

SWAMINARAYAN **BLISS**

September–October 2022

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Salutations to
Mahant Swami Maharaj
on His 89th Birthday

Pramukh Swami Maharaj Garlands
Mahant Swami, Atladara, 1997



RATH YATRA CELEBRATION **1 July 2022, Ahmedabad**

Swamishri carries Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj during the Rath Yatra procession in the mandir *parikrama*.

Inset: Swamishri offers *thal* to Thakorji during the Rath Yatra puja ceremony.

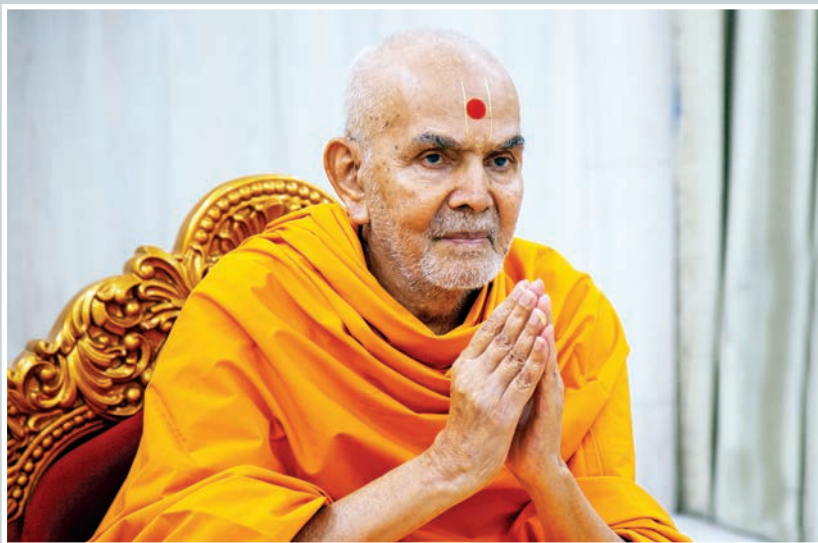


INAUGURATION OF BAPS RESEARCH INSTITUTE **Sydney, Australia , 24 July 2022**

Distinguished scholars during the inauguration of the BAPS Research Institute, Sydney, in the presence of Mahamahopadhyay Bhadrash Swami.

Inset: Swamishri blesses the inauguration assembly via video conference from Ahmedabad.





SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

September–October 2022, Vol. 45, No. 5



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



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

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C O N T E N T S

- 4 Shri Hari in Ahmedabad
- 7 Pre-Initiation Period
- 14 Katha: The Bedrock of Satsang
- 17 Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Modern Management (Part 3)
- 21 Behind the Sacred Relic
- 23 Letters to Pramukh Swami Maharaj
- 27 Inspirations
- 29 Mahant Swami Maharaj's Vicharan
- 37 Prayers and Condolences from His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj to His Majesty King Charles III, UK
- 38 Festival of Inspiration
- 40 'Island of Heroes'
- 42 Seminars on 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Contributions to Society
- 43 Special Centenary Assemblies
- 44 Celebrating Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary
- 47 BAPS News
- 57 Tributes

SHRI HARI IN AHMEDABAD

Shri Hari was given a grand welcome in Ahmedabad and during his stay he showered his divinity upon all...

CULTIVATE FIRM FAITH

It was *ekadashi* and lunch of *falahar* foods, like *barfi*, *shrikand*, *penda*, cooked vegetables, *puri* and *shiro*, were made for Shri Hari, his devotees and the Kathi royals. First, Maharaj ate and then he generously served the devotees. Though the sadhus had observed a waterless fast, they too served some items to the devotees. Shri Hari saw the sadhus serve and expressed his pleasure (*rajipo*). In fact, his sadhus, who practised austerity, were of immense credit and pride to the organization. Dharma is moreso inspired through its practice of dharma than by preaching alone. After serving lunch, Maharaj told everyone to rest for the afternoon.

At night, a satsang assembly was organized at the same place. Shri Hari gave a discourse and thereafter the sadhus sang bhajans till 12 midnight. Shri Hari was pleased with his sadhus' austerity and devotion, and the piety of his devotees. For the next four days the daily programme of spiritual discourses continued. Once, Shri Hari said, "Though you all do darshan of the *murtis* in this mandir and also my darshan, but if you are unable to cultivate firm faith in my divine form your worldly desires will not be totally eradicated and satsang will not become foremost in your hearts. Thus, the more



inclination you cultivate towards listening to spiritual discourses, the more faith in me will be established in your hearts. Additionally, the material desires of lust and attachment will be dissolved and your physical senses will become withdrawn from the material objects and pleasures, and remain stable in your heart."

MAHARAJ VISITS MR JENKINSON'S RESIDENCE

At the invitation of the acting Collector of Ahmedabad, Mr Jenkinson, Shri Hari visited his home in the Bhadra fort in Ahmedabad. The official collector was Mr Barrington, but he was out on a visit to Australia. Mr Jenkinson and his English officials welcomed Shri Hari at the entrance of his home and led him to his sitting room. The collector garlanded and honoured Maharaj. Thereafter, Shri Hari spoke to them in Hindi, "Greed is a formidable enemy of one's soul. People often have greed for money, and kings, out of their greed, strive to conquer other kingdoms. When one is burdened by greed for money or power, one invites personal destruction. At present, we are witnessing the beginning of British rule in India. You are inclined towards ethical ways and spiritual leanings, but if you become unethical and behave unjustly towards the local people

out of your greed to enhance your powers then your influence will wane and disappear. I am a teacher and an exponent of dharma, therefore it is my duty to inspire whoever comes to me on the path of dharma.”

Mr Jenkinson and his colleagues were impressed by Shri Hari’s candid and forthright words.

On the full moon (Punam) day of Fagan, Shri Hari showered coloured water and *gulal* on the devotees and celebrated the Holi festival in the mandir. Thereafter, Shri Hari and the devotees bathed in the River Sabarmati to wash off the colours. An assembly was arranged and the *paramhansas* sang festive bhajans of Holi before Shri Hari.

DIVINE OPPORTUNITY IN LIFE

On 13 March 1825 (Fagan *vad* 9, A.S. 1881), the third consecration anniversary (*patotsav*) of the Swaminarayan Mandir in Ahmedabad was held. Shri Hari performed the worship rituals of *pujan* and *arti* of the *murtis* of Shri Nar-Narayan. Then, dates and popcorn were offered to the *murtis* of Shri Nar-Narayan. The *murtis* were donned with garlands of sugar crystals. A small *murti* was placed in a decorated *hindolo* (swing) and worshipped. Maharaj then rocked the *murti* while the *paramhansas* sang bhajans. The festive and devotional ambience enthused all.

Shri Hari came to the mandir grounds and sat in an assembly of sadhus and devotees. The sadhus sang the festive Holi bhajans. Soon, Mukund Brahmachari brought vessels of water containing saffron and *kesudo* flowers. Adharanand swami gave an ornate and beautiful *pichkari* (squirter) to Shri Hari. Maharaj sprayed coloured water on the devotees and sadhus. The air became suffused with the sweet aroma of saffron and joyous festivity. Then, the devotees placed basketfuls of *gulal*

(vermilion powder) before Shri Hari. Maharaj profusely sprinkled *gulal* on the devotees and blessed them.

The sadhus prayed to Shri Hari, “Maharaj, you have showered coloured water and *gulal* upon us, but we pray that you also colour the *brahmacharis* and devotees who are singing the Holi bhajans and rocking Thakorji in the mandir. Shri Hari immediately went there and coloured the devotees sitting under the mandir dome.

SWAMINARAYAN FESTIVALS INSPIRE DHARMA AND BHAKTI

Thereafter, Shri Hari rode on his horse, accompanied by his sadhus on foot, to bathe in the River Sabarmati. The *kathis* rode on their horses, escorting Shri Hari. The scene turned into a colourful and festive procession with sadhus and devotees singing bhajans and playing instruments. While Maharaj exited the walled city from the Delhi Gate, the local citizens witnessing the long colourful procession thought that Swaminarayan’s festivals inspired all with dharma and bhakti.

DARIYAKHAN LIBERATED

Shri Hari was slowly riding his horse and leading the entire group towards the banks of the Sabarmati. Suddenly, Maharaj halted beneath a banyan tree for a few moments.¹ Everyone was surprised. A little while later, Maharaj proceeded and came to a spot by the banks of the River Sabarmati, now called Narayan Ghat. Here, while Shri Hari was changing his clothes to bathe in the river, Muktanand Swami asked, “Maharaj, why did you stop for a while beneath the banyan tree ? Was there any special reason?”

Shri Hari looked at Muktanand Swami and replied, “Swami, you had once resided at the Dariyakhan Dome. That Dome was, in its ancient past, known as Vikarna – one of the brothers of Duryodhan of the Kaurav family. He had

1. The banyan tree was located beyond the Hathinsing Dera outside the Delhi Gate, and to the left of the main road leading towards the Dariyakhan Dome.

- Ahmedabad Bhagwan Swaminarayan, p. 36. (A translation of the Gujarati text.)

upbraided Duryodhan for instructing Dushasan to undress Draupadi in a public assembly. Consequently, Duryodhan excommunicated Vikarna from his family. After several births, Vikarna became a general of an army and he was called Dariyakhan. Once, he hunted an animal near Dadhichi Rishi's ashram on the banks of the River Sabarmati. The rishi became irate and cursed him, 'You will become a ghost and suffer for your sinful action.' Dariyakhan pleaded to the rishi to forgive him. The rishi then responded out of compassion, 'When Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan will be born on earth in a human form you will have his darshan. By the merit of his darshan and blessings you will be liberated from my curse.' The reason why I stopped under the banayan tree was that Dariyakhan had come to me. I blessed him and sent him to Badrikashram (a divine abode to perform austerities and atone for one's sins)."²

Muktanand Swami recalled his former visit with his group of sadhus to the Dariyakhan Dome and how he had liberated the ghosts residing there. At that time, Dariyakhan had also come, but since he wanted to have the darshan of Shri Hari he choose to remain as a ghost.

Shri Hari then entered the waters of the Sabarmati to have a bath. All the *paramhansas* and devotees also bathed with Maharaj. The river water cleaned the stained clothes and faces of all, leaving the water red hued. After Shri Hari put on a pair of fresh clothes the devotees arranged a seat by the riverbank for Maharaj. Then, they all performed Maharaj's *pujan*, offered flower garlands and donations. Thereafter, Shri Hari headed towards Motera with his entourage of sadhus and devotees to give darshan to Purushottam Bhakta and others. Then, Shri Hari left to return to Shrinagar (Ahmedabad). Along the way, the singers and instrumentalists sang bhajans and played instruments. Many bystanders did darshan of Maharaj with great joy and glory

and savoured the bhajans. Soon, they all reached the Nar-Narayan Mandir in the Navavas area of the walled city of Ahmedabad.

GHANSHYAM IS NEAR, YET WHY SO FAR ?

Ever since Maharaj's family (Dharmakul) arrived in Gujarat, Suvasini Bhabhi often cooked Shri Hari's meals. She felt satisfied by serving in this manner. During Shri Hari's childhood in Chhapaiya and Ayodhya Suvasini Bhabhi served and bantered with Ghanshyam. However, now that Ghanshyam had revealed himself as Bhagwan, she found his silence and solemnness difficult to comprehend and bear. She thought Ghanshyam was physically so near, yet there was a great distance between them. Suvasini would turn sad at this, but then the fact that he had become revered as God exhilarated her.

A MANDIR WHERE THE SADHUS' DISCIPLINES ARE MAINTAINED

After having his meal, Shri Hari generously served food to his sadhus in the mandir dining area. He lovingly insisted that they all eat more. Thereafter, Maharaj returned to his residence and the devotees who had sponsored the meal performed his *pujan*. Shri Hari spoke to them, "I have built a mandir here so that the pious are spiritually nourished. However, when a devotee decides to build a mandir in his village he should build it in such a way that the sadhus' moral disciplines are fully maintained."

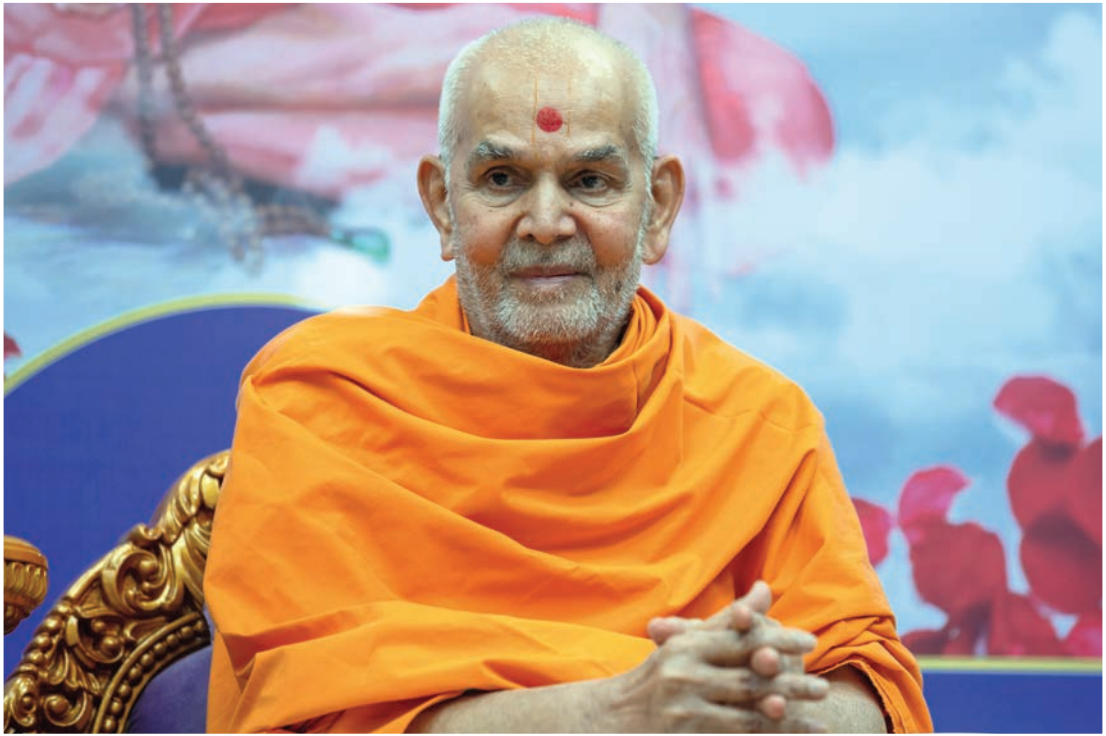
In the evening, Maharaj sat on a high seat arranged under a neem tree by the main gate of the mandir. The sadhus commenced the satsang assembly with the singing of kirtans. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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

PRE-INITIATION PERIOD

The Childhood and Youth of Mahant Swami Maharaj



BIRTH

In 1907, Shastriji Maharaj, the third spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, fulfilled the wish of his Lord by consecrating a *shikharbaddha* mandir in Bochasan. The devotees of Anand and the Charotar region played a pivotal role in the making of the mandir. Among them, Manibhai Narayanbhai Patel of Anand was a prominent devotee. Shastriji Maharaj often stayed at Manibhai's house during his visits to Anand between 1907 and 1929. Manibhai served him with profound devotion and care.

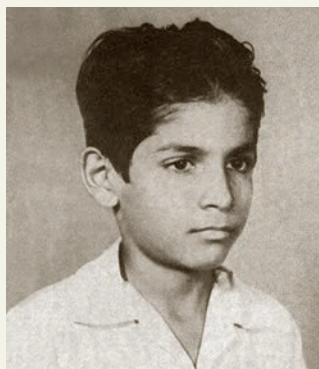
In 1929, Manibhai settled in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, with the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj for the purpose of doing business. There, he found many *patidar* settlers from the Charotar region in the tobacco businesses. Manibhai, however, entered into the dairy business.

Manibhai lived in house number 23 in the housing society of Napier Town in Civil Lines in Jabalpur. Here, on 13 September 1933 (Bhadarva vad 9, V.S. 1989), his wife, Dahiba, gave birth to a divine child.

What name should the child be given? Manibhai decided to wait for Shastriji Maharaj to come and name the child. But prior to that, everyone started affectionately calling the child Vinu. And this name was written on his birth certificate.

SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ'S BLESSINGS AND PROPHECY

Vinubhai was six months old. In March 1934, Shastriji Maharaj arrived in Jabalpur after his pilgrimage to Chhapaiya. With him were Ashabbhai and Ishwarbhai of Purushottampura and other



A young Vinubhai



Christ Church Boys' Senior Secondary School, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh

devotees and sadhus. Ashabhai brought the six-month-old child, Vinubhai, and placed him in Shastriji Maharaj's lap. Shastriji Maharaj looked at the baby and smiled. He cheerfully initiated the child into Satsang and named him 'Keshav'. Then, placing his hand on his head, he blessed, "Manibhai, your son will grow up to become a sadhu and will render great service to the Sampradaya."

In spite of Shastriji Maharaj having named the child Keshav, the family members called him Vinu because they had become habituated with the name.

Manibhai's neighbours were from different Indian states. One of them was a South Indian named Shyamrao. Another was a pious Punjabi. The room where Shastriji Maharaj had stayed was later rented to a Christian. So, Vinubhai, reticent by nature but very sharp and agile, was raised amidst neighbours of various language and cultural backgrounds. Vinubhai thus conversed with them in English and Hindi. The neighbours were fond of Vinubhai and the latter respected them.

BRILLIANT SCHOOL YEARS

During his childhood years, Vinubhai had a few close friends. But, he was more inclined towards reading books. He used to read in a nearby garden, sometimes in the evening and sometimes in the moonlight.

He studied till 2nd grade at the renowned Christ Church School in Jabalpur. Thereafter,

from the 2nd grade to Senior Cambridge (11th grade) he studied at the Christ Church Boys School.

Vinubhai excelled in all the subjects. He studied with unwavering attention and interest in class. He remembered whatever was taught in class. On returning home he would diligently do his homework. He always stood first or second in the class, which surprised everyone.

Vinubhai was exposed to three languages: Gujarati at home, English in school and Hindi outside of home and school.

