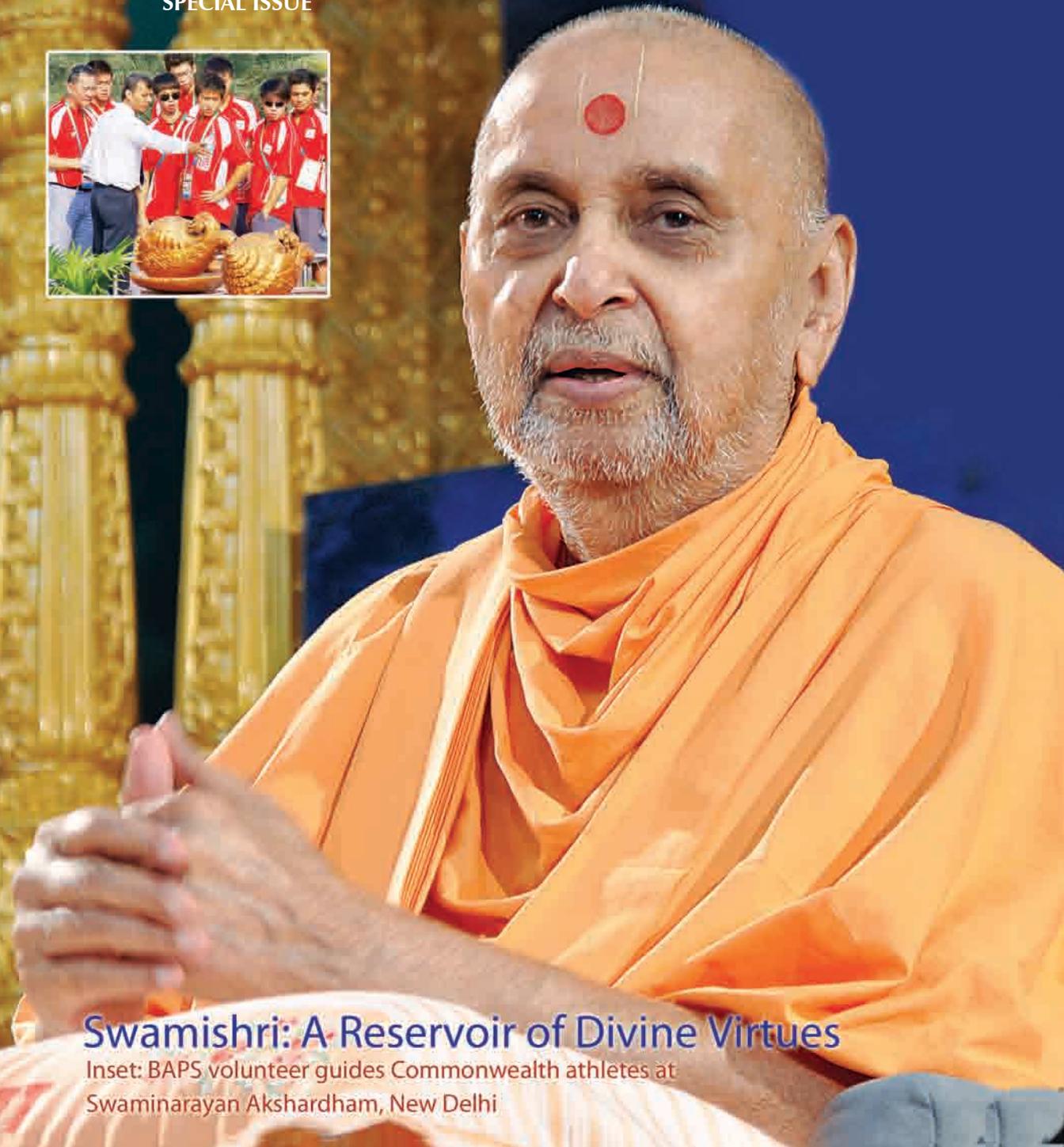


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November-December 2010

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

SPECIAL ISSUE



Swamishri: A Reservoir of Divine Virtues

Inset: BAPS volunteer guides Commonwealth athletes at
Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi

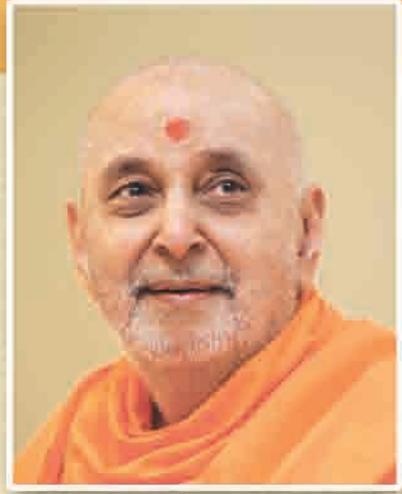


SHARAD PURNIMA CELEBRATION, GONDAL

22 October 2010

Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj blesses all on the festive celebration. Beneath the bright full moon sky of Sharad Purnima over 19,000 devotees celebrated the birthday of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami in the compound of Akshar Mandir, Gondal, in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri presided over the celebration assembly from a dais in the mandir *parikrama*. The assembly featured speeches by senior sadhus, skits, dance, video presentations and Swamishri's blessings. The traditional five *artis* were performed at intervals throughout the assembly.

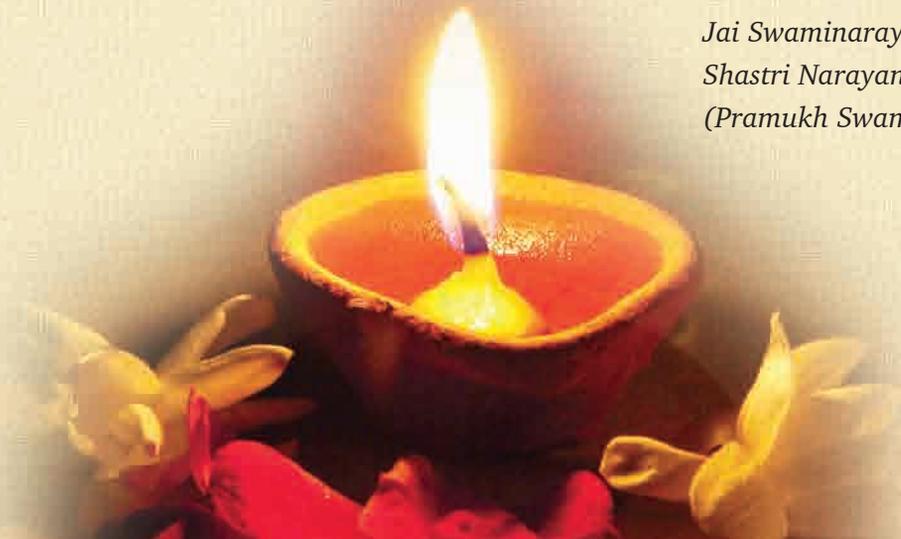
Happy Diwali and New Year



In this coming New Year may all resolve to be regular in doing satsang and ghar sabha, imparting good values to your children, focusing on God and turning away from worldly pleasures. May we introduce others to what we have attained and please God. May the New Year bring happiness to all; may the ignorance within be dispelled, may the flames of truth, compassion, ahimsa, mercy, love and wisdom be lit and may there be peace throughout the world. I offer such prayers at the Akshar Deri and to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. With blessings for the New Year.

*In our hearts we wish
on every auspicious
celebration*

*Jai Swaminarayan from
Shastri Narayanswarupdas
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)*





SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

November-December 2010, Vol. 33 No. 11-12

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Website: www.baps.org

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Cover Title: Swamishri in a satsang assembly, Bhavnagar

Photos: Sadhu Yogicharandas, Harshadbhai Vadodaria, Girish Patel (London) and BAPS volunteers (New Delhi and Sarangpur)

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Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas
Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad-380 004, India.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

	Outside India (By Air Mail)		India	
	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	Rupees
1 Year	500	6	10	60
2 Years	1000	12	20	110
3 Years	1500	18	30	160



Since its inauguration in 2005 Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, is visited by thousands of visitors and pilgrims each day. Recently, athletes of the Commonwealth Games visited Akshardham and were amazed by the ambience, architecture and messages in the exhibitions. For details see pages 12 to 39.

Celebration of Rangotsav



Shri Hari celebrated the festival of Vasant Panchmi in Gadhpur and then initiated a dialogue on guru parampara with Gopi Bhatt...

realize *brahmavidya*, he left in search of a God-realized guru.”

UDDHAVJI – THE ROOT OF THE SAMPRADAYA

“Soma Sharma’s long and arduous travels brought him to Badrikashram. Here, at the pilgrim place of Astra, he saw the divine weapons of God. From there he travelled to Meru, another sacred place, and he saw Uddhavji (the disciple of Bhagwan Krishna) and Shukdevji. He sought the refuge of Uddhavji and requested him to teach him *brahmavidya*. Uddhavji imparted to him the essence of Bhagvat Dharma which comprises of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti. To spread that Dharma he gave him the *bhagvati diksha* and named him Atmanand Swami.

“Atmanand Swami’s disciple was Govindmuni and he was succeeded by Anandmuni, who was also a spiritually realized soul. The disciple of Anandmuni was Gopalmuni, and his disciple was Atmanand Swami. Finally, my father, Atmanand Swami, had a disciple called Ramanand Swami, whom you accepted as your guru.¹

1. Details of the guru *parampara* are found in the *Haricharitamrut*, Vol.2, Tarang 12-13 and in *Shrijina Prasadina Patro*, p.27. Shri Hari had narrated the details of the guru *parampara* and had it scribed. That letter was with Narbheram Manekji Dave of Umreth, a disciple of Shri Hari. Today, his descendants have the letter. In it Shri Hari says, “In 1802 (S.1858 Kartak *sud* 11) Ramanand Swami initiated me as his disciple. The guru of my guru, Ramanand Swami, was Atmanand Swami, and his guru was Gopalanand Swami and his guru was Anandanand Swami and his guru was Atmanand Swami, and the latter had the darshan of Uddhavji in Badrikashram in 1429 (S. 1485, Jeth *sud* 11). He thereafter became the disciple of Uddhavji.”

Shri Hari addressed the assembly, “If the root of a *sampradaya* is eternal only then will it sustain itself and endure. So it is necessary to know the root of our Sampradaya. Gopi Bhatt is the son of Atmanand Swami. Since he learnt the history of our Sampradaya from Atmanand Swami, today he will reveal our guru *parampara*.”

Gopi Bhatt humbly declared before Shri Hari, “Maharaj, you are God incarnate, therefore you know everything.”

“In spite of that, say all that you know so that others may know too,” Maharaj instructed. Then Gopi Bhatt began, “I will describe what Atmanand Swami told me. Whatever I declare before you today is unknown to anyone else.” And he thus narrated, “A pious Brahmin lived in the village of Vishnupuri in South India. His name was Krishna Sharma. He had a son named Soma Sharma. The boy went to Nashik to study religious texts. There he met Nilkanth Shastri, who was a great pandit of the Vedas and a person of sterling character. He studied the shastras under him. Thereafter, to

Shri Hari was pleased with Gopi Bhatt's revelation. Then Gopi Bhatt added, "The guru *parampara* of Ramanand Swami starts from Uddhavji. Thus the Sampradaya has to be called the Uddhava Sampradaya." Shri Hari pleased Gopi Bhatt by donating to him clothes, jewellery and a horse.

Shriji Maharaj called Shukmuni Swami and said, "Write a letter to all our *paramhansas* that with the advent of the British administration times have changed for the better. So now the *paramhansas* should again keep a tuft on the back of their head, wear a sacred thread and a *tilak* in accordance with the Vaishnav tradition." Shukmuni sent letters to all the touring *paramhansas*. After twelve years Shriji Maharaj put an end to the chapter in which he had instructed the *paramhansas* in 1807 (S. 1863) to give up their tuft, sacred thread and *tilak*. He had done this to save them from being recognized as Swaminarayan sadhus, and thus from the persecution of *bawas* and *vairagis*.

CELEBRATION OF RANGOTSAV

With the offering of the *rangotsav*, the festival of colours, Shri Hari invited his *paramhansas* and devotees to come to Gadhpur. Daily, Maharaj would attend the *mangala arti* of Vasudev Narayan at Dada Khachar's *darbar*. Thereafter the sadhus would sing bhajans to please Shriji Maharaj. Shri Hari loved listening to kirtans and he would sometimes snap his thumb and middle finger to the beat of the singing or clap his hands and sing along.

The full moon day of 1820 CE (A.S. 1876) dawned. Devotees from different villages, far and wide, came in hordes to Gadhada. They worshipped Shri Hari by doing puja and offering him garlands of sugar crystals. Maharaj had put on orange clothes and gave darshan till 12 midnight. The next day, on *rangotsav*, Maharaj sprayed coloured water and sprinkled kumkum powder on the sadhus and devotees. Sadhus, too, sprayed coloured water on Shriji Maharaj.

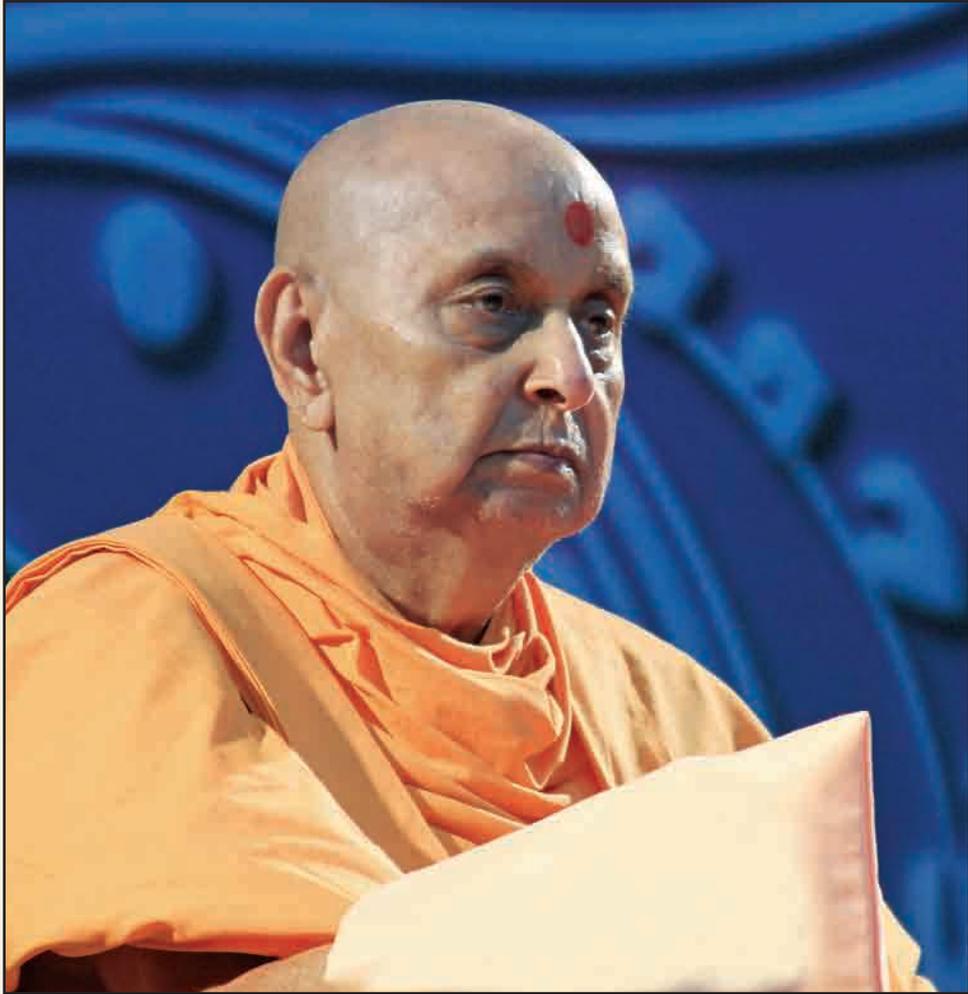
Premanand Swami sang bhajans. Then everyone proceeded with Maharaj towards the village bazaar and into the *darbar* of Jiva Khachar. Here again Maharaj sprinkled vermillion and coloured water. Everyone was soaked in red and orange colours, rejoicing with the feeling of having God's divine blessings and his proximity. The entire following came to river Unmat-Ganga (river Ghela) and bathed in its cool waters. Shri Hari was then about to proceed towards Dada's *darbar* when Gopi Bhatt arrived. He performed puja of Shri Hari and asked for his blessings on his 100th birthday. Gopi Bhatt was still healthy, having good eyesight and strong teeth. Maharaj gave him seven rupees in donation and clothes as a gift.

