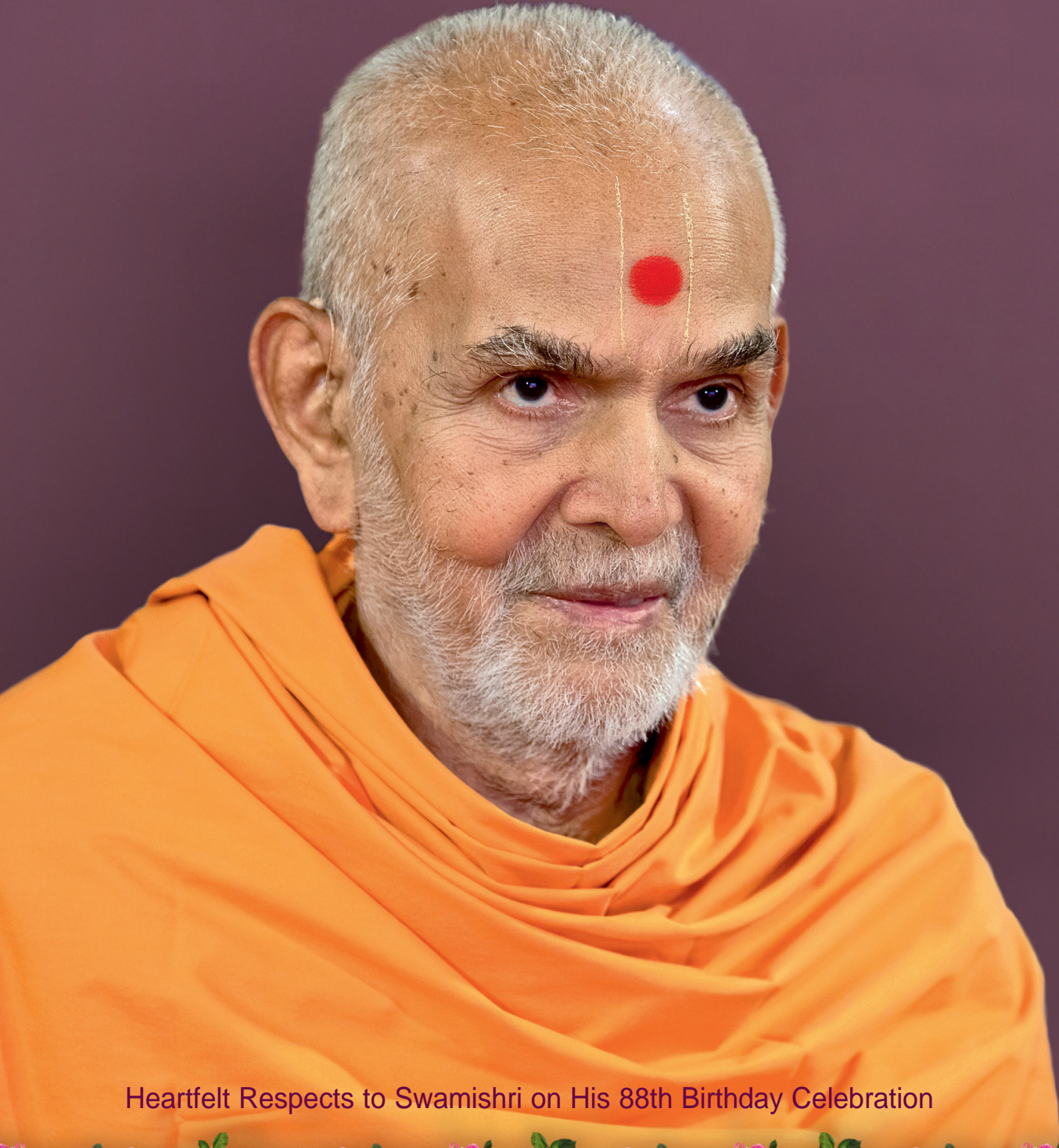


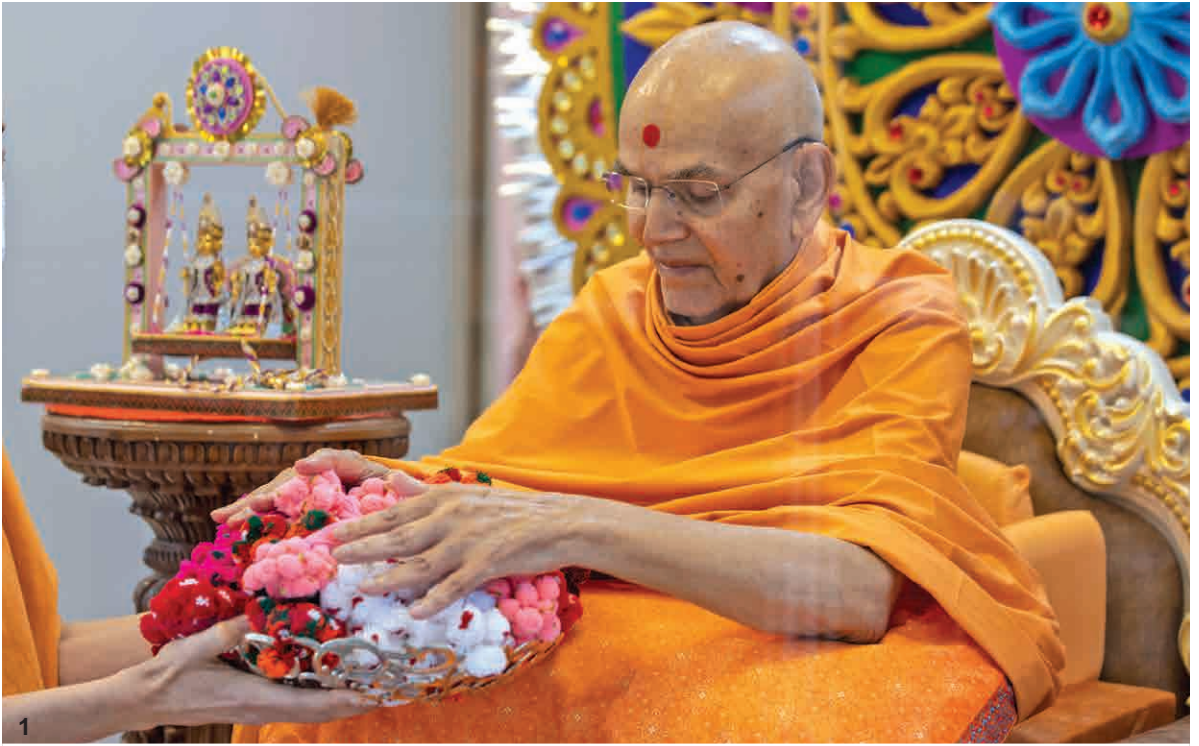
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September–October 2021

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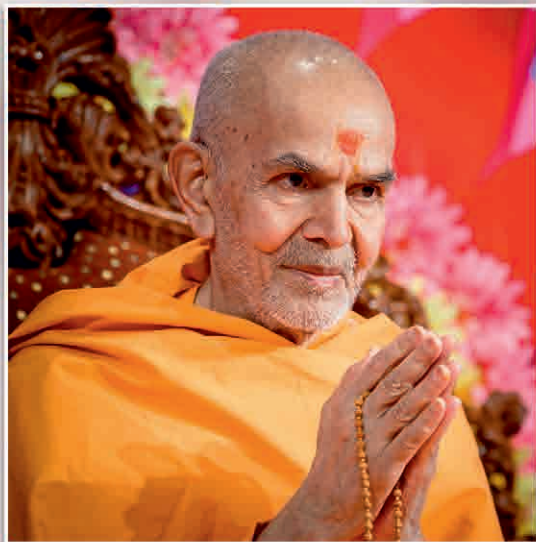


Heartfelt Respects to Swamishri on His 88th Birthday Celebration



RAKSHABANDHAN CELEBRATION
22 August 2021, Sarangpur

1. Mahant Swami Maharaj sanctifies *rakhdhis* for the devotees.
2. Swamishri rocks Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami on a decorated *hindolo* made of *rakhdhis*.



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

September–October 2021, Vol. 44, No. 5



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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MR HERON INVITES SHRI HARI

*During his stay in Surat Shri Hari was invited
by the British officers to their homes and honoured...*

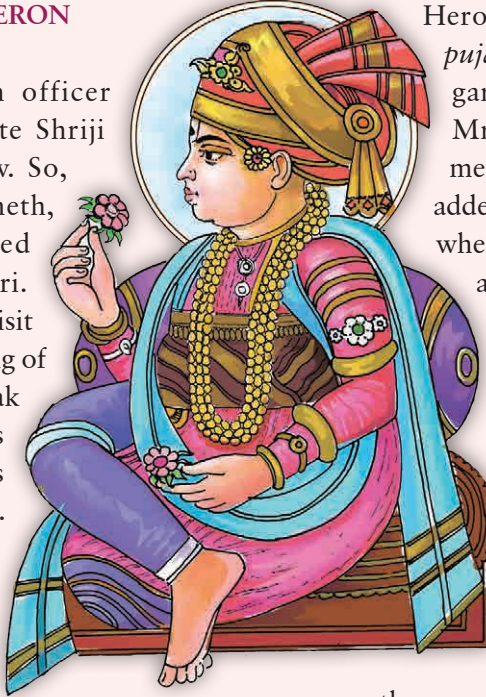
SHRI HARI VISITS MR HERON SAHEB'S BUNGALOW

Mr Heron, a British officer in Surat, wished to invite Shriji Maharaj to his bungalow. So, he informed Ardeshar Sheth, who personally conveyed the invitation to Shri Hari. Maharaj agreed and the visit was arranged on the evening of 18 November 1824 (Kartak vad 13, A.S. 1881). It was going to be Mr Heron's fifth meeting with Maharaj. He sent a music band, 50 soldiers on horseback, several foot soldiers and vehicles for Shri Hari and his entourage.

Shri Hari mounted his horse to leave with Ardeshar. The attendant *parshads* or bodyguards mounted their horses and were keeping a watchful eye for any malicious elements. They had received information about some spiteful people's plan to create problems. Ardeshar was fully aware of this and prior to Maharaj's arrival in Surat he had sternly warned the detractors from creating any problems.

Soon, Shri Hari reached Mr Heron's bungalow, and the latter came out with his officers and friends to greet him. Shri Hari held Mr Heron's hand and proceeded.

Mr Heron was acquainted with Shri Hari and ushered him to a beautiful chair placed opposite his own seat. The accompanying Darbars and sadhus sat on the seats arranged for them. Mr



Heron had arranged for Maharaj's *pujan* and thereafter he offered a garland and several gifts. Then, Mr Heron reminisced about his meeting with him in Dabhan and added, "At that time you were young, whereas now you seem to have aged a little."

Shri Hari smiled and praised the British rule, "Because of your judges and progressive thoughts dharma is protected in your ruling states. Subsequently, the innate religious spirit in people has been ignited. Our sadhus, who are also receiving your protection, are also able to spread dharma

among the masses."

Then, as Shri Hari got up to leave Ardeshar informed him, "Now, we have to proceed to Mr Anderson's bungalow. He is the chief judge of this entire district."

AT MR ANDERSON'S BUNGALOW

Shri Hari entered Mr Anderson's residence. The chief judge had met Shri Hari at the *yagna* in Dabhan fifteen years previously. Mr Anderson had also arranged for Shri Hari's *pujan* and thereafter garlanded him and offered gifts. The Kathi Darbars were very pleased to see the British officers' respect for Maharaj.

A CRITICAL LETTER

From Mr Anderson's bungalow Shri Hari went to Bhikharidas Sheth's residence. Here, Maharaj

discoursed briefly to an assembly. Then, he went to Purushottam Sheth's and Ambaram Mehtaji's homes. Thereafter, Maharaj went to the Lalji Mandir for darshan and performed *arti*. Here, he sat and discoursed in the assembly hall. While getting up to leave Shri Hari prophesied, "A big mandir will be built here."

Shri Hari arrived at his residence and went straight to his room on the topmost floor. Ardeshar saw a letter vilifying Maharaj stuck on the wall inside the house. Ardeshar removed the letter and brought it to Shri Hari. As Ardeshar read the letter he burned with anger, but Shri Hari simply smiled and said, "The evil-minded can never give up their wicked nature. In spite of that my birth to establish dharma will not be stymied. On the contrary, due to their diabolical nature they will cause harm to themselves. In this *brahmand*, no one can stop Bhagwan's work. Therefore, there is no need for you to get agitated."

But Ardeshar told his soldiers, "Arrest these vile people by any means and bring them to me."

Maharaj told Ardeshar, "Sheth, as my glory spreads, those who oppose me will increase. Such people cannot appreciate Bhagwan's work. Furthermore, as talks related to my supreme divinity spreads, a stiff opposition will also arise. Such things have been happening since time immemorial. There is no need for you to get disturbed or irked."

NARAYAN – THE MASTER OF AKSHAR

After a while Ardesharji softly told Shri Hari, "Maharaj, Mitharam, the Nawab's artist, wishes to meet you."

Maharaj agreed and said, "Call him."

Mitharam wished to paint a picture of Shri Hari but he felt he would not be able to express it on meeting Maharaj. So, he declared his wish to Narayanji, who in turn talked about it to Adharanand Swami. The latter privately talked about it to Maharaj.

Shri Hari said, "Call him tomorrow after I

have had my lunch."

Shortly after, a servant informed Shri Hari that an English officer wished to see him. Maharaj was surprised as to who would want to meet him and said, "He may come in." The officer entered, doffed his hat and bowed, saying, "I am Mr Halford, the resident officer of Khambhat region. The Nawab there has made several accusations against me. A commission has been appointed to investigate the matter, but I am innocent. I was told by your Kutchi devotees, who work in Khambhat as stone artisans, that if I got your blessings I would be exonerated."

Shri Hari listened to the officer's woes. Because he frankly revealed the matter and came to seek his refuge Shri Hari blessed him, "Pray to God and all the accusations against you will be totally withdrawn." Subsequently, the commission's investigative report declared Mr Halford to be innocent. In addition, he was appointed as Assistant Governor of the Mumbai region.

The next day, Mitharam arrived at Shri Hari's residence. According to Maharaj's instruction the sponsors of the meal for that day were brought to him. The devotees performed Shri Hari's *pujan* and offered donations. After they had left, Maharaj instructed Adharanand Swami to call Mitharam.

Mitharam arrived, thinking that if Maharaj would sit still he could draw a line sketch of him and paint it later. But Maharaj instructed him, "Draw a picture of mine in the form of Varnivesh, standing on one leg with both arms raised upwards. Then, on either side draw Nar and Narayan standing, with large eyes and folded hands."

Mitharam became worried because he had come with the idea of painting Shri Hari's *murti* alone. Shriji Maharaj perceived his anxiety and said, "Below my painting write 'Shri Aksharatit Purushottam Shri Sahajanand *pragat pote*'."

"What does that mean?" Mitharam asked.

Shri Hari smiled and explained, "I am

Purushottam Narayan, supreme and also the master of Akshar.”

Mitharam was elated to hear Maharaj’s revelation about his supreme form.

Seven to eight days had elapsed since Maharaj arrived in Surat. He had visited the homes of many devotees and fulfilled their wishes. Shri Hari told Muni Bawa, “I want to depart from here on 22 November (Magshar *sud* 2), because the devotees of Gadhpur are thirsty for my darshan. Many of them have given up eating food, while others have renounced drinking milk and eating ghee till I come.” At that time Ardeshar Sheth arrived. When Maharaj informed him about his departure he became sad. Maharaj tried to assuage his grief. Then, Sheth requested, “Like you sanctified Pirusha’s guesthouse and garden I would like you to sanctify my home.”

Shri Hari agreed, “Tomorrow is *padvo* (*sud* 1), so I will come tomorrow evening.”

MAHARAJ VISITS ARDESHAR’S BUNGALOW AND GARDEN

The next day, Shri Hari set out to visit Ardesharji’s bungalow and garden. Sheth had invited British officers, other government officers and eminent citizens for the occasion. Maharaj’s seating arrangement was organized in Ardesharji’s main sitting room. The seating arrangements for all the invitees were made in a decorative marquee with chairs. Ardesharji had planned to welcome and honour Shri Hari to his bungalow in the same grand manner that he had done when Shri Hari arrived in Surat from Rustam Baug to the town centre. The road on which Shri Hari was to travel to Ardesharji’s bungalow was cleaned and sprinkled with water. He also had flower pots transported from his garden and arranged them along the entire route. All the trees along the route were illuminated with hanging *divas*. Then every fifteen feet along the entire route, armed soldiers were stationed

opposite each other. Ardesharji personally came to receive Maharaj in a beautiful buggy drawn by two horses. Shri Hari sat in the buggy and Ardeshar Sheth himself drove the buggy. He believed it to be his great fortune and honour. The citizens of Surat were amazed to see the Sheth’s respect and devotion for Shri Hari.

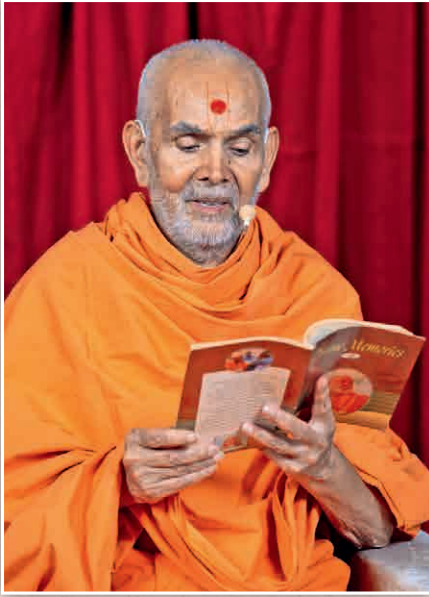
When the buggy arrived at Ardeshar’s bungalow, his elder brother Pirusha came to Maharaj and bowed at his feet. Then, he held Shri Hari’s hand and led him into the bungalow. Shri Hari entered the grand sitting room and sat on Ardesharji’s decorated chair. Atmaram Bhukhan, a very wealthy businessman, and many Parsi guests were also present. Then, Ardesharji performed Maharaj’s *pujan*, garlanded him, and offered several gifts and a plateful of money. Shri Hari was pleased by his bhakti.

Ardeshar Sheth was fluent in English and Farsi, and he was an avid reader. He asked Shri Hari questions and doubts that had arisen from his association with faithless people. Maharaj logically answered all his questions and also expounded upon his philosophical principle. Ardeshar felt peace at heart and humbly expressed, “Prabhu, I am your servant. I have come at your feet. It is in your hands to protect me.”

Shri Hari raised his right palm and blessed him, “I am forever in your protection. Do not worry in any way.” Then, Maharaj got up to meet the invited guests in the marquee. On departing, Ardeshar Sheth escorted Shri Hari to his residence with pomp and festivity. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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



Pramukh Swami Maharaj: A Real Sadhu

Mahant Swami Maharaj first met Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1951. Over the next 65 years, he experienced Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life from close range in a multitude of situations. Expressing his observations, Mahant Swami Maharaj wrote a Gujarati book, 'Jeva Me Nirakhya Re... 4', on the occasion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Amrut Mahotsav in 1995. The following are excerpts from an English translation of this book by Chaitanyamurti Swami, published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith as 'Divine Memories 4'.

Without a doubt, as you dive deeper into his personality, Swamishri will seem more and more special, more and more awe-inspiring.

We have heard of his virtues, we have interrogated him with our own eyes, we have experienced his proximity many times – yet, we haven't even come close to knowing him as he really is. He seems so plain and common. In fact, he's much like a tiger, perfectly camouflaged in the jungles of Bengal. Its yellow and black stripes match absolutely flawlessly with the yellow cane and dark backdrop of the jungle. Imagine, a tiger! Such a powerful and overwhelming creature! But it is so perfectly disguised and concealed, it becomes merged with the jungle. In the same manner, Swamishri has camouflaged himself in our 'jungle'. He accepts the shackles of this world, or so it appears to us. Swamishri has willingly accepted the ways of our world. But in reality, he is detached, far and above.

What role does Swamishri play in our lives? One answer is that he is an expert at diagnosing the aches and pains of our daily life. He knows what to prescribe for which ailment; he also

knows when to prescribe and in what proportion. He constantly delights in the bliss of God; but he also knows how to share with the rest of us. He shows how to make life and all its actions divine. He is a perfect sadhu. He is an ideal guru. Through his own life he has demonstrated the ideals of devotion to one's guru. He is the ideal 'devotee', showing us the subtleties and intricacies of devotion to God, in its purest form. He is the house of God. He shows how to keep God. He is the leader of our Gunatit community – the Satsang fold. He leads us to God. So great and glorious! Yet, so modest and concealed! No wonder we have failed to recognize him. He has camouflaged his identity superbly.

A genuine sadhu is one who has constant rapport with God. He lives within the framework of God's commands and wishes which he follows with utmost faith. His seat, instead of being situated in the snow-capped mountains, is located among the people, where they are most comfortable. His workplace is society and his work is worship. He works faithfully – but always for the good of others, never for himself. He works constantly amongst the people; yet he

firmly maintains the disciplines of celibacy and renunciation of wealth.

