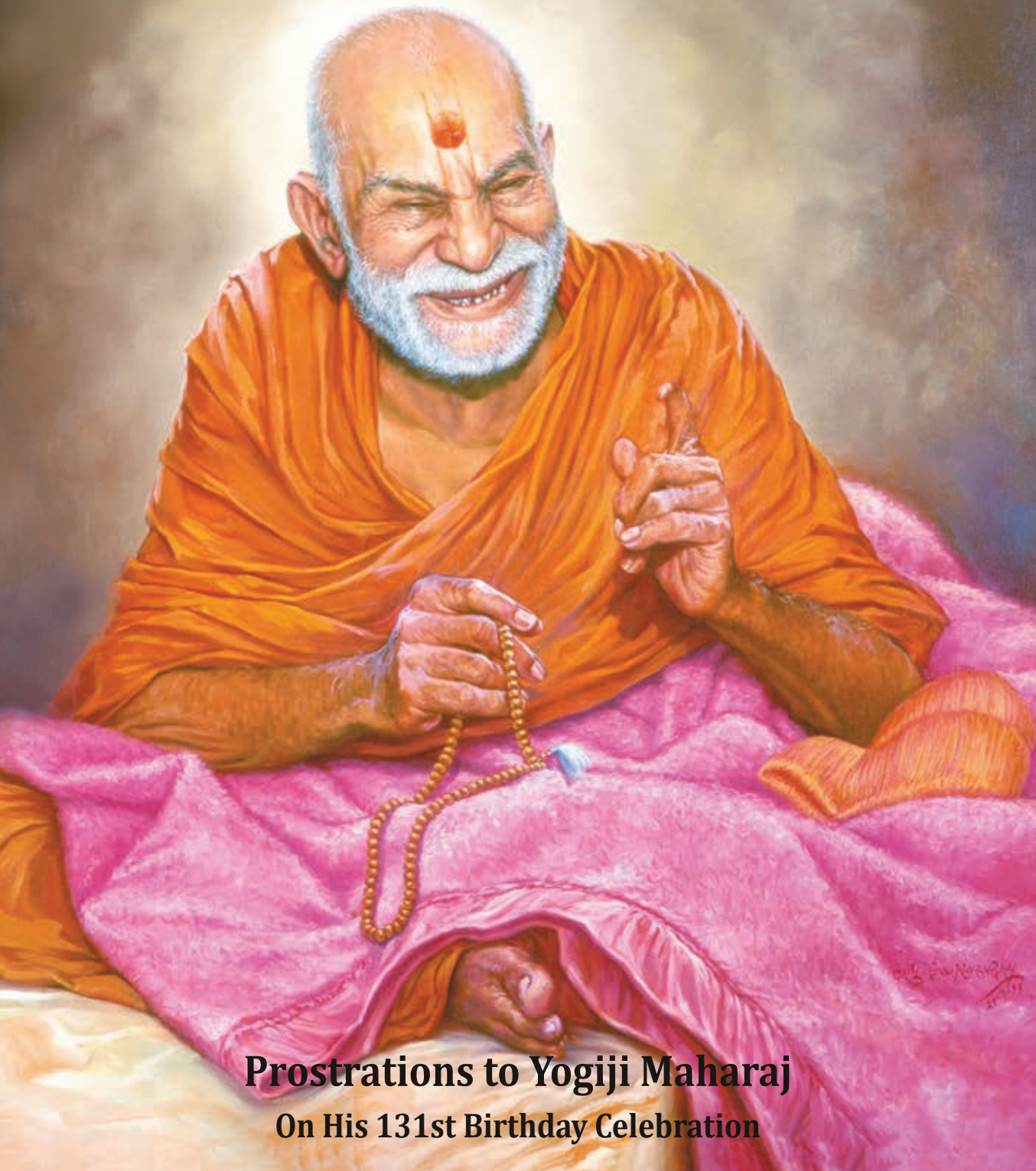


# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

May-June 2023

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



**Prostrations to Yogiji Maharaj  
On His 131st Birthday Celebration**





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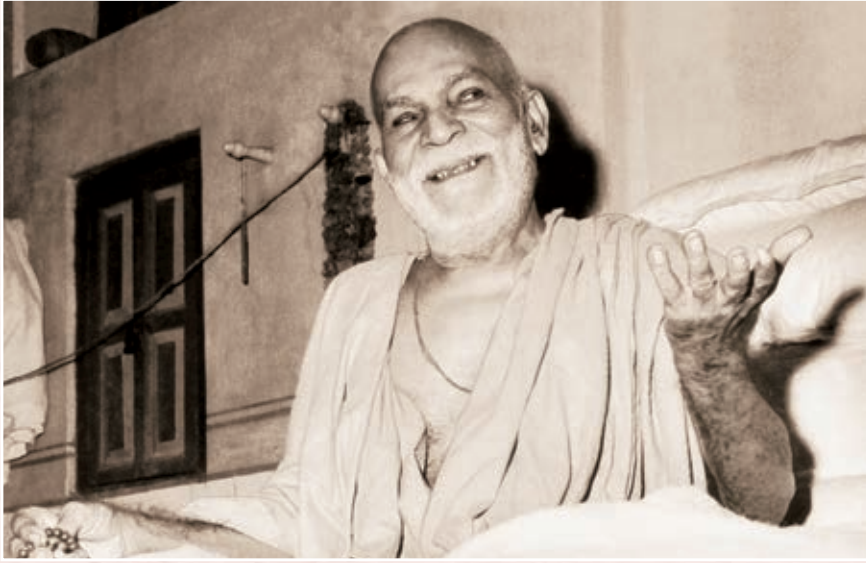
### OPENING CEREMONY OF NARAYAN SAROVAR, CHANSAD 9 April 2023

1. View of Narayan Sarovar.
2. Devotees and well-wishers during the inauguration assembly.
3. Chief Minister of Gujarat, Puja Bhaktipriyadas Swami and Puja Ishwarcharandas Swami perform the opening rituals.



3





# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

May–June 2023, Vol. 46, No. 2



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



In April 1978, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and inaugurated the first issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The bi-monthly magazine serves to enlighten BAPS youths, seniors and well-wishers about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and the Gunatit guru *parampara*. It also seeks to inspire the universal values and traditions of Hinduism to pursue a happy and peaceful life by serving God and humankind.

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# C O N T E N T S

- 4 Shri Hari Meets Bishop Heber
- 7 Yogiji Maharaj
- 12 Yogi Charitam
- 15 Reflections on Yogiji Maharaj
- 18 Learning to Adjust
- 21 Flexibility – The Key to Stability
- 23 Question Time with Pramukh Swami Maharaj
- 25 Humility and Egolessness in Action
- 28 Inspirations
- 30 Living With Swamishri
- 32 Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav
- 34 Opening Ceremony of Narayan Sarovar
- 35 Launch of 'Shatkoti Hanuman Chalisa' Recitals
- 36 BAPS News

# Shri Hari Meets Bishop Heber

*After departing from Ahmedabad, Shri Hari went to Jetalpur and fulfilled Gangama's wish to dine at her house. Thereafter, Shri Hari met Bishop Heber in Nadiad...*

## DRESS TAKEN AWAY AS SURETY

Shri Hari told his sadhus to sing *garbi* bhajans. He stayed the night in Aslali and left early next morning for Jetalpur. In Jetalpur, Maharaj camped under the shade of five banyan trees. Asjibhai, Gangadas and other devotees arrived and Shri Hari asked, "Where is Anand Swami?" Asjibhai replied, "He has gone to Ahmedabad." Shri Hari responded, "Then let us all go to Ahmedabad."

On hearing this, Gangama instructed, "Go to Ahmedabad tomorrow. You'll have to stay and eat here today." Shri Hari smiled at Gangama's command and immediately took off his rich upper cloth (*poshak*). Gangama took the *poshak* to her home without informing anyone. After a while Maharaj asked, "Where is my *poshak*?" Gangama replied, "It is at my home." Shri Hari became a little worried and said, "Give me my *poshak*, I will not go to Ahmedabad."

In reply, Gangama explicitly expressed her doubt, "Maharaj, I cannot trust you. Previously, you have done things such that devotees may not trust you. Therefore, only after you take your meal will you get your *poshak*." Shri Hari told his attendants, "Did you hear that! Because you did not take care of my *poshak* Gangama took it away as surety." Then, Maharaj instructed his sadhus to sing bhajans. Brahmanand Swami started singing extemporaneously, "*Jānyā jānyā ame jānyā, mārā*

*validā nā jādudā sarve ame jānyā...*" – "I have come to know my dear Lord's miracles..."

## I WILL APPEAR BEFORE YOU WHENEVER YOU SING KIRTANS

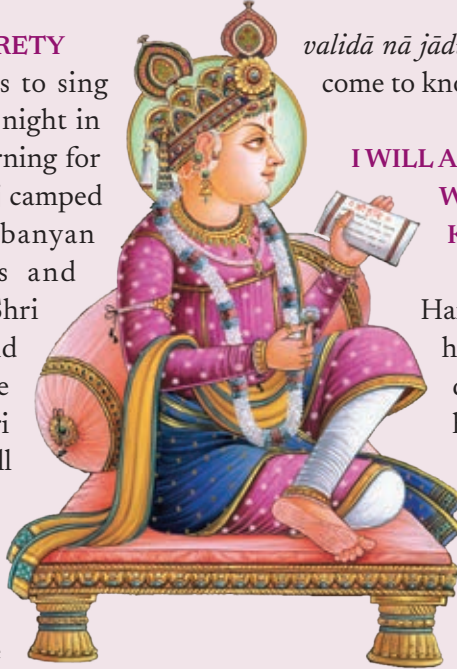
After hearing the kirtan, Shri Hari smiled and commented, "You have sung about the ways of a past divine avatar. I am different from him and I have not performed any of those actions you've described." Brahmanand Swami retorted, "Maharaj, Bhagwan is such that he takes away everything that belongs to his devotee. Thus, how can

one trust him? He tricked King Bali, killed Vali and destroyed Karna in a similar way."

Shri Hari countered, "But they were done by the previous divine avatars. In what way do you see me in them?" Brahmanand Swami was quick to answer, "Though they were done by the former divine avatars, but was it not because of your wish that they performed those acts?"

Shri Hari seemed to be momentarily baffled, and then answered, "Swami, what you say is true. My mission is to dissolve the worldly desires in aspirants and to enshrine God in their hearts. I bless the devotees with sweet words and call them lovingly, but when their wishes and tasks are not accomplished they lose trust in God."

Immediately, Brahmanand Swami said humbly, "Maharaj, what you say is true. But when you give us God then that is the greatest asset



and blessing for us. I composed this kirtan with such sentiments and understanding about your miracles.” Shri Hari was happy and blessed him, “Swami, whenever you sing kirtans I will appear before you.”

Shri Hari took his meal at Gangama’s house and then proceeded to Asjibhai’s home. Here, in the courtyard, Maharaj told his sadhus to sit in rows and then served laddus to them. Maharaj served two extra laddus to Brahmanand Swami and remarked, “Swami, don’t embarrass me in public.” Thereafter, Shri Hari went to rest at Asjibhai’s home.

In the evening, Shri Hari went to Fulbaug, a garden, where there were pomegranate, banana and guava trees. Whenever Shri Hari came to Jetalpur he always ate the fruits of this garden. He would sit under the Borsali tree and accept the garlands offered by the local devotees. Brahmanand Swami also wrote a bhajan of this incident, “*Hari baithe borsali ki chhaiyā...*” – “Shri Hari sits under the shade of the Borsali tree...”

### IN THE SADHUS’ JOY LIES MY JOY

Shri Hari stayed the night in Jetalpur and then departed early next morning. He arrived at Kanej village and gave darshan to the devotees. Thereafter, he bathed in a river near Mahemdavad. Then, Shri Hari mounted his horse and the devotees of Mahemdavad welcomed him and escorted him to the town. A bed had been arranged under the lush canopy of a pipal tree. Shri Hari sat on it and discoursed to the devotees. When lunch was ready Maharaj went to Durlabhram’s home to eat. He instructed his sadhus, “All of you fill your gourds from the well and come to Durlabhram’s house for lunch.”

Suvasini Bhabhi and Variyalibai had cooked a meal for Shri Hari. After lunch, Shri Hari happily served laddus to his sadhus and devotees. He often said, “What a great honour and privilege it is to serve such sadhus and devotees. They have sacrificed their lives on my word and implicitly

obey my instructions. They have relinquished their own ambitions and inclinations and through the practise of austerities reduced their bodies. They are the pillars of our organization and through them it will flourish and spread. Thus, in their joy I am always joyful.”

From Mahemdavad Shri Hari travelled to Dabhan. Here, he got news about an English head priest travelling in the neighbouring region. Shri Hari wished to meet him. He gave *prasad* and a flower garland to his five *parshads* and Miyaji and instructed them to go and honour him. Then, Maharaj added, “If the priest wishes to meet me then arrange a meeting for tomorrow afternoon in Nadiad.”

### MEETS BISHOP HEBER

Bishop Reginald Heber was the principal Bishop of Calcutta on behalf of the Church of England. He was on a tour of India and had arrived in Vadodara. Here, he met the resident officer Mr James Williams. The latter briefly described to him about the noble work accomplished by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, “He is a man of character, observes celibacy and is a scholar of the Hindu shastras. His teachings promote moral purity, celibacy and respect for women. He has curbed stealing, violence and other bad practices in society. He has inspired countless people towards cultivating faith in God and pure living. Through his powers Gujarat has been alleviated of lawlessness and *adharma*. He has spread dharma, values and purity in people, and established peace. He does not discriminate between high and low people. He propagates that God is one and promises to protect his disciples.”

While Bishop Heber was silently listening to Mr William’s narration he was inspired to meet him.

The Bishop was camping outside of Nadiad. Soon, the *parshads* and Miyaji, sent by Shri Hari, arrived to meet him. They offered the flower

garland and *prasad*, and conveyed, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan sends his good wishes.”

Bishop Heber was happy to hear the name of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and deeply wished to meet him. He noticed that all the *parshads* were Hindus and they were accompanied by a single Muslim. So he enquired, “Are you all disciples of Swaminarayan?” They replied, “Yes. Bhagwan Swaminarayan does not discriminate against people of other religions.” Thereafter, Bishop Heber told the group to convey his respects to Swaminarayan and that he would like to meet him at 11 a.m. on the following day in Nadiad. The *parshads* departed.

The next day, Sunday, 26 March 1825 (Chaitra *sud* 7, A.S. 1881), Shri Hari arrived at 11 a.m. at Bishop Heber’s residence. With him were two hundred armed Kathi horsemen. Some of them were wearing iron armours and armed with spears, bows and arrows, and swords. The head of them all was a king of a small kingdom. His robust body and large headgear spoke of his prominence and grandness. He came inside the residence, saluted the bishop, embraced him according to Indian tradition and informed, “Bhagwan Swaminarayan has come to meet you.” Thereafter, he escorted Shri Hari inside.

Shri Hari’s physical structure was of medium build and appeared ordinary looking. On seeing Maharaj’s face the Bishop seemed unable to gauge his true inner form. He held Shri Hari’s hand and led him to a chair, opposite his own, clad with ivory. A few *parshads* came in and sat on the floor. The rest of Shri Hari’s entourage stood outside eager to listen to the conversation that would follow.

