

YOGIJI MAHARAJ

A Short Biography of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 3

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A Short Biography of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj

Gujarati Text: Kishore M. Dave

Translation: BAPS Sadhus



Swaminarayan Aksharpith
Ahmedabad

Yogiji Maharaj

A Short Biography of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj

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

Inspirer: HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Blessings: HH Mahant Swami Maharaj

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Blessings

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

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

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

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

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

Vasant Panchami
Vikram Samvat 2028
(21 January 1972 CE), Atladara

Shastri Narayanswarupdasji
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
Jay Swaminarayan

Publisher's Note

This book is a brief biography of the divine personality that inspired us to frame this course of study – Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, the fourth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Yogiji Maharaj pioneered the children and youth wings of BAPS, encouraging children and youths to lead a pure, moral life and ascend the spiritual ladder.

For the benefit of the youths and children, the inspiring life-story of Yogiji Maharaj is given here in abridged form. The book is written in a simple and lucid style so that young and old alike can enjoy it and benefit from it. The book describes the important events from the life of Yogiji Maharaj – from his birth to his last days, his life's work, his inspiring personality and his eloquent teachings.

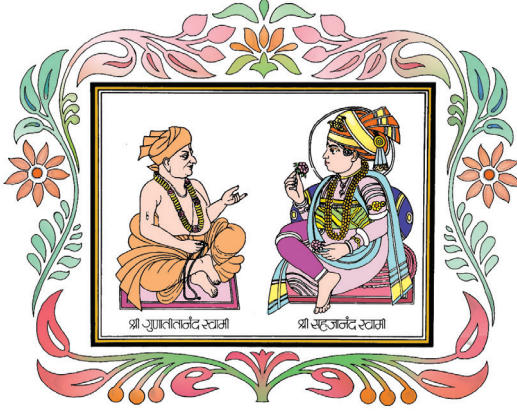
This publication, *Yogiji Maharaj: A Short Biography of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj* is a translation of the Gujarati book *Yogiji Maharaj*.

The book has been designed to serve as part of the curriculum for the Satsang Prarambha Examinations. We thank the BAPS swamis 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



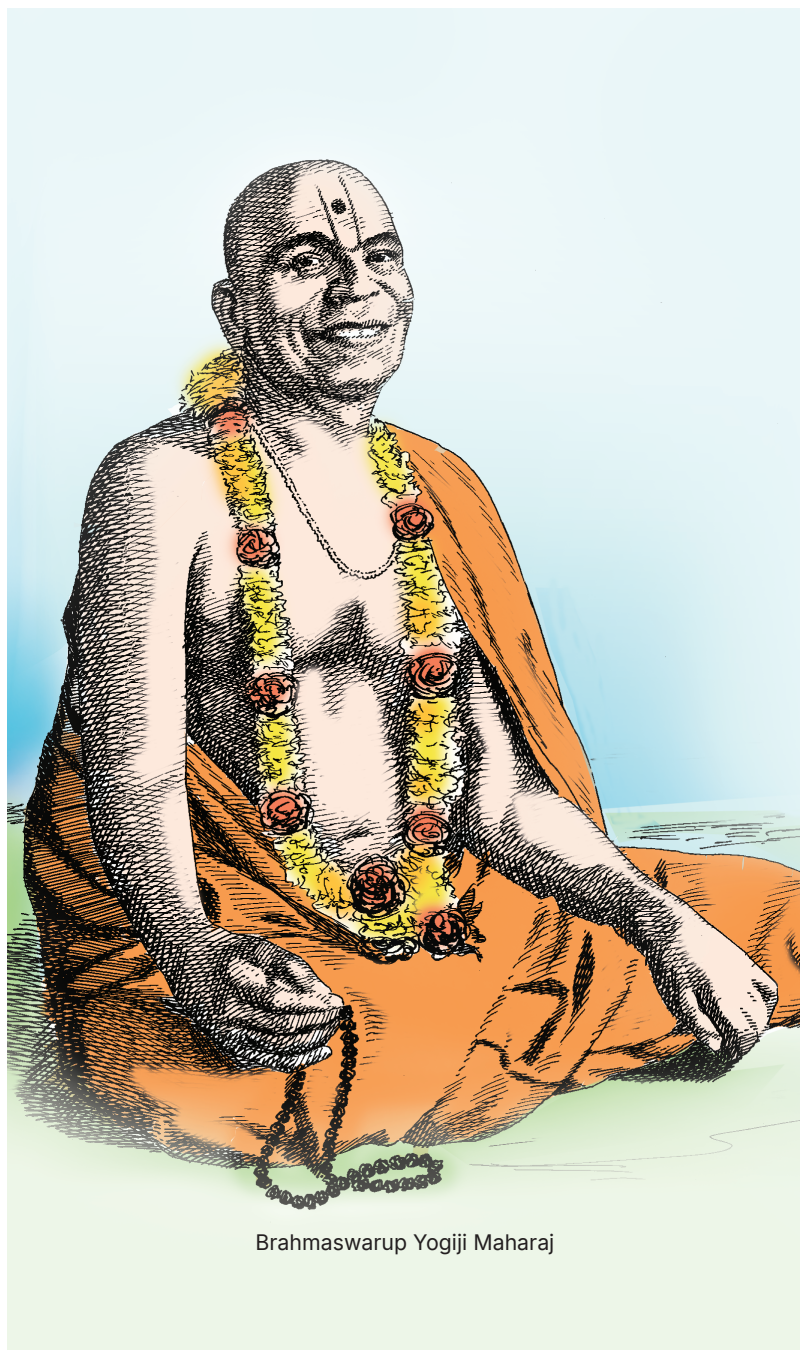
Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine mâte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine mâte...
Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānani parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...Ame 1
Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar-Purushottam, Gunātīt gnānanegāishu...Ame 2
Ame sau 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.



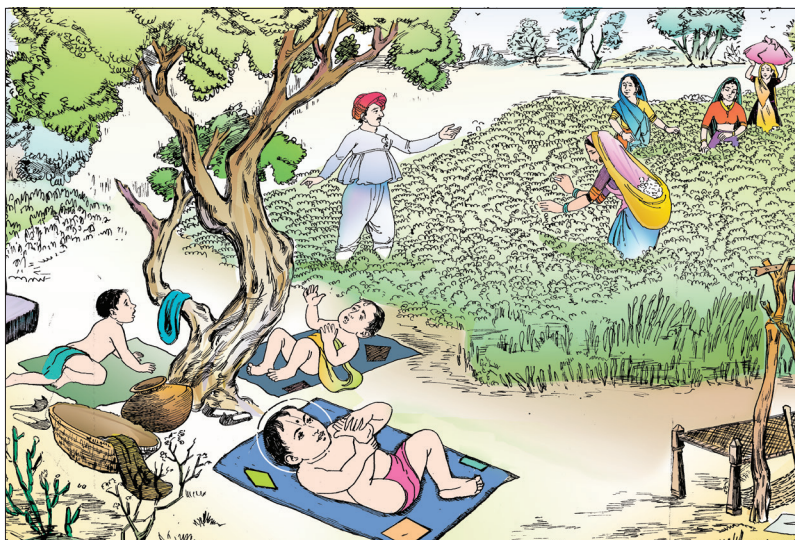
Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj

1. Birth of Jhinabhai

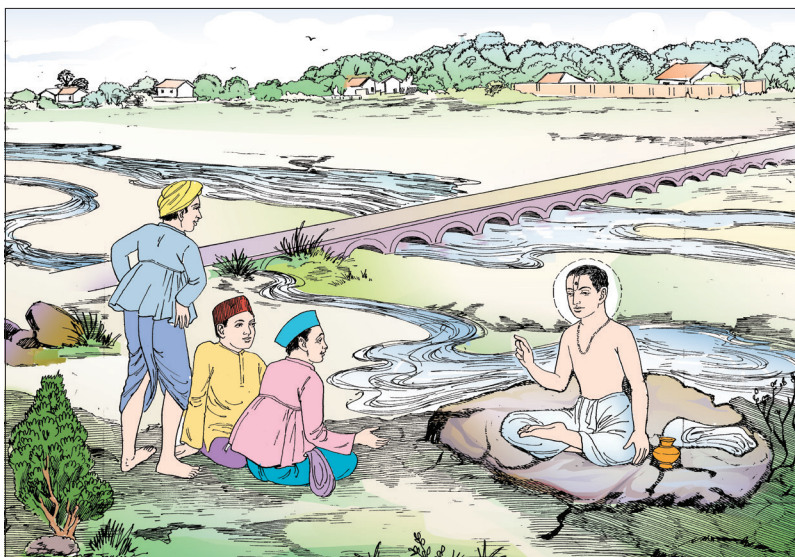
In the small town of Dhari in the Amreli District of Saurashtra there lived a devotee by the name of Devchandbhai Virji of the Lohana community. Jethabhai, the grandfather of Devchandbhai, was a blessed devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Yogiji Maharaj, the son of Devchandbhai, was born in Dhari on 23 May 1892 (Vaishakh *vad* 12, V.S. 1948). His mother's name was Puribai. His childhood name was Jhinabhai, but his parents lovingly called him 'Jhina'. Jhina was loved by everyone. All were captivated by his handsome, shining face.

When Jhina was an infant, his mother took him with her to the cotton farm every day. Other women of the village who came to pluck cotton also brought their children with them. The women would leave their children under the shade of a tree, before commencing their work in the fields. Sometimes their children, failing to see their mothers, would cry loudly. This infuriated the farm owner. He scolded the women daily, "Why do you bring your wailing children to my farm?"



"Why do you bring your wailing children to my farm?"



Jhinabhai teaches meditation to his friends

The farmer, however, never became angry with Jhina's mother. Looking at Jhina, the owner always remarked, "Jhina is a miracle child. Look, he always sucks his toe, just as Shri Krishna did. Puribai, one day everybody will fall at his feet. They will worship him."

Gradually, Jhina grew up and he was popularly called Jhinabhai. Jhinabhai, though young, had a strong liking for simplicity and cleanliness. He enjoyed nothing more than to engage in bhakti and singing bhajans.

2. Jhinabhai in Meditation

There is a confluence of three rivers on the outskirts of Dhari. The place of confluence is known as Triveni Sangam, and the resulting river is called the River Shetrunji. The Shetrunji narrows on reaching a bridge, and shrinks to the size of a small rivulet under the bridge. The inhabitants of Dhari call it 'Patalio Jharo'.

Every morning, Jhinabhai bathed at this spot near the bridge.

After his bath, he would wear clean clothes and then sit in an upright posture to perform meditation for hours. He meditated upon the divine form of Shriji Maharaj. To the many who saw Jhinabhai seated in meditation at such a lonely place, it seemed as if Dhruv himself was meditating! They invariably stood and watched the young Jhina engrossed in meditation.

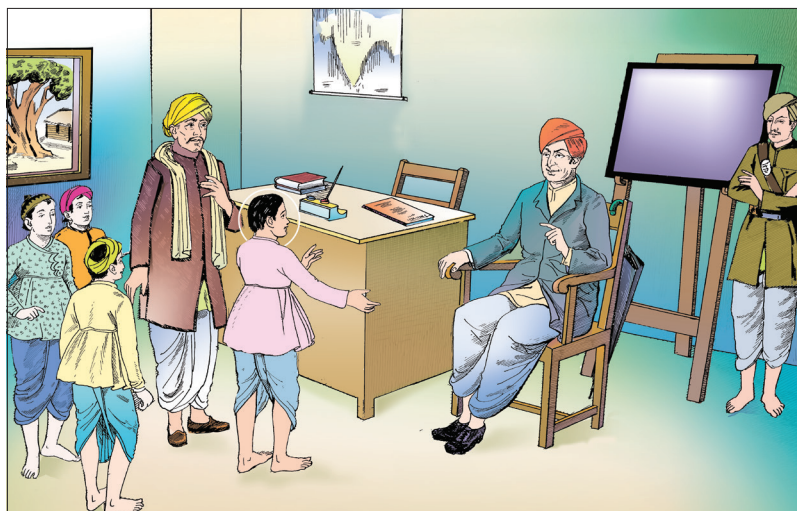
Sometimes, friends of Jhinabhai would come to bathe at Patalio Jharo. They were amazed to find Jhinabhai rapt in meditation. They would wait until he came out of his meditation and then enquire, “What were you doing?” Jhinabhai would reply, “I was remembering God. You also sit with me to meditate. I will teach you how to meditate.”

From his childhood Jhinabhai never failed to do his meditation every morning. He advised everybody to start their daily work only after remembering Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

3. Jhinabhai's Courage

Jhinabhai was studying in the fifth standard. Tribhovandas was the headmaster of his school. He was a very hot-tempered man. One day, Tribhovandas severely thrashed a boy named Chandu. Jhinabhai could not bear to see the boy suffer. He felt pity for Chandu, who was innocent of any wrongdoing. Jhinabhai started chanting ‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan’. Chandu screamed with pain. Tribhovandas continued thrashing him until he fell down unconscious. The children ran helter-skelter out of fear of the teacher. Later, Chandu died as a result of the severe beating. Chandu's father reported the case to the inspector, and an inquiry was opened. The inspector came to the school to investigate. But who would dare to bear witness against the headmaster?

