



# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

March–April 2020

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Newly Inaugurated  
BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Navsari  
30 January 2020





## LAUNCH OF PARIVARIK SHANTI ABHIYAN (FAMILY HARMONY DRIVE)

18 February 2020, Atladara

As part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations, the BAPS Sanstha will conduct a 'Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan' (Family Harmony Drive) throughout Gujarat, Mumbai, and other places in India. The ceremonial launch of this endeavour took place in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. The project involves daily visits by volunteers from March to May to the homes of people to convey the message of family harmony promoted by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

1. Volunteers parade past Swamishri during the launch assembly.
2. Swamishri with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj at the door of a model house.
3. Swamishri sanctifies the literature for the campaign.





Swamishri with Thakorji on the main steps of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Navsari

# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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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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# Shri Hari Travels to Surat

*After the murti-pratishtha of the Vartal Mandir, Shri Hari tells  
Brahmanand Swami to join him in his travels...*

## PROPOSAL TO INSTALL GOMTIJI

One evening, Shriji Maharaj decided to install Gomtiji at the Dhaaru Talav (pond) in Vartal. The official document of ownership of the pond was made. Maharaj told the senior *paramhansas*, “Once, Sachchidanand Swami had gone to Dwarika with some members of the Dharmakul. There, he was harassed by the local Gugali Brahmins when he wanted to do darshan and *pujan* of the *murtis* of Bhagwan Ranchhodji and have a seal applied on his arm. Sachchidanand Swami was upset by their rash and commercial behaviour and so prayed to Shri Ranchhodji. The deity gave darshan and said, ‘My darshan, *pujan* and application of a seal should be available free of cost. This is a holy place for attaining *moksha*, but the Gugali Brahmins are harassing and extorting money from pilgrims. The pujari [who worships me] is not maintaining cleanliness during the worship rituals. Thus, I do not reside here anymore. I have been pleased by your prayers and appeared before you to give darshan. So, I want to reside at another place.’ Hence, I will install Shri Ranchhodji and Gomtiji here at Dhaaru Talav. For this, all of you make the preparations.”



## THE SAMPRADAYA IS FOSTERED THROUGH ITS LITERATURE

Shri Hari told Brahmanand Swami, “You have applied all your skills and efforts in building this beautiful mandir. You have done it with profound bhakti, however, if a scholarly poet like you remains engaged in such an activity then you’ll be unable to produce literature for the growth of the Sampradaya. Your work of writing kirtans about the glory of my form and devotion to me have stopped since a long time. Thus, from now onwards, you will stay with me.”

Brahmanand Swami understood the purport of Shri Hari’s words. Once, Maharaj had told him in an assembly in Gadhpur, “Swami, I will become your mother and take care of you. I’ll not allow you to go through pain and discomfort.”

Brahmanand Swami unhesitatingly replied, “So be it Maharaj. For me, obeying your word is my life. I wish to be bound to you and no one else. My belongings [*jholi*] are ready.”

Shri Hari was happy with Brahmanand Swami’s straightforwardness and compliance in obeying his words.<sup>1</sup>

1. The following information is noted in the *Brahmasahita* by the royal poet, Mavdanji: Due to a severe famine in the Marvad (Rajasthan) region many local people and relatives of Brahmanand Swami from Khan village (his birth-place) had migrated to Gujarat to earn their living. At that time, Swami’s relatives had also joined the construction work of the mandir in Vartal. They laboured for about eight months till the rains came. Thereafter, all of them decided to return to their region, but since the *pratishtha* day was not far off many of them stayed to witness it. Subsequently, those who were jealous of and averse to Brahmanand Swami complained to Shriji Maharaj, “Maharaj, Brahmanand Swami is revered like Bhagwan in this region. He invited his relatives and people from his native land and has kept them in the mandir. Therefore, if you are not cautious now they will take over the mandir. So, be careful!”

Shri Hari, the all-knower, was aware of the true facts and the false accusation made by the detractors of Brahmanand Swami. Thus, Shriji Maharaj decided to redeem Brahmanand Swami from this concocted issue by instructing him to accompany him and leave Vartal.

## DEFINITION OF BHAKTI

The devotees of Surat offered an invitation to Shri Hari to come to Surat. Maharaj agreed and was pleased with their straightforward nature in refraining from insisting to raise the flag on the southern *shikhar* during the *pratishta* rituals of Vartal Mandir.

When Muni Bawa came to remind Maharaj the latter said, “I’m getting ready to go to Surat. You go in advance with a few swamis and make the preparations.”

Muni Bawa was pleased to hear this. As he turned around to leave Shriji Maharaj suddenly asked, “When will you have your overgrown hair clipped?” Muni Bawa replied smilingly, “Maharaj, as soon as you arrive in Surat I will get my hair cut. For a long time we all have insisted that you come to Surat. In addition, Ardesar Sheth (Kotwal) is eager to have your darshan. Though you are inclined towards your devotees’ wishes you behave according to the prevailing times. When someone like Brahma (deva of creation) becomes confused about your actions and behaviour, then of what calibre are we to understand your *lila*?”

Shri Hari smiled at Muni Bawa’s words and said, “Brahma would become disillusioned, whereas, you all are devotees. A true devotee never becomes disillusioned and if he does then he is not a devotee. He always remains equipoised in my divine and human actions.” Muni Bawa understood the attribute of a genuine devotee. He felt that only if Maharaj blessed them with a good intellect could they become true devotees.

Thereafter, Muni Bawa left for Surat with a group of sadhus. Shri Hari also got ready to leave. Many *darbars* – Dada Khachar, Sura Khachar, Somla Khachar, Naagmaalo, Vasta Khachar and others – got ready to join Shri Hari. Maharaj had arranged bullock carts for Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and other *sadguru* swamis. Brahmanand Swami took a cart from Vartal mandir. The retinue departed from Vartal and

headed towards Surat. They came to Jol village and then travelled to Valasan and took a little rest. Thereafter, they proceeded to Bochasan. Shri Hari stayed at Kashidas Mota’s home. The swamis stayed at an old mandir.

## THE GLORY OF BOCHASAN WILL SPREAD OVERSEAS

Shri Hari sat in the open ground outside Kashidas’s home. An assembly commenced with swamis singing bhajans. Shri Hari discoursed briefly till lunch was ready. After having his lunch, Maharaj served food to the *paramhansas*. Kashidas Mota stood there doing darshan while tears of joy overwhelmed his eyes. Then, Shri Hari came to Kashidas, placed his hand on his shoulder, and said, “Kashidas, you are very fortunate!”

“Yes Maharaj, there can be no greater fortune than the supreme Purushottam Narayan’s arrival at my home. You have blessed this land immeasurably and you have also blessed us by your presence here today,” Kashidas replied with folded hands.

“Kashidas, this land has become sacred. In future, because of my association, this place will become a great place of pilgrimage. The glory of this place will spread abroad.”

Kashidas felt happy and fulfilled on hearing Shriji Maharaj’s divine words.

## MUNI BAWA COMES TO RECEIVE MAHARAJ

The next day, Maharaj departed from Bochasan. He went to Devan and then crossed the Mahisagar. Here, Muni Bawa had come to receive Shri Hari with two sadhus and two devotees. Maharaj was surprised and enquired, “Muni Bawa, when did you reach Surat and make the preparations before coming here so soon? Did you find some flying footwear to do this!”

Muni Bawa smilingly replied, “Maharaj, when you left Vartal to come to Surat my pace became extremely brisk. On reaching Surat, I instructed the devotees to make the preparations and left

immediately to receive you. The devotees of Surat are elated that you are coming. They have sent these two devotees as their representatives to honour you.”

Shri Hari was pleased to see the two devotees. Soon thereafter, Revabhai, a Rajput devotee of Shaarad village, came before Maharaj. He insisted upon Maharaj to stay in his village for one day. Maharaj replied, “Muni Bawa’s passion is such that he has come all the way from Surat to receive us. So, I will come on my return journey.”

So saying, Maharaj continued with his retinue and stayed for the night at Kareli village. Here, Mokha Khachar was bitten by a scorpion at night. He felt a searing pain. Maharaj asked for ghee and sugar and told him to drink it. Then, he told someone to rub soap and some opium oil. Shortly thereafter, Mokha Khachar’s pain subsided. Then, Maharaj told the *paramhansas*, “Go for *vicharan* to the villages of this Mahikantha region. Come to me only when I permit you to do so.”

After listening to Maharaj’s discourse, many *paramhansas* got up and offered prostrations to him and left. Shri Hari looked at them as they departed and said softly, “Oh how straightforward my sadhus are; their sole focus lies in obeying my commands.”

## STAY WITH ME TO KNOW MY WISHES

Mahanubhavanand Swami said, “Maharaj, it would be nice to have a large number of sadhus come with us to Surat. Because Surat is a big town, and with Ardeshar Kotwal as the Chief Police Officer, we should enter it with great pomp.”

After listening to him Shri Hari said, “You are the only one who has made this suggestion. None of the other senior *sadguru* swamis and neither did Muni Bawa, who has come to receive us, suggest this to me or insist upon this. In fact, I cannot sleep without the presence of my sadhus.”<sup>2</sup>

On hearing Shri Hari’s words the senior *sadguru* swamis realized their mistake. Muni Bawa,

too, also felt regretful. He humbly expressed, “Maharaj, I thought you did not wish to have your sadhus join you.”

Shri Hari smiled and replied, “When you stay with me you will truly know my wishes and inclinations. See how Mahanubhavanand Swami has realized this!” Instantly, Muni Bawa responded, “Maharaj, quickly send your *parshads* on horseback and instruct the sadhus to come to Surat.” Shri Hari acknowledged his wish and sent his *parshads* and told them to convey that all his sadhus should come to Surat.”

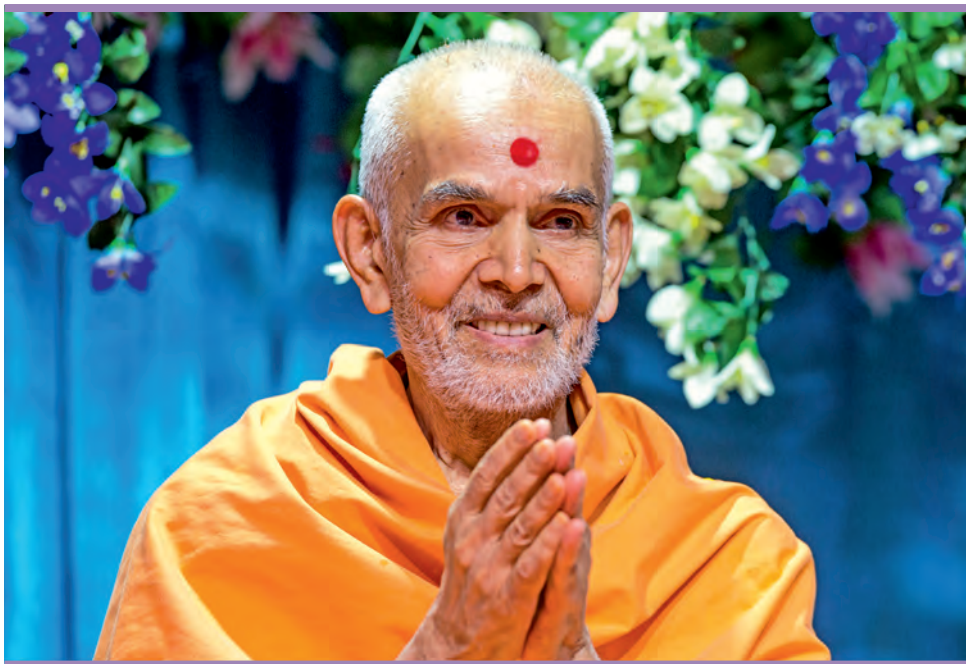
Shriji Maharaj departed from Kareli and came to Amod during the early morning. Here, Dinanath Bhatt, a local devotee, had first met Maharaj in 1808 in Mandvi. At that time, Shri Hari had listened to his *katha* on the Shrimad Bhagvat. Maharaj was pleased by his scholarliness. From then onwards Maharaj used to keep Dinanath with him during his *vicharan*. Due to Muktanand Swami’s company Dinanath came to understand the essence of satsang. His elder brother, Lakshmiram was also a pious devotee.

## ULTIMATE LIBERATION

Dinanath Bhatt’s scriptural scholarliness was matchless. He was also an accomplished poet. He had written Sanskrit verses about Shri Hari’s glory, but he was unable to fearlessly talk about Maharaj’s supreme glory. He used to say, “Wherever Bhagwan is manifest in human form he teaches about the futility of the sense objects, having control over one’s senses and spreading *ekantik* dharma. One who believes that money and physical pleasures lead to bondage finds the manifest Bhagwan. And through the God-realized Sant one attains God’s divine knowledge and is blessed with *moksha*. The principle of *atyantik moksha* is found here only.” ♦

Translated from the Gujarati text of  
*Bhagwan Swaminarayan* authored by Shri H.T. Dave

2. This implied that Shri Hari’s spiritual glory for and attachment towards his *paramhansas* was profound.



## A Ripe and Firm Devotee

*HH Mahant Swami Maharaj shares his thoughts about  
becoming a ripe devotee of God*

When a potter makes pots he seasons them by putting them in a kiln. Thereafter, (drinking) water remains in it. Of what use are 1,000 unbaked pots? Only a seasoned pot can be used to store water because it is fully baked. Similarly, there are many devotees of God, but only those who are ripe and strong are the true ones.

Once, we were returning by train from Benaras. A devotee had brought two [clay] potfuls of drinking water for us to our compartment. A few minutes later, one of the water pots broke and the whole compartment got wet. Everyone was troubled by it. Just when the compartment was cleaned dry, the second pot cracked. The reason being that the pots had not been fully seasoned in a kiln.

