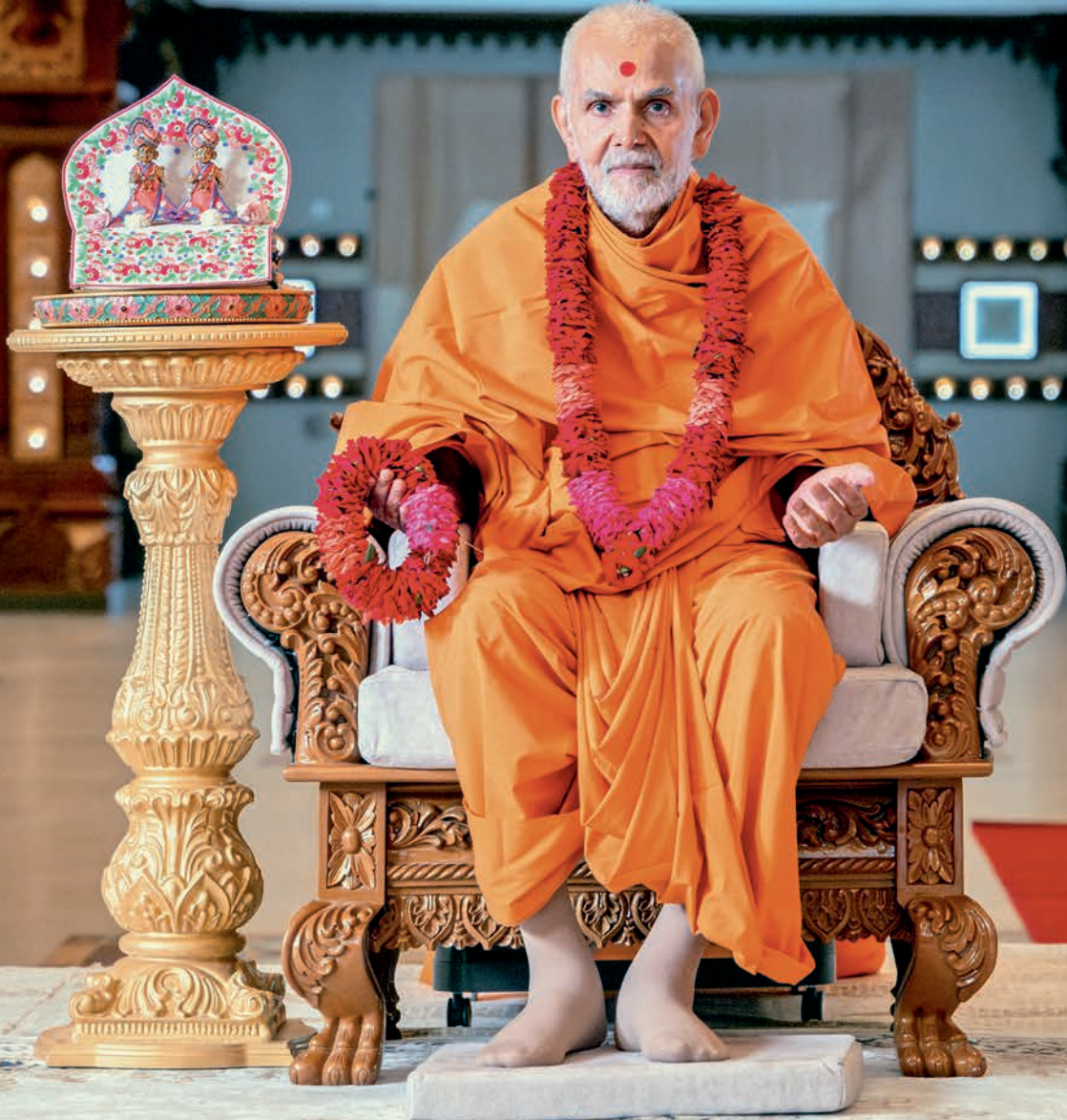


# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

September–October 2023

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



**Mahant Swami Maharaj**  
**at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Robbinsville, NJ, USA**  
**30 July 2023**





**KALASH PUJAN CEREMONY**  
Robbinsville, 30 August 2023

1. Swamishri performs *abhishek* after the *pujan* rituals of the main *kalash* of Akshardham Mahamandir.

2. Swamishri stands amid the *kalashes* that will crown the Akshardham Mahamandir.





Mahant Swami Maharaj is welcomed with an 80-foot garland at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Robbinsville, New Jersey, USA

# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

September–October 2023, Vol. 46, No. 4



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



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

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# Shri Hari Decides to Build a Mandir in Gadhada

*Dada Khachar humbly petitions Shri Hari to build a mandir in Gadhada.  
Later, a major obstacle stalls Shri Hari's plans...*

## THIS NARAYAN POOL IS SACRED

Shri Hari celebrated the birthday of Bhagwan Nrusinh and Bhagwan Vaman in Gadhada. Soon, groups of devotees started arriving in Gadhada for Maharaj's darshan and satsang. Daily, Maharaj went with the devotees to bathe in the River Ghela. Sometimes, he went to bathe in the Narayan pool. Shri Hari said, "Since the day I first time came to Gadhpur many years ago, I have bathed in the Narayan pool. I have also bathed at the Khalkhaliya in the River Ghela many times. Hence, these places are sacred and of great importance."

Once, while Maharaj was bathing in the Khalkhaliya, he told the swamis and devotees bathing with him, "This satsang is great and powerful. You are very fortunate because the *muktas* of Golok, Vaikunth and Akshardham praise you. When I close my eyes and go to Akshardham I see your radiant forms. This satsang is like the Bhagvat Dharma, and by obeying it spiritual aspirants will attain *mukti*."

Whenever Shri Hari returned after bathing in the Narayan pool he always steered an oxen cart. If the road was smooth Maharaj would steer the cart speedily. Jiva Khachar always came to watch this divine *lila* of Shri Hari. Maharaj would tell him, "There's no need for you to come so far." Jiva Khachar humbly replied, "Many times I have had darshan of you riding a horse, but I've never seen you steering an oxen cart. I come because I deeply desire to have your darshan."

## DADA KHACHAR ENTREATS SHRI HARI TO BUILD A MANDIR

So far, Shri Hari had built and consecrated three mandirs: Ahmedabad, Bhuj and Vartal. However, he gave no sign or hint of building a mandir in Gadhpur, a place that Shri Hari believed to be his home and often praised it to be like his divine abode, Akshardham. Consequently, Dada Khachar, Jivuba, Laduba and others were pained.

Dada Khachar came to Shri Hari, bowed and sat before him. Then, he humbly asked, "Maharaj, you have built mandirs in other places, but why not one here where you have been staying for many years?" Shri Hari smiled and replied, "Dada, here a supreme mandir will be built. Do not worry."

"But when?" asked Dada Khachar.

"You show me a place," Maharaj said.

While seeing Dada Khachar ponder about his words, Shri Hari told Bhaguji, Ratanji and the other *parshads*, "All of you get ready. I want to see the fort on the hillock by the banks of River Ghela. I want to build a supreme mandir there." Dada Khachar became exhilarated on hearing this.

## SHRI HARI PROCEEDS TO SEE THE FORT

Shri Hari proceeded towards the fort with his *parshads* and Dada Khachar. They passed by Jiva Khachar's *darbar* and entered the precincts of the fort. Shri Hari visited the turret situated to the east of the small gate. Here, he stood facing south and said, "This is the best location for the mandir. It will be appropriate to construct a mandir at the centre of this place and, with the River Ghela flowing, the sadhus will find it conducive to bathe



in and utilize its water.

“The undulating land from here till the mosque in the west should be levelled by filling it with mud. Furthermore, the land till Jiva Khachar’s *darbar* should also be levelled by filling it with mud. Thereafter, a wall should be built all around the land with one gate facing Jiva Khachar’s *darbar*, a second gate to the north of this turret and a third one between here, where we are standing, and the mosque, in order to go down to the river. The mandir should be built in the centre of the three surrounding gates. Since this land is high the mandir will look very beautiful.”

Shri Hari took the ball of thick thread from Muktanand Swami and started measuring the hilltop land. Maharaj drew a mandir plan on the ground and marked the positions of the three gates on its periphery.

### A BEAUTIFUL MANDIR WILL BE BUILT HERE

Bhaguji and Ratanji praised Shri Hari’s decision, “Maharaj, this is indeed a very good place and a beautiful mandir can be built here.” Thereafter, Shri Hari walked northward and then proceeded eastward to descend towards the main gate of Jiva Khachar’s *darbar*. Here, he stopped and said, “The main gate of the mandir complex will be located here so that the mandir precinct will be large and spacious.

“In addition, the land for the mandir is on high ground and this place is lower down so the mandir will appear beautiful along with its main gate.

In this way, Shriji Maharaj gave instructions about where to construct the mandir, which places to level by filling with mud and where to construct the gates. Then, Shri Hari returned to Dada Khachar’s *darbar* along with Muktanand Swami, *parshads*, sadhus and devotees.

### SHRI HARI INFORMS JIVA KHACHAR OF HIS WISH

Shri Hari took off his footwear by the steps and sat on a seat facing north. Shortly after, Jiva

Khachar arrived. He bowed to Maharaj and sat down before him. Maharaj revealed to him, “Bapu, I have made a wish to build a mandir here in Gadhada.” Jiva Khachar responded, “Maharaj, I have come to know that you had gone to see the land on the hilltop. The place is appropriate for a mandir. In its southern direction lies the River Ghela, so it will be conducive for the sadhus to take their daily bath and utilize its water.”

Shri Hari was pleased that Jiva Khachar was inclined to have a mandir built on the hilltop. Shortly after, Jiva Khachar touched Shri Hari’s feet and left. The next day, Shri Hari was sitting outside the north-facing rooms in Dada’s *darbar*. The sadhus, *parshads* and devotees were seated facing Shri Hari, who was talking about the proposed mandir. Soon enough, Jiva Khachar arrived. He respectfully touched Shri Hari’s feet and sat down before him. He then asked Maharaj, “Have you made any preparations for building the mandir?”

Shri Hari replied, “As of yet no preparations have been initiated.” Jiva Khachar apparently encouraged, “Maharaj, it would be good to start the preparations. There should be no delay in any good task.” Then, Jiva Khachar touched Shri Hari’s feet and was about to leave. Shri Hari asked, “Why are you leaving? Let’s call Dada Khachar and Harji Thakkar and initiate the preparations.” But Jiva Khachar answered disinterestedly, “Yes, do start the preparations. Where is the need for me to stay?” And Jiva Khachar walked away.

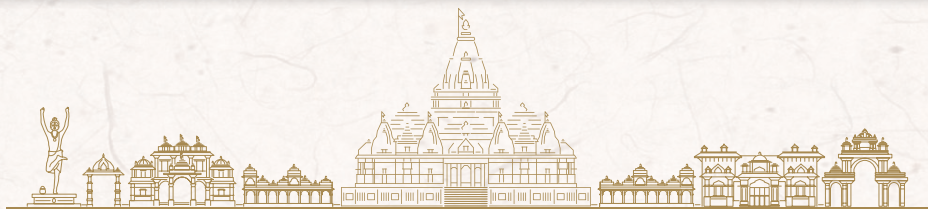
Shri Hari called Dada Khachar, Jivuba, Laduba and others and told them about his decision to construct a mandir on the hilltop. They were all elated about it. Then, Shri Hari instructed Dada Khachar, “For the mandir construction we need shovels, crowbars, pickaxes, metal tubs and other things. Order them quickly from Bhavnagar so that work can begin at the earliest.” Dada Khachar, however, suggested, “Let’s call Ladha Thakkar and assign him to acquire the tools.”

(Cont. on p. 23)





Swamishri waves a flag on his arrival at the premises of Swaminarayan Akshardham, Robbinsville



# SATPURUSH

H H MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ  
I N A M E R I C A  2 0 2 3





At 7.58 p.m. on 8 July 2023, Mahant Swami Maharaj entered Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, NJ, after a gap of 5 years, 9 months and 17 days.

His arrival marked the start of the third leg of his 'Akshardham Yatra', which will culminate in the grand inauguration of Swaminarayan Akshardham.

Since Swamishri's arrival in Robbinsville, devotees have enjoyed his darshan and discourses as part of the 'Akshardham Mahotsav: Festival of Inspirations'. Daily, Swamishri visits the shikharbaddha mandir for darshan and offers abhishek to Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, before performing his morning puja. Devotees line the routes for his darshan and blessings. During puja, swamis, balaks, yuvaks and elders sing bhajans and children also recite verses and passages from various shastras.

In the evenings, thematic assemblies take place, in which inspiring performances and experiences are presented, and the services of volunteers at their local BAPS centres are appreciated. Also, invited dignitaries are honoured and they also share their experiences of their visit to Swaminarayan Akshardham. On some evenings, Swamishri gives samip darshan to the devotees and visits the campus to bless the different departments and view the various features of Swaminarayan Akshardham.

Swamishri also blesses the grooms and families of the couples getting married or engaged in the collective wedding and engagement ceremonies.

Meanwhile, work on completing the Akshardham structure continues vigorously throughout the day, as the grand inauguration approaches.

The following pages provide an overview of Swamishri's stay in Robbinsville up to 15 August 2023.



Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami cheerfully honours Swamishri with a garland and chhadi





Swamishri sanctifies the marble replica of the holy charanarvind of Bhagwan Swaminarayan



Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami showers flower petals on the charanarvind placed in the memorial shrine by the main entrance

## 8 JULY: ARRIVAL & WELCOME

From early morning, the Swaminarayan Akshardham campus was abuzz with a flurry of final preparations along the path Swamishri would be taking. Women devotees were engaged in cleaning the temple complex, Pramukh Mandapam, and the Mayur Dwar. *Yuvatis* and *kishoris* enthusiastically drew elaborate *rangoli* designs, including a representation of Tapomurti Nilkanth Varni and Brahaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj along with the Festival of Inspirations logo at the entrance of the main mandir. Beautiful flower decorations also adorned the entrance.

