



INAUGURATION OF NEWLY RENOVATED AMBLI VALI POL 27 March 2022, Ahmedabad

This sacred pilgrim place, which has witnessed many momentous and historic BAPS events since the time of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, was renovated and enhanced to provide arrangements for the countless pilgrims who visit annually.

- 1. Shrihari Swami, carrying the *amrut kalash*, and other swamis accompany Shri Harikrishna Maharaj to the renovated Yagnapursh Smruti Mandir. (*Inset*) Entrance to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir.
- 2. The sacred room of the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir where Shastriji Maharaj stayed and appointed Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the BAPS president.
- 3. The *murtis* of the new *hari* mandir inaugurated adjacent to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir.
- 4. Devotees seated in the inauguration assembly.



Ambli Vali Pol. Ahmedabad

SWAMINARAYAN IBILISS

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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.

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas

Contributors: Sadhu Vivekjivandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas

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Dada Khachar's Marriage

Shri Hari drives the chariot of Dada Khachar, the groom, to Bhatvadar for his marriage to Jasuba...

GRANDFATHER HAS GONE TO MUMBAI

Shri Hari arrived in Rajula. The village devotees, Devjibhai Rajgor, Vitthalbhai, Bhagabhai, Gigabhai, Kalabhai, wife of Nagdan Soni and her grandson, Ram, and others came to greet Shriji Maharaj. Shri Hari asked Nagdan's grandson, "Where has your grandfather gone?" The boy humbly replied, "He has gone to Mumbai." Shri Hari simply smiled and remained quiet. Thereafter, Maharaj departed and arrived at Barpatoli. Kalu Vavadiya of Barpatoli had gone to

Bhatvadar for the preparations of Dada Khachar's marriage, however, his nephew, Khimo Vagh, came to Maharaj. He requested Shri Hari, "Maharaj, have lunch before you depart and fulfil our wish." Maharaj explained to him, "For the present, I cannot spare time to stay because I am leading a marriage procession. I will come again to fulfil your wish." The boy folded his hands and said, "Prabhu, the oxen have travelled a long distance and are fatigued. If you halt for a while, I'll bring gur and ghee for them to eat." Shri Hari was happy with his sentiments and agreed, "You may do so. We should take care of them. They have all gained good merits from their past births and have got this opportunity to serve in this birth."

Soon enough, Khimo Vagh returned with an abundance of ghee and gur and served them to the oxen to replenish their energy. Then, Shri Hari instructed, "Khima, join us in Dada Khachar's marriage procession." Instantly, Khimo joined the procession.

MARRIAGE PROCESSION ARRIVES IN BHATVADAR

The marriage procession reached Bhatvadar amidst the auspicious welcoming melodies of *sharnais* and

beats of *dhols*. Nagpal Varu, the principal host and father of the bride, and all his relatives had come to welcome Shri Hari and Dada Khachar. Sweet water made of gur was served to the entire entourage. All embraced each other with joy. The occasion was also one of celebration for Laduba, Jivuba and Surprabha Devi. Kumudaba

witnessed the emotional welcome with moist eyes. All came into the village.

Nagpal Varu had arranged the accommodations for all the guests. Shri Hari saw the arrangements and was satisfied. Much earlier, Nagpal Varu had conveyed to Shri Hari via Kalu Vavadiya about the shortage of drinking water in Bhatvadar. Shri Hari had advised them to dig at a certain spot for water. Nagpal Varu obeyed, and by Maharaj's grace an abundance of sweet water was found.

Shri Hari first went to this water well. Nagpal Varu humbly said, "Prabhu, by your grace the dearth of water has been solved. I have called Brahmins to cook the meals and learned Brahmins to perform the marriage rituals."

SHRI HARI PLAYS THE FATHER'S ROLE FOR THE BRIDEGROOM

The next day, the marriage ceremony commenced. Shri Hari sat next to Dada Khachar

¹ In the Rajput tradition, a dagger, symbolizing the bridegroom, is brought for the marriage with the bride, whereas in the Kathi tradition, the groom himself comes to get married. Thus, Maharaj led the marriage procession of Dada Khachar, a Kathi, by steering his chariot to Bhatvadar.

during the marriage. Nagpal Varu offered Shri Hari a cloth to tie on his head. Maharaj tied the decorated cloth over his *pagh*, which symbolized his role as the father of Dada Khachar. Then, as the Brahmins chanted Sanskrit mantras Nagajan Raval started singing an absurd song. Shri Hari rebuked him, "Bhagat, you do not know how to sing appropriately for the occasion. How can you sing something absurd when it took me great effort to convince Dada Khachar to marry again." Then, Shri Hari told the women devotees to sing bhajans related to marriage composed by Muktanand Swami. Shri Hari was pleased with the singing of bhajans that were appropriate for the occasion.

The ritual of the bride and bridegroom holding each others' hands took place. Thereafter, the chanting of shlokas for the saptapadi ritual began while the couple circumambulated the fire altar four times. Then, Shri Hari gave a golden mala to Dada Khachar and a golden necklace to Jasuba, and blessed them by placing his hand on their heads. Nagpal Varu gifted Dada Khachar the finest quality clothes, jewellery and other adornments. He also placed a special headgear on Dada's head and draped him with a shawl. Nagpal Varu gifted expensive clothes, jewellery, trunks, kitchen utensils, a bed and other items to his daughter, Jasuba. Shri Hari was happy with Nagpal Varu's generosity. The latter then praised, "Maharaj, it is my great fortune that you led Dada Khachar's marriage procession to my village. I am offering my daughter to you and may you bless her that her devotion remains forever. If I have lapsed in offering gifts or in any other way, please forgive me."

Shri Hari blessed him and said, "Nagpal, you have offered gifts beyond your means. It is your great fortune to have a son-in-law like Dada Khachar, and it is our fortune to have a daughter-in-law like Jasuba."

NO EKADASHI TODAY

The next day it was ekadashi (day of fast). Shri

Hari told Nagpal, "Today, bid a warm farewell to the group of devotees who have come in Dada Khachar's marriage procession." Nagpal humbly responded, "Maharaj, today is *ekadashi*. I would like to offer a feast to them tomorrow and then bid them farewell." At that time, Sura Khachar softly said to Maharaj, "You led the marriage procession here, and now with Dada Khachar's marriage over we should sponsor a feast for the host, his family and relatives. It would reflect well upon us." Shri Hari said, "Then, we have to hold the feast today." Sura Khachar smiled and said, "But it is *ekadashi* today." Shri Hari declared, "Sura Khachar, *ekadashi* is an observance introduced by God. Only for today, I instruct all not to observe it."

Sura Khachar was very happy to hear this. Shri Hari instructed Nagpal Varu, "Today, hold a feast in honour of Dada Khachar's marriage, and I shall sponsor it. Therefore, prepare a tasty meal for all the sadhus and devotees."

SHRI HARI RESCUES NAGDAN SONI

Soon thereafter, Nagdan Soni came from Rajula with some boatmen. Nagadan bowed at Maharaj's feet and grasped his feet for some time. The all-knowing Shri Hari said, "Nagdan, you have arrived safely."

"Yes, Maharaj. All due to your grace and compassion. I was on the brink of death in the sea." Shri Hari asked what had happened. Nagdan narrated, "Maharaj, you are omniscient. But since you have asked, I shall describe what happened. I was sitting on the edge of the boat. Suddenly, a wave surged and struck the boat. Consequently, I fell into the sea. My body is stout and I am unable to swim. So, I remembered you and you instantly raised me above the water surface. By then the boat had sailed ahead. However, when the boatmen realized my absence they turned the boat around to look for me. They had lost all hope for my survival. But they saw your two hands, decorated with gold bracelets, supporting me. Because of your hands' support I was standing only waist-deep in the ocean. The boatmen then picked me up and enquired, 'Who was holding you up in the ocean?' I replied, 'It was my Swaminarayan Bhagwan. Who else would have come to save me?' The boatmen were amazed by my reply. Subsequently, they were eager to have your darshan. That is why I have brought them with me."

The boatmen were pleased at Shriji Maharaj's darshan. They bowed at Shri Hari's feet and saw the same gold bracelets on his wrists. They were overwhelmed and asked Maharaj to initiate them into satsang. Shri Hari told them to observe the five moral vows and to chant the name of Swaminarayan while turning five *malas* daily. The boatmen were satisfied and felt fulfilled. Maharaj told them to have their meal before they departed.

WHICH IS THE BEST DIRECTION IN WHICH THE PROCESSION SHOULD LEAVE?

The next day, after the day of ekadashi, Nagpal Varu arranged a feast for Shri Hari and the entire marriage procession. Thereafter, Shri Hari told Nagpal Varu, "Now, I wish to leave. Permit us to do so. I want to hastily return to Gadhpur." Nagpal humbly replied, "As you wish Prabhu." On hearing this, the Brahmins, who had come for the marriage rituals, decided to wait by the north-facing gate of the village. Their motive behind this was to ask for donations from Shri Hari as he departed from the village. But the all-knowing Shri Hari read their inner thoughts. The Brahmins had been generously paid for performing the marriage rituals, yet, out of greed, they desired for more. So, Shri Hari asked Mayaram Bhatt, "Which is the best direction to exit the village?" Bhatt had heard the Brahmins' conversation and was quick to grasp the reason why Shri Hari was asking him. So, he took out his almanac and replied according to Maharaj's wish, "The best direction to leave the village is through the east-facing gate." Shri Hari was pleased with Bhattji.

As Nagpal Varu bid farewell to the marriage

procession, Shri Hari hastily steered Dada Khachar's chariot towards the east-facing gate. The accompanying oxen carts also followed behind with great speed. The Brahmins, waiting by the north-facing gate, were greatly surprised as they witnessed the procession leaving through the east-facing gate. There was no way they could reach Shri Hari and ask him for donations. The Brahmins realized that God's actions were mysterious and beyond the ken of the human mind.

Shri Hari arrived at Barpatoli. Kalu Vavadiya had returned there in advance. He insisted that the procession take a halt, but Shri Hari refused. Then, Maharaj asked Kalu Vavadiya, "How happy are you in this village?" He replied, "Maharaj, it is a bad village. Thus, I am thinking of leaving and settling elsewhere." Shri Hari replied, "Vavadiya, don't go anywhere else. You will be happy here and everything will work out well." Then, Maharaj asked, "Which is the best road to Rajula?" Kalu Vavadiya explained, "Maharaj, the straight road ahead is very rough and hard, so you should go via Hindorde village."

On arriving at the outskirts of Hindorde, Radho Vagh was standing there. Radho was happy and overwhelmed to see Shriji Maharaj. Shri Hari asked him, "Is there a shrine of Shiv Chanchudiya here?" Radho pointed, "Yes Maharaj. The place is before you." Shri Hari explained, "It is also known as the shrine of Varah Bhagwan. I had come here during my forest travels and it is also known as Vadgam. I had stayed here for one night and proceeded to Rampar. From there I went to the east and sat beneath a *khijdo* tree."

Then, Shri Hari steered the chariot and entered Hindorde.

(Contd. in next issue)
Translated from the Gujarati text of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan authored by Shri H.T. Dave

Bhagwan Swaminarayan



ven in this effortless age of clicks and 'follows,' how many people follow you on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter?

You will appreciate, then, how difficult it must be to have two million people follow you 200 years ago. Bhagwan Swaminarayan had that many followers.

Indeed, two million adults, youths, and children not only followed him, but they loved him, practised his message, and quite extraordinarily, believed he was God.

The divinity emanating from Bhagwan Swaminarayan was palpable to all. There was no doubt. The spiritual visions (samadhi) people experienced were real. The tranquility they enjoyed was profound. So many people experienced it, they could not help but follow.

Perhaps most importantly, Bhagwan Swaminarayan stated what they experienced: he was Purushottam himself.

His compassionate statements are well-recorded in many Vachanamrut discourses such as Gadhada II 9, II 13 and III 38. Here's a translated

excerpt from Gadhada III 38:

"Divine Bhagwan resides in Akshardham and brings supreme happiness to the liberated souls in his service. And that same supreme Purushottam Bhagwan, out of compassion, has appeared on this earth, visible before the eyes of all, for the betterment (kalyan) of souls, and is your Lord (Ishtadeva), and accepts your service. And this Purushottam before your eyes and the Bhagwan in Akshardham are not different. They are verily both one. And, this Purushottam Bhagwan before your eyes is the controller of all, including Akshar, is the Lord of lords (ishwar na Ishwar), the cause of all causes, resides above all, is the source (avatari) of all previous descents of God (avatars) and is worthy of being single-mindedly worshipped by you all. And the many previous avatars of this Bhagwan are also worthy of being bowed to and revered."

Such an announcement is unprecedented in the history of world faiths. Bhagwan Swaminarayan revealed it numerous times and spoke of it indirectly, almost every day. He even hinted it to Anglican Bishop Reginald Heber. Heber was the Bishop of Calcutta. They met in Nadiad, Gujarat, March 1825. Heber notes the conversation in his diary.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan shone like the sun on all, whatever their faith.

Yes, about 240 years ago, the Creator of this universe appeared on our blue planet! Please take a moment to let that settle.

On the most historic day of this universe, on 3 April 1781, Bhagwan Swaminarayan appeared as a child born to Dharmadev and Bhaktimata. He took birth in Chhapaiya, an idyllic village in north India. It is just 350 miles from Vrindavan where Lord Krishna was born and only 20 miles from Ayodhya where Lord Ram was born. Indeed, he took birth on the same day as Lord Ram, on Ram Navmi.

Fast-forward 18 years. On 21 August 1799, Bhagwan Swaminarayan arrived as a teenager in a small village named Loj, in western India, Gujarat. Muktanand Swami met him here for the first time.

"O, he is a great yogi," admired Muktanand Swami.

Muktanand Swami was 40 years old. Ever since childhood, he worshipped the small *murti* of Bal Mukund. He was a staunch sadhu of Lord Krishna, a true Vaishnav and the senior-most disciple

of Ramanand Swami, whom he regarded as an avatar of Uddhav. All worship and praises were directed to Krishna Bhagwan and Ramanand Swami.

Just two years later, on 5 November 1802, after several exhilarating experiences, Muktanand Swami composed a new *arti*. With tears streaming down his cheeks, waving the *divo* before the 20 year-old from Chhapaiya, he sang,

He who sees the visible Purushottam with his eyes will be freed from death (kal) and past actions (karma) along with his family. Today, the ocean of grace (Sahajanand) has made it easy to attain liberation.

Muktanand Swami realized that the 20 year-old was not just a great yogi, but "visible Purushottam." It was a transformation unparalleled not only in Vaishnavism but in the history of world faiths.

The epochal new *arti*, sung directly before Purushottam Bhagwan himself, was a paradigm shift for Muktanand Swami. By redirecting his worship from the *paroksha* – the invisible, to the *pragat* – the visible, he transformed his beloved guru's legacy from the 'Uddhav Sampradaya' to the 'Swaminarayan Sampradaya'.

The name of Sahajanand and Swaminarayan are now recited every day in millions of homes

worldwide and will continue in the future. If we choose.

God always gives choices. He does not rule the universe like a dictator but recommends like a tutor. Even spiritual

enlightenment or liberation are not compulsory. They're a choice. That's why we have free will. It's Bhagwan's first gift to humanity. Enlightenment is his second. We will receive it when we choose it.

When he appears on earth, he chooses to behave like a human being to achieve his objectives, just as humans must to achieve theirs. He sets an example and lives life the hard way, like us. There is no 'free lunch', he says. Enlightenment must be earned, or at least yearned.

We are like children. We can be nice or nasty. Humble or arrogant. Faithful or doubtful. Diligent or lazy. Asleep or awake. These are our choices.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan chose to enlighten all the children who choose it. Every soul in the universe is his child. None are small, insignificant, or expendable. None are greater than others. He loves us all equally. Hence, his visit to our world. He helped people not only spiritually, but also physically.

He renovated villages, dredged lakes, and dug wells. He educated females, stopped the immolation of widows, and the drowning of

female newborns. He visited people's homes. He travelled from village to village, town to town, city to city. All to convince his children to choose enlightenment.

Most astonishingly, he chose to live in a mud hut!

Yes, you read that right. Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Creator of the universe, lived for thirty years in the mud home of a devotee named Dada Khachar in Gadhada.

(Cont. on p. 29)



INAUGURATION OF NEWLY RENOVATED YAGNAPURUSH POL

27 March 2022, Ahmedabad

n 27 March 2022, the auspicious reinauguration of the sacred pilgrim place at Ambli Vali Pol in the Shahpur suburb of Ahmedabad was performed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

Located to the east of River Sabarmati in the Shahpur area of Ahmedabad, Ambli Vali Pol is one of over 360 'pols' — housing clusters which are accessed by a single entrance (known as 'pratoli' in Sanskrit) — that represent the tradition and culture of the past. Some of these 'pols' are over 400 years old.

The sacred texts of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya reveal that Bhagwan Swaminarayan sanctified most of these 'pols', as well as many other historic landmarks, during his visits to Ahmedabad.

Ambli Vali Pol is named after an *ambli* tree that was located at its centre. The tree is no longer standing, but the name has persisted for around 350 years.

From the 1930s, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj often stayed in Ambli Vali Pol during his visits to Ahmedabad. Many historic events and stories are associated with this sacred place.

However, the *hari* mandir where Shastriji Maharaj frequently stayed and the surrounding buildings have suffered wear and tear over the centuries. Without appropriate interventions, the risk of collapse was significant. Hence, work to reinforce and renovate the structures was initiated.

In 2000, the Ahmedabad Municipal



260-ft long rear wall



Entrance to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir



A view of the renovated pol

Corporation re-named Ambli Vali Pol as 'Yagnapurush Pol' in honour of Shastriji Maharaj.

The pol has 16, 24, and 32-ft wide multistoreyed houses, which have a small raised platform, windows, carved pillars, a small porch, a small inner open area – all located on either side of a narrow central road. With the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj and under the expert direction of Ishwarcharan Swami, the renovation work was done to preserve these historic features of the pol. In addition, to bolster the rear exterior of the pol a sturdy 260-ft long wall has been built.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had decided that such renovation was necessary and the late kothari of Ahmedabad Mandir, Satsangijivan Swami, had arranged the relocation of 16 devotee families residing in the pol, who had donated their homes to the Sanstha. This enabled the renovation work to proceed with the support of devout satsangi professionals. These included the husband-wife team of Shri Dipakbhai Popat and his wife, who surveyed and documented the site, and Shri Prashant Parmar and his team of architects, who designed the new plans in keeping with heritage regulations. The construction was supervised by Shri Ashokbhai Narola and Shri Jasmatbhai Patel and a team of youths. The decorative elements were made by Brahmacharan Swami, Adarshchintan Swami and their team in Sarangpur. Structural engineers Shri Bhavikbhai, Shri Harikrishnabhai, Shri Parimalbhai and others also gave their expert services.

After about three years, the robust renovation work of the *pol* was completed, while retaining its traditional ambience.

The two 16-ft wide houses on either side of the *hari* mandir where Shastriji Maharaj often stayed were linked to the central darshan area to create space for the pilgrims. The stairs and windows of these houses were beautifully reconstructed. On the first

floor, all three houses have been combined to create a large decorated hall. The other houses towards the main entrance of the *pol* have also been connected to create a large *hari* mandir on the first floor with parking and other amenities on the ground floor. Also, the remaining houses have been converted to provide accommodation for about 40 families.

On completion of the renovation work, the *pratishtha* and inauguration of this sacred pilgrim place took place on 27 March 2022, at the hands of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

First, Vedic rituals were performed at the main entrance to the *pol*. From here, Ishwarcharan Swami walked with the *amrut kumbh*, accompanied by Shrihari Swami, Atmaswarup Swami and other swamis, to the front door of the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, the house in which Shastriji Maharaj frequently stayed. After untying the *nadachhadi* and performing other Vedic rituals, he went to the sacred room of Shastriji Maharaj where Pramukh Swami was appointed as the president in 1950. Here, Ishwarcharan Swami performed the Vedic *mahapuja* rituals. At the same time, the *mahapuja* rituals were performed in the new *hari* mandir on the first floor.

Devotees and volunteers who had supported the renovation project also participated in the *mahapuja* rituals in both locations.

After performing the pratishtha rituals in Shastriji Maharaj's room, Ishwarcharan Swami sang 'Swamiji to mahāpratāpi enu dhāryu thāy' in honour of Shastriji Maharaj while an annakut was arranged before the murtis. Then he performed the pratishtha arti. Thereafter, he narrated his memories with Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj at this sacred pilgrim place. He said, "This sacred house in Ambli Vali Pol is a divine centre for promoting the Akshar-Purushottam nishtha. Here, Shastriji Maharaj appointed Pramukh Swami Maharaj as president



Entrance to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir



Interior renovated to resemble original looks



Decorated interior of a house adjacent to the sacred room



Ishwarcharan swami and swamis enter the pol with Thakorji



Ishwarcharan Swami performs the Vedic pratishtha rituals



Ishwarcharan Swami drapes a chadar on Pramukh Swami Maharaj

by draping a *chadar* and honouring him. Pramukh Swami Maharaj prayed, 'May I serve the Sanstha till my last breath and please Shastriji Maharaj.' Accordingly, he served till the end.

"On that day the devotees were served *shrikhand* and *puri*. And Pramukh Swami Maharaj washed their used dishes. On the day he was given this great honour, he humbly washed their used dishes. Many such divine events have taken place here. That is why Yogiji Maharaj used to say, 'This is Akshar Ordi.' And truly, it is.

"This Akshar Ordi is a truly divine and sacred place. Pramukh Swami Maharaj stayed here while studying and begged for alms at all the homes. Shastriji Maharaj gave Sanskrit lessons to the young Naranda (Pramukh Swami). In fact, not enough can be said about the glory of this place.

"Thousands of devotees from all over Ahmedabad regularly pilgrimage here by foot. They have darshan, perform *dandvats*, offer prayers and drape the *chadar* and Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj fulfil their wishes.

"This is such an important place. One should come here repeatedly by *padyatra*, and offer prayers. Shastriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj will definitely fulfil everyone's wishes. Drape a *chadar* and also pray to fulfill your worldly and spiritual wishes. They will be fulfilled. This is Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings for all."