When Shriji Maharaj visualized the image of an ideal sadhu, he had had a personality like Swamishri in mind. Such a sadhu is engrossed in devotion and inspires others to do the same. Such a sadhu cleanses us skilfully and imperceptibly. Even in today's rapidly changing age, he produces results by using the traditional tools of love and saintliness. Keeping these facts in mind, we can assert that Swamishri is a genuine Sadhu.

Swamishri's character, virtues and personality are such that the aspirant is assured of *moksha*. Superficially, though, it may seem that Swamishri is not making an effort to liberate us. Because in him, there is no show. No glamour. No hankering to make an impression. No deceit. No claims to high knowledge. No gimmicks. He works only through pure, genuine saintliness. This is his secret.

The basic source of Swamishri's profound bliss is different from ours. He has never turned to what the entire world has turned to for happiness – wealth, women and power. For him, God is the only goal and God is the only means. The profound experience of the bliss of God is so overpowering that it pales into insignificance the enjoyment gained from praise and pleasures.

The lustre of his saintliness is so encompassing in his activities and overall personality that nothing else remains. From all angles, pure, pristine saintliness is all one sees. The guidance of a father, the love of a mother, the warmth of a brother, the aptitude of a leader – many have experienced these aspects as well. But even in these roles, his saintliness shines out. Why does his saintliness surface so spontaneously through each of his virtues? It is because God resides within him in all his glory and brilliance. Where there is God, there is purity, there is piety – saintliness.

Swamishri is a Param Ekantik Sadhu. In Vachanamrut Vartal 3, such a sadhu has been compared with the geothermal fire which burns

even in water, at the bottom of our oceans. The fire is fully submerged in water, yet it remains unaffected by it. Similarly, Swamishri lives in the world, yet he is untouched by its charms. The ease and intrinsic nature of his detachment, in addition to his firmness in abiding by the dictates of God, is also proof of his absorption in God.

This is the Swamishri I have experienced!

Swamishri is forever engrossed in God. Then how can praise and insult ever disturb his inner stability? In fact, his inner calm does not allow any such outer agitation to perturb him. Even outwardly we notice the same calm, peace, stability and bliss.

A true sadhu is the ideal receptacle of God. Wherever Swamishri looks, he sees Maharaj. The same Maharaj who is in Akshardham is present in every atom and particle of creation. And that same Sahajanand resides in every pore of Swamishri, in all his majesty and radiance.

An incident with Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the night before the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony (15 May 1951, Gadhada) changed my life. His age was 29 and mine 16. My life was just beginning – and I met Pramukh Swami Maharaj!

With time I have come to realize how deep and divine Swamishri's personality really was – even so long ago. There was no effort to show off, no effort to glamorize, nothing of that sort. Simple, straightforward, open, and innocent. At that moment, I felt a deep, inner conviction, "Yes! This is what I call a sadhu!"

After reflecting and pondering over that brief encounter I realize the sheer impact of that divine experience. Swamishri had somehow, almost magically, transformed something deep within me.

As a result, I have never mistaken Swamishri to be an ordinary human; I have never experienced *manushyabhav*. My love and devotion for him has grown steadily stronger.

Whenever I look at Swamishri I always recall how he has completely worn down his

own body in serving others. His sacrifice has been matchless. I always seem to feel that we have done absolutely nothing for him in return. Absolutely nothing! I have travelled with him visiting devotees' houses, both in India and abroad. Everyone wants to meet Swamishri. Everyone throws the burden of their problems, complaints and inconveniences on him. All responsibilities are flung onto his shoulders. This means he is forced to endure both physical and mental hardships. So many strange people, thoughtless people as well – they all come to Swamishri. Many come to claim their rights; but none to exercise their duties. If we were to label these hardships, we would call them 'a nuisance.' Responsibilities of handling his own sadhus, as well as his householder devotees. Responsibilities of managing the Sanstha as a whole. Responsibilities of keeping everyone happy and satisfied. Day and night, well or ill, winter or summer – no matter what the situation – he is forced to continue with his busy activities. No holidays! No vacations! Just thinking about the burdens sends a chill down our spine. His ability to manage has never ceased to amaze.

Even though he has, without doubt, worked hard, in his mind he continues to feel that he has done nothing. Once in Sarangpur, during a quiz programme, the sadhus asked Swamishri, "What would you like to become?"

Swamishri replied, without a moment's hesitation, "*Sevak!*"

He has always remained a *sevak* (servant). He has never demanded his rights; instead, he has always acted on his duties and responsibilities. He believes his duty to be his only right and gains enjoyment from fulfilling his responsibilities. For this reason, he has never experienced boredom, laziness, weariness. This is why he has always remained light and tensionless.

What I have described is not an exaggeration; nor is it over-generalisation. What I have written are facts planted firmly on the foundation of



personal experience. Thousands of devotees can bear witness to these same experiences. To my mind, he has toiled so much that in future, incidents narrating the difficulties he has tolerated will be thought of as tales or fables.

So the question is, "What is the driving force which allows Swamishri to live in this manner?" The answers may lie in Swamishri's approach and attitude:

- ◆ He never forgets the sacrifice of the devotees. He always speaks with pride of their commitment and dedication to Satsang
- ◆ He truly believes that he has done nothing. Only his gurus are responsible for whatever success he has achieved
- ◆ He sees God and his gurus in all of his devotees. He serves them as he would serve God and guru
- ◆ He never thinks of spending time for his own self; all his thoughts are devoted for the good of others
- ◆ Most importantly, he wants to give us the bliss of God.

These are his secrets. This is why he remains so free. Otherwise, anyone else in his place would quickly become exhausted or even frustrated. If not that, they would definitely complain. If they still continue working, it would most probably be for some selfish motives.

On the other hand, we can see constant divinity and selflessness in Swamishri. Otherwise

no matter how much you pay a man, no matter what you give him, no matter how much you praise him – give him all he wants – still, no one would be willing to wear Swamishri's shoes. This is the Swamishri I have experienced.

I have experienced that Swamishri is a pure and genuine sadhu.

He has an everlasting and eternal association with God. That is why he is a reservoir of all virtues.

The Swamishri I have experienced is Narayan's *swarup* – the very form of Narayan. His bliss is a matter of experience. It is something to be relished, not merely described, defined or dated.

Swamishri has shared the sublime bliss he experiences with countless devotees, and this has made him even more happy. He has only one wish: To distribute the happiness which he himself enjoys to the rest of the world.

Whatever activity Swamishri undertakes, it is never for himself; instead, he constantly maintains the thought that 'I want to please God.' He offers devotion in this manner, not mechanically. This form of devotion is so powerful that it can even destroy the deadly grip of *maya* and karma. Also, because he understands the unparalleled glory of God, he can maintain a constant thought of being a servant, not a boss.

It is due to the above two thoughts that he is constantly at peace. It is due to these that he continues to please us as well.

He works paying no heed to his body; he speaks with a spirit; he walks freely, without worries; he smiles constantly, lost forever in the bliss of God.

Even when Swamishri retires at night, he seems fresh and lively. Unlike others at the end of a long, tiring day, we have never seen even a sigh of boredom or exhaustion.

Swamishri has a unique virtue in that he can meet people from all walks of life without the slightest hesitation. Whether to a small boy or an old man, rich or poor; no matter which caste or

creed – Swamishri has made himself available to all. Many come to him to offer suggestions and some even aim to criticize. Many even intend to insult! Yet, Swamishri greets their animosity with love. Thousands have experienced his openness and accessibility.

Because Swamishri is a storehouse of serenity, anyone who comes into his contact also experiences serenity. They feel content, having experienced a feeling they have never experienced before. That is why thousands of people throng just to have his darshan.

Our shastras describe Ekantik Bhakti as a wonderful harmony of four fundamental virtues, dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti. Swamishri is a master in the field of Ekantik Bhakti. His pure and balanced form of devotion has inspired thousands to a more devout way of life.

Swamishri engages in the darshan of the *murtis* of God and Harikrishna Maharaj with such love that even onlookers experience peace of mind. It seems that just his method of darshan creates a divine atmosphere. He relishes the moment as a hungry man, starved of food for a week, would enjoy the first morsel of his most favourite item. He has darshan as if he were meeting God face to face. He prays as if God were present in person before him to listen and reply. Of course, in keeping with his honest nature, he never makes a show or pretends to portray devotion. Only natural, inner devotion!

Only the Param Ekantik Sadhu can show us the true and shortest path to liberation. By his association, thousands have been saved from the filth of vices and addictions; so many have been freed from the burning chains of hatred and revenge; countless have been relieved of the constant agonies of family turmoil. In addition to these outer benefits, Swamishri has helped people eradicate their inner enemies – ego, lust, greed, jealousy and others.

Today, young children, youths and even atheists come to Swamishri. They all receive

equal love and gain his friendship. People from all walks of life, of all ages, of all backgrounds, of all levels – all gain boundless inspirations from Swamishri. Swamishri transforms lives – he is the Param Ekantik Sadhu.

In Swamishri's heart, everyone is welcome. Here there is no neglect. There is no criticism or hatred. In Swamishri's mind everyone is important. Swamishri meets thousands of people; still, he doesn't ignore even the smallest child. His manners are modern; but his ideals are traditional – in harmony with the teachings of the ancient Vedas and other Hindu shastras. His powers are infinite; yet his humility is second to none! So far apart are these extremes that he remains an enigma to thousands throughout the world who wonder, "Is such a man of flesh and blood possible in today's frenzied society?"

Despite his towering spiritual status, never does he feel others to be low, useless, immoral or even ordinary. His counsel is always soft, well-mannered and affectionate. Yes, he may need to criticize, but it is always loving and easy to swallow. His voice is always loving, caring, compassionate and blissful. He never misses a chance to praise, appreciate and congratulate. Humility and loving devotion to God are evident in every word he utters and in every action he performs.

Despite being so great, he has always mixed and mingled freely with others. He portrays himself as a fellow traveller, walking alongside us instead of ahead of us.

Swamishri has so much faith in the *murtis* of God and in mandirs that he performs the simplest of acts with absolute devotion. For him, God has ceased to be a mere metaphysical entity and has become a reality – he sees God everywhere and in everything!

Swamishri is a God-realized sadhu. But even if a newcomer doesn't have such knowledge, he will definitely feel Swamishri to be a pure and divine personality. They realize that never before have



they met such a man and never before have they had such an experience!

A young boy from Canada, Sanjay Rameshbhai Patel, had once written me a letter. Due to western influence, he wasn't familiar with our traditions in Satsang. Once, he had gone for darshan of Swamishri's puja. He writes in his letter,

"After studying the scene, I was very surprised. On one side, Swamishri was performing puja. On the other side, people were walking in and out; some people were singing devotional songs; others were talking among themselves... It all seemed like havoc. But Swamishri! He imprinted the *tilak* and *chandlo* on his forehead, closed his eyes and calmly engaged himself in meditation. I was totally dazed. Swamishri meditated with such serenity that it seemed he had forgotten everything around him. Only God and himself! Nothing else! The whole scene seemed so honest and genuine... After this experience, I have begun to do Satsang regularly. I never miss *bal sabha* [children's assembly]. I really enjoy it."

The spiritual journey is extremely intricate, complex and unfamiliar for all of us. Millions throughout the world are striving to make that journey, each taking his own path according to his own knowledge and intuition. Everyone acts according to his own preconceived concepts of what is right and wrong. How many bother to ask if they are on the right path or not? If they do bother, who do they ask? One can see outer riches,

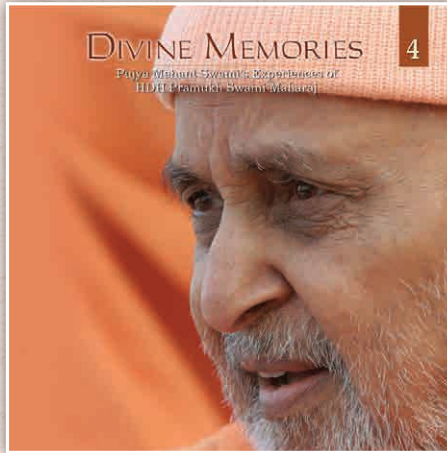
but how does one see if a guru is internally rich? How do we know he is experienced and can guide us properly? Truly, having found and recognized Swamishri, our luck knows no bounds!

Association with a sadhu melts the ego and creates a divine and pious atmosphere. The true sadhu acts like a magnet – attracting people from all walks of life towards his shelter. Invariably, all experience some new inspiration by his contact. He has given thousands the warmth of hope and the will to live a noble life. In doing so, he has never needed to resort to magic or miracles. Actually, the transformations he has made and the values he has instilled are miracles in themselves.

There is a tremendous difference between youths and Swamishri! Swamishri is highly spiritual, youths are highly flamboyant. Swamishri is not educated, youths receive the most modern knowledge in today's schools and universities. Swamishri is old, youths are in the prime of their lives. Swamishri is extremely detached from the world, youths are extremely attached. And yet, he has somehow managed to channel youth energy towards devotion – puja, *seva*, worship, prayers, etc. He has made youths spiritual. He has made youths humble. What else can we call this but a miracle?

This has been my account of Swamishri, as I have seen and experienced him. After having examined him in much detail, we must now examine ourselves. What can I learn from Swami?

Let us look at the principles which are both dear to him and have been imbibed by him; principles which can make our life as pure and pious as his; principles which can enlighten us after having lived countless lives in utter darkness:



- ♦ Work with absolute honesty – with others and with oneself.
- ♦ Work only with the aim to please and attain God – not to fulfil worldly desires.
- ♦ Always fill one's work with the fragrance of *sadhuta* – saintliness.
- ♦ Never waste a single second. Spend time to help others or in devotion to God.
- ♦ Cultivate unflinching faith in God and guru, and always remain humble, honest and sincere towards them.
- ♦ Always believe God to be the all-doer. This way we gain strength to overcome the ups and downs of life.
- ♦ Live a pure life so as not to transgress the commands of God and his holy Sadhu, and one's *upasana*.
- ♦ Draw strength from God, and only God, not from one's own efforts of achievements.

This is enough – enough to begin living a life like Swamishri's.

After saying so much, I still feel I have not said enough. Why? Swamishri is so vast and we are so insignificant! He is an ocean of virtue and we are filled with flaws. After all, to understand him and know him completely isn't child's play. Nonetheless, what we have discussed is enough to help begin to understand him.

Finally, let us pray:

"O Swami! Only you can help us understand you. Please give us the wisdom to see you as you really are. Please take our hands and guide us so that we may, in the end, attain Akshardham and enjoy the bliss of Purushottam." ♦

(Excerpts from *Divine Memories*, Part 4.
This book is available on
baps.store and at BAPS bookstores.)



Mahant Swami Maharaj: Promoting True Nishtha

In the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has revealed the highest philosophical doctrine by which all genuine spiritual aspirants can progress spiritually and attain ultimate liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. This is the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, which, in essence, teaches that one must become *aksharrup* and offer humble devotion to supreme Parabrahma. This is the core principle which Bhagwan Swaminarayan's succession of Gunatit Gurus have reiterated and reinforced by their exemplary lives and teachings. Their practical spiritual guidance to all devotees is based on this principle.

Since becoming the guru of BAPS in 2016, Mahant Swami Maharaj has continued to nourish this tradition. He has resolutely and repeatedly, through his work and words, embedded the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan in the hearts and minds of all devotees. He has ensured that this unique doctrine revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan is recalled regularly by devotees in their daily devotional rituals. To enable this, he has gifted the worldwide BAPS community of devotees with the mantra 'Aksharam aham Purushottam dasosmi', and a revised *arti*,

mahapuja and Sahajanand Namavali that focus entirely on the principle of Akshar-Purushottam revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

In addition, alongside the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj he worships daily, Swamishri has fulfilled Yogiji Maharaj's much cherished wish and consecrated the *murti* of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami.

The darshan of these *murtis* serves as a perpetual reminder to all of the core philosophical principle revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan: one must become *aksharrup* and offer humble devotion to Parabrahma, and that this is achieved by the profound association of a Gunatit Guru, who is the manifest form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on this earth.

The following incidents reveal Mahant Swami Maharaj's deep-rooted faith in the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan and his dedication to teaching it to all, such that it becomes an integral part of their lives.

10 April 2020, Nenpur

Uttamyogi Swami asked, "What have we come here to do?" Swamishri replied, "To worship

God.” And with his right hand gestured as if turning the beads of a *mala*.

“What earns the most grace?”

Swamishri said, “Spreading *nishtha*.”

29 August 2019, Dar-es-Salaam to Kampala

During the flight Kaushikbhai asked, “We serve as per your wish, but what can we do to earn even more blessings? Swamishri said, “Strengthen *nishtha* in others.”

3 November 2019, Rajkot

Swamishri gazed at the *murti* of Shastriji Maharaj sitting in a relaxed pose and said, “See, Shastriji Maharaj is sitting so relaxed because he has consecrated Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.”

Uttamyogi Swami asked, “If he had not consecrated Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj would he not be relaxed?”

“No, that is what he dedicated his entire life for.”

“Are you relaxed? Has what you have manifest on earth for been achieved?”

Swamishri said, “It’s in progress.”

“What is that work?”

“To propagate *nishtha* everywhere.”

20 April 2019, Dubai to Abu Dhabi

En route, an attendant sadhu said, “Yogi Bapa’s vision was to spread satsang throughout the world. Today’s historic Shilanyas Ceremony is part of that. What are your thoughts?”

Swamishri replied, “To strengthen *nishtha* in devotees for Maharaj-Swami... that is the main thing.”

7 April 2019, Sarangpur

After Swamishri’s walk, Vedantpriya Swami asked, “What can we do to quickly overcome our faults?”

Swamishri said, “Aksharam aham, Purushottam dasosmi. Constantly think and research on this mantra. By your association with Bhagwan, *kal*,

karma, *maya* cannot affect you. Just as a snake around Shivji’s neck is protected from a predatory eagle, but when separated from Shivji, the snake perishes. Similarly, if you have *ashro* of Bhagwan, he will protect and liberate you.”

4 October 2019, Nairobi

After lunch, Swamishri said, “Once I went to inspect another’s room. It was disorganized, so, thereafter, I resolved to look only at myself and stop looking at others.”

Atmadrup Swami said, “You used to keep a piece of paper in your puja, which you sometimes read to the sadhus: 1. Revel in the joy of what we have attained – *prapti no vichar*. In comparison, *atmavichar* is insignificant and 2. Keep our clothes and space neat and clean. Do not look at what others do.”

Swamishri nodded, smiled and commented, “Reflecting on one’s *prapti* supercedes everything else... Even *atmavichar*. By realizing what has been attained, everything is included in that.”

20 October 2017, London

Yagnanand Swami introduced Dev Patel of Dallas, USA, to Swamishri “He is a *kishore mandal* regional coordinator. Last year, on his birthday, he told his father, ‘I don’t want anything else, but every month come to two *sabhas*.’ His father agreed. Two days ago was Dev’s birthday. His father wanted to gift him a car. But Dev said instead of a car, let us start *ghar sabha*. And his family agreed.”

Swamishri was pleased to hear about Dev’s passion for satsang, and blessed, “He truly has *nishtha* for satsang. Others would have just taken the gifts.”

4 October 2017, London

At the end of the morning puja assembly, some *balaks* came to garland Swamishri. They asked, “We are going to school, so will you be with us there?” Swamishri replied, “Yes,” and added, “Talk about satsang there.”

1 January 2020, Surat

Uttamyogi Swami asked, “Today is the first day of the New Year. How do you want us to celebrate it?” Swamishri replied, “Strengthen *nishtha*.”

“*Nishtha* in whom?”

“In Maharaj-Swami and the Satpurush.”

“If one has *nishtha* in the manifest Satpurush, what else remains to be done?”

Shaking his head, Swamishri said, “Nothing.”

Another sadhu said, “So the essence of everything is *nishtha* in the manifest (*pragat*).”

Swamishri clarified, “Only if one lives accordingly.”

“How is that done.”

Swamishri answered, “By instantly obeying his wishes.”

31 October 2019, Rajkot

In the evening assembly, Swamishri was requested to write a one-word answer to the question, “What can we do to truly earn your inner blessings?”

Swamishri wrote: “*Nishtha*.”

18 May 2019, Nadiad

In the evening Chhatralaya Din assembly, a youth asked, “How can we become happy in our life as householders?”

Swamishri guided, “Sincerely observe the *niyams* and dharma given by Shriji Maharaj and develop unshakeable *ashro* in Bhagwan.”

6 October 2019, Nairobi

After puja, Swamishri blessed, “If you have firm *nishtha* and sincerely observe *niyams* and dharma, then wherever you are in the world, at all times, Bhagwan is always with you. He never separates from you. And if these two qualities are lacking, then even if you have been with Bhagwan for 30–40 years, nothing is gained.”

10 August 2019, Dar-es-Salaam

Preparing to retire for the night, Swamishri

said, “Without *nishtha* in Bhagwan, one’s ego cannot be eradicated.”

24 July 2019, Atladara

After Swamishri’s evening meal in the Chhatralaya, Paramprem Swami requested Swamishri to write his answer to the question, “What can we do to secure a permanent place in your heart?”