On reaching Dada's *darbar*, Maharaj took lunch and then served food to the sadhus. In the evening, an assembly was called. Shri Hari discoursed about how worldly desires pose obstacles for a devotee endeavouring on the path of spirituality. Muktanand Swami asked about how one could eradicate one's material desires. Maharaj replied, "One who has three things can overcome mundane desires: understanding of God's glory, realization of oneself as *atma* and an aversion for worldly pleasures." Then Maharaj elaborated further by explaining that such a pure state can be attained from an association with one who is free from all material desires and has imbibed *ekantik* dharma. So, through the *Ekantik* Satpurush one can internalize *ekantik* dharma.

With the exception of Gopalanand Swami, Muktanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and other senior sadhus Shri Hari told the rest of the sadhus to leave for satsang tours in the villages, and the devotees to return home. ◆

(Contd. next issue)
From Gujarati text of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan
by H.T. Dave

Goldmine of Virtues



The guru is the gateway to God. Every moment of his life reflects a message that can mould a true spiritual aspirant from an imperfect human being to the state of spiritual perfection. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life is a goldmine of godly virtues. It is his continuous focus on Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his gurus that makes him the perfect vessel for such spiritual virtues.

As Swamishri completes his 89th year on 13 December 2010, we reverently pay tribute to his many noble qualities that have inspired, enlightened, pacified and purified countless over the years. We offer our heartfelt prayers at the holy feet of Parabrahman Paramatma Bhagwan Swaminarayan that may Pramukh Swami Maharaj continue to grace this world and guide our lives for many, many years to come...

HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

Swamishri's truthfulness is highlighted by his transparency and straightforwardness. Once in Bochasan, he had told the sadhus seated in front of him. "If there is one thing I dislike, it is deceit and manipulation."

Thousands of local devotees and people flock to get a glimpse of Swamishri when he is in a particular city or town. Hundreds also line up to meet him and receive his blessings everyday. After one such exhausting day, Janmangal Swami decided to amuse Swamishri. He said, "Didn't you get tired of blessing five thousand devotees? Putting your hand on each one is a physically straining task. You should consider fabricating a wooden hand, attaching it to a motor and blessing every devotee that comes to meet you with it! The devotees won't be able to tell that it's automatically powered..."

Swamishri interrupted, "Why would you want to deceive them? I don't keep fake things. I only stock real things."

Though the incident seems trivial, it highlights Swamishri's honesty and transparency.

Only one who has nothing to hide can afford to be completely transparent. Swamishri's life is like an open book. Every moment is lived in someone's presence. Eating, sleeping, reading, writing, during the day and even at night, there is not a single moment when he is alone. There is no need for it either.

Swamishri was attending a meeting in Gondal. As the meeting continued, Swamishri kept on scribbling a few important dates on a small notepad. Vishwavahari Swami noticed and asked Swamishri, "What are you writing in that private diary?"

Swamishri replied, "My whole life is open to the public. There are no secrets. If you have secrets, you always fear them being revealed. I live my life openly with God as my witness."

Truth is eternal and unchanging.

ALWAYS THINKING OF GOD

In 1993 Swamishri was in Kolkata. Unexpectedly, he started having dizzy spells. He was immediately brought to Mumbai for a medical checkup to rule out the possibility of any serious illness which would require urgent treatment. The neurosurgeons recommended that an EEG and a BERA scan be performed.

During the BERA test Swamishri was told to lie face-up on the examination table. An array of sensors and wires were attached to Swamishri's head and around his ears. After 15 minutes of trying the technician told the attendant sadhu, "I am not satisfied with the readings. Please request Swamishri to relax and calm his mind."

The attendant explained the instructions to Swamishri. The second attempt yielded the same results. The technician again asked Swamishri to remain calm and free of thought.

Then he tried for a third time. Yet again, the readings were not satisfactory.

Swamishri then returned to the mandir after the incomplete test. As Swamishri was going to bed that night, the attendant sadhu explained that the physician had called and said he needed to do that test again.

Swamishri immediately refused.

The attendant sadhu explained the importance and urgency of the tests to diagnose the illness.

Swamishri again refused, "It doesn't matter how important it is. I am not taking that test again."

The attendant was astonished as to why Swamishri was being so firm. He tried to request one more time.

This time Swamishri raised his voice a little and said, "I was calm the whole time. I was imagining myself sitting in the Akshar Deri in Gondal, meditating on Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Is that not serene and calm enough?"

Swamishri can never be free from this thought, since Bhagwan Swaminarayan is forever etched in his mind.

PURITY OF CHARACTER

Once in Atladra, Swamishri walked by a few youths who were cleaning the filters of an old air-conditioning unit. He stopped and said to them, "The filters of this A.C. unit became filled with dirt so it had to be removed for cleaning. Similarly, when life becomes spoilt by bad habits it is degraded. So you have to inspect your character for impurities and cleanse it."

Swamishri has transformed the lives of thousands of people around the world and they are a testimony to his contributions in purifying society.

A tribal devotee from the village of Uber described his first darshan of Swamishri, which changed his life, "I first had your darshan in Atladra. I didn't think it was ever going to happen, but it did. It was like a miracle. With your blessings, my entire family has stopped eating meat, smoking and drinking. We have been able to bring our tempers under control. It has been eight months now and I can say that we feel 100 percent purified! My adulterous behaviour has also gone. I feel privileged to have received your blessings."

On 18 July 1996, a youth came to meet Swamishri in Dallas, Texas. In 1994, he had promised Swamishri that he would quit drinking and eating meat. He fell at Swamishri's feet and described his success, "Swami, though it seemed impossible, your blessings made my wife's dream a reality. I have given up eating meat and all other addictions. In fact, I don't even get angry any more. I never thought it would be possible, but you made it happen."

Only one who is clean, pure and spotless can transform the lives of others. Thousands of individuals have developed inner purity through Swamishri's blessings and many more are in the process of achieving it.

PERVASIVE PEACE

R.K. Laxman is the renowned cartoonist of *The Times of India*. He has been featured on the cover of *Reader's Digest* and hailed as India's, if not Asia's, greatest political cartoonist. He is a close friend of former Indian President, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. After the opening of Akshardham in New Delhi in November 2005, the President repeatedly suggested that he visit the newly opened complex. R.K. Laxman visited Swaminarayan Akshardham for two days and at the end came to meet Swamishri. He was mesmerized by Swamishri's darshan, commenting, "The president flew me in from Mumbai. He asked me to stay with him at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. He urged me to visit this complex. If I hadn't accepted his invitation, I would have missed out on the chance of a lifetime. I don't have words to describe it. I will never forget this experience."

There was silence in the room as Laxman stopped abruptly. He was lost for words. His lips were moving as if trying to say something, but his eyes were still, focused on Swamishri. Tears trickled from the corner of his eyes, reflecting the deep emotional impact Swamishri's presence had made on him in that brief meeting. Everyone was amazed to see the nation's boldest critic in tears! After a few minutes he managed to repeat three words, "Nothing to say. Nothing to say."

Leaving the room after having Swamishri's darshan, he said, "It feels like I was swept in a whirlwind of peace and stability."

The experience changed R.K. Laxman, and his wife was the first to notice, "I have never seen my husband so amazed, so touched. It is a miracle."

SHARP MEMORY

Most people are simply amazed when Swamishri remembers such minor details about thousands of his devotees. It reflects the deep



'When life becomes spoilt by bad habits it is degraded. So you have to inspect your character for impurities and cleanse it.'

bonds of affection and care which Swamishri has for devotees of all ages and backgrounds.

On 13 September 1993, Swamishri was returning to his room on the 5th floor at Dadar mandir in Mumbai after his walking session. Viveksagar Swami was waiting by the elevator with a devotee. Swamishri recognized him from a distance.

“Ahh Narendra! When did you get here?”

Swamishri hadn't seen Narendrabhai for over 50 years!

“We had held a *parayan* in Karachi decades ago. You were barely a toddler. You are Jivrajani's son. Swami [Shastriji Maharaj] used to travel in your father's car.”

On 28 December 1994, Kanubhai Amin from Mumbai had come to Ahmedabad for Swamishri's darshan. He had brought a relative who was visiting from America. Swamishri interrupted as he was starting to introduce his relative, “I know him quite well. Your father is Ramesh, his father was Bhailalbai, his father was Chaturbhai and his father was Shyamalbai. Chaturbhai had five sons – Somabhai, Hirabhai, Hathibhai, Chunibhai and Chhotabhai. Hirabhai had three sons. Somabhai had two and you have two other brothers...”

On his overseas *vicharan* tour in 2004, Swamishri was in London and a few youths were introducing themselves.

One said, “My name is Haresh and I am from Shrijipura.”

Swamishri asked him his father's name. He replied, “Ramji Chhagan.”

Swamishri had visited every single home in Shrijipura many times. He knew all the devotees and their families. He started telling the sadhus, “They were originally from Ugamedi. Shastriji Maharaj had brought them to Shrijipura to take care of the Sanstha's property. His father's name is Ramji, whose brother's name is Dayal. They were

the two sons of Chhaganbhai. Chhagan had three other brothers – Trikam, Narayan and Talshi. Haresh's brother is a sadhu in Sarangpur. They are related to Manilal from Surat.”

Haresh stood still with the microphone in his hand. He was at a loss for words. Swamishri knew more about his family than he did!

GOD IS THE SOURCE

Former Professor of Religion and Dean at Wabash College, Dr Raymond Williams, asked Swamishri a few questions:

“Technically, you have no experience when it comes to living a social life. You are a sadhu. How are you able to guide your devotees in that aspect of their lives?”

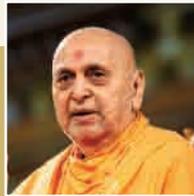
“God gives me the answers. God has experienced everything.”

“Do you ever hesitate before answering or after answering? Have there been times when you wish you had answered differently?”

“No, I have never felt it that way.”

“For example, what if one of your devotees asks you about buying a small business. You tell him to buy it, and it fails miserably. He loses everything. Don't you feel like you made a mistake? Don't you feel like you should have told him not to buy it?”

“No, of course not. God gives me the answers. God knows your past, present and future. He does everything for a reason. Some good will always come of it.”



*'God knows your past,
present and future.
He does everything
for a reason. Some good
will always come of it.'*

Swamishri firmly believes that God is at the core of all his decisions and reasoning,

God is the source of his energy.

God is the source of his skill and proficiency,

God is the reason behind his accomplishments.

That is why Swamishri is relaxed, at ease and in a state of constant stability.





The Commonwealth Games

A Brief Introduction

3 to 14 October 2010, New Delhi

The Commonwealth Games is an international multi-sport event which takes place every four years. It is the most visible face of the Commonwealth of Nations, which comprises 54 independent member states, which (except two) were formerly part of the British Empire. Some of the members comprise of multiple nations and territories, e.g., United Kingdom includes England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Hence the competitors represent teams from 71 nations and territories of the Commonwealth.

The Games began in 1930 and were initially called the British Empire Games. From 1954 they were titled the British Empire and Commonwealth Games. Then in 1970 they were renamed as the British Commonwealth Games. Since 1978

they have been known as the Commonwealth Games.

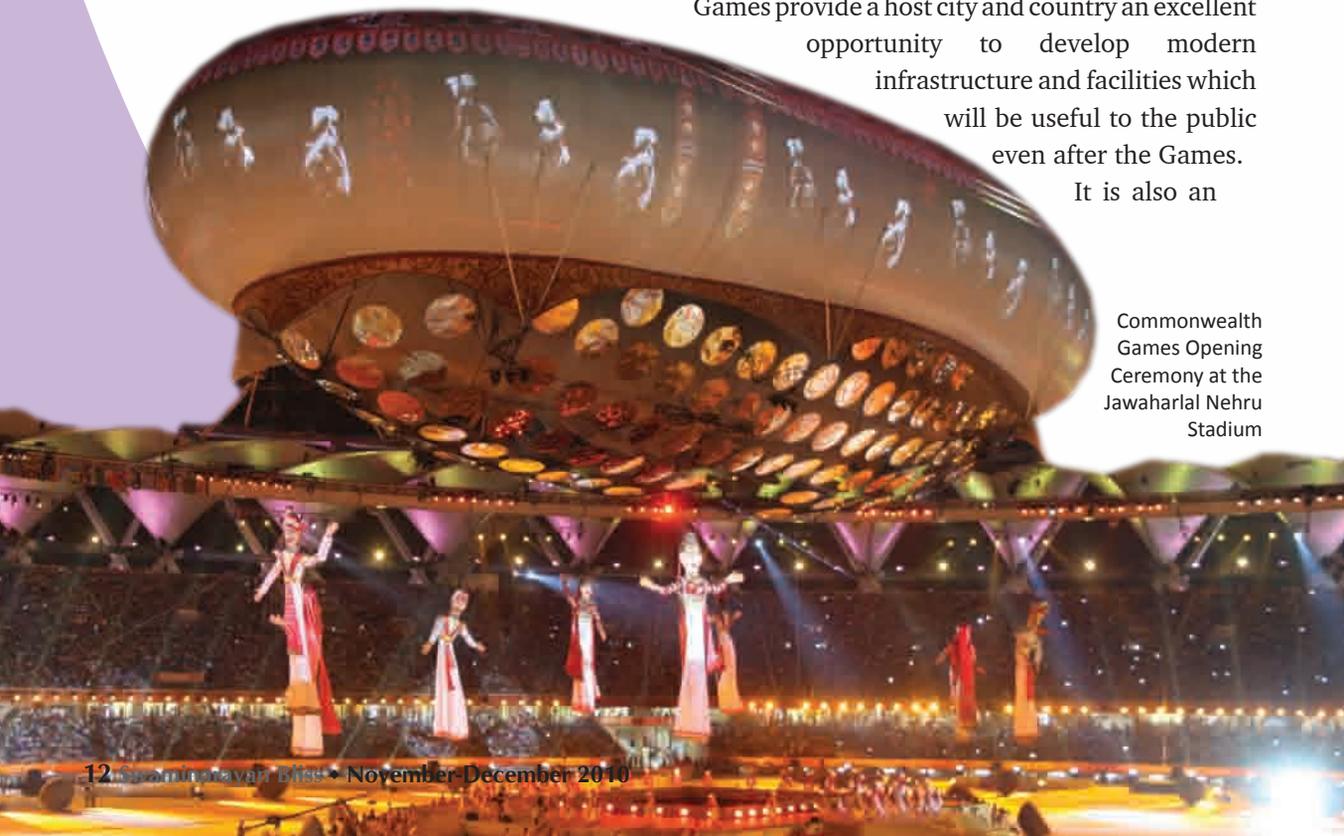
The host city is decided seven years prior to the date of the Games and is selected from the various bids submitted to host a particular Games. Including the just concluded 2010 Games, they have been held in Australia (4 times), Canada (4), England (2), India (1), Jamaica (1), Malaysia (1), New Zealand (4), Scotland (2) and Wales (1).

