

KISHORE SATSANG PRARAMBHA

Swaminarayan Satsang Beliefs, Traditions and History

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 1

KISHORE SATSANG PRARAMBHA

Swaminarayan Satsang Beliefs, Traditions and History

Gujarati Text: Kishore M. Dave

Translation: BAPS Sadhus



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Kishore Satsang Prarambha

Swaminarayan Satsang Beliefs, Traditions and History

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

Inspirer: HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Blessing: 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

The Swaminarayan Sampradaya has its unique tradition of worship rituals, festivals and observances. They are based on the Vedic Sanatan (Hindu) Dharma and have been revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan through his teachings and their practical application in his life. By living according to these traditions, devotees can protect themselves from bad company, become ideal *satsangis* and attain ultimate liberation in life.

Basic religious vows of satsang, prayers, *dhun*, puja, *arti*, *thal*, and other practices, along with the life sketches of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, other *parambansas* and devotees are briefly described in this book in lucid language. This book will provide a greater understanding of and attachment to Satsang.

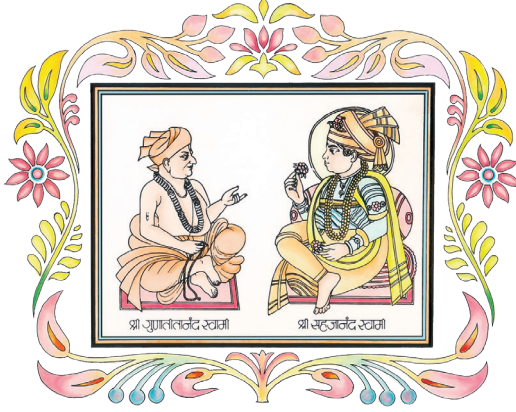
This publication, *Kishore Satsang Prarambha: Swaminarayan Satsang Beliefs, Traditions and History* is an English translation of the Gujarati book *Kishore Satsang Prarambha*.

This book has been designed to serve as part of the curriculum for the Satsang Prarambha Examinations. We thank the BAPS sadhus who have diligently produced this latest edition.

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 Aksharpath

Prayer



Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine mâte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine mâte...
Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānani parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...Ame 1
Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar-Purushottam, Gunātīt gnānanegāishu...Ame 2
Ame sau Shrijitanā putro, Akshare vās amāro chhe;
Svadharmi bhasma choli to, amāre kshobh shāno chhe...Ame 3
Juo sau Motinā Swāmi, na rākhi kāi te khāmi;
Pragat Purushottam pāmi, malyā Gunātīt Swāmi...Ame 4

Meaning: We are all children of Swami; we will die for Swami. We are all youths of Shriji [Maharaj]; we will fight for Shriji [Maharaj].

We are not afraid; we do not worry about our own lives. We do not fear anyone; for we are born to die.

We have begun this sacred endeavour (*yagna*), and we will offer any sacrifice. We will sing the glory of Akshar-Purushottam and the knowledge of Gunatit. We are all the children of Shriji [Maharaj]; Akshar is our abode. We are dedicated to our dharma; we have no sorrows whatsoever.

Everyone see Motibhai's Swami [Shastriji Maharaj]; he has left no shortcomings. We have attained the manifest (*pragat*) Purushottam and Gunatit[anand] Swami.



Bhagwan Swaminarayan

1. Gifts from God

Is it possible for a human being to live for five minutes without air? No! If one tries one will suffocate. Humans cannot think of existing without air even for a minute. But do you know the price of air? It is nothing; it is a free gift from God.

Similarly, we cannot live without water. This is also a free gift from God. We get water from rivers, ponds, wells, and other sources. God sends rain to the earth, with the result that we get water and grains. Cotton is also produced, and we get cloth.

Thus, God gives us air, water, food and clothes. Not only are we indebted to God for the moon and light from the sun, but he also gives us fruits, flowers, vegetables, etc. It is because of all these blessings that we are happy and able to survive on this earth.

Let us think of our body. God has given us a balanced body with two eyes, two ears, a nose, two hands and two legs, all in their proper places. When we see blind, deaf or dumb people we feel sorry for them, and we understand how lucky we are that God has given us a healthy body with all the sense organs in good condition. Thus, God is very kind to us in so many ways. We should therefore, remember him always. We should serve him.

How we can please God?

By going to the mandir.

By having the darshan of God.

By having the darshan of sadhus.

By serving the sadhus and devotees.

In this way God will be pleased. Some people think that there is no need to think of God from childhood; only in old age should one remember God. But that is not true. Dhruv worshipped God in his childhood. Prahlad worshipped God when he was a mere child. The famous devotee, Mirabai, also

worshipped God in her young age. Good habits must be formed in childhood. Thus, if we do not think of God in young age, we will not be able to worship him with real devotion when we become old. Therefore, let us make it a point to think about God from right now.

2. Dhun: Chanting God's Holy Name

You must have heard of Sage Valmiki, the author of the famous Ramayan. Early in life he was a dacoit. He killed people and robbed them of their possessions. He was a wicked person. But even such a sinner became a great sadhu by chanting the name of Bhagwan Shri Ram constantly.

Ajamil was also a shameless sinner. Ajamil had four sons. One day the famous saint Narad came to his house, and told him to chant the name of God. Ajamil at first refused to do so, because he did not believe in God. Then Naradji very cleverly named his youngest son Narayan. And so it happened that whenever Ajamil called his son, he had to say 'Narayan'. When this sinner was on his deathbed the servants of Yama – god of death – appeared before him to take his soul to hell. Ajamil cried out in terror and called out to his son, "Narayan! Narayan!" As soon as the servants of Yama heard the name 'Narayan' they disappeared in panic. Such is the power that lies in the name of God!

During the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, there lived a heartless robber named Joban Pagi whose sole occupation was looting and harassing people. Sometimes he would kill them also. No one had the courage to challenge the dacoit Joban Pagi. Even the king's soldiers were afraid of him. However, his character was completely changed by the influence of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who inspired him to live a pious life. He gave him a rosary and asked him to chant the name of God. Similarly,



Chanting the name of God

we can also change our irreligious thoughts and habits into good and pious ones by our devotion, by chanting the name of God or by prayer.

But how should we offer prayers to God? To whom should we pray?

Sitting in a cross-legged, erect posture and with eyes closed we must concentrate our mind on God and our guru. We must forget worldly affairs. God is always worshipped along with his true devotee. Hence, while remembering God and our guru, we should chant their names every day in the following manner:

Swami ane Narayan.
Akshar ane Purushottam.
Atma ane Paramatma.
Brahma ane Parabrahma.

Meaning:

Swami is Gunatitanand Swami, Narayan is Sahajanand Swami.

Akshar is Gunatitanand Swami, Purushottam is Sahajanand Swami.

Atma is Gunatitanand Swami, Paramatma is Sahajanand Swami.

Brahma is Gunatitanand Swami, Parabrahma is Sahajanand Swami.

Who should we worship? God and his ideal devotee.

That is Swami and Narayan.

Who is God? Sahajanand Swami (Bhagwan Swaminarayan).

Who is his ideal disciple? Gunatitanand Swami.

Who is our guru? Mahant Swami Maharaj (Swami Keshavjivandasji)

Who was his guru? Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Swami Narayanswarupdasji).

Who was his guru? Yogiji Maharaj (Swami Jnanjivandasji).

Who was his guru? Shastriji Maharaj (Swami Yagnapurushdasji).

Who was his guru? Bhagatji Maharaj (Pragji Bhakta).

Who was his guru? Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami.

3. Prarthana: Prayer to God

Bhagwan Swaminarayan is our father. We are his children. If we want nice food, new clothes, good books, we ask our father; and he brings us all these things. But if we want virtues, intellect or wisdom, who will give these to us? These are the gifts of God. If we pray to God with devotion, he will certainly grant us all these boons. With a pure heart and clear conscience we should pray or offer *prarthana* to God. To pray is to ask. Come, let us pray to God now. Sitting cross-legged and closing our eyes, let us concentrate our mind on God. Let us remember God and our guru. With folded hands and in all humility, let us bow down to God and pray:

Shri Hari jay jay jay jay kārī...
Akshardhāmnā Dhāmi tame chho,
Purushottam Parabrahma Hari chho,
Bhaktajanonā bhavbhayhāri...Shri Hari
Pragat Hari guru darshan āpo,
Prabhu tav nāmnā japiye jāpo,
Tav murti nitya bradaye dhāri... Shri Hari
Sadbuddhi sadguna Prabhu āpo,
Abhay kar muj shir par sthāpo,
Vighna sakalne sadya vidāri... Shri Hari
Shāstriji Mahārājnā guna nitya gāou,
Yogiji Mahārājnā guna nitya gāou,
Pramukh Swāminā guna nitya gāou,
Mahant Swāminā guna nitya gāou,
Tav charanomā shish namāou,
Āshish vachan dyo ānandkārī... Shri Hari

Meaning:

O Sahajanand Swami! You are ever victorious. You are the supreme Lord of Akshardham. You are Purushottam, the best amongst all men. You are Parabrahma, beyond Brahma. You remove the painful cycle of births and deaths for your devotees.

O Sahajanand Swami! You are ever present on this earth, so grant me your darshan. O God, may we always chant your name, and daily remember your *murti* in our hearts.

O Sahajanand Swami! We pray to you to bless us with wisdom and virtues. Bless us by placing your hands on our heads, so that all our fears be warded off and our difficulties removed.

We constantly sing the praises and the virtues of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, and bow our heads down at your lotus feet. Please bless us so that we can be happy.

This is how we should regularly offer our prayer to God. He will bless us with wisdom and virtues.

4. Parabrahma Purushottam Sahajanand Swami

Sahajanand Swami is our God and is also known as Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Let us, in brief, learn about his life.

Sahajanand Swami was born on 3 April 1781 (Chaitra *sud* 9, Samvat 1837) in a village called Chhapaiya, near Ayodhya, in Uttar Pradesh, North India. His childhood name was Ghanshyam and he was born in a Brahmin family. His father's name was Dharmadev and his mother's was Bhaktimata. He had two brothers, the eldest was called Rampratapbhai and the youngest was Ichharambhai. His parents were very devout. They were very religious minded and had deep faith in God.

Ghanshyam performed many miracles in his childhood. Everyone loved Ghanshyam, and because of his divine powers the village people began to think that this child must be an incarnation of God. Once, when Ghanshyam was 10 years old, he went to Kashi with his father to attend a conference of learned pundits. He defeated them all in a debate on philosophy. Everyone was amazed at the knowledge and intellect of this young boy. All the same, to his parents he was a very obedient son. Ghanshyam would spend the whole day in worshipping God. In Ayodhya he passed much of his time in the mandirs. He was least interested in playing or in gossiping with boys of his age.

One day, after the passing away of his parents, he left home. Renouncing the world at the tender age of 11, he put on the garb of a celibate and began his *vicharan* in the forest. Everyone now called him Nilkanth Varni. Wherever he went, he sanctified rivers, valleys, lakes and forests. He was not afraid of the wild animals of the forest or of the terrible forces of nature – heat, cold or rain. He charmed many sadhus and *rishis* by his divine personality and bestowed upon them *moksha*. Nilkanth Varni exposed the hypocrisy of many pseudo-sadhus. He granted

salvation to 900,000 *rishis*, who were performing austerities in the Himalayas. He learnt Ashtanga Yoga from a great sadhu called Gopal Yogi. In return, Nilkanth Varni blessed Gopal Yogi and granted him *moksha*.

After going around the whole of India and visiting many mandirs, pilgrim places and religious institutions, he arrived in Saurashtra. In the small village of Loj was the ashram of Ramanand Swami. In that ashram, Nilkanth Varni met Muktanand Swami. He asked Muktanand Swami five questions regarding *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahma and Parabrahma and received the correct answers from him. Hence, Nilkanth Varni decided to stay there. At that time, Ramanand Swami was in Kutch. After a few months, he came to Piplana. Nilkanth met him. Ramanand Swami was pleased and said, "I am just a drum-beater, but the lead player is this Brahmachari Nilkanth." Shortly thereafter, Ramanand Swami gave him *diksha* and renamed him as Sahajanand Swami. Devotees used to call him Maharaj or Shriji Maharaj.

Ramanand Swami selected Sahajanand Swami from amongst all his disciples and appointed him as his successor. Sahajanand Swami was so compassionate that he asked his guru for two boons or blessings, "If your devotee is destined to suffer the distress inflicted by the sting of one scorpion, may the distress of the sting of millions of scorpions befall every pore of my body, but no pain should afflict your devotee. And if the begging bowl is written in the fate of your devotee, may that begging bowl come to me; but on no account should your devotee suffer from lack of food or clothing." Touched by the compassion of Sahajanand Swami, Ramanand Swami readily blessed him and granted him these two boons.

