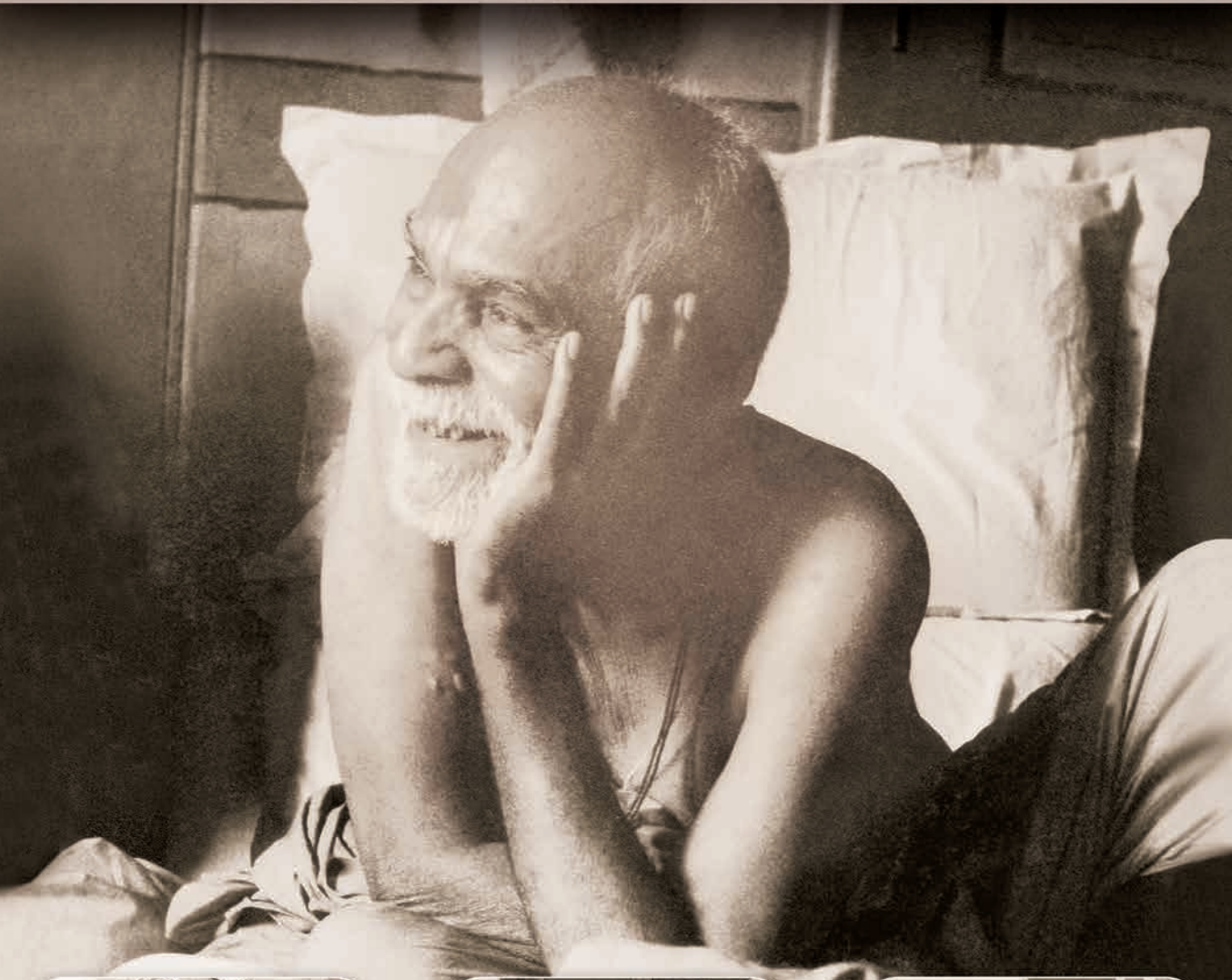


SWAMINARAYAN **BLISS**

May-June 2025

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Yogiji Maharaj's Innate Divine Joy



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ CELEBRATES PUSHPADOLOTSAV, SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA (15 MARCH 2025)

1. On the occasion of Pushpadolotsav, Swamishri welcomes the Prime Minister of Australia, Hon. Anthony Albanese, in the new BAPS Mandir precinct.
2. Swamishri sprays thousands of devotees with sanctified saffron-scented water on the grounds of the new BAPS Mandir.



Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

May–June 2025, Vol. 48, No. 3

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Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas

Contributors: Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

Designer: Sadhu Shrijiwarupdas

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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.



Shri Hari at Sayajirao Gaekwad's Palace

After a grand welcome procession on the streets of Vadodara, Shri Hari was led by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad to his palace. The Maharaja's minister and adviser – the diwan – was absent in the royal court, and was making plans to capture Shri Hari...

I'VE NOT BEEN BORN TO SIT ON ROYAL THRONES

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad led Shri Hari to his royal hall, followed by the senior swamis and Kathi Darbars. The king brought Maharaj before his royal throne and urged, “Prabhu, please sit on this throne and sanctify it.”

Shri Hari smiled and touched his foot on the throne to sanctify it. Then, Maharaj explained, “Honourable king, I have not been born to sit on royal thrones. However, I've come to enhance the importance of royal thrones, so that kings carry forward the ideals of Ram *rajya* and inspire citizens to abide by dharma in order to become happy. I've taught my devotees there is bliss in remembering and meditating on Bhagwan, and not in having the royal comforts and joys of infinite *brahmands*.”

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad was astonished by Shri Hari's words. He felt Maharaj lived a life untouched and aloof from the world because he was Bhagwan. In addition, he also observed that Maharaj taught his devotees to live like lotuses in a pond. This was the essence of his greatness and therein lay his godliness and divine powers.

TRUE GREATNESS LIES IN GHANSHYAM'S ASSOCIATION

The Maharaja brought Shri Hari to his mandir. A beautiful seat had been prepared in advance for him. Shri Hari bowed to the deities and sat on his seat. The king performed *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Hari, and gifted clothes embellished with designs of expensive threads. He also gave silk clothes, valuable shawls and a variety of scrumptious foods to Shriji Maharaj. Rampratapbhai and Ichchharam were with Shri Hari; both the brothers witnessed his glory and greatness. When they were in Chhapaiya and Ayodhya they had failed to comprehend the divinity of Ghanshyam's childhood *lila*. However, ever since their arrival in Gujarat, they had witnessed the boundless glory of their brother, Shri Hari. They also experienced that he was Bhagwan. Both the brothers felt that if Ghanshyam had not invited them to Gujarat, they would not have realized his greatness in spite of their brotherly relationship. They were joyful today for having seen Ghanshyam's divinity. The two brothers and their families understood that their true greatness lay in their association with Ghanshyam.

Then, Shri Hari came to the royal assembly, where everyone had taken their designated seats. Shri Hari's armed *parshads* stood close to him. The king had also stationed his armed guards appropriately in the royal hall. First, Shri Hari glanced at the assembly and broke into a faint smile. He asked the king, "Why is your diwan's (principal minister's) chair empty? The diwan is the pride of any kingdom. He should be present on such an occasion."

Maharaja Sayajirao perceived Shri Hari wished to give advice to his diwan. He thus instantly told Narupant Nana, a high-ranking official, to inform the diwan to come immediately to the royal court. Narupant Nana knew that the diwan was distraught from the day the Maharaja had invited Shri Hari.

The Suba of Kathiawad was known as Vitthalrao Subaji Babaji. From the day he was appointed as Suba, he nursed an intense hatred for Shri Hari. He had made several attempts to capture him, but failed miserably on each count. Now that he was the diwan of Vadodara, he wielded more authority and power. Subsequently, his determination to capture Shri Hari had intensified. When he told Maharaja Sayajirao not to invite Shri Hari to Vadodara, the king rebuffed him. Consequently, the diwan was miffed and had thus remained absent from the court. In fact he was planning to harness the powers of the black arts to capture Maharaj.

When Narupant Nana came to call him, he saw the diwan discussing the black arts with four sorcerers. Narupant informed him, "Maharaja Sayajirao has called you to the court." The diwan paused for a moment and then stood up to accompany him because it was the king's order. He reluctantly entered the court, looking downwards because he had pledged not to see Swaminarayan's face. However, his pledge was shattered when Shriji Maharaj looked at him and asked, "Are you the diwan of the kingdom of Vadodara?"

Instantly, he folded his hands and replied, "Yes Maharaj, I'm the diwan." Then, as he was about to sit on his chair, Maharaj called out, "Diwanji!" The diwan stopped and remained standing. He inadvertently looked at Shri Hari, and was unable to bear the divine light emanating from his eyes. Again, he folded his hands submissively.

Shri Hari asked, "Diwanji, since you run the kingdom you should have character at the root of your administrative powers. Only then will the influence of your character be felt by the citizens. This court is full, and I've come as an invited guest. Yet, what discussions were you engaged in that stopped you from attending the court?"

Diwanji was nonplussed by Shri Hari's enquiry and realized that Shri Hari's question revealed his omniscient powers. He fumbled and folded his hands again, confessing, "Maharaj, I was thinking about you."

Shri Hari smiled at him and remarked, "That's good, diwanji! If you think about me, whether it's benign or not, I'll have to liberate you. That is my timeless response. In the past, Shishupal, Dantvakra, Kansa, Ravan, Kumbhkarna, Hiranyaksh and Hiranyakashipu were liberated in the same vein."

By now, the diwan was sweating profusely and his whole body trembled. The entire assembly was stunned by what they were hearing. The diwan was frightened because he felt Swaminarayan knew all his ploys and shenanigans, and so there was no hope of succeeding against him.

DIFFICULT TO CAPTURE SWAMINARAYAN ALIVE

King Sayajiro saw that Shriji Maharaj had utterly exposed the diwan in his first meeting. He noticed the diwan was agitated and livid. To stem the volatile situation from spiralling further, Maharaja Sayajiro humbly spoke to Maharaj, "Prabhu, it is now evening and time for you to return to your residence along with your procession."

Shri Hari smiled tellingly and spoke, “Let the procession be disengaged, I will return on my mare, Manki.” Shri Hari got up to leave as his armed *parshads* cordoned around him. The diwan gauged it would be difficult to capture Swaminarayan alive with all his guards protecting him. He rubbed his hands in frustration and stood up, visibly tensed. Sura Khachar saw him and, out of fun, he emphatically placed his hand on the hilt of his undrawn sword. The gesture evoked a shiver of fear that rippled through the diwan’s body.

Shri Hari’s residence was arranged at Mastubaug, which was located between Kevdabaug, Motibaug and Navlakhi stepwell. A beautifully decorated tent was rigged with a nice bed for Shri Hari. The interior of the large tent was royally furnished. The floor was laid with opulent carpets and silk-cotton covered mattresses with back pillows for the *sadguru* swamis and officers to sit for discussions. There were ornate chandeliers hanging from its ceiling and ignited *divas* arranged in glass pots. Armed guards patrolled day and night outside the tents. Bhaguji and the other *parshads* were stationed exclusively outside Shri Hari’s tent. Flanked on either side of Maharaj’s tent were two more tents for the *sadguru* swamis. The Kathi Darbars, considered as state guests, were provided lodgings at the state houses. Women devotees were allotted accommodations in the reserved women’s quarters.

The next morning, Shri Hari completed his daily oblations and sat on his bed. At that time, Maharaja Sayajirao came with his two princes. They performed *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Hari and offered him gifts. Many devotees from the town also came for Maharaj’s darshan: Nath Bhakta, Sadashivrao, Dhundhura, Bhau Puranik, Ramchandra and Harishchandra Vaidya, Shobharam Shastri, Narupant Nana, Bapu Saheb (army captain), Rameshwar Danadhyaksha, Tryambakrai Shastri and his sons Badrinath and

Vishnuram, Chimanrao Shastri and others. One by one they all came and performed *pujan* of Shri Hari.

EVIL CHANTS OF SORCERERS WILL NOT AFFECT ME

During that time, three males were approaching Shri Hari’s tent, each with a dish of puja articles in one hand and a coconut in the other. Maharaj saw them and asked Maharaja Sayajirao, “Those three men seem to be new. Who are they?” Sayajiro looked at them and replied, “Maharaj, they are my diwan’s companions and sorcerers. It seems they have come to cast their evil mantras on you.”

Shri Hari smiled and recounted to the king, “During my travels in India, I was confronted by tantrics like Pibek and Magniram, but they failed in their diabolic efforts. However, because of some traces of piety in their souls, they were transformed and became *satsangis*. So, these tantrics’ assaults cannot harm me.” Bhaguji, who was standing behind Shri Hari, heard the conversation. He urgently signalled to his guards, Bharta Ratanji, Kubersinh and Mansinh, who were on duty outside the tent. The three guards barred the sorcerers from entering, but the latter wished to test their skills. Thus, they threw grains charmed with evil spells at Maharaj, but nothing happened. Then, the tantrics invoked Kal Bhairav and other malevolent spirits, but they failed again. Who could confront Purna Purushottam Narayan? On experiencing defeat and seeing the doomsday fire flash in Maharaj’s eyes, the three sorcerers turned mad. They behaved strangely like monkeys; jumping, scratching and hooting. The guards caught and locked them in a room under a tower. The tower is still known today as the ‘monkey tower’.

(Contd. in next issue)

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

A Saint of Our Time: **PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ**

Amlī Valī Pol, Ahmedabad. Jeth sud 4, V.S. 2006; 21 May 1950.

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj appointed the 28-year-old Narayanswarup Swami as the president of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. On this historic day, Narayanswarup Swami pledged to guru Shastriji Maharaj and the devotees of BAPS, “Today, before my guru and this whole gathering, I promise that I will fulfil my responsibility properly. Without caring for myself, I will remain loyal to this Sanstha and fulfil my duty to you.” It was a promise he lived every day for the next 66 years, till his last day on this earth. From then on, Narayanswarup Swami was affectionately called ‘Pramukh Swami’ throughout the satsang community.

This year, 30 May 2025 (Jeth sud 4, V.S. 2081), marks the 75th anniversary of that memorable day. Popularly known as ‘Pramukh Varni Din’, that special day continues to be celebrated because it commemorates the virtues of devotion to God and guru, dedication to duty and disinterest in the privileges that accompany high office that exemplified Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life. As the spiritual leader of a global religious organization, Pramukh Swami Maharaj fulfilled a multitude of roles, and without seeking fame, power, or personal gain, he created a global family of devotees rooted in bhakti, dharma, and seva. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was not just a spiritual leader, he was a spiritual builder, organizer, and visionary. The following is an overview of his contributions in his various capacities.





but demonstrated through his tireless service to humanity.

Promoting Devotion and Faith

He stressed the importance of regular prayer (personal puja), reading and studying shastras, participating in *satsang* assemblies, and living by the commands of God.

ORGANIZATIONAL STEWARDSHIP

Vision and Direction

Pramukh Swami had a remarkable vision and made BAPS a truly global, yet spiritually grounded, organization. He directed its growth thoughtfully, not just expanding numbers, but deepening

spiritual quality.

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

Upholding Doctrine

Pramukh Swami Maharaj perfectly embodied and defended the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan (APD) revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He inspired writing of the Swaminarayan Bhashyas based on the Prasthantrayi – Brahmasutras, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita – to formally establish the APD as a distinct Vedantic tradition amid Hindu philosophical traditions and made it accessible to modern devotees. He remained unwavering in his interpretation and practice of the teachings in Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Vachanamrut, ensuring that the doctrine stayed pure despite global expansion.

Personal Conduct

His personal life was the gold standard of saintliness: absolute celibacy, humility, compassion, simplicity, and selflessness. He never deviated from his vows taken as a sadhu, living without personal comforts even while presiding over a global organization. His motto – “In the joy of others lies our own” – wasn't merely rhetorical

Institution Building

Under his leadership, BAPS built over 1,100 mandirs, including Swaminarayan Akshardhams in Gandhinagar (1992) and Delhi (2005), considered masterpieces of Hindu devotion and craftsmanship. He also laid the foundations for Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, USA (subsequently inaugurated in 2023 by Mahant Swami Maharaj).

Organizational Structure and Governance

He implemented volunteer committees at local, regional, and international levels creating a sustainable organizational framework that balanced central direction with local empowerment.

Resource Management

He insisted on honesty, transparency, and accountability in financial and human resource matters. His careful oversight ensured that donations were utilized effectively and ethically, building tremendous donor trust.

CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND PROPAGATION

Safeguarding Traditions

Pramukh Swami Maharaj preserved the richness of Hindu rituals like puja, *arti*, *thal*, *yagna* and others. He ensured that Hindu practices remained relevant for diaspora communities in North America, the UK and Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the Middle East without compromising fundamental principles. Thus, ensuring that new generations of the Indian diaspora could experience authentic Indian spirituality. He implemented thoughtful reforms in areas like women's participation and social equality while firmly maintaining core spiritual disciplines.

Global Adaptation

He ensured BAPS assemblies in different countries incorporated local languages and cultural elements while maintaining core Swaminarayan practices. His approach balanced tradition with relevance. Where necessary, he guided the development of English-language satsang formats that remained authentically Hindu while being accessible to English-speaking generations.

Publishing and Communication

He recognized the need for high-quality, accessible resources in multiple languages and encouraged the publication of shastra translations, books for children, youths and adults, monthly magazines like *Swaminarayan Prakash*, *Swaminarayan Bliss*, and *Swaminarayan Bal Prakash*, as well as audio and video productions.

He embraced communication technologies to spread spiritual teachings. Under his guidance, BAPS developed websites and multimedia resources, and adopted video streaming for major events. The creative use of digital platforms reflected his understanding of modern communication needs.

SPIRITUAL CARE

Clear Messaging

Despite limited formal education, his simple yet profound guidance – often delivered through brief, memorable statements – revealed complex spiritual concepts translated into practical guidance relevant to daily life.

Community Building

He developed a culture of love and care through *satsang* centres and mandirs, fostering satsang communities where individuals supported each other spiritually and socially. BAPS mandirs and centres are models of social inclusion while maintaining traditional spiritual practices.

Personal Support

Pramukh Swami Maharaj provided spiritual advice to millions through personal counselling, letters (over 700,000 during his lifetime), and blessings. He personally addressed the worries, sorrows, and troubles of devotees. Whether it was repairing family discord, supporting youths battling addiction, or helping devotees during financial crises, he listened with compassion and provided appropriate and effective guidance. His daily life revolved around guiding individuals on the path of devotion, dharma, and *seva*.

MORAL AND ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Model of Integrity

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's personal example set an extraordinary ethical standard. His absolute adherence to his monastic vows, unfailing honesty, and complete dedication to service inspired similar commitment among devotees of all ages. Rather than merely preaching ethics, his life itself was his most powerful ethical teaching, demonstrating integrity in every interaction.

