

Portrait of Inspiration
Pramukh Swami Maharaj

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Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Inspirer: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

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PREFACE

Hindu shastras, avatars and acharyas have extolled the greatness and glory of a God-realized Sadhu, and pointed to him as the means of realizing God and attaining moksha. This is because he is in constant touch with God, he is free from worldly desires and liberates countless souls from mundane bondage. He is the dispenser of eternal happiness and the supporter of countless universes. He is described variously as an Ekantik Sadhu, a Gunatit Sadhu, Satpurush, Guru and Sant.

In the Shrimad Bhagwat, Bhagwan Shri Krishna states his close bond with a true Sadhu,

*Sādhavo hrdayam mahyam,
sādhunām tu hrdayam twaham.*

“The Sadhu is my heart, and I am the heart of the Sadhu.”

Sant Tulsidas writes in the Ramcharitmanas, “One who is awake in the darkness of greed and anger, and is not bound by the shackles of greed is equal to you, O Ram.”

The great acharya and pioneer of Advait Vedant, Adi Shankaracharya, says,

Gurorangripadme manaschenna lagnam tatah kim,...

“If one has not attached one’s mind at the feet of a Guru, then of what use is it!”

Bhagwan Swaminarayan also speaks eloquently of the glory of a bona fide Sadhu, “When one has darshan of such a *Sant*, one should realize ‘I have had darshan of God Himself’.

He praises further, “...Such a *Sant* should not be thought of as a human being, nor should he be thought of as a *deva*, even though that *Sant* appears to be human he is still worthy of being worshipped on par with God.”

The famous English writer, Somerset Maugham, after meeting Raman Maharshi in India, writes, “It is a mistake to think that those holy men of India lead useless lives. They are a shining

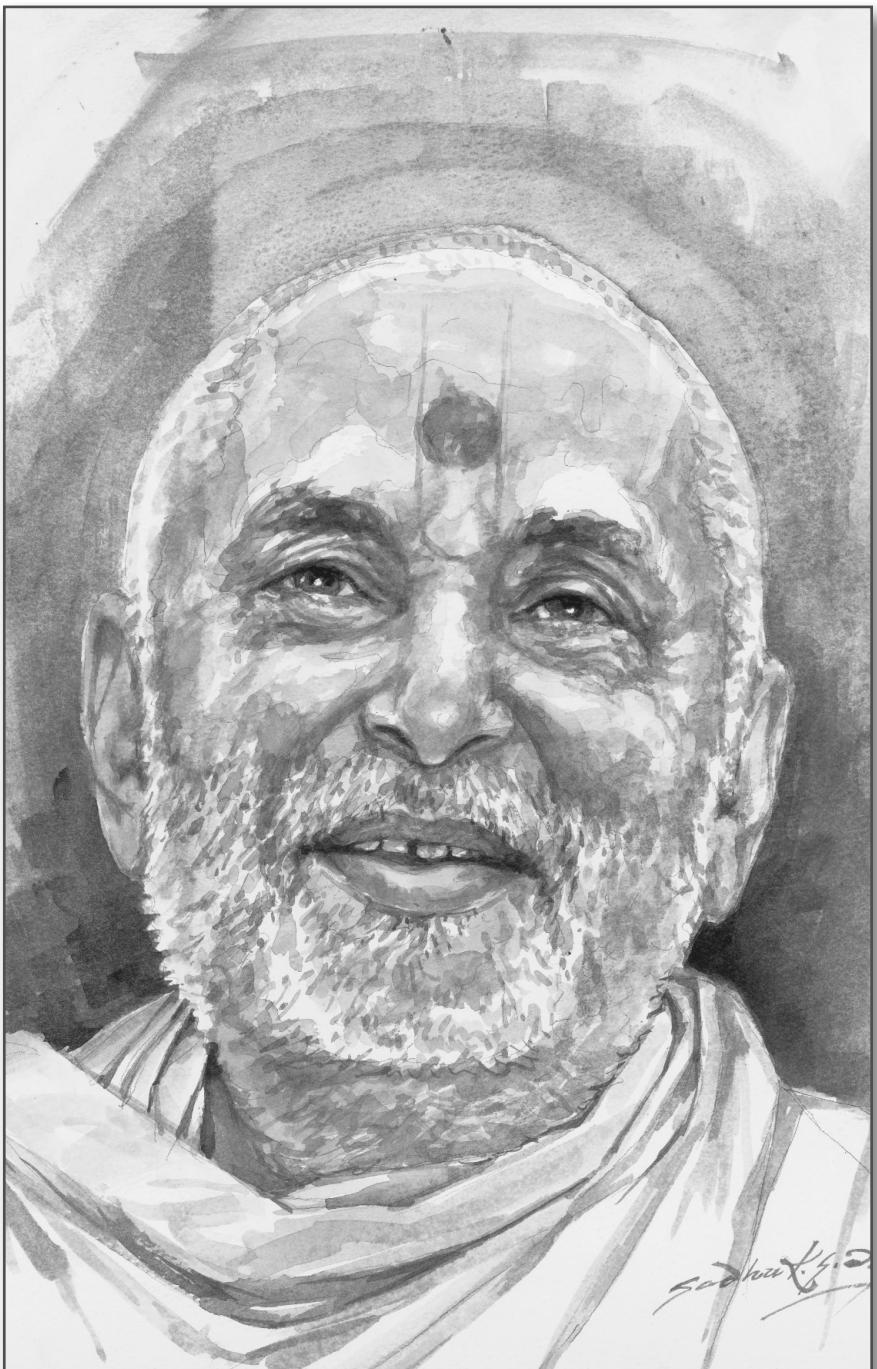
light in the darkness. When a man becomes pure and perfect, the influence of his character spreads so that those who seek truth are naturally drawn to him.”

The renowned philosopher and President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, opines, “Today we live in society not because of scientific inventions, but because of the saints who live in society.”

Portrait of Inspiration, by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, presents inspiring incidents from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj – a God-realized Sadhu. Every incident reveals his divinity and compassion for humanity. It has been rendered into English by Sadhu Vivekjivandas from the Gujarati version *Yugvibhuti – Pramukh Swami Maharaj* by Sadhu Aksharvatsaldas.

We hope this publication will serve as a source of inspiration and be a guiding light to devotees and spiritual aspirants in their endeavour to realize the Guru and thereby earn his divine grace for God-realization.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith



PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

INTRODUCTION

He whose glory the Upanishads, Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Vachanamrut, and saint-poets proclaim,

Whom the leading holy lights of India extol,

In whose person the people of India and abroad have witnessed divinity,

Whom human history salutes by recording his selfless services to mankind...

That illustrious and revered personality is Shastri Narayanswarupdas; popularly known as Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, or Swamishri, is the fifth successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830 CE) – the founder of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, who introduced a moral and spiritual renaissance in Gujarat during the dark, chaotic period of the 18th century.

In paying tribute to Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine personality and mission, Mahatma Gandhi said, "The work accomplished by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Gujarat could not and would never have been achieved by the law."

The noted litterateur of Gujarat, Chandravadan Mehta, said, "If Sahajanand Swami had not existed, then we would not have seen the pride of Gujarat that we speak of today. Instead of the morality that is in Gujarat, there would have been unseeable dirt.

"Instead of our hearts rejoicing on hearing the name of Gujarat, we would have been ashamed and would have had to hang our heads in shame if Sahajanand Swami had not been there. The contributions of Sahajanand Swami to morality, non-violence and virtuousness in Gujarat cannot be said to be of the ordinary.

“All Gujaratis salute Sahajanand Swami, the redeemer and sanctifier of the lowly; for liberating Gujarat from its lowly state in the nick of time. Sahajanand Swami ranks as one of the foremost torchbearers who did not allow the light of Gujarat to fade.”

Bhagwan Swaminarayan bestowed a legacy of spiritual succession through the Gunatit Guru for humanity’s benefit. His first successor, Gunatitanand Swami, spread his supreme glory and greatness. He was followed by Pragji Bhakta who propagated the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahma – the ideal devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, the third successor, established the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) in 1907. He built five lofty mandirs, consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in the central shrine to propagate the true *upasana* prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj inspired the children and youth movements in the Sanstha. He prescribed the weekly Sunday *satsang* assembly which spiritually fortified the devotees. Before Yogiji Maharaj left this mortal world in 1971 he declared to the devotees, “Pramukh Swami is my all.”

BIRTH

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was born on 7 December 1921 (Magshar sud 8, Samvat 1978) in the small village of Chansad, in Vadodara district. His childhood name was Shantilal. Motibhai Patel, his father, was a farmer, and his mother’s name was Diwaliba. They were pious and staunch disciples of Shastriji Maharaj.

