

PRAGJI BHAKTA

A Short Biography of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 10

PRAGJI BHAKTA (BHAGATJI MAHARAJ)

A Short Biography of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj

Gujarati Text: Sadhu Ishwarcharandas

Translation: BAPS Sadhus



**Swaminarayan Aksharpith
Ahmedabad**

PRAGJI BHAKTA (BHAGATJI MAHARAJ)

A Short Biography of BrahmaSwarup Bhagatji Maharaj

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

Inspirer: HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Blessings: HH Mahant Swami Maharaj

6th Edition: September 2025

ISBN: 978-81-7526-260-7

Copyright: © Swaminarayan Aksharpith

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher, except for brief quotations embodied in reviews and articles.



Published & Printed by

Swaminarayan Aksharpith

Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-4

Gujarat, India

Website: www.baps.org

Contents

Blessings	vii
Publisher's Note	viii
1. Early Childhood.....	1
2. Meeting Sadguru Gopalanand Swami	3
3. With Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh.....	6
4. Worthy Recipient of Akshar-jnan	7
5. Request for Akshar-jnan	8
6. Do or Die for the Guru.....	9
7. Sixty-Eight Places of Pilgrimage at Thy Feet	12
8. Art of Saintliness	16
9. Bananas on a Cactus	18
10. Realization.....	19
11. The Key to Akshardham Lies with Pragji.....	22
12. Akshar-jnan Proclaimed	24
13. The Path of Thorns.....	26
14. Discord in the Fellowship	28
15. Excommunicated	30
16. Manifestation Through Pragji Bhagat.....	32
17. Acceptance in Satsang	33
18. Guru of Shastri Yagnapurushdasji.....	36
19. "I Am Possessed by Swaminarayan"	38

20. Trouble for Bhagatji's Sadhus	39
21. Bliss in Solitude	42
22. End of Exile	44
23. Satsang with the Diwan of Vansda.....	46
24. Jnan Yagna in Ahmedabad.....	48
25. Bhagatji's Magnetic Personality	51
26. Jal Jhilani Celebration in Gadhada.....	53
27. Grand Reception in Junagadh.....	56
28. The Last Phase	61
29. Divinity Revealed	63
Glossary	67

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

Parabrahma Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan out of his compassion and grace manifested on this earth. He promised that he would remain forever present on this earth through the manifest form of Aksharbrahma, the Gunatit Satpurush. This is the succession of Gunatit gurus. The second guru in this divine succession was Pragji Bhakta, also known as Bhagatji Maharaj.

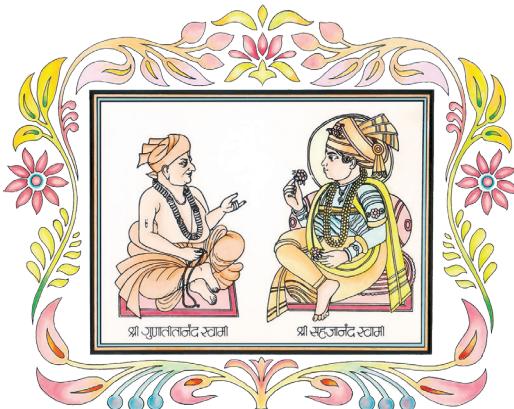
This publication, *Pragji Bhakta: A Short Biography of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj*, is a short biography of Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj which describes his divine life of unshakeable faith, profound devotion and humble *seva*. It is a translation of the Gujarati book *Pragji Bhakta*.

The book has been designed to serve as part of the curriculum for the Satsang Parichay 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 Aksharpith

Prayer



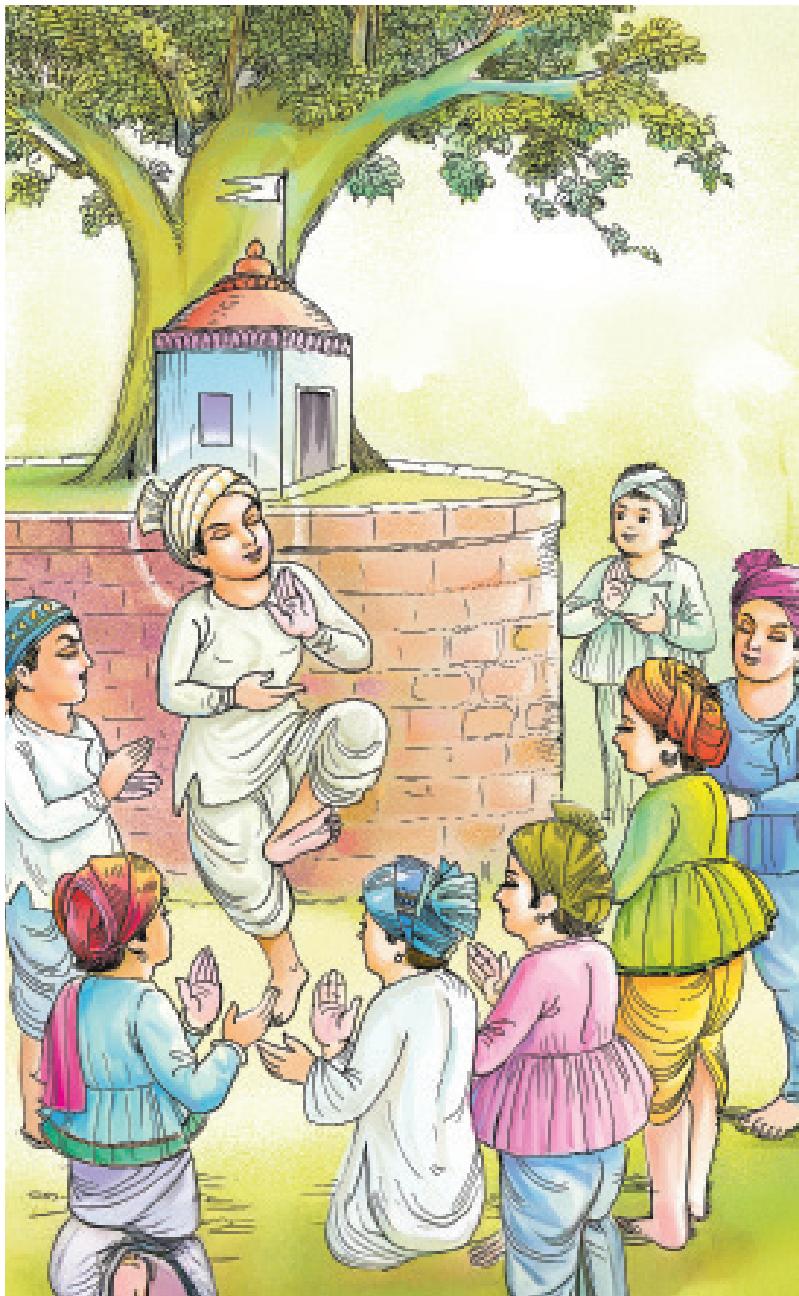
Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine māte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine māte...
Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānani parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...Ame 1
Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar-Purushottam, Gunātit gnānane gāishu...Ame 2
Ame sau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



Pragji Bhakta leads his friends in singing devotional songs
by the shrine of Hanumanji

1. Early Childhood

A group of children was chanting the Ram *dhun* in the mandir courtyard. In the middle a handsome young boy was dancing while singing devotional songs. All those visiting the mandir to offer their prayers were deeply impressed by the child's ardent love for God. They forgot everything else and stood there like statues watching this small boy dancing and singing the praises of God. When the children stopped singing, the people discovered that the leader of the group was Pragji, known as 'Bhagat', the son of Govindbhai and Maluba of Mahuva.

Pragji Bhakta regularly visited this Lakshmi-Narayan mandir with his friends. It was here in front of the small shrine of Hanumanji under the pipal tree, that Bhagwan Swaminarayan had stayed for three days when he was travelling as Nilkanth Varni. The child Pragji Bhakta always devoutly served the *murti* of Hanumanji.

Mahant Suryabharathi was greatly pleased with the devotion of the child. Pragji Bhakta served the *mahant* and attentively listened to the story of Bhagwan Shri Ram and pondered over the high ideals exemplified by the great characters of the Ramayan.

In the luscious green coastal town of Mahuva in Saurashtra, this child devotee was born to a tailor family on 20 March 1829 (Fagan sud 15, Samvat 1885). Handsome and luminous, the child was loved by all.

The child devotee was sent to the local school, but he was too active to remain within the walls of the school. Often, he would run away with other schoolboys to the River Malan that flowed along the outskirts of Mahuva. He would sit in the dry areas of the riverbed and talk to his friends, "I have studied everything. I have come to worship God and also make others worship God." Young children always remained in his company and everyone had a natural attraction towards Pragji Bhakta.



Pragji Bhakta engages his school friends in worshipping God

Once, a festival dinner had been arranged at Pragji's house. Pragji Bhakta went to his mother and said, "Mother, I am terribly hungry. Please give me something to eat." His mother, however, refused to give any food as she had not yet sanctified the food by offering it to God. Despite this, when she went out to do some work, Pragji Bhakta entered the kitchen and ate all the sweets, weighing $3\frac{1}{2}$ kg. He then climbed up into the loft and slept.

On returning, his mother was shocked to see the sweets missing. She asked everyone in the house. She thought that perhaps some stray dog might have eaten the sweets. Pragji Bhakta, however, called out from the loft, "I have eaten all the sweets." His elder brother chased him, but Pragji Bhakta jumped onto the veranda and escaped.

The story of this miraculous feat of the young Pragji Bhakta quickly spread throughout the entire town. Everyone exclaimed, "He is indeed a miraculous boy!"

Once, a great sadhu, Sadguru Yoganand Swami, came to the

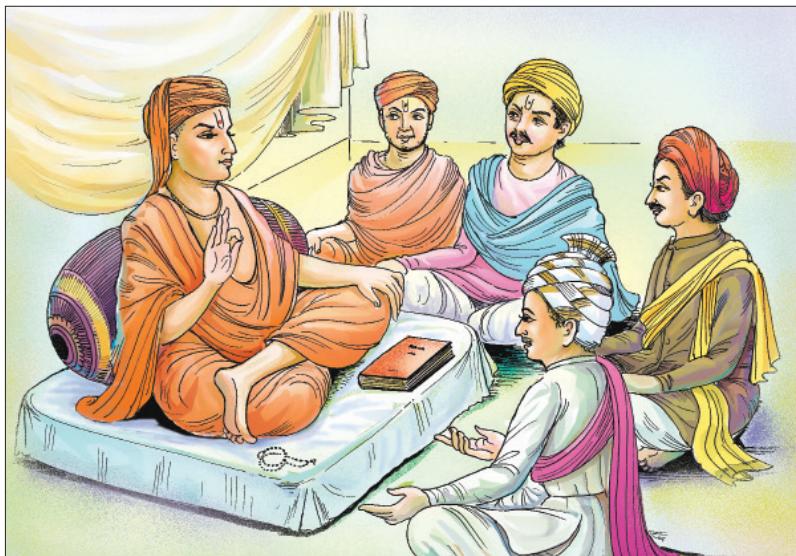
Swaminarayan mandir in Mahuva. Pragji Bhakta, who loved to serve sadhus, met this holy man. He experienced inner peace on having the darshan of Swami. Pragji Bhakta accepted the *vartman* from him and became a *satsangi*. Soon, Pragji Bhakta spent most of his time in the mandir in the *seva* of the sadhus. Yoganand Swami, who was deeply impressed by the zeal, devotion and love of this child observed, “He will indeed become a great devotee.”

2. Meeting Sadguru Gopalanand Swami

It was during this period that Acharya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj and Sadguru Gopalanand Swami visited the village of Pithvadi near Mahuva. The Rathods of Pithavdi had especially invited Pragji Bhakta from Mahuva to perform *pujan* of Acharya Maharaj and Swami. A huge assembly of sadhus and devotees was organised as per the tradition of Satsang. The ten-year-old Pragji Bhakta had worn beautiful clothes for the occasion. He boldly stood before the congregation and devoutly performed the *pujan* of Acharya Maharaj and the sadhus, performed *arti* and then offered prostrations to them.

The child caught the attention of Acharya Maharaj. Devotees introduced the child devotee. Sadguru Gopalanand Swami, who had been observing the child, said, “This child is a born devotee.” The devotees asked Swami to say more. Swami replied, “He is very great and will inspire thousands of people to worship God.” These words of Swamiji made the child all the more loved by the people.

Pragji Bhakta was instinctively attracted towards the luminous figure of Sadguru Gopalanand Swami. From then on, he regularly visited Vartal to seek the company of Gopalanand Swami. He was always accompanied by the elderly Jinabhai Rathod of Mahuva,



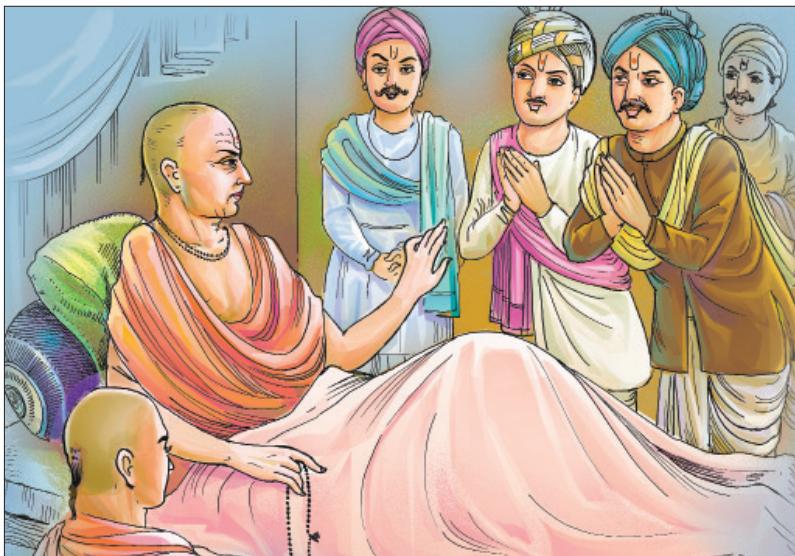
Pragji Bhakta listens to the discourses of Gopalanand Swami

whom he served during their journey. In Vartal, he always sat by Gopalanand Swami's side and ate only simple food, such as gram and jaggery. He served Gopalanand Swami with great devotion and listened to his discourses with great faith.

Pragji Bhakta's love and devotion towards Gopalanand Swami became deeper and more intense. He longed for more and more satsang. He desired to stay in the *seva* of Swami all the time. One day he asked Swami about this. Swami responded, "One who accepts Bhagwan Swaminarayan as the incarnation of all incarnations and becomes attached to Gunatitanand Swami, remains constantly in communion with Bhagwan Swaminarayan and me, regardless of whether such a devotee is a renunciate or a householder."

This made Pragji Bhakta aware of the greatness and eminence of Gunatitanand Swami, the choicest devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. But Pragji Bhakta, however, was too deeply attached to Gopalanand Swami to ponder over this revelation.

Out of deep love and reverence for Gopalanand Swami,



Gopalanand Swami advises Pragji Bhakta to go to Junagadh
and associate with Gunatitanand Swami

Pragji Bhakta thought of renouncing the worldly life. However, Swami commanded him to worship God while remaining as a householder. Once Pragji Bhakta went to Mumbai to learn the craft of tailoring. Soon, he prepared a beautiful coat and a pair of stockings for Acharya Maharaj. He personally went to Vartal to offer them to Acharya Maharaj, who was greatly pleased by this.

As he had great attachment for Gopalanand Swami, Pragji Bhakta often became sad when, in the course of his work, he forgot him. Seeing this, Gunatitanand Swami used to tell him, “If you attain *jnan* from the sadhus, then even while leading the life of a householder, you will not be able to forget God and his holy Sadhu.”