We do not like to eat chapattis and rice that

are not fully baked or boiled. We do not accept them, and instead throw them away.

When a devotee of God becomes strong in all aspects Bhagwan resides in him. Shriji Maharaj came on earth and discoursed to his devotees about becoming spiritually ripe and strong. When we do *seva*, other activities and satsang our focus should be on becoming ripe and strong.

Only during certain incidents or testing situations do we come to realize whether our satsang understanding is robust or not. It's like a student who studies throughout the whole year and he realizes how much he has learnt only when he takes an exam. In the same way, a devotee's understanding depends on how much he remains unwavering in a testing situation. There are those who come to satsang, but become sad, depressed and give it up on facing a minor insult. Such



people are not true (ripe) devotees.

Shriji Maharaj defines a true devotee as one who abides by moral instructions (*niyam*), has faith (*nischay*) and stands up (*paksha*) for God, his Sant and devotees. One who has resolute *nischay* in God and his Sant, strongly abides by *niyams* and has *paksha* for them – his satsang keeps on increasing. Shriji Maharaj stated this for Shukanand Swami.

To become ripe and strong one has to introspect. No camera has been invented to inspect things within ourselves. If it existed then the act of introspection would not have been so neglected. Whatever we do, we should introspect honestly. We should set our own question paper, correct it ourselves and give the marks ourselves. Be honest with yourself. Are Maharaj-Swami happy about what I am doing? Keep on inspecting.

When you cannot see your faults ask the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato. They will tell you immediately. The speedometer in a car shows you the speed, then another meter will show you how much oil or petrol there is in the car. Similarly, the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato are our life's meters. So, we have to inspect ourselves.

When you have been in Satsang for twenty-five years and still you have no affinity (*khap*) for it then whose fault is it? It is your own fault! A person driving a car will keep his eyes constantly on the road. He remains alert that his car does not veer off the road even a bit. So, we should remain alert – are we doing anything that displeases Shriji Maharaj and Swamishri?

Do whatever you do for Satsang only for gaining Bhagwan's *rajipo*. He is always ready to be pleased upon you. Once, Yogiji Maharaj travelled to a village. There were not enough arrangements for his stay there. However, the devotees had lots of love and devotional feelings, so Bapa gave his abundant joy to them. When Bapa was about to depart the devotees cried and regretted that they had been unable to look after him and make proper arrangements for him. Then, Yogiji Maharaj

replied, "I had come to please you. When you are happy everything is included in that." God and his Sant want to please you, and they do not want anything in return. All they want are your pure feelings (*bhav*). We are indeed extremely blessed. We have the association of Pramukh Swami Maharaj – a God-realized Sant. By doing even a little for such a Gunatit Sant he showers his *rajipo* on us.

It is not so that only when you get 100% (in your spiritual sadhanas) he becomes happy on you. But when you keep on making honest efforts he is equally happy on you. Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 5, "If during meditation one cannot behold the *murti* [of God] in one's heart, one should not lose faith and stop meditating. Those who persist in this way will earn the immense grace of God. Moreover, God will be bound by their bhakti." The main thing is the devotee's faith, inner love, enthusiasm and affinity (*khap*). Talent or skill are not God's parameters.

What can we give to Bhagwan? He has given us this human body. Then, whatever we earn through our body, intellect, knowledge, power, wealth – everything is his. It's okay that we take pride in giving to him. But he is pleased with us by the small things we humbly do for him.

We have met Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who is eternally in communion with Shriji Maharaj. When we are eagerly ready to sacrifice our everything at his feet the words of the Vachanamrut become a mirror for us. We are able to clearly see where our lapses obstruct us. Walk in the footsteps of the Vachanamrut, Gunatit Gurus and Pramukh Swami Maharaj to become strong in faith (*nishtha*), bhakti and *upasana*, *seva* and *niyam*-dharma. Then, we will easily become a ripe and strong devotee in whose heart Bhagwan will easily and eternally reside. ♦

*Translated from Swaminarayan Prakash  
(February 2020) by Sadhu Vivekjiandas*



# TIMELINE

## Navsari and the Swaminarayan Sampradaya



**P**re-1799: Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in the form of Nilkanth Varni, passed through the Dandakaranya (presently, Dang) region on his entry into Gujarat.

1816: Bhagwan Swaminarayan visited Queen Kushalkunvarba in Dharampur. En route, he stayed the night in Asundar village, then reached Dharampur via Kachhiyavadi, Kaliyavadi and Navsari. He also visited nearby Vandsa at the earnest request of Jitba, niece (*bhatiji*) of Queen Kushalkunvarba. Here, Bhagwan Swaminarayan

gave the imprints of his holy *charnavind* for the first time. Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami was also with Bhagwan Swaminarayan during this visit.

During the return journey also, Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his entourage passed through Navsari.

**June 1894:** At the heartfelt invitation of the Diwan, Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj visited Vandsa for one month and gave much spiritual inspiration to Shri Jhaverbhai Amin and others.



Bhagwan Swaminarayan blesses Queen Kushalkunvarba in Dharampur



Diwan of Vandsa Shri Jhaverbhai Amin



Left: Pramukh Swami Maharaj blesses a tribal devotee Right: Swamishri presides over an assembly in a tribal village

**Until 1950:** Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj frequently visited Bilimora and its surrounding places to purchase wood for the various mandir construction projects.

**September 1966:** Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj visited Navsari for the first time. A satsang assembly was held at Lakshman Hall.

**1968:** Yogiji Maharaj visited Bilimora and Itada. Then, he visited Navsari, where, during an assembly, he said, “Bhagwan [Maharaj] can create golden mandirs, but to benefit the devotees, he accepts their services.”

In total, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj visited Navsari three times and Bilimora 17 times.

**1966–2011:** Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Navsari over 60 times.

**1961–1980:** As per the wishes of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, sadhus based at the BAPS Mandir in Dadar regularly visited this region to nurture satsang. The Satsang grew due to the efforts of Shri Lallubhai, Shri Manubhai Jhaveri, Shri Ghanshyambhai Patel (Matroja), and Kapilaben Manibhai Desai and other women devotees.

**1980–90:** Despite the lack of facilities, Narendraprasad Swami (Acharya Swami), Nandkishore Swami continued to nurture the satsang.

**1985:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated a *hari* mandir built on the 30,000 sq. ft. land donated by Shri Dahyabhai Patel (Chovisi). Mahapurush Swami, Narayanprasad Swami, Yogivatsal Swami, late Govindprasad Swami, Purushottamcharan Swami and other sadhus also endeavoured tirelessly to spread satsang in the region.

**1997:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 77th birthday was celebrated in Navsari. Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated the new *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the mandir.

**June 2011 :** Pramukh Swami Maharaj initiated the project to build a marble *shikharbaddha* mandir. Marble was chosen since the heavy rains of South Gujarat made other stones unsuitable.



Swamishri performs the *shilanyas* rituals for the new assembly hall





Pramukh Swami Maharaj performs the *pratishtha* rituals and *arti* of the new *murtis*, Navsari, 1997

**2012 onwards:** Under the guidance of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Akshaymuni Swami, Shri Sanjaybhai Parikh and the BAPS Planning Cell, Shrijiprakash Swami and other sadhus, with the help of Shri Jitendrabhai diligently oversaw the quarrying of the required marble from mines in Agariya village near Udaipur in Rajasthan. Of the two types of marble available – dry and wet – it was decided to use the wet type.

After initial sculpturing at the BAPS workshops in Rajasthan, the stones were transported to Navsari for assembly and finishing.

**18 November 2012:** In Ahmedabad, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed *pujan* of the foundation *shilas*. Thereafter on 6 December 2012,

Pujya Mahant Swami performed the Shilanyas Ceremony at the mandir site in Navsari.

Prior to this, to dig the foundations, one contractor agreed to dig the foundations for Rs. 800,000 in one month. However, due to the devoted efforts of the devotees of Navsari, the foundations were completely dug in just four days.

The foundation centring was ensured by Vivekvallabh Swami with the assistance of Shri Nileshbhai and other devotees of Sadadvel town.

To fill the foundation and create the concrete raft, Shri Ankitbhai Shah of Makhinga generously allowed the use of his ready-mix concrete plant by the Sanstha's volunteer engineers to make the required concrete for the foundation.

Over a period of three days, the cement-fly ash mixture was poured into the foundations. Men and women devotees served day and night to accomplish this task.

The foundation rubbles were managed by Shri Sureshbhai Contractor, Shri Jayantibhai Sapariya, Shri Hemrajbhai Parmar and Shri Chamanbhai Vegad.

On the mandir site, Dharmasmaran Swami supervised the stonework and mandir construction. Also, under his guidance the mandir drainage and plumbing was fitted by the youths of Navsari.



Swamishri gives guidance for the new mandir project

To transport the stones from Pindwada, Shri Bakulbhai Mehta (Bhuj) provided the use of his trailer for one year.

The concealed electrical cabling of the mandir was carried out expertly by Shri Maheshbhai Chotaliya.

Daily, for several years, devotees from the city and surrounding villages came to the mandir to help in the construction work.

Many artisans from Rajasthan stayed in Navsari for the stone work. The firewood they used to prepare their meals was provided by Shri Pravinbhai Mistry and his family of Tankal village. The artisans' medical care was provided by Dr Dharmendrabhai Prajapati.

The colourful and artistic floor patterns were designed by Yogikishore Swami and Shri Haribhai.

The mandir marble-flooring was done by Akhilbhai Sompura of Makrana. The 100-ft crane used to lift the stones into place was assembled by Shri Yogeshbhai and Babubhai of Mumbai.

The design of the sadhus' residence, Premvati restaurant, bookstall and others facilities was done by Brahmacharan Swami and Shri Prashantbhai Parmar.

The gardens were prepared under the guidance of Yogikishore Swami and Shri Raghavbhai Patel.

The stone displays depicting scenes from the lives of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus were sculpted by artisans from Odisha, led

by Shri Shankarbhai Shetty, Shri Prashant Sahu and Shri Rajshekar Sahu.

The statuettes adorning the mandir were sculpted by artisans from Dungarpur and Sagvada in Rajasthan, under the supervision of Shri Rajubhai.

Other valuable services were provided by Vivekdarshan Swami, and devotees of Chikhli village.

## ACTIVITIES

The numerous spiritual and social activities managed from the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Navsari include:

- Over 150 satsang centres providing inspiring messages and practical spiritual guidance to people of all ages and backgrounds.
- Over 100 children's centres providing children and youngsters with character-building and academic encouragement.
- 12 *kutir* mandirs in the Dang-Vasda region and around 50 regular assemblies for spiritual and cultural inspiration.
- School and hostel in Rambhas for 200 underprivileged tribal students.
- 2 mobile ambulances providing free medical treatment and health guidance to tribal communities.
- Deaddiction campaigns to motivate and guide people to quit addictions and other harmful habits. ♦

## SWAMINARAYAN BLISS INFORMATION STATEMENT

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(Signed) Sadhu Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-3-2020



## MURTIS CONSECRATED IN THE NEW BAPS MANDIR



Shri Harikrishna Maharaj,  
Shri Radha-Krishnaji



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Shri Ram-Sita-Hanumanji



Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj



Shri Shiv-Parvati, Ganapatiji



Brahmaswarup  
Bhagatiji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup  
Shastriji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup  
Yogiji Maharaj



Brahmaswarup  
Pramukh Swami Maharaj





# BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Navsari











**I**n the long and illustrious history of mandir-building in the entire Swaminarayan Sampradaya, the recently inaugurated BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Navsari is only the fourth *shikharbaddha* mandir built entirely from marble, after Gadhada (1951), New Delhi (2013) and Robbinsville, NJ (2014).

This attractive new mandir is the focal point of the 11-acre BAPS campus located off the nearby busy national highway.

Along the inside perimeter is as extensive *parikrama* path that encloses the gardens and mandir.

At the front of the mandir, facing the main entrance gate of the campus, are two decorated elephants and the holy *charnarvind* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

The mandir, which faces to the east, comprises two *jagati piths* (plinths). The first – Gajendra Pith – is at ground level and features a series of sculpted elephants scenes depicting stories of devotion, service, unity, joy and other inspiring messages.

The second *jagati* (plinth) is reached by climbing a flight of stairs. This plinth is the base of

the mandir structure. It represents the ground floor of the mandir. The walls of the mandir at this level feature 44 sculpted displays of events from the lives of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus.

This mandir, which took seven years to complete, is built of Rajnagar (in Rajasthan) marble and has the following main features:

- 3 main and 2 secondary *shikhars* (pinnacles)
- 2 main *ghummats* (domes); 17 secondary domes
- 19 golden *kalashes* (auspicious water pots)
- Height: 82 ft; Length: 205 ft; Width: 188 ft; Podium size: 40 by 40 ft
- 222 intricately carved pillars and 150 arches
- 153 statues of divinities and inspiring devotees
- 70,000 cubic feet of stone used.

On the rear wall (*mandovar*) of the *garbhagruha* are statuettes of *devtas*, avatars, and prominent sadhus and devotees of the past. Among them are statuettes of the parents of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus.

The gardens feature well-manicured lawns and bushes and statues of children in yogic postures. ♦







# Grand Nagar Yatra

28 January 2020, Navsari

A grand procession through the main streets of Navsari city marked the start of the three-day festivities to commemorate the consecration of the *murtis* in the new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir.

Stretching for 1.5 km, the procession consisted of over 60 creative attractions, including beautifully decorated chariots housing the various *murtis*, youths on horseback and motorcycles, children and youths performing a variety of traditional dances, BAPS sadhus and youths singing devotional bhajans, tribal youths playing drums, youths carrying lighted torches (*mashals*), women devotees carrying *kalashes* (auspicious water pots) and other presentations.

The participation of over 300 BAPS sadhus and 4,000 devotees from Gujarat and abroad enhanced the devout atmosphere created by the procession.