Firstly, Bishop Heber and Shri Hari mutually asked about their health. After some formal talk, Bishop Heber praised, “You have propagated the principles of truth and morals in Gujarat and made its people happy. You have redeemed many from poverty. I had heard a lot of such talks about you and subsequently developed

a strong urge to meet you.” Then, the Bishop admitted, “My knowledge and understanding of the Hindi language is very poor. Therefore, I am eager to know about your principles through an interpreter in your group. If you come to Kheda I will arrange a separate tent for you to stay because I wish to have a long conversation with you.”

The purpose behind the bishop’s wish to meet him again was to present him with a Gujarati version of the Bible, which he did not have at the time. In addition, he also wished to take Bhagwan Swaminarayan with him to Mumbai and show him the work being done by the Church. Shri Hari, however, replied, “My life is mostly spent in spiritual travels. There are about five-thousand devotees waiting for me in the next village and more than fifty-thousand devotees in various other villages of Gujarat. Out of them, the majority will be shortly attending the ritual thread ceremony of my nephew in Vartal. Thus, for the present, I cannot accept your invitation. However, in future, if time permits, I will come to meet you.”

Then the bishop explained about the life and work of Jesus Christ, who was the Son of God, and that God lived through him. Then, Shri Hari talked about Paramatma and *upasana*, but the bishop found it very difficult to comprehend.

After the dialogue, the bishop gave a *paan* to Shri Hari and sprayed perfume on his hand and clothes. Shri Hari signed the bishop’s little book and the bishop also gave his signature. Finally, Shri Hari departed, saying, “We shall meet again if God so wishes.” ◆

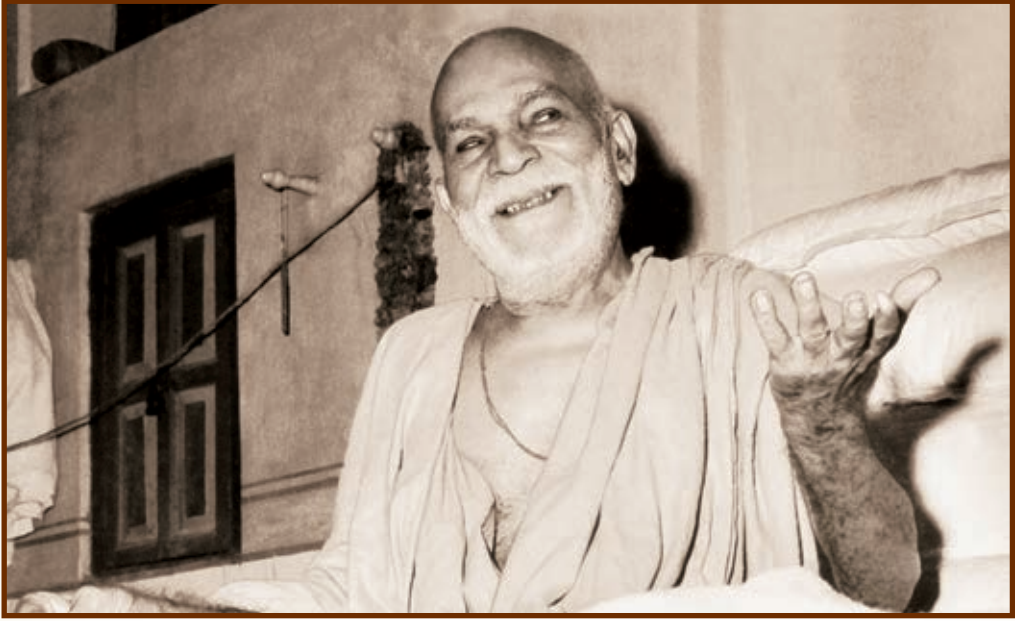
(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from the Gujarati text of

Bhagwan Swaminarayan authored by Shri H.T. Dave



# YOGIJI MAHARAJ



*The AARSH Lecture Series is a three-monthly event held at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar, in which distinguished experts on spiritual, social and other subjects address the audience of scholars and the public.*

*On 28 June 2008, Mahant Swami as a sadguru sant spoke about the personality of Yogi Maharaaj. The following is a translation of that lecture.*

Shastriji Maharaj had come to Jabalpur when I was six months old. While giving me *vartman* (initiation into satsang) he named me ‘Keshav.’ However, a family member had already given me a name (Vinu) and some of them did not like Keshav so they called me by the old name. However, when I became a sadhu, I got the original name ‘Keshav’ when I was named Keshavjivandas by Yogi Maharaaj. This showed the spiritual oneness between Yogi Maharaaj and Shastriji Maharaj. What Shastriji Maharaj did (by naming me Keshav) was continued by Yogi Maharaaj. The naming procedure of all sadhus by Yogi Maharaaj was like this: All the names of youths to be initiated into sadhus were written on small pieces of paper, then folded and kept on one side. Thereafter, the

names of new sadhus were written on small pieces of paper, then folded and kept on the opposite side. Yogi Bapa picked up one piece of paper with a youth’s name and then another having a sadhu’s name, which in turn became the new name of the initiated youth. I got my name due to divine providence, as it was not pre-arranged.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan says in Vachnamrut Sarangpur 1 that divine bliss and eternal happiness are generated by the mere darshan of God.

Nowadays, people make every effort to go to America to live happily. Even here in Gandhinagar, if someone gifts you two acres of land, it will give you immense joy. However, even if you receive the entire state of Gujarat as a gift or the entire universe or, for that matter, all the universes, still

all their combined comforts and happiness would be less than the bliss derived from the darshan of Bhagwan for one second. This statement may seem like mere imagination, but Yogiji Maharaj enjoyed that supreme bliss of God every moment of his life. Compared to that the total material happiness in all the universes was like trash to him. To portray such a personality in words is almost impossible. Even if I describe him to some extent, how much will you understand? Because here was a person of a different class and character. One who had experienced God all his life is beyond our capacity to describe, but I will still try to say something about his personality.

It is a fact that those who had met Yogi Bapa, had his darshan and served him are unable to give justice while describing his character. He was beyond our understanding. Since we have all eaten ice cream we can understand the joy we get from it, but someone who has never tasted ice cream will not understand its taste and its joy. Similarly, one who has not known about or experienced the bliss of God will not be able to understand Yogiji Maharaj's divine attribute of eternal happiness. However, Yogi Bapa had given God (his bliss) to everyone. Everyone experienced the joy of God when they came in touch with Yogi Bapa. Many *satsangis* have the firm conviction that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is God and they experienced his divine bliss through the grace of Yogi Bapa. He gave a divine experience to those who came to him, but it was like giving an expensive diamond ring to a child who was not aware of its value. People who were blessed by Yogi Bapa felt the divine touch of his pat, but they could not experience the bliss of God like Yogi Bapa did. However, even though a child is unaware of the value of the ring, if he preserves it, he will one day realize it. Similarly, those who got that divine experience of God in the presence of Yogi Bapa, will one day become deeply engrossed in that bliss. Since Yogi Bapa gave us the divine bliss of God, we can retain it providing we focus our attention on God.

In this world, we are made up of three things: body, mind and soul. Whatever we do or strive for our body amounts to material pursuit, and whatever we do for our soul tantamounts to spiritual pursuit. Our mind lies between the two. As per the Bhagavad Gita, Bhagwan Krishna says, "A steady mind experiences happiness, whereas an unsteady mind experiences pain and misery."

Therefore, if you incline your mind towards material things, which are unstable or temporary, you experience pain and unhappiness. However, if you incline your mind or focus your attention on spiritualism, which is endlessly pure and eternal, you become happy and blissful. The common denominator in both realms is to strive for happiness, but the difference is apparent; materialism has never given long-term happiness to anyone. Many famous personalities of the past have made these statements after pursuing a materialistic way of life:

Napoleon: "I have not seen six happy days in my life."

King Solomon: The richest person of his time, he received 150 pounds of gold daily in his coffers and had 700 beautiful queens. Still, he felt that it was all meaningless and he had merely been chasing after wind.

Alexander: He passed away at the young age of 33. He had instructed his doctors and army generals to carry his coffin with his palms open so that the world could see the conqueror of half the world leaving empty-handed from earth.

Now let us look at the spiritual pursuits of our great devotees and saints from India: Mira, Kabir, Narsinh, Tulsidas, Sant Tukaram, Namdev, Eknath, Brahmanand Swami, Muktanand Swami and others. In spite of facing many difficulties and hardships they all remained steady and happy because their minds were fixated on God. In short, we need to focus our mind on spiritualism.

Like we have the richest person in the world, Yogiji Maharaj was the richest spiritual person in this world. He lived a life of unfading internal and



external spiritual splendour.

Someone can become richer than the presently richest person, if not this year, then the next. There is no end to it. It is not fixed that the richest person will always remain so, and that no one will overshadow him.

In spirituality, one can attain the eternal *brahmi sthiti* or the highest state of spirituality. Yogiji Maharaj was born with such attributes. No one was above him except God. He was at the peak of spirituality. Just as we have champions in wrestling, boxing, athletics, cricket and badminton, similarly, in the domain of spirituality Yogi Bapa was an outright champion. Shastriji Maharaj used to say that in the infinite universes there was no one who could match Yogiji Maharaj's saintliness. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has mentioned in the Vachanamrut that saintliness is the highest attainment in all the universes. He further elaborates in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 22 that like a king's power to rule a kingdom the queen, too, has equal power. Similarly, what God can do, a saint like Yogi Bapa can also equally do.

There are many saints in India, but saints like Yogi Bapa were in a different league. He was unparalleled in this universe. Yet he remained unknown, nor he did not allow himself to be publicized. In fact, he was not worried about his own publicity. Whatever realization of divinity we felt and imbibed in our soul with Yogi Bapa's company was good for us, as he was the embodiment of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divinity. Only when we reach that stage of oneness with God, which Yogi Bapa had, would we achieve that complete bliss and joy every second of our lives. He was happy in remaining and believing that he was a servant of God's servants. What can be humbler than that. He was proud of that belief, unlike others who remain servants because they have no other choice. Out of his spiritual knowledge about the greatness of God, he believed he was a servant of God and his devotees.

Shastriji Maharaj praised Yogiji Maharaj many

times in different ways. Yogiji Maharaj got his name Yogi in Junagadh when he was a very young sadhu. He had been a *sadhak* (a trainee) for a year and then a sadhu for another year during which the senior *sadgurus* started calling him Jogi (Yogi) because of his high spiritual state. He had earned his name Jogi. It was not casually gifted or mentioned. Once, as a very young sadhu, he was in Bhavnagar. During that time, there was a marriage procession of Maharaja Krishnakumar Sinhji, who was the ruler. It was a magnificent procession with a lot of pomp and gaiety. Everyone rushed to the balcony to watch the procession, but Jogi did not go. He refused to watch. When others insisted, he said, "What is the point in watching something which one has already renounced." Therefore, he was a Yogi by nature.

One day, he met Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj in Rajkot. He had wished for this divine meeting since the day a senior sadhu, Madhavpriyadasji, of Junagadh had informed him about the greatness of Shastriji Maharaj and the noble work he was doing to establish Bhagwan Swaminarayan's true philosophy. Yogiji Maharaj had made 14 gurus in his life and served all of them with equal respect and glory. However, he harboured a special reverence for Shastriji Maharaj by following and obeying his minutest commands. For him, Shastriji Maharaj was everything: his life, soul, deity. He pleased him in every possible way. In short, only an ideal disciple can become an ideal guru. Shastriji Maharaj was extremely overjoyed and pleased with Yogiji Maharaj's nature and obedience, his service to God, his devotion, nobility, forbearance, tolerance, humbleness and eagerness to serve. Yogiji Maharaj was an embodiment of all virtues. Shastriji Maharaj once mentioned that Yogiji Maharaj was worth more than one crore rupees. Shastriji Maharaj mentions this to highlight the greatness of Yogiji Maharaj, because when he arrived from Junagadh the coffers of the mandirs of Shastriji Maharaj were empty. Whatever donations came were used immediately in either payments to labourers, buying stones

and *murtis*, and other essentials. The money never entered the mandir treasury.

Shastriji Maharaj used to say, “I am Jogi and Jogi is me.” He said that he was Jogi since time immemorial. Jogi had a saintly nature in his genes. There is a saying that some are born great, some become great and some have greatness thrust upon them. Yogiji Maharaj was born great.

We have mentioned his attributes and divine nature, but was there any proof? Shastriji Maharaj once remarked, “Vyasji has mentioned 64 characteristics of a *sant* in the shastras, but in case he had forgotten to write some more, one will find them in Yogiji Maharaj.” If Vyasji had met Yogiji Maharaj, he would not have had to go around looking for saintly characteristics in various saints of his era. He would have seen everything in Yogi Bapa. Yogiji Maharaj was like pure gold. If one were to test gold in any way, cut it, melt it, smash it, store it, bury it, still, gold would possess the same qualities. Yogi Bapa’s saintliness glittered throughout his life.

For example, in 1970, Yogiji Maharaj arrived in London, UK. A news reporter of *The Times* came to interview him. He asked Yogi Bapa if he had any issues in the past that troubled or puzzled him. Swamishri replied without a moment’s hesitation, “Never ever.” He never had any issues or problems in his lifetime. He was absorbed in God’s bliss and always smiling. During his life he met many people who were problematic, yet he remained equipoised. He had many ailments, like hernia, haemorrhoids, prostate gland enlargement and others, but he never worried or thought about his pain and discomfort. In fact, he always enjoyed every moment of his life because he was engrossed in God and at peace. He made all who came to him happy.

Yogiji Maharaj had tolerated a guru named Vignandas, who was always agitated and frustrated. He often harassed and punished Yogiji Maharaj for no reason. He could not bear Yogiji Maharaj’s humility and saintliness. No one in this world would tolerate Vignandas except Yogiji Maharaj, who was an epitome of tolerance.

It is said that a person is known by the company he keeps. Yogiji Maharaj was in the company of Vignandas for 17 years. The latter was always angry, arrogant, jealous and mean. However, Yogiji Maharaj was never affected by Vignandas’s perverse nature.

Everybody yearned to please Yogiji Maharaj and be blessed by receiving some of his good virtues. Such was the personality of Yogiji Maharaj. His spiritual state was the best. He used to say, “Never let your joyous and blissful nature of being *brahmaswarup* be diminished even for a moment.” Only God or his *sant* like Yogi Bapa, who had never lost his spiritual poise of being *brahmaswarup*, could say this. Despite living in this material world full of jealousy, envy, lust, greed and ego, Yogiji Maharaj remained aloof like a lotus in muddy water, looking pretty and untouched by dirt.

Once, Sanatan Swami spoke to Yogi Bapa, “Please name the 64 characteristics of a true *sant*.”

Yogi Bapa replied, “I don’t know.”

Sanatan Swami asked, “How can you say that you don’t know? A person having money in his pocket always knows how much he has. You have all the 64 characteristics in you. Yet, you say you don’t know!”

Yogi Bapa said, “You are a *shastri*, therefore you know them. You can explain.”

