and sang kirtans.

1961 Yogiji Maharaj gave sadhu *diksha* to 51 youths at Gadhada on the occasion of his 71st birthday celebration. Of them 18

Yogiji Maharaj spent hours talking and discussing about satsang with youths of Mumbai Yuvak Mandal. During the summer vacations the youths joined him in his travels, during which he inspired them academically and spiritually. Every early morning he discoursed to and motivated them. Even today those former youths have fresh memories of his pure love.



youths were from Mumbai.

1961 For the development of Satsang in Mumbai Yogiji Maharaj appointed a working committee of nine devotees and promoted the activities in 16 suburbs. He also appointed 16 *karyakars* (volunteers) for each suburb for the growth of Satsang. In this way a new chapter was added for the progress of the Yuvak Mandal.

1961 Yogiji Maharaj performed the *pran-pratishtha* at Akshar Bhuvan, opposite Dadar central railway station, on 15 December 1961 (Magshar *sud* 8). Thereafter the newly initiated sadhus started residing there and henceforth the weekly *yuvak* assembly (*sabha*) was shifted here. Previously the *yuvak sabha* used to be held on a rotational basis in various places.

1962 On the auspicious occasion of the *murti-pratishtha* in Mehalav on 8 December 1962 a youth convention was held in which the Mumbai Yuvak Mandal had participated.

1965 During the Centenary Celebration of Shastriji Maharaj in Atladra youths of Mumbai offered voluntary services. They looked after the exhibition and served the invited guests.



'Jnanyagna', compilation of handwritten articles by Mumbai youths.

1967 The Mumbai Yuvak Mandal offered significant *seva* during the Amrut Mahotsav of Yogiji Maharaj in Gondal.

1969 From 8 to 11 May 1969 the second National Yuvak Adhiveshan was held in Atladra in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj. Various competitions were held. In all, 350 youths participated, out of which the maximum number of prizes and shields were won by Mumbai youths.

1970 The Mumbai Yuvak Mandal welcomed and honoured Yogiji Maharaj with a marching band on his return to Mumbai from his third satsang tour abroad. Since 1952 Mumbai has been a pioneer of youth activities like spiritual discussions

Some Mumbai youths were given *parshad diksha* and dedicated their lives to Yogiji Maharaj, thus scripting history in the annals of Satsang. **Left Photo, standing from left:** Anupam Rathod (Bhagvatpriya Swami), Suryakant Patel (Niranjan Swami), Mahendra Patel (Tyagvallabh Swami), Niranjan Dave (Siddheshwar Swami); **Seated from left:** Ranchhodbhai Patel (Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami), Madhu Jasani, Vinu Bhagat (Mahant Swami), Arun Dave (Ishwarcharan Swami) and Narayan Pattani (Viveksagar Swami).

Right photo: Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami with newly initiated *parshads*.





Mumbai youths with Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami during the National Yuvak Adhiveshan in Atladra. Mumbai received a shield as first prize for best *mandal*.

(*gnan goshti*), *shibirs*, picnics, personal contact and handwritten magazines.

1971 With the wish of Yogiji Maharaj the third National Yuvak Adhiveshan was held in the presence of Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj at Gondal. In all, 1,200 youths participated in various competitions. The Mumbai Yuvak Mandal ranked as the second best Yuvak Mandal. The Mumbai youths had also won the Best Youth award.

1972 ‘Satsang Exams’ for youths and devotees in India and abroad were introduced through the wish of Yogiji Maharaj and blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Its administrative office was established in Mumbai. In its first year, 2056 devotees appeared for the ‘Prarambha’ (first year) exam in 65 centres of Gujarat. Balvantrai B. Brahmabhatt (Balubhai T.T.) was appointed as chief administrator of Satsang Exam activity.

1973 Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 53rd birthday celebration was held in Ahmedabad. At that time Swamishri gave *diksha* to 53 youths, of which 25 were from Mum-

bai. The Mumbai youths also contributed their services during the celebration.

1976 On the occasion of the Silver Jubilee Celebration of BAPS Yuvak Mandal the fourth National Yuvak Adhiveshan was held in Vidyanagar. Youths from Mumbai participated and won several prizes.

1978 In the regional Yuvak Adhiveshan, youths from Mumbai had achieved significant success.

1980 As part of the five-year celebration programmes of the Bicentenary of Bhagwan Swaminarayan the 199th Hari Jayanti festival was held in Mumbai. Members of Mumbai Yuvak Mandal rendered noteworthy services.

1981 As part of the Bicentenary Celebrations year of Bhagwan Swaminarayan 62 youths travelled to villages and towns to spread the message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The Mumbai youths actively participated in spreading the message in villages.

1981 During the Bicentenary Year morning devotional walks (*prabhat feris*) in various suburbs of Mumbai were done



Pramukh Swami Maharaj and sadhus preside over an assembly of BAPS volunteers, Mumbai.

while chanting the Swaminarayan *dhun*. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had joined some of these walks. The Mumbai youths offered their services for many months for the Bicentenary Celebrations held in Ahmedabad.

1983 During the *murti-pratishtha* of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Dadar, Mumbai, and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 63rd Birthday Celebration, youths were involved in planning and preparing the festival grounds.

1985 Mumbai youths offered their *seva* during the Bicentenary Celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami in Ahmedabad.

1986-1987 During the Kalash Mahotsav of Dadar Mandir and Swamishri's 66th and 67th birthday celebrations youths offered their services.

1990 Mumbai youths participated in the Yuvak Adhiveshan at Vidyanagar and achieved remarkable success in a number of competitions.

1993 Mumbai youths offered yeomen's service in providing relief and rehabilitation to the victims of the earthquake that rav-

aged Latur, Osmanabad, and other towns of Maharashtra.

1995 The celebration of Swamishri's Amrut Mahotsav in Mumbai enabled youths to offer *seva* in different departments on site.

2003 Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated the newly built 'Yogi Sabhagruh' and fulfilled Yogiji Maharaj's wish for a huge satsang assembly hall. The hall provided further impetus to satsang and youth activities.

1996-2012 Through the blessings and efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the weekly visits to satsang assemblies in the suburbs by sadhus several Sanskardhams were established.

At present there are 225 *bal-balika mandals*, 46 satsang *mandals*, 101 *mahila mandals*, 81 *yuvak-yuvati mandals* and 21 *hari mandals* in the suburbs of Mumbai.

Every year, youths actively organize and participate in personal contact campaigns, *shibirs*, exhibitions, training programmes and festivals. The contribution of youths to the growth of Satsang in Mumbai has been extraordinary. ♦

Translated from

Swaminarayan Prakash, February 2012

Andal

Profuse in her bhakti to Narayana, Andal is one of the 12 Alvar saints of South India.

INTRODUCTION

Andal is to the South what Mira is to the North. They belonged to the top league of Krishna devotees and loved him with an ecstasy that is evergreen. The only difference: Andal praised Krishna in words, whereas Mira not only composed bhajans but also danced in front of her Girdhar Gopal. The saint-poets were separated by a few centuries, but the fervour of their devotional poetry has not diminished with the passage of time. Their compositions have inspired millions of Krishna worshippers to revere him all the more. Andal's *murti* is to be found in all Srivaishnava mandirs, as she is revered as an avatar of Sri (Lakshmi), Vishnu's consort, along with other Alvars. She is the only female among the 12 Vaishnava saints called Alvars (also written as Alwars). Alvars were saints who were 'immersed in the love of God'.

The Alvars are supposed to be of hoary antiquity; the ancient (first group) of saints going back to the 5th millennium BCE and coming down to 2706 BCE. Vaishnava tradition sticks to this time frame. Dr R.G. Bhandarkar, however, dismisses these dates as of unlikely early antiquity. The generally accepted dates are between 700 CE and 900 CE.

The Alvars composed *pasurams* (verses) in praise of Narayana. They are called *Divya Prabandhams* (divine compositions). There are in all 4,000 verses. The philosophy propounded by the Alvars runs something like this: the forms of *moksha* are bhakti (devotion), *prapatti* (total surrender), and *kainkary*a (service to God in his various aspects). These *Prabandhams* contain



effusive praise of incarnations like Rama and Krishna, as well as deities in mandirs like Tirupati and Srirangam, which are considered fully conscious *archavataras* (*murtis*). Set to music, these verses are chanted daily during the month of Margashira (Maghshar) in Srivaishnava mandirs. They constitute an important part of the devotional literature of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and

Andhra Pradesh.

The 4,000 verses are divided into four parts, each approximately of 1,000 verses. That is why they are called *Nalayiar Divya Prabandhams* (*nal*: four, *ayiar*: thousand). The first 1,000 verses contain songs by Vishnuchitta Alvar and his adopted daughter, Andal (Andal means 'One who attracts'). Andal is also called Godadevi and Kodai which means 'One with the beautiful hair'. Vishnuchitta wrote *Tirupullayedu* and Periyalvar (the Great Alvar) penned the *Tirumoli*. *Tiruppavai* (Holy Vow) and *Nuchhiyar Tirumoli* were composed by Andal. *Tiruppavai* occupies an important position in Vaishnava devotional literature. Ramanujacharya enthusiastically propagated it. Therefore, he is called Tiruppavai Jeer (Tiruppavai pontiff). He is also acclaimed as Godagraj (elder brother of Goda). It is said that when he fulfilled a vow by visiting Villiputtur, Goda appeared before him as a young girl; hence the name. According to tradition, she said, "The elder brother has fulfilled the wish of his younger sister by giving the *naivedya* (offering) of butter and sweet rice (cooked in milk) to Bhagwan."

