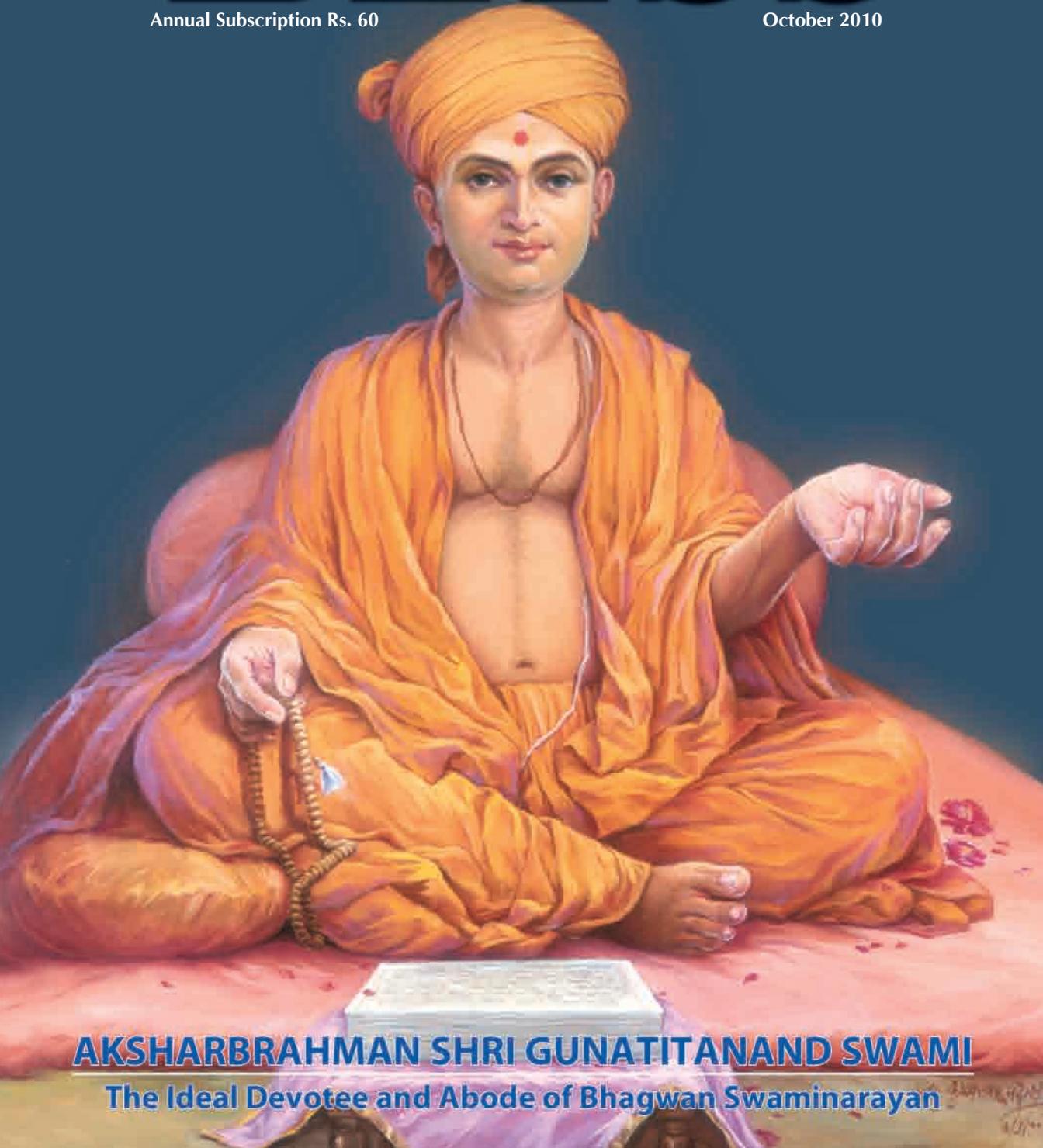


SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

Annual Subscription Rs. 60

October 2010



AKSHARBRAHMAN SHRI GUNATITANAND SWAMI

The Ideal Devotee and Abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan



**PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND VISITS BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR
5 September 2010, Auckland**

With the blessings and guidance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, BAPS conducts a variety of socio-spiritual activities from its mandir in Auckland, New Zealand. On 5 September 2010, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, The Rt. Hon. John Key visited the mandir and witnessed the varied activities for children, teenagers, youths and seniors that are conducted regularly. After addressing an assembly the BAPS also presented the Prime Minister with a contribution to the Christchurch earthquake fund.



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

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Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas
Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, 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

FIRST WORD

Evidences play a significant role in proving and advancing projects, researches, debates, litigations, historical facts, ownership, and disproving falsities. They can be in the forms of relics, objects, documents, facts and testimonies. Evidences prove matters that span from the trifle to the fundamental.

Institutions and ideologies have sprung from evidences and principles. The story of one popular religious institution stems from scriptural, inscrip-tional and verbal testimonies. They have all been weaved into a lucid and genuine understanding of the philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam. The in-stitution is known as the BAPS.

The 100-year-old BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha believes that Akshar is the ideal devotee of Purushottam (God). The Vedic and Upanishadic texts accept Parabrahman as the highest reality, and describe Brahman to be the same as Parabrahman and also distinct from Him.

The Swaminarayan Vedant Darshan (philoso-phy) preached by Bhagwan Swaminarayan be-lieves in five eternal entities: *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahman and Parabrahman. Brahman or Ak-sharbrahman pervades and transcends the lower three, yet it is inferior to and dependent upon Parabrahman. Aksharbrahman's prominence lies in its powers to liberate souls by blessing them with the state of Brahmabhav. Thereafter the souls become eligible to offer pure *upasana* (wor-ship) to Parabrahman. So for the *jivas* Akshar is the means to realize Purushottam (God). Only through Aksharbrahman can Parabrahman be known precisely, *maya* be eradicated, one be-come *brahmarup* and attain ultimate liberation.

(contd. on p. 6)

The Guru Parampara

Shri Hari calls Gopi Bhatt, the son of his guru's (Ramanand Swami) guru (Atmanand Swami) to reveal the entire succession of gurus in the Sampradaya...

I TURN THE MALA OF MY DEVOTEES

Shri Hari then sat in the lobby of Vasudev Narayan's room and addressed the sadhus, "Devji Bhagat of Nenpur has lost his teenage son. His soul has been liberated to the divine abode of Akshardham. To celebrate his departure Devji Bhagat's wife has brought a pot of ghee and sponsored a meal for us."

"O Maharaj, it is tragic that Devji Bhagat has met with such a calamity at this age," Niskulanand Swami sympathized.

"What calamity? It was he who had wished that I liberate his son's soul and bless it with Akshardham. So I had to do it," Maharaj revealed. All the sadhus were listening with amazement as Maharaj narrated the incident in detail.

Nishkulanand Swami praised, "Devji Bhagat is truly a realized soul (*mukta*). Once I and other sadhus were walking with Krupanand Swami from one village to another. By the time we reached Nenpur it was night-time.

"On arriving at Devji Bhagat's house he started making arrangements for our dinner. Krupanand Swami restrained him, 'Bhagat, there is no need for dinner. Come here and listen to our discourses.' Then, by the wish of Krupanand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami began his fluent and soulful discourse. Devji Bhagat sat focused, listening to Swami's preaching. Within no time it was midnight. Our eyes were heavy with sleep. So I said, 'Bhagat, you must be tired. Go and rest for the night.' Then Devji Bhagat replied, 'Swami, I will go to my farm now and turn 300 *malas* chanting the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*. By then sleep will have arrived, waiting for my order. She

will ask me, 'Shall I come?' I will permit her, 'Yes, you may'. Only thereafter I will lie down to sleep. But you have come a long way by foot and so you must be tired. Please retire for the night.'

Shri Hari and the entire assembly listened with rapt attention. Maharaj then recalled, "Once in Adhoi village, Ladhaji asked me, 'For whom are you turning the *mala*?' I replied, 'I chant the name of my genuine devotees.' Devji Bhakta is one such devotee. I chant his name while turning a bead of my *mala*." The sadhus realized the greatness of a true devotee like Devji Bhagat and that Maharaj offers devotion to such pious followers. This was the greatness of Shri Hari.

In the evening assembly at Dada's *darbar* Maharaj told Ramdas Swami, "The root of our Satsang comes from the Brahmin tradition. When the root of any *sampradaya* is the best, then that *sampradaya* is known to be the best. But the ignorant have no faith in the source of our Sampradaya. So, whatever you know of it reveal it now."

Ramdas Swami was a senior *paramhansa* from the time of Ramanand Swami. He had come to know the guru *parampara* of the Sampradaya from Ramanand Swami himself. It was because of this reason that Shri Hari told him to narrate the root of the tradition.

ATMANAND SWAMI

Ramdas Swami said, "Maharaj, your guru was Ramanand Swami, who established the Uddhav Sampradaya. He was born of the Kashyap *gotra* (lineage), his Veda was the Rig Veda and the branch was Ashwalayan.

“His guru was Atmanand Swami and his former name was Vishwambhar Bhatt. He belonged to the Jatukarna *gotra*, his Veda was the four Vedas (Chaturvedi) and the branch was called Madhyandini. He was born to the Modh Brahmin family of Jagjivan Bhatt and Nanbai. They belonged to the village of Dhuvav in the Halar region of Gujarat. Later, Jagjivan migrated to Gariyadhar in Gohilvad after his father passed away. Here at the mandir of Gopnath Mahadev Vishwambhar learnt the Yajur Veda from a *brahmachari* named Gopalanand. Later due to social unrest in Gariyadhar, Vishwambhar shifted to the village of Asodar. Here he married Rukimani, the daughter of Anandji Vipra. He fathered four sons and a daughter. Gopi Bhatt was his eldest son, followed by Bhanu, Jaydev and Atmaram, and his daughter was Anandi. Both Vishwambhar and his wife were aloof from the activities of the world. One day, Vishwambhar set out on a pilgrimage and came to Vrundavan. He accepted Shri Gopeshwar, a Telangi Brahmin who followed the Vaishnav tradition, as his guru. He stayed with him for nine years. Then he travelled to holy places for four years. Thereafter the guru told him to revert to the life of a householder. He did so for the next five years. At 60 years, Vishwambhar renounced home. He came to Dwarika and took *sannyas diksha* from Madhavanand Swami. The guru gave him a staff, a waterpot and saffron clothes to wear, and named him Purnanand.

“A little while later Vishwambhar returned to Gopnath. Here, Gopalanand Swami (the *brahmachari*) taught him meditation, gradually elevating him to the highest state of samadhi. Then Gopalanand told him to give up the *sannyas diksha* and take the *paramhansa diksha*. “Give up your staff and waterpot, and travel to discourse to all.” Gopalanand changed his name from Purnanand to Atmanand Swami.”

When Ramdas Swami paused Shri Hari asked, “From what guru *parampara* did Atmanand Swami come from? Talk of this elaborately so that nothing remains unknown.”

Ramdas Swami said, “Maharaj, I do not know the guru tradition Atmanand Swami hails from. However, his son, Gopi Bhatt, must know its history. He is a follower of Krishna, and he is well respected in the Vaishnav fold.”

“Then we must call him here,” Maharaj suggested. “If he is prepared to come and stay with us, we will make all the arrangements for him.” Then Dada Khachar offered, “If you so command I will have a new house constructed for him.” Shri Hari was pleased and Dada Khachar took up the responsibility. Maharaj added, “Write a letter to him to come here for the Vasant Panchmi festival. We will honour him and learn from him the root of the Sampradaya. The guru tradition is the mainstay of the Sampradaya.”

On receiving Shriji Maharaj’s letter of invitation, Gopi Bhatt came to Gadhada with his family and brothers. Since the house for him was under construction, he was provided with a temporary residence. During this time Laddkiba, a devotee of Meghpur, came for Maharaj’s darshan. Ever since Mulji Bhakta had been killed in Meghpur Shri Hari had stopped visiting the village. So Laddkiba would go for Maharaj’s darshan whenever he was travelling to neighbouring villages. Her love and devotion for Maharaj was profound and thus her mind and senses would remain engaged in him. On coming to Gadhpur she immediately experienced samadhi on seeing Maharaj. During samadhi she saw giant waves of light and heard a deafening sound as if the universe will be destroyed. Subsequently Laddkiba screamed, “Maharaj, I am burning. Save me!”

On hearing her cries Laduba and Jivuba were scared. “Maharaj, what is happening to her?” Jivuba asked.

Shri Hari replied, “When a devotee of God, who has not attained the state of *atma*-realization, enters from the waking state to the state of samadhi he becomes terrified by the sound of the movement of infinite planets and universes, and the engulfing giant waves of light. The brave Arjun could not behold the cosmic form of Krishna

and he thus prayed to him to appear in his benign human form. Then of what measure would Ladhkiba be? Then Maharaj told Ladhkiba in her samadhi, “As you ascend the higher divine realms in samadhi look at your form. Believe that Ladki is not your name and you do not belong to the Bhat community. Forget your bodily affiliations. Believe that you are *atma*, and that your *atma* is non-pierceable and undividable; fire cannot burn it and water cannot wet it.”

Ladhkiba experienced samadhi only due to Shri Hari’s divine grace. But because she had not attained the state of *atma*-realization she could not overcome her fears and burning sensation.

VASANT PANCHMI FESTIVAL

In 1820 (AS 1876) the festival of Vasant Panchmi was celebrated in Gadhpur. Dada Khachar had ordered the preparation of various colours and a few cartfuls of vermillion powder. In the morning, an assembly commenced with the singing of bhajans by the *paramhansas* beneath the neem tree in Dada’s *darbar*. Shri Hari arrived and sat on a seat. He had donned white clothes. The sadhus hailed his name and glory. Maharaj performed the worship rituals and then showered colours upon all. He also sprinkled it on Jiva Khachar, who was wearing new clothes. Jiva Khachar instantly shook off the vermillion powder. Maharaj smiled and added, “Bapu, the water colour in this squirter is not permanent. The moment you wash your clothes the colour will be washed away.”

Sura Khachar quipped, “Maharaj, if the colour you shower gets washed away then one cannot stay in Satsang!”

“Oh Sura Khachar, I am talking of the water

(contd. from p. 3)

Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself revealed the greatness of Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar – his divine abode and ideal devotee. Before concluding his stay on earth Bhagwan Swaminarayan declared Gunatitanand Swami as his successor and the gateway to moksha. Subsequently, the guru

colour in this squirter. My (spiritual) colour never fades when one understands the glory of my sadhus and devotees and keeps their company.” Jiva Khachar stood there lost in thought about Maharaj’s words.

GOPI BHATT COMES FOR SHRI HARI’S DARSHAN

Shri Hari called Gopi Bhatt. Shri Hari applied a round vermillion mark on his forehead to pay respects to him. Maharaj told Dada Khachar to do the same and introduced Gopi Bhatt to Jiva Khachar. Gopi Bhatt was then honoured with donations. Since everyone in the assembly was drenched in colours Maharaj announced that they should all proceed to the river Ghela for a bath. After the ritual bath was over the entire group followed Maharaj to Jiva Khachar’s *darbar*. Here Maharaj gave five *pendas* and *barfi* to each of the sadhus to eat. Maharaj also had a little *prasad* before proceeding to Dada Khachar’s *darbar*.