After Ramanand Swami passed away, Bhagwan Swaminarayan soon introduced the chanting of the 'Swaminarayan' mantra. He also performed miracles by using his divine powers. He

would bless human beings and even birds, animals and fish with samadhi. During samadhi, people had darshan of the deities they worshipped. As a result, many began to worship Bhagwan Swaminarayan as the supreme God. Hearing about his great glory, people desirous of acquiring *moksha* came to him from all parts of India. Many leading sadhus were given *paramhansa diksha*. In a single night he initiated 500 *paramhansas*. All these *paramhansas* spread the message and the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in various towns and villages.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan also undertook the task of social reform by engaging in social and relief work. During times of famine, he started many charity kitchens where free food was distributed to the needy. He made arrangements for the digging of wells and tanks to provide water. He stopped the practice of offering animals in sacrifices (*yagnas*) and performed them in a non-violent manner (*ahimsak yagnas*). He stopped many vile customs, especially prevalent among the people belonging to the more underprivileged strata of society. He arranged for women to be educated.

He was instrumental in the construction of six beautiful mandirs in Gujarat. He inspired many sadhus to learn the Sanskrit language and asked them to write religious books. These sadhus have written many devotional songs (*kirtans*) in Gujarati also. Bhagwan Swaminarayan inspired the sadhus to rise above temptations from women and wealth and shun worldly pleasures. For their spiritual benefit he formulated strict rules of moral conduct. They were not to think of material comforts, and were expected to observe eight-fold celibacy. He gave the Shikshapatri to his followers, so that they could attain ultimate *moksha* from its observance.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan instructed his followers to go to Junagadh for a month every year to listen to the discourses of Gunatitanand Swami. He also asked them to implicitly honour

the commands of Gopalanand Swami. He established two main centres in Gujarat, one in Vartal and the other in Ahmedabad. He installed his own *murti* in the mandir at Vartal. Bhagwan Swaminarayan spent 25 years of his life in Gadhada in the *darbar* of Dada Khachar. After serving humanity and blessing innumerable disciples, Sahajanand Swami returned to his divine abode, Akshardham, on 1 June 1830 (Jeth *sud* 10, Samvat 1886). On his memorial shrine in Lakshmi Vadi, Gadhada, a beautiful mandir has been erected in his divine memory.

5. Daily Puja

We eat every day. We bathw every day. And we sleep every day. Just as we go through this daily routine every day without fail, and spend time on it, we should also spend some time in worshipping God every day. We must make it a point to perform puja every morning after bathing. We should not eat anything nor even drink water before performing puja. Doing puja early in the morning makes us feel holy and our mind pure and peaceful. The whole day passes in good thoughts. Thinking of God early in the morning makes us feel happy. The great King Ambrish, in spite of his busy schedule, used to spend hours in performing his puja.

Let us see how we should perform our daily puja.

- A devotee should have his or her own puja set. Worship before a *ghar mandir* or another *murti* of God is not considered as daily personal puja.
- Breakfast or even water cannot be taken before puja is completed.
- Concentrate whilst performing daily puja. Do not talk with others.
- Perform your puja daily and take it with you whenever you are away from home.



Personal daily puja

1. Preparations

- Awake early every morning. After brushing your teeth and visiting the bathroom, bathe or shower.
- Do not put on your normal work or school clothes, wrap a towel or wear shorts. Wear either a dhoti and upper cloth, *lengho* and *jabbho* or washed clothes.
- Choose a quiet place to perform puja.
- Spread your *asan* and sit facing north or east.
- Lay another *asan* and place the *murtis*, Shikshapatri, Satsang Diksha, *mala*, *gaumukhi* and *tilak-chandlo* set.

- Never interchange your *asan* with the one you use for the *murtis*.

2. Tilak-Chandlo

- Females should apply a kumkum *chandlo* on their foreheads. Males should apply a *tilak-chandlo*.
- On the little mortar squeeze a few drops of water. Make a sandalwood paste that is not too watery or too thick. Spread it evenly on the *tilakyu*.
- Place the 'U' of the *tilakyu* between the eyebrows and carefully slide it up the forehead.
- In the middle of the *tilak*, imprint a red *chandlo* of *kumkum*.
- On the outer sides of both upper arms and the chest, imprint the *tilak* and a *chandlo* of sandalwood paste.

3. Dhyān – Meditation

- Close your eyes and sit in an upright posture. One can sit in either *padmasan* or *siddhasan*. Then perform *pranayam* for a few minutes.
- Contemplate on the *atma* telling yourself mentally: "I am *atma*, I am not this body. I am *chaitanyarup*, I am *brahma* and Paramatma Bhagwan Purushottam resides eternally within me."
- Recite the mantra: '*Aksharam aham, Purushotam dāsosmi – Akshar evo hu, Purushottamno dās chhu.*' Meaning: I am *akshar*, a humble servant of Purushottam.
- Then perform *mansi* puja, imagining God and guru to be before you. Gently awaken them. Lead them through the daily morning routine. Offer them clothes, ornaments, garlands, *arti*, *thal*, etc.

4. Ahvan – Invocation

- Lay out the *murtis* as shown in Murti Layout 1 or 2 (see page 12).

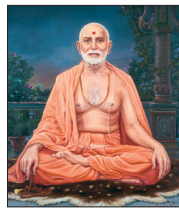
Murti Layout 1



Bhagatji Maharaj



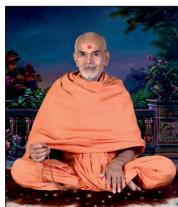
Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



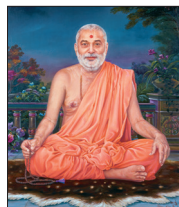
Shastriji Maharaj



Yogiji Maharaj



Mahant Swami Maharaj



Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Murti Layout 2



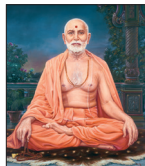
Yogiji Maharaj



Bhagatji Maharaj



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



Shastriji Maharaj



Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Mahant Swami Maharaj

Before you position each *murti* touch it to both eyes and heart in respect.

- Now ask God and guru to grace their presence in the puja by reciting the following Ahvan Mantra:

*Uttishtha Sahajānanda Shri-Hare Purushottama;
Gunātītā'kshara brahmann-uttishtha krupayā guro.
Āgamyatām hi puṣārtham āgamyatām mad-ātmataha;
Sānnidhyād darshanād divyāt saubhāgyam vardhate mama.*

Meaning:

“O Sahajanand Shri Hari! O Purushottam! O Aksharbrahma Gunatit gurus! Please shower compassion [upon me] and awaken. Please come forth from my *atma*, to accept my puja. I become more blessed due to your divine presence and darshan.”

5. Mantra Jap – Mala

- Whilst doing darshan of the *murtis* (when seated) turn at least five *malas*.
- Hold the *mala* in your right hand, resting it on the second finger with the first finger held out straight not touching the beads. With the thumb turn each bead in a clockwise direction and chant ‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan’.
- Start each rosary from the largest bead (*mer*). On reaching the largest bead and tuft, turn the *mala* around and start chanting again.
- It is preferable to turn the *mala* by keeping it in a *gaumukhi* – a right-angled *mala* bag.

6. Tapni Mala

- Then stand on one leg with the other crossed over it at the knee. Hold up both hands.
- Keep your eyes open, do darshan of the *murtis* and turn one *mala*.

- Think of Nilkanth Varni. Resolve to offer devotion to God no matter what the hardship.

7. Pradakshina – Circumambulation

- Still turning the *mala*, walk clockwise slowly around the puja 11 times with the feeling that God and the Satpurush are the centre of your life.
- As you complete each *pradakshina*, bow in respect to the *murtis*. Do not let go of the *mala* while doing this.

8. Dandvat Pranam – Prostration

- *Dandvats* symbolize our total surrender to God. We become humble.
- Males should perform five *sashtang dandvats*, fully stretched out on the ground.
- *Sashtang dandvat* means offering prostration to God by touching the eight parts of the body to the ground: head, chest, nose, arms, legs, sight, speech and mind.
- Females should sit and offer five *panchang pranams*.
- Perform a sixth *dandvat* or *pranam* asking for forgiveness for any mistakes that may have been made, such as hurting another's feelings through mind, speech or actions.

9. Prarthana – Prayer

- Now sit down and offer a *thal* in *mansi* before offering prayers.
- Then offer prayers:

He Mahārāj! He Swāmi! Aham-mamatva-rupi māyā thaki, indriyo-antahkaran-rupi shatru thaki tathā darek prakārnā kusang thaki māri rakshā karjo. Āpmā ane āpnā bhaktomā akhand divyabbhāv rabe, nirdoshbuddhi rabe, ātmabuddhi thāy ane āpni āgnā pramāne vartāy tevu bal āpjo.

Meaning:

“O Maharaj! O Swami! Please protect me from *maya* in the

form of attachment to ‘I’ and ‘Mine’; enemies in the form of the *indriyas* and *antahkaran*; and all forms of *kusang*. May I forever maintain *divyabbhav*, *nirdosh buddhi* and intense attachment to you and your devotees. And please grant me the strength to observe all your commands.”

- You can pray for any other matters, such as health, family or studies.
- Many also pray for the continuing good health of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

10. Punaragaman Mantra and Shikshapatri

- Now thank God and gurus for being present in your puja and for accepting your puja. Ask forgiveness for any mistakes you may have made during puja.
- Recite the Punaragaman Mantra, where you ask God to return to his abode and in your heart, and to come again the next morning:

*Bhaktyaiva divya-bhāvena puja te sam-anushthitā,
Gacchhā'tha tvam mad-ātmānam Akshara-Purushottama.*

Meaning:

“O Purushottam Narayan together with Aksharbrahma! I have performed your puja with devotion and *divyabbhav*. Now, please reside within my *atma*.”

- Pick up the *murtis* one by one.
- Then read five verses from the Shikshapatri and five verses from the Satsang Diksha.

11. After Puja

- Pack away the puja neatly, placing it in a safe and clean location.
- Then do darshan of Thakorji in your *ghar mandir*.
- Offer *panchang pranam* by bowing down to your parents and greet them and all others present by saying, ‘Jay Swaminarayan’.



The angry father overturned the cart

6. Brave Child Devotee

The sadhus of Bhagwan Swaminarayan travelled from place to place encouraging people to follow the moral path prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Once, in the district of Jamnagar, a farmer's young son, impressed by their sincerity accepted the vows of Satsang (*panch vartman*). He prayed to God every day, offered puja, applied *tilak chandlo* to his forehead, and daily visited the mandir.

His father, however, was unconvinced. He did not like his son's new beliefs and code of conduct. However, the son was a true *satsangi*. He told his son not to worship Swaminarayan. Daily his father scolded him because of his puja rituals. He tried persuasion, then threats, before finally gave him a sound thrashing. However, the boy would not yield. He eagerly pursued his devotion to God.

One day his father became so angry that he threatened him with death.

“If you chant the name of Swaminarayan any more,” he shouted, “I will kill you.”

But he was a brave boy. He calmly replied, “Come what may, I will never give up the practice of worshipping Swaminarayan, who is God to me.”

The irate father then tied his son to the yoke of his cart and told him, “If you remove your *kanthi*, I will let you go. Otherwise, I will kill you here and now by raising the yoke of this cart.”

The son replied, “I will never take off my *kanthi*, nor leave my devotion to Swaminarayan even if I have to die.”

The angry father at once raised the cart. Chanting ‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan’ the son died and went to Akshardham – the abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

In Gadhada, Bhagwan Swaminarayan heard this tragic story. He said, “This boy is indeed a true devotee. Prahlad could continue to have faith in God, as God protected him from the many cruel ordeals he had to endure. This farmer’s humble son, however, was not so protected. Still, he did not flinch from his faith. His father is like Hiranyakashyapu.”

There is a moral in this anecdote which we must imbibe. We should never give up our faith or devotion to God, whether we are protected or not. That is the hallmark of a true devotee.

7. Gangama

A Brahmin woman named Gangama lived in the small town of Jetalpur near Ahmedabad in Gujarat. She was a disciple of Atmanand Swami, the guru of Ramanand Swami. Ramanand Swami was the guru of Sahajanand Swami. Whenever Bhagwan Swaminarayan came to Gangama’s home in Jetalpur, she used to welcome him with such affectionate words, “Oh, my nephew, my son! Welcome, welcome to my house.” Bhagwan

Swaminarayan would reply in the same affectionate tone, “Yes my dear mother, I have come.”

