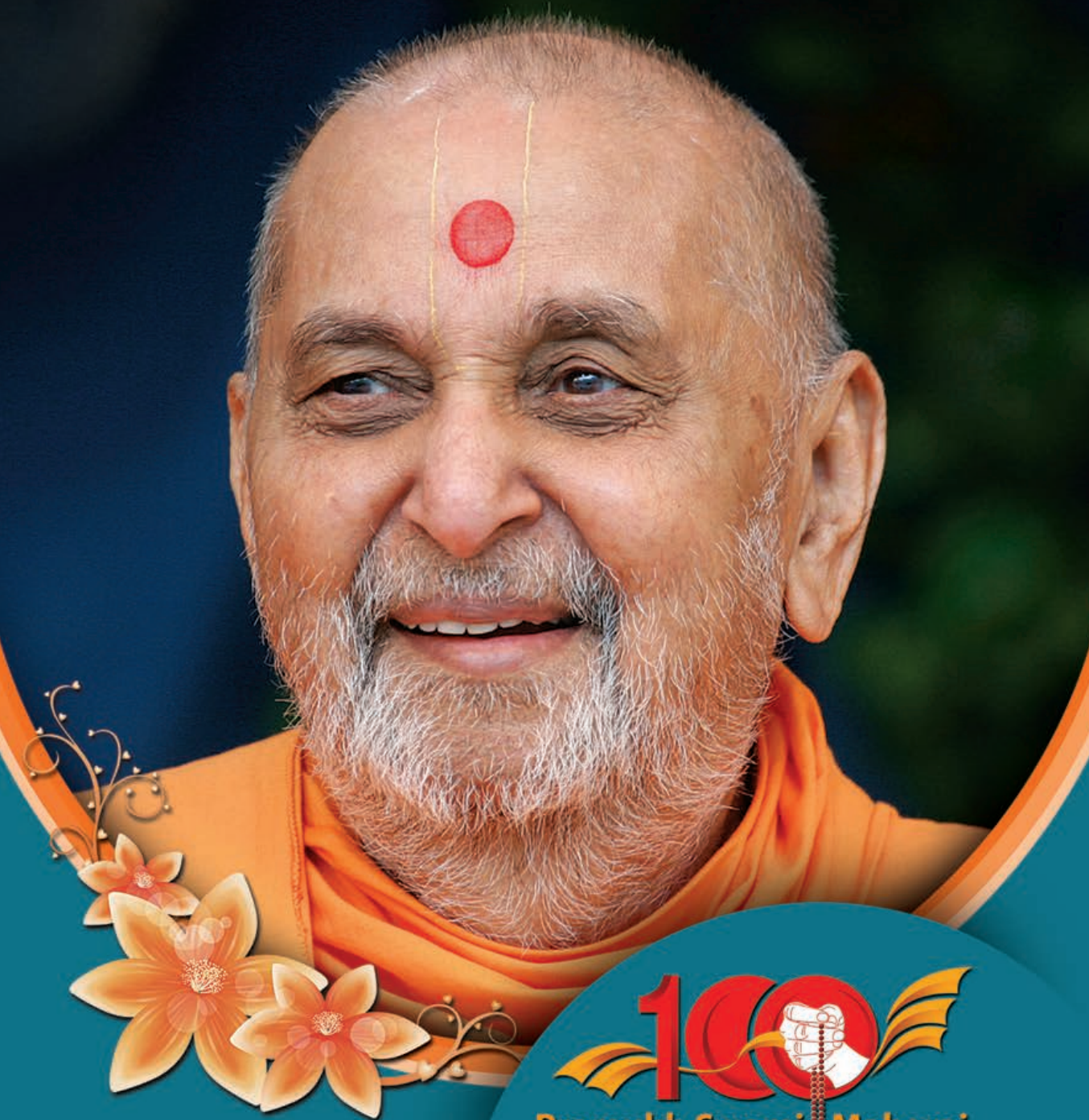


SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

March–April 2022

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



100
Pramukh Swami Maharaj
Centenary Celebrations
(1921–2022)



1. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS Mandir in Newcastle, Australia (23 October 2021, Sarangpur).
2. *Annakut* offered to Thakorji during the inauguration of the new BAPS Mandir in Newcastle, Australia (23 January 2022).
3. Swamishri performs the *pratishtha* of a Shivling to be consecrated at the Shri Hafeshwar Mahadev Mandir, near River Narmada (20 February 2022).
4. Mahant Shri Narmadasaji of Shri Hafeshwar Mandir performs *puja* of a Shivling (20 February 2022).



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

March–April 2022, Vol. 45, No. 2



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



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

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SONERI MOLIYU SUNDAR...

*Shri Hari departs from Gadhpur,
steering Dada Khachar's decorative oxen cart for his marriage...*

THE BRIDEGROOM'S PROCESSION TO BHATVADAR

On 27 January 1825, the bridegroom's procession was about to depart before sunrise from Gadhadra. The Kathi horsemen were armed with swords and saddled on their decorated horses for the auspicious event. The oxen yoked to the carts were also decorated with colourful cloths, frills, a string of bells around their necks and horns covered with cloth decorated with embroidered mini-mirrors. For Dada Khachar, a special chariot with a *shikhar* and dome was ready along with a pair of robust oxen yoked to it. The chariot had a velvet seat for Shri Hari and other decorated seats for Dada Khachar, his sisters and Nagmal.

On Shri Hari's instruction, sweet snacks like *motaiya* laddus and *sukhdi*, *ganthiya* (fried snack) and other items were prepared and stored in large trunks for all to eat along the way. All witnessed the enthusiasm Shri Hari had for Dada Khachar's marriage. But Dada Khachar's detractors did not like the lavish preparations. However, they were unable to create obstacles because of Shriji Maharaj's divine powers. They, too, were ready to join the procession out of social decorum.

Naja Jogiya, one of Shri Hari's attendants, brought the decorated mare, Manki, to him. Then, Shri Hari announced who should sit in the bullock carts, chariots and palanquins. He also instructed the *parshads* riding with him on how to provide security and protection to the entire procession along the way. Thereafter, Shri Hari mounted on Manki and pulled its reins to embark upon the journey. The armed guards fired rifles in the air to



mark the beginning of their journey and rode in front. Dada Khachar was holding the customary auspicious coconut while riding his horse. Following him were the *sadguru* swamis in canopied oxen carts, and the male and female devotees in chariots and palanquins. In the pre-dawn hour, oil torches illuminated the path. The vibrant procession advanced with the sounds of *dhhol* and *sharnais*. The devotees hailed the *jai*

of Sahajanand Swami with joy and devotion as they all departed from Gadhadra.

SHRI HARI DRIVES DADA KHACHAR'S CHARIOT

As soon as the procession reached outside Gadhpur, Shri Hari told Dada Khachar to sit in the decorated chariot. He, too, got off Manki and sat in the driver's seat of the chariot. The *parshads* prodded their horses to the front to have darshan of this divine sight. Some sadhus and devotees alighted from their carts and palanquins and came near Dada Khachar's chariot. Shri Hari was steering the oxen chariot and beaming with joy. He had become the charioteer of Dada's chariot. This special occasion did not only mirror Dada Khachar's love for Shri Hari, but also Shri Hari's inclination and love to serve his devotees.

The marriage procession reached Gundala via Raliyana. Here, Mulu Khachar wished to feast the entire procession. So, he requested Shri Hari, but Maharaj told him, "You join the procession and we will all take lunch at Malpar." Mulu Khachar agreed, however, he first wished to have his home sanctified and thus asked Maharaj to

come. Shri Hari mounted on Manki and came to his house. Mulu Khachar offered *pujan* and his wife, Sumariba, brought their two boys, Dada Khachar and Somla Khachar, before Maharaj. Shri Hari blessed them by placing his hands on their heads and prophesied, “Dada will become a great devotee and will rank among the best of *satsangis*.” Thereafter, Maharaj left.

SUGARCANE FODDER FOR OXEN

The long marriage procession slowly reached the village of Malpar. Rations for the meals had been sent well in advance. The procession halted amidst a leafy area full of trees. The village devotees, Karsan Dobariya (Patel) and Monjibhai Vipra, came there. Monji Vipra served a meal made by him to Shri Hari. The entire group was feasted and scheduled to stay the night. Karsan Patel told Shri Hari, “The oxen in your procession will require fodder, so send some disciples with me to my farm.” When some *parshads* arrived at his farm they saw a lush sugarcane field. Karsan told them, “Now, you start cutting the sugarcane for fodder. How fortunate I am to serve Dada’s procession led by Shri Hari.” The *parshads* were hesitant to cut the sugarcane crop for fodder. Karsan insisted, “Start cutting, and if you are reproached by Maharaj, I shall bear the blame.” The *parshads* started cutting the sugarcane, and tied them into bundles.

Shri Hari saw that the *parshads* had brought sugarcane instead of grass. So, he asked Karsan Patel, “What have you done? Why did you cut your expensive sugarcane crop?”

Karsan Patel replied humbly, “Maharaj, when will I get such an opportunity to serve you? Please accept my service.” Shri Hari was happy with his devotion, and knew that the hearts of the ordinary are not poor or miserly.

The next morning, the procession departed very early from Malpar and arrived at the village of Paatna. Here, opposite the riverbank of River Kalubhar, Shri Hari bathed by a well located

near a Shiv mandir. Thereafter, the sadhus and devotees also bathed by the well and completed their morning worship rituals. The procession then travelled to Dhasa village. After a brief halt, it headed towards Ingorala via the village of Methli.

In Ingorala, the local devotees, Sundarji Sheth, Lalji Sheth, Kanji Patel, Kala Patel and others, offered *pujan* to Shri Hari. They also donated money to Dada Khachar for his marriage. The devotees insisted that Shri Hari stay for a few days in their village. But Maharaj was in a hurry to leave and so left and reached Eklere. Here, on seeing the granaries to be full, Shri Hari was pleased and expressed, “This year the harvest is abundant.”

SONERI MOLITU SUNDAR

Along the way, people of many villages assembled to have darshan of Shri Hari and Dada Khachar’s marriage procession. The reason being that Bhagwan himself was driving the chariot of a devotee. Such an incident had occurred five thousands year ago when Bhagwan Krishna steered the chariot of his devotee and friend, Arjun.

Shri Hari and the procession arrived on the outskirts of Keraala village. Here, a cowherd was tending his cows while they grazed. He was attired in his traditional dress with a red cloth tied on his hip and a flute tucked in it. He had tied a red handkerchief on his head and had a large, thick staff on both his shoulders with his hands resting on it. Soon enough, he started lilting a tuneful song in his rustic voice, “*Jāmbude jāish mā ghāyal, jāmbude jāish mā, Jāmbude jaish to jāmbudā khāish mā...*” – “Beloved, do not go to the rose apple tree, do not go to the rose apple tree. If you do, then do not eat the rose apple fruits.”

Shri Hari smiled at the meaningless words of the cowherd’s song. At that time, Premanand Swami’s oxen cart came near to Maharaj’s cart. Shri Hari asked him, “Swami, did you hear what the cowherd sang?”

Premanand Swami replied, “Yes Maharaj, I heard his song.”

Shri Hari praised, “Though the lyric has no meaning the tune is very beautiful. Compose a kirtan on this tune.” Premanand Swami instantly sang melodiously, “*Soneri moliyu sundar, soneri moliyu, soneri moliyu Dharmakunvar nu...*” – “Dharmakunvar’s (Shri Hari) golden headgear is beautiful...” Premanand Swami’s song described how Shri Hari was dressed and how he appeared.

Shri Hari was very pleased and impressed with Swami’s expertise in composing and singing the kirtan instantaneously. Then, Maharaj took off his headgear and gifted it to Premanand Swami to express his blessings and joy. In reply, Premanand Swami urged, “Maharaj, wear it for the time being. It does not look good for the groom’s leader to have his head bare or uncovered.”

Shri Hari smiled and replied, “Okay, give it back to me.” Then, Premanand Swami added, “Maharaj, after returning to Gadhpur give it back to me.” Maharaj responded, “I’ll give it to you in Bhatvadar. Why should I make you wait till we return to Gadhpur.”

The marriage procession arrived at the village of Pithavdi and camped in a tree grove. Many devotees from Bhamodra, Jhinhuda, Senjal and other villages had come here for Maharaj’s darshan and to join him in the marriage procession. The devotees burst fireworks and ignited oil-soaked torches to illuminate the camp. Dinner for Shri Hari was prepared by Monji Joshi’s wife and the other devotees had prepared meals for the entire group. After having dinner, Shri Hari went to Bhaga and Mula’s house to sleep.

Early next morning, Shri Hari mounted Manki and took the road towards Gadhakda. On arriving by a river, everyone took their morning bath and travelled to Goradka. The local devotees pressed Shri Hari to stay, but Maharaj said, “Bring some dry snacks as breakfast for all.” The devotees brought *sukhdi*, laddus and *ganthiya*. Then, Maharaj and his entourage left for Meriyana. On reaching the village, Maharaj enquired, “Where is the house of Uga Chandu?” A villager led him there, and Shri

Hari dismounted from Manki and knocked on Uga’s door. Ladubai, Uga’s wife, opened the door and to her surprise saw Shri Hari. She exclaimed, “Prabhu, it’s you and that, too, at this hour!”

Shri Hari smiled and said, “Once, your husband had come to Gadhpur to invite me home. I replied that whenever I happen to travel near his village I would come, whether he was alive or not.”

GIVE ME ONE HUNDRED RUPEES AND YOUR RING

Ladubai brought a stool for Shri Hari to sit. She covered the stool with a silk-covered mattress. Then, she said, “Prabhu, I am truly blessed and fortunate that you have sanctified my home.” Shri Hari sat on the stool and Ladubai sat before him. She mentally recalled her husband’s last words before passing away, “Keep these one hundred rupees and gold ring in the chest. Whenever Maharaj comes here gift them to him.” Then, she thought that she would give them if Maharaj asked her.

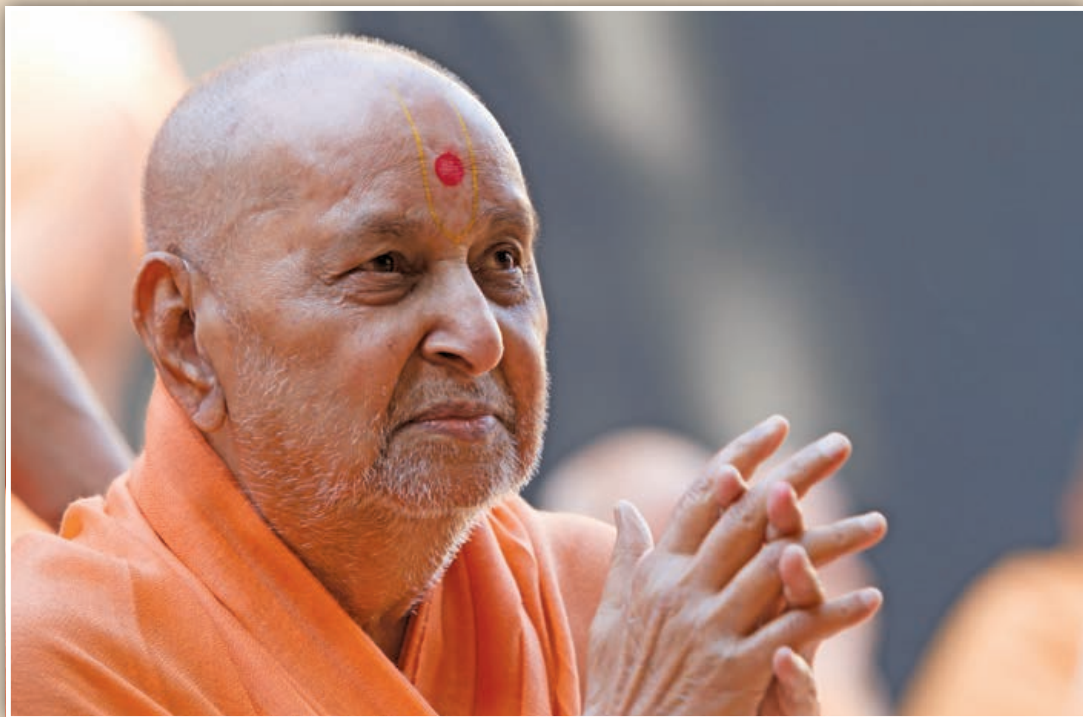
Shri Hari told her, “Ladubai, I don’t have much time. I am not thirsty. I wish to reach Bhatvadar at the earliest because Dada Khachar’s marriage is arranged for tomorrow. I must depart now. I came to fulfil my promise to your husband. Now, you will have to keep his word. Give me the hundred rupees and ring stored in the chest.” On hearing this, Ladubai burst with joy. She got up and offered the hundred rupees and gold ring. Shri Hari looked at her, blessed her and left. Ladubai stood riveted in darshan till Shri Hari was out of sight.

Shri Hari travelled from Meriyani to Bhamar and then stopped at Ghanla. Here, Krupanand Swami and his group of sadhus were present. The village devotees, Krupanand Swami and his sadhus went to the outskirts for Maharaj’s darshan. Everyone did darshan of Maharaj and experienced divine joy. Shri Hari stopped for a while and then left with a village guide towards Rajula. ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

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

HOW IMPORTANT WAS PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ?



He won no Nobel Prize. No Templeton Prize. No Bharat Ratna or Padma. How could he? He wasn't competing. On top of that, he was apolitical, low key, and self-effacing.

To find out how important a person really is, don't count their awards, likes or follows. Look at how many people turn up at their funeral. Given, you will have to wait till they pass away and it does sound a bit morbid. Yet, it's truly the acid test for how much people care for a person: funeral turn out.