The inspector asked all the students in the class. But who would be bold enough to report the truth? Jhinabhai, however, always spoke the truth. Why be afraid of speaking the truth? Jhinabhai



"Our headmaster mercilessly beat the innocent Chandu"

was not at all afraid of the headmaster. So, he boldly addressed the inspector, "Our headmaster mercilessly beat the innocent Chandu. He grabbed him by the arm and bashed him to the ground."

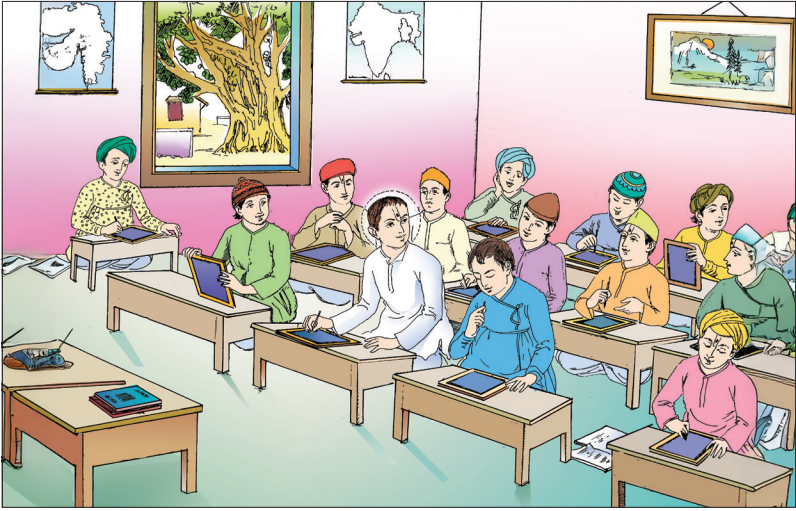
When Jhinabhai spoke up, all the other students gained courage and shouted with one voice, "Yes sir, it was the headmaster who beat Chandu." Looking closely at the forehead of Jhinabhai, the inspector saw the holy *tilak-chandlo* mark. Innocence and honesty were written on Jhina's face. He believed Jhinabhai and immediately dismissed the headmaster. He also rewarded Jhinabhai with a prize for fearlessly speaking the truth.

The truthful always triumph. Therefore we should not be afraid of telling the truth. We should form a habit of speaking the truth from early childhood.

4. An Ideal Student

Jhinabhai was very clever in his studies. He always stood first in every class and won many prizes.

Sometimes dull or lazy students would sit beside Jhinabhai,



"By copying you are cheating God"

hoping to copy his answers. Some bullies would threaten Jhina, "When you have solved all the questions you better tell us the answers."

Jhina would laugh and, to merely please them, say, "Alright, I will tell you. I will tilt my slate so that you can see everything I have written."

Whenever the teacher set any problem, Jhinabhai would solve it immediately, and then turn his slate upside down. Those around him who had neglected their previous lessons, would ask in a whisper, "What is the answer?" But Jhinabhai would remain silent.

One day some of the boys threatened him, "Jhina, show us your slate. Otherwise, we will beat you up."

But Jhina fearlessly replied and explained, "You work it out! If my answer is wrong, then your answer will also be wrong."

Whenever other students succeeded in copying his work, Jhinabhai did not like it. He would tell them off, "It is wrong to copy. By copying you are cheating God."

Thus, Jhinabhai always insisted that everyone should learn by working hard, and should never cheat.

5. Use of Leisure Time

At two o'clock in the afternoon there was a 30 minute recess for the class. During this time the students played games like *kho-kho*, hide and seek, chase and catch, and *amli-pipli*. Jhinabhai was not interested in playing games. He preferred to spend his time in prayer. So, while his friends and other children played games, Jhinabhai prayed to God in a quiet corner or under a tree.

The boys often wondered, “What is Jhina doing?” The teachers, too, would ask his friends, “What does Jhina do while others play?”

One day, two teachers saw Jhina while he was meditating under a tree and asked, “Jhina, you don’t play any games. You meditate on God all day. You are not interested in the affairs of this world, so why don’t you become a sadhu?”

“Yes, I will become a sadhu,” replied a determined Jhina. So saying, he resumed his prayers. How could the teachers of Jhinabhai know at the time that Jhinabhai would really become a sadhu and become famous throughout the world.

Jhinabhai did not like to waste his free time. He only liked to offer worship. We, too, should not waste time and should offer devotion to God.

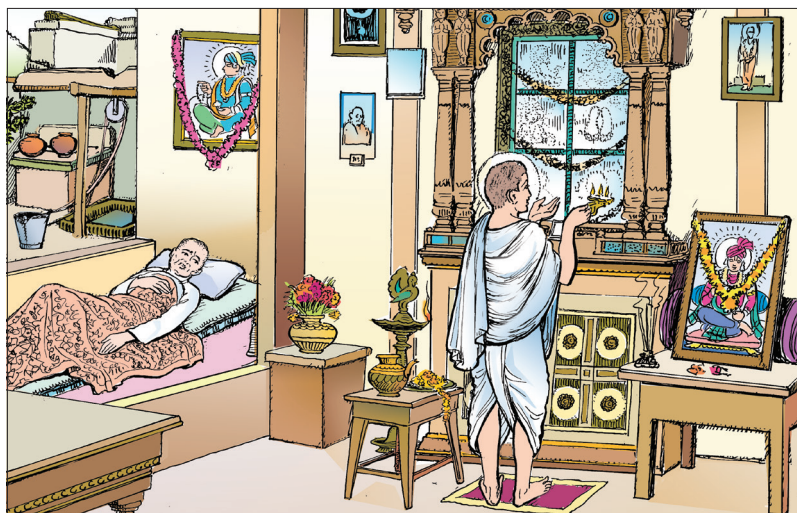
6. Worship of God

For many years Jhinabhai’s uncle, Mohanbhai, had been performing the daily worship and service of the *murtis* in the mandir at Dhari. But due to old age and ill health, he could no longer look after the mandir properly. He thought, “It would be nice if some good devotee could be found to perform this service.” His eyes fell on Jhinabhai.

He asked Jhinabhai if he would take up the mandir duties.



Whilst his friends played, Jhina preferred to meditate on God



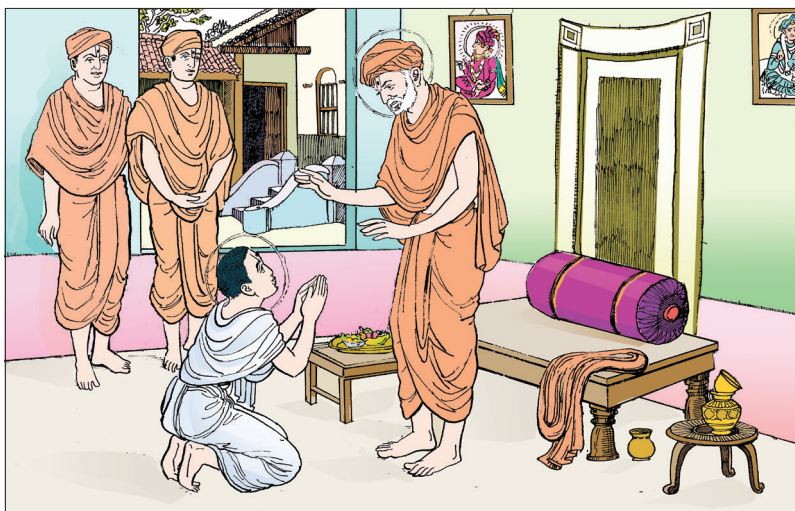
Jhinabhai performing *arti* in the mandir

Jhinabhai was overjoyed, and assured him, “Mohankaka, do not worry. I will serve Thakorji.”

From that day Jhinabhai assumed the mandir responsibilities, and engaged himself in the service of God. He would bathe the *murtis* lovingly, apply sandalwood paste and a kumkum *chandlo*, light the *divo* and incense sticks, and perform the *arti*. His heart overflowed with joy while offering devotion to God.

Besides all this, he would draw water from the well to water the plants in the compound of the mandir. Within a short time the garden in the mandir was filled with the sweet fragrance of flowers. Every morning Jhinabhai made garlands of flowers of various colours for the *murtis*. He would prepare a variety of delicacies to offer to God. He would serve the *murtis* as if God himself was physically present. Quite often, he even conversed with the *murti*.

In the mornings and evenings, he would bring his friends to the mandir. There, he taught them how to chant the ‘Swaminarayan’ mantra. He used to sing bhajans and asked others to sing with him. He taught them how to perform *arti*



"I would be happy if you would make me a sadhu"

and also how to prostrate before the *murtis*. Before they left he would give them *prasad*.

7. Initiate Me as a Sadhu

Now Jhinabhai passed his days and nights in the mandir. He worshipped Shriji Maharaj with single-minded devotion. Jhina would also serve visiting sadhus during their short stays in Dhari. All of them were pleased with his service and would bless him. At school, Jhinabhai passed the Standard VII exams. At that time, Sadguru Krishnacharandas Swami, along with his group of sadhus visited Dhari from Junagadh. On seeing the sadhus, Jhinabhai was extremely pleased. He was in their service from early morning until late night. In the morning, he would wake up early, bathe, and, after completing his daily puja, attend to the needs of the sadhus. He helped them by drawing water from the well for bathing. He would sweep the mandir floor, and neatly arrange the mats for the sadhus to sit and meditate upon. He lovingly served them all throughout the day.

Sadguru Krishnacharandas Swami was a blessed disciple of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. He saw that Jhinabhai, though often very tired, still completed his daily duties and services at the mandir. He was pleased to see the devotion of Jhinabhai, and appreciated the zeal with which he served.

One morning, while giving *prasad* to Jhinabhai, Swami asked, “Jhina, would you like to become a sadhu?” Jhinabhai was filled with joy at Swami’s question. He replied eagerly, “Yes Swamiji, I would be happy if you would make me a sadhu. It is my only wish. For many days I have been hoping to talk to you about it. But today, you yourself have read my mind. Swamiji, please initiate me as a sadhu. I want to become a sadhu and serve you and Maharaj.”

Swami Krishnacharandasji blessed the young devotee and said, “Your wish will be fulfilled.”

8. Jhina Bhagat in Junagadh

A year later, Jhinabhai obtained permission from his family to become a sadhu. Mother Puribai prepared *kansar* and served her son for the last time. Applying a *chandlo* to his forehead, and wishing him fulfilment in his new life, she gave him a proud but sorrowful send-off. On 1 November 1908 (Kartik *sud* 7, V.S. 1965), Jhinabhai left home. He set out for Junagadh. On the way he was accompanied by his elder brother, Kamalshibhai. The very next day, they met Krishnacharandas Swami.

On 8 November 1908 (Kartik *sud* Punam, V.S. 1965), Jhinabhai was given the *parshad diksha* by Krishnacharandas Swami. He was then given the name ‘Jhina Bhagat’. Jhina Bhagat immediately took on various duties at the mandir.

In those days the *parshads* were entrusted with the task of grazing the cows and buffaloes of the mandir. Jhina Bhagat would go along with the other *parshads* to the foot of Mount

Girnar to graze the cattle. While the cattle grazed, Jhina Bhagat sang bhajans, and memorized Swamini Vato.

In the evening, Jhina Bhagat would return to the mandir along with the cattle. On the way back he would cut and gather *babul* sticks, used for brushing teeth in the morning, for all 300 sadhus residing at Junagadh mandir.

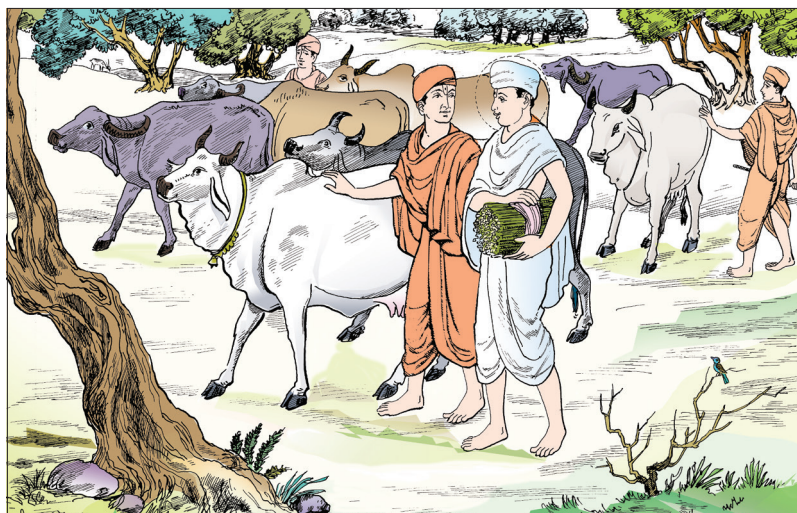
Besides this, every morning he cleaned the cowsheds and collected cow-dung. He would then make little flat cakes out of the dung and placed them in the sun to dry. They were then used for fuel.

In spite of fatigue from the day's work Jhina Bhagat always attended the *satsang* assemblies every evening. He would sing bhajans and chant the Swaminarayan mantra. Then he would listen to the discourses until late at night. Every morning he would get up at 4 a.m. to serve his guru once again. Such was his daily routine.