Thus, Gangama loved Bhagwan Swaminarayan with motherly affection. However, she did not know him as God manifest. Once, Ramanand Swami appeared before Gangama in a dream. He told her, “Sahajanand Swami is the supreme God. He is the Lord of Akshardham and I had come due to his command. I was just a drum-beater, but the actual player, the real guru is this Sahajanand Swami. You should not address him as son or nephew. You should ask for his forgiveness for failing to recognize him as God. Spread the mattress and pillow that you reserved for me,



Gangama would prepare meals for Shriji Maharaj

and have him sit on it. Then I will be pleased upon you. He will come to your place in a short time. Welcome him with all the adoration with which you would welcome God.”

A few days later, Gangama heard that Bhagwan Swaminarayan was visiting her town. She gathered all the devotees, and with great pomp and splendour, went to receive Shriji Maharaj. She asked her daughter to carry the auspicious coconut-bearing *kalash* on her head. Taking *kumkum* and singing holy songs, all of them went to receive Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Riding on the mare, Manki, Maharaj arrived in Jetalpur. He was wearing rich garments and ornaments. It was a glorious scene. All the disciples prostrated and offered *pujan* in homage. The women expressed their devotion by bowing with folded hands from a distance. With the beating of drums and in full splendour, Shriji Maharaj entered the town.

First, he went to the house of Gangama. She requested, “Maharaj, please sit on this cushion laid on the cot.”

Maharaj asked her, “Address me as, ‘My son, my nephew’ as before. Only then will I sit on the seat.”

Gangama replied, “I won’t call you that from now on.”

“Then I too will not sit on the seat!” said Maharaj firmly.

Gangama said, “O Maharaj! Until now I used to address you like that out of ignorance. But Ramanand Swami appeared in my dream and told me that you are God. Please forgive me for all my mistakes and take a seat on the cot.”

The almighty God knew everything through his all-knowing powers. He said smilingly, “Yes, I pardon you. But I very much prefer you addressing me as your son.” Bhagwan Swaminarayan then sat on the cushioned seat. Gangama was now fully convinced and had complete faith in the supreme glory of Maharaj.

In Jetalpur, Gangama would prepare delicious food for Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and always served him with love and devotion. Bhagwan Swaminarayan also enjoyed her meals



Akhandanand Swami thought that his death was near

very much, especially the rice and *dal* prepared by Gangama. Wherever Maharaj went to celebrate festivals, Gangama also went to cook meals for him.

At times Gangama used to keep a cooking grate and all the provisions needed to prepare meals for Maharaj in a basket. She would carry the basket on her head with the rice and *dal* simmering inside and walk behind Maharaj. When Bhagwan Swaminarayan took a break during a journey, she would serve him a full meal of rice, *dal*, rotis, vegetables, and other items. With due care and devotion she would thus prepare meals for Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj was greatly pleased by the love, devotion and loyalty with which she served him.

8. Akhandanand Swami

In accordance with the instructions of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, his sadhus conducted vicharan in many regions to spread his holy message. They had to undergo many hardships while carrying

out their mission. Once, Akhandanand Swami was travelling alone. As his name suggests, he was always happy. In spite of the many ordeals he suffered, his face always beamed with a glow of happiness. He derived great happiness in remembering Maharaj's *murti* and in chanting his holy name. He was a true sadhu.

Once, when he was travelling he lost his way and found himself in a dark forest. There was no sign of any human habitation. The forest was dark, dense and wild. As he walked he saw a ferocious tiger.

Swamiji thought, "Certainly, I will die today. The tiger will definitely devour me. But one day or another I will have to go to God's abode. So why not today? And my body will provide food for the tiger."

With these thoughts in mind, he proceeded without any fear. But God protects his devotees. How can he let them down or even bear to see them suffer?

Akhandanand Swami thought, "I am *atma*. I am immortal. Why should I fear death? My name is Akhandanand. Who can snatch away my happiness?" Emboldened by these thoughts, Swami stood in front of the tiger. The tiger lifted its paw as if to strike him. Akhandanand Swami remained steadfast in remembering Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Suddenly, as if answering a call from above, the ferocious animal dropped its paw. The tiger then fell at the feet of Akhandanand Swami as if it was acknowledging its master! After a short while the tiger rose and slowly disappeared into the forest. In this way, Shriji Maharaj protected Akhandanand Swami.

9. Arti

Ramanand Swami was the guru of Shriji Maharaj. He was also the guru of Muktanand Swami. Before Ramanand Swami decided to return to the divine abode, he declared Shriji Maharaj



Perform arti every morning and evening

as his spiritual successor, and instructed all his followers to remain faithful to the commands of Shriji Maharaj. Muktanand Swami, however, remained very much attached to Ramanand Swami. After Ramanand Swami passed away, Muktanand Swami became very sad. Shriji Maharaj decided to remove the grief from the heart of Muktanand Swami.

Once, Shriji Maharaj was in the village of Kalvani. Early one morning, he and the other sadhus were going to bathe in a nearby river. Muktanand Swami was following them close behind. Suddenly, there was a flash of light, and Muktanand Swami had darshan of his guru Ramanand Swami. With tears in his eyes, Muktanand Swami bowed to his guru.

Ramanand Swami asked his disciple, “Why are you so sad and unhappy? Had I not told you that I was merely a drum-beater, and the master player would arrive? Shriji Maharaj is the real star. Accept him as your guru and please him. Only then will I be pleased on you.” Muktanand Swami touched Ramanand Swami’s feet and resolved to obey his command. His

grief disappeared and his heart throbbed with inexpressible joy.

After bathing in the river, he came to the mandir, prepared a garland of flowers and put it around the neck of Shriji Maharaj. Pledging his loyalty and devotion, he proclaimed, “You are God in the form of a *sadguru*.” As an expression of his faith, he performed the *arti* with lighted wicks. The song he composed instantly in his praise at this time is known as *arti*. This holy *arti* fills our hearts with divine light.

Jay Sadguru Swāmi, (Prabhu) Jay Sadguru Swāmi;

Sahajānand dayālu (2), balavant Bahunāmi...Jay

Charan-saroj tamāra vandu kar jodi,

(Prabhu) vandu kar jodi;

Charane chitt dharyāthi (2), dukh nākhyā todi...Jay...1

Nārāyan sukh-dātā, dvij-kul tanu dhāri,

(Prabhu) dvij-kul tanu dhāri;

Pāmar patit uddhāryā (2), aganit narnāri...Jay...2

Nitya nitya nautam līlā kartā Avināshi,

(Prabhu) kartā Avināshi;

Adsath tirath charane (2), koti Gayā Kāshi...Jay...3

Purushottam pragat nu je darshan karshe,

(Prabhu) je darshan karshe;

Kāl karma thi chhuti (2), kutumb sahiti tarshe...Jay...4

Ā avsar karunā nidhi, karunā bahu kidhi,

(Vāle) karunā bahu kidhi;

Muktānand kahe mukti (2), sugam kari sidhi...Jay...5

In the *arti*, Muktanand Swami extols the glory of Sahajanand Swami, saying that he is very kind and all-powerful. He destroys all the sufferings of those who seek refuge at his lotus feet. Born in a Brahmin family, he has uplifted innumerable wicked and fallen people from the clutches of *maya*. He is eternal, has been perpetually performing divine *lila* and all the holy places reside at his sacred feet. Whosoever shall have darshan of this *pragat* Purushottam shall be set free from the bondages of *kal* and karma,

and attain the heavenly bliss, together with their family. This Sadguru Swami [Sahajanand Swami] is an ocean of compassion and has made the ultimate *mukti* easily accessible to all.

After Muktanand Swami composed this *arti*, during Bhagwan Swaminarayan's lifetime and even afterwards, many great poets – sadhus and devotees – of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya devoutly composed other *artis* which have also become widely known.

In accordance with this devotional tradition, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj had an *arti* about the glory of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, that is, Bhagwan Swaminarayan together with his ideal devotee, the Gunatit guru, composed by Bhadrashdas Swami and other scholar swamis. This new *arti* was adopted for daily recital by all BAPS devotees during the birth celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 2018.

*Jay Swāminārāyan, Jay Akshar-Purushottam,
Akshar-Purushottam jay, darshan sarvottam...
Jay Swāminārāyan...
Mukta anant supujit, sundar sākāram,
Sarvopari karunākar, mānav tanudbhāram...
Jay Swāminārāyan...1
Purushottam Parabrahma, Shri Hari Sahajānand,
Aksharbrahma anādi, Gunātītānand...
Jay Swāminārāyan...2
Prakat sadā sarvakartā, param muktidātā,
Dharma ekāntik sthāpak, bhakti paritrātā...
Jay Swāminārāyan...3
Dāsbhāv divyatā saba, brahmarupe priti,
Subradbhāv alaukik, sthāpit shubb riti...
Jay Swāminārāyan...4
Dhanya dhanya mama jivan, tav sharanesufalam,
Yagnapurush pravartita, siddhāntam sukhadam...
Jay Swāminārāyan,
Jay Akshar-Purushottam, Jay Swāminārāyan...5*

O Swaminarayan! Praise to you! O Akshar-Purushottam!
Praise to you!

O Akshar-Purushottam! Praise to you! Your darshan is
supreme...

He [Bhagwan Swaminarayan] is worshipped by countless
muktas (liberated souls), possesses a [divine] form, and is
splendid.

He, who is supreme and bestows compassion [on all],
manifested [on earth] with a [divine] human form... 1

Purushottam Parabrahma is Shri Hari Sahajanand,
The eternal Aksharbrahma is Swami Gunatitanand... 2

[Bhagwan Swaminarayan] is always manifest, the all-doer,
and the bestower of ultimate liberation.

He is the establisher of *ekantik* dharma and the protector of
bhakti (devotion)... 3

Devout humility with [an understanding of all to be] divine,
offering [loving] devotion upon becoming *brahmarup*, and
divine amity; [these] auspicious means he established... 4

[O Akshar-Purushottam!] My life is blessed! It has become
fruitful at your feet.

This doctrine [established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan
and] propagated by Yagnapurush [Shastriji Maharaj], bestows
ultimate happiness.

O Swaminarayan! Praise to you! O Akshar-Purushottam!
Praise to you!

O Swaminarayan! Praise to you!... 5

After *arti*, offer prostrations before the *murtis* of God and
recite the following *shlokas* in praise of God and gurus:

*Antaryāmi parātparam hita-karam, sarvopari Shri-Hari,
Sākāram Parabrahma sarva-sharanam, kartā dayā-sāgaram. 1
Ārādhyam mama ishtadeva prakatam, sarvāvatāri Prabhu,
Vandedukha-haramsadāsukha-karam, ShriSwāminārāyanam. 2*

*Sākshād Aksharadhāma divya paramam, sevāratam murtimān,
 Sarvādhāra sadā sva-roma vivare, brahmānda-koti-dharam. 3
 Bhakti dhyāna kathā sadaiva karanam, brahma-sthiti-dāyakam,
 Vande Aksharabrahma pāda-kamalam, Gunātītānandanam. 4
 Shriman-nirguna-murti sundara tanu, adhyātma-vārtā-ratam,
 Dehātita dashā akhanda bhajanam, shāntam kshamā-sāgaram. 5
 Āgnā-pālana-tatparam guna-grahi, nirdosha-murti swayam,
 Vande Prāgajī-Bhaktā-pāda-kamalam, brahmaswarupam gurum. 6
 Shuddhopāsana mandiram surachanam, siddhānta-rakshāparam,
 Sanshā-sthāpana divya-kārya-karanam, sevā-mayam jivanam. 7
 Nishhā nirbhayatā sukashta-sahanam, dhairyam kshamā-dhāranam,
 Shāstri Yagnapurushadāsa-charanam, vande pratāpi gurum. 8
 Vāni amruta-ṭurna harsha-karani, sanjivani mādhuri,
 Divyam drushṭi-pradāna divya hasanam,*

divyam shubham kirtanam. 9

*Brahmānanda prasanna sneha-rasitam, divyam krupā-varshanam,
 Yogiji guru Jñānajivana pade, bhāve sadā vandanam. 10
 Vishve vaidika dharma marma mahimā, satsanga vistarakam,
 Vātsalyam karunā aho jana-jane, ākarshanam adbhutam. 11
 Dāsatvam guru-bhakti nitya bhajanam, samvāditā sādhubā,
 Nārāyanaswarupa Swāmi Pramukham, vande gurum muktidam. 12
 Divyam saumya-mukhāravinda saralam, netre ami-varshanam,
 Nirdosham mahimā-mayam subrudayam,*

shāntam samam nishchalam. 13

*Nirmānam mrudu divyabhāva satatam, vāni shubhā nirmalā,
 Vande Keshavajivanam mama gurum, Swāmi Mahantam sadā. 14
 Swāminārāyan Swāminārāyan Swāminārāyan Swāminārāyan...*

Meaning:

He who is present in all as the all-controller, transcending even Akshar; the benefactor of all; the supreme Shri Hari.

