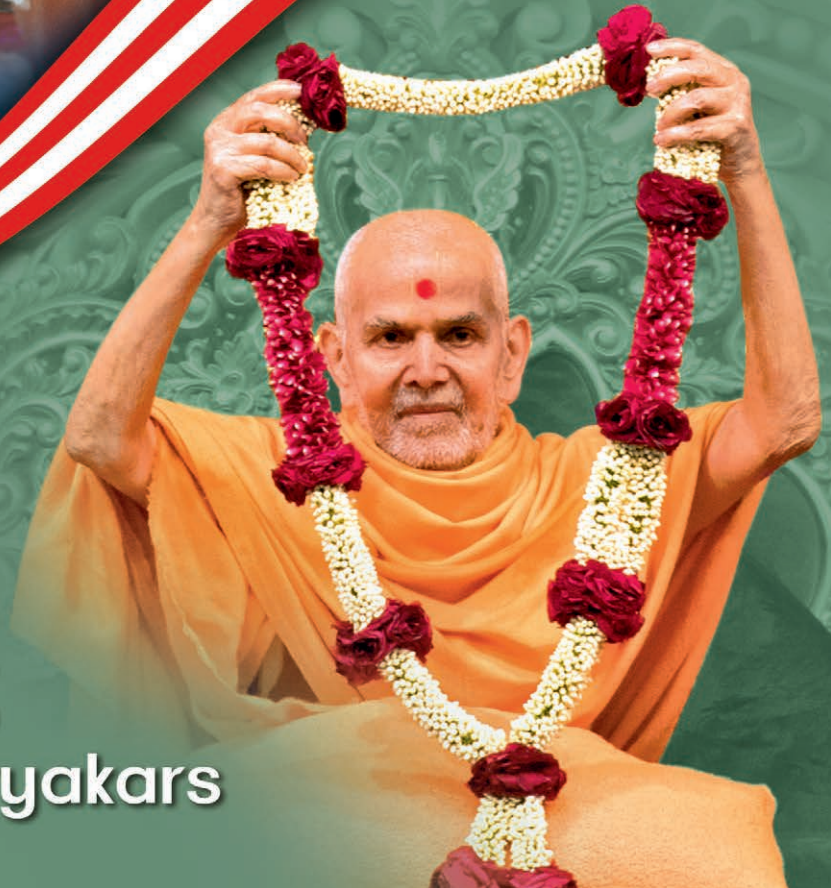


SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

November–December 2024

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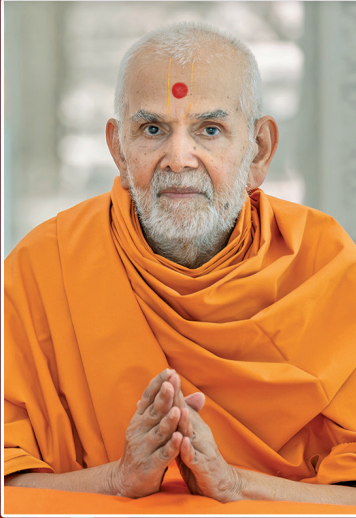


Honouring
BAPS
Karyakars



1. Thousands of devotees attended Mahant Swami Maharaj's 91st birthday celebrations in Mumbai (26 September 2024).
Inset: Swamishri blesses the assembly.
2. New BAPS Swaminarayan Chhatralaya in Junagadh.
Inset: Swamishir inaugurates the chhatralaya (11 October 2024).

New Year Blessings



HH MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ
(Swami Keshavjivandas)

Junagadh
7 October 2024
Monday

|| Swami – Shriji ||
|| Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj ||

To all BAPS devotees,

Heartiest wishes on Diwali and New Year and Jai Shri Swaminarayan from Sadhu Keshavjivandas.

Let us transform our attainment (prapti) into realization and conviction.

We are incredibly fortunate to have this Satsang and to have attained Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the manifest Satpurush, who eternally beholds him.

Though we engage in Satsang, we do not experience its true joy because we do not have 100% conviction in what we have attained.

This year, let us all come together and resolve to set aside 15 minutes daily to reflect on the attainment (prapti) we have received. If you do this regularly, you will certainly feel inner peace, become spiritually enlightened, experience Akshardham from within, and attain the true understanding of the Satpurush's virtues.

May everyone find happiness spiritually, mentally, and materially, and may you all experience the true joy of Satsang.

With blessings and prayers,

*May all reflect on Maharaj and
Swami and experience the true
bliss of satsang*

Sadhu Keshavjivandas – Jai Swaminarayan

Jai Swaminarayan from Sadhu Keshavjivandas
(HH Mahant Swami Maharaj)

B.A.P.S. Swaminarayan Mandir, Shahibaug Road, Ahmedabad – 380 004, Gujarat, India
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Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



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

Tense Duel Between Bhaguji and Khabad

Though outnumbered, Bhaguji and his men fought bravely against Khabad and his cohorts.

The tense duel between Bhaguji and Khabad stunned and froze the combatants on both sides...

MAHARAJ'S NAME WAS HIS SHIELD

Khabad and Mataro decided to strike the following day. Bhaguji got a hunch that, with thirty-seven *parshads* called away by Shri Hari to Gadhpur, the two Sandhis (Khabad and Mataro) would take the advantage to attack them. He told his cohorts, "Uptil now, the Sandhis were looking for an opportunity to attack us but nothing worked out for them. Today, however, with most of our men gone to Gadhpur, there is a great possibility of them coming. Therefore, be vigilant and ready for combat."

Bhaguji was of a short stature, sturdily built and armed with a large sword. He did not need a shield to protect himself because his faith in Shri Hari's name was his shield. His companions or *parshads* were confident of Bhaguji's strength and prowess. All of them had faith in Shri Hari. The *parshads* were also itching to fight Khabad, Mataro and their men. They simply waited calmly.

In Gadhpur, when Dada Khachar came to Shri Hari at the Akshar Ordi, Maharaj asked, "Dada who is with Bhaguji?"

Dada Khachar replied, "Maharaj, Manoji and Kesariji are with him." Shri Hari smiled and said, "Yes, they are both brave and true fighters. Who else is with Bhaguji?"

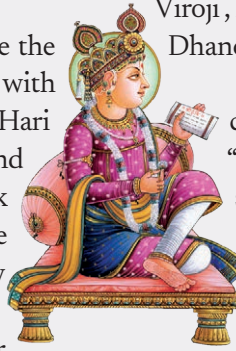
"Ratanji," Dada replied.

"Yes, he, too, is extremely brave. Who else?"

"Miyaji and Lakhoji," Dada revealed.

"Both are powerful warriors and have never failed in defeating or destroying the enemy. In all, how many are with him?"

"Maharaj, other than them there are Virbhatt



Viroji, Devoji, Bhimoji, Gumanji, Bechar Chavda, Dhanoji and Nathuji," Dada Khachar answered.

There was joy on Shri Hari's countenance. Then, Shri Hari remarked, "The thirteen *parshads* are so strong and skilled in combat that they can rout thirteen hundred opponents. However, send back the *parshads* whom we had called yesterday because a battle is in the offing."

SHRI HARI DECIDES TO JOIN THE FRAY

Shri Hari added, "Keep an armour ready, and a shield, sword and spear. I also want to go there tomorrow."

Dada Khachar restrained Shri Hari, "Maharaj, where is the need for you to go? We Kathis are not old and powerless. We will fight due to your strength and inspiration."

Shri Hari underscored, "When you witness my formidable, angry form you will be infused with courage. So, keep all my arms and armour ready." Dada Khachar knew that once Shri Hari had determined to do something he would never relent. So, he said, "Yes Maharaj." Then Dada Khachar left.

Bhaguji's group of brave and armed *parshads* were guarding the disputed field in Rampara all night. They were sure that the Sandhis and their men would attack them the next day or the day after. That night, Bhaguji was a little unwell and fell asleep at dawn. However at that time, with the dust arising in the air some distance away, Bhimaji urgently called out, "Bhaguji, wake up. It seems their army is approaching."

Instantly, Bhaguji sprang up. He tightened the stole around his waist and unsheathed his sword. The rays of the dawning sun glittered on Bhaguji's sword, making him look all the more formidable. Bhaguji addressed his men, "Listen, the enemy is approaching with their rifles. They will soon fire at us, therefore hide behind these boulders here. As soon as they come near we will attack them. "Bhaguji's confident words infused courage in them all. His men advanced in prone positions towards the stones and hid themselves.

Khabad and Mataro were riding their horses. Bhaguji grinned on seeing their indigenous breed of horses from the Sindh region and praised, "Their horses are impressive." The Goliath-like Khabad, carrying a massive sword, was followed by Mataro and two hundred fighters. The latter fired their rifles and the thirteen *parshads* remained safe behind the large boulders. Khabad, Mataro and his men thought they had hit their targets and thus rejoiced and advanced forward. But all the *parshads* were alive and they got up to attack the fighters. They killed many by skillfully wielding their swords.

MATARO, DON'T GO NEAR BHAGUJI, HE IS DEATH PERSONIFIED

Khabad saw what was happening and he roared, "Who is Bhaguji amongst you all?" Instantly, Bhaguji swirled his sword in the air and replied, "I'm Bhaguji." On seeing the diminutive Bhaguji, Khabad laughed uproariously and snubbed, "Bhaguji, today I will decapitate you as easily as chopping a pumpkin. But, you strike the first blow."

Bhaguji countered boldly, "Sandhi, if you aspire to kill me then you strike the first blow so that your wish does not remain unfulfilled." Immediately, Khabad steered his horse in a circle, came near Bhaguji and struck his sword hard. A deep gash on Bhaguji's body left him bleeding and injured badly. In spite of this, Bhaguji unwound his headgear (*fento*) and tied it tightly around his chest. His right hand was paralyzed. Then,

Bhaguji stood determinedly with his sword in his left hand and roared, "Sandhi, you have not seen my prowess. This is not the way to strike someone." And then, Bhaguji raised his sword to strike Khabad. At the same time, Miyaji shot an arrow at Khabad's horse that pierced its eye and made it collapse to the ground. Bhaguji hailed 'Jai Swaminarayan' and struck his sword on Khabad and cut him mortally. Such was Bhaguji's blow that Khabad's horse was wounded mortally. Khabad fell to the ground and screamed, "Mataro, don't go near Bhaguji. He is death personified!"

Thereafter, chanting the name of Swaminarayan, Bhaguji and his men fought bravely against Khabad's group. Bechar Chavda swung his belt with finesse to protect Bhaguji. On seeing Khabad fall and warn him, Mataro rode away on his horse, scared to death. Consequently, his men scattered and ran away. At that time, the group of *parshads* sent by Shri Hari arrived from Gadhada. They hotly pursued Bhan Khachar's men and killed many of them. Those who survived returned to Bhadli village abashed and crestfallen.

WHOSE WRIST HAS BEEN CUT OFF?

All the *parshads* came to Bhaguji and sat down before him. Bhaguji was wounded with eighteen gashes on his body. Word about Bhaguji's critical state had already reached Maharaj in Gadhada. Shri Hari immediately sent his men to Rampara, who then laid Bhaguji on a bed and headed to Gadhada. The rest of the *parshads*, who had suffered cuts and wounds, got up to walk towards Gadhada with pride and joy. Someone saw a chopped wrist lying on the ground. Ratanji looked at his hand and realized it was his own wrist. He simply smiled and walked nonchalantly towards Gadhada with the rest of the *parshads*.

MAHARAJ NURSES BHAGUJI

The brave *parshad* warriors returned to Gadhpur. Shri Hari appointed two *parshads* to take care of each of the injured warriors and four

parshads to serve Bhaguji in a secluded room. Because of his fierce battle with Khabad and his men, Bhaguji had become prone to getting up charged for battle at the slightest noise. Thus, Shri Hari banned the playing of the drum, *sharnai*, conch shell and gong during *arti*, so that Bhaguji would not be roused out of his bed for battle. Shri Hari remained present while Bhaguji's wounds were treated, stitched and bandaged. Then, Maharaj gently stroked his whole body to bless him for a complete recovery. Dada Khachar was also present, his eyes wet with tears. He said, "Maharaj, your dear devotees are seriously injured for my small, ordinary field. It is a big blot for me."

Shri Hari pacified him, "Dada, you have surrendered everything to me, then why do say it is your field? It is my property and my *parshads* got injured while safeguarding it." Dada Khachar was unable to reply.

Three to four days later, Bhaguji and the other injured *parshads'* wounds began healing. Shriji Maharaj came twice daily to see them. He carefully stroked his hands on their bodies to bless them and enquired about whether they were being looked after properly. Shri Hari felt satisfied that Bhan Khachar had been taught a fitting lesson and he would no longer dare strike again and meddle with Dada's land.

MAHARAJ, SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAS HAPPENED

The next day, Maharaj was in his residence, the Akshar Ordi. Suddenly, Nityanand Swami arrived and informed, "Maharaj, something terrible has happened. Bhaguji's stitches seem to have broken and he is in extreme pain. Come urgently."

Shri Hari got up quickly and hurried with Nityanand Swami. On seeing Bhaguji, Maharaj placed his hand on his head. The valiant Bhaguji was silently tolerating the acute pain of his injuries, but a streak of pain was visible on his face. Maharaj asked him, "How are you Bhaguji?"

Bhaguji folded his hands and replied, "Maharaj,

take me to Dham." Shri Hari turned sad. He asked Nityanand Swami, "How did this happen? Was the bandage replaced today?" Nityanand Swami said, "Yes." Shri Hari ordered, "Call the barber who changed the bandage. Instantly, two *parshads* brought the barber. On seeing Shri Hari's stern expression the barber became frightened and folded his hands. Maharaj asked him in an emphatic tone, "Did you change the bandage today?"

"Yes Maharaj," the barber replied anxiously. Shri Hari demanded, "Remove the bandage right now and tell me what you have applied." The barber trembled with fear and pleaded, "Maharaj, O compassionate one, spare me. I'm yours. I was instigated by Jiva Bapa (Khachar) to apply pigeons' droppings in his wounds and in return he promised to reward me with a piece of land."

Shri Hari was disappointed and unhappy. He felt that though (Jiva Khachar) had done so much satsang with him, and he himself had pleased Bapu on innumerable occasions, yet his spite and bitterness (for Dada Khachar) had scaled to callous heights. Maharaj thought that the base nature of jealousy, arrogance and greed in people degraded them and stalled the influence of satsang to elevate them.

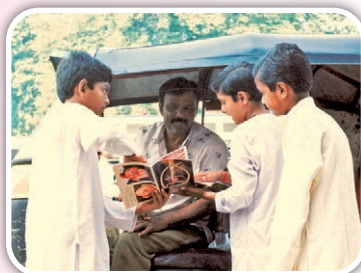
The barber unwound the bandage and Shri Hari told him to throw it away. Then, Maharaj told the *parshads*, "Do not punish the barber but expel him from the *darbar*." Thereafter, Shri Hari told Nityanand Swami to tie a new bandage on Bhaguji's wound." While Nityanand Swami was tying the bandage he said, "Maharaj, Bhaguji's stitches broke when he got up in a fit of rage due to the sounds of the drum, gong and shouts and screams." Shri Hari asked, "Who created the commotion?" No one replied. Shri Hari understood who the culprit was. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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

VOLUNTEERS

Karyakars and Swayamsevaks



The word 'volunteer' is derived from the Latin word *voluntarius*, meaning 'of one's free will'. It was first used in the English language around the 1600s to describe someone who offers service willingly. It is commonly used as both a noun and a verb. Dictionaries define the word as follows:

Oxford English Dictionary (OED)

Noun:

- A person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task.
- A person who works for an organization without being paid.

Verb:

- Freely offer to do something.
- Work for an organization without being paid.

Merriam-Webster

Noun:

- A person who voluntarily undertakes or

expresses a willingness to undertake a service.

- A person who does work without getting paid to do it.

Verb:

- To offer oneself as a volunteer.
- To offer or bestow voluntarily.

Cambridge Dictionary

Noun:

- A person who does something, especially helping other people, willingly and without being forced or paid to do it.

Verb:

- To offer to do something that you do not have to do, often without being asked and without expecting payment.

Collins Dictionary

Noun:

- A person who does a job or some other task without being paid for it.

- A person who offers to do something without being forced or paid to do it.

Verb:

- If you volunteer to do something, you offer to do it without being forced to do it or without getting paid for it.

These definitions highlight that central to the concept of volunteering are the elements of free will, lack of compulsion, and in general, the absence of financial reward.

Some synonyms for the noun 'volunteer' are: helper, participant, contributor, philanthropist, assistant, benefactor, altruist.

In addition to this general usage, 'volunteer' is used in certain specialized contexts.

Military: A person enlisting or serving in the armed forces without being drafted.

Non-Profit: An individual donating time, skills, or resources to a charitable organization.

Community Service: An individual participating in unpaid work for the benefit of the community.

Research: A participant in a study or experiment who freely gives informed consent.

There are also philosophical and social perspectives:

Altruism: Volunteering as selfless action for the benefit of others.

Civic Engagement: Volunteering as a form of active citizenship.

Personal Growth: Volunteering as a means of skill development and self-improvement.

Further, international bodies have their own take on the word's meaning:

United Nations Volunteers (UNV) Program: A volunteer is someone who freely gives time, energy and skills for the benefit of others.

International Labour Organization (ILO): Volunteering is unpaid, non-compulsory work.

Thus, there are many contexts and perspectives surrounding the concept of volunteering.

BAPS Terminology

In the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, the

cadre of volunteers comes from the community of devotees. It is these volunteers who coordinate and conduct the numerous socio-spiritual activities of BAPS at their respective satsang centres worldwide.

In BAPS terminology, two Gujarati words are used to describe volunteers: *karyakar* and *swayamsevak*. A subtle distinction is made between the two.

Who is a *karyakar*? One who is registered with the Satsang Pravrutti Central Office (SPCO) or Bal Pravrutti Central Office (BPCO) to perform dedicated service to carry out, develop and nurture local, regional and national satsang activities. Thus, a *karyakar* is a satsang activities volunteer.

Who is a *swayamsevak*? One who voluntarily contributes to or serves in the various socio-spiritual projects and activities of the BAPS, such as festivals, celebrations, disaster relief work, etc. Thus, a *swayamsevak* is a festival, project or mandir volunteer.