That was his profound humility.

Another important thing about Yogiji Maharaj was his divinity, which spread throughout the entire Satsang. He gave God’s bliss and happiness to everyone who came to him. It was a transcendental experience. He gave selfless love to everyone; a love with no strings attached. This attracted many youths towards him, and some were inspired to become sadhus.

Once, we had gone for *padhramanis* at Vile Parle, in Mumbai. At one place, a businessman was waiting outside his house. He asked us, “Are you sadhus of Yogiji Maharaj?” We said yes. He then invited us to his home. In one of his rooms, which he was using as his puja room, there was a chair tied



at a height on the wall. He informed us that Pujya Yogiji Maharaj had sat on that chair. Lower down, there were pictures of many Jain monks because he was a Jain. Then, he took us to his master bedroom. There was only one picture on the wall – that of Yogiji Maharaj. He said every night, before lying down on his bed to sleep, he looked at the picture of Yogi Bapa. This darshan gave him sound and peaceful sleep. He described Yogiji Maharaj as one who was constantly oozing with divinity.

For countless, Yogiji Maharaj's first darshan was enough to experience divinity. When Pujya Chinmayanand Swami was asked to write something about Yogi Bapa, he wrote, "The experience I had in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj cannot be expressed in language. He is the living mass of what is to be experienced in the Upanishads. The bliss of the self-supreme exploding out of that aged body, wafting a steady fragrance of pure love, gushed into those who came near him, to fill up the hearts of others – even when they are not pure enough to receive and retain it. Hence, none wants to leave him and his presence. To such a master we can only prostrate and not write about." Chinmayanand Swami was a brilliant scholar and philosopher. He had met Yogi Bapa only a couple of times, yet he was touched by his saintliness and divinity.

Shri Rangavdhootji Maharaj was so impressed with Yogiji Maharaj that he hugged him. Shri Ranchoddasji Maharaj, another famous *sant*, gave the title of 'Yogiraj' to Yogiji Maharaj. He himself was a yogi. Another *sant*, Swami Kashikanandji, of the Sadhu Bela Ashram (Prem Puri – Chowpatty), invited Yogiji Maharaj to his ashram one evening. He requested Yogi Bapa to say something to a congregation of mostly Sindhis, who could not understand Gujarati. When Yogi Bapa sang a kirtan in his typical Kathiawadi style, the entire congregation was stunned by and became engrossed in his divine singing and speech. As soon as Bapa concluded his speech, everyone shouted, "Once more." So much divinity had oozed from his speech!

Swami Kashikanandaji was so impressed that he wrote eight *shlokas* in Sanskrit praising Yogi Bapa. Shri Dongreji Maharaj was very much pleased by the company of Yogiji Maharaj that he once said, "In front of a Bhagvat Sant (God embodied saint) like you, how can I speak about the Bhagvat (holy shastra) to you?" Pujya Muktanand Baba of Vajreshwari used to say about Yogi Bapa, "Oh! Here is a *sant* ripe with divine love!"

During the opening ceremony of the Bhagvat Vidyapith in Sola, Ahmedabad, Shri Krishnashankar Shastri, the host, had invited many great distinguished *sants*: Shri Rangavdhootji Maharaj, Shri Dongreji Maharaj, Shri Ranchoddasji Maharaj, Pujya Muktanand Baba and Yogi Bapa. As soon as Yogiji Maharaj arrived, there was a joyous hail of greetings and praises. Everyone was simply amazed. Shri Krishnashankar Shastriji wished to garland all the *sants*, so he first went to garland Yogiji Maharaj. But Yogiji Maharaj first directed him to garland the other *sants*. When Shastriji finally garlanded Yogiji Maharaj, the latter prostrated to all the *sants*. Everyone was touched by his humble and divine gesture. Yogiji Maharaj overwhelmed everyone in the audience with his immense devotion towards God and his devotees.

Yogiji Maharaj was an 'asli' (true) sadhu. He liked and instructed his devotees to keep away from bad mouthing (*abhav-avgun*) about anyone and wanted them to love and foster mutual affection. He had unfathomable love for his guru (Shastriji Maharaj) and considered his guru as God in human form. His profound devotion to his guru is worth emulating. Yogiji Maharaj's humble and lovable nature touched everyone.

The main thing we must understand is that our guru never goes away. Even though Yogiji Maharaj apparently left for Akshardham in 1971, his nature, virtues and divinity are present in Pramukh Swami Maharaj. We are not missing Yogiji Maharaj at all because he merged into Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Our Gunatit line (successors) continues and remains forever. ♦

# YOGI

# Charitam



*Yogi Charitam, a Gujarati publication published by Swaminarayan Aksharpieth, is authored by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami. It comprises brief inspiring incidents from Yogi Maharaj's vicharan from 1959 to 1971 to various villages and towns in India and abroad. A translation of selected incidents that occurred in 1959 are as follows.*

## GREATNESS IN DOING LOWLY SEVA

A boil had developed on Yogi Maharaj's arm. A couple of youths were applying an ointment. One of them asked Yogi Maharaj, "When a leader of a nation gets ill a doctor is called by plane to treat him, whereas nothing of this sort is done for you."

Yogi Maharaj responded, "I am not a leader; I am a *sevak* (servant). My greatness is in washing dishes – in doing lowly *seva*."

- Mahelav

## ETERNAL DARSHAN

*Bhavan's Journal* is an English fortnightly magazine published in Mumbai. In each issue, an article titled 'How God Came into My Life' described how different leading swamis and *paramhansas* of India had realized and experienced God. I informed Yogi Maharaj about the article and asked, "Narrate incidents about Bhagwan's darshan in your life so that we can send them to the fortnightly magazine."

Yogi Maharaj smiled and replied, "I eternally

have Bhagwan's darshan."

- Ahmedabad

## SHRIJI MAHARAJ'S PRESENCE THROUGH HIS GOD-REALIZED SANT

In Piplana, Yogi Maharaj was on his way to answer nature's call. There was a grove of tulsi plants. Yogi Maharaj revealed, "Shriji Maharaj had been here."

A youth excitedly said, "Even now Maharaj has come." Yogi Maharaj corrected him, "At that time Maharaj himself had come and now he has come in the form of a Sant." Thereafter, Yogi Maharaj bathed in the River Ojhat.

- Piplana

## HIS ILLNESS – AN OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE

One night in Manavadar, the youths were massaging Yogi Maharaj's feet after singing the *cheshta*. A youth was applying a medicinal oil on a part of Yogi Maharaj's knee which had become black due to his practice for years of daily prostrations (*dandvats*) to God and holy places.



At that time, a youth asked Yogiji Maharaj, “Does God get a disease?”

Yogiji Maharaj answered, “No, not God, but a *sant* does.” Then, he hesitated a little and said smilingly, “On the surface [I] look healthy, but inside there’s a lot [of unbearable things] happening.”

Another youth enquired, “Why don’t medicines work for you?”

Yogiji Maharaj revealed, “So that many *vaidyas* (ayurvedic doctors) can get [my] *seva*.” In this way Yogiji Maharaj amused the youths and he too broke into peals of laughter.

- Manavadar

### IDEAL SEVA

Once, in Gondal mandir, Vinu Bhagat (Mahant Swami Maharaj) was washing dishes. At that time, Yogiji Maharaj came there wearing a *pagh* to go out of the mandir. However, on seeing a slightly oily, unwashed dish he took some ash and started washing it himself. He did not instruct anyone to do it.

One could tangibly see the ideal of *seva* in Yogiji Maharaj’s life. In his youthful years he had served immensely and in his autumn years, in spite of ill health and as the guru of countless people, his spirit of *seva* had not ebbed at all.

Yogiji Maharaj often recalled, “[I] used to get up at 3 a.m, make fences, bake *rotla*, wash dishes,... I experienced joy in that but never felt an iota of fatigue.”

A devotee quizzed, “Where lies joy in doing all that? In fact, there’s a lot of effort and pain.”

Yogiji Maharaj replied, “Guru, there was the joy of [God’s] *murti*. In doing the *seva* of God’s devotees lies God’s *murti*. By doing that one experiences peace and happiness. God’s bliss lies in doing *seva* of the devotees and not in nourishing ego for one’s body (*deh-abhiman*).”

What a great and wonderful ideal Yogiji Maharaj lived.

- Gondal

### A WISH FOR THE DEVOTEES’ COMFORT

Yogiji Maharaj was in Chansad village, the birthplace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Two devotees were scheduled to leave for Mumbai by train that evening. In the morning, Yogiji Maharaj had uttered that a car would come so that the devotees could take a ride to the railway station. However, the reality was that there was little chance of a car arriving at such a small remote village. But to everyone’s surprise a car arrived in the evening and the devotees sat in the car to leave.

After bidding the devotees farewell Yogiji Maharaj said, “A devotee of God should not experience discomfort and pain. Businessmen go by car, so they have a car to travel. In my fate there are bullock carts [to travel in], so I get bullock carts for transport.”

Then a devotee spoke with reference to the car that had arrived that evening, “You worked a miracle.” Yogiji Maharaj humbly replied, “It was all Maharaj’s doing.”

- Chansad

### SUFFERING FOR OTHERS

Yogiji Maharaj was taking a bath at 12 midnight in the village of Karakhdi. A youth enquired, “Is it a rule for you to daily sleep at 12 midnight?”

Yogiji Maharaj replied, “What can I do? Because of pain and difficulties I have to go to the toilet and thereafter bathe [at this hour].”

The youth asked, “Why do you travel around with such ills and problems?” Yogiji Maharaj responded with a smile, “Well, don’t all the rivers meet the ocean.” (Meaning: Like the ocean, Yogiji Maharaj took upon himself the pain and sufferings of his devotees.)

The youth told Swamiji to share his sufferings with others. Yogiji Maharaj replied, “Then, others would not remain alive. Look, didn’t Shriji Maharaj ask for the begging bowl and the pain of a scorpion bite [to save his devotees from both sufferings]. Similarly, it is the same with me.”

- Karakhdi

## REVEALS GLORY OF A SACRED PLACE

Shriji Maharaj had briefly stopped at Ghanla village while taking Dada Khachar's marriage procession to Bhatvadar. A shrine commemorates this sacred spot.

Yogiji Maharaj came with a group of sadhus and devotees at this sacred shrine. After doing darshan, *pradakshinas* (circumambulations) and *dandvats* (prostrations) Yogiji Maharaj revealed, "We do not know the glory of this place. However, Maharaj and his sadhus are always present here in the sky."

- 3.2.1959, Ghanla

## A WISH TO ENHANCE THE GLORY OF A HOLY VILLAGE

Yogiji Maharaj arrived in Bhatvadar with a retinue of sadhus and devotees. He sat by the shrine of Hanumanji near a house where Shriji Maharaj had once stayed. Swamiji instructed someone to bring the holy water of the Gangajaliyo well, then he sprinkled it on everyone's head and gave a little to drink. Thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj wished, "We want to build a big mandir here and this village will become a big city. It's not proper to have just a few homes in this holy village." Then, Yogiji Maharaj called the Kathi Darbars and their children living in the village and said, "Come here. I want to dissolve all your sins." He then initiated them into satsang, placed *kanthis* around their necks and praised, "These *kanthis* are made of gold!"

From Yogiji Maharaj's wish one can perceive his sentiment of enhancing the glory of Bhatvadar, a village of only five homes but sanctified by Shriji Maharaj. His enthusiasm and glory for a holy pilgrim place is apparent from this incident.

- 4 February 1959, Bhatvadar

## GROWTH OF SATSANG IS REST

Today, Yogiji Maharaj had a hectic and exhausting *vicharan* schedule. He departed from Mahuva and travelled to Bhadrod, Talaja, Tansa and thereafter he was on his way to Bhavnagar. Because of such a pressing schedule Yogiji Maharaj

had to undergo a lot of physical strain.

While travelling by car towards Bhavnagar a sadhu said, "Bapa, you did not get time to rest today!"

Yogiji Maharaj replied, "[For me] the growth of satsang is rest."

- 8 February 1959, Bhavnagar

## TRAINING THE YOUTHS

During the annual school and college vacations many youths would travel with Yogiji Maharaj. Today, after Yogiji Maharaj had completed his early morning ablutions and puja rituals, he personally woke the youths up. Many of them had fasted the previous day. So, once all of them were ready Yogiji Maharaj made arrangements for their breakfast (*parna*). He served them snacks and hot milk.

Then, Yogiji Maharaj demonstrated to the youths how to wash and clean the earthen water pots and fill them with fresh drinking water.

Thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj recited Vachanamrut Gadhada III 7 and 8 and explained them to the youths. Then, he signed letters addressed to the devotees. Following this, he came to help the youths who were cooking food in the kitchen. He personally sat down to clean the rice grains and lentils. Afterwards, he sat down with the youths to slice vegetables.

Then, Yogiji Maharaj went to take his bath. On returning, he started to wear his *dhotiyu* by wrapping it tightly around his waist. At that time, a postman, who was in a hurry, arrived to collect the letters. Yogiji Maharaj, instead of tucking the folds of his *dhotiyu*, sat down to sign all the letters and thereafter gave them to the postman.

During these days Yogiji Maharaj's daily schedule was very tight and hectic, yet he used to personally educate and train the youths himself.

- 6 March 1959, Goriyad







# *Reflections on* Yogiji Maharaj

*Great spiritual masters, pundits and prominent citizens share their  
reflections about Yogiji Maharaj*

One whose gaze is simple like a child's, whose speech is without deceit, whose heart is filled with genuine feelings, who always has the highest, pure devotion to Paramatma, who is staunch on the path of saintliness, who has noble and pure fame, with such virtues Yogiraj, the best among renunciates, forever radiates.

*- Pujyapad Kashikanandji Maharaj,  
Mumbai*

Approaching Yogiji Maharaj, his unshakeable faith, his heart filled with devotion to God, his detachment, his humility and other virtues are evident.

- *Pujyapad Shastriji Pandurang Athvale*

One whose master is the supreme Narayan, Parameshwar himself ... who believes from the heart that 'nothing is mine' and everything is his is a true devotee of Swaminarayan.

- *Pujyapad Shri Rang Avdhut Maharaj*

His life is noble and pure. This great man (sadhu) has spent his life for the benefit of society. That he has experienced much spiritual bliss is evident to us when we have his darshan.

- *Shri Ravishankar Maharaj  
Vallabh Vidyalyaya, Bochasan*

My inner progress was due to Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj was the representative of God; this was my personal experience. Today, I see and understand Yogiji Maharaj as that representative of God.

I believe that he (Yogiji Maharaj) has such powers to do anything he wishes in the *brahmand*.

Shastriji Maharaj was ill in Atladra. He sat me on his bed and showered his pleasure (blessings). I asked him, "Who will give me such joy now?" Shastriji Maharaj told me, "Yogiji Maharaj will give you every joy. Don't worry."

I had the last darshan of Shastriji Maharaj at Ahmedabad station, when he was on his way from Atladra to Sarangpur. I became tearful on seeing him ill. I asked him, "Who will support me now?" Shastriji Maharaj held my hand, placed it in Yogiji Maharaj's hand and said, "Yogiji Maharaj will forever protect you."