From childhood, Vinubhai had a very sharp memory. He still remembers incidents and events from the age of four. Even today, around 80 years later, he can fluently recite the poems he had been taught in grades three and four. A couplet of one poem that he often recites is, "He that is down need fear no fall; he that is humble ever shall have God to be his guide."

In the 5th grade, he stood first in the exams. As a reward he was given a book, which he read avidly. Vinubhai, however, was disinclined towards reading the newspapers. Every morning, the *Mumbai Samachar* was delivered at his house, but he never even glanced at it. He preferred to read good magazines and always skimmed through the *Swaminarayan Prakash*. Though he did not know Gujarati properly, he made an effort to read it.

Vinubhai's artistic sense and skill were well developed. He made excellent drawings in school. Football was his favourite sport. He played as left

full back.

In school, he was liked by all. He was quiet, thoughtful and ever-smiling, and the entire class admired him.

Mr Robinson, the principal of Christ Church School, was impressed with Vinubhai's radiant personality, intelligence and innate virtues. He once told Vinubhai, "In future, you'll become a priest."

After Vinubhai had completed his Senior Cambridge studies in 1951, Manibhai left Jabalpur to return with his family to Anand for business.

A NEW CHAPTER IN GUJARAT

Jabalpur and Anand were in stark contrast with regards to culture, language and social atmosphere. Vinubhai was fluent in English and Hindi, whereas his communication in Gujarati was weak and patchy. Thus, initially, the ambience in Anand was not conducive to him. However, Vinubhai's arrival in Anand in 1951 turned out to be a turning point in his life. In recollecting the historic moment, he writes, "In 1951, I was 17 years old. My elderly relatives were staunch *satsangis* from the beginning due to Shastriji Maharaj's association.

"At home, the virtues and glory of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj were sung, but [I did not have] enough clarity about what they were really like. Then, suddenly, one day we got the news, 'Shastriji Maharaj has departed to Dham!' All the relatives were about to leave for Sarangpur. Our whole house and even people from our neighbourhood were leaving. Thus, I, too, left with everyone. When I reached [Sarangpur], Shastriji Maharaj's cremation was over. I was naturally downhearted. From there, we all went to Gadhada. A few days later, the *pratishtha* [of the mandir] in Gadhada was going to take place.

"On the day before the Gadhada *pratishtha* I met Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I was still in a melancholy mood. At that time, he was 29 years

old and I was 17. I met him when my life [in Satsang] was beginning.

"Motikaka [Motibhai Bhagwandas] introduced me to Pramukh Swami. He had a flourish of jet black hair before the [monthly] *mundan*. His eyes were active and blinked rapidly. He was gentle and mild, had a round face, was thin and thus looked tall. I can still remember his form. He had a slightly dark complexion. One could see the faint red speckle on the tip of his nose. I looked at him as Motikaka was introducing us to each other. Yes, I was definitely moved by him. My thoughts seemed to have stopped. Pramukh Swami was talking to me in Hindi. I do not remember what he asked me and the answers I gave. However, I felt as if he knew me. I, too, felt that I knew him!

"Within a few moments of his contact I had a wonderful and divine experience. I felt transported from the sultry summer heat of Vaishakh [May-June] to the pleasant [icy] coolness of the Himalayas. Then a leading devotee came and Pramukh Swami had to attend to him. So, he briskly left, smiling. I was left dazed as if someone had snatched away an expensive thing from me.

"Today, I realize what his personality was like at that time. He never wished to impress or overwhelm anyone. He was honest, simple, straightforward and frank. I felt, 'Oh! He is a true sadhu!'"

For Vinubhai, his first meeting with the young Pramukh Swami left a deep impression of him.

ABSORBED IN YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S DIVINE LOVE

In 1951, another historic and memorable incident took place which changed Vinubhai's life.

Yogiji Maharaj arrived in Anand. During his stay there, he always visited Manibhai's house. Yogiji Maharaj's thick, coarse *dhotiyas* and rustic demeanour and speech did not interest Vinubhai. The moment Yogiji Maharaj stepped into his house, Vinubhai rushed out through another flight of stairs. Many felt that because of Vinubhai's



Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami and devotees after Shastriji Maharaj's cremation rituals were completed, Sarangpur

youthful whims his father's satsang had failed to appeal to him. Despite having a mandir at home, Vinubhai kept himself aloof from the daily rituals of puja, *katha*, kirtans and celebration of festivals. Sometimes, due to his rational mind, he would often ignore and make fun of devotional practices.

Once, while Vinubhai was leaving his house, Yogiji Maharaj came climbing up the same stairs. Yogiji Maharaj lovingly held his hand and spoke affectionately, "Guru, where are you going? Come back upstairs." Vinubhai returned in a vexed mood with Yogiji Maharaj. Then, Yogiji Maharaj talked to him casually and softly, "Here, put on this *kanthi*." And Yogi Maharaj placed a *kanthi* around his neck. But Vinubhai, out of his prejudice for sadhus, broke it instantly. In response, Yogiji Maharaj smiled sweetly, gave him a pat on his shoulder and said, "Oh, you are very strong!"

Vinubhai's actions were such that anyone would have got angry and chastised him. But not Yogiji Maharaj. He was of a different mettle. He was an embodiment of love and magnanimity. He kept on showering Vinubhai with his pure, selfless love.

A couple of days later, Yogiji Maharaj was departing from Anand. While he was walking towards the railway station, he saw Vinubhai sitting on the parapet of the village pond with his friends. Yogiji Maharaj hailed him affectionately,

"O Vinubhai, come here!" Vinubhai reluctantly came to Yogiji Maharaj, wondering what he would say now. However, to his surprise, Yogiji Maharaj humbly folded his hands, smiled and said, "Now I am going. Forgive me for my mistakes." Then, Yogiji Maharaj blessed Vinubhai with his signature pat and walked away hurriedly.

Vinubhai stood astonished, not knowing what to say or do. Instantaneously, his prejudice dissolved and he was overwhelmed by a wave of remorse. He became lost in thought. He mused about how Yogiji Maharaj was a unique sadhu. He also realized that his personality overflowed with pure love and his smile was ethereal. He was suddenly overwhelmed by a deep desire to be with him. He simply stood there transfixed, with his eyes thirsting for Yogiji Maharaj's darshan.

Sometime later, another soul-stirring incident took place when Yogiji Maharaj was travelling by train from Ahmedabad to Mumbai. The train halted for 10 minutes at Anand Station. Many devotees had gone to the railway station for Swamishri's darshan. The shy and reticent Vinubhai had also gone to the station for his darshan. Yogiji Maharaj started meeting the devotees. Then someone informed him that Vinubhai had come.

Yogiji Maharaj scanned the platform and enquired, "Where is Vinubhai?" After seeing him standing at a distance, Yogiji Maharaj alighted from his carriage and went up to him. Again, Swami showered his infinite love upon him and blessed him with pats. Vinubhai was overwhelmed by Swami's compassionate eyes and saintly virtues. Then, moments later, the train whistle blew and it was time for Swami to leave. Vinubhai did not feel like parting from Yogiji Maharaj. Swami flashed a smile and hurriedly headed towards his carriage. As soon as he put his foot on the footboard, the train started moving. Vinubhai kept his eyes focused on Swami till he was out of sight. Thereafter, he remained standing on the platform, savouring

thoughts of the divine encounter. The devotees and others dispersed. Only Vinubhai stood there, totally absorbed in remembering every frame of the divine occasion. The experience of Yogiji Maharaj was so profound that his *murti* pervaded his being. He realized that Swami was not an ordinary sadhu, but God-realized.

Thereafter, for the next fifteen days, Vinubhai returned daily to the railway station, sat on a bench at the same spot and joyfully reminisced about his experience with Yogiji Maharaj. Despite the routine hullabaloo and jostling of passengers on the platform Vinubhai remained unperturbed while recalling the occasion for 45 minutes.

While remembering that experience he states, “On meeting Yogiji Maharaj, I instantly bonded with him. It was as if I was in search of him, but unaware of it. On meeting him I became fulfilled. Everything else became subordinate. Yogiji Maharaj became the centre of my life.”

FIRST INSPIRATION TO BECOME A SADHU

Thus, Vinubhai became passionate about Yogiji Maharaj. He started to spare time to be with Yogiji Maharaj during his *vicharan* and take the benefit of his spiritual association. During his association with the guru, an occasion arose where the thought of becoming a sadhu was sowed in his mind. In remembering that day he writes, “After celebrating the festival of Krishna Janmashtami in Atladara some of us youths departed [a few days later] to go home. We came to the railway station to catch the morning train. It was Shravan *vad* 11. Pramukh Swami and his companion sadhu were on their way to Ahmedabad by train. All the youths got into the carriages where there were empty seats. I ran and joined Pramukh Swami in a third class carriage. I was the only youth with Swami and his companion sadhu. Pramukh Swami was happy to see me. The train started and he began asking me about my studies. Suddenly, he enquired, ‘Do you have a *kanthi* around your neck?’ I said, ‘No.’

“Pramukh Swami tenderly explained and said, ‘Get it from Yogi Bapa.’ By that time the companion sadhu had placed a *kanthi* in Pramukh Swami’s hand. So, he placed it around my neck. Then our conversation continued. He spoke continuously in broken Hindi. While speaking he said, ‘Become a sadhu. You will be able to serve immensely...’ And thereafter he talked spiritedly. There was no intention to force or command in his words. He talked about the miseries of *sansar* and confidently described the happiness associated with God and guru. He was speaking in such a way that the choice was entirely left to me.

“I found a new direction in Pramukh Swami’s sweet, humble and loving talks. I felt very peaceful. From that moment onwards I was awakened with the desire to live a sadhu’s life.

“After a while, Pramukh Swami began talking about the glory of Yogi Bapa. At that time I felt so peaceful that it seemed as if he had accepted me in his lap. In this way, he instilled [Yogi Bapa’s] glory in my soul.

“We soon reached Anand. The other youths came running from their carriages [to Swami]. Pramukh Swami met them all. He had to travel ahead to Ahmedabad. Saying goodbye to the youths he smiled and said, ‘Today is *ekadashi*. Don’t have anything to eat.’ The youths agreed to follow his instruction, and the train proceeded ahead.

“So, it was Pramukh Swami who inspired me to observe my first fast! I repeatedly experienced Pramukh Swami to be a unique and genuine sadhu.

“The task of moulding me was done through his courteous and affectionate speech, which was not an ordinary thing. I had never thought of becoming a sadhu. And neither did [Swami] purposefully talk to me about it. It always happened naturally and spontaneously.”

Pramukh Swami’s inspiring words left a deep impact on Vinubhai. In fact, they kindled a divine spark in his heart. In 1952, Vinubhai went to Gondal for Yogiji Maharaj’s spiritual association.



Vinubhai during his college years



Bansilal Amrutlal College of Agriculture, Anand, Gujarat

There, in the Akshar Deri, Yogiji Maharaj instructed Vinubhai to become a sadhu. Vinubhai beamed with joy. He decided there and then to dedicate himself totally to the guru.

From then onwards, his life's goal was clear and fixed. He was eager to become a sadhu at the earliest, but Yogiji Maharaj insisted that he graduate in his studies first. So, Vinubhai tried to put his mind in his studies.

EDUCATION IN AGRICULTURE AND BRAHMAVIDYA

Vinubhai decided to study science at the V.P. Science College in Vallabh Vidyanagar. There were two classes in the first year. One was a special class, which comprised of thirty brilliant students. Vinubhai studied in this special class. While attending Professor R.A. Dave's lecture, Vinubhai became acquainted with a brilliant student named Ramanbhai Patel.¹

They became very good friends. After the first year, Ramanbhai went to Mumbai to study medicine and Vinubhai enrolled for a bachelor's degree in agriculture in Anand.

After completing his first year at V. P. Science College, Vinubhai had many other academic options to pursue due to his brilliance. But he chose to do a bachelor's degree in agriculture. The main reason for this was so that he could easily go and stay periodically with Yogiji Maharaj and

avail of his spiritual company. In addition, the agriculture college did not have co-education, which facilitated his future plans of becoming a sadhu. His aim of becoming a sadhu was very clear and strong. He was disinterested in worldly matters. So, during the four years in college he studied agriculture and also took lessons in *brahmavidya* from Yogiji Maharaj.

PROFOUND IMPRESSIONS OF YOGIJI MAHARAJ AND PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

During his academic years Vinubhai gradually started spending more and more time with Yogiji Maharaj. He would often rush to wherever Yogiji Maharaj was travelling. On many occasions, Yogiji Maharaj blessed Vinubhai with immense spiritual joy and also revealed the disciple's greatness to others. His spiritual bonds with Yogiji Maharaj deepened.

Yogiji Maharaj showered his love and grace on Vinubhai and would also enlighten and inspire Vinubhai with the highest spiritual wisdom. He also moulded his life by instructing him to observe fasts. Sometimes, he told him to fast for two or three consecutive days to test his mental and physical endurance. Yogiji Maharaj also gave him the mantra for realizing *ekantik* dharma. Vinubhai abided by the guru's words with alacrity.

1 Later, Ramanbhai Patel went to Mumbai and studied medicine. He, too, earned the grace and blessings of Yogiji Maharaj and took *diksha* from him in 1961. He was named Swayamprakashdas Swami and is fondly known as Dr Swami.

TRIALS ON THE PATH OF SAINTLINESS

Through Yogiji Maharaj's association Vinubhai's life became enriched with saintly virtues. As news percolated in Anand that Vinubhai was going to become a sadhu, a wave of discontent and agitation arose among his relatives. Among them was his seniormost relative, Motibhai Bhagwandas Patel, who was also a dedicated and mature devotee. But, Vinubhai's father, Manibhai, wished that his son become a sadhu.

One day, Vinubhai was pouring water while Yogiji Maharaj washed his hands by a coconut tree in the compound of Sokhda mandir. At that time, Yogiji Maharaj surprisingly declared, "I will not initiate you as a sadhu because Motikaka has refused. So, get married and go to Africa. You will earn lots of money and fame there."

On hearing this Vinubhai was alarmed, and humbly beseeched, "Bapa, I want to be a sadhu and please you!"

At home, there were offers for Vinubhai's marriage and a generous dowry from seventeen families. But Vinubhai was resolute in his goal to never lead a householder's life. Once, he told Yogiji Maharaj while he was bathing, "Bapa, I want to become a sadhu and please you." On seeing his determination, Yogiji Maharaj became immensely pleased and replied, "Oh, you are very firm and determined." Then, Yogiji Maharaj stalled his bathing ritual by placing the small pot of water aside and embraced Vinubhai, saying, "I, too, am of the same resolve, but I have to side with Motikaka. However, you should tell him explicitly." With these words, Vinubhai felt calmness and joy pervading his entire being.

Soon thereafter, Motikaka came up to Yogiji Maharaj and spoke vociferously, "In our family,



Vinu Bhagat, after initiation into the *parshad-fold*

four youths took initiation as sadhus, but none of them have remained so. Whereas he [Vinubhai] is from a distant place [Jabalpur] and does not have any satsang knowledge – how long will he remain as a sadhu after becoming one? Tell me Swami, am I not his well-wisher?" And then Motikaka took hold of Vinubhai's arm and spoke sternly, "Come home. A girl and all other comforts of a married life are ready for you."

However, Vinubhai politely wrested his arm from Motikaka's grip and boldly replied, "I do not want to get married. I want to become a sadhu!" Motibhai was infuriated by the terse reply and so he struck Vinubhai with his hand, and shouted, "I give you three more days to think about it."

The taciturn Vinubhai spoke calmly and with a steely resolve, "I don't need to think any further. My final decision is to become a sadhu."

Yogiji Maharaj blissfully looked at Vinubhai and confidently said, "Motibhai, he wants to become a sadhu. Therefore, allow him to be one, and bless him."

Motibhai reluctantly agreed after hearing Yogiji Maharaj's words and uttered, "Okay, whatever he wishes." Then, he blessed Vinubhai, "If it is your wish, then become a sadhu. I am happy about it." Then, Motibhai walked away quietly.

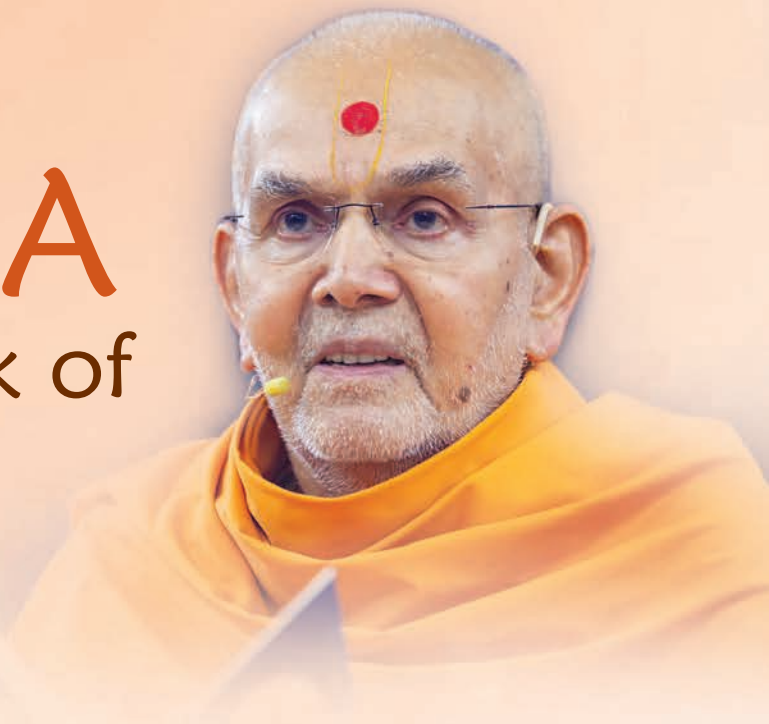
Yogiji Maharaj exclaimed, "Vinubhai! Motibhai had pleased Shastriji Maharaj immensely. On having received his blessings, you will be victorious."

Vinubhai hurdled over one trial, but there was another major one. His mother, Dahiba, was not happy and willing to allow her beloved son to become a sadhu. But Vinubhai discoursed to her about *vairagya* and the evanescent nature of the world.

