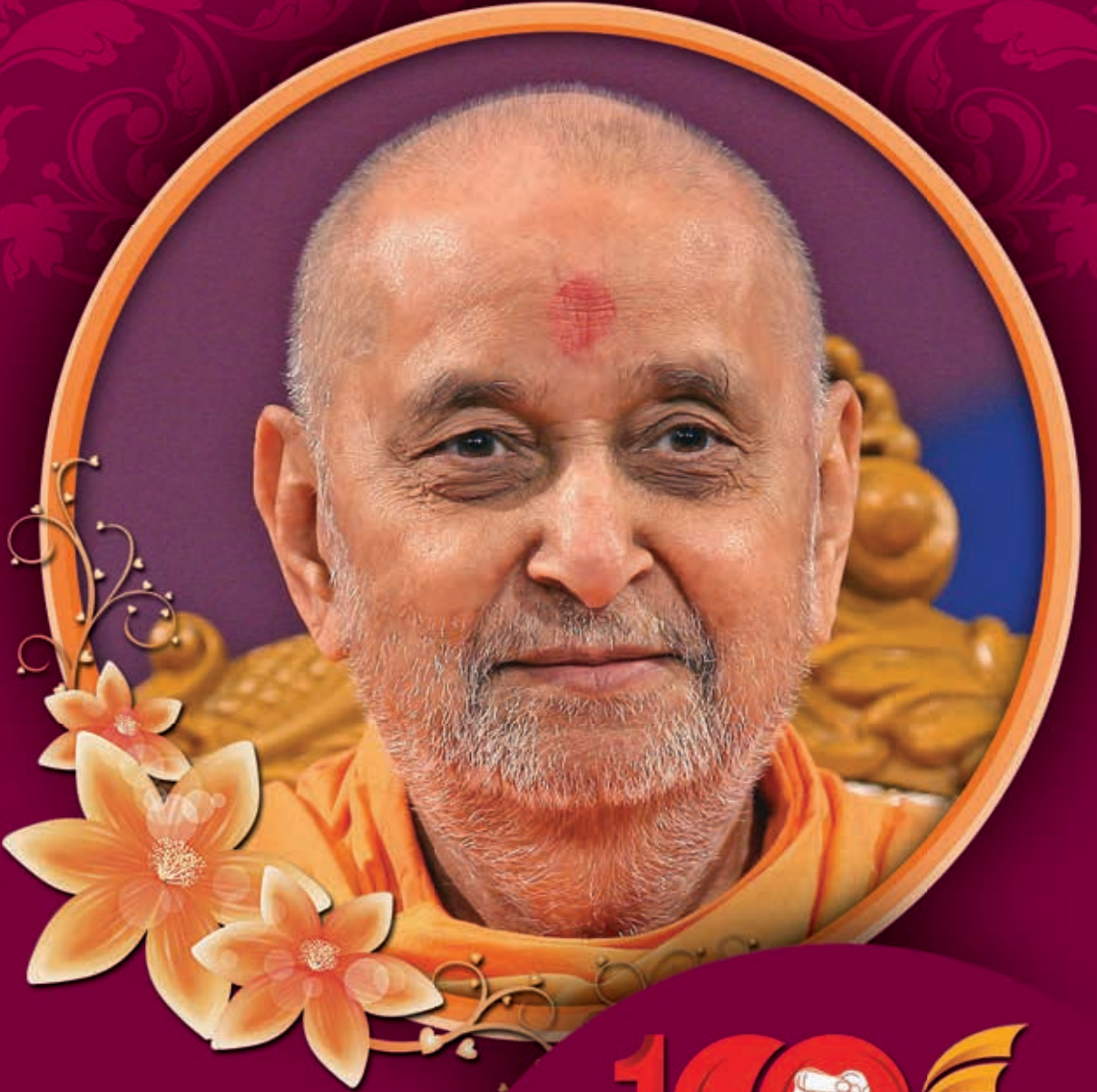


# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

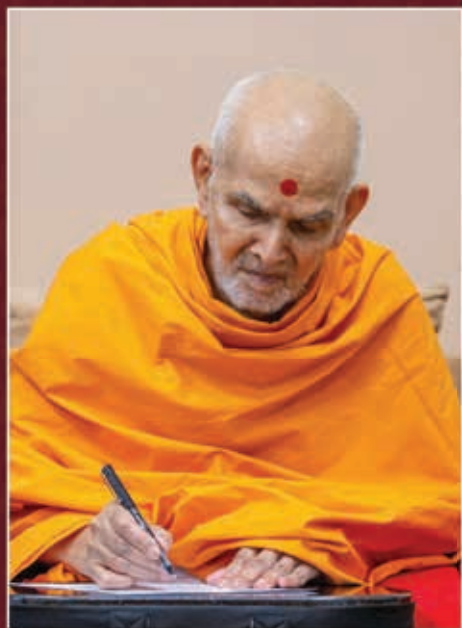
November–December 2021

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**Pramukh Swami Maharaj**  
**Centenary Celebrations**  
(1921–2022)





**Param Pujya  
Mahant Swami Maharaj's  
New Year Blessings**

Swami-Shreeji  
Bliss Readers & Others  
Heartiest New Year  
and  
Diwali Greetings.

Sorangpur

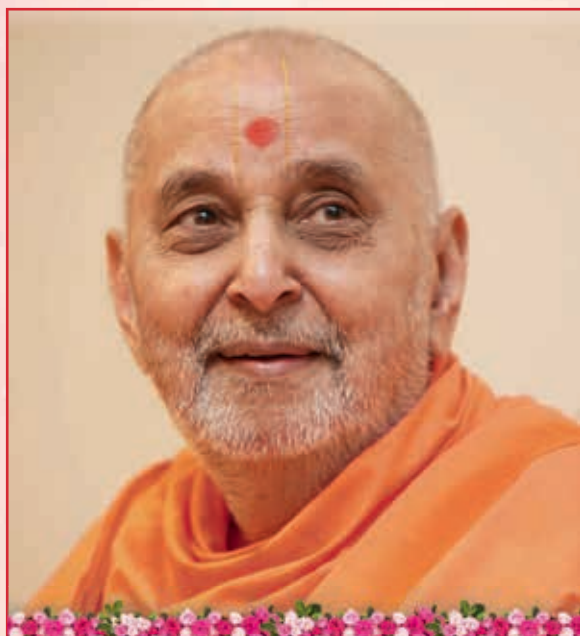
18-10-'21

Monday

May Bhagwan Swaminarayan  
grant everyone with peace, happiness  
and bliss. May all be blessed with  
good health and wealth. May all  
continue to grow in satsang, bhajan,  
bhakti and observing niyam dharma.  
May the forty nine feet Nilkanth  
Varni Mahaprabhu (Robinsville), who  
is overseeing the entire universe  
fulfill everyone's wishes.

Jai Shree Swaminarayan  
from  
Sadhu Keshavjiwandas





Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

November–December 2021, Vol. 44, No. 6



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

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# SHRI HARI GIFTS HIS PAGH TO ARDESHAR...

*Before departing from Surat, Shri Hari expresses his rajipo on  
Ardeshar Kotwal by gifting his pagh...*

## AGAIN IN RUSTAM BAUG

Shri Hari made preparations to depart on Maghshar *sud* 2. Ardesharji requested, “Maharaj, before you depart come to Rustam Baug again and give darshan and discourses to the devotees.” Shri Hari agreed.

Shri Hari mounted on Manki and the *parshads* and Kathi Darbars were ready on their horses. The music band and soldiers were also ready to march ahead. The people of Surat were prepared to give Shriji Maharaj a grand farewell. The procession soon reached Rustam Baug.

Ardeshar Sheth had arranged seats for Shri Hari, *sadguru* sadhus and Kathi Darbars. When Shri Hari sat the congregation loudly hailed the *jai* of Sahajanand Swami. Maharaj smiled and blessed all.

## SHRI HARI GIVES HIS PAGH TO ARDESHAR

Ardeshar Sheth sat down before Shri Hari. He wished for a gift sanctified by Shri Hari, so that he could daily do darshan and *pujan*, remember him, and also consolidate his devotion towards him. The all-knowing Shri Hari read his thoughts. Then, Ardesharji performed Maharaj’s *pujan*, offered a garland and clothes and donated money. Thereafter, Maharaj discoursed to the assembly and got up to leave. Ardesharji’s eyes turned moist and he asked, “Maharaj, when shall I have the opportunity of your darshan again?” Shri Hari smiled and replied, “Whenever you



remember me.” Then, Maharaj lovingly embraced Ardesharji. The latter experienced profound peace and purity. Ardesharji was overwhelmed with ecstasy and tears of joy. He removed his *pagh*, bowed down to Maharaj, and held his feet and passionately appreciated, “O compassionate one! You have showered so much compassion and grace upon an ordinary servant of yours.”

Shri Hari removed his own *pagh*, decorated with roses, and placed it on Ardeshar’s head. The latter was overwhelmed and reverently touched it to his eyes, chest and bowed to it. Ardesharji’s eyes were still moist with tears.

Shri Hari placed his hand on Ardesharji’s head and said, “Sheth, you have put aside your protocol and prestige to serve and please me. Due to your love and devotion I have given you this sanctified *pagh*. By doing its darshan your devotion for me will flourish. Worship it daily and your house will become a place of pilgrimage. Great, senior sadhus and devotees will come to your house for this *pagh*’s darshan. So, your house will always remain a place of pilgrimage.”

Ardesharji Sheth was simply amazed by Shri Hari’s words. Again, he respectfully touched the *pagh* to his chest. He thought, “Maharaj has showered his infinite grace upon me.” Shri Hari spoke to him, “One who is an ocean of compassion is generous in showering his divine compassion. You have been blessed with that

compassion, so do not worry about anything.”<sup>1</sup> Then, on 22 November 1824 (Maghshar *sud* 2, Samvat 1881), Shri Hari mounted his Manki to depart from Surat. Many devotees of Surat accompanied Shri Hari to Kosad and bid him farewell. Shri Hari stayed the night there and left the next morning towards Bharuch in an oxen cart. He arrived at an old mandir and revealed to Anandanand Swami, “King Bali<sup>2</sup> had performed a *yagna* here, and in future a big mandir will be built at this place.” Shri Hari often preached that mandirs would sustain *upasana* and dharma.

Shriji Maharaj departed from Bharuch and travelled to Amod, Kareli and Khambhat, where he stayed the night.

### TIRED OF EATING SWEETS

Next morning, Maharaj travelled to Gudel village and cooked brinjals and *bati* for lunch. For the sadhus and Kathi devotees there were sweet items. But the devotees were tired of eating them because of the daily menu of sweet foods during their stay in Surat. Consequently, Sura Khachar did not eat properly. When Shri Hari found out, he sent brinjals and *bati* for him. Sura Khachar was very pleased and told Maharaj, “If you had not sent brinjals and *bati* I would have remained hungry. I am fed up of eating sweets.”

Shri Hari smiled and asked, “For how long will

your dislike for sweets last?” Sura Khachar knew it would not remain for long and thus tactfully replied, “It would be fine if you serve me *bhajiya*, *vada* and *pudla*.” All the food items he mentioned contained flour, salt, pepper and other spices.

Shri Hari smiled at Sura Khachar’s clever reply and acknowledged, “Sure, I will serve you those things.”

### MAKE BHAJIYA, VADA AND PUDLA

Shri Hari appeared in a dream to Punjabhai’s sister, Ajuba, who lived in Dholera, and said, “I will arrive in Dholera tomorrow. There are Kathi devotees travelling with me, so make *bhajiya*, *vada*, *pudla* and *rotla* of millet flour for lunch. Presently, they all dislike sweet foods.”

The next day, when Shri Hari reached Dholera lunch was ready. After taking a bath Shriji Maharaj sat down to eat. The Kathi devotees sat down separately in rows to have lunch. Sura Khachar was surprised and happy to see *rotla*, *bhajiya*, *vada*, *pudla* and other food items. He wondered how Shriji Maharaj had conveyed to the host, at short notice and from a long distance, to prepare all these items. Later, however, Sura Khachar came to know that Maharaj had appeared to Ajuba in her dream and instructed her accordingly. He was happy about Shri Hari’s divine ways. The Kathi devotees travelling with Shri Hari had

1. Twenty years after Shri Hari’s blessings, that is, fifteen years after Maharaj had passed away, Ardesharji faced a big problem. Mr R.D. Leward, appointed as a judge in the Surat court, arrived in Surat on 22 June 1842. His English companions could not bear Ardesharji’s high position and status, so they complained about him to Judge Leward. During this time, Dalubhai Hargovind, a very wealthy person, wrote his will in the name of a girl named Premkunvar. Shortly thereafter, Dalubhai passed away and a dispute about his property arose between Dalubhai’s widow and Premkunvar.

Ardeshar and Dalubhai’s brother sided with the widow and made arrangements for her to receive the property and money. However, the relatives of Premkunvar accused Ardeshar of trying to embezzle a large amount of Dalubhai’s wealth. Judge Leward heard the complaint and pronounced Ardeshar guilty and thus dismissed him from his post. Subsequently, Ardeshar filed a legal case in the session’s court. Mr William Harvard, the defence lawyer for Ardeshar, came from Mumbai.

On the early morning of 30 November 1844, Shriji Maharaj gave darshan to Ardesharji in his dream and said, “Tomorrow, the government will reinstate you to your former position with dignity and honour.” And then Maharaj applied a kumkum *chandlo* on Ardesharji’s forehead. The latter woke up happily after Maharaj’s divine darshan. When he looked into the mirror, Ardesharji saw the *chandlo* on his forehead, and became convinced about the truth of Shri Hari’s darshan and blessings. On the same day, 30 November, the judicial commissioner, Mr Hert, declared Ardeshar to be innocent and rewarded him with his salary that had been withheld from the day he was dismissed. The government also reinstated Ardeshar to his former position with honour and dignity, and discharged Mr Leward’s services as a judge. - Translation of Gujarati text from Khanbahadur Ardesharji, pp. 27–29.

2. The story of King Bali and Lord Vaman appears in the Shrimad Bhagvat: 8.18–23.

sacrificed their all for him and were serving him as his security guards. Shri Hari nourished them spiritually and also took care of them.

## MAHARAJ MEETS MUKTANAND SWAMI IN KAMIYALA

Shri Hari wanted to meet Muktanand Swami, so he left Dholera and headed towards the village of Kamiyala. Here, he stayed at Sisa Vanar's home, where Muktanand Swami was undergoing treatment after he had fallen from a horse in Gamdi. Muktanand Swami's fractured hand had healed, but he was still feeling weak. Swami was happy on having Maharaj's darshan. Shri Hari sat before Muktanand Swami and enquired about his health and also blessed him by placing his hands on him. Then, Shri Hari said, "Swami, I have installed the *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan Dev in Vartal. All the devotees are very pleased. Now that the deities have been installed the devotees worship them with devotion and receive the fruits of their bhakti."

Muktanand Swami was quietly listening to Shri Hari. He had already got the message that Shri Hari had consecrated his own *murti*, called Harikrishna Maharaj, in the first shrine. Shri Hari had used his divine powers to install his own *murti* for the devotees to worship and offer devotion as the means to attain *moksha*.

## MUKTANAND SWAMI REALIZES THAT MAHARAJ IS DIFFERENT FROM LAKSHMI-NARAYAN

Muktanand Swami became absorbed in deep thought about the fact that Maharaj had installed his own *murti*. He realized that Shri Hari was different from Lakshmi-Narayan. He recalled that much earlier Maharaj had talked about his divine form in Kalvani. At that time he had experienced inner peace, but he had also experienced misery and lack of inner peace due to the influence of the *gunas* (*rajogun* and *tamogun*). He also remembered when Maharaj had once narrated to him about his own life incidents for three days

and thereafter he experienced inner bliss. At that time, he had felt that Shriji Maharaj was Bhagwan Krishna, and so he wrote a bhajan, "*Māro mat kahu te sambhālo Vrajvāsi...* – O residents of Vraj, listen while I talk to you about my belief."

Shri Hari had profound love for Muktanand Swami because he had formerly made intense efforts to seek God. Later, Shri Hari had discoursed to him about his own supreme glory in the village of Gamdi, where Muktanand Swami had fallen from a horse and injured himself. In spite of hearing Maharaj's discourses, Muktanand Swami was unable to fully accept and realize Shri Hari's supreme form.

Today, however, when Shri Hari narrated about the installation of his own *murti* in Vartal, Muktanand Swami realized that Shri Hari was Purushottam Narayan, supreme and different from the devas. He understood that Maharaj had installed his own *murti* for the propagation of pure *upasana*. Muktanand Swami experienced inner joy at Shri Hari's seminal work and spontaneously sang, "*Māiri me to Purushottam var pāyo...*" Shri Hari was happy to hear the bhajan and was pleased with his supreme spiritual conviction for him.

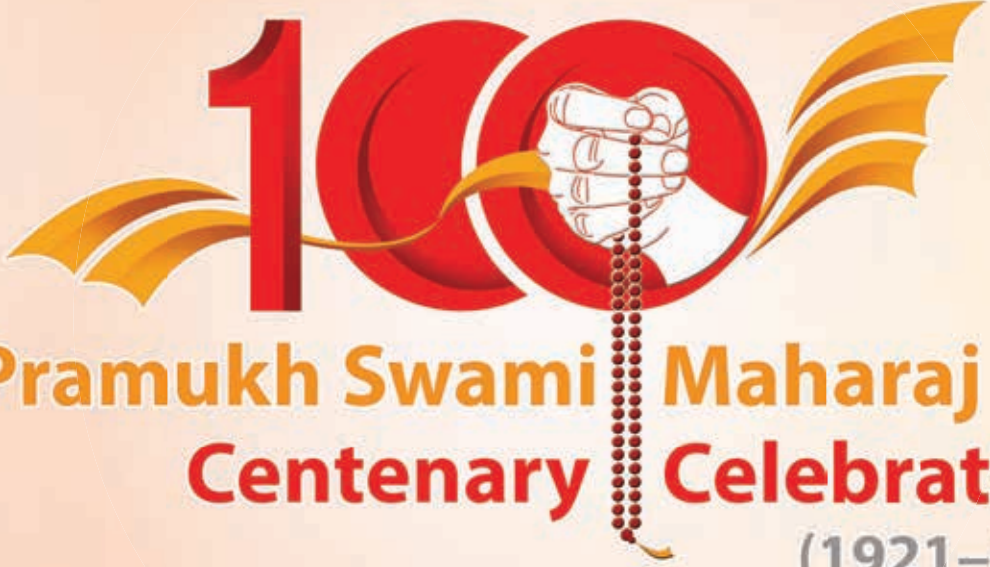
Shri Hari asked for an oxen cart to be brought for Muktanand Swami to travel with him. But Sisa Vanar said, "Maharaj, Swami will not be able to sit in the oxen cart because his hand is still painful. I will bring a bed for him so that he can lie down." Maharaj was very happy when a bed was brought for Muktanand Swami. Then, four persons were ready to carry the bed all the way to Gadhada.

Shri Hari left Kamiyala and reached Gadhpur a few days later. Maharaj arranged for Muktanand Swami's stay near his Akshar Ordi. He told Muktanand Swami's attendant, "I will often come to see how Muktanand Swami is. Therefore, do not lapse in serving him." Thereafter, Shri Hari retired to his room. ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

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





# Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations (1921-2021)

**T**his is the logo designed for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary. What do you notice? Normally, you would expect a graphic of the person being celebrated on such a logo. But not here. The stand out feature is the *mala* – rosary. It was Pramukh Swami Maharaj's constant companion. This in itself reveals Swamishri's true identity, for he was always rooted in devotion: offering prayers and chanting the Swaminarayan mantra. This is what the *mala* in Swamishri's hand encapsulates. This, in a nutshell, was his life.

In November 2005, Swamishri was at the newly inaugurated Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. Dr V. Subramanian, who had performed Swamishri's heart bypass surgery in 1998, came to visit Akshardham. After viewing the monument and exhibitions, Dr Subramanian came to meet Swamishri and expressed his joy at seeing the wonderful art, architecture, culture and spiritual messages. Then, he asked Swamishri, "What is your next project?" Swamishri raised the *mala* in his right hand and said, "Offering devotion to God and inspiring others to do the same is our main, permanent project. All this (i.e. Swaminarayan Akshardham), happens in-between."

This was Swamishri's life. For him, every moment revolved around Thakorji. From his early morning walk to puja to innumerable daily activities and responsibilities to late night prayers, and even while asleep – there was never a time when he did not remember Thakorji.

On 26 June 1977, in London, Swamishri was asked to fill in a form used for registering children joining the various mandir activities. One of the questions

was about hobbies, to which Swamishri wrote, 'Bhajan, darshan, *seva*' (To offer devotion, perform darshan and engage in service). Even in his free time, Swamishri loved to engage in bhajan – devotion.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj lived physically on this earth for 95 years, but his ideals continue to live on in his devotees, men and women, young and old, and continue to inspire countless to strive for spiritual progress.

Swamishri's was a life lived 'In the joy of others'. Disregarding all personal comforts, his persistent, passionate and pious endeavours always focused on helping others. Through his relentless *vicharan*, personal counselling, letters, phone calls, home visits, assemblies, discourses and in myriad ways, Swamishri touched the hearts of countless. Through mandirs, festivals, weekly satsang assemblies, de-addiction campaigns, and a varied portfolio of social, cultural, spiritual, medical, educational, disaster relief and other activities, Swamishri created a platform for all to engage, excel and enjoy. He was also a passionate and distinguished patron of art, music, literature and culture. In short, he reached out to people of all backgrounds and encouraged them to better their lives.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Sarangpur. The year was 1993. Sadhus were seated shoulder-to-shoulder in Swamishri's meeting room, eagerly awaiting Swamishri's last darshan of the day. The room was abuzz with joyful chatter about the wonderful magic show the renowned K. Lal had just presented in the evening assembly.