- *Honourable Shri Gulzarilal Nanda,  
Twice Acting Prime Minister of India*

Ever since I came in contact with Yogiji Maharaj, his great personality has been engraved

in my heart. Love and compassion continually flow from his eyes. His words always flow with memories of God.

- *Shri Babubhai Jashbhai Patel  
Minister, Public Building, Electricity and City  
Supplies, Gujarat State*

In today's circumstances, a saint like Yogiji Maharaj is our mentor. In the presence of this Yugpurush [person of the era] we forget the world and ourselves. We experience peace. That feeling is beyond words.

- *Shri Chimanbhai Patel  
Minister, Gujarat State*

Yogiji Maharaj's heart and actions are innocent and simple like a child's. Listening to his bhajans I experienced his intense devotion. Devotees are drawn to him due to his detachment, simplicity and child-like innocence.

- *Shri Vijaykumar Trivedi  
Minister, Gujarat State*

Limitless love and firm *atmanishtha* are manifest in Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj. His mere darshan grants worldly souls peace.

Yogiji Maharaj is like an innocent child. His heart is pure and transparent like a gem. His glory is limitless.

- *Shri Mohanlal Vyas  
Minister, Gujarat State*

His clear talks, his detachment, his compassion towards all, his faith in God, his trust in truth, his self belief, his matchless devotion.... So many noble virtues, how many should I list?

- *Shri Devendra M. Desai  
Minister, Gujarat State*

Who is the life force of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya? Swami Yogiji Maharaj.

- *Shri Hariprasad M. Choksi  
Government Pleader, Bombay State*



Saints like Yogiji Maharaj do not distinguish between you and I, yours and mine; they have no worldly desires and so their thoughts, words and actions succeed for the good of all.

- Shri A.B. Patel, CMG  
Shri Arvind Ashram, Pondicherry

His outstanding quality is his saintliness, which is revealed by his pure life, devotion, humility and simplicity. Yogiji Maharaj is the guru of thousands, yet he is not egoistic about this. This is a great feat.

- Shri Manilal C. Parekh  
Renowned Writer, Rajkot

Love, service, renunciation, compassion... all these and other virtues are found in Yogiji Maharaj. In his presence, improper thoughts do not arise.

- Justice Shri D.V. Vyas, Mumbai

His life is a great message. It is our great fortune that we have his company. Whatever I have achieved is the result of Swamishri's blessings.

- Shri Govindsinhji M. Chudasama, IAS

A yogi is greater than one who performs austerities, and one who has knowledge or performs rituals. A yogi is one who is totally attached to God. In this sense, Yogiji Maharaj is a true yogi.

- Shri B.J. Diwan, Chief Justice, Gujarat

His simple language had a captivating aura, leaving a deeper and more effective impression than even the greatest speeches.

- Shri A.B. Yagnik  
Principal, Mithibai College  
of Arts and Science, Mumbai

Yogiji Maharaj is such a saint who is not attracted to the world, is detached, is honest, is a

friend to all and advocates discipline. His talks do not differ from his actions.

- Shri S.R. Bhatt  
Principal, B.D. Arts College, Ahmedabad

Yogiji Maharaj is truly a liberated saint. He is the form of bliss... He is truly a great person.

- Shri Ramanlal Soni, Writer, Modasa

He is an ocean of affection. He has won the hearts of countless people, young and old. Without losing his mental stability and without even the slightest trace of disrespect he has tolerated many hardships in a saintly way.

- Prof. Dr Bhagvatiprasad Pandya Ahmedabad

Param Bhagvat Sant Swamishri Yogiji Maharaj is supremely austere, compassionate, devout and a sadhu of the highest calibre. Through his pure life he has guided countless souls onto the spiritual path.

- Mahantshri Shantiprasadji  
Shri Anandabawa Seva Sanstha, Jamnagar

Yogiji Maharaj is a stream of flowing nectar. Humility is his innate God-given nature.

When a devotee departs from his presence, he feels that he has embraced God.

Whatever he says comes true and his actions are pure. He has matchless humility.

- Shri Krishnashankar Shastri, Nadiad

His sparkling eyes, smiling lips and shining face inspire spiritual joy in all his disciples. His life is an honour to himself and a pattern to mankind. It is like the sap of a living tree which penetrates every bough, branch and twig and permeates them through and through.

- Shri M.R. Gopalacharya  
Panditratna Panditraj, Mumbai



# Learning to Adjust

*How Playing the Trombone Taught Me the Importance of Harmony*



## A VERSATILE INSTRUMENT

The trombone is quite a versatile instrument. It is a Western instrument that is a member of the brass family. I used to play the tenor trombone, which has no true valves and only a single slide to produce a variety of notes. The versatility of the slide allows me to play a variety of music genres – from classical music to jazz to modern and even devotional hymns.

However, with versatility comes difficulty. Any trombonist knows that producing the correct musical notes can be quite tricky.

The trombone requires three specific factors in order for a note (the pitch and duration produced by the instrument) to be correct:

1. The correct slide position
2. The correct embouchure (the shaping of the mouth against the instrument's mouthpiece)
3. The correct amount of airflow passing through the instrument.

If any of these three factors are even slightly off, the instrument would produce a different

sound compared to the sound intended.

A trombonist quickly needs to understand what factor is off and adjust accordingly to produce a soothing note.

## ADJUSTING TO OTHERS

Having played the trombone for eight years, there were many times in which I had to adjust these factors not only to make me sound better, but to make the entire orchestra sound better.

I vividly remember a time in high school when the entire band was playing a four-page arrangement.

During one part of the piece, the trombone had a unique glissando (or moving the slide without interrupting the airflow). The four of us would play the glissandos with such pride. But no matter how loud the four trombones played, the other 70 musicians would overpower us!

The conductor would frequently stop to tell the other musicians to quieten down in order for

our part to be heard.

In contrast, there was another music piece in which the four of us played some of the more difficult notes too loudly, overpowering the other instruments. I could see the looks on the clarinet players, who sat in front of us, constantly squirming in their seats when they heard the notes.

Nevertheless, the conductor would continuously turn on us to quieten down in order to hear the flute's vibrato or a trumpet solo.

She would explain, "In order for a music piece to sound accurate and beautiful, a musician must know what to adjust, when to adjust and how to adjust."

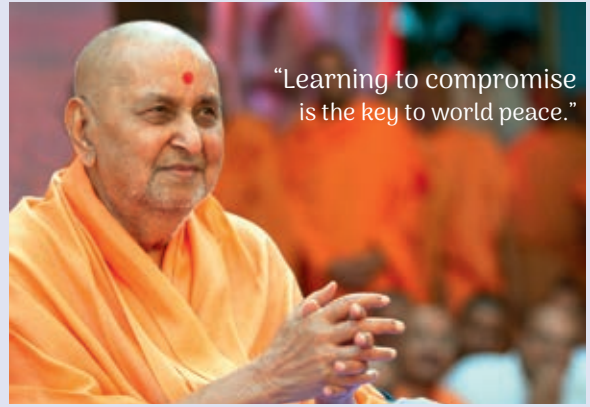
### HARMONY IN MUSIC AND LIFE

The conductor would always teach us the concept of musical harmony. In order for a music piece to sound how the composer intended it to be, all of the players must know how loud to play their instrument at the right times.

A flute player plays a note, a trumpet player plays another note, a percussionist strikes another best, and I (the trombone player) play a different note. But when all the instruments play their individual contribution together with understanding the importance of the others' contributions, musical harmony is created.

The same goes for harmony amongst people and in society. Harmony is simply an agreement of ideas, feelings, or actions. We use harmony everyday and in many aspects of life:

- In sports, teams need to use their individual abilities to work together and score points.
- At the workplace, co-workers use their individual knowledge and skills to come together to complete a project or create a product.



- At school, students collaborate on group projects or presentations in order to receive a high score.
- At home, family members use their individual strengths to help one another out to learn and grow.

Each individual has unique ideas, feelings and backgrounds and when those aspects are brought together with other individuals through discussion and collaboration, harmony can be achieved.

### KEY TO HARMONY

Harmony may seem like a distant principle, but what is the key to creating such harmony?

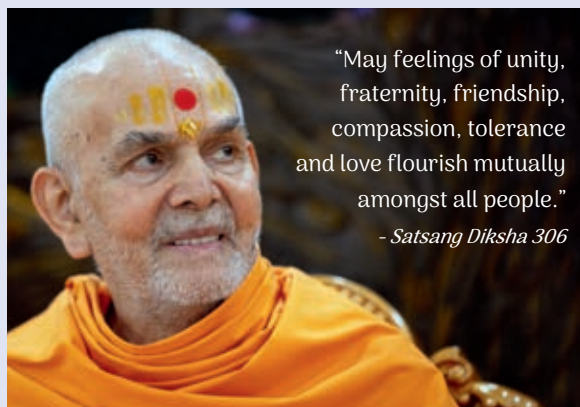
While reading the book *Eternal Virtues*, I came across an incident from the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, whose birth centenary celebrations were celebrated in 2022–23.

On 6 May 2004, Dr David Boddy, a teacher in Sanskrit and the headmaster at St. James Independent School for Senior Boys in London, met Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden.

He asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj an interesting question, "What is the answer to developing world peace? How can we teach the people of this world to live in harmony?"

Pramukh Swami Maharaj replied, "Learning to





compromise is the key to world peace.”

Compromising at the right moments is the key to harmony.

When playing the trombone alone, I would have to compromise on one of the three factors in order for a beautiful sound to be produced. If the slide position is even slightly off, the note produced will sound incorrect.

When playing the trombone with the entire ensemble, I would have to compromise my volume in certain parts of the piece in order to bring out other instruments. In other instances, others may have to compromise their volume to bring the sound of the trombone out even more.

The awareness of what, where and how to compromise in the music piece allows a musician to assist the entire group in bringing out the best aspects of the piece. Through this constant compromise, the entire ensemble would sound in unison and would create a beautiful musical harmony.

The same can be seen for keeping harmony with others.

Just as a musician needs to constantly adjust and compromise in order for the entire ensemble to be heard, I also have learned the importance of adjusting to others.

There have been many projects which I have worked on when I would find no area to compromise. Whether it be my final project at university or planning a summer camp, I would think it would just be a burden to keep harmony

with others as it would affect the final result of the project. In those moments, I think back to what I learned with my trombone. Just like in an orchestra, compromise comes in the form of:

What? – What is the factor that is hindering harmony in this situation? What can be resolved in the moment?

Where? – Where can I compromise in this situation to move forward?

How? – How can I compromise and keep harmony while adhering to my values?

Doing this exercise allowed me to take a step back from the situation and look at the entire project as a whole. Is it worth arguing over a small detail rather than just letting it go? Could I lose a little bit of quality in order for others to develop a new skill? Taking a step back and compromising allowed me to keep harmony with myself and with others.

## VALUE OF HARMONY

Mahant Swami Maharaj explains the value of harmony in our daily life, “Throughout history, maintaining harmony has been the key to success. The slightest discord always leads to destruction.”

Harmony allows for individuals to come together to achieve a common goal by putting one’s self motive aside for the common good.

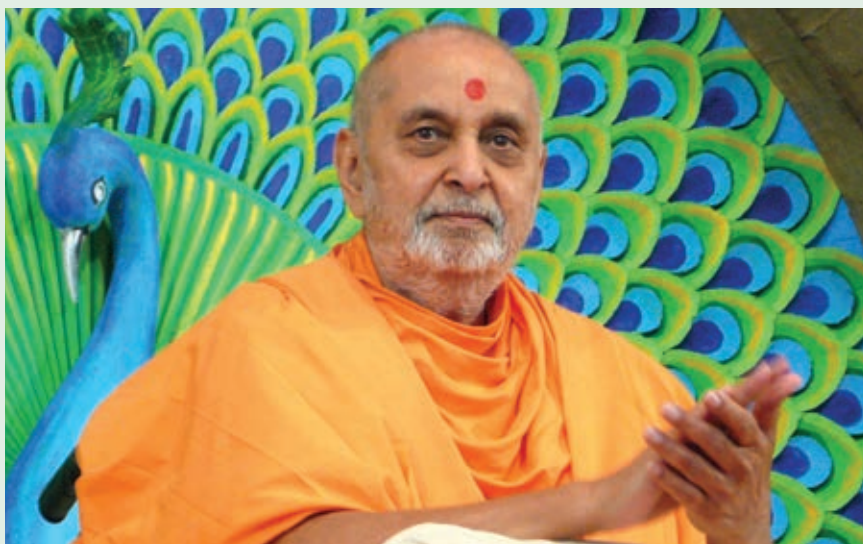
This is also why in the contemporary Hindu scripture, Satsang Diksha, Mahant Swami Maharaj writes in verse 306, “May feelings of unity, fraternity, friendship, compassion, tolerance and love flourish mutually amongst all people.”

Harmony is not something that can be achieved in one day but is practised over time. Just like an instrument.

Sometimes you have to adjust the instrument (that is, yourself) in order to make the entire ensemble sound beautiful. ♦

*Published online: BAPS Better Living*

# Flexibility – The Key to Stability



A thinker writes, “Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape.”

Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Bochasan, Gujarat. A young devotee had just bought a new set of Flexon eyeglasses. He explained, “Swamishri, these glasses cost 18,000 rupees. They are more durable and resistant than conventional metals, allowing them to be flexed, bent, or twisted and still they return to their original shape.” He then took off his glasses and bent the frame, but it did not break. Swamishri smiled and said, “If we are flexible in life, we can adjust to any situation. Accordingly, we become stable, and our value increases.” Flexibility is the key to stability. Problems, difficulties and hardships disappear when we are willing to become flexible.

Following his 59th birthday celebration in 1979, Rajkot, Swamishri was visiting the homes of well-wishers and devotees in the city. Suddenly, his car ran out of fuel and came to a halt. The driver requested Swamishri to remain seated in the car while he looked for a petrol station. But Swamishri told him, “If we wait around, we’ll be late for the next town which is at least two hours’ drive from here.” He got out of the car in an instant and took

a three-wheeler public rickshaw to continue with the rest of the home visits. It was nothing new for him to travel that way, because earlier in his life there were no special travel arrangements for him. Sometimes, he travelled in a bullock cart or in a wagon attached to a tractor. But his main mode of transport was either a State Transport bus or a third-class compartment on a local train. Even as the President of BAPS, no special provisions or privileges were ever afforded to him. Often, he slept on wooden benches or under a neem tree. Sometimes, he even slept on a heap of sand. He had no specific office or workplace; wherever he worked became his workplace. Amazingly, Swamishri never complained about anything or made a fuss. For him, serving humanity was of paramount importance, with or without special arrangements.

In February 1965, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s guru, Yogiji Maharaj, requested Swamishri and Doctor Swami to fly to New Delhi for some important work. Doctor Swami noted in his journal, “I was travelling in an aeroplane for the first time, and I remember being excited to see the view from the window. However, Swamishri was occupying



the window seat. Unable to contain my curiosity, I kept leaning across Swamishri to try and catch a glimpse below. Then, suddenly, he got up. Instead of becoming irritated with my constant obstruction, he gently sat me in his window seat. That was the first time I truly experienced Swamishri's remarkable ability to understand the wishes of others. He not only understood my eagerness, but he was so humble and flexible to vacate his own seat so that I could enjoy the journey."