The hosts are required to arrange competitions for the following core sports: Athletics, Badminton, Boxing, Hockey, Lawn Bowls, Netball, Rugby Sevens, Squash, Swimming and Weightlifting. Also, additional sports are chosen from the list approved by the Commonwealth Games Federation.

Although primarily a sporting event, the Games provide a host city and country an excellent opportunity to develop modern infrastructure and facilities which will be useful to the public even after the Games.

It is also an

Commonwealth Games Opening Ceremony at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium





Athletes stroll through the Games Village, New Delhi

occasion to showcase the culture and traditions of the country hosting the Games, thus helping to develop better understanding, harmony and friendship between participating athletes and countries.

DELHI 2010

The 2010 Commonwealth Games, officially titled XIX Commonwealth Games, were held in New Delhi, the capital of India, from 3 to 14 October 2010.

The Games featured 17 sporting disciplines in which around 7,000 athletes and officials representing teams from 71 nations competed for 272 gold medals and also an equal number of silver and bronze medals.

In terms of participation it was the largest Games ever held.

Simultaneously, para-sports competitions were held in swimming, athletics, powerlifting and table tennis.

THE GAMES VILLAGE

Comprising of 34 residential blocks divided

Misty water spray with the Village and Swaminarayan Akshardham in the background



A view of Swaminarayan Akshardham from the Games Village

into four zones, the Games Village was widely praised by athletes and officials. The Organizing Committee had arranged for dining, health, transport, communication and many other services to make the stay comfortable and safe.

For the first time in Commonwealth history, the training centre for athletics, swimming, weightlifting/para-sport powerlifting and wrestling was within the Games Village premises.

To enable athletes and officials to experience the culture and traditions of India, tours were available to take them around Delhi, to the Taj Mahal and to Swaminarayan Akshardham, with which the Games Village shared a common boundary wall.

To facilitate these visits, the Organizing Committee had allocated an office in the international zone of the Games Village.

From the Games Village, the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir was clearly visible, arousing the curiosity of the athletes and officials. As a result, over 1,500 visited Swaminarayan Akshardham and were genuinely delighted by the opportunity to learn about Indian culture and



The Queen's Baton is sanctified at the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Akshardham



The Queen's Baton Relay delegation at Swaminarayan Akshardham

traditions through its art, architecture and exhibitions.

The multi-faith Religious Centre provided a special area for athletes to engage in private prayer and meditation and also to receive spiritual counselling.

The Organizing Committee also requested BAPS to operate the Hindu religion section of the Religious Centre. Accordingly, BAPS volunteers set up the centre and provided prayer, meditation and scripture-reading facilities for Hindus of all denominations. Athletes and officials of many faiths regularly used the Religious Centre and enquired about India's culture and Hinduism.

The backbone of the Games Village and other sporting venues used in the XIX Commonwealth Games were the 20,000 young volunteers. These were selected college boys and girls who were specially trained to fulfil specific roles. It was the sincere efforts of these volunteers that ensured the smooth conduct of the Games.

THE QUEEN'S BATON

The Queen's Baton Relay, similar to the Olympic Torch Relay, is a relay around the world held prior to the beginning of the Commonwealth Games and has been a tradition since the 1958 Games in Cardiff, Wales. The Baton carries a message from the Head of the Commonwealth, currently Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, to the athletes of the Games. The Relay traditionally begins at Buckingham Palace in London as a part of the city's Commonwealth Day festivities. The Baton's journey symbolizes the unity and shared ideals of the Commonwealth of Nations, and enables communities beyond the host city to share in the Games' celebrations.

For the 2010 Games in New Delhi, the Queen entrusted the baton to the President of India, Her Excellency Pratibha Patil, at Buckingham Palace in London on Thursday 29 October 2009.

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) contributed to the cultural ceremony within

Excellent outdoor and indoor training and recreation facilities adjacent to the Games Village





England Commonwealth Games team at BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, London



BAPS youths blow conch shells at the start of the Queen's Baton Relay at Buckingham Palace in London

the Palace forecourt and around the Victoria Memorial in front of the Palace gates. At the beginning of the ceremony young boys and girls from BAPS performed a colourful dance to mark the occasion. BAPS volunteers also signalled the auspicious beginning of the Relay in traditional style with the sounding of ten *shankhs* (conch shells).

The baton then travelled through all 71 Commonwealth nations and territories, covering a distance of 170,000 kilometres in 240 days. Then, on its 100-day national tour of India, the host nation, it was paraded in all the 28 states and seven union territories. So, the baton travelled a total of over 190,000 km before reaching the Opening Ceremony of the 2010 Games in New Delhi on 3 October. The Queen's message was then read aloud and the Games officially opened.

As a part of its national journey, the Queen's Baton 2010 Delhi was proudly taken around the Swaminarayan Akshardham Complex on 2 October 2010, where the baton and accompanying delegation of dignitaries were received with great honour in traditional style with garlands, vermilion *tilak* and *kalava* (sacred thread).

The Queen's Baton was then paraded throughout the complex amongst a cheering crowd of thousands of visitors and devotees and colourfully and traditionally dressed children. Children also performed a special peacock dance

at the famous Peacock Gate – 'Mayur Dwar'.

Members of the delegation, which included Dronacharya Awardee Gurcharan Singh, Arjuna Awardee Ms. Sunita Sharma all took turns carrying the Queen's Baton around the complex and inside the main mandir, with special darshan of the sacred *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Sita-Ram, Radha-Krishna, Lakshmi-Narayan, Parvati-Shivji.

The delegation members expressed their experience of inner peace during their visit Swaminarayan Akshardham.

COMMONWEALTH ATHLETES VISIT LONDON MANDIR

Prior to their departure from the UK for the CWG, the England and Wales teams visited the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, London, on 11 September 2010 and on 24 September 2010 respectively.

The athletes and officials were honoured and felt delighted by the beauty of the mandir. Many expressed their keen wish to visit Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. ◆

BAPS Volunteer Services for Athletes in Akshardham

October 2010, New Delhi

The Commonwealth Games Village in Noida, New Delhi, was next to the iconic Swaminarayan Akshardham. Over 7,000 athletes, coaches and officials at the Games Village were impressed by the vistas of the towering architectural beauty of Akshardham which showcases India's glorious Hindu heritage. At night the well-lit shimmering Akshardham Mandir mesmerized all. After their competitions were over the athletes avidly started visiting Akshardham. To make their tour enlightening, a team of dedicated BAPS volunteers from India and abroad served as guides. A brief description of their efforts reveals their story of sacrifice and selfless service.

Swaminarayan Akshardham has a permanent staff of around 850 devotees. They have been running the 100-acre complex since its opening in 2005. To cope with the Commonwealth Games rush an additional group of volunteers was arranged. The volunteers were garnered from India and abroad. The selection procedure started nine months prior to the Games. An online application form was sent to BAPS centres in the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Dubai and India. The criteria for selection included: commitment to Satsang, knowledge about BAPS and spirituality in general, good health and



A para-sport athlete is amazed by the carvings inside Akshardham



A volunteer explains to athletes about the deities in Akshardham Mandir

communication skills in English or Hindi. If the applicant was a student then he or she was told not to miss studies.

In all, more than 300 applications were received. In accordance with the requirement, the applications were scrutinized and 47 volunteers from abroad (23 males and 24 females) and 24 from India were selected. A further 39 volunteers (27 males and 12 females) from the Akshardham staff were included to create a team of 110. All the volunteers from abroad were required to spend at least three weeks, from the last week of September to 15 October 2010. The number of volunteers from different nations was: India (63), UK (20), USA (10), South Africa (6), Canada (5), Austria (2), Australia (1), Kenya (1), Botswana (1) and UAE – Dubai (1).

During their first week, training sessions were conducted by sadhus and senior devotees of Akshardham. They were given information about the creation of Akshardham and the meanings and stories of various sculptures and shows. The volunteers were also given physical training to cope with the long hours as guides, and for their duties in the Akshardham bookstore, Premavati food court, cloakroom, Neelkanth Abhishek, reception counter in the parking area, and the religious centre and helpdesk at the Commonwealth Games Village. Some also helped out in managing



Inside Swaminarayan Akshardham



Athletes avidly listen to the story of how Akshardham was built

the tour and hospitality for the athletes, and in preparing reports of their experiences. All the volunteers served enthusiastically for over twelve hours each day, from 9.30 a.m. to 9.30 p.m. They started their day with the daily morning *arti* at 7.30 a.m. in the mandir and then listened to the spiritual discourses of sadhus till 8.30 a.m.

At the end of each day, the volunteers shared their experiences and suggestions for the next day. After dinner the volunteers sang *chesta* (description of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's daily routine) and then retired for the night. In all, the volunteers had a daily routine of service (*seva*), devotion (*bhakti*), and spiritual discourses (*katha*).

HOW THE ATHLETES WERE ATTENDED

After the opening ceremony on the evening of 3 October many athletes became engaged in their final preparations for the competitions. From 6 October onwards the athletes started enquiring

at the religious centre and registering their names for visits to Akshardham at the helpdesk in the Games Village. The helpdesk was managed by Shri Narottambhai Pattni, Shri Shailesh Pujara and Shri Girish Patel. From the Village they were told to go to the special cabin inside the parking grounds of Akshardham. The volunteers at the cabin were given the names of the enrolled athletes in advance. After their security procedures at Akshardham the athletes were led by volunteer guides into the main reception. Here, the medal winners were received with a round of applause by volunteers and also honoured with garlands by senior sadhus or devotees.

The Akshardham tour was arranged according to the time the group of athletes had. The tour mainly included the main sanctum of Akshardham Mandir, the panel of stone elephants, the boatride, fountain show and the large format film on Neelkanth. Most of the athletes performed the *abhishek* of Shri Neelkanth Varni in the Abhishek



A volunteer guides one of the 430 groups of athletes and officials in Swaminarayan Akshardham



Athletes are intrigued by the relics of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

Mandap and experienced peace in their hearts. Before leaving, the medalists were photographed in front of Akshardham, and framed copies were presented to them as mementos.

The athletes were impressed by the volunteers' spirit of service and warmth. They also expressed their joy and satisfaction in learning about the rich heritage of Hinduism and India, and their experience of calmness and peace in the precincts.

After the Games the BAPS volunteers shared their feelings of joy and honour for having been selected to serve for the occasion. They added that it was an educative and inspiring experience. All felt that they developed bonds of camaraderie with each other; they learnt more about satsang activities and experiences of Swamishri from each other. In addition the group realized and praised the dedication of the permanent staff of 850 volunteers running the mammoth Akshardham complex daily. Reciprocally the Akshardham

volunteers witnessed and appreciated the efforts and services of the guides who were not used to the hot weather and long hours.

All the volunteers were finally appreciated and honoured for their services by the senior sadhus and devotees. The 110 volunteers served an average of 12 hours each day for three weeks. In all, their voluntary services totalled to 30,030 hours. Many also met Swamishri in Gondal and received his blessings and appreciations. The entire volunteer arrangements were managed by Atmaswarup Swami, Gnanmuni Swami and other sadhus as well as Shri Janakbhai Dave, Shri Markandbhai Patel and the Akshardham PR team. ◆

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES

When the athletes returned from their visit to Akshardham they would come back to our office in the Games Village to thank us – their faces glowing with satisfaction. They said, ‘It is simply amazing,’ ‘Nothing like it anywhere,’ ‘The most wonderful spiritual experience.’

Girishbhai Patel
Former British International Athlete

It was wonderful working together with volunteers from abroad and India. We all meshed with each other so wonderfully. We have experienced a family spirit. We learned so much about Satsang from each other. The *seva* of taking athletes around was very educating for me. It has definitely made me an enlightened *satsangi*.

George Kingaby
Vienna, Austria

My perception of *seva* has changed. It has been different in that there is a lot of bhakti with *seva*.

Most of all I was impressed with the *sevaks* from abroad and the local *sevaks*. What dedication! Great team spirit! The Bombay guys even spent

whole nights taking care of their sick team mate!! Young guys from well to do families doing personal *seva* – so touching!

Harish Patel
Chicago, USA

My Akshardham experience has beaten all my expectations. I have gained by improving my skills and spiritually my relationship with Maharaj and Swami. I’ve learnt a lot about Indian culture. Obviously being brought up in England it’s hard to know where your roots are and to understand them. I feel I have achieved that by coming to Akshardham.

Darshan Rughani
Nottingham, England

I really enjoyed *seva*, and what I learned by meeting other devotees and other volunteers from all over the world was a tremendous experience. The experience here is very fulfilling and enjoyable.

Dr Atul Gandecha
East London, England

BAPS volunteers with Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Atmaswarup Swami



VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES

I got to learn about Satsang. I got to learn about Akshardham. I got to learn about the *mahima* of various people and the things the people have done to get this mandir off the ground and to move it forward.

Harish Pancholi
Luton, UK

I also learned a lot from the Gajendra Peethika which can itself convey over a hundred different concepts that Hinduism has. It taught me how to stay low even if you reach the echelons of power. It was a great learning experience in terms of what a Hindu is and what Hindu culture is about. *Seva* at Delhi Akshardham is a matter of pride, it cannot be bartered for any worldly experience that you can achieve anywhere else.

Parashar Pandya
Mumbai, India

In the lost and found, over the last 5 years, people have lost valuable items. The total amount of the items is massive. All of these items have been returned to the respective owners. I was just

impressed by the level of integrity the *sevaks* have here. It just goes to show the people who do *seva* here are not ordinary, they are dedicated devotees who live their lives the way Maharaj wants them to live.

Yogin Patel
Chicago, USA

My depth of understanding of Hindu culture, heritage and values has deepened quite a bit. The architecture, culture, art, and beauty are so wonderfully presented here.

