

AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM UPASANA

As Revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 16

AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM UPASANA

As Revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan

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AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM UPASANA

As Revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan

A textbook for the Satsang Examinations curriculum set by
Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha

Inspirer: HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Blessings: HH Mahant Swami Maharaj

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Blessings

The youth movement established and nourished by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj has been expanding at a very rapid pace. To satisfy the aspirations and thirst for knowledge of the youth joining the movement, and also to enable them to understand and imbibe the principles of Akshar-Purushottam expounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the publication division of Shri Akshar-Purushottam (Swaminarayan) Yuvak Mandal, organized under the auspices of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Sanstha, has drawn up a plan to bring out a series of books.

These books are intended to systematically impart scholarly knowledge in a simple language to the children and youth of the Satsang. It is hoped that this Sanstha – established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj to implement and propagate the ideals revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan – will, through this activity, teach the ideals and noble traditions of the Sampradaya and through it, the Sanatan Hindu Dharma.

The aim of this Sanstha is to spread the divine message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to all corners of the world. It is planned to bring out these books in different languages. We hope that all religious-minded truth seekers of the Sampradaya and those outside it, will welcome this activity and extend their full support to it by all possible means, including monetary help.

To encourage children and youths, examinations are held based on the curriculum as presented in these books. Certificates are also awarded to successful candidates.

I bless Shri Ishwarcharan Swami, Prof. Rameshbhai Dave, Kishorebhai Dave, and all others who have assisted in the preparation of these books.

Vasant Panchami

Vikram Samvat 2028

(21 January 1972 CE), Atladara

Shastri Narayanswarupdasji

(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)

Jay Swaminarayan

Publisher's Note

In the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has revealed his philosophical doctrine, now known as Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. This unique perspective on how all spiritual seekers can achieve the highest spiritual state and *moksha* is rooted in the Vedic corpus and is supported by the verses of the Prasthantrayi – Brahma Sutras, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's teachings align with and illuminate these shastras, offering clarity where ambiguity may have persisted.

The term 'Akshar-Purushottam' refers to the two eternally distinct realities: 'Akshar' – the perfect devotee and eternal abode of God, and 'Purushottam' – the Supreme God, transcending even Akshar. This has direct implications for spiritual practice. One must become *aksharrup* – possessing the qualities of Akshar – and offer singular *bhakti* to Purushottam to attain *moksha*.

This book provides a thorough introduction to the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. It systematically explains the important concepts of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's philosophy with relevant references from the Vachanamrut, as well as other shastras and authoritative sources.

This publication, *Akshar-Purushottam Upasana: As Revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan*, is a translation of the Gujarati book, *Akshar-Purushottam Upasana*.

This book has been designed to serve as part of the curriculum for the Satsang Pravin Examinations.

It is our earnest prayer that all *satsangis* study this book carefully, pass the examinations with flying colours, and above all, derive immense spiritual benefits, and please Bhagwan Swaminarayan and gurus Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith

Introduction

He was a spiritual colossus who walked the length and breadth of India in just seven years. Hailed as a champion of peace and purity, he crusaded against the crippling evils in society.

Thousands admired him, obeyed him and above all held him in the highest reverence.

His name was Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Born on 3 April 1781 (Chaitra *sud* 9, Samvat 1837) in the village of Chhapaiya, near Ayodhya in North India, he was known as Ghanshyam during his childhood. His birth was a blessed light that dawned on earth. At the age of eight, he was given the sacred thread. Extraordinarily brilliant and intelligent, he completed the study of Sanskrit grammar, the Vedas and other Sanskrit shastras within three years. When aged only ten he defeated learned scholars in a religious debate at Kashi.

At the tender age of 11, after the passing away of his parents, Ghanshyam left home renouncing the world on 29 June 1792. He was known as Nilkanth Varni during his *vicharan* or travels. He went to the forests of the Himalayas and reached Pulhashram, where he performed intense austerities for four months. In the course of his Himalayan pilgrimage, he met Gopal Yogi from whom he studied and mastered Ashtanga Yoga. For seven years, he travelled barefoot across the length and breadth of India visiting numerous holy shrines, interacting with many mahatmas and pandits as well as lay devotees.

On 21 August 1799, his travels came to an end when he arrived at Loj in Gujarat, where there was an ashram of Ramanand Swami. There, Nilkanth met Muktanand Swami, the chief disciple of Ramanand Swami. After a few months,

he met Ramanand Swami in Piplana and accepted him as his spiritual guru.

On 28 October 1800, Ramanand Swami initiated Nilkanth and named him Sahajanand Swami. Although there were many scholars and senior disciples, Ramanand Swami chose Sahajanand Swami, just 21 years old, as his spiritual successor on 16 November 1801. On that occasion, Sahajanand Swami prayed, “O, Gurudev! If your devotee is to suffer even a single scorpion bite, then let me suffer the pain of millions of scorpion bites in every pore instead; and if your devotee is destined to face the begging bowl, then let that begging bowl be my fate, but your devotee should not suffer from hunger or lack of clothing.”

Within a month, Ramanand Swami passed away leaving the following in the hands of young Sahajanand Swami.

Sahajanand Swami instructed his devotees to chant the ‘Swami-Narayan’ mantra in their prayers. Consequently, over time, as his popularity increased he came to be known as ‘Swaminarayan’.

Thousands witnessed his divine powers and miracles. He graced many with samadhi – spiritual trance – enabling them to have a direct experience of the deities they worshipped. Many of them saw Swaminarayan in the highest abode during such experiences and came to recognize him as God.

He organized and ran almshouses to serve mendicants, the needy and the poor. He also inspired countless men and women to tread the path of morality and religion. Peter Brent writes in *Godmen of India*, “He created a band of five hundred *paramhansas*, the founding saints of his continuing order of monks. They gave themselves up to a life of total austerity, yet at the same time managed to go outward to the needy, building almshouses, digging wells and doing charitable work.”

These *paramhansas* lived a life of celibacy and very high moral

character. This reflects on the dynamic personality and the prodigious moral and spiritual force of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He and his disciple-sadhus started the work of morally and spiritually elevating society through their own pristine character, comprehensive teachings and humble service.

All his sadhus strictly observed the five principle vows: *nishkam* – freedom from lust, *nirlobh* – freedom from greed, *nirman* – freedom from ego, *nissneb* – freedom from worldly attachment and *nisswad* – freedom from indulgence in taste.

All his lay followers abstained from alcohol, meat-eating, adultery, stealing and faithfully discharged their duties according to their station in life. Truthfulness, non-violence and celibacy were the salient attributes of his devotees.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan uplifted the socially underprivileged and neglected. He changed the hearts of thieves and sinners, transforming them into true devotees free from vices. Pryn Hopkins, an American socialist, pacifist and author, notes, “Yet his message had a revolutionary effect on the personal lives and character of thousands of people in a very lawless period... Members of martial and criminal tribes gave up meat and drink; they renounced the use of opium and tobacco, to both of which most were very much addicted.”

By liberating the masses from illiteracy and ignorance, false beliefs and superstitions, addictions and bad habits, he kindled in them the flame of hope, love, faith and devotion. He lived with them in their low-roofed houses, mingled with them, became a part of them and uplifted them to the level of virtuous devotees leading a life of moral and spiritual purpose. Such a change aroused great respect and regard for him in the minds of the people at large. Many came to realize and worship him as Purushottam –the supreme God.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was the very embodiment of love and compassion. He looked upon all with an equal eye – rich

and poor, princes and paupers, the pious and the downtrodden. Henry George Briggs, an English author, observes in his *Cities of Gurjarashtra*, “Sahajanand was loved beyond belief by his disciples – comprising men of talent, of station, and of wealth; the poor, the ignorant, the rude – and who would have sacrificed life itself for their preceptor.”

Bhagwan Swaminarayan brought about a great awakening in the path of morality and devotion. He elevated society by encouraging education even for women – considered a revolutionary practice in those days. He fought against the malpractices of female infanticide and *sati* – where the widow was forced to join her husband on the funeral pyre. He preached non-violence, forbidding the practice of sacrificing animals in *yagnas*. An advocate of moral and religious respect, he eradicated evil by non-violent means, such as love, goodness, service and sacrifice.

Henry George Briggs notes, “Swaminarayan welcomed and accepted everyone for discipleship, with the same rights and privileges, be they Muslims, Parsees, Christians or of other faiths.”

To keep his religious institution free from corruption and to maintain moral purity, Bhagwan Swaminarayan made special arrangements for women to worship and receive religious education through female preachers. Separate mandirs were built for them. He remedied the misery and loneliness of widows by diverting their minds to God as their real solace and saviour, through the promotion of single-minded devotion.

He taught people to live simple, pious and virtuous lives. He himself lived an ascetic life of detachment, renunciation, dedication and service. He preached the gospel of devotion to the masses, seeing nothing but God in all. To love, to uplift and to liberate was his motto.

His religious discourses were noted and compiled by

four senior *paramhansas* to form the Vachanamrut – the most sacred shastra of the Sampradaya, containing his teachings and philosophy. He also wrote the Shikshapatri – a small text containing the essence of the codes of ethics in 212 verses.

He promoted devotion and constructed six grand traditional mandirs in a short span of eight years. After working incessantly for 30 years, Bhagwan Swaminarayan left this mortal world and returned to his abode on 1 June 1830.

A contemporary writer notes, “And as the announcement of his death was winged, one wail, loud and piercing and bitter, rang throughout Gujarat upon the signal calamity which was believed to have befallen the country.”

By the time he passed away at the age of 49, in his own lifetime, he was worshipped as God by a large following of devotees.

The essence of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s teachings was to continue his work and remain spiritually present on this earth through the Aksharbrahma succession of God-realized Sadhus.

The first guru in the spiritual succession was Gunatitanand Swami (1784–1867) who transformed the lives of countless people and strengthened their faith in the supremacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan through his inspiring and insightful discourses. In his very lifetime, Gunatitanand Swami came to be recognized as the manifestation of Aksharbrahma – the nearest and dearest devotee of God.

He was succeeded by Bhagatji Maharaj (1829–1897) who made a valuable contribution to the Sampradaya by explaining the true glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami.

After him, Shastriji Maharaj (1865–1951) furthered the cause by spreading the philosophy of Akshar and Purushottam – the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. In consonance with the teachings

of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj propagated the worship of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as Purushottam and Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahma. Despite overwhelming difficulties, he built five glorious mandirs and consecrated the dual *murtis* of God along with his choicest devotee. He founded the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) in June 1907.

The fourth spiritual master was Yogiji Maharaj (1892–1971), whose work carried the message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan across the oceans to East Africa and England. His crystal-pure innocence, towering saintliness and selfless love inspired all. He established youth and children's centres to guide them in spiritual matters and character building. He passed away after placing the oars of the Sanstha in the hands of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1971.

Under the inspiration and able leadership of Pramukh Swami Maharaj (1921–2016), BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha developed into a worldwide organization with over 1,100 mandirs, over 5,000 Satsang centres, about 1,000 sadhus, and over a million followers spread over five continents.

Swamishri's led an austere life, untiringly travelling from tiny tribal huts to modern metropolitan cities all over the world to promote a value-based, God-centric life. At his tender word, thousands left addictions and walked the path of God.

At present, Mahant Swami Maharaj (b. 1933) is the living representative of Bhagwan swaminarayan on this earth and the spiritual guru of BAPS.

Under his guidance, the Sanstha performs a wide variety of social, educational, environmental, medical, moral, cultural and spiritual activities which have helped millions of people worldwide.

His striking humility, profound wisdom and simplicity have touched many. His love for mankind and respect for all religions

is weaving a fabric of cultural unity, interfaith harmony and universal peace.

The sole reason behind his unique success is his deep, fluent communion with God.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith



Purna Purushottam
Bhagwan Swaminarayan



Aksharbrahma
Gunatitanand Swami

1. UPASANA

The Sanskrit word *upasana* is a compound of two words: *upa* – meaning ‘near’; and *asanam* – meaning ‘to sit’. Thus, *upasana* is the manner in which an aspirant endeavours spiritually to forever reserve a seat near God. In simple terms, it is one’s way of understanding God, the mode in which one offers devotion to him.

It is essential for all followers of the Sampradaya to have a clear concept of *upasana*. An attempt has therefore been made in this book to explain, in easy-to-understand language, *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam as taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

We can confidently say, on the basis of the words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself, by the assertions of the sadhus who were privileged to have personal contact with him, and finally by the evidence based on the experience of the God-realized Sadhus, that Shastriji Maharaj (Shastri Yagnapurushdasji) had a clear understanding of the true Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, and was the pioneer in propagating it. Following in the footsteps of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and their disciples have spread the message of this pure *upasana* throughout the world.

1.1 IMPORTANCE OF UPASANA

All aspirants are striving to attain *brahmabhaav* through *vrat* (vows), *tap* (austerities), *yagna* (offerings), *dan* (alms) and *satsang* (association with sadhus and religious people). By such religious activities, followers on the spiritual path aspire to attain *moksha* and thus liberation from the cycles of birth and death. To achieve this, *upasana* is absolutely indispensable.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan, known to his followers as Shriji Maharaj or simply Maharaj, states in the Vachanamrut, “Many

people become realized yogis, many become omniscient, many become devas, and thus attain countless types of greatness, including the highest state of enlightenment. All this is achieved through the force of the *upasana* of God. Without *upasana*, though, nothing can be accomplished. ...Therefore, forsaking one's dependence on the strength of other spiritual endeavours, one should rely exclusively on the strength of God's *upasana*" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 56).

Shriji Maharaj is emphatic about the impossibility of achieving *atmagnan* or *brahmagnan* in the absence of *upasana*. He says, "Only through *upasana* can the *atma* and Brahma be seen; without it, they cannot be seen.

"In fact, wishing to see the *atma* and Brahma without *upasana* is like attempting to lick the sky with one's tongue; even if one tries for a hundred years, one will never be able to taste it as sour or salty. Similarly, the *atma* and Brahma simply cannot be seen without the *upasana* of the form of God – regardless of the efforts one may resort to.

"Furthermore, the shastras' mentioning of the possibility of *atma*-realization through *nirbij*¹ Sankhya and Yoga is irrelevant – I have not seen anyone do so, nor is the claim in accordance with my experience. Therefore, the claim is false" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 36).

Shriji Maharaj also says, "Death, however, is like an ocean. In that case, both a person with *atma*-realization and a person without it require the help of a ship in the form of faith (*upasana*) in God. Therefore, only the firm refuge of God is helpful at the time of death, whereas *atma*-realization alone is of no use whatsoever at the time of death. For this reason, one should firmly cultivate faith [*upasana*] in God" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 61).

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami says, "Moksha is

1. That Sankhya and Yoga which promotes the understanding that God is formless.

2 Akshar-Purushottam Upasana

attained through *upasana*.” (Swamini Vato 5.135).

Furthermore, Swami says, “Our greatness is due to *upasana*. And even if one falters in observing dharma or other spiritual endeavours, if *upasana* is firm, the *jiva* will not flounder” (Swamini Vato 5.70).

Swami also says, “Even if one encounters intense misery like the final destruction of the world, one who has firmly developed the *upasana* of God understands that the body will die one day and we (the *atma*) will go to God’s abode. With this understanding, one remains happy” (Swamini Vato 1.56).

1.2 WHAT IS UPASANA?

The Vachanamrut contains numerous references in which Shriji Maharaj has stressed the importance of clearly understanding *upasana* to develop firm faith in God. Faith implies understanding that:

1. God is the all-doer – *sarva karta*.
2. He always has a divine form – *divya sakar*.
3. He is supreme and transcends all – *sarvopari*.
4. He is always present in human form – *pragat*.

Also, one must fully understand the form of Aksharbrahma and through mental association with Aksharbrahma one must worship Parabrahma.

In the absence of such faith, an aspirant cannot attain Akshardham – God’s divine abode.

In the following chapters we will discuss the details of these four facets of *upasana*.

2. KARTA

God Is the All-Doer

2.1 HOW IS GOD KARTA?

Parabrahma Paramatma is *sarva karta* – the all-doer. Unless willed by him, nobody can move even a dry leaf. He gives all living beings the fruits of their karmas – actions. Though he does not play an immediate role in creating, sustaining or dissolving the universe, he is the ultimate cause of all causes.

Antah pravishtaha shāstā janānām sarvātma.

Dwelling within the *atma* of all the *jivas*, God controls them.

- Taittiriyaranyakam 3.11

In the way God governs all living beings, he also governs the deities and supervises their actions, controlling them according to his will. By his *ichchhashakti*, *kriyashakti* and *jnanshakti*, he inspires the appropriate *shakti* in the *jivas*. God has the power to absorb *maya*. And even while supporting Akshar, he has the power to absorb Akshar. God possesses *kartum*, *akartum* and *anyathakartum* powers. A dedicated seeker should therefore realize God as the all-doer and seek refuge in him.

Shriji Maharaj has said, “God, who is the cause of all, appears like a human being; yet by his yogic powers, he is able to create countless millions of *brahmāns* from his body and is able to absorb them back into himself.... So, one who is wise realizes, ‘God appears like a human, but, in fact, he is the cause of all and the creator of all; he is all-powerful’” (Vachanamrut, Loya 2).

“In the same way, the factors of place, time, karma and *maya* can only do as much as God allows them to do; they cannot do a single thing against the wish of God. Therefore, only God is the all-doer” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 21).

2.2 SHRIJI MAHARAJ: THE ALL-DOER

Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan, the all-doer, is Shriji Maharaj. This point has been clearly brought out in a number of Vachanamruts by Shriji Maharaj himself. It has also been reiterated in other texts of the Sampradaya in these and other similar words: “This very manifestation”, “Visible before you in human form”, “The God who accepts your devotion”, “God who is *pragat* – present – before you.”

The following excerpts affirm this point, “Thus, God eternally possesses a form. In addition, he is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of countless *brahmans*; he is forever present in his Akshardham; he is the lord of all; and he is *pratyaksh* – manifest here before your eyes” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 35).

“I am the creator, sustainer and destroyer of all of the *brahmans*. In those countless *brahmans*, it is by my divine light that countless Shiks, countless Brahmas, countless Kailases, countless Vaikunths, Goloks, Brahmapurs, as well as countless millions of other realms are radiant.

In the Bhaktachintamani, written by Nishkulanan Swami, Shriji Maharaj says:

Vali kahu ek vārtā, sarve kidhu āpanu thāy chhe;
Sukh dukh vali jay-parājay, yatkinchit je kahevāy chhe.
Je je āpanane nav game, te jiva kem shake kari;
Juo sarve jaktamā, kon shake chhe fel āchari.
...Te māte tame sāmbhalo, satsangi sahu narnār;
Je je thāy chhe jaktamā, teno bijo nathi karnār.

Let me give you an account of the divine saga. Whatever happens is solely due to me.

Pleasure or pain, victory or defeat, call it what you will.

No one can do whatever I disapprove.

Nor can anybody in the wide world indulge in wanton behaviour.

Listen all male and female *satsangis*,

Whatever happens under the sun is not done by anyone else.

- Bhaktachintamani 76

Māru dhāryu asatya satya thāy chhe, samarath māru nām sahi;

Māri drushti e jakta upaje shame, anek rupe māyā thai...

I am the omnipotent. As I wish, the untruth turns into truth.

With my look, the earth is created and dissolved, and *maya* pervades in many forms.

- Bhaktachintamani 68

Shriji Maharaj succinctly explains his doership in the kirtan 'Bolya Shri Hari re...':

Jiva ishwar tano re, māyā kāla purush pradhān;

Saune vash karu re, sauno prerak hu Bhagwān.

Aganit vishwani re, utpatti pālan pralay thāy;

Māri marji vinā re, koithi taranu nav todāy.

The inspirer of *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, *kal*, Purush, Pradhan; I control them all. I am the inspirer of all, God.

I create, sustain and dissolve countless worlds; Without my will, no one can pluck even a blade of grass.

- Sadguru Premanand Swami

2.3 NECESSITY OF KNOWING GOD AS THE ALL-DOER

The paramount sadhana for the liberation of the *jiva* is to know God as the all-doer. Shriji Maharaj says, "For the purpose of liberation, however, realizing God to be the all-doer is the only means" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 21).

"Furthermore, the *jiva*'s liberation is attained only by the following understanding: 'Everything happens by the will of the incarnate form of Shri Krishna Narayan, not by *kal*, karma, *maya*, or other factors.' In this manner, understanding only God to be the all-doer is the supreme cause of liberation. ...

"There is no sinner worse than the person who does not realize God to be the all-doer. In fact, they should be known to be a sinner worse than one who has killed a cow, killed a Brahmin,

associated with the wife of one's own guru or maligned a true guru who is a knower of Brahma. Why? Because they believe *kal*, karma, and others to be the cause of everything, not God.

“In fact, one should not even stand in the shadow of such persons who are *nastik* outcasts, nor should one listen to their talks, even unknowingly.” (Vachanamrut, Kariyani 10).

Furthermore, “God is the all-doer. To ignore this and to claim that only *kal*, karma, *maya* and *swabhav* are the all-doers of this world is serious slander against God” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 2).

Therefore a true devotee “realizes that God is not like *kal*, not like karma, not like *swabhav*, not like *maya*, and not like Purush. He realizes God to be distinct from everything, their controller and cause; yet, despite being their cause, he is beyond their influence” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 62).

A devotee can become fearless only by seeking complete refuge in Purna Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan. If he is convinced that whatever happens in this world is God's doing, he will not fear any *deva* or *devi*, mantra, *tantra* or *jantra*, and will remain mentally stable in times of misery and happiness.

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami observes, “If someone comes in a violent rage, hitting and beating, one should understand that everything happens due to my Swami. Without him, nobody is able to even move a leaf” (Swamini Vato 1.88).

By firm conviction of the omnipotence and all-doership of God, the devotee is able to abide by all his commands. He realizes God's infinite glory and progresses on the spiritual path, ultimately attaining the *ekantik* state. In adversity, a devotee may fail to observe some minor religious tenets, but his conviction saves him from becoming disheartened. As a matter of fact, on the spiritual path, doubts such as, 'Will I be liberated or not?' act as obstructions. It is therefore of utmost importance to have unflinching conviction of God's doership, as it is a fundamental principle of *upasana*.

3. SAKAR

God Has a Form

3.1 LIKING FOR SAKAR

Earlier, we learnt in the *upasana* explained by Shriji Maharaj that he is disinterested in the divine light as the final goal. The aspirant should not merely stop at this stage. Shriji Maharaj has clearly shown his liking for *sakar* – that God has a form (Vachanamrut, Loya 14) as opposed to *nirakar* – the notion that God is formless.

Maharaj clearly states his liking for the divine form of God. In the Vachanamrut, Maharaj comments, “I myself also accept that view {that God has a divine form}...” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 71).

Speaking about his innate nature, Shriji Maharaj says, “In fact, so firm is my conviction that God possesses a form that even though I have read and heard many Vedanta shastras, my conviction has not been dislodged” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 39).

Shriji Maharaj also explains the reason behind his firm faith in the divine form, “I have delivered this discourse having experienced it directly myself. Therefore, there is not a trace of doubt about it” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 64).

Since Shriji Maharaj has a strong inclination for the divine form of God, he truly likes a devotee who worships the divine form of God (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 30).

Shriji Maharaj further clarifies this point in the Vachanamrut, “They also understand that God and his devotees eternally possess a form; but never do they understand them to be formless, regardless of any Vedanta shastras they may hear. ...A person with such firm conviction that God has a form, even if he is an ordinary person, is still dear to me” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 37).

In Shriji Maharaj's eyes, only an aspirant who has faith in the divine form of God is a genuine devotee, "Upasana can be defined as having a firm conviction that God eternally possesses a form. Even if a person becomes *brahmarup*, that conviction would never disappear. Moreover, even if they happen to listen to shastras propounding the view that God is formless, they would still understand God to always have a form. Regardless of what is mentioned in the shastras, they would only propound that God has a form, never allowing their own *upasana* to be refuted. One who has such a firm understanding is considered to possess *upasana*" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 40).

However, "If he does not understand God to possess a form, then his *upasana* cannot be considered resolute" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 35).

Therefore, "One should never refute the form of God" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 71).

These precise words of Shriji Maharaj make it absolutely clear that he himself has unshakable faith in the divine form of God, as well as love for those who accept such a belief.

Shriji Maharaj has deep faith in God's form. He also wishes his followers to share the same faith, so that they may be freed from all sins and attain liberation. To avail of these double blessings, he instructs all followers to have faith in God's divine form. He assures them, "If a person realizes God to possess a form and is convinced of this, then even if they happen to commit a sin, there is nothing to worry about. Because by the grace of God, all those sins will be burnt and their *jiva* will attain God. Therefore, one should keep a firm conviction of the form of God and staunchly worship him. This is my message to you. So, please imbibe these words firmly in your lives" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 39).

A follower at a premature stage may not have firm faith in the divine form of God. To protect him from being influenced by

the precepts of formlessness, Shriji Maharaj advises with caution, “Shastras which do not promote God possessing a form... but instead discuss pure Vedanta and propound a single, formless entity, should never be studied or heard, even if they have been written by someone very intelligent” (Vachanamrut, Loya 6).

Shriji Maharaj has also advised against associating with *shushka* Vedantins as they believe God to be *nirakar*.¹

In all these spiritual dialogues, Shriji Maharaj has clearly stated his liking for the divine *sakar* form of God. At the same time, he has also expressed his total dislike for the concept that God is *nirakar*. He says, “To learn about the beliefs of those possessing *shushka-jnan*, I listened to their shastras. Merely hearing them, though, has caused much grief in my heart.” Describing this, the *paramhansas* write, “In [this] distressed mood, the white *feto* tied around his head had loosened and become undone, yet he paid no attention to it. In this manner, he sat extremely distressed for a few minutes and tears began to flow from his eyes” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 19).

3.2 DISADVANTAGES OF UNDERSTANDING GOD AS NIRAKAR

There are many references in the Vachanamrut supporting *sakar* and refuting *nirakar*. A few excerpts will suffice to clarify this. To treat God as *nirakar* amounts to negating the very form of God, who is to be worshipped and meditated upon. Shriji Maharaj therefore warns, “To believe God as being formless is a sin much graver than even the five grave sins. There is no atonement for that sin” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 39).

“Furthermore, of all mistakes made against God, to denounce the form of God is a very grave mistake. One should never make this mistake. One who does do so commits a sin more serious than the five grave sins” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 71).

1. Vachanamruts, Gadhada I 48, II 18, II 19, III 36.

“God is complete, with limbs, hands, feet, and other body features. ...So, to say he is not the all-doer and he is formless... is equivalent to maligning God. Without such an understanding, even if one performs puja by offering sandalwood paste, flowers, and other objects, one is still a slanderer of God” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 2).

“If, however, one... believes God to be formless or like the other avatars, then that is regarded as committing blasphemy against God” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 9).

For those well-versed in the shastras, eminent in society and progressing on the spiritual path, Shriji Maharaj warns, “A person may well be endowed with each and every virtue, but if they believe God to be formless – not possessing a definite form – then that is a grave flaw. So much so, that because of this flaw, all their virtues become flaws” (Vachanamrut, Loya 16).

“On the other hand, a person who meditates on God and does his *upasana* believing him to be formless is consigned to *brahma-sushupti*, from which they never return. Nor does such a person ever acquire any spiritual powers from God” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 64).

Gunatitanand Swami also says, “Those who describe and regard the form of God as formless and misinterpret the shastras will, for countless births – for ten thousand years in Treta-yug; for a thousand years in Dwapar-yug and for a hundred years in Kali-yug – not even be able to cry with relief when they are cut out from the womb.² In this way, they will endlessly suffer miseries for an infinite period of time, but they will not get any happiness” (Swamini Vato 3.16).

3.3 ORIGIN OF THE BELIEF IN GOD AS NIRAKAR

As mentioned earlier, by treating God as formless, one commits a far more serious sin than the five grave sins. Not only

2. Sinful *jivas* will suffer tremendously at birth.

that, but such conduct maligns God and negates all one's virtues. Naturally, the question arises as to how the understanding of a *nirakar* God developed?

Using the shastras, some argue that God is formless. To them, Shriji Maharaj replies, "The Shrimad Bhagvat proclaims that Brahma possesses a form. However, if those who read it do not have bhakti for God, they will understand God to be formless, even from reading the Shrimad Bhagvat" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 10).

Shukdevji recited the Shrimad Bhagvat. Narad, Shaunak and other sages, the pioneering spirits of the path of devotion delivered discourses on the Bhagvat. Shukdevji preferred discourses on God to meditation:

*Parinishthito'pi naирgunye uttamashlokalilayā;
Gruhitachetā rājarshe ākhyānam yadadhitavān.*

Addressing King Parikshit, Shukdevji says, "O King! Despite being perfectly poised in the *nirgun* state, I – having been attracted by the divine actions and incidents of God – studied the [Shrimad Bhagvat] epic."

- Shrimad Bhagvat 2.1.9

Reciting the account of God's divine life, Shukdevji does not interpret him as formless. While describing his human behaviour as divine and not *mayik*, there is negation of the *mayik* form. Reading this description, the ignorant and undevout interpret this to mean that God is formless and then stubbornly stick to these beliefs. They pick out words from the shastras that support their misunderstanding. Subsequently, by preaching their false beliefs, they mislead the aspirants.

Shriji Maharaj says, "From a group of people, someone saw the tail of a cow, someone else saw its mouth, someone saw its hoof, another saw its stomach, and yet another saw its udder. Whichever part of the cow was seen did, in fact, belong to the cow, yet no one saw the cow completely. But, because at least

one part was seen, it can be said that the cow was actually seen. In the same manner, a person can be said to have seen the *atma* to the extent to which he has seen the light of the *atma* through his *indriyas* or *antahkaran*. This, however, cannot be said to be perfect *atma*-realization" (Vachanamrut, Loya 15).

The understanding of the formlessness of God is propagated by those who have not attained the stage of self-realization or God-realization and by those who do not have faith in the form of God. Either they have not correctly grasped the scriptural meanings or they are deliberately distorting them. Therefore it is laid down in the shastras, "The words of the shastras cannot be understood in their true context by anyone except an *ekantik bhakta*. Which words? Words such as, 'God is formless', 'universally pervasive', 'luminous' and '*nirgun*'. On hearing such descriptions, a fool concludes that the shastras describe God as being formless" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 66).

The listeners and readers are confused by descriptions of God as *nirgun* and infer that God has no form. However, their inference is the result of their misunderstanding (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 66).

To attempt to understand the knowledge of God's form by the study of only one shastra often leads to imperfect understanding. Precisely for this reason, Shriji Maharaj clarifies, "In the Vedas, God himself has described his nature in many ways, but no one could comprehend it. ... This is how the Sankhya shastras and the Yoga shastras described God's nature; still, no one attained realization of the nature of God as he is. By inference it was accepted. ... However, is that God black or yellow? Is he tall or short? Does he possess a form, or is he formless? That was not realized. ... Thereafter, Vasudev Bhagwan himself composed the Panchratra Tantra, in which he explained, 'In his own Akshardham, Shri Krishna Purushottam Bhagwan eternally possesses a divine form. ... In this way, he propounded that God

possesses a form. ...Only one who realizes God through these four shastras [Sankhya, Yoga, Vedanta and Pancharatra] can be said to possess total *jnan*" (Vachanamrut, Vartal 2).

"The drawback in trying to understand God's form from the Vedanta shastras alone is that God – who is described as the cause of all, pervading all and *nirgun* – is believed to be formless. The eternal form of God would not be realized as being devoid of *mayik* arms, legs, and other features, and as possessing divine limbs" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 52).

Therefore, only a Satpurush can explain the apparent contradictions of the shastras. The knowledge of God's divine form can therefore only be attained through such a Sadhu. Shriji Maharaj explicitly says, "These facts [about the divine form of God] can be understood only from a person who firmly believes that God is forever divine and possesses a form; they can never be understood from others" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 64).

3.4 HOW IS GOD SAKAR?

Shriji Maharaj has logically explained how God must be *sakar* and not *nirakar*. He explains that God is the creator of the moveable and immovable world. If, however, he is formless, how could he possibly create an earth with a form? Shriji Maharaj says, "God is not formless. Why? Because it is through God that everything mobile and immobile is created. Now, if God were formless, then how could he create something that possesses a form? For example, *akash* is formless. Therefore, pots and other forms that can be created from *pruthvi* cannot be created from that *akash*. In the same manner, since Brahmā and the rest of creation possess a form, God – their creator – also definitely possesses a form" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 10).

Reiterating this point, Shriji Maharaj says, "God eternally possesses a form" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 35). "He eternally has a form. If he did not have a form, he could not be called

the all-doer” (Vachanamrut, Panchala 1). “God, thus possessing a form, is also the all-doer, since that which is formless can accomplish nothing” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 39).

Explaining the same point in a different way, Maharaj says, “Purushottam Bhagwan eternally possesses a form, and that form is extremely luminous. His perfect, all-pervasive *antaryami* form – Brahma,³ characterized by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss – is actually the divine light of Purushottam Bhagwan, but he himself possesses a definite form. The Shrutis also mention: ‘That God looked towards *maya*.’ Now if God sees, does that mean that he has only a pair of eyes and nothing else? In reality, he does have hands and feet. This proves that he possesses a form.

“Take the example of water. Its corresponding deity, Varun, possesses a form in his own realm, while water itself is described as formless. Also, the flames of a fire are described as formless, while their corresponding deity, Agni, possesses a form in his realm. Sunlight is also described as being formless, while Suryadev, who resides in his realm, possesses a form.

“Similarly, Brahma – characterized by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss – is formless, while Purushottam Bhagwan possesses a form. Furthermore, that all-pervasive, perfect Brahma, with the attributes of eternal existence, consciousness and bliss, is the divine light of Purushottam Bhagwan.

“Someone may claim that the Shrutis propound, ‘God is all-pervasive and perfect, without hands, feet, and other features’ But those Vedic verses that refute the hands, feet, etc., of God are actually refuting *mayik* hands, feet, and other features. In reality, God’s form is divine, not *mayik*.