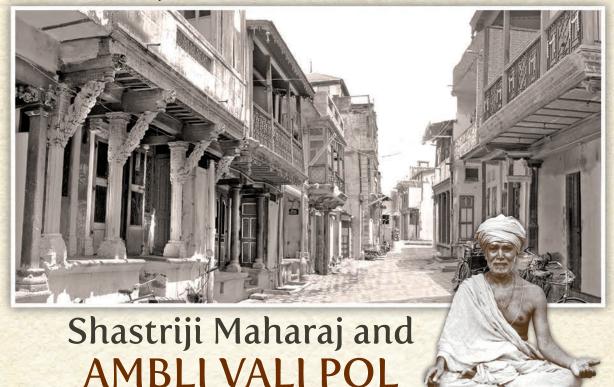
Then, Ishwarcharan Swami felicitated everyone who had helped in the renovations. And Atmaswarup Swami honoured Ishwarcharan Swami with a garland on behalf of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Thereafter, Ishwarcharan Swami performed the *pratishtha* rituals and *arti* in the new *hari* mandir on the first floor.

In this way, this sacred site, witness to many significant events in the history of the BAPS, was declared open for all.



BAPS MANDIRS: Kaushik Joshi



Prahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and his succeeding gurus have sanctified Ambli Vali Pol with their frequent visits. Houses on both sides of the *pol* (a cluster of houses) have been sanctified by the holy feet of Shastriji Maharaj. Shastriji Maharaj used to stay at the *hari* mandir here and promoted satsang with his discourses. BAPS witnessed some memorable historic moments here thanks to Shastriji Maharaj.

It was here that Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj appointed the young Narayanswarupdasji as the president of BAPS on the auspicious day of 21 May 1950 (Jeth *sud* 4, V.S. 2006).

By appointing him, he said, he was ensuring the best administration for BAPS for the next fifty years.

1929 (Samvat 1985)

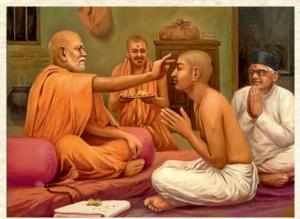
In this year, Babubhai Somnath Patel of Ahmedabad entered into satsang through the association of Shastriji Maharaj. He was one of the pioneers of BAPS satsang in Ahmedabad and offered his heartfelt services. During their visits to Ahmedabad from 1931, Shastriji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami and Yogiji Maharaj started staying at Babubhai's house in Ambli Vali Pol. Prior to that, for a year-and-a-half, they used to stay at the nearby Rangila Pol in Bhavanbhai Solanki's house.

1931 (Samvat 1987)

This was the year that Shastriji Maharaj started living at Babubhai S. Patel's home in Ambli Vali Pol. The second house in the left row belonged to Shri Babubhai Kothari.

Thanks to Babubhai, the youths of Ambli Vali Pol, namely, Haribhai Dalsukhbhai, Mansukhbhai Mistry, Kashalchandbhai and Guru Magan Bhagat, used to accompany Shastriji Maharaj for collecting alms in the *pol*. They would also freely give alms whenever Shastriji Maharaj visited their homes.

Shastriji Maharaj used to stay on the first floor



Shastriji Maharaj gives parshad diksha to Shantilal at the home of Babubhai Patel

of Babubhai's house. Babubhai's house was rather cramped and small, and the staircase was steep and narrow. Since it was difficult to climb the stairs, Nirgundas Swami once suggested to Shastriji Maharaj, "Bhaishankar Solicitor's house in the Haveli Pol is large and spacious. So, let's go to stay there." But Shastriji Maharaj at once uttered, "Where else do we find a devotee like Babubhai? I would not care even if I have to stay on the banks of River Sabarmati with him?"

1931-32 (Samvat 1988)

Sometime this year, Babubhai began accommodating Shastriji Maharaj and other sadhus in another house in Ambli Vali Pol. That house was later purchased by the BAPS.

After laying the foundation-stone for the Akshar Mandir in Gondal on Posh sud 10, Shastriji Maharaj came to Ahmedabad and collected funds for Akshar Mandir. Some of the devotees donated three months' pay. Shastriji Maharaj placed the burden of funding the construction of Akshar Mandir on the shoulders of the devotees of Ahmedabad: Sheth Nandulal, Mansukhbhai Mistry, Prof. Jethalal, Vinayakrao Trivedi, Khengarjibhai Chauhan, Babubhai Kothari, Premchand Bhagat, Chaturbhai, Mohanlalbhai and Gidhabhai Sheth, who gave their all.



Home of Shri Babubhai Patel in Ambli Vali Pol

1936 (Samvat 1992)

Once, Shastriji Maharaj entrusted Ahmedabadbased Prof. Jethalal Swaminarayan to write the Akshar-Purushottam Charitra. He also wrote the Sanskrit verses 'Anantkotindu raviprakāshe...', that are daily sung after the evening arti in all BAPS mandirs.

1939 (Samvat 1996): Parshad Diksha to Shantilal

Shastriji Maharaj gave the *parshadi diksha* to 18-year-old Shantilal Patel (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) on 22 November 1939 (Kartik *sud* 11 or Prabodhini Ekadashi, Samvat 1996), and named him Shanti Bhagat.

Prior to the *diksha*, Shastriji Maharaj had written a letter addressed to Shantilal. He gave the letter to Ravjibhai of Bhayli to deliver it and bring Shantilal to Ahmedabad. On Aso *vad* Ekadashi, Samvat 1995, Shantilal was about to leave Chansad to Padra to buy cricket gear for the village boys. But when he received Shastriji Maharaj's letter, he immediately opted out and left Chansad on Ravjibhai's cycle to go to Bhayli. From there, he went to Bochasan with Ghanshyam Swami. Thereafter, he left Bochasan with Nirgundas Swami and travelled to Bhadran and Nadiad. Here, he got a fever and didn't get well. So, he went to Ahmedabad and stayed at Babubhai's home.

On that very day, Shastriji Maharaj arrived



Shastriji Maharaj gives Sanskrit lessons to Swami Narayanswarupdasji

from Sarangpur at Babubhai's home in Ambli Vali Pol. Shantilal was sleeping in a corner of a room. Shastriji Maharaj was pleased to see his young devotee. He ran his hand on Shantilal's chest and blessed that the temperature would subside. Soon thereafter, he got well.

The next day was Prabodhini Ekadashi. Shastriji Maharaj said to Shantilal, "Get ready to take parshad diksha." Shantilal asked, "When?" Shastriji Maharaj replied, "Right now." Shantilal showed his readiness at once, and after getting his head shaved, Shastriji Maharaj initiated him as a parshad and named him Shanti Bhagat. That day, Shastriji Maharaj assigned him to learn by heart a lesson in Sanskrit. A few hours later, Shanti Bhagat recited it before Shastriji Maharaj. Swamishri was pleased and blessed him, "You will be a learned Shastri." Then, addressing the devotees present there Shastriji Maharaj said, "Later on, he will ably manage the Sanstha as a sadhu."

1940 (Samvat 1997)

This was the year when the *samadhi* chapter, initiated by Shastriji Maharaj in Ahmedabad, culminated and became the talk of the town. To verify this *samadhi*, a Polish citizen, Maurice Friedman (later known as Swami Bharatanand), who was a resident of Gandhiji's Vardha Ashram in Pune, came to Shankarlal's house in Ahmedabad. He described the *samadhi* he saw in a magazine called *Hindu*, printed on 20 October 1940.



The sacred room where Shastriji Maharaj often stayed

1941 (Samvat 1998)

On 29 October 1941, Gulzarilal Nandaji brought Manu Subedar (a renowned economist) to Ambli Vali Pol for Shastriji Maharaj's darshan. He was pleased with Shastriji Maharaj's discourse. Then, Shastriji Maharaj took Nandaji with him to search for a mandir site in Ahmedabad.

1943 (Samvat 1999)

The devotees organized a *parayan* in the large premises of Kashi Vishwanath Mandir in Ahmedabad.

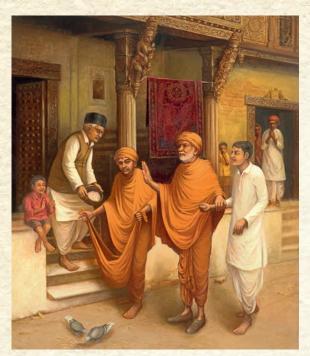
Shastri Narayanswarupdasji discoursed in the morning session and Shastriji Maharaj discoursed in the evening. Babubhai had also organized a group of youths along with Rasikbhai to sing bhajans prior to the *parayan*.

1948 (Samvat 2004)

The festival of Makar Sankranti was celebrated on 14 January in Ahmedabad with gusto and Shastriji Maharaj went to every house in Ambli Vali Pol to ask for alms.

9-10 February 1948

On 9 February, Shastriji Maharaj arrived from Sarangpur at the Ellis Bridge railway station in Ahmedabad at 10.30 p.m. The devotees offered garlands and prostrated before him at the Ambli Vali Pol gate. Then, they went to the *hari* mandir.



Shastriji Maharaj and the young Narayanswarupdasji collect alms from the residents of Ambli Vali Pol

After doing *sabha* and *cheshta*, Shastriji Maharaj took a bath and went to bed at 2.30 a.m.

The next day, on 10 February 1948, Shastriji Maharaj went to inspect the site for a *shikharbaddha* mandir at Shahibaug. He saw the bungalow and instructed the devotees to purchase it.

Thereafter, Shastriji Maharaj went to Narayan Ghat and sprinkled the holy water of River Sabarmati on his head and asked the devotees to do the same. From here, he returned to Ambli Vali Pol.

February, 1948 (Samvat 2004)

After celebrating the Vasant Panchami festival in Atladara, Shastriji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami, Yogiji Maharaj, Narayanswarupdas Swami and others travelled to Nenpur to participate in a parayan held to mark the murti-pratishtha of the newly built hari mandir. The parayan on the Satsangijivan shastra was organized by Manibhai, Dahyabhai and Narayanbhai of Nenpur. Shri Maganbhai and Harmanbhai of Africa had also come to attend the parayan.

1948: Shastriji Maharaj Suffers a Heart Attack

During the parayan in Nenpur, Shastriji Maharaj had a heart attack. Thus, he was immediately taken to Ahmedabad. There, Champakbhai Banker brought a well-known physician, Dr Mankad, to examine Swamishri. After examining his pulse and heart he confirmed that Swamiji had suffered a heart attack, and his condition is serious.

When the devotees from Nenpur reached Ambli Vali Pol, Shastriji Maharaj was brushing his teeth and looked quite normal. He took his bath and did puja. Then, he instructed Harmanbhai to go to Nenpur and come back only after the *parayan* was over.

After the *parayan* was over in Nenpur, Yogiji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* and left with the other sadhus to Ambli Vali Pol. On seeing Shastriji Maharaj's ailing condition, the young Narayanswarupdas Swami broke into tears. Yet, Shastriji Maharaj spoke for quite some time to all, as if he had no heart ailment.

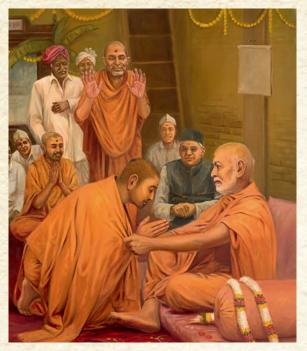
5 to 17 August 1948

During this time, Champaklal Banker and Vinayakrao Trivedi had organized a *parayan* at the newly purchased bungalow on Shahibaug Road in Ahmedabad. Shastriji Maharaj used to come by car from Ambli Vali Pol to attend it twice a day, in the morning and evening. Nirgundas Swami and Yogiji Maharaj spoke in the *parayan* and Naranji Maharaj spoke about the life of Shriji Maharaj.

Today, instead of the original bungalow, is the *shikharbaddha* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir consecrated by Yogiji Maharaj in 1962.

1949 (Samvat 2005-2006)

Every year, Shastriji Maharaj used to celebrate Hari Jayanti in Ahmedabad. On 7 April 1949, the Shri Hari Jayanti festival was celebrated in Ambli Vali Pol, during which devotees came from central and north Gujarat.



In Ambli Vali Pol, Shastriji Maharaj appoints Narayanswarupdasji as president of BAPS by draping a *chadar* over his shoulders

21 May 1950 (Jeth sud 10, Samvat 2006): Pramukh Varni Din

At 5 p.m., Shastriji Maharaj appointed 28-year-old Narayanswarupdas Swami as the president of the BAPS at Ambli Vali Pol Mandir in the presence of senior sadhus and devotees.

6 May to 4 September 1950: Shastriji Maharaj's Final Illness

During this time the ailing Shastriji Maharaj



Newly appointed BAPS president Swami
Narayanswarupdasji washes the used dishes and utensils



The front area of the house where Shastriji Maharaj stayed

stayed at Ambli Vali Pol. At that time, a parayan was held at the Shahibaug bungalow. Shastri Narayanswarupdas Swami (Pramukh Swami Maharaj) discoursed on the Satsangijivan shastra, Yogiji Maharaj discoursed on the Swamini Vato and Naranji Maharaj spoke on Shriji Maharaj's divine lila. Shastriji Maharaj stayed for one-and-a-half months at the bungalow and gave the bliss of his darshan to the devotees.



The *chokdi* (washing area) where Pramukh Swami washed the devotees' used dishes and utensils



A Pilgrim Place Unmatched AMBLI VALI POL

n 1907, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj established the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Sanstha by consecrating a grand mandir in the small village of Bochasan.

However, as Shastriji Maharaj continued to travel tirelessly to promote the Akshar-Purushottam upasana revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, he made Ahmedabad his primary base from where he coordinated the Sanstha's activities. From the 1910s, Shastriji Maharaj visited Ahmedabad frequently staying at the homes of local devotees. These included: Bhavanbhai Solanki, Khengarjibhai Chauhan, Mansukhbhai Mistry, Arjunbhai Chauda, Vasantray Pandya and Champaklal Banker. But, the home in Ambli Vali Pol of Babubhai Somchandbhai Kothari, of the Leuva Patidar community, was Shastriji Maharaj's mainstay.

During this period, the home in Ambli Vali Pol of Rukhmanibai, the childless widow of Jethabhai Nathubhai Patel, was also vacant. Before she passed away in 1920, she had prepared a will on 7 May 1920, expressing her wish that her home be used as a mandir. Her affairs were being handled by

Babubhai and Amrutlal Bahechardas. Hence, after her demise, Shastriji Maharaj frequently stayed in this house, inspiring and enlightening devotees with his discourses. This arrangement continued for many years, and on 21 May 1940, Amrutlal Bahechardas, as the executor of Rukhmanibai's will, formally transferred the deeds of the house to the Sanstha. Subsequently, Shastriji Maharaj consecrated a *hari* mandir there.

This house had already served as Shastriji Maharaj's base for several decades and had witnessed many divine and historic occasions. In the ensuing years, it continued as the venue for numerous inspiring moments. Today, this sacred pilgrim place, now known as Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, continues to be an inspiring haven that reflects the core values and historic roots of BAPS. It is a window into the past that inspires and guides us to progress in the future.

Ambli Vali Pol is a haven where:

- the pious footprints of four Gunatit gurus Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj
 - have sanctified the terrain.



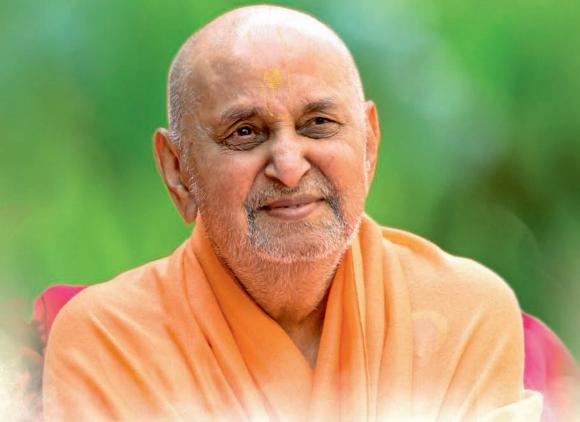
- numerous festivals have been celebrated and discourses have been held.
- the true Akshar-Purushottam upasana was openly revealed to Shri Gulzarilal Nanda, twice acting prime minister of India, and other stalwarts.
- Shastriji Maharaj ordained 18-year-old Shantilal into the *parshad* order.
- Shastriji Maharaj appointed 28-year-old Narayanswarupdasji as president (*pramukh*) of BAPS, on 21 May 1950 (Jeth *sud* 4, V.S. 2006) at 5.00 p.m., and thus gave the Sanstha 'Pramukh Swami'.
- Pramukh Swami pledged to guru Shastriji Maharaj that he will loyally serve the Sanstha till his last breath.
- after his appointment as president, Pramukh Swami washed the dishes and utensils used by the devotees, setting an example of servant leadership.
- numerous landmark decisions were taken by Shastriji Maharaj.
- Shastriji Maharaj launched the Sanstha's acclaimed monthly magazine Swaminarayan Prakash, to strengthen the spiritual knowledge and understanding of devotees.
- devotees of Ahmedabad donated funds to Shastriji Maharaj to build the mandir

in Gondal.

- Shastriji Maharaj inspired Prof. Jethalal Swaminarayan and others to write shastras, poems and other texts that elucidate the Akshar-Purushottam upasana.
- Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj established the first Akshar-Purushottam Yuvak Mandal.
- yuvaks and devotees devoutly sang bhajans before Shastriji Maharaj.
- Shastriji Maharaj graced many with the divine experience of samadhi and strengthened their faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan.
- Shastriji Maharaj rested after a heart attack and revealed the glory of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- Shastriji Maharaj stayed from 6 May to 4 September 1950 to coordinate plans for the mandir in Shahibaug.
- Pramukh Swami Maharaj had blessed, "The wishes of whoever drapes a chadar here will be fulfilled. The darshan of the sixty-eight holy places and all sacred rivers is included here."
- Pramukh Swami Maharaj affectionately cooked and served *rotlis* to the young Vinubhai (Mahant Swami Maharaj).

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ: Sadhu Anandananddas, Robbinsville, USA

Pramukh Swami Maharaj: Secrets of His Success and Popularity



hen the sad news of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's passing spread throughout the world on 13 August 2016, thousands swarmed to Sarangpur to catch a last glimpse of Swamishri, whom they believed as their father, mother, friend, mentor and guru. People scurried to book flight and train tickets by putting everything else aside. Overseas embassies opened their offices to facilitate travellers to India. On reaching Sarangpur, many spent nights on the bare grounds of a crowded campus, unmindful of their own discomforts. Young and old, men and women, openly shed tears and expressed their grief. Such uninhibited displays of emotion reflected the magnitude of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's appeal to all. His universal success and popularity were not

the result of power, education, wealth or arrogance; but because he had touched people's souls and made an impression on their hearts. His success and popularity were beyond society's conventional and superficial quantifiable measures – even though his list of noteworthy accomplishments is extensive. His humility, service, tolerance, compassion and spirituality were the key reasons people admired and revered him. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had a mind which never minded, a heart which never hurt, a touch which never pained and relations which never ended. These were the secrets of his success and popularity.

Success begins in the mind. It is our most powerful tool and can help us attain success or take us to the depths of failure. When the mind is burdened or clouded by negative thoughts, doubts, pain, faults, anger or wasteful anxiety it loses judgement, control and objectivity and so everything becomes distorted. Therefore, it is essential for the mind to be unburdened and unbothered, and for that the mind must be humble and resilient like a blade of grass. A heavy storm will take down rigid trees, but the grass will bend with the storm's winds and come back up again once the storm passes. If the mind is conditioned to bend like the blade of grass, then it will remain unaffected by the nuances of the world.

One evening in June 2004, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was being escorted by the local police to the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Edison, New Jersey. With their sirens and lights, the escort cars were racing through the streets of Edison as every car on the streets pulled over to give way. However, one truck driver who would not give way, and so the police cars rang their sirens louder, flashed their lights brighter, and ordered him over the loudspeaker to move aside, but to no avail. Amid all the raucous sounds, as the police became more and more agitated, Swamishri with a calm mind remarked, "Why can we not just go around the truck?" A small yet quintessential example of the effectiveness of a humble-cum-unclouded response of bowing in contrast to an ineffective rigid-cum-clouded response of commanding.

In a competitive, cutthroat and cast-iron world where humility is considered a weakness by some, it was, in fact, one of the hallmarks of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's character. He was a spiritual leader of millions and the president of a reputable global organization. Yet, he remained humble, empathetic, accommodating and composed. To inspire people to live a more mindful, balanced and harmonious spiritual life, he made over 17,000 village, town and city visits; personally counselled over 800,000 people; read and replied to over 700,000 letters; and adjusted his exhausting schedule countless times to meet the convenience of others. In 1973, Swamishri was in Mumbai when a devotee

approached him and demanded, "You have to come to Vadodara to bless my nephew's wedding." When Swamishri realized that the date of the wedding conflicted with his already scheduled visit to Thana, which had previously been cancelled twice, he respectfully requested the devotee to reconsider his request to another date. However, the devotee was adamant, "You have to come no matter what. What about my word I have given to the other members of my family? It will reflect poorly upon me!" Rather than clouding his mind with negative thoughts of the absurdity of the request, Swamishri instantly cancelled his plans for that day and told the devotee that he would come to Vadodara on the day he requested. Pramukh Swami Maharaj possessed a special ability to empathize with and think from others' points of views. He humbly bowed to others to fix broken feelings that might have worsened to everlasting resentment, and he even easily gave credit for the hard work that he had done to those who were undeserving. Such was Swamishri's humility that his mind was never burdened with unnecessary thoughts, and due to that there was no limit to his success and popularity.

The path to success is not a straight line, there are no fairy tale stories of success. Pain, struggle, insults, failure are all part of life and cannot be escaped, but they can result in wisdom, strength, courage, and success with the virtues of tolerance and compassion. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's tolerance and compassion were such that he was never provoked by petty grievances, never fretted over perceived slights and never succumbed to jealousy. In September 2002, Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar, India, was attacked by terrorists. Over 30 innocent lives were lost, including a BAPS swami and young children. Recent communal tensions in Gujarat had just about subsided, and a small spark was all that was needed to re-ignite the fuse that could turn Gujarat into a burning inferno. In fact, widespread riots as an instinctive reaction to such a tragic attack was the expectation, and Pramukh Swami Maharaj was incited by some to voice strong protest and harsh anger. However, Swamishri's heart remained merciful, and he responded with a prayer of tolerance and peace which prevented a country-wide human tragedy. This magnanimous and exemplary act of restraint was praised across the world by politicians, community leaders and scholars as a timeless precedent worthy of emulation.