The divine glow in Shantilal’s eyes and his innocent looks made him the cynosure of all eyes. Mahant Haridas of the Hanuman Madhi Mandir, on the outskirts of Chansad, had noticed the worth of this little, illustrious star. The Mahant used to narrate stories

from the Ramayan, Mahabharat and the Shrimad Bhagwat to Shantilal and other village boys. He also talked about the divinity and serenity of the Himalayas. Subsequently, Shantilal developed a yearning to retreat to the Himalayas in future and spend the rest of his life praying to God.

Shantilal went for darshan to the Swaminarayan mandir in Chansad daily. His association with Shastriji Maharaj and his sadhus, whenever they came to Chansad, strengthened his affiliation and love for *satsang*.

RENUNCIATION AND DIKSHA

When Shantilal was 17 years old he received a letter from Shastriji Maharaj instructing him to come and join him by becoming a sadhu. His parents happily complied with Shastriji Maharaj's wish and presented their beloved son at his feet.

On 22 November 1939, Shastriji Maharaj gave Shantilal the *parshad diksha* at Ambli-Vali Pol in Amdavad. On 10-1-1940, he was given the ochre robes and initiated into the *bhagvati diksha* in Gondal. Shastriji Maharaj named him Narayanswarupdas Swami. Within a short time his austerity, renunciation, tolerance, patience, purity and devotion to the guru blossomed and revealed his pure saintliness. Within ten years he earned Shastriji Maharaj's divine grace. In 1950, Shastriji Maharaj, with great foresight, appointed Narayanswarupdas Swami as the President of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha. At that time no one had the faintest idea that one day the 28-year-old Narayanswarupdas Swami would be venerated throughout the world.

In 1951 Shastriji Maharaj passed away and Yogiji Maharaj succeeded him. For the next twenty years Pramukh Swami served under the instructions and blessings of guru Yogiji Maharaj. In 1971 Yogiji Maharaj passed away and Pramukh Swami Maharaj succeeded him to continue his mission.

SOCIO-SPIRITUAL WORKS

It is impossible to describe the work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj who has transformed the BAPS from a sapling into a sprawling banyan tree.

When one looks at his pristine saintly life one is faced with the question as to which of his many divine facets is most impressive and outstanding?

- ◆ As the torchbearer of Hindu revival in modern times.
- ◆ As a guru who has spread the universal message of morality and spirituality preached by Indian culture and Bhagwan Swaminarayan in over 52 countries.
- ◆ As the inspirer of over 900 marvellous Swaminarayan mandirs, including the impressive Swaminarayan Akshardham cultural complexes in New Delhi and Gandhinagar, the world renowned Shri Swaminarayan Mandirs in London, Chicago, Houston, Atlanta, Toronto, Nairobi and thousands of character-building centres throughout the world.
- ◆ As the president of the global BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.
- ◆ As an epoch-maker who has channelized the energies of hundreds of thousands of youths towards the path of spirituality and service to society.
- ◆ As an initiator of educated youths into the sadhu-fold for lifelong service to society.
- ◆ As an inspirer and organizer of state-of-the-art educational and hostel complexes and health institutions.
- ◆ As a promoter of literature, music and the arts.
- ◆ As one who harnesses modern science and technology for the propagation of spiritual wisdom.
- ◆ As an idol of compassion who has rescued and rushed relief materials to those devastated by natural disasters in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Kutch,

Karnataka and other states.

- ◆ As one who has tirelessly made 15,500 visits to towns and villages in India and abroad – regardless of time, the vagaries of weather, discomfort and health – for the benefit of mankind.
- ◆ As a giant who has unfurled the flag of India's cultural pride in the West.
- ◆ As a liberator of the downtrodden and poor.
- ◆ As a pure, ideal disciple absorbed in supreme devotion of God.
- ◆ As a living *brahmaswarup* Sadhu – the crowning glory of all sadhus.

Besides all these features, one can add many others to his fathomless divine personality. In the words of the late Jain acharya Muni Sushilkumarji, "India has been nourished and enriched by the Buddha, Tirthankars, Ram, Krishna, Nanak and other sadhus and divine incarnations. We had been waiting for someone who could lead India's cultural revival – who could nourish India spiritually, socially and politically. By God's grace we have found such a person. His name is Pramukh Swami. If we want to unite India, then it can be done so through the leadership of Pramukh Swami. Pramukh Swami is not the head of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya alone but also the head of the Hindu faith. No, not the head of Hindu Dharma alone, but also the head of Indian society."

HONOURS AND RECOGNITIONS

Swamishri's most impressionable trait is his egolessness. He is humble and simple, natural and transparent. There is not even an iota of deception in him. He has no desire for honour or self-importance. He speaks straight from the heart, with no frills added. He is never stressed by the daily activities he performs. After having helped someone, there is not a trace of self-praise in

his words or actions. He claims no proprietorship in all that he has inspired. He asks for no rights. His mantra is, “In the good of others lies our own, and in the happiness of others abides our own.” With this ideal, Swamishri works for the good of all.

Whoever comes to him experiences a feeling of warmth and serenity. And that is why his divine personality has touched the hearts of all – from the tribals of Gujarat to the elite and intelligent people of the world.

The renowned multimedia producer, the late Professor Jaroslav Fric, opined, “Pramukh Swami is a great part of the Infinite. I can say with conviction that he is a true guru and the embodiment of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on earth.”

The late Ron Patel, a Pulitzer Prize winner and editor of the Sunday edition of *The Philadelphia Enquirer*, experienced the filial love of his father in Swamishri’s affectionate personality.

Han and Theo Kop, Dutch nationals, see Swamishri as a unique guru.

Professor Washington Okuma of Kenya felt an indescribable peace when he saw Swamishri for the first time.

The holy spiritual leaders of India also hold Swamishri in high esteem. H.H. Chinna Jeer Swami says that he sees Pramukh Swami as “a spiritual sculptor.” The president of the Divine Life Society, H.H. Chidanand Swami, considers Swamishri to be “an idol of morality in our contemporary age.”

The late Head of the Ramkrishna Mission, Raipur, H.H. Atmanand Swami, said, “Oh! What a humble man. What a divine man! I’ve yet to see such people in abundance. One of the very rare souls that our country has. I have not travelled far and wide, I have gone to some countries, but he is one of the most impressive men I have met in my life; very dedicated, spiritually very high, at the same time wonderful organizing capacity. Pramukh Swami is so silent, at the same time making so many people so active.”

Many heads of other faiths have been impressed by

Swamishri's divine personality, namely, H.H. The Dalai Lama, Pope John Paul II, Rabai Lau (leader of the Ashkenazi sect) and Rabbi Doron Bakshi (leader of the Sephardi sect) of the Jewish faith, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Jagjitsinghji (the leader of the Sikh faith).

Various heads of government and royalty who have been touched by Swamishri's saintliness include: Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, Prince Charles and many others.

The eminent economist and advocate, Nani Palkhiwala, said, "It is difficult to pen down the achievements of the Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha. Under the stewardship and inspiration of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj his sadhus have dedicated themselves to the propagation of nonviolence, brotherhood and spiritual awakening that will become a hallmark of Indian culture."

The founder of Amul Dairy and former chairman of the National Dairy Development Board, Dr Kurien, declared, "What Swamiji is able to achieve makes what little I have achieved very insignificant. One then realizes what goodness can achieve, what piety can achieve, what the devotion of his followers can achieve. And I wish, I too will receive a small portion of this."

The honour accorded to him by the British and Canadian Parliaments, 'Key to the City' presentations, honorary citizenships and 'Pramukh Swami Day' declarations by many cities of America and England speak of his globally appealing personality.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's universal appeal as a great spiritual master lies in his austerity, renunciation, dedication and supreme devotion to God.

VICHARAN

Another unique aspect of his life is his untiring *vicharan*. Regardless of physical discomfort, he continuously travels for the benefit of society. And that is why there is no answer if anyone

were to ask him for his address. There is no inventory of the hardships he has put up with to please the devotees. He has sacrificed his entire life for the good of others. Despite having had a cataract operation, gall bladder removed, a heart attack, bypass surgery and arthritis he has not reduced his activities.

In 1985, in spite of illness, he had visited 95 villages in Gujarat in 20 days. In the village of Vasad, Swamishri sanctified 121 homes from 9.00 am till 3.30 pm with a fever of 102⁰F.

Swamishri has sanctified homes by walking 2 kilometres in the undulating Badalpur region on the Mahi riverbank. His home-visits on the hilly grounds of Bamangam village would exhaust any energetic youth. He has also travelled for months in the scorching summer in the arid region of Bhal, breathing the sand-laden air and drinking its muddy lake water.

Swamishri has undertaken home-visits during tight schedules and in the aftermath of natural calamities. He has also paid home-visits to please devotees by getting up from his lunch at 2.30 pm.