I'm also inspired by the manner in which the visitors react to Akshardham. Everyone leaves here learning something about human values, about life, and about human interactions. Everyone leaves here wanting to make the world a much better place.

Anjna Makan
Johannesburg, South Africa

Coming here and learning about the architecture and the detail with which Indian culture has been able to provide and inspire such

BAPS volunteers who offered their services at Akshardham during the Games





BAPS help desk and booking office in the Games Village for visits to Swaminarayan Akshardham

a beautiful mandir complex also inspires me for the future; to believe we can do much more going forward.

Doing *seva* at Akshardham allows you to cultivate humility, humanity and a spirit of service for others and it allows you personal growth by being there for others. By serving others you grow personally.

Misha Bhika
Johannesburg, South Africa

In the process of doing this *seva* I have learned how others have done *seva* and that has inspired me even more to do the *seva* and come again.

Mina Dave
Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

Akshardham has given me more insight into Hinduism and the Indian heritage and culture itself.

It's amazing to see even how young kids or even young athletes coming from South Africa, Jamaica and other places feel so blissful and so peaceful.

Bhargav Patel
Columbus, Ohio, USA



Volunteers welcome athletes with a round of applause at the Swaminarayan Akshardham reception centre

In my corporate job, I do not get an opportunity to reflect on myself. With perfect *katha* and overall spiritual experience, it elevated the *seva* to a different plateau.

Parag Tanna,
Toronto, Canada

I found the entire experience totally 'divine'.

Shailesh Pujara
London, UK

I was inspired by saints who work relentlessly for BAPS. I wanted to be a part of this moment.

Nilesh Taunk
Vadodara, India



Volunteers lift a para-sports athlete up the stairs of Akshardham Mandir

Akshardham has helped me to be articulate

when I was explaining it to people, and it's also showed me how Hinduism can be explained to people when they come to a place like this, and a Mandir like this, where everything has been explained in one go.

Mostly when I was showing people around they all said that their feelings are totally indescribable.

**Mili Soni
Bostwana**

The values I have learned from the exhibition are the outstanding messages I will take with me. I will also take the glory of my Indian Culture, which I have learned a lot about after coming over here.

**Seval Gandhi
Mumbai, India**

I've realized that the concept of *parivar* should be always foremost in word and action. Seeing *sevaks* recognize each other's *seva* I've realized that this is the way to support each other and sustain *seva* of this level and quality. This appreciation of one another is genuine and bowls me over!

The *bhavna* of the *sevaks*, regardless of the nature of their *seva* is enormously inspirational.

**Birju Patel
Johannesburg, South Africa**

The scope of what I would label as *seva* has changed. Before I came, my idea of *seva* was mainly physical actions, e.g. kitchen *seva*, tour guiding, etc.

I would now include in *seva* things like obeying *agnas*, being patient, learning from devotees, and controlling your state of mind.

**Shilpa Patel
London, UK**



Athletes receive a guided tour inside the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir



An athlete is presented with a photographic memento of her visit to Swaminarayan Akshardham by a senior volunteer



Athletes and officials write about their experience of Swaminarayan Akshardham

RELIGIOUS CENTRE AT THE GAMES VILLAGE

Since 2002, the officials of the Commonwealth Games introduced a Religious Centre in the Games Village for athletes to pray and worship. The centre comprises of separate prayer rooms for Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Sikh athletes. An altar in each room allows the athletes to say their prayers and perform rituals. Sacred texts of the respective religions are available for reading and taking away for personal study.

The Religious Centre in the Games Village in Delhi was located near the main entrance to the residential quarters of athletes.

The Hindu prayer room was managed by four BAPS volunteers, of whom two were Sanskrit pundits who conducted Vedic rituals and sang the Shanti Path (peace prayers) and performed *arti* during the worship sessions. The other two volunteers gave counsel and answered enquiries about Hinduism. The Hindu centre was open from 8.30 a.m. to 10.00 p.m.

The Hindu prayer room comprised of images of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Lakshmi-Narayan Dev, Radha-Krishna, Sita-Ram, Shiva-Parvati and Ganapatiji. The Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayan, Mahabharat, Shrimad Bhagvat, Vachanamrut and other sacred Hindu texts were available for daily reading.

Every morning and evening *arti* was performed at 7.30 a.m. and 7.00 p.m. respectively. A few athletes would attend

the *arti*. To calm their minds and boost their confidence the priests sang Vedic mantras and gave the athletes flowers to offer at the feet of the deities. Some athletes prayed and meditated at the centre. Many even turned the *mala* and chanted the name of God.

The BAPS volunteers conducted visualization sessions for the athletes to instil confidence and calmness. During the initial days, 15-20 athletes attended the Hindu centre every morning and evening. Later, the number increased to 60-70 athletes per day.

Some of the athletes who visited were: Ravi Kumar, the Indian weightlifter in the 69 kg category (who won the gold medal); Jean Pascal of Mauritius, a swimmer; the Indian women's table tennis team daily attended the morning *arti* at 7.30 a.m. (they won the silver and bronze in doubles and individual events); Gopal, a member of the Indian shooting team; Ritesh Anand of Dhanbad (Bihar) who competed in 4x100m relay race; Henry Lawrence of Dominica spent time to learn about Hindu principles; Keith of Barbados expressed that he was happy to have made Indian friends; the women's Indian 4x110m relay team who won a gold medal. Some came in spite of their loss to gain strength and solace through prayers.

The Indian officials in charge of the Village, Col. Kapur, Mr Banerjee, Smt. Sunita and Smt. Vasundhara lauded the effort made by the volunteers at the Religious Centre.

During the day the



EXPERIENCES

priests of the various faiths at the Religious Centre interacted with each other to learn about their religious beliefs and practices.

The Religious Centre provided solace, strength and an opportunity to worship for many athletes

We thank God for you for having prepared a religious place for us.

- Joan Orenda
Medical Personnel, Kenya

I was in heaven on Earth.

- Ravi Krishna
Athlete, India

I am feeling very good and I want to come every day. This place is very peaceful.

- Mouma Das
Table Tennis, India

Renewing of spirituality and refreshing of mind.

- Dr. David Inaho
Team Doctor, Papua New Guinea

Inspirational; Awesome worship! Praise God!

- Nikki Wilson
Track Athlete, Jamaica

I appreciated this spiritual atmosphere. I now have confidence that I will win a gold medal.

- Anil Maan
Wrestling, India

It is just fantastic to have a prayer centre where

Indian athletes pray in the Hindu worship area



and officials.

The BAPS volunteers who served at the Religious Centre were Shri Ghanshyambhai J. Patel, Shri Mrudulbhai Parekh, Shri Ghanshyambhai Shukla, Shri Mukeshbhai Bhatt

anyone at anytime can have a pious moment to pray peacefully.

- Dev Patty
Ministry of Youth and Sports, Mauritius

Ideal centre for spiritual pathway and continual uplifting.

- Ang Peng Siong
Swimmer, Singapore

Very motivational.

- Obeta Chineme
Para Athlete, Nigeria

Excellent display of religions in one place. This is how the world should live – together .

- Sunil Rhamne, Canada

Thank you for your guidance, Namaste.

- Joanne Kiesanowski
Cyclist, New Zealand

Really feel relaxed after arriving here. Very calm and pleasant atmosphere to offer prayers of all religions. The best example of Bharat's unity in diversity.

- TC Ravindranath
Retd Engineer, National Games Secretariat, India

BAPS volunteer enlightens athletes about spirituality





Experiences of Commonwealth Games Athletes and Officials Visiting Swaminarayan Akshardham

More than 1,500 Commonwealth athletes, coaches and officials of different countries visited Swaminarayan Akshardham between 6 and 15 October. After their visit the athletes expressed their impressions of India and its culture, their experiences of Swaminarayan Akshardham and the message they would be taking with them from their visit. The following is a selection of their responses.



**Bruce Robertson, Vice-President
Commonwealth Games Federation**

Beautiful Architecture

It was a wonderful sight. Beautiful architecture. I am really glad that many of the athletes had the opportunity to come to the temple and get a sense of Indian culture. Being right next door to the athletes' village it was very convenient, and I gather quite a number of them took advantage of the opportunity to come here.

The message here is quite consistent with what sport is all about. Sport brings people together from all around the world. The Commonwealth Games have 71 teams from 54 nations together in peace, fair competition and sportsmanship – very consistent with the messages you have here at the temple.

There certainly were some challenges early on but Delhi pulled together. Particularly the volunteers did a spectacular job in welcoming everyone here to India and making them feel at home. I have to say the Indian athletes were the highlight of the whole event. They performed wonderfully and there were some remarkable performances right the way through. India should be proud of their athletes.



**Honourable Garry Vincent Lunn, P.C.
Minister of State (Sports)
Government of Canada**

Humility and Power of Spirit

It is breathtaking, stunning, beyond beauty in everything it represents. This structure is amazing but even more so is what it represents – the humility and the power of spirit.

I have no doubt that the power you have here can change the world.

I encourage anyone visiting here to come or to visit temples in another country or city. It makes you think how small the world is and how we are all one family. The importance of humility and the importance of we are all one.



Saina Nehwal, India

Sport: Badminton

Medal: Gold

A Dream Come True

I really enjoyed visiting Akshardham. It's a dream come true to win such a big event in India, in front of my home crowd. It is a dream come true, after winning the gold medal, to come to such a beautiful temple. I really enjoyed everything over here. From the first day we have been trying to come here.

We use to see it from the Games Village. My coaches and parents told me you should go to the temple. I had been trying to come since the first day of the games, but did not have time to come until today. Today was the day only for temple and I actually wanted to come from last night, but I was at the closing ceremony. Today was wonderful and this is the best day of my life.

I've learned from here that you should be cool and relaxed in your life and not be impatient. By seeing the film ('Neelkanth Darshan') over here, I learned the things Swaminarayan has done from his childhood. I was not like him at the age of 11, not so relaxed. But now after seeing this film, I will surely be more relaxed and will try to be more patient on the court when I am playing a tough match.



K RAVI KUMAR, India

Sport: Weightlifting, 69kg event

Medal: Gold

Different Feeling

I'm really obliged by visiting such a marvelous temple of India, and after coming here it gives me a different feeling of being an Indian.

I would like to request all Indians to visit this place and there is a divine power which takes us to a different ambience. This place has made us proud and looking at our history I got goose bumps. No words to describe it.

It's a wonderful experience for me as I have come across many new things about our nation and religion. I'm proud to be Indian.



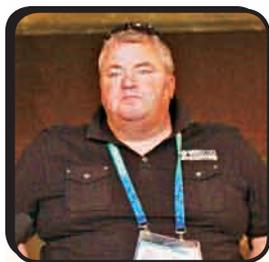
Davina Stevenson, Guyana

Sport: Swimming Coach/Manager

Spontaneous Happiness

It was a wonderful experience. We greatly appreciated the architecture, peace, and tranquility.

We would wish everyone spontaneous happiness; which is what we learned here today.



Anthony Hughes, Wales
Sport: Athletics Coach (Paralympics)

A Humbling Experience

I just have to say it has been quite mind-blowing to take in everything I have seen.

I think my whole India's experience so far has been that I have learnt that its people, its spirit and its will is about desire and friendship. I felt that since I came in I wanted to spend a little bit of time just to actually stare at the temple, to take it in; absorbing that, and I think that was important for me.

How people here in magnificence can also be very humble. The whole experience here has been humbling for me. I am just so impressed and I think that the rest of the world should visit.



Jonathan Snell, Norfolk Island
Sport: Archery

Just Unbelievable!

It was unbelievable! We've been able to see it from the Village and it looks spectacular but that is nothing compared to when you walk through the door or through the gates. It's mind-blowing. The craftsmanship and the feel is just something we didn't expect and it was just unbelievable.

I would say if you come to India, you have to come and have a look at this. You have to experience the hospitality and the beauty of the temple. We are just overwhelmed.



Raea Khan, South Africa
Sport: Swimming,
Medal: Silver (800 metres freestyle)

A Very Spiritual Place

It was awesome. I loved going around the temple. It's very beautiful. I was amazed by all the designs. You can tell it's a very spiritual place and it has a lot of meaning to a lot of people and that's very inspiring.

My experience in India has been great. I'm so impressed with the people out here. They are so friendly and so helpful and so proud as a nation and it's been a very good opportunity for me.



Alana Macdougall, Canada
Sport: Archery
Medal: Bronze Medal in
Archery Recurve Team Women

Very Peaceful

It was excellent! It's very peaceful here, it's kind of calming, it's nice. It's beautiful! I'm overwhelmed.



Archery Team, Sri Lanka
Sport: Archery

Insight into Indian Culture

Coach: It was wonderful. It was really inspiring and we got an insight into the Indian culture.

I think we should spread the message of peace and kindness, free of greed, lust and hatred.

I think this is a very good idea for ordinary lay people to come and cleanse their minds and become more spiritual.



Prasanta Karmakar, India
Sport: Para-athlete Swimmer
Medal: Bronze Medal, 50m freestyle

I Like the Atmosphere

Akshardham can be seen from my room window. I had never thought of coming here. I use to see it every day but if I had not come here I would have definitely missed a lot in my life.

But after coming to Akshardham and knowing about the temple and the work of Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, I am now more attracted towards our culture.

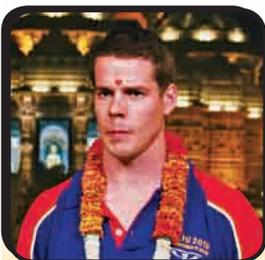
I like the atmosphere over here and your volunteers.



Deepika Kumari, India
Sport: Archery
Medal: 2 Gold Medals

Every Stone Is Wonderful

Just amazing. Wherever I have been in India I think this is the most beautiful of all places. And I think there is probably no other beautiful place than this. The reason is that it has been wonderfully created and everything and every stone looks really wonderful. I feel mental peace in seeing this place. There's no tension. My mind is very happy.



Tim Kneale, Isle of Man
Sport: Shooting Singles Double Trap Men
Medal: Bronze Medal

Mind-Blowing

What an amazing place it is. It's been a bit mind-blowing really. The sculptures, the architecture and the message.

It showed me a lot of things that I didn't know originally. You tend to be worried about your own culture and society, so it's interesting to come and learn new things in different places and experience other people's views and ideas.



Ang Peng Siong, Singapore
Sport: Swimming Team Coach
and Team Manager

Calming Experience

It was really amazing. I am really impressed. I am glad I made the trip here. Actually I am planning to bring my family here the next time.

My wife and I are Buddhist and I think there is a very close relation between the two religions. When I first stepped in here it was a very calming experience altogether and that's one of the reasons I would like to bring my wife here.



Bruce Quick, Australia
Sport: Shooting – Rapid fire Pistol Pairs 25 m
Medal: Bronze Medal

Very Educational

It's great here at the temple. We saw some lovely cultural things, and some educational stuff about India's past. Very very educational and it's a lovely place.

I think India is a great place and has a great future.



Ritul Chaterjee; Jignas Chittibomma, India
Sport: Archery
Medal: Silver Medal

Peace of Mind

Jignas: Akshardham is super! It is so pleasant here.