Suddenly, the bedroom door opened. Swamishri stood with folded hands and his *gatariyu* draped over his shoulder and reaching to his lower leg. He sensed the joy and excitement. A sadhu briefly described the magic show to Swamishri and asked, "Do you know how to perform magic?" Swamishri grasped an edge of his draped *gatariyu*, flicked it and said, "You are all the magic. I flicked my *gatariyu* and you all appeared."

The message was clear, Swamishri had spiritually transformed so many people – that was his magic. The lives he touched and continues to touch have been transformed from scrap metal to spiritual gold.

Never one to waste time, self-sacrificing and humble, he dedicated every moment of his life helping people advance spiritually, and conveying and consolidating the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and formally enshrined in mandirs by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj.

Swamishri spent his formative childhood years in the nondescript village of Chansad. He had little formal education, yet was erudite and enlightened. His awareness of and insights into the nuances of personal, familial, domestic, civic, professional, business and spiritual matters was matchless.

His legendary humour, wit, wisdom and eagle-eyed observation of detail, all expressed with humility, left all buckled up in laughter or gasping in awe. In his presence, there was never a dull moment.

Despite the frenzy of activities surrounding him, he was always calm, measured and focused. His divine glow and radiant smile were the fuel that drove everyone to greater heights.

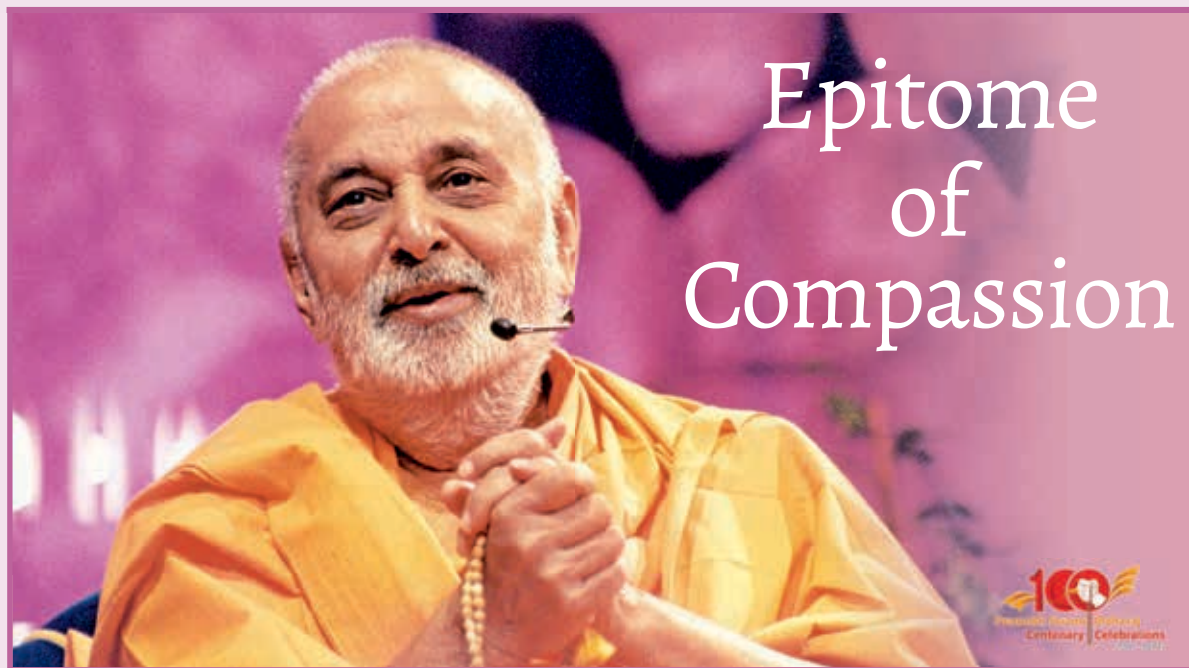
Saturday, 11 December 2021, (Magshar *sud* 8, V.S. 2078) marks Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 100th birthday. So, as we commemorate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary, let us reflect on his vast reservoir of virtues and resolve to imbibe them in our lives. That is the only fitting tribute to his life and legacy.

The following articles highlight Swamishri's virtues and provide an insight into his deep spiritual persona.

◆  
- Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



# Epitome of Compassion



## ON A QUIET NIGHT IN LONDON

It was a quiet summer night in London in the year 1990. After a hectic and tiresome day, everyone in the BAPS Neasden Mandir was sound asleep. In the solemn darkness of the night, a sudden murmuring sound awoke the attendant sadhu. He wondered, “Where is this sound coming from? Everyone is asleep; what could this be?” He glanced at the clock and was startled by how late it was. He wanted to go back to sleep, but was overwhelmed by his curiosity to investigate the sound. The more he looked around, the more confident he became that the sound was coming from the room next door. He slowly opened the door and was astonished to see an aged sadhu seated on his bed, huddled in a blanket, eyes closed, completely engrossed in chanting and prayers. The attendant joined him. After a few minutes, his sleepiness and impatience got the better of him, so he asked the aged sadhu, “Swami! Don’t you want to sleep? Why are you chanting and praying now?” The sadhu was startled, but remained quiet. Then, he answered, “Since there is a famine in Gujarat,

I am praying for rains and the well-being of the people and animals.”

“How often do you pray like this?” the attendant sadhu enquired.

Again, there was no immediate reply. The attendant sadhu, however, persisted. The aged sadhu then briefly said, “I pray quite often in the night for those who reveal their troubles and problems to me during the day.”

The attendant sadhu’s heart filled with admiration. He thought, “This is true compassion. How pure must his heart be to stay up late at night solely to pray for others?”

This aged sadhu, who frequently sacrificed his own sleep, unheard and unseen by others, to relieve the pain and suffering of others was none other than Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He engrossed himself in prayers for people and animals thousands of miles away. Only when one is genuinely concerned about something can one devote hours of precious sleep time to it. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was consumed by compassion, in fact, genuine compassion – because it was totally selfless and completely unconditional.

## COMPASSION: THE NEED OF THE TIME

Without compassion, society devolves into a state of chaos and brutality, as evidenced through multiple genocides and atrocities throughout human history. Therefore, compassion born out of love is a necessity, not a luxury. Without it, humanity will not survive. Despite this, society is unable to develop this virtue. As individualism grows, so does the selfish pursuit for personal success, pleasure, fame and fortune. This personal chase often comes at the cost of consideration for others and compassion. Although we seem to be surrounded by people invested in their own agendas, the compassion that still exists in the souls of many provides us hope in making the world a better place.

We live in a world where jealousy, hatred and violence are increasing. Compassion is needed now more than ever. Society at large needs role models of compassion. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a role model. His life inspired and continues to inspire others to become compassionate and love humanity at large.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's compassion was not due to a life-changing or tragic incident in his life. His loving and genuinely compassionate nature was innate. His eyes craved to see every single person happy and his heart had space for each soul. His loving nature was not for just his own devotees or community; he loved every living being. For him, this was as natural as breathing. His whole life speaks for itself. He lived for the joy of others, for the progress of others and for the good of others.

## IN THE JOY OF OTHERS...

"In the joy of others, lies our own.

In the progress of others, rests our own.

In the good of others, exists our own."

These words are not merely a tagline given by Pramukh Swami Maharaj; they were his lifestyle. This mantra also became the guiding principle for his followers. It was not enough to just tolerate

and forgive, to merely wish well for others; it was imperative to contribute to their success. It is such contribution through action that differentiates compassion from empathy and sympathy. Feeling for others is one thing, but taking action about it is another. Success, happiness and spiritual progress are only possible through sacrifice, forgiveness and collective advancement. Individuals cannot progress without the collective progress and happiness of all members of society.

This was the message delivered by Pramukh Swami at the United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit in August 2000. His remarks were applauded by world and religious leaders alike. When asked why this was remarkable, one religious leader said, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life is an extraordinary example of love and harmony. If the entire nation were to take a cue from him and live by those standards, it would solve all of our problems." Pramukh Swami Maharaj was one of the rare individuals who actually practised this credo while encouraging others to do the same. He was an embodiment of love, compassion and peace.

## COMPASSION BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF CASTE, COLOUR OR CREED

Pramukh Swami Maharaj dedicated his entire life to bettering the life of every person he came across. He treated every member of society with love, respect, dignity and compassion. His heart of empathy and generosity extended to those well outside of his immediate circle of followers, or community of Hindus and well-wishers. His universal compassion for all is demonstrated by the massive humanitarian effort he organized after the 1979 Morbi Dam disaster in Gujarat, India.

He knew that the most gravely affected members of the community were Muslims and Dalits. He wanted to make sure that they were cared for in a way that allowed them to follow their own traditions and religious practices. He came to Morbi and trudged through the





Swamishri blesses the BAPS volunteers in Morbi, 1979



Providing fodder to famine-affected cattle, 1987

mud-covered streets to distribute supplies and food grains. He guided volunteers to construct closed tent and tin-style bathrooms rather than the simpler makeshift restrooms, so that flood victims would have privacy. Having this depth of compassion for others without any discrimination is unequivocally one of the inspiring virtues of Pramukh Swami.

### COMPASSION BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF HUMANKIND

In the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna defines his dearest devotee as not only ‘करुण’ (*karun*), meaning compassionate, but also ‘सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः’ (*sarva-bhutānam maitraha*), one who is a dear friend to all living entities. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was truly ‘सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः’. He was compassionate to every creation of God.

In 1987, Gujarat faced its worst famine in over a century. The calamity had a devastating impact on life and livestock. During his visit to one of the affected cattle camps, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was surrounded by a large group of calves. He was on a tour of the camp, but he could not look away from these helpless calves. What he saw broke his heart. It was as if he heard the plight of the poor creatures. He immediately asked about their situation and was informed by volunteers that the calves hadn’t eaten for three days. Swamishri’s eyes welled up with tears as he heard

of their suffering. He couldn’t bear to see them starving and immediately ensured all necessities were taken care of. However, he was still not satisfied and soon after proceeded to organize the construction of multiple cattle camps that would save the lives of thousands of cattle and help the farmers. Kasambhai, a Muslim resident, was touched by Swamishri’s kindness and shared, “I feel that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is my Khuda.” Not just Kasambhai, but all who came in contact with Pramukh Swami Maharaj felt the compassion and kindness of God through his actions.

### COMPASSION BEYOND COMPREHENSION

Perhaps the biggest test of this boundless compassion was when Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar, India, fell victim to a brutal terrorist attack in 2002. Nobody could ever imagine such an incident taking place at such a blissful house of God. People in India and around the world were stunned to hear reports that many pilgrims and staff were wounded or worse. In the aftermath of the incident, people throughout India were very hurt and angry, and the public’s instinct for retaliation reared its head. However, Pramukh Swami Maharaj made a heartfelt public appeal for peace and stability that echoed around the country and the world. His call averted waves of angry mobs and prevented many needless deaths.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s response to

this terrorist attack has been studied as an exemplary case of peacekeeping and dubbed as ‘The Akshardham Response’. On his first visit to Akshardham after the attack, he went to the locations where shootings had occurred. He offered prayers for the souls of the deceased. When the prayers concluded, he asked to go to where the terrorists had been shot. The volunteers were dismissive of the request. He insisted and said, “Though they attacked us and the innocent pilgrims, we must not allow their hate to overcome our love. Take me there. I want to pray for the peace and redemption of their souls as well.” The profundity of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s innate forgiving and loving nature is truly unfathomable. Compassion is borne out of unconditional love for others, as is forgiveness. So, it was only natural for Pramukh Swami Maharaj to act this way. Pramukh Swami’s whole life was a lesson in peace, harmony and compassion.

Many have been inspired to imbibe these virtues in their lives. If practised sincerely, they transform lives.

### COMPASSION THAT INSPIRES OTHERS

The depth and breadth of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s selfless love and compassion span decades and vast geographic distances, encompassing believers, non-believers and everyone in between. Swamishri has created a community of people who strive to bring joy to others. These lessons of compassion, empathy and love translate into everyday life in schools, at the workplace, and in families and homes.

Swamishri is the inspiration for young school students raising funds through various campaigns for humanitarian causes. He is the inspiration behind a young boy in Flushing, New York, walking to school every day, so that from the bus fare saved, he can buy lunch for one of his less fortunate classmates. He is the inspiration behind a young college-bound student giving up his scholarship to someone who is less financially



Prayer Assembly at Akshardham, Gandhinagar, 2002

fortunate than he is. He is the inspiration for a young gynaecologist in Bryan, Texas, treating uninsured expecting mothers free so that they can have access to quality healthcare. He is the inspiration for a professional musician and travel agent in Chino Hills, California, donating all his income as a musician to humanitarian and spiritual charities through BAPS for the past 20 years. The list of those inspired by him to think and act with compassion for others is endless. The important point is that this mindset is taught, encouraged and fostered through Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s spiritual and social teachings about helping and loving others. To those who look up to his ideals, compassion is an action – not merely an idea.

### EPILOGUE

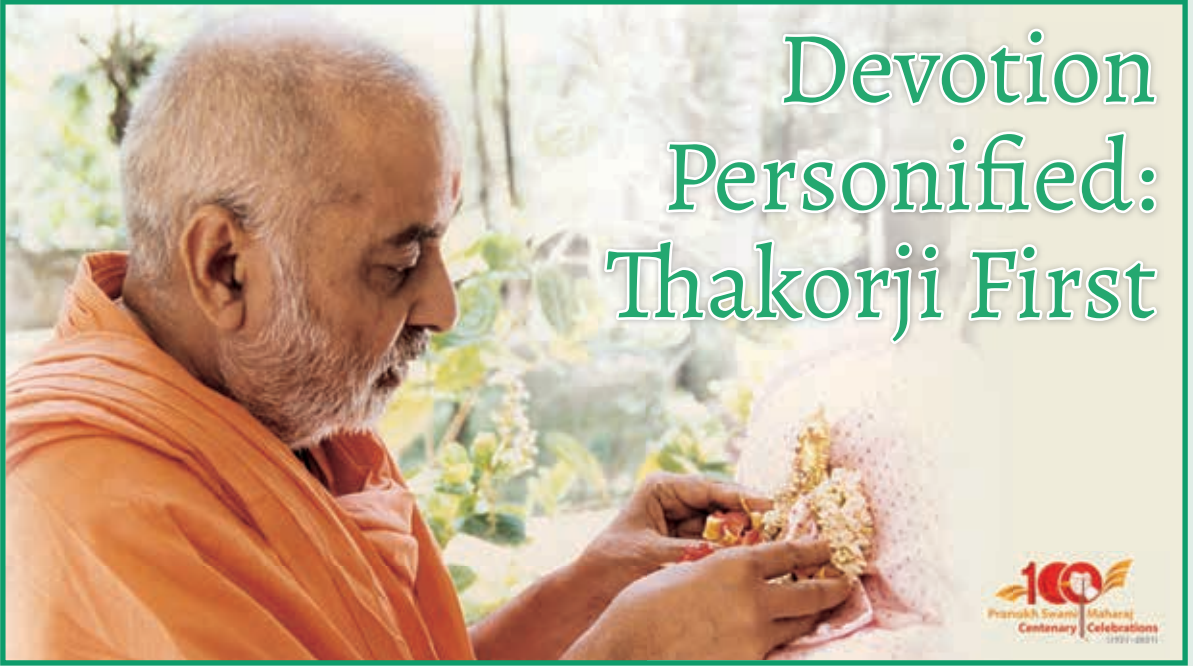
ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।  
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिद्दुःखभाग्भवेत् ।  
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

*May all be happy. May all be free from illness.  
May all see what is auspicious. May no one suffer.*

The above is a prayer of compassion from the Upanishads; Pramukh Swami Maharaj was truly the epitome of such compassion – he not only prayed but persevered until his last breath to bring each word of that prayer to life. May we follow in his footsteps, develop love and compassion, and be kind to all. ♦



# Devotion Personified: Thakorji First



**B**hakti is devotion. The word ‘bhakti’ comes from the Sanskrit verb root ‘bhaj’, which means to surrender, to serve, or to love God. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the personified form of bhakti defined in the Hindu shastras. His bhakti captured innumerable hearts and transformed countless lives.

Our bhakti towards Bhagwan and the Satpurush fluctuates in accordance with our status, time, place, health, company, circumstances, and other internal and external factors. Depending on which factors are predominant, we are either enthusiastic in engaging in devotion or are disengaged.

*Parabhakti* is the purest, highest level of unconditional devotion to God. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s bhakti to God was unparalleled. Swamishri’s senses were innately blunted from the sights, sounds and fragrances of the world. He had no desire for anything except devotion to God (Thakorji).

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s most precious possession and, indeed, his only possession, was the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Every action and every moment of Swamishri’s

radiated with devotion for Thakorji. Amidst all the *vicharan* and satsang activities, Swamishri was always focused on Thakorji.

Swamishri always put Thakorji ahead of himself. Swamishri would request for his seating arrangements to be adjusted to ensure that Thakorji’s seat (*asan*) was more prominent than his own. Before using or accepting any item, such as a pen, spectacles or a garland, Swamishri would always ensure that it was first offered to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. The world may applaud Pramukh Swami Maharaj for his great accomplishments, but for him, the only applause he yearned was that of Thakorji.

His entire life centred on devotion to God. On one occasion, Swamishri arrived at Mahelav in the late evening after a hectic day of *vicharan*. A grand procession was planned through the town. Due to the insistence of the devotees, Swamishri agreed to their wishes and participated in the procession. He sat in a decorated tractor surrounded by devotees. A devotee joyfully approached Swamishri to garland him, but Swamishri politely guided him towards Thakorji

and asked him to offer the garland first to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

In Swamishri's mind, none of the honours were for him; they were all for God. Whether engaged in celebratory or significant occasions, such as, visiting the President of India in New Delhi, the grand Suvarna Tula Mahotsav in London in 1985 or the Platinum Tula Mahotsav in New Jersey in 1991, or whether performing *pujan* of a second-hand car, Swamishri always kept Shri Harikrishna Maharaj at the forefront. Swamishri's entire life revolved around God.

In Ottawa, 13 June 1998, Swamishri was invited to grace the Canadian Parliament in honour of his spiritual and humanitarian work. During the parliamentary session, the Speaker introduced Swamishri and described his accomplishments. He announced Pramukh Swami Maharaj's presence in the VIP gallery. Everyone's eyes turned to the VIP gallery, expecting to see Pramukh Swami Maharaj stand up. But Swamishri remained seated. There was a brief delay as Swamishri instructed the swami holding Thakorji to stand up first. Swamishri wanted everyone to have darshan of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj first. Only then did Swamishri briefly stand up with folded hands to thunderous applause. His genuine reverence for Thakorji was evident.

On 13 May 1980, the Mayor of Nairobi in Kenya arranged a grand reception at the Nairobi City Council Hall to honour Swamishri. The mayor proudly stood up to present a special crest to Swamishri. Swamishri also stood up, but directed the Lord Mayor to first offer the crest to the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and only thereafter did he accept it.

On 25 January 1974, Swamishri was embarking on his first overseas satsang tour as the guru after Yogiji Maharaj had reverted to Akshardham in 1971. Thousands of devotees and well-wishers gathered at Mumbai International Airport to bid him farewell. The Air India plane set off for Nairobi, Kenya.

The scenes at the international airport in Nairobi matched those in Mumbai. Hundreds of devotees were eagerly awaiting the arrival of their beloved guru. Many devotees had come with garlands and bouquets. The flight from India had landed, but there was no sign of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the accompanying sadhus. Thereafter, what unfolded could not have been imagined. All other passengers were allowed to disembark, except Swamishri and his twelve accompanying sadhus. Due to some misunderstanding among the local authorities, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was not given permission to disembark. This major setback did not fluster Swamishri. He merely uttered, "Whatever God wishes!" Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the sadhus had to return to India on the same aeroplane.

The accompanying sadhus were in dismay and devastated. Endless thoughts were running through everyone's minds. How could their guru be humiliated like this?

However, Swamishri was not in the slightest affected or disconcerted by what had happened. He merely smiled and engaged in devotion to God. He reiterated, "It is Maharaj's wish." His face carried the same jovial expressions on the way back to Mumbai as it had just a few hours earlier when he had been given a grand farewell from the same city. His thoughts and focus were on Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, because Thakorji's meal times could not be appropriately maintained due to the prevailing situation, and he thus continually asked for Harikrishna Maharaj's forgiveness. On arriving back at the mandir in Mumbai, he made all the necessary arrangements for Thakorji's food and personally offered *thal*. Only then, at 3:30 a.m., after Thakorji was sound asleep, did Swamishri retire for the night.

This is a merely a snapshot of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *parabhakti* – supreme devotion to God. It provides a glimpse of the deep and genuine love Pramukh Swami Maharaj had towards Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. ♦





# Transformer of Lives

## FROM CATERPILLAR TO BUTTERFLY

Butterflies have a beauty that draws us to look and admire. But the butterfly wasn't always as it is. It was once a caterpillar. Visually, not very appealing. The caterpillar and butterfly represent our beginning and who we can become.

To become a butterfly, the caterpillar must undergo internal change. A caterpillar gorges on food, mostly leaves, to facilitate this change. Similarly, to facilitate our inner transformation, we require food in the form of true knowledge. We get this from a person who is perfect in mind and heart. Associating with such a person transforms one's life.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had the ability to transform people.

Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam was a distinguished Indian aerospace scientist who served as the president of India from 2002 to 2007.

Dr Kalam and Pramukh Swami Maharaj first met on 30 June 2001 in New Delhi, forming

a lasting friendship and spiritual rapport. Thereafter, they met in person or by phone on numerous occasions.

These interactions left a deep impression on Dr Kalam. He was touched by Swamishri's profound spirituality and divinity. Explaining the reason for writing his book, *Transcendence: My Spiritual Experiences with Pramukh Swamiji*, Dr Kalam said, "On the day I inaugurated Akshardham in Delhi, I found a teacher in Pramukh Swamiji. A great teacher. That day I decided I must write with my friend Arun Tiwari a book. It's not a book. It's a tribute. To a great leader."

Dr Kalam, a renowned scientist and thinker was humbled by a simple sadhu with little formal education. He relished the proximity of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and saw a great teacher in him.

He was so keen to write the book that he told Arun Tiwari, "If I do not hand over my experiences before Pramukh Swamiji then it will be the biggest disappointment of my life." In



2015, when Dr Kalam made the journey from Delhi to Sarangpur to present the book, he was 84 years old. The Gujarat government and others repeatedly offered to provide a helicopter for him to go to Sarangpur from Ahmedabad. But Dr Kalam refused all approaches, reasoning, “If given a chance, I will walk. I am going to somebody who is my spiritual better.” Dr Kalam presented the first copy of *Transcendence* to Swamishri in Sarangpur on 20 June 2015, their last personal meeting.

While presenting the book, Dr Kalam said, “You are a great teacher... I learnt to remove I, remove mine. That’s a great lesson I have learnt. I learnt from you.”

Swamishri said, “To rise above I and mine is only possible by God’s grace. It is the best principle by which to remain happy in life.”

Transformation is achieved by seeking the refuge of a great teacher, for only then do his compassion and words affect us and help us to change. Such changes benefit not just the individual, but also their family and friends.

We need that helping hand to transform. Just

as the sun in the sky makes the trees blossom and the fruits ripen, similarly we need that association of the wise for our transformation to take place. Shrimad Ramchandraj said, “Satsang replaces the beast in you by the best in you.”

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was like the sun; amid our turmoils, his wisdom and guidance brought a positive personal change in many people, no matter their background.

### PERSONAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Mohanbhai Patel, a devotee from Bolton in England, used to smoke 80 cigarettes and drink 16 pints of beer a day. In 1994, in Ashton, England, Mohanbhai came into contact with Pramukh Swami Maharaj for the very first time when he was invited by a friend to attend the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony at the BAPS mandir.

Mohanbhai believed that sadhus only indulged in eating rich food and collecting money. But a brief personal meeting with Pramukh Swami Maharaj changed Mohanbhai’s life forever. Swamishri learnt about Mohanbhai’s chain smoking and beer drinking habits, and encouraged

him to give up these vices. Swamishri lovingly blessed, “God will give you strength to give up these addictions.”

Mohanbhai introspected and thought to himself that the judgement he had made about sadhus was incorrect. He firmly decided to give up his addictions. What for many years had seemed impossible happened by the association of a pious saint like Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Mohanbhai said that after giving up his addictions he began to experience true inner peace.

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Residents of Petli, a village in the Anand district of Gujarat, benefited as a community. Dahyabhai Parmar, aged 21, was elected the village head (*sarpanch*) and was the point of contact between government officers and the village community. A dedicated BAPS volunteer, Dahyabhai put into practice the values of community service and pious living nourished in him by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Dahyabhai endeavoured for 28 years to bring about a positive change in his village and make it into an exemplary village in his district.

The villagers acknowledge the efforts of Dahyabhai as the prime reason behind the prosperity of their village. Dahyabhai often personally cleaned the dirt in the village; he changed the village through humble service, and not through the arrogance of a person in power.

Where filth was prevalent, today, there prevails hygiene and elegance that soothes the eye. The village is mainly populated by labourers, but the cleanliness of the village is an inspiration to all. It is as if the villagers have willingly prohibited addictions such as alcohol and gambling.

The literacy rate of the village is over 99%. Initially, girls in the village would drop out of studies after the 7th standard. Dahyabhai found that parents were reluctant to send their daughters to the neighbouring village for secondary schooling. So, he built a secondary school in the village, encouraging education among girls. Dahyabhai also promoted life values

in them. Every week, he visits the schools, meets the students and inspires them to lead a value-based life. As a result, over 90% of the students bow down to their parents.

Despite notable accomplishments, Dahyabhai says, “The development of this village of Petli is as a result of the values instilled in me by Swamishri.”

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Jayesh Kedariya, a BAPS devotee in Surat, approached his cousin brother Anand, who was addicted to alcohol. The addiction was ruining Anand’s life. After a lengthy chat to persuade him, Jayesh offered prayers for Anand to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Anand observed all this. Some months passed, but his cousin had still not given up his addiction. Several times, Jayesh wrote to Pramukh Swami Maharaj for blessings that his cousin gives up his addiction to alcohol. Each time, Swamishri replied with words of blessings and encouragement.

Eventually, after many months of persistent effort by Jayesh, Anand gave up his addiction, and this had a knock-on effect. Anand’s wife was very pleased. She and other women were inspired to make efforts to free their village of alcohol. They achieved a resounding success.

In turn, women from over 50 other nearby villages were inspired to free their villages of rampant alcohol addiction.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj continuously toured villages, towns and cities across the world, using every moment to transform innumerable lives for the better. He transformed individuals and empowered them to also bring about positive change in the world.

And just like Pramukh Swami Maharaj, today, Mahant Swami Maharaj continues that legacy. Through his association people have been transformed to experience inner peace. May we transform from a caterpillar into a butterfly so that we may fly high in the sky of spiritual joy and bring joy to others. ♦



# A Profound Spiritual Bond

## Part 2

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



Once, in Bochasan, Swamishri praised Viveksagar Swami, “He accompanies with me during *vicharan*. How much hardship he endures! Ten times more than me. Usually, all believe that only I bear all the hardships, but he bears more than me in all ways. Whether in India or abroad, he has to arrange my *vicharan* itinerary, *padharamanis*, convince devotees and do many other tasks. It is all very taxing. I don’t have any worries and sleepless nights, because he takes care of many things. He has to always deliver discourses – in personal counselling sessions with me, when meeting the devotees or in satsang assemblies. I quickly give blessings and may not talk much, but he converses and explains to all who come (to meet me).”

Swamishri readily credited the success of his extensive and strenuous *vicharan*, in the

villages and cities of India and abroad, to an accompanying saint.

Bhartruhari has stated:

*“Pargunparamānu-parvatikrutya nityam,  
Nijhrudi vikasantah santi santah kiyantaha.”*

“How many saints are delighted by ascribing greatness to the modest virtues of others?”

Swamishri perceived and appreciated even the minor virtues of his young swami-disciples.

In Bochasan, during an assembly held on the occasion of a lunar eclipse, Swamishri appreciated the quiet services of Purushottamcharan Swami and stated, “He talks less, but does more work. He does his *seva* silently. His style of communication is good. Others would wholeheartedly get convinced about satsang from his talks. He can talk without hesitation to any high-ranking officer. He appreciates my virtue of particularity,

but he is more meticulous than me.”

In 1988, in Nairobi, on the day of Bhai Bij, while discoursing on the Swamini Vato to an assembly of devotees, Swamishri wholeheartedly started appreciating the specialties of the young swamis. He called out the names of young swamis, telling them to stand up, and proudly praised their greatness to the devotees.

Swamishri said, “Shruti (Shrutiprakash Swami) has become a pandit. He came from a small village and had a farmer’s background, but he has become a pandit. He performs rituals. Sakshar (Aksharjivan Swami) offers his *seva* for the publications department in Ahmedabad. Shriji (Shrijiswarup Swami) makes very good arrangements (in designing things). Vishwavihari looks after (the Akshardham) in Gandhinagar.

“By Yogi Bapa’s wish they have all come from India or abroad to become sadhus. They are all-rounders and skilful in all chores and *seva*. Prabodhjivan (Swami), stand up. He looks after the kitchen *seva*. He never gets tired in preparing food for thousands of people. Tyag Swami (Tyagvallabh Swami) and Ghanshyam (Ghanshyamprasad Swami) are head cooks. Prabodh, Nishkam (Nishkamjivan Swami), Brahmthirth (Swami), all have become adept in cooking food. (Due to them) our mega-festivals are successful.”

“We have Aksharvallabh (Swami), who hails from Kutch. He is our electrician. He has never attended college, yet he can find and solve electrical faults. Mukti (Muktijivan Swami), stand up. He designs fountains in such a manner that they amaze and impress all. He has not attended school, but he has that skill. Mukund Shastri (Mukundjivan Swami) can deliver discourses for hours. He takes care of the Dhrangadhra region.

“Gunnidhi (Swami) is a teacher with a B.Sc. and B.Ed. degrees. Three brothers have become sadhus (from his family). Janmangal (Swami) and

Sarvamangal (Swami): both of them travel to the villages, deliver discourses, bring donations and inspire values and faith in others. During the famine (of 1987 and 1988) both swamis served immensely. P.J. (Purshottamjivan Swami) looks after the satsang in Kolkata.”

In 1983, after Swamishri suffered a heart attack, he was later recuperating at the home of Ashokbhai, owner of Aims Oxygen, in Vadodara. At that time, some *parshads* had come from Sarangpur and were engaged in Swamishri’s darshan. Instantly, Swamishri introduced them by praising them before Dr B.R. Patel, who was treating him. Swamishri said, “They became sadhus in 1981. They are educated, experienced and come from well-to-do families. Still they do all types of *seva*. They clean the toilets, scrub cooking vessels and get up early in the morning. In spite of them being so young, they observe all the *niyams* and fast five, six or seven days in a month. Today, they are observing a fast and they have not taken a drop of water.” Swamishri’s heartfelt words touched the hearts of all who were present.

Swamishri’s love helped inspire various arts and skills in the lives of swamis: some uneducated swamis from villages could deliver fluent discourses while other swamis could successfully plan and execute festivals on extraordinary scales. Swamishri’s grace enabled them to do everything.

Swamishri always inspired all the swamis to develop themselves comprehensively for the service of Shriji Maharaj. Moreover, Swamishri inspired the swamis to become proficient in different languages like Sanskrit, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, etc. so that they could express the glory of Shriji Maharaj. On hearing kirtans, Swamishri would sway his head and enthusiastically respond with gestures. Such acknowledgement from him would enliven the swamis. Swamishri would make the best arrangements for the swamis’ studies.

To the swamis travelling in the villages for satsang Swamishri would ask them the minutest details of their *vicharan* and the well-being and level of satsang of the devotees.

In all BAPS mandirs, swamis are engaged in multiple activities, such as doing Thakorji's puja, preparing meals in the kitchen, distributing milk and making ghee; and taking care of the mandir's cows and buffaloes, farming, electric department, lodgings and others facilities. Whenever Swamishri visited a mandir he would visit the various departments, meet the swamis serving there and enquire in detail about their *seva*. If there were any difficulties, he would solve them, and if Swamishri found any deficiencies he would draw their attention to them. While doing Thakorji's darshan, he would often guide the pujari to arrange Thakorji's clothes and adornments properly and thus give the pujari a lifetime lesson and *smruti*. Sometimes, Swamishri would visit and help in the kitchen to make chapattis. At times, he would also visit and sit down in the cowshed to milk a cow. He also inspired swamis who were learning painting and sculpture by sitting before them for hours. He observed their paintings and sculptures carefully and gave expert suggestions for changes. He would also visit the Sanstha's printing press and enquire about the publications. He also took deep interest in and inspired the swamis working in the Sanstha's audio-visual department.

Once, Brahmirth Swami prepared delicious *gulab jambu*. Swamishri appreciated his skill and gave him *prasad*. On another occasion, when the vegetables were not cooked properly by him, Swamishri pointed it out as well.

In the *Janmangal Namavali*, one of the names ascribed for Shriji Maharaj is *Tapah Priyah* – one who likes austerities. Swamishri also liked to perform austerities and appreciated those who observed austerities. Once, Swamishri was in Ahmedabad. When he came to know

that Vishwavihari Swami had observed the Kruchchhati-Kruchchha *vrata*, Swamishri bent down to bow to him. The following year, Vishwavihari Swami and Parmeshwar Swami had observed the Taptakruchchha *vrata*. Swamishri served them lemon water to drink and conclude their fasts. Swamishri often inspired swamis to please Shriji Maharaj by observing various austerities during the four months of Chaturmas. Along with such special observances, many swamis willingly observed the rule of not eating sweets or having only a single meal daily.

Yogi Bapa was pleased on whoever memorized bhajans, Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato. Swamishri, too, appreciated whoever recited them. In Ahmedabad, Vedpurush Swami had recited the Patri or letter written by Nilkanth Varni to Ramanand Swami from the 42nd chapter of the Bhaktachintamani. Swamishri appreciated it a lot and blessed him. In Sarangpur, Shamik Bhagat recited the Patri and Swamishri gave him *prasad* and blessed him. However, when Shamik Bhagat was reciting the Patri he forgot a few words and was trying to recall them. At that time, Krishnavallabh Swami (who cooked for and served food to Swamishri) helped Shamik Bhagat by reciting the words. Immediately, Swamishri blessed Krishnavallabh Swami by placing his hand on his head.

Studying Sanskrit in this age is very difficult and challenging. Swamishri inspired the swamis studying Sanskrit not only when he met them personally, but also by writing letters to them.

In one such letter, Swamishri wrote, "All of you are studying Siddhant Kaumudi and other texts, hence I bless you for strength and success in the examination. Study properly. May all of you become scholars and live a saintly life. Knowledge will be of immense value if you imbibe the virtues of saintliness. Thus, strengthen your devotion, listen to spiritual discourses and do *seva*. Give up laziness and inertia. I bless you all to work and live together in unity."



In this way, Swamishri showered his love and care upon his sadhus through letters and personal interactions and thus nurtured them. Sunshine is also important as the rains are for the growth of trees. Similarly, Swamishri would also admonish swamis if required.



In 1977, Swamishri was at his residence in Dar-es-Salaam. In the morning, before going for home visits, he came to the terrace. Swamishri found some mattresses lying in a disorderly manner. In one corner, Swamishri saw some buckets and cups lying around untidily. In fact, they were used for making lemon water by swamis who had fasted on the previous day. Swamishri also noticed some lemon juice on the floor. Swamishri asked Narayanmuni Swami, “Who was using these mattresses?”

Narayanmuni Swami replied, “I will properly roll them all.”

Swamishri, however, again asked emphatically, “Who has used them?”

Narayanmuni Swami hesitatingly gave the names.

Swamishri asked in a strict tone, “Who had made this lemon juice?”

Narayanmuni Swami gave another name as well.

Then, Swamishri spoke, “Doesn’t he understand why he delivers discourses? (It seems) all of you have become *sadgurus*. Whatever habits you form here, you will practise the same in the mandir, and whatever habits are formed in the mandir, the same will manifest here. If you leave your *dhotiya* after taking your bath, you will forget about drying them once you engage in your routine work. Subsequently, the *dhotiya* will remain lying in the bathroom for the whole day.

You must remember that after taking your bath, you must wash your *dhotiya* and immediately hang them to dry.”

Then, Swamishri called one sadhu aloud and scolded him, “You have not become a *sadguru*! You are a *sevak*. I could have cleaned this

up, but you should also know that such sheer negligence is improper.”

Swamishri reprimanded another sadhu, “Is everything over just because you have learned music? You will have to learn to serve and be a *sevak*.”

Then, a few days later, in Kisumu, while Swamishri was going to sleep at night, the swamis remembered the incident in Dar-es-Salaam. Swamishri laughed a lot and said, “Narayanmuni wondered where the intense illumination came from? But, I had to say it because I consider you all as mine, and we have a spiritual connection and understanding. I reprimanded you because I knew you wouldn’t take it badly. If you were to feel bad I would not have admonished you. From the very beginning my nature is such that everything should be in order. During Shastriji Maharaj’s and Yogiji Maharaj’s times I used to make all the arrangements in festivals and on other occasions. Thus, I like to have things in an organized and proper way. I feel that since you are with me, you should also be meticulous. Why remain slipshod and for how long? If I don’t correct you, you won’t realize what’s wrong.”

Once, while discussing about the importance of simplicity and absence of greed in the life of a sadhu, Swamishri said, “There is no objection for acquiring things for Thakorji, but one should not ask for one’s own sake. Do it for the deity and not for one’s body. In fact, if one is not vigilant



Maganbhai and Tribhakaka are the pioneers of Satsang in Africa. Harmanbhai and Maganbhai were and Tribhakaka is strongly anchored to (satsang) knowledge and understanding. You are fortunate to have got the chance to serve him.”

Swamishri inspired swamis to serve the devotees by instilling the latter’s glory and greatness.

Swamishri discoursed to swamis on many occasions, “I want to make you as happy as I am in God’s bliss.” And that was

then one starts using things brought for God. But remember that one’s own body should be used in God’s work and devotion. One should make do with whatever one gets – either in the forms of simple food (*rotlo*) and shelter (*otlo*). Accept everything with equanimity.”

The importance of our life is due to Bhagwan Swaminarayan only. He is at the core of our life. Swamishri embedded this understanding in the swamis, so that thorns of ego would not sprout in them. Once, in a satsang assembly, Swamishri said, “All these swamis are ornaments of God. God has accepted them and that is the reason for their great value. If one forsakes God, one becomes worthless.”

In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 47, Shriji Maharaj has said that just as the householder devotees serve us, similarly, we (i.e. sadhus) should also realize their greatness and serve them by discoursing to them. Swamishri groomed the swamis to serve the devotees, who offer their body, mind and wealth to God.

Once, at the Bochasan mandir, Swamishri visited an ill and dedicated devotee named Tribhakaka. Swamishri enquired, “Who is taking care of Tribhakaka?” On knowing that Prabodhjivan Swami was serving him, Swamishri told him, “You have got an opportunity to serve Tribhakaka, so do it with *mahima*. He has served Shastriji Maharaj and Yogi Bapa with immense devotion and dedication. Harmanbhai,

why, whenever Swamishri got time, he would elaborately discourse on all aspects of saintly life. He talked about waking up early, doing puja and darshan of *arti*, listening to discourses, singing *cheshta*, remaining steadfast in observing the moral vows, and other aspects of a sadhu’s daily routine. Swamishri also profusely talked about firmly practising celibacy, developing egolessness, unity, fraternity, harmony, cultivating supreme faith in Shriji Maharaj, and believing the Satpurush to be one’s *atma* and observing his wishes as an important part of one’s life. But, in his talks and behaviour, one never observed in him the slightest ego of being the guru.

In 1984, Swamishri wrote a letter to all the swamis, “All should regularly attend the daily discourses and sing the *cheshta*.” At the end of the letter, he added, “Please excuse me, I have written to sustain the traditions set by Yogi Bapa. Remain happy, as the purpose of writing this is for you all to engage together in discourses and devotional acts.”

In 1985, during the Bicentenary Celebrations of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, in Ahmedabad, Swamishri addressed the swamis, “The main reason why I sometimes admonish you is to awaken you to cultivate saintly virtues. You have all come to attain *moksha* and that is why I sometimes reprimand you. Other than that where is the need to tell you anything? There are many

people outside our organization who behave in the ways they wish, but I don't go to rebuke them. I want to purify your innerself from materialistic desires and make you happy."

Once, Swamishri said, "Be punctual in the daily discourses. Don't forget to do your routine spiritual activities. Other activities or *seva* are good, but do them according to their scheduled times. Never forget that listening to spiritual discourses is the cornerstone of life. Skip eating, if you have failed to do Thakorji's darshan and listen to spiritual discourses."

With regards to renunciation of women and wealth for his sadhus, Swamishri once emphasized, "A high position or status is not a measure of spiritual greatness. Similarly, do not believe that greatness lies in delivering discourses and singing bhajans. It lies in what Shriji Maharaj wants us to do. If you do that, then it is true greatness. Others may press for leniency in the sadhu's vows pertaining to renunciation of wealth and women, but that is not possible at all. Satsang should not be promoted at the cost of giving up *niyam*-dharma. If you wish to attain *ekantik* dharma and *moksha*, then the renunciation of women and wealth is necessary and there should be no lapses in that. The injunctions of Shriji Maharaj are at par with the proclamations and instructions in the Vedas. We are all here to please Shriji Maharaj."

Swamishri inspired his sadhus to serve for the uplift of society by remaining steadfast in their moral vows, "Wherever you go, deliver discourses extensively. If you don't do God's work, then you will experience fatigue (and boredom). So you should serve as much as you can."

On 4 March 1987, Swamishri was in Khambholaj, Gujarat. Swamishri was climbing the steps of a stage while holding Bhagvacharan Swami's hand. Suddenly, Bhagvacharan Swami slipped and was about to fall, but Swamishri pulled and saved him. Then, Swamishri remarked with a smile, "Though he was trying to support

me, I had to support him." The devotees, seated in the satsang assembly commented, "While he was falling he was inadvertently bringing you down." Swamishri stated profoundly, "Would I let him fall down?"

Swamishri had never let anybody fall down from satsang. The Upanishads say that the spiritual path is as difficult as walking on a sword's edge. Even the slightest lapse would cause a slip and irreparable harm. However, Swamishri's love and compassionate words saved and strengthened countless devotees treading on a precarious and challenging spiritual path.