Along with his tireless *vicharan*, he performs scores of socio-spiritual activities to uplift society, which are simply amazing. Furthermore, he has personally convinced and inspired hundreds of thousands of people to give up addictions and practise spirituality. Besides his one-to-one dialogue in solving problems, he receives hundreds of letters asking for guidance and blessings. So far he has read and replied to over 700,000 letters.

CONCLUSION

Through his leadership the BAPS has taken giant strides, and in spite of its colossal growth Swamishri has never compromised in observing the five cardinal moral injunctions prescribed for sadhus by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, namely, celibacy (*nishkam*), non-covetousness (*nirlabh*), non-taste (*nisswad*), non-attachment (*nissneh*) and humility (*nirman*).

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is always relaxed despite his multifarious activities. The secret of his happiness and coolness lies in his supreme devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

A reporter in London once questioned, “In spite of being engaged in so many activities how is it that you are always fresh?” Swamishri replied, “I do not allow any amount of activities to get to my head. I do not feel burdened because I believe the fruits of all activities are due to God’s wish. I perform all actions by following God’s commands and remembering him. One does not feel the burden of activity when one keeps God in the forefront in all that one does. One should discard one’s ego and become engaged in God and the guru. By giving up one’s resolves and abiding by his wishes and believing him to be the doer, one experiences eternal happiness.”

On seeing Akshardham in Gandhinagar, the eighth wonder of the world, L.K. Advani, a stalwart national leader, asked Swamishri, “Who has made it?”

“God,” Swamishri replied instantly. “Whatever there is belongs to God and it is all because of him.”

These sentiments of God’s doership are echoed unceasingly in his supreme devotion to him. On seeing his devotion to the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj (Thakorji), H.H. Chidanand Swami of the Divine Life Society observed, “To see Swamiji with his supreme Master is a rare sight even for the gods. He never separates himself from his Lord. In all important events, be it on stage or wherever, he always places the *murti* of God in the foremost position. In his presence, the *murti* of God is always given priority. Pramukh Swami is like a matchless crown of our society.”

Swamishri’s profound divinity, care and compassion are beyond the ken of human intellect. No amount of thought, emotion or endeavour can enable one to understand him or realize him fully. However, a little realization of his divine personality does

enable an aspirant to become a recipient of his grace, and thus experience the joys of pristine divinity. To make this possible, *Portrait of Inspiration* presents Pramukh Swami Maharaj's personality and divinity through short, inspiring and touching incidents. Every incident has its own appeal and message, and reflects a unique aspect of his personality.

To those who have seen him, spoken to him, been blessed by him, even heard of him or thought about him, this book will provide an opportunity to experience and understand his philanthropy and divinity.

We hope the episodes from Swamishri's life will ennable and inspire the readers with spiritual joy and strength to serve God and humanity.



HUMBLE SERVICE

The ‘Jaljhilani Ekadashi’ festival was over and the devotees, who had come from far-off places, started returning home. The sadhus and devotees staying at Sarangpur mandir were exhausted due to the fast. That night, they all retired to bed early.

Swamishri’s attendant sadhu could not sleep because of the fast. He lay sleepless tossing on his mattress. Then his eyes fell on Swamishri’s bedding. It was empty! He wondered where Swamishri could have gone. He got up to find out.

In his search he went behind the mandir and found Swamishri cleaning the toilets.

“Oh Swami! What are you doing?” he asked.

“Sh... Sh..! Don’t shout. You’ll wake everyone up!” Swamishri whispered.

The attendant sadhu was amazed to see Swamishri doing the work of a lowly sweeper. He thought that Swamishri must have felt the need to do so after the Jaljhilani festival. He failed to stop Swamishri from cleaning the toilets. When he insisted on taking the brush and bucket from Swamishri’s hand, Swamishri replied, “Two will be better than one. Come, you bring the water in this bucket, and I’ll do the cleaning with this brush.”

And so, while the attendant sadhu poured bucketfuls of water, the president of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha scrubbed the toilets. The attendant sadhu simply wondered, “Who is the real attendant?”



SELFLESS LOVE

Once, a youth was overwhelmed by the unprecedented interest and care shown by a spiritual guru in his life.

In an instant, his shattered life began to flash before his mind. He recalled how much he had wished to study engineering, but his stubborn father came in the way and forced him to take up architecture.

Then, family conflicts added to his woes. He had to shift to a hostel. But soon, without his parent's love and security, he found himself at the crossroads of life; confused and apprehensive about what would happen to him and how he would manage things by himself. At this juncture he went to Swamishri.

“How do you arrange for your expenses?” Swamishri asked. Then he also enquired about his lodging and boarding arrangements and his academic progress.

The youth's deep sense of loneliness surfaced in his conversation. Swamishri responded affectionately, “Whenever you have any problem, write to me. I will write to Kothari Swami and he will make all the arrangements for you. However, for the present, just study and develop your talent in music.”

Like a child deprived of love, the youth instantly buried his head in Swamishri's lap. He was overwhelmed by Swamishri's unbounded love and generosity for him.

He broke down saying, “Even my parents have never showered so much love on me.”

He remembered the lines of the bhajan he had sung many times before:

Het to kare chhe kevu, anant janani jevu...

“O how he loves like a myriad mothers...”



DIVINE EXPERIENCE

One morning, David woke up after an extraordinary dream. The dream left a lingering doubt in his mind. Was it real?

To find the answer he and his two friends, Daniel and Richard, started looking for the saffron-clad sadhu who had appeared in his dream. They found him at the mandir in Neasden, London. It was 15 May 1994.

The three English youths had come from the county of Sussex in England. When they sat down in the small mandir room they gazed out of curiosity and interest at Swamishri.

Greatly impressed by Hinduism and its principles, the three youths had visited India and met several gurus. But they still had a yearning to learn more.

Then, David began narrating his dream to Swamishri, “Four days back, I saw you in my dream. You explained to me about *nirvikalp samadhi* and blessed me with a divine experience. I wish to ask you whether you experience *nirvikalp samadhi* 24 hours a day?”

Swamishri replied in a serene, modest manner, “I do all my activities with God in the forefront, hence I always experience *samadhi.”*

The ring in Swamishri’s words convinced David and his friends. They sought Swamishri’s blessings and left, wondering at the spark of divinity in his august personality.



DEVOTION TO GOD

In 1994, Mr Cogswell was impressed on meeting Swamishri during his stay in Orlando, Florida. He asked Swamishri, “Are you God or a human being?”

“I am a servant of God,” pat came the reply.

Once, at the Atladra mandir, Swamishri was absorbed in Thakorji’s darshan. Bhagvatcharan Swami bent down to touch Swamishri’s feet. This startled Swamishri, who then checked him from touching his feet, “Never bow down to touch my feet before Thakorji. One should respect Thakorji.”

And then explaining further, Swamishri added, “Before the king, tell me, how would it look if one shows respect to a servant by touching his feet?” Swamishri’s words showed his profound humility and devotion to Thakorji. All have experienced his virtues of service and devotion; from heads of state like President Jomo Kenyatta to the common man.

Once, during Swamishri’s visit to the presidential house in Nairobi, President Jomo Kenyatta, on seeing the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj, enquired “What is this?”

“God’s *murti*,” Swamishri replied briefly.

“Oh! It’s a symbol like the cross worn by Christians!” the president commented.

“No, a cross is just a symbol, whereas God actually resides in this *murti*,” Swamishri replied spontaneously. “This *murti* sees and inspires, and is also a witness to all our actions. So it is not just a *murti* but God Himself.”

President Kenyatta was touched by Swamishri’s profound faith and devotion to God.



“WE ARE ALL GOD’S PEOPLE”

On hearing a voice, the group of five lower-caste youths looked surprisingly at each other. They wondered as to which one of them was being called.

Then they heard the sweet voice again, “All of you come here.”

“Swamiji, we are all Harijans!” they replied shyly.

Swamishri spoke out of compassion for them, “Even we are *Harina jan* (God’s people). Come closer.”

In response, the youths ran towards Swamishri. And Swamishri affectionately blessed them by placing his hands on their heads. The youths felt immensely happy and proud.

Then Swamishri addressed them, “Everyone has to become a person of God (*Harina jan*). But do you have any bad habits or addictions? If so, then give them up. Live a pure life free from addictions. I bless you all.”

Swamishri then blessed them again.

It was a divine experience for these Harijan youths of Sarangpur. They were blessed not by Swamishri alone, but also by God who resides in him.

There was a glow on their depressed faces, which dissolved their inferiority complex and inspired a new wave of joy. Their hearts echoed with the words, “We are all God’s people (*Harina jan*); noble and full of pride.”



“I HAVE GOD, I HAVE NO MONEY!”

On 23 August 1988, a local *satsangi* brought Mr Carlos Vega, a 62-year-old American, to meet Swamishri at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Los Angeles. It was his first ever encounter with a Hindu guru.