From 2:30 p.m., heavy rain soaked the complex, around the time Swamishri was departing from Canada. Suddenly, after about 15 minutes, the rain stopped. Everyone was surprised because the weather forecast was for rain until 8 p.m. Later, it was learned that Swamishri was informed about the rain while he was on his way to the airport. Swamishri said, "It will stop now, and everyone will have the joy of darshan." The sudden weather change boosted everyone's spirits and everyone enthusiastically joined in completing their *seva*.

At 7:44 p.m., escorted from the airport by Robbinsville Mayor, David Fried, and a state police convoy, Swamishri arrived at the Swaminarayan Akshardham and Shayona premises amidst chants of the *jay naad* and Swaminarayan mahamantra *dhun*. There, Swamishri sat in a raised glass cabin on the back of an open van, and at 7:58 p.m., Swamishri entered the gates of Akshardham with *balaks* joyously dancing and devotees hailing the *jay naad*.

First, Swamishri stopped at the memorial shrine, near the entrance gate, at the location where Swamishri himself had performed *pujan* of *guruhari* Pramukh Swami Maharaj to welcome him when he had visited the complex for the first time in 2014. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed *pujan* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Swamishri with sandalwood paste, rice, and by garlanding them. After this, Swamishri performed *pujan* of the *charanarvind* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and then Ishwarcharan Swami completed the consecration ceremony by placing the *charanarvind* in the *chhatra* (memorial shrine).

At 8:23 p.m., Swamishri arrived in front of Tapomurti Nilkanth Varni, where with immense





Swamishri observes the beautifully crafted welcome *rangoli* and warmly gestures his appreciation for its artistry by the steps of the *shikharbaddha* mandir

affection, he became absorbed in darshan of the 49-foot *murti* and reverently offered a tray of sweets.

Then, Swamishri's vehicle reached the Pravesh Dwar (entrance gate) which was adorned with a grand 80-foot garland lovingly made by the devotees. Swamishri sanctified it and at 8:30 p.m. reached the Welcome Center, where children and youths greeted him with a dance. Inside, Swamishri performed *pujan* in front of the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and with his loving gaze, met all the swamis as he proceeded through the Mayur Dwar (Peacock Gate) to the middle of the open platform directly opposite the Akshardham Mahamandir.

With Swamishri in position, the red curtain shielding the view of the Akshardham Mahamandir was gradually lowered, amid fireworks and cheers, enabling Swamishri to have his first darshan of the Mahamandir. Swamishri's face beamed with joy as he viewed the Mahamandir for about five minutes. Then, Swamishri got out of the wheelchair and stepped directly on this ground while walking towards the temporary stage. Thousands of devotees had gathered to welcome Swamishri. When asked,

"How do you find Akshardham?" Swamishri replied, "Akshardham is Akshardham."

Then Ishwarcharan Swami, Anandswarup Swami and Yagnavallabh Swami greeted Swamishri with garlands. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed, "All of you volunteers have done amazing work. Otherwise, this [Mahamandir] would not have finished. You have all dedicated your mind, body, resources, family and everything. You have all done this with togetherness, camaraderie and unity, following Yogi Bapa's principle. This is easy to say, but it is not easy to serve with such unity. And everyone found joy in this *seva*. No negative or discouraging words. Unbroken joy... I wondered what it would be like, but seeing it in person, I am very very happy. Lots of joy."

Then, Swamishri sanctified the sweets to be given as *prasad* and announced, "From today, whatever *niyams* (vows) you have taken are complete." Devotees of all ages had observed special vows so that the construction work of Akshardham Mahamandir be completed without any hindrances; Swamishri announced their completion. After the brief welcome assembly, Swamishri entered the Pramukh Mandapam





Swamishri gestures to embrace and bless everyone in the Akshardham Volunteers Assembly by the steps of the *shikharbadhha* mandir

and offered *abhishek* to the *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj. Then, he proceeded for darshan of Thakorji in the main mandir and performed *arti*. Thereafter, he entered his residence.

## 9 JULY: AKSHARDHAM VISIT

Today was a scheduled rest day, but at 6:15 p.m., Swamishri left his room to visit the Akshardham Mahamandir. With Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, he ascended to the podium via a boom lift. There, Ishwarcharan Swami welcomed him with a garland and said, “We welcome you to your Akshardham.”

Thereafter Shrijiwarup Swami, Aksharvatsal Swami and other swamis explained the main features of the Mahamandir to Swamishri. Engrossed, Swamishri viewed and listened to the details with great interest and attention for over one hour; where necessary he asked questions and gave guidance.

Before descending from the podium, Swamishri commented, “Even if one views just the main elements, there is so much to see.”

On his return journey, Prashantdarshan Swami, who has overseen the construction since 2012, described to Swamishri how the

combined efforts of thousands of devotees from all parts of North America has resulted in this magnificent monument.

## 11 JULY: VOLUNTEERS ASSEMBLY

In the evening, Swamishri arrived in the special assembly for long-term Akshardham volunteers in the Pramukh Hall.

While he took his seat in the cabin, a video was shown. At the end, Swamishri spoke in the video, “I wish to embrace you all.” At that time, the curtains opened and Swamishri opened his arms and slowly gestured to embrace everyone.

Around the cabin, a variety of tools, equipment, stones and other construction-related items had been placed. Then followed a series of interactions with Swamishri.

The emcee addressed Swamishri, “Swami, all these volunteers have taken breaks from their studies, jobs and businesses to do *seva*. Disregarding the cold, rain, wind, snow and sun, they have tirelessly served to please you. What feelings arise in your mind and heart?”

Swamishri replied, “Words are not enough to describe them. I am really, really pleased.”





Swamishri threads *mala* beads into a garland while returning after his medical checkup



Swamishri honours the volunteers with a *mala* garland

With this, a measure tape was extended before Swamishri and he was requested to stop when the measure of his pleasure was reached. But the measure tape proved too short as a gauge of his joy. Swamishri said, “You have all lived as per Vachanamrut Loya 3, dedicating your resources and everything to do *seva*. Yet, you have all remained humble *sevaks* of Maharaj and Swami.”

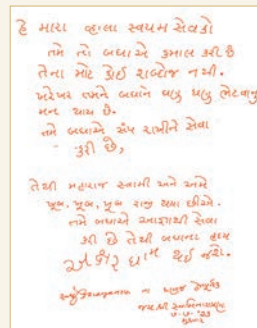
After some volunteers had narrated their experiences, an artificial stone was placed before Swamishri, which he cracked open using a golden hammer and chisel to reveal a gold-coloured heart, symbolizing that the volunteers’ hearts had been cleansed of all defects and transformed into gold. In this way, Swamishri participated in a variety of meaningful interactions showering his blessings and sentiments on all.

Describing Swamishri’s wish to honour all the volunteers, Narayanmuni Swami revealed that Swamishri had spent 87 minutes in Toronto and 10 minutes after arriving in Robbinsville to prepare a special card. Swamishri was requested to show the card, and then he himself read what he had written in Gujarati. The following is a translation:

*My Dear Volunteers,*

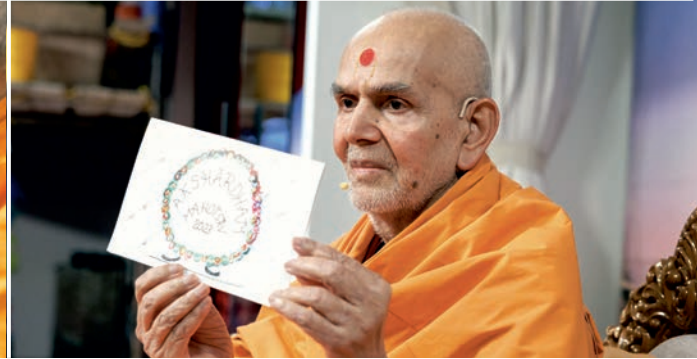
*You have all done an amazing feat. There are no words to describe it. Truly, I deeply wish to embrace you all. You have all served with unity, so Maharaj, Swami and I are very, very, very pleased. You have performed this seva as instructed, so everyone’s hearts will become (like) Akshardham.*

*With loving Jai Shri Swaminarayan from  
Sadhu Keshavjivandas (7.7.23, Friday)*



Narayanmuni Swami revealed that Swamishri wished to prepare a garland of rosary beads to symbolize that all the volunteers had earned a place as beads in Maharaj’s *mala*. So, while returning from his medical checkup on the previous day, Swamishri had spent 25 minutes in the car threading beads in the garland.





Swamishri participates in various activities during the Akshardham Volunteers Assembly

Swamishri then stood up with this *mala* garland and offered it to all the volunteers by raising it in all directions. The entire assembly was euphoric and touched by Swamishri's loving gesture.

Swamishri blessed, “A *manko* (bead) means perfection. You have all served and left nothing undone. There are no words to describe this. You have done great *seva* and become a part of the *mala*.”

Then, Narayanmuni Swami said that Swamishri wished to have darshan of the soil collected from all the different locations where the volunteers have carried out *seva*.

When the tray of small bowls containing the soil from the various locations was brought to Swamishri, he instinctively dipped his fingers in each bowl and touched the soil reverently to his head.

The sight of guru Mahant Swami Maharaj humbly bowing to the soil with such sentiments emotionally moved everyone. All the volunteers were deeply touched by Swamishri's humble gesture that outwardly reflected his true inner respect for all their efforts.

#### 14 JULY: MEETING WITH SRI SRI RAVISHANKAR MAHARAJ

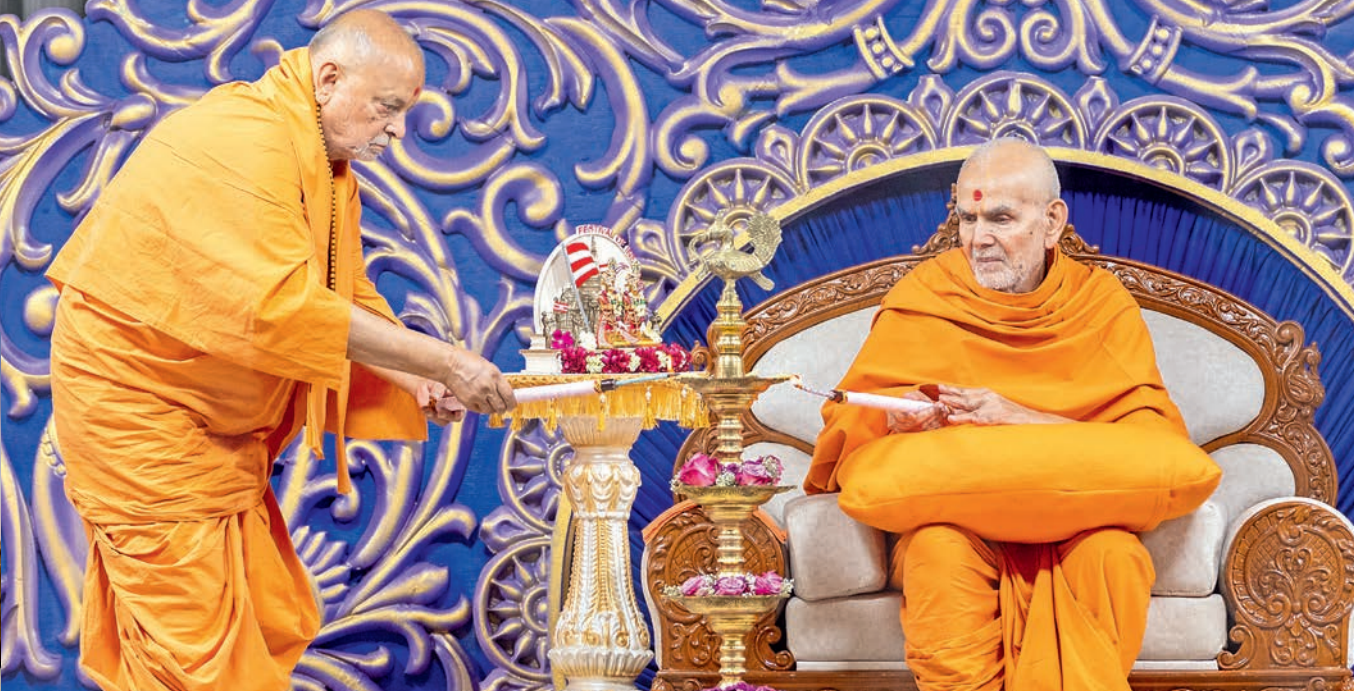
In the afternoon, Gurudev Sri Sri Ravishankar, Founder of The Art of Living, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham. After a guided tour of the campus with senior swamis, he met Mahant Swami Maharaj. Sri Sri Ravishankar Maharaj was honoured with a garland and then he said, “Akshardham is extremely amazing. It will inspire everyone for generations to come. This mandir is not built with merely stones, but with bhakti and dedication. And so it will remain eternal.”

#### 16 JULY: WELCOME AND FESTIVAL INAUGURATION

In the evening, Swamishri arrived in the Yagnapurush Sabhagruha, a large marquee erected on the Akshardham campus, for his public welcome assembly and to inaugurate the ‘Akshardham Mahotsav: Festival of Inspirations’.

A troupe of 160 youths performed an exhilarating welcome dance. These youths were also full-time volunteers on the construction site, and had practised for this dance during their off-duty time.





Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj and Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami officially inaugurate the 'Akshardham Mahotsav: Festival of Inspirations' by lighting the ceremonial lamp

Thereafter, Swamishri was welcomed with garlands by senior swamis. Then, Swamishri and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami lit the inaugural lamp to commence the Akshardham Mahotsav – Festival of Inspirations.