(Cont. on p. 20)

KATHA

The Bedrock of Satsang



Bhagwan Swaminarayan described satsang as a haveli – an ornate wooden building – and *katha-varta* as its foundations. He emphasized *katha-varta* – spiritual discourses and discussions – as the foundation upon which one’s personal satsang is built. The more robust one’s engagement in *katha*, the higher and sturdier will one’s satsang rise.

Such affinity for *katha* is evident in the lives of the Gunatit gurus. Gunatitanand Swami ensured that constant discourses echoed throughout Junagadh mandir, where he was mahant for over 40 years. Bhagatji Maharaj conducted discourses even after performing arduous physical *seva* for many hours during the day. Shastriji Maharaj often discoursed late into the night to the devotees. Yogiji Maharaj discoursed early every morning (*mangal pravachan*), established regular satsang assemblies in all mandirs and centres, and especially encouraged youths to discuss spiritual teachings. Pramukh Swami Maharaj also emphasized the importance of spiritual discourses as a necessity for spiritual growth.

Today, Mahant Swami Maharaj continues

this tradition by discoursing and listening to discourses daily. The following gives an insight into Mahant Swami Maharaj’s inclination for spiritual discourses.

After Yogiji Maharaj had initiated 51 youths during the Kalash Mahotsav of Gadhada Mandir, he instructed them to stay in Mumbai, under the leadership of Mahant Swami. Subsequently, for almost two decades, Mahant Swami Maharaj served there as per the wish of Yogiji Maharaj, and later Pramukh Swami Maharaj. During this time, he presided over the daily *kathas* – both to discourse and listen: at 5.30 a.m., he himself discoursed on the Nishkulanand Kavya; at 8.00 a.m. – after the *shangar arti* – the morning *katha* took place; at 1:00 p.m., the post-lunch discourse took place; at 3.45 p.m., the afternoon discourse was held; after the *sandhya arti* at around 7.00 p.m. the evening discourse took place; and the day’s final *katha* was in the nightly assembly at 9.00 p.m. Mahant Swami never tired in delivering and listening to spiritual discourses.

In 1982, Mahant Swami was in Bamaniya village on the day of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s

birthday – Shri Hari Jayanti. As per Shastriji Maharaj's directive, everyone was observing a *nirjala* (waterless) fast – including Mahant Swami. That day, Mahant Swami completed his morning routine and puja by 6.00 a.m. Then, he sat with Vallabhbhai and several other devotees and became immersed in discussions on numerous spiritual topics. Mahant Swami became so engrossed in the discussions that morning became afternoon and then night. Losing all track of time, the discussions concluded at 12 midnight.

Years later, Mahant Swami was asked, "What topics did you discuss?" He replied, "We discussed on the first two parts of Haricharitra-mut-Sagar. I still remember one very important point from that day: Honour and insult are both fleeting. So do not let them affect you."

For over four decades, as per the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he travelled continuously to villages, towns and cities throughout India and abroad to spread the teachings of satsang. Everywhere, he graced the daily assemblies – whether in the heat of summer, cold of winter or the rains of the monsoon – the weather never disrupted his daily discourses.

The following incidents demonstrate Mahant Swami Maharaj's affinity for spiritual discourses.

In 2011, Mahant Swami was in Antarsuba, a town near Godhra, to perform the *murti-pratishtha* of the new mandir there. It was peak summertime. In the assembly, a cooler was set up to give some relief from the sweltering heat, but the cool air did not reach him. When Swamishri began to speak, the wind blew so strongly that the temporary canopy was blown away, and he was exposed directly to the heat. Still, Swamishri continued his discourse undisturbed.

In 2014, Mahant Swami performed the *patotsav* rituals of Atladara mandir and then went for darshan in the *parikrama*. Here, to cool the floor from the hot summer sun, water had been sprayed. But Swamishri was unaware of this and as he walked, he slipped and injured his back.

The doctors assessed him and requested him to rest, but Swamishri refused and still attended the *patotsav* assembly, where he discoursed to the devotees.

In September 2017, Mahant Swami Maharaj was in London, where he expressed his wish that a day-long *chhavni* (a traditional seminar or conference that includes extensive and detailed presentations) to expound on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan be held.

As per the day's schedule, Swamishri was due to attend at a designated time to bless the gathering. But, totally unexpectedly, Swamishri sat in the *chhavni* sessions for a total of 7 ½ hours. In particular, he arrived in the evening session, five minutes early – when preparations were still ongoing and the first speaker had not yet arrived. Then, he sat attentively and continuously for 4 hours and 10 minutes throughout the entire session, without even taking a bathroom break or drinking water.

Later that night, as Swamishri prepared to sleep, Bhadrash Swami asked, "How much longer can you sit to listen to *katha*?" Swamishri replied, "For about another 2½ hours." Even at the age of 85, Swamishri was able to sit for around 10 hours to listen to *katha*.

4 July 2018, Sarangpur

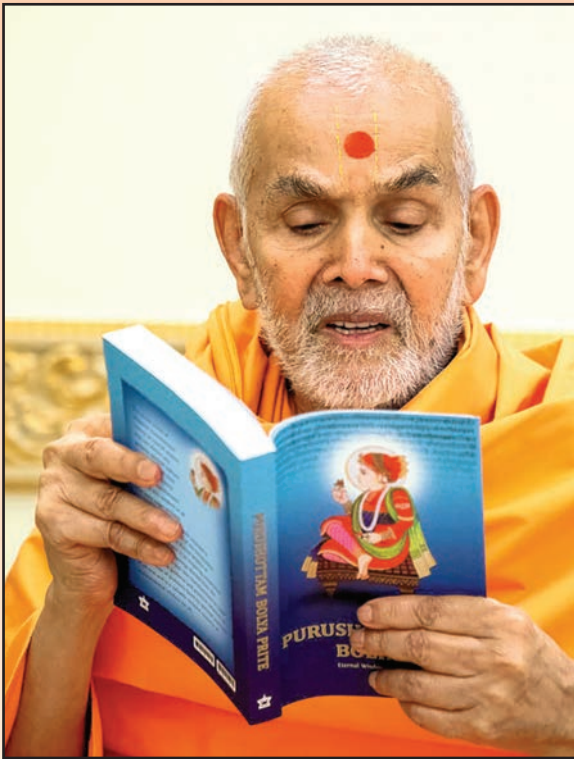
"Bhagwan and *katha* are one. One who does not have an affinity for *katha* will not develop affection for Bhagwan."

2 July 2019, Ahmedabad

"One must apply the contents of *katha* to oneself. If one assumes it applies only to others, one will never benefit. But if one believes 'the *katha* is for me, and I have to live according to it' then one progresses. As *satsangis*, one must listen to *katha* daily."

22 August 2019, Atladara

"Just as when one chews one's food properly



one enjoys its taste more, if one analyzes and imbibes *katha* one will really enjoy it. So, listen attentively to *katha* and you will learn a lot. If some junior sadhu or a child is doing *katha* and one does not listen to it, that is disrespectful to God. Who is the *katha* about? Bhagwan. Would you not take *prasad* served by children or juniors? So, consider *katha* as *prasad* in the form of Bhagwan's wisdom."

20 July 2021, Ahmedabad

From 8.23 to 8.48 a.m. Swamishri underwent a prostate procedure at the Yogiji Maharaj Hospital. Later, in his room, Swamishri was lying in bed and said, "I want to listen to *katha*." Even in such circumstances this was Swamishri's first thought. So, an attendant sadhu read from Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *jivan charitra* for over 35 minutes. Then, Swamishri rested.

Swamishri has always placed a sustained emphasis on *katha*. For decades he daily held an impromptu morning *katha* after the *mangala arti* at whichever mandir he was present in. Sadhus eagerly crowded into his room to listen

to his soft soothing voice that provided deep and experienced insights into enigmatic and practical spiritual topics. In this approximately 20-minute session he served merely a few drops from the vast reservoir of knowledge he possesses. His astute ability to pinpoint and convey essential spiritual ideas is outstanding.

In addition to the routine daily discourses, over the years, Swamishri has also presented speeches at innumerable seminars, *shibirs* and other events. His sincerity for such events is reflected in the way he often spent several days amid his busy schedule researching and preparing for the topics he was assigned to speak on.

Mahant Swami Maharaj has frequently described the importance and necessity of *katha* in his discourses.

16 December 2021, Atladara

"*Katha* moulds a person. It informs one about the true teachings and glory of Maharaj, satsang and devotees. *Katha* is the core, but we tend to ignore it. Without *katha* the teachings of satsang do not take root in a person. If the roots are strong then a robust and healthy tree develops."

23 January 2022, Atladara

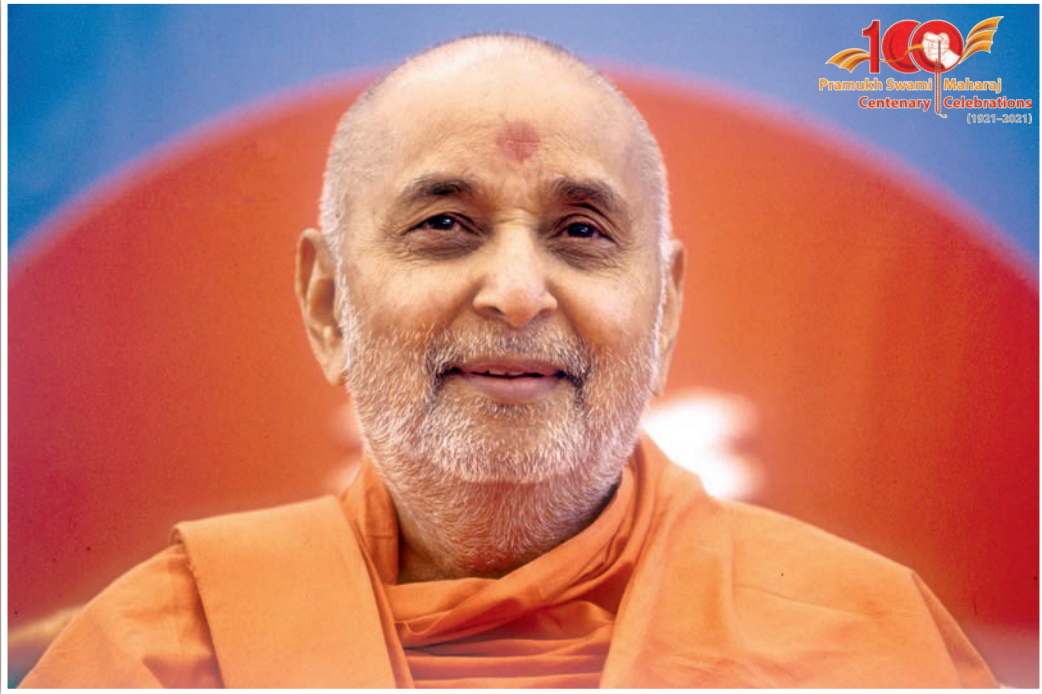
Today was the date in 1971 that Yogiji Maharaj returned to Akshardham. Swamishri wished to listen to the details of Yogiji Maharaj's last few days from Pujya Viveksagar Swami. So, by phone, Viveksagar Swami narrated the events in detail for over one hour. Swamishri listened with intense attention. Such is his affection for and devotion to his guru.

8 February 2022, Atladara

"If one has a special inclination for *katha-varta*, then one can progress. Otherwise one does not improve. One may be in satsang, perform *seva*, offer devotion, but without *katha-varta*, one does not progress." ♦

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ AND MODERN MANAGEMENT (Part 3)

In continuation to the previous installment in this series, which appeared in the March–April 2022 issue, we present the final part that deals with other aspects of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's management.



Peter Drucker (1909–2005), the father of modern management, was a legendary management consultant who guided and mentored executives of corporations like Coca Cola, General Electric (GE) and many more Fortune 500 Companies. Apart from being a consultant, he also authored more than 39 books on multiple topics related to management, many of which were worldwide bestsellers and inspired principles of modern management across the globe. He says, “Great leaders work extremely hard. They take their jobs very personally and are subject to ongoing and often unfair criticism, and pay a price for their success.” Let us look at

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life in the context of this statement.

Once, when Swamishri was in Hoboken, New Jersey, Dr J.C. Patel requested Swamishri to sanctify his house at Monmouth County, which was almost 100 kilometres away. Swamishri had travelled all day and was scheduled to continue his *vicharan* the next day. But in spite of that, Swamishri decided to please the devotee and left for the *padhramani* at around 9.30 p.m. and stayed at Dr Patel's home for some time. On returning, the driver missed an exit and Swamishri returned to his residence at 2.15 a.m. The next day, Swamishri resumed his early morning routine as planned.

In 1991, Shri Harkishan Mehta, a renowned reporter, asked Swamishri, “You perform so many social welfare activities based on the principles of dharma. Does criticism bother you?” Swamishri instantly replied, “We introspect on the activities done and if they uphold the principles of dharma for the larger good of people, we do not take such criticism to mind. Instead, we pray to God to help critics understand our objective behind the activities and continue doing them for the greater good of society and mankind.”

The two incidents clearly show Swamishri’s attitude, who, as a true leader, did not only work extremely hard to please his devotees, but also never allowed criticism to disturb him.

Drucker further states that for real leaders, their motivation doesn’t come from the outside, i.e. from sources like money or status, but from within. Such leaders are self-motivated. Swamishri was always self-motivated to do any task or service, small or big, with the sole aim of pleasing his gurus, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

In 1999, Swamishri was having breakfast prior to the inauguration ceremony of a hospital in Dabhoi. A sadhu told him that he was the most photographed person on the earth. Swamishri did not pay any attention to this remark. Someone else added that Swamishri was the most garlanded person on the earth and if all his recognitions were added together, it would be a world record. Then, Swamishri remarked that if he paid heed to all this, there would be no time left for him to do bhakti and bhajan (which was his prime activity).

During another conversation, Swamishri was told that he should be awarded the Nobel Prize. Spontaneously, Swamishri replied that he had already received two Nobel Prizes in the form of his gurus, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. Swamishri was contented and satisfied from within and so continued doing countless tasks without any worldly expectations or recognitions.

Daniel Goleman, a Harvard professor who not only wrote about aspects of behavioural science in

the *New York Times*, but is also a two-time nominee for the Pulitzer Prize. He writes about a very important aspect of exceptional leaders in his book, *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*. He says great leaders have the ability to focus on one task at a time, in spite of external sensory and emotional distractions, and to remain composed under any situation. This trait was visible in all of Swamishri’s actions and works.

In 1974, Swamishri travelled by flight from Mumbai to Nairobi for satsang *vicharan*. Then, to everyone’s surprise, the whole entourage was instructed to return to Mumbai on the same plane. Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami noted this incident in his report. He asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj how he felt about returning. Swamishri smiled and replied, “When you believe yourself to be *akshar* and *sevak* (servant) of God, these things don’t affect you.” Swamishri was fully composed and at ease when he returned to Mumbai. Then, the following morning, he heartily discoursed to an assembly of devotees.

Goleman further states that every leader must focus and have firm attention where it is most needed and in things that are most productive. As part of his exhaustive *vicharan*, Swamishri often visited the remote tribal regions with the sole objective of liberating them from the addiction of alcohol and many other vices. It was due to his tireless efforts that he edified 42 out of the 72 tribal villages of Dadra and Nagar Haveli in Gujarat. The extent of transformation was such that every house destroyed the tools and utensils used in making country liquor (*tadi*). The reason was so that their children and future generations would not have an inkling about the addictions their parents and forefathers had.

Jonah Berger is a marketing professor at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, and an internationally acclaimed bestselling author of books like *Contagious*, *Invisible Influence* and *The Catalyst*. In *Contagious*, he reveals the secret behind the success of word-of-mouth and social

transmission. According to him, a product or a service can become very popular, successful and reap great returns if it is spread through word of mouth effort. In 1992, after the inauguration of Akshardham in Gandhinagar, Swamishri blessed, “Akshardham is a divine complex, and whosoever visits it will naturally speak of its beauty to others, thus inspiring them to come.” So much was the truth in Swamishri’s words, that even after 30 years, there has been a constant flow of visitors round the year.

Steve Jobs, co-founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Apple Inc. had a knack of delivering quality products that catapulted his company into a mammoth corporate company. The quality of his products, like the i-Phone, i-Pad and others, is unparalleled to such an extent that as of date, there is a sale of ten i-phones every second on this planet. Similarly, quality and perfection were the hallmarks of every activity of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In 2001, Gujarat was struck by an earthquake with catastrophic consequences. The epicentre of the earthquake was in Kutch. Immediately, the state government, BAPS and many prominent organizations launched relief activities. Later, BAPS also conducted a rehabilitation programme in which it constructed and renovated 50 schools and nine villages. In all, it built 1,500 concrete houses for the villagers. Mr P. Chino, a Japanese gentlemen and chairman of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), visited one of the reconstructed villages named Ukhad Mora. During his inspection, he was surprised and happy to see the quality of houses constructed by BAPS. In another example, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s emphasis on quality and perfection can be keenly observed in the Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, London. It has been hailed as the eighth wonder of the world by *Reader’s Digest*.

One of the most important aspects of Swamishri’s work was that he never compromised with values and disciplines. Globally renowned Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck, in

her path-breaking work, *Mindset – Changing the Way You Think to Fulfill Your Potential*, enlightens about a new psychology of success. She writes, “Some leaders have a closed mindset, i.e. a fixed mindset in certain activities, and an open mindset, i.e. a growth mindset, in case of other activities.” Swamishri had these unique attributes. Regarding the principles of *agna* and *upasana* he had a very clear mindset of remaining firm and steadfast in observing established codes and principles. He would always insist that if there was any activity that compromised the value system, it would be better not to do it in spite of the humongous gains. On the other hand, he always exercised a growth mindset for activities connected with social welfare and the uplift of people.