Thousands of local residents joyously and devoutly welcomed the procession along the 4 km route by showering flower petals on and offering garlands to the *murtis*. The *murtis* cast their divine gaze upon the city to bless all the residents.

Senior BAPS sadhus and Shri Piyushbhai Desai (MLA, Navsari) performed the initial *pujan* rituals to flag off the procession.

The procession set off from the Garda College Hostel grounds at 2.30 p.m. and concluded at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir at 7.00 p.m. in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. ♦





# Yagna for World Peace

29 January 2020, Navsari

**T**he highlight of the second day of festivities to commemorate the inauguration of the new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Navsari was the grand Yagna for World Peace.

From 8.00 p.m. to 12 noon, around 3,750 *yajmans*, seated around 380 *yagna* altars, participated in the Vedic rituals. They were guided through the rituals by 100 learned Brahmins.

The main *yagna* rituals were performed by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj at the main *yagna* altar. He also performed the *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* to be consecrated.

Blessing the *yagna* assembly, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “A grand new mandir has been built in Navsari. The mandir is delicate. It has thin, elegant columns which are pleasing to view. Since

the time of Shriji Maharaj, this is the fourth all-marble mandir.

By serving God in even a small

way, you will earn his infinite blessings. He will fulfil your sincere and noble prayers. All should regularly visit the mandir for darshan and to offer devotion. We have been trapped in *maya* since eternity. To be liberated from such bondage is the real reward. Through devotion, *upasana*, *nishtha* and observance of *niyams*, the path of *moksha* becomes clear. Maharaj will grant *moksha* to all. May all enjoy good health and all-round prosperity.” ♦



Swamishri performs the *arti* and offers ghee in the main *yagna* altar







# Murti-Pratishtha Ceremony of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir

30 January 2020, Navsari

**O**n this auspicious day of Vasant Panchami (Maha *sud* 5), over 20,000 devotees and wellwishers from India and around the world gathered at the 11-acre BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir campus to celebrate the *murti-pratishtha* (consecration) ceremony of the grand new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir performed by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

At 7.00 a.m., the consecration (*murti-pratishtha*) rituals of the *murtis* began with a celebratory procession along the 900 ft-long Gajendra Pith circling the mandir base.

From 9.00 a.m., senior BAPS sadhus and over 900 devotees participated in the consecration

*mahapuja* rituals under the main mandir dome, while thousands of devotees watched the live relay of the ceremonies on large LED screens in the assembly hall.

Thereafter, at 10.30 a.m., Mahant Swami Maharaj ritually inaugurated the new mandir complex by untying a *nadachhadi* at the main gate. Thereafter, he walked along the main path holding Shri Harikrishna Maharaj passing between the two beautifully sculpted elephants. He performed *pujan* of the holy *charanarvind* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Then, he proceeded up the main staircase of the mandir, where he released balloons to mark the auspicious occasion.







Swamishri inaugurates the main gate



Swamishri performs *pujan* of the holy *charanarvind*



Swamishri performs *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni

At the same time, flowers were showered from a plane circling above the mandir.

Then, Swamishri and *sadguru* and senior swamis performed the main consecration and *pujan* rituals of the *murtis* in the various shrines of the marble mandir: Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, Shri Nilkanth Varni (*abhishek murti*), Shri Guru Parampara (marble *murtis*), Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Sita-Ram and Shri Hanumanji and Shri Shiv-Parvati and Shri Ganeshji.

At the conclusion of the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals, Mahant Swami Maharaj, *sadguru* swamis and everyone present performed the first *arti* of the consecrated *murtis*.

Blessing the gathered devotees, Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “May all the residents of Navsari and everyone be blessed with good health and prosperity and may everyone be spiritually strengthened by the mandir. May all strengthen unity and experience inner peace. Through mandirs like this, noble values will spread, spirituality will be consolidated and *ekantik* dharma will be attained.”

Thereafter, all through the day up to 9.30 p.m., more than 37,000 devotees and well-wishers came for darshan of the mandir.

More than 2,500 male and female BAPS volunteers served during the 3-day *murti-pratishtha* festivities. ♦



Devotees under the mandir dome during the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony



# Murti-Pratishtha Celebration Assembly

30 January 2020, Navsari

**T**he *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the new marble BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Navsari, were performed in the morning by Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj.

In the evening, over 20,000 devotees and well-wishers attended the *murti-pratishtha* and Vasant Panchami celebration assembly.

The celebration assembly included speeches, skits, videos and traditional dances. The programme was as follows:

- Speech: Shastriji Maharaj built mandirs for the propagation of *upasana* – Shrutiprakash Swami.
- Speech: How mandirs have transformed the lives of tribals in South Gujarat – Vivekswarup Swami.
- Speech: Mandirs are sources of supreme faith in God and nobler living – Prabhucharan Swami.
- Speech: Mandirs as inspirers of cultural and spiritual pride – Atmaswarup Swami.
- Video: Highlights of the morning *murti*

-*pratishtha* ceremony of Navsari Mandir.

- Speech: Mandirs are abodes of bhakti and *seva* – Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami: “Mandirs are the means by which one can reach the feet of God and his Sadhu. Mandirs are where the nine forms of devotion can be offered. By sincere prayers to God, all of one’s difficulties in life are overcome and one experiences profound peace. Children, teenagers and youths learn noble values and qualities from the mandir and thus please God and his Sadhu.”
- Speech: Making a mandir in our heart – Pujya Dr Swami: “We also have to make our homes into mandirs. This is achieved by daily darshan, *arti*, *thal* and spiritual discourses. In this way, satsang and *upasana* have to be strengthened. Believe that the Lord of all creation resides in your *atma* and this will give you unimaginable joy and strength.”
- Speech: Mandir develops *atma shakti* – Pujya Viveksagar Swami.
- Speech: Glory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj





Swamishri sanctifies the development plans for the schools and hostels in Rambhas

and Mahant Swami Maharaj – Shri Anil Naik, Chairman of L&T.

- Swamishri sanctified the plans for the development of the Gyan Seva Vidya Sankul (boys and girls schools and hostels for tribal children) managed by BAPS in Rambhas.
- Publications inaugurated by Swamishri: the mandir *murti-pratishtha* souvenir; a Swaminarayan Aksharpith publication, *Purushottam Boliya Prite: Eternal Wisdom of Bhagwan Swaminarayan* (English); *Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Karika Sanchay* (English); and *The Mundaka Upanishad Swaminarayan Bhashyam* (English).
- Swamishri was garlanded by *sadguru* swamis and senior sadhus.
- Swamishri blessed the celebration assembly, “Today is Shastriji Maharaj’s birthday and this mandir has also been inaugurated. Shastriji Maharaj used to say ‘My birth is for building mandirs.’ Shastriji Maharaj spread and strengthened the Akshar-Purushottam principle through mandirs. Shastriji Maharaj taught, ‘Mandirs kindle and strengthen the flame of faith.’ Mandirs teach that whatever God does is for our benefit. He built mandirs which are centres of faith and humanitarian services. Believing Bhagwan to be the all-doer and the doer of the highest good for all will enable one to remain equipoised in the storms of life. It is not always possible to change difficult situations, but imbibing spiritual knowledge provides you with inner peace. By cultivating harmony, fraternity and unity one will attain progress and inner peace. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj continued to teach such spiritual understanding, which has given inner joy and strength to countless devotees.”
- Thereafter, children and youths performed a grand finale traditional dance.
- Among the dignitaries present were Shri Anilbhai Naik (Chairman, L&T), Shri G.S. Damor (MP, Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh), Shri Piyushbhai Desai (MLA, Navsari), Shri Nareshbhai Patel (MLA, Gandevi), Shri Bharatbhai Patel (MLA, Valsad), Shri Arvindbhai Patel (MLA, Dharampur), Shri Bharatsinh Parmar (Secretary, BJP, Gujarat) and others. ♦



Over 20,000 devotees attended the evening *murti-pratishtha* celebration assembly

# Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Devotion to Thakorji

**O**n the morning of 2 September 1980, the auspicious day of Janmashtami, Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived in Boston by road from New York. After a medical examination for his ripe cataracts, Swamishri departed to return to New York. To ease the fatigue from the 8-hour two-way commute, Swamishri accepted the sadhus' request to sleep on the rear seat of the van. Thakorji (the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj) was also placed to rest on the upper berth of the van. The sun had set. Then, while the van was travelling smoothly on the broad highway, a sudden loud thud of something falling down was heard amid the darkness. Along with the others, Swamishri suddenly sat up, asking, "What happened? What fell down?" One saint replied, "Thakorji fell down from above." The statement was like a jolt to Swamishri. Concerned and shaken, Swamishri said, "Quickly, check whether Thakorji has fallen out." The interior light was switched on. On inspection, the sadhus noticed that the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj had turned on to the side. Seeing this, Swamishri became quite perturbed. Tearfully, he continually stroked his hand all over the body of Maharaj while repeatedly saying, "Maharaj, please forgive. Maharaj, please forgive." It was as if Swamishri felt responsible for the fall and that Thakorji had been injured. Remorsefully, Swamishri started prostrating

in the van... one...two...three...five...ten...twenty...twenty-five... Despite his own ill health and exhaustion, he continued prostrating. Yet, in his mind he was still not satisfied. To please Thakorji, he lovingly offered *thal*, and afterwards sat silently throughout the remainder of the journey, devoutly turning his rosary. Even on reaching New York, Swamishri's heart remained unalleviated.

That Thakorji had fallen was not his fault. But their bond was different.

Swamishri offered devotion and service to Thakorji with the firm conviction that he was manifest in the *murti*. Such was his exemplary devotion towards Thakorji (*parabhakti*).

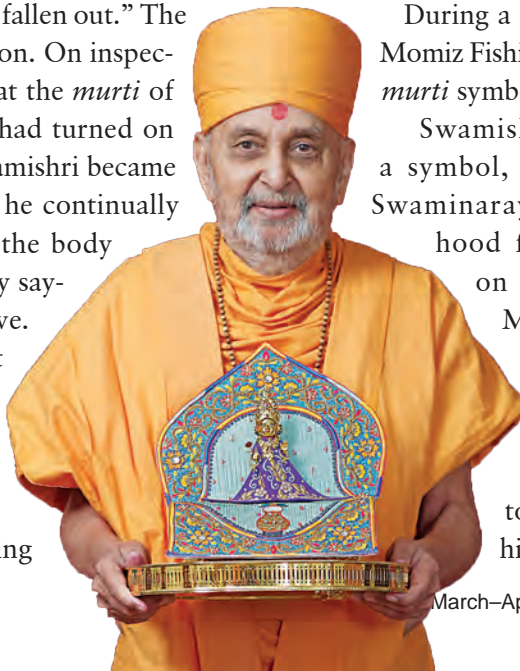
Such *parabhakti* is described in the scriptures, but Swamishri's life was a living form of *parabhakti*.

## NOT A SYMBOL, BUT GOD HIMSELF

During a TV interview in Lusaka, Mr Momiz Fishi asked, "What does this small *murti* symbolize?"

Swamishri replied, "This is not a symbol, but is manifest Bhagwan Swaminarayan. This was his childhood form when he manifested on earth. He is Harikrishna Maharaj himself."

In the village of Ambardi, the *murti* of Thakorji was left by mistake at a devotee's house. Swamishri was told about it when he came to his room after an assembly in





Amreli. The attendant sadhus had already sent another car to Ambardi to bring Thakorji. On learning about this, Swamishri became more annoyed and said, “For whom is this Mercedes car? It is for Thakorji; not for me! Use the Mercedes for him.”

### SWAMISHRI DID NOT STAND UP

On 13 June 1988, during a session of the Canadian Parliament, Hon. John Fraser, the Speaker, stood up to felicitate Swamishri, declaring, “I wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in the gallery of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Head of the Swaminarayan Mission.”

And with thundering applause, the members of parliament looked up towards the VIP gallery to have darshan of Swamishri. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not stand up to receive the felicitation. Instead, he first made the sadhu who was holding Harikrishna Maharaj stand up.

Whatever the occasion, big or small – an honour in the Canadian Parliament or a Nairobi City Crest presentation, a meeting with Pope John Paul II in Vatican City or a meeting with The Dalai Lama, a visit to the Rashtrapati Bhavan in Delhi at the invitation of President of India Zail Singh or a *suvarna tula* honour by devotees – Swamishri always kept Harikrishna Maharaj at the forefront, because he firmly believed that the honours were first to be offered to Thakorji, whereas he was merely a medium. He often said that whatever greatness there is, is due solely to Thakorji.

### STAUNCH DEVOTION

In public or private, even in the smallest acts, Swamishri did not forget Thakorji.

In Gondal, a new room had been prepared for him. When the saints affectionately requested him to rest in that room, Swamishri ensured that Thakorji slept in that room on the first night and only thereafter did he use the sanctified room.

Swamishri always insisted that the food

prepared for him should first be offered to Thakorji. He even showed the medicines to Thakorji before taking them.

In Kisumu, Swamishri was to take a cholera vaccine at Dr Ghanshyambhai Patel’s clinic. While taking the injection, Swamishri looked unblinkingly at Thakorji. When the doctor gave him a tablet of Novalgin to neutralize the side effects of the vaccine, Swamishri immediately said, “Sanctify it by showing it to Thakorji.” Only then did Swamishri take the tablet.

After Swamishri’s cataract operations, Pravinbhai Patel from Staten Island brought new spectacles for him. Swamishri told an attendant saint, “Sanctify them by offering them first to Thakorji, and then bring them to me.” Then, when the attendant gave the spectacles to him, Swamishri said, “Bring Thakorji.” After Thakorji was brought, Swamishri put on the eyeglasses and first had darshan of Harikrishna Maharaj, thus sanctifying both his spectacles and eyesight.