Once, in Bochasan, Sarvamangal Swami asked Swamishri, "You give us lofty and noble talks and messages, but we cannot perfectly act accordingly. Don't you regret about this matter?" Swamishri replied, "There is no point in regretting because a *jiva* is ultimately bound by *maya*. The crux of the matter is that so many *jivas* are on the path of God and eventually they will become *brahmarup*. Shriji Maharaj had a broad vision and compassionate outlook. The fact that countless *jivas* have come into satsang; that in itself is a big accomplishment."

Once, in Mumbai, Swamishri was explaining Vachanamrut Gadhada I 67 in a satsang assembly, "Bhagwan and the Satpurush never keep accounts of anyone's bad karmas. If they start doing so, no one would get liberated. They don't look at our faults."

A Chinese proverb says, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

Swamishri always kept kindling the light of understanding in the hearts of devotees by forgetting the darkness of their mistakes. Swamishri, as a protector, sustainer and giver of all, lovingly inspired and helped all to become *brahmarup*. ♦

Gujarati text from Brahmopanisad:  
Sadhu Jnaneshwardas  
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas



# Behind the Sacred Relic

## Insights into the Life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

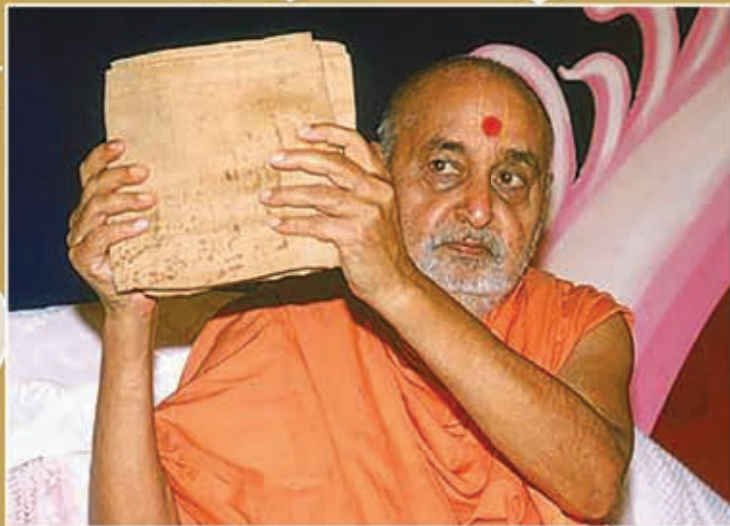
*Anything that Bhagwan or his holy Sadhu touch or use becomes sacred.*

*Such objects are revered and preserved by the faithful as sacred relics. Innumerable such relics exist in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, but among them, relics with a special history provide a deeper joy and satisfaction. Such relics are a source of enlightenment and inspiration.*

*Enlightenment because the background story provides an insight into their divine lives and thoughts; and inspiration because the message from that story helps to guide, direct and uplift our lives. Such relics connect us to Bhagwan and his Sadhu and help us to develop a sturdier bond of devotion, service and understanding towards them.*

*Countless such sanctified relics associated with Pramukh Swami Maharaj can be found at BAPS mandirs and at the homes of devotees worldwide. Here, we present some such objects that are extra special and meaningful to all devotees.*

### PRAMUKH VARNI DIN CHADAR



Known as the *chadar*, this is an enduring memento of a landmark day in BAPS history. On 21 May 1950, at Amlī Valī Pol in Ahmedabad, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj appointed 28-year-old Narayanswarupdas Swami as the president (*pramukh*) of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. From then on, Yogiji Maharaj fondly addressed him as ‘Pramukh Swami’.

On that historic day, in the morning, in the presence of a few sadhus and devotees Shastriji Maharaj expressed his wish. Then, Shastriji Maharaj draped this upper garment, specially prepared by Ishwarbhai (Daji) for the occasion, around the shoulders of Narayanswarup Swami, unofficially appointing him as the president, and blessed him to fulfil his duties as president. This ‘chadar’ was collected and preserved by Shri Tulsibhai Patel of Purushottampura.

This was unknown to anyone until, in 1979, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Purushottampura and at that time Tulsibhai revealed that he had this historic *chadar* in his possession. The accompanying swamis requested that he give it to the Sanstha for preservation, which Tulsibhai joyfully did.

On the evening of 21 May 1950, in a formal meeting of the Sanstha’s committee members,



Shastriji Maharaj officially instated Narayanswarup Swami in his place. He again draped another *chadar* to bless him. Unfortunately, the whereabouts of this second *chadar* is unknown.

In that evening assembly, the newly appointed Pramukh Swami pledged to serve the Sanstha till his last breath – a promise he lived up to.

This *chadar* is a physical reminder of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's pledge and his subsequent efforts over 66 years to sincerely and loyally serve the Sanstha with total disregard for his own needs and comforts.

It is currently preserved at the BAPS headquarters in Ahmedabad.



### SHRIJI MAHARAJ'S MALA

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj encouraged and arranged for the newly initiated young Pramukh Swami to study Sanskrit in Khambhat. Once, in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj told Narayanswarup Swami that when he cleared the 'shastri' level of Sanskrit study, he would give him the *mala* he uses that was sanctified by Shriji Maharaj.

Narayanswarup Swami sincerely pursued his Sanskrit studies. But, due to other responsibilities entrusted to him by Shastriji Maharaj, he did not formally clear the Shastri level. In fact, due to his ever-growing workload, Pramukh Swami had to stop his studies.

Once, Yogiji Maharaj reminded Shastriji Maharaj about giving the sanctified *mala* to Pramukh Swami. Shastriji Maharaj countered that he had not cleared the Shastri level. Yogiji Maharaj persisted and convinced Shastriji Maharaj that despite this, Pramukh Swami merited receiving the *mala*.

So, Shastriji Maharaj happily gave the *mala* to Pramukh Swami, but prophetically added, "The *mala* will not remain with him." Pramukh Swami received the *mala* with great joy and cherished it with great devotion.

Pramukh Swami kept this *mala* in his puja. Many years later, after Shastriji Maharaj had returned to Akshardham, Pramukh Swami was in Mumbai. A devotee who keenly collected and preserved sacred relics of the Sampradaya asked Pramukh Swami for permission to take the *mala* and arrange for others to have darshan of it. Pramukh Swami agreed, with the understanding that it would be returned.

However, despite Pramukh Swami's repeated reminders over several years, the devotee did not return it.

One morning in Ahmedabad, Pramukh Swami was performing his puja when Yogiji Maharaj came to him with the devotee. Yogiji Maharaj said to Pramukh Swami, "I have given that *mala* to him, so do not ask for it now."

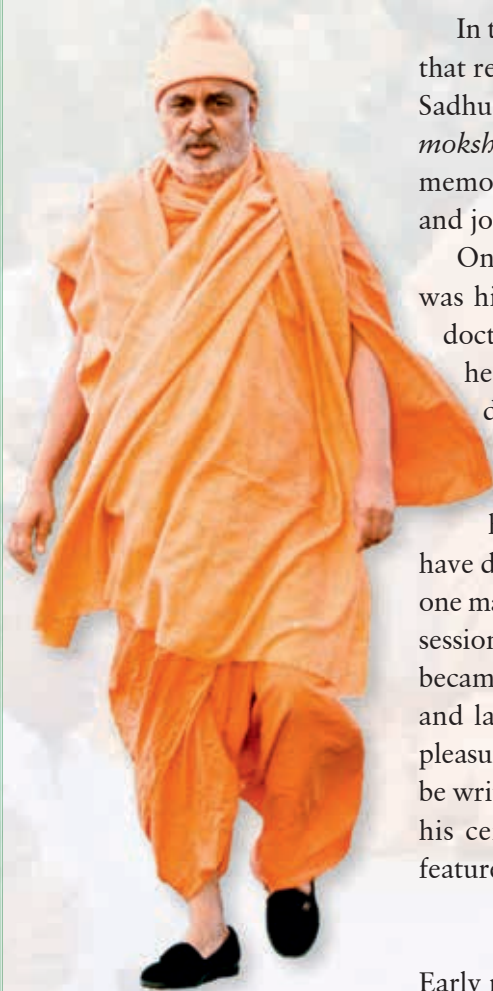
Pramukh Swami gladly replied, "It was by your wish that I received it and by your wish it has been given away."

From that day, despite the *mala* being so sacred and of high personal sentimental value, Pramukh Swami never asked for the *mala*. He was wedded to following the wishes of his guru and so, as per Yogiji Maharaj's wish, willingly gave the *mala*.

Subsequently, when Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar was being built, the descendants of that devotee gave the sanctified *mala* for permanent display in the Hall of Holy Relics, where it serves as a reminder of Pramukh Swami's unhesitating and instant observance of his guru's wishes. ♦



# Walking with Pramukh Swami Maharaj



In the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has revealed that recalling stories and memories of Bhagwan and his holy Sadhu are a means to experiencing inner peace and attaining *moksha*. Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed us with countless memories that whenever recalled bring a smile to our face and joy to our heart.

One of the many public activities Swamishri did regularly was his daily walk. After suffering a heart attack in 1983, doctors advised that he adopt walking as exercise – which he did for over 30 years. At first, he would walk twice daily – in the morning and late afternoon – for about 30 minutes each time. Wherever he was – in a city, town or village, in India or abroad – this was a part of his daily routine. Devotees, young and old, gathered to have darshan of him walking – innumerable people watching one man walking in circles or to and fro. These public walking sessions were indeed a sight to behold. His walking sessions became celebrations. They were occasions of devotion, fun and laughter, antics and anecdotes – just all round divine pleasure. They brought so much joy to everyone. So much can be written just about his walking sessions. So, as we celebrate his centenary, this poem relives some of the memorable features of Swamishri's daily walk.

Early morning and late noon,  
Each occasion was a real boon.  
All flocked early to book their place,  
Leaving not an inch of space.

Just on time, opened the door,  
And fell your first step on the floor.  
With folded hands you greeted all,  
Young and old, big and small.





Such was the pleasure of your sight,  
Our hearts and minds danced with delight.  
Walking at a spritely pace,  
Casting glances and divine grace.

For 30 years this was your routine,  
In our minds is fixed this scene.  
Piercing our hearts your regal gait,  
Nourishing our souls, as we celebrate.



First with garment in hand you walked,  
While by your side devotees talked.  
Questions you answered, guidance you gave,  
Your counsel and blessings did a new path pave.

From the wings the children sang,  
One by one up they sprang.  
A wave of your hand to divinely bless,  
Encouraging all to freely express.

Familiar faces passed witty comments,  
Spreading joy and laughter, and memorable moments.  
A fleeting gaze, approving smile,  
Pushed the performer that extra mile.



In later years, it was God's will,  
You continued to walk – but on a treadmill.  
For 30 minutes it was heaven each time,  
For every step was indeed sublime.

And when the clock or counter reached its target,  
Attendants quickly rolled up the carpet.  
In the blink of an eye, the time had whizzed past,  
If only we could make this forever last.

Then behind you closed the door,  
As devout hails of the 'Jai Naad' roar.  
And with a parting glimpse of your room,  
We wished your return ever so soon.



## Letters to Pramukh Swami Maharaj



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

I was very lucky and excited when I received the *janoi* from you and I still speak about this experience to this day.

Life would have been very tough without a guru like you. You have held my hand in the tough times. You were visiting London Mandir and I knew my mum had a burning desire to attend your morning puja.

We set off from Loughborough at 3:00 a.m. to reach Neasden by 5:00 a.m. When you finished your puja, I had the opportunity to have your darshan and receive *ashirwad* from you. I still remember the vibrant colours of the flowers you gave to me. I held these in my hand like precious stones and when I had the chance I gave these to my mum. She could instantly feel your presence through the flowers and was filled with tears of happiness.

- Yashvir Sakaria, 39, Self-Employed, Loughborough, UK

I was 10 when I had darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj during our house *padhramani*. I could not understand why I could not meet him because I was a girl. I just accepted it and observed all the actions from a distance in *sabhas* whenever Swamishri visited the UK.

I enjoyed listening to all the work he was doing for mankind, especially the cattle camps, and this is what drew me towards him. I loved doing mandir *seva* as I learnt so much. It was not until 1985 at the Cultural Festival of India that I viewed his actions and thoughts to be so sincere when I heard he was thinking of his volunteers in Alexandra Palace when sitting on the *tula* [at QPR stadium]. I thought this person is different; he really cares.

I feel Swamishri has walked with me in all my difficult and not so difficult moments. I truly feel blessed. Even today I feel he is with me. I often have conversations with him as he sits in the front passenger seat of my car wearing a *pagh* and looking ahead. I know Swamishri has left his body, but in spirit he is always with me answering all my questions and guiding me to pray.

- Meena Patel, 53, London, UK

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

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

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

- Dipen Gadhia, 48, Senior NHS Manager, UK

When you did *padhramani* and came to our simple home, you changed my and my family's life. It was like the Sun coming into our home and burning our sins of many births to ashes.

You purified us, showing us the true path. You have lit the way and revealed the truth, and held our hand as you guided us.

I have so many wonderful memories of you. I took you so much for granted when you were here amongst us. Always ran to you when I had problems. Wrote to you and you never failed to reply; the replies gave hope and solutions. In the beginning I did not really recognize and understand you. It's only by your grace that we devotees were able to realize you and look in wonder at your amazing achievements, for which you never took credit. You told people you met to live a pure life. If it were not for you I would have drowned in sense gratification. You have been such an inspiration to me, your kindness, humbleness, mercy, gratitude.

- Asha Jenner, 55, IT Salesperson, Liverpool, UK

Despite the physical distance, I've always felt your presence whenever I needed you. You are my life support. It is beyond our imagination how much you have given to us without asking for anything in return. Bapa, I truly take pride in being called yours.

You have gifted me the most memorable and precious *smrutis*, I just want time to stand still when I'm with you.

I miss you immensely Bapa. But now, not a day goes by without feeling your presence in Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Words fall short to describe your importance in my life. You are my *sarvasva*! I promise to you, Bapa, to never forget you.

- Janky

Even when we forgot you in times of our joy, you never forgot us in our times of difficulties. You have always held our hands tight and said, "Hold on. I've got you." You have never made us feel like we were disturbing you. Even when you were busy, you made time for us; you never made us feel as if we were a burden.

We pray to you that we never let go of your hand and fall into the dark clutches of *kusang*.

- Alpa Mehta



Thank you for accepting me into your royal family. In 1981, I came as a contractor for the ceiling in the old mandir. The day after the mandir opened I was introduced to you. You said two things: come to the mandir regularly and do *seva*. At that time our eyes met and within a few weeks I gave up meat and drinking without any hesitation.

I remember I used to argue with my dad when he used to tell me to go to the mandir, as he was a regular. I replied, “Only girls and weak-minded people go to the mandir.” I can truly say after meeting you and being in satsang that only the strong-willed and strong-minded people can enter and last in satsang.

Seeing you over the years has inspired me to introspect so I can try and walk the path that pleases you. Ever since I entered satsang you looked after me in every aspect of my life. There are many occasions that you have silently been looking after me, cushioning me from falling.

There is nothing I can do to repay what you have done for me. All that I wish is that I can always humbly stay in your service, and please both you and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

- *Aku Amin, London, UK*

You gave my family so much love and attention that watching them behave giddy with excitement was enough for me to join them as a young child.

Even as adults, my parents felt they had a precious parent to go to and look up to. You have always been the centre of our family and home.

You made me laugh so many times with your gestures, comments and *sabhas*. Your actions, facial impressions and words are so important in my mind and I’m so grateful for every one I’ve witnessed. I hope that I can in return make you proud by my actions and gestures.

Our bond is special, our bond is unique, because I grew up with you in my life, just like a parent and child. You are central to my being. You have left an imprint that cannot just disappear.

You led by complete example and for that I have so much pure respect. Every action was thoughtful for another and that is so rare to see, but you did it so easily because you really do love your devotees.

Thank you, Bapa, for all the things I still don’t realize that you did for me and looked out for me when I was too busy thinking I was the decision maker.

- *Bijal Nakarja*

You have always been that eternal light in my life and source of strength. I will never forget the feeling when we first came for your darshan on the first car park India Trip. As I walked away from you, you pulled my hand back to talk to me more. This moment has always stayed with me and I still cannot truly describe the feeling that coursed through me when you pulled my hand back. It was shock and elation.

All the personal meetings and time you gave for me, just us in the room and you listening to my needs and issues. You gave me so much attention, care and personal time even when you were also doing so much to grow satsang.

- *Tilesh Patel, 41, Head of Finance, London, UK*

Swami, words fall short when I try to describe what you have done for us. You never ceased to love us; never looking at our faults, unconditionally fulfilling our most worthless wishes, taking care of us like a mother. You made us all feel worthy of it, even though in actual fact we were absolutely worthless to experience that love.

Swami, you stayed up till late night praying for our well-being so we could sleep peacefully every night, you addressed every problem we presented to you, but never even once did you complain about your problems and your pain.

You gave us the gift of Mahant Swami and still stay with us through him giving us the same motherly and unconditional love.

Whenever I have looked beside me in times of need I have always found you there supporting, comforting and loving me.

- Janki Patel, 17, Student, Eldoret, Kenya

From my first memory of you when you were in London to my favourite memory of you on the India Trip 2014 where I was able to truly understand your *mahima*, my love for you and the impact you have had on my life. From helping my family get through tough times to you writing letters to say that it will be okay.

My favourite times with you are still the constant internal conversations I had with you. You were always there for me like a friend and that is what I loved about you. Being a girl having these conversations with you never let me feel the physical separation we had; I am still able to come to you and talk about anything as you're always just one thought away.

- Darshika

It took me a long time to realize Bapa's true identity and divinity, but when I did it was a life-changing moment for me. Only now can I fully appreciate how much Bapa has saved me, forgiven me and blessed me.

I remember one year I was doing car parking *seva* outside the main entrance to the mandir during *annakut*. It was late in the evening, approx 8:30 p.m., when a message came over the walkie-talkie that Bapa is calling me. I was shocked, because this was the busiest day of the year for the mandir, but Bapa had time to see me! My Mum had written a letter to Bapa, and Bapa wanted to reassure me that everything would be okay.

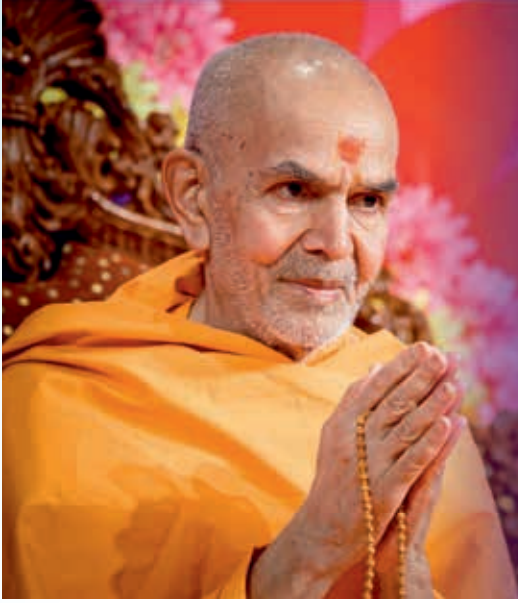
- Nitin Rabheru, Solicitor, UK

I will never forget the day when I first met you in 1978 in Mombasa. When our eyes met I could feel an electric current pass through my body and I could feel the presence of divinity. Bapa, You have looked after me and my whole family ever since.

- Ajesh Mehta, London, UK

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

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



# Fruits from the Spiritual Orchard: DASBHAV

**T**he spiritual realm is a succulent orchard of ripe fruits waiting to be plucked by spiritual seekers for spiritual nourishment. What are these fruits? They are the concepts and virtues that facilitate spiritual progress. God is the proprietor – he owns this orchard. And his God-realized Sadhu, the Gunatit Guru, is his chief gardener. He is our guide and will direct us to the fruits we need to pluck and feast on.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has established such an orchard and, at present, Mahant Swami Maharaj is his chief gardener. He knows which fruits to recommend. How does he direct and guide us? Through his deeds and discourses, his actions and advice.

Mahant Swami Maharaj is himself an orchard of spiritual virtues and divinity. With this issue we begin a series of articles that will highlight these divines qualities and how, by living them, he leads the way.

We begin with the fruit of *dasbhav*. More than just a word, *dasbhav* represents a way of life. In English, it loosely translates to ‘humble service’, ‘serving with humility’. *Dasbhav* is a means to attaining humility – *nirmanipanu*. It is the attitude that, no matter how spiritually advanced one may be, one can always learn

from others. This approach persists even, in fact especially, when one has become *brahmarup* – spiritually enlightened.

Let us understand this foundational concept from the life and teachings of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

## Sankari

Many years ago, before the new *shikharbaddha* mandir was built, there was a house across the road from the old mandir. Behind the house was an empty field, where a *shibir* had been arranged in the presence of Mahant Swami. When Swamishri went to the field, he saw that it was littered with used *datan* sticks, which people had thrown after cleaning their teeth. So, he found a bucket and started picking up the sticks. The youths saw this and rushed to stop him. But Swamishri refused and said, “You pick them and I will also pick them up.” In this way, Swamishri helped till the entire field was cleaned and ready to host the *shibir*.

## May 1987, Bochasan

At 11.00 p.m., Mahant Swami arrived at Bochasan mandir after a tiring day of *vicharan* in the villages. He had a bath and got dressed. Meanwhile, Vipul (presently, Anandvihari Swami)



went into the bathroom to wash Swamishri's clothes. When he exited the bathroom, he saw Mahant Swami performing *dandvats* in the direction of the bathroom, and asked, "To whom are you offering *dandvats*?" Swamishri replied, "You have observed a *nirjala* fast today and still performed strenuous *seva* all day. Also, you have left the comforts of Mumbai to serve here. Yogi Bapa would be delighted on seeing youths like you. So, I have offered *dandvats* to you."