Jim Collins is an American researcher, author, speaker and consultant with an expertise in business management, corporate sustainability and growth. His bestselling books include *Good to Great*, *How the Mighty Fall* and *Build to Last*. In his book, *How the Mighty Fall*, he mentions the prime reason for the downfall of giant conglomerates and mighty personnel: their undisciplined pursuit by compromising on values for attaining more and more. Once, Swamishri was in Gandhinagar. Mr Sunil Parekh, a manager of a newly inaugurated Bank of Baroda branch, requested Swamishri to be the first account holder of his branch. Swamishri informed Mr Parekh that he did not own a single penny in his name and that everything belonged to the BAPS Trust and Thakorji (Bhagwan Swaminarayan). On hearing this, Mr Parekh was astonished and he bowed with deep respect to Swamishri’s morals. There are numerous such incidents in Swamishri’s life that elucidate the fact that he strictly followed, till his last breath, the moral rules for a sadhu prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

On another note, Collins states in *Good to Great* that leaders create a disciplined managerial workforce. Disciplined people place the objectives of the company ahead

of their own personal successes and consider them as their personal responsibility. During the inauguration ceremony of Akshardham in Gandhinagar in 1992, Shri L. K. Advani was one of the dignitaries invited. When he met the volunteers, he congratulated them for doing such great *seva*. The volunteers responded by saying that the driving force behind them all was the guidance received from swamis of BAPS. On meeting the swamis and commending them for such a feat, the swamis stated that the ceaseless inspiration came from Pramukh Swami Maharaj. On meeting Pramukh Swami Maharaj he praised him for his work. In response, Swamishri immediately replied that such an event was possible only due to the tireless efforts of the volunteers and swamis and the blessings of God. Advaniji was awestruck by this and he spoke from the main dais about the selfless services rendered by the disciplined volunteers inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He added that no one wanted to take the credit and that everyone worked for the larger good.

For any leader, the biggest challenge is to create a succession plan to perpetuate the organizational legacy. There have been multiple instances in the world where organizations have achieved unprecedented successes under the leadership of the founder, but once he passes away or leaves, the organization fizzles out. In the case of BAPS, Pramukh Swami Maharaj appointed Mahant Swami Maharaj as his successor in a letter dated 20 July 2012. When the letter was read after Pramukh Swami Maharaj's earthly departure on 13 August 2016, hundreds of thousands of swamis and devotees instantly accepted this letter of declaration with full faith and trust.

Finally, based on all the three articles in this series we can conclude that Pramukh Swami Maharaj's people-based management, servant-leadership, value- and faith-based humanitarian activities have set an inspiring paradigm for humanity. We pay our profound tributes to him on the occasion of his birth centenary year celebrations to be held in Ahmedabad from 15 December 2022 to 15 January 2023. ♦

(Cont. from p. 13)

Soon, she realized that her son was destined to worship God and inspire others to do likewise. Finally, she happily agreed to allow her son to fulfil his ardent desire.

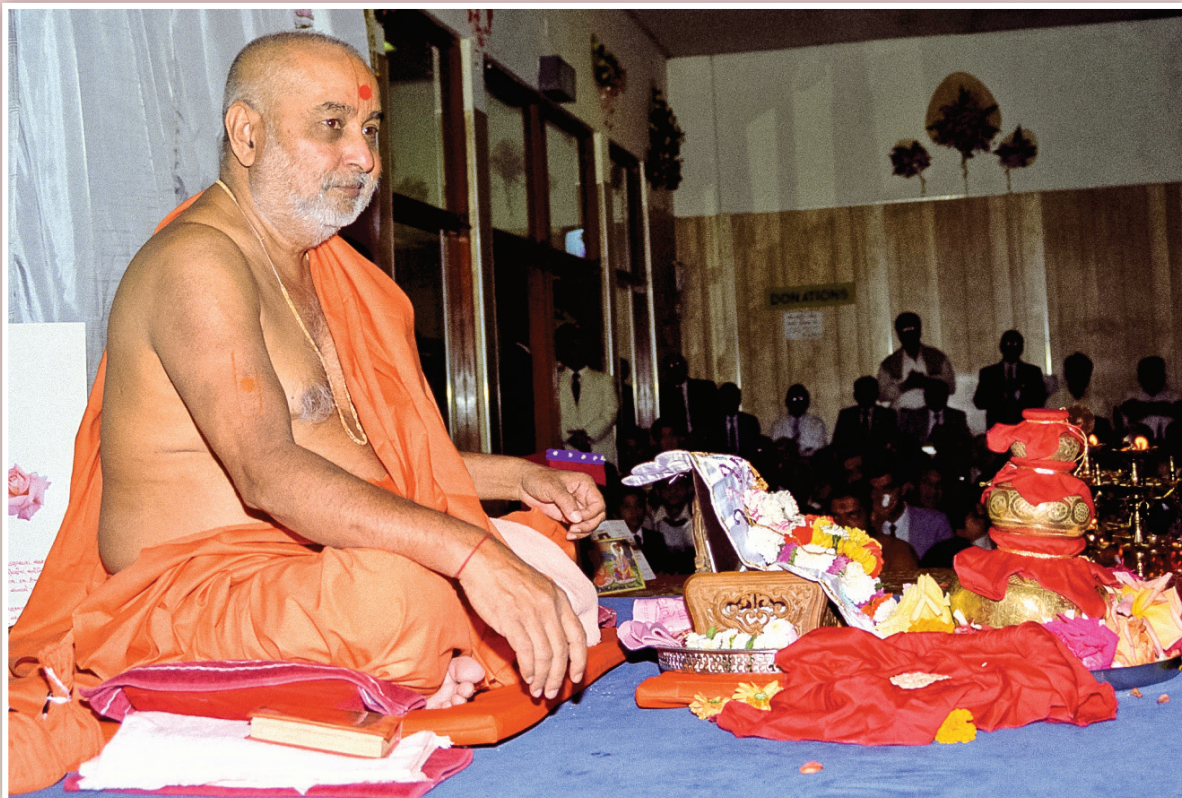
Manibhai was not financially sound because of his ailing business. So, other members of the family were not too keen to allow the freshly graduated Vinubhai to join the saffron order. Vinubhai's sister-in-law told Dr Ramanbhai to convey to Yogiji Maharaj, "Since Vinubhai has graduated with a B.Sc. degree it would be better if he worked for a while to earn money and become a sadhu later on." As soon as Ramanbhai conveyed her message, Yogiji Maharaj prophesied, "I will make Vinubhai into such a sadhu that through his wish people will gain lakhs of rupees." Vinubhai

thus overcame many trials to become a sadhu. Now that everyone was willing to let him go he waited for the moment to leave home and take *diksha*.

RENOUNCING HOME

In 1956, Vinubhai completed his last year at college. He graduated with a B.Sc. degree in Agriculture. After his last exam, instead of going home, Vinubhai rushed off to Gondal to be with Yogiji Maharaj. That was his moment of renunciation. Thereafter, he never went home again. And surprisingly, he did not even go to receive his graduation certificate. It was indeed the climax of Vinubhai's renunciation. Vinubhai gave up his worldly life with great ease. ♦

Behind the *Sacred* Relic



The stacked triad of kalashes placed before Pramukh Swami Maharaj, London, 19 October 1990

Between June and November 1990, Swamishri spent over four months in London coordinating the search for and visiting numerous prospective sites to build a *shikharbaddha* mandir in London, as per the wish of Yogiji Maharaj.

During his stay, on 19 October 1990, Swamishri celebrated the auspicious festival of Annakut – to mark the Hindu New Year.

For that occasion, Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and the sadhus in Ahmedabad had sent a stacked triad of traditional *kalashes* filled with hand-peeled rice grains and

covered by auspicious red cloths.

Dr Dipak Trivedi, a devotee from Ahmedabad, had brought them. He met Swamishri on Diwali, the previous day – 18 October 1990. Swamishri instructed that the *kalashes* be brought to the assembly after his puja the following day – New Year's Day.

As Swamishri was completing his puja on New Year's Day, Pujya Viveksagar Swami announced, "The wish of the sadhus in India is that a grand *shikharbaddha* mandir be built here and that it is crowned with *kalashes*." At that time, Swamishri was reading the Shikshapatri, but on hearing this,

he immediately raised his right hand in acknowledgement, laughed and looked joyously at the senior devotees sitting before him.

Viveksagar Swami then continued, “The sadhus have hand-peeled around 28,500 rice grains (about 50g) – like Kushalkunvarba had done for Maharaj and have sent two prayers, which Dipakbhai will read.”

Thereafter, Dr Trivedi read a prayer poem written by Puja Ishwarcharan Swami and another prayer by the sadhus before presenting the stack of three *kalashes* and hand-peeled rice grains to Swamishri. Swamishri placed the *kalashes* amid a tray of flowers and garlanded them.

In his New Year’s blessings, Swamishri said, “Such is Bhagwan’s grace that even before the foundations of the mandir have been dug, the *kalashes* have come.” Then, wittily poking fun at the historically miserly nature of Ahmedabad natives, he continued, “And that, too, from Ahmedabad! So, as we have their support, we are now confident that the mandir will be built. Normally, Ahmedabadis don’t give [they only take], but they have sent this with great affection!”

“So, this is a good omen, received in advance. We want to place *kalashes* like this – one, two and three – so take note. The sadhus from Ahmedabad have sent these with great love, so keep them in one place and preserve them – CM [addressing the chairman of the UK Satsang Mandal, Shri C.M. Patel]. They are antique, not modern imitations. See, they have traditional designs – like in the past. Ahmedabadis would normally send imitations, but they have sent traditional ones; that reflect their inner sentiments. They are in our



Recent photo of the *kalashes*, BAPS Mandir, London

support. That’s a great thing. Those who have the support of Bhagwan and his sadhus, have everyone’s support. It is Shastriji Maharaj’s and Yogiji Maharaj’s wish that a grand mandir be built and thousands of people benefit.

“They have also sent hand-peeled, unbroken rice.” Then, Swamishri narrated the story of Kushalkunvarba who had similarly sent hand-peeled unbroken rice grains to Shriji Maharaj with the prayer that he spiritually cleanse everyone.

“So, with this prayer they have sent rice grains,”

Swamishri concluded.

In this way, Swamishri accepted the *kalashes* and grains well before the London mandir construction had begun, and expressed his wish that the *kalashes* be preserved since they serve as a symbol of Bhagwan’s and everyone’s support to build the mandir.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj subsequently inaugurated the grand *shikharbaddha* BAPS Mandir in London in August 1995. True to his wishes, these *kalashes* are currently preserved there.

These *kalashes* remind us of Swamishri’s firm faith that Yogiji Maharaj’s vision of a *shikharbaddha* mandir in London would be fulfilled. And that the purpose of building mandirs is to spiritually purify all and enable everyone to experience the bliss of God. ♦



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.

Sometimes words on a paper are just not enough to express gratitude.

In the midst of life's challenges you gave us hope.

In the midst of obstacles you gave us courage.

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of life you gave us peace and stability.

You showed us the path and gave us direction.

For this we are forever indebted.

The global dimension of our lives means it is more important than ever to understand our true values, our identity and what spirituality really means. This is something you have given us unconditionally and keep doing so even today through Pragat Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Your vision of reconnecting us to God seems so relevant in a constantly changing and forever evolving world. Your life and teachings are timeless and eternal and will help us rise above this.

- Hem Mehta, 42, Associate Director Strategy and Transactions, London, UK

- Meera Mehta, 40, Commercial Manager, London, UK

Being an aimless wanderer, I found a GPS system in you – my Guru Positioning System. You navigated me through the labyrinth of this world. You have bailed me out of moral bankruptcy, rescued me from psychological bankruptcy and liberated me from spiritual bankruptcy. Your moral compass has guided me to internalize and practise ethical behaviour.

What you do is like what a blacksmith does with iron and a goldsmith does with gold. You are a Soulsmith; you reshape and revitalize my soul. You taught me to change myself, and kindled my spiritual awakening. Your pragmatic ways and divine grace have established my absolute faith.

Your hands of blessings on my head felt like the fingerprints of God.

I experience your promise that "I will always be with you" through your present form, Mahant Swami Maharaj.

I pray to you through him: keep navigating me, keep purifying my soul and enable me to achieve the highest level of *ekantik* dharma.

Kunal Bhatt, 57, Architect, Bangalore, India

Thank you for replying to my every letter and guiding me towards the right path. Thank you for healing my every tear, soothing my every pain. Thank you for answering my every plea, my every silly question, my indecisiveness, my simple requests, my not-so-simple problems and my sensitive matters. Thank you for sharing so many unforgettable moments when you made me feel loved. Your care and affection will never be forgotten. You gave me your all. I pray that I can also give you my all to follow your every *agna* and *niyam*.

- Nayna, Leicester, UK

I regret not being in satsang when you were the president of the BAPS Sanstha and now I just wish I could see you at least once in my lifetime. On 13 August 2016, the moment I heard the news, tears just fell off my eyes and I felt like I have just lost my father. I slowly slowly came into satsang in 2017 when Mahant Swami Maharaj had come to Nairobi for his first *vicharan* and this made me realize that you haven't left us; instead you are present in him. I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for handing us over to Mahant Swami Maharaj, through whom we will always have you and I know you are always there for me.

- Kesha Patel, 20, College Student, Nairobi, Kenya

No matter the circumstances, you have been happy because of the understanding that Maharaj is *karta-harta*. Growing up, that's one of the main things I learned from you and it's helped me get through various stages of my life.

Your aura gave a peaceful feeling and created an ineffable atmosphere. Experiencing that bliss with you has been a constant reminder that the world is temporary, and there is much more to life than the pleasures it provides.

Even though you may not physically be here today, your presence is still felt. You have given us Mahant Swami. I never thought I would be able to find a connection after having developed a strong love for you, but I have been able to do much more. Not only has my love for the Satpurush increased, but my understanding of satsang has deepened. He has pushed me to continuously reflect and do *antardrashti*, and it wouldn't have been possible without you.

Thank you for all that you have done.

- Payal Lodhia, 21, Student, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania

I still remember the day you visited our house, the day you put a *kanthi* around my neck and the last time I had your darshan at Neasden Mandir. You were very frail that day, yet you still made time to come out and see me while you were seated in your wheelchair. You gave me sanctified flowers. The fact you took so much trouble on a hectic day, while your health was so frail is still something that I remember so vividly.

You have been an inspiration to my generation – without you, we would not have found satsang and without satsang our lives would have been a waste.

In London, you have given us the gift of one of the most magnificent mandirs in this entire world. Through your teachings and blessings, you have made our lives so much better and given us the opportunity of *moksha* in this very life.

- Tushar Morzaria, 51, Chartered Accountant, London, UK

There are no words to describe the impact of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in my life. He is my guru but he has always been more.

My life without Pramukh Swami Maharaj would be like crossing an ocean without a boat. It would be impossible. I have been able to overcome any challenges in life knowing that Pramukh Swami is on my side – a guru who cares and will never let me down.

I get strength from praying to him and talking to him as I know he listens.

I will try my best to live by the legacy of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. By doing satsang and telling others about the life and legacy of Pramukh Swami. Thank you for making my life what it is today.

- Megha Brahmhatt Joshi, Teacher, Pretoria, South Africa

You have transformed me from what I was to what I am now. Critically, you are continuing to do so through Mahant Swami Maharaj, who is your greatest gift to us.

Your life, works and teachings will continue to affect individuals and society for the better until the earth stops spinning. Their universality means they have something for everyone. They will benefit all and will only lead to the happiness of all.

- Shahil Parmar, 25, Research Analyst, London, UK

You are my father, mother, brother. I am not perfect but you have unconditionally accepted me and are chiseling away my faults. Your infinite virtues and your whole life are lifelines for me. Your words are like honey. Your smile, your hearty laughter, your superb sense of humour, your selfless nature, your love are ingrained in my heart. No one can take them away from me. You have made me realize the reality of this human life and I will always try to gain your *rajipo*. I promise you that. I still cannot fathom your *krupa* of making me a *satsangi*. I love you Swami Bapa.

- Nehal Desai, 50, Software Developer, Houston, USA

My most memorable moment with you was in 2004. I had the great fortune to present a *mala* to you on the first day of the Bal Shibir. You went above and beyond to show me how to do *mala*. I stood in front copying you and then you brought me closer to you and put the *mala* onto me. Thank you so much for giving me the fortune to have this interaction with you. I recall it every day and it brings me utmost joy.

- Kirtan Patel

Thank you for being my father, giving me your motherly love, being my teacher, being my friend, saviour and guru, and my everything in this world filled with materialistic things. As you know we have improved a lot in satsang, but we are still not at the level you would like us to be. I would like to apologize, Bapa, for not being consistent in my *ahnik* and sometimes not following my *niyams*. I do puja, but sometimes I rush through it and once or twice a month I miss it.

Your simplicity, loving tolerance, peaceful and humble soul, and the millions of virtues you have are extraordinary. Please help me imbibe these virtues that you have.

- Nyasha Patel, 15, Student, Tzaneen, South Africa

I ate meat and drank alcohol, but through patience and talking calmly you made me understand this was wrong and, in time, I gave up. I lost my father and mother and you were there to reassure me by phone and guide me.

- Vinay Mehta

Swami Bapa, you have always been The Hope in my life. The only reason I walk this path is because of you. It isn't forced, but it's something that I want. I want this *sukh*. I want this *moksha*. During my dark days there is only one thing I do... a thought away you said, and so I think of you. No matter how big or small the obstacle is, I go through it with you, because with you it isn't an obstacle, but an opportunity to make you *raji*.

- Aagna Alaiya, Student, 15, London, UK

I can remember even as a little girl praying to you for help; you were always there for me.

I thank you for London Mandir. I am grateful for having the *seva* of making candy floss in the *bal nagari* and polishing the mandir stones as a 12-year-old girl. Little did I know what I was polishing. This mandir became my home and instilled in me faith and confidence to tackle the outside world; and has never left me. I pray to you, at your feet, that it never does.

Throughout my teens and university life you were there for me as a guiding light. Life has come with its ups and downs, but you have never left me. Your love, your *drashti*, your *daya* has kept me in satsang and kept me safe.

Now, as a mother, I see how important it is to have satsang as a child.

I thank you for Param Pujya Mahant Swami. I cannot put into words how much he has helped my family and me.

- Bijal Patel-Keogh, 37, Dentist, London, UK

After completing my secondary education, I was invited to Mombasa Mandir in 1977 for some artwork, and through just that one visit my life changed.