At Khambhala Hill Hospital in Mumbai, Swamishri had an operation to remove a lump from his thigh. When Swamishri regained consciousness, everyone thought of showing Swamishri the orange-sized tumour that had been removed. So they placed a pair of spectacles on Swamishri and said, “See, this is the lump!” Swamishri did not give any response, but asked instead, “Where is Maharaj?” He put on the spectacles and first had the darshan of Harikrishna Maharaj.

After the surgery, everybody insisted to Swamishri that he should sleep. Swamishri did not wish to sleep. Still, he closed his eyes after everyone left the room. But, he couldn’t sleep. Standing at a distance, the saints had a special darshan – as if Maharaj had come in person for Swamishri! Humbly, with folded hands, Swamishri was making gestures as if he was saying something. Briefly, he would fold his hands, then he would say something. Then, he would relax his hands, and concentrate as if listening

to something. This continued for about twenty minutes. After a few days, the secret of this silent conversation was revealed. When an attendant saint asked Swamishri, he said, “At that time, I was having the darshan of Thakorji in all the mandirs.”

Everyone realized that Swamishri remained constantly engrossed in Thakorji even when alone and under the effect of medications.

In Ahmedabad, Swamishri arrived in an evening assembly. He saw that the seat for Thakorji was behind his own seat. So, he immediately called one of the organizing sadhus and said, “My seat should never be ahead of Thakorji’s seat. Bear this in mind always. Fix it in your mind. Remember this. Not just for today or for this place only, but remember this norm forever.”

### THAKORJI IS THE ALL-DOER

In 1985, on his return to India after the successful Cultural Festival of India in London, Swamishri was felicitated in Ahmedabad. The compering saint announced, “Swamishri, who has hoisted the flag of Indian culture in the West will now bless the assembly.” Then, Swamishri began, “We are unable to break even a roasted *papad* [i.e., to do anything]. All this is achieved only due to the wish of Shriji Maharaj.”

In 1985, while being honoured in the Suvarna Tula in London, Swamishri’s attention and feelings were totally focused on Maharaj. This was evident when he said, “First of all, I bow to Parabrahman Sarvavatari Purushottam Narayan Bhagwan Swaminarayan, because he gave me this human body, and thereafter, I bow to my gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, who accepted and blessed me. With their grace and blessings, I am standing before you. Without their grace, I would not have been at this place. They gave me the chance to serve. There are so many standing before God with folded hands, but he gave me the opportunity to do this service. It is my great fortune! Nothing can be done without the grace

and wish of God. God is the all-doer. Without God’s wish, even a dry leaf cannot move.”

### ALWAYS A SERVANT

In 1982, a grand procession took place in London on the occasion of the foundation-stone laying ceremony of the *hari* mandir in Neasden. Swamishri was seated on an elephant. After a while, it started to rain and a strong cold wind was blowing. Swamishri immediately held an umbrella to cover Thakorji. He did not mind getting drenched.

During his daily puja, Swamishri so lovingly offered *thal* that it felt as if Harikrishna Maharaj was himself accepting the offering.

Sometimes, due to the travel schedule, if Thakorji’s rest time was delayed, Swamishri would instruct that Thakorji be woken up a little later next morning.

### SAME FOR GOD AS FOR THE BODY

In 1981, while touring in the Bharuch district, the dusty roads caused everyone much discomfort, fatigue and inconvenience. So, whenever they reached their lodgings, the accompanying sadhus would freshen up by washing their hands and feet. Swamishri would say, “Just as we feel the effects of the dusty roads, Thakorji would also have been affected and be tired. Hence, please bathe him in the afternoon and evening before offering him the *thal*.”

There was only one place to refresh for everyone on their return from the pilgrimage to Kedarnath: in Gaurikund, where there is a natural hot water spring. Swamishri also came to the *kund* for a bath after returning from the pilgrimage. Swamishri said, “First, let us bathe Harikrishna Maharaj, as he must also be tired.”

The water in the *kund* was very hot. So, Swamishri specially asked for cold water. He mixed the hot and cold water before bathing Thakorji. Then, for ten to fifteen minutes, Swamishri lovingly and devoutly massaged the



*murti* of Thakorji while bathing him and chanting *mantras* from the *Purushsukta*. It was a wonderful experience of Swamishri's oneness with and devotion for Thakorji.

Without such devotion, the thought that a metal *murti* would get tired would not arise. As Shriji Maharaj has said in Vachanamrut Sarangpur 3, "If a person lovingly performs puja of God, with elation and an emotion-filled voice, then regardless of whether he performs puja physically or performs *mansi* puja, both are superior."

### GOD IS PRESENT IN THE MURTI

In 1988, on the occasion of Yogi Jayanti, the women devotees of London had prepared a cake for Thakorji. When Thakorji was offered fruits in the afternoon, the youths placed the uncut cake and offered it to Thakorji. Then they brought it to Swamishri requesting him to cut it. Swamishri cut the cake and said, "Offer the cake to Thakorji." Upendra Patel said, "It has already been offered." Swamishri asked, "How can Thakorji eat a whole cake? Now it is cut, offer it again." Then, after the cake had been offered again, Swamishri had a small piece.

Once, Swamishri came to have darshan of Thakorji during the *shayan arti*. On seeing four *murtis* of Lalji Maharaj in a single bed, Swamishri suggested to the pujari saint, "You have placed all to sleep in one bed. But, since there is not much space how can they stretch or turn to their sides?" So, alternative arrangements were made.

In 1986, at Gajera village, Swamishri arrived to do puja in the assembly hall. The temperature was 7°C and a cold wind was also blowing. A heater was kept facing Swamishri to keep him warm. However, when he sat down to perform his puja, Swamishri had the direction of the heater turned towards Harikrishna Maharaj to keep him warm.

On countless such occasions, Swamishri's devotion and conviction that God is manifest in the *murti* was seen by all.

### GOD FIRST

After the evening assembly at Kelod village in the Bharuch district, Swamishri sat down for dinner. While eating, Swamishri asked an attendant, "Did you offer the *bhakhri* in the *thal*?" The attendant said, "No. The *bhakhris* brought by another devotee from his house were offered." Swamishri said to the attendant, "Look, two or three *bhakhris* out of the ones being made for me should be prepared first and offered to Thakorji. Do not give me anything unless it has been offered to Thakorji. To eat without offering to Thakorji is like eating dust."

In 1987, the construction for the township in preparation for the Kalash Jayanti Mahotsav in Mumbai were to be started. Swamishri arrived to inaugurate the kitchen. Dharmabhushan Swami brought *shiro* to offer to Thakorji during the inauguration rituals. Swamishri took the plate from him, removed his sandals, even though the ground was muddy, and offered the *shiro* to Thakorji. After offering it, when he touched the *shiro* to give it to the saints he realized that it was too hot. Swamishri said, "Oh! This is very hot. I thought it must have been cooled when it was brought for offering!" Then, he himself spread a part of the *shiro* on one side and cooled it and again offered it to Thakorji saying, "Maharaj, please forgive me. At first, hot *shiro* was offered. It must have caused you discomfort." Thus, he humbly begged pardon. Then, after lovingly offering the cooled *shiro* to Thakorji, he joyfully distributed it to all.

In 1974, Swamishri flew to Nairobi and had to return on the same plane from Nairobi to Mumbai. On the way to Nairobi, *thal* had been offered to Thakorji in the afternoon. The evening *thal* was to be offered in Nairobi. However, due to the unexpected return, the evening *thal* could not be offered to Thakorji. The return flight arrived late at night in Mumbai. On reaching the mandir at about 2.45 a.m., Swamishri emotionally begged for forgiveness before Thakorji and

offered about twenty prostrations. Then, he had some fresh food prepared and offered *thal* to Thakorji.

Shriji Maharaj has said in the Vachanamrut Gadhada I 68 that, “I forever reside in the eight types of *murtis*.” Swamishri’s devout life was such that it reflected his true faith in the words of Maharaj.

That is why on returning from bathing Thakorji at the seashore in Vile Parle in Mumbai, Swamishri asked an attendant saint, “We bathed Thakorji in the salty sea water. Have we bathed him in fresh water after returning?” Such devotion is possible only when one believes that God is actually manifest in the *murti*.

### SUBTLE SERVICE

On Swamishri’s return to India after the Suvarna Tula Mahotsav in London, one *parshad* had prepared a small set of scales and placed a small *murti* of Swamishri on one side and flowers on the other. In this way, he offered ‘Pushpa Tula’ and brought the set up to show to Swamishri. But Swamishri said, “This is not proper. Bring a *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.” So, the *parshad* brought a standing *murti* of Maharaj, but Swamishri said, “This is not appropriate. Bring a seated *murti*.” After a seated *murti* was brought, Swamishri swapped it with his *murti* and honoured Maharaj by weighing him against the flowers. How could Maharaj be not bound by such dedicated devotion by Swamishri, who remembered him at every moment? Shriji Maharaj has said in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 61 that God “becomes bound by anyone who offers profound bhakti to him. As a result, the mind of a devotee who has such loving bhakti becomes so bound to God that God is unable to free himself from him”.

### HE IS OUR MOST CHERISHED

Once, Swamishri was asked, “What thoughts do you have for all 24 hours?”

Swamishri replied, “About God only.”

On another occasion, somebody asked Swamishri, “What is your personal opinion about Harikrishna Maharaj?”

Swamishri replied, “He is our most cherished. What more needs to be said?”

The real opinion about someone beloved is beyond words. His place lies in the heart, not on the lips. Swamishri possessed Maharaj in every atom of his physical form. Without him, how could the existence of Swamishri even be imagined?

### THE SECRET OF LIFE

After the evening assembly in Nadiad, Swamishri asked, “Has the *arti* been performed?” One saint, with the intention of not troubling Swamishri, replied, “Bapa, you need not come, we will perform the *arti*.” This reply annoyed Swamishri, “You are trying to stop me from attending the *arti*, but you should never stop me from having darshan. You prohibit me from doing such things. But I have come to offer devotion and worship. If that cannot be done, how do I survive?”

Thakorji was Swamishri’s life.

The worship of Thakorji nourished Swamishri. His attachment towards Thakorji sustained Swamishri.

Can the existence of fish be imagined without water?

If life without air can be imagined, then one could imagine the life of Swamishri without Thakorji. In fact, Thakorji was integral to Swamishri’s existence. ♦





# Letters to Pramukh Swami Maharaj

100  
Pramukh Swami Maharaj  
Centenary Celebrations  
1921-2021



*Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired, influenced and impacted the lives of many people, young and old, men and women, in a multitude of ways. As we approach his birth centenary celebration in 2021, we have reached out to the worldwide satsang community to express their feelings and memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the form of a letter addressed to him. This is a selection from the letters received so far.*

**My Beloved Guruhari Pramukh Swami Maharaj,**

You spent 95 years on this planet for the benefit of humanity. To have witnessed the purity, humility, honour and divinity that characterized your life was the greatest thing to have ever happened to me.

Time and time again, you helped overcome the obstacles that came in my life. You guided and helped me realize my innate talents and abilities, that I had no idea of, enabling me to achieve greater heights. Yet, above all, you mentored me in developing a purer way of living that resulted in the highest level of happiness.

Everything you did for me was for my *moksha*. Be it blessing me through letters or via a meeting with my father, no matter the time or day. But, most of all, you guided me towards detaching myself from this world and its trivial pleasures while attaching myself to God and His infinite bliss.

Aristotle said, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” No matter where you were, no matter what you did and no matter whom you dealt with, you produced excellence. Your will-power exhibited this in the fullest.

There was not a single organ in your body that worked right any more. Still, you worked for our *moksha* right until the very end. When you couldn’t walk, you sat in a wheelchair to meet us and when you couldn’t meet us on a personal basis, you came out in your wheelchair while we sat watching you from afar. When your age and health took toll and you couldn’t come out in the open, you began giving us darshan in a glass cabin, waving *chhadis*, light sticks, throwing balls and raising your hands. Lastly, when you couldn’t give darshan from Pramukh Mandiram, you gave darshan from Sarvasva, waving light sticks and raising your hand for us till the very last day. Every second, every hour, every day, every week, every month, and every year of your entire life was for us only! No holidays, no weekends, no vacations, no pay and no complaints. Only a person like you who loved us unconditionally and unselfishly would go through all this.

Swamishri, not only did you play a great essential role in my spiritual journey, but for me you were the MOST accurate GPS of life – as Guru Pramukh Swami!

*Rupal Patel, 41, UK, Accountant*

Dear Swami Bapa,

Why don't you drink they'd ask me? Religious beliefs I'd respond. But for some reason that response wasn't enough. So, I'd elaborate by describing my gurus *agnas* and explaining the mourn and guilt I'd feel if I broke them. They said they respected me, that no one else would be able to resist it, and how they were like me until they came to college and were pulled into it.

Then, someone came up to me and told me, "Dude, your guru was a big shot." Those words stuck to me. It was my friend's birthday and people saw my actions and automatically related my decisions to my guru. For 3 years, I knew why I didn't drink, but I always had a thought in the back of my head. I wonder if one day I'll give in. Maybe I'll call it a one-time thing or just celebrate my birthday and then stop it all together.

How dare these thoughts even come into my mind. I was living my guru's legacy and my guru would never approve of something like this. And above everything, celebrating a birthday by breaking Bapa's *agna*? What kind of nonsense was this newfound logic? After all, on your birthday you should be paying respects and thanking a guru for guiding you throughout your years and showing you right from wrong. Everyone respected me and directly correlated my decisions to my guru's teachings. How could I give up a lifetime of following his *agnas* and literally spreading word of my guru through my actions just because of a little desire? That was ridiculous, I could never do something like that. I realize that the life I live is actively speaking about who my guru was and what he taught me. And it's not just my life, it's my life with Bapa.