Upholding Ethical Standards

He continuously campaigned against social evils and unethical practices like dowry,

addictions (alcohol, smoking, drugs, and others), and corruption. He insisted on ethical living, uplifting thousands of families around the world and promoting pure living.

Responding to Contemporary Issues

Without compromising satsang values, he guided responses to challenges like technological distraction, materialism, and changing family dynamics – always reinforcing spirituality as the centre of life.

INTERFAITH AND GLOBAL OUTREACH

Dialogue and Cooperation

Pramukh Swami Maharaj met Pope John Paul II, the Archbishop of Canterbury and other Christian leaders, The Dalai Lama and Buddhist monks, Jewish rabbis, Muslim imams, Jain acharyas, Hindu mahatmas and many religious leaders, promoting harmony and mutual respect. In his address to 1,800 religious leaders during the UN Millennium World Peace Summit in 2000, he advocated for more dialogue between the leaders and followers of all faith traditions.

External Relations

As BAPS's global ambassador, Pramukh Swami Maharaj met numerous heads of state, including prime ministers and presidents, royalty, diplomats, statesmen, politicians and other dignitaries. His dignified representation of Hinduism helped shape positive perceptions of Sanatan Dharma globally.

Advocacy for Peace and Harmony

Through his message, "In the joy of others lies our own," he constantly encouraged peace, selfless service, and non-violence. After the terrorist attack on Swaminarayan Akshardham in 2002, he responded not with hatred, but with forgiveness and a call for peace.

Serving Humanity

Under his leadership, BAPS engaged in

many humanitarian efforts – disaster relief in the aftermath of floods, earthquakes and other natural calamities, medical camps, educational drives, and environmental initiatives – serving millions of needy people irrespective of religion, caste, or nationality.

EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

Spiritual Education

He encouraged separate weekly *bal-balika*, *kishore-kishori*, and *yuvak-yuvati* assemblies globally to provide age-relevant guidance in devotion, values, shastras, service, studies and other topics through engaging programmes. He also initiated annual Satsang Examinations to encourage deeper study of Hindu and Swaminarayan history, traditions, values and philosophy.

Training Sadhus and Volunteers

In addition to his personal guidance to sadhus, he established a training centre to provide them all-round instruction. He also inspired training camps for men and women volunteers, coaching them in public speaking, scriptural study, humility, personal discipline and service.

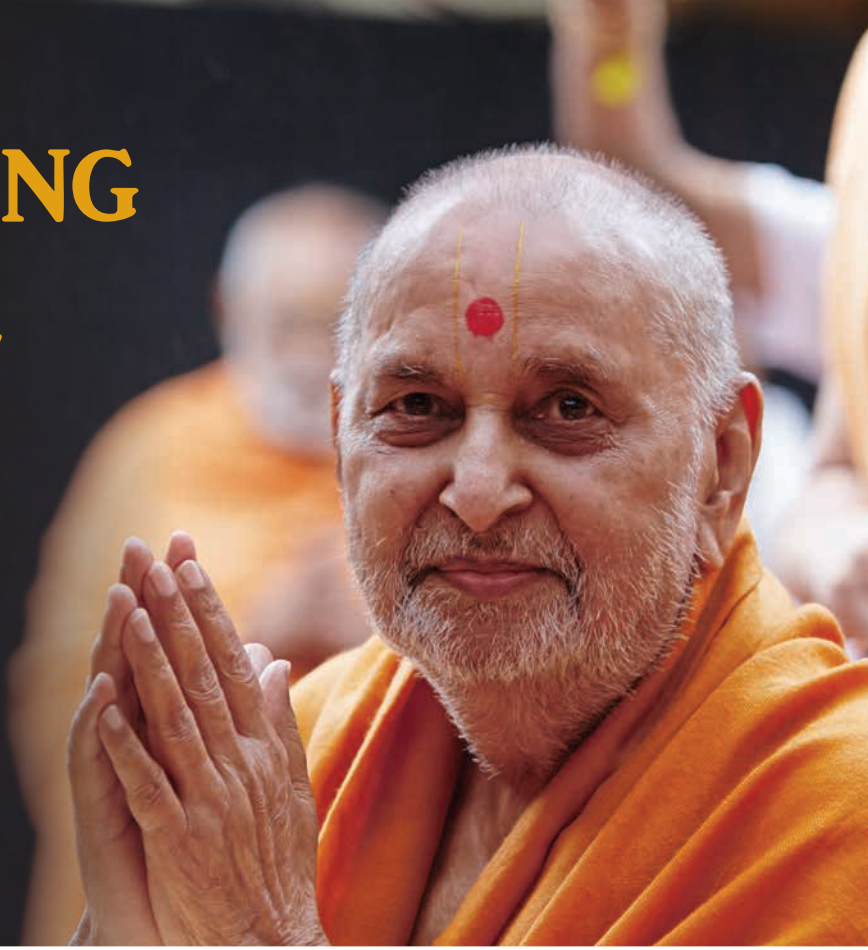
Research and Scholarship

He encouraged academic study, and research in Swaminarayan Vedanta, leading to scholarly publications, lectures and exhibitions. He established schools and hostels to provide value-based education to children and youths.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 66-year tenure (1950–2016) as president transformed BAPS from a regional Hindu denomination into a highly respected organization that proudly represents Sanatan Dharma globally. His legacy continues through BAPS's worldwide activities and the leadership of his successor, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, who carries forward the same principles of spiritual guidance, ethical leadership, and compassionate service. ♦

FORGIVING NATURE

Pramukh Swami Maharaj forgave innumerable people out of his all-embracing nature, compassion and innate divinity. He endeavoured to heal volatile situations, longstanding conflicts and personal affronts through his virtue of forgiveness – a hallmark of great spiritual masters.



In 1991, the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha had organized a 30-day Cultural Festival of India in Edison, NJ, United States. A local resident named Jim lived across the road from the Middlesex County College grounds where the festival was held. Jim and a group of residents had been protesting in opposition for the disturbance caused by the noise and traffic. But during the last days of the mega event, Jim and his friends paid a visit to the festival. They had come not to oppose but to apologize to Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

“We owe you an apology,” they said collectively. Jim then continued, “We did a lot against you to disrupt the festival, but now we have realized our mistake. I have come on behalf of our neighbourhood to congratulate you. Your festival was superb, and we got a chance to see India’s great culture. I have come specially to say sorry.”

Without a feeling of resentment, Swamishri responded, “There is no need to apologize. Your genuine feelings have touched our hearts and we shall pray to God for your peace, happiness and progress.”

* * *

People who can put the past behind them, forgive those who have wronged them, and pray for their well-being, have scaled the heights of forgiveness. On one occasion, Swamishri’s message of love and forgiveness saved a town from burning into flames of revenge, riots and violence after a small dispute had turned deadly.

In 1997, Swamishri summoned two groups of people who had been fighting for three years in the town of Gondal, Gujarat. He pleaded with them not to fight and kill each other.

“To forgive is priceless,” he reiterated. “Forget your animosity and prejudice.”

Revenge fuels revenge. Forgive and forget. Work together and live happily together.” He stressed that those who fight fire with fire end up in ashes.

* * *

Swamishri’s merciful persona even helped to resolve a centuries-old case that many, including the British authorities, the Gujarat State government, and King Krishnakumarsinhji of Bhavnagar had given up as insoluble. Kukad and Odarka are two villages in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. An endless dispute over land turned into a gruesome conflict involving a total of 45 surrounding villages. With each succeeding generation, the violence fueled to uncontrollable proportions. The dispute threatened complete annihilation. In the 80’s, Swamishri sowed the seeds of peace after transforming the life of one of the most brutal members of the mob – Ramsang Bapu. On 12 April 1990, Pramukh Swami Maharaj created history by gathering the warring parties from both villages under one roof for the first time in 150 years. He gave them water from each other’s village to break the 200-year-old animosity. It was the first time the two sides had seen each other smiling, laughing and happy. The leaders were amazed at Swamishri’s patience and ability to inspire forgiveness.

Swamishri’s message of forgiveness uprooted prejudice from the heart, took away fear, war, and hatred from society and dissolved conflicts between communities.

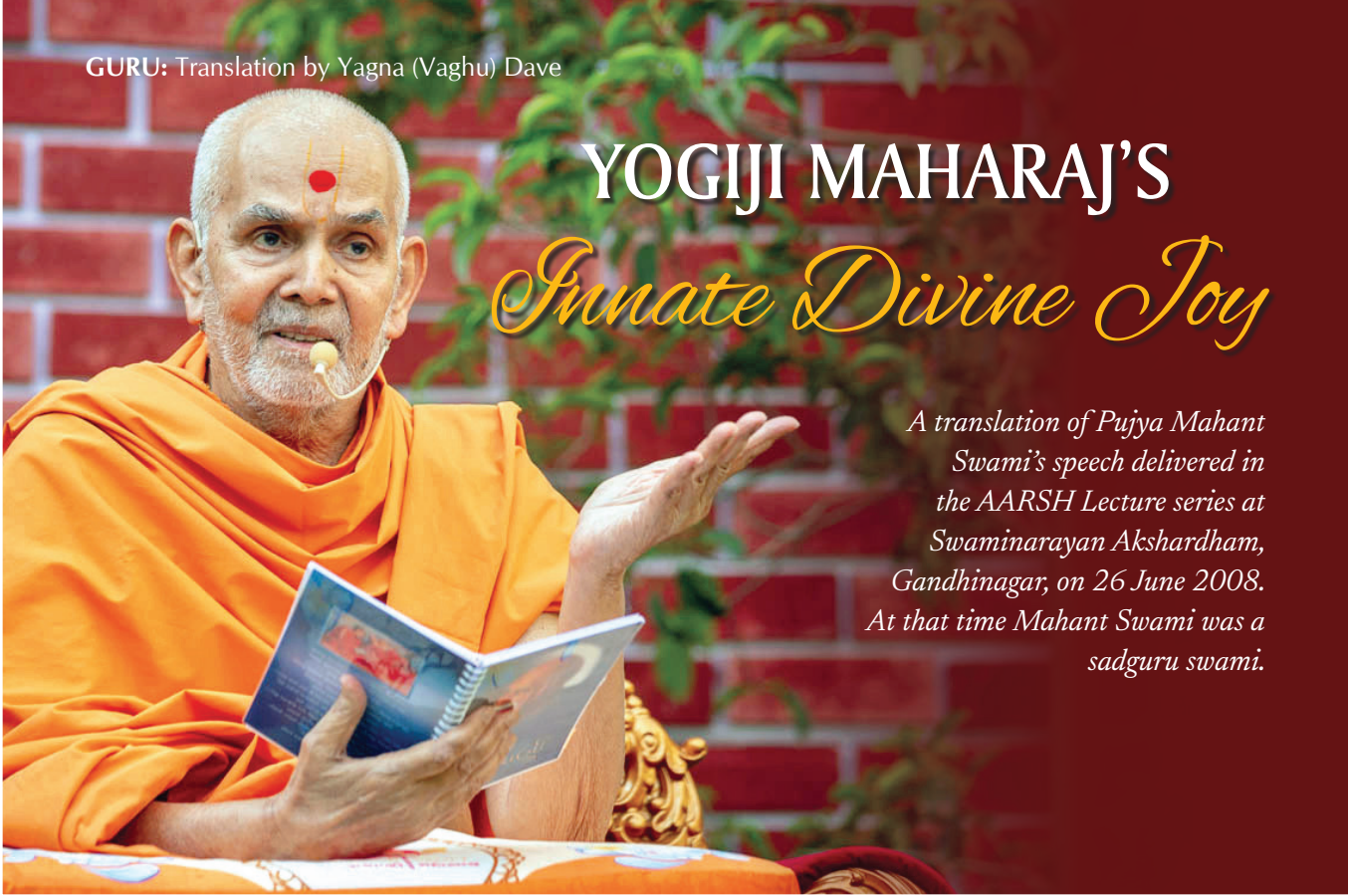
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On 24 September 2002, there was a horrific terrorist attack on Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. But Swamishri’s mental stability and patience helped the organization take a course of action that the entire world appreciated. His response that night determined the future of Gujarat, and the whole of India. More than 30 innocent people had died in the attack, and Swamishri knew that the state of

Gujarat could flare up in riots. The simmering communal sentiments could have burnt with redoubled fury. Swamishri made an immediate appeal for peace, which he repeated the following morning and the day after. Swamishri’s soothing voice played on the airwaves, “Now is the time for peace and solidarity. Let us pray that such an attack is never repeated.” The result? A quiet and serene Gujarat and India. Political leaders around the world closely monitored India and its western state of Gujarat. To their surprise, Swamishri’s appeal for peace calmed the minds and hearts of millions of people. Analysts around the world credited Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s timely and effective appeal. Many leaders echoed the same sentiments, “You saved Gujarat and India from all-out carnage and devastation. The result of your forgiveness and stable thought process should be rewarded.”

At an international anti-terrorism conference in Germany, Swamishri’s pacifying response was acknowledged and used as an example. Coining it ‘The Akshardham Response’, strategists and political analysts recognized it as the most effective and efficient response to any terrorist attack. Shri Raghuvir Chaudhary, the President of the Gujarati Literary Association, said, “The attack was meant to stir communal riots and tear apart the fabric of society. The terrorists failed. Swamishri encouraged the state to forgive and pray, not punish.”

One who shows mercy to all can lead others. Forgiving, even when one is capable of retaliating, is something only the great can do. Swamishri’s every step inspired the ethos of a beautiful, borderless world. ♦



YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S

Innate Divine Joy

A translation of Pujya Mahant Swami's speech delivered in the AARSH Lecture series at Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar, on 26 June 2008. At that time Mahant Swami was a sadguru swami.

Let me begin with an interesting incident. When Shastriji Maharaj came to Jabalpur, I was six months old. Shastriji Maharaj named me Keshav. My aunts had already named me earlier as 'Vinu', and they did not like the new name, so they kept calling me 'Vinu'. Later, when I was initiated as a sadhu, Yogiji Maharaj named me 'Keshavjivandas'. This was a divine coincidence. It showed the oneness of both gurus. The naming of swamis during the initiation ceremony was not pre-planned. There were small pieces of folded paper, each mentioning the names of those being initiated and the same number of folded papers with new names for the swamis. Yogi Bapa picked one piece from each lot and matched it. My name was matched with Keshavjivandas.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has mentioned in his spiritual discourses: "What kind of bliss and joy does Bhagwan's proximity give? The infinite joy

of Bhagwan's darshan even for a fleeting moment is more than the combined happiness of trillions of worlds. People are jumping to go to the USA for so-called worldly happiness. If somebody gives you a big chunk of land in Gandhinagar, how happy will you be? You will simply go out of your mind. Presently, the price of the land in Gandhinagar is Rs. 50,000 per square yard; imagine if someone gave you two acres of land as a gift. But, what if you get the entire Gujarat as a gift, or maybe the whole world?

How much joy and happiness would it bring to you? The mere darshan of Bhagwan for a split second gives you blissful joy exceeding the happiness of millions of universes. For us, this is all imagination, but Yogiji Maharaj enjoyed that bliss for every second of his life. To quantify this bliss: all the worldly happiness of infinite universes is like a heap of garbage against this joy. How can one describe such a person? His entire

life was full of divine bliss. He was oblivious of everything around him. However, he saw divinity in all living beings and prayed for their well-being.

Even if I try to explain to you about Yogiji Maharaj's divinity, how much will you be able to understand? That is a big question. How can I describe his divinity in a one hour speech? The fact is that I have met him, served him, and had his darshan. That is why I feel like talking to you about him, but I will not be able to justify his entire character and life. Only one who has enjoyed God's bliss can explain Yogiji Maharaj's blissful life; like one who has tasted ice cream can understand the happiness of another person enjoying the ice cream.

Yogiji Maharaj gave us the gift of God. He explained God's glory and made us experience that divine happiness. It is up to us whether to bask in that bliss or go for short-lived, worldly pleasures.

We all have three things in common: body, mind and soul. The body obtains pleasure through material objects. The soul is full of God's eternal bliss, while the mind plays a central role in selection. A person who directs his mind towards the body becomes unstable, since the body is unstable due to its constant material demands and desires, which are short-lived and cause pain. If one bends the mind towards the soul, it becomes stable as the soul is stable, constantly at peace and full of bliss.

Everybody wants peace and happiness, but nobody who has sought after worldly pleasures has attained them:

- Napoleon conquered Europe and Russia, but said that he had not seen six days of happiness in his life.
- King Solomon, the richest king of his time, procured 150 pounds of gold every day from his mines and had 700 beautiful queens, yet he tried to commit suicide four times in his lifetime.

- Alexander the Great, a world conqueror, when he was about to die at a young age, said to his doctors, "Please, keep my palms open for the world to see when they take my casket to the burial place. Let them know that Alexander, who had tonnes of wealth, is going empty-handed."

On the other hand, look at the lives of great Indian saints and devotees: Mirabai, Tulsidas, Namdev, Tukaram, Narsinh Mehta, Brahmanand Swami, Muktanand Swami and others. Despite facing difficulties in their lives, they remained focused on the form of God residing in their souls. They enjoyed that divine bliss.

Just as the richest person in this world has material wealth; Yogiji Maharaj was the wealthiest person spiritually. He was internally full of divine splendour. Others may become the world's richest person in future. There is no end to it. But, in the divine domain, Yogiji Maharaj had the highest level of spiritual bliss. There is nothing to be achieved beyond it.