There's another, less melancholic way to do the test. Look at the number of books written about a person. Not articles. Articles are a dime a dozen on the internet, even in newspapers. A

non-remarkable, generic article can be plastered together across a few days by an intern. It takes a year or more to write a book and weeks to write a thoughtful article.

There are numerous sports, film and media stars. Some have spawned franchises and empires. They're covered in national and international media. Despite this, perhaps ten books are written about each. After they pass away perhaps another ten might be written.

In contrast, seventy books have already been dedicated to Pramukh Swami Maharaj in a span of just 40 years. In future, countless more will be penned. Students will pursue PhDs on him. Encyclopaedias and historians will discuss him. His life and message will never be forgotten.

Further, you will have heard of the celebrated philosophers Plato, Socrates and Aristotle. Their messages live perhaps only in philosophy classes. Today, leaders and high profile people make grandiose speeches. But their words are written by speechwriters. Their messages never become

a way of life, because they themselves don't live by them.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj wasn't a wordsmith. His sentences were broken, but his heart was whole. He spoke from it. Indeed, it mended broken ones. What he uttered was his way of life and breath. He practised 100 times more than he taught. Yet, he served 1,000 times more than even that.

His following increased exponentially because he was true to others and himself. That's why millions still speak about him. Not once in a while, not fortnightly, but every day. Not about his talents, but his care and sacrifice for them. For 50 years, he visited countless homes and became a family member. He was grandpa, father, mother, brother, sister and friend.

Love is the most intimate measure of a person. Not their awards, even less, their words. No wonder a million hearts attended his funeral. No wonder the deluge of seventy books. No wonder the countless souls that live his message.

What was it? "You are Akshar," he said in three crisp words. Indestructible. Immortal. Divine. "Be that, not your body."

Why such a focused message? Because this lofty principle of Akshar-Purushottam, meditation, introspection, and living a caring, charitable life enhances everything you learn at school. This



is his holistic message: become a master of the spiritual and you will achieve more with the material. Look at his own success.

Spirituality doesn't impede your material life. It improves it. You love all, make more friends, judge people less, and experience more joy.

Once, in Sarangpur, some local villagers came to meet him. When the villagers enthusiastically rushed into the room, I was at the back with my head beneath one of the open windows.

And then it hit me: a brain-numbing odour of stale sweat from the villagers' clothes. They were a boisterous lot and had already surrounded Swamishri while trying to get his blessings. Even though I was sitting under an open window, I thought of leaving the room because the air was so unbreathable. I remained, however, thinking it was improper for me to leave when my guru didn't have a problem. He was sitting against a wall with no ventilation whatsoever. I wondered how he could breathe. I peeked between the villagers. Swamishri was joyful! The suffocating odour didn't disturb him. He happily patted the villagers on their sweat-drenched backs and heads as they took off their turbans. He did not judge them by their looks, clothes or smell. He judged them by their hearts. By their service. Nothing else mattered.

Is it any wonder that he was so successful? That the whole world loved him and rallied around his message of Akshar-Purushottam? ♦



AN IDEAL SAINT



INTRODUCTION

A true sadhu, or an ideal saint, is not determined by external appearances. The virtues and internal qualities in a sadhu characterize a perfect *sant*. The Shrimad Bhagvat shastra, written by Ved Vyasji, describes the 39 virtues of a true sadhu. Pramukh Swami Maharaj naturally possessed all 39 qualities and lived them throughout his life. We will focus primarily on three fundamental traits that define an ideal saint: compassion, forgiveness and equality. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's compassion, forgiveness and sense of equality had no limitations, because he saw God in all.

COMPASSION, FORGIVENESS AND EQUALITY

You're driving down the highway with your friend. A few minutes later, the car suddenly breaks down. You pull over on the shoulder and your friend gives you an outrageous solution – repaint the car. Sounds silly, doesn't it? It is. Because it's the engine that gives life to the car. No matter how attractive the exterior is, the car is meaningless without an engine.

Similarly, an ideal sadhu cannot be determined by external appearance. Ravan came disguised in the orange robes of a sage to kidnap Sitaji. But he was not a sadhu because he lacked the virtues and internal qualities that define an ideal saint.

In the Shrimad Bhagvat, Mother Earth describes the 39 virtues of God to Dharma (1.16.26–8). A sadhu who possesses these 39 virtues is considered an ideal saint and is revered like God. Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Swamishri), the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, embodied all 39 virtues in his life.

COMPASSION

Daya, or compassion, is listed as one of the primary virtues of a true sadhu in the 11th chapter of the Shrimad Bhagvat. Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami has stated, “God is the root of compassion. It is from him that all compassion is born.” It is that very God who lives through the Satpurush. So just like the rain falls for all, Swamishri's compassion had no boundaries.

In 1990, Swamishri was in London. One night, at 2:00 a.m., the attendant sadhu woke up

to witness something very surprising. Swamishri was sitting in bed, chanting something under his breath. The attendant sadhu observed him for some time. Finally, he gently touched Swamishri and asked him what he was doing. Swamishri explained that he was praying for the drought to end in Gujarat. On further enquiry by the attendant, Swamishri revealed that he had been praying for several nights consecutively.

Have we ever prayed for someone by forsaking our sleep? Have we ever prayed for even ourselves in the middle of the night? Swamishri's heart was always connected to people throughout the world. But his compassion was not limited only to humans. Bhagwan and the Satpurush are compassionate on all forms of life.

In 1987, a severe famine gripped Gujarat. Swamishri was visiting a government-operated cattle camp in Ratanpura, a small town near Rajkot. There were about 5,000 calves trying to survive the drought. Swamishri noticed that several of the calves started following him. One of the volunteers explained that no rain meant no water to drink and no fresh grass to eat. The calves had been starving for the past three days!

Swamishri's heart was shaken. His eyes welled up with tears. With a strong impression left on his mind, Swamishri arrived in Gondal. He immediately summoned Jnanprasad Swami and said, "The way those calves in Ratanpura were trailing behind me was unbearable. So, arrange to send some trucks full of fodder there right away."

In the days following, Swamishri, even during his routine activities, would become lost in deep thought: "I can't think of anything else right now. I really feel for the people and their livestock who are suffering because of the drought. In everything that I do, I think of the rain."

His compassion gave birth to a project that would change the lives of hundreds of farmers and thousands of cattle in Gujarat. Swamishri stopped all the farmers from selling their livestock. He organized cattle camps in several locations.

These facilities provided complete care for the animals until their owners were prepared to take them back.

"In the joy of others, lies our own," is born from Swamishri's compassion. On 30 April 2004 in London, Swamishri read a long letter and sighed, "There is not one happy letter. Only letters describing pain and misery... Hearing about them causes [me] much pain." Swamishri's happiness or sadness was directly correlated with the well-being of others.

FORGIVENESS

A saint who is compassionate is also naturally forgiving. *Kshantihi* means forgiveness. The Satpurush only knows how to bless and do good, but not how to curse. Just like a rose emits fragrance to those who crush it, a Satpurush always forgives those who insult, offend, harm or criticize him. He never seeks revenge or punishment.

Swamishri was once visiting Karjisan in 1994. Natubhai Patel, a devotee from America and a native resident of Dangarva village, came to Swamishri, quite upset. "Swami, I want to invite you to my town, but there is a group of people who won't let me invite you," an agitated Natubhai said. "They are jealous of your fame and are opposing your visit to my town. I have helped to build their mandir. I have financed most of their projects. But now I am not going to give them a single penny."

"Do not think like that," Swamishri said with a smile. "You have done all that service to please God and not for others. So, whether or not they invite us, do not worry about it." Natubhai had nothing further to say. He was simply touched by Swamishri's forgiving response.

On another occasion, a prominent writer continued to publish false and unfounded criticism about Swamishri in a daily newspaper for several months. Some of the sadhus and devotees were fed up. They had decided to give a strong response to these negative articles.

"There is no need for that," Swamishri calmly

said. “Did Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj ever respond to such things? I want you to promise me that you will never respond to such articles.” The sadhus tried to convince Swamishri, but he paid no heed to them. Sometime later, Swamishri met the writer at a public event. He requested the antagonistic writer to sit on the stage next to him on a sofa. Everyone was astonished to see this unimaginable sight.

A few sadhus and devotees experienced something similar on 18 June 1988 in Toronto, Canada, at Chandrakantbhai’s house in Markham. During breakfast, the sadhus mentioned that a letter had arrived from Bhadra. It read: “We have been distributing *sukhdi* (a sweet delicacy made from wheat, gur and ghee) to the families ravaged by the drought. Many people are sarcastically saying that we are probably distributing only a small portion of what we have received.”

“People will always speak,” Swamishri said. “We must perform our duty with God in mind. If you listen to such things, you will not be able to do any work. Many of those people are speaking out of ignorance. God and his holy Sadhu do not look at others’ faults. If God looked at our faults, we would never be liberated. Shriji Maharaj always looked at the good in all. We should do the same.”

The climax of his forgiving nature was reflected by his prayers for the perpetrators who had attacked Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar on 24 September 2002. Moreover, Swamishri appealed for peace (now famously known as ‘The Akshardham Response’) to stop the cycle of violence. His forgiveness restored calm.

Swamishri practised forgiveness and instilled it in others with wisdom and understanding. His ability to overlook the mistakes of others, to view the good in all, and to see God in everyone allowed him to view everyone equally.

EQUALITY

Samyam is equality, fairness and impartiality. One who sees God equally in the rich and

poor, in success and failure, in joy and misery, in the priceless and worthless is described in the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita as a Gunatit Brahmaswarup Sadhu. Swamishri was such a Gunatit Brahmaswarup Sadhu.

During Swamishri’s grand birthday celebration in Mehsana, tens of thousands of people had assembled to honour Swamishri. After the celebration, Swamishri went to Mahendrabhai Sukhadiya’s home. A poor devotee from Mahiyel was waiting outside the house to meet Swamishri as he arrived. Swamishri greeted him and began a conversation. Doctor Swami, watching from a distance, was stunned to see this sight. Someone who had just been praised and honoured by thousands of people was now meeting a poor villager with the same enthusiasm.

Swamishri was felicitated at many prominent public events, such as the Millennium World Peace Summit at the United Nations. Similarly, he also inaugurated and spoke at events in many tribal villages and areas, “God belongs to all,” Swamishri reassured them. “He does not belong just to the wealthy, educated or powerful. God belongs to those who worship him.”

Dalubhai lived in Dedvasan, a small tribal village in southern Gujarat. He was excited because Swamishri was going to visit his hut. Swamishri arrived, but there was no place for Swamishri to sit. Dalubhai’s house and cowshed were practically one. Therefore, Dalubhai cleaned a portion of the stony area in the shed for Swamishri. Swamishri sat down and helped Dalubhai perform Thakorji’s puja.

Swamishri then stood up. When he learned that Dalubhai had given up all his addictions, Swamishri embraced him. The other tribal villagers standing nearby had also given up their addictions. Swamishri was overjoyed and hugged them all. “They may be poor, but even their darshan brings peace,” Swamishri said. “They are pure. These huts are like places of pilgrimage.”

(Cont. on p. 29)



All India Bharat Sadhu Samaj Conference during the Bhagwan Swaminarayan Bicentenary Celebrations, Ahmedabad, March 1981

A BRIDGE BETWEEN ALL FAITHS

“**E**very civilization, culture and religion on this earth is like a goldmine. It is rich with values, wisdom and vision.

Let us share this legacy and construct a common platform of values for all of mankind to stand on.”

This powerful message of hope, delivered by *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj in August 2000 at the United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit in New York, reveals his vision of a world connected through unity and harmony. In his inaugural address to over 1,800 spiritual, social and world leaders in attendance from all corners of the globe, Pramukh Swami Maharaj emphasized the need for inter-religious dialogue, tolerance/acceptance and respect.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s words continue to resonate as strongly as ever and are still the basis of world peace and harmony. In an ultra-connected modern society, technological advancements have provided us with the ability to transcend boundaries of language, ethnicity, creed and culture and connect us with one another in a way that was never previously possible. Yet, amidst progress, division and prejudice continue to plague the world – fuelling disunity and intolerance.

It was to dispel such prejudices and to spread the messages of love and harmony that Pramukh

Swami Maharaj travelled from continent to continent meeting and connecting with thousands of people from various backgrounds and faiths. His purity and sincerity touched the lives of all those who came in his contact, since he treated everyone with immense love and respect.

Former President of the United States of America, Bill Clinton also recognized this quality of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, saying, “In his heart, Pramukh Swami has no distinctions.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj continuously wished for the progress and happiness of all people, regardless of the faith they followed.

In September 1999, Pramukh Swami Maharaj travelled to Israel. After visiting the birthplace of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem and meeting the Chief Rabbis of the Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem – a place of prayer and pilgrimage with great religious significance to Jews, Christians and Muslims. Placing a sanctified flower in the recess of the Wall, Pramukh Swami Maharaj recited the Shanti Path (Vedic Peace Prayer) and chanted the Swaminarayan *dhun* to pray that the wishes of all pilgrims who have visited the Wall till date and all who visit in the future are fulfilled and that all experience peace and prosperity in their lives.



Pramukh Swami Maharaj with Pope John Paul II, April 1984

To Pramukh Swami Maharaj, at the core of every living being lies the essence of the Divine. He lived by the Vedic maxim ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ – the world is one family.

In 1988, Pramukh Swami Maharaj travelled to Fatima in Portugal. There, at the basilica in the Sanctuary of Fatima, Pramukh Swami Maharaj prayed to God to fulfil the wishes of all pilgrims and devotees who had visited and would visit the basilica. At the request of the Chaplain of the Sanctuary, John Vilanova, Pramukh Swami Maharaj wrote in the visitors’ book, including a prayer that God bless all who visit the Sanctuary and that Portugal and its citizens experience peace, progress and happiness.

This sentiment was consistent wherever Pramukh Swami Maharaj travelled. He always prayed for the peace and happiness of all mankind. In addition to prayer, Pramukh Swami Maharaj reached out to build positive relationships with other faiths and foster unity and harmony.

In 1984, Pramukh Swami Maharaj travelled to the Vatican to meet Pope John Paul II. Prior to the meeting, several reporters had asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj what purpose the meeting between both spiritual heads would serve. Pramukh Swami Maharaj replied, “Apart from creating understanding and friendship, when religious heads meet, it reduces enmity between the followers of the two faiths and helps generate harmony, understanding



Swamishri with Chief Rabbis of the Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jewish faiths, September 1999

and goodwill. A single meeting, a simple dialogue can positively influence the minds of millions.”

During the meeting, Pramukh Swami Maharaj garlanded the Pope and the two religious leaders embraced. They discussed the importance of strong moral principles and teachings that form the fabric of every religion.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj then presented various gifts, which included paintings of both Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Jesus Christ. Pramukh Swami Maharaj then said, “God resides within all our hearts and provides bliss to one and all.”

The Pope was deeply touched by Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s sentiments and replied, “Yes that is very important. It is important to give people a consciousness of God.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj often said, “Religion is that which spreads love for one another.” This sentiment is clearly seen in his friendship and interactions with Dr APJ Abdul Kalam.

Dr Kalam was a Muslim scientist and a former President of India. One may wonder how such a strong bond was formed between him and a Hindu guru. However, Dr Kalam was immediately drawn towards Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s simplicity, purity and spirituality from their very first meeting in June 2001. Dr Kalam was inspired to such an extent that he wrote *Transcendence: My Spiritual Experiences with Pramukh Swamiji* in 2015, describing his spiritual experiences with



Pramukh Swami Maharaj addresses the Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, United Nations, New York, 29 August 2000

and reflections on Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Reflecting Pramukh Swami Maharaj's universal appeal, Dr Kalam writes, "Pramukh Swamiji is a great bridge in the vast archipelago of humanity. An archipelago is an island group. Humanity has divided itself into hundreds of islands. These islands are religions. Each island is a beautiful territory, full of flora, fauna and inhabitants, and yet disconnected from the others. Pramukh Swamiji is connecting these different islands by making bridges of love and compassion."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's vision of a God-centric society was brought forward in his address at the Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, "Let every religion exist and flourish. Allow them to serve the world in their own small ways. At this hour in human history, we religious leaders should not dream of only one religion in the world, but dream of a world where all religions are one – united. Just as the unity of our followers makes our faith strong and stable, unity of faiths will make our future strong and stable."

These were not mere words to Pramukh Swami Maharaj; he exemplified these teachings in practice. He placed countless into a "God-synchronous orbit" – no matter which God they believed in.

In 1982, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Leicester, UK, when Frank, a local British man, came to see him. Frank was grieving the loss of his son who had committed suicide. While narrating the incident,

Frank broke down. He and his wife were filled with grief, hopelessness and guilt. They felt responsible for what had happened to their teenage son.

After carefully listening to Frank pour his heart out, Pramukh Swami Maharaj asked, "Did you give him enough love?"

"Yes Swamiji. We loved him very much."

"Did you take care of him to the best of your ability?" asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

"Yes, we had taken all the care and responsibility as parents."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj consoled him saying, "Then you are not to blame for his death. Whatever God has willed has happened. Don't burden yourself with grief, otherwise you will suffer from tension. Now that he is no more, by you lamenting and crying he is not going to come back. For peace of mind go to your church every Sunday and pray. It was not your son's fault nor yours."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj then suggested that Frank should make a donation to his church in his son's memory. Frank felt a wave of peace envelope him, and said, "Today, my tension has dissolved. I feel peaceful. I have never experienced such tranquillity before."

The next day, Frank told the priest at his church how a Hindu guru from India had blessed him with peace and inspired him to become stronger in his faith. The priest was amazed and requested Frank to speak of this incident to the Sunday congregation.

In this way, Pramukh Swami Maharaj advised Frank to seek comfort in his faith.