I settled in the UK in 1979 and I was privileged to have your darshan and blessings for the first time in 1980.

I have approached you when I have felt stressed in life or with certain problems and difficulties. Just merely having your divine darshan has always given me immense happiness, peace and bliss.

Thank you so much for many memorable events. Thinking about them keeps me connected to you. I know you are always with me. I see your presence in Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj.

- Mukesh Tailor, London, UK

Our mum was bringing up two daughters on her own. She joined the Satsang and our life changed. Bapa, you took care of us from studying to marriage. You have always been there.

We were in Nairobi for your 54th birthday celebration. I thought to myself 'I wish I was a boy so I could go and give a birthday card to you'. It was just a thought. Then, one day, we received a letter from you, Bapa, saying thank you for the birthday card.

I was shocked, because I had not given you a birthday card. I cried thinking Bapa is the only person in the world who would accept anything through your thought.

- Riya Brahmhatt

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.

INSPIRATIONS

*A potpourri of inspiring and interesting
information and wisdom*

THE TORCH GETS BRIGHTER



As one's knowledge and understanding of God's divine form develops and as proximity to God increases, one experiences a higher level of bliss – both quantitatively and qualitatively. Shriji Maharaj illustrates this using the analogy of a burning torch in Vachanamrut Panchala 1, "Consider the following example: The light from this burning torch which falls a short distance away is not as intense as the light in the vicinity of the torch. Very far away, there is no light at all. In the same way, elsewhere there is only a little bliss, but absolute bliss is only available in the vicinity of God. The further one is away from God, the less bliss one experiences."

- Analogy from the Vachanamrut

DEATH SENTENCE REDUCED TO A THORN PRICK



Many robbers lived in a particular town. Gangs stalked the streets and stole as they willed. Out of these, one particular thief used to regularly attend the spiritual discourses given by the local sadhu. Once, while on his way to the assembly his foot was pricked by a thorn. It became red and swollen. That night he could not join his team for their nightly loot. His friends, however, carried on without him. They broke into the king's treasury and succeeded in escaping with a lot of money. Overnight, they shared the wealth among themselves and slept as millionaires.

Hearing of their success, the family of the thief scolded him, "Just because you went to the assembly you were hurt, and so failed to join your friends in the robbery. You had to sit here and waste your time and didn't get a single penny!" While they said these words, the king's army arrived. They had tracked the robbers down and arrested all of them for execution. Even the innocent thief was lined up for death. But on seeing him, the sadhu and the local villagers stood up as witnesses and said that the thief had been hurt by a thorn and so he had not gone to steal the king's treasury that night.

The king pardoned him.

The thief thereafter was transformed into a law-abiding citizen. The rewards of engaging in satsang are immense. God protects even if one simply sits in a spiritual assembly. For the thief the death sentence was reduced to the prick of a thorn. These are the words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut and they are the truth.

- 101 Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj

SPREAD OF INDIA'S CULTURE

Takakusu Junjiro (1866–1945 BCE), a Japanese academic and an internationally known Buddhist scholar, writes in his book *I-Tsing* about the famous Chinese traveller's (I-Tsing, 635–713 CE)



Takakusu Junjiro

visit to India in 673 BCE. From his records one finds about India's outreach to several neighbouring eastern countries. "The whole coast of farther India from Suvarnabhumi (Indonesia) or Burma to China, and also of the islands of the Malay Archipelago, was studded with prosperous Indian colonies and naval stations, which ocean-liners regularly plying in the eastern waters between India and China constantly used as convenient halting places. I-Tsing refers to more than ten such colonies where Indian manners, customs, and religious practices prevailed together with Sanskrit learning. These were Sri-Bhoja (Pelambang) in Sumatra, Kalinga in Java, Mahasin in Borneo (Barhinadwipa), and the islands of Bali, Bhojapara, etc., which had all Indian names, and afforded to Chinese pilgrims to India a good preparatory training."

- Mookerji, *Radhakumud. A History of Indian Shipping and Maritime Activity from the Earliest Times. London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912, p. 171*

VALUE OF CHARACTER



Once, Gandhiji was travelling by train from Mumbai to Pune. The train stopped at Kalyan Station. A principal and two students of a school came to congratulate Gandhiji. Gandhiji asked, "Who is the more intelligent of these two students?" The principal replied, "The older student."

Then Gandhiji asked, "Who has a better character?" The principal said, "The younger one."

Gandhiji explained. "In my eyes, the younger one is better than the older. For me character is more valuable than intellect. There are many intelligent people in our world, but there are few people with a spotless character. Our society needs them."

SANT JNANESHVAR (1275-1296 CE)



Sant Jnaneshvar or Jnanadev was born into the Brahmin family of Vitthala Pant and Rakhumabai of Alandi in 1275 CE, near Pune, in Maharashtra. From a young age Jnaneshvar was intelligent and inclined towards devotion to God.

Once, a Brahmin spoke disparagingly to Jnaneshvar. Then he slightly told him, "This buffalo is also called Jnanadev."

Jnaneshvar calmly replied, "Yes, the buffalo is also essentially an atman. We are all atmans. Names are temporary and superficial."

The Brahmin sneered, "Is that so?" Then he started hitting the buffalo. To his surprise he saw welts on Jnaneshvar's back. The Brahmin felt remorseful and apologized to Jnaneshvar.

Once, a yogi named Changadev, believed to have conquered death, came to challenge Jnaneshvar on hearing of his fame. He came riding on a ferocious, wild lion, with a snake as his whip. At that time, Jnaneshvar was engaged in a spiritual discussion with his brother and sister. They were all sitting on a wall. When Jnaneshvar saw Changadev he flew along with his brother and sister to greet him. Changadev's ego dissolved and he humbly offered respects to Jnaneshvar.

Sant Jnaneshvar's fame spread through his discourses, which were a Marathi commentary on the Gita known as *Bhavarthadipika*. It is commonly known as *Jnaneshvari*. ♦

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

1 June–15 August 2022, Ahmedabad



Swamishri performs the *shila puja* rituals for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Paris, Ahmedabad

On the evening of 1 June 2022, Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived in Ahmedabad amidst a fervent and festive welcome by thousands of swamis and devotees. During Swamishri's scheduled 75-day stay a variety of programmes and events were organized whereby devotees and dignitaries could have his darshan and blessings. Every morning, Swamishri performed his puja in the Yagnapurush Sabhagruh during which swamis and youths sang bhajans and thereafter he gave a brief discourse. In the evening, Swamishri gave a brief discourse and *samip* darshan to devotees from Ahmedabad, Mehsana, Himmatnagar, Dholka and Gandhinagar. Every Sunday evening, Swamishri blessed the special theme-based inspiring satsang *sabhas*. Some of the programmes and events that took place were as follows.

JUNE (AHMEDABAD)

- 13: Via video conference, Swamishri inaugurated the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute in USA by kindling a lamp in Ahmedabad.
- 19: Swamishri reconsecrated the marble *murtis* of Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj to be enshrined in the newly built guru shrines in the *pradakshina* of Ahmedabad

mandir. After the *mahapuja* rituals of the *murtis*, Swamishri and senior swamis performed the *puja* and *arti* of the *murtis* installed in the shrines.

- 21: Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Ghanshyam Maharaj and the Guru Parampara (canvas print), and the marble *murtis* of Shri Ganapatiji and Shri Hanumanji for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Patdi (Ahmedabad rural).

JULY

- 2: Devotees offered devotion by performing the *tula* rituals of Swamishri's Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.
- 7: Swamishri performed the *shila puja* rituals for the proposed five-*shikhar* BAPS mandir in Paris and sanctified a mixture of cement and concrete to be used for the ritual.

Under the auspices of Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations, lectures on the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were held in several universities of Gujarat in association with AARSH (Akshardham Centre for Applied Research in Social Harmony), Gandhinagar. The lectures were delivered

by expert BAPS swamis and youths. Today, Swamishri inaugurated one such seminar by kindling an auspicious lamp.

- **9:** Swamishri inaugurated an Aksharpith publication in Sanskrit on the 1,000 names of Nilkanth Varni: ‘Shri Nilkanth-Vishwakalyan-Sahasra-Nam-Strotram’.
- **14:** On the first day of the month-long *hindola* festival, Swamishri devotionally rocked the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in a large decorated *hindolo* in the mandir. Devotees savoured the divine darshan of Swamishri swinging Thakorji.



Swamishri salutes the Indian flag on Independence Day

- **20:** The day marked a historic moment that occurred ten years ago, in 2012, when Pramukh Swami Maharaj wrote a letter declaring Mahant Swami Maharaj as his spiritual successor. Swamishri’s morning puja was followed with speeches by Anandswarup Swami narrating the historic moment and Atmaswarup Swami praising the glory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami read the historic letter written by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In conclusion, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed, “Whatever is being done is done by Maharaj. I am personally unable to believe that I am the guru. Everyone tells me that I am the guru, but it does not come to my mind. Everything is being done by Bhagwan.”

Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurated the fourth edition of *Karma and Reincarnation: Hindu Principles and Beliefs* authored by Mukundcharan Swami and published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

- **22:** Mahant Swami Maharaj kindled an auspicious lamp in Ahmedabad to inaugurate the ‘Festival of

Inspiration’, organized under the auspices of the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations, at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden, London. Swamishri also inaugurated a beautiful commemorative souvenir to mark the occasion.

- **25:** Through a video conference, Swamishri blessed the volunteers engaged in the construction *seva* of Akshardham in Robbinsville, NJ. He also wrote a message about *seva*: ‘Seva with Samp.’

- **28 & 29:** Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in the Himmatnagar region: Ratanpur, Chitrodi, Itadi, Nava Samera, Kanera, Kaliyakuva and

Eploda. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the devotees from those towns and villages and inspired them to engage in more bhajan and bhakti.

- **30:** Devotees of Himmatnagar devotionally performed a suvarna *tula* of Swamishri’s Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Swamishri blessed them for their services.

AUGUST

- **14:** Swamishri consecrated a marble footprint to be installed in a shrine commemorating the spot where Shastriji Maharaj’s room existed at the BAPS mandir in Ahmedabad.
- **15:** Swamishri celebrated the 75th Independence Day of India in Ahmedabad by unfurling and saluting the Indian flag. The flag-hoisting ceremony took place at all the BAPS mandirs. Thereafter, everyone waved Indian flags and joined in singing the national anthem. Mahant Swami Maharaj expressed his good wishes and blessing for the celebrations. ◆

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

Mahant Swami Maharaj Blesses Special Satsang Assemblies

18 June–15 August 2022, Ahmedabad



Children and volunteers present a thematic parade before Swamishri, 26 June 2022

JUNE

■ 19: VOLUNTEERS' ASSEMBLY

Today's Sunday satsang assembly was themed on 'Shatabdi Mahotsav: One Goal'. Yagnapriya Swami addressed the assembly and other swamis narrated incidents about the services and sacrifices of volunteers at the celebration site in Ahmedabad. Shri Sandeep Sagle, Collector of Ahmedabad, praised the volunteers' efforts in his speech and even announced that he would like to serve as a volunteer at the festival site.

Thereafter, a parade was carried out portraying the different departments comprising the centenary celebrations. Swamishri showered his divine grace on all the participants as they passed by. This was followed by an energetic devotional dance by youths. In conclusion, Swamishri addressed the volunteers to serve with a spirit of selflessness.

■ 26: HONOURING CHILDREN FOR ANTI-ADDICTION AND PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT CAMPAIGNS

Under the banner of the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations, BAPS children conducted anti-addiction and protect the environment campaigns for 15 days, during their summer vacation from 8 to 22 May, in Gujarat

and other states. Swamishri presided over the evening Sunday satsang assembly to honour their efforts. Hundreds of children carried out a remarkable parade, displaying banners and dressed in appropriate costumes. They also shared their experiences on stage about how they deaddicted people. Their live and video presentations impressed all. Swamishri profusely appreciated their efforts and blessed them.

JULY

■ 1: RATH YATRA FESTIVAL

Annually, the Jagannath Mandir, Ahmedabad, carries out a grand procession of chariots with the *murtis* of Bhagwan Jagannath, Balram and Subhadra through the city streets from early morning till evening. This year, the city witnessed the 145th *rath yatra* festival in which a decorated chariot from the BAPS also rolled on the streets to announce the centenary celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The *rath yatra* festival was celebrated at the BAPS mandir in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. After his morning puja, Swamishri performed the *pujan* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and thereafter they were installed in a remote controlled *rath* and steered on the stage. The devotees relished



Swamishri performs the Rath Yatra celebration *arti*

the divine celebration. Finally, Swamishri reminisced the Rath Yatra celebration held in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj in 1970, London. Then, Swamishri added, “We have to surrender the reins of our life’s chariot to God. When we follow the direction in which he steers, we will have no worries. But how can we do this? Only when we surrender our senses and mind to God. May we offer such bhakti and attain Akshardham.”

Then, Swamishri did darshan of Thakorji in the main mandir and performed *arti*. This was followed by a colourful *rath yatra* celebration in the mandir *pradakshina*. Swamishri sat in a decorated *rath*, while Anandswarup Swami and Atmaswarup Swami customarily swept the pathway. Behind Swamishri’s *rath*, swamis joyously sang festive bhajans and played cymbals and *kartals*.

The entire festival was relayed live to devotees seated in the Yagnapurush Sabhagruh.

■ 3: YOUTH DAY

The Sunday satsang assembly was celebrated as youth day. It was themed on strengthening one’s faith in God. A traditional dance and drama were effectively performed by youths. Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami addressed the assembly. Thereafter, Swamishri was asked, “What should we learn from Pramukh Swami’s life?” Swamishri wrote, “To have intense faith in the guru’s words

and instructions.” Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly.

■ 10: IMPORTANCE OF CHATURMAS

The Sunday satsang assembly was themed on the meaning and importance of the four holy months of Chaturmas in the Hindu calendar. Pujya Viveksagar Swami explained the meaning and significance. Then, an enthralling live portrayal of all the festivals celebrated during the four months was presented. The unique colours, sounds and devotional flavours of all the festivals uplifted and inspired the entire congregation. Thereafter, a short satirical drama on Sura Khachar’s ambiguous commitment to *niyams* was wonderfully enacted by youths. Then, the devotees took the *niyams* they would follow for the entire four months. In conclusion, Swamishri urged all to follow *niyams* properly.

■ 17: CHILDREN’S DAY

A children’s day programme was held in today’s Sunday satsang assembly. Children and volunteers presented skits, dances and video films based on the theme: Shantilal Is Our Ideal – Childhood Incidents of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Inspiring stories were enacted of Pramukh Swami Maharaj as an ideal student, his spirit of devotion, resoluteness in obeying *niyams* and his renunciation of home to become a sadhu. The entire presentation was riveting and elevating.



Swamishri listens to Shri Dilipbhai Joshi's address on Pramukh Swami Maharaj Day Celebration

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly by eulogizing Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine life.

■ 24: ASSEMBLY ON GURU MAHIMA

The evening Sunday satsang assembly was themed on 'Mahant Swami Maharaj – An Ocean of Virtues'. Swamishri's personal attendant swamis spoke about Swamishri's virtues of bhakti, humility, equanimity, transparency, non-taste and others. Shrijiswarup Swami recalled about Mahant Swami Maharaj's love and care and Atmaswarup Swami spoke on Swamishri's divinity. After each speech, a short traditional theme dance was performed by children and a video on Swamishri's virtue was shown.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Shriji Maharaj has said 'Perceive *divyabhav* in all'. This is the essence of all spiritual discourses. One who perceives virtues amidst a sea of faults is intelligent. One must perceive everything to be divine, divine and divine in Satsang.

"Yogi Maharaj was an idol of divinity. If one wants to be happy and joyful in life, one must understand all to be divine."

■ 31: ASSEMBLY ON GLORY OF SEVA

The Sunday evening satsang assembly was themed on 'Seva According to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Way'. Incidents of *seva* about Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj were

presented through speeches and skits. A bhakti dance also mirrored the significance of *seva*.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the spiritually charged assembly, "Everyone is fully engaged in doing *seva* for the centenary celebrations, regardless of hardships and discomforts. All are passionate about doing *seva*. Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj had done immense *seva*. In those times, there was nothing but difficulties, yet all offered *seva* with enthusiasm. I congratulate all who are presently doing such *seva*."

Thereafter, Shri Nitin Mukesh, a renowned singer, sang a devotional lyric, "*Jinke hruday Shri Ram base, un aurko nām liyo nā liyo.*" The entire assembly was touched by his soulful singing. He prayed to Swamishri that he bless and instruct him to do whatever *seva* he can for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations. Swamishri blessed Shri Nitin Mukesh.

AUGUST

■ 7 (Shravan *sud* 10) & 13:

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ DAY

Today, marked the sixth anniversary of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's earthly departure to Akshardham. Today's Sunday satsang assembly was dedicated as 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Din'. The central theme of the assembly revolved around how could we repay our debts

to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Incidents about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life, works and saintliness were described by Pujya Viveksagar Swami, Yagnapriya Swami, Atmaswarup Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami. Each speech was followed by appropriate videos. Shri Dilip Joshi (Jethalal), a renowned TV artist and devotee, reminisced about his associations with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

On the evening of Saturday, 13 August 2022, the English date of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's departure to Akshardham, an evening memorial assembly was held in Mahant Swami Maharaj's presence. The assembly theme was 'Swamishri Is Present in the Form of Mahant Swami Maharaj'. The presentation of various speeches related to incidents of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj was interlaced with videos explaining the verses of Brahmanand Swami's bhajan, '*Sant param hitkāri...*'. The speakers were Vivekjivan Swami (*Hari sam sab dukhāri...*), Yagnapriya Swami (*Trigunātīt firat tanu tyāgi...*), and Atmaswarup Swami (*Prabhu pad pragat karāvāt priti...*). The video presentations of testimonials by devotees were related to the topics of each speech. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami extolled the glory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, "Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj has immensely blessed us by gifting Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj. We are very fortunate and blessed that we have the proximity and darshan of a living guru. We are thankful to Mahant Swami Maharaj for staying here for two-and-a-half months and giving us the benefit of his spiritual association. Despite his advanced age, he daily gave us puja darshan, discourses and *samip* darshan. We all came for his darshan, however Swamishri felt he would like to do darshan of the devotees and please them all. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj revealed Mahant Swami Maharaj's profound glory and his calm and sober nature, which we all are experiencing."