Swamishri welcomed Carlos, who was touched by his humility and simplicity. In Swamishri's presence, he felt time come to a halt. An extraordinary divine feeling pervaded his entire being, and he experienced an ineffable peace within.

Bowing before Swamishri, Carlos said, “I was eager to see you. And now after meeting you I experience profound peace for the first time in my life. I have everything that I want in my life. I have a good car, a beautiful home, money...”

And Swamishri interrupted him, “I have God, I have no money! When you have God you have everything.”

Carlos was overjoyed at the unique experience of supreme joy radiating from Swamishri. He left contented and enlightened with the fact that material things are not the be-all and end-all of a happy life.



LOVING SERVICE

“Do you have a fever?” Swamishri asked affectionately.

A student from South Gujarat, who had joined Swamishri in his *satsang* tour in Saurashtra, 1973, was shivering and feeling weak because of fever and vomiting. He was confused as to whom to approach and tell about his miserable state of health. At that point, Swamishri held his hand and posed the above question.

“Yes, Bapa!” he replied.

After Thakorji’s darshan, Swamishri sat down to have breakfast. He gave the youth a cup of hot milk and said, “Now drink this. You will be all right soon.” The youth hesitated. But he could not refuse what Swamishri had offered with care and affection. He took the cup of milk and walked off to a corner of the room. Swamishri called him back, “Not that far, sit near me and drink it.”

The youth hesitated again, but on Swamishri’s insistence he sat nearby him and drank the milk.

“Now, take rest. Don’t go out anywhere,” Swamishri advised.

It was 10:30 am, the same day. The youth was lying half asleep with a splitting headache. Suddenly, he felt a cool touch on his head. He opened his eyes and to his surprise found Swamishri softly pressing his head. He tried his best to dissuade Swamishri, but Swamishri told him, “Lie still and let me serve you.”

Tears rolled down the youth’s cheeks. He was filled with so much gratitude that he could not utter a word.

The next morning, when the youth got up for his bath, he heard Swamishri calling out, “Don’t have your bath now. There is cold in all the bathrooms. Take my hot water for your bath.”

Today, even after many years, when the youth recalls Swamishri’s selfless affection and care, his eyes turn moist with emotion and admiration for Swamishri’s deep love for him.



No LANGUAGE BARRIER

In 1980, Swamishri was in Johannesburg at the residence of Dr. Rameshbhai. For 20 minutes, a reporter from the *Sunday Tribune* had been asking questions to Swamishri. Then Atmaswarup Swami, who was Swamishri's interpreter, requested the reporter to ask his final question.

"Don't the ladies feel neglected or discriminated when you keep yourself away from them?" the reporter asked.

Before Atmaswarup Swami could translate the question into Gujarati, Swamishri told Atmaswarup Swami, "Tell him to come to India and see for himself. Hundreds of thousands of women worship Bhagwan Swaminarayan but none of them feel discriminated..."

Atmaswarup Swami was amazed by Swamishri's all-knowing power. He was further surprised when he saw the reporter writing down Swamishri's answer even before he could translate it into English. Out of curiosity, Atmaswarup Swami asked him what he had written.

The reporter, who did not know a word of Gujarati, said, "Swamiji told me to come to India and see first hand the hundreds of thousands of women who worship Swaminarayan and yet do not feel discriminated."

Atmaswarup Swami realized the time-old truth that the Satpurush has no language barrier.



IN HONOUR AND INSULT

It was 6.50 pm on 20 July 1985, London. The day every devotee had been eagerly awaiting for months. Final preparations for the Suvarna Tula festival at Queens Park Rangers stadium were over. The festival atmosphere was charged with excitement, and when Swamishri arrived, the congregation of 17,000 devotees chorused, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj ni Jai.” The thunderous ‘jais’ echoed the magnitude and feelings for the divine occasion.

The festival climaxed when Pramukh Swami Maharaj took Harikrishna Maharaj and sat on a giant scale for the Suvarna Tula. Then, one by one, the devotees placed packets of sugar on the empty scale, which in turn were later weighed against gold. The ambience of devotion was elevating as the mellifluous Vedic mantras chanted by the sadhus filled the air. The reverence offered to Swamishri was a celebration of honour and pride to not only the devotees of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya alone, but to all Hindus and well-wishers of Indian culture. And amidst this outpouring of faith, Pramukh Swami Maharaj remained equipoised and absorbed in the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

After this grand, divine celebration, Swamishri became immersed in reading letters from devotees while his car left the stadium. Within seconds, Swamishri had forgotten the honour bestowed upon him. The grand Suvarna Tula festival, the impressive Queens Park Rangers stadium and the thunderous applause of devotees had not overwhelmed him one bit.

The very next day, there occurred a contrasting incident.

A person came to see Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the Akshar Purushottam Mandir in London. Rage and anger were writ large on his face. Some misunderstanding had distorted his attitude and inflamed his countenance. He started uttering foul language before Swamishri. His uncouth words and insults incensed the

sadhus and youths sitting in the room. But Swamishri was unruffled. There was not a trace of anger on his face and no bitter feeling in his heart. Like an idol of compassion and forgiveness, he merely listened and suppressed any counter reactions from those sitting in the room. After exhausting his rage, the person became silent. Swamishri instructed the attendants, “See that he is served lunch before he leaves.”

Swamishri can forget the grand honour accorded to him in moments, and also forgive and forget the insult rained on him in seconds! He accepts honour and insult with equanimity.



A YOUNG BOY'S REQUEST

"Swami! Please come to my village."

Fifteen-year-old Ganesh, who lived in a small village of Kankrawadi near Viramgam, was holding Swamishri's feet and repeatedly requesting him to sanctify his home in 1977. Though there were no other *satsangis* in his village, and Swamishri's programme had already been arranged elsewhere, Ganesh's faith and love compelled Swamishri to promise him that he would come. The subsequent rescheduling and the physical hardship he would have to bear were of no concern to Swamishri.

Finally, the day arrived.

At dusk, cutting through the dust-filled air and the bumpy village road, Swamishri's car entered the village of Kankrawadi. Ganesh's happiness knew no bounds.

The village was very small and all the houses, except one, were built of mud and straw. Swamishri finally came to Ganesh's mud-house. There was no electricity, no toilet and no bathroom in his house. Later in the night, Swamishri held a *satsang* assembly outside his house in the light of paraffin lamps. The summer heat was stifling.

Swamishri's sleeping arrangements for the night were made on the terrace of a neighbouring house. He and all the sadhus slept on a mattress laid on the terrace floor.

Next morning, after his daily routine, Swamishri sanctified a few houses in the village and then held an assembly. After lunch, Swamishri retired for a nap in Ganesh's mud-house. Despite the prickly afternoon heat and absence of ventilation, Swamishri slept soundly.

Ganesh's young mind made a note of one point, that in spite of all the discomfort, Swamishri's face was beaming with joy. Even today, Ganesh vividly remembers the pure, divine joy on Swamishri's face.



TAMING A RACEHORSE

In 1977, the devotees of Ashton-U-Lyne in England had made grand preparations for a procession to welcome Swamishri. They had enthusiastically arranged for a decorated buggy and a national prizewinning racehorse called Jacob to pull it. Everything was ready. The devotees eagerly awaited Swamishri's arrival. The Mayor of Ashton and Mr Wilkinson, who had great respect for Swamishri, had come to welcome him. On seeing the spirited horse they drew the attention of C.T. Patel, "This is a racehorse. Look at it now. Its eyes are restless and impatient. Imagine what will happen when the marching band plays music? If it goes wild, it will cause havoc and injury."

Mr Wilkinson spoke with concern because he was acquainted with the nature and habits of horses.

But the devout C.T. Patel said, "Swamishri will take care of it, because he has the power to control and calm anyone and any situation. Once he sits in the chariot, everything will be all right."

Mr Wilkinson did not expect such an answer. Out of his love and concern for Swamishri he emphatically responded, "What you say is absolute nonsense! You are putting Swamishri's life in danger..." During that time Swamishri arrived and before anyone could decide upon anything, Swamishri sat in the buggy. Mr Wilkinson became anxious. Everyone shuddered with fear as to what might happen. But the horse became calm. His roving eyes and fiery spirit turned placid. Throughout the entire procession the horse trotted tamely amidst the sound of the marching band and the throng of devotees.

Mr Wilkinson was wonderstruck and intrigued at the transformation. Even today he cherishes the memory of that procession – an occasion that reflected Swamishri's divine charisma.



DIVINE GRACE

After visiting a few homes, Swamishri arrived at Dallubhai Madari's house.

For the past year, Dallubhai had been in touch with Swaminarayan sadhus. Through their inspiration, he had given up liquor, meat, violence and cheating. His transformation had blessed him with a new direction in life.

So, it was Dallubhai's intense desire that Swamishri sanctify his house and bless him. Though he had no idea when Swamishri would come, he prayed that his desire be fulfilled.