He earned the blessings of Krishnacharandas Swami by serving him devoutly.



Parshad Jhina Bhagat



Returning to the mandir with a bundle of 300 babul sticks

9. Jaga Bhakta Appears in a Dream

During those days, Krishnaji Ada and Pujaji Bapu (disciples of Jaga Bhakta, a devout disciple of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami) were frequent visitors to Junagadh. Jhina Bhagat would listen to their discourses. Krishnaji Ada narrated many incidents about the greatness of Jaga Bhakta. Day after day Jhina Bhagat heard about the spiritual glory of Jaga Bhakta.

Once, at night, a thought came to him, “How great must Jaga Bhakta have been!” With this thought he fell asleep. During his sleep, at 2 a.m., he had a wonderful dream. He dreamt that Jaga Bhakta was standing before him, wearing a dhoti and a white *pagh* on his head. Jhina Bhagat immediately prostrated before Jaga Bhakta, and addressed him saying, “Guru, today you have fulfilled my wish by giving me your darshan. I am overjoyed. Please say a few words of wisdom.”

Jaga Bhakta replied, “You should keep two guidelines in mind. The first is to form a habit of reading the shastras and

the second is to keep the association of holy sadhus.” Then Jhina Bhagat again prostrated before Jaga Bhakta in his dream.

The habit of reading shastras means daily reading of the Vachanamrut, Swamini Vatu, Shikshapatri, Bhaktachintamani, Harilamrut, etc. with reverence, and applying the wisdom contained in them. Contact of revered sadhus means seeking the company of a God-realized Sadhu such as Shastriji Maharaj.

We must also cultivate these two habits and thus strive to achieve inner fulfilment.

10. First Meeting

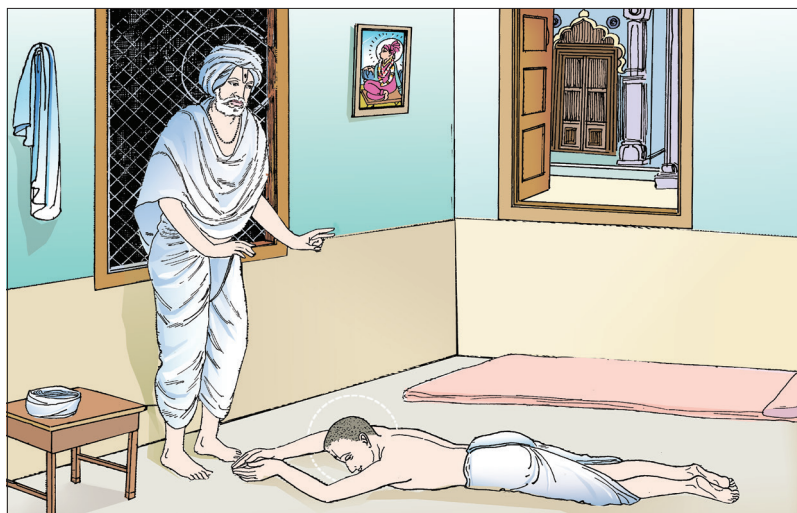
Jhina Bhagat belonged to the group of sadhus led by Krishna-charandas Swami. Once, the group went to Rajkot.

One day, Shastriji Maharaj (Shastri Yagnapurushas) also arrived in Rajkot. He stayed at the house of Krishnaji Ada. When Jhina Bhagat heard this news, he felt a strong desire to have the darshan of Shastriji Maharaj. So, early in the morning, under the pretext of going to bathe in the River Aji, Jhina Bhagat and three other sadhus went to the house of Krishnaji Ada.

When Shastriji Maharaj awoke at 4 a.m., Jadavjibhai informed him that some sadhus from Junagadh had come for darshan. Shastriji Maharaj went to the room in which the sadhus were waiting. Jhina Bhagat and the other sadhus paid homage to Shastriji Maharaj and then presented to him a *mala* and a *tumbdi*, which had been used by Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. Shastriji Maharaj was greatly pleased.

Jhina Bhagat could not take his eyes off Shastriji Maharaj and looked at him with great reverence. Shastriji Maharaj, too, looked at Jhina Bhagat with much affection.

Jhina Bhagat thought, “Shastriji Maharaj is worthy of being a guru.” There and then, he mentally accepted Shastriji Maharaj as his guru.



Jaga Bhagat appears in a dream

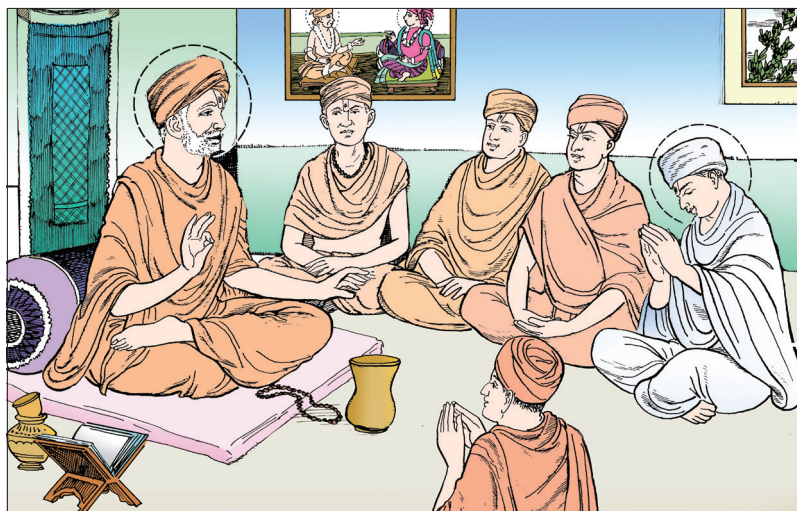
Thus, in Rajkot, on 12 August 1910 (Shravan *sud* 7, V.S. 1966), Jhina Bhagat met Shastriji Maharaj for the first time. It was like a river meeting the ocean.

11. “I Am Only a Servant”

After staying for some days in Rajkot, Krishnacharandas Swami and his group of sadhus resumed their *vicharan* in the villages. In the course of their *vicharan* they visited Hajadiyala, near Sardhar. There was no Swaminarayan mandir in the village, and therefore the sadhus rested at the community hall of the village.

It was afternoon. The sadhus, following the afternoon sermon, retired for a short rest. Jhina Bhagat, after completing his duties also lay down for some rest. A Rajput devotee, who was an expert in astrology and palmistry, was struck with wonder when he saw the soles of Jhina Bhagat’s feet. He had never seen such extraordinary lines on the feet of any sadhu before.

Thus, when Jhina Bhagat got up and welcomed him, the Rajput devotee exclaimed, “O Jhina Bhagat! You will be a great



First darshan of Shastriji Maharaj in Rajkot

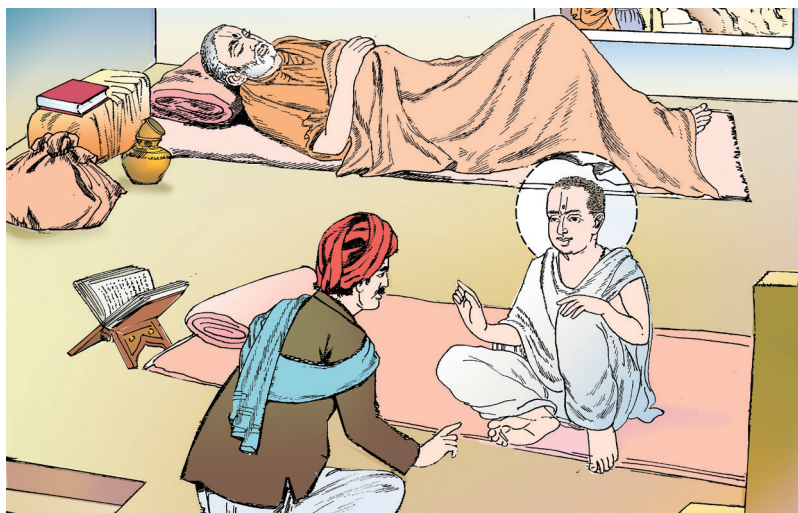
sadhu one day. People in their thousands will follow you. They will pray to you to earn your favour and blessings. Bhagwan Swaminarayan will be your constant companion. There are *urdhvarekhas* on your soles. Holy men with *urdhvarekhas* are extremely rare. They are the sacred signs possessed by a sadhu who has a constant rapport with God.”

On hearing these words, Jhina Bhagat at once covered his feet and said, “Don’t talk like that. I am merely a servant. Krishnacharandas Swami is a great sadhu. Please never speak about this to anybody.”

But the devotee could not remain silent. He at once disclosed his thoughts to Krishnacharandas Swami. Swamiji smilingly agreed, “Yes, he possesses all the qualities of a great sadhu.”

12. Austere Jhina Bhagat

The King of Mengani was a great devotee of God. At his request, Krishnacharandas Swami would visit Mengani every year to celebrate the Annakut festival.



"O Jhina Bhagat! You will be a great sadhu one day"

One year, however, the King of Lodhika invited the sadhus to celebrate Annakut in Lodhika. The king was also a staunch devotee. He provided all the raw materials for the celebrations. From early morning till late evening, the sadhus and *parshads* devoutly prepared a variety of sweet and savoury delicacies for the festival. When the day of Annakut arrived, a grand festival was held. The delicacies were first offered to God. At the king's order, a meal with *sata* and *jalebi* were ready to be served to everyone.

Jhina Bhagat used to fast some days in the month. Realizing that delicious sweets such as *sata* and *jalebi* would be served on that day, he decided to observe a fast. All the sadhus went for lunch, except Jhina Bhagat.

When the king heard that Jhina Bhagat was fasting, he pleaded with him saying, "Today is a festival day. You should not fast today, so please eat." Jhina Bhagat politely refused. The king repeated his request several times but Jhina Bhagat told him, "I have a stomachache and am not hungry, so I do not want to eat anything."

The king then appealed to Krishnacharandas Swami, "Please



Krishnacharandas Swami tells Jhina Bhagat to have his meal

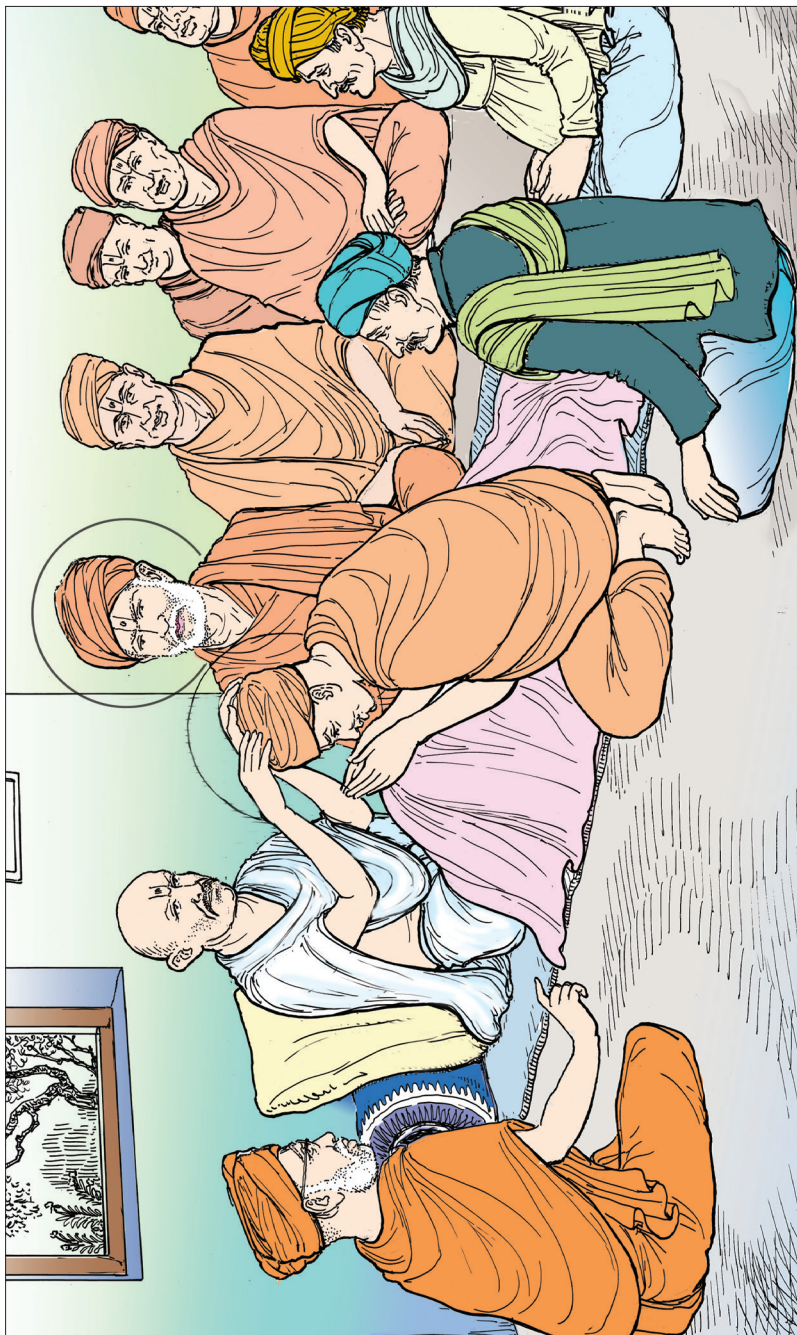
tell the young Jhina Bhagat to eat.” So Swamiji asked Jhina Bhagat not to fast that day. But he gave the same reply to Swamiji, and did not eat. Thus, despite such tasty delicacies, Jhina Bhagat fasted.

