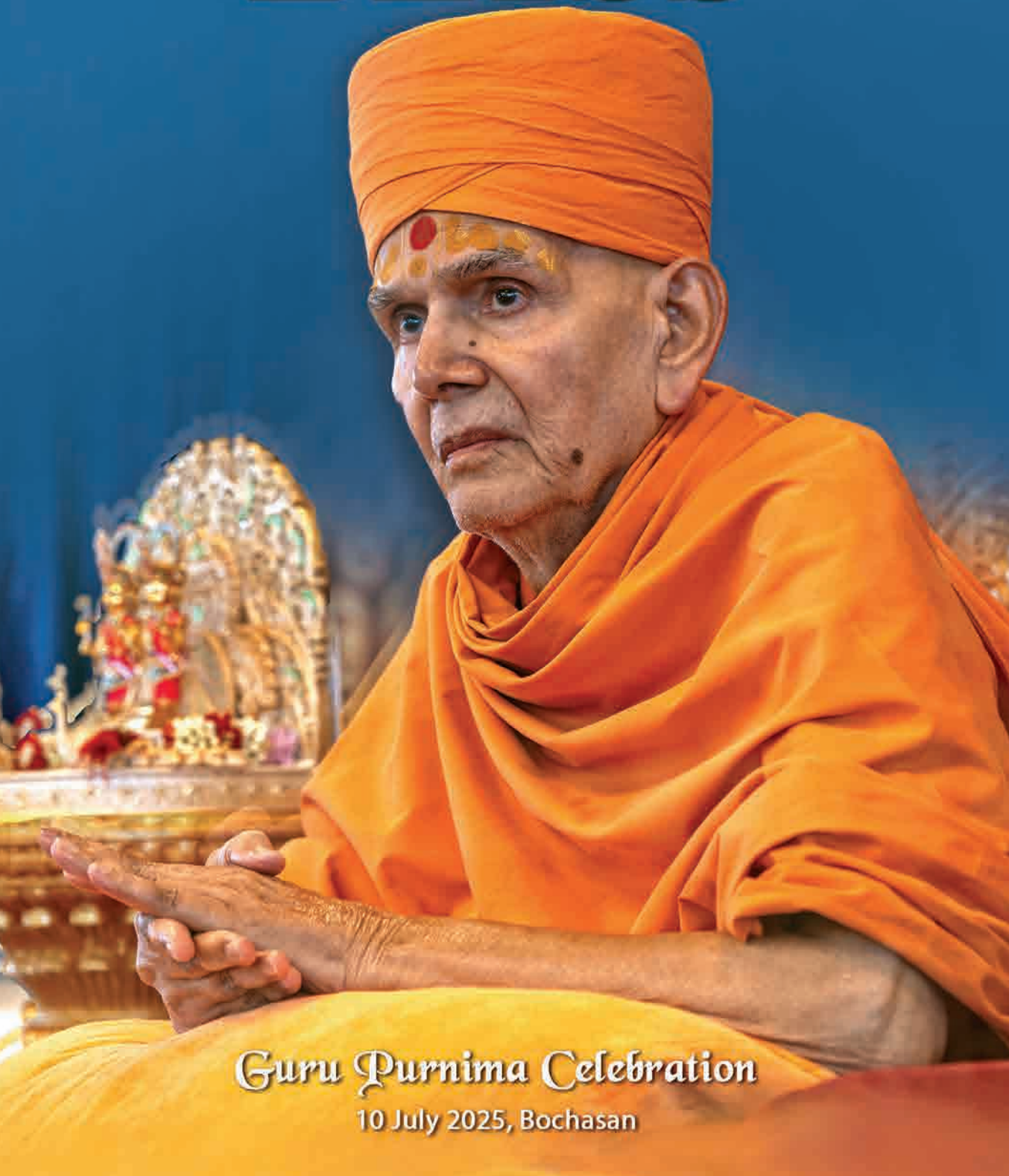


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Guru Purnima Celebration

10 July 2025, Bochasan



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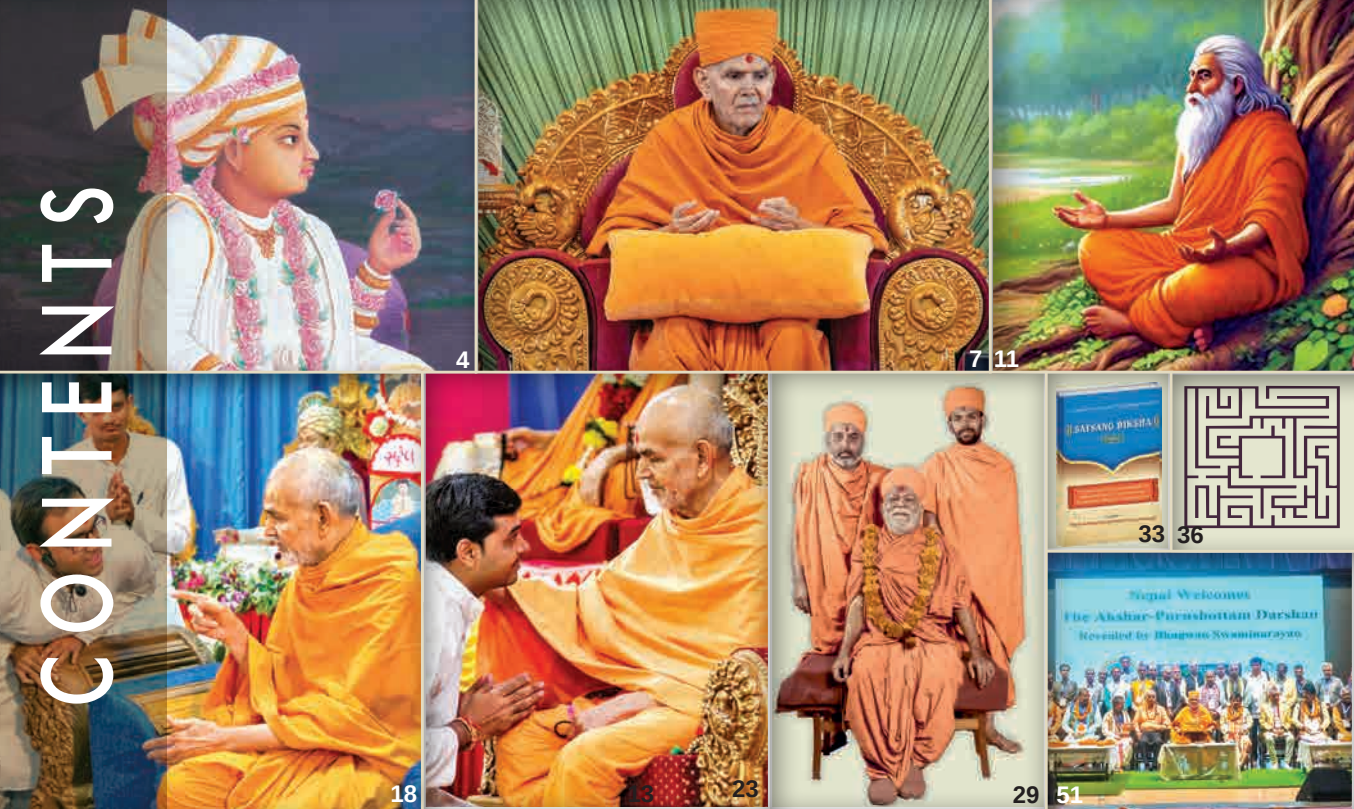


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PRATHANA MANDIR MURTI-PRATISHTHA, 30 April 2025, Surat

On the auspicious day of Akha Trij, Swamishri consecrated the Prarthana Mandir at the site of the under-construction Swaminarayan Akshardham in Kanad, Surat.

1. The consecrated *murtis*. 2. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals. 3. Exterior view of the Prarthana Mandir. 4. Swamis and devotees seated in the *murti-pratishtha* assembly.



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July–August 2025, Vol. 48, No. 4

- 4 A Scriptural Debate**
- 7 Guru Purnima Celebration, Bochasan**
- 11 Bedrock of Sanatan Hindu Dharma:
The Enduring Guru-Shishya Bond, Part 1**
- 18 Bedrock of Sanatan Hindu Dharma:
The Enduring Guru-Shishya Bond, Part 2**
- 23 Beyond Words, Beyond Time:
Meeting Mahant Swami Maharaj**

- 29 Mahant Swami Maharaj's Guru Bhakti**
- 33 Speech to Inspire: Satsang Diksha's
Guidance, Part 1**
- 36 Hide and Seek: Searching for 'Anand'**
- 42 Mahant Swami Maharaj's Vicharan**
- 51 Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Featured
at the 19th World Sanskrit Conference**
- 53 BAPS News**

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

A Scriptural Debate

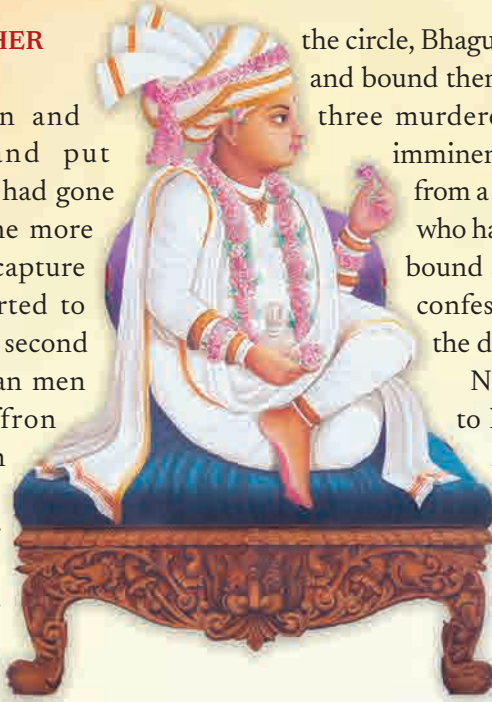
The Diwan of Vadodara was averse to Shri Hari. He had failed in his first attempt to do away with him. However, spurred by his animosity, he set about to launch his second attempt. Then, the local scholarly Brahmins decided to debate and defeat Shri Hari...

DIWAN EXECUTES ANOTHER PLAN

The diwan's first plan and aspiration to defeat and put Swaminarayan behind bars had gone awry. This made him all the more angry and determined to capture him. Subsequently, he started to impliment his preposterous second plan. He called three African men and clothed them in saffron robes like Swaminarayan sadhus. Then, he gave each of them a *mala* in their hands and strapped poison-laced daggers around their waists. He told them to kill Swaminarayan while he was asleep in his tent that night.

However, outside Shri Hari's tent, Bhaguji, Ratanji, Karimji, Mansinh, Kubersinh and Kesarisinh were alert and on guard all through the night. To enter Maharaj's tent anyone would have to pass through these formidable security guards. There was no issue about checking a devotee and known persons of Vadodara, but they rigorously searched and questioned unknown and doubtful persons.

The guards saw three Africans dressed in saffron robes approaching them. It was crystal clear they were not their sadhus, but charlatans in the robes of sadhus. Bhaguji instantly and hurriedly set up a plan to thwart them. He wound a rope in a circle and placed it on their pathway. The remaining two ends of the rope were in their hands. When the three fake sadhus stepped into



the circle, Bhaguji and his team pulled the rope and bound them in a tight grip. Instantly, the three murderers thought their death was imminent. Then, they were suspended from a tree. The Brahmin companions who had accompanied them were also bound and rendered immobile. They confessed the plot was schemed by the diwan.

Next morning, everyone came to learn of what had transpired.

Maharaja Sayajirao was pained to learn of his diwanji's egregious act. He appealed to Maharaj to forgive him and stated, "I will immediately dismiss the diwan from his post."

Shri Hari calmly restrained him, "Maharaja, there is no need to punish him because of me. He will naturally go away later because of his sinful karmas. Therefore, do not act in haste." Maharaja Sayajirao was impressed by Shri Hari's earnest words and magnanimity. He felt Bhagwan's divinity lay not only in his divine powers but also in his virtues of tolerance, forgiveness, patience and peace. For Bhagwan, who possessed infinite powers, the diwan was like a mere mosquito. Yet, he did not exercise his powers to destroy him because he had assigned such tasks to Kal or Dharma Raja.

The closer the Maharaja Sayajirao came to Shri Hari, the more he experienced his divine charisma. He humbly informed Maharaj, "Prabhu, it seems the Brahmins who had once lost a scriptural debate with Muktanand Swami in my

palace now desire to have a debate with you. What should I do?"

Shri Hari replied, "If they wish to debate with a purpose to learn and know, they will surely be satisfied and happy. However, if they harbour envy in their hearts their defeat will further aggravate it. But since it is their wish, you may arrange an assembly in the afternoon."

As soon as Sayajirao left Maharaj's tent, Bhaguji entered and informed, "A prominent British officer has come to meet you. He says he had met you in Surat." Shriji Maharaj instantly recalled Mr Halford's talk and instructed Bhaguji to allow him in.

Mr Halford entered and doffed his hat and bowed to Shri Hari. Then, he bent down and touched Maharaj's feet. Mr Halford's personal guards were surprised to see this. The officer stated, "Prabhu, by your blessings I have been vindicated in an accusation by the nawab. Furthermore, I've been promoted as an additional governor of Mumbai state. Accept this gift from me." Mr Halford offered a *mala* of agate beads.

BUSINESS OF AGATE STONES

Shri Hari carefully saw the *mala* and commented, "The agate stone from which these beads were made seem to be raw and immature. That's why they do not have a proper sheen and shape." Then, Maharaj advised, "Presently, you are the additional governor of Mumbai, so you are the head of the Mumbai region, which also includes the town of Khambhat. You should develop a business of agate stones in Khambhat. I will show you how to mature the agate stones. When your craftsmen prepare the stones accordingly, their value will increase significantly."

Mr Halford was awed on hearing Shri Hari and felt that though Shri Hari was a saintly figure his intelligence was boundless. Then, Shri Hari explained the craft of maturing the stones, "Wash the stones with cow dung and put them in

an earthenware pot. Place a lid on top of the pot and seal it. Turn the pot upside down and make a hole on its upturned side. Thereafter, heat the pot, using cow dung as fuel, for the whole night. By morning, the stones will have ripened or matured."

Shri Hari sanctified the agate *mala* and returned it to the British governor as a gift. Mr Halford replied, "Your technique will set a new trail in the world-famous business of agate stones of Khambhat." Then Mr Halford took leave.¹

* * *

The evening satsang assembly was arranged in Mastubaug. Four scholars of different Indian philosophies and other scholars were also present for the debate. They were curious to know about the essence of the Hindu shastras from Shri Hari.

Other than the moral and ritual practices Shriji Maharaj had established in the *sampradaya* he also propagated Brahma and Parabrahma as the two most important entities in his (Akshar-Purushottam) philosophy. To promulgate it, he believed it was necessary to have scriptural debates. And when scholars would understand and appreciate his philosophy (Darshan), it would enhance the glory of the *sampradaya* and also draw them towards the *sampradaya*.

SCRIPTURAL DEBATE IN MASTUBAUG

Shri Hari happily welcomed all the scholars who were seated in the assembly. The scholars were impressed by Maharaj's warm feelings. However, those who nourished hatred for and a desire to defeat Shri Hari maintained a stern and confrontational attitude. They had decided to pose difficult and challenging questions that Shri Hari would not be able to answer. The questions they asked were, "The four *acharyas* had established the four *sampradayas*, so how can your *sampradaya* be called the fifth? An *acharya* is one who writes a commentary on the Prasthantrayi (Upanishads, Brahmasutra and Bhagavad Gita). But scholars who write commentaries on the other shastras

1. Sourced from an article published by Nagindas Shankarlal Patel in his Gujarati monthly magazine *Shri Swaminarayan*, Year: 41, Issue: 4, April 1978.

besides the Prasthantrayi are not considered to be *acharyas*. Then, how can such an *acharya* go around to attain victory in scriptural debates? How can women of his fold give the mantra or *vartman diksha* to women? The shastras have not authorized women to do so. In each *sampradaya*, there is only one deity to worship, whereas you worship Nar-Narayan, Lakshmi-Narayan, Radha-Krishna, Shiv-Parvati, Surya, Ganeshji, Hanumanji and others.”

Shri Hari rattled off solid and undisputed answers to their questions with references from the shastras. He also explained the difference between pandits who memorized *shlokas* and those who were true *jnanis*. He said, “It is only through the grace of a *jnani* person who has realized Brahma and Parabrahma that one can truly understand the philosophy of the shastras.”²

SCHOLARS PRAISE MAHARAJ

The scholars were humbled by Maharaj’s brilliant answers. They were convinced that the root of all knowledge was Paramatma. They all praised Shri Hari, “Above all worldly things lie Prakriti-Purush and above them is Aksharbrahma Dham, which is also known as Akshardham or Brahmadham. In that highest Dham, infinite *muktas* are always serving you. You have taken a divine body from which there is an incessant flow of light. Oh Shri Hari, we, the pandits of Vadodara seated in this assembly, humbly seek refuge at your lotus feet.”³

On the final day of Shri Hari’s stay, the Maharaja of Vadodara invited him to sanctify his palace. A grand procession was carried out for Shri Hari to the palace. Maharaj entered with his principal sadhus, *parshads* and bodyguards. The royal court was full with his ministers and distinguished citizens. They all perceived Shriji Maharaj to be a unique scholar because he had deflated the ego of the scholars and made them humble.

In the past, Shri Hari had defeated many evil conspirators and shrewd politicians through his divinity and astuteness. In many of the tasks he undertook, he faced stiff opposition from many types of people. Yet, he had always remained undefeated and undeterred. Through his virtues of forbearance and forgiveness he reformed them outwardly and also dissolved their *swabhavs*. Shriji Maharaj played the dual role of a king and a sadhu. However, his saintly persona predominated and touched all. These and many other thoughts reverberated in the minds of the scholars.

TO THE ROYAL COURT AGAIN

When Shri Hari arrived at the royal palace the Brahmin scholar who performed rituals in the royal court chanted and welcomed him with Vedic mantras. He instructed the king and his princes to perform *pujan* of Shri Hari. Once the rituals were over, Shriji Maharaj glanced at the diwan’s empty seat. Maharaj asked, “Call the diwanji. I wish to advise him before I depart. He will not be able to malign me, but I am pleased with him because he thinks about me in all his evil plans.”

Maharaj blessed the king, “You are very meritorious and fortunate because Parabrahma Purushottam Narayan and his holy sadhus have come to your palace and accepted your *seva*. Thus, you belong to the legendary ranks of great devotees of yore like Janak, Ambrish, Jaidev, and others. Many attain God after they die, whereas you have attained him while alive. Thus, you have nothing more to do in this life. You are fulfilled and blessed.” Maharaj then gave him a personal *mala* and blessed, “Chant the name of Swaminarayan while you turn the beads of this *mala*. Take a pledge to eat only after doing five *malas*.” ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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

2. All the questions and answers are found in the *Shri Hari Digvijay* (Ullahas 43–46) authored by Nityanand Swami, who was present during the debate. Detailed answers are provided in the *Shri Satsangjivan* (Prakaran 4, Adhyay 32, 34, 38, 41 and 42).

3. *Shri Hari Digvijay*, Ullas 45, Shloka 223.



Guru Purnima Celebration

10 July 2025, Bochasan

On 10 July 2025, from 8.30 a.m. to 12.15 p.m., thousands of devotees from throughout India and abroad gathered in Bochasan to celebrate the auspicious Guru Purnima festival in the divine presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The colourful main stage included the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the Guru Parampara. The assembly commenced with the singing of Swaminarayan *dhun*, and a kirtan extolling the guru's glory, '*Guru Parameshwar re...*'

The celebratory assembly was themed on the timeless *shloka* from the Guru Gita: '*Gurur Brahmā, Gurur Vishnu, Gurur Devo Maheshwarah, Guru Sākshāt Parambrahma, Tasmai Shri Gurave Namah,*' which defines the guru as Brahma (Creator), Vishnu (Sustainer), Maheshwar (Destroyer), and Parabrahma himself.

The programme included enlightening videos and speeches by swamis and *sadguru* swamis of BAPS, who graciously shared their personal experiences about the virtues of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Viveknishth Swami spoke about the significance of Guru Purnima, also known as Vyas Purnima. Quoting the Hindu shastras, he described the guru as the bridge to God and one who dispels ignorance to lead devotees to Akshardham.

GURUR BRAHMA: GURU AS A CREATOR

A captivating video of Mahant Swami Maharaj



was shown on the theme *Gurur Brahma* (Guru: The Creator). Since becoming the guru in 2016, at the age of 83, Mahant Swami Maharaj has inspired timeless creations and led countless devotees on the spiritual path.

Addressing the assembly on this theme, Anirdesh Swami narrated the glory of Mahant Swami Maharaj as an extraordinary and divine creator. He said, “Mahant Swami Maharaj has built over 500 *shikharbaddha* and *hari* mandirs, including the iconic Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Jersey and the historic BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. Swamiji has authored the Satsang Diksha, initiated over 400 sadhus, and inspired over 35,000 children to memorize Satsang Diksha. His leadership consolidated the virtue of offering selfless *seva* among BAPS volunteers during the global COVID-19 crisis, and in helping Indian students who had left Ukraine when the war broke out with Russia. He has also organized grand festivals like the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Shatabdi Mahotsav (2022), which reflects his role as a creator in leading devotees to attain *brahmabhav*.

Pujya Ghanashyamcharan Swami emphasized in his speech about obeying the guru’s commands,

“We must work with the strength of a God-realized guru like Mahant Swami Maharaj, and the more we follow his commands, the more spiritual joy we will experience. We will become free from *maya* and attain Akshardham.”

GURUR VISHNU: GURU AS A SUSTAINER

Thereafter, an interesting video about Mahant Swami Maharaj portrayed the theme of *Gurur Vishnu* (Guru: The Sustainer).

Adarshjivan Swami explained that just as a farmer nurtures crops and parents care for their children, the guru nurtures his disciples. “The guru looks after his disciples’ betterment in this world and hereafter to attain *moksha*. The essence of Bhagvat Dharma is dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya*, and bhakti. The guru fosters these virtues in the disciple.” He also highlighted how Mahant Swami Maharaj has instilled and sustained the values of Bhagvat Dharma in devotees worldwide. Through his guidance, devotees cultivate spiritual wisdom, resilience amidst challenges and commitment to truth, integrity, and *seva*.

Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami stated that Mahant Swami Maharaj speaks little but nurtures devotees

through his conduct, which is full of profound devotion. He nurtures his devotees' spiritual and temporal well-being.

GURUR DEVO MAHESHWAR: GURU AS A TRANSFORMER

An enthralling video about Mahant Swami Maharaj portrayed the theme *Gurur Devo Maheshwarah* (Guru: the Transformer). It featured how Mahant Swami Maharaj inspired unimaginable transformations in making individuals morally sound and non-believers into believers.

Brahmavihari Swami described how the guru eliminates negativity and flaws to transform people. He narrated incidents about how Mahant Swami Maharaj has transformed people.

Pujya Kothari Swami described his journey of associations with Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and how they effected a spiritual transformation in his life. He added that Mahant Swami Maharaj's continued blessings have sustained this transformative connection. He prayed that all be blessed with such grace from the guru.

GURUR SAKSHAT PARABRAHMA: GURU AS BHAGWAN'S FORM

A captivating video of Mahant Swami Maharaj featured the theme of *Guruh Sākshāt Parabrahma* (Guru: The Form of Parabrahma).

Anandswarup Swami spoke about how the guru is God incarnate, who destroys the causal body (*swabhavs*) responsible for the cycles of life and death. He compared the guru to a piece of iron pervaded by fire, meaning Parabrahma eternally resides in Aksharbrahma and, hence, Parabrahma works through the Aksharbrahma guru. He shared incidents of devotees who, upon meeting Mahant Swami Maharaj, have experienced profound peace, divine love, and to be a God-like saint. They felt an unwavering faith that Mahant Swami Maharaj would lead them to *moksha*.

Thereafter, Pujya Viveksagar Swami emphasized that pleasing the guru requires sincere service

and unwavering faith, exemplified by Satyakam Jabala, who attained *brahmagnan* through steadfast obedience. He also stated that true devotion lies in offering the mind to the guru with *nirdosh buddhi* (pure faith), constantly reflecting on the guru's divine qualities, and selflessly fulfilling his wishes, as Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj demonstrated through their lives.

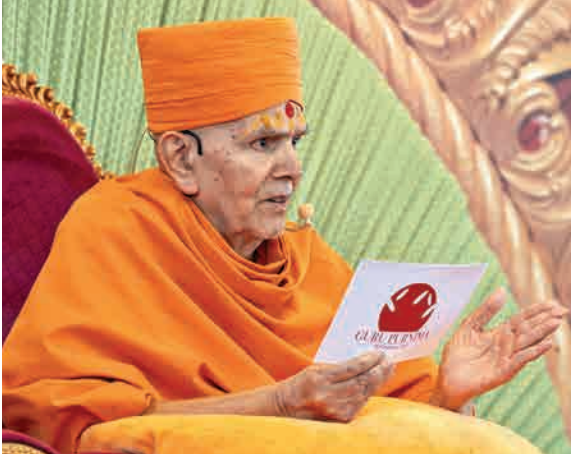
PUBLICATION LAUNCHES AND FELICITATIONS

The celebration assembly saw the inauguration of several Aksharpith publications at the hands of Mahant Swami Maharaj. They included: *Bhagwan Swaminarayan: Life and Work, Part 2*; *Universal Harmony in the Life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj* and four English translations of Gujarati books as part of the series *Sadgun Sagar Pramukh Swami Maharaj*; and Robbinsville *Akshardham Guide Booklet* in four languages (English, Spanish, Hindi and Mandarin). Also, an updated version of the *Swaminarayan Prakash* app, featuring sections on Mahila Utkarsh, Bal Utkarsh, and Pramukh Amrut, was inaugurated, along with BAPS Satsang YouTube accounts featuring discourses (in English, Hindi, Gujarati) by BAPS swamis.

Thereafter, *sadguru* swamis and senior swamis garlanded and honoured Mahant Swami Maharaj. Then, children and teenagers performed a devotional dance on the bhajan, '*Mahant Swamina darshan karata haiya sau harakhata.*'"

Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami prayed, on behalf of everyone, to guru Mahant Swami Maharaj that all swamis and devotees remain united and be blessed with *nirdoshbhav* towards him. He also sought blessings for devotees worldwide to prosper and be happy in body and mind. Finally, he prayed for Mahant Swami Maharaj's good health.

Thereafter, the *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual was performed by thousands of devotees to express reverence to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.



The atmosphere was emotionally charged with devotion and heartfelt reverence.

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, saying, “Today is the sacred day of Guru Purnima, and in Hindu dharma the guru plays a pivotal role. All achievements (*siddhis*) come through the guru’s grace, and without a guru, life becomes

desolate. Yogiji Maharaj taught that *nirdosh buddhi* (pure faith) in the guru is true guru *pujan*. Bhagatiji Maharaj is our ideal, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have blessed us, and thus we should serve them with pure faith.

“Whatever sadhanas we are doing are superficial, and that is why we do not get any results. We need to engage ourselves in rigorous introspection and pull out the inner impurities. Then the guru will place us at Bhagwan’s divine feet. I pray that all of you get the strength to introspect and attain happiness in body, mind, and wealth.”

Thereafter, the devotees took *prasad* and departed with joyous, divine memories of the occasion. In all, over 3,500 volunteers served to ensure the efficient planning, preparation, and execution of the celebration.

The celebration was webcast live on live.baps.org. ♦

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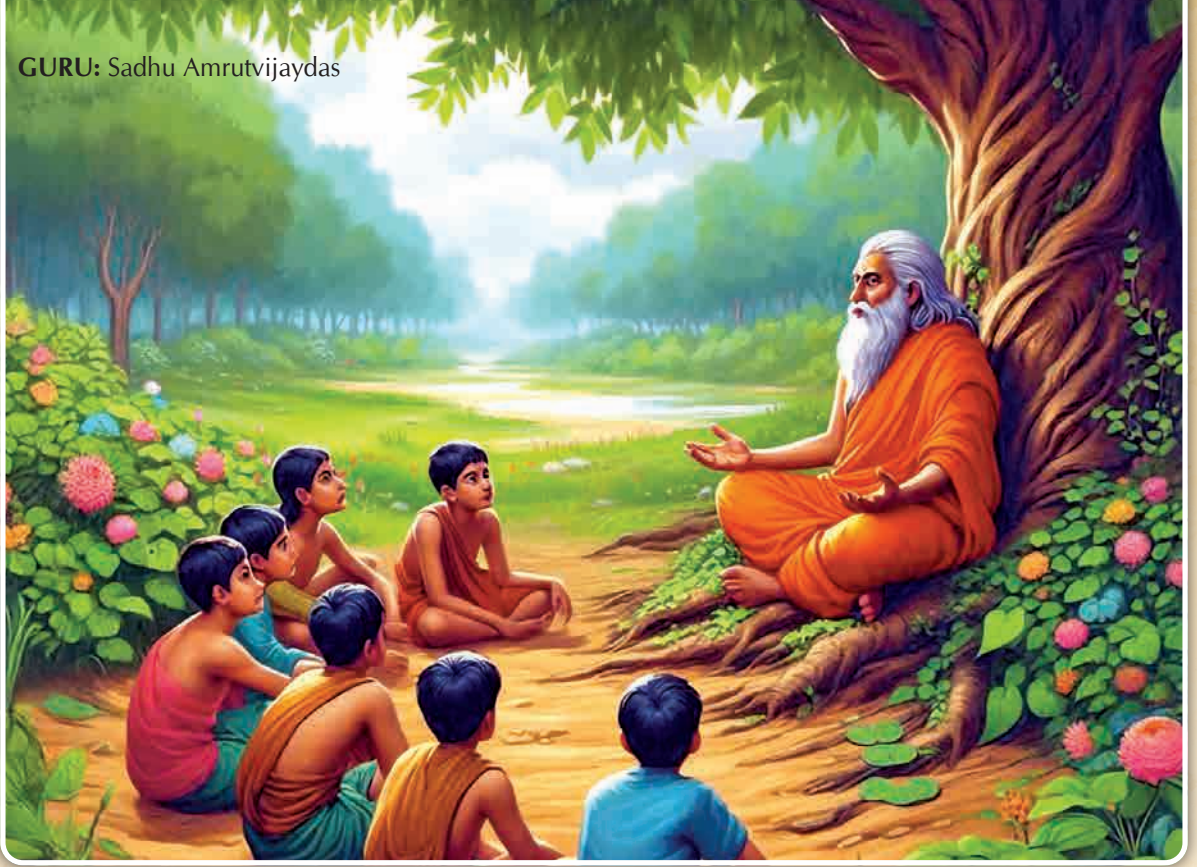
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BAPS Satsang

New BAPS *katha* channels on various social media platforms to help devotees in their daily spiritual endeavours. These channels offer insightful spiritual discourses in Gujarati, Hindi, and English, based on the timeless teachings of the Sanatan Hindu shastras, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and the Gunatit Guru Parampara.

Subscribe to receive regular spiritual insights and discourses.



Bedrock of Sanatan Hindu Dharma: The Enduring Guru-Shishya Bond Part 1

In the journey of life, everyone seeks guidance – especially when it comes to understanding life's deepest questions: Who am I? What is my purpose? How do I find lasting happiness?

On the spiritual path, there is only so much a person can do on their own.

They need an experienced guide to help them progress. In Sanatan Hindu dharma, the tradition of the guru – a spiritual teacher and guide – has been a central feature for thousands of years, guiding the spiritual endeavours of their shishyas.

This article traces the guru-shishya tradition from its ancient Vedic roots to its vibrant expression in modern Hindu life. Drawing from sacred texts such as the Upanishads, Mahabharat, Ramayan, and the Shrimad Bhagvat, it examines the guru's role across time. It concludes with a focused case study of the BAPS Swaminarayan tradition, illustrating how why having an authentic guru is not just helpful but essential in the twenty-first century.

THE GUIDING LIGHT OF THE GURU

The word *guru* comes from Sanskrit: *gu* means ‘darkness’ and *ru* means ‘dispeller. So, a guru is one who removes the darkness of ignorance and brings the light of wisdom. In Hinduism, the guru is not just a teacher, but also a spiritual guide who leads the student or disciple (*shishya*) towards self-realization and a meaningful life.

The guru plays many roles, serving as a trusted counsellor, and a guide who helps individuals realize their true self (*atma*). A guru instils core values through example and inspires their student (*shishya*).

Hindu dharma teaches that a guru is essential for understanding spiritual truths. Inner perfection and liberation (*moksha*) can be achieved through their guidance.

A true guru helps one navigate information overload, understand complex spiritual truths, and apply timeless wisdom to everyday life. They do not just give answers; they help one find one’s own answers, fostering purity, commitment, and a deep determination to grow. As stated in the shastras, spiritual progress requires an experienced guide – someone who has already walked the path and can safely lead us through its challenges.

THE GURU TRADITION IN ANCIENT SHASTRAS

The concept of the guru is deeply woven into the very fabric of Hindu shastras. From the earliest Vedic hymns to the profound philosophical dialogues of the Upanishads, and the epic narratives of the Mahabharat and Ramayan, the guru-*shishya* relationship stands as the cornerstone of knowledge transmission and spiritual realization.

THE VEDAS & UPANISHADS

The word ‘guru’ appears in the Rig Veda, one of the oldest Vedic texts. This shows that spiritual guides were important from the earliest days of Hindu philosophy.

This early acknowledgment underscores the foundational belief that guidance is essential for seekers striving to understand the ultimate truth and the essence of reality. The knowledge of the Vedas, the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism, was initially transmitted orally from guru to disciple.

The Upanishads are part of the Vedic literature, often referred to as the Vedanta – end or culmination of the Vedas. The term ‘Upanishad’ itself illustrates the intimate nature of ancient spiritual instruction. Derived from the Sanskrit words ‘upa’ (near), ‘ni’ (down), and ‘shad’ (to sit), ‘Upanishad’ literally means ‘sitting down near’ a spiritual teacher to receive profound wisdom. This etymology highlights the personal, one-on-one relationship at the heart of this tradition, where subtle and advanced knowledge was transmitted directly from a realized teacher to a dedicated disciple.

During the early oral traditions of the Upanishads, the guru-*shishya* relationship solidified into a fundamental component of Hinduism. The Upanishads are filled with dialogues where earnest seekers approach wise gurus, seeking answers to the ultimate questions of life, death, and reality. Here, the guru is not just an instructor, but also a living embodiment of the truth, whose presence and wisdom can transform the disciple.

The Upanishads are replete with stories that exemplify the profound guru-*shishya* bond and the pursuit of ultimate knowledge. The Upanishads consistently highlight that without a guru, efforts to understand the Self remain incomplete.

The Mundaka Upanishad (1.2.12) declares, “*Tad-vignānārtham sa gurum evābhigacchet* – To understand that supreme Truth, one must approach a guru.” This emphasizes that true spiritual insight, unlike worldly knowledge, cannot be acquired merely through books or intellectual effort; it requires the guidance of one who has already seen the light.



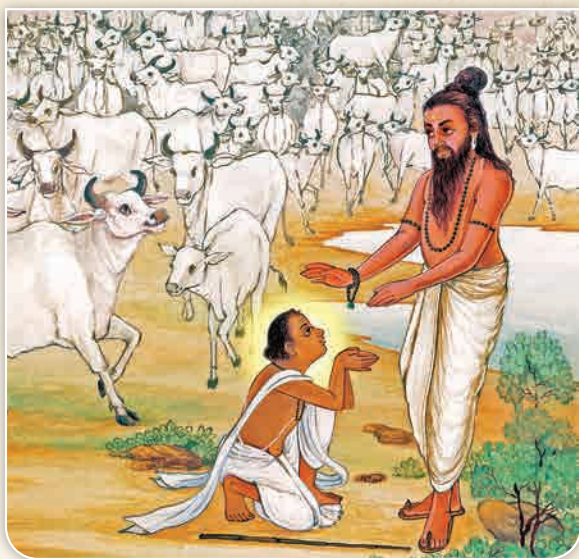
Nachiketa

Nachiketa and Yama: One of the most profound guru-*shishya* stories is found in the Katha Upanishad, featuring young Nachiketa and Yama, the Lord of Death. Nachiketa, a sincere and determined boy, is offered to Yama by his father in a fit of anger. When Nachiketa arrives at Yama's abode, Yama is absent for three nights. Instead of despairing or leaving, Nachiketa waits patiently, demonstrating immense sincerity and determination. Impressed by his unwavering resolve, Yama offers Nachiketa three boons.

For his third boon, Nachiketa asks the most profound question: "When a man dies, there is this doubt: Some say he exists, others say he does not. I would like to know the reality from you."

Yama initially tries to dissuade Nachiketa, offering him wealth, long life, and earthly pleasures to test his resolve. However, Nachiketa, firm in his spiritual quest, rejects all worldly temptations, asserting that no amount of material pleasure can satisfy the thirst for eternal truth.

Impressed by Nachiketa's unshakeable sincerity, purity of intention, and determination to seek only the highest spiritual knowledge, Yama finally agrees to teach him. Yama then imparts the deepest wisdom concerning *atma* and Paramatma,



Satyakam Jabala

and the path to liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

This story illustrates the guru's commitment to only transmit the deepest wisdom to a truly worthy and prepared disciple, and the disciple's unwavering pursuit of ultimate truth. It shows that determination, not age, defines a seeker.

Satyakam Jabala: The story of Satyakam Jabala in the Chandogya Upanishad challenges conventional notions of spiritual worth. Satyakam, eager for knowledge, approaches Sage Haridrumata Gautam, seeking to live in his *gurukul*. When asked about his family lineage, Satyakam honestly reveals that his mother, Jabala, does not know who his father is. This remarkable honesty deeply impresses the sage, who accepts him as a student. This story powerfully emphasizes that sincerity and truthfulness, rather than birthright or social status, are the true qualifications for spiritual pursuit. This suggests that the ideal *gurukul* system, at its core, was meritocratic and inclusive, prioritizing a student's genuine aptitude and earnestness above all else.

Satyakam's education is unique and experiential; his guru sends him to tend four hundred cows, instructing him to return when



Bhagwan Krishna and Arjun

they multiply to a thousand. During this period, Satyakam learns profound truths from nature itself. Upon his return, he humbly receives the remaining knowledge from his guru, completing his profound education.

The Upanishads contain many such guru-*shishya* stories. Each illustrates different qualities needed for spiritual learning. While Nachiketa's story emphasizes determination and spiritual focus, Satyakam's story highlights the importance of honesty and sincerity.

THE EPICS: MAHABHARAT AND RAMAYAN

The two great Hindu epics, the Mahabharat and the Ramayan, are rich sources of wisdom on dharma, ethics, and the guru-*shishya* relationship, showcasing gurus in diverse roles.

Mahabharat: Mentors in Morality and Warfare

The Mahabharat presents the guru-*shishya* relationship in various forms. Some gurus teach warfare and statecraft. Others provide spiritual and moral guidance. The most famous example combines both aspects.

Krishna and Arjun: This is arguably the most celebrated guru-*shishya* dialogue in all of Hindu literature. The relationship between Krishna and

Arjun shows how a guru can transform a moment of crisis into spiritual awakening. This dialogue reveals the guru's power to provide clarity when the mind is confused.

At the heart of the Mahabharat lies the Bhagavad Gita, a philosophical dialogue set on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Here, Arjun, a mighty Pandav warrior, faces an unprecedented moral crisis. Overwhelmed by grief and moral confusion at the prospect of waging war against his own kin, he lays down his weapons, paralyzed by indecision. Despite his intellectual prowess and martial skill, he finds himself lacking 'dharmic (moral) clarity'. In this critical moment of despair, Arjun turns to Krishna, his charioteer, for guidance, effectively accepting Krishna as his guru. Here, Krishna transcends his role as a friend and reveals himself as Arjun's ultimate spiritual guide.

Arjun's surrender to Krishna paved the way for the profound teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. Arjun's plea perfectly encapsulates the need for a guru: "My very being is overcome by faintness. My mind is confused about my duty. I ask you to tell me decisively what is best for me. I am your disciple, surrendered to you. Please instruct me" (Gita 2.7). This verse powerfully conveys how a guru is essential when one's own intellect is clouded by confusion and despair.

Krishna then imparts the profound teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. He persuades Arjun to perform his duty as a warrior, emphasizing that actions should be performed without attachment to their outcomes and ultimately attributed to God.

Krishna's teachings transform Arjun, dispelling his doubts and empowering him to fulfil his dharma. This relationship highlights the guru's supreme role in guiding a disciple through existential crises, providing clarity, profound spiritual knowledge, and the courage to act righteously.

Ramayan: Gurus of Royalty and Renunciation

The Ramayan, composed by Sage Valmiki, also shows different types of guru-*shishya* relationships. Some focus on childhood education and character building. Others involve specific training for particular challenges. Each relationship reveals different aspects of the guru's role.

Vasishtha and Ram: Even Bhagwan Ram, considered an incarnation of Vishnu, sought guidance from gurus during his earthly existence, underscoring the indispensable role of mentors in one's journey, regardless of one's inherent spiritual stature.

Sage Vasishtha was the revered family guru of King Dasharath and a primary mentor for Bhagwan Ram and his brothers. He guided them in their daily lives and instilled profound principles of dharma (righteous conduct). His teachings shaped Ram into the ideal king, whose life exemplified *maryada purushottam* (the perfect man). This relationship highlights the guru's role in moulding a *shishya's* character for both worldly and spiritual success.

While Vasishtha shaped Ram's character through daily guidance, Vishwamitra provided specialized training for specific challenges. This shows how different gurus can serve different purposes in a student's development.

Vishwamitra with Ram and Lakshman: Sage Vishwamitra, a powerful ascetic, took the young princes Ram and Lakshman to the jungle to protect his sacred rituals from disruptive demons. On this journey, Vishwamitra acted as their guru, imparting crucial knowledge for their protection and success in combat against powerful demonic forces. This highlights the guru's role in bestowing specific knowledge and tools for protection. This period of intense training under Vishwamitra transformed Ram from a prince into a divine warrior, ready to face future challenges.

Ram and Shabari: Shabari was a simple, uneducated tribal woman and a devoted



Bhagwan Ram and Shabari

disciple of Matang Rishi. Following her guru's instructions, she waited for many years for Bhagwan Ram's arrival at her humble hermitage. Her profound faith and unwavering devotion were so pure that when Ram finally visited, he lovingly accepted her offerings of berries, which she had tasted herself to ensure their sweetness – an act considered impure by conventional standards, but accepted by Ram due to her intense love and sincerity. This narrative demonstrates that spiritual guidance can come from unexpected sources, and that the capacity for spiritual realization is not limited by societal conventions. Shabari's unwavering faith, cultivated under her guru's guidance, led her to ultimate liberation.

SHRIMAD BHAGVAT PURAN & OTHER SHASTRAS

The Shrimad Bhagvat Puran profoundly emphasizes the necessity of a spiritual master on the path of bhakti. It states that to understand the highest benefit of human life, one must approach a bona fide guru. Such a guru is described as being well-versed in Vedic knowledge, free from material attachments, and engaged in loving service to the Divine. The disciple, in turn, is urged to serve the



Dhruv



Prahlad

guru with utmost love, dedication, and surrender, offering their life, wealth, intelligence, and words. The guru is often seen as a representative of the Divine, worthy of the same reverence as God, because it is through the guru that divine knowledge and grace flow.

Dhruv and Narad Muni: The Shrimad Bhagvat explains how devotion to a guru leads to liberation through stories like that of Dhruv. Guided by Narad Muni, Dhruv rises from wounded pride to divine vision. Through disciplined devotion, he attained the highest spiritual realm.

Prahlad and Narad: Prahlad, a young devotee of Bhagwan Vishnu, was taught by Sage Narad even before his birth. Narad instructed Prahlad's mother, Kayadhu, in spiritual truths, which Prahlad absorbed in the womb. Despite being born into the demon king Hiranyakashipu's family, Prahlad's devotion to Vishnu remained unshaken, even under persecution. Narad's teachings instilled in Prahlad unwavering faith, illustrating the guru's power to ignite bhakti and resilience in a *shishya*.