The compositions were not written down

during the lifetime of the Alvars. It was felt that some of the *pasurams* (verses) ran the risk of being forgotten or faced the threat of misrepresentation. To obviate this danger, the first Srivaishnavacharya, Srinathamuni (824-924 CE), put them in writing after strenuous efforts. He and Ramanujacharya gave the *Prabandhams* an exalted status in the Vaishnava Sampradaya. They are also called the Dravida Veda.

Andal came into this world in a miraculous manner 1100 years ago in the Pandya kingdom of ancient Tamil Nadu. King Vallabhadeva was the ruler and Madurai, the seat of Tamil *sangams*, was the capital. Infant Andal was found lying in a box. Vishnuchitta was an ardent Vishnu *bhakta*. Once, while he was tending to his tulsi plants with a spade he struck something that gave out a metallic sound. When he dug deeper he was surprised to find a box in the ground. On opening it, he found a beautiful female child. Vishnuchitta accepted the child as a gift from God and brought her up with loving care. According to another account, Vishnuchitta handed over the baby to his wife and both of them jointly reared Andal.

Thus, Vishnuchitta, whom Andal succeeded as the seventh Alvar, was not her biological father. Vishnuchitta lived alone in a hut. He used to spend his time in making garlands for and worshipping Vatapatrasayi, (infant *murti* of Krishna or Balamukunda lying on a banyan leaf), which is the chief deity of the local mandir.

SIGNIFICANCE OF NAME

Since Andal was found inside the earth she was also named Goda: ‘Go’ means ‘earth’ and ‘da’ stands for ‘given by’). It was an apt name as Vishnuchitta found the child from earth. Both father and daughter subsisted on mandir *prasadam* as there was no one to cook food at home. Vishnuchitta, spent all his time in worship. He had no time left for anything else. Goda would lovingly join Vishnuchitta in tending the garden, and weaving garlands and offering them to Bhagwan. As she was growing up Goda stopped going to her

father’s tulsi garden but stayed at home and wove tulsi garlands which her father offered to the *murti* of God. This intense love grew with each succeeding day and is reflected in the *Tiruppavai*.

One day a strange thing happened, which changed Goda’s life. She thought, “Why not try on the garland woven for the Lord? I love him so much.” Thinking thus, she put on the garland and stood before a mirror to see how she looked. She liked the look of it; so she started wearing the garland regularly and then would take it off. Not knowing what was going on behind his back, Vishnuchitta would take the garland and offer it to God. Once, the father happened to notice what his daughter had been doing. He mildly chided Goda and pointed out to her the impropriety of her action. He did not offer the garland that day to God. But Krishna appeared to Vishnuchitta in a dream at night and told him he would like to wear the garland that had been worn by Goda, and this clinched the issue. This showed how Krishna appreciated and accepted her devotion for him.

It is said that King Vallabhadeva became an ardent Vaishnava after Vishnuchitta defeated a Shaivacharya in a debate arranged by the king. The monarch accepted Periyalvar as his guru. At first Vishnuchitta was reluctant to go to Madurai to participate in the debate as he had doubts about his intellectual competence to take on learned scholars whom the king had invited to the assembly. For, Vishnuchitta was good only at worshipping Narayana and was not versed in the Vedas. But the result of the debate showed that his fears were entirely unfounded. Vishnuchitta won with flying colours and was conferred the title of *pattharpiran*, chief priest, by Vallabhadeva.

It was after his triumphant return from Madurai that Vishnuchitta found the infant Goda in his garden.

USED IN WORSHIP

Tiruppavai (the Holy vow), Andal’s celebrated work, is used in daily worship during

Maghshar (December-January). In this work she imagines herself to be one of the *gopis* of Vrindavan. She imagines her town to be Gokul and Vatapratrasayi Mandir as Nandagopa's palace. In 30 verses she exhorts maidens to perform the *Katyayani vrat*. In olden days the *gopis* used to perform this *vrat* as a prayer to have Krishna as their husband. It was also observed to get good rains. (Nowadays girls perform this *vrat* while praying for good husbands.) Andal races through the streets, lanes and bylanes of Srivilliputtur waking her friends up. The purpose of her *vrat* is to pray to Krishna to become her husband. She imagines that she and her companions are in Vrindavan. Her companions thus become the *gopis* of Vrajamandal. The reason for waking them up in the morning was so that they could all go to the Yamuna for bathing. These songs are sung during the *vrat*. According to tradition, the elders of Vrindavan locked up their girls in rooms as they disliked the idea of their meeting Krishna. But they were set free to perform the *vrat* which, among other things, prevented drought. The classic brings out the fact that worshipping Krishna should not be treated as a personal affair between him and his devotee but should be participatory in nature that is why the *Katyayani vrat* is chosen as the occasion.

When Goda came of marriageable age, Vishnuchitta was greatly worried. The girl had to be married. But how was the question. He was a man of limited means, and finding a match would be extremely difficult. He did not reckon with the higher forces that were at work in this matter. But who would like to give his son in marriage into an ordinary family? Vishnuchitta was indeed perplexed. He was weighing the pros and cons like an ordinary father. He had to find a husband for his adopted daughter to keep off the idle sneers of the world. So, one day he asked Goda, "Whom would you like to marry?" She replied, "The Lord of Sriranga Kshetra. I shall marry no one else, except Sriranganatha." The answer, which delighted the father, showed

the extent of love the would-be bride bore for Bhagwan. But it introduced a new dimension to the matrimonial issue. The father was finding it difficult to find a mortal bridegroom for his daughter, and now the daughter is demanding the hand of Ranganatha himself. It is said that Goda performed the *Katyayani vrat* on the advice of her father when she expressed the desire to marry Ranganatha (the Lord).

GOD'S ROLE

Meanwhile, God himself took a hand in the affair. He appeared to Vishnuchitta and the priest of Srirangam Mandir in a dream and told them he wanted to marry Goda. Vishnuchitta's worries were over. His prayers had been answered. The devout Goda succeeded in finding a husband for herself. Vishnuchitta was thinking how to go to Srirangam as it was quite distant. He appealed to Vallabhadeva for help. The king made all arrangements for the wedding and led the bride's party from Srivilliputtur to Srirangam with all pomp and pageantry, caparisoned elephants, horses, etc. Andal was decked out in her bridal best. When she was led into the Mandir and came face to face with Ranganatha, legend has it that she miraculously united with the *murti* of the recumbent God. She was sixteen when this miracle happened. This is the ultimate in devotion and supreme example of personal love. We have in this a parallel of Mira uniting with her Gopal at Dwarka.

Now let us return to the *Katyayani vrat* preparations. In the poem, when Andal reaches Nanda's palace she finds all the principal characters – Krishna, Balaram, etc. – fast asleep. She had to wake up Krishna so that he could participate in the celebrations. That being of paramount importance she enlists the support of Niladevi, one of Krishna's consorts. Other consorts like Rohini and Satyabhama do not figure in the poem. As if to explain their absence, Andal establishes a bond with Niladevi by calling the consort her uncle's daughter. Niladevi on her part promises to do everything in her power to wake Krishna

up. At first, no amount of cajoling succeeds. Finally, Krishna is woken up.

INVITATION TO GIRLS

Goda adapted the episodes described in the Bhagavata in her narrative. Briefly stated, the first five verses are introductory in nature. In them she invites the girls to participate in the *Katyayani vrat*. They are exhorted to obtain from Krishna the drum which symbolizes union with him and to bathe in the Yamuna. She then narrates to her companions the difficulties in performing the *vrat*. Various restrictions and prohibitions are described. These are set off against the benefits that accrue from the observance of the vows, however difficult they might be. The rain god is also invoked for good rains so that people can reap a plentiful harvest.

The maidens are still sleeping and they have to be woken up. Verses 6 to 15 deal with this.

Goda asks them not to be lazy. After collecting the entire group she imagines she was going to the palace of Nandagopa. After waking up Nanda, Yashoda, Balarama and Niladevi, Krishna is woken up. These developments are narrated in verses 16 to 20.

The last ten verses express total surrender to Krishna after erasing the sense of I-ness and mine-ness. In the 29th verse the maidens say they are looking for any material symbols to signify their love for Krishna. Now the vow is about to be fulfilled and the girls prepare to deck themselves in their best and prepare to enjoy a feast.

In the last verse Goda sets out the advantages of reading the poem and the fruits that flow from it.

In one of the earlier verses before Krishna is woken up he is invoked thus: “*O son of him who is blessed with countless generous cows, showering milk that overflows the vessels placed under their udders, wake up. O the firm One, the protector of those who seek refuge in you, and the effulgent, shining all over the universe, wake up. In the same way as your enemies, overcome*

by your prowess, have come to your doorstep, to bow down at your feet, losing their strength and pride, we have come to you, to glorify your feet and pronounce benediction.”

