

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January–February 2022

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100
Pramukh Swami Maharaj
Centenary Celebrations
(1921–2022)



**SWAMISHRI AT PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S
BIRTHPLACE, CHANSAD
11 December 2021**

1. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birthplace in Chansad adorned for the festive celebration.
2. Swamishri performs the Vedic *puja* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
3. Swamishri and senior swamis offer *annakut* and chant the Swaminarayan *dhun* to pray for the good of all.

Inset: Swamishri launches Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations by lighting the *akhand jyot*.





Online 100th Birthday Celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

CONTENTS



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

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

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- 4 Shri Hari Arranges Dada Khachar's Marriage
- 7 A Farmer's Boy Who Changed the World
- 10 A Leader, Yet an Exemplary Servant
- 14 Clarity in the Nature of God
- 17 Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Modern Management
- 21 Behind the Sacred Relic
- 23 Letters to Pramukh Swami Maharaj
- 27 Abhav, Avgun & Droh
- 30 Even More Is Never Enough
- 34 No Desires, Know Peace
- 36 Stress and Moksha
- 38 Bhakti Rituals
- 42 Inspirations
- 44 Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Birthday Celebrations
- 51 Mahant Swami Maharaj's Vicharan
- 56 The ICPR Presents the 'Lifetime Achievement Award' to Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadrashdas Swami
- 60 Pramukh Swami Maharaj Honoured in the British and Canadian Parliaments
- 62 BAPS News
- 66 New Publication



Shri Hari Arranges Dada Khachar's Marriage

*Shri Hari desires that Dada Khachar marries
for the second time, and makes all the arrangements...*

SHRI HARI ARRANGES DADA KHACHAR'S SECOND MARRIAGE

In the days that followed, Shri Hari came to hear about some strange talks related to Dada Khachar, “Dada has no son, and once he passes away his home and property will be ours.”

Shriji Maharaj was pained to hear this because Dada Khachar was his blessed devotee. So, he called Kumudaba and told her about what he had heard. Kumudaba humbly replied, “Prabhu, I have repeatedly been telling Dada, ‘Our *darbar* is the centre of Satsang. If you have a son then he will look after this holy *darbar*, serve the sadhus and enhance the pride of our family. Thus, you should marry again.’ But Dada says, ‘I do not want to get mired in more worldly bondage and responsibilities. And who knows about what type of son I will get. If he turns out to be bad-natured, he will destroy whatever I have developed and harass the sadhus. So, it is better that I do not marry again.’ And when I keep insisting, he replies, ‘I will become a renunciant.’ Now, it rests upon you to make him understand. If he agrees, we will be blessed with a descendant to serve the sadhus and Satsang. The *darbar* will be looked after by his son.”

Shri Hari was very pleased to hear Kumudaba's words and told her, “Tell Dada to come and see me.”

Shri Hari started enquiring for a suitable match

for Dada Khachar's second marriage. Whenever he received any news on this matter, Shri Hari would send a trusted person to see and enquire about the lady. But, Dada Khachar's detractors would approach her and speak critically about Dada Khachar and prevent the marriage from materializing. Shriji Maharaj knew it was the work of Jiva Khachar of Gadhadra and his cohorts. But finally, the latter's efforts failed before the wish of Shri Hari, the supreme God.

Soon, Kalu Vavadiya of Barpatodi arrived for Shri Hari's darshan. Shri Hari told him, “If you can find a lady from your region I would want her to marry Dada Khachar.”

Kalu Vavadiya instantly replied, “Maharaj, the daughter of Nagpal Varu of Bhatvadar would suit Dada Khachar well.” Shri Hari thought for a while and replied, “I had gone to her house as Nilkanth Varni. She had devoutly offered me milk and *rotlo* to eat. She is a suitable match to become Dada's new wife. Go to Bhatvadar and talk about this to Nagpal Varu.”

Kalu Vavadiya went to Bhatvadar and informed Nagpal Varu. The latter was happy to hear about the proposal and agreed. Thereafter, Kalu Vavadiya returned to his village, Barpatodi, and sent two devotees to convey to Shri Hari that he had arranged Dada's marriage with Nagpal Varu's daughter.

When Shri Hari got the good tidings in Gadhada he was very happy. He called Harji Thakkar, the administrator of Dada Khachar's finances and assets, and told him about the matter. In response, Harji Thakkar spoke softly, "Maharaj, the daughter of Nagpal Varu is good, but she belongs to a lower class in the Kathi clan. Therefore, Dada's marriage cannot be solemnized."

Shri Hari looked sternly at Harji Thakkar and said, "Thakkar, Nagpal Varu has had my association. By virtue of my association even those who belong to the lower class are great. Thus, do not doubt or think otherwise. My choice lies for Nagpal Varu's daughter."

Harji Thakkar understood Shri Hari's wish. He realized that the lady's past merits must be lofty. Then, Shri Hari said, "Before we send Bhaguji and Ratanji tomorrow to take clothes and jewellery as gifts for Nagpal Varu's daughter, I would like to talk to Surbai (Surprabhadevi) and the sisters (Jivuba and Laduba)."

Soon, Kalu Vavadiya arrived in Gadhada. He said to Maharaj, "Prabhu, I believe the daughter of Nagpal Varu is blessed by God. Nagpal Varu is happy with your proposal. He said, 'I am very honoured for my daughter to have a husband like Dada Khachar. But I belong to a lower class in the Kathi clan. If Surbai, Jivuba and Laduba have no objections, I give you my word for her marriage.'"

Shri Hari was pleased with Nagpal Varu's words. Then, Maharaj told Kalu Vavadiya, "After talking to Surbai, Jivuba and Laduba, I wish to send clothes and jewellery for Nagpal Varu's daughter. You, too, will have to go and tell Nagpal Varu that he should not be affected by others' negative and doubtful words."

NO ONE IS LOW ONCE THEY ARE BLESSED BY YOUR DIVINE SIGHT

Shri Hari called Surprabhadevi, Jivuba, Laduba, Panchuba and Kumudaba. Maharaj told them, "I wish that Dada gets married again. Kumudaba has agreed, however, what do you all

think?" Jivuba replied, "Abhel Bapu had given to you the responsibility of taking care of Dada Khachar. Thus, there is no need to ask us about what we wish. We believe that whatever you do will be for our highest good."

Shri Hari then elaborated, "She is the daughter of Nagpal Varu and belongs to a lower class in your Kathi clan. If you say yes, then we will all eat gur to sweeten our mouths as a symbol of approval and consent. And thereafter, we will send clothes and jewellery for Nagpal Varu's daughter to express our approval."

Jivuba and Laduba replied, "Maharaj, we believe that one who has your association is not low-born. Thus, you decide accordingly."

"But Surprabhadevi has not said a single word on this matter," Shri Hari spoke while looking at her. She replied calmly, "Maharaj, Dada Khachar is like a son to you. You have given shelter to him at your feet. Thus, I have nothing else to say."

On hearing this, Shri Hari's eyes turned moist. He thought that Dada's entire family was totally dedicated to him. Then, Shri Hari revealed, "I have yet not talked to Dada about this, but I will convince him to agree."

I WISH TO IMMORTALIZE DADA'S GREATNESS

Shri Hari continued, "This thought [of his second marriage] occurred to me because those who are jealous wish to take away his home and property. I wish to immortalize Dada's greatness and fame."

On hearing Shri Hari's words everyone remained silent, with tears in their eyes. Oh, how fortunate Dada is! The entire family felt blessed by the abundant grace that Shri Hari had upon them.

Maharaj asked, "So, shall I now finalize everything?" Everyone chorused, "Yes Maharaj."

DADA KHACHAR'S ANXIETY

Dada Khachar observed the flurry of activities going on in his *darbar*. He realized that something

new was brewing, yet he was not keen to know what it was. Soon, Shri Hari called him. Dada Khachar felt a little uneasy at Maharaj's call. He had never felt like this before.

He thus slowly headed towards Shri Hari. On seeing him, Maharaj said, "Dada, come and sit down." Dada Khachar came while rubbing his fingers and sat down hesitantly. He wondered why he was not feeling enthusiastic as he always did whenever he came to Maharaj.

ONE CONDITION

Shri Hari explicitly stated, "Dada, we have decided for your second marriage."

Dada Khachar was stunned to hear this and reacted with surprise, "My second marriage! Maharaj, what are you saying?"

Shri Hari spoke gently, "Dada, I am saying that we have all decided to get you married again." Dada Khachar asked, "Maharaj, has Kumudaba suggested this to you?"

Shri Hari smiled and replied, "Dada, Kumudaba is a *mukta* (God-realized) and if she had told me, then so what! However, presently, I am telling you and it is my command." Dada Khachar cast his eyes downwards and sat speechless. He thought Shri Hari had not only decided, but commanded him. So, Dada softly uttered, "Yes."

Shriji Maharaj was very pleased upon Dada's straightforwardness. But then Dada spoke, "Maharaj, there is one condition." Shri Hari was a little surprised and asked, "You wish to make a condition with me?" Dada Khachar said, "Yes, I have one condition for you to abide by. You drive my chariot in the marriage procession. Only then will I agree to get married. Without your association my marriage will only bind me to *maya*." Shri Hari perceived Dada's words and agreed, "I will drive your chariot and be your parent on that day."

Dada Khachar was extremely happy.

* * *

Shri Hari decided to celebrate the Vasant

Panchmi festival in Gadhada and invite his sadhus and devotees from all places. Thereafter, he wished to take all of them to Bhatvadar for Dada's marriage. Maharaj had planned to hold Dada Khachar's marriage in a grand way. On the other hand, Dada Khachar remained absorbed in the thoughts that Shri Hari would drive his chariot in the marriage procession.

The festival of Vasant Panchmi of 1825 (A.S. 1881) was held with great devotion and joy in the presence of a large assembly of sadhus and devotees. On 27 January 1825 (Maha *sud* 8), prior to embarking upon the journey to Bhatvadar, the *pujan* ritual of Shri Ganeshji was performed.

Oxen carts had been ordered from Mandavdhar to transport everyone. To mark the occasion with auspiciousness, a sweet food item was made by two cooks, Lakhu and Jechand, and served to the Kathi devotees and others. Surprabhadevi and other women devotees served food to their relatives. Shri Hari invited all to join him all the way to Bhatvadar for Dada's marriage. Maharaj told Brahmanand Swami, Anandanand Swami and Nishkulanand Swami to come with him to Bhatvadar. They all hesitatingly said, "Maharaj, you had once said that renunciants should not come to or attend marriage occasions."

Shri Hari replied, "This is not a marriage occasion. It is a divine festival similar to the festivals we celebrate. Many spiritual aspirants will join us along the way and also meet us in Bhatvadar. You will have to talk to them about satsang. In this way, satsang will spread." The *paramhansas* got ready to depart immediately. ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

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



A FARMER'S BOY WHO CHANGED THE WORLD

Shantilal didn't have the wind blowing behind his back. It blew against him. He was born in a village insignificant on the Indian map, let alone the global map, even today. His father was a farmer of average means and they lived in a humble home with simple belongings. Moreover, he was born in colonial India.

In these circumstances, Shantilal was destined to become another poor farmer paying burdensome taxes to the British or perhaps a meagrely paid clerk in the British 'Raj'. He did have access to some education, but good schools were far and few. Besides, his father could barely afford to buy him a bicycle to ride to school, let alone pay for a university education.

But none of this mattered to this boy. He saw no obstructions, only stepping stones. He saw no limitations, only possibilities. Liberated from preconceptions, prejudice and preconditioning, he was prepared to serve the world.

How? Three thoughts remained with him at all times: “I am not my body or mind, I am Akshar.” “Shastriji Maharaj is with me.” And “I never want to hurt anyone”.

These beliefs about a deeper self, a guru by your side and altruism are positive forces. They are enablers. They lead to psychological empowerment and multidimensional growth.

More than anything else that may thwart your future plans, despite your university education, is your mind. The thoughts that swirl within your head. The decisions you take. The mindset you build.

Shantilal’s worldview energized him. His self-confidence didn’t depend on certificates, awards or praises. He was free from self-doubt through self-validation: “I am Akshar.” It’s a condition of joy, exhilaration and true enlightenment.

Self-validation has additional benefits. You validate others. You encourage them and give credit. Your fragile ego is replaced by an indestructible spirit. It divinizes you. It makes you likeable, indeed, loveable.

Shantilal was one of the nicest people you could meet. On his way to school every day he often sat on his friend’s cycle. The school was about 6 km away. Whenever they went uphill, he asked his friend, Ambalalbai, to sit while he pushed.

It became emblematic of his entire life. Whenever people’s lives went uphill, Shantilal, Shanti Bhagat, Narayanswarupdas, Narayandas, Pramukh Swami, Bapa – as his name progressively evolved – came to push. For 95 years, till his final moments, he was always there for everyone. He was only a phone call or letter away. You were his family. Your problem was his problem. Your success was his. Thousands of people spoke to

him or received recorded messages via WhatsApp, email and letters.

“Whatever problem you face,” he told everyone, “remember you are *akshar* and there will be a solution.”

Self-validate and burst out of self-doubt and self-limiting beliefs. Never give up. Keep trying. Keep learning. Keep asking. Keep helping. Keep praying.

Shantilal, in his youth, wasn’t a know-it-all. He had to learn on the fly and sometimes made errors. He couldn’t draw water from a well, a presumably standard task for kids in those days. Most homes didn’t have running taps like modern homes today. You had to fill pots from the village well and carry them home. But Shantilal always learned.

“I always involved everyone and asked for their advice,” he said many years later. “So why would there be any problems? I was new, so what was wrong with asking for their advice on how to do things better? They appreciated it when I asked them. They liked it when I got involved in the work with them. I asked them to teach me. I never acted as though I was bigger or superior to them.”

Indeed, during the building of Gadhada mandir, Shastriji Maharaj sent Narayanswarup Swami (Pramukh Swami) to bring marble from deep quarries far away in Makrana, Rajasthan. He had never travelled to another province, let alone to such a distant town where people spoke a different language.

It was a desertous land, poor and extremely hot. There were few trees for shade or places to stay. Wells were 200 feet deep! Water was scarce. Newcomers dropped a large bucket into a well. After drawing it up 100 feet they would drop it back. Lifting it was exhausting. Wiser workers lowered a smaller bucket, but had to subsist on that much water for the whole day. It was a catch 22.

For the first time in his life, in that blazing sun-parched land and paucity of water, Pramukh

Swami worked with labourers to identify good marble, cut it out and transport it safely back to Gadhada.

“I never asked Shastriji Maharaj how or what to do,” said Pramukh Swami to an overheated and dehydrated sadhu who went with him to Makrana on a later visit. “I never brought up the water and food problems, or the 200-foot wells. Shastriji Maharaj said I will experience the same peace as he.” The flustered sadhu calmed down.

Courageously taking the bull by the horns and living in those inhospitable conditions is an example of being truly self-confident and self-sufficient. Shantilal needed next to nothing to survive. He improvised and thrived. He always adjusted to the situation, no matter how uncomfortable.

Instead of changing the situation, he changed himself. In doing so, he changed the world. It’s an example of how changing oneself can do more to transform others than preaching or teaching.

Shantilal made his fair share of mistakes and endured numerous obstacles. But he never let them define him. He was always positive, no matter what.

“They (obstacles) are rocks of gold,” said Mahant Swami in a letter to *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* in London, UK. “All obstacles will cease to be obstacles. They will turn into gold. Imagine all rocks (say obstacles) turning into gold. That is what is going to happen. Abe Lincoln said, ‘I love difficulties, they are gems to me. I cannot do without them.’ This was the stuff which Shastriji Maharaj was made of.”

If mistakes weigh you down, they become obstacles. If a mistake is the last thing you do, it defines you. It becomes your legacy. If a mistake inspires and educates you, it becomes an asset. Success follows.

Sounds simple, doesn’t it? In theory. In practice, staying positive even during small losses and errors is difficult. Ever been over-billed by a few pennies!

How did Shantilal kindle his powerful mindset? It didn’t appear from a vacuum. It emerged from the company he kept, especially the person he loved the most: guru Shastriji Maharaj. It matters who you love. It determines how you think and who you become.

Before, and especially after, he became a sadhu, Shastriji Maharaj coached and mentored Narayanswarupdas Swami personally. When he wasn’t in town, he often wrote letters of counsel and blessings to Narayanswarupdas Swami, who always wrote back. After Shastriji Maharaj went to Dham, he prayed to him and put everything on his shoulders. No setback demoralized or undermined his drive. In his heart there was no room for negativity, hate or self-pity. He helped others, exuded positivity and took responsibility for his future.

Do you run the same algorithm? It remained Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s even after he was unceremoniously sent back from Kenya to India in 1974. After England revoked his permission to build a temple in Harrow in 1987. And after Gandhinagar Akshardham was attacked in 2002. Nothing deflated his enthusiasm. Whatever people threw at him made him stronger, more determined, more convinced that Shastriji Maharaj was with him, testing him, moulding him, guiding him. He believed in his guru. He believed in himself.

So should you. *Do not let your mistakes or failures define you, no matter how many you make.* You are *akshar*. From this knowledge invested in you by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, climb the mountain of life and help others along the way. Indeed, your inner identity will become so large, the mountain will have to climb you. ♦

A Leader, Yet an Exemplary *Servant*



LEADING WITH LOVE

We may not realize it, but we are all leaders in some form in our own circle of influence: professionally, socially or personally.

How one handles even the simplest of tasks reveals the leadership skills of a person. Visiting the supermarket, organizing a house-warming gathering, arranging a birthday party, raising children or working with others, and other such tasks reflect one's leadership skills.

To be a successful leader in any aspect of life requires the ability to communicate well, listen to feedback, be flexible, motivate others, plan effectively and, crucially, lead by example. Put simply, do what you say.

Parents are leaders of their households. They inspire their children to work hard, do well, carry out important chores, and live with noble values.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, guru of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha between 1971 and 2016, was a leader like no other. He inspired hundreds of thousands of people to lead moral, spiritual and pious lives. He inspired the building of more than 1,200 mandirs across the globe and initiated over 1,000 sadhus. His teachings and practices continue to transform people and societies everywhere.

This is due to his unique leadership style. The way he connected with people was peerless, because he would lead with love.

A LOVING SERVANT LEADER

Looking at leaders who have shaped world history, we may think that here's a huge difference between them and us.