The majority of the audience of around 12,000 had been involved over the years in *seva* for the Akshardham project. They included long-term and short-term volunteers, as well as devotees living nearby who had provided food, transport, accommodation and other support services to facilitate the volunteers serving on site.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, “From today, the Akshardham Mahotsav begins. By the grace of Shriji Maharaj, blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the selfless *seva* of the saints and devotees, this Akshardham is now ready and will inspire everyone for eternity. This Akshardham Mahotsav is to inspire all with noble values. If our lives are filled with virtues, others will love, respect and trust us.

“Just as water nourishes a plant, satsang nourishes our life with virtues. Such satsang will be available daily here. Then, endeavour to

practise what you learn. That is the only way to progress and that is true satsang.”

### 19 JULY: VEDIC MAHAYAGNA

At 11:30 a.m., Swamishri entered the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Yagnashala to perform the main inauguration rituals of the Vedic Mahayanga. This 2½-month *yagna* will be the longest ever *yagna* performed in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and will continue until the beginning of October when the *murti-pratishtha* of Swaminarayan Akshardham takes place. Daily, couples and families from all across North America and other countries will participate to perform the *yagna* rituals and offer *ahutis*.

On 25 June, in Toronto, Swamishri had ignited the auspicious flame for the *yagna* using direct sunlight.

First, Swamishri performed *pujan* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and other rituals. Thereafter, using the naturally kindled flame, Swamishri lit the flame for the *yagna*, which Ishwarcharan Swami placed in the main *yagna kund* (altar). Then, Swamishri performed the *arti* and remaining rituals.





Swamishri participates in the Agni Sthapan Vidhi of the Vedic Mahayagna

Swamishri blessed, “There is devotion in all your hearts. And because of your efforts this campus has been created. It will have widespread impact and bring boundless joy. May everyone become happy and attain *moksha*.”

## 21 JULY: THE GLORY OF SATSANG

The evening assembly theme was ‘The Glory of Satsang’.

Anandswarup Swami spoke about the glory of satsang and guests expressed their sentiments about their visit to Akshardham.

In Swamishri’s presence, volunteers from various centres presented overviews of the duties of the various departments in their respective satsang centres: facilities, operations and maintenance, IT and audio-visual, kitchen, Aksharpith, satsang activities, *sabha* arrangements, networking and outreach, women’s wing, mandir coordinators and admin.

Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly through a question and answer session.

## 22 JULY: INSPIRING MORALITY

The evening assembly was themed ‘Inspiring

Morality’. Among the guest speakers were Dr Navinbhai Mehta, a distinguished ENT surgeon and Shri Dilipbhai Joshi, an acclaimed Indian film and TV actor, and Dr Aseem Shukla, Co-Founder of the Hindu American Foundation.

Stories of devotees whose lives had been transformed by their involvement in satsang were presented.

During the ensuing question and answer session, Swamishri said, “If one lives by the *niyams* given by Shriji Maharaj then everything is achieved. In satsang, avoid taking faults of others as this only diminishes one’s own spirituality.”

The assembly concluded with youths performing a dance to the lyrics of a new bhajan: ‘*Swaminarayan Akshardham ko kare hraday se abhivandan...*’

## 23 JULY: MEETING WITH PUJYA NIRMALANANDNATHJI SWAMI

In the afternoon, Pujya Nirmalanandnathji Swami, present guru of the Adichunchungiri Math in Karnataka, India, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham. After a comprehensive tour of the complex, he met Swamishri. Ishwarcharan





Swamishri performs *pujan* of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni with sandalwood paste



Swamishri bows at the feet of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni

Swami honoured Nirmalanandnathji Swami with a garland on behalf of Swamishri. Then, after an affectionate conversation, in which the excellent work of his *math* was appreciated and praised, Nirmalanandnathji Swami commented, “Whenever I meet BAPS swamis, I feel that I am meeting our own swamis.”

#### 24 JULY: VISIT TO NILKANTH VATIKA

Swamishri expressed his wish to do the *pujan* of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni. By early evening, devotees and volunteers filled Nilkanth Vatika with excitement, awaiting the most unexpected darshan amidst a clear, beautiful sky.

The setting sun of the early evening bathed the towering Nilkanth Varni *murti* in its warm glow. Swamishri arrived in the Nilkanth Vatika, humbly greeting eager devotees with folded hands. Shrijiiswarup Swami explained in detail the map of Nilkanth Varni’s pilgrimage throughout India, Tibet and Nepal. Thereafter, coming to the base of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni, Swamishri raised an incense stick in prayer to the mesmerizing 49-foot tall *murti*.

Swamis sung the Nilkanth Varni Stotram,

Sanskrit hymns in honour of Shri Nilkanth Varni, creating a divine atmosphere as Swamishri was raised by lift to the top of the *murti*. There, he applied a sandalwood *chandlo* and *archa* on the *murti*’s forehead with utmost devotion. Following this, he offered *thal* and affectionately selected a sweet from it, offering it directly to Shri Nilkanth Varni.

As he descended, Swamishri devoutly pressed both hands on the chest of Nilkanth Varni’s *murti* and at the base reverently bowed to touch Nilkanth Varni’s holy feet.

Then, a short programme began with Swamishri seated at the base of the *murti*. Ishwarcharan Swami honoured Swamishri with a flower garland.

Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni’s *murti* holds a special place in Swamishri’s heart. He was immensely pleased with Ishwarcharan Swami for guiding and sincerely endeavouring the making of this *murti*. Swamishri expressed his joy by spontaneously embracing him.

Mahant Swami Maharaj said, “My affection for Nilkanth Varni inspired me to perform this *pujan* ceremony today. Moreover, all of the acts





Swamishri observes a skit presentation during the 'Power of Forgiveness' evening assembly

and expressions of devotion you have performed here – like *pradakshinas* – have been accepted 'as it is' by Bhagwan Swaminarayan."

A spiritually charged evening culminated with Mahant Swami Maharaj performing the *arti* of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni, while Akshardham's grandeur served as the perfect background. Fulfilling his inner wish, Swamishri offered devotion by completing two *pradakshinas* before returning to his residence.

## 27 JULY: POWER OF FORGIVENESS

The theme of the evening assembly was 'Power of Forgiveness'.

Among the stage guests were Reyhan Ozgur, Consul General of Turkey to New York, and Padmashri Dr Sudhirbhai Parikh.

During the assembly, skits were presented depicting the forgiving nature of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, and how this virtue has inspired devotees to forgive others.

Also, youths who were on the India Trip in 2001 as *balaks* recalled how Swamishri had spared four days to thoroughly prepare a presentation for them in English using overhead slides. But, since

they were young, tired and uncomfortable with the heat, the children seemed disinterested and some even fell asleep. At that time, Swamishri had written a letter of apology seeking their forgiveness for his long presentation. Now, these youths asked Swamishri for his forgiveness for their inappropriate behaviour in that assembly 22 years previously and requested him to show the same slides using an overhead projector.

In the question-answer session, explaining what understanding one should keep, Swamishri said, "Understand that what has happened, is happening and will happen by the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan."

## 28 JULY

After his morning puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS mandirs in Springfield (Massachusetts), Syracuse (New York) and Dowingtown (Pennsylvania).

## 29 JULY

At 9.07 p.m., after singing the *chestha*, Swamishri visited the Brahma Kund, where the





Swamishri visits an on-site trailer, where swamis reside

soothe lighting amid the darkness of night created a divine atmosphere.

After a leisurely tour of Brahma Kund, Swamishri sat on a small dais facing the *murti* of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni. After a brief presentation, Swamishri performed the *arti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni.

### 30 JULY

After performing his puja in the Welcome Center, Swamishri arrived in the Pramukh Mandapam, where grooms, brides and their families were seated. Swamishri sanctified flowers which Anandswarup Swami then showered over the items to be used for the wedding and engagement rituals.

Swamishri blessed, “May all the couples enjoy good health and prosper in all ways. May they progress in their *seva* and bhakti. By incorporating satsang in your life, you will experience great joy.”

At 7:00 p.m., Swamishri visited the trailers in which the swamis, *sadhaks*, volunteers and artisans reside on campus. He entered trailer number 17 and viewed the facilities. Swamishri also viewed the extensive solar panel farm at the rear of

the campus. Along the way, Swamishri blessed numerous volunteers.

### 31 JULY

After puja, Swamishri blessed couples and families involved in the *samuh lagna* and engagement ceremonies. Swamishri said, “Now that you are entering a householder life, may you all be blessed with good health and prosperity. And may you all progress in your daily devotion and spiritual wisdom.”

At 6:20 p.m., Swamishri went to the Akshardham Experience tent, where he watched the first screening of Part 7 of the *Shri Swaminarayan Charitra* animation series and *The Symphony of the Stones*, a specially prepared video that introduces each aspect of Swaminarayan Akshardham to the devotees who will be visiting during the Akshardham Mahotsav.

### 2 AUGUST

After Swamishri’s morning puja in the Pramukh Hall, Brahnavihari Swami presented Swamishri an invitation sent by the devotees of the United Arab Emirates for the *murti-pratishtha* of





Swamishri sanctifies a model of the BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi, UAE

the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. Swamishri sanctified a 3D model of the mandir and then blessed the assembly, “The mandir being built in Abu Dhabi is truly a miracle. It is only happening due to God’s wish and divine power, it would not happen otherwise. The sadhus have put in tremendous effort. They have given this mandir a beautiful form. The mandir is half-complete and will be finished. In a very beautiful desert land, the mandir is like a lotus blossoming in the sand.

“The Abu Dhabi mandir is beautiful, and the values at its core are just as beautiful. It is in seamless harmony with one and all. So if anyone asks you if you belong to Abu Dhabi mandir, say yes! We can say with pride that we belong to this mandir. The whole world will celebrate.”

In the evening, Swamishri visited the Akshardham campus: Shayona and Aksharpith buildings, and the area where the stones for assembly are kept. Then, he performed *arti* of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni and blessed the volunteers, “You are all volunteers and have served wholeheartedly. There are no words to describe this. Young and old, you have all sincerely endeavoured and accomplished. Nilkanth Varni

is standing before us and all your *seva* is for him.”

Thereafter, Swamishri continued his tour, passing the blood donation tent and the rebar (where steel bars are bent) workshop. Swamishri was informed that the majority of the rebar work was done by the women volunteers. He was pleased and conveyed his blessings to them.

Proceeding, Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Swamishri were honoured with a garland presented by using a crane. After a two-hour tour, Swamishri returned to his room.

## 5 AUGUST: MY GURU, MY GUIDE

The evening assembly was titled ‘My Guru, My Guide’ and focused on how the bond between a guru and disciple can ignite a complete transformation from within.

Brahmviharidas Swami spoke about how the guru is not just an idea, but rather a living person with whom we can express our innermost emotions. Though the literal meaning of guru is one who guides from darkness to light, a true guru is also the guardian of morality, a gateway to God, and someone who inspires goodness in the world.





Police officers of Robbinsville are felicitated on stage during the 'My Country, My Duty' assembly

Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami emphasized the necessity of always keeping the utmost faith in the guru and only then can one fulfil the wishes of the guru.

Youths performed a skit of an incident in which Mahant Swami followed the wishes of guru Yogiji Maharaj by engaging in gruelling tasks while ill.

Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly through a question-answer session. He said, "One should surrender fully to the guru's wishes, because the guru is the guru and he knows everything. Faith in the guru is faith in Shriji Maharaj. It is the devotee's duty to understand the value of the guru, have trust, and have profound faith that each step he takes is in the best interest of that individual." Throughout his life, while being a spiritual guide and inspiring devotees, Swamishri has also set an example of how to be an ideal disciple.

## 8 AUGUST

After puja, Swamishri was presented a garland prepared by the *balaks* and *balikas* of the UAE inviting him to perform the *murti-pratishtha* of the under-construction mandir in Abu Dhabi. They had asked a question which was presented

in the form of four planes: Which plane would you prefer to travel in to come to Abu Dhabi – Agna, Dasbhav, Divyabhav or Samp. Swamishri selected the Divyabhav plane.

In the late morning, Pujya Swarupanandji, Head of the Chinmay Mission, met Swamishri, after having visited the Akshardham campus. He described his experience as 'divine'.

## 9 AUGUST: SAMP

The evening assembly was themed 'Samp' and was presented in the form of a *bal sabha* highlighting the four aspects of unity revealed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj: *khamvu* (tolerate), *ghasavu* (assist), *anukul thavu* (cooperate) *mangamtu mukvu* (adjust). Skits were performed, following which Swamishri was asked questions for his guidance on various aspects of unity.

Swamishri said, "If one understands each other's glory, one will be able to help others by forgoing one's own convenience to strengthen unity and mutual love."

## 10 AUGUST: MY COUNTRY, MY DUTY

Today, marked the ninth *patotsav* of the





Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha arti*, 11 August

Robbinsville mandir. At 6:13 a.m., Swamishri performed the *patotsav arti* and then performed his morning puja in the Pramukh Hall.

The evening assembly was themed ‘My Country, My Duty’. Among the guests were the Mayor of Robbinsville, David Fried, and representatives of the local police and emergency forces.

Swamishri blessed the assembly by answering questions based on the evening’s theme.

Swamishri said, “It is our duty to live by the laws of our country of residence.” He added, “Keep your focus on the Satpurush, because he sets the ideal example on how to serve. Pramukh Swami Maharaj washed the devotees’ used utensils on the day he was appointed as president of BAPS by Shastriji Maharaj. In addition, on his 51st birthday celebration, he picked up the discarded used *datan* sticks. So serve, not for praise, but to please Bhagwan and guru. Also, in whichever line of work you chose to make a living, you can serve society.”

## 11 AUGUST

After his puja, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the BAPS mandirs in Warrington (Pennsylvania), Harrisburg

(Pennsylvania), Staunton (Virginia) and Calgary (Alberta, Canada).