This is a prayer of Goda to Krishna: “*O Lord, you, born as the son of another lady and you grew with her in concealment. As you grew up, frustrating Kamsa’s evil plans, he could not bear it and you became as fire in his stomach. We have come praying to you, who are madly in love with those who seek you. If you would give us what we want (the drum), we shall ever sing your glory, that is worthy of goddess Lakshmi, and your might. With our sorrows dispelled, we shall rejoice.*”

Another *prabandham* emphasizes the prowess of Krishna who killed several demons like the horse demon, Kesi, and wrestlers Mustika and Chanura, sent by his uncle Kamsa. The same *prabandham* also stresses the importance of group effort in worshipping God however exalted a position one may have attained:

“*We have kept back the other girls who were proceeding to the ritual and we are standing here to call you. O lady of intense longing. Get up! If we sing, to the accompaniment of the drum, about the God of gods, who slew the demon (by splitting his mouth) and the champion wrestlers, and worship him, surely he will take pity on us, enquire about us and shower his grace on us.*”

It is quite clear that Goda and her companions are more interested in meeting Krishna and they use the *vrat* only as an excuse. Their request for implements is a part of the plan, as the articles are always with Krishna. Their intention was to serve Krishna permanently by giving up all other wishes. They pray to the Lord to bless them.

Andal and the other Alvars promoted *madhur bhav* (bridal mysticism) in their compositions. Goda considered herself to be the bride of Krishna. The Vaishnava tradition considers each Alvar to be an article or person connected with Vishnu. Thus Vishnavnuchitta is the vehicle of Vishnu and Andal is Bhudevi (consort of Vishnu). ♦

Hindu Festivals

May-June 2012

4 MAY 2012

NRUSINH JAYANTI (VAISHAKH SUD 13)

On this day Hindus celebrate the appearance of Nrusinh Bhagwan. He incarnated for only one purpose; to protect Prahlad, the supreme child devotee from his demon father, King Hiranyakashipu. The latter tried in many gruesome ways to kill Prahlad, but failed. Finally, Nrusinh Bhagwan appeared from a heated pillar and vanquished Hiranyakashipu. Then Prahlad offered a unique prayer to Nrusinhji; to protect him from his *indriyas* (senses) and *antahkaran* and grant *moksha* to him and his father!

On this day, devotees observe a *farari* fast until evening, when Nrusinh Bhagwan appeared. Nrusinh Jayanti celebrates Bhagwan's victory over *asuri* (evil) elements.

17 MAY 2012

YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S JAYANTI (VAISHAKH VAD 12)

Devotees of BAPS Swaminarayan Sampradaya celebrate the birth anniversary of Yogiji Maharaj, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's fourth spiritual successor and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's guru. A special celebration assembly is held, during which bhajans are sung, speeches extolling the life and work of Yogiji Maharaj are made and cultural programmes are held.

25 MAY 2012

PRAMUKH VARNI DIN (JETH SUD 4)

BAPS devotees celebrate this *tithi* on which Shastriji Maharaj appointed Shastri Narayanswarupdas as head (Pramukh) of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, in the *hari* mandir in Ambaliwali Pol in Amdavad on 21 May 1950. After the appointment ritual, Pramukh Swami

Maharaj offered a sublime prayer, "Today O Gurushri, in front of you and this gathering, I pledge that I shall sincerely uphold my duties, without caring for my body, and in every way remain loyal to the Sanstha and faithful to you." Today at the age of 91, Swamishri continues to abide by his pledge.

31 MAY 2012

BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN'S PHYSICAL RETURN TO HIS ABODE AKSHARDHAM (JETH SUD 10)

Followers of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya celebrate by extolling Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine life, glory and mission to establish Ekantik Dharma on Earth and his continued manifestation through his spiritual successors, the first being Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami.

21 JUNE 2012

RATH YATRA (ASHADH SUD 2)

This is one of the most spectacular festivals annually celebrated by Hindus worldwide. On this day, Hindus install Shri Jagannathji (Shri Krishna), Balbhadra and Subhadra in huge *raths* – chariots, perform their puja, *arti* and offer *khichdi*, sprouted *mung*, *chana* (grams), cucumber, *jambu* and pomegranate. The three deities are then taken in a procession through the streets so that people can have darshan and receive blessings. Traditionally, the *raths* are devotionally pulled by devotees. The original and greatest Rath Yatra occurs in Puri in Odisha, on India's east coast. The sentiments underlying this festival is a prayer to Paramatma to steer the chariots of our mundane lives through *samsara* to attain *moksha*.



Rath Yatra, Jagannathpuri



Chandan adornments in Keshav Deva Mandir, Vrindavan

30 JUNE 2012

DEV SHAYANI EKADASHI (ASHADH SUD 11)

This day marks the onset of devotional rituals and fasts during Chaturmas – four sacred months. On this day, Bhagwan Narayan leaves his abode Vaikuntha to rest in *Satal* – one of the nether regions until Kartik *sud* Ekadashi (Deva Prabodhini Ekadashi). Devotees observe a waterless fast, offer extra devotion

by visiting mandirs, sing bhajans, listen to spiritual discourses, perform mantra *japa* and *pradakshina*. These are then observed during Chaturmas, since such devotional rituals and fasts accrue greater *punya* (merit) in this period. In many major shrines in south India, the *utsav vighraha* (mobile) deities are taken on a procession around the mandir in a palanquin on this as well as other important *ekadashis*. ♦

CHANDAN YATRA

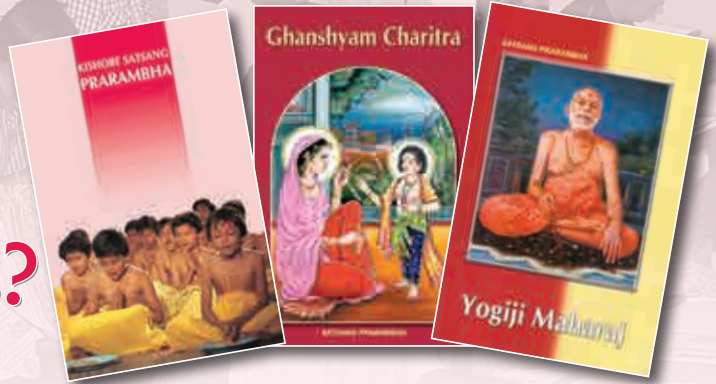
Chandan means sandalwood paste and *yatra* here means period (*parva*). In most Vaishnav *sampradayas*, this period begins on Akha Trij (Vaishakh *sud* 3). This festival of devotion lasts from 21 to 30 days during which deities in mandirs are smeared with white or coloured *chandan* and then decorated with various materials. In Puri and other shrines in Odisha, camphor, musk and saffron are mixed with *chandan*. The *utsav vighraha* (mobile) deity of Jagannathji, known as Madanmohan is taken out of the shrine with Lakshmi and Saraswati for a boat ride in the town's tank known as Narendra Sarovar. The beautifully decorated boats are known as *Chapaa*.

In Pandharpur in Maharashtra, Bhagwan Vitthal is offered *chandan* adornments during the month of Vaishakh. Similarly in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, the *panchdhatu* (metallic) and *utsav vighraha murtis* are offered exquisitely decorated *chandan* adornments for one month.

This form of devotion is known as *archanam*, one of the nine forms of devotion (*navdha bhakti*). The underlying sentiment of *chandan utsav* is that during this hottest period of the Indian summer, devotees offer adornments which have a natural cooling effect. Sandalwood paste has such a property. Additionally it is also innately fragrant.

Incidentally, in many shrines in south India, *chandan* is smeared on the deities throughout the year.

Why Satsang Exams?



I had been visiting the local BAPS Mandir since 2002. The spiritual atmosphere of a mandir is very purifying and uplifting. A mandir is a refuge from the negative material influences of this world. In 2007, after Pramukh Swami gave me initiation (*vartman*), I began following his command (*agna*) to attend Sunday satsang *sabha*. I play *tabla* at the San Francisco mandir. Since I am passionate about *tabla* and traditional music of India, playing *tabla* in the *sabha* inspires me to keep attending. The universal spiritual message of music can be conveyed to those who, like me, do not know much Gujarati. Also, the elegant and beautiful *murtis* magnetically attract me to the mandir. Just being in a mandir has spiritual benefits.

Jnan (knowledge) is a pillar of Satsang. However, my knowledge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, and the concept of Pragat Brahmaswarup was lacking. I only knew tidbits of BAPS philosophy through my conversations with devotees. Through Satsang Exams, I embarked on my journey into the heights and depths of history and philosophy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and BAPS.

I had been involved with Hinduism since the 1990s, and have studied about it since high school. I have read some of the major shastras like the Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharat, and some of the Upanishads. My impression was

that Hinduism is a vast and diverse religion with many manifestations of God. Specifically studying Vaishnavism and bhakti, I learned about incarnations like Krishna, Rama and others.

Studying about Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, the history of BAPS, the biographies of our gurus, and all the places considered holy by BAPS was an entirely new endeavour for me. I had to make an adjustment, opening my mind to a new universe I had not encountered during my previous studies of Hinduism. Of holy places, I knew about Vrindavan, but not Gadhada. Of sacred rivers, I knew about Ganga, but not Ghela. Of staunch women devotees, I knew about Mirabai, but not Jivuba. Of saint-poets, I knew about Tulsidas, but not Nishkulanand Swami. Of festivals, I knew about Rama Navmi, but not Swaminarayan Jayanti. Of shastras, I knew about the Shrimad Bhagavat, but not the Vachanamrut.