Then, Swamishri inaugurated the Sanstha's social media platforms for the auspicious centenary year celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The



Swamishri inaugurates the Sanstha's social media handle, 'PSM100yrs'

Sanstha's social media platform uploads videos, inspiring stories and news on:

1. psm100.org
2. youtube.com/psm100yrs
3. twitter.com/psm100yrs
4. facebook.com/psm100yrs
5. www.instagram.com/psm100yrs

Swamishri also inaugurated several Aksharpith publications: 1. *Pranamu Pramukh Swami Pyara* (bhajans), 2. *Pramukh Swami na Pagle Pagle* (weekly broadcast on Gujarati 1st TV channel, and 3. *Jinke Gun Rijhat Girdhari* (Hindi audio-book). Thereafter, appreciations were offered to Swamishri for his two-and-a-half-month stay in Ahmedabad. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Whatever work that is happening [in the Sanstha] is not being done by one person. Shriji Maharaj is the all-doer and he is doing everything. There are many swamis and devotees who collaborate with harmony and camaraderie to do the satsang work. The young and old are eager to serve in the centenary celebrations. Everyone is buoyant and joyful because we have the association of Shriji Maharaj and the Guru Parampara, who are spotless and pure. My namaskars and Jai Swaminarayan to all."

Thousands of devotees offered their heartfelt reverences to Mahant Swami Maharaj during his final satsang assembly of his 75-day stay.



Swamishri (inset) blesses the Rakshabandhan festival assembly

The satsang assembly was broadcast live in India and abroad.

■ 11: RAKSHABANDHAN FESTIVAL

Thousands of devotees had gathered today for the Rakshabandhan festival. Prior to Swamishri's morning puja, Brahmins were given the *yagnopavit* as per tradition. Swamishri then proceeded for Thakorji's darshan, where the decorations of *rakhdhis* and *pavitra* amplified the festive spirit. During Swamishri's morning puja swamis sang bhajans related to the festival and children gave recitations of the Satsang Diksha. After Swamishri's puja, Atmaswarup Swami tied a *rakhdi* on Swamishri's wrist. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "The belief in Bhagwan to be the all-doer encapsulates all *jnan* (spiritual knowledge). In difficult times, many have discarded this *jnan*. However, those who are true devotees remain steadfast and anchored to him. Only when the seed of Bhagwan as the all-doer is sowed in our hearts does Bhagwan protect us. A seed may be small but its outcome and growth is huge. One becomes victorious when one resolutely believes Bhagwan Shriji Maharaj to be supreme and the all-doer. However, when one places Bhagwan aside and acts according to one's own will then it is useless. One should pray that such moments do not arise."

Children performed a devotional dance. Then,

swamis tied the sanctified *rakhdhis* on the devotees' wrists.

■ 12: SWAMISHRI'S ABUNDANT BLESSINGS

A special evening satsang assembly was held on the theme that Swamishri had abundantly blessed all during his 75-day stay in Ahmedabad. The divine memories of Swamishri's stay were rivetingly presented through narrations and videos: his morning puja, while doing Thakorji's darshan, delivering discourses, celebrating festivals, giving *samip* darshan, blessing devotees, and many other things. Finally, Swamishri was offered a festive invitation for the centenary celebrations. Puja Ishwarcharan Swami and Puja Viveksagar Swami presented an auspicious *kalash*. Then, an exciting and colourful display of the different components of the festival were presented. Swamishri was immensely pleased with the soulful presentation. Then, Dharmatilak Swami, *kothari* of Ahmedabad mandir, thanked Swamishri on behalf of everyone for having given the benefit of his long stay in Ahmedabad.

On 15 August 2022, Swamishri celebrated the Azadi Amrit Mahotsav of India in the mandir precincts by unfurling and saluting the Indian flag. At 5:00 p.m., thousands of devotees seated in the Yagnapurush Sabhagruh were blessed with Swamishri's darshan before he departed to Anand. ♦

GURU PURNIMA CELEBRATION

In the Presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj

13 July 2022 (Ashadh sud Punam), Ahmedabad

Thousands of devotees avidly assembled in the early morning for Swamishri's morning puja darshan at the mandir. Hundreds of male and female devotees had pilgrimaged by foot from the various suburbs of Ahmedabad and observed austerities to please and gain the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj. During Swamishri's morning puja swamis and youths sang bhajans extolling the glory of the guru.

The main celebration was held in the evening. It was themed, 'In the Footsteps of Our Gurus.' The celebration assembly commenced with *dhun* and bhajans and was followed by speeches, videos and skits:

- Speech about the glory of guru described in the shastras and in the spiritual history of India: Atmatrapt Swami.

- Speech on Bhagatji Maharaj's guru bhakti for Gunatitanand Swami: Adarshjivan Swami.

- Video-skit depicted how Shastriji Maharaj organized an event in Junagadh to honour Bhagatji Maharaj.

- Video-skit presentation on Yogiji Maharaj's guru bhakti towards Shastriji Maharaj.

- Speech on Yogiji Maharaj's guru bhakti for Shastriji Maharaj: Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

- Speech on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's guru bhakti for Yogiji Maharaj: Anandswarup Swami.

- Video of Mahant Swami Maharaj's enthusiasm to celebrate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary portrayed his inspiring letters to the devotees and volunteers.

- Speech about Mahant Swami Maharaj's inspiring incidents and discourses related to his



enthusiasm in celebrating the centenary: Atmaswarup Swami.

- Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the celebration assembly, "All are engaged in *seva* of the centenary celebrations with gusto, but all should reinforce *divyabhav* towards each other. If you have *divyabhav*, you will enjoy your *seva*. Maharaj has said, 'All sadhus and devotees are divine. One who knows, understands and contemplates upon this essence will be ecstatic and lord over the world. His joy never ebbs all through the day.'

"All should make little adjustments with each other while doing *seva* and serve with energy. Will the centenary celebrations come again! Keep in mind the immense efforts our gurus had made for the sake of their gurus. Think and focus about what you can do to the utmost for the centenary celebrations. Don't miss this opportunity."

- Swamishri inaugurated publications by Swaminarayan Aksharpith: 1. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's biography, Part 7 (book), 2. Pramukh Shatabdi Vandana (bhajans), 3. 'Swamishri – Our Best Friend' book in English authored by Mahant Swami Maharaj and 4. Satsang Diksha (Spanish edition).

- The celebration climaxed with the guru *pujan* ritual. Thereafter, the traditional theme dance '*Shat shat varas sare...*' was performed by children, during which Swamishri was honoured with garlands. In conclusion, everyone performed *arti*. Countless devotees and well-wishers in India and abroad viewed the Guru Purnima celebration through the live broadcast.



Prayers and Condolences from His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj to His Majesty King Charles III, UK

9 September 2022

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II passed away on Thursday 8 September 2022 after serving the United Kingdom and 56 Commonwealth nations for 70 years with dignity, dedication and steadfast courage. She was 96.

On behalf of the worldwide BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu fellowship, swamis and devotees offered prayers at Neasden Temple in London and other mandirs around the UK.

Members of the congregations at all BAPS mandirs and centres in the UK will also join the country in remembrance and tribute during the weekend assemblies by offering prayers for Her Majesty's departed soul, the Royal Family, the new sovereign His Majesty King Charles III, and the whole of the United Kingdom.

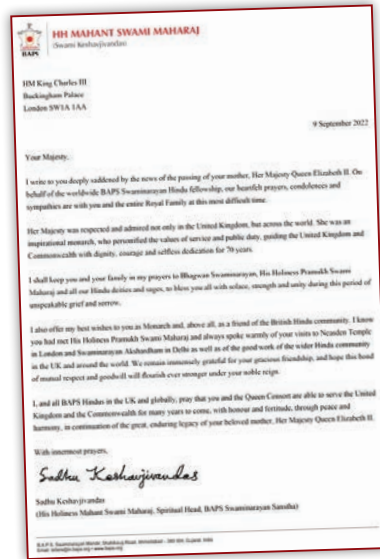
In addition, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj sent a personal letter of prayers and condolences to His Majesty The King.

Letter from His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj to His Majesty King Charles III

Your Majesty,

I write to you deeply saddened by the news of the passing of your mother, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. On behalf of the worldwide BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu fellowship, our heartfelt prayers, condolences and sympathies are with you and the entire Royal Family at this most difficult time.

Her Majesty was respected and admired not only in the United Kingdom, but across the world. She was an inspirational monarch, who



personified the values of service and public duty, guiding the United Kingdom and Commonwealth with dignity, courage and selfless dedication for 70 years.

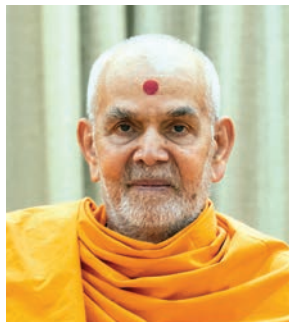
I shall keep you and your family in my prayers to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and all our Hindu deities and sages, to bless you all with solace, strength and unity during this period of unspeakable grief and sorrow.

I also offer my best wishes to you as Monarch and, above

all, as a friend of the British Hindu community. I know you had met His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and always spoke warmly of your visits to Neasden Temple in London and Swaminarayan Akshardham in Delhi as well as of the good work of the wider Hindu community in the UK and around the world. We remain immensely grateful for your gracious friendship, and hope this bond of mutual respect and goodwill will flourish ever stronger under your noble reign.

I, and all BAPS Hindus in the UK and globally, pray that you and the Queen Consort are able to serve the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth for many years to come, with honour and fortitude, through peace and harmony, in continuation of the great, enduring legacy of your beloved mother, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

With innermost prayers,
Sadhu Keshavjivandas
(His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj)





FESTIVAL OF INSPIRATION

Centenary Tribute to
Pramukh Swami Maharaj

22–31 July 2022, London, UK

Over 75,000 members of the local community as well as visitors from across London and the UK experienced the historic ‘Festival of Inspiration’ at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, from 22 to 31 July 2022 as part of the UK’s ongoing celebrations marking the birth centenary of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The event – which was formally inaugurated by His Excellency Sujit Ghosh, Deputy High Commissioner for India to London, and delivered by more than 3,000 volunteers – celebrated the very best of Hindu values and Indian culture. It was dedicated to helping individuals, families and the community enjoy and grow together by learning values that Pramukh Swami Maharaj had fostered throughout his life – harmony, respect, compassion and hard work.

These values were vividly conveyed at the Island of Heroes, a children’s adventureland that featured musical productions, a shadow play, a 4D immersive experience, a UV magical jungle, an escape room, an obstacle course, a colouring cave, interactive games, and much more. The young cast

and crew had planned, prepared and rehearsed for several months, presenting over 1,200 shows in total during the ten days of the Festival.

Visitors also enjoyed a vibrant blend of live music and dance from the outdoor stage where some of the most acclaimed and sought-after artists of Indian music in the UK performed more than 120 acts over the ten days. These artistic exhibitions were complemented by cultural performances by talented BAPS teams from around the country, nurtured through the vision and blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. Many visitors enjoyed the performances while savouring the wide selection of delicious and freshly cooked vegetarian cuisine on offer at the ‘Flavours of India’ food court.

The ‘Garden of Divinity’ housed beautiful life-sized figures of some of India’s great saints, sages, philosophers and poets representing the rich cultural heritage of Hinduism. This was further exhibited through various evening cultural programmes delivered by children, youths, swamis and female devotees.



Welcome Gate



Youths present their talents on stage

Other Festival highlights included a community health hub where leading British charities and experts delivered screenings, fitness and exercise sessions, well-being workshops and cooking demonstrations, multimedia halls that featured video shows and interactive presentations bringing to life the profound impact of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life and work for communities, families and individuals, while thousands participated in the daily *maha-arti* as a personal tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj in front of his iconic 27-foot *murti* in the mandir courtyard.

The Festival inspired individuals and families from all walks of society to practice the values taught by Pramukh Swami Maharaj to experience greater inner peace, family unity and social harmony. The Rt Hon. Priti Patel MP, Home Secretary, commented: "This is just incredible! It is inspiring. It is a 'Festival of Inspiration', but the real inspiration lies with the children and the volunteers who made all of this happen."

Angela Rayner MP, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, added, "Every child in the country needs to listen to that ['Mountain of Shravan' production at the 'Island of Heroes']. I don't think I have ever seen a show or production like that."

The festivities concluded with a spectacular outdoor finale, which included appreciation for the tireless efforts of the volunteers. The electrifying atmosphere of devotional music and dance brought the community together in joyous celebration. ◆



Festival site map



27-foot *murti* of Swamishri in the mandir courtyard



An evening assembly



Aerial view of the festival



Public presentation



More than 40,000 children and families were inspired by the 'Island of Heroes' children's cultural adventureland at the 'Festival of Inspiration' – a historic 10-day community celebration to mark the birth centenary of Pramukh Swami Maharaj at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, from 22 to 31 July 2022.

The 'Island of Heroes' was one of the star attractions of the Festival – a fun, immersive experience for children and families to engage through theatrical shows, musical productions, a UV light show, 4D immersive experience, shadow play, escape room, obstacle course, interactive games, and much more.

Children were invited to set sail on an adventure through four distinct terrains – the Jungle of Gajendra, Mountain of Shravan, Sea of

Squirrels, and Village of Shanti – and be inspired by heroes of the past and present to become the heroes of the future.

The journey motivated children and their parents to become shining members of our multi-cultural society, drawing upon the timeless wisdom of Hinduism and universal values lived by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Adventurers also learned about contemporary values and issues, such as respect for Mother Earth and the environment, delivered through a powerful 4D experience in a relevant and practical way for children.

Navigators collected souvenir stamps and other mementos as they ventured through the 'Island of Heroes' and understood the respective values of each terrain, namely, faith, respect, hard work and kindness.



Younger children enjoyed their own journey of learning and discovery at the 'Little Heroes Forest', a fun zone with its own puppet show, wiggle cars, sandpit, arts & craft area, and more.

The 'Island of Heroes' was entirely designed, produced, directed and performed by children and youth volunteers of BAPS UK & Europe. More than 1,200 shows were delivered across the four terrains. The young cast had planned, prepared, and rehearsed for several months and over 450 children performed in these productions over the ten days.

The entire journey was supported by more than 650 volunteers, artists and crew members each day, who provided entertainment, energy and also educated visitors further to enrich their experience.

Visitors departed with renewed motivation and vigour to imbibe noble values in their lives. A ten-year-old girl delivered a handwritten letter to the mandir after her visit in which she wrote: "Me and my family went to the Island of Heroes Adventureland. It was amazing! The set up was just beautiful. It was all inspiring for me and my brother."

Claudio Giambrone, Head of Marketing for Wembley Park, London, one of the largest regeneration projects in Europe, observed, "What you have done here is incredible! It looks like something you would see at Sea Life or London Dungeons – like a Disneyworld. The difference is that those things cost millions of pounds to make. This was done by volunteers."

Professor Chris Butler, Professor of Primary Care at Oxford University, commented, "The involvement of the children that we saw across all the shows – helping around, performing, developing their confidence, developing their sense of citizenship and community engagement of selfless contribution.... That's the kind of person that makes me, as an older person, hopeful about the future." ♦



Puppet show



Children watch a presentation



Children participate in an activity



A thematic presentation by children

Seminars on ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Contributions to Society

July–August 2022



Kadi Sarva Vishwa Vidyalya, Kadi



P.P. Savani University, Kosamba, Surat

Under the auspices of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Centenary Celebrations, a series of seminars at universities in Gujarat were held in association with AARSH Research Institute, Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar, to highlight the selfless and far-reaching contributions Pramukh Swami Maharaj made in technology, education, professional ethics, tribal uplift, agriculture and other fields.

Each seminar featured a speech by BAPS swamis and an academic of the respective institute on the topic of the seminar. Videos depicting the saintly life and selfless works of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were also shown. In addition, other distinguished guests also spoke briefly on the topic. The seminars were broadcast live on the university’s website and BAPS Sanstha’s Prerna Setu mobile application.

8 July 2022

At Sarva Vidyalya Kelavani Mandal and Kadi Sarva Vishwa Vidyalya, Kadi, on the topic ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Use of Technology to Transmit Spirituality’.

Main Speaker: Shri Kalpeshbhai Bhatt, Assistant Professor in Asian Religions at the University of Mary Washington, Virginia, USA.

12 July 2022

At Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, on the topic ‘Role and Contributions to the History of Gujarat State’.

Main Speaker: Aksharvatsaldas Swami.

14 July 2022

At P.P. Savani University, Kosamba, Surat, on the topic ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj: Proponent of Morality in Business and Professions’.

Main Speaker: Shri Harikrishnabhai Vinchi, a motivational speaker and educationist from Surat.

15 July 2022

At P.P. Savani University, Kosamba, Surat, on the topic ‘Krushi Maharshi: Pramukh Swami Maharaj’.

Main Speaker: Dr Shrutiprakashdas Swami.

23 July 2022

At UPL University of Sustainable Technology, Vatariya, Ankleshwar, on the topic ‘Incredible Management by Pramukh Swami Maharaj’.

Main Speaker: Jnanvijaydas Swami.

3 August 2022

Seminar on ‘Fusing Creativity, Spirituality and



Gujarat Technological University (GTU), Ahmedabad



Birsa Munda Tribal University, Rajpipla

Technology: From the Life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj', at Gujarat Technological University (GTU), Ahmedabad.

Main Speaker: Shri Kalpeshbhai Bhatt, Assistant Professor in Asian Religions at the University of Mary Washington, USA.

25 August 2022

At Birsa Munda Tribal University, Rajpipla, on the topic 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Contributions in the Field of Tribal Uplift'.

Main Speaker: Jnannayandas Swami. ♦

Special Centenary Assemblies

July–August 2022, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, India



Uttarakhand Community Convention



Shri Dharmic Leela Committee Convention

Under the auspices of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary celebrations special gatherings were held at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi.