Swamishri blessed, “Bhagwan is now present in these *murtis*. Now, you must sincerely offer *seva* and *bhakti*, because Bhagwan himself manifests in them. From marble, the sculptor sculpts the *murti* – his job is done. Then, the Satpurush infuses divinity in the *murti*, through which Bhagwan accepts your *seva* and *bhakti*.”

## 12 AUGUST

Today was *ekadashi*, so there were no public engagements for Swamishri. However, he continued his daily routine of attending to his letter correspondence, reading, discussions, meetings and other duties. In the afternoon, Swamishri was asked some questions for the *bal-balika* and *kishore-kishori* day assemblies.

**Q:** In 2017, you respectfully touched the feet of the *balaks* dressed as *paramhansas*. With what thought did you do this?

**Swamishri:** They are *muktas* from Akshardham.

**Q:** When we are far away from you, our sincerity in observing *niyams* is reduced, and we give in to temptations. What thought should we





Devotees rejoice on having Swamishri's darshan during his visit of the Akshardham campus, 12 August

bear in mind so that even when you are physically distant, we remain sincere in observing *niyams*?

**Swamishri:** If you observe the *niyams* and dharma then even if you are far, far away physically, you are still near. And if you lapse in observing *niyams*, then even if you are seated near, you are actually far, far away.

**Q:** How can we derive the strength to observe *niyams*?

**Swamishri:** By keeping firm *nishtha* in Maharaj and Swami.

**Q:** Do you have any specific message for the children?

**Swamishri:** All you *bal-muktas* should bow down to each other. All should develop mutual *divyabhav*.

In the evening, Swamishri visited the Akshardham campus. First, he went to the welding department. Then, he was taken clockwise around the Akshardham Mahamandir, where the devotees engaged in *seva* were delighted by his darshan.

### 13 AUGUST

Prior to his morning puja, Swamishri blessed the couples in the Pramukh Mandapam for their

*samuh lagna* ceremony. Swamishri said, "Now you are all entering the householder life. May you all be blessed with good health and prosperity. Also, remain sincere in practising satsang, because that is the source of everything. Continually strengthen your dedication to satsang and never became distant from it. Beware of the worldly temptations that may affect you. Remain committed to your satsang *seva* and bhakti. Remain joyous and fulfilled in the knowledge that you have attained Maharaj and Swami."

Today marked the seventh anniversary of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's passing away to Akshardham. After puja, Swamishri was asked some questions.

**Q:** What can we learn from Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life?

**Swamishri:** Humility. He was very humble. He was extremely special, but did not let anyone know. He impacted the world in special ways.

**Q:** On this day, at the age of 83, you became the guru. Did you ever think 'I am past retirement age, so how will I manage this responsibility?'

**Swamishri:** No, God is the all-doer. He does everything; I am just a medium.





Swamishri rolls the dough



Swamishri offers *puranpuri* to the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

**Q:** In your mind, who was Pramukh Swami Maharaj?

**Swamishri:** The manifest form of Bhagwan. *Ekantik*.

**Q:** What prayer would you offer to Pramukh Swami Maharaj today?

**Swamishri:** To bless everyone with the virtues of *ekantik* dharma.

After lunch, Swamishri made *puranpuri* – he rolled the dough into a small round *puri*. Then, he placed the sweet *puran* in the centre and sealed the filling inside the *puri*. Thereafter, he rolled the *puranpuri* into a circular shape and baked it on a pan. He flipped it to bake both sides. Afterwards, ghee was spread on top and Swamishri offered the *puranpuri* to Thakorji. Finally, Swamishri ate a small piece of the sanctified *puranpuri*.

In the evening, Swamishri visited the Swaminarayan Nagar, where the Akshardham Mahotsav events were being held. He visited all the departments in turn: Yogiraj Bhojanshala – where all the devotees take their meals, Akshardham store, Ghanshyam Activity Centre – where the *yagna* and other activities for

children and teenagers take place, Yagnapurush Sabhagruha, housekeeping department, Shayona Café Express, audio-video department; stones inventory management area – where all the stones used in building Akshardham were received and processed before assembly, reception area; welcome tent; guest services; and the blood donation camp.

## 15 AUGUST: DASBHAV

After puja, Swamishri inaugurated *The Musical Legacy of Swaminarayan*, a book written by Toral Patel of Charlotte.

The evening assembly was titled ‘Dasbhav’ (humble service). Swamishri blessed, “In Purushottam Bolya Prite, Shriji Maharaj says, ‘I regard the humblest as the best.’ So, advance on the path of humble service, since Bhagwan resides in the heart of a humble servant. And that is what we have to accomplish in life.” ♦

*(Compiled by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas using baps.org news articles and translated extracts from Brahmapatsal Swami’s Gujarati reports of Mahant Swami Maharaj’s vicharan.)*



(Cont. from p. 5)

### A VOLTE-FACE BY JIVA KHACHAR

Dada Khachar sent his servant to call Ladha Thakkar, who looked after the administrative affairs of the *darbar*. When he arrived Shri Hari informed him about his wish to build a mandir on the hilltop. Ladha Thakkar enquired, “Maharaj, has Jiva Khachar agreed to your wish?” Shri Hari replied, “Jiva Khachar has been coming here for the past two days and saying that we should start preparations for building the mandir. He has been insisting upon it.”

However, Ladha Thakkar cautioned, “Maharaj, though Jiva Khachar has agreed about building the mandir on the hilltop, I do not trust him.” Instantly, Shri Hari disagreed, “Oh, how can that be so? Jiva Khachar is a prominent and leading person in our region. How can you say that you do not trust him?” But Ladha Thakkar remained steadfast in his opinion and opined, “Maharaj, Jiva Khachar will change his words according to his whims. Thus, I do not have an iota of trust in him.”

### I HAVE TO ASK MY FAMILY

Shri Hari pondered upon Ladha Thakkar’s words, but he did not agree with him. He thus asked, “Ladha, just as Hemraj Shah of Sundariyana and Bhaga Doshi of Botad are famous and respected, similarly Jiva Khachar is an eminent person. How can he backtrack upon his words?” But Ladha Thakkar was firm in his view and replied, “Maharaj, what you say is true, but I am still unable to repose my trust in him. If you trust him then tell Jiva Khachar to give his share of the hilltop land in writing to us in the presence of a witness. We cannot start building a mandir on his word alone.”

Shri Hari thought for a while upon Ladha Thakkar’s words and agreed, “With regards to this matter your insight is true. I was unable to perceive this. Since you are socially adept and wise I have to believe you.” Immediately, Ladha Thakkar folded his hands and acknowledged,

“Maharaj, it is you who have blessed me with intelligence. Hence, let us get the document for the land signed by Jiva Khachar. Once he signs it, I will make the arrangements for acquiring the construction tools from Bhavnagar.”

Shriji Maharaj thought there should be no delay in this matter. He sent a *parshad* to call Jiva Khachar, who arrived a few minutes later. Jiva Khachar asked, “Maharaj, have you made any arrangements for acquiring tools for the mandir construction?” Shri Hari replied, “A proper document for the land is yet to be made. Then, I will order the tools.” Thereafter, Maharaj instructed Ladha Thakkar, “You prepare a document according to Jiva Khachar’s instruction.” But Jiva Khachar remarked, “Maharaj, the document can be done tomorrow. Let us not do it today.” Then, Jiva Khachar changed the topic of the conversation and conversed on another subject for an hour. Thereafter, he touched Shri Hari’s feet and left.

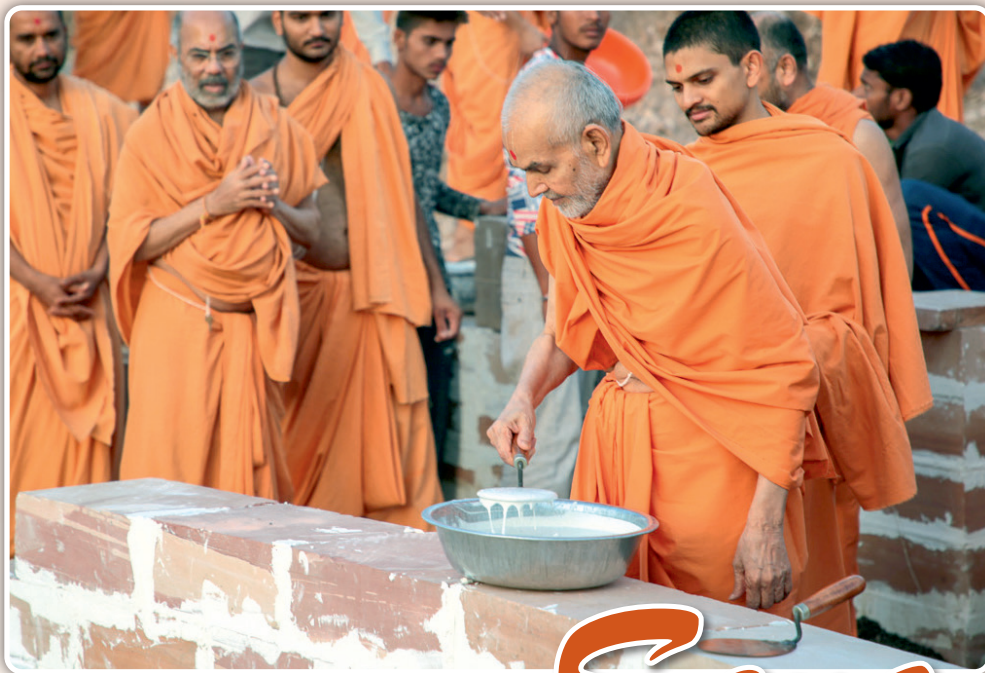
Once Jiva Khachar left, Ladha Thakkar commented, “Maharaj, did you see how he postponed it for tomorrow? Now let’s see how he dictates the words for the document tomorrow.” For the next two days Jiva Khachar delayed in preparing the land deed. Finally, Shri Hari told Jiva Khachar, “Bapu, finish the land deed today. It’s been delayed for two days.” Jiva Khachar smiled haughtily and replied, “Maharaj, how can a land deed be done hastily. I have to ask all my family members at home. So, let’s leave it for tomorrow.” Then, Jiva Khachar got up hurriedly and left.

Ladha Thakkar asked Shri Hari, “See Maharaj, Jiva Khachar is showing signs of rejecting your proposal. Do you think he will write and offer us the land deed?” Shri Hari remarked, “It seems that Jiva Khachar will not give us the land deed. However, let’s make everything clear tomorrow. I want to perform the mandir foundation rituals on Jeth *sud* 8.” ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

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





# A Life of *Seva*

*Seva* refers to the selfless actions and activities humbly performed to attain God-realization. It is loosely translated in English as ‘service’. However, service commonly refers to work done by people or organizations with the expectation of some material gain. Whereas, *seva*, more accurately, ‘selfless service’, is a devotional act devoid of ego and performed out of love and reverence to earn the blessings of Bhagwan and guru.

*Seva* in its purest form is free from anger, greed, ego, lust, envy and other negative emotions. It is performed with the belief that Bhagwan resides in the recipient. Hence, it is a form of devotion to God.

The Gunatit gurus are a living legacy of the spiritual ideals revealed and practised by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. From Gunatitanand Swami to the present day, all have emulated the *seva* performed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself expressed in Vachanamrut that he wishes to repeatedly take birth amid the devotees of God to serve them. In fact, the Gunatit gurus are fulfilling this wish.

Gunatitanand Swami has stated in his talks, Swamini Vato 5.344, “There is worth only in the *seva* of Bhagwan and his devotees.”

This is the mindset with which all the Gunatit gurus have performed *seva*. They have sincerely endeavoured in serving Bhagwan, their gurus, sadhus, devotees, mandirs, festival and social projects, and in many other ways.

Mahant Swami Maharaj was inspired by guru Yogiji Maharaj to engage in *seva* in a multitude of ways.

In the 1950s, as a youth newly affiliated with satsang, and later as a *parshad*, Vinu Bhagat engaged in washing clothes and utensils, kitchen work, housekeeping, indoor and outdoor errands, letter-writing and many other tasks.

## SEVA AMID FEVER

Once, when Yogiji Maharaj was in Gondal, Bhailubhai of Adval brought his new tractor to be blessed. Yogiji Maharaj had been thinking of transferring a big heap of garbage to a suitable location. So, after performing *pujan* of the tractor, with Bhailubhai's permission, Yogiji Maharaj instructed the sadhus to complete the task. Yogiji Maharaj asked, "Where is Mahant Swami?" Someone replied, "He has a fever of 103°F." Still, Yogiji Maharaj said, "Tell him to do this *seva* and his fever will go."

On receiving the message, Mahant Swami immediately joined in the *seva* for over two hours despite his fever.

## MURTI-PRATISHTHA PREPARATIONS

In 1970, devotees of London had purchased an unused church building in Islington to establish the first BAPS mandir in the UK. They requested Yogiji Maharaj to come to perform the *murti-pratishtha*.

A few days prior to the *murti-pratishtha*, Mahant Swami and other swamis and youths went to clean the building, which had been unused for a long time. The task was challenging, since there was a lot to do. Over time, others began to drift away from the *seva* and eventually only Mahant Swami and a few others remained. They ensured that every corner and surface were clean and ready for the big occasion.

Yogiji Maharaj came to check on the progress and was delighted with the cleanliness of the place.

## CLEANING WASHROOMS

In Gondal, many years ago, there were five bathrooms and toilets, which were used by all the sadhus and devotees. Whenever Yogiji Maharaj visited Gondal, Mahant Swami and Madhusudanbhai cleaned them daily. Although Mahant Swami was not assigned this *seva*, he willingly undertook it, in addition to the duties Yogiji Maharaj had directly assigned to him.

## REMOVING WEEDS

Pramodbhai Jajal of Limdi was a volunteer during the Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Bicentenary Celebrations in 1985. The volunteers from Limdi were assigned to serve in the Landscape Department under the guidance of Mahant Swami.