Learning about Krishna bhakti, I became familiar with Vrindavan and the *lilas* of Bhagwan Krishna performed there. Studying for Satsang Exams, I learned about the many *lilas* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. I learned about his Hindola *lila* at Vartal and his water sports in the Ghela river. I learned of his *raas* dance in Sarangpur.

Mirabai and Tulsidas are famous in the world of Hinduism. While studying for the Satsang

Exams, I learned about the poetic genius of Premanand Swami and his vivid descriptions of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine form and activities. I learned about Muktanand Swami's dance of absolute bhakti as he sang his composition 'Vhālā rum jhum kartā...', and the story behind the *arti* he composed which BAPS devotees sing. I also learned of Jivuba's deep and profound austerities to her beloved Lord, Bhagwan Swaminarayan. I learned how Queen Kushalkunvarba's devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan is on par with Rukmini's devotion to Bhagwan Krishna.

Reading for Satsang Exams, I gained understanding of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's purpose on earth. Bhagwan Swaminarayan said that he had come to liberate infinite *jivas*, and he made sure this path of liberation would remain open and available to all through his succession of Brahmaswarup sadhus. The previous avatars came for a specific purpose and departed after their purpose was fulfilled. Bhagwan Swaminarayan made his purpose clear: to liberate infinite *jivas*, regardless of caste or creed, through his promise to remain manifest, or *pragat*, through his Sadhu. The following incident from the Parichay exam book *Sahajanand Charitra* illustrates this point. A Kanbi farmer, considered lower class, complained, "During Ramavatar and Krishnavatar we were isolated. The monkeys and shepherds were liberated while we were forgotten." Bhagwan Swaminarayan responded, "I want to liberate these Kanbis and even all the lower class people....No one is to be left out this time"(p. 64).

Another inspiring story of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's infinite compassion comes from the Pravin exam book *Kishore Satsang Pravin*. Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave liberation to a prostitute in Jetalpur. All she had to do was follow his command to grind wheat into flour, and Bhagwan blessed her with the same

liberation he had given to one of his most senior sadhus, Muktanand Swami.

One gains a very positive outlook of Hinduism through the study of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *lilas* and work on earth described in the Satsang Exam books. He discounted superstitions, witchcraft and black magic. He also liberated members of all castes. He forbade animal sacrifices during rituals. He prohibited the practices of *sati* (widow burning) and female infanticide. Such reforms protected women. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's reformations give a positive impression of Hinduism to the world, and dispel misconceptions the world may have.

One gets a proper understanding of main Hindu concepts and rituals through Satsang Exams. One learns the meaning behind such rituals as puja and deity worship in mandirs. One understands that such rituals are not just performed blindly, but have deep meaning rooted in Hindu shastras. Also, through Satsang Exams, one learns that the true meaning and purpose of yoga is to attain liberation. One learns that the popular form of yoga that mostly deals with physical postures is only one of the eight steps of yoga. One also learns the meaning, importance, and traits of a true guru who can lead one to liberation. Thus, Satsang Exams provide a clear understanding of Hinduism to the world.

Realizing the pure divinity of our Brahmaswarup *parampara* is an essential concept gained through my study of Satsang Exams. I learned about the struggles our gurus underwent in propagating this true *upasana*. Throughout history genuine persons have faced tough oppositions. The way our gurus have faced oppositions and endured hardships is deeply commendable. The spread of Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* began with Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself, as he trekked throughout India, and practiced years of austerities. He faced natural calamities, as well as adverse forces which tried to defeat him.

But Bhagwan Swaminarayan, being omniscient, knew his pilgrimage was for all *jivas*, not only those present during his time, but for those in the future as well. He brought with him from Akshardham his purest Bhakta (devotee), Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has made sure that he eternally remains on earth through such a Bhakta, so he can liberate infinite *jivas*. Thus, he has given us our guru *parampara* (tradition of spiritual successors) of Brahaswarup Sadhus, and he promised this chain will remain unbroken. This alone is unique in the world of religion. During my previous studies and explorations of Hinduism, I have never come across a Pragat Brahaswarup Sadhu, or even this precise concept. As the Pravin exam book, *Akshar Purushottam Upasana*, proclaims, “This succession continues forever. At any one time, the path of ultimate liberation remains open through only one guru” (p. 171).

Knowledge gained from Satsang Exams about the sacrifices our gurus underwent for all *jivas* is awe-inspiring and humbling. I learned how Gunatitanand Swami and other sadhus were beaten and had dung thrown at them in the village of Juna Savar as they were travelling to spread Satsang. They were undeterred and showed love instead of enmity. All *satsangis* should strive for even a small fraction of Bhagatji Maharaj’s obedience to Gunatitanand Swami. He followed all commands from Gunatitanand Swami, doing any menial and sometimes dangerous tasks! One can easily realize that only someone with divine powers, one who is Brahaswarup, can do what he did.

Shastriji Maharaj, the beloved founder of BAPS, let nothing stand in the way of the absolute truth, the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. As with any truth-setter, he faced strong opposition that was at times life-threatening. He held no malice towards anyone. Despite the odds, but empowered by Bhagwan and his guru Bhagatji

Maharaj, he built the first BAPS mandir, and consecrated magnificent *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam which serve as the foundation for the current awe-inspiring growth of the Sanstha. Study of Yogiji Maharaj’s life shows us how giving one’s all for God and guru can bring the greatest joy. This joy and steadfast devotion to his guru made him immune to insults and violent beatings, like he and other sadhus experienced in Keriya. He met such abuse with a smile of love.

Finally, learning about our present guru, Pragat Brahaswarup Pramukh Swami’s life of sacrifice for humanity and all *jivas* is deeply humbling. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is following Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s decree to liberate *jivas*, regardless of caste or creed. Swamishri called and blessed the Harijans, who did not feel they were deserving of Swamishri’s blessings due to their caste. Pramukh Swami blessed them and uplifted them, calling them ‘Harina Jan’, or ‘God’s people’, inspiring a new sense of pride in them. Reading about such incidents during my studies for the Satsang Exams reassured me that the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy is the universal truth that anyone is eligible to practice and realize.

Through Pramukh Swami’s selfless service to Bhagwan and his guru, he has made BAPS an international organization. He has uplifted the spirits of villagers in the most remote areas of India, trekking through muddy trenches and intense summer heat. He has made everlasting impressions on heads of state from around the world as well. As I learned from the Satsang Exams, wherever the God-realized Sadhu goes the place becomes a pilgrimage site or *tirtha*. So, the mandirs Pramukh Swami has opened throughout the world, from Surat to Nairobi, from London to Sydney, and all the mandirs in North America are now *tirthas*, holiest of holy places. And he never takes credit, always crediting God and his guru. I have gained reverence for Pramukh Swami and BAPS

through Satsang Exams.

Through specific study of the book on Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, I have come to understand with more clarity the true form of Pramukh Swami as Pragat Brahmaswarup. If one looks up at the stars at night without knowledge, one is sure to be filled with wonder and become awestruck. One may even come up with his own story or theory about the stars. But if one begins to study astrophysics, and begins to understand the intricacies of the universe, I believe one's wonder increases. The same principle applies to understanding Pramukh Swami Maharaj as Pragat Brahmaswarup. Those without *jnan* (knowledge) can and have been filled with awe and wonder at the darshan of Pramukh Swami. When I first met Pramukh Swami, I knew I was meeting a rare divine personality, but did not have the knowledge about exactly who he is. Without proper study one may misunderstand and misinterpret Pramukh Swami's form. Through gaining knowledge provided by Satsang Exams and BAPS literature, one understands the true meaning of Pragat Brahmaswarup – Pramukh Swami's true form. A plethora of spiritual experts have propounded this truth of *upasana*. Being Pragat Brahmaswarup, Pramukh Swami is the ideal Bhakta of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and Bhagwan resides in him fully. However, Pragat Brahmaswarup is never God himself, but God's eternal servant, Aksharbrahman.

When I have visited some of the most sacred pilgrimage sites in Gujarat, like Bochasan, Sarangpur, Gondal, Gadhada, Lakshmi Vadi, etc., my visits have been enriched with meaning from the stories I read while studying for Satsang Exams. Reading and re-reading about these places I have visited bring up ever-fresh divine memories.

“Take the Satsang Exams and earn *rajipo* of Pramukh Swami.” These were the words of encouragement from our Satsang Exam

coordinator. He approached me to take the first exam, Prarambha, shortly after my *vartman* by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 2007. Taking the exams is Pramukh Swami's command to all *satsangis*.

I began studying, without really understanding what '*rajipo*' even meant. I quickly realized that succeeding at the exams was an enormous undertaking. I must admit that at times during my studies, I was overwhelmed with all the details. Not being from India was even more challenging. I hold a BA in English Literature from University of California at Berkeley, and I must say that the Satsang Exams were some of the most difficult I have taken. As I progressed in the exams, I found that knowledge of Gujarati was necessary, especially in the final, Pravin, exam. The exam required that I memorize seemingly endless Gujarati verses and bhajans. There were times when I felt saturated with information! I could not take in any more Hindu calendar dates, remote village names, and names of all the members of Dada Khachar's family. What was being asked on the exams was so minute and even the smallest detail was significant! But every effort was worth it. My success in all four Satsang Exams was the greatest feeling of success I have ever had, surpassing even all my academic achievements.