In August 1979, the city of Morbi, Gujarat, was severely flooded due to the bursting of the nearby Machhu Dam. Thousands were killed and the floods caused countless to be displaced from their homes. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was saddened on hearing the news of the disaster and immediately appealed to BAPS volunteers to go to Morbi to help. Over 1,500 volunteers left whatever they were doing and went to Morbi. A few days later, Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself travelled to the city to oversee the large-scale BAPS relief work, which included setting up relief kitchens and ensuring the city became habitable again.

During his time in Morbi, Pramukh Swami Maharaj expressed his concern to the sadhus, “Tomorrow is Eid – how will the Muslims living in Morbi celebrate this major festival?” After speaking to the various Muslim leaders and giving them confidence and assurance, Pramukh Swami Maharaj made special arrangements at the BAPS relief kitchens and ensured that every single Muslim was personally invited to dine in the Eid celebration.

The volunteers at the relief kitchen prepared a feast including a variety of Indian sweets and savoury items. More than 5,000 Muslims were treated to a celebratory meal. The Muslim community in Morbi were touched by Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s gesture at their time of need. Even today, they remember this selfless and caring act.

Through these incidents, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s vision for the future is clear. It is succinctly summarised in a prayer he made on 5 April 1997.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was visiting Abu Dhabi and was taken to the desert in Sharjah. There, during a simple conversation with a handful of people, he prayed, “May peace prevail here and everywhere. May all religions of all countries grow greater love for one other. May all countries be free of internal enmity and prejudice



Eid celebration at BAPS relief kitchen, Morbi, 1979 towards each other and may they all progress in their own unique way.”

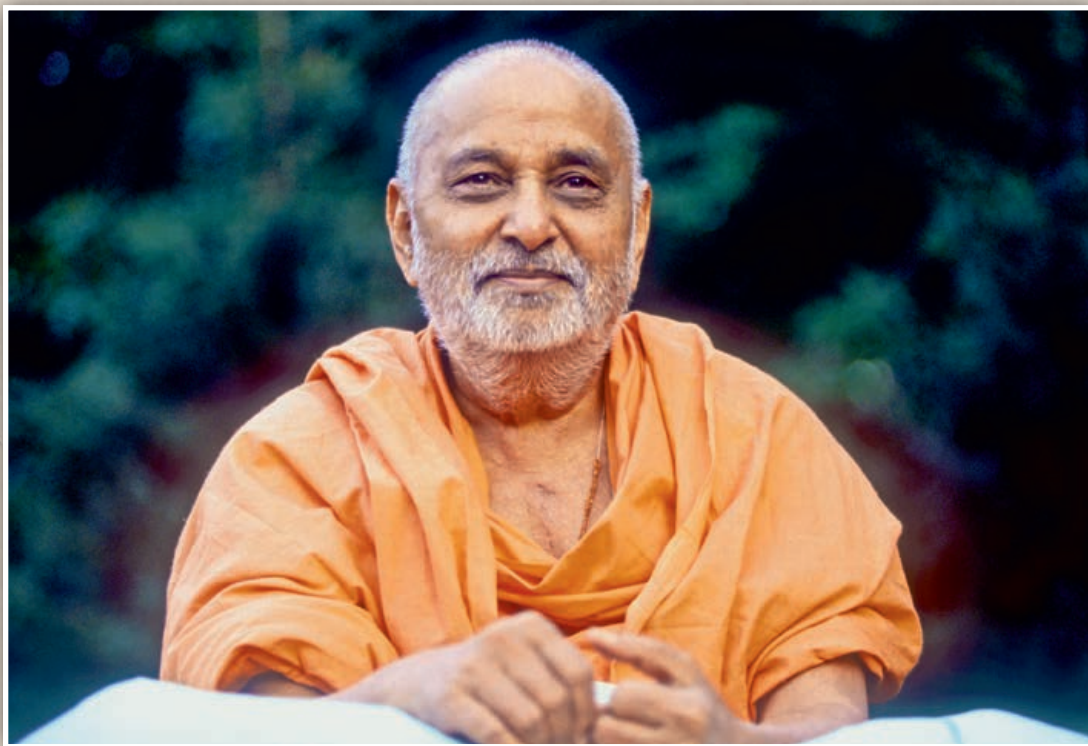
Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s vision was for peace, love and harmony across all religions.

Through his inspiration and prayers, and with the support of His Royal Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Prime Minister Narendrabhai Modi of India, a traditional BAPS Hindu mandir is being built in Abu Dhabi. It will be the very first Hindu stone mandir in the Middle East. This mandir will not only form a place of worship for the hundreds of thousands of Hindus in the UAE, but it will stand tall as a symbol of respect, harmony and unity – a physical manifestation of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s legacy.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life provides a perfect example on how to overcome the divisions and prejudices of our modern society. While it has been two decades since he addressed the various world and religious leaders at the United Nations, no words better summarize his message than his life motto, “In the joy of others, lies our own. In the progress of others rests our own. In the good of others, lies our own. Know this to be the key to peace and happiness.”

On Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s centenary celebrations, we pay homage to a guru whose life influenced hundreds of thousands across the world and whose teachings of peace, harmony, acceptance and unity will inspire the world for generations to come. ♦

VOW OF BRAHMACHARYA



In 1986, Swamishri visited the house of Kanubhai Khachar, a descendant of Dada Khachar in Gadhada. While initiating Kanubhai's two small children, Swamishri placed a *kanthi* around their necks and lovingly asked one of the children, "What is your name?" "Surubha," the child replied. Swamishri blessed him by placing his hand on his head. Then, he asked the second child, "What is your name?" "Devkuba" (a girl's name). Swamishri remained calm, blessed Kanubhai and left. He instructed the driver to take the car to the River Ghela. There, Swamishri took a bath as per Bhagwan Swaminarayan's injunction when a sadhu has touched a female. It was already twilight when Swamishri arrived at the Gadhada mandir. The attendant swamis requested him to have dinner. But Swamishri observed a fast according to Bhagwan Swaminarayan's command. Though Swamishri had inadvertently touched the

girl child, he remained firm in his decision to fast. Even at night, he neither drank water nor took his medicines.

Out of the five vows that Bhagwan Swaminarayan prescribed to his sadhu disciples, the vow of celibacy or *nishkam* dharma, is the most important. It meant that a Swaminarayan sadhu could never talk, touch or associate with women.

This vow was strictly observed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj throughout his whole life. He was always adored by all, within the Sampradaya and outside, as an ideal saint of Bhagwan Swaminarayan due to his unwavering observance of celibacy.

'*Brahmacharya*', i.e. celibacy, is to move in search of Brahma (God) and to conduct oneself accordingly. Shriji Maharaj reestablished the scriptural practice of eightfold celibacy among his sadhus. The purpose was not to discriminate

against or reject women. In fact, it is a moral discipline to maintain a sadhu's character for personal spiritual upliftment. Shriji Maharaj also prescribed the vow of celibacy to safeguard his sadhus' sadhanas and help conquer their passions to attain *moksha*. Because, for those who wish to transcend the worldly passions to become *brahmarup*, they must be wary of the slippery path of worldly desires.

In addition, Bhagwan Swaminarayan championed the cause of women's dignity and empowerment.

But, why did Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who himself was the incarnation of Aksharbrahma and forever in rapport with Parabrahma, observe the vow of celibacy? Once, in response to such a question from a press reporter, Swamishri revealed that the guru strictly practises the vow to set an example for his disciples. Just like a mother abstains from doing and eating certain things to keep her beloved child healthy, Swamishri observed the vow to inspire and nourish his disciples. On the spiritual path of devotion, aspirants emulate the guru.

In 1977, during Swamishri's tour of East Africa, the president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, was extremely pleased and impressed on meeting Swamishri. He requested, "Kindly bless my 90-year-old mother for her good." Swamishri politely instructed the accompanying devotees, "Please tell the president that we observe the vow of celibacy and so cannot personally bless a woman." The devotees hesitated a little, fearing that the president would be displeased. At that time, Swamishri asserted to the devotees, "Tell the president what I have said! Why are you frightened? Tell him that Swamishri has prayed for his mother, and she will be well."

When the president heard about Swamishri's vow of celibacy he willingly acknowledged and expressed his satisfaction that his mother was indeed blessed. Shortly after, Swamishri sent Thakorji to bless the president's mother.

Knowingly or purposefully giving darshan to women is also a breach of the code of conduct for a Swaminarayan sadhu. In 1977, in London, the devotees who had come from many towns and cities of England for darshan were about to return. Swamishri came outside his room on a volunteer's request to give darshan to those devotees. At that time, an enthusiastic devotee exclaimed, "Kindly come to give darshan to the women devotees."

Swamishri suddenly doubted whether he was invited to give darshan to the women devotees under the guise of giving darshan to all the devotees. Swamishri immediately returned to his room and later explained to the devotee who had invited him to give darshan to the women devotees about his vow of celibacy.

In 1980, during the last days of his exhausting spiritual tour of America, Swamishri put his right foot into his left shoe and his left foot into his right shoe. When the attendant swami enquired about this, Swamishri revealed, "Recently, I've been facing difficulty in seeing even nearby things." After Swamishri's eyes were checked by an eminent ophthalmologist, Dr Hutchinson, in Boston, it became evident that he had advanced cataracts. The doctor advised to get both his eyes operated at the earliest. Swamishri agreed to do so after taking everyone's consent. Finally, the operation was decided to be performed at the Massachusetts General Hospital, a famous medical institute in Boston. But Swamishri gave instructions about the arrangements for the operation, "Ensure that no lady nurses are present during the operation. Enquire whether our vows will be maintained at the time of the operation and also thereafter."

The issue was whether it would be possible to make the arrangements for a male nurse in a foreign country? In addition, would the doctor agree to bend the rules of the hospital management?

But Swamishri added with poise, "If such an arrangement is not possible here, I will get the

cataracts operated after we reach India. I am not in a hurry.” But the doctor had warned that if the cataract operations was delayed for fifteen more days, it would endanger Swamishri’s sight.

To find a middle way, the doctor suggested to Swamishri, “Do you have any objection if the lady nurse comes into the operating room once you are unconscious?” Swamishri explained, “I may be unconscious or sleeping, but a lady nurse should not be allowed into the operating theatre.” The chief doctor, looking at the sheer insistence of Swamishri, put aside the rules of the hospital and arranged for male nurses.

Swamishri was then operated, while fully maintaining his vow, in both the eyes at an interval of a few days. When Swamishri was being discharged from the hospital, he had made arrangements for mementos to be sent to the lady nurses and other male nurses. The lady nurses appreciated Swamishri’s observance of celibacy and his respect for them.

Swamishri never attended any public programmes or assemblies where his spiritual disciplines could not be maintained or if they would hurt others’ sentiments. At the Sayaji Hospital in Vadodara, the Blood Donation Committee had organized a programme for felicitating its blood donors. On behalf of the committee, Mr Raval came to invite Swamishri to preside as the chief guest and bless the occasion. Swamishri explained to him, “It is not that I don’t want to come to your event, but due to our moral constraints and God’s orders you will need to change your seating arrangements by making the ladies sit at the rear part of the auditorium. Therefore, in such circumstances your lady participants may feel offended and harbour ill-will later.”

Once, during a discussion on the vows of celibacy with Shri H.M. Patel, the ex-finance minister of India, the latter told Swamishri that he should relax his vow and take the liberty of talking to and blessing women. Swamishri replied frankly, “We

have already incorporated all the necessary changes. But, if you say that we sadhus should sit together with women and talk and walk with them; then that will not be possible.”

Generally, people fail to understand the sentiment behind Swamishri’s vow of celibacy and consider it to be an insult to women. Let us consider some of the many incidents which reflect Swamishri’s respect for women.

A youth, sued by his mother, asked Swamishri how he should react. Swamishri advised, “Let the case be. After all, she is your mother. After a year or two, she will understand and make amends. You should not retaliate even if she does anything untowards. Keep calm.” Swamishri thus advised the youth to bear with his mother’s legal proceedings.

Once, Swamishri mildly scolded a youth in Bochasan and said, “How can you harass your mother? You must never quarrel with her. She gave birth to you. In fact, you should serve her because of her age. That is your duty and devotion.”

A youth’s wife left him due to his habit of drinking and returned to her parents’ home. The youth approached Swamishri to seek blessings so that she would come back. Swamishri pacified him, “Everything will be alright. Now that you have, out of your own will, given up drinking there shouldn’t be any trouble. She will observe your behaviour for a month and will return to you if you do not drink. Do not follow the wrong path. Is she your slave? You should both support each other.”

It is clear that Swamishri never harboured disrespect for women.

There are thousands of BAPS women’s activities centres throughout the world for *balikas*, *yuvatis* and *mahilas* wherein separate facilities and activities are managed by them. ‘Premvati’ is a quarterly women’s magazine solely managed by the BAPS women’s wing. Moreover, there are numerous annual women’s conferences organized solely by the women devotees. If Swamishri had

been biased towards women, how could he have fostered the women's activities in BAPS?

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has instructed in the Shikshapatri that when a woman's life is in danger, at that time a sadhu should talk to her or even help her and save her life. Once in Mumbai, a swami travelling by train saved a woman, who was about to fall from the train, by pulling her to safety. In another life-threatening instance, one swami saved a girl child from drowning in a river in Gondal. In spite of the strict discipline of celibacy enunciated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan for his sadhus, he was never rigid with regards to saving a woman's life from danger or death.

Swamishri had never disregarded or rejected women. He understood their sentiments and respected them. Swamishri had once visited the State of Bilada in Rajasthan on the invitation of its queen mother. He had also visited Trinidad by honouring the wish of a *satsangi* lady. Swamishri respected the women devotees and at the same time never transgressed his monastic vow of *nishkam* dharma.

Following the vow of celibacy has remained a challenge for every spiritual aspirant. Once in Mumbai, an ascetic named Tapasyanand met Swamishri. He was formerly the son of a wealthy family and had voluntarily renounced everything to attain God. However, after many years as an ascetic he was struggling in his spiritual sadhanas; especially in his practice of celibacy.

He said to Swamishri, "I desire only *moksha*. That is why I took the sannyasi *diksha*. I have realized that there is no happiness in the worldly life, but lust overwhelms me such that I am unable to control myself and find it difficult to maintain celibacy. I think I will not be able to conquer it without a guru like you, who is observing lifetime celibacy. Kindly guide me." Swamishri blessed and advised him to abstain from conversing with and touching women.

Whenever a spiritual aspirant transgresses the vow of celibacy, a rationalist or other people in

society reprimand him harshly. Conversely, when a person like Swamishri advocates self-control and abstinence, in order to avoid such incidents, again people criticize him. That was why Swamishri prioritized worshipping God by strictly following his commands and ignored all such criticisms.

Kanti Bhatt, the then owner and editor of a weekly magazine, 'Abhiyan', asked Swamishri, "Swamiji, have you ever thought that in these modern times your vow of celibacy should be changed? Or do you consider that whatever you staunchly believe and practice is OK?"

Swamishri replied, "The discipline we practise is proper. There is nothing to be changed about it. Many people have remarked to us in this regard, but we do not mind if we are considered to be orthodox for following this code of conduct. People may like it or not, but we are committed to observing this vow prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. We believe that ultimately truth will prevail."

Once, Ishwarbhai Petlikar, a leading novelist of Gujarati literature, commentator and social worker, recommended to Swamishri, "Swami, if you want to make the Swaminarayan Sanstha globally famous, then you should allow some relaxations in your practice of eightfold celibacy."

However, Swamishri was not one to compromise his vow for the sake of the organization's growth. Thus, he calmly replied, "We do not believe in propagating satsang at the cost of our vows and do not wish to advocate such satsang. Whether our organization flourishes or not is ultimately in Shriji Maharaj's hands. Many prominent people tell us that you will not make any progress by having such a strict code of conduct. But we tell them that we will carry on till our organization lasts. Ultimately, God's wish prevails and, if necessary, we will sit in one corner and do God's bhajan."

Swamishri's work and aim were not to publicize the organization or increase its reputation. His principal aim was to liberate people from worldly desires and bondage, and enable them to realize God. This

is what he emphasized to his swamis also. He said remember God and obey his injunctions. Swamishri elaborated, “Greatness is not ascribed to one’s position or status. It is not achieved by merely delivering discourses or singing devotional songs. If we do what Maharaj wants us to do then we will attain true greatness. Others may press us for relaxing our vows regarding our renunciation of women and wealth, but we will never agree to them. We do not wish to do satsang or allow our satsang to flourish at the cost of our vows. If we put our hand in a bag full of coal, then it will not remain unspoiled. Similarly, we will be of no value if we inspire satsang in millions by relinquishing our vows. Live in a dignified manner so that the honour of our *sampradaya*, Bhagwan, and guru remains unsullied. If any other part of one’s body is cut, one can live, but if the head is severed one cannot survive. In the same way, if one wishes to attain Ekantik Dharma and *moksha*, a sadhu has to renounce wealth and women. There cannot be any lapses in that. Let society be averse, but one should remain resolute. One should never compromise in this matter. The commands of Shriji Maharaj are like injunctions from the Vedas. One should never make changes in them. We have to please [Shriji] Maharaj.”

A perfect celibate practises celibacy in mind, speech and action. If someone observes it physically, but nourishes bad thoughts then he is described to be false or foolish in the Bhagavad Gita. Thus, Bhagwan Swaminarayan advocated the practice of *deh-daman* (austerity for self-control), keeping oneself engrossed in devotion to God (*bhagwad bhakti*) and contemplating that one is *atma* (*atma vichar*) to perfect one’s practice of celibacy.