### 14 September 2016, Mumbai

Swamishri was meeting the resident sadhus individually in his room. The last to enter was Divyanand Swami. He had recently undergone a leg operation and was seated on a wheelchair. After their conversation, Divyanand Swami wheeled himself to the door, but was unable to open it. Nobody else was in the room. Swamishri realized the predicament and immediately got up to open the door, took control of the wheelchair and navigated it outside. Swamishri himself pushed the wheelchair all the way to the lobby. Instead of calling others to do this, Swamishri himself performed this *seva*.

### 2 October 2016, Nadiad

After lunch, students of the BAPS hostel asked Swamishri, "This sun is asking, the moon is asking, the stars are asking... who is Mahant Swami? So please reveal to us your identity."

Swamishri replied, "*Das na das* (a servant of servants)."

### 5 November 2016, Gondal

With folded hands Swamishri made his way to the sadhus' residence. Here, Shrikrishna Pandya said, "I have won a presidential award for the best teacher. I am the principal of our school here. I have served for years as a *sanyojak* (senior volunteer) in our satsang activities... I have many achievements like these, what are your achievements and who are you? Instantly, Swamishri replied, "*Sevak*." But

Pandyaji tried again to coax a different answer from Swamishri. But again, Swamishri replied, "*Sevak*," and this time bowed down to touch Pandyaji's feet. Not only through words, but also by deed, Swamishri revealed his inner nature.

### 25 January 2017, Sarangpur

After darshan in the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir, Swamishri arrived at the sacred Shami tree (*khijdo*). While he was performing *pradakshinas* some sadhus presented a skit. One said, "I have a stomachache," another said, "I have a headache," while another complained about another problem. After each complaint, one sadhu advised the complaining sadhu to perform a certain *mudra* (yogic hand gesture) as treatment. Then, one sadhu pointed out, "None of these *mudras* will solve the problems. The true *mudra* to perform is that of becoming *ekantik*." So, he requested, "Swamishri, please show us what an *ekantik mudra* is."

Swamishri immediately folded his hands and bowed – revealing that to become *ekantik* one must cultivate *dasbhav*.

### 3 March 2017, Mt. Abu

Shyambhai Raval, who is the chief administrator of the BAPS Hostel and School in Mt. Abu, gave a report of the hostel and school to Swamishri during his evening dinner. After describing some of the features, Shyambhai said, "The children also observe a fast on *ekadashi*."

Swamishri said, "When one good quality is cultivated, others follow."

Shyambhai asked, "Which is the one virtue that all other virtues will follow?"

Swamishri replied, "Bowing down to others." Swamishri's message was clear – *dasbhav* and humility are the root of all virtues.

### 4 February 2018, Bhavnagar

A youth was celebrating his birthday and asked Swamishri for blessings, "Swami! Please bless me that I can become *das na das*."

Swamishri asked an attendant swami to bring the whiteboard from the bathroom. He read the message on it, “I am the most junior of the juniors, the dust at the feet of the sadhus. I am the most junior of all.”

Swamishri added, “This is what you must do.”

### 9 October 2018, Bhavnagar

In Swamishri’s room after the evening assembly, Atmaswarup Swami asked, “Swami! The *kishores* of London have asked, ‘What are the four essential qualities required to attain Akshardham? If we have them, will you stamp our visa to Akshardham?’”

Swamishri replied, “One, eradicate *abhavavgun* from the root – absolutely, then *divyabhav*, *mahima* and *das na das*. Do this and you will get the visa.”

### 28 February 2019, Selvas

Swamishri sat on his bed to retire for the night. He folded his hands, bowed to the swamis in the room and said, “I am *das no das*.” The sadhus offered *panchang pranam* and said, “No Swami, we are your *das na das*.”

Swamishri said, “Daily endeavour to become a *das*... Endeavour. Even if you relax slightly, then you will end up being a boss of bosses. Our mind is fickle, so if this happens, it will result in problems.”

### 6 June 2019, Sarangpur

After puja, Swamishri blessed the assembly and spoke about becoming *das na das*. Then, he sat in a golf cart to return to his room from the assembly hall. On the way, he pointed to some *balaks* standing in a line along the route and said to the attendant swamis, “See, we have to become their *das na das*!” Then, whenever Swamishri saw any *balaks*, he pointed to them and questioned the attendants, “What do we have to do?”

The attendant swamis replied, “We have to become their *das na das*.”

### 24 June 2019, Ahmedabad

After singing *chestha*, a discussion ensued with the attendant swamis. Swamishri said, “When is the *antahkaran* purified? When one becomes *das na das*, humble, and develops other such virtues. Only when ego is totally removed is the *antahkaran* purified. The key lies in becoming *das na das*. First eradicate ego, then you will move towards Bhagwan – that is the real spiritual strength.”

### 22 August 2019, Dar-es-Salaam

After puja, while Swamishri was taking his medicine, a sadhu said, “Swami! You fold your hands and bow to everyone for so long that we become tired.”

Swamishri smiled and said, “Still, I do not feel it is enough. It is earning [spiritual merits].”

Then, Swamishri add, “*Das*... of all,” while slowly spreading both hands to indicate that the more one becomes a *das* the more spiritual merits one earns.

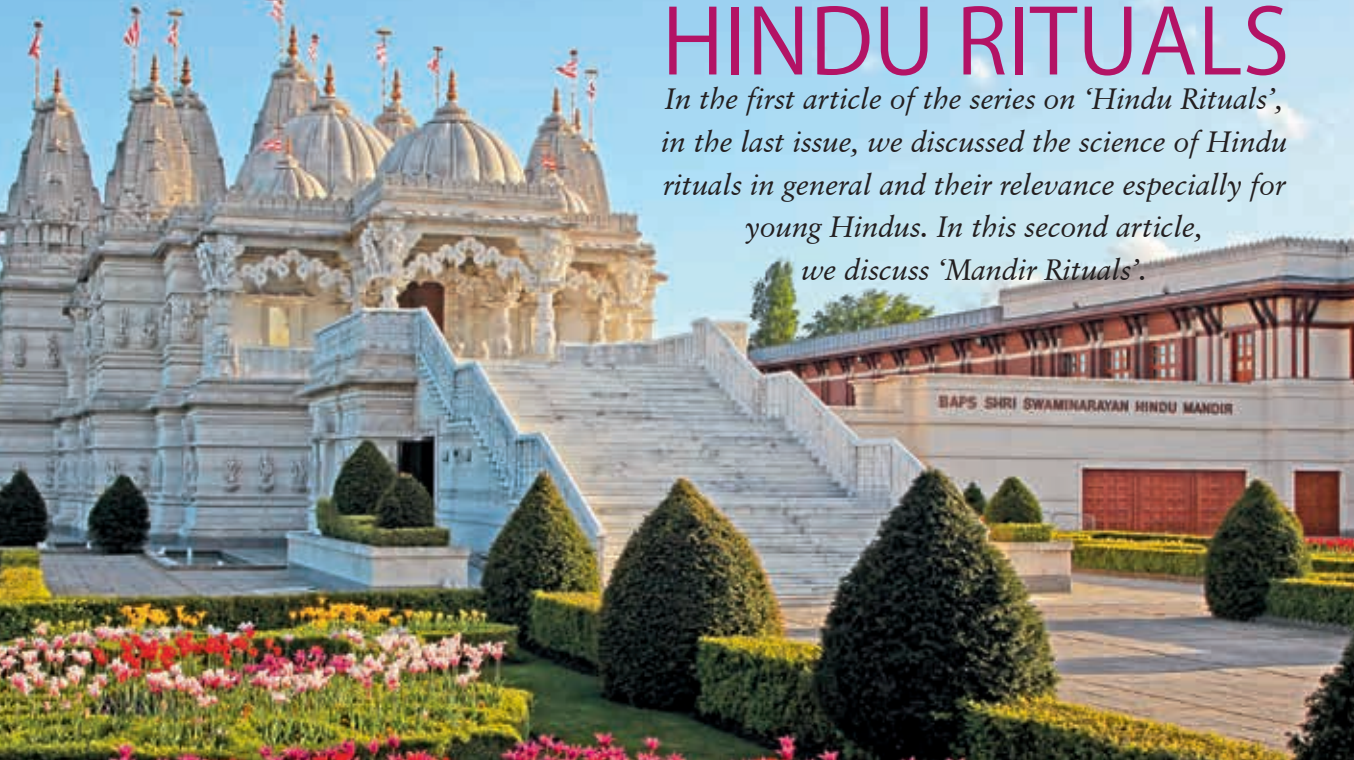
### 24 August 2019, Dar-es-Salaam

After puja, blessing the morning assembly, Swamishri said, “In the kirtan you sang ‘*Dās tamārā dāsno rākho Nāth hajur*...’ By becoming the *das* of one you earn a certain amount; if you become *das na das* you earn double, and by becoming *das na das na das* you earn triple. So, the more you become *das*, the more you earn. But if you behave as a boss of a boss of a boss, then you face only loss, loss and more loss. Everybody wishes to become a boss! This mindset has to be removed. Then you will experience endless joy. This is what Bhagwan likes.

“If you do this, God will embrace you and not let go. So, this is the way. This is satsang – to become *das na das*.”

A sadhu asked, “In the other mindset, people see money and rewards, while as a *das na das*, nothing is attained.”

Swamishri said, “For this, *vishwas* – trust – is required.” ◆



# HINDU RITUALS

*In the first article of the series on 'Hindu Rituals', in the last issue, we discussed the science of Hindu rituals in general and their relevance especially for young Hindus. In this second article, we discuss 'Mandir Rituals'.*

The word 'mandir' denotes a Hindu dwelling of worship. Synonyms for mandir used in various traditions of Sanatan Dharma include: *devalaya*, *devagara*, *devagruham*, *devakulam*, *archagruha*, *vimana* and *prasada*. The ancient sacred texts of architecture, known as *Shilpashastras*, regard the mandir as a living form of Paramatma – the *adhar shila* as the feet, the *kalash* pot on the *shikhar* as head and the *murti* as the *atma*.

Devotees visit a mandir to not only have darshan and blessings of the deity, but also to experience or participate in the periodic, festival and seasonal rituals. Such rituals include *murti prana-pratishtha* – consecration of the *murtis* in a new mandir, *patotsav* – annual anniversary of the *prana-pratishtha*, also known as *brahmotsavam* in South Indian mandirs, *abhishek*, *shangar*, *arti*, *naivedya*, special puja rituals, *siveli* – grand procession of the *chal* (small mobile) *murti* of a deity on a palanquin or elephant in the mandir premises, *rath yatra*, *hindola* or *jhulan yatra*

(festival of swinging the *chal murti*), and *katha* (discourse on a sacred text). We shall briefly deal with three mandir rituals, namely, *arti*, *abhishek* and *naivedya*.

## ARTI

Also known as *deeparadhana* and *nirajanam*. *Arti* invokes the deity with the *panch mahabhuts*, namely, *pruthvi* (earth), *jal* (water), *tej* (light), *vayu* (air) and *akash* (space). This ritual of waving lighted *diyas* in front of the deity with the accompaniment of lyrics, bells, drums, *shankhnad* (blowing of a conch) and incense, is a deeply solacing and thrilling ritual. After *arti*, pujaris offer the *diyas* to devotees to take *ashka* – spreading one's palms over the flame and then touching one's eyes and head – thus transferring the divinity of the deity invoked in the flame onto one's being. In huge gatherings, when it is not possible for the *arti* to reach everybody, devotees just offer their palms from afar, and then touch their foreheads and still experience the deity's





blessings. The number of *artis* vary in different *sampradayas*. The *shangar arti* in the morning is the most appealing to the devotees who can have the first sight or darshan of God after being exquisitely adorned with rich garments, flower garlands and ornaments. This darshan may then be repeatedly recalled mentally at intervals during the day's daily activities to re-infuse divine solace and boost one's mind. This recall, known as *smriti*, is a potent de-stressor.

### ABHISHEK

This ritual, usually performed by pujaris, involves pouring fragrant water, milk or gingili (sesame) oil on either the main *murti* or a *chal murti*. The sanctified fluid is then availed by devotees. In the *shikharbaddha* mandirs of BAPS globally, Pramukh Swami Maharaj introduced the *abhishek* ritual to be performed by devotees on the metallic *murti* of Nilkanth Varni. Through this ritual people pray for the fulfilment of mundane wishes as well as to seek spiritual solace. Even non-Hindus are able to perform this spiritually invigorating ritual. The sanctified water is then available in bottles to people who wish to take it during illness or sprinkle it to sanctify their homes.

A unique *abhishek* tradition practised by the Shaivites is known as *kavadis*, in which the pilgrims carry water filled in two cans from the River Ganga in Haridwar. The cans are suspended on a pole resting on their shoulders.

Then, they walk all the way to Rameshwar, or other Jyotirlings or Shiva mandirs in their own village, to pour the holy water on the Shivling. This strenuous feat of faith and stamina is made more arduous by not letting the cans touch the ground during the *yatra*. So, at night, when the pilgrims rest, they are hung on poles.

In some mandirs in South India, a famous ritual known as *kumbhabhishekam* is organized every 12 years. In the Shri Krishna Mandir in Guruvayur in Kerala, *abhishek* is performed daily, first with gingili (sesame) oil and then with holy water known as Vaarunajalam. This involves the invocation of the seven river deities, namely, Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri, in the water placed in a *shankh* while chanting the Brahmakalash mantra.

### NAIVEDYA

The offering of food to the deity is known as *naivedya*, *bhog* or *thal*. Usually this ritual is performed by pujaris with the mandir doors or curtains closed. It is usually performed three or more times daily in all shrines. The sanctified food is known as *prasadam*, which is served to devotees by the pujaris or served in dining halls known as *bhojanshalas*. There are two types of *prasadam*; one is a dry form having a longer shelf life, and the other is freshly cooked *dal*, vegetables, rice, *rotis*, sweets and other things that are served on that day. The most important



aspect of *prasadam* is that on eating it, one's being is suffused by the deity's blessings. All famous *tirths*, shrines or *sampradayas* have their unique forms of *prasadam*. Before the advent of transportation, when pilgrims walked hundreds of miles to and from *tirths*, the dry *prasadam* was of such nature that it remained well preserved for months without getting stale or spoilt. This enabled the pilgrims to share it with their family and community after returning home.

In Shaiva shrines the *prasadam* is usually non-edible such as bili leaves, sacred ash and flowers. In some Jyotirlings, as in Somnath, edible *prasadam* of wheat ladus is available. In Baidyanath (Bihar), the *prasad* is *bergutta* – dried berry powder with *sakar*. In Vaishnav shrines, *mathadi thor* is common. These are small wheat *puris* soaked in sugar syrup and then dried. In Dwarka and Dakor, *magas* ladus are also available, made of gram flour baked in ghee and sugar. *Chhapan bhog* – 56 cooked food items – is available from pujaris. Venkateshwar Balaji's famous fist-sized *bundi* ladu is made of chickpea flour, raisins, cashew nuts, sugar, ghee and whole cardamom. About 300,000 ladus are made daily. *Prasadam* at Jagannathji in Puri is of *mathadi* and *sukhadi*, offered in traditional cane baskets. Cooked rice, which is dried and sewn in small cloth bags about four inches long, is also available. Devotees tie them to the main beam of their homes. When a family member is about

to die, rice from the bag is dipped in water, and a few sanctified drops are given to the dying person. The latter thus feels uniquely blessed by Jagannathji before death. High in the Himalayan shrine of Badrivishala (Badrinath), the *prasadam* of ladus is made by the local womenfolk from *kuttu* (buck wheat) *cholai* (amaranth) and *jhangora* (millet). The traditional *prasadam* in the Swaminarayan mandirs is known as *magas ladudis* or small balls of *magas*.

The grandest food offering ritual to the deities in Hindu mandirs is the annual *annakut* – mountain of food – offered on Kartik *sud* 1 – New Year's Day, the day after Diwali. In Vaishnav traditions this offering symbolizes thanksgiving to the devas for having blessed the earth with abundant rains during the monsoon for a successful harvest. Hence, over a thousand sweets and savouries are cooked and offered to the deity. The large assembly halls in the havelis of BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandirs, outside India, provide ample space to offer ornately decorated food items. This *annakut* attracts visitors who are amazed on seeing the sumptuous variety of vegetarian dishes artistically offered to the deities.

Ten days later, on Dev Prabodhini Ekadashi (Kartik *sud* 11), the winter's first harvest of fresh vegetables is arranged before the deities in the evening in a manner similar to *annakut*. *Arti* is performed and thereafter the vegetables are distributed to the devotees as *prasad*. This festive ritual also symbolizes thanksgiving to the devas and God for a bountiful harvest.

Though these three rituals have been discussed as 'mandir rituals' they are also performed by devotees in their *ghar* mandirs or home shrines.

In the next *article* we shall discuss bhakti rituals.

(For details of Hindu rituals, refer to the author's book: *Hindu Rites & Rituals: Sentiments, Sacraments and Symbols* (2010). Published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath and available on baps. store and at BAPS bookstores.) ♦

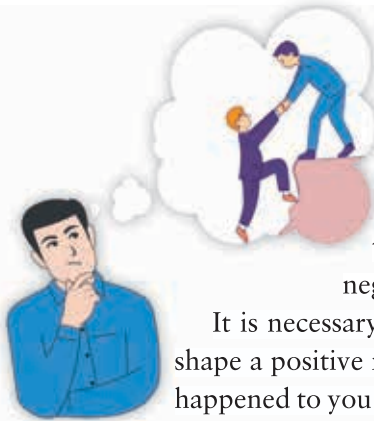


# INSPIRATIONS

*A potpourri of inspiring and interesting  
information and wisdom*



## CHOICES AND ATTITUDES



Life is a journey from B to D, i.e. Birth to Death. We need to learn to become wise and stop worrying about the uncertainties and adversities in life. But how?

Between the letters B and D lies C, which stands for choices. Our choices make our life between B and D. This means right choices are imperative for a better, healthier and meaningful life. Some choose to see the positive dimensions in everything, while others look at the negative aspects.

It is necessary to train our minds to see the positives in everything. One exercise to shape a positive mindset is to write down, before going to sleep, ten positive things that happened to you during the day. It could be anything, from having seen or heard beautiful birds in a garden, helped someone, enjoyed breakfast, accomplished a task, stayed calm in conflict, had darshan of God's *murti* in a mandir and many other things. Soon, you will realize that the world is filled with amazing and beautiful wonders and joys.

When you are upset, think of events that gave you joy or do something that you enjoy doing. Your attitude is in your hands. Always choose to be happy, satisfied and eager to learn good things. Be like a lotus blooming in the middle of a muddy pond.

## POISONED MILK



The poisoned milk analogy has been used by Shriji Maharaj on seven occasions throughout the Vachanamrut – each time to explain a different concept. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 35, Shriji Maharaj says, “Suppose there is some tasty buffalo milk in which *sakar* (sugar crystal powder) has been dissolved. Now if a snake's venom were to fall in it, then that same milk and *sakar* would become poisonous. Thereafter, whoever drinks it would die. Similarly, such a person may be highly intelligent, but he has perceived a flaw in the great Sant or God. This drawback, in the form of perceiving a flaw, has entered his mind and is comparable to the snake's venom. So how can he possibly walk on the path of liberation? In fact, even if someone were to listen to his talks, the listener's mind would also fall back from Satsang. Moreover, wherever a person possessing such a polluted intellect takes birth, he always maligns God or his devotees. Conversely, a person whose intellect is not polluted in this manner, even if he has little intelligence, does not falter in safeguarding his own liberation.” Here, the milk represents the sharp intelligence of a person and the snake venom represents the negative habit of taking *avgun* which has infected that person. So, even though such a person is smart, his harmful habit poisons his mind, ultimately leading to his spiritual ruin – just as someone who drinks the poisoned milk will die. The key to keeping the mind pure is to avoid, totally, taking the *avgun* of others.



## PROFESSOR A.A. MACDONELL



Professor A.A. Macdonell (1854–1930 CE), Boden Professor of Sanskrit, Oxford, writes, “According to Greek tradition, Thales, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, and others undertook journeys to Oriental countries in order to study philosophy. The influence of Indian philosophy on Christian Gnosticism in the second and third centuries [CE] seems at any rate undoubted. The Gnostic doctrine of the opposition between the soul and matter, of the personal existence of intellect, will, and so forth, the identification of soul and light, are derived from the Sankhya system. Again Bardesanes, a Gnostic of the Syrian school, who obtained information about India from Indian philosophers, assumed the existence of a subtle ethereal body which is identical to the *linga sharir* (subtle body) of the Sankhya System.”

- Macdonell, A.A. *A History of Sanskrit Literature*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1900, pp. 422 & 423

## AVERAGE, KNEE DEEP!

There was a group of fools. They all lived together and trusted each other at all times. It so happened that one day, while journeying to a distant place, they came to a river. They had to cross the river, but none of them knew how to swim. So they stopped by the river bank and put their brains to work. Funnily, the same idea occurred to the whole group.

They thought, “Here, near the river’s edge, the water is very shallow. Then as one walks into the river it becomes knee-deep. Midway it must be very deep indeed, flowing right above our heads, and then it decreases again as one approaches the other side.” So thinking they concluded, “This means the average level of the water is only knee-deep!”

They held hands and happily walked into the river. And, of course, all of them drowned.

One cannot calculate averages while crossing a river. Similarly, one should not apply the law of averages on the spiritual path. It would be foolish to say, “For four days I’ll be noble in the company of the enlightened Sadhu, two days I’ll be myself and one day I’ll enjoy the world with bad company. This should still make me fairly good in the law of averages.” One must be fully aware of pitfalls and avoid them at all times.