Well, is there? We're all made of flesh and blood, and have the same number of hours in a day. Successful leaders have dreamt big, worked hard, made decisions and had courage. This is something that we can all do.

John Maxwell, a leadership thinker, said, "Leadership is about how one's life influences another." How we do this depends on the choices we make and the way we choose to undertake tasks.

Leadership is about having an impact on the people within our circle of influence. This could be our family, friends or co-workers, and might be just a handful of people or many hundreds.

Steve Jobs, cofounder of Apple, put it very simply, "Leadership is about inspiring people to do things they never thought they could do."

Great leaders throughout history have done just that. They have stamped their mark on the world and influenced generations that have followed.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a leader. He did not go to war, but he showed the way to fight wars with our internal enemies of anger, greed, lust, jealousy and other base instincts that torture us every day.

This is what sets Pramukh Swami Maharaj apart from other leaders. With his unique and loving style, he inspired innumerable people to lead pure and pious lives, to work on improving themselves and their inner nature, to give up damaging lifestyles dominated



by addictions, and to keep God at the centre of everything. He transformed people through love. And this was one of his defining leadership features.

With his credo, 'In the joy of others, lies our own', Pramukh Swami Maharaj helped people to change and improve, and taught them to be selfless and put others first.

Ronald Reagan, former president of the USA, once said, "The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one who gets people to do the greatest things."

This is exactly what Pramukh Swami Maharaj did; he inspired people to do great things. He did this in a number of ways, primarily leading from the front, but as a servant.

Leadership is about inspiring people to do things they never thought they could do.

- Steve Jobs, cofounder of Apple

PRESIDENT WASHES UTENSILS

In 1950, at the young age of 28, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was appointed as president of BAPS by guru Shastriji Maharaj. On this day, he made a pledge: "Today, O Guruji, before you and this gathering, I pledge that I shall sincerely uphold

my duties, without caring for my body, and in every way remain loyal to the Sanstha and faithful to you.”

All the senior sadhus and elderly devotees wholeheartedly supported Shastriji Maharaj’s decision in appointing him as the president.

After the memorable function was over, the devotees had dinner before departing. But Pramukh Swami, the newly appointed president noticed the pile of used dishes, cups, bowls, pots, pans and cooking utensils and washed them all – without a fuss and without asking anyone for help.

As the president, he could have asked someone else to do it; however, he didn’t do that. Nor did he complain to anyone. He simply did the *seva* himself, as per his pledge. Such humble service was a hallmark of his unique personality.

CLEANING THE RESTROOMS

Once, in the 1960s, thousands of devotees gathered in Sarangpur to celebrate the Jal Jhilani festival. After the celebration, the devotees left to return home and the volunteers were taking rest in the afternoon.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, too, decided to rest. After a while, Dharmajivan Swami, who was sleeping near Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the assembly hall, noticed that he was not sleeping there any longer. So, he got up and started looking for him. His search led him to the common toilets at the rear of the mandir campus.

To his surprise, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was cleaning the overflowing toilets. He was carrying a bucket full of excreta and taking it to the dump site, pausing momentarily between rounds to sweep the toilets.

Dharmajivan Swami quickly ran to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and tried to forcibly take the bucket and broom from him. Pramukh Swami

Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired innumerable people to lead pure and pious lives, to work on improving themselves and their inner nature.

Maharaj simply remarked, “Don’t make a noise. You will wake up the other sadhus who are resting. Now, two is better than one. If you want me to finish this sooner, you fetch me the water and I will clean the toilets.”

The president of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha happily performed the most menial of services, as a servant of servants.

HELPING WITH THE LITTER

In 1962, the grand inauguration of Ahmedabad Mandir had been celebrated. That night, after 10 p.m., amid the darkness a youth was collecting the litter on the grounds into a cart. Alone, he was struggling to push the loaded cart up a steep slope to empty it into a much bigger container. From a distance, Pramukh Swami Maharaj saw the youth and his difficulty, so he rushed over immediately to help him.

Together, the two of them pushed the cart up the slope and emptied the rubbish. The youth was humbled and touched by Swamishri’s timely support. So much so that it inspired him to later become a sadhu himself.

PEELING VEGETABLES

In 1981, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Mt. Abu, India. It was Pramukh Varni Din, the 31st anniversary of the day he had been appointed as the president of BAPS.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had just finished a meeting, and was moving between rooms when he noticed that a group of sadhus were sitting and peeling vegetables. Immediately, Swamishri sat down and joined them in peeling and preparing the vegetables.

No *seva* was ever too small for Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His position or status never held him back from engaging in even the most menial of tasks. He was always willing to lend a

helping hand – the hallmark of an exemplary servant leader.

THROUGH SIMPLE LIVING

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's simple life and softly spoken words touched the lives of many.

Despite being the BAPS president and having a hectic and challenging schedule, Swamishri never demanded any special arrangements for himself. For example, in Bochasan, he would put two wooden benches together to prepare a makeshift cot to sleep. In Atladara, he often slept on a pile of sand under a neem tree. In Gadhada, he slept on the office ledge or on the sandy floor.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj would use the same general restrooms and bathe in the same common areas as others, often with cold water. Never did he ask for hot water or a decent restroom or showers. He lived with the rest.

He would not allow anyone to make special food for him and would eat whatever had been prepared with the other sadhus in whichever mandir he was at. He firmly instructed his attendants, "You must never do anything special for me, anywhere or anytime. I am like the rest and want to mingle with them."

He led by example and taught us that no matter who we are or what our status may be, we should remain simple and humble.

NOT DISTURBING OTHERS

One night, at around 1.30 a.m., during the preparations for Shastriji Maharaj's centenary celebrations in Atladara in 1965, a truck stacked high with mattresses arrived for use by those attending the celebrations. The truck driver wanted to leave straight away, so the mattresses had to be unloaded. Apart from Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Satyapriya Swami, everyone else was fast asleep.

The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one who gets people to do the greatest things.

**- Ronald Reagan,
former USA president**

Satyapriya Swami asked if he should wake up some youths to help. Swamishri said, "No, they've worked all day and must be tired. I will stand here, you get onto the truck and pass me the mattresses. I will stack them in the corner."

Together they completed this long, repetitive and strenuous task at about 3.00 a.m. It would have been done much quicker with the

help of the youths. However, Swamishri cared more about them being fully rested than for his own body and fatigue.

He was a leader, but was also a servant. He led and served from the front.

LET US FOLLOW

The footprints of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's leadership are forever embedded in the sands of time. He showed us that great leadership is based on goodness. Helping others to grow, and generating joy for others was his credo.

We often have to do the same things every day, but if, like Pramukh Swami Maharaj, we do them with love and compassion it will transform us as leaders, and ultimately bring joy to all others around us.

Real leaders become bigger than themselves, and their legacy lives on beyond them. Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave people direction that made a difference in their lives, and he did it by leading with love and selfless service.

Let us strive to follow in his footsteps. ♦

Clarity in the Nature of *God*



For thousands of years, people have discussed the nature of God. But, to fathom God is complex. And then to apply this understanding in one's life, is a very subtle and slippery craft.

For Pramukh Swami Maharaj, discussing the nature of God was not just an intellectual exercise, but a means to unify, dignify and pacify all minds without discrimination.

He knew that knowing about the nature of God meant living by that understanding. For him, faith in and an understanding of God was of the greatest importance.

His life aptly characterized his clarity in understanding the nature of God.

With such paramount certainty, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's mere presence had a profound impact even on the faithless and atheistic. Without much talking, and often without talking at all, his presence naturally enabled everyone to 'feel' God.

* * *

On 7 July 1998, at the age of 77, Pramukh Swami Maharaj underwent bypass surgery at Lenox Hill Hospital, NY.

On 8 July, at 6. 10 a.m., he awoke from the anaesthetic effect. All his vital body functions were being monitored by various machines. He was entirely enmeshed and intertwined with monitoring wires, intravenous lines and other vital tubes.

He saw that he was encircled and being observed by a panel of doctors, male nurses

and other attendants. Millions of his followers worldwide had stayed awake all night praying for his successful surgery. In spite of being the cynosure of all eyes and minds, and even amid such a wiry clutch, his eyes desired to have Thakorji's darshan. A swami came with Thakorji in his hands.

Rapt devotion bloomed in his eyes in an instant. Impromptu, Swamishri tried to fold his hands to offer reverence to Thakorji, but the monitoring and intravenous coils caging him would not allow his hands to meet. Even then, with tremendous effort he raised himself for darshan. He folded his hands. They were shaking, yet he held them up. The breathing and other tubes had only recently been removed, and so he had difficulty in talking. Despite this, Swamishri repeatedly chanted, "Maharaj... Swami... Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj... Swaminarayan... Swaminarayan." Despite his fragility, he tried to bow his head.

A swami asked, "Bapa, how are you?" Only by blinking his eyelids could he convey that he was fine. Yet, the chant continued. The swami said, "Dr Subramanian did a good surgery. You are good now." Swamishri said, "Yes, Swaminarayan... Swaminarayan..." and in a flash everyone present witnessed a surge of devotion welling up in his eyes. He tried to turn to his right to touch the feet of Thakorji. His innate devotion came to the fore. It was coursing through his veins, beating like an immortal heart and pulsating in sublime clarity.

In September 1998, just a few weeks after his heart bypass surgery, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Edison, New Jersey. Ronald Patel, distinguished Sunday editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, was interviewing Swamishri about his recent medical experiences.

Ron asked Swamishri, "What was the first thought that came to your conscious mind after your quintuple bypass surgery?"

Without a moment's hesitation Swamishri replied, "God."

Not the pain. Not the doctors. Neither cursing the situation nor overwhelmed under the obligation of people around him. His first thought was – God.

Astonished by Swamishri's quick and confident response, Ron asked, "After regaining consciousness, didn't you feel disappointed that you were back on earth and not in the presence of God?"

"No, God is always with us."

In his first public discourse after the bypass surgery, Swamishri said, "The basic goal for everyone is one – to attain God. The whole world functions because of him. Without him, we can do nothing. People think that it is Dr Subramanian who has done the surgery. But it is God who has operated through him. One should not forget this. People are full of the instincts of lust, anger, greed, attachment, prejudice, envy and so on. But, God is devoid of all such traits. He is the source of eternal bliss. He is totally free of faults and prejudice. He is independent. He knows how to handle everyone and whatever he does is for the good of all. Because of our prejudices we feel he is partial. But God wants to liberate everyone and that's why he is impartial. Such an understanding is true devotion and will bring one constant happiness."

With Swamishri, every moment was replete with such clarity of understanding. And his spiritual eminence was a result of this. He did not have to speak. His spontaneous vibes and outpouring aura influenced divinity in one and all.

On 20 December 2000, in an interview on Zee TV international channel, Dr Subramanian was asked, "You have performed over 20,000 heart operations. During this time, have you had any extraordinary experience?"

He replied, "Once, I was operating on Pramukh Swamiji of the BAPS Sanstha. When I held his heart in my hand I had a unique experience. I felt as if some divinity

God is the source of eternal bliss. He is totally free of faults and prejudice. He is independent. He knows how to handle everyone.



Swamishri in discussion with Dr Kalam, 2001



Swamishri performs *puja* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj

had pervaded the entire operation theatre. I had never felt like that in the other 20,000 operations.”

* * *

When the missile man and former President of India, Dr Abdul Kalam met Swamishri for the first time in June 2001, he presented the plans of his vision for India 2020 to him. Pramukh Swami Maharaj guided, “Along with your five areas to transform India add a sixth one – faith in God.” At that time Dr Kalam described, “I felt I was in the Divine Presence... there was a light radiating through Pramukh Swamiji which illuminated my inner self. I felt I had acquired a sixth sense.”

He said later that this was the moment when he decided he must write a book on Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In his book, *Transcendence*, he reveals that in the presence of Pramukh Swamiji his spirituality truly flourishes. He describes him as “my ultimate teacher” and records, “How do I summarize Pramukh Swamiji’s effect on me? He has indeed transformed me. He is the ultimate stage of the spiritual ascent in my life, which started with my father, was sustained by Dr Brahma Prakash and Prof. Satish Dhawan; now, finally, Pramukh Swamiji has put me in a God-synchronous orbit.”

Swamishri appreciated that technology could build a nation.

And, for Swamishri, his ‘technology’ was his faith in God. He would often say that the wisdom of *atma* and Paramatma is our technology which enhances people. He used his technology and brought about paramount peace in the hearts of millions.

For Pramukh Swami Maharaj, God himself was abundance, a matchless intelligence, superlatively resplendent in beauty, an unassailable refuge in fatigue and depression, a haven of unconditional happiness-contentment-rapture-ecstasy, an unfluctuating companion overflowing with constant forgiving and understanding – and a sublime bliss which he perpetually savoured.

For Swamishri, no-thing, no-one or no-where else sufficed as much as God himself.

* * *

In 2005, after seeing the wonderful architectural marvel Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, Dr Subramanian asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj,

“What is your next project?”

Swamishri replied “We have only one project – to worship God and inspire others to worship God! Projects such as these are by-products.”

Such was Swamishri’s clarity in his understanding of the primacy of God. ♦

How do I summarize
Pramukh Swamiji’s
effect on me?

He has indeed
transformed me.

Pramukh Swamiji
has put me in a God-
synchronous orbit.

- Dr Abdul Kalam



Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Modern Management (Part 1)

Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj (1921–2016), the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the BAPS, was an epitome of saintliness. During his tenure as the spiritual leader and president of BAPS, he was instrumental in consolidating the fundamental spiritual values, work flow systems and organizational activities of BAPS on a global level. It was one of his great achievements.

BAPS is a spiritual organization which conducts numerous activities throughout the world in the social, cultural, educational, environmental, health care and spiritual sectors. These activities for human welfare were conducted under the divine leadership and inspiration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Swamishri) and the able guidance and efforts of more than 1,000 BAPS saints and a dedicated volunteer force of more than 55,000 men and women. It is only due to their selfless efforts that BAPS as of today has more than 1,200 mandirs, *sanskardhams* and *hari* mandirs,

and many ancillary institutions like schools, students' hostels and hospitals and others. The main objective, as often mentioned by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, of conducting these activities is to promote the universal ideals of Hindu dharma, traditions and systems amongst aspirants of all ages, to foster their spiritual upliftment, and also for the development of society, the nation and the world. Due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's virtues and resolute adherence to principles, BAPS, which was established in 1907 with a handful of devotees, now has a global outreach along with a consultative status in the UNO as a non-governmental organization.

How was Swamishri able to do so much? The answer to this question lies in his exemplary leadership qualities and impeccable timeless managerial skills. On closer inspection, one realizes that the ideas, principles, theories, thoughts and actions which are propagated, practised and taught by current academia and

modern management executives were naturally ingrained in Swamishri. Though he had studied only up to sixth grade, his innate managerial skills blossomed under the wings of his gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. Under their guidance, he organized festivals and celebrations and oversaw the general administrative affairs of all mandirs and activities.

WHAT IS MODERN MANAGEMENT?

As defined by academia, modern management is a process of getting things done with the aim of achieving goals effectively and efficiently. They also say that the traditional viewpoint of management is considered inappropriate in our present-day environment, where workers have a high level of aspirations. To elaborate, traditional management skills would be rendered ineffective in dealing with the current educated workforce, which is aspirational, growth-oriented, knowledge-driven, exposed to social media and is able to understand and take decisions of their own.

The congruence of modern management and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's method of management can be partly understood through the following three aspects: People Management, Resource Management and Value Management.

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

Modern management gurus opine that if you care for your people, your people will care for your work. "People First," in the words of renowned American management consultant Tom Peters, is the key to success in today's ever-changing times. The book, *Managing the Millennials – Discover the Core Competencies of Managing Today's Workforce* by Chip Espinoza, Queg Rooz and Nick Kukreja, brings before us a very important aspect in relation to managing people and understanding the mindsets of multiple work generations. The book reflects that people belonging to the same work generation, who pass through similar sets of processes, systems and procedures, possess

a similar mindset and value system, and similar objectives and aspirations. The authors further classify the work generations over the last century (see box on next page).

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, during his tenure as the organizational president (1950–2016) and spiritual leader (1971–2016) of BAPS, understood, adjusted, managed and positively engaged all the working generations and delivered extraordinary results. Indeed, a rare feat. Swamishri, even at the age of 85 years, would work with sadhus of 30–35 years with the precision and mindfulness of a CEO of a multinational working with his executives.

Another critical aspect to note is the work culture and delivery model in an NGO like BAPS compared to corporates. Corporates work on the principle of 'Pay and Smile', wherein the employer likes the work of the employee and compensates him monetarily, whereas the employee likes the monetary compensation paid by his employer and thus works for him. There is less human touch in this relationship and more pay and work. The day when there is a mismatch in this relationship, it is called off and they part ways. However, this is not so in the case of a spiritual NGO. It works on the principle of 'Serve and Smile'. The work done by volunteers in a spiritual NGO is on a spiritual level: to help people imbibe cultural values, understand the mindset and expectation of people, adjust according to the counterpart and consider other humane intangibles. This ability to deliver results and execute world-class projects globally under this setup made Swamishri special and unique. This was possible as Swamishri used to function on the principle of 'Flexibility to Firmness', similar to water. Water can be extremely flexible as it can take the shape of any vessel it is filled in, and at the same time can be extremely firm and strong as it can cut an aluminium or iron bar when unleashed from a water jet with immense pressure. This quality of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was witnessed on a number of occasions.

A SUMMARY OF DIFFERENT GENERATIONS AND THEIR ATTRIBUTES

| Period | Title | Mindset | Peculiarity |
|-----------|-------------------|---|--|
| 1925–1945 | Silent Generation | Follow people. Work with utmost loyalty for and integrity towards the organization and patiently wait for the appreciation of their accomplished work. | Mostly, this generation spends the whole of their career working in a single organization. |
| 1946–1964 | Baby Boomers | Work for their social upliftment. Aspire for economic objectives. Create a professional identity. | This generation strives to achieve their personal and organizational objectives. |
| 1965–1976 | Gen X | Like to work independently. Believe in work-life balance and in working in a hassle-free environment. | This generation is comparatively impatient and changes jobs/businesses/ professions frequently in case of any dissatisfaction. |
| 1977–1995 | Millennials | Have a very high regard for their abilities and potential. Require immediate gratification from their superiors. Believe in direct communication and instant feedback. | This generation is currently working in society, is ambitious and aspires for larger-than-life goals in their career. |
| 1996–2009 | Gen Z | First true digital natives. Sustain relationships through social media apps. | This generation searches for truth, values individuality, mobilizes for many causes and uses dialogue to solve conflicts. |
| 2010–2024 | Gen Alpha | Most racially diverse generation. Will need social-emotional learning support. Consider smart devices as commonplace. | This generation has a unique digital savviness. COVID-19 pandemic will likely have lasting effects on Gen Alpha. |

Let us try to understand this through the following incidents.