“Moreover, despite the fact that Purushottam Bhagwan’s *brahmarup* light, which pervades all *jivas* and *ishwars* as their *antaryami*, is formless, it should be considered to possess a form. This is because it governs the granting of the deserved fruits

3. ‘Brahma’ in this context refers to the divine light of Purushottam Bhagwan, and should not be understood to mean ‘Aksharbrahma’.

of karmas to all *jivas* and *ishwars* according to their respective karmas. This power of governing makes it function as if it possesses a form. Thus, that divine light should be considered to possess a form as well.

“In the same manner, Purushottam Bhagwan always possesses a form; he is not formless. Those who do believe him to be formless just do not understand” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 45).

Emphasizing God’s divine form, Shriji Maharaj elaborates, “On the other hand, an *ekantik bhakta* realizes, ‘When the shastras describe God as being formless and *nirgun*, they are referring to the fact that he does not possess a *mayik* form or *mayik* attributes. In reality, his form is forever divine, and he possesses countless redemptive virtues.

“There is also a reference to God being an immense mass of divine light. However, if there is no form, then there can be no light either; therefore, that light must definitely be from that form. ...

“In the same way, having the intensity of a million suns, the divine light, which is like *brahmasatta*, is the light of the form of Purushottam Bhagwan. ...

“Therefore, regardless of which shastras are being read, if they describe God as being *nirgun*, one should realize that they are merely extolling the glory of God’s form; but, in fact, God always possesses a definite form” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 66).

3.5 GOD HAS A FORM AND IS ALL-PERVASIVE

God is *vyapak* – all-pervasive or immanent, but also *murtiman* – always with a form. In the Vedanta and other shastras, God is described as all-pervasive. Questions may arise such as, “How can God be pervasive, yet still have a form?” or “How can God have a form, yet still at the same time be pervasive?” Muktanand Swami asks a similar question in the Vachanamrut, to which

Shriji Maharaj replies, “Brahma resides in only one place, but not everywhere. ...even though the shastras describe God as pervasive, he actually possesses a definite form. In those shastras, he is described as pervasive in the sense that using his own powers, he gives his darshan to all while still residing in one place. But he is not pervasive in the sense of being formless like *akash*.

“So, in reality, God eternally possesses a form. It is that God with a definite form, who, while always residing in Akshardham, appears in countless millions of *brahmants*” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 13).

Nityanand Swami questions whether God dwells within the *jiva* without a form or with a form. And if he dwells with a form how can he be described as all-pervasive? Shriji Maharaj replies, “God dwells as the refuge of the *indriyas*, their presiding deities, the *antahkaran* and the *jiva*. Shri Krishna Bhagwan, for example, made Uddhavji explain to the gopis, ‘I am near to you by being the refuge of your *indriyas*, *antahkaran*, their presiding deities and *jiva*.

“Just as the very same five *mahabhuts* which reside in the *brahmants* are also within everyone’s body, similarly, I reside in Mathura like the *mahabhuts* reside predominantly in the *brahmants*; but just like those *mahabhuts* reside subtly in the bodies of the *jivas*, I also reside within you all.

“The fact that I cannot be seen is to keep the *vrutti* of your mind confined within me; that is why I cannot be seen. Nevertheless, I reside within you possessing a definite form” (Vachanamrut, Loya 15).

In this way, God resides in all the *jivas* and at the same time is all-pervasive. Shriji Maharaj explains how this actually happens, “That which possesses a form can also be pervasive. For example, Agnidev possesses a definite form when residing in his realm, but through his powers, he is latent within wood.

Similarly, God possesses a definite form in his Akshardham, but through his *antaryami* powers, he pervades the *jivas* and functions as if he possesses a form. Therefore, even that *antaryami* form should be considered to possess a form" (Vachanamrut, Kariyani 4).

From these references of the Vachanamrut, it is quite clear that God, with his divine form, dwells in the divine abode Akshardham. Simultaneously he is all-pervasive by his *antaryami shakti*. The *antaryami shakti* also has a form as explained by Shriji Maharaj, "Moreover, despite the fact that Purushottam Bhagwan's *brahmarup* light, which pervades all *jivas* and *ishwars* as their *antaryami*, is formless, it should be considered to possess a form. This is because it governs the granting of the deserved fruits of karmas to all *jivas* and *ishwars* according to their respective karmas. This power of governing makes it function as if it possesses a form. Thus, that divine light should be considered to possess a form as well" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 45).

Thus, Purushottam Narayan is *murtiman* – has a form – and yet is also *vyapak* – all-pervasive.

3.6 GOD IS SAKAR IN AKSHARDHAM AND ON EARTH

Some people believe that when God appears on earth as a human incarnation, he is *sakar* and *sagun*; but in his divine abode, he is *nirakar* and *nirgun*. Shriji Maharaj clearly disapproves of this theory.

Shriji Maharaj mentions that God is also *sakar* in Akshardham, "Conversely, the form of God in Akshardham and the form of the *muktas* – the attendants of God – are all *satya*, divine and extremely luminous. Also, the form of that God and those *muktas* is two-armed like that of a human being, and it is characterised by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 38).

"God, who possesses a definite form, is always present in his

abode, Brahmapur" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 7).

In Premanand Swami's kirtan, '*Bolya Shri Hari re...*' Shriji Maharaj affirms:

Māru dhām chhe re, Akshar amrut jenu nām;

Temā hu rahu re, dwibhuj divya sadā sākār.

My abode is known as eternal Akshardham.

I always dwell in it in a divine *dwibhuj* (two-armed) form.

- Sadguru Premanand Swami

Describing the divine form of God in Akshardham, Maharaj says, "Amidst that divine light [of Akshardham], I see the extremely luminous form of God. The form is dark, but due to the intensity of the light, it appears to be rather fair, not dark. The form has two arms and two legs, not four, eight or a thousand arms; and its appearance is very captivating. The form is very serene; it has a human form; and it appears young like a teenager" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 13).

Shriji Maharaj has expressly stated in many Vachanamruts that God is with form – *sakar* – in Akshardham. In his human incarnation on earth, he is also *sakar*. Therefore, he is forever *sakar*.

Stressing this, Maharaj says, "The manner in which the incarnate form of God resides on this earth, and the manner in which the devotees of God remain in the vicinity of God is exactly how they remain when *atyantik-pralay* occurs. ... God and his devotees eternally possess a form" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 37).

As God is with form on earth, similarly at the time of *atyantik-pralay*, he is in a divine form in Akshardham. And as he has a form in Akshardham, similarly he is with form during his human incarnation. Shriji Maharaj explains, "Even at the time of *atyantik-pralay*, God and his devotees remain in Akshardham, where the devotees enjoy divine bliss [in the form of darshan], having attained a divine and definite form. Moreover, the form of that

God and the forms of the devotees of God possess divine light that is equivalent to the light of countless suns and moons....

“Also, it is to liberate the *jivas* and to allow those *jivas* to offer the nine types of *bhakti* to him that that God – who has a luminous and divine form – becomes like a human out of compassion, always doing so with all his strength, divine powers and attendants.

“Even then, those who realize this esoteric truth understand the human form of God on this earth as being exactly the same as the form of God residing in Akshardham – they do not feel that there is even a slight difference between that form and this form” (Vachanamrut, Panchala 7).

In this way God eternally possesses a form.

3.7 DIVYABHAV – DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

Some people are of the opinion that in his abode, God is *divya* (divine) as well as *sakar* (with a form), but in his human incarnation he has, like all mortals, a body, *indriyas* and *antabkaran* composed of *panchbhuts*. Therefore, his form on earth is not divine. Shriji Maharaj, however, refutes this view, “That God, also known as Parabrahma Purushottam, himself manifests on earth out of compassion, for the liberation of the *jivas*. When he manifests, all entities that he accepts become *brahmarup*.⁴ The three bodies, namely, *sthul*, *sukshma* and *karan*; the three states, namely, waking, dream and deep sleep; the ten *indriyas*; the five *prans*; and other such faculties, were all apparent in avatars such as Ram, Krishna, and others. Although they all appear to be like those of ordinary humans, in reality, they are all *brahma*,⁵ not *mayaik*” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 71).

Confirming this, Shriji Maharaj says, “God’s form is such that he is *anvay* within *maya* and yet, at the same time, he is *vyatirek*. God is not afraid, ‘What if I enter *maya* and thereby

4. In this context ‘brahmarup’ should be understood as ‘divine’.

5. ‘Brahma’ should be understood as ‘divine’ in this context.

become impure?’ Instead, when God associates with *maya*, even *maya* becomes like Akshardham; and if he associates with the 24 elements, then they also become *brahmarup*” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 7).

Despite this, “The phases of childhood, youth and old age apparent in God, as well as his birth and death are all perceived due to his yogic powers of creating an illusion. In reality, God remains absolutely unchanged [always divine]. . . .

“In this way, the manifest form of Purushottam Narayan is the cause of all; he is forever divine and has a form. One should not perceive any type of imperfections in that form – it is like a *murti* made of *sakar*. . . .

“Furthermore, whichever human traits seem apparent in that God should be understood to be like the ‘*maya*’ of a magician” (Vachanamrut, Panchala 7).

Gunatitanand Swami also says, “Human traits cannot be ascribed to God at all. Since, our *jiva* and body are separate, but this cannot be said of God” (Swamini Vato 4.40).

He also explains the reason for this, “the human traits that are seen in him [God] are like the magic of a magician.”(Swamini Vato 5.66).

All *tattvas* adopted by God become divine. There is nothing in God worthy to be discarded. Shriji Maharaj therefore advises one to refrain from quibbling over the *tattvas* in the divine form of God with these words, “One who understands God’s form as being composed of the elements is a sinner, and one who understands God’s form as not being composed of the elements is also a sinner. Those who are devotees of God do not at all like to senselessly quibble over whether or not God’s form is composed of the elements.

“A devotee realizes, ‘God is God’. There is no scope for dividing or discarding any part of him” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 17).

To drive this point home, Shriji Maharaj elaborates, “The

divine form of Purushottam Bhagwan Vasudev is constantly present in that divine light [in Akshardham]. Through that divine form, he himself becomes visible to everyone and manifests on earth in human form for the purpose of granting liberation to the *jivas*.

“But the *jivas* on earth who are ignorant fools claim that God has *mayik gunas* within him. In reality, though, he does not have any *mayik gunas* within him. He is forever *gunatit* and has a divine form. Moreover, it is that very same God, who has a form and is divine, that the Vedanta shastras propound as being uncuttable, unpierceable, *nirgun*, and pervading everywhere. It is to dispel the *mayik* view from the mind of the *jiva* that He has been propounded as being *nirgun*.

“That God remains as he is during the time of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the cosmos; that is, he does not undergo any changes like worldly objects do. He always maintains a divine form” (Vachanamrut, Kariyani 7).

“That God’s form is supremely divine – there is not even the slightest trace of human traits in God. Therefore, one should not perceive human traits in God, and one should instead initially view him as a deva; then one should view him as Brahmā, and other deities; then one should view him as Pradhan-Purush; then as Prakruti-Purush; then as Akshar; and finally as Purushottam – who transcends Akshar” (Vachanamrut, Loya 18).

Clarifying still further, Shriji Maharaj says, “Therefore, there is a great similarity between the form residing in the abode of God and this incarnate form of Shri Krishna [Shriji Maharaj]. . . .

“Thus, the same form that is in Akshardham – which is *gunatit* – is manifest. There is no difference between the two. Just as the form in the abode is *gunatit*, the human form is also *gunatit*” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 31).

God is thus eternally *divya* – with a divine form – and is

gunait – beyond the *gunas*. In spite of his sublime divinity, in his human incarnation, God behaves as one with all human traits so that devotees may experience happiness by serving him. They can fulfil their long-cherished desires and achieve liberation. At the same time, the wicked are beguiled by his actions. In any case, God is free from all blemishes. Shriji Maharaj has explained this point in the Satsangijivan:

Asurānām vimohāya doshā Vishnornabi kvachit.

- Satsangijivan 3.29.107–8

3.8 NECESSITY OF UNDERSTANDING DIVYABHAV

As mentioned earlier, on earth as well as in his abode, God always has a divine form. He accepts *manushyabhab* – human attributes – in order to be on the same level as his devotees. Therefore, a true devotee should always be conscious of the sublime divinity of God. The knowledge of his *divyabhab* – divinity – leads to freedom from the bondage of *maya*, and grants ultimate liberation.

Shriji Maharaj has dealt with this point in many Vachanamruts, as can be seen from the following excerpts:

“Nevertheless, when Purushottam Bhagwan, who transcends both the perishable and the imperishable, assumes a human form and travels in the *brahmand* for the liberation of the *jivas*, his actions are just like those of all humans.

“Just as humans possess *mayik swabhav*s such as lust, anger, avarice, infatuation, *matsar*, jealousy, defeat, victory, fear, grief, arrogance, desires, cravings, and others, God also exhibits the same *swabhav*s himself, but they are all for the liberation of the *jivas*.

“So, a true devotee extols the divine actions of God and attains the highest state of enlightenment. . . .

“Thus, all actions God performs after assuming a human form are worthy of being extolled. One should not doubt,

‘Despite being God, why does he do this?’ In fact, to realize all actions and incidents of God as redemptive is the very dharma of a devotee, and only one who understands this can be called a perfect devotee of God” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 72).

Shriji Maharaj explains the same point in Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 10, “Shri Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita:

*Janma karma cha me divyam-evam yo vetti tattvataha;
Tyaktvā deham punarjanma naiti māmeti so’rjuna.*

O Arjun! My birth and my actions are divine. He who realizes them as divine will not take another birth when he leaves his body; rather, he will attain me.

“Whenever God performs divine actions, they appear divine to both a devotee and to one who is not a devotee. However, when God performs human-like actions, a true devotee still perceives divinity in them, but by no means does he perceive flaws in such actions of God. Having such understanding is known as having bhakti towards God. In fact, only such devotees earn the fruits mentioned in the above verse. . . .

“Therefore, bhakti in which one perceives all the actions and incidents of God as being divine, as the gopis did, and never perceives a flaw by understanding them to be human-like, is very rare. . . .

“In fact, such bhakti is itself the highest state of enlightenment. It is this type of bhakti that is greater than *jnan* and *vairagya*. If a person has such bhakti in their heart, what would be lacking in their love for God? Nothing would be lacking” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 10).

Furthermore Maharaj says, “Regardless of the type of action God performs, they do not perceive any fault in God. In addition, one who has faith in God coupled with the knowledge of His greatness becomes a fearless devotee” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 12).

Shriji Maharaj shows the means of subduing base instincts, which cannot be eradicated by sadhanas such as *tap* (austerities),

tyag (renunciation), *vairagya* (detachment), *vrat* (vows), *dhyan* (meditation) or Ashtanga Yoga, “If a person realizes God to be absolutely flawless, then regardless of their own *swabhav*s, they themselves become absolutely flawless as well” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 24).

“One who has realized God completely by believing that there are no *mayik* qualities in his form and that that God transcends *maya* and the products of *maya* – the three *gunas*, has transcended God’s *maya*.

“Despite the fact that within that devotee are the products of the *gunas* of *maya*, such as, the *bhuts*, the *indriyas*, the *antahkaran* and their presiding devas, each of which carries out its respective activities, that devotee is still said to have transcended *maya*. This is because even though the products of *maya* are within them, they still realize that the incarnate form of Shri Vasudev Bhagwan, who is worthy to be worshipped by them, transcends the *gunas* of *maya*; thus, that devotee should also be known to have transcended *maya*” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 5).

“One who understands God as flawless by believing, ‘God is capable; so whatever he does is appropriate,’ is said to have overcome *maya*” (Vachanamrut, Loya 4).

“Those who realize this esoteric truth understand the human form of God on this earth as being exactly the same as the form of God residing in Akshardham – they do not feel that there is even a slight difference between that form and this form. One who has known God in this way can be said to have known God perfectly. For them, *maya* can be said to have been eradicated. One who realizes this is called a devotee with *jnan* and an *ekantik bhakta*.

“Moreover, if, by chance, a person possessing such firm *upasana* of the manifest form of God – never harbouring any doubts of *maya* being present in the form of God – were to behave unbecomingly due to the influence of bad company or

due to the influence of their own *prarabdha* karmas, even then they would attain liberation" (Vachanamrut, Panchala 7).

"When the divine and human characteristics of God and his Sadhu are considered as equally divine, then true bliss in worshipping God is attained" (Swamini Vato 5.100).

"By understanding God as fault-free, one also becomes fault-free" (Swamini Vato 5.124).

A *gunatit* Sadhu – in the same way as God – is also divine and *nirdosh*. Emphasizing this, Gunatitanand Swami says, "Understand the form of God to be free from all flaws; and also understand the great God-realized Sadhu to be the same. There is no spiritual endeavour equivalent to this" (Swamini Vato 2.170).

Shriji Maharaj also says, "In fact, if one realizes the truly great Purush to be absolutely lust-free, then, even if one is as lustful as a dog, one will also become lust-free. ...

"Therefore, if one understands the great Purush to be absolutely free of lust, avarice, taste, egotism and attachment, one will also become free of all those evil natures and become a staunch devotee" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 58).

"Whoever believes the great *Purush* to be absolutely free of flaws becomes totally flawless himself" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 73).

It is therefore essential to accept God and the Sadhu as divine.

3.9 DISADVANTAGES OF PERCEIVING MANUSHYABHAV IN GOD AND HIS SADHU

God and the *brahmaśwarup gunatit* Sadhu, in human form, are eternally divine, *nirdosh* and transcend the three *gunas*. They are free from the slightest trace of *maya* or *manushyabhab* – human attributes, "God is devoid of each of the flaws that senseless people attribute to him.

"However, the intellect of the person attributing such flaws will never be freed of those flaws that they attribute to God.

Specifically, a person who believes God to be full of lust will themselves become intensely full of lust; a person who believes God to be full of anger will themselves become intensely full of anger; a person who believes God to be full of avarice will themselves become intensely full of avarice; and a person who believes God to be full of jealousy will themselves become intensely full of jealousy; and so on.

“In fact, whatever types of flaws a person attributes to God will ultimately cause misery to the person themselves – just as a fistful of sand thrown at the sun falls back into the thrower’s eyes” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 24).

Commenting further on this point, Shriji Maharaj quotes from the Bhagavad Gita:

“*Avajānani mām mudhā mānushim tanumāśkritam;
Param bhāvamajānanto mama bbutamaheshwaram.*⁶

“Therefore, those who are fools fail to realize such transcendence of God and instead perceive human traits in God, seeing him as a human like themselves.

“What is meant by perceiving human traits? Well, it is when all the feelings of the *antahkaran*, that is, lust, anger, avarice, infatuation, arrogance, *matsar*, desires, cravings, and others; and all the characteristics of the physical body, such as, bones, skin, faeces, urine, and others, as well as birth, childhood, youth, old age, death, and others; and all other human characteristics are perceived in God.

“A person who perceives such characteristics may appear to have a conviction of God, but their conviction is flawed. As a result, they will surely fall from the Satsang fellowship. . . .

“Moreover, if a person does not believe God to be completely divine, then they repeatedly become upset and constantly perceive virtues and flaws; that is, they think, ‘God is favouring that person, but not me,’ or ‘He often calls that person, but not

⁶ Fools deride me when I descend in human form. They do not know my transcendental nature as the Lord of all.

- Bhagavad Gita 9.11

me,’ or ‘He has more affection for that person, and less for me.’ In this way, they continue perceiving virtues and flaws.

“As a result, their heart becomes more and more despondent day by day, and ultimately they fall from Satsang” (Vachanamrut, Loya 18).

“However, if at some time that same devotee harbours doubts in the divine actions and incidents of God, either by the influence of unfavourable places, times, company, shastras, and other factors, or due to their identification with the body, then their *jīva*, which was like the full moon of Punam, becomes like the unlit moon of Amas.

“Therefore, some minor flaw in oneself will not really harm the *jīva* very much; but if one somehow doubts the divine actions and incidents of God, or if one somehow develops dislike for God, then that *jīva* instantly falls from the path of liberation. Just as when the roots of a tree are cut, the tree automatically becomes dry, similarly, a *jīva* who in any way perceives faults in God can never stay without falling from the Satsang fellowship” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 12).

“Therefore, a person who perceives faults in the divine incidents of God or regarding the understanding of that God should be known to be a non-believer and a sinner. In fact, they should be considered to be the king of all fools.” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 53).

However eminent a devotee may be, but if he has any misgivings about God, he cannot transcend *maya*. In this regard, Shriji Maharaj points out, “If even Brahmā and others doubt God’s yogic powers, then they cannot be said to have overcome the power of God’s *maya*” (Vachanamrut, Loya 4).

Gunatitanand Swami also says, “If one continues to perceive human traits in God, then final *moksha* is not attained” (Swamini Vato 5.115).

One who looks at the weaknesses and faults of even the

devotees of God is also sure to fall from the path of God and *ekantik dharma*. Explaining this, Shriji Maharaj says, “God’s and his Bhakta’s understanding transcends this world. How, then, can a person who believes themselves to be the body possibly comprehend it?

“So, it is simply out of one’s foolishness that one perceives flaws in God and his Bhakta and thus falls from the path of God” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 53).

“For such *ekantik bhaktas*, leaving the body is not considered to be death; rather, for them, falling from that *ekantik dharma* is true death. This occurs when an aversion arises in one’s heart towards God or his Sant.

“It is then that that devotee should be known to have fallen from the dharma of *ekantik bhaktas*. . . .

“Therefore, to perceive flaws in God and his Bhakta is a graver sin than committing the five grave sins” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 46).

One who looks at the shortcomings of a God-realized Sadhu, himself becomes a victim of those shortcomings. Shriji Maharaj therefore says, “If one perceives the fault of lust in the great Purush, then no matter how lust-free one may be, one becomes full of intense lust. In the same manner, if one views the great Purush to be full of anger or avarice, then one becomes full of anger and avarice.” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 58).

Furthermore he says, “Whichever faults they perceive in the great Purush all return to dwell in their own heart.” (Vachanamrut, Sarangpur 18).

Therefore, Gunatitanand Swami says, “What is the worst of all? That one attributes human traits to this Sadhu – there is nothing worse than this” (Swamini Vato 3.36).

By attributing human weaknesses to God in human form and his *Ekantik* Sadhu, one goes astray and spoils all chances of

liberation. Thus, Shriji Maharaj warns his followers, “Therefore, one should certainly not perceive human traits in God.

“Further, one should not perceive flaws even in the devotees of God. …

“Regardless of whether you realize this fact today or you realize it after a hundred years, it must be realized. In fact, there is no alternative but to realize it and imbibe it firmly. Therefore, all devotees should remember this principle of mine and discuss it amongst each other.

“Furthermore, whenever someone suffers a setback due to some misunderstanding, they should be alerted by mentioning this. In fact, one should discuss this principle of mine routinely, at least once a day – this is my command. So please do not forget it; please, please, do not forget it!” (Vachanamrut, Loya 18).

In this way, Shriji Maharaj has clearly commanded that one should never assume that God and the devotees suffer from human traits. They should always be regarded as divine.

God and the Sadhu are divine and *nirgun*. Those who come into their contact also attain the *nirgun* state. Shriji Maharaj explains, “So, even though God assumes a human body, he is still divine, and the place where he resides is also *nirgun*. His clothes, jewellery, vehicles, attendants, food, drinks – and in fact, any objects which become associated with him – are all *nirgun*” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 13).

Shriji Maharaj repeats the same point in the Satsangijivan:

*Divyam Krishnasya rupam bhavati cha
satatam tasya loko'pi divyo,
Divyā bhogāshcha bhogyañyapi cha
bhagawatastasya divyāni santi;
Divyā vai pārshadāshcha prakatita-
nrutanoho shaktayastasya divyā,
Divyā bhaktāshcha sarve jagati yadupate
Santi divyāhā kriyāshcha.*

As God has a divine form in Akshardham, similarly his human incarnation on earth is always divine; his abode is divine; All his enjoyments are divine; the objects of his enjoyments are divine.

His *parshads* are divine. His powers are also divine.

All his devotees are divine; and all his actions are divine.

- Satsangijivan 3.29.143

Shriji Maharaj believes Satsang to be divine, *brahmarup* and *mahavishnurup*. Therefore, an aspirant should not dishonour the Sampradaya or its followers. They should be accepted as '*brahmai murti*' – images of Brahma. Nevertheless, it is not scepticism to dislike those who merely profess their faith in devotion of God, but are actually irreligious, violating the fivefold vows. They may appear innocent to conceal their weaknesses and they merely engage in satsang to serve their selfish ends or to gain a higher social standing.

True devotees, on the other hand, faithfully observe the fivefold vows, live in accordance with the prescribed religious codes, and thus offer worship. It is their insignificant lapses or idiosyncrasies which should be overlooked. And they should be treated as divine. With progressive realization of Shriji Maharaj's divinity, a follower of the Sampradaya will easily reach this stage. This principle can be best understood from Vachanamruts, Gadhada I 56, I 58, II 10, II 17, Panchala 4 and Loya 18.

3.10 OMNISCIENCE

The Vayu Puran describes the extraordinary characteristics of God. The foremost among these is omniscience.⁷ The word omniscient is not to be taken merely literally, because omniscience is a trait of the *ishwars* as well as the *muktas*. The omniscience of Parameshwar, however, is quite different. He simultaneously knows about all the objects in countless worlds,

7. *Sarvagnatā trupirānā dibodhābā svatantratā nityā viluptadrishtibhi;*

Ananta shaktishcha vibhorvibhugnāhā shadāhurangāni Maheshwarasya.

about every *jiva*, the *ishwars*, infinite *muktas* in his divine abode and Mul Akshar. Precisely this is his omniscience.⁸

God dwells within all souls as a witness – *sakshi*. Dwelling in their heart as a witness, he is aware of all their physical deeds and mental thoughts. He knows their past, present and future, as well as their virtues and flaws, their disposition and desires. He also knows the motives of the *ishwars* regarding the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the cosmos.

8. *Yo vetti yugapatsarvam pratyakshena sadā svataha.*

4. SARVOPARI God Is Supreme

4.1 NECESSITY OF FAITH IN DIVINE SUPREMACY

Swaminarayan devotees accept the refuge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan with faith that he is God. We meditate on him and worship him as God. It is, however, of paramount importance for all followers of the Sampradaya to understand him as *sarvopari* – the supreme and highest.

With conviction of the supreme form of God, a devotee is freed from the cycles of birth and death. He realizes the difference between *atma* and *anatma*. Shriji Maharaj says, “Rather, it is the extent of a person’s faith in their *ishtadev* – God – that determines how much distinction between *atma* and non-*atma* they cultivate. In fact, without using the strength of their *ishtadev*, no spiritual endeavours can be fulfilled.” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 56).

Shriji Maharaj stresses the importance of understanding the true glory of the divine form of God, “When you come to comprehend this fact, you will not encounter any difficulty in subduing the desires for the *panchvishays* and *swabhavas* such as lust, anger, and others; they will be subdued easily” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 13).

Gunatananand Swami says, “Without knowing Maharaj as Purushottam, it is not possible to go to Akshardham” (Swamini Vato 3.12).

Shriji Maharaj therefore says, “The path of *jnan* should be understood in such a way that one does not malign the form of God in any way. ...Therefore, one who is wise should certainly abide by God’s commands to the best of one’s ability.

“However, one should also intensely maintain the strength of conviction in God’s form; that is, ‘I have attained the very

form of God who reigns supreme, who forever possesses a divine form, and who is the ‘avatari’ – the cause of all the avatars.’ If a person realizes this, then even if they may have left the Satsang fellowship, their love for God’s form will not diminish. In fact, even though they are out of Satsang at present, ultimately, when they leave their body, they will go to God’s Akshardham and stay near God.

“On the other hand, a person may be in the Satsang fellowship at present, and they may even be abiding by the commands prescribed in the shastras, but if their conviction of God is not firm, then when they leave their body, they will either go to the realm of Brahmā or to the realm of some other deva; but they will not go to the abode of Purushottam Bhagwan.

“Therefore, one should realize the manifest God that one has attained to forever possess a divine form and to be the ‘avatari’, the cause of all the avatars. If, however, one does not realize this, and instead believes God to be formless or like the other avatars, then that is regarded as committing blasphemy against God” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 9).

In the Vachanamrut and other texts of the Sampradaya, Shriji Maharaj has been described as *sarvopari* – the transcendental highest, as the *avatari* – the cause of all incarnations, and as Purna Purushottam Narayan. The following extracts will help one to understand his supreme position.

4.2 AKSHARDHAM: THE HIGHEST ABODE; SHRIJI MAHARAJ: THE SUPREME

Akshardham is the divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is distinct from the abodes of other avatars and devas. Other avatars, and their devotees and devas reside in different abodes.

Nishkulanand Swami says:

*Jeha Dhāmne pāmine prāni, pāchhu padvānu nathi re,
Sarve par chhe sukhni khāni, kevu kabie tene kathi re.*

*Anant mukta jyā ānande bhariyā, rabe cbhe Prabhujini pās re,
Sukh sukha jyā sukhmā dariyā, tyā vasi rabyā vās re.
Eva Dhāmni āgal bijā, shi ganatimā ganāya re...*

The ultimate divine abode is from where there is no return.
An indescribable reservoir of sublime happiness, it is beyond all.

Where, in close proximity of God, live infinite *muktas*; full of infinite bliss.

They live as if in the midst of oceans of utter happiness.

God's divine abode [Akshardham] is unique and incomparable with other abodes.

- Chosath Padi 55–56

Therefore, Shriji Maharaj says that the bliss offered by his divine abode is so infinitely overwhelming that in comparison to it, the happiness offered by the *lokas* of the deities is described in Mokshadharma as utterly infernal and insignificant (Vachanamruts, Sarangpur 1, 4, 11; Gadhada III 28).¹

Apart from Akshardham, all other abodes are perishable. Akshardham is imperishable and eternal. Nishkulanand Swami says:

*Mā'pralay kālanā agnimā sijā, hamesh je hanāya re,
Prakruti-Purush pralaymā āvē, bhav Brahmā na rabe koy re,
Chaud loka dhām rahevā na pāme, sarve sanhār hoy re.*

In the scorching heat of the final destruction, the fourteen *lokas*, Bhav (Shiva), Brahma and Prakriti Purush are all consumed.

- Chosath Padi 56

Shriji Maharaj also explains, "With the exception of God's Akshardham, the form of God in that Akshardham and his devotees in that Akshardham, everything else – all the realms, the devas, and the opulence of the devas – is perishable" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 24).

All other abodes are ephemeral. Eventually, the *jivas* have to

¹ *Ete vai nirayāstaat sthānasya Paramātmanaha.*

- Mahabharat, Shantiparva 12.191.6

return to the cycles of birth and death. Only from Akshardham does a *mukta* never return:

*Na tadbhāsayate suryo na shashāṅko na pāvakaha;
Yadgatvā na nivartante taddhāma paramam mama.*

The supreme abode is not illumined by the sun or the moon or the fire. Those who attain it never return to this material world.

- Bhagavad Gita 15.6

Other abodes are influenced by the three *gunas* and *maya*. It is only Akshardham that is uninfluenced by the *gunas* or *maya*.

Other abodes have specific dimensions according to scriptural descriptions. However, because of its vastness, Akshardham is described as immeasurable and endless in all directions (Vachanamrut, Loya 14).

Other abodes abound with material objects such as diamond-studded palaces, jewels, etc. Akshardham, however, is flooded with divine light. Purushottam, Akshar and the *akshar muktas* dwell within that divine light.

Shriji Maharaj describes his abode in Premanand Swami's kirtan, 'Bolya Shri Hari re...':

*Māru Dhām chhe re, Akshar Amrut jenu nām;
Sarve sāmrathi re, shakti gune kari abhirām.
Ati tejomaya re, ravi shashi kotik vārane jāy;
Shital shānt chhe re, tejni upamā nav devāy.*

My abode is known as Akshar – the centre of nectarine sublimity.

It is supreme, and full of power and prosperity.

Shining with divine light, it is served by countless suns and moons;

Infinitely soothing light reigns supreme there.

- Sadguru Premanand Swami

Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami also writes:

*Tēj tej jiyā tej ambār, tejomay tan tenā re,
Tejomay jyā sarve ākār, shu kahiye sukh enā re.*

*Te tej madhye sinhāsan shobhe, tiyā bethā babunāmi re,
Nishkulānand kabe man lobhe, Puran Purushottam pāmi re.*
Flooded with divine light, the abode is extremely bright.
There, all the forms are full of light; the peace is indescribable.
At the centre of the light sits God on a dazzling throne.
Nishkulanand says – my mind is enchanted. I have met
Purna Purushottam.

- Chosath Padi 55

In his talks, Gunatitanand Swami has clearly stated the superiority of Akshardham over other abodes (Swamini Vato 3.11, 3.23, 3.49).

Shriji Maharaj also describes, in his own words, the superlative position of his divine abode, “The abode in the form of Akshar is the highest and beyond all” (*Vedras*, p.146).

In the Samvat year 1869 (1813 CE), Shriji Maharaj was bedridden. By his yogic powers, he visited various abodes, ultimately reaching Akshardham. He describes the journey, “I went alone to the abode of Shri Purushottam Narayan, which transcends everything. There, I saw that it was I who was Purushottam; I did not see anyone eminent apart from myself. . . .

“Moreover, I will grant my supreme abode to all who come to my refuge and understand this” (Vachanamrut, Ahmedabad 7).

Here, Shriji Maharaj has unambiguously described Akshardham as the highest. That abode is his and he himself is supreme there. It is therefore but natural that God residing in such a transcendent and divine Akshardham, should also be the highest, the supreme of all gods.