Swamishri's tolerance was of another calibre as it was fuelled by compassion. A few days after the attack, Swamishri visited Swaminarayan Akshardham and blessed all the places of death and destruction with sanctified flowers and prayers. He came upon the spot where the terrorists had met their demise, and to everyone's surprise Swamishri sprinkled flowers there as well and prayed for their souls' peace and that "May no one even think of attacking anyone, any place or any religion. May the world be freed from terror."

His touch never pained anyone but was as soft as the flower petals he sprinkled, giving compassion and comfort to the souls he touched. His tolerance was unparalleled, but it was his compassion that surpassed expectations and took your breath away. He did not just acknowledge people's anger, hatred or ignorance with silent tolerance, but he also graciously prayed for their well-being and invariably responded with a kindhearted gesture. If he was like this with ill-mannered people, then it is not surprising that he was so popular and admired amongst others.

Swamishri's innate humility, tolerance and compassion were all deeply rooted in his profound spirituality, the fundamental reason for his glory and admiration. Success and popularity based on measures of material achievements and metrics leave a person exhausted, stressed and unfulfilled. True success, on the other hand, leaves a person feeling fulfilled and genuinely happy. True success is achieved with spirituality. And Swamishri's spiritually inspired success was such that not only did he live a life of eternal inner peace himself, but he also gave that gift to all who came in his contact. His pure, righteous and saintly demeanour

inspired millions to forego troublesome addictions, vices, negative temperaments and live a serene and fulfilling life. Further, these effects were not momentary feelings that withered away over time, but Swamishri's sanctity left an everlasting impression in people's hearts that created a bond that never degraded nor disintegrated. When Brigadier Raj Seetapathy, the National Security Guard commando in charge of the rescue mission during the Akshardham attack, heard about Swamishri's peace-inspiring reply to the attack he was so impressed by it that he became a proponent of the Akshardham Response and presented it in police academies, army training programmes, and other centres. He said, "What Pramukh Swami Maharaj did was unbelievable. He pieced society back together. What I observed after the operation was the calm and serenity that was quickly restored. I have faced many violent encounters in my professional life, but the Akshardham Response was a great learning, both from an operational and philosophical point of view." Brigadier Raj Seetapathy was so mesmerized by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's spirituality that after retiring from the NSG, he served for many years at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. Swamishri's piety was such that even a brief interaction with him led to a never-ending relationship. This was the underlying reality of his success and popularity.

Of those who poured into Sarangpur on 13 August 2016, some were in regular contact with Swamishri, some had not interacted with him in years, some had briefly met him only once, and some had never even met him face to face. And, of course, there were those who could not be physically present in Sarangpur. But they were all drawn mentally and emotionally to this one location because they all had some sort of personal relationship with Pramukh Swami Maharaj, for he had a mind which never minded, a heart which never hurt, a touch which never pained, and therefore, relations which never ended.



EPIC EFFORTS FOR DE-ADDICTION

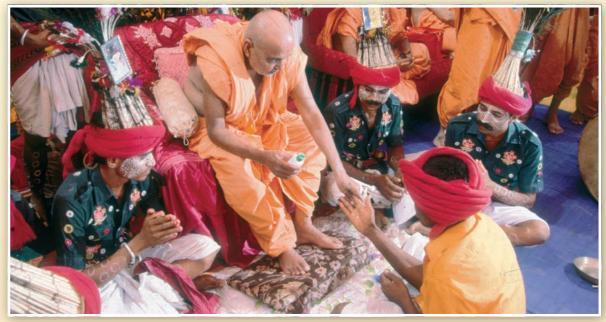
(Part 1)

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's campaign for de-addiction was unremitting and epic.

An addiction-free life is the foundation of a happy and progressive society.

Swamishri tirelessly endeavoured to free people from addictions and instil peace in society.

The following article explores the various aspects and ways in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj redeemed many people from the shackles of addictions.



fter his strenuous satsang tour abroad in 1977, Swamishri became ill in Mumbai. Several days later, Swamishri had still not recovered from his fever and could barely stand while wearing his dhoti. Furthermore, whenever he spoke he became breathless and his voice quaked. Still, in this debilitated state he stood talking with his back against a wall and his hand resting on a small wooden cupboard to de-addict a man. Moved by Swamishri's compassion and warmth the man quit his habit of drinking alcohol.

Sometimes, while going to the washroom, if Swamishri met someone with an addiction his *janoi* would remain wound around his ears and he would start explaining to the person to give it up. Only after de-addicting him would Swamishri feel satisfied and attend the washroom.

Sometimes, when Swamishri was about to sit in a car to depart, with one leg inside the car, and if someone said, "Bapa! Please bless him so that he quits drinking alcohol." Immediately, Swamishri would disregard his scheduled time to depart, become oblivious to his standing position and start talking to the person to quit alcohol. Sometimes, Swamishri even postponed his meals while convincing people to quit addictions.

Whenever someone appeals to an addict to give up his addiction, he usually refuses or tries to buy time to quit it. But Swamishri's practical arguments and logic defuses all his reasons and resistance. Once, a person named Vasantbhai, addicted to alcohol for ten years, came to Swamishri. He was unable to quit drinking in spite of trying several times. Swamishri motivated him to give it up. Finally, he happily vowed to quit. But, after a few days, he questioned Swamishri, "Swami, my condition is not good because I'm losing my body weight. This worries me, so what should I do?"

Swamishri motivated him, "Look, there is nothing to worry about a little loss in weight. Even people weighing 40 kg live, whereas you are very healthy. By God's grace you are now free from the vice [of addiction], so don't think of starting again. If any such [weak] thoughts arise, pray to God." Swamishri's words and blessings charged Vasantbhai to such an extent that he started deaddicting others.

A doctor, who smoked, came to Swamishri. When Swamishri explained to him to stop smoking, he replied, "I won't be able to quit instantly, but give me two months to give it up."

On such occasions, Swamishri would often be lenient, but in this case he argued, "You are a doctor. If someone had to be operated upon urgently, what would happen to him if you told him to come some other day? So, understand that your body has deteriorated because of your addiction. You must quit cigarettes now and any delay will be detrimental." Then, to the astonishment of all, the doctor instantly gave up smoking.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj used convincing ways to liberate people from various types of addictions. Mr Sharma was a film addict from Haryana. He came to know of Swamishri's glory from others. One day he came for Swamishri's darshan. Mr Sharma confessed about his weakness and addiction to films.

Swamishri explained, "This world itself is a cinema! See how beautiful God has created everything! Why give up seeing the real world for something that is fake? Films often distort your mind and nature, whereas seeing good and real things will bring you joy." Mr Sharma realized the truth of Swamishri's simple yet spiritual words. He gave up his addiction to films.

Once, a man from Kathiawad came to Surat in search of work in a diamond workshop. Soon, due to bad company, he became addicted to pan masala (tobacco) and spent 300 rupees every month on it. Swamishri met him and warned that this habit would ruin his life. Swamishri averred, "Do you know that in Kathiawad, a poor family could survive on the amount you waste on addictions! Give up this sin now. Take a pledge not to eat pan masala ever again."

It was as if a family elder was giving sage advice to his grandson. The man quit his addiction and his family became pleased and happy.

A real estate agent in Bangalore came in contact with Swamishri. He had been betting on horses and had lost a substantial sum. Swamishri lovingly explained to him to give it up, "You have helped us in acquiring land for a mandir, so in a sense it is a service on your part. Furthermore, you have been with us for the past three days. I wish that you quit your bad habit. Earn your living by practising dharma and righteousness. God will bless you with peace."

Swamishri's words touched his inner core and he refrained from gambling. His mother experienced as if God himself was manifest in Swamishri, because she had nursed a deep desire that her son be redeemed from gambling. Swamishri's effort and blessings opened a gateway to happiness for the whole family!

Also noteworthy is the tale of how Arvind Dave gave up his chronic addiction to cigarettes. Settled in Bangalore, he used to smoke 12 packets every day and was also addicted to tea. He met Swamishri in the winter of 1990 and narrated how he gave up his addictions, "I was meeting Swamishri for the first time. I had already smoked a cigarette prior to meeting him. Perhaps, he may have noticed it from my unpleasant breath. Still, he didn't utter a single word about it! He held my right hand, put

a few drops of water in my palm, recited a mantra and placed a kanthi around my neck. Then, he affectionately and lucidly explained, 'You have now taken refuge in God, so live a good, clean, moral life. Give up addictions and bad company. Daily, do five malas by chanting the name of Swaminarayan. You will become happy.' Then, Swamishri touched my heart, placed his hand on my shoulder and looked into my eyes. I felt as if my addiction was getting expunged. Since that day, I don't know why, I have never felt like smoking a cigarette. I was extremely relieved. Earlier, my friends and family had tried very hard to de-addict me. My beloved parents aspired till their last breath to see me quit my addiction. I still regret that I could not make them happy by fulfilling their wish. They instructed me to go on a pilgrimage to Tirupati, Dwarika, Dakor and Char Dham with the hope that I would be inspired to quit my addiction. But, I remained trapped in the stranglehold of my habit. Today, I realized the significance of Swamishri's grace. Indeed, he saved me."

There are countless such stories of people who have experienced Swamishri's profound compassion.

A well-known diamond businessman brought his friend to Swamishri. The friend's three sons had wasted Rs. 25 lakh in drinking and gambling. Swamishri sat with that family.

Swamishri said, "By aspiring to earn more in this manner, you have lost Rs. 25 lakh and if you pursue further, you will become bankrupt. So, stop all this from today. You will find it difficult and painful to quit addictions and gambling because you will feel like gambling on seeing others do so. But you will have to be firm not to do it. Cut down your extravagant expenditures and work hard, even if you earn only two hundred rupees. The habit of trying to make a million from one rupee is wrong. Such means to earn money will rob you of all your wealth. Earn your progress through hard work. Don't regret about what you have lost till now. Abandon the thought that you were once a

millionaire, and instead think that you were poor from the beginning and want to progress through hard work. Otherwise, your children will suffer and you will be miserable. The three of you are young, and if you work diligently you will earn well. I have no selfish motive in talking to you. But the path you are pursuing is one of abject misery. I have seen millionaires get ruined in this way, so steer yourselves away from it. Take a pledge today. Your friends will lure you, but be steadfast." The three sons' lives were transformed because of their faith in Swamishri's sound advice.

Once, Swamishri became distressed on learning of a staunch devotee's son mired in chewing tobacco. He called the youth and told him to take a vow of giving up tobacco. Swamishri said, "Never fall into this habit again. Don't you get food to eat at home? Then, where is the need to chew tobacco? I inspire others to make their children ideal, but when *satsangi* youths like yourself indulge in addiction it stains our honour."

The youth couldn't look into Swamishri's eyes because of his lapse. He thus firmly pledged never to chew tobacco. Swamishri said, "To atone for your addiction inspire ten persons to give up addictions." This is an example of Swamishri's approach with those whom he believed to be his. The youth quit his addiction and forged a robust connection with Swamishri.

Swamishri always made efforts to help people and society in times of calamity and difficulty. In 1988, Swamishri organized four large cattle camps to save cattle from the devastating famine in Gujarat. The owners of the cattle were also asked to stay in the Sanstha's cattle camps to look after their oxen. Many of them smoked bidis and chewed tobacco. Swamishri made visits to all the four camps and inspired the herdsmen to give up their addictions. He said, "Give up your addictions and from the savings you make, buy a pair of good oxen to till your land. Then, you will be able to properly farm your land and earn money. Your financial condition will improve and you will be

able to easily pay for your children's school fees. So, whoever has any addictions give them up today. If you smoke bidis it will destroy your lungs and overall health, and make your family unhappy. You have come to this pilgrim place, therefore give up your addictions. In this time of famine, you will benefit by quitting addictions. Remember, there are stacks of fodder lying here and a single spark from your bidi will burn everything to ashes."

Swamishri's address inspired many of the herdsmen to quit their addictions. The cattle camps were run for a year.

Apart from addressing individuals to give up addictions, Swamishri also made efforts to provide collective care. Once, Swamishri told the village chief of Khakhariya, "You are the chief of this village. Ukabhai sells pan masala and tobacco in your village. However, he has pledged to shut his shop. This doesn't mean that you should give permission to five other persons to open such shops. Tobacco ruins the lives of people. If someone wants to open a tobacco parlour, you must request him not to do it. When five prominent people of your village refuse him, he will understand and not open one. Also, never ever allow liquor to be made or sold in your village. If someone wants to, then strongly deny him because it will spoil your entire village and ruin the prevailing harmony. Make a special note of this."

One *sarpanch* (village chief), after winning a *panchayat* election, came to Swamishri for blessings. Swamishri said, "You have been elected, but if anyone hasn't voted for you, do not harbour bitterness towards him. When required, help him but never discriminate against him. Those who garner votes by freely giving opium to people, what type of welfare will they provide to them? You must not do that and never engage in any type of addiction. Make efforts to remove addictions from your village, especially gambling and alcohol. Do not give up your moral principles for the sake of money and power. Money and power are temporary and fleeting. How can one reap

goodness by winning votes through bribes and enticements of liquor? It is a grave sin to destroy someone's life by making him into an addict."

Once, Swamishri told a village chief in the Jhalavad region of Gujarat, "Of what use are you by becoming the village chief? I have known you ever since you were a child. You have to make your village ideal." Then, the village *bhuvo* (exorcist) came and Swamishri said, "Varjang, you are a sadhu, yet why have you become a *bhuvo*? As a sadhu you should inspire people to do bhajan and quit their addictions. So, first quit your addictions and draw spiritual strength from God."

In one suburb of Surat, the citizens daily spent 100,000 rupees in drinking liquor. Swamishri explained to them that if they gave up drinking on the days of *ekadashi* every month, then from the money saved in one year they could build a school, a water tank or a small medical clinic.

Whenever Swamishri came to know that a person who has come for his darshan runs a kiln to distil alcohol, he would inspire him to relinquish his business.

In a village of the Kheda district, Gujarat, a person daily distilled 200 five-litre containers of alcohol and gave bribes to the tune of ten thousand rupees to the police so that they would not arrest him for his illegal activity. Once, he came in contact with a devotee and the latter brought him to Swamishri. When Swamishri came to know of his unlawful activity, he made him realize about the grave sin he was committing. The man resolved there and then to shut his business. He pledged to give it up and wore a *kanthi* from Swamishri's hands.

Swamishri was extremely pleased and motivated him, "Be brave. God will bless you with a living in some other way. Food acquired through hard work will be of great benefit to you. Your greed for money will make thousands miserable and unhappy, and your life will get spoiled. Why should you lead other people astray? God will provide food and also forgive all your transgressions. However, from now onwards, don't commit any new sins. When your

old friends come to know that you have stopped your business, they will tempt and force you. Then, your mind will challenge you as to why you should give up your lucrative business? But, remain determined. Now, you have to inspire others to give up such unlawful activities. Are you mentally strong and determined?"

"Yes, Swamishri," he replied. Thereafter, Swami made him take a moral pledge. Swamishri further reinforced him by saying, "If you supply liquor to your village, it will enter the homes of people. Consequently, quarrels will arise and other evils will burgeon. When you have no money you will steal, lie and gamble to get it. However, by earning money through such means will make you sleepless and unhappy. So, work hard." The person was touched by Swamishri's selfless and frank words.

Many speculated that Swamishri used magical herbs to free people from addictions. When one such addict came to Swamishri with this perception, Swamishri burst out laughing. Then, Swamishri said amusingly, "Yes, it is true. I have opened a shop of de-addicting people by dispensing a magical herb." Saying this, Swamishri explained to him about the disadvantages of addictions in terms of loss of money, health and time. Swamishri's words made a deep imprint on his mind. He quit his addiction, and also asked for the magical herb so that he wouldn't relapse. Swamishri said, "Look brother, the magical herb is spiritual knowledge (jnan) and contemplation. Whatever I have talked to you, ponder about it for your entire life and you won't relapse into addictions." Later, that man started prescribing the same 'herb' to others!

Whenever Swamishri travelled abroad on a satsang tour, he passionately talked about remaining righteous and leading an addiction-free life. Swamishri used to say, "A righteous life is a feature of a Hindu. A Hindu should never drink alcohol, eat meat and gamble, and must refrain from adultery. A Hindu also believes in the Vedas and God. The foundations of Hindu dharma are nourished and strengthened by a true guru who

teaches and enforces our values and faith."

Whenever Swamishri was invited to public programmes, he would request the organizers, "Whatever programmes you organize arrange a vegetarian diet and observe moral conduct. If your diet and conduct are pure, you will attain success."

In Leeds (UK), a leader of the Leuva Patel Community Centre had pledged not to drink till their centre was constructed. Co-incidentally, after the assembly hall was ready, he invited Swamishri to inaugurate it. Swamishri had come to know about his pledge, hence he appreciated him in the public assembly and added, "I wish that you refrain from drinking all your life." Touched by Swamishri's love, he took a lifetime vow to never drink. Swamishri happily said, "My having come here is worthwhile. In our passports, we mention that we are Hindus by religion, but we have to live accordingly."

In 1988, during Swamishri's satsang tour abroad many journalists of various newspapers came to interview him. Swamishri answered their questions effectively. Thereafter, Swamishri would interview them and ask them whether they smoked or drank liquor. Most of them said they did. Swamishri would then explain to them, "People have high expectations with regards to morals from you. They read when you write about cultivating good habits, how to quit addictions, and the fact that alcohol, drugs and cigarettes or tobacco cause cancer and diseases. But, how many readers will be influenced by your writings? If you have addictions, they will not accept what you write. Thus, you must first give up your addictions."

The journalists responded, "We will try."

Swamishri argued, "Once you become convinced that addictions are harmful, you must quit them. Do you believe that they are harmful to your body?"

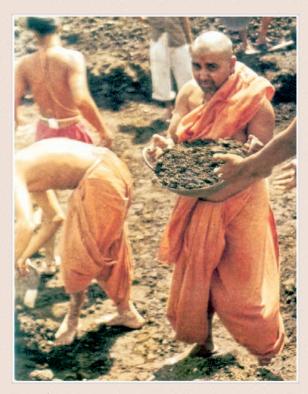
"Yes."

Finally, some of the reporters pledged to give up their addictions.

Gujarati text from Brahmopanishad: Sadhu Aksharjivandas (To be continued in next issue)

HELPFUL LEADERSHIP





raser Sherman, a witty American writer, has said some compelling things about helpful leadership. He shared that whenever someone needs help, it is a leader who steps up and provides all the help one needs. Moreover, irrespective of whether a task is as small as cleaning a toilet, a leader takes on the job without any hesitation. These traits only evoke a sense of goodwill and respect from people. Helping others is a step forward in elevating our lives.

Robert Ingersoll, a well-known American lawyer, civil war veteran and politician, said, "We rise by helping others." By helping others, we not only gain the respect of others, but also gain and experience a sense of self-respect. We cannot estimate the true value of helping others on a large scale.

Today, it is often seen that at the time of

need, instead of rushing to help, people shoot videos on their mobile phones to make them viral. A few years ago, a teenager hailing from the Koppal district in Karnataka state, suffered a serious injury after a vehicle ran over him. At that moment, people surrounded him and, instead of calling an ambulance, took out their mobile phones from their pockets to shoot videos of the unconscious boy. The boy passed away because he did not receive timely treatment. It is during times like these that we and others get to know what we are truly like.

Regis Murayi averred, "Part of being a person is about helping others."

In 1962, after the *murti-pratishtha* of the Ahmedabad mandir was over a few youths were allocated various duties to wind up the facilities set up for the occasion. One youth's *seva* was to clean the bathrooms and see to it that the garbage trolleys, where everyone had left their disposable leaf-plates, were emptied.

Thousands of devotees had dined that evening. The dustbin in the kitchen behind the sadhus' quarters was filled to the brim. It was around 10 p.m. The youth was trying his best to push the heavy and overflowing trolley up a slope to reach the main garbage tip. He was alone, tired, and fast losing the battle against the slope. There was no one around whom he could approach for help.

Just at that time, Swamishri emerged from a meeting. He saw the youth's feeble and frustrated efforts, and literally ran to his aid. Together, both of them pushed the garbage trolley up the slope and emptied the contents in the tip. Swamishri even helped him return the empty trolley to its original place.

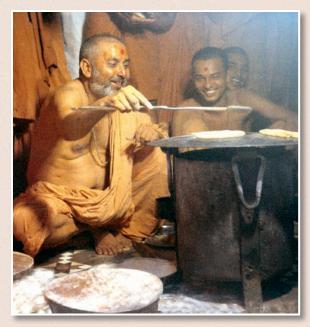
There was a glow in Swamishri's eyes that

showed not only that he never considered himself above such *seva*, but also how much he enjoyed helping out an ordinary youth in even the most menial of jobs.

On 5 May 1968, Yogiji Maharaj and his sadhus were getting ready to leave Kolkata for Benares (Varanasi). As usual, there were so many last minute things to do: packing, meeting the devotees and preparing some snacks to eat on the journey. All the sadhus were busy. Devcharan Swami was occupied in making other arrangements. So it was left upon Narayanprasad Swami to make the snacks.

He started rolling the puris. The oil was sizzling, and ready to fry the puris. But there was no one to fry them. Pramukh Swami happened to pass by and looked in. He gathered that the swami was alone. "Here," he said instantly, "I'll fry them." And so saying, he overturned an empty kerosene can near the stove and sat down on it and started frying the puris.

He was so relaxed as he performed the task. He could well have said, "Hold on, I'll go and call someone to help you." But no, he sat down himself, not in the least concerned about his position or power. His simplicity, humility and spirit to help deeply touched Narayanprasad Swami.



Just as it is impossible for someone to wake up in the morning and become the world's best *tabla* player, it is not possible to wake up one fine day and become the world's best leader. It takes a lot of hard work and good intentions to achieve that. Only those who selflessly help and serve God and others can become true leaders. Such a person is wholeheartedly celebrated as a worthy leader in the world. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was one such spiritual leader.

(Cont. from p. 8)

Why? Because he and his two sisters – Laduba and Jivuba – chose enlightenment. There were many rich folk living in towns and cities such as Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara and Bhavnagar. Bhagwan Swaminarayan could have lived luxuriously in beautiful two-or threestory mansions and raised large donations. But mud, stone or diamonds meant nothing to their Creator.

Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, too, could have resided permanently in large cities and raised huge capital. But they were yogis, not *bhogis* (pleasure seekers).