In 1995, Swamishri was having lunch at the Sankari mandir. As per routine, one of the disciples was reading the *Swaminarayan Prakash* – the BAPS monthly magazine in Gujarati. He was reading a 1995 report of the London *murti-pratishtha mahotsav*. The reader could not properly pronounce the letters ‘sh’ that appeared in the word ‘polish’. This was remarked on by the others present there, but still the disciple was unable to

correct it. Observing this, Swamishri said, “Once you know the limitation of a person with whom you work and have a long-lasting relationship, you should immediately adjust to his shortcomings.” This highlighted his flexible approach in accepting people’s shortcomings, which made them love Bapa till their last breath.

In 1994, the UK was in the midst of an economic recession and the trustees of the under-construction London BAPS Mandir opined that it would be difficult to complete both the *shikharbaddha*

mandir and the wooden haveli as planned before the summer of 1995. With this opinion, they called Swamishri who was on his *vicharan* in South India. Swamishri listened to what the trustees said and then replied, “All of us had earlier sat together and decided to complete this project on time as per Yogi Bapa’s wish. Now at this point we cannot and should not go back from our decision. We have Shastriji Maharaj’s and Yogiji Maharaj’s blessings and will complete the London mandir and the haveli on time.” To give momentum to the mandir project, Swamishri went to London and endeavoured tirelessly for four months. Thereafter, in 1995, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the mandir and opening of the haveli.

Thus, the way in which Swamishri strived and managed people for 65 years in serving society and building landmark spiritual complexes, like Akshardham, across the world are worthy of study in B-schools.

Some of the other dimensions of Swamishri which were reflected over a period of time through his actions were the care, compassion and consistency with which he dealt with people. Whether the person was a sadhu, devotee or a well-wisher, Swamishri never failed to shower his care and compassion on them.

During festivals, Pramukh Swami Maharaj always instructed the local mandir *kothari* and sadhus to take care of the devotees who had come from their respective cities, towns or villages. He guided them to treat all with equal care and love.

Once, Swamishri was in Limbdi when a *satsangi* youth named Harikrishna met him. As he was only a commerce graduate, it was extremely difficult for him to find a job and hence make ends meet. He sought Swamishri’s help. Immediately, Swamishri called Harishbhai, a devotee in Mumbai, and asked him to provide the youth a job in his factory. Harikrishna was overwhelmed by Swamishri’s instant care and recommendation. Later, Swamishri took the report of his work and instructed Harishbhai to give Harikrishna a cycle

so that he could fulfil his household duties of shopping and other things.

William McKnight (1887–1978), who served as president of the 3M Corporation, said, “People are your greatest asset. How you look after your people should be consistent with your words.” In the case of Pramukh Swami Maharaj the words of McKnight resonated in his life to the hilt. On 21 May 1950, when Swamishri was appointed president of the BAPS by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, he pledged to remain faithful to the principles of BAPS and serve the devotees and the organization throughout his life without concern for his body. He fulfilled his oath till his last breath at the age of 95.

McKnight adds, “If you put fences around people, you get sheep. Give people the room they need.” Creating unnecessary restrictions around your people would hamper their creativity, subdue their decision-making power and make them less accountable for their work. Instead, identify the talent in people and give them the full freedom to perform within their jurisdiction, and see the wonderful results of their performance. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had this inborn knack of identifying the talents and potential in people and giving them the scope and freedom to perform and deliver.

In 1980, a *satsangi* youth met Swamishri and showed him his handcrafted bat and ball. Swamishri looked at his art and blessed him to develop his talent. The teenager was greatly affected and inspired by Swamishri’s words that he worked tirelessly to develop his craftsmanship. Later, the teenager took the sadhu *diksha* at Pramukh Swami’s holy hands. Presently, he contributes his skills in art and craft in designing and creating exhibitions, mandirs and mega-festivals for the BAPS.

These are just a few droplets from the vast ocean of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s people management skills. In the next article, we will elucidate on Swamishri’s work management skills. ♦

Behind the *Sacred* Relic

BLESSED WITH A GATARIYU

On 6 January 1986, Pramukh Swami Maharaj went to Mojidad for the three-day Shikshapatri *parayan* sponsored by Ramsangbhai Solanki.

Ramsangbhai, whose father, Kesharbhai, was a dedicated devotee of Shastriji Maharaj, was suffering from advanced oral cancer. Ramsangbhai was himself a highly respected devotee, whom Pramukh Swami Maharaj knew well.

On 9 January, before departing from Mojidad, Swamishri met the ailing Ramsangbhai, who requested, “Bapa please take me to Dham now.” Swamishri had the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj placed on Ramsangbhai’s head for a lengthy time to bless him.

Swamishri said, “Now continuously keep your focus on this *murti*. After Uttarayan, whenever Maharaj wishes, go with him.”

Swamishri chanted the *dhun* and asked the sadhus to sing the bhajan ‘*Tamāri murti vinā...*’.

Then, Swamishri said to Ramsangbhai, “I have

prayed to Maharaj on your behalf. Now forget everything and focus only on him.”

Thereafter, Swamishri draped the *gatariyu* (upper cloth) he had been wearing for the past one month around Ramsangbhai and said, “From today, you have donned the saffron robes. Now you are free from everything worldly. So, constantly engage in bhajan. Maharaj will take care of you.”

Subsequently, on 21 January 1986, Ramsangbhai passed away to Akshardham. At that time, a Brahmin named Mukundbhai Dave, a female devotee named Lalitaben Mistry and Ramsangbhai’s niece, Janakba, all had darshan of Ramsangbhai being taken to Akshardham by Maharaj and the Gunatit gurus.

Ramsangbhai’s family has preserved this *gatariyu* as a memento of Swamishri’s affection and compassion for his devotees. It reminds us all that our lives are in the hands of Maharaj and our gurus and that they will fulfil their promise to take us to Dham.



Swamishri blesses Ramsangbhai



The *gatariyu* draped over Ramsangbhai by Swamishri



Swamishri chants the Swaminarayan *dhun* on his first visit to the Akshardham site, 2000



Swamishri by the Jamun tree

THE JAMUN TREE

In 1968, Yogiji Maharaj first revealed his vision for a grand mandir to be built on the banks of the sacred River Yamuna in New Delhi.

In 2000, after 32 years of persistent efforts by Pramukh Swami Maharaj and other sadhus and devotees, suitable land was acquired for Yogiji Maharaj's wish to be fulfilled.

On Friday, 26 May 2000, at 6.15 p.m. Swamishri arrived on this land for the first time. Even before he set foot on it, Swamishri showered some rose petals sanctified by Thakorji on the ground to worship and honour the land before stepping out of the car. During a brief walk around the land, Swamishri showered more sanctified rose petals and sacred water on the land.

Then, at around 6.45 p.m., Swamishri entered a tent where a Jamun tree was standing. He performed the *arti* of Thakorji as well as the land. Before prostrating to Thakorji, Swamishri told everyone, "Every day you offer five *dandvats* (prostrations), but today perform two more to the land." Swamishri also performed two extra prostrations. Then, while remembering Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his guru Yogiji Maharaj, Swamishri voiced a series of nine *sankalps* (wishes)

and chanted the Swaminarayan *dhun* in prayer for their successful fulfilment. This was the devout beginning of this historic project.

Around a year later, Swamishri returned to this part of the land to inspect the ongoing construction of Akshardham. At this same location, Swamishri noticed that only the trunk of the Jamun tree remained in place. He tenderly placed his hand on the tree trunk and instructed Ishwarcharan Swami to ensure that this tree is preserved and nurtured. Thereafter, through the experienced care of sadhus and volunteers, the tree flourished. And continues to do so even today.

This Jamun tree is preserved in the same location where Swamishri sanctified it. It is situated adjacent to the Yagnapurush Kund at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, where the nightly Sahaj Anand Water Show takes place.

This sanctified Jamun tree serves as an enduring reminder of Swamishri's first visit to this auspicious land and that from the very beginning of this momentous project Swamishri's every step was perfused with devotion and prayer to Thakorji. ♦



Letters to Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired, influenced and impacted the lives of many people, young and old, men and women, in a multitude of ways. As we celebrate his birth centenary, we have reached out to the worldwide satsang community to express their feelings and memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the form of a letter addressed to him. This is a selection from the letters received so far.

You have been a part of my life since the day I was born. Watching over me, guiding me through life. Growing up in London, in a western culture, it is only because of your foresight, courage and drive to cement satsang in the UK that has saved me from living a very different life.

I have consistently failed to live in accordance with your wishes, and have sometimes even doubted your words and questioned my faith. Yet, you have never failed to be there for me. You have shown me time and time again that you will always take care of me and keep me on the true path.

You have never hidden away on any occasion I have tried to challenge you. On these occasions, you have stood up pure and strong and shown me that you are nothing but complete divinity. Over the years, you have allowed me to be a small part of your *karya* and for that I will be forever grateful.

- Dipen Gadhia, 48, Senior NHS Manager, UK

Because of your unconditional love, we are able to digest the difficult times in our life. You are like a brother, father, best friend, mother and everything for me.

Thank you for giving us Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj to continuously guide and inspire us on our spiritual path.

- Mukti

My parents told me that in January 2005 in Atladara, at the time of the Vasant Panchami celebration, I played with you in your lap for over 30 minutes and you did my first ever *tilak-chandlo* on my forehead. Ever since I heard how lucky I was, I have done *tilak-chandlo* every single day without fail.

- Khushit Mistry

Once again, I write to you, just like I've done in the past. I was relatively new and weak in satsang, yet you replied. Strengthening the feeling that you were my guru, and I was your *shishya*. You were in India, and I was in London, yet you never made me feel like we were oceans apart.

Bapa, I often wonder what my life would have been like without meeting you: your *prapti* and the *prapti* of your sadhus and devotees. The result of these thoughts is always the same – that your association has grabbed me from the rotting pools of samsara, allowing me to blossom like a lotus.

- Miraj Patel, Medical Student, London, UK

I have been fortunate enough to have your close darshan many times during your many visits to London. I remember once seeing you having dinner in the small *hari* mandir kitchen. Once, on a New Year's Day (Bestu Varsh), we all had your close darshan and you gave a *prasadi* Diwali card on which was a *murti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj with your blessings. I still have that *prasadi murti* in my place of daily prayer. I have never written to you before. However, I have had many mental conversations with you and you have always guided me.

- Hardevbhai Patel, 82, London, UK

As a *balika*, I remember in the old *hari* mandir [in London], I used to play jacks with friends during *sabha*. Although we never understood what was being said, I will never forget your warmth, your smile and your radiating aura as you sat on the high sofa. I truly felt a magnetic connection and bond.

You have always stood by me even though I didn't see it. You came into my puja and held both my hands for comfort. I am forever indebted to you for love and guidance in all aspects of my life.

- Bhavisha Panchmatia, 43, Creative Designer, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Ten years ago I was not aware of the BAPS Sanstha. I was against spending money for building so many mandirs. I always questioned people, "Why so many mandirs?" However, my thinking and understanding was wrong. This mandir brings bhakti and satsang in my life, in my children's life and ultimately in my family. Now, I can't imagine what would happen without the mandir. School is needed to get knowledge, but I strongly believe that mandirs are needed to bring satsang in our life and to preserve our culture. Mandirs bring happiness and peace in our life. For that we greatly thank Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Guru Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Swami, we do follow *niyam*-dharma to gain your *rajipo*, but living in this society we sometimes do make mistakes and break *niyams*. Please give us the strength to keep stronger and stronger satsang in our life. Please stay with us all the time to bring happiness and peace in our family.

- Vaishali Patel, 48, Global Clinical Manager, Parsippany, USA

Through my toughest days and hardest challenges, it is your beating heart that gives me the strength to battle it out and keep fighting to make you *raji*. If it weren't for you, I would have given up years ago.

Despite the challenges I have faced, you never let my hand go, even when I let your hand go time and time again. You taught me to smile and laugh through every breath, even when your heart sat on an erupting volcano. Your *shraddha* in Maharaj's *kartapanu* inspired me to try my best to have that same *vishwas* in him.

Through all the successes and failures, you always shone your brilliance upon me, pushing away my dark imagination and ending the cycle of inner turmoil.

No doubt this journey is testing my faith, but you have guided me on my sadhana by helping me to flourish in my satsang and teaching me to spread my wings to smile and laugh wholeheartedly through every experience. A willpower to continue fighting physically, mentally and spiritually grows along with my positivity, confidence and patience. Bapa, you are my strength and energy through all the challenges I face with my health. My only desire is to make you *raji* and never fail you by syncing my heartbeat with yours and making your *marji* mine.

- Student, 20, NJ, USA

It was Mandir Mahotsav in Houston, TX, in the summer of 2004. One morning, I had the opportunity to stand in front of Bhagatji Maharaj's *murti* (due to my hometown being Mahuva) and had prepared a short stanza embodying Bhagatji Maharaj's life. As Swamishri approached, I began my rehearsed statement. "*Bhagatji Maharaj ni evi samjan hati, ke Gunatitanand Swami, bija bhakta thaki mari kasoti kare chhe.*" A sadhu had warned me that Swami will ask what *kasoti* is, so I was ready. And, as predicted, Swami asked me what that word meant. I said, "*Kasoti etle pariksha.*" Swamishri smiled and said, "*Ha, e vaat samji rakhje!*" This was a life lesson that I still recall while doing *seva*. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was always teaching us how to be better people and *satsangis* and for that I am forever indebted.

- Amar Trivedi, 34, Dentist, Houston, USA

How can I begin to thank you? Words fall short for what you have done for me and how you have loved and supported me throughout my life. My family joined satsang in 2000. Even though I was only 11 years old, I began to learn the value and necessity of a spiritually centric life.

The more I came to learn about Shriji Maharaj, our guru *parampara* and you, the more I couldn't help but be drawn to earning your *rajipo* and always making sure that I'm anchored to you. There were crossroads in my life where I had difficult decisions to make. I faced a lot of stress and felt defeated, but not once did I feel alone. It was all because I knew that no matter what the situation, you would always be by my side. You'd always be in my heart; you'd always be holding my hand. ♦

- Arpita Patel, 30, HRIS Analyst, Detroit, USA

In difficult times or happy times, whether I remember you or not, I have realized that you never forget to look after me. So many *prasangs* when I have felt you protect me...

I still remember when I saw you for the first time in the London Mandir haveli. Didn't know how to do your darshan, but the moment I saw your face I burst into tears and couldn't stop. At that moment, I felt the power of your divinity and decided that I want to be a real *satsangi*. I started with not eating onions and garlic. Since then I have never felt like eating them ever again, which surprises me still.

- Nirali Patel

You are the one person who has always been there for me. The one person who made me feel constantly loved and safe. You touched me even before I understood your greatness. As a *balika*, I loved you without understanding your true *mahima* or your true *swarup*.

In 2005, my family and I came to visit Akshardham Delhi in the summer holidays, before the opening in November 2005. I became quite ill and eventually fainted whilst looking at the construction of the large bronze *murti* of Nilkanth Varni. That evening, once you had been informed of the situation, you sent me food (including *khichdi*) from your *thal*. This was a lovely gesture, one of which I didn't think much of until later. I realized the extent of your love. With a massive project like Akshardham Delhi taking place, your ongoing *vicharan*, countless letters and Sanstha projects taking place, you still took out time for the smallest and most insignificant of your devotees.

- Shraddha Patel, 26, Secondary School Teacher, London, UK

You are not just my guru but my spiritual father. You picked me back up if I fell down, you led me to the path of *moksha* and you haven't let go of my hand. Bapa, without you I can't imagine where I would be.

The love that you have showered on me is unmatched and there is nothing more that I could ask from you.

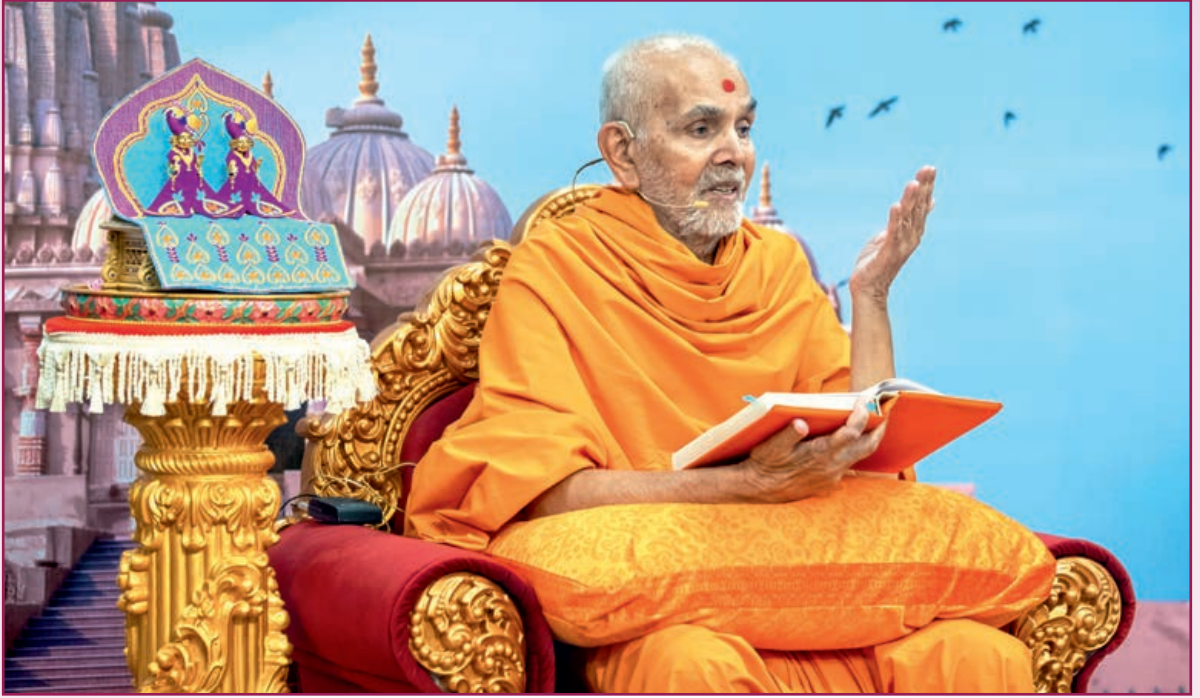
- Priyam

You have always showered your blessings over me and kept me in satsang, even when I was falling away. There have been times when I haven't followed your *agna* and even then you haven't let go of my hand. You have always kept satsang at the centre of my life. Since a young age you have kept me engaged in *seva*. When I was 4, in 1994, your infectious laugh at my performance of teddy bear rolls has been etched into my heart for eternity. Then again in 2000, the same teddy bear rolls filled your heart with so much joy. In 2006, you blessed us with memories during your visit to London and on our UK trip to India. Those priceless memories have helped me to stay by your side and not fall into the path of *kusang*.