Sometimes, the roles and responsibilities of *karyakars* and *swayamsevak*s overlap, and so both words are, in common parlance, used interchangeably.

The Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav is a humble attempt to acknowledge and honour the many decades of selfless contributions of countless *karyakars* and *swayamsevak*s to the various BAPS activities and projects.

The following pages provide some information on the development of the volunteer cadre, the motivation given to volunteers by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahant Swami Maharaj and senior swamis, the selfless dedication of volunteers and the year-long events to celebrate the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav, which will culminate in a spectacular celebration assembly on 7 December 2024 at the Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad, in the presence of around 100,000 *karyakars*, *swayamsevak*s and devotees. ♦



TIMELINES

BAPS Satsang Activities



BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha is respected worldwide for promoting Hindu spirituality, culture and traditions as guided by the philosophical and practical principles revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It also serves society in times of calamity and catastrophe and for the amelioration of humanity through anti-addiction drives, prayer campaigns in hospitals, parenting seminars and other activities. The global growth of BAPS has been organic in that as devotees have migrated to various parts of India and throughout the world, they have established satsang centres for their own spiritual sustenance. Others are then drawn to these noble and socially conducive activities for children, teenagers, youths and adults. To coordinate all these mainly spiritual activities, central offices have been set up and operated by devotees who serve as volunteers to organize and oversee the smooth running of the activities. The following timelines of each of the major global regions in which BAPS centres exist provide an overview of the gradual structural growth of the Sanstha over the years.





INDIA

1907: Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj consecrates the mandir in Bochasan and establishes the BAPS. He continues *vicharan* to the towns and villages to promote the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy.

1911: Yogiji Maharaj joins Shastriji Maharaj to spread the BAPS principles and practices. Thereafter, while accompanying Shastriji Maharaj on his *vicharan*, Yogiji Maharaj conducted *sabhas* for children, teenagers and youths to encourage them to engage in *seva* and observe *niyams*.

Yogiji Maharaj emphasized the weekly Sunday satsang *sabha* (*ravi sabha*) as an essential element in strengthening personal satsang.

November 1952: Yogiji Maharaj established the first BAPS *yuvak mandal* in Mumbai, comprising 25 youths.

1954: Yogiji Maharaj began the first *bal mandal* at Matunga in Mumbai. Thereafter, *bal* and *yuvak mandals* were started in many villages, towns and cities in India and abroad.

1950s: Regular weekly assemblies were conducted in cities, towns and villages. Yogiji Maharaj sent the weekly *sabha* programme by postcard to each centre – initially handwritten, then cyclostyled copies.

December 1956: Yogiji Maharaj launched the weekly *Swaminarayan Satsang Patrika*, which contained a summary of Yogiji Maharaj's recent *vicharan* and the programme for the weekly satsang assembly.



1956

1954



17–22 May 1971: Bal-Yuva Adhiveshan, Gondal, India. 1,200 participants.

8 November 1971: By the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Yuva Pravrutti Madhyastha Karyalaya was inaugurated in Mumbai by Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami. Letters of blessings from Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami. The *karyalaya* was managed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, with help from Ravjibhai Patel, Balubhai Brahmabhatt (TT) and Nirmalsinh Rana.

The Yuva Pravrutti Madhyastha Karyalaya was later renamed as the Satsang Pravrutti Madhyastha Karyalaya (also called, Satsang Pravrutti Central Office – SPCO).

1972: Based on satsang demographics, Pramukh Swami Maharaj created five administrative areas: Gujarat, India, Africa, England and USA. In each area, one main *nirikshak* and other assistant *nirikshaks* coordinated the satsang activities.

1972: In Gujarat, a 14-member committee was formed to oversee the youth and children's

1971





1979



1989



1990



1992

activities, volunteers, *adhiveshans* and *shibirs*, *nirikshaks*, Satsang Shikshan Pariksha (Satsang Exams) and publications.

6–7 May 1972: First Yuva Sneh Sammelan at Gana in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Over 1,000 youths from 75 centres attended.

9 July 1972: In Vallabhipur and Bhavnagar, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated the first Satsang Exams. Over 2,565 devotees in a total of 63 BAPS centres sat for the exams.

January 1975: Satsang Pravrutti Madhyastha Karyalaya (SPCO) relocated from Mumbai to Atladara mandir.

June 1975: At the request of Manibhai Brahmabhatt and Rasikbhai Patel (BAPS secretary), Pramukh Swami Maharaj authorized transfer of the SPCO from Atladara to the BAPS Mandir in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad. Dhirendrabhai Vinchhi also joined in the *seva*.

May 1975: First *balika mandal* established, Ahmedabad.

10–11 January 1976: *Nirikshak* convention in the presence of Mahant Swami and other senior swamis. Attended by *nirikshak* swamis and *yuva nirikshak karyakars* (volunteers).

Mahant Swami guided, “Shriji Maharaj is Purushottam Narayan and the Gunatit Sant is the gateway to *moksha*. Pramukh Swami Maharaj is such a Gunatit Sant. The objective of all our activities is to promote this *upasana*.”

February 1977: Monthly ‘Nilkanth’ newsletter launched for *karyakars* in India. In August 1998, it was renamed as ‘Sahajanand Sudha’.

21–25 December 1977: First Annual Karyakar Shibir, in Sarangpur. This *shibir* was initially known as the ‘Yuva Netrutva Talim Shibir.’ Since then, such *shibirs* have been held every year.

1978: Six *nirdeshaks* appointed to oversee the six zones with the help of the *nirikshaks* in each zone.

May 1979: International Bal Adhiveshan, Vidyanagar, India, to celebrate the Bal Pravrutti Silver Anniversary. 3,000 participants.

June 1981: Bal Pravrutti Madhyastha Karyalaya

(Bal Pravrutti Central Office – BPCO) established in Ahmedabad to oversee satsang *sabhas* and other activities for children aged up to 14 years. The *karyalaya* was managed by Vishwaswarup Swami, with help from Dipakbhai Merchant, Kantibhai Pandya and Bharatbhai Gadhia.

May 1983: Annual training *shibirs* for *bal karyakers* started.

April 1988: ‘Bal Ghanshyam’ monthly newsletter for *bal karyakers* launched.

1989: Eleven *sanyojaks*, each to oversee between two to five zones with the help of the *nirdeshaks* and other *karyakers* in each geographic zone (*kshetra*).

1989: Gujarat Government honours the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha with the ‘Best Children Activities Award’.

May 1989: International Bal Adhiveshan, Vidyanagar. Over 15,000 children participated.

June 1990: International Yuva Adhiveshan, Vidyanagar. Over 21,000 youths participated.

June 1992: Parental Awareness programmes started.

December 1992: Government of India honours BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha with the ‘National Award for Child Welfare’ presented by HE Shankar Dayal Sharma, President of India.

October 1994: Bal-Yuva Karyakar Adhiveshan, Vidyanagar. 3,800 participants.

October 1997: Monthly ‘Suvasini’ newsletter launched for women’s activities *karyakers*.

January 2000: Separate *shishu sabhas* for children aged 4 to 7 years began.

2001: Yuva Karyakar Adhiveshans. Over 4,600 participants.

27 July 2002: Monthly *Bal Prakash* magazine launched in Gujarati.

10 Oct 2003: Bi-monthly *Bal Prakash* magazine launched in English.

February 2004: Bal Pravrutti Golden Anniversary Celebration, Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar, in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and President of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. Over 20,000 children attended.





2005: Karyakar Adhiveshans, India. Over 9,600 participants.

January 2007: Monthly 'Nilkanth' newsletter launched for youth activity *karyakars* in India.

April-May 2007: BAPS *balaks* and *balikas* conduct De-Addiction Campaign throughout Gujarat, convincing over 630,000 people to give up their addictions. President APJ Abdul Kalam felicitates BAPS representatives at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi.

June 2007: Yuva Talim Kendra (YTK) inaugurated, Sarangpur.

4 August 2008: Bal Sevak Sabha (BSS) started.

January 2010: Vali Mandals started to guide parents whose children attend *bal sabhas*.

January 2012: New three-year course for all *bal sabhas* started.

December 2012: Yuva Pravrutti 60th Anniversary Celebration, Ahmedabad.

25 June 2016: 'Chalo Banie Adarsh' project launched to provide monthly cultural education material to schools throughout Gujarat.

June 2017: Yuvati Talim Kendra (YTK) inaugurated, Randesan.

11 June 2017: Online reporting system launched for *bal karyakars*.

28-29 May 2019: All-India National Bal Adhiveshan. Over 25,000 *balaks* and 15,000 *balikas* participated.

November 2020: 'Siddhant Sarvasvam' course launched in Sarangpur for *balaks* and *balikas* to learn Sanskrit.

August 2021: New course for all *shishu sabhas* started.

22 May 2024: Karyakar Talim Kendra inaugurated by Mahant Swami Maharaj, Sarangpur.





1928



1956

AFRICA

1927: Shri Harmanbhai M. Patel (Gana) receives blessings from Shastriji Maharaj and arrives in East Africa.

1928: East Africa Satsang Mandal is established; Shri Manibhai A. Patel is appointed as president.

1933: In Rajpur, Shastriji Maharaj blesses and instructs Shri Harmanbhai, "Make efforts in spreading satsang. The satsang fellowship will flourish because it is a blessing from God."

1930s–40s: Nirgundas Swami's voluminous and inspiring letters bolstered satsang and a regular Sunday assembly was started.

Satsang activities in East Africa included annual conventions, festivals and camps.

Harmanbhai, Maganbhai and Tribhovanbhai travelled to the towns and villages to spread the message of satsang.

Letters from Shastriji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami and Yogiji Maharaj continued to give momentum to the fledgling satsang.

1946: Satsang Convention in Tororo, attended by many devotees from Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika.

1948: Satsang *sabha* started in Kampala at Prabhudas Lalaji's house.

1950: Satsang Convention in Kampala attended by devotees from many places.

1951: Satsang centre established in M'bale, Uganda.

1956: First Akshar-Purushottam Youth Convention, Nairobi (also held in 1957, 1962, 1963, 1965, 1970, 1972, 1974).

1960: Satsang started in Kisumu, Kenya.

1964: Seminar for youth volunteers of East Africa, Kampala.

1965: Satsang *sabha* started in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania.

1970: Satsang *sabha* started in Nakuru, Kenya.

1974: Satsang *sabha* start in Eldoret, Kenya.

1975: Satsang *sabha* started in Mwanza, Tanzania.

1980: Satsang *sabha* started in Kisumu.

1988: Satsang *sabha* started in Botswana.

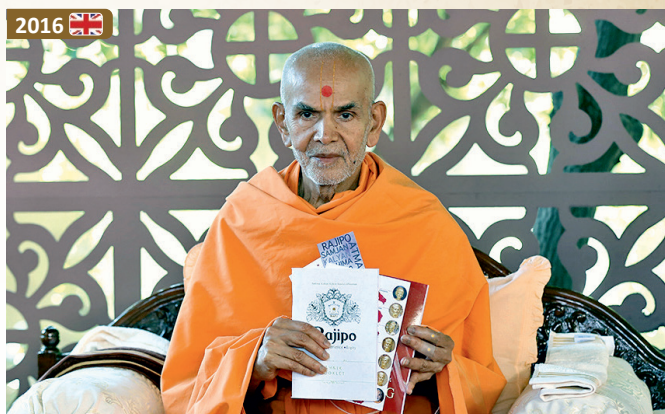
2007: Satang *sabhas* started regularly in Rwanda and Burundi.

2009: Pujya Mahant Swami inaugurated the Satsang Pravrutti Central Office for Africa in Nairobi.

March–July 2012: Satsang and Karyakar Shibirs in the presence of Pujya Ghanshyamcharandas Swami.



2012



2013: *Karyakars* conduct Bandhutva Pravasa.

2015: Regional and National Karyakar Adhiveshans.

August 2019: ‘Divyam’ *shibirs* for *karyakars* in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

2024: Spiritual discourses training *shibirs*.

UK & EUROPE

1970: *Karyakar* structure for UK established with opening of first mandir in UK in Islington, London.

1973: Start of regular Yuva Adhiveshans (1973, 1974, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1987, 1994).

1973: Start of regular Bal Adhiveshans (1973, 1974, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1987, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2012, 2016).

1980: Start of regular national *shibirs*.

1982: Start of regular *vicharan* by *karyakars* to various cities in mainland Europe.

1995: National Satsang Pravrutti Office established for Bal-Kishore-Yuvak-Sanyukta

Satsang activities in UK and Europe with opening of the BAPS Mandir, Neasden, London.

1996: Monthly newsletters published for *karyakars*: Ghanshyam (*bal-balika karyakars*); Nilkanth (*kishore-kishoris*); Adarsh (*yuvak-yuvatis*); Suvasini (*mahila karyakars*).

1997: Start of regular Karyakar Adhiveshans to develop skills, understanding and knowledge. (1997, 2002, 2012, 2016, 2024).

1998: Commencement of annual residential Satsang Shibirs for *bal-kishore-yuvak-sanyukta mandals*.

1998: Commencement of regular activities for satsang activities *karyakars*, such as, *karyakar goshtis*, *shibirs*, retreats, appreciation, welfare and skills development.

2003–4: Bal Pravrutti Suvarna Mahotsav – Over 300 *karyakars* managed over 30 projects and events across UK and Europe for over 1,500 children for 18 months, such as community services, elderly care home visits, talent development and *mahapuja*.

2009: BAPS Children’s Forum received the prestigious Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service.

2020–21: Online classes with weekly online examinations for *karyakars* and *satsangis* based on Satsang Exam books, Satsang Diksha and Pramukh Swami Maharaj *jivan charitra*.

2020–21: Online *padhramanis* (home visits) to connect with all *karyakars* and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic.





NORTH AMERICA

1970: Yogiji Maharaj inspired devotees to start weekly satsang *sabhas*.

1980s: Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired Bandhutva Pravas (Satsang Outreach) tours.

1998: National Satsang Development Committee established to develop syllabi for Bal-Balika and Kishore-Kishori *sabhas* and other projects.

December 1998: First North American Kishore-Kishori Karyakar Convention (KarCon). Now held regularly.

1999: Bal-Balika Mandal detailed *sabha* syllabus provided.

April 1999: First North American Bal-Balika Karyakar Convention (KarCon). Now held regularly.

2000: Weekly *ravi sabha* (Sunday satsang *sabha*) syllabus started.

December 2000: National Karyakars appointed to coordinate satsang projects.

April 2001: First National Satsang Network and Sabha Karyakar Training.

2001: Bal and Kishore Regional Coordinators appointed.

2002: Weekly area *sabha* syllabus started.

April 2002: First Kishore Mandal North American Activities Meeting.

November 2002: First North America Activities Meeting for all wings: children, teenagers, youths, men and women, in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami.

November 2002: First National Sanyojak Meeting (for swamis and *karyakars*) in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami.

December 2002: Regional *karyakar* teams formed.

Winter 2003: First Bal-Balika and Kishore-Kishori Regional KarCons held across North America.

January 2004: Detailed *ravi sabha* syllabus introduced.

March 2006: National Satsang Pravrutti Karyakar Convention.

March 2006: Kishore-Yuvak National KarCon.

2007: Satsang Pravrutti was divided into two tracks: Sabha and Network allowing for a more focused and effective approach.

June 2008: Regional Leadership Seminars in each region.

March 2009: National Yuvak-Yuvati KarCon.

2009: Regional Leadership Seminars (RLS) conducted regionwise. Now held regularly.

January 2015: BAPS North American Leadership Conference, North America.

October 2016: Initiative to strengthen personal satsang practices for National Sanyukta-Premvati Karyakars – 2AVGC: Daily two Artis, read Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato, sing Chesta, and do weekly Ghar sabha.

2018: 2AVGC initiative launched for all national, regional and local *karyakars* in North America.

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

September 1984: Pramukh Swami Maharaj's first *vicharan* in Australia & Fiji.



1995: *Bal sabha* started.

October 1996: Pramukh Swami Maharaj's first *vicharan* in New Zealand.

1997: *Bal* and *kishore* activities started in the presence of Pujya Mahant Swami.

2003: Mahant Swami Maharaj announces new *karyakar* structure.

March 2006: *Karyakar shibir*, Auckland.

February 2008: First Regional KarCon.

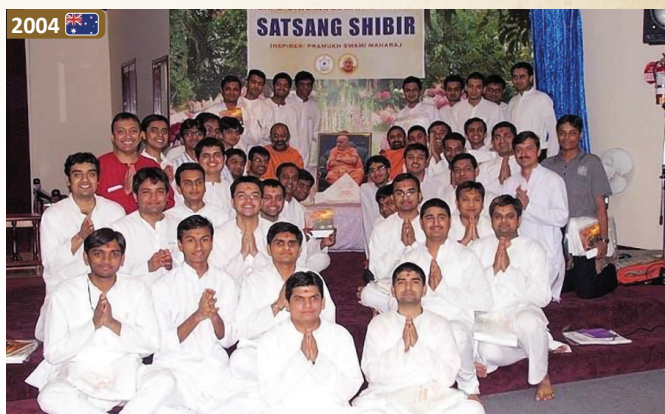
2008: First Bal-Kishore Karyakar Convention. Regular conventions held since.

April 2015: Bal-Kishore National Leadership Seminar, Adelaide. New *bal-kishore karyakar* structure implemented.

2015: National Development Committee Annual Meeting, Australia.

March 2015: During Pujya Mahant Swami's *vicharan*: First National Leadership Seminar; Formation of Satsang Development Committee; Mandir and Mandal Seva Structures introduced.

March–April 2016: First Bal-Kishore KarCon Karyakar Conventions in Adelaide and Auckland.



September 2016: Bal-Kishore Regional Activities Meeting, NZ.

Since 2016: Annual Karyakar Training sessions at each centre. Monthly *bal-kishore karyakar* discussion sessions started.

2017: National Activities Meeting, Australia.

February 2018: During Mahant Swami Maharaj's *vicharan*: National Leadership Seminar; National Yuvak-Yuvati Convention.