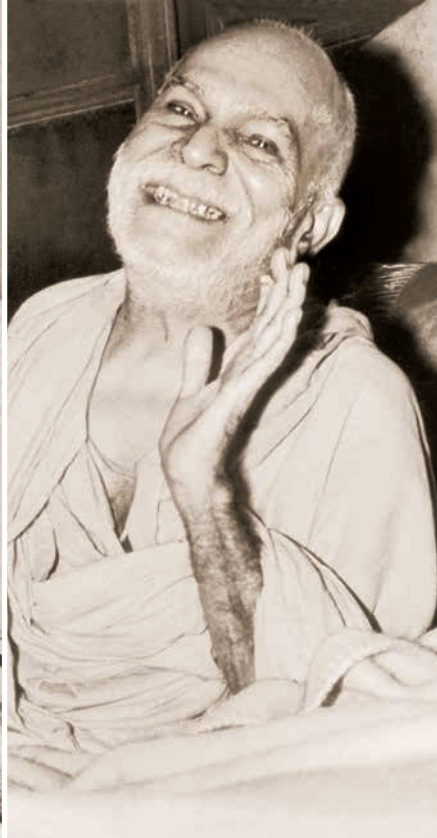
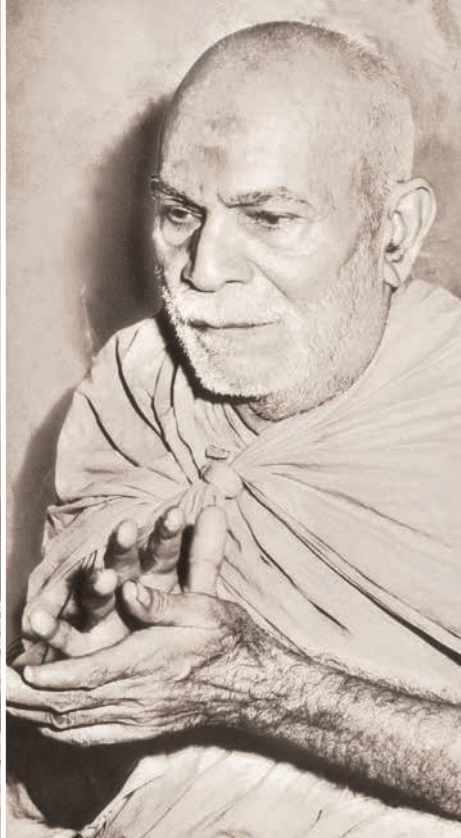
Shastriji Maharaj used to say, "There is no saint in this world like Yogiji Maharaj."

Bhagwan Swaminarayan said, "There is no higher status than being a sadhu." He said that a God-realized Sadhu is on par with God. He is talking about a saint like Yogiji Maharaj, not ordinary saints. However, very few people realize it. Yogiji Maharaj remained out of the spotlight purposefully.

Yogiji Maharaj always considered himself as a servant of God's servants. What is lower than that? He took pride in being a servant of all God's devotees.

He was instinctively called 'Jogi' (Yogi) by everyone in Junagadh Mandir within just a year after becoming a sadhu. The senior *sadgurus* began to call him Jogi after seeing his saintly nature. He earned that name.

Once, in Bhavnagar, there was a royal wedding procession for the son of King Krishnakumarsinhji. Everybody went to the balcony to see it, except



Yogiji Maharaj, who refused to see it despite being pressured by seniors. He simply said, “What is the point in seeing such things which I have discarded from my life?” Yogi was his eternal name.

Yogiji Maharaj heard about Shastriji Maharaj in Junagadh from Sadguru Madhavpriyadas Swami, who spoke about his greatness. Yogiji Maharaj firmly decided to make Shastriji Maharaj his guru and met him in Rajkot for the first time. Yogiji Maharaj had made fourteen gurus in his life. He sincerely and humbly served them all, yet he went above and beyond to serve Shastriji Maharaj. Whenever Shastriji Maharaj called him ‘Jogi,’ he became extremely energized. Yogiji Maharaj would run to offer his service to Shastriji Maharaj whenever he called him. He would leave his food if he were eating and would drop his pen if he were writing. Shastriji Maharaj was a living God for him.

Yogiji Maharaj served all the great *sadgurus* who had served Gunatitanand Swami, but recognized Shastriji Maharaj as a unique sadhu

who had come to earth to fulfil Shriji Maharaj’s incomplete work due to various hindrances he faced during his period.

In short, only an exemplary disciple can become an exemplary guru. Guru Shastriji Maharaj praised Yogiji Maharaj beyond words because of his spiritual virtues. Some of Yogiji Maharaj’s virtues are as follows:

- Yogiji Maharaj was kind and empathetic.
- He was an embodiment of tolerance.
- He excelled in serving devotees with food, and cleaning toilets and bathrooms. He would serve one and all, young or old, with equanimity and equality.
- His bhakti towards Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Shastriji Maharaj was incomparable.
- His humility, patience, purity and life full of divine joy were due to his total devotion towards God.

At a time when there was hardly any balance in the [Gondal] mandir’s cash box, Shastriji Maharaj

said, “Even one crore rupees is worth nothing compared Yogiji Maharaj.” It was a critical period when the BAPS Sanstha was in huge debt. Time and again, Shastriji Maharaj mentioned there was no one like Yogiji Maharaj in the entire universe. He said, “Yogi and I are the same. I am Yogi, and Yogi is me.” He further said, “Vyas Bhagwan stated the sixty-four virtues of a true sadhu, but if he has forgotten any, then you will see them in Yogiji Maharaj.”

Yogiji Maharaj was born eternally divine and great. He did not become great. The following incidents will help us to understand this.

■ In 1970, in London, a reporter from a famous newspaper came to interview Yogiji Maharaj. At that time, Yogiji Maharaj was almost 80 years old, physically frail but mentally very agile. The reporter asked, “Have you suffered from any mental stress in your life?” Yogiji Maharaj, without hesitation, said, “Never!” I was sitting next to him, so I heard him say this. In actual life, I had observed the many physical and other difficulties Yogiji Maharaj faced, but he never got rattled. He was always in his divine mood, smiling and enjoying God’s bliss. Anyone in his place would have become a mental wreck. Yogiji Maharaj was physically overworked, yet he served one and all, including those who harassed him. He constantly enjoyed the bliss of God within.

■ A sadhu named Vignandas was his guru for 17 years. He was a self-assumed guru. He harassed Yogiji Maharaj out of jealousy, as devotees praised Yogiji Maharaj’s virtues. Yet, Yogiji Maharaj always remained unruffled. He never left him until Shastriji Maharaj called him in his *seva*. He never spoke badly about his so-called guru throughout his life. Yogiji Maharaj never adopted the bad nature of Vignandas despite staying with him for 17 years, because he was eternally a divine sadhu. He had come from Akshardham and had no worldly nature.

Yogiji Maharaj used to say, “One should not let go even for a single moment one’s blissful joy of

being *brahmaswarup* (divine).” Who can say this? No human being can imagine this kind of bliss. Only those who have become like Yogiji Maharaj, through his close association, can do so. Some people say ‘*Aham brahmasmi*’ (I am *brahma*), but that is like a beggar saying, “I am a billionaire.” To be a billionaire and to call oneself as one are different things. Similarly, to call oneself *brahma* and be *brahma* is vastly different. Yogi Bapa was himself *brahmaswarup*, so he could say such things.

Yogiji Maharaj stayed amongst ordinary humans yet remained aloof and was always in a divine state of bliss. He was definitely from a different world. That is why he answered the London reporter’s question without any hesitation, that he had never been worried or stressed in his life. Despite living in a challenging world, he was in a happy state of mind throughout his life. It is often said, “A man is known by the company he keeps.” But Yogiji Maharaj was different. He was never affected by the jealous, cruel and vicious nature of his guru Vignandas. He constantly lived with devotees who were struggling in the sea of *maya*, yet he was never fazed by their nature, but instead inspired them with his saintliness.

■ When thousands of people start praising a sadhu for some virtues he may have inculcated as a result of his sadhana, he becomes arrogant and is diverted from his path of achieving spiritual bliss. His ego blows up. But Yogiji Maharaj remained in a blissful state his entire life, whether someone beat him, abused him, praised him or garlanded him. He remained *sthitpragna* – equipoised in all situations.

■ Once, Sanatan Swami asked Yogi Bapa, “Please talk about the sixty-four virtues of a true saint.” Yogi Bapa said, “I don’t know, you speak, as you are a learned Shastri.” This was like a millionaire saying, “I do not know how to count money,” and then telling a beggar to count it for him. Yogi Bapa never advertised his virtues as he was fully engrossed in God.

Another thing he did was to spread divinity among all his devotees. His divine love even oozed from the ordinary food, like the plain *rotla* (millet bread), he devoutly prepared and served. His selfless love was evident in everything he did for his devotees. He equally loved one and all. He drew ambitious youths with his selfless love and transformed them by making them sadhus. Not just a few, but hundreds of them.

Once, a Jain devotee – a businessman – took us into his house and showed us a chair which he had kept as a souvenir. He said, “Yogiji Maharaj had sat on it. Yogiji Maharaj was a unique sadhu. I am Jain, but I remember Yogiji Maharaj in my meditation.” Then, he took us to his bedroom. There was only one picture – that of Yogiji Maharaj. He said that at night, he would look at him and pray. He told us one thing, which I remember even now, “Yogiji Maharaj was immersed in total divinity.”

The great spiritual orator Pujya Chinmayanand Swami had met Yogiji Maharaj for only 15 minutes, yet he was deeply touched by his divinity. When he was asked to write something about Yogiji Maharaj after his passing away, he said, “It is impossible to write about him. Whatever is said about Brahman and its divinity was seen in Yogiji Maharaj. Brahman manifested in him on earth.”

Ranchhoddasji Maharaj, a great sadhu and a famous yogi of Gujarat with millions of followers, called Yogiji Maharaj as ‘Yogiraj’. Another great saint, Rang Avdhutji Maharaj, even in his old age, hugged Yogiji Maharaj. He said that divinity flowed through his voice.

At the Sadhu Bela Ashram in Vile Parle, Kashikanand Swami was so impressed with Yogiji Maharaj’s saintliness that he called him to his congregation, which was mostly attended by Sindhis. Few understood Gujarati, yet by looking at the graceful style of Yogiji Maharaj, they wanted to keep listening to him. Kashikanandji wrote eight superb *shlokas* on Yogiji Maharaj.

Yogiji Maharaj was free from worldly desires and attachments. Despite living and engaging with everyone, he remained aloof and detached. He connected all who were close to him with the supreme divinity. We find the same spiritual qualities in Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Yogiji Maharaj showed the easy path to reach God. He gave the following guidelines.

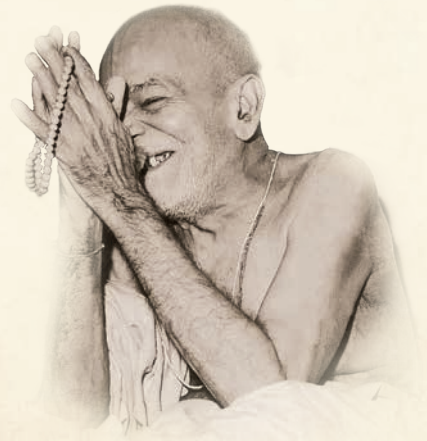
1. *Samp, suhrudbhav, ekta* – harmony, fraternity, unity.
2. No *abhav-avgun* and do not publicize people’s faults.
3. See the virtues of others and talk about their glory.

He would even prostrate to youths and believed them to be divine. His nature was very peaceful and humble.

Yogiji Maharaj had tremendous attachment to his guru, Shastriji Maharaj. He considered him as a living God and sincerely obeyed his commands for forty years. He taught us how to devote ourselves to our guru and serve him like God.

Yogiji Maharaj was sitting on the Mount Everest of divine virtues, and he took everyone who was attached to him to that height.

We see all these virtues in Pramukh Swami Maharaj. ♦





YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S *Spirit of Service*

DURING HIS CHILDHOOD

Kamalshibhai, the elder brother of Yogiji Maharaj, recounted the acts and utterances of the young Jhinabhai, “When he was young nobody understood Jhinabhai. Several times he would talk about other-worldly things. As my understanding was limited, I found it hard to follow what he was saying. Even when he was young Jhinabhai had great piety which melted one’s inner self. He would play ‘mandir-mandir’, would recite Swamini Vat and verses from Bhaktachintamani, engaging everyone with his sonorous voice. My father’s sister, Manekba of Kunkavav, would send for Jhinabhai just to listen to his kirtans.

“He would serve the sadhus visiting the mandir, serve Mohankaka and serve the mandir.

He was very fond of the company of sadhus. He used to come first in the class. He had a sharp memory and remembered many things. If he did not get what he wanted, he would not make an issue of it. He would eat whatever was readily available. Mother would say, ‘Jhina, what do you want to eat, I shall make it for you.’ He would just laugh and keep quiet. He had no worries and no sorrows. He would never demand. He was equally fond of his brothers and friends. He made no distinction of ‘mine’ and ‘thine’. He would take care of everyone. This has been his nature from childhood.”

As Kamalshibhai was talking of Jhinabhai’s childhood, there were tears in his eyes. He could not say anything further. One cannot describe

Brahma in words. One can only experience him through inner joy.

MANDIR SERVICE

As Virji Bapa became too old to cope with the mandir service, Mohanbhai looked after the worship and other rituals. But he, also, used to fall ill frequently. So, Mohanbhai was searching for someone who could look after the mandir. His eyes fell on Jhinabhai. The boy was immensely happy. Mohanbhai was thinking of a pious soul who could do the mandir *seva*. Jhinabhai ideally suited the role.

Jhinabhai was eager to serve God, like a river is eager to meet the sea.

FEEDING OTHERS

Bhagwanbhai would collect provisions from the homes of devotees. After feeding Krishnacharandas Swami, the sadhus, devotees and guests, if there were any, Jnanjivan Swami and Bhagwandas would eat last. Jnanjivan Swami would insist on the unwilling Bhagwandas to eat more. “Take *kadhi*, it is very tasty, you will not leave it without licking your fingers! Today, Chaturbhuj Swami has prepared the *kadhi*.” In this way, Jnanjivan Swami would press Bhagwandas to eat *kadhi*, *rotla*, *khichdi*, and other items. If *athanu* (pickles) or chillies were available, he would serve them also.

Sometimes, when Bhagwandas said he would go home for his meal, Jnanjivan Swami would say lovingly, “Eat here! Where else can you have Thakorji’s *prasad*! All along you have been eating at home, haven’t you?”

SERVING THE BLIND BHAGWATSWARUPDAS

After land was purchased for Sarangpur mandir, work began to build a fence around the land. to build a fence around the land. Jnanjivan Swami would get up early at three in the morning, perform his ablutions, have a bath and then perform puja. After that, with the help of a sadhu, he would knead dough for making *rotla*.

Before sunrise, he would go with other sadhus to work in building the fence. Everybody had affection for Jnanjivan Swami, who in spite of his lean body was ever ready to serve.

He would help bathe the blind sadhu, Bhagwatswarupdas, with hot water. He would wash his clothes, dry them and put them in their proper place, duly folded. In the afternoon, he would serve him food and clean everything up afterwards and put everything away neatly. At night, he would prepare his bed. To Bhagwatswarupdas and other sadhus the love and affection shown by Jnanjivan Swami was a reflection of his innate goodness and kindness.

EXTRA SEVA

Life in Chansad was infused with fervour for God. Kirtans, talks, rituals and service continued in an unending stream. Jnanjivan Swami engaged himself in every *seva*, from kitchen to discourses. Days passed with effortless ease. He would prepare food and feed the sadhus and devotees with love and affection. At that time, an aged *parshad* used to wash the utensils in the afternoon. Jnanjivan Swami noticed this and thought, “This *parshad* is very old. He might have to draw water from the well and then washes the utensils. He must be feeling extremely exhausted after performing his chores. So, I shall do his work.”

The afternoon discourse was over, and everybody had gone for a short rest. Jnanjivan Swami went to the *parshad* and said, “Bhagat, you go to sleep. I will wash the dishes. I don’t have any work in the afternoon.” The *parshad* resisted in the beginning but had to give up cleaning the vessels at the insistence of Jnanjivan Swami. Thereafter, Jnanjivan Swami would carry out that *seva*.

When Mahapurush Swami observed that the aged *parshad* was coming earlier for a nap in the afternoon, he asked him, “Bhagat, do you become free earlier now after cleaning the utensils?” He replied, “It is Jnanjivan Swami who

washes the dishes. He told me not to wash dishes. He is very kind to me.” Mahapurush Swami laughed and said, “He is practising the teaching of Vachanamrut Gadhada II 7. He is young in years, but does *seva* fit for grown-ups.” When the assembly was held at night, Mahapurush Swami told Vignandas Swami, “This ‘Jogi’ is always keen to serve others. You take care of him. I see true saintliness in him.” From then on, Mahapurush Swami always kept an eye on Jnanjivan Swami’s wellbeing.

SEVA IN SARANGPUR

The Sarangpur mandir work was in full swing. Shastriji Maharaj would take personal interest in the progress of the work. Nothing was too small for his attention. Everybody, young and old, engaged in the work.

Yogiji Maharaj used to work in the kitchen and whenever he was free, he would rush to the mandir construction site to carry basket-loads of material.

On one occasion, Kothari Bhaktivallabhdas Swami was filling the basket. The frail body of Jnanjivan Swami would bend under the heavy load and his head shook because of the excessive weight. Shastriji Maharaj saw this. He told the sadhu, “Don’t fill his basket to the brim. He will struggle. Understand the glory of a sadhu like him. Fill only a couple of shovels.”

Bhaktivallabhdas Swami replied, “How can I know such a sadhu? Only if you say so will I know. I fill everyone’s bucket to the brim.”

Shastriji Maharaj not only used to take good care of Jnanjivan Swami, but he would tell other sadhus about his glory. Who else would know of the divinity in that frail bodied ‘Jogi’?

PLEASURES OF FASTING

Shastriji Maharaj asked in an assembly, “Where is Jogi Maharaj?” Nobody answered. He enquired, “Did he have his meal? Somebody go and find out.” He sent a couple of devotees on the errand.

They went in search of Yogiji Maharaj. They found him cleaning utensils in the courtyard near the kitchen. The devotees told him, “Shastriji Maharaj is inquiring whether you had your food.” He replied with a smile, “Today I am observing a fast.”

The devotees were taken aback. The previous day had been *ekadashi*, which he had observed without even sipping a drop of water. Yogiji Maharaj often undertook such consecutive fasts without anyone’s knowledge. Shastriji Maharaj raised the issue to show to others that the senior sadhu was not merely a ‘Jogi’ in name.

The devotees who had gone to Yogiji Maharaj, returned to Shastriji Maharaj and told him that he was fasting. They requested Shastriji Maharaj to make Yogiji Maharaj give up his fast. Shastriji Maharaj said, “That is what you feel. But look at Jogi’s face. It looks as if it has been freshly infused with one litre of blood. It is so glowing. This Jogi is of Junagadh. When he fasts, he feels as if he is breathing nectar.”

WASHING UTENSILS

It was 3 p.m. Yogiji Maharaj was busy washing dishes at the Ahmedabad *hari* mandir. He had locked himself in the small room adjacent to the kitchen and was engaged in cleaning utensils.

By the time Yogiji Maharaj had cleaned half the vessels, Babubhai Kothari, who had completed his work, came out of the mandir office. He heard the clanging noise of the utensils being cleaned. He wondered, “Who could be cleaning vessels at this hour of the day?” When he tried to open the door, he found it had been bolted from inside. He looked through a crack in the door and was surprised to see what was going on. He saw Yogiji Maharaj, one at whose feet thousands prostrated, engaged in cleaning dishes.

Babubhai knocked on the door. He pleaded with him, “Let the utensils remain where they are. This is not the type of work you should do.” Swamishri opened the door and said with a smile,

“All those who were in *seva* are tired and sleeping. That is why I have got the immense benefit of doing this *seva*. Don’t say no!”