- 101 Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj

## ENLIGHTENING QUOTES

- A fault recognized is half-corrected.
- You don’t get to choose how you’re going to die or when.  
You can only decide how you’re going to live.
- Kind **hearts** are the garden,  
Kind **thoughts** are the roots,  
Kind **words** are the blossoms,  
Kind **deeds** are the fruits.

- John Ruskin





MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

# VICHARAN

August–October 2021, Ahmedabad, Sarangpur



After performing the *murti-pratishtha* rituals Swamishri offers *mantra-pushpanjali*

**AUGUST, 2021**

**4, Wednesday, Ahmedabad**

In Ahmedabad, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Aminpur and Bahediya (Sabarkantha district).

**SARANGPUR**

**13, Friday**

Today, marked the fifth anniversary of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's departure to Akshardham in Sarangpur. Swamishri did darshan at the memorial shrine of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and performed *arti*. Thereafter, Swamishri went to the Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir for darshan and prayers.

**18, Wednesday**

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the BAPS *hari* mandir in South London, UK, and the *abhishek murti* of Nilkanth Varni for the *hari* mandir in East London.

**24, Tuesday**

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha*

rituals and *arti* of the *murtis* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Shiv-Parvati and Shri Ganapati for the BAPS *hari* mandir in Vancouver, Canada, and the *murti* of Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj for the *hari* mandir in Edmonton.

On 9 July 2021, during Swamishri's stay in Nenpur, Swamishri had performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Canada: Calgary (Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj), Vancouver (Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj), Whitby (Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj), Saskatoon (Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj) and Winnipeg (Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Shiv-Parvati, Shri Sita-Ram, Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji). Swamishri had also performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the *hari* mandirs in the Ahmedabad rural region: Patdi (Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji) and Vasai (Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji). For the

Nadiad rural region, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the *hari* mandirs in Piplag (Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Hanumanji and Shri Ganapatiji) and Hirachand Muvadi (Shri Guru Parampara).

## 26, Thursday

Swamishri performed the *pujan* rituals of the *shilas* and *yantras* for Thakorji and Sant Nivas, called Pramukh Hraday, as part of the under-construction BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandir complex in Kanad, Surat.

## 27, Friday

Swamishri performed the groundbreaking ceremony of the *sant* ashram and assembly hall as part of the under-construction BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir complex in Surendranagar. Swamishri also performed the *pujan* of the *shilas* and *yantras*.

## SEPTEMBER

### 4, Saturday

Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *pujan* rituals of the *shilas* and *yantras* for the *sant* ashram and assembly hall, as part of the first phase of the BAPS *shikharbaddha* mandir construction in Bhuj, Kutch. Swamishri also conveyed blessings for the construction work.

### 5, Sunday

Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami inaugurated an English book by Dr Kiritbhai Shelat, 'Mahan Rushi: Mahant Swami Maharaj.'

### 10, Friday; Ganesh Chaturthi

On the day of Ganesh Chaturthi, Swamishri performed the *pujan*, *arti*, *thal* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of a *murti* of Shri Ganapatiji.

### 21, Tuesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs



Swamishri inaugurates a Swaminarayan Aksharpath audio book publication, 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj: Life & Work in Brief'

in Cranbourne (Australia) and Myrtle Beach (Australia). He also consecrated the *abhishek murtis* of Shri Nilkanth Varni for the *hari* mandirs in Brisbane and Canberra (Australia). Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* rituals.

## 26, Sunday

A special *mahapuja* was performed in Sarangpur for the peace and *moksha* of departed souls due to the coronavirus. Devotees participated in the online *mahapuja* in India and abroad. Swamishri blessed all the participants and the departed souls.

Swamishri also inaugurated an English audio book, 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj: Life and Work in Brief', published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath.

## OCTOBER

### 1, Friday

Swamishri consecrated the marble *murtis* of the Guru Parampara to be installed in the BAPS *hari* mandir, Petlad. The mandir is celebrating its 10th inauguration anniversary.

### 7, Thursday

Swamishri inaugurated three English Aksharpath publications for children: *Adventures of Ghanshyam*, Parts 5, 6 & 7.





Swamishri swings Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami on a *hindolo*

## 19, Tuesday

Swamishri inaugurated a French translation of Satsang Diksha published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith.

## 20, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *pujan* rituals of pillars for the under-construction haveli in Sydney (Australia). Swamishri also inaugurated an English audio book published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith titled *Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami: Life and Work* and a Sanskrit translation of the Vachanamrut.

Some festivals celebrated by Swamishri in Sarangpur were as follows.

### JANMASHTAMI FESTIVAL

**30 August 2021, Sarangpur**

A festive assembly was held after Swamishri concluded his morning puja in Sarangpur to celebrate the divine life and work of Bhagwan Krishna. Bhaktisagar Swami and Viveksagar Swami expounded upon the life of Bhagwan Krishna. Thereafter, Pujya Dr Swami gave an inspiring speech. An *annakut* of sweets and fruits was offered to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj amidst the singing of *thals* by swamis.

The main evening Janmashtami celebration

was held online from 8.00 to 9.30 p.m., and was relayed on [sabha.baps.org](http://sabha.baps.org) and GTPL Katha channel. Shrutiprakash Swami and Bhaktisagar Swami spoke about the divine life and work of Bhagwan Krishna. A video of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings was shown.

Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj was honoured with a garland and he blessed the assembly, "The Janmashtami festival is celebrated with faith by Vaishnavs throughout India and the world. Where there is Bhagwan or the Sant there lies victory. Because Arjun gave up his mind's resolves and took the humble refuge of Shri Krishna he attained victory in the Mahabharat war. Similarly, we have the refuge of Bhagwan and the gurus and have also given up our minds' resolves. Thus, our victory in *sansar* is certain and without doubt. We have to consolidate our own spiritual faith and offer our devotion to the gurus."

Then Swamishri performed the *arti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Bhagwan Krishna, who were placed in a decorated crib. The festival concluded with singing of kirtans while Swamishri rocked Thakorji.



Swamishri honoured with a garland

## MHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 88TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS 13 September 2021, Sarangpur

As per the Gregorian date, Mahant Swami Maharaj's birthday celebration was held with devotion and festivity in Sarangpur. Swamishri gave darshan to swamis and devotees while performing his morning puja in Pramukh Mandiram. The bhajans sung by swamis about the glory of guru imbued the environment with devotion and peace.

After his puja, Swamishri blessed the gathering, "May all be happy in body, mind and wealth. May whatever losses have occurred due to the corona pandemic be overcome and may there be abundant rains throughout the country."

Finally, Swamishri was honoured with garlands by Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Atma-swarup Swami.

## INAUGURATION OF PRAMUKH DARSHAN- PUJAN MANDAPAM

16 September 2021, Sarangpur

Adjacent to the under-construction shrine of Pramukh Swami Maharaj a decorative *mandap* has been built. Today, Swamishri ritually inaugurated the *mandap* and thereafter, ritually installed an ornate *sinhasan* with the *murtis* of



Swamishri offers *mantra-pushpanjali* after inaugurating Pramukh Darshan-Pujan Mandapam

Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Then, Swamishri performed *arti* of and offered *mantra-pushpanjali* to the *asthi kumbh* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the holy *charanarvind* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Devotees who come for darshan of the memorial shrine will also get the opportunity of performing the *pujan* rituals in the newly inaugurated *mandapam*.

## JAL JHILANI FESTIVAL 19 September, Sarangpur

Swamishri performed his morning puja in Pramukh Mandiram in the presence of swamis and devotees. After his puja, Swamishri blessed the congregation, "The essence of this festival is transformation. It is important that we transform ourselves. According to the Purans, God changes his sleeping position from one side to the other. This symbolizes that we should make efforts to improve our habits so that we can ultimately attain Akshardham. For this, one requires faith."

Pujya Dr Swami garlanded Swamishri and thereafter Swamishri inaugurated an English audio publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpith titled *Rajipo*.

The climax of the Jal Jhilani festival commenced with Swamishri steering a remote-controlled



Swamishri manoeuvres Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami's boat by remote control

boat with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Simultaneously, sadhus sang wonderful festive bhajans and gave a devotional and festive flair to the occasion. The celebration was interlaced with five *artis* performed by Swamishri, senior sadhus and devotees. Finally, Swamishri performed *pujan* of Ganapatiji, who was later immersed in the waters of Yagnapurush Sarovar.

The entire celebration was relayed live on live. baps.org and GTPL Katha Channel from 6.15 to 8.15 a.m. Countless devotees availed of the online celebration in India and abroad.

Today, the Government of Gujarat had organized a booth in the mandir precincts to vaccinate people against the coronavirus.

## MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 88TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION 30 September 2021

As per the Indian calendar, on Bhadarva *vad* 9 (30 September 2021), Mahant Swami Maharaj's 88th birthday celebration commenced with his morning puja darshan in Sarangpur. A large number of devotees had gathered at the Pramukh Darshan Vatika, which was decked for the celebration. A beautiful *annakut* was arranged before Thakorji in the main mandir and before Swamishri at the Pramukh Darshan Vatika. The swamis sang

mellifluous bhajans during the puja and thereafter Swamishri blessed the gathering. Pujya Dr Swami garlanded Swamishri and honoured him.

Thereafter, Swamishri inaugurated some Swaminarayan Aksharpith publications: 1. *Shishu Satsang Vihar*, Part 1 (Gujarati and English), 2. *Satsang Diksha* (Udiya), 3. *Swamini Vato* (Telugu), 4. *Yug Vibhuti Pramukh Swami Maharaj* (Marathi), 5. *Vachanamrut Brahmasutra Swaminarayan Bhashya* (Gujarati), and 6. *Brahmopadesh Rasayanam* (Sanskrit) by AARSH, Gandhinagar. Also, Dr Swami inaugurated *Sadhutana Shikhar*, *Mahant Swami Maharaj* (Marathi).

## Evening Online Celebration

Swamishri's birthday celebration was held online so that devotees in India and abroad could celebrate and have darshan. Devotees had decorated their homes for the occasion. The online celebration was from 7.30 to 10.30 p.m. The entire celebration was themed on Brahmanand Swami's bhajan, *Sant Param Hitkari...* which included devotional bhajans, inspiring speeches, wonderful videos and impressive 3D animation. A brief report of the spiritually immersive celebration is as follows.

- The celebration commenced at 7.30 p.m. with the bhajan, '*Sant Param Hitkari...*' sung by BAPS youths. Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived in the celebration assembly.

- The entire celebration programme revealed the glory and greatness of a God-realized Sant. The virtue of charity was explored through a video of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, Brahnavihari Swami spoke eloquently on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's virtue of charity and services to society.

- The second virtue of a Sant is to do good to all. A video presentation on how Pramukh Swami Maharaj had strived for the good of all was relayed. Thereafter, video clips of people sharing their personal experiences and transformations due to their association with Pramukh Swami Maharaj





Swamishri performs his morning puja on his 88th birthday celebration

and dignitaries voicing their opinions about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's saintliness was shown.

Then, Anandswarup Swami spoke fluently about how Mahant Swami Maharaj is inclined towards doing bhajan and bhakti and how he inspires them in others.

- The third virtue of a Sant is to liberate all souls from misery and pain. A touching video was shown on this theme. Then, Aksharvatsal Swami spoke impressively about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's unfathomable compassion and services.

- A video about Mahant Swami Maharaj's compassion for all was shown. Thereafter, swamis narrated incidents of how Mahant Swami Maharaj had inspired BAPS volunteers to serve those afflicted by the coronavirus.

Then, a video was shown in which devotees narrated how they overcame family, professional and social issues through Mahant Swami Maharaj's guidance and blessings

- The fourth virtue of a Sant is to do good to others. Pramukh Swami Maharaj disregarded physical inconveniences and hardships to fulfil the wishes of devotees. Through a video presentation, sadhus shared their personal experiences of Swamishri's strenuous and Herculean *vicharan*. In the same way, Mahant Swami Maharaj had also performed intense *vicharan* for over six decades to please the devotees. Glimpses of his *vicharan*

were presented with photographs and narrations by sadhus.

- Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami spoke glowingly about the experience of God through the association of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. He said, "The Sant is the supreme doer of good to all souls. The reason behind this is that God fully resides in him and he thus connects and binds all with God. Today, we have the association of Mahant Swami Maharaj, whose darshan benefits us with the attainment of ultimate *moksha*." Then, a short video was relayed on this subject in which distinguished people shared their experiences of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's and Mahant Swami Maharaj's divinity.

- Pujya Dr Swami's spirited speech inspired all with spiritual strength. He said, "One's entire life is a celebration of the birthdays of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Guru Parampara. When one realizes this, then one has truly celebrated Mahant Swami Maharaj's birthday. Gunatitanand Swami has said that speaking about the glory and greatness of Bhagwan and Sant tantamounts to celebrating their birthdays."

- Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj was honoured with garlands and decorative shawls by Pujya Dr Swami and swamis. The celebration climaxed with Mahant Swami Maharaj's blessings, "Firstly, may all the devotees be

blessed with happy times and may whatever financial losses that have occurred due to the coronavirus pandemic be regained. May all the volunteers and swamis have happy times. May all students achieve success in their studies and enhance the pride of BAPS. May the rains be plentiful in all places and countries and may God bless the farmers with bountiful harvests. May the construction of the mandirs in Bhuj and Morbi be accomplished.

“Since the day we became associated with Maharaj and Swami it has been Diwali for us. Shriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have blessed us with their association. They have accomplished everything. The *sadguru sants* and other senior swamis are giving their fullest cooperation to me. They are all intensely active and working hard, and through their blessings the Sanstha is running smoothly. We are all experiencing the bliss of Akshardham.” Swamishri’s blessings inspired joy and inner strength in all the swamis and countless devotees watching the online celebration.

The celebration concluded with the *mantra-pushpanjali* and *arti* rituals of Thakorji and Swamishri.

### Special Online Assemblies Prior to the Birthday Celebration

From 26 to 30 September 2021, a five-day evening lecture series by BAPS sadhus on Mahant Swami Maharaj’s life was relayed on the GTPL Channel and [sabha.baps.org](http://sabha.baps.org).

## SHARAD PURNIMA FESTIVAL 20 October 2021

On 20 October 2021 (Sharad Purnima), the 237th birthday celebration of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami was celebrated with great joy and festivity in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur.

A large number of devotees had gathered for Swamishri’s morning puja at Pramukh Darshan



Swamishri sings a *thal* during Sharad Purnima festival Vatika. The festive decorations and bhajans sung by swamis about the glory of Gunatitanand Swami inspired all with devotion and joy.

The main celebration commenced in the evening with *dhun* and prayers. Pujya Dr Swami spoke about the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as Aksharbrahma. Thereafter, a video was shown about the grand welcome Swamishri gave in Nenpur to the newly made small *murti* of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami and the subsequent installation ceremony of the *murti* next to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.

The entire celebration was punctuated with the customary performance of five *artis*. The assembly climaxed with Swamishri’s blessings and performance of the fifth *arti*.

Then, Swamishri was given *dandiyas* (sticks) to play *ras* with a few swamis as they passed by him. Finally, Swamishri also raised his *dandiyas* towards the audience of swamis to make the celebration memorable. In conclusion, *prasad* of *dudh-pauva* was served to all.

From 21 October to 3 November, a series of evening lectures to commemorate Gunatitanand Swami’s birthday (Gunatit Satra) by scholarly swamis was relayed on [sabha.baps.org](http://sabha.baps.org) and GTPL Katha Channel. Every evening, countless devotees in India and abroad availed of the 9 to 10 p.m. lectures. ♦

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

## IMPRESSIONS OF MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ BY DIGNITARIES

The very first darshan of Mahant Swami Maharaj dissolved all my worries and troubles. After his darshan and blessings I have been experiencing energy and positivity in my heart. There has been a change in my nature; I have started listening to what every person says and keep an open mind. Whenever I have darshan of Swamiji's (photo), I feel as if I am near him. I can never forget his compassionate eyes and he views all as his own. I don't have words to express my inner feelings. The transformation that has occurred in my life is not because of money, but due to joys; joys that are around us, which we are unable to perceive. I got this insight to see these joys from Mahant Swami Maharaj. I am very happy; my family is also very happy. I feel that a light has suddenly pervaded my house. I can see that the joy and happiness on the faces of my wife and children have increased.

**- Shri Arvind Babbal**

(Film Producer and Businessman, Mumbai)

It is true I have operated on many people of all walks of life. By God's grace, I also had the fortune of operating on Mahant Swami. But while doing the operation, I felt that things were just following in place so easily, as if I was not doing anything. I don't remember at that time where I was and how I was. I was lost in the whole thing and then I felt I had just come again to the world. It was a totally different experience for me. I felt that this man is different; a real saint in the true sense. He had knocked me out of this world. I had a small trip outside this world, got the surgery done and got back into the world. And then I said to myself, "This person is different and there's something in him." Today, I see this man on the top of this big organization. He is a real soul, and how Pramukh Swami chose

him was no surprise to me. He is one of the very, very holy persons whom Pramukh Swami Maharaj has chosen.

**- Dr Sudhanshu Bhattacharya**

(Renowned Heart Surgeon, Mumbai)

On doing Mahant Swami Maharaj's darshan, I realized that he is not an ordinary person, but a great person. I became attached to him on my first darshan, and forgot about what was happening around me or outside of me. Out of my joy, tears started rolling down. After his darshan, I experienced something different in me. There was positivity in me. I do business and we experience profits and losses. One hears negative talks in business. However, after meeting Mahant Swami, I now have no fears about anything. Everything seems positive, and that is having a great effect on me.

**- Shri Dinesh Shinde**

(Prominent Businessman, USA)

When I first met Mahant Swami Maharaj, I touched his feet. He looked into my eyes and from that instant onwards I felt a deep connection. His eyes have that emotion which I had seen in my father's and mother's eyes. Though I was meeting him for the first time, I felt a deep emotional and spiritual connection with him. He was just holding my hand and I could feel a surge of energy within my body. I think that moment, when I met Mahant Swami Maharaj, was the most important moment in my life. It was a transformational moment in my life; something I will never forget.

**- Dr Vijay Patil**

(Renowned Businessman, Mumbai)





# Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni Pratishtha

Swaminarayan Akshardham  
Robbinsville, NJ, USA

8–10 October 2021



Swamis and devotees perform the Vedic rituals on the first day of the Vishwashanti Mahayagna, Robbinsville

Over three decades ago, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visualized a grand Swaminarayan Akshardham in the USA to strengthen Hindu traditions. He had wished for a *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni performing *tap* to be placed in the complex.

With the guidance and blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj, these wishes are being fulfilled by the tremendous efforts of BAPS swamis and devotees.

To celebrate Bhagwan Swaminarayan's 49 years on earth and honour his 7-year journey throughout India as a teenage-yogi, the special 49-ft bronze *murti* of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni was made. In Muktinath, North India, Nilkanth Varni performed intense austerities, which is represented in this imposing *murti*: meditative posture, standing on one leg with arms raised, eyes closed and turning a *mala*.

The *murti-pratishtha* celebrations of this Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni – the Icon of Austerity – were held in the presence of Pujya

Ishwaracharan Swami in Robbinsville, with Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj joining online from Sarangpur.

### 8 October: Vishwashanti Mahayagna

To commemorate this historic occasion, a three-day Yagna for World Peace was held. Mahant Swami Maharaj and Dr Swami performed the commencement rituals in Sarangpur, while Ishwarcharan Swami performed the rituals in Robbinsville before the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. At both places, traditional Vedic *yagna kunds* were prepared into which oblations were offered while the Vedic mantras were recited. All the resident swamis of North America as well as the Rajasthani artisans, and other long-serving volunteers also offered oblations in the 35 *yagna kunds* set up for this occasion. The Vedic chants created a divine atmosphere throughout the complex.

Also, on this auspicious occasion, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed *pujan* of the Nilkanth Varni *abhishek murtis* for the BAPS





Swamishri offers oblations during the *yagna*, Sarangpur



Ishwarcharan Swami offers oblations, Robbinsville

mandirs in Raleigh (NC), Jackson (Mississippi) and Cleveland (Ohio).

Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the occasion, “Shriji Maharaj manifest on this earth for us. He blended with us, but he was divine. May all of you be blessed with physical, mental and financial well-being; progress in dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and *bhakti*; and attain the virtues of *samp*, *suhradbhav*, *ekta*, *divyabhav*, *dasbhav* and *mahima*. Due to your united efforts, Nilkanth Varni has blessed us with this occasion.”

Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami addressed the gathering, “After journeying throughout India, Nilkanth Varni is now manifest here in

Robbinsville through this magnificent 49-ft *murti*. Everyone who has darshan of this *murti* will be delighted and inspired and will experience peace and prosperity.”

On the second day of the *yagna*, *kishores* and *kishoris* of America offered oblations and on the third day, Brahmins and other devotees offered oblations. In total, the Sahajanand Namavali was recited 1,108 times while oblations were offered.

### 9 October: Brahmakund Abhishek

The Nilkanth Vatika is a section near the entry to the Swaminarayan Akshardham complex in Robbinsville. It features the *murti* of Tapomurti



Ishwarcharan Swami offers *abhishek* in the Brahmakund



Swamis offer *abhishek* in the Brahmakund





Devotional *nagar-yatra* in the Akshardham campus



Model of Shri Nilkanth Varni performing austerities at Muktinath

Shri Nilkanth Varni and the large Brahmakund, which is the first stepwell built in America as per Indian traditions and contains the holy water of 108 sacred rivers and lakes.