2018: Bal-Kishore National Activities Meeting, Australia.

July 2019: Bal-Kishore KarCon, Australia.

July 2020: Bal-Kishore Karyakar Adhiveshan.

October 2022: Annual Australian National Management Meeting in the presence of Pujya Dr Swami.

July 2023: Bal-Kishore-Yuvak-Sanyukta Karyakar Convention, Australia.

September 2023: Annual Australian National Management Meeting.

2023: Bal-Kishore National Activities Meeting, Australia. ♦





Blessings and Guidance from Gurus

Over the past 50 years, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj have continually motivated karyakars to progress on their personal spiritual path and in their duties as satsang activities karyakars. The following pages present a selection of the words of encouragement and enlightenment by both gurus directed towards karyakars.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

6 May 1973, Letter to karyakars attending a Zonal Shibir in Vidyanagar

“Pure conduct is an essential aspect for the growth of satsang. One should have attachment towards, oneness with, and love for the Satpurush;

and serve and worship according to his wishes. Efforts should be made to establish unity, friendship and harmony in every *mandal*. If devotees have disagreements for any reason, make special efforts to resolve them; otherwise, the development of the *mandal* will stall. Working selflessly is also very

important. If even a little selfishness enters, people will lose faith. This work requires patience. Even if despite efforts, results are not visible, one should not lose patience at all. The fruits of our efforts will surely come. So never be discouraged and never give up trying.”

29 August 1978, Atladara

“Encourage people to avoid addictions and to practise satsang. Don’t give weak advice. Don’t become discouraged by others. No one is going to give up their vices easily. Keep beating your drum.”

23 August 1981

“Satsang is indeed God’s service. In worldly jobs, money is visible, but the merits earned in this service, although not visible, cannot be obtained even by giving crores of rupees.

“Daily, dedicate an hour for this. Prepare others to also become *karyakars*. This is God’s *seva*, so there’s no need to hesitate.”

29 June 1986, Surat

“You will always have a lot of personal work. But as you are doing *seva*, God will take care of your worldly affairs. The more contact you maintain, the fresher the satsang will remain. We may cook food, but if there’s no one to stir it, it will burn. Similarly, we may establish a *mandal*, but we need someone to run it. If we consider this satsang and these *satsangis* as our own, we won’t feel tired or burdened. We should not be affected by honour and insults.”

25 December 1992

“It is very important to have a *karyakar* in every *mandal*. Everyone should be able to discourse. In the beginning, they should prepare by reading and then give speeches. They should follow up [others]. If no one follows up, the *mandal* will fall apart. Even one enthusiastic *karyakar* can shake up the whole village. We need to prepare *karyakars* who

are dedicated, knowledgeable, and have a strong connection to our goal.”

28 April 1993, Surat

“The satsang you encourage is a form of excellent social service also. If people improve, quarrels and conflicts will end. How grateful would someone be if you cured them of a disease? This is about freeing them from the disease of births and deaths. So, no matter what anyone says, keep serving. Don’t get tired of doing this *seva*. This path is true. We have found the true God and guru. The *seva* you do is not beyond their notice.”

9 March 1996, Divya Sannidhi Parva

“A *karyakar* is one who works without any expectations. This is the best definition! If one has expectations, work cannot be done. The only self-interest should be to please God and for one’s *jiva’s kalyan*. If there are worldly expectations, there will be distractions. Serving without expectations accomplishes everything.

“One should also strengthen one’s understanding and devotion as a *karyakar* through reading. We must have firm conviction in and knowledge of the Sampradaya and the guru *parampara*. We should properly understand the customs and rules of the Sampradaya. Our life should be according to them. Become good *karyakars* and make others good *karyakars* too. Keep creating good *karyakars*.”

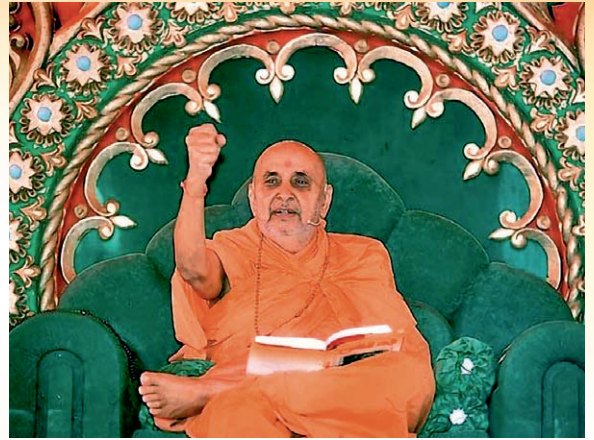
27 May 1997, Manor

Q: “Bapa! What expectations do you have from us as *karyakars*?”

Swamishri: “First of all, our own life should be pure and pious. Whatever work we undertake should be done with devotion; it should be done from within. Not for show, but to please God. There should also be unity. When you serve, you may face insults, but you must endure them. All the problems you face were also faced by Shastriji



21 June 2002, Tithal



24 February 2003, Sankari

Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj in their lives. If we read about how they took on their *seva*, it gives us strength. This is not about running away. It's about facing challenges head-on.

“No matter how many difficulties arise, don't abandon the *seva*. Those who face challenges head-on have a different kind of strength. Don't back down over small matters. No strength emerges without difficulty.”

15 September 1997

“We should follow up once, twice, five times, ten times, fifteen times, but not get bored, not get angry, and not develop aversion. We should always have compassion for others. By doing this *seva*, we are pleasing Swami. We should maintain a positive perspective. We shouldn't find fault with others. We should serve with a forgiving heart. Many have become good through this.

“The newsletters that come to you are to help you. So keep a file of them. Blending with the wishes of the guru pleases him. The less effort a *karyakar* puts in, the more they will lack. Do whatever service is required at whatever time.”

21 June 2002, Tithal

“You are *karyakars*. The meaning of being a *karyakar* is to serve God with body and mind while remaining loyal to the Sanstha. It's not about increasing internal problems, but

resolving them. That should be the vision of a *karyakar*. The work of a *karyakar* is to ensure that people know our satsang well and understand its importance.”

1 July 2002, Mumbai

“The characteristic of a *karyakar* is that even if they are insulted anywhere, they continue their work with folded hands. It's the duty of a *karyakar* to speak to others with great humility, modesty, and calmness; then satsang will grow. We shouldn't have any ego that ‘things should be done our way.’”

18 October 2002, Bhuj

“As householders you must engage in worldly affairs, but the main thing is to keep God foremost. One day, we will all have to leave these worldly affairs. Always keep this in mind. When God and sadhus give instructions, don't prioritize worldly affairs. At that moment, do as they say. Then, even a householder is considered a renunciant. We are renunciants for as much time as we dedicate to God. It's not that there's no time! If you decide, you'll find plenty of time, and if you don't, you won't find even an hour. So, everyone needs to organize themselves.

“We should also firmly observe our *niyams* and dharma. If we are seen eating and drinking in the market or watching movies, it tarnishes



22 September 2006, 'Thaie Yogi Jeva' Karyakar Shibir, Mumbai

Yogiji Maharaj's reputation. The firmer we are in our *niyams* and *dharma*, the more it will inspire people."

24 February 2003, Sankari

"A true *karyakar* is one who encourages others to engage in *satsang* and also engages in it themselves. The *karyakar*'s job is to perform the assigned task with great dedication and in an organized manner. Reports should also be sent punctually and in an organized way."

11 April 2005, Divya Sannidhi Parva, Gadhada

"If one understands *mahima*, everything will happen. If there's no *mahima*, we'll quickly give up. If things don't go according to our wish, we say we don't want to do this *seva*. If there's *mahima*, then even if insulted, one will continue to serve. If everyone has *mahima*, the assigned service will be completed."

22 September 2006, 'Thaie Yogi Jeva' Karyakar Shibir, Mumbai

"Everyone wants 'to become like Yogi', but how can we become like Yogiji Maharaj? Whatever we do in *satsang* – service, devotion, spiritual discourses – is to remove our negative qualities and establish positive ones. Becoming like him doesn't mean having the same physical form, but acquiring his virtues. When does this

happen? When we follow his instructions and serve accordingly. We want to become ideal *karyakars*, and when these qualities come in us, that's considered ideal.

"One who has a strong concern for their *seva* and is focused on pleasing Yogi Maharaj is a true *karyakar*. We should aim to become such *karyakars*.

"In our lives, laziness and carelessness are two enemies. Laziness is thinking, 'It's okay if I don't go', and carelessness is thinking, 'It will happen... I'll do it... what's the hurry?'

"We shouldn't become discouraged in *seva* by someone's taunts or casual remarks. We should always maintain enthusiasm, realizing that we've got this great *seva*."

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

10 February 2017, Divya Sannidhi Parva, Sarangpur

"This *seva* is for our development. Therefore, we should serve with enthusiasm, love and necessity. We should serve considering it as our great fortune. When we consider it as our fortune, no deficiencies remain. Ego, jealousy, showing off – everything disappears, and nothing but *seva* comes to mind. Does God, who has created infinite universes, need you? He has graciously given us this *seva*. So we should do it."



10 February 2017, Divya Sannidhi Parva, Sarangpur

16 November 2017, Mumbai

Q: When our service isn't appreciated, we feel discouraged. What should we do?

Swamishri: "We haven't come here to seek appreciation. Our duty is to serve. In that, we should be willing to be trampled upon, to become like the dust of the feet. Seeking appreciation is worldliness, not spirituality. If you have even a slight desire for it, you won't find happiness. How much service did Bhagatji Maharaj do? How great is God? What are we in comparison to him? We should follow in their footsteps. The desire for appreciation is very base, trivial. It will cause pain to sadhus and devotees."

Q: We are householders, so how can we manage our family and satsang *seva* properly?

Swamishri: "If you understand the importance of satsang, this will happen. Go to weddings and other functions, but keep satsang as the priority. In everything, add the thought of satsang. But if satsang is weak or lax, you'll get carried away. Satsang should be in our hearts, then it will become primary."

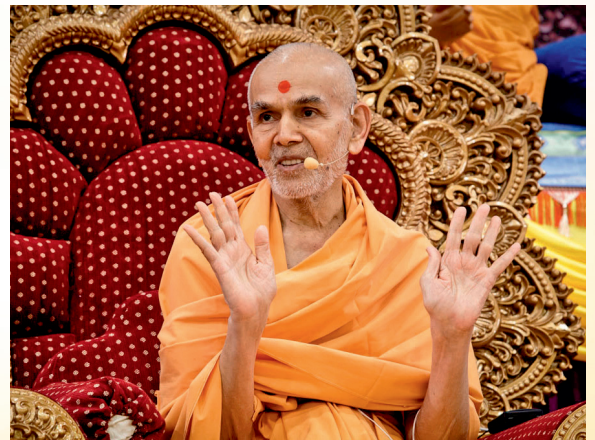
21 September 2018, Ahmedabad

Q: "For us householders, time is a big issue. We have to work and take care of our family. Often it feels like there are 26 hours of work in a 24-hour day. So, how can we find time for satsang activities?"

Swamishri: "Time is wasted on TV, mobiles, and other such activities. If satsang is primary, unnecessary things can be set aside. There's such a big benefit in satsang! Satsang is practised if it is in one's *jiva* – that's the main thing. Without that, excuses are made. This happens if you've thought about 'What is satsang? What benefit will come from it?' There's a huge benefit in satsang. Countless births have passed and we've struggled. If this is in your mind, satsang will happen naturally. You won't even need to be told, and you will find plenty of time for satsang."

28 January 2024, Kanad, Surat

"It is our greatest fortune to have received the opportunity to serve as a *karyakar* in this BAPS Sanstha of Shastriji Maharaj. Truly! We don't



16 November 2017, Mumbai



28 January 2024, Kanad, Surat

realize it. It is such a great *seva*. Where else can one get such *seva*? This *seva* takes one beyond the physical realm.

“This is the service of promoting the eternal Vedic Akshar-Purushottam principle. This *seva* is for Shastriji Maharaj, who is beyond *maya*, has nothing in his heart except Maharaj and Swami and is their manifest form. This service will earn their million-fold pleasure.”

14 April 2024, Divya Sannidhi Parva, Sarangpur

“Outwardly you volunteers and other people may look the same, but your sentiments are excellent. That’s what counts. You don’t wish ill for anyone, which is a great thing.

“What are these sentiments? *Divyabhav* (seeing the divinity in all), *mahima* (understanding the

glory of all), *dasbhav* (humble service) and *gun-grahan* (seeing only the good in others). This is how we must work.

“There should be absolutely no place for negativity or fault-finding. Shri Maharaj strongly prohibited this. Then, Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj – all have strongly prohibited this. So we must completely remove this from our lives.

“In this Satsang, one can only progress by eliminating negativity and fault-finding. If we behave as the *atma*, there won’t be any negativity. We have the strength to become *brahmarup*, to become *ekantik*. This is how we must work.” ♦



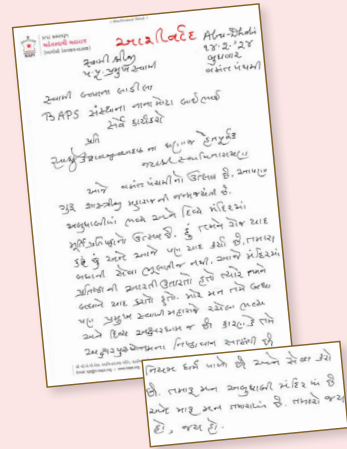
14 April 2024, Divya Sannidhi Parva, Sarangpur

Gurus and Sadguru Swamis Laud Karyakars



Pramukh Swami Maharaj managed the Sanstha's volunteer force with his affectionate saintliness. He showered the volunteers with selfless, unconditional love, advancing them on the spiritual path. Sometimes he would publicly describe them as 'white-clothed sadhus' or 'shvetambari sadhus'. He deeply understood the greatness of these volunteers who dedicated themselves physically, mentally and financially. That is why he said, "*Karyakars* are living, moving mandirs. The swamis and *karyakars* are regarded as places of pilgrimage."

In the same way, Mahant Swami Maharaj continues to appreciate and applaud the dedicated services of BAPS volunteers. Even during important and historic events, they remain foremost in his mind, as revealed by the letter he wrote after consecrating the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi.



BLESSINGS

Swami Shriji

P.P. Pramukh Swami

Abu Dhabi

14.2.24, Wednesday, Vasant Panchami

To,

All Swami Bapa's Beloved Young and Old Men and Women Karyakars of the BAPS Sanstha.

Deeply affectionate Jai Swaminarayan from Sadhu Keshavjivandas.

Today is the festival of Vasant Panchami. It is the birthday of our guru Shastriji Maharaj. It is the *murti-pratishtha* celebration of the grand and divine mandir in Abu Dhabi. I remember you daily and I have also remembered you today. I just cannot forget the *seva* you all do. Today, while I was performing the *pratishtha arti* in the mandir I was remembering you all.

In my mind, you are all grand and divine Akshardhams created by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, because you are dedicated devotees of Akshar-Purushottam, observe *niyams* and dharma and serve [selflessly].

Your mind is focused on the Abu Dhabi mandir and my mind is focused on you.

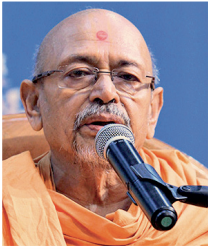
May you be victorious, [truly] victorious. ♦

PUJYA DOCTOR SWAMI



No matter how much we congratulate these volunteers, no matter how much we honour them, it's not enough. They are doing God's work. It's the best work. So, we thank them. We congratulate them.

PUJYA TYAGVALLABH SWAMI



In BAPS, both social and spiritual activities are carried out on a very large scale. Only if there are truly dedicated volunteers can these big activities run smoothly.

Volunteers sacrifice through body, mind, wealth and time. They provide a lot of service, but also endure a lot of strain.

Truly, the work of all our volunteers is amazing. No matter how much we praise them, it's not enough. May Maharaj and Swami bless these volunteers and their families abundantly with a lot of happiness and peace in their lives. May their devotion become stronger.

PUJYA ISHWARCHARAN SWAMI



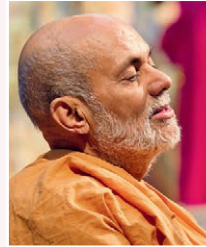
You all serve as volunteers of the Sanstha. A person might be extremely intelligent, but without hands and feet, they couldn't do anything. You are the hands and feet of our guru.

You are all householders. Everyone has some job, business and family responsibilities. And from all this, you take out and give a good amount of time for this satsang *seva*. So, the biggest thing is the time contribution you all make – that's a very big deal. Along with this, there are challenges. To constantly endure this

kind of challenge is a very special virtue.

No matter how much we thank you all, it's not enough. We greatly applaud you all and also bow to you all deeply.

PUJYA VIVEKSAGAR SWAMI



Volunteers are the backbone of the Sanstha. Because of them, all the plans are successful. The Central Office delivers these plans to them to implement. Without volunteers, everything would go cold and nothing would progress. To implement them, is a very big task.

Volunteers also have their own families to look after and nurture, and along with that, to do this *seva* is highly commendable.

We are very grateful to all these volunteers. Their contributions are invaluable. May God bless them all and give them strength to continue their selfless service.

After the bicentenary celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami (in 1985), Pramukh Swami Maharaj said in a meeting of volunteers, "I have merely adorned the chair. Even if I prostrate millions of times before all of you, it would still be insufficient." Our guru understands the greatness of the volunteers in this way, and we too express the same sentiment that even if we prostrate millions of times before all of you, it would still be insufficient. Such dedication is unique. With complete selflessness, you do this *seva* considering everything else secondary, solely to please of Maharaj, Swami and the manifest *guruhari*. Therefore, with their blessings, our place in Akshardham is assured. ♦



Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav Launch Assembly, 28 January 2024, Surat

Commemorating the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav

On 22 November 2023, Yagnapriya Swami, the head swami of the Satsang Pravrutti Central Office (SPCO), and all the swamis who serve in the SPCO and BPCO (Bal Pravrutti Central Office) met Mahant Swami Maharaj in Bochasan, to propose the year-long Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav. Swamishri enthusiastically agreed to honour the karyakars and celebrate their contributions to the growth of satsang in India and worldwide.