I thank you for giving me the strength to follow your *agnas* even when no one around me was. I want to thank you for giving me the understanding behind those *agnas* and being with me when times were tough.

Bapa, there's nothing I wouldn't do to please you; thanks for coming into my life, changing the perspective I had all the *kusang* out there and helping me realize that your *agnas* were the best possible decisions I could make in any scenario. Without you, I'd probably just be like my other friends and give in to doing what everyone did; there would be no one to guide me or right my wrongs. Bapa you're watching me, and the whole world is watching the both of us; I will continue to dedicate the rest of my life in your *agnas*. Thank you, I love you.

Ami Patel, 25, USA, Software Engineer

Dear Swami,

You are in everyone's heart and will be forever.

I remember the time when I was 2 to 3 years old and you were the one who first cut a piece of my hair. That day was the best day of my life. It was the best feeling. Whenever I remember this I am so happy.

Param Patel, 14, Canada, Student



**Swami Bapa,**

My heart fills with joy as I write this letter to you. I don't know where to start. I have been a *satsangi* since I was three-and-a-half years old. You've been my guru ever since I was a kid.

You have been a father figure and a friend to me. Hearing your *prasangs*, your hard work and your dedication towards your gurus and our Sanstha has inspired me a lot.

Your motto, 'In the joy of others lies our own' has motivated me into living a better life by changing the way I see and treat others. Your teachings have inspired me to find happiness in the progress of others. And, seeing your *bhakti* and dedication for your gurus, and hearing about the tireless efforts you have put in to bring so many people into satsang has motivated me to make efforts to do as you do.

Swami, you have worked without care for your body. Your *vicharan* and dedication towards the spread of satsang has touched me deeply.

So, following in your footsteps at the age of 11, I decided to try and bring my friend into satsang. I wanted to do something that pleased you, just as you always put the wishes of your gurus first. So, I made the effort to explain the *mahima* of satsang to one of my friends. By your inspiration, my friend became a *satsangi* and started coming to *sabha*. She is now a firm *satsangi* who follows all the *niyam*-dharma. Your teachings have made this world a better place and continue to inspire millions.

Bapa, I can't appreciate you enough for what you've done for me. But I do want to thank you for always being there to support me at every turn in my life. Like a life support system, you are central to my life.

*Nimita Kharawala, 19, Tanzania, Business Student*

**My Beloved Guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj,**

It was because of you that I developed the intricate understanding and true *mahima* of what I have attained. It was your unconditional love, endless compassion, and constant efforts of spreading Shastriji Maharaj's *karya* that awoke me.

It was the countless *prasangs* of you being selfless, and fulfilling to the fullest the promise you made to your guru that inspired me to become your hands and feet, and serve this Sanstha and you to the best of my ability.

It was your teachings and sayings that gave me the courage to become your lioness, have no fear, and ensure I maintain the proper *pratiti* in my every encounter.

And, in the end, it was your biggest gift to me of Mahant Swami Maharaj, who you forever hold my hand through, directing me to my sole and final destination of Akshardham.

Saying 'thank you' is simply an understatement. You have given me all I could ever wish for and more, and for that I will eternally remain indebted in your grace.

*Nandini Thaker, 17, USA, Student*

We invite anyone wishing to contribute to write a letter (max. of 500 words) and send it by email to [letterstopsm100@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopsm100@gmail.com) or WhatsApp to +91 7069060900.

Please include your name, age, city and country of residence, occupation/study and mobile number.

### Respected Swami Bapa,

Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The name itself has so much power. Even a brief glimpse of him will feel like you have achieved all your goals in life. He is respected and adored by everyone. Just by looking at his innocent face, you will feel so fresh and instantly forget all the tension that has been going through your mind.

The words that best describe Bapa are joyful and humble. He was the leader of a worldwide organization, yet was so free and easy-going. This was possible for him because he had fully surrendered himself to Bhagwan. The aim of his life was to serve society and please God. You would never see him thinking about himself.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj loved everyone thoroughly and readily forgave people. Such things like ego and revenge were never seen throughout his life. He always found happiness for himself in others.

*Krishna Patel, 14, Australia, Student*

### Jai Swaminarayan Pramukh Swami,

It's hard to write a letter thanking you without my eyes welling up with endless tears.

In 2011, I felt peer pressured to begin drinking in college. I went to parties and for my 21st birthday I felt like I should make my friends happy by taking on this new adventure. I told a few my plan and no one disagreed. A thought occurred that I should go see Pramukh Swami prior to this huge decision. This thought was solely inspired by my guru, who at the age of 89, reached out to me to pull me out of *kusang* and connect me to him. So I packed my bags and went to India for a month alone without technology. I arrived at Dadar mandir as his birthday celebrations in Anand were cancelled and he was resting in Mumbai and had my first darshan in 4 years. His *drashti*, cast in my direction, and the look is still vivid in my mind today. I remember feeling like every college mistake was erased and replaced with love. That loved turned into *dradh priti* as he directly inspired me to place a *ghar* mandir in my room, read satsang books and gave me better company within a year.

Out of all the life-changing gifts you have given me and the lessons you have taught me – fighting my *swabhavs* is the greatest one.

Thank you for showing what it means to live a life without ego. A word that carries so much weight, but you rose above and eliminated it from others with your actions. A word that breaks families, relationships and friendships – you spoke on the importance of being a *das*.

To my father who guided me in silence, from a wheelchair in Sarangpur – I thank you for showing me that spiritual efforts (sadhana) towards a purpose (*moksha*) is my priority in life.

To my mother who smiled with warm eyes in my direction – I thank you for teaching me how to love others (*suhradhbhav*) and that the world is my family.

To my sister and brother who never judged my actions – I thank you for looking past my body and into my soul's past and present, and always giving reassurance at the right moment.

To my best friend – thank you for staying true to me in a day and age where it is difficult for millennials to make time outside of school, work, family for social commitments. Caring about me, you left me a friend in Mahant Swami.

Swami dearest, I thank you, I love you.

Oh, how blessed I am for finding a gem like you who carries all the eternal virtues!

*Eva Patel, 30, USA, Paediatric Occupational Therapist*





# How Satsang Exams Have Helped Me

When Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave me *vartman* (initiation) in September 2007 in California, his *agna* to me was that I must attend the Sunday satsang *sabha*. I am an American, and do not know Gujarati, but this did not matter to Pramukh Swami.

As a *tabla* player, I have been playing for and enjoying the bhajans during the Sunday satsang assembly. I also enjoy having darshan of the *mur-tis* in the mandir. The spiritual atmosphere of a mandir is very purifying and uplifting. A mandir is a refuge from negative material influences. But *jnan*, spiritual knowledge, is also one of the pillars of satsang. It is through the Satsang exams that I really began to understand our Sanstha, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, and the true Brahmaswarup form of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Prगत Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj.

I am grateful to BAPS for providing the first four exams (Prarambha, Pravesh, Parichay and Pravin), as well as the accompanying books in English. Through very intense study, which was sometimes overwhelming, I now have a foundation of *jnan*. To please Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami, I have passed all four of the exams, and am eligible for Pragna once I learn Gujarati at a more advanced level. Our local exam coordinator has repeatedly said that one will earn Pramukh Swami Maharaj's and Mahant Swami Maharaj's *rajpo* by taking the exams, and this experience has been very tangible.

Though BAPS is an international organization, and continues to grow at an incredible rate, its philosophy is not known outside of the Sanstha. Bhagwan Swaminarayan as

Purushottam is also not realized outside of the Sanstha. I had been studying Hinduism for the past 20 years, and before I had contact with the BAPS, I had no knowledge of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. Most of the Hindu mandirs I had attended revere and worship the past avatars of God, like Krishna, Rama, Narayan, Shiva, and their goddesses.

Learning about the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, the history of BAPS and Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and the biographies of our gurus, as well as all the places considered holy by BAPS was an entirely new endeavour for me. I had to make an adjustment. I knew about Vrindavan, but not Gadhada; I knew about the Ganga, but not the Ghela; I knew about Mirabai, but not Jivuba; I knew about Tulsidas, but not Nishkulanand Swami; I knew about Ram Navami, but not Swaminarayan Jayanti. I knew about the Shrimad Bhagvat, but not the Vachanamrut.

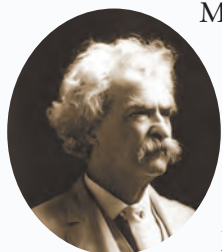
As I continued my studies, I learned about how transformational Bhagwan Swaminarayan was in India, and Gujarat in particular. I learned of the social reforms he had made, like ending Sati and female infanticide. I was in awe about the courage of Shastriji Maharaj in spreading the true Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. Despite the challenges and dangers he faced he remained undeterred. This should serve as an inspiration to our *satsangis* to follow Pramukh Swami Maharaj's and Mahant Swami Maharaj's *agnas*. I learned how Pramukh Swami had been so patient and tolerated very harsh conditions to bless all of us. I then decided I must go to India and visit these sacred places first-hand, and deepen my understanding of

(Cont. on p. 49)

# INSPIRATIONS

*A potpourri of inspiring and interesting  
information and wisdom*

## INDIA, A CULTURAL MILLIONAIRE



Mark Twain (1835–1910 CE), an American author and humourist, praises India, “This is indeed India; the land of dreams and romance; of fabulous wealth, cradle of the human race, birthplace of human speech, mother of history, grandmother of legend, great-grandmother of tradition. The one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the globe combined. There is only one India! It is the only country that has a monopoly of grand and imposing specialties. In religion all other countries are paupers; India is the only millionaire.”

## DIVINE MAGNETISM

In Vachanamrut Vartal 13, Shriji Maharaj reveals how engaging in the darshan of the *murti* of God with faith and understanding leads to an experience of divine bliss, “By appearance, God’s form appears similar to that of any human; however, it is an exceptionally divine form. For example, a magnetic rock appears similar to all of the other rocks on the earth; yet there is a natural magical property in it – when a ship sails past a mountain of magnetic rock, then all of the iron nails of the ship are drawn towards the magnetic rock. Similarly, when a person does darshan of God’s form with *shraddha*, be it the form of a king or the form of a sadhu, his *indriyas* are drawn towards God. Then one attains *samadhi*.”



## FOREST BATHING

According to recent scientific studies visiting a park or forest is believed to relieve one’s stress and increase the immune system. The exposure to fragrances and essential oils released by trees enables one to become healthy and relaxed. Forest Bathing is widely practiced in Japan.



## FATHER OF MODERN MANAGEMENT



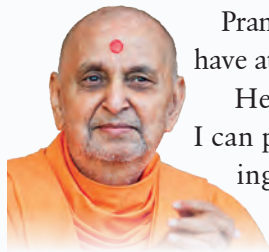
- Peter Drucker (1909–2005) was the first to say that people are the most important resource of any corporation. The world of business had not realized this simple fact! It believed that it was capital, not people, that was centre stage. It was capital, not thinking human beings, which determined productivity, differentiation, profits and all that the world of business is made of.
- Drucker said most of us, much of the time are trying to ‘solve’ problems, but most problems in life cannot be solved. You can only stay ahead of them. Too often, leadership gets so focused on solving problems that in reality, it begins to feed



them and in the process starves the various opportunities that may actually be just sitting there.

- Material incentives, said Drucker, work only in good times. More than ever before, we will hear about the value-centred work place with the emergence of the volunteer worker. Drucker said it is values that save us from breaking apart.

## REASON FOR SUCCESS



Pramukh Swami Maharaj was once asked, “What is the essence of the successes you have attained?”

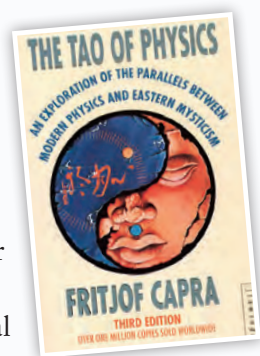
He replied, “There is only one essence – in having the single thought of how I can please my guru. After having met the genuine guru I shaped my life according to his commands [*agna*]. The main reason behind the progress [or success] attained is the guru’s *rajipo* [joy], his *drishti* [grace] and his *ashirwad* [blessings].”

## THE TAO OF PHYSICS



Fritjof Capra (Austrian-born American physicist) writes in his book, *The Tao of Physics*, “Rational knowledge is characterized by a linear sequential structure. The natural world, on the other hand, is one of infinite varieties and complexities, a multidimensional world which contains no straight lines or completely regular shapes, where things do not happen in sequences, but all together; a world where even empty space is curved. It is clear that [rational knowledge] can never describe or understand this reality completely.”

Capra’s book explains at great length and depth the need for metaphysical experience to truly comprehend even the physical world.



## SOME SIGNS YOUR BODY NEEDS WATER

1. Headaches.
2. Poor concentration.
3. Dry mouth and bad breath.
4. Food cravings.
5. Lethargy and fatigue...

– *Times Life* (Health)



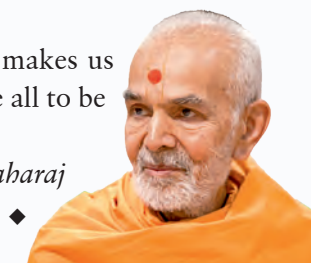
“The greatness of great men is known by the way they treat little men.”

– Thomas Carlyle,  
British Historian and Essayist

## POWER OF THINKING

“By believing others to be good-for-nothing and foolish, then God makes us like that. We become what we think about others. Thus, we must perceive all to be divine and as God’s devotees.”

– HH Mahant Swami Maharaj



# Vicharan

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

October–November 2019

Limuru, Nairobi, Ahmedabad, Nenpur, Gondal, Rajkot, Bochasan



Swamishri greets all after performing the re-murti-pratishtha rituals, Nairobi

## OCTOBER

LIMURU: 1–2 & NAIROBI: 2–7

3, Thursday

At about 11.00 a.m., Swamishri arrived in the inner sanctum of the mandir to perform the re-murti-pratishtha rituals of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev and Shri Guru Parampara and the *pratishtha* of the new *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* and inaugurated the mandir in 1999.