Swamishri wrote: “*Maharaj-Swami ni dradh nishtha ane temne apela niyamo.*”

(Meaning: Firm *nishtha* in Maharaj-Swami and sincere observance of the *niyams* they have given.)

1 August 2018, Godhra

After puja, youths presented a decorative heart to Swamishri and requested him to write something on it

Swamishri wrote: “*Niyamni dradhtha and nishchay rahe to Akshardhamma jay.*”

(Meaning: One who sincerely observes *niyams* and has firm *nishchay* attains Akshardham.)

16 April 2019, Gandhinagar

During the afternoon, post-lunch, assembly, Swamishri said, “The pleasures and pains of this world are temporary and perishable. That is the way of the world. But Maharaj-Swami are permanent. Develop this firm *nishtha*.”

An attendant sadhu asked, “How can we know that we have developed such *nishtha*?”

Swamishri said, “Constant joy within. Regardless of the external situation, that person is at total peace, unflappable, undisturbed. Because he has faith that Maharaj-Swami are the ultimate truth he has no worries. Even the slightest doubt in this causes unrest.”

4 February 2017, Sarangpur

A sadhu asked, “What should we do so that the mind does not overpower us?” Swamishri replied, “Have firm *ashro* in Bhagwan. Unshakeable. Then the mind does not stand a chance.” ♦

Building Bridges



Eklavya seeks guidance from guru Drona's murti

Arjun was invincible. Under the tutelage of Guru Drona he had mastered archery and the divine *astras*. He wielded the Gandiva, the celestial bow, crafted by Brahma that clapped like thunder when fired. To woo Draupadi, he was able to shoot the eye of a fish swivelling above him, while only looking at its reflection in a pool of water on the floor. But, was he the greatest archer in the world?

When Eklavya was young, he had approached Drona and asked him to be his guru, but Drona had refused because, unlike Arjun, Eklavya was no prince. Eklavya was disappointed, but not discouraged. He gathered some mud that Drona had stepped on, and moulded a statue of Drona in his village. Accepting this inanimate statue as his guru, and praying for his blessings, Eklavya began to learn archery on his own. After years of self-training, he became such an exceptional archer that he once silenced a barking dog by shooting at and stuffing its mouth full of arrows, all without injuring it.

When Drona learned of this feat, he praised

Eklavya for his resolve and talent, and Eklavya bowed to him with gratitude and deference. But Drona's awe was quickly overshadowed by fear: What if Eklavya had surpassed Arjun, his favourite student? So, Drona asked Eklavya for his guru *dakshina*, the payment from a student to a guru for his guidance. Eklavya was keen to offer payment to the guru who meant the world to him. Eklavya complied to guru Drona's demand, which subsequently neutralized his threat against Arjun's championship. Eklavya did not have any regrets about his action nor did he harbour any bitterness towards his guru. Eklavya's story is remembered as a shining example of an extreme case of guru bhakti.

Let us try to relate a particular parallel from Eklavya's story in which he was physically separated from his guru. Similarly, countless BAPS devotees in India and abroad are physically separated from *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj. Fortunately, despite the physical separation from a guru, it is still possible for a disciple to build a spiritual bridge with him. In the Swamini Vato, Gunatitanand Swami provides a three-step instruction for constructing this bridge: "Remembering this Sadhu in the mind destroys the sins of the mind; listening to his talks destroys the sins of the ears; and engaging in his darshan destroys the sins of the eyes. Understand his glory in this way" (1.30).

Before every shot, Eklavya remembered his guru. If it found its mark, he thanked his guru for inspiration, and if it missed, he prayed to his guru for perseverance. Eklavya never had his guru to personally guide him, but by repeatedly



Doing darshan of the guru



Listening to the guru's *katha*



Remembering the guru

remembering him, he became an archer as skilful as the privileged Arjun. We all remember Swamishri on the weekends when we go to the mandir, or every morning when we do our puja, but remembering him as often as possible, even during routine activities like driving, will clear our heads, relax our emotions, and destroy “the sins of the mind”. This can be facilitated, for example, by developing the habit of praying to Swamishri before routine activities, or by using his image as a wallpaper for our smartphones and computers. Thus, the first step of building a bridge to Swamishri is simply to remember Swamishri throughout our day.

The second and third steps of building a bridge to Swamishri may seem impossible: admittedly, listening to Swamishri in person and engaging in his darshan is challenging, since he can be in *vicharan* anywhere in the world under the meticulous care of sadhus and doctors. Thankfully, audio recordings, photos and videos of him are easily accessible on the internet, e.g. the BAPS website. This luxury, which did not exist during Eklavya's or Gunatitanand Swami's time, is quite effective at destroying “the sins of

the ears” and “the sins of the eyes.” Of course, it cannot replicate the wonderment and bliss we feel when we are actually with Swamishri – the feeling of *brahmanandam* – but it can certainly help us relive our memories with him, and strengthen our bond with him.

Eklavya realized the importance of having a great guru, even if his presence was only felt through a small *murti*, and he built such strong bonds with his guru that he ultimately gave up his entire livelihood at his guru's command. Using these three practical ways, we can also build a bond just as strong with our guru: by remembering him throughout our day, listening to his recorded talks, and engaging in his photo or video darshan. With these concrete solutions, we can, much like Eklavya, bond with our guru despite being physically apart from him, and eventually become one with him and attain his divine virtues in our life. ♦

Satpurush: The Bridge with God



Connecting with friends, family and peers has become effortless: our ancestors' weeks-long journeys to share the goings-on of their personal lives has been shortened to less than the 10 seconds it takes to unlock a phone, capture an image and send it. We can connect with someone abroad in a matter of seconds, for little cost, at any time. Though man's technology inspires awe, it falls short of connecting us to the one being everyone wants to connect to: God. To reach God, to feel his presence, to befriend him even, there is a spiritual technology that has been written about and embedded within the Hindu shastras: Aksharbrahma.

Shriji Maharaj himself spoke on many occasions of the greatness of Aksharbrahma, Gunatitanand Swami. Shriji Maharaj also pronounced that he himself would reside on this earth amongst devotees for their liberation through such a Param Ekantik Sant.

Today, Mahant Swami Maharaj is the very form of Shriji Maharaj. He is Aksharbrahma, the Param Ekantik Sant in whom Maharaj eternally resides. Through him, by his travels, correspondence, and personal interactions with sadhus and devotees, a friendship with Shriji Maharaj is established and nourished. Moreover, despite possessing innumerable pure, saintly qualities, Swamishri's personality is compassionate and comforting. His saintliness inspires rather than intimidates, strengthens rather than subdues, pacifies rather than pressurize and liberates rather than limit. To befriend such a magnificent Sant may seem impossible. However, his approachable nature attracts even the youngest among us.

In Robbinsville, a *balak* no older than eight years of age ran up to Atmaswarup Swami. Noticing that Atmaswarup Swami spends a lot of time around Swamishri, the *balak* enquired, "Are you Mahant Swami Maharaj's friend?"

Leaning over, Atmaswarup Swami confirmed, “Yes, I am!”

Delighting in the response, the *balak* responded, “Then, you are my friend!” He paused for a second, placing one finger to his chin, “Swami, can you take me near Bapa?”

“Yes, I can! Meet me by this doorway at 6.45 p.m.”

The *balak* skipped away, and thereafter impatiently and repeatedly visited the doorway, awaiting evening. Finally, the evening assembly began, and the *balak* sat by the door. When it was time, Atmaswarup Swami brought the *balak* to the hallway through which Swamishri would be entering the assembly. Upon seeing Swamishri, the *balak* ran towards him and latched onto his legs, giggling joyfully because Swamishri had returned the embrace. Swamishri, too, had an ever-brightening smile.

The joy experienced in Mahant Swami Maharaj’s presence is unlike the pleasure derived from material gain, which is superficial and fleeting. The bliss of sitting near Swamishri, hearing his discourses, and even seeing his interactions with others nourishes a joy not found elsewhere. It is a happiness that penetrates deep within, one that is rejuvenated with each passing second spent in his company. One of Shriji Maharaj’s most prolific *paramhansas* put it best:

“*Kahe Nishkulānand ene sange,*

Uge antare ānand sur...

Sant te swayam Hari...”

Nishkulanand Swami says, “In his company, a melody of bliss arises within the heart. For, the Sant is Shriji Maharaj himself.”

The happiness of being near Mahant Swami Maharaj is the same happiness of being near Shriji Maharaj. This blissful experience is instinctive and innocent – it is not through one’s personal effort that this friendship and joy is maintained, but his grace.

In 1988, devotees had taken Pramukh Swami Maharaj on a day trip to the Catalina Islands, off

the coast of California. On the boat ride back, the swamis were singing *godi* and were enthralled by Swamishri’s swaying to the rhythm. C.M. Kaka, a senior devotee of London, noticed this and tapped Swamishri on the shoulder to enquire, “Swami, what are these swamis staring at?”

Gently, Swamishri leaned over and replied, “They are experiencing the happiness of Akshardham from me.”

“But Swami, I can’t experience it,” C.M. Kaka admitted.

Swamishri unhesitatingly remarked, “C.M., in the *murti* that resides in Akshardham, and the *murti* seated before you now – there is not an iota of difference; they are the same.”

Overjoyed by Swamishri’s unprompted revelation, C.M. Kaka, too, became engrossed in the divinity.

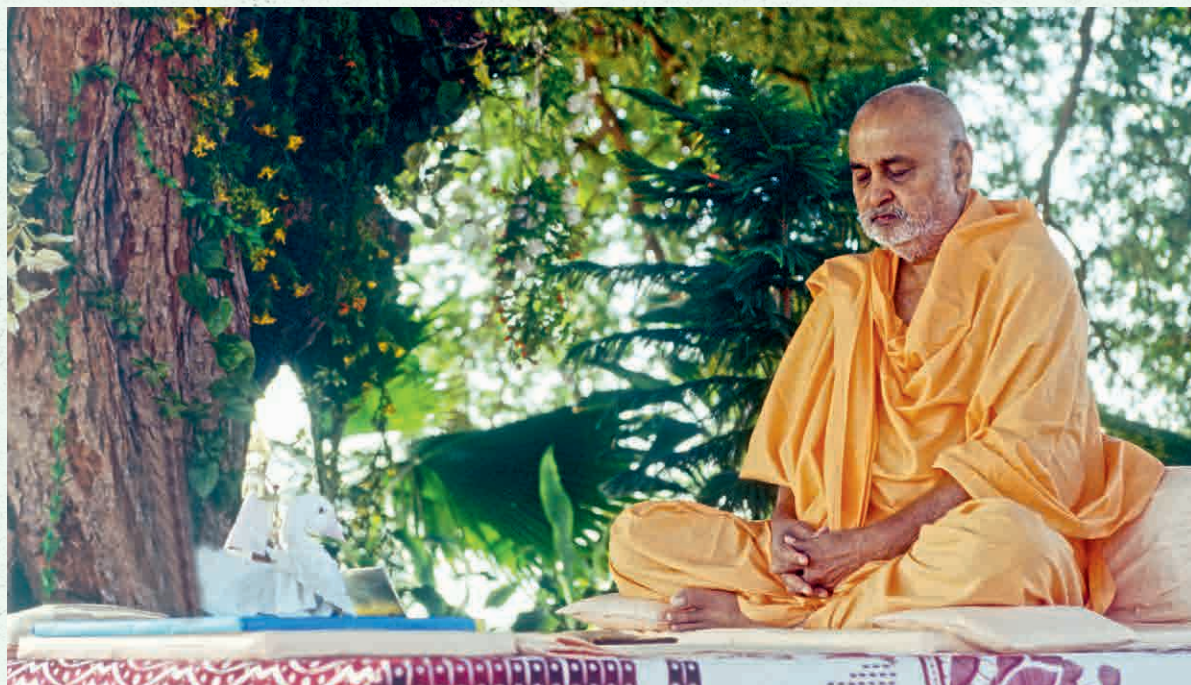
Age, race, class, ethnicity, religious affiliation – none of these social markers have an impact on whether one experiences the pure, other-worldly joy of Shriji Maharaj through the Gunatit Sant.

In 2013, Mahant Swami Maharaj visited Bangalore. Swamishri was seated in a chair atop a decorated stage. While a sadhu was discoursing a slight commotion broke out, and everyone watched as a 5-year-old *balak* dashed across the hall, climbed onto the stage, rushed to Swamishri and sat on his lap. After a few moments laughing and playing, the *balak* rushed to the back of the hall and sat right in front of his mother.

Laughing at what she had just witnessed, the *balak*’s mother asked, “Where did you just sit?”

The *balak* intonated, “Mum! I went and sat on Bhagwan’s lap!”

In this way, Mahant Swami Maharaj is the greatest technology, for he connects us to God. Through his presence, one connects directly to Shriji Maharaj. Writing to him is writing to Shriji Maharaj. Merely remembering him, spending time with him, his smile and gestures, his guidance and talks makes one’s heart brim with euphoria. He is our bridge to God. ♦



Swamishri's Unbreakable Bond with Bhagwan

We have many thousands of thoughts every single day. Because our mind is constantly being pulled in so many directions by our friends, mobile phones and various other worldly distractions, we struggle to even concentrate on one topic for longer than eight seconds. How remarkable is it then that there is someone on this earth who is able to dedicate every moment of his life to a single thought without ever losing focus? Pramukh Swami Maharaj had devoted and Mahant Swami Maharaj is devoting every single breath and every single thought of his life to Bhagwan and his gurus. His bond with Bhagwan is unbreakable, and ultimately unmatched.

On 13 June 1988, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was invited to the Canadian Parliament in recognition for his relentless spiritual and humanitarian work. This was a special occasion

for BAPS. Swamishri and the accompanying sadhus arrived while the parliamentary session was in progress. They were immediately ushered into the VIP gallery. John Fraser, the Speaker of the House, introduced Pramukh Swami Maharaj. “We are very honoured to have a saint like Pramukh Swami Maharaj present with us today,” he announced, motioning towards the VIP gallery.

There was pin-drop silence in the Parliament house. All the diplomats craned their necks to get a look at Pramukh Swami. However, nobody stood up to receive the welcome! Swamishri was instead busy trying to get the attention of his *sevak sant* who was holding Thakorji. Only after the Canadian politicians got proper darshan of Thakorji did Swamishri himself humbly stand up with folded hands.

This is the type of bond that Swamishri had



with Bhagwan. No matter what the situation, his thoughts were constantly directed towards God and tending to him first. Imagine if we were in such a situation, receiving the extremely rare opportunity to be honoured by the most important ministers and diplomats of Canada. Our mind would be racing a million kilometres per hour, concerned more by how we look, what we should be doing, and what we should say when we are welcomed. Swamishri's bridge to Bhagwan, however, was singular and transcended such worldly bounds.

On 22 January 2017, Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived in Sarangpur at approximately 8p.m. He was sick with an infection. Additionally, he had spent over three hours in a car coming from Ahmedabad. He was late for his scheduled dinnertime. The sadhus in Sarangpur advised Mahant Swami Maharaj to eat and go to sleep early so that he could recover properly from his sickness. However, Mahant Swami Maharaj insisted that he could not eat or go to sleep without doing darshan of the *murtis* in Sarangpur.

Reluctantly, the sadhus arranged for a golf cart and took Mahant Swami Maharaj to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir and guru *parampara murtis*. They hoped that he would be satisfied with the darshan and agree to eat afterwards. As soon as Mahant Swami Maharaj got back into the golf cart from the Smruti Mandir, he did not mention anything about eating. He requested that he wanted to have Thakorji's darshan in the main mandir. For quite some time, Mahant Swami Maharaj patiently had darshan at each and every shrine in Sarangpur mandir. Swamishri's bridge with Bhagwan is such that he also does not lose focus in times of physical hardship.

In a world of constant distractions and a fast-paced life, let us learn from Swamishri's life and laser sharp focus on and devotion to Thakorji and his gurus. He has created a connection like nothing on this earth can offer. If we can derive even a drop of inspiration from Swamishri's bridge with Bhagwan in our own lives, we will experience ultimate peace and inner joy. ♦

Means to Happiness and Peace

The following is a translation of a Gujarati article written by Pujya Mahant Swami, which appeared in the Swaminarayan Prakash, April 1985

Shriji Maharaj's *paramhansa*-poet Brahmanand Swami writes, "*Rāj māre din din Diwali re...* – My Lord, every day is Diwali for me..." For an *ekantik* devotee each day is like Diwali (full of divine joy). Why is it that we do not experience such divine joy in spite of having the association of a God-realized Sant?

In Vachanamrut Kariyani 6, on the day of Diwali, Shriji Maharaj talks about pure devotion (bhakti). He describes how he himself got up from his seat and walked towards the female devotee of Div Bandar to accept her gift of new clothes and worship. Though Maharaj had donned very nice clothes on the occasion of Diwali, he happily wore the clothes offered by the female devotee. Thereafter, he declared that due to her many years of sincere devotion he is intensely pleased upon that devotee.

If we introspect we may also find lapses in our devotion. Out of the devotion we offer, 75 per cent of it is to please Bhagwan and Sant and the remaining 25 per cent to please ourselves or others. Subsequently, we never attain the fullest *rajipo* of God because we offer bhakti according to our mind's resolve, out of jealousy, ego, lapse in faith or other reasons. Thus, we do not experience inner fulfilment or that our base instincts (*swabhavs*) are being eradicated.

When we speak about God we do so with the motive to preach and not out of bhakti. The same applies while doing *seva* and other

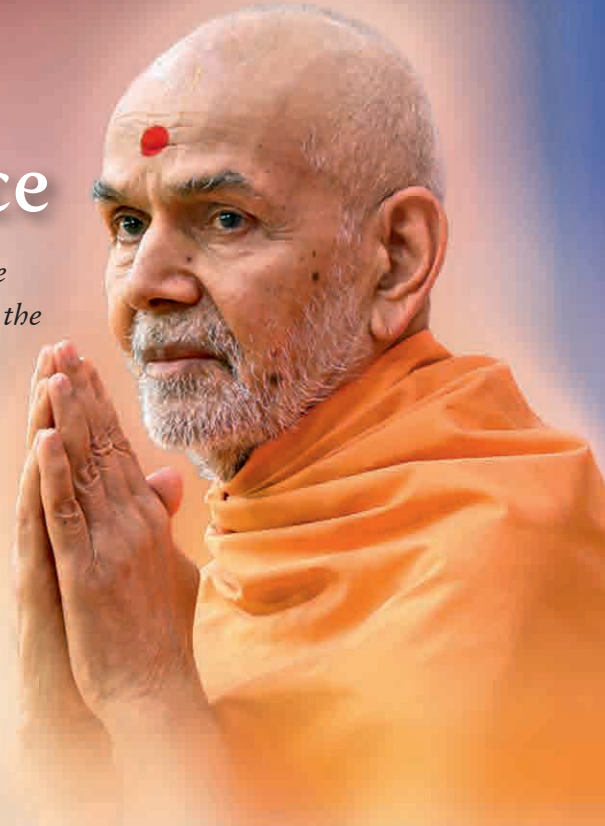
spiritual sadhanas. The devotee of Div Bandar offered bhakti to purely please Maharaj; it was not tainted with worldly feelings.

In our feelings to please God there lies a mixture of other feelings. This means that one may observe *niyams* out of formality or to please others. In addition, one does not offer bhakti without the element of ego.

Jealousy engenders competitive feelings, faithlessness or the thought of downgrading someone. In spite of knowing that we offer bhakti out of self-will we tell ourselves, "Let me do it this time and I will improve the next time." But there is no end to 'next time'!

Out of all our inner faults (*doshes*) envy (*matsar*) is the basis of all the other *doshes*. That is why an envy-free Sant (God-realized) is the upholder of Bhagvat Dharma (Ekantik Dharma).

What is jealousy (*irsha*)? To be unable to bear the progress of a colleague or peer. One who has *matsar* (envy) cannot bear the progress of



anyone, regardless of a person being a peer or not. And one who has *asuya* (a subtler form of jealousy) perceives another's virtue (*gun*) as a fault (*avgun*).

The father of all faults is ego. Shriji Maharaj says that when someone does not praise you, you turn a blind eye to that person's 100 virtues and harp upon his minor fault. One always feels one should be honoured or praised even though one may not be worthy of it. Then what would happen when one is not honoured when one is truly eligible or possesses a few virtues? One would definitely gripe and create a commotion. When someone else is honoured instead of oneself, then again the situation becomes tense or dicey.

On the other hand, when a person who praises you has 100 faults (*avguns*) you ignore them and sing about his single virtue.

All such noble talks and truths were spoken by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, which mostly apply to everyone. Without self-examination one will not be able to understand or accept this. A thinker says, "The deepest craving in human beings is to be appreciated." All our activities have their roots in these words. Ego is the basic cause of world wars.

Anger and jealousy arises when one is not honoured or praised. When Daksh Prajapati arrived in an assembly he was not honoured by Shivji. Everyone else stood up to honour him except Shivji. As a result there was mayhem. Everyone wants honour or praise. Even animals are not exempt from it. Gunatitanand Swami has mentioned that once when a racehorse came second in a race it lost 14 lbs of weight. Such was the effect of losing!