Overwhelmed by his love, Gopalanand Swami told Pragji Bhakta, “Go to Junagadh. All my promises to you shall be fulfilled there.”

In 1852 CE (Samvat 1908), Gopalanand Swami was taken ill in Vartal. The devotees of Vadodara wanted him to spend his final days with them. Swami, however, promptly replied, “Now

my attention is towards Maharaj in Akshardham or towards the Jogi of Junagadh.”

Pragji Bhakta requested Swami to explain the significance of his reply. Gopalanand Swami said, “The Jogi of Junagadh is himself the manifestation of Akshardham, the dwelling place of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He is not even an atom’s width away from Bhagwan Swaminarayan.” Soon thereafter, Gopalanand Swami passed away to Akshardham on Vaishakh *vad* 4.

3. With Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh

As Pragji Bhakta had adored Gopalanand Swami so much, he found the pangs of separation unbearable. He felt sad and unhappy. He left Vartal and reached Gadhada. Here, Siddhanand Swami consoled him and took him to Junagadh to meet Gunatitanand Swami.

“Where does this forest deer come from?” asked Gunatitanand Swami on seeing Pragji Bhakta. He welcomed Pragji with affection. Pragji Bhakta also experienced inner peace. His mind was pacified in the presence of Gunatitanand Swami. Soon, he recalled the advice given by Gopalanand Swami, “Go to Junagadh.” He was greatly impressed by the saintliness of Gunatitanand Swami, and quickly developed affection for him.

He was won over by the learned discourses of Gunatitanand Swami in which he explained the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan as Parabrahma Purushottam, and the means of becoming *brahmarup*. He felt like remaining in the company of Gunatitanand Swami at Junagadh. He would spend eight months every year in the company of Swami.

In 1855 CE (Samvat 1911) Swami gave discourses on

swarupnishtha and *ekantik* dharma for six months in Vartal. All the words of Swamiji were recorded in Pragji Bhakta's mind and he would daily repeat them before the learned sadhus and devotees. Besides this, he would reveal to them that Gunatitanand Swami was himself the manifestation of Aksharbrahma, the personified form of the divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

4. Worthy Recipient of Akshar-jnan

Once, as he was unable to reach Vartal for a festival, Pragji Bhakta came to Sarangpur in search of Gunatitanand Swami. At that time, Swami was in the nearby village of Khambhda. With great difficulty, Pragji reached Khambhda late at night. Swami was very happy to see Pragji Bhakta, because at that very moment he was thinking of him. Under the pretext that he felt hungry, Swami asked one of his attendants to bring a *rotlo*. He took a piece and gave the rest to Pragji Bhakta.

Early the following morning, Swami set off for Sarangpur. At Narayan Kund, on the outskirts of Sarangpur, Swami got down from his cart to answer a call of nature and perform ablutions. Pragji Bhakta was pouring water to help Swami wash his hands when Swami told him his inner thought, "Pragji, I am overflowing with *jnan*. However, I have yet to find a worthy person to receive it."

Seeing the mood and love of Swami, Pragji Bhakta showed his readiness, "Swami, can't you give that *jnan* to me?"

Swami replied with a smile, "It can only be given to a valiant soul who has total control over all the senses and body and is prepared to surrender oneself completely to me."

Pragji Bhakta took Swami's words seriously and resolved to become worthy of the Swami's blessings. Swami also saw in him a worthy disciple and blessed him.

5. Request for Akshar-jnan

During his trips to Mahuva, Pragji Bhakta used to talk to the devotees about the divine supremacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and that Gunatitanand Swami was the manifestation of Akshar. In 1860 CE (Samvat 1916) when the *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj was installed at Gadhpur, Pragji Bhakta pleased Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj by preparing beautiful garments for the *murtis* of Gopinathji Maharaj and Harikrishna Maharaj. That same year, a *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj was also installed in Junagadh. On that occasion also, Pragji Bhakta, with the loving assistance of the devotees, prepared elegant garments of gold and silver threads for Thakorji. Swami was greatly pleased with the devotion and practical worldly wisdom of Pragji Bhakta.

Pragji Bhakta had cultivated a habit of doing *seva* while remembering God. Even a little deviation from this caused him great pain. As a devout *sadbak*, he once requested Swami to give some illness to his body to strengthen his faith.

For some time, Pragji Bhakta remained ill. During this illness Pragji continuously focussed his mind on Swami. Devotion to Swami became the sole purpose of his life.

The following year, in 1861 (Samvat 1917), Acharya Raghuvirji Maharaj was to be present in the Ful Dol festival in Junagadh. Swami asked Pragji Bhakta to prepare an artistic canopy to cover the huge assembly area. Pragji Bhakta, with assistance from the devotees, purchased suitable thick cloth for the purpose and started his work. He worked incessantly day and night to prepare the canopy. Once, Swami came to observe the work in progress. He was so happy to see Pragji Bhakta singing bhajans while working. Swami asked Pragji to ask for whatever boon he liked. But Pragji Bhakta had no wants. So Swami gave him a boon, "You will earn lots of money, so associate with the

sadhus while leading the life of a householder.”

Pragji Bhakta, however, requested, with folded hands, “I have learnt from associating with you and Gopalanand Swami that there is no happiness in wealth and women. Please bless me with your knowledge, show me your dwelling place and make me a true *satsangi*.”

In order to test him, Swami had tempted Pragji with material pleasures. However, why would Pragji Bhakta trade the *chintamani* for them? Seeing that Pragji Bhakta was firm in his determination to reject worldly pleasures, Swami said to Pragji, “You can have your three boons only if you are prepared to leave home and stay here and dedicate your life for them.”

Swami was convinced of Pragji’s intense yearning for *jnan* and made the promise. The canopy, which could only have been completed after many days of hard work by many tailors, was prepared by Pragji Bhakta alone within a month. This earned him the profuse blessings from Gunatitanand Swami.

6. Do or Die for the Guru

In accordance with Gunatitanand Swami’s wish, Pragji Bhakta left home and remained in Junagadh to serve him. Swami had begun the task of constructing a haveli on the mandir premises. Pragji Bhakta laboured hard to help dig the foundations. Then, following Swami’s wish, Pragji undertook the difficult work of washing the sand and pouring it into the foundation. He completed this task all alone. As he performed this task, Gunatitanand Swami expressed his pleasure, which encouraged Pragji Bhakta to offer more *seva*.

Then came the most difficult job of preparing the lime mortar. Everyone was afraid that it would cause blisters on their hands and feet. There was also the risk of eye damage. Nobody came forward to undertake this work. As it was Swami’s wish, Pragji Bhakta

volunteered. He willingly accepted the work and started lifting the large sacks of lime on his back. He mixed water and lime in a pit, pounded it into mortar with his bare feet. With a desire to please Swami, Pragji Bhakta enthusiastically engrossed himself in the work maintaining *divyabhav* for all. If anyone warned him, “Pragji, you will become blind on account of the heat from the lime,” he would simply reply, “I want to please Swami. I have dedicated my life in the *seva* of Swami.”

Although Pragji Bhakta served day and night, Gunatitanand Swami once told him, “You are working hard physically, but without austerities your senses will not be tamed.” So, on Swami’s instructions, he began to fast for two days at a time and eat only once on the third day. He served during the day and in his spare moments he sat near Swami and listened to his spiritual discourses. Even at night, he would be in Swami’s company. Sometimes, when instructed by Swami, he would sleep in the *gorakh* posture for an hour or so. He never slept with his legs extended.

Gunatitanand Swami was greatly pleased with this deep devotion and *seva* of Pragji Bhakta. Often, Swami would explain to him the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan from the Vachanamrut. He also taught him intricate yogic methods. Pragji Bhakta had only one aim – to act according to the wishes of Gunatitanand Swami and to obey all his commands.

At times, Swami would test him. Once, Swami told him, “Pragji, mortar is to be prepared. Fetch 200 spades and 500 buckets.” Pragji searched the mandir and returned with a few spades and buckets. He did not argue with Swami that there were not so many items available in the mandir. He knew that Gunatitanand Swami was the all-knower. Therefore, it was his duty to act according to Swami’s wish, keeping firm faith in him.

On another occasion Swami issued an unexpected command,

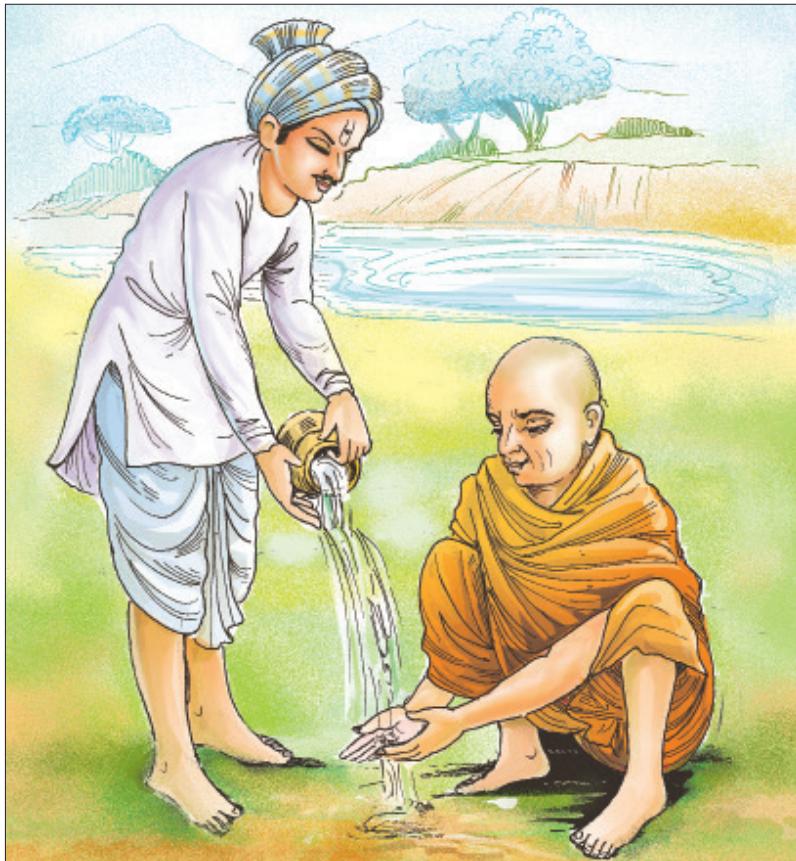
“Pragji, go and call Mount Girnar. The poor fellow has been performing austerities for ages. I want to redeem him.” Pragji rushed to call Girnar. Some people criticized Pragji for not using discretion. They remarked, “Do you really expect a mountain to come? You should use discretion in carrying out commands.”

Pragji Bhakta replied, “Except for those commands that are against the tenets of dharma, it is the duty of a disciple to carry out all the commands of one’s guru without any hesitation. I will go to Girnar and call him. Whether he wants to come or not is up to him.” Such was his firm faith in Swami.

Pragji worked hard for three consecutive days to prepare the furnace. For another three days, he worked to fill it with lime. Swami became so happy that he embraced Pragji several times and touched his head to bless him. Tears of joy rolled down the cheeks of Pragji Bhakta. He thought, “It is my great fortune that Gunatitanand Swami himself is embracing me and bestowing upon me his divine love!”

Pragji’s inner self was in constant communion with Swami. Even a very trivial incident revealed this fact to all. Once, Swami went with some sadhus and devotees to the meadows of Sankhdavadar, near Junagadh, to cut grass. All of a sudden it started raining heavily. Pragji Bhakta instantly sewed two sheets, made an improvised umbrella and sheltered Swami. Swami was very pleased and said, “*Kalyan* lies in three things, *atmabuddhi*, *anuvrutti* and *seva* in relation to the great Sadhu.”

A barber named Karsan used to shave the sadhus residing at Junagadh mandir every month. Once, he increased his rates by one paise per person. Gunatitanand Swami refused to pay him the increased rates. Soon the sadhus felt uncomfortable without their monthly shave and tonsure. Swami asked Pragji Bhakta to take on the barber’s job. He was always eager to obey his guru. He bought the necessary instruments from the market and served Swami first. Then, for nearly six months he



Pragji Bhakta helps Gunatitanand Swami wash his hands
and resolves to attain the knowledge of Akshar

performed the role of a barber without feeling belittled by what he was doing. He also served as a torchbearer, which was also a barber's role. Swami's affection for Pragji grew, and he always offered him *prasad* from his own wooden eating bowl.

7. Sixty-Eight Places of Pilgrimage at Thy Feet

To please Gunatitanand Swami, Pragji Bhakta served as a barber, tailor, stonemason, carpenter, blacksmith and a woodcutter.

There used to be continuous reading of the scriptures in the presence of Swami. Pragji Bhakta was responsible for reading the last recitation at night. He daily served Swami late into the night. He helped him to sleep by pressing his legs. Even in the middle of the night, if Swami got up to answer a call of nature, Pragji would hold the lamp to help Swami wash his hands and escort him back to his bed. Although he remembered his guru in his heart incessantly, he always longed to serve him in person.

Although he was the mahant of Junagadh mandir, Gunatitanand Swami did not spare himself from certain manual tasks in the mandir. This did not allow him to devote as much time as he wished to deliver discourses. He felt sorry that he could not concentrate so much on preaching. Pragji Bhakta realized Swami's difficulty and said humbly, "I will take over your manual work in the mandir. You sit in the assembly and deliver spiritual discourses."

When Gunatitanand Swami heard this, he was pleased. However, he questioned, "You are already busy and engaged for 23 hours a day. How will you be able to find time to do my tasks?" However, Pragji Bhakta never bothered about himself because of his love and devotion for Swami.

During this period, the construction work of the haveli was in progress. Some slabs of stone were lying outside the mandir. And a dead dog lay on top of the slabs. Everyone thought that a scavenger would come and remove the dead dog. Meanwhile, Swami asked, "Pragji, why has the supply of stones from outside stopped?" He went and noticed the dead dog lying on the stones. Immediately, he thought that he should remove the dead dog. Otherwise, why would Swami have asked him. He duly changed his clothes and removed the dead dog. After bathing, he returned to the mandir.

The work restarted. Gunatitanand Swami was greatly pleased. Some people made faces, while others criticized Pragji

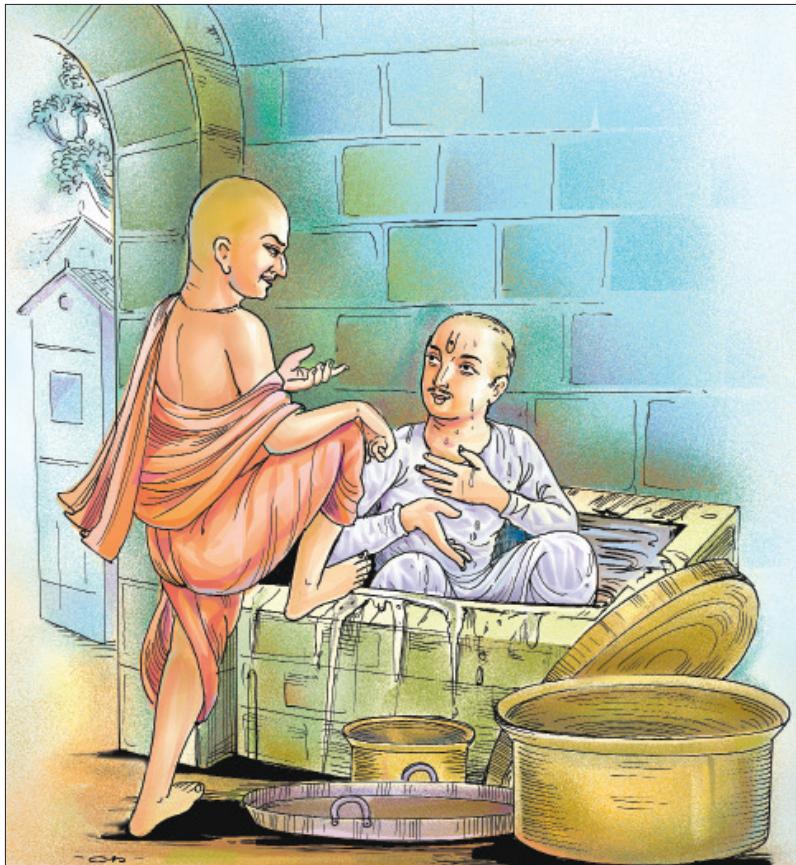


Pragji Bhakta prepares mortar for the haveli construction

for acting like a scavenger. On hearing this, Swami observed, "Every living being is, in a sense, a scavenger. What wrong has been committed by Pragji in helping the work restart by removing the dog? After all, he has only acted according to my wishes."