But Babubhai was very insistent and Swamishri acceded to his wish.

A TRUE COMPANION OF DEVOTEES

Whenever Swamishri visited Ahmedabad he would go walking to the Swaminarayan Mandir in Kalupur for darshan. While returning to the *hari* mandir in Shahibaug, he would stop at a tamarind tree. From here, he would send a devotee to find out if Arjunbhai was at home. He would stand below his house, waiting for a reply.

If Arjunbhai was at home, Swamishri would go for *padhramani* and say five Swamini Vato. The devotees at that time knew him like they knew other sadhus, because Swamishri had hidden his glory. He made no distinction between big or small devotees. All were equal in his eyes. He would visit the homes of even the smallest of devotees. This is possible only if the sadhu has love for his devotees. Except for a sadhu wedded to humble knowledge no one else can do that?

On Saturday, 21 July 1951, Swamishri arrived at Rajkot railway station at 11.30 p.m. Despite the late hour several devotees had come to the station to welcome him and seek his blessings.

The following day, a satsang *sabha* was arranged at Krishnaji Ada’s house to celebrate a symbolic Guru Purnima festival. Daji Bapu and Aksharprakash Swami had come from Gondal. Naranbhai Sheth, Mohanlal Ajagiya, Badrinathbhai, Dr Tank and Ganatra performed guru *pujan*. Swamishri made home visits to devotees’ houses. Thereafter, Swamishri went to Gondal in Ganatra’s car. En route Swamishri sanctified the homes of Vajubha’s sons and other devotees at Ribda village.

ARRANGING FOR OTHER’S NEEDS

Swamishri invited Kantibhai Bhailalbhai Patel of Bhadran along with G.K. Swami to Gondal for the Sharad Punam festival. Yogiji Maharaj called

Kantibhai to string a cot. He made Kantibhai sit at one end, while he sat at the other end.

Yogiji Maharaj said to him, “You apply the right amount of force and pull the string because I do not have much strength.” Kantibhai replied, “Bapa, don’t worry. All the strength I have has been given by you.”

Then both of them started working on the cot. Swamishri said, “This cot is for Mota Swami, who will be coming for this festival. Also, many devotees will also come here. We will have to arrange for *datan* to clean their teeth, tea, breakfast, food, and other things. So, you also join in doing the *seva*. You will not get such *seva* again.”

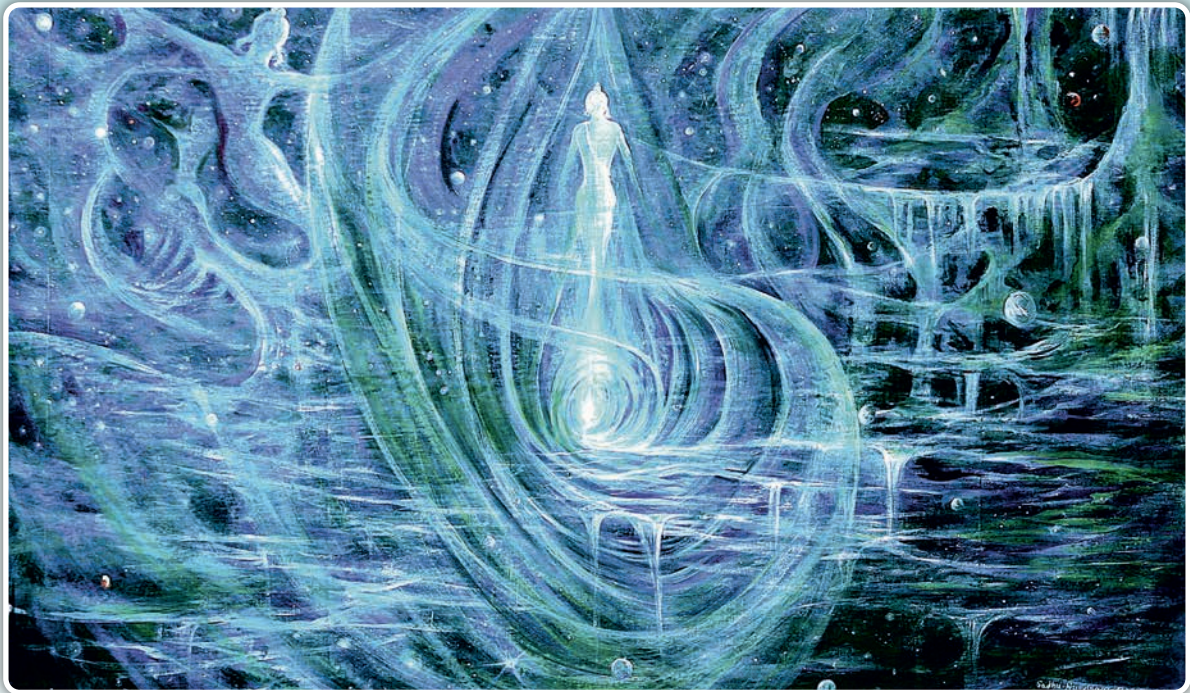
Kantibhai was amazed to see Swamishri’s devotion and feelings for the devotees.

DURING DIWALI AND ANNAKUT

A festive atmosphere used to prevail at Gondal from Sharad Punam to Annakut. Even otherwise, it was a festive atmosphere when Swamishri was around. But on the occasion of Diwali, thousands of devotees would come. Everytime, there would be satsang *sabhas* and *seva*. Yogiji Maharaj would go to every place with an ever-present smile on his face.

Lakshmi Pujan and Chopda Pujan were held in the Akshar Deri. Devotees flocked to the mandir from Gondal, Rajkot and other places with their accounts books. At the auspicious time, Swamishri would perform *pujan* of the books as per Vedic rites. Swamishri would bless everyone, wishing them a happy New Year in business, health, career and satsang. Also, he would sign in red ink in each of the hundreds of accounts books. This would take at least two hours to accomplish. Swami would do all these things to please the devotees. Those in business and other occupations would feel immensely happy to have Swamishri’s blessings and his signature on their books. They would experience inner joy that the New Year would bring them extra success.

(Cont. on p. 25)



Karma and Reincarnation

*In this third and final article, we discuss the research on the scientific evidence for reincarnation.
Parts 1 & 2 were published in the September–October & November–December 2023
issues of Swaminarayan Bliss.*

There are four types of scientific evidence for reincarnation, namely:

Revelations of avatars and rishis in the Hindu shastras: In the second article, we cited a few revelations by avatars and rishis.

Near-death experiences (NDEs): Medical scientists have recorded hundreds of cases of people who have reported of an afterlife. These include Dr Raymond Moody in his book *Life after Life* (1975), Dr Melvin Morse and Paul Perry in *Closer to the Light* (1990) and Dr Michael Sabom in *Recollections of Death* (1982). Their common experience was of travelling through a tunnel, at the end of which they met a soothing source of light, which then sent them back indicating that ‘it is not your time yet’.

Two new NDEs in BAPS are cited in *Karma and Reincarnation*, 4th ed. 2022.

Past-life regression: Parapsychologists have discovered that many chronic illnesses, disorders and phobias have been removed by past-life regression therapy. Regressionists hypnotize such patients, regressing them beyond this birth to other births until the problem is located. From these cases, therapists have reported evidence of reincarnation. In his book, *The Power Within* (1950), Dr Alexander Cannon, a British past-life regression therapist, stated, “For years, the theory of reincarnation was a nightmare to me and I did my best to disapprove it... yet as years went by, ... over a thousand cases have been investigated and I have to admit that there is such a thing as reincarnation.”

In *Children's Past Lives* (1998), Carol Bowman reported cases of children who described events after death. She concluded, "These memories present perhaps the best documented evidence yet for reincarnation."

Testimonies by children, their birth marks, birth defects, habits and diseases: Perhaps the highest number of reincarnation cases of children was investigated by Dr Ian Stevenson, former Professor of Parapsychology at the University of Virginia. He was a methodical, meticulous and dynamic researcher who studied over 2,500 cases of children during his career spanning about 40 years. He discovered cases in India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Lebanon, Turkey, the UK and even in the USA.

Usually, the children, in their previous lives, had died prematurely, either shot or stabbed. In their next birth, they would have a small birthmark from a bullet entering the chest and a large mark on the back where it exited. In cases of the neck being slashed, the child would bear a similar mark on the neck, which might bleed even after birth for some time.

Other children had disorders such as dermatitis, cough, laryngitis and others, which they had suffered in their previous births.

Amazingly, other children had certain habits from their previous lives, such as a liking for cigarettes, coffee, whisky, etc. During World War II, Japanese soldiers shot by Allied pilots in Burma who took birth in Burmese families, displayed such characteristics. More astonishing were the cases of American pilots shot down by the Japanese. When they were born in Burmese families, they had blonde hair, blue eyes and habits such as a dislike for Burmese food, craving for biscuits and bread, and demanded pants and shoes rather than shorts and sandals. They loved to play with toy planes or cars and learnt English faster than other school kids.

In the USA, a whole group of people seem to have reincarnated. In her book, *A Tribe Returned*,

the regression therapist Janet Cunningham cites the story of a native Indian tribe known as the Oglala in the Dakotas. Caucasian soldiers had massacred them. They took birth in the 20th century. More bizarre, was that the soldiers also reincarnated and married the members of the Oglala tribe to work out their guilt.

In *Beyond the Ashes*, Rabbi Yonassan Gershom mentions Jews of the Holocaust who reincarnated in the USA.

Though Western researchers such as Stevenson meticulously documented hundreds of cases of reincarnation, they could not explain how the characteristics cited above could manifest again in the next birth.

MECHANISM OF REINCARNATION

The Hindu shastras beautifully describe the metaphysics of reincarnation, which explains how biological and mental characteristics manifest again. Bhagwan Shri Krishna provides the answer in the Gita (15.8):

*Sharīram yad avāpnoti yach-
chāpi utkrāmatishvaraha;*

Gruhitvaitāni sanyāti vāyur-gandhān-ivāshayāt.

When a *jīva* leaves or enters a body, it takes the mind and other *indriyas* (senses) with it, just as the wind carries scent from its source. This is also described in the Bruhadaranyak Upanishad (4.2.2).

In Vachnamrut, Kariyani 12, Bhagwan Swaminarayan reveals further that the *karan* (causal) body of the *jīva*, which contains all the imprints of that birth, evolves into the *sthul* (physical) and *sukshma* (subtle) bodies. To be more precise, potent impressions that caused death are imprinted in the subtle and causal bodies. The subtle body is composed of 19 elements: five *jñan indriyas*, five karma *indriyas*, five *tanmatras* and four *antahkarans* – mind, *buddhi* (intellect), *chitta* (consciousness) and *ahankar* (ego). All these 19 elements accompany the *jīva* to the next birth. In this birth, the recorded impressions such as

wounds, disorders and habits manifest in the physical body. Hence, it may be said that the subtle and causal bodies are the metaphysical DNA of a *jiva*. They contain all records of a *jiva*. It is only this intricate mechanism that can perfectly explain all the physical manifestations in the next birth.

The final and crucial question that remains is how does a *jiva* extricate itself from the miserable and perpetual cycle of rebirths? How are the *sanchit* karmas and the causal body – all the metaphysical DNA – eradicated? How does the *jiva* attain *moksha*?

THE MEANS TO MOKSHA

There are many endeavours or sadhanas cited in the shastras for *moksha*, such as mantra *japa*, *tirth yatra*, yoga, meditation, *yagna*, study of shastras. Yet these only accrue *punya*, but do not eradicate *sanchit* karmas. For this the rishis of the Upanishads state:

*Bhidyate hridayagranthish-
chidyante sarvasamshayāhā;*

Kshiyante chāsya karmāni tasmin drushte parāvare.

By realizing (*sakshatkaar* of) Paramatma, the knot of the heart (*vasana*) is destroyed, all doubts resolve and all karmas are destroyed.

Shvetasvetara Upanishad (3.8)

*Tameva viditvaimrutyumeti nanyah panthā
vidyate yanāya.*

By the knowledge (realization) of Paramatma, death can be transcended. Without this, there is no other path to attain the highest enlightenment.

In the Shrimad Bhagvat, Bhagwan Kapildev adds:

*Prasangam-ajaram pāsham-ātmanah kavayo
viduhu;*

Sa eva sādhusu kruto moksha-dvāram apāvrutam.

If a person develops profound love for the Ekantik Sadhu of Paramatma just as resolutely as one has profound love for one's relatives, then the

gateway to *moksha* opens for one.

In the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan similarly glorifies the association of such a sadhu: “If a person attains the company of a sadhu, realizes Paramatma's form through the words of that sadhu, meditates on that form of Paramatma and imbibes the words of Paramatma in one's heart, then the causal body attached to one's *jiva* is burnt completely” (Kariyani 12).

Again, in Vachnamrut, Vartal 11, he states: “Profound love for the Satpurush is the only means to attain realization, it is the only means to realize the glory and greatness of the Satpurush, and it is the only means to realize Paramatma.”

Practically, in the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha when a person wishes to enter the *sampradaya*, the Gunatit sadhu, and by his *agna*, his sadhus or devotees, perform the *vartman* ritual. In this, they pour a few drops of holy water in the right palm of the person and request him to utter the following Ashray Diksha mantra:

*Dhanyo'smi purnakāmosmi nishpāpo
nirbhayah sukhi;*

Akshar guru-yogena Swaminarayan-āshrayāt.

Having taken refuge in Bhagwan Swaminarayan through the Aksharbrahma guru, I am blessed and fulfilled. I am without sins, fearless and blissful.

By this ritual utterance, one's *sanchit* karmas are eradicated. Then, one has to obey the codes of conduct in the Shikshapatri and Satsang Diksha and others observances advocated by the Gunatit gurus. This ensures that no new *kriyaman* karmas pile up. In case of lapses in one's vows, one performs *prayaschitt* (atonement) as guided by Mahant Swami Maharaj or senior sadhus.

The power of the Aksharbrahma Satpurush to eradicate *sanchit* karmas can be gleaned from Munja Suru's story. During the time of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, he once met Munja Suru of Lilakha. This man used to loot sheep and goats from shepherds for meat, drank

liquor and was addicted to opium. Swami sent him to Narak in *samadhi*, where he witnessed the harsh punishment given by the Yamadutas to sinful *jivas*. This *samadhi* humbled him and he begged Swami to wash away his *pap* karmas. When Swami offered him water for the *vartman* ritual, he asked, “Will this simple ritual cleanse me? I have committed so many evil karmas.” Swami replied, “Look down.” After uttering the Swaminarayan mantra, as the water drops fell on a large rock, it shattered into many pieces.

During Shastriji Maharaj’s time, the second wife of a devotee of village Gana died. Due to *vasana*, he wished to remarry a third time. By Swami’s wish, he suffered an illness. When Swami arrived to see him, the devotee requested to be taken to Akshardham. Swami replied, “I can take you now but you will have to take 20 more births. If you bear this illness for 20 days then for each day of suffering you will lessen one birth.” The devotee appreciated Swami’s merciful grace to cleanse his *vasana* to eradicate future births. After bearing the illness for 20 days, he went to Akshardham.

Another vital question that arises is, after the *vartman* ritual, are not new *kriyaman* karmas deposited in the *sanchit* pool? Bhagwan

Swaminarayan provides a lucid solution for this in Vachnamrut, Gadhada II 11, “If one abandons the desire for the fruits related to dharma, *arth* and *kam*, and if one performs pious karmas only to please Bhagwan, then those pious karmas become *bhaktirup* – the form of bhakti – and aid in attaining *moksha*.” In other words, one performs all daily activities according to his codes of conduct and only to please him, then those karmas do not cause attachment, they become *bhaktirup*.

For *jivas* who, despite having met the Satpurush, but are too steeped in *maya* and unable to offer exuberant devotion, who consequently are heavily burdened with *vasana*, Bhagwan grants them further human births in Satsang until they become *nirvasanic* – devoid of *vasana* – within one or a few births. During this process, the Aksharbrahma Satpurush keeps guiding and boosting them. Finally when they become *brahmarup* or *akshar-rup*, they attain Paramatma’s divine abode, Akshardham, where they experience his divine bliss for eternity, from which there is no return (Gita 15.6). This ends reincarnation for all time and is known as *atyantik mukti* – ultimate liberation. Hence, reincarnation ends. ♦

(Cont. from p. 21)

THAKORJI EATS FROM THESE PLATES

After celebrating Annakut in Gondal, Swamishri made preparations to leave for Rajkot. Early in the morning, youths were cleaning utensils under the neem tree towards the *pujari* swami’s room. Swamishri went there and was happy to see the youths doing *seva*. He picked up a plate and found that it had not been cleaned properly. He said, “You shouldn’t wash them like this. Thakorji eats from these plates.”

A youth replied, “Bapa, these plates are for the devotees.”

“So, what?” replied Yogiji Maharaj. “Is

Thakorji not present in the devotees? Maharaj and Swami eat through the devotees. So, the plates should be shining like pure silver. See like this...” And then Swamishri sat down, with a *pagh* on his head, shawl across his shoulder and with slippers on. “Swami, leave them, we shall clean them...” the youths urged. Swamishri ignored their protests and cleaned several plates. The youths were astonished by Swamishri’s quick reflexes and his impeccable style of cleaning the plates. ♦

From the Gujarati text of
Yogiji Maharaj’s Biography by
Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami



RELIGION: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

In an age flooded with social media affirmations, wellness apps, and spiritual influencers, many youngsters are turning to 'Spiritual But Not Religious' (SBNR) practices for inner peace and meaning. This shift represents a growing desire for personal meaning and experience outside traditional religious institutions. While this approach offers freedom, it often leaves individuals adrift, disconnected from deeper, structured systems of belief and practice. Religion, particularly in the context of Hinduism, offers a cohesive and time-tested framework. It provides the structure, support, and depth necessary for true spiritual transformation. Moreover, spirituality is considered integral to religion. So, can you have spirituality without religion, and which path provides more solid ground?

Why Structured Religion Offers More than Solo Spirituality

DEFINING RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Religion (from the Latin *religare*, meaning 'to bind') is an organized system of beliefs, practices, traditions, and ethics, with a community of followers centred around a time-tested worldview and understanding of the sacred or divine. Religion offers a framework that helps communities walk together towards spiritual goals.

In Hinduism, for example, core features include sacred texts like the Vedas, Upanishads,

Bhagavad Gita, and Vachanamrut; rituals like puja, meditation and *arti*; community life through festivals and mandirs; discipline through *niyams*; symbols like the *tilak*; and guidance from gurus and institutions.