Krishnacharandas Swami was inwardly pleased that Jhina Bhagat was not tempted even by the tastiest of sweets to break his fast. He praised his austerity and self-control. That night he called Jhina Bhagat and placed his hands on his head, and blessed him. He advised the other young sadhus to cultivate the same virtues of austerity and self-restraint as Jhina Bhagat.

13. Krishnaji Ada's Blessings

In Vartal, on the morning of 11 April 1911 (Chaitra *sud* 13, V.S. 1967), Acharya Shripatiprasadji Maharaj gave Jhina Bhagat the *bhagvati diksha*. Jhina Bhagat was renamed ‘Sadhu Jnan-jivandasji’. However, the sadhus and devotees fondly called him ‘Yogi’, while Krishnacharandas Swami called him ‘Jnanji Swami’.

On 8 July 1911 (Ashadh *sud* 12, V.S. 1967), after celebrating



Krishnaji Ada blesses Yogiji Maharaj

ekadashi, Sadhu Jnanjivandasji, along with six other sadhus, left the Junagadh Mandir to join Shastriji Maharaj to help promote the true philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam, as taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut.

Two years later, on Saturday, 11 October 1913 (Aso *sud* 11, V.S. 1969), that Krishnaji Ada breathed his last. Bidding his last ‘Jai Swaminarayan’ to Shastriji Maharaj and other sadhus he asked, “Where is Jnanji Swami? Call him here.” Jnanji Swami (Yogiji Maharaj), who was sitting in the corner, prostrated before him and then came and stood respectfully by his side. Krishnaji Ada asked him to come nearer. When he did, he placed his hands upon his head, and blessed him.

Nirgundas Swami remarked, “Jnanji Swami! It is not Krishnaji Ada who is blessing you, but believe that Bhagatji Maharaj and Jaga Bhagat are blessing you.”

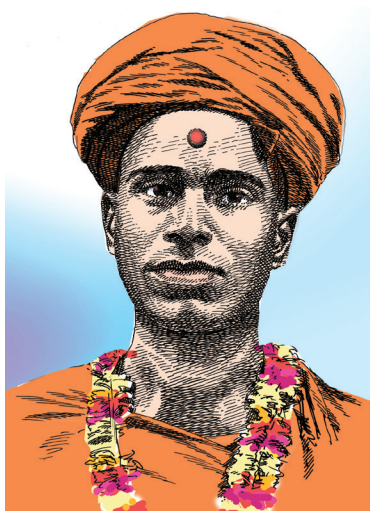
Because of his great love for all, Krishnaji Ada’s eyes welled up with tears. Then bidding ‘Jai Swaminarayan’, his last farewell, he left this world for Akshardham.

14. The Desireless Sadhu

Yogiji Maharaj was absolutely without any desire. Though he was young, he never wanted anything for himself. All day long he would remain engaged in spiritual discourses, singing bhajans, memorizing scriptures and serving others.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj was with a group of sadhus in Bhavnagar. They were staying at the house of a staunch devotee. This house was situated on the main road. It was evening and Yogiji Maharaj was on the upper floor of the house reading the Swamini Vatu.

On the streets below, people were eagerly awaiting the king’s wedding procession. The procession was to pass along the main road. Both sides of the road were crowded with onlookers. Win-



The young and spirited Yogiji Maharaj

dows and balconies were also full of eager spectators. From a distance, drums and clarinets could be heard.

Suddenly, a devotee got up and approached Yogiji Maharaj, “Come on, why are you seated here? The king’s wedding procession is here. It is worth seeing. Come to the window – don’t you want to see it?”

Yogiji Maharaj replied, “Of what consequence is it for us sadhus? Of what use is it for us to see such things? Once we have renounced something, why let it re-enter our heart?” The devotee was amazed by this reply and spirit of renunciation. He bowed down at the feet of Yogiji Maharaj.

Due to this spirit of service and other saintly virtues the veteran sadhu, Narayandas Swami of Junagadh, sent a message three times, “Jnanji Swami, if you return to Junagadh, I will myself come down to Jetpur from Junagadh to welcome you, and bring you back here in a grand procession.” However, Jnanji Swami stayed with Shastriji Maharaj to help him accomplish many noble tasks.

In Rajkot, Yogiji Maharaj unintentionally made a small

mistake. Vignandas Swami became very angry and ordered Yogiji Maharaj to leave his unfinished meal as punishment. Hargovind Mehta of Vadhwan witnessed this scene, and in the afternoon privately asked Yogiji Maharaj, “Yogi! Why do you tolerate so much? Don’t you feel like leaving and going home?” Yogiji Maharaj replied happily, “When the guru scolds us, it is for our good. Without punishment we would not remain alert. It helps us to correct our mistakes.”

Hargovindbhai was amazed at this reply and fell at the feet of the young sadhu in recognition of his patience and humility.

15. Indifferent to Insult

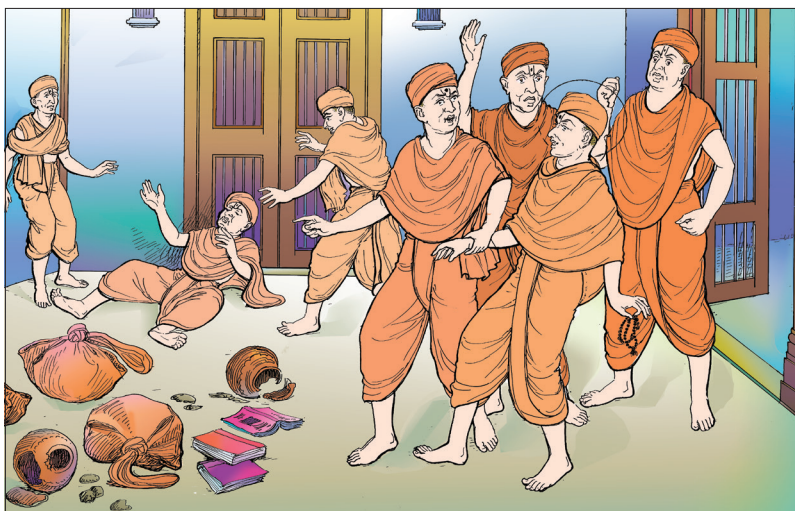
Yogiji Maharaj would travel with Shastriji Maharaj and his sadhus. While touring the villages with the sadhus, Yogiji Maharaj arrived in the village of Keriya. They stayed in the village mandir. Some resentful sadhus, who were not on friendly terms with Shastriji Maharaj, heard that the sadhus of Shastriji Maharaj were staying in the mandir.

It was afternoon and, except for Yogiji Maharaj who was fasting that day, all the sadhus were resting in the afternoon. Meanwhile, the resentful sadhus came to the mandir. At once, they flung the clothes and other belongings of Shastriji Maharaj’s sadhus out of the mandir and broke their water pots.

They saw that Yogiji Maharaj was the youngest, so they caught hold of him and pushed him out of the mandir. “Call your Gunatit, and see if he can save you!” they shouted, and then pushed the blind sadhu Bhagwatswarupdasji against the grills.

Another sadhu was violently pushed aside into a corner. Others were beaten severely, while Vignandas Swami was locked up behind a grill.

The villagers came to know about the sudden unrest and



The resentful sadhus beating the innocent sadhus

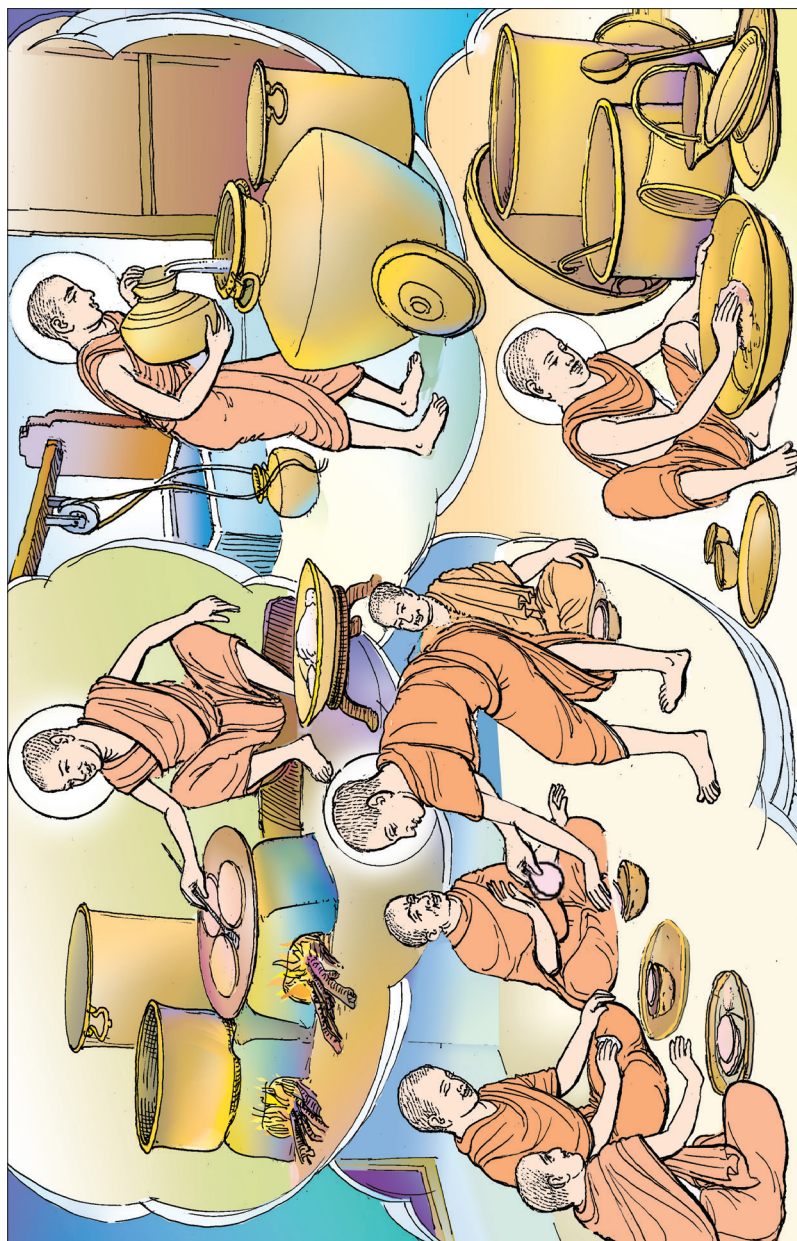
hurried to the mandir with sticks in their hands. They threatened the intruders, and peace was quickly restored.

Though the sadhus opposing Akshar-Purushottam had beaten and insulted them, Yogiji Maharaj and his fellow sadhus did not utter even a single word against them. They met the assault with smiles on their faces. Their humility and saintliness were indeed admirable.

16. A Hard-Working Sadhu

Yogiji Maharaj, though young, excelled in *seva*. From early morning to late at night, he remained busy in the service of others. He never tired. In fact, he never felt at ease in the absence of *seva*. Even during fasts he would serve others with the same enthusiasm and love.

Each day he would get up early in the morning, then after bathing and prayers, he would start cooking in the kitchen. He would cook 300 *rotla*. He prepared and cooked the *rotla* simultaneously on two separate hot-plates. Whilst cooking,



Yogiji Maharaj cooked food, drew water, served the sadhus and washed the cooking utensils

Yogiji Maharaj would sing bhajans and recite Swamini Vatu. He used to cook everything by himself no matter how many people there were to feed.

When the food was ready, he would call everybody to eat by hailing ‘Vasudev Hare’. He himself served the food to all the sadhus and devotees. He was always the last to have his meal.

He also drew water from the well that would be required for cooking and for bathing by the sadhus and devotees. Every day, early in the morning, he rinsed out all the big pots and vessels, and filled them with filtered drinking water.

Even after all this *seva*, he would also wash the utensils after the meals were over. Many times he would be found cleaning the huge pots until late at night.

Yogiji Maharaj was an ideal of *seva*.

17. A Real Sadhu

The sadhus visited village after village to teach the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam and a purer way of life. They cared not whether it was day or night. Wherever they went, they collected flour and cooked their meals from whatever they managed to get.

Once the sadhus had halted at a village called Sankarda. Every morning, they would go round the village to beg for alms. Yogiji Maharaj, accompanied by the blind sadhu, Bhagwatswarupdasji, would also go around to beg for alms. Holding one of his hands, he would lead Bhagwatswarupdasji along the road. A cloth bag for collecting the alms hung from Yogiji Maharaj’s shoulder. When anybody offered flour, grains, and other foodstuffs, he would empty them into the bag with the other hand. As he walked, he took great care that no stones, thorns or holes in the road got in the way of Bhagwatswarupdasji. After the morning round was over, he cooked whatever alms they had received. He would first



Yogiji Maharaj collecting alms with Bhagwatswarupdas Swami

devoutly offer the food to God. Then, after serving the other sadhus, he would finally sit down to have his meal.