Once, after the Annakut festival, Pragji was washing the vessels. There was a pit in which dirty water was collected. Swami came there and put his foot on the edge of the pit. The dirty water touched his toes. Swami asked, "Pragji, where can one find all the 68 places of pilgrimage?"

Pragji Bhakta understood the deeper meaning of Swami's



Pragji Bhakta jumped into the pit of dirty water as soon as Gunatitanand Swami asked,
"Where are the 68 places of pilgrimage?"

words and immediately jumped into the pit of dirty water. It was a spiritual bath for him. He knew that the dirty water in which Swami had dipped his toes contained all the 68 holy places. For a while, Swami just kept watching. He then said, "Pragji, come out and wash yourself with clean water." Such was the intense devotion of Pragji Bhakta!

Once Mana Bhagat said to Swami, "This poor Pragji has left everything to learn meditation from you. Instead, you make him lift big stones. You are extracting work beyond his capacity." Mana Bhagat failed to see the divine flame that burnt in Pragji

Bhakta's heart. Swami boldly replied, "I will make him lift stones and realize God." Mana Bhagat became silent on hearing Swami.

8. Art of Saintliness

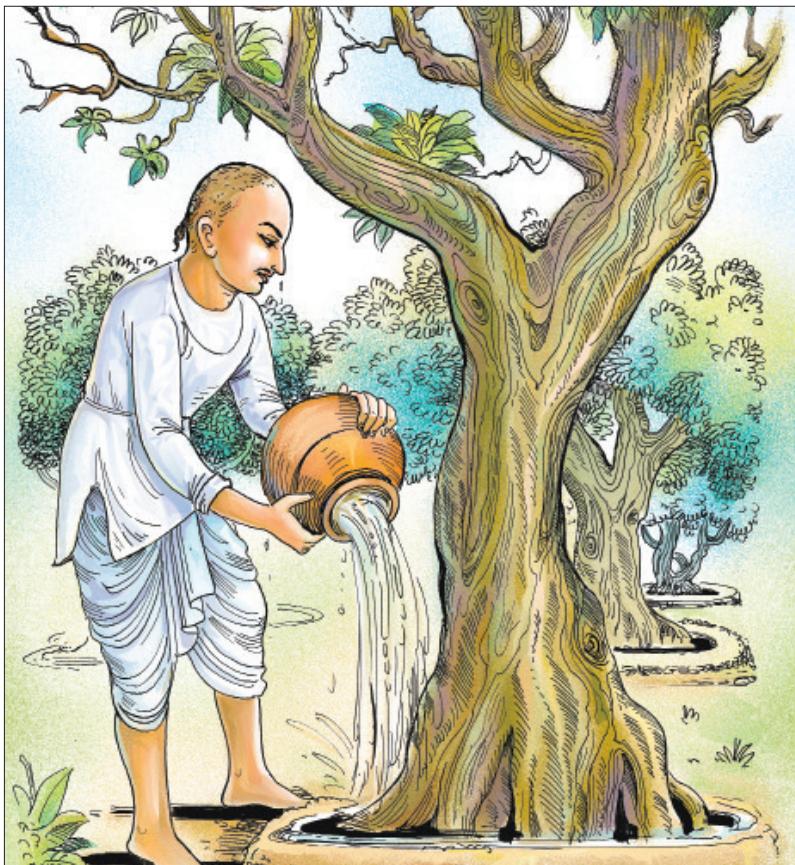
Once on his way to the meadows of Sankhdavadar, Swami stopped at the village of Maliya. He stopped to rest at the mango grove belonging to the mandir. Seeing the mango trees, Swami casually remarked, "They will wither away for want of water." As soon as Pragji Bhakta heard Swami's remark, he found two pots and started fetching water from the nearby river to water the trees. There were some 300 mango trees, and Pragji poured four pots of water on each tree. He was drenched to the skin with water and sweat. When he went to Swami, water was dripping from his clothes.

Swami was nearing the end of his discourse. He wanted to make everybody understand that he could be pleased by devout *seva*. Pleased with Pragji's devout *seva* Swami said, "Pragji! Ask a question."

Innocently Pragji Bhakta asked Swami, "I already know all the worldly crafts, but please teach me the path to saintliness."

The congregation was stunned by this deep scholarly question, which contained the essence of all the shastras, coming from a simple, ordinary-looking person.

Swami, who was pleased by Pragji's question, replied, "The craft of saintliness is very tough. To look upon insults and honours with equanimity, to bear no ill-will towards anyone, to overcome the pleasures of the five senses, to realize the *atma* and remain constantly in communion with the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan is the craft of sainthood. One who has attained this is never separated from God. Such a devotee becomes capable of helping countless people to overcome their shortcomings and



Pragji Bhakta waters the mango trees in Maliya

leading them to God."

The entire assembly of devotees was completely absorbed in the divine words of Swami. Manji Thakkar and Nathu Patel told Swami, "Swami, why are you so pleased with Pragji?"

"Why should I not be pleased with Pragji who has intuitively obeyed me without caring for his own self?" replied Swami. From then on, with the blessings of Swami, Pragji always remained engrossed in devotion in all three states – waking, deep sleep and dream.

9. Bananas on a Cactus

Once, while talking to Abhesinh Bapu of Ganod, Swami said, “Darbar, you must have seen bananas growing on a banana tree. However, here we find bananas growing on a cactus. That boy, who is pounding mortar, is the son of an ordinary tailor, but he has attained the *yoga* which even the *yogis* find difficult to attain. He remains engrossed in devotion exercising complete control over his mind and senses in all three states.”

Aware of Pragji Bhakta’s devotion for Swami, the Darbar asked, “You have rewarded his *seva*?”

“He is yet to be rewarded. He is an eternal devotee. Others would not have been able to serve like this,” Swami responded, explaining the greatness of Pragji Bhakta to the Darbar.

Once, during the Hуташани (Holi) festival assembly, Swami talked to the thousands of sadhus and devotees about the divine teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the need for associating with the holy Sadhu. Swami then he gave the *sagva prasad* of grams, popcorn and dates to everyone. As Swami did not see Pragji Bhakta there, he sent for him. When Pragji arrived, Swami offered him what was left – the unpopped popcorn kernels. Pragji Bhakta became very happy to receive this *prasad*. Manji Thakkar, who was present at that time, thought to himself that Swami is ready to bestow everything upon him, but instead of asking for sanctified hair, nails and other items of value, he is pleased with the leftover *prasad*. In order to make other people realize how precious the *prasad* received from Gunatitanand Swami’s own hands was, Pragji Bhakta approached Swami and asked, “Swami, is this *prasad* a token of your divine favour?”

“Yes, I am very pleased with you,” said Gunatitanand Swami.

While putting one kernel in his mouth, Pragji Bhakta asked, “Swami, have I overcome lust?”

Swami said, "Yes, indeed." Then, one after another, he put the unpopped kernels in his mouth and asked "Swami, am I purged of all flaws?"

Swami smiled and said, "Yes, they have been reduced to ashes." Swami continued, "From half a sesame seed sanctified by Vitthalnathji,⁸⁴ Vaishnavs arose, but this is *mahaprasad*. Pragji is pure at heart and has full knowledge of the glory of those who associate with the great Sadhu."

10. Realization

Gunatitanand Swami bestowed much divine grace upon Pragji Bhakta, who had selflessly served Swami, through mind and body, with deep devotion and love for three-and-a-half years. Swami now wanted him to experience the divinity of God. He asked Pragji Bhakta to sit in meditation in a secluded place. At the end of the ninth day of meditation, Swami asked Pragji, "Do you see anything?"

During the meditation, he had continuously had the darshan of Swami's *murti*. Swami asked him to remain attentive. On the tenth evening of his meditation, he saw an intense light in which he had the darshan of the graceful divine *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan dressed in saffron robes. Pragji Bhakta's joy at the sight of the divine figure of Bhagwan Swaminarayan was boundless. Tears overflowed from his eyes. He intensely enjoyed this darshan.

Pragji Bhakta was completely overwhelmed by this divine experience. He offered his prayers and said to Shriji Maharaj, "O Master! O Maharaj! You have made me fulfilled. I do not deserve this, yet you have graced me with your divine darshan."

Bhagwan Swaminarayan smiled and said, "Swami has earned you this merit." Then he disappeared. Now, Pragji Bhakta began to see Maharaj's divine *murti* continuously in his heart.



With Gunatitanand Swami's grace, Pragji Bhakta attains realization

Exactly at that moment, Gunatitanand Swami arrived. Pragji Bhakta fell at his feet. He was overwhelmed by what he had seen. He asked Swami, "Shriji Maharaj gave his divine darshan, but why had he worn saffron clothes?"

Swami replied, "He gave darshan in the form of a sadhu, but now see!"

With these words, Swami looked at him. Pragji Bhakta had the darshan of the divine and graceful *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Akshardham, dressed in glittering garments and ornaments.

Shriji Maharaj graced him and said, “I am under the loving command of Swami and you have won Swami’s heart. Therefore, I am now also at your command.”

Pragji Bhakta’s bliss knew no bounds. His heart danced with joy. Now he was impatient to reveal Swami’s true greatness to the people.

In this manner, Swami fulfilled the promise that he had given to Pragji three years previously.

Pragji Bhakta’s moulding into a divine receptacle was now complete. He was filled with divine nectar. Swami started to reveal his divine powers and grace through Pragji Bhakta. He mentioned, “This Pragji does so much *seva* and continuously offers devotion that people will make him their guru, even though he has no desires.”

In this way, Swami appointed Pragji as the guru of all his disciples. He instructed Pragji Bhakta to preach to and purify all the devotees. Swami also commanded Pragji to reveal the true form of Mul Akshar in Satsang, and to make people fearless by giving a divine assurance that they would experience divine bliss if they worshipped Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Through his contact with the *paras*, Pragji himself had now become a *paras*. Now he had no fear. He openly started telling people, “Gunatitanand Swami is the manifestation of Mul Akshar, the divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.” He intuitively knew the desires of the devotees and brought them to Swami for atonement and purification. Word went around the entire Satsang that Swami fulfilled all the wishes of Pragji Bhakta.

Pragji Bhakta’s father left his mortal body and was blessed with Akshardham. Pragji Bhakta was reluctant to return to Mahuva, but Gunatitanand Swami told him to pay a visit. It was his first visit to Mahuva in four years. There, he stayed in the mandir and talked to the devotees about the greatness and divine powers of Gunatitanand Swami.

11. The Key to Akshardham Lies with Pragji

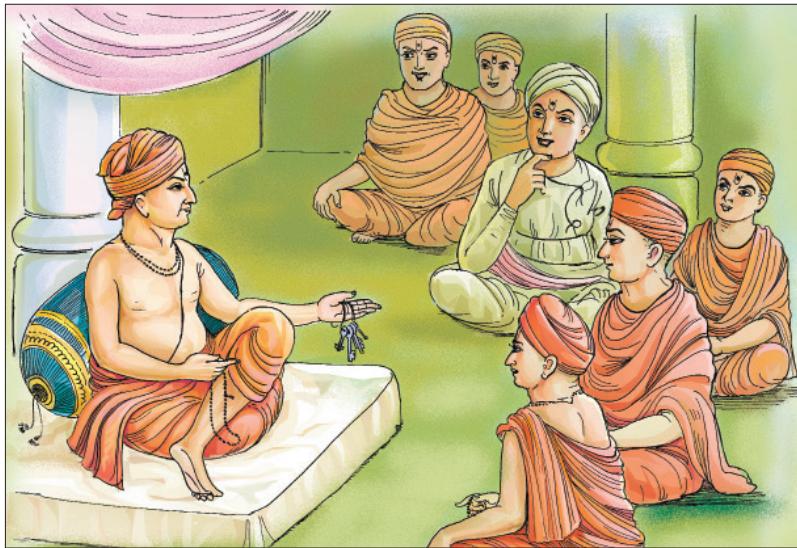
In accordance with the wishes of Gunatitanand Swami, Pragji Bhakta used to discourse on the Swaminarayan philosophy to the devotees. Thus, through him, the devotees of Sorath realized Gunatitanand Swami as the manifestation of Akshar. During festivals, as commanded by Swami, Pragji Bhakta would sit under the canopy in the assembly hall in Junagadh and deliver discourses. Swami would tell the devotees who came for darshan, “Now I have retired. If you want to listen to religious discourses, go to Pragji.” In this way, Swami would direct the devotees to Pragji Bhakta. The devotees experienced great peace through his talks.

Once, Amaidas Kothari, Bechar Bhagat and some five to seven *parshads* came to Junagadh from Vartal to listen to Swami’s discourses and to visit some pilgrim places. Swami spent a great deal of time talking to them and remarked, “Kothari, I have retired and handed over the keys to Pragji Bhakta.”

Amaidas was shocked to hear this. He suspected that perhaps Swami had handed over the mandir keys to Pragji. Gunatitanand Swami instantly read his mind and said, “Amaidas, do not worry. The keys of the mandir are here with me. However, I have handed over the key to Akshardham to Pragji.”

This news soon spread to Vartal. People started murmuring, “Pragji has become the main in Junagadh. Swami has merged his personality into Pragji and remains at his command. All the devotees from Saurashtra offer *dandvat pranam* to Pragji Bhakta first and then they go to Swami. Also, Pragji glorifies Swami too much.”

Once, some Darbars asked Swami, “Swami, instead of giving all your spiritual powers to some Brahmin, sadhu or scholar,



Gunatitanand Swami reveals that he has given the key to Akshardham to Pragji Bhakta

why have you given them to this tailor?"

Swami smiled and replied, "I was reluctant to give them to him. However, he overpowered me by his selfless, sincere *seva*, love and devotion. In fact, I could not help giving them to him."

"Then withdraw them," urged the Darbars.

Swami retorted sternly, "It is not possible to withdraw them because their foundation runs deep down."

To substantiate his argument, Swami referred to an episode from the Upanishads, "Vaishampayan Rishi had taught his knowledge to Yagnavalkya. Once, the rishi ordered Yagnavalkya to go to the palace of a king who had no offspring. However, Yagnavalkya knew that it was not proper for a person who had taken a vow of celibacy to do so. So he politely refused to carry out his guru's command. The guru was angered and ordered him to return the knowledge he had learnt. But how can that which has been learnt be returned? I, too, have taught *brahmavidya* to Pragji, and it cannot be recalled. And don't you think that the one who has given *paravidya*, is capable of making

him worthy of receiving it? Besides, God and his Sadhus do not look at one's caste, creed or *ashram* in society."