2 July 2022

A special convention for members of the

Sindhi Samaj convention commenced by welcoming and honouring the *murti* of Shri Jhulelalji, the most revered deity of the Sindhi Samaj, and the divine *gyot*, according to the Sindhi tradition. BAPS sadhus offered puja with Vedic chants.

BAPS swamis sang devotional songs and

delivered the wisdom and messages of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj in Sindhi.

Also, Param Pujya Sant Sai Chandru Ram Sahebji of Shiv Shanti Sant Asudaram Ashram, Lucknow, had sent his son, Sai Mohanlalji, to deliver his written blessings.

9 July 2022

A special Uttarakhand Community Convention for devotees and well-wishers from the Garhwal, Kumaon and Jonsar regions of Uttarakhand.

The convention, attended by over 900, commenced by welcoming and honouring the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj according to the Uttarkhandi tradition with drums, *damai*, *masakbeen*, *ransingha*, *hudak* and other musical instruments, followed by an Uttarkhandi cultural Chholiya folk dance.

BAPS sadhus presented Pramukh Swami

Maharaj's messages on family harmony and leading an addiction-free life filled with values and spirituality.

15 August 2022

Shri Dharmic Leela Committee Convention commemorated the birth centenary of Shri Lala Bansi Dhar Guptaji and the centenary celebrations of Shri Dharmic Leela Committee, Delhi.

Akshardham volunteers enacted an enlightening and entertaining sketch from the life of Alexandra the Great and the wise yogi Danda Maharshi (Dandamis). A video on the life and works of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj was presented.

Pujya Doctor Swami addressed and blessed the special gathering, which also included honourable ambassadors, chiefs of missions and diplomats from Armenia, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Kenya, Japan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. ♦

Celebrating Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary

July–August 2022, Australia



Love, Peace & Harmony Dive, Cairns



Equality and Respect Walk, Uluru

LOVE, PEACE & HARMONY DIVE

13 July 2022, Cairns, Australia

On the auspicious day of Guru Purnima, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's virtues of love, peace and harmony reverberated in the Pacific Ocean

from the world's largest living structure.

The festivities commenced with guru *pujan* on the Ocean Freedom boat in the middle of the Upolu Reef. Prayers were offered for love, peace and harmony. *Arti* was performed and an *annakut* was offered.



Mt. Buller, Melbourne



Buchan Caves, Victoria

The *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj were then taken in a dive under water in the Great Barrier Reef amidst the innumerable living organisms. Mahant Swami Maharaj had blessed that all the living organisms will be liberated. In the water, guru *pujan* was performed through *mangalam*, *arti* and *dandvats*. A unity garland was offered as a gesture of commitment for humans and nature to flourish together. A procession also took place with a variety of fish. Finally, prayers were offered underwater for love, peace and harmony to spread across the globe.

On the Upolu Cay, swamis performed guru *pujan*. Thereafter, a special assembly and *nagar yatra* were held. Then, everyone offered *abhishek* to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj while praying for world peace and harmony.

EQUALITY AND RESPECT WALK

20 July 2022, Uluru, Australia

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life message – 'In the joy of others lies our own' – was shared from Uluru, one of Australia's most recognizable natural landmarks and one of the most important indigenous sites. Uluru is sacred to the Pitjantjatjara, the Aboriginal people of the area, and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

BAPS swamis and volunteers gathered at Uluru to take part in the 'In the Joy of Others – Equality and Respect Walk'. Australian values

based on freedom, respect, fairness and equality of opportunity are central to providing a secure, prosperous and peaceful place to live. These are the same values Pramukh Swami Maharaj taught across the globe throughout his life. Uniting with the traditional custodians, BAPS volunteers also raised awareness about living by these values.

At the Talinguru Nyakunytyaku sunrise viewing area the Anangu people gathered to traditionally welcome Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the volunteers by performing a traditional dance.

Thereafter, on the Lungkata walk path, the 'In the Joy of Others – Equality and Respect Walk' commenced from the Mala car park and ended at the Kuniya car park. The 4 km walk was smoothly completed while spreading the messages of equality and respect.

3 August 2022, Mt. Buller, Melbourne

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary was celebrated at the fifth longest land-based mountain range in the world, the Victorian Alps of the Great Dividing Range in Australia. Here, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life message 'In the joy of others, lies our own', echoed from the summit of the snowcapped Mount Buller.

Individuals from across Australia united to spread this message in remembrance of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's vision for global peace and harmony. All honoured Pramukh Swami Maharaj

with great reverence by performing guru *pujan* and *arti*. Prostrations were offered as a symbol of humility and servitude. Prayers were offered with purity to spread love, happiness and solidarity, and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life lessons and incidents were recollected. A procession in the snow was also held, and prayers for world peace and harmony were offered by the swamis and volunteers.

IN THE JOY OF OTHERS - CELEBRATING A LIFE PROMOTING FAMILY HARMONY 12 August 2022, Buchan Caves, Australia

The Buchan Caves are a group of limestone caves that include the Royal Cave and the Fairy Cave, located in the south-west region of the Australian state of Victoria. The limestone rock at Buchan was laid down 400 million years ago. The caves were formed by solution of limestone over time. They have a total length of between three and four kilometers, and six entrances. This was the location selected to proclaim Pramukh Swami Maharaj's message of family harmony as part of his centenary celebrations.

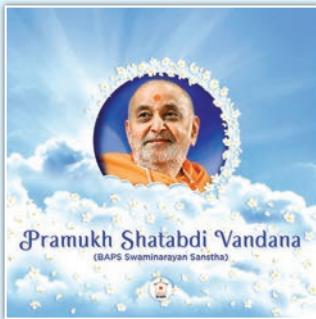
Pramukh Swami Maharaj travelled throughout the world, dedicating his life to the well-being of

others by fostering family harmony. Thus, this message, 'In the Joy of Others: Celebrating a Life Promoting Family Harmony' – echoed from inside of the caves as a call for all to adopt for a peaceful and harmonious life.

Swamis performed *pujan* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj inside the Fairy Cave and Royal Cave, and also recited the Vedic Shanti Path for world peace.

Thereafter, Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami spoke in Sanskrit to express the messages Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj have spread across the globe for developing a harmonious world. Sanskrit verses from the Satsang Diksha shastra related to family well-being were also recited. A special annakut of cakes decorated with the messages for family harmony given by Pramukh Swami Maharaj was offered to the *murtis*. Then, the swamis and local park ranger performed *arti*. At the end, the swamis prayed that the seven practices revealed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj help to unite all families with peace and happiness. ♦

NEW BHAJAN AUDIO COLLECTIONS



In celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary, new bhajans specially composed by BAPS swami's on the life, work and glory of Pramukh Swami Maharaj have been released. Two new collections. 'Pramukh Shatabdi Vandana and 'Pranamu Pramukh Swami Pyara' are now available.



Available from BAPS.store, iTunes, Amazon and Google Play Music



INDIA

INAUGURATION OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN VIDYAMANDIR

3 May 2022, Junagadh



Pramukh Swami Maharaj had inaugurated a *chhatralaya* in Junagadh in 2008. Since then, the need for a residential school was noticed. Such a school has been built with the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj. On 3 May 2022, the auspicious day of Akha Trij, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami inaugurated the newly built BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir.

He ceremoniously untied the *nadachhadi* while Vedic verses were recited. Then, with Thakorji, he visited the various parts of the Vidyamandir and was informed about the facilities that will be provided.

In the evening, a special inauguration assembly was held in the presence of the *kothari* swamis of nearby BAPS mandirs. On this occasion Jnanvatsal Swami spoke about the need for value-based education.

The school will provide Gujarati- and English-medium education to 2,400 students from Nursery to Standard 12 (Science and Commerce streams).

Also, the school has a 1000-student capacity hostel, with large open areas for sports and recreational activities.

SPECIAL PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ SHATABDI ASSEMBLIES

5–9 July 2022, Kolkata



Over 2,500 devotees attended the five special assemblies held under the auspices of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Shatabdi Mahotsav in the presence of Aksharcharandas Swami.

Aksharcharandas Swami narrated the glory of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Hindi, while videos were shown in Bengali.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ SMRUTI MANDIR DWARSHAKH PUJAN

13 July 2022, Sarangpur



The construction of the majestic Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir in Sarangpur is well under way. On the sacred day of Guru Purnima, the mandir's Dwarshakh Pujan Vidhi was held to mark the completion of the mandir's

main *dwarshakh*. A *dwarshakh* is an ornate door frame of an entrance, through which devotees will pass to reach the mandir's sanctum.

The event took place in the presence of Kothari Jnaneshwar Swami, other senior swamis, and devotees from India and abroad. A *mahapuja* was first held in the Yagnapurush Sabha Mandap. The gathering then moved to the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir, where the final, carved stone was set in place to complete the *dwarshakh*. Auspicious Vedic prayers were recited as the *dwarshakh* was sanctified. Then, everyone offered their respects to the sacred stone.

GURU PURNIMA CELEBRATION IN BENGALI

17 July 2022, Kolkata



Over 2,200 Bengali devotees attended the Guru Purnima assembly conducted in Bengal in the presence of Aksharcharandas Swami.

Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj sent special Guru Purnima blessings in Bengali in which he highlighted:

1. God and guru are extremely pleased by bhakti.
2. Even though you are physically far away, but if you remember God and guruji they will always be with you.

Local Bengali teenage boys and girls had set up traditional Bengali decorations for the celebration assembly. Also, an *annakut* of more than 250 vegetarian Bengali delicacies, prepared by local devotees, was offered to Thakorji.

HOME MINISTER PLACES KALASH AT PRAMUKH SWAMI NAGAR

24 July 2022, Ahmedabad



Home Minister of India Shri Amitbhai Shah visited the Pramukh Swami Nagar, where he was welcomed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami with a garland. Thereafter, the home minister was informed about the plans for developing the festival site. Then, Shri Amitbhai performed the Vedic *pujan* rituals of a *kalash* and placed it in the ground near the main festival gate.

He then expressed his best wishes for the celebrations and acknowledged the efforts of the volunteers helping to prepare the festival site.

AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM DARSHAN MUKHPATH MAHOTSAV

4-6 August 2022, Nenpur



As part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, Sarangpur, organized an Akshar-Purushottam Siddhant Karika Mukhpath Mahotsav. Around 100 students studying in various courses at BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, as well as those affiliated to

the Mahavidyalaya through online courses or external studies through Shree Somnath Sanskrit University, enthusiastically participated.

The Swaminarayan Siddhanta Karika is an extract from the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, which reveals the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The students worked hard to memorize its 565 Sanskrit verses (*karikas*). The Mahotsav began on the afternoon of 4 August in Nenpur, where they were assessed through written and oral examinations.

That evening the students presented a novel Sanskrit play called ‘Pavani’, similar to the famous Sanskrit play ‘Pala’ of East India.

On the morning of 5 August the students participated in *samuh* puja and chorus singing of the Karika and Satsang Diksha. Thereafter, the students received experienced guidance from Shrutiprakash Swami, Bhadresh Swami and Atmatrupt Swami.

Overall, 11 male students successfully memorized all 565 *karikas* and received the title of ‘Karikajayi’ and 12 female students received the corresponding title of ‘Karikajayini’.

In the afternoon, a special assembly was also held at BAPS Mandir, Ahmedabad, in the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Vivekasagar Swami and Atmaswarup Swami, in which students presented their *mukhpath* and received their awards.

A separate assembly was also held for the female students to present their efforts in memorizing the *karikas* and receive their awards.

The highlight of the Mukhpath Mahotsav was the assembly in the presence of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. Swamishri was delighted to hear the recitations and the stories of the sincere efforts of all. Swamishri also tested the students and certified their success by saying, “All of you immersed yourself [in this *mukhpath*] for Rajipo. Rajipo has worked. Those who understood Rajipo were successful.

On the morning of 6 August, students recited

selected Sanskrit *karikas* and their Gujarati translations during Swamishri’s puja.

MEDICAL CAMPUS KARYAKAR SHIBIR: ONE STEP AHEAD

7 August 2022, Ahmedabad



At numerous medical colleges throughout Gujarat, campus assemblies are held every week, which impart guidance on studies, spirituality and cultural values to medical students.

Over 100 campus assembly *karyakars*, who organize and conduct the assemblies at their campuses, attended this *shibir* based on the theme ‘One Step Ahead’.

The attendees were inspired through speeches by Pujya Viveksagar Swami and other learned swamis. They also received practical guidance through videos and other activities.

The highlight of the *shibir* was the darshan and blessings of Param Pujya Mahant swami Maharaj.

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ CELEBRATES INDIA’S AZADI KA AMRIT MAHOTSAV

15 August 2022, Ahmedabad



Hundreds of devotees gathered at the BAPS

mandir in Ahmedabad to celebrate India's Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav (75th Independence Day) in the presence of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. The ceremony featured the singing of 'Vande Mataram' – India's national song and 'Jana Gana Mana...' – India's national anthem. Everyone stood to attention as Mahant Swami Maharaj unfurled and saluted the Indian Tricolour. In his blessings, he paid tribute to all of India's freedom fighters and everyone who has contributed to the nation's progress, prosperity and peace.

The 75th Independence Day celebrations were also held at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi in the presence of Pujya Dr Swami, at Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar in the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and at BAPS mandirs in India and abroad.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ SMRUTI MANDIR PRATHAM STAMBH STHAPAN VIDHI

7 September 2022, Sarangpur, India



The construction of the ornate Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir in Sarangpur is well under way. On the sacred day of Jal Jhilani Ekadashi, the mandir's Pratham Stambh Sthapan Vidhi was held.

The event took place in the presence of Pujya Viveksagar Swami, Gnaneshwar Swami, other senior swamis, and devotees from India and abroad. A *mahapuja* was first held in the Yagnapurush Sabha Mandap. The gathering then moved to the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Mandir. Vedic prayers were recited as the first carved *stambh* (pillar) was set in place to complete

the ceremony. All those present then offered their respects to the sacred stone.

UK & EUROPE

INDIAN LEGEND SACHIN TENDULKAR VISITS NEASDEN TEMPLE

13 July 2022, London



Indian cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar, regarded as one of the greatest batsmen in the history of cricket, visited the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir.

Mr Tendulkar and his family prayed at the mandir, and was blessed by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj through an online meeting.

Mr Tendulkar offered his best wishes for the forthcoming 'Festival of Inspiration', a ten-day family celebration in London marking the birth centenary of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, whom he had met at the BAPS Mandir in London in 1990.

DEVOTIONAL PROCESSION COMMEMORATES PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S CENTENARY

17 July 2022, London



A grand procession took place in London to

commemorate the birth centenary of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The *nagar yatra* brought together thousands of devotees from across the country for a colourful, joyous occasion through the streets of Alperton and Wembley, suburbs near BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden.

Led by women carrying decorated *kalash* pots on their heads, the approximately 3-mile procession featured large decorated floats depicting various aspects of the forthcoming 'Festival of Inspiration' and 'Island of Heroes'.

The celebratory procession included devotional music and traditional Indian folk dancing by children and youths dressed in vibrant costumes.

The procession fittingly concluded before the 27-foot *mahamurti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the courtyard of Neasden Mandir.

BLACKPOOL TOWER ILLUMINATED TO COMMEMORATE PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S CENTENARY

8 August 2022, Preston



The iconic Blackpool Tower in north-west England was illuminated to mark the centenary birth anniversary of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj – the first time in the Tower's 128-year history that a spiritual leader has been honoured.

Following a short ceremony, the tower was majestically lit in the BAPS colours of red and white.

The ceremony took place in the presence of

numerous distinguished guests, including Cllr Kathryn Benson, Mayor of Blackpool, Cllr Neil Darby, Mayor of Preston, and Martin Ainscough, High Sheriff of Lancashire. This historic event was organized by BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Preston, and Fylde Coast Hindu Society.

Following prayers at the top of the Tower for peace and harmony, a short horse-drawn carriage procession along the promenade and a ceremonial gathering, the grand lighting of the tower commenced with devotional dancing and celebration. It was attended by BAPS swamis, members of the local community, as well as hundreds of visitors and well-wishers from across the region who paid tribute to the inspiring life, work and wisdom of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Blackpool on two occasions – in 1974 and 1977, when he was joined by the current spiritual head of BAPS, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. Both gurus have provided inspiration to individuals and members of the community in the region by gifting mandirs to serve communities, preserve culture and promote harmony.

Cllr Kathryn Benson, Mayor of Blackpool, stated that the evening had truly been "moving, inspirational and colourful". Cllr Neil Darby, Mayor of Preston, added, "It was an honour to attend the centenary celebrations of the birth of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a great holy man whose influence in life is still felt in the community today in Preston, Blackpool, the North West and beyond."

ASIA PACIFIC

INAUGURATION OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

24 July 2022, Sydney, Australia

Thousands witnessed the inauguration of the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, Australia, at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sydney.



His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the event via a live webcast from Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India, and lit the inaugural *divo* to open the institute.

As part of the opening ceremony 14 children sang verses from the Swaminarayan Siddhant Karika and 40 youths sang Sanskrit verses from the Swaminarayan Siddhant Samamnaya.

Thereafter, Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami presented expert guidance and explanations.

Religious and community leaders, pandits and media personnel were among the 88 representatives from 41 organizations present. Devotees and well-wishers appreciated the new research institute. Many organizations presented letters of commendations, recognizing the tremendous contributions of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

This research institute is one of several established across the world as part of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations. The BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute will inspire and educate individuals by providing them with the right tools and opportunities to foster personal success, develop awareness and strong communal ties. The research institute will include in-depth teaching of Hindu shastras, Sanskrit, the Akshar-Purushottam Upasana and traditional Hindu practices.

SANSKRIT SHASTRAS PRESENTED TO THE PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

2 August 2022, Melbourne, Australia

The Parliament of Victoria honoured



Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami in recognition of his academic achievements as an eminent global scholar of Indian philosophy, beliefs, and culture who has studied Vedic literature and texts for the last 40 years.

He has authored the Swaminarayan Bhashyam, a classical-style Sanskrit commentary on the ten Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras in which he expounds on the distinct Akshar-Purushottam Darshan school of philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. This unique Vedantic philosophy – Akshar-Purushottam Darshan – has been recognized by institutions worldwide.