One cold winter's evening in 1977, Swamishri took a break from his constant travels to stay the night in Ahmedabad. A small group of swamis and youths had also accompanied him. As they were getting ready to sleep, one of the swamis started looking for a blanket for a youth who had fallen ill during the journey. He had a fever and chills. The swami looked around, but he could not find a warm blanket, so he went to sleep. Swamishri understood the scenario and thus got up to wrap his own blanket around the ailing youth. He did it so discreetly that it wasn't until the next morning

that everyone realized what had happened. All night, Swamishri had suffered the cold with just a thin upper garment covering his body. Flexibility is a vital quality of leadership. It is said, "Those who are most able to adapt, become successful."

In 1971, there was a procession in honour of Swamishri's visit to Nadiad. Swamishri was seated on a decorated chariot. The streets were baking under the sun. Swamishri noticed that one of the younger swamis did not have his sandals, so he called him closer and said, "Here, take mine and wear them. It is not good to walk barefoot in the scorching sun. It is harmful and may damage your health." The young swami accepted the sandals as a blessing and put them on. But after a few moments, he realized that those sandals were Swamishri's. Consequently, he removed them. Swamishri again noticed and said, "I didn't give you the sandals to hold them in your hand. Wear them."

Swamishri's deep concern for others underlined his flexible nature. He always strived for the comfort and happiness of others. ♦





## Question Time with Pramukh Swami Maharaj

On 4 February 1977, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was at the home of Shri Ghanshyambhai in Bangalore. During the evening assembly, there were many newcomers unfamiliar with Hindu Dharma. The following are some of the questions they asked.

**Q:** Who founded the Hindu Dharma?

**PSM:** Bhagwan. It is also known as Sanatan Dharma. It has no beginning or end.

**Q:** Other religions publicize more. Why is Hindu Dharma not promoted as much?

**PSM:** Hindu Dharma advocates restraint. It has a greater emphasis of underlying principles.

**Q:** What is the difference between karma and dharma? Which should be prioritized?

**PSM:** If dharma is observed, good karmas are performed, karmas based on dharma take one towards God.

**Q:** In today's age, should you not relax the sadhus' rules of celibacy?

**PSM:** The core disciplines and principles must

be preserved. If they are changed, no meaning remains to sadhu life.

Swamishri's clear, confident and concise answers pleased the newcomers.

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On 14 June 1977, *yuvaks* in London engaged in a question-answer session with Swamishri.

**Q:** In this materialistic country, by what means can we please God?

**PSM:** By observing their commands, God and his Sadhu are pleased.

**Q:** The Shikshapatri states that the *jiva* resides in the heart. So, if a heart transplant is performed, does the *jiva* change?

**PSM:** Each *jiva* is eternal. It cannot be cut or destroyed. There is no change in the *jiva* (i.e. it is not transferred).

**Q:** Each action is attributed to Shriji Maharaj's wish. It is said for good actions, but what about in bad actions?

**PSM:** One does not think of consuming poison. Do you think of sitting near scorpions and snakes? No. So, God has given everyone a brain to think about the good and bad. We have desires and so do wrong things. However, God does not wish that you do wrong things. Before you do wrong things, your inner voice will warn you, 'This is not right.' Your mind says 'yes', but your *jiva* says 'no'.

**Q:** What is the straightforward path to worshipping God?

**PSM:** To obey God's commands and offer worship is the straightforward path. Disobeying leads to miseries.

**Q:** Do the cycles of birth and death and Akshardham exist?

**PSM:** Have faith in the shastras. We have not seen those who have gone to the moon. Yet, because the scientists say so, we believe it. Similarly, the Gita, Bhagvat, Vachanamrut and other shastras are true. They do not contain untruths. Akshardham had been described by those who have seen it. If you keep trust and faith in them, you will also experience it.

**Q:** What is meant by 'Akshardham while alive'?

**PSM:** Even now we are seated in Akshardham. Yogi Bapa was such a personality that in his presence, one becomes oblivious of the world. That is the bliss of Akshardham.

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On 27 September 1977, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Stilwell Hall, Cleveland State University, Ohio, to attend the start of the new term for the religious studies students.

**Q:** What is the best path to liberation?

**PSM:** To associate with the manifest God and his Sadhu who are on earth.

**Q:** What is your opinion on Western spiritual leaders?

**PSM:** I respect everyone who practises the path of dharma and good conduct.

**Q:** Can women become pious and immersed in dharma?

**PSM:** Yes, they can.

**Q:** What is your mantra?

**PSM:** Swaminarayan.

**Q:** What does it mean?

**PSM:** To remember the ideal Gunatit devotee and God. It is our *upasana* (philosophical basis).

\*\*\*

On the morning of 15 November 1977, a press conference was held at Wembley Conference Hall. David Bester of the *Wembley Observer* asked Swamishri some questions.

**Q:** Why do sadhus wear saffron robes?

**PSM:** The sentiments of renunciation are represented by this colour. The saffron colour reminds one of God.

**Q:** What is the future like for this world?

**PSM:** It is in the hands of God. The future depends on our faith in God. There will always be ups and downs. But God showers compassion on humans and will continue to do so.

**Q:** Do you have an association with God?

**PSM:** By following his wishes and offering devotion, I have an association [with God].

**Q:** What do you know about the Bible?

**PSM:** I have not read the Bible, but I know its key teachings.

**Q:** Why does God remain hidden? Why can he not be seen?

**PSM:** He can be seen, but we do not believe it. If one becomes pure, God will be instantly visible. You can see a reflection only in a clean mirror.

**Q:** In your life, when did you first experience God?

**PSM:** Since I met my guru, Shastriji Maharaj, and developed *atmabuddhi* (deep attachment) with him.

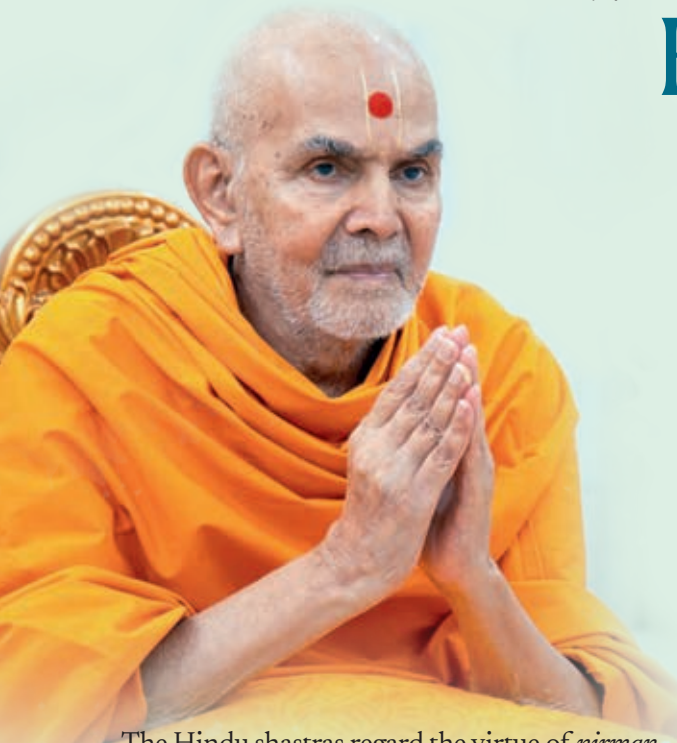
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On 12 January 1978, Swamishri engaged in a question-answer session with *balaks* in Nairobi, Kenya.

**Q:** You travel everywhere, but where is your real home?

**PSM:** God's Akshardham is my real home.

(Cont. on p. 46)



# Humility and Egolessness in Action

The Hindu shastras regard the virtue of *nirman* as the zenith of all saintly virtues.

*Nirman* is a combination of egolessness and humility. These two words are often used synonymously, but they are not exactly the same. Ego is what separates us from others and distances us from God. It attaches us to things that are perishable and makes us feel proud, arrogant, selfish, greedy, envious and other negative emotions. Hence, to become egoless is to overcome this self-centredness and connect with the Divine to experience everlasting divine bliss. Becoming egoless transforms us from being egoistic to being altruistic. Hence, egolessness is the realization that we are insignificant before the vastness of God and his virtues. This state of egolessness is not a submissive state. It is a state of wisdom and strength, love and compassion, and happiness and peace.

Humility is putting others before oneself, and not seeking praise or attention. It is the quality of being humble and modest.

Thus, humility and egolessness share some common characteristics. However, egolessness may be considered as the thought process, while humility is the practical application of

this understanding.

Mahant Swami Maharaj, as the present manifest form of Aksharbrahma, embodies the virtue of *nirman*, and hence egolessness and humility.

The following incidents reveal just how naturally he exemplifies this pinnacle of saintly virtues. Since, his egolessness manifests naturally through his humility.

## 8 November 2020, Nenpur

After singing the *chestha* an attendant swami pointed to Swamishri's feet and asked, "How much are these feet worth?"

"Two paisa," Swamishri quipped.

The swami laughed and countered, "No, swami. We say that Vairat Purush prayed for 50 years and 1½ *pahors* [of his time scale] and then Maharaj's feet graced this earth. And that Maharaj is manifest through you. So, now how much are they worth?"

"Two paisa," Swamishri said again, firmly. The swami smiled and said, "You are not telling the truth, Swami."

"Tell the true value," another swami said.

"Two paisa," Swamishri said for the third time.

"Two paisa in Akshardham? Which currency?" a swami quizzed.

Again, Swamishri replied, "Nothing... Zero!"

Self-deprecatingly, Swamishri reduced his value to zero.

An attendant swami then pointed to another swami's feet and asked, "What is the value of his feet?"



“Crores of dollars,” Swamishri replied. The attendant swami pointed to another swami’s feet and asked again.

Again, Swamishri said, “Crores of dollars.” Pointing to a third swami, the attendant again asked Swamishri.

Again, Swamishri replied, “Crores of dollars.”

This casual dialogue revealed just how much Swamishri believed in the greatness of others, while he claimed that he himself was insignificant.

### 3 October 2019, Limuru, Kenya

During a discussion between Swamishri and the swamis, Jnanpriya Swami said, “In 2017, in Chicago, Swamishri told me, ‘I daily perform *dandvats* to the attendants in my mind. They all offer *seva*. So, I understand their greatness and perform *dandvats*.’”

Swamishri was asked, “Even today?”

“Yes, in my mind...”

“Why?” the swamis probed.

“Why? Because we have to become the servant of servants.” Swamishri explained.

Then Uttamyogi Swami said, “Even if we have done something routine, Swamishri expresses his approval and humbly bows down to us. On *ekadashis* he says, ‘O! You have earned billions and trillions of dollars.’ Then, he bows low and touches our feet!”

### 30 July 2019, Atladara

During Swamishri’s puja *balaks* sang melodious bhajans and recited *mukhpath* (memorized verses and phrases) on the topics of unity, friendship and oneness. When Swamishri began to read the Shikshapatri, a group of eight *balaks* fluently recited the Sahajanand Namavali. At the centre of the line was a very young *balak*. Even though small in size, he had a booming voice.

Swamishri was delighted by their presentation and so called them near. The small *balak* approached Swamishri first. Immediately, Swamishri bowed down and touched his feet. Then, he hugged and

blessed him. The remaining *balaks* also hugged Swamishri and received his blessings.

After breakfast, the sadhus asked Swamishri why he had touched the feet of the small *balak*.

Swamishri replied, “Well, he was so fluent. Such a capable braveheart.”

The sadhus expressed that such a gesture is possible by the Gunatit Satpurush. It is out of this world. Impossible. The sadhus recalled other occasions of Swamishri’s humility, before Swamishri changed the topic of conversation.

### 29 July 2019, Atladara

During lunch, the sadhus discussed how humble Yogiji Maharaj was, yet he always downplayed himself.

Bhagyasetu Swami said to Swamishri, “In a recent assembly for dignitaries, we saw that in you. From the stage, you bowed down to everyone.

Swamishri tried to change the topic of conversation, but Jnanvatsal Swami said, “The guests gave Swamishri a standing ovation and Swamishri gave them a ‘bending ovation.’”

### 6 February 2017, Sarangpur

During the Sant Shibir Swamishri took his meals in the Yagnapurush Sabhagruh so that all the swamis could have darshan. After lunch, Swamishri departed from the stage to return to his room. In the lobby, Ramcharan Swami was standing, as he did daily, to bow to Swamishri.

Today, he stopped Swamishri and requested, “Even though I have asked you not to, you continue to bow down to me. Why? Please stop.”

Swamishri replied, “I can’t help it. It’s out of habit.”

### 4 February 2017, Sarangpur

In the evening, Atmaswarup Swami recalled the occasion in 1987, when Mahant Swami was at the home of a relative of Raja Babu, near Amer fort in Rajasthan. The hosts had prepared food, but more guests than expected had come and

they feared that there would not be enough food. So, they approached Mahant Swami. He had the food covered with a cloth, placed Tharkorji's *murti* on the cloth, lit a *divo*, chanted the *dhun* and said, "Now, there will be enough food." And sure enough, the food was enough to feed all.

Having recalled the incident, Atmaswarup Swami asked, "Do you remember this?"

Swamishri replied, "No," But then, he added, "Yes, I remember covering the food with a cloth, but I don't know what happened afterwards."

Swamishri is not attached to even his divine acts, such is his egolessness.

### 14 September 2016, Mumbai

Swamishri was meeting swamis personally. The last scheduled meeting was with Divyanand Swami, who had recently undergone a leg operation and so was seated in a wheelchair.

The conversation concluded and it was time for Swamishri to go to the evening assembly. Nobody else was present in the room. Divyanand Swami moved his wheelchair to the door and gently tried to push it open. Suddenly, Swamishri got up from his seat, took control of the young swami's wheelchair and manoeuvred it outside. Outside, everyone was stunned to see Swamishri pushing the wheelchair. Other swamis tried to wrest control from Swamishri, but he refused and joyfully continued into the lobby.

Even as guru, he is humble enough to serve his disciples.

### 13–14 January 2023, Ahmedabad

On 13 January, Swamishri said to Bhadrash Swami, "I wish to place the dust from the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebration grounds on my head. So, please collect the dust and bring it to me."

Bhadrash Swami was stunned when Swamishri conveyed this wish and questioned, "Bapa, dust?"

Swamishri then revealed, "It has been on my mind for several days that I want to place the dust

from the festival grounds on my head, because I keep remembering Yogiji Maharaj and how he used to take the dust from the Akshar Deri [in Gondal] and place it on his head.

"The volunteers of the centenary celebrations have offered tremendous service. The swamis have also offered tremendous service. And millions of well-wishers have come to visit the celebration grounds. Those who have come and those who have offered their services are all divine. Thus, I wish to place the dust that has touched their feet onto my head. Please bring it tomorrow."

So, on 14 January, in the afternoon, Narayanmuni Swami and Bhadrash Swami placed the dust in the presence of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

Swamishri performed *pujan* of the dust by offering flowers. He then took the dust and touched it to his eyes and placed it on his head.

Swamishri then requested that the swamis place the dust on his head.