When I passed the final, Pravin, exam with first-class marks, a devotee told me, “Pramukh Swami's innermost *rajipo* is on you.” I was not really sure what he meant by this. Then, I went to India and found out. I learned that to follow Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *agna* is the essence of satsang. As Swamishri learned of my success in Satsang Exams, I realized that there is no greater joy in life than to please our Pragat Brahmaswarup guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

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THE DIABETES EPIDEMIC

Part 1

Diabetes is a major world health problem. Increasing affluence, fast-food culture and inactive lifestyles have caused a rapid escalation in the prevalence of this sinister disease.

Diabetes is fast becoming the 21st century's major public health concern, according to a recent report on the diabetes epidemic in a UK newspaper, *The Guardian*. Diabetes is nearly four times as common as all types of cancer combined. The incidence of diabetes mirrors the increasing global surge in obesity, a reflection of the urbanisation and westernisation of our lifestyles. It is estimated to be four to six times higher in people of South Asian descent.

It is therefore important for us to understand the condition, causes and measures to prevent or delay its onset. For those who suffer from diabetes, and their families, it is equally essential to understand how to manage this condition more effectively.

This article will provide basic background information on the types of diabetes, causes, incidence and the significant impact of diabetes on the entire body. The second article will provide information on the symptoms, prevention and treatment.

TYPES OF DIABETES

1. Diabetes insipidus (DI) is an uncommon condition that occurs when the kidneys are unable to conserve water as they perform their function of filtering blood.
2. Diabetes mellitus (DM) is a commoner condition that occurs when the body's

ability to handle glucose (sugar) is impaired and so the blood sugar level remains high. These articles will only deal with diabetes mellitus.

BLOOD SUGAR








The food we eat is broken down and the nutrients absorbed into the bloodstream. Among them is glucose, which is used by cells for energy. Insulin is a hormone secreted by the pancreas gland which enables glucose to enter the cells. However, when there is not enough insulin or the insulin which is produced does not work, glucose remains in the blood instead of entering the cells. This leads to a high blood glucose (sugar) level.

DIABETES MELLITUS

The two commoner types of diabetes mellitus are:

- ◆ Type 1 diabetes develops when the body's immune system attacks and destroys the cells that produce insulin. As a result the body is unable to produce insulin and this leads to increased blood glucose levels, which in turn can cause serious damage to all organ systems in the body. Type 1 diabetes can develop at any age but usually appears before the age of 40, and especially in childhood. Type 1 diabetes accounts for between 5 and 15 per cent

Organs Damaged by Diabetes

Microvascular Diseases Cardio- and Cerebrovascular Diseases	Microvascular Diseases
<p>Myocardial Infarction</p> 	 <p>Diabetic Foot</p>
<p>Atherosclerosis</p> 	 <p>Nephropathy Renal Insufficiency</p>
<p>Stroke</p> 	  <p>Retinopathy</p>

of all people with diabetes and is treated by daily insulin injections and adopting a healthy diet with regular physical activity.

- ◆ Type 2 diabetes develops when the body can still make some insulin, but not enough, or when the insulin that is produced does not work properly (known as insulin resistance). Type 2 diabetes accounts for between 85 and 95 per cent of all people with diabetes. It is treated with a healthy diet and increased physical activity. In addition to this, oral medication and/or insulin is often required

INCIDENCE

- ◆ In the UK, it is estimated that 2.9 million people suffer from diabetes, but of more concern, approximately 850,000 more suffer from the disease but are not aware (undiagnosed).
- ◆ The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that in 2010 285 million people, corresponding to 6.4% of the world's adult population, had diabetes. The number is expected to grow to 438 million by 2030, corresponding to 7.8% of the adult population.

- ◆ While the global prevalence of diabetes is 6.4%, the prevalence varies from 10.2% in the Western Pacific to 3.8% in the African region. However, the African region is expected to experience the highest increase, mirroring the growing trend in obesity.
- ◆ 70% of the current cases of diabetes occur in low and middle income countries. With an estimated 50.8 million people living with diabetes, India has the world's largest diabetes population, followed by China with 43.2 million.
- ◆ The largest age group currently affected by diabetes is between 40-59 years. By 2030 this is expected to move to the 60-79 age groups with some 196 million cases.
- ◆ Diabetes is one of the major causes of premature illness and death worldwide. Non-communicable (non-infective) diseases including diabetes account for 60% of all deaths worldwide.

CAUSES OF TYPE 2 DIABETES

These can be divided in to modifiable or non-modifiable factors.

Modifiable factors are those where we can

introduce changes, e.g., weight loss and regular exercise. Non-modifiable are those factors which we cannot change, e.g., genetic factors and family history.

- ◆ Family history (genetic) – the risk is particularly raised if a close family member suffers from diabetes, e.g., parents or siblings.
- ◆ Overweight or obese. This is now the major factor in the onset of diabetes, with the increasing incidence of diabetes mirroring the increasing global incidence of obesity (*Swaminarayan Bliss*, Sept.-Oct. and Nov.-Dec. 2011).
- ◆ A history of high blood pressure (hypertension), heart attack or stroke (paralysis).
- ◆ Women who suffer from polycystic ovarian syndrome and are overweight.
- ◆ Women who have suffered from diabetes during pregnancy.
- ◆ Those who suffer from mental health conditions.
- ◆ Certain medications, e.g., long term use of steroids.

HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES OF DIABETES

Over time, diabetes can affect virtually all the organs in the body. However, it is well established that good diabetes control reduces the risk of developing these complications, or reduces their progression.

1. Hypo or hyperglycaemia. These are extremes where the blood sugar level either becomes extremely low or raised. Both conditions are potentially dangerous and can impair one's level of consciousness.
2. Target organ damage:
 - Increased risk of developing heart attack or stroke.
 - Increased risk of peripheral vascular disease (affects circulation to limbs, especially the legs and may even lead to

amputation).

- Increased incidence of damage to the kidney structure, resulting in impairment of kidney function or even kidney failure.
- Neuropathy affecting the peripheral nerves, resulting in numbness in hands or feet.
- Skin damage often due to impaired sensation.
- Damage to eyes, resulting in retinopathy (damage to the retina resulting in impairment of vision or even blindness) and increased risk of cataracts.
- Gum disease.
- Increased risks of infections, e.g., TB, chest, gum and urinary infections.
- In men, it may cause erectile dysfunction (difficulty with erection). It is a well recognized complication and an early marker for the onset of cardiovascular conditions such as heart attack. The current evidence suggests that ED precedes a cardiovascular event by about five years and, therefore, men suffering from this condition will benefit from early intervention.

As Asians we will all have a close family member or friend who is affected by diabetes. Understanding diabetes and maintaining good control are the key to improving the quality of life and reducing the risk of developing complications.

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FAQs on Hinduism

From 'Hinduism, An Introduction'
by Sadhu Vivekchand and
Consultant Editor Dr Janak Dave



Om or Aum, one of the most popular symbols of Hinduism



Vedas are the principal sacred texts of the Hindus

1. WHAT IS SANATANA DHARMA?

Sanatana Dharma is the traditional name of Hinduism. It means the Eternal Religion. It is also called Manava Dharma and Arya Dharma (*arya* means noble) – the religion for humanity and religion of the Aryas (noble race of India). Sanatana Dharma is a religion that makes a human into a civilized person and teaches him or her the way to *moksha*. It is both a way of life and goal of life practised by Hindus. It includes beliefs, faith in and ritual worship of God. Sanatana Dharma is a federation of many *sampradayas* with common as well as different beliefs and practices. Hindus believe it is the oldest of all living religions.

2. HOW DID HINDUISM GET ITS NAME?

In ancient times one of the names of Hinduism was Arya Dharma (the religion of noble people). The name was derived from its people, who were indigenous to India and were known as Aryas and later as Aryans.

The Aryans lived on the eastern bank of the River Sindhu (also called Indus) in northwestern India. On the other bank lived the Persians. They called the River Sindhu as 'Hindu', because in Persian they pronounced 's' as 'h'. So they called the people who lived around and beyond the River Sindhu as Hindus. Later, the country was called Hindustan or the land of the Hindus. A couple of centuries ago the religion of the Hindus came to be named Hinduism.

The Greeks called the River Sindhu as Indos

and its people as Indoi. Later, they became Indus and Indian in English respectively. The country came to be called India.

3. WHO IS THE FOUNDER OF SANATANA DHARMA?

Sanatana Dharma does not have one single, historical founder or a specific date of origin. Hindus believe that the Vedas, the most authoritative primary sacred texts of Hinduism, are the oldest in the world, and are a revelation from God to many enlightened rishis of India. The rishis meditated on God, and in the state of *samadhi* they heard the truths revealed to them by God. The revealed knowledge of the rishis was passed on from generation to generation through an oral tradition, and it came to be known as Sanatana Dharma.

The Vedas are known as Shruti shastras. Shruti means that which was 'heard'. Later it was written and classified by Veda Vyasa into the four Vedas: Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva.

4. HOW OLD IS HINDUISM?

The concept of time is cyclical in Hinduism and not linear as it is in the West, where there is a beginning and an end. According to the Vishnu Purana (1.3 & 6.3), the four *yugas* or eras are Satyuga (1,728,000 years), Tretayuga (1,296,000 years), Dwapara (864,000 years) and Kaliyuga (432,000 years). At the end of the final era, namely, Kaliyuga, the cycle repeats itself, beginning again with Satyuga. So that is



Bhagwan Vishnu and his avatars



Good karmas mean kindness, charity, service, etc.