Swamishri always remained absorbed in God’s bhajan and also inspired others to do so. If one keeps the body and senses under control, then only would the mind remain rooted in God’s bhajan. Hence, Swamishri ensured the observance of eightfold celibacy for his sadhus, despite it seeming strict to others. An aspirant is protected and spiritually nourished by following this vow.

The vow of celibacy is equally beneficent to male and female householder devotees alike. For the householder, celibacy is defined as being faithful to one’s spouse.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan says in Vachanamrut Gadhada III 24, “One should not understand the greatness of female devotees in excess. Why? Because under the pretext of realizing their greatness, one may constantly think upon them, leading to them appearing in one’s dreams. So, if one does understand their greatness, one should understand it collectively, by thinking, ‘All of them are devotees of God.’ But, one should not attempt to understand a particular one as being greater and another being lesser. However, if one attempts to understand their greatness to a greater or lesser degree than this, then there is a great danger in that. Similarly, female devotees should also understand the greatness of male devotees collectively. If they don’t realize this, then it is also a great danger for those females.”

Shriji Maharaj states, “In fact, I swear by the lives of the *paramhansas* that, from the day I was born to this very day, I have never harboured an improper thought regarding women or wealth, either in the waking state or in the dream state.” Shriji Maharaj declares these words by taking an oath. The same observance was manifest in Pramukh Swami Maharaj too.

In Sharjah, while addressing an assembly, Jain Acharya Pushparaj Muni said, “Without looking at which God Pramukh Swami worships or which principles he follows, I look at his conduct. If anyone observes celibacy even for a day, the deities would come to bow their heads at one’s feet. Pramukh Swami has been observing celibacy all his life. It will not be an exaggeration, if I were to give Pramukh Swami the first rank among all the celibates.” ◆

Gujarati text from *Brahmopanishad*:

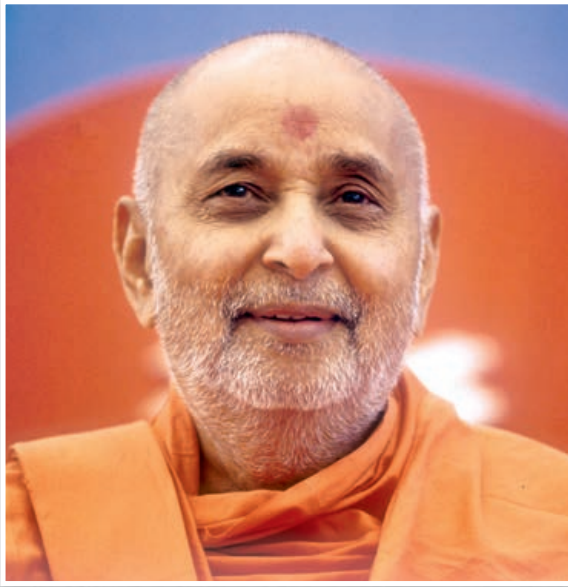
Sadhu Shriharidas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas and Bansal Bhalja

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ AND MODERN MANAGEMENT (Part 2)

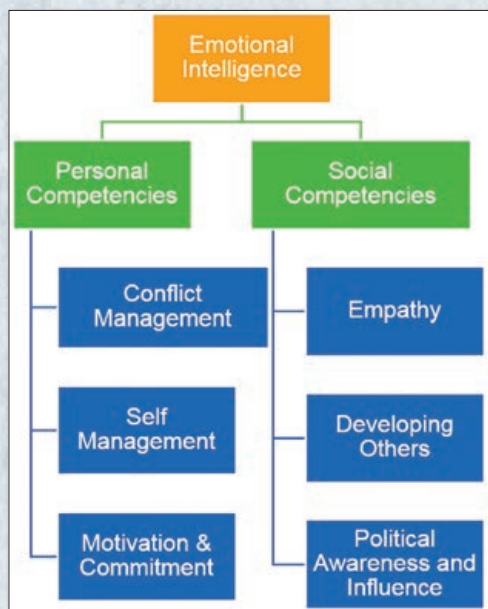


*In continuation from the previous issue, this second article on
Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Modern Management deals with his Work Management.*



Marjan Bolmeijer, a world-famous executive leadership consultant and author of an article, “What It Takes to Be a CEO” in the famous book, *1000 CEOs*, focuses on one very important aspect – Get Your Senior Team Right. In this book, he emphasizes on the fact that a CEO must work to understand the importance of the senior team in his organization. According to him, if a team works well together, no matter how diverse its members are, it has a beneficial effect on the operational performance of the organization. Furthermore, he also discusses the importance of managing personal emotions while dealing in the professional sphere. As an organizational leader, the CEO must be in an emotionally right place and right frame of mind so that the employees can take their Emotional Quotient (EQ) from their leader.

These principles were reflected in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's actions in the toughest of times. On 24 September 2002, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Sarangpur when two terrorists attacked Akshardham in Gandhinagar. Akshardham was very dear to Swamishri as it was built purely because of Yogiji Maharaj's wish. No one in their wildest dreams could have imagined such an act of horror on this epitome of Indian culture. Everyone was deeply shocked to the core at the attack, and all eyes were on how Swamishri would respond to this heinous act. Swamishri, in spite of being grieved, maintained calm and immediately prayed that no further lives were lost and the situation be quickly brought under control. Then, Swamishri sent a group of swamis to Gandhinagar to help and guide the police and commandoes to defuse the situation. He also appealed for peace to the whole of Gujarat and for no backlash to occur. After the attack was neutralized, Swamishri immediately went to Ahmedabad to meet the injured at the Civil Hospital. He visited the places in Akshardham where the terrorists had unleashed mayhem and prayed for the solace of those who had lost their lives or were injured. Swamishri also visited the spot where the terrorists had died and prayed for their souls and that no one would ever think of committing such a horrific act anywhere in the world. Swamishri's compassionate act became popularly known as the 'Akshardham Response'. Bolmeijer opines that a successful leader needs to stock up on emotional intelligence. The diagram on the next page further breaks down the important aspects of emotional intelligence. We



shall try to understand some of these aspects with context to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj possessed the highest level of emotional intelligence which was evident from his works and services to others. To elucidate on his **personal competencies**, we learn about his compassion while he was participating in a tree plantation programme. He gently removed a large ant in the pit before planting a sapling, regardless of the possibility of the ant biting him or of what others would think of him. In 1985, Ahmedabad was in the midst of a raging communal protest and rounds of violence, and a severe drought. Many prominent personalities advised Swamishri to cancel the 59-day Bicentenary Celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami, but Swamishri remained firm and confident in celebrating it. Eventually, with his prayers and efforts, the communal protests and drought were resolved, and the celebration was held with great success.

It would not be wrong to say that Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a synonym of commitment and hard work. Even in his old age and ailing health, he continued his untiring *vicharan*. When asked to rest and stay in one place, he would say that when his gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj did

vicharan till their last breath, then how could he remain seated and not follow his gurus' footsteps. It was his unrelenting commitment and effort that inspired his disciples to endeavour and promote the message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and BAPS.

In the context of **empathy** towards fellow beings, Swamishri's actions spoke louder than anything else. One such instance occurred in Sarangpur on 21 March 2009, when Swamishri phoned Atmaswarup Swami in New Delhi to know about the hospital treatment report of Dr K.C. Patel's son. Not only did he ask about the well-being and arrangement of Dr Patel's son but he also enquired about the arrangements made by the mandir for his domestic needs and other things. Such was Swamishri's heart, full of love and service for others.

Another aspect about social competency is the idea of **developing others** – to think and work in the direction of developing others.

On 13 December 2007, during the BAPS Centenary Celebrations in Ahmedabad, IPS officer Yashwant Jethva acknowledged Swamishri's contribution and blessings for the success he had attained to an audience of 300,000 devotees. He narrated that being of poor means he stayed in a hutment area during his childhood years in Malad, Mumbai. His father passed away when he was a child. Thereafter, Swamishri sponsored his educational expenses and inspired values and talents in him through the weekly satsang *sabhas* and services. Then, Swamishri encouraged and supported him to study for the UPSC (Union Public Services Commission) exams and serve the country. He passed and got selected into the Indian Police Services (IPS). Thereafter, with the blessings of Swamishri he was selected to attend a training course at the International Peacekeeping Police Force Summit in Italy. There, from amongst 150 officers from around the world, Yashwant stood first in the training examinations.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and blessed others to develop spiritual values. In 1974, Swamishri blessed a small group of swamis in

Sarangpur, “*Tamne badhane Bhagatji jeva taiyar karva chhe. Brahmi sthiti prapta karavavi chhe. Tocho j na lage*”, – “I wish to make you all ready like Bhagatji and attain the *brahmi* (divine) state; and that nothing worldly disturbs you.”

On analyzing the working style and behaviour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj through the lens of organizational principles, we also come to learn about his expertise in the areas of **conflict management**, influencing others and servant leadership. His conflict management skills came into focus during the ‘Anamat Andolan’ (students’ anti-reservation agitation) that took place in Ahmedabad, 1985. It soon turned violent. Swamishri strived to reestablish peace and security. He participated in talks with the students’ group, trying to convince them to stop their violent agitation and solve the issue amicably. Swamishri’s words had the desired effect and the agitation was called off.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj could inspire social reforms, fulfil societal needs and influence human behaviour for the ultimate betterment of the individual and mankind.

In 1996, Swamishri was in Surendranagar. Gujarat was reeling under a severe water shortage due to the unfinished Narmada dam project.

At that time, during Swamishri’s 76th birthday celebration assembly, he appealed to a large number of devotees to save a rupee a day and contribute to the government to enable it to complete the project. Swamishri’s appeal had the desired effect and people started saving and contributing for the successful completion of the dam. The dam was inaugurated in September 2017.

Another instance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s impact was seen during his birthday celebration in 1989 in Bharuch, when he urged the mammoth gathering of youths to pledge not to take dowry as part of their marriage custom. Thus, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s impact, with reference to social reforms, societal needs and transforming human behaviour, is evident from the incidents mentioned.

In *Servant Leadership*, Robert Greenleaf writes that servant leadership is “a journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness”. He further states that “in leadership philosophy, the main goal of the leader is to serve and that in turn helps the leader to find his true power and moral authority”. In all his acts and activities, Swamishri epitomised this quality. Be it on ‘Pramukh Varni Din’ on 21 May 1950, when he washed utensils after being appointed as the president of BAPS or in 1995 during his Amrut Mahotsav in Mumbai, during which he himself opened and shut the doors of his car in spite of the numerous attendants present. In addition, in 1980, in spite of being the guru, Swamishri quietly obeyed the orders of a junior swami, who had scheduled his *vicharan* schedule during the bicentennial year celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Marshall Goldsmith, a globally renowned professional, mentored senior executives of multinational corporates for more than three decades. He also authored numerous bestsellers like *Leaders of the Future*, *Triggers*, *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*, *Change Your Questions*, *Change Your Life*. Goldsmith states, “In my vast experience of working with more than 100 CEOs and their management teams, I have learnt that business is more than strategy, competency and ROI (Return on Investment). A large part of it is about soft skills like relationship management, personal growth and feelings.” When we understand this statement in the context of Swamishri’s life, he excelled on all these fronts. It was because of his understanding of the human virtues of care, compassion and consideration that he was able to create a mammoth force of youth volunteers and sadhus.

Thus, the way in which Swamishri executed and managed the BAPS can be assessed from multiple management viewpoints. Swamishri’s life included three main aspects: to worship Bhagwan Swaminarayan, to obey the orders of his gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, and to work for the betterment of society. ♦

Behind the Sacred Relic

THE GRINDING STONE



In the summer of 1944, the BAPS Mandir in Atladara was being built. By Shastriji Maharaj's wish, Narayanswarupdas Swami (Pramukh Swami) served there under the guidance of Devprasad Swami, who was overseeing the mandir construction. In those days, lime was used in place of cement. Years later, narrating his role in the construction, Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, "Two oxen pulled a large, heavy stone around a shallow circular groove. We would add the lime, sand and water into the groove for grinding and mixing under the stone. As the oxen pulled the stone, we would follow behind with a spade to scrape back any spills and ensure proper mixing. After 108 rounds, the mixture would be ready for use. Then, we would gather it into a pile and supply it in small baskets to the stonemasons for use."

Swamishri fulfilled this duty three times a day: early morning, midday and at 4:00 p.m. As a result, the heat of the hot summer sun combined with the heat of the lime mixture caused red patches to erupt all over Swamishri's body. Yet he

persisted in his allotted *seva*.

At that time, Shastriji Maharaj was ill and resting in nearby Jhadeshwar. He called for 'Naranda' (the name by which Shastriji Maharaj often referred to Narayanswarupdas Swami) to come there from Atladara. When Shastriji Maharaj saw him, he blessed Naranda, by stroking his hand over his body. Thereafter, after a few days of rest, the red patches disappeared, except for a small patch on the tip of Swamishri's nose – which persisted for many years afterwards.

On 13 February 2005, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the groundbreaking ceremony to initiate the construction of the new master plan for the BAPS Mandir in Atladara. On this occasion, he pointed out the location of the large shallow circular groove in which the limestone was mixed.

Later, as the ground was dug, the shallow circular groove was indeed found. It is now below the ground above the shrines of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Presently, a small memorial pillar bearing the sacred footprints of Bhagwan Swaminarayan marks the spot behind the mandir where Swamishri performed the groundbreaking ceremony.

Devotees dine on the grounds of Atladara mandir amid the furrow in which limestone was crushed



The large sanctified stone which was used by Swamishri for mixing the lime is on public display at the foot of the side stairway of the mandir opposite the original assembly hall. This stone

represents Swamishri's commitment to persevere in fulfilling his duties as per the wish of guru Shastriji Maharaj amid taxing circumstances and even while suffering from troublesome ailments.

HAVELI MASTER PLAN



In October 1990, Pramukh Swami Maharaj finalized the Arlington site, opposite the BAPS *hari* mandir in Neasden, London, as the location for the new *shikharbaddha* mandir.

In addition to the traditional stone mandir, Swamishri wished to build an ancillary building to provide the necessary spaces and facilities for devotees of all ages to participate in satsang *sabhas* and activities.

Thus, in effect, two distinct projects were in progress simultaneously – the construction of the traditional stone mandir and the modern multi-purpose complex, whose design had to blend seamlessly with the mandir architecture.

Nigel Lane, the chief architect for the London Mandir project, and his team were briefed about the functional requirements for this adjacent building. Based on this, over the Christmas period of 1991, they developed four variations using the insights they had gained from their research visits to India.

In February 1992, Nigel Lane flew to India and met Swamishri in Sarangpur where, on 4 February, he presented the drawings of the four designs they had prepared for Swamishri to select the final design.

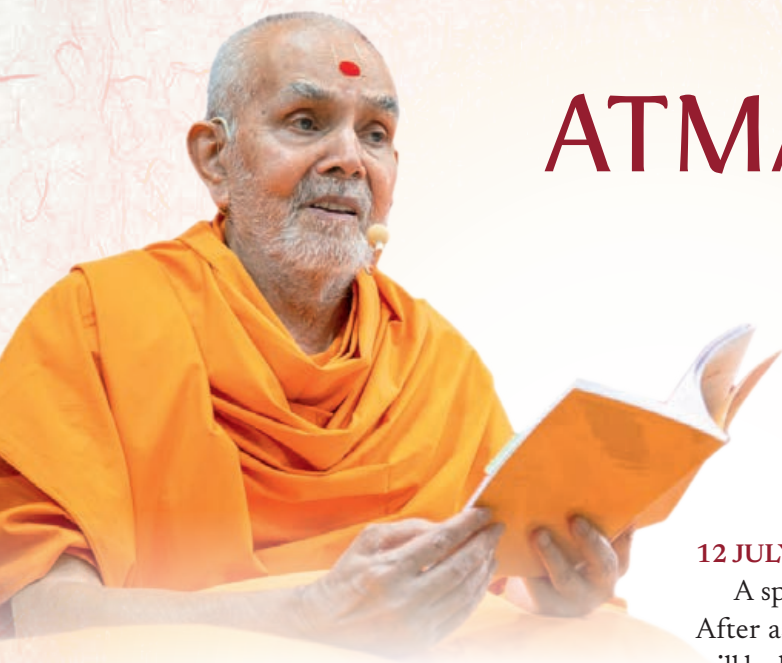
The four architectural styles he showed were, in

sequence: Delhi (Indo-British), Jaisalmer, Jaipur and Haveli.

When Nigel unrolled the final drawing – that of the Haveli design – Swamishri looked at him and he instantly realized that this design was Swamishri's choice. Swamishri explained that this was the Gujarati style of architecture adopted by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the mandirs he had built and so it is fitting that this architectural style be used in the London mandir.

Thereafter, Swamishri signed the plan (see above). He wrote: The above plan is of the Haveli type. And after seeing it I have selected it. It will be built from wood. A mandir and assembly hall are built in all the mandirs here. This will look like them. And it will look good. Blessings to all. Jai Swaminarayan from Shastri Narayanswarupdas. 4/2/92. Sarangpur. Time: Morning, 11 o'clock.

This signed plan is presently preserved in the archives at the BAPS Mandir in Neasden, London. It is a record of Swamishri's commitment to the traditions initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and a reminder that each aspect of the historic BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden was developed under Swamishri's direct supervision and guidance.



ATMAVICHAR

The *jiva* or *atma*, is one of the five eternal realities identified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is the animate, conscious entity that pervades and enlivens all living material bodies. With its exit, the body dies. Hence the body and *atma* are separate – knowing this and living one's life accordingly reaps great spiritual benefits.

This is realized through the process of *atmavichar* – thinking of the *atma* as separate from the physical body and living one's life accordingly.

In fact, this is the first part of the aim of life defined by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, in verse 116 of the Shikshapatri – that aspirants should identify themselves as one with Brahma, separate from the three bodies (gross, subtle, causal). The second part is that in this enlightened state one should offer devotion to Paramatma.