Ritul: This experience was very good. Gave peace of mind. The movie and the boat ride was very good and after that the *aarti* was so good that I cannot express it in words one; can only experience it. Very peaceful place.

Neat and clean.

Ritul: See it does not matter what religion you belong to, the peace that you get here, this experience we will never forget because we experienced peace in our hearts and minds.



Linda Ryan, Australia
Sport: Shooting
Medal: Silver Medal
25 m Pistol Women Pairs

Spiritual and Very Inspiring

My experience today was amazing. This wonderful temple is absolutely beautiful, but is also spiritual and is very inspiring.

I have discovered that Hinduism has a very spiritual way of looking at life, and actually interacting and connecting with all different areas of life.

More broadly, India is absolutely friendly in nature. Everybody has a welcoming nature in this country. It is an absolute pleasure to be here.



Edward Dawkins, New Zealand
Sport: Cycling
Medal: Silver Medal in Team Sprint and Bronze Medal 1000m Time Trial

Really Breathtaking

We got treated like kings, me and the other cyclist. It's given me a little bit of an insight. The buildings are amazing and all the people. We watched the fountain show and it was really breathtaking as well.



Ben Rosec, Guernsey
Sport: Squash Coach

Quite Impressive!

It was quite amazing! I have been in India for 10 days, and to start with it was more discovering the Village, sharing with the athletes from all over the world. It was a time and a place together. It was amazing. The second thing was to discover the venue. It was the best ever for squash.

Seeing all these wonderful things and learning a bit from the guide has given us some bit of history about Indian religions. It gives me a good taste and I want to go further and know more about Indian culture and religion, the temple and everything. It was a great introduction. It's quite impressive!



Louise Hazel, England
Sport: Heptathlon 7 events
Medal: Gold Medal

Unforgettable Experience

My experience at the temple has been unforgettable. I never expected so much architecture and intricate detail, and we were really blown away. We have had a really good reception here. Everyone has been extremely friendly and welcoming, and our guide was out of this world. It was a really great experience.

I feel very humbled today by the experience. It makes you feel quite insignificant to a certain extent but it gives you inspiration to go follow your dream and pursue the higher heights.

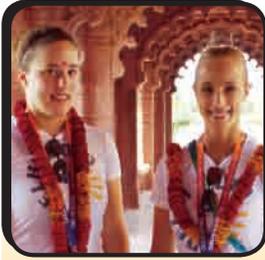


Justine Bouchard, Canada
Sport: Wrestling Freestyle 63kg Women
Medal: Gold Medal

Wonderful Hospitality

It's been amazing so far. Wonderful hospitality. I feel like I've been treated like a champion the whole time.

I love opening my mind to new ways and this has been a great experience for me to learn the culture and the different experiences.



Marilou Dozois-Prevost, Canada
Sport: Weight Lifting – 53kg Category
Medal: Gold Medal

Perfect, Impressive, Beautiful

Marilou Dozois-Prevost: I think it's really very beautiful and I was really impressed that how many people have worked here and that everything is hand carved. It's so perfect and very impressive and very beautiful.

There are values I have in my heart, but sometimes we just go into life and forget about them. I think this is a great reminder to take them seriously and to live by them.



Natalie Du Toit, South Africa
Sport: Swimming
Medal: 3 gold medals at Commonwealth Paralympics (women's 100m butterfly S9 event, 100m freestyle and 50m S9 freestyle)

Very Humbling

It's been an absolutely amazing experience from the minute we walked in here. The hospitality has been amazing. Just walking around for me has been very humbling. To see the amazing architecture, to sense the amazing feeling when you walk in here, that it's a temple and its peacefulness – that's really what I enjoy. The gardens and everything is immaculate.

Coming here it's just phenomenal! Amazing! I enjoy religions. Everyone can be of a different religion, but you can still respect someone else's religion and still come out here and be a part of it.



Mark Lewis-Francis, England
Sport: 100m; 4 x 100m relay
Medal: Gold

A Spiritual Feeling

Amazing! I came here today and I learned a lot about the Hindu religion, something I didn't know much about before. It really did open my eyes and give me a new experience.

It made me believe that if you walk around with an open mind as to what people think, you appreciate life a bit more. I respect the religion a lot more than I did before. I've learned so much today than I would have any other day. I'm glad I came here and took the tour.

As soon as you walk through the main doors you get that spiritual feeling. The feeling that I got today was humbling. The temple itself is overwhelming. It's making me leave this tour a humble person.

My personal opinion today is that Delhi, with so much negativity coming into the Championships, for me to be here today has definitely made me realize that Delhi is a beautiful place. It's got so much to offer and so much to give and me standing here today experiencing what I have experienced is overwhelming.



Johanna Jackson, England

Sport: Race walking

Medal: Gold medal in the 20km race walk

Spiritual Experience

I was just overwhelmed walking around the temple. Oh it's amazing. It's a very peaceful and spiritual experience.

I didn't know anything about Hindus, but I've learnt a lot today and the guides have been fantastic.

It's just been a very spiritual experience. I've learnt to just work hard, carry on with what I'm doing and not to let anything negative in my life get in the way.

I just want to basically thank India for an amazing games and thank you for inviting me here today. It truly means a lot.



William Sharman, England

Sport: 110m Hurdle

Medal: Silver Medal

Very Relaxing

Absolutely fantastic! It's a beautiful place! Very relaxing and it has a lot of culture to it.



Elizabeth, Ghana

Sport: 100m relay, 4 x 100m

Medal: Bronze

People are Very Kind

Akshardham is a very nice place. I hope I can come back here again.

India is a nice place. The competition was good and the visit too was very marvelous. India's people are kind, very kind and very respectful. You give respect to everybody.



Reuben Ross, Canada

Sport: Diving

**Medal: Gold in men's
3m synchronized diving**

Message for a Peaceful, Humble Life

Akshardham was very interesting, to be here and witness the beauty of this place.

The message I am taking with me from this experience is to enjoy life, to embrace life and not take anything for granted, and to lead a peaceful and humble life.

I think the main message is that you can never accomplish anything by yourself, you have to trust in more than yourself.



Andy Turner, England

Sport: 110m hurdles

Medal: Gold

Enlightening Site

It's an amazing, enlightening site, something I'm not used to seeing. To see the hard work that has gone into the temple is quite outstanding. To come here and learn about a whole new culture, it's been a really good experience for me, one that I will never forget.

So many messages really; the fact that Hinduism is a very peaceful, very deep culture, something that I would definitely like to learn more about.

It's a whole new experience for me and just learning new things like that makes you think maybe I should explore my spiritual side more.



Rasi Ahemad Khan, Pakistan

Sport: Shooting Team Manager

Great Feeling

I have waited so long to come here as this was the most adorable place to see from our Village. Yesterday, after our athlete won the gold, I wanted to come here but could not manage as we had our closing ceremony. Today morning I had said to myself that I have to visit this place and take blessings. Everyone out here have really taken care of me. This is the best day of my life and I'm really feeling great.

I have learnt to be patient and calm from Shri Neelkanth Varni which is an essential element for a sport's person.



Joanne Kiesanowski, New Zealand

Sport: Cycling

Medal: Silver, (Women's 10 km Scratch Race Cycling Track)

So Beautiful and Pretty

I went to the religious centre in the village and met two very nice chaplains over there and they helped me out and prayed for me. I'm sure that helped me out a lot in bringing positive thoughts and that helped me win a silver medal. So I'm very happy that I could come to Akshardham and have a great tour in this amazing place. It's so beautiful and pretty and am really excited to have seen it. I liked the gardens, the beautiful green grass and the contrast of all the colours. I liked the sandstone and the marble and just the big temple.

Nonviolence. It was great to learn about Hinduism more. The movie, the robotic shows and the boat ride. I learned a lot about the origins of Hinduism and how it came about and also learned about Swaminarayan and how everything happened.



Stanislav Chalaev, New Zealand
Sport: Weight Lifting (150kg)
Medal: Silver

Feeling of Unity

It's great! We had a really great guide. We spent three hours here. It was great just to see the space and all that's been built in five years. It's amazing! The buildings, how they're hand carved, are amazing. The statues and everything has blown me away – it's very good.

I think it's just the feeling of unity here. We saw the movie and that portrayed the unity of people coming together. I think, competing at the Commonwealth Games you have different teams from different countries and once we competed we all came together to celebrate our victory.



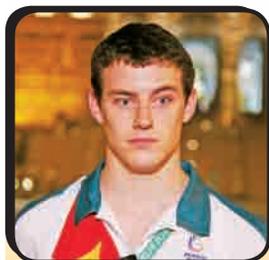
Jenny Davis, Scotland
Sport: Sprint Cycling
Medal: Silver

Absolutely Fantastic

Akshardham was absolutely fantastic and it's something which I would never forget.

The tours here and the video footage and the exhibitions have really opened up my views on what your culture is all about.

I think the inner peace is very important, especially as an athlete. I can relate to probably keeping focus on the job when you are trying to perform. It is good to try and have a balance of that and your life as a whole.



Henry Birch, Guernsey
Sport: Squash

Just Incredible!

It's brilliant. I can see the temple behind me, from the block actually and it's very impressive. When it's all lit up at night it's just incredible.

What really struck me here was the architecture. It's actually incredible. The most impressive thing is that everything was handcrafted.

It's very peaceful and it's very calming.



Nickiesha Wilson, Jamaica
Sport: 400m hurdles
Medal: Bronze medal

Loved the Boat Ride

It was excellent! I loved the boat ride especially and the intricate details of the building. I think it was a great experience.

I think what I've learned, which is new to me, is everyone here is a vegetarian and animals have rights just like humans do.



Chinna Raju Srithar, India
Sport: Compound Archery
Medal: Silver Medal

Feel Blessed by Lord

This is my first visit to Akshardham and it's a wonderful experience. The artists have done a very good job; I'm impressed by the place.

If you visit this place than you feel blessed by Lord himself and the saints. I request all Indians to visit this place at least once, and the moral values

given here, if implemented, you can surely prosper in life.

I feel proud to call myself Hindu after visiting this place. It's awesome.

My only message to all the youth of India is to learn selfless service, dedication and human behaviour from the volunteers of Akshardham, and by doing this we can make our country into a superpower of the world.



Anita North, England
Sport: Shooting
Medal: Gold Medal (Shooting Singles Trap Women)
Silver Medal (Shooting Pairs Trap Women)

Fabulous!

It's been absolutely fabulous! We've been made to feel so welcome; it's been lovely and definitely very spiritual.

The spiritual nature of India which is very very obvious, and the sense of peace and love.

It's been fabulous! It's given me something which is wonderful. Thank you very much. I've got something to take back home.



Marie-Pier Boudreau-Gagnon, Canada
Sport: Synchronized Swimming Duet Women,
Synchronized Swimming Solo Women
Medal: 2 Gold medals

Chloe Isaac, Canada
Sport: Synchronized Swimming Duet Women
Medal: 1 Gold Medal

Beyond Words

Marie-Pier: It was awesome and we think it was just like words cannot say how amazing it is.

Chloe Isaac: We learnt that Indian culture is really rich and there is so much heritage. And we learnt so much today. It's really impressive, and we are just really proud to be here right now.

Marie-Pier: I will encourage all the athletes of every country to come here and get the same experience as we got here today because it's an amazing one.



Julia Lydall, England
Sport: Shooting
Medal: Bronze medal in sport pistol pairs event

Wonderful Religious Site

Akshardham is an absolutely stunning place. The artistry and intricacy of the artwork on all the walls and the arches, the meaning behind all of the statues is just breathtaking.

I'll be taking a feeling of acceptance for everyone else in the world and a sense of equality. I came today not really knowing a huge amount about Hinduism and I've just found it to be a very peaceful, accepting and very beautiful culture and religion.

Thank you very much for a warm welcome and the interesting tour around such a beautiful, wonderful religious site.



Tara Whitten, Canada
Sport: Track and Road Cyclist
Medal: 2 Bronze for Track Cycling and 1 Gold in Time Trial

Attention to Detail

It was nice to get out of the Village and see India.

Just the attention to detail that you can see in this building is something that is important in everything that you do in life. The details and looking after the small things so that the big picture is what you want it to be.

I was very welcome here in India by everyone I met and it's been a great experience.

We saw the media reports and we didn't know what to expect coming here. Once we were here it exceeded our expectations and we felt very welcome, and the facilities were wonderful.



Nick Baxter, England
Sport: Shooting
Medal: Silver (Pairs 10m Air Pistol Men)

Very Special!

Very humbling, and quite magical to be honest. It's a very spiritual place. You can feel there's something very special about this place. Just in the fact that what it took to create it, but also the people around, you know you feel very very humble and very spiritual walking around. It's very peaceful within a very busy bustling incredibly busy city. But it's just an incredible place. Very peaceful.

There's so much depth to Indian history. I like to play chess and I didn't realize that the game was invented in India. Really educational.

I really wish that more people can come and visit to be honest, because it's very special!



Carol Huynh, Canada
Sport: Wrestling
Medal: Gold Medal, Wrestling

Amazing!

It was amazing! I just wish I had more time to explore this place because we only had an hour, which is much too short. Getting to know the culture, values, and traditions of the Hindu religion was very enlightening.

The Hindu religion and culture, for my interpretation, is based on good values and being a good person. I took away with me the idea of reincarnation and that your karma dictates your next life.



Iqbal Ubhi, England
Sport: Shooting
Medal: Bronze Medal
Shooting Pairs 25m Standard Pistol Men

Magnificent Place

Akshardham was unbelievable. A lot more than I really expected or imagined it would be. We climbed the roof of our block to have a look initially and we really thought that it was a magnificent place. But when I came here I really felt peace with myself.

I knew that the Hindus are very peaceful people, but I think that has been reaffirmed and it shows how mellow and down to earth the Hindus are.



Carys Parry, Wales
Sport: Hammer Thrower
Medal: Silver

Kind and Generous

It's absolutely beautiful. It's very peaceful. It's very calming. I have learnt quite a bit since I have been here.

This is my first visit to India and I will be taking home lots of colours, lots of smiles and different foods, and more than anything I will be taking back how kind and generous the people of India are. I have really enjoyed being here.



Charles, Antigua
Sport: Athletics

Embraces All

Hinduism is about being very spiritual and embracing all people.



Irimi Pantelli, Cyprus
Sport: Shooter-pistol

Beyond Expectations

The first thing is that we were watching this place from the Village and we said that we have to go there. So we decided today after training, to come and see it. We didn't expect to see what we saw today. We thought it was okay to see the temple and leave, but this journey we have done in two- and-a-half hours it was great!

The architecture is very beautiful and the people, when we went around, showed us different things. We did the 10,000 year journey. We saw the movie. Everything is great. It's not just one thing, it's many things and we thank you.