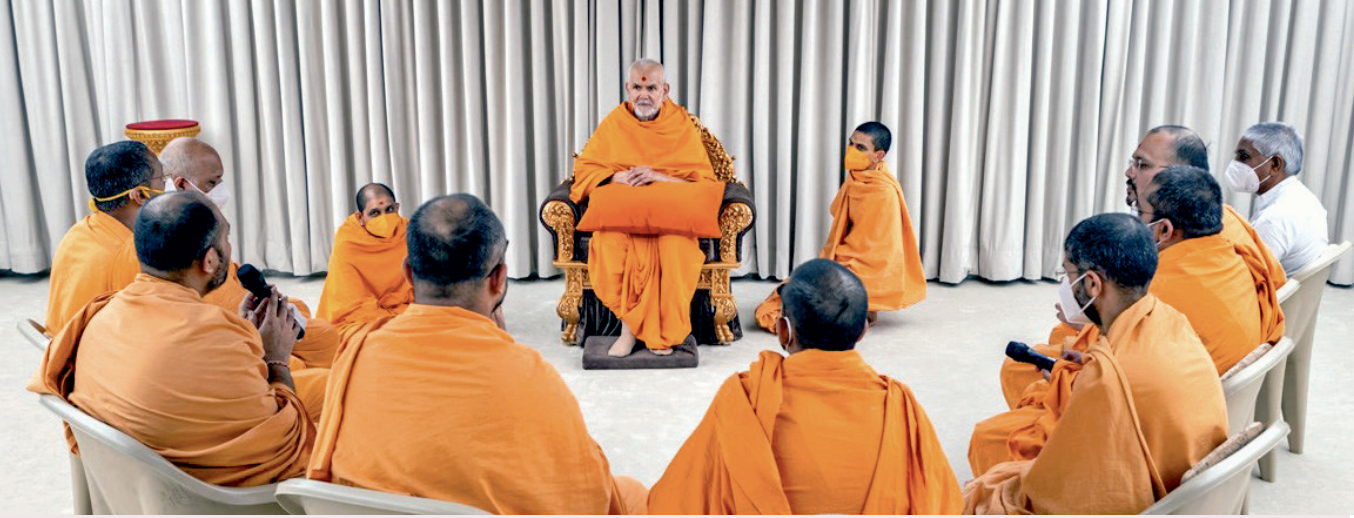
The Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav – Karyakar Golden Anniversary – celebration events during 2024 focused on enhancing these four factors, both individually and collectively:

1. **Asmita** – strengthening the sense of belonging and pride in serving as a BAPS *karyakar*.
2. **Antarvaibhav** – Developing inner virtues by consolidating *nishtha*, and sincerely observing *niyams* and dharma.
3. **Atmiyata** – Enhancing harmony and fraternity among *karyakars*.
4. **Abhivadan** – Highlighting the *seva* and dedication of the *karyakars* to the wider BAPS satsang community, and felicitating them for their outstanding efforts.

To commemorate the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav, the following events and activities were organized in India.

1. Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav Launch Assembly

During this grand and colourful evening assembly on 28 January 2024, Surat, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to say that all of you are like ‘sadhus in white (householder’s) clothes’ because of your immense contributions and sacrifices. The women’s wing is also making great efforts. You have all relegated your *sansar* and personal life activities for the sake of doing *seva*. It is not possible to evaluate the value of your sacrifices and neither can they be repayed. Thus, your



Swamishri in a meeting with Satsang Pravrutti and Bal Pravrutti Central Office sadhus, 22 November 2023

seva is like that of swamis. We are celebrating the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav to honour and recognize you. This celebration will foster your spiritual faith, pride for the *sanstha*, *satpurush* and *siddhant* and for *samp*, *suhradbhav* and *ekta*.”

On this occasion it was declared that ‘Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav ni Jai’ be hailed throughout the year by everyone.

2. Sampark Karyakar Shibirs

During February 2024, over 22,000 *sampark* (network) *karyakars* attended the *shibirs* held at 32 locations.

3. Karyakar Jnansatras

During February and March 2024, over 46,000 *karyakars* attended the one-day *jnansatras* at 38 centres to strengthen their satsang values.

4. Karyakar Abhivadan

Over 60,000 *karyakars* were felicitated for their satsang services at all BAPS centres throughout India.

5. Divya Sannidhi Parvas

Two separate Divya Sannidhi Parvas were held in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur.

Over 1,300 senior satsang and youth activities *karyakars* (males and females) participated in the first, from 12 to 14 April 2024.

Over 1,700 senior children’s activities *karyakars* participated in the second from 10 to 12 May 2024.

6. Karyakar Sadbhav Milan

At all BAPS centres, senior *karyakars* personally visited the homes of other *karyakars* in their centre to strengthen harmony.

7. Sant Karyakar Milan

BAPS swamis throughout India conducted *padhramanis* (home visits) to interact with all *karyakars* in their centres.

8. Karyakar Suhrad Milan

To strengthen harmony and develop familiarity, *karyakars* at each centre organized one-day outings with their families to nearby locations.

9. Karyakar Jnan Spardha

In October, an online quiz based on two publications was conducted for all *karyakars*. The *karyakars* studied *Sadhutana Shikhar Mahant Swami Maharaj* and *Satsang Jnanamrut* to participate in the quiz.

10. Sant-Karyakar Goshthi

To guide *karyakars* on personal spirituality and satsang activities, swamis at all centres organized discussions with *karyakars*.

11. Special Weekly Assembly Programmes

Special presentations during the weekly satsang assemblies at all BAPS centres in India highlighted the *seva*, dedication and indispensability of *karyakars* to the wider BAPS satsang community.

12. Online Karyakar Newsletter

Regular online newsletters to encourage *karyakars* were sent. ◆



MESSENGERS OF FAITH

UNTOLD STORIES OF BAPS KARYAKARS

The worldwide BAPS satsang activities are conducted by dedicated karyakars, who voluntarily contribute their time, energy and resources to take the practical spiritual messages of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to the doorstep of individuals and families. These karyakars conduct and coordinate the weekly BAPS satsang assemblies and other spiritually enriching projects at their respective centres. The karyakars face many challenges in their personal life and satsang duties, yet they remain undeterred and remain steadfast in their commitment. Their deep desire to serve God and guru and meaningfully use their time and resources empowers them to surmount obstacles and experience fulfilment in guiding others on the spiritual path. In many regions, these volunteers work under challenging conditions – from navigating jungle areas with wild animals to confronting potential threats from hostile individuals. Yet their unwavering devotion to God and guru, along with their strong connection to the Sanstha's values, drives them to persist in their service. The following narratives highlight the extraordinary contributions of selected karyakars, offering glimpses into their lives and the remarkable circumstances under which they continue to serve the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha wholeheartedly.



Shri Dhirendrabhai Vinchi
Surat

Karyakar from 1972 to 2016

As per Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wish, Dhirendrabhai, a native of Surat, began serving as a *nirikshak* in 1972 at the age of 35. From 1976 to 2016 he served as a lifelong *karyakar* in the Satsang Pravrutti Central Office. Dhirendrabhai's wife stayed in Surat, supporting the household by sewing women's clothes.

He initially travelled throughout Gujarat, in preparation for the bicentenary celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1981. He visited many small and large satsang centres, restarted closed centres, established new satsang centres, encouraged satsang exam participation, and also began new *bal mandals*. He visited homes of devotees to encourage them to engage in satsang.

Dhirendrabhai travelled to the centres until 1995. Thereafter, he diligently served in the SPCO in Ahmedabad helping in various office duties.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj often acknowledged his *seva*, saying, "Vinchhi is ours."

His many years of *seva* was based on his deep understanding of satsang values, and his readiness to serve humbly and in harmony with all was always evident.



Shri Krishnabhai Pandya
Gondal

Karyakar from 1964 to 2018

Krishnabhai had a long distinguished career as a school teacher and principal. He received many state and national awards for his services to education.

In addition to this, in 1964, Yogiji Maharaj instructed Krishnabhai, then aged 21, to serve in the satsang activities in Vidyanagar. Thereafter, in 1972, he was one of the first 12 *nirikshaks* appointed in the Sanstha and served in the Junagadh and Rajkot districts.

He also served as a senior *karyakar* from 2003 to 2018, travelling up to 150 km to participate in satsang *sabhas*, discussions and meetings at various centres.

Once, while travelling by bus to conduct a meeting in a village, a man sitting next to him started smoking a bidi. Krishnabhai began talking to him about quitting addictions. The man slapped him and started speaking rudely, "What's it to you? I'm smoking with my own money!" Krishnabhai remained calm and didn't retaliate. Later, the man had a change of heart and, while getting off the bus, he bowed down to touch Krishnabhai's feet and said, "From now on, I'll reduce smoking bidis." Such were the challenges Krishnabhai endured to help others.

Travelling from village to village often meant facing transportation difficulties. During monsoons, he would often get completely drenched and had to wait for hours on the road for transportation.

Despite the many difficulties he was never discouraged nor stopped completing his *seva*.



Shri Kashibhai Patel
Simaliya, Passed Away: 2023

Karyakar from 1969 to 2023

Kashibhai joined as a *karyakar* in 1969, at the age of 26, initially serving as a *nirikshak*. Later, he served for years as a senior *karyakar* in the Simaliya, Jambusar, Vagra, Rajpipla and Rajparda areas.

He often travelled up to 125 km to visit his assigned centres to attend *sabhas*, conduct meetings, and complete other duties.

In the early years, he had no vehicle, so he travelled by bus. He would often spend the night at a devotee's home and return the next morning.

In April 1999, Kashibhai had an accident and suffered significant injuries to his face and hands. Two days later, he still attended the Divya Sannidhi Parva in Sankari despite his pain.

When Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Simaliya, he would stay at Kashibhai's house. For

years, he served Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the swamis and devotees. He organized the satsang tours of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj in the Kanam region. He often took three to six months leave from his job to join Pramukh Swami Maharaj's tours.

Once, while with Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Kuvadar village, a buffalo on the road became agitated. Kashibhai came between to save Thakorji and Swamishri. Kashibhai was injured in the chest, but still he continued his *seva*.

Kashibhai understood the greatness of all devotees. If any devotee fell ill, he would visit them. He had great affection for every devotee and never had conflicts with anyone.

On Kashibhai's last visit to Ahmedabad, Mahant Swami Maharaj praised his *seva*, "Kashibhai is my old friend. He has done a lot of sincere *seva*. There is no pretense in his *seva*, just straightforward and sincere. He has taken Pramukh Swami Maharaj and me on many satsang tours."



Shri Alkeshbhai Parikh
Rajkot, Passed Away: 2018

Karyakar from 1979 to 2018

Alkeshbhai served as a *karyakar* from 1979, when he was 20 years old, and as a senior *karyakar* from 1984 until he passed away in 2018.

He regularly travelled up to 60 km within Rajkot city and its rural areas for satsang activities, and also went to Morbi and Wankaner.

He worked as a cashier in a bank and gave up promotions to continue his *karyakar* duties. After work, every evening, instead of going home, he would directly go to visit satsang centres. He would reach home at 11 p.m. and then have dinner. This was his almost daily routine.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had instructed all devotees to conduct family assemblies. So, Alkeshbhai and his family would conduct home assemblies in the morning two to three times a week, to accommodate for everyone's schedule.

Alkeshbhai, who was deeply connected with all *karyakars* and devotees with great affection, was like a family member to everyone. Due to his rapport with them, everyone enthusiastically supported him in all ways.

His ability to connect was special. There was hardly a home in Rajkot that he hadn't visited for satsang. He would visit the homes of devotees taking the Satsang Exams and encourage everyone to study, thus producing very good results.

One of his special qualities was that he would unfailingly attend both the joyous and sad occasions of *karyakars* and devotees, and help them. As a result, he maintained close relationships with everyone.

He would unfailingly attend the final rites of devotees. He would go to the crematorium and read a prayer. Even the workers at the crematorium knew that if a Swaminarayan devotee had passed away, Alkeshbhai would surely be present and would definitely read a prayer.

When Alkeshbhai passed away in 2018, a large number of devotees attended his final rites. At this time, a worker at the crematorium asked a *karyakar*, "Where is that *satsangi* who comes every time and reads a prayer?" The *karyakar*'s eyes welled up. With a heavy heart, he said, "Today's final rites are of the person you're talking about."

The large number of devotees who joined Alkeshbhai's final rites indeed reflected their love for him.



Shri Kiranbhai Mehta
Tithal

Karyakar since 1978

Kiranbhai began serving as a *karyakar* in 1978, aged 25, and has served as a senior *karyakar* since 1982.

He worked as a *talati* (village government administrator) from 1980 to 2008. From 2008, he began full-time *seva* at the Tithal mandir. Along with satsang activities, he also assists in the mandir administration.

For many years, he travelled extensively on a two-wheeler in the tribal areas of South Gujarat. When returning late at night after conducting satsang assemblies in the villages, he would struggle with sleepiness. Having no time to rest during the day due to work, and returning late at night, he would sometimes doze off while riding his bike. As a result, he and his vehicle went off the side of the road four times. During monsoons, when ditches on the road were filled with water, he would fall in with his bike. Each time, by the grace of Maharaj and Swami, he was protected.

However, even when exhausted, Kiranbhai has never had any negative thoughts about engaging in *seva*.

For about twenty years, Kiranbhai joined the swamis on their satsang tours in the villages. Often, they had to stay overnight in tribal villages with no facilities. Sometimes, they had to sleep on sand outside the village compounds at night. Many times, they had to sleep on platforms outside houses. They would be bitten by bedbugs, lice and mosquitoes. Due to this, his sleep would be disturbed throughout the night, and he often fell ill with malaria. Still, he never backed down from *seva*.

His financial situation was not very good since he was responsible for the wedding expenses of his four sisters and other household expenses. After completing his job as a *talati* at 5 p.m., he could have taken up other jobs in the evening to improve the family's financial situation, but his sole aim was to please Swamishri by serving the Sanstha.



Shri Dilipbhai Patel
Bharuch

Karyakar since 1977

Dilipbhai began serving as a *karyakar* in 1977 at the age of 28, and has served as a senior *karyakar* since 1993 in the Rajpipla and Rajpardi regions. He regularly travels up to 100 km to fulfil his satsang duties.

To reach the villages in the Rajpardi area, he has to change vehicles three times. For villages in the Rajpipla area, he has to change vehicles four to five times. So, to reach the *sabhas*, meetings and other events on time in Rajpipla, he leaves home three and a half hours early. Even today, at the age of 74, he endures such hardships to carry out his *seva*.

In 2000, when Doctor Swami visited Rajpipla, a public assembly was organized in the town hall there. After the assembly ended, Dilipbhai helped the *karyakars* to wrap things up. Thereafter, Dilipbhai had to reach home in Rajpardi. So, at 12 midnight, he was standing at the intersection waiting for a vehicle. After an hour, a truck driver gave him a ride. The truck had no windshield. So, the cold wind made him shiver. The driver gave him a blanket reeking of alcohol to cover himself. Dilipbhai realized that both the driver and his companion were drunk. But by God's grace, he reached home at 2:30 a.m.

Again, early next morning, he reached Umralla village to make the arrangements for the public assembly in the presence of Doctor Swami.

In 2004, a fungal infection in Dilipbhai's right eye troubled him for one-and-a-half years; during which he could barely see from his right eye. This placed an extra strain on his left eye. By evening, his left eye would get tired and just close. Even in such a situation, his enthusiasm and passion for *seva* did not diminish. After one-and-a-half-years of treatment, the vision in his right eye was restored.



Shri Rileshbhai Barot
Ahmedabad

Karyakar since 1976

Rileshbhai, a school teacher, began serving as a *karyakar* in 1976, at the age of 14, and has served as a senior *karyakar* since 1995.

Between 1995 and 2005, he finished his teaching duties at 12 noon, after which he came to the BAPS Mandir in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad, where he served in the SPCO until 6 p.m. and

then went home. Then, he daily travelled up to 125 km by moped to serve in his assigned centres in the rural villages around Ahmedabad.

So, he would return home around midnight every day. If he had gone to distant villages, he would return at around 2 a.m. and would wake up at 5:30 a.m. for his school job. He served in this way consistently for ten years and didn't rest for more than five hours a day.

In the early years, his income was very modest, yet he would travel to the villages at his own expense and still donate tithes to the mandir as per Bhagwan Swaminarayan's *agna* in the Shikshapatri.

Rileshbhai and his wife cut down on their personal expenditure and household expenses. Rileshbhai could have earned well by giving tuitions after 12 noon, but he prioritized serving at the Central Office.

Even during biting cold winter nights, he would continue his duties, wearing two sweaters to stave off the cold, which often were not enough to protect him fully.

In February 2022, Rileshbhai was asked to travel in the Panchmahal area to recruit *swayamsevak*s for the Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations. Rileshbhai enthusiastically went there, climbing hills to meet everyone personally and inspire them to join in the centenary festival *seva*. He travelled continuously for nine months in Panchmahal, Pavi Jetpur, and Ahmedabad rural areas.

As a result, many skilled masons and other *swayamsevak*s from these areas joined the *seva* for 15 days at a time.

He would climb hills on foot to contact and inspire the people. While in the Panchmahal region his exertions led to unbearable leg swelling and pain, such that he was unable to stand on his feet. The doctor gave him six days of medication but warned that he may need surgery followed by many months of complete rest. Worried, Rileshbhai earnestly prayed at night to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, "You have granted me

infinite favours. I must serve to repay this debt. So please cure me. You can give me whatever hardship you want after the centenary celebrations." He slept after praying from his heart, and the next morning, there was no swelling or pain in his legs at all. He was completely healthy. Without worrying about his body again, he resumed his service with the same enthusiasm.



Shri Rajeshbhai Gandhi
Amreli

Karyakar since 1978

Rajeshbhai has served as a senior *karyakar* since 1978, when he was 29.

He worked in the Stores Department of the Gujarat State Transport Division Office. He was first offered promotion in his job in 1980. When he asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj about taking the promotion. Swamishri asked, "Are you not able to make ends meet?"

He replied, "Bapa! I'm managing well. But it would be beneficial for the children's future, and I would get a higher pension after retirement."