Forever with a [divine] form, Parabrahma is the refuge for all, the all-doer and the ocean of compassion. 1

He who is worthy of being worshipped, my choicest deity and forever manifest on this earth; the cause of all incarnations and all-powerful.

I bow to [Bhagwan] Shri Swaminarayan, who removes all sorrows and forever bestows bliss to all. 2

He who is the divine, supreme abode, Akshardham; and engaged in *seva* through his personified form [in Akshardham].

He who is the support of all creation and forever beholds millions of universes in each of his pores. 3

He who continuously engages in devotion, meditation and spiritual discourses; and elevates one to the *brahmic* state.

I bow at the lotus-like feet of that Aksharbrahma, Gunatitanand [Swami]. 4

He whose resplendent *murti* is [full of virtues and] devoid of all *mayik* qualities; whose form is attractive; and who is engrossed in spiritual talks.

He who is beyond the body and continuously absorbed in devotion; calm and an ocean of forgiveness. 5

He who instantly complies with all commands; imbibes the virtues of others; and is himself totally free of flaws.

I bow at the lotus-like feet of that Brahmaswarup guru, Pragji Bhakta [Bhagatji Maharaj]. 6

He who created grand mandirs dedicated to the pure upasana, preserving the doctrine [of Akshar-Purushottam as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan].

He who established the [BAPS] Sanstha and accomplished divine works; and whose life is dedicated to *seva*. 7

He who possesses faith, is fearless and tolerates great hardships; is ever-patient and forgiving.

I bow at the feet of that all-powerful guru, Shastri Yagnapurushdas [Shastriji Maharaj]. 8

He whose speech is full of nectar, gives joy, is life-giving and is sweet.

He who bestows all with a divine perspective, has a divine laugh; whose devotion is divine and auspicious. 9

He who is absorbed in the bliss of God, is content, is full of affection and showers divine grace.

I forever lovingly bow at the feet of that guru Yogiji [Maharaj], Jnanjivan[das]. 10

He who spreads the glory of the essence of Vedic dharma and Satsang throughout the world.

He who has affection and compassion [for all beings], and to whom people are extraordinarily drawn. 11

He who is humble, devoted to his gurus and always absorbed in devotion; he who engages in harmonious dialogue with everyone and is saintly.

I bow to that guru who grants *moksha*, Narayanswarup[das], also known as Pramukh Swami [Maharaj]. 12

He whose lotus-like face is divine and serene; who is considerate; and whose eyes shower the nectar of compassion.

He who is flawless, contemplates on the glory of God and guru, and is kind-hearted; calm, equipoised and steadfast. 13

He who is humble, gentle and constantly sees divinity in all; whose words are beneficial and pure.

I forever bow to my guru, Keshavjivan[das], Mahant Swami [Maharaj]. 14

In this way, all should sing the *arti* while performing the *arti* – moving a lighted lamp in one’s right hand in a clockwise circular movement in front of the *murtis* of Shriji Maharaj and our guru *parampara* and ringing a small bell with one’s left hand. Following the *arti*, sing the *stuti shlokas* daily in the morning and evening. All family members should get together every morning and evening to perform *arti* in one’s *ghar mandir*.

10. Brave Bhaguji

Bhaguji was the personal attendant of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He was very devoted and brave. He had forsaken everything, including his home, village and wealth, and chosen to remain in the *seva* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Despite his small stature, he was very brave. In those days people were harassed by dacoits and thieves. Maharaj used to engage brave watchmen like Bhaguji to protect the fields of Dada Khachar. Even hardened robbers were afraid of Bhaguji. They dared not enter the fields when guarded by this brave man. No robber was prepared to face Bhaguji in a fight.

Once, the Darbar of Bhadli State, Bhan Khachar, proclaimed that he would give a piece of land and a handsome reward to any person who was willing to kill Bhaguji and bring his severed head to him. But no one was bold enough to fight with this brave lion, Bhaguji. Ultimately, two brothers from Sindh, Khabad and Mataro, took up the challenge. They came to attack Bhaguji when he was guarding the fields.

Bhaguji confronted Khabad and said, “You strike first.” Khabad attacked Bhaguji so fiercely that he was severely wounded. After tending to his own wound, Bhaguji retaliated and killed Khabad with a single blow. Mataro then took up the fight. The struggle went on for some time. There were 18 wounds on Bhaguji’s body. Despite the wounds, Bhaguji attacked Mataro so fiercely that he ran for his life.

Nevertheless, Bhaguji was seriously wounded, and there was little hope for his survival. Maharaj himself looked after him. He dressed the wounds. He also stopped the practice of beating drums, bells, during the *arti* in the village because it would awaken the valour of Bhaguji. If he got up, the stitches on the wound may open up. Bhagwan Swaminarayan used to come daily to visit him.



Bhagwan Swaminarayan personally nursed Bhaguji's wounds

Once, the barber who was dressing Bhaguji's wounds was bribed by Bhaguji's enemies to harm and kill him. The barber, out of greed, used pigeon dropping to dress the wounds that subsequently burned. At the same time somebody started ringing the bells loudly in order to upset Bhaguji and worsen his condition. Bhaguji suffered severe pain. On hearing of this, Bhagwan Swaminarayan immediately came to see Bhaguji. He understood at once that somebody had plotted to kill Bhaguji. Maharaj scolded the barber, who then confessed that he had been offered a piece of land to murder Bhaguji.

Maharaj asked Sachchidanand Swami to take care of Bhaguji and if necessary defy the god of death, Yama, as he wanted to give him a new life. Maharaj's protection worked. Within a short time Bhaguji recovered.

When the King of Bhavnagar, Bapu Vajesinh, heard about the bravery of Bhaguji, he thought of recruiting him for his army. He called Bhaguji on the pretext of honouring him and offered, "I will pay you a salary of 300 rupees a month and



Samat Patel sold everything and offered the money to Shriji Maharaj

give you charge of 500 mounted soldiers in the army.” Bhaguji, however, declined the handsome offer.

Bhaguji replied, “I want nothing. I only want Bhagwan Swaminarayan. I have given up everything and all my wealth only for him. I want to spend the rest of my life in the *seva* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.” Vajesinh Darbar was greatly impressed with the reply and admired him even more.

11. Samat Patel

A true devotee of God sacrifices everything in return for his grace and blessings. They do not hesitate to give up their wealth, family interests, or even their own lives for God. This is the story of one such devotee.

Samat Patel, a faithful disciple of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, lived in a small village in the Valak region. Once, he came to Gadhada for the darshan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. At the time Bhagwan Swaminarayan was busy supervising the construction of

the mandir there. He was in need of money to pay the salaries of the labourers engaged in the construction work. He asked Samat Patel, “I need money. Will you give me some?”

Without hesitation, Samat Patel replied, “Yes, Maharaj.”

Samat Patel immediately went home and sold everything he had – his land, bullock cart and buffaloes. He collected ₹4,500, came to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and offered him the whole amount.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan enquired, “From where did you bring such a large amount from?”

Samat Patel replied, “I had the money with me.”

But the all-knowing Maharaj knew how he had got the money. He asked Samat Patel, “Tell the truth. Where did the money come from?” Samat Patel then told Maharaj how he had sold everything he had.

Maharaj said, “You have sold everything – land, farm, carts, cattle, food! What will you eat now and how will you feed your family? I shall keep only ₹1,000 rupees. I want you to take back the rest of the money.”

Samat Patel replied, “We will not go hungry. We will borrow food grains from other villagers. By next year, we will return whatever we borrow.”

Bhagwan Swaminarayan was happy to hear these words. Samat Patel was a true disciple and an ideal for all devotees.

12. Thal: Offering Food to God

We live on a daily intake of food. Without food, we would die of hunger. God gives enough sunlight and water to grow food grains. The farmer’s labour alone is not enough. We must therefore offer a portion of everything we eat to God before we start eating.

God is the creator and the controller of everything we see

around us. Therefore, before we utilize these things for our benefit, we must first offer them to God. Food grows because of his grace, so how can we eat without offering it to him first? All the delicious food items for which we have a special liking should first be placed before him. This offering is known as *thal*. Sadguru Bhumanand Swami has composed a *thal*. There is an interesting story as to how the *thal* was composed.

Once, it so happened that Bhumanand Swami did not get anything to eat for four days. On the fifth day, he came to a village. A sadhu there took pity on Bhumanand Swami and gave him some green wheat grains (*ponk*) to eat. Bhumanand Swami was overjoyed. In gratitude he first offered the green wheat to God. Being a poet, words flowed spontaneously from his lips, '*Jamo thal Jivan jāu vāri...*'

Bhagwan Swaminarayan gave him darshan and ate the food items spoken of in the *thal*. Maharaj spoke words of cheer and consolation to Bhumanand Swami before disappearing. Since then, this *thal* has become popular in Satsang. Let us also sing the same *thal* and keep Maharaj in our minds. If we are sincere in our devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, like Bhumanand Swami, God will surely come and accept our *thal*.

Jamo thāl Jivan jāu vāri; dhou kar-charan karo tyāri
Beso melyā bājothiā dhāli, katorā kanchanni thāli,
Jale bharyā chambu chokhāli...1
Kari kathā ghauni poli, meli ghrut sākarmā boli,
Kādhyo ras kerino gholi...2
Galyā sātā ghebar fulvadi, dudhpāk mālpuā kadhi,
Puri puchi thai chbe ghi mā chadhi...3
Athānā shāk sundar bhaji, lāvi chhu tarat kari tāji,
Dahi bhāt sākār chbe jhājhi...4

Then engage in meditation, imagining that Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the gurus are having their meal. Then help them wash their hands and mouths before singing the following:

*Chalu karo lāvu hu jal-jhāri, elāychi laving sopāri,
pān-bidi banāvi sāri...5*
*Mukhvās man-gamtā laine, prasādino thāl mune daine,
Bhumānand kabe rāji thaine...6*

Meaning:

O Jivan (Maharaj)! Please bless me and accept this offering;
I will wash your hands and feet in preparation;

Please sit on the stool which has been placed, with a golden
plate and bowls before you and a tumbler full of water...1

I have prepared wheat flour *puranpuris*, soaked in ghee and
sugar; I have extracted (fresh) juice from mangoes...2

(I also offer) sweet *sata*, *ghebar*, *fulvadi*, *dudhpak*, *malpua*,
kadhi, as well as soft *puris* fried in ghee...3

I have brought *athana* (pickles) and freshly cooked (spiced)
spinach; rice and yogurt mixed with ample sugar...4

Please wash your hands with the water I've brought; accept
the cardamom, cloves, betel nuts and (refreshing) betel leaf *pans*
that I have made ...5

Please take the *mukhvas* you like, and be pleased, says
Bhumanand; please give me the (remainder) of the *thal* (as
prasad)...6

In this way we should always first offer our food to God and
only then eat, and thus, express our thanks to him for what he
has given.

13. Jodho the Shepherd

B hagwan Swaminarayan had appointed Jodho the shepherd
to look after the cattle of Dada Khachar. This shepherd had
an affectionate nature, though his language was rather rough.
He loved Shriji Maharaj very much. He would not eat any rich
or tasteful dish, but consumed only plain buttermilk and *rotlo*.



Shriji Maharaj churned buttermilk with Jodho

Once, when Maharaj passed through the village of Nani Barai, Jodho was so fascinated as a result of Maharaj's darshan that he immediately left his home, wife, children and his cattle and followed Maharaj to Gadhada. There, he started doing *seva* to please Shriji Maharaj.

Once, at Dada Khachar's *darbar*, the women were boiling milk to prepare *dudhpak*. Unfamiliar with such a preparation as *dudhpak*, Jodho did not approve of it and thought that valuable milk was being burnt away. He complained to Maharaj, "Laduba and Jivuba are burning our milk. Milk should not be burnt away in this manner."

Maharaj laughed and said, "Take the cattle to the field and come back for lunch at noon." Jodho was annoyed, but went away as directed.

When he returned at noon, the sadhus were seated in meditation with their heads covered by their upper garments. When he saw them he said, "You have burnt the milk and now you have no alternative but to cry!"