- Nitin Ruda, 32, Accountant, Leicester, UK

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

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



Abhav, Avgun & Droh

The satsang lexicon is full of words with nuanced meanings. Understanding them helps us to understand the core concepts of satsang and practise them in our daily lives. For example, although the words *abhav*, *avgun* and *droh* are often used interchangeably, each conveys a specific attitude.

Abhav refers to the dislike of another's faults which one then publicizes and tells others about.

Avgun is seeing faults even in the virtues and good habits of others. For example, if someone performs selfless service, one who dislikes him may project this as him doing the service to show off. So, one who takes *avgun* sees faults where none exist.

Droh includes *avgun* and exceeds it in that such hatred/aversion/hostility to someone has developed that one actively makes efforts to disrupt the life of or harm that person.

These three terms are widely and interchangeably used in satsang, and Bhagwan

Swaminarayan and all the Gunatit gurus have condemned such attitudes as unbefitting of and detrimental to devotees on the spiritual path.

The antidote to these harmful habits is to engage in *gun grahan*. That is, to consciously endeavour to see the good in others.

Today, *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj's words and gestures continue to highlight the need to avoid these destructive habits and adopt *gun grahan*.

9 MARCH 2017, SARANGPUR

At 6.55 p.m., Swamishri went to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir. After darshan, he arrived at the nearby Shami tree. Here, after Swamishri had performed *dandvats* and while he was performing *pradakshinas*, Atmatrupt Swami hailed, "*Ek-do-tin-char...*" And, in unison, the sadhus hailed, "*Abhav-avgunne kadho bahar.*" (Meaning: One-two-three-four, *abhav-avgun* out the door.)

Swamishri was extremely delighted to hear this apt slogan, and added, “Forcefully push it out.”

Atmatrupt Swami asked, “How?”

Swamishri replied, while scrunching his hands in gesture, “Decimate it. One who takes *abhav-avgun* becomes miserable and also makes others miserable.”

4 AUGUST 2017, LOS ANGELES, USA

In the evening assembly, Swamishri narrated “I was a *parshad* at the time. I was with a devotee from the time of Shastriji Maharaj. We were seated on a train in a packed service compartment. In a space for 10 people, 20 were seated. Not an inch of space. The devotee started talks of *abhav-avgun*. He was very senior, and there was nowhere for me to go. I did not like it, so I started chanting ‘Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan...’ in my mind. But, I had to listen to him.

“When we reached Ahmedabad mandir, Yogi Bapa asked. ‘What did you talk about on the train?’ Normally, he would not ask, but this time he did. I replied, ‘*Abhav-avgun*.’ Immediately, he said to me. ‘Two fasts.’ He told the other person to do one. So, if one takes *avgun* of devotees, one’s ignorance deepens and if one takes their *gun*, one becomes enlightened. So, in every way, such talks have to be removed.”

23 DECEMBER 2017, MEHSANA

While bathing, Swamishri said to the sadhus, “Remove negativity. There is so much peace in positive, good talks. By listening to *avgun*, one’s mind is corrupted. Why is it necessary to talk negatively? So, root it out.”

26 DECEMBER 2017, HIMMATNAGAR

Gurumanan Swami asked, “If someone warns us about the nature of another and it is true, what should we do?”

Swamishri replied, “This habit eventually leads to taking *abhav-avgun*. Instead of seeing their virtues, we focus on their faults. Maharaj has told us not to do this. Maharaj used to censor those who

gossiped about other sadhus and devotees. The person warning you, wants to fit his ideas into you.”

Then, Swamishri laughed and recalled, “Yogi Bapa told me to observe two *nirjala* fasts and since then I have avoided this. At that time, I had to listen. We were seated in the same train compartment. I was not interested in his talks at all. And the person he was talking about was actually like that. Still, Yogi Bapa told me to do two fasts and the speaker one. Yogi Bapa said, ‘What is the need to speak about that? Why not speak about the good in others. Instead of raking up dirt and waste, drink the nectar.’”

7 MARCH 2018, ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

After *chestha*, Atmaswarup Swami said, “Swamishri spoke forcefully about not taking *abhav-avgun*.”

Then, the other swamis repeated some of the phrases Swamishri had used in his evening discourse. “If you engage in *abhav-avgun* satsang will be decimated.” “You will not experience inner peace. That is my guarantee.” “*Abhav-avgun* is a big bump. If you overcome it, you are directly in Akshardham.”

Atmaswarup Swami said, “Still people engage in taking *abhav-avgun*.”

Swamishri said, “Yogi Bapa used to say, ‘Do not indulge in gossip.’ Do not publicize faults of others. Even if it is true, it is still gossip. And what is the need to take *abhav-avgun*?”

“See, we’re seated here. But if someone has *abhav* for another, then our enjoyment diminishes. Such gossip is voiced, and others hear it, even if they do not want to.”

Atmaswarup Swami, “We strain our ears to listen to such talks!”

Swamishri said, “Yes, the frequency instantly matches. And all the gossipers gather. There are so many other good things to talk about. Why gossip? It is worthless, Maharaj’s words are worth billions of dollars and talks of *abhav-avgun* put one in debt. If we are weak, people will come frequently and

gossip to us about others. This has become a habit.”

Brahmamuni Swami said, “Often, we do not even realize that we have slipped onto this path.”

Swamishri said, “It has been our habit for countless births to take *abhav-avgun*. But because we have taken refuge in Maharaj, through this satsang, this habit of taking *abhav-avgun* will be overcome. So, never leave satsang.”

19 APRIL 2018, NEW DELHI

The sadhus were presenting a report of the widespread public esteem for Swaminarayan Akshardham in North India. Suddenly, Swamishri instructed them, “Recite ‘*Ek-do-tin-char...*’”

The sadhus hailed together: “*Ek-do-tin-char, abhav-avgunne kadho bahar.*” (Meaning: One-two-three-four, *abhav-avgun* out the door.) *Panch-chho-sat-ath, abhav-avgunne maro lat* (five-six-seven-eight, boot *abhav-avgun* out the gate).”

Atmaswarup Swami said, “Even on the recent *vicharan* to Australia and New Zealand, Swamishri emphasized the necessity of uprooting *abhav-avgun*.”

23 MARCH 2019, SARANGPUR

After *chestha*, Swamishri was seated on his bed. Urvishbhai, a *sadhak*, was introduced. Swamishri was informed about his long-term ear problems and that they had now mostly resolved.

Urvishbhai prayed to Swamishri. “Now my hearing has improved a lot, but bless me that I do not hear *abhav-avgun* with these ears.”

Swamishri said, “The *abhav-avgun* talks directly enter the *jiva*. Even one word easily enters, but the talks of *mahima* do not enter easily. They rebound off the ears! So, inner turmoil develops.”

18 MAY 2018, CHENNAI

Atmaswarup Swami introduced a youth to Swamishri, “Bapa, it’s his birthday today. He wishes to become a sadhu. What should he do to become an ideal sadhu?”

Swamishri said, “Do not take *abhav-avgun*.”

1 JUNE 2019, SARANGPUR

In the evening assembly, Swamishri presided over the prize-giving ceremony for the *balaks* and *balikas* who had participated in the National Bal-Balika Adhiveshan.

The efforts of all the children had truly pleased Swamishri and the *balaks* were joyously celebrating at the end of the assembly.

As Swamishri was departing, he stood still on the stage, pursed his lips and with his right hand traced a big ‘X’ in the air to enforce the message to all the children, ‘A big cross to *abhav-avgun*’.

Then, Swamishri returned to his room and before taking dinner, he again gestured a big ‘X’ to the swamis seated before him and asked, “Do you understand?”

The Swamis replied, “Yes, no to *abhav-avgun*.”

17 JUNE 2019, MORBI TO AHMEDABAD

While travelling from Morbi to Ahmedabad, Swamishri was asked, “You emphasize a lot that we must not take *abhav-avgun*. But how do we know what constitutes *abhav-avgun*?”

Swamishri replied, “When it is overt, everyone knows, even a young child. But when it is subtle, then one has to think.”

Uttamyogi Swami asked, “If I have *abhav* for someone, what characteristic in me identifies that I have taken another’s *abhav*?”

Swamishri said, “First, one develops dislike for that person and does not care for them. One may outwardly put up a helpful facade, but in one’s mind one wishes to spoil things for them.”

22 DECEMBER 2019, MUMBAI

During a question-answer session in English, Uttamyogi Swami asked, “What happens when one takes *abhav-avgun*?”

Swamishri replied, “First of all, Shriji Maharaj does not like it. And second, the soul of the person taking *abhav-avgun* gets completely destroyed.” ♦

Even More Is Never Enough

*An undeniable feature of human life is that it is full of ups and downs,
highs and lows, pleasures and pains, and joys and sorrows.*

*Given the choice, everyone would prefer a constant experience of ups,
highs, pleasures and joys – never having to suffer the anguish caused by their opposites.*

*But the very nature of human experience is comparative – and it is because there is pain that
we seek and enjoy the pleasure. The contrast provides the relief and we end up with a longing for more of it.
That is an inherent human tendency. But we are misguided in what can provide that permanent relief.*

THE DIDEROT EFFECT



Denis Diderot (1713–1784) was an 18th century French philosopher and was the chief editor of the *Encyclopedie*, one of the outstanding literary works of the Enlightenment era. He

lived much of his life in poverty. However, his fortunes changed in 1765 when Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia – who was an admirer of his works – purchased Diderot's entire library and appointed him as the librarian, paying him a substantial annual salary to look after it.

Now wealthier and able to buy previously inaccessible luxuries, Diderot's spending habits changed. He describes the spiral of unnecessary spending

stemming from the purchase of a seemingly harmless scarlet robe. With a new elegant scarlet robe in his possession, Diderot felt that the other, old decor in his house did not match the charm of his new robe. So, using his newly acquired wealth, he splashed out on a series of upgrades to blend in with and complement his new stylish robe – new clothes, furniture, home decorations and other things.

Ultimately, however, he realized the folly of this approach and in a candid, light-hearted essay resorts to self-examination and analysis of his unnecessary spending. He points out the knock-on effect of one purchase pushing him to make another purchase, and so on.

In this essay, 'Regrets on Parting with My Old Dressing Gown' his insights provide a lesson to modern-day consumers. He says, "I was



the absolute master of my old robe. I have become the slave of the new one.... My friends, fear the touch of wealth. Let my example teach you a lesson. Poverty has its freedoms; opulence has its obstacles.”

In 1988, based on the story of Diderot’s spending spree, anthropologist Grant McCracken coined the term ‘Diderot Effect’ to represent the idea that items purchased by consumers will reflect their sense of identity and that current items which do not match their new items are replaced by more spending. We almost always seek to upgrade from what we have. This is the endless desire for more.

THE DISEASE OF MORE

The ‘Disease of More’ is the perpetual pursuit to add to one’s pleasure, passion, prestige and power. People are constantly seeking to acquire more. We seek to acquire a newer phone, better car, larger house, bigger income, more fame and other bigger, better, faster things. There is nothing inherently wrong in pursuing these objectives. But after they are attained, the pleasure, joy, happiness they provide remain only for a while – then we are knocked off the pleasure pedestal and we seek to acquire an even newer phone, better car, larger home, bigger income and more fame. And the cycle of pleasure and pain continues. This is the disease of more – the never-ending desire to have more than we already have. Ultimately, these are merely things – material objects and pleasures. By nature, they are temporary and contextual. Just as seasons come and go, these things pass from being the latest fad and soon fade into obscurity.

The changing trends in clothes, phones, cars

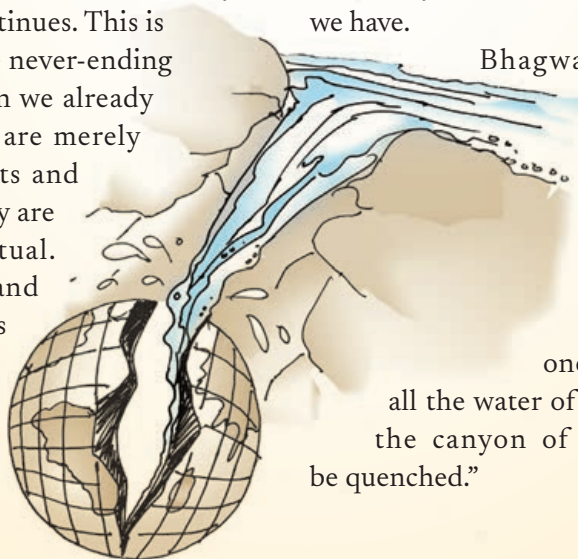
and other objects of desire are themselves proof that nothing is constant. But the disease for more grips like an addictive drug. The high it gives can be so intoxicating and alluring that one desires more of it. We pursue and acquire, but are never satisfied.

Not satisfied with a high income, trendy clothes, a spacious home, luxury car and other ‘in things’, we want to get to the next level – more money, a bigger house, a more luxurious car, more things. Money and material objects do make one happy. But only to a limited extent and for a limited period.

Science explains our predicament. When we desire something, our pursuit and anticipation to acquire it raises our dopamine levels. Once the craving is quenched, that dopamine high subsides. This is the basic physiology that drives our overactive consumerism.

When we crave for chocolate cake or ice cream, the first serving is really enjoyed. But as more servings are offered and forced upon us, the initial desire turns to disgust – because the dopamine kick has worn off. When we come inside a warm house from a freezing cold blizzard we initially sit close to the fire. But after a while, we move further away, since now the heat is causing discomfort. Once we acquire an object of desire the high soon fades away and it becomes just another thing that we have.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has explained in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 47 that desires are never-ending through a wonderful analogy. He says, “Just as if the earth splits to the core, one cannot fill it with even all the water of all the oceans. Similarly, the canyon of our desires can never be quenched.”



JOY, HAPPINESS, CONTENTMENT

Our engagement with material objects and pleasures can be broadly categorized in three ways.

First, joy, which loosely corresponds to the Indic term *anand*. It describes the pleasure of the moment or experience while it is in progress: the joy of eating a delicious meal, visiting a scenic location or reading a bestseller novel.

Second is happiness, approximately equivalent to the Indic *sukh*, is a step higher than joy. It implies a deeper feeling that lasts beyond the act of enjoyment or pleasure. It represents the fulfilment of our desires. But such happiness only persists until new desires arise. Then the happiness wanes and eventually subsides. Only when the new desires are fulfilled is happiness restored, temporarily. And this cycle continues.

The third category is that of satisfaction or contentment, represented by the Indic words *santosh* and *trupti*. This, in essence, is what we really want – to remain always happy and enjoy life. It is a state in which material desires are overcome and we are satisfied with what we have.

Often, we are so focused on attaining the next level, that we do not appreciate or enjoy what we do have. In this age of rampant social media, we crave for more likes, followers, views and other metrics that demonstrate our popularity. But there will always be someone or something more popular. We measure life in quantifiable metrics instead of meaning. Measuring our happiness by such external parameters is like treating bullet wounds with band-aids. They do not tackle the root problem, because external sources are incapable of giving permanent internal fulfilment.

As a result, we see that, in general, happiness has not only flatlined, but has nosedived. We live in an era of external enjoyment, but inner

discontent. The wanting of more makes a person miserable – despite having an abundance.

THE NEXT GEN

Even children demand more: more toys – even though they don't have time to play with the room-full they already have. More chocolate, ice cream and cake even though they can't finish what they already have.

Where have they learnt this from? Parents, of course. Parents tend to overestimate what kids really need. They nobly wish for their children to have everything. But what children really need is attention and affection more than the gadgets and games. So, to curb this epidemic, we must educate our children about the futility of chasing more. Leading by example is the best teacher.

Ambition is healthy and necessary – it is the basis for personal and human progress. But when it goes unchecked, it tends to be unhealthy and damages individuals and society. In the body, unchecked growth is called cancer and we seek treatment to curb or cure it. Drug and other

addicts are often sent to forums and rehab centres to help them overcome their habits. Where are those addicted to the disease of more sent for treatment? They are not. In fact, they are rewarded by society with more fame, money and awards, perpetuating the cycle and reinforcing their habit, and speeding the spiral descent into potential misery. Superficially, addicts to the disease of more do not appear self-destructive like drug addicts. But chasing an ever receding horizon never brings happiness. The remedy: ask yourself, how much is enough?

Dax Shepard, an American podcast host who interviews celebrities about their lives, often asks them, “You are rich, famous and successful. Did it fix the things you thought it would?” Nobody has ever answered ‘Yes’.

“You are rich, famous and successful. Did it fix the things you thought it would?”
Nobody has ever answered ‘Yes’.
- Dax Shepard

THE ANSWER LIES WITHIN

Urges to acquire things will come and go. It is innate in human nature to seek. It is the mind that interprets the outer conditions as feelings of inner happiness or misery. In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 23, Bhagwan Swaminarayan explains that we should strive to attain an equipoised mind, whether we are exposed to misery-causing material objects or pleasurable material objects. Such a state of mind leads to permanent inner peace.

The long term, realistic and sustainable solution to this hedonic treadmill is to look within and curb our desires for more unnecessary objects. Learn to want less by controlling impulses. Avoid the feeling that you need to keep up with others. Such self-control can, actually, liberate one from unhealthy behaviours and actions. Instead of always endeavouring for more – optimally use what we already have.