Spirituality is an individual quest for meaning, inner peace and growth, or connection with the sacred or something greater than oneself, often detached from religious institutions. Core features of spirituality include

meditation and contemplation, a focus on personal growth, a connection to the universal self, and less emphasis on dogma, with more focus on direct experience.

Individuals who identify as SBNR seek meaning outside traditional institutions, creating hybrid spiritual identities by blending elements from various religions and philosophies, particularly Eastern wisdom practices like yoga and meditation. It is worth noting that spirituality often uses practices developed by religious traditions over centuries.

Research published in the *Journal of Religion and Health* found that although both religious and spiritual practices correlate with wellbeing, religious participation showed stronger associations with sustained happiness, sense of purpose, and community support.¹ The community nature of religion appears to amplify the benefits of spiritual practices by embedding them within supportive social structures.

SHARED GOALS, DIFFERENT PATHS

Religion and spirituality share some common pursuits: seeking connection to something greater than the self beyond the material realm, transcendence, answers to fundamental questions about life, identity, and purpose, and ethical development, including virtues like compassion and honesty.

However, their approaches differ significantly. Religion is structured, community-based, tradition-rich, and guided by gurus, shastras and institutions.

Spirituality is individualized and focuses on self-inquiry, with authority resting in intuition, experience, and self-proclaimed influencers.

THE ANCHOR OF IDENTITY

Spirituality appeals to young people more than religion because it has no rules to follow, no rituals to practice, and no one to answer to. Yet, this very freedom can be a trap. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson noted that identity formation during adolescence requires structure and role models, not just freedom.²

Spirituality can become a personal echo chamber, whereas religion connects one to a tradition of wisdom, values, and verified paths. Without a shared framework or established wisdom, personal spirituality can easily drift, swayed by fleeting emotions or trendy ideas.

Religion offers structure, guidance, and community. It offers narratives that situate personal experience within a larger framework of meaning. Research by developmental psychologist Dr James Fowler demonstrated that religious identity provides adolescents and young adults with “a sense of coherence and continuity within which personal changes can occur without the threat of chaos.”³

Psychologist Dr Kenneth Pargament’s research has shown that religious involvement helps people navigate difficult life passages by providing “a sense of continuity amid change and coherence amid fragmentation.”⁴

Sociologist Dr Christian Smith’s comprehensive National Study of Youth and Religion found that religiously committed teens reported higher levels of personal meaning and purpose compared to their non-religious or merely ‘spiritual’ peers.⁵

A study in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* found that religiously affiliated individuals reported more consistent spiritual

1. H.G. Koenig, J.R. Peteet, and T.J. VanderWeele, “Religion and Spirituality in Psychiatry: A Systematic Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 5 (2020): 2296–2331.

2. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968).

3. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

4. Kenneth I. Pargament, *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy: Understanding and Addressing the Sacred* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007).

5. Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

practices and deeper spiritual experiences than those identifying as SBNR.⁶ Without the supporting structure of religious traditions, spiritual practices often become sporadic or abandoned when personal motivation wanes.

THE STRENGTH OF STRUCTURE

Religion offers a well-defined blueprint for belief and practice that has endured over time, including:

Established Beliefs and Doctrines: These provide a coherent worldview, answering fundamental questions about existence, purpose, and morality based on centuries of accumulated wisdom.

Ethical Codes and Guidelines: Religions provide clear moral compasses rooted in sacred texts and traditions, offering guidance on living virtuously.

Rituals and Practices: Regular rituals create rhythm, connection, and shared experiences. They offer tangible ways to express faith and engage with the sacred, fostering belonging and purpose. Passed down through generations, they connect individuals to a shared history and provide comfort.

Community and Support: Religion inherently involves a community of fellow believers, offering a vital network of support, encouragement, and shared identity.

For young people, the clear pathways and supportive communities in religion can be invaluable, offering meaning, purpose, and a strong sense of belonging. Religious traditions provide structured ways to mark life transitions, often lacking in individualized spirituality. Research published in the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* indicates that participation in meaningful rituals significantly contributes to

identity formation during adolescence and young adulthood.⁷

WISDOM THROUGH THE AGES

Religious traditions are like ancient trees with deep roots in human history. They are reservoirs of collective wisdom, insights, and experiences of countless individuals who have grappled with existence's fundamental questions. Sacred texts, the lives of saints and devotees, and centuries of philosophical reflection offer a depth of understanding that self-constructed spirituality cannot match.

For instance, Hindu texts like the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads and Vachanamrut offer concrete wisdom considered as revealed knowledge, contrasting with many modern spiritual teachings that may be unverified, unstructured, and lacking tradition. Trying to build a spiritual system from scratch is like reinventing the wheel. Religions offer well-tested models refined over time that address the complexities of human existence with depth and nuance.

Psychologist Dr Jonathan Haidt uses the metaphor of 'moral capital' for the accumulated ethical wisdom in religious traditions.⁸ His research on moral psychology suggests religious moral teachings often contain adaptive solutions to persistent human problems refined through cultural evolution, thus creating 'communities of virtue' in which ethical development is supported through shared practices and accountability.

THE POWER OF PRACTICE

Religious traditions offer spiritual growth through well-established practices refined over centuries: prayer, meditation, fasting, meaningful rituals and ceremonies, acts of service and charity, and scriptural study. These are grounded in the

6. Patrick K. McClure, "Something Besides Monotheism: Sociotheological Boundary Work among the Spiritual, but Not Religious," *Poetics* 62 (2017): 53–65.

7. Kenneth I. Pargament and Crystal L. Park, "Religious Ritual and Developmental Transitions: A Longitudinal Study," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 85 (2023): 101429.

8. Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012).

lived experiences of countless generations.

Psychological research confirms that identity is shaped not just by thoughts but also by repeated behaviours. Religious practices like daily puja, fasts, festivals, scriptural study and *seva* become transformational habits, while spirituality often lacks these structured tools.

Neuroscientist Dr Andrew Newberg's research demonstrates that regular religious practices produce measurable changes in brain structure and function associated with emotional regulation, attention control, and empathy.⁹ His studies found that consistent, structured practices were more likely to produce these neurological benefits than irregular or self-designed approaches – comparable to following a training programme versus casual jogging.

The *Handbook of Religion and Health* demonstrates positive correlations between religious practices (like prayer and service attendance) and aspects of physical and mental health.¹⁰

Religious calendars create 'spiritual scaffolding' that fosters social bonding, reduces stress, and enhances well-being.

THE STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY

One of the greatest advantages of religion over individualistic spirituality is genuine community. Religion fosters not only social connection but also a shared commitment to transcendent purpose. It creates a built-in support system that reminds individuals they are not alone, offering belonging, shared rituals, and collective purpose.

While spirituality can be pursued in groups, religious communities provide covenant relationships that are centred on a shared commitment to the divine. These relationships go beyond mere social networks. Religious

communities provide:

Shared Support Systems: A network of care and understanding in times of crisis or celebration.

Collective Learning and Growth: Religious study and discussion deepen understanding and strengthen faith.

Accountability and Encouragement: Being part of a religious community fosters accountability to shared values and encourages spiritual progress.

Opportunities for Service: Religion emphasizes charity and service, providing meaningful avenues for contributing to something larger than oneself.

In Hinduism, mandirs are more than places of worship. They serve as vibrant community centres where festivals, ceremonies, and gatherings strengthen collective identity and mutual support. This shared experience reinforces religious values and fosters a sense of belonging.

Loneliness is a significant mental health issue, especially among youth. While individualized spirituality might seem self-reliant, it can lead to isolation. Without a community or structure, individuals may lack the support, guidance, and constructive criticism that come from religious belonging. This isolation is particularly challenging during difficult times.

Research consistently shows the power of religious communities. Dr Tyler VanderWeele, a social epidemiologist at Harvard, found that religious service attendance was associated with lower rates of mortality, depression, suicide, and substance abuse, while also promoting prosocial behaviour. According to VanderWeele, religious communities provide "systems of support, meaning, and coping that go substantially beyond what is available through other social structures."¹¹

Religious communities also provide

9. Andrew Newberg, *Principles of Neurotheology* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014).

10. H. G. Koenig, D. B. Larson, and D. R. McCullough, *Handbook of Religion and Health* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

11. T.J. VanderWeele, "Religion and Health: A Synthesis," in *Spirituality and Religion within the Culture of Medicine: From Evidence to Practice*, ed. J.R. Peteet and M.J. Balboni (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 357–401.

intergenerational connections. Sociologist Dr Vern Bengtson discovered that religious communities create ‘unique structures of intergenerational solidarity’, benefiting both older and younger participants. His research showed young people in religious communities have greater access to ‘non-parental adult mentors’, while older adults experienced greater purpose by sharing their wisdom.¹² A young person might find a sense of belonging and mentorship within their mandir community that is absent in individual spiritual practices.

THE ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

Religion provides clear ethical frameworks rooted in revealed truths, offering a concrete guidance for actions and accountability.

Constructing personal ethics can be challenging and often leads to inconsistent or self-serving biases. Religions, however, offer well-developed ethical systems that have been refined over centuries.

Dr Anantanand Rambachan notes, “Hinduism connects spiritual practices with ethical responsibilities, preventing spirituality from becoming merely self-focused.”¹³ Research published in the *Journal of Moral Education* showed that youth in religious communities with clear ethical frameworks demonstrate more complex moral reasoning.¹⁴

Psychologist Dr Lisa Miller’s research shows religious structure provides a ‘holding

environment’ that supports spiritual development. She writes, “Structure that supports transcendent awareness isn’t confinement – it’s a scaffold that makes growth possible... the paradox of spiritual growth is that we need boundaries to experience boundlessness.”¹⁵

Sociologist Dr Robert Putnam found that participation in religious communities consistently predicted greater altruism, volunteerism, and civic engagement.¹⁶ Dr Christian Smith’s studies found religiously involved teens were more likely than their peers to have adults providing moral guidance, helping them to navigate challenges.¹⁷

BEYOND SELF-IMPROVEMENT

While contemporary spirituality often focuses on personal growth and well-being, religious ethics typically emphasize responsibility and service to causes beyond oneself. Dr Martin Seligman notes this outward focus is crucial for genuine happiness, “The meaningful life is one in which you connect and contribute to something beyond yourself.”¹⁸

Dr Everett Worthington’s research found religious contexts are particularly effective at fostering virtues like gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion because they embed individual growth within community expectations and a transcendent purpose.¹⁹

Hindu traditions also provide wisdom that guides individuals through the paradox of modernity – where unlimited choices lead to

12. Vern L. Bengtson, *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down Across Generations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

13. Anantanand Rambachan, “Ethics in Hindu Traditions: Contemporary Applications,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 50, no. 1 (2022): 114–136.

14. Todd Johnson and Namita Mehta, “Religious Frameworks and Moral Reasoning Development in Adolescence,” *Journal of Moral Education* 52, no. 3 (2023): 312–329.

15. Lisa Miller, *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015).

16. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

17. Martin E. P. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment* (London: Free Press, 2002).

18. Martin E. P. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realise Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment* (New York: Free Press, 2002).

19. Everett L. Worthington, ed., *Handbook of Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2007).

anxiety and indecision. Dr Barry Schwartz's work on 'choice paralysis' suggests that excessive options decrease satisfaction. This is a crucial insight: personalized spirituality may provide a plethora of choices, but it can lead to confusion and frustration.²⁰

Sociologist Dr Nancy Ammerman found that individuals with personalized spirituality often struggle to maintain consistent practice and community connection, whereas those grounded in specific traditions report greater spiritual depth and life satisfaction.²¹

FINDING MEANING IN SUFFERING

One of the most profound advantages religion offers is its capacity to help people find meaning in suffering, a universal challenge that individualistic spirituality often struggles with. Religion helps people navigate crisis by offering meaning ('Why is this happening?'), community support ('Who will be there?'), and ritual coping ('How do I process this?').

Extensive research by Dr Kenneth Pargament reveals that religious frameworks provide unique resources for 'meaning-making in suffering' – helping individuals integrate painful experiences into a coherent worldview that preserves purpose and hope. His studies show that religious meanings are particularly effective in addressing 'boundary situations' like death or serious illness that challenge assumptions about life. In these cases, religious frameworks provide 'comprehensive systems of meaning that address ultimate questions about purpose, morality, suffering, death, and the afterlife' in ways individualistic spirituality often could not match.²²

WHY YOUTH NEED RELIGION MORE THAN EVER

Teenagers today face unprecedented levels of identity confusion, digital anxiety, and moral ambiguity. In this context, religion offers not just personal well-being, but a moral code, routine, community, and purpose. Religion offers grounding, resilience, and reality checks in an age of overstimulation and under-reflection.

ADDRESSING COMMON CONCERNS

Young people have legitimate concerns about organized religion. One common concern is that it can be rigid and not allow for personal exploration. However, traditions like Hinduism, and specifically BAPS, value personal realization alongside structured guidance. This promotes a deeper spiritual curiosity and exploration than purely individualized approaches.

Another concern is that religion may focus too much on rules without explaining their purpose. In authentic Hindu traditions, such as BAPS and others, there is a strong emphasis on understanding the meaning behind practices. BAPS encourages contextual devotion, where practices are connected to deeper spiritual goals rather than blind adherence to rituals.

THE HINDU ADVANTAGE: INTEGRATION OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

Hinduism inherently integrates both religion and spirituality. It seamlessly weaves religious observance with personal spiritual experience. Dr Vasudha Narayanan notes, "Hinduism is perhaps unique among major world religions in providing both comprehensive religious frameworks and encouraging personalized spiritual exploration."²³

20. Barry Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less* (London: Ecco, 2004).

21. Nancy T. Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

22. Kenneth I. Pargament, *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy: Understanding and Addressing the Sacred* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007).

23. Vasudha Narayanan, "Hinduism: A Contemporary Philosophical Investigation," *Religious Studies Review* 48, no. 2 (2022): 185–201.

Hinduism is both deeply religious (rituals, mandirs, festivals) and deeply spiritual (meditation, philosophy, introspection).

Hinduism's shastras like the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, and Vachanamrut provide concrete responses to existential questions. This avoids the challenge of individual spirituality, where seekers may feel the need to 'figure everything out' on their own.

Hindu traditions offer wisdom refined over thousands of years. Dr Jeffery Long observes, "Hindu traditions contain sophisticated insights into consciousness, ethics, and human fulfilment that would take multiple lifetimes to discover independently."²⁴

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF AN ENLIGHTENED GURU

One of the most significant contributions of Hindu traditions like BAPS is the emphasis on an enlightened spiritual master – guru – for spiritual growth. Bhagwan Swaminarayan emphasized that true enlightenment requires the guidance of a living guru.

A living guru offers integrated guidance that connects outer practices with inner experiences. The guru embodies the virtues they teach, serving as a living example. Their presence accelerates the disciple's progress, and through grace, they purify consciousness and awaken spiritual potential.

BAPS: A LIVING EXAMPLE

BAPS exemplifies how organized religion can enhance personal spiritual growth. It provides:

Modernized Ancient Wisdom: BAPS teaches the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, a coherent belief system that guides daily spiritual practices for contemporary life.

Clear Spiritual Authority and Guidance: BAPS offers structured mentorship through its

guru *parampara* and sacred texts.

Balanced Approach: BAPS encourages engagement in society while finding spiritual meaning in everyday life.

Intergenerational Wisdom Transfer: BAPS fosters mentorship through experienced practitioners guiding younger generations.

Community Support System: BAPS mandirs function as centres for practice, cultural preservation, and social support.

CONCLUSION: INTEGRATION, NOT OPPOSITION

The journey towards spiritual fulfilment involves integrating both religion and spirituality.

While the SBNR movement offers personal freedom, it often lacks the depth and sustainability provided by traditional religious frameworks. Religion offers structure, wisdom, community, and guidance, enabling lasting transformation.

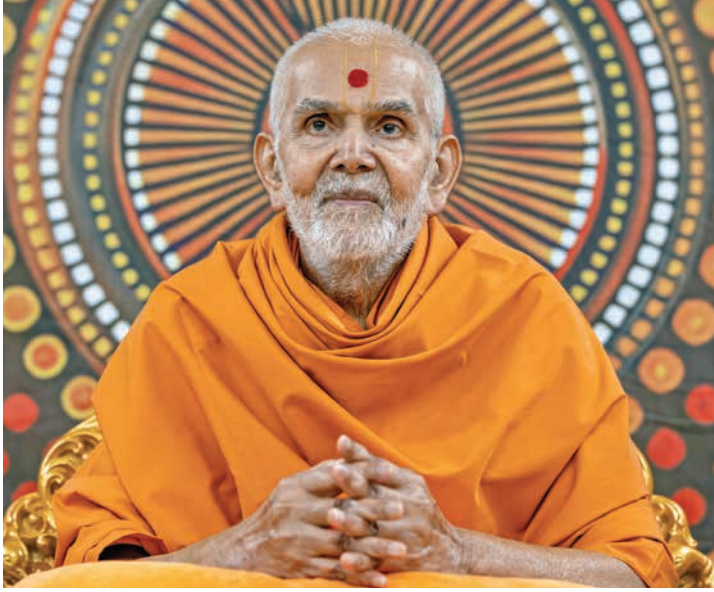
Hinduism, especially through BAPS, provides the wisdom of the guru, the depth of shastra, the strength of community, and the potential for real transformation. It offers young people spiritual literacy, emotional intelligence, and ethical clarity, providing lifelong strength rather than temporary escape.

Religion connects us to a community of seekers, guided by the timeless wisdom of realized masters – an essential foundation for spiritual growth. ♦

24. Jeffrey D. Long, "Hinduism in the Modern World: Adaptations and Innovations," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (2021): 87–105.

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

12 February to 16 April 2025
Melbourne, Sydney and Surat



The vicharan report in this issue includes Swamishri's visits to Melbourne and Sydney, Australia. On 11 February, Swamishri departed from Johannesburg, South Africa, and flew to Melbourne. After a 15-hour flight, Swamishri landed in Melbourne. The principal aim of Swamishri's vicharan was to perform the foundation-stone laying ceremony of Akshardham in Melbourne, inaugurate the BAPS Hindu Mandir and Cultural Precinct in Sydney and perform the murti-pratishtha rituals therein.

FEBRUARY: MELBOURNE

12: Swamishri's Arrival

Swamishri, at nearly 92 years of age, flew 12,000 km from Johannesburg to Melbourne. His plane landed at the Tullamarine Airport at night. Because of his late arrival, Swamishri had given darshan and blessings, via a Zoom call, during his flight to the devotees assembled to welcome him in Melbourne. He had also instructed the swamis and devotees to conclude their fasts by drinking lemon water.

The residing swamis in Australia welcomed Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Swamishri with garlands at the airport. At 12.25 a.m., Swamishri arrived at the Akshardham site amidst a warm welcome by the devotees.