Shastriji Maharaj could have set up comfortably in Mumbai or East Africa. Pramukh Swami Maharaj could have set up in Manhattan or California. But they, too, chose the mud huts of India's villages.

Like Muktanand Swami, Dada Khachar, Laduba, and Jivuba, you also have seen the Creator hidden in human guise. He remains present within Mahant Swami Maharaj. With your gift of free will, what will you ask from him? 1. The transient pleasures of ignorance or 2. the endless bliss of enlightenment?

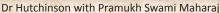
Hint. If you're thinking of asking for both, that item isn't on the menu. And the first one, you already have. Lol.

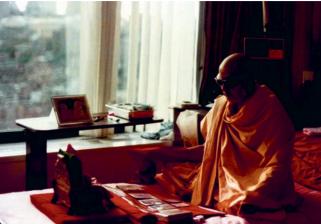


Behind the Sacred Relic

EYE PADS SYBOLIZE SWAMISHRI DEDICATION AND DEVOTION







Pramukh Swami Maharaj performs his daily puja

The purpose of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's overseas satsang *vicharan* in 1980 to the UK, USA, Canada and Africa was primarily to promote the bicentenary celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to be celebrated in 1981 in India.

During the extensive and exhausting sevenmonth *vicharan*, Swamishri's schedule came to an abrupt halt in the USA.

On 29 August 1980, Swamishri was in Tantallon, Maryland, USA. After breakfast, as he prepared to leave, he was putting on his slippers and one of the swamis noticed that he was trying to fit his right foot into his left slipper. The swami asked, "Bapa, why are you doing this?"

"I can't see properly," Swamishri said.

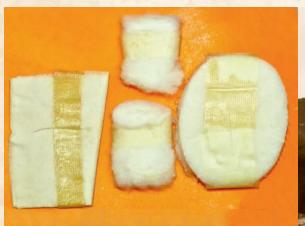
Swamishri's reply concerned everyone and sent alarm bells ringing. It was suggested that Swamishri immediately be taken to New York for assessment. Swamishri, however, refused. He remarked that the check-up could be arranged after that night's assembly – which was the

last of the special bicentenary celebration assemblies planned for the visit.

Up to that time, Swamishri had participated in every bicentenary programme while fulfilling his regular duties of discourses, personal counselling, padhramanis, correspondence, etc. During all this, he did not give any inkling of the obvious difficulties he had been experiencing due to poor eyesight as a consequence of cataracts in both eyes.

Subsequently, from New York, Swamishri was taken to Boston to be assessed at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston by Dr B. Thomas Hutchinson. The eye specialist advised that if the left eye operation was delayed, there was potentially a high risk of complications.

But before Swamishri agreed to have the operations, he sought the permission of senior devotees in the UK and Africa, since they had already arranged Swamishri's schedule for his visits there. This was a hallmark of Swamishri's



Sanctified eye pads used as dressings



Narayanmuni Swami reads from the shastras during Swamishri's recuperation

dedication and sacrifice for the devotees. Despite his evident problems, he deferred the decision regarding his health to others.

Naturally, everyone agreed that Swamishri's health was of the utmost priority and that the visit schedules would somehow be rearranged. Thus, based on this expert guidance, Swamishri's first operation was arranged for 3 September. Dr Hutchinson had been informed about the celibacy vows observed by Swamishri and the sadhus. However, since male assistants could not be arranged, he suggested that once Swamishri was sedated, female nurses could assist. They would leave before Swamishri awoke. When Swamishri was informed. he emphatically said, "Even in the unconscious state, this vow must not be transgressed. If such arrangements are not possible here, we will postpone the operations until we return to India."

Because of Swamishri's firm insistence, the operation on his left eye was delayed by three days and was performed on 6 September, when male assistants were available. On 9 September, Swamishri was permitted to leave the hospital.

In the early 1980s, the most widely used operative technique was a 45-minute extracapsular cataract extraction (ECCE) procedure. Also, the age of routinely implanting refractive, intraocular lenses was still some years away. Hence, the

post-operative recovery was more involved and took much longer than it does today.

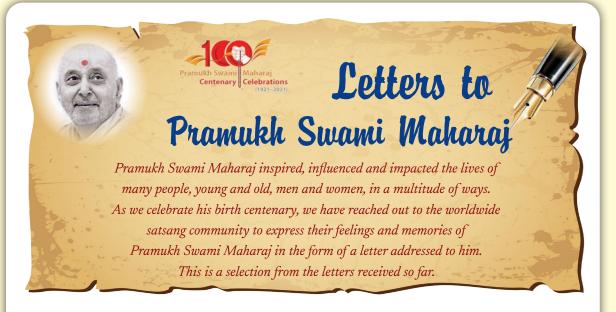
Arrangements had been made for Swamishri to rest and recover at the home of Dr J.C. Patel in Boston. Here, Swamishri spent the majority of his time listening to narrations of the *sampradayik* shastras and the Sanstha's publications released for the bicentenary celebrations.

The cataract in the right eye was removed on 23 September. Again, during the recovery period, Swamishri listened avidly to narrations of the shastras and other texts published by the Sanstha for the bicentenary celebrations.

This, in brief, is the story of Swamishri's bilateral cataract operations. The eye pads in the photo were used as dressings and are currently on display in Swamishri's old room at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sarangpur.

They are a reminder of Swamishri's total dedication to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and disregard for his own health and comforts to cater to the convenience of devotees. They also symbolize his willingness to risk his eyesight to ensure that his vow of *brahmacharya* was preserved.

In addition, they teach us that in such circumstances, one should always endeavour to use time constructively by engaging in reading or listening to shastras and other satsang texts.



My first darshan of you and Yogi Bapa was in 1970. You stepped into my room on the second floor and you saw only Beatles posters on the walls – but none of Yogi Bapa.

Through the decades you gave me guidance and special instructions on how to live a good, honest and spiritual life. You allowed me to serve the greatest calling of any human being – to serve God.

Now in my twilight years I feel I have been born again – and realize your true divinity.

My eternal thanks to you for ensuring that I did not succumb to immoral practices, and saved me from others and, crucially, from myself.

- Girish Patel, London, UK

I am still in awe at how you transcend age and mean the same to a child and an elderly person. A true guru is timeless and ageless, which you have shown us.

As a female, I have never felt far from you and am proud to have a guru who upholds *niyams* to the highest regard and offers women their own platform to enhance and improve their personal skills and satsang.

Sarangpur became a go-to place for all of us and reminiscing on our stay there, hearing the siren, seeing you come out in your wheelchair to give us your darshan, *chhadi* in hand, brings a big smile on my face. The twinkle in your eyes was always there till the end.

Bapa, you were there all the time for me. Through school, university, employment and married life, you have been there throughout, guiding me and listening to me. You have given me direction and purpose and the strength and courage to face problems, overcome obstacles and inspire change.

I am always so proud to say you are my guru – a truly pure guru, who only seeks good for all. The reputation you have built in the world makes me incredibly proud to be your disciple.

- Sheena Patel, 40, Chartered Accountant, Gants Hill, UK

In my household, we used to eat meat. Therefore, being the only vegetarian was a problem and I reverted to eating meat again. Then, when you came to Dar-es-Salaam in 2007, I met you and just felt that spiritual energy from you. Thereafter, I adhered to vegetarianism, fasting and other *niyams*.

From my small *niyams*, slowly my brother followed, and it wasn't long till my sister and mother followed. My mother then decided not to cook meat in the house and eventually after many years, my father gave up meat too. Bapa, as children, my siblings and I have witnessed incidents that no children should because of my father's alcohol addiction. Seeing the same person respecting and loving us, regularly going to temple for darshan and *ravi sabha*, doing *dandvats* and *mala*, for me, it is nothing less than a miracle that you have done. My family and I are and will forever be grateful to you.

Your teachings and memories will always stay with me. Whenever I encounter a problem, I leave it on you and Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It happens because of your wish, and everything works out for the best.

You promised you will always be with us and, today, through Mahant Swami Maharaj, you are fulfilling your promise.

I pray to you that I get the motivation and strength to please you and that I never let you down, because what you have done for us, for humanity, is priceless and we are forever in debt.

- Bhavnesh Chudasama

I remembered the day I sat in *sabha* waiting for you to enter. I was in the front row with only two rows of small *balaks* in front. My friends and I were having a debate on what part of you we should be doing darshan as we only get close darshan for a short period of time. Do we focus on your feet, face, hands, arms? Then you entered and our debate stopped as we focused fully on you. You walked in and stopped directly in front of us. While you spoke to the cameramen we had the most amazing darshan. We got the chance to do darshan of you from head to toe. You did not move and we were not rushed to do your darshan. You truly are *antaryami*. You answered our question that we should do darshan of all of you and you gave us the opportunity to do so.

I came on the first India Trip from the UK. The *labh* you gave us in IRMA was out of this world. You showed us how caring you are by ensuring that our rooms and everything had been arranged properly.

- Himali Patel, 34, Finance Manager, East London, UK

When I came into Satsang, I thought to myself that you must be a very enlightened and pious Sant. But I did not understand or fathom your greatness.

I could not believe how you could connect with every one of us on a personal level. I remember you telling me to give up alcohol; it made a very big difference on my spiritual path. Without physically speaking to me, you were already growing me on my spiritual path.

You have changed my life and I know there is no end to my good fortune in having you as my guru. I owe my entire spiritual path to you. You have given my life meaning and you are the success in my life.

- Chetan Suryakant Patel, 39, IT Consultant, Wellingborough, UK

Who am I? I was nowhere without your presence. Without you I felt alone and lost. From my association with you I understood my identity in the world. You led me onto the spiritual path. Through this satsang I have been able to implement beneficial changes in my life, which have made me a better person today.

During difficult times, it was impossible to handle situations without your teachings. It taught me to be humble. I feel like I was in a different world when I had your darshan.

Thank you for everything you have given me in my life, thank you for being by my side, and thank you for being my role model.

- Alka Patel, 54, Shop Assistant, London, UK

Bapa, I really hope that I can learn stability from you. The way you never lose faith in God and the firmness you have in the belief that whatever happens to us only happens because of Maharaj's wish.

Bapa, your humility and affection not only throw an everlasting impact on *satsangis*, but have impacted non-*satsangis* as well.

Bapa, I really hope to grow strong in Satsang and never take *abhav-avgun* of others because it will never please you and will make my life miserable.

- Shreya Gupta, 26, CIPD, London, UK

In 1979–80, when Pramukh Swami Maharaj came to Nairobi, it was my first darshan of Bapa. During his stay in Nairobi, I had to travel for some official work duties for 2–3 days. On return from my official duties, I went to the temple in the evening for darshan of Bapa.

After the *sabha*, Bapa was walking to his chambers with other sadhus and in between hundreds of other devotees Bapa stopped, called me forward and asked me where I was during the past few days. Then, he patted me on the back saying that 'I will never have any problems in my life'. What is astonishing is that amid hundreds of people, Bapa recognized me – someone who had met him only for the first time.

Bapa's blessings and guidance have always been with me.

- Babu Bharadva

Bapa was always present at all times in my life. Especially in the most difficult moments, when I needed someone to listen to me and calm my tears, and when I felt lost and needed guidance. Without asking for or expecting anything in return, you helped me to overcome every obstacle in my life. In moments of darkness you are the light that comes on to protect me and guide me in the right direction. Please always stay by my side and please hold me steadily in the satsang.

Bapa taught me a lot through his affectionate ways, the teachings of the sacred books, and the opportunity to be in different festivals and events in such a participatory way. Also, through the construction of incredible mandirs he gave me a home, where I can meet with Maharaj and Swami and feel inner peace.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for accepting me as I am and for giving me this incredible satsang.

- Manasvi Irachande, 25, Finance and Risk Management, London, UK (original letter in Portuguese) Since the age of 9, through attending *balika sabha* and doing your *samagam* when you came to London Mandir in 2004, I got to know you better and built a lifetime of memories. I then began to read satsang books, take satsang exams and get involved more in the mandir.

Swami, you have helped me through every stage of my life. You once said to my father that we are your daughters and my father should never worry about us. You are my comfort blanket and whenever I feel anxious about the future, I have always felt comfort knowing that you will be there for me.

Bapa, please continue to hold my hand, all the way until my very end.

- Rakhi Gohil, London, UK

I came to New Zealand in 2012 to study. With no regular mandir and no regular *sabha*, I felt myself being carried away from satsang. After a couple of years, there were days I would skip my morning puja and days I would feel it's okay to eat onion and garlic, since 'I am far away and no one can see me'.

On 13 August 2016, I received the heartbreaking news that you, Bapa, had returned to Akshardham and that numbed me completely. At that point I felt so ashamed of myself because I realized what kind of guru I had. Tens of thousands of people went to India for your darshan. You were continuing to inspire people even when you were not around. That was an eye-opener for me. That was the turning point for me. It's hard to put into words what I felt completely changed me again, but it was something like 'He gave his whole life for us, and what am I doing in return?'

What you gave to us, Bapa, was selfless love – never expected anything in return. You had a big heart, always forgave us for our mistakes.

Bapa, you inspired everyone to lead a pure and pious life. You formed a bond with the young and old, poor and rich. You had space and time for everyone. You saw God in everyone.

Bapa, you were and will always be a source of infinite and eternal happiness. Your life is a blessing, a boon for us, and no words can ever thank you for it.

- Disha Patel, 25, Hamilton, New Zealand

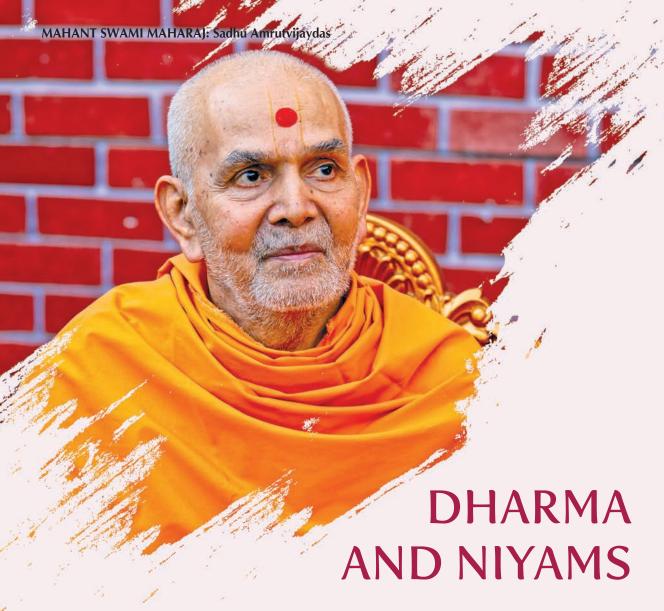
It took me a long time to realize Bapa's true identity and divinity, but when I did it was a life-changing moment for me. Only now can I fully appreciate how much Bapa has saved me, forgiven me and blessed me.

I remember one year I was doing car parking *seva* outside the main entrance to the mandir during *annakut*. It was late in the evening, approx 8:30 p.m., when a message came over the walkietalkie that Bapa is calling me. I was shocked, this was the busiest day of the year for the mandir, but Bapa had time to see me! My Mum had written a letter to Bapa, and Bapa wanted to reassure me that everything would be okay.

- Nitin Rabheru, Solicitor, UK

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

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



very aspect of worldly life is governed by rules – they are what enable societies and the world to function harmoniously and progress.

Spiritual progress, too, is dependent on one's observance of injunctions and prohibitions – the dos and don'ts. These spiritual codes of conduct are specified in the shastras and the living guru not only embodies them, but makes them relevant to modern life.

Loosely, the words 'dharma' and 'niyams' are used to refer to these codes of conduct. However, Mahant Swami Maharaj draws an important distinction. He defines dharma as one's general attitude and aptitude for following a certain way of life, while *niyams* are the specific codes that enable one to live by that approach. The terms 'dharma-*niyam*' or '*niyam*-dharma' are often used to refer to the codes of conduct. Also, the individual words 'niyam(s)' and 'dharma' are used to mean codes of conduct.

In the BAPS satsang community, the term 'dharma-niyams' is used to refer to the agnas the commands, wishes or codes of conduct – which a devotee is expected to observe. The agnas are specified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the

Shikshapatri and their modern-day necessity has been reinforced by Mahant Swami Maharaj in the Satsang Diksha.

The commands may be deemed as minor and may seem trivial, but each is a building block that strengthens one's spiritual foundation. Each is a necessary component of a genuine devotee's daily life. Observing even the apparently insignificant niyams will embolden one to follow the major niyams. And by sincerely observing all these niyams, one earns the innermost blessings of God and guru.

Swamishri's life and teachings reflect his sincerity in observing *niyams* to preserve dharma.

1 October 2017, London

At 11.05 a.m. Swamishri arrived in the Kishore Din assembly. The youngsters asked Swamishri, "Give us all one *niyam* that will strengthen our bond with you." Swamishri wrote on an ipad: "Divyabhav ane badha niyam padva." Explaining, Swamishri said, "See the Sant as divine. Never perceive human traits in him. And observe all the minor and major niyams. Then nobody can stop you from reaching all the way to Akshardham."

6 June 2018, Limbdi

As usual, after his evening dinner, Swamishri walked around 100 steps. Then, a youth opened the door leading towards Swamishri's room. He requested Swamishri, "I opened this door, so you please open the door to Akshardham."

Swamishri replied, "It's open. The passport is *niyams*."

23 September 2019, Nairobi

Today was Swamishri's birthday (as per the Vikram Samvat Calendar). He blessed all the sadhus individually. Yogimanan Swami asked, "Today is your birthday. What can we do so that you remain in good health?"

Swamishri said, "Observe niyam-dharma."

1 October 2019, Limuru

In the evening, during a discussion with Swamishri, the swamis presented Swamishri's incidents.

Shrutipriya Swami narrated how once, in Selvas, Swamishri missed the *mangala arti*. He said that except Gondal, Sarangpur, and a couple of other mandirs, everywhere else the *mangala arti* takes place at 6.00 a.m. But Swamishri had not been informed that in Selvas the time was 5.45 a.m. So, as per routine, Swamishri was making his way for the *mangala arti* when he saw the other sadhus returning and realized that the *arti* had already taken place. So, Swamishri returned to his room, gave his usual 10–15-minute morning discourse, completed his puja and attended the *shangar arti*.

Then, when he returned to his room, Swamishri emphatically declared, "No breakfast today." The attendant swamis, Chinmay Swami, and other swamis and devotees tried to persuade Swamishri to change his mind. But his decision was final. As a last resort, Dr Mukulbhai said that if Swamishri didn't eat, the devotees would also not eat. Eventually, Swamishri ate one *mamro*. He even refused his morning medications. Then, Swamishri agreed to eat lunch.

So, for inadvertently missing *mangala arti*, through no fault or intention of his own, Swamishri undertook this atonement.

Then, Priyavrat Swami asked, "Swami! You did not make any mistake. It was because you did not know the time of the *arti* and nobody had even told you beforehand. So, why such an atonement?"

Swamishri replied, "A lapse in observing one agna, leads to a lapse in two, then three and then..."

"Big lapses occur," the sadhus said.

Atmaswarup Swami said, "In Vachanamrut Gadhada III 38, Maharaj has said, 'One should attach one's *jiva* to the Bhakta of God – the great Sant who feels that he has transgressed a major injunction even if he has transgressed a minor injunction.' Swami, these words are truly evident in your life."

Even now, despite the shastras permitting those who are over 80 and the ill certain relaxations, Swamishri still observe the prescribed fast until the afternoon of Bestu Varsh (Hindu New Years' Day) until Thakorji has been offered the *annakut*, and also in the period before and during solar and lunar eclipses.

Swamishri's life is a beacon for all on how to firmly observe *niyams* and dharma.

5 October 2019, Gandhinagar

The *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* of Rajkot were going to Delhi for a *shibir*.

Apurvamuni Swami described the arrangements and *shibir* details. Swamishri was asked a written question: "O Swami Bapa! What should we youths do so that our goal of attaining Akshardham is attained?"

Swamishri wrote, "The more one firmly observes dharma-niyams, the closer one is to Akshardham. *Upasana* and *agna*."

22 October 2019, Gondal

In the evening, Swamishri finished his correspondence duties. Then, Gurumanan Swami asked, "Swami, we are all still *sadhaks* on the spiritual path. So, what thoughts should we constantly have to achieve maximum progress?"

Swamishri said, "First, read that which strengthens your observance of dharma-niyams. Because that is the most important. If one is sincere in dharma-niyams then one reaches straight to Maharaj – nobody comes in the way.

"And second, ashro – refuge. But ashro is included when one staunchly observes dharmaniyams. One who is firm in dharmaniyam is able to do everything. So, begin with these two: sincerity in observing dharmaniyams and ashro."

17 December 2019, Mumbai

Swamishri wrote today's 'Brahmavidya Path – Lesson in Brahmavidya': "Maharaj has given *niyams* to secure *moksha* for everyone."

22 December 2019, Mumbai

In the interval during a walking session, Swamishri answered some questions in English.

Uttamyogi Swami: What expectations do you have from us?

Swamishri: First of all, strong *niyam*-dharma. And then *upasana* automatically comes afterwards. And secondly, be good at all times.

Uttamyogi Swami: We have faith in you, the Satpurush. But how can we increase that faith?

Swamishri: Niyam-dharma.

Uttamyogi Swami: How can observing *niyam*-dharma increase our faith?

Swamishri: It will. The deeper you enter into *niyam*-dharma, the more solid they become. And you will never lapse in *niyam*-dharma.

Uttamyogi Swami: But how can they increase our faith?

Swamishri: It is automatic. When you enter deep into and like *niyam*-dharma they become stronger. That is how you increase faith in the Satpurush.