The commoners looked upon Pragji Bhakta as one belonging to the lower strata of society, but the devotees saw in him the form of God.

12. Akshar-jnan Proclaimed

Once, while returning from Vartal, Gunatitanand Swami arrived in Sarangpur. There, Vagha Khachar (Bapu) told Swami that he frequently has dreams of fighting. Swami asked Vagha Khachar to accompany him to Junagadh. As Bapu could not live without an attendant, Swami asked Pragji Bhakta to serve him. Pragji Bhakta willingly served Vagha Khachar. While serving, Pragji also used to explain the greatness of Swami to him. However, Bapu did not like Pragji Bhakta's preaching. So he left him. But he was not able to live without an attendant. Gunatitanand Swami persuaded him to keep Pragji Bhakta in his company. He agreed, but stopped listening to Pragji Bhakta's talks.

Vagha Khachar noticed that all the disciples of Swami in Junagadh were cheerful and happy. He wondered why he did not experience such joy. Once, he talked to Dama Sheth of Mahuva about this. Dama Sheth told him, "Keep faith in Pragji Bhakta and accept Swami as *Mul Akshar*." Vagha Khachar remarked, "I will believe this only if Swami tells me in person." Soon, Pragji Bhakta meditated on Swami, who was talking to a congregation, and drew him to the garden where they had gathered.

Pragji Bhakta casually mentioned to Swami, "This Vagha Bapu wants to ask you a question."

Swami responded, "What Pragji is telling you is the truth." Vagha Khachar asked directly, "Swami, are you yourself *Akshar*?"

Swami smiled and said, "Yes." Vagha Khachar immediately experienced divine peace and his flaws were conquered.

Pragji Bhakta had to face many obstacles and insults while spreading the glory of Swami as the manifestation of Aksharbrahma. Still, how could he prevent himself from sharing with others the joy of realizing the manifest form of Aksharbrahma?

Once, Swami asked Balmukunddasji to call Pragji Bhakta, who was fast asleep. Balmukunddasji called him thrice, "Wake up, Pragji Bhakta. Swami is calling you." Pragji, however, did not wake up. So, he returned to Swami and said, "Pragji Bhakta is fast asleep. Despite calling him by his name, he did not wake up. Swami smiled and told him to go back and say, "Gunatit, please wake up."

Balmukunddasji again went to Pragji Bhakta and called out, "Gunatit, please wake up." Immediately Pragji Bhakta woke up and came to Swami. Swami clarified, "Pragji is dead! He has become 'Gunatit'." In this way, Swami explained the greatness of Pragji Bhakta to all.

Once, Pragji Bhakta explained the divine greatness of Swami to Kama Sheth of Una. Kama Sheth lost his temper and slapped him. That night, Maharaj appeared to Kama Sheth in a dream and ordered, "Ask forgiveness from Pragji Bhakta." In the morning, Kama Sheth went to the assembly and, prostrating before Pragji Bhakta, he begged for forgiveness. He bowed before him and presented a dhoti to him.

As instructed by Swami, Pragji Bhakta discoursed to the devotees and prescribed atonements to purify them. Once, Pragji Bhakta asked Swami, "At present, you burn the sins of the devotees and purify them. However, what will happen when you are no longer here?" Swami replied, "Maharaj is always at your command. Through your guidance they will become pure."

Once, Pragji Bhakta talked about the divine greatness of Swami to Kothari Trikamdas of Junagadh mandir. The *kothari*

did not like this and angrily told Pragji Bhakta, “If you talk like this then someone will beat you up.”

Swami came to know about this incident. He led Trikamdas to the office and said, “Do you want to see the divine radiance?” With these words, he gave him a glimpse of his original divine form. The entire room filled with divine radiance and light. That light travelled to Swami and merged into him. The *kothari* was convinced of Swami’s divine form. In this way, Pragji Bhakta helped countless sadhus and devotees realize the original form of Swami and convinced them of the fact that Swami himself was Aksharbrahma, the divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

13. The Path of Thorns

With the blessings of Gunatitanand Swami, Pragji Bhakta’s divine powers soon became known to many. Certain senior sadhus did not like the talks about the glory of Akshar. They soon began to express their opposition. Once, Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj accompanied by Shuk Swami, Pavitranand Swami and many other learned sadhus came to participate in a festival in Junagadh.

Pragji Bhakta discoursed to thousands of devotees during this festival and satisfied their spiritual thirst. The talks and discourses continued late into the night, near Pavitranand Swami’s seat. Pavitranand Swami lost his temper when he heard Pragji Bhakta talking about the glory of Akshar. Pragji Bhakta went to him and whispered, “There is no choice but to understand Gunatitanand Swami as the manifestation of Akshar.”

“Who are you to teach me? You are unduly overestimating yourself. I will see to it that you are excommunicated from the Satsang,” declared Pavitranand Swami, beating the floor with his stick. Pragji Bhakta replied with a smile, “Swami, now even if Bhagwan Swaminarayan wishes, he cannot excommunicate

me. Iron transformed by a *paras* into gold cannot be converted back to iron even by a *paras*."

During this exchange of words, Gunatitanand Swami came there. He made Pragji Bhakta tender an apology to and appease Pavitranand Swami. Still, the latter was so angry with Pragji Bhakta that he announced that he did not ever want to see Pragji's face again. Swami then took Pragji Bhakta away.

After the festival was over, Swami set out for *vicharan* in Sorath. He arrived in Upleta. Here the devotees asked him, "Swami, what will happen to us when you will be no more! Who will help us attain *ekantik dharma*? Who will be our support?" Hearing this, Swami narrated an anecdote, "Once a gardener presented some bitter gourds filled with sweet pomegranate seeds. Everyone laughed at the gardener. The king ordered his servants to break the gourds. On breaking them, they saw the sweet pomegranate seeds. Everyone was pleased to eat these sweet pomegranate seeds. Everyone was wonderstruck to find sweet pomegranate seeds in the gourds. In the same manner, I, too, have prepared an individual who will hold forth the reins of *ekantik dharma*. He, too, is as sweet as the pomegranate seeds. However, only those who are humble at heart and who have earned merits over many births will be able to recognize my divine successor." In this way, Swami explained the greatness of Pragji Bhakta.

Once, Swami was travelling by bullock cart to Vanthali from Junagadh. Some devotees were also seated with him. Others were on foot. Swami called a *parshad* and said, "Go and call Pragji. The poor fellow must be feeling tired. Let him sit in the cart." When Pragji Bhakta approached the cart, Swami invited him to travel with him. Pragji revealed, "The mattress on which Swami is seated is radiating the light of innumerable suns; so I am unable to go near him!" Through this incident, Swami made the devotees realize Pragji Bhakta's elevated spiritual state.

By associating with Pragji Bhakta, the devotees of Mahuva understood the infinite greatness of Swami. Swami gave special bliss to the Mahuva Satsang Mandal. Once, Swami was preparing leaf bowls from *khakhra* leaves in the company of the devotees. Out of sheer curiosity, Fulchand Sheth of Mahuva asked Swami, “Swami, what must Akshardham be doing at this moment?” Swami replied, “Akshardham is preparing leaf bowls from *khakhra* leaves in your company.” In this way, Swami was kind enough to talk about his own form.

14. Discord in the Fellowship

The popularity and importance of Gunatitanand Swami in Satsang was increasing day by day. Certain sadhus and Acharya Bhagvatprasad Maharaj decided to reprimand Swami and asked him to meet them in Una. When Swami received the message from Acharya Maharaj, he uttered,

*Bhuko bhār haru santan bit, karu chhāyā kar doi;
Jo mere Santku rati ek duve, tehi jad dāru me kholi,
Nārad mere Sant se adhik na koi...*

([God says that] I bear the burden of the earth for the benefit of the Sadhu. I protect him. If somebody harms my Sadhu even a bit, I will uproot him. O Narad, there is none greater than my Sadhu...)

Pragji Bhakta requested Swami to explain the meaning of this couplet. Swami clarified, “The sadhus from Vartal have resolved to reprimand me. And as you are spreading my glory, they have decided to excommunicate you from this Satsang. But they will not succeed at all in this region. Moreover, how can I tolerate you being insulted in my presence.” Pragji Bhakta requested Swami, “Let any trouble come to me. But you must not feel despondent with this world.”

On his way to Una, Gunatitanand Swami stopped in Maliya.

There, he learnt that as Krishnaprasad Maharaj had passed away in Dholera, Acharya Maharaj and the sadhus had to return to Vartal. Thus the plan of reprimanding Swami at Una did not materialise.

Before leaving for Vartal to participate in the Chaitra Punam festival of 1866 CE (Samvat 1922), Swami remarked, "This time Pragji will face trouble, but I have prepared his armour so carefully that nothing will harm him." This time when he left for the festival in Vartal, Swami left Pragji Bhakta behind in Junagadh. He went to Vartal via Gadhada, accompanied by many sadhus and devotees.

On the auspicious day of the Ram Navami festival, certain sadhus and people, referring to Swami, sarcastically commented, "He has become God and is being worshipped." Swami, however, remained quiet and unruffled. Swami clarified, "Bhagwan Swaminarayan is the only God." He talked about the supremacy of Maharaj as Purushottam. Meanwhile, Balramdas Shastri rushed to call Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj to the assembly. As soon as Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj arrived, everyone became quiet. The beating of drums in the mandir drew them all to participate in the *artī*.

On his way back from the mandir, a gardener garlanded Swami with a garland of roses. With that garland, Swami then honoured Sadhu Hariswarupdasji who was the attendant of Shuk Swami and had just insulted Swami in the assembly. With a smile Swami said:

Haldi jardi nav taje, khatras taje na ām;

Gunijan gunku nav taje, avgun na taje gulām.

(Even turmeric does not leave its colour, nor mango its flavour, nor a base man his demerits; how then can a great person leave their goodness!)

Hariswarupdas was completely disarmed by the tolerance

and saintliness of Swami. All those, including senior *sadgurus*, regretted what they had done and offered an apology. Despite this, at the same time they decided, “Pragji speaks very highly of Swami’s greatness, so he must be excommunicated.” They conveyed their decision to Swami. Swami went into deep thought and spoke, “I will tell Pragji, so he stops glorifying me.” But Pavitranand Swami had resolved to excommunicate Pragji Bhakta. Unfortunately, with the consent of Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj, letters to that effect were sent to the mandirs of all towns and villages.

While returning to Junagadh, Swami arrived in Mahelav, a village in Kheda district. Here, Swami blessed Dungar Bhagat (later, Shastriji Maharaj), the 15-month-old son of Dhoribhai, “He will become a sadhu and spread the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s supreme form. And through spiritual discourses, he will promote and expand the Sampradaya.” Swami then visited Sarangpur and Gadhpur before returning to Junagadh.

15. Excommunicated

As soon as the letter excommunicating Pragji Bhakta from Satsang reached Junagadh, he set off for Mahuva. The *bhandari* had given him some laddus for the journey. After travelling for some time, he broke his journey to eat a little. As soon as he put a piece of laddu in his mouth, he felt a terrible burning sensation in his body. He realized that the sweets contained poison, so he buried them deep in the ground. With great difficulty, he reached Mahuva. He was able to digest the poison through *yoga*, but boils developed all over his body. Shrijii Maharaj then gave him darshan, touched his whole body with his hand and advised him to take some soup of black beans. With this remedy, he was completely cured within a short time.

Soon thereafter, Swami visited Una with Acharya

Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj. Pragji Bhakta went there for Swami's darshan. Swami met him in private and consoled him. He pleased him with *prasad* and sent him back to Mahuva.

From Una, after visiting several places, Swami and Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj came to Mahuva. The devotees of Mahuva had arranged a grand reception for them. Pragji Bhakta had reserved special foodstuff for the guests. The foodstuff which was offered by others was not fit for the sadhus. It was getting late. Pavitranand Swami remarked, "Pragji may be excommunicated, but not his rice and pulses. Accept his foodstuff." Thus, this timely assistance from Pragji Bhakta inspired respect for him in the hearts of all devotees.

In the assembly, some of the senior devotees of Mahuva asked Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj, "We can understand your excommunicating a person who is unrighteous, but we fail to understand why you should excommunicate a great devotee such as Pragji Bhakta."

The *sadgurus* promised, "We are soon going to take him back into the Satsang." In the scorching summer heat, Pragji Bhakta used to squat in front of the tents of the sadhus and return home only in the evening when the religious discourses were over. Thus, all realized that although Pragji had been excommunicated, his love for Satsang continued to increase day by day. Pragji Bhakta had also requested Pavitranand Swami to take him back into Satsang. During this seven-day stay, Gunatitanand Swami, too, met Pragji Bhakta in private and gave him much bliss.

Soon after this, Swami was invited to Ahmedabad by Acharya Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj, who had fallen ill. Swami gave him great comfort. At the insistence of Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj, Swami celebrated the Ram Navami festival in Ahmedabad, talking to the devotees and sadhus about the supremacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj

and other *sadgurus* had also arrived from Vartal. Pragji Bhakta had also come there with a desire for the darshan of Swami and had put up outside the mandir. Occasionally, when Swami went out, Pragji would have his darshan from a distance and would tell all, "Look, there goes Akshar." In this way, Pragji Bhakta continued to spread the divine glory of Swami. Swami would tell the *bhandari* to send food for Pragji Bhakta to eat.

Acharya Ayodhyaprasadji Maharaj of Ahmedabad served Swami sincerely with full devotion and earned his blessings. Swami then travelled to Nadiad. From there, he went to Vartal. Thousands of devotees welcomed Swami with overflowing love and devotion, performed his *pujan* and offered him dhotis. Swami also graced them with his learned talks on *brahmajnan* before returning to Junagadh.

16. Manifestation Through Pragji Bhagat

Thousands of devotees had thronged to the Junagadh mandir on the occasion of the Bhim Ekadashi festival. As soon as Swami saw the assembly hall canopy, he remembered Pragji Bhakta. He could not control his tears and remarked, "For what crime has he been excommunicated. Actually, those responsible for excommunicating him are themselves excommunicated." Such was the deep love Swami had for Pragji Bhakta.

Swami then entrusted certain mandir duties to Jaga Bhagat and other trusted devotees and left for *vicharan*. He came to the gate leading to Nagarwada and sat there for some time. He said, "I have spent forty years, four months and four days at this place. Now I will move around in Satsang, visiting the devotees and then stay in Mahuva." In this way, he indirectly referred to the fact that he was manifest in Satsang through Pragji Bhakta.

Gunatitanand Swami left for Vanthali. From there, he went to Upleta, Panchala and Gondal. The Maharaja of Gondal had sent a special invitation to him. He was accorded a royal welcome at the palace. He blessed young Bhagwatsinhji and offered him *vartman*.

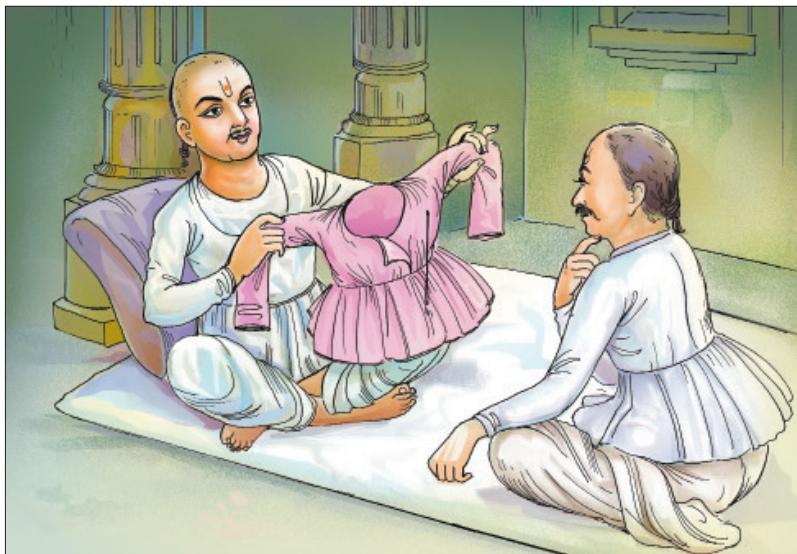
He visited the homes of the Darbar of Ganod and Madhavji Karbhari at 9 p.m. Then on 11 October 1867 (Aso *sud* 12, Samvat 1924) at 12.45 a.m. he, of his own free will, independently left his mortal body and passed away to Akshardham – the divine abode – to serve Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The pangs of separation from his divine master were unbearable for Pragji Bhakta. The entire Satsang mourned the passing of Gunatitanand Swami and experienced a great spiritual loss.