Karsansang Bapu of Adval often saw Yogiji Maharaj leading the blind and aged Bhagwatswarupdasji while going round for alms. One day, he saw the barefooted Yogiji Maharaj begging for alms in the scorching heat of summer. He felt pity for him. He asked, “Yogiji Maharaj, why don’t you take a younger sadhu with you? How difficult it must be to be with such an aged sadhu while begging for alms!” Yogiji Maharaj, with a smiling face, replied, “Bapu, it is my good fortune to have such an aged sadhu with me. I am extremely fortunate for the opportunity to serve a revered old sadhu! Also, by moving about with him I get the benefit of his vast knowledge and experience. And, I also get a chance to serve the mandir by carrying the alms.” Karsansang Bapu heard these words of Yogiji Maharaj and mentally bowed to him with great respect.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj went to Narayan Dharo from the village of Mojidad, to bathe. There, a sadhu named Narayan-prasad, wild with resent and envy, insulted and abused Yogiji

Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj merely smiled and chanted ‘Maharaj... Swami’. After bathing, he quietly returned to his residence without uttering a word in retaliation.

Some time later, when the monsoon had set in, this same sadhu, Narayanprasad, alighted from a train at Botad railway station at 2 a.m. The cart driver refused to take him to Kariyani. Walking wearily along the muddy road, he came to the Akshar-Purushottam Mandir in Sarangpur and knocked on the door. A thorn had lodged deep into his foot. Thus his foot was swollen, and he was in extreme agony. The watchman came and informed, “Yogiji Maharaj, a sadhu has come and wishes to stay for the night.”

Yogiji Maharaj went to receive him and brought him inside with courtesy. He then removed the thorn from his foot and dressed the wound. He lovingly fed him *prasad* of puri and laddus. He made a bed for him, and gently asked him to rest. In the morning he kept a cart ready to take Narayanprasad to Kariyani. Narayanprasad recognized Yogiji Maharaj as the very sadhu he had insulted a few weeks previously. He underwent a complete change of heart and thought, “Yogiji has served me with love even though I had insulted him. He has not said one word of rebuke to me. He has won me over completely with his great affection.”

Narayanprasad repented, fell at the feet of Yogiji Maharaj, and said, “You are a humble and loving sadhu because you do good to even those who have harmed you. You are an ideal *paramhansa* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who repays animosity with love and affection.” Then receiving the blessings of Yogiji Maharaj, Narayanprasad left by cart for Kariyani.

18. Mandir Seva

Yogiji Maharaj enjoyed serving Thakorji and the mandir as much as he liked to serve the sadhus and devotees. When engaged in such *seva*, he would forget hunger and fatigue. He



Serving on the construction site

sincerely obeyed all the commands of Shastriji Maharaj. He served him and helped him in all his work.

In 1907, Shastriji Maharaj built the first mandir in Bochasan, and consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in the central shrine. After some time he also started building a mandir in Sarangpur. The work was in progress, but due to lack of funds, the sadhus and the devotees also helped in the construction of the mandir.

Yogiji Maharaj, too, after completing all his normal duties used to help in the construction work of the mandir. He carried large stones on his head for the masons to lay. He mixed lime and sand with a spade, and supplied the mixture. He assisted in digging and filling in the foundation. He was the youngest in age, but in *seva*, he excelled everyone.

He had only one thought, "A mandir will be built, and the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam will be consecrated. How can one ever get such an opportunity to serve Maharaj! So, seize the opportunity and serve as much as possible, so that God is pleased."

Shastriji Maharaj was much pleased with Yogiji Maharaj's

sincere service and loving nature. He frequently praised and blessed Yogiji Maharaj.

19. Swami-Shriji Accept Offerings

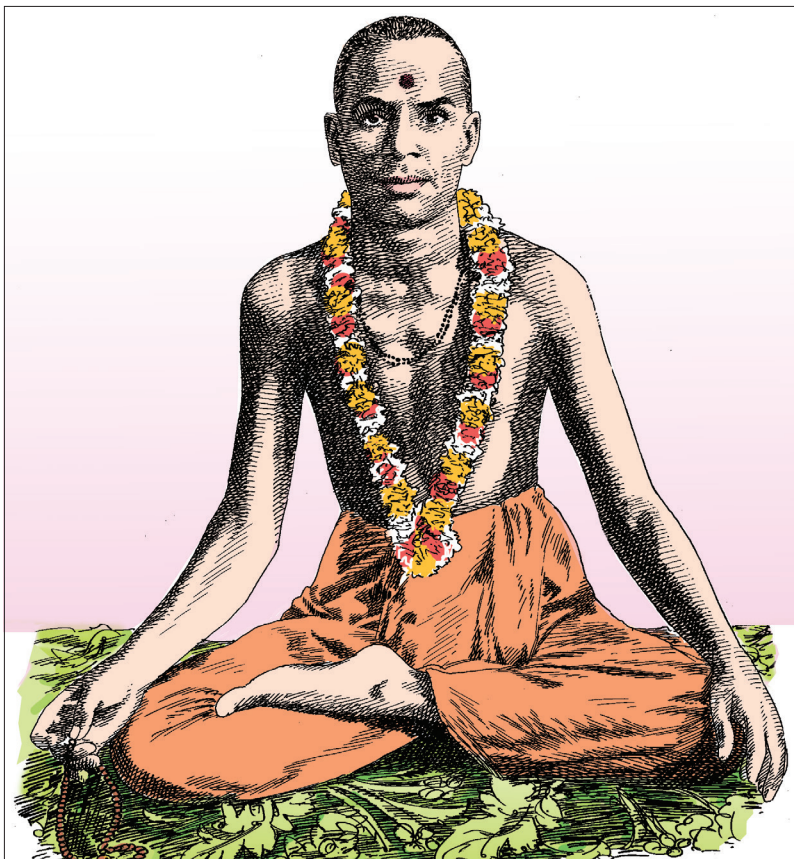
Jal Jhilani Ekadashi was being celebrated at Sarangpur. Shastriji Maharaj was feeling unwell and was resting in bed. Some devotees from Bhavnagar had come there for the celebration. Afterwards, Kuberbhai, a leading devotee of Bhavnagar, requested Shastriji Maharaj, “Swami, please come to Bhavnagar so that we may all benefit from your association.”

Shastriji Maharaj replied, smiling, “I am not well. Take Yogiji Maharaj in my place. I am included in Yogiji Maharaj.” They were pleased with these words of Shastriji Maharaj, and returned to Bhavnagar along with Yogiji Maharaj.

Prabhudas Sheth invited Yogiji Maharaj and the other sadhus for lunch at his house. A pious Brahmin prepared a meal of laddus, dal, rice, vegetables, and other items. When the meal was ready, Jayantibhai, along with Prabhudas Sheth, approached Yogiji Maharaj and requested, “Yogiji Maharaj! You have won the favour of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami. Today pray to them on our behalf to accept the *thal*.”

Yogiji Maharaj smiled and answered, “Let us go and pray. Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Swami will surely come to accept the *thal*.” So saying, Yogiji Maharaj entered the prayer room. The *thal* was placed before the *murtis*. Silver cups full of water were also placed near the *murtis*. The curtains were then drawn. Yogiji Maharaj sat there and all around him sat the devotees. Yogiji Maharaj started singing, “*Avinashi avo re...*” with profound devotion.

After half-an-hour, when the curtains were opened, they gasped with wonder at what had happened. Five laddus, dal and some rice had been accepted by Maharaj. The water cup was also half empty. All the devotees were struck by the power



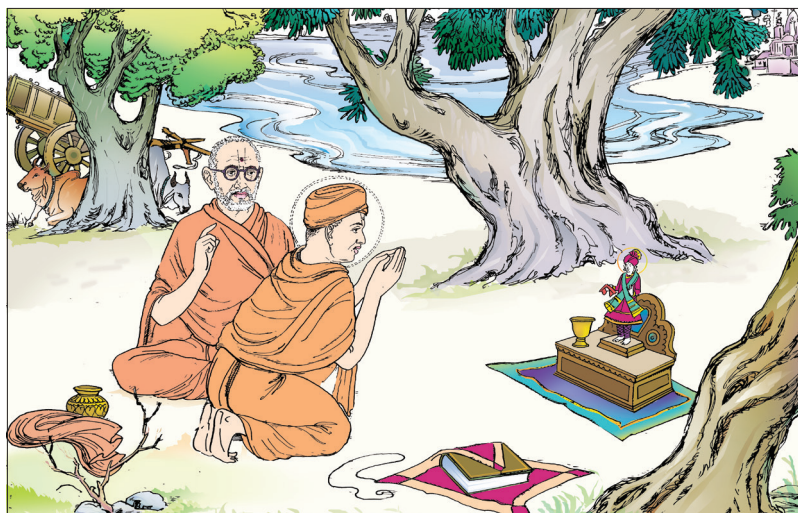
Yogiji Maharaj as a young sadhu

and devotion of Yogiji Maharaj. They were convinced that Yogiji Maharaj enjoyed the favour of Swami and Shriji.

20. Devotion Par Excellence

Once Yogiji Maharaj and Nirmundas Swami were travelling to Gadhada from Sarangpur by bullock-cart. It was a hot summer's day, and the road was deserted. There were neither any wells nor rivers on the route. It was already 4 p.m.

Yogiji Maharaj always kept the small metallic *murti* of Hari-krishna Maharaj (the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan originally



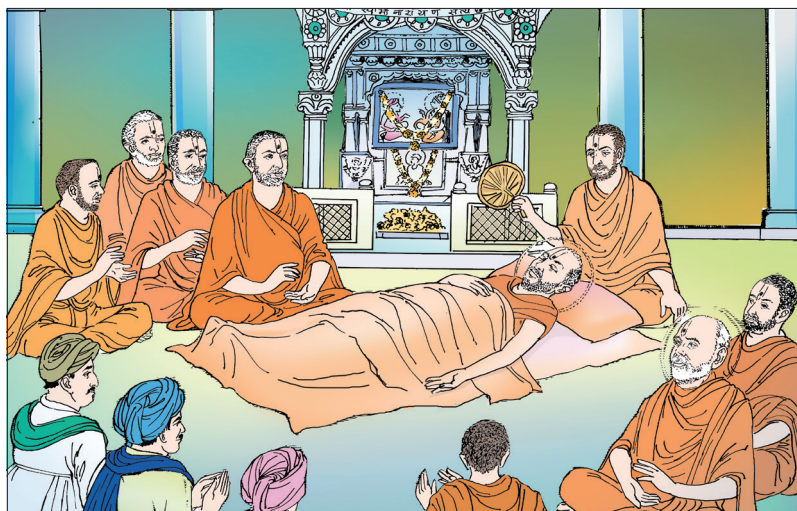
"O Maharaj! Please forgive me"

worshipped by Gunatitanand Swami). The time to offer water to Harikrishna Maharaj was fast approaching but as there was no water anywhere Yogiji Maharaj became worried and upset. "Thakorji must be very thirsty. Harikrishna Maharaj's throat must be dry due to thirst," he thought to himself.

It was 6 p.m. when they saw a river. Yogiji Maharaj asked the cart-driver to stop by the riverside. He took the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj, bathed it in the river and offered it filtered water to drink. Yogiji Maharaj was still not fully satisfied. He prostrated and prayed repeatedly before the *murti*, "O Maharaj! Please forgive me. I am at fault. Today, I have failed to give you water on time. Please forgive me." On hearing this, Nirmundas Swami, who was standing nearby said, "What is your fault? We were travelling and couldn't find any water on the way, and so we were late."

Still, Yogiji Maharaj kept bowing to the *murti* repeatedly and prayed for forgiveness.

Words fail to describe the full measure of his *seva*, devotion and humility.



Yogiji Maharaj in the Akshar Deri after being bitten by a snake

21. Snake Bite

A small memorial shrine had been constructed in Gondal at the place where the last rites of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami had been performed. It was known as the Akshar Deri. To add to its sanctity, Shastriji Maharaj started building a beautiful mandir over it. Yogiji Maharaj was stationed there at the time. Every day, he would wake up early in the morning at 4 a.m. and perform puja of the *charanarvind* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan which had been consecrated there. He also performed the *mahapuja* and offered *thal* in the Akshar Deri.

While the mandir was being built, Yogiji Maharaj and other sadhus used to live in huts built of mud and bricks. Once at midnight, while Yogiji Maharaj was sound asleep, a venomous black cobra bit the index finger of his left hand. The sudden rush of pain woke him up.

As a result of the poison, the pain quickly spread through his whole body. However, Yogiji Maharaj did not complain. While chanting the Swaminarayan mantra, his eyes closed.

Some anxious devotees suggested a physician be called. Others proposed various remedies. Meanwhile, Shastriji Maharaj arrived. When he heard about the snake bite he said, “Take Yogiji Maharaj to the Akshar Deri and chant the Swaminarayan mantra. The effect of the poison will vanish by the divine power of the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*.” Immediately, the sadhus lifted Yogiji Maharaj and carried him to the Akshar Deri and started chanting the holy name of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. After exactly 12 hours, the effect of the poison subsided. Yogiji Maharaj opened his eyes and bowed to Shastriji Maharaj. Just then, a government doctor arrived. He was amazed to see that the effect of the poison had been nullified by chanting the Swaminarayan mantra. He fell at the feet of Shastriji Maharaj. The Maharaja of Gondal and his officers were also surprised at the divine power of the Akshar Deri. They were convinced that it was a highly sanctified place.