26 May 2020, Nenpur

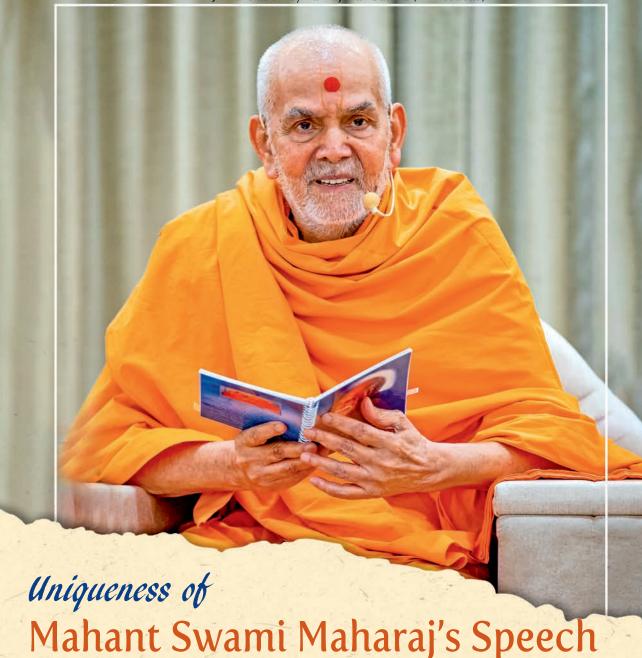
At 11.00 a.m., Swamishri was seated in the outside lobby in the sun. Gurumanan Swami asked, "Swami, one of the kirtans sung today mentioned that honouring Pramukh Swami Maharaj even with gemstones is not enough. You are Pramukh Swami Maharaj's manifest form, so please tell us how we should honour him and you."

Swamishri replied, "Observe dharmaniyams. Be absolutely firm in dharma-niyams. Remain resolute."

26 October 2020, Nenpur

After dinner, Swamishri sang the *cheshta* and listened to a reading of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *jivan charitra*. Then, Brahmanayan Swami asked, "By which type of our actions and thoughts is the Satpurush displeased.

"By lapses in dharma-niyams."



From the Gujarati discourse by Atmatrupt Swami on 29 September 2021 during the week-long online 88th Birthday Celebrations of HH Mahant Swami Maharaj.

is Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj's style and depth of spiritual discourses are truly unique and extraordinary. By delving into them one becomes enriched and enlightened. Some examples of his unique insights and interpretations on various spiritual aspects are as follows.

INTRODUCTION

In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 13, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has emphasized the importance of understanding the shastras through the Satpurush. He has stated very clearly that the glory of God cannot be truly understood by oneself from the shastras. Only when the Satpurush manifests on this earth, and one hears his explanations of the shastras, can one fully comprehend about God. This is because one's intellect alone is not capable of truly understanding the divine words of God.

Similarly, for knowledge on the aspects of one's atma, Bhagwan Swaminarayan states in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 16 that when the Sant says, "You are distinct from the mind, body, indriyas (senses) and pran (vital air); you are satya (truth); the knower of the body, indriyas and pran, which are all asatya (false)," the seeker accepts this to be the truth because he has faith in the Sant. Similarly, the knowledge that the world is perishable, worldly pleasures cannot provide permanent happiness, God alone is the provider of permanent happiness, etc., can be understood and imbibed only through the Satpurush's teachings and grace. This has been explained by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in detail in Vachanamruts Loya 10, 17 and Gadhada I 70. Therefore, all important spiritual knowledge can be truly understood through the Satpurush's discourses.

Why is the effect so different when the knowledge is disseminated by a Sant, when most of the time the Sant appears to be very ordinary or moderate? One of the reasons is that the Sant's teachings are practised by him, and are reflected in his behaviour or actions. The Sant lives his life in the same manner as his preaching. There is no difference between his words and deeds. Furthermore, in the Sant's speech there is neither any trace of ego nor any intention of creating a distorted impression in the minds of the listeners. There is no falsehood or deception.

The Sant's speech is pure and reflects what is in his heart. Thus, this knowledge from him touches one's heart.

Once, when Mahant Swami Maharaj was describing Pramukh Swami Maharaj's quality of speech, he said that generally when people speak they use different emotions and tones. Sometimes, the speaker's speech reflects his ego, jealousy, anger or selfishness. Sometimes, the speaker's speech reflects kindness, mercifulness, detachment, etc. which may or may not be his true self. Then, Mahant Swami Maharaj added that Pramukh Swami's speech reflected pure truth. It is through such a Sant that God speaks and transmits his compassion and love upon humanity. Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 27 has said the same thing, that God speaks through the Sant and therefore the effect on the listeners is totally different.

If we observe Mahant Swami Maharaj, he speaks very little. Most of the time he communicates through actions. He always speaks very softly and never in a loud tone, irrespective of whether it is a discourse or a conversation. Professional speakers are trained to modulate their tone while speaking to add emotions to it. However, this has never been the case with Mahant Swami Maharaj. His speech is always plain and natural, yet the effect on the listeners is very profound and soul-stirring.

SIMPLICITY OF SPEECH

The first speciality of Mahant Swami Maharaj's speech is simplicity. He uses easy and uncomplicated words that are used in day-to-day parlance and can be very easily understood by all. There is a lot of depth in his simple speech on spiritual concepts. This is possible only when there is absolute clarity in his mind. Also, Mahant Swami Maharaj's words are based on his vast experience, enabling him to use simple and precise language, leaving no room for any

confusion or ambiguity.

During Mahant Swami Maharaj's vicharan to the USA in 2002, many listeners experienced the profound effect of his speech.

During Mahant Swami Maharaj's stay in New York, Shri Bharatbhai Bhatt, a devotee, had invited some successful industrialists and professionals to a special meeting at his home in Manhattan. Mahant Swami Maharaj spoke in English. Mr Andrews, a local businessman, who had a deep interest in Hinduism, was among those present. He had studied the Bhagavad Gita and about yoga. After the discourse, Mr Andrews met Mahant Swami Maharaj and said that the religious texts he has been studying state the same facts narrated by Mahant Swami Maharaj. However, no one had presented them to him in such a simple and lucid manner as Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Similarly, when Mahant Swami Maharaj was in Pittsburgh, a public assembly was organized in a Hindu Jain Mandir. After the assembly, a member of the Jain community said that although he had heard discourses of several learned persons in the past, he had not heard such a lucid and simple explanation about the *atma* (soul) as Swamishri had given. He added that he clearly understood the concept and was inspired to usher a positive change in his life. It is only when words touch one's heart that one is motivated to effect a self-transformation.

The following examples from Mahant Swami Maharaj's speeches demonstrate his ability to enable devotees to easily understand difficult concepts.

■ Purpose of Human Life

Mahant Swami Maharaj explains that suppose you are a businessman and you are on a business trip to London for a week. During your stay in London, will you take your meals or not? Of course. But did you specifically go to London to take meals? The answer is no. Then, during your stay there for a week, will you sleep or not? Of course,

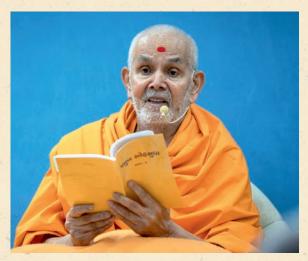
you will. But did you go to London to sleep? No. Similarly, as a human we must fulfil our worldly duties and interests of earning a livelihood, family responsibilities, social commitments, recreation, etc. However, these aren't the main reasons for our human birth. The main purpose of attaining *moksha* for one's soul should never be forgotten. This is how Mahant Swami Maharaj succinctly explains this concept.

■ Body and Soul

Explaining the concept of body and soul, Mahant Swami Maharaj gives the following analogy. Suppose that someone enacts the role of King Alexander the Great in a drama. To make the character realistic, the actor displays all the characteristics of King Alexander. However, he himself is fully aware that he is just playing a role of Alexander and that he is not the king. Similarly, Swamishri says that in reality we are atma. However, as human beings we have to discharge our duties as a father or mother, brother or sister, son or daughter. Like the actor staging the drama knows he isn't Alexander the Great, we must also be very clear that we are atma and different from the body and merely playing a role only. We must try to remember this in all stages of our life.

■ Body, Mind and Soul

Mahant Swami Maharaj explains the difference between deha (body), man (mind) and atma (soul) in the following way. He says that in business, there is generally a working partner, managing partner and a financing partner. The financing partner is most critical for starting and running the business. Similarly, Swamishri compares that in life the body is a working partner, the mind is a managing partner and the atma is a financing partner – the most important player. However, in business the working partner often takes the maximum share of the profit, followed by the managing partner and the financing partner gets the least. Similarly, in life, people spend most of



their time on their body and mind and very little for their *atma*. The essence of Mahant Swami Maharaj's analogy is that we should prioritize and focus our efforts and resources in elevating our *atma* to attain *moksha*.

On Happiness

Mahant Swami Maharaj explains the concept of happiness by posing a question: If you can sleep peacefully for eight hours on a bed worth ₹5,000, then for how many hours can you sleep on a bed costing ₹50,000? And what if the bed is worth ₹500,000, ₹5,000,000 or ₹50,000,000? Swamishri replies that happiness does not increase in proportion to having greater wealth or more expensive things. Wealth can provide convenience, but not inner peace, which is a totally different domain.

On Anger

Mahant Swami Maharaj explains that people often get angry on someone over small matters. There may be times, depending on the circumstances, when one has to tell someone off. Swamishri says the important thing is how much to tell, how to tell and when to tell. Then, he elaborates it with an example. To heat 100ml of water, would it make sense to burn 1 metric ton of coal? Similarly, there are times when too much anger is not warranted. Sometimes, one faces

minor issues and so saying a little may suffice. But, at times we get extremely angry, which then spoils the matter further, including our health, peace of mind and spirituality. Thus, Swamishri teaches the need to control one's anger.

■ Prapti (Association or Attainment of God and Guru)

Mahant Swami Maharaj explains the idea of *prapti* by saying that it is as big as the Himalayas, while our worldly problems are like small heaps of mud. Our focus should always be on our *prapti*. Our worldly problems are petty, temporary and limited to this life. On the other hand, realizing *prapti* results in a permanent relief and liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

Mahant Swami Maharaj illustrates this further by saying that suppose you are successfully running a big factory in Ahmedabad. Then, due to a new official regulation your factory operations stall. The matter becomes more complicated, resulting into legal issues with some higher officials in New Delhi. Despite your best of efforts in meeting the officials in Delhi, the matter remains unresolved. You return home to Gujarat, desperate to resolve the ongoing heavy losses in capital, production and market share. Now, suddenly out of the blue, you get a call from the authorities in Delhi asking you to urgently meet them the next day at 11 a.m. To get there, no air or train reservation ticket is available. But, you manage to get into a train without any reservation for a bunk to sleep or a seat. Consequently, you reach Delhi the next morning, standing all the way. You are extremely tired and exhausted when you reach your meeting place at 11 a.m. At 11.15 a.m., your file is cleared by the concerned official, giving you permission to recommence your factory operations. Consequently, you are greatly relieved. In this situation, will you remember or feel the pain and struggle of your train journey? The answer is no, because a

bigger problem has been solved for which you had been struggling and making efforts for quite some time.

Then, Swamishri explains that souls have been struggling for countless births to obtain *moksha*. It is only in this life that we have come in the contact of the Satpurush and satsang to enable us to solve our long struggle to achieve permanent relief and happiness. If we keep this in mind, then the problems of this world are trifle, like the difficulties of the train journey to Delhi. This is how Swamishri explains in very simple terms the concept of spiritual *prapti* in this life and why we should rejoice and always remain joyous.

■ Unique Relationship Between God and His Devotees

Mahant Swami Maharaj narrations and detailed interpretations of the incidents of Yogiji Maharaj enlighten listeners in new ways. Once, Yogiji Maharaj was about to leave Gondal for Rajkot, when he decided to inspect the utensils being washed by the youths. On inspecting a dish, he found it to be a little oily and unclean. Immediately, Yogiji Maharaj said in his loving style that it was not acceptable since Thakorji (God) eats from the dish. In response, a youth replied that the dishes are used for devotees and not Thakorji. Yogiji Maharaj replied that Thakorji also eats from the dishes, because he resides in the hearts of devotees. Mahant Swami Maharaj narrates this incident and highlights Yogiji Maharaj's mahima for devotees and his insistence that they receive appropriate care.

■ Traffic Jam

Mahant Swami Maharaj often speaks about a big traffic congestion which he had once encountered. All the vehicles had come to a standstill. On investigating, it was found that there was a problem between two vehicles on a narrow section of the road, where neither driver was willing to give way to each other. Mahant Swami Maharaj explains that it wasn't a traffic jam, but a *swabhav* (temperament) jam. If one of the drivers had reversed a little, the congestion would have eased totally. However, because of their egos, neither were willing to take a step back. Swamishri emphasizes that in life, too, we face such problems. In most cases they are a result of our *swabhavs*.

■ Nothing Before His Gurus

Finally, a very important facet of Mahant Swami Maharaj's speeches is that he never highlights his own greatness. When talking about his gurus, he states that he is nothing compared to them. Referring to Shastriji Maharaj, he says that without him, we would be nowhere. About Yogiji Maharaj, he often says that it was his compassion and love that attracted him and made him forget everything else. When talking about Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahant Swami Maharaj says that Pramukh Swami Maharaj did so much work in his lifetime that now apart from accepting garlands from the devotees there is nothing else left for him to do. Furthermore, he adds that the work done by Pramukh Swami Maharaj can never be done by anyone else. Even in his dreams, Mahant Swami Maharaj is aware of the greatness of his gurus. It is his deep humility towards and reverence for his gurus that gives his words the ring of genuineness and strength.

Once, when Mahant Swami Maharaj was in Portland, Oregon, Shanubhai, a new devotee, had come for darshan and to listen to his discourse. He had studied many Hindu shastras and heard various discourses in other *sampradayas* as well. He was so moved on hearing Mahant Swami Maharaj, that he told Swamishri that his talks were like *amrut ni dhara* (stream of nectar) and that he felt extremely peaceful.

Swamishri's words clear doubts, touch hearts and provide relief and solace because Bhagwan Swaminarayan speaks through him.

Personal Rituals

In article four, we discussed home rituals. In this fifth article, we shall briefly discuss personal rituals of ashtanga yoga.

The eight limbs of ashtanga yoga by Maharshi Patanjali are *yama*, *niyam*, *asana*, *pranayam*, *pratyahar*, *dharana*, *dhyan* and *samadhi*. The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj* – to unite with or realize Paramatma.

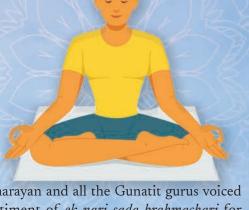
1. YAMA

This comprises of five ritual disciplines of self-restraint, namely ahimsa (non-injury), satya (truthfulness), asteya (non-theft), brahmacharya (non-lust) and to remain engrossed in Paramatma and aparigrah (living with minimum requirements).

Personal rituals of ahimsa involve dignified speech, avoiding thoughts wishing ill for others or physically hurting them, including other creatures. The latter necessarily means avoiding animal slaughter to observe a plant-based diet. Rituals of satya mean to speak the truth and avoid deceitful and fraudulent behaviour. This includes gaining money by lottery, gambling and betting. For children and young students, this means to avoid cheating or copying in exams and to study sincerely with the awareness that Bhagwan is omniscient and that cheating does not please one's spiritual guru.

Asteya means to avoid theft or even taking an object without permission of the owner. Children should not even pick a neighbour's flower or fruit to offer in a mandir without their consent. For adults asteya means to honestly pay tax.

Brahmacharya for the young means to study diligently until the age of 25 years without dating, or watching or reading material which induces lustful thoughts. For the married, brahmacharya means to remain loyal to one's spouse. Bhagwan



Swaminarayan and all the Gunatit gurus voiced the sentiment of *ek nari sada brahmachari* for householders. *Brahmacharya* brings one closer to Bhagwan (Vachanamrut Gadhada II 33).

Aparigrah is simple living, the key to peace. More possessions lead to greater mental burden. Hoarding leads to ashanti – misery. The fewer one's possessions, such as clothing, gadgets, property and so forth, the greater is one's detachment from the mundane world. In practice, this means to simplify one's living and to make do with minimum requirements. The time and energy saved is spent in devotion to Bhagwan and seva of his devotees.

2. NIYAM

This second limb involves rituals of external and internal purity, comprising five factors: *shauch* (purity), *santosh* (contentment), *tapas* (austerity), *swadhyay* (regular study of truthful shastras) and *ishwar pranidhan* (bhakti of Bhagwan). *Shauch* involves rituals of physical purity such as bathing daily in the morning since sleep renders impurity to the mind and body. Ideally, bathing in a holy river or lake accrues great *punya*. Water washes away the karmic impurities deposited in the mind by unholy dreams. Chanting sacred mantras or Bhagwan's name while bathing is an even greater purifier.

Santosh means contentment. One remains content with whatever Bhagwan has destined in our *prarabdha* karmas. This involves factors such as intelligence, health, wealth, possessions and longevity. Striving for more than what is karmically destined leads to *asantosh* – discontent

and misery. *Tapas* means austerity. In addition to ritual fasting and fasting for atonement (*prayaschitt*), *tapas* also means willingly tolerating hardships and the dualities of heat-cold, hungerthirst, joy-unhappiness, honour-insult, gain-loss and so forth. A practical form of *tapas* involving diet is to eat less, thus leaving the stomach partially empty. Children often take vows of avoiding their favourite food items such as chocolate, etc. to donate the money saved for constructing a new mandir in their city or region. A current example is of the Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, USA. Such rituals of *tapas* strengthen the *atma* to gain control over the *indriyas* (senses) and mind.

Swadhyay is the daily study of true or authentic shastras such as those written by Bhagwan Ved Vyas as cited by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Shikshapatri (93–95). In the BAPS, this also includes all literature about the guru parampara. A recent addition is Satsang Diksha by Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Ishwar pranidhan means devotion to Paramatma. The rituals of such devotion were cited in article three, rituals of navdha bhakti.

3. ASANA

This third limb involves mastering the 84 postures of yoga.

Mastering these postures is just one limb of yoga. Prior to beginning yoga postures it is a prerequisite to practise the previous two limbs of *yama and niyam*. Only a rare few are able to master all 84 postures. For practical postures in daily life: *padmasan* (lotusposture), *sukhasan* (sitting cross-legged) and *surya namaskar* – similar to *dandvat pranams* – can be practised during the morning *nitya* puja.

4. PRANAYAM

This fourth limb involves control of *prana* through breath. *Prana* is a powerful form of energy flowing in the body. *Prana* and the mind are intricately related. By controlling *prana* the constantly wavering mind can be controlled.

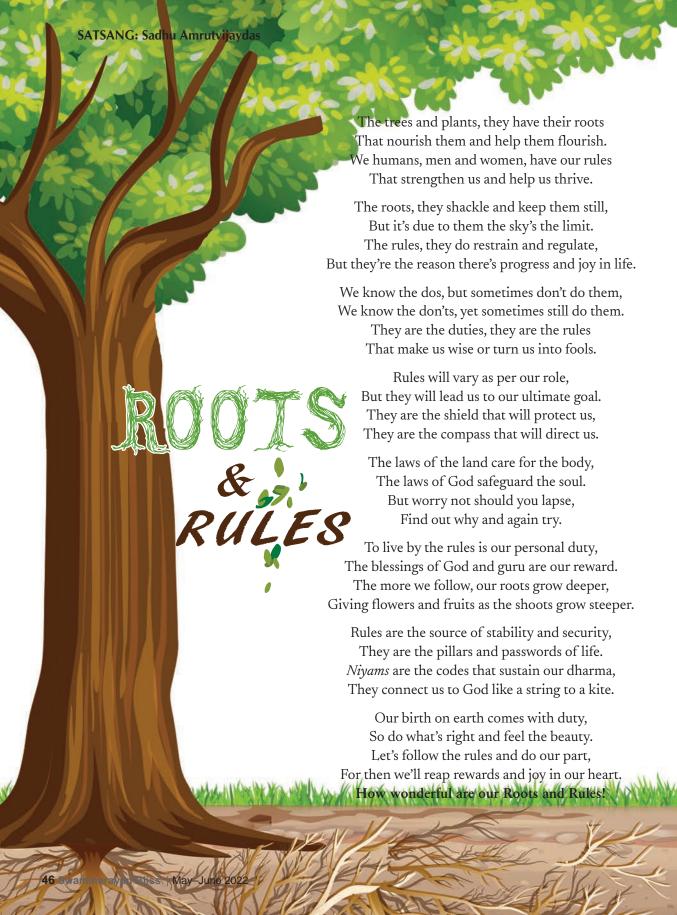
There are several different types of *pranayam*, which should be learnt from an expert. Its great benefits to students is that it enhances concentration, memory, creativity and eradicates hyperactiveness. The 'Om' *pranayam* is the easiest which can be practised before beginning *nitya* puja and before studying.

5. PRATYAHAR

This is the control and withdrawal of the *indriyas* (senses) and diverting them inwards from their respective mundane sense objects. In Bhakti yoga, the mind is easily withdrawn from mundane objects by offering intense devotion to Paramatma.

Only after mastering these five external limbs can a sadhak - spiritual aspirant - embark on the remaining three internal limbs, namely dharana, dhyan and samadhi. Since the rituals of these are extremely difficult to practise for lay people, they are not discussed here. (For details refer to Hindu Rites & Rituals, 2010, 2nd ed. pp. 222-223.) However, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has revealed an easier and practical endeavour to realize Paramatma, the final goal of ashtanga yoga. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 42, he cites the example of the gopis. By their intense and unalloyed devotion for Shri Krishna, known as premlakshana bhakti, they became gunatit and nirgun - devoid of maya, and attained Paramatma's Akshardham. They focused their chitt constantly on only Paramatma. By controlling the chitt in this manner, the pranas are controlled. Bhagwan Swaminarayan declares that such a devotee whose chitt vrutti becomes focused on Paramatma, masters ashtanga yoga without even attempting to master it. Further, in Vachanamrut Vartal 11 he states the need for the Satpurush to help one realize Paramatma easily: "Profound love for the Satpurush is the only means to realize one's atma; it is the only means to realizing the glory of the Satpurush and the only means to realize Paramatma."

In the next article we shall discuss rituals of personal *nitya* puja.



INSPIRATIONS

A potpourri of inspiring and interesting information and wisdom

FACING LOSSES WITH FAITH & COURAGE HELPS TO HEAL



When Arther Ashe, a renowned tennis player, was on the verge of losing his battle against AIDS in 1992, many of his fans expressed shock and despondency, asking him why God had chosen him for such an untimely death when he had done nothing wrong. Ashe placidly replied, "All over the world millions of teenagers aspire to become tennis players. Of them, only a few thousand play in the professional circuit and only a hundred or so play in grand slam tournaments. And only two reach the final of Wimbledon. When I was standing with the trophy of Wimbledon in my hand, I never questioned God, 'Why me?' So, what right do I have now to ask God, 'Why me?'

When we confront adversities with faith, equanimity and effort, then the immense power they hold over us begins to diminish. Faith enables us to overcome our negative emotions and reactions of fear, etc. and inspires us with peace, charity and wisdom.