17. Acceptance in Satsang

Although he had been excommunicated from the Satsang for nearly three years, all were impressed and drawn to Pragji Bhakta due to his saintliness, *divyabhab* towards all and *ekantik* state. Thus, it was agreed to take him back into the Satsang fold. Due to his divine spiritual qualities, everyone fondly called him 'Bhagatji'. Now, Bhagatji¹ started accompanying senior sadhus such as Pavitranand Swami, Bhumanand Swami and Shukanand Swami on their *vicharan*. Also, in accordance with the wishes of Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj, he delivered religious discourses during festivals and pleased the devotees.

Girdharbhai, nephew of Kothari Gordhanbhai of Vartal, was a genuine aspirant for salvation. With a view to attaining the *brahmic* state in this very life, he searched within Satsang for the Satpurush as described in the Vachanamrut. He lived in the company of renowned sadhus, but none could quench his spiritual thirst. Finally, he returned to Vartal and stood on one

1. From here onwards Pragji Bhagat will be referred as Bhagatji.



Pragji Bhakta prepares a perfect-fitting shirt for Bechar Bhagat

leg before the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and started praying for divine enlightenment. After one month, Maharaj was pleased, gave him darshan and said, "This Pragji Bhakta is my most beloved devotee. I remain manifest in the Satsang through him. Go and seek communion with him and I will dwell forever in your heart."

Girdharbhai initially failed to understand the significance of Maharaj's advice. He thought, "How can a tailor, Pragji Bhakta, possibly be the *param ekantik bhakta*? No, he can't be." He once again started praying to Maharaj.

Maharaj again appeared and instructed Girdharbhai to associate with Pragji Bhakta. Therefore, he went to see Bhagatji. His very first meeting with Bhagatji convinced him. He became his disciple. Gordhanbhai arranged for Girdharbhai to be given *bhagvati diksha* and he was named as Swami Vignandasji after renunciation.

Kothari Bechar Bhagat assisted Gordhanbhai in his work in Vartal. Once, Bechar Bhagat asked Bhagatji to stitch a shirt for

him. To his surprise, even though Bhagatji had not taken any measurements, the shirt was a perfect fit. Bechar Bhagat was pleased with Bhagatji's skill. Bhagatji said, "This shirt will cover your body. However, I can also prepare a shirt for your soul, too. But, for that you will have to come to my seat." This aroused an air of curiosity in Bechar Bhagat. He went to Bhagatji's seat and sought communion with him. He was greatly impressed by Bhagatji's talks about *atma* and Paramatma. His desire for Bhagatji's company increased, and he became his disciple. In this way, many pillars of Satsang were drawn towards the *murti* of Bhagatji.

Once, Acharya Bhagvatprasadji Maharaj and the sadhus had gone to Anand. Every evening after the *arti*, the Swaminarayan *dhun* was chanted. One evening, Pavitranand Swami took objection. He said, "Since the time of Maharaj, there has been the practice of chanting 'Nar Narayan, Swami Narayan'. Why do you break this?" However, the younger sadhus did not listen to him and started arguing with him.

Pavitranand Swami could not tolerate this insult. He returned to Vartal and felt disturbed. He sent for Bhagatji and asked him to discourse to him. Bhagatji explained, "In Satsang if one does not overcome ego, jealousy and other base instincts and does not become *atmarup* to offer devotion to God, one will one day be completely exposed. To become *atmarup* one needs unbroken love for a great Sadhu like Mul Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami." Bhagatji narrated many such talks on the basis of the Vachanamrut and gave comfort to the greatly disturbed and agitated mind of Pavitranand Swami. Swami was now convinced that Bhagatji had become one with Gunatitanand Swami and had attained the *brahmic* state with his blessings. Soon after this, Pavitranand Swami passed away to the abode of God.

Due to some reason, Kothari Bechar Bhagat was relieved of his duties by Kothari Gordhanbhai. When Bechar Bhagat

went to see Bhagatji, he was rebuked by him for what he had done. Bhagatji talked to him about the greatness of a devotee of God and instructed him to apologize to Gordhanbhai. Bechar Bhagat had great love for Bhagatji, so he shed his false sense of pride and apologized. Bhagatji then asked Gordhanbhai to use his good offices to arrange for Bechar Bhagat to be initiated by Acharya Maharaj. Bechar Bhagat renounced and was named Swami Mahapurushdas. Now that he was relieved of all other duties, Mahapurushdas absorbed himself completely in devotion to God.

18. Guru of Shastri Yagnapurushdasji

In 1883 CE (Samvat 1939), Bhagatji had gone to Surat to take part in the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj. While preparing a decorative cloth-sheet for the mandir elephant, Bhagatji discoursed to the devotees. Many sadhus and devotees gathered around his seat to listen to his inspiring talks.

Here, the young Yagnapurushdasji was staying with Vignananand Swami, serving him and studying the scriptures. He was drawn to the darshan and discourses of Bhagatji, and was surprised to find him discoursing while stitching at the same time. Bhagatji remarked, “*Ajnani* has innumerable eyes.” Seeing his *brahmic* state, Yagnapurushdasji mentally accepted Bhagatji as his guru.

Also, from Bhagatji, he learnt for the first time that Gunatitanand Swami was Akshar – the divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and that he was forever in the *seva* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Hearing this, his guru Vignananand Swami, who had met Maharaj in person, endorsed Bhagatji’s views. Yagnapurushdasji was convinced that Bhagwan Swaminarayan

himself had revealed this knowledge to the people. He soon realized the greatness of Bhagatji and became his staunch disciple.

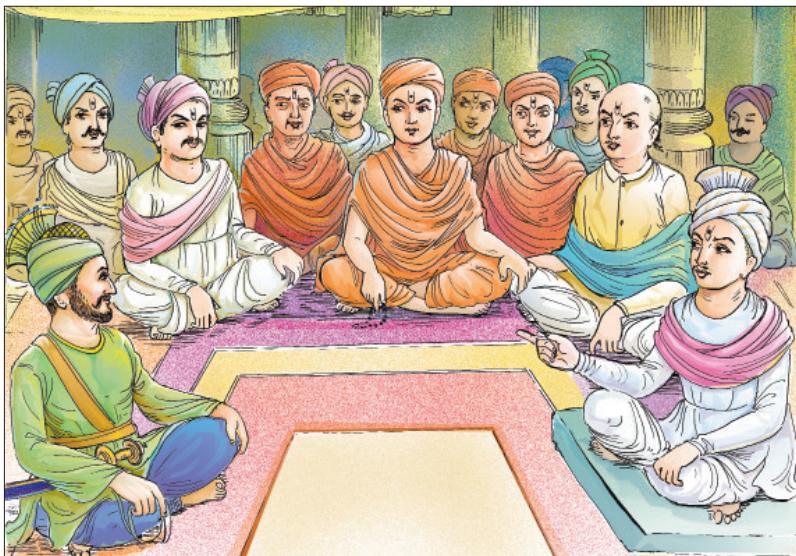
Great personalities readily identify each other. Bhagatji Maharaj used to say, “He is my beloved son.” Such was the affection Bhagatji had for Yagnapurushdasji.

Ramratandasji and Yagnapurushdasji were sadhus in the same *mandal*. Once, Ramratandasji requested Bhagatji Maharaj to get him the pair of footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan that Yagnapurushdasji owned. Yagnapurushdasji acted according to the wishes of Bhagatji and parted with the holy treasure. When Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj came to know of this, he became angry and reprimanded Bhagatji. He told Bhagatji that as Yagnapurushdasji was the leader of the group of sadhus, he was required to have the footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in his possession. Bhagatji Maharaj replied instantly, “I will give him the maker of the footprints – Bhagwan Swaminarayan!”

In this way, he revealed his divine powers, as well as his love for Yagnapurushdasji.

Gradually, many sadhus – Vignandasji, Yagnapurushdasji, Mahapurushdasji and others – started seeking the divine company of Bhagatji boldly and openly. These sadhus, with their flawless character, earned name and fame as the disciples of Bhagatji throughout the Sampradaya. Also, Bhagatji became increasingly respected throughout the entire Satsang because of his *brahmic* state, and his talks about the supremacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami as the manifestation of Aksharbrahma and of becoming *brahmarup*. Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj also loved to listen to his religious discourses. During festivals, the *acharya* specially invited Bhagatji to participate and deliver discourses.

The sadhus who were deeply attached to Bhagatji spread his glory throughout the Satsang. Certain sadhus, however,



Bhagatji Maharaj tells the bodyguard of Rao Saheb to scold the sadhus

could not bear Bhagatji's increasing popularity. Once, they complained to Bhagatji regarding this. Bhagatji sided with them and made the sadhus attached to him apologize.

Once, Bhagatji was going to the mandir in Nadiad. He was accompanied by a Barot devotee. When they were passing through a narrow lane, a *harijan* woman was approaching them. The devotee lost his temper and shouted, "Stay away, can't you see we are passing?" Bhagatji did not like this. He felt sorry and told the devotee, "Isn't God in the heart of this woman?" In this way, he taught the lesson of respect towards all.

19. "I Am Possessed by Swaminarayan"

The hostile sadhus who could not tolerate the increasing fame of Bhagatji started protesting. They wanted to put a ban on Bhagatji's movements in the Satsang. Bhagatji often said, "I am possessed by Swaminarayan."

Once a sadhu remarked, “Is God a ghost that he possesses you?” “If a ghost has the power to possess, doesn’t God also?” explained Bhagatji, “God does not possess just anyone. He possesses only those who have immense faith and love for him.” Then, he described the intense loving devotion of the *gopis* for Bhagwan Shri Krishna. He declared, “Due to the blessings of Swami, I continually enjoy the divine bliss of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s *murti*. Those who associate with me are granted that everlasting happiness.”

Once, Bhagatji was the guest of Rao Saheb of Petlad. Rao Saheb’s bodyguard was a Muslim. He was a genuine aspirant of God and came to offer his respects to Bhagatji. Bhagatji intuitively read his thoughts and talked to him about the four types of *satpurush* as described in the Koran. The bodyguard experienced divine peace in his presence. Vignandasji and other sadhus were also present. Bhagatji pointed towards the sadhus and told the bodyguard, “Scold these sadhus as they are always pestering me.”

The bodyguard then addressed the sadhus. “You are all fakirs of Khuda, and here is Khuda himself. Therefore, even if he beats you with a stick or with shoes, you should follow him wherever he leads you.” Hearing this, Bhagatji started laughing. In Petlad, Bhagatji blessed the sadhus and devotees with the bliss of his company, *prasad* and darshan.

When Bhagatji returned to Nadiad after meeting Acharya Viharlalji Maharaj in Surat, he told the sadhus, “This time you will face many difficulties. Remain humble and tolerate any opposition with patience.”

20. Trouble for Bhagatji’s Sadhus

Bhagatji’s *vicharan* comforted countless devotees in Gujarat. Motilalbhai of Pij used to chant bhajans incessantly. Once, Shriji Maharaj appeared in his dreams and said, “I manifest in Satsang

through Pragji Bhakta.” He was overjoyed by this darshan. He wrote letters to each and every town about this revelation. Thus, the glory of Bhagatji spread. Certain jealous sadhus could not tolerate this. They managed to get Bhagatji’s disciple-sadhus excommunicated from the Satsang.

Vignandasji, Yagnapurushdasji and some other sadhus arrived in Mahuva during their *vicharan* in Gujarat. At first Bhagatji remained indifferent to them, but then he made arrangements for their stay at the Gopnath Mandir. He scolded them for glorifying him. The sadhus used to visit the Swaminarayan mandir in turn and seek Bhagatji’s company. With Bhagatji’s grace, Yagnapurushdasji and Purani Keshavprasad were permitted to stay with him at the mandir. This gave the sadhus an opportunity to serve Bhagatji during the day.

Many devotees came to the mandir to listen to the religious discourses. Once, at the mandir in Mahuva, Yagnapurushdasji spoke to the assembly of devotees and sadhus from Gadhada, citing the Vachanamrut. He explained that Bhagatji was the *param ekantik* Sadhu and described his glory.

One devotee, Vitthalbhai, asked, “How did you come to know about these divine virtues of Bhagatji?” Yagnapurushdasji replied, “He belongs to your town and you know him better. Tell me from your experience whether he possesses dharma. Is he a righteous man or not?”

Vitthalbhai replied, “There isn’t a more righteous man than Bhagatji in the entire town. Although he sews clothes for women of the Nagar, Bania and other communities, he never entertains any kind of unholy ideas in his mind. On the contrary, he wins them over to the Swaminarayan fold by explaining to them the divine greatness of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.” The sadhus from Gadhada endorsed his views and observed, “We, too, are purified by his company. How then can there be any impurity in him?”

Yagnapurushdasji clarified further, “Bhagatji is a *jnani* too.

The entire Satsang declares with one voice that there is nobody as *jnani* as Bhagatji. Whether he is praised or abused, he remains unruffled by any insults. Again, all the principles described in the Vachanamrut have been mastered by him under the divine guidance of Gunatitanand Swami. Therefore, we can say that Bhagatji is a *jnani* in the truest sense of the term.

“His *vairagya* is also unique. He is a householder, yet he remains above attachments. Whenever he receives any message from Acharya Maharaj he leaves home immediately. He harbours no worries. If Acharya Maharaj commanded him to renounce, he would renounce this very moment. We have talked about him. But those who seek his company also become detached and overcome all desires. Otherwise, how is it that devotees run to him from distant places, forgetting all their domestic chores and concerns?”

In this manner, Yagnapurushdasji talked of Bhagatji’s great qualities of dharma, *jnan* and *vairagya* before asking the gathering, “Now, you tell me, whether or not he has faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan.” Thus, he asked the assembly to testify to Bhagatji’s virtues as an *ekantik bhakta*.

Vitthalbhai said again, “Bhagatji is a man of firm determination. Even when he was taken out of Satsang, he continuously worshipped Bhagwan. He sat at the mandir gate, yearning for darshan of sadhus and devotees. He pleased all with his humility. His discourses have helped many people to develop true *nishchay* in Bhagwan Swaminarayan, so there is no doubt about his supreme *nishchay* in Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He believes Maharaj as the all-doer; nothing affects him.”

On hearing this, Yagnapurushdasji concluded, “In this way, we can manifestly see all the four virtues of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and *bhakti* in Bhagatji. And Bhagwan Swaminarayan, as depicted in Vachanamrut, eternally dwells in him. This is the reason we follow him wherever he goes.”

Some of the sadhus then proceeded to Gujarat as instructed by Bhagatji.

During a festival in Vartal, some influential sadhus decided to make Bhagatji's sadhus wear white robes. But Bhagatji's disciples did not agree to this. Still, the sadhus had to remain outside of Satsang. Thus, they all returned to Mahuva.