Mulji Brahmachari brought dinner for Maharaj. At that time Gopi Bhatt arrived and he requested, “Maharaj, I wish to worship you.” Shri Hari told him to do so at that very time. Gopi Bhatt applied a *chandlo* on Maharaj’s forehead. Maharaj gave him his golden threaded *pagh* (head gear). This pleased Gopi Bhatt profusely. After having dinner Shri Hari called an assembly in Dada’s *darbar*. Ramdas Swami, Nityanand Swami, Brahmanand Swami, Shuk Swami and others were present. When Gopi Bhatt arrived he prostrated to Maharaj and sat before him. ◆

(Contd. next issue)

From Gujarati text of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan
by H.T. Dave

tradition in the BAPS has continued through the succession of Aksharbrahman gurus. This special issue, based on articles from *Swaminarayan Prakash*, January 2010, shows evidences from stone inscriptions and *murtis* at various holy places and mandirs of the old Swaminarayan School in Gujarat that Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar. ◆



Glory of Aksharbrahman in the Hindu Shastras

‘एतस्य वा अक्षरस्य प्रशासने गर्गि! सूर्याचन्द्रमसौ विधृतौ तिष्ठतः । एतस्य वा अक्षरस्य प्रशासने गर्गि! द्यावापृथिव्यौ विधृते तिष्ठतः । एतस्य वा अक्षरस्य प्रशासने गर्गि! निमेषा मुहूर्ता अहोरात्राण्यर्धमासा मासा ऋतवः संवत्सरा इति विधृतास्तितिष्ठन्ति ।’ – *‘Etasya vā Aksharasya prashāsane Gārgi! Sooryāchandramasau vidhrtaut tishthataha; Etasya vā ‘O Gargi! Aksharasya prashāsane Gārgi! Dyāvāpṛthivyau vidhrute tishthataha; Etasya vā Aksharasya prashāsane Gārgi! Nimeshā muhoortā ahorātrānyardhamāsā māsā rutavaha samvatsarā iti vidhṛtāstishanti’* – ‘This Aksharbrahman rules over the sun, the moon and the people of the earth and in the region between heaven and earth. Even the day and night, the months, and the years and the season, all the fractions of time, are caused by Aksharbrahman’ (Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad 3.8.9).

Therefore, Aksharbrahman rules over and governs everything.

These are the words spoken thousands of years ago by the learned Sage Yagnavalkya in the Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad, revealing the nature of Aksharbrahman to the learned Gargi in a debate in the court of King Janak.

This article will present the glory of Aksharbrahman described in the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras.

WHAT IS THAT BRAHMAN?

Arjun asks this question, which also arises in our minds, to Shri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita.

Shri Krishna replies, ‘अक्षरं ब्रह्म परमम् ।’ – *‘Aksharam Brahma Paramam’* – ‘Dear Arjun! Akshar, which transcends the three worldly qualities (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*), is that Brahman’ (Bhagavad Gita 8.3). Combining the two words, it is also called Aksharbrahman.

Detailing what that Aksharbrahman is like, Shri Krishna says, ‘यद् अक्षरं वेदविदो वदन्ति ।’ – *‘Yad Aksharam vedvido vadanti!’* – ‘O Arjun! Even those who know the Vedas have been singing the glory of the virtues and form of Aksharbrahman’ (Bhagavad Gita 8.11). From this we can simply deduce that Akshar is eternal.

Indeed, Shri Krishna knows ‘सर्वे वेदा यत्पदमामनन्ति’ – *‘Sarve Vedā yatpadmāmananti’* – ‘Even the Vedas sing his glory’ (Kathopanishad 2.15) and “एतद्भ्येवाक्षरं ब्रह्म” – *‘Etadhyevāksharam Brahma’* – ‘This Akshar is itself Brahman’ (Kathopanishad 2.16). Thus, as if echoing the words of the Mundak Upanishad from the Atharva Veda, Shri Krishna says emphatically ‘ॐ इत्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म’ – *‘Om ityevāksharam Brahma’* – ‘That which is called Om is Aksharbrahman’ (Bhagavad Gita 8.13).

AKSHARBRAHMAN – AN INTEGRAL PART OF BRAHMAVIDYA

‘विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते’ – *‘Vidyayā’mrutamashnute’*, ‘विद्यया विन्दतेऽमृतम्’ – *‘Vidyayā vindate’mrutam’* and other *shloks* show that *brahmavidya* (knowledge of Brahman) is required for ultimate liberation. But what is *brahmavidya* really? Sage Angira throws light on this in the Mundak Upanishad, ‘येन अक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम्’ – *‘Yena Aksharam Purusham veda satyam provācha tām tattvato brahmavidyām’* ‘Aksharam’ is Aksharbrahman and ‘Paramam’ is Parabrahman Purushottam. So, knowing Akshar and Purushottam as they are is *brahmavidya*.

In the Prashnopanishad Sage Pipplad says the same. Explaining that contemplation on the sound of Om is a means to the highest liberation, he says, ‘एतद् वै सत्यकाम परं च अपरं च ब्रह्म यद् ॐकारः’ – *‘Etad vai Satyakāma param cha aparam cha Brahma Omkāraha’* – (Prashna Upanishad 5.2). Thus, he explains, ‘O Satyakam! This sound of Om has incorporated the whole of *brahmavidya* in itself. So first its meaning should be known. Satyakam! Om has two meanings. One, ‘परं ब्रह्म’ – *‘Param Brahma’*, that is, Parabrahman Purushottam Narayan and the other is ‘अपरं ब्रह्म’ – *‘Aparam Brahma’*, that is, Aksharbrahman.’

Thus, while reciting Om, if one refers to it as meaning Akshar and Purushottam, then ‘स सामभिरुन्नीयते ब्रह्मलोकं स एतस्माज्जीवघनात् परात्परं पुरिशयं पुरुषमीक्षते ।’ – *‘Sa sāmabhiroonniyate Brahmaloke sa etasmājjeevadhanāt parātparam purishyam purushmeekshate’* – ‘One attains Brahmalo, that

is, Akshardham. And one attains *sakshatkar* of Purushottam, who is above Aksharbrahman – who surpasses all *atmas*’ (Prashna Upanishad 5.5).

The essence of *brahmavidya* contained in the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita has been captured in the Brahmasutras by Vyasji. In the very first *sutra*, ‘अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा ।’ – ‘*Athāto Brahmajignāsā*’ – ‘Now, therefore the enquiry into Brahman’ (Brahmasutra 1.1.1), he incorporates the whole of *brahmavidya* by referring to Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman in just one aphorism. Using the word ब्रह्म ‘Brahma’, which is a part of both Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman, he establishes the entities of Akshar and Purushottam as necessary for *moksha*.

So, only when both Aksharbrahman and Parabrahman are known is *brahmavidya* fully attained.

The significance of this special definition of *brahmavidya* has been explained in our shastras.

The Bhagavad Gita says, ‘ब्रह्मभूतः प्रसन्नात्मा न शोचति न काङ्क्षति । समः सर्वेषु भूतेषु मद्भक्तिं लभते पराम् ॥’ – ‘*Brahmabhoota prasannātmā na shochati na kāṅkshati; Samaha sarveshu bhooteshu madbhaktim labhate parām*’ Meaning, only one who becomes *brahmarup*, that is *aksharrup*, gains the benefit of the highest devotion to Purushottam (Gita 18.54).

The Taittiriya Upanishad says, ‘ब्रह्मविदाप्नोति परम्’ – ‘*Brahmavidāpnoti Param*’ – Only one who knows Brahman, or Akshar, that is, has become *brahmarup*, attains Paramatama. Thus, it is clear that to qualify for ultimate liberation, one must know Purushottam Parabrahman, and offer *upasana* and *bhakti* to him. And to fully attain this knowledge, *upasana* and *bhakti*, one must also know Aksharbrahman and become *aksharrup*.

AKSHARBRAHMAN – AN ENTITY DISTINCT FROM ATMA AND PARAMATMA

Aksharbrahman is fundamentally different from *jiva*, *ishwar* and Paramatma. This is clearly described in the shastras.

Kathopanishad describes the increasing greatness of the *indriyas*, etc., *atma*,

Aksharbrahman and Paramatma. It reveals, ‘आत्मा महान् परः’ – ‘*Ātmā mahān paraha*’ – The *atma* is greater than and the director of all senses and is their support (Katha Upanishad 3.10). Then it states, ‘महतः परमव्यक्तम्’ – ‘*Mahataha Paramavyaktam*’ (Katha Upanishad 3.11), that there is an entity, called ‘अव्यक्तम्’ – *avyaktam*, that is even greater than *atma* and is its controller and support. This entity is Aksharbrahman. In the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna clarifies this point, saying, ‘अव्यक्तः अक्षरः इति उक्तः’ – ‘*Āvyaktaha Aksharaha iti uktaha*’ – ‘It is said that this *avyakta* is Aksharbrahman’ (Bhagavad Gita 8.21).

Then, in this ascending hierarchy, Paramatma is described as above, and the controller and support of even Aksharbrahman, ‘अव्यक्तात् पुरुषः परः’ – ‘*Āvyaktat Purushaha paraha*’ – ‘Purushottam Paramatma is above that Aksharbrahman’ (Katha Upanishad 3.11).

Thus, Aksharbrahman has been portrayed as greater than *atma* but lesser than Paramatma. In this way it is thus described by the shastras as an entity distinct from *atma* and Paramatma.

The Bhagavad Gita corroborates this doctrine, ‘द्वाविमौ पुरुषौ लोके क्षरश्च अक्षर एव च । क्षरः सर्वाणि भूतानि कूटस्थोऽक्षर उच्यते ॥ उत्तमपुरुषस्त्वन्यः परमात्मेत्युदाहृतः’ – ‘*Dvavimau Purushau loke ksharashcha Akshara eva cha; Ksharaha sarvāni bhootāni kootastho’kshara uchyate. Uttampurushastvanyaha Paramātmetyudāhṛutaha*’ – ‘There are two kinds of Purush in this world. One is *kshar* and the other is Akshar. *Kshar* includes all *atmas* (souls) and distinct from them is Aksharbrahman. That which transcends the two is Purushottam, also known as Paramatma’ (Bhagavad Gita 15.16-17).

That is why in the Brahmasutras, Vyasji has incorporated sections such as ‘पराधिकरणम्’ ‘*Paradhikaranam*’ (Brahmasutras 3.2.30) and promoted this principle.

FOUR FORMS OF AKSHARBRAHMAN

Aksharbrahman is essentially only one entity, but on the basis of its functions, the shastras have described it as having four forms: (1) the

Chidakash form, (2) the Dham form, (3) the Servant form, serving Paramatma in Akshardham and (4) the Gunatit Satpuruṣ form on earth.

AKSHARBRAHMAN AS CHIDAKASH

Chidakash means an expanse of the sky which is divine. Since Aksharbrahman is pervasive like the sky it is called Chidakash. In the form of Chidakash, Aksharbrahman is the cause of, pervades and supports the whole of creation.

AKSHARBRAHMAN, THE ORIGIN OF THE UNIVERSE

‘अक्षरात् सम्भवतीह विश्वम्।’ – ‘*Aksharat sambhavateeha vishvam*’ – ‘The whole universe is born out of Aksharbrahman’ (Mundak Upanishad 1.1.7). This is the unique glory of Aksharbrahman. Although the eternal doctrine is that only Parabrahman Purushottam Narayan is the independent cause of creation, by the wish of that Parabrahman, Aksharbrahman, who is subservient to Parabrahman, becomes the cause of all creation. This, too, is an eternal principle. Thus, through many varied examples the Upanishads have explained Aksharbrahman as the cause of creation.

In the Mundak Upanishad, guru Maharshi Angira explains this maxim to his disciple Shaunak through three examples, ‘यथोर्णनाभिः सृजते गृह्णते च यथा पृथिव्यामोषधयः सम्भवन्ति यथा सतः पुरुषात् केशलोमानि तथाऽक्षरात् सम्भवतीह विश्वम्॥’ – ‘*Yathornabhihi srujate gruhnate cha yathā pruthivyāmoshadhayaha sa bhavanti yathā sataha purushāt keshalomāni tathā’ksharāt sa bhavateeha vishvam*’ (Mundak Upanishad 1.1.7).

The first example is that of a spider. He says that just as a spider builds a net out of its saliva and then retracts it when it wishes, the universe similarly arises out of Akshar.

The second example refers to the luxuriant growth of vegetation on the earth. Just as the various herbs, flowers and trees grow from their respective seeds, the universe is born out of Akshar.

The third example is about the growth of hair

on the body. Just as hair and nails grow naturally on the body, Akshar creates the universe.

Thus, these three examples explain how Akshar accepts the divine wish of Purushottam and becomes the cause of creation.

Also, the Mundak Upanishad explains that the created universes are absorbed by Akshar, ‘अक्षराद् विविधाः सोम्य भावाः प्रजायन्ते तत्र चैवाऽपियन्ति’ – ‘*Aksharād vividhāhā bhāvā prajāyante tatra chaivā’piyanti*’ – ‘O Somya! Many varied objects have arisen from this Akshar and at the time of dissolution they are absorbed back into Akshar’ (Mundak Upanishad 2.1.1). Therefore, in the Bhagavad Gita Aksharbrahman is described as ‘ग्रसिष्णु प्रभविष्णु च’ – ‘*Grasishnu prabhavishnu cha*’ – responsible for the creation and destruction of the entire creation (Bhagavad Gita 13.16).

ALL-PERVADING AKSHARBRAHMAN

Our shastras describe Aksharbrahman as all-pervading. In the Mundak Upanishad of the Atharva Veda, Maharshi Angira says, ‘ब्रह्मैवेदममृतं पुरस्ताद् ब्रह्म पश्चाद् ब्रह्म दक्षिणतश्चोत्तरेण। अधश्चोर्ध्वं च प्रसृतं ब्रह्मैव।’ ‘*Brahmaivedamamrutam purastād Brahma paschād Brahma dakshinatashchottarena; Adhashchordhvam cha prasrutam Brahmaiva*’ – ‘Truly, Before us all there is the nectar-like, eternal Aksharbrahman. Behind is Aksharbrahman. To the south and north is Aksharbrahman. And, above, below and everywhere is Aksharbrahman’ (Mundak Upanishad 2.2.11).

Also, in the Ishavasya Upanishad in the final *adhyay* of the Shukla Yajur Veda, together with the all-pervading nature of Parabrahman, that of Aksharbrahman has also been described: ‘तद् दूरे तद् वन्तिके। तदन्तरस्य सर्वस्य तदुसर्वस्य बाह्यतः॥’ – ‘*Tad doore tad vantike tadantarasya sarvasya tadasarvasya bāhyātaha*’ – ‘It is very far and very near. It is also within all and outside’ (Ishavasya Upanishad 5).

The Bhagavad Gita echoes the same view: ‘बहिरन्तश्च भूतानामचरं चरमेव च। सूक्ष्मत्वात् तदविज्ञेयं दूरस्थं चान्तिके च तत्॥’ ‘*Bahirantascha bhootānāmacharam charameva cha; Sookshmatvāt tadvigneyam doorastham chāntike cha tat*’ – ‘It pervades all and everything’

(Bhagavad Gita 13.15); 'तस्माद् सर्वगतं ब्रह्म' – 'Tasmad sarvagatam Brahma' (Bhagavad Gita 3.15).

Aksharbrahman pervades everything: 'ब्रह्माणं ब्रह्म हविर्ब्रह्मग्नौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम् । ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्मकर्मसमाधिना ॥' 'Brahmanam Brahma havirbrahmagnau Brahmanā hutam; Brahmaiva tena gantavyam Brahmakarmasamādhinā' – 'Aksharbrahman pervades even the wooden ladle used in making the offerings in a yagna. It pervades ghee, sesame seeds, barley grains, rice grains and other materials used in the yagna. The fire is pervaded by Aksharbrahman. And even the person making the offerings is pervaded by Aksharbrahman. The ultimate destination for one who performs Brahma-centric actions in this way is Aksharbrahman' (Bhagavad Gita 4.24).

A collection of such talks has been written in the 'सर्वत्राधिकरणम्' – 'Sarvatrādhikaranam' (Brahmasutra 1.2.1) section by Maharshi Vyasji.

When we speak of the pervasiveness of Aksharbrahman, mention must be made of the *daharvidya* explained in detail in the eighth *adhyay* of the Chandogya Upanishad. This knowledge merges the all-pervasiveness of Aksharbrahman with all our hearts: 'अथ यदिदमस्मिन् ब्रह्मपुरे दहरं पुण्डरीकं वेश्म दहरोऽस्मिन्तराकाशः' – 'Atha yadidamasmin Brahmapure daharam pundareekam veshma daharo'sminntarakāshaha' (Chandogya Upanishad 8.1.1).