After an interval of about seven years, Swamishri arrived on the soil of Australia.

16: Welcome Assembly

The local swamis and devotees had transformed the Cranbourne Race Course venue into an impressive Swaminarayan Nagar, comprising a large marquee for Swamishri's puja darshan and evening assemblies.

In the evening welcome assembly, the devotees welcomed Swamishri's arrival with the waving of BAPS flags. Devotees from different parts of Australia and New Zealand, dressed in traditional costumes, festively welcomed Swamishri with local dances. Children, dressed in white clothes, chanted the Satsang Diksha shlokas, teenagers and youths performed traditional Indian dances and swamis performed *pujan* and offered garlands to welcome Thakorji and Swamishri. Thereafter, devotees from different countries in the Asia-Pacific region offered a variety of foods to Thakorji and Swamishri on the main stage.



Youths perform a traditional dance during the welcome assembly, Melbourne

On behalf of the Premier of Victoria state, Ivan Walters, welcomed Swamishri, saying, “On behalf of Honourable Premier Jacinta Allan I welcome you and congratulate you for your compassionate spiritual guidance and leadership. We are greatly humbled and appreciative of Swamiji who, at nearly 92 years, stands as a beacon of knowledge, compassion and selfless service and inspires countless people worldwide. Organizations like the BAPS are playing a significant role in uniting various groups of people in our society.”

Thereafter, swamis and devotees specially welcomed Swamishri with presentations themed on *samp* (harmony), *divyabhav* (divine feelings) and *nishtha* (faith).

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “I am intensely happy with you all for having welcomed Maharaj and Swami with *samp*, *divyabhav* and *nishtha*. May you all foster more and more *samp*. Whoever has the association of Satsang is divine. How much benefit one reaps when one does satsang with these sentiments. And, we are all very happy because of the strength of our faith.”

23: Bhagwati Diksha

Swamishri gave the *bhagwati* (saffron) *diksha* to Pradyumna Bhagat and named him Keshavsankalpdas Swami. Swamishri congratulated his parents for permitting him to become a sadhu.

AUSTERITIES OBSERVED BY DEVOTEES OF AUSTRALIA TO HONOUR SWAMISHRI'S ARRIVAL AND PLEASE HIM

Spiritual Sadhanas	Number of Devotees
Nirjala Ekadashi	1,156
Chain Fasts	7,770
Bhagatji Vrat	288
Liquid Fast	405
Khatras	27
Chandrayan	15
Dharna-Parna	470 (approx.)
Mahantji Vrat	2,358
Mala Jap	614,366
Pradakshina	177,168
Dandvat Pranam	173,222
Panchang Pranam	133,398
Sahajanand Namavali Paath	119,321
Foot Pilgrimage	3,731 (34,325 km)

SWAMISHRI PERFORMS BHUMI PUJAN OF SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

22 February 2025, Melbourne

After the Akshardhams in Gandhinagar, New Delhi, Robbinsville, Mahant Swami Maharaj initiated the construction of Akshardham in Surat and today he was going to perform the *bhumi puja* rituals for an Akshardham in Melbourne, Australia.

On 17 February 2025, Melbourne, Mahant Swami Maharaj had blessed, “A grand and divine Akshardham will be constructed here. Maharaj and Swami will forever be installed here and bless all with happiness. The glory of Akshar-Purushottam will reverberate in the Asia-Pacific region.”

On 18 February, Swamishri toured and blessed the Akshardham site and inspired all.

On 22 February, Swamishri performed the *bhumi puja* of Akshardham in Melbourne. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the Vedic *mahapuja* rituals. During the *bhumi puja* assembly children and youths presented a variety of cultural performances to celebrate the occasion. Paramchintan Swami, the principal swami heading the satsang activities in Australia, and other swamis honoured and welcomed Swamishri and the invited guests.

To commemorate the occasion, Deputy Premier Ben Carroll of Victoria state presented a written message from the Premier Hon. Jacinta Allan. The premier expressed in her letter, “I would also like to acknowledge the extraordinary work of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. You make a difference to so many Victorians, and we are deeply honoured that you have chosen to build the Hindu mandir and cultural precinct here.”

Finally, Swamishri blessed the historic assembly, “When Akshardham will be built Australia will benefit immensely. Maharaj and Swami will be installed here and bless everyone. The reason to build Akshardham here is to inspire values and make people’s lives beautiful. Whoever



does *seva* in Akshardham will be blessed with Akshardham. All should do *seva* by following dharma-*niyams*. The all-doer is Shriji Maharaj. He inspires and instils strength in the devotees.

“Having begun the Akshardham project may you all have *divyabhav* for each other and also bow and touch each other’s feet with respect.”

On 16 February, Swamishri had written a wonderful letter to Paramchintan Swami for the *bhumi puja* of Akshardham. A translation of the letter is as follows: “We want to make a supreme Akshardham. A grand and divine Akshardham will be completed in no time. We do not want to merely make Akshardham out of stone, bricks and sand and neither only having art and carvings. We want to create an Akshardham out of divine values. In its foundation, we want to embed the values of *samp*, *bhakti*, *seva*, *divyata*, *shanti*, *prapti*, *gun-grahan* and more.

“Decorate and make Akshardham with *nishtha*, *samarpan* and *bhakti* for Akshar-Purushottam. Akshardham is not only a place of beautiful art, architecture, culture and traditions. It is a haven of spirituality, peace and devotion.

“While building Akshardham we want to instil these sentiments of Maharaj in it and to inspire a flow of these sentiments in everyone.”

In conclusion, Swamishri waved the BAPS flag to the joy of all the devotees. ♦

HON. RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA, WELCOMES MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

26 February, Melbourne



gathering for Hindus in Melbourne, but more than that it will be a place of connection between Australia and India.”

Swamishri presented an Amrut Kalash, a symbol of auspiciousness, to Hon. Richard Marles and blessed him for good health, progress of Australia, and peace and happiness.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Shastriji Maharaj’s sadhus maintained *samp* among themselves and

The evening assembly was themed on Swamishri’s favourite subject, *samp*. Incidents were narrated related to *samp* between the devotees of Australia and New Zealand. Then, children and youths performed a traditional dance on unity.

Hon. Richard Marles, the Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister of Australia, arrived in the evening assembly. He was honoured with a garland and thereafter he addressed the assembly, “Welcome to Australia, welcome to Melbourne, welcome to Cranbourne Mahant Swami Maharaj. Mahant Swami Maharaj’s text, the Satsang Diksha, is a revelation of a purposeful life. Diksha means an unwavering conviction, which is the heart of pursuing a purposeful life.

“It is a pleasure to be here, but also an honour on behalf of the Australian nation to receive the blessings from His Holiness today. We welcome and look with excitement towards the vision of the Melbourne mandir, which will be a place of

built five mandirs. Today, because of *samp*, we have thousands of mandirs. I have seen the embodiment of *samp* here, intertwined among you all. Sustain immense *samp* among yourselves.”

This morning, Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Melbourne East and other cities. In addition, Swamishri also planted a tree to promote environmental awareness.

On 27 February, according to Swamishri’s wish, a ‘Gruh Shanti Satsang Diksha Homatmak Paath’ was organized. Daily, a family from the Asia-Pacific joined in this *yagna* to offer bhakti. Also, Swamishri explained the Satsang Diksha shastra and launched the daily reading of Satsang Diksha in every family residing in the Asia-Pacific.

Swamishri inaugurated a translation of Satsang Diksha in Maori, a language of the natives in New Zealand. ♦

MARCH: MELBOURNE

2: Bhakti Tula

The highlight of the evening assembly was a bhakti *tula* performed by the devotees of Australia and New Zealand. After inspirational speeches by swamis, Paramchintan Swami performed *pujan* of Thakorji and Mahant Swami Maharaj seated

in one pan of a giant decorative weighing scale (*tula*). The *sadguru* swamis placed packets of sugar crystals on the empty scale to offer bhakti to Thakorji and Mahant Swami Maharaj. Swamis also garlanded Swamishri.

On this special occasion, Swamishri blessed, “Today, you have performed a bhakti *tula* with

SWAMISHRI HONOURS 1,400 BAPS CHILD SCHOLARS

1 March 2025, Melbourne



Earlier, Mahant Swami Maharaj had expressed his wish that 1,000 children in Australia memorize 315 Sanskrit *shlokas* of the Satsang Diksha. However, due to Swamishri's blessings, 1,400 children had memorized the entire Satsang Diksha.

On 1 March 2025, a special felicitation assembly was organized for the children scholars who had memorized the Satsang Diksha. They were first honoured with showers of flower petals sanctified by Swamishri. Then, they were welcomed by feeding them a traditional Indian sweet sanctified by Swamishri.

During the stage programme a volunteer narrated the special attributes and incidents of children who had memorized the Satsang Diksha. The audience applauded and appreciated the children's stellar efforts. Then, children fluently recited *shlokas* when Swamishri displayed *shloka* numbers of the Satsang Diksha. Swamishri expressed his *rajipo* and blessed the assembly, "It gives me great joy to see so many solid scholars all together. You are all solid scholars. This means that you understand the meaning of the *shlokas*, observe *niyam*-dharma, and understand the Akshar-Purushottam principle. This is the



true meaning of a solid scholar. You should talk about what you have learned and convince others about it."

Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Anandswarup Swami honoured all the children with a letter of Swamishri's blessings and a certificate of honour. Thereafter, swamis honoured Swamishri with a garland of leaves and beads with 1,000 *shlokas* of the Satsang Diksha, Karika, Mahapuja and the names of the child scholars written on them. Thereafter, Swamishri inaugurated a book, 'Pearls of the Pacific', comprising inspirational incidents of the child scholars. Finally, a group photo of the scholars was taken with Swamishri for an everlasting memory of the historic occasion. ♦

immense devotion. Bhagwan is weighed not by gold or silver, but by our devotional feelings. Shriji Maharaj will bless you with manifold gains in life.”

Today’s evening assembly was the last public assembly with Swamishri during his stay in Melbourne.

MARCH: SYDNEY

Introduction

In 1971, with the blessings of Yogiji Maharaj, Dr I.P. Mehta started a satsang *mandal* in Sydney, Australia. In 1996, at the instruction of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a mandir was consecrated by Pujya Mahant Swami in the Glazeville suburb of Sydney. Soon, the small mandir could not accommodate the burgeoning satsang *mandal*. In 2000, a new *hari* mandir hall was inaugurated at the hands of Pujya Dr Swami. In 2002, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, deities and the guru *parampara* in the new hall in the Paramatta region and Rosehill borough of Sydney. After renovations at the mandir, the re-*pratishta* rituals of the *murtis* was performed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami in 2014.

Soon, with the rapid growth of satsang, the mandir proved to be too small for the weekend satsang *sabha*. Then, with Mahant Swami Maharaj’s blessings, a 25-acre land was purchased in Aldington, Sydney, for a new *shikharbaddha* mandir. In 2018, Mahant Swami Maharaj visited Sydney and gave momentum for the construction of the new mandir complex.

On 4 March 2025, Mahant Swami Maharaj departed from Melbourne and arrived in Sydney amidst a warm welcome at the new under-construction mandir complex. The first phase of the mandir construction project was accomplished with the completion of the BAPS Hindu Mandir



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishta* rituals of Tapomurti Nilkanth Varni, Sydney

and Cultural Precinct and the 49-ft tall *murti* of Tapomurti Nilkanth Varni.

SWAMISHRI PERFORMS THE VEDIC MURTI-PRATISHTA RITUALS OF THE 49-FT TALL TAPOMURTI SHRI NILKANTH VARNI

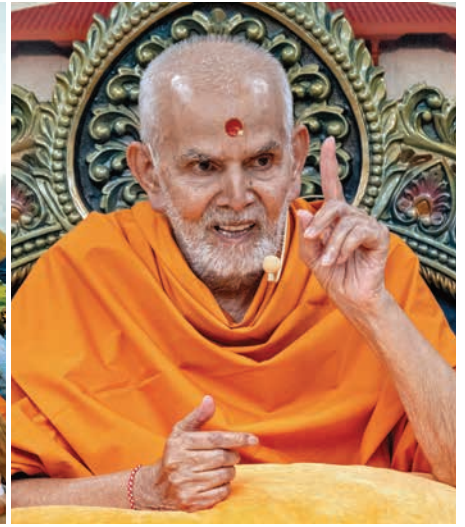
5 & 6 March 2025, Sydney

On 5 March 2025, a Satsang Diksha *homatmak yagna* for world peace was held prior to the *murti-pratishta* rituals of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni and the *murtis* to be installed in the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir and Cultural Precinct (Haveli). Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami, Anandswarup Swami and Vishwavihari Swami performed the rituals. Hundreds of devotees also participated in the *mahapuja* rituals. Swamishri performed the *pujan*, *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* rituals of all the *murtis* and the *yagna*. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, “May your social conditions improve, your *seva* and *bhakti* increase and you be blessed with immense spiritual knowledge.”

Swamis then honoured Swamishri with garlands and welcomed the leaders of various Hindu organizations in Sydney. Members of the Australian Council of Hindu Clergy presented



Swamis and devotees doing darshan of Swamishri during the *nagar yatra*, Sydney



Swamishri blesses the welcome assembly

a citation of honour to Swamishri for gifting a Hindu mandir to Australia.

On 6 March 2025, the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony of the 49 ft high *panchdhatu* Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni was held on the grounds of the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu and Cultural Precinct in Sydney. For the first-time ever the tall *murti* of Nilkanth Varni was to be installed on the Australasian continent. In the beginning, senior swamis and devotees performed the *mahapuja* rituals. Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* rituals by ritually infusing the Divine by touching the eyes, chest and feet of the *murti*. Swamishri also showered rice grains and flower petals on the *murti*. Thereafter, he performed *abhishek* with the holy waters of 350 rivers and pilgrim places and finally performed the *arti*.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami, Anandswarup Swami and other swamis performed *pujan* of and honoured the *murti*. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the ceremonial occasion, "The *pratishtha* of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj was accomplished with great divinity, joy and festivity. The *murti* is truly wonderful. I like the life of Nilkanth Varni very much, because even though he was Bhagwan he travelled throughout Bharat to liberate souls. How compassionate

he was! Whoever comes here to do darshan of Nilkanth Varni will attain *moksha*. They will be inspired to perform austerities. To please Nilkanth Varni a *yagna* of Satsang Diksha will be organized here every week. I pray at the holy feet of Nilkanth Varni that everyone be happy in body, mind and wealth, and all be blessed with soulful satsang."

7: Colourful Procession (Nagar Yatra)

Today, as part of the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* to be installed in the BAPS Cultural Precinct, a colourful procession was carried out on the mandir grounds and streets of Sydney. The *murtis* were displayed in decorative chariots, children recited the Satsang Diksha *shlokas*, youths played a music band, more youths were dressed in colourful traditional Indian costumes, women carried *pothis* (shastras wrapped in red cloths) and *kalashes* on their heads, and many devotees waved flags. Swamishri also gave darshan during the procession.

Dignitaries, who came for the procession, were honoured by swamis. When the *nagar yatra* concluded in the mandir complex, Swamishri, dignitaries and devotees performed *arti*.

8: Welcome Assembly

Thousands of devotees from various centres



Karyakars with Swamishri during the Karyakar Smruti Sabha, Sydney

had come for the evening welcome assembly for darshan and to honour Swamishri. Children and teenagers performed a variety of exciting cultural programmes to welcome Swamishri. Swamis gave inspiring speeches and also garlanded Swamishri. Dignitaries were also garlanded and voiced their sentiments to welcome Swamishri. In conclusion, Swamishri, swamis and devotees joined hands to express the spirit of *samp*.

9: Karyakar Smruti Sabha

A special felicitation assembly was held to honour the volunteers (*karyakars*) of Australia and New Zealand for their selfless services. Each *karyakar* was welcomed by offering a stole, *pujan* and a sweet in their mouth. The *karyakars* presented an inspiring cultural programme. After the invited guests were honoured, swamis narrated inspiring incidents of *karyakars*.

In conclusion, Swamishri praised the *seva* of *karyakars*, “I experience joy in seeing the sacrifice of *karyakars*. No matter how much we do for the *karyakars*, it will always fall short. To do good *seva karyakars* must follow the *niyams* prescribed by Shriji Maharaj. All should sustain a strong conviction in Shriji Maharaj as Bhagwan and

offer bhakti. By seeing the *seva* of *karyakars* I am overwhelmed with joy.”

13: Pragji Bhakta Jayanti

The 196th birthday celebration of Pragji Bhakta was held in Swamishri’s morning puja in Sydney. Youths sang bhajans extolling the virtues of Bhagatiji Maharaj. Children narrated incidents from the life of Pragji Bhakta, and in conclusion Swamishri blessed the congregation by narrating the glory of Bhagatji Maharaj.

16: Murti-Pratishtha Ceremony at the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir and Cultural Precinct (Haveli)

On the occasion of the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony, the pre-*pratishtha* rituals were performed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami. Devotees participated in the *mahapuja* rituals. Swamishri performed the *pran-pratishtha* of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (*panchdhatu*), Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj (marble *murti*), Shri Guru Parampara, and the marble *murtis* of Shri Radha-Krishna, Shri Sita-Ram-Hanumanji and Shri Shiv-Parvati-Ganeshji.

(Cont. on p. 43)

PUSHPADOLOTSAV FESTIVAL WITH SWAMISHRI AND PRIME MINISTER ANTHONY ALBANESE

14 March 2025, Sydney



The evening Pushpadolotsav assembly was held on the grounds of the BAPS Hindu Mandir and Cultural Precinct in Sydney. Devotees from all parts of the world had specially come for the memorable festival. In the beginning, youths sang festive bhajans and performed a cultural dance. Thereafter, extraordinary stories of harmony, *seva*, dedication and brotherhood exemplified by the youths of Australia were narrated and presented through various means. Swamis also gave inspirational speeches.

One of the highlights of the festival was the arrival of the Prime Minister of Australia, Honourable Anthony Albanese. He and other ministers were honoured with garlands by swamis on behalf of Swamishri. Swamishri presented an auspicious *kalash* to him. The prime minister addressed the huge assembly, “Jai Swaminarayan! It is such a great pleasure to be with you here today, and I was particularly honoured to meet His Holiness earlier on. I'm joined by a number of members of my team: ministers Chris Bowen, Michelle Rowland and Jason Clare and by Andrew Charlton and Anne Stanley.

“It is such a great pleasure to be with you, at this sacred place, for such a special occasion. One of the joys of being prime minister of this great country is the opportunity to come to an event like this, to witness the incredible devotion of communities who have given so much to our country.