22. Head of Akshar Mandir

It was the year 1934 (V.S. 1990). Most of the construction work of the Gondal mandir (also called ‘Akshar Mandir’) had been completed. In the same year, on 24 May 1934 (Vaishakh *sud* 10), Shastriji Maharaj ceremoniously consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in the mandir in traditional Vedic style. After the function, an assembly of all the devotees was held in the compound of the mandir. Here, in the presence of thousands of devotees, Shastriji Maharaj appointed Yogiji Maharaj as the first mahant of the Akshar Mandir and garlanded him. The whole congregation greeted the choice with joy and acclaim.

To Yogiji Maharaj, the Akshar Mandir and Akshar Deri meant everything in life. The Akshar Deri was dearer to him than his soul. He was never tired of performing *pradakshinas*

of the Deri. He would get up early at 3.30 am and sweep the floor of the Deri. After performing puja of the *charanarvind* with sandalwood paste and flowers, he would perform *arti*. Then he gave spiritual discourses to the devotees. He also performed *mahapuja* in the Deri regularly. During the *mahapuja* he prayed whole-heartedly, “May the number of sadhus increase and may the Satsang spread.” During his free hours, he kept the accounts of the mandir himself, and maintained the ledger. Yogiji Maharaj looked after the maintenance of the mandir and himself attended to the needs and the comforts of any visitors. The greater the number of visitors, the happier he would be. He never allowed any visitor to leave without eating.

Rana Daji Bapu assisted him in many of his duties. One day, Daji Bapu wanted to consult Yogiji Maharaj about the mandir accounts. He searched for him in the *kothar*, but did not find him there. Thinking that he might be in the Akshar Deri or upstairs in the mandir, he went there to look for him. But he was not there either. After searching for him everywhere, he finally went to the kitchen where he found him cooking, all by himself.

Seeing the mahant of such a large mandir working like an ordinary cook in the kitchen, he said, “I have been searching for you for a long time. Why are you cooking? Where is the sadhu who cooks daily?”

Yogiji Maharaj quietly replied, “The sadhu who cooks is ill. By Maharaj’s grace, today I have got the chance of this *seva*. For a long time I had wanted to prepare food to serve Thakorji. Today, I received that opportunity.”

Hearing these noble sentiments, Bapu admired Yogiji Maharaj more than ever before. However, when he enquired of the sadhu in charge of the kitchen, Bapu found that he was not ill at all. He and some other sadhus were loitering around and not doing their duty. He scolded them, “Yogiji Maharaj works day and night. Yet you make him serve in the kitchen

as well.” He then sent them to the kitchen immediately. Along with Yogiji Maharaj, Bapu went to the mandir office to discuss the accounts.

23. Devotion to Guru

Yogiji Maharaj used to eat only once a day. Moreover, every third day he observed a fast. Even when fasting in the scorching heat of the summer, he would carry all the luggage on his head while visiting villages in the company of Shastriji Maharaj. He would spend the whole day in the service of others. Owing to such incessant heavy work he developed a hernia.

In December 1936 (V.S. 1993), Dr Aspinol, a British surgeon at Rajkot Hospital, was consulted. After examining Yogiji Maharaj he said, “Swamiji, you will have to undergo an operation.” And so, on the instructions of Shastriji Maharaj, Hirjibhai reserved a special room at Rajkot Hospital for Yogiji Maharaj.

At the time, Shastriji Maharaj was also under medical treatment in Gondal. Still, he came to Rajkot before the day of the operation. Though it was winter and very cold, Shastriji Maharaj, as usual, got up early in the morning, and after completing his morning puja, he put on his *pagh* and went to the hospital without delay. As he entered the hospital premises the attendants were taking Yogiji Maharaj on a stretcher to the operating theatre.

On seeing Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj was overcome with joy. He folded his hands in reverence. Shastriji Maharaj blessed him and Yogiji Maharaj was taken to the operating theatre. The doctor performed the operation very skilfully. When the operation was over, Yogiji Maharaj was taken back on a stretcher to his room in the hospital.

Yogiji Maharaj had brought the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj

to the hospital and had placed it on a table in front of his bed. The devotees were all sitting on the floor around the bed. Shastriji Maharaj was sitting on a chair in front of the bed and was chanting with a *mala* in hand. After about two hours, the effects of the anaesthetic subsided. Yogiji Maharaj stirred in his bed and opened his eyes. Shastriji Maharaj was sitting right in front of him and smiling softly. Immediately Yogiji Maharaj folded his hands in reverence and asked the devotees sitting nearby in a low voice, “Has milk been served to Shastriji Maharaj?”

The question came as a surprise to the devotees and to Dr Aspinol. They felt, “This sadhu was not unconscious. This yogi must have been in a divine trance. Only then is it possible to remember the guru on waking.”

Yogiji Maharaj was, at the time, the personal attendant of Shastriji Maharaj in Gondal. There he served him milk and medicine daily. When he awoke, the first thing he remembered was his duty to his guru. How unique his devotion to his guru was!

24. “Shastriji Maharaj Is Always Manifest”

In 1951 (V.S. 2007), Shastriji Maharaj fell ill in Sarangpur. One day he said, “I have performed the *arti* of the *murtis* for the Gadhadra mandir. They will now be ritually consecrated by Yogiji Maharaj. There is not even a slight difference between me and Yogi. I am Yogi, and Yogi is me.”

These were his final words. On 10 May 1951 (Vaishakh *sud* 4), in Sarangpur, Shastriji Maharaj passed away to Akshardham. His body was cremated the following day. The devotees were in deep shock. They all thought, “Shastriji Maharaj has gone. Now what will happen to us?” No one knew what to do.

At that time Yogiji Maharaj reassured everyone, “Shastriji Maharaj has not gone. We should never think that Shastriji Maharaj has gone from our midst. Shastriji Maharaj is forever present in Satsang.” Listening to these words of Yogiji Maharaj, everyone felt, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan was ever present in Shastriji Maharaj, and that same Bhagwan Swaminarayan is now manifest in Yogiji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj will now bless everyone through Yogiji Maharaj.” All saw Shastriji Maharaj in Yogiji Maharaj. The spiritual eyes of all opened.

Six days after the passing away of Shastriji Maharaj to Akshardham, on 16 May 1951 (Vaishakh *sud* 10, V.S. 2007), Yogiji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* in Gadhada with great joy and festivity. Around 50,000 devotees had assembled to witness the ceremony. Everyone was convinced, “Shastriji Maharaj is always manifest in the Satsang.”

The opponents were disappointed. They had thought that as Shastriji Maharaj had passed away to Akshardham, no one would attend the celebrations and that the Akshar-Purushottam Sanstha would collapse. But they were amazed by the personality of Yogiji Maharaj. The glory of Akshar-Purushottam spread in all directions. It was the beginning of a new era in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj. He captured the hearts of all the devotees, earning their respect and admiration.

25. Youth Centres and Satsang Assemblies

Yogiji Maharaj had been conducting weekly *satsang* assemblies of the devotees for a long time. After the departure of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj injected new vigour into these activities. Gradually, he established a youth wing (Yuvak Mandal). In the beginning, only a few youths attended the assemblies. The organizers, therefore, were somewhat discouraged. But Swamiji

lovingly encouraged them, “Happiness lies in obeying commands. Your youth centre will flourish. So, be patient. Bring new youth friends to the assembly. Conduct discourses and explain our messages. Then, by Maharaj’s grace, the number of youths will increase.” If any centre had stopped, he would restart it. Thus, he established youth centres in every village or city he visited. He kept a record and encouraged them by writing to the members regularly. In no time, many youth centres sprang up in Gujarat. In many places, assemblies were also organized for children (Bal and Balika Mandals) to teach them the knowledge of *satsang*.

Yogiji Maharaj often said, “One should attend the weekly youth or *satsang* assembly even if one has to forego a profit of ₹25,000. It is not possible to meet the devotees individually in their homes. But if we attend the *satsang* assembly, then we can meet all the elders and youths at the same time. We also get to learn about the moral and spiritual beliefs of our Sanstha. Moreover, at such gatherings, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami and Shastriji Maharaj are divinely present. So one should never miss these *satsang* assemblies.”

Yogiji Maharaj took keen interest in all the activities of the youths. He intently observed their activities such as public speaking, yoga *asans*, bands, dramas and *ras*. He blessed them and applauded their efforts. He would listen attentively to their articles which were read out to him from the handwritten magazines they had prepared. Yogiji Maharaj used to say, “A handwritten magazine should be prepared every three months.”

26. Youths and Yogiraj

Youths and children were very dear to Yogiji Maharaj. He often said, “Youths are my heart.” And he cared for them as one cares for one’s heart. He spoke to them affectionately, expressed genuine interest in whatever they said, and lovingly

put his hands on their heads or shoulders in blessing. Moving his delicate hands around their neck he would quietly check whether the youth had a *kanthi* or not. If anyone wished for a *kanthi*, he would immediately give them one. He won them over by showering them with more love than even a mother.

In the summer and Diwali vacations, Yogiji Maharaj used to take the youths to the villages with him. During this time he would teach them Swamini Vatu, Vachanamrut, kirtans, *cheshta*, etc.

Once, while Yogiji Maharaj was walking with the support of two youths, he said, “On two sides are two youths. In the middle is Yogi the youth.”

He took personal care of the youths who toured the villages with him. He personally prepared *rotlas* for them, served them food, and in case anyone fell ill, he would care for them during their illness.

Yogiji Maharaj woke up early at 4.30 a.m. and would then awaken the youths. He gave discourses on subjects such as *agna*, *upasana* and *seva*. He was especially pleased by those who observed a waterless fast or a water-only fast. He expressed his joy by blessing them and patting them on their backs. At 11.00 p.m., after the evening *satsang* assembly for the devotees and singing of the *cheshta* were over, Yogiji Maharaj would gather all the youths in a quiet corner of the hall and sit with them again. He encouraged them to converse among themselves in different languages such as English, Hindi or Gujarati. He would sometimes join in to amuse the youths by using English words, even though he did not know much English.

Yogiji Maharaj captivated the hearts of even college students. He helped many to overcome bad habits such as smoking, eating *pan* and visiting the cinema. He inspired them to live a pure, simple and disciplined life, and thus prepared them to become ideal devotees and citizens. Thus, during their vacations every year, the youths accompanied Yogiji Maharaj for a month or



Youths and Yogiraj

two. When they departed at the end, he would advise them, “Observe *niyams* sincerely. Attend the weekly youth assemblies regularly. If there isn’t a youth centre in your village, then start one. I will write to you.”

His affection for them was so great that he would take the trouble of walking upto the mandir gate to see them off. The youths were so attached to Yogiji Maharaj that their eyes would often fill up with tears when they left.

27. Youths Become Sadhus

Within ten years Yogiji Maharaj had formed groups of dedicated and trained youths in many different towns. Inspired by his wish, even at home these youths led a simple and pious life. They fasted every fifth day and slept on a simple mat without using even a pillow. They had cold water baths every morning and made it a point to apply *tilak-chandlo* on their foreheads. They did not eat or drink anything that was not prepared at home. And they never watched any films.

By the wish of Yogiji Maharaj, many such youths were inspired to become sadhus. He would ask, “I want you to become a sadhu. Will you?” Hearing these loving words, the educated youths readily agreed.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj wrote a letter to a youth who wanted to become a sadhu, “I do not want to make you a sadhu to serve me, but I want to teach you *brahmavidya*, which will enable you to attain *ekantik* dharma. I want to help you attain *moksha*. Through you, thousands will join Satsang. The Akshar-Purushottam philosophy will spread throughout the world.” Many parents realized the lofty ideals of Swamiji and willingly agreed to dedicate their beloved sons to the Sanstha and its noble task. A large group of highly educated young men was soon ready and eager for initiation into the sadhu-fold.

On 11 May 1961 (Vaishakh *vad* 12, V.S. 2017), the 70th birthday of Yogiji Maharaj, the spires of Gadhada Mandir were fitted with golden *kalashes*. On this auspicious day Yogiji Maharaj initiated 51 educated youths into the sadhu-fold. After Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in the entire history of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and spirituality, it was the first time that 51 educated youths were being initiated into the sadhu-fold. The credit goes wholly to Yogiji Maharaj. This occasion will be written in letters of gold in the annals of the Sanstha's history.

After this, many educated youths from India as well as England, Africa and other places approached Swamishri to be initiated as sadhus. This gave a great impetus to the Satsang. Later, these young sadhus, trained and nurtured by Yogiji Maharaj from their pre-initiation days, travelled throughout India and abroad to explain to people the true doctrine of Akshar and Purushottam. They totally dedicated themselves to the noble service of Yogiji Maharaj and the Satsang.