21. Bliss in Solitude

In Mahuva, a large group of devotees and sadhus had come from Gujarat. As advised by Bhagatji, all of them rented a house in Katpur, near Mahuva. Here, Bhagatji also joined the sadhus and stayed with them. He blessed the sadhus with his darshan and divine company. The devotees would prepare a variety of dishes everyday to feed the sadhus. Sometimes, Bhagatji himself served the sadhus with great affection. Bhagatji discoursed, while the sadhus sang kirtans. Everyone enjoyed divine bliss.

Yagnapurushdasji had composed an octet of verses in Sanskrit in praise of Bhagatji. All were greatly pleased to hear these eight verses. When the devotees understood the deep devotion of the sadhus towards Bhagatji, they too realized his glory. The excommunication of the sadhus had given them an opportunity of remaining in the company of Bhagatji. Bhagatji also graced the sadhus by allowing them to remain in his divine company. Thus, their excommunication was a blessing in disguise.

Once, during a light moment, Bhagatji remarked, "This Yagnapurushdasji is the *mahant* of this *mandal*." He then said to Yagnapurushdasji, "You will obey the commands of Vignandasji." Thus, he commanded the sadhus to serve as per the commands of Vignandasji.

Once, Bhagatji told the sadhus, "These saffron clothes are a great obstacle. Therefore, go home and practise satsang." However, the sadhus expressed their firm determination of

worshipping God, while observing strict celibacy. Bhagatji was greatly pleased to learn of their firm resolve. He blessed them and sent them all to Bhadrod, where they stayed at the mandir of Bhadreshwar Mahadev.

As they did not have Bhagatji's darshan, the sadhus fasted for three days. On the fourth day, Bhagatji arrived there and they all experienced divine peace. He fed them and gave them the divine pleasure of his company.

Waking them early in the morning, he would send them to the river to bathe. Then he would sit them in meditation. He taught them the *yogic* process of continuously concentrating on the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He would ask them to observe a fast on alternate days. On the day of a fast, he would send them to collect alms in the neighbouring villages. He also sent them to collect cow-dung for fuel. On days of *parna*, he would feed the sadhus affectionately. Through constant spiritual discourses, he made the sadhus forget their physical bodies. They experienced the divine bliss of Akshardham. He inspired the sadhus to sing kirtans describing the form and glory of Shriji Maharaj. He made them recite the Vachanamrut and conduct religious discussions.

The sadhus also got an opportunity of serving Bhagatji. Of late, he had not been keeping well. He had given up wearing shoes. Yagnapurushdasji used to rub Bhagatji's soles with a small emery stone and apply butter on the cuts. Other sadhus also served him in many ways. Late into the night, Bhagatji infused courage in the hearts of his disciple-sadhus through his talks. While discoursing on *agni* and *upasana*, he promised, "If you accept Bhagwan Swaminarayan as supreme and worship him without aspiring for anything else, and observe the vow of *nishkam*, I will take you to Akshardham."

Once, Bhagatji asked the sadhus to prepare millet *rotla*, fried brinjals and buttermilk. He then proclaimed, "Today, I want

to feed you all well. If you eat as much as I say, I will be at your command.” Bhagatji pressed the sadhus to eat more and more. With great difficulty, Yagnapurushdasji finished three *rotla*. Bhagatji told him, “If you eat half a *rotlo* more, I’ll do whatever you say.”

It was not possible for Yagnapurushdasji to take even an extra morsel. Despite this, he ate half a *rotlo* more to please Bhagatji.

The sadhus then desired to apply *chandan* on Bhagatji’s body. They prepared *chandan* paste and applied it all over Bhagatji’s body. They were overjoyed with this rare darshan of Bhagatji with sandalwood paste all over his body. Then, as desired by Yagnapurushdasji and the other sadhus, he embraced them all, besmearing them with *chandan*.

In Bhadrod, many were pleased with Bhagatji’s discourses and became *satsangis*. At times, he would talk all night and inspire the sadhus. Bhagatji felt pain when he saw the sadhus facing hardships, despite their saintliness. Often, he would pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami for them.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan answered Bhagatji’s prayer. Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj soon sent a letter from Vartal asking Bhagatji to send the sadhus there. It was time to depart. When would they again have such an opportunity of serving their spiritual master? The sadhus served Bhagatji as if they were serving Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Yagnapurushdasji prepared *puranpoli* and Surat-style *dudhpak*. Bhagatji was pleased to see these new delicacies. He blessed the sadhus and purified them. Although they were reluctant to depart, they followed Bhagatji’s command and set off for Vartal.

22. End of Exile

On arriving in Vartal, the sadhus stayed in the haveli opposite the main gate of the mandir. Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj met

them and instructed them to wear saffron robes. He sent Vignandasji and some sadhus to Khandesh. Yagnapurushdasji and other sadhus were sent to Gujarat for *vicharan*.

In Khandesh, Vignandasji attracted many people towards the Satsang. In samadhi, some devotees saw the *murti* of Bhagatji next to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. A woman devotee was possessed by an evil spirit. As soon as she saw the *murti* of Bhagatji, the evil spirit left her and she became possessed by Bhagatji. She started behaving like Bhagatji and brought happiness to many people. In this way, Bhagatji's greatness spread in Khandesh. Devotees started visiting Mahuva to seek the company of Bhagatji.

During this period, Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj arrived in Mahuva. He received Bhagatji with great respect and sent *thal* to him every day. He always asked Bhagatji to address the assembly, and praised him before the sadhus and devotees. Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj graced Bhagatji's house by paying a visit.

In 1893 CE (Samvat 1949) a *murti-pratishtha* ceremony was to be held at Lakshmi Vadi in Gadhpur. Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj sent a special invitation to Bhagatji. Bhagatji had invited devotees from Gujarat to attend this ceremony in Gadhpur. Yagnapurushdasji had also come with his Sanskrit teacher, Rangacharya, from Vadodara. Everybody got the opportunity to meet Bhagatji at Lakshmi Vadi as well as at the place where he was lodging. Rangacharya was greatly impressed on having Bhagatji's darshan. Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj used to ask Bhagatji to discourse to the assembly of devotees.

Thereafter, due to the insistence of the devotees of Gujarat, Bhagatji visited Nadiad. Here he stayed with Jhaverilalbhai. Devotees started arriving from afar to seek the company of Bhagatji. All of them brought offerings with them. Bhagatji discoursed on the supremacy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan,

Swami as the manifestation of Akshar, and the need to seek the company of the Satpurush and observe celibacy. He visited the mandir both in the morning and evening and conducted religious discourses there. At night after singing the *cheshta*, he would return to the place where he was staying. Even there, he discoursed late into the night. Certain devotees had the darshan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on account of their association with Bhagatji.

23. Satsang with the Diwan of Vansda

Jhaverbhai Nathabhai Amin, a native of Virsad, was the Diwan of Vansda. He was inspired by Yagnapurushdasji's company and longed for the darshan and association of Bhagatji. He wrote three letters to Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj and the *kothari* in Vartal expressing his earnest desire to meet Bhagatji. On receiving instructions from Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj and the *kothari*, Bhagatji arrived in Vansda, via Bilimora, along with four devotees. He invited Vignandasji from Khandesh to join him in Vansda. The diwan accorded a hearty welcome to Bhagatji befitting his status and position. He and his wife attended to Bhagatji day and night.

They were Vedantins, so Bhagatji talked in detail about the five eternal realities – *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahma and Parabrahma with relevant quotations from the Vachanamrut and other scriptures. He also explained to them the significance of *agni* and *upasana*.

One night, after completing his routine *cheshta*, Bhagatji retired to bed. All of a sudden, he got up and started chanting the name of God. The diwan and other devotees also got up. After some time, Bhagatji woke up and addressed the people sitting around him, “One who wants to realize God should

remember him incessantly. They must always wake up like this, and start singing the praises of God. A genuine seeker should fear like a deer and sleep like a crow. How can we engage in sound sleep when we have innate enemies such as our senses and *antahkaran*? Therefore, if while eating, drinking, sleeping or waking, one remembers God by singing his glory, one is able to do whatever one desires.”

While delving deep into the realms of Brahma and Parabrahma, Bhagatji often gave practical worldly guidance too, “If you want to become *brahmarup* and worship God, you should follow your dharma rigorously. Dharma sustains *jnan*. *Jnan* establishes *vivek* and kindles *vairagya*. *Vairagya* that is based on *jnan* liberates one from worldly desires and one develops love for God. One should strictly follow the eleven commandments, and think and act accordingly. Bhakti is like a faithful wife; it will follow dharma. *Jnan-vairagya* are the two sons, which also follow her.” Thus, through such wonderful talks, Bhagatji taught the Diwan to derive pure joy from devotion to God. He made a solemn promise to Diwanji, “At the time of your death, I will come with Maharaj to receive you.”

The Maharaja of Vansda and other high officials would also come for Bhagatji’s darshan. They were greatly impressed by Bhagatji’s spiritual powers. The Maharaja called Bhagatji received him in his palace.

After giving the diwan the immense pleasure of his company, Bhagatji departed from Vansda. The Diwan was so attached to Bhagatji that his heart became heavy when he left. From Vansda, Bhagatji went to Chansad before returning to Vartal. Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj was pleased to learn the news about Vansda. He had a turban tied on Bhagatji as a mark of honour. Bhagatji then took Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj’s leave and arrived in Ahmedabad via Nadiad.

24. Jnan Yagna in Ahmedabad

Acharya Purushottamprasadji Maharaj of Ahmedabad was pleased to receive Bhagatji. He made arrangements for Bhagatji and his group's stay in his own mansion and took personal interest in their comforts. The entire atmosphere of the mandir was transformed with the arrival of Bhagatji. Daily, after the *mangala arti*, Bhagatji would address the assembly of devotees. Then, prior to the *shangar arti* he would lead the singing of kirtans. Thereafter, until *rajbhog*, he would give religious discourses. In the afternoon he would discourse on the Vachanamrut and make all the devotees focus their *indriyas* and turn the rosary at least ten times. In the evening also, until *cheshta*, he would talk to the assembly about the supremacy of Maharaj and inspire them on how to become *aksharrup*. Frequently, he instructed the devotees of Gujarat to sponsor meals. These things greatly pleased the devotees.

During this time Yagnapurushdasji, was stationed in Mahemdavad. He talked about the spiritual powers of Bhagatji to many devotees, inspiring them to go to Ahmedabad for his darshan.

Once, during his religious discourses, Bhagatji talked about the importance of *brahmacharya*, "God is pleased only by *brahmacharya*. Radiance emanates from the forehead of a person who observes celibacy. When they bathe, the drops of water that fall from their tuft are caught by the devas before they touch the ground. Even the devas find this *vrat* difficult to observe. During his manifestation on earth, Bhagwan Swaminarayan strongly enforced the practice of this vow. Therefore, those who want to realize *ekantik* dharma must observe celibacy rigorously, control the senses, eat only once, remember God incessantly, meditate forgetting everything, and not entertain thoughts of any temptations. Through these means, *brahmacharya* can

be observed. Therefore, woe be to the renunciates, who after renunciation fail to observe this *vrat*."

In Mahemdavad, Yagnapurushdasji regularly visited the railway station and enquired about Bhagatji from those who returned from Ahmedabad after visiting Bhagatji. He constantly yearned for the darshan of Bhagatji. He became impatient. One day, he went to Ahmedabad in the company of a sadhu. At first, Bhagatji told him off for coming to Ahmedabad. Other sadhus and devotees, however, requested him to receive Yagnapurushdasji with love. He changed his attitude and welcomed him.

Whenever a meal was sponsored by Bhagatji's followers, Acharya Purushottamprasadji Maharaj served food himself. In this way, he favoured Bhagatji. Also, the sadhus and devotees were pleased with Bhagatji's presence since they experienced divine bliss in his company. Thus, many senior *satsangis* from the city also sought his darshan and company as they were greatly drawn to his divine *murti*.

Very frequently, Bhagatji would also address the sadhus in the mandir. Once, he told them all to turn the rosary and concentrate upon the divine *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He explained, "A businessman keeps his eye on the price of wheat, jaggery and ghee because he has to make a profit from them. In the same manner, if we keep our eye on the divine *murti* of Maharaj, we too can earn profit in terms of divine bliss. Remember God all the time and do not forget him even for a second. After renouncing the world, if we forget God, what has been renounced?" In this way, he used to impress upon the sadhus the need to seek communion with God.

Once, as desired by Bhagatji, Yagnapurushdasji addressed the assembly taking about the virtues and glory of the Satpurush. Bhagatji was so pleased with his talk that he got up and put his palms on the head of Yagnapurushdasji to bless him. A

stunned devotee remarked, “How is it that you, a householder, are placing your hands on the head of a sadhu?”

Bhagatji nonchalantly replied, “It is Bhagwan Swaminarayan, not I, who has placed his hands.” The devotee realized the meaning of these words and became quiet.

The *hindola* festival was being celebrated at the mandir in Ahmedabad. Bhagatji said, “Shri Nar-Narayan is known as the emperor of India. So, Maharaj built a mandir here and dedicated it to him. Once in the eastern *roop choki*, holding the hand of Anand Swami, Maharaj had said, ‘Countless avatars stand on one foot and worship this *murti*.’ In this way, Bhagwan Swaminarayan explained the supreme *upasana*. I am just an ordinary tailor. I remove two stitches and stitch another two. I help you to shun wealth and women, and join your soul to God and his Sadhu.”

He allowed Yagnapurushdasji to stay with him in Ahmedabad for a few days before permitting him to return to Mahemdavad. He commanded him to pursue the studies of shastras and jokingly remarked, “Your slight build does not befit a leader. A leader should build his body.” Yagnapurushdasji had taken a *murti* of Thakorji with him. He gave it to Bhagatji to sanctify. Bhagatji became very happy to see it. Then, as if he were watching Maharaj’s figure in person, he observed, “The nose is a bit long; Maharaj’s nose was not so long.” He kept the *murti* pressed against his chest for nearly an hour before returning it to Yagnapurushdasji.

Carts loaded with sand for washing hands had come to the mandir. The *parshads* were emptying the carts. When Bhagatji saw this, he also joined them and started emptying the carts, basket after basket. The devotees who were watching them followed Bhagatji, and the work was completed in no time. Bhagatji’s special status in the Satsang never stopped him from engaging in manual labour. He never felt belittled in doing such menial jobs. This greatly impressed all the sadhus and devotees.

25. Bhagatji's Magnetic Personality

Sitaba, the wife of Rao Saheb of Vadodara, once saw Bhagatji along with Bhagwan Swaminarayan for five successive days during *samadhi*. She was overcome with emotion. Rao Saheb invited Bhagatji to Vadodara. Both Rao Saheb and his wife were very pleased to have his darshan, and served him with love and devotion. Bhagatji visited the mandir and persuaded Rangacharyaji to associate with a sadhu who possesses the redemptive virtues of God. He explained to him the real value of scholarship, "After reading the scriptures, if one does not contemplate on the redemptive virtues of God, that knowledge is of no use." Rangacharyaji, through association with Yagnapurushdasji, had been enlightened about Bhagatji's God-realized state.

The householders who stayed continuously with Bhagatji were inspired by him to observe *shvet-dharma* – a vow to avoid the company of women. In this way, he inspired them to overcome desires. He taught them how to worship God. He advised, "Remember God with your eyes wide open without blinking." He used to demonstrate this by offering prayers without blinking his eyes and by giving a detailed description of Maharaj, from head to toe, while remaining in that state. Everyone was surprised to see this.