Swamishri said, "No, you shouldn't leave Amreli. You have to stay here and do satsang *seva*."

Then, in 1984, he was offered promotion a second time. Again, he asked Swamishri. Swamishri remembered having refused permission four years previously. He said, "We've already discussed this. You have to stay in Amreli and do satsang *seva*. You should never leave Amreli." After that, respecting Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wish, Rajeshbhai gave up the idea of taking a promotion or transferring elsewhere.

For many years, he would travel up to 50 km to conduct satsang in the villages. At that time, transportation in rural areas was erratic. So, if Rajeshbhai had to go to villages in the Damnagar area, he would take a bus from Amreli at 5 p.m. to Damnagar. There, with a local *karyakar* he would go on a bicycle to the respective village for the satsang assembly.

Returning was even more difficult. There was no bus from Damnagar to Amreli at night. He didn't feel it was appropriate to stay at someone's house in Damnagar every time. So, local *karyakars* would drop him off by bicycle at Dhasa bus stand, 20 km away from Damnagar. At around 2:30 a.m., the Ahmedabad-Savarkundla bus would arrive and he would reach home at 3:30 a.m. He undertook this journey to and from Damnagar several times every month. Yet, neither the monsoon rains nor the winter cold ever dampened his enthusiasm for *seva*.

In 1984–5, he served as a *sanyojak* (coordinator) in the Kutch-Bhuj, Jamnagar and Rajkot regions.

He faced many inconveniences regarding food, accommodation and transportation. When no food arrangements were possible, he would eat puffed rice, roasted peanuts and chickpeas, but he would carry out his satsang duties enthusiastically.

Some of Rajeshbhai's relatives didn't approve of his devotion to BAPS and often harassed him in social circles. However, Rajeshbhai endured their actions and continued his satsang *seva*, undeterred.

After 2020, problems arose in both his eyes. Despite treatment, he can only see 25–30% with his right eye and has little vision in his left eye. Yet, he still goes to conduct satsang assemblies four days a week. To prepare for the discourse he has to deliver in the assembly, his wife reads the material, and Rajeshbhai memorizes it by listening.

As a senior *karyakar*, when he receives circulars from the central office or messages via mobile, his wife or other male *karyakars* read them out to him. Based on this, he carries out projects and activities in his area.



Shri Ashwinbhai Thakkar
Gandhinagar

Karyakar since 2000

Ashwinbhai began serving as a senior *karyakar* since 2000, at the age of 38.

He worked as a Divisional Manager in the

Oriental Insurance Company. In 2006, he was transferred to Rajkot for his job. This caused significant disruption in his satsang *seva*, so he asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj about quitting his job. But Swamishri told him not to quit.

Two years later, in 2008, when he asked again, Swamishri gave him permission to quit his job. The very next day, Ashwinbhai submitted his resignation, despite his very good salary. Ashwinbhai's work performance was excellent throughout Gujarat, so the company's director wanted Ashwinbhai to continue his job. With this intention, the director tried to persuade him, but Ashwinbhai didn't change his mind. So, the director specially came from the head office in Delhi to Gandhinagar to meet Anandswarup Swami, and for an hour, he urged swami to convince Ashwinbhai to not resign. But Ashwinbhai's own desire was to quit and engage in satsang *seva*. So the matter was settled and the director accepted Ashwinbhai's resignation.



Shri Harikrishnabhai Jadav
Rajula

Karyakar since 1981

Harikrishnabhai has been serving as a *karyakar* since 1981, when he was 20, and as a senior *karyakar* since 1983.

A native of Rajula, he has lived in Ahmedabad since 2021.

As a *nirdeshak*, he was responsible for the Amreli-2, Mahuva, Talaja, Una and Kodinar areas and would travel up to 110 km to conduct satsang assemblies.

Currently, he serves as a *sanyojak* in areas under Junagadh and Dholka mandirs.

Previously, Harikrishnabhai had to travel from Rajula to Junagadh several times a month for assemblies, meetings and other duties. He would finish his *seva* and leave at 10:10 p.m. He would take a bus and reach Visavadar at 11:45 p.m. From the bus stand, he would walk 2–3 km to his brother-in-law's

house and stay overnight. At 3:45 a.m., he would catch the Visavadar bus and reach Rajula at 7:30 a.m. After bathing and puja, he would go to work. This was his gruelling routine for 20 years.

Once, Harikrishnabhai and another *karyakar* set out for an assembly in Khamba. Near Dedan, their motorbike broke down. They tried to repair it, but couldn't get it started. The road was deserted. They sat outside a puncture repair shop. Hungry, tired, drenched in rain, and amid fears of wild animals, they spent the whole night singing bhajans. There were no mobile phones at that time, so they couldn't even inform anyone of their situation. Everyone at home was worried. At 8 a.m., four *karyakars* set out on bikes to search for them. They found the two *karyakars* on the way. After repairing the motorbike, they reached home at 9 a.m., much to everyone's relief.

Harikrishnabhai has even suffered serious accidents and insults, yet he has not let them disrupt his *seva*.



Shri Narayanbhai Faldu,
Jamnagar

Karyakar since 1985

Narayanbhai has served as a *karyakar* since 1985, when he was 21, and as a senior *karyakar* since 1992.

When he served as a senior *karyakar* in the Jamnagar, Bhadra, Kutch, and Bhuj areas, he would travel up to 350 km to Kutch-Bhuj. And to reach Pandhro, the last village of Kutch-Bhuj, he travelled 500 km.

For some distant areas, he would board a train at night, reach in the morning, spend the whole day in satsang *seva*, and return by train at night, reaching Jamnagar the next morning.

When staying overnight in a village, he often had to bath at village ponds, rivers or hand pumps.

In the early years, transportation was a major challenge. When buses weren't available, he had to wait for long periods and returned on milk vans

or vegetable trucks.

On many occasions he had to wait for hours late at night for transport, reaching home in the morning. Then, after bathing and puja he would go straight to work, with no time for rest.

The family's financial situation was precarious, so they avoided unnecessary expenses and saved on transportation costs by walking up to 10 km to reach home.

Despite such financial hardships, Narayanbhai did not take up additional work after 5 p.m. to supplement his income, but prioritized satsang *seva*. By God's grace, none of his practical work was hindered, and all tasks were accomplished properly.



Shri Shankarbhai Patel
Tithal

Karyakar Since 1990

Shankarbhai has served as a *karyakar* since 1990, when he was 35. From 1993 to 2014, he served as a senior *karyakar* in the Dharampur and Dungri areas. Due to his eye problems, he currently serves as a *nirikshak* in the Tithal area.

Shankarbhai, who is of modest means, used to leave home early in the morning to travel 65 kilometres daily from his village in Valsad (Abrama) to Surat for his job. On returning home in the evening, after dinner he would immediately set out for distant villages to engage in satsang activities.

In 1990, Shankarbhai and Pramodbhai attended a *karyakar shibir* in Sankari. At this *shibir*, Mahant Swami provided great inspiration to all regarding the spread of satsang.

After listening to the discourse, Shankarbhai had a thought: Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself had visited Dharampur. Pramukh Swami Maharaj also visited Dharampur. Yet, there is no satsang in the entire Dharampur area. So, with the thought of introducing satsang there, he met Mahant Swami personally and presented his idea. Swamishri was very pleased and gave him his blessings.

(Cont. on p. 62)

BAPS Humanitarian Services

BAPS volunteers worldwide also engage voluntarily in many projects, activities and campaigns to help society. With over 5,000 satsang centres in India, North America, the UK, Europe, Africa, the Asia Pacific and the Middle East, socially beneficial activities are conducted according to local and regional circumstances and requirements.

The following is an overview of some of the socially impactful activities BAPS volunteers serve in to help create better communities, and ultimately, a more peaceful and just world.

HEALTH AWARENESS LECTURES

Health lectures provide the public at large with information to improve their lives through healthier living.

HEALTH FAIRS

Organized with the support of experienced doctors and medical professionals to provide free primary health guidance to individuals on how to prevent and manage common ailments.

MEDICAL CAMPS

Free diagnostic medical camps are conducted with the support of experienced medical and paramedical professionals.

BLOOD DONATION DRIVES

Every year, thousands of donors participate in the blood donation drives conducted at BAPS centres.

BONE MARROW DRIVES

BAPS volunteers conduct bone marrow

registration drives to increase the chances of patients with blood disorders finding a match in the donor registry for bone marrow transplants.

FLU VACCINATION DRIVES

Flu vaccination drives help to reduce the risk of this contagious disease.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH & SAFETY DAYS

Held in many BAPS centres, in which the local police, fire department and doctors help educate thousands of children about important health and safety topics, providing them with the tools and resources to make better lifestyle choices.

FOOD DRIVES

Annual food drives are held to address hunger across all communities. Volunteers of all ages and community partners collectively donate hundreds of canned and dried food items, which are then delivered to local food banks.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Volunteers serve communities through clean up activities, and by providing essential food, clothes and other items to local hospitals, schools, orphanages, old age homes and other institutions.

SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL & LOCAL CHARITIES

Through annual walkathons, cyclothons and other challenges, BAPS volunteers raise funds to support local and national charities. ♦



Opinions About BAPS Volunteers

Many religious leaders, eminent litterateurs, dignitaries, professionals, sports stars, philanthropists, social workers and others have unstintingly praised BAPS volunteers for their social services and sacrifices during mega-festivals and in creating landmark mandirs like Akshardham in Robbinsville, NJ, and the iconic BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. Some of their inspiring opinions about BAPS volunteers during their visits to the month-long Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Celebrations (December 2022 to January 2023) and the three-month long Swaminarayan Akshardham Mahotsav in Robbinsville, New Jersey (16 July to 16 October 2023) are as follows.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS



It is humbling for me to see the power of volunteerism here spread over 600 acres and completed in less than six months. This is unmatched and there is so much here for even the best global corporations to learn.

- **Shri Gautambhai Adani**,
Chairman of Adani Group



This festival is mind-boggling. My institute is huge, but I have never seen the spirit of service that I have seen in the volunteers here. Their *seva* is pure faith.

- **Dr Girish Ahuja**
*Chartered Accountant,
Taxation Expert and Educationalist*



Pramukh Swami taught that selfless service to others benefits us spiritually. He inspired not just individuals, but entire families to serve. Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his institution can astound the greatest management experts through their creative capacity. Work that would take 50 years has been done in two years here by BAPS. I have never seen such a passion for service in any other organization.

- **Padma Shri Kumarpal Desai**
Trustee, Gujarat Vishwakosh Trust



Thousands of volunteers and swamis have worked tirelessly day and night to create this magnificent *nagar*. It is difficult to build even one home, and so to build an entire *nagar* is extraordinary. I have been going around the *nagar* since 3 p.m. and can truly say that there is nothing lacking. I must tell others that to understand cleanliness, guru-bhakti and service, you must go to Pramukh Swami Maharaj Nagar.

- **Bandhu Triputi Pujya Shri Jinchandraji Maharaj**
Founder, Shantidham Aradhana Kendra



Dedicated volunteers have created a campus that is so clean, green and serene. It appears miraculous. Nowhere can you find a single piece of litter. The amazing managerial, leadership and service skills learned here will lead us to a better nation for tomorrow.

- **Shri Tejasvi Surya**
*Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha, and President,
Bhartiya Janta Yuva Morcha*



I want to bow to the volunteers. The volunteer showing me around was a graduate from IIT. Other volunteers I was introduced to were people with their own successful businesses, and yet they were serving water to the visitors. I cannot help but ask why everything here is so clean and efficient? I realized it is because the volunteers serving here expect no worldly rewards or

remuneration, but only the spiritual blessings of their guru.

- Dr Sambit Patra

National Spokesperson, Bharatiya Janta Party



The volunteers have executed the plans that have been meticulously laid down. The discipline, hygiene, politeness, courtesy, and feeling of welcome that we get here are exemplary.

- Justice Abhilasha Kumari

*Judicial Member, Lokpal Committee of India and
Former Chief Justice, Manipur High Court*



I saw little girls and women in this *nagar* as volunteers. When I saw the girls from London who prepared a portrait of Pramukh Swami Maharaj by injecting colours in bubbles, I was touched by their patience, hard work, teamwork and attention to detail as an offering to their guru. If this sort of devotion can be spread everywhere, it can transform the world.

- Dr Jayanti S. Ravi (IAS)

Secretary, Auroville Foundation



In times when tech-savvy people are losing a sense of communication, the BAPS volunteers who have dedicated themselves to create the grandeur of this place exemplify the passion and unity within the community. It is our duty to inculcate value-based communication in the industry and make them realize the importance of community.

- Leander Paes

World-renowned professional tennis player



We must take an example from Pramukh Swami Maharaj Nagar, where women are involved in so many aspects of its management. These volunteering opportunities have increased

their self-confidence and determination to contribute.

- Beenaben Handa

Founder and Director of Poiesis Achievement Foundation



The whole *nagar* is out of this world. To visit such a unique place is a unique and lifetime experience. It was a pleasure to know how women are actively involved here. Everything is beautiful and precisely made. Beautiful and amazing work.

- Dr Mona Desai

Chair of the National Medical Institute



This has been an amazing experience. It is unfathomable how this celebration has been organized and managed by thousands of volunteers over a period of one month. I can see the deep commitment, compassion and hard work that has gone into the same and all this is possible only with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

- Dr Jagdish Kaur

*Regional Adviser for Tobacco Free Initiative
at the WHO's Regional Office for South East Asia,
New Delhi*

SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM, USA



This is a miracle of human cooperation and determination. It's really remarkable. This magnificent temple was created by the hands of volunteers that came here from all over the country. The magnificence of what human beings can create when they work together, treating each other with love in a spirit of equality.

- Richard Porter

Republican National Committee



Fabulous. I would say it's mesmerizing. It's a great feeling. Commitment is the most important factor to do anything or to create

anything. I mean, the volunteers are so committed. The way they have been working together for a cause I think it's really fabulous. Hats off to them.

- **Krishna Rao Venkatesh Prasad**
Former Cricketer, Indian National Team



As a CEO, meeting the volunteers was an incredible experience; the inspiration in seeing so many people working to build something together that is bigger than themselves.

- **Enrique Lorez**
Chief Executive Officer, HP



I'm just blown away by what I've seen in this incredible location. I really had no idea of the scope and scale of the undertaking here, and the fact that volunteers came from all over the country to be a part of something truly special and meaningful. I think all of that effort has made it pretty clear that the values of Hinduism are being lived here and the shared values of love, compassion, unity and peace.

- **Kevin Mullin**
U.S. Congress Representative (CA-15)



What I've seen today is really mind-blowing. This is the first place I've seen where everything is done by sheer volunteers. I've seen doctors, I've seen engineers, I've seen ordinary people. It is where class and your station really doesn't matter. What matters is what you can give as a human being to a good cause.

- **Ndileka Mandela**
Granddaughter of Nelson Mandela



There are not enough adjectives in the English language to explain what I saw today. There will never be enough. And I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you've done

and the difference you made in our community. Winston Churchill said, "You make a living by what you earn; you make a life by what you give." Keep up the great work because it is a beautiful facility.

- **Charles Tomaro**
County Commissioner, Middlesex County, NJ



Everybody comes with a different set of backgrounds, but everyone still comes together with a shared sense of community, family and religion, hoping for something better, hoping to inspire others and to work hard to accomplish great things. I think you see that here with the volunteers.

- **Matthew Moench**
Mayor of Bridgewater, NJ



Every time I visit this place, I am mesmerized and inspired by the beauty, the kindness, the welcoming and the mission of giving back to others by volunteering your time and helping.

- **Deborah Blakely**
President, Robbinsville Township Council



The people who have built this have volunteered their time, invested weeks, months and, some of them, years. And yet they've opened it to the community at large and I think it's a beautiful thing.

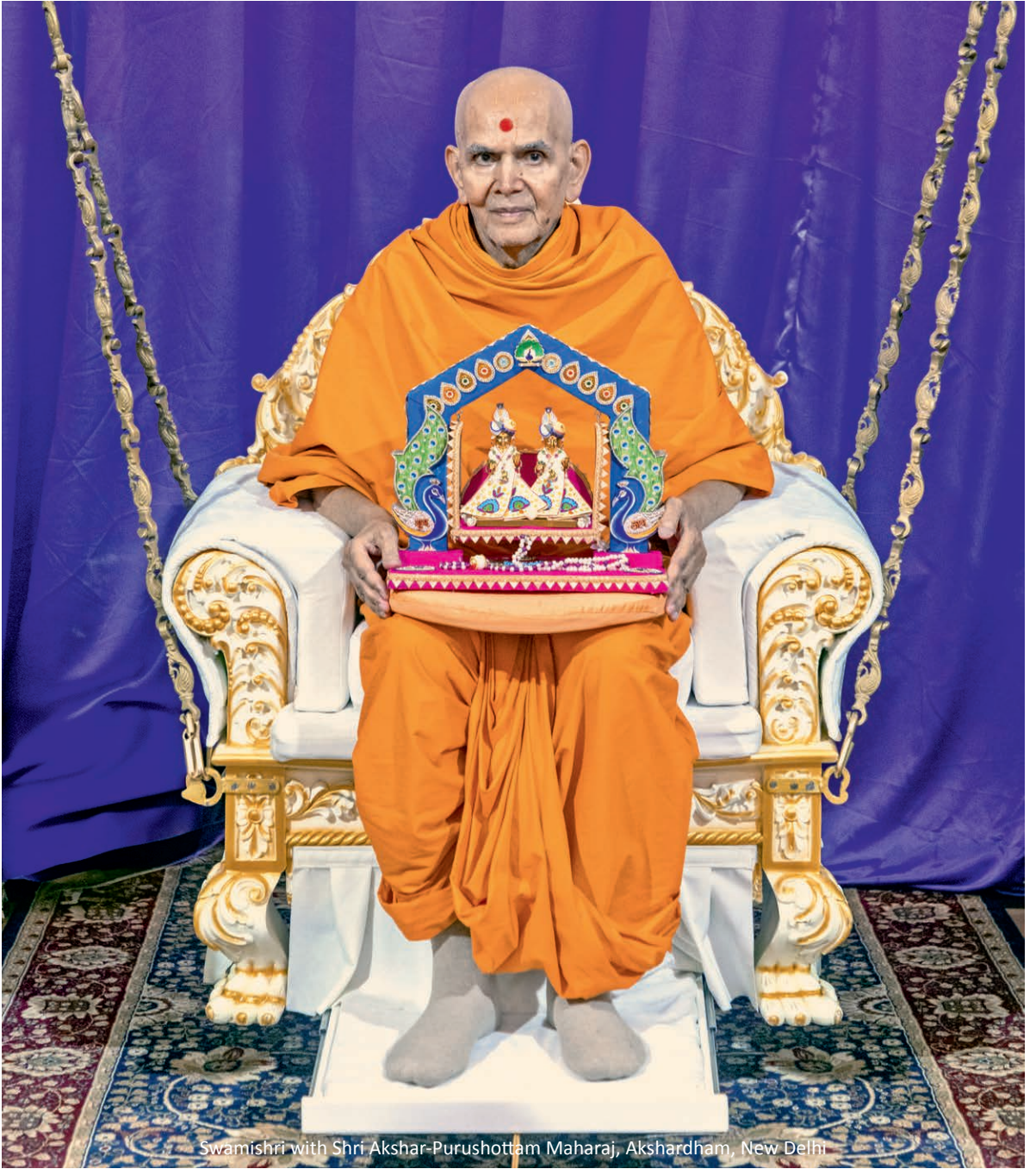
- **Noah Croom**
Senior Vice President Legal Counsel LIFT Sports Management



One lesson I'm taking in, how did thousands of people come together to make this impossible possible? The sacrifice that thousands of volunteers have made to make what Akshardham is today, is unparalleled.