28. Yogiji Maharaj's Life and Work

Yogiji Maharaj never tired in explaining the *upasana* of Akshar-Purushottam to the world at large. He toured villages incessantly day and night. He would be in one village in the morning, and in the evening he would be in another. Wherever he went, he was warmly welcomed. Aspirants came in large numbers to seek his spiritual refuge and become disciples of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. There was an unending series of celebrations, and *satsang* assemblies. The number of *satsangis* increased. Yogiji Maharaj started Satsang centres in many villages. He guided and encouraged the *satsangis* by writing to them regularly.

Accompanied by sadhus and devotees, he twice organized a special train pilgrimage of India, in 1953 and 1956. These pilgrim

centres were further sanctified by the visits of Yogiji Maharaj, and many more aspirants were drawn towards Satsang. At his request the government built a platform at the railway station in Chhapaiya and named it 'Swaminarayan Chhapaiya'. A tremendous welcome was given to him when he arrived in Chhapaiya.

In recognition of Swamiji's great work, about 10,000 devotees came from all over to celebrate the 65th birthday of Yogiji Maharaj on 5 June 1956 (Vaishakh *vad* 12, V.S. 2012) in Sarangpur.

Yogiji Maharaj fulfilled the wish of his guru, Shastriji Maharaj, by consecrating a *hari* mandir at Akshar Bhavan, in Mumbai on 15 December 1961 (V.S. 2018).

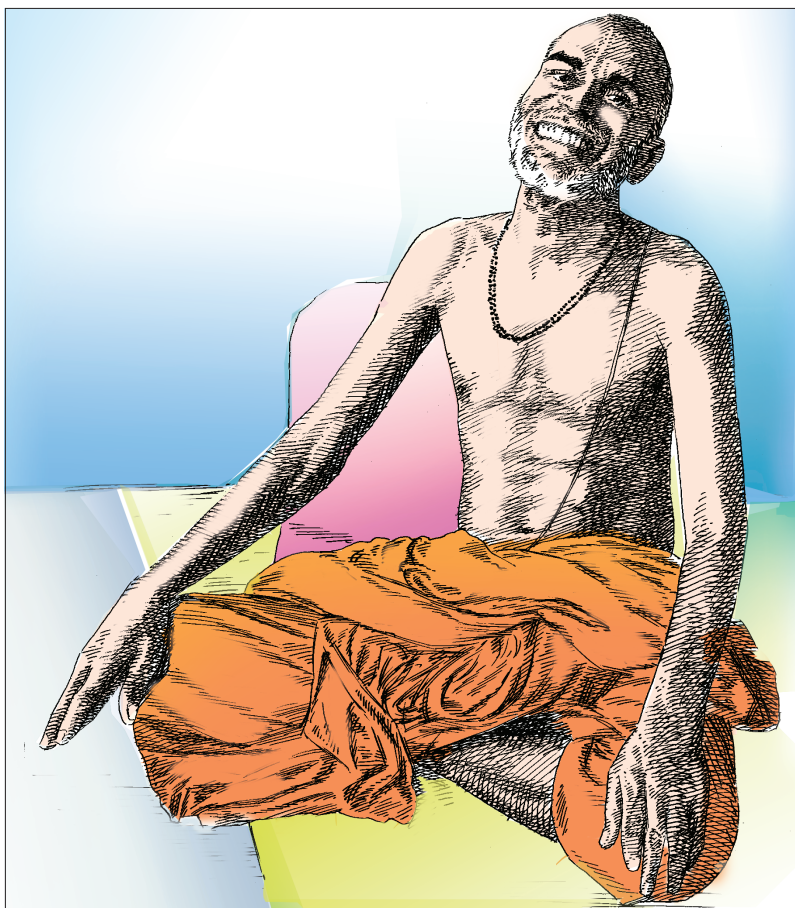
The following year, he inspired a three-pinnacled *shikharbaddha* mandir in Ahmedabad (in the Shahibaug area), and consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam on 10 May 1962 (Vaishakh *sud* 7, V.S. 2018).

He also built a fine mandir in Mahelav, the birthplace of Shastriji Maharaj. In this mandir, besides the painted *murtis*, he also consecrated a marble *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj.

The year 1965 (V.S. 2021) marked the birth centenary of Shastriji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj was himself 73 years old, and was in very delicate health. Despite this, he visited 82 villages in 38 days during the biting cold of winter, to create awareness of and collect funds for the centenary celebrations. He was prepared to undergo any hardship to celebrate the centenary in a grand manner. On 6 February 1965 (Vasant Panchami, V.S. 2021), in Atladara, the birth centenary of Shastriji Maharaj was celebrated with great joy and festivity in the presence of 150,000 devotees.

To promote character-based education amongst students, he established a students' hostel in Vidyanagar and a *gurukul* in Gondal in which primary and secondary education was given.

In 1967, thousands of devotees from India and abroad gathered in Gondal to celebrate, with due pomp and devotion, the 75th



Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj

birthday (Amrut Mahotsav) of Yogiji Maharaj, through whom Bhagwan Swaminarayan was manifest on this earth. A souvenir publication named *Amrut Parva*, describing his glorious character and work, was published on this occasion. On this occasion, Yogiji Maharaj presented a ₹25,000 donation to the Gujarat Government for feeding famine-stricken people. The 200,000 devotees who attended this celebration in Gondal spoke about the glory of his life and work.

Yogiji Maharaj himself laboured with the devotees to construct

the Gunatitnagar Railway Station in Bhadra, the birthplace of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. In Bhadra, Yogiji Maharaj built a marvellous single-spired *shikharbaddha* mandir over the birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami. He consecrated the *murtis* of Dham (Gunatitanand Swami), Dhama (Bhagwan Swaminarayan) and Mukta (Gopalanand Swami) on 23 April 1969 (Vaishakh *sud* 6, V.S. 2025).

Vedras, a book containing the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, was re-published at Yogiji Maharaj's request. He also prepared the biographies of his guru, Shastriji Maharaj and Bhagatji Maharaj (the guru of Shastriji Maharaj) for publication. On the occasion of Shastriji Maharaj's centenary celebrations, a publication named *Yagnapurush Smruti* was released. The Harililakalpataru – a scripture inspired by Gunatitanand Swami and written by Achintyanand Brahmachari/Acharya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj – was also published through Yogiji Maharaj's initiative. Hindi and English publications on the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were published. Also, Hindi and English translations of the Vachanamrut were initiated by him. A biography of Gunatitanand Swami was also printed in Gujarati.

Yogiji Maharaj encouraged many devotees to read the *Swaminarayan Prakash*, the Sanstha's Gujarati monthly periodical. A weekly, *Swaminarayan Satsang Patrika*, was also started to provide instructions and news regarding the Satsang to members in various centres, enabling them to conduct regular Sunday assemblies.

Yogiji Maharaj established a school for higher education in Sanskrit for the sadhus in Mumbai. With his blessings and guidance many sadhus became *shastris* (BA) and *acharyas* (MA) in Sanskrit. Some of the sadhus received government scholarships and doctorate degrees. Moreover, many young sadhus were also encouraged to develop their various innate skills in music, art, writing, etc.

Yogiji Maharaj built many *hari* mandirs. He arranged *parayans* and *shibirs*, through which thousands of devotees benefited from *satsang*. Many new devotees were attracted and the Satsang grew considerably.

What is remarkable about Yogiji Maharaj is that he was also highly respected by leaders of many different religions. They often approached him for guidance and blessings. They said, “Yogiji Maharaj belongs to all. He is not only for the Swaminarayan Sampradaya only, but for the whole world.” The reason for this was that Yogiji Maharaj respected everyone. He never engaged in or allowed criticism of others. In India and Africa, Yogiji Maharaj visited, without any hesitation, Sikh gurudwaras, Jain *derasars*, Christian churches and other places of worship. He had great respect for all religions.

Today, we see many leaders who allow relaxation or adjustment in their moral codes of conduct to attract more followers. However, Yogiji Maharaj strictly observed eight-fold *brahmacharya* and the renunciation of wealth. He implicitly obeyed even the most minor commands of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

He captured the hearts of all. Thus, due to his spiritual and social works people looked up to him with reverence and respect.

29. Visits to Africa and UK

Due to the persistent requests of the devotees living in East Africa, Yogiji Maharaj visited East Africa and Aden for the first time in the year 1955 (V.S. 2011). He consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in the grand mandir in Mombasa. He consecrated the sacred footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan at the memorial spot of Shri Maganbhai, a respected veteran devotee of East Africa, who had inspired many onto the spiritual path.

Yogiji Maharaj sanctified many places by celebrating festivals and holding spiritual assemblies. He travelled thousands of miles and spiritually uplifted many during his *vicharan* in Africa. As a result of his visit many new centres for youths and elders were established. Their enthusiasm was sustained by his regular flow of letters to them. Later, the devotees built mandirs in Kampala, Jinja and Tororo, and requested Yogiji Maharaj to visit East Africa again to perform the *murti-pratishtha* ceremonies in these mandirs.

So, during 1959–60 (V.S. 2015–6), Yogiji Maharaj once again visited East Africa, Central Africa and Aden. He consecrated the *murtis* in the mandirs in Kampala, Jinja and Tororo. He travelled 35,000 miles, visiting 103 centres in seven countries. Many new aspirants were drawn to the Satsang. The Satsang in Africa increased immensely.

In the West, too, centres were started in the UK, USA and Canada. Especially in the UK and USA, many aspirants started to embrace the Satsang.

In Africa, the devotees purchased large plots of land in Gulu and Nairobi and built huge mandirs. Again, the devotees appealed to Swamiji to visit them once more. Yogiji Maharaj, in spite of ill health, was moved by their devotion and agreed to visit East Africa for the third time.

In 1970 (V.S. 2026), Yogiji Maharaj set forth on his third foreign tour. He consecrated the *murtis* in the mandir built on the main road in Nairobi and gave the devotees much joy.

The devotees in London bought a church hall in Islington and converted it into a mandir. They invited Yogiji Maharaj to London to consecrate the *murtis* in the mandir. Pleased by their devotion, Yogiji Maharaj went to London. He was given a festive welcome and was honoured with a procession accompanied by the RAF band through the main roads of central London. He performed the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony

of the *murtis* in the mandir in Islington. During a ceremony at the River Thames in London, the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was bathed in the river.

After seven weeks in London Yogiji Maharaj returned to India. He also sent four sadhus to the USA to explain the message of Satsang.

30. Reception and Departure

Yogiji Maharaj's visit gave immense happiness and satisfaction to the devotees in Africa and England. He returned to India after spending a total of five months abroad. English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and other newspapers in India commended his spiritual tour. Everywhere people sang his praises. He was given a grand reception in Mumbai at the Shanmukhanand Hall, the largest auditorium in Asia. He was felicitated for his work and achievements. Swami Chinmayanand who presided at the function said, "While Indian youths imitate Western culture, this great sadhu at the age of 80 went abroad to promote the Hindu Dharma. He deserves acclaim for imparting moral and spiritual values to all."

A public reception on the same scale was also accorded to him at Vadodara.

In Ahmedabad, then the capital of Gujarat, Yogiji Maharaj was taken in a grand procession through the main roads of the city. Yogiji Maharaj was the centre of attraction in the mile-long procession, where around 600,000 people lined the streets for his darshan. In the city's Tagore Hall, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri Hitendrabhai Desai, and other ministers and spiritual heads paid glowing respects and tributes. The Chief Minister, Shri Hitendrabhai Desai, said, "To honour Yogiji Maharaj is to honour a true adherent of Indian civilization. To honour Yogiji Maharaj is to honour the liberator of the whole

of mankind. Today, we greet Yogiji Maharaj as the real giver of peace, one who dissolves the miseries caused by the many unpleasant incidents taking place in India and abroad.”

He was given a rousing reception at many other places, including Limdi, Gadhada, Bhavnagar, Mahuva, Amreli, Rajkot, and Gondal.

Despite all these honours, Yogiji Maharaj never faltered in offering devotion to God and guru, and completing his other duties. On his last visit to Sarangpur he performed *arti* of the golden *sinhasans* (in the mandir sanctum) prepared for Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Dharmakul. This was a highly cherished desire of Shastriji Maharaj, and it was at last fulfilled.

Despite the heavy rains in Bhavnagar, he came out to lay the foundation stone of the new mandir. In Mahuva, he performed the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony in the mandir built at the birthplace of Bhagatji Maharaj, the guru of Shastriji Maharaj.

He then went to Gondal, where he stayed for three months. During this period in Gondal on the auspicious occasion of Sharad Purnima, he consecrated a beautiful marble *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj placed on a fine marble platform behind the Akshar Deri. He stayed in Gondal and pleased everyone. He invited the devotees there, and showered his divine blessings upon them. He celebrated many festivals, giving precious memories to the devotees.

Then, all of a sudden, he decided to invite illness. It is not always possible to understand the actions of such godly sadhus. His illness worsened. Swami was immediately flown to Mumbai for further treatment. However, on 23 January 1971 (Posh *vad* 11, V.S. 2027) at 1 p.m., he bid ‘Jay Swaminarayan’ to all, and left this world for Akshardham. The whole Satsang community was overwhelmed with grief and shock.