When one is not accorded honour or praise, one becomes jealous. Many times, when someone who is of the same calibre and position as you is promoted, you become jealous. Even though you may not wish anything bad or hurtful for him, yet you experience restlessness and displeasure.

No matter how fine a pair of shoes one wears, but a thorn in one's foot disables one from walking properly and with ease. Similarly, the thorn of jealousy robs one's joy in spite of having 10 million rupees or a good position at work.

Once, there were two officers who each had a monthly wage of ₹1,200. Both their homes were next to each other. Every evening, they would return to their homes, have dinner and visit each other's homes on alternate days. For four years this routine continued smoothly. Both were happy friends and neighbours. However, one day, one of them bought a fridge. When his friend came to know of it he burned with envy. He became sleepless and kept on thinking, "He has five family members, whereas I have only three. We both get the same wages. Yet, how did he manage to buy a fridge?" Soon after, he stopped visiting and speaking to his friend. Though he had not given a single paisa for his friend's fridge, he became restless because of his own jealousy. The strange thing was that other people living in the same colony had posh cars, yet this officer was not jealous of them. If he had not had a close friendship with his neighbouring officer, he would possibly not have been jealous. So, being close to someone leads to such things. In fact, jealousy is more predominant between brothers and other family members. Other than someone else's progress, the progress of one's own brother ignites more jealousy. How can one be happy in such a state of mind? Even one's own wealth and property fail to make one happy in such a state of mind.

Another point is in not being able to tolerate the progress of others. In fact, one desires for that person's loss and downfall. When that person suffers a loss, one becomes very happy. Further, one either causes that person's ruin or instigates someone else to do so. In this way, *matsar* means not being able to tolerate the progress of a peer or a non-peer. Shriji Maharaj says that one who

has *matsar* unnecessarily burns when someone else donates and another accepts.

One who has *asuya* (a subtler form of jealousy) shows and interprets another person's virtues as faults and bears malice towards him. As a further regression to this, a person having *asuya* will display intense abhorrence (*droh*) towards him. When one behaves in this manner, one's body is destroyed or damaged. However, when one behaves in this manner with God or the Satpurush, one's intellect (*buddhi*) and soul (*jiva*) become demonic (*asuri*). Thereafter, such a person is never satisfied with the extent of abhorrence (*droh*) he practices.

Bhagwan and the holy saints say no to harbouring such faults (*doshes*). They are never happy upon someone having these *doshes* and neither do they get along with such a person. Doing bhakti out of ego is said to be demonic. Renounce stubbornness (*bath*), ego (*man*) and jealousy (*irsha*) and develop faith (*shraddha*), eagerness (*khap*) and spiritual association with the Satpurush (*samagam*). God and the guru like a devotee who does bhakti coupled with faith and bereft of jealousy.

When a devotee is honoured someone feels jealous, and when the same devotee is insulted the person rejoices. He again rejoices when anything goes wrong or there is a loss for the devotee.

When a good relationship turns sour jealousy rears its head. Thereafter, one cannot tolerate that person's progress. Formerly, one likes the person's progress, but later one detests it. He starts finding overwhelming faults in him. He contemplates about his ruin. Things like this happen a lot in human society. Even brothers who have been together for years, decline into developing intense hatred for each other when their relations turn bitter. And their hatred continues into future generations.

Once, a person gave up his hatred for someone and he experienced immense peace. That person confessed, "Before I used to be stressed and get

agitated." In this way, there are so many who remain agitated because of jealousy. But one should try to understand and think that the person is being rewarded with the fruits of his past karmas or his hard work. We, too, should try to achieve things through intense effort. After this, one should develop a higher understanding: "Only offering bhakti to God gives one happiness."

Yogi Bapa used to say, "May God do good to all." Others cannot sincerely utter this. In fact, for those whom we are jealous of we feel that they should be taught a lesson. Yogi Bapa never believed or accepted when someone told him that so and so person was jealous of him. Once, someone told Bapa, "A certain person is terribly jealous of you and he cannot bear your progress." But Bapa refused to believe it and responded, "No one is jealous of me." Yogi Bapa could never ever imagine that someone was jealous of him. Thus, how can Yogi Bapa be jealous of anyone?

When someone is jealous of us, we feel self-pity and become miserable and inactive; or we react adversely. Once, there was a Russian officer who was highly patriotic for his country. When someone junior to him was promoted the officer divulged his country's secrets to another country. He thus harmed his own country out of his personal jealousy.

Shriji Maharaj states that within ego lies the element of cruelty. In fact, ego is the root of all the terrible base instincts of pretence, envy, jealousy, anger and others. Even a devotee of God does not like to offer bhakti without satisfying his ego. However, without offering true or pure bhakti one cannot rid oneself of ego.

That is why the manifest form of God or the Satpurush is required in order for one to offer pure, untainted bhakti. I pray that such pure gurubhakti towards Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj develops in all. ♦

Sunrise with Swamishri



Prior to the pandemic-enforced restrictions, devotees descended in droves, before dawn, to wherever Mahant Swami Maharaj was to have darshan of his daily puja.

This was an early morning spiritual tonic that delighted the heart and pacified the mind.

Though the pandemic changed the scenario from actual to virtual, from in-person to online, Swamishri's webcast puja darshan continued to rejuvenate and comfort all devotees.

However, the memories of the in-person darshan are still fresh in our hearts and minds and have not been dampened by the pandemic.

This poem refreshes these memories of the face to face darshan we relished and which we pray will soon be restored.

The darkness of the night prevails
Yet the faithful rise and hit the trail.
Why so early? Why the rush?
Even the Sun is not yet up.

The roads are clear, journey smooth
But the mandir parking is totally full.
What's the reason for this crowd?
Don't you know – Swami's in town!

So now you know, it's puja time
Soon it's six, the clock does chime.
Flocks of the faithful hurry to the hall
Hastily filling every precious inch.

With the sight of the rising Sun
Spreading the rays of morning light,
Swamishri emerges radiant as ever
Triggering widespread inner delight.

Hands folded to greet the faithful,
Who line the route to catch the first glimpse.
Sometimes stopping to tap and bless
Or place a healing hand to resolve distress.

First to Thakorji, the soul of all
Ornately adorned, mesmerizing all.
Absorbed in darshan, peaceful and pious,
Then the booming bells of *arti* toll.

Now to *abhishek*, Swamishri prays for all.
From there it's time to reach the hall,
Where hearts are beating with anticipation
and joy
To spend this sunrise with Swamishri.

As Swamishri enters the hall erupts
With arms raised the hails prevail,
Glory to the Lord, glory to the gurus,
And soon there's quiet as puja begins.

Tilak and *chandlo*, *mansi* and *mala*
Devotees observe and absorb the scene,
Serene, sublime and satisfyingly supreme
Etching the sight into the soul.

From the start, utterings of the heart
A melody of bhajans and medley of *mukhpath*.
As puja proceeds, eyes are transfixed
On the ocean of purity, piety and peace.

Thal is offered, water is blessed
Thakorji departs and the prayers begin.
'Swaminarayan' echoes around the hall
While Swamishri reads the daily codes.

The hush of silence as reading ends.
With folded hands and engaging eyes
Swamishri scans the scene to bless,
Slowly but surely every nook and cranny.

Nine minutes or more
Just Swamishri and you,
What an opportunity
To connect to the guru.

The music stops, puja is over
and then his blessings flow.
Swamishri departs having filled our hearts,
Same again tomorrow, Bapa, we plea
To spend our sunrise with you, Swamishri.





A Profound Spiritual Bond

Part 1

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's care, love and seva for his swamis forged a unique bond of affection and sacrifice...



In 1985, after an evening assembly during the Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami Bicentenary Celebration in Ahmedabad, Swamishri left by car towards his accommodation. The car was moving slowly. Brahmaprakash Swami was engaged in Swamishri's darshan from far. As the car came near to him he placed his hand onto the closed window to greet Swamishri. Then, Swamishri spontaneously responded by placing his hand from the inside onto the closed window. But, in no time, Swamishri started opening the window till both their hands came together in a clasp. Brahmaprakash Swami was overjoyed!

What was the rapport between Swamishri and his swamis like?

It was of oneness!

Just like the Ganga, which descended from the Himalayas to become accessible to all, Swamishri compassionately came down from Akshardham,

the divine abode, to mingle with his swamis and devotees.

* * *

Swamishri never showed that he was the guru of his swami-disciples. He always blended with them by shouldering their responsibilities and resolving their problems on the arduous spiritual path.

Swamishri also showered his selfless love on the swamis. Victor Hugo, the French poet and novelist, said, "The supreme happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved."

For the swamis, Swamishri was more than just a mother, a father or a noble guru. In fact, Swamishri was everything to the swamis.

Swamishri asked a young sadhu, Shukmuni Swami, "Do you want to see God?"

"Yes," Shukmuni Swami replied with eagerness. Swamishri held the young Swami's head

with his hands, gazed into his eyes and said, “Here, see him.” Swamishri’s divine compassion and self-revelation overwhelmed the disciple with joy.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 67, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, “There is a Satpurush who has no affection at all for the pleasures of this world; he harbours desires only for the higher realms, i.e., the abode of God, and for the form of God. He also wishes the same for whoever associates with him. He feels, ‘As this individual has associated with me, it would be of great benefit to the individual if his desires for this world are eradicated and his affection for God is developed.’”

Swamishri desired to elevate everyone who came to him to his divine realm.

* * *

Once, after attending the evening satsang assembly in Mumbai mandir, Swamishri returned to his quarters in a lift. When Swamishri stepped out several disciples started moving slowly, mimicking a train, while singing a children’s song, “*Māri Swaminarayan ni gādi chhuk chhuk karti chāle...*” Swamishri immediately joined the front of the ‘train’ as an engine and marched in rhythmic steps with all. Swamishri effortlessly transformed his sober, sincere composure to suit that delightful childlike play. Just like a child learns more through love than commands, Swamishri similarly led his disciples onto the spiritual path.

Once, in the Mumbai mandir, at late night, Swamishri was on his way to his bed to sleep. Near the bedroom door, Dharmasut Swami was leaning with one hand against the wall. Before he could say something, Swamishri came and stood before



him, mimicking his posture, and asked, “Tell me what you wish to say.” This friendly approach and conversation of Swamishri brought smiles on the faces of the swamis standing there.

* * *

Swamishri’s gentleness, grace and humour enlivened his interactions with the volunteers and swamis and evoked enormous joy. Swamishri was an embodiment of blissful Brahma, a reservoir of joy who continually showered his infinite happiness on all.

* * *

Once, Swamishri told his sadhus, “You have renounced everything for Yogi Bapa, so I want to please you and sacrifice my body for you.” Swamishri’s remarkable quality was that he never proclaimed himself as the guru of all, but behaved as a humble servant and sacrificed everything for all.

* * *

The pilgrimage to ‘Chardham’ in 1987 concluded with the darshan of Lord Badrinarayan in Badrinath. Swamishri was returning to Haridwar by car with a large entourage of sadhus and some devotees travelling behind in ten coaches. The night stay was planned in Shrinagar, but a landslide along the way delayed the schedule. So, Swamishri decided to take a halt at Rudra Prayag because the swamis’ coaches, travelling way behind, would not be able to reach their lodging and boarding facilities in Shrinagar. Though Swamishri was tired due to the day-long journey, he made

all the arrangements in Rudra Prayag for the swamis’ dinner and stay. When the coaches arrived Swamishri enthusiastically welcomed all the swamis and relieved them of their fatigue and hunger. Even at 68 years of age and frail health, Swamishri’s enthusiasm

to greet the swamis was remarkable. Swamishri's care and concern for the swamis resembled God's care, which sustains the world.

* * *

Swamishri's disposition was to always provide comfort to others and never care about his sufferings and discomforts. In 1977, during Swamishri's satsang tour in South India, he once noticed there were no mattresses for the accompanying swamis to sleep on. So, Swamishri asked his attendant to give the mattresses to them from the bedding prepared for him, leaving only a single, thin mattress for him to sleep on.

In 1980, in Nairobi, Narayanmuni Swami and another swami had gone in advance for the preparations of an evening public assembly at the Kenyatta Conference Hall. When the assembly was over, Swamishri called both the swamis and told them to return to their residence and have dinner. Swamishri knew that both of them had come early for the preparations without having dinner, and since it was *ekadashi* on the next day Swamishri had arranged a car to take them to their residence and have the food reserved by him.

* * *

A tired traveller rests under the shade of a tree and then proceeds with renewed energy. Soon after, he forgets the tree and becomes engrossed in his thoughts and work. Similarly, devotees hardly remembered the new lease of energy and joy derived from the shade of Swamishri's care and blessings.

In 1988, during a satsang tour abroad, Swamishri was having a spiritual discussion (*goshthi*) with the swamis in a room. Shortly after, there was a telephone call for Swamishri from India. Since the devotee on the phone wanted to discuss his matter privately Swamishri got up and went to another room. When the talk was over, the swamis told Swamishri, "If you had told us, we would have gone to another room." Swamishri replied, "How could I ask you to go out? You all

swamis are like crowns [i.e., highly respectable]."

Swamishri was old. The swamis were young.

Swamishri was frail. The swamis were physically strong.

Swamishri was the guru. The swamis were his disciples.

Yet, Swamishri got up to give a reply to a devotee's call in another room. Swamishri had limitless awe, respect and care towards his swamis and devotees.

* * *

Swamishri was in Gadhada. Doctor Swami and Narendraprasad Swami went to meet Swamishri in his room. The moment they entered, the lights went off. Swamishri called both the swamis to come near and take their seats. The discussions started. A few minutes later, the electricity returned and the lights turned on. Both the swamis were surprised when they realized that Swamishri had placed his own mattress in the dark for them to sit and he was sitting on the ground!

It is usually observed that until a disciple prepares and arranges a seat for his guru, the guru would not sit. But here, it was the guru who gave up his seat for his disciples.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a guru who considered his disciples before himself.

* * *

In 1983, Swamishri suffered a heart attack. He was immediately taken to the hospital of Dr B.R. Patel in Vadodara. Doctor Swami and Mahant Swami also rushed there to see Swamishri. At that time, Swamishri gave instructions to his attendant sadhus, "Cook mung for Mahant Swami and prepare the bed properly for Doctor Swami."

Swamishri didn't pay attention to his illness, but instead gave instructions to make arrangements for the *sadguru* swamis.

* * *

Swamishri always cared selflessly whenever any swami fell ill.

In Atladara mandir, Chaturbhuji Swami, an



aged sadhu, was on dialysis due to total kidney failure. Chaturbhuj Swami told Swamishri, “Now, I am of no use. I cannot serve. So please stop my dialysis.” Swamishri said, “Your dialysis will continue. I will make more efforts for your expenses.” Subsequently, the dialysis was continued for one year.

In 1982, Yogmuni Swami, a young sadhu residing in Sarangpur, suffered a leg injury and it had become septic. He was being treated and advised to take bed rest for a month. Meanwhile, as Swamishri was not well he was also taking rest in Sarangpur mandir. Every day, Swamishri would go to meet Yogmuni Swami in the morning as well as in the evening. Swamishri would bless him by placing his hands on his leg and enquire about his well-being.

* * *

Swamishri would invariably meet the sick swamis and bless them by placing his hand on their head and body. As a result of his divine touch the ailing swamis would feel greatly relieved and happy.

In 1987, during Swamishri’s pilgrimage to Uttarakhand, while bathing in the holy River Ganga near Lakshman Jhula, Mahant Swami told all the saints to pray for Swamishri’s good health. Immediately Swamishri added, “Not for

me alone, but also pray for the good health of Mahant Swami, Doctor Swami, Ishwar Swami, Viveksagar Swami and all.”

* * *

In 1984, Balmukund Swami, the mahant of Gondal mandir, was operated for a kidney stone in Rajkot. However, due to some reasons, his condition became serious. Swamishri instantly called him to Mumbai and instructed Dr Kiran Doshi to make all the arrangements for his treatment. When the ambulance arrived outside the mandir in Dadar, Swamishri came and applied a *chandlo* on Balmukund Swami’s forehead, held Thakorji before him for darshan and said, “Now that you have done Thakorji’s darshan you will get well. You can now go to the hospital. Maharaj will protect you.” Swamishri daily went to the hospital to see and inquire about Balmukund Swami’s health. Once he was discharged from the hospital and returned to the mandir Swamishri visited him daily.

* * *

Sant Swami was initiated as a sadhu by Shastriji Maharaj. He was the mahant of Sarangpur mandir, and was replete with spiritual knowledge and austerities. As a senior sadhu he was respected by all. Swamishri’s respect and love for him even after becoming the guru was always special.

Whenever Swamishri met Sant Swami, Swamishri would prostrate to him and at the same time Sant Swami would also prostrate to Swamishri. Such delightful occasions became firmly etched in the minds of those who witnessed them. For Sant Swami's good health, Swamishri happily provided things to him which were in fact meant for himself. In 1985, when Sant Swami was not well, Swamishri called him to Mumbai for treatment. Swamishri would go to see him every day in his room at the Dadar mandir. Once, Swamishri mistakenly reached his own room on the uppermost floor, but on realizing it he immediately returned to the lower floor to meet Sant Swami.

* * *

The swamis initiated by Shastriji Maharaj or Yogiji Maharaj had never experienced the absence of their gurus in the affectionate presence and care of Swamishri. They perceived and experienced Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj in Swamishri. Sant Swami often shared, "Both Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj are manifest in Swamishri." Balmukund Swami once spontaneously exclaimed, "The same affectionate care of Yogi Bapa is experienced in Swami Bapa."

Mahant Swami revealed, "After Yogi Bapa departed to Akshardham, I felt that everything was over – all over! But then one failed to notice how Pramukh Swami gradually took the Satsang forward. I became engaged in him. My bond with Yogiji Maharaj was that of guru-*shishya*; however, today, though Pramukh Swami doesn't behave as a guru with me his love for me is exactly the same as that of Yogi Bapa's."

* * *

No differences in rank ever stemmed between the swamis initiated by Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj or Pramukh Swami Maharaj. All were united in the presence of Swamishri because their guru was one and common to all.

In Vidyanagar, the youths expressed before

Swamishri that he should be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

"What do you feel about this?" Suresh, a youth, asked Swamishri.

"For me, having such swamis is itself the 'Nobel'. What is worth more than that? Having all of these swamis and disciples is equivalent to getting the Nobel!"

The Nobel Prize is considered to be one of the highest awards in the world and it's prestige is more valuable than its prize money. However, Swamishri believed that he had already been rewarded with the Nobel Prize – the swamis!

For Swamishri the swamis were everything, and for the swamis Swamishri was everything.

* * *

Swamishri arrived for darshan at the Nadiad mandir. He was about to bend down to offer prostrations to the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Since the floor was cold due to winter, Sarvamangal Swami spread his own woollen shawl on the ground for Swamishri to prostrate on. Swamishri remained standing and said, "You've spread your woollen shawl but you are exposed to the cold. How can a *sant* be kept uncovered? Take my upper cloth." Saying this, Swamishri unfolded half of his upper cloth and covered Sarvamangal Swami.

Such was the warmth of Swamishri's love.

* * *

In Sarangpur, the swamis asked Swamishri, "What are your expectations from us?"

Swamishri replied, "I don't expect you to personally serve me, but I wish that you all remain united and do satsang."

In addition, Swamishri's heart always echoed, "All these swamis have dedicated their lives at the resolve of Yogi Bapa, thus how can I please them!"

* * *

After Swamishri had a heart attack in 1983, Swamishri's health became weak and fragile. While examining him in Sarangpur, Dr Bharatbhai said, "You should not do prostrations. Tell the



swamis or devotees to do them on your behalf.” Swamishri immediately said in an emotional voice, “When I was sick, the swamis and devotees did a lot of service for me; even though I wish, I won’t be able to repay that debt.”

* * *

Swamishri never ever felt that he was doing a favour to his swamis by nurturing them spiritually and making arrangements for their lodging, boarding and studies. On the contrary, he felt he was not doing enough serve and praise the services rendered by his swamis.

In 1981, a special assembly to honour and appreciate the volunteers who had served in the Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan was held at the Premabhai Hall in Ahmedabad. The assembly climaxed with Swamishri’s blessings, “What can I give to you swamis and youth volunteers who have served in this festival? It would be insufficient even if I offered tens of millions of prostrations to you all. All that has happened was due to the able support of the swamis and volunteers. This festival was a success because of the profound ideas of Mahant Swami, Doctor Swami, Ishwar Swami. I simply moved around in a car and was adorning chairs [in the assembly].”

* * *

Once, in a *sant shibir* in Gondal, Swamishri thanked all the swamis and said, “Since you all love me you give me all the credit. In fact, that credit is yours. I am merely an instrument. A lion thrives in the forest and a forest thrives due to a lion. The beauty of a peacock and its feathers are interdependent. Similarly, if you all were not together with me, nothing could have been accomplished.”