“I'd especially like to acknowledge His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj who once again comes to us with his message, that is a message for all Australians, ‘In the joy of others, lies our own.’ Your Holiness, it is an honour for all of us that you have chosen Sydney to celebrate this festival outside India.

“Your Holiness, as we gather here, on the very site that you blessed and chose 10 years ago, I wanted to say on behalf of the Australian people that you are always very welcome here. As a part of the great festival of colours, what Fuldol does is hold out to us the greatest hope of all, the triumph of good over evil as it is a hope that never loses its currency. And as Australians of Hindu faith so compellingly remind us, it is something that we must never stop striving for.

“Through the beautiful power of your example, you have firmly cemented the festival of colours as a cherished fixture in the Australian calendar, and it was my great honour two years ago to celebrate Holi in Gujarat with PM Modi. This year we have gathered to celebrate it in what is already becoming an invaluable addition to our country. The BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir and Cultural Precinct is a majestic work in progress.

“It was His Holiness’s vision that first brought this mandir to life and now that dream is being realized. I am told that when His Holiness first saw the complex, he simply said, ‘I’m home.’ That simple statement speaks volumes, because this mandir is not just a place of worship, it is a place of belonging, of tranquillity, and peace, a place that makes everyone feel at home, regardless of their faith or background.

“The first stage is open and available for all to enjoy and appreciate. And when it is completed, I know that Chris Bowen will be so proud that it will be the largest Hindu mandir precinct in Australia, a place of spiritual growth and development for anyone seeking peace amongst the noise of everyday life.

“His Holiness has always taught that ‘Unity is strength’. When hearts are united, nothing is impossible.

“Yet I often think back, I was discussing with His Holiness, about my first visit to India, way back in 1991, as a very young man, as a backpacker. The memories from that trip are so fresh and vivid. It is when I fell in love with India and Indian culture. I spent six weeks catching trains and buses, even catching a lift.

“What strikes me is that this wonderful mandir and cultural precinct will play such an important role in Australia. I am so confident that the Camps Creek Mandir will be the ‘Akshardham’ of Australia.



Prime Minister Hon. Anthony Albanese in a conversation with Mahant Swami Maharaj

“That is the power in the great heart of your community. Australia is a better country because of you, so to the BAPS community, to all the volunteers who I met earlier today and to all who have contributed to making this dream a reality, you should be, and I know you are, really proud. And to your Holiness, on behalf of the Australian people, welcome home!

“Jai Swaminarayan. Namaste!”

After the prime minister left the assembly, children, teenagers and youths performed a fitting cultural dance to commemorate the festival. Swamishri then performed *pujan* and *arti* of Thakorji.

Swamishri blessed the festive assembly by first apologizing to the devotees and well-wishers for having had to sit in the sun and heat. Then, Swamishri added, “Today, you’ll get coloured with joy but the true colour is of conviction (*nishtha*) and *niyam*-dharma. This colour should never fade, but increase day by day.”

Swamishri then sprinkled coloured water on Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and vice versa. Thereafter, he first sprayed the holy coloured water on the senior sadhus and then on the eager devotees. The devotees danced, rejoiced and basked in the coloured water showered by Swamishri.

◆



After the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony, Swamishri greets all with folded hands, Sydney

(Cont. from p. 40)

Dignitaries and swamis spoke glowingly about the occasion. A report was given about the austerities, *seva* and sacrifice of the devotees.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the auspicious occasion, “My Mandir, my Home. When we believe the mandir to be our home then we will do everything for the mandir. We will become attached to the mandir and do *seva* with a spirit of ownership. Children will attain good values here and our lives will become pure. Offering *seva* and bhakti and doing *samagam* in the mandir with pure feelings will enable you to become *ekantik*. The aim of all mandirs is to enable us to become *ekantik* and make this our last birth.”

22: Grand Shilanyas Ritual of Shikharbaddha Mandir

On the grounds of the BAPS Cultural Precinct in Sydney, Swamishri performed the foundation-stone laying ceremony for the new *shikharbaddha* mandir. Swamishri lowered an auspicious *kalash* in the main *gart* (pit), containing various symbolic divine articles. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami,

Anandswarup Swami and senior sadhus performed rituals at the other pits. Finally, Swamishri blessed, “A grand divine, unique and iconic mandir will be built here. It will become the cynosure of all eyes. We are not the doers, but everything is done by Bhagwan’s blessings and grace. We must endeavour one percent and the remaining 99 percent will be done by him. As you join in this *seva* you will experience that Bhagwan does everything. I pray to Maharaj and Swami that the mandir is completed on time, we get generous support and help from everyone and your (financial) situation becomes



Swamishri places an auspicious *kalash* in the *gart*, Sydney



Swamis and devotees welcome and do darshan of Swamishri at the Y.P.D. Convention Centre, Surat

conductive so that you can render immense *seva* through body, mind and wealth.”

23: Annakut

A beautiful and grand *annakut* was offered during Swamishri’s morning puja to Thakorji. Swamishri performed *arti* of the *annakut*.

Hon. Peter Dutton, Leader of the Opposition, met Swamishri at the BAPS Hindu Mandir and Cultural Precinct.

In the evening assembly, Hon. Milton Dick, Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives,

met Swamishri. He was honoured with a garland in the assembly and also performed *arti*.

APRIL: SYDNEY

2: Departure

Swamishri departed from Sydney by flight to Surat, Gujarat.

3: Arrival, Surat

Early morning, Swamishri landed at Surat airport. As Swamishri arrived at the massive Y.P.D. Convention Centre, thousands of excited devotees



Swamis and devotees welcome Swamishri by showering flower petals as he arrives at the convention centre, Surat

warmly welcomed and showered flower petals as Swamishri’s car passed by. Flower *rangolis* decorated the red-carpet pathway and youths played a music band to welcome Swamishri.

Arriving in Surat after one year, Swamishri was welcomed and honoured with flower garlands on behalf of all by Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Kothari Uttamprakash Swami, government minister Shri Prafulbhai Panseriya, Mayor of Surat Shri Daksheshbhai Mavani and diamond magnate Shri Lavjibhai Badshah.



Swamishri performs *arti* to celebrate the 244th Shri Hari Jayanti festival, Surat

Swamishri blessed over 4,000 devotees who had observed special austerities and spiritual sadhanas for his good health and to please him. After nearly four months of *vicharan* in Africa and Australia, Swamishri stayed for a few days at the Pramukh Swami Hospital for his routine checkup and rest.

6: 244th Shri Hari Jayanti Celebration

Swamishri performed *pujan* and *arti* of a *murti* of Bhagwan Ram and celebrated the birth of Shri Ram on Ram Navami. In the evening, a grand celebration assembly was held at the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Sabhagruh near the BAPS Mandir in Adajan. Thousands of devotees had assembled for the evening celebration.

Swamishri was welcomed by youths playing the music band and blowing conches. During the assembly, swamis delivered speeches extolling the glory of Bhagwan Ram and Bhagwan Swaminarayan. The celebratory programme was interspersed with videos. Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured by swamis with a variety of decorative garlands. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the festive assembly, “Today, is the birth of Bhagwan Ram and Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Both of them emphasized upon the observance

of dharma-*niyams*, because by observing *agna* one experiences peace and happiness.

“Out of immense grace upon us Bhagwan Swaminarayan was born on this day. If he had not been born we would all still be entangled in the cycles of life and death. It is because of his grace that we all exist. We should ponder upon the thought of his *prapti*.”

Thereafter, Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj was placed in a golden crib and a variety of foods were offered as *annakut*. Swamishri rocked Thakorji during the singing of *dhun*. At 10.10 p.m., Swamishri, senior sadhus and guests performed the *janma jayanti arti*. Swamishri then rocked Thakorji while children and teenagers danced and celebrated during the festive bhajans sung by swamis.

On this auspicious day, Bhagwan Ram’s and Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s birthday were celebrated at all BAPS mandirs in India and abroad. All the mandirs were festively decorated and *annakut* was offered to the deities. To please Thakorji and Mahant Swami Maharaj, thousands of devotees observed austerities, performed *pradakshinas*, *dandvats*, *mala japs* and scripture reading. Processions, mass *arti* and Satsang Diksha *homatmak* chantings were also held to celebrate Shri Hari’s 244th birthday.



Swamishri presides over the Sunday satsang assembly

On 12 April Swamishri performed *pujan* and *arti* of Shri Hanumanji and celebrated Hanuman Jayanti.

13: Sunday Satsang Assembly

Thousands of devotees from Surat and satsang centres of south Gujarat had arrived for the evening Sunday satsang *sabha*. After the customary *dhun* and bhajans sung by swamis, the satsang *sabha* was themed on 'The Dream of a Great Pilgrim Place'. Swamis spoke on various aspects of the theme. Then, Swamishri blessed the mammoth assembly through a question-answer session with youths. Thereafter, Swamishri was garlanded by senior swamis. Finally, Swamishri blessed the entire assembly with words of wisdom.

15 & 16

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the new BAPS *hari* mandirs in Govindpur (Dhari), Nada (Dabhoi), Tadhivedi (Poshina), Hafsabad (Modasa), Kishorpura (Modasa) and Amod (Mahelav – Guru Parampara *murtis*). ♦

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



10: Welcome Assembly

Swamishri travelled from the BAPS mandir in the Adajan suburb to the Akshardham site in Kanad. He was joyously welcomed by youths playing a music band, devotees waving flags and showering flower petals.

The evening welcome assembly began with *dhun* and bhajans. Children and youths performed a welcome dance to honour Swamishri. Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami, Kothari Uttamprakash Swami and other swamis honoured Swamishri with flower garlands. Many dignitaries were also present to welcome Swamishri.

In the coming days, Swamishri's daily puja darshan, discourses by swamis on 'Mahant Charitam', special evening satsang assemblies and celebrations were scheduled at the sacred Akshardham grounds.

‘Santvibhuti Pramukh Swami Maharaj’ Book Launch at BAPS Mandir

23 March 2025, Ahmedabad



The Sahitya Akademi – India’s National Academy of Letters – under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, in collaboration with BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, Delhi, launched the book ‘Santvibhuti Pramukh Swami Maharaj’ at the BAPS Mandir in Ahmedabad in the presence of eminent dignitaries, scholars and authors.

Authored by Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami, the book presents an insightful portrayal of the profound life, works and global services of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his contributions in sustaining and fostering Indian culture. It reflects upon his spiritual influence and service-driven leadership that brought global recognition to India’s timeless heritage of Sanatan Dharma.

After lighting the ceremonial lamp and offering floral tributes before a *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the eminent guests shared their wisdom.

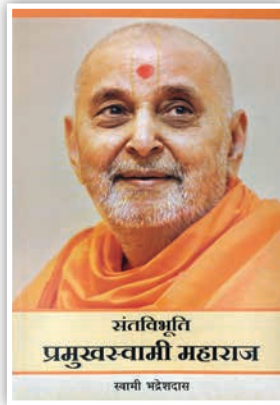
Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Culture, Government

of India, praised, “It is impossible to capture Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s vast life journey in a single book. The moment I had darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the most fortunate and blessed moment of my life.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a rare soul. He was a saint who dedicated every moment of his life to public welfare. He was a saint who lived every moment in infinite bliss, seeing the entire world as a manifestation of God.

“He was the embodiment of infinite peace, yet simultaneously simple, straightforward, and humble. By dedicating every moment of his life to public welfare, he made an immense contribution to preserving Sanatan Dharma. Amidst numerous invasions, the reason Indian culture remains uninterrupted and eternal is because of such saints who have donned saffron robes and made sacrifices.

“He kept Indian culture perpetually renewed. At a time when Indian culture needed preservation and the saint tradition



needed strengthening, Pramukh Swami Maharaj initiated saints, built mandirs, and promoted scriptural traditions.

“He was full of affection and capable of delivering eternal wisdom in just a few words. People felt that every message he gave was for their welfare, and his words would resonate deeply in their hearts. The changing global role of India today has a special contribution from Pramukh Swami Maharaj. By publishing this book about his life, I feel that my ministry and I have been blessed.”

Dr Bhagyesh Jha, President, Gujarat Literature Academy, Gandhinagar, said, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed many devotees like myself. I met him 29 times. In 2000, I spent 24 hours with him in Sarangpur. At that time, I realized that the globally venerable Pramukh Swami Maharaj never used a single moment for himself, but used every moment for society, religion, and cultural protection. Being in the proximity of such a person was a blessed moment of my life. His blessings were a greater honour for me than even the Padma Bhushan.

“This book is not just a book, it is a guru’s saga, a poem, the essence of our shastras, and the purpose of human life. Despite managing a vast empire-like organization, Swami Bapa always smiled like a child. Today, the subtle presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj is here.”

Dr K. Srinivas Rao, Secretary, National Literature Academy, Delhi, explained, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj was one of the greatest spiritual personalities of the 20th century. He was a spiritual guide and supreme friend to everyone. He showered selfless love towards all. Due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s tireless efforts, BAPS has served in numerous spiritual and social activities.

“The Literature Academy is extremely pleased to publish this book about his life, written by Bhadreshdasji Swami. This book is a brilliant document of a divine life and philosophy.”

Shri Tarun Vijayji, Former Member of Parliament, scholar and author, said, “When I became a member of parliament, Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed me at Akshardham in Delhi to spend my life serving India along with serving the poor and helpless people of society. Only India’s sages, ascetics, and saints can give such blessings. Pramukh Swami Maharaj dedicated his entire life to serving humanity. Through him, Vedantic knowledge was spread to everyone, and through him, brave saints are propagating and expanding the radiance of India’s eternal religion across the entire globe. This is Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s greatest gift to the world. He was a century-defining personality.”

Prof. Srinivas Varkhedi, Vice Chancellor, Central Sanskrit University, Delhi, opined, “Today, through this book, we are having darshan of a great personality and guiding light, Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This book is not a literary work or a biography, but a manifestation of a saint. In every word of this book, one experiences the presence of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself.

“My guru Swami Vishveshtirthji Maharaj used to say that just as King Bhagirath brought the divine Ganga to this land to liberate his ancestors, Pramukh Swami Maharaj propagated the Indian cultural Ganga worldwide for the liberation of future generations. He was a modern-day Bhagirath-like saint.”

Prof. Murali Manohar Pathak, Vice Chancellor, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri National Sanskrit University said, “I have watched Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s videos many times. His facial expressions reveal the essence of the Indian spiritual aura. Reading this book, I felt that this is the language of conduct, civilization, good character, and culture.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj lived for the welfare of the public and dedicated his entire life for social good. He had done so much for the society, nation, and world that we cannot even imagine. Mahant

Swami Maharaj is another form of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Just by having his darshan, worldly sorrows disappear, and all difficulties are resolved.”

Prof. G.S.R. Krishnamurthy, Vice Chancellor, National Sanskrit University, Tirupati asserted, “Just by remembering Pramukh Swami Maharaj, our heart’s desires are fulfilled. Under his inspiration, Bhadreshdas Swami wrote the commentary on the Prasthantrayi. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the embodiment of service. His special quality was that he paved the way of selfless action.”

Prof. Harekrishna Satpathi, Former Vice Chancellor, National Sanskrit University, Tirupati, said, “Like a sacred confluence, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was himself a confluence. He was an ocean of knowledge, an ocean of action, an ocean of devotion. In Swamiji, the Ganga of action, the Yamuna of devotion, and the Saraswati of knowledge flowed. These three rivers merged into one great ocean.

“The same merit one gets by bathing at a holy pilgrimage site will be obtained by remembering the name and life of the saintly personality Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

Mahamahopadhyaya Padmashri Gautambhai Patel shared, “India has produced great personalities like Swami Vivekanand and Pramukh Swami Maharaj who have guided the world. Pramukh Swamiji was the embodiment of equality. If a four-year-old child invited him, he would go to their hut, and on the other hand, he would give an inspiring speech at the UN addressing the entire world. The composition of this book is marvelous. I request that everyone study this book.”

Prof. Virendrakumar Tiwari, Former Director, IIT, Kharagpur, said, “BAPS volunteers provide service worldwide through Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s grace. People from every walk of life are involved. Today, the world needs dialogue and peace, which can only come through the words

of a saint like Pramukh Swami Maharaj and by reading such books.”

Shri Madhav Ramanuj, a renowned poet, recalled, “I had the benefit of having Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s darshan on many occasions. He had saved many people’s lives. Many great works were done by him. Much more can be written about him. By seeing, knowing, and reading all this, we will continue to get constant inspiration.”

Prof. Sukantakumar Senapati, Vice Chancellor, Somnath Sanskrit University, said, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a great human being. The objective of Indian wisdom is to become human. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was its best example. His vow was public welfare. He remained dedicated to public service throughout his life.”

Finally, Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami, author of the book, spoke, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life was not lived in a single time period; it was an immortal historical event. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a noble saint. A supreme devotee of God, a pure heart, pure thoughts, and pure actions were his identity. Such a saint is called Brahmaswarup in spiritual philosophy. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s extraordinary life infused energy into us. In the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Lord Shri Krishna says, ‘Esha Brahmi-sthiti’ –This is the Brahmic state. Another name for the Brahmic state is Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He was the living embodiment of the ‘sthitaprajna’ described in the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita. His existence is eternal. Presently, Mahant Swami Maharaj is the representative of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This book is a unique offering at the feet of Pramukh Swami Maharaj on behalf of the Government of India, for his divine life and selfless service works.”

The event concluded with a grand opening of the book by Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister of Culture, and the stage dignitaries, amidst a thunderous applause from the packed auditorium. ♦



INDIA

NEW ZEALAND PRIME MINISTER VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM 18 March 2025, Delhi



The Rt Hon. Christopher Luxon, Prime Minister of New Zealand, visited BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, with a 110-member delegation, including senior government officials, ministers, business leaders, and community representatives from New Zealand.

Prime Minister Luxon and his delegation received a traditional welcome before exploring the intricately carved mandir, which embodies India's rich heritage, devotion, and values. As a mark of respect, Prime Minister Luxon offered flower petals at the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir and participated in the *abhishek* ceremony.

YUVAK ANTAR JAGRUTI PARVA 2025 2-12 April 2025

The 91 youths of the first Yuva Talim Kendra batch of 2025 participated in the Antar Jagruti Parva. The *yuvaks*, split into 22 groups, visited 232 villages in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan.

The youths contacted 8,928 households to convey the importance of satsang values in



daily lives. They inspired 1,651 families to take various vows to help foster personal spirituality and family harmony. These included attending weekly satsang assemblies, doing daily puja, going to their local mandir for darshan, reading Swamini Vato and Vachanamrut regularly, fasting on *ekadashi*, doing *ghar sabha* regularly, and other such devotional satsang rituals and practices.