At 9.30 a.m., Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed *pujan* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and then, with the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni in the backdrop, he and the resident swamis of North America ritually poured holy water into the Brahmakund while Vedic verses were recited.

### Nagar-Yatra

In the afternoon, a colourful *nagar-yatra* honouring Shri Nilkanth Varni was held in the grounds of Swaminarayan Akshardham.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the *pujan* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Nilkanth Varni and flagged off the celebratory procession to the tune of *dhun* and bhajans. The joyous procession included youths performing traditional dances, swamis singing bhajans, *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* carrying banners and waving flags, women devotees carrying *kalashes* in traditional style on their heads, and decorated floats with the *murtis* of Shri Nilkanth Varni in Muktinath, Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the Gunatit gurus. The procession circled the complex and concluded before Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni.

### 10 October: Murti-Pratishtha

In preparation for this auspicious day, the women devotees of North America had reached out to thousands of devotees and ensured that each family received the six-inch replica of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni through the ‘Gher Gher Nilkanth’ (Nilkanth in Every Home) campaign. Due to the pandemic protocols, devotees throughout North America joined online to perform the Vedic *murti-pratishtha mahapuja* rituals.

The ceremony began with swamis singing the Swaminarayan *dhun* in a traditional North Indian tune and Vedic verses in praise of Shri Nilkanth Varni.

The initial *mahapuja* rituals were coordinated by swamis in Sarangpur. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the rituals in Robbinsville.

Thereafter, a video depicting the selfless services of volunteers in assembling Akshardham was shown.

Then, Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj joined from Sarangpur to perform the main *murti-pratishtha mahapuja* rituals of the replica of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni, while Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami performed the rituals on Swamishri’s behalf in Robbinsville.

An *annakut* of sweets and savoury delicacies was offered. Then, Pujya Dr Swami performed *pujan* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and



Ishwarcharan Swami performs *pujan* at the feet of Shri Nilkanth Varni



Ishwarcharan Swami offers *thal* to Shri Nilkanth Varni

*guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj on behalf of all devotees.

Thereafter, the *murti-pratishtha arti* was performed, after which Nilkanth Varni was welcomed to North America with a variety of traditional gifts.

Devotees from the BAPS mandirs throughout North America had collected water from their main rivers and lakes, sanctified it by performing its *pujan* and using it to perform *abhishek* of their local Nilkanth Varni *murtis*. This combined water was offered at the feet of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni by Ishwarcharan Swami.

Then, Mahant Swami Maharaj pressed a digital button to remotely activate a shower of flowers released from a crane above the 49-ft *murti* of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni. Similarly, *abhishek* was also offered from a large *shankh* full of saffron-scented water atop the crane.

*Kishores* then performed a lively traditional dance to welcome Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni.

In Sarangpur, Pujya Dr Swami honoured Swamishri with a garland

on behalf of all the devotees of North America.

Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami addressed the assembly, “America is blessed with this divine 49-ft *murti* of Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj. This has been possible with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. All pilgrims who visit Akshardham will receive the blessings of Shri Nilkanth Varni.” He emphasized the intense austerities performed by Nilkanth Varni and requested everyone to also undertake some austerities in their lives.

Then, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed, “Shriji Maharaj revealed that his main wish was to make everyone *brahmarup*. All who have darshan of this *murti* will experience peace and joy.”

This entire occasion was broadcast live worldwide.



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals, Sarangpur

As per Mahant Swami Maharaj’s wish, every evening *thal* will be offered and *arti* will be performed before Tapomurti Shri Nilkanth Varni. All visitors can also participate by performing the *arti* with incense sticks to offer their worship and prayers. ♦

# International Seminar on Satsang Diksha

5–9 October 2021, Sarangpur



Mahant Swami Maharaj and Dr Swami inaugurate the Satsang Diksha Seminar by lighting the inaugural lamp

Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj presented the Satsang Diksha shastra in July 2020. Since then, thousands of children, teenagers, youths and adults throughout the world have memorized it, either whole or in part. The original Gujarati text has also been translated into Sanskrit, Hindi, English, Swahili, Telugu, Udiya, Kannad, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, Polish and Bengali and is also available in Braille. Also, over 20,000 devotees have enrolled for the one-year Satsang Diksha online study course.

Scholars who have read the concise 315-*shloka* Satsang Diksha shastra have been impressed by the philosophical, ethical and practical depth of the text.

Hence, to delve further into the various aspects of the shastra, a 5-day seminar titled ‘Satsang Diksha: Perspectives on Enhancing Daily Living’ was organized in Sarangpur by the joint collaboration of the AARSH Research Centre in Gandhinagar and the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya in Sarangpur. A total

of 46 scholars presented research papers during the seminar.

Mahant Swami Maharaj lit the inaugural lamp and blessed, “It was my wish that a small text which concisely encapsulates the eternal wisdom revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit Gurus be written. The purpose for writing this shastra is so that all attain happiness in life and also attain liberation. This international seminar on the shastra will enlighten and benefit everyone even more.”

Addressing the inaugural session, Dr Murlidhar Sharma, Kulpati of Kendriya Sanskrit University (Tirupati) said, “When viewed from the two parameters of Vedic authenticity and modern relevance, the Satsang Diksha is a shastra that is absolutely relevant for today’s age, and contains the essence of the Vedas and Shrutis.”

Throughout the 5-day seminar, 34 scholars from India, 10 from America, 7 from England, 1 from Canada, 1 from France and 1 from South Africa presented papers on various





Pujya Viveksagar Swami, other swamis and scholars on the seminar stage

topics, including, philosophy, sadhana, *mukti*, translations, grammar, Sankhya, *atma*, God's all-doership, child and youth development, family unity, world peace and social harmony.

Among the scholars who chaired the seminar sessions were: Dr Lalit Patel, Vice Chancellor, Somnath Sanskrit University, Veraval; Shri Ravindra Pandaji, Former Head of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrut Languages Department, M.S. University, Vadodara; Shri Amrutlal Bhogayata, Principal Acharya, Sandipani Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, Nadiad; Prof. Dr Niranjambhai Patel, Head of Postgraduate Studies, Sardar Patel University, Vidyanagar; Prof. Ramkishore Tripathiji, Former Principal Acharya, Vartantu Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, Ahmedabad; Dr Jitendrabhai Shah, Former Principal, L.D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad; Prof. Govindbhai Patel, Former Principal, Gurjar Pradesh Sanskrit Pathshala, Gandhinagar; Dr Bipinbhai Joshi, Former Principal, Babdeswar Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, Porbandar.

Scholars from University of Toronto,

University of Leeds, University of Cambridge, King's College London, Harvard University, University of Chicago, University of California, University of Cape Town, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Shri Somnath Sanskrit University and other academic institutions presented papers.

During the seminar sessions, scholars expressed their views. Dr Niranjan Patel said, "Satsang Diksha is for the benefit of all and will help people to know themselves. It is a text that can produce model citizens and human beings. It represents India's traditions." Shri Ravindra Pandaji said, "This shastra is written in a simple language, yet gives complex and deep ideas."

Dr Bipinbhai Joshi said, "We can say with certainty that anyone who lives by this Shastra will become wise and respected in society."

Sarju Patel of Chicago University said, "This seminar has demonstrated that there is no spiritual topic not touched upon in this shastra." ♦



A seminar session in progress



## Bal-Balika Karika Mukhpath Felicitation Assembly

13 October 2021, Sarangpur

The Swaminarayan-Siddhant-Sudha is a ‘vad granth’— a text that explicates and defends the foundational philosophical positions of a darshan (philosophy). Authored by Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami, the Swaminarayan-Siddhant-Sudha identifies the foundational philosophical principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, substantiates them based on readings from sacred texts, and defends its philosophical positions. Positioned within the Swaminarayan-Siddhant-Sudha is the ‘Swaminarayan Siddhant Karika’ — 565 Sanskrit *karikas* (verses) that summarize the elaborate discussions in the Swaminarayan-Siddhant-Sudha and the core philosophical teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj has expressed his wish that all should memorize the 565 *karikas*. All who memorize 565 Sanskrit *karikas* are bestowed the honourary title ‘Karika Jayi’.

### Preparation

Hence, from 21 May 2021, 157 *balaks* and 97 *balikas*, all aged between 5 and 14, from India, Australia, Dubai and other places embarked on the ‘Siddhant Karika Mukhpath Yagna’. From

Mumbai, Shreyassetu Swami conducted daily two-hour online sessions to teach the children. The children were also regularly encouraged by the guidance of the *sadguru* swamis and other learned swamis.

During September these children were tested on what they had memorized. Of them, 52 *balaks* and 15 *balikas* were judged as having successfully memorized all 565 *karikas*. The others had memorized at least 250 *karikas*.

To appreciate their efforts, a special felicitation assembly was held for all the *balaks*, *balikas* and their parents in Sarangpur in the presence of Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj on 13 October 2021.

### Mahant Swami Maharaj’s Puja

The first session took place in Swamishri’s morning puja. The *balaks*, freshly tonsured and dressed in traditional attire, collectively recited selected *karikas*. Afterwards, Swamishri blessed the children.

### Parents’ Seminar

From 9.30 to 11.30 a.m. the parents of all the *balaks* and *balikas* were congratulated for their efforts in motivating their children to memorize





the *karikas*. Bhadresh Swami and Atmatrapt Swami guided them on how to sustain what the children had learnt. Also, Pujya Doctor Swami and Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami blessed the parents.

### Mothers' Felicitation Assembly

From 2.00 to 4.00 p.m. the Balika Pravutti Central Office organized an assembly to felicitate all the children's mothers. In the assembly, *balikas* presented *karika* recitals, discussions, skits, a quiz and other activities.

### Main Felicitation Assembly

From 6.00 p.m. the main felicitation assembly was held in the Pramukh Vatika, in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The assembly, which was conducted by the children, included a philosophical debate elucidating Bhagwan Swaminarayan's philosophy,

recital of the *karikas*, interviews of the children giving insights into how they prepared and other presentations. Also, Swamishri tested the *balaks* in a variety of creative and entertaining ways on the *karikas* they had memorized.

Blessing the assembly, Swamishri said, "This was outstanding. The *balaks* recited the *karikas* spontaneously and fluently. Now the children must also study sincerely at school. Memorizing all this in Sanskrit will help them to study well. This *mukhpath* is spiritual knowledge. It will lead to *moksha*."

Mahant Swami Maharaj was extremely pleased by the outstanding efforts of all the children and blessed them profusely. Each 'Karika Jayi' *balak* and the father of each 'Karika Jayi' *balika* was presented a memento, certificate and *prasad* by senior swamis and had a photo taken with Mahant Swami Maharaj. ◆





# Chief Minister of Gujarat Visits Swaminarayan Akshardham

18 September 2021, Gandhinagar



Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel, the newly appointed Chief Minister of Gujarat, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham. He was welcomed with a sanctified flower garland by Anandswarup Swami, Mahant of Akshardham.

Thereafter, the chief minister had darshan in the Akshardham Mandir and performed *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni while praying for the prosperity and wellbeing of the people of Gujarat.

The chief minister also engaged in a spiritual dialogue with the swamis, who also prayed for his good health and success in his new role. ♦

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# Chief Minister of Gujarat Visits BAPS Mandir

17 October 2021, Gadhada



The newly appointed Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel, visited the BAPS Mandir in Gadhada. He was accompanied by Shri C.R. Patil, the BJP State President.

On their arrival, they were warmly greeted by young children waving flags and showering flower petals. Thereafter, they visited the main mandir for darshan, where they were welcomed in traditional style, and offered prayers for the peace and prosperity of Gujarat.

The duo also offered respects to the 25-ft *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan on his horse, Manki, and visited the historic 200-year-old residence of Jiva Khachar, where Bhagwan Swaminarayan had stayed for many years.

They were delighted to learn of the onsite educational exhibition and the many social services rendered by the mandir.

# Swamishri Blesses Chief Minister of Gujarat

23 October 2021, Sarangpur



Honourable Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri Bhupendrabhai Patel, visited the BAPS Mandir in Sarangpur to meet His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj and receive his blessings.

The Chief Minister was warmly welcomed with garlands. He visited Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Smruti shrine to pay his respects, where he praised the divinity and universal work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, specially recounting his love for the people of Gujarat.

During the meeting with Mahant Swami Maharaj, Bhupendrabhai asked for blessings to serve the people of Gujarat to the best of his ability. He also prayed for peace in India and the rest of the world. Swamishri was delighted to learn about Bhupendrabhai's humility and dedication.

Swamishri blessed Shri Bhupendrabhai for good health and that his services benefit all the people of Gujarat. Swamishri presented him with the 'Satsang Diksha' book and a *mala* as mementoes. ♦

## India's Home Minister Visits BAPS Mandir

1 November 2021, Sarangpur



Honourable Home Minister of India, Shri Amit Shah, visited the BAPS Mandir in Sarangpur for darshan, along with family members.

The Home Minister was traditionally welcomed with garlands. He paid his respects at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Smruti shrine, warmly remembering and praising the divinity and universal work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Shri Amit Shah then had darshan of the *murtis* in the main BAPS Mandir.

Smt. Sonalben Shah, wife of Shri Amit Shah, was also welcomed and garlanded by devotees. She also paid her respects at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Smruti shrine and at the main mandir.

Shri Shah then met the sadhus, who prayed for his good health and for achievements that would benefit the people of India. He also discussed the need for values and spirituality to usher in social harmony. ♦





## First Convocation Ceremony of the National Sanskrit University

20 October 2021, Tirupati

The first convocation ceremony of the newly recognized National Sanskrit University, Tirupati, was held for the 2021 graduates at the Mahati Auditorium in Tirupati in the presence of Padmabhushan Sri N. Gopalaswami, University Chancellor and former Chief Election Commissioner of India; Prof. V. Muralidhara Sharma, University Vice Chancellor; Dr. Jitendra Kumar Tripathy, Joint Secretary of the University Grants Commission; Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. Bhadreshdas Swami, Head of the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi; and distinguished faculty and administrators of the National Sanskrit University, Tirupati.

The Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapith (1961) was ordained as the National Sanskrit University on 30 April 2020. Since then, the university has been recognized as one of the foremost educational institutions in India and has been accredited with an A++ grade by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC).

Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami was invited as the chief guest to deliver the first convocation address and he was also felicitated for his outstanding contributions to Sanskrit literature and Darshanic thought.

After the welcome addresses, 650 graduating students were presented with degrees and awards by the chief guest Mahamahopadhyaya

Bhadreshdas Swami and the Honorable Chancellor Sri N. Gopalaswami.

Thereafter, Bhadreshdas Swami and the Hon. Chancellor released books published by the university.

Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami then addressed the convocation assembly. He mentioned that today was Sharad Purnima, the birthday of Aksharabrahma Gunatitanand Swami, the first spiritual successor of Parabrahma Swaminarayan in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. He also described how Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired him to learn the Sanskrit language and Hindu shastras. He elaborated on the glory of India as the birthplace of numerous philosophies, such as, Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya and Vedanta, and the country's contribution to the betterment of society through its education system.

He offered a heartfelt prayer for all the graduates to Parabrahma Swaminarayan, Aksharabrahma Gunatitanand Swami, and Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj, "May the flow of learning please our hearts, purify our minds, enlighten our intellects, and extend the immense glory of wisdom."

In his presidential address, Chancellor Shri N. Gopalaswami congratulated the graduating students for their exceptional achievements and expressed his deep regard for Bhadreshdas Swami's outstanding literary and philosophical contributions.



Chancellor Shri N. Gopalaswami added, “Our university has a great opportunity to work with the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute. I am confident that with their guidance, the collaboration with the institution, and the guidance of our vice chancellor, we will be able

to make tremendous progress. Thereafter, the chancellor felicitated Bhadreshdas Swami and the distinguished guests.

The Convocation Ceremony concluded with the national anthem. ♦

## UK Prime Minister and Home Secretary Visit mandir for Diwali

7 November 2021, London



The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, Secretary of State for the Home Department, celebrated the Diwali and the Hindu New Year with worshippers and members of the local community at the BAPS Mandir in Neasden, London.

This was the Prime Minister’s fifth visit to the Mandir. He was greeted in traditional Hindu manner before being taken on a brief tour of the stone temple complex.

The Home Secretary was similarly welcomed upon her arrival at the Mandir earlier and joined the Prime Minister to offer a fruit basket at the central shrine of the mandir’s inner sanctum, where they spent several minutes absorbing the peace and intricate architecture. Here, they also observed the *annakut* artistically arranged before the deities. They then performed the *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni.

Thereafter, the distinguished guests viewed exhibits summarizing the Neasden Temple’s

nationwide COVID-19 relief efforts and met some of the volunteers involved in executing these relief services.

Sharing some of his impressions from his visit, Mr Johnson said: “What His Holiness [Pramukh Swami Maharaj] has contributed to the United Kingdom has been incalculable. I see it here today at the Neasden Temple. I have been here many times, but I don’t think I have ever been here at a time when the Neasden Temple has been so central to the life of the whole of the London community.”

Ms Patel added, “The Temple has been at the forefront of every single activity in the local community, but also at a time of a national crisis which, of course, the pandemic was.”

Before departing, the Home Secretary further spoke about the “incredible work” of the Mandir, which the Prime Minister lauded as “an absolutely perfect representation of community spirit in action”. ♦



## INDIA

### PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

18–20 September 2021, Ukai, Gujarat



A total of 84 youths studying in the second Yuva Talim Kendra (YTK) batch of 2021, took part in the ‘Jan Jagruti Abhiyan’ as part of their six-month training.

The youths, paired into 42 groups, visited 49 tribal villages and towns surrounding Ukai in South Gujarat.

During their three days in each place the youths conducted many *bal sabhas*, 1,396 school assemblies, 1,797 home visits, evening public assemblies and other activities. They promoted the message of de-addiction from smoking, tobacco, alcohol and other vices, as well as encouraged 1,800 people to adopt a more spiritually centric life that would bring them greater inner peace and prosperity. In all, 546 people gave up addictions.

The youths encouraged children to imbibe greater integrity, regularity and sincere effort in their lives. The home visits guided families to live more harmoniously and freed them from crippling superstitious beliefs.

### PERSONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

18–24 October 2021, Gujarat

As part of their six-month Yuva Talim Kendra (YTK) course, the 88 youths of the second batch of 2021 students undertook a week of *vicharan*.



The 22 groups of four youths visited a total of 155 villages and towns in Gujarat to inspire and strengthen the basic practices of satsang in devotees.

They visited 2,507 homes, inspiring devotees to attend their local weekly assembly, perform daily personal puja, visit the local mandir regularly for darshan, daily read the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, conduct family assemblies, observe a fast on *ekadashi* and practice other basics of satsang.

The youths conducted a total of 155 public assemblies, attended by over 8,600 people, and 103 children’s assemblies, attended by around 11,000 children. In the evenings, the youths organized *bhakti feris* – devotional parades – through the towns and villages, in which around 2,500 devotees participated. The youths also inspired over 1,000 people to give up their addictions.

## UK & EUROPE

### BAPS PARTICIPATES IN INTERFAITH CHARITY RUN

30 August 2021, London

Members from BAPS in London joined thousands of runners at the inaugural London Interfaith Fun Run held at the StoneX Stadium in Barnet.

The event brought together many different faith groups to send a global message of unity and friendship between people from diverse backgrounds.



A total of 34 charities participated in the event to raise funds for their respective good causes. Some organizations also joined this event virtually by running in their own geographical areas from as far away as Hyderabad in India.

BAPS further contributed to this occasion by sharing informative posters and messages from His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and also provided food to over 200 participants in appreciation of their efforts.

### INAUGURATION OF NEW BAPS MANDIR 16–17 October 2021, Manchester (Ashton)



The new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Ashton-under-Lyne was inaugurated by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami following almost seven years of tireless efforts by hundreds of local devotees and volunteers.

The new mandir incorporates eco-friendly features such as solar panel heating, energy-saving lighting and electric charging pods in the car park.

A special weekend of devotion commemorated the historic opening. This included a Vedic *mahapuja* on 16 October, in which participants prayed for peace, harmony, well-being and righteous prosperity to prevail throughout the local community and around the world. In the

afternoon, the sacred *murtis* of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj and Harikrishna Maharaj were ceremonially carried around the mandir campus during a devotional procession.

On 17 October, Ishwarcharan Swami performed the *murti-sthapan* ceremony. Other swamis from London also joined the ceremony along with hundreds of local devotees and guests from around the country, while many more across the world joined online through a live web stream. His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishta* rituals of the *murtis* on 31 December 2020 in Nenpur, India.

Attending the celebrations, Cllr Brenda Warrington, Leader of Tameside Council, said, “I found the experience tremendously moving, gentle but powerful!”

### BHUMI PUJAN OF BAPS HINDU MANDIR 19 October 2021, Paris, France



On 7 July 1970, Yogiji Maharaj departed from London for Mumbai via Paris, Zurich and Beirut. During the stopover at Le Bourget Airport in Paris, Yogiji Maharaj requested Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami to disembark the plane and sanctify the land of France on his behalf, and blessed that a mandir would be built in the city in the future.

In 2017, during an evening assembly in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj in Paris, the Mayor of Bussy-Saint-Georges granted land for a new BAPS mandir to meet the needs of the growing number of devotees.

On 19 October 2021, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami performed the *bhumi puja* of the new mandir site in the presence of swamis from



London and more than 500 local participants, with thousands more watching the live stream online.

The devotional programme included a Vedic *mahapuja* and an insightful video presentation on the religious architecture of mandirs. Children eloquently recited *shlokas* in Sanskrit and French from the Satsang Diksha, while a youth fluently articulated in French the importance and benefits of a mandir.