Dahar means subtle. Here, the heart in every person's body is compared with the lotus. Even in the heart, represented by the subtle lotus, there is space which is subtle. The Upanishad calls it *daharakash*. This *daharakash* is Aksharbrahman in the form of Chidakash. It is within us all. Thus we all have a special relationship with Aksharbrahman. Thus, this description of *daharakash*, that is Aksharbrahman in the pervasive form of Chidakash in our hearts, is known as *daharvidya*.

With this *daharvidya* in mind Maharshi Vyasji has written the 'दहराधिकरणम्' – 'Daharadhikaranam' section in the Brahmasutras and in it he has explained that Aksharbrahman in the form of

daharakash pervades everyone's heart.

Parabrahman Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan also refers to this *vidya* (branch of knowledge) in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 46, 'In this way, Chidakash is present on all four sides of the *brahmand* as well as within the *brahmand*. When one's vision reaches the perspective of that all-supporting Chidakash, it is known as *daharvidya*. Just as *akshividya* and many other types of *brahmavidya* have been described, this is also one type of *brahmavidya*.'

AKSHARBRAHMAN AS THE SUPPORT OF ALL

Our shastras explain that just as Aksharbrahman is all pervading, it is also the support of all creation. In the Katha Upanishad, Yama, god of death, in explaining *brahmavidya* to Nachiketa describes clearly the all-supporting nature/form of Aksharbrahman. He says, 'तद् ब्रह्म तदेवामृतमुच्यते । तस्मिंल्लोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे तद् नान्त्येति कश्चन ।' 'Tad Brahma tadevamrutamuchyate; Tasmimllokāhā shritāhā sarve tadū nāntyeti kaschana' – 'O Nachiketa! This Aksharbrahman is imperishable. The infinite universes are supported and sustained by it. So, there is no one in these universes who can surpass Aksharbrahman' (Katha Upanishad 5.8).

Chandogya Upanishad says, 'उभे अस्मिन् द्यावापृथिवी अन्तरेव समाहिते' – 'Ubhe asmin dyāvāpruthivi antareva samāhite' – 'This whole earth and everything else is included in Aksharbrahman' (8.1.3).

Mundak Upanishad also says, 'यस्मिंल्लोका निहिता लोकिनश्च तदेतदक्षरं ब्रह्म ।' – 'Yasmimllokā nihitā lokinashcha tadetadakasharam Brahma' (Mundak Upanishad 2.2.2), 'यस्मिन् द्यौः पृथिवी चान्तरिक्षमोतम्' – 'Yasmin dyauhau pruthivi chāntarikshamottam' – 'Earth, space and other lokas, and their gods are all sustained by this Aksharbrahman' (Mundak Upanishad 2.2.4).

Bhagavad Gita says, 'सर्वभृच्चैव' – 'Sarvabruchchaiva' – 'Aksharbrahman beholds all' (Bhagavad Gita 13.14); 'भूतभृ च' – 'Bhootabhatru cha' – 'It supports and nourishes all life forms' (Bhagavad Gita 13.14).

In this way, the Upanishads and Gita describe the glory of Aksharbrahman as the support of all creation. This truth is incorporated in the Brahmasutras by Vyasji. In the 'द्युभ्वाधिकरणम्' 'Dyubhavadhikaranam' section, he writes, 'द्युभ्वाद्यायतनं स्वशब्दात्' – 'Dyubhāvādhyāyanam svashabdāt' (Brahmasutras 1.3.1).

Thus the Hindu shastras widely describe Aksharbrahman as the cause of all creation, all-pervasive and the support of all. In the Vachanamrut, Parabrahman Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan presents the essence of these various descriptions, 'Now, on the path of 'brahma-jnan', one should understand in the following manner: Brahman is not subject to change and is indivisible. Thus, it does not undergo change, nor can it be divided. When that Brahman is equated with all forms, it is because that Brahman is the cause of all – Prakriti-Purush, etc. It is their supporter and pervades all through its *antaryami* powers. Furthermore, that which is the cause, the supporter and the pervader cannot be distinct from its effect. It is in reference to this context that the shastras equate that Brahman with all forms. However, one should not believe that that Brahman itself undergoes change and assumes the forms of all mobile and immobile beings. Transcending that Brahman is Parabrahman, Purushottam Narayan, who is distinct from Brahman, and is the cause, the supporter and the inspirer of Brahman. With such understanding, one should develop oneness with one's *jivatma* and with that Brahman, and worship Parabrahman while maintaining a master-servant relationship with him. With such understanding, 'brahma-jnan' also becomes an unobstructed path to attaining the highest state of enlightenment' (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 3)

This is the Chidakash form of Aksharbrahman. Now we will consider its other forms.

AKSHARBRAHMAN – AS THE ABODE OF PARABRAHMAN/GOD

Our shastras portray Aksharbrahman as the highest abode of God, Parabrahman. They

describe the form of Akshardham, its glory and the means to attaining it.

AKSHARBRAHMAN – AS A DEFINITE PLACE

In its form as the divine abode, Aksharbrahman is the dwelling place for Parabrahman and the *akshar muktas*. Thus, the Shrutis describe Aksharbrahman as 'पदम्' – 'padam', or 'place'. For example, 'सर्वे वेदा यत्पदमामनन्ति तपांसि सर्वाणि च यद् वदन्ति । यदित्च्छन्तो ब्रह्मचर्यं चरन्ति तत् ते पदं संग्रहेण ब्रवीम्योमित्येतत् ॥' – 'Sarve Vedā yatpadmāmananti tapānsi sarvāni cha yad vadanti; Yadichhanto brahmacharyam charanti tat te padam sangraheṇa bravi yomityetat' – 'The place upon which the Vedas meditate, the place which can be reached by observing austerities and the place which the learned observe celibacy to attain: that place is Aum' (Katha Upanishad 2.15). That very place is Akshar; it is Brahman.

How luminous is this place? Katha Upanishad describes, 'न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्रतारकं नेमा विद्युतो भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः । तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥' 'Na tatra suryo bhāti na chandratāarakam nemā vidyuto bhanti kuto'yamagnihi; tameva bhāntamanubhāti sarvam tasya bhāsā sarvamidam vibhāti' – 'This Akshardham is so luminous that the collective light of the sun, the moon, the stars and lightning pale into insignificance when compared with it. What then can be said about the light of fire. The light of Akshardham lights up the whole of creation' (Katha Upanishad 5.15).

Describing this Akshardham as the dwelling of God, the Shrutis say, 'तद् विष्णोः परमं पदम् ।' – 'Tad Vishnoho param padam' – 'That Akshar is God's highest abode.'

Bhagwan Swaminarayan also says, 'That Aksharbrahman is the abode of God.' (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I...).

AKSHARDHAM – SUPREME ABODE

The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita explains that of all the places in the countless universes, Akshardham is the supreme place, 'अव्यक्तोऽक्षर इत्युक्तस्तमाहुः परमां गतिम् ।' – 'Avyakto'kshara ityuktastamāhuhu paramām

gatim' – 'Akshardham is *avyakta* and is the highest attainable place' (Bhagavad Gita 8.21).

The supremacy of Akshardham is eloquently captured in the dialogue between Sage Yagnavalkya and Gargi in the Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad.

Gargi asks Yagnavalkya what the earth is merged in, meaning, what sustains it?

Yagnavalkya replies, 'It's water.'

Gargi further asks – 'What supports water?' Yagnavalkya refers to light. In reply to Gargi's further philosophical queries, Yagnavalkya refers to wind, space, ego and so on in sequential order, and finally says that everything is sustained by Aksharbrahman. Then Gargi tries to inquire further, 'कस्मिन् खलु ब्रह्मलोका ओताश्च प्रोताश्चेति।' '*Kasmin khalu Brahmalo kā otāshcha protāshcheti*' – 'What is Brahmalo supported by?' At this point Yagnavalkya warns, 'स होवाच गार्गी मातिप्राक्षीर्मा ते मूर्धा व्यपत्तदनतिप्रश्रन्यां वै देवतामतिपृच्छसि गार्गी माऽतिप्राक्षीरिति ततो ह गार्गी वाचकनव्युपराम।' – '*Sa hovācha Gārgi bhātiprākshermā te moordhā vyapaptadanatiprashanyām vai devatāmatipruchhasi Gārgi mātiprāksheeriti tato ha Gārgi vāchaknavyuparāma*' – 'Stop Gargi! If you ask further questions, you will be beheaded' (Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad 3.6.1). There is no place above Aksharbrahman. Even to think that there is a place beyond it endangers one's life. Thus, Yagnavalkya stops Gargi.

AKSHARDHAM: BEYOND THE GUNAS OF MAYA

Akshardham is Gunatit and beyond *maya*. Thus, the Bruhadaranyak Upanishad describes it as above the sinful *maya*, 'विपापो विरजोऽविचिकित्सो ब्राह्मणो भवत्येष ब्रह्मलोकः।' – '*Vipāpo virajo'vichikitso brāhmano bhavatyēsha Brahmalo kaha*' – 'Akshardham is sinless, beyond the three qualities of *rajoguna*, etc. and free of the doubts created by delusion' (Bruhadaranyak Upanishad 4.4.23).

AKSHARDHAM – FROM WHERE THERE IS NO RETURN

The unique feature of Akshardham is that once it is attained one never has to fall back to

earth. After attaining other abodes, one still has to take birth again on earth. This is explained in the Bhagavad Gita, 'आब्रह्मभुवनाल्लोकाः पुनरावर्तिनोऽर्जुन ।' – '*Ābrahmabhuvanāllōkāha punarāvartino'rjuna*' – 'O Arjun! All the heavenly abodes up to Akshardham are such that one has to return to earth from there' (Bhagavad Gita 8.16).

This fact is also stated in the Chandogya Upanishad, 'स खल्वेवं वर्तयन्वावदायुषं ब्रह्मलोकमभिसम्पद्यते न च पुनरावर्तते न च पुनरावर्तते ॥' – '*Sa khalvevam vartayanyāvādāyusham Brahmalo kamabhisa padyate na cha punarāvartate na cha punarāvartate*' – 'Having attained this Brahmalo, the liberated soul never returns to the earth' (Chandogya Upanishad 8.15.1).

DARSHAN OF PARABRAHMAN IN AKSHARDHAM

What is the object of reaching Akshardham? What does one do there? There are no commonplace sensual pleasures in Akshardham, so does one indulge in divine pleasures? Or does one remain there merged with the *atma*? Answering this question, the Prashnopanishad explains, 'स सामभिरुन्नीयते ब्रह्मलोकं स एतस्माज्जीवघनात् परात्परं पुरिशयं पुरुषमीक्षते तदेतौ श्लोकौ भवतः ॥' – '*Sa sāmabhirunneeyate Brahmalo kam sa etasmājīvevadhanāt parātparam purishayam purushameekshate tadetau shlokau bhavataha*' – 'On attaining Brahmalo, the liberated soul sees Purushottam Narayan who transcends the *jivas*, *ishwars* and Aksharbrahman.' The darshan of the infinitely blissful *murti* of Parabrahman is the sole purpose of attaining Akshardham.

3. AKSHARBRAHMAN – PERSONAL SERVANT OF PARABRAHMAN IN AKSHARDHAM

Aksharbrahman is one entity, but its several functions are clearly and simply described in the shastras. In the form of Akshardham, Aksharbrahman is the dwelling place of Parabrahman and the *akshar muktas*. At the same time, within Akshardham, Aksharbrahman serves as the personal attendant of Parabrahman

Purushottam Narayan. This is also widely stated in the shastras.

Maharshi Angira explains this in the Mundak Upanishad. Explaining to his disciple, Shaunak, about the various forms of the Aksharbrahman entity, Angira Rishi says, 'महत्पदम् अत्र एतत् समर्पितम्। एषत् प्राणन्निमिषच्च... तदेतद् अक्षरं ब्रह्म' '*Mahatpadam atra etat samarpitam; Eshat prānannimishachcha... tadetad Aksharam Brahma*' – 'O Shaunak! Aksharbrahman is the supreme place, Akshardham. Not only that, in this Akshardham, Aksharbrahman is dedicated to the service of Purushottam Narayan.' Further, he says, 'O Shaunak! Aksharbrahman, who is engrossed in the service of Purushottam-Narayan moves, breathes and also blinks his eyes' (Mundak Upanishad 2.2.1-2). This simply means that the Aksharbrahman in the service of Purushottam-Narayan is not formless but has form and has divine hands, feet and other body features. Later, Maharshi Angira states, 'दिव्ये ब्रह्मपुरे ह्येष व्योम्यात्मा प्रतिष्ठितः। मनोमयः प्राणशरीरनेता' '*Divyē Brahmapure hyesha vyo nyātmā pratishthitaha; Manomayaha prānashareeraneta*' – 'In the divine Brahmaपुर, or Akshardham, resides Aksharbrahman, who is the life force/*atma* of all *jivas*. He has a divine form, mind and body and is complete in every respect' (Mundak Upanishad 2.2.9).

Bhagwan Swaminarayan describes this form of Aksharbrahman in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 21, 'In its other form, that Akshar remains in the service of Purushottam Nārāyan.'

Thus the shastras have described a special form of Aksharbrahman.

Together with this complete divine *murti* form of Aksharbrahman the liberated souls in Akshardham enjoy the highest bliss of Paramatma, 'सोऽश्नुते सर्वान् कामान् सहा ब्रह्मणा विपश्चितेति' – '*So'shnute sarvān kāmān saha Brahmanā vipashchitēti*' (Taittiriya Upanishad, Anandvalli 1).

It is not easy to experience the all-causing, all-pervasive and all-supporting forms of Aksharbrahman. Also, it is not possible to know or even to have darshan of the personal attendant form, Aksharbrahman in the service of

Purushottam Narayan in Akshardham, before one becomes *brahmarup*. Only if that Aksharbrahman incarnates on earth in human form, can we human beings have his darshan and associate with him. But is this possible? Does Aksharbrahman manifest in human form and live amongst us? Our shastras say yes. Aksharbrahman certainly manifests in human form on this earth and we are able to associate with him. This is the benevolent divine form of Aksharbrahman.

4. AKSHARBRAHMAN AS BRAHMASWARUP GURU

Our Gunatit Guru who lives among us and goes from place to place is the human incarnation of Aksharbrahman. It is only through association with him that one can acquire virtues like Brahman, become *brahmarup*, develop the highest faith in Parabrahman and experience firsthand the manifest presence of Paramatma.

That is why the Mundak Upanishad categorically states, 'तद् विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निच्छम्।' – '*Tad vijnānārtham sa gurumevābhigachchhet samitpānihi shrotriyam brahma nishtham*' 'If one wishes to realize *brahmavidya*, one has to seek the refuge of a guru' (Mundak Upanishad 1.2.12). And what should that guru be like? The answer: 'shrotriyam' – one who has attained *sakshatkar* of essence of all shastras, 'Brahma' – one who is himself Aksharbrahman and 'nishtham' – one who has unparalleled conviction in the form of Parabrahman Paramatma and is engaged in the highest devotion to Paramatma.

This reveals that Aksharbrahman gives darshan as the manifest guru. The Bhagavad Gita says, 'तद् विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया। उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः॥' – '*Tad viddhi pranipātena pariprashnena sevayā; Upekshyanti te jñānam jñāninastattvadarshinaha*' (Bhagavad Gita 4.34). Meaning, only that Aksharbrahman guru is known as a *jnani* and one who truly knows the essence of all philosophy. We are directed to realize *brahmavidya* by bowing to him, dialogue with him, serving him and thus pleasing him.

AKSHARBRAHMAN GURU: BRIDGE AND BOAT

What is the role of such an Aksharbrahman guru in a disciple's life? The Upanishads explain his role with a variety of similes.