Today, modern technologies make the temptation to spend easily implemented. Unless one has a measure of self-control, such spending can soon sky-rocket and result in many problems. We humans have become compulsive hoarders. In America, the self-storage industry is worth \$22 billion. Americans need over 2.3 billion square feet of rooms, lockers, containers, outdoor space and other types of storage units to store their stuff. The same is true for citizens of other countries as well and the global self-storage market is expected to be worth over \$64 billion by 2026.

The chase for more things illustrates that we are unhappy and seek alternatives to find the elusive joy. Inner discontent drives our consumerism. Although it is not possible to stop the mind from generating desires, they can be completely controlled to experience ultimate happiness.

Verse 2.66 of the Bhagavad Gita states: “An undisciplined person, who has not controlled the mind and senses, can neither have a resolute

intellect nor steady contemplation on God. For one who never unites the mind with God there is no peace; and how can one who lacks peace be happy?”

In Vachanamrut Gadhada III 8, titled ‘Remaining Eternally Happy’, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, “A person who has not controlled his *indriyas* by *vairagya* and *swadharma* remains miserable.... He who has not gained control over his *indriyas* does not experience happiness anywhere.... Thus, only one who gains control over one’s *indriyas* remains eternally happy.... Therefore, since a person who has *vairagya* and *dharma* has restraint over all of his *indriyas*, he is eternally happy.”

Thus, the message is clear: exercise restraint to attain inner peace and lasting happiness.

To achieve this, Bhagwan Swaminarayan directs us in Vachanamrut Panchala 1 to realize that compared to the bliss of God, the fleeting joys of this world are insignificant. Thus, he stresses in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 49 that one should never be satiated in pursuing devotion and service to God. One should always desire more. In the Gita, Shri Krishna teaches: Know God; Know peace. And he warns: No God; No peace.

A question may arise that when one desires more spirituality does that not also lead to unhappiness, since it is, after all, a desire? However, one must understand that material pleasures have an expiry date. So, after initially giving happiness, that happiness eventually fades away. On the other hand, spiritual pursuits have no expiry date – they never go out of fashion – and so are a source of perpetual happiness.

Pursuing and attaining material pleasures makes one restless and spurs one’s desire for more. While spiritual pleasures make one restful and give one lasting inner peace. That is why one should always pursue them. ♦



No Desires, Know Peace

They're what make the world go round
And cause everyone to become bound,
That is the sticky nature of desires.

Split the earth to the core
It cannot be filled with the oceans and more,
That is the endless nature of desires.

What is a desire?
A craving for something you do not have.
A craving from within that fuels your actions
And even your reactions.

Without your consent they spring up in your mind
And until you supply them they put you in a bind.
When they arise they cause you surprise
But to deal with them is the real prize.

To sustain your body you have needs
But your wants are what really drive your misdeeds.
Out with the old, in with the new
That is the driving force of desire.



A quick puff and you're hooked
From now on you are constantly spooked.
Instant pleasure, and subsequent pain
The eternal inseparable duality of desires.



Desires are companions on your earthly ride
Controlling the rise and fall of your every tide.
Desires fuel your drive for life
And also end up causing you strife.



Life passes in pursuit of prestige, pleasure, passion and power
But those who rise beyond them reach the top of the tower.



So cut the flow of desires that bind
And desires that overpower the mind.
Channel your wish for everything
Into a desire for just one thing – the Divine.



To discover the self and the Divine within
Meditate and pray, serve and surrender.
Achieve that and all will be fine
They are the source of happiness sublime.

Only when your desires cease
Will you experience real lasting peace.
Only when you reach the state of No Desires
Will you truly then Know Inner Peace. ♦





STRESS and MOKSHA



*“The greatest weapon against stress is our ability
to choose one thought over another.”*

- William James

At some points in our lives we go through some form of stress, and during those times it feels like we’re being hemmed in by it. It’s as if we can only be at peace if the source of stress vanishes. When one searches for any remedies to stress or anxiety, some of them may work, but they do not provide a long-term fix. For example, say your personal treatment for stress is spending time with friends and family. What if something changed in the dynamics of your friends or family; this meant you couldn’t spend as much time with them as you would like. We have all heard the popular saying, “Friends come and go, but family is with you forever.” This can be extended to include a third dimension: Friends may come and go; family may

also come and go, but Shriji Maharaj and the Satpurush are with you forever.

In Gadhada III 8, Shriji Maharaj describes how we can stay eternally happy. Amongst other things, he mentions that we need firm *vairagya* and love for God to achieve this. With all the temptations in the world, these two are more difficult to attain than we care to admit. Typically, we are brought up in this exciting but intimidating world. Right from the beginning of our school lives, this sometimes unmanageable pressure gets loaded onto us. The need to impress and get a good job and earn lots of money are at the forefront of our minds, whilst sometimes satsang lingers in the background. Despite reading countless times that we should distance ourselves from worldly pleasures, we don't. Maybe we're not ready or maybe it is just too difficult. Nonetheless, it is still important that we at least try. As Mahant Swami Maharaj often says, "Do your best and leave the rest."

Of course, we should all work hard and strive to get a good job. Those are things that satsang encourages. However, getting good grades and a good job should not be the building blocks of our lives. Religion should be. If and only if, intense love for God is present in our minds and our hearts, then all the rest will fall into place. On 23 August 1988, Carlos Vega, a 62-year-old American, went to meet Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Los Angeles. On meeting Swamishri, Carlos said that he experienced peace like no other. He then said that he had everything: cars, money and a beautiful home. Swamishri interrupted him and said, "I have no money, I have God. When you have God, you have everything."

Rather than thinking that we have got this human body to get a good job and earn lots of money, we should think that we are primarily here to attain Akshardham and not materialistic things. You have probably read that line or something very similar a thousand times and are

probably thinking to yourself, "I get it!" True, it is easier said than done, so why not start to think like this in small steps. Any time we get stressed or nervous or overwhelmed, we should think to ourselves, "I am *atma* and not the body." The main purpose of our life is to follow *niyams* and attain *moksha*. Essentially, detach yourself from worldly activities and attach yourself to Bhagwan. Keep your worldly life modest and your satsang above all else. Strive to earn a successful living but whenever you feel life is too much, don't become absorbed in that journey, but rather become absorbed in your efforts to attain Akshardham. By doing this and changing your mindset, stress will slowly disintegrate.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had encountered a myriad difficulties. In 1987, permission to build a mandir in Harrow, London, was denied. Naturally everyone experienced stress, anxiety and disappointment upon hearing this. However, on the other side of the leaf, Pramukh Swami Maharaj remained calm. His response was, "Whatever Maharaj does is beneficent." There's failure in this story, but there's also resilience and composure.

In the Satsang Diksha, Mahant Swami Maharaj writes, "*Bhagwan je kare te sadāy sārā mātē hoy. Temni ichchhā e ja mārū prārabdha chhe. Teo ja mārā tārak chhe.*" This translates to, "Whatever Bhagwan does is always beneficial. His wish alone is my *prarabdha*. He alone is my liberator." Although success in our world is important, it should not override our aim to achieve *moksha*. Bhagwan will do what he wills. Our priority should be to attain *moksha* and when we physically depart from this earth our *atmas* enter Akshardham. With this thought, stress won't enter our minds and through this mindset, our lives will become much happier. ♦



BHAKTI RITUALS

In the past two articles we discussed Hindu rituals in general and mandir rituals.

In this third article we discuss 'bhakti rituals'.

Bhakti means loving devotion for Bhagwan. Compared to other forms of yoga, bhakti yoga is the easiest path to attain Paramatma. In the Shrimad Bhagvatam (11.14.20), Shri Krishna Bhagwan reveals to Uddhavji, his foremost devotee, “O Uddhav! What yoga, knowledge, dharma, study of shastras, austerities and renunciation cannot attain, the highest bhakti will attain – me.” Even Shankaracharya, the proponent of Advait Vedant regarded bhakti as the supreme path – *bhaktireva gariyasi* – among all forms of sadhana. Bhagwan Swaminarayan added the word *mahātmyajñānyugbhuri-sneho bhaktischa Mādhave* (Shikshapatri 103) – bhakti is intense love for Paramatma, with a full-fledged realization of his glory, grandeur and greatness.

The Bhagvatam (7.5.23) cites nine forms of devotion – *navdha* bhakti – namely, *shravanam*, *kirtanam*, *Vishnoho smaranam*, *padsevanam*,

archanam, *vandanam*, *dasyam*, *sakhyam* and *atmanivedanam*. In the Ramcharitmanas (3.58.8), Tulsidas also cites *navdha* bhakti with a few variations. All rituals of bhakti may, for the sake of simplicity, be incorporated in *navdha* bhakti. They are briefly discussed below.

SHRAVANAM

Shravanam means to listen to Paramatma's glory, divine *lila* and injunctions and those of his avatars and eminent devotees (Haricharitamrut Sagar 1.65). Of all the nine forms of bhakti, *shravan* bhakti is the most important. This is effected through the ritual of *katha*. As mentioned in article two (*Swaminarayan Bliss*, November–December 2021), one ritual in mandirs is *katha*. All bhakti traditions have their own shastras on which *katha* is done. Common shastras include the Ramayan, Ramcharitmanas, Bhagvatam and



Shrivaranam



Kirtanam

Bhagavad Gita. In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, in addition to above shastras, *katha* is usually based on the Vachanamrut, Harililamrut, Swamini Vato, Yogi Gita and Satsang Diksha.

BAPS devotees listen to *katha* at their nearest *shikharbaddha* or *hari* mandir daily or weekly. The Sunday satsang *sabha* globally is a ritual introduced by Yogiji Maharaj. The daily *ghar sabha* – home *katha* – is a ritual introduced by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In both, people listen to discourses by devotees or sadhus. By listening to *katha* devotees gain an understanding of core principles and practices, redemptive virtues and inner peace. More importantly, as declared by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, it removes *swabhavs* and *vasana* – base instincts – more effectively than by performing austerities such as *chandravan*. Hence, the flitting and miserable mind is stabilized by eradicating desires for *vishays* – sensual enjoyment (Vachanamrut Kariyani 12).

KIRTANAM

Kirtan bhakti means to sing aloud or chant Bhagwan's name (mantra *japa* or *dhun*), divine events (*lila*) and attributes. It also means to sing devotional bhajans which describe Bhagwan's persona, *shangar* – attire and adornments – and his glory. In the Haricharitamrut Sagar (1.65), Bhagwan Swaminarayan adds that kirtan means to recite, study, learn and teach shastras related to Bhagwan and his eminent devotees.

Some well-known singers and poets of Sanatan Dharma include Naradji, Valmiki, Shukdevji, Tulsidas, the Alwars, Narsinh Mehta, Mirabai, Swami Haridas, Surdas, Tyagraj, Tukaram, Nanakdev, Pushti Marg's eight poets and Bhagwan Swaminarayan's eight poet-*paramhansas*.

In the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, daily kirtan rituals include *katha*, *prabhatiya*, *arti*, *thal* (*naivedya*), *dhun*, *godi*, *nitya chesta*, *mala* and chanting the Sahajanand Namavali – the 108 divine names of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Similar to the *prabhatiya* bhajans in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, the *suprabhatam* is sung daily in Tirumala when Shri Venkateshvar Balaji is awakened at 3.00 a.m. Singing *prabhatiya* is a common tradition in bhakti *sampradayas*.

SMARANAM

Smaran means to recall. So by *smaran* bhakti devotees recall everything related to Bhagwan. The Bhagvatam (12.12.54) cites five ways of performing *smaran* bhakti: 1. recalling Bhagwan's name in one's heart, 2. remembering his divine *charitras* (*lila*) 3. recalling his divine attributes (*gunas*), 4. meditating on his form and 5. constant mental rapport with him.

In the Vachanamrut (Gadhada I 3), Bhagwan Swaminarayan states the immense importance of remembering Bhagwan's *lila*; if at the time of death, a devotee forgets Bhagwan's form but



Smaranam

remembers his divine actions or his sadhus and devotees then he will attain an elevated spiritual state.

PADSEVANAM

Pad means Bhagwan's lotus-feet. *Padseva* bhakti means to offer devotional service – *seva* – to Bhagwan and the God-realized guru, (Svetashvatara Upanishad 6.23).

Shri Krishna also advocates *seva* bhakti in the Gita (4.34).

In the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan extols the importance of *seva* of Bhagwan and his realized Sadhu: it eradicates *swabhavs* and *vasana* (Gadhada II 7, II 25), it leads to *moksha* (Gadhada II 28, II 40), it bestows strength to subdue the *indriyas* and *antahkaran* (Gadhada II 63), it helps one to attain bhakti with an understanding of the *mahatmya* (glory and greatness) of Bhagwan (Vartal 3), it enables the *jiva* become a supreme *bhakta* (Vartal 5) and it earns Bhagwan's grace



Padsevanam



Archanam

(Gadhada II 28).

The ritual of physical *seva* in a mandir includes housekeeping, maintenance, serving pilgrims and devotees, making garlands, cooking, gardening and farming. Besides physical *seva*, a special form of mental *seva* is to regard God, the guru and devotees as divine and to develop an attitude of looking only at their virtues – *gunas*.

ARCHANAM

Archan bhakti means to offer puja – worship with physical materials such as kumkum, *chandan*, flowers, leaves such as tulsi and *bili*, and fragrant water. *Shodshopchar* puja involves worship in 16 ways. The most important requisite for *archan* bhakti is to believe that Bhagwan resides in the *murtis* and in the Aksharbrahma guru (Vachanamrut Gadhada I 68).

VANDANAM

Vandan means to humbly offer pranams and to prostrate to Bhagwan and the guru. Male devotees offer *dandvat* pranams and females offer *panchang* pranams. Such bhakti demands utter humility by eradicating one's ego. This bhakti also forms the basis of *dasyam* bhakti.

DASYAM

Das means servant – *sevak*. *Dasya* bhakti means to surrender one's ego and karmas to Bhagwan and guru and offer humble devotion with total *sharanagati* – surrenderance as his servant and also



Vandanam

as the servant of his servant – *das na das*. Bhagwan Swaminarayan lauds the glory and benefits of *dasya* bhakti: all evil instincts are eradicated and the *jiva* attains virtues of *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti (Gadhada I 58) and becomes a true *bhakta* in this very life (Gadhada II 62).

Practical rituals of *dasya* bhakti include humbly cleaning the mandir and serving devotees and pilgrims.

SAKHYAM

Sakhya means friend. *Sakhya* bhakti means to have unflinching faith in Bhagwan and offer him bhakti as a true friend. Arjun offered such bhakti to Shri Krishna. Brahmanand Swami offered such bhakti to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

ATMANIVEDANAM

Atmanivedanam means to devotionally surrender one's body, mind and *atma* to Bhagwan. *Atmanivedanam* bhakti means to devotionally surrender oneself and one's family and wealth to Bhagwan. Eminent devotees in the past who offered such bhakti include Prahlad, King Ambrish, King Rantidev, King Bali, the *gopis*, Draupadi, Kunti and Uddhavji. During Bhagwan Swaminarayan's time, such devotees included Dada Khachar, Ladudan Barot (who later became Brahmanand Swami), and Anandanand Swami (from Ayodhya) and Swayamprakashanand Swami (from Bengal), who both renounced their *muths* and followers to join Bhagwan Swaminarayan.



Dasyam

With today's fast-paced living styles, stress additionally induced by electronic media and information overload, it is not surprising that people easily lose their mental and spiritual balance. One then wonders how to regain spiritual strength and re-orientate oneself. In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 63, Bhagwan Swaminarayan reveals the answer: one who has love for Bhagwan and his sadhu and serves them with intense *shraddha* (faith) along with *navdha* bhakti will attain instant strength, even greater than imbibing *atmanishtha*. Hence, rituals of *navdha* bhakti, if practised in one's daily life, will act as de-stressors and positively invigorate one's being.

Of all the bhakti rituals, the one most important and key ritual for *moksha* is *katha*. Why? Through *katha* one is able to eradicate *swabhavs*, become *nirvasanic*, attain redemptive attributes and realize Bhagwan's true form.

In the next article we shall discuss home rituals. ♦



Sakhyam and Atmanivedanam

INSPIRATIONS

*A potpourri of inspiring and interesting
information and wisdom*

REMEDYING AN EMOTIONAL EMERGENCY

The body and mind needs to be taken good care of, with regards to basic needs, safety and care. Our mind often reacts, feeling panic, fear, anger. Negative thoughts crowd it and our self-esteem, will power and confidence take a beating. Thus, along with physical preparedness, it is important to strengthen the mind in order to deal with emotional challenges posed by unexpected events or disasters.

Some Emotional First-aid:

1. Tell yourself that it will pass.
2. Pay attention to your breathing. Take slow, deep breaths and then take time to exhale.
3. Allow yourself to feel (tolerate) what you are undergoing rather than suppress your feelings.
4. Keep your faith through which you can handle more than you think. Practise prayer and meditation.
5. Instead of feeling that you are a victim, look at it as a learning experience.
6. Get good sleep. It will have a calming effect. Do not stay hungry.
7. Talk to a relative or friend – it will have a therapeutic effect.
8. Change the course of your life if required.
9. Surviving a traumatic experience is a great learning experience.
10. There is truth in the saying ‘everything happens for the good’.

Thinking on these lines will help reinforce positivity and make you emotionally stronger.

RABID DOG



In Vachanamrut Gadhada III 12, Shriji Maharaj says, “Even though he may be called a *satsangi*, a person who has perceived faults in God or His Bhakta should be known to be like a rabid dog. Just as one who is touched by the saliva of a rabid dog also becomes rabid, similarly, if one listens to the talks of or keeps affection for one who has perceived faults in God or His Bhakta, then both the person who keeps the affection as well as the listener become like a non-believer.”

As everyone knows a rabid dog is a menace to all. Whoever it bites will be infected with rabies – which without treatment is often fatal. This analogy highlights just how dangerous and infective people who take *avguns* are. They themselves are already infected with this dangerous habit and whoever they bite – through their talks – are also likely to become infected with negative thoughts that will ultimately lead to their spiritual demise. Thus, like rabid dogs they are a menace to all who come in their contact.