Pramodbhai recalls, "One day, under the hot sun, we were removing unnecessary weeds when Mahant Swami arrived there. He said, 'Remove the weeds completely, otherwise they will regrow and spoil our landscape designs.' Then, he joined us in removing the weeds despite the afternoon heat."

Mahant Swami's mode of working has always been collaborative.

## PICKING UP DISCARDED DATAN STICKS

Anandjivan Swami recalls, "Opposite our old mandir in Sankari was a building, behind which was a field. A *shibir* had been organized there and preparations were under way. Mahant Swami came to the field where the *shibir* was to be held. He saw that there were innumerable used *datan* sticks scattered throughout the area. For years, people had discarded their chewed *datan* sticks in this vacant field. Without saying a word to anyone, Mahant Swami found a bucket and then proceeded to pick up the used *datan* sticks and put them in the bucket. We rushed to stop him and told him that we would pick them all up. However, Swamishri said, 'No, you also pick them and I will, too.' Only when the field was cleared of the *datan* sticks did he leave."

## PAINFUL FALL

In July 2015, a special book launch programme was organized at the BAPS Mandir in Mumbai for the *Transcendence* book written by Dr APJ Abdul Kalam.

Mahant Swami was to fly from Delhi to Mumbai to preside over the event.

(Cont. on p. 29)



# Question Time with PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ



**O**n 8 February 1986, in the evening assembly, sadhus asked Swamishri some questions.

**Q:** You are eternally God-realized, yet what is the worldly cause of your success?

**Swamishri:** Through association of such a guru and by following his wishes, progress has followed naturally.

**Q:** If we have to choose between the Sanstha and the Satpurush, how should we select?

**Swamishri:** The question of selection only arises if you believe them to be separate. The

Satpurush is the Sanstha and the Sanstha is the Satpurush. If you are attached to the Satpurush, there is no distinction.

**Q:** What is your favourite Vachanamrut?

**Swamishri:** The whole Vachanamrut! But Gadhada III 7 is more preferred. By living according to that Vachanamrut, God is pleased.

**Q:** As our guru and one who grants us *moksha* how do you view us?

**Swamishri:** That you all attain *ekantik* dharma, progress in your devotion and *seva*, and all your worldly desires are overcome. Also, that you all become blissful and strengthen the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam in thousands of others and make them blissful.

**Q:** What is your vision of the Sanstha after 100 years?

**Swamishri:** This Sanstha is based on the efforts of a powerful person like Shastriji Maharaj. He has envisioned a thousand years ahead. Yogiji Maharaj has laid such firm foundations that the Sanstha will function well. This is God's work, so he will take care of it. So, the Sanstha will continue to progress well.

**Q:** What are your expectations from us?

**Swamishri:** I do not expect you to serve me personally, but that you sincerely carry out the duties entrusted by Shastriji Maharaj. I wish that we all strengthen our core understanding, remain strong, cooperative and united. Our unity must never break.

\* \* \*

On the evening of 1 November 1988, Swamishri replied to questions related to *murti* puja.

**Q:** How are you able to continuously focus on Harikrishna Maharaj 24 hours a day?

**Swamishri:** He looks after us so much, that it is natural to always think about him. I am nothing before him. Everything is due to Harikrishna Maharaj. I am his servant.

**Q:** You realize the presence of Bhagwan in Harikrishna Maharaj. How can we develop such realization?

**Swamishri:** First, you must develop *vishvas* (trust) and then *pratiti* (faith) develops. This is achieved by offering bhakti.

**Q:** When an attendant lapses in serving Harikrishna Maharaj, how do you feel towards the attendant?

**Swamishri:** Mistakes happen. I do not feel any negativity towards him. The Satpurush always wishes for all *jivas* to progress and enhance their bhakti and he guides them accordingly.

**Q:** During *vicharan*, when there is a delay in offering *thal*, water and other *seva*, how do you maintain an awareness of this?

**Swamishri:** One who is *brahmarup* is always aware. There is no desire for the *panch vishays* or wordly objects and so such awareness remains naturally.

**Q:** During *vicharan*, Harikrishna Maharaj may be in a different car, which is delayed. Then, Harikrishna Maharaj's *thal* can be reserved and the food can be offered to another *murti* so that you can eat on time. Yet you do not allow this. Why?

**Swamishri:** Is that even a question? Would a servant ever eat before his master? He is the reason everything happens. We are mere instruments.

**Q:** What is the difference between *atmanivedi* bhakti and *para* bhakti?

**Swamishri:** *Atmavivedi* bhakti is included in *para* bhakti. *Para* bhakti is the highest form. Such bhakti is possible after becoming *brahmarup*.

**Q:** We place great importance on the manifest Satpurush, since God gives bliss to devotees through him. The *murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj does not speak or interact. So, what feelings should we have for Harikrishna Maharaj as part

of our *upasana* of the manifest?

**Swamishri:** Even though he may not speak, believe that he is God. Serve him in the same way you serve the manifest Satpurush.

**Q:** What are your personal feelings for Harikrishna Maharaj?

**Swamishri:** He himself is personal [to me].

\* \* \*

On 23 May 1989, Shri Mahendra Desai, a journalist from *Chitralkha* magazine, interviewed Swamishri.

**Q:** Which incident in your life as a sadhu has given you much joy?

**Swamishri:** The incidents from the lives of my gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj are such that they always give joy.

**Q:** Is there any sad occasion that is imprinted in your mind?

**Swamishri:** No

**Q:** Have you experienced any scenes in India or abroad that have moved you emotionally?

**Swamishri:** Yes, when I saw the hungry cattle at the Ratanpur cattle camp [1987]. Then, on reaching Rajkot, we arranged to send them fodder.

**Q:** You have outstanding management skills, which is unique. I do not see this in other faiths.

**Swamishri:** This is the work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The grace of my guru Yogiji Maharaj is at work in all this.

**Q:** Where did you get these skills from?

**Swamishri:** From him. From my guru. He taught me when I was young. Shastriji Maharaj was also an expert in worldly and spiritual matters. Through his blessings and guidance all this is possible.

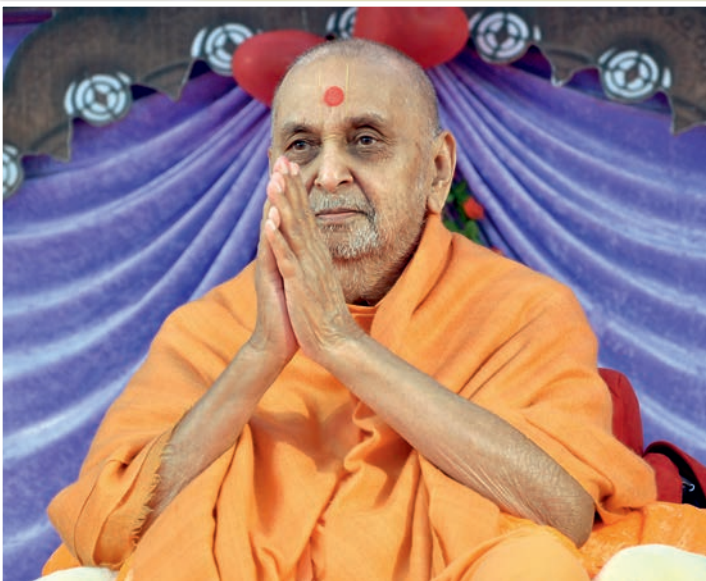
**Q:** In the past, this country did not have such troubles and difficulties. What is the reason?

**Swamishri:** Previously, dharma was more prevalent. Due to faith in God, there was peace. Today, that has declined.

\* \* \*

(Cont. on p. 32)





# The Humble Way

*Humility is a deeply revered quality in all spiritual traditions. Indeed, many consider it to be the mother of all virtues. We should endeavour to nurture our humility. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life was a hallmark of humility.*

**H**umility is recognized as a great virtue in all spheres of life. It is an underrated quality that is imperative on the spiritual path. The Hindu shastras say, “Humility is the ladder to divine understanding.”

Humility is, in fact, one of the most powerful and important attributes of growth and lasting success. Being humble helps to build trust and facilitates learning, which are key aspects of leadership and personal development.

## HUMBLE LEADERS HELP

A group of soldiers were trying to lift a large piece of timber. The corporal stood on the side, commanding the men to heave harder to lift the timber. A stranger rode by on his horse and observed the scene. He said to the corporal, “Don’t you think if you helped them, the strength of one more person might help them lift the timber?” The corporal replied, “That is not my job. It is for them to do that work. That is not the work of a corporal.” The stranger dismounted from his horse, joined the ranks of the soldiers, and helped them to lift the timber. The added strength of one person was all it took to lift the wood. Having completed the task, the stranger

mounted his horse. Before departing he turned to the corporal and said, “The next time you have a piece of timber you need help lifting, call for the commander-in-chief.”

It was then that the men realized that the stranger was none other than George Washington, the first President of the United States, the commander-in-chief of the army.

## SWAMISHRI SHOULDERS THE BLAME

In the summer of 1980, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in the UK. The devotees had arranged a retreat at Epping Forest, a vast area of woodland in Essex, London. There was an air of excitement amongst the young and old, who had turned out in large numbers. Many had travelled from all over the country to spend time with their guru in beautiful natural surroundings. However, there was a problem. On his way to the site, Swamishri made some house visits, which took more time than anticipated. At first, devotees were patient and waited, but after a few hours, they became restless and frustrated because there was no sign of their guru. By the time Pramukh Swami arrived, clouds were looming, and a drizzle had started. Soon, there was a downpour and

the whole retreat was ruined. Everyone left for their homes in anger and confusion. Some of the disoriented devotees blamed the organizers for the fiasco. Many felt hurt and started criticizing the senior devotees who were responsible for Pramukh Swami's schedule. As the day wore on, the negativity around the failed event amplified until it reached Pramukh Swami's ear. But he was calm and composed.

Humble leaders serve others and build relations. They help to join and connect. The next day, Pramukh Swami was at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Islington for his daily puja. Afterwards, there was an assembly. Hundreds of devotees, many of them from the previous day's event at Epping Forest, were present. Pramukh Swami started his discourse, "First and foremost I am sorry for what happened yesterday. It was entirely my fault. I had organized the house visits without realizing how much all of you had sacrificed to come out there. I planned the schedule, not the organizers or the senior devotees. It is not their fault. Please forgive me." There was stunned silence. Pramukh Swami's words carried immense power. They had a profound impact on people's lives. Everyone resolved to forget their differences and move on. Humble leaders put others first. They take the blame, even if it is not their fault.

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(Cont. from p. 25)

However, in Delhi, on 11 July 2015, while walking in the *pradakshina* of the mandir after the *mangala* arti, Swamishri slipped while attempting to touch the feet of a *murti* of Ghanshyam Maharaj being carried by Bhaktimata. Heavy rain had fallen overnight and the *pradakshina* surface was wet. Swamishri lost his balance as he reached out and fell heavily. Without informing anyone, he returned to his room to finish his puja and morning routine, despite the pain and discomfort.

Swamishri flew that morning to Mumbai. At the mandir, while offering *abhishek* to Shri Nilkanth Varni, he struggled to lift his hands to

## SWAMISHRI'S INNATE HUMILITY

In Ahmedabad, in 1989, Justice B.J. Diwan, former Chief Justice of Gujarat High Court, said, "Despite him being the president of BAPS, I have seen Swamishri perform menial tasks in Gondal. 'I am the President of this organization. I cannot perform such ordinary tasks.' This kind of pride does not exist even in the deepest corner of his heart. He does not have the slightest trace of ego. He sees God in all."

Once, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, a group of swamis asked Swamishri to write on a piece of paper, "I bless you." Swamishri wrote the sentence. It was written correctly, but there was a distinct difference. All the letters were in upper case except 'I', which he wrote in lower case. One of the swamis pointed that out to him. Swamishri smiled and said, "I know. We should keep the 'i' small in our life."

Shri Chidanand Saraswati, the president and spiritual head of the Parmarth Niketan Ashram based in Rishikesh, India, once said, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj is always considerate, simple and humble. He leads a multinational organization yet is always relaxed. He remains stress-free because he has surrendered himself to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He continues to serve society with the aim to please God. He thinks nothing of himself. God works through him." ♦

pour the water. So, he was immediately taken for a check up, where it was discovered that he had significant bruising in his back. The doctors advised complete rest.

Despite this, Swamishri presided over the evening book launch programme, sitting through the pain, participating in all the guest felicitations and also blessing the gathering.

Recalling these events a year later, Swamishri said, "For a month afterwards the bed had to be tilted so that I could stand up. The discomfort was severe, but the opportunity to praise Pramukh Swami Maharaj was irresistible." ♦



# MANDIRS

## Inspire Personal and Community Growth



While many people around the world are charitable and giving, for me, it was something I was taught while going to a mandir. A mandir is a Hindu place of worship, like churches for Christians, synagogues for Jews, mosques for Muslims, gurudwaras for Sikhs, or *derasars* for Jains. These religious structures are vital in bringing communities together, serving as a place of spiritual guidance, cultural preservation, and social connection.

As a child in the 1980s, my parents took me to the BAPS Mandir in Flushing, NY, the first mandir for the organization in the United States. I used to stay there throughout the day with other kids, many of whom have become my life-long friends. The reason we stayed there throughout

the day was because of the multiple activities the mandir offered.

The mandir in Flushing, NY, along with the 100+ BAPS Hindu mandirs and hundreds of other Hindu mandirs that now exist in the USA, serve as centres for cultural, social, spiritual and educational activities, such as language classes, music and dance programmes, and community service events, that help people connect and foster a sense of belonging.