His body was flown to Gondal. There, on 24 January 1971 (Posh *vad* 12), after all the funeral rites were over, the body

was cremated in the compound to the right of Akshar Mandir. Thousands of devotees from India and abroad offered their last tearful homage to Yogiji Maharaj.

To commemorate the spot where Yogiji Maharaj was cremated, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired a memorial shrine called Yogi Smruti Mandir.

31. Yogiji Maharaj's Preferences

Yogiji Maharaj used to wear only coarse clothes throughout his life. He was very simple and liked to spend his time in *seva*. He always ate simple food which he mixed in a wooden bowl and ate only after adding water to it. Whenever there was any special dish or if there were any sweet delicacies, he would fast on that day. He always had a cheerful smile on his face. He was at home with young and old alike, inquiring about their welfare and blessing them all. He prayed to Bhagwan Swaminarayan that everyone be relieved of their miseries. He chanted the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* constantly with a *mala* in his hand.

Yogiji Maharaj had a special bond with children. He affectionately called them to him and taught them to sing, “*Swami ane Narayan, Akshar ane Purushottam, Atma ane Paramatma, Brahma ane Parabrahma.*”

He often gathered the children around him and taught them to sing bhajans, and to recite Swamini Vatus. He narrated stories from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami to point out a moral or teach truths to the children. He also narrated incidents from the lives of Bhagatji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj as illustrations of correct thought and conduct. He taught everyone how to perform puja and *arti*, and gave them *prasad*.

Yogiji Maharaj instructed youths to rise early in the morning. He would explain that after getting up, one should first

remember Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Then, after bathing, one should perform puja, offer prostrations, and read five verses from the Shikshapatri. After puja, one should do one's school work. School children should regularly study for four hours a day and college students for eight hours. Elders must always be respected. Children should daily bow to their parents.

Before going to school or college, one must apply *tilak-chandlo* to one's forehead. Everyone should visit the mandir daily. They should attend the weekly assemblies without fail. They should commit to memory Swamini Vatu, Vachanamruts and kirtans. Milk and water should be filtered before drinking. One should fast on *ekadashi*. One should not steal, nor use another's materials without permission. One should not touch another's property. One should not smoke or tell lies. One should neither watch films nor attend plays. One should not eat in hotels or restaurants.

32. Sermons of Yogiji Maharaj

1. We should pray to God. While walking, eating, drinking or in any activity, we should remember God.
2. We should regularly read two Vachanamruts and ten Swamini Vatu.
3. Daily recite bhajans, Vachanamruts, Swamini Vatu, etc., which have been committed to memory.
4. When youths get together, they should not talk about worldly affairs, but should discuss religious matters. They should narrate and discuss the incidents of God and his holy Sadhu. They should recollect and ponder over what the Satpurush has taught.
5. Be committed to overcoming one's flaws. Never lose one's temper. Always be honest with one's guru, then one can attain perfection with his blessings.

6. Those who acquire philosophical and religious knowledge and also do *seva* continue to progress. Therefore, always engage in *seva*, big or small. Also develop a liking for religious discourses (*katha*).
7. “*Nānese ho nānā rahie, jaisi nāni dub, Ghās fis sab ud gayā, dub khubki dub.*”
 “During floods big trees which stand high and erect are often washed away; however, the grass remains in its place in spite of the heavy water flow, because of its flexibility.”
 Thus, harbouring ego will cause one misery in Satsang. It could even lead one to fall from Satsang. But if one humbly renders *seva*, no matter how menial, then one does not become proud, and is able to uphold the *satsang*.
8. Youths should maintain unity (*samp*), friendship (*subradbhav*) and a sense of oneness (*ekta*) amongst themselves.
9. The whole Satsang should be regarded as divine. One must see divinity in all devotees. Our guru, through whom God manifests, should be realized as being perfect. Never speak ill of God or his devotees.
10. Youths should not make fun of others or indulge in mischief. They should always behave themselves.
11. One should not criticise the actions, forms (physical) or flaws of other people. One should analyse one’s own actions and flaws.
12. Tolerate physical and verbal hardships. Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Satpurush are pleased with one who tolerates hardships patiently.
13. One should make do with whatever one gets, irrespective of its adequacy or quality. One should never quarrel over things.
14. Fire changes everything to its own colour, whereas water takes the colour of whatever is added or mixed with it. Similarly, we should be like fire and influence others for

- their good, but we should not, like water, be influenced by another's vices or weaknesses.
15. One should walk with one's eyes cast down. One should not be lured by the temptations in a city. Youths should therefore avoid sinful thoughts and visit the mandir daily. Develop love for Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Satpurush; then, despite living in the city, one will remain immune to temptations.
 16. Saintry virtues should be cultivated. Evil habits prevalent in one's nature should be discarded. What is saintliness? Tolerance. One's behaviour must be such that it sets a good example for others.
 17. The highest degree is to become the servant of a servant of God. So, serve devotees by washing utensils, washing their clothes, cleaning the latrines and the dining areas. Even if one becomes a senior manager, one should serve. This is the way to *moksha*. So learn it.
 18. Ahimsa and *brahmacharya* must be strictly observed. Believe one's *atma* as *gunatit*, *brahma*, *akshar*.
 19. Three are eternal: Dham, Dhami and *mukta*. Bhagwan Swaminarayan – Purushottam, is the supreme Parabrahma. He is the sole doer (*karta*), has a form (*sakar*) and is the transcendental, supreme entity (*sarvopari*) who is ever manifest on earth (*pragat*). Gunatitanand Swami, who is Aksharbrahma personified, is the divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and the Satpurush is the gateway to Akshardham. One must have complete faith in this.

33. Pramukh Swami Maharaj

In 1950 (V.S. 2006), Shastriji Maharaj appointed Shastri Narayanswarupdasji as the administrative head of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS). All the devotees were asked to work under his orders and guidance.

He was only 28 years old at the time. Since then, Shastri Narayanswarupdasji was known by the name of 'Pramukh Swami'.

Yogiji Maharaj wrote about this occasion in his diary as follows, "Swami [Shastriji Maharaj] looked at him, 'I want to appoint only him as the president of the Sanstha.' So, he was so appointed at a meeting in Ahmedabad. I was then sitting nearby. Swami told me, 'Put your hand on his head and bless him so that he acquires virtues like yours.' So I put my hand on his head, whereupon Shastriji Maharaj said, 'You have placed your hands on his head, by which my hands are also included.' In this way, Swamiji asked me to bless him. When I did so, he became very happy."

Thereafter, in accordance with the wishes of Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami worked day and night to further the cause of BAPS. In 1968, many sadhus and devotees celebrated the 48th birthday of Pramukh Swami in Mumbai. On that occasion Yogiji Maharaj said, "Shastriji Maharaj was highly pleased with him ever since his younger days and so appointed him as the president. How fast and how admirably he has developed the Sanstha! All should obey him implicitly. Pramukh Swami is the manifest form of Shastriji Maharaj. He is not at all different from him. Everyone should behold him with divine feelings. We want to initiate 700 sadhus. This task will be fulfilled by Pramukh Swami." Yogiji Maharaj thus revealed the glory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

During his final illness, Yogiji Maharaj had said, "Pramukh Swami is my everything. All of you will now enjoy the bliss of God through him."

Until the age of 95, Swami Narayanswarupdasji – Pramukh Swami Maharaj – gave spiritual guidance and bliss to hundreds of thousands of devotees.

Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's successor and our guru is Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj. Let us please him and enjoy the bliss of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Glossary

acharya spiritual teacher or leader who upholds scriptural teachings and religious discipline within a tradition

agna divine instruction, order, or command from God or the guru

Akshar in his personal form, Akshar (the eternal divine abode) serves Purushottam (the Supreme God) in Akshardham (the highest divine realm), and manifests as the ideal devotee, the Satpurush (God-realized guru), on earth

amli-pipli popular traditional Indian children's game

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; one of the eight limbs (*ashtang*) of yoga practice

asat untruthful, false, or that which is not eternal

atma the soul (*jiva*) distinct from the physical, subtle, and causal bodies – free from the senses (*indriyas*), mind (*antahkaran*), worldly desires, and all influences of *maya*

babul medicinal twig from the babul tree, traditionally used as a natural toothbrush

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

brahmacharya celibacy; spiritual discipline involving abstinence and the channelling of vital energy for spiritual growth

brahmavidya supreme spiritual knowledge; divine wisdom about the nature of God and the soul

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

charanarvind respectful term referring to the sacred feet of

God or a spiritually elevated person, literally meaning ‘lotus feet’

cheshta devotional verses sung before bedtime describing the daily activities and divine glory of Shriji Maharaj

dal spiced lentil soup, a staple food in Indian cuisine

derasar Jain temple or place of worship

diksha initiation ceremony

divo traditional oil lamp consisting of a lighted wick in an earthen or metal vessel filled with ghee

ekadashi the eleventh day of both the bright (*sud*) and dark (*vad*) halves of the lunar month, considered auspicious for fasting and worship

ekantik one possessing four essential virtues: dharma (righteousness), *jnan* (spiritual knowledge), *vairagya* (detachment), and bhakti (devotion to God)

ekta unity, oneness, or harmony

guna fundamental quality or attribute; the three *gunas* are *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (activity), and *tamas* (inertia)

gunatit one who has transcended the three *gunas* of *maya*; beyond the material modes of nature; God-realized

gurukul traditional residential school where students live with and learn from their guru

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

jalebi popular Indian sweet delicacy made in a spiral shape by deep-frying a fermented flour batter and then soaking it in sugar syrup

jiva individual soul; one of the five eternal realities

kalash sacred water vessel or pot used in religious ceremonies, often topped with coconut and mango leaves

kansar traditional Gujarati sweet dish made from wheat, ghee, and jaggery

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

karta the doer or agent of action; in spiritual context, God is recognized as the ultimate *karta* of all happenings

katha spiritual discourse or narration of sacred stories and teachings

kho-kho popular traditional Indian team sport and children's game

kothar storeroom of a mandir

mahapuja elaborate worship ceremony offered to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami, liberated souls (*muktas*), divine incarnations, and deities

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

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

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

mukta liberated soul; one who has achieved *moksha* and is free from worldly bondage

murti sacred image, icon, or statue of God that serves as the focus of worship

murti-pratishtha traditional Vedic ceremony in which sacred images (*murtis*) are ritually consecrated in a mandir

niyam moral and spiritual disciplines; observances that purify and elevate consciousness

pagh traditional turban worn as a head covering

pan preparation made from *nagarvel* (betel) leaves filled with various condiments, spices, and sometimes tobacco

paramhansa literally ‘supreme swan’; the highest order of male sadhu, characterized by perfect discrimination between truth (*sat*) and falsehood (*asat*), like the mythical swan’s ability to separate milk from water

parayan series of spiritual discourses held over several consecutive days

parshad male renunciant who wears white robes

pradakshina ritual circumambulation; walking clockwise around a sacred object, person, or place

pragat manifest; visibly present (referring to God’s divine manifestation on earth)

prasad sanctified food that has been blessed by being offered to God, then distributed to devotees

puri deep-fried, puffed bread made from wheat flour, often served with vegetables or dal

rajas one of the three *gunas*, characterized by activity, restlessness, passion, anger, desire for sensory satisfaction, and material ambition

ras traditional folk dance of Gujarat performed in circles, especially during festivals

rotla traditional unleavened flatbread, typically made from millet flour in Gujarat

sakar crystallized sugar

samp unity, harmony, or coming together in spiritual fellowship

sampradaya spiritual tradition based on scriptural tenets and practices, and a succession of bona fide gurus

sarvopari supreme, highest, or above all

sat truth, reality, or that which is eternal and unchanging

sata traditional Indian sweet delicacy made from roasted wheat flour, ghee, and jiggery, often shaped into flat, round pieces

Satsang divine fellowship; the spiritual organization and community of devotees

satsang the spiritual practice of associating with the Satpurush (God-realized guru), fellow devotees (*satsangis*), one's own pure soul (*atma*), and sacred shastras

satsangi devoted follower who has been initiated and practices the principles of satsang

sattva one of the three *gunas*, characterized by purity, clarity of thought, goodness, harmony, and spiritual inclination

seva selfless service performed with devotion, particularly in service to God, guru, or devotees

shibir spiritual conferences, training camps, or retreats for devotees

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

sinhasan ornate throne or seat for the sacred images (*murtis*) of God

sud bright or waxing half of the lunar month when the moon phases increase

suhradbhav attitude of pure friendship; loving sentiment without selfish motives

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

tamas one of the three *gunas*, characterized by inactivity, lethargy, ignorance, darkness, and spiritual dullness

thal food offering presented to God with devotion as an act of worship

tilak sacred U-shaped mark applied to the forehead with

sandalwood paste as a sign of devotion

tumbdi bottle gourd; a type of vegetable commonly used in Indian cooking

upasana worship or spiritual practice; philosophical framework outlining how to understand and worship God; literally means 'sitting near' (God)

urdhvarekha auspicious vertical line marking on the sole of the foot extending from toe to heel, considered a sign of spiritual greatness

vad dark or waning half of the lunar month, during which the moon progressively decreases in size from full moon to new moon

vartman vow or pledge; spiritual commitment undertaken by devotees

vicharan spiritual travels undertaken by a guru or sadhu to uplift devotees and spread dharma