MILK ANALYSIS



The true nature of an object can be learnt only by proper study. Shastras describe the nature of God, but no one shastra is comprehensive. Thus, only by study of all the major shastras does a complete picture of God become clear. Shriji Maharaj explains this in Vachanamrut Vartal 2, "Only one who realizes God through these four shastras can be said to possess total *jnan*. For example, only when one sees with one's eyes does one come to know that milk is white; only when one smells with one's nose does one come to know its smell; only when one touches it with one's finger does one come to know whether it is hot or cold; and only when one tastes it with one's tongue does one come to know its taste. In this manner, only when milk is tested through all the *indrivas* can one totally

know its nature; it cannot be totally known through one *indriya* alone. Similarly, one realizes God's nature totally when one realizes it through the four shastras, i.e. the Vedas, etc. To have such knowledge is called total *jnan*."

- Analogy from Vachanamrut

NOT A SERVANT OF AUBERGINES

Once, there lived a king. He had a very intelligent minister in his royal court. One day someone brought some brinjals or aubergines as a gift.

The king began complaining, "These brinjals are useless. They're black and fibrous and are not a healthy vegetable to eat."



"Yes, my lord. Yes, you're perfectly correct," supported the minister.

The next day, the king summoned the minister and praised, "Minister, there is no vegetable better than aubergines. Nothing is tastier or healthier."

"Oh, yes, my lord. These aubergines are the best," the minister continued.

Hearing this, the king questioned, "Minister, why this sudden change? Yesterday, when I deplored the aubergines you agreed with my opinion, and today when I praise them you praise them as well!"

The minister folded his hands and said, "O king, I am not a servant of the aubergines. I am your servant. Whatever pleases you, pleases me. Whatever displeases you, displeases me. I say yes to your yes and no to your no."

The king was pleased by his loyalty and raised his wages by five hundred rupees.

We, too, must say yes to everything said or done by our guru. This is the stamp of our true service towards him.

- 101 Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj

INDIAN DEVAS AND DEVIS IN TURKEY, PERSIA AND ROME

A fact that shows the West had an Indian connection was the worship of goddess Magna Mater¹ or 'Great Mother' in Turkey since at least 800 BCE. In 204 BCE, a Roman delegation brought an image of Magna Mater from Phrygia in Asia Minor to Rome to enable them to win their war against Carthage. The goddess remained the patron deity of Rome till Rome's conversion to Christianity. The Magna Mater was discovered to be the Indian goddess Durga. Even today, 300 ft up the north face of Mount Sipylus in Turkey one can find an ancient 30 ft high image of the goddess carved into solid rock.

Magna Mater, her Latin name, means 'Great Mother', which is similar to Durga's title, Maha Devi (Great Goddess) or Shri Mata (Respected Mother), in India. In ancient Turkey Magna Mater was known as Truquas, whom scholars believe is related to her Indian name, Durga.

Other Hindu devas were worshipped in Turkey in ancient times. Renowned Indian archaeologist B.B. Lal explains that in 1500 BCE, the Mitanni people of Turkey worshipped and appeased Indra (rain-god), Mitra (sun-god), Varuna (sea-god) and the Ashwinis (physicians of the devas). He writes, "The Boghaz Kuei inscription, dating back to the fourteenth century BC, refers to Indra, Mitra, Nasatya and Varuna as witnesses to a treaty between the Mitanni King Matiwaza and the Hittite King Suppiluliuma.

"The renowned scholar, T. Burrow (1955) came to the conclusion: 'The Aryans appear in Mitanni from 1500 BC as the ruling dynasty.' Around 1500 BC there was no other country in the entire world except India where the above mentioned gods were worshipped." Thus Mitra was worshipped in India in 4000 BCE and beyond, and was worshipped as Mithras by the Persians, and was also the patron deity of the Roman army.

^{1.} Johnsen, Linda. The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hinduism. Indianapolis, USA: Alpha books, 2002, pp. 37–38.

^{2.} Lal, B.B. The Homeland of the Aryans. New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2005, p. 84.



24 February-17 April 2022, Atladara and Surat



Swamis and devotees doing darshan of Swamishri as he departs from Atladara

On 24 February 2022, Mahant Swami Maharaj departed from Atladara, visited Bharuch mandir for darshan and then travelled to the Akshardham mandir site at Kanad, Surat. He was given a warm, devotional welcome by the sadhus and devotees of Surat.

After giving darshan to all, Swamishri inaugurated the newly built sant nivas, called 'Pramukh Hruday', where his stay was arranged. On 1 March 2022, a grand welcome assembly was arranged for Swamishri. With the ebbing of the third wave of the coronavirus and relaxation in health protocols, thousands of devotees from Surat and South Gujarat flocked for Swamishri's darshan. Thereafter, every morning, Swamishri performed his puja in the Akshar Jharukho, giving darshan and the benefit of his discourses to the devotees. Every Sunday evening, Swamishri attended the satsang sabha to bless all. On

weekdays, Swamishri gave the benefit of *samip* darshan to the devotees in the evening.

Many devotees practised various austerities and pilgrimaged on foot for Swamishri's morning puja at the mandir site in Kanad to please Swamishri.

Highlights of Swamishri's stay in Atladara and Surat are as follows.

FEBRUARY: ATLADARA AND SURAT

- 3, Atladara: Swamishri inaugurated an English publication, *In the Good of Others*, authored by Sadhu Mukundcharandas and published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.
- 5: Swamishri inaugurated *Vachanamrut Sangrah* and a translation of Satsang Diksha in German.
- 7: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Amberavpur (Bochasan region).

- 11: Swamishri inaugurated the Gujarati audio book of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's biography, Part 6.
- 23: Swamishri performed the murti-pratishtha rituals of the murtis for BAPS hari mandirs in Menka (Surendranagar) and the Ahmedabad rural villages of Vadodara and Vasai (Ghanshyam Maharaj and Guru Parampara).
- 27, Surat: Swamishri ritually inaugurated the BAPS Hindi Youtube channel.

MARCH: SURAT

- 8: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Kakloor (Chennai region). Swamishri also blessed the devotees from Chennai.
- **10:** Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Vyara (Sankari region).
- 20: Swamishri blessed 1,650 students appearing for the final 10th and 12th grade Gujarat Board exams.
- 22: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Palol (Sojitra region).
- 28: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in USA at Mertle Beach (Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Shiv-Parvati and Shri Hanumanji-Ganapatiji) and Raleigh (Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Guru Parampara, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Shiv-Parvati and Shri Hanumanji-Ganapatiji).
- 30 & 31: Swamishri performed the *murtipratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Fali (Sankari region) on 30 March and Sadadi (Sankari region) on 31 March.

APRIL: SURAT

■ 2: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Kapura (Sankari region) and the newly

- built *hari* mandir in Valvada (Sankari region). Swamishri also blessed the devotees of both towns
- 3: Swamishri performed the murti-pratishtha rituals of the murtis for BAPS hari mandirs in the Athva Lines and Adajan suburbs of Surat.
- 9: Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performed the *pre- pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam
 Maharaj and Shri Bhagatji Maharaj for the
 Bhagatji Maharaj Smruti Mandir in Mahuva.
 Thereafter, Swamishri performed the
 concluding *pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* and
 the marble *charanarvind* of Shriji Maharaj.
 Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the devotees of
 Mahuva who had come for puja darshan.
- 11 & 14: Swamishri performed the *murti pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in the Housing Board suburb of Surat and Hariyal (Sankari region).
- **16:** Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Dharampur (Tithal region).
- 17: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj to be installed in the BAPS *hari* mandir in the Kamrej suburb of Surat.

After the *pratishtha* rituals, Swamishri blessed and said, "The consecrated *murtis* will soon be installed in all the *hari* mandirs. So, you must go daily for darshan to the mandir. These *murtis* are not merely stone, but God resides in them. Have firm faith and enthusiasm and do bhajan and bhakti. Attend *arti* and perform *pradakshinas* of the *murtis*. Whoever has offered their services for building the mandir will be happy in mind, body and in all ways."

Swamishri also celebrated festivals during his stay in Kanad, Surat.

CELEBRATIONS OF FESTIVALS IN SWAMISHRI'S PRESENCE, SURAT

Fuldol Festival, 18 March 2012

The Fuldol festival was celebrated in the



Swamishri and senior sadhus on the stage during the Fuldol festival assembly, Kanad, Surat

presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj in Kanad, Surat. The devotees of Surat, South Gujarat and other nearby regions attended the festival. From 3.30 p.m., the devotees started entering the open festival ground. A colourful stage and backdrop had the *utsav murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the Guru Parampara. Senior swamis were seated on the main dais. About 55,000 devotees were present when the festival assembly commenced. Two large LED screens on both sides of the main stage enabled all to have darshan of the stage programmes. The festival programme was as follows.

- At 5.30 p.m., the assembly commenced with *dhun* and prayer.
- Prabhucharandas Swami spoke about the significance of the Fuldol celebration.
- Anandswarupdas Swami described how Pramukh Swami Maharaj propagated the principle of spiritual divinity (divyabhav).
- Ishwarcharandas Swami spoke about how Pramukh Swami Maharaj spread the life and message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.
- Dr Swami gave an inspirational discourse.

As Mahant Swami Maharaj came onto the main stage, the mammoth assembly of devotees gave a tumultous welcome by hailing the *jais*. Then, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "One who establishes firm spiritual faith within oneself attains the virtues of fraternity, humility and harmony. Faith is the cornerstone of all spiritual sadhanas. Thus, one must become faithful, and as one realizes the glory of Maharaj and Swami, one's faith becomes stronger.

"One requires faith in celebrating Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary celebrations. When one praises his glory with faith, one's words have a unique ring. One who has faith definitely talks about it to others. This is how we have to celebrate the centenary."

Then, Swamishri performed the *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Thereafter, a video was shown about the past Fuldol festivals celebrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Swamishri then sprayed coloured water on Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and conversely Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



Swamishri performs the janmotsav art

sprinkled coloured water on Swamishri. The devotees were enthralled by the divine darshan. Then, Swamishri sprayed the sanctified coloured water on Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami and other sadhus. Subsequently, Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus.

The festival climaxed with Swamishri showering coloured water on the devotees with *pichkaris* from the podium of the underconstruction Akshardham Mandir. Devotees rejoiced and felt blessed as they filed passed before Swamishri. All received *prasad* of *fagva* (sanctified baked grams, popcorn and dates) as they exited the venue. Finally, Swamishri showered coloured water on the sadhus and exclaimed, "Today's festival was supremely celebrated."

SHRI SWAMINARAYAN JAYANTI

On 10 April 2022, the celebration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's 241st birthday was held in Swamishri's presence at Kanad, Surat. Thousands of devotees had assembled

for the celebration. In Swamishri's morning puja, an annakut was arranged before Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and swamis sang bhajans on the divine lila and murti of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Thereafter, Swamishri discoursed about the divinity and greatness of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and also blessed the devotees who had observed austerities and pilgrimaged by foot. Swamishri inaugurated two print publications: Satsang Diksha Paryalochanam (a compilation of essays on Satsang Diksha) and an English publication called Murti Puja in Sanatan Dharma: Beliefs and Traditions by Sadhu Mukundcharandas.

In the main evening celebration assembly, the stage and backdrop decoration was themed on the divine *lilas* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The celebration programme was as follows.

- *Dhun* and kirtan bhakti by swamis and youths.
- Shrutiprakash Swami spoke about Bhagwan Swaminarayan's uniqueness.
- Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami narrated inspiring divine incidents about Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

- Children and youths enacted various incidents from the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.
- To commemorate the festive occasion swamis garlanded and honoured Swamishri with a variety of garlands.
- Swamishri blessed the festive assembly, "When we talk of *prapti* (attainment) of Maharaj then we realize how great Maharaj is and how inferior we *jivas* are. Shriji Maharaj himself said that, 'If I were to talk about my glory there would be no end to it.' Then, there's no one else who could gauge and realize his glory.

"The greatest work Shriji Maharaj did was to introduce and talk about the glory of the Gunatit Satpurush. All the subsequent gurus are his form and so Maharaj remains ever-present. Shastriji Maharaj once said, 'The Satpurush never leaves our earth. Thus, Maharaj revealed the Gunatit form to us and he is present even today."

Then, Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were placed in a golden, decorated cradle. An *annakut* was offered to them. Thereafter, Swamishri and sadhus performed the celebration *arti*. This was followed by the singing of festive bhajans by swamis and youths as Swamishri and sadhus rocked Maharaj and Swami. Thereafter, children

and youths, dressed in vivid costumes, danced with joy to celebrate the birth of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Around 28,000 devotees were present in the celebration, and many thousands more saw the live webcast from their homes in India and abroad.

SATSANG ASSEMBLIES

In Swamishri's presence, special satsang assemblies were organized on every Sunday evening and special festival days. Devotees attended in large numbers to relish the performances of dramas and traditional dances by children and youths, question-answer sessions with Swamishri and speeches by scholarly swamis. Swamishri capped each assembly with his profound discourses.

On Sunday, 3 April 2022, youths from the BAPS Youths Training Centre in Sarangpur, presented an impressive stage programme in the evening assembly. Swamishri sanctified the mementos and certificates to be presented to the youths of the Youth Training Centre.

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

Mahant Swami Maharaj Performs Rituals of the First Pillar of Akshardham Mandir

20 March 2022, Kanad, Surat

The *shikharbaddha* BAPS mandir in the Adajan suburb of Surat was consecrated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in December 1996. Later, with the rapid growth of satsang, the mandir complex was too small to accommodate the devotees and satsang activities. Thus, Mahant Swami Maharaj decided upon a large new mandir to be built in Kanad, Surat. The *shilanyas* rituals were performed by Mahant Swami Maharaj

on 7 May 2019. Then, on 31 January 2021, Swamishri residing in Nenpur, initiated the historic construction of the Akshardham Mandir with special rituals performed by Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami at the site in Kanad.

As part of the Akshardham construction phase, the ritual *pujan* of establishing the first pillar was held on the morning of 20 March



2022. The mahapuja ritual was performed by Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and Jnaneshwar Swami. Thereafter, senior swamis addressed thousands of devotees who had assembled to witness this momentous occasion. After Swamishri completed his morning puja, he arrived to perform the main sthambh pujan ritual. Swamishri poured water on the base part of the pillar (khar-shila), then poured cement and performed pujan with abil, gulal and kumkum. Senior sadhus and devotees also performed the ritual pujan. When the main pillar was lowered onto the base part of the pillar the assembly erupted with ecstatic jais. Swamishri then applied the auspicious swastik symbol on the main pillar. Thereafter, Swamishri unveiled another pillar and performed pujan. This was followed by arti of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and showering of flower petals on the main pillar. Munivandan Swami appreciated the services of all the volunteers and skilled artisans involved in the construction project.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the historic occasion, "This grand and divine ritual is being

held in the presence of akshar muktas. All of you will benefit immensely. These pillars will remain witness to this mandir tradition for thousands of years. Congratulations to all who are offering their services in this project." Swamishri was honoured with garlands. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the engineers, artisans and volunteers involved in the construction project.

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



Swamishri performs pujan of the main pillar

Grand Felicitation of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan in East India

21-23 March 2022, Jagannath Puri, India



The Swaminarayan Bhashyam and the Swaminarayan Siddhant Sudha were humbly offered at the holy feet of Shri Jagannathji

A momentous three-day celebration in honour of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan was organized in the sacred land of Jagannath Puri in Odisha, East India. The celebration encompassed a scholarly conference focusing on Parabrahma Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan and its relationship with other Vedantic schools of philosophy, a devout tribute to His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the auspicious occasion of his centenary birth celebrations, a written endorsement offered by prestigious scholars of East India validating the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as a distinct Vedic darshan, and felicitation of Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami in recognition of his remarkable work of authoring the Swaminarayan Bhashyam.

A Historic Offering

On the morning of 21 March, a devotional

tribute that will be forever etched in the annals of Vedic tradition was offered. As per the wish of Mahant Swami Maharaj, the Swaminarayan Bhashyam and the Swaminarayan Siddhant Sudha were humbly offered at the holy feet of Shri Jagannathji by the bhashyakar himself, Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami. Vice chancellors of various universities as well as respected scholars and dignitaries were present to witness this historic event. While the commentaries were being offered, the atmosphere resonated with divinity as Sanskrit shlokas exalting the glory of Shri Jagannathji were recited by the sadhus and dignitaries. These shlokas were authored by Bhadreshdas Swami and their recitation along with this sacred tribute was recognized by scholars as a significant and momentous occasion. Many centuries ago, Adi Shankaracharya had offered his commentaries to Shri Jagannathji while



The valedictory session of the three-day national conference

reciting self-composed Sanskrit verses extolling Shri Jagannathji's greatness. After centuries this was the first time that the commentaries on the Prasthantrayi were being offered to Shri Jagannathji by the *bhashyakar* himself while reciting Sanskrit verses.

A Festive Procession

Thereafter, a traditional festive procession was organized within the Sadashiv Campus of Central Sanskrit University to express the profound veneration towards the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, and the unprecedented work and contribution of Mahamahopadhyay Sadhu Bhadreshdas. The metallic *murtis* of Parabrahma Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami along with the Swaminarayan Bhashyam and Swaminarayan Siddhant Sudha texts were placed in a decorated palanquin and carried during the procession throughout the campus and on the streets of Puri. Traditional Odisha singers sang bhajans while scholars and students recited Vedic mantras inspiring a sublime experience for all present.

A Memorable Ceremony

The inauguration ceremony of the three-day national conference organized by the Central Sanskrit University and Utkal Parishad was blessed with the honourable presence of the King of Puri, Gajapati Maharaja Divyasingha Deva, as well as prominent scholars and dignitaries of East India.

The king stated, "On the occasion of the centenary birth celebrations of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the commentaries were offered to Shri Jagannathji, which was a significant event... Moments that are passed within the presence of great saints create everlasting impressions within the heart. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a great saint." Gajapati Maharaja Divyasingha Deva extolled Pramukh Swami Maharaj's illustrious and selfless persona, and reminisced his personal memories with him.

Vice chancellor of Central Sanskrit University, Dr Shrinivasa Varakhedi, said, "This commentary does not criticize any school of thought. Rather, it substantiates its own position while expressing reverence towards everyone. This is the reason why we have all gathered to welcome and honour this commentary. We have experienced a



Scholars offer a written declaration engraved in copper endorsing the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as a distinct Vedic darshan

glimpse of only one disciple of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. There are one thousand such sadhus, more than a thousand mandirs, and numerous educational institutions. He inspired the creation of the Prasthantrayi commentaries. Hence, this felicitation will forever be etched in the history of this university."

A Sacred Tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj: Shastra-parampara Kalpa-druma

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's countless contributions to protect, foster and nourish India's eternal Vedic tradition have touched and transformed thousands. An essential facet of his contributions was his continuous encouragement to promote and preserve the shastra tradition. By inspiring the creation of the Swaminarayan Bhashyam and numerous other texts in various languages, Pramukh Swami Maharaj revitalized the ancient shastra legacy. Recognizing this priceless contribution, five prominent institutions – the Utkal Parishad, Central Sanskrit University, Shri Jagannath Sanskrit University, Maharshi Vyasadeva Rashtriya Prachavidya Gaveshana Centre and Akhil Bharat Amrut Vani Seva

Pratishthan – collectively awarded Pramukh Swami Maharaj a distinct accolade entitled 'Shastra-parampara Kalpa-druma'. Engraved in copper, this recognition was offered to Pramukh Swami Maharaj by the royal hands of Gajapati Maharaja Shri Divyasingha Deva.

Grand Felicitation of Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami: Bhashyakar Mahacharya

By the inspiration of guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj along with his own tireless efforts and tremendous perseverance, Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami gifted the Vedantic tradition with an invaluable contribution by authoring the Swaminarayan Bhashyam. The Swaminarayan Bhashyam is an extensive Sanskrit commentary that thoroughly substantiates the Vedic authenticity of Parabrahma Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. Thus, unanimously recognizing this contribution as a momentous and historic accomplishment achieved after centuries, several prestigious universities and organizations of East India collectively bestowed Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami the 'Bhashyakar Mahacharya Award'. The award was presented by Gajapati Maharaja Divyasingha Deva. In his address, Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami humbly offered the award at the holy feet of *ishtadev* Parabrahma Swaminarayan and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj, stating that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is truly the Bhashyakar Mahacharya.

A Scholarly Conference

The three-day national conference entitled 'The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan: A Dialogue with Other Darshans' provided a special opportunity for scholars to gain a deeper insight into Parabrahma Swaminarayan's Vedic doctrine. Professors and students from various universities presented more than 30 scholarly research papers on topics such as 'Akshar-Purushottam Darshan within the Kathopanishad, 'Daharavidya within the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan,' 'A Reflection of Shrimad Bhagavad Gita's Aksharbrahma Yoga,' 'The Characteristics of Sthitapragna within the Bhagavad Gita Swaminarayan Bhashyam,' 'Comparing Advaita and the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan on the Basis of the Brahmasutra's Jignasaadhikaran' and 'Satsang Diksha - A Pragmatic Guideline for Living'.

The unique aspect of this conference was an invaluable opportunity to engage in a philosophical discussion with the *bhashyakar*, Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami, himself. During this discussion he substantiated the Vedic authenticity of Parabrahma Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan by extensively referencing the shastras. Receiving satisfying responses to their questions, scholars unanimously and joyously accepted the Akshar-Purushottam Doctrine as a distinct Vedic darshan.

Expressing his experience, the secretary of Maharshi Vyasadeva Rashtriya Prachavidya Gaveshana Centre, Prof. Buddeshwar Sarangi, stated, "We were able to experience the prestige and intellect of a true scholar by the humble

responses of Bhadresh Swamiji."

Dr Bhagirath Nandaji, a professor of literature at Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, said, "The River Ganga ultimately flows into the ocean, but the sacred Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Ganga will continuously flow within the hearts of scholars. This darshan has earned a position amongst the succession of prestigious darshans that have been gifted from time to time by the great acharyas of India. The responsibility to promote this darshan is ours."

Mahamahopadhyay Dr Harekrishna Shatpathiji, a renowned vice chancellor of several universities and prominent scholar bestowed with numerous awards and accolades, proclaimed, "Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan will liberate society. This event signifies the commencement of an aspiration to further this darshan. This darshan will have an impact on the entire world from every perspective - social, spiritual, cultural and educational. This darshan is a complete and holistic darshan. The aspiration to further this doctrine will be fulfilled if the study of this darshan is integrated within the academic curriculum of the new education system that will soon be implemented in our country. A distinguishing characteristic of the guru parampara of this sampradaya is that it upholds vairagya, but not indifference. Even upon renouncing the world, [the gurus and sadhus] serve society. Today, let us hope and wish that we promote the Swaminarayan Darshan throughout the entire world and establish peace and benevolence. I can confidently say that this commentary is the world's eighth wonder."