To facilitate this task, Mahant Swami Maharaj has revealed the guru mantra to all: '*Aksharam aham Purushottam dāsosmi*' – I am akshar, servant of Purushottam.

Mahant Swami Maharaj teaches us how to do this through his own life, discourses and interactions with devotees.

12 JULY 2017, CHICAGO

A specialist doctor came to check Swamishri. After assessing Swamishri, the doctor said, "He will be happy once he starts taking this medicine."

Swamishri said, "I am always happy." Then, he added, "I only told you all because you asked, otherwise the pain has persisted since we were in Kolkata."

Atmaswarup Swami asked the doctor, "What if he does not take the medicine?"

The doctor replied, "The pain is likely to continue and trouble him."

Swamishri said, "It's all under control due to the power of the *atma*."

The doctor said, "You are very strong. It is very difficult to tolerate such discomfort. I've seen people scream with pain in such cases."

30 DECEMBER 2017, HIMMATNAGAR

Swamishri gave brief blessings after his morning puja and, on returning to his room, immediately went for a bath. Not feeling well, Swamishri did not wish to eat breakfast, and so took some rest.

However, later in the morning, he sat for around 75 minutes to give personal audience and blessings to over 1,500 devotees. Then, again, he had to go for a bath. Such is his affection for the

devotees and his *atmanishtha* that he readily and happily endures such physical hardships.

22 MAY 2018, RAJKOT

Hitendrasinh Jadeja narrated an incident before Mahant Swami Maharaj, “In 1975, we left Sarangpur to go to Ahmedabad in the Sanstha’s Fargo van. There were 17 of us, and I was sitting at your feet. After about 45 minutes, the van suddenly flipped over a couple of times and came to a rest on its side. I was not injured, but others were. Your jaw was broken and blood was coming out of your mouth. We tried to open the doors from the inside, but couldn’t. A farmer rushed to us with a pick axe and forced the doors open so we could all come out. Your *pattar* (bowl) was taken out and you were spitting blood into it. By the time we reached the Vadilal Hospital in Ahmedabad at about 7 p.m., you had spat out about six-seven *pattars* full of blood. The others were injured less than you, yet complained of their pain more. You were totally calm and composed. I still remember that.”

22 DECEMBER 2018, MUMBAI

After puja, while explaining Vachanamrut Gadhada II 2, Swamishri said, “The body and *atma* have become one. This is the root of all ignorance. If one behaves as the *atma*, everything falls in place. To do this, observe Maharaj’s *agnas*. Since, everything enters within from outside. So, it must be blocked. This is such an effective method shown by Maharaj. By observing *niyams* everything is achieved.”

17 MARCH 2019, NAVSARI

Swamishri finished performing *mudras* (yogic hand gestures). Attendant Uttamyogi Swami asked, “What is your next project?”

Swamishri replied, “If you separate and arrange the various parts of the body, would there be any affection or attachment to them?

The attendant replied, "No."

Swamishri continued, “If you bring all the parts together again, but without the *jiva* it is still a lifeless body. It does not move. Only when the *jiva* enters does it come to life. That is the nature of the physical body. That is what everyone is infatuated by. Do an analysis – in the stomach there is half-digested food that is then turned into waste. Still we proclaim ‘I, I, I, I,...’ But if one understands that the human body is to be used for securing *moksha*, that is worth more than millions and millions of dollars.

“Except for Dham, Dhami and *mukta* all else perishes. If this is realized, everything falls into place, otherwise the endless cycle continues.”

Uttamyogi Swami asked, “We see that at death the *atma* separates from the body. Still, one’s worldly desires do not cease...”

Swamishri explained, “We realize this for others, but not ourselves. We see that another’s *atma* has separated from his body, but fail to apply it to ourselves. That is attachment, infatuation.”

The attendant probed, “By introspecting we realize ‘I am not the body; I am the *atma*’, but our ego and other faults remain.”

Swamishri said, “That is due to attachment for the body. Only Maharaj and Swami can remove the attachment for ‘I and mine.’”

“So, when do they remove this?”

Swamishri said, “By following their *agnas* (commands).”

10 AUGUST 2019, DAR-ES-SALAAM

During Swamishri's evening meal, Kirtanprem Swami entered with his hand bandaged. Swamishri asked, "What happened?"

Kirtanprem Swami explained, “I cut my finger while using a knife to cut the thermocol designs. Since the cut was deep, it was necessary to take a stitch to seal the wound. But at that time I recalled an incident with you and really understood your *mahima*.”

Then he continued to narrate the incident he had witnessed as a youth, “In 2002, you had

come to America. You went for dental treatment in Edison. I accompanied you as a translator.

“The dentist said that since your tooth had to be removed, he would give you a local anaesthetic. You agreed. So, he injected a local anaesthetic into your gums, but it did not numb the area. So, he gave you a second injection. Still, the area was not numbed. Then, he said, ‘It is not safe to give a third so I will continue, but if you feel too much pain or discomfort, raise your hand and I will stop for a while.’

“You were reclined on the dental chair and I was observing your hand. The dentist began to remove the tooth. It’s natural that any surgery without adequate anaesthesia is painful. But, during the procedure, when you felt extreme pain, you merely raised the first finger of your right hand. So, I would tell the dentist and he would stop for a while. In this way, the surgery was completed.”

“Afterwards, the dentist said, ‘Swami’s tolerance of pain is incredible. Others would scream with pain if the area is not numbed with anaesthetic.’

“The doctor stitched my finger without numbing the area, so I screamed in pain. That’s when I recalled what you had experienced then.”

Then Swamishri said, “My jaw was broken, so it was wired together. And for one month, I could take only liquids. I could barely swallow.”

Swamishri’s tolerance and physical pain reveals his elevated spiritual state of *atmarup*.

21 AUGUST 2019, ATLADARA

Today’s evening assembly was titled ‘Samjan Din’ – Understanding Day. In his blessings, Swamishri said, “Up to now we have remained foolish. Now is the time to remove this foolishness. How? Everyone has forgotten their true form – *atma*. If this is understood, everything is achieved.

“But such understanding evades us. No matter how much you memorize and repeat this, it is forgotten and you remain the same.

“One may give eloquent speeches on this topic,

but one’s body-consciousness and *swabhavs* (base natures) remain. If one is not honoured, one is immediately affected. But this is due to attachment for the body. Gunatitanand Swami has told us to constantly remember that ‘I am not this body, I am *atma*.’ Since we have taken refuge in Maharaj and Swami, it will be achieved.”

14 NOVEMBER 2019, BOCHASAN

After breakfast, Swamishri experienced a painful muscle spasm in his left arm, which he tried to relieve by massaging with his right hand.

Meanwhile, a senior sadhu garlanded Swamishri. Despite the pain, Swamishri even smiled for the photo. Then, as he got up, Swamishri folded his hands to the sadhus, just like he did every day, even though his arm was painful.

Swamishri entered the lift. Inside, in the background, the *dhun* ‘*Swaminarayan namo namaha; Shriji Maharaj namo namaha*’ was playing, Swamishri joined in the *dhun* while clapping, ignoring the pain in his left arm.

Trilokbandhu Swami asked with amazement, “When will we be like this?” Swamishri instantly replied, “It won’t happen!”

Trilokbandhu Swami was referring to being able to constantly engage in bhajan, while Swamishri was referring to the pain in his arm.

Despite the pain, Swamishri engaged with all and revealed his sentiments for others.

4 JANUARY 2020, SURAT

After Swamishri’s evening meal, the sadhus described the worrying situation in Australia due to the bushfires and the immense loss of wildlife and widespread damage.

Then, Swamishri sat down to sing the *cheshta*, but he was deep in thought about the fires in Australia. As there was some pain in Swamishri’s foot, the attendant sadhus placed an ice pack around that area. When the *cheshta* concluded, Swamishri asked, “Have you placed the ice pack?”

“Yes,” replied the attendants.

“I didn’t feel it.”

An attendant touched the area to check that the ice pack was cold. Swamishri also touched that area and said, “Oh, it is very cold. I didn’t even notice.”

Swamishri’s physiotherapist, Rahul, said, “Swamishri is very sensitive to the cold, yet did not notice this.”

Then, Swamishri went to the bathroom to brush his teeth. Uttamyogi Swami asked, “Is there a reason you did not notice the ice pack?”

Swamishri said, “During *cheshta* I was praying for the situation in Australia, so did not notice it.”

Swamishri retired to sleep at 10.20 p.m., but was restless. At 10.53 p.m. he got up to sit on the sofa. For 39 minutes he turned the *mala* to pray and then went to sleep.

26 MARCH 2020 NENPUR

Discoursing after puja, Swamishri said, “Maharaj manifested on earth to teach us that the body and *atma* are separate. So do not waste this life and opportunity. We have attained this birth and God’s manifest association. This is a great opportunity, so do not waste it. Believe ‘I am the *atma*, not the body’ and live accordingly. Strengthen this belief daily. We say ‘*Aksharam*

aham, Purushottam dāsosmi’ but we must live it day and night – 24 hours. Throughout the day, frequently repeat, ‘I am *akshar*, but am the servant of Purushottam’. This is the focus of our *sadhana*.”

2 MAY 2020, NENPUR

After puja, Swamishri blessed, “Over countless births, the body and *atma* have become one. But they are distinct. Understanding this is the goal of *satsang*. It is not possible to physically separate the two, but it must be done through understanding. With such wisdom, one lives in the body, but knows the *atma* to be separate.”

27 MAY 2020, NENPUR

After his puja, Swamishri discoursed, “The body and *atma* are separate. By assuming yourself to be the body, you experience misery. Believe your true form to be *atma* and there will be no miseries. So, all the pain everybody experiences is due to body-consciousness. We have attained this *satsang*, the *Satpurush* and *Bhagwan*. But problems remain due to one’s body-centredness. If this is overcome, one will experience unbroken joy. Remaining attached to the body leads to great deficiencies.” ♦

(Cont. from p. 11)

In 1974, Swamishri visited London and was majestically honoured by thousands at the Alexandra Palace. Later, after returning to India, Swamishri was visiting the village of Rohishala in the Saurashtra region. He was staying in a mud house. Subhash, a youth from London, commented, “This is a far cry from Alexandra Palace!”

“Subhash, a hundred Alexandra Palaces do not add up to this little mud house,” Swamishri responded. “Look at the affection of these poor devotees.” Swamishri’s affection for all, regardless of who they were, was amazing.

The key to Swamishri’s compassion, forgiveness, and sense of equality is born from his knowledge and realization of *atma* and *Paramatma*. He never judged anyone based on their race, economic status, culture, religion, ethnicity, or other external features. He saw beyond the body. He understood everyone to be pure *atmas* or souls. He saw God living in every *atma*. This is the ultimate characteristic of a true, ideal saint. Today, Mahant Swami Maharaj continues this legacy of genuine, ideal saintliness. ♦

Various Dimensions of the AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM DARSHAN



INTRODUCTION

Indian Darshanic thought presents a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the self, the world in which it lives, and its relationship with all that exists. Its constant inquiry into the most profound and fundamental questions continued to enlighten humankind throughout many millennia. Who are we, why do we exist, and what is the nature of the world? Is there a divine being, and if so, what are they like? How can we overcome misery and experience everlasting bliss? These are but a few of the questions that have sourced, inspired, and guided human thought throughout its existence. In search of meaningful answers to these and many other questions, great acharyas and thinkers have provided original perspectives and interpretations of sacred works. These eventually culminated in the birth of various schools of thought known as *darshans*.

The formation of *darshans* transformed the Indian experience. They presented reflections with significant bearing on one's experience of

both the phenomenological and unperceived world. They offered revolutionary and comprehensive ways of understanding the self, the world and the divine. Their perspectives encourage one to view the familiar and the ordinary through a broader, more encompassing paradigm. *Darshanic* reflection, revelation and relevance served as catalysts that brought together the intricacies of reasoned thought with the infinite complexities of life. Their principles provided viewpoints that both enlightened and inspired. They served as beacons that revealed how and to what significance to view the world we live in, provided insight into what it means to live a meaningful life, and guided how to make life more meaningful.

Such interweaving of doctrine and practice resulted in the identity of a darshan becoming limited not to just well-organized ideas written



in a text or deliberated in conversations but exemplified, reaffirmed, and witnessed within the lives of its followers. A *darshan* refused to be reduced to just thoughts and reflections but took in a broader framework, encompassing as many dimensions as human experience itself.

WHAT IS A DARSHAN

What is a darshan? More relevantly, what are its various dimensions of the human experience? Reflection or analysis of a darshan occurs in terms of three broad categories:

- A darshan is a system that consists of a ज्ञानमीमांसा (*jnan-mimamsa*), what may roughly be understood as epistemology. *Jnan-mimamsa* reflects on what is the nature and form of knowledge, where it resides, how is it acquired, what are the causes of error, and other questions pertaining to knowledge.

- A darshan is also defined in terms of its unique तत्त्वमीमांसा (*tattva-mimamsa*) or metaphysics. A *darshan's tattva-mimamsa* consists of reflections on its enumeration of metaphysical entities, their nature and form, and the relationships between them. Among other things, it explains the cause of the experienced world and the nature of existence.

- The third category of *darshan* reflection consists of its मुक्तिमीमांसा (*mukti-mimamsa*) or soteriology – its understanding of misery and pain, happiness and bliss, the cause and form of bondage or ignorance, spiritual endeavour and the state of liberation.

In addition to these categorical features, a *darshan's* identity comprises of many other related elements. To expand on these, we must first understand what the term 'darshan' entails. What is a *darshan*? The concise answer is:

दृश्यते अनेन इति दर्शनम् ।

Drushyate anena iti darshanam ।

"A darshan is that by which one sees."

The mention of 'see', or rather sight, is complex: not only is it meant literally, as in terms of actual

perception through vision, but it is also not limited to just sight, but incorporates all experiences, utilizing all the sense faculties. Hence, a *darshan* is how one listens, hears, feels, tastes, smells, and even thinks or understands. Furthermore, a *darshan* is not limited to just how one receives experience but also conveys how one expresses it to others. For example, a *darshan* may be expanded as how one speaks, moves, and allows others to see, touch, understand and experience.

Speaking more concretely, to witness a *darshan*, one must know, understand, practise and experience the teachings of its sacred works, its diverse literature and song, its places of worship, its festivals, its guru *parampara* and leadership, its unique methods of conveying teachings, the lives of its followers, their forms of worship, their daily practices and ritual acts, the *darshan's* expression of art as it occurs in music, the visual arts, and performing arts, and even its distinct cuisine. As such, experiencing a *darshan* requires one to study its sacred texts and literature, understand and imbibe its principles, perceive its expression in the lives of its practitioners, become familiar with its history and culture, and perhaps more importantly, undergo its transformative effects in one's own life.

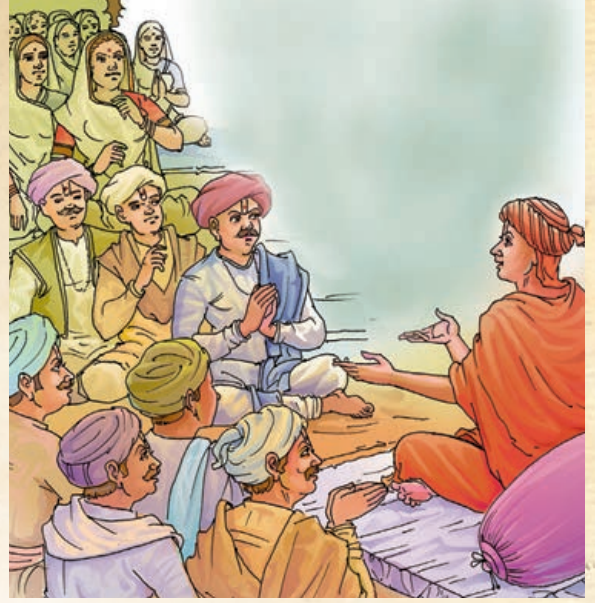
Within the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, we can experience all these various dimensions of the *darshan* world. Beginning with the *darshan's* core teachings, its *jnan-mimamsa*, *tattva-mimamsa*, and *mukti-mimamsa*, the principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan were revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM DARSHAN

While travelling from one village to the next, Bhagwan Swaminarayan delivered discourses to devotees on *brahma-jnan*. These teachings are compiled in the Vachanamrut, a chronological collection of Bhagwan Swaminarayan teachings delivered between 1819 and 1829. Bhagwan Swaminarayan revealed that there are five eternal and ontologically distinct entities: *jiva*, *ishvar*, *maya*,



Bhagwan Swaminarayan discourses in an assembly



Gunatitanand Swami emphasizes the importance of *katha*

Aksharbrahma and Parabrahma. He explained that the *jivas* and *ishvars* were enshrouded by *maya* since eternity, whereas Akshar (Aksharbrahma) and Purushottam (Parabrahma) are both unique and eternally beyond *maya*. He emphasized the need to perform *ekantik bhakti*, become *akshar-rup*, and offer singular devotion to Purushottam. The underlying message of his discourses was:

निजाऽऽत्मानं ब्रह्मरूपं देहत्रयविलक्षणम् ।

विभाव्योपासनं कार्यं सदैव परब्रह्मणः ॥

Nijātmanam brahmarūpam dehatrayavilaksanam ।

*Vibhāvīyopāsanam kāryam sadaiva
parabrahmanah ॥*

“Upon realizing one’s *atma*, which is distinct from the three bodies, as *brahmarup*; one should always offer *upasana* to Parabrahma.¹

The Gunatit Aksharbrahma gurus who came after him – Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and presently *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj – have all furthered Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s work. Under their experienced leadership, efforts and inspiration, each aspect of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan

has been expanded and elaborated.