Bhagwan Swaminarayan quietened him. When Maharaj began to serve *dudhpak*, Jodho protested, “Please don’t give me any of that burnt milk.”

“Just try it first,” Maharaj said and served him a little. Reluctantly, he tasted it. Only then did he realize that the milk was not spoiled. On the contrary, a fine delicious sweet delicacy had been prepared from it.

Many a time, Jodho offered fresh milk with almonds, saffron and sugar to Maharaj. To please Maharaj, he showed him his ability to control fighting cattle. At times he would offer fresh curd, buttermilk or butter. Maharaj, on account of his loving devotion, would accept. Sometimes, Jodho would milk the cows in such a way that milk fell in a spray from the udder onto the feet of Maharaj. Every time Maharaj passed that way, he noticed some new evidence of Jodho’s affectionate and innocent behaviour.

Sometimes Maharaj would help him in churning the buttermilk. During this process, Maharaj would uncover the buttermilk pot, and eat the butter for fun. But Jodho’s vigilant eyes would immediately catch Maharaj.

Once, Maharaj tried to tease Jodho saying, “You have remained a fool of fools.” Jodho replied, “Yes, I know that you are so wise that you once deluged the whole universe only to save one sparrow! Even though I am foolish and you are very wise, can you tell me out of these female goats, which is Koyli, Katudi and Jambudi?”

At this impertinence, Muktanand Swami reproached Jodho, “Maharaj is the all-knower.” Maharaj merely laughed. He then put Jodho into samadhi and showed him his divine form in Akshardham. When he came out of the samadhi, he was very happy, and realized the true power and glory of Maharaj.

Jodho’s devotion can be compared to that of the *gopis* of Vraj. He possessed such strength that he could drive away a tiger,



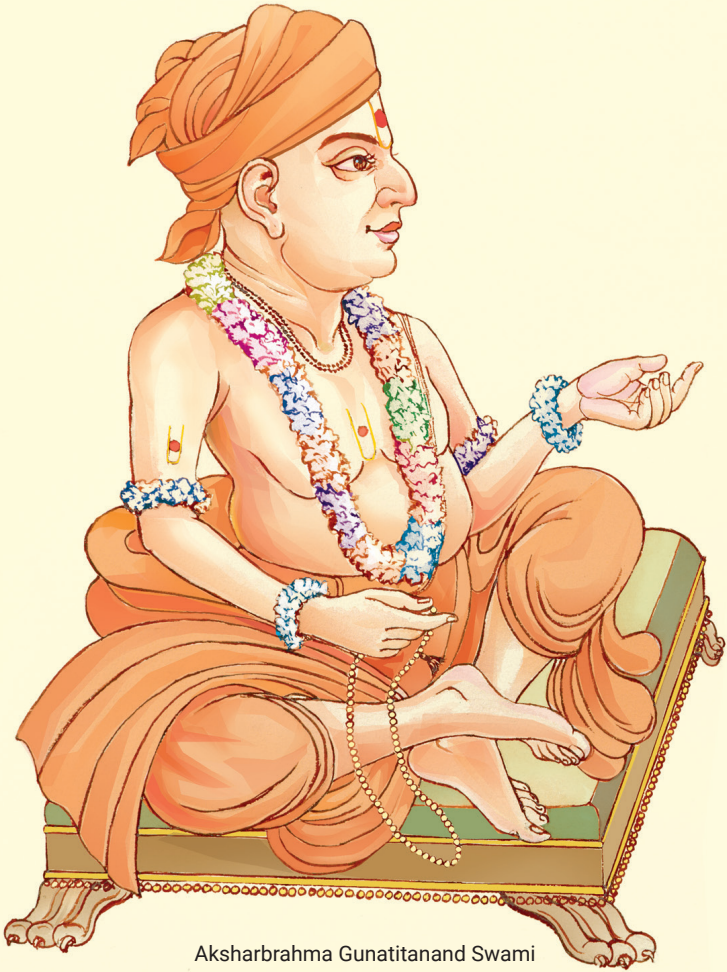
The *bibi* offers a babul stick to Maharaj

but he remained very meek and humble before Maharaj. How great was the devotion of a simple, unlettered man!

14. The Muslim Woman from Bhal Region

God is merciful. His grace knows no bounds. Even a little time spent in devoted service to him frees a person from the clutches of *maya*. Whether one is a Hindu, Muslim, Christian or Parsi, whether one is a man or a woman, whether young or old, God is merciful to one and all. He showers his blessings on all alike.

In the region of Bhal, in a small town called Sodhi, there lived a Muslim woman (*bibi*). She had cultivated a babul tree in her garden. The tender sticks of this tree, used for brushing teeth, grew in abundance. However, the woman did not give them to anyone. She would simply remark, “These sticks are meant for God alone.”



Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami

Once, Bhagwan Swaminarayan came to that town. On the outskirts of the village he halted to bathe in the pond. He asked Sura Khachar, “Bring me a babul stick.”

Sura Khachar replied, “Maharaj! This Bhal region is dry. How is it possible to find such a stick here?”

Even so, Maharaj insisted, “At least go and try.” So, Sura Khachar went.

As he passed by the Muslim woman’s compound, he saw the babul tree. He promptly requested her to give him a stick. The *bibi* enquired, “Who is the person in this dry Bhal region who expects to find a babul stick here?”

Sura Khachar said, “He is our God.”

Hearing this, the *bibi* responded, “This stick is meant for God only. If he really is God then I will come personally to offer him the stick.”

She went with Sura Khachar. When she saw Maharaj she presented the babul stick to him and prayed, “O Swaminarayan! Please come to take me to heaven when my days are over!”

Maharaj said, “Certainly.” He assured her that he would come without fail. And sure enough when the end of her life was near, the all-merciful Maharaj appeared before her. He had in his hand the same babul stick that she had given to him. The Bibi recognized Maharaj. She was immediately transported to Akshardam – the divine abode. How merciful is God!

15. Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami

Jodia is a very famous port in Kathiawad (Saurashtra). There is a beautiful village near Jodia, called Bhadra, on whose outskirts flow the River Und. On both banks, there is a beautiful forest of mango, pipal, neem, rose, apple and banyan trees.

Over 200 years ago in that town, there resided a holy Brahmin, Bholanath Sharma, and his devout wife, Sakarbai.

As his name would suggest, Bholanath was really *bhola* – naive, gentle and religious-minded. Sakarbai was also very mellow and pious. Both of them were followers of Atmanand Swami. They did not have any children. Atmanand Swami once blessed them, “Aksharbrahma, the divine abode of Bhagwan himself, will take birth as your son.”

After some time, on the auspicious day of 28 September 1784 (Sharad Purnima [Aso *sud* 15], Samvat 1841), a son was born to them. Ramanand Swami named him Mulji.

Right from his childhood, Mulji possessed a fine intellect and immense devotion to God. When he was four years old, he told his mother, “Mother, give me some milk.”

His mother replied, “Wait, let me first offer it to God. Then I will give it to you.”

Mulji replied with a surprising statement, “When I drink milk, Thakorji also drinks along with me.” So saying, Mulji drank all the milk. As he did so, Sakarbai saw a thin white line on the lips of the *murti* of Thakorji. She realized the truth behind Mulji’s words.

Once, Mulji asked his mother, “Mother, please sing the songs that are sung during the sacred thread ceremony.”

Mother asked him, “Why?”

Mulji replied, “Lord Ghanshyam has revealed himself on this earth as the son of Dharmadev. At this time, Lord Ghanshyam is being given the sacred thread in Ayodhya. Ghanshyam is my God. So please sing some sacred thread ceremony songs.”

Sakarbai was amazed to hear this request. She started singing the songs as requested by her son.

Many a time mother Sakarbai would tell Mulji to rock the cradle of his younger brother Sunderji. Whilst rocking the cradle, he would say, “Mother, I want to become a sadhu, and my brother Sunderji will also become a sadhu.”

Mulji was given the sacred thread at the age of eight.

Sometimes Mulji’s father would say to him, “Mulji! You are

still very young. This is the age when you should play, eat and enjoy life.”

Mulji would calmly reply, “Father! How can one know when one will die? Therefore one should engage in devotion right from an early age.”

Once, Mulji was busy in the field watering the sugarcane crop. Bhagwan Swaminarayan suddenly appeared before him, and reminded him of his mission on this earth, “What have you come to do and what are you doing? The Brahmic consciousness in this world has dried up, so leave your home now.” On hearing this, Mulji immediately renounced Bhadra, and went to meet Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

After some time on 20 January 1810 (Posh *sud* Punam, Samvat 1866), Bhagwan Swaminarayan performed a *yagna* in Dabhan and initiated Mulji Bhakta into the sadhu-fold, naming him Gunatitanand Swami.

Gunatitanand Swami was a great *tapasvi* (ascetic) and always engaged himself in the service of others. He used to serve old and ailing sadhus. He was very proficient in the art of preaching and explaining the greatness and glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to everyone. Dutiful and obedient, he followed all the commands of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, faithfully and enthusiastically. Bhagwan Swaminarayan was very pleased by his undivided loyalty and devotion.

On 10 May 1826 (Vaishakh *sud* 3, Samvat 1882), construction of the Junagadh Mandir commenced. Then in Gadhada, on 11 April 1827 (Chaitri Punam, Samvat 1883), Bhagwan Swaminarayan decided to appoint Gunatitanand Swami as the mahant of Junagadh. During the assembly he said, “Call Gunatitanand Swami.” When Muktanand Swami brought Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagwan Swaminarayan took the garland from his own neck, put it around the neck of Gunatitanand Swami and proclaimed, “He will be the mahant, the religious

head of our Junagadh Mandir.” In this way, Gunatitanand Swami was appointed mahant of the Junagadh Mandir.

When Bhagwan Swaminarayan decided to return to his abode, he sent a letter to Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh asking him to come and see him. On receipt of the letter, Gunatitanand Swami hastened to Gadhpur, walking at the rate of 60 miles a day. On meeting Bhagwan Swaminarayan he offered prostrations and sat before him.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan then reminded all his followers to visit Junagadh once every year to listen to the discourses of Gunatitanand Swami for at least a month. On 1 June 1830 (Jeth *sud* 10, Samvat 1886) Bhagwan Swaminarayan returned to his abode – Akshardham. After the funeral rites of Maharaj were performed at Lakshmi Vadi, Gunatitanand Swami was going to bathe when he saw green grass swaying around the stream. Seeing this Swami thought, “Oh! Water is the life of this grass. How green it is! Similarly, Maharaj was our life. But he is now gone!” While these thoughts were running through his mind, Swami became unconscious and fell down. Immediately, Shriji Maharaj emerged there in a divine form and brought Swami back to consciousness. He revealed, “Swami, I have not gone away! I dwell in you eternally.” With these words, Maharaj disappeared. Swami, who was feeling unhappy due to the departure of Maharaj, felt overwhelmed after the darshan of Maharaj.

Gunatitanand Swami then returned to Junagadh to complete the construction of the mandir. He also built a new *dharmashala* for the sadhus. His simplicity, spirit of *seva* and spiritual greatness had a great impact on all who visited the mandir. He used to sweep the mandir precincts as he believed it was a form of *seva* to God. He ate only simple food such as *mung dal*, *rotla* (thick millet bread), buttermilk and *khichdi*, and always shunned rich and sweet dishes. He walked barefoot, and always bathed with cold water.

The local Muslim king and many Nagar Brahmins of Junagadh became his followers. He used to give learned discourses in a most pleasing manner. Well known sadhus, *acharyas*, and even Gopalanand Swami used to come to Junagadh to hear the inspiring talks of Gunatitanand Swami. Such great souls as Bhagatji Maharaj, Jaga Bhakta, Balmukunddasji, Yogeshwardasji and Raghuvirji Maharaj were among his devout followers. Bhagatji Maharaj was the guru of Shastriji Maharaj. The spiritual discourses of Gunatitanand Swami are compiled in a book popularly known as Swamini Vato.

Swami stayed in Junagadh for 40 years. Then he went to Gondal. He passed away to the divine abode, Akshardham, on 12 October 1867 CE (Ashwin *sud* 13, Samvat 1924). A shrine was built at the site where his body was cremated. This soon became known as the Akshar Deri. The mandir built on that shrine by Shastriji Maharaj has now become famous as ‘Akshar Mandir’.

16. Swamini Vato: Gunatitanand Swami’s Talks

We are now well acquainted with the life of Gunatitanand Swami. He was a firm believer in the divinity of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and a true exponent of his philosophy. Besides, in saintliness, dedication to seva, meditational power and other virtues there was no one who could equal him. Once, he had asked Bhagwan Swaminarayan, “What should I do predominantly? Should I meditate, serve, preach or behave as *atmarup*?”