Ceremonial Honouring of the Commentaries and Bhashyakar

On the third day of the conference, all the scholars wished to perform *pujan* of the commentaries as well as honour the *bhashyakar*,

Bhadreshdas Swami. Hence, amid the chanting of Vedic mantras, all the scholars participated in this event at the Saraswati Mandir located on the university campus.

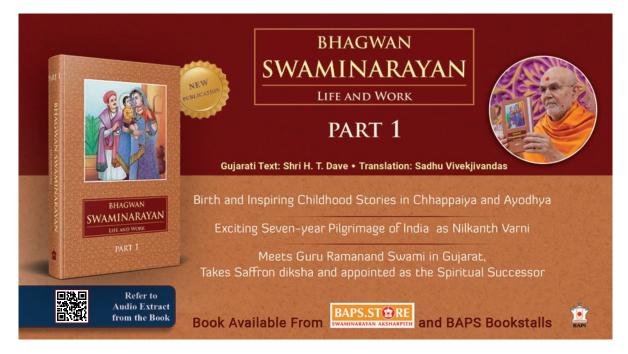
Recognition of a Distinct Vedic Doctrine: The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan

The conference concluded with the valedictory ceremony that was attended by more than 250 scholars from five different states of East India: Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura, Bihar and Assam. The presence of distinguished intellectuals and dignitaries, including Prof. Harihar Hota, Vice Chancellor of Shri Jagannath Sanskrit University; Prof. Khageshwar Mishra, Director of the Sadashiv Campus of Central Sanskrit University; Prof. Vishnupad Mahapatra, a renowned scholar of Nyaya; Dr Harekrishna Pattajoshi, an acclaimed Advaita scholar, and others, enhanced the ceremony's dignity.

All the scholars endorsed the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan's Vedic authenticity and its distinct *darshanic* identity by presenting a

written declaration engraved in copper entitled 'Anugna-patra-prativi'. Having meticulously examined and analyzed the Prasthantrayi commentaries and *sampradayik* texts, such as the Vachanamrut, for more than a month, all the scholars decided to make a unanimous declaration of accepting the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as a novel Vedic tradition. The declaration clearly expressed that the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is an eternal Vedic darshan that is 'distinct from Advaita, Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and all other Vedic doctrines'.

The overall success of this three-day historic celebration was due to the efforts of Prof. Gnanranjan Panda, secretary of the Utkal Parishad; Prof. Radhagovinda Tripathi, chief trustee of the Utkal Parishad; Prof. Satyanarayan Acharya, chairperson of the Utkal Parishad; and Dr Somnath Dash, a scholar of *sahitya*. Atmatruptdas Swami, Aksharnandandas Swami, Purnavatsaldas Swami and other BAPS sadhus also greatly contributed to the success of this event.



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson Visits Swaminarayan Akshardham

21 April 2022, Gandhinagar





Prime Minister of the UK Boris Johnson was greeted at the ornately carved stone Mayur Dwar in Akshardham with a garland of flowers by Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami. The Prime Minister was accompanied by Gujarat Chief Minister Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel and High Commissioner of UK to India, HE Alex Ellis.

Then, Brahmaviharidas Swami gave the Prime Minister an overview of Swaminarayan Akshardham. The Prime Minister was overwhelmed and commented, "This is the mother of all mandirs. It is the source of your wonderful mandirs across the world."

As the Prime Minister proceeded to the main monument of the Akshardham complex, children dressed in traditional costumes welcomed him with a traditional dance and waving of flags.

Inside the main monument, he paid respects to the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan by offering flowers, and admired the art and architecture. He learned how His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired thousands of volunteers and artisans to create Akshardham to share the messages of love, peace, tolerance, non-violence, co-existence and global harmony. Prime Minister Johnson conveyed his best wishes for the ongoing worldwide Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations and the grand 30-day festival to be held in Ahmedabad.

From here, while appreciating the messages of peace, world harmony, social uplift and personal integrity of the exhibition halls, the prime minister went to the *abhishek* hall where he performed the *abhishek* (ritual pouring of water) on the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj, the teenage-yogi form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and offered prayers for world peace, progress and harmony.

PM Johnson shared, "Every time I visit a BAPS temple I am uplifted and feel a sense of deep spirituality. All of you, by your selfless work, values and goodness, are contributing in an amazing way towards world development."

PM Johnson wrote in the visitor book, "Thank you for a wonderful time at Akshardham. It was a blessing to take part in your ceremonies and I much appreciated your prayers for stability in Europe. I am full of admiration for all the work done by countless volunteers, and by your sadhus."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj Shatabdi Vandana Samaroh

18 April 2022, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi



In the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, over 8,000 dignitaries, guests, devotees and well-wishers from throughout Delhi, Punjab, Hariyana, Himachal, Jammu, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand attended the grand Shatabdi Vandana Samaroh celebrating the life and work of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The podium of the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir served as the main stage with the attendees seated on the facing lawns and central passage.

The assembly highlighted special features of Swaminarayan Akshardham through the topics of *sankalp* (vision), *sarjan* (creation) and *sandesh* (message).

The evening assembly featured speeches by senior and learned swamis elaborating on the three topics and thematic videos. The entire assembly was interlinked by skits and traditional dances by children, teenagers and youths.

Dharmavatsal Swami spoke about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's guru bhakti, Munivatsal Swami and Aksharvatsal Swami narrated Pramukh Swami Maharaj's unique working style, Bhadresh Swami explained how Akshardham has served as a platform for interfaith dialogue and harmony, Brahmavihari Swami and Atmaswarup Swami described the profound personal impact of Akshardham in people's lives and Anandswarup Swami narrated incidents of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's innate humility.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami paid tribute to Swamishri and invited everyone to attend the Centenary Celebrations in December 2022.

Then, from Surat, Mahant Swami Maharaj, blessed the assembly via video, "By creating Akshardham, Pramukh Swami Maharaj has given a profound gift to the world. Swamishri was always beyond attachments and firmly believed that everything achieved was due to the grace of Bhagwan and guru."

An excerpt of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings from the Akshardham inauguration assembly in November 2005 was shown, "We have built this Akshardham, not out of competition or



to show others, but it was the wish of guru Yogiji Maharaj and is a humble tribute of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and will benefit everyone." At the end, the swamis on stage and youths standing on the steps raised oil-lit torches to hail the centenary of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan Shatabdi Volunteers Felicitation Assemblies

24 April & 1 May 2022, India



Felicitation assembly in Ahmedabad

Special assemblies were held at 60 BAPS centres in India to appreciate the efforts of the 72,000 volunteers involved in the Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan, a project promoting family harmony and values as part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations. Over the past three months, these volunteers visited 2.4 million homes, taking Pramukh Swami Maharaj's message

of family unity, *ghar sabha* and spiritual values to over 6 million people across the country.

The Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan inspired some 424,000 families to conduct regular *ghar sabhas*, and a further 1.9 million families pledged to have at least one meal with their family members daily.

The project was embraced and applauded by



Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel addresses the assembly in Ahmedabad

government leaders, communities and individuals across the country.

In the assemblies, videos were shown highlighting the personal experiences of the volunteers and the deep impact of the messages of the Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan in the daily lives of the families and individuals contacted by the volunteers.

At the assembly in Ahmedabad, the Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel was the chief guest. He said, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj's personal touch and project management was such that we continue to learn from his ideals... You have all upheld those ideals today."

And added, "I, too, will join you as a volunteer in this Shatabdi Mahotsav... And you have the full support of me and my government."

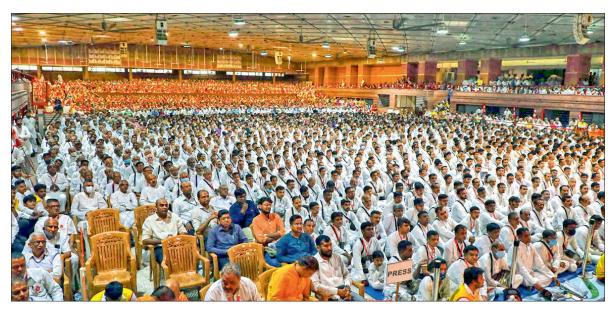
Education Minister of Gujarat Shri Jitubhai Vaghani commended the volunteers' efforts saying, "This is probably the first time in history that such a large-scale family values project has been organized to commemorate someone's centenary."

Gujarat's Minister for Industry, Shri Jagdishbhai Panchal, lauded the project's inspirer saying, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj was one of the top 10 religious leaders of the world, who touched millions of hearts."

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami spoke of how each volunteer has earned the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj through their selfless service.

The invited guests were also informed about another upcoming project to celebrate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary to be carried out by 30,000 BAPS children in which they will encourage de-addiction, and raise awareness for water and electricity conservation.

The assembly concluded with a ceremonial waving of flags to honour the male and female volunteers who had participated in the Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan.





INDIA

HISTORIC DISCOURSE ON THE SACRED BANKS OF THE INDRADYUMNA SAROVAR 24 March 2022 January Project

24 March 2022, Jagannath Puri



A historic discourse based on the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita Swaminarayan Bhashyam was held on the banks of the sacred Indradyumna Sarovar in Jagannath Puri. Bhagwan Swaminarayan graced this ancient pilgrim place with his divine presence during 1797-1798 CE (Samvat 1853-1854). During his six-month stay in Jagannath Puri, Bhagwan Swaminarayan further sanctified the sarovar on numerous occasions by bathing in its holy waters. In memory of his stay at this holy place, a small shrine has been constructed in which the divine *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj have been consecrated. Commemorating Bhagwan Swaminarayan's talks of Akshar-Purushottam that might have transpired at this location, a historic discourse was organized in the presence of distinguished scholars of East India.

After welcoming and garlanding all the scholars, Atmatruptdas Swami conveyed the significance of the Indradyumna Sarovar as well as the history of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan's vibrant growth. Thereafter, Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami elaborated on verse 54,

chapter 18 of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita. He spoke about the verse's contextual reference, spiritual significance and practical implications in a scholarly Sanskrit manner. The discourse culminated with a profound discussion in which the scholars also candidly expressed their experience and emotions. Shri Harekrishna Shathapathiji concluded the event with his address, in which he stated, "Today, my 20 years of doubt and questioning have been solved. I used to explain that the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita is a journey from despair to bliss. But I was unclear on how to attain this bliss. I tried by searching where the word 'prasad' is found within the Gita, but I was still not content. In today's lecture, which was based on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, I learned that when one becomes brahmarup one attains 'prasad', meaning bliss. After hearing this, like Arjuna, my disillusion has been destroyed and I am overjoyed. Now, we scholars will all endorse and spread the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. We are soldiers of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan." All the scholars present unanimously and joyously applauded to express their delight and support for Shathapathiji's experience and perspective.

A SCHOLARLY DELIBERATION WITH GOVARDHAN PITHADHISHWAR JAGADGURU SHANKARACHARYAJI

25 March 2022, Jagannath Puri

A profound academic and philosophical deliberation took place between the Govardhan Pithadhishwar Shankaracharya of Jagannathpuri Nishchalanand Saraswati and Prasthantrayi Bhashyakar Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami. First, Bhadreshdas Swami offered the Prasthantrayi commentaries to Shankaracharyaji. He then concisely elucidated the doctrinal principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan based on Vedic authority. On hearing Bhadreshdas Swami's scholarly explication, Shankaracharyaji expressed his contentment and gratitude for the *sampradaya's* fruitful endeavours to protect, preserve and foster the eternal traditions of Sanatan Dharma. He also conveyed his noble wishes for the centenary birth celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

CELEBRATORY NAGAR YATRA

26 March 2022, Kolkata



Thousands lined the 5-km route to view the nagar yatra honouring the Shri Swaminarayan Bhashyam shastra, which explains Bhagwan Swaminarayan's unique Vedic Akshar-Purushottam Darshan and was inspired by Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and authored by Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami.

Under the auspices of the Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birth centenary celebrations, around 500 devotees participated in the colourful procession through the streets of Bhowanipore. The procession began from and concluded at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir at Chakraberia. At the conclusion, swamis performed the *arti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the Guru Parampara.

BHASHYOTSAV IN CENTRAL INDIA

30 March 2022, Nagpur

A grand Bhashyotsav celebrating all the prominent Prasthantrayi commentaries of



Sanatan Hindu Dharma was organized by the collaborative efforts of the Kavikulaguru Kalidas Sanskrit University and BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, New Delhi, in the university's campus. Eminent scholars, such as Acharya Shripad Subrahmaniya Shastri, Pundit Pramod Kulkarni of Advaita Vedant, Dr Dhananjay Rav of Dvaita Vedant, Dr T.K. Nrusinha of Vishishtadvaita Vedant and Pundit Shrihari Shivaram Dhaygude of Shuddhadvaita Vedant, and other renowned academicians engaged in profound scriptural deliberations based on their school's commentaries. Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami presented the doctrinal principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan based on Vedic authority. He concluded by proclaiming that while resolutely upholding our respective doctrinal beliefs and principles, it is important that we harmoniously work together to strengthen Sanatan Dharma. All the scholars present joyously affirmed Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami's sentiments.

In the final session of this event, BAPS Swamiaminarayan Research Institute honoured Prof. Pankaj Chande for his significant academic contributions by bestowing him with the 'Kulpati Vibhushan Award'. Thereafter, Dr Madhusudan Penna, Vice Chancellor of the Kavi Kulguru Kalidas Sanskrit University, offered a written declaration endorsing the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. This declaration expressed the unified and wholehearted recognition of the scholars of

the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan's distinct Vedic identity and its position amongst the succession of prestigious and accepted darshans, such as Advaita, Dvaita and Vishishtadvaita. The session concluded with Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami felicitating all the scholars.

MEDICO-SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE FOR STUDENTS

14-15 April 2022, Sarangpur



Around 520 students studying medicine, ayurveda, homeopathy, dentistry and physiotherapy attended the Medico-Spiritual Conference for Students. The conference was based on the theme, 'Have Amaro Varo Chhe – Now It's Our Turn.'

Through speeches by senior and learned swamis, workshops, panel discussions and video presentations, the students were guided on how to imbibe spirituality in their daily lives.

The highlight of the conference was the live video darshan of Mahant Swami Maharaj from Surat, during which he blessed the students to strengthen their resolve to practice the traditions of satsang in their daily lives.

SEMINAR BY CHILDREN'S UNIVERSITY AND AARSH

15 April 2022, Gandhinagar

Under the auspices of the centenary celebrations of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Children's University in association



with the AARSH Research Institute, Gandhinagar, organized a special seminar on the topic 'Sculptor of Children – Pramukh Swami Maharaj'. It highlighted the influential work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in establishing children and youth centres that nurture values in children and inspire them to become pious and virtuous, and serve their families, country and society.

The seminar was chaired by Mr Harshadbhai Shah, Chancellor of the Children's University. Registrar of the Children's University, Dr Ashok N. Prajapati, welcomed the dignitaries and speakers. The event was graced by the renowned poet and illustrator Shri Madhav Ramanuja and other dignitaries.

Following the inaugural prayers and traditional lighting of the lamp, a video highlighting the works of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was shown. Subsequently, the various activities of the Tapovan Centres of the Children's University were shown through a video.

Thereafter, Bhagwatsetudas Swami, from the BAPS Sanstha's Children's Activities Central Office in Ahmedabad, spoke on 'Sculptor of Children - Pramukh Swami Maharaj'.

In his speech Dr Kunalbhai Panchal of the Children's University remarked that valueeducation in children is the base for the positive development of society.

Then, special guest Shri Madhav Ramanuja praised the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He reminisced his divine encounter with Pramukh Swami Maharaj during the Amrut Mahotsav in 1995 and presented a poem.

Mr Harshadbhai Shah of the Children's University emphasized that the unlimited powers of a child should be recognized and their aspirations should be ignited. This will lead to a brighter future for India.

In the concluding speech, Director of AARSH Research Institute, Dr Pujya Shrutiprakash Swami reflected in detail on the exemplary work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in shaping children's lives with noble values and spirituality.

The seminar was broadcast live on the Children's University website and on the BAPS Sanstha's Prerna Setu application.

BAPS SWAMIS MEET PM NARENDRA MODI 16 April 2022, New Delhi



Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Brahmavihari Swami visited Prime Minister of India Shri Narendrabhai Modi. They were warmly received by the PM. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami honoured the PM with a sanctified garland. Brahmavihari Swami updated PM Modi on BAPS relief efforts from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic until now, which included medical, food and financial assistance to hundreds of thousands of people. The PM recalled BAPS relief efforts after the Kutch earthquake and that he had remembered Pramukh Swami Maharaj when he called BAPS for assistance on the Ukraine border for Indian youths stranded there.

He took great interest in the preparations for

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Shatabdi celebrations at Ahmedabad. He reminisced about many significant events with Pramukh Swami Maharaj that shaped his spiritual thoughts, and credited Pramukh Swami for his spiritual progress. The PM lauded the work being done for the upcoming BAPS Mandir in Abu Dhabi and Bahrain.

The hour-long meeting concluded with prayers for the welfare and well-being of Indians worldwide.

SHRI NITIN GADKARI VISITS BAPS MANDIR 22 April 2022, Dhule



India's present Minister for Road Transport & Highways, Shri Nitinbhai Gadkari, visited the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Dhule, Maharashtra.

He had darshan of the *murtis* in the main mandir and also offered *abhishek* to the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni, while offering prayers for the progress of India and its citizens and for world peace.

The minister was delighted to learn of the numerous social, cultural, educational, medical, environmental and spiritual activities performed by BAPS.

SEMINAR ON 'ANIMAL WELFARE BY PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'

25 April 2022, Anand

Under the auspices of the centenary celebrations of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami



Maharaj, Kamdhenu University in association with AARSH Research Institute, Gandhinagar, organized a special seminar on the topic 'Animal Welfare by Pramukh Swami Maharaj' in the openair theatre of the university, which is a national leader in veterinary and allied sciences. The seminar highlighted the seminal work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who championed the welfare of livestock, ensuring appropriate facilities for their care.

The seminar was chaired by Shri N.H. Kelawala, Chancellor of Kamdhenu University, and compered by Dr J.B Nayak, Associate Professor at the Veterinary College.

Dr Adarshjivan Swami, author of the biography on the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, from BAPS Sarangpur Mandir and Dr S.K. Bhavsar, Professor and Head of the Veterinary Pharmacology Department were the main speakers at the seminar. Dr K.B. Kathiriya, Chancellor of Anand Krishi University, also graced the event.

After the traditional lighting of the lamp by senior BAPS swamis, Dr M.N. Brahmabhatt, Dean of the College of Veterinary Science & Animal Husbandry, Kamdhenu University, delivered the welcome speech.

In his speech, Dr S.K. Bhavsar highlighted the contribution of Pramukh Swami Maharaj towards the welfare of animals. A video showcasing Pramukh Swami Maharaj's exemplary planning, decision making and foresight was also shown.

In his address, Adarshjivan Swami described the many works of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who not only toiled all his life for the all-round development of society, but also compassionately worked for the well-being of animals. During the 1987 drought in Gujarat, Pramukh Swami Maharaj guided the BAPS Sanstha to set-up four cattle camps to care for more than 10,000 livestock endangered by the drought.

Shrutiprakash Swami, Dr K.B. Kathiriya, Dr N.H. Kelawala also addressed the seminar. At the end, Bhagwatcharan Swami gave detailed information about the modern animal welfare centre operated by the BAPS Sanstha in Khandadhor, Dakor. The state and central government officials have commended this work of the Sanstha.

Over 500 students and staff members of the veterinary college attended this seminar, which was also broadcast live on the university's website and on the BAPS Sanstha's Prerna Setu app.

SEMINAR ON 'NURTURE OF SCRIPTURAL TRADITIONS AND SANATAN SANSKRITI BY PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'

28 April 2022, Veraval



Under the auspices of the Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj centenary celebrations, Shri Somnath Sanskrit University in association with AARSH Research Institute, Gandhinagar, organized a seminar on the topic 'Nurture of Sanatan Culture and Traditions by Pramukh Swami Maharaj' at the Patanjal Yogabhavan Auditorium. The seminar highlighted Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine and mammoth endeavour of preserving and fostering Sanatan culture and traditions amidst the challenges and temptations of modern life.

The seminar was chaired by Dr. Lalitkumar Patel, Chancellor of Shri Somnath Sanskrit University. The speakers included Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami, from BAPS Sarangpur Mandir; Dr. Narendrakumar Pandya, Principal of University College; Dr. Pankaj Jani, Educational Advisor to the Governor of Uttar Pradesh; Prof. Shrutiprakashdas Swami from BAPS Akshardham, Gandhinagar; and Dr. Dashrathbhai Jadav, Registrar of Shri Somnath Sanskrit University.

Following inaugural prayers and the traditional lighting of the lamp, a video highlighting the works of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the preservation of Sanatan culture and traditions was shown. The compere of the event, Dr. Atmatruptdas Swami from BAPS Sarangpur Mandir, welcomed the speakers and dignitaries.

In his speech, Prof. Bhadreshdas Swami highlighted that as a part of the centenary celebrations, 72,000 male and female volunteers of the BAPS Sanstha visited around 24 lakh homes and met 60 lakh people to spread Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine message of family peace and unity. Further, he added that the Sanskrit language is vital in nurturing and safeguarding Sanatan traditions, culture and values and that Shri Somnath Sanskrit University has played a key role in promoting the Sanskrit language. BAPS Sanstha has published numerous shastras and texts in Sanskrit. Pramukh Swami Maharaj built more than 1.100 beautiful mandirs that nurture our traditions. Bhadreshdas Swami thus highlighted that the pillars of Sanatan Dharma are Shastras, Mandirs and Sants.

UK & EUROPE

BAPS AMONG VOLUNTEER GROUPS APPRECIATED BY PM MODI FOR HELP AMID UKRAINE CRISIS

15 March 2022, Warsaw, Poland



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally praised and thanked volunteer groups, including BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, who had supported the critical evacuation efforts of Indian nationals from Ukraine and neighbouring countries, in a special video conference held with key stakeholders.