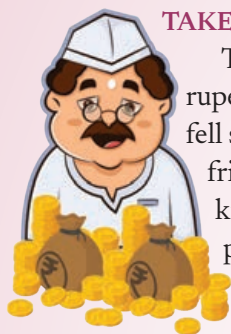


INDIA IN GREECE

Indians had travelled to several European countries and after settling there they preserved their culture and religion. Mr E. Pococke, author of *India in Greece* states, “Now, the whole of this state of society (Greece), civil and military, must strike every one as being eminently Asiatic; much of it specifically Indian. Such it undoubtedly is; and I shall demonstrate that these evidences were but the attendant tokens of an Indian colonisation, with its corresponding religion and language. I shall exhibit dynasties disappearing from western India, to appear again in Greece: clans, whose martial fame is still recorded in the faithful chronicles of northwestern India, as the gallant bands who fought upon the plains of Troy; and, in

fact, the whole of Greece, from the era of the supposed god-ships of Poseidon and Zeus, down to the close of the Trojan war, as being Indian in language, sentiment, and religion, and in the arts of peace and war.” Mr Pococke further confirms, “The early civilization then – the early arts – the indubitably early literature of India, are equally the civilization, the arts and the literature of Egypt and of Greece – for geographical evidences, conjoined to historical fact, and religious practices, now prove beyond all dispute, that the two latter countries are the colonies of the former.”

- Pococke, E. *India in Greece*. London: John J. Griffin and Co., 1852, p.12.



TAKE A NEEDLE TO HEAVEN

There lived a wealthy *sheth*, but he was a scrooge, mean and miserly. He never spent a rupee, never donated a paisa, and always wore worn shoes and tattered clothes. One day, he fell seriously ill and became bedridden. During his whole life, it was said, he had only one friend, his personal tailor. But unfortunately, he had died a few months earlier. Everyone knew the *sheth's* days were numbered. One by one his family and neighbours came to pay their formal respects. When the tailor's son arrived, the *sheth* said, “It seems that I will not last long here. My moment to go to God's abode has come.”

The young boy, though only 15 years old, was very wise. He knew of the *sheth's* craving for wealth and miserliness. He replied, “O Sheth, my father is already in God's abode. He often told me that he wished to sew rich garments for the Lord. But he forgot to take his needle with him. Will you please take this needle with you and give it to him.”

“Oh, alright, I'll be happy to do that,” he agreed.

The *sheth* was happy to do anything as long as it did not involve giving anything. He took the needle and gave the boy permission to leave. Alone, on his bed, he began wondering, “Where shall I place the needle? Pin it to my shirt? No, that won't do. All my clothes will burn away in my funeral fire. In my mouth. Yes, I'll place the needle in the bulge of my cheek.” Then again, he had second thoughts, “But my whole body will be burnt to ashes. How am I to carry this small needle to God's abode?” The more he thought about it the more confused he became. Finally, he called the tailor's boy and said, “Son, here, take your needle back. I won't be able to take it to heaven.”

“But,” the boy looked amused, “if you are going to carry all your millions of rupees to heaven, then why can't you carry one little needle?”

The *sheth's* inner eyes were opened. He realized that none of his wealth or property would accompany him after death. He prayed to God to forgive him for all his past miserliness and promised to profusely donate his wealth in charity should he survive the illness. God cured him and he kept his word. He built a grand mandir, fed thousands and comforted the less fortunate people.

Remember that only wealth which is spent in the service of God, his holy Sadhu and the needy is worthwhile. Our good deeds alone accompany us after death and nothing else will join us.

- 101 Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj

ENLIGHTENING QUOTES

- In prayer, it is not how well you arrange your words, but how well you arrange your heart that counts. - Pramukh Swami Maharaj
- Example is leadership. - Albert Schweitzer
- Nothing is enough to the man for whom enough is too little. - Epicurus (Greek philosopher) ♦



BRAHMASWARUP PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S CENTENARY BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

7-11 December 2021, Chansad

To commemorate
Swamishri's 100th birthday,
a series of evening celebration
events were held in
Chansad from
7 to 11 December 2021.





Swamishri performs *arti* at the birthplace of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Chansad, 11 December 2021

On 7 December, Mahant Swami Maharaj gave *bhagvati diksha* to 54 *sadhaks*. In his blessings, Swamishri said, “We know these youths outwardly, but Shriji Maharaj has sent them from Akshardham. Such educated and experienced youths continue to join here. So, our future is bright. Some are the only child of their parents. That is a grand miracle, since it is very difficult for them to give their sons, whom they have raised and are a part of them. Yet, they have wholeheartedly permitted. The mothers and fathers deserve tremendous praise for their sacrifice and dedication.

“These *sadhaks* will serve society and spread *nishtha*. They have clarity in their goal. Yogi Bapa had declared that there will be 5,000 *sadhaks*.”

On 8 December, Jnanvatsal Swami delivered a wonderful speech titled ‘Sadguna Sagar Pramukh Swami Maharaj’.

On 9 December, Swamishri initiated 55 *sadhaks* into the *parshad* order. On this occasion, Swamishri blessed, “This is indeed a real miracle. They all have such clarity of purpose that they will certainly make everyone proud. Tremendous praise for the mothers and fathers who have encouraged and permitted their sons to renounce. They will inspire countless into Satsang. Satsang means the righteous path. They will inspire many to live in this way.”

On 10 December, a video documentary of the past celebrations, in India and abroad, of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s birthday was shown.

BRAHMASWARUP PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ’S 100TH BIRTHDAY

Magshar *sud* 8, VS 2078; 11 December 2021: on this momentous day of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s birth centenary, Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived at Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s birthplace – his childhood home – in Chansad at 6.30 a.m.

The home was bedecked with fresh, colourful flowers, with the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj seated on a decorated *sinhasan*.

Vedic verses were recited as Swamishri lit the centenary *akhand jyot* – which will remain continuously lit until the centenary celebration finale.

Thereafter, Swamishri performed *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Then, everyone chanted the Swaminarayan *dhun* for the fulfilment of a series of prayers.

From the sacred birthplace, Swamishri arrived in the assembly on the outskirts of Chansad village to perform his daily puja. During Swamishri’s puja,



Swamishri performs his daily puja, Chansaad, 11 December 2021

sadhush sang bhajans remembering and paying tribute to the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Blessing the assembly on this centenary morning, Swamishri said, “Today marks Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 100th birthday. And today also marks the start of a new year – the centenary year!

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj did everything for us. He did *padhramanis* in India and abroad, initiated educated sadhus, inspired a staunch community of devotees. Everywhere, he made a positive impact. He built mandirs – the mandir being built in Abu Dhabi is also his inspiration.

“So, in short, now it is our turn. It is impossible to repay our debt to him. But, in his centenary year, dedicate yourself wholeheartedly in every way possible.”

To commemorate this special day, Swamishri had personally prepared a card honouring Pramukh Swami Maharaj, which was displayed on the screen for all to see.

Then, the *sadguru* swamis and senior representatives of Chansad village honoured Swamishri with garlands.

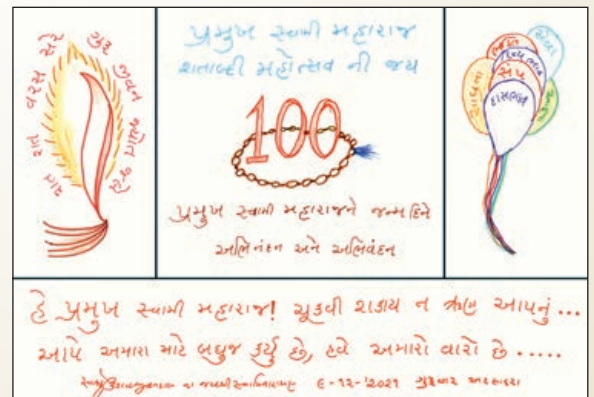
Thereafter, Swamishri inaugurated some Aksharpith publications: *Pramukh Swami Maharaj Jivan Charitra*, Part 6 (in Gujarati), Bengali translations of *Sahajanand Charitra*, *Shastriji*

Maharaj, *Satsang Vihar*, *Kishore Satsang Prarambha*, *Pramukh Swami Maharaj: 100 Inspiring Incidents* and some other publications.

Swamishri also launched the 14-part documentary series on the London Mandir, titled ‘The First of Its Kind: The Untold Story of London Mandir and Its Creator’ – which traces the mandir’s history and making, and the tremendous patience and efforts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in ensuring that this vision and wish of Yogiji Maharaj came to fruition.

EVENING CELEBRATION ASSEMBLY

In the evening, on 11 December, the 100th birthday centenary of Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Swamishri’s card of tributes and prayers to Pramukh Swami Maharaj

was celebrated with a spectacular three-hour online virtual assembly.

Using 3D animations interlaced with real speeches, rituals and performances, the assembly charted a journey through some of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's innumerable innate virtues. From his childhood as Shantilal to the universally revered Pramukh Swami Maharaj, these virtues were an integral part of his life. The assembly focused on six such virtues: *sahanshilta* (tolerance and acceptance), devotion to God, consideration for others, firm observance of dharma, unflinching resolve and dedication to guru.

The grand assembly stage was digitally created on the banks of the Chansad village lake where Shantilal bathed. Together with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Mahant Swami Maharaj was seated at the centre of the stage, flanked on both sides by the *sadguru* swamis.

Hosting the assembly, two *balaks* who took the worldwide audience on a pilgrimage around Chansad to some of the spots sanctified by Shantilal, which represented one of the virtues listed above and a story from his childhood which depicted that virtue.

The assembly began with a celebratory dance by youths of Surat to the bhajan, '*Shat shat varas sare, Guru jivan jyot jale...*' (Meaning: Even after 100 years, the light of the Guru continues to illuminate).

TOLERANCE

Following a speech by Adarshjivan Swami, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's doctors expressed their personal experiences of his capacity to bear pain and discomfort with genuine fortitude.

As a child, Shantilal contracted chickenpox which resulted in painful blisters. Yet he tolerated the pain without complaint. On another occasion, he suffered from dysentery, and had to pass motions very frequently. Thus, due to repeatedly bathing after passing motions, Shantilal became cold and fainted. His ability to cope with such

health challenges was a constant throughout his life. These childhood incidents were presented in the form of a video docudrama.

CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS

Aksharvatsal Swami spoke about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's natural concern for others and how he always put others before himself.

The virtue was shown through a video docudrama and personal testimony of Ramnikbhai Narigara of Khadhar village near Amreli. His parents contracted tuberculosis. So, his father, Ravjibhai, wrote to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who told them to seek treatment in Anand, and also arranged help for them. Shortly thereafter, the family went to live at the home of one of Ravjibhai's friends in Surat.

One night, the friend suddenly told them to leave. The family moved to nearby Kim town, where they worked in a factory. Pramukh Swami Maharaj learnt of their plight and advised Ravjibhai to start a business, and even arranged initial support for them. Soon, they prospered and 92-year-old Ravjibhai still acknowledges his debt to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

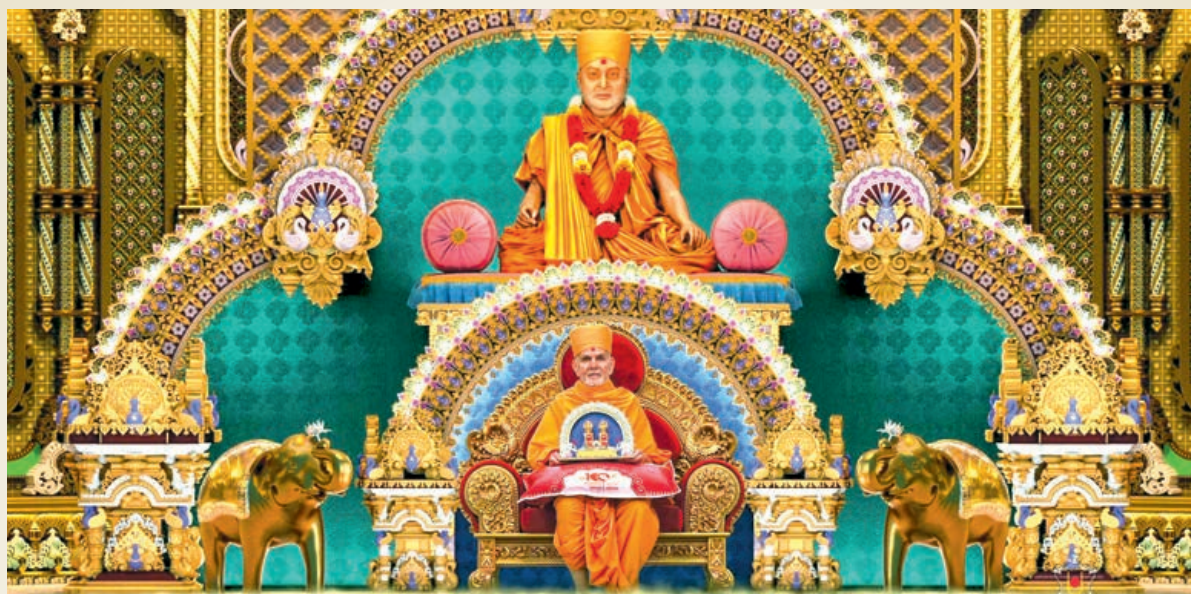
Even as Shantilal, he was sensitive to the difficulties of others and avoided causing hardships to others. Having studied upto Standard 5 in the Chansad village school, Shantilal enrolled for Standard 6 at a school in Padra, six kilometres away. As he had no bicycle, his friend, Shankar, would take him on his cycle. Seeing the strain on Shankar, who pedalled the cycle, Shantilal apologized for the trouble he had caused and instead chose to walk to and from school.

A docudrama video of this interaction was presented.

RESOLUTE IN DHARMA

Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's resolute observance of dharma, even amid the most trying of circumstances.

A video docudrama depicted this virtue in



Swamishri with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj seated on the grand virtual celebration stage

Shantilal. For a brief period Shantilal and his family took up residence in Rajnagar. One day, Chhotakaka, a relative, invited Shantilal for a meal. Chhotakaka served delicious sweet and savoury items, but since it was *ekadashi* on that day, Shantilal did not eat the food. Chhotakaka insisted that Shantilal break his *ekadashi* fast. However, despite the pressure, Shantilal remained resolute and observed *ekadashi*.

DEVOTION TO GOD

A God-realized Sadhu is forever connected to God. His life is immersed in devotion to God. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was always ready to serve society. He constantly travelled to meet and inspire people of all backgrounds and strata of society onto the spiritual path. But his thoughts were always on God. His every action was God-centric. As a result, his devotion inspired countless to engage in devotion.

Atmatrupt Swami delivered a speech on this virtue of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

To facilitate this global wave of devotion, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated over 1,100 mandirs worldwide and established thousands of BAPS Satsang centres which still continue

to nurture devotion to God in all. A special video portrayed this aspect of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life and work.

UNDETERRED BY FAILURE

Success and failure are integral to life. Our shastras proclaim that a true sadhu is not carried away by worldly success nor discouraged by failure.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, as the dynamic leader of an international spiritual institution, faced many difficult challenges. Although he faced many failures, he never lacked in his noble efforts.

Like the Himalayas, he was unmoved by failures. This virtue was narrated by Brahmavihari Swami who described the many hurdles Pramukh Swami Maharaj faced and overcame to build the now world-renowned BAPS Mandir in Neasden, London. It was his wholesome spiritual strength that saw him surpass the steady stream of struggles he encountered.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life inspired this quality in the lives of countless devotees. This was demonstrated by a video of the many health, business and other difficulties faced by Ashish Patel and how the strength of God enabled him to overcome all of them.

As Shantilal, he was never deterred by difficulties or failures. He was a bright student and wanted to study beyond the fifth standard taught in his village school. Despite his efforts, he was unable to gain admission to a school in nearby Darapara. His efforts to continue studying were shown in a video docudrama.

GURU BHAKTI

Anandswarup Swami spoke about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's devotion to his gurus, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, highlighting how he observed their wishes, understood them as fully divine and saw the divinity of God in them.

From childhood, Shantilal had such devotion and dedication to guru Shastriji Maharaj.

A video docudrama showed the emotional and historic occasion when Shastriji Maharaj's letter to Shantilal prompted his renunciation from home. It was a moment he and his parents and family had been prepared for. Despite the pleadings of his friends, Shantilal's only focus was guru Shastriji Maharaj. So, with the consent and blessings of father, Motibhai, and mother, Diwaliben, Shantilal shed all worldly attachment to dedicate his life to guru Shastriji Maharaj.

Following these presentations, Pujya Dr Swami, who closely served under Pramukh Swami Maharaj for many decades addressed the assembly, "Our shastras describe the virtues of a true sadhu. All these virtues were present in Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The Shrimad Bhagavad Gita describes *nirman* – humility – as the foremost. Detailed knowledge and training is required to remove the tiniest of brain tumours. But even more subtle than them are ego and attachment. They are not visible even under an electron microscope. Former president of India, Shri Abdul Kalam, wrote in his book, *Transcendence*, that Pramukh Swami Maharaj had removed all traces of ego from his life.

"We all enjoy reading and listening to the incidents of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life. But walking

the path he showed will bring greater enjoyment. May we all be blessed to progress on that path."

Thereafter, Pujya Viveksagar Swami honoured Mahant Swami Maharaj with a garland on behalf of all. This was followed by all *sadguru* swamis on stage and devotees at home offering *mantra-pushpanjali*.

Then, Swamishri blessed the centenary celebration assembly, "The older folk of Chansad had seen Pramukh Swami Maharaj as a child. They described him as an obedient, straightforward, cooperative boy. He was honest and loyal. From his childhood, he seemed special.

"Swami Bapa's motto was 'In the good of others lies our own'. He did not merely speak this, but he lived it. Reading his biography in detail reveals that his life was truly spent for the benefit of others. From fidgety young children to stumbling elders, all revelled in Swami Bapa's darshan. He blessed everyone, even those who had insulted him. He never held any grudges or prejudices against anyone. He was unfazed by honours or insults. Now, it is our opportunity serve him by revealing his saintly virtues to others."

Thereafter, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami declared, "From today, we launch the centenary celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. They will conclude with a grand Shatabdi Mahotsav. This is our opportunity to offer our guru bhakti, to cultivate his values in our life and dedicate ourselves to him, and to somewhat repay our enormous debt to him."

Then, with *mashals* in hand, Mahant Swami Maharaj and all the *sadguru* swamis on stage thrice proclaimed 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Shatabdi Mahotsav ni jai'.

This was followed by *arti*. The virtual celebration assembly concluded with a colourful virtual fireworks display.