* * *

In 1987, a severe famine struck Saurashtra. BAPS undertook many relief works, such as distributing grains, clothes and buttermilk, organizing cattle camps and other services. Among them all, the management of cattle camps by BAPS was considered to be the best in Gujarat. Sarvamangal Swami praised Swamishri, “Bapa, your heart indeed is as large and generous as an ocean. If anyone dares to manage what you are doing, he will fail miserably.” Swamishri responded, “This has been possible not because of me, but due to the generous efforts of all you swamis.” ◆

Gujarati text from *Brahmopanishad*:
Sadhu Jnaneshwardas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas
(To be continued in the next issue.)



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.

One of the most amazing things that I have learnt from you is how even the most mundane things in life can be done in an extraordinary manner. No matter how stressful things get, you have always handled everything with love and care. Despite our outstanding capabilities, your belief in Bhagwan Swaminarayan as the sole universal force is incredibly inspiring. You have always attributed all events in this universe to God.

- Chandni Gokani, 28, Senior Data Scientist, Watford, UK

I came into satsang in 2007, when I came to the UK after my marriage.

I started coming to the mandir as family were coming, but never knew why I was coming or what is the purpose of life.

Then, when Bapa came, I went to do his darshan. I still remember that moment when Bapa's eyes told me, "I am here for you..." Just that one moment and that divine experience is still with me. Since then, in my life, Bapa has been at the forefront for me. I have never needed to ask for anything; he has given me everything.

I am in his debt for ever... I am so very thankful for everything in my life.

- Ekta Depala, London, UK

You have been such an inspiration to me over the years, and I know that you will continue to be one as I grow older. You encourage me to make the right choices every single day and do exceptionally well in my studies. It is because of you that I know what I am doing, and thank you for always being there for me.

For without you I would have fallen prey to the clutches of *maya*, and without you the ignorance of the world would have captured me.

- Anya Patel

I still remember the time you graced our home in Eldoret, Kenya, in 1980. You had lunch and blessed us all. In 1981, you gave us *agna* to come to the UK. You kindly gave us the opportunity of *seva* and be part of building this grand London mandir. I have such fond memories of it. Every time you came, you gave us so much love, how can I ever forget; I am forever indebted to you.

You held my hand in life's journey – studies, work and marriage. You were always there for me in my ups and downs. Through your life you have taught me so much. I pray that I am able to follow your *agna* till the very end and gain your *rajipo*.

Please help me to realize the full extent of your *pragat swarup* Mahant Swami Maharaj and have *dradh priti* in him. Please may I remain your humble servant till the very end.

- Jasmin Shah, 53, IT Trainer, London, UK

One of your many, many qualities that I admire and try and imbibe is that no matter what the task is you can do it. Many people specialize in one thing, whereas you were proficient at everything, from building mandirs to giving advice to people like me.

As time passes people start to forget the people that once existed, but for you it's the opposite. Every day, we realize more and more what you have done for this world.

Thank you Bapa for all that you have done for me. It's something that will always stay with me and something that I will never be able to forget.

- Nisarg Brahmhatt, 16, Student, London, UK

Your teachings are a way for us to uphold our Hindu culture in the everyday chaos of the Western world. They are a way for us to stay attached to our religion as well as helping us to stay away from *kusang*. Your life has been so meaningful for me as it has taught me not to let a single minute of the day go to waste. You have also taught me the importance of tolerance and forgiveness. They are the two things that will help me get further, by not bringing down others but by helping them to get more out of life.

- Nishal Patel, Leicester, UK

Bapa your ego-less persona and your soft, kind and ever-warm nature have struck me close to heart. Your non-judgmental perspective and love for all, have inspired me and I am yet to find a person who shows this quality more than you. It was this that drew me closer to you and this satsang. Bapa, I pray that I am able to imbibe your life-long motto 'In the joy of others lies our own' in my own life.

I wasn't able to meet you in person when you were present on earth, but I felt I was holding your hand when I held Mahant Swami Maharaj's. I said this to Mahant Swami Maharaj at that moment, but I felt you too could hear me through him. Please never let go of my hand.

- Dhairya Goverdhan, 17, London, UK

This is my first letter to you, but I know my grandfather wrote to you on many occasions. The responses you provided gave the family such conviction in Maharaj that the faith and conviction live on in the family even now.

One of my favourite memories is probably the last Diwali you were in the UK. You came out into the haveli at the end of the evening and walked around. It felt like you came out just for us who were there and may have missed out on other darshan. I'm sure there were other reasons, but to me it felt like it was just for me.

- Dhara Parmar

The values you have taught me since the day I was born into satsang are still within me today. Knowing your principles and life teachings has always given me the courage to firmly walk in your footsteps by following your *agna*. You gave immense *labh* when I was a *balika* during your various visits to Leicester and London, but I was unable to understand your true and divine glory.

No matter how much I do or give, it will not be enough to repay what you have given and done for me. I pray to the holiest feet of Param Pujya Mahant Swami that may I become an ideal *yuvati* that you would like me to become.

- Jalpa Parekh, 29, Pharmacist, Leicester, UK

You've helped me through school, you patted me on my head when I did puja while you walked in the haveli, you listened as I spoke the story of Vajiba, you heard me sing with other *balaks* and gave me *magas*, you touched my hands as I met you in *mulakat*, and gave me a small bouquet of flowers for doing well in the satsang exams. I gave you nothing, and you gave me diamonds in the form of your *rajipo*. I know I don't appreciate your *prapti*, but I know I have you with me, forever. I don't know where I'd be if you weren't in my life. I'm positive that I definitely would not have believed in God were it not for you. Your life, words and love gave me faith.

- Kirtan Patel, 26, Student, London, UK

I am from Nepal. When I came to the UK, I did not know about satsang. I had no idea about Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Pragat Satpurush. I went to Ashton Mandir and, bit by bit, I started to learn about Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Guru Parampara.

Bapa, you accepted me in satsang. This is the biggest achievement in my life. I am very lucky that I am a *satsangi* now. Now I am learning about the *mahima* of guru and devotees. All this became possible due to you, Bapa.

I used to eat anything, including onions and garlic. I learnt what to eat and what not. You made it so easy to give up those foods which are forbidden.

This is just like a puzzle. There are no words to describe how fortunate I am.

- Urmila Nakarmi Harrison, Hyde, Cheshire, UK

I am never ever alone – you are always there. I feel you every day and everywhere. I close my eyes and throughout my inner space, you are there, filling every molecule. Sitting in my heart and mind – guiding and tapping my shoulder, making sure I take the right road. Even in challenging times – you mentally whisper, look, nudge, smile and hug me. Nothing then seems a challenge.

In 2000, you helped me to become the first Asian woman magistrate in my area. You conveyed that I take the oath on the Vachanamrut – I did. And every court session since, I put my hand on the Vachanamrut and then you, Swami, come with me.

- Dipana Patel, 53, Magistrate, Wellingborough, UK

I am very thankful to Bapa because we are into satsang today just because of him. My father quit all his bad habits of drinking and eating meat after starting the *sabha*.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has inspired me to also be positive and also to do my daily puja.

I had darshan of Bapa in Sarangpur. It was total bliss for me and I always remember him in my *mansi* puja.

- Dhruti P. Patel, 23, Computer Engineer, Louis Trichardt, South Africa

Your promise of “I will always be with you” brings peace and calm no matter what the situation might be. You have been my shield and knight in shining armour through each and every battle; I wish to dedicate this life of mine to you, only wanting your immense *rajipo* through and through.

- Anon

When I see your *murti*, all my problems go away, and I feel peace at heart. In times of need, in times of problems, in times of uncertainty, you were my friend who looked after me every step of the way. I get emotional when I see your *murti*. Thank you for coming in my dreams.

- Vaibhavi Sheth, 22, University Student, Pardi, India

I am forever grateful to you for allowing me to be part of this satsang family. There are countless times where I have wondered where I would be if it were not for you and this beautiful mandir that you have gifted us.

You give me strength when I need it the most and have shown me that there is no other place for ultimate peace and happiness than by your feet. Your ability to give comfort to those in the darkest times is something that I have experienced first hand and I know that I am safe in your hands.

- Roshni Soneji, 33, Chartered Accountant, London, 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.

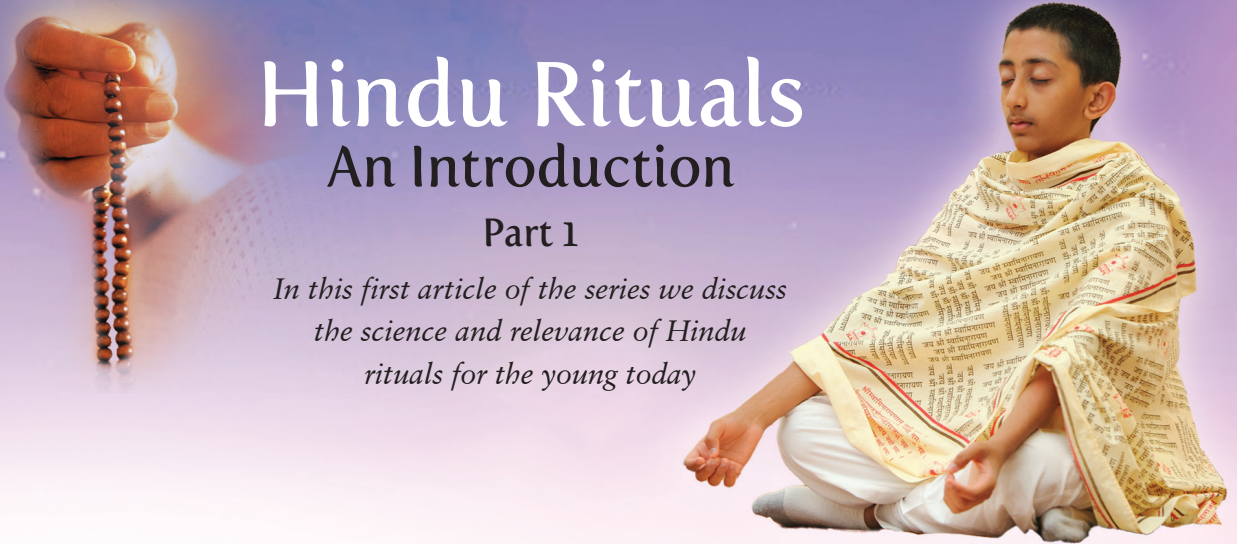
Please include your name, age, city and country of residence, occupation/study and mobile number.

Hindu Rituals

An Introduction

Part 1

*In this first article of the series we discuss
the science and relevance of Hindu
rituals for the young today*



INTRODUCTION

The ancient rishis advocated rituals to elevate man to a higher realm, ultimately leading to Paramatma.

Rituals have existed in all cultures and religions since antiquity. They serve several purposes. Anthropologists contend that rituals in animals and humans reduce acts of aggression between group members. They create and strengthen the social unity of the group. The aspects of repetition and rhythm of rituals, such as the daily marching of soldiers and group singing, help an individual to identify with the group.

In recent decades medical researchers have discovered many physical, mental and spiritual benefits of religious rituals such as chanting mantras, prayer and meditation. In the early 1970s, Dr Herbert Benson, a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, demonstrated that by breathing slowly and repeating a word or phrase such as God, OM or peace, reduced stress and tension throughout the body. He named his technique 'The Relaxation Response'.

For Hindus, if a meaningful Sanskrit aphorism or mantra is chanted, this induces an even more powerful effect on the body and mind. Researchers at the Vivekanand Kendra Yoga

Research foundation in Bengaluru have noted that mentally chanting 'OM' resulted in 'a statistically significant reduction in heart rate', with increased mental alertness, suggestive of psycho-physiological relaxation. In comparison, the control, which involved chanting the non-meaningful word 'one', had the opposite effect.¹

From this effect with just a simple mantra, we may presume that more meaningful and longer mantras, aphorisms and lyrics will have similar or even more pronounced effects on the *atma*. In his book, 'Why God Won't Go Away', neuroscientist Dr Andrew Newberg states that rituals such as prayer and chanting connect people to God and they experience great energy. He further believes that religious rituals turn spiritual stories into spiritual experiences, and that belief turns to something one can feel. He writes, "By giving us a visceral taste of God's presence, rituals provide us with satisfying proof that the spiritual assurances are real"² (2001: 90–91). A delightful example of such a Hindu ritual which induces an intensely transcendent effect on people, including non-Hindu observers, is the *arti*. This involves the waving of lighted *diyas* before the deities to honour and welcome them by singing lyrical sentiments, accompanied by

drumbeating, clapping, striking a *jhalar*, ringing a bell or *ghantadi*, blowing a *shankh* and fragrant incense wafting from the *garbhagruha*. This multi-sensorial ritual affects the brain producing an intensely joyous and ineffable feeling. Newberg describes this effect as ‘religious awe’, which triggers neurotransmitters in the brain. Hence, by altering the neurochemistry of the brain, spiritual practices bestow a sense of peace, happiness and security, while decreasing symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress”³ (2009: 56). The above findings of modern science amply corroborate the wisdom of our ancient rishiscientists who enjoined religious rituals for the smooth functioning of society while simultaneously boosting man’s ascent to the Divine. Dr Newberg concludes, “The more we engage in spiritual practices, the more control we gain over our body, mind and fate... If you removed the rituals, you might be left with little more than an intellectual understanding of God”³(2009: 63, 44).

RELEVANCE OF HINDU RITUALS FOR THE YOUNG

Hindu children and teenagers studying in large cities in India and those living abroad are sometimes questioned by peers and even teachers about many aspects of their religious practices. The best way to deal with this is to cultivate a strong cultural identity by imbibing dharmic *sanskars*. Another problem, that has emerged in the past decade or so, is children’s easy access to electronic media with unethical and immoral influences streaming in round the clock. For Hindu parents this presents a critical problem of nurture. For many parents the past 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic witnessed children glued to electronic entertainment, since they were housebound. This resulted in the decline of *vivek* – discrimination of what to watch and play, what was to be avoided – and much time wasted daily. Many BAPS followers took advantage of

the weekly online programmes and activities for children on kids.baps.org and wholeheartedly praised the website volunteers.

To return to the advantages of practising Hindu rituals. They inspire order and discipline in children’s lives. A disciplined life leads to personal self-control. Lack of discipline impairs children’s development. Rituals *sanskarise* – elevate – their lives. They empower children to overcome frustration, confusion, exam stress, anger, unruliness, selfishness, an inferiority complex and procrastination. Many rituals, such as *dhyana* or meditation, mantra chanting and prayers, boost concentration and memory and instil *atmic* strength. A burning problem leads to a macabre spectre, to the extent that the social media and other similar time-robbers throttle children, poisoning their minds with immorality and violence. To avoid such loss of character and cultural degradation Hindu rituals offer the most pertinent antidote. Pramukh Swami Maharaj often warned that if we forget our lofty past (*sanskars*) then we shall destroy our future.

We shall discuss how rituals help combat the aforementioned undesirable influences in future articles.

Hindu rituals are a treasure trove of dharmic *sanskars*. As such, parents should inspire children to practise daily rituals by first practising the rituals themselves. A Gujarati saying teaches, “If there is water in the well then it will pour into the trough.” Also, they will need to know the underlying meanings and sentiments. As children grow older they will ask searching questions. Children who are not aware of the meanings of Hindu rituals may be unable to answer questions posed by peers or teachers. A Hindu girl in England recalled that when she was in primary school the other ethnics had detailed answers about their religion. Since her mother had considered Hinduism as old-fashioned she remained ignorant, which meant she had no understanding of her own identity. Later, by

her own efforts she began to read and discover Hindu principles and practices. She described the amazing result, “People around me began to respect my presence as a Hindu.”

In their book *Hindu Children in Britain*, the British sociologists Jackson and Nesbitt noted the beneficial experiences of young Hindus who recited Hindu mantras. A young girl who learnt and recited the Gayatri mantra every morning with her grandmother felt “happier in the knowledge that God will help her”. Another girl divulged, “When I’m in trouble I say the Gayatri and I have good luck!” The sociologists further noted that, in contrast, when a boy was asked to describe the ‘rakhdi’, he said it was a sort of string, rope or bobble. Another boy regarded the water squirter used during ‘Holi’ as a ‘bike pump’ and named Shiv in his home shrine as ‘OM’⁴ (1993: 86, 97).

Hence, in order to educate and ‘sanskarise’ children, parents should inspire them to sincerely practice common Hindu rituals, such as *puja*, *mala*, *prarthana*, *arti*, *dandvat pranams*, *mansi*, *dhyan*, *dan*, *pradakshina*, chanting mantras and Sanskrit *shlokas*, and singing bhajans and doing *seva* at home and in the local mandir. A good opportunity to inform children about these rituals, festival rituals and inspiring stories from sacred texts, is during the evening *ghar sabha* – a home assembly – with all family members. Pramukh Swami Maharaj introduced this unique ritual in the late 1970s for BAPS followers. He regarded it as ‘*sab dardo ki ek dawa*’ – a panacea for all problems. Today, Mahant Swami Maharaj also advocates it and has immortalized it as an injunction in the Satsang Diksha (*shloka* 86).

Researchers who discovered the benefits



of mantra chanting and meditation, such as lowering of the heart rate, advocated twenty-minute meditation once daily for health benefits.

Initially there may be many fluctuations. Yet children should be inspired to persist. Positive results will induce greater enthusiasm and diligence. This process can be repeated for *mansi*

puja and *pranayama*.

In the next article we shall discuss mandir rituals.

(For details of Hindu rituals, refer to the author’s books: *Hindu Rites & Rituals: Sentiments, Sacraments and Symbols*. *Hindu Festivals: Origins, Sentiments & Rituals* (2010). *Murti Puja and Bal Samskaras – A Handbook for Parents* (2016). Published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith. Available on baps.store and at BAPS bookstores.)

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1. Telles, S., *et.al.* Autonomic Changes while mentally repeating two syllables – one meaningful and the other neutral. *Indian Journal of Physiology & Pharmacology*. 1998: 4(1): 57–63.
2. Newberg, A., E. D’Aquili (2001). *Why God Won’t Go Away*. New York: Ballantine.
3. Newberg, A., M.R. Waldman (2009). *How God Changes Your Brain*. New York: Ballantine.
4. Jackson, Nesbitt (1992). *Hindu Children in Great Britain*. England: Trentham Books Ltd.





The Company We Keep

After a long day in his workshop, Lalji only wanted to spend time with his friend. Every evening, he would walk for more than an hour to a Shiv mandir. There, he would meet his friend Mulji and they would talk all night about their daily struggles, their hopes and dreams, the nature of the world and their deep desire to attain God. It was a friendship based on mutual growth and support.

Many years passed. As Mulji and Lalji grew, so did their shared life goals and conviction. When they met Shriji Maharaj, their inner yearnings bore fruit and they both renounced the world. Mulji Sharma became Gunatitanand Swami and Lalji Suthar became Nishkulanand Swami. And so their friendship continued.

Perhaps Gunatitanand Swami was reflecting on this friendship when he said, “Two people with the same inclination are equal to thousands and hundreds of thousands. Without this, know that even if we are thousands and hundreds of thousands, we are alone” (Swamini Vato: 1.334).

In our quest to succeed in our school, career,

families, and satsang, we must surround ourselves with friends who share our inclination. It is through this power that we can do the work of hundreds of thousands. Like Lalji, we need a Mulji in our lives.

Each conversation and interaction shapes us subtly to determine the destiny of our lives. It is said, “*Sang evo rang*” – You are the company you keep. Scientists and thinkers in the Western world say, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.”

This translates into real world differences. In a study of 147 students in high school, researchers tried to understand the impact our social circle has on our grades. They discovered a very interesting trend: if your friends have higher grades, you will work harder to raise your grades as well. On the other hand, they also found that if your friends have lower grades, your grades will start to decline as well.¹

Similarly, researchers at Harvard wanted to understand the impact of friends on our health and lives. They tracked a group of people over

1. Blansky D, Kavanaugh C, Boothroyd C, Benson B, Gallagher J, Endress J, Sayama H. Spread of academic success in a high school social network. *PLoS One*. 2013;8(2):e55944

three decades and found that having even one obese friend shoots up our own risk of becoming overweight by more than 50%! This means a lower life expectancy, higher chances of heart disease, diabetes and other chronic diseases.²

One would think that genetics or family history would matter more when it comes to obesity. Or that our grades are determined by the schools we go to, the tutors and teachers we have and our past performance. Yet, this research shows us that it is our friends that make a deeper impact in our lives. Their negative habits, attitudes and results start seeping into our life if we aren't vigilant of their impact on us.

The research above proves Gunatitanand Swami's words about how deeply the wrong company can affect us. Our friends change us more than we think, and they influence not only our academics, career and health, but also our relationships and spirituality.

Shriji Maharaj understands the tremendous impact our friends can have in our lives. He warns us to stay away from those who take us away from our *niyams* and *upasana*.

We must become conscious of the impact our friends make in our lives: in our studies, careers, relationship and spirituality. We must ask ourselves if their impact on our lives is positive or negative.

This line of questioning isn't meant to add a clinical detachment to our friendships. It means to pursue these relationships with intent. It isn't meant to remove the joy we get from friends, but rather to make us understand what sort of person we are becoming when surrounding ourselves with others.