I can honestly say that my ability to speak publicly, communicate, be a team leader, dance, play Indian instruments, and read/speak my mother tongue is due to the various classes and opportunities the mandir offers. To this day, when there are icebreakers or team meetings at work



where everyone is asked to share a fact that a co-worker would not know, I proudly say that I once danced at the famous Radio City Music Hall in New York in front of 5,000 people, all because of the mandir.

Beyond the personal development of countless individuals that mandirs help inspire, their true gift is in helping communities and bringing people together. One of the central tenets of Hinduism is *seva* or selfless service. By performing *seva* for others, we are in fact serving God. So, whereas it might be seen as volunteerism by many, for Hindus, this is an act of devotion that helps in one's spiritual growth. Therefore, it's not just an option, but a religious obligation. The act of *seva* bestows many benefits. It reduces the attachment of the giver towards material objects, develops an attitude of service, comforts the heart, and helps foster the sentiment of compassion for others. It also gives you the satisfaction that you are part of a bigger purpose.

Mandirs provide a space for regular *seva*, allowing people to directly help others by participating in tasks like cleaning restrooms, leading children's activities, and cooking food for the congregants after the weekly assemblies. Additionally, events such as blood donation drives, health fairs, food drives, and walkathons are organized throughout the year to support the larger community.

These walks/runs have been held annually throughout the country, raising millions of dollars over the past 25+ years for many remarkable charities, including the American Cancer Society, UNICEF, the Nature Conservancy, and local emergency services where BAPS mandirs exist.

Although I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact mandirs have had on my life, as well as that of my family and children, we live in an era where being religious is somewhat taboo, or at least, questioned. According to a religious landscape survey conducted by Pew Research Center in 2018 and 2019, 26% of Americans

are now religiously unaffiliated, up from 17% in 2009. That's slightly over one in every four Americans! Even among those who maintain religious affiliation, the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago has tracked attendance at spiritual services, which has declined sharply over the years. While nearly 50% of Americans reported going to religious services at least once a week in the 1960s, that number has now fallen below 25% in 2020, with a particularly pronounced decline among younger generations.

Given this context, it is not surprising that some of my friends during college, and a few now, questioned why I regularly attend the mandir or help when a new BAPS mandir is being built. For them, being a good person and giving to others was more important than creating such places. Some even considered it a waste of money to build places of worship. I won't dispute that some people who claim to be religious may not be good humans. However, based on my personal experience, I can directly attribute my talents, skills, and disposition in life to my association with the mandir. I'm not suggesting that one must go to a mandir to be considered a good person, as many individuals are genuinely kind-hearted. Nevertheless, a mandir provides a space that continually inspires individuals to do good, not just once or twice a year, but every day, at all times, even when it is not convenient for them. It is one's religious and moral obligation. And, just like schools are only useful if one attends them regularly, these positive thoughts are reinforced consistently by going to the mandir consistently.

Mandirs inspire people to think about how they can help others. Giving money or clothes to someone can provide immediate relief, but it is often limited. And sometimes, undoubtedly, that is needed. Asking a person who is dying of thirst to build a well would be a disservice to them. Instead, give them a glass of water.



Similarly, BAPS mandirs have taught me helping can come in two forms. During natural calamities, BAPS volunteers deliver hot food, clothes, and other essentials to affected sites. After 9/11, I went to major intersections in central New Jersey with BAPS volunteers to collect funds for the families of the victims and emergency personnel who lost their lives helping others.

At the same time, when looking at the long-term horizon, helping someone learn a skill or overcome addiction can change the trajectory of their life and that of their family.

In 2003, I travelled with a few friends and BAPS swamis to some rural and tribal areas of Gujarat, India. The purpose of the trip was for us to recognize that while schools and hospitals are needed in society, so too are mandirs. During our visit, we met a family who shared their story with us. The male householder was a farmer who had to have his wife and children work on the farm due to financial hardships, which led to them having only one decent meal a day. He could not afford to send his kids to school. They had to work on the farm because of his addiction to alcohol and *bidis* (Indian cigarettes). At times, he even borrowed money to sustain his addiction.

However, he was able to turn his life around after meeting BAPS swamis who encouraged him to start attending the nearby mandir once a week for religious services. Through this, he gradually

gained the strength to give up his addictions and incorporate religion and spirituality into his daily life. He eventually saved enough money to hire farmhands, enabling him to send his kids to school, and to expand his hut with better materials for a comfortable life. His friends were also inspired by the change in his life and began attending the mandir or re-engaging in their worship choices. Over time, the entire village became more spiritually inclined, creating a peaceful and harmonious community where villagers respected, helped, and appreciated each other.

Peace and harmony are essential in our world, but we are often controlled by our base instincts of ego, greed, jealousy, anger, and lust. The news is often filled with stories about wars, shootings, and partisan issues. However, as Mahatma Gandhi said, “If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change.” We need to change first to create a better world. Cities can change if towns and communities change first, communities can change if families change first, and families can change if individuals change first.

As seen in the example of the farmer, individuals can be inspired to change by going to mandirs or places of worship. I have experienced it in my life, and I hope I can help my children experience that too. ♦

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(Cont. from p. 27)

On 12 September 1993, in the evening assembly, youths of Mumbai ask Swamishri some questions.

**Q:** What is the secret for family progress?

**Swamishri:** *Ghar sabha* (family assembly), satsang reading and daily puja.

**Q:** What is the biggest disservice?

**Swamishri:** To talk negatively.

**Q:** What things are ruining society?

**Swamishri:** TV, vulgar visuals and indecent

books.

**Q:** What should we do so that we do not fall from Satsang?

**Swamishri:** Practise introspection and strengthen your faith.

**Q:** What should we do to please the Satpurush?

**Swamishri:** Live as per his wishes.

**Q:** When does attachment for the Satpurush develop?

**Swamishri:** When one obeys his wishes. ♦





# Karma and Reincarnation in Sanatan Hindu Dharma

Sanatan Hindu Dharma is based on four principles namely, *avatarvad*, *murti puja*, the law of karma and *punar janma*. *Avatarvad* is the belief that the supreme Reality either sends his avatars on earth or descends himself to eradicate evil, establish dharma and fulfil the devotional wishes of his devotees. *Murti puja* is the worship of Bhagwan through his many forms in the form of *murtis*. The law of karma states that every action by a human begets appropriate fruits. *Punar janma* means rebirth or reincarnation.

In this and two future articles, we shall briefly discuss reincarnation. Globally, over one billion Hindus believe in reincarnation. Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism also believe in rebirth as do other religions and cultures worldwide.

Some believe that humans are always born as human beings. Some believe that we are born immediately after death, while some believe in an intermission period. Others believe in metempsychosis, which means to be born either as humans or animals.

Hindu beliefs about reincarnation are based on the law of karma. Reincarnation and karma are inextricably interwoven, the former being founded on karma. Hence, we first briefly discuss karma. There are three types of karmas, namely, *sanchit*, *prarabdha* and *kriyaman*. *Sanchit* karmas are the sum total of a *jiva's* karmas of past births and the present. When a portion of *sanchit* karmas ripen, they form *prarabdha* karmas from which the next birth results.



They cannot be changed and have to be borne until death. The *sanchit* karmas may to some extent be changed by spiritual endeavour. This will be discussed later. It is the *sanchit* karmas which lead the *jiva* to transmigrate in the perpetual cycle of rebirth. Here, it is important to note that karmas do not attach to *jivas* in non-human births. For instance when a carnivore kills an animal for food, it does not incur *pap* karma for killing the animal. *Pap* and *punya* karmas only apply to humans. How do humans benefit from the belief in the principle of karma?

### RELEVANCE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF KARMA

The underlying mechanism of karma is so mathematical, precise and infallible that it leaves no room for chance. From this, one can deduce that there must necessarily be a supreme intelligence to be able to record all karmas of *jivas* and dispense their fruits. This is only possible by Paramatma, who is therefore known as *karmafal-pradata*, the dispenser of the fruits of karmas.

There are four advantages of karma which provide answers to many compelling enigmas in life.

1. It provides satisfactory answers about the apparent disparities that may occur in life. A common example is that villains seem to live luxurious lives while law-abiding citizens may experience poverty or misery all their lives. A religious person may similarly experience pain or chronic illness while an atheist may lead a healthy life. Other anomalies concern children. Why some infants die prematurely? Why are some born healthy, others chronically ill or even mentally challenged? Why are some intelligent and gifted with special abilities, while others are not so gifted?

2. It provides comfort during life's crises or painful events.

3. It helps people to refrain from performing undesirable actions and inspires them to perform good deeds.

4. It dispenses true justice. For example, a person who commits a crime may escape the judicial system, but he will have to bear the fruits of his evil deeds either in this birth or the next. Nobody escapes the law of karma, including those who do not believe in it! It operates universally like the law of gravity.

All karmas of humans are recorded by Chitragupta, the chief attendant of Yama Raja in Narak. At death, a *jiva* is taken by Yamadutas (attendants) to Narak where his karmas are read out by Chitragupta to Yama Raja. The latter then dispenses the appropriate punishment in the 28 regions of Narak. Pious *jivas* who have offered sincere devotion are taken to the abodes of their *ishtadeva* for example, devotees of Rama to Vaikunth, devotees of Krishna to Golok, devotees of Shiva to Kailas and so forth.

*Yānti devavratā devān-pitrūnānti pitruvratāh;  
Bhūtāni yānti bhutejya yānti mad-yājino'pi mām.*

- Bhagavad Gita 9.25

Meaning: Those who worship the deities attain those deities, those who worship the ancestors attain the ancestors (*pitru lok*), those who worship the spirits attain the spirits and those who worship me attain only me.

Other pious *jivas* who have accumulated *punya* karmas travel to Swarg, also known as Devalok. Here, they enjoy the fruits of their *punya* karmas, return to earth to begin endeavours again as human beings. Bhagwan Shri Krishna states this in the Gita (9.21):

*Te tam bhuktvā swargalokam vishālam,  
Kshīne punye martyalokam vishanti.*

Meaning: After enjoying the vast pleasures of Swarg, when their *punyas* are exhausted, they [*jivas*] return to earth.

### DESTINY OF JIVAS WITH VASANA (UNFULFILLED DESIRES)

*Jivas* who harbour *vasana* – unfulfilled desires – of lust, greed, taste, revenge and so forth, at the time of death, become a *preta* or *pretatma*

(ghost). They roam around seeking people whom they can possess to fulfil their unsatiated desires. This occurrence is common in just about every culture globally. They are named according to their origin or inherent traits, varna or gender. In Gujarati these include *brahmarakshas*, *zund*, *jin*, *mamadev*, *babro*, *pancho khaliyo*, *simadiyo*, *zampdo*, *vaital*, *vir*, *narsingo*, *khavis*, *zond-zapatiyo*, *agnimukho vaitar*, *brahmarakshasi*, *pishachini*, *sikotaru*, *chudel*, *danyal*, *dakan*, *mashani meladi*, *dakini*, *shakini*, *zampdi*, *bhimdiyo*, *bhutavari*, *vaitari*, *agnimukhi vaitari*, *aagiyo betal* and *shaytan*.

The *atma* possesses immense power. However, *pretas* misuse this power for evil purposes. They usually endanger the health of their hosts, or destroy their businesses or machinery. They usually inhabit hollows, old wells, unused buildings, etc.

Such *pretas* are eternally condemned. With their subtle bodies (*sukshma sharir*), they can enter any person's physical body to satisfy their unfulfilled desires. Exorcisms by *bhuvras* cannot redeem them from their *preta* bodies. Only Paramatma or the Satpurush can liberate them by sending them to Badrikashram. There, they perform *tapas* – austerities – after which they are granted a human birth on earth to begin *sadhana* – spiritual endeavours – again. Only when they become *brahmarup/aksharup*, do they attain *atyantik mukti* – ultimate liberation to Akshardham.

During his time, Bhagwan Swaminarayan redeemed several *pretas*. Once, on his way to bathe in the River Sabarmati in Ahmedabad, he stopped for a few moments under a banyan tree near the Dariya Khan mausoleum in Shahibaug. Later he revealed his reason to Muktanand Swami:

“When Draupadi's sari was being pulled, Vikarna castigated all those present for this undignified act. Duryodhan then sent him away. Since Vikarna sided with Draupadi who was Bhagwan's devotee, he took several births and was

then born as the Badshah Dariya Khan. Once, he hunted near Dadhichi Rishi's ashram. Angered by this, the rishi cursed him to become a ghost. Khan begged for forgiveness. The rishi then said, “When Purna Purushottam Narayan manifests on earth, he will redeem you from my curse.” Hence, he had come for our darshan under the tree. We blessed him to go to Badrikashram” (Dave 2003, V: 83).

In a second incident, hundreds of infants, as ghosts, once entered Bhagwan Swaminarayan's tent at night in Pachham. He blessed them to be born in the Satsang. To Somla Khachar, who was on guard outside his tent, he revealed, “They were *gopa* infants who had been killed by Putna (Shri Krishna's maternal aunt) (Dave 2003, V: 191).

This legacy of redeeming *pretas* has continued in his Gunatit successors. Yogiji Maharaj redeemed many *pretas* who had possessed family members of devotees. During Pramukh Swami Maharaj's time two notable cases occurred in Surat. One can be viewed on the internet on ‘Surat Bhoot’<sup>1</sup>. Also, 368 *pretas* of ascetics who had died 600 years ago, had possessed a devotee named Labhu Pati.

Today, Mahant Swami Maharaj also continues to redeem *pretas*. (see Appendix 5 in *Karma & Reincarnation: Hindu Principles & Beliefs*, 4th Edition, Swaminarayan Aksharpith). In the next article, we shall discuss reincarnation in the ancient Hindu shastras and texts during the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan until the present day.