Guru-*shishya* tradition

why Hinduism is believed to be eternal or Sanatana Dharma. Also, since it was revealed by God, who is eternal, Hinduism is also eternal – hence the name Sanatana Dharma.

5. WHAT ARE THE CORE BELIEFS OF A HINDU?

Generally, a Hindu is one who believes in:

1. The existence and acceptance of one supreme Reality known as Brahman, Parabrahman, Paramatma or Bhagwan (God), and not of many Gods – which is the common misconception among those unfamiliar with Hindu beliefs. God, however, manifests in many forms called avatars.
2. The authority of the Shrutis (Vedic literature) and practises its principles.
3. *Avataravad* or the belief that Bhagwan manifests himself in human and other forms on earth to liberate souls from the bondage of *maya*, base instincts and the cycle of births and deaths. He remains ever-present on earth through a God-realized guru.
4. Atman, the unchanging inner self, is the essence of animate life. The atman is *sat* (eternally existing), *chit* (consciousness) and *ananda* (bliss). It is independent of body, mind, intellect and ego. In fact, it controls them.
5. Karma or the law of cause and effect. One's actions produce positive or negative results which affect one in the present

life or future lives.

6. *Punarjanma* or rebirth. Due to one's karmas and the will of God the soul (*jiva*) repeatedly takes on another body in the cycle of births and deaths.
7. *Murti-puja* or worship of God in the form of a *murti* (image). However, there are also Hindus who believe God to be formless (*nirakara*) or that he is simply light, and thus meditate on the divine light.
8. The guru-*shishya* tradition. Many Hindus believe that without a spiritually enlightened guru it is not possible for a person to realize and attain God.
9. Ahimsa or nonviolence in mind, action and speech. Hindus believe that God pervades all things, therefore they care for all living things.
10. The four *purusharthas*, which means the four goals or endeavours of human life, namely, *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. The ultimate goal is *moksha* (liberation of soul from the cycle of births and deaths and *maya* (ignorance), and the experience of the eternal bliss of God).
11. Varnashrama Dharma, which deals with the duties and responsibilities of Hindus in relation to their *varnas* (classes) and ashramas (stages of life).

Besides the eleven beliefs mentioned there are others which different *sampradayas* of Hinduism give importance to and practise. ◆

Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

February & March 2012

Mumbai and Sarangpur



Swamishri performs *murti-pratishtha arti*, Mumbai

FEBRUARY: MUMBAI

6, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Ranoli and Occhan.

8, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Moviya and Ghoghavadar in Gondal region and Chikhodra in Anand region.

29, Wednesday; Mumbai, Sarangpur

After staying for nearly eight months in Mumbai, Swamishri was scheduled to depart by helicopter to Sarangpur this morning.

According to his daily morning routine, Swamishri went for *abhishek* darshan of Nilkanth Varni, followed by darshan of Thakorji. Here, on the threshold of the middle shrine the small *chal* (mobile) *murtis* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Jabreshwar Maharaj were placed. Swamishri was given a *pichkari* (squirt-er) filled with coloured water to symbolically celebrate the *rangotsav* (festival colours). There-

after, Swamishri blessed all the devotees seated beneath the mandir dome.

At 10.00 a.m. Swamishri reached the airport at Parle Flying Club and departed at 10.10 a.m. The helicopter landed in Sarangpur at 12.20 p.m. Swamishri gave darshan to all.

MARCH: SARANGPUR

6, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandir in Damapura (Bodeli region).

7, Wednesday; Holi and Bhagatji Maharaj Birthdays Celebrations

First, Swamishri did darshan of the *murtis* in the assembly hall, followed by darshan of Shastriji Maharaj's and Yogiji Maharaj's rooms. Thereafter Swamishri went to the main mandir for Thakorji's darshan. Then he gave darshan to devotees seated beneath the mandir dome. This was followed by darshan of Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji and the Rang Mandap. Then Swamishri travelled by golfcart through the canopied assembly hall where volunteers and devotees were seated. Swamishri blessed all of them as he advanced towards the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. Here, a short skit was performed before Swamishri. After darshan of Shastriji Maharaj's *murti*, Swamishri returned on the same path to his residence to perform his daily puja.

A morning assembly was held to celebrate Bhagatji Maharaj's Birthday. ◆

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjavandas



PUSHPADOLOTSAV

(Festival of Colours)

8 March 2012, Sarangpur

MORNING

At about 10.30 a.m. Swamishri came to the lawn behind his residence to specially bless the sadhus with coloured water. First Swamishri performed *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Then a tiny sprinkler in the hands of Harikrishna Maharaj was activated to spray Swamishri with coloured water, and Swamishri also sprinkled coloured water on Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

Pujya Mahant Swami and Pujya Dr Swami honoured Swamishri with garlands, and Pujya Kothari Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami tied strings of flowers on Swamishri's wrists. Thereafter, Swamishri first sprayed coloured water on the senior sadhus and then on all sadhus as they filed past before him. The tempo of devotion and joy was enhanced with the singing of bhajans and lively rhythms. For one hour Swamishri joyously drenched the sadhus with coloured water, making the occasion festive and memorable.

AFTERNOON

By 3.30 p.m. thousands of devotees from India and abroad had started flocking to the festive venue behind the Swaminarayan Vidyamandir (school) grounds. The stage backdrop had huge colourful fountains made of wood and papier mâché and the *utsav murtis* of Akshar Purushot-

tam Maharaj were placed on a pedestal.

The theme of the assembly was 'Colour of Joy'. Speeches by senior sadhus enlightened and inspired the audience about Swamishri's life. Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke about how Swamishri has tolerated hardships to please everyone.

Pujya Kothari Swami spoke about how we should bear physical hardships that may come our way to please Swamishri. Then Pujya Anandswarup Swami discoursed on how Swamishri has pleased his gurus and devotees according to their wishes. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami talked on understanding the glory of all devotees to please Swamishri.

A number of Swaminarayan Aksharpith Publications were inaugurated by senior sadhus: *Renunciation, Reform and Women in Swaminarayan Hinduism* by Prof. Sureshbhai Raval, *Prasangam 2009*, India's Glorious Heritage (all in English), *Seva Aur Samarpanki Bhagirathi* by Dr D.P. Garg, *Upanishad Marma* by Sadhu Bhadreshdas, *Satsang Darshan*, Pt. 115 (DVD), *Shu na thay re Pramukh Swamine Kaje* (DVD), *Swaminarayan Bhashyam* by Sadhu Bhadreshdas (in Sanskrit), *Nilkanth Charitra* (in Kannad).

Pujya Brahmavihari Swami talked about God and guru being the centrepieces in Swamishri's life. Pujya Dr Swami explained what it means to

have God and guru at the centre of one's life. Pujya Mahant Swami elaborated upon how to sustain the thought of pleasing Swamishri in order to be blessed with his bliss.

After the inspiring speeches sadhus sang 'Var-tāl gām fulvādiye...' Thereafter, senior sadhus garlanded Swamishri and honoured him on behalf of more than 100,000 devotees.

Swamishri blessed the mammoth gathering, saying, "We appreciate your coming here to the Fuldol Festival by leaving aside your work. Wherever God and his realized Sadhu have travelled, those places have become sacred.

"Shriji Maharaj, his sadhus and devotees travelled to such small villages. There, Maharaj celebrated festivals and pleased the devotees and liberated them from *maya*. *Moksha* is attained by an association with God and by developing

firm faith in his greatness.

"One also attains *moksha* by remembering God, obeying his commands and observing moral disciplines.

"Shastriji Maharaj built this huge mandir here, and today thousands of people come for darshan."

Then Swamishri performed *arti* and puja of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Swamishri then sprayed coloured water on Harikrishna Maharaj and Harikrishna Maharaj coloured Swamishri with saffron-scented water from a small spray. Finally, at 7.35 p.m. Swamishri started spraying the devotees with sanctified coloured water. Swamishri sat for 20 minutes and thereafter departed from the stage. Thereafter an *utsav murti* of Swamishri was placed for darshan. In all, more than 100,000 devotees attended the festival. ♦

DIKSHA UTSAV

14 March 2012, Sarangpur

At 5.45 p.m. Swamishri arrived on stage for the *diksha utsav*. The ritual *mahapuja* for the *diksha* ceremony commenced at 4.00 p.m. in the presence of Mahant Swami. When Swamishri arrived he gave *bhagvati* (saffron) *diksha* to 24 *parshads* and *parshad diksha* to 44 *sadhaks*. In all, Swamishri gave *diksha* to 68 youths. During the *diksha* rituals Swamishri patiently blessed each youth and his father. The atmosphere was surcharged with divinity and joy. The youths who were taking *diksha* beamed with the joy of renunciation, and Swamishri, too, looked radiant, showering his inner blessings on the youths and their parents. Swamishri also blessed Shri Vijay Bhatkar, a renowned scientist who developed the 'Param' supercomputer for India. Thereafter, an audio blessing of Yogiji Maharaj was relayed.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "To give away one's son for *diksha* is very difficult. Today, I would like to congratulate the parents who have allowed and dedicated their educated



sons to become sadhus. I also convey my appreciations to the youths who have taken *diksha*.