4.3 SHRIJI MAHARAJ: THE SUPREME

4.3.1 In His Own Words

At times, Shriji Maharaj has described his own supremacy. Normally, God – in human incarnation – conceals his divinity and limitless powers. He hesitates in speaking about his divine

form because, “Upon discussing this topic, what if someone were to misunderstand it? What if, due to this discussion, any inclination that one may have firmly cultivated were to be destroyed, or even be uprooted? Yet, there is no alternative but to reveal this fact. If one does not interpret it correctly, many problems can arise” (Vachanamrut, Loya 18).

Only after the sun rises can one appreciate the sun. Similarly, only when Purushottam Narayan identifies himself can one realize his divine glory.

We accept Shriji Maharaj as God. We worship him and offer our prayers to him. Honouring his words as self-evident and eternal truths, let us study them first.

In the old manuscripts written during his own lifetime, Maharaj reveals, “The earlier incarnations had a specific cause for a particular end. But my incarnation is to make the *jivas brahmarup* and allow them to attain ultimate liberation. For this noble mission, I – Purushottam – beyond even Akshar, have assumed human form.”

Past incarnations manifest to serve a specific purpose, such as defeating the demons. Having accomplished their mission, they departed from the world. But Bhagwan Swaminarayan incarnated to make the *jivas brahmarup* and to grant them ultimate liberation, thereby ensuring permanent liberation from the cycles of birth and death.

Therefore, Shriji Maharaj’s manifestation on earth was for a higher mission than the other incarnations. Shriji Maharaj clearly mentions his supremacy in the Vachanamrut,

“It is that same supreme Purushottam Bhagwan who manifests on this earth out of compassion – for the purpose of granting liberation to the *jivas*. He is presently visible before everyone; he is your *ishtadev*; and he accepts your service. In fact, there is absolutely no difference between the manifest form of Purushottam Bhagwan visible before you and the form of God residing in Akshardham; both are one.

“Moreover, this manifest form of Purushottam Bhagwan is the controller of all, including Akshar. He is the lord of all the *ishwars* and the cause of all causes. He reigns supreme, and he is the cause of all the avatars.

“Moreover, he is worthy of being worshipped single-mindedly by you all. The many previous avatars of this God are worthy of being bowed down to and worthy of reverence” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 38).

“That uniform divine light is referred to as the *atma*, or Brahma or Akshardham. The form of God within that light is called the essence of the *atma*, Parabrahma or Purushottam.Realize that the form amidst the divine light is this Maharaj visible before you” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 13).

“All the avatars of God manifest from the very God that is present in this Satsang fellowship. That is to say, he is the cause of all the avatars and is the *antaryami* of all. It is he who, in Akshardham, is radiant, full of countless powers and eternally has a form. He is also the Lord of all the lords of the countless *brabmands*; he is even the cause of Aksharbrahma” (Vachanamrut, Ahmedabad 6).

These words of Shriji Maharaj clearly explain the importance of firm faith in his supreme form. It is imperative for all seekers of liberation to develop such faith.

4.3.2 As Expressed in Swamini Vato

When God descends on earth for the liberation of the *jivas* and assumes human form, he is accompanied by his divine abode Akshardham and the released *jivas* (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 71).

Shriji Maharaj has also observed, “As he is in Akshar, he is not in Prakriti Purush.” This signifies that no one is in a better position than Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami to explain his supreme glory. Gunatitanand Swami’s unambiguous and

unequivocal talks – Swamini Vato – amply prove this. Every word in his talks testifies to Shriji Maharaj's majestic glory.

Unafraid and uninhibited by scriptural dogmatism, Gunatitanand Swami openly proclaimed the sublime and supreme position of Maharaj.

When asked about the absence of scriptural references regarding Shriji Maharaj's divine glory, Gunatitanand Swami used to reply, "How can there be a marriage of a person before his birth? Similarly, when Purushottam had not incarnated, how could his story be written in the shastras?" (Swamini Vato 5.399).

Prior to Shriji Maharaj's descent on earth, how could the shastras have mentioned him?

Gunatitanand Swami explains the significance of his talks in inspiring words: these talks "are as piercing as the sharpest of arrows", "incisive as surgical instruments", "dispel all doubts" and "are the talks of Purushottam himself".

Elated by the incessant flow of Gunatitanand Swami's talks, Sadguru Gopalanand Swami expressed his joy, "In Vartal, we hear 25% of these talks, in Gadhada, 50%. Only in Junagadh do we have the satisfaction of hearing them 100%."

Some of these talks of Gunatitanand Swami which explain Shriji Maharaj's supreme glory are presented below:

1. "There is nothing more to understand and this is all that needs to be understood, know Maharaj as Purushottam [supreme God] and this Sadhu as Akshar" (Swamini Vato 3.38).
2. "Without knowing Maharaj as Purushottam, it is not possible to go to Akshardham. And without becoming *brahmarup*, it is not possible to stay in the service of Maharaj." Then Shivlal asked a question, "How should Maharaj as Purushottam be known? And how can one become *brahmarup*?" Then Swami said, "Know that Maharaj is supreme, the source of all avatars and the cause of all causes." Based on this, he had Vachanamruts Gadhada II 9 and Gadhada III 38 read

and said, “Today, in Satsang, sadhus, *acharyas*, mandirs and *murtis* are all supreme. So what is there to say in Maharaj being supreme? One should understand that he is supreme.” (Swamini Vato 3.12).

3. “All avatars are like magnets. Some weigh several kilogrammes, some tens of kilogrammes... and a magnet weighing hundreds of thousands of kilogrammes attracts metal of an entire region. And today, a whole mountain of magnet has come, otherwise how would the whole universe be attracted?” Then, Swami said, “*Jivas* are drawn to previous avatars according to their powers. And today the source of all avatars, the cause of all causes, Purushottam, has come. And seeing him, the lords of countless abodes and the liberated souls in them are drawn to Maharaj’s *murti*; just as on encountering a mountain of magnet, the nails of a ship are attracted” (Swamini Vato 3.4).
4. “Today even 20-year-olds are renouncing worldly life and coming. And in the past, in the shastras, nobody has renounced women, and today thousands are renouncing women. And previously, God came to collect two or three – this is written in the scriptures; and today God comes to each home to collect. And other great incarnations are like the *parasmani*, and Purushottam is the *chintamani*” (Swamini Vato 2.169).

4.3.3 In the Words of the Paramhansas

Attracted by the divine and glorious personality of Shriji Maharaj, many of the *paramhansas* unreservedly accepted his supremacy. Others accepted him initially as God, but on realizing his immense glory and superhuman deeds, they started trusting his words and gradually came to acknowledge his divine supremacy. Their realization of Shriji Maharaj’s supremacy has been incorporated in the words of their kirtans and shastras, as exemplified in the following excerpts:

1. In all his literary works, Nishkulanand Swami has described Shriji Maharaj in glowing terms – as Purna Purushottam, the ultimate *avatari* of all avatars:

(A)

*Adya madhya antye avatār, thayā aganit thāshe apār,
Pan sarvenā kāran jeh, teto Swāmi Sahajānand eh.*

At the beginning, the middle and the end of creation, countless avatars have incarnated and will incarnate.

But the prime cause of them all is one and only one – Swami Sahajanand.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Avatar Chintamani 32

(B)

*Vidhipar te Virat kahi e, te par Pradhan Purush labie;
Te par Mul Prakruti Purush, tethi par Akshar sujash.
Akshar par Purushottam jeha, tene dharyu manusyanu deha;
Tenu darshan ne sparsh kyāthi, sabu vichārone manmāthi.*

Je chhe man vānīne agam, te to āj thayā chhe sugam;
Beyond Brahma is Virat. Beyond Virat is Pradhan Purush.
Beyond Pradhan Purush is Mul Prakriti Purush. And beyond him is majestic Akshar; Beyond Akshar is Purushottam, who has descended in human form.

Just think – could we ever have seen or touched him?

The one who is beyond words and thoughts, he has become easily accessible to us today.

- Bhaktachintamani 77

(C)

*Pachhi boliyā Prānjivan, tame sāmbhalajyo sabu jan,
Tamane je mali chhe murti, tene Nigam kahe neti neti...*

*Ati apār Aksharāit, thai tamāre te sāthe prit,
Bhakta jaktamāhi chhe jo ghanā, upāsak avatār tanā.
Je je murti janane bhāvē, te murti nijadhām pahochāvē,
Pan sarve pār je prāpati, te chhe tamāre kahe Prānpati.*

Then addressing them, Shriji Maharaj said, “All of you listen

carefully.

Though the Vedas say, 'He is not, he is not', he is very much before you in human form.

You are associated with him, who is immeasurable and beyond Akshar.

Many devotees on this earth worship various avatars.

They, in turn, help their followers to attain their respective abodes.

What you have attained is unsurpassable, and beyond their reach," so said Shriji Maharaj.

- Bhaktachintamani 79

(D)

Nishkulanand Swami sings of Shriji Maharaj's supremacy in Purushottam Prakash:

Purushottam pragati re...

Kalash chādāvyo kalyānāno re, sahunā mastak par mod;

Dhanya dbanya ā avatārne re, jovā rākhi nahi jod...

Dhāmī je Akshardhāmna re, tene āpyo cbhe ānand;...

Bandh kidhā bijā bāranā re, ve'ti kidhi Akshar vāt...

Ashādhi meghe āvi karyā re, jbājhā bijā jbākal;...

The advent of Purushottam marked the pinnacle of liberation as if everyone has a crown on their heads.

Blessed and unparalleled is this incarnation.

The supreme God of Akshardham has given divine joy in abundance.

All other doors are closed, but the royal road to Akshardham has been laid wide open.

Before the torrential rains of Ashadh, all others are like dew.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Purushottam Prakash 55

Shriji Maharaj is compared in the simile with the heavy downpour of the month of Ashadh which blossoms the whole earth. The other avatars are compared to dew which cannot affect the earth. In such words, Nishkulanand Swami has sung

the divine glory of his supreme master.

(1)

*Sahajanand Swāmi re, Pote Parabrahma chhe re,
Swāminārāyan jenu nām re.*

Sahajanand Swami himself is Parabrahma.

His name is Swaminarayan.

- Sadguru Muktanand Swami

(2)

*Divya chaitanya Akshar jenu ghar chhe jo,
Kshar Akshar thaki e to par chhe jo.*

Full of divine consciousness is his abode Akshardham.

He is beyond *kshar* and Akshar.

- Sadguru Premanand Swami

The poems of the eight *paramhansa*-poets as well as *Haridigvijay* written by the great scholar sadhu Nityanand Swami, and the monumental Shri Harililakalpataru composed by Acharya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj and Achintyanand Brahmachari at the inspiration of Gunatitanand Swami contain numerous references of Shriji Maharaj's supreme status.

4.4 COSMIC EVOLUTION

Let us now examine the phases of cosmic evolution to understand the supreme position of Shriji Maharaj.

While explaining cosmic evolution, Shriji Maharaj has clearly distinguished the position of different deities, *ishwars*, their evolution, etc. Philosophically, there are five *anadi bhedas* – eternal realities. *Jivas* are born in any one of four categories: *ubbhij*, *jarayuj*, *swedaj* and *andaj* – i.e. born from earth, womb, sweat or egg – and include Indra and other *devas* and all *jivas*. All entities from Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh to Pradhan Purush are included in the *ishwar* category. *Maya* is the *shakti* of God. *Maya* merges in the light of Aksharbrahma.

Shriji Maharaj says, “From the Vedas, the Purans, the Itihas and the Smrutis, I have formed the principle that *jiva*, *maya*, *ishwar*, Brahma and Parabrahma are all eternal.

“Consider it as follows: *Maya* represents the soil; the *jivas* represent the seeds in the soil; and *ishwar*, the rain. By the will of God, an *ishwar* – in the form of Purush – unites with *maya*.² Subsequently, just as the seeds in the soil sprout by the association of rainwater, similarly, the *jivas*, which are eternal, arise from within *maya*; but new *jivas* are not created. Therefore, just as *ishwar* is eternal, *maya* is also eternal. The *jivas* residing in *maya* are also eternal, and they are not components of God; they are always *jivas*.

“When a *jiva* seeks refuge in God, it overcomes God’s *maya*, becomes *brahmarup* like Narad and the Sanakadik, attains the abode of God, and becomes his attendant. This is my principle” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 10).

“Following the dissolution of the *brahmants*, it is only this incarnate God who remains. Also, it is this same God who, at the time of creation, creates countless millions of *brahmants* through Prakruti and Purush” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 56).

Shriji Maharaj explains the process of evolution in the Vachanamrut, “At the time of creation, Purushottam Bhagwan – who transcends even Akshar – inspires Akshar. As a result, Purush manifests from Akshar.³ After entering Akshar, Purushottam enters Purush, and in the form of Purush, inspires Prakruti. In this way, as Purushottam successively entered the various entities, the activities of creation took place.

“Thereafter, Pradhan-Purushes were produced from Prakruti-Purush. From Pradhan-Purush, *mahattattva* was produced. From *mahattattva*, the three types of *ahamkar* were produced.

“From *ahamkar*, the *bbuts*, the *vishays*, the *indriyas*, the

2. Here ‘*maya*’ refers to Pradhan-Prakruti.

3. Akshar looks at the countless *muktas*, from whom one Purush arises. This is explained in Swāmini Vāto 7.15. The shastras describe this Purush as Mul Purush.

antahkarans and their presiding deities were produced. From those, Virat-Purush was produced. From the lotus extending from his naval, Brahmā was produced.

“From that Brahmā, Marichi and other *prajapatis* were produced. From them, Kashyap and other *prajapatis* were produced. From them, Indra and other deities, the demons, and all the mobile and immobile creation were produced” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 41).

When Parabrahma Paramatma desires to create the universe, he looks at his eternal devotee Akshar. Knowing his master’s – Parabrahma Paramatma’s – wish, Akshar looks at Purush (*akshar mukta* or *akshar purush*) and inspires him to abide by the will of Purushottam. Therefore, this Aksharatmak Mul Purush, to fulfil Parabrahma’s desire, unites with Mahamaya (Prakriti) resulting in infinite Pradhan-Purush pairs, which had until then been lying dormant in *maya* since the time of dissolution. Thus, through Pradhan and Purush, the entire cosmos comes into existence.

Referring to Aksharatmak Purush – also known as an *aksharrrup mukta* of Akshardham – Shriji Maharaj says, “That Purush is desireless, he is a *mukta*, he is *brahmarup* and he is the cause of *maya*. Although he stays within *maya*, he still remains unaffected by *maya*. Also, he has no desire to enjoy *maya* since he is content due to the bliss of Brahma; thus, he is fulfilled” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 31).

The majority of shastras refer to this Purush as Purushottam. It is therefore difficult to realize that Parabrahma Purushottam is different from Purush. Consequently, confusion arises regarding Purushottam. But in the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj clarifies, “Just as there is a difference between the *jīva* and Virat-Purush, who is an *ishwar*; and just as there is also a difference between *ishwar* and Purush, similarly, there is an immense difference between Purush and Vasudev Bhagwan –

Purushottam. Purushottam Vasudev Bhagwan is the master of all, whereas there are many such *brahmarup*, Akshar-like Purushes who worship the holy feet of Vasudev and who offer praise to him. ...

“I have explained this fact in this way many times, but it is not firmly fixed in one’s heart due to a lack of deep contemplation. As a result, after listening to the words of the shastras, no stability remains in one’s understanding” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 31).

This chain of evolution clearly demonstrates that Shriji Maharaj himself – as Parabrahma Purushottam – is the inspirer, the *antaryami* and the prime cause of creation. Listening to this elucidation by Shriji Maharaj, Sadguru Premanand Swami has written in his kirtan, ‘*Bolya Shri Hari re...*’:

*Jiva ishwar tano re, māyā kāla Purush Pradhān,
Saune vash karu re, sauno prerak hu Bhagwān.
Aganit vishvani re, utpatti pālan pralay thāy,
Māri marji vinā re, koithi taranu nav todāy.*

The inspirer of *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, *kal*, Purush, Pradhan, I control them all. I am God.

I create, sustain and dissolve countless worlds.

Without my will, no one can pluck even a blade of grass.

- Sadguru Premanand Swami

4.5 PARABRAHMA PURUSHOTTAM NARAYAN: ONE AND UNIQUE

We have seen from the above account that Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan is the supreme, the cause of all avatars, the ultimate cause of all causes and the controller of all. There is only one Parabrahma. That Parabrahma is Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He is one and incomparable. And no power – not even Akshar – is capable of becoming Parabrahma. The scriptural confirmation in this regard, is as follows:

The Shrutis pronounce:

Ekamevādvitiyam Brahma

God is only one and unique.

Clarifying this basic principle, Shriji Maharaj says, “Only God is like God (Narayan); no one can become like him” (Vachanamruts, Loya 13, Kariyani 8, Kariyani 10).

“Only God is like God. Many have attained qualities similar to his by worshipping him, yet they certainly do not become like God” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 39).

“After all, there is only one form of God. This God is extremely powerful and no one, including Akshar, is capable of becoming like him. This is an established principle” (Vachanamrut, Loya 4).

The *Upanishads* also reiterate this point:

Na tatsamashchāpyadhibikashcha drishyate.

None can ever equal or surpass Parabrahma.

- Shvetashvatara Upanishad 6.8;
Bhavasambhava Samhita Upanishad 2.24

4.6 WELL-KNOWN INCIDENTS DEMONSTRATING SHRIJI MAHARAJ'S SUPREMACY

4.6.1: As Explained by Shriji Maharaj Himself

1. A Brahmin aspirant by the name of Shitaldas had heard about the admirable work of Ramanand Swami and came for his darshan. Unfortunately, Ramanand Swami had passed away just a few days before Shitaldas's arrival. He was therefore very disappointed and thought of going back. At that moment, Shriji Maharaj graced him with samadhi – a divine trance – in which he had the darshan of Ramanand Swami and the 24 avatars in Shriji Maharaj. In this state of trance, Shitaldas performed puja of Shriji Maharaj with love. He also had an intense desire to offer puja to the infinite *muktas* residing in Akshardham.

Realizing his desire, Shriji Maharaj asked him to think, “If any one of the incarnations or if Ramanand Swami happens to

be Purushottam, then may I assume infinite forms.” In spite of such a wish, Shitaldas failed to assume infinite forms.

Shriji Maharaj then said, “*Chintvan evu muj vishe, have karo kahe Parmesh...*” (Now you may think on the same lines about me....).

Shitaldas did as instructed and imagined, “If Shriji Maharaj is Purushottam, may I assume infinite forms.” The moment Shitaldas thought of this, he was able to assume countless forms and performed the puja of infinite *muktas* simultaneously. Coming out of the trance, Shitaldas prayed to Shriji Maharaj. He was immediately convinced of the supremacy of Shriji Maharaj. He was soon initiated as a sadhu by Shriji Maharaj and was renamed Vyapakanand Swami. It has been described in the *Harililamrut*:

*Sarva avatār emā samāy, pote koi mā lin na thāy,
Evi vāt kahi jeha vār, thayā lin badhā avatār.*

All the incarnations merge in him, but he does not merge in anybody.

The moment this was said, all the incarnations merged in him.

- *Harililamrut* 5.3

2. Parvatbhai of Agatrai was a dedicated devotee of Shriji Maharaj. Once while ploughing his field, he was engrossed in meditating on Maharaj, and had the darshan of his radiant form. Subsequently, he had the darshan of all the 24 incarnations one after another, and saw all of them merge into Shriji Maharaj’s divine form. Parvatbhai was immensely pleased by this darshan.

By sending learned and illiterate devotees and non-devotees, and even animals and birds into divine trance, Shriji Maharaj manifested his spiritual powers and convinced others of his supremacy. Followers of different faiths also went into trance and had the darshan of the deities they were worshipping. In trance, they also saw all these deities merging into Shriji Maharaj. Attracted by his sublime glory, aspirants from all over India came and sought his refuge.

Vachanamrut, Panchala 6 also mentions a similar point. Shri

Krishna exhibited the glory of all the previous incarnations. Therefore, his superiority over them is acknowledged in the shastras. Similarly, Shriji Maharaj manifested his spiritual powers by merging into himself all the previous incarnations. Shriji Maharaj therefore proved his supreme nature.

3. After Ramanand Swami passed away, Shriji Maharaj revealed his supreme glory on many occasions. In Loj and Mangrol, he also blessed countless people with samadhi. Soon after Maharaj was appointed as guru of the Sampradaya, Bhimbhai, a devout follower from Kalvani requested Maharaj, “When a new king is enthroned, all the prisoners are set free. You are the ultimate *avatari* of all avatars. To commemorate this joyous event, kindly free all the *jivas* who are condemned to suffer the tortures of Hell.”

Moved by Bhimbhai’s prayer, Shriji Maharaj sent Swarupanand Swami into trance to Yamapuri (Hell). Deeply touched by the piteous wailing of the *jivas* in Yamapuri, Swarupanand Swami felt sorry for them. He asked them to chant the name of Swaminarayan. By chanting this divine mantra, all the *jivas* were instantly freed from the torments of Hell. They all assumed four-armed forms and transmigrated to the *loka* of Bhumapurush. Thus, Shriji Maharaj also manifested his infinite powers through his *paramhansas*.

Muktanand Swami has narrated this incident in the following kirtan:

*Pote Parabrahma re, Swāmi Sahajānand,
Nārāyan prabal pratāp chbe.
Swaminārāyan mukhe uchchare,
Tene janmamaran Jamno bhay jāy,
Sarve Naraknā kund khāli thayā,
Bhukhyā Jamgana re kar ghasi pastāy.
Sahajānand Swāmi re, Na pragatat ā same re,
Prāni koi pāmat nahi bhavpār...*

Swami Sahajanand himself is Parabrahma Narayan with great powers.

He who utters the name of Swaminarayan is freed from the vicious cycles of birth and death, and the clutches of Yama.

All the pits in Hell have been emptied; the hungry hell-wardens are wringing their hands in despair.

Had Sahajanand Swami not descended on earth in our times, No soul would have been freed from the relentless wheel of births and deaths.

On the same theme, Nishkulanand Swami has also written:

Jiva sayamni e (Yamapurimā) shid jāy re,

Pragat Prabhu chhe pruthvi māy re....

Bese rājā gādi par koy re, Chhode bandhivānānā bandh soy re;
Tem bandhthi chhodyā bahu jan re, Pote pragat Shri Bhagwān re;
Mahā moto pratāp pragatāvi re, Rit nautam nyāri chalāvi re;
Jene upar nahi bijo koy re, Te to jem kare tem hoy re;
Saunā nāth niyantā Swāmi re, Sau dhāmatanā pan Dhāmi re;
Te to adhalak āj dbaliyā re, Thayā sukhi jan jene maliyā re.

When God in human form has manifested on earth, why should a *jiva* be consigned to Hell?

When a king is enthroned, all the prisoners are set free from their bondage.

Similarly, manifest God has released many *jivas*.

Demonstrating his immeasurable glory, he has blazed a new trail.

No one is above or beyond him; whatever happens is according to his will.

He governs all and is the lord of all the abodes.

He [Maharaj] is now showering his pleasure; whoever has met him experiences divine bliss.

4. When Shriji Maharaj had the Satsangijivan shastra written in Gadhada, a lengthy debate on *upasana* took place. Nityanand

Swami insisted on describing Shriji Maharaj as supreme, the ultimate *avatari* of all avatars, and the final cause of all causes. The other *paramhansas*, however, were in favour of depicting Shriji Maharaj as equal to other avatars. Nityanand Swami firmly presented his reasoning. However, Shriji Maharaj himself sided with the rest of the *paramhansas*.

Shriji Maharaj had a long drawn-out debate with Nityanand Swami regarding this matter, but Nityanand Swami refused to change his stance. Following this, Nityanand Swami was excommunicated and Maharaj stopped talking to him. Despite this humiliation, Nityanand Swami remained firm in his understanding about Maharaj's supreme nature. After seven days, Maharaj called him and praised his understanding. As a token of his appreciation, he garlanded Nityanand Swami, adding, "A true *upasak* should have understanding like Nityanand Swami. Although I sided with the other *paramhansas* and he was insulted, he refused to give up his correct understanding." This incident clearly illustrates Shriji Maharaj's supremacy.

Despite this, some of the leading *paramhansas* remained hesitant in publicly declaring Shriji Maharaj as God and as supreme. They had apprehensions that such portrayal lacked scriptural confirmation and would not be widely accepted. Consequently, their inflexible views prevailed and Shriji Maharaj was depicted as like others in the *Satsangijivan shastra*. At that time Shriji Maharaj said that shastras describing his supreme glory would be composed at a later date and also his *murti* would be consecrated.

On many occasions, Shriji Maharaj had said that had he asked Gunatitanand Swami and Nishkulananand Swami to study Sanskrit, there would have been a large scale acceptance of this principle by followers of the Sampradaya. There would have been no need for a scholar such as Dinanath Bhatt, and the divine glory and majestic powers of his form would have been written exactly as they were.

5. In the course of his travels in the teenage-yogi form of Nilkanth Varni, Shriji Maharaj arrived in the village of Loj. At the time, Ramanand Swami was staying in Bhuj. Ramanand Swami was well aware of Nilkanth Varni's eminence. He therefore instructed all his disciples to visit Loj for Varni's darshan. Lalji Suthar of Shekhpat (later Nishkulanand Swami), however, had an irresistible attraction for his guru, Ramanand Swami. Therefore, instead of going to Loj, he decided to go to Bhuj. There, Ramanand Swami asked him, "Disregarding my orders, why did you come here? Varni is extremely great and worthy of darshan."

Thereupon Lalji Bhakta inquired, "How eminent is this Varni? Can he be compared to you?"

Ramanand Swami replied, "Varni is superior to me. He is the cause of all avatars, greatest of the great, endowed with all divine virtues and powers. He himself is Purushottam." In this way, Ramanand Swami explained at length the supremacy of Shriji Maharaj and rebuked Lalji Bhakta for not going to Loj.

This incident has been described in the *Harililamrut* (4.3):

Ā chhe avatārnā avatāri, Ghanu shu kabie vistāri...

Evā motānā darshan muki, Kem āvyā chho Kachchhīmā chuki?

He is the ultimate *avatāri* of all avatars. There is no need to elaborate any further.

Leaving aside his darshan, why have you come to Kutch?

6. Although Shriji Maharaj lived in Saurashtra, he became well-known throughout the whole of India. People talked about the new faith started by 'Jivanmukta' (one who grants liberation in this very life) in western India. By merely uttering the word 'Jivanmukta', the surroundings glowed with light. Everyone wondered that if the name itself was so impressive, how wonderful would he be in person? Many were attracted from all corners of the country and came to Saurashtra to join the Sampradaya. Some of these disciples were previously powerful

heads of sects and monasteries. With their band of disciples, they sought refuge in Shriji Maharaj.

When Shriji Maharaj was only 25 years old, he initiated 500 aspirants as *paramhansas* in a single night, many of whom were senior in age, great scholars, ascetics, and extremely brilliant. This incident illustrates his majestic awe, enchanting personality and his boundless energy. These *paramhansas* were no ordinary people. Many were experts in literature, music, sculpture, painting, dance and other fields; others were erudite and affluent. What was the charisma of this young man that the *paramhansas* renounced their homes, families, wealth, status and their fixed notions of caste to fall at his lotus feet? This single act of Maharaj is in itself an eloquent testimony of his divine supremacy.

The *paramhansas* had an unshakeable conviction of Shriji Maharaj's supremacy. Shriji Maharaj once put them to the test by asking, "O *paramhansas*, the previous incarnations destroyed many demons and accomplished wonderful feats. On the other hand, I have not done anything to merit the honour of being called God. I have not churned the ocean, nor have I liquidated the Kshatriyas from the face of the earth. I have neither conquered demons like Ravan, nor have I built a bridge over the ocean. Neither have I lifted Mt. Govardhan, nor have I destroyed Jarasandh. I have not performed such heroic acts. Yet, why do you call me God? You must certainly be mistaken."

The *paramhansas*, however, were not the type to be misled by Maharaj's testing words. Their conviction remained unwavering. They replied, "Maharaj! If the sky says that it is not the sky and if the sun says that it is not the sun, who will believe them? God is simply divine. Whatever he may say, we are unlikely to be fooled. You may not have destroyed the demons. But they were already destroyed by their passion, anger, greed, infatuation, jealousy, ego, etc. These vices are such that they can precipitate

one's downfall from Swargalok, Vidhilok or Vaikunth. You have emancipated us from these deadly vices."

Māte ene diye ja vidāri, te to avatārnā avatāri.

He who can uproot vices, he is the ultimate *avatāri* of all avatars.

- Bhaktachintamani 105

"You have liberated the pious as well as the impious. You may not have built a bridge across the ocean; but you have built a bridge that helps one to cross the turbulent ocean of worldly life, and leads one onto the path to Akshardham. You have freed us from the bondage of *maya* and helped us to attain Akshardham" (Bhaktachintamani 104–5).

Shriji Maharaj was extremely pleased to hear these words of unflinching faith from the *parambhansas*.

4.6.2 As Explained by Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami

The inspiring words of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami acted as a catalyst in propagating the correct understanding of Shriji Maharaj's supremacy in Satsang. In the absence of such understanding, it is not possible to transcend the dense darkness of *maya*. Precisely for this reason, Shriji Maharaj appeared to Sadguru Gopalanand Swami in a dream in Umreth and told him, "Spread the knowledge of my supremacy as Purushottam; otherwise, I will keep you in this human body for a thousand years."

1. Whenever Sadguru Gopalanand Swami explained the distinction between avatars and their ultimate cause, *avatāri*, Mota Atmanand Swami, who was senior in age, used to remark, "Boy! Do not indulge in comparisons of God."

Gopalanand Swami used to reply with a smile, "Swami, today you may not understand what I am saying, but in the future, some sadhu will come and explain this truth to you."

When Atmanand Swami reached the age of 116, he wondered, “I have no desires yet why has Maharaj still not come to take me to his divine abode of Akshardham?”

At that time, he met Gunatitanand Swami who recalled various incidents wherein Shriji Maharaj had told Atmanand Swami in person about his supremacy. Gunatitanand Swami emphasized the importance of understanding the supreme *upasana*. As a result of these talks, imperfections in Atmanand Swami’s knowledge of *upasana* were removed, following which Maharaj took him to Akshardham.

Thus, many a senior sadhu had the benefit of such talks given by Gunatitanand Swami.

2. Only when Gunatitanand Swami explained Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 9 to Sadguru Shukanand Swami did the latter realize the divine supremacy of Shriji Maharaj. At that time Shukanand Swami commented, “I myself edited this particular Vachanamrut and was instrumental in its selection, but only today have I grasped its true meaning.”

3. In the propagation of the supreme form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami was never deterred by scriptural dogmatism. About those who indulged in such fanaticism, he remarked, “The *jīva* does not hesitate anywhere, but hesitates in describing Maharaj as Purushottam.” Then Raghuvirji Maharaj asked a question, “Why does one who has seen and heard of Maharaj’s divine actions still hesitate to describe and write about them?” Then Swami said, “A horse had a dream in which its leg was broken. When it awoke, it stood as if the leg was really broken, and would not put it on the ground. Then it was shown to the vet, who said, ‘This horse’s leg is not broken. It is not ill. It has had a dream so it is standing holding its leg up.’ Then someone asked, ‘What should be done?’ The vet said, ‘Prepare 200 horses and fire canons and guns. When it is startled, it will forget its dream.’ Similarly, people have been

confused by the words of the shastras, so when we continuously bombard like this, it will clear up the confusion.” This much was said. Then Raghuvirji Maharaj placed three *champa* flowers on his seat and said, “Some have reached up to this first flower and some reach up to this second flower, but nobody reaches this third flower” (Swamini Vato 3.19).

In another words, some understood Shriji Maharaj as similar to an ordinary avatar. They had reached the first flower. Others who recognized Maharaj as a higher avatar had reached the second flower. But no one realized Shriji Maharaj as he was – supreme, the ultimate *avatari* of all avatars, Purushottam – to reach the third flower. To inculcate this understanding to the *jivas*, Gunatitanand Swami handed over the third flower to Achintyanand Brahmachari and instructed him to compose a unique text describing Shriji Maharaj’s sublime form and reflecting his divine glory in every word, so that the supremacy of Shriji Maharaj could be propagated in Satsang.

Abiding by Gunatitanand Swami’s directive, Achintyanand Brahmachari composed a monumental volume in Sanskrit known as *Harililakalpataru*, which described the supreme glory of Maharaj.

Thus, Gunatitanand Swami not only spread the knowledge of Shriji Maharaj’s supremacy through his talks, but also had it noted in the religious literature of the Sampradaya through his disciples.

There are many such incidents prevalent in the Sampradaya which have been propagated by prominent *sadgurus*. We have also come to know about them through the hierarchy of spiritual gurus. The constraints of space do not allow further narration of such incidents. A clearer understanding will be gained by studying the literature of the Sampradaya.

4.7 QUESTIONS REGARDING SUPREMACY

Let us now discuss certain questions regarding the knowledge of Shriji Maharaj's supremacy.

Question 1: How many avatars are there? Are they all identical? Or is there a difference between them?

Answer: The shastras mention 24 avatars. At other places, ten avatars are mentioned. But as described in the Shrimad Bhagvat, just as thousands of springs flow from an inexhaustible lake, similarly from Shri Hari – the reservoir of *sattvagun* – countless avatars emerge.⁴

The Bhagavad Gita also proclaims:

Babuni ne vyatitāni janmāni tava chārjuna.

Oh Arjun! Many, many births both you and I have taken. I am aware of them, but you are not.

- Bhagavad Gita 4.5

Nishkulānand Swami says, “Purushottam Narayan Shri Sahajanand Swami is the *avatari* of all avatars.”⁵

Purushottam Narayan – with utmost compassion for the *jivas* – descended to grant them final liberation.

Shriji Maharaj himself has written, “The Vedas prayed to me, asking me to destroy *avidya* – ignorance. Today, I am fulfilling that promise.”

Evo karyo moto upkār, jemā anek janano uddhār.

His highest obligation has led to the liberation of many *jivas*.