In the Katha Upanishad, Yamaraja says, 'यः सेतुरीजानानामक्षरं ब्रह्म यत्परम्। अभयं तितीर्षतां पारं नाचिकेतुः शकेमहि ॥' – 'Yaha setureejānānāmaksharam Brahma yatparam; Ubhayam titeershatāmpāram Nachiketas shakemahi' – 'For those who wish to traverse the whirlpools and oceans of *maya* Aksharbrahman is a bridge' (Katha Upanishad 3.2). Just as a bridge helps one to comfortably cross from one side of a river to the other, Aksharbrahman in the form of the guru serves as a bridge. He saves us from drowning in *maya*, takes us beyond *maya*, takes us to the Dham of Paramatma and joins us to him. Angira Rishi explains this to his disciple, Shaunak, 'अमृतस्यैष सेतुः' – 'Amrutasyaisha setuh' – 'This Aksharbrahman is the bridge to the eternal Paramatma.'

Shvetashvatara Upanishad describes such a guru in a different way, 'ब्रह्मोडुपेन प्रतरेत विद्वान् स्रोतांसि सर्वाणि भयावहानि' 'Brahmodupena prataretā vidvān strotānsi sarvāni bhayāvahāni' – 'The intelligent should cross the hazardous currents of *maya* with the boat in the form of Aksharbrahman.' This boat is the manifest Brahmaswarup guru.

Thus, in the form of a bridge or boat the Aksharbrahman guru takes us to Paramatma, who is forever beyond *maya*.

ASSOCIATION WITH MANIFEST AKSHARBRAHMAN

Out of compassion, Aksharbrahman himself manifests on this earth and lives among us, but if one does not recognize and associate with him, the potential benefits are not attained. Thus, describing the Brahmaswarup guru as a bow the Mundak Upanishad explains, 'प्रणवो धनुः शरो ह्यात्मा ब्रह्म तल्लक्ष्यमुच्यते। अप्रमत्तेन वेद्भ्यं शरवत् तन्मयो भवेत्।' – 'Pranavo dhanu sharo hyatma brahma tallakshyamuchyate; apramattena vedbhavyam tanmayo bhavet' (Mundak Upanishad 2.2.4). 'Pranav' means Aum and Aum

means Aksharbrahman. 'ॐ इत्येतद् एतद्भ्येवाऽक्षरं ब्रह्म' – 'Aum itiyetad etadhyevaaksharam Brahma' (Katha Upanishad 1.2.15-16), 'ॐ इत्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म' – 'Aum ityekaaksharam Brahma' (Bhagavad Gita 8.13), and other references in the shastras use the word 'Aum' to describe Aksharbrahman. Also, 'गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निष्ठम्।' – 'Gurumevābhigachchhet samitpānihi shrotriyam brahma nishtham' (Mundak Upanishad 1.2.12) refers to Aksharbrahman as the Brahmaswarup guru.

So, the meaning of this mantra is: 'Pranav', or the Aksharbrahman guru is a bow. We, the *atmas* are arrows. That Aksharbrahman is our goal, target. So, just as an arrow remains attached with the bow and focuses on the target, a devotee should remain sincerely attached to the Aksharbrahman guru to reach the target, which is Brahman. That is, one has to become *brahmarup* and attain Akshardham since Purushottam Narayan himself, the master of Akshar, is seated there.

SEEING NARAYANSWARUP IN THE FORM BRAHMAN

'शरवत् तन्मयो भवेत्।' – 'Sharavat tanmayo bhavet' (Mundak Upanishad 2.2.5) directs that one must attach to the manifest Brahman. The shastras also reveal the feelings with which such attachment must be maintained. The final mantra of the last *adhyay* of the Shvetashvatara Upanishad reveals, 'यस्य देवे पराभक्तिर्यथा देवे तथा गुरौ। तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्थाः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः ॥' – 'Yasya deve parābhaktiryathā deve tathā gurau; tasyaite kathitā hyarthāhā prakāshante mahātmanaha' (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 6.23). This is the height of devotion – to see the form of Narayan in the manifest Aksharbrahman guru. If such a feeling is developed then nothing else remains to be known or attained. One experiences satisfaction and fulfilment.

Though Aksharbrahman himself is a servant of God, he fully and eternally holds Parabrahman in his being. That is why the above directs us to cultivate the sentiment that God is manifest in him.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has himself explained this in Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 2, "The

Shrutis state: 'If a person develops conviction in the guru – who is the manifest form of God – in the same way that he has conviction in the non-manifest deities, then, as a result, he attains all of the *arthas* which are described as attainable.' ”

In this way, Aksharbrahman incarnates as our guru and gives all the experience of manifest God.

Thus the Upanishads, Brahmasutras and Bhagavad Gita – the Prasthantrayi – describe the special nature of Aksharbrahman.

FRUITS OF KNOWING AKSHARBRAHMAN

One who realizes the glory of Aksharbrahman attains great merits. The shastras state:

‘एतद्भ्येव अक्षरं ज्ञात्वा यो यदिच्छति तस्य तत् ॥’ *‘Etadhyeva Aksharam jñātvā yo yadichchhanti tasya tat’* – ‘One who fully knows Aksharbrahman can attain all desires’ (Katha Upanishad 1.2.16).

‘ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मणि स्थितः’ *‘Brahmavid Brahmani sthitaha’* – ‘One who knows Aksharbrahman attains the *brahmic* state’ (Bhagavad Gita 5.20).

‘ब्रह्मविद् आप्नोति परम्’ *‘Brahmavid āpnoti param’* – ‘One who knows Aksharbrahman attains Parabrahman’ (Taittiriya Upanishad, Anandvalli 1).

‘एतदालम्बनं ज्ञात्वा ब्रह्मलोके महीयते ।’ *‘Etadāmbanam jñātvā Brahmaloke maheeyate’* – ‘One who knows Aksharbrahman attains Brahmalo, that is, Akshardham, and enjoys the highest bliss of Parabrahman’ (Katha Upanishad 1.2.17).

‘स ब्रह्मयोगयुक्तात्मा सुखमक्षय्यमश्नुते ।’ *‘Sa Brahmayogayuktātma sukhamakshayyamashnute’* – ‘One who associates with Aksharbrahman enjoys the eternal bliss’ (Bhagavad Gita 5.21).

In essence, one who knows Aksharbrahman as he attains the joys of this world; attains the *brahmic* state, which beyond the three bodies, in this lifetime; in this *brahmic* state attains Parabrahman; and after death attains Akshardham and experiences the unbroken bliss of Paramatma.

This is the fruit of knowing Aksharbrahman.

In the Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad, Yagnavalkya Rishi says, ‘यो वा एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यविदित्वाऽस्मिंल्लोके जुहोति यजते तपस्तप्यते बहूनि वर्षसहस्राण्यन्तवदेवास्य तद् भवति’ *‘Yo vā etadaksharam Gārgyaviditvā’sminlloke juhoti*

yajate tapastapyate bahuni varshasahastrānyantvadevāsya tad bhavati’ – ‘O Gargi! Without knowing this Aksharbrahman, a person may perform *yagnas* or observe austerities for thousands of years, but will only attain perishable fruits. That is, eternal fruits will not be attained’ (Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad 3.8.10).

Also, ‘यो वा एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यविदित्वाऽस्मिंल्लोकात् प्रैति स कृपणः’ *‘Yo vā etadaksharam Gārgyaviditvā’smānllokāt praiti sa krupanaha’* – ‘O Gargi! One who dies without knowing this Aksharbrahman is to be truly felt sorry for and is incomplete [since he has to be reborn]’ (Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad 3.8.10).

Further, ‘अथ य एतद् अक्षरं गार्गि विदित्वा अस्मिंल्लोकात् प्रैति स ब्राह्मणः ।’ *‘Atha ya etad Aksharam Gārgi viditvā asmānllokāt praiti sa brahmanaha’* – ‘One who dies after knowing this Aksharbrahman is a true knower of *brahmavidya*’ (Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad 3.8.10).

CONCLUSION

On studying the ancient shastras of India, one thing is plainly evident: whenever the great thinkers, like Maharshi Angira of the Mundak Upanishad, Yamaraja of the Katha Upanishad, Maharshi Yagnavalkya of the Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad, Maharshi Piplad of the Prashna Upanishad, have engaged in deep spiritual contemplation, or when the confused Arjun received *brahmavidya* in the form of the Gita or when Maharshi Vyasji wrote the Brahmasutras as a compilation of *brahmavidya*, together with the glory of Parabrahman they have all described the glory of Aksharbrahman.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has identified this Aksharbrahman as Gunatitanand Swami and today that Aksharbrahman is manifest in the form of guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. May we all realize his true glory as described in the shastras and attain fulfillment in this birth. ◆

Translation from Swaminarayan Prakash,
January 2010



**“I Tell You
on Oath That...”**

- Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj

Vignananand Swami was a leading *sadguru* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and had been in his company for 12 years. He had learnt firsthand from Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself that Gunatitanand Swami was the manifest form of Aksharbrahman. Vignananand Swami later revealed this authentic fact to Shastriji Maharaj.

Speaking late into the night to the Deputy Collector of Palitana, Shri Govindbhai Chudasma, in Sarangpur, Shastriji Maharaj said, “My guru, Vignananand Swami, was an accomplished and learned sadhu who was groomed by Shriji Maharaj. But he didn’t at first tell me that Gunatitanand Swami was Akshar. When Bhagatji Maharaj told me that it was so, I asked him to make my guru vouch for it. The next day Bhagatji went to Swami’s room. Vignananand Swami was seated on the cot and I had hid underneath it.

“Then Bhagatji Maharaj said to him, ‘Swami, in the past’ talks that Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar took place. Please tell me those talks.’

“Then, Vignananand Swami said, softly, ‘Listen, many times I have heard from Shriji Maharaj himself that Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar. Gopalanand Swami also used to promote such talks. So, I have a deep conviction in these talks.’

“Thus, after having learnt it all from my guru, I understood it and then began to spread it.”

From Dhuliya, on 7 December 1938, Shastriji Maharaj wrote a letter, which even today serves as an authoritative record of his firm faith, to his devotees in Africa, “As you asked me to write to you incidents in support of Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar, I share with you my experience.

“During the celebration of Hutashini at the home of Rathod Dhadhal in Sarangpur, Shriji Maharaj sang the Holi bhajan, ‘*Sadguru khele Vasant... Koti Krishna jode hāth, Koti Vishnu name māth, Koti Brahmā kathe jnān, Koti Shiv dhare dhyān, ho sadguru khele vasant!*’ Then he asked Muktanand Swami and Anand Swami, ‘Who is that Sadguru?’ They both answered, ‘You are that Sadguru.’ Then Maharaj replied, ‘I am Purushottam Bhagwan in-

carnate, whom the Sadguru worships. And that Sadguru is this Gunatitanand Swami, who is Mul Akshar. On saying this he touched his (*ras*) stick on Swami’s chest and said, ‘*Juga juga jivo evā jogiyā, jugo juga jivo evā jogiyā.*’ And saying thus Shriji Maharaj himself told the glory of Swami.

“Once, Swami (Gunatitanand) was seated in the *darbar* of Jhinabhai in Panchala having his meal along with 500 *paramhansas*. At that time Shriji Maharaj told Kalyanbhai of Vanthali, ‘Do you know this sadhu?’ He replied, ‘Yes. He is a great ascetic, very austere and perceives others’ glory.’ Then (Maharaj) said, ‘No, not that. He is my eternal abode, Akshardham.’ In this way Maharaj himself inspired such faith (*nischay*) in Kalyanbhai. I had heard this incident from Kalyanbhai’s son (Devjibhai). The incident in Sarangpur was told by Rathod Dhadhal to Jasa Gor and Nagji Sheth – from whom I had heard” (*Likhitan Yagnapurushdasji*, Part 2 p.374).

Shastriji Maharaj (Swamishri) was in Mahuva. He arranged a meeting with Krishnacharandas Swami, who was a disciple of Sadguru Siddhanand Swami.

Swamishri knew that Siddhanand Swami did not approve of Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar and Krishnacharan Swami spoke to Shukanand Swami about this. Swamishri asked Krishnacharandas Swami what Shukanand Swami had said.

Krishnacharandas Swami said, “Listen, Shastri,” Shuk Swami had said, ‘Gunatitanand Swami and Siddhanand Swami are poles apart. Maharaj himself revealed the glory of Gunatitanand Swami, which I will now tell you.’”

Shastriji Maharaj has noted in his letter the incidents Shuk Swami had narrated to Krishnacharan Swami.

Shuk Swami added, “Shriji Maharaj once asked Muktanand Swami in an assembly, ‘What type of sadhu is Gunatitanand Swami!’ Muktanand Swami replied, ‘He is a great ascetic and is very austere. He discourses unceasingly, serves everyone and bears hunger. Hence, he is a very

good sadhu.’ Then Maharaj said, ‘The qualities you have mentioned are of this world. But he is eternally great, and he grasps my *murti* as if he is holding a snake with a pair of tongs. In this way he beholds my form in the three states (waking, dream and deep sleep). He beheld my form even prior to entering his mother’s womb, when he was inside the womb and beholds it even today.’ In this way he (Maharaj) talked about Swami’s greatness in the assembly.

“Once Shriji Maharaj instructed Gunatitanand Swami to serve some sick sadhus. Swami washed their quilts. The healthy sadhus took advantage of Swami’s inclination to serve and also gave their quilts to wash. After washing a total of eighteen quilts Swami arrived at the entrance of the three doors from the Gomti pond. Maharaj also arrived there after having had lunch at Vasan Suthar’s house. He saw Swami outside the Hanuman gate. Swami, too, saw Maharaj outside the Hanuman gate and became engrossed in his form. Maharaj stopped and when Swami came to him, he asked, ‘Can I go?’ ‘Yes.’ Then Maharaj went to the assembly hall and told Bhaguji, ‘That sadhu has burdened my shoulders with the quilts. Go and bring them here.’ Then two *parshads* brought them. (Maharaj) told Swami, ‘The owners of the quilts should come and take them.’ The sick sadhus came and took them away, but the healthy were embarrassed. Ten of them did not come forward to take their quilts. Maharaj then called an assembly and told Brahmanand Swami, ‘Do you know this sadhu?’ He replied, ‘Yes, he sings lots of bhajans, performs a lot of *seva*, and his renunciation and faith are complete.’ Then Maharaj replied, ‘No, not only that. He beholds my *murti* (within) in all three states (conscious, dream and deep sleep). And today the number of people following me will also follow him. He will attain greatness akin to mine, and he will spread my supreme knowledge.’” In this way Shriji spoke about Swami’s glory.

“And so saying, Shukmuni narrated a fourth incident, ‘Once, Shriji Maharaj was present

in Gadhada. Brahmanand Swami told Shriji Maharaj, “You have appointed *mahants* of our other mandirs, but think carefully before deciding upon the *mahant* of Junagadh.” Maharaj said, “The *mahant* of Junagadh I appoint will never have to be changed.” Then Swami was called and Maharaj declared, “This Gunatitanand Swami will be the Mahant of Junagadh.” After saying this he removed a garland from his neck and placed it on Swami. Then Swami replied, “I cannot do it.” Maharaj said, “I have given you the garland. Now, if anyone else is ready to take it then give it to him, and then you are relieved.” At that time Gopalanand Swami said, “It is Shriji Maharaj’s wish, so you keep it on.” Maharaj said, “Gopalanand Swami will be your administrator. And you need good people like him.” So saying Swami was appointed as *mahant*.

“At that time Shriji Maharaj addressed Kurji Dave, ‘When you came to Loj with the good news from Ramanand Swami, Muktanand Swami gave you the cloth that he tied on his head. I told you that I have nothing. I will give you Akshardham. Do you remember my promise?’ ‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘So I am giving you Gunatitanand Swami, who is Akshardham. Serve him always!’

“Once, Swami came from Junagadh to Gadhada for Maharaj’s darshan. Shuk Swami said, ‘Swami is a mahant, so I got up to bring him a seat.’ Shriji Maharaj said, ‘His greatness is not because of a seat. His greatness is eternal.’

“Thus Shuk Swami narrated many such incidents to Sadhu Krishnacharandasji which I had heard when he spoke in Mahuva” (*Likhitan Yagnapurushdasji* Part 2, p.374).

In an audio recording of Shastriji Maharaj speaking, he describes his meeting with Swami Keshavjivandasji, who was a disciple of Sadguru Gopalanand Swami.