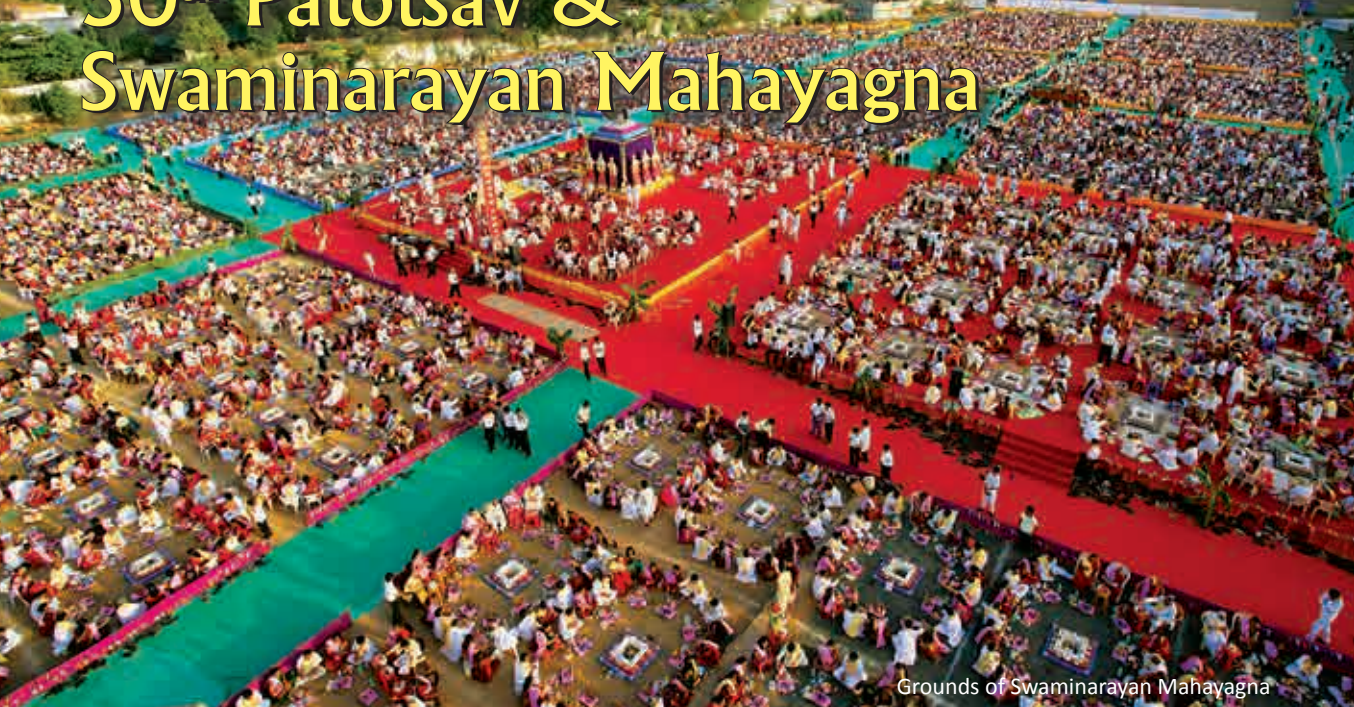
"It was Yogiji Maharaj's wish to have more sadhus. These sadhus will inspire thousands of people on the path of spirituality. Whatever one offers to God never remains fruitless or inconsequential, but one receives abundant returns."

At 7.45 p.m. the *diksha* assembly concluded with Swamishri performing *arti* of Thakorji. In conclusion, senior sadhus honoured him with garlands. ♦

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas

28-29 April 2012, Ahmedabad

50th Patotsav & Swaminarayan Mahayagna



Grounds of Swaminarayan Mahayagna

476

Yagna Kunds

430

Brahmin Priests

8,890

Yajman Devotees

31 Lakh

Ahutis

The 50th Patotsav (anniversary of *murti-pratishtha*) of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Ahmedabad, was celebrated on 28 April 2012.

In the esteemed presence of Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Doctor Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Kothari sadhus, the auspicious Parsnapan Ceremony, based on the Panchratra shastras, was performed to com-

memorate this special occasion. The first main ritual involved offering worship to twelve *kalashes* (water pots) containing water specially prepared by using grains, herbs, fruits and other items.

Then, using this sanctified water, *abhishek* was offered to the *murtis* in the central shrine – Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Shri Gopalanand Swami and Shri Lalji Maharaj.



Senior sadhus perform the Parsnapan Ceremony rituals



Mahant Swami performs *abhishek* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

Following the rituals, the senior sadhus who were present when Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the mandir in 1962 shared their memories of that auspicious occasion. Pujya Viveksagar recalled, “In 1962, prior to the *murti-pratishtha* a grand procession was held throughout the city. When the *abhishek* of the *murtis* was performed in the mandir, all the sadhus and devotees entered the *garbhagruha* and at that time Yogiji Maharaj bent over to scoop a handful of water in which everyone had walked, and reverently touched it to his head – such is the glory with which he regarded the devotees.”

Addressing the Patotsav gathering, Pujya Dr Swami said, “Yogiji Maharaj used to say, ‘A mandir is a college for *brahmavidya*.’ Gunatitanand Swami used to say that without learning *brahmavidya*, worldly knowledge is of no use. To attain *brahmavidya*, understand and imbibe three principles: *swarupnishtha* (firm faith in the glory of God), *sanghnishtha* (unity) and *swadharmanishtha* (*niyam-dharma*).”

At the conclusion of the rituals, an *annakut* was offered to Thakorji and the 50th Patotsav *arti* was performed.

At 5.15 a.m. on 29 April 2012, the Swaminarayan Mahayagna for World Peace began in the presence of Mahant Swami, Dr Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami, Viveksagar Swami, Kothari Satsangijivan Swami, sadhus and devotees. Inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj the Mahayagna was held to offer peace and to celebrate 50 years

of spiritual and social services rendered by the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Shahibaug. After completion of the initial rituals, senior sadhus addressed the devotees.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami said, “In 1948, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj acquired the land for this mandir and consecrated the *murti* of Lalji Maharaj. In 1959, Yogiji Maharaj performed the *khatmuhurt* of the mandir. In 1962, a grand three-day celebration was held in the open grounds of Madhupura Market just a 100 metres from here. Thousands of devotees participated in the *yagna* and assembly. Today, in the divine presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, this divine occasion is a special memory and whatever good wishes we make will be fulfilled.”

Pujya Mahant Swami said, “To gain maximum benefit we must stop all other thoughts and focus our mind on this main ceremony, and believe all devotees to be divine. If someone contemplates, understands, imbibes and becomes immersed in this principle then they will win over the world. They will experience unbroken joy. God is manifest here. Swamishri has also said that Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj are present here. These are not empty words.”

Pujya Dr Swami said, “To experience God purify the heart. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has said that there is nothing superior to worshipping God. And to purify the heart develop five things: *smaran*, *stuti*, *seva*, *sayam* and *satsang*.”

(Contd. on pg. 62)



Murtis of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj consecrated in BAPS Yogiji Maharaj Hospital



Young boys participate in the *janoi* ceremony

Living with Swamishri

February 2012, Mumbai



FEBRUARY 2012, MUMBAI **AVOIDING BAD COMPANY** **2, Thursday**

Swamishri was listening to a confession letter by a primary school student. He had been influenced by bad company from sixth standard. As a result he had strayed from goodness. He was indiscriminately surfing the internet, watching what he was not supposed to. When his father got wind of this, he tried to bring sense to him. He said that he should write a confession letter apologizing to Swamishri. The child wrote a letter and asked for forgiveness, “I swear from today that I will not watch such things on the net. I’ll not listen to bad things. I’ll never speak unwholesome things. And I’ll refrain from bad company. Have compassion upon me and forgive me.”

Swamishri blessed him and added, “Tell him never to eat what he is not supposed to eat. He should be resolute in abiding by what he has

pledged. Do not break moral commands. God will make him happy.”

SWAMISHRI’S VIRTUE OF PARTICULARITY **4, Saturday**

A devotee phoned Swamishri. He informed that his wife was in hospital. She had not recovered after two operations on her intestines. The daily hospital expense was ₹20,000. What should he do?

Swamishri replied, “I’ll call you back after some time.” Immediately thereafter Swamishri contacted an expert doctor to understand the situation. After assessing the situation Swamishri talked to the devotee, saying, “Have patience, you have my blessings.”

Swamishri is meticulous in all his works, small or great. ◆

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekshivandas



February, March and April 2012

Worldwide

BAPS SUPPORTS EARTH HOUR 2012

31 Mar. 2012, UK, North America, India

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandirs throughout UK, USA and Canada and Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, India, joined hundreds of millions of supporters in thousands of cities, towns and communities in a record 150 countries in observing Earth Hour 2012 on 31 March. Buildings across the continents switched off their non-essential lights for one hour at precisely 8.30 p.m. local time.

Demonstrating a year-round commitment to the principles of environmental sustainability symbolized by Earth Hour, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha is continuously finding new ways to creatively harness cutting edge environmental designs and materials in its mandirs and activities. Currently, many facilities utilize solar power, LED lighting, power saving fibre optics and management practices to ensure optimal and efficient energy consumption.

UK

ONE-DAY SATSANG SHIBIR: KARIYE RAJI GHANSHYAM

26 Feb. 2012, Coventry, UK

A one-day Satsang *shibir* themed ‘*Kariye Raji Ghanshyam*’ was held at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Coventry on Sunday 26 February 2012. This was the first *shibir* to be held at the Mandir.