Bhagatji then left for Mahuva. Many devotees from Gujarat accompanied him to Vadhwan. After arriving in Mahuva, he turned 18,000 *malas* for the welfare of the devotees. He continuously sat in meditation, offered worship and told the devotees, "Remember God while performing your worldly duties. Bhagwan Swaminarayan had told Somla Khachar to engrave the *murti* in his heart and preserve it, otherwise one would lament afterwards."

Many devotees from Gujarat flocked to Mahuva to experience

the company of Bhagatji. During this period Swami Vignandasji, the most beloved and *param ekantik* disciple of Bhagatji, had to leave for Chhapaiya in accordance with the wishes of Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj. He had sought communion with Bhagatji during his stay in Ahmedabad. After arriving in Chhapaiya, Vignandas Swami passed away to Akshardham following a short illness. This caused great distress to all the disciples close to Bhagatji.

Bhagatji's glory was spreading very fast all over Gujarat. Ganpatbhai, a wealthy resident of Bharuch, was an authority on the Vachanamrut. He realized the greatness of Bhagatji. Accompanied by Jethabhai of Pij, he left Valsad for Mahuva by boat. When their boat was caught in a storm, Bhagatji protected them all. They reached Mahuva safely. Ganpatbhai was immensely satisfied by Bhagatji's darshan. He understood that the Satpurush was the gateway to *moksha*. Bhagatji also explained to him the deeper meanings of the Vachanamrut. He revealed his own experiences which convinced Ganpatbhai further.

Bhagatji saw in him a sincere seeker. He blessed him and asked him to maintain satsang. Ganpatbhai wished to return by train. However, with the wish of Bhagatji, he went by boat. There was no trouble during their return voyage and they reached home in one day.

In this way, the devotees would go to Mahuva to seek Bhagatji's company despite the great hardships that they had to undergo on their way. Once, a group of the devotees from Gujarat arrived in Mahuva. They sang devotional songs all the way from the port to the mandir where they had the darshan of Bhagatji. Seeing this, a Lohana resident, who had been instigated by someone, started abusing the devotees. A jealous Brahmin villager went to the extent of slapping Bhagatji. Bhagatji, however, remained calm. The devotees from Gujarat could not bear to see this, so they pushed the villager aside.

Later, Bhagatji scolded the devotees, “We should tolerate.” He added, “One should always side with a devotee of God.” Although the incident created some bitterness in Mahuva, nothing untoward happened because of Bhagatji’s influence. Bhagatji gave the devotees much bliss before they departed. Thereafter, due to the opposition raised by some sadhus at the festival in Vartal, devotees were forbidden to go to Mahuva. Nothing, however, could deter the courageous devotees. They continued to go to Mahuva to pay their respects to Bhagatji.

Those devotees who went to Mahuva received the opportunity of Bhagatji’s darshan and company.

Bhagatji used to tell them, “Maharaj’s manifest form here on earth is as divine as that which dwells in Akshardham. There is no difference. Only if you accept this truth will you succeed in your spiritual endeavours. You will all have to become like Jadbharat. Otherwise, there will be no happiness. Is it not better to attain Akshardham than to rot in this hell of sense gratification?” In this way, Bhagatji always used to talk about associating with God and his holy Sadhu.

26. Jal Jhilani Celebration in Gadhada

In 1896 CE (Samvat 1952), Yagnapurushdasji, in consultation with Acharya Maharaj, invited Bhagatji to Gadhada to participate in the Jal Jhilani festival. The devotees were informed accordingly, and all of them assembled in Gadhada.

On this occasion, Bhagatji would give darshan to the devotees at the Lakshmi Vadi Mandir and at the seats of Acharya Maharaj and senior sadhus in the mandir. The *kothari* had forbidden Bhagatji to discourse, so he spoke sparingly.

Once Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj invited Bhagatji to his seat and asked, “How does one experience God’s bliss?” Bhagatji

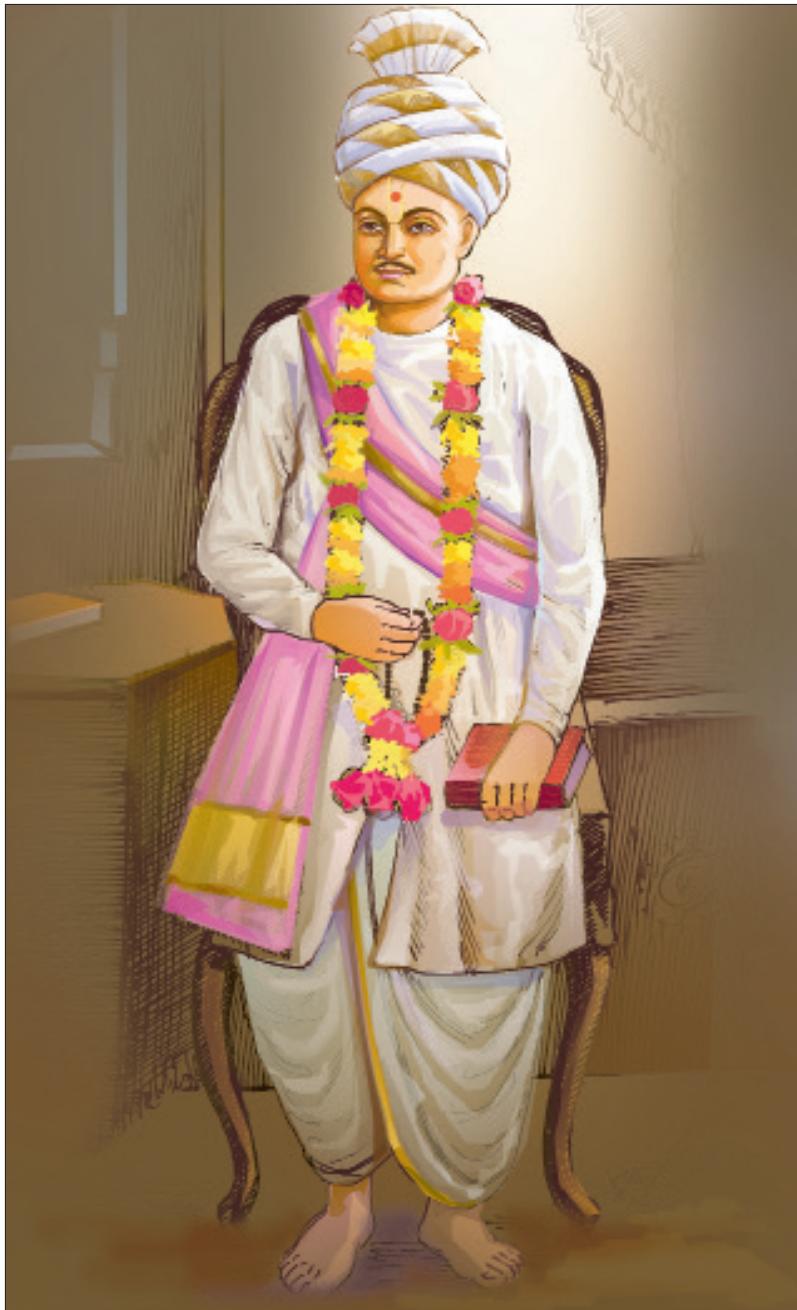
replied, “God’s bliss is experienced by one who adores God. One’s ten senses become quiet and one’s four *antahkarans* experience eternal peace. One who has experienced God’s bliss will not become attached to anything except the *murti* of God. Muktanand Swami has said that one who is dedicated to the guru experiences such bliss.” In this way, Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj sought communion with Bhagatji and experienced fulfilment.

Bhagatji talked openly to his beloved sadhus, “*Atmabuddhi* towards the God-realized Sadhu is the only means to salvation. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has entrusted the key to *moksha* to such a Sadhu; he is the gateway to *moksha*. Such a Sadhu should be served by thought, word and deed to attain *ekantik* dharma. However, one should never insult him. Once, some *baawas* threatened Maharaj with their swords and asked him to pluck spinach. Maharaj refused and replied, ‘We are merciful, but understand the principle that if anybody insults a devotee, they will face great troubles in their own life.’”

The then sadhus asked him, “How do you meditate?” Bhagatji replied, “I don’t know how to meditate. By the grace of Gunatitanand Swami, I become oblivious of this body and I behold Maharaj the way I am beholding you presently. I withdraw my sense of hearing, the moment I hear something. I know this much; I don’t know anything else. Therefore, those who want to realize God should bravely control the senses and *antahkaran*.”

“When is true knowledge said to have been attained?”

“Just as the sword and sheath remain separate from each other, similarly, when the *atma* and the body are realized as independent of each other, that is true *jnan*. No thoughts, except those of God, arise in the *antahkaran*. Desires are removed.” He added, “How can one sleep quietly if one is chased by bandits in the form of the body, senses and *antahkaran*? One should not



Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj

give in to the instincts of lust, anger, etc. One should fight as a tiger against them and pray for Maharaj's help. One should pray, 'O Maharaj, please dwell in my heart forever.'" In this way, Bhagatji spoke at length about becoming *brahmarup* and associating with God.

During this festival, devotees sought Bhagatji's instructions on the further studies of Yagnapurushdasji. Bhagatji clarified, "If arrangements can be made in Rajkot, he should continue his studies. However, there is no need for him to go to Kashi. Yagnapurushdasji is a brush that cleans the devotees from within."

Once, Bhagatji was sitting with Mana Bhagat who advised Bhagatji, "Life is short; you should not become attached to your *babula*-like disciples. Otherwise, you will have to take them to Dham." Bhagatji replied, "How can such devotees be called *babula*? I see in them all the *murti* of Brahma. If we call them *babula* our *jiva* will perish. If it is Maharaj's wish, I would like to remain with such godly devotees for many lives to come."

Thus, Bhagatji used to inspire the devotees with the glory of God and his devotees, "However much one may talk about *atma*, one cannot become *atmarup*. One has to offer bhakti with a full understanding of God's glory. Just as a girl suffering from tuberculosis dies before attaining youth, similarly, bhakti without understanding of God's glory never ripens. It is destroyed. The redemptive attributes develop in the heart of one who offers bhakti with an understanding of God's glory." Bhagatji then he returned to Mahuva.

27. Grand Reception in Junagadh

Since his excommunication from the Satsang, Bhagatji Maharaj had not visited Junagadh. He could not go to Junagadh due to opposition and the absence of Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj's orders. With permission, Yagnapurushdasji decided

to accord a grand reception to Bhagatji at the very place where he had been insulted. In 1897 CE (Samvat 1953) on the occasion of the Janmashtami festival in Junagadh, he persuaded Acharya Maharaj to invite Bhagatji to Junagadh.

Bhagatji Maharaj arrived in Junagadh. He was received along with Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj at Junagadh railway station with all the traditional fanfare. Like Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj, Bhagatji Maharaj and his followers were driven in a decorated cart. Special arrangements were made at the mandir to make their stay comfortable. Yagnapurushdasji was assisted by Kothari Jibhai in making these arrangements for Bhagatji.

The news of Bhagatji's arrival in Junagadh spread all over the city. All the Nagar devotees came to the mandir for Bhagatji's darshan. Here, he met senior sadhus, Balmukunddasji and Jaga Bhagat, who had served Gunatitanand Swami. He asked his devotees to sponsor meals in the mandir. He served the sadhus and devotees most affectionately.

During the festival days, Bhagatji used to visit the assembly hall. He used to call on Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj, eminent *sadgurus* and Jaga Swami. Wherever he went, he engaged himself in delivering discourses. All the old sadhus and devotees knew very well that Bhagatji had been Gunatitanand Swami's favourite disciple. They also knew that he had won Swami's favour, so they paid their respects by prostrating to him. A Nagar devotee named Dr Umiyashankar once asked his guru Balmukunddasji, "How is it that Pragji Bhakta, a tailor, sits on a *sinhasan* and the sadhus prostrate to him?"

Balmukunddas Swami smiled and explained, "You don't know Pragji Bhakta. He has pleased Gunatitanand Swami so much that even if we were to offer him a throne made of gold and perform *arti* with lamps made from gold, it would still fall far short of his status and eminence."

On this occasion, the beloved Nagar devotees of Gunatitanand

Swami – Chakubhai, Sadashankarbai and others were overwhelmed with joy at the sight of Bhagatji. They recalled memories of their days together, “Pragbha, Pragbha, Pragbha you swallowed all the nectar offered by Swami and didn’t leave a drop of it for others.” Bhagatji, too, was glad to meet them all.

Bhagatji narrated how he had sought the company of Gunatitanand Swami and how he had served him by carrying out his commands. He blessed the devotees by explaining how to become *brahmarup* and attach oneself to God.

Bhagatji advised, “One should always remain vigilant and find out which virtues one possesses. One will then be sure to win the favour of the God-realized Sadhu. Such a Sadhu in turn will make one great like him. What is the use of our communion with the Satpurush, if we cannot avail of the ‘Sat-chid-anand’ bliss that he enjoys? One should, therefore, offer sincere devotion and seek God’s bliss. There are three types of joy:

Vishayyanandi jakta hai, bhajanānandi Hariidās;
Paramānandi jivanmukta hai, jyāki bhayi vāsnā nāsh.

(The world derives pleasure from sense gratification; a devotee derives it from devotional songs; the *jivanmukta* whose desires have been extinguished enjoys the supreme bliss of God.)

“By attaching ourselves to such a God-realized Sadhu one can experience the joy that he experiences.

“Bhakti means to form a habit of seeing the great virtues of the great Sadhu. Bhakti is life – it is like the *jiva*. What’s the use of a body which has only *indriyas* and the *antahkaran* but no *jiva*? Similarly *vairagya*, *jnan*, *dharma* are meaningless if there is no bhakti. Bhakti is the *jiva*, *vairagya* is the legs, *dharma* is the heart and *jnan* is the eyes. One who chants bhajans and does not allow *adharma* to take hold becomes *brahmarup*.

“Animals are more sincere than people. If someone gives a piece of bread to a dog, it will follow him everywhere. If it is driven away, it would certainly go away, but still guard one’s

house. Therefore, we should cultivate at least a dog's attitude. The slightest insult upsets us. Understand for sure that your bread lies in Satsang.

"It is very difficult to overcome our *granthis*. Complete detachment dispels *sneb-granthi*; realization of God removes *sanshay-granthi*; knowledge destroys *aham-granthi*; steadfastness in the self takes away *mamatva-granthi*. Complete dedication to dharma burns out *maithun-granthi* or *briday-granthi*."

During this festival, Jaga Swami and Bhagatji Maharaj used to call on each other and discuss spiritual matters. Jaga Swami used to praise Bhagatji before the devotees. He once observed, "It is our great fortune to have Bhagatji Maharaj among us. He is the guru of the *gunatit* garden planted by Gunatitanand Swami."

Bhagatji supported Jaga Swami's observations. He used to say, "By attaining all the worldly objects of sense gratification one experiences physical happiness in this world. Ultimately, however, one will be condemned to hell. Only through the company of the Sadhu is the *antahkaran* purified."

He then narrated an anecdote:

"There was a Vaishnav devotee who always bathed and remained pure in his diet and travellings. He was steadfast and derived pleasure from devotion to God. Once he was out on business. He could not concentrate during his daily prayers. He asked his landlord as to why this was so. The landlord explained, 'The well from which you have brought water is impure.' So, he went to fetch water from another well. Only then was he able to concentrate. Therefore, it is necessary for a devotee to observe purity in matters of food, etc. to steady the *antahkaran*. Only then will the *antahkaran* become pure and will you be able to remember God.

"The *jiva* looks after the body. At night, one goes for a stroll. Thus, in many ways, one endeavours in bringing pleasures to the body. However, as long as one hasn't surrendered their

mind to the guru they have not done anything. Therefore, the *indriyas* and *antahkaran* should be controlled. They should not be allowed to drift towards the objects of sense gratification. The *jiva* has become addicted to the pleasure of the five senses. However, the pleasure derived is as short-lived as a grass fire which dies out instantly.”