Beyond these major texts, the concept of the guru permeates other Purans, which are narratives detailing creation, deities, and sacred stories. In them, gurus are consistently portrayed as revered

spiritual teachers who impart sacred knowledge, initiate disciples into specific traditions, and guide them towards understanding the divine and achieving liberation. The guru-*shishya* tradition has been crucial for transmitting the vast body of knowledge and practices of Sanatan Hindu Dharma across generations.

As Kabir writes, "*Guru bin gnān na upaje, guru bin mile na moksha* – Without the guru, knowledge does not arise; without the guru, liberation is not attained."

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad states, "A teacher is like the eye; without him one cannot see the truth."

The Bhagavad Gita instructs, "*Tad viddhi pranipātena pariprashnena sevayā* – Learn from the realized souls through humility, inquiry, and service." This verse underscores that the spiritual journey is not a solo adventure; the guru's wisdom and grace shorten the journey and help avoid pitfalls. The guru does not replace God; he reveals God.

These scriptural accounts clearly establish the guru's centrality in spiritual progress. But how were these ideals practised? The answer lies in the *gurukul* system – the earliest formal embodiment of the guru-*shishya* relationship.

THE GURUKUL SYSTEM: HOLISTIC EDUCATION

The earliest formalized manifestation of the guru tradition was the *gurukul* system. Dating back to the Vedic period, this was a unique residential schooling system where students (*shishyas*) lived with their guru in his hermitage, often in a forest or secluded area. This immersive experience often began at a young age, around eight, and continued until early adulthood, typically between 23 and 25 years of age, signifying a complete dedication to the learning process.

Within the *gurukul*, all students were treated equally, cultivating an environment of brotherhood, humanity, love, and discipline. The setting itself was typically simple, disciplined, and self-sustained, amid surroundings that were conducive to deep learning, contemplation, and meditation. This holistic approach ensured that education was intertwined with the students' daily lives and practical experiences, making learning a deeply ingrained aspect of existence rather than a mere academic pursuit.

The *gurukul* curriculum was broad and comprehensive. It gave students a well-rounded education that went beyond regular academic subjects. A core component was rigorous study of the Vedas, Upanishads, and other sacred texts, laying a deep philosophical and spiritual foundation. However, practical and intellectual skills were given equal importance.

The guru was much more than just an educator. They were mentors, spiritual guides, and guardians of cultural heritage, transmitting knowledge directly through spoken word and living example. The emphasis was heavily on applied knowledge and practical experiences, preparing students holistically for all aspects of life, rather than focusing solely on abstract, bookish learning. This comprehensive approach aimed to equip students not just with information, but also with the wisdom and character necessary to thrive.

A crucial aspect of the *gurukul* system was its fundamentally egalitarian nature. Entry into these institutions was primarily based on the student's aptitude and learning capability, rather than their lineage or wealth. Education in the *gurukul* was typically free, reflecting a deeply ingrained cultural ethos that knowledge should be accessible to all who sought it earnestly, irrespective of their background. This merit-based system aimed to make knowledge accessible to all. Talent and dedication mattered more than birth or wealth.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD AND THE RISE OF MONASTIC ORDERS

The medieval period (roughly 6th to 18th centuries CE) saw significant developments in the guru tradition, particularly with the emergence of organized philosophical schools and large monastic orders. These orders played a crucial role in systematizing teachings, preserving shastras, and spreading spiritual knowledge on a wider scale.

Across these diverse traditions, the guru acted not just as a teacher, but also as the preserver and interpreter of complex knowledge, adapting it to the changing times while maintaining its core essence. This period solidified the guru's role as a living link to the spiritual heritage, ensuring its transmission across centuries.

This shows that gurus were not just keepers of old knowledge. They were active leaders who interpreted and organized vast amounts of spiritual teachings. This created the rich variety of Hindu philosophy we see today. Their leadership in establishing *maths* and *sampradayas* was crucial for the survival, propagation, and evolution of these complex traditions across centuries. ♦



Bedrock of Sanatan Hindu Dharma: The Enduring Guru-Shishya Bond Part 2

THE MODERN GURU TRADITION: RELEVANCE AND CHALLENGES

In the 21st century, the guru tradition continues to be a vibrant and dynamic force, adapting to global changes while facing new challenges.

Despite the advent of the internet and abundant information, the guru's role remains profoundly vital in contemporary spiritual life. Gurus continue to guide individuals on their spiritual journey towards self-realization, inner perfection, and liberation (*moksha*). They provide essential tools and timeless teachings necessary to navigate life's complexities with wisdom, fostering mindfulness, self-awareness, and resilience in a fast-paced world.

For many Hindus, having a guru is still considered immensely beneficial, as it can make the spiritual journey clearer, easier, and more profound, providing a structured path for knowledge and advancement. In our fast-paced, often overwhelming world, people continue to seek out gurus.

The tradition has shown remarkable adaptation and evolution in modern society. While the traditional residential *gurukuls* are not as prevalent as in ancient times, they still exist in various forms, often as spiritual centres, particularly for classical arts and traditional knowledge.

In the Hindu diaspora – communities living outside India – mandirs have taken on a more

significant religious and social role. They serve as important centres where Hindus can meet, worship, and socialize, and gurus often lead religious practices, helping with cultural and linguistic maintenance for younger generations who may otherwise lose touch with their heritage.

Challenges in the 21st Century

The traditional structure of guru-disciple relationships can sometimes clash with modern ideals of autonomy and individual freedom. With many individuals claiming to be gurus, the challenge for seekers is to discern a genuine, enlightened spiritual master from those who are self-serving or misguided.

QUALITIES OF A TRUE GURU

Ancient texts outline the qualities of a true guru:

Scriptural Knowledge (Shrotriya): The guru should be well-versed in the shastras and able to explain them clearly. His teachings are rooted in scriptural wisdom, not personal whims. They help individuals navigate complex spiritual concepts, meditation techniques, and the path to self-realization or liberation (*moksha*).

Personal Realization (Brahmanishtha): This is the most crucial quality. A true guru is not just academically learned but has *realized* the ultimate truth, experienced the Divine, and is firmly established in that consciousness. They are living examples of what they preach. They embody the virtues and spiritual principles they advocate, inspiring disciples through their conduct and helping individuals make moral choices that build character.

Detachment from Material Desires: The guru should not be motivated by money, fame, or power. Their primary motivation is the spiritual uplift of their disciples. They foster mindfulness and inner peace.

Selfless and Compassionate: A true guru cares for the well-being of all, regardless of status

or background. They possess immense patience and compassion, willing to guide even the slowest learner. They create spiritual communities where seekers can find support, share experiences, and feel connected.

Humble, Calm and Steady: Free from anger, greed, and ego, a true guru exhibits equanimity and inner peace, serving as a tranquil refuge for their disciples.

Balanced Approach: They help integrate spiritual practice with worldly duties. A guru plays a crucial role in preserving ancient traditions, languages, arts, and festivals, especially for diaspora communities.

QUALITIES OF A TRUE SHISHYA

A true *shishya*, too, must cultivate certain virtues to benefit from the guru's grace. These include:

Shraddha (Faith and Sincerity): A deep conviction in the guru's words and their path. An openness to learn and an earnest desire for spiritual growth.

Seva: Serving the guru humbly and selflessly, not for personal reward, but out of devotion and gratitude. This purifies the mind and prepares it to receive wisdom.

Eagerness to Learn: Asking questions, seeking clarity, and having a genuine thirst for knowledge.

Austerity and Discipline: Practising self-control, discipline, and dedication to spiritual practices as guided by the guru.

Humility and Surrender: Letting go of ego, preconceived notions, and being open to the guru's wisdom, even if it challenges one's own understanding.

CONTEMPORARY GURU TRADITIONS: LIVING EXAMPLES

Today's world presents unique challenges that require spiritual guidance adapted to modern contexts. While the core principles of the guru-*shishya* relationship remain unchanged, different

traditions have developed distinct approaches to meet contemporary needs.

Some traditions focus on meditation and mindfulness practices. Others emphasize community service and social reform. Many combine ancient wisdom with modern educational methods. These diverse approaches show how the guru tradition continues to evolve while maintaining its essential purpose.

THE BAPS GUNATIT GURU TRADITION

Among these contemporary movements, the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha represents a particularly vibrant example. This tradition demonstrates how ancient guru-*shishya* principles can be applied in the 21st century. The BAPS tradition emphasizes an unbroken succession of living spiritual masters, showing how the guru's presence remains accessible to modern seekers.

The Concept of the Gunatit Guru

In the Vachanamrut, the foremost shastra of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has revealed his philosophical doctrine, now known as Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. This unique perspective on how all spiritual seekers can achieve the highest spiritual state and *moksha* is rooted in the Vedic corpus and is supported by the verses of the Prasthantrayi – Brahma Sutras, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's teachings align with and illuminate these shastras, offering clarity where ambiguity may have persisted.

The term 'Akshar-Purushottam' refers to the two eternally distinct realities: 'Akshar' – the perfect devotee and eternal abode of God, and 'Purushottam' – the Supreme God, transcending even Akshar. This has direct implications for spiritual practice. One must become *aksharrup* – possessing the qualities of Akshar – and offer singular bhakti to Purushottam to attain *moksha*.

Based on this unique doctrine, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, revered as Parabrahma

Purushottam, established the Gunatit (Akshar-brahma) guru succession to help spiritual seekers attain the highest spiritual goal of *moksha*. The Gunatit guru is the manifest form of Akshar on Earth – a living, God-realized saint who serves as the perfect spiritual guide. Through this continuous succession of Gunatit gurus, Bhagwan Swaminarayan remains ever-present on Earth, accessible to all seekers. The Gunatit guru is the gateway to understanding God and achieving liberation (*moksha*), by helping disciples overcome *maya* and align with the divine. By associating with the Gunatit guru, individuals can attain the *aksharrup* (*brahmarup*) state.

The succession of Aksharbrahma gurus includes Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and currently, Mahant Swami Maharaj. Each of these gurus is a direct spiritual link to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, embodying purity, wisdom, and selfless service.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself emphasized the importance of association with satsang and the living guru. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 54, referring to the Gunatit guru, he states, "If a person maintains profound love towards the Ekantik Sant of God just as resolutely as he maintains profound love towards his own relatives, then the gateway to liberation opens for him."

MOULDING TEMPORAL AND SPIRITUAL LIVES

The BAPS Gunatit gurus actively mould the lives of devotees in both spiritual and temporal realms. Their lives are marked by unwavering celibacy, detachment from worldly possessions, and relentless dedication to the spiritual uplift of others. They live by the principles they preach.

Spiritual Guidance

They provide clear, practical guidance on spiritual practices such as:

Daily Personal Puja: Personal morning

worship of *murtis* of God and the Gunatit gurus, together with *mansi puja* – mental worship.

Atma-Vichar & Paramatma-Vichar: Guiding disciples to introspect to realize their true self (*atma*) as distinct from the body and to constantly remember God (Paramatma).

Satsang Sabhas: Weekly spiritual assemblies and discourses that deepen knowledge of shastras and dharma. They help devotees stay connected to their roots amidst Western influences.

Ethical Living: Emphasizing a strict vegetarian diet, refraining from addictions (alcohol, tobacco, drugs), and maintaining purity of conduct (e.g. celibacy outside marriage). They guide devotees in developing virtues like humility, tolerance, and devotion.

Community Building: Establishing mandirs and centres worldwide that serve not only as places of worship but also as vibrant cultural, educational, and community hubs. For many young people, being connected to the BAPS guru means being part of a supportive, global family that upholds strong values and offers a clear path forward.

Addressing Modern Challenges: The Gunatit gurus have directly tackled the anxieties of contemporary culture by providing a strong moral foundation and a sense of community. They inspire youth to resist negative influences, cultivate positive habits, and find meaning beyond material pursuits. They offer spiritual activities, youth conventions, and personal guidance that provide a healthy alternative to the often-isolating and superficial aspects of modern life.

Personal Guide and Confidant: Mahant Swami Maharaj, like his predecessors, travels extensively, connecting with countless individuals, including teenagers. He provides personal counsel, answers spiritual questions, and helps them navigate complex life decisions, career choices, and family dynamics from a spiritual perspective. His guidance offers clarity and peace amidst the chaos of modern life.

Bridge to God: The BAPS philosophy teaches that the living Aksharbrahma guru is the perfect medium to connect with God (Purushottam). This provides a tangible, accessible spiritual figure who can help youth understand and experience divinity, making their faith concrete and personally relevant.

Temporal Guidance

The gurus inspire and guide devotees in their worldly lives, ensuring their spiritual path is integrated with their responsibilities.

Humanitarian Service: Initiating and motivating large-scale community service projects (e.g. disaster relief, healthcare, education). Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself emphasized that humanitarian service is complementary to spirituality.

Moral & Social Reform: Actively campaigning against modern social evils like drug abuse, and urging devotees to live principled lives.

Education & Career: Encouraging academic excellence and supporting educational initiatives, establishing schools and colleges. They emphasize hard work, integrity, and using talents for positive contribution to society.

Family Values: Promoting harmony within families through *ghar sabha* (family assemblies), respect for elders, and raising children with strong moral and spiritual foundations.

Integration of Tradition and Modernity: The Gunatit gurus demonstrate how ancient wisdom enhances rather than conflicts with modern life, encouraging disciples to excel in contemporary fields while maintaining spiritual values.

Cultural Pride: Through festivals, the Gunatit gurus connect devotees of all ages to their heritage.

Through their unwavering purity, profound commitment to dharma, and selfless lives, the Gunatit gurus provide tangible examples for millions of devotees. Their detailed, personal guidance, coupled with the devotees' sincerity and determination to follow their instructions, allows for profound spiritual progress and a balanced,

purposeful life even amid the complexities of the 21st century.

For BAPS devotees, the guru is not just a historical figure, but a living, breathing guide who is accessible, compassionate, and whose every action is geared towards leading them closer to God.

CONCLUSION: THE ENDURING LEGACY OF THE GURU

The guru-*shishya* tradition in Sanatan Hindu Dharma reveals a timeless, transformative relationship that has been central to the transmission of wisdom and spiritual growth for millennia. From its ancient roots in the Vedic era, through the intimate and practical *gurukul* system, and into the diverse narratives of the Mahabharat and Ramayan, the guru has consistently served as a pivotal figure. This tradition underscores that while the path to spiritual growth can be walked alone, it is made significantly easier, clearer, and

more profound with the help of a genuine guru.

In the 21st century, the guru tradition continues to evolve, adapting to modern challenges while maintaining its core relevance. The digital age has expanded its reach globally, making spiritual teachings more accessible than ever before.

The BAPS Swaminarayan tradition stands as a modern embodiment of the ancient guru-*shishya* ideal. Through the living guidance of the Gunatit gurus, millions of individuals experience personal transformation while staying rooted in timeless Hindu values.

Ultimately, the guru tradition is not merely a historical relic but a vibrant, living system that continues to offer profound wisdom and practical tools for navigating life's challenges, fostering inner peace, and contributing to a harmonious society. ♦



Chaturmas Niyams

6 July to 2 November 2025

As instructed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Shikshapatri and by the wish of *guruhari* Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, devotees should undertake extra spiritual observances during the four holy months of Chaturmas. This year, Chaturmas is from 6 July 2025 (Ashadh *sud* 11) to 2 November 2025 (Kartak *sud* 11). To please Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, the following extra observances should be undertaken:

Reading

The following should be read:

For Gujarati Readers and Listeners

1. Daily read or listen to the Vachanamrut & Swamini Vato.
2. *Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj Jivan Charitra*, Parts 9 or 10 (or listen for 15 minutes daily to their audio on the Akshar Amrutam app).
3. *Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj Jivan Charitra* (or listen for 15 minutes daily to the audio on the Akshar Amrutam app)

For English Readers

4. *Mahant Swami Maharaj: An Epitome of Saintliness; Vibrations, Part 3; and In Love, At Ease: Everyday Spirituality with Pramukh Swami.*

Devotion

- Daily turn extra five or more *malas*. Perform extra *dandvats*, *pradakshinas*, etc. as per one's capacity.
- Inspire one friend or relative to join satsang.

Homage to Guru

- Every week, narrate in person or via letter, email or social media, one incident highlighting the virtues of Mahant Swami Maharaj to as many relatives and friends as possible.

Family

- Conduct *ghar sabha*: Gather your family to read, listen, have darshan, contemplate and discuss.
- For one year invite the same one family to your *ghar sabha* once a month.
- Inspire one family to start conducting their own *ghar sabha*.

Austerities

- If health permits, observe *dharna-parna*, *chandrayan*, *ektana* or other forms of fasting during the month of Shravan.

Note: During Chaturmas, devotees should not eat brinjals (eggplants, aubergines), white and red radish, sugarcane and *mogri*.

Beyond Words, Beyond Time: Meeting Mahant Swami Maharaj



Humans are driven by feelings. Following our interactions with others, long after words have faded and moments have passed, what lingers is how we felt and how someone made us feel.

This is not an account of events. It is not a collection of stories or incidents. This is something far more delicate, far more elusive. This is a reflection on a feeling. A humble, feeble attempt to put into words what can only truly be experienced by the heart.

Not just any feeling, but the feeling of meeting Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Before you read further, I invite you to pause the whirlwind of your life. Detach for a few minutes. Step away from the noise, the distractions, the endless movement. Imagine you are there, in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Still your mind and allow yourself to experience this – not just as words on a page, but as something real, something felt.

This memoir is not a record of conversations, nor the vastness of his wisdom, or the sheer magnitude of his responsibilities. Instead, it is about something deeper. It is about the immeasurable experience of being in his presence. Because to sit before him is not just to meet a spiritual leader or a person who shoulders the problems, prayers, aspirations,

and emotions of countless; it is, in fact, to meet someone who, in that moment, carries only *you*.

These reflections are shaped not only by my personal conversations with him over several years, but also by closely observing his interactions with many others – whether swamis, devotees, or dignitaries. It is an experience shared by thousands across decades – different times, people, and circumstances, yet the same undeniable feeling.

The way you feel in someone's presence says a lot about them.

To sit before Mahant Swami Maharaj is not just to witness his presence, but to experience it. And in that experience, you begin to grasp, however faintly, the greatness of who he truly is.

This account is a window into Mahant Swami Maharaj, seen through the feelings we experience when we meet him.

The moment you step into the room, something shifts. The air feels different; calmer, lighter, filled with an imperceptible divinity. And there he is, seated before you, a soft smile spreading across his face as if he has been waiting just for you. His smile is warm, inviting, reassuring. In that instant, every inhibition, every nervous thought evaporates.

You are with him, and that is all that matters.

You move closer, settling before him. His stillness is remarkable: his legs do not move, his body completely at rest, exuding a tranquillity that is almost otherworldly.

Then, you begin speaking.

LISTENING & ABSORING

He listens, not just with his ears, but with his entire being. Listening is often thought of as an act of hearing, but with Swamishri, it is something far deeper. When he sits before you, it feels as though he is not only *listening* through his ears, but *absorbing* totally with his mind and heart. Picture the way a sponge effortlessly, gracefully soaks up water. He listens in the same way, fully, completely. He listens to understand, not to respond. While most listen to formulate a response, he listens with complete presence. You feel valued in a way that is rare, almost impossible to find elsewhere.

His hands rest gently on a pillow in his lap, occasionally shifting with slow, deliberate grace – never abrupt, never distracting. Sometimes, a single finger rests on his lips in contemplation. At times, his palms open slightly. When he agrees with something, his index finger moves ever so slightly, tracing the air in affirmation. And sometimes, his fingers interlock in a serene almost meditative posture that reflects his calm composure. There are many more such gestures.

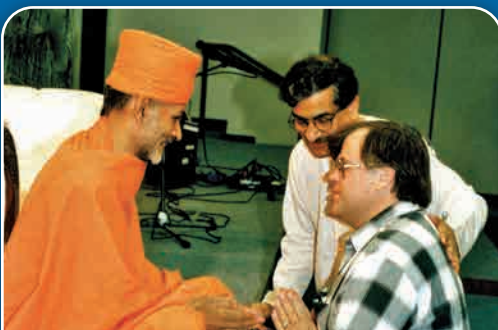
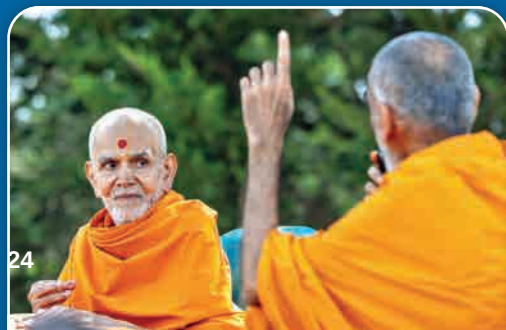
EMBRACING EYES

But it is through his eyes that he truly communicates. His eyes are extraordinary. They do not merely look at you – they *see* you. When Mahant Swami Maharaj's eyes meet yours, they

do not waver, nor do they quiver with distraction. They remain steady, deep, knowing. It is as though they reach past the words you speak, beyond what you choose to share, and into the very thoughts and emotions you carry within. It is as if he has known you for eternity. There is a quiet intensity in them; not overwhelming, not piercing, but vast and boundless. They draw you in with their depth. His eyes do not just acknowledge your presence, they *embrace* it.

His expressions speak just as much as his eyes. They are his unspoken response, each movement revealing a quiet depth of emotion. There is the flicker of curiosity – his brows lifting ever so slightly, his eyes widening with genuine interest. A moment of astonishment, as if he is hearing something profoundly new, though you know he has heard it all before. A quiet nod of understanding, a slight tilt of the head as he hears your words. At times, a look of deep contemplation. And when you bring something grave or troubling to him, his brows crease ever so slightly, revealing a deep concern that makes it feel as though the problem you have mentioned has become his own. He feels what you feel – that's true empathy.