The day was broken down into three sessions that focused on *mahima*, *milan* and *mamattva*.

Each session featured enlightening speeches by sadhus, interviews, panel and group discussions and interactive activities.

BAPS CHARITIES DONATES £25,000 TO AGE UK BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR, LONDON

3 March 2012

BAPS Charities UK presented £25,000 to Age UK at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, on 3 March 2012.

In his address during the special presentation ceremony, Mr Farthing, Director of Fundraising for Age UK, expressed his gratitude for “the tremendous support” of BAPS Charities and commented on how he was “inspired by the spirit of service and volunteerism at the Mandir, and also how the elderly are looked after here.”

Africa

KARYAKAR SHIBIR

6-8 Apr. 2012, Kisumu, Kenya



From 6 to 8 April 2012, around 225 Satsang Activities volunteers from all BAPS centres in Kenya and Uganda gathered in Kisumu for a Karyakar Shibir in the presence of Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami and other learned sadhus.

The volunteers were guided on how to perform their duties with faith and sincerity to please guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj and serve society.

Asia Pacific

SHILANYAS MAHOTSAV

5 Feb. 2012, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Sydney, Australia

On Sunday, 5 February 2012 the Shilanyas Mahotsav, Foundation-Stone Laying Ceremony, for the new Mandir was held in the presence of Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and other sadhus, as well as invited guests and dignitaries.

Over 400 devotees participated in the Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony, following which Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, and some devotees and sadhus placed the foundation stones, which had been sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in India, on the Mandir site.

The ceremony was followed by an assembly attended by invited guests from around Australia and over 800 devotees.

Addressing the gathering, State Minister Victor Dominello, who was representing the New South Wales State Premier, Barry O'Farrell, said, "The new temple will be built with not only physical materials like bricks and mortar, but will be built with goodness, righteousness and dharma. Millions of people's lives have been touched and enriched by BAPS since its founding in 1907. And we are fortunate and blessed that this tradition continues here."

Also present on this special occasion were the Consul General of India to Sydney, Amit Dasgupta, and the Federal Member for Paramatta, Geoff Lee.

THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND ATTENDS THE MANDIR DASHABDI MAHOTSAV

19 Feb 2012, Auckland, New Zealand

The Right Honourable John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand, was the chief guest at the Mandir Dashabdi Mahotsav celebration at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Auckland, New Zealand, on Sunday, 19 February 2012.

Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister said, "One of the lasting impressions that I had



from my last visit here two years ago is the great belief in education that you have for your young people and the efforts of community spirit. I saw the young people learning about a range of issues and areas of interest to them. We all want our youngsters to turn out the way in which we want them to and I saw the opportunities that you give them. The guidance and instructions of parents and teachers is very important. I want to congratulate all of you for providing this opportunity."

The Honourable Prime Minister was accompanied by Hon. Tim Groser, Minister of Trade and Kanwaljit Singh Bakshi, List MP Manukau East.

Earlier in the day, a Vedic *mahapuja* was held to mark the 10th Patotsav of the mandir. Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami offered prayers for global harmony. He also congratulated all the devotees for their devotional efforts over the past 10 years and blessed everyone with inner peace, prosperity and progress.

NEW BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR OPENS

24-25 Feb. 2012, Christchurch, New Zealand

The two-day Mandir Mahotsav to celebrate the opening of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Christchurch commenced on 24 February 2012. The *murtis* to be consecrated in the mandir were paraded around Lyttelton Bay in a colourful boat-cruise to bless the city. Many devotees participated in the boat-cruise, joyously singing bhajans. On the morning of Saturday 25 February, the sacred *murtis*, previously sanctified by Pramukh



Swami Maharaj in India, were installed in the new mandir by Sadguru Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami. Devotees from across New Zealand and Australia offered their prayers for peace and well-being to prevail throughout the local community and country. In a special message, Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed the people of Christchurch with stability and peace.

NEW BAPS MANDIR INAUGURATION 23 - 24 Mar. 2012, Melbourne



The Mandir Mahotsav, celebrating the opening of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Melbourne, Australia, began on 23 March 2012 with a colourful parade through the local streets in the presence of Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, devotees, wellwishers, community leaders and representatives. The *murtis* previously sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in India for the new mandir were placed on beautifully decorated floats. The parade comprised of sadhus leading a chorus of bhajans, children in costumes performing folk dances,

women in traditional dress and devotees carrying flags of Australia and India.

The Vedic *murti-pratishtha* ceremony was performed on 24 March 2012 by Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, in the presence of devotees from across Australia, New Zealand and south-east Asia and invited guests.

Among the dignitaries present were Stevan Kozmevski, Mayor of Whittlesea Council; Councillor Mary Laliotis; and the Consul General of India, Subhakanta Behera.

A drama portraying the history of Satsang in Melbourne was presented by BAPS youths.

INAUGURAL WALKATHON

31 Mar. 2012, Sydney, Australia

On the morning of Saturday, 31 March 2012, BAPS in Sydney, Australia, hosted its inaugural Walkathon, in support of Westmead Medical Research Foundation (WMRF), which conducts life-saving medical research. Families, children and the elderly all turned out for the 3-km walk through Parramatta Park. Walkers were flagged off by Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and chief guest Mr Phillip Ruddock, Federal MP for Berowra.

Addressing the walkers, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami said that the tradition of walking for the good of others began over 200 years in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya with the divine pilgrimage of Nilkanth Varni, who walked for seven years across India to inspire spiritual seekers and help people in the community.

India

YOUTHS PARTICIPATE IN 60TH YOUTH ANNIVERSARY YEAR PADYATRAS

5 Feb. to 24 Mar. 2012, India

Between 5 February and 24 March 2012, thousands of youths from BAPS centres throughout Gujarat and Mumbai participated in the *padyatras* held as part of the BAPS Youth Activities 60th Anniversary Celebrations Year. Many



youths of various centres undertook *padyatras* to pilgrim places. The distances varied from 2km to 75km. During the *padyatras* the youths sang *dhun* and bhajans. Decorative floats were also used. Some of the centres which arranged *padyatras* include:

Ahmedabad, Anand, Atladra, Bharuch, Bhavnagar, Bhuj, Bilimora, Borsad, Dabhan, Himmatnagar, Karjan, Mahemdavad, Mumbai, Nadiad, Navsari, Rajkot, Surat, Surendranagar, Uttarsanda and Veraval.

MANDIR DARSHAN YATRA BY UAE BAL-YUVA MANDAL

26 Mar. to 7 Apr. 2012, India

(Contd. from pg. 57)

The closing rituals of the *yagna* were performed by the senior sadhus together with the Mayor of Ahmedabad, Shri Asit Vora. The *yagna* concluded at 8.35 a.m.

Details of the Mahayagna are as follows:

- ◆ 476 *yagna kunds* around which couples performed Vedic *yagna* rituals.
- ◆ 4,445 couples participated, i.e., 8,890 *yajman* devotees and well-wishers.
- ◆ 59 devotees who were present for the *murti-pratishtha* in 1962 participated in this *yagna*.
- ◆ 430 Brahmin priests assisted the devotees in the rituals.
- ◆ More than 31 lakh *ahutis* were made into the *yagna kunds*.
- ◆ More than 31,800 devotees and well-wishers attended.
- ◆ The *yagna kunds* were prepared by BAPS youths.
- ◆ All decorations, arrangements,

From 26 March to 7 April 2012, 25 children and 10 youths from BAPS centres in the UAE visited India for their first ever ‘Mandir Darshan Yatra’. Commencing from Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, the *yatra* incorporated darshan at 34 mandirs in Gujarat and an inspiring two-day *shibir* in Mumbai in the presence of Pujya Dr Swami.

During the *yatra* the children learnt about the history of the mandirs and the importance of the three pillars of Hindu Dharma: mandirs, shastras and sadhus.

During their visit to Sarangpur Swamishri blessed them and gave them all divine memories to cherish. ◆

housekeeping were done by 3,000 BAPS children, teenagers and youth volunteers. ◆ The entire *yagnashala* was spread over 300,000 sq. ft. ◆ The event was graced by three decorated elephants from the local Jagannath Mandir who performed a *pradakshina* of the entire *yagna* arena. ◆ Also, the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj were consecrated in the BAPS Yogiji Maharaj Hospital, adjacent to the *yagna* arena. ◆ 39 boys accepted the *janoi*.

The Chief Fire Officer of Ahmedabad, Mr. Dastur, visited the *yagnashala* and commented, “Such a mammoth event is a great managerial feat. The open sky *yagnashala* with broad roads to each section is the safest and best planning I have ever seen in my life.” ◆



50TH PATOTSAV & SWAMINARAYAN MAHAYAGNA
28-29 April 2012, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Ahmedabad

1. On the Mahayagna day, elephants from the Jagannath Mandir stand before the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir.
2. Senior sadhus preside over the rituals at the main yagna kund.
3. The lotus-shaped main yagna kund with murtis in the background.
4. Aerial view of some devotees performing rituals while seated around the yagna kunds.
5. A young brother and sister engrossed in performing the yagna rituals.



Over 100,000 devotees attended the colourful Fuldol Celebration, 8 March 2012, Sarangpur