Narayanmuni Swami said, "It is not at all appropriate for us to do this. In fact, this is only because you have insisted, but we cannot do this or even allow you to do this."

So, Swamishri mixed some dust in sandalwood paste.

Then, the swamis applied a *chandlo* with the paste on Swamishri's forehead.

This entire episode shows how much affection Swamishri holds towards everyone who attended Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations.

In particular, it reveals his humility.

On 20 July 2020, in Nenpur, Swamishri had said, "I don't feel I am a guru. Not at all. I only have a wish to serve all as a humble servant. Although I may not be able to express this physically, it remains in my mind that I am the servant of servants.

"I feel others are far greater than me, and I am insignificant.

"This thought constantly remains with me. And it brings me great joy and satisfaction." ♦

# INSPIRATIONS

*A potpourri of inspiring and interesting  
information and wisdom*

## DROP BY DROP



In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 23, Shriji Maharaj describes, “Consider, for example, a pot that is filled with water and emptied somewhere. If another pot of water is subsequently emptied at the same place on the following day or the day after, a pool of water will not collect there. Why? Because the water poured on the first day dries up on that very day, and the water poured on the second day also dries up on that same day. On the other hand, if a trickle of water were to flow continuously, a large pool of water would soon be formed. Therefore while eating, drinking, walking, engaging in any activity whatsoever – whether it be pure or impure – in fact, at all times, one should constantly keep one’s *vrutti* (mind) on God. While maintaining one’s *vrutti* constantly on God in this manner, one attains that abiding elevated spiritual state.”

Thus, undivided concentration on the form of God results from a continual effort during every activity to remember Him.

*- Analogy from the Vachanamrut*

## TRUE FRIENDSHIP

A prince and a minister’s son were out hunting in a forest. Both were hungry and exhausted after a long day’s wandering. They sat down to rest under the cool shade of a tree. Soon, the prince fell asleep, while the minister’s son stayed awake and kept guard.

A little while later, a snake slithered towards the prince. Hissing furiously, it prepared to bite him. However, the minister’s son was quick to raise his sword. But before he could kill it, the snake spoke, “This prince was my enemy in my past life. I cannot rest until I drink blood from his neck.”

The minister’s son wanted to save his friend’s life and he was also intelligent. “Then, what if I give you some of his blood to drink. Will that quench your hate?” Saying this, he knew he was saving the life of the prince because if the snake bit him, to draw blood, it would at the same time spit poison that would kill his friend.

The snake agreed. He was only after the prince’s blood, not his life.

The minister’s son made a cup out of dry leaves. He climbed upon the chest of the prince who was still fast asleep. He pulled out his dagger and made a small slit on the side of his neck. The sharp cut suddenly shocked the prince awake. But on seeing that his friend, the minister’s son, was holding a dagger, he closed his eyes again. The minister’s son filled the cup with enough blood and offered it to the snake, which drank the blood and left. Then, the minister’s son applied some medicinal herbs and bandaged the wound. A few hours later, the prince awoke and made preparations to proceed further. He said nothing and walked happily as if nothing had happened. Two whole days passed in the forest, yet the prince never reminded him of the event. It was the minister’s son who grew impatient as to why he was not questioned.



He finally said, “Friend and master, you know that I climbed upon you and slit your throat, drew blood and then bandaged you. You even saw me do it. Still, why haven’t you yet questioned me or asked me for an explanation?”

“You are a friend of mine,” the prince answered. “I believe that whatever you did must have been for my good. That is why I desire no explanation.” He continued, “If someone else had attempted this, I would have been suspicious. Does he want to kill me or rob me? But with you, I know you’re a very close friend and I have boundless trust in you – that my friend shall never ever do any harm to me.”

This is a mark of true friendship. A friend is he who is harsh to you if it brings greater good. And in return, he who does not sulk or feel hurt by the actions of his friend is a true friend. One should cultivate such intimate friendship with the true Sadhu.

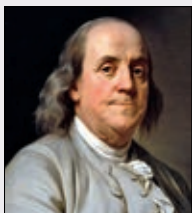
- 101 *Tales of Wisdom* by Yogiji Maharaj

## AL BIRUNI IN INDIA



Born in 973 CE, Al Biruni (973–1048 CE) lived in Khwarizm, today’s Khiva in Uzbekistan. He was a brilliant Arab astrologer and scholar who wrote books on chemistry, mathematics, mineral science, optics, mechanics and the dating systems and calendars of many nations. Khwarizm was looted by the Muslim raider Abu-Said Mahmud (Mahmud Ghazni) in 1017 CE. Al Biruni was taken to India by Mahmud where the former lived for 13 years. During his stay Al Biruni studied Sanskrit and learnt science and spirituality from the Hindu pundits. He wrote a voluminous study of Hindu culture and spirituality called *Kitabul Hind (Alberuni’s India)*. He has noted the Hindu view of God in his book saying that the Hindus believed in one God and that he is beyond the perception of mind and senses. He further noted that to attain him and experience his bliss, single-minded meditation on him was necessary.

## BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



Albert Schweitzer wrote, “Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing.” An incident in the life of Benjamin Franklin is a good illustration of what Schweitzer said.

Franklin wanted to install street lighting in Philadelphia, but he knew the city fathers would balk at the expense. Instead of trying to persuade them, he simply hung a lantern in front of his own house.

People walking their way carefully along the streets at night would come out of the dark into the well-lit area in front of Franklin’s house and think, “What a great idea.” Soon Franklin’s neighbours began placing lights in brackets in front of their homes. Shortly, the entire city awoke to the value of street lighting. Franklin had achieved what he wanted through example without a word being spoken.

## INSPIRING QUOTES

- The real benefit of a team can be found in the word ‘team’. It’s an acronym for, Together Everyone Achieves More.
- It takes only 10 minutes to find in others the faults we often fail to discover in ourselves in a lifetime.
- Consider how hard it is to change yourself and you’ll understand what little chance you have of trying to change others.

# Living With Swamishri

OCTOBER

## AN ASPIRANT'S DIVINE EXPERIENCE

### 1, Nasik

Nareshbhai Vyas of Vandsa town is locally active in rendering social and spiritual services. A local doctor treating him for an ailment suggested that he go to Nasik for Mahant Swami Maharaj's darshan and also seek his blessings. He drove with his son, Neel, to Nasik.

He had his first darshan while Mahant Swami Maharaj was on his way in a golf cart to an evening satsang assembly. When an attendant swami gave a brief introduction of Nareshbhai, Swamishri blessed him with his compassionate glance. Thereafter, in the satsang assembly, Nareshbhai got close darshan of Swamishri while sitting in front of the stage. At that moment, Nareshbhai experienced all his problems and questions subsiding altogether. He became emotional and his eyes became wet with tears.

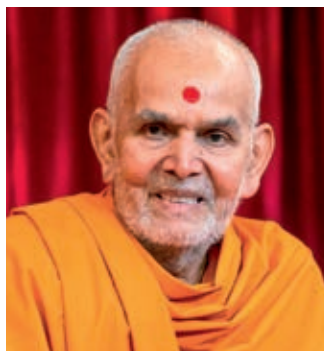
After the satsang assembly, Nareshbhai got a third opportunity of darshan while Swamishri was having dinner. He was overwhelmed with emotions of joy and privilege.

Then, after a long drive back he reached Vandsa at 1 a.m. He took his bath and sat down to meditate. During meditation he saw Swamishri's *murti* continuously till 5 a.m. The divine experience gave him intense inner joy. He resolved there and then to attend the weekly Sunday satsang assembly at Dharampur, 35 km away.

Later on, an attendant swami informed Swamishri about Nareshbhai's unique experience of peace and joy and then asked, "Swami, what did you do that Nareshbhai saw your form continuously for four hours?"

Swamishri replied, "Bhagwan did it."

The attendant further enquired, "What is the



reason when some have such a divine experience and others don't?"

Swamishri replied, "It's God's wish."

"But isn't God being partial when he blesses someone with such a divine experience and doesn't do so for others?"

Swamishri replied, "We do not know the aspirant's past or present.

Thus, whatever happens according to God's wish is always for the good of souls."

## A MEANS TO OVERCOME DEPRESSION

### 5, New Delhi

A devotee prayed to Swamishri, "Please bless a member of my family to overcome depression, which affects him repeatedly."

Swamishri blessed, "Talk to him about the greatness and glory of satsang and his depression will go away."

## QUESTION-ANSWER

### 8, New Delhi

**Q.** Explain about the philosophical greatness of a guru.

**A.** Only when one attains the spiritual state of a guru can one understand and experience his philosophical greatness. If one behaves wilfully, according to the whims of one's mind, then one cannot attain anything. So, it is essential that one becomes absorbed in the guru by doing his true bhakti and *seva*.

**Q.** How are you attached to your gurus Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj?

**A.** [I] have become one with them. There's nothing left other than them.

**Q.** We cannot always be with you physically, but how can we experience your presence?

**A.** In spite of wherever you may be, if you are mentally connected with the guru then you are

with the guru.

**Q.** We are greatly indebted to you, but how can we repay our debt?

**A.** One cannot repay the debt to the guru. However, when one is connected with the guru by obeying his commands, one can repay the debt.

**Q.** What should we do to explain to others about the glory of the living guru?

**A.** Primarily, one's personal behaviour and actions should be pure.

**Q.** Today, devotees have come from many far off places for your darshan. Guide us to strengthen our satsang.

**A.** First of all, it is important to have an Akshar guru. Do not become a guru of the guru, but always remain humble to him.

## **SERVING GURU AND SANSTHA**

**10, New Delhi**

Sanyam, a *satsangi* boy, asked Mahant Swami Maharaj, "How can I serve you and BAPS well?"

Swamishri replied, "By following God's commands and *niyams*."

## **OVERCOMING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND WORRIES**

**15, New Delhi**

A spiritual aspirant conveyed to Swamishri that he gets a lot of negative thoughts and feels someone will do something harmful to him.

Swamishri replied, "Happily worship Bhagwan. Nothing will happen to you. Bhagwan is with you, thus leave all your worries to him."

## **CURBING WASTAGE OF RESOURCES**

**18, New Delhi**

Today, prior to having breakfast in his room, Swamishri gestured with his finger to switch off the extra lights because there was enough natural light entering through the windows. Swamishri is meticulous about not wasting electricity or any other thing.

In 2019, Swamishri was in Sarangpur. After

coming out of his bathroom he walked a few steps forward and then looked backwards. The lights in the bathroom were still on. Swamishri looked towards the bathroom three times but the attendants failed to understand his action. Finally, Swamishri spoke, "Lights!" Then, the attendants switched off the bathroom lights.

In spite of the massive growth and development of the Sanstha, Swamishri never remains lax in curbing unnecessary expenditure or wastage of natural resources.

## **MESSAGE OF DIVYABHAV**

**20, New Delhi**

This afternoon, Viveksagar Swami was scheduled to fly to Mumbai to celebrate the Diwali and New Year's celebrations at the Dadar Mandir. He informed Swamishri about it and asked, "Is there any message for the devotees of Mumbai?"

Swamishri instantly replied, "*Divyabhav* (divine feelings)."

Viveksagar Swami responded, "That is your standard message."

Swamishri added, "Supreme *divyabhav*."

Swamishri deeply desires that all cultivate divine feelings for each other.

## **NOVEMBER**

### **GENUINE FEELINGS**

**22, Ahmedabad**

A spiritual aspirant conveyed a question to Swamishri, "How should we do *seva*, etc. so that they reach Maharaj and Swami?"

Swamishri answered, "By doing everything with genuine feelings."

"What does it mean to do things with genuine feelings?"

Swamishri revealed, "By believing that what we do is true and that it connects us all the way to Akshardham." ◆

*Translation by Sadhu Vivekjiandas from a concise Gujarati report by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas*



# Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir Murti-Pratishtha Mahotsav

25–26 January 2023, Sarangpur



At the sacred spot where the final rites of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj were performed on 17 August 2016, Pragas Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the newly built Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir in the presence of thousands of swami and devotees from India and abroad.

The location was selected by Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself – where he could constantly have the darshan of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the main mandir and where the divine gaze of his

guru, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, would constantly remain upon him. Thus, the doors in the directions of the main mandir and the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir are made of glass.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj built more than 1,100 mandirs around the world and enhanced the pride of Indian culture by creating Swaminarayan Akshardham mandirs in Gandhinagar, New Delhi and Robbinsville (USA). To pay homage to his monumental deeds, the architecture of his memorial mandir is also similar to the Akshardham mandirs and is built of white marble



from Makrana, Rajasthan.

The first stone of the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir was laid by Mahant Swami Maharaj on 17 December 2018. Built in the *nagar* style of mandir architecture, the mandir is 140 feet long, 140 feet wide and 63 feet high. It is made of 7,839 stones and comprises 1 *ghummat*, 4 *samarans*, 16 *ghummat*s, and intricately carved pillars, domes and other elements. It is decorated with sculptures of contemporary saints and devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In the mandir sanctum sanctorum, a marble *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj is enshrined with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. The cremation spot is covered with a transparent case so that all can have darshan.

On the morning of 25 January, the *sadguru* swamis performed the initial rituals of the *yagna* in the Guruhari Pujan Mandapam, which is near the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir. Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the concluding rituals and also performed *pujan* of the *murtis* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj to be placed in the Smruti Mandir.

In the afternoon, a grand celebratory procession of the *murtis* took place from the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Murti Mandapam, on the

grounds of the BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir, to the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir.

On the morning of 26 January, the Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony was performed by senior swamis. Then, at 11.45 a.m., the main *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the memorial mandir were performed by Mahant Swami Maharaj.

In the celebration assembly, speeches by *sadguru* swamis highlighted various aspects of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inspiring life, works, virtues and teachings. In his blessings to the assembly, Mahant Swami Maharaj sang the glory of guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the Pramukh Smruti Mandir as a place of peace, faith and devotion, and blessed that the auspicious prayers of all who visit this mandir will be fulfilled.

Also, 'Guinness World Records' officially recognized the bubble wrap painting of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, created by 150 young men and women from London and displayed at Pramukh Swami Maharaj Nagar during the Shatabdi Mahotsav, as a world record. The painting was 97.78 square meters (1,052 sq.

ft.) consisting of 850,000 bubbles filled with 320 different colours.

A new audio publication titled 'Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj Jivangatha' was inaugurated by Mahant Swami Maharaj. ♦





# Opening Ceremony of Narayan Sarovar

9 April 2023, Chansad



The village of Chansad, near Vadodara, is the birthplace of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and has been sanctified by his divine touch during his childhood as Shantilal. One of the sacred places is the village lake, where young Shantilal would often bathe and take part in the swimming competitions.

In honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary, Gujarat Tourism and BAPS renovated this holy lake.

The work commenced on 5 October 2019 by the then Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijaybhai Rupani and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami. Under the guidance of Ishwarcharan Swami, and by the efforts of Brahmavihari Swami, Shrijiswarup Swami, Bhagyasetu Swami (Kothari of Atladara Mandir), and other swamis and devotees, the lake was renovated in just three years and named 'Narayan Sarovar'.