- **Neeraj Kalani**
Global Head: Moderna





Swamishri with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Akshardham, New Delhi



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

VICHARAN

13 August to 1 October 2024
New Delhi and Mumbai



Swamishri salutes after performing the flag hoisting ceremony, 15 August, New Delhi

The *vicharan* report in this issue includes Swamishri's stay in Akshardham, New Delhi, from 13 August to 2 September and in Mumbai from 2 September to 1 October 2024.

AUGUST: NEW DELHI

13: Arrival

On 13 August, Swamishri departed from Bochasan and travelled by flight from Vadodara to New Delhi. On his arrival at Akshardham, youths and volunteers welcomed Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Swamishri at the *shikharbaddha* mandir by waving BAPS flags. Swamishri showered his blessings on all as he passed by. After doing Thakorji's darshan, Swamishri was pleased on seeing an exquisite floral *rangoli* under the mandir dome. Thereafter, Swamishri came to the mandir podium where thousands of devotees and

volunteers of Akshardham were delighted to have his darshan. Kothari Munivatsal Swami welcomed Swamishri, and Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Dharmavatsal Swami honoured Swamishri with flower garlands on behalf of all.

Then, children and volunteers of Akshardham performed a variety of traditional welcome dances: Bhangara, Marvadi and Timli. To please Swamishri, 140 volunteers of Akshardham had observed various austerities. They had also prepared a 92-foot-long pearl garland and a flower garland that was offered by swamis and leading devotees and volunteers.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed all, saying, "Jai Shri Swaminarayan. I have Bhagwan's happiness by the profound grace of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and gurus. You have all gathered here and are joyful and will remain ever-joyful."

15: Independence Day Celebration

After doing Thakorji's darshan, Swamishri rocked Thakorji in a beautiful *hindolo* made of *rakhdīs*. Thereafter, to commemorate India's 78th Independence Day, Swamishri came to the



Swamishri sanctifies *rakhdhis*, New Delhi

Yagnapurush Kund before the *murti* of Nilkanth Varni. The morning air was surcharged with national pride while the tune of ‘*Sāre jahā se acchā...*’ percolated the campus. Nilkanth Varni’s podium and a small stage in front were decked with flowers. Many swamis and devotees were seated on the steps of Yagnapurush Kund. At 7:50 a.m., Swamishri hoisted the Indian flag amidst salutes from all. Then, Swamishri blessed, “Today, we are celebrating India’s 78th Independence Day. We pray to Bhagwan that India progresses in all fields. May the problems prevailing in our country be solved quickly and all the people of India be happy. We also remember and pay tributes to all those who had sacrificed themselves for our country’s independence. May all citizens take inspiration from them by living with the thought and spirit, ‘Not what the country will do for me, but what I will do for my country.’ Then, our country will definitely progress.

“Today, we should also not forget guru Yogiji Maharaj because he, at Shastriji Maharaj’s behest, turned 25 *malas* daily for many years for the independence of India. His bhakti and austerity

also lie at the root of India’s independence. I pray that we are all endowed with intellect and strength to sustain our country’s independence that was gained by the endeavours of countless people.”

Prior to departing, Swamishri waved a small tricolour and then stood up to salute the Indian flag. All were inspired and impressed on witnessing Swamishri’s patriotism.

Evening Welcome Assembly

Swamishri’s welcome assembly was held in the Pramukh Swami Sabha Gruh on the mandir campus. First, Swamishri gave darshan to the devotees seated outside the hall in the dining marquee. All were ecstatic at the close up darshan. Thereafter, Swamishri entered the assembly hall where children welcomed him by showering flower petals on his pathway.

Swamis honoured Swamishri by performing rituals during recital of the *mahapuja* mantras. Then, children and youths performed a welcome dance and the mantra-*pushpanjali* ritual. Swamishri then performed *arti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, “You have all welcomed me, so I also welcome you. True welcome lies in abiding by Shriji Maharaj’s commands (*agna*). By so doing, you will gain his immense pleasure. Everything is included in following his commands and having faith in him.”

17: Satsang Shibir

More than 1,000 devotees and well-wishers came from Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu-Kashmir for Swamishri’s darshan and to attend a satsang *shibir* (camp). Swamishri blessed them all and said that if they did satsang they would benefit a lot; they would gain control over their mind and experience happiness.

19: Raksha Bandhan and Sevak Din

After Thakorji’s darshan, Swamishri gave *samip* darshan to devotees from Punjab, Himachal



On Satsang Day, devotees from Kolkata offer sweet dishes to Swamishri, New Delhi

Pradesh and Jammu-Kashmir.

In the evening Sevak Din assembly, the *sevaks* (volunteers) of Akshardham festively welcomed Swamishri in the assembly. Swamishri was honoured with a garland of *rakhdhis* by Atmaswarup Swami and Dharmavatsal Swami. Beautiful garlands made by 375 *sevaks* were also offered to Thakorji and Swamishri. Then, swamis showered sanctified flower petals on all the *sevaks*.

Swamishri blessed, “It is best to do *seva* with *samp* and *suhradbhav*. Do not allow jealousy to arise while doing *seva*, otherwise that *seva* will not be acceptable to Bhagwan. The biggest lapse in maintaining *suhradbhav* lies in not having *mahima* for others. May you progress on the path of *suhradbhav* and, for that, pray daily for the good of all.” The *sevaks* touched each others’ feet with *mahima* and linked their hands to form a *samp* chain to please Swamishri.

A drama, ‘Vajesinh Bapu’s Hoko’, was enacted before Swamishri. A video of Yogi Bapa praising Mahant Swami was shown. Swamishri also blessed all by applying a stamp with the words, “Akshardham is assured.” Thereafter, *sevaks*

performed a traditional dance and offered a 92-foot-long garland of flowers and leaves to Thakorji and Swamishri.

21: Satsang Day

Over 250 devotees from Kolkata and other parts of Bengal celebrated ‘Satsang Day’ for two days in Swamishri’s presence. They attended Swamishri’s puja darshan and evening assemblies.

In the first evening assembly, devotees of Kolkata offered gifts to Thakorji and Swamishri. Also, youths from Nepal offered a *rudraksha mala*. The women devotees had hand-peeled the husk from rice grains with devotion and swamis presented them to Swamishri. Then, Swamishri blessed all by elaborating upon the glory and importance of satsang.

During the second evening assembly, devotees from Bengal offered flower garlands prepared by them, green vegetables grown on their farms and traditional Bengali sweets. Swamis offered a garland of *malas* to Swamishri. Then, some Bengali devotees expressed appreciations to Swamishri for the mandir gifted to them in Kolkata.



A skit presentation on Children's Day themed on 'Prapti', New Delhi

Incidents were narrated of four devotees who do satsang *seva* and always experience Swamishri's divine proximity.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "Shastriji Maharaj, out of his compassion, installed the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in Bochasan. That philosophy and knowledge spread from there to all places and also to Bengal. The knowledge of Akshar and Purushottam is genuine and that is why it has spread and will continue to spread."

Swamishri had written a letter blessing that the *abhishek murti* of Nilkanth Varni in Kolkata Mandir will fulfil the good wishes and solve the problems of all those who offer prayers and perform *abhishek* with faith. Thereafter, swamis offered Swamishri a decorative shawl prepared by *satsangi* male and female youths of Kolkata. Then, the youths performed a Bengali dance.

24: Youth Day

Today's evening Youth Day assembly was themed on 'Thank You Swami Bapa'. The youths performed three dramas related to contemporary

problems faced by them. The first drama was about how a youth quarrels with his parents out of his passion for a mobile phone. The second drama portrayed how an intelligent student declines in all aspects due to bad company. The last drama showed youth issues related to health, work, finance and family, which often lead to suicide. Thereafter, *satsangi* youths thanked Swamishri for protecting them.

In conclusion, Swamishri gave solutions to the problems portrayed in the dramas, "The youths should prioritize satsang amidst the problems they face. Always think of attaining Bhagwan and guru's *rajipo*. Do all your work to please Bhagwan and guru, and restrain your physical senses and focus them on your goal. Subsequently, you'll experience peace and be able to solve your problems."

25: Children's Day

The evening Children's Day assembly was themed on 'Prapti'. The virtues of dharma-*niyams*, fearlessness and victory over *kusang* and *maya* were presented through dramas: Abhaysinh's steadfastness, a goat takes refuge of a lion's

footprint, and overcoming addiction to television and mobile phones. Another drama was enacted about an ordinary shopkeeper who sold edible oil in leaf cups and remains forever poor.

Finally, children asked Swamishri, “What should we do to become your beloved children?” Swamishri blessed, “Obey the *niyams* prescribed by Bhagwan and you’ll gain power and be able to study very well. Secondly, know the *mahima* of the Satpurush (guru) and his devotees. This will benefit you a lot.” Then, the volunteers running the *bal mandal* asked, “What expectations do you have from us?” Swamishri replied, “Observe *niyam-dharma* and do good satsang related activities.”

26: Janmashtami Celebration

Devotees in large numbers attended the evening celebratory Janmashtami assembly. Pujya Viveksagar Swami narrated incidents from the life of Bhagwan Krishna. Then, children and youths performed a vibrant dance on the bhajan ‘*Govind ālā re...*’ before Swamishri.

Swamishri sang the glory of Bhagwan Krishna, “Bhagwan Krishna teaches us the virtue of humility by picking up the used leaf-plates after everyone had eaten during the Rajsuya *yagna* organized by Yudhishtir. Bhagwan Krishna had great love for his devotees – Sudama, Vidurji, Kuntaji, Pandavs, *gopis* and others. He protected them and fulfilled their wishes. In the Bhagavad Gita he declares that he is present in every era. This means that Bhagwan always remains manifest through his Gunatit Sant. We are fortunate and blessed that we have an association with the Gunatit guru.”

Swamishri performed the birthday celebration *arti* and also rocked Thakorji. The festive devotional ambience suffused all with faith, joy and positivity.

29: Primary Rituals for Installation of a Giant Murti of Nilkanth Varni

In the precincts of Bharat Upvan in Akshardham, a beautiful giant *murti* of Nilkanth



Swamishri blesses the Janmashtami Celebration assembly, New Delhi

Varni will be installed. Swamishri performed the preliminary rituals for the *yantras* and the *nidhi kumbh* to be placed later under the base of the *murti*. Senior swamis placed the flowers and other sacred objects into the *nidhi kumbh*. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, “The grand *murti* of Nilkanth Varni to be installed here will be very beautiful. People will be amazed and awed. They will praise Nilkanth Varni and be drawn from other Indian states.” Then, prayers were offered for the success and early completion of the project.

The next day, Swamishri visited the site where the *murti* of Nilkanth Varni would be installed. Swamishri was also pleased to know all the information about the *murti*. Then, Swamishri performed the *bhumi puja* ritual of the site and blessed, “The *murti* of Nilkanth Varni will be installed without any obstacles. Everything will work out well.”

31: Symbolic 91st Birthday Celebration

To celebrate Swamishri’s birthday, the courtyard of Sarvasva (Swamishri’s residence) was decorated with small *diyas* (lamps), photos of Swamishri and



On Swamishri's symbolic 91st Birthday Celebration children and youths perform a guru bhakti dance, New Delhi

birthday messages. There were flower decorations in the mandir sanctums and an *annakut*. Swamishri performed Thakorji's *arti* and then stood to give darshan in the middle of a large floral *rangoli* under the mandir dome. Thereafter, Swamishri gave puja darshan to a large gathering of devotees.

In the evening celebration assembly at the Pramukh Swami Sabha Gruh, attendant swamis spoke about Swamishri's saintliness and glory. Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami spoke about their own experiences of Swamishri's greatness.

Children and youths performed a beautiful, traditional dance to the bhajan '*Gunātīt Paramparā ne Koti Koti Vandan*'. Finally, Swamishri blessed the occasion, "Bhagwan Swaminarayan, out of immense grace, came on earth to liberate us. He is the king of infinite universes, yet he did not allow a minor devotee go out of his divine sight. He loved them. After his physical departure he remained present through a tradition of Gunatit gurus. If we become a true devotee then he will look after us and bless us with his divine happiness."

Senior swamis garlanded and honoured

Swamishri. After *arti*, Kothari Munivatsal Swami offered appreciations to Swamishri for giving the benefit of his presence and blessings.

A devotee, Rajendra Sharma (52 years), pilgrimaged 240 km by foot from Jaipur to Delhi for Swamishri's good health and to earn his *rajipo*. During his pilgrimage, he chanted the Swaminarayan mantra. Last year, when Swamishri was in Anand, he had pilgrimaged 700 km by foot from Jaipur to Anand. Swamishri blessed Rajendrabhai for his devotion and efforts.

SEPTEMBER: NEW DELHI, MUMBAI

2 September: Swamishri's Departure

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami garlanded Swamishri prior to his departure from Akshardham, New Delhi, by flight to Mumbai.

4 September: Welcome Assembly, Mumbai

Swamishri's welcome assembly was arranged in the Yogi Sabha Gruh and Yogi Sabha Mandap at the Dadar mandir. Swamishri was welcomed by en masse singing of "*Āj māre orde re....*". Then, devotees, young and old, expressed their different

feelings for Swamishri: as the Sant form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, like Pramukh Swami Maharaj, as a best friend, as a great emotional and spiritual support. After each presentation appropriate verses from kirtans were sung.

Finally, Swamishri blessed, “Shriji Maharaj is present through the Gunatit Sant and will remain so for millennia. Shriji Maharaj had, out of compassion and grace, come to this *brahmand* and blessed all. Thus, one must remain strong from within and remain buoyant that ‘I’ve attained Bhagwan, and he is with me.’”

Then, all the devotees seated in the assembly offered a food item brought from their homes to Thakorji and Swamishri. Everyone also sang a *thal* in unison. Thereafter, all raised their home-made garlands to honour Thakorji and Swamishri. At that time, Pujya Kothari Swami honoured Swamishri with a garland, and then Swamishri took the garland in his hands and raised it before the devotees to honour them all.

5 September: Youth and Karyakar Day

In the evening assembly, 2,000 youths and 400 youth *karyakars* were present. A drama, ‘Sona na Haiya’, on the daily routine of a *karyakar* was enacted. Then, Prasannamuni Swami narrated several inspiring incidents of male *karyakars*, and a male *karyakar* spoke about inspiring incidents of female *karyakars*.

Finally, Swamishri blessed, “When we look at the faith and efforts of our gurus then whatever efforts we make pale into insignificance. Once, the devotees of Surat told Yogi Bapa that they were going to close down the Sunday satsang *sabha*. In response, Yogi Bapa said, ‘Continue doing the Sunday *sabha* even if only one devotee is present. Discourse to the pillars (in the hall).’ Such was his faith.

“While doing *seva* your opinions may differ, but your minds should not become bitter and split. By mutual understanding of *mahima* your minds’ bitterness and diversity will dissolve.”

6 September: Always Be With Us (Pune and Chennai Satsang Mandals)

The evening assembly was dedicated for the *satsangis* of Pune and Chennai satsang *mandals*. They presented a programme themed ‘Always Be With Us’, based on Swamishri’s four points for experiencing the Satpurush’s divine proximity: observing *niyam*-dharma, obeying his personal commands, *samp* and *dasbhav*. To portray these four principles the devotees performed skits and dramas.

Swamishri blessed the assembly, “I always like to stay with one who strongly follows these four principles. You obey the *niyams* and the degree to which you follow the *niyams*, then we are together.”

7 September: Satsang Sabha (Rajasthan Satsang Mandal)

Today marked the celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi. A *murti* of Ganeshji was ritually installed in the *abhishek mandap*. Swamishri did darshan and touched the feet of Ganeshji.

A special evening satsang assembly was dedicated for devotees with their roots in Rajasthan. Children welcomed Swamishri with a traditional dance. Then, dramas were enacted in Hindi and Marwadi languages. Swamishri and the audience appreciated the performances. Thereafter, Himatbhai Chaudhary gave a glimpse in his speech about how satsang has touched the lives of Rajasthani people.

In conclusion, Swamishri explained the glory of satsang, “You are all doing satsang in a strong, spirited fashion. Hold on to satsang in this way and progress. Understand that satsang is genuine by believing that Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and Guru Parampara are all genuine. Also, *niyam*-dharma are true and you all *satsangis* are genuine.”

12 September: Bal-Balika Karyakar Day

The evening assembly theme was ‘Jivishu Apne Kaje, Mahantji Apna Thaine’. Two dramas portrayed how *bal* and *balika karyakars* do satsang



During Jal Jhilani festival Swamishri manoeuvres the boat with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj by remote control, Mumbai

seva with *mahima* and joy in spite of difficult situations and busy schedules.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, “You have to progress and not be tied down anywhere. To do this you must never think what the Sanstha will do for you, but what you can do for the Sanstha. Do *seva* with loyalty, properly and with passion. Then you will progress and experience happiness and enthusiasm.”