Summary of Commonwealth Games Athletes and Officials Visits to Swaminarayan Akshardham

Visitors

Total Groups: 430
Total of 1,576 Visitors from 46 Countries
Total Medal Winners: 138
Gold: 46 | Silver: 46 | Bronze: 46



Visitors From Countries

- | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| Australia | India | Northern Ireland |
| Antigua & Barbuda | Isle of Man | Pakistan |
| Bahamas | Jamaica | Papua New Guinea |
| Barbados | Jersey | Samoa |
| Cameroon | Kenya | Scotland |
| Canada | Kiribati | Singapore |
| Cayman Islands | Malawi | Republic of South Africa |
| Cook Islands | Malaysia | Sri Lanka |
| Cyprus | Malta | St. Lucia |
| Dominica | Mauritius | St. Vincent & The Grenadines |
| England | Mozambique | Swaziland |
| Falkland Islands | Namibia | Trinidad & Tobago |
| Ghana | New Zealand | Uganda |
| Gibraltar | Nigeria | Wales |
| Guernsey | Niue | |
| Guyana | Norfolk Island | |

The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita

ARJUNA VISHĀD YOGA

Part 3



In the previous instalment we saw how Duryodhan went to Dronacharya and described the warriors of both the Pandava's and his own army.

Thereafter, both sides sounded conch-shells to signal their readiness to commence battle.

ARJUNA'S ENTHUSIASM TO FIGHT

The collective sound of conch-shells and other instruments of the Kaurava army filled the sky with a deafening clamour. It was a proclamation to begin the war. The Pandava army replied to this call with the thundering sounds of their own conch-shells. Hearing this, the unrighteousness in the hearts of the Kaurava army started to crush, along with their courage which began to crumble. This was the unexpected result of the magnificent reverberance, filled with unity and conviction

in God, that resounded from the Pandava army. Nevertheless, the Kaurava army took its position in its designated military formation. Seeing this, the courageous Arjuna's enthusiasm is aroused. Sanjay describes this by saying, 'अथ व्यवस्थितान् दृष्ट्वा धार्तराष्ट्रान् कपिध्वजः। प्रवृते शस्त्रसंपाते धनुरुद्यम्य पाण्डवः॥ हृषीकेशं तदा वाक्यमिदमाह महीपते॥' – 'Atha vyavasthitān drushtvā Dhārtarāshtrān Kapidvajaha, pravrate shastrasampāte dhanurudyamya Pāndavaha. Hrusheekesham tadā vākyamidamāha Maheepate' – 'When it was time to fight, seeing the sons of

Dhritarashtra and the allies, Kapidhvaj Arjuna picked up his bow and said to Shri Krishna Bhagwan' (Gita 1.20-21). (During the Pandavas' time in the forest, Hanuman, who became pleased with Bhim, promised to stay on Arjuna's flag and help the Pandavas in the war. Therefore, Arjuna has been referred to as Kapidhvaj – *kapi* means monkey and *dhvaj* means flag.)

Arjuna said, 'सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये रथं स्थापय मेच्युत ॥ यावदेतान्निरीक्षेहं योद्धुकामानवस्थितान् । कैर्मया सह योद्धव्यमस्मिन् रणसमुद्यमे ॥ योत्स्यमानानवेक्षेहं य एतेत्र समागताः । धार्तराष्ट्रस्य दुर्बुद्धेर्युद्धे प्रियचिकीर्षवः ॥' – '*Senayorubhayormadhye rathamsthāpya mechyuta, yāvadetānnireeksheham yoddhukāmānavasthitān, Kairmayāsahayoddhavyamasminranasamudyame. Yotsya-mānānaveksheham ya etetra samāgatāhā, Dhārtarāshtrasya durbuddheryuddhe priyachikeershavaha*' – 'O Achyut (Krishna)! Take my chariot between the two armies for as long as it takes for me to have a good look at all the foes that have gathered with a desire for war. This, so that I may see who I am to fight with, and, moreover, so that I may take a good look at those who have gathered to please the evil-minded son of Dhritarashtra, Duryodhan' (Gita 1.21-23).

Arjuna's fearless enthusiasm to fight a fierce battle resonates in his words. He is not like Duryodhan. As soon as Duryodhan saw the Pandava army, he ran to Acharya Drona and fearfully told him to look at the Pandava army. However, on seeing the Kaurava army ready for war, Arjuna immediately raises his Gandiv bow. He does not feel the need to run off to anyone, since he has no confusion. He is clear that he wants to fight. He has no doubts, neither in himself, nor in anyone on his side. And, above all, he has complete faith in Shri Krishna. This is the mark of a true warrior. Every action should begin in this way.

Arjuna does not see Duryodhan as a great archer or *maharathi*, but sees him as evil-minded. Arjuna's bitterness regarding the deceit and sins of the sons of Dhritarashtra can be seen here. So, he naturally goes for his bow. But, before taking aim with an

arrow, he wants to see the 'योद्धुकामान्' – '*yoddhukāmān*' or 'योत्स्यमानान्' – '*yotsyamānān*', i.e., those 'looking for war'. Arjuna sees these warmongers as the 'प्रियचिकीर्षवः' – '*priyachikeershavaha*' of the evil-minded Duryodhan, i.e., those who want to please him. Arjuna knows well that Duryodhan is a rebel looking for war. That is why Duryodhan never agreed to the Pandavas' repeated offers for a peaceful compromise. Moreover, he unhesitatingly and clearly stated that war was the only means for settlement. Because Duryodhan was inclined to war, the people who joined his army to please him were also looking for war, and thus Arjuna describes them accordingly. Arjuna wants to take a good look at these warmongers and so tells Shri Krishna Bhagwan, "O Achyut! Place my chariot between the armies."

O ACHYUT!

'O Achyut!' What a fitting address! It shows Arjuna's subtle view of his charioteer. 'Achyut' means one who never wavers from his state, remains stable, calm and unagitated. Arjuna knows well about the ups and downs of life, and about the distractions caused by the good and bad feelings that arise due to such incidents. Moreover, in these days of war, he has experienced many waves of emotion caused by them. Along all of this, he has also noticed something extraordinary in his very close friend, Shri Krishna Bhagwan. It was an innate quality of Shri Krishna to remain calm and collected in any situation, without even the slightest agitation. Arjuna had experienced this natural quality time and time again. Even now, on the verge of war, when he himself is subject to the enthusiasm and overwhelming atmosphere of the battlefield, he sees that Shri Krishna is completely calm and collected, like a mountain resting at the bottom of the ocean. He knows that Shri Krishna is enthusiastic but he is not controlled by that enthusiasm, and therefore he addresses him with the words 'O Achyut'.

PARTHA! LOOK

Describing what Arjuna's charioteer, Shri Krishna, did on hearing Arjuna's eager words, Sanjaya says, 'एवमुक्तो हृषीकेशो गुडाकेशेन भारत। सेनयोरुभयोर्मध्ये स्थापयित्वा रथोत्तमम्॥ भीष्मद्रोणप्रमुखतः सर्वेषां च महीक्षिताम्। उवाच पार्थ पश्यैतान् समवेतान् कुरूनिति॥' – 'Evamukto Hrusheekesho Gudākesheṇa Bhārata, senayorubhayormadhye sthāpayitvā rathottamam. Bheeshmadronapramukhataha sarveshāṃ cha maheekshitām, uvācha Pārtha pashyaitān samavetān kurooniti' – 'O Dhritarashtra! After being told thus by *gudākesha* Arjuna, Shri Krishna Bhagwan took the chariot between the two armies, especially in front of Bheeshma, Dronacharya and the other kings, and thence said, "O Partha! Take a look at these Kauravas who have gathered (for war)"' (Gita 1.24-25).

As instructed by Shri Krishna, Arjuna begins to take a look at the opposing army, and from this moment the situation takes a new turn. What happened then was so natural that no one even sensed it. The event did not even take a long time; it happened in a matter of seconds. Surprisingly, the change was due to no one else but Arjuna. Yes, the enthusiastic warrior Arjuna – the very Arjuna who was ready and armed with his *gandeev* (bow); the Arjuna who had Hanuman on his flag; the very Arjuna who had Shri Krishna Bhagwan himself as his charioteer.

Whatever happened was a result of the way in which Arjuna had seen and the attitude with which he had seen. Describing what he saw, how he saw it, and with what attitude, Sanjaya says to Dhritarashtra, 'तत्रापश्यत् स्थितान् पार्थः पितृन्थ पितामहान्। आचार्यान् मातुलान् भ्रातृन् पुत्रान् पौत्रान् सखींस्तथा॥ श्वशुरान् सहृदश्रैव सेनयोरुभयोरपि। तान् समीक्ष्य स कौन्तेयः सर्वान् बन्धूनवस्थितान्॥ कृपया परयाविष्टो विषीदन्दिदमब्रवीत्।' – 'Tatrāpashyat sthitān Pārthaha pitroonatha pitāmahān, āchāryān mātulān bhrātroon putrān pautrān sakheenstathā. Shvashurān sahrudashchaiva senayorubhayorapi, tān sameekshya sa Kaunteyaha sarvān bandhoonavasthitān, krupayā parayāvishto

visheedanniramabraveet.' – 'There, Arjuna, the son of Prutha, saw his forefathers, grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, friends, in-laws and dear ones on both sides. On seeing all his relatives present there, and after having seen them well, he, becoming extremely emotional, said in despair...' (Gita 1.26, 27, 28).

The words '*krupayā parayā*' have been used here for infatuation. The hidden infatuation within Arjuna has surfaced. It has captured that Arjuna has a soft corner for his relatives. As a result, his courage is subdued, his skills forgotten, his warrior instincts dissolved. His genius and intelligence seem to have lost direction. Emotions have taken control and despair has made its home. '*Krupayā parayāvishto visheedan*' – 'Where there is infatuation there is despair.' The Bhagavad Gita has summarized everyone's cause of misery in one line.

REACTION OF THE INFATUATED

In this infatuated state Arjuna then said, 'दृष्ट्वेमं स्वजनं कृष्ण युयुत्सुं समुपस्थितम् ॥ सीदन्ति मम गात्राणि मुखं च परिशुष्यति। वेपथुश्च शरीरे मे रोमहर्षश्च जायते ॥ गाण्डीवं संस्रते हस्तात् त्वक्चैव परिदह्यते। न च शक्नो यवस्थातुं भ्रमतीव च मे मनः ॥' – '*Drushtvemam svajanam Krushna yuyutsum samupasthitam. Seedanti mama gātrāni mukham cha parishushyati, vepathushcha shareere me romaharshashcha jāyate. Gāndeevam sansrate hastāt tvak chaiva paridahyate, na cha shaknomyavasthātum bhramteeva cha me manaha.*' – 'O Krishna! Seeing my relatives willing to fight, my limbs are weakening, my mouth is drying up, my body shakes and my hairs stand on end. My *gandeev* (bow) is slipping from my hands and my fingers burn. I can no longer stand; it is as if I am dizzy' (Gita 1.28-30).

This was the reaction to the infatuation by which he was overwhelmed. The force of his emotions took root. His thoughts became disturbed. As a result, he was also physically affected by this disturbance. His powerful limbs lost their vitality. His shining, courageous face, became lacklustre. His imposing, rock-like body trembled. The mighty

archer did not have the energy to even lift his bow. The fire of anguish permeated his every pore and his steadfast mind lost its balance.

To understand the reality of life, this event should be analyzed in detail.

It is difficult to understand infatuation directly, but it can be understood by its effects on one's inner thoughts. And it is the effect on these thoughts that have a physical, observable effect on the body. Thus, this demonstrates the close bond between one's inner traits and the physical body.

Were Arjuna's limbs really weak? Why did his mouth suddenly become dry? Was this his first war? Was he a coward that he began to tremble on the battlefield? Why did the raised bow suddenly slip from his hand? What were the factors that placed even Arjuna in such a situation? The answer to all these questions: the force of his emotions.

It is good to acquire skills. Some become singers, some become artists, some excel in science, while some attain fame in sports. Here, Arjuna is renowned for his knowledge of weapons (*astra-shastra*). However, all these abilities are merely skills. Merely developing skills does not guarantee completion of one's work. It is a different matter altogether to fight against inner emotions.

It is generally observed that no matter how skillful a person may be, he succumbs to the force of emotions generated by his innate nature. Thus, his skills remain unused and his emotions predominate. As a result, knowingly or unknowingly, inappropriate actions are performed. One becomes angry, makes unachievable promises, uses unacceptable language, becomes quarrelsome, is unable to make decisions and becomes devoid of all thoughts. He becomes despondent, and either does not eat or eats voraciously. He either does not like to talk or talks continuously. He is either unable to sleep or sleeps excessively. When this happens repeatedly, the body becomes affected by many new illnesses and becomes weak. He does not have the willpower to

do any work and is easily bored. His tolerance is reduced. He does not like to be anywhere, to do anything, or to be with anybody. He smoulders like a half-burnt log. He becomes depressed and does not even feel like living. As a result, when overcome by emotion, he may even commit suicide. Thus, the implications of uncontrollable emotions are unpredictable.

Also, he is deluded by an intense feeling of inferiority, and claims to be unable to do things which he is, in fact, capable of doing. From this, he slowly develops a false attitude that this work is not worth doing and attempts to justify this point. Many of these attributes have been experienced by all types of people.

On this occasion, Arjuna is experiencing such a situation. The dormant infatuation suddenly attacks and weakens his thoughts. And such weak thoughts have sapped his body of strength and stability, making him weak. His skills and courage are eclipsed by the inner force of emotions.

DECISIONS OF THE EMOTIONAL

In Arjuna's own words, let us see what decisions he makes in this emotional state. Arjuna says, "O Keshav! I see negative omens. By killing my relatives in war I do not see my liberation. O Krishna! I do not wish for victory nor a kingdom nor happiness. O Govind! What is the purpose of such a kingdom? What is the purpose of such (material) pleasures or even of life itself? Those for whom we desire a kingdom, material pleasures or happiness have themselves left all hope for their own wealth and life and are present here for war. Also, these are all teachers, fathers, sons, grandfathers, maternal uncles, in-laws, grandsons, brothers-in-law and other relatives. So, O Madhusudan! Even if I am slain, I do not wish to kill these relatives even to attain rulership of the three *lokas*. So, what remains to be said about (fighting for) land? O Janardan! By slaying the sons of Dhritrashtra, what joy will we attain? By killing these troublemakers, we will

only incur sin. So, O Madhav! I am not fit to kill the sons of Dhritrashtra, who are my brothers. By killing our own relatives, how will we become happy? However, these people, controlled by the power of greed, do not see the consequences arising from the destruction of family and the sins due to maligning friends. Yet, O Janardan! Knowing the faults resulting from the destruction of family, why should we not think about avoiding this sin? Also, destruction of kin destroys the eternal family dharma, and with the destruction of this dharma, the whole family is engulfed by unrighteousness. O Krishna! Due to the force of *adharma*, the women of the family will become extremely unfaithful. And when the women are unfaithful, a hybrid lineage is born. Such hybrids destroy the family and consign the family to hell. Also, their forefathers, who are not offered appropriate *tarpan*, suffer decline from the heavens. The faults arising from these kin-destroying mixed-breeds uproot the eternal family and community (*jati*) dharma. Also, O Janardan! We have heard that people whose family dharma has been destroyed are consigned to hell for an indefinite period. It is sad, that even though we are intelligent, we are ready to commit such a grave sin, and for the greed of a kingdom and happiness we are prepared to kill our relatives. Instead of this, I will not retaliate and will remain weaponless. It is better if the armed sons of Dhritrashtra kill me. That for me it will result in a greater liberation” (Bhagavad Gita 1.31-46).