You can *see* when he is processing your words. His expression shifts subtly. His brows draw in slightly and he gazes slightly upwards, as if he is giving every thought the weight it deserves. These subtle cues make it effortless to follow the rhythm of conversation. You instinctively know when to continue speaking and when to pause, as his face becomes a quiet guide. Every sentence you speak is absorbed – a slow, measured nod, a silent assurance that he is fully present. His head



movements seem to follow the rhythm of your words, each tilt and gesture a perfect mirror of the tone and theme of your sentences, as if his expressions and subtle motions are harmoniously attuned to the themes of your conversation.

An example of Mahant Swami Maharaj's eye contact and connection with you is seen whenever showing him slides or visuals on a screen. Normally, a screen would easily distract, and attention would be drawn to the moving slides, yet Mahant Swami Maharaj remains entirely focused on you. You have to actively point him to the screen for him to look at it. He will glance at the screen momentarily, only to return his gaze to yours, as if his attention is entirely devoted to you, not the display. So, whenever showing him anything on a screen, this cycle continues, with the need to redirect his attention back to the screen. Such is the depth of his focus on you.

Even when the need arises to capture a moment, and a photographer might step forward to take a photograph, Swamishri remains undisturbed, as if the photographer is invisible. The click of the camera, the subtle movement of the lens, none of it makes the slightest dent in his unwavering attention. His gaze remains unbroken – there is not a hint of distraction, no shift in his expression. It is as though the entire world outside his immediate moment of concentration simply dissolves.

HIS SMILE

Then, there is his smile – graceful and radiant. Observing and recollecting closely, you realize there is actually an entire array, a palette of smiles, with a variety of hues, shades, and textures.

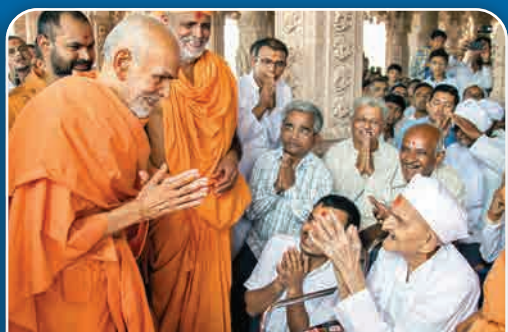
Some are faint, a gentle curve of his lips. Others are slightly cheeky, pursed lips with a slight pout, as if you and he share a silent understanding, a moment of connection that only the two of you can appreciate. And then there are those beaming smiles, wide and full of life, lighting up the room in an instant.

There are countless varieties, each one distinct in its own way. But one thing is common in them all: his smile is beautiful. It has a way of filling your heart, of touching your soul. When he smiles at you, it draws you into a trance, as if the world fades away and nothing else exists in that moment. A smile that does not merely convey joy, but gives it – wrapping you in warmth and making you feel truly loved.

BELONGING

And yet, beyond all of this, there is something even more profound. As humans, we crave reassurance and validation – silent affirmations that we are heard, that we are understood, that we are enough. This is what he so effortlessly provides. Without a single word, he makes you feel reassured and validated. He makes you feel like you're on the right track, on the right path. It's a feeling so subtle yet so powerful, as if in his presence, every doubt and uncertainty gently dissolves. Perhaps that is why we all go to him. Sometimes, we don't need guidance or advice, we simply need his reassurance, because his blessings, his safety, are what push us forward.

You feel *safe*, as if no harm could reach you. *Secure*, as though you belong completely in that moment. *Fearless*, as if every worry or hesitation fades in the warmth of his gaze. *Comfortable*, not



just in his presence, but within yourself. Each one of those feelings is precious on its own, yet to feel them all at once, in the presence of one individual, tells you a great deal about who Mahant Swami Maharaj truly is. And perhaps what makes these feelings even more extraordinary is the way he transforms time itself.

In a world that constantly rushes forward, where conversations are hurried and moments slip through our fingers, Mahant Swami Maharaj makes you feel as though time itself slows down. In those moments with him, it is as if nothing else exists – no schedules, no constraints, no urgency. Just you and him.

Through his demeanour alone, he makes you feel that he *wants* to be there, that he is not just listening but *enjoying* listening. His body language radiates an effortless ease, an unspoken reassurance that this moment – your moment – matters. There is no impatience, only pure, undivided attention. Not just attention, but loving, undivided attention.

And so, you speak. You say more than you intended to, because his presence makes you feel as though you *should*. You lose track of time, because he makes you feel as though he has *all the time in the world* for you. And perhaps this is why, inevitably, meetings with him stretch longer than anticipated, not because he demands it, but because *you* never want to leave.

Yet, paradoxically, time is what he does not have. His days are full, his schedule relentless, his responsibilities vast. And yet, when he is with you, none of that is felt. In those moments, you feel as though you are the most important person in the world. He listens as if nothing else exists. The

truth is, he *is* stretched for time – but the greater truth is, he never makes you feel it. And that is the extraordinary thing. In a world that values efficiency, that counts seconds and measures productivity, Mahant Swami Maharaj offers something far greater – *presence*.

Even when you speak of your shortcomings, your struggles, or the times you have faltered in following *agnas*, his face remains untouched by judgment – only compassion fills his expression. In those moments, his face changes. A visible shift washes over him, exuding even more love, even more care, as if he is soaking in your pain and replacing it with reassurance and compassion.

His eyes soften, his gaze deepens, and without a single word, he comforts you. It is as if his very presence is saying, “*Don’t worry. I understand. I empathize. I know what you are going through. I am with you. Do not feel scared or burdened. Feel light, loved, and strong.*”

And in that moment, something remarkable happens: you feel as though you have done nothing wrong at all. That is how much his compassion soaks you and he completely embraces you, dissolving every trace of guilt or hesitation with his silent, boundless love.

His face conveys all of this effortlessly. He does not need to speak, because his silence carries more comfort than words ever could.

WORDS OF WISDOM

But indeed, he does speak. When you seek his guidance or blessings, he responds with words that carry depth and clarity. His speech is an extension of his humility – soft, gentle, unhurried, and deeply considerate. He never interrupts, never



imposes his voice over yours. He waits, allowing you to finish your thought completely, as if each word you speak is of utmost importance. Then, slowly, almost as if seeking your silent permission, he begins to speak.

His voice is soft, never forceful, never demanding attention. There is no excess, no embellishment – only what needs to be said, nothing more, nothing less. At times, his brevity is so profound that you find yourself asking him to expand, to say more.

His responses are always encouraging, always empathetic, always empowering. But to truly hear him, you must also learn to *wait*. He does not rush to fill silence, nor does he compete to be heard. If you leave space – if you allow a moment of stillness – then he will speak. He will never, or only very rarely, interrupt to say something. To listen to him is not just to hear words, but to gain wisdom.

He is remarkably sharp, with an uncanny ability to read your face. The moment he senses even the slightest confusion, he adjusts effortlessly. For instance, if he uses a word in Gujarati and notices you have not grasped its meaning, he will immediately detect it and seamlessly translate it into English – always ensuring you are with him, never left behind.

There is a particular expression on his face when a profound insight has crystallized within him, and he is on the verge of sharing it. The moment you notice it, you must pause. Be patient. Let him take his time. You can see he is searching for a way to express his thoughts. The fact that he does not immediately speak, or takes time to express himself in words, should never be mistaken for hesitation or lack of clarity. On

the contrary, it is because his thoughts are so vast, so deep, and so intricately layered that language itself struggles to hold their depth. And he knows, too, that our minds may not easily grasp what he wishes to convey – so he takes the time to shape his point with the utmost care.

And because he speaks with such care, using words sparingly and with absolute precision, he will never rush. Every word he chooses is intentional – never wasted, never misplaced.

Sometimes, words are not his first language. Instead, he will make his point through a gesture, an action that speaks with its own eloquence. Then you gently request him to verbalize what he meant by his action, and he will nod, kindly oblige, and then utter words. Yet, at times, you can sense how even he feels unsatisfied with the limits of language, as though the depth of his wisdom cannot be fully contained within words alone.

Sometimes, an attendant might bring a phone close to his face, hoping to record his words so that his wisdom can be shared with many. Even then, when the phone is suddenly and abruptly placed in his line of sight, there is no change in him. Not even an expression of annoyance or a ‘What are you doing?’, he simply continues. Normally, when someone knows they are being recorded, a subtle shift occurs: voices become slightly more measured, words more deliberate, or an underlying self-consciousness may creep in. Some may feel a nervousness, an awareness of being watched that alters their natural flow. But for Mahant Swami Maharaj, there is zero difference. His words continue to flow without hesitation, as though the presence of the recorder doesn’t even register. There is no pretence, no desire to



impress, no need for performance. His words are pure, untainted by ego or self-awareness – just the raw truth, spoken with grace. And perhaps that is why, despite all that he is, he never feels distant. His words, like his presence, do not create barriers – they dissolve them.

DISSOLVING BARRIERS

Despite being the leader of a vast spiritual community, despite carrying the hopes and aspirations of countless devotees, he carries none of it. There is no distance, no hierarchy, no weight of status – only connection. Only *you and him*. His humility is not a cultivated virtue, but his very essence. He does not impose his presence; he *offers* it. And in doing so, he reveals a truth far deeper than words: that true greatness is not in being above others, but in being *with* them, and not only that, in serving them.

Even though you stand before him to seek his guidance, his blessings, his wisdom, he never makes you feel as though he is above you. There is no air of superiority, no divide between guru and disciple. This is not conveyed through words but through the subtleties of his being – his body language, his eyes, his speech, his hands, his stillness. Every aspect of him communicates one thing: *you matter*.

In fact, as he always says, to be *das na das* – the servant of the servants – is not just his belief, it is his very being. Meeting him, you do not just hear these words, you *witness* them. You *feel* them. His humility is not something he preaches; it is something he *is*. The way he bows to children, the way he insists how he feels that he is not the guru, the way he carries himself with effortless simplicity – these are not mere gestures or statements. They *are him*.

A person's truest nature is seen in their most natural state. And when you sit before Mahant Swami Maharaj, when you meet him face to face, you realize that humility is not just a virtue he embodies – it is *him*, personified.

He is 91. His schedule is relentless. Hundreds of thousands of swamis and devotees seek his guidance. Every mandir, every Akshardham, every publication, every gathering has his input. It may be through a letter, a voice message, a call, a prayer – but he is involved. And yet, when you sit before him, you experience that he feels none of that weight. It is as if he has placed it all aside just to be with *you*.

Most of us, when busy, want others to know how much we have going on. We signal our importance through our exhaustion or hurried responses. But Mahant Swami Maharaj does the opposite. Despite all that he carries, he makes you feel as though you are the only thing that matters.

That is extraordinary. To quote his own words from his book about his experiences with Pramukh Swami Maharaj: 'Swamishri becomes ordinary in order to make us extraordinary.'

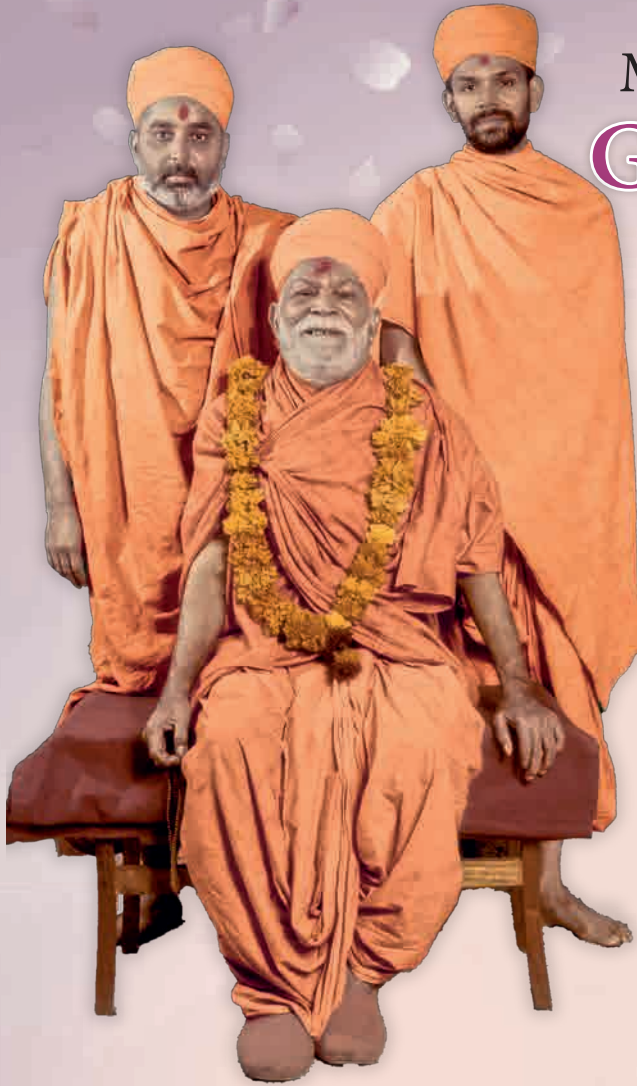
ONE HEART AT A TIME...

The meeting comes to an end, but something lingers. As you rise to leave, there is no urgency in his demeanour, no rush to move on to the next person. He offers one final nod, a gentle smile – one last acknowledgment that does not fade with the moment, but remains imprinted in your heart.

You walk away lighter, your heart full of joy, your mind clear, your soul uplifted. You walk away energized, as if something deep within you has been reignited. But more than anything, you walk away wanting to be better – wanting to serve more, to give more, to love more. Meeting him awakens something within you, a profound urge to rise higher in satsang, to walk the path of sadhana with greater sincerity.

Imagine – if every person who meets him leaves with that same feeling, if every soul carries forward that spark, how much more beautiful, how much more compassionate, how much more elevated the world becomes through him. This is the unseen impact of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

(Cont. on p. 41)



Mahant Swami Maharaj's GURU BHAKTI



lustrous guru-*shishya* tradition, where the living guru is a beacon of inspiration and a role model for all disciples.

His life, teachings and works inspire the disciples to remain steadfast and unremitting in their spiritual devotion and sadhanas.

Mahant Swami Maharaj's unique love for and indomitable faith in his gurus, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, provide an ideal template for spiritual aspirants and disciples alike to tread on the path of *moksha*.

After becoming the guru in 2016, Mahant Swami Maharaj has, on innumerable occasions, expressed his guru bhakti and glory for Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Some of his utterances in this regard are as follows:

- Yogi Bapa loved *samp*, *suhruddbhav* and *ekta*, therefore I, too, love these virtues.
- Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj were the embodiment of Bhagwan's form.
- Pramukh Swami Maharaj has done everything; there is nothing left for me to do. I merely have to accept the honours and garlands that come my way.
- Whatever Pramukh Maharaj wished, that is my wish.
- I cannot step into the shoes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- In his letters to the devotees, Mahant Swami Maharaj writes, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings and my prayers."

Let us dive into some incidents in Mahant

The guru-*shishya* tradition is one of the cornerstones of Hinduism. Glowing examples from the ancient past, Vedic, Upanishadic, Pauranic and subsequent times, beautifully portray a tradition that has blazed a trail for *atma*-realization and God-realization. Service, submission, patience, hard work, honesty, faith and other virtues are prerequisites for a *shishya* (disciple) to forge a meaningful bond with a guru. Only thereafter, the guru's knowledge and spiritual grace descends upon the disciple to bless him with *brahmavidya* or God-realization.

The BAPS Swaminarayan Sampradaya has a

Swami Maharaj's life that reflect his profound guru bhakti for Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

UNWAVERING OBEDIENCE

In 1956, Vinubhai (Mahant Swami Maharaj) was travelling with Yogiji Maharaj in the villages of Gujarat. On arriving in Bhadran, Vinubhai had a stomach problem. Yogiji Maharaj treated him and then helped him sit up from a supine position with his legs stretched before him. Then, Yogiji Maharaj instructed him to bend his head forward and grasp both his toes.

Thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj told him, "Maintain this position till I go and make a ball of ginger for you to eat." In spite of the stress and pain of holding his toes, Vinubhai remained steadfast in obeying Yogiji Maharaj's instruction. After forty-five minutes, Yogiji Maharaj returned and Vinubhai was still obediently holding his toes. He only let go off them and ate the ginger ball at Yogiji Maharaj's word.

Vinubhai's reverential adherence to Yogiji Maharaj's words is humbling and praiseworthy.

DIVYBHAV IN YOGIJI MAHARAJ

Yogiji Maharaj showered his special love and care for the youthful Vinubhai during his *vicharan*. After Vinubhai took his first *parshad diksha* in 1957, Yogiji Maharaj tested him severely. For the following three months, Yogiji Maharaj behaved as if he did not know Vinu Bhagat, totally ignoring him and speaking sparingly or not at all to him.

Once, they arrived in the village of Mojidad in Kathiawad. They lodged for the next few days at the old mandir. After having their daily meals, Vinu Bhagat would wash the kitchen utensils. On one occasion, he lost a small *taveti* – a utensil used for pressing and baking *parothas* on a hot iron plate. Consequently, a sadhu of the old mandir chastised Vinu Bhagat and also complained to Yogiji Maharaj. Subsequently, Yogiji Maharaj sided with the sadhu and gently scolded Vinu

Bhagat. Despite the guru's criticism, Vinu Bhagat did not feel offended and neither did his love for and *divyabhav* in Yogiji Maharaj tarnish one bit. Such was his pristine guru bhakti.

GURU'S SIMPLE COMMAND

Once, Vinu Bhagat was with Yogiji Maharaj in Nadiad. On their last day, they were scheduled to travel by train to another town. With a large surrounding passenger crowd, an imminent fast for the entire day was in the offing. This meant he would have to eat a heavy breakfast.

That morning, there were *pattarveliya* for breakfast. Vinu Bhagat liked them a lot. When a person came to serve *pattarveliya* in Vinu Bhagat's bowl, Yogiji Maharaj suddenly called out, "He doesn't like *pattarveliya*, so don't serve them. Serve him *mamra* because he likes them." In response, Vinu Bhagat did not voice his preference for *pattarveliya*. Then, he quietly and happily ate the light *mamra* for breakfast, satisfied in obeying the guru's word.

In the subsequent decades, Mahant Swami Maharaj has never eaten *pattarveliya*. In fact, he often starts his breakfast by eating *mamra*.

An ideal disciple unflinchingly obeys the guru's seemingly ordinary and simple instructions.

ABSOLUTE OBEDIENCE

In 1958, Yogiji Maharaj was in the village of Adval in Kathiawad. The summer sun was mercilessly scorching the ground. He received a letter informing that Pramukh Swami was travelling by train to Ahmedabad. Yogiji Maharaj instructed Vinu Bhagat and Shankar Bhagat to carry a pot of drinking water for Pramukh Swami to Rayka railway station. A devotee, Dilawarsinh, said to Yogiji Maharaj, "Let the two *parshads* travel in my horse carriage, which is going there anyway." But Yogi Maharaj replied, "Formerly, everyone used to walk to their destination."

Another devotee, Bhailubha, requested Yogiji

Maharaj, “It would be better if they went holding an umbrella over their heads. It’s simply too hot to bear.” But Yogiji Maharaj countered, “With the cool water pot on their head, they will not feel the heat.”

Again, a third devotee expressed his sentiment, “Bapa, instruct them to at least wear a pair of shoes.” Yogiji Maharaj replied confidently, “Nothing will happen to them. They will return without any problem.” Thus, Yogiji Maharaj did not yield to any of the devotees’ sympathetic suggestions.

Vinu Bhagat and Shankar Bhagat reached Rayka station while doing bhajan. When the train arrived on the platform Pramukh Swami did not step down; he had not caught the train due to some other work. Subsequently, both the *parshads* returned with the water pot on their head. They did not empty the water from the pot because Yogiji Maharaj had specifically instructed them to return with whatever water was left.

Despite Yogiji Maharaj not allowing them to use the horse carriage, an umbrella and footwear, Vinu Bhagat and Shankar Bhagat remained undeterred in happily following the guru’s commands to please him. Such ideal examples of guru bhakti encourage and inspire aspirants striving on the path of *moksha*.

108 YEARS

On 19 December 2015, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 94th birthday celebration was organized in Sarangpur. A morning assembly was held while Swamishri was seated in a large glass cabin. All the *sadguru* swamis stood outside the cabin and offered prayers on behalf of all. Finally, Mahant Swami prayed, “Bapa, promise us that you will remain on Earth until you are 108 years old and



bless us with your divine happiness. Promise us! It’s a promise, yes!”

These were the heartfelt prayers and words of the future Gunatit guru – Mahant Swami Maharaj. Though he knew he was going to be the future guru, he prayed that his guru lived longer to provide spiritual bliss to all the devotees. He never thought about himself, because his devotion and love for Pramukh Swami Maharaj superseded all other things.

GURU BHAKTI OF THE HIGHEST CALIBRE

Pramukh Swami Maharaj became the guru in 1971 after Yogiji Maharaj’s earthly departure. In the mid-70s, Mahant Swami was revered as a guru by a small number of devotees in the BAPS. They even urged him to leave Pramukh Swami Maharaj, but Mahant Swami did not succumb to their offers. Subsequently, Mahant Swami silently tolerated a harrowing period for some time – on the one hand, he bore the pressures of excessive admiration from the group of supporters and, on the other, the aversion of those who doubted his allegiance to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. However, on several occasions, Pramukh Swami Maharaj vouched for and praised Mahant Swami’s unshakeable allegiance. He said, “Mahant Swami has broken the shackles of gold.” This meant that because of Mahant Swami’s conviction and faith in Pramukh Swami



OMITTING THE GURU'S JAI IS PAINFUL

Prior to all BAPS occasions, assemblies and celebrations, there is a tradition of hailing the *jais* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and the guru *parampara*. Sometimes, the first three *jais* are hailed as mentioned and then the *jai* of the current guru is chorused by all.

During the initial months after Mahant Swami Maharaj's

Maharaj as the guru he did not become shackled to the temptations of those who revered him. In fact, he strongly condemned those who believed him to be the guru.

Later, someone asked Mahant Swami, "With what thought or belief did you resist the wishes of that group?" Swamiji underscored, "I had become a sadhu only to attain *moksha* and that *moksha* could be attained through Pramukh Swami alone."