The entire celebration assembly was webcast on the BAPS website and broadcast on GTPL and AASTHA channels.

◆
-Translation: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

29 October–2 December 2021, Gondal



Swamishri chants the Swaminarayan *dhun* during Chopda Pujan, Gondal



Devotees participate in the New Year's *mahapuja* rituals, Gondal

From 10 August to 29 October 2021, Swamishri stayed at the BAPS Mandir in Sarangpur and gave darshan and discourses, and celebrated festivals in the presence of swamis, parshads, sadhaks and devotees.

On 29 October, Swamishri departed from Sarangpur and travelled to Akshar Mandir, Gondal. The swamis and devotees festively welcomed Swamishri at the Akshar Dwar, Gondal. The main mandir, Yogi Smruti Mandir and the entire spiritual complex were decorated with colourful lights. Swamishri gave darshan to all as he headed towards the Akshar Deri, mandir and Yogi Smruti Mandir for darshan. A brief note on Swamishri's stay in Gondal is as follows.

From 29 October 2021 to 2 December 2021, Swamishri resided for 35 days at the Akshar Mandir, Gondal. Devotees of Gondal, Junagadh, Rajkot, Morbi and the surrounding villages took the opportunity of Thakorji's and Swamishri's darshan and discourses.

GONDAL

DIWALI CELEBRATIONS: 2–4 NOVEMBER

2, Tuesday; Dhanteras

Swamishri gave darshan to the devotees while performing his morning puja in the Yogi Sabhagruha (assembly hall). Then, Swamishri performed *pujan* of ornaments to honour Lakshmi and delivered blessings, “Today, is Dhanteras. Along with Bhagwan we also do *pujan* of wealth. However, the ultimate wealth is ‘*Re Shyam tame sāchu nānu...*’ Since we all live in this world we need money to run all our affairs. Nothing can be done without money. By doing Lakshmi *pujan* our wealth becomes pure, we

get noble thoughts and are inspired to perform charitable actions.”

3, Wednesday; Kali Chaudas

Swamishri performed *pujan* and *arti* of Hanumanji in the shrine located at the front part of Akshar Mandir.

4, Thursday; Diwali

Thousands of devotees had come today, on Diwali, for Thakorji's and Swamishri's darshan at the Akshar Mandir. The mandir and Akshar Dwar were illuminated with countless *diva*, creating a heavenly sight.



Swamishri doing darshan of *annakut* offered to Thakorji



Swamishri performs the *annakut arti*, Akshar Deri

Swamishri arrived early morning at the Yogi Sabhagruh to perform his daily puja in the presence of thousands of devotees. Swamis sang festive bhajans in the puja and thereafter senior swamis honoured Swamishri with garlands. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Today, the joy of Diwali is felt everywhere. It is a celebration to illuminate our inner selves. This light within grows day by day and our hearts become purer till we attain *ekantikpanu* (spiritual enlightenment). Then, we become stable and remain forever in communion with Bhagwan. Subsequently, every day becomes Diwali or joyful.”

In the evening, the ritual of Chopda Pujan was held in the Yogi Sabhagruh. Devotees sat with their accounts books and laptops and performed the *mahapuja* rituals. Soon, Swamishri arrived after doing Thakorji’s darshan and offering prayers in the Akshar Deri for the welfare of all. Swamishri performed the concluding rituals of the *mahapuja* and *arti*. Senior swamis showered rice grains sanctified by Swamishri to bless the accounts books of devotees. In the mean time, Swamishri wrote his blessings on the accounts books of Akshar Mandir. Thereafter, senior swamis honoured Swamishri with a variety of garlands.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Tomorrow, the New Year will begin and all will start writing accounts. As *satsangis* we should also consolidate our dharma-*niyams*. We have the association of Maharaj and Swami, thus, we should

not think ordinarily. Increase our inclination and strength for satsang and decrease our desires for worldly things. Always remain spiritually strong and spirited. Whatever (moral) lapses you have made are all forgiven, but be careful and alert from now onwards. Cultivate more *nirdosh buddhi* in the Gunatit guru. May all be very happy in body, mind and wealth. I pray that may all regain the monetary losses incurred due to the corona pandemic and be blessed with more.”

5, Friday; New Year’s Celebration

On 5 November 2021, Swamishri offered and celebrated a grand *annakut* festival before Thakorji at the Akshar Mandir, Gondal.

The day’s celebration commenced in the early morning with the New Year’s *mahapuja* rituals performed by Viveksagar Swami, on behalf of Swamishri, in the Yogi Sabhagruh. Then, while Swamishri performed his morning puja before thousands of devotees in the specially decorated Yogi Sabhagruh, swamis sang bhajans and prayers. A variety of food items and sweets were arranged around Swamishri’s puja platform. Thereafter, senior swamis honoured Swamishri with a variety of garlands. Swamishri’s puja darshan was relayed live worldwide by the GTPL channel and BAPS website.

Swamishri gave his blessings for the New Year, “Having the association of Maharaj and Swami is a very great thing. Shriji Maharaj came on earth to establish *ekantik* dharma. Bhagwan is attained through his grace (*krupa sadhya*) and not merely



Swamishri picks a vegetable to display to all



Annakut of fruits and vegetables offered in Akshar Deri

through our spiritual endeavours (*kriya sadhya*). Whatever efforts we make by remembering Bhagwan and Sant enables us to attain *shubh* (auspicious) Lakshmi. And by using whatever we attain in the service of Bhagwan and Sant, and satsang is also *shubh* Lakshmi. By keeping our mind on God will enable us to accomplish all things.

“All of you will be happy in body, mind and wealth; your hearts will turn into gold and Maharaj and Swami will forever reside within.”

All felt blessed and fulfilled by Swamishri’s enlightening New Year’s darshan and blessings.

After his morning puja, Swamishri went for darshan at the Yogi Smruti Mandir, where an *annakut* had been arranged. Then, Swamishri went to the Akshar Deri for darshan of the beautiful *annakut* and performed *arti* and offered prayers for all. Thereafter, Swamishri went for darshan of the gurus’ shrines in the mandir *pradakshina* and Thakorji in the sanctum sanctorum, where a decorative and impressive *annakut* had been arranged. Swamishri sat before Thakorji and joined swamis in singing *thals* and finally performed the *annakut arti*. Simultaneously, the mandir precincts were enlivened by the sound of fireworks.

The memorable and auspicious festivals of Diwali, Chopda Puja, New Year’s *mahapuja* and Annakut were celebrated with divinity and joy in Swamishri’s presence.

■ On New Year’s Day of V.S. 2078 (5 Nov.), Swamishri gave darshan and blessings

via video-conference to swamis in India and abroad. During Swamishri’s stay in Gondal many dignitaries and guests came for Swamishri’s darshan and blessings, and the devotees got the opportunity of *samip* darshan in the Yogi Sabhagruh.

15, Monday; Dev Prabodhini Ekadashi

The traditional *shaak ni haatdi* (an offering of fresh vegetables) was arranged in Swamishri’s morning puja. Three wooden carts on the stage contained vegetables arranged in a decorative fashion. Swamis sang bhajans during Swamishri’s morning puja in the Yogi Sabhagruh. After puja, swamis offered garlands to Swamishri. Then, Swamishri addressed the devotees and thereafter, according to tradition, took a variety of vegetables in his hand: brinjal, potatoe, gourd, carrot, ginger, lemon and others, and gave memorable darshan to all.

Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* for BAPS *sanskardhams* in Mehsana and Akshardham. Swamishri also performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the Guru Parampara *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Lira, Uganda.

In the evening, Swamishri came for Thakorji’s darshan in the main mandir and Akshar Deri, where a beautiful offering of fresh vegetables was arranged. Swamishri was extremely pleased at the darshan and performed *arti* in the main mandir and Akshar Deri.



Devotees doing *samip* darshan of Swamishri, Gondal



Convocation of YTK youths with Swamishri, Gondal

■ On 26 November 2021, a convocation ceremony for the youths of the Yuva Talim Centre (in Sarangpur) was held in Swamishri's presence in Gondal. The youths gave inspiring stage presentations. Swamishri blessed all the youths and sanctified their certificates, *nada-chhadis*, *malas* and mementos.

from Gondal and travelled to Atladara to celebrate and launch the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary year celebrations. ♦

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

■ On 27 November 2021, Swamishri inaugurated the newly built school and students' hostel – BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir and Swamishri Njanjivandasji Gurukul respectively. Swamishri sanctified the educational complex with Thakorji and by showering flower petals in the classrooms. Swamishri gave blessings for the success of the school and *gurukul* and to the swamis, teachers and students. Swamishri gave *samip* darshan to all the students.



Swamishri with Thakorji at the Gurukul entrance

■ On 2 December 2021, Swamishri departed



Swamishri gives *samip* darshan to the students at the newly inaugurated Vidyamandir school, Gondal

Swamishri Consecrates Murtis for New BAPS Mandirs



Swamishri performs *arti*, Gondal

SARANGPUR

During Mahant Swami Maharaj's stay in Sarangpur from 21 to 29 October 2021, he performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* to be installed in various BAPS *hari* mandirs in India and abroad: Newcastle, (Australia), Macchi Sadada (Sankari), Gariya (Morbi), Pramukh Vatika (Amreli), Sarita Society and Akshardham Society (Bhavnagar), Rampara and Panvi (Sarangpur region) – re-*pratishtha* of Guru Parampara *murtis*, Yoginagar area (Botad) and Nobar (Atladara region). Swamishri also performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Hanumanji and Pramukh Swami Maharaj for the Ramji Mandir in Chansad. He also performed the re-*pratishtha* rituals of the renovated original *murtis* of Shri Ram, Lakshman and Sita of the Ramji Mandir, which are presently installed in the *pradakshina* of the mandir.



Consecrated *murtis*, Sarangpur

GONDAL

During Swamishri's stay in Gondal, he consecrated the *murtis* for newly built BAPS *hari* mandirs: Maliya Hatina, Manavadar, Prarthana Sanskardham (Mehsana), Akshardham Sanskardham (Mehsana), Lira (Uganda), Bhanvad Sanskardham, Gorana (re-*pratishtha*), Varna (Bhadra), Jayva (Bhadra), Pramukh Vatika (Rajkot), Bandra (Gondal), Haripar (Gondal), Pipaliya (Poshina), Hingatiya (Poshina), Chitrodi (Poshina), Gayatrinagar, New Gurukul (Gondal) and Madhuram Sanskardham (Junagadh).

Swamishri also performed the *pujan* rituals of bricks to be ritually placed in the foundation of many BAPS Sanskardhams. ♦

The ICPR Presents the ‘Lifetime Achievement Award’ to Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami

26 December 2021, Delhi



The Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR, Ministry of Education, Government of India) awarded Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami its prestigious ‘Lifetime Achievement Award’. Distinguished scholars and invited guests from around the nation participated in celebrating this momentous occasion.

By Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s wishes, Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami authored comprehensive commentaries on the Prasthantrayi – the Upanishads, Brahmasutras, and the Bhagavad Gita, as well as a *vadagranth* according to the teachings of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. By authoring these works he has provided immense contributions to Darshanic literature. Within the last few centuries in the field of philosophy, he is the only *bhasyakar* who has authored both a commentary on the entire Prasthanatrayi and a *vadagranth*. In addition, he has visited numerous universities, research institutes, and educational centres throughout the world. By engaging in dialogues on Vedic darshans with scholars at these institutions, he has provided novel contributions to darshanic thought. To recognize these achievements, the ICPR decided

to honour him for his tremendous work.

The award ceremony was held after a three-day conference organized by the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, Akshardham, New Delhi and sponsored by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research on the topic: ‘Various Dimensions of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan and Recent Trends in Advait Philosophy’.

The felicitation ceremony was headed by Prof. R.C. Sinha, chairman of the ICPR. Dr Ram Madhav, the former national secretary of the BJP and a distinguished leader, author and thinker, was the chief guest. In addition, Prof. Jatashankar Tivari, president of the All Indian Philosophy Association; Padma Shri Chamu Krishna Shastry, cofounder of Sanskritbharati, and trustee and secretary of the Sanskrit Promotion Foundation; Murlidhar Sharma, Vice Chancellor of the National Sanskrit University, Tirupati; Prof. Sacchidanand Mishra, member-secretary of the ICPR; Ramkishore Tripathi, a renowned traditional scholar from Varanasi; and over ten distinguished university scholars from throughout India, along with BAPS’s respected senior scholar and Shaddarshan-acharya Shrutiprakashdas Swami, also graced the assembly.

Srinivas Varkhediji, Vice-Chancellor of the Kavikulaguru Kalidas Sanskrit University, joined remotely to express his congratulations and good wishes to Bhadreshdas Swami. Shri Murlidhar Sharma commended the ICPR for selecting such an outstanding and worthy recipient of the 'Lifetime Achievement Award'. Other scholars and acclaimed guests who attended in-person joined in celebrating Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami's exceptional scholarly aptitude and virtuous life.

At this event, Pujya Bhadreshdas Swami humbly bestowed all the tributes received at the feet of Bhagwan Sawminarayan and his gurus Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

On this occasion, scholars endorsed the Vedic authenticity of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, expressed their profound admiration and reverence regarding Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami's scholarly intellect, and shared their heartfelt experiences of BAPS's work and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divinity. During the ceremony, Vice Chancellor of the National Sanskrit University in Tirupati, Shri Muralidhar Sharma, expressed his gratitude towards ICPR, "I thank the Indian Council of Philosophical Research for selecting an appropriate scholar to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award." Showing his respect for Bhadreshdas Swami, he further stated, "Within society, there are many scholars who chase awards and accolades but Bhadreshdas Swami, who has surrendered his life for a spiritual tradition, is a scholar who is chased by awards. Today, I believe that the Lifetime Achievement Award has become fortunate upon being bestowed to such a great personality." Thereafter, the vice chancellor conveyed his sentiments regarding the Prasthantrayi Swaminarayan Bhashya and affirmed the Vedic authenticity of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan saying, "Authoring a lucid and scholarly commentary on the Prasthantrayi is

not an ordinary feat. This commentary does not criticize anyone. Pujya Bhadreshdas Swami is a living *bhasyakar* (commentator). Accepting our invitation, Pujya Bhadreshdas Swami came to Tirupati and engaged in a discussion with more than 35 prominent scholars for many days. As a result, all the scholars unanimously accepted that the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is truly a unique Vedic Darshan."

On this occasion, Professor Shrinivas Varkhediji, Vice Chancellor of Kavikulaguru Kalidas Sanskrit University, Nagpur, addressed the assembly through a video message. He said, "We're honouring a scholar, and a *bhasyakar*. With the formation of the Swaminarayan Bhashya on the Prasthantrayi, Pujya Bhadreshdas Swami has presented the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan in an academic manner. He has presented this unique darshan to the academic world. It is an original doctrine based on the Vedic shastras. This Darshan has now received national acclamation through this Lifetime Achievement Award."

Professor Jatashankar Tivariji, Chairman of the All India Philosophy Association, explained the significance of today's event. "After hundreds of years, someone has written a Bhashya on the Prasthantrayi. Now joining a long tradition of Bhashya commentators, Pujya Bhadreshdas Swami has provided a treasured contribution to that very tradition. It is unfathomable to understand how much effort he must have spent in creating this Bhashya, considering that an entire life can be spent merely studying a portion of such a text." Acknowledging the unique facets of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, he said, "After three days of discussions, it is clear that the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is worthy of admiration from other scholars."

Expressing his sentiments, Padma Shri Chamu Krishna Shastry, Co-Founder of the Sanskrit Bharati Association and Chairman of the Provincial Language Conservation Committee, said, "By granting this award to Pujya Bhadreshdas

Swami, the ICPR has elevated its own prestige. The award's prestige has been elevated. It is our great privilege to receive his guidance and be present in such a time."

Informing the audience of the purpose of giving this award, the ICPR member-secretary, Prof. Sacchidanand Mishra said, “The purpose of this award is to present a role model to the world.” Thereafter, he proceeded to read out the words of the citation presenting the award: “It is a privilege for the Indian Council of Philosophical Research and fraternity of Philosophy as a whole to honour you with this lifetime achievement award... your lifetime achievements in the field of philosophy require no accolades for recognition, but this is a humble effort on part of the ICPR to honour your lifelong selfless services to enrich Indian philosophy... the ICPR takes pride in presenting the Lifetime Achievement Award to the living Bhasyakar Mahacharya of our time.”

After the reading, chairman of the ICPR, Prof. R.C. Sinha and the member-secretary, Prof. Sacchidanand Mishra presented the award to Mahamahopadhyaya Pujya Bhadreshdas Swami who immediately offered the award to Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. The audience demonstrated their delight for this historic moment with a long standing ovation.

Thereafter, Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami informed the audience that he was once a mischievous boy who was not interested in studying, but Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj took him into his care and inspired him to study. Pramukh Swami Maharaj continually cared for and guided him, and patiently had him pursue a traditional education in Sanskrit scriptures. Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami further vindicated that for this reason, this award does not acclaim the once-mischievous young boy, but acclaims Param Pujya Pramukh Swami who transformed that boy. This is a veneration of Param Pujya Pramukh Swami and the present guru, Param Pujya Mahant Swami



Maharaj. Bhadreshdas Swami further asserted that if Bhagwan Swaminarayan had not given his teachings on Akshar and Purushottam, there would be nothing to write the Bhashya on, therefore, this is a veneration of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. If Pramukh Swami Maharaj had not instructed him to write the Bhashya, he would have never have done so, therefore, this is a veneration of Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Even today, whatever is being done is by the pure inspiration of Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, therefore, this is a veneration of Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj. Bhadreshdas Swami concluded by saying, “A lifetime achievement award for a sadhu is to have imbibed all the characteristics of a true sadhu in one’s life, I pray that I achieve such an award in my life.”

This event's chief guest, Dr Ram Madhav, an acclaimed politician, writer and philosopher, praised Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami by saying, "Pujya Bhadreshdas Swami is an unparalleled scholar." He also commended the Swaminarayan Sampradaya by saying, "The Swaminarayan Sampradaya has played a pivotal role in spreading our country's glorious culture, legacy and generosity to the masses. This *sampradaya* is a renowned bhakti *sampradaya*, through which our country's religious legacy continues to flourish. Today, when the progression of scientific knowledge requires the addition of spiritual knowledge, Bhadreshdas Swami has significantly contributed to its progress."