During their travels, the youths conducted 186 satsang assemblies, which were attended by around 11,400 people. They also held about 80 assemblies especially for children, and 105 school assemblies, where they provided guidance to over 18,800 children. In the evenings, the *yuvaks* organized special devotional processions in the villages, in which about 2,000 people participated. They also inspired 400 people to give up various addictions.

This opportunity gave the *yuvaks* practical experience and enabled them to also draw inspiration from devotees who sincerely practise satsang in their daily lives.

US VICE PRESIDENT JD VANCE VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM 21 April 2025, Delhi

The Vice President of the United States, Mr JD Vance, began his maiden official visit to India



with a spiritually enriching visit to Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. He was joined by his wife, Second Lady Usha Vance, and their three children – Ewan, Vivek, and Mirabel.

Upon arrival, the Vance family received a traditional Indian welcome with flower garlands and friendship threads, symbolizing goodwill and unity. The family was guided through the Akshardham complex, gaining insights into India's ancient cultural and spiritual heritage of faith, peace, selfless service, and family unity, which the complex embodies through its architecture and exhibitions.

Vice President Vance was honoured by BAPS swamis and presented a personal letter of blessings and prayers from His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. The letter expressed heartfelt gratitude for the visit and special prayers for the well-being of the vice president and his family, as well as for the continued unity and progress of the United States of America.

The Vance family was presented commemorative gifts and a framed family photograph taken in front of the mandir was also presented as a special memento.

Reflecting on the experience, Vice President JD Vance wrote in the guest book: "Thank you all so much for your hospitality and kindness in welcoming me and my family to this beautiful place. It is a great credit to India that you built a beautiful temple with precision and care. Our kids, in particular, loved it. God bless."

The special visit reflected the deep-rooted friendship and shared ideals between India and

the United States. It also underscored the vital role of spiritual and cultural institutions in fostering and promoting dialogue, respect, and harmony between nations and traditions.

UK

BAPS MANDIR FEATURED IN SACRED ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION

27 February to 31 May 2025, Paris, France



The Pavillon de l'Arsenal at Espace Notre-Dame, a leading centre for urban and architectural exhibitions in Paris, explored the theme of sanctity in the context of architecture, religion, nature, and its evolving role in modern society in its 'Sacred Places: Building, Celebrating, Coexisting' exhibition. Among the featured exhibits was the upcoming BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir in Bussy-Saint-Georges, Paris.

The mandir was featured through various visual mediums – a framed exhibit on the wall, a spatial blueprint on the floor, and a detailed account in the accompanying exhibition book, *Lieux Sacrés*. The blueprint on the floor, alongside other architectural landmarks of Paris, such as the Pantheon and Notre-Dame Cathedral, highlights the significance of the mandir to the people of Paris.

The exhibition also recognized the location of the mandir on the unique Esplanade des Religions et des Cultures in the Parisian district of Bussy-Saint-Georges. Sitting alongside other places of worship, the mandir plays an

important role with other faith communities in promoting interfaith harmony and serving as a beacon of diversity, inclusivity, and cooperative coexistence.

Mathieu Lours, a distinguished French historian of architecture and the curator of Sacred Places, commented on the significance of the mandir's inclusion in the exhibition, "We have created [Sacred Places]... to highlight all the sacred buildings that are not necessarily historical monuments, but that deserve recognition because they give meaning to places and bring beauty to them."

THE GREAT BRITISH SPRING CLEAN

21 March to 27 April 2025



Volunteers from 18 BAPS mandirs and centres around the UK took to the streets to help clean up and rejuvenate their local neighbourhoods.

The volunteers filled more than 150 bags containing various forms of litter, significantly improving the surrounding environment.

The initiative was part of The Great British Spring Clean, the nation's largest mass-action environmental campaign in which thousands of individuals, groups and schools come together around the country to participate.

The annual event is organized by Keep Britain Tidy, a leading independent environmental charity that works to inspire, educate and enable everyone in the country to value the environment on their doorstep.

In many places, BAPS volunteers were joined by local councillors, well-wishers and residents,

who were grateful to BAPS for helping improve the local neighbourhood.

KARYAKAR SHIBIR

22–23 March 2025, UK & Europe



More than 2,000 volunteers from across the UK and Europe participated in the Karyakar Shibirs held in London, Leicester, Manchester, Paris (France), Heidenrod (Germany), and Lisbon (Portugal).

Themed 'Upasak Karyakar', the *shibirs* deepened the understanding of what it means to be a devoted volunteer who firmly upholds and practises the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Delegates reflected on Shastriji Maharaj's immense hardships in propagating the eternal truth at the foundation of BAPS and explored its rich history. They also learnt about the four key principles of Shastriji Maharaj explained by Mahant Swami Maharaj, namely: faith in *upasana*; versatility and perseverance in one's *seva*; humility and empathy whilst performing one's *seva*; and remaining dedicated and loyal.

The *shibirs* featured a diverse range of engaging sessions, practical panel discussions, inspiring presentations on *seva* and spiritual resilience, discourses by swamis reinforcing the importance of humility, dedication and steadfastness, and impactful videos bringing to life the legacy of Shastriji Maharaj and the spiritual principles he revived.

The *shibirs* inspired the delegates to perform their assigned *seva* with conviction, humility, and

unwavering faith while remaining rooted in the *upasana* enshrined by Shastriji Maharaj.

NORTH AMERICA

CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER VISITS BAPS MANDIR

5 April 2025, Toronto



The Right Honourable Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada, visited the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto.

Prime Minister Carney was warmly welcomed in a traditional Hindu manner by the Board of Directors of BAPS Canada and BAPS swamis in the Abhishek Mandapam.

The prime minister performed the auspicious *abhishek* ritual of Nilkanth Varni Maharaj, offering prayers for peace and well-being across Canada and around the world.

The prime minister then proceeded to the main mandir, where he admired the architecture and intricate carvings, taking a deep interest in the spiritual and cultural significance of this sacred place. He joined the swamis in performing the *arti* and offered flowers and a basket of fruits to the *murtis* in the central shrine.

A special letter of blessings for the prime minister, sent from India by Mahant Swami Maharaj, was then read aloud in his presence. The prime minister was touched by the heartfelt message. Mahant Swami Maharaj wrote: “It is a pleasure and joy to welcome you today to the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto, Canada. Your visit is deeply appreciated, and prayers have

been offered to Bhagwan Swaminarayan for your continued strength and clarity as you lead the nation of Canada with wisdom, strength, and integrity... Prayers have also been offered for Canada’s continued success and for the well-being of its citizens.”

Before departing, the prime minister wrote a message in the guest book: “With the deepest appreciation for your prayers and hospitality, and with all my conviction to work without fail to promote peace, unity, harmony, and prosperity for Canada, India, and all nations.”

He also spent time interacting with community members and Hindu leaders, marking a warm and meaningful conclusion to his visit.

CANADA’S OPPOSITION LEADER VISITS BAPS MANDIR

18 April 2025, Toronto



The Honourable Pierre Poilievre, Leader of the Official Opposition of Canada, visited the BAPS Mandir in Toronto.

Hon. Poilievre was warmly welcomed in a traditional Hindu style by the Board of Directors of BAPS Canada and BAPS swamis in the Abhishek Mandapam.

He performed the *abhishek* ritual, offering heartfelt prayers for peace and well-being across Canada and around the world.

During his visit, Hon. Poilievre interacted with volunteers of all ages, as well as representatives from Hindu community organizations and local leaders, acknowledging their service and contributions to society.

ASIA PACIFIC

MURTI-PRATISHTHA CELEBRATIONS

23–25 March 2025, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Singapore



On 23 March, the new *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Nilkanth Varni were honoured in a colourful *palkhi* and chariot during a *nagar yatra* around the mandir vicinity.

On 25 March, following the Vedic *murti-pratishtha mahapuja* rituals, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the new *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Nilkanth Varni in the presence of over 200 devotees and well-wishers.

Also present on this occasion were notable members of the Indian community, Mr Hari Dass and Mr Sengkuttuvan.

In the celebration assembly, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami inspired everyone to visit mandir regularly for darshan and *abhishek*.

BSRI AUSTRALIA CONFERENCE: ‘TIMELESS TEACHINGS FROM HINDU MANDIRS’

28 March 2025, Sydney

BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha was honoured with 18 commendation letters from community organizations at the third annual BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute (BSRI) conference in Sydney, recognizing its outstanding contributions to society. These letters highlight the positive impact BAPS has made spiritually and in fostering social harmony.

Held at the newly opened BAPS Swaminarayan



Mandir and Cultural Precinct, this year’s conference was themed ‘Timeless Teachings from Hindu Mandirs’. The event featured enlightening speeches by senior BAPS sadhus, and discussions on how the principles taught in Hindu mandirs play a pivotal role in building strong and compassionate communities.

Drawing on his extensive experience as a community leader and elected representative, Warren Kirby, State Member of Parliament for Riverstone, spoke about the vital role places of worship play in society. He said, “Mandirs are essential in preparing the next generation with the tools they need to face life’s challenges. They teach language and culture that has lasted for thousands of years, instilling a strong sense of self.”

A standout moment of the conference was the demonstration of unity by community organizations, who signed a pledge to embody the enduring values of love, peace, and harmony inspired by Mahant Swami Maharaj, by fostering a more inclusive, united, and compassionate society.

Over 70 attendees from 21 community organizations participated in the conference, highlighting the shared commitment to community building through the teachings at Hindu mandirs.

BAPS EAST ASIA KARYAKAR SATSANG SHIBIR: ‘SUVARNA SE ADHIK’

18–20 April 2025, Bangkok, Thailand

Over 235 dedicated *karyakars* from BAPS



centres in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand gathered at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir in Bangkok for a spiritually enriching three-day Satsang Shibir themed ‘Suvarna Se Adhik’.

The *shibir* focused on some of the essential pillars of BAPS Satsang: Prapti, Satsang Reading, Nitya Puja, Ghar Sabha, and Pragat Nishtha. These core topics were explored through insightful discourses by experienced and learned swamis, inspiring videos and engaging presentations.

Separate parallel sessions for *balaks-balikas* and *kishores-kishoris* provided age-appropriate learning, deepening their understanding and practice of Satsang values.

UAE

THE GLOBAL JUSTICE, LOVE, AND PEACE SUMMIT 2025

13 April 2025, Dubai



Around 1,200 delegates from the world over attended ‘The Global Justice, Love, and Peace Summit’, a unique peace summit organized by the ‘I am Peacekeeper Movement’ at the EXPO 2020

venue in Dubai. The delegates included a galaxy of Nobel laureates, celebrities, leaders, thinkers, and speakers.

Among the Nobel laureates present were human rights activist Abdessattar Ben Moussa, educationist Houcine Abbasi, Jose Ramos Horta, President of East Timor, Indian social activist Kailash Satyarthi, Lech Walesa, former President of Poland, Leymah Gbowee from Liberia, Mohamed Fadhel Mahfoudh, President of the Tunisian Order of Lawyers, and others.

In his address, HE Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance and Co-existence, said, “It will be our wisdom that will strengthen peace among nations and will promote and ensure respect and human rights for everyone. It will be our wisdom that will allow us to resolve conflicts through peaceful means.”

Representing BAPS at the summit, Swami Brahmagharidas said, “The role of faith leaders in promoting peace and harmony is critical. His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj prayed for and envisioned a mandir in Abu Dhabi that bridges countries, cultures, and religions. Today, the BAPS Hindu Mandir has become a spiritual oasis for global harmony. With over 70,000 people stepping forward to lay a brick during the construction of the mandir, the journey itself was one of harmony. In the past year, over 2.5 million people from all over the world, of all religions, races, and cultures have visited. The mandir itself is the proof that religions can coexist, that countries can help one another, that culture is no longer a point of conflict, but the creation of cohesion.”

The two-day conference created positive energy across all sections of society.

SWAMI KAILASHANAND GIRI JI MAHARAJ VISITS BAPS HINDU MANDIR

20 April 2025, Abu Dhabi

Swami Kailashanand Giri ji Maharaj,



Neeranjan Peethadheeshwar Shree Shree 1008 Acharya Mahamandaleswar, visited the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. He was welcomed with traditional honour by the sadhus at the mandir.

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. He appreciated the continued immense support and active contribution of the UAE leadership to the mandir.

He called upon people from all faiths and countries, whether they believe in Sanatan Dharma or not, to visit this mandir to witness what strong conviction backed by divinity can build.

Swamiji also performed 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.

FORMER INDIAN PRESIDENT VISITS BAPS HINDU MANDIR

21 April 2025, Abu Dhabi

Shri Ram Nath Kovind and his family were



traditionally received with garlands by the Board of Directors at the BAPS Hindu Mandir.

As the former president walked through the mandir's serene surroundings, he explored and appreciated the mandir's key architectural and spiritual features. He also witnessed The Fairy Tale immersive show, which conveys messages of values, unity, and cultural harmony through engaging visuals and inspiring history.

Inside the mandir, Shri Kovindji admired the intricacy of the Pillar of the Pillars, offered heartfelt prayers at each of the seven inner shrines, and reflected on the far-reaching legacy of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, whose vision brought this spiritual haven to life.

Describing the BAPS Hindu Mandir as "a summary of all mandirs", Shri Ram Nath Kovind lauded its stunning architectural elegance and profound spiritual resonance. He highlighted that the mandir is not only a place of worship but also a living testament to India's timeless values of acceptance, non-violence, and unity in diversity. Shri Kovindji noted that such a place, built with the spirit of collaboration and devotion, holds the potential to become a global symbol of peace and harmony. He envisioned the mandir as a future gathering place for world

leaders where dialogue, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to unity could flourish. He added that this mandir honours and embraces the diverse perspectives and interests of all cultures and countries.

AFRICA

FIRST VISIT TO NIGERIA BY BAPS SWAMIS

13–16 March 2025, Nigeria



For the first time, BAPS swamis conducted satsang *vicharan* in Nigeria.

The swamis met Shri Chandramauli Kumar, India's Consul General in Nigeria. During this meeting, he shared many details about Indians living in Nigeria and swamis discussed the various service activities conducted by BAPS in Africa.

The swamis also visited the ISKCON Mandir, Gita Mandir, Gita Ashram and other Hindu mandirs. The swamis were warmly received, as it was the first time Hindu swamis were visiting.

On 15 March, the swamis conducted an evening satsang assembly at Sundarkand Pathya. The swamis spoke on the messages of Sundarkand and inspired the devotees to develop steadfast devotion like Hanumanji in their lives. Additionally, they conducted satsang in small groups at the homes of devotees.

On 16 March, a public satsang assembly was organized at Gita Ashram, attended by around 200 local followers. Devotees were delighted by the swamis' kirtans and discourses. India's Consul General Shri Chandramauli, senior Gujarati

community representatives Shri Shaileshbhai Tanna and Shri Chandreshbhai Shah were also present. Quoting the Satsang Diksha, Shri Chandramauli said, "Everything that can be achieved in human life is contained in this Satsang Diksha shastra."

The swamis visited the homes, shops, and industrial complexes of over 35 devotees, offering prayers for their well-being.

The five-day visit helped to strengthen the devotion of *satsangis* staying in different places, encouraged others to become satsang-oriented and inspired many to give up addictions and adopt a pure lifestyle.

BAPS MANDIR MURTI-PRATISHTHA MAHOTSAV

19–20 April 2025, Mzuzu, Malawi



Mzuzu is a city in the northern region of Malawi, in Central Africa. Despite the small Indian population in this city, Satsang assemblies were started through the efforts of Shri Rasikbhai Patel, who had settled in Mzuzu for business from Limbe city.

In 2018, after land was acquired, the foundation stone ceremony was performed by Pujya Kothari Bhaktapriya Swami. With the cooperation and dedication of local devotees, a beautiful mandir was constructed.

Then, 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 Yagneshwar Swami, Nikhilesh Swami, Priyavrat Swami and other 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. His wife, Mrs Nyasulu, walked in the women's section. 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.

The evening assembly featured devotional songs by swamis and youths, and a drama

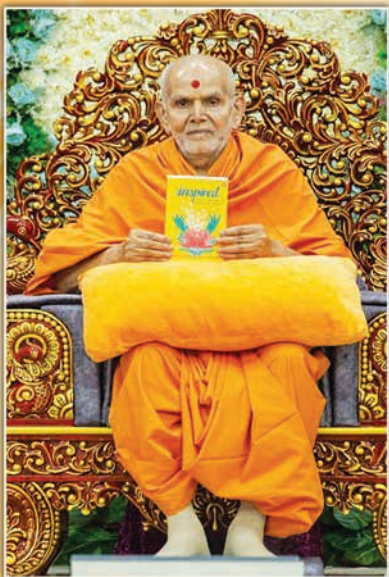
titled 'Small Country, Great Compassion', commemorating the grace of the Gunatit gurus on Malawi.

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.

Children also celebrated the inauguration with a traditional dance performance. The assembly concluded with the video blessings of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, specially sent for this occasion. ♦

NEW PUBLICATION



INSPIRED

Daily Wisdom for Holistic Living

Author: Gnanvatsaldas Swami

Through compelling storytelling and concise, powerful chapters, Gnanvatsal Swami empowers readers to overcome inner struggles and embrace lasting success. Whether seeking inspiration or a clear path to personal growth, this book will ignite your journey.

The four pillars of this book – Personal Growth, Family Values, Work Ethics & Human Relations, and Spirituality – are essential components for a well-rounded and fulfilling life.

May all get great inspiration from this book.

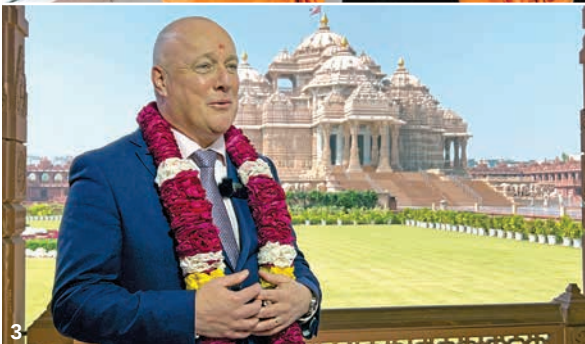


Also available at all BAPS bookstores



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ AT KANAD, SURAT

1. Yuvaks present before Swamishri during the evening Yuva Din assembly (20 April 2025).
2. Thousands of youths seated in the Yuva Din assembly (20 April 2025).
3. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of murtis for the new BAPS hari mandirs (16 April 2025).



1. American Vice President JD Vance and his family at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi (22 April 2025).
2. Candian Prime Minister, Hon. Mark Carney, with BAPS Swamis and senior devotees at the BAPS Mandir in Toronto, Canada (7 April 2025).
3. New Zealand Prime Minister, Hon. Christopher Luxon, at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi (18 March 2025).
4. BAPS swamis meet this Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Abu Dhabi, UAE (15 April 2025).