Shastriji Maharaj says, “Keshavjivandasji was initiated by Nityanand Swami. A Hindustani sadhu told him that since he was from the Ahmedabad region, he should live in Ahmedabad if he wanted

liberation. But Keshavjivandasji wanted to stay with Gopalanand Swami in Vartal. So, he went to see Gopalanand Swami, who promised him Akshardham in this very birth. When Gunatitanand Swami came to Vartal Gopalanand Swami told Keshavjivandasji, ‘Keshavdas! I promised you Akshardham in this present life. Now, take it from me that this Gunatitanand Swami is the incarnation of Akshardham. So, go to Junagadh and associate with him.’ Thus he sent him to Junagadh.”

Shastriji Maharaj further says, “Keshavjivandasji himself told me this. He insisted that I consecrate Swami’s *murti* with that of Maharaj since he himself wanted to do it in Gondal, but could not do so.”

To this Shastriji Maharaj said, “If Balmukund Swami asks me to do that, I will. At that time Balmukund Swami also said that he would be very pleased if the golden *murtis* of Gunatitanand Swami and Maharaj were consecrated” (*Swaminarayan Prakash*, Nov.-Dec. 1977 pp 462-463).

Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj often used to recount this episode: “Once, Shastriji Maharaj took me to Bhojka to meet Gopalanand Swami’s disciple, Malji Soni, who told us, ‘Gopalanand Swami addressed Gunatitanand Swami as Akshardham and told me, “You wanted to see Akshardham, right? Now, see for yourself. The one seated fourth on the mattress is himself Gunatitanand Swami. Know him.”’”

Shastriji Maharaj also wrote about this incident in his letter to the devotees of Africa. He wrote, “I had heard it from Malji Soni in Bhojka in Samvat 1967 (1911 CE). At that time Jogi – Jnanji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami, Vignandas Swami, Bhagvatswarupdasji and others were present.”

In a recording of a speech by Shastriji Maharaj he narrates this incident at length, “When we visited Bhojka, Malji Soni narrated the whole episode to us. Mahapurush Swami and Nirgundas Swami were with us. Addressing us, Malji Soni

said, ‘When Ayodyaprasadji Maharaj visited Vartal in Samvat 1906, he took about 25 *satsangis* with him and I was also with them. The *sabha* was held at four o’clock. I had two garlands with me. I offered one to Raghuvirji Maharaj and the other to Gopalanand Swami. I asked Gopalanand Swami, “Swami, what does Akshardham look like?” Then Gopalanand Swami asked me, “You want to have darshan of Akshardham?” I thought Swami would show it to me in a trance. But he at once [pointed and] told me, “Gunatitanand Swami, who is there, is Mul Akshar. Have darshan of him to your heart’s content.”’

“Malji Soni then added, ‘From that day I was convinced that Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar.’”

Ingorala village in the Gadhada region was sanctified by the visits of Gunatitanand Swami. A *satsangi* called Kunvarji Patel used to live there. Whenever he visited Gadhada, he used to sit with Nrusinhanand Swami for spiritual talks. Once, Nrusinhanand Swami told Kunvarji Patel, “Patel, how many sculpted small arched stones hem the wall of Gadhada mandir?” Patel replied, “Many.”

Then Swami said, “If it is wrong to say that Gunatitanand Swami is himself Akshardham, I invite the sin of destroying one universe for every arched stone.”

Shastriji Maharaj often recollected this and said, “Kunvarji Patel used to narrate this incident and I have myself heard it from him.”

Shastriji Maharaj collected further proofs from Dahyabhai, brother of Vanthali’s Kalyanbhai, who was a disciple of Gunatitanand Swami.

Once, Dahyabhai told Shastriji Maharaj, “Once Hariharyanand Swami came to our orchard all of a sudden and told Kalyanbhai, ‘I have to explain to you a very important matter.’ So Kalyanbhai said, ‘Tell me only if it is anything other than the fact that Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar and Maharaj is Purushotam.’ Then Swami told him, ‘It is that very thing I wanted to speak to you about, but since you know it already I have nothing more to say.’”

Shastriji Maharaj heard this from Dahyabhai a number of times. Swami noted that the understanding of the forms of Akshar and Purushottam gradually developed even among the *paramhansas* initiated by Maharaj.

Gunatitanand Swami was portrayed as Aksharbrahman in the Satsang, but some sadhus and *satsangis*, out of envy, began to spread the untruth that 'Gopalanand Swami is Aksharbrahman.' This group was led by Siddhanand Swami and Mana Bhagat of Gadhada.

Shastriji Maharaj recounts the story, "Once, the sadhus who were studying went to Rander, where Mana Bhagat addressed us. Once he told us, 'See, this Prabhudas Kothari is my disciple, yet he does not come to see me.' So I (Shastriji Maharaj) told him, 'The reason is that you speak ill of Gunatitanand Swami.' Then Mana Bhagat said, 'I say that Gopalanand Swami is Mul Akshar and Gunatitanand Swami is Anadi Mahamukta. That is what I say.' Then I countered, 'If you believe that Gopalanand Swami is Akshar then swear to it by the Shikshapatri. Did you believe Gopalanand Swami as Akshar while he was alive? Hold this Shikshapatri and say so.' But he did not hold the Shikshapatri. So, while he was alive, there was no talk that Gopalanand Swami is Akshar."

Before Shastriji Maharaj accepted Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar he checked the veracity of the idea by speaking to several sadhus, and finally Gopalanand Swami. It was only when he was satisfied about the truth that he accepted Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman. It was Shastriji Maharaj's rare intelligence, wisdom and maturity that saved the unique entity of Akshar from being pushed into oblivion.

Jaga Swami was one of the leading sadhus of Junagadh who was a vocal propagator of Akshar. He told Shastriji Maharaj several episodes in support of Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar.

Disclosing one such incident by Jaga Swami, Shastriji Maharaj says, "Jaga Swami told this

fact frequently: 'I was with Gopalanand Swami in Vadodara. Shortly before Swami breathed his last, he was meeting devotees close to him, namely, Shivalal Sheth of Botad, Pragji Bhakta of Mahuva and Jaso Gor of Sarangpur. Swami was in a peaceful state. Then, some *satsangis* of Vadodara came for darshan. They requested, "Swami, kindly please do not forget the *satsangis* of Vadodara." Then Swami said, "At this twilight hour of my life, it won't be fair to think of Vadodara. At this moment, I should fix my gaze on either Shriji Maharaj in Akshardham or on the Jogi of Junagadh, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami."'"

In the recorded speech (mentioned above), Shastriji Maharaj recalls the blessings of Jaga Swami and narrates an episode regarding his wish to consecrate the *murti* of Gunatitanand Swami, "There was to be a festival in Junagadh in 1953. Jaga Swami called Jeebhai Kothari to ask Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj to consecrate the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam together and publish a book describing the glory of Akshar-Purushottam. If he did that, Jaga Swami promised to bless him with a great son. So Jeebhai went to see Acharya Viharilalji Maharaj, but returned crestfallen. When Jaga Swami asked him the reason, he said, 'Acharya says Gordhan and Bhimji won't let me do that while they are alive.' Hearing this, Jaga Swami felt distressed and did not speak for 15 minutes. Then he asked me (Shastriji Maharaj), 'Won't you do that?' So I told him that it was with great difficulty that I got even a postcard from the mandir store and that this task could only be achieved either by a king or *acharya*."

"Then Jaga Swami promised me, 'I will help you realize all your wishes. But you resolve to do this.' I agreed. Then Jaga Swami said, 'Since you have a guru like Bhagatji Maharaj, this will become a reality'" (*Swamishri Yagnapurushdasji*, Part 1, p.664).

(contd. on p. 35)

Inscriptions Identifying AKSHARBRAHMAN

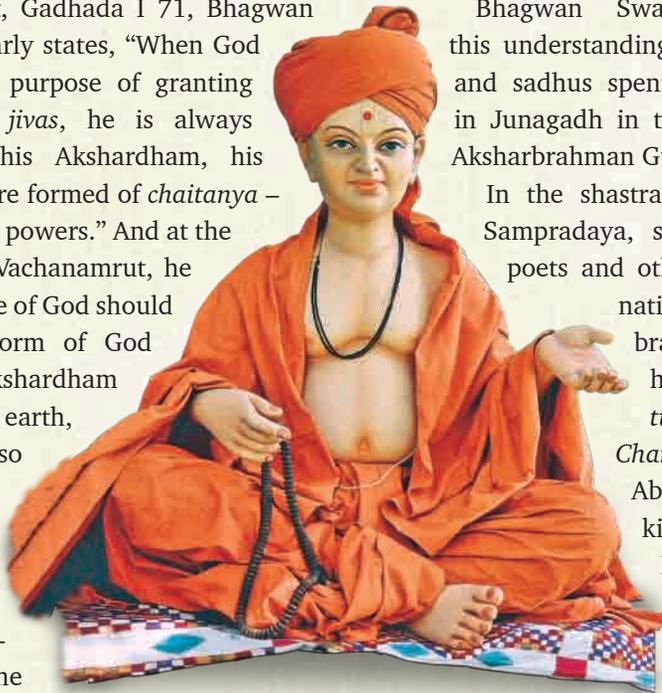
In Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 71, Bhagwan Swaminarayan clearly states, “When God incarnates for the purpose of granting liberation to the *jivas*, he is always accompanied by his Akshardham, his attendants – who are formed of *chaitanya* – and all of his divine powers.” And at the conclusion of this Vachanamrut, he instructs, “A devotee of God should realize that the form of God along with his Akshardham is present on this earth, and he should also explain this fact to others.”

For spiritual aspirants Aksharbrahman is the original guru, since he guides all to overcome *maya* and attain the *brahmarup* state. Thus, Paramatma Bhagwan Swaminarayan is the supreme deity to whom devotion is offered and Aksharbrahman is the guru who leads all to Paramatma.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan identified Gunatitanand Swami as the manifestation of Aksharbrahman. There is much documented evidence which supports this.

GUNATITANAND SWAMI IS AKSHARBRAHMAN

The shastras of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya note that the parents of Gunatitanand Swami were followers of Ramanand Swami and his guru, Atmanand Swami. Both these gurus revealed many times to Gunatitanand Swami’s parents that Aksharbrahman would be born to them.



Bhagwan Swaminarayan consolidated this understanding and so many devotees and sadhus spent some time every year in Junagadh in the spiritual company of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami.

In the shastras of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, senior sadhus, *acharyas*, poets and others have described Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman: Viharilalji Maharaj in his *Kirtan Kaushtubhamala*, *Purushottam Charitra* commissioned by Abhesinhji of Lodhika, the kirtans of Jagdishanand Brahmachari of Junagadh, in the *Ratnamala* (collection of bhajans) and *Kusumanjali* (verses describing the *murti-pratishtha* at Jetpur) by Sadguru Bhaktipriya Swami of Junagadh.

In their discourses and personal sessions with devotees, senior sadhus, such as, Sadguru Balmukund Swami, Madhavcharan Swami, Krishnacharan Swami and others, identified Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman.

This widespread understanding is also documented in the form of inscriptions.

At places sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami there are engravings describing the incidents in which Gunatitanand Swami is referred to as Aksharbrahman, Brahmaavatar, Aksharmurti, Anadi Mul Aksharmurti and other synonymous words.

In *shikharbaddh* mandirs, where the *murti* of Gunatitanand Swami is placed in the *mandover*,

on the pillars, under the dome, and other such locations, the titles 'Aksharbrahman', 'Aksharmurti', etc. are used.

Also, under the painted relief *murtis* of Gunatitanand Swami, similar descriptions are used.

In scores of *hari* mandirs under the jurisdiction of the Vartal diocese and other Swaminarayan Sampradaya streams, the *murti* of Gunatitanand

is described as 'Aksharbrahman', etc.

The following is a sample collection of stone engravings and consecrated *murtis* which refer to Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahman. The text in the stone inscriptions which refers to Aksharbrahman, Aksharmurti and Mul Akshar is highlighted in yellow.

Translation from Swaminarayan Prakash, January 2010

શ્રી સ્વામિનારાયણ નમઃ
આ સ્થળે જુનાગઢના મહાંત અનાદિ અક્ષર મૂર્તિ સદ્ગુરુ શ્રી ગુણાતીતાનંદ સ્વામી દ્વારે સ્થાપી સંમુખ સ્વસ્તિકાસને બેસી સ્વતંત્ર થકા સ્વંત ૧૯૨૩ ના આસો સુદિ ૧૨ ને બુધવારે સતીનાબાર ઉપર પોણી કલાકે અંતર્ધ્યાન થયા હતા.

Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Gondal

શ્રી સ્વામિનારાયણ ભગવાન ના અં મુળ અક્ષરમૂર્તિ સદ્ગુ ગુણાતીતાનંદ સ્વામિ ત્યા અ. સ્વ. સ. ગુ. સ્વામિ નારાયણદાસજીના શિષ્ય સ. ગુ. સ્વામિ નીલકંઠદાસજીની પ્રસન્નતપે આદિ નિવાસી શ્રીમાન શેઠ શ્રી પાંચરાણ દુરજીવનભાઈ કાઠેલા પરજોગજાણીયા વાણવે શ્રીજી મહારાજ ને પોઠવાની અક્ષર અક્ષરની પસાદી તો ને સ. ગુ. સ્વામિ નારાયણદાસજીની આજ્ઞાથી શ્રી. પંચરાણીને વાણવે વિગેરે નજી નવાસીને અક્ષર અક્ષરની રીપેર કરાવી છે. સં. ૨૦૨૨ ના અ. આષાઠી સુદ ૧૫ ને સંમુખ કાલકારી રામસુખદાસજીના જન્મ સ્વામિનારાયણ. અક્ષર અક્ષરની રીપેર કામ કી. શા. ભગવત સ્વરૂપદાસજીના વખતમાં કરાવ્યું છે.

Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Junagadh

શ્રી સ્વામીનારાયણો વિજયતે
ભાલ દેરાના મોઢાની હરિભક્ત શા. પારસી સીખદેએ પોતાના સહકુટુંબના મોકાચે શ. ૧૯૦૭ તથા સ. સ્વામી નિર્મલદાસજીની આજ્ઞાથી વિજયાવના કા. જામજા નાજીએ શ. ૨૦૧૫ તથા સ. સ્વામી નિલકંઠદાસજીની આજ્ઞાથી વિજયાવના સુતાર સખકા વાણવે શ. ૨૦૧૨ કુલ મળી શ. ૨૦૦૨ આખાં છે તેના વ્યાજમાંથી અનાદીમૂળ અક્ષરમૂર્તિ સ. ગુણાતીતાનંદ સ્વામીની સંવત્થી ૧૯૨૩ ના આસો સુદિ ૧૨ ને દેસેત્સ્વર્ણની તિથીએ, માટે ને દીવસે સુસાલ ૧૫ વાદે પી સ્વામીનારાયણના મંદીરમાં, "યાવત્સંદ દિવા કરી" પાટી રસોઈ કરીને દ્વારે સ્થાપી તથા ત્યાગીઓને જમાવવા આ રસોઈ ભવિષ્યમાં કોઈ અધિકારીએ વંધ કરવી નહિ. (સંવત ૧૯૨૩ની સાલમાં) ગેનલા પીઠાલ સહ. વાંચ.

Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Junagadh

શ્રી સ્વામિ નારાયણ વિજયતો.
અક્ષરભાઈની પુણી પરસોના શ્રી સદ્ગુણાનંદ સ્વામિ તથા અક્ષર સ્વરૂપ સ. સ્વામિનારાયણદાસજીની પ્રસન્ન તપે તથા સ. સ્વામિ નીલકંઠદાસજીની આજ્ઞાથી મેઘણી દરબાર શ્રી સર્જન સિદ્ધ ભાઈ તથા રાજદેરાના શિષ્ય રામરામ પુસ્તોતમ વિજયાવની સતાર સવંક વાણવે વિગેરે સંમુખ અનાદી મુળ અક્ષરમૂર્તિ સગુણાતીતાનંદ સ્વામિની આધની નિધિ ભાદરવા વાદે ૧૨ નાજી ૧૯૨૩ ના મોઢાના સહકુટુંબના મોકાચે શ્રી. ૧૯૦૭ અને ૧૯૧૨ ને એક શ્રી જુનાગઢના મંદિરમાં સ્થાપ્યા છે ને સંમુખ કામ સોમી તેના વ્યાજમાંથી દર વર્ષે ને નીચીના રાજ પાટી રસોઈ કરી પી કાકોરજીને દેરાવો ને ત્યાગીઓને જમાવવા સંવત ૧૯૨૩ના જેઠ સુદી ૭ દે. આધુ વર્ષે પ્રકાશદાસજીના જે સ્વામિ નારાયણ

Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Junagadh

|| શ્રી હરિ ||
અનાદિમૂળ અક્ષર મૂર્તિ સદ્ગુરુ શ્રી ગુણાતીતાનંદ સ્વામીના આસીવાદથી પ. ભ. દરબારથી વાણવે વણવે ને ગરાસ મળ્યો. સ્વામીશ્રીની આજ્ઞાથી જ્યારે આ ગામ પારોમાણસા નું તોરણ બંધાયું ત્યારે સદ્. શ્રી ગુણાતીતાનંદ સ્વામીએ પોતેજ આ સ્થળે મંદિર કરેલું. આ મંદિર જણાયતા પૂ. સ્વામીશ્રીની પરંપરાના સદ્. પુરાણી સ્વામી શ્રી ગોપીનાથદાસજીના શિષ્ય રાજકોટ, જુનાગઢ ને અમદાવાદ શ્રી સ્વામિનારાયણ ગુરુકુલ ના સંસ્થાપક સદ્વિદ્યા સદ્ધર્મ રજક સદ્. શાસ્ત્રી મહારાજ શ્રી ધર્મભવનદાસજી સ્વામીએ સદ્. શ્રી ગુણાતીતાનંદ સ્વામીએ નાખેલ પાયા ઉપરજ નવું મંદિર બંધાવ્યું હતું. આ મંદિર પણ જણાયતા અ. તિ. શાસ્ત્રીજી મહારાજ શ્રી ધર્મભવનદાસજી સ્વામીની મુખ્ય સ્મૃતિમાં તેમના શિષ્ય ભંડારી સ્વામી શ્રી હરિપ્રસાદદાસજીની દેખરેખ નીચે શ્રી સ્વામિનારાયણ ગુરુકુલ - રાજકોટ તરફથી આ મંદિર નો જણાવેલ કાવ્યામાં આખ્યો છે. ૨૦૧૪ - ૧૫ જી ઝી. ભા. અ. કા. સ. ૨૦૧૪.

Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Pati Manasa

શ્રી સ્વામિનારાયણો વિજયતે
એક સદ્ગુરુ સ્વ હરિભક્તે શ્રીજી મહારાજ તથા મુળ અક્ષર મૂર્તિ સદ્ સ્વામી ગુણાતીતાનંદજી તથા સદ્ સ્વામી નીલકંઠદાસજીની પ્રસન્નતપે અક્ષર સ્વરૂપ સદ્. સ્વામી નારાયણદાસજીની આધની નિધિ ભાદરવા વાદે ને દીવસે ઉના સ્વામિનારાયણના મંદીરમાં દર સાલ પાટી રસોઈ બંધવા શ્રી. ૨૦૧૨, બસા એક આખ્યા છે. ને સંમુખ કામ રાખી તેના ઉપનમાંથી વાણવ એક દીવા કરી ઉપલી તિથિએ દર સાલ પાટી રસોઈ કરાવી શ્રી કાકોરજી તથા આગીઓને જમાવવા ઉપની તિથિએ રસોઈ કરવી થયા બાબ ૧ મોઢાના પટી વરકાંતે આસલ ત્યાજ વખતે.

Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Una

શ્રીસ્વામિનારાયણો વિજયનો
 રાજકોટના પરમ ભગવદી ઠા. દંવરી લાધાએ
 પોતાના તથા પોતાના ધર્મપત્ની અ. સૌ.ઓનમબાઈ
 આણંદજીના મોકાયાં શ્રીજી મહારાજ તથા અક્ષર
 સ્વરૂપ સદ. સ્વામી નારાયણ દાસજી તથા
 સદ. સ્વામી નીલકંઠદાસજીની પ્રસન્નતાયે
મૂળ અક્ષર મૂર્તિ સદ. ગુણાતીનાનંદ સ્વામીના
 જન્મ દીવસ આસા રુદી ૧૫ને દીવસે
 શ્રી ઉના સ્વામિનારાયણ મંદીરમાં ફરસાલ પાકી રસોઈ
 જમાડવા રૂ. ૨૦૧, બસો એક આપ્યા છે તે રકમ
 કાયમ રાખી તેના ઉત્પન્નમાંથી યાવન ચંદ દીવાકરો
 ઉપલી નિથિએ ફરસાલ પાકી રસોઈ કરી
 શ્રી ઠાકોરજી તથા ત્યાગીઓને જમાડવા.
 સં. ૧૯૯૯ ના જેઠ સુદ ૧૫.



Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Una

Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Veraval

શ્રી સ્વામિ નારાયણ નમો નમઃ
 રાજકોટના-ઠાકરણાછાડનાજી
 તથા રતીલાલ નાજીના કુટુંબનાં મોકાયાં
 સ-ગુ- સ્વામી નીલકંઠદાસજીની પ્રસન્નતાયે
અ-મુ-અક્ષર મૂર્તિ ગુણાતીનાનંદ સ્વામી
 ની શ્રાધ. હ્રીચી નીમીને ઉના મંદીરમાં રૂ. ૨૦૧
 આપ્યા છે તેના વ્યાજમાંથી દરસેદરવા વદી
 ૧૩ના રોજ ઠાકોરજીનો યાવન ત્યા ત્યાગીઓને
 રસોઈ કરી જમાડવા સં. ૨૦૦૦ના યાવણ રુદી ૧



Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Una

Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Rajkot

સંવત ૧૮૮૩ ના ચૈત્ર શુદ્ધિ પુનમને દિવસે થી હરિએ વડતાલ
 મુકામે સભામાં મૂળ અક્ષર મૂર્તિ ગુણાતીનાનંદ સ્વામીને
 જુનાગઢ મંદિરની મહુંતાઈ નો હાર પહેરાવ્યો તે જમાન
 થ યા તે પૂણ્ય પ્રસંગ સ્મરણાર્થે અને પોતાના જવના મોકાયાં
 સ.સ્વામી કૃષ્ણચરણદાસજી તથા અક્ષરપુત્રદાસના ઉપદેશથી
 કોવેસમઠીયાળાઆહિરમુણીશામી ૧૦૧ એક હુ દિ ભઠત તરફથી
 ૧૦૧ સરઘાર. પા. સવજી લાખા પૃષ્ઠમંથળી ઉકુરજી ભવાન
 રપ રાજકોટ. ઠા. જેઠલાલ ત્રીકમજી રપ = ૭૭ ક. લાધા રાધવ
 રપ ૭૭ ક. કલ્યાણજી કરસનદાસ રપ ૭૭ ક. વાલજી પમા
 રપ ધુળ. ઠોટ. ભાઈ વીરુ રાધવ રપ ૭૭ ક. રવજી હુરજી
 તેઓ તરફથી જુનાગઢ મંદિરમાં આપ્યા છે. તેના ઉત્પન્નમાંથી
 સૂર્યચંદ્ર તપે ત્યાં સુધી દરસાલ ચૈત્ર શુદ્ધિ ૧૫ ને દિવસે દેવને
 યાવન અને ત્યાગીઓને પાકી રસોઈ કરી જમાડવા. સં. ૨૦૦૨
 જેઠ શુદ્ધિ ૧૧. દા. ખડેખ ધનરયામસિંહુ વખતસિંહુજી. અયવા.
 ગામ સરઘાર ના પાઈજીવી સવજી ના મોકાયાં રૂ. ૧૦૦ આપણ કર્યાં છે
 તેના યાજમાંથી સુદ. ત્યાં ચૈત્ર રૂ. ૧૫ નારોજ મહા પુનમ કરાવી દસવજી લાખા



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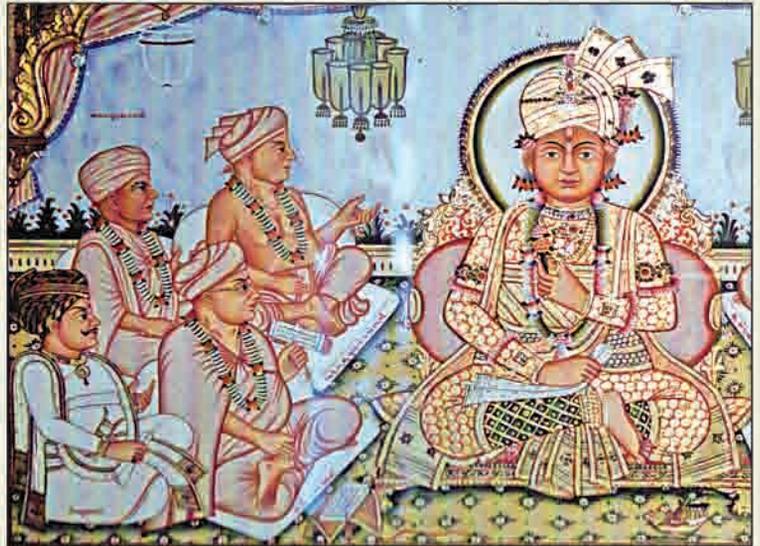
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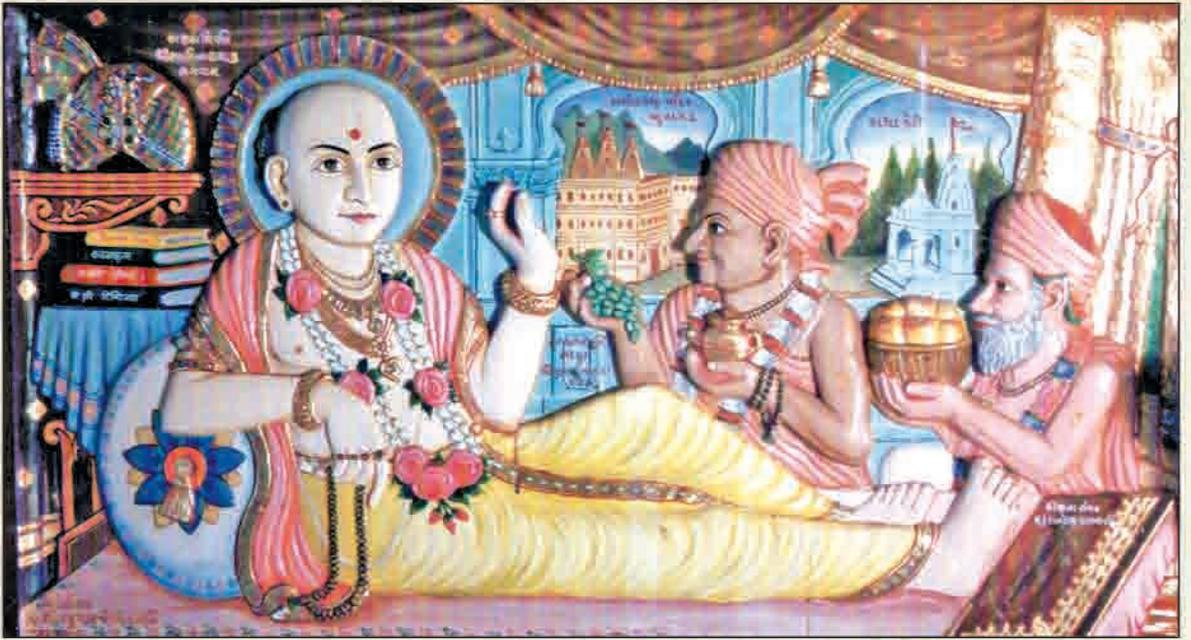
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Junagadh



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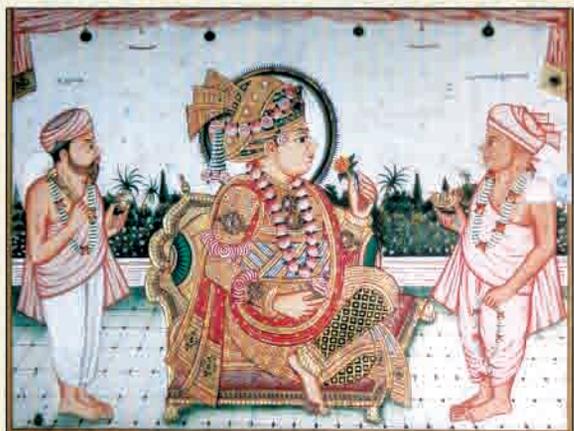
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SHRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA
ARJUN VISHĀD YOGA

Part 2



In the last article we saw that the Gita commences with Dhritarashtra's question, "What did my sons and Pandu's sons, who had gathered for war in the righteous land of Kurukshetra, do?" Sanjaya's reply to this speaks of Duryodhan first.

Seeing the military formation of the army, Duryodhan went to Drona and said,

"O teacher, look at the large army of the sons of Pandu,
arranged in formation by your intelligent pupil Dhrushtadyumna,
the son of Drupad. Let us now see what happened thereafter.

DURYODHAN'S DESCRIPTION OF THE TWO ARMIES

After telling Acharya Drona to take a look at the Pandava army, Duryodhan himself begins describing it. 'अत्र शूरा महेष्वासा भीमार्जुनसमा युधि। युयुधानो विराटश्च द्रुपदश्च महारथः ॥ ४ ॥ धृष्टकेतुश्चेकितानः काशिराजश्च वीर्यवान्। पुरुजित्कुन्तिभोजश्च शैब्यश्च नरपुङ्गवः ॥ ५ ॥ युधामन्युश्च विक्रान्त उत्तमौजाश्च वीर्यवान्। सौभद्रो द्रौपदेयाश्च सर्व एव महारथाः ॥ ६ ॥' – '*Atra shoorā maheshvāsā Bheemārjunasamā yudhi, Yuyudhāno Virātashcha Drupadashcha mahārathaha. Dhrushtaketushchekitānaha Kāshirājashcha viryavān, Purujitkuntibhojashcha Shaibiyashcha narapungavaha. Yudhāmanyushcha vikrānta Uttamaujāshcha veeryavān, Saubhadro Draupadeyāshcha sarva eva mahārathāhā.*' – 'Courageous warriors like the archers Bhima and Arjuna, Sātyaki, Virāt, the *mahārathi* Drupad, Drushtaketu, Chekitan, the powerful Kashiraj, Purujit, Kunitbhoj, the valiant Shaibya, the heroic Yudhamanyu, the powerful Uttamauja, Abhimanyu – the son of Subhadra, and Draupadi's (five) sons who have joined in this war are all *maharathis*.' (Gita 1.4,5,6) (*Mahārathi* is a special title. It is said that 'एको दशसहस्राणि योधयेद् यस्तु धन्विनाम्। शस्त्रशास्त्रप्रवीणश्च महारथ इति स्मृतः ॥' – '*Eko dashasahasrāni yodhayed yastu dhanvinām, shastrashāstrapraveenashcha mahāratha iti smrutaha*' – 'One who has mastered the shastras and weaponry and can single-handedly fight ten thousand armed men is called a *maharathi*.)