Bhagatji then asked Yagnapurushdasji to recite verses in praise of the guru and said, “One who removes darkness from the heart is a guru. One who is pure within and without is a guru. One, on seeing whom the mind is not deviated and who makes us steadfast is a guru. One who removes all the *doshas* from his disciples and purifies them is a guru. If one goes out in search of such a guru with the heart of a seeker, one will certainly find him. Therefore, one should recognize the Satpurush who has attained the *brahmic state*.

“Once, a calf became separated from its mother and went to a cowshed where only bulls were housed. Whenever the calf tried to get milk, it received kicks from the bulls. Its mouth soon became swollen without getting even a drop of milk. When it returned, it could not suck milk even from its own mother. Thus if one leaves the Satpurush and turns to a lesser being, then one will receive kicks only.

“One should be like a dove. It falls headlong at the command of its master who catches it in the air. If we can cast all our cares to the Satpurush and observe his commands there is nothing to worry about. He will look after us.”

In this way, by participating in the festival in Junagadh, Bhagatji fulfilled all the desires of Yagnapurushdasji. He gave all the sadhus and devotees the bliss of his company before taking leave of Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj for Gondal. Jaga Swami could not control his tears at the time of parting. The two beloved disciples of Gunatitanand Swami embraced for the last time and parted.

28. The Last Phase

While in Gondal, Yagnapurushdasji sought Bhagatji's opinion regarding further studies. Bhagatji said, "You have mastered all the shastras and I have completely taught you *brahmavidya*. Now make everyone as happy as you are." So saying, Bhagatji appointed Yagnapurushdasji as the guru and blessed him.

On reaching Mahuva, Bhagatji fell ill. It appeared as if he had decided to pass away to Akshardham. He called some of the devotees to Mahuva for darshan. Jetha Bhagat rushed from Mumbai to Mahuva leaving aside his work as *kothari* to serve Bhagatji. Devotees from all corners of Gujarat began to pour in for this final darshan. Bhagatji had given up food. His condition was deteriorating, his illness worsening.

Despite this, Bhagatji still gave strength to all and discoursed to them. When he went to the mandir for darshan on the day of *annakut*, thousands of devotees had his darshan. He said, "Those who have had my darshan even once, I will take them to Akshardham."

The devotees frequently prayed to Bhagatji to stay on this earth longer and not remain unhealthy. The *vaidya* from Chansad, Mansukhbhai, came. He prescribed some medications and milk for Bhagatji's condition. Bhagatji, however, was disinterested. Bhagatji told Yagnapurushdasji not to come to Mahuva. His mind, however, was continuously focused on Bhagatji. He wrote a letter to Bhagatji requesting him to regain good health. Still, Bhagatji's health continued to deteriorate. The devotees lovingly served Bhagatji in every way, but were sad to see him ill.

Bhagatji's condition became critical from the morning of 7 November 1898 CE (Kartik *sud* 13, Samvat 1954). He used to do puja regularly after his morning bath. That day,

however, he could not attend even to his bodily needs. He was surrounded by Prabhudas and other devotees. Suddenly Bhagatji started speaking, "Take me to Vartal." So saying, all of a sudden, he got up and sat in a *swastik asan*, stopped his breath and pulse, and remained motionless. Concentrating in this way on Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Bhagatji independently passed away to Akshardham. The devotees failed to understand this phenomenon. They lay him on the bed and felt his pulse, which had already stopped.

They were all shocked, as if struck by lightning. They all started crying bitterly. Kothari Jetha Bhagat consoled and pacified them.

Bhagatji's body was laid on the floor. All started chanting the *dhun*. Soon the sad news spread all over the town. He had been loved and revered by one and all. Thousands of people thronged for darshan. Bhagatji had instructed the devotees in advance that his last rites be performed according to the customs of his community, but without using sandalwood.

Accordingly, the following morning, in the presence of thousands of devotees, Bhagatji's mortal body was cremated at the farm of Fulchand Sheth, situated on the banks of the River Malan.

Hearing this news, in Rajkot, Yagnapurushdasji felt as if the heavens had come down upon him. He became extremely unhappy and grieved so much that he fainted while going to bathe. Bhagwan Swaminarayan appeared to him and said, "I have not gone. I dwell forever in you."

With these words, Bhagwan Swaminarayan took a garland of roses and jasmine from his neck and garlanded Yagnapurushdasji. A sadhu who was nearby was fortunate to witness this rare sight.

Yagnapurushdasji's grief disappeared. All could understand the significance of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine words that he remained manifest in the person of a *param ekantik* Sadhu, Yagnapurushdasji, popularly known as Shastriji Maharaj.



Bhagatji Maharaj leads the devotees through the flooded River Shetrunji

29. Divinity Revealed

In 1858 CE (Samvat 1914), Bhagatji was going to Junagadh to pay respects to Gunatitanand Swami. He was accompanied by the devotees of Mahuva. Due to heavy rains, the River Shetrunji was flooded. The current was so powerful that the boatman and the travellers were all held up on the riverbank.

Bhagatji encouraged the devotees by saying, "Let us remember Maharaj and Swami and we will be able to cross safely." So saying, he led the devotees. The boatman tried to dissuade the group from going across the river. However, he fears nothing who has before his eyes the *murti* of Maharaj and Swami. The water was only chest deep when they reached halfway. Even the current was not so strong. The devotees followed Bhagatji. The boatman and others who were watching the scene from the bank were amazed, and marvelled at the faith and courage of the devotees!

On the way, a devotee was bitten by a dog. Bhagatji soothed him with his touch and the pain vanished. Proceeding further,

Bhagatji's elder brother, Narsinhbhai, was bitten by a poisonous snake. Everyone was worried. Bhagatji, however, consoled them saying, "Offer prayers to Maharaj; everything will be alright." Soon Narsinhbhai felt relief because of the divine power of the Swaminarayan mantra and the blessings of the Satpurush. Then they encountered robbers. The devotees offered them food. While the thieves were busy eating, the devotees managed to escape. In spite of many such hardships, the devotees from Mahuva never missed a chance to go for Gunatitanand Swami's darshan with Bhagatji.

In 1887 CE (Samvat 1943), Bhagatji led a group of devotees to Gadhada. It was raining heavily and it was very dark. Visibility was poor and the road was full of thorns and stones. The devotees were greatly troubled and frustrated. Bhagatji made them all sit in a circle and asked them to hold one another's toes and pray with their eyes shut. After some time, he woke them up. To their surprise they found themselves sitting on the banks of the River Ghela in Gadhada. Thus, in no time at all, Bhagatji had placed them all in Gadhada.

Once, Kanji Darji of Mahuva went to Gadhpur with Bhagatji. Both of them were sewing garments for Thakorji. Acharya Maharaj arrived in Gadhada from Vartal. Devotees went to receive him. Bhagatji and Kanjibhai also joined the devotees for darshan. Acharya Maharaj was pleased to see Bhagatji there. He took off the rose garland from his neck and offered it to Bhagatji, who in turn passed it to Kanjibhai. From then onwards, Kanjibhai began to continuously see the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami for the next three years, until his marriage.

There was once an outbreak of cholera in Mahuva. Vitthalbhai's

daughter-in-law contracted the infection. Whenever anyone offered prayers to Bhagatji to cure a victim of cholera, he would ask him to offer oil to Hanumanji and the victim would be cured. Vitthalbhai also tried this, but his daughter-in-law was not cured. So, he went to Bhagatji and said, “I offered oil to Hanumanji, but the disease was not cured.”

Bhagatji told him, “Who had told you to offer oil to Hanumanji?”

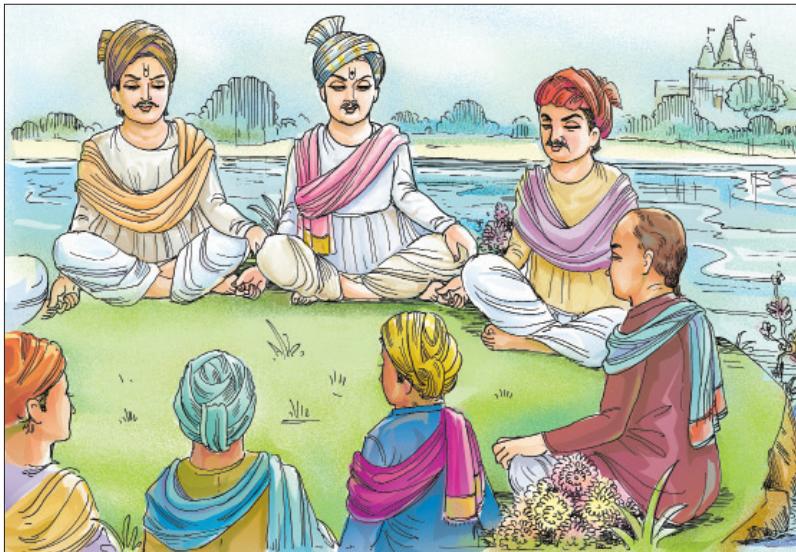
Vitthalbhai replied, “I did it because you ask so many others to do so.”

Bhagatji smiled and said, “You can’t succeed if you follow your own will. Now I command you to go again and offer oil to the *murti* of Hanumanji that has been sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.” Vitthalbhai carried out the orders and his daughter-in-law soon recovered.

In 1895 CE (Samvat 1951), Bhagatji was in Mahuva. A Brahmin came to his house and stared into his eyes without blinking. Bhagatji asked him. “Maharaj, what are you gazing at? You will find Bhagwan Swaminarayan in every pore of my body.”

The Brahmin replied, “You are perfectly right, Bhagatji. I see Bhagwan Swaminarayan in both of your eyes. That’s why I have been staring at you.”

During his final illness, Bhagatji’s condition was very critical and was confined to bedrest. Meanwhile, it was time for the Annakut festival. At the mandir in Mahuva, Bhagatji sponsored the festival. Despite his condition, Bhagatji decided to go to the mandir. All the devotees were surprised at this decision. On the day of *annakut*, Bhagatji got up and donned new clothes, a turban and *khes*. Using his *yogic* powers, and supported by two attendants, he started walking towards the mandir before the



Bhagatji Maharaj divinely transports the devotees to Gadhada

devotees could arrange for any transport.

Bhagatji soon reached the mandir, had darshan and then sat down against the second pillar to the right of the dome. The thousands of devotees who had thronged to the mandir for the *annakut*, were fortunate to have darshan of the luminous personality of Bhagatji. They all praised Bhagatji. Fulchandbhai's father, Khimjibhai, had also come there with a carriage to take Bhagatji home. On his way home, Bhagatji told Jetha Bhagat, "Blessed are those who had this darshan today." How gracious Bhagatji was!

Glossary

adharma unrighteousness; conduct contradictory to dharma or divine law

agna divine command or instruction from God or the guru; religious injunction

aksharrup form of Akshar

annakut festival in which a large variety of vegetarian delicacies are offered to God, traditionally celebrated the day after Diwali
antahkarana the subtle inner faculty comprising mind (*man*), intellect (*buddhi*), ego (*ahamkar*), and memory/impressions (*chitta*), which processes perception and thought

anuvrutti to act in harmony with the will of God or guru; to follow intuitively and spontaneously

arti ritual waving of lighted wicks before a deity or guru, accompanied by devotional singing

asan posture; seat

atma soul

atmabuddhi perceiving oneself as the *atma* and relating to God with that awareness; deep spiritual affection for God

atmarup living with the awareness of being the *atma*, distinct from the body, mind, and senses

babula weak or timid individuals

bhagvati diksha initiation as a sadhu into saffron robes

bhakta a devotee of God; one engaged in bhakti (devotion)

bhandari storekeeper of a mandir

Brahma Aksharbrahma

brahmacharya celibacy

brahmajnan true knowledge of Aksharbrahma and Parabrahma as revealed by the guru

brahmarup form of Brahma

brahmavidya supreme spiritual knowledge of Aksharbrahma and Parabrahma, leading to liberation

brahmic pertaining to Aksharbrahma or the state of being brahmarup

chandan sandalwood paste used for tilak or offering to deities
cheshta devotional verses narrating the daily activities, divine form, and lilas of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

chintamani wish-fulfilling gem

dandvat prostration

Darbar a regional ruler

darshan to see with reverence and devotion

Dham short form for Akshardham, the abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

dhoti a garment wrapped around the waist to dress the lower part of the body

dhun chanting the name of God

dhyan meditation

diksha initiation

divyabhav to firmly believe that God and his Sadhu are divine

diwan minister

dosh moral flaws

dudhpak sweet, thickened milk with rice and condiments

ekadashi the eleventh day of each half of a lunar month

ekantik bhakta God-realized devotee

ekantik dharma the fourfold spiritual discipline comprising dharma (righteousness), *jnan* (knowledge), *vairagya* (detachment), and bhakti (devotion)

ekantik sthiti brahmic state

fagva prasad sanctified food of popcorn and dates

fakir Muslim mendicant or ascetic

Fagan a month of the Hindu calendar (February–March)

Fuladol festival of colours

jnan knowledge; wisdom

jnani a wise person

gorakh a type of yogic posture

granthi psychological complex; deeply rooted desire

guna the three fundamental qualities of nature: *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (ignorance)

gunatit transcends the three gunas of maya

hindola swing

hriday-granthi desires

Hutashani Holi festival

ishwar second of the five eternal realities

jamadar head constable

jiva soul

jivanmukta redeemed during this very life

kalyan liberation

Kartik a month of the Hindu lunar calendar (October–November)

khatras an observance in which only food devoid of the six types of taste – sweet, salty, bitter, sour, spicy and astringent – is eaten

khes silken scarf

Khuda God

kothari chief administrator of mandir

mahant chief priest; pontifical head of a mandir
mahaprasad sanctified food
maithun-granthi lust
mala rosary
mamatva-granthi attachment to self
mandal group
mangala arti first *arti* of the day, performed at sunrise
maya third of the five eternal realities
moksha ultimate liberation
Mul Akshar the original, eternal form of Aksharbrahma
murti sacred image
murti-pratishththa consecration of *murtis* in a mandir

naivedya food offered to a deity
nishchay absolute faith or conviction in God
nishkam vrat vow of celibacy

paras philosopher's stone – magical stone which turns iron into gold
paravidya wisdom of God
parna breaking of fast
parshad male renunciate in white robes
pativrata fidelity
pranam obeisance offered with folded hands
prasad consecrated food
pujan religious rites
punya merits
puranpoli sweet delicacy

rajbhog arti third *arti* of the day performed after lunch has been offered to the deities
rotlo millet bread

- sadguru** senior sadhu
- sadhak** a person endeavouring on the spiritual path
- samadhi** divine trance
- sangh** group
- sanshay-granthi** doubts
- Sat-chid-anand** truth-consciousness-joy; existence-consciousness-bliss
- satsangi** one who practises satsang
- seva** devotional service offered to God
- sevak** one who serves
- shangar arti** second *arti* of the day; performed after breakfast has been offered and the *murtis* have been adorned with garments, ornaments and garlands
- shvet-dharma** a vow to avoid the company of women
- sneh** attachment
- sud** bright half of each lunar month of the Hindu calendar
- swadharma** one's own dharma
- swarup** form
- swarupnishtha** firm conviction in and understanding of God's true divine form and nature
- swastik asan** cross-legged posture
- thal** offering of food to the deities
- upasana** philosophical understanding of the nature of God; mode of worship
- vad** dark half of each lunar month of the Hindu calendar
- vairagya** detachment
- vartman** vows
- vishay** worldly pleasures
- vrat** a spiritual observance