- Bhaktachintamani 83.45

Acharya Shri Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj, in the Sanskrit commentary, *Bhaktamanoranjani*, on Shrimad Bhagvat writes, “*Avatāran kramishyan prathamam purushāvatāramāha*” (3.3.1). In the sequential order of avatars, the foremost is the avatar of Purush. Purush is the source of creation and dissolution of

4. *Avatārā hyasankhyeyāhā barebe sativanidherdvijāhā;*

Yathāvidāsināha kulyāhā sarasāha syubu sahasrashāha.

- Shrimad Bhāgavatam 1.3.26

5. Nishkulānand Kāvya, *Avatār Chintāmani* 32

numerous minor avatars, and is simultaneously their prime cause. This is how the 24 avatars came about. Subsequently, there were scores of avatars of Shri Hari. But all of them were partial, incomplete and served a limited purpose. Since all of them, to a certain extent, possessed the dignity and powers of Purushottam Narayan, they are likely to be treated as equal to one another. But Purushottam Narayan's manifestation in all of them was not in the same measure. There were variations; hence the distinctions between various avatars. Furthermore, there is the distinction of abodes also, as each of the avatars have their own abodes. Explaining this difference, Shriji Maharaj has said, "The many avatars are all ultimately of God; yet, among these avatars, I like Rushabhdevji greatly. I also like Kapilji and Dattatreya equally, but to a lesser extent than Rushabhdevji" (Vachanamrut, Loya 14).

It is thus quite clear that Shriji Maharaj is supreme, the ultimate *avatari* of all avatars, higher than all the *akshar muktas* and *Mul Akshar*; he is worthy to be worshipped by all and is the all-doer. He is always with a form. None are above him. True *upasana* is attaining the state of *brahmarup* and offering devotion to him.

4.8 UNDIVIDED FAITH, BUT RESPECT FOR ALL

Shriji Maharaj has held all devas, *acharyas* and avatars of Sanatan Dharma in high regard.

In the mandirs he constructed, Shriji Maharaj consecrated the *murtis* of various deities, thereby showing his high regard for them all. But to have innate faith to one's *ishtadev*, akin to the loyalty of a faithful wife for her husband, is the hallmark of a genuine devotee. Shriji Maharaj has laid great stress on this point.

He says, "A wife who observes the vow of fidelity... the affection she has for all other men does not even come close to

the affection she has for her husband. Nor does she see virtues in other men as she sees in her own husband. Moreover, she acts according to the wishes of her own husband. Such is the firm fidelity that a faithful wife has towards her husband. ...

“In the same manner, a devotee should have firm fidelity to God. ...Nor do they develop affection for other avatars of their *ishtadev*. They keep affection only for the form that they have attained, and they act according to his wishes only” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 16).

Shriji Maharaj was interested in the well-being of all *jivas* and therefore he has been described as ‘*Sarvajiva-hitavaha*’. He has taught in the Shikshapatri:

Tasyaiv sarvathā bhaktibhi kartavyā manujairbhavi;

All human beings on this earth should worship that supreme God only.

- Shikshapatri 113

The genuine aspirant should be elated by this supreme attainment. Nevertheless, this should not act as an excuse to deride other deities, goddesses or avatars. Shriji Maharaj has strictly forbidden this. He is not pleased with those persons who show such disrespect. He does not approve of the tendency of manifesting petty ego.

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj has followed the same tradition. In the Akshar-Purushottam mandirs he constructed, he consecrated the *murtis* of avatars. In assemblies, he often recited Shrimad Bhagvat. He often encouraged weekly discourses on it to derive inspiration from the lives of devotees such as Shuk, Sanak, Narad, Dhruva, Prahlad and the Gopis. He insisted that all followers of the Sampradaya should develop a broad outlook and not be narrow-minded.

The sadhus and *paramhansas* of Shriji Maharaj, as well as Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, Brahmaswarup Pragji Bhakta (Bhagatji Maharaj), Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

and Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj worked tirelessly throughout their lives so that thousands of *jivas* could realize Shriji Maharaj in his true form and worship him.

Brahmaswarup Param Pujya Swamishri Narayanswarupdasji – Pramukh Swami Maharaj – constantly travels all over the world to spread the message of Sanatan Hindu Dharma and Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Presently, Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj is continuing this tradition.

The truly learned are never egoistic and do not assert 'only mine is the best'. They are open-minded enough to accept 'whatever is good'.

Today, irreligion and atheism are present. In such critical times, the faith described here has gone a long way in consolidating morality and spiritual faith in countless people. The Swaminarayan Akshar-Purushottam Sanstha is earning a reputation all over the world as an active socio-spiritual movement. Many intellectuals, aspirants and youths in particular become members. Here, they find solutions to their problems.

All are eager to become *brahmarup*. This can only be attained through the medium of Aksharbrahma, who descended along with Bhagwan Swaminarayan and then remained forever present – *pragat* – in the form of a God-realized Sadhu. Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the exponent of the genuine and supreme *upasana*, is at present with us through a God-realized Sadhu.

5. PRAGAT

God Is Ever-Present

5.1 MEANING OF PRAGAT? HOW?

With infinite compassion, Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan Bhagwan Swaminarayan descended upon our earth. He opened the road to ultimate liberation – the way to Akshardham – for all through dedicated *pragat upasana*. Nishkulanand Swami therefore writes:

Bandh kidhā bijā bāranā re, vaheti kidhi Aksharvāt...
Purushottam pragati re...

With the manifestation of Purushottam, all other doors were closed, and the pathway to Akshardham was laid wide open.

For attaining Akshardham, Shriji Maharaj has propounded the principle of *pragat upasana*. What is the *pragat* form of Purushottam? How does he always remain *pragat*?

To those on earth, God in his divine abode is unmanifest or *paroksh*. When he descends on this earth, he is manifest or *pragat*. The manifestation was not, however, restricted to Shriji Maharaj's lifetime, nor to the liberation of the *jivas* living during that period. If it were, it would imply an imperfection in his system, since it shuts the door of *moksha* for future generations, and results in the collapse of the Sampradaya.

Shriji Maharaj has explained the principle of the shastras that God is eternally present on earth. And those who seek his refuge will be liberated. Acharya Shri Raghurvirji Maharaj has interpreted the word 'Sampradaya' in his commentary on the Shikshapatri as:

Guruparamparā-prāptaha sadupadeshabha Sampradāyaha

A true Sampradaya is one in which, through a successive line of gurus, sermons (lucidly explaining the principles of Brahma and Parabrahma) are given (*Shikshapatri Bhashya* 207).

The *Halayudhakosh* explains: *Sampradāyo gurukramaha*.

Sampradaya is the spiritual succession of gurus.

God is never unmanifest; the Sampradaya established by him will always flourish and the path to liberation forever remain open. Shriji Maharaj says in the Vachanamrut, “God himself has said, ‘I forever reside in the eight types of *murtis* and in the Sant’” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 68).

According to this principle, Shriji Maharaj is always *pragat* through his *murti* as well as the Brahmaswarup Satpurush. All the pillars of Satsang – *murti*, the Sadhu and shastras – are extremely beneficent. But the best among them for liberation is the Sadhu, according to the words of Maharaj.

The Shrimad Bhagvat also places the Sadhu on a higher pedestal than *murtis* and holy places:

Na hyammayāni tirthāni na devā mrichchhilāmayāhā;

Te punantyurukālena darshanādeva sādhavaha.

The pilgrimage centres are not simply reservoirs of water. Nor are the *murtis* just clay or stone, i.e. they are also divine. But they elevate in the long run. Whereas, even by the mere darshan of the Sadhu, one is purified.

- Shrimad Bhagvat 10.84.11

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami also confirms, “When God is not manifest (*paroksh*), how can association remain?” He answered, ‘Through discourses, *kirtans*, spiritual talks, bhajans, and meditation, connection is maintained. And apart from these, the company of the great Sadhu is said to be the company of God himself and one gets the bliss of God, because God dwells fully in such a Sadhu. And even when [God] was manifest, if one did not know him as he truly is, then it is not called association; and without knowing him like that, so what even if he is manifest? And similarly, if the Sadhu in whom God fully resides is known then today he [God] is manifest and without knowing this, he is not manifest.’

“Then, a sadhu asked, “Are *murtis* not manifest?” Then Swami said, “If one attributes human traits to the actions of God and his holy Sadhu then one’s spiritual progress vanishes like the new moon; and if one attributes divine traits, then one progresses spiritually like the waxing moon of the second day of the bright half of the lunar month. And what actions do the *murtis* perform that one perceives faults in them and regresses? Therefore, only the talking-walking [human] form of God is called manifest.

“Only the great Sadhu can instil divinity in the *murti*. But the three – *murtis*, shastras and pilgrim places – together do not equal a Sadhu. And such a great Sadhu is able to make all three – *murtis*, shastras and pilgrim places. Therefore, such a Sadhu, in whom God fully resides, is the manifest form of God.” (Swamini Vato 5.392).

Shriji Maharaj also stresses the same point, “When God is not manifest on this earth, one should seek the refuge of the Sant who has the realization of God – because the *jīva* can also attain liberation through him” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 10).

These words of Maharaj have been exactly reiterated by Nishkulananad Swami in the following lines:

Kahyu bahu prakāre kalyān re, ati aganit apramān re;
Pan sabuthi saras Santmā re, rākhyu Vālame eni vātmā re.

Many are the means of liberation – innumerable and immeasurable.

But as told by the beloved Master, the best among these is the *Sant*.

- Nishkulananad Kavya, Purushottam Prakash 42

Shriji Maharaj is therefore fully and forever *pragat* through the Sadhu. One of the six objectives of Maharaj’s incarnation on earth was to remain ever present on this earth through his Param Ekantik Sadhu.

In this way, God himself is present on earth, he is said to be

pragat Bhagwan – manifest God. When he physically leaves, but travels on this earth through the Sadhu, that Sadhu is recognized as the *pragat swarup* – form of God.

In Purushottam Prakash, composed by Nishkulanand Swami, Shriji Maharaj says:

Sant hu ne hu te vali Sant re, em Shrimukhe kahe Bhagwant re;

Sant mānajo māri murti re, emā fer nathi ek rati re.

The Sant is myself and I am the Sant. Thus God says himself.

The Sant is my very form – there is not the slightest difference.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Purushottam Prakash 41

5.2 TRUE KNOWLEDGE IS RECOGNIZING THE PRAGAT FORM OF GOD

It is laid down in the Shrutis:

Rute jnānānna muktih.

There is no liberation without knowledge.

Also:

Tameva veditvātīmrityumeti nānyaha panthā vidyate'yanāya.

Only after knowing {the form of} God is the *jīva* delivered from the cycles of birth and death. There is no other road to liberation.

What is the definition of the knowledge that leads to instant liberation? Who is to be understood as a *jnani*? This knowledge is not merely the literal interpretation of the shastras, but that which is experienced. Shriji Maharaj has said, “Those who know God through the shastras receive liberation after several lives” (Vachanamrut, Loya 7).

Defining knowledge, Shriji Maharaj says, “God dwells within them all as their *antaryami* and as their cause. It is that very God who is this manifest form. To know and see God with such an understanding of greatness is called perfect *jnan*” (Vachanamrut, Loya 7).

“Knowing God perfectly means knowing the manifest form

of God through the *indriyas*, the *antahkaran*, and experience. Only then can one be said to possess perfect *jnan*.

“However, if any one of these three types of *jnan* is lacking, one cannot be said to have realized ultimate *jnan*, nor can one overcome the cycle of births and deaths. In fact, even though someone may have attained the *brahmaswarup* state through their personal endeavours, if they do not realize the manifest form of God in this manner, they cannot be said to possess perfect *jnan*” (Vachanamrut, Loya 7).

“Those who realize this esoteric truth understand the human form of God on this earth as being exactly the same as the form of God residing in Akshardham – they do not feel that there is even a slight difference between that form and this form. One who has known God in this way can be said to have known God perfectly. For them, *maya* can be said to have been eradicated. One who realizes this is called a devotee with *jnan* and an *ekantik bhakta*” (Vachanamrut, Panchala 7).

“Such a devotee with *jnan* faithfully serves the manifest form of God – who eternally has a form – realizing him as transcending Prakruti-Purush and Akshar, and as being the cause and supporter of all. Such understanding constitutes *jnan*, and such *jnan* leads to ultimate liberation” (Vachanamrut, Loya 7).

Gunatitanand Swami says “The ultimate spiritual wisdom is to recognize this Sadhu” (Swamini Vato 5.7).

Nishkulanand Swami also supports this:

*Ej jnāni ej tattvavettā, jene pragat Prabhune pekhiyā;
E vinā rakhe jnāni gano, jene Hari nayane nathi dekhiyā.*

He who has closely observed the *pragat* form of God is the *jnani* and the philosopher.

He who has not seen him with his own eyes should never be considered a *jnani*.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Sarsiddhi 30

5.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVOTION TO THE PRAGAT FORM OF GOD

God, himself or manifest in the form of the Sadhu, is always present on this earth. As observed earlier, *jnan* means to know that *pragat* form of God. And only he who knows the *pragat* (manifest) form of God is a true devotee; and then to seek shelter in him is genuine devotion. Shriji Maharaj confirms this as follows:

“Whenever a *jiva* attains a human body in Bharat-khand, God’s avatars or God’s sadhus will certainly also be present on earth at that time. If that *jiva* can recognize them, then it becomes a devotee of God” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 19).

“To realize such redemptive virtues in *pratyaksh* God and to seek his firm refuge is known as *bhakti*” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 10).

Praising *bhakti* of the manifest, Muktanand Swami says:

Kalpataru sarvanā sankalp satya kare,
pāse jai pritashu seve jyāre;
Tem je pragat Purushottam prichhbashe,
thāsbe harijan tatkāl tyāre...
Pragatne bhaji bhaji pār pāmyā ghanā,
gidh ganikā kapivrund koti;
Vrajtani nār vyabhichār bhāve tari,
pragat upāsanā sauthi moti...
Pragatnā bhajanthi param sukh pāmie,
Ura thaki nāsh pāme andhāru...

When approached with loving care, the *kalpataru* (the wish-fulfilling tree) fulfills all desires.

Similarly, he who recognizes *pragat* Purushottam is transformed into a devotee of God.

By dedicated service to God in human form, many were liberated – the vulture, the fallen women and hordes of monkeys.

In spite of their amorous sentiments, the women of Vraj by their sincere *pragat upasana* were liberated.

Only devotion to the *pragat* form of God yields ultimate bliss and dispels inner darkness.

Only the most fortunate are privileged to offer *pragat* bhakti. Devotion, save that of the manifest God, is an indication of ego and dogmatism, as pointed out by Nishkulananand Swami:

Mote bhāgye bhete bhagati, pragat Prabhu paramānani;
Teh vināni je bhagati, te to mat mamañna tānani.

Only by extreme good fortune can one serve the *pragat* form of God.

Devotion without this is a display of ego and obstinacy.

- Nishkulananand Kavya, Sarsiddhi 22

In his book *Bhaktinidhi*, Nishkulananand Swami has acknowledged *pragat* bhakti as the highest. When Shiva heard that the villagers of Vraj were blessed with the darshan as well as the touch of Shri Krishna, he was remorseful and felt that had he been born as a cowherd, he would have enjoyed similar bliss. Brahma also became a fish to enjoy the happiness of the *pragat* form of God. Nishkulananand Swami writes:

Em pragat bhakti sabu upare, ethi uparānt nathi kāi;
Nishkulānand nishche vāratā, saune samajavi manamāi.

Devotion of the *pragat* is the supreme. Nothing supersedes it.

Nishkulananand says everyone is convinced of this as an unquestionable fact.

- Nishkulananand Kavya, Bhaktinidhi 15

Brahmaand Swami has also written:

Pragat swarup upāsi, dhanya so pragat swarup upāsi.

Blessed are the devotees who offer *upasana* to the *pragat* form of God.

Gunatitanand Swami says, “At this time God is present, and the talks are of the present manifest form of God, while others are like a painted sun” (Swamini Vato 5.64).

Explaining the importance of faith in the *pratyaksh* form of God, Shriji Maharaj says, “If a person has firm faith in the

manifest form of God and believes themselves to be fulfilled merely by his darshan, and desires nothing else, then God himself forcefully shows them his divine powers and forms in his abodes” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 9).

“Except for the manifest form of Shri Krishna Bhagwan, they wish for no other object. Then, even if they have only a slight amount of *atma*-realization and *vairagya*, such a devotee still attains profound bliss in the abode of God after leaving their body” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 5).

Imperfections are eradicated only by the contact of the *pragat* form of God. Gunatitanand Swami explains, “When Indra killed Vishwarup, he incurred four *brahmahatyas*... Then, he met Naradji, who told him, ‘Your brother, Vamanji, is an avatar of God, so take his *ashro* (refuge).’ Indra developed *nishchay* (unshakeable faith) in Vamanji and was relieved from the sin of *brahmahatya*. Thus, *ashro* is a great thing” (Swamini Vato 1.293).

5.4 PRAGAT BHAKTI: THE PATHWAY TO PEACE

Inner peace and happiness are attained by *pragat* bhakti. Once Sadguru Muktanand Swami asked Shriji Maharaj the means to peace. Shriji Maharaj narrated various incidents of his own life beginning with his birth. Muktanand Swami felt that Maharaj had missed the point. The following day, he repeated the same question. Maharaj again started to repeat the same account of his life. Muktanand Swami, however, failed to grasp the essence of Maharaj’s words. Finally Shriji Maharaj said, “Swami, please go to the villages; you will experience peace.” So, Muktanand Swami left Gadhada. Nityanand Swami followed him and explained, “Shriji Maharaj is God himself. Nowhere else will you find the peace which comes from reminiscing the divine episodes of the *pragat* form of God. Maharaj wanted you to realize this. That is why he had narrated various incidents of his life to you.” Muktanand Swami soon realized his mistake.

The ancient sage Vyাsji had composed many shastras, yet he was still at unrest with himself. Then, as advised by Narad, he recited the episodes of Shri Krishna's life in the Shrimad Bhagvat. Only then did his unrest subside and he experienced true happiness.

Precisely for this reason, Shriji Maharaj asked Muktanand Swami, "You too should continuously preach and write shastras related to your *Sampradaya* and your *ishtadev* for the rest of your life. This is my only command to you for as long as you live" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 58).

Obeying this order, Muktanand Swami religiously engaged himself in preparing the literature of the Sampradaya until the end of his life. He clearly wrote:

*Pragatnā bhajanthi param sukh pāmie,
Ura thaki nāsh pāme andhāru... Bhajan kar bhāvshu.*

Only devotion to the *pragat* form of God yields ultimate bliss and dispels inner darkness.

Similarly, Swarupanand Swami remained preoccupied with the inner vision of Shriji Maharaj, oblivious of his manifest form. To explain to him the importance of the *pragat* form, by Shriji Maharaj's will he fell ill. During this illness, Swarupanand Swami failed to have the inner vision of Shriji Maharaj and was quite at a loss. Feeling utterly despondent, he went to Shriji Maharaj and prayed. Shriji Maharaj told him, "Go to Parvatbhai and you will find peace."

Parvatbhai, in the course of their talks, requested him to meditate on the roof tiles of Dada Khachar's house. Swarupanand Swami soon realized his mistake and understood that by the association of Shriji Maharaj, even the roof tiles had attained *nirgunbhāv* and were worthy of meditation. Therefore Swarupanand Swami realized that he should also be constantly engaged with the *pragat* form of Shriji Maharaj. He changed his course and attained the desired peace.

5.5 PRAGAT FORM OF GOD OR HIS SADHU NECESSARY FOR LIBERATION

Many seekers worship the *paroksh* form of God for their liberation. But by a synthesis of all the shastras, we can clearly understand that without the *pragat* form of God, or a God-realized Sadhu, ultimate liberation is unattainable.

Explaining the fundamentals of liberation, Shriji Maharaj says, ““If a person realizes the glory of manifest God and his Bhakta-Sant in exactly the same way as they realize the glory of past avatars of God such as Ram, Krishna, and others, as well as the glory of past sadhus such as Narad, the Sanakadik, Shukji, Jadbharat, Hanuman, Uddhav, and others – then nothing remains to be understood on the path of liberation.

“Whether this principle is understood after being told once, or after being told a thousand times; whether it is understood today, or after a thousand years, there is no option but to understand it. . . .

“A person who has such a firm conviction has grasped all fundamental principles. What is more, they will never fall from the path of liberation. . . . Thus, the essence of all the shastras is this very fact” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 21).

“That is why the Shrutis state: ‘If a person develops conviction in the guru – who is the manifest form of God – in the same way that they have conviction in the non-manifest devas, then, as a result, they attain all the *arthas*¹ which are described as attainable.’

“In fact, when they attain the company of such a Sant, they have, while still alive, attained he who was to be attained after death. That is to say, they have attained that which is called the highest state of enlightenment, or liberation, while being alive” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 2).

“The sole cause behind the *jiva* attaining liberation,

1. Here ‘arthas’ should be understood as ‘purusharths’ – *dharma*, *arth*, *kam* and *moksha*.

transcending *maya* and becoming *brabmaswarup* is its engagement in the *jnan*, meditation, devotional songs, spiritual discourses, and other spiritual practices related to the manifest form of Vasudev Bhagwan, who is Purushottam. It is due to these that the *jiva* transgresses *maya*, attains an extremely elevated state, and also attains God's Akshardham" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 32).

"Thus, one who aspires for liberation should recognize God through these characteristics and seek refuge of that God. One should have complete faith in him. One should perform his bhakti while remaining within the framework of his injunctions. This is the only means of attaining liberation.

"However, when God is not manifest on this earth, one should seek the refuge of the Sant who has the realization of God – because the *jiva* can also attain liberation through him" (Vachanamrut, Vartal 10).

"Thus, the means to transcend *maya* is as follows: When the *jiva* comes into contact with the manifest form of Shri Purushottam Bhagwan – who is beyond *maya* and who is the destroyer of *maya* and all karmas – or the Sant who has attained that God, then by accepting their refuge, the *jiva* can transcend *maya*" (Vachanamrut, Jetalpur 1).

Time and again, at numerous places in the Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj has declared God in *pragat* form or the God-realized Sadhu who has constant rapport with him as the means to final liberation. As a summing up of all the shastras, he explains, "In the four Vedas, the Purans and the Itihas shastras, there is but one central principle, and that is that only God and his Sant can grant liberation. ...So, when one attains God or his Sant, then, apart from this, there is no other liberation for the *jiva*; this itself is ultimate liberation" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 59).

Gunatitanand Swami, well-versed in the shastras and fully aware of Shriji Maharaj's innermost opinion, has explained in

his talks that only the *pragat* form of God or a God-realized Sadhu can grant *moksha*.

“Only God and his holy Sadhu can grant *moksha*” (Swamini Vato 1.20).

“One may observe ten million commands, but without resort to manifest God one will not attain *moksha*. And by observing even just one command by the order of this manifest God and manifest Sadhu, *moksha* is attained” (Swamini Vato 4.36).

“Only when ultimate *moksha* is attained can it be described as [true] *moksha*. ...Such *moksha* is attained by surrendering to the manifest form of God and God’s enlightened Sadhu” (Swamini Vato 5.5).

Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami writes:

Bijā kāhe muvā pachhi moksha re, vali Prabhu batāve chhe proksh re...
Jyāre emaj arth jo sare re, tyāre Hari tan shid dhare re;
Jnān vinā to moksha na thāy re, em Shruti Smruti sahu gāya re;
Māte pragat joie Bhagwant re, evu sarva granthnu siddhānt re;
Jem pragat ravi hoy jyāre re, jāy tam brahmāndnu tyāre re.
Jem pragat jalne pāmi re, jāy pyāsini pyās te vāmi re;
Jem pragat annane jame re, antar jatharājhāl virame re.
Tem pragat male Bhagwān re, tyāre jananu kalyān nidān re;
Māte pragat charitra sāmbhalvu re, hoy pragat tyā āvi malvu re.
Māte pragat Prabhu jo na hoy re, na thāy e nishpāp koy re;
Jāno pragat murti bhavpāj re, saheje utāravāno samāj re.

Others say liberation comes after death, and say that God is *paroksh* (not manifest).

If that be so, why should God assume a human form?

The Shrutis and Smrutis proclaim, ‘There is no liberation without knowledge.’

Therefore the quintessence of all the shastras is that *pragat* God is necessary.

Because, when the sun shines, darkness vanishes.

Thirst is quenched only by drinking water.

Devouring hunger is satiated only by taking food.
Similarly, when God is *pragat*, liberation is assured.
Therefore, listen to the episodes of his life and work;
And go to him when he manifests in *pragat* form.
Without his manifestation, the sinners will remain
unliberated.

Know the *pragat murti* to be a bridge which takes one
Easily across the ocean of births and deaths.

- Bhaktachintamani 164

Pragat Prabhu ke Prabhunā Sant re,
teh vinā na uddhare jant re.

No creature can be liberated without God in *pragat* form or
his Sadhu.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Kalyan Nirnay 13.28

Ātyantik kalyān kārane jāvū pragat Prabhune pās;
Mokshadāyak eh murti ke mokshadātā enā dās.

For final liberation, seek refuge in the *pragat* form of God.
He is the liberator, or his servant {the Sadhu}.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Kalyan Nirnay 16.4

Māte kalyānkāri sāmbhalyā re, ek Hari ke Hari nā malyā re;
Sāchi vāt tu mānaje sahi re, eh beu vinā moksha nahi re.

Only God or the God-realized Sadhu are the liberators.

Accept this absolute truth. Because there is no liberation
without them.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Kalyan Nirnay 16.10

Male Prabhu pragat pramān re, kā to tenā malele kalyān re;
Teba vinā to koti upāy re, ātyantik kalyān na thāy re.

Liberation is attained by the company of God in *pragat* form
or the God-realized Sadhu.

Barring that, endless efforts do not lead to final liberation.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Kalyan Nirnay 2.18

Sadguru Brahmaand Swami has written:

Ā bhavṣāgar pār utār, Hari ke Hari ko dās.

Moksha can only be attained through God or his servant [the God-realized Sadhu].

In Shri Vasudev Mahatmya of the Skanda Puran, in the chapter of the commentary on bhakti and *vairagya*, the following verse reiterates the same point:

Sākshād-bhagwataha sangāt-tad-bhaktānām cha vedrishām;
Dharma hyekāntika pumbhi prāpyate nānyathā kvachit.

By contact with God, or by contact with an *Ekantik Bhakta*, who is virtuous as described in the preceding verse, *ekantik* dharma can be attained. No other alternative can help in its attainment.

- Vasudev Mahatmya 25.65

This same principle has been confirmed by Shriji Maharaj, “Such *ekantik* dharma can only be attained by following the commands of a Purush who is free of worldly desires and who has attained the state of God-realization; it cannot be attained merely by reading books. Even if a person were to attempt to restate those talks exactly, having merely heard them, they would not be able to do so properly. Therefore, one can attain *ekantik* dharma only from someone who has already attained the state of *ekantik* dharma” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 60).

5.6 DEFICIENCIES FROM NOT REALIZING THE PRAGAT FORM OF GOD

From time immemorial, the *jīva* has been plagued by countless flaws. These can be overcome by the genuine knowledge of the *pragat* form of God and by seeking refuge in him. The imperfections cannot be eradicated without knowing the *pragat* form of God and without his association.

Shriji Maharaj says, “If any deficiency remains in understanding God, then one’s flaw will never be eradicated” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 13).

“Thus, even after attaining this Satsang... affection for

objects other than God still remains because the person has not developed as firm a conviction for the manifest [*pragat*] form of God as they have for the non-manifest [*paroksh*] form of God" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 2).

"If a devotee of God whose faith is perfect and who is not affected by lust, anger, avarice, and other disturbances, desires anything other than the manifest form of Shri Krishna Bhagwan, then, even if he is a great renunciate and has firm *vairagya* and intense *atma*-realization, he will attain a lower level of bliss" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 5).

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami states, "Those who do not understand Maharaj as he is and the Sadhu as he is, are eternally unfortunate like the Yadavs. They are like the famine of [Samvat] 1876 (1820 CE) which occurred despite the torrential rains, and like one who bathes in the Ganga but keeps his head dry. Since, without knowing the glory they stay in this Satsang. They remain ignorant like children. But they are not able to understand the true glory of God and his Sadhu" (Swamini Vato 3.35).

"No matter how learned a scholar of the shastras or an orator of traditions and history one may be, if he does not know this manifest God and manifest Sadhu, he is unproductive like the *khijdo* and in his company, one will not experience peace or happiness" (Swamini Vato 3.68).

"Today, God is manifest, the Sadhu is manifest and dharma is manifest. And those who do not understand this at this time will bitterly regret afterwards" (Swamini Vato 4.49).

Sadguru Mukhtanand Swami writes:

*Parokshthi bhavatano pār āve nahi,
Veda Vedānt kabe satya vāni.*

The *paroksh* form of God cannot liberate; the Vedas and Vedanta affirm this truth.

*Mangal rup pragatne meli, parokshne bhaje je prāni re;
Tāp tirth kare dev derā, man na tale masāni re...*

Those who leave aside the beneficial form of the *pragat* and worship the *paroksh* form;

Despite their *tap* (austerities), *tirth* (pilgrimages to holy places), and devotion to the deities, they can never attain the stage of no-mind.

Koi kahe Hari ho gaye, koi kahe Hari hovan hār;
Mukta pragatki prichh bina, bhatakat sab sansār.

Some say God has been; some say he is still to come.

Not knowing the *pragat* form, they roam {aimlessly} in the cycles of birth and death.

The shastras narrate the episodes of the divine life of God. Their mere reading or listening are of little significance. Only the *pragat* form of God is the source of bliss.

Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami writes:

Vānchi kāgal koi kanthno, jem nār apār rāji thai;
Pan pragat sukh piyutanu, anu jetlu āvyu nai.

On reading her husband's letter, the wife was immensely delighted.

Yet it was not even an iota of the pleasure of his actual presence.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Bhaktinidhi 14

Unmindful of *pragat* bhakti, those who worship the *paroksh* form are really lost, as described in the following by Nishkulanand Swami:

Jem koi fulavādinā ful meli, ākash fulni āshā kare;
Pār vīnā parishram pade, sār thoduj male sare.
Tem pragat Prabhune parahari, parokshmā kare pratita;
Te to piyushno taru parhari, kari chhāsh pivā chāhe chitta.

Instead of plucking flowers from the garden, one who hopes to pluck them from the sky endures endless efforts without any results.

Similarly, instead of devotion to the *pragat*, devotion to the *paroksh* is like forsaking nectar for buttermilk.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Sarsiddhi 47

*Pragat bhaji rushi patni, paroksh bhajyā Rushirāy;
Rushi patnie Hari rājī karyā, rushi rāhyā paritāp māy.
Prabhu pragatnā prasang vinā, rahi gai evā motāne khot;
Āj kālnā abhāgiyā, dash vinā diye chhe dot.
Pragat vinā chhe pāmpalā, bhakta kare chhe bhavamāy;
Kharā khāndtā kusakā, kan nahi nisare te māy.
Hari lādilā lādu jami gayā, kede padyā rāhyā patarāvalā;
Jethi bhukh na jāy sukh na thāy, van samaje chāte chhe saghalā.*

The wives of the rishis worshipped the *pragat* form of God, whilst the rishis worshipped the *paroksh*.

The wives pleased God; the rishis were left repenting.

Without the contact of the *pragat* form of God, the eminent were losers.

The unfortunate ones roam around aimlessly.

Without *pragat* bhakti, all are cripples,

Since no grains come out by only pounding the chaff.

The beloved of God ate the *laddus*, leaving the leaf-plates aside.

Mindlessly licking them neither gives joy, nor satisfies one's hunger.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Sarsiddhi 24

Sadguru Brahmaand Swami also says:

Pragat pramān Haribina prāni, kyu jabā tabā bhatakantā hai;

Or upāy kiye te koi vidhi, āt na bhavako antā hai;

Pragat pramān Purān batāve, Gitā pragat kathantā hai;

Pragat pramān binā Brahmānand, sab hi jagat bharamantā hai;

All are wandering here and there without knowing the *pragat* form of God.

Try all other means, but there is no end to the worldly turmoil.

The Gita and other shastras point out the *pragat* form as the ultimate authority.

Brahmaand says that leaving aside the *pragat*, all the world is under a spell.

5.7 THE PRAGAT FORM OF GOD AFTER SHRIJI MAHARAJ'S RETURN TO AKSHARDHAM

On Jeth sud 10, Samvat 1886 (1 June 1830 CE), Shriji Maharaj left this world to return to his divine abode Akshardham. Since that day, the devotees could no longer have the darshan of his manifest *pratyaksh* form. In that case, how can one take him to be *pragat*? And what is the arrangement for the liberation of the *jivas* after his return to the divine abode?

These questions have been answered by Shriji Maharaj himself. God is never *paroksh* to the devotees who are endowed with genuine knowledge. “When Shri Krishna Bhagwan left his body, Rukmini and the other wives of God took his body and burnt themselves along with him. At that time, the ignorant thought, ‘Now he is dead.’ On the other hand, those who possessed *jnan* thought, ‘He has disappeared from here and has manifested elsewhere.’ They understood God as being eternal” (Vachanamrut, Panchala 7).

Although Shriji Maharaj physically returned to his divine abode, he remains *pragat* in another form to liberate the *jivas* eternally. That is to say, he remains present through Aksharbrahma.

Shriji Maharaj says, “Purushottam Bhagwan enters and dwells in all of the above as their cause and *antaryami*.

“However, he does not manifest in Prakruti-Purush to the extent he manifests in Akshar; and he does not manifest in Pradhan-Purush to the extent that he manifests in Prakruti-Purush. . . .

“In a similar way, Purushottam Bhagwan manifests in various entities with various degrees of power according to the task to be accomplished through that entity.

“Purushottam Bhagwan also resides in Akshar, Prakruti-Purush and others as their *antaryami*. However, because of the difference in the capacities of those entities, there is a difference in their power” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 41).