After describing the Pandava army, Duryodhan then describes his own army saying, 'अस्माकं तु विशिष्टा ये तान्निबोध द्विजोत्तम। नायका मम सैन्यस्य सञ्चार्यं तान्ब्रवीमि ते ॥ ७ ॥ भवान्भीष्मश्च कर्णश्च कृपश्च समितिञ्जयः। अश्वत्थामा विकर्णश्च सौमदत्तिर्जयद्रथः ॥ ८ ॥ अन्ये च बहवः शूरा मदर्थे त्यक्तजीविताः। नानाश प्रहरणाः सर्वे युद्धविशारदाः ॥ ९ ॥' '*Asmākam tu vishishtā ye tānnibodha dvijottama, nāyakā mama sainyasya sangnārtham tānbraveemi te. Bhavānbhishmashcha Karnashcha Krupashcha samitinjayaha, Ashvatthāmā Vikarnashcha saumadattirjayadrathaha. Anye cha bahavaha shoorā madarthe tyaktajeevitāhā, nānāshastrapraharanāhā sarve yuddhaviśhārādāhā.*' – 'O great Brahmin! For your information, I will now mention the extraordinary warriors of our army – You, Bhishma, Karna, victorious Krupacharya, Ashvatthama, Vikarna and Somdatt's son, Bhurishrava. Besides them, there are many other armed brave warriors who have given up their lives for me and are all skilled in war.' (Gita: 1/7,8,9)

After describing both armies, he finally says, ‘अपर्याप्तं तदस्माकं बलं भीष्माभिरक्षितम्। पर्याप्तं त्विदमेतेषां बलं भीष्माभिरक्षितम्॥ १०॥ अयनेषु च सर्वेषु यथाभागमवस्थिताः। भीष्ममेवाभिरक्षन्तु भवन्तः सर्व एव हि ॥ ११॥’ *‘Aparyāptam tadasmākam balam Bheeshmābhirakshitam, paryāptam tvidameteshām balam Bheemabhirakshitam. Ayaneshu cha sarveshu yathābhāgamavasthitāhā, Bheeshmamevābhirakshantu bhavantaha sarva eva hi.’* – ‘Our army, which is protected by Bhishma, is insufficient, whereas the other army, which is protected by Bhima, is sufficient. Therefore, O Ācharya, all who have been assigned various sections of the battle filed protect Bhishma in all possible ways’ (Gita 1.10, 11).

This description of the two armies given by Duryodhan echoes his feelings.

From the entire Pandava army, he first saw Bhima! Why? The reason is clear. He knew that Bhima had vowed to kill him and that Bhima was daring and true to his word. He knew that Bhima would not let him live. He was constantly grasped by this hidden fear which is apparent in his eyes. Therefore, for him, the entire Pandava army was now ‘protected by Bhima’. In reality, just as the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army was Bhishma and hence it was referred to by Duryodhan as ‘protected by Bhishma’, similarly, the commander-in-chief of the Pandava army was Dhrushtadyumna and thus Duryodhan should have referred to it as ‘protected by Drushtadyumna’, yet he felt it to be ‘protected by Bhima’.

Also, he sees something extraordinary in each warrior of the Pandava army. He sees them all as *maharathis*. This is the result of his fearful mind.

However, rather than what Duryodhan saw, it is of greater importance to notice what he did not see. Duryodhan saw about nineteen warriors like Bhima and Arjuna in the Pandava army. But there was one person in the Pandava army that he failed to see, and that was Shri Krishna Bhagwan. He saw many things, but he did not see Bhagwan. He

viewed Krishna only as an ordinary person – just a charioteer. He never perceived his supernatural powers. It seems as though this was Duryodhan’s weakest point. This is what hindered his rise. This was the foundation of his fall. He never saw Shri Krishna Bhagwan. This is the result of evil instincts having taken root in him.

This was not the first time this has happened to Duryodhan. Before the war, he chose the Narayani army over Krishna, thinking, ‘This Krishna is just the son of a cowherd. What more can there be to him? Moreover, if he comes to the war, he will not take up any weapons. What is the use of such a coward?’ Immersed in such illusory thoughts, he let God fall from his hands! This miscalculation was going to cost him dear.

This was the major difference between Duryodhan’s and Arjuna’s point of view: military force vs. divine force – which is greater? Duryodhan’s viewpoint would choose the first, Arjuna’s viewpoint would choose the second. Thus, Duryodhan’s failure to see Krishna in the opposing army is a perfect reflection of this.

Furthermore, Duryodhan’s advice to protect Bhishma was also well-calculated. He knew that Bhishma did not completely agree with what was happening. Bhishma was a knower of righteousness. Duryodhan knew that Bhishma was agitated by his (Duryodhan’s) deceiving and cruel ways. Therefore, if he fought, he would do so half-heartedly. Thus, doubting Bhishma to be half-hearted, Duryodhan felt that his army which was ‘protected by Bhishma’ was, although larger, insufficient to take on the Pandava army. How can there be any substance to an army in which doubts are held for the commander-in-chief himself.

BLOWING OF THE CONCH SHELLS

Duryodhan spoke to Acharya Drona as described above. Drona did not give any response and remained quite. Bhishma noticed this and picked up on Duryodhan’s fearful and doubtful mind. He blew the conch shell

to please Duryodhan, lest his enthusiasm be destroyed at the very start of the battle. Sanjaya explains this saying, ‘तस्य संजनयन् हर्षं कुरुवृद्धः पितामहः । सिंहनादं विनद्योच्चैः शङ्खं दध्मौ प्रतापवान् ॥ ततः शङ्खाश्च भेर्यश्च पणवानकगोमुखाः । सहसैवा यहन्यन्त स शब्दस्तुमुलोभवत् ॥’ – *‘Tasya Sanjanayan harsham Kuruvruddhaha pitāmaha, sinhanādam vinadyochchaihi shankham dadhmau pratāpavān. Tataha shankhāshcha bheriyashcha panavānakagomukhāhā, sahasaivābhyahanyanta sa shabhstumulobhavat.’* – ‘The elder of the Kauravas, grandfather Bhishma, roared like a lion and blew a conch shell loudly, delighting Duryodhan. Thereafter, conch shells, drums, tabors and war trumpets sounded forth together (from the Kaurav army). The sound was tumultuous and ferocious’ (Gita 1.12,13).

As soon as Bhishma invoked the Pandava army with the blow of the conch shell, he received a fitting reply. Sanjaya says, ‘ततः श्वेतैर्हयैर्युक्ते महति स्यन्दने स्थितौ । माधवः पाण्डवश्चैव दिव्यौ शङ्खौ प्रदध्मतुः ॥’ – *‘Tataha shvetairhayairyukte mahati syandane sthitau, Mādhavaha Pāndavashchaiva divyau shankau pradadhmātu’* – Thereafter, sitting in magnificent chariot pulled by white horses, Madhav (Krishna) and Pandava (Arjuna) also blew a divine conch’ (Gita 1.14).

This *shlok* contains the first mention of Shri Krishna Bhagwan in the Gita. Arjuna had received this magnificent chariot as a reward from Agnidev. The chariot was covered in gold, it could store as many weapons as nine carts, its wheels were extremely large, its flag would flutter for a *yojan* (about four miles), and Hanuman was on the flag. Arjuna had also received the horses as a gift. A *gandharva* named Chitrarath had given him a hundred horses. The speciality of these horses was that no matter how many of them die in war, their quantity would always remain one hundred and never decrease. Moreover, these horses could travel in heaven as well. Arjuna had four of these horses pull his chariot.

The conch shells which Krishna and Arjuna blew whilst sitting in such a chariot are also further described, ‘पाञ्चजन्यं हृषीकेशो देवदत्तं धनञ्जयः । पौण्ड्रं दध्मौ

महाशङ्खं भीमकर्मावृकोदरः ॥’ – *‘PānchajanyamHrushikesho devadattam Dhananjayaha, Paundram dadhmau mahāshankham Bheemakarmā vrukodaraaha.’* – ‘Hrushikesh (Shri Krishna Bhagwan) blew a conch shell named Panchajanya, and Dhananjaya (Arjuna) blew a conch shell named Devadatta. Bhima, who has performed terrific feats, blew a conch-shell named Paundra’ (Gita 1.15).

There was an *asura* named Panchajan. He had taken the form of a conch shell. Shri Krishna Bhagwan killed him and kept him as a conch. The name of the conch shell ‘Panchajanya’ is derived from the name Panchajan.

Arjuna had received the conch shell named Devadatta from Indra.

Sanjaya explains further, ‘अनन्तविजयं राजा कुन्तिपुत्रो युधिष्ठिरः । नकुलः सहदेवश्च सुघोषमणिपुष्पकौ ॥ काश्यश्च परमेष्वासः शिखण्डी च महारथः । धृष्टद्यु नो विराटश्च सात्यकिश्चापराजितः ॥ द्रुपदो द्रौपदेयाश्च सर्वशः पृथिवीपते । सौभद्रश्च महाबाहुः शङ्खान् दध्मुः पृथक्पृथक् ॥’ – *‘Anantavijayam rājā Kuntiputro Yudhishtiraha, Nakulaha Sahadevashcha Sughoshamanipushpakau. Kāshyashcha parameshvāsaha Shikhandee cha mahārathaha, Dhrushtadyumno Virādashcha Sātyakishchāparājitaha. Drupado Draupadeyāshcha sarvashaha pruthiveepate, Saubhadrashcha mahābāhuhu shankhān dadhmuhu pruthak pruthak.’* – ‘Yudhishtir, the son of Kunti, blew a conch shell named Anantavijaya, Nakul blew a conch shell named Sughosh and Sahadev one named Manipushpak. Furthermore, O king! The great archer Kashiraj, *maharathi* Shikhandee, Dhrushtadyumna, King Virat, unbeatable Satyaki, King Drupad, Draupadi’s (five) sons, and Subhadra’s son Abhimanyu all blew conch shells from various locations’ (Gita 1.16,17,18).

Sanjaya then describes the resulting effect saying, ‘स घोषो धार्तराष्ट्रानां हृदयानि व्यदारयत् । नभश्च पृथिवीं चैव तुमुलो व्यनुनादयन् ॥’ – *‘Sa ghosho Dhārtarāshtrānām Hrudayāni Vyadārayat, Nabhashcha pruthiveem chaiva tumulo vyanunādayan.’* – ‘The terrific noise thundered through the earth and sky, and pierced the hearts of your sons and your allies.’

This sound of conch-shells also tells us a lot.

According to the traditional rules of war, only the commander-in-chief can blow the first conch-shell. It is a call to symbolize that my army is now armed and ready and we are now commencing the battle. The commander-in-chief of the Kaurav army was Bhishma, therefore he blew the conch shell first, the rules were observed. But the same did not happen in the Pandava army. The commander-in-chief in the Pandava army, Dhrushtadyumna, was not the first to blow the conch-shell, it was Shri Krishna Bhagwan. Why? A little thought reveals that this was a sound of unity, the sound of respect for the virtuous, a sound of conviction in God.

The Kauravas were disciplined. Discipline is a good thing. But it is often an imposed burden. This imposed discipline can sometimes be the cause of disunity. When there is more concern for personal power than duty, none can ever accept another's progress. In such circumstances, rules have to be introduced to maintain order. As a result a structure for strict discipline is developed, and care is taken to ensure that it is never broken. From afar, this discipline looks organized, but it has no room for feelings. This sort of discipline is normally obeyed out of fear, or to show or please the person in authority. This type of discipline is synonymous to hypocrisy. Although this pretentious discipline can often hide disunity, in the end, it will always lead to destruction.

The Kauravas are a perfect example of this. Discipline is just a show, a means to cover up their disunity. Discord had spread across the Kaurava army like wildfire. There was constant quarrelling. No one hesitated in insulting anyone at anytime.

In a casual conversation in the Kaurava camp, the topic of who would perform which feats came up. Karna enthusiastically said that he would beat Arjuna single-handedly with a *brahmastra*, and as for the others, they are just gnats. Hearing this, instead of encouraging his enthusiasm Bhishma belittled him. Karna's enthusiasm was shattered. He made a pledge to

not enter the battlefield until Bhishma departed from it. Hearing this, Duryodhan said much that should not be said to Bhishma (Mahabharat: Udyog Parva)

Similarly, once Duryodhan was boasting about his abilities. Hearing this, Krupacharya laughed and insulted him, and he reminded him that he had continually lost against the Pandavas. Hearing this, Karna got angry at Krupacharya, swore at him and threatened to cut off his tongue if he ever said anything like that again. Ashvatthama saw all of this and could not stand Karna's insolence. He drew his sword in preparation to cut off Karna's head, but the others just about managed to restrain him (Mahabharat: Drona Parva).

Such incidents happened repeatedly in the Kaurava camp. It was a pitiful state. Therefore they had to try to impose discipline in order to keep everything on a sound footing.

This was not the case in the Pandava army. There, there was no enforced discipline, but a sense of unity. Therefore, the commander-in-chief Dhrushtadyumna's turn to blow the conch shell came ninth. The conch shells commenced first with Shri Krishna, and thereafter the five Pandavas. Social status was secondary. Unity was respected. Faith in God was a bonus to this unity, like fragrance added to gold. Before everyone else, it was Shri Krishna Bhagwan who first blew the conch shell. Keeping Krishna in the forefront and having conviction in him was the lifestyle of the Pandavas. In fact, Krishna was the pillar of their unity.

The strength of the Pandava unity was known throughout the Kaurava army. After the Pandavas had escaped alive from the Lakshagruh, Duryodhan plotted to cause a rift amongst them and have them kill each other quarrelling. But Karna checked him, informing him that the Pandava's unity was indestructible and he should thus think of some other plan.

The sound of the conch shells in the Pandava army reflected their unity and the predominance

of God. That is why the effect of the resulting sound was so different to that of the Kauravas'. In the Kaurava army, after Bhishma had blown his conch shell, the rest of the army played conch shells, drums, tabors and war-trumpets, etc. Sanjaya describes this saying, '*Sa shabdastumulobhavad*' – 'the noise was tumultuous and ferocious.' Whereas when he describes the conch shell sounds of the Pandava army, he says, '*Sa ghosho Dhārtarāshtrānām hrudayāni vyadārayat*' – 'the sound pierced the hearts of Dhritarashtra's sons and allies.' It is as though the defeat of the Kauravas was obvious from the start. Superficial discipline could not give them the comfort of victory, whereas the Pandavas' faith in God and unity was victorious. In fact, many of the Kaurava army knew of the Pandavas' special qualities and had accepted defeat right from the start. For instance, Acharya Drona told Yuddhishtir, 'ध्रुवस्ते विजयो राजन् यस्य मन्त्री हरिस्तव। यतो धर्मस्ततः कृष्णो यतः कृष्णस्ततो जयः ॥' – '*Dhruvaste vijayo rājan yasya mantree haristava, yato dharmastataha Krishno*

yataha Krishnastato jayaha.' – 'O Yudhishtir! Your victory is assured. Shri Krishna is your advisor. Moreover, where there is righteousness, there is Krishna, and wherever there is Krishna, there is victory' (Mahabharat: Bhishma Parva 43.59).

Once, Bhishma told Duryodhan himself, 'O Duryodhan! Krishna and Arjuna are unbeatable. There is no force, not even amongst the devas or the asuras, that can defeat them' (Mahabharat: Udyog Parva 49.20).

Moreover, when Shri Krishna Bhagwan went to Hastinapur to mediate a settlement, the very Karna on whose skills Duryodhan expected victory, that same Karna said that looking at Krishna he felt for a moment that their destruction in the war is assured.

Thus, on one side we see a blanket of disunity, distrust, fear and ego, whereas on the other side we see a resonance of unity, trust, fearlessness and faith in God. ◆

(contd. from p. 21)

In a letter to the *satsangis* of Africa, Shastriji Maharaj writes about Raghuvirji Maharaj, "In Samvat 1912 (1856 CE) Raghuvirji Maharaj spoke to Gunatitanand Swami in Anand in private, 'The sadhus and *satsangis* insist that I remarry (Raghuvirji Maharaj had become a widower). What should I do?'

"Then Swami asked, 'What do you think about it?' Raghuvirji Maharaj said, 'I do not think of doing so. But, because of the inclinations of my body I do think of it.' So Swami said, 'If you come to Junagadh and listen to my discourses, you will gradually get rid of that instinct also.'

"Thereafter, Raghuvirji Maharaj visited Junagadh every year for seven years to benefit from the *satsang* and discourses of Gunatitanand Swami. As a result he understood the true glory of Swami and Maharaj. Then, in Samvat 1917, he

(Raghuvirji Maharaj) began to speak of Swami as Akshar without any fear. It was then that Gunatitanand Swami uttered these words, 'In the whole of Vartal only Raghuvirji Maharaj has known my real form.'"