Shrutiprakash Swami conducted the re-pratishtha rituals. Swamishri performed the rituals of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Tyagvallabh Swami performed the rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and other senior sadhus performed the rituals of the other *murtis*. Swamishri also

performed the *pujan* rituals of all the *murtis*. Thereafter, he blessed the assembly, “Shastriji Maharaj disregarded the difficulties and problems he faced and installed the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. We have inherited the principle and tradition he established. Thus, consolidate them in one’s life and never give up the principle he propagated.”

At 12 noon, Swamishri and all performed the *murti-pratishtha arti*. The evening celebration assembly, arranged on the neighbouring Premier Club grounds, commemorated 20 years of the mandir inauguration ceremony. A wonderful drama-cum-ballet, ‘A Dream Come True’ (*Sapna Thaya Sakar*), was enacted by 175 children, youths and seniors. The inputs for the ballet were given by Amrutswarup Swami and the script was written by Paramkirti Swami. In conclusion,



Swamishri blessed, “Everything is accomplished [on the spiritual path] after attaining faith in God. The drama was well scripted. It gave great joy. One who has faith experiences joy.”

#### 4, Friday

After his morning puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Guru Parampara to be installed in the BAPS *hari* mandirs in the South Zone (Nairobi), Thika (Kenya) and Lira (Uganda).

### AHMEDABAD & NENPUR: 7-10

#### 7, Monday, Nairobi, Ahmedabad and Nenpur

In the morning, Swamishri was given a devotional farewell from the Nairobi mandir and his flight departed for Ahmedabad at 12.04 p.m. Swamishri landed at Ahmedabad airport at 8.14 p.m. (10.44 p.m., IST) and then travelled to the BAPS farm (Shantivan) in Nenpur. Swamishri retired for the night at 1.20 a.m. (IST).

After Swamishri’s hectic satsang tour in Africa he took rest for the next two days in Nenpur.

#### GONDAL: 10-29

During Swamishri’s stay the special evening assemblies held were as follows: Sharad Purnima (13), Bal Din (14), Diwali Celebration (27) and New Year’s Day and Annakut (28).

#### 10, Thursday, Nenpur, Ahmedabad, Gondal

At 11.30 a.m., Swamishri arrived from Nenpur at the Ahmedabad mandir. After doing Thakorji’s darshan and giving darshan to the devotees Swamishri took lunch and rest.

At 5.30 p.m., Swamishri travelled to Rajkot by flight and thereafter proceeded to Gondal. Swamishri was welcomed at Akshar Mandir by the Gondal Gurukul Band. After doing darshan in the Akshar Deri and of Thakorji in the mandir Swamishri was welcomed with a garland.



Swamishri performs his daily puja on the day of Chopda Pujan, Gondal

#### 18, Friday

After completing his morning puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Meghraj Chokdi (Modasa) and Mota Sakhpur (Gondal region).

#### 27, Sunday; Diwali and Chopda Pujan

In Swamishri’s morning puja, the main stage was decorated with the account books of devotees. After completing his puja, Swamishri performed *pujan* of the account books of Akshar Mandir. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Today is Diwali. May all be happy physically, mentally and financially. I pray that you all progress in your worldly affairs and on the path of satsang.”

In the evening, the annual Chopda Pujan rituals commenced in the presence of senior sadhus and thousands of devotees seated on the vast grounds of Akshar Chowk. Swamishri came and gave darshan to all.

#### 28, Monday; New Year’s and Annakut Celebrations

During Swamishri’s morning puja a grand *annakut* of 1,186 vegetarian foods had been arranged on the stage of Yogi Sabha Hall.

Thereafter, Swamishri inaugurated audio publications by Swaminarayan Aksharpith: Hindi Vachanamrut and the Biography of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Part 2.



On New Year's day, a grand *annakut* was arranged in Swamishri's morning puja on the stage of Yogi Sabha Hall

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "It is New Year's day today. My blessings to you all. You also have the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. May you all be happy in body, mind and wealth. However, one should not be attached to and infatuated with them. You should have attachment to Bhagwan and Sant. Secondly, whatever work we do out of harmony will be accomplished, otherwise it will get spoilt."

Later on, Swamishri went for darshan of the *annakut* in the Akshar Deri and performed *arti*. Thereafter, Swamishri went to the main *annakut* in the mandir. He joined in the singing of *thals*, and performed Govardhan puja and then Thakorji's *arti*.

#### RAJKOT: 29-31

##### 29, Thursday, Gondal, Rajkot

At 6.45 p.m., Swamishri departed from Gondal and was welcomed by the youth band at the Rajkot mandir. A beautiful *annakut* was arranged in the Nilkanth *abhishek mandap*. After doing darshan and *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni, Swamishri proceeded towards the mandir for darshan.

#### NOVEMBER

##### RAJKOT: 1-10

During Swamishri's stay the special themed assemblies held were 20th Anniversary Celebration of the Chhatralaya (3), Devotees of Jamnagar took *labh* (6), Prabodhini Ekadashi (8) and Kirtan Bhakti programme (9).

##### 7, Thursday

After his morning puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *pujan* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Dolatpura (suburb of Junagadh) and Jargali (Mahuva).

##### 8, Friday; Prabodhini Ekadashi

To mark the celebration of Prabodhini Ekadashi fresh vegetables were arranged before Shri Nilkanth Varni in the *abhishek mandap*. Before Thakorji in the mandir, three types of offerings were arranged: middle shrine (Dham, Dhami and Mukta) – vegetables; first shrine (Shri Harikrishna Maharaj) – fruits; and the last shrine (Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj) – dry fruits and spices. Swamishri was pleased on doing darshan and *arti* of Thakorji and the *hathadi annakut*.

Thereafter, Swamishri arrived on the main stage of the large assembly hall to do his morning puja. Here, too, a variety of vegetables and





Swamishri performs arti of Thakorji and the hathadi annakut, Rajkot

fruits were arranged. About 300 male and female youths had arranged the vegetables, with designs created by *yuvatis*, from 11.00 a.m. on the previous day till 5.00 a.m. Swamishri praised their devotion. After completing his puja, Swamishri took a few vegetables in his hand and displayed them one by one: brinjals, carrots, *parvar*, cauliflower, chillis, potatoes and others.

In his blessings Swamishri said, “All these vegetables grow from the same soil. This means that they arise from one source. There are so many varieties of vegetables, which is the work of Shriji Maharaj. He is the all-doer. No matter what occurs [even problems] Shriji Maharaj is the all-doer. A devotee who is swayed by miseries and joys is not a true devotee. A true devotee remains stable in whatever state and condition Shriji Maharaj keeps him.”

## 9, Saturday; Kirtan Bhakti

In the evening kirtan bhakti programme by swamis, Swamishri briefly played the *ghughra*, *kartal* and *jhanjh* and gave his divine bliss to all. In culmination to the programme, Swamishri sang, “Akshar-Purushottam *dayālu* Prabhu Akshar-Purushottam...” The entire congregation was in raptures on hearing Swamishri sing and all cherished the unique occasion.

## BOCHASAN: 10–28

### 10, Sunday, Rajkot, Bochasan

At 6.00 p.m., Swamishri and his entourage of swamis departed by flight from Rajkot and landed at Vadodara airport at 6.30 p.m. Thereafter, Swamishri proceeded to Bochasan and arrived at the BAPS Mandir at 8.15 p.m. amidst a sparkling welcome of lighted *divas*.

### 12, Tuesday; Dev Diwali

Every year on this day (Kartik Punam) a grand *annakut* is offered to Thakorji. Prior to his morning puja, Swamishri performed the *annakut arti*.

In the evening, Swamishri presided over the



Swamishri plays the kartals during a kirtan bhakti programme, Rajkot

Dev Diwali celebration assembly themed on ‘The Sanstha’s Progress Based on the Principles Taught in the Vachanamrut’. The programme was interlaced with speeches, videos and skits:

- Sanstha’s Progress Based on Upasana: Sarvamangal Swami.  
Consolidatory Speech: Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami.
- Sanstha’s Progress Based on Agna: Jnanpriya Swami.  
Consolidatory Speech: Pujya (Kothari) Bhaktipriya Swami.
- Sanstha’s Progress Based on Sadbhav and Paksh: Atmaswarup Swami.  
Consolidatory Speech: Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami.
- Sanstha’s Progress Due to the Satpurush (Guru): Pujya Dr Swami.
- Members of Adas Yuvak Mandal performed a traditional dance.
- Swamishri inaugurated an audio publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpith, *Sant Samagam*, Part 12, containing elaborations on various Vachanamruts by the *sad-guru* swamis.
- Swamishri was honoured with ornate flower garlands by senior swamis.

In conclusion, Swamishri addressed the mammoth assembly, “Shriji Maharaj himself came on earth and took a human form like us to give his

bliss in many ways. This was his immense grace upon us. He also gave us a living tradition of Gunatit gurus.

“The virtues of *subradbbhav* [friendly feelings] and *ekta* [unity] will elevate us. Firstly, one must have the desire, ‘I want to inspire harmony [*samp*].’ Therein lies Shriji Maharaj’s great *rajipo*. To inspire harmony one has to give up one’s mind’s inclination, one has to make efforts and sacrifices for others, one has to become helpful to others and one must not have any expectations from others.”

## 26, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for 16 BAPS *hari* mandirs and the foundation stone-laying ceremonies of four BAPS *hari* mandirs. The new *hari* mandirs were: Bochasan Zone: 1. Navakhal, 2. Chandanpur, 3. Vrundavan, 4. re-*pratishtha* of Kalyanpura, 5. Santpura, 6. Ganeshpura, 7. Nilkanthpura, 8. Ravpura, 9. Khadoli (*murtis* of Ghanshyam Maharaj and Guru Parampara.) and 10. Virsad.

Matar-Radhu Zone: Bhailakui. Sankari Zone: Ghata (*murtis* of Ghanshyam Maharaj and Guru Parampara), Vyara (*murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj) and re-*pratishtha* of Bajipura *hari* mandir. Ahmedabad City: Nava Naroda. Surendranagar City: Bhadreshi.

In all, Swamishri invoked the Divine in 105 *murtis* and thereafter performed the *arti*.



Swamishri performs *arti* of Thakorji in the Dev Diwali celebration assembly, Bochasan



Swamishri performs the *pratishtha* rituals, Bochasan



## MUMBAI: 28–30

### 28, Thursday, Bochasan, Mumbai

During late afternoon, Swamishri travelled to Vadodara and departed by flight at about 6.30 p.m. and landed at Kalina Airport in Mumbai at 7.32 p.m. Swamishri arrived at the Swaminarayan Kala Kendra in Vashi at 9.30 p.m. He performed

the inauguration rituals of the Kala Kendra and thereafter did darshan of the mandir Thakorji before retiring to bed. ♦

*From Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas.  
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekjivandas*

# Sharad Purnima Festival

13, Sunday 2019; Gondal

In Swamishri's presence, the 235th birthday of Gunatitanand Swami was celebrated in the evening on the grounds of Akshar Mandir. The celebration theme was based on the Vachanamrut. It comprised speeches, five *artis* and a traditional dance by children and youths. The programme was as follows:

- Glory of the Vachanamrut: Atmatrupt Swami.
- Gunatitanand Swami's Life and Work: Viveksagar Swami.
- Moksha *nu* Dwar (Gadadha I 54): Anandswarup Swami.
- Stuti-Ninda (Loya 17): Ishwarcharan Swami.
- Atma-Paramatma: Dr Swami.
- Inauguration of Swaminarayan Aksharpith publications: 1. Vachanamrut in Kannad language, translated by Girija Shastri, 2. Sant Vykyanmala, Part 18 – audio publication of speeches by sadhus on the Vachanamrut.
- Swamishri blessed 1,300 devotees and six swamis who had pilgrimaged by walking 40 km from Rajkot.
- Swamishri was honoured with a garland.
- Traditional dance performed by children and youths.



Finally, Swamishri blessed the large celebration assembly, “Many give discourses but there are no transformations thereof. It is very difficult to effect transformations. Gunatitanand Swami was not only virtuous, but he instilled virtues in others [through his discourses and grace]. Till there is no transformation in oneself one remains deficient and raw. The Gunatit gurus have done transformational work. Whoever has come in their association has been transformed. This Satsang deals with transformation of souls. We are all very fortunate that we have had the association of Shastriji Maharaj.”

The celebration assembly concluded with the final, fifth, *arti*.



# LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

October–November 2019

*Inspiring incidents from the life of  
Mahant Swami Maharaj*

## OCTOBER

### SINGING CHESHTA PROPERLY

#### 1, Limuru (Kenya)

Mahant Swami Maharaj's strict adherence to singing the daily *cheshta*<sup>1</sup> properly is inspiring and reflects his deep devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his gurus. He sings it uninterrupted, slowly and with *smruti* of Maharaj and Swami. If hitches arise while singing it, he always stops and restarts it. Some inspiring incidents narrated before Swamishri by sadhus in Limuru, Kenya, regarding his resoluteness in singing the *cheshta* properly are as follows:

\* \* \*

Priyavrat Swami recalled before Swamishri, "In the year 2008, you were in Saputara [Gujarat]. One late evening, you sat down and started singing the *cheshta*. A little while later, someone came to talk to you and you listened to him and solved his problem. Then, you started singing the *cheshta* from the beginning. Shortly thereafter, the same person came to you again to talk about another thing. Again, you patiently listened to him and restarted singing the *cheshta*. In this way, the same person came to you for four times. So, you started singing the *cheshta* from the beginning four times. Then, others also came to ask you about something. In all, there were eight interruptions in your *cheshta* routine, and you restarted singing it eight times. You completed the *cheshta* after one-and-a-half hours.