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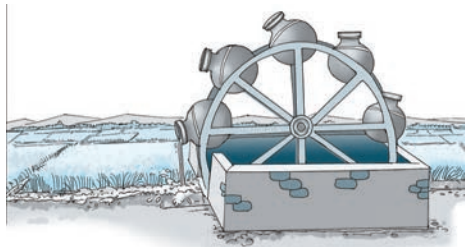
1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efVKa7CfyZc>



# INSPIRATIONS

*A potpourri of inspiring and interesting  
information and wisdom*

## COMBINING ONE'S ENERGIES



In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 25, Shriji Maharaj says, “If twenty pails of water are drawn from a well, and the flow of water from each pail is allowed to flow in separate directions, then there would be little force in each flow. However, if the flow of all twenty pails of water are combined, then the resultant flow would become extremely powerful – like that of a river – and would not be able to be diverted by any means

whatsoever. Similarly, when a person’s *vruttis* (mental inclinations) have become free of worldly desires, his *chitt* (consciousness) focuses only on God’s form.”

We all interact with the physical world through our five senses. We acquire maximum information when all our senses are focused on one task. Similarly, all our senses must be focused on the divine form of God to achieve the highest benefit.

*- Analogy from the Vachanamrut*

## THE CAMEL'S NECK



A camel performed great austerities. God was pleased and said to it, “Ask whatever boon you desire and it shall be granted.”

The camel asked, “Lord, make my neck 400 *gau*<sup>1</sup> long, so that by sitting here I can graze far away.”

“So it shall be,” God said. And instantly the camel’s neck became 400 *gau* long!

The wild animals of the jungle, tigers, mongooses, foxes all saw the massive neck. They sunk their teeth into its very middle and cut it in half and ate it. The camel died very miserably.

**Moral:** One should perform worldly activities according to one’s strength and abilities. By increasing such activities without the ability to cope one will end up like the camel’s neck – cut and eaten. Do what little you need to and spend the rest of your time in the worship of God.

*- 101 Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj*

## FOREIGN SCHOLARS AND THINKERS

In the 18th century, many British, French, American and other intellectuals were especially impressed by Hinduism and India’s people and culture.

**Sir John R. Seeley** (1834–1895), Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University, writes about India, “Perhaps no race has shown a greater aptitude for civilization. Its customs grew into laws, and were consolidated in codes. It imagined the division of labour. It created poetry and philosophy

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

and the beginnings of science. We [British] are not cleverer than the Hindu; our minds are not richer or larger than his. We cannot astonish him, as we astonish the barbarians, by putting before him ideas that he never dreamed of. He can match from his poetry our sublimest thoughts; even our science perhaps has few conceptions that are altogether novel to him.”<sup>2</sup>



**Mark Twain** (1835–1910), an American author and humourist, praises India, “This is indeed India; the land of dreams and romance; of fabulous wealth, cradle of the human race, birthplace of human speech, mother of history, grandmother of legend, great-grandmother of tradition. The one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the globe combined. There is only one India! It is the only country that has a monopoly of grand and imposing specialties. In religion all other countries are paupers; India is the only millionaire.”<sup>3</sup>



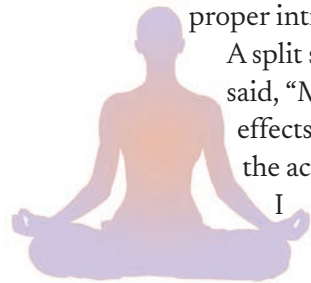
**Prof. Will Durant** (1885–1981), an American author and historian, writes that India is the mother of our spiritual and mundane realms, “That India was the motherland of our race, and Sanskrit the mother of Europe’s languages; that she was the mother of our philosophy, mother, through the Arabs, of much of our mathematics, mother, through Buddha, of the ideals embodied in Christianity, mother, through the village community, of self-government and democracy. Mother India is in many ways the Mother of us all.”<sup>4</sup>



**Romain Rolland** (1866–1944), a French author, writes highly of India, “If there is one place on the face of the earth where all the dreams of living men have found a home from the very earliest days when man began the dream of existence, it is India.”<sup>5</sup>

## PAUSE

Pause or self-reflection plays a crucial and guiding role in assessing one’s actions and work. Without proper introspection one can never fully understand one’s successes and failures.



A split second pause in the midst of action was the secret of Bruce Lee’s success. He said, “Many martial artists attack with the force of a storm without observing the effects of their attack on their opponents. When I attack I always try to pause, stop the action, to study my opponent and his reactions before going into action again.

I include pause and silence along with activity, thus allowing myself time to sense my own internal processes as well as my opponent’s.”

The Japanese have moon-viewing parties at which no conversation is allowed. They merely sit in the elegant surroundings and watch the moon rise, and nurture their appreciative abilities.

## TO LISTEN OR TALK?

God gave us two ears but only one mouth. Some people say that’s because he wanted us to spend twice as much time listening as talking.

Others claim it’s because he knew listening was twice as hard as talking. ◆

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# UK Prime Minister Visits Swaminarayan Akshardham

10 September 2023, New Delhi



The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, accompanied by his wife Akshata Murthy, visited BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, during his official trip to the city for the G20 summit.

The prime minister and his convoy arrived at 6.45 a.m. They were warmly welcomed in a traditional Hindu manner. Prime Minister Sunak was then greeted by swamis, as well as senior leaders from Akshardham, who conveyed a special message on behalf of Mahant Swami Maharaj, “In the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, we pray for you and all the attendees: May the summit be a resounding success in collectively helping the whole world towards peace, righteous prosperity, and global harmony.”

Inside the main mandir, Mr Sunak and his wife paid respects to the sacred images and admired the art and architecture. The couple also performed *abhishek* on the *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni Maharaj, and offered prayers for world peace, progress and harmony.

Sharing his impressions of his visit, the prime minister said, “My wife and I were delighted to visit Swaminarayan Akshardham for darshan and puja this morning.

“We were amazed and awed by the beauty of this temple and its universal message of peace, harmony, and becoming a better human being. This is not only a place of worship, but a landmark that also portrays India’s values, culture and contributions to the world.

“We see today in Britain these very same values and culture through the positive contributions the British Indian community makes to our country.

“I was honoured to have received the blessings of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj conveyed to me this morning, and I understand that His Holiness is inaugurating another beautiful Swaminarayan Akshardham temple in Robbinsville, USA, very soon. I would like to send my very best wishes to His Holiness and all the devotees of BAPS ahead of the opening.”

Brahmavihari Swami added, “The UK’s relationship with India is built on a bond of friendship and fostered by cultural exchanges as well as a vibrant Indian diaspora in the UK. We were delighted to strengthen this relationship through this visit.”

Despite the inclement weather conditions, the prime minister dedicated almost one hour for darshan and prayer at the temple. ♦



## INDIA

### ANNUAL BAL-BALIKA KARYAKAR SHIBIRS

10 June to 9 July 2023



Over 14,300 children's activities volunteers attended the Annual Regional Bal-Balika Karyakar Shibirs held at various BAPS mandirs throughout India.

A total of 22 *shibirs* were held, based on the theme 'Be A Perfect Karyakar'. These one-day *shibirs* guided the volunteers on three main topics: Who can be called a perfect *karyakar*? Why should one strive to become a perfect *karyakar*? What are the duties of a perfect *karyakar*?

Through various educational and entertaining presentations, including, skits, workshops, videos, thematic games and speeches by experienced swamis, the volunteers were guided on how to serve to the best of their ability.

### GOVERNOR OF GUJARAT ATTENDS NATURAL FARMING CONFERENCE

14 July 2023, Sarangpur

The Natural Farming Conference, attended by over 500 local farmers, and 450 BAPS swamis and youths, took place in the esteemed presence



of Shri Acharya Devvratji, Honourable Governor of Gujarat, along with Pujya Viveksagardas Swami, Jnaneshwardas Swami and other dignitaries.

The event aimed to encourage sustainable agricultural practices among farmers in Gujarat.

In his address to the conference, Shri Acharya Devvratji, said, "The inherent well-being of our nation's people lies in adopting a natural agricultural system. If every farmer becomes conscious of this fact, Gujarat as a whole can serve as a role model for the world in the realm of natural agriculture."

Thereafter, Jnaneshwardas Swami read Mahant Swami Maharaj's heartfelt letter of blessings, written from America, applauding the convention's goals and underscoring the significance of natural agriculture.

During his visit, the governor inaugurated the state's first 'Mahantam Prakrutik Krushi Sanshodhan Kendra' (Mahantam Natural Farming Research Centre), at Yagnapurush Farm, Sarangpur, which will conduct research on crop cultivation methods under the guidance of the Gujarat Natural Farming and Organic Agricultural University. In addition, the governor also inaugurated a 10,000-litre Jeevamrut plant



at Yagnapurush Farm in Sarangpur. This plant, constructed by BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, will produce natural fertilizer, and serve as a platform for promoting and implementing natural farming techniques. The governor also visited the Yagnapurush Gaushala, where he expressed his appreciation for the use of drip irrigation systems and the rearing of indigenous cow breeds.

After the conference, Honourable Governor Shri Acharya Devvratji also visited the BAPS Sant Training Centre established by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur.

Before departing, the governor congratulated the swamis and other individuals involved in the management of the agricultural research centre for their remarkable efforts in promoting natural farming.

## US CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATIONS VISIT SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

15 & 17 August 2023, New Delhi



On 15 August, Congressman Ro Khanna, Congressman Michael Waltz, Congresswoman Deborah Ross, Congresswoman Kat Cammack, co-chairs of the bipartisan Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. And on 17 August, US Congressmen Ed Case and Rich McCormick and their delegation visited.

The delegates were traditionally welcomed on their arrival. Then they paid their respects at the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir and

admired its art and architecture. They gained insights into the significance of the temple's design elements and spiritual philosophy. The cultural boat ride depicting thousands of years of Indian history also left a lasting impression of India's rich heritage.

The delegates also performed *abhishek* to pray for world peace and harmony.

The visits helped the delegations to gain profound insights into the spiritual, artistic, and historical significance of India that Akshardham embodies.

Congressman Ro Khanna expressed his gratitude, "We are honoured to have been graciously welcomed by the Akshardham community. This visit has strengthened our nations' friendship bonds and highlighted the significance of cultural exchange."

Congressman Michael Waltz remarked, "Our visit to Swaminarayan Akshardham has been an incredible experience that deepened our understanding of India's cultural and spiritual roots. The warm reception and the opportunity to partake in sacred rituals have left a lasting impression on our delegation."

Congressman Ed Case stated, "Exploring Akshardham has been a captivating journey. Its architecture and cultural representations provide an insightful window into India's rich heritage that is truly inspiring."

Congressman Rich McCormick said, "The visit exemplified the transformative power of cultural exchange in fostering mutual understanding and appreciation. Akshardham stands as a compelling testament to India's cultural richness."

## GURU PUJAN

26 August 2023, Sarangpur

On 26 August 2023 (Shravan *sud* 10), swamis and devotees commemorated the seventh anniversary of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's earthly departure to Akshardham by performing a short *guru-pujan* ceremony in the newly consecrated



Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir. Jnaneshwar Swami, Aksharcharan Swami, and other swamis and devotees participated in the rituals. Thousands of devotees also joined from their homes through the live webcast. After the Vedic rituals, a *maha-arti* was performed at 6 p.m., the time when Swamishri went to Dham on 13 August 2016.

In the assembly that followed, swamis spoke about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's eternally elevated spiritual state, his love and affection for all the swamis and devotees and the elevated spiritual state that was achieved by swamis and devotees through their association with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

At the end, Jnaneshwar Swami spoke on how Swamishri is forever present through Mahant Swami Maharaj and that the truest tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj is to wholeheartedly serve Mahant Swami Maharaj.

## NORTH AMERICA

### HINDU HRIDAY MILAN ASSEMBLIES

10 June to 10 September 2023

BAPS mandirs throughout North America celebrated the 2023 Unity Forum and Hindu Hriday Milan assemblies. Each occasion was more than just a gathering; it was a significant step towards promoting unity, harmony, and peace among community leaders and the broader Hindu community in the region. The Unity Forum's inaugural event took place in 2022. During this year's events, Hindu mandir leaders and

representatives of Indian organizations convened, focusing on deepening their connections and mutual respect.

These gatherings were inspired by Mahant Swami Maharaj's profound words, "The circle of global harmony will continue to grow." Both the Unity Forums and the Hindu Hriday Milan assemblies provided a platform for local community leaders to cultivate communities rooted in universal values such as peace, unity and selfless service.

Leading the forums and assemblies across the country were BAPS sadhus, including Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami, Munivatsaldas Swami and Amrutcharitdas Swami. The swamis engaged in purposeful dialogues with mandir boards, community leaders, and local authorities, fostering collective strategies to address challenges and ensure the preservation of diversity and harmony. In addition, Jnanvatsaldas Swami and Yogipremdas Swami shared invaluable insights at the Hindu Hriday Milan assemblies. They emphasized the significance of mandirs, shastras, and the role of a *sant* in guiding individuals closer to Bhagwan, further underscoring the importance of community harmony through unity.

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CONFERENCE

13 August 2023, BAPS Mandir, Edison, NJ

As part of the Festival of Inspirations, undergraduate and graduate students hailing from around the globe attended the International





Students Conference that aimed to teach students how to think differently, be different, and succeed differently during their academic lives.

Addressing the assembly, Jnanvatsaldas Swami shared invaluable insights on achieving success in personal, academic, and spiritual life. He emphasized the paramount importance of a strong value system that one must remain anchored to for true success. He concluded that when one thinks differently, one inherently becomes different and, as a result, succeeds differently. He encouraged the attendees to stay rooted in their spiritual and cultural fundamentals and maintain unwavering faith in Bhagwan to pave the way for lasting happiness.

### SANSKRIT SHASTRAS PRESENTED TO THE CALIFORNIA STATE ASSEMBLY AND LIBRARY

24 August 2023, Sacramento, CA, USA



The California State Assembly welcomed Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadrashdas Swami as

a special guest in recognition of his academic achievements as a distinguished scholar in Hindu philosophy, beliefs, and culture.