Bhagwan Swaminarayan replied, “You should preach and give discourses. In this way, explain the true glory of God to all.”

In accordance with the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami discoursed day and night, bringing spiritual benefit and enlightenment to countless people. The

knowledge he preached is called ‘*Gunatit Jnan*’. The language of his talks was very simple and lucid and can be followed by one and all. His anecdotes were very interesting and instructive. Let us learn five of them.

1

Swāminārāyan Hare, Swāmie vāt kari je: “Swāminārāyan nāmna mantra jevo bijo koi mantra āj baliyo natthi, ne e mantre kālā nāgnu pan jher na chade, ne e mantre vishay udi jāy chhe, brahmarup thāy chhe ne kāl, karma, māyānu bandhan chhuti jāy chhe, evo babu baliyo e mantra chhe. Māte nirantar bhajan karvu” (1.153).

“Today, there is no mantra as powerful as the Swaminarayan mantra. It neutralizes even the poison of a black cobra and dispels the *vishays*. With it, one becomes *brahmarup* and is freed from the bondage of *kal*, karma and *maya*. That is how powerful the mantra is. Therefore, chant it always.”

The divine power of the mantra was revealed when a poisonous serpent bit the finger of Yogiji Maharaj in Gondal. When Bhaktivallabhdas Swami saw the snake, he realized that it must have bitten Yogiji Maharaj. He immediately informed Shastriji Maharaj, who then instructed that Yogiji Maharaj be taken to the Akshar Deri and that all should start chanting the Swaminarayan mantra with total faith. Accordingly, one and all began chanting the mantra.

When the Maharaja of Gondal came to know of the snake bite, he immediately sent his doctor to treat Swami. But Shastriji Maharaj refused the treatment, and affirmed his faith in the chanting of Swaminarayan mantra. He said that God would cure him.

After about 12 hours, the effect of the poison completely subsided. However, the bite and poison were so vicious that the tip of Yogiji Maharaj’s left hand index finger withered slightly and became somewhat bent.



At noon, a disciple arrived with food

We, too, must recite the Swaminarayan mantra with faith and devotion.

2

Swāminārāyaṇ Hare, Swāmī vāt kari je: “Koi Bhagwān sambhāre teni sevā māre karāvavi, tenā lugdā māre dhovrāvavā, ne tene māre bethā bethā khāvā devu chhe” (1.276).

“If someone remembers God, then I will arrange for his *seva*, have their clothes washed and give them food at home.”

If one worships God devoutly and with implicit faith in him, he will take care of everything. God will look after every single need if one has full faith in him.

One of the disciples of Gunatitanand Swami, Balmukunddas Swami, once recited this Swamini Vato in the mandir at Chalala. Some disciples questioned, “If we do not cook and instead simply chant the name of God, shall we get our meal today? Will God get the meal ready for us? This does not seem correct.”

Balmukund Swami responded, “This is true. If we pray to

God with absolute faith, then he will give us food. Let us all pray to God. Nobody should have any doubts. This discourse is true and God will give us food.”

From morning, all of them sat in the mandir and started chanting the Swaminarayan mantra and singing bhajans. It was 11.30 a.m.; still there was no sign of any food appearing. Some followers started doubting the truth of Gunatitanand Swami’s words. Balmukund Swami, however, never wavered in his belief. Exactly at 12 noon, a devotee suddenly arrived carrying various items of food and offered them to Swamiji. The devotee said, “Please offer this food to Thakorji and then distribute it among the sadhus.”

Balmukund Swami said, “See, God has sent us food!”

He asked the devotee, “How come you are here?”

He replied, “We were going to Amreli with the bridegroom party of my son. Since it was lunchtime, we were preparing to eat. Some villagers who were passing by informed us that sadhus are in the mandir. So we thought of offering the food to the sadhus before we eat.”

In this way, the loal devotees realized that when they prayed to God with full faith in him, he did not let them down. We always profit by doing bhajan provided our devotion is genuine.

3

Swāminārāyan Hare, Swāmīe vāt kari je: “Karod kām bagādīne pan ek moksha sudhārvo ne kadāpi karod kām sudhāryā ne ek moksha bagādyo, to temā shu karyu?” (1.14).

“Spoil ten million tasks but improve your *moksha*. But if ten million tasks are improved and *moksha* is spoilt, what has been achieved?”

There was a Patel who lived in a small village. Once, he planned to go shopping to the nearby town. His wife gave him a long list of items to be bought from the town. The Patel was very forgetful,



The Patel forgot about his own purchases

so he noted down everything on a piece of paper. When some of the villagers came to know about the Patel's going to town for shopping, they also came, and asked, "Patel, will you bring this also?" He said, "Sure." The Patel noted everything down.

The Patel proceeded to the town in his bullock cart. He thought that first he would buy things for his neighbours, and later on for his own family. There was much hustle and bustle in the market. The Patel, one by one, bought what the villagers wanted and put the items in his cart. The cart was filled up within a short time. So, he returned home.

The people of the village called at his house to collect the items they had asked for. Patel gave them the articles he had bought for them. Within a short time, the cart was empty. His wife who was watching with growing anxiety asked the Patel, “Where are our purchases?”

Patel scratched his head and said, “I absolutely forgot to buy our things.”

Should we call Patel a wise man or a foolish one?

He went to the market and forgot about his own purchases. In the same way we may undertake many tasks. If we think only of others, but forget to think of our own *moksha* or neglect to worship God, then we would be as foolish as this Patel.

That is why Gunatitanand Swami stresses that we should think of our own liberation even if it means less attention to worldly work.

We must think of God constantly if we are to attain *moksha*. If we offer wholehearted devotion to him and engage in bhajan regularly, then we can be sure that God will always protect us.

4

Swāminārāyan Hare, Swāmīe vāt kari je: “Bhagwān to potānā bhaktani rakshā karvāmā ja bethā chhe. Keni pethe? To jem pāpan ānkhni rakshā kare chhe ne hāth kanthni rakshā kare chhe ne māvtar chhokrāni rakshā kare chhe ne rājā prajāni rakshāmā chhe, temaj Bhagwān āpani rakshāmā chhe” (1.22).

“God always protects his devotees. Just as the eyelids protect the eyes, the hands protect the neck, a mother protects her child and a king protects his subjects, God protects us.”

Prahlad, Narsinh Mehta, Mirabai, for example, were so deeply devoted to God that he protected them from all evil forces. Similarly, Bhagwan Swaminarayan protects his devotees as the following story shows.

A devotee called Naja Bhakta was living in the small town of



The king begged for forgiveness at Bhagwan Swaminarayan's feet

Bhadli. This small town was much oppressed by the shepherds. Therefore, Naja Bhakta went to live in the town of Bhoyra. He told Vasur Khachar, the chieftain, about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The chieftain heard him and then said, "If your God is really God, then he should present himself here tomorrow. Otherwise I will break your kneecaps!"

At that time, Bhagwan Swaminarayan was in Visnagar.

"How can Maharaj reach Bhoyra in one night?" worried Naja Bhakta.

The chieftain was a very cruel man and would not hesitate to carry out his threat. Desperately Naja Bhakta began to think of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and made a silent appeal.

Meanwhile, Bhagwan Swaminarayan started out from Visnagar. On the way, near Vadhwan, there was a river in flood. Walking over the waters, Maharaj reached Bhoyra early in the morning and sent a messenger to the chieftain, "Naja Bhakta's God has arrived."

Early in the morning, when Naja Bhakta opened the door of

his house, he saw Bhagwan Swaminarayan standing at his door. He was stunned. He knelt at the feet of Maharaj in gratitude. After some time, the two went together to the court of the cruel chieftain. On the way, Maharaj heard about the people's woes and their cries of anguish.

Naja Bhakta told Maharaj, "The chieftain is a very cruel man. He punishes people without mercy and breaks their kneecaps."

When the chieftain came to meet Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Bhagwan Swaminarayan at once sent him into samadhi and showed him the horrors of Hell. Here Yamraj beat him mercilessly.

After some time, by the grace of Maharaj, he came out of samadhi. Immediately, he fell at the feet of Maharaj, confessed his evil deeds and asked for forgiveness. He realized that Swaminarayan was God manifest.

Maharaj instructed him to become good and never subject people to terrible punishments. Bhagwan Swaminarayan initiated him into the fellowship and made him a *satsangi*. This was how Maharaj protected his devotee Naja Bhakta, when he was in danger.

5

Swāminārāyan Hare, Swāmīe vāt kari je: "Ketlākne man ramāde chhe ne ketlāk manane ramāde chhe. Ā vāt nitya vichārvā jevi chhe" (4.123).

"Some are controlled by the mind and some control the mind. This talk is worth contemplating daily."

Our mind is full of worldly desires, and is therefore our greatest enemy. It prevents us from thinking of God and offering bhakti or *seva*. However, there are people who can control their minds.

There was a boy of the Koli caste in Gadhada. His father was growing sweet pumpkins in his orchard. The boy decided to offer the first pumpkin to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. When the pumpkins ripened, he selected one of them for Maharaj. On his way to meet Bhagwan Swaminarayan, he was tempted



The boy offered his pumpkin to Maharaj

by the sweet smell of his ripe pumpkin. The boy thought that he might as well eat it.

But almost immediately he scolded his mind, controlled his desire and went on his way. Again, after some time, the thought came into his mind that people offer very nice and costly gifts to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Who would appreciate an insignificant thing like a pumpkin? So why not eat it! But again he resisted the temptation, “No, no! I have decided to give it to Maharaj, so I must give it to him.” Thus, keeping his mind under control, he soon reached the *darbar* of Dada Khachar.

Maharaj himself called the boy, and asked for the pumpkin. He ate some of it himself and the rest he distributed as *prasad*. Maharaj was very happy with this young boy because he had

succeeded in controlling his mind. Maharaj asked the *kothari* (storekeeper) to give the boy a reward of 5 kg of sugar crystals to take home.

In that assembly there was a Bania. He thought, “If this boy could get 5 kg of sugar crystals for a single pumpkin, how many sugar crystals would I get if I were to give a cartful of pumpkins to Maharaj!”

The following day, the Bania came to Maharaj with a cartful of sweet pumpkins. Maharaj told him, “You may as well throw all the pumpkins into the river and let the fish eat them.”

The Bania was disappointed. He asked, “Why Maharaj? Yesterday you gave 5 kg of sugar for just one pumpkin, while I have brought you a whole cartload.”

Maharaj replied, “Yes, I did give the boy 5 kg of sugar crystals. But it was not for the pumpkin; it was for the self-control that the boy had exercised over his mind. You came here with greed in your heart. So you will get nothing.”

Thus, if we conquer our minds, and resist evil temptations, then Maharaj will be extremely pleased.

17. Shastriji Maharaj

Shastriji Maharaj was the guru of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He was born on 31 January 1865 CE (Vasant Panchami [Maha *sud* 5] in V.S. 1921) in the small village of Mahelav. His father’s name was Dhoribhai and his mother’s name was Hetba. In his childhood, he was known as Dungar Bhakta.

Dungar Bhakta was very brave and clever right from his early days. In his studies he always came first. He had a natural tendency to offer devotion to God. While other children played, he would make mandirs out of sand, place *murtis* of God in them and then offer his prayers to the deity.

At the age of 17, he renounced home and became a disciple

of Vignananand Swami. Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj gave him *bhagvati diksha* on 29 November 1882 (Kartik *vad* 5, V.S. 1939), and he was named Swami Yagnapurushdas. Nobody could compete with him in his Sanskrit studies. He defeated great pundits in scriptural debates, and so people called him by the name of Shastriji Maharaj.

His piety and saintliness were unsurpassed. Shastriji Maharaj fearlessly preached the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam. Some sadhus, not approving of this doctrine, harassed him, insulted him, and sometimes even beat him. To avoid conflict, he left Vartal. Soon, he built a mandir in Bochasan and installed the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam.

Shastriji Maharaj inspired the construction of magnificent *shikharbaddha* mandirs in Bochasan, Sarangpur, Gondal, Atladara and Gadhadra. Through his influence, the lives of dacoits, bandits, thieves and sinners in general were wholly transformed. They became ardent disciples of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He founded the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS). Shastri Narayanswarupdas (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) was appointed the President of the Sanstha in 1950 by Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj expounded the full greatness of our beloved Yogiji Maharaj. He performed many glorious deeds on this earth and passed away to Akshardham on 10 May 1951 CE (Vaishakh *sud* 4, V.S. 2007) in Sarangpur.