Narayan Sarovar has an air-conditioned auditorium, a walk-through exhibition on the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, separate gents and ladies Snan Ghats for bathing, Asthivisarjan Ghat for ritual immersion of ashes, a place for children's tonsuring, and other amenities and facilities. The Sarovar is surrounded by 18 ornate shrines, commemorating the 18 years Shantilal lived in

Chansad. Daily, a *maha-arti* is performed at 7 p.m. followed by the spectacular lighting that enhances the beauty of the lake.

The opening ceremony of Narayan Sarovar was held on 9 April 2023. In the morning, a Vedic *mahapuja* was performed in the presence of senior swamis and devotees to consecrate the Narayan Sarovar.

At 5 p.m. the public opening of Narayan Sarovar took place in the presence of the Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel, Pujya Bhaktipriyadas Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami, Minister of Tourism of Gujarat State Shri Mulubhai Bera and other dignitaries.

In the assembly, to commemorate the grand opening, senior swamis honoured the Chief Minister and other dignitaries. The assembly featured speeches by Adarshjivan Swami, Brahmavihari Swami, Tourism Minister Mulubhai Bera, Chief Minister Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami. His Holiness Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj also blessed the assembly via video.

More than 15,000 devotees from Vadodara city and surrounding villages were present in this assembly. ♦



# Launch of 'Shatkoti Hanuman Chalisa' Recitals

21 March 2023, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi



As part of the devotional celebrations leading up to the consecration of the Ram Janmabhumi Mandir in Ayodhya (scheduled for 15 January 2024), the 300-day 'Shatkoti Hanuman Chalisa' recital campaign was launched at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, in the presence of distinguished mahatmas, mahants, acharyas, swamis and other dignitaries.

The organizers have envisioned that 100 crore recitals of the Hanuman Chalisa be offered by devotees everywhere as their devotional contribution and to awaken the country's cultural consciousness.

Among the dignitaries present were Mahamandaleshwar Swami Shri Punyanandgiriji Maharaj, Swami Shri Paramatmanand Saraswatiji Maharaj, Swami Shri Jnananandji Maharaj, Swami Shri Balakanandgiriji Maharaj, Swami Shri Pranavanand Saraswatiji Maharaj, Mahamandaleshwar Swami Shri Vishveshwaranandgiriji Maharaj, Puja Swami Shri Gopalsharandevacharyaji Maharaj, Yogaguru Shri Baba Ramdevji, Puja Jain Acharya Shri Lokesh Muniji Maharaj, Shri Champatray (Shri Ram Janambhumi, Ayodhya), Shri Nrupendra Mishra (Shri Ram Janabhumi, Ayodhya), and Shri Alok Kumar (Vishwa Hindu Parishad).

Trustee of the Ram Janmabhumi Mandir, Puja Shri Govinddevgiriji Maharaj said, "This

Ram Mandir is the nation's mandir. Recitals of the Hanuman Chalisa will create an auspicious national atmosphere. It will awaken latent virtues and inspire everyone towards nation building."

Punyanandgiriji Maharaj said, "Through these initiatives, spiritual consciousness will be awakened among the families and hence, no one will complain that the youth is going away from the path of spirituality."

All the dignitaries present pledged to engage in and encourage chanting of the Hanuman Chalisa.

Ahead of the inauguration, spiritual discourses, book and essay writing, discourses on 'Sundarakanda', conferences, spiritual debates, competitions and other devotional activities will be held throughout the year to celebrate the occasion.

Mahant Swami Maharaj conveyed his sentiments via video, "The character of Bhagwan Ramchandra is an inspiration for the entire world. These devotional initiatives in the build up to the inauguration of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir in Ayodhya will foster spiritual values worldwide.

"Our guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj also dedicated his entire life to promote and sustain Sanatan Dharma and its cultural values. He had actively contributed to the cause of the Shri Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, right from its Shila Puja to other aspects of planning." ♦



## INDIA

### CELEBRATING 100TH AARSH SEMINAR IN THE PRESENCE OF MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

15 February 2023, Mumbai



Since 1997, AARSH at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar, has organized four seminars annually, one each on the subjects of (1) Prominent Personalities, (2) Current Issues, (3) Philosophy and (4) Literature. The 100th seminar in this series was held in the presence of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. The title of the seminar was 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Contributions to the Spread of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan'.

Mahant Swami Maharaj ceremonially lit the inauguration lamp after his morning puja. During the day, four sessions were held on the following topics: 1. The Virtues Described in the Shrimad Bhagvat Are Exemplified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 2. From Darkness to Light, 3. The Life of Women in Vedic Times and 4. Principles and Practices for Family Unity. The speakers on the above topics were: (1) Prof. Dr Narendra Pandya, Principal, Shree Somnath Sanskrit College, Veraval, (2) Shri Prakash Pathak, Prominent Speaker, Dhule, (3) Prof. Dr Shubhada Joshi, Former Head, Philosophy Department, Mumbai University and (4) Shri Harikrishna Shastri, Motivational Speaker, Surat. The chairpersons for the sessions

were: (1) Mahamahopadhyay Dr Bhadreshdas Swami, (2) Dr Vidhyasinhacharya, Chairperson, Satyadhan Vidhayapith, Mulund, Mumbai, (3) Prof. Dr Purnima Dave and (4) Pujya Dr Viveksagardas Swami.

The concluding session was held in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj from 6 to 8 p.m. The stage dignitaries included Pujya Bhaktipriyadas Swami, Mahant, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Dadar, Mumbai; Guest of Honour Shri Rajan Velukar, Former Vice Chancellor, Mumbai University; Dr Rudrax Sakarikar, Assistant Professor, Somaiya Institute of Religious Studies; and Prof. Dr Shrutiprakashdas Swami, Director, AARSH, Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar.

The main lecture was by Dr Atmatruptdas Swami, Associate Professor, AARSH, Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar. Thereafter, Shrutiprakashdas Swami gave brief details of the previous 99 seminars, and informed that their audio recordings are available on the Akshar Amrutam app by BAPS.

In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly and commended everyone involved for continuing the lecture series for 25 years and reaching the century mark. He attributed this feat to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings. He added that Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj had shown us the right path of devotion by creating Akshar-Purushottam mandirs and that Pramukh Swami Maharaj had established research institutes like AARSH to spread this true doctrine.

The opening and concluding sessions were webcast.

### FIRST VISIT TO MIZORAM BY BAPS SWAMIS

17-19 February 2023, Aizawl, Mizoram

For the first time ever BAPS swamis based in



Kolkata visited the state of Mizoram in northeastern India. During their week-long stay, Amrutcharitdas Swami and Muktapriyadas Swami conducted enlightening seminars on family values and principles of Sanatan Dharma, satsang *sabhas*, discourses on the Ramayan and interacted with representatives of the Bengali, Nepali, Gorkha and Bihari communities. The seminars were hosted by the Bhojpuri Kalyan Samiti and Gorkha/Nepali Samaj – Aizawl. During their visit, the swamis met Prof. Pravakar Rath, Vice Chancellor of Mizoram University; Shri S Sundar, Vice Chancellor of the National Institute of Technology, Mizoram; Shri Vanlalhmuka, State President, BJP; Shri Tikaram Sharma, Central Committee of Nepali/Gorkha Samaj; Shri Sanjit Dey, President of Bengali Samaj of Mizoram; and other dignitaries.

#### 40TH ANNUAL DAY CELEBRATION

19 February 2023, Atladara (Vadodara)



Over 5,000 devotees attended the 40th Annual Day Celebration of BAPS Swaminarayan Chhatralaya, Atladara-Vadodadra in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami.

The inspiring evening cultural programme

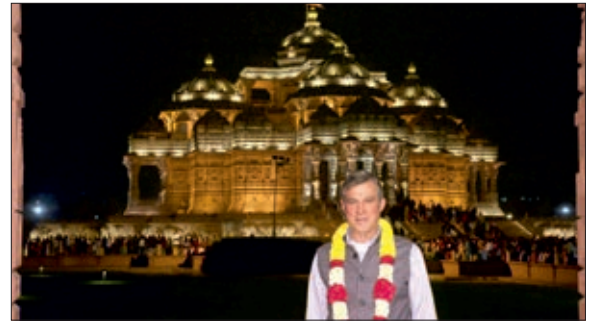
began with a ghazal in honour of Mahant Swami Maharaj and then a drama titled 'ITJOOLO' based on the life motto of Pramukh Swami Maharaj (In The Joy Of Others Lies Our Own), which depicted how to find stability amid unexpected calamities and how to live life with a noble spirit by doing good to others in every situation.

Then, youths performed a lyrical dance titled 'Sant Samagam Kije' portraying the necessity of associating with a true Sadhu. Thereafter, Pujya Doctor Swami felicitated students for their success in academic and extracurricular activities throughout the year by presenting trophies and certificates.

Dr Vijay Srivastava, Vice Chancellor of the prestigious Maharaja Sayajirao University, enlightened the assembly with his speech. The assembly concluded with an inspiring address by Pujya Doctor Swami.

#### GOVERNOR OF DELAWARE VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

19 February 2023, New Delhi



Governor John Carney of Delaware, USA, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, at the start of his first visit to India to further cooperation with India in various sectors and efforts in strengthening Gujarat-Delaware sister state relations.

Governor Carney and his ten-member Delaware delegation were traditionally welcomed. They then offered their respects at the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir and performed *abhishek*. After viewing the Gajendra Peeth, the delegation experienced the Sanskruti Vihar boat ride exhibition, as well as the Sahaj



Anand multimedia water show, which depicts the timeless messages of the Upanishads.

Having experienced the ageless beauty, borderless culture and timeless values of India at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Governor Carney expressed, “I thank my Indian American friends for their support, for their friendship, for everything that they bring and including their commitment to this religious practice, to the state of Delaware, the temple – that I have visited there with my friends – and for encouraging me to come, for the first time to this great country of India.

“I will always associate my first trip to India with my visit to the Swaminarayan Akshardham. The water show and lessons of peace were inspirational.”

### **BAPS SWAMINARAYAN SANSKRIT MAHAVIDYALAY STUDENTS SECURE TOP AWARDS**

**20 February 2023, Veraval**



BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, Sarangpur, one of the 38 colleges affiliated with Shree Somnath Sanskrit University, teaches students Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, Logic (Nyay), Grammar (Vyakaran), Literature (Sahitya), and other subjects in Sanskrit as part of the BA (Shastri), MA (Acharya) and other courses in Swaminarayan Vedant.

Through their dedication, a conducive environment and appropriate guidance, BAPS students graduate with top grades each year.

The convocation ceremony for BA and MA graduates in the academic year 2021–22 was held in the presence of Shri Acharya Devvratji (Hon.

Governor of Gujarat) via video conference; and the in-person presence of Shri Praful Pansuriyaji (Education Minister of Gujarat), Shri Shrinivas Varkhediji (Vice Chancellor, National Sanskrit University, New Delhi), Dr Lalitkumar Patel (Vice Chancellor, Shree Somnath Sanskrit University) and other dignitaries.

Students of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya were presented the gold and silver medals for attaining first and second ranks in the BA and the MA exams.

Also, Shri Krishna Gajendra Pandaji, a professor at BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, was awarded a doctorate (PhD) for successfully completing his thesis on Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

### **INAUGURATION OF BAPS PRAMUKH ACADEMY**

**26 February 2023, Atladara, Vadodara**



In India, many youths prepare for the competitive Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) exams. The UPSC is India’s premier central recruitment agency for all Group A officers under the Government of India and is responsible for appointments to all Group A posts of all the central government establishments.

Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj often encouraged youths to appear for the UPSC exams and serve the nation with integrity and diligence. Thus, in honour of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s birth centenary celebrations, by the inspiration of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, the BAPS Pramukh Academy was inaugurated to provide suitable guidance with

appropriate facilities to youths preparing for the UPSC exams. Established with the guidance of experts, the BAPS Pramukh Academy in Atladara will provide in-person and online tutoring by experts to 150 male and female students.

On 26 February 2023, the inauguration of the BAPS Pramukh Academy was performed via video conference from Mumbai by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami, and in Atladara by Pujya Doctor Swami. Dignitaries present in Atladara included District Magistrate Shri Dr A.B. Gor, IAS; MLA Mr. Keyurbhai N. Rokadia, MLA Chaitanya M. Desai; and City BJP President Dr Vijaybhai Shah.

Doctor Swami motivated the students to prepare for the examinations with determination and patience. Mahant Swami Maharaj encouraged and blessed the students to become excellent officers and serve the nation with pride and integrity.

On 5 March, a special session for parents was conducted. Titled ‘The Power of Parental Support’, it focused on the importance of parental support to patiently motivate their aspiring children and help them to achieve their goal.

### KARYAKAR SHIBIR: ‘ALAUKIK PRAPTI’

4–5 March 2023, Kolkata



More than 200 Bengali-speaking *karyakars* attended the two-day Karyakar Shibir titled ‘Alaukik Prapti’ (Sublime Attainment) held at the BAPS Mandir in Kolkata.

The *shibir* featured insightful speeches by BAPS swamis in Hindi and Bengali.

### FIRST JAGATIPITH SHILA PUJAN AND STHAPAN, SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM, 7–12 March 2023, Surat



In Sarangpur, on 7 March 2023, on the auspicious day of Pushpadolotsav, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj and senior swamis performed the *pujan* of the first Jagatipith Shila of the under-construction Swaminarayan Akshardham at Surat.

In Surat, on 12 March 2023, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the *pujan* and *sthapan* rituals of the first Jagatipith Shila on the site of Swaminarayan Akshardham in Surat.

### SATSANG SHIBIR: ‘SATSANG VRUDDHI HI VISHRAM’

2 April 2023, Bengaluru



Around 235 men and women devotees from Bengaluru and nearby areas attended the one-day Satsang Shibir organized and conducted by swamis of the BAPS Satsang Pravrutti Central Office.

Titled ‘Satsang Vruddhi hi Vishram’ – ‘Satsang Growth Is Rest’, the *shibir* was presented in Hindi and featured speeches by swamis, discussions and audio-visual presentations.

## SHILANYAS CEREMONIES FOR NEW BAPS SHIKHARBADDHA MANDIRS

6 & 22 April 2023, Bhuj & Surendranagar

Bhuj



On Chaitra *sud* Punam, 6 April 2023, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the Shilanyas Ceremony for the new *shikharbaddha* mandir. Blessing the occasion, Swamishri said, “Shriji Maharaj sanctified this area many times and visited the villages. In 1956, Yogiji Maharaj came here. I was with him as a youth. Pramukh Swami Maharaj also visited this region many times. So, the soil of this region is sanctified by Shriji Maharaj our gurus and many swamis.

“Through the mandir, people will attain dharma *jnan*, *vairagya*, bhakti and other virtues. By working with unity, the mandir will be completed soon. Offer your services in every way with devotion and Shriji Maharaj will bless you. May everyone be blessed with peace and prosperity.”