Several months later, Swamishri's tour to the rural areas of southern Gujarat was arranged. The tribal villages were difficult to reach due to lack of proper roads. The travelling was troublesome and uncomfortable. When Swamishri arrived at Dallubhai's village he started on his round of home-visits. Midway, there was a sudden downpour of rain that made the lanes muddy and waterlogged. After having walked to several houses in the rain, the attendant sadhus told Swamishri, "Bapa, let's postpone the visits for now. You are getting wet and bogged down in the soggy ground."

Swamishri replied, "The rain won't dissolve us. Besides, look at the devotees who live in these difficult and unbearable conditions. Even our sadhus tour these villages despite problems of food, water, mosquitoes and bugs. So don't worry, everything is fine."

The sadhus were dumbfounded. They had no words to describe Swamishri's enthusiasm and resolve to serve and satisfy the tribal devotees. Stopping him was out of the question.

When Swamishri came to Dallubhai's house, the latter was extremely happy. But he was also perplexed because he didn't know where to arrange a seat for Swamishri in his dark, small hut. Such was his abject poverty.

The sadhus suggested that he have the small shed where he tied his milch buffaloes cleared. And so within no time the seating arrangements for Swamishri and the sadhus were made. Then, Dallubhai performed *pujan* of Thakorji and Swamishri.

Then Swamishri asked the names of all the tribals present. When he learnt that Dallubhai had given up all his bad habits and adopted a virtuous life, Swamishri immediately got up from his seat and embraced him. He also showered his love on the tribals for their virtuous life and hugged them, too.

The ordinary, innocent tribals were unaware of how Swamishri was revered by hundreds of thousands worldwide. But Swamishri's embrace convinced them of his abundant love for the poor like them.

Swamishri then addressed them, "Even though you are poor, seeing you gives us a unique feeling of peace. How can anyone call you backward? You have become *satsangis* and lead pious lives. Such a home as this is a holy place. By visiting your huts one experiences devotion and love."

As he spoke, Swamishri looked around and showered his blessings on the luxuriant vegetation, ordinary huts and the children playing in the fields.

For Swamishri, the poor, innocent tribals are the sons and daughters of Eternity.



FREE FROM WEALTH

During the *satsang* tour of 1974, Swamishri took a flight from Mwanza to Dar-es-Salaam. On arriving at Dar-es-Salaam airport, the African officials began interrogating Swamishri's entourage. The devotees, who had come to welcome Swamishri, were startled by the stubborn investigation of the officials. They tried their best to make them understand, but the officials emphasised on one point only, "Someone has smuggled diamonds in this flight and we have been directed by our higher authorities to search each and every person coming out of this plane."

The devotees repeatedly pleaded with the officials to exempt Swamishri from the custom's checking. But this only fuelled their doubts all the more. They began examining the belongings of Swamishri and the other sadhus in great detail. They even opened their articles of daily worship, emptying the vermillion powder from its vials.

Finally, the officials were astonished after all their rummaging. They asked, "How many countries will you be visiting during your tour?"

"A few more countries in Africa and then we will be travelling to England and the USA," a spokesman answered.

The surprised officials said, "We are convinced that you do not have any diamonds. But we are surprised all the more that you are on an international tour and you do not even have the permitted 75 shillings on you! This is the first time in our lives that we have come across such tourists who do not keep a single shilling!"

The airport officials were all the more surprised when they came to know that Swamishri, let alone not having a single shilling as a tourist but, as the president of a world renowned organization does not have even a penny in his own name.

The officials felt privileged to have Swamishri arrive in their country.

Regretting and apologising for having rummaged through their belongings, the custom's officials bowed before Swamishri and welcomed him to Dar-es-Salaam.



DEVOTION TO THAKORJI

“Bapa! Visit my house...”

“Bapa! Please don’t forget my house...”

The devotees of Bamangam were personally inviting Swamishri to sanctify their homes.

Swamishri started his round of home-visits in the scorching afternoon sun. He gave up his afternoon rest to tread the rough, uneven roads of Bamangam during the home-visits. Swamishri untiringly visited the devotees’ homes to bless them and infuse joy in their routine, mundane lives.

By the time Swamishri returned to the home where he was lodging, his throat was dry with thirst. He was in time for the evening *arti*. So he became absorbed in prayer and forgot about his thirst. After the *arti* concluded, Swamishri bowed to all. Then the attendant sadhu suddenly remembered that Swamishri was thirsty, and ran to get a glass of water. When he offered the water, Swamishri enquired, “Have you offered it to Thakorji?” The sadhu had forgotten to do so.

Even in times of extreme thirst and hunger, Swamishri never forgets Thakorji. His devotion and faith for Thakorji remains unflagging. He never accepts anything that has not been offered to Thakorji, be it a drop of water or a garland of flowers.

Swamishri’s entire life is centred on his absolute devotion to Thakorji.



CELEBRATION THROUGH SERVICE

December 1971. The village of Dharmaj, Gujarat, had hosted the 51st birthday celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

There was a wave of happiness and festivity in the village.

The Golden Jubilee celebration was Swamishri's first birthday celebration after he became the guru.

The 11-day celebration included many enlightening programmes. Every morning and evening there were bhajans, prayers and spiritual discourses. Distinguished sadhus and scholars from India shared their wisdom, honoured Swamishri and praised his virtues. The celebration spirit was festive and divine.

Soon, the ultimate day of Swamishri's 51st birthday celebration arrived. Early that morning, when Swamishri was brushing his teeth with a *datan*, he noticed the used sticks of *datan* thrown away carelessly by people in an open area nearby. He did not say anything to anyone. After brushing his teeth Swamishri went into the bathroom. And when those few who were present outside dispersed, Swamishri came out and collected the used *datan* sticks. Without saying a single word, he threw them into the dustbin and briskly spruced up the surroundings.

When thousands of devotees had congregated, eagerly waiting for Swamishri's darshan and to greet him on his birthday, Swamishri began the day with menial service.

Even on his birthday Swamishri seized the opportunity of performing *seva* as if it were a celebration. He is happy in rendering such *seva*; it is his lifeblood. And that is why he always believes himself to be a servant.

Swamishri's greatness lies in his spirit of service.



SWAMISHRI'S ONENESS

In 1988, Swamishri was at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Los Angeles, USA. He was performing the fourth consecration anniversary (*patotsav*) rituals of the mandir. The mandir resonated with the chanting of Vedic mantras when Swamishri was performing the ritual of sprinkling holy water on the *murtis* of Akshar Purushottam Maharaj.

At that point, Narendraprasad Swami (Acharya Swami) came to seek Swamishri's permission to depart on a short *satsang* tour. But Swamishri, instead of permitting him to go, gave him a towel and said, "Before you go, do a little *seva* by soaking up the water on the *murtis* with this towel." While Narendraprasad Swami was performing the *seva*, a doubt arose in his mind regarding the divinity of the *murtis*. On reaching the feet, he pressed the thumb of Gunatitanand Swami a little harder.

At that moment Swamishri, though engaged in another ritual, turned to Narendraprasad Swami as if he had felt the pressure on his thumb and said, "Acharya, do it gently."

Narendraprasad Swami was astonished and asked, "How did you know?"

"Oh, I would know!" Swamishri replied with a smile.

Narendraprasad Swami was elated at the oneness Swamishri has with the *murti* of Gunatitanand Swami.



IN THE SERVICE OF OTHERS

It was the height of the Indian summer. A devotee entered the Akshar Purushottam Chhatralay one hot afternoon in Vidyanganar to get his brand new truck sanctified by Swamishri. At his request, Swamishri came out of his residence, placed Thakorji in his truck and performed the rituals of sanctification.

Then, instead of returning to his residence, Swamishri proceeded towards Sadhujivan Swami, who was standing in the sun. On reaching him, Swamishri asked with love and care, “Don’t you wear shoes?”

“No, Bapa,” Sadhujivan Swami replied.

On learning that Sadhujivan Swami had vowed not to use any footwear out of austerity, Swamishri removed his own shoes and compassionately said, “Here, wear these. From now onwards wear either shoes or slippers that suit you.”

Sadhujivan Swami refused to wear Swamishri’s shoes, and on seeing him barefooted in the hot sun he begged Swamishri to take his shoes back.

As Swamishri returned to his residence, Sadhujivan Swami reflected upon Swamishri’s profound love and empathy for him.



COMPASSION FOR AN AILING BOY

In 1999, a fisherman's son met with a serious accident in Val-sad. He was rushed to the Mahavir General Hospital in Surat.

On hearing about the boy's critical condition, Swamishri was pained and concerned for his life. A few days later Swamishri arrived in Surat.