Mahant Swami Maharaj has always remained supremely focused on his gurus, Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. They have always remained pivotal in his life. Truly, Swamishri is an archetype of guru bhakti.

GURU IS ALWAYS IN THE FRONT

On 22 September 2016, Mahant Swami Maharaj entered a welcome assembly at Bochasan mandir. He observed that his seat was in the centre of the stage and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *murti* was arranged to the right. He found the arrangement to be totally inappropriate and unacceptable. He instantly instructed that Swamishri's *murti* be arranged in the centre and his seat to the right. Then, in his blessings to the assembly, Mahant Swami Maharaj stated, "Guru is always in the front, and he will always remain so!"

succession as guru, he did not, and still does not, approve of the devotees hailing his *jai* in place of that of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. At one satsang centre, some *satsangi* youths fervently chorused Mahant Swami Maharaj's *jai* without hailing the *jai* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. At that time, Swamishri expressed, "You should first hail Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *jai*. I am his servant." Then, Swamishri revealed the agony he experiences when they omit Pramukh Swami's *jai*, "When you say (my *jai*) without hailing Swami Bapa's *jai*, I feel as if you are cutting off both my arms."

On another occasion, Swamishri revealed, "It all seems blunt and pointless when you do not say Swami Bapa's *jai*. I feel frightened and nervous!"

Mahant Swami Maharaj's life is a beacon for guru bhakti of the highest quality. His supreme love for and servitude to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his gurus is starkly evident from his life, teachings and beliefs.

On the festive occasion of Guru Purnima (10 July 2025), we offer our obeisances and prostrations to *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj and pray to him to bless us with the ideals of guru bhakti he practises. ◆

(Source from Gujarati text in Satsang Saurabh, Part 3, pp. 27-29)

Speech to Inspire: SATSANG DIKSHA'S GUIDANCE

Part 1

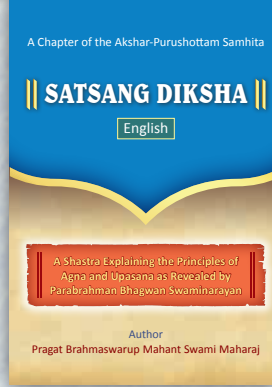
Have you ever noticed how a single kind word can light up someone's day? Or how a harsh comment can linger in the heart? Speech is a gift, a tool to uplift or wound. Our shastras, our gurus, and even everyday stories show how words can spark transformations. Let's explore this power from the sacred teachings to real-life moments, and be inspired to speak with encouragement.

GIFT OF SPEECH: A CALL TO INSPIRE

Our shastras teach that words are sacred, shaping who we are and how we connect. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 12, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, "The attributes of sound are that it is the indicator of all objects, and the cause of all social interactions. Sound also reveals the nature and class of the speaker." Gunatitanand Swami, in Swamini Vato 1.15, adds, "There is nothing as powerful as words."

The Atharva Veda (1.34.2) encourages, "May my speech be like honey, and may my words be filled with sweetness. May my behaviour be gentle, and may my speech be perfectly sweet. May I always speak with love, and may I earn the affection of everyone."

This sweetness isn't just poetic – it's practical. A proverb captures this well, "Has the koel done any good? Has the donkey done any harm? But why does one love the former and dislike the



latter? Because of their speech." The koel's song wins hearts, whereas the donkey's bray annoys people.

In 1952, in Saring, two youths, Vinubhai and Ramanbhai, struggled to memorize verses of the *chesta*. Doubting their progress, they planned to leave. But Yogiji Maharaj's kind words stopped them, "Why worry? Your *seva* and devotion are immense. I

can't do enough for you. Stay here, do satsang, and give darshan!" The youths who received his loving encouragement are revered today as Mahant Swami Maharaj and Doctor Swami.

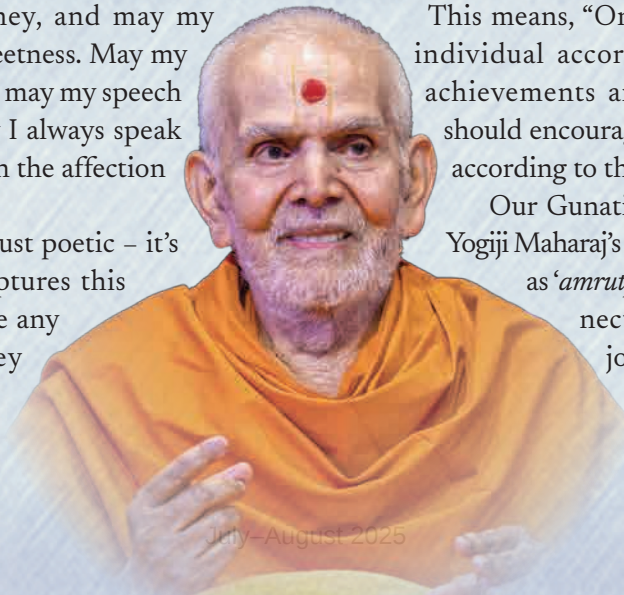
WORDS THAT TRANSFORM: GUIDANCE FROM SATSANG DIKSHA

Satsang Diksha, authored by Mahant Swami Maharaj, inspires wisdom into action. Shloka 161 says:

*Janasambodhanam kuryād yathākaryagunādikam;
Samvardhayet tadutsāham yathāśhakti sukarmasu.*

This means, "One should address each individual according to their virtues, achievements and other merits. One should encourage them in noble works according to their abilities."

Our Gunatit gurus exemplify this. Yogiji Maharaj's speech, sung in his *ashtak* as '*amrutpurna harshkarani*' – was nectar-filled and brought joy to all, and '*sanjivani mādhuri*' – sweet and inspiring, reviving even the lifeless.



Mahant Swami Maharaj's speech is '*shubhā nirmalā*' – auspicious and pure. Yogiji Maharaj respectfully called postmen 'Tapali Saheb' and drivers 'Driver Saheb', which teaches us to address everyone with respect.

On 9 November 1974, in the town of Lady Smith, South Africa, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited devotee Ramanbhai Righa's home. On learning that Ramanbhai's son collected matchboxes, Swamishri asked his sadhus, "We have matchboxes from London and Canada, bring them now." The sadhus were puzzled because Swamishri never used them, but they still fetched them. Swamishri gave them to the boy and said, "Add these to your showcase." The boy's joy strengthened his bonds with satsang, showing how a guru's encouragement can inspire even a child.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired countless through his gentle words and thus encouraged swamis, devotees, youth and children. One story, from pages 55–58 of 'Sant Vibhuti Pramukh Swami Maharaj', authored by Bhadreshdas Swami, reveals how Pramukh Swami's loving encouragement transformed Bhadreshdas Swami's life.

In 1981, at 14, Bhadreshdas Swami received the *parshad diksha* from Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Mischievous and restless, he skipped Sanskrit classes, played pranks, and swam in a water body instead of studying. Senior sadhus were worried, and often scolded him lovingly. Once, a sadhu complained to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, "He's very mischievous. When will he improve?" Swamishri smiled and replied optimistically, "Even a mischievous boy can do extraordinary things. He will become a pandit!" Swamishri's faith stirred Bhadreshdas Swami's mind. In 1984, at the Atladara mandir, Swamishri gave him laddus for *prasad*, then held his hand and said, "From now on, write a diary daily. Note when you wake up, what you do. Write this after puja. Will you write?" Bhadreshdas Swami agreed. Swamishri added, "Eat the laddus. Form good habits from a young age. I want you to study well. Show me your diary when we meet." The

next day, when Bhadreshdas Swami brought a diary, Swamishri said, "*Dahyo chhe. Kahe em kare chhe*," meaning, "You are good and you do what I say."

For twelve years, Swamiji reviewed his diary, saying, "You study well. You're very intelligent," and nurtured his life. Later, he authored the Swaminarayan Bhashyas on the Prasthantrayi, and fulfilled Pramukh Swami Maharaj's words and vision.

This illustrates how Pramukh Swami Maharaj's kind words ignited a transformation.

In May 1990, at the Youth Convention in Vidyanagar, Pramukh Swami Maharaj personally blessed around 12,000 youths in the heat, ignoring and tolerating the dust and sweat. When someone complained about the heat, Swamishri smiled and said, "Look at the enthusiasm of these youths. And during his address to the youths Swamishri said, "This convention is '*na bhuto na bhavishyati*'. Your efforts outshine crores of Nobel Prizes. Memorizing the Vachanamrut is greater than mastering Ashtanga Yoga. Swami will forever reside in you and grant you eternal joy."

His words fuelled the efforts and devotion of those youths. Presently, BAPS has a worldwide network of 100,000 youths.

The power of kind words isn't limited to spiritual contexts alone – it's universal. The famous Gujarati author, the late Bhupat Vadodariya, in his article, 'You Don't Require to Spend Money to Say Good Words', wrote of a mischievous schoolboy. He was notorious for leading strikes, mocking teachers, and disrupting classes with balloons and animal noises. Even during his metric year (10th grade), he persisted in his pranks and no one believed he'd pass. But a new English teacher saw his potential. However, when he was told he's very mischievous, the teacher replied, "He seems bright." Then, despite others' skepticism, the teacher insisted, "He's talented. If he focuses, he'll succeed." On hearing this, the boy's antics faded. He studied hard, aced his metric exams, joined college, and became a doctor. A teacher's faith changed his life.

People have potential, but it often strays.

Mischievous children often brim with boisterousness and creativity, which becomes destructive if unguided. A few words of praise can redirect their energy, and change their lives.

Thomas Edison's story proves this. As a child, he struggled to read and write. Teachers called him addle-brained and hopeless. His mother declared, "My son is brilliant. I'll teach him myself." Her faith and effort sparked Edison's genius and he illuminated the world. Abraham Lincoln said, "You cannot build character by taking away a man's encouragement."

Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774), an Anglo-Irish writer, mocked for poverty and buried in debt, found strength in his friend Dr Samuel Johnson's belief in him. Johnson's encouragement inspired him to write *The Vicar of Wakefield*, a literary gem. Most transformations result from someone's praise or faith – a teacher, friend, parent, mentor or guru.

THE IMPACT OF KIND WORDS

Kind words don't always come easy to most people. In the village of Gadhada, 200 *bawas* caused a commotion by vociferously demanding *malpuva* and *dudhpak* – sweet items difficult to prepare instantly and in large quantity. On knowing about their agitation, Bhagwan Swaminarayan called Muktanand Swami and sent him to the *bawas*. Muktanand Swami went and respectfully addressed them, "Dear *parshads* of Vaikunth, what would you like to eat?" Calmed by his gentle words, they agreed to have a simple meal of dal and *rotla*.

The great Sanskrit poet Magh, in *Kirtarjuniyam* (6.46), writes, "Encouragement from a respected person enhances one's brilliance."

On 29 April 1981, in the volunteer felicitation assembly at the end of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Bicentenary Celebration in Ahmedabad, Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, "We often hear that festivals during Shriji Maharaj's time were '*na bhuto, na bhavishyati*' – unprecedented and unrepeatable – but we had never witnessed them. However, we have experienced it in this festival. Everyone who

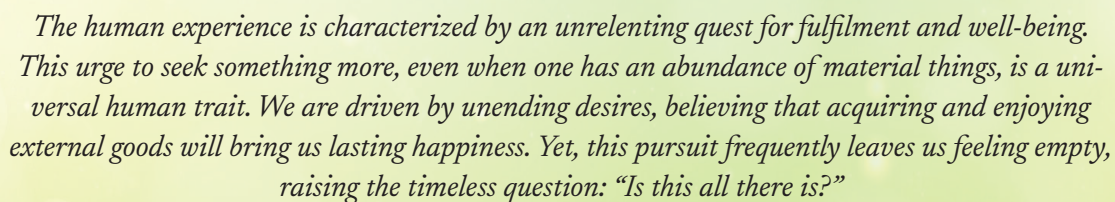
visited praised that they had never seen anything like it before. We've felicitated a few volunteers today, but countless devotees, including women, served wholeheartedly. For those who did *seva* with body, mind and wealth, this ceremony pales in comparison – all of you deserve a thousand praises. I didn't serve; I merely observed and decorated (by sitting in) a chair. Mahant Swami made immense efforts, Doctor Swami stayed in the Nagar, and Ishwarcharan Swami served tirelessly. I've served in past festivals and know the weight of such responsibilities. Tyagvallabh Swami ensured the successful cooking of (lakhs of) hot meals, and so the kitchen *seva* was demanding. All swamis worked selflessly, expecting no recognition, even refusing felicitation. A million salutations and prostrations to them. This was God's will, and it could not be accomplished by wealth alone. Those who cherish this festival's memories will earn Shriji Maharaj's Akshardham."

His appreciative words inspired lifelong devotion and dedication in the volunteers present.

A person lives by faith. When faith falters, life stumbles. We all recall someone whose praise we craved. Why not be that person for others? Spouses, children, students, strangers – everyone yearns for encouragement.

Charles Caleb Colton (1777–1832), an English cleric, writer and collector, said, "When you have nothing to speak, say nothing." But when you can uplift, why stay silent? Let's speak words that spark faith, inspire growth, and transform lives, wherever we may be. Our gurus' lives inspire those seeking progress, not only on the spiritual path but also in our personal, professional, and social interactions.

Let us recall again the words of Mahant Swami Maharaj in the Satsang Diksha, "One should address each individual according to their virtues, achievements and other merits. One should encourage them in noble works according to their abilities." ♦



Swaminarayan Bliss

UNDERSTANDING HAPPINESS, JOY, SUKH AND ANAND

Words like happiness, joy, *sukh*, and *anand* might seem interchangeable, but they represent a spectrum of distinct meanings, moving from transient, externally-dependent states to profound, inherently blissful states of being.

Happiness is a temporary and fleeting emotion, frequently linked to material possessions, sensory pleasures, achievements, social validation, and other external factors. It comes and goes with what *happens* to you.

Joy is a more intense and enduring internal state – a sense of contentment that is not necessarily tied to external events and that can persist even amidst challenges. While happiness is often about getting what you want, joy is about appreciating what you have or experiencing deep connection.

Sukh, a Sanskrit word, is a deeper sense of well-being or satisfaction, more lasting than happiness and joy – a blend of mental peace and inner contentment. While joy can be emotionally active, *sukh* is a calmer, more stable, and comfortable internal equilibrium.

Anand, a Sanskrit word, is a profound and enduring state of supreme bliss, often associated with spiritual or philosophical insights. It is often associated with connecting to the divine and transcends circumstances. Unlike happiness, joy, or even *sukh*, *anand* is not dependent on anything. It is the self-existent, perfect state of being.

The focus of the essay is *anand* and the journey towards it.

BRAHMA'S HIDDEN TREASURE

An ancient Hindu creation story involving Brahma, the creator god, offers insight into why true happiness is elusive and lasting joy is hidden. Brahma brought the universe into existence, everything from stars and planets to lush forests and flowing rivers. He filled the world with incredible material beauty and sensual delights,

including food, music, art, love, and the potential for pleasure. He gave humans the capacity to experience and enjoy all these gifts through their senses.

However, Brahma made a crucial decision. He realized that if true, lasting joy (*anand*) was readily available in the material world, humans would never seek anything deeper. They would remain trapped in the pursuit of fleeting pleasures and never discover their true potential or connect with their divine source.

This decision by Brahma holds a crucial insight about the nature of joy, which challenges our modern assumptions.

WHY HAPPINESS ISN'T WHERE YOU THINK

So, by divine design, Brahma intentionally kept *anand* with himself. This means that while the physical realm offers many delights, true and lasting joy is found only by seeking something deeper, beyond the superficial; something connected to the divine that must be actively sought.

Brahma's act was not cosmic mischief, but a profound act of wisdom. By withholding *anand* from the tangible world, he created a spiritual developmental task for humanity. The pursuit of material comforts, status, wealth, and sensory pleasures represents an immature understanding of what truly brings fulfilment. The real joy, *anand*, requires seeking something deeper. It suggests that life's purpose is not mere material enjoyment, but spiritual elevation; to seek the divine, where true and enduring fulfilment resides, waiting to be discovered and enjoyed.

This ancient wisdom finds an unexpected parallel in modern developmental psychology.

THE SALLY-ANNE TEST: A MODERN PSYCHOLOGICAL PARALLEL

To illustrate the kind of conceptual shift required to understand Brahma's actions and find true happiness, let us explore a landmark

experiment from modern psychology: the Sally-Anne Test. First described by developmental psychologists Simon Baron-Cohen, Alan Leslie, and Uta Frith in 1985,¹ the Sally-Anne Test has become the classic assessment of Theory of Mind (ToM) development in children. ToM is the ability to understand that other people have thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that are different from one's own, and that may not align with reality.

The Sally-Anne Test involves a child watching a puppet show. This is how it works:

1. Two dolls, Sally and Anne, are introduced to a child.
2. Sally has a marble. The child watches Sally put the marble in her basket.
3. Sally then leaves the room.
4. While Sally is gone, Anne takes the marble out of the basket and puts it into her box.
5. Sally then comes back into the room.
6. The child is asked: "Where will Sally look for her marble?"

Failing the Test: Younger children (under four years old) often say Sally will look in Anne's box. Why? Because they saw Anne place the marble in the box, and they have not yet developed the ability to understand that Sally will believe the marble is still in the basket, where she last saw it. They project their own knowledge onto Sally, assuming Sally knows what they know – even though Sally did not see the marble being moved.

Passing the Test: Older children (usually by age five) say Sally will look in her own basket. They understand that Sally's belief is based on what she experienced (having last seen the marble in the basket) and has not been updated with the new information (that Anne moved the marble into her box). They can take Sally's perspective.

The Sally-Anne Test represents something profound and reveals a fundamental conceptual leap: the ability to see the world from another's perspective and realize that what you know is not necessarily what others know.

CONNECTING THE DOTS: SPIRITUAL THEORY OF MIND

The ancient story of Brahma and the modern Sally-Anne Test, though seemingly unrelated, both describe a similar developmental journey – one cognitive, the other spiritual. To understand their connection more clearly, we can introduce the concept of a Spiritual Theory of Mind (Spiritual ToM or S-ToM).

Spiritual ToM can be defined as the developmental capacity to understand that spiritual reality operates differently from material reality. Specifically, that lasting fulfilment exists in a realm beyond our immediate material perception, accessible only through spiritual growth and connection with the divine.

Just as children develop the ability to understand that others have different beliefs and perspectives (cognitive ToM), humanity as a whole, and individuals within it, undergo a similar developmental process in understanding the true nature and location of *anand*.

In this 'Spiritual Sally-Anne Test' analogy, each element has symbolic meaning:

- The 'marble' represents *anand*.
- The 'basket', where humanity initially assumes happiness resides, are material things, external achievements, social recognition, and other temporary pleasures.
- Brahma's act of keeping *anand* with himself is like the 'Anne' figure moving the marble to the 'box'. It signifies that *anand* is hidden in a different location than where it was initially perceived to be.

Most people fail this Spiritual Sally-Anne Test, because they believe happiness must be where they directly see and experience it – in wealth, pleasure, status, or external achievements. They have not yet developed the spiritual insight to see beyond their limited understanding, that happiness is not where it appears to be externally. This is analogous to the young child failing the cognitive Sally-Anne test.

1 Baron-Cohen, Simon, Alan M. Leslie, and Uta Frith. "Does the autistic child have a 'theory of mind'?" *Cognition* 21, no. 1 (1985): 37–46.

Passing the spiritual Sally-Anne Test means realizing that *anand* is not found externally, but in a deeper, hidden place. It requires a conceptual leap similar to the one children make when developing Theory of Mind.

Spiritual ToM is ultimately about developing the capacity to understand perspectives beyond the immediate material self. It involves recognizing that *anand* is 'hidden' beyond our individual awareness. It exists in a dimension (the spiritual) not readily accessible to our materially focused mind.

THE HAPPINESS TRAP

The modern world is replete with 'baskets' of material objects and external pursuits that promise happiness. They are constant and immediate, becoming a modern equivalent of the objects Brahma created as temporary distractions.

In each case, the pattern is the same: we look for *anand* in places designed only to provide temporary pleasure. Like the young child, we assume happiness must be in the 'basket' because that is where we put our hopes or where we last experienced something pleasurable.

Psychological research supports this ancient insight. Tim Kasser's extensive studies on materialism and well-being reveal that individuals who prioritize wealth, image, and status often experience lower life satisfaction, more anxiety and depression, and weaker social connections. Thus, what Brahma's story symbolized millennia ago is now confirmed by modern psychology: lasting happiness cannot be found in material pursuits, since we are chasing the wrong marble. This is not a modern dilemma; it is a timeless human experience.²

THE STAGES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Just as children pass through cognitive milestones, spiritual seekers progress through stages of Spiritual ToM development.

The Material Stage: Pre-Spiritual ToM

Individuals in this stage assume happiness must be where they can directly see and experience it (in the 'basket' of material pleasures). They cannot yet conceive that the 'marble' of *anand* is in a different location entirely. They are like the young child who fails the test.

The Seeker Stage: Emerging Spiritual ToM

At this point, dissatisfaction with material life prompts deeper questioning about happiness. They realize that material success or external achievements do not provide lasting fulfilment. This stage marks the beginning of real spiritual inquiry. They may experience temporary satisfaction, followed by emptiness, leading them to search for something deeper. However, without guidance, many people can stay stuck in confusion, jumping from one external pursuit to another.

This represents the transitional phase in our Spiritual Sally-Anne Test. It is like a child who sometimes passes and sometimes fails, showing emerging but inconsistent Theory of Mind. They begin to suspect the 'marble' isn't in the 'basket' where they expected, but they don't yet know where to look for it.

The Connected Mind: Spiritual Maturity

This mature spiritual ToM stage represents fully passing the Spiritual Sally-Anne Test. Just as a mature child confidently knows Sally will look in the basket (understanding her perspective), the spiritually mature person confidently knows that *anand* resides with the divine. They have developed complete Spiritual Theory of Mind. This allows them to transcend materialistic limitations and seek *anand*.

THE ENLIGHTENED GURU: MIRROR AND GUIDE

Just as children need interaction with and guidance from adults who already possess Theory

² Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

of Mind to develop their own, human beings need spiritual mentors to awaken their spiritual vision.