In this manner, his powers and majesty are at their peak in Aksharbrahma; but they are not manifest in the same measure in other *muktas*. Shriji Maharaj is therefore *pragat* on this earth through Aksharbrahma.

For further confirmation of this principle, Shriji Maharaj has talked of becoming *brahmarup* and offering dedicated devotion to Parabrahma. To attain the highest category of *nirvikalp* knowledge, a devotee has to attain virtues like Akshar, and with this elevated spiritual offer worship to Purushottam Bhagwan. The inference is therefore very clear that to attain the state of *brahmarup* or to acquire the highest category of *nirvikalp* knowledge, it is imperative to have the association of Akshar. It is essential to know Aksharbrahma in order to be free from the clutches of *maya*, to realize God in all his divine glory, and to develop unshakeable faith in him (Vachanamruts, Panchala 7 & Gadhada II 42).

After all, no one knows the glory and powers of God as much as Aksharbrahma does. *Nirvikalp* knowledge is not acquired by contact with other *muktas*. If the highest category of *nirvikalp* knowledge can be achieved through other *muktas*, why should Shriji Maharaj manifest on the earth along with Aksharbrahma? The fact that Shriji Maharaj manifested with Aksharbrahma and identified his form to the followers is proof that the highest category of *nirvikalp* knowledge is attainable only through Aksharbrahma. Shriji Maharaj desired that countless *jivas* should be liberated even after Gunatitanand Swami. For fulfilling this objective, Aksharbrahma should perpetually remain on earth so that Maharaj can work through him.

In the *Vedras*, Shriji Maharaj has said, “The Vedas sing the praises of that Brahma. The road to liberation is also shown by that Brahma” (*Vedras*, p.165).

In the Vachanamrut published by Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, Yogiji Maharaj has written

in his blessings, “The Vachanamrut proclaims that the Sadhu opens the doors of liberation. Maharaj has identified that Sadhu as *Mul Akshar Murti Gunatitanand Swami*.”

It can therefore be clearly stated that Shriji Maharaj manifests on this earth through Aksharbrahma. During his lifetime, Maharaj had on many occasions identified Gunatitanand Swami as that Aksharbrahma, as we shall read in the following chapter on Aksharbrahma. Shriji Maharaj, after returning to his abode, remained *pragat* through Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami.

After Maharaj returned to his divine abode, his mortal remains were cremated in Lakshmi Vadi in Gadhada. Soon after, Gunatitanand Swami went to answer a call of nature. On the way, he saw some green grass and thought, “Water is the life of grass; that is why it is so green. Our life was Maharaj, but he has now passed away.” With this thought, he fainted and fell down. Shriji Maharaj immediately appeared before him, helped him to get up, embraced him and said, “Swami, why are you so sad? Where have I gone? I dwell totally in you, totally in you, totally in you.” Thus, he said this thrice. Manifesting through Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, Shriji Maharaj liberated many seekers and gave them a pride of place in Akshardham.

After Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami returned to Akshardham, Shriji Maharaj remained *pragat* through the spiritual succession of God-realized gurus. Gunatitanand Swami has revealed, “I will live forever and all of you will pass away in five to ten years” (Swamini Vato 5.67).

In the *gunatit* spiritual succession, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has remained *pragat* through successive gurus – Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj.j. At present, Shriji Maharaj is *pragat* through His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

5.8 ONLY ONE PRAGAT FORM OF SHRIJI MAHARAJ

Bhagwan Swaminarayan remains *pragat* through Aksharbrahma – the *gunait* Satpurush. He continuously moves on this earth and opens the doors of liberation for countless *jivas*. There can be only one such Satpurush.

Shriji Maharaj manifests only through Aksharbrahma, and eternal Aksharbrahma is only one. God's manifestation is naturally therefore, through only one.

Shriji Maharaj has clearly described in Vachanamrut the situation if more than one God were at work, “[If there was] the existence of several Godsthe governance of the world would not remain orderly.

“One God would say, ‘I will create the world,’ while another God would say, ‘I will destroy the world.’ One God would say, ‘I will make it rain,’ while another would say, ‘I will not.’ One would say, ‘I will instil human instincts in animals,’ while another would say, ‘I will instil animal instincts in humans.’ A stable state would not be possible in this situation.

“But see how orderly everything functions in the world! There is not even the slightest irregularity. Thus, the governor of all activities and the lord of all is one God” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 39).

Similarly, if Bhagwan manifests through more than one Sadhu, chaos would prevail in the system of liberation.

A king may have more than one son, but only one of them – competent and virtuous – inherits the throne. All the sons cannot occupy it. Similarly, the throne of the *pragat* also can not be an inheritance for more than one.

A Sampradaya shines by a galaxy of virtuous sadhus and devotees. But there is only one sadhu who is the *pragat* form of God with all his redemptive traits.

Nishkulananand Swami has written:

Bijā gunavān to ghanā malashe, pan nabi male Harinā malel;

Nishkulānand evā Sant sambandhe, anantnā pāp balel.

You may find many virtuous persons, but will not come across one who has met God.

By contact with such a Sadhu, says Nishkulanand, sins of countless are burnt away.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Sarsiddhi 38.10

Nishkulanand Swami uses the phrase, 'One who has met God' for the Sadhu. Shriji Maharaj has also used the same words 'One who has met God' in Vachanamruts, Vartal 10 and Jetalpur 1. What is meant by the words 'One who has met God'? Five hundred *paramhansas* were living with Shriji Maharaj. Does this imply that all of them can lead one to final emancipation since all of them had 'met' Shriji Maharaj?

Also, the *paramhansas* and the householders were no ordinary people. Parvatbhai of Agatral, Dada Khachar of Gadhada, Devji Bhakta of Nenpur, metaphorically speaking, were 'the beads of Shriji Maharaj's rosary'. Among the sadhus were Muktanand Swami, saintliness personified and the loving guardian of Satsang; Gopalanand Swami, master of ashtanga yoga; Nityanand Swami, eminent scholar; Brahmaand Swami, extraordinary poet and outstanding artist; Premanand Swami, master poet and singer; Nishkulanand Swami, embodiment of *tyag* and *vairagya*; Vyapakanand Swami, who could revive the lifeless; Sachchidanand Swami, who challenged Indra and made it rain; Swarupanand Swami, who emptied the agonizing pits of hell; and Santdas, who freely travelled in human form to and from Badrikashram in samadhi. All of them were highly virtuous and were full of dignity and glory. They all had met Shriji Maharaj. The words 'who have met God' do not, however, imply emancipation through the hundreds of thousands of householders or the 500 *paramhansas* who had met Shriji Maharaj.

If these words imply emancipation only through those householders and *paramhansas* who had physical contact with

Shriji Maharaj, then the road to final *moksha* would come to a dead end once they had all passed away. That, however, is not Shriji Maharaj's implication or intention. He wants to perennially keep the road to liberation open for countless *jivas*. The words 'who have met God' therefore do not imply those who actually lived during Shriji Maharaj's lifetime. 'Who has met God' refers to one who is in 'constant rapport with God, and in whom God has revealed himself completely'.

Only Aksharbrahma has such constant rapport with God. Besides Aksharbrahma, no one has such contact with God. Aksharbrahma is however only one. God's manifestation is therefore through one only.

Gunatitanand Swami has clarified, "At any given time, *moksha* [liberation] is attained from one whom God has entrusted the task of granting *moksha*. Just as, when Parikshit was cursed to die, Vyajji and many other greats were present, but *moksha* was attained only when Shukji came" (Swamini Vato 4.48).

In Ahmedabad, Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami said to Acharya Keshavprasadji Maharaj, "As your father has handed over to you the keys of the treasury, similarly Swaminarayan has given me the responsibility of the key of emancipation."

Out of 500 *parambhansas*, the key of liberation was given to only one – Gunatitanand Swami. It has been nobly preserved to this day in the Gunatit spiritual succession. Through precepts, the *gunatit* gurus impart the knowledge for *moksha*. This enables countless *jivas* to become *brahmarup*, so as to ultimately dwell in Akshardham. In no other Sampradaya can such a spiritual succession of pure gurus be found.

During Gunatitanand Swami's lifetime and thereafter, history bears witness to the fact that many sadhus were full of saintliness, spiritual enlightenment and completely detached; yet Shriji Maharaj always fully reveals himself through only one Sadhu who opens the gates of liberation. Many prominent

persons have had the contact of that Sadhu and influenced others to do likewise.

In the spiritual line of gurus, Shriji Maharaj has revealed himself successively through one particular *gunatit* Sadhu. The Sadhu's life and works amply demonstrate his incomparable saintliness.

There is also a school of thought advocating the present manifestation of both Akshar and Purushottam (as Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami were two forms). But according to the philosophical doctrine of Shriji Maharaj, he manifests only through *gunatit*. After his return to the divine abode, he does not repeatedly manifest with Aksharbrahma. He liberates the *jivas* by revealing himself through Aksharbrahma.

After Shriji Maharaj's return to the divine abode, he remains *pragat* through the *gunatit* Sadhu. In future also, as advocated by Shriji Maharaj, it will be through only one. Shriji Maharaj emphatically states that one who has the contact of the *pragat* form at a given point of time, should be faithful to only that form, "A devotee should have firm fidelity to God. Specifically, like a woman who observes the vow of fidelity, they would never develop the same affection towards even other *mukta* sadhus – however great they may be – as they have developed towards whichever form of God they have had the darshan of" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 16).

5.9 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GUNATIT SADHU

The aspirant should know the traits of a *gunatit* Sadhu through whom Shriji Maharaj is *pragat*. He should find and recognize a Sadhu who has the characteristics of a *gunatit* Sadhu as given in the shastras and seek his refuge to attain final liberation. On the other hand, if he is impressed by dress, oratory, superficial knowledge of the shastras, expertise in worldly arts, petty achievements or miracles, and credulously regards someone else as the *pragat* form of the divine, he attains Hell instead of Akshardham.

Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami says:

*Sāchā Santnā ang endhān re, joi levā jivadiye;
Jene malave mānyu kalyān re, tene jovā ghadi ghadiye*

The *jiva* (seeker) should know the essential traits of a genuine Sadhu.

He, whose company can liberate, should be seen [contacted] time and again.

- Chosath Padi 9

Sadguru Brahmaand Swami also says:

*Jadbuddhi jiva, Prabhu-padne ichchhe to kar Santnu pārkhu;
Rang-pitapane, sonu ne pittal na hoy ek sarkhu.*

O *jiva*, the dullard, if you are keen to know God, thoroughly examine a Sadhu;

Both brass and gold are yellow in colour, but they are not the same.

It is therefore absolutely necessary to know exactly the Sadhu's characteristics before surrendering to him. The shastras sing the glory of the Sadhu, and in the same breath narrate the essential traits of a true Sadhu.

In the Bhagavad Gita, characteristics of a *sthitapragna* being (one with steadfast intellect) are described in the second chapter, the attributes of a dear devotee of God are narrated in the 12th chapter, and in the 14th chapter, innate qualities of the *gunatit* Sadhu are mentioned.

Tulsidasji also mentions the qualities of a God-like Sadhu in the Ramayan;

*Nāri nayan shar jābī na lāgā
Ghor krodh tam nishi jo jāgā
Lobb pāsh jehi gar na bandhāyā
So nar tumha samān Raghurāyā*

He who is not wounded by the arrows from a maiden's eyes;

Who is wide awake in the pitch darkness of anger, i.e. does not get angry;

Who is not shackled by the fetters of greed;
Such a person, Shri Rama is exactly like you.

- Kishkindha Kand: Chopai following 20th verse
It is stated in Shrimad Bhagvat:

*Tasmād gurum prapadyeta jignāsu shreya uttamam;
Shābde pare cha nishnātam brahmayupashamāshrayam.*

Therefore an aspirant should, for his own spiritual well-being, accept the tutelage of a guru who is an expert in the knowledge of Brahma and through *brahmic* consciousness has attained the *upsham* state.

- Shrimad Bhagvat 11.3.21

Vachanamrut, the quintessence of all shastras, describes in detail the characteristics of a *gunatit* Sadhu. A few excerpts are given below:

“What are the characteristics of a Sant who is worthy of being worshipped on par with God? Well, such a Sant suppresses the actions of *maya*’s *gunas* – the *indriyas*, the *antahkaran*, and others; but he himself does not get suppressed by their actions. In addition to this, he only performs activities related to God; he is staunch in his observance of the five religious vows^d; and believing himself to be *brahmarup*, he worships Purushottam Bhagwan.

“Such a Sant should not be thought of as a human being, nor should he be thought of as a deva, because such behaviour is not possible for either humans or devas. Indeed, even though that Sant appears to be human, he is still worthy of being worshipped on par with God.

“Therefore, whoever desires to attain liberation should serve such a Sant” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 26).

“Similarly, the attributes of the Sant – being free of lust, avarice, egotism, taste, attachment, and other faults – are also described in the shastras. The Sant who possesses these attributes has a direct relationship with God” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 27).

“One should also attach one’s *jiva* to the *Bhakta* of God – the great Sant – who does not identify his self with the body, who possesses *vairagya*, and who feels that he has transgressed a major injunction of God even if he has transgressed a minor injunction. One should act according to his command by thought, word and deed” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 38).

“Therefore, as long as a person believes the body to be their true self, their entire understanding is totally useless; and as long as they continue to harbour vanity of their varna or ashram, they will never imbibe the virtues of a sadhu.

“Thus, after discarding the feelings of I-ness and my-ness for the body and its relations, believing one’s *atma* to be *brahmarup*, and after forsaking all worldly desires, if a person worships God while observing *swadharma*, they should be known as a sadhu” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 44).

“Bhagvat dharma is upheld by maintaining profound love towards the Ekantik Sant of God, who possesses the attributes of *swadharma*, *jnan*, *vairagya*, and *bhakti* coupled with knowledge of God’s glory. Maintaining profound love towards such a Sant also opens the gateway to liberation” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 54).

“Only one whose mind has a craving for God and which becomes neither ‘hot’ nor ‘cold’ by the *vishays* should be known as a sadhu” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 23).

Comparing a Sadhu with the *vadvanal* (sub-ocean) fire, Gunatitanand Swami says, “‘*Pushpa-haraya sarpaya*’ – i.e. to such a Sadhu, a garland and a serpent are the same. He holds the image of God at all times. His definition of Satsang is: concentrating on *atma* and Paramatma. Guiding many *jivas* to worship God, he maintains his pristine purity and never violates even a minor injunction” (Swamini Vato 5.142).

In addition to the above extracts, other Vachanamruts such as Gadhada I 27, Gadhada III 35, etc. describe the attributes

of a Sadhu in whom God reveals himself. The attributes of a genuine renunciant are given in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 36 and I 37. Many other Vachanamruts also refer to the traits of a genuine devotee and an *Ekantik Bhakta*.

The qualities of the Sadhu have also been vividly and clearly described by Sadguru Nishkulanan Swami in *Chosath Padi*, Sadguru Muktanand Swami, Sadguru Brahmaand Swami, as well as in the kirtans of other sadhus.

5.10 GLORY OF THE GUNATIT SADHU

Being *pragat* through a *gunatit* Sadhu, Shriji Maharaj liberates infinite *jivas*. The glory and majesty of such a Sadhu have been repeatedly described in the Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato, other shastras, and the devotional poems – kirtans of the *paramhansas* and other devotee-poets. Let us now see some of their observations.

5.10.1 In the Words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

“A Sant with such a conviction is so highly respected by me that even I place the dust of his feet on my head. In my mind, I am afraid of harming him, and I also long to have his darshan. . . .

“In fact, the darshan of such a true Bhakta of God is equivalent to the darshan of God himself. He is so great that his darshan alone can redeem countless wretched *jivas*” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 37).

“God and the abode of God are not even an atom’s distance away from [such] a Sadhu. . . . When one has the darshan of such a Sant, one should realize, ‘I have had the darshan of God himself’” (Vachanamrut, Sarangpur 10).

“No distance remains between Purushottam Bhagwan and a person who has cultivated such qualities of a sadhu” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 44).

“He also possesses countless noble virtues such as *jnan*,

bhakti, *vairagya*, and others. God eternally resides in the heart of such a devotee.

“Consequently, by the grace of God, that devotee attains countless types of powers and liberates countless beings. Despite these powers, though, he tolerates the praises and insults of other people. This itself is also a great feat, because to tolerate despite being so powerful is not easy for others to achieve. Therefore, one who tolerates in this manner should be considered to be extremely great.

“The powers of such a person are such that since it is God who sees through his eyes, he empowers the eyes of all beings in the *brahmand*; and since it is God who walks through his legs, he is also capable of endowing the strength to walk to the legs of all beings in the *brahmand*. Thus, since it is God who resides in all the *indriyas* of such a Sant, that Sant is able to empower the *indriyas* of all beings in the *brahmand*. Therefore, such a Sant is the sustainer of the world” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 27).

“When they become such a sadhu by worshipping God in this way, then there is no greater status than that of a sadhu. For example, in a kingdom, the queen’s authority is equal to that of the king. In the same way, that sadhu possesses as much majesty as God” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 22).

“Similarly, the great Purush, like the *vadvanal* fire, transforms even the ‘salty’ *jivas* who are like the saline sea water, into ‘sweet’ *jivas*. . . .

“The person who is like the *vadvanal* fire is known as God’s Param-Ekantik Sant – who is perfectly God-realized” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 3).

It is evident from the above observations in the Vachanamrut that according to Shriji Maharaj, the *gunatit* Sadhu has as much honour and as much glory as God. Whatever fruits are therefore attained by worshipping God, by abiding by his dictates, by

pleasing him and by his contact, are also equally attained through the Gunatit Sadhu.

Shriji Maharaj further adds, “If one serves such a Sant, one earns merits equivalent to having served God” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 35).

“By performing with extreme affection such similar service of God and the Sant who possesses the highest qualities, even if they are a devotee of the lowest type and were destined to become a devotee of the highest type after two lives, or after four lives, or after ten lives, or after a hundred lives, they will become a devotee of the highest calibre in this very life. Such are the fruits of the similar service of God and God’s Bhakta” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 5).

“If the extremely great Purush becomes pleased upon a person, then regardless of how unfavourable the person’s samskars may be, they are all destroyed.

“Moreover, if the great Purush is pleased, a beggar can become a king; regardless of how unfavourable a person’s *prarabdha* may be, it becomes favourable; and regardless of how disastrous a misfortune they are to face, it is avoided” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 58).

“Intense love [*dradh priti*] for the Satpurush is the only means to realizing one’s *atma*; it is the only means to realizing the greatness of the Satpurush; and it is also the only means to having the direct realization of God” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 11).

In a number of Vachanamruts, it is mentioned that a devotee is endowed with virtues by the contact, service and worship of a *gunatit* Sadhu; and his bliss leads to attachment to God, removal of inner flaws, erosion of passion, and finally it culminates in a devotion that is full of dharma and *jnan*. And the *jiva* is extremely exalted by the Sadhu. Precisely for this reason, we can achieve whatever we desire through a Gunatit Sadhu.

Shriji Maharaj therefore asserts, “The profound association of the Sant that I have attained is like a magnificent *chintamani*

[magic stone] and a *kalpavruksh* [tree that give the desired fruits]" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 14).

5.10.2 In the Words of Gunatitanand Swami

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami describes the glory of the great Sadhu, "He is great, has realized God, lives according to the commands of God, tolerates hardships; God is under his control, God does as he says, God travels to wherever he says; he has won over God, he knows the opinions of God, he grants *moksha*, by his darshan one has the darshan of God, by worshipping him one worships God; he frees us from the miseries of the womb, hell and the cycle of births and deaths and helps us attain the limitless Akshardham of God; he helps us attain similarity to God – that is how great he is. God cannot live without him and by his darshan the five grave sins are burnt away. By the actions of his senses the universe is enlivened, and *kal*, karma and *maya* tremble before him. Just as by worshipping the body, the *jiva* is worshipped, similarly, by worshipping this Sadhu, God is worshipped. He is the provider of food, the indweller, omniscient, the all-doer, and he appears to be like a human but is not human; God continuously stays with him, and he helps one attain the eternal abode; he is the doer, yet is the non-doer; like a tree his body is for the benefit of others; he possesses the qualities of the genuine Sadhu which have been described in the shastras; he is '*kamil, kabil sub hunar tere hath*' [he is pure and perfect and has mastered all the arts]" (Swamini Vato 4.139).

"The Sadhu is greater than all. His glory was narrated. The details: bigger than all is earth and then from water, fire, wind, space, *ahamkar*, *mahatattva*, Pradhan-Purush, Mul Prakruti-Purush upto Akshar, each one is bigger than the preceding one. And God is the support of all. The Sadhu continually beholds this great God in his heart. Therefore, he is great" (Swamini Vato 2.110).

5.10.3 In the Bhajans of the Paramhansas

(A) Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami has eulogized such a great *Ekantik* Sadhu in Purushottam Prakash, Bhaktachintamani, Chosath Padi and in many of his kirtans. He has written in Purushottam Prakash:

Sant bole te bhelo hu bolu re, Sant na bhule hu ye na bhulu re;
Sant vāt bheli karu vāt re, em Santmā chbau sākshāt re.
Sant juve te bhelo hu jou re, Sant sutā pachhi hu sou re;
Sant jāge te bhelo hu jāgu re, Sant joi ati anurāgu re.
Sant Jame te bhelo hu jamu re, Sant bhame te kedye hu bhamu re;
Sant dukhāne hu dukhāno re, eh vāt satya jan jāno re,
Sant hu ne hu te vali Sant re, em Shri mukhe kabe Bhagwant re,
Sant mānajo māri murti re, emā fer nathi ek rati re.

The Sadhu speaks and I speak with him. The Sadhu forgets not, and I also do not forget.

The Sadhu talks, and I talk with him. Thus I reveal myself thoroughly through the Sadhu.

The Sadhu looks and I look with him. I sleep after he sleeps.

I get up before he arises. I see him and am filled with joy.

The Sadhu eats and I eat with him. The Sadhu walks, I follow him.

The Sadhu is grieved, I suffer the pain. Believe this as the gospel truth;

The Sadhu is myself and I am the Sadhu. Thus says God himself,

The Sadhu is my very image – without the slightest difference.

- Purushottam Prakash 41.6-9

Evā Sant jamye jamyā Shyām, jamyā sahu devatā;
Jamyā sarve lok sarve dhām, sahu thayā truptatā.
Evā Sant malye malyā Swāmi, khāmi koye nā rahi;
Kabe Nishkulānand shish nāmi, sāchi sahune kahi.

When the Sadhu eats, God and all the deities are fed.

All the cosmoses and all the abodes are contented.

Communion with such a Sadhu is like communion with God and no inadequacy is ever felt.

Bowing his head in all humility, Nishkulanand says, I tell you only the truth.

- Chosath Padi 3

Sant krupāe sukh upaje, Sant krupāthi sare kām;

Sant krupāthi pāmie, Puran Purushottam dhām.

Sant krupāthi sadmati jāge, Sant krupāthi sadguna;

Sant krupā vinā sadbutā, kahone pāmyā kuna.

Sant sevā tene sarve sevā, sevā Shri Hari Bhagwan;

Rushi muni sevā devatā, jene Sant karyā rāji man.

Kāmadugha² kalpataru³, pāras⁴ chintamani⁵ chār;

Sant samān eke nahi, me manmā karyo vichār.

Bliss follows through the Sadhu's grace and all ends are served.

By the Sadhu's grace is attained Purushottam's abode.

Through the Sadhu's grace, wise counsel prevails and virtues flourish.

Without the Sadhu's grace, who has acquired saintliness?

By serving the Sadhu, all are served and God is also worshipped.

He who pleases the Sadhu, has served the rishis, sages and deities.

The foursome of *kamadugha*, *kalpataru*, *paras* and *chintamani*

Pale into insignificance before the Sadhu. This is my considered opinion.

- Bhaktachintamani 2

Dhanya dhanya e Sant sujānane, jenu ulati palatyū āp,

Sant te swayam Hari.

Āp tali malyā Bhagwānmā, jenā āpmā Harino vyāp,

Sant te swayam Hari.

2. Wish-fulfilling cow.

3. Wish-fulfilling tree.

4. Philosopher's stone that turns iron into gold by touch.

5. Wish-fulfilling gem.

The Sadhu is indeed fortunate, whose inner self is completely changed.

The Sadhu is God himself.

He (the Sadhu) who has effaced the self, merges in God and is possessed by him.

The Sadhu is God himself.

(B) Sadguru Muktanand Swami says:

*Aise mere jan Ekāntik, tehi sam aur na koi;
Muktānand kahat yu Mohan, mero hi sarvasva soi.*

No one can be on par with my Ekantik Sadhu.

God says, 'For me, he is my all.'

*Muktānand mahā Santne, Prabhu pragat pāse re;
Anubhavine antare rahe Rāma vāse re.*

God manifest is close to the great Sadhu.

In the heart of an enlightened one, God always resides.

(C) Sadguru Brahmaand Swami says:

*Brahmānand kabe Santki sobat, milat he Pragat Murāri,
Jagatmāhi Sant param hitakāri.*

The company of the Sadhu is like meeting God himself.

Our only well-wisher in the whole world is the Sadhu.

(D) Sadguru Premanand Swami writes:

*Āthe pahor ānand jenā angmā,
Rame Govind evā Santnā re sangmā;*

God is one with the Sadhu, who is constantly brimming with joy.

*Evā Sant Harine pyārā re,
Tethi ghadie na rahe Vālo nyārā re.*

Such a sadhu is dearest to God; He doesn't leave him for a moment.

Evā Santni balihāri re, Jene gune rijhyā Giradhāri re.

Glory to the Sadhu, whose innate goodness has won over God.

5.10.4 In the Bhajans of Well-Known Devotee-Poets

Well-known devotee-poets Narsinh Mehta, Mirabai, Pritam, Dayaram, Surdas, Tulsidas and others are ecstatic in their poems while praising the *gunatit* Sadhu and have placed him on par with God.

(A) Narsinh Mehta has written:

*Prān thaki mune Vaishnav vahālā, rāt divas brude bhāvu re;
Tap tirath Vaikunth pad meli, mārā harijan hoy tyā hu āvu re.
Lakshmiji ardhānganā mārī, te mārā Santni dāsi re;
Adasath tirath mārā Santne charane, kota Gangā kota Kāshi re.*

Vaishnavs are dearer to me than my life. Day and night, I think of them; Leaving aside austerities, holy places and Vaikunth, I rush to wherever my devotees are.

Lakshmiji, who is my wife, faithfully serves the Sadhu; All the 68 holy places lie at the feet of my Sadhu. They [the feet] are as sacred as a million Gangas and Kashis.

(B) Tulsidas says:

*Ramsindhu ghan sajjan dhirā, chandantaru Hari Sant samirā;
More man Prabhu as bisvāsā, Rāma te adhik Rām kar dāsā.*

If Rama is the ocean, the pious Sadhu is a monsoon cloud.

If Rama is the sandalwood tree, the Sadhu is the cool scented breeze.

I am quite sure in my mind that – Rama's Sadhu is greater than even Rama.

- Uttar Kand, Chopai following 119th verse

(C) Pritam says:

*Sant harijan ek hai, bhinna na māno koi;
Pritam Sadguru mile, tāku mālum hoy.*

The Sadhu and God are the same. Do not distinguish between them.

Pritam says only one who has met the Sadguru realizes this fact.

(D) Sant Kabir says:

Sāhabakā ghar Santanmāhi, Sant Sāhab kachhu antar nāhi.

God dwells in the Sadhu. There is no distance between God and the Sadhu.

5.10.5 In Other Shastras

In the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Shrimad Bhagvat, Ramayan and other shastras, there are numerous references to the Sadhu's greatness and glory, as can be seen from the following excerpts:

*Yasya deve parābhaktir-yathā deve tathā gurau;
Tasyaite kathitā hyarthā prakāshante mahātmanaha.*

If the *jiva* serves the *pragat* guru in the same spirit as he worships the *paroksh* form of God, he achieves all that is worth achieving.

- Shvetashvatara Upanishad 6.23

*Sādhavo bridayam malyam Sādhunām bridayam traham;
Madanyatte na jānanti nāham tebhyo manāgapi.*

The Sadhu is my heart. And I am the Sadhu's heart.

Just as he does not recognize anyone as superior to me, I also do not treat anyone superior to him.

- Shrimad Bhagvat 9.4.68

*Nirapeksham munim shāntam nirvairam samadarshanam;
Anuvrajāmyaham nityam puyeyetyan-ghrivenubhibhi.*

I constantly follow the detached, contemplative, quiet, unbiased and righteous sadhus;

So that if I receive the dust of their feet, I shall be purified.

- Shrimad Bhagvat 11.14.16

Does this mean that God is not pure? God certainly is. Only to illustrate the endless glory of his Sadhu, does he speak about him in such glowing terms.

5.11 THE GUNATIT SADHU: THE PRAGAT FORM OF GOD, YET A LOYAL SERVANT

The shastras, Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the sadhu-poets have placed the *gunatit* Sadhu on par with God, or even on a higher plane, as seen in the previous pages. Nevertheless, the *gunatit* Sadhu always serves Shriji Maharaj as a loyal servant. Gunatitanand Swami in the *Swamini Vato* identifies himself as the master of all, yet at the same time the servant of Purushottam.

Brahmaand Swami has written:

*Sāmrath pāy kabu nahi chhalakat, jyu udadbi ke toy;
Brahmānand kabyo Shri mukhase, eso jan priya moy.*

Though extremely powerful, the Sadhu does not demonstrate his competency, like the ocean waters that never overflow.

Brahmaand says that God himself declares, ‘Such a Sadhu is my beloved.’

The *gunatit* Sadhu has as much power as God. It is, however, a fact that all the powers, dignity and authority of the Sadhu are due to Purushottam Narayan.

The *gunatit* Sadhu never becomes God himself. But God, in all respects, dwells in him. The darshan of the *gunatit* Sadhu is therefore equivalent to the darshan of God. Principally, “Transcending that Brahma is Parabrahma – Purushottam Narayan – who is distinct from Brahma, and is the cause, the supporter and the inspirer of Brahma” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 3).

In our succession of *gunatit* gurus, no one has ever even dreamt of being God or becoming God. In the assembly at Vartal when Gunatitanand Swami was insulted, somebody commented, “Gunatitanand Swami wants to become God.”

Swami unhesitatingly retorted, “No one can become God. Only Shriji Maharaj is God. If anyone calls me God, he will be considered as good as a donkey.”

Shastriji Maharaj often used to say, “We are the bullocks of

Akshar-Purushottam.” He also used to clarify, “Shriji Maharaj alone is God. Anyone worshipping me as God will be consigned to Hell.”

Like Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, today His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj always serves as a humble servant of Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan. This is amply demonstrated by his unpretentious, humble life.

God manifests through Aksharbrahma. We shall examine in the next chapter the form of Aksharbrahma, his powers and glory, and how he helps aspirants on the path to *moksha*.

6. AKSHARBRAHMA

All the Vedic philosophies and commentators accept Parabrahma as the highest and the most sublime entity. But nowhere is it clearly discussed what exactly Aksharbrahma is. The dignity, form and attributes of Brahma are profusely expounded in the shastras. The shastras by and large describe Brahma as Parabrahma. Even the learned *acharyas* – who have written commentaries on the shastras – have explained that often Brahma is synonymous with Parabrahma. However in certain Shrutis, Brahma is clearly described as distinct from Parabrahma. No one has elaborated on the entity of Brahma as clearly as Shriji Maharaj. In Swaminarayan Darshan, Aksharbrahma is described as the fourth entity which transcends the three entities of *jiva*, *ishwar* and *maya*. Aksharbrahma is described as the supporter of these three, and as pervading them and transcending them. However, Aksharbrahma is still inferior to Parabrahma. This entity is traditionally also known as ‘Akshar’ or ‘Brahma’.

Aksharbrahma has a prominent place in the Swaminarayan *upasana*. Ultimate liberation is to attain *brahmabhav* and devoutly worship Parabrahma Paramatma Bhagwan Swaminarayan. All followers of the Sampradaya offer *upasana* to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. However, this *upasana* is not fulfilled without Aksharbrahma.

Through Aksharbrahma Parabrahma is known precisely and *maya* is eradicated. One then becomes *brahmarup* and attains ultimate liberation. Akshar is the means to the attainment of Purushottam. It is therefore quite essential to clearly understand the relationship between Akshar and Purushottam.

6.1 BECOMING AKSHARRUP AND OFFERING UPASANA TO PURUSHOTTAM WITH SWAMI-SEVAK BHAV

Shriji Maharaj has instructed us to develop the highest

category of *nirvikalp* faith (*uttam nirvikalp nishchay*). Only through *nirvikalp* faith can one understand the sublime form of Purushottam Narayan. All followers of the Sampradaya in their evening prayers request for this by singing:

Nirvikalp uttam ati nishchay tav Ghanshyām...

O Ghanshyam, kindly favour us with the highest category of *nirvikalp* faith.

- Sadguru Premanand Swami

Shriji Maharaj has explained the highest category of *nirvikalp* faith in the following manner, “one possessing the highest level of ‘nirvikalp faith’ realizes that countless millions of *brahmāns*, each encircled by the eight cosmic coverings,^e appear like mere atoms before Akshar. Such is the glory of Akshar, the abode of Purushottam Narayan. One who worships Purushottam realizing oneself to be *aksharrup* can be said to possess the highest level of ‘nirvikalp faith’” (Vachanamrut, Loya 12).

In these words of Shriji Maharaj, the highest category of *nirvikalp* faith is basically becoming *aksharrup* to devoutly worship Purushottam.

Again Maharaj says, “Transcending that Brahma is Parabrahma, Purushottam Narayan, who is distinct from Brahma, and is the cause, the supporter and the inspirer of Brahma. With such understanding, one should develop oneness with one’s *jivatma* and with that Brahma, and worship Parabrahma while maintaining a master-servant relationship with him” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 3).