In the Queen's Hall, Bhadreshdas Swami delivered a special message in Sanskrit derived from the insights of the Satsang Diksha scripture, wherein he also appreciated the promotion of multiculturalism in the state of Victoria.

Thereafter, the Swaminarayan Bhashyam, Satsang Diksha shastra and *Transcendence* book were presented to the Parliamentary Library of Victoria. The texts were received by former President of the Legislative Council, Hon. Bruce Atkinson, Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, Mr Craig Ondarchie, Dr Tien Kieu, Member for the Legislative Council, and the Speakers Advisor, Mr Jason McDonald. BAPS also gifted the books to the manager of the Parliamentary Library and Information Service, Mrs Carolyn Macvane.

Thereafter, members of parliament and Bhadreshdas Swami had an intriguing discussion about the importance of the Sanskrit language

and how it is applicable to the world today.

During the Legislative Council sitting, the Hon. Nazih Elasmr, President of the Legislative Council, acknowledged Bhadreshdas Swami and the delegation in the president's gallery.

Bhadreshdas Swami prayed for everyone's peace, prosperity and progress. He also gifted a memento to the president and members of parliament inscribed with a special message from His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj inspiring all to unite and nurture global harmony collectively: "In the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, let's reach out to extend the circle of global harmony."

AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM ADHYAYAN CONFERENCE 2022

12–15 August 2022, Glenaladale, Australia



The first Australia and New Zealand Akshar-Purushottam Adhyayan Conference was held in Glenaladale, Australia, in the presence of Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami and resident swamis from Australia. A total of 48 *yuvaks* and 31 *yuvatis* gathered for this historic conference, organized by the recently opened BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute. For the last one-and-a-half years the delegates had participated in two separate online courses: 1. Akshar-Purushottam Adhyayan and 2. Siddhant Sadhana.

The Akshar-Purushottam Adhyayan course focused on learning about the history of BAPS, Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, attachment to the Satpurush, learning how to sing Sanskrit verses from the Swaminarayan Siddhant Karika and

discussions about the dedication of volunteers.

The Siddhant Sadhana course focused on understanding the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy in depth and its practical daily life applications.

The four-day conference began with the delegates taking their final exam for their respective courses. During the conference, swamis guided and inspired the delegates to continue to learn and imbibe the teachings from their courses. Swamis also gave creative in-depth presentations on performing the different *ahniks* – daily devotional routines. Also, the delegates actively engaged in group discussions on how to apply these teachings in their daily lives. At the end of the four-day conference, a convocation ceremony was held for all the delegates who had passed their final exam.

On the last day, 15 August 2022, the delegates participated in the flag hoisting ceremony to commemorate India's Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav – India's 75th Independence Day.

SATSANG DIKSHA HOMATMAK PATH YAGNA

21 August 2022, Adelaide, Australia



As part of the inauguration ceremony of the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, Australia, over a thousand devotees and well-wishers, in person and many more via the live webcast, participated in the 'Satsang Diksha Homatmak Path,' a special *yagna* ceremony that was the first of its kind in Australia.

The rituals commenced with the *pujan* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Pramukh

Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, the Satsang Diksha Shastra and the traditional *yagna kund*. Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami commenced the historic *yagna* by lighting the flame for this auspicious ritual. Sanctified grains were offered in the sacrificial flame with the recital of 315 Sanskrit verses from the Satsang Diksha shastra by 100 children and youths from Australia and New Zealand. These children had all memorized the entire Satsang Diksha scripture in Sanskrit. Bhadreshdas Swami explained the glory of this *yagna* and the benefits of performing such a traditional ritual. The rituals included prayers for world peace and harmony.

VEDIC PHILOSOPHY AND RITUALS CONVOCATION

21 August 2022, Adelaide, Australia



BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, Australia, provides children and youths across Australia and New Zealand to engage in courses related to Vedic philosophy and Vedic rituals.

Children aged 5 to 14 years had completed: i) the study and memorizing of the 565 Sanskrit verses from the Swaminarayan Siddhant Karika, and ii) memorizing the Sanskrit verses of the Shri Swaminarayan Mahapuja and how to perform the accompanying Vedic rituals.

To commemorate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary, they pledged to perform more than 100 *mahapuja* rituals at the homes of well-wishers in their own cities by December 2022. Also, all of these children had memorized the 315 Sanskrit verses of the Satsang Diksha shastra as well.

Over 100 children gathered for their convocation ceremony in the presence of Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami. Devotees welcomed the youngsters by showering sanctified flowers on them in recognition of their great accomplishment. Bhadreshdas Swami addressed the assembly and also lauded the children's achievements. Each student was presented a graduation certificate and a memento.

A CELEBRATION OF LOVE, PEACE AND HARMONY

27 August 2022, Bangkok, Thailand



BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, Thailand, organized a special assembly in the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami to mark the centenary of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami welcomed and honoured the Chief Guest, Phra Maha Raja Guru Bidhi Sri Visudhigun, Chief Hindu Brahmin Priest of The Royal Court of Thailand, as well as representatives from various Indian community organizations based in Thailand.

The assembly featured speeches by BAPS swamis on the life, works and wisdom of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and inspiring video presentations.

Addressing the assembly, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami spoke about the greatness of satsang and the spiritual succession of Gunatit gurus established by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. And, on behalf of HH Mahant Swami Maharaj, he invited Sri Visudhigunji and all the guests to visit the grand Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations to be held in Ahmedabad at the end of the year.

UAE

JANMASHTAMI CELEBRATION

21 August 2022, BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi



Over 6,000 guests and devotees attended the auspicious Janmashtami celebration at the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. *Vishupads* and kirtans honouring Shri Krishna's life were sung, and a brief oration on how one may truly surrender to Bhagwan's will and imbibe peace and righteousness in one's life was delivered. To celebrate the birth of Shri Krishna, a beautiful swing decorated with peacock feathers was placed at the centre of the assembly. *Pujan* and *arti* were performed and the celebratory 'Nand Gher Anand Bhayo' kirtan commemorating Shri Krishna's birth was sung.

Then, the thousands of attendees came forward in turn to swing the Lord in the *hindolo*. As they advanced, groups of devotees took turns in 45-minute slots to sing celebratory devotional bhajans. Small children also performed a dance remembering Shri Krishna's childhood incidents.

Before departing, attendees were also able to participate in a special puja to sanctify a brick, which they then personally carried and placed on the five-metre-high plinth of the upcoming BAPS Hindu Mandir.

BAPS HINDU MANDIR GIVES 10,000 HANDMADE RAKHIS TO WORKERS AND RESIDENTS

7 August 2022, Abu Dhabi

BAPS Hindu Mandir held a special prayer assembly to celebrate Rakshabandhan and pay



tribute to HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj on his sixth memorial anniversary. The celebration, attended by more than 4,000 workers from over 26 companies, was a joyous occasion to thank those working earnestly to provide for their families.

Rakshabandhan symbolizes a bond of support and protection between brothers and sisters and God and devotees. On this auspicious day, 10,000 *rakhis*, handmade by the female devotees of the BAPS in UAE, were distributed to workers, residents, families, and communities to celebrate this occasion.

HH Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the audience from India with prayers for harmony and fraternity – underlining that we are eternally under God's protection and are blessed with the wisdom to help one another in the spirit of universal fellowship.

Afterwards, attendees participated in a special puja to sanctify a brick which they later personally carried and placed on the five-metre-high plinth, above the foundation of the upcoming mandir.

The audience also enjoyed a medley of festival bhajans sung by the sadhus and youth volunteers of BAPS Hindu Mandir. Meanwhile, as each member of the assembly came forward a *rakhi* was tied on their wrists accompanied with a prayer for protection, fulfilment and happiness.

RAKSHABANDHAN WITH HE SHEIKH NAHYAN

11 August 2022, Abu Dhabi

Brahmaviharidas Swami of BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi was warmly welcomed



to the Royal Majlis by HE Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence, UAE. They discussed the updates of the mandir project and the upcoming Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations in India.

During the meeting they cherished the everlasting bonds of friendship and understanding, and the universal human values shared by the leadership and the people of both India and the UAE. With prayers for greater love and harmony between countries, cultures and communities, Brahmaviharidas Swami tied a *rakhi* on the wrist of HE Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan.

DR S. JAISHANKAR APPRECIATES BAPS HINDU MANDIR: ‘SYMBOL OF PEACE, TOLERANCE AND HARMONY’

31 August 2022, Abu Dhabi, UAE



On the auspicious day of Ganesh Chaturthi, Honourable Dr S. Jaishankar, the External Affairs Minister of India, visited the BAPS Hindu Mandir site in Abu Dhabi. He was accompanied by an esteemed delegation of senior officials from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs,

including the Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra, Ambassador Sanjay Sudhir, Joint Secretary Shri Vipul and Consul General Dr Aman Puri.

Dr Jaishankar made the visit a priority stop on his official visit to the United Arab Emirates to chair the 14th India-UAE Joint Commission Meeting and the India-UAE Strategic Dialogue with UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Brahmaviharidas Swami welcomed Dr Jaishankar and the delegation and led them to the Rivers of Harmony exhibition, which presents the story of the mandir and its sentiments for peace and harmony. It was a pleasant coincidence that Dr Jaishankar had appreciated the words of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the United Nations Millennium Peace Summit in New York exactly 22 years previously.

Dr Jaishankar appreciated the mandir’s harmonious design and diverse construction team. He also expressed his gratitude for the mandir and the BAPS Sanstha’s role in community service, especially the special services during COVID-19 and the Ukraine crises.

Thereafter, the delegation watched the ‘History of Harmony’ video which depicts how this mandir project has come to fruition.

Afterwards, Dr Jaishankar and the delegation performed Ganesh puja and *pujan* of bricks which they later personally placed on the mandir’s five-metre plinth.

Thereafter, Dr Jaishankar personally met and congratulated representatives of the thousands of contributors who were giving with their hearts to make this miracle in the desert.

Dr Jaishankar next visited the mandir site, despite the hot afternoon sun. Here, he conversed with the construction workers and craftsmen and took a keen interest in their personal well-being and their experiences while working on the mandir. Encouraged by their spirit and joyfulness, he asked them to keep up the same spirit to

complete the work in the projected time. “You are doing a great service for India, and also doing something great for the world.”

Then, Dr Jaishankar visited the newly installed Gajendra Pith and admired the intricate carvings as well as the diverse value tales envisioned for the mandir’s *mandovar* façade.

After the mandir site visit, Dr Jaishankar sat with Brahmaviharidas Swami and others to discuss ideas regarding global harmony and progress. On hearing of the upcoming Centenary Celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Dr Jaishankar graciously accepted an invitation to join the festivities.

Before departing, he added, “I will regularly keep coming to see how it is progressing.”

Thus, after an extensive 90-minute visit to the BAPS Hindu Mandir, Dr Jaishankar left to meet HH Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak al Nahyan.

AFRICA

BAPS TANZANIA PARTICIPATES IN INTERRELIGIOUS WORKSHOP

25 June 2022, Mwanza, Tanzania

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, Mwanza, was invited, together with representatives of various



other religions in Mwanza, by the St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) to a workshop on interreligious dialogue. SAUT is a Catholic-owned higher academic institution managed by the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC).

The Department of Philosophy and Ethics at SAUT organized this workshop on ‘Interreligious dialogue to promote a peaceful and harmonious society’.

On behalf of BAPS, Dipeshkumar Girishchandra Dave spoke on how to equip the youth to serve society so that people live by the principles of love, dignity, equality and mutual respect.

The event was attended by over 1,500 delegates, including representatives of religious institutions in the region and government officials. Vice Chancellor Prof. Costa Ricky Mahalu was the chief guest. ♦

TRIBUTES



PUJYA NATHA BHAGAT

Adas; Age: 98, Aksharvas: 8 August 2022

A native of Thuvavi village, near Dabhoi, Pujya Natha Bhagat was a resident of Vadodara when he met Shastriji Maharaj and was drawn to the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* in 1944. He pleased Shastriji Maharaj by helping to take the *murtis* for Gadhada mandir from Vadodara, regularly engaging in a variety of duties and also enthusiastically spreading the teachings of satsang to others.

After serving Shastriji Maharaj, he tirelessly

served Yogiji Maharaj. And on 16 July 1964, Yogiji Maharaj initiated him as a *parshad*.

For the past 50 years, at the wish of Brahmawarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Pujya Natha Bhagat served at the BAPS Mandir in Adas. His life reflected his dedication and affection towards the Sanstha. His simple, pure, disciplined and devout life inspired many. Humble tributes to such a pious servant of the Sanstha.



PUJYA ANANDPRAKASH SWAMI

Surendranagar; Age: 57, Aksharvas: 9 August 2022

Pujya Anandprakash Swami was initiated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1986. For a number of years, he travelled in the villages to promote satsang. From 1996, he was assigned as the *bhandari* of the newly consecrated Surendranagar mandir; a duty he fulfilled with tremendous devotion, dedication and discipline for 26 years. He lived a pious and bhajan-centric life and served without any complaints even in challenging circumstances. He was regular in attending the daily *artis* and *kathas*,

routinely observed fasts and other austerities, and joyfully cared and catered for the devotees who came to the mandir.

For the past eight years, he suffered from liver problems which rapidly progressed a few months ago and he suffered a stroke. With great composure, he continued his constant devotion without any complaints. We offer our heartfelt tributes to such a saintly, devout and dedicated saint. ♦

Register Now for the Historic Yagna During Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations



We are delighted to announce that a historic month-long Swaminarayan Vishwashanti Yagna will be held during the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations in Ahmedabad to offer homage to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, revered sadhus and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This special *yagna* will commence on Magshar *vad* 8, 16 December 2022, and will conclude on Posh *vad* 5, 14 January 2023.

Daily, a total of 60 *yajman* couples – in four batches of 15 *yajman* couples – will be able to participate in this *yagna*. In each batch participants will be able to offer the 16 sacred rituals in the holy *yagna kund* while the Swaminarayan Mahapuja, Sahajanand Namavali and Satsang Diksha Shastra are recited. Each session will take approximately two hours to complete.

This is an ideal occasion to offer prayers for family and relatives, to commemorate a family member's birthday, marriage anniversary or other special occasion, and for newlyweds to seek blessings for their future.



You may choose the date or *tithi* on which to participate and receive the blessings of swamis during the Swaminarayan Vishwashanti Yagna.

FOR REGISTRATION AND MORE DETAILS:

<https://yagna.psm100.org/>

yagna.mahotsav@in.baps.org

Whatsapp and Mobile: +91 9998993221

Yagna Department, Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations, Pramukh Swami Nagar, Ahmedabad



GURU PURNIMA CELEBRATION
BAPS Mandir, Ahmedabad, 13 July 2022

Over 10,000 devotees gathered to offer their heartfelt respects to *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj on the auspicious occasion of Guru Purnima. (Inset): Swamishri inaugurates *Pramukh Swami Maharaj Jivan Charitra*, Part 7.

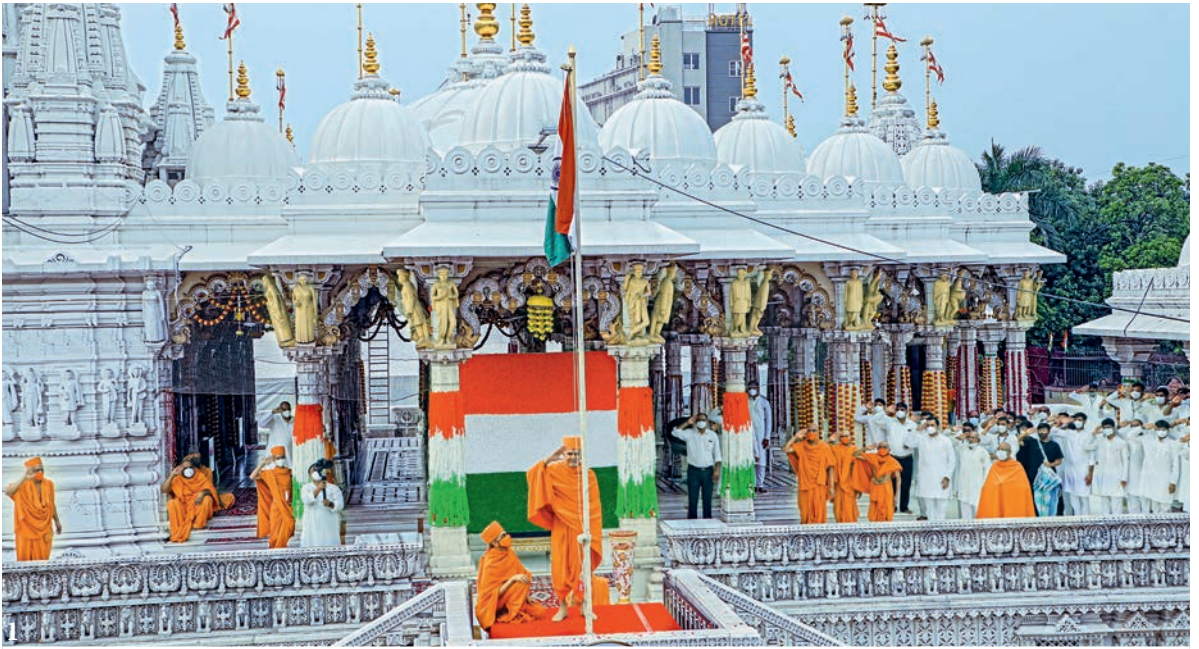


JANMASTHTAMI CELEBRATION
Anand, 19 August 2022

Thousands of devotees attended the evening Janmashtami celebration in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Inset: Swamishri performs the birth celebration arti of Bhagwan Shri Krishna.





BAPS CELEBRATES INDIA'S AZADI KA AMRIT MAHOTSAV

15 August 2022

BAPS Mandir in India and abroad celebrated India's 75th Independence Day with great national pride.

1. Mahant Swami Maharaj salutes the Indian Tricolour, Ahmedabad.
2. Celebration in the presence of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar.
3. Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrated in the presence of Pujya Dr Swami (centre) at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi.

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