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami continued Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s legacy by emphasizing *katha-varta* as an essential means for conveying teaching. Upon receiving instructions from Shriji Maharaj himself, Swami dedicated his life to delivering discourses on the *paravani* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Swami’s passion for *katha-varta* was so much that within Junagadh mandir, where Swami served as the mahant for over forty years, *katha-varta* would often occur around the clock. Swami would often express, “By listening to these discourses, a *jiva* would become *brahmarup*.”² Many of Swami’s teachings are recorded in a seminal text of the *darshan* known as ‘Gunatitanand Swamini Vato’.

Shriji Maharaj also instructed devotees and sadhus to go to Junagadh every year and listen to Swami’s discourses for at least one month. Devotees and sadhus would come from all around Gujarat to be with Swami and listen to his transformative *katha*. These acts of *samagam* are the origins of the *shibir* – an immersive experience where devotees would leave their homes to listen to discourses undisturbed.

1 (Satsang Diksha 116)

2 (Gunatitanand Swamini Vato 1.24)



Bhagatji Maharaj exemplified the ideals of *seva*

When Raghuvirji Maharaj would come to listen to Swami's discourses, he would be so engrossed in Swami's *katha* that there would be no time to prepare a meal. So that he could spend more time listening to Swami's discourses, he would cook rice and vegetables together. This is how the Swaminarayan *khichdi* was born. He saved time not only in preparing a meal but also in eating it. The Swaminarayan *khichdi* was born from an enthusiasm for listening to *katha* and serves as a reminder of the *darshan's* value for spiritual discourse. Soon after, it became a unique food item of the *darshan*.

In addition to continuing Gunatitanand Swami's legacy of *katha-varta*, Bhagatji Maharaj exemplified the ideals of *seva* and singular devotion to the guru. His willingness and enthusiasm to mix mortar at the risk of his health, remove a deceased dog, jump into a vat of grimy dishwater, call the Girnar mountain, manually water 300 mango trees, fetch non-existent construction materials, deliver discourses, and even endanger himself to announce Swami's true form epitomized the *darshan's* teachings on selfless service towards the guru. Bhagatji Maharaj serves as a role model of the *sadhak* – an aspiring devotee who continually strives to please the guru.



Shastriji Maharaj propagated the Akshar-Purushottam principle by establishing mandirs

He exemplified how a *sadhak* could become *siddha* – attain realization – by imbibing the teaching of the *darshan's* sadhana.

Bhagatji Maharaj conveyed Gunatitanand Swami's true form to his successor, Shastri Yagnapurushdasji (Shastriji Maharaj), who established Bhagwan Swaminarayan's teachings as the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. Shastriji Maharaj explained the eternal principle of becoming *aksharrup* and offering *upasana* to Purushottam to many devotees. His explanations were scholastic and referenced expositions from Vedic shastras and sacred texts of the *darshan*. They would serve as the building blocks of the acclaimed *Swaminarayan-bhashya*.

In addition to revealing the Akshar-Purushottam Siddhant to others, Shastriji Maharaj also constructed Akshar-Purushottam mandirs. These mandirs established public sacred spaces for darshan, where one could 'see' (witness) Maharaj, Swami, and the guru *parampara* with their own eyes and offer worship or bhakti. They became *tirth sthans* (sacred places of pilgrimage) that had historical significance because of their relationships with the lives of the gurus



Yogiji Maharaj further spread the Akshar-Purushottam principle abroad

and Bhagwan Swaminarayan and, as a result, are regularly visited by devotees. Within these mandirs, Shastriji Maharaj consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam, which provided an embodied form to the essence of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's teachings and the 'Swaminarayan' mantra. These *murtis* became one of the unique identifying features of an Akshar-Purushottam mandir and the identity of the *darshan*.

Thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj furthered the *darshan* experience by inspiring the publication of the *jivan charitras* – biographical works of many of the BAPS gurus. These publications recollected and preserved the gurus' lives and teachings, allowing all to experience their sacrifices, values and embodiment of the *darshan's* principles. These works were authored after meticulous research, supported by eye-witness reports and corroborated from multiple sources. As a result, they also serve as authoritative historical records of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

Yogiji Maharaj also spread satsang by establishing *mandals* tailored to each age group. By creating *bal mandals*, and even conducting the first *bal sabha* with his own unique narrative storytelling

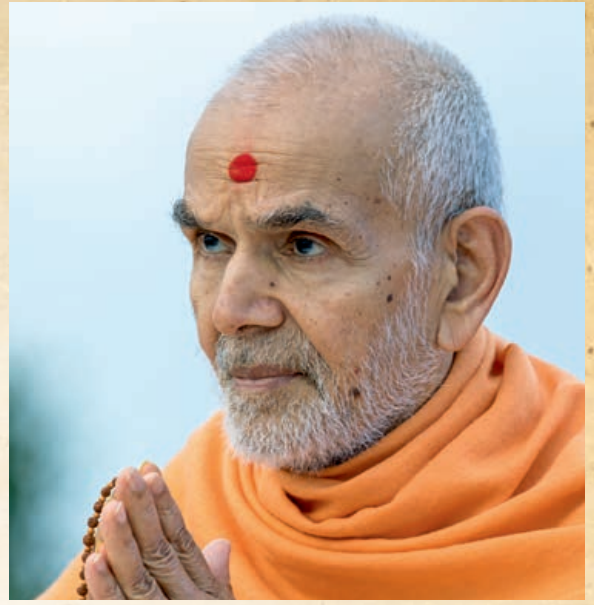
methods, he ensured even the youngest members of the satsang would have their own unique *darshan* experience. Over time, his simple and universally appealing *bodh-kathas*, would come to inspire artistic representations that express profound *darshan* principles. In addition, he established *kishore* and *yuvak mandals* and regular weekly *sabhas*, allowing devotees of all ages access to the teachings of the *darshan* and platforms to integrate new dimensions for their expression. His emphasis on promoting the *darshan's* principles in diverse languages and initiating educated sadhus from the UK and Africa laid the foundation for the exponential growth of the international satsang communities we see today. Yogiji Maharaj's visionary leadership paved the multi-dimensional growth of the *darshan* that followed.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj fostered *darshan* expression and its experience through various forms and mediums. For example, their enthusiasm for *darshan* expression through literary works is far-ranging. They inspired foundational literary and philosophical works such as the *Swaminarayan-bhashya* (2009–12), *Swaminarayan-siddhant-sudha* (2017), *Akshar-Purushottam-mahatmya* (2013), the *Satsang Diksha* (2020), and the extensive *jivan charitras* of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Along with these *darshan* texts, they continue to inspire the creation of more than 450 works in various languages, including Gujarati, English, Hindi, Tamil, Marathi, and some European languages. Poetic creations like the two-volume *Swaminarayan-Charit-Manas*; periodicals like the *Swaminarayan Prakash*, *Swaminarayan Bliss* and *Premvati*; and online article series and courses like the 'Satsang Diksha Adhyayan' continue to serve as vehicles of *darshan* experience.

In addition to literary and periodical creations, they inspired the expression of *darshan* thought through numerous activities. Having motivated the study of music, playing of traditional and contemporary instruments, singing and the



Pramukh Swami Maharaj spread the Akshar-Purushottam principle on a global scale



Today, Mahant Swami Maharaj fosters the principle in many ways

performing arts, hundreds of audio and video productions continue to be created. Training in classical dance, performing arts, visual arts, various practical fields of study and management are continually put to use in numerous international festivals, many of which, like the *janma jayanti* celebrations, are annually occurring megaevents. Even studies in history, anthropology and social sciences have produced many research works and permanent exhibitions throughout the world.

They also inspired the creation of over a thousand mandirs in nearly all the continents of the world. There is nothing more awe-inspiring than the Swaminarayan Akshardham complexes in Gandhinagar, New Delhi and Robbinsville. These structures allow visitors to experience Vedic culture and majesty through their architectural designs and the values and teachings of Sanatan Dharma through meaningful artistic elements, inspirational exhibitions and educational activities.

An even closer examination of these mandirs reveals their relationships with individuals of the satsang community. As witnessed by the recent docu-series, 'The First of Its Kind', on the BAPS Mandir in London, these mandirs have deeply

woven histories and represent a community's inseverable bond with not just the mandir but also the *gunatit satpurush*. They stand as monuments of the dedication, hope and sacrifice of the devotees who have poured themselves into its foundation. They are sacred places where devotees come to do darshan, not just of Bhagwan but also his eternal *bhakta* and other devotees. They are places where they come to offer *seva* (service); where they come to meet and interact with one another, with sadhus and the guru; and where they can listen to *katha*, learn about their identity, history and values, and pass it all on to their children.

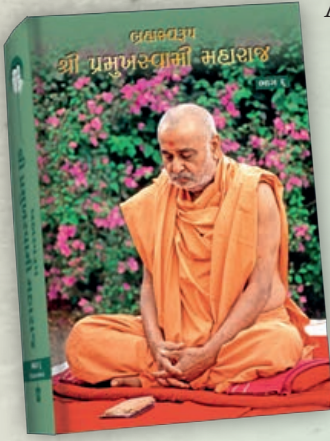
With mandirs come festival celebrations, such as Diwali, Annakut and Guru Purnima. These festivals provide platforms for the expression of *darshanic* values, teachings, and history through presentations involving music, choreography, drama, and other visual and performing arts. By facilitating these modes and forms of expression, mandirs continue to serve as portals for diverse *darshanic* experiences.

The *gunatit* gurus have furthered the philosophical reflection and discourse of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan; inspired the

continued creation of its literature, places of worship and daily practices; expanded on the *darshanic* identities of the gurus; forged *darshanic* values and practices among the *darshan's* followers; organized *darshanic* festivals and celebrations; cultivated *darshanic* thought through artistic expressions; and even inspired the integration of *darshanic* sentiments into novel cuisines. They became both the benefactors of tradition and values

and the drivers of innovation and change. For this reason, these gurus are not only the सम्प्रदायाऽभिरक्षकः (*sampradaya-abhirakshak*) – guardians of the *sampradaya* – but also the सम्प्रदायाऽभिवर्धकः (*sampradaya-abhivardhak*) – the proliferators of the *darshan*. By introducing and inspiring unique and identifying features to the *darshanic* experience, they are mediums through which devotees continue to have darshan of the Divine. ♦

BIOGRAPHY OF SHRI PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ (Part 6)



Author: Sadhu Adarshjivandas **Language:** Gujarati

The sixth part of Brahaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's biography covers the period from 1987 to 1990.

The pace of Swamishri's *vicharan* remained unrelenting. Sustaining previous undertakings and embarking on new endeavours was Swamishri's hallmark. He handled his hectic and demanding schedule with grace, composure and unwavering commitment. But more than anything, his day was perfused with devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his innate saintliness always shone to the fore.

In 1987, Swamishri led an entourage of around 400 swamis and devotees on a pilgrimage of North India, retracing the historic journey of Shri Nilkanth Varni, the teenage-yogi form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

During this period, Swamishri met many of the revered mahatmas residing in these sacred places. On his return to Gujarat, he immediately turned his attention to helping alleviate the effects of the severe famine due to the drought in parts of Gujarat by setting up four large-scale cattle camps and taking other necessary steps. He personally appealed for resources and administered their efficient and optimum use. His concern for the well-being of all was evident through his selfless service in this time of dire need. The year concluded with the Kalash Mahotsav of the BAPS Mandir in Mumbai. In 1988, Gujarat recovered from the famine and Swamishri embarked upon an eight-month overseas satsang tour to UK and Europe, North America and Africa. During these exhausting travels, among other accolades, Swamishri was honoured in the parliaments of Britain and Canada. He also reached out to leaders of other Hindu denominations and other faiths to promote inter-faith harmony and world peace. Swamishri also inaugurated several overseas BAPS mandirs, providing devotees places to congregate for individual and collective worship.

In 1989, Swamishri remained in India, visiting over 325 cities, towns and villages to strengthen the practice of spirituality in people's daily lives.

In 1990, Swamishri again visited the UK and North America. In America, Swamishri launched the year-long Cultural Festival of India celebrations that would promote the millennia-old traditions and values of India and Sanatan Dharma to the people of America and would culminate in a grand month-long festival the following year. In the UK, after 10 years of searching, he finalized the Arlington site to build a *shikharbaddha* mandir in London, as per Yogiji Maharaj's vision. After celebrating Diwali in London, Swamishri returned to India.

THE HOLES THAT EMPTY YOUR SOUL

What is a hole?
Is it a gap, or something missing?
Like in a donut, pretzel or bagel.
Or is it a passage to fill something?
Like in a bag, pocket or bucket.
Life is a container you fill as you journey,
During which you gather and shed.
You collect worldly knowledge and its wondrous ways,
You hoard material gadgets
And enjoy fleeting pleasures.
They are what fill your mundane life,
Making you feel they are the purpose of living.
But pause and ponder, for when your body is no more
What will you take when you leave this world?
The answer, you will find,
Is none of the above.

Why? Because you are the *atma*, separate from the body.
The body will perish, it's your fleeting home;
The *atma* will persist, it's your permanent form.
Use the body to discover your *atma*,
And establish your link with the supreme Paramatma.

So do good deeds and conquer inner demons,
Offer devotion and serve the Divine.
They are the source of peace and joy,
They are the things that fill your soul.
But beware your stock is not lost on the way,
Through holes which you can readily seal.
What are these holes that undo the good,
And displace you from where you once stood?
They are the holes of addictions and vices,
Of faultfinding and fingerpointing.
They are the holes of loose character and negative talks,
Of disregard for values and duties.
So, block these holes that empty your soul
And use your life to make your soul whole.





A family engaged in doing *ghar sabha*

Home Rituals

In article three we discussed bhakti rituals, especially those of navdha bhakti.

In this fourth article on Hindu rituals we discuss home rituals.

No matter how poor a Hindu is he will have a shrine of plastic or wood at his home or work area. Before he leaves home for work or even at work, he will wave an incense stick and perhaps a *diya* a few times towards his Ishtadevata's *murti*. This is a ritual in its simplest way.

Hence, for Hindus, home rituals are centred on the home shrine – *ghar mandir*. In turn, the *ghar mandir* functions as a smaller version of the bigger mandir in the village or city. The benefits of rituals observed in the *ghar mandir* are numerous, which contribute to the holistic nurture of all the family members, especially children. Sociologists and neuroscientists have praised and advocated the importance of religious rituals. We cited a few in the first article of the series. However, it is worth citing one again, “Within the context of highly developed Western technological

societies, whether in new form or old, religious ritual behaviour is much too important to the psychological well-being of a society for it to lapse into oblivion,” declares Dr Eugene D'Aquili, former professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania.

Home rituals include a vast array of daily practices of worship, such as, awakening the deity; bathing the deity physically or in *mansi*; offering adornments, flowers, garlands and *naivedya*; performing *arti*; offering pranams; singing bhajans and *stotras* glorifying the deity's divine attributes, *lila* and injunctions; and so forth. These will also be boosted by festivals of the Indian calendar and those of special celebrations and auspicious *tithis*.

Children can be inspired to participate in all such rituals. This inspires in them religious and cultural *sanskars*. Hence, rituals are the best and most important source of *sanskars* which

bestow upon them self-esteem, cultural pride and spiritual fortitude.

Such virtues are inherently associated with ritual practices. Let us consider a few examples. By singing bhajans and playing instruments such as *tabla*, *sitar*, *manjira*, *khanjari* and others children develop vocal and musical skills. Simultaneously they develop a sense of beat and rhythm. In *Toxic Childhood*, the author, Sue Palmer, posits that a young child's ability to keep a steady percussion beat is one of the best predictors of future success at school.

Chanting Sanskrit mantras and *stotras* improve pronunciation as well as memory and thus increase the power of memorizing easily and rote learning.

Another skill that develops during recitation and reading of sacred texts is proficiency in vernacular. This directly boosts self-esteem and pride of being able to speak one's mother tongue fluently. Taking this one step further, if children are then taught and encouraged to discuss the import of the stories, parables and principles, they develop elocution skills and the ability to think creatively. This again boosts their self esteem and provides a foundation to speak confidently in public by overcoming stage fear.

During the birthday celebrations of divine avatars and other important Hindu festivals, such as Rath Yatra and Hindola, children can be encouraged to decorate the *ghar* mandir and perhaps the whole room. This induces paper crafting and other decorative skills by using materials such as tinsel, plasticine and cloth materials such as saris. Decorating also develops an aesthetic sense.

As children become more proficient in decorating, their powers of observation and sharpness increase. They are easily able to visualize proper combinations of colour matching. This obviously helps tremendously in studies as well.

One important feature of Hindu ritual



Singing bhajans before the *murti* of God

celebrations is traditional folk dancing. This may involve learning the folk dance of one's region in India such as *dandia-ras*, *garba*, *kathakali* and others. This is especially helpful during adolescence when teenagers may wish to direct their zestful stamina to devotional pursuits. This will necessarily mean interacting with other children or teenagers and in turn this promotes fraternity and unity. The shy and meek are able to shed their introverted nature to become more gregarious and sociable.

The varied forms of *naivedya* offered during festivals is an important source of culinary *sanskars*. Young children can be inspired to help arrange the cooked items. As they grow up, they learn how to cook all types of traditional Indian vegetarian foods. Cooking is considered as the third lifesaving skill, the other two being the ability to cross a road and swim. This will help youths who leave home for further studies. The ability to cook one's traditional foods empowers them to survive anywhere in the world as well as maintain mental and spiritual health by observing the diet purity codes of one's *sampradaya*.