18. Behaviour in School and at Home

We are the children and disciples of God. We are members of the Bal-Balika Mandal (Children's Forum). Our habits and behaviour should be good and proper. If we tell lies or quarrel with others, our parents will naturally be blamed. People will ask, "Who are their parents? Who is their guru? Are they taught

such bad manners in the Bal-Balika Mandal?” Thus, because of our bad behaviour we bring disgrace to our parents, to our guru, to our Sanstha. So we must perfect our character and manners.

A *satsangi* child should wake up early every morning and perform puja. Then, one should bow down to one’s parents. Some children may be rude to their elder brothers, sisters and parents. This is most unbecoming for a *satsangi* child. We should always respect our elders. We should obey them and should be very polite when we talk to them. We should always use decent, respectful language while talking to anyone.

Some children have a bad habit of quarrelling with everyone over everything. They want things their own way. They will wear only some clothes and eat only some kinds of food. They want the best of everything. All this makes things difficult for other people. One should therefore accept whatever is available and be satisfied with it. True followers of Bhagwan Swaminarayan will never quarrel over trifling matters, like items of food or clothing. We should wear whatever clothes our parents give us. In case we don’t like them, we should tell them in a polite way, but never quarrel with them.

There are children who always tease their younger brothers or sisters. Some say, “Why should I work when my brother is idle? Why should he have better things than I? Why should I write with a pencil, when he writes with a pen?” Thus, every now and then, petty quarrels arise from jealousy. A *satsangi* child should not behave in this way. They should be above petty squabbles. They should be kind and helpful to their brothers and sisters and should live in harmony with all members of the family, and co-operate with them.

Some children spend a lot of money. They never enjoy food prepared at home, but like to eat in a hotel or in restaurant. They go to hotels with their friends and watch TV for hours. Serials and films are a must for them. They have all sorts of fancies and

extravagant habits. And if they don't get money, they won't hesitate to steal in order to satisfy their bad habits. They keep the company of children with similar undesirable habits.

Such habits are bad and should be discarded. A *satsangi* should not eat anything from a hotel or restaurant. Such food is unhygienic and unwholesome. Our health can be adversely affected by such adulterated food. Good children should not watch TV or films. They do not steal. If they need anything, they ask their parents, but never steal. They always remain in good company and avoid the company of bad children, who have a habit of stealing or telling lies.

Satsangi children who are kind and well behaved, are loved by one and all. People will also speak highly of their parents and their guru. Let us therefore resolve to observe the guidelines given below:

Don'ts

We will never steal.

We will never tell lies.

We will never eat in a restaurant.

We will never watch TV or cinema.

We will never speak back to our parents.

We will never quarrel over food or clothes.

We will never fight with brothers or sisters.

We will shun bad company and keep away from addictions.

We will never drink unfiltered water or milk.

Dos

We will always tell the truth.

We will always respect our parents and elders.

We will perform puja daily.

We will apply the *tilak* and *chandlo* to our foreheads.

We will always be studious.

We will always attend our Bal-Balika Mandal assemblies.
We will always visit the mandir.
We will always obey our guru.

19. Punja Dodia

In the village of Panvi resided a Rajput devotee by the name of Punja Dodia. Before he became a *satsangi*, he had decided to end his life if he failed to find God. He had gone to Nana Gopnath and clinging to a *murti* of Shivji was about to plunge himself into the violent waves of the sea. All of a sudden he heard a divine voice, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan has manifested and you will meet his sadhus.” Punjabhai heard the voice and so returned home.

One day, Punjabhai was going to his field with his plough. On his way to the field he met Krupanand Swami and Gunatitanand Swami. The devout Punja knelt at their feet and prayed, “Show me where God is.” He then took the two sadhus to his home and served them food. The sadhus told him about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and inspired him to follow the divine path of satsang. Punjabhai became a *satsangi*.

Punja Dodia soon became a very staunch *satsangi*. He remembered Maharaj at all times. In addition, he also inspired his daughter and her husband to follow the path of satsang.

Punja Bhakta had asked Vasta Khachar of Kariyani to inform him whenever Maharaj came to his place. Once, quite unexpectedly, Bhagwan Swaminarayan arrived in Kariyani. Vasta Khachar sent Gangaram Dave to inform Punjabhai of the arrival of Maharaj. When Gangaram Dave went to Panvi to tell Punja Bhakta, the latter was working in his field. As soon as he heard the news, he sent the bullocks with the plough home and hurried to Kariyani.

When he reached Kariyani, Vasta told him, “Maharaj has



Punja Bhakta fell down unconscious

just left for Sarangpur.” Hearing this, Punjabhai, disregarding hunger and thirst, ran after him in the direction of Sarangpur.

On his way to Sarangpur, Maharaj decided to rest under a tree, midway between the two small villages of Sajeli and Vajeli. Maharaj told Naja Jogia, “I am so thirsty.” Naja offered water two to three times to Maharaj, but his thirst was not quenched.

Maharaj then climbed the tree and saw Punja Bhakta running in his direction. Immediately, he got down from the tree, and with a jug of cold water ran to meet Punja Bhakta. He embraced

him, offered him cold water, and asked him to rest under the tree. Maharaj told Naja, “Now my thirst is quenched.”

Punja was a very sincere devotee. Not only did he worship Bhagwan Swaminarayan, but he also thought very highly of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s mare, Manki. “How blessed this Manki is! Bhagwan Swaminarayan, God manifest, rides her.” Thinking in this way, he used to bring grass for the mare to eat and always took care to see that the grass was fresh, soft and had no thorns. Such was his love for Manki. He used to say that Manki was free from *maya* and was a *mukta* because she had association with Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He felt that she must not be given ordinary grass to eat.

Once, Punja Bhakta was going to Gadhada with a fresh load of grass in his bullock cart. On that very day, Bhagwan Swaminarayan had passed away to Akshardham. While Bhaguji and Ratanji were making the necessary arrangements for the final rites they met Punja Bhakta. Bhaguji asked, “Punjabhai, where are you going?”

Punja Bhakta replied, “I have brought fresh grass for Manki. I shall deliver it, and have the darshan of Maharaj.”

Bhaguji then informed him that the rider of Manki, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, had just left this earth. On hearing this, Punja Bhakta fell down, unconscious.

He regained consciousness after three hours, but he had a foreboding that his death was near. He stopped taking food and water. He came to Gadhada and met Gopalanand Swami and started mourning. Gopalanand Swami offered him food, but he refused and said, “I do not feel like taking food or water.” Not that he wanted to starve, but that he did not relish any food at the time.

Swami requested him not to give up food and water. Punjabhai replied, “I do not want to starve, but I do not relish food at all. If I am knowingly trying to starve, then I take an

oath on the *paramhansas*. If this has happened by the grace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, then he will take me to his abode on the 13th day.”

On the 13th day after the departure of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Punja Bhakta was performing his daily duties. As soon as his duties were over, he collapsed on the floor. His soul departed from his mortal body. Everybody saw that Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself had come to take his *atma* to Akshardham. Such was the dedicated life of the great devotee Punja Dodia.

20. Nath Bhakta

In Vadodara there lived a staunch follower of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. His name was Nath Bhakta. He was a Kachhiya Patel by caste. Bhagwan Swaminarayan always spoke very highly of him. Nath Bhakta used to present skilfully woven clothes to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He loved and adored Maharaj very much. Whatever little he earned from selling vegetables, he would spend it for Maharaj and his sadhus by offering them rich and wholesome food.

Once, Nath Bhakta had gone to Gadhada. After staying there for some time, he left for Vadodara with the permission of Maharaj. Some time later, Maharaj changed his mind and asked one of his followers to call Nath Bhakta back. The man hurried after Nath Bhakta and caught up with him in Vadodara, near the River Vishwamitri. On hearing the summons from Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Nath Bhakta immediately turned back. Even though his home was near, he did not send any message to his own people. On hearing of his obedience and loyalty, Bhagwan Swaminarayan was greatly pleased.

Nath Bhakta's wife was also an ardent devotee. When she passed away, many people saw Bhagwan Swaminarayan carrying her great *atma* to Akshardham in his divine chariot. At that

time of loss, Nath Bhakta did not grieve at all, despite his bereavement.

Nath Bhakta had a young son, Prabhudas. Prabhudas used to experience samadhi. He would bring dry dates, sugar crystals and other items from Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the form of *prasad*. When he passed away at the age of 16, Nath Bhakta distributed sweets among the people of the town. Some of them were shocked at this act of charity. They remarked, “Nath Bhakta, what are you doing? Have you lost your mind?”

Nath Bhakta replied, “He was a devotee of God. God has called him. This is a joyous occasion. There is no need to mourn at all.”

Such was the noble understanding of Nath Bhakta. Bhagwan Swaminarayan praised the profound understanding of Nath Bhakta, and asked others to follow his example.

21. Behaviour in Bal-Balika Mandal

We all need food and water to preserve our body. We bathe to keep it clean and perform exercises to keep our body strong and healthy. Similarly, we should cultivate noble thoughts to keep our mind pure. For training our mind and to learn good behaviour we should attend the weekly Bal or Balika Mandal assembly. This purifies our mind. Our bad habits go away and we become happy. So, one should never miss the weekly Bal Mandal assembly.

In the Bal Mandal we learn how to behave properly. When we enter a mandir, we should first prostrate before God, and then bow down to all the sadhus present and take our seat as directed by the sadhus.

We should never laugh or crack jokes while the assembly is in progress. Some children have a habit of indulging in all sorts of mischief when a discourse is in progress. Not only do they not listen to the discourse themselves, but they do not allow

others to listen. We should bear in mind that we attend to learn something good and beneficial, and not to create a disturbance.

We should listen attentively to the talks and stories narrated in the Bal Mandal. We should remember the anecdotes and stories that we hear, write them down and bring them the following week. At the time of prayer we should think of only God and our guru. We should remain still and quiet, and not fidget. We should not answer if somebody else is asked. If we are asked only then should we speak. We should reply in a very polite manner.

While playing games in the Bal Mandal we should not quarrel with each other. Neither should we be too proud of our victory, nor feel disheartened when we are defeated. We should allow the younger players to play first. We should not say, “I will play only if you let me play this game.” Whatever game is being played, we should play; whatever task we are given, we should do. We should not think about play all the time. In Bal Mandal we come not only to play but to learn too.

When *prasad* is being distributed we should wait quietly and patiently until our turn comes. Before eating the *prasad* remember God. If we do not like the *prasad* we should not throw it away, but bow to it and give it to others. *Prasad* is sanctified food offered to God. Take only as much *prasad* as you wish to eat.

Some children take more *prasad* than they can eat and then waste it. This is not good. If *prasad* is served on paper, that paper should be thrown only in the waste-paper basket. If it is given on a reusable plate, it should be put in its designated place.

After taking *prasad* we should not rush for water, but wait in an orderly queue until our turn comes. We should drink water in a clean glass, and should have it in such a way that the glass does not touch our lips. We should then tidy the area ourselves. We should form the habit of doing our work ourselves.

After taking *prasad* in this way, remember to say, “Jay Swaminarayan” to everybody before going home.

22. Vajiba of Vijapur

God alone knows the affection that a real devotee bears for him in his heart. Vajiba is an ideal example of a true devotee. A real devotee does not waver in their faith in spite of the miracles shown to them or doubts raised by others! Even if God himself comes down to test the sincerity of a true devotee or undermine their faith, they will not flinch from their loyalty and devotion. Vajiba of Vijapur was one such devotee.

Vajiba was of the Sathwara caste. She served sadhus and ascetics. She would always invite sadhus to her house, even offering them marijuana or smoking pipes if they desired. She never found fault in their bad habits, because she believed all of them to be men of God.

Once, Ramdas Swami, a *paramhansa* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, came to Vijapur. When Vajiba came to know of this, she invited him to her place. Ramdas Swami stayed there for 12 days and talked to her husband about God, dharma and the characteristics of a true sadhu. He described to him the glory of Shriji Maharaj. Vajiba listened to these religious talks from behind a curtain.

Soon, Vajiba and her husband, inspired by the discourses of Ramdas Swami, accepted the precepts and doctrines of Shriji Maharaj and both became *satsangis*. From then on, Vajiba stopped giving shelter to sadhus who indulged in intoxicants such as *bhang*, marijuana or heroine. Even though she had not met Shriji Maharaj, she became one of his most faithful disciples.

Once, Shriji Maharaj went to Vijapur to test her faith in him. He took Mulji Brahmachari with him. Maharaj inquired in the village whether he could find shelter for the night.