Arjuna said all this to Bhagwan Shri Krishna. In fact, it was the monologue of a depressed person engulfed by infatuation. It was a philosophy born from the attachment to his relatives. It was an exercise in logic to justify his thoughts and wishes. But in Arjuna’s mind, this was the truth. To him, his version of dharma was the highest command of the shastras. Often, those who are lost believe their path to be the right one. And they justify this with the support of various examples. Arjuna was in that frame of mind. His attachment

for his relatives was leading his thoughts in an inappropriate direction. However, Arjuna believed that to be the right path.

What Arjun did after saying all of this is described by Sanjay with the words: ‘एवमुक्त्वाऋजुनः सं ये रथोपस्थ उपाविशत् । विसृज्य सशरं चापं शोकसंविग्नमानसः’ – ‘*Evamuktvarjunaha sankhye rathopastha upavishat, visrujya sasharam chāpam shokasanvignamānasaha.*’ – ‘Having said all this on the battlefield, Arjuna, his mind agitated by depression, left his bow and arrow and sat down in the rear of the chariot’ (Gita 1.47).

How would this scene have looked? What would the Pandavas and their supporters have thought? What would the Kauravas have thought? And, above all, what impression would the mere description of this situation generate in the calculating mind of the blind Dhritrashtra? To what extent would his mind be rejoicing? And of course, what would Arjuna’s charioteer, Shri Krishna, have been thinking? Whatever the answers maybe, it is certain that this scene would have resulted in a variety of conclusions in the minds of all who witnessed it. So, in one respect, this situation was a reflection of the attitudes towards Arjuna of all those who were observing him.

It is at this point, with Arjuna engulfed in despair born out of infatuation that the first *ādhyāy* of the Gita concludes. This despair is special in that even in this despondent state, there is the *yoga* (presence) of God. That is why this *adhyay* is titled ‘Arjuna Vishad Yoga’. This *adhyay* lays the foundation for the rest of the Gita.

GREAT GIFTS OF DESPAIR

While on the subject of despair, the following is noteworthy and of special interest.

India (Bharat) has been blessed with many shastras that have their basis in despair.

Valmiki’s despair led to the first poem, the Ramayan. This historic shastra results from the despair of the *kraunch* bird, whose partner was suddenly killed by a hunter’s arrow. Valmiki saw

this and he too became plunged into despair. He voiced this despair in the form of a *chhand*, a poetic metre. Then Brahmaji arrived there, consoled Valmiki and instructed him to use this *chhand* and 'रामस्य चरितं कृत्स्नं कुरु त्वम् ऋषिसत्तमम्' – '*Rāmasya charitam krutnam kuru tvam rishisangamam*' – 'Describe the complete story of Bhagwan Shri Ram.' Then, truly, 'शोकः श्लोकत्वमागतः' – '*Shokaha shlokatvamāgataha*' – 'That despair was transformed into a verse (*shlok*).' This resulted in the Ramayan.

The story of Veda Vyas is well known. Once, he was seated alone on the banks of River Saraswati, engrossed in *atma*-contemplation. He thought of his contributions, such as the classification of the Vedas and the writing of other shastras. Despite this, he did not at all feel bliss within his *atma*. On the contrary, his *atma* cried out, 'तथापि बत मे दैह्यो ह्यात्मा... असं पन्न इवाभाति' – '*Tathāpi bata me daihyo hyātmā... asampannā ivābhāti*' – 'O! After doing so much, why is there despair within?' (Shrimad Bhagavat 1.4.30). This was the despairing voice of his *atma*, which felt empty and unfulfilled.

At that time, Naradji arrived there. Vyasji re-

vealed his sense of despair to him. Naradji advised him to write a shastra describing the divine exploits of the manifest avatar of Paramatma as the solution to remove his pain. Vyasji did as advised, and wrote the Shrimad Bhagavat Mahapuram. As a result, he experienced great joy. Thus, out of Vyasji's despair, the Shrimad Bhagavat Mahapuram was born.

'सोहं भगवो शोचामि। तं मां शोकस्य परं तारयतु।' – '*Soham bhagavo shochāmi, tam mām shokasya pāram tārayatu.*' – 'O God! I am drowning in the ocean of despair. So please save me from this misery.' This is the despair voiced by Naradji in the first mantra of the seventh *ādhyay* of the Chandogya Upanishad. He opened his heart at the feet of the great Rishi Sanatsujat. In response, Sanatsujat revealed the *bhoomividyā* to remove Naradji's despair and bring him joy. Thus, Naradji's despair resulted in the *bhoomividyā* being revealed in the seventh *adhyāy* of the Chandogya Upanishad.

As revealed earlier, the despair of Arjuna gifted us the Bhagavad Gita. ♦

HINDUISM

AN INTRODUCTION

New

The book provides fascinating insights into Hinduism on an introductory level. It comprises of two parts having 700 pages and 750 photographs. The publication enlightens Hindu youths and others about the oldest religious tradition in the world. It will serve as a wonderful gift to friends and relatives.

Part 1 features a brief history and the core beliefs of Hinduism, its sacred texts, various denominations, mandirs, holy men and women, sacred places and rivers, festivals, rituals, and sacred symbols and objects.

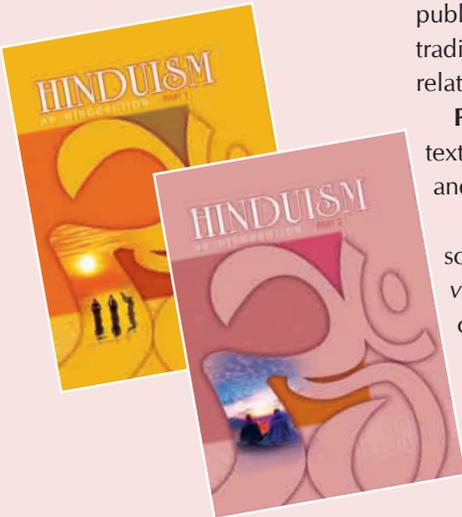
Part 2 features sadhana, *āhāra-vihāra*, great devotees of God, rishi-scientists of India, Hindu perceptions, Hindu way of life, Hindu reformers, *varnāshrama*, impressions of India and Hinduism abroad, concept of creation, Swaminarayan Sampradaya, India, and frequently asked questions on Hinduism.

Author: Sadhu Vivekjivandas

Editorial Consultant: Dr Janakbhai Dave

Pt 1: 380 pgs, **Pt 2:** 328 pgs

Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad, Gujarat



Pramukh Swami Maharaj's **VICHARAN**

August to September 2010
Bochasan, Bhavnagar, Sarangpur



Swamishri inaugurates the new assembly hall, Bhavnagar



Swamishri during his morning puja, Sarangpur

- ◆ **1-22 Aug.: Bochasan**
- ◆ **23 Aug.: Bochasan, Bhavnagar**
- ◆ **24-31 Aug. & 1-3 Sept.: Bhavnagar**
- ◆ **4 Sept.: Bhavnagar, Vallabhipur, Sarangpur**
- ◆ **5-30 Sept.: Sarangpur**

AUGUST

1, Sunday, Bochasan

Swamishri initiated a youth, Jaydeep K. Pedhadiya, of Bhadra into the *parshad*-fold of renunciation. He was renamed Shankar Bhagat. Swamishri inaugurated an audio CD of his blessings called *Amrut Vani* 14.

7, Saturday, Bochasan

The *mahapuja* for the foundation-stone laying ceremony for the BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir in Dhari commenced soon after the *mangala arti*. Senior sadhus and leading devotees from Dhari participated in the rituals. After completing his morning puja Swamishri performed the puja rituals of all the foundation stones, three *kalashas*,

Kurma, Anant and Bhumi. He showered rose petals on the stones and placed the *asthi* of Yogiji Maharaj.

[The ritual on site in Dhari was performed by senior sadhus on 17 October.]

8, Sunday, Bochasan; Children's Day

Swamishri blessed the assembly after his morning puja, "To serve the world people become doctors, engineers and acquire other qualifications, but Yogiji Maharaj said that Satsang is the college of *brahmavidya*. God has blessed us with a human birth, so we should live and endeavour in such a way that God and his Sadhu are pleased and grant us *moksha*. Human birth is not for enjoying the worldly sense pleasures. Our culture teaches us to respect our parents, teachers and guests." Swamishri further added that one should not keep bad company, and as *satsangis* follow the Shikshapatri and understand the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam according to the Vachanamrut.

15, Sunday, Bochasan; Independence Day

To celebrate India's Independence Day the flag hoisting ceremony was performed by Tyagvallabh Swami on the grounds of Bochasan Mandir. Then Viveksagar Swami spoke on independence.

On Swamishri's arrival youths of Borsad Satsang Chapter sang a song of national pride, "Sāre jahā se achchhā." Swamishri waved the national flag. In conclusion, Tyagvallabh Swami garlanded Swamishri.

The *murtis* in all the sanctums of the mandir were adorned in the tricolours.

16, Monday, Bochasan

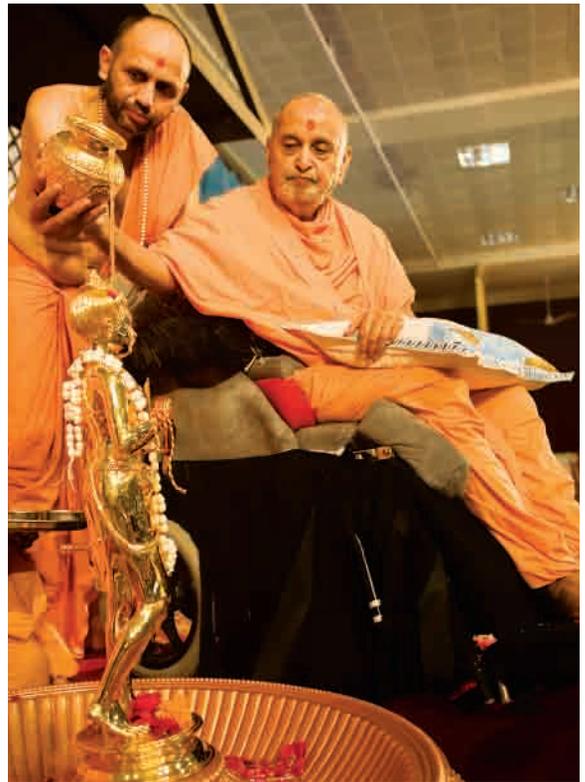
Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan*, *arti* and *pushpanjali* of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Orangeburg, South Carolina.

24, Tuesday, Bhavnagar; Raksha Bandhan

Prior to Swamishri's daily morning puja darshan Viveksagar Swami discoursed on the Kathopanishad.

On arriving for his morning puja Swamishri inaugurated the newly constructed assembly hall by untying a giant *nadachhadi*. Youths sang bhajans related to the festival in Swamishri's puja. Sanctified *rakhis* were distributed to all the devotees on entering the hall. At the end of Swamishri's puja the ritual mantras for the ceremony were sung after which the devotees tied the *rakhis* on each others wrists.

Finally Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Raksha Bandhan means that we are bound to God. God too is bound to us by our devotion to him. Dada Khachar had bhakti and that was why he sacrificed his wealth, family and home in the service of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. God does not come to take, but to give. He has given us this human body – eyes, ears, nose, hands and legs... Today on Raksha Bandhan, sustain the bonds of *agna* and *upasana*. One should abstain from addictions and from watching television and movies."



Swamishri performs *abhishek* after consecrating the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni for BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Jaipur

29, Sunday, Bhavnagar; Kishore Day

The previous day children of Bhavnagar Bal Mandal celebrated Children's Day in Swamishri's morning puja. They discoursed on the glory of Nilkanth Varni and enacted a few skits.

In today's evening satsang assembly Viveksagar Swami addressed the teenagers and youths. After Swamishri's arrival children and teenagers performed a welcome dance. Then they performed a drama, 'Values of Life'. Thereafter senior sadhus garlanded Swamishri. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Since you have the refuge of God it is necessary to keep away from unethical ways. One should do one's duties at work with honesty and sincerity... Ultimately, when one realizes the knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma one becomes happy in all ways."

More than 5,500 devotees attended the satsang assembly.

Janmashtmi Celebration

2 September 2010, Bhavnagar



Swamishri swings Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a decorated *hindolo*

The evening celebration assembly commenced at 8.00 p.m. with *dhun* and prayers. The stage backdrop illustrated a jail in which Bhagwan Krishna was born. Viveksagar Swami discoursed about the pastimes of Shri Krishna. Then, percussionist Shri Shivamani impressed all by playing rhythms on various objects. Children and teenagers performed a traditional dance on Krishna's divine *lila*.

Swamishri blessed the assembly of more than 8,000 devotees, "God comes on earth to establish dharma. For that the Mahabharat war followed. The Pandavas, who had love and devotion for Krishna, won. God sided with the Pandavas because they were devotees and they wished to please him only. Victory is theirs on whose side God takes... Without spiritual knowledge one cannot experience true joy. When Arjun received the knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma he became recharged with courage. It is heartening to see you all here for the celebration of Krishna's birthday. May God bless you with pure intellect, happiness and bhakti."

SEPTEMBER

2, Thursday, Bhavnagar, Janmashtmi Celebration

See box above.

4, Saturday, Bhavnagar, Valbhipur, Sarangpur

At 10.05 a.m. Swamishri departed from Bhavnagar and arrived at Valbhipur to sanctify the nearly completed BAPS *hari* mandir. Swamishri entered the mandir and performed the puja, *arti* and *pushpanjali* rituals of the marble *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Nilkanth Varni (metal), Hanumanji and Ganapatiji, and Guru Parampara (canvas). Swamishri was honoured with garlands

and gave darshan to all devotees. Swamishri departed at 11.20 a.m. and arrived in Sarangpur amidst a traditional welcome at 11.50 a.m.

6, Monday, Sarangpur

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of puja and *arti* of the marble *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Radha-Krishna Dev, Shiv-Parvatiji, Hanumanji and Ganapatiji and Guru Parampara (canvas) for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Albany, Georgia, USA.

19, Sunday, Sarangpur; Jal Jhilani Festival

See box on next page.

Jal Jhilani Festival

19 September 2010, Sarangpur



Swamishri offers devotion to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj by steering him in a remote-controlled boat steered by remote control in the pool of water in a decorated boat. After his puja Swamishri steered Shri Harikrishna Maharaj's boat through remote control. Then he blessed the devotees, "God has graced us by taking birth on earth. He blessed us with happiness through his divine life and wisdom. Subsequently, we are celebrating his life through such festivals. Shriji Maharaj celebrated on the River Und in Bhadra. God is not past and gone. He is present today. When we accumulate enough merits we get the opportunity of his association. And through it we become liberated from the bondage of material attractions, desires and ignorance. Whosoever will recollect this festival at the time of death will be liberated."

Swamishri then performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Nilkanth Varni for the BAPS Mandir in Jaipur. Finally, Swamishri was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus.