One morning, Swamishri suddenly expressed his wish to visit the boy. Within no time Swamishri left for the hospital. His car could not reach the hospital gate because of heavy roadwork. So, Swamishri walked along the uneven, excavated road with the help of his attendant sadhus. Despite his fragile health at eighty years, Swamishri reached the hospital and went to the intensive care unit. He gently and compassionately touched the unconscious boy's head and heart with his hands and called out to him, "Prashant, Jai Swaminarayan..." Then he placed a garland of flowers around his neck and chanted the Swaminarayan mantra, praying for his recovery. Once again Swamishri blessed Prashant and consoled his father, Shantilal, assuring him that his son would get all the help and care needed.

On leaving the hospital, Swamishri once again went through the ordeal of jumping the two-and-a-half-feet wide ditches with the help of his attendant sadhus and then walked a quarter of a kilometre back to his car.

After blessing Prashant, Swamishri felt satisfied for offering his sympathy and prayers for an innocent, suffering boy. There was no fatigue on Swamishri's face for having taken out time from his busy schedule and going through all the discomfort and difficulties for a poor, ailing boy.

Later, Prashant recovered fully.



HIS SAVING GRACE

“Catch the thief! Catch the thief!”

The tranquillity of midnight was shattered by angry voices in a suburb of Trichinapalli, South India. Swamishri and some sadhus were resting in a guesthouse. The commotion woke up Ramcharan Swami who was sleeping in a room next to Swamishri’s. He came out to find a crowd of over 100 people with sticks shouting that the thief had hid himself inside the guesthouse. “Find him. Catch him,” they yelled.

On returning, Ramcharan Swami was surprised to find that Swamishri was not in his room. Only his upper cloth was lying on his mattress. Ramcharan Swami immediately came out looking for Swamishri in the open space on the fourth floor. Moments later, at the far end, in the faint light, he saw Swamishri’s silhouette. He was standing fearlessly in the darkness without his upper cloth. As Ramcharan Swami came closer, Swamishri beckoned him to remain quiet.

Ramcharan Swami realized that the noise and shouts had also awokened Swamishri. On perceiving the cause of the commotion, Swamishri had got up to search for the thief himself. And he had found him. The thief, in his bid to escape, had fallen into a water tank. Swamishri pointed to the tank with his torch and whispered, “Let us help him out.” When the thief was helped out of the tank he was wet and shaking with fear. Swamishri told Ramcharan Swami, “Give him some water to drink.”

The thief looked on with surprise. Swamishri then lovingly offered him a glass of water.

“Don’t let him go out. The angry crowd is waiting to beat him up.” Swamishri added.

Though the frightened thief did not understand Swamishri’s Gujarati, he felt assured he was in safe hands.

Then Swamishri spoke to him in broken Hindi, “Look brother!

What's the point in making a living by stealing? Why not work hard for yourself! God has given you hands and feet, so why not use them to work honestly. God knows everything, because he resides within you. He will bless you with his grace."

The thief nodded as Swamishri spoke to him. How much he understood was open to question, but the vibrations of forgiveness in Swamishri's voice had awakened him to a new beginning. He repented and his heart throbbed with a resolution not to steal ever again. It was a transforming, auspicious moment for him.

The thief bowed thankfully at Swamishri's feet, and Swamishri, in turn, blessed him.



To FULFIL A DEVOTEE'S WISH

It was 10.30 p.m.

Swamishri's car was racing ahead on the national highway in Kheda district, Gujarat. He had been travelling all day for the drought relief work by the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. After having visited the Sanstha's cattle camp in Bhavanpura, Swamishri was heading towards another camp in Bochasan. The sadhus and volunteers in Bochasan were waiting for him.

Then, Swamishri suddenly instructed the driver, "Take the car to the left."

"Are we not going to Bochasan?" the driver asked.

Swamishri kept quiet. The car soon turned off from the highway to take an interior road.

The accompanying sadhus were surprised at the sudden change in itinerary. Swamishri had already visited four villages that day, and the schedule had been tiring. They wondered whether they were going to another village. The car was travelling speedily on the road to Tarapur. On seeing a signboard, Swamishri told the driver to slow down. "Now take the car inside this village."

Swamishri's car had entered the village of Limbasi. It was late night and there was not one home in which the lights were on. Everyone was blissfully sleeping. Swamishri guided the car with brief instructions of left and right till they came to the house of Dahyabhai Patel. Then he told the driver to knock on the door. The door opened with an enquiry from within as to who it was. On seeing Swamishri, the members of the family were amazed and welcomed him inside.

"Where is Dahyabhai? I want to see him. As he is ill, I have been wanting to see him for the past several days."

As Swamishri spoke, his face showed his eagerness to meet Dahyabhai.

Dahyabhai was suffering from cancer. He tried to get up from

his bed and welcome Swamishri. “I was confident that Bapa would come,” Dahyabhai said with tears of joy.

Swamishri sat on the edge of Dahyabhai’s bed and told him to remain lying down. His soft, divine touch soothed the much-enduring Dahyabhai.

News soon spread in the village that Swamishri had arrived. Everyone came running out to offer their respects. A brief assembly was held and Swamishri blessed everyone. When Swamishri left for Bochasan it was late in the night.

Everyone in the village felt happy and blessed. And Dahyabhai lay in bed wondering about Swamishri’s compassion for him. He thought of Swamishri’s greatness and the grace he had showered upon an ordinary devotee like himself. Tears of fulfilment trickled from his eyes and soon Dahyabhai slept with blissful joy.



SACRED FOOD

In 1990, Swamishri travelled from London to Cardiff.

During an evening *satsang* assembly, the attendant sadhus left to offer *thal* to Thakorji. When they reached the residence, they found that many food items had yet to be prepared. Hurriedly, they cooked the food, and by the time they finished offering it to Thakorji, Swamishri arrived.

Swamishri sat down to have his meal. From there he had to go to another devotee's home for rest. So, the attendant sadhu served Swamishri rather hurriedly. While eating, Swamishri listened to the host devotee's talks. Finally, *khichdi* and *kadhi* were served in Swamishri's eating bowl.

When Swamishri finished his meal, another sadhu inside the kitchen shouted, "Don't serve *kadhi* because it has turned stale."

When the attendant sadhu rushed into the kitchen, he realized that he had used stale cream instead of curd for making the *kadhi*. On tasting it himself, he found it extremely distasteful. The thought of Swamishri having eaten the unpleasant *kadhi* filled him with remorse. He apologised, "Bapa, it was my mistake."

Swamishri replied calmly, "When Thakorji had eaten it, there was no problem for me in having it!"

Through the lives of such great souls wedded to the virtue of non-taste (*nisswad*), one experiences their absolute devotion to God. Swamishri revels in the taste of God's devotion, beholding food offered to Thakorji as sacred and unworthy of rejection.



A NEW DAWN!

“What is your name?”

The affection with which the question was asked surprised him. He found it amazing because no one enquired about him during daytime, and now someone cared to ask him at midnight when the entire village was asleep. When he turned back to see who it was, he was all the more surprised.

“O, he is a great sage! Of what benefit will I be to him?” And before he could think further, Swamishri had already come near him.

Bhimpura is an utterly backward village in the district of Bharuch. During his visit there Swamishri was staying at the home of the village chief, Chunibhai. It was 11.30 p.m. when Swamishri had finished counselling people. He was about to retire for the night when he decided to visit the backyard. There, he saw a middle-aged man smoking in the open. Swamishri went up to him and affectionately asked him his name. Immediately, the man nervously threw away his bidi.

“My name is Mangal,” he said.

“Wonderful. What a nice name! What do you do here?” Swamishri enquired gently by placing his hand on Mangal’s shoulder.

“I am a servant of the village chief.”

“Do you drink liquor?”

“Never, Maharaj.”

“Do you smoke bidi?”

“Yes, I have to smoke daily.”

“You should give it up,” inspired Swamishri. And then, while explaining to him, he stated, “Smoking is worthless and it will spoil your health. It is not for you, therefore give it up and you’ll be happy. Remember, it has devastating effects on your health and money.”

“Yes Maharaj, you are right,” Mangal acknowledged.

“How many sons do you have?” Swamishri asked out of care and concern for him.

“Two.”

“Do they have any addictions?”

“Yes, they both drink.”

“Bring them to me in the morning. I will put a *kanthi* around their neck and inspire them to give it up. I will also put a *kanthi* around your neck. Then, say the *mala* everyday, give up smoking and you’ll be happy.”

The next day when Mangal came with his two sons, Swamishri welcomed them. He blessed Mangal with two pats on his shoulder and inspired him to take an oath. Mangal responded instantly, and with him, his two sons also gave up their addictions. Thereafter, both father and sons started doing daily puja after their morning bath.

Swamishri’s selfless love has the power to transform people’s lives. For Mangal, the divine dialogue of care and love at midnight opened a new chapter and a fresh dawn in his life; and that of his sons, too!



FROM VICES TO VIRTUES

“God does not differentiate between high and low. However, such distinctions do exist in people because of their karmas. If your karmas are good, then you are virtuous.