Hindu rituals of *sharanagati* – surrenderance to Bhagwan and one's spiritual guru, such as wearing



Offering *panchang pranam* to one's parents

a *kanthi*, performing puja, imprinting *tilak* (and *chandlo* in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya) on the forehead and *panchang* or *dandvat pranams* collectively induce the virtue of faith and humility in children and young people. This also entails honour and respect towards one's parents and teachers. This sublime virtue prevents unruliness at home and school. It instils the awareness in children that Bhagwan and the guru love and guide them. Hence, it prevents children from cheating in studies and during exams. In the case of peer pressure, to do something against the codes of dharma, Hindu children will have the fortitude not to be swayed. Similarly, the ritual of puja infuses children with the belief that 'whatever devotional rituals we observe will earn

the blessings of Bhagwan and guru and they listen to our prayers'.

Mahant Swami Maharaj offers a compelling argument to combat peer pressure and practising religious observances. He says that pleasing peers is equal to gaining ten rupees, while pleasing Bhagwan and guru is similar to attaining a billion rupees.

Finally, the key home ritual that acts as a panacea for many domestic, mundane and spiritual problems is the daily evening *ghar sabha*. Introduced by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the early 1970s and now also advocated by Mahant Swami Maharaj, it involves reading and discussing satsang literature in the presence of all family members (Satsang Diksha 86). This family gathering offers opportunities to children to participate and develop their reading, singing, verbal and other skills. More importantly, it establishes love, peace, harmony and unites the family. Issues are discussed and resolved amicably. Adults and children who may have undesirable *swabhavs*, mannerisms and traits begin to shed these tendencies by divine blessings.

In the fifth article, we shall discuss personal rituals.

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1. Palmer, Sue (2006). *Toxic childhood*, UK. Orion.
2. Lindstrom, M. (2005). *Brandchild*. London, Kogan Page.
3. Mukundcharandas, Sadhu (2016). *Murti Puja and Bal Samskaras - A Handbook For Parents*. Amdavad: Swaminarayan Aksharpath.

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I, Sadhu Swayamprakashdas, hereby declare that the above mentioned information is true to my knowledge.

(Signed) Sadhu Swayamprakashdas. Date: 5-3-2022

INSPIRATIONS

*A potpourri of inspiring and interesting
information and wisdom*

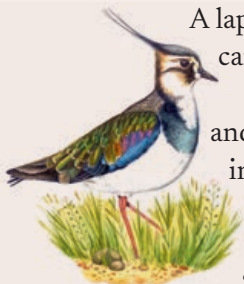
THE WAXING MOON



Once the target is fixed, one's efforts can be directed in attaining the bliss of God. In so doing, attachment to the world gradually declines, the veil of *maya* is slowly removed and one increasingly realizes the infinite glory of God. Shriji Maharaj describes this process of gradual evolvment in Vachanamrut Sarangpur 17, "From here, the full moon appears like a small plate. But as one approaches it, it appears to get increasingly larger. Then, when one comes extremely close to it, it becomes so vast that one is unable to see its limits. Similarly, as obstacles in the form of *maya* are overcome, and one increasingly attains the proximity of God, one realizes the unlimited greatness of God, and one's sense of servitude towards Him is increasingly strengthened."

- Analogy from Vachanamrut

UNITED WE WIN



A lapwing once laid her eggs on the seashore. Soon the eggs hatched. But a very high tide carried the babies into the sea. The mother lapwing cried all day long.

Then all the lapwings gathered together and decided, "Let's fill in the sea with sand and rescue the babies. Millions of lapwings came together. Each one would dip its beak in the sea and fill it with seawater and then throw it onto the shore. Then every lapwing would pick up a grain of sand or a small pebble and throw it into the sea.

Naradji happened to pass by that way. He saw the millions of lapwings and so asked, "What are all of you doing?"

The lapwings said, "The sea has taken away one of our lapwing's babies and so we're filling the sea." Naradji was astonished at their efforts and faith. He at once went to Vaikunth.

The Lord asked Naradji about the latest happenings on earth. Garudji was sitting next to the Lord. Naradji answered the Lord in a loud voice so Garudji could hear, "The human race is getting along well, but there is trouble among the birds."

Garudji heard this and asked, "Naradji, why do you speak ill of my species? What has happened among my people?"

Naradji explained, "Millions of lapwings have united and are trying to save the babies of one lapwing by filling in the ocean. They're working tremendously hard. You yourself belong to the bird species. You should join their efforts. Your not helping them is the trouble and disunity I'm talking about!"

Garudji at once went to the seashore. He filled one of his wings with sand and threw it into the sea. With each round he filled forty *gau*¹ of sea.

The sea became worried, "Garudji will completely fill me in no time!" he thought to himself. He took a human form and came before Garudji and folded his hands in humility. Garudji said, "Give the babies back." The sea at once gave the babies back.

It was because the lapwings were united that Garudji joined their efforts, and the sea was humbled.

1. One *gau* is equal to 3.2 km.

The sea that Garudji filled in is today known as the Bhal region of Gujarat. The water there is salty even today!

If we have unity amongst ourselves God is sure to join our efforts.

- 101 Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj

APOLLONIUS OF TURKEY



Apollonius of Tyana

Apollonius of Tyana was a physician who lived in Turkey in 100 CE. Much of what we know about Apollonius today comes from a biography written by Philostratus, a prominent Greek intellectual of the 2nd and 3rd century.

Philostratus notes that Apollonius was a follower of Pythagoras (c. 570–495 BCE), a Greek philosopher and mathematician, who lived six centuries earlier. Apollonius believed that many of Pythagoras's teachings, like reincarnation, vegetarianism, observing silence as a spiritual discipline and others, were all a part of Hindu tradition. Apollonius travelled to India, and with the help of a local king he was introduced to a yogi named Iarchas. The yogi welcomed him by name, and told him his parents' names and mentioned a few facts and incidents about Apollonius's life. Apollonius was surprised and asked the yogi

how he knew so much about him. Iarchas replied, "By knowing ourselves."

In the months that Apollonius stayed Iarchas taught him disciplines and rituals through intensive yogic training, the Vedic method of performing puja and other Hindu techniques. Apollonius learned to use mantras and how to empower *yantras* (sacred diagrams). For centuries after his death, the *yantras* empowered by Apollonius were known throughout the Western world for their miraculous properties.

Apollonius travelled throughout the Roman Empire, Spain, Africa and India. Noting his experiences in India he wrote, "I have seen men dwelling on the earth, but not of the earth. I saw them well defended without fortifications. I saw they owned nothing, yet possessed all things."

Apollonius travelled to Egypt and up the Nile, he met the desert ascetics of Ethiopia whose spiritual beliefs and practices were similar to the ascetics he had met and stayed with in India. On further enquiry he found evidence that the forefathers of these Ethiopians had emigrated from India. This is confirmed by an account on Egypt's history in Greek by Manetho, an Egyptian priest. He wrote that the immigrants from northern India settled in Ethiopia around 1400 BCE.

Apollonius travelled widely in the Western world and in Egypt and Persia for most of his life. He noted that nowhere did he find and experience the lofty wisdom and knowledge as he had found in India. He claimed that many of the mystic schools of the West had their origin in India. He wrote a four-volume book about Hindu spiritual wisdom, which unfortunately is lost to us. Apollonius was one of the most revered and famous spiritual teachers in the Western world during the initial several centuries of the Common Era.

- Philostratus, the Athenian (2nd/3rd century). Translated by Phillimore, John Swinnerton.,
In Honour of Apollonius of Tyana, Vol.1. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912, pp.107–110.

ENLIGHTENING QUOTES

- The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people. - Theodore Roosevelt (26th US President)
- Bad company divorces one from God and character. - Pramukh Swami Maharaj
- Tears will get you sympathy; sweat will get you results. - Anon



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

VICHARAN

2 December 2021–7 January 2022, Atladara



On 2 December 2021, Mahant Swami Maharaj departed from Gondal by car and went to the BAPS Mandir in Rajkot. Here, Swamishri did darshan of Thakorji and gave darshan to the devotees assembled in the mandir. Thereafter, Swamishri and his entourage of swamis travelled by plane to Vadodara and then by road to Atladara mandir. The local swamis and devotees gave a joyous welcome to *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj, who had arrived to celebrate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 100th birthday at his birthplace in Chansad.

Swamishri's morning puja was held daily at the Yagnapurush Sabhagruha, opposite the mandir. Thereafter, his discourses inspired all with divine joy and inner strength. To please Swamishri, devotees performed austerities and *seva*, and pilgrimaged by foot to the mandir from distant villages and towns. Also, adhering to the prevailing coronavirus protocols, daily arrangements were made for Swamishri's *samip* darshan for the devotees and dignitaries of various satsang centres under the Atladara mandir region.

- **3 December:** Swamishri ritually inaugurated the newly constructed Yagnapurush Sant Ashram in the mandir precincts. It was then

sanctified by Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Swamishri, who showered flower petals.

- **7 to 11 December:** Swamishri gave darshan and discourses during the five-day special Pramukh Parva assemblies in Chansad and Atladara. On 7 and 9 December, Swamishri gave the *bhagwati* and *parshad dikshas* to a total of 109 *sadhaks*. On 11 December, the birthday celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was festively held virtually for the entire Satsang following.
- **17 December:** Swamishri presided and blessed an online felicitation assembly of the winners of the Satsang Diksha *mukhpath* competition, held at sixteen BAPS centres in Africa. The winners gave brief recitations before Swamishri and earned his *rajipo*. Swamishri sanctified the trophies and medals for the winners with flower petals. Swamishri also blessed the winners by touching his hands on their photographs and list of names.
- **16 December 2021 to 14 January 2022:** On the occasion of Dhanurmas, Swamishri daily wrote inspiring messages in commemoration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary year.
- **7 January 2022:** Due to the third wave of the coronavirus pandemic, Swamishri instructed all satsang programmes, namely, *sabhas*, *parivarik shanti abhiyan* campaigns, celebrations, mandir *patotsavs*, *sant vicharan*, and the groundbreaking and inauguration ceremonies of mandirs be stalled indefinitely. Thereafter, all satsang *sabhas* were reverted to an online format.

SWAMISHRI CONSECRATES MURTIS FOR BAPS MANDIRS

Atladara

During Mahant Swami Maharaj's stay in

Atladara, he consecrated *murtis* for the following BAPS *hari* mandirs: in the Mahelav region, Israma and Devataj; in the Bodeli region, Kathola, Khajuriya, Pratapnagar, Chhota Udepur, Bahadarpura, Lingsthal, Kashipura, Lunadra Colony and Ambali. Also, Swamishri consecrated the *murtis* for other *hari* mandirs in the regions of Vaghodiya, Antoli, Etola, Pipaliya, Shraddha Park Society – *murti* of

Ghanshyam Maharaj (Rajkot), Rajupura (canvas *murtis*) and *murtis* for mandirs in Geelong, Victoria, and Cairns, Queensland, in Australia.

Swamishri also performed the *pujan* rituals of bricks for the foundations ceremonies of several *sanskardhams*. ◆

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

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

November–December 2021

Some divine incidents of Swamishri during his stay in Gondal and Atladara are as follows.

GONDAL: NOVEMBER HARMONY AND SUCCESS 2, Tuesday

The 12th grade students of Gondal *gurukul* had acquired outstanding marks in the NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) exam – a national level entrance exam for admission to medical colleges in India. Nirbhayjivan Swami, who oversees the Gondal *gurukul* explained to Swamishri the reasons behind the success achieved, “We have very good teachers, and they work in harmony (*samp*) with each other.” He also prayed, “Bless us so that we get better results every year.”

Swamishri expressed his joy and remarked, “See, how wonderful the result of *samp* is. Even if one is ordinary, *samp* elevates one immensely. However, if there is disharmony (*kusamp*), then even large business companies collapse and fail. Thus, one should live in harmony. Furthermore, we are blessed with the associations of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. They fostered *samp* in others through their exemplary lives. Therefore, we should follow their footsteps.”

Swamishri lucidly explained and emphasized the efficacy of practising *samp* and the harmful effect of disharmony.



PERFECT SOLUTIONS TO PRACTISE SAMP

Devotees who came for Swamishri’s darshan today asked, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj often said, “To maintain *samp* it is necessary to tolerate (*khamvu*), serve others (*ghasavu*), give up one’s wilful nature (*man gamtu mukvu*) and be accommodative (*anukul thavu*).” But we tolerate because we have to and not out of joy, we serve others but only superficially, we give up our mind’s resolve by doing what our mind wants to do and the virtue of being accommodative to others is eclipsed by the fact that we often make others accommodate to our wishes and ways. This is the reality in our lives. Therefore Swami, guide us about how we should cultivate *samp* and practise accordingly?”

Swamishri replied, “By having *mahima* (understanding the glory and greatness) of others, one can attain the (four) virtues. When one realizes others’ *mahima*, one becomes humble and then whatever lapses that obstruct us in practising the four virtues are dissolved and exit the mind.”

BRAVE HEARTS

4, Thursday

Prior to retiring for the night, Swamishri was looking at the sadhus with joy. Then, he said, “All are truly brave hearts.”

An attendant swami expressed, “With your strength and blessings all are battling against *maya*. Bless them that they become victorious.”

Swamishri smiled and replied, “*Maya* is very tough and harsh. However, you have God’s association, so you will be victorious. You will face some struggles, but finally you will all attain victory.” Then, Swamishri added, “Be absorbed in satsang or else *maya* will beat you against the ground.” Then, someone asked, “Satsang means the Satpurush. So, it means we should remain absorbed in thinking about you. Is that correct?”

Swamishri gestured affirmatively.

FAITH AND THE GURU’S RARE BLESSINGS

5, Friday

On New Year’s Day, an array of food items were arranged as *annakut* before Thakorji in the Akshar Deri. Swamishri was seated outside the glass encasement singing the *thal* with the swamis. When it was time to perform the *annakut arti*, Swamishri was asked to do so by remaining seated in his chair. But Swamishri stood up, and performed the *arti*.

Thereafter, Swamishri was patiently meeting the swamis and devotees, blessing them on New Year’s Day. Among the large number of devotees, Swamishri saw Kishorebhai Gadhia, a blind devotee from Ahmedabad. He remembered Kishorebhai and wished to bless him. In no time, Kishorebhai was brought to Swamishri and he blessed him. Kishorebhai was overwhelmed with joy and expressed, “Swamishri remembered me out of hundreds of devotees!”

It is amazing that Kishorebhai travelled all the way from Ahmedabad, even though he could not see Swamishri and would probably not have got the opportunity of touching Swamishri’s feet.

Such deep faith in a devotee definitely earns him the guru’s grace and blessings.

MEANS TO THE HIGHEST DIVINE BLISS

7, Sunday

Vedananddas Swami asked Swamishri, “Once, you had said that one should rejoice in the bliss of Bhagwan and guru. But what should one do to experience the eternal joy of Bhagwan and guru?”

Swamishri replied, “Obey them and follow the *niyams* prescribed by them.”

Swamishri revealed the simple means to attaining the highest divine bliss.

IMPORTANCE OF OBEYING AGNA

8, Monday

Swamishri was asked, “What should we do so that our association with the Gunatit Satpurush never breaks?”

Swamishri replied, “Obey the instructions (*agna*) of Shriji Maharaj. Then, in spite of you being thousands of kilometres away, you are near to him. Whereas, when one disobeys God’s *agna*, and though one may be sitting near him, one is thousands of kilometres away.”

Swamishri explained the importance of obeying the instructions of God and guru in order to experience their divine proximity.

SWAMISHRI’S HUMILITY

14, Sunday

Daily, Swamishri blesses each of the swamis present by doing their darshan many times. In spite of this, he still wishes to do more darshan of the swamis. Each night, before he retires to bed, Swamishri raises his hands and humbly says “Jai Swaminarayan” to all. Today, he raised his hands, joined them together and circled them in the air three to four times, and said, “*Pradakshina* (circumambulation).” This meant that he offered *pradakshinas* to all.

Swamishri’s profound humility and glory for all is simply beyond the ken of human imagination. Many times, his gestures and words reveal his

innermost spiritual sentiments and perception for all.

GLORY FOR GURU

16, Tuesday

Today, a video recording of Swamishri was arranged for an online programme to be relayed under the auspices of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations. The recording went well, but an attendant swami asked, "Bapa, can you repeat it once again?"

Swamishri replied enthusiastically, "I can do it again five times." This meant that he would do it for as many times as required for Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Such is Swamishri's devotion to his guru. Thereafter, Swamishri spoke again for the video recording.

ATLADRA: DECEMBER

3, Friday

After his morning puja, Swamishri read from the *Yogi Vani* and explained, "Do *tilak-chandlo*, because it is our emblem. Follow *dharma-niyams* properly. By so doing, the supreme Shriji Maharaj becomes pleased upon us. When he becomes happy upon us, then nothing remains to be done.

"Do not harbour jealousy, worldly desires or hatred. Do not look at others' faults. All of this should penetrate one's soul and not merely remain in the mind. Talking about others' faults, even if they are true, amounts to gossiping. Stop talking negatively and start talking about others' glory and greatness. Negative words spoil the health of one's *atma*. Spiritual knowledge (*jnan*) is the food of the *atma*. The *atma* feels peaceful when it attains *jnan*. Thus, learn *jnan* and do not allow one's *atma* to get spoiled. This amounts to the state of God-realization."

SINGING THE CHESHTA PROPERLY

7, Tuesday

Today, according to the English calendar, was the 100th birthday of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Swamishri blessed innumerable devotees, who had come for darshan, from many parts of India and abroad.