Conscious friendships happen when we choose to share our values with others openly and with courage. We have to be determined in following our *niyams* and our life goals. This may seem difficult at first, because we do not want to appear 'weird' in front of others. But most

often, our fears are misguided. People are more accepting than we think. This was the experience of a *yuvak* from USA who chose to make friends with intent and purpose.

Nisarg from Chicago had recently joined satsang and decided to do the *tilak-chandlo* to college. He was nervous about how his friends would react. He decided the best place to announce this decision would be on Facebook. He wrote a post and tagged all his friends explaining that he was making a change in his life and he needed their support. Privately, he felt that many of his friends would stop associating with him. He prayed, posted the message and hoped for the best.

Over the next few days, instead of receiving criticism, he received an overwhelming amount of support and praise. His friends became very curious about how this change came about in his life. So, Nisarg decided to invite all his friends, Indian and non-Indian, to his birthday party – at the mandir.

He gave them a tour of the mandir and exhibition, explaining to them the roots of our culture. He even had a cake-cutting ceremony and dinner in the haveli. Throughout this entire process, he was surprised that he was met with curiosity and openness. He created lasting friendships by expressing his values openly and surrounding himself with positive people cheering his success. At graduation, Nisarg proudly wore the *tilak-chandlo* as he gave the class graduation speech about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life motto 'In the Joy of Others' and how it had transformed his life.

His story teaches us to lead with our values courageously. On the other hand, we may have tried to explain our goals and beliefs but may have been met with a discouraging response. Perhaps our peers ridiculed us, or downright guilted or shamed us. Since we now understand

(Cont. on p. 66)

2. Christakis NA, Fowler JH. The spread of obesity in a large social network over 32 years. N Engl J Med. 2007 Jul 26;357(4):370-9.

INSPIRATIONS

*A potpourri of inspiring and interesting
information and wisdom*

WHO IS YOUR FALLBACK?



Fallback means having an alternative plan in an emergency.

People help you the way they know how to help you. Their personal backgrounds, experiences, perceptions and lifestyles are varied and different. Let us consider some examples to help understand the idea of fallback clearly.

To help you to come out of stress, one friend will ask you to drink and another will ask you to meditate.

To overcome hurt, one friend will ask you to take revenge and get even, and another will ask you to forgive and move ahead with your life. Who your fallback is makes all the difference.

Duryodhan's predicament in his own words, "I know what dharma is, but I am not able to follow it. I know what *adharma* is, but I cannot give it up." His fallback was his uncle Shakuni, who was cunning and evil, and subsequently Duryodhan regressed from bad to worse.

Arjun's problem was different. He was overwhelmed by his personal emotions, which overshadowed his sense of duty. Subsequently, he wanted to escape from his responsibility of abiding by his dharma. His fallback was Krishna, and thus, Arjun was restored to his greatness.

Dada Khachar faced many adversities, but with Bhagwan Swaminarayan as his fallback he remained unscathed and became a great devotee.

We are humans and at some point we all need a fallback. Who your fallback is makes all the difference. It could be a friend, family member, teacher, guru or God.

HALF-BURNT LOG OF WOOD



In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 28, Shriji Maharaj says, "When a *satsangi* is likely to regress in the Satsang fellowship, vicious desires steadily flourish within him. At first, he begins to perceive flaws in all the *satsangis* day by day. In his heart, he feels, 'All of these *satsangis* lack understanding; only I have true understanding.' In this way, he considers himself to be superior to all. Such a person remains constantly uneasy, day and night. He cannot sit peacefully anywhere during the day; nor can he sleep at night. Moreover, his anger never subsides. In fact, he constantly smoulders like a half-burnt log. A person who behaves in this manner should be known to be on the verge of falling out of Satsang. No matter how many days he spends in Satsang, he will never experience peace in his heart; ultimately, he will fall from Satsang."

In this analogy, Shriji Maharaj uses the example of a smouldering log of wood, which is the cause of much irritation and discomfort because of the smoke it gives off. The smoke irritates the eyes and throat and results in much trouble. Similarly, a person who takes *avguns* of others is simmering

with malice. His words spread trouble. His damaging remarks cause discomfort and he himself feels uncomfortable. Just like the smouldering log which is unable to burn out completely or be extinguished, a person who takes *avguns* is neither able to extinguish his habit nor fully restrain himself from irritating others. Thus, such a person, will sooner or later fall from the spiritual path.

“JUST GETTING UP!”



There was once a *sheth*. In his house he had a chest full of ornaments. One night, thieves broke into his house. His wife, the *shethani*, awoke. The thieves opened the chest.

The *shethani* said to the *sheth*, “Wake up! Thieves have opened the ornament chest!”

The *sheth* said drowsily with his eyes closed, “Just getting up.”

The *shethani* said again, “Wake up, they’re taking the ornaments!”

The *sheth* yawned, “Just getting up.”

The *shethani* screamed, “They’ve taken everything and are leaving!”

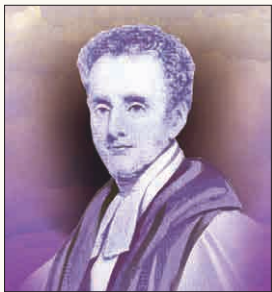
Even then the *sheth* muttered, “Just getting up.”

Of what use is this, ‘Just getting up’?

God and his true Sadhu are shouting warnings. If we awake, *moksha* is ours. Or else it will be snatched away from us.

- 101 Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj

BISHOP REGINALD HEBER



As the Bishop of Calcutta in the early 19th century Bishop Reginald Heber (1783–1826 CE) of England observed during his journey through India, “To say that the Hindus are deficient in any essential feature of a civilized people is an assertion which I can scarcely suppose to be made by any who have lived with them. They are decidedly by nature a mild, pleasing, intelligent race, sober and parsimonious, and, where an object is held out to them, most industrious and persevering. They are men of high and gallant courage, courteous, intelligent and most eager for knowledge and improvement, with a remarkable aptitude for the abstract sciences, geometry, astronomy, etc., and for imitative arts, painting and sculpture, dutiful towards their parents, affectionate to children, more easily affected by kindness and attention to their wants and feelings than almost any men I have met with. I have found in India a race of gentle and temperate habits, with a natural talent and acuteness beyond the ordinary level of mankind.”

- Sarda Har Bilas. *Hindu Superiority: An Attempt to Determine the Position of the Hindu Race in the Scale of Nations*, pp. 42–43

ENLIGHTENING QUOTES

- Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm.

- Winston Churchill

- The five-word weight-loss formula; Eat less and exercise more.
- Bad habits are like comfortable beds – easy to get into but hard to get out of.



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

April, May & June 2021, Nenpur

APRIL

3, Saturday

Today, as per the Gregorian calendar, Swamishri and swamis celebrated Bhagwan Swaminarayan's 240th birthday.

6, Tuesday

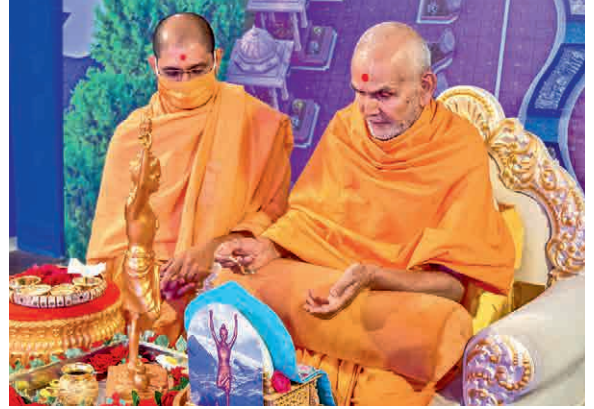
Swamishri performed an online ground-breaking ritual for a haveli at the planned BAPS Mandir complex in Sydney. Swamishri performed the *pujan* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, the *nidhikumbh* containing nine jewels, six *shilas* representing the earth's six devas and *ishtikas*. Swamishri also sanctified the *nada-chhadis* for the swamis, devotees, engineers, artisans and others involved in the construction project. In conclusion, Swamishri performed the *arti* and blessed all for the successful completion of the entire project.

10, Saturday

Swamishri performed the *pujan* rituals of the *nidhikumbh* and *ishtikas* for the proposed *hari* mandir to be built in Whitby and Calgary, Canada.

11, Sunday: Nilkanth Varni in Every Home

A gigantic *murti* of Nilkanth Varni will be installed in the near future at the Akshardham *maha*-mandir complex in Robbinsville, New Jersey. To spread the glory and importance of Nilkanth Varni in countless homes the BAPS women's wing in USA have organized a project named 'Nilkanth Varni in Every Home' whereby they will place *murtis* of Nilkanth Varni in every *satsangi* home. Swamishri inaugurated this auspicious project by performing *pujan*, *arti* and *abhishek* of a small



murti of Nilkanth Varni performing austerity. On this occasion Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami spoke about the glory of Nilkanth Varni.

In conclusion Swamishri blessed, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj had made a wish to have a grand Akshardham built there. At that time there were no mandirs in North America. Soon, Akshardham will provide inspiration and glory for thousands of years." Then, Swamishri talked about the many inspiring aspects of Nilkanth Varni's life: his austerity, renunciation, selfless services, tolerance and bhakti. Then Swamishri added, "To get such inspirations the 'Nilkanth Varni in Every Home' project has been launched. All will gain happiness and peace, because God is with us all – within our hearts and also without. However, by doing bhajan and bhakti God will remain with us and so we will experience eternal happiness and peace."

Finally, Swamishri performed an *abhishek* of flower petals on Nilkanth Varni's *murti*.

11, Sunday

The renowned Pujya Mahamandaleshwar Shri Vishwambhar Bharti Bapu passed away today. He had deep respects for Pramukh Swami Maharaj



As a climax to the Hari Jayanti celebration, Swamishri swings Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami in a *hindolo*

and Mahant Swami Maharaj. A virtual condolence assembly was held today wherein Aksharvatsal Swami, Bhaktitanay Swami, Viveksagar Swami, Ishwarcharan Swami and Dr Swami offered eulogies to him. Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj praised his life and work.

21, Wednesday: Shri Hari Jayanti Celebration

Based on the Indian calendar, Swamishri celebrated Bhagwan Swaminarayan's 240th birthday with devotion and festivity in Nenpur. The day also marked one year of celebration of various festivals in Nenpur by Swamishri.

27, Tuesday

Swamishri took his second vaccine dose against the coronavirus and appealed to all to get vaccinated.

MAY

8, Saturday

As part of BAPS relief services in the prevailing coronavirus pandemic, Swamishri performed the *pujan* of an oxygen concentrator machine, one of over 1,000 that were donated to various hospitals in Gujarat. Swamishri also prayed for

an early end to the pandemic and recovery of COVID-19 patients.

11, Tuesday: 60th Diksha Day

According to the Gregorian calendar the day marked Mahant Swami Maharaj's 60th *bhagvati diksha* day. A special assembly was held online to extol Swamishri's saintliness. Swamishri was also honoured with garlands in Nenpur by senior swamis.

26, Wednesday

A convocation assembly was held via a video-conference for the youths of the Yuva Talim Kendra in Sarangpur with Swamishri in Nenpur. The youths presented a variety of programmes and prayers to Swamishri and pleased him. Swamishri wrote a letter of inspiration for all and also sanctified their certificates and mementos.

29, Saturday

Swamishri performed the *shilanyas* rituals in Nenpur for the *shikharbaddha* BAPS Mandir in Johannesburg, South Africa.

30, Sunday

Swamishri ritually inaugurated the sixth part



Swamishri performs arti on Yogi Jayanti celebration

of the Swaminarayan Charitra animation series called 'Neelkanth and the Secrets Beyond Yoga'. The sixth part was made under the direction and guidance of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Shrijiswarup Swami and published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith. Swamishri blessed Parth Gajjar and Parag Shastri virtually for their technical contributions and efforts and also blessed the entire animation team of BAPS youths.

31, Monday

Swamishri performed the Vedic *pujan* rituals of the *shilas* for the new BAPS Mandir in Wellington, the capital of New Zealand.

JUNE

7, Monday: Yogi Jayanti

To celebrate Yogiji Maharaj's 129th birthday a 4-day discourse by learned swamis of BAPS was organized online from 2 to 5 June. Prabhucharan Swami, Priyavrat Swami, Bhaktisagar Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami spoke about different aspects of Yogiji Maharaj's life and work. Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami also spoke after each discourse.

On 6 June, swamis sang bhajans as part of the Yogi Jayanti Celebrations in the evening online Sunday assembly from 5.30 to 7.00 p.m.

On 7 June, from 6.00 to 8.30 a.m., Swamishri's morning puja was webcast live. Finally, Swami blessed the assembly by narrating incidents about Yogiji Maharaj.

14, Monday: Pramukh Varni Din

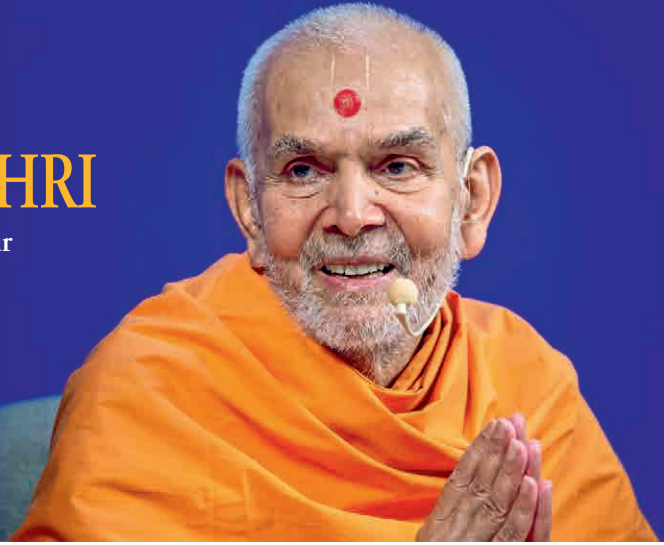
To celebrate Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 71st Pramukh Varni Din (Jeth *sud* 4) an online morning assembly started with Mahant Swami Maharaj's puja at 6.00 a.m. The assembly was attended online by thousands of devotees in India and abroad. The assembly included bhajans by swamis and speeches by senior swamis based on the pledge that Pramukh Swami Maharaj had taken when Shastriji Maharaj appointed him as the president of BAPS. In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the celebration event.

Also, on 13, the Sunday evening satsang assembly was themed on Pramukh Varni Din. Pujya Viveksagar Swami discoursed about the glory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. ♦

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

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

March–April 2021, Nenpur



MARCH

SAMP (HARMONY)

2, Tuesday

Swamishri lay down on his bed to sleep at night. Then, he spontaneously spoke, “For the sake of *samp* (harmony) one should let go. Do not pull and try to get things one’s way. Just let go with ease and love and with the understanding that it is an honour to let go. This is known as *samp*.”

Swamishri spoke without any reference to anything, so the attendant swamis asked out of curiosity, “Swami, did what you say occur naturally to you?”

“Yes, naturally!” Swamishri replied with a smile.

Swamishri is not only a great propagator of *samp*, but he himself has imbibed and practises it in his life.

QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION

4, Thursday

A brief online question-answer session was held with Swamishri. Anandnayandas Swami from Robbinsville posed several questions.

Question: What do you prefer to do in your free time?

Swamishri: Read a (satsang) book.

Q: Which book do you specially like to read?
Swamishri: At present ‘Purushottam Boliya Prite’. It contains the words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Q: To please the devotees which *seva* would you mainly choose: home visits, meeting personally, *mahapuja* or doing *katha* in a *sabha*?

Swamishri: Meeting the devotees personally.

Q: What do you dislike the most: *abhav-avgun* (seeing or talking about others’ faults), lack of *vani-vivek* (polite speech), angry *swabhav* or ego?

Swamishri: *Abhav-avgun*. A big cross over it (meaning a no). Maharaj and all the Gunatit gurus hate it. It destroys you (spiritually) and whoever associates with you. Therefore, do not fall into *abhav-avgun*, but land into Maharaj’s lap.

Q: What number of *dandvats* should devotees perform before Thakorji in a *hari* mandir: 5, 11, 21 or other?

Swamishri: Eleven *dandvats*.

Q: What number of *dandvats* should devotees perform before each shrine of a *shikharbaddha* mandir: 5, 11, 21 or other?

Swamishri: Five *dandvats* each. Thus it adds up to 15 (5x3).

Q: How many *pradakshinas* should devotees perform in a *shikharbaddha* mandir: 5, 11, 21 or other?

Swamishri: According to their suitability. If they have time they should do five.

Since others would also be doing *pradakshinas*, so five is okay. Maharaj accepts that to be okay.

Q: At least how much time should a devotee spend daily in reading Pramukh Swami Maharaj's biography: 15 minutes, 20, 30 or other?

Swamishri: At least 15 minutes. One can read more according to one's availability of time and inclination.

Q: For how many minutes should a devotee do his daily puja: 20 minutes, 30, 40, 50 or other?

Swamishri: At least 20 minutes.

Q: In the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has mentioned the five eternal separate entities: *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahma (Aksharbrahma) and Parabrahma. Among them which category do you fall in?

Swamishri: Brahma.

DIVINE SEVA

6, Saturday

Gurumanandas Swami asked Swamishri, "Today, marks the day on which Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave you the responsibility of attending to his correspondence. From that moment onwards with which thought have you been writing letters?"

Swamishri replied, "The thought of doing *seva*; divine *seva*."

MAHARAJ'S INSPIRATION AND ENTRY

10, Wednesday

Swamishri and swamis were discussing about the extraordinary incidents of children who had memorized the Satsang Diksha text. A transformation of their nature and behaviour had occurred in the process of memorizing it. In response to this Swamishri revealed, "Shriji Maharaj resides in the Satsang Diksha." Then Swamishri added, "Whoever decides to memorize Satsang Diksha then Shriji Maharaj will enter within that person (or inspire him or

her) and provide strength and courage; only then will it be accomplished. Otherwise, it is difficult to achieve this and that, too, at a very young age. Furthermore, the children don't have knowledge about Sanskrit and Gujarati because most of them are studying in English. So, it is Maharaj's inspiration and entry in them. And when Shriji Maharaj enters, everything gets done."

Finally, Swamishri added, "There is no other motive for them other than to earn *rajipo*. They have given up all material attractions to memorize it."

QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION

11, Thursday

A brief online question-answer session was held with Swamishri. Snehmuni Swami from Chicago posed some questions.

Question: What would you do if Yogiji Maharaj were to give you darshan in a dream: *dandvat*, darshan, pray or hug him?

Swamishri: I would do *dandvats*.

Q: Which *seva* of Yogiji Maharaj did you like doing the most: giving him your hand for support, writing letters, bathing him or raising him while he got up?

In reply, Swamishri described how he used to lift Yogi Bapa up with his hands.

Q: Which story narrated by Yogi Bapa did you like to hear the most: *Dhotā gae bhai*, *Bapu no hoko*, *Andhāru kādhyu* or *Lindiyo*?

Swamishri: *Lindiyo*.

Q: Which kirtan did you like to hear Yogi Bapa sing the most: *Anubhavi ānand...*, *Man mām kahyu tu mārū...*, *Dhīr dhurandharā...* or *Hāji bhalā sadhu*?

Swamishri: *Man mām kahyu tu mārū...*

Q: Which was the most memorable *seva* you got to do with Yogi Bapa: washing dishes, doing Thakorji's *seva* or making garlands?

Swamishri: Making garlands.

Q: Which English sentence did you like

to hear from Yogiji Maharaj: Today fast, I am blessing you, Thank you or any other?

Swamishri: Gunatit don't doze. He said this daily.

PRAYING AT NIGHT

14, Sunday

Tonight, Swamishri performed *mala* for three hours and twenty-two minutes for the happiness and comfort of all. Swamishri had prayed several times in the past in this way. Sometimes, Swamishri had stayed awake all through the night offering prayers. When this was mentioned Swamishri responded, "There is joy in praying for the devotees' relief from misery and their happiness."

Uttamyogi Swami asked, "When you are asleep are you absorbed in the thoughts of God and the devotees?"

Swamishri replied, "Yes. There's nothing other than that."

Thereafter, an old recording of Swamishri's discourse was played, and he was asked whether his voice was from the time he was a *sadguru* or guru?

Swamishri replied, "[I am] *dās nā dās* (servant of servants)."

RAJIPO ON BALAKS

17, Wednesday

For the past five days Swamishri had been giving online darshan in the evenings to children who had memorized *shlokas* from the Satsang Diksha shastra. Swamishri gave *labh* to every *balak* by blessing and bowing to him. Today, after the assembly had finished, the large LED screen used for the online projection was switched off. In other words, none of the children were visible on the screen, yet Swamishri lovingly and respectfully circumambulated the screen before taking dinner. He stopped mid-way and praised the children who had memorized the Satsang Diksha. He said, "Their faith and effort in memorizing the *shlokas* are overwhelming and astonishing. Some memorized

by merely listening to the *shlokas*. Five-year-old children who are still learning to read and write. Oh, how wonderfully they recited the *shlokas* in Sanskrit, as if they were like great pandits."

Then, during dinner, Swamishri's thoughts revolved around the children who had memorized the Satsang Diksha scripture. He uttered, "All are *muktas*."

QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION

18, Thursday

Today, Swamishri answered questions posed online by Paramkirti Swami from Nairobi, Kenya.

Q: Who do you remember while doing *mansi puja*? Is it Yogi Bapa or Pramukh Swami Maharaj, or both?

Swamishri: I remember both of them. I remember Yogi Bapa and I remember Pramukh Swami Maharaj (while sanctifying the water).

Q: Why do you bow down in the second verse of the *arti*? Is it because the name of the supreme Shriji Maharaj appears or is it because we sing the name of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami? Or thirdly, is it because Gunatitanand Swami is the servant of Shri Hari? Out of the three reasons is it one or all three?

Swamishri: All three.

Q: If you have 15 minutes which bhakti ritual would you specially choose to engage yourself in: do *katha*, listen to *katha*, meditate or read?

Swamishri: I would do *katha* because Gunatitanand Swami had chosen it. By doing *katha* one inspires faith (*nishtha*) in others. In fact, I also intensely like to listen to *katha*.

Q: Which years in the life of Shriji Maharaj would you specifically choose to read and contemplate upon: Ghanshyam *charitra*, Nilkanth *charitra*, Sahajanand *charitra* or all three?

Swamishri: All! All are Bhagwan's *charitras*, however I love to read more about Nilkanth's *charitras*, because his *murti* is extraordinary and he practised *tyag* (renunciation) and *vairagya* (detachment).

Q: You have dedicated and gifted the Satsang Diksha shastra to Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the occasion of his Centenary Celebrations. So, under the auspices of this celebration what do you expect from us: *niyam*-dharma, to inspire *nishtha* of Akshar-Purushottam and the living guru in others, to practise special austerities or other?

Swamishri: To consolidate *nishtha* of Akshar-Purushottam and the living guru in oneself and others. Our *sampradaya* has and believes in the living guru. Shriji Maharaj is supreme, has a divine human form, is the all-doer and forever remains manifest on earth – this is the *nishtha* we must attain and inspire in others.

SEEING VIRTUES IN OTHERS

19, Friday

While Swamishri was having breakfast he spontaneously blessed all by saying, “An ant will not touch a heap of sand grains, but if there are four or five small sugar crystals in the heap it will pick them up. Likewise, we should pick up only the good qualities (*gun grahan*) in others.” Then Swamishri added, “Our *sampradaya* is of *gun grahan*.”

ARDUOUS VICHARAN

23, Tuesday

In 1977, Mahant Swami was also with Pramukh Swami Maharaj during a satsang tour abroad. Talks about the hardships and difficulties of that *vicharan* were being described.

Mahant Swami Maharaj reminisced about the tour, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj and I did not get to sleep properly because I had to accompany him wherever he went.”

The attendant swamis stated, “That meant you had to bear the same amount of hardships that Pramukh Swami Maharaj bore.”

Swamishri explained, “But, in addition, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had to meet everyone and solve their problems and enquiries.”

An attendant swami asked, “Weren’t there

other swamis accompanying Bapa and you during the home visits?”

Swamishri replied, “Yes, there were others, but we two were the main. The other swamis would change [in order to attend to some other *seva*].”

“That meant you had to always remain with Swami Bapa?”

Swamishri humbly replied, “Yes.”

QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION

27, Saturday

A children’s *shibir* was organized in Australia and New Zealand. An online question-answer session was arranged with Swamishri in Nenpur.

Q: What should we do to increase our concentration while doing *mala* in our puja, because our mind wavers and strays?

Swamishri: You are still children so you will progress step by step. Initially, you will experience blankness and find it difficult to do the *mala*, but the spiritual path you are following is correct. So, after some time things will work out.

Q: What should we think while doing the *arti*?

Swamishri: You will get other thoughts because you have not formed a habit. In spite of this, think and meditate upon Maharaj and Swami. The manifest guru beholds and bears Maharaj and Swami, thus you should meditate upon him.

Q: When we offer *thal* does God truly accept and eat it?

Swamishri: Yes. It depends on your feelings (*bhav*). If you do not have devotional feelings then it is of little value. But by offering *thal* with devotional feelings God accepts and eats it. In the past, Maharaj ate Jivuba’s, Laduba’s and others’ *thal*. Thus, by offering with devotion Maharaj definitely accepts it.

GURU’S GLORY FOR HIS DISCIPLES

29, Monday

In the morning, Swamishri celebrated the Fuldol festival by showering sanctified coloured water on swamis, *sadhaks* and devotees in

Nenpur. That same evening, Swamishri came to the spot where he had showered the coloured water. He bowed down and touched the base of the neem tree with respect. Everyone around were surprised to see this. An attendant swami asked, “Swamishri, why did you bow down and touch the base of the neem tree?”

Swamishri replied, “All the *muktas* played *ras* here and were drenched with coloured water. They did this while remembering God. I wished to bow down everywhere and also perform prostrations. But due to my physical limitations I focused on this one tree as my target to bow down. All of you are great! One should not only speak of others’ glory, but also imbibe it in one’s life.”

Swamishri practices whatever he preaches.

APRIL

INCLINED TOWARDS KATHA

1, Thursday

Swamishri is greatly inclined towards reading satsang books or listening to other swamis’ discourses. Daily, Swamishri listens to the audio version of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s biography.

Tonight, it was 9.50 p.m. and Swamishri had completed his daily routine early. The attendant swami requested Swamishri to go to sleep. But Swamishri declined because it was a little earlier than his usual bedtime. Then, Swamishri expressed a wish to listen to a satsang book. As per his wish *Parabrahma Sudha*, a satsang booklet, was brought. Swamishri told an attendant swami to read a paragraph. Once the paragraph was over Swamishri gestured to read further. In this way, Swamishri kept listening for about eight minutes. Then, an attendant swami uttered ‘Sajahanand Swami Maharaj *ni jai*’ to conclude the reading session. The attendant swami told Swamishri to lie down because he had taken the coronavirus vaccine that day.

Then, Swamishri declared the quintessence of what had been read, “Fault-finding is more potent than lust, anger, etc. Therefore, do not see faults in others.”

QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION

2, Friday

An online question-answer session with Swamishri was arranged for children and teenagers.

Question: How should we children celebrate Shriji Maharaj’s birthday?

Swamishri: You should abide by *niyam-dharma*. Then you can say that you have celebrated his festival.

Q: Can you tell us your favourite incident from Ghanshyam Maharaj’s life?

Swamishri: I like all his incidents equally.

Q: What should we learn from Ghanshyam Maharaj’s life?

Swamishri: Do not sulk during mealtimes at home and eat whatever is prepared. Offer *thal* to God. Eat with a peaceful mind and remember God.

Q: Was there anything that Ghanshyam Maharaj did not like?

Swamishri: Ghanshyam Maharaj used to eat and drink fresh food and water. He never ate anything that was bad or spoilt.

He will eat food offered to him, even if it is a *rotlo* or chapatti. He will eat when you offer food with pure feelings.

He never liked *abhav-avgun* and was averse to it.

Q: What did Ghanshyam Maharaj like?

Swamishri: He liked dharma and *jnan*. He also liked someone doing satsang discourses and *seva*.

Question: Is Ghanshyam Maharaj present on earth today?

Swamishri: Of course! Always present. He is present from the day he was born on earth – through all the Satpurushes: Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Thereafter, the satsangi teenagers asked questions to Swamishri.

Q: Which virtue of Nilkanth Varni do you like the most?

Swamishri: Bhakti.

Q: Which *murti* of Nilkanth Varni do you meditate upon?

Swamishri: I intensely like the *murti* of Nilkanth Varni performing austerity while standing on one leg and with his hands raised.

Q: Which incident of Nilkanth Varni do you like the most?

Swamishri: I like all his incidents equally.

Q: When Nilkanth Varni was travelling in the forests which thought was constantly running in his mind?

Swamishri: He was thinking about the devotees, and that was why he travelled so much. He searched and went to aspirants and devotees in different and far-off places.

Q: What inspiration should we teenagers take from Nilkanth Varni?

Swamishri: Live a life of self-control and perform austerities, so that one can control one's senses and mind. Also, by doing satsang we can properly serve and do bhakti of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Otherwise, if one's mind is dirty then one's actions will also be immoral or improper.

Q: Why is it necessary to remember Nilkanth Varni's life?

Swamishri: Because he is Bhagwan!

Q: How is Nilkanth Varni's work ongoing today?

Swamishri: His principal mission was to inspire faith in God and talk about God's glory. Shastriji Maharaj installed the *murtis* (of Akshar-Purushottam) and also inspired faith in others. He used to say, 'The Satpurush never goes away from earth.'

Similarly, spreading faith in Maharaj and Swami, Brahma and Parabrahma will remain ongoing.

Q: How did Nilkanth Varni propagate the true principle?

Swamishri: Firstly, through his pure life, *upasana* and bhajan of God. He never forgot Bhagwan in all his actions. He was Bhagwan himself, yet to set an example he performed all

his actions like a *sadhak*. No matter how much one may talk, but when one imbibes the teachings in one's life it will surely impact others.

Q: What did Nilkanth Varni not like?

Swamishri: He did not like worldly talks or gossiping.

Q: And what did he like?

Swamishri: He liked listening to spiritual discourses and doing bhajan. When he was young he used to visit each and every mandir for darshan (in Ayodhya). He had formed a habit of doing that.

ABOUT PRAYER

20, Tuesday

A question-answer session was held with Swamishri on the subject of prayer.

Question: What do you always think about?

Swamishri: I contemplate on *prapti* (attainment of the Divine) and perceive everyone as *muktas* (liberated). That is why I experience peace and so I have no problems. I tolerate and apply spiritual understanding to solve all small or big problems.

Q: What benefit does one get by praying?

Swamishri: The true benefit is an experience of peace. God fulfils one's prayers for worldly things if they will be of benefit to oneself, but he will not fulfil them if it were to cause any obstacles.

Q: When your prayers are not answered what type of understanding do you apply?

Swamishri: God is the all-doer to the extent that a dry leaf cannot move without his wish. So, why worry? What God has decided happens in spite of all our immense efforts. And whatever he does is for our good. *Shloka* 152 of Satsang Diksha says God is very compassionate and he never wishes ill for anyone.

Q: What should we pray and for how long in order to eradicate our inner faults and *swabhavs*?

Swamishri: We should fight against our *swabhavs* till we are victorious. And once our *swabhavs* are defeated we will attain *moksha*.

God has blessed us with his association and attainment (*prapti*). We have attained God, which in itself is a great victory!

Q: How should we pray to overcome our *swabhavs*?

Swamishri: Plead to him, “Bhagwan be compassionate and destroy my *swabhavs* and inner faults.”

Q: When there are no results despite of praying for years to overcome our *swabhavs* what should we think?

Swamishri: The *swabhavs* cannot be overcome by oneself, but with God’s help they can be dissolved. Furthermore, God has come on earth for this; to eradicate our *swabhavs* and to take us to Akshardham and place us in the ranks of the *muktas*.

Q: How much effort should we make along with offering prayers?

Swamishri: Make efforts according to God’s commands and not wilfully. Look, what happened to Saubhari Rishi (who wilfully performed intense austerities).

Q: What shortcomings obstruct us while praying?

Swamishri: There are too many shortcomings and lapses, but with God with you everything will turn out well. That’s guaranteed!

Q: When we get no results after praying, our faith and patience diminishes. What should we do about it?

Swamishri: The base instincts (*doshes*) are like five strong persons before your single, ordinary self. So, you will have to be patient. On the one hand you have attached yourself with God, but on the other the *doshes* are pulling you away from him. But in spite of that you have God’s presence. The more faith and trust you have in God, to that extent you will be victorious. But having less faith and trust results in inner weaknesses and a longer time to overcome the *swabhavs*.

Q: Despite praying one experiences that the *swabhavs*, instead of getting uprooted, never

seem to diminish. Then should one understand that it is for one’s good?

Swamishri: No. They are getting diminished, but one is not able to notice it. Due to one’s association with the Satpurush, the latter strikes upon one’s *swabhavs*. Whatever he does is to annul our *swabhavs*, but he does it in such a way that one does not know, and eventually the *swabhavs* get dissolved.

Q: What should we do to offer a genuine prayer?

Swamishri: By understanding the glory of having attained God. One should keep on thinking about how great God is and how great the Gunatit gurus we have attained are.

QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION

26, Monday

Today, the youths of North America had a question-answer session with Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Question: What priority should we give to the practice of *aahnik* (daily rituals like *arti*, *puja*, *katha*, etc.)?

Swamishri: The priority for practising *aahnik* should be of the highest level. Shriji Maharaj and all the Gunatit gurus have practised them to the highest level.

Q: How can we form a habit of listening to *katha* the way you do?

Swamishri: Look up to the lives of all our gurus. They do not need to do so, yet they listen to *katha*. Whereas, we truly need it, therefore we need to listen to *katha*.

Q: Would you like to say anything to us regarding the practice of daily rituals?

Swamishri: Being firm in following the *aahnik* amounts to having faith (*nishtha*) in Shriji Maharaj and Akshar-Purushottam. This means that you believe in God. That is why you have to practise the *aahnik*. ♦

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



Swamishri Performs the Shilanyas Rituals of a Second Shikharbaddha BAPS Mandir in Ahmedabad

13 April 2021, Nenpur

In 1822, Bhagwan Swaminarayan consecrated the first *shikharbaddha* mandir in Kalupur, Ahmedabad. He performed many divine *lilas* in Ahmedabad. Thereafter, Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami discoursed about the supreme divinity of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the assembly hall of the mandir. Bhagatji Maharaj often pointed to Gunatitanand Swami at the Ahmedabad mandir and said, “The one who goes is Akshar.” Later, Shastriji Maharaj visited and sanctified Ahmedabad many times and accomplished important works. In 1962, Yogiji Maharaj gifted the BAPS satsang with a *shikharbaddha* mandir in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad. Pramukh Swami Maharaj made great efforts in sanctifying the homes of devotees in Ahmedabad, celebrating mega-festivals and creating Akshardham in nearby Gandhinagar. In this way,

Swamiji expanded the satsang in Ahmedabad manifold times.

With the rapid burgeoning of satsang in Ahmedabad, Mahant Swami Maharaj declared his wish for the construction of a *shikharbaddha* mandir in Jagatpur-Gota, in the western part of Ahmedabad.

On 13 April 2021 (Chaitra *sud padvo*, V.S. 2077), the *shilanyas* rituals for the mandir were performed online by Mahant Swami Maharaj in Nenpur. The initial *shilanyas* rituals were performed by Atmaswarup Swami in Nenpur. During Swamishri’s morning puja the swamis of Ahmedabad sang bhajans about Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s *lila* in Ahmedabad and the Guru Parampara.

Shrutiprakash Swami conducted the online *shilanyas* rituals from Gandhinagar. Swamishri

performed the *pujan* of the three *nidhikumbhs*, symbolic representations of the devas of earth and the three main *shilas* of the mandir. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* rituals. Swamishri also sanctified the *nada-chhadis* for the devotees and the rice grains to be showered on them as blessings.

Then, Puja Dr Swami garlanded Swamishri online from Sarangpur. On this occasion the late *kothari* Satsangjivan Swami and Punitcharan Swami were remembered for their tremendous effort in acquiring the land for the planned mandir. Thereafter, Puja Ishwarcharan Swami, under whose guidance the mandir would be built,

addressed the occasion online from Ahmedabad.

In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the occasion, “A very nice, beautiful piece of land was acquired for the mandir. May the mandir be completed quickly so that the devotees can avail of it and profusely engage themselves in doing bhajan and offering bhakti. Maharaj and Swami will be installed and through them satsang will spread. The *shikharbaddha* mandir will be accomplished soon. It will turn out to be exquisite and grand.”

Thousands of devotees witnessed the online *shilanyas* rituals. ♦

Pujan of First Pillar for Morbi Mandir

8 June 2021, Nenpur



Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *shilanyas* ceremony of the new *shikharbaddha* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Morbi on 12 June 2019.

Since then, the foundations have been completed and the stonework is set to begin. In Nenpur, on 8 June 2021, Swamishri performed the Vedic *pujan* and *arti* rituals of the first carved pillar of the new mandir.

Swamishri blessed, “All devotees will benefit from this mandir. It will be a divine and beautiful mandir.” ♦

Rath Yatra Celebration

12 July 2021, Nenpur

The annual Rath Yatra festival was celebrated in Swamishri’s presence in Nenpur.

The stage backdrop featured a *rath* (chariot) drawn by horses. Festive bhajans were sung during Swamishri’s morning puja. Thereafter, Swamishri performed *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami seated in a decorated motorized *rath*. Then, Swamishri

expertly operated the remote control to parade the *rath* across the stage.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, “Bhagwan and his Sadhu are the drivers of our *rath* [life]. We should hand over the controls to them. Arjun gave the reins to God and so was victorious. If we do the same, they will protect us. Shriji Maharaj protected Dada Khachar.



Protection does not mean safety for this physical body, but protection from the harmful influence of our troublesome senses and inner base natures.

“We have attained manifest Bhagwan and his Sadhu, so *moksha* is guaranteed. Through *nishtha* in them, one transcends *maya*. This was the purpose of Shriji Maharaj’s manifestation on earth: to grant *moksha*, ultimate liberation to all.”

Then, with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

in his lap, Swamishri sat in a peacock-themed *rath* in the grounds of Shantivan. After Swamishri was garlanded, the sadhus devoutly pulled the *rath* around the lush Shantivan grounds while festive bhajans and music echoed all around. Behind the *rath*, *sadhaks* and youths joyously waved BAPS flags and sang festive bhajans.

The celebrations were webcast live for all to enjoy. ♦

Tula Ceremony in Honour of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

13 July 2021, Nenpur



In Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s presence, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj had been honoured on many occasions in special ceremonies. He would always highlight that Bhagwan Swaminarayan has emphasized upon honouring Bhagwan and his Sadhu together to free oneself of *maya*.

So, for the first time, Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami were honoured together in a special *tula* ceremony in Nenpur, which was webcast live for all. Today also marked the 76th *patotsav* of Atladara Mandir.

After morning puja, Swamishri devoutly performed the Vedic *pujan* of the two *murtis* and then, while the names of the sponsors were read, Swamishri performed the *tula* ceremony.

Thereafter, blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, “This is the first time since Gunatitanand Swami was consecrated next to Maharaj that their *tula* has been performed. Devotees always strive to please Bhagwan and his Sadhu and so they devoutly offer their precious possessions to

them. Even amid this pandemic, all have lovingly offered their devotion. Bhagwan and his Sadhu are won over by genuine inner devotion. And so they will grant *moksha* to everyone.

“May there be an early end to the pandemic and may all be blessed for all-round joy in life. May unity be strengthened in Satsang. May everyone’s life be enriched with the virtues of *nishtha*, *niyam-dharma*, *dasbhav* and *divyabhav*.” ♦

Swamishri in Ahmedabad

15 July 2021



On 15 July 2021, Mahant Swami Maharaj departed from Nenpur and arrived in Ahmedabad. After doing darshan at the BAPS Mandir in Shahibaug, Swamishri stayed at the BAPS Yogiji Maharaj Hospital. During his stay,

Swamishri underwent a thorough medical check-up alongwith a minor medical procedure. During his 25-day stay at the hospital Swamishri’s health was very good.

On 10 August 2021, Swamishri was scheduled to depart for Sarangpur at about 3.00 p.m. Devotees had gathered according to COVID-19 guidelines and protocol at the Pramukh Vatika ground behind Yogiji Maharaj Hospital. Swamishri took a round in a closed golf cart, giving close darshan to all the devotees. The devotees clapped with joy at Swamishri’s in-person darshan after one-and-a-half years. Thereafter, Swamishri and his attendant swamis departed for Sarangpur mandir. ♦

Swamishri in Sarangpur

10 August 2021



After one-and-a-half years Swamishri arrived in the evening at the grounds of Sarangpur mandir amidst a warm, devotional welcome from swamis, *parshads*, *sadhaks* and devotees. The mandir was decorated with colourful lights and the sound of firecrackers created a festive welcome for Swamishri. As Swamishri proceeded towards the main mandir children and youths welcomed him by waving banners

and flags and playing drums. Then, Swamishri did darshan of Thakorji and performed the evening *arti*. Pujya Doctor Swami honoured Swamishri with a flower garland. Swamishri then sat on a seat prepared on the mandir steps and gave darshan to all. Narayanmuni Swami welcomed Swamishri with words of salutation and thereafter Viveksagar Swami and Kothari

Jnaneshwar Swami also welcomed him from afar with garlands of flowers.

Swamishri came for darshan at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's room in Sarvasva and thereafter retired to his room.

Swamishri's arrival and darshan in Sarangpur evoked joyous celebration and inner fulfillment in all. ♦

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Smruti Sabha

17 August 2021



Today, on Shravan *sud* 10 (17 August), Pramukh Swami Maharaj departed to Akshardham in 2016. Swamishri performed *arti* at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's memorial shrine and offered his respects and prayers. Then, Swamishri did darshan at the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir and gave darshan to all while returning to his living quarters.

In the evening, from 8.00 to 10.00 p.m., an online memorial assembly was held, during which countless devotees in India and abroad watched. Video clips of dignitaries like President Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BAPS devotees and others extolling the greatness of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were shown.