13 September: Mahant Swami Maharaj's 91st Birthday Celebration (English Calendar)

According to the English calendar today marked Mahant Swami Maharaj's 91st birthday. The mandir in Dadar was beautifully decked for the celebration and devotees flocked in large number for *guruhari's* darshan.

On the stage of the Yogi Sabha Gruh an *annakut* was arranged before Thakorji to celebrate the occasion. Swamishri gave puja darshan to all. Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami honoured Swamishri with a flower garland. Swamis too offered garlands and shawls prepared by devotees from India and abroad.

14 September: Jal Jhilani Festival

Swamishri arrived to perform his morning puja at the Yogi Sabha Gruh. The *murtis* of Ganapatiji and Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were installed during Swamishri's puja. A large rectangular water body had been set up on the stage. Jabreshwar Maharaj (Thakorji) and graphic *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were installed in two remote controlled boats. During puja, swamis and youths sang bhajans interspersed with the waving of four *artis* of Ganapatiji and Thakorji.

After puja, Swamishri operated the remote controlled boat with the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Then, Swamishri, Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, senior swamis and devotees performed the fifth and final *arti*. Thereafter, Swamishri performed *pujan* of the three *murtis* of Ganapatiji, which was then followed by the vibrant singing of ‘Ganapati Bapa Moriya...’. Thereafter, the *murtis* of Ganapatiji were immersed in the water body.

Finally, Swamishri blessed, “Shriji Maharaj spoke in Methan village, ‘Do not eat [even] *falahar* on three *ekadashis*: Dev Podhi, Dev Uthi and Jal Jhilani. Remain awake all night and do bhajan.’



On Bal Din, 152 *balaks* and *bal karyakars* present an impressive ballet-cum-drama on 'My True Identity' based on 'Sheru'

Though it is difficult to observe, one should make an effort to follow this. Fasting on *ekadashi* is the best among all austerities. One should at least observe *ekadashi*."

16 September: Bal Din

After two months of practice, 152 *balaks* and *bal karyakars* presented an impressive ballet-cum-drama on 'My True Identity' based on 'Sheru' (performed during Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations in 2022–23). Swamishri and the audience generously appreciated the *balaks* and *karyakars* with thunderous claps.

Swamishri blessed, "Our true identity is 'Aksharam aham Purushottam dāsosmi'. You are *akshar* and the servants of Purushottam. Like the lion who realized its true identity and roared, you are not the body but *atma* and *akshar*. We must all consolidate this belief firmly within ourselves, and then remain forever strong at heart. Never believe we are timid like sheep, but we are like lions. With this understanding and identity, do satsang."

Eighty-five *bal-balikas* memorized Satsang Diksha in Sanskrit, out of which 23 *bal-balikas* are studying Siddhant Sanskrutam, an online BAPS

course. Furthermore, 1,251 *bal-balikas* registered for memorizing Satsang Diksha.

Finally, Swamishri inaugurated an Aksharpith print publication 'Suvarna: The Secrets of the Sea.'

18 September: Gramya Din

In the evening assembly, a report about satsang in the Mumbai rural (*gramya*) region was presented before Swamishri. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed all the main devotees of the rural villages and towns. Finally, Swamishri blessed, "I am happy to learn that satsang is flourishing in the regions of Dahanu, Palghar, Goa and Konkan. If one has understood the glory and importance of satsang then it will remain in you in spite of problems and difficulties. When people understand the value of money they strive for it rigorously. Similarly, such efforts must be made for satsang."

September 19: Youth Day

In the evening Youth Day assembly, a drama titled 'Therefore Remain Vigilant' was enacted by youths. Then, on the basis of a youth's prayer Swamishri blessed, "The spiritual attainment (*prapti*) we have gained is invaluable. A Kohinoor

diamond cannot be kept lying anywhere other than in a safe. Likewise, *prapti* cannot be left alone or thrown around anywhere. There must be limits and protocols to respect it. Similarly, the limits for devotees mean observing *stri-purush maryada*.

“Shriji Maharaj and all gurus have prescribed restraints for us. We (sadhus) have renounced wealth and women, whereas you (householders) have to remain faithful to your spouse with the understanding that all other women are like mothers, sisters or daughters.

“Use mobile phones with proper discretion (*vivek*). Use them only when necessary and do not speak an extra word. Pramukh Swami used to often say that they are like poison. Don’t look at them, however when the need arises use them judiciously. Do not say one word that is extra or unnecessary.”

September 20: Satsang Sabha

The evening assembly was dedicated to devotees of Nagpur, Bangalore (Karnataka), and towns in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Orissa. Reports were presented about the satsang activities in these regions. Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj had tirelessly travelled for satsang in these states and cities. Thereafter, youths, dressed in South Indian attire, performed a wonderful devotional dance.

Finally, Swamishri spoke about the value and importance of satsang.

September 21: Shastriji Maharaj Smruti Parva

The evening assembly paid tributes to Shastriji Maharaj. Swamishri entered the assembly wearing a *pagh* similar to what Shastriji Maharaj used to wear. Two dramas depicting the faith of two dedicated devotees of Shastriji Maharaj, Keshavlal Shukla of Umreth and Hira Mukhi of Bocharan, were enacted.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, “Whenever we talk about Shastriji Maharaj one experiences

immense joy. We all become spiritually charged because the spirit of Akshar-Purushottam oozed from every pore of his body. He strived unceasingly for *upasana* and to experience its fruits you have to strongly adhere to Shriji Maharaj’s instructions and *dharma-niyams*.”

Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami performed *pujan* of Swamishri. Then, Swamishri offered *dudhpak* to Thakorji and performed *arti*.

September 24: Satsang Sabha

In the evening assembly, devotees from Nasik and Dhuliya (Khandesh) were present. After a traditional dance by children, the history of how satsang started and flourished from the time of Shriji Maharaj to Mahant Swami Maharaj was narrated. Swamishri then blessed the prayer letters written by devotees of Khandesh. Swamishri wrote in Marathi, ‘Akshar kâle, sankat tâle’, meaning, ‘When one understands Akshar then all problems and *swabhavs* will be overcome.’

Then, members of Nasik satsang mandal performed a drama, ‘Prapti Divya Mandir Ki’. Thereafter, children and youths performed a joyous drama. Then, Swamishri blessed, “Purna Purushottam Narayan and Gunatitanand Swami have been installed in Nasik mandir. Mandirs immensely benefit all. Children and youths are taught values. By doing satsang you will experience lots of joy and be able to sit at Shriji Maharaj’s holy feet.” Swamishri then blessed the prayer letters written by the devotees of Nasik. In conclusion, a garland of prayer letters written by devotees of Khandesh was offered to Swamishri.

Murti-Pratishtha Rituals

The *murti-pratishtha* rituals of mandirs performed by Swamishri at Dadar mandir were as follows: Goregaon (Mumbai), Samudraal (new *murtis*), Jabalpur, Shindi (Khandesh), Mangrul (Khandesh) and Thane (Mumbai). ◆

Translation by Sadhu Vivekji vandas from a concise Gujarati report by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas



HH Mahant Swami Maharaj's 91st Birthday Celebration

26 September 2024, Mumbai

On 26 September 2024, the 91st birthday celebration of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj was celebrated with profound devotion and grandeur at NESCO, Goregaon, Mumbai. Today, also marked the Smruti Parva of Shriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The spiritual programme commenced at 5 p.m. It was themed on the saintly virtues of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, namely, *parabhakti* (unparalleled devotion to God), *bhaktavatsalta* (love for devotees and all humanity), *seva parayanta* (service) and *aham-shunyata* (egolessness). The celebration assembly programme included speeches, thematic dances and videos.

To offer heartfelt tributes to Mahant Swami Maharaj more than 400 sadhus and 31,000 devotees from across India and abroad had assembled for the celebration event.

The celebration assembly commenced with the devotional singing of prayers, which was followed by discourses and speeches by senior swamis.

In his address, Jnannayan Swami highlighted the extraordinary works of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and how his divine presence continues to manifest today through his Gunatit

sadhu. He stated that the birth anniversary of Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj is a sacred opportunity to experience the presence of God.

Narayanmuni Swami emphasized the unparalleled devotion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, while Bhagvatsetu Swami spoke about the unwavering devotion and discipline inherent in Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Pujya Viveksagar Swami elaborated upon Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine love for the devotees and all of humanity. Thereafter, Adarshjivan Swami reflected on the infinite love and affection of Mahant Swami Maharaj for all the devotees and humanity at large.

Brahmavihari Swami and Atmatrupt Swami highlighted the selfless services and charitable works of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, respectively. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami spoke about Mahant Swami Maharaj's divine impact upon the volunteers who completed the Akshardham Mahamandir in Robbinsville, NJ. Thereafter, Pujya Anandswarup Swami discoursed on the humility and egolessness of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

In his address, Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami

explained about Mahant Swami Maharaj's humility (*dasbhav*) and dedication to the welfare and uplift of humanity.

Special guest, Shri Devendra Fadnavis, Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra, opined, "Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj is a global spiritual leader of immense stature. I consider myself extremely fortunate to be present here and receive Mahant Swamiji's blessings. BAPS spreads our culture in a constructive and positive manner across the world. Our temple in Abu Dhabi is a living testament to this. I am confident that BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha will play a vital role in spreading peace and happiness in the world. A special attribute of our dharma and culture is that we have won over the world through our thoughts and ideas and not by the sword or violence."

Dignitaries present on the stage included Shri Mangal Prabhat Lodha, Minister of Tourism, Skills, Employment, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Govt of Maharashtra, and Shri Krishna Patel, Chief Managing Director, NESCO Ltd. Shri Krishnabhai Patel made great efforts in urgently preparing the hall for the celebration.

The *sadguru* and senior sadhus offered flower garlands to honour Mahant Swami Maharaj, while youths and children performed a thrilling, traditional dance. The assembly concluded with the collective offering of *arti* by 31,000 devotees. The event concluded with the *mantra-pushpanjali*

ritual to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The celebration concluded with Mahant Swami Maharaj's blessings, "Today marks the *smruti parvas* (celebration to pay tributes) of Shriji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. There is no greater happiness than having attained Shriji Maharaj. The infinite *brahmands* are of no significance to him, yet Maharaj has taken us into consideration. Oh, how great is his grace! Shriji Maharaj has always remained on earth through the Gunatit Satpurush and will always do so. Through them he will liberate all.

"Pramukh Swami Maharaj had pleased everyone and always remained happy. He accomplished his work but now what remains for us to do. We should do bhakti, bhajan and *seva*; and importantly strictly abide by dharma-*niyams* which are the means to please him. Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, 'My words are my form.' Thereafter, absolute obedience to his *niyam*-dharma is the means to gain his pleasure (*prasannata*)."

Swamishri inaugurated a YouTube, BAPS Kirtan Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@BAPSKirtanChannel>).

Thousands of devotees who were not present witnessed the enlightening three-and-a-half hour celebration assembly through a live broadcast on live.baps.org and Aastha Bhajan channel. ♦

Devotion of Young and Old Devotees of Mumbai to Celebrate Mahant Swami Maharaj's 91st Birthday

Leading upto Mahant Swami Maharaj's 91st birthday devotees of Mumbai observed austerities and bhakti rituals to please him and wish him long-lasting good health. They had observed austerities like *chandrayan*, *dharna-parna*, Bhagatji *vrat*, waterless or liquid fasts and pilgrimaged by foot to Dadar mandir. In addition, many chanted the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*, perceiving and

singing others' virtues and pilgrimaging by foot while reciting Satsang Diksha.

For Swamishri's good health, 518 *bal-balikas* observed serial fasts, 714 (*bal-balikas*) gave up mobile phones, TV and video games (till the birthday celebration) and 679 *bal-balikas* daily read the entire Satsang Diksha. ♦

Mahant Swami Maharaj Consecrates Grand 49-Foot-High Murti of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj

11 November 2024, Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar

In 1992, 32 years ago, Pramukh Swami Maharaj gifted the divine and grand Swaminarayan Akshardham to Gandhinagar, which portrays Indian culture and Sanatan Dharma. Today, on 11 November 2024 (Kartik *sud* 10), the consecration



ceremony of the 49-foot-high *panchdhatu murti* of the ascetic form of Shri Nilkanth Varni (teenage form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan), was held at Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar at the hands of Mahant Swami Maharaj. *Sadguru* swamis, Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami, and the mahant of Akshardham Pujya Anandswarup Swami performed the preliminary consecration rituals.

A *yagna* was held at the Akshardham complex from 5:30 to 7:30 a.m. in which 3,000 male and female devotees participated. Shrutiprakash Swami conducted the entire *yagna* and consecration rituals.

At 8:30 a.m., Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj commenced the final consecration ceremony by performing *abhishek* with the sacred waters collected from 550 holy rivers and *kunds* (water bodies), including, the four Dhams, 5 Kedars, 5 Lakes, 7 Puris, 7 Badris, 7 Kshetras, 8 Vinayak pilgrim places, 12 Sangams, 51 Shakti Piths, 6 mandirs by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, 5 mandirs by Shastriji Maharaj, all mandirs consecrated by BAPS gurus and others. Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *nyas* rituals by

touching the head, mouth, throat, heart and other parts of the *murti* while mantras were being chanted. Thereafter, *pujan* and *arti* were performed, and *thal* was offered. Prayers for peace were also offered. Finally, the *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual was performed

with showers of rose petals over the *murti* from a drone.

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, who was instrumental in the entire project, said, "At the age of 11, Nilkanth Varni Maharaj left his home and journeyed across India. For the welfare of spiritual aspirants, he undertook severe austerities and travelled for seven years, enduring extreme hardships. This *murti* serves as an enduring reminder of his intense austerities and compassion for humanity. The *murti* of Nilkanth Varni has been installed by the wish and blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj."

Finally, blessing the occasion Mahant Swami Maharaj said, "The sight of this magnificent ascetic *murti* brings calmness to the mind and draws one's heart towards it. Bhagwan Swaminarayan resided in the Himalayas for many months, surviving only on air. With a resolve for the welfare of all beings, Nilkanth Varni Maharaj performed unimaginable austerities and travelled selflessly for the good and liberation of countless people. May Nilkanth Varni fulfil everyone's aspirations and all be inspired to perform austerities. My heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has served here, and I pray for the happiness of all." ♦



INDIA

YUVAK-YUVATI PARAYANS: 'SHRI HARILILAMRUTAM'

12 August to 15 September 2024



During the holy months of Chaturmas, thousands of *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* participated in the Yuva Parayans held throughout Gujarat and other states of India.

Using the content prepared by the Satsang Pravutti Central Office (SPCO) in Ahmedabad, the three-day *parayans* were conducted by over 900 *yuvak* and 1,200 *yuvati mandals*.

This year, the *parayans* were conducted on selected chapters of the Shri Harililamrut shastra. Based on the inspiring stories of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine exploits and the lives of his devotees, the youths learnt about cultivating *nishtha*, observing *niyams* and dharma, and strengthening harmony and fraternity.

The daily programmes included discourses by youths, dramas and videos.

YUVAK ANTAR JAGRUTI PARVA

24 September to 3 October 2024

The 197 trainee youths of the second Yuva Talim Kendra (YTK) batch of 2024 split up into 48 groups of four to travel to various regions across Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan to



participate in the Antar Jagruti Parva (Inner Awakening Programme).

The youths travelled to 464 villages, where they contacted 6,197 households. During these visits, they spoke about the importance of satsang values and inspired 4,476 families to take different vows to help nurture their spirituality. This included attending weekly satsang assemblies, doing daily puja, going to their local mandir for darshan, reading Swamini Vato and Vachanamrut regularly, fasting on *ekadashi*, doing *ghar sabha* regularly, and other such satsang rituals and practices.

During their visits, they held a total of 417 satsang assemblies, during which over 21,625 people enjoyed their speeches and bhajans. They also held 171 assemblies for children, and 317 school assemblies, providing guidance to over 57,165 children. In the evenings, the *yuvaks* held special devotional processions through the villages, in which more than 4,600 people participated. They also inspired 1,300 people to give up various addictions.

VISHWASHANTI MAHAYAGNA

12 October 2024, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi

On the auspicious occasion of Vijaya Dashami (Dussehra), about 2,000 devotees, including 900 couples, participated in the Vishwashanti

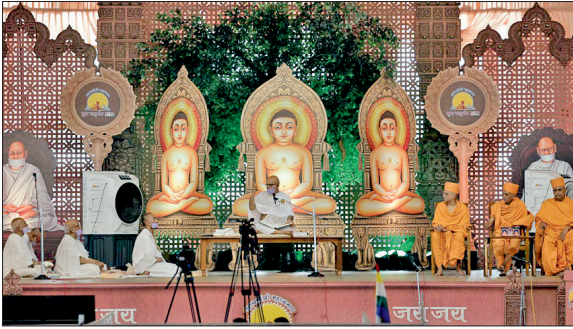


Mahayagna at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, offering prayers for world peace.

Seated around 114 specially prepared *yagna kunds*, the devotees chanted sacred Vedic mantras and made traditional offerings. Recitation of the 315 verses of the Satsang Diksha shastra further enriched the spiritual atmosphere.

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE WITH HIS HOLINESS ACHARYA MAHASHRAMANJI

18 October 2024, Surat



Over 3,000 people gathered at Bhagwan Mahavir University in Surat for a special event in the presence of His Holiness Acharya Mahashramanji as part of the four-month long Surat Chaturmas 2024 celebrations organized by the Jain Shwetambar Terapanth sect.

Representing His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj and BAPS at this spiritually enriching event were Narayanmuni Swami and 28 swamis and devotees from the BAPS Mandir in Surat. The gathering provided a platform to foster interfaith harmony, dialogue, understanding, and shared values to nurture deeper connections between communities.