The village folks explained, “There is a woman here, Vajiba, who used to give shelter to sadhus and ascetics. However, she does not entertain them any longer because she has become a



Maharaj stretched his feet to touch the pipal tree

devotee of Swaminarayan. She does not have any faith in the *bawas* and *vairagis* who ask for all sorts of intoxicants.

Maharaj said, “We will go to her place only.”

Maharaj went to Vajiba’s place and asked for shelter.

“We are pilgrims,” he said. “We want to stay here for the night. We will lie down here in the courtyard of your house? We won’t ask for anything else.”

Vajiba replied somewhat harshly, “Hypocrites and cheats like you come here in large numbers. Did you take to the saffron robe and priesthood because you could not get enough to eat? It seems that you are happily maintaining your robust frame, but have you ever thought of the well-being of your *atma*? I am sorry. I don’t give any lodging or boarding to sadhus like you. Oh! Before you leave, one word of advice; if you wish to attain liberation, you must seek refuge at the feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.”

“Vajiba, you are mistaken,” Maharaj protested. “Swaminarayan is not God. On the contrary, he is a hypocrite.

I think you have been misled by someone about his glory and greatness. The pundits from here to Kashi can prove that he is not God. Seeing that you are illiterate and gullible, someone must have misled you.”

Vajiba, however, was firm in her faith. She retorted, “You and your pundits are all wrong. I am prepared to follow Bhagwan Swaminarayan even if it costs me my life. Henceforth, if I hear you speak ill of Swaminarayan, I will throw out all your belongings.”

Meanwhile her husband came. He also rebuked Maharaj for speaking ill of Swaminarayan. Maharaj was silenced. “I shall not speak a word,” he said. “We will stay here for one night. We won’t ask for anything else. Even if you beat us we will not go.”

Vajiba said, “I will not give you a mattress or food and if I see you smoking or taking *ganja* I will throw all your belongings out.”

Maharaj could not sleep. After some time he said, “Mother, please give me a cot.”

Vajiba said, “I do not have one.”

“Give me the painted cot that lies in the room at the back,” Maharaj said.

Vajiba was taken aback. “How could this sadhu know about the bed in my back room?” she wondered. However, she brought the cot from the back room and placed it in the courtyard.

After some time, Maharaj demanded, “Mother, give me a mattress.”

Vajiba said, “I do not have any.”

Maharaj said, “Right in the middle of a pile of mattresses inside is a brand new mattress. Give it to me.”

Vajiba was again surprised at Maharaj’s insight. She gave him the mattress too.

To ease the day’s fatigue, Maharaj stretched his legs. He stretched his legs further and touched the pipal tree in the

compound. Divine light radiated from the big toe of his right foot. Vajiba saw this from a crack in the door, and was dumbfounded at the sight. However, she thought, “There are so many sadhus like him who have supernatural powers. None can equal my Bhagwan Swaminarayan.” Pondering in this way, she soon fell asleep.

Early in the morning, Maharaj woke up and left.

After some time, Vajiba went to Gadhada for darshan of Maharaj. On seeing her, Maharaj called her and asked, “Have you seen these feet before? They are the same ones that touched the pipal tree in your compound!”

Vajiba was amazed and felt repentant for not recognizing Maharaj. She asked for forgiveness with a feeling of shame, “Maharaj, I am sorry I could not recognize you.”

Maharaj replied, “You are my true devotee, and. I came only to test your faith in me. And you passed the test.”

Maharaj told everyone about the staunch faith Vajiba had in him. We should all be as steadfast in our faith as Vajiba was.

23. Kirtan

*Bhāv dharine bolo jay jay,
 Akshar-Purushottam jay jay
 Akshar-Purushottam...jay jay...
 Shāstra sakalno sār param e,
 Brahma ane Parabrahma jay jay
 Brahma ane Parabrahma...jay jay...1
 Mul Akshar je Brahma Anādi,
 Gunātītānand jay jay
 Gunātītānand...jay jay...2
 Purushottam Parabrahma parātpar,
 Shri Hari Sabajānand jay jay
 Shri Hari Sabajānand... jay jay...3*

*Nartanu dhāri pote pragatya,
 Swāmi ane Bhagwan jay jay
 Swāmi ane Bhagwan... jay jay...4*
*Bhāve nām ratan karvāthi,
 shānti pāme man jay jay
 shānti pāme man... jay jay...5*
*Māte sarve bolo jay jay,
 Akshar-Purushottam jay jay
 Akshar-Purushottam... jay jay...6*

Meaning:

With true feeling, hail the victory of Akshar-Purushottam...

Glory to Brahma and Parabrahma...

This is the highest principle of all the shastras...1

Glory to Gunatitanand Swami, who is Mul Akshar, the eternal Brahma...2

Glory to Shri Hari Sahajanand [Bhagwan Swaminarayan], who is the supreme Purushottam Parabrahma...3

Glory to Swami [Gunatitanand] and Bhagwan [Swaminarayan], who both assumed human forms and manifested [on earth]...4

By chanting this mantra [of Akshar-Purushottam] with true feelings, the mind will attain peace...5

So, all call out 'Glory to Akshar-Purushottam'...6



Glossary

arti Hindu ritual of waving lighted wicks or lamps before the sacred image (*murti*) of God as an act of worship and devotion

asan seat or posture, especially for meditation or worship

ashram hermitage; spiritual retreat or dwelling place of sadhus (ascetics) and spiritual seekers

athana Indian-style pickles made from fruits or vegetables, preserved in oil, salt, and spices

atma the soul (*jiva*), distinct from the physical, subtle, and causal bodies; the true spiritual self

atmarup one who has realized their true nature as the eternal soul (*atma*)

bawa ascetic or *sadhu* (holy person)

bhagvati diksha initiation ceremony into the *sadhu* order, renouncing worldly life for spiritual pursuit

bhang intoxicating substance derived from cannabis

bhola innocent, simple, or naive in nature

bibi respectful term for a Muslim woman

Brahma the second highest of the five eternal realities, transcending everything except Parabrahma (the Supreme); also known as Aksharbrahma

brahmarup possessing divine qualities similar to those of Brahma; God-realized

brahmic relating to Brahma or Aksharbrahma

chaitanyarup the luminous form of divine consciousness or spiritual light

chandlo auspicious vermilion mark applied on the forehead as a sign of devotion

dal spiced lentil soup, a staple food in Indian cuisine

dandvat full prostration as a form of respectful greeting or worship

Darbar member of the Kshatriya (warrior) caste community

darbar traditional royal court or palace with a central courtyard surrounded by rooms and verandas

dharmashala rest house or accommodation provided for pilgrims and travellers

dhun devotional chanting of God's holy names, often accompanied by musical instruments; a form of *japa* (repetitive prayer)

diksha spiritual initiation into a religious tradition (*sampradaya*) or into the renunciant order

divyabhav the devotional attitude of perceiving divine qualities in God and His true devotees at all times

dudhpak rich, sweet dish made from milk, rice, aromatic spices, and nuts

ekantik dharma the fourfold spiritual discipline comprising dharma (righteous living), *jnan* (spiritual knowledge), *vairagya* (detachment from worldly pleasures), and bhakti (devotion), combined with understanding of God's supreme greatness

fulvadi a spicy Gujarati snack made from gram flour and spices, shaped into rolls or strips and deep-fried until crisp

gadi ecclesiastical seat or diocese of a spiritual leader

ganja intoxicating substance derived from cannabis

gaumukhi cloth bag used to hold prayer beads (*mala*) while chanting

ghar mandir home shrine or domestic place of worship

ghebbhar sweet made from ghee, flour, and sugar syrup, known for its spongy, porous texture and rich flavour

gopis cowherd women who were devoted followers of Lord

Krishna, exemplifying pure devotion

guru parampara unbroken succession or lineage of God-realized spiritual teachers

indriya sense organ through which one perceives and interacts with the world (five senses of perception and five senses of action)

ishwar a cosmic being; one of the five eternal realities

jabbbho a traditional male upper garment

japa repetitive chanting or mental repetition of a sacred name or mantra

jiva individual soul with worldly desires and attachments; one of the five eternal realities

kadhi a soup made from gram flour, yoghurt and spices

kal time as a cosmic force; the universal principle governing the progression of existence, often personified as the destroyer that brings death and dissolution

kalash sacred water vessel, typically made of copper or other metals, used in religious ceremonies

kanthi double-stranded necklace made of tulsi (sacred basil) beads, worn by initiated devotees (*satsangis*) as a symbol of their spiritual commitment

karma action or deed, and its inevitable consequences according to the law of cause and effect

khichdi simple dish of spiced rice and lentils cooked together

kirtan devotional singing of hymns and songs praising God

kothari administrative head or treasurer of a mandir

kumkum vermilion powder used for applying the sacred forehead mark (*chandlo*)

lila divine actions or playful deeds of God, often with deeper spiritual meaning

mahant head priest or administrator of a mandir

mala prayer beads or rosary used for chanting the name of God (*japa*)

malpua a soft, syrup-soaked sweet pancake made from flour, milk, and sugar

mansi puja mental worship; spiritual practice of performing elaborate worship rituals in one's mind and heart

maya the divine power that creates the material world and veils the true nature of reality. One of the five eternal entities, it deludes the soul and diverts it from God

mayik pertaining to *maya*; worldly, illusory, or spiritually distracting

mer the largest, central bead in a *mala* that marks the starting and ending point

moksha liberation; the soul's (*jiva's*) release from the cycle of births and deaths

mukta liberated soul; one who has transcended all worldly attachments and the influence of *maya*

mukti ultimate liberation from the cycle of births and deaths

mung dal soup made from mung beans (green gram)

murti sacred image, icon, or statue of God used as a focus for worship

nirdoshbuddhi the conviction that a God and guru are faultless, even if apparent flaws are perceived

panch vartman five fundamental vows observed by initiated followers: abstinence from alcohol, meat-eating, adultery, and theft, plus faithful performance of one's duties according to one's station in life

panchang pranam respectful prostration performed by touching five parts of the body (forehead, both palms, and both knees) to the ground

paramhansa the highest grade of *sannyasi* (renunciant)

ponk tender, green wheat grains, often roasted and eaten as a snack
pradakshina ritual circumambulation (walking around) of a sacred object, person, or place in a clockwise direction
pragat manifest; visibly present (referring to God's incarnation)
pranayam yogic breathing exercises designed to control and regulate the life force (*prana*)
prarthana prayer or supplication to God
prasad sanctified food that has been blessed by being offered to God, then distributed to devotees
pujan worship performed with various sacred items
puranpuri a sweet delicacy
puri a deep-fried, puffed bread made from wheat flour, often served with vegetables or dal

rishi ancient sage or seer; one who has received divine revelations
rotlo traditional unleavened flatbread of Gujarat, typically made from millet flour and cooked on a griddle

samadhi highest state of meditative absorption; also refers to the tomb or memorial of a great saint or devotee
sampradaya authentic spiritual tradition with an unbroken lineage of *gurus* passing down sacred knowledge
sashtang dandvat a full-body prostration offered by lying flat on the ground with eight parts of the body touching the floor – forehead, nose, chest, hands, knees, feet, eyes and mind – as a gesture of total surrender and reverence before God or guru
sata traditional Indian sweet delicacy made from roasted wheat flour, ghee, and jiggery, often shaped into flat, round pieces
Satsang holy fellowship; association with spiritually-minded people and activities
satsangi devoted follower who has taken initiation and observes the principles of Satsang

seva selfless service

shikharbaddha category of mandir where five daily *artis* are performed and regular worship is conducted by sadhus

shloka Sanskrit verse, typically consisting of two lines with specific metre

siddhasan a yogic posture

stuti verses in praise of God or guru

sud bright or waxing half of the lunar month, during which the moon progressively increases in size from new moon to full moon

swadharma one's own righteous duty according to one's nature, circumstances, and stage of life

tapasvi one who practises austerities

thal food offering presented to God with devotion, which sanctifies it into *prasad*

tilak U-shaped sacred mark made on the forehead with sandalwood paste

tilakyu wooden or metal U-shaped template used for applying the *tilak* mark

vairagi renunciant; one who has developed detachment (*vairagya*) from worldly pleasures

vicharan spiritual travels undertaken by a guru or sadhu to inspire and guide devotees

visarjan conclusion of a religious ritual or ceremony

vishay objects of sensory enjoyment that the soul (*jiva*) experiences through the senses (*indriyas*)

vrat religious vow or observance, often involving fasting or other spiritual disciplines

yagna Vedic fire sacrifice; ceremonial worship ritual performed to invoke divine blessings