Stressing the importance of thoroughly knowing Akshar and complete identification with him, Shriji Maharaj says, “Identifying one’s *jīva* with Aksharbrahma, one who worships Purushottam is indeed praiseworthy. And one who distinguishes the *jīva* and Akshar, and fails to realize the unity between them should be condemned” (Vedras, p.220).

“Knowing one’s *atma* and Akshar as one, one who offers his

worship to Purushottam Paramatma deserves compliments, and one who does not realize the *Swami-sevakbhav* with Purushottam, but treats them as one, deserves condemnation” (*Vedras*, p.220).

From this it must be clearly realized that the *jiva* should develop oneness with Akshar and offer *upasana* to Purushottam with *Swami-sevakbhav*.

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami had a thorough understanding of Shriji Maharaj’s principles. Once he asked someone to read Vachanamruts Gadhada I 23, Gadhada II 30 and II 45, Ahmedabad 2 and 3. The five Vachanamruts were re-read twice or thrice. Gunatitanand Swami then said, “Listening to these Vachanamruts, I have concluded that even after millions of years, without behaving in this way [becoming *aksharrup* and worshipping Purushottam], there is no final release. So, for us, there is no alternative but to follow that path. Also, even if one is an *acharya*, a son of God, an *ishwar* or some small or big deity, still there is no release without behaving in that way. Since, that is Maharaj’s belief” (Swamini Vato 3.13).

To arrive at the stage of *aksharrup* and offer one’s devotion to Purushottam through *Swami-sevakbhav*, i.e. to be *brahmarup* and be devoted to Parabrahma with *Swami-sevakbhav* is the timeless fundamental principle propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Therefore it is essential for us – his followers – to become *aksharrup* or *brahmarup*. Maharaj has explained the need of becoming *aksharrup* in the Vachanamrut in different ways which we will now consider.

6.2 THE NEED TO BECOME BRAHMARUP

6.2.1 For the Privilege of Worshipping Purushottam

Everyone worships God. But who is rightly privileged to do so? Shriji Maharaj explains: “Only one who is *brahmarup* has the right to offer bhakti to Purushottam” (Vachanamrut, Loya 7).

The same principle is propounded in the Bhagavad Gita:

*Brahmabbuta prasannātmā na shochati na kānkshati;
Samah sarveshu bhuteshu mad-bhaktim labhate parām.*

One who has become *brahmarup* remains joyful, grieves for nothing, desires nothing, behaves equally with all beings, and attains my supreme bhakti.

- Bhagavad Gita 18.54

6.2.2 For Unhindered Devotion

For unhindered devotion to God, it is essential to become one with Aksharbrahma. Otherwise, there is the constant risk of downfall. In the absence of such a state, one is likely to be distracted by the body, the *gunas*, or the states of consciousness, and inevitably lapse into the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. It may also lead to attributing human weaknesses to God.

For an aspirant, the two greatest hurdles on the spiritual path are lust and wealth. How can they be overcome? According to Shriji Maharaj, “Gold and women are the source of extreme attachment.

“One does not become attached to these two when one realizes the pure *chaitanya* Brahma – which transcends Prakruti-Purush – as the only *satya*; and when one realizes that Brahma to be one’s own self; and when one becomes *brahmarup* and worships Shri Krishna Bhagwan, who is Parabrahma” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 30).

Gunatitanand Swami also says, “In this universe, there is no man who does not desire a woman, and no woman who does not desire a man. To separate each from the other, Maharaj has written one *shlok*: ‘*Nijatmanam brahmarupam...*’ i.e. believe one’s true self as *atma*, not the body. Just as there are no stones when one digs the soil of Gujarat deep down into the earth, similarly, there are no faults in one who is *brahmarup*” (Swamini Vato 1.141).

“By following the instruction in the Shikshapatri, desires are

destroyed. Which instruction? That of *Nijatmanam brahmarupam* – if this instruction is followed, the causal body is destroyed” (Swamini Vato 5.72).

Therefore, to remove all obstacles on the path of devotion, it is necessary to overcome human imperfections and become *brahmarup*.

6.2.3 For Ultimate Liberation

Some devas repeatedly take birth along with the creation and then ultimately merge back into *maya*. But they do not attain Akshardham, the abode of Shri Purushottam Bhagwan. One reason for this is, “They do not realize that becoming *aksharrup* and serving Shri Purushottam Narayan is in itself liberation” (Vachanamrut, Ashlali).

If such creators of the universe are required to become *brahmarup* for their ultimate liberation, then its need for lesser beings can hardly be overstated. Shriji Maharaj therefore maintains, “Thus, one who does not offer bhakti to Parabrahma after becoming *brahmarup* cannot be said to have attained ultimate liberation” (Vachanamrut, Loya 7).

6.3 NECESSITY OF AKSHARBRAHMA ON THE PATH OF LIBERATION

6.3.1 To Become Brahmarup

Tatra brahmātmāna Krishna-sevā muktishcha gamyatām;

- Shikshapatri 121

Explaining the definition of liberation or *moksha*, Shriji Maharaj says: “Ultimate *mukti* or liberation is serving Parabrahma in the divine abode, after becoming *brahmarup*.”

Having realized the necessity of attaining the *brahmarup* state, the obvious question is how to become *brahmarup*? According to Maharaj, ignorance, passion and attachment to the body are not undone by any means. They can only be eradicated by the

company of Brahma. The influence of *maya* can only be removed by association with Brahma, because in Brahma there is no trace or influence of *maya*.

Shriji Maharaj states, “If one associates with Brahma through continuous contemplation in this manner, the *jiva* acquires the virtues of that Brahma” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 31).

The Shruti also declares:

Brahma veda Brahmaiva bhavati;
He who knows Brahma becomes *brahmarup*.

- Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.9

It is quite essential then to know and to be associated with Aksharbrahma in order to do away with the influence of *maya* and become *brahmarup*. Gunatitanand Swami also says: “One can become *brahmarup* by believing this Gunatit Sadhu to be *brahmarup* and associating with him through one’s mind, deeds and speech. Then one becomes *brahmarup*” (Swamini Vato 3.12).

6.3.2 To Know Parabrahma as He Is

Parabrahma in his human form is forever divine, so how can human beings bound by *maya* develop *nishchay* in him. This question is asked in the Vachanamrut: “God, however, transcends *maya*. How, then, can one cultivate the conviction in God through the *mayik antahkarans*?” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 51).

Shriji Maharaj answers, “When one worships God with sincerity, having faith in the words of the Ekantik Sant of God, one’s *mayik* vision disappears. Thereafter, one realizes that same form of God as being the supreme *chaitanya*, characterized by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss” (Vachanamrut, Panchala 7).

Therefore, “If a person realizes this glory of Purushottam Bhagwan by profound association with the Sant, then all their *indriyas* and *antahkarans* become divine like Purushottam Bhagwan’s *indriyas* and *antahkaran*. Then, through those

indriyas and *antahkarans*, they can develop the conviction of that God" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 51).

In Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 13, after revealing his glory as Purushottam in a wonderful account, Shriji Maharaj explains, "However, such discourses regarding the nature of God cannot be understood by oneself even from the shastras. Even though these facts may be in the shastras, it is only when the Satpurush manifests on this earth, and one hears them being narrated by him, that one understands them. They cannot, however, be understood by one's intellect alone, even from the shastras" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 13).

It is therefore evident that only through the Satpurush can one realize Maharaj as Purushottam and the Satpurush as *gunait*. Without understanding the form of Aksharbrahma, it is impossible to have a clear realization of the glory of Purushottam as he is.

Shriji Maharaj has also said, "Purushottam Bhagwan enters and dwells in all of the above as their cause and *antaryami*. However, he does not manifest in Prakruti-Purush to the extent he manifests in Akshar" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 41).

This means that Aksharbrahma is in close proximity with Purushottam. No *mukta* can therefore realize Purushottam's glory and greatness as much as Aksharbrahma can. It is no wonder then that others cannot realize it. The condition essential to visualize the immense glory and greatness of Purushottam is to have the association of Aksharbrahma.

That is to say, only through Akshar can Purushottam be known. This is the key, the fundamental principle of correct understanding. Therefore, to cultivate indomitable faith in Purushottam Narayan and to understand his divine glory, it is absolutely essential to know Aksharbrahma with all his greatness and to associate with him in thought, deed and word.

The Shrutis also mention:

Brahmavidāpnoi Param.

He who knows Brahma attains Parabrahma.

- Taittiriya Upanishad 2.1

Now let us aspire to understand the glory and form of Aksharbrahma, as it is the only medium to attain Parabrahma.

6.4 THE GLORY OF AKSHARBRAHMA

The infinite glory of Aksharbrahma is given at length in the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and other shastras. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has also described the glory in the *Vedras* and the Vachanamrut.

“Enwrapped by the sixteen *vikars* – the ten *indriyas*, *panch-bbuts*, and the mind; and encircled by the eight spheres of earth, etc. – each one ten times greater than the preceding one; and five crore *yojans* {200 million miles} in dimension – a *brahmand* (universe) appears like a tiny atom before Aksharbrahma. And before whom millions of universes appear like tiny atoms, that Aksharbrahma is the cause of all, the cause of even Prakriti and Purush, and the abode of Paramatma himself – in the shape of a human”¹ (Shrimad Bhagvat 3.11.40).

Akshar is the onlooker and the witness of all. Brahma is aware of them all, governs them all, controls them, and is their all-doer. Brahma is stable. It is immanent in Prakriti-Purush and is the *antaryami* of all. It inspires all. Brahma is unchanging and is endowed with supreme wisdom. ...By its power, the entire world of Purush-Prakriti is created and sustained. That Brahma is omnipotent and subtler than the subtlest (Based on *Vedras*, p.157–9, p.165, p.213).

1. *Dashottarādikairyatrapravishta paramānuvat;*
Lakṣhyate'ntargatāśchānye kotiśo hyandarāśhayaha.
Tadāhuraksharam Brahma sarvakāraṇakāraṇam;
Vishnordhāma param sākshāt purushasya mahātmanaha.

6.5 THE FORMS OF AKSHARBRAHMA

There is only one Aksharbrahma, but because of its various duties it is described in different ways. The first reference to this is in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 21 in which Shriji Maharaj says, “After an *ekantik bhakta* leaves his body and becomes free of all influences of *maya*, he attains Akshardham via the *archimarg*.... That Akshar has two forms. One, which is formless and pure *chaitanya*, is known as Chidakash or Brahmasmahol. In its other form, that Akshar remains in the service of Purushottam Narayan.”

Here, Shriji Maharaj has described two forms of Akshar, but within these two forms another two forms are present. These other two are also described in the Vachanamrut.

In summary, Aksharbrahma can be described as serving in four forms: (1) Aksharbrahma as Chidakash, (2) Aksharbrahma as the abode (Dham), (3) personal form of Aksharbrahma serving the divine abode (Dham) and (4) manifest on earth as the Brahmaswarup Satpurush form of Aksharbrahma.

Let us now learn more about the forms of Akshar engaged in the various services.

6.5.1 As Satchidanand Chidakash Radiance

‘Satchidanand’ means *Sat* – Existence, *Chit* – Consciousness, and *Anand* – Bliss. As Satchidanand Chidakash, Aksharbrahma is imperceptibly formless and all-pervading. It is also immanent in everything. It is immanent even in the millionth part of a dust particle. This Akshar as Chidakash is imperishable, unwaning, unchanging and eternal. It is beyond creation and dissolution (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 46).

Chidakash is the existent, conscious and blissful divine radiance of Akshar, the divine abode of God. It possesses no cause-effect relationship. As mentioned in Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 42, countless millions of *brahmans* rotate in Chidakash.

Aksharbrahma, as Satchidanand Chidakash radiance, is by its *antaryami* power all-pervading within and without all the functions of Prakriti-Purush, as well as their supporter. This is the *nirgun* form of Akshar.

6.5.2 As the Divine Abode

This is the infinitely vast, personal (*sakar*) and *sagun* aspect of Aksharbrahma.

In reply to Kubersinh's question on Brahmapur (Akshardham), Shriji Maharaj gives the following description, "It is *aksharrup* Brahma which has become the abode for Shri Purushottam Narayan to dwell in. That Aksharbrahma – in the form of the abode of God – is eternal in comparison to all the other aksharbrahmas [*aksharmuktas*]. ...

"In addition, its splendour is countless times more than the divine riches of countless other abodes.

"That abode is also limitless. Just as there is no limit to *akash*, regardless of the direction in which one looks, similarly, there is no limit to Brahmadham. Whether above, below or in the four directions, there is no boundary to the abode of God. This is because it is boundless. If one were to try to reach its end, one would realize that it is endless. Such is the vastness of Brahmapur. ...

"Countless attendants, who are also radiant and have a divine form, reside in that abode. There, they are forever eager for the service of God" (Vachanamrut, Ahmedabad 6).

"The cause of all of these is Aksharbrahma, which is the abode of Purushottam Bhagwan.

"That Akshar does not have any states of contraction or expansion; it forever remains in the same state. That Akshar also possesses a form, but because it is so vast, its form cannot be visualized.

"For example, the *brahmand*, which has evolved from the

24 elements,² is known as Purushavatar. That Virat-Purush possesses hands, feet, and other features, but because his form is extremely vast, he is beyond visualization. . . .

“In the same manner, despite having a definite form, Akshardham cannot be visualized. This is because it is so vast that countless *brahmāns* float within its each and every hair.

“It is within that Akshardham that Purushottam Bhagwan himself eternally resides” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 63).

Shriji Maharaj has thus described Aksharbrahma, the divine abode, as personal and with a form. It neither contracts nor expands, and so its form cannot be visualized. No one upto Mul-Purush (*mukta*) – the lord of *mul-maya* – can fathom its vastness. To all of them, Brahma appears infinitely immeasurable. The shastras sometimes describe it as *nirakar*. However, in reality, Aksharbrahma as the divine abode of God and supporter of infinite *muktas* is personal; and has the radiance of countless suns and moons (*Setumala* 63.45–49).

6.5.3 As Divine, Personal and Sakar

In the abode of Akshardham, the personal form of Aksharbrahma is divine, with humanly shape and always readily serving Purushottam Narayan. The personified Aksharbrahma is the ideal example of the highest devotion and service. In Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 21, Shriji Maharaj has specified, “In its other form, that Akshar remains in the service of Purushottam Narayan.”

Commenting on these words, the text *Harivakyasudhasindhu* explains:

Murtam tatrāsti Krishnasya sevāyām divyavigraham;

The divine personal form of Aksharbrahma is always there in Akshardham serving Purushottam.

- *Harivakyasudhasindhu* 21–22

2. One year of Brahmā is equivalent to 315,360,000 human years.

The *Setumala* commentary on *Harivakyasudhasindhu* further adds:

1. “The incarnate (*sakar*) Aksharbrahma is divine, has a human-like form endowed with two hands and two feet, is strikingly attractive and is always engaged in the devotion and servitude of his master – Purushottam Narayan – who is even more attractive than him.”³
2. “In his divine Akshardham, God is being served with utter dedication as per his wishes by countless *muktas* – who have attained the qualities of Aksharbrahma – and also by the personal form of Aksharbrahma.”⁴
3. “As Aksharbrahma is the chief attendant (the principal, ideal and eternally choicest *sevak*) of Purushottam Narayan, he has a divine and extremely attractive *sakar* human-like form with beautiful features.”⁵

6.5.4 As the Param Ekantik Satpurush

“When God incarnates for the purpose of granting liberation to the *jivas*, he is always accompanied by his Akshardham, his attendants – who are formed of *chaitanya* – and all his divine powers.

“Therefore, a devotee of God should realize that the form of God along with his Akshardham is present on this earth, and they should also explain this fact to others” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 71).

Shriji Maharaj – Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan – with infinite compassion descended on this earth in human form and became visible to all. He brought along with him the personal

3 *Murtam tu divyavigraham rupānurupa-karacharanādyava-yavishishtatvena atisundara-purushākāra-murti sat Krishnasya tato'pyatiniratishaya-sharirashobhāvataha sveshtadevasya... sevāyām asti dāsavat sadā variate.* - Setumala 21.22

4 *Haribi svakiyāksharadbhāmanyakshara-bhāvāpanna-muktakotibhir- murtenā'ksbara-brahmaā cha chbandā'nuvrittitayā kruta-paricharyaya.* - Setumala 159.5

5 *'Tadaksharam' Krishnasya sevakatvād mukhya-parichārakatvādi-hetobho divyairati-manobaraibi pānipādamukhādhibibi avayavaibi pratikaibi upalākshitatvāt sākruti-purushākāramuchyate.* - Setumala 159.5

form of the divine abode – Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. Shriji Maharaj dwelled on this earth for 49 years and bestowed infinite bliss upon the devotees and also liberated countless souls. After returning to his abode, he remains manifest through a succession of God-realized Sadhus, who are form of Aksharbrahma, thus keeping the road to ultimate liberation open forever.

6.6 AKSHARBRAHMA: ONE AND UNIQUE

As observed earlier, Aksharbrahma serves as radiant light, as the divine abode, as the constant and closest *sevak* of Purushottam and as a human being on this earth. Despite his various functions, there is no essential difference as Aksharbrahma is always one and unique.

Again, there are countless *jivas* and countless *ishwars*. All the *jivas* and *ishwars* are liberated by their direct contact with and compassion of Aksharbrahma and Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan. On attaining *moksha*, they are known as *akshar muktas*. They are also countless in number. Just as Parabrahma is one and incomparable, similarly, Aksharbrahma is also only one and incomparable. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has explained this fact in the Vachanamrut and the *Vedras*. “There are many who have attained divinity similar to that of Akshar. But there is only one Akshar” (*Vedras*, p.213–4).

Gunatitanand Swami also reiterates the same point, “There is only one Akshar – God’s abode. The rest are *akshar muktas* and their number is infinite” (Swamini Vato 5.177).

In the *Setumala* commentary on the *Harivakyasudhasindhu* by Acharya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj, the same principle is restated, “God in his abode is served as he wishes by the personal Aksharbrahma – and by infinite *muktas*, who have attained rapport with Aksharbrahma” (*Setumala*, 59.5).

Here, it is mentioned that there are infinite *akshar muktas*,

but only one Aksharbrahma. The singular case is used for Aksharbrahma at many places in the Vachanamrut and the *Vedras*. For example, “Akshar is like this, and the bliss associated with him is like this” (Vachanamrut, Loya 17).

“Akshardham (*evo je Aksharrup Dham*) is the greatest of the great” (*Vedras*, p.146).

It is therefore clear that Aksharbrahma is one and incomparable. Shriji Maharaj has also said that the one and incomparable Akshar is *anadi* – eternal. The other *akshar muktas* have reached that stage only through the association of eternal Akshar.

“That Aksharbrahma in the form of the abode of God is eternal in comparison to all the other *aksharbrahmas* [referring to *akshar muktas*]” (Vachanamrut, Ahmedabad 6).

6.7 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AKSHAR AND PURUSHOTTAM

Akshar and Purushottam have a special relationship as *sharir-shariri* and *sevak-Swami*.

Shriji Maharaj says, “Wherever that form of Purushottam resides, that is the very centre of Akshardham” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 42). Furthermore, “The form in which there is not even a trace of the influence of Prakruti-Purush, and others, and in which only Purushottam Bhagwan resides – that should be known as the *vyatirek* form of Akshar” (Vachanamrut, Sarangpur 5).

Akshar and Purushottam thus have a special relationship with each other.

Aksharbrahma – as the dearest, nearest, ideal and best *sevak* and devotee – is always with Parabrahma in his divine abode, and accompanies him in any universe where he desires to manifest (Vachanamruts, Gadhada I 71, Gadhada II 42). Precisely for this reason, Aksharbrahma is a separate entity from Parabrahma Purushottam, yet they remain eternally bound together. That

is to say, Aksharbrahma is associated with Parabrahma through the special bond of *Swami-sevakbhav*. It is impossible to imagine Aksharbrahma to be aloof or separate from Parabrahma.

Thus Aksharbrahma and Parabrahma have a special relationship. Aksharbrahma cannot be even thought of without Parabrahma. Also, without Brahma, one has no right to offer worship to Parabrahma.

Akshar is the lord of all; but is the servant of Purushottam. Except for Parabrahma, no entity can rule over Aksharbrahma.

“Purushottam Bhagwan...is the inspirer of both the *atma* and Akshar, is independent from them and is their controller. He also possesses all spiritual powers. He is greater than even Akshar, which is greater than everything” (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 64).

Thus Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan is the support, cause and inspirer of Brahma.

The powers of Purushottam Bhagwan are explained in Vachanamrut, Loya 13, “If he wishes, he can eclipse all of the *muktas* of Akshardham by his own divine light and prevail alone. Also, if he wishes, he can accept the *bhakti* of the *muktas* and reside with them. He can eclipse even Akshar – in the form of the Akshardham in which he dwells – and preside alone independently. If he so chooses, he is capable of supporting the countless *muktas* by his own power, without even needing Akshardham.”

It is clear that Purushottam is totally independent. He is not dependent on Akshar, whereas, Akshar is dependent on Purushottam.

Purushottam has the supreme powers to merge Akshardham. At the time of *atyantik pralay* (final rest), the *jivas* and *ishwars* merge into *maya*. *Maya* merges in Brahma. But there is no mention of Brahma merging into Parabrahma. It is mentioned that, “With the exception of God’s Akshardham, the form of

God in that Akshardham and his devotees in that Akshardham, everything else...is perishable" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 24).

In other words, after the final rest, *Dham* (Akshardham), *Dhami* (Purushottam) and the *muktas* are the only three entities that remain.

It is mentioned in the Vachanamrut that Brahma merges into Parabrahma. What exactly is meant by this reference? Here, merging of Brahma into Parabrahma means that the powers of Brahma are suppressed and the influence of Parabrahma predominantly prevails. The powers of Brahma are suppressed in the superior powers and glory of Parabrahma, but there is no merging of Aksharbrahma's form.

6.8 DIVINE QUALITIES OF AKSHAR BRAHMA

For all practical purposes, Brahma and Parabrahma are different, "Transcending that Brahma is Parabrahma, Purushottam Narayan, who is distinct from Brahma, and is the cause, the supporter and the inspirer of Brahma" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 3). However, by the wish of Parabrahma, Aksharbrahma has special qualities compared to *jivas* and *ishwars*.

In the way Purushottam transcends *maya*, so does Akshar. Purushottam is personal; similarly, Akshar is also personal. Whatever is touched by Purushottam becomes *brahmarup* – even *maya* becomes *nirgun*; Aksharbrahma also shares the same quality. Akshar is also like Purushottam – aloof, unaffected by *maya*, one and incomparable. Like Purushottam Narayan, Akshar is also not directly involved with the process of creation.

To liberate infinite *jivas* wherever Purushottam manifests in human form, Aksharbrahma also accompanies him in human form. In a kingdom, 'the queen's authority is equal to that of the king.' Similarly, Aksharbrahma has as much power and glory as Purushottam. Just as Purushottam can liberate infinite *jivas*,

Aksharbrahma can also similarly liberate infinite *jivas*. But one must not forget that all the glory and powers of Aksharbrahma are bestowed upon Akshar by Purushottam.

6.9 MEANING OF AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM UPASANA

The Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* is not the *upasana* of two separate entities, Akshar and Purushottam. However, it means to become *akshararup* and worship Purushottam; that is, to become *brahmarup* and offer *upasana* to Parabrahma.

The principle meaning of *upasana* is to understand Parabrahma as the all-doer, supreme, with a form and manifest, as clearly explained by Shriji Maharaj in Vachanamruts, Panchala 7, Gadhada I 40, Gadhada III 35 and others.

The powers of Aksharbrahma and the other entities are entirely dependent on Parabrahma Paramatma, and so, clearly, there is no question of offering *upasana* to them.

After the manifest form of Parabrahma returns to his divine abode, the *mumukshu* who associates with the manifest guru still offers *upasana* to Parabrahma only. Since, Paramatma himself is fully present through the form of the manifest *brahma-swarup* guru.

6.10 GLORY OF EQUAL SERVICE AND BHAKTI TO AKSHAR AND PURUSHOTTAM

By consecrating the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan, Lakshmi-Narayan, Radha-Krishna and others Bhagwan Swaminarayan advocated the equal service of *Bhakta-Bhagwan*, i.e. God and his choicest devotee.

In the Vachanamrut, replying to Nityanand Swami's question, Bhawan Swaminarayan describes this as the best way to eradicate the drawbacks of 100 lives in one life: "Nityanand Swami asked, 'Can a devotee who is of the lowest level eradicate their deficiency and become a devotee of the highest level in this very life, or not?'

“Just as one performs the *mansi* puja of God, if one also performs the *mansi* puja of the ideal Bhakta along with God, by offering him the *prasad* of God; and just as one prepares a *thal* for God, similarly, if one also prepares a *thal* for God’s ideal Bhakta and serves it to him; and just as one donates five rupees to God, similarly, if one also donates money to the great Sant – then by performing with extreme affection such similar service of God and the Sant who possesses the highest qualities, even if they are a devotee of the lowest type and were destined to become a devotee of the highest type after two lives, or after four lives, or after ten lives, or after a hundred lives, they will become a devotee of the highest calibre in this very life. Such are the fruits of the similar service of God and God’s Bhakta” (Vachanamrut, Vartal 5).

This answers the frequently ask question: since Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami, Sadguru Gopalanand Swami were sadhus is it appropriate to adorn their *murtis* with rich garments, crowns and ornaments? The answer is that Shriji Maharaj has shown equal service as the best means to eradicate the drawbacks of 100 lives in one life.

The inference is therefore very clear that Shastriji Maharaj did not concoct a new theory of Swami and Narayan, i.e. of Akshar and Purushottam. He has only lucidly explained the core of Shriji Maharaj’s principle in the Sampradaya and thus opened the doors to liberation for infinite *jivas*.

Shastriji Maharaj often used to give the following anecdote: As devotees, we should not follow the example of Ravan or Shurpankha; but should follow the example of Vibhishan. Ravan had affection for Sita, but anger for Rama. As a result he was beheaded. Similarly if one is affectionate towards the ideal, Gunatit, devotee but nurses a grudge against God, i.e. Shriji Maharaj, he loses his head. Shurpankha had love for Rama, but hated Sita. Consequently, her ears and nose were chopped

off. If therefore one has love for God, but hatred for Gunatit, one's ears and nose may get cut off. Vibhishan, however, had the correct understanding of worshipping Rama, Lakshman, Sita and Hanuman. Similarly, we should also have the same degree of love for and never malign the ideal devotee – *Dham*, God – *Dhami*, and the *akshar muktas*.

6.11 GUNATITANAND SWAMI IS MUL AKSHAR: WHY?

Explaining his manifestation to the *parambhansas*, Shriji Maharaj said, "My present objective is to annihilate ignorance and make the *jivas* attain the state of *brahmarup*." To eradicate the *jivas*' age-old bondage to *maya*, to make them *brahmarup* and to help them to understand the knowledge of Parabrahma, Shriji Maharaj brought Aksharbrahma with him on this earth.

These words are echoed in a kirtan ("*Dharmane lale mune...*") composed by Sadguru Premanand Swami:

*Mul mayanā bandhan kāpavā āvyā,
Dhām-dhāmnā vāsi ādi bolāvyā rāj... Dharmane
Mul Akshar pan Shri Hari sange,
Mukta mandalne lāvyā umange rāj... Dharmane*

To sever the bonds of *maya*, the inhabitants of various abodes followed him.

Mul Akshar and *akshar muktas* joyfully descended with him.

Thus it is clear from the above (and Vachanamrut Gadhada I 71) that Shriji Maharaj manifested on this earth with his Akshardham. The obvious question arises as to who is that Aksharbrahma? A historical study of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya reveals that in the initial stages, it was difficult for many to accept the divine supremacy and glory of Shriji Maharaj as Parbrahma. In such circumstances, how could they have had any idea – let alone a clear understanding – of the concept of Aksharbrahma?

Shriji Maharaj occasionally disclosed to those followers

and *paramhansas* who had innate faith in him that his divine abode was none else but Gunatitanand Swami. As well as this, as mentioned earlier, Shriji Maharaj also narrated the glory and greatness of Aksharbrahma in the shastras. In addition to that, we shall also examine the evidence and incidents recorded by the *paramhansas* revealing Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahma.

6.11.1 Scriptural Evidence

In Samvat Year 1866 (1810 CE) on the full moon day of the month of Posh, Mulji Sharma of Bhadra was initiated ceremoniously into the sadhufold by Shriji Maharaj in Dabhan on the last day of the grand *yagna* held there. He was renamed Gunatitanand Swami. Shriji Maharaj at that time revealed Mulji Sharma's greatness. This description has been recorded by Acharya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj in the following words:

*Mulji Sharmane dikshām dadānasya prajāyate;
Bhuyānme'tra samānando yato Dhāmāksharam sa me.
Muktairanantai sākam me yatrā'kbandatayoshyate;
Urdhvādbhōbhāgarabitam tanmulam Dhāma chāksharam.*

Today, I am extremely happy to initiate Mulji Sharma (who was born in Bhadra). He is my divine abode – Akshardham, which is infinite and endless. With infinite *muktas*, I forever reside in my *Dham*.

- Shri Harililakalpataru 7.17.49–50

It is also written in *Purushottam Charitra*.⁶

*Vandu Gunātīnānd Swāmi, jebi par rijhe Antaryāmi;
Bhagvad-vārtā satata karabi, dhyān Dharmānandānko dbarahi.
Uttamkulmā dhari avatār, Shri Hari kāj tajyo sansār;
Rakhe dharma puni dharma rakhāve, ādi hi Akshar āp kahāve.*

I bow to Gunatitanand Swami with whom the *Antaryāmi* (God) is extremely pleased.

6. The author, Darbar Abhaysinhji of Lodhika, has described the glory and power of Gunatitanand Swami, as narrated by Shriji Maharaj in Bhadra.

Uninterrupted, he (Gunatitanand Swami) is engaged in spiritual discourses,

And meditates on Shriji Maharaj – the son of Dharma.
Born in a noble family, he renounced the world for God.
He treads on the straight and narrow religious path,
And guides others onto the same path. He is renowned as Mul Akshar.

Acharya Shri Viharilalji Maharaj has written in his collection of kirtans, *Kirtan Kaustubhamala* (p.13):

*Aksharmurti Gunātitānand Svāmi, tene āpyā vartmān
Pote pāline pachhi palāvya, janane dai ghanu jnān;
Āvoji Avatāri, ānandkāri, pritam jivanpran.*

Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami initiated and guided me to practice the religious vows.

He followed them and then inspired others to follow them through giving immense knowledge to people.

We heartily welcome you, the divine incarnation, the dispenser of joy and the most beloved.

Brahmachari Krishnanandji has written:

*Dhām Dhāmi ja sāthē padhāryā, Svāmi ne Mahāraj,
Ekāntik dharma sthāpvā bani, alaukik jodi āj re,
Avo he Avināshi, sukhnā rāshi, Aksharnā ādhār...
Dayālu tame dayā kari lāvyā, Mul Aksharne sāth,
Gunātitānand nām chhe jenu, pādyu chhe pote ho Nāth re,
Āvo he Avināshi, sukhnā rāshi, Aksharnā ādhār...*

To establish *Ekantik Dharma*, the unique pair of *Dham* and *Dhami*, Swami and Maharaj, descended together.

We welcome you, O eternal, full of joy, the supporter of Akshar.

O Merciful, compassionate, as you are, you brought along with you Mul Akshar.

And you gave him the name – Gunatitanand.

We welcome you, O eternal, full of joy, the supporter of Akshar.

Similar references are also found in the *kirtans* of Jeram

Brahmachari, Akhandanand Brahmachari and Jagdishanand Brahmachari of Junagadh.

6.11.2 In the Words of Shriji Maharaj

1. In Samvat Year 1864 (1808 CE), Shriji Maharaj visited Bhadra. He was invited to Mulji Bhakta's house for lunch. On that occasion, Shriji Maharaj revealed Gunatitanand Swami as Mul Akshar for the first time. He told Sakarba – Gunatitanand Swami's mother, "Mother, you may not understand, but your son (Mulji) is my divine abode Akshardham in person. He is bound with me and I am bound to him. Our bond is unbreakable." Shriji Maharaj also talked at length with the devotees who had gathered there of the glory of Mulji Bhakta as Aksharbrahma.⁷

2. During the Janmashtami festival in Junagadh in Samvat Year 1905 (1849 CE), Sadguru Gopalanand Swami requested the devotees from Bhadra to recollect what Shriji Maharaj had told them about Mulji Bhakta. The incident above gained wider publicity.

3. In Samvat Year 1868 (1812 CE), Holi, the festival of colours, was celebrated in Sarangpur at Rathod Dhadhal's place. At that time, Shriji Maharaj sung Kabir's poem on Holi:

*Jogiyā tālat janam kerā fāsalā re,
Premnā pyālā jogiyā, jug jug jivo so jogiyā..
Sadguru khele Vasant...*

The noose of the cycle of births is removed by the God-realized Sadhus.

They are the cup of love. May they live for all time.

That Sadguru is engaged in the divine play of Spring.

Shriji Maharaj then asked. "Who is that Sadguru?"

Earlier in Loj and Mangrol, Maharaj himself had said, "I am that Sadguru." The sadhus therefore replied, "Maharaj, you are that Sadguru."

7. For a detailed account of this incident refer to *Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan* (2nd edition) Part 2, p. 337 and *Gunatitanand Swami* Part I, p. 50.

Shriji Maharaj touched his stick on Gunatitanand Swami's chest and declared, "I am the supreme Purushottam Narayan. That Sadguru is none other than Gunatitanand Swami whose glory and greatness have been described in this poem. Gunatitanand Swami, in the form of the divine abode, is the dwelling place for me and infinite *muktas*. In his personal *sakar* form, he serves me in Akshardham as well as on earth. He has manifested with me as a sadguru to propagate the supreme *upasana*."⁸

4. In Vartal, Gunatitanand Swami was returning from Lake Gomti after washing the quilts of the ill sadhus. Shriji Maharaj was returning following his meal at Vasan Suthar's house. They crossed each other at Hanuman Gate. By the force of Swami's concentration, Shriji Maharaj had to stop on the spot. The heavy weight of 18 quilts had made Gunatitanand Swami sweat profusely. Shriji Maharaj also began to perspire. After a while, asking for Swami's leave, Shriji Maharaj asked, "Sadhuram, may I go now?"