Dubbed 'Operation Ganga', the initiative successfully evacuated around 23,000 Indians from Ukraine, of which 3,700 were evacuated from Poland in 17 flights. The flights out of Poland also carried, notably, over 600 students from Sumy who had fled the Ukrainian war zone in a long, perilous journey to Przemyśl in southeastern Poland.

The video conference convened the ambassadors of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, who were joined by representatives of NGOs and companies who had helped in the operation.

Bimal Patel, a lead BAPS volunteer from Warsaw, Poland, had been invited to join the video conference by Her Excellency Nagma M. Mallick, Ambassador of India to Poland & Lithuania.

Bimal thanked the Prime Minister for his continued personal support and also the officers of the Indian Embassy in Poland in providing vital infrastructure that allowed volunteer organisations like BAPS to help the refugees.

Over 60 BAPS volunteers from the UK, Ireland, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, the Czech Republic, Poland and the USA had swiftly arrived at the Polish city of Rzeszów where they daily provided around 1,000 hot vegetarian meals to evacuees of all faiths and nationalities.

In addition to emergency relief and administrative support for local government agencies, BAPS volunteers further provided vital emotional care and comfort to the refugees, both at the relief camp set up by the Indian Embassy in Rzeszów as well as on the Polish-Ukrainian border.

RENOWNED INDIAN YOGA GURU SADHGURU VISITS NEASDEN TEMPLE

19 March 2022, London



The internationally renowned Indian yoga guru, Jagadish Vasudev, better known as Sadhguru, visited BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London.

Sadhguru was received at the main entrance by trustees of the Mandir and then greeted with a traditional welcome by Kothari Yogvivekdas Swami.

After paying his respects at the shrines in the upper sanctum and performing *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni, Sadhguru met members of the Hindu community and engaged with BAPS volunteers to understand BAPS's outreach work, such as the relief efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic and BAPS's response to the

humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

A special evening assembly was held in the presence of Sadhguru, attended by Lord Rami Ranger CBE, Bob Blackman MP, Virendra Sharma MP, and several other leaders of Hindu temples and associations.

During an interactive dialogue, Sadhguru explained his global 'Save Soil' campaign and elaborated upon his planned incredible solo motorbike journey from London to the Kaveri in India – 30,000 kilometres across 25 nations in 100 days – to raise awareness about the need to increase the organic content in cultivable soil.

Sadhguru also paid tribute to the Mandir's charitable community services, "When human beings are committed beyond their own life, they will do things that most others cannot imagine. That I see here, and that I deeply appreciate."

Sharing his impressions of his visit, Sadhguru spoke of the "enormous amount of dedication, focus and devotion" taken to create this "exquisite" mandir, and paid tribute to the legacy of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj by reflecting on the many people who attend and make use of the mandir.

Commenting on the BAPS activities across the UK and Europe, he said, "These are things that will live forever and inspire people for a long time to come."

Nitin Palan MBE, a lead BAPS volunteer in the UK, added, "It is an honour to welcome Sadhguruji and support his important global campaign. Here in communities across the UK, BAPS will be doing its bit, too. As a part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centennial birth anniversary this year, we are contributing to the 'Queen's Green Canopy' project by encouraging households to plant a tree at their home. We wish Sadhguruji all the best in his mission of raising vital awareness about saving our soil."

CENTENARY NAGAR YATRA

10 April 2022, Leicester, UK

A colourful procession was held through the streets of Leicester, as part of the year-long



celebrations across the world to commemorate the birth centenary of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The procession took place in the presence of BAPS swamis as well as hundreds of devotees, members of the local community and distinguished guests, including the Mayor of Leicester, Sir Peter Soulsby, and former MP of Leicester, Keith Vaz.

The procession began at the BAPS Mandir on Pramukh Swami Junction, and proceeded along Catherine Street, Doncaster Road and through the famous 'Golden Mile' to the Belgrave Roundabout.

The procession was led by two large elephant floats and featured children and youths performing traditional Indian folk dances and devotional music. A beautifully decorated peacock float carried the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Nilkanth Varni, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Hanumanji, Shri Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Shri Mahant Swami Maharaj.

AKHAND DHUN: ANNUAL PRAYERS FOR SUCCESS, PEACE AND HARMONY

17 April 2022, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Wellingborough, UK

Thousands of worshippers and visitors from around the UK convened to pray for success, peace and harmony to prevail in communities across the world during a special day of continuous prayers.

The prayers began at 7.00am, with visitors joining throughout the day to offer their devotion



at the 'Akshar Deri', a beautiful shrine housed within the mandir.

This year's prayers were particularly poignant as the world emerges from the ongoing uncertainty and challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the current humanitarian crisis unfolding in Ukraine. Mahant Swami Maharaj sent a special video message in which he shared that he is also praying for the safety, righteous prosperity and harmony of communities around the world.

In honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary, over 70 cyclists rode over 100 kilometres from BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London to Wellingborough.

The prayers continued uninterrupted till 7.00 p.m.

ASIA PACIFIC

SHATABDI PADYATRAS

6 February 2022



Under the auspices of Brahmaswarup Pramukh

Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations, more than 1,950 devotees participated in the Shatabdi Padyatras organized at 14 BAPS centres across Australia and New Zealand. One *padyatra* involved walking 8 to 10 km along a designated route. Even the extreme weather at some centres did not stop the devotees from taking part.

While walking, the participating devotees of each centre discussed inspiring incidents from the lives of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj. This made the walks especially enjoyable and devotional.

At the destination, participants offered prayers, and performed *pradakshinas* and *malas* in front of a specially erected Pramukh Mandir.

Over 900 devotees have pledged to do between 2 to 30 such *padyatras* before the start of the centenary celebrations in December 2022.

SHATABDI GHAR SABHA PROJECT

1-31 March 2022



More than 3,500 people participated in the Shatabdi Ghar Sabha motivation assemblies at 13 centres across Australia and New Zealand. Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj promoted a regular *ghar sabha* as the means to ensuring family happiness and harmony.

The *ghar sabha* motivation assemblies were conducted at the weekly local satsang assembly. The attending families were inspired through

inspirational videos, group and panel discussions, and speeches. Many pledged to conduct a *ghar sabha* with their family on a regular basis.

AUSTRALIAN AND INDIAN TRADE DELEGATION VISIT BAPS MANDIR

7 April 2022, Sydney, Australia



Following the signing of the Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (AI ECTA) earlier in the week, Hon. Piyush Goyal, India's Minister for Commerce and Trade, and the Australian Minister for Trade, Hon. Dan Tehan, visited the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sydney. They were accompanied by a 35-member delegation which included Federal Member for Berowra Julian Leeser, High Commissioner of India Manpreet Vohra, Indian Consul General Manish Gupta, Councillor Reena Jethi and Federal Candidate for Parramatta Maria Kovacic.

Addressing the assembly, Mr Goyal described that his visit to the mandir was like "coming home". He said, "My connection with the BAPS organization is truly deep. It comes from within."

Mr Goyal and his family have been a part of many key moments in BAPS history, such as the inauguration of the BAPS Mandir in London in 1995 and His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 75th birthday celebrations in Mumbai, later in the same year.

Mr Goyal said he has been inspired and guided by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj throughout his life. Referring to a *murti* of His

Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mr Goyal said, "Did you see the smile on his face? It was radiant. It was infectious. It just elevates your spirit and the goodness in you.

"To me, Pramukh Swami always embodied devotion, truth, detachment and knowledge. Knowledge is important for all of us, but that knowledge has to be pure. With that knowledge, we have to serve society, and service can only happen if you are spiritual."

Speaking about BAPS's worldwide charitable contributions, Mr Goyal emphasized to Mr Tehan, "This is one set of people who are completely and selflessly devoted to giving back to society. It is in their blood. It is in their knowledge. It is in their training."

In his address, Mr Tehan called the AI ECTA a 'unity' agreement which will turbocharge the close, long-standing, and highly complementary economic relationship between the two nations.

Both Mr Tehan and Mr Goyal referred to the 'close friendship' and 'brotherhood' between them, the two countries, and the two nations' leaders, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

INAUGURATION OF NEW BAPS MANDIR 15–17 Apr 2022, Cranbourne, Melbourne, Australia



Three days of celebrations marked the inauguration of the new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Cranbourne, Melbourne South.

On the evening of 15 April 2022, BAPS sadhus and volunteers presented a melodious programme of devotional bhajans devoted to His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj as part of his birth centenary year.

On the afternoon of 16 April 2022, the *murtis* to be consecrated in the new mandir were installed in decorated floats and honoured in a grand colourful parade that stretched over 500m from front to back. It included more than 50 women carrying *kalashes* in traditional celebratory style on their heads and many other enthralling presentations by children and youths. Around 1,150 people participated in this *nagar yatra* through the streets of Cranbourne South and was warmly received by the residents.

On 17 April 2022, Paramchintandas Swami and other swamis performed the auspicious Vedic installation ceremony and inauguration rituals of the beautiful new mandir in the presence of 1,500 devotees and well-wishers. Thereafter, a grand annakut of vegetarian delicacies was offered to the murtis with great devotion.

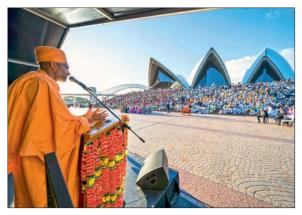
Among the guests present for the celebrations were Hon. Jason Wood MP (Federal Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs) and Hon. Craig Ondarchie MP (State Shadow Minister for Energy and Renewables & Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship and Minister for Communities' Recovery, Victoria). The guests deeply appreciated and commended the efforts of BAPS and its volunteers, and also praised the contribution of the local Indian community in the region.

Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* on 21 September 2021 in Sarangpur, India.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ CENTENARY CELEBRATION AT SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

23 April 2022, Sydney, Australia

As part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary celebrations, more than 3,000 devotees



and well-wishers took part in a *nagar yatra* (colourful procession) which culminated in a kick-off assembly on the forecourt of the iconic Sydney Opera House.

The event celebrated Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life based on the theme 'In the Joy of Others – Celebrating a Life of Peace and Harmony'. The large turnout reflected Pramukh Swami Maharaj's impact on people of all ages – from children to the elderly.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited the iconic Sydney Opera House in 1984 during his first spiritual tour to Australia. Therefore, this sacred and iconic location was selected to pay tribute to Swamishri's life and message.

The *nagar yatra*, which began from Circular Quay Station and moved along the scenic harbour, highlighted the values of selfless service, global peace, harmony and unity promoted by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

As the *nagar yatra* arrived at the forecourt, attendees were seated on the steps of the Sydney Opera House for the celebratory assembly. The assembly featured speeches by BAPS swamis on various aspects of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life, speeches by invited guests, Vedic peace prayers led by BAPS youths and sung in unison by all, and a traditional dance by teenagers. Mahant Swami Maharaj's special blessings for the event from Surat, India, were also relayed to the audience. The assembly concluded with everyone performing *arti* and offering *mantra-pushpanjali*.

Thereafter, a celebratory fireworks show lit up the evening sky.

Addressing the assembly, HE Manish Gupta, Consul General of India, said, "The *nagar yatra* and congregation demonstrate the values of peace, service and humility which could be seen in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life. His Holiness's entire life was dedicated to the cause of humanity and the betterment of mankind. I thank all of you who have worked tirelessly to spread these values."

Mr Geoff Lee, Minister for Corrections, said, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj's legacy in Australia lives on through the BAPS mandirs in all major cities of Australia and the centennial celebrations are an example of the power they hold. [The mandirs teach] the younger generation the good values of life – promoting what is good about BAPS and its wonderful culture – and what it also means to be an Australian. We are right here at the Opera House. It will be something that will stay in my mind for the rest of my life."

Dr Andrew Charlton, Federal Labour candidate for Parramatta, said, "This volunteerrun event exemplifies the message of harmony. It's a wonderful celebration and something that brings us all together as Australians. The values of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life, and the messages of harmony and service he taught people all around the world will live on forever."

Among the other distinguished guests who attended the event were Mr Chris Minns, NSW Leader of the Opposition; Ms. Julia Finn, Shadow Minister for Sport and Youth; Hon. Daniel Mookhey, Shadow Treasurer and Shadow Minister for the Gig Economy; Lord Mayor Donna Davis, Parramatta City Council; Councillor Sameer Pandey, Deputy Mayor, Parramatta City Council; Councillor Barbara Ward, Deputy Mayor, Ku-ring-gai Council; and Councillor Reena Jethi, Hills Shire Council.

AFRICA

SHILANYAS MAHOTSAV OF BAPS MANDIR

3 April 2022, Johannesburg, South Africa



Amid heavy rainfall, over 2,500 devotees and well-wishers participated in the sacred *shilanyas mahapuja* ceremony for the *shikharbaddha* BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Johannesburg in the presence of Pujya Viveksagar Swami.

A grand welcome gate greeted devotees at the entrance of the mandir construction site. Posters of the 3D models of the haveli from various angles lined the 500m walkway to the main marquee erected for the *shilanyas* ceremony.

Vedic mantras were recited and the Swaminarayan *mahamantra* was chanted whilst Pujya Viveksagar Swami placed the main *shilas* in the foundation of the new mandir. Prayers were offered that the building of this mandir, dedicated to the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and nurturing of the values of Hindu Dharma, would bring peace and prosperity to South Africa.

The celebratory assembly after the main ceremony included a cultural programme by youths, a speech by Pujya Viveksagar Swami and felicitation of the invited guests.

The Shilanyas Mahotsav ended with all devotees and well-wishers placing a foundation stone in the mandir foundation.

His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *pujan* rituals of the same *shilas* on 29 May 2021 in Nenpur, Gujarat.

GULF COUNTRIES

GCC SATSANG SHIBIR: EKAJ ASHA CHHE 2 May 2022 - 4 May 2022, Abu Dhabi, UAE



More than 630 devotees attended the first ever three-day GCC regional shibir, which was held at the site of the under-construction BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. Based on the theme 'Ekaj asha chhe', the shibir elaborated on the principle that the Satpurush's divine presence on earth is eternal, and that he is always with us. The shibir provided clear guidance on how to show gratitude to and immerse oneself in the Satpurush's life, and better one's life by imbibing Pramukh Swami Maharaj's virtues.

Before the start of the shibir the devotees placed a consecrated brick upon the plinth of the mandir. Then, the shibir began with deep pragatya and a video from guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj welcoming all delegates from across the GCC to the event. Key messages were delivered through a variety of innovative and interactive mediums, tailored specifically for diverse age groups. The sessions incorporated a medley of enlightening speeches and presentations, videos, panel discussions, question-answer sessions, quizzes, interactive games, a kirtan aradhana and skits. They provided insights into the character, virtues and values of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, with each message echoing what Swamishri always propagated, "In the joy of others, lies our own." It was this message that had touched so many

devotees as Swamishri had personally and selflessly ensured the devotees' wellbeing and joy. To Swamishri, his devotees always came first. Now, it was the devotees' turn to immerse themselves in Swamishri's life.

The shibir also included guidance on how to incorporate devotional rituals into one's daily routine, and balance seva, personal satsang and work life. The story of how devotees and well-wishers have engaged in Satsang in Bahrain was also narrated.

The highlight of the last session was a interaction with Mahant Swami Maharaj with the children via video. The balaks asked him to choose one of three toys as a gift for them: an elephant representing 'prapti,' a lion representing our 'true identity,' and a slice of a watermelon representing 'happiness from controlling one's mind'. Mahant Swami Maharaj chose the elephant as a gift to each balak and balika. The joy on the children's faces was apparent as a result of their interaction with Swamishri.

THAI AMBASSADOR AND BUDDHIST MONKS VISIT BAPS HINDU MANDIR 5 May 2022, Abu Dhabi, UAE



H.E. Waravuth Pouapinya, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand to the UAE, along with two senior Buddhist monks - Revered Phra Yanwikrom and Revered Phra-kru Thammatorn from Tha Mai Temple visited the BAPS Hindu Mandir site, accompanied by 20 members from the Thai Community and the Thai Women's Circle, including Ms. Sukanya Suthiphan, Ms. Arnotay Bathpo and Ms. Norrakamol. The delegation was traditionally greeted by sadhus and volunteers of the BAPS Hindu Mandir.

The delegation then observed the 'Rivers of Harmony' exhibit, which presents the harmonious purpose, history, and construction of the BAPS Hindu Mandir, as well as the ongoing community services carried out by the mandir, including the timely COVID-19 relief work. The delegation also participated in prayers and placed bricks on the mandir to mark their visit and contribution to this historic project. All members of the delegation appreciated the work being done for global harmony by the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi.

BAPS CHARITIES

TREE PLANTING IN KEREITA FOREST 24 April 2022, Nairobi, Kenya



Kereita Forest forms the southern tip of the Aberdares ranges. These ranges are an important water catchment area for Nairobi's water supply.

Over 30 BAPS Charities volunteers joined KENVO (Kijabe Environment Volunteers) in planting 2,000 seedlings at the Forest. It was part of the ongoing efforts of BAPS Charities to bring awareness of important environmental issues faced in the community by participating in and supporting initiatives such as tree-plantings,

water conservation campaigns and promotion of renewable energy sources.

The volunteers planted the following eight different species of indigenous trees during the planting effort: Podocarpus, Croton, Polyscias, Olea africana, Wild magnolia, Prunus, Red Cedar and Water berry.

Seedlings were planted within parcels allocated to farmers who will facilitate the proper care and upkeep of the trees as they grow to ensure high survival rates of the trees which typically get trampled on by animals grazing in open areas.

TRIBUTES



PUJYA MAHAMANDALESHWAR SWAMI SHRI HARINARAYANANANDJI Patna, Age: 92, Aksharvas: 10 April 2022

A widely revered and distinguished saint, Maha-

mandaleshwar Swami Shri Harinarayananandji, was the first secretary (*mahamantri*) of the Akhil Bharat Sadhu Samaj – which was established in 1956 through the efforts of the President of India Dr Rajendraprasad, Shri Gulzarilal Nanda and others.

A native of Kotvalia village in Bihar, the scholarly swami was born into a landowners family. After taking *sannyas diksha*, he endeavoured relentlessly to sustain the unity of sadhus from all over India.

In Patna, he established the Bihar Sanskrutik Vidyapith Ashram and performed many social services.

In 1981, during the Bhagwan Swaminarayan Bicentenary Celebrations, inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Swami Harinarayananandji helped to organize the grand silver jubilee gathering of the Akhil Bharat Sadhu Samaj. Since then, he was deeply touched by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's saintliness. He was profoundly impressed by Swamishri's efforts to promote Hindu traditions and the pious cadre of sadhus he had ordained.

Swami Harinarayananandji travelled extensively throughout the world and frequently lauded Pramukh Swami Maharaj as not only an exemplary sadhu, but as a manifest form of Paramatma.

He maintained close ties with BAPS and was regarded with great love and respect by all throughout the Sanstha.

He dedicated his entire life for the welfare of the sadhus of Bharat. He lived a simple, austere life, detached from material trappings.

Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj paid heartfelt tributes to Swami Harinarayananandji's inspiring life and works.



PUJYA SARVAGNADAS SWAMI, Junagadh Aksharvas: 13 March 2022, Age 46

After taking *parshad diksha* in 1999 and *bhagwati diksha* in 2001 at the hands of Brahmaswarup

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Sarvagna Swami served as pujari at the BAPS Mandir in Junagadh from 2006. He sincerely observed the daily rituals of devotion with deep understanding of the glory of Maharaj and Swami. In 2018, he was

diagnosed to have a brain tumour and suffered many problems as a result. However, he devoutly continued to attend all five *artis* and *kathas*. He tolerated much pain and inconvenience without complaint and revelled in the glory of having attained the refuge of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus. We pay humble tributes to the devout and saintly Sarvagnadas Swami.

SHRI JASHBHAI P. PATEL, London Aksharvas: 5 March 2022, Age: 89

A native of Vartal, Jashbhai was born into a satsangi family. He migrated to Tororo in Uganda,

where, through the company of Bhaktaraj Shri Maganbhai and others, he developed firm faith in the Akshar-Purushottam upasana. The visits of Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj to Africa in 1955 and 1959-60 further consolidated this conviction.

In 1967, he settled with his family in the UK and, as per Yogiji Maharaj's wish, made significant contributions in establishing the mandir in London and the spread of satsang. He also served wholeheartedly in the building of the shikharbaddha mandir in Neasden under the

guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

For many years, he actively served as a trustee of the BAPS Sanstha in the UK. For many decades, he bolstered the faith in the Akshar-Purushottam upasana in many others through his knowledgeable discourses and discussions.

By the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he also travelled extensively in the UK, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and other countries to strengthen the Akshar-Purushottam nishtha and practise of satsang in others.

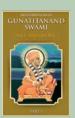
We pay tributes to the dedicated and devout Jashbhai, who faithfully served and earned the blessings of four Gunatit gurus.

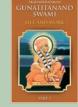
AUDIO BOOKS

The following audio books published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith are available in the audio book publication's section of www.baps.org

- Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. Life and Work, Part 1
- Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Life and Work, Part 2
- Bhagwan Swaminarayan, An Introduction
- Rajipo
- Mahant Swami Maharaj: An Epitome of Saintliness
- Eternal Virtues
- Divine Memories, Part 1
- Divine Memories, Part 4
- Divinity
- Pramukh Swami Maharai: Life and Work in Brief

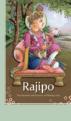


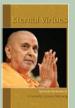


























DIGNITARIES VISIT BAPS MANDIRS WORLDWIDE, February-April 2022

- 1. Chief Minister of Gujarat Hon. Bhupendrabhai Patel attended the Parivarik Shanti Abhiyan Volunteers Felicitation Assembly in Ahmedabad (24 April).
- 2. India's Minister for Road Transport & Highways, Shri Nitinbhai Gadkari, visited the BAPS Mandir in Dhule, Maharastra (22 April).
- 3. The Chief Justice of India Shri N.V. Ramana, visited the BAPS Hindu Mandir exhibit at Expo 2020 in Dubai (18 March).
- 4. Speaker of the Lok Sabha of India, Shri Om Birla, and a senior parliamentary delegation visited the under-construction BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi (23 February).



INDIAN AND BRITISH PRIME MINISTERS INTERACT WITH BAPS April 2022

- 1-2. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Brahmavihari Swami met Prime Minister Shri Narendrabhai Modi in New Delhi (16 April).
- 3-4. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar, where he was warmly welcomed and offered prayers for world peace and prosperity (21 April).