The assembly climaxed with Swamishri's blessings, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj's credo was 'In the joy of others...'. He spent his entire life for the good and liberation of his swamis, devotees and others. He looked after and fulfilled the wishes of everyone. He strived for whoever came in his contact. By reading his biography one will come to learn about how he took care of others.

"Till his last breath, he had fulfilled the pledge he had taken when he was appointed by Shastriji Maharaj as the Sanstha's president. We have all seen him with our own eyes. He kept his focus on his gurus and observed their commands till his last moments.

"Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was asked, 'With what skill did you work and elevate the BAPS globally?' He replied, 'I obeyed Shastriji Maharaj's and Yogiji Maharaj's wishes. I did according to their wishes and commands.' He was passionate about attaining the guru's *rajipo*.

"Now we have to carry forward his work. Let us strive to do that for his centenary celebrations. I pray that we imbibe his words and consolidate them in our hearts and spread them throughout the world."

Thereafter, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's video blessings were relayed, followed by *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali*. ♦

Raksha Bandhan Festival

22 August 2021

The Raksha Bandhan celebration was held online. It started with Swamishri's morning puja in Sarangpur. Swamis sang festive bhajans during his puja and thereafter Swamishri sanctified the *rakhdīs* to be later tied by swamis on the devotees' wrists. Swamishri blessed the occasion by emphasizing on the observance of *niyam*-dharma and how Bhagwan and the Satpurush always protect their devotees. ♦



Satsang Diksha Online Course Inauguration

6 September 2021, Sarangpur

Satsang Diksha is a 315-verse shastra written by Mahant Swami Maharaj which concisely conveys *agna* and *upasana* to be practised and understood by BAPS devotees.

To enable a thorough study of the text, the Satsang Diksha Online Course was inaugurated by Swamishri in Sarangpur.

During the evening inauguration assembly, sadhus sang Sanskrit verses describing the glory of the Satsang Diksha shastra, and then Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke about the vital need for a shastra which provides contemporary spiritual guidance. He also explained about the content of the Satsang Diksha shastra.

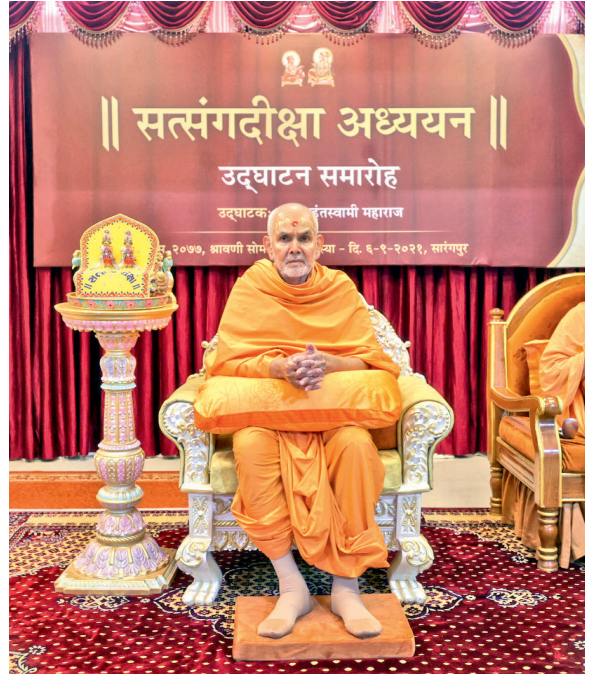
Thereafter, Swamishri performed *pujan* of the shastra and, together with Pujya Doctor Swami, lit the inauguration *divo*.

Then, Bhadresh Swami conducted the first class of the course.

At the end, Swamishri blessed the assembly and performed the *arti*.

Over 16,000 devotees worldwide have registered for this Satsang Diksha Online Course.

The course comprises four 3-month semesters. Every week, four 30-minute classes will be uploaded which registered participants can use



to study the shastra at their convenience. Every week, there will be a practice test and a final exam at the end of each semester.

The course videos will be in Gujarati, but the tests and exams can be taken in Gujarati, Hindi or English. ♦



INDIA

FAMILY SATSANG SHIBIRS

June–July 2021



During June and July 2021, over 100,000 families from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal, Punjab, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Delhi and other places participated in the online Family Satsang Shibirs organized by the Satsang Pravrutti Central Office in Ahmedabad.

Based on the theme ‘Satsang: The One Solution’, each *shibir* highlighted the essential role of satsang in personal spirituality, professional progress and family harmony.

The *shibirs* were webcast from BAPS centres throughout the country on different weekends during the two months. Each *shibir* comprised a 2½-hour session on Saturday evening and a 4-hour session on Sunday morning. During the two sessions, the devotees were guided on the *shibir* theme through speeches by Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami as well as other senior and learned swamis, workshops, case studies, videos, skits and other activities.

At the conclusion of each *shibir*, *guruhari* Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj guided and blessed the devotees through a special question-answer session.

SATSANG DIKSHA ONLINE TEST

11 July 2021



A total of 27,471 devotees (14,575 men and 12,896 women) aged between 28 and 93 years from five states in India took the Satsang Diksha Questionnaire Online Test conducted by the Satsang Pravrutti Central Office (SPCO) from Ahmedabad. The test comprised of 100 multiple choice questions to be answered in 40 minutes. Participants took the test in Gujarati, Hindi or English as per their preference.

The devotees had prepared for this test over the previous six weeks. To assist them in their study of the text, the SPCO provided 15 daily practice questions and two full pre-tests of 100 questions.

The efforts of the devotees in studying the Satsang Diksha was reflected in the results, since around 81% of candidates scored 60% or more in the final test.

SATSANG KNOWLEDGE ONLINE TEST

18 July 2021

A total of 7,872 *yuvaks* and 5,661 *yuvatis* from BAPS centres in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Delhi, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka participated in the Satsang Knowledge Online Test organized and conducted by the Satsang Pravrutti Central Office in Ahmedabad. The test was based on two books, ‘Shatadal Pramukh



Parimal’ and ‘Sadhutana Shikhar Mahant Swami Maharaj’, and provided an opportunity for the youths to learn more about the life, work and saintly qualities of the two gurus.

To prepare for the test, the youths used printed, digital and audio versions of the books. The SPCO provided four practice tests, each of 40 questions, and two pretests of 100 questions each during the 50-day preparation period.

The final test comprised 100 multiple choice questions to be answered in 40 minutes. Despite the short preparation time, the youths performed commendably.

MEDICO-SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE FOR STUDENTS

15–16 August 2021, Gadhada



A total of 380 students of medicine, dentistry, ayurveda and homeopathy from throughout Gujarat attended the in-person Medico-Spiritual Conference at the BAPS Mandir in Gadhada.

Based on the conference theme, ‘Bhagya Jāgyā Re... Prāpti Samajiye, Māniye, Jiviye’ (Our Great Attainment... Understand, Experience, Live It), the students were guided through speeches by Pujya Viveksagar Swami and other learned and experienced swamis on how to integrate

spirituality in their daily lives and maximize their experience of inner peace and joy.

The students also participated in workshops, discussions, skits and other activities which inspired them to strengthen the practice of satsang principles in their daily lives.

YUVA PARAYANS 2021

9 August to 6 September 2021



Over 25,000 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* participated in the separate three-day Yuvak and Yuvati Parayans based on the theme ‘Eva Santne Nāmu Hu Shish’ (I Bow My Head to Such a Sadhu) held in-person at around 1,500 BAPS centres across Gujarat and Mumbai during the holy month of Shravan.

The youths at each centre decorated the venue and set up displays to convey the *parayan* theme. During the three nightly *parayan* assemblies, the youths presented discourses based on the Bhaktachintamani, and gave speeches, participated in discussions and watched videos that elaborated on the *parayan* theme. They were also inspired by the video blessings of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

UK

BAPS VOLUNTEER RECEIVES BRENT YOUTH LEADER AWARD

17 August 2021, London

Dev Patel, a young volunteer at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, received the Young Leader Award at the Pride of Brent Youth Awards, which recognizes outstanding achievements of young people in the London borough



of Brent. The award felicitates those who have reached ‘above and beyond’ to support the local community and others. The 2020–1 awards especially highlighted the efforts of young people from Brent in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Dev, aged 20, is a first-year law student at SOAS, University of London. Despite the pandemic restrictions, he achieved outstanding academic results and also volunteered several times a week to deliver tiffins to the elderly and other needy people through BAPS’s nationwide ‘Connect & Care’ programme.

The Young Leader Award was presented at a special awards ceremony at the Civic Centre in Wembley by Cllr Lia Colacicco, the Mayor of Brent, in the presence of Cllr Muhammed Butt, Leader of Brent Council, and Carolyn Downs, Chief Executive of Brent Council.

After receiving the award, Dev said, “I am inspired by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life motto, ‘In the joy of others lies our own.’ His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj continues to motivate us all by imbibing these principles and so when he issued a call for everyone to support the vulnerable at the outset of the pandemic, I just had to do my bit.

“The Mandir has provided me and many others like me a sense of purpose and belonging, an opportunity to give something back to the community, particularly during the adversities of Covid. Honestly, without the Mandir, I’d be lost. And so I dedicate this award to my gurus, to everyone at the Mandir, and to every BAPS volunteer who has helped to keep people safe and connected during the pandemic.”

BAPS PARTICIPATES IN INTERFAITH CHARITY RUN

30 August 2021, London



BAPS volunteers in London joined thousands of runners at the inaugural London Interfaith Fun Run at the StoneX Stadium in Barnet to raise funds for charity.

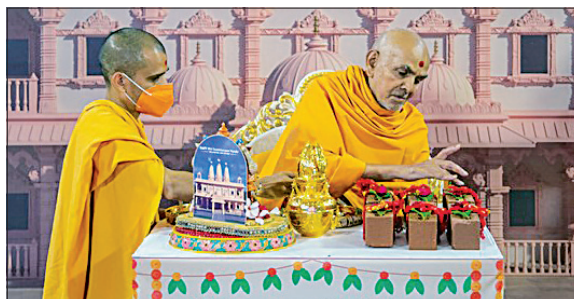
The event brought together many faith groups to promote unity and friendship between people from diverse backgrounds.

At the venue an international food court, prayer and reflection areas, and Interfaith and Cloud Nine inflatable Zones were set up. Runners and spectators enjoyed a diverse range of music, dance and storytelling performances.

BAPS further contributed by sharing informative posters of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s inspiring messages.

ASIA PACIFIC

SHILANYAS MAHOTSAV FOR NEW BAPS MANDIR 19–20 June 2021, Wellington, New Zealand



For almost a decade, the present BAPS Mandir in Wellington has served as a centre of community, culture and spirituality. Now, a new

BAPS Mandir is to be built in Wellington. Over 800 devotees participated in-person in the Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony, which was conducted at the Lower Hutt Events Centre as part of the Shilanyas Mahotsav. Also, 200 devotees at the BAPS Mandir in Auckland and 35 devotees at BAPS Mandir in Hamilton participated via a live webcast.

The ceremony was followed by an assembly attended by invited guests and over 1,200 devotees from throughout New Zealand. Among the dignitaries present were the High Commissioner of India to New Zealand, Shri Muktesh Pardeshi, and Mr. Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education, Minister for COVID-19 Response, Minister for the Public Service and Leader of the House.

Thereafter, Paramchintan Swami and other resident sadhus visited the new mandir site to lay the foundation bricks sanctified by Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj in India on 31 May 2021.

On 19 June, more than 800 people watched the youths present a special cultural programme of skits, dances and bhajans which highlighted the values, spirituality and spirit of service a mandir brings.

SHATABDI GHAR SABHA

June 2021



A total of more than 4,500 participants from about 1,400 families from across Australia and New Zealand participated in the Shatabdi Ghar Sabha project.

As part of the Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj centenary celebrations, the project encouraged family bonding based on the advice and *agna* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The Shatabdi Ghar Sabha project was conducted

at each BAPS centre by *karyakars* inviting one or more families to their homes to participate in a *ghar sabha*. The *sabhas* focused on three important topics: teaching values to children, God is the all-doer and seeing the good in others. The *sabhas* gave the invited families an insight into how a regular *ghar sabha* enhances family harmony. Invited participants expressed their approval of the concept, acknowledging that it is an effective way of bringing families together. Many pledged to conduct a regular *ghar sabha* with their own family.

SATSANG DIKSHA ADHIVESHAN

24–25 July 2021



A Satsang Diksha Adhiveshan was organized at all BAPS centres in Australia and New Zealand. The participants had around seven weeks to prepare for the two-part Satsang Diksha Adhiveshan: Satsang Diksha Mukhpath and Satsang Diksha Exam. Due to pandemic restrictions, some centres held the *adhiveshan* in person whereas some centres organized it online.

Satsang Diksha Mukhpath, 24 July 2021

A total of 509 participants memorized *shlokas* of the Satsang Diksha, in either Gujarati or Sanskrit, based on three challenge levels: the Ghanshyam Challenge (memorize 1–100 *shlokas*), the Nilkanth Challenge (1–200 *shlokas*) and the Sahajanand Challenge (1–315 *shlokas*).

Satsang Diksha Exam, 25 July 2021

A total of 830 devotees took part in the exam which comprised 100 multiple choice questions to be answered in 30 minutes. Despite the short preparation time, more than 70% of candidates scored 70% or more in the final test.

ABHISHEK MANDAPAM INAUGURATION

15 August 2021, Perth, Australia



The *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj was consecrated during the inauguration of the Abhishek Mandapam at the BAPS Mandir in Perth.

The resident sadhus of the Asia Pacific region conducted the Vedic *mahapuja* and *murti* consecration rituals of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj. Thereafter, a grand *annakut* of sweet and savoury vegetarian delicacies was offered to Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj.

The auspicious ceremony was webcast live and more than 180 families throughout Perth participated in the *mahapuja* and *abhishek* rituals virtually from their homes.

In the afternoon, devotees came in-person to perform *abhishek* of and offer prayers to Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj.

Previously, in Nenpur, on 10 March 2021, Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj.

NEW BAPS MANDIR INAUGURATION

29 August 2021, Hobart, Australia

Since 2016, Satsang has flourished in Hobart, the capital of Tasmania, an island state to the south of mainland Australia.

Paramchintandas Swami and Priyachintandas Swami performed the auspicious inauguration rituals of the beautiful new *hari* mandir in the Claremont suburb, following which a grand *annakut* of vegetarian delicacies was offered to the *murtis* with great devotion.

Over 1,330 devotees and well-wishers from



Australia and New Zealand participated in the rituals at home via a live webcast.

The inauguration ceremony was followed by an online satsang assembly which highlighted the necessity of mandirs in society.

Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *arti* of the *murtis* on 28 August 2021 from Sarangpur.

NORTH AMERICA

JAMAICAN TRACK TEAM VISITS BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

21 July 2021, Los Angeles, CA



Yohan Blake together with Rasheed Dwyer, Jevaughn Minzie, Ronda Whyte, Anastasia Le-roy and other accomplished Jamaican Olympic track team members visited the mandir before their flight to Tokyo for the Olympics.

The Olympic athletes received a warm traditional welcome and were guided around the mandir complex and exhibition. They also offered *abhishek* to the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni and conducted an inspirational discussion with 75 BAPS youths.

When asked about the mindset that has brought them success, Mr Blake said, "Never

settle, be a go-getter... believe in your talent [because] that will be your greatest strength.” Ms Whyte encouraged the youths to “be hungry for success” and tell yourself that “I can, I must and I will!” The youths extended their prayers and best wishes to the athletes.

Before departing, Mr Blake described his experience, “To come here and spend time with the kids and see the mandir and all its pieces touches me a lot. The mandir is mind-blowing. When I walked into the temple for the first time, seeing everyone praying and the faith everyone had left me speechless. I prayed for the betterment of my country and for the youth that are the next generation in Jamaica. Thank you for hosting me at this beautiful place.”

UAE

KUMBHI PUJAN OF BAPS HINDU MANDIR 9 August 2021, Abu Dhabi



On the first day of the holy month of Shravan, a special ceremony was conducted at the BAPS Hindu Mandir site in Abu Dhabi. Following pandemic protocols, the small gathering witnessed the auspicious ceremony. The first stone of the hundreds of tons of carved and semi-carved stones that have arrived from India was symbolically sanctified by Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami. Addressing the gathering, Brahmaviharidas Swami thanked the leadership of the UAE and India, and the donors, dignitaries, well-wishers and volunteers. His Holiness Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the occasion from India. Everyone present, including consultants and contractors, prayed for

this historic and iconic spiritual project of global harmony. Sanctified flowers were showered in all directions for the smooth progress and timely completion of the mandir.

BAPS CHARITIES

BLANKETS DONATED TO HOSPITALS July 2021, Johannesburg, South Africa



To assist during the coldest winter in over a decade in Johannesburg, BAPS Charities provided 2,300 hospital grade blankets to three leading government hospitals in the city: Helen Joseph, Raheema Moosa and Chris Hani Baragwanath hospitals.

The initiative was especially appreciated given the strain on government facilities due to the third wave of COVID-19 in the Gauteng province.

COVID-19 VACCINES WEBINAR WITH MEDICAL EXPERTS

15 July 2021



To help in the efforts against the deadly impact of the COVID-19 virus, BAPS Charities held an informative vaccine webinar to emphasize the necessity of vaccine uptake among young adults

to stem the pandemic.

The webinar featured educational videos produced by BAPS Charities encouraging vaccination uptake among young adults, explaining the benefits of vaccines and dispelling common misconceptions about the safety and

efficacy of vaccines.

Presentations by experienced experts clarified many apprehensions and misunderstandings, and the panel of experts also participated in a live Q&A session, satisfactorily answering many questions from the attendees. ♦

TRIBUTES



PUJYA DHARMASWARUP SWAMI, SARANGPUR

Aged: 88, Aksharvas: 3 August 2021

A native of Monpur (Vallabhipur), Pujya Dharmaswarup Swami was initiated by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj during the Pushpadolotsav celebration in 1957. He served as pujari of the BAPS Mandir in Sarangpur for many years. He was very sincere and devout in his *seva*, and also careful in not wasting resources.

His saintly *paramhansa*-like simple, austere and devout life was inspiring for all. He also made time to attend *katha*, read shastras and turn 200 *malas* every day. He never complained about his

health and was respectfully known as ‘Jadbharat’. For five years, he also served at the BAPS Mandir in Mehsana. Despite his advanced age, he regularly accompanied other sadhus in their *vicharan*.

In his final months, he suffered from ill health, but he never complained and always radiated an inner joy derived from his inner devotion. His saintly attributes endeared him to all.

Our humble prostrations to such a pious sadhu who earned the inner blessings of all three gurus he served. ♦



PUJYA VIRAKTASWARUP SWAMI, ATLADARA

Aged: 67 Aksharvas: 8 August 2021

A native of Nala village, Pujya Viraktaswarup Swami was initiated by Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj during the Bhagwan Swaminarayan Bicentenary Celebrations in 1981. After spending his initial years in Sarangpur and Bochasan, he served as a *bhandari* in the new *chhatralaya* in Atladara from 1986. Thereafter, for many years, he oversaw the various construction projects at

Atladara mandir and *hari* mandirs in surrounding areas. He also served at Bansipahadpur (Rajasthan) to quarry stones for the Akshar Dwar in Gondal and Akshardham in Gandhinagar. He suffered from ill health for several years, yet continued to joyfully engage in *katha*, reading and devotion.

Our humble tributes to such a dedicated sadhu. ♦

(Cont. from p. 41)

just how deeply our friends can affect our lives, we can interact with them with the purpose of mutual growth.

We spend our lives thinking mostly about big decisions, but forget that small decisions matter just as much. Where to go to school, what to study, or where to work are important questions that define the starting lines. Yet, it's the simple

ways we live our lives with our friends that determines how we fare on the journey.

We can choose to spend more time with supportive friends, even if their beliefs and goals differ. This may also be a great opportunity to call swamis, speak with fellow *kishores* and *karyakars*, and perhaps even write to Mahant Swami Maharaj – our eternal friend.

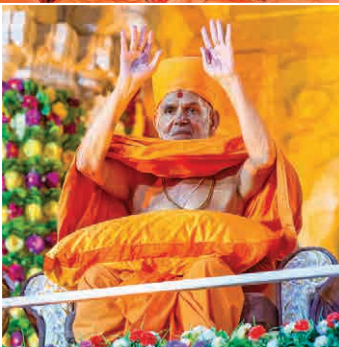
He is, after all, the *pragat* form of Mulji. ♦



**PAYING TRIBUTE TO GURU
PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ
17 August 2021, Sarangpur**

Swamishri offers respects and prayers on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of Brahmawarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's passing away to Akshardham (Shravan *sud* 10).

1. Swamishri performs *arti* at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's cremation shrine.
2. Swamishri prays to Shastriji Maharaj in the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir.
3. Swamishri performs *arti* in Pramukh Swami Maharaj's room.



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ WELCOMED IN SARANGPUR
10 August 2021, Sarangpur

Swamishri returned to Sarangpur after 17 months. Sadhus, *sadhaks* and devotees warmly and devoutly welcome him on his arrival.