Swami replied, "Maharaj, of course you may leave."

Entering the assembly, Shriji Maharaj said, "I am perspiring because I feel I am carrying a heavy load." Thus Bhagaji and Bapu Ratanji started to fan Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj then pointed out, "To reduce the load, take the quilts off that sadhu's shoulders." Bhagaji removed all the quilts from Swami's shoulders. Shriji Maharaj then called for Muktanand Swami, Brahmaand Swami and other sadhus and said, "Just as a snake is held by pincers, this sadhu firmly holds my *murti* in all three states [i.e. he constantly beholds me]. He is my dwelling place – Akshardham – in person. He is the best of all and worthy of spiritual association even for the most exalted."⁹

8. Rathod Dhadhal narrated this incident to Jasa Gor and Nagji Sheth. Shastriji Maharaj heard it from them in person.

9. Shukanand Swami narrated this incident to Siddhanand Swami's disciple, Krishnacharandas, who in turn told it to Shastriji Maharaj in Mahuva. [From the letters of Shastriji Maharaj, *Swaminarayan Prakash*, Jan. 1987]

5. When Gunatitanand Swami was appointed as Mahant of Junagadh Mandir, Shriji Maharaj garlanded him and presented him with his own entire dress. He placed his *pagh* on Swami's head with his hands and blessed him.¹⁰ At that time, Kurji Dave of Akha was present in the assembly. Shriji Maharaj reminded him, "Many years ago, you brought the happy news that Ramanand Swami had arrived from Bhuj. The devotees gave you various gifts. I had told you at that time, 'I will give you my Akshardham as a gift.' You did not quite understand it. But today I give to you the gift of my very Akshardham – Gunatitanand Swami – to the devotees in Sorath. I have been unable to live here in this Sorath region for long. I therefore offer this sadhu to you. He is my all."

6. Samvat Year 1884 (1828 CE) was a particularly cold year. A heated iron grate was placed besides Gunatitanand Swami and he was warming himself. Soon Swami was feeling the heat. Exactly at that time in Gadhada, Shriji Maharaj said, "I am feeling very hot, I want to take a bath. Please bring some cold water." Everyone was surprised. Muktanand Swami asked for a reason. Shriji Maharaj replied, "I was feeling hot because my Akshardham was feeling hot."

Muktanand Swami countered, "Maharaj, Akshardham is cool and calm. How can it become hot?"

Shriji Maharaj replied, "My Akshardham incarnate – Gunatitanand Swami – while warming himself felt hot due to the excessive heat in the grate. Consequently, I also felt hot."

7. While taking a bath at the River Ghela in Gadhada, Gunatitanand Swami's foot became stuck in a rock crevice. Despite much effort, he could not pull it out. Shriji Maharaj appeared before him and asked him to slowly draw out his foot. At the same time, Shriji Maharaj was asking in his room in Gadhada, "Pull out my foot; otherwise it may break."

10. This incident is described in *Purushottam Charitra*, p.100

Mulji Brahmachari questioned, “Maharaj, you are sitting on a cot; how can your foot possibly suffer a fracture?”

Shriji Maharaj replied with a smile, “My abode Gunatitanand Swami’s foot was trapped in a crevice in the fast running water. Only with great effort was it freed.”

8. When Shriji Maharaj had made up his mind to return to his abode, he advised those sadhus and devotees who were emotionally attached to him and were likely to be affected by the separation, to go on a pilgrimage of Gujarat. Gopalanand Swami submitted at that time, “Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, the Mahant of Junagadh has come here. He is very much attached to you and is unlikely to bear your separation. Ask him to return to Junagadh.”

Shriji Maharaj listened. He then replied, “Swami, Gunatitanand Swami is my *gunatit* Akshardham. How can I possibly send him away? Wherever he is, I am there. And wherever I am, he is also there. How can he ever be separated from me?”

9. Once in Panchala, Gunatitanand Swami had sat down to eat with the *paramhansas* – Muktanand Swami on one side and Bhai Atmanand Swami on the other. Shriji Maharaj came and said to Kalyanbhai of Vanthali, “Look! A goat squeezed between two tigers.” Smiling, he pointed his finger to Gunatitanand Swami and said, “Kalyanbhai, do you know this Sadhu? He is my Akshar-dham. Make it a point to recognize him thoroughly.”

6.12 GUNATITANAND SWAMI'S UNIQUE GLORY

6.12.1 As Described by Shriji Maharaj

Only God fully knows and can explain the glory of his greatest devotee. We have seen earlier that Shriji Maharaj has clearly identified his choicest devotee Gunatitanand Swami as the incarnation of Aksharbrahma. In addition to this, he has also explained on many occasions the unique glory of his ideal and eternal servant.

1. In Samvat Year 1877 (1821 CE) in Panchala, Shriji Maharaj taught the *paramhansas* how to apply the *tilak* on their foreheads. Shriji Maharaj first of all applied the *tilak* on Gunatitanand Swami's forehead and announced, "Please look at my *tilak*. There is no Sadhu like him; there is no God like me."

2. To ensure that the sadhus observed the religious vows faithfully, Shriji Maharaj asked them to arrange mutual sureties. Exactly at that time, Gunatitanand Swami arrived from Junagadh. However, there was no sadhu left to stand as Swami's surety. Brahmaand Swami asked, "Maharaj, who will stand as a surety for Gunatitanand Swami?"

Shriji Maharaj replied, "I am his surety forever."

3. Gunatitanand Swami had come to Gadhada for Shriji Maharaj's darshan. Shukanand Swami started searching for a mat for Gunatitanand Swami to sit on. Shriji Maharaj pointed out to Shukanand Swami, "His greatness is not due to the mat. His greatness is eternal."

4. Once Muktanand Swami, Brahmaand Swami, Nityanand Swami, Anand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami and other sadhus, totalling about 18, were seated in a group while Shriji Maharaj served them food. Shriji Maharaj then asked the sadhus, "All of you should learn how to eat from Gunatitanand Swami."

With tongue in cheek, Brahmaand Swami retorted, "The sadhu eats very well."

Shriji Maharaj immediately corrected him. "I do not mean what you say. Because that sadhu enjoys the taste of my *murti*. Just as grains are poured in a storage bin, similarly, he fills his stomach with food. He lives suppressing his immense greatness and powers; otherwise crowds of people would follow him in the same way they follow me."

Agreeing, Brahmaand Swami said, "Maharaj, you are quite right. He is indeed a very great sadhu."

5. When Gunatitanand Swami was appointed as the Head of

Junagadh Mandir, Shriji Maharaj mentioned, “Those who go with Swami to Junagadh will be cleansed of all sins in this very birth, which otherwise would take ten million births to be purified.”

6. In Samvat Year 1884 (1828 CE), the *murtis* were consecrated in the Junagadh Mandir by Shriji Maharaj. When he was about to leave, the Nawab of Junagadh, Hamadkhanji, requested, “Maharaj, please stay here permanently.”

Shriji Maharaj replied, “I am not in a position to live here. But I shall place a sadhu like myself (*Ham nahi to ham jaisa rakhenge*).” With these words, he pointed to Gunatitanand Swami who had been appointed the Mahant of Junagadh.

7. At the *murti-pratishta* ceremony of the Junagadh Mandir, Shriji Maharaj instructed all the sadhus to stay one month every year in Junagadh in Gunatitanand Swami’s company.

Vali santne āpi āganyā re, re'vu nahi āhi āvyā vīnā re;

Varaso varas ek mās re, karavo ā mandir māhi vās re.

[Shriji Maharaj] instructed that the sadhus should invariably come here [Junagadh Mandir];

For one month every year, they should stay in this mandir.

- Nishkulanand Kavya, Purushottam Prakash 32

This order was to be strictly observed by all the sadhus in the Sampradaya. Reading between the lines of this specific order, one can understand the need for associating with Gunatitanand Swami to grasp the supreme *upasana* of Shriji Maharaj and to realize his glory, because only in the company of Akshar can one attain the state of *aksharrup*, and realize the glory and powers of Purushottam. Honouring this order, Sadguru Gopalanand Swami visited Junagadh every year. If during a particular year, he was unable to go to Junagadh, he would make up the following year by staying for two months.

Some people believed that because the mandir in Junagadh was somewhat isolated, and that Gunatitanand Swami was unlearned, Shriji Maharaj had issued the order to give him the benefit of

living with the sadhus. But Aksharbrahma has no need to learn worldly knowledge. Even the Vedas refer to him as “*Neti! Neti!*” (Not this! Not this!). Furthermore, anyone who reads and studies Gunatitanand Swami’s talks would be more than convinced that Swami himself was an inspiring source of *brahmavidya*. Therefore all the sadhus in the Sampradaya felt the need to associate with him. In the regular discourses of the sadhus, Swamini Vato have a pride of place and the sadhus cite them as eternal truth.

8. When Shriji Maharaj decided to return to his divine abode, he called for Gunatitanand Swami from Junagadh. Meeting him alone, Shriji Maharaj said:

*Mithā Vhālā kem visaru, māru tamathi bāndhel tan ho,
Tarasyāne jem pānidu vhālu, bhukhyāne bhojan ho...*

My dearest one, how can I forget you. I am inseparably bound to you.

Like a thirsty person’s love for water, and hungry person’s love for food...

Swami also echoed the same feelings.

6.12.2 Gunatitanand Swami Is Akshar: In the Words of Gunatitanand Swami

Brahma and Parabrahma transcend *maya*, and are incomprehensible through the *mayik indriyas* and *antahkarans*. They can be realized only, if out of sheer compassion, they reveal their forms. Compassionately, Gunatitanand Swami occasionally revealed himself as Aksharbrahma to those sadhus and devotees who had deep faith in his words.

1. Gopalanand Swami identified Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar to the Hindustani Sadhu Keshavjivandas, and asked him to go to Junagadh to have the benefit of Swami’s company. While in Junagadh, Keshavjivandas heard different accounts about Akshar and was rather confused. Therefore he asked Gunatitanand Swami plainly, “Swami, Gopalanand Swami has

explained to me that you are Akshar. Pragji Bhakta and Jaga Bhakta also call you Akshar. But someone calls Brahmamuni [Brahmaand Swami] Akshar, and others call Mulji Brahmachari Akshar. What is the truth? Swami, I have abiding faith in you. Kindly explain to me as it is.”

Gunatitanand Swami quietly told him, “You have faith in me. You believe me as Akshar. I alone am Akshar personified. If someone else claims to be Akshar, that’s between him and me.” On hearing these words of Gunatitanand Swami, Keshavjivandas was fully convinced of Swami’s glory as Aksharbrahma and began propagating it to others.

As Gunatitanand Swami’s popularity was increasing rapidly, a few sadhus were becoming envious. Someone therefore warned Keshavjivandas, “You know Swami is Akshar, but do not say so here in Vartal. If you will say it, you will be compelled to put on white clothes.” But Keshavjivandas had unflinching faith in Swami’s words and knew Swami as Aksharbrahma. Undeterred, he replied, “I shall say it, say it and say it! Even if I am made to wear black clothes, I shall still say that Swami is Akshar. (*Kahunga, kahunga, kabunga! Kala paherke bhi Swami ko Akshar kabunga.*)”

Then Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj had him discard his saffron clothes and put on white clothes. Despite this humiliation, he continued to propagate Swami’s glory as Aksharbrahma.

2. In Samvat Year 1923 (1867 CE), Gunatitanand Swami was to attend the full moon day festival of the month of Chaitra in Vartal. Pavitranand Swami and others had planned in advance not to receive Swami on the outskirts of Vartal. However, when Gunatitanand Swami was about to arrive, most of the devotees from the assembly went to receive him. After Swami’s arrival, there was a great rush for his darshan resulting in pandemonium. As planned, Gopaljidada (Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj’s elder brother) was to reprimand Swami. All of a sudden, he shouted,

“All of you are showmen rushing around like this; Swami also wants to become God and therefore does not utter one word.”

Immediately Swami stood up in the assembly and at the top of his voice boldly said, “Please do not call me God. Only Sahajanand Swami – the most supreme, and the ultimate cause of all causes – is God; no one else. However, speaking before you today in this assembly is Mul Akshar – as mentioned in the shastras. Know him as such.”

Unhesitatingly and undeterred, in a highly surcharged situation, Swami clarified that he was Aksharbrahma. All were left speechless.

3. To eradicate the ignorance of the causal body, Vagha Khachar of Sarangpur had gone to Junagadh. Gunatitanand Swami had asked him to come to Junagadh and stay in his company. On his way to Junagadh, Bhagatji Maharaj told him that Swami was Mul Akshar. Vagha Khachar, however, could not accept this. Once in Junagadh, the devotees were clearing the ground of the mandir farm by removing stones and pebbles. All of them appeared extremely elated. Vagha Khachar thereupon asked Dama Sheth of Mahuva, “Why do I not experience the joy which all of those devotees seem to be enjoying?”

Dama Sheth replied, “Have faith in Pragji Bhakta’s words and know Swami as Mul Akshar; then you too will experience the same joy.”

Vagha Khachar replied, “Only if Swami himself says so, will I accept this.”

In a short while, Gunatitanand Swami came there, attracted by Pragji Bhakta’s intense concentration. Vagha Khachar asked him, “Swami, Pragji says you are Mul Akshar personified. Please make it clear to me.”

Gunatitanand Swami replied, “What Pragji says is a fact.”

With utter surprise, Vagha Khachar asked again, “Swami, are you Akshar in person?”

Gunatitanand Swami replied in the affirmative. Vagha Khachar was instantly convinced that Gunatitanand Swami was Mul Akshar and felt the removal of all the sensual cravings and experienced immense joy.

4. Once Naja Kamali attended the Janmashtami festival in Junagadh. In the assembly, he asked Gunatitanand Swami, “Swami, we know Maharaj as the ultimate avatar of all *avatari*s, and Gopalanand Swami as the highest *mukta*. But how can we know and realize the personal form of Akshar?”

Gunatitanand Swami replied, “He, who is at the moment sitting with you and talking with you, is none other than Akshar himself.”

5. Revealing his identity to the devotees of Mahuva, Gunatitanand Swami said, “At the moment, Akshar is picking pebbles and is making leaf-cups with you.”

6. Following his final departure from Junagadh, Gunatitanand Swami came to Vanthali. At that time, Kalyanbhai’s son, Devji-bhai, offered puja. He then asked, “Swami, all of us are talking about Akshar. What is that Akshar like?”

Swami replied, “That very Akshar is sitting in your house.”

6.12.3 Gunatitanand Swami Is Akshar: As Revealed in Swamini Vato

1. “There is nothing more to understand and this is all that needs to be understood: Know Maharaj as Purushottam (the supreme God) and this Sadhu as Akshar. All these are *akshar* [*muktas*], but he [referring to himself] is Mul Akshar – and he also has assumed a human body and manifested” (Swamini Vato 3.38).

2. “In the village of Devrajiya, Swami said, ‘The one whom we wanted to attain after leaving this body, the one whom we wanted to meet, that God we have met. That God and that Sadhu we wanted to attain after shedding this body, that [very same] God and Sadhu are the ones we have met.’ Then Swami

thumped his hand on the seat and said, ‘And this Sadhu is the abode of God.’” (Swamini Vato 4.58).

3. “A devotee asked, ‘Why is the *atma* not seen?’ Then Swami said, ‘It is seen but it is not believed. When jnan is attained it will be believed. The one who is here is Brahma and the one who has gone is Parabrahma.’ In this way, he spoke the essence”(Swamini Vato 6.208).

4. “Akshardham is very far, but for our sake God has brought it near. He is seated here in human form” (Swamini Vato 4.61).

5. “This sadhu is Akshar. His divine and human traits should be taken in the same regard. He is unborn and has never entered in the womb. Understand his ways to be like that of a magician. He is seen here by the wish of Maharaj” (Swamini Vato 5.183).

6.12.4 Gunatitanand Swami Describes His Own Unique Glory

1. “In the village of Pithvajal, Swami said, ‘Someone may ask what Akshardham is like. Well, we have seen God, seen those who live in Akshardham, seen the servants of God, seen those who live near God and have talked to them. Now, the only thing left is that we cannot see the divine light of Akshardham. And God resides in this Sadhu; therefore keep trust in him’” (Swamini Vato 4.66).

2. “This sadhu constantly remains in the presence of God. He is not likely to remain distant for even a moment. But he has stayed here, away from God, for the liberation of the *jivas*. At present, people say that such talks cannot be given by another sadhu in his lifetime, since he would not even know how to do it. And even if he studied for an entire lifetime, such talks cannot be learnt” (Swamini Vato 5.20).

3. “Today, those who have taken birth in human form have one foot in Akshardham, and those who have recognized this

Sadhu have both feet in Akshardham” (Swamini Vato 3.26).

4. “The form of God that is in Akshardham and the one which you see [Bhagwan Swaminarayan] are identical. The only difference is that the former shows more luminance. The only deficiency is in not understanding this *murti*, which one is seeing, to be the same as the *murti* in Akshardham. Therefore, understand divine traits and human traits to be one and the same, and everything is achieved. All other things will be automatically understood afterwards” (Swamini Vato 5.255).

5. “In Vartal, Swami said, ‘There is no need to do anything else. Become his devotee and surrender the *jiva* to him. By this, everything is being done. In Akshardham, Maharaj is seated like this facing north.’ After saying this, he demonstrated by pointing his finger from the toe on his foot to the crown of his head” (Swamini Vato 4.89).

6. This sadhu is a ‘foreigner’ [i.e. not belonging to this universe]. With the *pragat* form of Maharaj, this sadhu can be seen. Otherwise, this sadhu is not to be found anywhere else. (Swamini Vatos 4.70, 4.51).

6.12.5 Gunatitanand Swami Is Akshar: In the Words of Gopalanand Swami

1. In Samvat Year 1906 (1850 CE), in the month of Fagun, Sadguru Gopalanand Swami visited Navli. Keshavjivandas, a Hindustani sadhu, prostrated before him, and with tears in his eyes, said to him, “I belong to the Ahmedabad diocese. Yet I live with you at Vartal. Everyone therefore tells me that I will not attain liberation.”

Gopalanand Swami consoled him and said, “You need not be disturbed. I shall take you to Akshardham in your present body.”

In the same year in the month of Chaitra, Gunatitanand Swami came to Vartal. Sadguru Gopalanand Swami pointing

his finger to Gunatitanand Swami said to Keshavjivandas, “Do you remember my promise to take you to Akshardham? Well, Gunatitanand Swami is the very incarnation of Shriji Maharaj’s Akshardham. Stay with him. He will explain to you the knowledge of Maharaj’s supremacy. He can talk incessantly without any problems, whereas I am unable to do so.”

2. Once, on the full moon day of the month of Chaitra, Gunatitanand Swami had come to Vartal. The *acharyas* of both dioceses as well as senior *sadgurus* were present at the festival. In the assembly, Gopalanand Swami was seated on the platform. Next to him were seated Nityanand Swami, Shukanand Swami and Gunatitanand Swami.

At that time Gopalanand Swami said to Malji Soni of Bhoyka, who had a high regard for him, “Hadn’t I told you that I would show you Akshardham? This Gunatitanand Swami is the incarnation of Akshardham. Maharaj has identified him as Akshardham. Make sure you recognize him thoroughly.”

Shastriji Maharaj himself visited Bhoyka to verify the truth of this traditional account that had gained popularity by oral transmission. He heard it from Malji Soni himself. Subsequently Yogiji Maharaj and other devotees also went to Bhoyka and heard the complete account from Malji Soni.¹¹

3. Once Jhinabhai Rathod and Pragji Bhakta of Mahuva along with Jaga Bhakta decided together to ask a question to Gopalanand Swami. Pragji Bhakta asked the question, “To remain forever in close proximity with Maharaj and yourself, and to wipe away all imperfections, is it possible while staying as a householder or does one have to become a renunciant?”

Gopalanand Swami replied, “To accept Shriji Maharaj as the ultimate cause of all avatars, and this [pointing to Gunatitanand Swami] Gunatitanand Swami as the eternal Akshardham of

¹¹ This incident is taken from Shastriji Maharaj’s recorded discourse.

Shriji Maharaj; and to be thus completely dedicated to them is the only way for a householder or a renunciant to remain in close proximity with Maharaj and myself. Otherwise a devotee is far away from both.”

4. In Samvat Year 1905 (1849 CE), Sadguru Gopalanand Swami had come to Junagadh for the Janmashtami celebrations. Addressing the assembly on the following day, the ninth day of the dark half of the month of Shravan, he said, “No-one recognizes Swami as he really is. Shriji Maharaj himself has told me in private about his glory – that Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar.”

Thereafter he asked Dosabhai, Ratnabhai and Vashram Suthar of Bhadra to address the assembly and recount the details of Gunatitanand Swami’s glory which Shriji Maharaj himself had revealed for the first time in Bhadra many years before.

5. In Samvat Year 1908 (1852 CE), before he passed away, Gopalanand Swami was very sick. At that time, Bapu Raiji, Premanand and other devotees of Vadodara requested him to visit Vadodara as Gopalanand Swami previously often stayed in Vadodara. Swami replied, “Now there can be no more looking towards Vadodara. Now my eyes are only towards Akshardham where Maharaj dwells, or towards Junagadh where Akshardham personified – ‘the Jogi of Junagadh’ – resides.”

Hearing this, Shivilal Sheth of Botad asked, “What do you mean by ‘My eyes are looking towards the Jogi of Junagadh’?”

Swami replied, “The Jogi of Junagadh – Gunatitanand Swami – is Akshardham, the divine abode of Maharaj. Maharaj is not even an atom of a distance away from him.”

6.12.6 Gunatitanand Swami’s Unique Glory: As Described by Gopalanand Swami

1. Once Gopalanand Swami halted in Gadhada on his way to Junagadh. He mentioned, “Maharaj appointed *mahants* for

different mandirs but Gunatitanand Swami has proved to be the best of them. He completed the construction of Junagadh mandir despite the opposition of the Nagar community. He has also improved the financial standing of the mandir and spread the Sampradaya's message all over Sorath. The sadhus in his group strictly observe all the religious tenets and the ascetics' codes of conduct. He has pleased Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj. Conducting round-the-clock religious discourses, he has not lost sight of Maharaj even for a second. He is incomparable in the entire Sampradaya. He is omniscient, omnipotent and the *Dhanvantar Vaidya*."

2. Once Gopalanand Swami was staying in Junagadh. The *parshads* were about to leave to cut grass from the hills for the mandir's cattle. Gopalanand Swami saw them. He cautioned, "The clouds have gathered on the Bhensala hill. There will be heavy rains. All of you will get drenched. Therefore do not go to collect the grass." Obeying, the *parshads* returned.

Gunatitanand Swami crossed them on the way. He said, "Thakorji likes only cow's milk. The cows cannot be milked if they do not have green grass in their fodder. You should therefore go and collect the grass. Rest assured, the rains will be delayed." Accordingly, the *parshads* went on their way to cut the grass. After all of them safely returned, it began to rain heavily. Gopalanand Swami was very much surprised. But when he learned that the *parshads* had gone on the orders of Gunatitanand Swami, he said, "Oh, this is the doing of Jogi (Gunatitanand Swami). Only he can change what I have said."

3. In Samvat Year 1908 (1852 CE), Gopalanand Swami was terminally ill and had no desire to live any longer. At that time, Shivilal Sheth of Botad became very distressed. Very much grieved, he asked Gopalanand Swami, "Swami, who is our support now?"

Gopalanand Swami replied, "What support do you want? If

you want to be an expert in worldly affairs, go to Punja Sheth of Sundariyana; and if you want expertise in both worldly affairs and the path of liberation, go to Gunatitanand Swami – the Jogi of Junagadh. There is no sadhu with as much competence as him.”

4. Once Gopalanand Swami told Pragji Bhakta, “Pragji, will you go to Junagadh? Pragji! Go to Junagadh, and whatever I have promised you will be fulfilled there.”

5. When Gopalanand Swami passed away, he appeared in a dream before Jaga Bhakta. Jaga Bhakta asked him, “Swami, you are now leaving. What am I to do? Nothing happens as per my wishes.”

Swami imprinted his feet on Jaga Bhakta’s chest, embraced him and asked, “What do you wish to do?”

Jaga Bhakta replied, “I want to renounce the world and serve Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh.”

Gopalanand Swami said, “I shall indeed be very happy if you serve Swami in Junagadh.”

6. Listening to Gopalanand Swami’s talks, Brahmachari Achintyanandji, Madhavcharandasji and other renunciants, as well as Nathu Patel, Deha Khachar, Jetha Khachar, Manji Thakkar, Jibhai Shelat, Vaghjibhai, Karshanbhai Desai and many other householders were attached to Gunatitanand Swami.

6.12.7 Gunatitanand Swami Is Akshar: In the Words of the Paramhansas

1. In Samvat Year 1939 (1883 CE), Ghanshyam Maharaj’s *murti* was consecrated in the Swaminarayan mandir in Surat. Gunatitanand Swami’s choicest disciple, Pragji Bhakta, had come to Surat on that occasion. There he met Sadhu Yagnapurushdas (Shastriji Maharaj), disciple of learned *paramhansa* Vignananand Swami, who had been privileged to have lived with Shriji Maharaj. To convince Shastriji Maharaj that Gunatitanand

Swami was Akshar, Pragji Bhakta asked Vignananand Swami, “Swami, in your times, there were talks that Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar. Kindly tell me today about those talks.”

Vignananand Swami looked around to make sure that nobody was overhearing, and whispered, “I had heard on many occasions from Maharaj himself that Swami was Mul Akshar. Gopalanand Swami also had established that fact time and time again. It is, therefore, uppermost in my heart.”

At this point, young Yagnapurushdas, who was hiding under the cot of Vignananand Swami, came forward and asked, “Why you did not tell me this before?”

Vignananand Swami clarified, “Today, there are still some in the Satsang who are unable to recognize even Maharaj as Purushottam. Then how can they possibly accept Swami as Akshar? We therefore talk according to the absorbing capacity of the listeners. But what you have heard is completely true and accept it as such.”

2. In Gadhada, Nrusinhanand Swami once asked Kunvarji Patel of Ingoralal, “Kunvarji Patel! How many *kangra* are there on this mandir in Gadhada?”

Kunvarji Patel replied, “There are many *kangra*.”

Nrusinhanand Swami then explained, “If Gunatitanand Swami is not Akshardham, then may I incur the sin of destroying as many cosmoses as there are *kangra* on this mandir. Therefore, either believe me, or go your own way.”

3. Shriji Maharaj’s personal attendant, Naja Jogia, was initiated as a sadhu after Shriji Maharaj passed away. He was renamed Ghanshyamdas. Once when he was meditating, Gunatitanand Swami told him what was playing in his mind. Surprised by Swami’s powers, he said, “Until now I regarded you as a subordinate ruler. But you are indeed the sovereign emperor; you really are Akshar.”

6.12.8 Gunatitanand Swami's Unique Glory: As Described by the Paramhansas

1. Sadguru Shukanand Swami once said in Surat, "Gunatitanand Swami's discourses in Junagadh have just as much impact as the discourses of Maharaj."

2. After listening to Gunatitanand Swami's talks in Junagadh, Nityanand Swami exclaimed, "Oh! Only today have I realized Swami's greatness as was described by Maharaj. How emphatically he talks. No one can possibly talk like him. For how can one talk when one's own actions belie the words. And even if someone else does talk, there would be no impact. But for Swami, his actions fully comply with his sermons. There may be some restraint in his sermons, but in his living, there is not the slightest violation of Shriji's injunctions. His benign influence has moved the whole of Sorath. As is said in the Shruti:

*Yamevaisha vrinute tena labhyastasyaisha
atmā vivrinute tanum svām.*

He who is graced by God, is rightly selected by him.

- Katha Upanishad 2.1.23; Mundaka Upanishad 3.2.3

"Swami is blessed with Maharaj's infinite grace. Thus he is the form of Maharaj. In addition, through his own grace, he elevates others to his level."

3. Sadguru Brahmaand Swami said to Gunatitanand Swami in Muli, "Swami, I am returning to Dham. But you need not be in a hurry to reach there. Please be patient. Gopalanand Swami is still here to spread the knowledge that Maharaj is Purushottam. You also have to stay here for that very purpose. We have descended from Akshardham to spread this supreme knowledge. You may return to Dham only after it has been fully propagated."

4. Sadguru Nishkulananand Swami has written in his kirtan:

*Jevā e Sant kahiye shiromani, evā Hari sau shiramod,
Nishkulānand nihālatā, na jade e beni jod...
Anup Santne āpu upamā...*

The Sadhu is the foremost. God is the best even among the foremost.

Nishkulanand says, in spite of a thorough search, it is difficult to find such a pair.¹²

The Sadhu is unique and incomparable.

5. In Vartal, Shriji Maharaj made Gunatitanand Swami sit between Sadguru Brahmaand Swami and Sadguru Muktanand Swami, and described at length his greatness and glory. The next day, Swami requested Muktanand Swami for some *prasad* (food from his eating bowl). Refusing, Muktanand Swami said, “You have cheated me for long enough [by hiding your glory]. Those days are now over. Now I shall no longer give you any *prasad*.”

6. Gunatitanand Swami convinced Sadguru Bhai Atmanand Swami about Shriji Maharaj’s supremacy. Swami then requested some *prasad*. But Bhai Atmanand Swami said, “No more reversal of the course. Until now, it was reversed. But today it has been set right.” (Bhai Atmanand Swami was senior in age to Swami and always gave him *prasad*. But after this incident, he discontinued this custom.)

7. Impressed by Gunatitanand Swami’s living and inspiring precepts, Sadguru Krupanand Swami used to say, “You are worthy to be selected as a guru.”

8. When Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj requested Gunatitanand Swami to dissolve his five ‘entanglements of ignorance’, Swami replied, “Come to Junagadh as a pilgrim; I shall dissolve your ignorance.”

Raghuvirji Maharaj promptly said, “I am not Raghuvirji if I do not come to Junagadh as a pilgrim.”

Equally forcefully Swami replied, “I am not Gunatit if I do not dissolve your entanglements.”

12. The ‘pair’ means Shriji Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami. Nishkulanand Swami propagated this principle since he had realized both these forms. Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj heard this from leading *sadgurus*.

Raghuvirji Maharaj had full faith in Swami's immense powers. Accordingly, he went to Junagadh as a pilgrim and Swami dissolved all his imperfections.

9. Once, in an especially inspirational mood, Gunatitanand Swami talked quite dynamically. Raghuvirji Maharaj commented, "Swami, what you said should be thoroughly understood. Your talks can remove the defects of millions of births and help one to attain Akshardham."

Swami immediately replied, "Maharaj, I do not think about any of the talks. It is Shriji Maharaj within who talks."

Raghuvirji Maharaj agreed, "Swami it is evident. Maharaj dwells in you and always talks through you."

10. Shriji Maharaj's personal attendant, Bapu Ratanji, came to Junagadh to listen to Gunatitanand Swami's discourses. He said to Swami, "Maharaj had described your glory and now I understand. If there is any defect in my understanding, please remove it and always help me. I can see that Maharaj personally manifests through you. Therefore kindly look after me." Saying these words to Swami, he departed.

Bapu Ratanji then said to Jaga Bhakta, who had come to see him off, "Unique preachers and eager listeners like you are only to be found in Junagadh. Shriji Maharaj often used to say, 'No sadhu is as dynamic as Gunatitanand Swami.' Many *muktas* accompanied Shriji Maharaj to this earth. But they are not as great as Akshar. Swami's greatness will be realized in the future. Therefore, always remain under Swami's obligation. But never let him feel your obligation. In Shriji Maharaj's lifetime, *Satyuga* prevailed. Even a youngster was immune to the feelings of sleep and lust. The same *Satyuga* prevails in Swami's presence. By pleasing Swami, rest assured, that you are pleasing Maharaj."

Besides this, Sadguru Anandanand Swami, Sadguru Pavitranand Swami and other *sadgurus*, and Abhesinhji Darbar of Lodhika and other devotees have narrated their personal

experiences about Gunatitanand Swami's greatness as well. These are widely known throughout the Sampradaya.

6.12.9 Gunatitanand Swami Is Akshar: Other Evidence

The principle of Akshar is not new, nor an exotic idea concocted by Shastriji Maharaj out of thin air. It was prevalent from the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. There are many references to Akshar – and also Gunatitanand Swami being Akshar – even before Shastriji Maharaj left Vartal in 1905 CE.

1. The room where Shriji Maharaj stayed in Dada Khachar's *darbar* in Gadhada was known as 'Akshar Ordi'. It is quite significant that Shriji Maharaj's dwelling place is Akshar.

2. Shriji Maharaj was appointed as guru of the Sampradaya in Jetpur by Ramanand Swami. At the old mandir in Jetpur, there is an embossed silver *murti* of Gunatitanand Swami and Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Under Gunatitanand Swami's *murti*, the words 'Mul Akshar Murti Gunatitanand Swami' are clearly inscribed; under Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *murti*, the words 'Purna Purushottam Sahajanand Swami' are inscribed.

3. Gunatitanand Swami passed away in the old Swaminarayan mandir in Gondal in 1867 CE. This mandir was under the jurisdiction of the Vartal diocese. On a marble throne in that mandir, there are the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam, i.e. of Gunatitanand Swami and Shriji Maharaj.

4. In the assembly hall of Junagadh Mandir (under the jurisdiction of the Vartal diocese), there was an excellent oil-painted portrait of Gunatitanand Swami. Under it was written 'Anadi Mul Aksharmurti Shri Gunatitanand Swami'.¹³

5. In the new assembly hall in Junagadh mandir, on the spot where Gunatitanand Swami used to sit in the old hall, a marble shrine with Shriji Maharaj's footprints has been erected. The inscription on it reads: "In the old sanctified hall, Anadi

13. The assembly hall and the portrait were both destroyed in a fire later.

Mul Akshar Murti Gunatitanand Swami sat for 40 years and delivered religious discourses.” At other sanctified places such as the area next to the *sinhasan*, the square where Swami used to bathe, the stand of the marble canopy, the circumambulation walkway and many other sacred places, the inscriptions refer to Swami as ‘Mul Akshar’.