An enlightened guru, who already has a developed Spiritual ToM and has established connection with the divine source of *anand*, can see the spiritual realities that are hidden to others and can guide them towards that same connection.

The guru's role is essential because the illusions of the material world and our own ingrained habits of seeking externally are powerful. Just as it is hard for a young child to truly grasp Sally's perspective without experiencing more of the world and receiving explanations, it is difficult for us to fundamentally shift our perception of happiness without external guidance. Similarly, to find *anand*, a guide who has already made the journey is essential. Thus, a guru serves as a bridge between the material and spiritual worlds.

A guru helps us develop spiritual ToM and connect with the hidden divine joy in the following ways:

Points Out the Falsehood of Material Happiness: Like telling a child that Sally has a different perspective, a guru directly reveals that genuine contentment is not where most people assume it is – in external achievements, possessions, or validation. They challenge our false beliefs about the source of fulfilment.

Provides Real-Life Analogies and Explanations: Through parables, spiritual reasoning, and teachings, the guru helps disciples reframe their understanding of happiness and reality, helping them transcend their ego and limited perspective. They help align their thoughts with the divine.

Guides Practical Experience: A guru does not just teach theory, but also provides specific spiritual practices – like meditation, self-inquiry, devotion, service – that help individuals directly experience the difference between fleeting pleasure and true bliss, and connect with the divine.

Serves as a Mirror and Role Model: By embodying spiritual maturity, inner peace, and divine connection, the guru reflects a disciple's true

potential and inspires them to follow the path. The guru demonstrates that the state of *anand* is possible.

Facilitates Connection to the Divine: The guru serves as a bridge, guiding seekers towards establishing their own relationship or connection with the divine source of *anand*. They help verify genuine spiritual experiences.

A true guru is not someone who demands blind obedience or seeks exploitation. They encourage critical thinking and embody humility and compassion. They help seekers to see beyond their ego and material desires and guide them towards the hidden truth. A true guru helps seekers find *anand*, teaching them to uncover it by connecting with the divine.

This is what Bhagwan Swaminarayan states in Vachanamrut Gadhada I 67, "There is a Satpurush who has no affection at all for the pleasures of this world; he harbours desires only for the higher realm, that is, the abode of God, and for the form of God. He also wishes the same for whoever associates with him."

Sanatan Hindu Dharma is replete with examples of spiritual seekers achieving spiritual maturity through their association with an enlightened guru. These include Satyakam Jabali under Gautam Rishi, Upamanyu with Dhaumya Rishi, and Aruni through Uddalak Rishi.

Manifest Guru Parampara

While the role of a spiritual guide is universal across traditions, the Swaminarayan tradition is a clear example of how this guru-disciple relationship manifests in practice through an unbroken succession of enlightened guides. To enable spiritual seekers to transition from material ignorance to spiritual enlightenment, Bhagwan Swaminarayan established the Aksharbrahma succession of Gunatit gurus who manifest in human form on earth: Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami Maharaj (1784–1867), Bhagatji Maharaj (1829–1897), Shastriji Maharaj (1865–1951), Yogiji Maharaj (1892–1971),

Pramukh Swami Maharaj (1921–2016), and presently, Mahant Swami Maharaj (1933–).

Over the past two centuries, these God-realized Satpurushes have guided countless to shed their material misunderstandings and realize true spiritual wisdom.

CONCLUSION:

THE TREASURE WAS THERE ALL ALONG

The ancient Hindu story of Brahma and the modern psychological Sally-Anne Test, though separated by time and cultures, echo a shared message about human development and the pursuit of spiritual fulfilment. They both demonstrate that maturity – whether cognitive

or spiritual – means moving beyond our limited perspective to discover a hidden reality.

The journey from seeking temporary happiness in the external world to realizing *anand* is with the divine is the core of spiritual growth. This transition is often challenging and requires guidance, just as cognitive development does. Unlike the Sally-Anne Test, which children naturally outgrow, developing Spiritual Theory of Mind requires conscious choice, sustained effort, and often, wise guidance. An enlightened guru serves as an indispensable guide, helping us navigate the illusions, providing the tools for inner exploration, and pointing us towards the divine that holds the ultimate treasure of *anand*. ♦

(Cont. from p. 28)

He does not just guide – he transforms. He does not just bless – he inspires. And in meeting him, the world itself is made better, one heart at a time.

PERSISTING PRESENCE

Later, as you sit with your thoughts, you realize something profound: *meeting Mahant Swami Maharaj is not just an event – it is an imprint, an encounter that does not dissolve with time*. The more you reflect, the more you realize that the experience defies explanation, that no matter how much you write, how much you articulate, it will always be incomplete – because it is not just about the moments in his presence, but the feeling of having met someone *beyond us all*. Someone who is above this realm, who is ontologically different to us.

Mahant Swami Maharaj once said that the difficulty with the Satpurush is that he appears completely normal, just like us. But when you observe him, when you reflect deeply, you realize how great he, Aksharbrahma, is. And that is the essence of meeting him. What seems simple on the surface – his silence, his smile, his stillness – when examined closely, reveals a vastness beyond comprehension. He is a different entity. It is his raw *sachai* (authenticity), his overflowing selfless

love, his deep purity, his entrenched humility that make him who he is.

Humans are not simply identified by their achievements. True greatness is not always in the grand gestures but often lies in the smallest of actions. It is found in the way a person listens, the warmth of their smile, the sincerity in their words, and the way they engage with the world around them. These minute details reveal the true essence of a human being, the subtle qualities that shape a person's character. In the case of Mahant Swami Maharaj, the characteristics articulated above are not merely my personal observations but are echoed in the experiences and feelings of so many others who have encountered him. It is in his everyday acts that one begins to comprehend the depth of his greatness.

No single moment defines him, no single word encapsulates him. But the small things – the way he listens to you, the way he sees you, the way he lifts you – all come together to paint a picture of who he truly is. And this personal account is merely a window into Mahant Swami Maharaj, seen through the feelings we experience when we meet him. A window into a presence that stays with you long after you have walked away. ♦

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

17 April to 15 July 2023

Surat



A skit presentation on Youth Day

APRIL: SURAT

20: Youth Day (Yuva Din)

A sea of youths were present in Swamishri's morning puja. A few youths sang bhajans and made presentations themed on *prapti*.

In the evening assembly, youths presented a cultural programme. An inspiring drama, *Nirnay* (Decision), was enacted by youths. Thereafter, the presentations provided guidelines and solutions to problems faced by youths during their three principle phases of life: education, career and marriage. Then, Jnaneshwar Swami, Atmatrupt Swami, Munivandan Swami and other swamis spoke on the above subjects.

Finally, the youths had a Q&A session with Swamishri.

22: Prayers for Victims of Pahalgam

On 22 April, 26 innocent tourists lost their lives during a terrorist attack in Pahalgam in

Jammu and Kashmir. The heinous attack was strongly condemned, and prayer and condolence meets for the victims were held at all BAPS mandirs and centres. In today's morning puja, Mahant Swami Maharaj, along with thousands of sadhus and devotees, offered prayers for peace of the departed souls and their relatives, and the early recovery of those injured.

Swamishri inaugurated a print publication, *Inspired, Daily Wisdom for Holistic Living*, authored by Jnanvatsal Swami and published by Penguin Random House, India.

27: Vidyamandir Day

The evening assembly was celebrated as Vidyamandir Day, themed on 'One Who Has Filled Colours...' The students of Surat Vidyamandir presented an interesting cultural programme in colourful costumes. Infants performed a skit on effort, values and virtues. Parents spoke about the



Around 2,500 devotees participate in the *yagna* rituals.
(Inset) Swamishri blesses the participants



benefits their children have gained by studying at the Vidyamandir. Swamis also gave inspiring speeches. In conclusion, students had a Q&A session with Swamishri.

Of the 200 students learning music at the Keshav Music Academy, 51 students sang and played various musical instruments in Swamishri's puja. Swamishri had showered his blessings upon them all.

27 & 28: Yagna for World Peace

A grand two-day *yagna* was held at the under-construction premises of Akshardham for the *murti-pratishtha* of a Prarthana Mandir. Swamishri held a magnifying glass to focus the sun's rays for igniting a flame to be used in kindling the *yagna* fire.

The mammoth *yagnashala* included a main *kund* (pit) on a large stage and other smaller *kunds* in the *yagnashala*. The *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the Guru Parampara, to be consecrated in the Prarthana Mandir, were installed on the stage. The two-day *yagna* was held in the presence of Swamishri and *sadguru* swamis. More than 2,500 devotees and well-wishers participated in the early morning hours

for two days. Male and female youth volunteers welcomed them by applying *chandlo* and tying *nadachhadis*. Thereafter, the *yajmans* (participants) took their seats before the *yagna kunds*. They offered oblations while Brahmin pandits chanted Vedic *shlokas*.

Swamishri and the *sadguru* swamis also offered oblations in the *yagna kund* and performed *arti*. As Swamishri performed the *pujan* rituals of the *yantras*, to be later placed under the *murtis* prior to the *pratishtha* rituals, senior swamis performed *pujan* of all the *murtis* installed on the stage.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, "May all of you who have participated in this *yagna* be blessed with happiness in body, mind and wealth, and attain *brahmavidya*. May your wishes be fulfilled and the Akshardham complex be accomplished at the earliest. In the Prarthana Mandir, prayers of all will be fulfilled and Maharaj and Swami will bless everyone. May bhakti flourish in all, because the purpose of this complex is to offer bhakti."



Nagar Yatra in the streets of Kanad, Surat



Swamishri performs *puja* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Prarthana Mandir

28: Grand Nagar Yatra

A grand *nagar yatra* of the *murtis* to be consecrated in the Prarthana Mandir was carried out on the streets of Kanad, Surat.

The highlights of the colourful procession included the marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj installed on an ornate chariot, children dressed in vivid costumes, youths playing a music band, devotees carrying Thakorji on a decorated palanquin, and women carrying auspicious *kalashes* and *pothis* (shastras wrapped in red cloth) on their heads. Youths, wearing colourful traditional headgear, on bikes, children's performances and giant muppets attracted the attention of bystanders. The *sadguru* swamis welcomed the devotional procession when it concluded on the precincts of the Prarthana Mandir and performed *arti* of the *murtis*. In conclusion, a spectacular fireworks display was presented.

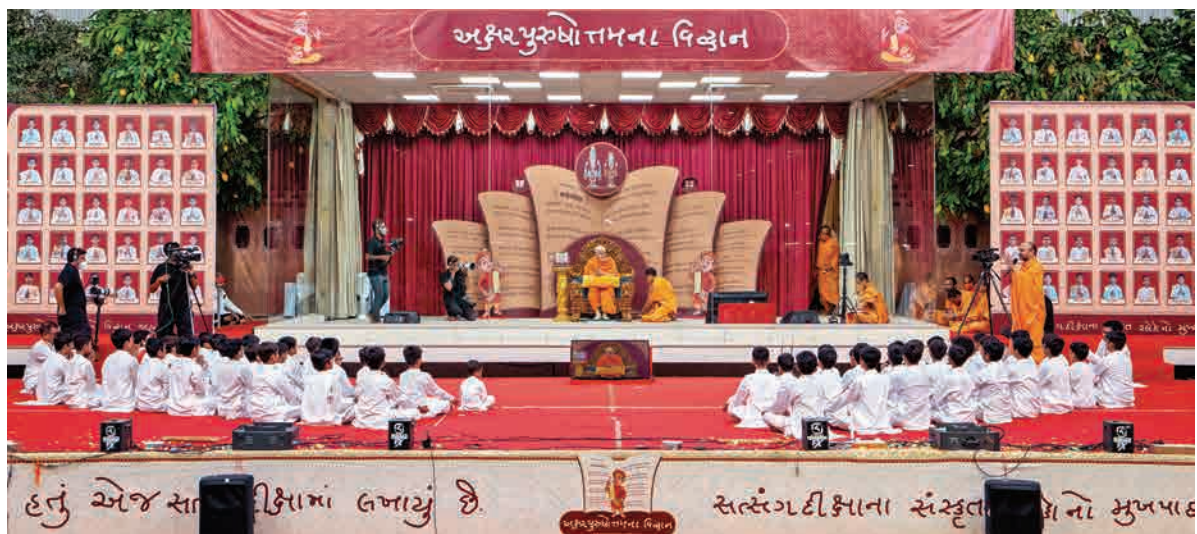
30: Murti-Pratishtha of Prarthana Mandir

As part of the ongoing Akshardham Mahamandir construction project, the *murti-pratishtha* ritual of the Prarthana Mandir was performed by Mahant Swami Maharaj with devotional fervour.

At 6 a.m., Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Kothari Uttamprakash Swami commenced the *mahapuja* rituals in the Prarthana Mandir hall. The whole event was relayed live in India and abroad. Thereafter, Munivandan Swami narrated Mahant Swami Maharaj's passion and desire to build the Prarthana Mandir. Swamishri had written a letter describing the glory of the Prarthana Mandir.

When Swamishri arrived, he performed the *pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. The rituals for the Guru Parampara *murtis* were simultaneously performed by Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami. Pujya Dr Swami performed the *pratishtha* rituals of two pairs of Shriji Maharaj's marble *charanarvinds* to enable the devotees to do darshan and *pradakshina*. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *puja* of all the *murtis* and prayed for the fulfilment of the wishes of all.

Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, who is guiding the entire Akshardham project, addressed the audience, "Once Akshardham is ready, whoever does darshan will be blessed by having had the darshan of all the Akshardhams



Children's Day, themed on 'Scholars of Akshar-Purushottam', in Swamishri's presence

– in Gandhinagar, Delhi, Robbinsville – and all the sacred Hindu places. The architecture of Akshardham is intensely beautiful and wonderful. Everyone will remember it for life. One will attain the bliss of Akshardham on earth.”

Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the occasion, “The *pratishtha* rituals of the Prarthana Mandir have been accomplished with immense divinity. Whoever prays here with inner feelings, with divinity and love will reap the fruits thereof. Here, Maharaj and Swami will fulfil everyone's wishes. Since Maharaj and Swami are present here, he will listen to everyone's prayers and bless all. Whoever does darshan here will experience peace, their minds will become still and experience happiness in all ways. May all who have contributed in this project be blessed with good times and personal progress in satsang.”

The divine inauguration of the Prarthana Mandir by Swamishri brought joy and solace to all the swamis and devotees. Once the *annakut* was arranged before the *murtis*, Swamishri, swamis and devotees performed the first *arti* of the mandir and the *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual. Then, Swamishri offered a prayer to the consecrated *murtis* for the happiness of all. Swamishri and all the swamis and devotees performed a *mala*

while chanting the Swaminarayan mantra. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *pujan* of both *charanarvinds*. Finally, the *sadguru* swamis and senior swamis honoured Swamishri with flower garlands.

MAY : SURAT

4: Children's Day (Bal Din)

The special evening Children's Day assembly was held in Swamishri's presence. It was themed 'Scholars of Akshar-Purushottam'. As part of the 'Mission Rajipo' project, children had memorized all 315 Sanskrit *shlokas* of the Satsang Diksha. They gave a variety of presentations before a mammoth assembly of devotees: recitation of Satsang Diksha *shlokas*, inspiring skits, dramas and cultural programmes. A *palkhi yatra* was carried out for children who had memorized the entire Satsang Diksha. Swamis showered flower petals to honour them. Swamishri blessed them by showering his grace.

A number of important guests, like the Central Minister of Jal Shakti (Water Power) and others, shared their sentiments from the dais.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the guests and children scholars.

On 8 March, Swamishri visited and observed



Swamishri blesses freshly graduated YTK youths

the ongoing construction work of Akshardham and blessed the swamis and devotees offering *seva* in the project.

11: Swamishri Blesses the Shibir Participants of North America

As part of the 2025 Satsang Competition Convention (*adhiveshan*), a two-day satsang *shibir* (camp) was organized in different *shikharbaddha* mandirs of North America. It was themed, ‘Satsang – The Journey to Rajipo’. Mahant Swami Maharaj addressed them through video-conferencing and blessed the children and youths. Swamishri also sanctified the medals for the winners of the competitions, *prasad* and mementos for children and youths.

Swamishri wrote a beautiful letter of blessings to the hundreds of devotees who had memorized Satsang Diksha.

13: Convocation of YTK Youths

In the evening assembly, the freshly graduated youths of the Yuva Talim Kendra (YTK) in Sarangpur presented inspiring programmes before Swamishri. Finally, Swamishri addressed them about the glory of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* and its benefits of being liberated

from the cycles of life and death and attaining Akshardham. He also added that the divine knowledge would augment their external prestige, purify their inner selves and enable them to experience the highest peace.

16: Swamishri blessed 1,100 youths from Vadodara, who had completed a *shibir* at Sankari Mandir. Some of the youths sang bhajans in Swamishri’s morning puja.

17: Swamishri performed the *pujan* rituals of the *jagti pithika* stone for the ongoing construction of a *shikharbaddha* mandir in Bhuj.

18: Shilanyas Rituals of Pithika for Nilkanth Varni Murti

Swamishri performed the *shilanyas* ritual of the large *pithika* (base) for the installation of a 49-foot-high *murti* of Nilkanth Varni on the grounds of the under-construction Akshardham complex. Swamishri performed the Vedic *pujan* rituals of the *nidhikumbhs* and *shilas* to be placed in the foundation. Then, in the presence of Ghanshyamcharan Swami, the *shilas* and *nidhikumbhs* were placed in the foundation by swamis and devotees.

The evening Sunday assembly featured inspiring dramas and skits by youths and speeches



Swamishri performs the *shilanyas* rituals for the *pithika* of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni



Swamis and devotees during the *shilanyas* rituals

by swamis. In conclusion, youths held a Q&A session with Swamishri. Thereafter, swamis honoured Swamishri with flower garlands on behalf of the mammoth congregation.

On 20th morning, Swamishri gave the *parshad diksha* to Bharatbhai *sadhak*.

On 21 May, according to the English calendar, Pramukh Varni Amrut Din was celebrated with festivity and joy.

22: Prapti Din

In the evening assembly, devotees from villages

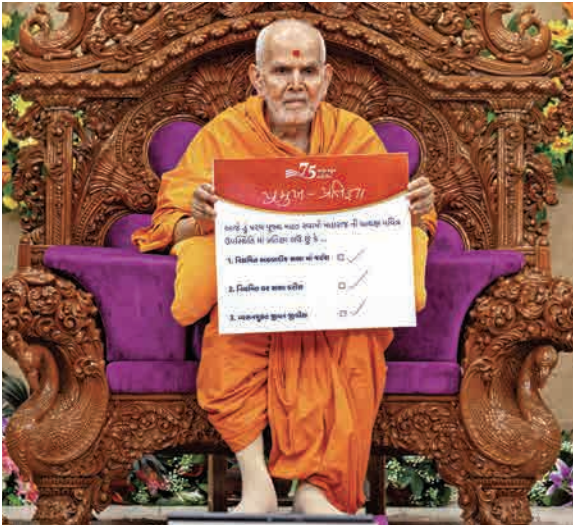
surrounding Surat celebrated 'Prapti Din' through a variety of cultural performances. Speeches by swamis on *prapti* clarified and consolidated the faith of devotees in Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Swamishri. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed by strengthening the principles of *prapti* and *mahima* in all.

24: Yogiji Maharaj's Birthday Celebration

In Swamishri's morning puja, swamis sang bhajans to commemorate the 133rd birthday celebration of Yogiji Maharaj. Thereafter,



Swamishri listens attentively to a volunteer



Swamishri displays a *pratigna* (pledge) card designed for the devotees of Ahmedabad

Adarshjivan Swami engaged in a Q&A session with Swamishri about Yogiji Maharaj. Swamishri narrated Yogiji Maharaj's divine incidents, which reflected his guru bhakti.

27: Volunteer Assembly

A special evening assembly was held in Swamishri's presence to honour and inspire the volunteers engaged in a variety of *seva* at the Akshardham site. After the customary singing of *dhun* and kirtan, swamis narrated interesting stories of *seva* by the volunteers. Then the volunteers presented a devotional programme. Thereafter, the volunteers spoke briefly about their specific *seva*. Finally, Swamishri praised and congratulated the volunteers for their selfless service.

Murti-Pujan Pratishtha

During Swamishri's stay in Kanad (Surat), he performed the *murti-pujan pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for three BAPS *hari* mandirs of Surat: Saroli, Veluk (Guru Parampara *murtis*) and Kudsad. Swamishri blessed the occasion, saying, "With the *pratishtha* rituals done for the *hari* mandirs, all should go daily for darshan. Bhagwan is present in the *murtis*, so all should do darshan with heartfelt love and experience inner joy."

30: Pramukh Varni Amrut Din Celebration

According to the Indian calendar (Jeth *sud* 4), today marked the 75th anniversary of Pramukh Varni Din. On this momentous day, Shastriji Maharaj appointed Pramukh Swami as the president of BAPS in Ambli Vali Pol, Ahmedabad.

The evening assembly was celebrated as Pramukh Varni Amrut Din. The *balaks*, *yuvaks* and *karyakars* of satsang centres in Dadra Nagar Haveli presented programmes to celebrate the occasion. Scholarly swamis gave inspirational speeches, and children and youths of Surat presented a drama and a traditional dance portraying the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The swamis from Selvas offered garlands and a shawl to Swamishri. Then swamis had an open discussion with Swamishri.

Early morning today, in Ahmedabad, swamis and devotees pilgrimaged by foot from the Shahibaug mandir to Ambli Vali Pol. During the entire day over 7,000 devotees from all the suburbs of Ahmedabad and neighbouring villages pilgrimaged to Ambli Vali Pol and paid tributes.

In addition, thousands of devotees from the suburbs of Vadodara pilgrimaged to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's birthplace in Chansad. In Sarangpur, swamis and devotees celebrated Pramukh Varni Din at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Smruti Mandir with devotion and joy.