Thus, Shastriji Maharaj confidently proclaimed the truth about Akshar. Once, he boldly said, "What I say (about Akshar) is not untrue and I have no vested interest in saying that. It is a sin to speak untruth. There is no point in being obstinate about what is meaningless and untrue. If you confide in me and believe me to be honest and an advocate of truth, then take the Akshar-Purushottam principle as sacred and believe Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar and Maharaj as Purna Purushottam. Such fortune will not come your way again." ◆

Translation from *Swaminarayan Prakash*,
January 2010

Who Is Bound to Whom?

One day a Sufi saint was walking with some of his students. He saw a man leading a cow down the road. “Who is bound to whom?” asked the saint to his students.

“The cow is bound to the man of course,” said the students. The saint instructed his students to cut the rope that tied the cow to the man and see what happens. One student went and cut the rope, the cow ran off and the man went running after the cow. “Now tell me,” said the saint, “who is bound to whom?”

This very small tale teaches us an extremely valuable lesson. It shows us a stark reality. We are all bound to the *vishays* of this world. We have told ourselves that there is happiness in worldly possessions. Society provides a set of superficial terms and conditions for happiness, where, you must have a good phone, a good fashion sense, a decent MP3 player, a respectable car and a healthy bank balance to be seen as happy. But, ask yourself – what about ten years from now?

- That same phone will serve as no more than a novel paperweight on your desk.
- That same MP3 player will make you the laughing stock of your friends.
- That same healthy bank balance will seem malnourished.
- Those same clothes will be an embarrassment to wear in public and so they'll become the things you wear on laundry-day.

Everything in the world that we believe to be happiness right now, will become nothing more than a mere archive entry in the warehouse of pursued

happiness.

Let's now learn another extremely valuable lesson. Let us now face another reality. The happiness found in God and the Satpurush is a different kind of happiness. The happiness that God and the Satpurush are willing to give us is everlasting. It is a happiness that doesn't leave you craving for more like worldly happiness does – because the happiness God provides never leaves you. It doesn't have a use-by date, it doesn't expire and it never turns sour.

The problem we have is that we've become so conformed to society's peer pressure, that looking good amongst friends (looking externally happy) becomes more important than being internally happy. We will force ourselves to like certain types of music, force ourselves into those dreadfully tight pair of jeans and force ourselves to enjoy food and drink that we never really like, just so that we can show the world that we're happy.

The bliss of God and the Satpurush leaves you so satisfied internally, that there no longer is a need for the social façade. You no longer care for the latest gadgets, the current fashion trends, the 'must-see' movie, or keeping up appearances.

Alas, this doesn't come easy. To experience what they are willing to offer requires a great deal of introspection. One must look within and ask if I want the peace and happiness they are offering, am I ready to cut the rope that has bound me to the world?

One must ask...Who is bound to whom? ♦





Kishore parayan



Awareness drive

KISHORE-KISHORI PARAYANS **August-September 2010, Gujarat**

During the holy month of Shravan, from 10 August to 8 September 2010, around 350 *kishore mandals* and 450 *kishori mandals* throughout Gujarat and Mumbai held three-day *parayans*. The *parayans* were based on the topic of 'Nilkanth Kalyan Yatra,' in which the youngsters presented discourses, kirtans, skits, video shows and other activities centred on inspiring messages from Nilkanth Varni's travels throughout India.

KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR **28-31 August 2010, Gadhada**

Around 885 *kishores* and *kishoris* from Rajkot and Morbi participated in the Annual Kishore-Kishori Shibir held at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Gadhada in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami from 28 to 31 August 2010. The *shibir* was titled "Yuvano Jago" – "Youths Arise".

In the various sessions of the *shibir* there were presentations by experienced sadhus and volunteers on pride for the Sampradaya and Hindu Dharma, how to perform daily personal puja, family values and study techniques.

The youths also learnt important and inspiring

messages through skits, video shows, question-answer sessions and discussions.

ANTAR JAGRUTI PARVA – PERSONAL AWARENESS DRIVE **10 to 18 August 2010, Gujarat**

Since 2007, the BAPS Youth Training Centre in Sarangpur, Gujarat, has been conducting a six-month training course for selected youths to provide an in-depth knowledge of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and Hindu Dharma. During the course a 10-day practical training session is arranged.

This year, from 10 to 18 August, 27 groups each of four youths, visited a total of 270 villages throughout Gujarat. The groups spent one day in each village in which, during the day they conducted home visits, *bal sabhas*, school assemblies, village processions, and de-addiction campaigns. In the evening they conducted satsang assemblies. Despite this year's heavy rains, the youths enthusiastically completed their schedules.

During the 10 days, the youth inspired 1,026 people to give up addictions and helped to strengthen satsang among children, teenagers, youths and seniors. ◆

CHILDREN AND YOUTHS EXPERIENCE INDIA

3 July to 16 August 2010

Between 3 July and 16 August 2010, four separate groups of *kishores* and *kishoris* from the UK and North America visited India for varying durations to experience its culture and spirituality.

During their stay the *kishores* and *kishoris* had inspiring sessions with Ishwarcharan Swami, Kothari Swami and other sadhus.

Highlights of the trip included time spent in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a satsang shibir in Sarangpur titled, 'Brahmvidyani College', and a pilgrimage to many of the BAPS mandirs



and other sacred places around India, including many of the Himalayan sites that Nilkanth Varni visited during his travels.

The 12-day *shibir* in Sarangpur comprised of lectures and workshops on the Akshar-

Purushottam philosophy, daily service activities and classroom sessions on other useful topics.

The *kishores* and *kishoris* returned home spiritually reinvigorated, taking with them enlightening messages as well as many enjoyable memories. ◆

SHIBIRS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

Perth, Australia; Auckland, New Zealand

August-September 2010

Based on the theme 'Hindusim: Discover and Live', separate *shibirs* were held for *balaks-balikas* and *kishores-kishoris* in Perth, Australia and Auckland, New Zealand.

Topics such as karma, *punarjanma*, *murti-puja*, dharma and *guru-shishya* relationship were presented by Jnanpurush Swami and Adarshmuni Swami.

The youngsters' knowledge of Hinduism was further strengthened with interactive speeches,



group discussions and inspiring video presentations. The youths also participated in a special session of team-building exercises.

Over 100 children and 200 teenagers attended the Bal-Balika and Kishore-Kishori

Shibirs in Perth and Auckland.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the *shibirs* and resolved to apply the principles they had learnt in their daily lives at home, school and the mandir. ◆

UK NATIONAL SUMMER SHIBIRS 2010

Warwick Conference Park, England

28-30 August 2010

From 28 to 30 August 2010, the National Sanyukta Mandal Summer Shibir (Theme: What Does Bhagwan Swaminarayan Like?), National UK Yuvak-Yuvati Shibir (Theme: Madhya 7) and the National Shishu and Bal-Balika Shibir (Theme: Hinduism – Modern Problems, Ancient Solutions) were held at Warwick Conference Park.

Over 350 seniors, 320 youths and 170 children from across the UK and Europe attended the *shibirs*.

The *shibirs* featured speeches, discussion sessions, question-answer sessions, video shows, activity sessions and skits to convey the messages of each *shibir*.

The childrens' *shibir* was based around a drama, narrating the story of a young boy, Manish, who appears confused and feels Hinduism has



no relevance to modern day problems. Manish is transported back in time and introduced to great Hindu characters from the past. He learns that the problems faced by people in the past are similar to those faced by children today and

that the solutions to all these problems are rooted in the ancient values of Sanatan Dharma.

Through the drama, the *balaks* and *balikas* learned about the importance of family, necessity of daily worship and bhakti, dangers of *kusang*, benefits of discipline and that for all these qualities Swamishri is the ideal role model. By having faith in his words and following his wishes, one will experience peace and find answers to problems.

In the special shibir for *shishus* (children aged 5 to 8), *karyakars* taught them about Hindu values through games and activities specially tailored for the age group. ◆

EDUCATION INFORMATION SEMINAR

18 September 2010, Sydney, Australia

Over 200 *kishores* currently studying in high school and parents attended the Education Information Seminar at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sydney. The seminar featured a presentation on the Australian education system, a panel discussion involving current students who spoke about the expectations of parents, personal expectations and distractions, guidance for parents on how to better understand and support their children at



this important stage in their life and a panel discussion involving successful *kishores* and *yuvaks* who talked about effective study balance, time management, career opportunities and the importance of satsang during school.

The seminar was much appreciated by both parents and students and helped to create a common understanding which will benefit all in the long run. ◆

PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND VISITS

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Auckland, New Zealand

5 September 2010



Prime Minister Rt. Hon. John Key at the youth centre



The Prime Minister in the assembly

The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Rt. Hon. John Key, attended the Janmashtami celebration at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Avondale, Auckland, on Sunday 5 September 2010. On his arrival, the Prime Minister first visited the Pramukh Swami Youth Centre where youngsters presented some of the regular weekly activities, such as classical Indian music and dance, karate, Gujarati learning and satsang classes. The Prime Minister was amazed to see so many young people active in preserving their culture and heritage. Next, he had darshan in the mandir where he learnt about the life and teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Finally, he attended the Janmashtami celebration in the assembly hall where the youths had earlier performed a drama entitled 'Paksh', depicting a scene from the Mahabharat. Children greeted the Prime Minister with a welcome dance. Following a short video presentation of Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, Jnanpurush Swami formally welcomed the Prime Minister and then read a letter of condolence from Pramukh Swami Maharaj for the victims of the devastating earthquake in Christchurch. In the letter Swamishri offered prayers for the affected and conveyed his deepest sympathy to all. The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha presented the Prime Minister with a cheque of \$11,000 towards the earthquake relief fund and BAPS volunteers pledged to continue their support. The Prime Minister then addressed the

assembly, "Namaste. Can I thank you firstly for the invitation to your most beautiful temple and an opportunity to come and see so many of you, and the boys and girls that are here this evening. Thank you for the extraordinary generosity, your gift of \$11,000, which I will give to the earthquake relief fund tomorrow morning. It is good to be here to celebrate the birth of Krishna and to support you and your faith. New Zealand is very lucky. We have now over 100,000 New Zealanders of Indian ethnicity. I had an opportunity earlier to visit your youth centre, and can I say how impressive it was. It was wonderful to see the opportunities you are providing for your young people. One of the reasons that the Indian community is so strong and so successful in New Zealand is because of its beliefs in families and to the respect that the children show for their parents and their grandparents, and for the wider family community. Thank you for inviting me here this evening. Next year I am going to go to India. It is a remarkable country. I have been there before a couple of times. Finally, I think it is great to see a community that cares so much for its families and is so ambitious, that works so hard and believes in all the very best of New Zealand." Accompanying the Prime Minister on his visit was Kanwaljit Singh Bakshi, MP, representing Manukau East. The Prime Minister and his delegation departed after spending 75 minutes at the mandir. ◆

COMMONWEALTH ATHLETES VISIT LONDON MANDIR

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden, London

11-12 September 2010



Members of Team England perform abhishek



Team England at Swaminarayan Mandir

To mark its fifteenth anniversary, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden, London, organized Community Open Days on the weekend of 11 and 12 September 2010. Many members of the public as well as invited guests visited the Mandir.

The event was launched in the presence of Brent's Borough Commander, Chief Superintendent Matt Gardner, and the England Commonwealth team.

Youths guided members of Team England and explained the various social, cultural and spiritual activities that are promoted at the Mandir. Former Olympic javelin gold medallist Tessa Sanderson CBE also came to visit with the group.

Christine Ohuruogu, current Olympic and

Commonwealth 400m gold medallist commented, "I saw some amazing monuments in China [during the Beijing Olympics] – but the Temple is the most beautiful building I have seen."

The Community Open Days event was based on the theme of "One World – One Community" and other activities available throughout the weekend included blood donation awareness, free health screening by experienced medical professionals, guided tours and interactive informative exhibits. The interactive exhibits consisted of eight zones covering art, values, volunteering, festivals, welfare, music and lifestyle whilst promoting the 'International Year of Youth' initiative led by the United Nations. ♦

OPEN HOUSE LONDON 2010

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden, London

18-19 September 2010

As a part of the annual Open House London architecture festival during the weekend of 18-19 September 2010, over 1,300 visitors to BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London appreciated its beauty, serenity and spirituality.

Visitors admired the intricate carvings and beautifully adorned sacred images, and were guided around the 'Understanding Hinduism' exhibition and the gardens. A video presentation on the history and construction of the Mandir

provided an informative and educational experience. Many also chose to attend the midday *arti* ceremony.

The Open House London initiative is a "simple but powerful concept: hundreds of great buildings of all types and periods open up their doors to all free of charge." More than 700 landmarks throughout London were available for visitors to explore as part of the festival.



A volunteer explains to the visitors

EXPERIENCES:

A breathtaking place where one can experience peace and happiness.

AJ (Tourist visiting London from USA)

A truly remarkable learning experience of Indian architecture and the Hindu faith.

Ms P (Teacher)

The Mandir is a beautiful building infused with a feeling of deep spirituality and peace. Our guide was exceptionally informative and entertaining.

NN (Interior Designer)

To describe it as a beautifully spiritual place would be too simplistic; words fail me. I am glad that it is in Brent. Thank you for allowing me to visit. I am blessed.

OF (Editor)

Beautiful building with strong & peaceful energy.

BT (Artist)

Beautiful environment and wonderful guide with explanation of how the building was built and use of it.

HM (Architect)

Very impressive and very informative which increased my knowledge and understanding of both the culture and Hindu religion.

A (Accountant)

A beautiful building and a fascinating story of community engagement.

AC (Journalist)

Amazed. Who knew that such a building existed in North London? (And I have lived in North London all my life!) I would like to come back during one of the festivals.

Y (Student)

This building is still amazing 15 years later. The craftworks are phenomenal.

Dr J (Doctor)

I am filled with joy. The beauty of the Mandir overwhelms me. I shall strive to lead a better life.

OW (Retailer)

I had an amazing and very peaceful experience and I walk away from your beautiful temple with a rekindled positive attitude to life.

MS (Teacher)



AN APPEAL FOR DRIVING SAFELY

Swamishri and senior sadhus appeal to all devotees and others to observe traffic rules and safety measures to avoid inconveniences, accidents and deaths.

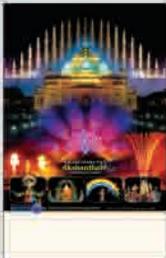
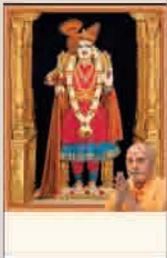
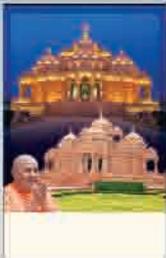
- While driving a car or riding a motorbike/scooter, please do not talk on the phone or send SMS, since this often results in serious accidents.
- Drivers and passengers on motorbikes/scooters should wear helmets. By not wearing a helmet many have died and many have also suffered serious head injuries.
- While riding a motorbike/scooter, do not spit. To avoid the saliva, the rider behind has to change direction, often resulting in accidents.
- Do not drive/ride vehicles on the wrong side of the road. Always wear a seat belt and observe the traffic rules.
- Stop to allow children, the elderly or women to cross the road. Do not horn unnecessarily.
- These [and other such safety guidelines] should be highlighted by sadhus and volunteers once or twice a year in the satsang *sabha*.



UK NATIONAL SHIBIRS 2010

Over 1250 children, teenagers, youths and seniors attended the UK National Shibirs held at Warwick Conference Park between 28 to 30 August 2010.

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DATES & TITHIS FOR HOMES AND OFFICES**



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JAL JHILANI CELEBRATION

19 September 2010, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur

Thousands of devotees from throughout India and abroad experienced the divine atmosphere of the Jal Jhilani Celebration in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 19 September 2010 in Sarangpur. The traditional Vedic Mahapuja ceremony was performed and then Thakorji was taken on a boat-ride in the large pond set up on the assembly hall stage. Swamishri also operated the boat via remote control and offered his devotion to Thakorji.