6. At various sacred places in Sorath, all the inscriptions referring to Gunatitanand Swami’s name are prefixed with the words ‘Anadi Mul Akshar’.

7. The mandirs of Rajkot, Gondal, Jetpur, Piplana, Vanthali, Panchala, Dhoraji and Upleta in the region of Sorath are all under the administrative jurisdiction of the Vartal diocese. In the spired or smaller mandirs of these towns and villages, Sadguru Balmukunddasji, Sadguru Krishnacharandasji and other sadhus have consecrated the painted *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam. In all these places, Gunatitanand Swami’s name is prefixed with the words ‘Anadi Mul Akshar’.

8. Soon after Gunatitanand Swami passed away in 1867 CE, Monghiba, the then Queen Mother of Gondal, had a small shrine erected on the cremation spot of Gunatitanand Swami in Gondal and had the footprints of Shriji Maharaj consecrated therein. From that time onwards, i.e. long before Shastriji Maharaj constructed the mandir there, the shrine has been known in the Sampradaya as ‘Akshar Deri’.

From Samvat Year 1923 (1867 CE) onwards, for 65 years the shrine and the surrounding land were under the administrative control of the old Swaminarayan mandir in Gondal. In the accounts books of those years, the expenditure incurred on the land is referred to as expenditure on ‘Akshar Vadi’.

9. In the old manuscripts dictated by Shriji Maharaj, Gopalanand Swami has been identified as Krishna, Muktanand Swami as Narad, Nityanand Swami as Vyajji, Shukmuni as Shukdevji and Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar.

All these above references were made before the construction of any of the Akshar-Purushottam mandirs by Shastriji Maharaj. They prove that Shastriji Maharaj did not start a new school of thought. He only propagated a principle that had already been revealed by Shriji Maharaj.

10. Shastriji Maharaj, with his very sharp intelligence, thoroughly verified the belief that Gunatitanand Swami was Akshar. He checked all the incidents described earlier as well as many more by hearing them directly from original and authentic sources.

In a letter written to devotees in Africa, Shastriji Maharaj mentioned the sources from whom he had come to know about specific incidents. He wrote, “I confidentially asked Kothari Gordhanbhai of Vartal, ‘You and some others are against accepting Swami as Akshar. But Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj regularly used to go to Junagadh to listen to the discourses of Gunatitanand Swami. What was his understanding?’

“Kothari specifically replied, ‘Initially, he was not quite categorical in saying so. But after his visit [to Junagadh] in Samvat Year 1917 (1861 CE), he became one with Swami and was convinced that Swami was Akshar. This much I can say on oath.’ ”

Summing up, Shastriji Maharaj wrote, “I do not know how to manipulate stories to serve my personal motives. Besides, to lie is a grave sin. The Shrimad Bhagvat proclaims, ‘*Nasatyat param papam*’ – ‘There is no greater sin than lying’. Moreover, the Earth has said, ‘I can bear the burden of all sinners. But I cannot bear the burden of one who speaks the untruth.’ I have no reason to lie. If you truly trust me and treat me as an honest and sincere person, then please accept the above description as authentic and have unflinching faith in the fact that ‘Swami is Anadi Akshar and Shriji Maharaj is Purna Purushottam Bhagwan’.”

Since it is a plain fact that ‘Swami is Akshar’, the principle has been propagated by the will of Shriji Maharaj.

After the propagation of Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar began, organized propaganda was started about Gopalanand Swami also being the incarnation of Akshar.¹⁴ In some mandirs, ‘Mul Akshar Murti Gopalanand Swami’ was written under Gopalanand Swami’s *murtis*.

Presuming that certain persons may not accept Gunatitanand Swami as Mul Akshar, nevertheless, the principle of Akshar-Purushottam still stands valid, and the principle that Shriji Maharaj should be honoured along with his ideal devotee is the logical corollary. In other words, Shastriji Maharaj’s principle proves to be true.

6.13 GUNATITANAND SWAMI IS AKSHAR: FROM HIS LIFE AND WORK

Gunatitanand Swami’s life and work are far more inspiring than that of any other *paramhansas* or devotees. This is borne out by many incidents from his life, as is evident from the following points.

1. From his childhood, Swami constantly had the vision of Shriji Maharaj. At the age of four, he requested his mother to sing the songs of the sacred thread ceremony. Precisely at that moment, Shriji Maharaj’s thread ceremony was being performed in Ayodhya. When Ghanshyam left home for his travels, Swami told his mother, “Mother, today the lord of the divine abode has set out on his long pilgrimage.”

2. Arrogant with their half-baked knowledge of Brahma, the scholars at Mahemadabad were humbled by the saintliness of Gunatitanand Swami.

14. This propaganda was started by Mana Bhakta of Gadhada – a disciple of Gopalanand Swami. Shastriji Maharaj asked him to take an oath on the Shikshapatri that Gopalanand Swami is Akshar. Mana Bhakta then hesitated and admitted, “At that time there was no such talk [of Gopalanand Swami being Akshar].” [From a recorded speech of Shastriji Maharaj]

3. During the course of his whole life with his extraordinary powers, he miraculously cured many incurable diseases. Many received a new lease of life. Many were saved from daunting trials and tribulations. Many were sent into trance to have the vision of Akshardham.

4. Valera Varu of Mansa, Munja Suru of Lilakha, Darbar Dajibhai of Kamrod were weaned away from the path of unrighteousness and became devotees with Swami's inspiration.

5. Swami ensured strict observance of the vows regarding the renouncing of women and wealth by the sadhus under his jurisdiction. Even the householders religiously honoured the *panch vartmans* and were totally uninterested in sensual pleasures. Living an ideal life, his devotees were ready to lay down everything for the sake of the Satsang.

6. With Swami's association, Acharya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj and many sadhus and householders came to realize that Gunatitanand Swami was Akshar. Many of them attained the *brahmarup* state and were firmly attached to Shriji Maharaj. The principal followers of Gunatitanand Swami were Bhagatji Maharaj, Jaga Swami, Balmukunddas Swami, Yogeshwardas Swami, Madhavpriyadas Swami, Madhavcharandas Swami, Krishnaji Ada, Shivilal Sheth of Botad, Vaghjibhai of Vaso, Kalyanbhai of Vanthali, Velo Sathvaro of Bagasara, Rayo Desai of Kamigadh, Karsan Bambhaniyo of Hamapar, Ram Bhanderi of Chadiya, Lalabhai of Upleta and Arjanbhai, etc.

7. Deep faith in God, dynamism, glory and valour were the hallmarks of Swami's discourses – Swamini Vato. These qualities were rarely found in the discourses of other *sadgurus*. Wherever Swami spread the message of Satsang, he instilled such firm faith in the sublime form of Shriji Maharaj that his devotees remained uninfluenced by others.

8. He inspired the composition of the scholarly volume of *Harililakalpataru* in Sanskrit. He thereby helped in disseminating

the knowledge of Shriji Maharaj as the supreme God, as well as enriching the literature of the Sampradaya.

9. Despite his efficient management of the administration of the mandir in Junagadh, Swami never had to ask for any funds. His main objective was to instil steadfast faith in Shriji Maharaj. Once that was achieved, devotees were unlikely to use their earnings in other pursuits, and therefore would automatically donate funds to the mandir. With their firm faith, they were ready to sacrifice their all for Shriji Maharaj, Swami and the mandirs. That is why Swami could say to Acharya Raghuraj Maharaj, "Maharaj, the *satsangis* are so staunch that if I wish, I can completely fill the Khengar step-well with their heads!"

10. While running the huge administrative set up of the mandir, looking after never-ending construction work and a wide range of other activities, Swami never slowed down the pace of religious discourses. They were enthusiastically carried out many times daily without fail.

11. The epitome of saintliness, the highest degree of pure devotion for Shriji Maharaj, strict observance of the five vows for ascetics, readiness to abide by the words of Maharaj – these were only some of the sterling qualities of Swami. Without fear or favour, he pointed out the slightest lapse in the religious codes of conduct or faith. With his steadfast intellect, he was unaffected by honours or insults.

12. The most remarkable feature, which has continued to this very day, is his illustrious line of disciples who have attained the *brahmic* state. Nowhere else can such an impressive line of enlightened disciples be found.

Gunatitanand Swami's life, work and precepts clearly show that he was the most blessed and graced disciple of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as well as his divine abode – Mul Akshar, and his best and unparalleled devotee. He is, therefore, the most suitable ideal for a devotee aspiring to become *brahmarup*.

In our Sampradaya, the *sadgurus* regularly chanted the following *dhun*:

Swāmi ane Nārāyan;

Swāmi te Gunātit Swāmi, Nārāyan Sahajānand Swāmi.

Akshar ane Purushottam;

Akshar te Gunātit Swāmi, Purushottam Sahajānand Swāmi.

Brahma ane Parabrahma;

Brahma te Gunātit Swāmi, Parabrahma Sahajānand Swāmi.

Swami and Narayan;

Swami is Gunatitanand Swami, Narayan is Sahajanand Swami.

Akshar and Purushottam;

Akshar is Gunatitanand Swami,

Purushottam is Sahajanand Swami.

Brahma and Parabrahma;

Brahma is Gunatitanand Swami, Parabrahma is Sahajanand Swami.

In this way, a devotee should have firm faith in the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. One should recognize the Gunatit gurus, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj as Aksharbrahma and as the *pragat* forms of Shriji Maharaj. One should loyally honour his commands to realize the true knowledge of *upasana*. All seekers of *moksha* should imbibe this knowledge, dedicate themselves to its preaching, and in turn earn the divine grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

7. SUMMARY

After studying this book, one should keep in mind the following points regarding *upasana* as documented in a letter by Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj:

7.1 UPASANA: WHAT TO UNDERSTAND

Written Statement on the Philosophical Principles of BAPS¹,
Guru Purnima, Samvat 2064; 18 July 2008

The five entities – *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahma and Parabrahma – are eternal, real and forever fundamentally separate from each other.

7.1.1 Parabrahma

Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan², the Master of Akshar, is eternal, supreme, always divine, always with a form, free of faults, beyond *maya*, one and unique, and a *chaitanya* entity.

In his divine Akshardham, he is seated on a divine *sinhasan* (throne) in his eternally divine, lustrous and teenage human form complete with two arms and all other features. He (Parabrahma) is worshipped with *dasbhav*³ by the *murtiman* (personal) form of Aksharbrahma and the *brahmic*-bodied infinite *muktas*, who have attained similarity to Aksharbrahma.⁴

Parabrahma is forever naturally replete with infinite liberating virtues and devoid of *mayik* (mundane) qualities. He is free of all faults, forever possesses all powers, is all-knowing, and is the all-

1. This is a translation of the Gujarati text written by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

2. Parabrahma, Purushottam, Narayan, Bhagwan, Paramatma and any combination of these words are synonymous for God.

3. Service performed willingly and naturally by the devotee; not out of forced or coerced submission by Parabrahma, but out of love, respect, adoration, humility and gratitude.

4. Aksharbrahma has countless virtues and is eternally liberated. ‘Similarity’ to Aksharbrahma means that the *jiva* attains those virtues of Aksharbrahma by which it attains liberation and is able to offer pure, true and the highest *upasana* to Parabrahma.

doer and destroyer. He is the material and efficient cause of all creation. While remaining present in his divine Akshardham in his *vyatirek* (particular) form, he pervades the infinite *brahmands* in his *anvay* (all-pervasive) form as *antaryami* and is their support.

He is always infinitely more powerful than *jivas*, *ishwars*, *maya*, *akshar muktas* and Aksharbrahma and is their independent controller, inspirer and *shariri*. By his wish, he is the giver of the fruits of the actions of all the *jivas* and *ishwars*. He is the inspirer of their ability to will, to know and to do.

Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan is imperceptible by the *mayik indriyas* (senses) and *antahkaran* (mind, etc.). While still remaining in Akshardham, by his own divine wish and out of compassion, for the ultimate liberation of infinite *jivas* and *ishwars* and to fulfil the wishes of his devotees, he manifests with all his divine virtues, powers, etc., in human form in each *brahmand* and becomes visible to all.

That manifest form of Parabrahma Paramatma is Sahajanand Swami Maharaj – Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan. He is the absolute focus of worship for us all. To forever continue his *upasana* in a manifest form even after leaving his (human) body, he always remains totally manifest in his *anvay* form through the Aksharbrahma guru.

He (Parabrahma) is the cause of all avatars; he is the *avatari* and is the master of them all.

When, by his special wish, he pervades a *jiva* or an *ishwar* for a particular task, an avatar manifests. The *chaitanyas* of each of these avatars are fundamentally separate from each other. Like these avatars, the *chaitanyas* of Vasudev and the Chaturvyuh, and the 24 *murtis*, like Keshav, etc., are fundamentally separate from each other.

7.1.2 Aksharbrahma

Aksharbrahma is separate from Parabrahma. Like Parabrahma

it is one, eternal and a *chaitanya* entity and it is beyond the three *gunas*. It is forever divine, replete with infinite liberating virtues, devoid of all *mayik* qualities and free of all faults. The form, qualities, powers, etc. of Aksharbrahma are dependent only on Parabrahma. And by the eternal wish of Parabrahma, it is the cause, support, controller and *shariri* of all of *jad* (inanimate) creation and *chaitanya* forms (*jivas* and *ishwars*) and pervades them.

Although Aksharbrahma is essentially one entity, it serves in four different ways.

In its Chidakash form, Aksharbrahma pervades within and is present outside the infinite *brahmans* and supports them.

In the form of Dham (Akshardham), Aksharbrahma is the divine abode of Parabrahma, the *murtiman* (personal) form of Aksharbrahma and the infinite *akshar muktas*. There is only one such Akshardham; it is eternal and forever beyond the three *gunas*. Only the *muktas* who have attained similarity⁵ to Aksharbrahma are able to enter it.

In the personal attendant form in that Akshardham, Aksharbrahma has, like Parabrahma, a divine human form complete with two arms and all other features. He forever remains engulfed in the service of Parabrahma and is the ideal for the *akshar muktas*.

In the form of the guru as the eternal and complete representative of Parabrahma, that Akshar manifests in a human form with Paramatma in each *brahmand* so that through his (Akshar's) divine association, he can make the *jivas* and *ishwars* who are bound in the cycles of birth and death *brahmarup*, establish in them the highest level of *nirvikalp nischay*, ultimately liberate them and forever let them experience the manifest presence of Paramatma through himself. He (the Aksharbrahma guru) protects the traditions of the Sampradaya and graces all with the experience of the highest bliss. In this succession

5. See footnote 4.

of Aksharbrahma gurus, Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj have appeared. This succession continues forever. At any one time, the path of ultimate liberation remains open through only one guru.

7.1.3 Maya

Maya is composed of the three *gunas*, it is eternally changing, *jad* (inanimate), a material cause of the creation of infinite *brahmans* and the diverse mysterious power⁶ of Paramatma. As the cause of ego and attachment of *jivas* and of *ishwars*, this maya has been the cause of their births and deaths since eternity. Aksharbrahma and Parabrahma are forever totally aloof from and beyond *maya* and are its *shariri*.

7.1.4 Ishwar

Ishwar is an eternal *chaitanya* entity different from Parabrahma, Aksharbrahma and *jivas*. In comparison to *jivas* they possess more power and *jnan* (knowledge). Paramatma, through his wish, assigns them to the tasks of creation, etc. of the *brahmans*. Like the *jivas*, these *ishwars* are countless in number, subtle like an atom, possess the qualities of indivisibility, etc., are *jnanswarup* (personified knowledge of their own self), *jnata* (knowers), doers of good and bad karmas and experiencers of the fruits of those karmas. They have been bound by *maya* since eternity.

Pradhan Purush, Virat Purush, the devas of their *indriyas* and *antahkaran*, and others are all *chaitanya* entities of the *ishwar* category and these *ishwars* are fundamentally different from each other.

7.1.5 Jiva

Jiva is an eternal *chaitanya* entity different from Parabrahma,

6. It is an instrument, just like a sword is the 'power' of a soldier.

Aksharbrahma and *ishwars*. These *jivas* are countless, subtle like an atom, possess the qualities of indivisibility, etc., are *jnanswarup, jnata*, doers of good and bad karmas, and experiencers of the fruits of those karmas. They have been bound by *maya* since eternity.

7.1.6 Sadhana and Benefits

To attain ultimate liberation, *mumukshus* (spiritual aspirants) should firmly love Parabrahma Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the manifest Aksharbrahma guru through whom Parabrahma manifests fully and continuously. They must develop *nirdosh buddhi* and a feeling of the highest divinity in them. When they (*mumukshus*) meet either of them they should be convinced that they have met Parabrahma. By firmly associating with them through thought, word and deed they should please them immensely.

Mumukshu jivas and *ishwars* who endeavour in this way, through the grace of Parabrahma, having achieved *ekantik dharma*, become *brahmarup*, that is, attain similarity⁷ to Aksharbrahma, and attain the highest bhakti to Parabrahma. All their miseries and faults are forever destroyed, and while alive, they experience the highest bliss of Paramatma.

By the wish of Paramatma, such a *brahmarup* devotee, on leaving the (physical) body, attains the Akshardham of Paramatma via *archimarg* (a divine path), and there with a *brahmic* body, while serving by doing darshan with *dasbhav*,⁸ forever enjoys the divine bliss of the Lord of Akshardham, Parabrahma.

7.1.7 The Meaning of Akshar-Purushottam Upasana

Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* is not the *upasana* (worship) of two entities – Akshar and Purushottam. But it means to become *aksharrup* and offer *upasana* to Purushottam, i.e. to become

7. See footnote 4.

8. See footnote 3.

brahmarup and offer *upasana* to Parabrahma. Therefore, when Parabrahma in human form returns to his abode he suppresses the powers of the BrahmaSwarup guru and himself remains manifest on earth through him. Therefore, a *mumukshu* who profoundly associates with the manifest guru is, in fact, offering *upasana* only to Paramatma.

The meaning of the Swaminarayan *maha mantra* is incorporated in the meaning of Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. That is, to become *swamirup*, i.e. *aksharrup*, and offer bhakti and *upasana* with *dasbhav*⁹ to Narayan, i.e. Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan.

7.1.8 Conclusion

Thus, these philosophical principles are Vedic, eternal, revealed by Shriji Maharaj and propagated by the Gunatit guru *parampara*. So, all devotees of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha should strengthen their understanding in this way and explain it to other *mumukshus*.

Jay Swaminarayan from Shastri Narayanswarupdas.

Guru Purnima, Samvat 2064, Bochasan.

7.2 UPASANA: WHAT NOT TO UNDERSTAND

1. Do not understand Purushottam Narayan Shriji Maharaj as equal to others.
2. When God manifests on earth, he does not remain in his abode, i.e. his abode becomes vacant during that period.
3. Only Purushottam exists, but there is no entity such as Aksharbrahma.
4. Only Aksharbrahma exists. Purushottam is included in him and can live only through him.
5. The *atma* of a released *mukta* does not become like Aksharbrahma.

9. See footnote 3

6. There is no difference between *jiva (atma)* and Parabrahma.
7. There is no difference between a *mukta* and Aksharbrahma.
8. There is no difference between a *mukta* and Purushottam.
9. There is no difference between Aksharbrahma and Parabrahma.
10. Aksharbrahma as the personal attendant is not *murtiman*(with form). Aksharbrahma is only formless, is merely the abode or is only divine light.
11. Articles such as the footwear and clothes worn by Shriji Maharaj, quilts and rooms used by him are equivalent to Mul Aksharbrahma. (In reality, articles related to Shriji Maharaj can be termed divine, but cannot be called Aksharbrahma.)
12. *Parambhansas* other than Gunatitanand Swami can also be called Mul Aksharbrahma.
13. It is possible to become *brahmarup* or *ekantik* through the refuge of the mandir *murtis* or shastras without resorting to Parabrahma Paramatma or a God-realized Gunatit Sadhu (*pragat* manifestation of Shriji Maharaj).
14. *Moksha* can be achieved despite not honouring the commands or duties and codes of conduct prescribed in the Shikshapatri or Satsang Diksha, or by minimizing their importance.
15. Without the contact of a God-realized Sadhu and his grace, the principles of the Vachanamrut and other shastras or *nishchay*¹⁰ of God can still be understood or explained by one's own efforts.

10. Similarly the shastras say that the *panch vartmān* – *nishkām*, *nirlobb*, *nisswād*, *nissneb* and *nirmān* – are the vital redemptive attributes that a sadhu must possess. The God-realized Sadhu in whom these attributes are displayed is said to have established rapport with God. Therefore, his words should be taken as the ultimate truth, and the knowledge of God that he infuses in the disciples is the ultimate knowledge and the eternal truth.

- Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 27

GLOSSARY

acharya founder of a religious doctrine or school of philosophy; a spiritual teacher or preceptor

ahamkar ego or sense of 'I'; one of the four aspects of the *antahkaran* (inner faculty), characterized by its function of creating individual identity and self-awareness

akartum extraordinary divine power of God to exercise restraint, allowing infinite liberated souls (*muktas*) of Akshardham to exist without being eclipsed by God's infinite divine light

akash space, ether, or cosmic void; one of the five gross elements (*panch mahabhuts*) from which the physical universe is formed

akshar-mukta liberated soul residing in Akshardham (the divine abode)

anadi without beginning; eternal

anadi bheds eternal fundamental realities or categories

anand divine bliss; spiritual joy

andaj egg-born; category of life forms that emerge from eggs, such as birds, reptiles, fish, and insects

antahkaran inner faculty of consciousness comprising four aspects: *man* (mind that generates thoughts), *buddhi* (intellect that makes decisions), *chitt* (memory that contemplates), and *ahamkar* (ego that creates self-identity)

antaryami inner controller; God's power to reside within every soul (*jiva*) and deity (*ishwar*), knowing their innermost thoughts and controlling their actions

anupravesh re-entry or re-entrance

anvay inseparable connection; when referring to God, it means his immanent presence within all creation

anyathakartum extraordinary divine power of God to act in ways that transcend natural laws

artha material prosperity; one of life's four legitimate pursuits (*purusharths*)

arti Hindu worship ritual involving the waving of lighted wicks before the sacred image (*murti*) of God

asanam seat or posture; in yoga, refers to physical positions for meditation and spiritual practice

Ashtanga Yoga eight-step path of yoga comprising: *yama* (ethical restraints), *niyam* (observances), *asana* (postures), *pranayam* (breath control), *pratyahar* (withdrawal of senses), *dharna* (concentration), *dhyan* (meditation), and *samadhi* (union with the divine)

atma individual soul; the eternal, conscious essence of every living being

atmagnan self-knowledge; understanding of one's true nature as soul (*atma*)

atmanishtha firm conviction in one's identity as *atma* rather than body; spiritual self-awareness

atyantik pralay final cosmic dissolution when all creation returns to its source

avatari the supreme incarnation; the highest manifestation of God from whom all other incarnations emerge

avidya spiritual ignorance; misunderstanding of one's true nature and reality

avyakrut the causal or unmanifest form; the subtle body of cosmic beings (*ishwars*) analogous to the *karan* body of individual souls

bhagvat God-realized person; one who has attained divine consciousness

bhakta devotee of God; one who practices *bhakti* (devotion)

bhakti loving devotion to God; spiritual practice of surrender and worship

bhuts the five fundamental elements: *pruthvi* (earth), *jal* (water), *tej* (fire), *vayu* (air), and *akash* (space)

brahmabhav state of divine consciousness; feeling oneness with Aksharbrahma and recognizing divinity in others

brahmagnan knowledge of Brahma (the ultimate reality); spiritual wisdom

Brahma Aksharbrahma; the eternal divine entity, ideal devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

brahmand cosmic egg or universe; one of countless individual cosmos systems containing 14 realms, each governed by a trinity of creator deities

brahmanized possessing the qualities or nature of Brahma; spiritually elevated

brahmarup having the form or qualities of Brahma; divinely realized state

brahmasatta the formless, luminous essence of Brahma; pure consciousness (Chidakash)

brahma-sushupti deep spiritual sleep state; dormant consciousness merged with Brahma

brahmic relating to or characteristic of Brahma; divine in nature

chaitanya pure consciousness; the fundamental nature of the soul that transcends physical existence

champa a fragrant tropical flower, typically yellow, used in worship and offerings

chidakash the infinite, formless consciousness of Akshar; pure, luminous, eternal space within which all creation exists

chintamani wish-fulfilling divine gem; metaphor for something that grants all desires

chit consciousness or awareness; the fundamental knowing principle

crore ten million (Indian numerical unit)

dan charitable giving; donation offered with spiritual sentiments

darbar royal court; traditional Indian palace architecture with central courtyard

das servant; one who serves with humility and devotion

deva deity or divine being; celestial entity

dham divine abode; sacred realm where God resides

dhami presiding deity of a divine abode (*dham*)

dhanvantar vaidya divine physician of the gods; celestial healer with extraordinary medical knowledge

dhun repetitive chanting of God's name; meditative recitation

dhyan meditation; sustained concentration leading to inner stillness and divine awareness

divya divine

divyabhav divine outlook; seeing God and gurus as completely transcendent and free from worldly limitations

dradh priti firm, unwavering love; steady affection that endures through all circumstances

dwibhuj two-armed; referring to the human-like form of God with two arms

ekantik ultimate spiritual state characterized by perfection in dharma (righteousness), *jnan* (knowledge), *vairagya* (detachment), and *bhakti* (devotion)

ekantik bhakta highest level of devotee who has perfectly developed all four qualities of *ekantik* dharma

feto traditional cloth headdress; long fabric twisted and tied around the head

guna fundamental quality or attribute of nature, classified as *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (passion), or *tamas* (ignorance)

gunatit transcendent of the three *gunas*; beyond the influence of material nature (*maya*)

ichchhashakti power of divine will; God's ability to manifest desires

indriyas the ten senses: five of action (hands, feet, speech,

excretion, reproduction) and five of perception (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch)

ishtadev chosen deity; personal form of God selected for worship and meditation

ishwar cosmic deity; one of the five eternal realities, responsible for universal functions

ishwaratma see *ishwar*

jal water; one of the five fundamental elements (*panch mahabhus*)

jantra mystical charms or talismans; magical devices used for supernatural purposes

jarayuj womb-born; category of life forms born from the womb, including all mammals

jiva individual soul; see *atma*

jivatma individual soul; see *jiva* and *atma*

jnan spiritual knowledge; wisdom that leads to liberation

jnani one possessing spiritual knowledge; a wise person

jnanshakti power of knowledge; divine ability to know all things

kal time; the cosmic force that brings change, aging, and eventual destruction to all temporal things

kalpataru see *kalpavruksh*

kalpavruksh wish-fulfilling divine tree; mythical tree that grants the desires of those who sit beneath it

kangra small decorative stone carvings; ornamental architectural elements

karan causal body; the subtle body of desires and impressions that causes rebirth

kartum divine creative power; God's ability to create and manifest

khijdo a type of tree native to western India

kirtan devotional song; musical worship praising God's names and qualities

kriyashakti power of action; divine ability to perform all activities

kshar perishable; that which is subject to decay and destruction

laddu round sweet ball; traditional Indian confection offered to deities

loka realm or world; different levels of existence in the cosmic hierarchy

mahabhuts see *bhuts*; the five great elements

mahant head of a mandir

mahattattva cosmic intelligence; the first principle emerging from the interaction of Purush and Prakruti

mahavishnurup form of God as Vishnu; divine cosmic manifestation

manushyabhav seeing human limitations in God; perceiving divine beings as having mortal qualities

matsar intolerance of others' success; inability to bear another's progress or happiness

maya cosmic illusion; God's creative power that manifests the material world and causes spiritual ignorance

mayik pertaining to *maya*; material or illusory rather than spiritual

moksha liberation; freedom from the cycle of births and deaths

mukta liberated soul; one who has attained *moksha*

mul root; original or fundamental

mul-maya primordial illusion; the original form of *maya* from which all creation emerges

murti sacred image of God worshipped in mandirs and homes

murtiman having form; manifested in visible shape

murti-pratishtha Vedic ritual of consecrating sacred images (*murtis*) for worship

nastik atheist; one who denies God's existence or rejects spiritual principles

nirakar formless; without physical shape or attributes

nirannamukta liberated soul of Shvetdwip (divine realm)

nirbij without seed; unable to produce further results or consequences

nirdosh faultless; completely pure and without defects

nirgun beyond material qualities (*gunas*); possessing only divine attributes

nirvikalp free from doubt; state of absolute certainty and realization

nishchay unwavering faith; complete conviction in spiritual truths

pagh turban; traditional cloth headwear worn by wrapping fabric around the head

panch vartman five vows; either the renunciant vows of sadhus or the basic ethical commitments of devotees (avoiding alcohol, meat, theft, adultery, and maintaining ritual purity)

panchbhuts see *bhuts*; the five fundamental elements

panchvishays five sense objects; the various sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures that attract the mind through the senses

paramhansa highest order of renunciant; special cadre of sadhus initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan

parasmani legendary philosopher's stone that transforms base metals into gold

paroksh indirect; not directly perceived; known through inference or testimony

parshad male renunciant who wears white robes

pragat manifest; clearly visible and present

prajapatis cosmic creators; deities responsible for creating and populating the universe

pran life force; vital energy flowing through the body in five main currents

prarabdha destiny; karmic results that must be experienced in the current lifetime

pratyaksh directly perceived; witnessed with one's own senses

pruthvi earth element; solid matter; one of the five fundamental

elements

Purush cosmic being; liberated soul (*akshar-mukta*) chosen by Aksharbrahma to partner with Prakruti in creation

rajogun quality of passion; the *guna* characterized by activity, desire, and restlessness

sadguru true spiritual teacher

sadhak spiritual seeker; one actively pursuing the path to God-realization

sadhana spiritual practice; disciplined effort towards God-realization

sagun with material qualities; possessing worldly attributes rather than being purely divine

sakar with form; having visible shape and attributes

sakshi witness; the *atma*'s role as observer of all mental and physical activities

sankhya jnan understanding that distinguishes between the eternal and perishable

sampradaya spiritual tradition; lineage of religious teaching and practice

samyavastha state of equilibrium; balanced condition of cosmic forces

sarva karta doer of all; God as the ultimate cause of all actions

sarvajiva-hitavaha beneficial to all souls; that which promotes the welfare of all living beings

sarvopari supreme; highest above all

sat eternal existence; that which is permanent and unchanging
satchidanand existence-consciousness-bliss; the nature of ultimate reality

satsang company of the pious; association with spiritually elevated people

Satsang refers to the Swaminarayan spiritual community
satsangi – one who practises *satsang*; follower of the Satsang community

sattvagun quality of purity; the *guna* characterized by clarity, harmony, and virtue

satya truth; that which corresponds to reality

satyuga golden age; the first and most righteous of the four epochs of Hindu time

sevak one who serves; devoted helper

sevakbhav attitude of service; feeling of humble dedication to serving others

shakti – power, energy or strength

sharir-shariri body-soul relationship; the connection between the physical form and its indwelling consciousness

shushka dry; barren; lacking spiritual vitality

shushka-jnan fruitless knowledge; learning that doesn't lead to spiritual transformation

sinhasan throne; ornate seat for the sacred image of God

sthitapragna one of steady wisdom; person whose understanding remains unshaken in all circumstances

sthul gross or physical; the material body composed of the five elements

sud bright half of a month; the waxing phase of the lunar month when the moon grows fuller

sukshma subtle body; the mental and energetic body composed of mind, senses, life force, and ego

sutratma cosmic subtle body; the *sukshma* form of *ishwars*

swabhav innate tendencies; one's natural inclinations, often

referring to lust, anger, greed and other negative traits

swadharma one's own duty; personal responsibilities based on one's nature and circumstances

Swami-sevak bhav attitude of humble service to one's spiritual master; feeling of devoted discipleship

swedaj sweat-born; category of life forms that emerge from moisture, such as certain insects

tamoguna quality of ignorance; the *guna* characterized by darkness, inertia, and delusion

tantra ritualistic practices; esoteric methods of worship aimed at gaining supernatural powers

tap austerity; spiritual discipline involving self-control and sacrifice

tattva fundamental principle; basic element or reality

tilak sacred marking; U-shaped mark made with sandalwood paste on forehead and body as sign of devotion

tirth sacred place; pilgrimage site with spiritual significance

tyag renunciation; giving up worldly attachments for spiritual growth

udbhij earth-born; category of life forms that sprout from soil, including all plant life

Upanishads philosophical texts; the concluding portions of the Vedas exploring the nature of reality, soul, and liberation

upasak worshipper; one who follows a particular spiritual doctrine

upasana mode of worship; philosophical framework defining how to understand and approach God

upsham tranquility; peaceful state achieved through meditation when worldly awareness dissolves

vadi snake charmer; performer who controls serpents through music

vadvanal submarine fire; mystical flame that burns within oceans yet remains unextinguished

vairagya detachment; dispassion toward worldly pleasures and material pursuits

vayu air or gaseous matter; one of the five fundamental elements

Vedras sacred letters; collection of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's correspondence with his *paramhansas*

virat cosmic physical form; the gross body of *ishwars*

vishay sense object; anything perceived through the ten senses that can attract or distract the mind

vrat vow; spiritual commitment or observance undertaken for self-purification

vrttி mental modification; the soul's focus of attention or direction of consciousness

vyapak all-pervading; present everywhere simultaneously

vyatirek separate and distinct; when referring to God, implies transcendent

yagna fire sacrifice; Vedic ritual offering performed to honour deities and seek blessings

yogic relating to yoga; supernatural abilities gained through spiritual practice

yojan ancient unit of distance; approximately 4 miles or 8 km