Among the distinguished guests were the Senator of Seine-et-Marne, the Mayor of Bussy-Saint-Georges and members of his team, as well as local civic leaders and representatives of religious communities.

The Mayor, Yann Dubosc, shared, “There are projects that mark a life. This Mandir is one such project. In my time on earth as mayor, I will be able to tell my daughter that I have participated in the building of a remarkable place of worship. Prior to this, I did not know anything about Hinduism, but with you, I have discovered this light that enlightens humanity. There is nothing more essential in our time. May the Bussy Mandir help to enlighten humanity and reveal the best in each of us.”

The auspicious occasion concluded with video blessings from Mahant Swami Maharaj, who shared fond memories of his flight with Yogiji Maharaj in 1970 and enthused everyone to fulfil that divine vision for Paris and the whole of Europe.

## NORTH AMERICA

### BAL-BALIKA SUMMER SHIBIR

11 September 2021

More than 3,000 children, between ages 7 and 13, from across the continent took part in the North American Bal-Balika Summer Shibir, based on the theme ‘Guru Bhakti’ – offering devotion to one’s guru. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, most children watched the animated common session at home with their families. Then, they joined the subsequent group activities via video conference. Some children had the opportunity to watch the



programme and participate in the group activities in person at their local mandir.

The *shibir* helped the youngsters understand the importance of a guru in one’s life and how to offer devotion to the guru.

The first half of the *shibir* focused on the greatness of a guru, or *guru mahima*. The children learnt that the guru is one’s guide throughout life, the guru is *divya* (divine), and the guru is the gateway to *moksha* (ultimate liberation).

The second half of the *shibir* focused on how to associate with and offer devotion to the guru through one’s *man* (thoughts), *karma* (actions) and *vachan* (words).

Through the *shibir*, the youngsters developed a deeper understanding of the importance of a guru in one’s life and how they can connect to their guru on a daily basis through devotion.

### INAUGURATION OF NEW BAPS MANDIRS IN CANADA

11 September 2021, Vancouver, BC



The inauguration celebrations for the new mandir featured a Vedic *mahapuja* followed by the *murti-sthapan* ceremony, which was performed by Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami. Mahant Swami Maharaj had performed the

Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the new mandir in Nenpur, India, on 9 July 2021.

Devotees attended the event following local COVID-19 protocols. In addition, thousands of devotees, community leaders, friends and well-wishers from across Canada and worldwide participated in the ceremony virtually through the live webcast.

Vancouver has been blessed by the visits of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1988 and HH Mahant Swami Maharaj in 1986. Swamis from the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto have regularly come to Vancouver since 2004 and organized satsang assemblies at devotees' homes. Since 2018, the weekly satsang assemblies had been held at a local Hindu mandir.

### 18 September 2021, Saskatoon, SK



Satsang activities in Saskatoon began in 2007 at the homes of devotees and rented community halls. Satsang flourished with the regular visits of swamis. HH Mahant Swami Maharaj inspired the establishment of this mandir to meet the needs of the ever-increasing number of devotees.

The Mandir Mahotsav celebration began with the Vedic *mahapuja*. Thereafter, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami ceremonially installed the *murtis* in their respective shrines. An *annakut* of vegetarian delicacies, prepared by the women devotees, was offered to the deities as part of the ceremony. His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* of the *murtis* on 9 July 2021, in Nenpur, India.

Devotees attended the event following local COVID-19 protocols and thousands more participated in the ceremony virtually through the live webcast.

Mahant Swami Maharaj sent his blessings from India on this auspicious occasion for the happiness and spiritual progress of the devotees and the community.

### 19 September 2021, Winnipeg, MB

Satsang activities began in Winnipeg in the early 1990s. From 2004, swamis from the BAPS Mandir in Toronto regularly visited Winnipeg to guide the satsang. Since 2012, weekly Satsang activities have taken place at a local Hindu mandir. In 2020, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj inspired the establishment of this mandir to meet the community's needs and the increasing number of devotees. Volunteers worked together tirelessly to complete the renovations of the property and prepare it for the inauguration.

The auspicious *murti-pratishtha* celebrations began with a *mahapuja* in which devotees and well-wishers prayed for peace, harmony and well-being for all. Previously, on 9 July 2021, Mahant Swami Maharaj had sanctified the *murtis* that would grace the new mandir. The sanctified *murtis* were ceremonially installed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami.

## ASIA PACIFIC

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### NEW BAPS MANDIR INAUGURATION

#### 29 August 2021, Hobart, Australia

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

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



the *murtis* with great devotion.

Over 1,330 devotees and well-wishers from Australia and New Zealand participated in the rituals at home via a live webcast.

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

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

## BAPS PROVIDES ASSISTANCE DURING CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

5 September 2021, Shepparton, Australia



BAPS Volunteers in Shepparton partnered with GV Cares, Shepparton Foodshare and People Supporting People to provide essential food items to assist the most vulnerable community members during the latest COVID-19 outbreak.

Whilst adhering to pandemic protocols, volunteers of BAPS Shepparton donated over 1,000 kg of food items to GV Cares and Shepparton Foodshare in the presence of Deputy Mayor Cr Rob Priestly. A further 560 kg of essential food items were donated to People Supporting People. Senior representatives of these organizations

thanked BAPS for generously supporting the broader Shepparton Community.

The efforts by the communities were also commended by the Prime Minister of Australia, Hon. Scott Morrison, via a Zoom meeting with the local community representatives on 7 September 2021.

## TREE PLANTING EVENT

19 September 2021, Christchurch, New Zealand



In honour of the Centenary Celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, BAPS devotees in Christchurch planted 333 trees along with native grasses, fencing plants and shrubs at Groynes Park in Belfast, Christchurch, to help in the preservation and protection of the local environment.

The event was organized with the assistance of Christchurch City Council and a commemorative plaque was installed in the park.

## SHATABDI GHER GHER JANMOTSAV

30 September to 3 October 2021, Australia & New Zealand



Under the auspices of the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations, over 1,600 BAPS families at centres in Australia and



New Zealand celebrated guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj's 88th birthday at their homes, either by inviting friends and relatives or with their families, depending on local pandemic restrictions.

The celebrations, based on the agenda provided by the BAPS national team, included: decorating their homes, performing sacred rituals to honour Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Guru Parampara, conducting a *janmotsav* assembly of bhajans and speeches, and offering an *annakut*.

### BAL SANSKAR AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

1–31 October 2021, Australia & New Zealand



A Shatabdi Bal Sanskar Awareness Campaign was organized at BAPS centres in Australia and New Zealand.

Using the comprehensive material provided by the BAPS national team, the sessions were conducted at the home of devotees, where they invited one to three families to participate. The attendees were guided on the importance of nurturing good character and instilling good values in children through videos, discussions, engaging activities and the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj. At some places, *balaks* and *balikas* recited the Sahajanand Namavali and Satsang Diksha shloks by heart.

Host families decorated their homes with inspiring quotations of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj about the importance and necessity of nurturing noble values in children. Parents also pledged to spend more time with

their children to strengthen their family bond and harmony, and to encourage their children to participate regularly in the various Bal-Balika activities held by BAPS Bal Pravrutti.

In total, over 1,000 families participated in this campaign.

### KIDS' DIWALI CELEBRATION 2021

31 October 2021, Asia Pacific



Over 1,000 families from Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and Indonesia joined the virtual Kids' Diwali Celebration webcast for *balaks* and *balikas* in the Asia-Pacific region.

The theme for this year's celebration was 'The Curse of Maya', highlighting the different types of *kusang* (negative influences in life) to be aware of and how to avoid them. The first session focused on *kusang* in the form of physical (in-person) bad company, explained by the incident of Vasta Khachar. The second session highlighted *kusang* in the form of internet usage, giving guidance on watching the right content with discipline. In the last session *kusang* in the form of video games was discussed. The children were taught practical tips in creative ways based on actual incidents from the past and recent times and the Swamini Vato.

The creative and interactive webcast was presented with a special storyline through animations, stories, dance and speeches by swamis to explain the different concepts. The celebration also consisted of challenges for children to carry out with their families, like a scavenger hunt and making origami *divas*.

Special video blessings were given by Mahant Swami Maharaj in which he explained how to lift the curse of *maya*. The celebrations concluded with fireworks.

## AFRICA

### EXTERNAL & PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS MINISTER OF INDIA VISITS BAPS MANDIR 22 October 2021, Juba, South Sudan



During his official visit to South Sudan, the Minister of State for External & Parliamentary Affairs of the Govt. of India, Shri V. Muraleedharan, visited the BAPS Mandir in Juba, South Sudan.

At the mandir, the minister performed *abhishek* of the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni and lit *diyas* to offer prayers for India's progress and prosperity and world harmony.

Accompanying the minister was the High Commissioner of India to South Sudan and other delegates.

## UAE

### BAPS MANDIR FEATURED AT EXPO 2020 1 October 2021, Dubai



Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce

& Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, Textiles, and Leader of the Indian Rajya Sabha, inaugurated the India Pavilion at Dubai Expo 2020. During a tour of the 8,750 sq.m. pavilion, the minister previewed the different levels of the pavilion, each exploring India's different regional states and leading industries. The grand finale of the pavilion features a panoramic segment of India's most famous historical and spiritual landmarks. It includes heritage sites and grand buildings like the Red Fort, Gwalior Fort, Statue of Unity, Varanasi Ghat, Temple of Tanjore, Swaminarayan Akshardham and many other landmarks of India.

The minister was captivated by the sight of the crystal-like model of the iconic BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, and said, "This is truly amazing. It will be a great addition to the UAE."

During his remarks at the opening of the Expo, the minister commended the UAE leadership for hosting Expo 2020 and elaborated on the significance of India's participation, coinciding with India celebrating 75 years of independence and UAE celebrating the 50th year of its foundation.

Other notable guests to the BAPS Hindu Mandir model exhibition included Anil Agarwal, a leading businessman, His Excellency Dr Ahmed Abdul Rahman AlBanna, the UAE Ambassador to India, Lakshmi Mittal, the Indian steel magnate, Vinod and Karan Adani of the Adani Group, His Excellency Dr Aman Puri, the Consul General of India, His Excellency Pavan Kapoor, the Ambassador of India to the UAE, and Shri Navdeep Singh Suri, former Indian ambassador to the UAE.

The BAPS Hindu Mandir exhibit in the India Pavilion at Expo 2020 enables visitors to immerse themselves in the various ways this mandir will create, promote and sustain harmony in line with the UAE's vision of tolerance.

## BAPS CHARITIES

### BAPS CHARITIES DONATES \$50K TO BREAST CANCER CHARITY 27 August 2021, Dallas, TX



In June 2021, BAPS Charities held its annual sponsored ‘In the Joy of Others Walk/Run’ across 73 cities in USA. This year, unlike the past, the event was primarily a virtual one due to COVID-19 protocols.

Participants in this year’s event collectively pledged to walk 100 million steps. People of all ages took part, from 5-year-old first-time walkers to senior citizens. The event format allowed participants to achieve their steps in a manner they felt comfortable and safe. It gave families a reason to do something together, all for a good cause. Over 11,000 registered participants in 73 cities logged over 200 million steps, far exceeding the initial goal.

On 27 August 2021, in Dallas, TX, BAPS Charities presented a donation of \$50,000 to the representatives of the Susan G. Komen Charity.

Also present was Rick Stopfer, Mayor of the city of Irving, TX. He added: “I can’t say enough about kindness and commitment that BAPS Charities shows by raising funds for giving back to the community. While this year they were not able to do the annual walk physically, they did it virtually instead. It was a great opportunity for my wife Melanie and I to get out and walk together.”

BAPS Charities thanks all of the participants, volunteers, supporters and well-wishers who made the events across the country successful.

## HURRICANE IDA RELIEF EFFORTS

August–September 2021, Louisiana



On August 29, 2021, Hurricane Ida made landfall near Port Fourchon, Louisiana, devastating the state of Louisiana. More than a million people were left with no electricity and many without shelter due to extreme wind and heavy flooding.

BAPS Charities volunteers from throughout Louisiana worked together on many different fronts to help ease the burden of those affected. BAPS Charities in partnership with charitable organizations and local government offices provided critical supplies over several weeks to families in need.

On 8 September, BAPS Charities volunteers helped to provide critical items to 325 families in New Orleans, and over 350 families in Hammond, Louisiana. On 10 September, BAPS Charities distributed essential supplies to 2,100 families in Saint Rose, Louisiana. On 11 September, helped to provide supplies for 850 families at Denham Springs. And on 20 September, BAPS Charities helped to provide essential supplies to 1,450 families of the coastal community of Jean Lafitte. ♦



## TRIBUTES



### PUJYA NARAYANPRASAD SWAMI, SURAT

Age: 80, Aksharvas: 19 October 2021

Pujya Narayanprasad Swami was the son of Shri Maganbhai (Sarsa, Anand), a stalwart devotee of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

Narayanprasad Swami studied physiotherapy before receiving initiation into the sadhu-fold from Yogiji Maharaj in 1964. Thereafter, he stayed in Mumbai and developed great skill in abstract art. His artwork received international acclaim and awards. He was also conferred an honorary D. Litt degree.

From 1972, Pramukh Swami Maharaj

instructed him to tour the villages of South Gujarat to further the Satsang. Through his tremendous efforts, satsang in the tribal areas of South Gujarat grew tremendously.

Through his devotion and varied services he pleased gurus Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. He was of a simple, humble nature and ever willing to help others.

Our humble tributes to such a respected swami who dedicated his life for satsang.



### SHRI NAVNITBHAI DAHYABHAI PATEL, LONDON

Age: 86, Aksharvas: 26 September 2021

Shri Navnitbhai joined the BAPS Satsang in 1950 in Tororo, Uganda, through his contact with *mukhtaraj* Shri Maganbhai Patel. He migrated to London in 1968. He actively contributed to the satsang by serving at the mandirs in Islington and Neasden. His intelligent, hardworking and dedicated efforts gave great impetus to the satsang. He had firm faith in and devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan

and the Gunatit gurus. He dedicated two of his sons to Pramukh Swami Maharaj to serve as sadhus – Premvadan Swami and Shukmuni Swami (both initiated in 1981).

Throughout his life, he meticulously observed the *niyams* of satsang and pleased all the gurus he served – Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. Our tributes to such a dedicated and devout devotee.



### SHRI VINODBHAI HARMANBHAI PATEL, LONDON

Age: 83, Aksharvas: 26 September 2021

Shri Vinodbhai was the son of *mukhtaraj* Shri Harmanbhai Patel, one of the pioneers of BAPS Satsang in Africa under the guidance of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. Vinodbhai contributed greatly to the satsang in East Africa, the UK and Europe. He received *vartman* into satsang from Shastriji Maharaj.

He joined Barclay's Bank in 1957 and then from 1958 worked in a senior position for East African Airways (EAA). From 1989 to 2002, he

ran his own successful travel agency.

During his tenure with the EAA, he enthusiastically made appropriate arrangements for Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and other swamis during their travels in Africa and the UK.

After migrating to London in 1970, he played a major role in spreading BAPS Satsang in London and other UK centres.

In 1974, Pramukh Swami Maharaj appointed him as the general secretary of the BAPS in the UK.

After the *shikharbaddha* mandir was inaugurated in 1995, he served as a trustee until 2017.

He often guided dignitaries visiting the mandirs and was an eloquent speaker and emcee. He also served in many capacities during the

major celebrations and events held in the UK.

Through his selfless services he earned the grace of Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. Our humble tributes to him.



### JASBIR SINGH SAHNI, BAHRAIN

Aged: 75, Aksharvas: 14 November 2021, Dubai, UAE

Jasbir Singh is known fondly by the entire BAPS Satsang family for his deep wisdom, unshakeable faith and expressive devotion. He joined Satsang in 1995, but the moment he always remembered emotionally was his first darshan of beloved 'Mera Sundar Swamiji', his guru Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1997 in Dubai at the home of the late Rohitbhai Patel. Later that same year, Swamishri visited Jasbirji's own home in Bahrain, which since then he preserved as a sacred museum.

He helped build the first BAPS centre in Bahrain, and was one of the first to publicly pray to Swamishri for a *shikharbaddha* mandir in the Gulf. When Swamishri decided to build a traditional Hindu mandir in Abu Dhabi, Jasbirji

renounced everything to lead the construction of the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. He left his comforts in Bahrain, where he was a citizen, and stayed alone in a flat in Dubai to serve selflessly. He gave his everything – time, strength, intellect and donations to the mandir.

A passionate man who loved his family and all devotees fervently, but loved his guru and his sadhus more than anything or anyone else, Jasbirji always put Maharaj, Swami and Satsang first. He always strived for perfection, and was generous and cooperative. Once known as a strong task-master, he became so forgiving and gentle.

Jasbirji passed away with a smile, serving till his last breath. Our heartfelt tributes to such a devout and dedicated devotee. ♦



## ONLINE CELEBRATION

## PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 100th JANMA-JAYANTI



11 December 2021

Time: 7.30 to 9.30 p.m.

**WEBCAST:** • [live.baps.org](http://live.baps.org)  
• [sabha.baps.org](http://sabha.baps.org)

**BROADCAST:** • GTPL  
• AASTHA Bhajan channel from  
7.30 to 9.00 p.m. on  
11 and 12 December 2021



Inspirer: Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj







On 5 November 2021, *annakut* was offered at the BAPS Mandir in Gondal and the Akshar Deri (inset) in the presence of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.



On 7 November 2021, Prime Minister Boris Johnson is welcomed at the BAPS Mandir, Neasden, London.



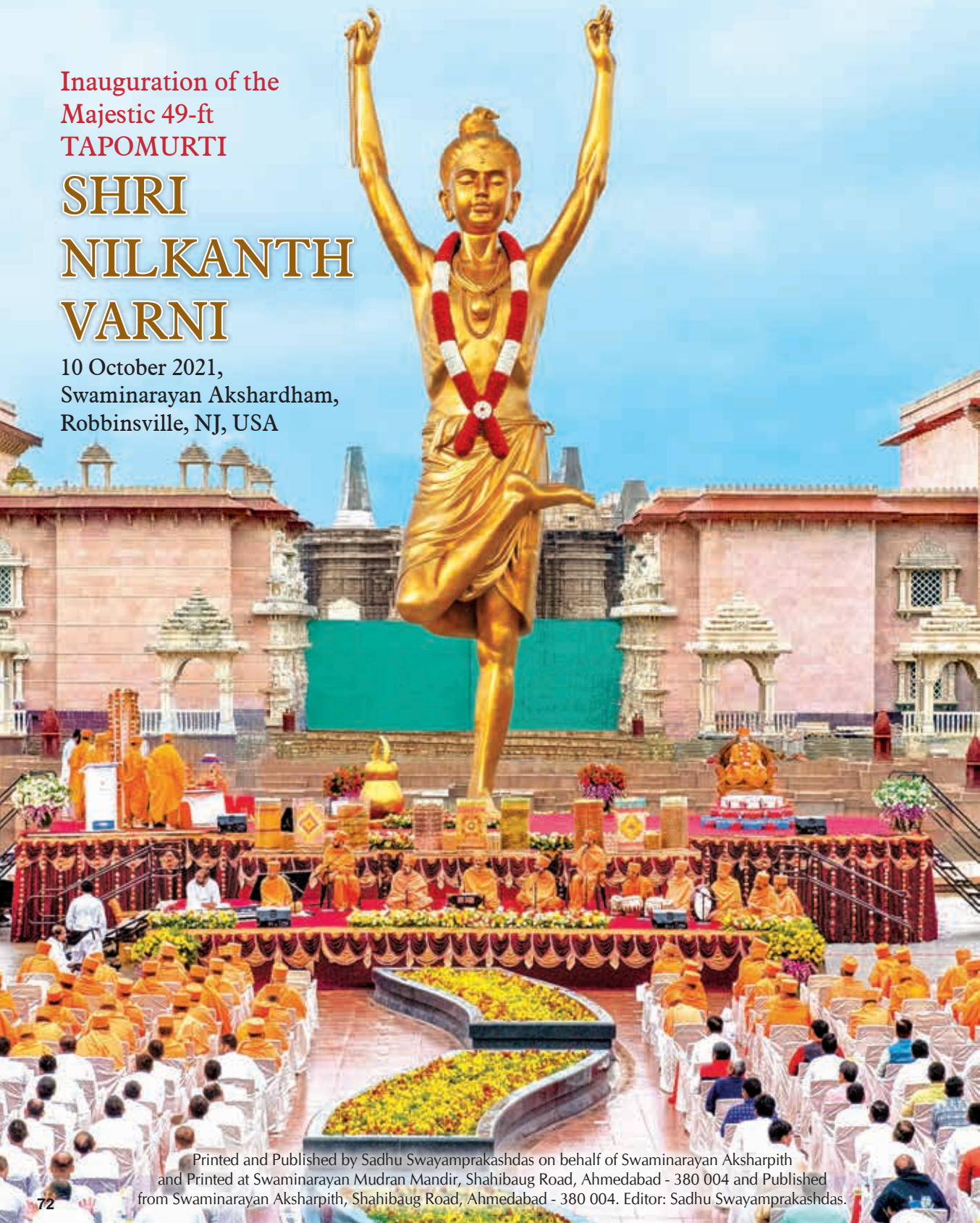
Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Home Secretary Priti Patel offer *abhishek* to Shri Nilkanth Varni.



Inauguration of the  
Majestic 49-ft  
TAPOMURTI

# SHRI NILKANTH VARNI

10 October 2021,  
Swaminarayan Akshardham,  
Robbinsville, NJ, USA



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