### Surendranagar



On Vaishakh *sud* 3 (Akha Trij), 22 April 2023, the Shilanyas Ceremony of the new BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandir was performed. *Sadguru*

swamis and other swamis performed the initial rituals and thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the concluding rituals

## BAPS SWAMIS SATSANG TOUR IN NORTHEAST STATES OF INDIA

12–17 April 2023



Swamis from the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Kolkata visited the states of Nagaland, Manipur and Assam in Northeast India to share the Sanatan Hindu values and traditions upheld by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and gurus Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

On 12 and 13 April, at Kohima and Dimapur in Nagaland, they conducted satsang seminars and an assembly for the tribal Hindu Garo community. They also met the Honourable Governor of Nagaland Shri La Ganeshan, BJP President of Nagaland Shri Temjen Imna, as well as leaders of the Marwadi and Bengali communities.

On 14 and 15 April, at Imphal in Manipur, leading representatives and members of many Manipuri Hindu communities attended the public satsang assembly organized by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad

On 16 and 17 April, the swamis went to Silchar in Assam, where they conducted a public satsang assembly attended primarily by Hindu leaders and members of the Marwadi and Bengali communities. Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj had visited Silchar in September 2010.

On 17 April, the swamis also went to West Jalinga Tea Estate in the southernmost area of Assam for a public satsang assembly in the



presence primarily of members of the Bengali and Bihari communities.

In all three states, the swamis offered prayers for the growth and prosperity of the people.

### **‘KESHAV KAVYA KALARAV’ POETRY CONVENTION**

**23 April 2023, New Delhi**



A grand poetry convention titled, ‘Keshav Kavya Kalarav’, was organized by BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi.

Original poems, *muktaks* and ghazals in Hindi, Sanskrit and English on the subjects of ‘Guru’, ‘Bhagwan’, ‘Atmavichar’, ‘Sankhya Vichar’, ‘Akshaya Anand’ were submitted from which the selection committee invited the composers of the best to present their creations at the function.

This special programme started with the lighting of the lamp and an address by Munivatsaldas Swami, in which he described poetry as an integral part of devotion. Then, a Sanskrit poem by Mahamahopadhyay Bhadresh Swami, Head of the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, who was not present, was recited.

Thereafter, 22 participants, aged between 19 and 90 years, presented their poems on Guru-Glory, Guru-Love, God’s Blessings, Guru Education, Beauty of Akshardham, Guru Darshan, Guru Kripa, Virtues of God and Guru and other topics.

Among the contributors were Dr Yuvraj Bhattaraiji, recipient of the 2019 Sahitya Academic Yuva Puraskar, who narrated his

composition dedicated to Maa Kali; and former High Court Chief Justice and present judicial member of Lokpal committee Abhilasha Kumariji, who presented a wonderful composition on Guru Mahima.

The recitations by the participants filled the atmosphere with divine joy.

At the end, the winners were presented awards on behalf of the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi.

### **UK**

#### **BAPS VOLUNTEER RECEIVES KING’S HONOUR FOR SERVICES TO THE BRITISH ASIAN COMMUNITY**

**1 January 2023, London**



Hitan Mehta, a long-serving volunteer of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in the UK, has been awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by His Majesty King Charles III in the New Year Honours List for 2023.

The citation reads: Hitan Mehta: Executive Director, British Asian Trust. For services to the British Asian Community

The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire is a British order of chivalry, rewarding contributions to the arts and sciences, work with charitable and welfare organisations, and public service outside the civil service. It was established on 4 June 1917 by King George V.

Hitan was awarded the honour in recognition of his 15 years of service to the British Asian community, particularly as Executive Director of the British Asian Trust. He worked closely with

the former Prince of Wales as well as distinguished British Asian business leaders to establish the Trust in 2007 to help tackle development challenges and opportunities across South Asia.

Hitan Mehta OBE shared, “I am honoured and humbled by this award. The British Asian diaspora is a significant part of the United Kingdom, and it has been a privilege to have been able to serve the diaspora through the British Asian Trust and BAPS.”

## MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S CORONATION TRIBUTE TO HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III 6 May 2023, London



His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj led the tributes to commemorate the historic coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and Her Majesty Queen Camilla.

As the country celebrated the momentous occasion throughout the day, the Mandir was also honoured that the Chair of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha UK, Jitu Patel, was invited to join other senior faith leaders to greet HM The King at the coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey with a joint message of goodwill.

During the evening assembly, Yogvivekdas Swami, Head Swami of London Mandir, shared his message of congratulations for Their Majesties while Kamlesh Patel, a senior BAPS volunteer, reflected upon the warm, friendly relationship that His Majesty has enjoyed with BAPS for over four

decades, as well as his personal affection and admiration for His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Mahant Swami Maharaj had written a personal letter to His Majesty King Charles III, in which he extended his warmest congratulations on behalf of the global BAPS Swaminarayan fellowship. This letter was read by Paramtattvadas Swami before Mahant Swami Maharaj lit a traditional lamp as a symbol of auspiciousness and prosperity while young children chanted the Shanti Path as the whole congregation prayed for peace and harmony to prevail across the world.

In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj addressed the assembly, “Your Majesty, on behalf of everyone at BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha around the world, I send you my heartiest congratulations.

“We pray to God that you remain in good health and can serve the people of this country with righteousness and moral fortitude. May our friendship continue to blossom. We look forward to welcoming you not only here at Neasden Temple, but to our temples across the world.

“Our heartfelt wishes for the success and happiness of you, the Royal Family, and all the people of the United Kingdom.”

## NORTH AMERICA

### BAPS PARTICIPATES IN AAHOA CONVENTION 2023

13 April 2023, Los Angeles, CA



The AAHOA Convention in Los Angeles, CA, drew nearly 8,000 delegates and over 500 vendors showcasing products and services for the hotel and

hospitality industries. Emphasizing ‘Honouring the Past, Creating a Bolder Future’, this year’s convention featured a keynote address by Brahmaviharidas Swami on ‘Preserving Culture, Values, and Unity’.

During the event, leaders of AAHOA also recognized and thanked Captain Jaydevsinh Zala, U.S. Air Force Pilot, Special Operation Command, for his services to the United States. Capt. Jaydevsinh is a BAPS volunteer and received motivation and guidance from His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj in selecting his career in the U.S. Air Force.

## ASIA-PACIFIC

### INAUGURATION OF NEW BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

11–12 March 2023, Toowoomba, Australia



Nestled atop the western slopes of the great dividing ranges, the city of Toowoomba, the second largest inland city in Australia, welcomed its first Hindu Mandir, celebrating the values of multiculturalism, diversity and faith in this regional city of Queensland.

On 11 and 12 March, the inauguration of the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir, Toowoomba, was celebrated with traditional ceremonial rituals attended by approximately 1,000 devotees, well-wishers and community leaders, and all eight resident BAPS sadhus in Australia.

On 11 March, a colourful and vibrant *nagar yatra* of the sacred images of the deities and gurus took place in Queens Park.

On 12 March, community members from

Toowoomba and across Australia witnessed the Vedic inauguration ceremony of the new mandir. Mr. David Jantezki, a Queensland member of the legislative assembly, spoke highly of how the addition of a Hindu Mandir in the beautiful city will significantly add to the multicultural fabric of the region. Cr James was also present with his family on both days.

### NEW ZEALAND PRIME MINISTER VISITS BAPS MANDIR

21 Mar 2023, , Wellington, New Zealand



BAPS New Zealand warmly welcomed the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Rt. Hon. Chris Hipkins, at the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Taita, Lower Hutt, Wellington. The Prime Minister was welcomed and honoured in a traditional Hindu manner by BAPS children with a kumkum *chandlo*, *nadachdadi* and a garland.

The children also enthusiastically waved the New Zealand and Indian flags, as symbols of harmony and shared love, to welcome the prime minister into the assembly. The prime minister had darshan of Shri Akshar-Purshottam Maharaj and was informed about Mahant Swami Maharaj, the current spiritual leader of BAPS.

All present in the assembly paid homage to the victims of Cyclone Gabrielle and offered prayers for those affected by the disaster.

After viewing a video of the many activities carried out by BAPS New Zealand, the prime minister was felicitated on his recent appointment as the 41st Prime Minister of New Zealand.



Addressing the assembly, Prime Minister Hipkins said, “I’ve been the prime minister for just over eight weeks now. During that time, we have faced some extraordinary challenges as a country. And what we have seen is communities rallying around and supporting each other. So, I acknowledge the contribution that BAPS has made in that regard in supporting our communities, making sure that they are fed, making sure that they get what they need to get through very challenging times. I am so proud to live in a country where people are free and able to celebrate who they are, to worship as they choose to in a way that is free, where they are not discriminated against.”

The prime minister also reminisced about his visit to the ground-breaking ceremony of the new BAPS Mandir to be built in the Lower Hutt suburb of Naenae, Wellington, and was pleased to hear about its progress.

### INSTALLATION OF ABHISHEK MURTI OF SHRI NILKANTH VARNI MAHARAJ

2 April 2023, Hong Kong, China



The *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj was installed with Vedic rituals by Divyamurtidas Swami and Jaytirthdas Swami in the presence of over 650 devotees and distinguished guests from the Indian community of Hong Kong.

Previously, on 15 October 2022, Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, had performed the *pran-pratistha* of this *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj in New Delhi, India.

## UAE

### BAPS PARTICIPATES IN THE GLOBAL TOLERANCE & HUMAN FRATERNITY SUMMIT 2023

7–8 February 2023, Abu Dhabi



In honour of the International Day of Human Fraternity, the Ministry of Tolerance and Co-existence, UAE, in collaboration with the Council of Muslim Elders, organized The Global Tolerance and Human Fraternity Summit. His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan officially launched the conference on 6 February with an inspiring speech that emphasized the importance of ‘human fraternity’ as a means of fostering understanding, cooperation, and resilience in the face of human diversity. Thereafter, a panel of distinguished religious, spiritual, and business leaders offered their unique perspectives on four seminal topics: Faith, Diversity, Peace, and the Planet.

The summit delved into the crucial matter of formulating the ideas of the Global Tolerance Alliance into actionable initiatives and programmes that can be adopted by nations and communities worldwide to foster relationships built on dialogue, coexistence, respect for differences, and belief in diversity.

Representing the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, Brahmaviharidas Swami illuminated the Planet panel discussion with his insightful initiative of ‘Pause for the Planet’ by highlighting the crucial role the planet plays in sustaining our existence. He described the environmentally conscious measures taken by the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, especially the use of 55% fly



ash in its construction, which significantly reduces its carbon footprint. He also mentioned that the temple will be fully powered by solar energy, demonstrating its commitment to sustainability. The temple thus serves as a shining example of how religious institutions can lead the way in protecting the planet and preserving its resources for future generations. The audience appreciated the innovative solutions employed by the temple.

## FIRST SHIKHAR SHILA PUJAN VIDHI

18 April 2023, Abu Dhabi



The first stone of the spires (*shikhars*) of the mandir were blessed in an auspicious ceremony by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami. Among the swamis who also participated on this momentous occasion were Brahmavihari Swami, Vishvavihari Swami, Shrijiwarup Swami, Bhaktinandan Swami and Dharmavatsal Swami.

During the *pujan* ceremony, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the rituals while the Shantipath and Vedic mantras were recited. The stone was then lifted and placed in position, signifying the beginning of the main spire construction.

## BAPS CHARITIES

### TÜRKIYE EARTHQUAKE PRAYER ASSEMBLY

25 February 2023, Robbinsville, NJ, USA

Amidst the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan in Robbinsville, New Jersey, organized a special prayer assembly to seek solace and divine intervention for those affected.

During this prayer assembly, the Robbinsville



chapter of BAPS Charities donated \$25,000 to the Embrace Relief Foundation to aid their humanitarian relief efforts. The contribution will provide support in three key areas: food distribution, housing assistance, and emergency supply distribution.

## PATIENTS ASSISTED WITH CATARACT SURGERIES

1 April 2023, Nairobi, Kenya



BAPS Charities Kenya, in conjunction with Eye Camp Africa Charity (UK), organized and performed free cataract eye surgeries in association with Lions Sightfirst Eye Hospital. For this second phase, a total of 44 surgeries were carried out, bringing the total cataract operations sponsored over two phases to 100.

The patients, from the Kitui and Nyahururu areas, were also provided with transportation to and from the hospital, meals for two days and free full body checkups.

The patients will also have free post-operative check-ups after one month, two months and three months.



## TRIBUTES



**PUJYA NIRMALKIRTI SWAMI**

**Aksharvas: 11 December 2022, Age 33**

A graduate in computer science and a trained pilot, Pujya Nirmalkirti Swami was initiated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 2011. He served diligently in the satsang activities in Mumbai. For the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations he helped to organize and conduct the educational

seminars at colleges and universities. He also made significant contributions to developing the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Nagar mobile app for visitors. Just prior to the centenary, he suffered a sudden heart attack and passed away. We offer our tributes to such a sincere and dedicated sadhu.

(Cont. from p. 24)

**Q:** What is Akshardham like?

**PSM:** Spiritual discourses take place and continuous inner peace is experienced – that is the bliss of Akshardham.

**Q:** Why should one become *nishkapat* (confess one's deficiencies) to the guru? What should one do if deficiencies still remain?

**PSM:** Confessing to the guru reflects our understanding of his greatness. If you have a bond with him, nothing is hidden from him. Then, one experiences real, actual joy. If deficiencies still remain, it is due to lapses in one's observances.

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On 13 January 1978, in the eveing, in Nairobi, Kenya, Swamishri was interviewed by reporters from the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*.

**Q:** How is the spiritual succession (*parampara*)

of gurus decided?

**PSM:** The guru has the divine power to know who will come after him.

**Q:** How will you give your powers to the next?

**PSM:** That is God's work. God inspires and operates everything. So, it will happen as per God's wish, just as it has happened in the past.

**Q:** Why did you decide to become a sadhu?

**PSM:** I was inspired by God.

**Q:** What is the biggest question facing the world?

**PSM:** People do not follow the path of dharma and do not offer devotion to God.

**Q:** Apart from obeying his commands, is there another way to become close to God?

**PSM:** How is it possible without obeying his wishes? Without good conduct it is not possible to get near to God. ♦



## New Gujarati Publication

**Brahmaswarup**

### Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Part 8

Part 8 of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's detailed biography covers the period from 1995 to 1998. This volume describes the inauguration of the London Mandir, Swamishri's Amrut Mahotsav in Mumbai, Swamishri's bypass operation, and other important and inspiring occasions.

Language: Gujarati | Author: Adarshjivan Swami | Pages: 608

Inspirer: HH Mahant Swami Maharaj

Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad ♦ Available on [baps.store](http://baps.store) & at BAPS bookstores (India)





**MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ PERFORMS SHILANYAS CEREMONIES FOR NEW BAPS SHIKHARBADDHA MANDIRS**

**Bhuj and Surendranagar**

1. Swamishri blesses the assembly (Bhuj, 6 April 2023)
2. Swamishri performs the *shilanyas* rituals (Bhuj)
3. Swamishri performs the *shilanyas* rituals (Surendranagar, 22 April 2023).





#### MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN IN LONDON, UK

1. Murtis of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shri Gunatitanand Swami and Shri Gopalanand Swami in the central shrine.
2. Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj.
3. Devotees joyously welcome Swamishri to London Mandir in the early morning, 2 May 2023.
4. Youths perform a traditional welcome dance in the evening welcome assembly, 6 May 2023.