“But several addictions and bad habits have become a part of your lives. Subsequently, your huts are as they are and you have been unable to progress. Even though you are people of ordinary means and live in humble huts you will be worthy of respect when you imbibe good values. If you cultivate character, then it will not take long for you to become rich.”

Swamishri’s words stirred the souls of the downtrodden Harijans and Vankars in the village of Bhoj. He had come of his own accord to the community of Harijans residing at the extreme end of the village. Here he gathered them in the middle of the ground hemmed by their ramshackled huts and preached to them about the true purpose of life and moral conduct. Swamishri’s loving words touched the community and they gave up their addictions at his holy feet.

A month passed after this incident. When the festival of Dhuleti arrived, a flock of guests and relatives came to Bhoj with the intention of celebrating it with a liquor party. But when they entered the Harijan ghetto they were surprised to see a small religious gathering in which the Shikshapatri was being read. They saw the festival being celebrated with purity and joy. The guests insisted that they have a liquor party. But the local Harijans refused and replied, “Ever since we have become disciples of Pramukh Swami Maharaj we have stopped drinking altogether.” Their words echoed with pride, joy and satisfaction.

Through Swamishri’s grace, the village of Bhoj, once a ground for binging, had become blessed with virtues.



No COMPLAINTS!

The celebration of the Cultural Festival of India (CFI) in USA, 1991, by the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha showcased the glory of India's ancient heritage. For an entire month, 1.2 million visitors carried with them a lasting impression of India's rich culture and wisdom. High-ranking officials, dignitaries and common people, who visited the festival grounds, also praised Swamishri's divinity and managerial powers.

One evening, after dinner, Swamishri was routinely gargling salt water. After the first gargle Swamishri asked his attendant sadhu, "Is there salt in it?"

"Yes. I refilled the bottle with salt today," the attendant sadhu replied.

Swamishri remained silent and finished gargling all the water. Then the attendant sadhu went to the kitchen to see whether he was right or not. He opened the bottle and it looked like table salt. Then he took a little and tasted it. The tangy, sour taste made him spit it out immediately. It was not salt but citric acid!

Swamishri had not uttered even a single word to reveal the distasteful experience. There was not a word of reproach either, and neither has Swamishri ever mentioned that incident to anyone.

Even today, the attendant sadhu is saddened whenever he remembers Swamishri's tolerance during that incident.



SWAMISHRI'S HEALING TOUCH

Ratansinh, a resident of Radhu village, was suffering from an incurable skin disease. He could not bear the excruciating pain and growing decay in his body. The doctors refused to touch his pus-filled skin. Even his wife and family members would not come near him. Ratansinh could not comprehend as to which of his karmas were responsible for his agony and rejection. Life had become painful and meaningless to him. He had no solution to the depressing thoughts that repeatedly troubled him.

While Ratansinh was spending his days in pain in a hospital in Nadiad, one day, he got news that Pramukh Swami Maharaj had come to see him. His joy knew no bounds. By the time he managed to get up on his bed, Swamishri arrived and sat besides him. Ratansinh was overwhelmed with emotion. Tears rolled from his eyes. Swamishri's care and compassion touched him profoundly. Swamishri began consoling and blessing him gently with his hands, "Don't worry, nothing will happen to you. You will be cured soon!" Ratansinh felt relieved by Swamishri's love and compassion for an ordinary, sick person like him.

A few days later, Ratansinh's disease receded and he recovered fully. Subsequently, Ratansinh felt that his illness was a blessing because he got an opportunity to experience a priceless moment of divine happiness.



AN END TO 200 YEARS OF CONFLICT

The villages of Kukad and Odarka in the district of Bhavnagar were notorious for a conflict that had protracted for 200 years. For generations the Rajput citizens of both villages were hostile to each other and fought bitterly over a piece of disputed pastoral land. Many had died because of the issue. And the volcano of hatred was still active, sometimes spitting its deathly lava to claim a few more lives. For 200 years, the villagers had abstained from drinking each other's water. And every year their hatred grew more and more bitter.

Through the decades, many arbitrators, like the Maharaja of Bhavnagar Krishnakumarsinhji, and British and Indian government officials had tried to resolve the conflict, but they failed. For 200 years the cauldron of hate and revenge remained simmering as many more lost their lives.

But the deadlocked situation took a new turn when the transformation of Ramsangh Bapu, a hard-core criminal who wreaked terror in the region of Ghogha near Bhavnagar, took place through his association with Swamishri. Being a resident of Odarka, he expressed his remorse for his sins. He appealed to Swamishri to help resolve the hostility between Odarka and Kukad.

On 12 April 1990, Swamishri visited Odarka and went to the disputed land on its outskirts. Here, Swamishri ceremoniously bathed the memorial stones of those who had been killed in the conflict with *panchamrut*, and water mixed from both villages. Swamishri offered respects to all the stones with *pujan*, chanting of Vedic mantras and *mahapuja*. Prayers were offered for the redemption of all those who had died in the conflict and for an end to the pledge of not drinking water from each other's village. Swamishri told the Darbars to bathe the memorial stones. Then *arti* was performed in the presence of senior members of the

Kshatriya community of Saurashtra.

The occasion climaxed when the Darbars drank water from each other's village offered by Swamishri. Two hundred years of vendetta was dissolved with the blessings of Swamishri. Finally, Swamishri addressed the gathering, "I am very happy today because you have given up your hatred for each other. You have resolved it with an open and compassionate heart. Bhagwan Swaminarayan will bless your villages. To give up past hatred is a sign of nobility. Progress is only possible if one forgets hate. You have pledged to drink water from each other's village, but there is one thing you have to abstain from, and that is drinking liquor.

"The mission of God and His holy Sadhu is to bring people closer to each other. I pray that you attain the true purpose of human birth – liberation, through devotion to God and by helping and serving others."

This historic event of extinguishing the fires of hatred and inspiring springs of love and friendship will forever be etched in the annals of history. Swamishri was extremely happy for the restoration of peace in the hearts of the people of Odarka and Kukad.



RELIEF TO AN ACHING HEART

In 1982, Swamishri was in Leicester and had finished writing letters. He was about to leave for a public assembly when Anandswarup Swami brought Frank.

“Swami, this is Frank. He wishes to talk to you.”

Then Frank narrated a recent tragedy from his life:

“I had a son who was 17-years old. My wife and I took him to a psychiatrist for a minor mental problem. But the psychiatrist declared that he was mad and had him admitted to a mental hospital. Subsequently, my son was terribly shocked. Each time we met him, he reacted strongly by stamping his feet in anguish and crying that he was not mad, and that he should no longer be in the hospital. We consoled him every time. But one day he climbed over the seven feet high hospital wall and escaped. Then he got onto the roof of a neighbouring house, tied a rope around its chimney and hanged himself.”

While narrating the incident Frank broke down.

“From then onwards I have been extremely unhappy and full of grief. My wife is also terribly disturbed. There is no peace in our hearts anymore. We feel he committed suicide because of our mistake. People keep telling us that we did not give him enough love! This makes us feel even more guilty. There is no peace...no peace... I can’t understand what I should do.”

Then Swamishri asked Frank, “Did you give him enough love?”

“Yes Swamiji. We loved him very much.”

“Were there any lapses on your part for his treatment?”

“Not one bit. We had taken all the care and responsibility.”

“Then you are not to blame for his death,” Swamishri consoled. “Whatever God has willed is right. Don’t burden yourself with grief, otherwise you will suffer from tension. Now that he is no more, he is not going to come back. For peace of mind go to

church and pray every Sunday. It was not your son's fault or yours either."

While Anandswarup Swami was explaining to Frank, Swamishri added, "Tell him to offer donations."

Before completing his sentence, Swamishri perceived the surprise on Anandswarup Swami's face and then continued, "Tell him to offer donations to his church."

Frank was pleased by Swamishri's wonderful words.

While leaving, a relieved Frank opined, "Today, my tension has dissolved. I feel peaceful. I have never experienced such tranquillity before."

When Frank left he was immensely relaxed and peaceful. The next day, he told his priest that a great sadhu had come from India. He had blessed him with a lot of mental peace and inspired him to become stronger in his faith.

The church priest was amazed and requested Frank to talk about the great, realized sadhu to the Sunday congregation.

When Frank narrated his experience in church, the congregation felt blessed and inspired.



COMPASSIONATE PRAYERS

In 1990, Swamishri was in London. One night, the attendant sadhu was suddenly awakened from his sleep by a murmuring sound.

But where was this sound coming from despite the entire Swaminarayan mandir complex being quiet and its members asleep at 2.30 am?

After a little while the attendant sadhu recognized the voice. He heard the chanting of the mantra coming from the direction of Swamishri's bed. He saw Swamishri seated on his bed, with eyes closed and hands folded in prayer, chanting the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*.