In the evening assembly in Chansad, Swamishri gave the saffron *diksha* to *sadhaks*. Since it would be late by the time they reached the Atladara mandir, an attendant swami started the audio *cheshta* to make proper use of the travelling time. However, along the way, it was not possible to pay attention to the *cheshta* due to genuine reasons. This did not suit Swamishri well, so he told the attendant, "We'll have to sing the *cheshta* again. This won't do." Subsequently, the attendant switched off the audio *cheshta*. But then the attendant thought that if they sang the *cheshta* after reaching the mandir, then Swamishri would have to go late to sleep. So, he started the audio *cheshta* and Swamishri also joined in singing it. Then, the attendant realized that the Atladara mandir was not very far, so the *cheshta* would remain incomplete. Subsequently, they would have to sing it all over again as per Swamishri's inclination. To avoid this, the attendant increased the audio speed. But the *cheshta* was only half completed by the time they arrived at the mandir. Thus, the attendant kept the audio on while getting out of the car, on going up in the lift and on entering Swamishri's room. Then, when Swamishri was about to go to the bathroom for a shower, he told the attendant swami, "Singing *cheshta* in this way is not acceptable."

After his shower, Swamishri said, "We have to sing the *cheshta* properly all over again. A short cut version is not acceptable. There shouldn't be any interruption while singing it. It must be done properly." Seeing that Swamishri would not make any compromises on singing the ritual *cheshta* again, the attendant swami started singing from the beginning.

When it was over after half an hour, there was satisfaction on Swamishri's face in fulfilling his *niyam* of singing the *cheshta* properly. ♦

Translation by Sadhu Vivekji vandas from a concise Gujarati report by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas

BAPS Responds to Ukrainian Humanitarian Crisis

27 February 2022 to 2 March 2022, Rzeszów, Poland



Thousands of stranded students have fled the conflict-stricken regions of Ukraine seeking safe haven

As a devastating humanitarian crisis unfolds in Ukraine, hundreds of thousands are fleeing the warzone seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. This has included thousands of Indian nationals, mainly students, who have been left stranded amid the conflict.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally called Brahnaviharidas Swami at midnight on Sunday 27 February, asking for assistance from BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in ensuring the safe passage of Indian nationals on the Polish, Romanian and Hungarian borders with Ukraine.

Brahmaviharidas Swami, with years of experience in disaster relief work, joined an emergency meeting in Delhi by video conference from Dubai. After the Prime Minister expressed anguish at the plight of the refugees, Brahmaviharidas Swami assured that help was already on its way. "His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj has mobilized BAPS volunteers from all over Europe to help in the prevailing crisis."

Volunteers from the UK, Ireland, France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Austria and Poland swiftly sprang into action to support the emergency relief effort on the ground. This



BAPS swamis and volunteers from all over Europe called an emergency Zoom meeting to plan the relief work



BAPS volunteers meet Ms Nagma Mohamed Mallick, Ambassador of India to the Republic of Poland



Chirag Godiwala, a BAPS volunteer from Interlaken, Switzerland, help students settle down in a hotel



Hot food transported to the hotel on the first night

has included setting up a mobile field kitchen in the south-eastern Polish city of Rzeszów, which has begun feeding around 1,000 hot vegetarian meals daily to refugees of all faiths and nationalities.

BAPS is also arranging accommodation facilities and coordinating medical assistance, and is working closely with the Indian government as well as local partners to further expand the humanitarian efforts as the situation escalates.

Vijay Kumar Singh, former Army Chief of Staff and current Minister of State for Transport and Civil Aviation, observed the tireless efforts of the volunteers firsthand in Rzeszów. He commented, “BAPS has always been at the forefront of community service, being the first to arrive and the last to leave. The people of

India are indebted to your swift, selfless and organized action.”

Shailesh Bhavsar, a lead BAPS volunteer from Paris, added, “The situation in Ukraine is desperate and tragic. The priority is to support those seeking refuge by providing them with food and shelter. We are working closely with transport networks and logistical agencies to ensure the safe and timely delivery of essential services to those in need.

“Our volunteers are inspired by the ethos of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who personified the motto “In the joy of others lies our own”, and there has perhaps never been a more urgent moment to embody this selfless spirit of public service by providing the basic needs for those severely impacted by the conflict.” ♦



Hot vegetarian meals are served to the refugees



Young students are relieved to be returning home to India



INDIA

KARYAKAR SHIBIRS 2021

13 December 2021 to 2 January 2022



A total of over 13,000 volunteers involved in the BAPS Satsang, Mahila, Yuvak and Yuvati activities attended the 22 in-person Karyakar Shibirs held at the BAPS mandirs in Sarangpur, Gondal, Ahmedabad, Bochasan, Bharuch, Sankari and Tithal.

Based on the theme 'Ek Nishan: Shatabdi Mahotsav' – 'One Aim – Centenary Celebrations', the *karyakars* were guided and inspired through speeches by Pujya Doctor Swami, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, as well as other learned and experienced swamis.

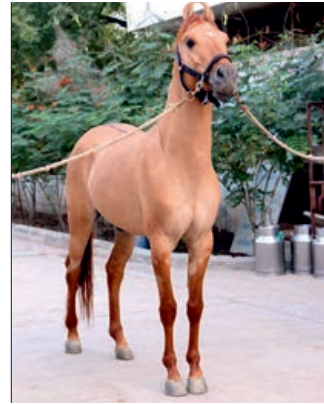
Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj's video blessings were also relayed to all the attendees.

YAGNAPURUSH GAUSHALA WINS NATIONAL AWARDS

23–24 December 2021

Yagnapurush Gaushala, the cattle and dairy farm at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur, has won numerous national awards over the past three decades.

On 23 December 2021, the National Bureau



of Animal Genetic Resources, operated by the Indian Council of Agriculture Research – an undertaking of the Government of India – presented Yagnapurush Gaushala the 'Breed Conservation Award 2021' in the Institution Category for its efforts in the conservation of Gir cattle.

On 24 December 2021, Malav, a three-year-old Kathiawadi horse, won first place in the Best Indian Livestock Competition during the 2021 Chetak Festival held at Sarangkgheda in Maharashtra. Malav was sired by Kanaiyo, who was reared at the Yagnapurush Gaushala and was first in the Best Kathiawadi Horse category in 2018.

NATIONAL MEDICO-SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE 2022

20 February 2022, Sarangpur

A total of 432 doctors and their families attended the one-day medico-spiritual conference based on the theme of 'Have Amaro Varo Chhe – Now It's Our Turn'.

Through speeches by learned swamis, videos, workshops and other thought-provoking activities, the doctors were given practical guidance. They also received guidance from Pujya Doctor



Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami via video conference. Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj also blessed the delegates. They were informed about the ongoing preparations for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebration and all readily volunteered to offer their professional services during the festival.

The delegates also performed guru *pujan* at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's memorial.

STUDENT SEMINAR

21 February 2022, Bhavnagar



To commemorate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary, the Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavnagar University, Bhavnagar, and AARSH Research Centre, Gandhinagar, jointly organized a seminar titled 'Creator and Nurturer of a Pious Society: Pramukh Swami Maharaj'. The seminar, attended by over 600 students, was held at the university's Atal Auditorium in the presence of Vice-Chancellor Dr Mahipatsinh Chavda; Shri

Apurva Sheth, MD of Sheth Group; Shri Sanjay Rawal, motivational speaker, Shrutiprakash Swami and other BAPS swamis.

The seminar featured speeches by the dignitaries and swamis that highlighted the values promoted by Pramukh Swami Maharaj for a better society. To sustain such Values, an MoU was announced between the university and the BAPS-run Integrated Personality Development Course (IPDC) to teach the university's students soft skills that will enrich their lives.

DEFENCE & TOURISM MINISTER VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

22 February 2022, Gandhinagar



Hon. Ajoybhai Bhatt, Minister for Defence and Tourism, Government of India, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar. During his visit, he offered prayers before the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the main mandir and performed *abhishek* of the *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni. Then, after viewing exhibition halls 1 and 2, he engaged in a spiritual discussion with Pujya Anandswarup Swami, Mahant of Swaminarayan Akshardham.

Before departing, Shri Ajoybhai Bhatt commented, "This is the first time I have come for darshan of Akshardham here in Gandhinagar. It is due to the merits of my past births that I have been able to come here. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's entire life inspires us all to become exemplary human beings. I offer my prayers for this. Om Shanti."

UK & EUROPE

NEW YEAR'S FAMILY SHATABDI MAHAPUJA

1 January 2022



More than 2,400 families joined a special online *mahapuja* to herald the first day of the New Year. The mahapuja was conducted from the shrines of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, by the resident swamis and was streamed via a live webcast across the UK and Europe.

The *mahapuja* ceremony, with explanations in Gujarati and English, provided families an opportunity to offer reverence, adoration and gratitude to God and pay tribute to the inspirational life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and marked the commencement of the year-long celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary.

Families adorned their homes and *ghar* mandirs with *rangolis*, lamps and other traditional decorations.

Dhara Bhatt, a young mother of two, whose family participated in the *mahapuja* from Stuttgart, Germany, shared, "What an uplifting way to bring in the New Year! This *mahapuja* gave my family and many others an opportunity to celebrate the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and live by his principles of compassion and harmony by praying for others for the year ahead. And the detailed explanations [in the *mahapuja*] helped my children to really enjoy the various parts of the ceremony and get fully involved."

ANNUAL SATSANG PRAVRUTTI & MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

20 February 2022, London



Held at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London (with a limited audience), and shared via a live webcast, the annual Satsang Pravrutti & Management Conference for BAPS UK & Europe was based on the theme, 'One Goal: Shatabdi Seva'.

The conference provided delegates detailed plans on the events and projects being planned to pay tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life of selfless sacrifice, pristine devotion and profound spirituality during his year-long birth centenary celebrations across the UK and in Europe.

A series of inspiring speeches by Narayanmuni Swami (via video) and resident swamis, and video presentations emphasized the importance of the opportunity to celebrate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's tireless spiritual travels across the UK and Europe were relived through photographs, videos and personal testimonies by devotees, who narrated the profound impact they have experienced from his visits.

Board of Trustees members also addressed the conference, highlighting BAPS achievements during another pandemic-hit year and setting the platform for the forthcoming centenary celebrations.

Lead volunteers then shared detailed plans of the activities and projects for the year-long

celebrations, which focus on personal spiritual development, connecting with individuals and families, serving the community, and vibrant cultural celebrations. All these will provide unique opportunities for young and old to participate and grow.

In his keynote address, Yogvivekdas Swami explained the ‘once in a lifetime opportunity’ of the celebrations. Further uplifting messages from *sadguru* swamis and a specially recorded message from Mahant Swami Maharaj energized the assembly at the mandir and everyone watching from their homes.

The conference concluded with all the participants joining in a collective pledge, drawing from the words of Mahant Swami Maharaj himself, in which they declared: “*Have amaro varo chhe!*” – Now it is our turn to offer our services to our guru during his centenary birth celebrations.

UAE

HON. SPEAKER OF INDIA'S LOK SABHA AND SENIOR DELEGATION VISIT BAPS HINDU MANDIR

23 February 2022, Abu Dhabi



A senior delegation of Indian parliamentarians, led by the Hon. Speaker of India's Lok Sabha, Shri Om Birla, visited the BAPS Hindu Mandir site. Among the 20 delegates were members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, and representatives from the UAE. The delegation members were welcomed traditionally with the tying of a *nadachhadi* around

the right wrist and a sandalwood paste *chandlo* on their forehead.

The delegation was given an overview of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's and Mahant Swami Maharaj's vision behind the mandir, and an update of the construction work to date. They then observed the ‘Rivers of Harmony’ exhibit.

Speaker Shri Om Birla remarked, “The BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi is an ideal example of global harmony. It is more than a temple, it is truly an Oasis of Spirituality, Beauty and Universality. For hundreds of years, the magnanimity and the integrity of the rulers of UAE and the leaders of India shall be celebrated by generations to come. I congratulate Pramukh Swami, BAPS saints, volunteers and workers involved in this selfless saga of harmony. It is a matter of great pride for India and for Indians all over the world.”

Senior parliamentarian Mr. Sushil Kumar Modi stated, “Amongst all the temples across the globe this temple is iconic and historic and marks its position in a different league. This morning, during our meeting with Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince, H.E. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed, he expressed his joy and happiness for the harmony that the upcoming BAPS Hindu Mandir and all the Indian businessmen and workers are contributing to this great nation.”

The delegation also participated in prayers and *pujan* and placed the sanctified bricks on the construction site.

ASIA PACIFIC

GHER GHER JANMA MAHOTSAV 1-12 December 2021, Australia and New Zealand

During December 2021, more than 1,750 families at BAPS centres in Australia and New Zealand took part in the ‘Gher Gher Janma Mahotsav’ as part of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 100th birthday celebrations.

Devotees invited two to three families to their homes to participate in the celebration assembly



in which a specially prepared programme was provided that showcased the scale, scope and spiritual nature of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's work.

The host families decorated their homes, and many offered an *annakut* of over 100 sweet and savoury vegetarian delicacies to commemorate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary. Also, every attendee wrote a special prayer or wish to Pramukh Swami Maharaj on his birthday. After the assembly everyone had *mahaprasad*.

SHILANYAS CEREMONY

11 December 2021, Bangkok, Thailand



On 11 December 2021 (Maghshar *sud* 8, V.S. 2078), Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 100th birthday, 111 *yajman* couples participated in-person in the Shilanyas Ceremony for the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Bangkok, Thailand.

The participants were guided in performing the

Vedic *mahapuja* rituals virtually by BAPS swamis from Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi.

After the auspicious rituals, Puja Ishwarcharan Swami gave an inspiring discourse online.

Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed *pujan* of the *shilas* on 1 January 2020 in Surat.

SHILANYAS MAHOTSAV

15 January 2022, Canberra, Australia



Over 250 devotees participated in-person in the Vedic *mahapuja* for the Shilanyas Ceremony of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir and Community Centre in Canberra, the capital of Australia.

Among the dignitaries present for the auspicious occasion were the High Commissioner of India Mr Manpreet Vohra, Mrs Naseem Vohra and Mr Deepak-Raj Gupta.

After receiving Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj's blessings via video, everyone placed sanctified bricks in the foundation pit.

NEW BAPS MANDIR INAUGURATION

23 January 2022, Newcastle, Australia

On 14 September 1984, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Newcastle during his first satsang tour to Australia. Lake Macquarie Council in Newcastle were the first in Australia to honour Pramukh Swami Maharaj with a proclamation.

On 23 January 2022, with the blessings



of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, Paramchintandas Swami and Priyachintandas Swami performed the auspicious *murti sthapan* ceremony and inauguration rituals of the beautiful new *hari* mandir in the Cardiff suburb of Newcastle. Thereafter, a grand *annakut* of vegetarian delicacies was offered to the *murtis* with great devotion.

Many devotees and well-wishers from Australia and New Zealand participated in the rituals at home via a live webcast.

The inauguration ceremony was followed by an online satsang assembly which highlighted the necessity of mandirs in society.

Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the *murtis* on 23 October 2021 in Sarangpur, India.

BAPS CHARITIES

DECEMBER 2021 & JANUARY 2022, USA



BAPS Charities continues to support those

affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with monetary contributions to local charities:

- Matthews Free Medical Clinic, Greater Matthews Habitat for Humanity and Matthews HELP Center in Matthews, NC, which provide critical assistance to needy families.
- Mount Carmel Health System in Columbus, Ohio, to support the healthcare professionals working around the clock.
- Escondido Community Foundation, an affiliate of the San Diego Foundation which funds other non-profits that improve social and emotional well-being by addressing social isolation, anxiety, depression, suicide, abuse, and/or providing specific support for young people in the community.
- Long Island Care, Inc., in Long Island, NY, a food bank which supports needy families.
- Emergency Network Los Angeles (ENLA) which represents over 40 nonprofits and government agencies in the Los Angeles area that work to promote community welfare and emergency management.
- Power of One Christian Coaching and Outreach Ministries, Inc., a community-based organization providing valuable resources to individuals in need in Clifton, NJ.
- Zufall Health Foundation in Dover, NJ, which provides healthcare in the community.
- Solid Foundation, Inc., in Largo, Maryland, a community-based organization providing support to families facing hardship as a result of parent-guardian incarceration in Washington, DC.
- Island Harvest, a food bank for Long Island, NY, to provide food for needy families.
- Rocky Hill Education Foundation (RHEF) in Rocky Hill, CT, to support educational opportunities and scholarships to students.
- Merrimack Valley Food Bank in Boston, MA, which delivers food to those in need with specific dietary requirements.
- Lowell General Hospital, in Lowell, MA. ♦



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1. Swamishri performs *puja* of bricks for the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Canberra, Australia (9 November 2021, Gondal).
2. Resident swamis place sanctified bricks in the foundation during the *shilanyas* rituals, Canberra, Australia (15 January 2022).
3. Sadhus perform the *shilanyas mahapuja* rituals of the mandir, Canberra, Australia (15 January 2022).
4. Devotees participate in the *mahapuja* rituals, Canberra, Australia (15 January 2022).
5. Devotees and well-wishers participate in the *shilanyas mahapuja* rituals for the new BAPS Mandir, Bangkok, Thailand (11 December 2021).
6. Devotees and well-wishers receive Swamishri's online blessings, Bangkok, Thailand (11 December 2021).



**BAPS RELIEF SERVICES AMID CRISIS IN UKRAINE
February–March 2022, Rzeszów, Poland**

1. BAPS volunteers help the thousands of stranded students who fled the conflict-stricken regions of Ukraine seeking safe haven.
2. A field kitchen has been set up in a hotel lobby for the refugees.
3. BAPS volunteers serve hot vegetarian meals to the refugees.
4. As refugees arrived at a hotel in Rzeszów, south-east Poland, they were greeted and assisted by BAPS volunteers.
5. The refugees were helped onto buses to the airport for flights back to India.