His Holiness Acharya Mahashramanji, the Eleventh Acharya of the Jain Terapanth Religious Order, has inspired millions through his teachings on non-violence, compassion, de-addiction, and self-discipline. During the special meeting, Acharya Mahashramanji shared divine memories of his guru, Acharya Shri Mahapragya, and His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and the long-standing bond between the Jain Terapanth and BAPS Swaminarayan traditions.

In the assembly, Narayanmuni Swami delivered a heartfelt address, sharing insights on interfaith harmony and universal peace, drawing from the Vachanamrut, and the teachings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. During the event, a letter from His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj was read out, conveying his prayers and best wishes to His Holiness Acharya Mahashramanji.

HOME MINISTER SHRI AMIT SHAH VISITS PRAMUKH SWAMI SMRUTI MANDIR

31 October 2024, Sarangpur



India's Home Minister Shri Amit Shah was welcomed to the BAPS Mandir in Sarangpur by Narayanmuni Swami and Brahmavihari Swami. After meeting other senior saints, he went to the Pramukh Swami Smruti Mandir for darshan and prayer. Here, he recalled his affectionate memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and offered heartfelt prayers for India's progress, security and well-being.

During his stay, he also visited the Sant Training Centre, where he met and conversed with swamis currently undergoing training.

DIPLOMATS DELIGHTED BY ANNAKUT DARSHAN

1 November 2024, BAPS Mandir, Mumbai



A distinguished group of diplomats representing various countries visited the BAPS Mandir in Dadar, Mumbai, with their families for darshan of the New Year's Day *annakut* offered at the mandir. The visit was organized by the Honorary Consul of the Republic of Djibouti in collaboration with BAPS.

The distinguished guests included the High Commissioners of the UK, Ghana and Nicaragua; the Consuls General of Sweden, China, Indonesia, Belarus, Chile, Sri Lanka, Hungary; and Chief of Protocol, Maharashtra.

After a traditional welcome, the diplomats had the darshan of the 1,700 vegetarian food items offered in the *annakut* to the deities and then participated in the *arti* ritual.

The guests were genuinely mesmerized by the experience, expressing that they had never before felt such positive energy and serenity. For many, this was also their first true realization of the richness and diversity that vegetarian cuisine has to offer, extending far beyond the typical salads.

The guests left with cherished memories and a renewed outlook on the beauty of Indian traditions.

UK & EUROPE

SATSANG DIKSHA MUKHPATH SANMAN MAHOTSAV

3 August 2024, London

A special felicitation assembly for children



from across the UK and Europe who had memorized the Satsang Diksha in Sanskrit was organized in the presence of Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami.

Hundreds of children aged between 3 and 14 joined 'The Mukhpath Marvels Club' – an online learning programme – from 14 March 2023 to 31 July 2024. Swamis conducted the course weekly to teach and prepare children for the *mukhpath*. *Sadguru* and senior learned swamis also provided regular encouragement. So far, 44 children have successfully memorized all 315 Sanskrit verses.

Prior to the evening programme, a special online session was held with Mahant Swami Maharaj from Bochasan, India, in which *balaks* presented recitations and received personal guidance.

Thereafter, the *balaks* and *balikas* performed a grand Homatmak Yagna, a special ceremony in which sanctified grains were offered to a sacred fire while reciting all 315 Sanskrit verses of the Satsang Diksha. They were joined by parents, swamis, and well-wishers.

The grand celebration in the evening included a recitation of selected verses by the young scholars, enlightening presentations by swamis, and interactive discourses from the children.

The children and their parents were appropriately congratulated and felicitated. They also received mementoes to mark their historic achievement.

BAPS ANNUAL CHARITY CHALLENGE

4 August 2024, UK

Over 3,000 people of all ages and backgrounds



from BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu mandirs and centres around the UK participated in the BAPS Annual Charity Challenge.

In the 10K Annual Challenge participants complete a 10 km walk, jog, or run to raise funds for a variety of worthy causes. The centre in South London also held an additional Static Bike Challenge in which riders participated to help provide vital support to two local charities.

KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIR: 'GURU BHAKTI: OUR LIFE'

16–18 August 2024, Warwick Conference Park



Over 500 youngsters from across the UK and Europe attended the three-day Kishore-Kishori Shibir. Themed 'Guru bhakti: Our Life', the *shibir* helped participants to understand the significance of a guru in their lives and practice guru bhakti, following the example set by Mahant Swami Maharaj, particularly his reflections upon Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The *shibir* featured a captivating musical production illustrating Mahant Swami Maharaj's journey of unwavering devotion to guru Yogiji Maharaj, interviews with swamis on their

experiences with Mahant Swami Maharaj, presentations by swamis and experts, group discussions, question-answer sessions, an exciting guru bhakti-themed treasure hunt around the Warwick University campus, a kirtan bhakti performance by swamis, and video blessings from Mahant Swami Maharaj.

SANYUKTA MANDAL SHIBIR: 'MARU KARTAVYA: THE LEGACY CONTINUES'

16–18 & 25–27 August 2024, Warwick Conference Park



A total of over 1,700 delegates from the UK and Europe attended the two 3-day Sanyukta Mandal Shibirs.

Titled 'Maru Kartavya: The Legacy Continues', the *shibirs* strengthened their understanding of Mahant Swami Maharaj's spiritual work, wisdom and virtues.

The *shibirs* featured insights into the virtues of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj through narrations, interviews, speeches and videos and a lively kirtan bhakti performance. Delegates also gained a deeper understanding of Mahant Swami Maharaj's tireless work in driving satsang activities worldwide.

The *shibirs* gave everyone a clearer understanding of their duty as devotees to forge an unwavering spiritual bond with God and guru.

YUVAK-YUVATI SHIBIR: 'EKANTIK: THE TRUE PATH'

23–25 August 2024, Warwick Conference Park

Over 730 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from across the



UK and Europe participated in the *shibir* themed, 'Ekantik: The True Path'.

The *shibir* inspired the youths to deeply understand the concept of *ekantik dharma* and that walking the *ekantik* path requires unwavering commitment, discipline and courage. The *shibir* emphasized that through a strong connection (*jodan*) with the Param Ekantik Satpurush, Mahant Swami Maharaj, one can successfully navigate this path, attain the *ekantik* state, and ultimately experience the bliss of Akshardham.

The *shibir* featured lively panel discussions with swamis, an exciting interactive game session, presentations, videos, interviews, dramas and a kirtan *aradhana*.

In a special video blessing from Mahant Swami Maharaj, he emphasized, "The Satpurush is the true path."

BAL-BALIKA SHIBIR: 'MISSION JODAN'

25–27 August 2024, Warwick Conference Park



Around 400 children aged 8 to 13 years from across the UK and Europe attended the three-day *shibir* to enhance their understanding and application of core Satsang principles.

Conveyed through a thrilling special agent-themed theatre production interwoven with engaging spiritual talks by swamis, vibrant musicals, uplifting presentations and interactive classroom sessions, each delegate was tasked with a 'secret mission' to establish *jodan* (a strong spiritual connection) with guru Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The insightful messages used to explain how to fulfil that mission focussed on three key facets: Man (Mind) – Developing a deeper understanding of Mahant Swami Maharaj through his work and virtues, and doing constant *smruti*. Karma (Actions) – Following the guru's instructions with pride will enable one to become strong, responsible and spiritually aligned. Vachan (Speech) – Speaking positively to others and always seeing the good in everyone. Also, sharing *prasangs* about Mahant Swami Maharaj strengthens one's own faith and inspires others.

All this helps one to imbibe the virtues of the Satpurush and happiness.

The *shibir* also featured group discussions and classroom sessions, fun activity-based learning and a vibrant kirtan bhakti programme by swamis and youths.

OPEN HOUSE FESTIVAL

14–15 September 2024, BAPS Mandir, London



Popularly known as Neasden Temple, the BAPS Mandir in London welcomed more than 1,200 architecture and culture enthusiasts as part of the mandir's continued participation in the Open House Festival, an annual London-wide festival that opens up and celebrates the capital's

architecture, special places and neighbourhoods, with free open days and events held across all 33 London boroughs.

Volunteers provided guided walkthroughs, explaining the mandir's architecture, history, religious significance and its contributions to the wider community.

Guests also toured the 'Understanding Hinduism' exhibition on Hindu beliefs, values and practices. Visitors also witnessed the *arti* ceremonies during the day.

Visitor experiences:

"Exceeded expectations! The site itself was immaculate and looks newly built. Volunteers were enthusiastic and welcoming, and I felt like we could access everywhere and ask as many questions as we wanted."

- A. Phillips, Doctor

"Very lovely, informative, extremely welcoming and kind. Beautifully decorated and I will definitely visit here again."

- Shakana, Aerialist

"It was wonderful. Spiritually rewarding!"

- N.M. Cathmhaoil, University Lecturer

"We had a wonderful day and felt so welcomed."

- M. Collier, Teacher

NORTH AMERICA

BAPS PARTICIPATES IN UNITED NATIONS SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE

20–23 September 2024, New York, NY



Eight BAPS delegates attended the United Nations Summit of the Future held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. The

Summit united leaders and stakeholders from 193 countries in dialogue on a broad range of global issues to foster mutual trust and cooperation.

This year, the Summit took place in two phases. During the first two days, dubbed 'Action Days', BAPS delegates joined more than 7,000 representatives from NGOs, academia, youth organizations, and other stakeholders in a discussion on three key themes: digital and technology, peace and security, and sustainable development and financing. In addition to these general themes, there was a dedicated focus on future generations led entirely by youth.

Following the Action Days, the Summit culminated in the adoption of the Pact for the Future, an inter-governmentally negotiated, action-oriented pact between the UN member states. The Pact for the Future featured five main themes: (1) sustainable development and financing for development; (2) international peace and security; (3) science, technology, innovation, and a global digital compact; (4) youth and future generations; and (5) a more equitable, inclusive, and effective global governance.

CONSULS GENERAL VISIT BAPS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

8 October 2024, Robbinsville, NJ



To commemorate the first anniversary of the inauguration of BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, New Jersey, 14 Consuls General from the Society of Foreign Consuls of New York, attended the gathering hosted by the Deputy Consul General of India, Dr

Varun Jeph, and the Consul General of Malaysia, Amir Farid Abu Hasan.

The event began with a warm welcome from Township of Robbinsville Council President Mike Todd, who acknowledged the significant impact BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham has had on the local and global community.

A moving video presentation followed, showcasing the global contributions of BAPS under the spiritual guidance of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The highlight of the event was a special ritual inside BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham in which the Consuls General and their teams offered prayers for world peace and unity. Then, the Consuls General toured Swaminarayan Akshardham, guided by volunteers who shared the architectural, cultural, and spiritual significance of the site.

Before departing, the Consuls General expressed their admiration for BAPS's work and the values embedded in BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham.

DIWALI FOR DIPLOMATS

17 October 2024, BAPS Mandir, Los Angeles, CA



Consuls General, diplomats and staff representing over 15 countries – United States of America, St. Vincent & Grenadines, Peru, Hungary, Switzerland, Poland, Slovakia, Armenia, Kenya, Togo, India, Cambodia, Indonesia, The Philippines, Palau and Fiji – attended the ‘Diwali for Diplomats’ organized to promote

Mahant Swami Maharaj’s vision: “In the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, let’s reach out and expand the circle of global harmony.”

Diplomats were greeted by volunteers in a traditional manner with garlands, live traditional Indian music and refreshments. Then, each delegation was taken on a tour of the Mandir, where they learned about Hindu architecture, and the history and significance of the Mandir.

Following the tour, guests attended a Diwali Gala programme in the Haveli which featured guest speakers, a keynote address by Brahmaviharidas Swami and a delicious vegetarian meal.

The programme concluded with remarks from Deputy Consul General of India in San Francisco, Mr. Rakesh Adlakha, “These events help us understand each other, our cultures, and our countries better. And these understandings go a long way in fostering harmony and unity. I welcome all of you to celebrate this wonderful festival of lights.”

ASIA PACIFIC

BAL-BALIKA SHIBIRS: ‘MY AKSHARDHAM, MY HOME: LET’S BUILD IT TOGETHER’

15 July to 22 September 2024, Australia & New Zealand



Over 1,180 *balaks* and *balikas* participated in the Bal-Balika Shibirs held in Adelaide, Auckland, Brisbane, Christchurch, Melbourne, Melbourne South, Perth, Sydney, Suva (Fiji) and Wellington.

The theme, ‘My Akshardham, My Home: Let’s Build It Together’, was based on Mahant

Swami Maharaj's vision for the devotees of the Asia Pacific region to build a grand Akshardham in Melbourne, Australia. The *shibirs* focused on what *balaks* and *balikas* can do personally in their own homes to help make this vision a reality.

The *shibirs* elaborated on four main topics: Guru Sankalp & Mahima, Seva, Samp, and Niyam-Dharma. The children learnt how each of these four pillars is critical to not only building the physical Akshardham, but also to building an Akshardham within themselves.

Each session included insightful talks by BAPS swamis, group discussions and fun activities to explain the meaning and practical implementation of each pillar. The sessions highlighted the importance of *samp* (teamwork) in completing any task, benefits of selfless service, and importance of following *niyams* (codes of conduct).

The *shibirs* guided the *balaks* and *balikas* on how to grow spiritually, learn about themselves, and connect with others.

INDIAN MINISTER PIYUSH GOYAL VISITS BAPS MANDIR

23 September 2024, Sydney, Australia



India's Minister for Commerce and Industry, Honorable Piyush Goyal visited the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sydney during his trip to Australia.

This was the minister's second visit to the mandir, during which he said, "I invited myself before anybody else could," underscoring the warmth he feels from the BAPS community. His visit also celebrated the growing India-Australia

relations, and the shared values of community spirit and cultural harmony.

Among the high-ranking dignitaries present were Dr Andrew Charlton, Federal Member for Parramatta; Mr Gopal Bagalay, High Commissioner of India to Australia; Dr S. Janakiraman, Consul General of India; and Warren Kirby, State Member for Riverstone. Dr Charlton welcomed the minister on behalf of the local community and highlighted the remarkable contributions of BAPS to the social and spiritual fabric of the region. He also noted that September 2024 marked 40 years since Pramukh Swami Maharaj's first visit to Australia in 1984.

The evening featured children reciting Sanskrit verses for universal harmony and youths offering prayers for peace and prosperity.

Reflecting on his enduring relationship with BAPS, Minister Goyal fondly recalled his personal experiences and 'happy coincidences', such as his impromptu participation in the opening of the traditional BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir in London in August 1995. He remarked, "I suspect no other Indian ministers, except Prime Minister Modi himself, have been privileged to visit as many Swaminarayan temples across the world as I have."

The occasion reflected the deep bonds that unite BAPS with local communities worldwide.

INAUGURATION OF NEW BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

19–20 October 2024, Berri, Australia



Many devotees, dignitaries, and local

community members gathered to witness the opening of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir in Berri, South Australia. Amongst the dignitaries present were Ian Schlein, Councilor of the Berri Barmera Council; Andrew Haigh, Berri Barmera Council; Councilor Jagdish Lakhani, City of Campbell town; and Councilor Surendar Chahal, City of West Torrens.

The celebrations included a vibrant and colorful *nagar yatra* (procession) of the *murtis* through the streets of Berri, drawing onlookers from across the region.

Paramchintan Swami and other BAPS swamis

performed the sacred Vedic rituals to mark the mandir opening. Devotees also participated in a grand puja to offer their devotion to the newly installed *murtis*, seeking blessings for peace, prosperity, and spiritual upliftment. The celebration assembly also featured devotional songs, traditional dances, and other cultural performances reflecting the rich heritage of Hinduism.

Previously, on 22 May 2024, in Sarangpur, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj had performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis*.



(Cont. from p. 35)

Initially, he was assigned to serve in Nani Vahiya-Barfata Falia in Dharampur. This village was 43 km away from his home in Valsad. Riding on Pramodbhai's scooter, Shankarbhai started going to Nani Vahiya every Saturday, contacting each household. Here, alcohol was made in every home. Every household consumed chicken or goat meat. People would even sell their land to buy alcohol and meat. There were fights every night. Involving people in satsang here was as difficult as growing roses in a desert.

Ramanbhai, Gulabbhai and others from this village were fully involved in alcohol, meat, theft, looting, and other bad habits. Until now, whoever had come to reform these villagers had been beaten and driven away.

Once, Ramanbhai decided they would teach Shankarbhai a lesson so that he wouldn't come back to hold a *sabha* again. In the *sabha*, Shankarbhai began his discourse in the Adivasi language. Ramanbhai and his associates came there, after having consumed alcohol. From afar, they heard Shankarbhai speaking in their local language. They listened to some of the satsang talks and felt something special. They abandoned

the idea of beating him. To verify if what Shankarbhai was saying was true, they decided to visit the mandir. At that time, there was no mandir in Tithal, so the whole group went to the Navsari mandir. They thought it might be a small shrine, but seeing the grand and divine mandir, everyone was amazed. Acharya Swami and the swamis welcomed them lovingly and treated them hospitably. Everyone also received a *kanthi* from the swamis.

Those who had planned to beat Shankarbhai invited him to their homes a week later. Everyone started attending the satsang meetings. They gave up addictions and vices and became *satsangis*. Seeing the transformation of Ramanbhai and others, satsang spread to nearby villages as well.

Despite financial and other constraints, Shankarbhai would go to conduct *sabhas* by bus and would stay overnight in whichever village he was in.

The Adivasi villagers found Shankarbhai's discourses so interesting that they would often request him to discourse until 12 at night. Gradually, the number of satsang centres in the Dharampur area increased to 33, which Shankarbhai sincerely oversees.





Swamishri inaugurates a new wing of the BAPS Jnanjivandas Gurukul in Gondal (18 October 2024).
Inset: Students seated in the gurukul grounds during the inauguration.



Consuls General representing 14 countries attended the first anniversary celebration of Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, New Jersey (8 October 2024).



**MURTI-PRATISHTHA OF
TAPOMURTI SHRI NILKANTH VARNI
11 November 2024
Swaminarayan Akshardham,
Gandhinagar**

Swamishri and senior swamis on the
plinth of the 49-foot-high Tapomurti
Nilkanth Varni.

*Inset: 1. Swamishri performs the
murti-pratishtha rituals.
2. Devotees seated in the
murti-pratishtha assembly.*