For a little while, the attendant sadhu whispered the mantra himself but his patience wore down with time. So he asked Swamishri, who was absorbed in chanting, "Bapa! Don't you want to sleep? Why are you chanting and praying now?"

On realizing that his attendant had found out, Swamishri recoiled and remained quiet. Then he answered slowly, "Since there is a famine in Gujarat, I'm praying for rains and the happiness of people and animals."

"When do you pray like this?" the attendant sadhu enquired.

Swamishri did not answer. Only after some persistence did Swamishri reply briefly, "I pray quite often in the night for those who bring their troubles and problems to me during the day."

The attendant sadhu was filled with admiration for Swamishri's compassion and spirit to relieve the pain and suffering of souls.



FAITH IN PRAYER

During March and April 1981, there was a students' agitation against reservations in Amdavad.

On the one hand, Gujarat echoed with the announcement of the Bicentenary Celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and on the other, students were vehemently protesting against the reservation of seats in colleges for scheduled caste students. The sponsors of violence in the agitation had upset the daily tenor of life in many cities of Gujarat.

The 'Swaminarayan Nagar' – a 200-acre spiritual township specially created in Amdavad for the Bicentenary Celebration – provided a refreshing contrast to the unrest. On 12 April 1981, the climax-day of the celebration, Swamishri was interviewed by many media reporters.

One reporter asked, "What have you done to solve the students' agitation in the city?"

"We have prayed for peace," Swamishri answered solemnly.

"But what has your organization done in the streets and by-lanes of the city to solve this issue? Will it be resolved through mere prayer?"

"Yes," Swamishri's voice rang with faith. "I have faith that my prayers will work."

The reporter with little faith was not convinced.

That same night, during the main celebration assembly, Swamishri prayed on the public address system for peace. He said, "I pray to God that may there be peace in the whole of Gujarat and may the political leaders and students come to a compromise." And then Swamishri appealed for peace to the people of Gujarat.

And the very next day, to the surprise and amazement of everyone, the two-month-old agitation was called off by the agitators unconditionally. The daily newspapers on the one hand

printed the interview of Swamishri and on the other the happy news about the end of the students' agitation.

The power of Swamishri's prayers became apparent to the sceptic reporter who had questioned Swamishri.



SWAMISHRI'S WORDS OF WISDOM

- 1 Our wilful or fanciful approach to peace and happiness do not bring happiness. Peace and happiness are possible by treading the path prescribed by God and the holy Sadhu.
- 2 Lakshmiji is Bhagwan Vishnu's wife. If one were to lock up someone's wife, wouldn't it frustrate her? Similarly, one should not lock up Lakshmiji (money) in one's house. By spending Lakshmiji (money) in the service of God one is blessed with happiness.
- 3 If one does not have values in life then it won't take long to lose one's wealth.
- 4 If one is not cautious with a bottle of cooking gas it can explode and kill. One has to be careful with life, too. If one lives according to God's commands then one will be ennobled; but if one is careless by having addictions then one invites ruin upon oneself and spiritual downfall.
- 5 Eating a dry millet bread earned honestly brings peace, instead of earning abundantly through dishonest means.
- 6 This body should not be made into a hell, but into a mandir. The jewels of the body-mandir are compassion, character, satisfaction. What is the point in being smart from the outside and impure from inside? One's birth will be worthwhile when one purifies one's inner self and installs God in one's physical mandir.
- 7 Do not get trapped in superstitions. Excessive love makes one indiscriminate; excessive *rajogun* makes one characterless; and arrogance shatters one's family.
- 8 One who gives is divine, whereas one who has the motive to take another's wealth is a devil. By doing good to others one invites goodness upon oneself.

- 9 Till one does not become pure and pious, one does not get good thoughts and so how can one get nearer to God?
- 10 Bad company benefits no one. There is no progress; be it a village or a home, society or country. If you keep bad company then you will lose your money and name. Therefore, give up bad company and addictions, and keep good company.
- 11 Many say why should one endeavour in this birth in order to reach God? But where did the astronauts train themselves in order to go to the moon? On earth, of course. Similarly, one should realize God and His Sadhu in this human birth.
- 12 You are not employed because of your looks; or the cosmetics, the shoes and the suits you wear. You require a certificate of your qualifications – and your experience counts too. Likewise, God is not pleased by your external appearance. He is pleased by your virtues and the true colour of devotion.
- 13 Can you get diamonds from a hawker who sells onions? Your eyes will burn instead! Similarly, the knowledge of *atma* is found from holy sadhus and no one else.
- 14 The joy you will not find in money, power and luxuries, you'll find in seeing, hearing and doing good to others. This one attains by associating with a bona fide Satpurush.
- 15 Satsang is the soap that cleanses the mind.
- 16 We can never be happy by making others miserable.
In the joy of others lies our own.
In the good of others abides our own.
In the progress of others rests our own.
- 17 When one sees God in everyone then the sentiments of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' are born. Then no one is seen to be different.
- 18 When one is extremely hungry, will diamonds, precious

stones and gold satisfy the hunger? Similarly, the *atma* hungers for peace; and hunger cannot be satisfied through material things. Only an association with a holy Sadhu bestows peace.

19 **Question:** What is your prediction for the future?

Swamishri: The future is going to be good if one worships God and obeys his commands.

Question: Can you tell us about the technology of the 21st century?

Swamishri: If one lives morally and spiritually then one is living in the 21st century. One hears that Satyug is coming, but if one abides by the moral laws and abstains from liquor, stealing and corruption then Satyug is already here. If one lives a pure life then it is Satyug. When man fails to elevate himself personally, even when he enters the 22nd century, it will still be the Stone Age for him.

Question: What are the reasons for religious conflicts?

Swamishri: There is only dharma which inspires humanitarianism, morality and true guidance. Dharma teaches us to be good. The conflicts are due to man's ego and his possessive instinct. Dharma does not teach discord. Religious conflicts are due to politics.

Question: How can world peace be possible?

Swamishri: Peace can be established if one follows dharma and develops mutual tolerance.



GLOSSARY

A

arti

Hindu ritual of waving lighted wicks before the *murti* of God as an act of worship.

atma

The pure *jiva* distinct from the physical, subtle and causal bodies – i.e., distinct from the *indriyas*, the *antahkaran*, worldly desires, or any other traces of *maya*.

antahkaran

Mind.

B

bhagvati diksha

Initiation into the monastic order where a youth is given saffron cloth to wear.

brahmaswarup

‘Form of Brahma.’ Possessing qualities similar to those of Brahma.

D

datan

Thin, soft stick cut from certain trees used for cleaning teeth.

devas

The lower gods.

H

Harina Jan

Devotee of God.

I

indriyas

Senses.

K

kadhi

Soup made of buttermilk, gram flour and spices.

kanthi	Double-threaded necklace, usually made of <i>tulsi</i> beads, received by <i>satsangis</i> upon initiation into the Satsang fellowship, and worn as a sign of their affiliation to God.
khichdi	Spiced boiled rice and lentil grain.

M

mahamantra	A great mantra.
mahapuja	Elaborate worship rituals of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami, <i>muktas</i> , incarnations and deities.
mala	rosary with 108 beads used for chanting God's name.
muktas	Released souls.
murti	Sacred idol of God that is revered and worshipped.
maya	Ignorance, material universe, darkness. One of the five eternal realities.

N

nirlobh	Vow of non-covetousness.
nirman	Vow of humility.
nirvikalp samadhi	Highest state of realization, in which one sees only God and no doubts or distinctions remain whatsoever, i.e., a state of perfect realization.
nishkam	Vow of absolute celibacy.
nissneh	Vow of detachment.
nisswad	Vow of non-taste.

P

panchamrut	Mixture of milk, curd, ghee, honey and sugar used in ritual worship of deities.
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parshad diksha	Initiation into the monastic order where a youth is given white cloth to wear.
patotsav	Anniversary celebration of mandir <i>murti-pratishtha</i> ceremony.
pujan	The act of worshipping.
R	
rajogun	quality of passion
S	
samadhi	Transcendental experience, usually of God or His abode.
sanstha	Organization.
Satpurush	Guru for a spiritual aspirant.
satsang	The practice of spiritually associating with the Satpurush, fellow <i>satsangis</i> , one's own <i>atma</i> and the sacred scriptures of the Satsang fellowship.
satsangi	Member of the Satsang fellowship. One who practises <i>satsang</i> .
seva	Service.
sud	Bright half of each lunar month of the Hindu calendar.
T	
thal	Food devotionally offered to God as a form of <i>bhakti</i> .
U	
upasana	'Sitting near', derived from 'upa' + verb-root 'ās' – meaning to sit near. Philosophical framework outlining the

fundamental principles of a doctrine. Philosophical understanding of the nature of God as well as the mode of worship of God.

V

vicharan

Spiritual travels.