More than 7,000 devotees attended the celebration. Shortly after Swamishri left the stage a procession of the *utsav murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was carried out upto Narayan Kund and then to Yagnapurush Sarovar (lake). Here the *murtis* were ritually taken on a boat ride and finally the *murti* of Ganapatiji was ritually immersed in water.

27, Monday, Sarangpur; Shastriji Maharaj's Smruti Parva

Prior to Swamishri's morning puja the festive occasion commenced with a discourse by Ghanshyamcharan Swami. During Swamishri's puja sadhus sang bhajans on Shastriji Maharaj's life and work. Finally Swamishri blessed the gathering, "Shastriji Maharaj incarnated on earth to establish the true principle of Akshar-Purushottam. For that he tolerated insults and hardships. Despite all the trials he never flinched from his mission. On thinking about his accomplishments one finds it difficult to understand as to how he did them. He used to say that the bell tolls in a true mandir."

Swamishri then sanctified the *dudhpak* that was served to all the devotees. In all, 11,000 devotees attended.

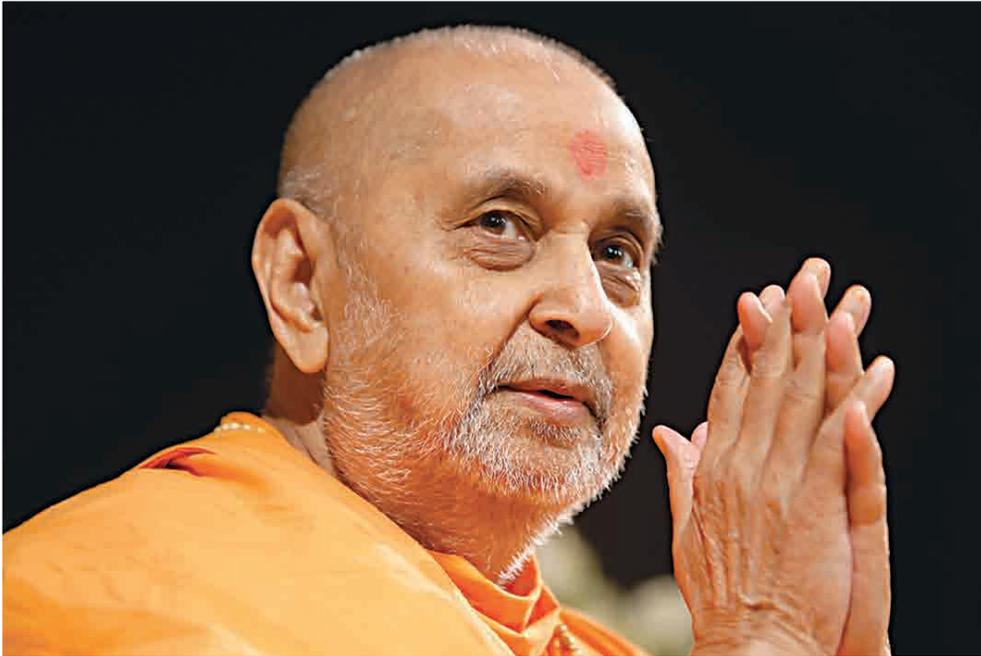
28, Tuesday, Sarangpur

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the marble *murtis* of Ghanshyam Maharaj, Guru-Parampara and Nilkanth Varni (metal) for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Kampala. Swamishri also performed *abhishek* of Nilkanth Varni. ◆

Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekchandras

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

August-September 2010



FIRM FAITH

3 August, Bochasan

A devotee revealed in his letter to Swamishri that he had met an astrologer because his business had run down. The astrologer gave him a horse shoe to keep in his home for a week. But there was no improvement. After that the devotee felt remorse for having lapsed in his faith. He wrote that he had breached his faith in him and requested for atonement (*prayaschit*).

Swamishri replied, “Be vigilant and strong that you do not lapse again. Whatever happens believe it to be the wish of Shriji Maharaj. He wishes well for you.”

SOCIAL SANCTION

4 August, Bochasan

A youth from abroad called Swamishri. He revealed, “Swami I have fallen in love with a girl, and I wish to marry her. But the problem is that her parents wish to marry her to someone else.” Then he added, “If one is to have a love marriage where

is the need of marrying someone of the same caste! Isn't that right? In context to spiritual knowledge there are no distinctions of caste and class.”

Swamishri broke into peals of laughter at his preaching. He replied, “You seem to be a great *jnani*.” Then Swamishri explained to him in a spirit of friendship, “If you are knowledgeable and wise then so am I. Now listen to me. If the girl's parents give their consent and blessings then you can marry her. If the girl wishes to marry you, then she will do so. Do it with the consent of your parents and hers too.”

Swamishri always upholds systems and traditions that have social sanction and the authority of the Hindu shastras.

NEAR AND FAR

12 August, Bocvhasan

Swamishri communicates and blesses devotees on a personal level either through his daily audience session, letters or by phone. In spite of his advanced age, Swamishri is still active

and responds punctually to the enquiries from devotees on mundane and spiritual matters. Just as he answers the youths and devotees he equally appreciates and responds to children.

Akhand, a little boy in America, asked Swamishri on the phone, “Where are you?”

Swamishri replied, “I am in Bochasan and with you too!”

Swamishri’s brief answer conveyed the depth of Hindu theology that God and his Sadhu are all-pervading and present wherever their devotees reside.

HAPPINESS IN ALL SITUATIONS

13 August, Bochasan

After his brief afternoon walk Swamishri was about to lie down to rest on his bed. At that time Bhagvatcharan Swami remarked, “You are very happy.”

Swamishri spoke with pride, “I have the association of God, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. Is there any greater happiness other than them in this world! If one realizes this then no matter in illness or good health, in insult or honour, there is always happiness, happiness and happiness!”

BEING TOGETHER

21 August, Bochasan

Mayur, a boy from London, lovingly asked Swamishri while parting, “When shall we meet again?”

Swamishri reassured him, “We are always together. Whenever you remember, we are together. Doesn’t one see things instantly on the internet? Similarly, by chanting Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan you will see [us] immediately.”

CELEBRATING HIS GURU

26 August, Bhavnagar

Swamishri’s *vicharan* in the last four decades has been phenomenal. Anyone who contemplates upon the hardships and conditions in which Swamishri has travelled to please devotees is left

feeling humbled and awed. On many occasions such conversations have cropped up and each time Swamishri begins unfolding the glory of his gurus. Today something of a similar nature happened.

Brahmavihari Swami: “No one can ever dream of the amount of *vicharan* you have done. And because of its magnitude none can take a cue to relax or become lazy. Furthermore, you have strived immensely to please the young and old. You have visited the same homes five times.

Swamishri: “Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj visited the same homes ten times. He visited whenever he was told to do so again and again.

Krishnavallabh Swami: “But those were times when there were only few devotees. One had to look for them.

Swamishri: “But because they (gurus) had laid the foundations (of Satsang) we are able to build upon it. In comparison to them, we have done nothing!”

Brahmavihari Swami: “But just to please the devotees you have gone to their homes despite having no reason to. There is hardship and hassle to one’s body in that.”

Swamishri: “The hardship is physical only, but nothing of the sort is experienced by one’s *atma*. When one thinks about comforts of the body one will not be able to do anything; not even *seva*. Thus, one should not think about the body.”

Even at 90 years Swamishri disregards the condition of his ailing body and strives to please all from the plane of his *atma*.

DISSOLVE NEGATING THOUGHTS

25 September, Sarangpur

An aspirant enquired, “How can I get rid of negative thoughts?”

Swamishri replied in two words, “Do bhajan.”

Remembering God is the panacea of all ills. To console the mind of anxiety and frustration Swamishri advised with surety. ◆

*Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekivandas*

BAL-BALIKA PARAYANS

THEME: NILKANTH CHARITRA

August-September 2010, Gujarat & Mumbai, India

During the holy month of Shravan (August-September 2010), over 4,000 BAPS Bal-Balika Mandals throughout Gujarat and Mumbai held one- to three-day *parayans* based on inspiring incidents of Nilkanth Varni, Dhruv, Prahlad and other child-devotees. The BAPS Children's Activities Central Office provided the content for the *parayans* which were presented by the children through shastra-reading, skits, monoacting, speeches, debates and audio-visual aids.



A balak recites the story of Nilkanth Varni

which Vedic mantras and *dhun* were recited. As part of the three-day programme *hindola*, *arti* and drawing contests were organized at some centres. On the final day in some places, *annakut* was offered.

Through these *parayans* the children learnt inspiring messages of faith, dedication, courage and other values to help them in their daily lives.

The *parayans* began with a Pothi Yatra, during

Around 50,000 children and parents attended the *parayans* throughout the month. ◆

YOUTH TRAINING CENTRE PRESENTATION

3 October 2010, Sarangpur

In the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, on 3 October 2010, youths of the current batch attending the Youth Training Centre in Sarangpur presented an inspiring programme during the evening Sunday assembly. Based on theme 'Bharat Bhagya Nirmata',



Youths present a cultural programme in Swamishri's presence

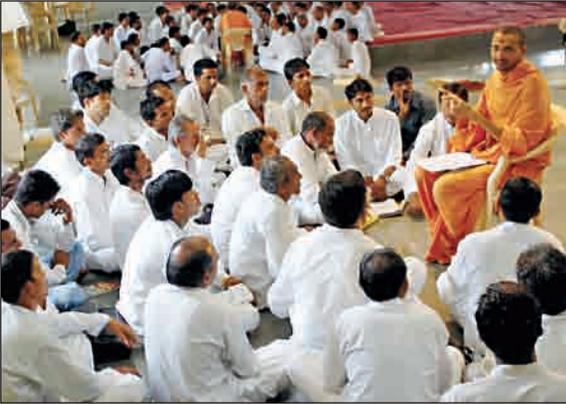
the youths conveyed the message that if India is to fulfil its true potential on the world stage, youths

will have to contribute through service, values and spirituality. The training centre youths presented an excellent programme including a discussion, debate, traditional dance and other presentations.

At the end, Swamishri blessed the assembly and commended the youths for their entertaining and enlightening presentation. ◆

MANDAL SANCHALAK TRAINING SHIBIRS

5 & 12 September 2010, Navsari and Ahmedabad



Group training session

The Satsang Activities Central Office at Ahmedabad conducted two training *shibirs* for *mandal sanchalaks*, who coordinate the activities of each BAPS Satsang *mandal*.

These *sanchalaks* received guidance and training to enable them to execute their duties more effectively and efficiently. The following topics were covered: (1) Sabha schedules and arrangements, (2) Reading of Satsang Patrika, (3) Public speaking skills, (4) Teamwork and (5) Organization. ◆

KARYAKAR ADHIVESHAN

September-October 2010, Gujarat & Mumbai, India



A *karyakar* presents his speech to the judges

The Satsang Activities Central Office in Ahmedabad organized a 'Karyakar Adhiveshan' in which speech was the sole competition. However, the *karyakars* competed as pairs, consisting of a good speaker and a not-so-good speaker. The aim of this format was to help the less able speakers to receive guidance from their more competent partner so that their public speaking skills develop.

All *karyakars* had to prepare two speeches selected from a common list of titles. Members of a pair could not select the same speech.

Separate competitions were held for *karyakars* from city and village areas.

Each pair was assigned to one of two groups for the competition: (1) Sahajanand and (2) Nilkanth



Prize distribution ceremony

The first round of competitions took place on regional levels in 200 regional centres on 26 September and 3 October, in which *karyakars* from Satsang Centres from within a particular region gathered at chosen centres in that region to compete. Winners were awarded prizes and earned the right to compete in the final round.

The final, inter-regional competitions took place at 26 selected centres on 10 and 17 October in which 5,101 men and 5,022 women *karyakars* competed in separate groups. Prizes were awarded for the best performing pairs.

As result of this *adhiveshan*, the *karyakars* enhanced their confidence and public speaking skills. ◆

BAL-KISHORE PARAYAN

September-October 2010, Adelaide & Melbourne, Australia

On Sunday, 26 September 2010, the *balaks* and *kishores* of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in Adelaide presented a memorable 2½ hour cultural programme at the University of South Australia, Magill Campus, Adelaide, based on the theme 'Nilkanth Varni Kalyan Yatra'.

Around 30 boys aged between 4 and 18 years enacted several incidents from the life of Nilkanth Varni through short plays, skits and a drama about Pibek's transformation. They also presented



Balaks present a skit from the life of Shri Nilkanth Varni

speeches, stories and bhajans to highlight some of the salient features of Nilkanth Varni's personality. The *balaks* also performed a colourful traditional folk dance in honour of Nilkanth Varni.

A similar programme was presented by 20

boys aged between 5 and 14 years in Melbourne on Sunday, 17 October 2010.

The Bal-Kishore Parayans focused on Nilkanth Varni's life, inspiring everyone with his messages of fearlessness, faith and friendship. ♦

EUROPE KARYAKAR SHIBIR

THEME: LIKHITAN YAGNAPURUSHDAS

17-19 September 2010, Guincho, Cascais, Portugal



Classroom session

More than 100 *karyakars* from Austria, France, Italy, Portugal, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom gathered in the picturesque setting of Guincho Beach, in Cascais, Portugal, for the third Europe Karyakar Shibir from Friday 17 September to Sunday 19 September 2010.

This year's *shibir*, entitled 'Likhitan Yagnapurushdas', was themed around the rich corpus of historical letters communicated between Shastriji Maharaj and his contemporaries. The



Group discussion

karyakars were given an insight into Shastriji Maharaj's clarity as well as his tireless efforts in propounding the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the difficulties Shastriji Maharaj experienced and how he overcame them, inspiring everyone to rise above the challenges they each face.

Everyone departed thoroughly inspired and motivated to strengthen their personal satsang and *seva* in their respective regions. ♦



COMMONWEALTH GAMES ATHLETES & OFFICIALS VISIT SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

New Delhi, 3-15 October 2010

Over 1,500 Commonwealth Games athletes and officials visited Swaminarayan Akshardham and learnt about Indian art, culture, traditions and spirituality. **1.** Atmaswarup Swami garlands and presents a memento to Honourable Garry Lunn, Minister of State (Sports), Government of Canada. **3.** Athletes pray inside the Religious Centre in the Games Village. **2 & 4.** A total of 110 volunteers from India and abroad diligently served for three weeks to guide the Games visitors in Swaminarayan Akshardham.



SWAMISHRI'S VICHARAN

August-September 2010, Bochasan, Bhavnagar, Sarangpur

1. Swamishri presides over the Indian Independence Day celebration, Bochasan, 15 Aug. 2. Swamishri performs puja on the morning of Raksha Bandhan, Bhavnagar, 24 Aug. 3. Swamishri performs *arti* of Thakorji on the occasion of Janmashtmi, Bhavnagar, 2 Sept. 4. A satsang assembly in the newly inaugurated assembly hall, Bhavnagar. 5. Sadhus and devotees in the Shastriji Maharaj Smruti Assembly, Sarangpur, 27 Sept. 6. Youths enact a skit from the life of Shastriji Maharaj at Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, Sarangpur.