\* \* \*

Shrutipriya Swami recounted an incident, "One evening, we landed at the New Delhi airport and then travelled to Akshardham by car. At that time you were a *sadguru* [senior saint]. On the way, when we were about 17 to 18 minutes from Akshardham, I switched on the audio-recording of the 18 minute (fast) *cheshta*, so that we could finish singing it by the time we reached Akshardham. I did this so that you could go to rest once we reached Akshardham at night. We reached the mandir precincts and the *cheshta* came to an end. We [attendants] were pleased. Thereafter, you completed your routine work in your room and we told you it was time to sleep. But you gently said, 'I think we should sing the *cheshta* again.' Subsequently, we spent half-an-hour singing the *cheshta* slowly and properly."

\* \* \*

Shrutipriya Swami remembered another incident of Swamishri's inclination to sing the *cheshta* properly, "You were a *sadguru* at that time. Your *vicharan* in the month of Shravan was arranged in Atladara. You had to attend *shibirs* and also take lunch or dinner daily at the devotees' homes. We (attendants) were aware that you preferred to sing the *cheshta* properly and not along with the fast-paced audio version. So, after we all took dinner at a devotee's home we got into a car to return to the mandir. At that time, I switched on the audio *cheshta*. However, after reaching the mandir we were singing the last verse. We remained seated in the car to finish it, but a devotee opened your

1. Verses describing the divine nature and incidents of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.



car door and said ‘Jai Swaminarayan’. So, you got down and went to your room. After washing your face, you sat down and said, “Let’s sing the *cheshta* all over again.”

The swamis seated before Swamishri exclaimed, “Couldn’t you have continued by singing the last verse?” Swamishri replied, “Then I would become habituated [in singing it in that way]. It is a tradition and command [to sing it entirely in one session].”

Swamishri practises all the bhakti rituals of *arti*, *darshan*, *katha* (discourses), *cheshta* and *thal* mindfully and heartfully.

## PROSTRATING TO YOUTHS

### 2, Limuru

Atmatrupt Swami recalled an incident of Swamishri’s humility and glory for the devotees. “It was 1991. I and other students were staying at the Akshar-Purushottam Chhatralaya in Vidyanagar. You once came there. At that time, about 12 of us had decided to take the *sadhu-diksha*. To strengthen our resolve further in this matter we used to have sessions with the *sadguru* swamis. So, we arranged a meeting with you at around 9.00 p.m. We came to your room and sat down before you. You wound up your work and got up. We did not know why you had got up. Then, you went farther from us and started prostrating to us. We were all shocked because we had never imagined that a *sadguru* swami would offer prostrations (*dandvats*) to us. So, we were perplexed as to what to do. So, before we could think of stopping you, you had done three *dandvats*. Thereafter, you came and sat on your seat and gave an inspiring talk.”

Swamishri offered prostrations to the youths out of profound glory (*mahima*) for their resolve to renounce their worldly attachments and homes.

## BHAGWAN’S JOY

### 10, Ahmedabad

After Swamishri’s medical check-up, Dr Vrajlal advised, “Swami, when you sleep at night you should do so continuously for six hours and not

have any breaks.”

Swamishri replied, “Whether I get sleep or not I feel joyful.”

The attendant sadhus asked, “What type of joy? Is it Bhagwan’s joy?”

Swamishri replied, “Yes.” And then he added, “*Aksharam aham Purushottam dasosmi* [I am Akshar and the servant of God].” Swamishri further revealed, “It doesn’t make any difference whether I’m awake or asleep.”

## REASON FOR BEING TENSION-FREE

### 22, Gondal

Gurumanan Swami asked Swamishri, “Presently, the construction work of Akshardham in Robbinsville [USA] is going on and the work of mandirs in Abu Dhabi, South Africa, Australia and other places is going on. Do you experience any tension about this?”

Swamishri calmly said, “No.”

“What’s the reason for that?”

Swamishri revealed, “Maharaj and Swami are doing it all. They are the doers of everything. I am not doing anything. I’m an agent [an intermediary]! When Maharaj and Swami are doing everything, where is the need to worry? I strongly believe that Maharaj and Swami are the all-doers.”

## NOVEMBER

### DESPITE HIS PAINFUL CRAMPS

#### 14, Bochasan

After having breakfast, Swamishri experienced cramps in his left arm. He remained seated and started treating the problem himself by pressing it with his other hand. No one around him perceived his problem. At that time, a senior swami brought a flower garland and offered it to him. A photo was clicked and, in spite of the painful cramp, Swamishri smiled. Then, Swamishri got up and folded his hands to the swamis seated before him. This, too, he did so in spite of his painful cramp. As soon as Swamishri entered the lift to return to his room he started clapping to

the audio *dhun* being played. Again, he did this despite the pain in his cramped hand.

After getting some treatment in his room Swamishri's cramps subsided.

Swamishri never utters about or reveals his

physical pains to others. He silently tolerates and makes others happy. ♦

*From Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahmapatsaldas.  
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekshivandas*

# ANSWERS AND REVELATIONS

October–November 2019

*When questions were posed to Mahant Swami Maharaj he revealed his spiritual understanding, perspective and sometimes his own spiritual state. Let us see some of his fascinating answers and revelations*

## OCTOBER

Q. What should we do to please you?

A. (Have) faith (*nishtha*) and (observe) dharma-*niyam*. (4, Nairobi)

■ Purity of mind and heart is most important. One should not be mentally cunning and deceptive. Be fervent in purifying one's heart.

■ When one believes oneself to be superior than others then things [relations and situations] get spoilt. Then, dirt and filth fills one's mind.

■ Keep an eye on one's faults. Ego is dirt and wherever it appears it spoils everything. (16, Gondal)

■ You won't be able to follow any *niyam* when you apply your intellect. However, when you apply your heart – meaning, having bhakti and obeying the commands of Bhagwan and Sant – then things will work out. The intellect will keep on arguing. (17, Gondal)

■ When a dirty person sits next to you, you won't like it. Similarly, God does not like deceit, fraud and hypocrisy because they are like dirt. (18, Gondal)

■ A mother never loses sight of her child no matter where the child is playing. Likewise, God

keeps a humble devotee in his heart and persists in purifying his heart. (20, Gondal)

## NOVEMBER

■ Bhagwan dislikes worldly and crass talks and thus runs away. By doing (or engaging in) *katha* and kirtan Bhagwan is pulled towards you and you become dear to him.

■ Bhagwan adopts us even if our mind remains 99% in *sansar* (worldly matters) and 1% in him. (4, Rajkot)

■ Through satsang one benefits internally. Internal benefit means transformation of life. Then, nothing else needs to be done.

■ One who bears pain and difficulties for Bhagwan becomes happy. Though this (process) is not visible one becomes happy. (5, Rajkot)

■ Perceiving others' faults and harbouring ego and jealousy are all trash. Do not collect them. (13, Bochasan)

■ One benefits a lot by perceiving others to be pure, whereas, seeing others' faults is wrong and one never experiences inner happiness. ♦ (19, Bochasan)



# Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Mukhpath Mahotsav

21-23 January 2020, Gadhada



A group photo of 'Karika-Jayi Award' winners with  
Puja Kothari Swami and Bhadrash Swami

Students of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, Sarangpur, participated in the first scholarly Sanskrit memorization event entitled 'Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Mukhpath Mahotsav', held in Gadhada in the esteemed presence of Puja Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami).

The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Mukhpath Mahotsav entailed the memorization and understanding of 560 verses and *karikas* of the *Swaminarayan-siddhant-sudha* – a traditional scholarly Sanskrit text, authored by Mahamahopadhyay Bhadrash Swami, which establishes and substantiates the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan's principles according to Vedic scriptures such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita.

After the inaugural ceremony, the students were evaluated through: (1) a written exam (2) *mukhpath* (oral) (3) and a *shastrartha* (scriptural debate), testing the students' ability to recall, understand and explain the *karikas*. In the evening assembly, sadhus and *sadhaks* innovatively sang the verses and *karikas* of the *Swaminarayan-siddhant-sudha*.

The second day began with a *karika samuh gan* in front of the central shrine of the mandir. Following this, the students participated in the two-hour 'Karika Challenge' – an interactive 8-round quiz that tested the students' comprehensive knowledge of what they had memorized. The tasks included grammatically analyzing *karikas*, reciting a *karika* based on a pictorial representation of its meaning, and recalling sequential verses. In the evening, the

students enjoyed an enthralling assembly focused on Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj's divine virtues.

The final day commenced with a *karika samuh gan* along the banks of the sacred Ghela River. The atmosphere was transformed as Vedic prayers and Sanskrit verses resonated across the divine river in the early morning. Students then participated in a *nagar yatra*, honouring Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami and the *Swaminarayan-siddhant-sudha* text in a *palkhi* procession through the holy village of Gadhada.

Thereafter, in a question-answer session with Puja Kothari Swami the students acquired invaluable guidance on how to tackle the challenges they encounter.

The day culminated with the awards ceremony in the presence of Puja Kothari Swami and other sadhus. The students were felicitated according to their performances: 23 students completely memorized all 560 verses and *karikas*; 9 students memorized over 300 *karikas*; and 19 students memorized over 100 *karikas*.

The assembly concluded with Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj's blessings, "Everyone has a strong resolve, without which memorizing would be an impossible undertaking in today's age. But you are all determined and have a desire to please Swami Bapa.

"Memorization provides numerous benefits, including the cultivation of intellectual strength and development of grasping power. Since memorization requires time, it is necessary to adjust your sleep and diet. Thus, diligence and sacrifice are compulsory... But no matter what, strive to earn the *rajipo* of Swami Bapa. Everyone should keep a target of memorizing all 560 Sanskrit *karikas*.

"You all are studying Sanskrit, so make sure to study exceptionally well. This is all Pramukh Swami's and Yogi Bapa's work. So, by memorizing these *karikas*, we will be very pleased." ◆

## Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro

24 January 2020



Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro began his first-ever state trip to India with a visit to Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi.

As the chief guest at India's 71st Republic

Day Parade, President Bolsonaro visited with a 50-member delegation, including his two young daughters, eight ministers, four members of the Brazilian Parliament, senior officials and a large business delegation.

After a traditional welcome, President Bolsonaro and his delegation offered their respects at the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir and performed *abhishek*. They also viewed the educational Sanskruti Vihar boat ride.

Regarding his visit to Akshardham, President Bolsonaro noted, "This is truly a dedication of selfless service. Akshardham is impressive in terms of traditions, culture, wisdom and grandness." ♦

## Myanmar President Win Myint

26 February 2020



Myanmar President Win Myint and First Lady Daw Cho Cho visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi as part of an official state visit to India. The 28-member Myanmar delegation also included the Union Minister for International Cooperation Mr. U Kyaw Tin, Union Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Mr. Thura U Aung Ko, Union Minister for Transport and Communications Mr. U Thant Sin Maung, Chief Minister Rakhine State Mr. U Nyi Pu and Myanmar Ambassador to India

Mr. Moe Kyaw Aung.

President Myint was traditionally greeted by Gnanmuni Swami on behalf of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, the sixth spiritual leader of BAPS.

"I am delighted to pay a visit to the Swaminarayan Akshardham Temple, home to rich art and architecture that demonstrates the rich culture and traditions of Hinduism," President Myint said.

President Myint, along with the delegation offered their respects at the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir and performed *abhishek* to share sentiments for world peace and harmony.

The Myanmar delegation then viewed the Gajendra Pithika (Elephant Plinth) that features 148 lifelike carved stone elephants depicting messages of social harmony, peace, and spirituality. They also experienced the Sanskruti Vihar boat ride exhibition that displays 10,000 years of India's heritage and contributions to society. ♦



## INDIA

### NATIONAL MEDICO-SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE 2020

14–16 February 2020, Sarangpur



Around 500 doctors, dentists and other medical professionals, together with their families, attended the 25th National Medico-Spiritual Conference held in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami.

The conference was themed ‘Guru Roon Ada Kem Karie: Krutarthata, Krutagnata, Kartavya’ (How to Fulfil Our Obligation to Our Guru: Attainment, Gratitude, Duty). The delegates were guided on life-centric topics based on the saintly life, selfless works and inspiring teachings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj through speeches by senior and other experienced sadhus, panel discussions, workshops, audio-visual presentations and skits.

### PLACEMENT OF FIRST STONE PILLAR

#### BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir

20–26 February 2020, Jodhpur

On 26 February 2020, the first stone pillar of the under-construction BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandir in Jodhpur was ceremonially placed into position by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.



The Vedic *mahapuja* rituals for this auspicious occasion were performed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami in the presence of over 1,200 devotees and invited dignitaries.

Among the dignitaries present were: Mahant Shri Ramprasadji Maharaj, High Court Justice Shri Vinit Mathur, Collector of Jodhpur Shri Prakash Rajpurohit, Police Commissioner of Jodhpur Shri Praful Kumar, Shri Gauravbhai Pravinbhai Shah, Former Mayor Shri Rameshwarji Dadhich and Former Mayor Shri Ghanshyamji Ojha.

As part of the week-long celebrations, on 20 February 2020, over 2,000 women devotees and well-wishers of Jodhpur participated in a devout Kalash and Pothi Yatra by carrying auspicious water pots and cloth-wrapped copies of the Shrimad Bhagvat scripture.

Then, in the evening assemblies from 23 to 25 February, Mahant Param Pujya Ramprasadji Maharaj of the Bada Ramdwara Math delivered discourses on the life of Shri Narsinh Mehta and his faith in God. In the afternoon assemblies, Yogiprem Swami discoursed on the Shrimad Bhagvat and devotional bhajans were sung by BAPS sadhus.