Special Satsang Day Assemblies

On 28, 29 and 31 May, special evening assemblies, namely, Navsari Din, Sankari Din and Tithal Din respectively, were held in Swamishri's presence. The presentations by the three Satsang *mandals* included traditional dances, skits and dramas by children, youths and volunteers, inspiring speeches by swamis, reports of satsang activities, and honouring children who had memorized Satsang Diksha under the aegis of 'Mission Rajipo'.

Swamishri sanctified and blessed a photo of



Swamishri, swamis and *balaks* during the felicitation assembly of child scholars

the newly built BAPS Vidyamandir in Navsari. Swamishri also blessed the students of Pramukh Swami Vocational Centre in Dharampur for their bright future and success. On Tithal Din, all the devotees stood up in the assembly to honour Swamishri with decorative garlands. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed all the three special assemblies.

JUNE : SURAT

4: Felicitation Assembly of BAPS Child Scholars

After his morning puja, Swamishri kindled a lamp to inaugurate an Akshar-Purushottam Chhavani (camp). BAPS children, who had memorized 315 Sanskrit *shlokas* of Satsang Diksha and 565 *shlokas* of Siddhant Karika, spoke about various subjects based on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

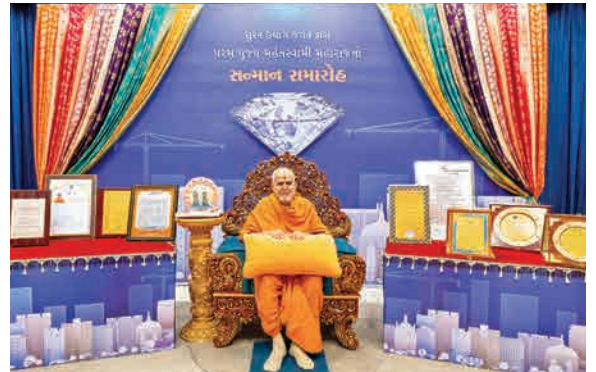
Swamishri sanctified certificates, medals and trophies for the child scholars. Both male and female children who had memorized a combined total of 880 *shlokas* from the two shastras had also completed a course on ‘Siddhant Sarvasvam’ conducted by BAPS Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya in Sarangpur.

In the evening assembly, the child scholars gave various recitation presentations before Swamishri, *sadguru* swamis and Mahamahopadhyaya

Bhadresh Swami. Their presentations on scriptural knowledge from both the shastras impressed and elicited generous applause from the audience. The male child scholars, who had graduated as Karikajayi, were honoured by swamis and the female scholars, Karikajayini, were honoured by leading female devotees.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the child scholars.

On 6 June, the devotees of Khandesh gave special presentations themed on ‘Khandesh ne Satsang na Range Rangvu Chhe’. Swamis gave inspiring speeches, and children and youths portrayed the satsang history of Khandesh through various performances. Kothari Anandjivan Swami engaged in a spiritual *goshthi* with Swamishri.



Swamishri honoured with various plaques and citations



Swamishri sanctifies *kalashes* and flagstaffs of Jodhpur mandir

8: Industrialists Honour Mahant Swami Maharaj

In the evening special assembly, hundreds of industrialists had gathered to honour Swamishri. In the beginning, swamis delivered inspiring speeches. Thereafter, youths welcomed Swamishri with a music band and a traditional welcome dance. Several industrialists spoke glowingly of Swamishri's life and work. They also presented proclamations to honour Swamishri. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the guests.

10: Pujan of Kalash and Flagstaffs of Jodhpur Mandir

Swamishri performed the Vedic *pujan* rituals of the *kalashes* and flagstaffs of the under-construction BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandir in Jodhpur. The devotees of Rajasthan sang bhajans in Swamishri's puja. The swamis serving in Rajasthan honoured Swamishri, the inspirer of the mandir, with a flower garland and an invitation card for the *murti-pratishtha* rituals.

Swamishri Performs the Murti-Pratishtha Pujan Rituals

Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of several BAPS *hari* mandirs during his stay in Surat. They are as follows:

Jamalpur (Navsari), Mogar (Anand), Kapodara (Surat), City Light (Surat), Rander (Surat) and Buhari (Valod); Athola, Chikhli and Baldevi (Selvas region); Dadva and Keriya (Gadhada region); and Shirpur and Karvand (Dhule region). Swamishri also performed *pujan* of the *yantras* to be placed under the *murtis* at the BAPS mandir in Ottawa, Canada.

15. Departure

During Swamishri's 73-day stay in Surat, many festivals, special days and other programmes were celebrated and presented.

In the evening, Swamishri departed for Bharuch amidst a warm farewell from thousands of devotees and well-wishers. Prior to Swamishri's departure, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami and Kothari Uttampriya Swami offered him a flower garland and prayed that he returns again at the earliest. ◆

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

Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Featured at the 19th World Sanskrit Conference

26–30 June 2025 , Kathmandu, Nepal



The World Sanskrit Conference is a prestigious international gathering dedicated to the Sanskrit language. Held every three years in different countries, the conference brings together thousands of scholars from around the globe to present research and engage in meaningful dialogue on Sanskrit language, literature, and philosophy.

This year, the 19th edition of the five-day conference was inaugurated by the President of Nepal. Reflecting Nepal's sacred connection to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the organizers dedicated a special session to the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan – the unique Vedantic philosophy revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

On 28 June, the special academic session on Akshar-Purushottam Darshan involved esteemed scholars from Nepal, India, the United States, China, Japan, and various European nations.

The session was chaired by Mahamahopadhyaya Swami Bhadrashdas, author of the Swaminarayan Bhashyas, a commentary on the Prasthanatrayi, and a globally recognized scholar of Vedanta. Many distinguished academics and institutional leaders graced the session, including:

1. Shri Kashinath Nyaupane – National Coordinator of the World Sanskrit Conference and

renowned scholar from Nepal

2. Prof. Srinivasa Varakhedi – Vice Chancellor, Central Sanskrit University, Delhi

3. Prof. Murli Manohar Pathak – Vice Chancellor, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University, Delhi

4. Prof. G.S. Murthy – Vice Chancellor, Central Sanskrit University, Tirupati

5. Prof. Bhagyesh Jha – Renowned Sanskrit scholar and former IAS officer

6. Prof. Sukanta Senapati – Vice Chancellor, Shree Somnath Sanskrit University, Gujarat

7. Prof. Rani Sadashiv Murthy – Vice Chancellor, Vedic University, Tirupati

8. Prof. Hareram Tripathi – Vice Chancellor, Kavikulaguru Kalidas Sanskrit University, Nagpur

9. Prof. Ramsevak Dubey – Vice Chancellor, Jagadguru Ramanandacharya Rajasthan Sanskrit University

10. Prof. Vijay Kumar C.G. – Vice Chancellor, Maharshi Panini Sanskrit & Vedic University, Ujjain

11. Prof. Ramnarayan Dwivedi – Secretary General, Kashi Vidvat Parishad

12. Dr. Sachchidanand Mishra – Member Secretary, Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR).

Representatives from several prominent Nepali organizations also attended, including Nepal Sanskrit University, Rashtriya Dharma Jagaran Abhiyan, Jayatu Sanskritam, Nepal Shikshan Parishad, Nepal Panchang Nirnayak Vikas Samiti, Nepal Pandit Mahasabha, Nepal Maharshi Vedic Foundation, and Valmiki Vidyapeeth.

A defining feature of this session was that the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, was formally introduced in Nepal to the scholarly community for the first time. On this historic occasion, Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj conveyed his blessings and prayers for the success of the entire conference through a heartfelt video message.

During the session, scholars presented research papers on various tenets of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. Topics and presenters included:

1. Prof. Dr Atmatrptdas Swami: A Study on the Composition Process of the Swaminarayan Bhashyas on the Prasthanatrayi in 21st Century Sanskrit Literature
2. Prof. Dr Aksharananddas Swami: The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan's Analysis of Dharma in the Bhagavad Gita
3. Prof. Acharya Brahmananddas Swami: The Concept of Divine Manifestation in Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Revealed by Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan
4. Prof. Dr Gnanatrptdas Swami: Akshar-Purushottam Darshan in the Vachanamrut of Bhagwan Swaminarayan
5. Prof. Dr Sagar Acharya: The Unified Philosophical Structure of the Swaminarayan Bhashyas on the Prasthanatrayi from the Perspective of Aksharbrahma
6. Prof. Acharya Tarun Dhola: A Study on the Brahma-Parabrahma Relationship According to Akshar-Purushottam Darshan
7. Prof. Acharya Harikrishna Pedhadiya: An Analysis of Brahma-Atma Unity in the Gita Bhashya of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan
8. Acharya Tejas Koria: A Comparative Study

of the Concept of Akshar in Vishishtadvaita and Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Based on the Bhagavad Gita.

In his keynote remarks, Prof. Srinivasa Varakhedi praised the Akshar-Purushottam Siddhant revealed by Parabrahma Bhagwan Swaminarayan as a distinct and original contribution to the Vedic philosophical tradition. He further announced that the Central Sanskrit University has formally incorporated the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan into its curriculum from this academic year.

In his concluding address, Mahamahopadhyaya Swami Bhadrashdas emphasized the sanctity of Nepal, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's journey, and the divine truths of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan he had shared with seekers. He also highlighted the unbroken flow of the Sanatan Vedic tradition, which continues to give rise to new insights and schools of thought over time.

He said, "Today, countless aspirants across the world are striving to internalize the principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. Leading scholars have recognized it as a unique and foundational contribution to Vedic Sanatan Dharma. Notably, numerous global universities are now offering courses and academic programmes focused on this school of thought, furthering its reach and scholarly exploration."

To commemorate this occasion, Shri Kashinath Nyaupane, National Coordinator of the World Sanskrit Conference, formally declared, "Today, we in Nepal joyfully welcome, honour, and establish the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan."

Thus, the special session on Akshar-Purushottam Darshan at the 19th World Sanskrit Conference became a memorable occasion – both from the perspective of Vedantic philosophy and the sacred bond between Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the spiritual land of Nepal. ♦



INDIA

YUVA JNANSATRAS 2025

4 May to 8 June 2025



During their summer vacations, a total of 850 *yuvaks* and 860 *yuvatis* participated in the 7-day Yuva Jnansatras conducted at 19 BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandirs across Gujarat and Maharashtra. The youths attending the Jnansatras stayed at the mandir for seven days and engaged in various activities as per the schedule designed by the Satsang Pravrutti Central Office in Ahmedabad.

These included guidance and training on Vachanamrut study, spiritual discourse preparations, *mukhpath*, story narration, public speaking and other practical topics.

Enlightening discourses, workshops and discussions by sadhus and volunteers on the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*, inspiring stories of devotees and a variety of spiritual topics imparted invaluable lessons. Furthermore, interviews with dedicated volunteers and senior devotees guided and inspired the youths towards incorporating devotion and service in their daily lives.

Also, through videos and Q&A sessions, the youths experienced the divine presence and guidance of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

In addition to the daily knowledge-based sessions, the youths engaged in *seva* activities

and sports.

After six days of in-depth learning at the mandirs, the seventh day involved a one-day rural satsang outreach, in which all the youths visited nearby villages, building rapport with local devotees. The youths also conducted de-addiction camps, inspiring many to give up addictions.

YUVA SHIBIR: 'DHANYA DHANYA MAMA JIVAN'

15–18 May 2025, Sankari



More than 1,150 youths from Vadodara participated in the four-day Yuva Shibir based on the theme 'Dhanya Dhanya Mama Jivan'.

On 15 May, in Sankari, speeches by learned and experienced swamis guided the youths on *prapti* (spiritual attainments), *niyams* and dharma, restraint and discretion in using social media, understanding the all-doership of Bhagwan, and other topics. The *shibir* theme was further elaborated on through workshops, skits, videos, quizzes, and other activities.

The highlight of the *shibir* was the kirtan bhakti and Q&A with Mahant Swami Maharaj during puja darshan at Surat Akshardham on 16 May.

During the Darshan Yatra on 16 and 17 May, the youths visited Navsari, Silvassa and Tithal mandirs, where they learnt about the history of each mandir.

As a result of this *shibir*, the youths pledged

to observe social media discretion and restraint, maintain a pure vegetarian diet, attend their weekly local youth assembly, daily read satsang literature and other *niyams*.

PRAMUKH VISION CONFERENCE 15–21 May 2025, Vidyanaagar



BAPS Pramukh Academy organized two 3-day training conferences to provide college and school students guidance on preparing for UPSC and GPSC examinations candidates.

Based on the theme ‘Igniting the Leader Within’, the conferences provided subject-wise guidance from experienced officers and teachers, and motivation from BAPS swamis to remain committed to reaching their set goals.

The conferences featured various activities, workshops, and interviews with present and former government officers that provided the delegates practical guidance. They also received valuable guidance on using technology and developing their writing and reasoning skills.

CULTURAL FESTIVAL OF DEVELOPED INDIA 19–24 May 2025, BAPS Mandir, Anand



A six-day ‘Cultural Festival of Developed India’ commemorated the Silver Jubilee of the BAPS Mandir in Anand.

Based on former President APJ Abdul Kalam’s five points for Vision 2020 for a developed India and the sixth point, ‘Faith in God and Spirituality’, suggested to him by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, exhibitions and conferences were organized over the six days.

Thousands of attendees received guidance through the Youth Conference, Farmers’ Conference on the topic of ‘Green and White Revolution’, and Professionals’ Conference on the theme ‘One Vision, One Nation’. The exhibitions presented information about India’s rich history and development. A blood donation drive was also organized during the festival.

The celebrations featured enlightening discourses by BAPS swamis, as well as nightly light and sound shows and inspiring cultural programmes.

Many dignitaries, including local MLAs and social leaders, attended the various programmes.

INAUGURATION OF BAPS VIDYAMANDIR 24 May 2025, Jamnagar



The Vedic inauguration rituals of the new BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir in Jamnagar was performed by Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami in the presence of Jnaneshwar Swami, cabinet ministers Shri Raghavjibhai Patel and Shri Mulubhai Bera, other BAPS swamis and dignitaries, and over 7,600 devotees and well-wishers.

KARYAKAR TALIM KENDRA

1–8 June 2025, Sarangpur



In 2024, as part of the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav, Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurated the Karyakar Talim Kendra (Volunteer Training Centre) at the BAPS Mandir in Sarangpur to help train BAPS volunteers to perform their *seva* duties more effectively.

This year, in the presence of Pujya Viveksagar Swami, around 150 male volunteers and 50 female volunteers from various parts of India received training from learned and experienced sadhus. The training included guidance on public speaking, compering, music coordination, and networking. Volunteers also engaged in group discussions on practical topics.

SIDDHANT SARVASVAM SHIBIR: NAKKAR VIDWAN

2–4 June 2025, Sankari



On June 2 and 3, 71 boys and 103 girls who have memorized the Siddhant Karika, participated in the Siddhant Sarvasvam Shibir at the BAPS Mandir in Sankari. Based on Mahant Swami Maharaj's inspirational letter to the children, the

central theme of the *shibir* was 'Nakkar Vidwan'.

The *shibir* focused on four key points: understanding the meanings of the *shlokas*, comprehending the Akshar-Purushottam Siddhant, explaining the Akshar-Purushottam Siddhant to others, and strengthening personal practice of *niyam-dharma* and satsang understanding.

These topics were covered through enlightening talks by swamis, interactive activities, engaging workshops, and creative presentations. The children also participated in discussions and Q&A sessions with senior swamis, gaining inspiration for academic and spiritual progress.

On 4 June, the children had Swamishri's puja darshan in Kanad, Surat, during which they recited *shlokas*. Throughout the day, the children participated in an Akshar-Purushottam Chhavani in which they presented on various topics related to the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

In the evening assembly, Swamishri blessed the children through a fascinating Q&A session. Also, the Karikajayi boys and Karikajayini girls were honoured. Additionally, those who achieved top ranks in the Siddhant Sarvasvam course were recognized.

BAPS HOSTS TALKPODS LECTURE

6 June 2025, Mumbai



Over 500 distinguished guests, representing many age groups, attended the fourth TalkPods lecture, which was hosted by BAPS Mumbai, in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami.

Renowned industrialist, Shri Chandubhai Virani, MD of the Balaji Group, shared his

inspiring journey from humble beginnings to business success, emphasizing empathy, people-first leadership, and the importance of spiritual grounding in today's fast-changing business world. He fondly recalled seeking the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj before commencing each factory and shared how Doctor Swami constantly inspired him to aim higher in his entrepreneurial journey.

Pujya Doctor Swami also addressed the gathering, sharing heart-touching and motivating stories of youths he has met who have defied the odds to achieve spiritual and societal success.

The event concluded with an engaging Q&A session that left attendees spiritually enriched and inspired.

BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER OFFERS PRAYERS AT SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

13 June 2025, Gandhinagar



The British High Commissioner to India, Lindy Cameron, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar, where she offered heartfelt prayers for the victims of the flight AI171 tragedy.

She was warmly received by BAPS representatives and taken on a guided tour of the Akshardham complex.

During her visit, High Commissioner Cameron also acknowledged the courage and dedication of the first responders, rescue teams, and local communities who played a vital role in the aftermath of the incident.

BAPS PARTICIPATES IN BHARATEEYA SANTA MAHAA PARISHAD

16 June 2025, Bengaluru



To enhance coordination between the various denominations of Sanatan Dharma, over 1,000 spiritual heads, saints, *acharyas*, and mahatmas from India and across the globe attended the Bharateeya Santa Mahaa Parishad (BSMP). This historic gathering took place in the esteemed presence of: Jagadguru Shri Shankar Vi Jayendra Saraswati Swami Gal (Head, Jagadguru Kanchi Kamakoti Peeth); Jagadguru Ramanandacharya & Swami Rambhadracharya; Jagadguru Sri Sri Varatri Deshi Kendra Mahaswamiji (Jagadguru Sri Veerasimhasan Mahasansthan Math, Suttur Srikshetra); Acharya Shri Govinddev Giri Maharaj (Treasurer, Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust); Sri Sri Swayam Prakash Sachchidanand Saraswati Mahaswamiji (Sri Adi Shankaracharya Sarada Lakshminarayan Singh Peetham); Sri Sri Sri Dr Nirmalanandanath Mahaswamiji (Sri Adi Chunchanagiri Mahasansthan Math); Sri Vishweshwara Tirtha Shri Ramnath Swamiji (Pejawar Math); HH Sadguru Bodhinatha Veylanaswamy Swamiji (Kauai Hindu Monastery, Hawaii, USA); Sri Masilamani Desi Gyan Sambandh Swamigal (Dharmapuram Adheenam, Mayiladuthurai, Tamil Nadu); Jain Acharya Shri Lokesh Muni Ji (Founder, Ahimsa Vishwa Bharati & World Peace Center, New Delhi); Sri Sri Sri Jayendra Puri Mahaswamiji (Padsevak Peethadhipati, Shri Kailash Ashram Mahasansthan, Bengaluru).

On behalf of BAPS, Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadrashdas Swami attended the BSMP. During his

address at the inaugural ceremony, he highlighted the invaluable contributions of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj to society and Sanatan Dharma. He emphasized the three key pillars of Indian culture as taught by Pramukh Swami Maharaj: Mandir, Shastra, and Sant. He also conveyed Mahant Swami Maharaj's heartfelt prayers for the preservation, nourishment, and flourishing of Vedic Sanatan Dharma and the great long-term success of the BSMP.

Prior to the Parishad, on the evening of 15 June, Bhadreshdas Swami met Pujya Jayendrapuri Mahaswamiji of Rajarajeshwari Temple, Bengaluru, who appreciated BAPS's global efforts toward the propagation of Sanatan Dharma.

Then, on 16 June, during the main inauguration, Bhadreshdas Swami met Jagadguru Shri Shankaracharya, who fondly recalled the divine lives and contributions of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, and also lauded the work of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

UK & EUROPE

AKHAND DHUN: ANNUAL PRAYERS FOR PEACE, HARMONY, AND SUCCESS

20 April 2025, BAPS Mandir, Wellingborough



Devotees from across the UK gathered to offer heartfelt prayers for global peace and well-being during the 41st Akhand Dhun, a day-long continuous prayer tradition that began in 1984.

Throughout the day, devotees engaged in continuous chanting, *pradakshinas*, darshan, and *seva* to pay their respects at the Akshar Deri shrine within the mandir.

In his letter of blessings, Mahant Swami Maharaj highlighted the spiritual legacy of the Akshar Deri, a gift from Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and offered his heartfelt prayers for the health, peace, and prosperity of all.

LIFE-ENHANCING SEMINARS BY JNANVATSALDAS SWAMI

3 May to 8 June 2025, Europe



Jnanvatsaldas Swami delivered 20 presentations at BAPS mandirs and other venues across 12 European countries – Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland – on topics such as ‘Think Different, Be Different, Succeed Different’, ‘Stress Management’, ‘The Attitude Factor’, ‘To Serve is Life’, and ‘My Family, Happy Family’.

The topics allowed attendees to receive practical guidance on how to tackle contemporary challenges currently being faced by individuals and families in both their personal lives as well as their professional careers.

Drawing from the life, work and wisdom of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, Jnanvatsaldas Swami spoke emphatically, inspiring people towards personal integrity, family values, ethical leadership, community service, and global harmony.

NEASDEN TEMPLE PARTNERS WITH BRITISH MUSEUM

19 May 2025 to 19 October 2025, London

On 19 May, the British Museum opened a



major new exhibition, titled *Ancient India: living traditions*, exploring the origins and evolution of Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist sacred art dating back over 2,000 years.

In curating this exhibition, the British Museum collaborated closely with cultural experts, academics, and a diverse group of community partners. Among these consultants was BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden, London. Neasden Temple and the British Museum share a longstanding relationship, having previously collaborated on the Museum's Celebrating Diwali event in 2022 and an interfaith music festival in 2018.

Curators, designers, and planners from the British Museum visited Neasden Temple to learn about devotional practices, sacred iconography, and the respectful display of living religious traditions. These insights helped inspire various elements of the exhibition and its design.

At the exhibition inauguration, BAPS representatives chanted Sanskrit verses and offered prayers invoking peace, harmony, and universal well-being. The evening was presided over by the Chair of the British Museum's Trustees, Rt Hon George Osborne CH, who emphasized the exhibition's significance and collaborative spirit in which it was created.