The event was hosted by California State Senator Dave Cortese, along with California State Assembly members Alex Lee and Ash Kalra.

Later in the day, the Swaminarayan Bhashyam and the Satsang Diksha shastra were presented to senior representatives of the California State Library, who were delighted to receive these shastras for their collection.

Thereafter, Bhadrashdas Swami explained how the values of diversity, equity, and inclusiveness are essential today to the strength of the United States, and are also the foundational values of Hinduism. At the end, he prayed for everyone's peace, prosperity and progress, and shared the message of Mahant Swami Maharaj: "In the spirit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* – the entire world is one family – let's reach out to extend the circle of global harmony."

## UK & EUROPE

### BAPS DELEGATION MEETS PM OF INDIA

13 July 2023, Paris, France



BAPS representatives met the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, in Paris. They updated the prime minister on the progress of the new BAPS mandir being constructed in Paris. This included a presentation of a 3D model of the mandir, construction plans and architectural drawings of the complex, which will become mainland Europe's first traditional purpose-built

mandir and will promote culture, integrity, and harmony.

The representatives also explained to the prime minister how the mandir complex will serve the needs of current and future generations, and that it will stand as a beacon of inspiration, service and harmony to people of all faiths and backgrounds within the Indo-French community and beyond.

## AFRICA

### KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIRS

30 June to 20 August 2023, Africa



Over 1,115 *kishores* and *kishoris* attended the Kishore-Kishori National Conventions held at four major BAPS centres in Africa: Nairobi, Kenya; Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania; Mayfair, South Africa; and Kampala, Uganda.

Themed ‘Kah Pantha? Path of Happiness’, the conventions delved into the profound concept that faith in God constitutes the genuine path to lasting happiness, transcending the fleeting allure of materialistic pursuits.

During the conventions, attendees were guided through introspective sessions and workshops that explored how remembrance (*smruti*), prayer (*prarthana*), and observance of God’s commands (*agna*) increase one’s faith in God, ultimately leading to eternal happiness. Based on true examples and practical tips, the delegates were inspired to undertake daily devotional activities to strengthen their own faith in God and guru: *arti*, *nitya puja*, *mansi puja*,

satsang reading, *cheshta*, and being honest with the guru.

The conventions also addressed the pitfalls on the path to happiness. Engaging discussions dissected the impact of screens, social media, and the internet on personal well-being and spiritual growth, urging attendees to recalibrate their relationship with these digital interfaces.

The conventions answered the question, ‘Kah Pantha?’ (Which Path?): ‘Mahajano yena gatah sa pantha’ – Follow the path taken by the great. The resounding message was clear to all attendees: while temporary pleasures may captivate one momentarily, it is faith in God that paves an enduring road to genuine and lasting happiness. The conventions illuminated the minds of the teenagers with the wisdom that can lead them toward a fulfilled and spiritually enriching life.

### PM NARENDRA MODI MEETS BAPS DELEGATION DURING BRICS SUMMIT

22 August 2023, Johannesburg, South Africa



During his trip to South Africa for the annual BRICS Summit, Hon. Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, met the BAPS delegation led by Swami Brahmaviharidas. The delegation presented a 3D model, renditions, photographs and progress updates of the upcoming BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir and Cultural Complex in Johannesburg.

The prime minister appreciated the preservation of Indian culture and values by



BAPS devotees over many generations and the mandir's potential to further strengthen India-South Africa relations.

Following the meeting, BAPS delegates shared the project details and the mandir's role in community-building with summit attendees, who expressed great admiration for this one of its kind project in Africa.

## ASIA PACIFIC

### BAL-BALIKA SHIBIRS

10 June–16 July 2023, Australia & New Zealand



More than 1,100 *balaks* and *balikas* from 12 major centres in Australia and New Zealand attended the one-day Bal-Balika Shibirs based on the theme 'Pacific Rangvu Chhe – Akshar-Purushottam ni Bhakti thi Rangvu Chhe'.

Each *shibir* taught three cardinal aspects to the children. First, the glory of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj based on an understanding of the profound philosophy of BAPS. Second, *ahnik* – daily devotional rituals that anchor their daily lives at home and elsewhere. Third, their identities as young Hindus.

The three sessions clarified the children's understanding of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, and guided them on how to perform the bhakti of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj at the mandir and at home. Through presentations by swamis, skits, activities and hands-on breakout sessions, the children joyfully learned about the importance of offering bhakti in its true form.

## PROMOTING BAL SANSKARS

1–31 July 2023, Australia & New Zealand

His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj often said that children are the future of the world and should be raised to have values that enrich them and society. With this objective, over 2,500 parents and children took part in the special assemblies promoting *bal sanskars* held at homes



in BAPS centres across Australia and New Zealand during July 2023.

Using material provided by the national team, devotees conducted the assemblies at their homes, inviting up to three families to participate. Through videos, group discussions, interactive activities and Mahant Swami Maharaj's blessings, the assemblies guided children on respecting their parents and parents on their duties towards their children.

Parents pledged to spend more quality time with their children in order to strengthen the parent-child bond. Additionally, parents were inspired to enrol their children in various BAPS *bal-balika* activities to further the development of their children's character and values.

## THE BKYS KARYAKAR CONVENTION

6–9 July 2023, Adelaide, Australia

Over 600 devoted Bal-Balika, Kishore-Kishori, Yuvak-Yuvati, and Sanyukta Mandal *karyakars* from 32 centres across Australia and New Zealand attended the BKYS Karyakar Convention 2023 held in Adelaide on the theme 'Nishtha, Niyams, Namrata'.



In Toronto, on 14 June, Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurated the convention by lighting the lamp, sanctifying various mementos and offering his divine blessings for the success of the convention.

Through enlightening speeches by swamis, personal anecdotes shared by the *karyakars*, captivating screenplays, and thoughtful group discussions, the virtues of *nishtha*, *niyams* and *namrata* were explored in depth.

The convention encouraged deep self-reflection, challenging any preconceived notions and providing practical resolutions, thus empowering the delegates to take responsibility for cultivating and nurturing these virtues in themselves.

The BKYS Karyakar Convention 2023 helped to instil a deep sense of purpose and devotion in all who participated.

## BSRI CONFERENCES

9 July to 20 August 2023, Australia



BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute (BSRI) in Australia organized special conferences titled

‘Timeless Wisdom from Hindu Scriptures’ in Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

Over 279 religious leaders, representatives and scholars from 124 Hindu organizations, cultural groups and media united to reinforce the significance of Hindu shastras, their relevance today and the importance of relaying this spiritual legacy to future generations. The conferences promoted understanding of the profound wisdom and cultural richness encapsulated within these sacred texts.

Each conference began with a grand *palkhi yatra* (procession) and *pujan* of the shastras. Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami gave the keynote speech via video.

Thereafter, children and youth recited Sanskrit verses from the shastras. Distinguished speakers delivered presentations on the following shastras: Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Shrimad Bhagvat Puran, Ramayan, Upanishads, Vedas, Vachanamrut and Satsang Diksha. At the end, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the conferences via video.

Mahant Swami Maharaj’s vision of making the circle of global harmony bigger was seen through these conferences and support from the community.

## BAPS CHARITIES

### NATIONWIDE BLOOD DONATION DRIVE

25 June 2023, Kenya



Over many years BAPS Charities has supported the Kenya Tissue and Transplant



Authority (KTTA) by organizing blood donation drives for the benefit of communities and hospitals throughout the country.

A total of 703 pints of blood were collected by KTTA from the following 10 BAPS Charities chapters across Kenya: Nakuru, Kisumu, Kericho, Kakamega, Mombasa, Eldoret, Kisii, Nairobi, Thika and Bomet.

## AID TO LIBERTY CHILDREN'S HOME

5 July 2023, Mlolongo, Kenya

The BAPS Charities Nairobi Chapter donated blankets, pillows, bed sheets and assorted foods and fresh vegetables to Liberty Children's Home



in Mlolongo, which is approximately 25 km from Nairobi and serves vulnerable and needy children from the nearby communities. ♦

## TRIBUTE



**PUJYA PAVITRAKIRTI SWAMI, SARANGPUR: Age: 28, Aksharvas: 17 August 2023**

Pujya Pavitrakirti Swami was a student swami at the BAPS Sant Talim Kendra in Sarangpur. After completing his *vicharan* schedule during the month of Adhik Shravan, he went with other swamis to bathe in the sacred River Narmada. Unfortunately, he slipped and was dragged away by the flowing river current. The accompanying youths rescued him out of the

river but, despite immediate treatment, could not revive him.

Pavitrakirti Swami had graduated with an MSc in Chemistry before taking *diksha* from Mahant Swami Maharaj in 2021 in Chansad. He was bright, hardworking, focused and very mature. He was regular in offer daily devotion, austere and keenly did any *seva* assigned to him. We offer our humble tributes to such a devout and diligent sadhu. ♦

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

### Yogiji Maharaj's Tales of Wisdom Children's Book Series



Book 1: *Together We Fly!* is about a family of doves who are trapped by a hunter, but through the power of unity and teamwork set themselves free.



Book 2: *Know the True You* is about a confused lion cub, raised with a herd of sheep, who discovers his true identity with the guidance of the majestic lion, Keshav.

Inspirer: HH Mahant Swami Maharaj

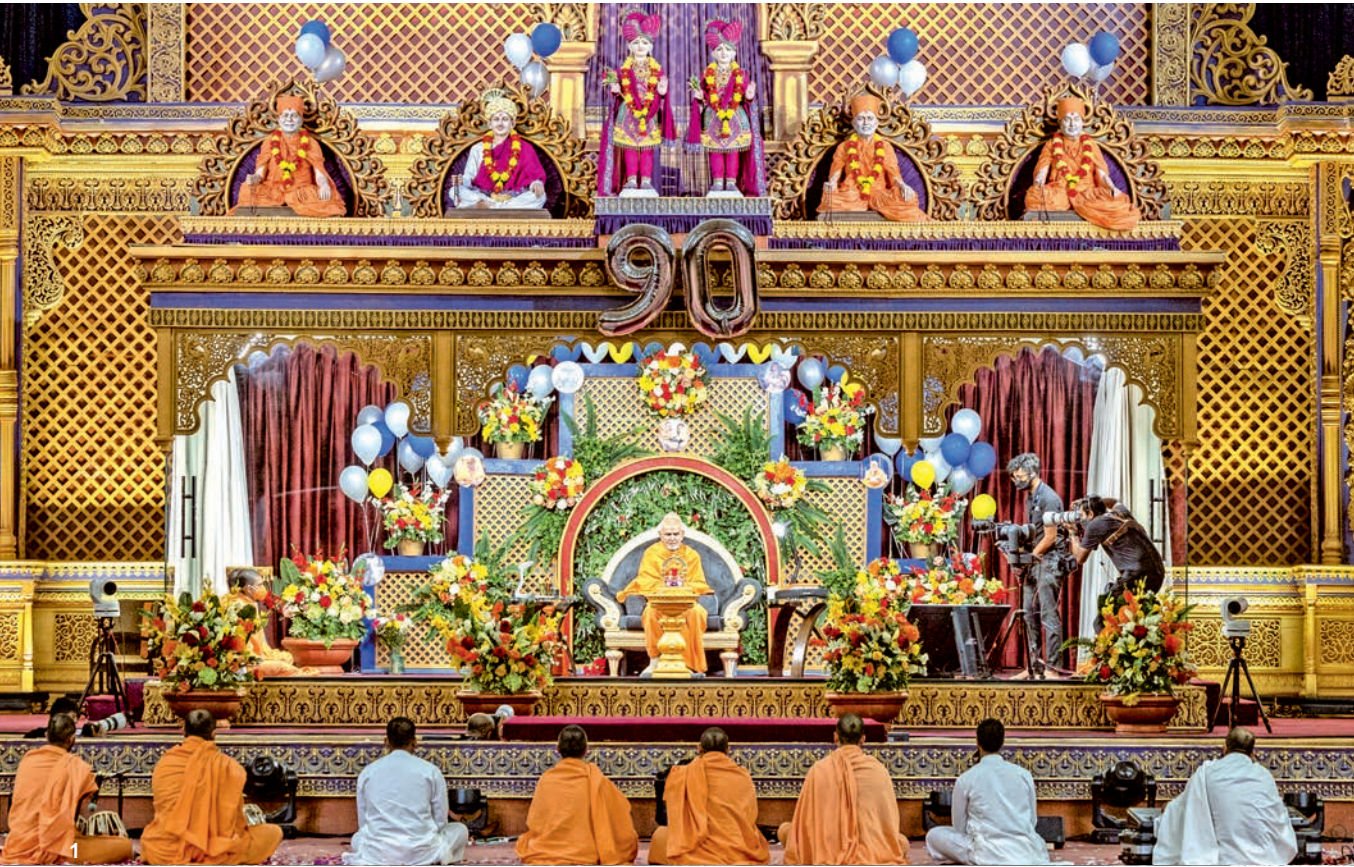
Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, Ahmedabad ♦ Available on [baps.store](http://baps.store) & at BAPS bookstores



**DHAJA DAND PUJAN CEREMONY**  
**Robbinsville, 13 September 2023**

1. Swamishri and *sadguru* swamis perform *pujan* of the flagposts to be placed on the *shikhars* of Akshardham Mahamandir. *Inset*: Swamishri performs *pujan* of the main flag.
2. Swamishri with *sadguru* swamis in front of the main 46-foot flagpost and *dhaja*.





**MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 90TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION**  
**Robbinsville, 13 September 2023**

1. Swamishri performs the *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual before Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj during the evening celebration assembly.
2. Swamishri honoured with a garland.
3. *Sadguru* swamis sing the glory of Swamishri and offer prayers to him during the celebration assembly.