Prior to these celebrations, on 17 February 2020, Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj had

performed the *pujan* of this first stone pillar in Atladara in the presence of devotees of Jodhpur and others.

## UK & EUROPE

### KISHORE-KISHORI MANDAL WINTER CAMP 27–31 December 2019



The UK Kishore-Kishori Mandal organized special winter camps at BAPS Swaminarayan mandirs in London and Leicester titled “My Satsang: My journey with Bapa”. The camps focused on understanding and developing their relationship with the Satpurush.

Key messages were presented by learned swamis and experienced volunteers during the engaging and inspiring sessions. These were followed by short group discussions and activities in which delegates consolidated their understanding.

In addition, Q&A sessions with swamis provided further guidance and clarity to the delegates.

Amongst other activities, delegates participated in garland making, making cupcakes to be offered to Nilkanth Varni and other devotional and recreational activities.

## ASIA-PACIFIC

### BLOOD DONATION CAMPS 2019 3–15 December 2019, Australia

All BAPS mandirs in metropolitan cities and, for the first time, regional centres, such as, Shepparton, Geelong, Ballarat, organized blood



donation camps during the month of December.

A total of 404 people donated either blood or plasma, which equates to around 189 litres of blood.

### BAPS SWAMINARAYAN SANSTHA RECEIVES COMMUNITY AWARDS ON AUSTRALIA DAY 26 January 2020, Perth & Melbourne, Australia



BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha was presented the ‘City of Wanneroo Australia Day Community Group Award’ and ‘La Trobe Australia Day Award 2020’ for its outstanding contributions to both communities.

While presenting the ‘City of Wanneroo Australia Day Community Group award’, Mayor Tracey Roberts stated, “BAPS volunteers work tirelessly to enrich the community, offering support and help through a range of outreach programmes. The committed volunteers have rallied the community to support causes including Clean Up Australia Day, the Perth Children’s Hospital Foundation, and the annual food can drive to support the Spiers Centre and Salvation Army.”

Hon. Jason Wood, Federal MP for La Trobe and Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs, presented the 'La Trobe Australia Day Award 2020' for the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha's tremendous contributions to the community in Melbourne's south-east region.

### BAL-BALIKA AND KISHORE-KISHORI ADHIVESHANS 1 February 2020



At 20 BAPS centres throughout Australia and New Zealand, a total of 942 *balaks*, *balikas*, *kishores* and *kishoris* participated in this year's *adhiveshan* themed 'Thaiye Swami Jeva: Dharma – Follow Him'.

The youngsters memorized scriptural excerpts relating to the Akshar-Purushottam Upasana, and also participated in painting, essay writing and Vachanamrut elaboration competitions.

For the past four months the participants had prepared, practiced and memorized for the *adhiveshan*, especially using their summer holidays.

At each centre, the day began with an assembly to highlight the benefits of the *adhiveshan* and that by participating they have attained the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, the participants were judged in the various competitions by senior *karyakars* of the various centres.

### Participating Centres

**Australia:** Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Hobart, Melbourne, Darwin, Gold Coast, Newcastle, Perth, Griffith, Shepparton,

Sunshine Coast, Tarneit, Toowoomba, Cranbourne.

**New Zealand:** Auckland, Hamilton, Christchurch, Wellington.

## MIDDLE EAST

### BAPS HINDU MANDIR FOUNDATION COMMENCED

13–14 February 2020, Abu Dhabi, UAE



Marking a major construction milestone, the concrete pouring ceremony for the raft foundation of the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi took place in the presence of Akshaymuni Swami, Brahmavihari Swami, His Excellency Pavan Kapoor, the Indian Ambassador to the UAE and His Excellency Shri Vipul, The Consul General of India to Dubai, Dr Omar Al-Muthanna, CEO of the Community Development Authority and Mohandass Saini, CEO of Shapoorji Pallonji & Co. Ltd., and other distinguished guests.

Special prayers for the project were offered after which Brahmavihari Swami gave a detailed report of the project.

Dr Omar Al-Muthanna also addressed the assembly, stating, "We want this country to not just be a residency, we want you to feel at home. It is always positive to inject our community with religious individuals irrespective of their religion and this is our commitment to you. We wanted to be sure that we have selected the right partner; today is an excellent example that we have selected the right partner – BAPS."

Attendees then proceeded to the construction



site, where prayers were offered prior to the first layer of fly-ash concrete mix being poured into the foundation. This occasion marked the largest such single pour of concrete in the UAE: 3,000 cubic metres of concrete mix consisting of 55% fly ash, making the Mandir foundation environmentally friendly.

Moreover, more than 300 hi-tech sensors have been embedded at 10 different levels to provide online active data of stress, pressure, temperature and seismic events for the next 50 years. Professor Kishida Tadahiro of Khalifa University, who was also present, along with Snehal Patel, a foundation engineer of BAPS Canada, will conduct research on the data collected by the sensors.

Once the raft foundation solidifies, the rest of the foundation features will be completed in stages.

Having begun at 6:00 p.m. on 13 February, the concrete pour was completed 20 hours later at 2:00 p.m. on 14 February 2020.

## BAPS CHARITY

### WINTER CLOTHES & FOOD COLLECTION FOR THE HOMELESS

December 2019, UK

BAPS Charities centres in Preston, Luton, Chigwell, Oxford and other places collected garments and food for the homeless. The collected items were handed for distribution to local charities serving the homeless.

(Cont. from p. 32)

Pramukh Swami Maharaj through darshan and personal meetings. I have since made eleven annual trips to India.

Finally, the most important knowledge I gained through the Satsang exams is that Bhagwan Swaminarayan remains eternally *pragat* through our gurus. This was one of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's purposes for coming to Earth – to establish an unbroken line of Brahmaswarup



**Preston:** 400 garments of warm clothing; 210 cans of tinned food and 75 dry food packets were deposited at the Preston branch of Emmaus, a UK-based charity “working together to end homelessness”.

**Luton:** More than 100 cans of tinned food and a variety of packaged foods were deposited at Luton Foodbank, a local charity that aims to “eradicate food poverty in Luton and provide free, nutritionally balanced and culturally appropriate food to people in hardship or distress”.

**Chigwell:** A variety of warm items of clothing were given to The Whitechapel Mission, a charity which has been serving the homeless in the East London area for 143 years.

**Oxford:** More than 200 kg of packaged food items were collected and given to the Abingdon and Didcot foodbanks, which have been set up “to meet the needs of people who are going through a period of crisis and are struggling to feed themselves and their families”. ♦

Gunatit Sants. Through reading for the exams, I began to understand the concept of Pragat Brahmaswarup. So, passing these exams has been so empowering to me. Earning Pramukh Swami Maharaj's and Mahant Swami Maharaj's *rajpo* have been the greatest gift.

*Jerry Barr is a PhD candidate in English Literature at the University of Houston, where he also teaches poetry and essay writing.* ♦

## PUJYA SATSANGIJIVAN SWAMI

A stalwart who tirelessly served the BAPS Satsang in Ahmedabad

Age: 70

Passed Away: 9 March 2020

Originally a native of Bamangam in the Charotar region of Gujarat, Pujya Satsangijivan Swami was a pillar of the BAPS Satsang, who served tirelessly to ensure the growth of satsang in Ahmedabad, and the surrounding villages and cities. He was initiated into the sadhufold by Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the historic Kalash Mahotsav occasion of Ahmedabad Mandir on 3 December 1973.

Even prior to this, Swamishri had spotted his potential and in 1974, Swamishri appointed him as the *kothari* (chief administrator) of the BAPS Mandir in Ahmedabad. He served as *kothari* until 2015.

As per the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Satsangijivan Swami built 36 *hari* mandirs (*sanskardhams*) in the suburbs of Ahmedabad city, 24 *hari* mandirs in the surrounding villages and also contributed significantly to the building of the *shikharbaddha* mandirs in Mehsana, Dholka and Himmatnagar.

He deeply revered and had a very close friendship with Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who had total trust in the work of Satsangijivan Swami. He was an unsung stalwart who sacrificed all personal comforts to serve the Sanstha. His support during the Sanstha's major international festivals in Ahmedabad in 1981, 1985, 1992 (Gandhinagar), 2007 and 2012 reflected his single-minded dedication to serve the Sanstha.

He maintained close, cordial and affectionate bonds with all devotees, young and old, and



was always willing to help them in whatever way necessary.

More than his tangible contributions, his saintliness, humility and calm demeanour left a lasting impression on all. He always avoided the public limelight, yet sincerely fulfilled all his duties.

Moreover, even amid all his physically taxing duties, for over two decades he ate only one meal a day and observed waterless fasts on *ekadashis*. Health difficulties never curbed his drive and enthusiasm to serve and he always attended the five *artis* in the mandir, the daily discourses and offered his personal devotion to Thakorji.

Pujya Dr Swami (Mahant of Ahmedabad Mandir) eulogized that Satsangijivan Swami's departure was a great loss to the Sanstha and his exemplary life and tireless efforts in fostering the massive growth of satsang in Ahmedabad is noteworthy and inspirational for all.

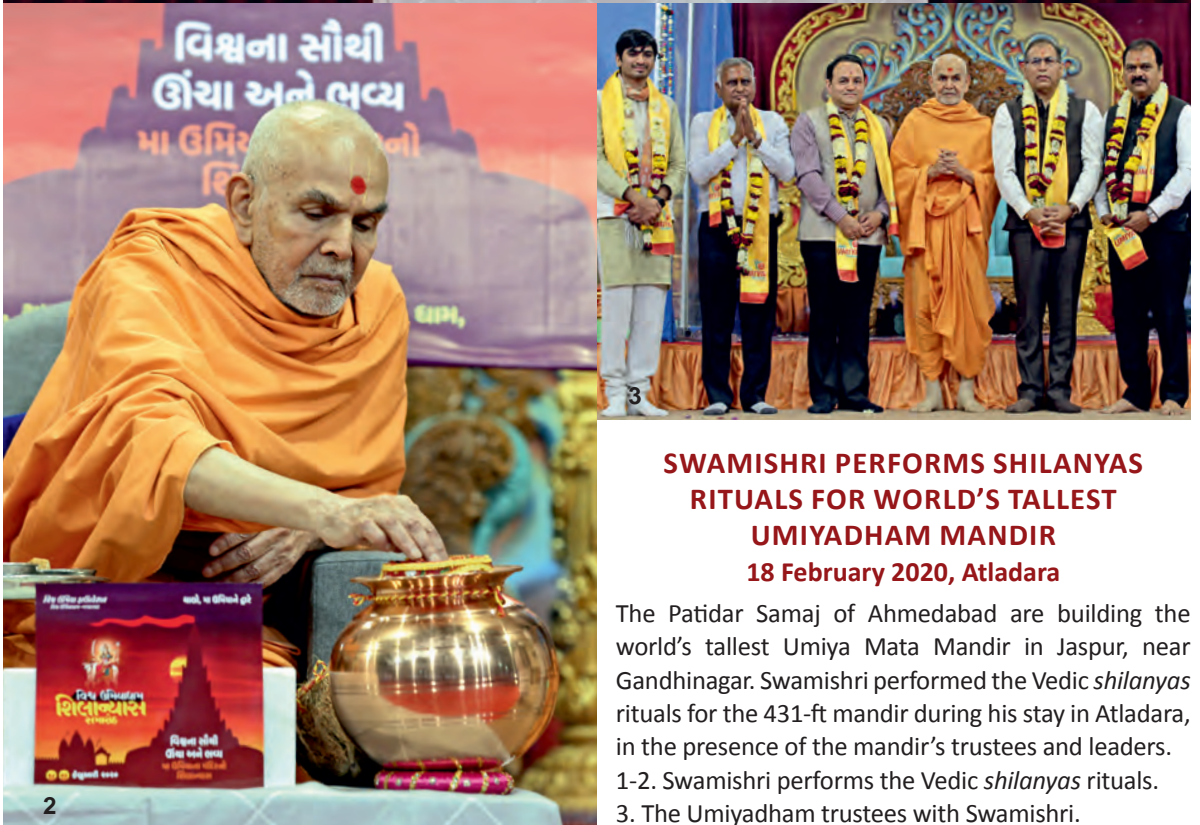
Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the last rites, prior to which he also paid glowing tributes to Satsangijivan Swami's saintliness and his untiring efforts for the growth of satsang in Ahmedabad.

HH Mahant Swami Maharaj paid tributes to him by praising his saintliness and selfless *seva* for the Sanstha.

May we all be inspired by his *nishtha*, *seva*, bhakti, humility and dedication. ♦



1



2

3

## SWAMISHRI PERFORMS SHILANYAS RITUALS FOR WORLD'S TALLEST UMIYADHAM MANDIR 18 February 2020, Atladara

The Patidar Samaj of Ahmedabad are building the world's tallest Umiya Mata Mandir in Jaspur, near Gandhinagar. Swamishri performed the Vedic *shilanyas* rituals for the 431-ft mandir during his stay in Atladara, in the presence of the mandir's trustees and leaders.

- 1-2. Swamishri performs the Vedic *shilanyas* rituals.
3. The Umiyadham trustees with Swamishri.





## SWAMISHRI VISITS THE HISTORIC LAKSHMI VILAS PALACE

17 February 2020, Vadodara

Since the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the connection between the Sampradaya and the royal Gaekwad family has always been friendly.

In 1989, the then Maharaja Shri Ranjitsinhji Gaekwad received and honoured Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the famous Lakshmi Vilas Place.

Recently, the present Maharaja Shrimant Samarjitsinhji Gaekwad affectionately welcomed and honoured Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj at his palace.

1. Swamishri and Maharaja Samarjitsinhji Gaekwad with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in front of the Lakshmi Vilas Palace.
2. Swamishri honours the Maharaja with a garland.
3. Swamishri places a garland to honour the royal seat of the Gaekwad lineage.

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