Sushma Jansari, the exhibition's curator, reflected on the unique continuity and influence of these living traditions, "We were so lucky to have been welcomed to the beautiful Neasden Temple. We came with our designers, lighting designer, graphic designer, at the very start of this project, thinking about what a sacred space looks like and

feels like. How does it impact how you venerate and how you feel inside a sacred space? I think what's really very special is that these are living traditions and when you go to places like Neasden Temple, and you go into the mandir, you will see these incredible figures of God being venerated and you'll see them being dressed, you'll see them being garlanded with fresh flowers – and if you think about the ancient past, that's pretty much exactly what people would have done to the incredible ancient sculptures on display in the exhibition."

BAPS 10K CHARITY CHALLENGE 2025

8 June & 3 August 2025



More than 3,000 people of all ages and backgrounds came together at 20 BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu mandirs and centres around the UK to participate in the annual BAPS 10K Charity Challenge.

The 2025 Challenge also supported BAPS's national charity partner, Children With Cancer UK, which is the country's leading childhood cancer charity.

Individual mandirs and centres also supported local charities, making a tangible difference in their local communities.

NORTH AMERICA

BAPS CELEBRATES CULTURAL HERITAGE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AT TEXAS STATE CAPITOL **2 April 2025, Austin, TX**

BAPS representatives joined public officials and civic leaders at the Texas State Capitol's Legislative Conference Center in Austin for 'Strength in Unity:



Elevating Texas Together Day'

Throughout the day, attendees celebrated the rich heritage of India. BAPS volunteers met Texas State Representatives, Senators, and legislative staff members to share how BAPS-led initiatives in health, education, and disaster relief are positively impacting communities across Texas.

Texas House of Representatives adopted a resolution honouring April 2 as 'Strength in Unity: Elevating Texas Together Day.' Legislators appreciated BAPS's long-standing contributions to the state, commending its role in fostering faith, family values, and a commitment to selfless service. Leaders praised BAPS volunteers for setting an example in civic responsibility and compassion through community outreach, food drives, educational initiatives, and humanitarian relief efforts.

In the evening programme, speakers shared reflections on the importance of preserving culture while contributing to society. Texas State Representative Matt Shaheen (District 66) said, "BAPS has a great history of community service dedicated to peace and harmony. It strives to care for society, families, and individuals, making a positive impact in Texas."

BAPS HINDU MANDIR IN ABU DHABI HIGHLIGHTED AT TEDx

2 May 2025, Tampa, FL

The BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi took center stage at TEDx Tampa, as Brahmaviharidas Swami addressed a sold-out audience of over 1,000 delegates.

He elaborated on how simple, everyday conversations have the power to shape history, and the timeless messages of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 'In the joy of others lies our own', and Mahant Swami Maharaj, who often says, 'You only live when you give'.

Among the other distinguished speakers at TEDx Tampa were: John Couris, CEO of Tampa General Hospital; Laurel Lee, U.S. Congresswoman for Florida's 15th District; Rhea Law, President of the University of South Florida; Bawa Jain, Secretary General of the World Council of Religious Leaders; Michael Stephens, CEO of Tampa International Airport; Dan Toomey, investigative journalist and founder of 'Good Work'; Randall Kaplan, founder and former CEO of Akamai Technologies; Tim DeKay, acclaimed actor, director, and producer; and Wardah Inam, CEO of Overjet AI and a pioneer in dental artificial intelligence.

Prominent media representatives from FOX, ABC, NBC, PBS, and other major outlets were in attendance, capturing the energy and power of the event. In addition, more than 25 digital content creators, including national commentators, and Tampa-based creative voices, amplified the event's message across social media platforms, reaching tens of thousands in real time and far beyond the auditorium walls.

BAPS SWAMIS VISIT THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

18 June 2025, Utah

A delegation of BAPS swamis and volunteers were hosted by the global headquarters of The



Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) in Salt Lake City, Utah.

After a tour of several key Church sites, Brahnaviharidas Swami and the delegation met the First Presidency – the highest governing body of the LDS Church. They met President Dallin H. Oaks and President Henry B. Eyring. Other senior Church leaders present included Elder David A. Bednar and Elder Patrick Kearon of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; Elder Anthony D. Perkins, President of the Middle East/Africa North Area; and Elder Matthew S. Holland, Executive Director of the Church Communication Department.

With deep mutual respect, the dialogue focused on promoting global harmony, peace, and service to foster a more compassionate and unified world. The conversation highlighted common values and discussed ongoing humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts led by both faith communities. The leaders also discussed the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi as a shining example of tolerance and unity.

Brahnaviharidas Swami conveyed the vision and guidance of Mahant Swami Maharaj, who has consistently emphasized the importance of expanding the circle of global harmony through faith, dialogue, and selfless service.

BAPS EXECUTIVE FORUM

21 June 2025, BAPS Mandir, San Jose, CA

Senior technology leaders from across the San Francisco Bay Area convened for the BAPS Executive Forum, which provided a unique opportunity for executives to connect with



like-minded peers, reflect on purpose-driven leadership, and draw inspiration for personal and professional growth.

Brahnaviharidas Swami delivered the evening's keynote, on the theme "Value Added Life – Leading with Values, Thriving with Purpose" deeply resonated with the audience. He shared powerful insights through stories from his close experiences with visionary leaders such as Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahant Swami Maharaj, and former President of India Dr APJ Abdul Kalam.

As the evening concluded, many leaders shared that they left feeling spiritually renewed, thoughtful about their own journey, and newly inspired to lead with greater purpose.

This unique forum highlighted the growing recognition that in a world increasingly driven by technology, it is timeless human values that remain the most enduring force behind thriving teams, organizations, and lives.

AFRICA

MURTI-PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV

19–20 April 2025

BAPS Mandir, Mzuzu, Malawi



In Sarangpur, on 22 April 2024, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the mandir.

Subsequently, two days of celebrations marked the inauguration of the new mandir in Mzuzu in the presence of BAPS swamis.

On the morning of 19 April 2025, the Vastuhom (ritual purification of the building) and Prasad Pravesh (ceremonial entry) were performed.

In the afternoon, the *murtis* were honoured in a grand procession through the main streets of Mzuzu. The procession was flagged off by the city's Mayor, Mr. Kondwani Bryan Nyasulu, who also walked at the forefront throughout the entire procession. At the end of the procession, the local council named the approximately 1.5-kilometre road circling the BAPS mandir as 'Pramukh Swami Road'. The plaque was unveiled by the Mayor, City Council CEO, and Indian Ambassador Mr. Gopalakrishnan.

In the evening assembly, swamis and youths presented a programme of devotional songs. Also, after addresses by the local police chief and the Mayor, the youths performed a drama titled 'Small Country, Great Compassion,' commemorating the grace of the Gunatit gurus on Malawi.

On the morning of 20 April 2025, the Vedic rituals to install the *murtis* were performed by Yagneshwar Swami, Nikhilesh Swami, and Priyavrat Swami in the presence of hundreds of devotees from Malawi, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, UK, India, and other countries.

In the assembly held on this occasion, Indian Ambassador Mr. Gopalakrishnan highlighted the need for mandirs as havens for preserving and promoting Sanatan Dharma. Yagneshwar Swami also spoke eloquently on the benefits of mandirs in society.

The assembly concluded with the blessings of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj specially sent for this occasion.

UNITY FORUM 2025

7 June 2025, BAPS Mandir,
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania



Representatives from 33 Dharmik Indian communities attended the Unity Forum 2025 organized by BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, Tanzania, to celebrate cultural and spiritual harmony. Uniting under the theme 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – The World Is One Family', the event was a powerful reminder of the shared heritage and values that bind together these communities living abroad, and emphasized the importance of unity in preserving and celebrating Indic traditions globally.

The evening commenced with a spiritually uplifting performance by young children reciting prayers. Thereafter, revered swamis and respected community members, Kumarbhai Pujara, Malharbhai Dave, and Hirenbhai Chandarana, lit the ceremonial lamp.

Then, Tyagvatsal Swami spoke eloquently on the joy and responsibility of living one's culture even when far from its geographical roots. He stressed that unity is the foundation of collective success and inner peace, highlighting the timeless wisdom of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In his address, Priyavrat Swami reflected on the visible unity of the Hindu community in Tanzania. He noted with joy how nearly all Hindu temples in Dar es Salaam are situated in close proximity and how devotees of various communities come together to celebrate each other's festivals with enthusiasm and mutual support. He emphasized that such unity is not only a source of strength today, but also a precious value that must be

passed on to future generations for the continued growth and harmony of the community.

Malharbhai Dave, President of the Hindu Council of Tanzania, addressed the gathering with gratitude, expressing appreciation for the initiative taken by BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha to bring together so many communities to strengthen spiritual and cultural bonds across all Indic traditions. Kumarbhai Pujara, Chairman of BAPS, Dar es Salaam, delivered a heartfelt Vote of Thanks to all the communities for their wholehearted support during the Dar es Salaam Mandir Mahotsav held in December 2024.

GULF COUNTRIES

GCC SATSANG SHIBIR: PRAPTI – TODAY, EVERYDAY

30–31 March 2025

BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi, UAE



Around 1,000 devotees, including 130 children and 77 teenagers, from across the Gulf Region attended the two-day Satsang Shibir at the BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi. Themed ‘Prapti – Today, Everyday’, the *shibir* provided a practical roadmap to integrate the practice of ‘Prapti no Vichar – Realization of Attainment’ in their daily lives.

The *shibir* was presented in four sections: Attainment, Commitment, Engagement, and Fulfillment.

In the group discussions, devotees discussed challenges, shared practical solutions, and discovered personalized engagement techniques.

During the *shibir*, children, teenagers, and youths attended tailored sessions on the same theme, with

teambuilding activities, treasure hunts, scavenger hunts, letter writing, and other engaging activities.

The *shibir* provided clarity and determination to the participants, equipping them with the tools, confidence, and devotion to make ‘Prapti no Vichar’ a daily habit.

VISITORS TO BAPS HINDU MANDIR, ABU DHABI, UAE

Swami Kailashanand Giri Ji Maharaj, Niranjan Peethadheeshwar

20 April 2025



Swami Kailashanand Giri ji Maharaj, Neeranjan Peethadheeshwar Shree Shree 1008 Acharya Mahamandaleshwar, was welcomed with traditional honour by Swami Brahmviharidas and sadhus.

During his visit, Swamiji toured the mandir complex and observed its divine architecture, intricate carvings, and peaceful spiritual atmosphere. He was deeply moved by the devotion, discipline, and dedication with which the mandir had been created. Swamiji offered his respects at the sanctum sanctorum and appreciated the mandir as a vibrant symbol of Sanatan Dharma outside India.

Swamiji reflected on the mandir’s role in sharing Indian culture, values, and spirituality with the world. He praised the vision and blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Swamiji also participated in the *abhishek* ritual and joined devotees and visitors in the Ganga Arti.

Sharing his joy, Swamiji expressed that the mandir stands as a testament to faith and unity. Beyond being a source of pride for Sanatan

Dharma, the mandir also reflects the spirit of global peace and harmony, a message that will inspire countless hearts across the world and serve as a symbol of respect and pride for the leadership and people of the UAE.

Shri Vikram Misri, India's Foreign Secretary 10 June 2025



Foreign Secretary of India, Shri Vikram Misri, accompanied by Aseem Raja Mahajan, Joint Secretary for Gulf Affairs, Ambassador Sanjay Sudhir and members of his delegation, was welcomed with a sanctified garland at the Harmony Wall by Brahmavihari Swami.

During the visit, Shri Misri was deeply touched by the mandir's thoughtful symbolism and ornate craftsmanship. Within the mandir sanctum, he offered reverent prayers at the seven inner shrines.

Expressing his feelings, he said, "I have had a thousand blessings today. This is not just a building; it is an expression of faith, beliefs, and ideas that are transcendental. The Mandir unites not just different streams of faith but the entire humanity. This is a mandir every Indian must visit."

Shri Misri commended the engineering, architectural brilliance and values of the mandir, describing the mandir as "a global symbol of interfaith harmony and cultural dialogue."

ASIA PACIFIC

GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF AUSTRALIA VISITS BAPS MANDIR

24 May 2025, Canberra, Australia

Her Excellency, Honourable Sam Mostyn AC,



Governor-General of Australia, accompanied by her husband Mr. Simeon Beckett SC, were traditionally welcomed with garlands and tying of *nadachhadis* at the BAPS Mandir in Canberra.

After a guided tour of the mandir by youth volunteers Her Excellency performed *abhishek* of the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni.

In the assembly hall, over 200 people warmly welcomed the Governor-General. During her speech, Her Excellency shared personal reflections, describing the mandir visit as a transformative experience. She noted the remarkable generosity displayed by the community's youths, emphasizing their selfless contributions, "I was so moved about the sacrifices of time and resources that brought this Mandir to life. Sacrificing birthday presents – that says so much about giving at a young age."

Before leaving, Her Excellency warmly engaged with community members, reflecting mutual respect and understanding.

BAPS CHARITIES

ANNUAL BAPS CHARITIES WALK-RUN

1 June 2025, North America



In support of this year's 'Spirit of Service'

theme, more than 45,000 devotees in 100 cities participated in the annual BAPS Charities Walk-Run. This nationwide initiative allowed each city to support causes that mattered most to their communities. This year, the Walk-Run supported over 50 local organizations – from fire and police departments to groups serving veterans, seniors, women, and the homeless. More than 20 health-focused nonprofits also benefited, including those advancing mental health, cancer care, and family wellness. Several schools and education programmes received support as well, underscoring how the Walk continues to make a meaningful impact in neighbourhoods across the country.

Over the past 20 years, BAPS Charities has organized more than 1,100 Walk-Runs across North America, empowering everyday citizens to become changemakers and contribute constructively to a vast network of civic engagement.

RESET & REIGNITE: CHAMPIONING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH DIALOGUE

5 June 2025, USIU-A, Nairobi, Kenya



BAPS Charities hosted Reset & Reignite, a youth-centred mental health talk show at United States International University – Africa (USIU-Africa) in Nairobi. The event brought together students, professionals, and educators for an afternoon of meaningful conversation around mental health, resilience, and value-based living.

The event was attended by over 150 participants, including USIU-Africa students, BAPS Charities volunteers, and members of faculty, most notably the Chair of the School of

Business and the University's Head Counsellor.

Designed to empower youth through open and honest dialogue, Reset & Reignite featured speeches on managing emotional struggles, overcoming addictions, prioritizing mental well-being, and living a life rooted in purpose and integrity. Also, a panel discussion with the speakers provided students with practical takeaway messages.

The event reflected BAPS Charities' continued commitment to promoting mental wellness and fostering meaningful conversations among youth.

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS CONFERENCE

12–15 June 2025, Houston, TX



The inaugural BAPS Charities Healthcare Professionals Conference (HPC25) brought together 1,150 delegates from more than 30 healthcare disciplines to advance not only clinical knowledge but also to rediscover the heart of why they entered healthcare. The conference featured 9 breakout tracks, more than 60 speakers and facilitators, and offered up to 14 continuing education (CE/CME) credits across multiple specialties. Guided by the theme 'Enrich, Explore, Empower', the conference offered a dynamic blend of scientific rigour, meaningful dialogue, and soulful reflection.

In addition to the plenary sessions, HPC25 hosted specialty-specific breakout tracks tailored to the interests and needs of attendees.

Each session aligned with the theme to help professionals elevate both their clinical impact and personal growth.

Sessions under the Enrich theme focused on

aligning career, family, and personal values.

The Explore track featured CE-accredited sessions across diverse topics.

The Empower track spotlighted purpose-driven leadership, encouraging delegates to elevate others while staying anchored in compassion and integrity.

In his keynote address, Jason Glover, CEO of Memorial Hermann TMC, emphasized the importance of human connectedness in care delivery, sharing his personal philosophy grounded in the “Four L’s”: Love, Learn, Little things matter, and Larger than each of us. His message underscored that technology and systems should always elevate the human experience, not overshadow it.

Delegates also learned about service-based internships and global outreach programmes in India. These initiatives reaffirmed BAPS Charities’ commitment to applying professional skills for humanitarian good, creating channels for volunteers to serve through meaningful projects around the world.

ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES DONATED TO BRITONS COMMUNITY SCHOOL

24 June 2025, Nairobi, Kenya



BAPS Charities in Nairobi continued its support for grassroots organizations by donating

supplies to Britons Community and Orphanage School located in Mukuru Kwa Njenga slums. The school, established in 2009, provides education and care to vulnerable children, many of whom have gone on to join high schools and universities despite difficult beginnings.

To assist their efforts, BAPS Charities donated a range of essential food, sanitary, insect protection and stationery supplies. Geoffrey Onchieku, who leads the school’s programmes, expressed sincere gratitude and emphasized the positive impact this support will have on the children’s education and daily well-being.

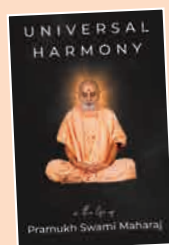
NATIONWIDE BLOOD DONATION DRIVE

29 June 2025, Kenya



BAPS Charities chapters across Kenya in Bomet, Eldoret, Kakamega, Kericho, Kerugoya, Kisumu, Mombasa, Nyali (Mombasa), Nairobi (BAPS), Nairobi (South C), Nakuru, Narok and Thika conducted a blood donation drive, collecting 751 pints of blood.

Over the years, BAPS Charities has partnered with the Kenya Tissue and Transplant Authority (KTTA) to organize nationwide blood donation drives, helping save lives and support communities as well as hospitals across Kenya. ◆



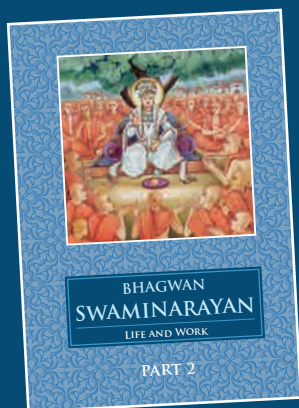
UNIVERSAL HARMONY: In the Life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

New Aksharpith
Publication

An overview of the legacy of harmony described in the shastras of Sanatan Hindu Dharma, followed by its practical application by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his spiritual successors. The book explores in detail 34 compelling facets of universal harmony reflected in the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Author: Sadhu Mukundcharandas

NEW AKSHARPITH PUBLICATIONS



BHAGWAN SWAMINARAYAN

LIFE AND WORK

PART 2

Includes outstanding aspects of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's life:

Raghunathdas opposes Bhagwan Swaminarayan

Paramahansa *diksha* to 500 sadhus

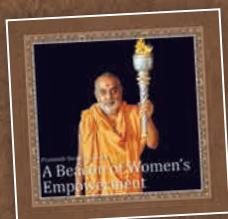
18 village chiefs become sadhus on one letter

Lalji Suthar becomes Nishkulanand Swami

Glory of Mulji Sharma as Aksharbrahma

And many more interesting stories...

Gujarati Text: Shri H.T. Dave
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas



Pramukh Swami Maharaj

A BEACON OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

An overview of how Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and supported the women's activities in BAPS, continuing the tradition of women's uplift initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Translation: Sejal Patel, London, UK

Pramukh Swami Maharaj

AN UNPARALLELED SERVANT OF GOD

An insight into how Pramukh Swami Maharaj always kept Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his gurus in the forefront of whatever he did. He served and worshipped them with servitude and humility.

Translation: Neha Patel, Luton, UK



AN IDEAL OF GURU BHAKTI

A memorable collection of incidents depicting the guru bhakti of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who lived his life as an ideal devotee despite being a guru revered and loved by millions.

Translation: Meha Patel, Cambridge, UK

IMMORTAL LETTERS OF COMPASSION AND DIVINITY

Pramukh Swami Maharaj reached out to countless devotees and people to alleviate or resolve their problems, dilemmas, sufferings and pain. His letters are documents of his fathomless compassion and divinity.

Translation: Yagnesh Patel, London, UK



Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad ♦ Available on baps.store & at BAPS bookstores (India)

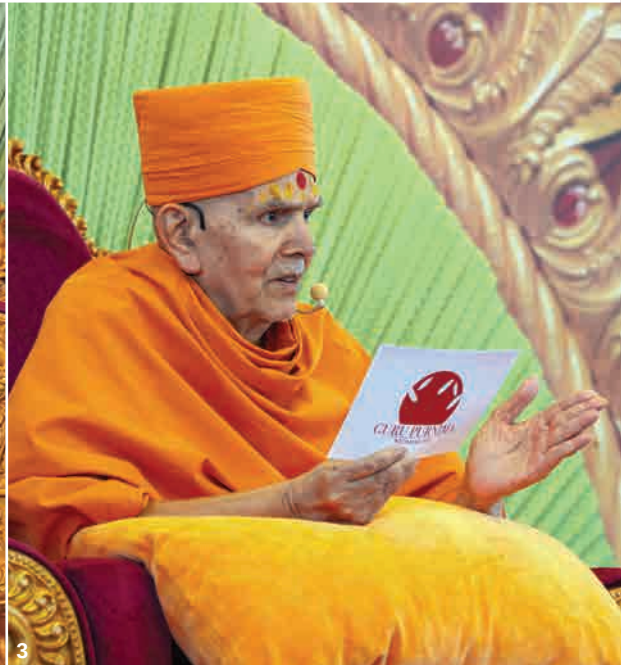


**AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM NAKKAR VIDWAN
FELICITATION ASSEMBLY,
4 June 2025, Surat**

Balaks and *balikas* who have memorized the Satsang Diksha and Siddhant Karika were presented 'Akshar-Purushottam Nakkar Vidwan' awards.

1. *Balaks* with Swamishri and Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.
2. *Balaks* recite Sanskrit verses.
3. Group photo of Akshar-Purushottam Nakkar Vidwan *balaks* with Swamishri.
4. Swamishri sanctifies a trophy.





GURU PURNIMA CELEBRATION, 10 July 2025, Bochasan

1. Youths joyously perform a traditional dance. 2. Swamishri honoured with a garland. 3. Swamishri blesses the assembly. 4. Around 65,000 devotees attended the celebration.

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