The chairman of ICPR as well as this event, Professor R.C. Sinha said, “The Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR) and the All India Philosophy Association (Akhil Bharatiya Darshanik Parishad) has always been graced with the blessings of sadhus. For a sadhu, an award such as this is of no importance, but more so the ICPR has been honoured by being given a chance to present this award thereby increasing the organization’s value. Seeing this assembly, I feel that ICPR has been blessed.”

Thereafter, Shri Jyotindrabhai Dave shared Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj’s blessings for this event: “It is a historic moment today when ICPR is felicitating Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Through the blessings of Param Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Bhadreshdas Swami has made great advancements in the field of philosophy by writing many shastras such as the Swaminarayan Bhashya and the Swaminarayan Siddhant Sudha. Therefore, this honour does not only belong to Bhadreshdas Swami, but it is also a tribute to Param Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the occasion of his birth centenary celebrations...”

In his valedictory speech, Puja Shrutiprakashdas Swami spoke regarding Param Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s visionary foresight, “Just as a sculptor sees a sculpture in a block of stone, Param Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj saw a *bhashyakar* in Puja Bhadreshdas Swami since 1987, 20 years before he even wrote the Bhashyas. At the time, Puja Bhadreshdas Swami was very young, yet Param Puja Pramukh Swami Maharaj proclaimed, ‘Bhadreshdas Swami will write the *bhashyas* in the future.’” Concluding, Puja Shrutiprakashdas Swami commended the ICPR for celebrating the Bhashyas as well as uplifting India’s philosophical legacy.

On this occasion, the renowned Sanskrit journal, ‘Vyas-shrihi’, published a special issue dedicated to the Akshar-Purushottam

Darshan. The chief-editor of this issue, Shri Buddheshwar Sarangiji said, “Vyasashri is a biannual publication dedicated to the promotion of Sanskrit and culture. It is ISSN marked and care-listed by the UGC. Each edition is dedicated to a scholar featured on its cover, with the aim to educate future generations about their unique contribution. While we wished to continue this tradition with a cover-photo of Puja Bhadreshdas Swami, he politely declined and insisted that the issue be dedicated to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Of Vyasashri’s 19 issues published so far, this would be the first to not feature a scholar on its cover – a testament to Bhadreshdas Swami’s humility. The depth of the research papers published in this special Akshar-Purushottam Darshan issue command a month’s worth of discussion and impetus for a new thesis.”

At this event, the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute took the opportunity to present respected Kashi scholar, Prof. Ramkishor Tripathiji, with the title of ‘Vedant Martand’. Commending Prof. Tripathiji’s scholarly achievements, Bhadreshdas Swami said, “Scholars have no desire to be honoured, but their knowledge itself attracts such honour. Prof. Ramkishor Tripathi is a great scholar and can be regarded as a personification of Vedantic knowledge. He teaches over nine Vedant Darshans. On the occasion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s centenary celebrations, the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute is pleased to recognize and honour the respected professor as a ‘Vedant Martand’.

This event was webcast from New Delhi and viewed across the world. It was a moment of pride for the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and Vedic Sanatan Dharma and proved to be a truly memorable event for all who were present. Let us together congratulate Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami for raising the scholarly status of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. ♦

Pramukh Swami Maharaj Honoured in the British and Canadian Parliaments

7-8 December 2021



House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

In 1988, the parliaments of Britain and Canada honoured Pramukh Swami Maharaj in recognition of his impact on the spiritual and social lives of the Hindu communities in these countries. To commemorate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary and recognize his continued positive influence in the lives of the Hindu communities through the traditional mandirs he built in London and Toronto and the numerous socio-spiritual activities he inspired, members of both parliaments honoured him during their parliamentary sessions.

HOUSE OF COMMONS, OTTAWA, CANADA

On 7 December 2021, Hon. Chandra Arya, MP for Nepean, stated in the House of Commons:

“It is my honour to make this statement today, December 7, 2021, the 100th birth anniversary of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His Holiness, who was a Hindu swami of the Swaminarayan denomination, gifted the people of Canada the magnificent BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto, the first traditionally hand-carved Hindu place of worship in Canada. The Mandir stands as a symbol of Canada's diversity,

cultural mosaic and spirit of plurality.

“Today, BAPS carries out spiritual and humanitarian activities in 154 towns and cities across our country. Living by the motto, ‘In the joy of others, lies our own’, His Holiness inspired spiritual, humanitarian, environmental, education, health promotion, youth and children's initiatives that touched the people of Canada and the world.”

Also, Hon. Tim S. Uppal, MP for Edmonton Mill Woods, stated:

“It is my great honour to make this historic statement in Canada's House of Commons marking December 7, 2021, the 100th birth anniversary of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

“His Holiness was a Hindu swami of the Swaminarayan denomination and he gifted the people of Canada the magnificent BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto, which is the first traditionally hand-carved Hindu place of worship in Canada. The Mandir stands as a symbol of Canada's abundant diversity, cultural mosaic, and freedom of religion.

“His Holiness lived by the saying, ‘In the joy of others, lies our own’. This was evident in his work,



Houses of Parliament, London, UK

which promoted health and inspired spiritual, humanitarian, environmental and educational initiatives. Much of His work focused on helping young people, and touched many Canadians as well as the broader global community.

“He dedicated his life to the service of others, inspiring many for the greater good of mankind. In his travels throughout the world, he fostered love, peace, harmony, righteousness, faith in God, and unconditional service to others.

“BAPS Charities have supported communities in 43 cities across Canada. They helped those who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and provided vaccines to over 21,000 Canadians.

“His Holiness was introduced in the House of Commons in 1988, and in 2000 was presented with the Key to the City of Toronto.

“Since his passing in 2016, his successor, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, continues his legacy of inspiring people all over the world.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life and work is one that needs to be preserved and celebrated to present and future generations.”

HOUSE OF COMMONS, LONDON, UK

On 8 December 2021, in the House of Commons of the UK Parliament, Hon Bob Blackman, MP for Harrow East, declared: “This week, thousands of my Hindu constituents and millions worldwide start the celebrations of the birth centenary of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. His life was given over to people of all castes, races and religions. He was, of course, the inspiration behind the world-renowned Neasden Temple and hundreds of other temples. Will my Right Honourable Friend join me in that celebration and in giving good wishes to all Hindus across the world?”

Then, Prime Minister, The Rt Hon Boris Johnson, said, “I thank my Honourable Friend for raising this, and I thank the Hindu community for their amazing contribution to this country. I was delighted to visit the Neasden Temple last month to hear about all they have done during the pandemic. I wish everybody in that community and all those celebrating all the very best.” ♦



Bob Blackman



Prime Minister Boris Johnson



Chandra Arya



Tim S. Uppal



UK & EUROPE

INAUGURATION OF NEW BAPS MANDIR BIRMINGHAM 23–24 October 2021



The weekend of devotion began with a Vedic *mahapuja* on 23 October in which participants prayed for peace, harmony, well-being and righteous prosperity to prevail throughout the local community and around the world.

On 24 October, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami performed the *murti sthapan* (installation) ceremony at the new BAPS Mandir in Birmingham. Previously, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* on 31 December 2020 in Nenpur, India. Other swamis from London also joined the ceremony along with hundreds of local devotees and guests from around the country, while many more across the world joined the live webcast.

The new mandir will serve as a place of worship and as the hub of spiritual, community and charity services for BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in Birmingham and the wider West Midlands region.

NORTH AMERICA

KISHORE-KISHORI SUMMER SHIBIR 2021 25 September 2021, North America

Thousands of youths from across the continent



between ages 14 and 22 took part in the North American Kishore-Kishori Summer Shibir, either virtually or in person. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, a majority of the youths watched the documentary-style common session programmes at home and joined the following group activities and discussions on a video conferencing platform. In some centres, where COVID-19 restrictions allowed, youths also had the opportunity to watch the programme and participate in the group activities in-person at their local mandir.

As part of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Shatabdi Mahotsav, the one-day *shibir* was themed 'Guru Bhakti' explaining how one can offer devotion to one's guru. The *shibir* was designed to help delegates understand the importance of a guru in one's life and how one can offer devotion to the guru.

The focal point of the *shibir* was based on the following message provided by *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj, "Guru bhakti is to develop love for our guru and to live for him according to his wishes."

Delegates learned about the greatness of the guru, and the exemplary guru bhakti of Mahant Swami Maharaj towards his gurus, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The delegates were guided on how to offer guru bhakti through thoughts, words and actions.

**INAUGURATION OF BAPS SHRI
SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR
22–24 October 2021, Jackson, MS**



Satsang in the Jackson area began through the inspiration of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1988. Thereafter, a mandir was constructed and inaugurated in 1998. Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the mandir in 2000. As the satsang grew, a larger facility became necessary.

The three-day celebration commemorating the new mandir opening attracted many devotees and well-wishers.

On the evening of 22 October, a kirtan *aradhana* was presented. On the afternoon of October 23 hundreds of devotees joined in the grand procession of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Nilkanth Varni in the local area. That evening, children, youths and adults presented a cultural programme highlighting the timeless traditions and values that the mandir instils in all.

Chokwe Lumumba, Mayor of the City of Jackson, who attended the cultural programme, said, “To have a beautiful home of worship like this, it allows people to feel welcome, it allows people to know this is home.”

On 24 October, devotees and well-wishers took part in the Vedic *murti-pratishtha mahapuja*. Yagnavallabh Swami performed the *murti sthapan* rituals, amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras and prayers. Previously, Mahant Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* in Mahelav, Gujarat, India, on 2 February 2019.

ASIA PACIFIC

**SHATABDI VANCHAN PARAYAN
1–10 December 2021**



To celebrate Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 100th birthday, more than 2,700 young and old devotees attended the one-day Vanchan Parayans (readings) of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Jivan Charitra Parts 4 and 5 organized at BAPS centres across Australia and New Zealand during December 2021.

The *parayan* locations were beautifully decorated and each *parayan* commenced with *pujan* and *arti*. Devotees participated in 20-minute sessions by reading the text from where the previous participant had stopped.

Following their participation in this endeavour, many resolved to read Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s detailed biography on a daily basis.

**SHRI NILKANTH VARNI MAHARAJ MURTI
CONSECRATED**

**14 December 2021, BAPS Mandir, Brisbane,
Australia**



The Vedic rituals to install the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj and the grand opening of the Abhishek Mandapam were

performed at the BAPS Mandir in Brisbane by Paramchintan Swami and other swamis. Thereafter, a grand *annakut* of sweet and savoury vegetarian delicacies was offered to Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj.

Around 125 families from Brisbane and nearby centres participated in the *mahapuja* and *abhishek* rituals in-person and hundreds of families from BAPS centres in Australia and New Zealand joined virtually to celebrate this monumental occasion.

Previously, the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj had been performed by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur on 21 September 2021.

UAE

INDIAN UNION MINISTER VISITS BAPS HINDU MANDIR SITE 16 November 2021, Abu Dhabi



A delegation of Indian officials led by Honourable Hardeep Singh Puri, India's Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas, and Housing & Urban Affairs, visited the construction site of the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. They were welcomed and guided by Brahmavihari Swami and the board of directors.

The visiting minister said, "At a time when this message is most needed, this mandir reminds the world about the necessity of tolerance and harmony between people, faiths and cultures."

As part of his visit he participated in the Shila Sthapan Ceremony by carrying and placing a brick on the mandir plinth.

Also, the minister viewed the on-site 'Rivers

of Harmony' exhibition that presents the harmonious purpose, history and construction of the BAPS Hindu Mandir, and the selfless community work, including the COVID-19 relief aid, carried out by BAPS.

GUJARAT CHIEF MINISTER VISITS BAPS HINDU MANDIR SITE 9 December 2021, Abu Dhabi



Honourable Bhupendrabhai Patel, Chief Minister of Gujarat, visited the BAPS Hindu Mandir site in Abu Dhabi, Abu Mureikhah, with a 40-member delegation, including Shri Jagdishbhai V. Panchal, MOS; Shri K. Kaliasnathan, IAS; Dr Rajivkumar Gupta, IAS; Shri S.J. Haider, IAS; Smt. Neelam Rani, as well as industrial leaders and entrepreneurs from Gujarat. Brahmavihari Swami and the BAPS Hindu Mandir board of directors welcomed the delegation in a traditional style.

The chief minister and delegation watched a video documenting the journey of the BAPS Hindu Mandir from its inception to its current status.

Then, the chief minister and his team participated in the auspicious Shila Sthapan (bricklaying) ceremony by performing a special puja to sanctify the bricks which they then personally carried and placed upon the 5m-high plinth above the foundation of the mandir.

Enthralled by the progress and grandeur of the project, the Chief Minister expressed, "This is more than a dream. This is impossible to conceive and can only happen with the blessings of the divine."

AFRICA

FIRST VISIT BY BAPS SWAMIS 6–13 October 2021, Namibia



Since 2007, brothers Shri Jaydipbhai and Chetanbhai Gandhi have lived in Namibia and practised satsang. Through their efforts, over the past year, BAPS swamis stationed in Africa have bolstered the satsang through online assemblies. To further nurture the satsang, they invited Amrutswarup Swami and Rishinayan Swami to visit Namibia. During their 8-day stay, the swamis went to Windhoek (capital), Ongwediva, Oshakati, Okandjingedi, Otavi, Omwandi, Eenhana, Swakopmund, Walvis Bay and other cities to conduct visits to the homes and businesses of devotees and wellwishers and conveyed practical messages of family harmony, spirituality and a value-based life.

In Windhoek, with the support of the Indian Namibian Friendship Association (INFA) and Realtek Group, a public satsang assembly was held in the presence of Indian High Commissioner to Namibia Shri Prashantbhai Agrawal, Indian High Commission officials and over 80 well-wishers. The attendees were inspired to learn about the global efforts of BAPS, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj to promote personal and family spirituality in daily life.

BAPS CHARITIES

October to December 2021, USA

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 and other challenges, BAPS Charities has continued to support local charities with monetary donations:



- NJ Rise which operates various social programmes to support needy families in central New Jersey.
- C.A.R.E. (Community Addiction Recovery Effort) in Robbinsville, NJ, to help provide resources, access to treatment and guidance from a trained counsellor.
- Bread for the City, which provides food, clothing, medical attention and other critical services to the needy in Washington DC.
- Meals on Wheels programme run by Spectrum Community Services to deliver healthy meals to the homes of seniors who are unable to prepare their own food or have difficulty with mobility in the San Francisco Bay Area, CA.
- Free Meals programme run by WishingWell, Inc. to provide hot, nutritious meals to the needy in the San Francisco Bay Area, CA.
- The Frisco Veterans of Foreign Wars in Frisco, TX, which supports front line military personnel returning home.
- the Chris Howell Foundation in Dallas, TX, which conducts training programmes and services to empower individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency.
- Dallas Afterschool in Dallas, TX, which supports after-school and summer programmes for children of all races and economic backgrounds.
- Girls Inc. in Dallas, TX, which helps underprivileged girls with necessary education and mentoring resources to develop their inherent strengths.
- Baylor Scott & White Medical

Centre in Irving, TX, to help care for COVID-19 patients.

- Attack Poverty Organization, a global organization that also serves locally in Houston, Texas.
- HomeFrontNJ in Robbinsville, NJ to provide essential items for children.

BAPS CHARITIES DONATIONS TO CHILDREN'S HOMES December 2021, Kenya

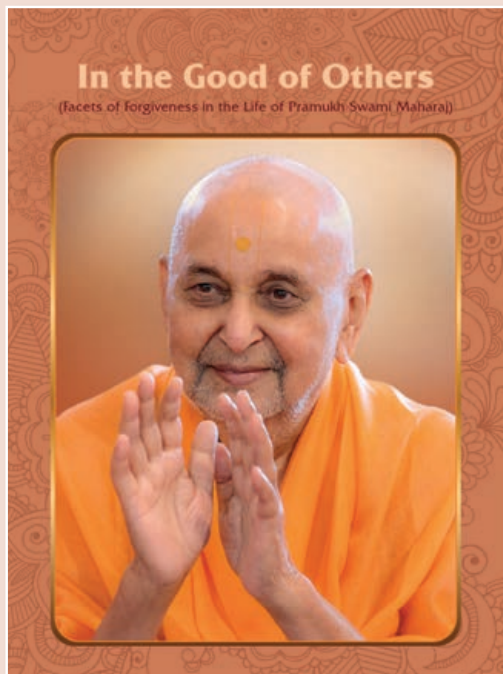
On 7 December 2021, BAPS Charities in Nairobi donated food rations, snacks, clothing and books to the Dream Children's Home in Ngong town, which currently cares for 120 orphaned



children aged between 4 and 19 years.

On 19 December 2021, BAPS Charities in Nakuru donated milk, bread, infant formula, diapers and porridge to The Holy Family Children's Home, which cares for orphaned children from infants to teenagers in Nakuru. ♦

NEW PUBLICATION



Author:
Sadhu Mukundcharandas

In the Good of Others (Facets of Forgiveness in the Life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj)

- Legacy of Forgiveness in Sanatan Dharma
- Forgiveness in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life
- Ingraining Forgiveness in People at the individual level
- Societal Forgiveness
- Appendix: Forgiveness in the Shastras

**Available at all BAPS bookstores and
online at baps.store**



Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad ♦ Inspirer: HDH Mahant Swami Maharaj



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN CHANSAD, DECEMBER 2021

1. Swamishri initiates 54 *sadhaks* into the sadhu order (7 December).
2. Swamishri gives the guru mantra to one of the 55 newly initiated *parshads* (9 December).
3. Fathers and family members of new initiates perform the *diksha mahapuja* rituals (9 December).
4. A view of the newly renovated Chansad village lake, where Shantilal bathed.
5. Swamishri views the development plans for the sacred pilgrim spots in Chansad.

His Life is Our Light,
His Light is Our Life



**SPECTACULAR VIRTUAL ASSEMBLY TO CELEBRATE PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S
100TH BIRTHDAY
11 December 2021**

A special three-hour online assembly paid tribute to Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj by depicting six of his innumerable innate virtues which were evident from childhood throughout his life. The broadcast incorporated real presentations by Mahant Swami Maharaj, *sadguru* swamis, other sadhus and youths amid the virtual backdrop. Swamishri (*inset*) and youths hold aloft *mashals* to launch Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations.