

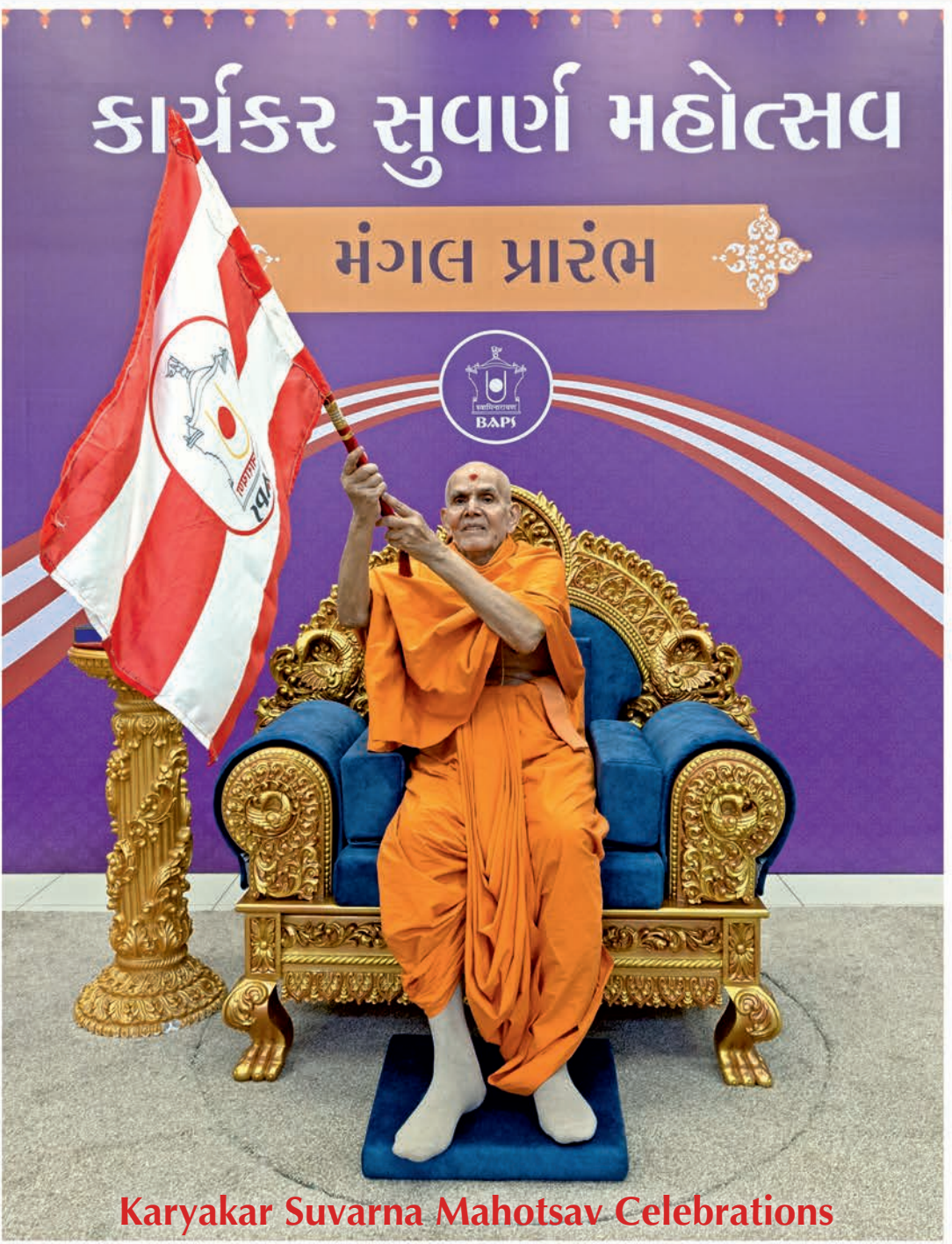
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September-October 2024

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Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav Celebrations

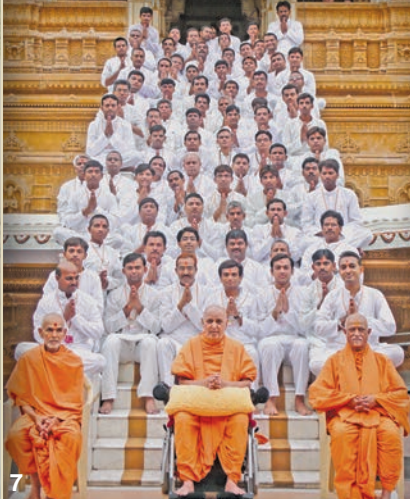
Launched on 28 January 2024, Surat



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ AT SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM, NEW DELHI

Swamishri was joyously welcomed on the *shikharbadhha* mandir podium by thousands of cheering devotees and youths dancing to celebratory bhajans and music (13 August 2024).

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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.



Arrangements for Running the Mandirs

The mandir construction in Gadhpur had begun in earnest. Maharaj blessed Narayanji Suthar for the construction work. Soon, devotees from Junagadh and Dholera came and prayed to Shri Hari to construct mandirs in their towns...

It was the month of July 1825 (the beginning of A.S.1882) and Jhinabhai Darbar (Thakor of Panchala) came to Gadhpur. Shri Hari told him, “Now that you have come, you might as well stay here to celebrate Janmashtami and other festivals with me.

Jhinabhai folded his hands and said, “Maharaj, there is one wish I have. You have made and consecrated mandirs in Ahmedabad, Bhuj and Vartal. Also, build a mandir in Junagadh so that satsang in the Sorath region can flourish. The pious cannot worship Bhagwan without a place of worship.”

Shri Hari was pleased to know about his sublime wish and deep desire. Then, Jhinabhai added, “Maharaj, I will donate the land of my home (*darbar*) and if more is required I will donate my nearby farmland.”

BRAHMANAND IS AN EXPERT IN ALL ARTS

Shri Hari replied, “Junagadh is under Muslim (Nawabi) rule and there are Nagars (Brahmins)

who are not favourable towards us. So, the mandir can be built only if we send Brahmanand Swami.”

Jhinabhai Thakor spoke, “Then Maharaj send Swami. I and others will assist and serve him in all ways.” Shri Hari smiled and remarked, “Bapu, I recently relieved him from building mandirs. He built a mandir in Vartal, however, during that period all his activities related to writing bhajans and other things had stopped. The Sampradaya will flourish with the creation of literature about the life and work of one’s own God. Brahmanand Swami is an expert in that.”

Instantly Jhinabhai replied, “Maharaj, he is an expert in all the arts.” Shri Hari responded, “That’s the problem and so he is needed everywhere for all types of tasks.”

Jhinabhai gently argued, “Maharaj, satsang will grow after the mandir is completed.” Shri Hari remained quiet for a while. Then he spoke, “Bapu, satsang definitely grows through the presence of mandirs, but only through a God-realized Sant is it possible to understand and spread the knowledge

of pure *upasana*.” Shri Hari paused for a while and uttered, “Okay Bapu, I will send Brahmanand Swami to construct a mandir in Junagadh.”

Jhinabhai was elated with Shri Hari’s consent and blessings. Maharaj told him, “To embark upon such a big project you’ll have to make a lot of pre-preparations. First, you go and meet Brahmanand Swami, talk to him about the project and then return to Junagadh.” Thereafter, Jhinabhai met Brahmanand Swami, discussed and decided upon everything, and departed for Junagadh.

The following day, Punjabhai Darbar arrived from Dholera. Shri Hari asked him, “Darbar, what brings you here suddenly?” Punjabhai replied, “Maharaj, I’ve come with a prayer and request to build a mandir in Dholera.”

Shri Hari smiled and said, “Yesterday, Jhinabhai Darbar left after discussing about building a mandir in Junagadh. And now you have arrived. It seems that times are good for the devotees to dream of such an auspicious wish.”

Then, Shri Hari said, “I will instruct Nishkulanand Swami and Adbhutanand Swami to come to Dholera to build a *shikharbaddha* mandir according to your wish.” Punjabhai was pleased that Maharaj had agreed to his request and thus stayed for three days to discuss details about the mandir with Shri Hari and Nishkulanand Swami. Thereafter, he returned to Dholera.

A few days later, Shriji Maharaj told Muktanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Nityanand Swami and other senior sadhus to think about making arrangements for the administration of the mandirs. Shri Hari said, “I only think of worshipping Bhagwan and inspiring others to do the same. Besides that I have no other inclinations. Therefore, you all decide about how to make the arrangements for the administration.”

After a little while Gopalanand Swami and Nityanand Swami said, “Maharaj, Vallabhacharya had installed his son, Vitthalnathji, on his spiritual

seat and their succession (*parampara*) has endured till today. Likewise, we should ritually appoint an *acharya* as per your choice. Then the *acharya* will appoint someone, be it a sadhu or a householder, to run the mandir affairs.”

Shri Hari was in a solemn mood and mused, “A Sant who lives according to my wishes is a true *acharya*.” Then, Shri Hari did not wish to disappoint Gopalanand Swami and revealed, “You have made your suggestion, however, a person eligible to be installed on my seat as the *acharya* should be able to discriminate whatever is good from all things and be accepted by virtuous swamis and devotees. However, one who does not meet these criteria is not suitable to be appointed on my seat even if he is related to me. Furthermore, one who has greed for money, is arrogant and disobeys my words should not be accepted as a member of my family.”¹

Since Shri Hari’s words and tone were solemn, the senior (*sadguru*) sadhus felt that Maharaj disliked discussions on such matters. They knew that Maharaj was intensely detached from his family members. Still, the *sadguru* sadhus decided to install, in future, a descendant of Maharaj’s brothers as the *acharya*. But for the present, they decided to drop the idea.

After a while Maharaj said, “Tomorrow, set up a *mandap* in the courtyard by the sadhus’ resthouse. We will hold satsang assemblies and celebrate festivals during the four holy months (Chaturmas).” The sadhus then got up at Maharaj’s behest.

Harji Thakkar, Dada Khachar’s administrator, came hurriedly to Shri Hari. Shri Hari smiled on seeing him in a frantic state and asked, “Administrator, what is it that is worrying you?”

Harji Thakkar replied anxiously, “I’m greatly worried because there’s trouble brewing. Uptil now, I did not believe the talks I had heard about the trouble.” Shri Hari found his talk puzzling and asked, “At least reveal what trouble has befallen us so that we can decide on what to do.”

1. *Shri Hari-Charitramrut-Sagar*, Pur 28, Tarang 48.

IS THERE ANYONE BRAVE ENOUGH ?

Harji Thakkar explained, “There is a disputed field between our village, Mandavdhar, and Rampar village which belongs to Bhan Khachar of Bhadli. The dispute has been going on for many years. When we sow the field Bhan Khachar’s men harvest the crop, and when they sow the field we harvest the crop.”

Shri Hari laughed at Harji’s narration. The latter continued, “But, O Merciful one, Bhan Khachar has become possessive and militant. I’ve heard that yesterday he announced a challenge, ‘Is there anyone brave enough to behead Bhaguji?’”

Shri Hari’s interest rose and he asked, “Is it really true that he wants Bhaguji’s head?”

“Yes Maharaj. But on hearing Bhaguji’s name the gathering froze. They knew of Bhaguji’s prowess and who he protects. Thus, Bhan Khachar was shocked and deflated,” Harji Thakkar narrated.

Shri Hari smiled and asked, “Then, did anyone in the gathering pick up the gauntlet?”

“Yes Maharaj, two Sandhis,² Khabad and Mataro, took up the challenge. I’ve heard they are very tall and robust. Their necks are as wide as a buffalo’s and they have broad chests like strong iron shields similar to what the brave Rajput warriors had. Their solid hands are like elephant trunks, and their eyes are blood red, filled with raw, unbridled hate.” Shri Hari listened avidly to the administrator’s description. But this worried Harji all the more because Maharaj was not saying anything in response.

HE OBSERVES BRAHMACHARYA

Shri Hari asked, “Harji, what reward was promised to the Sandhis after they accomplish their task?” Harji replied frantically, “Maharaj, Bhan Khachar promised to award a large piece of land to each of them.”

Shri Hari remarked, “Bhan Khachar is one who fulfils his promise once his work is accomplished. I have done his darshan once.”

Harji, the administrator, was surprised to hear

this and thought why was Maharaj using the word ‘darshan’ for Bhan Khachar, who was a bully and sinner. So, he asked, “Maharaj, you had done his darshan?” Maharaj replied, “Yes. On knowing he observes celibacy I did his darshan once. But I instantly covered my face to avoid looking at him further because he troubles and bad-mouths Dada Khachar.”

“But Maharaj what should we do now?” Harji asked. Shri Hari soothed him, “Listen Harji, we have fifty *parshads* to look after our field, so Bhan Khachar’s two Sandhis and his men will be of no match before them. So, be at ease. Now go and tell Dada Khachar to come to me.” Harji Thakkar left, chanting the Swaminarayan mantra.

The disputed field on the outskirts of Rampar village was fertile with the harvest of millet crop. The upright green stalks crowned with ears would tempt anyone to covet it by creating friction and conflict.

Khabad and Mataro and Bhan Khachar’s two hundred men camped nearby the disputed field. Several days later, they were still unable to execute their plan to capture the field because Bhaguji and the fifty *parshads* were guarding it well. Both Khabad and Mataro thought they would strike when an opportune time arose. But nothing of the sort came their way. They both thought if the impasse continued then what answer would they give to Bhan Khachar?

A few days later, Khabad and Mataro got news that out of the fifty *parshads* a majority of them were called for a task back to Gadhadra. Now, there were only thirteen *parshads* remaining with Bhaguji. Khabad and Mataro knew of Bhaguji’s prowess, but they did not know the full extent of his bravery. Thus, Khabad disclosed to Mataro, “We will strike tomorrow and take Bhaguji’s head to Bhan Khachar. Now you quietly inform the rest of our group about it.” ◆

(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from the Gujarati text of

Bhagwan Swaminarayan authored by Shri H.T. Dave

2. Strapping men from the Sindh region whose occupation was to steal and bully others.



Karyakar SUVARNA Mahotsav

The Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav (1972–2022) celebrates and pays tribute to 50 years of selfless and dedicated satsang service by thousands of BAPS karyakars, young and old, male and female. Though satsang activities for children, teenagers, youths and adults were begun by Yogiji Maharaj in the early 1950s, a formal organizational structure was first implemented in 1972 under the guidance and with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Since then, under the oversight of the Satsang Pravrutti Central office (SPCO) for teenagers, youths and adults, and the Bal Pravutti Central Office (BPCO) for children, these karyakars have contributed their time, energy and resources to promote the values of satsang revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus.

Over the decades, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj have personally guided and inspired the karyakars to progress, both in their personal spirituality and their allocated satsang duties.

In Surat, on 28 January 2024, Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurated the year-long Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav celebrations, which will conclude with a grand finale celebration assembly on 7 December 2024 at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad.

To commemorate their efforts, the following articles highlight the high regard and affection Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj have for the karyakars, as well as the dedication and outstanding qualities that distinguish the karyakars.

Maganbhai sitting behind Shastriji Maharaj in Sarangpur



An Everlasting Legacy

The pages of human history are filled with legends whose lives, values, and works have shaped mankind. Whether it was the African-American civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, who delivered his people's freedom through non-violence and inspired millions to follow their dream; the famous scientist, Albert Einstein, whose groundbreaking research and theories altered the world's understanding of physics; or the 'Iron Man of India', Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who unified 562 princely states into one great nation – their everlasting impact continue to inspire future generations.

Similarly, the thousands of selfless volunteers of BAPS have been silently shaped by a *parampara* of legends that begins from the time of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. These legends have left an extraordinary legacy of *mahima*, commitment, and selfless service.

A LEGACY OF MAHIMA

Black clouds covered the sky at the bustling station in Kibwezi, Kenya. Trains roared

in and out with the rhythmic rumbling of the train tracks. Among the clatter emerged Maganbhai, a stationmaster who coordinated the incessant flow of wagons that carried goods. His coat and moustache mirrored the billows of smoke while his bright *tilak-chandlo* stood out in stark contrast. From afar, a man frantically struggled through the dense crowd. He panted heavily as he reached Maganbhai and requested him to release his goods. “It will take four days in the official line,” replied Maganbhai. “But come with me I can release them right now.” He ushered the man into his office and to his surprise instead of documents and paperwork, Maganbhai revealed his most cherished treasure – the Vachanamrut, a sacred text that contained the spiritual teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Maganbhai possessed an unparalleled passion to spread the message and *mahima* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj. Amidst his continuous hectic schedule at work, Maganbhai routinely seized every opportunity to share this *mahima* with his customers. During his off days, he tirelessly travelled to the cities of East Africa such as Tororo, Mbale, Bukedia, Budopa, Nairobi, Masaka and Kampala. Once, while travelling from Africa to India on a ship, he spoke nine hours a day for 12 consecutive days. Maganbhai’s unwavering enthusiasm and perseverance to spread the *mahima* of Bhagwan and his guru reflected his profound passion – a passion that created an everlasting legacy.

Maganbhai’s legacy is vividly



Ashabhai Patel

experienced even to this day. His home and the station where he worked have become sacred places of pilgrimage. His life incidents have become a beacon of inspiration for thousands. And his virtues still resonate through spiritual discourses within satsang.

A LEGACY OF COMMITMENT

Sweating profusely and with his heart racing, a young boy ran towards the village of Radhu. What he had witnessed was beyond belief. The boy frantically rushed into the front yard of the house where Shastriji Maharaj was staying and cried out, “Shastriji Maharaj!” Startled, everyone turned and fixed their gaze on the boy. “It has all been burnt to ashes,” he uttered slowly. “Ashabhai and Ishwarbhai’s warehouse and bungalow are gone.” A heavy silence gripped the audience. All were shocked by the tragic news except for two people, Ashabhai and Ishwarbhai.

Despite the devastating circumstances – 12 tonnes of cotton, 14 tonnes of grains, 20 tonnes of wheat, and the brothers’ lifetime savings were consumed by flames – the determination of the two brothers to fulfil their guru’s wish remained steadfast. Later that day, Shastriji Maharaj visited the land blanketed in darkness. He was taken aback. The remnants were still crackling. This trail of fire had derailed Shastriji Maharaj’s plans. He wanted the brothers to donate money for the *murtis* of Sarangpur mandir. Realizing their guru’s wish, Ashabhai and Ishwarbhai immediately went to the village moneylender and



Ishwarbhai Patel

secured the required amount for the donation. They returned to Shastriji Maharaj with an offering.

The brothers' unshakeable dedication during challenging times left a remarkable legacy of commitment. This legacy is forever etched within sacred texts and continues to inspire and guide thousands of volunteers even to this day.

A LEGACY OF SELFLESS SERVICE

The hush of the evening and the gentle rush of the River Ghela serenaded the mystical air of Gadhada. Numerous *paramhansas* resided on the hillock at the riverbank. Some chanted the *dhun* beneath the scattered trees, while others hummed kirtans near the rocks. The sky was their roof, the earth their bed. As Shriji Maharaj returned from the river that evening, his heart overflowed with compassion. "Dada Khachar!" he said, "These sadhus endure such hardship without shelter. I wish they could have a permanent place to live." Dada Khachar responded immediately with folded hands, "Maharaj! My royal court (*darbar*) has ample space. Let the sadhus reside there."

"But then, where will you live?" Shriji Maharaj asked surprisingly.

Dada confidently replied, "We need little, Maharaj. A corner will suffice for us. But, how can I allow our *paramhansas* to continue suffering?"

Dada Khachar's entire life exemplified selfless service. He relinquished personal luxuries, comforts and even basic necessities for the comfort and betterment of others. He happily reserved most of his home for the *paramhansas*. Despite being the chieftain of Gadhada, Dada was forever engrossed in the service of Bhagwan and his devotees without any expectations. He would constantly serve the sadhus by arranging their meals every day. As Shriji



Bhaktaraj Dada Khachar

Maharaj permanently resided in his *darbar*, festivals throughout the year were celebrated in Gadhada. Dada always shouldered all the responsibilities for each festival. Despite the strain on his resources, Dada was happy to selflessly serve the satsang. He was so determined to serve the *santo* that once in the freezing cold, he dismantled his expensive newly made furniture for their campfire! Dada's life is a testament to how he served

without any expectations.

Dada Khachar's selfless service pleased Shriji Maharaj and he often uttered, "*Gadhadu maru chhe ne hu Gadhadano chhu.*" (Gadhada is mine and I belong to Gadhada.) No matter what the circumstances were, Dada was forever ready to give his *darbar*, his time and his resources to the satsang. Thus, Dada Kachar symbolizes the legacy of selfless service.

These seemingly simple *prasangs* unveil staunch understanding, unshakable loyalty and selfless service. They are just a glimpse into the glorious legacy left behind by the Akshar-Purushottam ancestors of volunteerism. Whether it be Uka Khachar from Vavadiya, who disregarded his status as a landlord and humbly performed menial *seva*, or be it Rupbai from Upleta, who courageously fought against superstitious practices; whether it be Harshadray Dave from Mumbai, who spent his life writing the biographies of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus, or be it Prof. Jethalal, a prominent mathematician of Gujarat, whose service to Shastriji Maharaj earned him the name Prof. Jethalal Swaminarayan. They all served as sources of motivation for *karyakars*. This illustrious tradition of volunteers continues today, inspiring more to bear the torch tomorrow. ♦

Pramukh Swami Maharaj meets and blesses Bhagwanjibhai Mandaviya



The Heartbeats of BAPS

One of the most vital organs of the human body is the heart. It is about the size of a clenched fist and weighs between 300 and 450 grams, less than a half a kilogramme. As the centre of the circulatory system, it connects to all the organs and is the source of the body's nourishment. With each beat the heart sends blood throughout the body providing oxygen and other nutrients to every cell, facilitating the smooth functioning of every organ.

Similarly, a person's passion and perseverance make up their psychological heart. This heart is the source of inner strength and provides the necessary will to push through regardless of the challenges and circumstances – the heart to wake up early on a cold winter day and go to work and the heart to continue practising basketball after a tiresome workout. The physical heart gives purpose to the body, while the psychological heart gives purpose to life.

Today, the heart of thousands of BAPS volunteers all over the globe has touched, inspired and astounded countless. Despite their varying ages, backgrounds, social statuses, and circumstances, each volunteer continues to tirelessly surrender



Swamishri blesses Pragneshbhai during the Akshardham Mahotsav

their time and effort in selfless service. Where does this heart come from? It stems from the profound spiritual understanding that Bhagwan Swaminarayan teaches: viewing *seva* as a great privilege and a prime opportunity to please God.

A GOLDEN MOMENT

When one considers an opportunity to be unique, one serves with a sense of gratitude. This is witnessed in the life of Pragneshbhai. In his professional life, he is a senior key expert in the Artificial Intelligence and Super-computing Department at Siemens Healthineers. He develops and trains medical AI models on a supercomputer based on an immense dataset comprising of billions of medical images, including CT scans, MRIs and X-rays. These models have the potential to revolutionize the medical field. One significant benefit is that by simulating medical procedures, doctors would be able to practise and refine their techniques in a safe virtual environment. Consequently, patient safety as well as quality of medical care would increase exponentially. Despite possessing a promising and financially secure career that many people would dream of having, Pragneshbhai seized the opportunity to volunteer in the creation of the Akshardham monument in Robbinsville, NJ.

At the Akshardham site, Pragneshbhai's actions echoed his understanding of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's teachings: feeling fortunate for the privilege of serving God. His tasks ranged from the detailed work of sitting in one place grouting attached stones to scouring the site for the one correctly coded stone. Whether it was operating the crane to lift stones weighing up to 10 tonnes, bringing down boxes of gathered trash, taking precise measurements for the next stone, or organizing scaffolding pipes, no service felt too big or too small. He felt blessed.

Expressing his experience, Pragneshbhai states, "I believe that Mahant Swami Maharaj has provided me with everything I need, including the blessings for doing Akshardham site *seva*. I am profoundly grateful. Every day, I reflect on this spiritual privilege granted to me, which motivates me to continue doing *seva*." The perspective of a senior AI expert involved in groundbreaking research who grouted and lifted stones was simple but powerful: feeling fortunate for the opportunity to selflessly serve God.

A CHAMPION

Possessing the sole purpose of pleasing God is a powerful force – a force that enables an individual to transcend the most challenging circumstances, even death. Everyone experienced this force within the life of Bhagwanji Mandaviya. He was known as one of the pioneers of satsang in Canada, where he settled in 1973. Bhagwanjibhai's career thrived as he became an active member of the Indo-Canadian Federation. He played an important role in fostering political and social relations between India and Canada. Along with these social responsibilities, he was the president of the BAPS satsang *mandal* in Canada. This involved organizing weekly assemblies, scheduling *padhramanis* when Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited, and managing the celebrations of festivals such as Diwali and Annakut.

(Cont. on p. 16)



A Guru's Gift of Gratitude *Celebrating Selfless Service*

What does an expression of love look like? Chocolate? A bouquet? Or is it some other grand gesture? While these acts can be memorable, their effect usually fades with time. But what about authentic expressions that show how you genuinely cherish someone else? These expressions leave a more profound and enduring impression. These expressions show that the relationship is not superficial but holds immense value.

Mahant Swami Maharaj conveys this type of love to his *karyakars*. He continuously shows how much he treasures them by remembering, caring, and expressing heartfelt gratitude towards them. His actions convey the value he places on the bond he shares with them.

TO LOVE IS TO REMEMBER

On 14 February 2024, the world witnessed a historic moment: the inauguration

of the first traditional Hindu mandir in the Middle East. The mandir's magnificent beauty left everyone stunned. Devotees and others had worked tirelessly to ensure the occasion ran smoothly. With millions tuning in via TV and live streams and thousands attending in person, everyone's attention was focused on the mandir and Mahant Swami Maharaj.

While the world's eyes were on him, Mahant Swami Maharaj's heart was elsewhere. Amidst a day filled with commitments, he carved out time to draft a personal letter to the object of his affection. With each pen stroke, he poured out his heart: "I can never forget your *seva*. While all of you were focused on the grand consecration ceremony of this mandir, my heart was remembering you all!" For Mahant Swami Maharaj, his beloved *karyakars* were the objects of his heart. True love is about forgetting yourself and remembering the ones you love, especially in the most significant moments.

Remembering and prioritizing what is important to those you hold dear is also an expression of love. In 1990, Mahant Swami Maharaj was doing *padhramanis* in the suburbs of Mumbai. Kantibhai P. Makwana, a *bal karyakar*, joined Swamishri during his visits. When they reached an area close to Kantibhai's residence, Jnanpriya Swami asked him if he would like to invite Swamishri to his house. Though Kantibhai secretly longed for such a visit, he graciously declined the offer, not wanting to impose on Swamishri.

Two years later, when Swamishri returned to Mumbai, he reached out to Kantibhai and expressed a keen interest to visit his home. Kantibhai was overjoyed, but surprised by how Swamishri knew and remembered his unvoiced desire. Love speaks a language beyond words, understanding and responding even to the unexpressed wishes of loved ones. It transcends calendars, reminder apps, and to-do lists and instinctively knows and remembers to fulfil another's wishes.

In a conversation with Adarshjivan Swami, Swamishri once revealed his inner feelings: "Thoughts of these *karyakars* come naturally to me at least four to five times throughout the day." This constant mindfulness captures only a glimpse of his deep connection with his *karyakars*.

It is why Swamishri hails 'Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsavni Jai' twice at the start of his discourses. On one occasion, he hailed the 'Jai' six times consecutively! In his mind, celebrating *karyakars* once is simply not enough. Whether Swamishri is attending a global event or is at a small venue, in public moments or private reflections, his thoughts remain with his *karyakars*. This unwavering focus highlights the essence of his love for them.

TO LOVE IS TO CARE

Swamishri's love is also expressed through the mentorship and care he gives to his *karyakars*. Adulthood brings many responsibilities and challenges, yet Swamishri continues to be there to guide his *karyakars* through them. On 15 May 2011, Swamishri wrote a letter answering five questions from the North America Yuvak National Development Committee (NDC) team. The questions included how to nurture a healthy relationship with one's spouse, how to raise children who uphold Hindu culture, doing *seva* with elderly *karyakars* in the mandir, and other personal *satsang* topics. Swamishri responded by writing a 13-page letter filled with practical and in-depth advice. How many of us have ever written a 13-page letter to a loved one? Swamishri took a genuine interest in the *karyakars*' problems. To him, their problems were his problems.

When asked about maintaining a healthy relationship with one's spouse, he wrote, "The key is being the right partner. When you focus on improving yourself, minor grudges naturally fade away." When asked about raising children with Hindu values, Swamishri advised, "Build a strong

connection with your children from an early age. Create a loving, secure environment where family members genuinely care for each other. This nurtures self-confidence in children, enabling them to face peer pressure with great resilience.” Swamishri’s 13-page letter expressed his deep affection for his *karyakars*. It was like a parent sharing their life experiences with their beloved children. His thoughtful responses respected the gravity of each question, offering in-depth, practical insights.

Swamishri’s love extends beyond the immediate needs of his devotees. His care persists even after a *karyakar*’s passing. Pinalbhai Patel was a *karyakar* from Vadodara and the father of two young sons. He unexpectedly passed away in September 2015. Upon hearing this news, Swamishri took it upon himself to become a father figure to Pinalbhai’s family, guiding them through life’s challenges. Swamishri took great interest in crucial decisions about the children’s education, career paths, and even practical matters such as buying a house and relocating. Swamishri even guided the elder son in choosing a life partner.

This level of care shows how Swamishri’s love transcends the individual, encompassing entire families as if they were his own. Moreover, Swamishri’s ability to maintain such deep connections even in their absence or after their death is truly remarkable. His love stands the test of time; after all, true love survives even death.

TO LOVE IS TO APPRECIATE

When relationships are woven with threads of love, honouring each other becomes natural



Swamishri peels the husk from rice grains

when each understands the other’s virtues. This seed has blossomed into the year-long Karyakar Survarna Mahotsav (Golden Jubilee Celebration for Volunteers). Reaffirming these sentiments on 28 January 2024, Swamishri said, “We are celebrating this Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav to honour and appreciate the unparalleled sacrifice you, the *karyakars*, have all made.”

On 13 February 2024, the day before the opening of the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, Swamishri wrote a

letter to Yagnapriyadas Swami, the head swami of the BAPS Satsang Activities Central Office in Ahmedabad, with instructions on how he would like to honour the *karyakars*. Three key directives stood out:

1. The swamis should continually reflect on the sacrifices made by *karyakars*,
2. In each Sunday assembly, share at least one or two accounts of exceptional sacrifices by *karyakars*, and
3. Conduct activities to strengthen unity and mutual appreciation among *karyakars*.

By inspiring these efforts, Swamishri acknowledged the invaluable contributions of his *karyakars*. He clearly seeks to convey their exceptional virtues and establish them as beacons of inspiration for the entire satsang community.

Throughout the years, Swamishri has honoured *karyakars* by offering them hand-made garlands, arranging grand felicitation assemblies, and sending *prasad* and artistic appreciation cards. However, to celebrate the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav, he found a unique way to convey his appreciation: by preparing *anishuddha* rice grains.

Here, ‘anishuddha’ refers to rice grains

individually hulled by hand with extreme care to preserve the integrity of their delicate corners. With the help of the swamis, Mahant Swami Maharaj himself joined in the meticulous, devotion-filled task of hand-peeling over ten kilograms of *anishudhha* rice. Even at ninety, Swamishri prioritized this extraordinary gesture of love, which stemmed from his deep affection and appreciation for his *karyakars*. In love, even small acts infused with genuine reverence carry great significance.

BEYOND EXPRESSIONS

When asked about his motivation for honouring the *karyakars* in this unique way, Swamishri replied without hesitation, “I want to make each of them pure, just like these

meticulously peeled rice grains.” His sentiment echoes the promise made by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Gadhada II 45, “For those who belong to me, I desire not even the slightest imperfection to remain.” Both Bhagwan and his Sant wish to purify the hearts of those dear to them. Such an expression of love is truly unique to Bhagwan and his Sant.

By integrating Swamishri’s divine perspective into our lives, we can learn to recognize the true value of the *karyakars* and cultivate a deeper appreciation for their contributions. As the saying goes, “Actions speak louder than words.” Let us work toward truly remembering, genuinely caring for, and expressing heartfelt gratitude for the *karyakars* we know. ♦

(Cont. from p. 12)

While diligently performing his *seva*, his life journey took a dramatic turn in 1985. Bhagwanjibhai was diagnosed with a life-threatening form of blood cancer. The illness and its treatment took a heavy toll on Bhagwanjibhai, draining his energy. However, instead of informing others, praying for relief, stepping away from his responsibilities and resting, or spending more time with family and friends, Bhagwanjibhai continued performing *seva* with the same passion and enthusiasm. He spearheaded the historical event of honouring Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the Canadian Parliament in 1988. From his hospital bed he coordinated Swamishri’s accommodation, transport and meetings with members of parliament. His health may have deteriorated due to the cancer, but his purpose of pleasing God and guru fuelled his will to tirelessly persevere in his *seva*.

Bhagwanjibhai’s unfaltering passion for *seva* resonated Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s words: “Regardless of whatever pain or pleasure we may encounter by the wish of God, we should

not become disturbed in any way; we should be pleased with whatever pleases God.” In response to a religious leader who expressed pity and offered his prayers, Bhagwanjibhai wrote, “Death is certain in my life, yet I am filled with complete contentment and joy that I have had the privilege of associating with the supremely saintly Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the great opportunity to please him.”

The experiences of Bhagwanjibhai and Pragneshbhai are just two of the heartbeats among the thousands that keep the BAPS pulsating with life. Their dedication to Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus serves as an inspiration to present and future generations on how to perform true service: with the mindset to view the opportunity to perform *seva* as one’s great fortune and to do it only to please God. Even to this day, one will find Pragneshbhai performing *arti* or sweeping the floors of the Akshardham monument. Additionally, Bhagwanjibhai’s legacy has become a beacon that lights the way for devotees who aim to please God. ♦

Swamishri honours Vinodbhai with a garland during the Robbinsville Akshardham inauguration ceremony



Samarpan: A Legacy of Sacrifice, Service and Serenity

Sounds of *seva* filled the air. The screech of grinder blades, the humming of drills, and the revving of JCB vehicles melded into the steady streams of devotional songs playing on Bluetooth speakers. This ensemble created a spiritual symphony of stone and service that surrounded Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, New Jersey, deeply moving the 12,500 volunteers fortunate enough to experience it.

The volunteers (*karyakars*) of Akshardham tirelessly embraced personal sacrifices to experience profound spiritual fulfilment. Each had a different, inspiring story to tell. Some took time off from school, others adjusted their careers, and many relocated with their families. Yet, it was all worth it. Krishna Patel from Tampa, Florida, captures

this when he says, “We’ve seen our friends advance in their careers and go on vacations around the world, but this experience was something spectacular. It brought us true peace.” Like Krishna, thousands of BAPS volunteers worldwide commit themselves wholeheartedly to guru Mahant Swami Maharaj’s service, finding in his wishes a path to tireless enthusiasm, meaningful contentment and everlasting fortitude.

SAMARPAN – A MONUMENT TO SELFLESS SERVICE

“My guru [Pramukh Swami Maharaj] travelled without caring for his bodily comforts, sometimes sleeping in open fields or on mounds of hay or gravel. He did this with the sole intention of improving the lives of others.” This selfless perspective fuelled Vinodbhai Patel’s dedication as he tirelessly performed *seva* for his guru. His journey of sacrifice began in 1983 when Vinodbhai, then in his twenties, worked at the stone quarries in Bansi-Paharpur. He was responsible for overseeing the quarrying, cutting and transportation of stones for the Akshardham being built in Gandhinagar. Each of these tasks would be daunting, but Vinodbhai persevered. He devoted countless hours to planning and managing the logistics for stone shipments and played a crucial role in creating the first Swaminarayan Akshardham.

Although being young gave Vinodbhai the flexibility to serve more freely, his commitment to serve never wavered as he grew older. Fast forward to 2011, 28 years after his days in Bansi-Paharpur, he became one of the first volunteers to serve at Akshardham in Robbinsville. He fondly recalls, “I felt as if the stones were calling me back. I felt as if Pramukh Swami Maharaj was calling me back. I had to go.” Two years later, the stones of Greece, Turkey, Italy and Bulgaria summoned Vinodbhai to embark on a six-year odyssey.

Alone amid a sea of stones, Vinodbhai meticulously searched for those that were the best. It was like searching for needles in colossal haystacks. He faced the challenge not with frustration but focus and fortitude.

Living alone in an unfamiliar land brought many challenges for Vinodbhai. The harsh conditions at the quarries, working with uncompromising people, and overcoming cultural and language barriers were just a few struggles he faced. Yet, Vinodbhai refused to flinch from his *seva*. Instead, he felt blessed for the opportunity, viewing these trying periods as trials designed to shape him.

He found joy in faithfully following guru Mahant Swami Maharaj’s commands. After the inauguration of Robbinsville Akshardham, his face lit up with a radiant smile. Overwhelmed with happiness, Vinodbhai eagerly shared a letter with other volunteers. Mahant Swami Maharaj had assigned him a new mission to return to the quarries of Bansi-Paharpur. There, a tall, elderly man dressed in plain white clothes can be seen today inspecting stones for the upcoming Swaminarayan Akshardham in Surat, Gujarat.

SAMARPAN – A LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Prof. Gajendra Panda stands out as a volunteer who unfailingly followed Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s wishes. To serve Pramukh Swami Maharaj, he enthusiastically taught BAPS sadhus and youths Sanskrit for twenty-nine years, beginning in 1995. Gajendrabhai’s

unique love for Sanskrit, coupled with his cheerful nature, enhanced his students’ ability to learn the language more effectively. Seeing his passion, Pramukh Swami Maharaj expressed his admiration by saying, “Yogi Bapa is pleased with the *seva* you are doing.” Swamishri’s heartfelt acknowledgment shows how sincere service in line with the guru’s vision can earn the guru’s blessings.



Gajendrabhai with Swamishri



Swamishri blesses Ashishbhai during the Divya Sannidhi Parva 2024

Over time, Gajendrabhai's faith in the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan deepened. It infused every aspect of his life with renewed joy and purpose. His passion for sharing its wisdom was boundless. He travelled around the world to lecture on the *Swaminarayan-bhashya*, visiting over 170 centres across 33 countries. He even organized conferences to foster discussions on the Sanskrit commentary, showcasing his profound devotion to the Darshan.

Gajendrabhai was ecstatic about conveying the Darshan's teachings to others. Events often required him to travel long distances by car or public transport; however, he willingly endured any physical discomfort required. On one occasion, he embarked on a seven-hour bus ride from Ahmedabad to Bhuj to deliver a speech. While travelling, he developed a throbbing pain in his chest, which seemed to increase with each passing mile. Ignoring the pain, he persevered. Upon reaching Bhuj, he delivered his talk and returned to Ahmedabad that same evening. The following day, he visited a hospital for a check-up. To everyone's surprise, his doctor diagnosed the discomfort he experienced as a mild heart attack.

Gajendrabhai's dedication stemmed from the happiness he experienced from his *seva*. He once remarked, "I don't need an award for what I've done. Having taught over 800 sadhus

and spoken to over 150,000 people about the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan – this is my lifetime achievement." This sense of fulfilment, inspired by Swamishri's guidance, filled Gajendrabhai with an infectious joy that ignited both minds and spirits.

SAMARPAN – A SOURCE OF UNWAVERING STRENGTH

While reflecting on his experience serving at Robbinsville Akshardham, Dhruvbhai from Flushing, New York, states, "To achieve greatness, one must embrace sacrifice. This sacrifice isn't limited to just one or two areas but extends across many aspects of life." Ashishbhai Shah, a *karyakar* from Mumbai, brings these sentiments to life. After stepping into a leadership *karyakar* role in 2015, he faced a tragic loss – his wife passed away. Suddenly, he found himself the sole provider for his seven-year-old son, Param, his aging parents, and his disabled younger brother.

Ashishbhai's challenges extend beyond his family responsibilities to his own health. He continues to grapple with vertigo, an unpredictable affliction that leaves him dizzy and disoriented. Low blood pressure saps his strength, while cataracts, which have troubled him since he was young, cloud his vision. Digestive issues further complicate his health,

(Cont. on p. 23)



Unveiling Identity

“Who am I?” A simple yet profound question. This question has echoed through the corridors of time. It has challenged each generation to seek their true essence. But the quest for identity is not merely a personal journey, it is a spiritual adventure – an adventure in which the Satpurush inspires and guides every step of self-discovery.

As *karyakars*, it is essential to understand one's true identity to be able to embody the ideals of selfless service and spiritual dedication. This understanding is developed through the teachings of the Satpurush.

OWNERSHIP

In satsang, ownership transcends mere possession. This perspective shifts our mindset from being self-centred to accepting collective responsibility, weaving a tapestry of selfless service and spiritual dedication that defines our journey. As a result, ownership is an integral virtue that forms the identity of a *karyakar*.

Rohitbhai Patel epitomized success in the grand metropolis of Dubai. Celebrated for his business acumen and unwavering commitment to both religious principles and



Mahant Swami Maharaj honours Rohitbhai with a garland of flowers



Rohitbhai Welcomes Mahant Swami Maharaj to the UAE

national laws, he stood out as a respected figure. His demeanour mirrored the order he demanded in his businesses. His sharp gaze and firm voice spoke volumes of a man who valued structure, routine and, above all else, perfection.

However, behind the polished façade of his corporate life lay a pivotal moment that reshaped his trajectory forever. In 1997 when Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the UAE, Rohitbhai made a decision that would astonish his peers and inspire countless others. With a resolve as untiring as the desert sun, he chose to serve wholeheartedly at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's side throughout his tour.

During Pramukh Swami Maharaj's visit, Rohitbhai's dedication shone brightly, transcending the familiar realms of boardrooms and profit margins. His devotion stemmed from a profound belief in collective responsibility and ignited an unwavering commitment that knew no bounds. Rohitbhai emerged not just as an aide, but as a beacon of selfless service.

When Pramukh Swami Maharaj expressed his vision for a grand mandir in Abu Dhabi amidst the deserts of Sharjah, Rohitbhai stood witness to a historic moment. These words didn't just echo in his mind, they resonated deeply in his heart, forging a solemn commitment: "We shall build a grand mandir, with the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam in its central shrine. I will sell all my

possessions, if need be, to fulfil Pramukh Swami Maharaj's vision."

These words were a reflection of Rohitbhai's inner sentiment of ownership as well as his faithful conviction. In a heartfelt tribute assembly dedicated to Rohitbhai, Brahmaviharidas Swami painted a vivid picture, "Like a caring father, he nurtured the youth, ensuring their paths toward fulfilment. His generosity knew no bounds; whenever natural calamities struck, whether in India or afar, he would earnestly inquire, 'How can I be of service?' If a swami or devotee fell ill, Rohitbhai's concern was distinct. He devoted himself to daily prayers and fervent rosary counts, tirelessly praying for their swift recovery. From the most devoted disciple to the smallest soul seeking solace, none found Rohitbhai's assistance wanting."

Every aspect of Rohitbhai's life was a testament to these words. His ability to balance his thriving businesses, familial obligations and altruistic pursuits stemmed not from mere duty, but from a genuine sentiment of ownership. He exemplified Mahant Swami Maharaj's words, "A *karyakar* is one who takes ownership in their *seva*." As a result, he believed that those he served were an extension of God. He approached every task with a sense of personal responsibility and dedication, viewing each endeavour as a sacred opportunity to contribute selflessly to the community.



Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden, London, UK

NO EXPECTATIONS

On 8 March 1996, during his address to an assembly of volunteers, Pramukh Swami Maharaj expressed the ideal characteristics of a *karyakar*, “A *karyakar* is someone who offers his service without any expectations.” In a world where awards often define success, BAPS volunteers embody a different ethos – accomplishing tasks without any expectations.

The Robbinsville Akshardham mandir stands as a testament to this philosophy. While the physical foundation of the Akshardham mandir was laid in cement, fly ash and water, its spiritual bedrock was forged by the selflessness of the volunteers – motivated not by recognition or personal gain but by a higher purpose. More than 12,500 volunteers from all corners of the United States, spanning generations, devoted years to its realization. These volunteers halted their education, paused their careers, and set aside their personal lives to dedicate themselves to this project. Through heavy rains, sweaty summers and freezing winters, they tirelessly laboured day and night to erect one of the world’s largest Hindu mandirs. From across the nation and around the world they united, forging bonds, honing skills and pushing beyond their limits to achieve the extraordinary. Akshardham – a monument destined to inspire for generations – stands as a testament to their selfless dedication and unwavering commitment.

Every participant in this endeavour embodies the spirit of a *karyakar* – serving with no

expectations. They exemplify the belief that their service transcends personal ambition, underscoring their honour in witnessing and contributing to this monumental journey. As a result, their pivotal contributions continue to remain silent to the thousands who visit this architectural marvel every day.

SMALLEST OF SEVAS

In 1972, Pramukh Swami Maharaj envisioned a grand mandir in London. After years of land acquisition, fundraising and volunteer recruitment challenges, the mandir began to take shape. During his visit to London on 30 April 1994, Pramukh Swami Maharaj addressed a gathering of volunteers, emphasizing, “For God, we have all embarked on this mammoth task, so even if I must beg I will.” Swamishri expressed an essential virtue that is necessary for all volunteers to imbibe: humility. Being able to unhesitatingly engage in the most menial services for Bhagwan characterizes a *karyakar*.

Swamishri’s words inspired volunteers to organize transformative initiatives such as the tin can collection scheme. This scheme was a seemingly humble and modest effort to fulfilling Swamishri’s grand vision. Children and adults of all backgrounds dedicated their free time canvassing neighbourhoods, businesses, and homes to collect tin cans. Each tin can was then recycled for a nominal fund. Over time, substantial funds were raised for the mandir. Impressed with the volunteers’ unwavering dedication to such an initiative, Pujya Swayamprakashdas Swami (Doctor Swami) proclaimed, “This mandir stands on the shoulders of these tin collections.” He particularly commended the children for their fearlessness in collecting cans, embodying the spirit of service and community envisioned by Swamishri.

Age, background or social status were no barrier to making a meaningful impact. From the smallest contributions to the grandest efforts, each

volunteer readily embraced their role in bringing Swamishri's dream to fruition – a testament to their profound humility.

IDENTITY

Understanding the identity of a *karyakar* as defined by the Satpurush's timeless teachings is pivotal. This understanding propels one to serve wholeheartedly and inspires one to selflessly commit to every task, no matter how tall or small. Who could have imagined children raising tens of thousands of pounds for a mandir project? Who could fathom devotees in foreign lands taking responsibility for caring for swamis and fellow

devotees? Who could envision youths who have boundless opportunities, setting aside everything to build the world's second-largest Hindu mandir?

Unimaginable feats, unprecedented achievements and transformative *seva* initiatives all begin with one thing: discovering one's identity as a true BAPS *karyakar*. As a result, these stories surpass superhero tales. Each devotee possesses a unique superpower – not flight or superhuman strength, but an unwavering understanding of their identity as BAPS *karyakars*. An understanding that is capable of generating positive change within families, communities and societies. ♦

(Cont. from p. 19)

resulting in worrying weight loss. As the hospital became a second home, the costs of CT scans, MRIs, and countless medical reports steadily drained his already strained finances.

Despite these insurmountable challenges, Ashishbhai's commitment to his *seva* has never wavered. Instead, his faith in Satsang has deepened over the years. Satsang continues to be the source of much-needed stability. His commitment to *seva* has remained unshakeable since becoming a *bal karyakar* in 1985, with his passion for spiritual growth only intensifying over the years.

Ashishbhai's dedication to his *seva* also never came at the expense of quality time with his loved ones. Alongside assisting his parents and brother with physical tasks, he devoted hours to instilling spiritual values in his son. He also helped his son memorize the Satsang Diksha and Swaminarayan Siddhant Karika and supported him in joining the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya in Sarangpur.

Ashishbhai's guiding compass continues to point toward Swamishri. When he was asked to present a prayer to Mahant Swami Maharaj, his words left many in tears. With folded hands, he requested, "Let Swamishri test me with whatever obstacles he sees fit. I ask for only one blessing: may this be my final birth. I desire nothing more."

Ashishbhai's prayer epitomized the pinnacle of spiritual progress. It echoed the profound message in Vachanamrut Gadhadra I 61: one grows closer to God by not just enduring but embracing hardships with unwavering faith.

Today, thousands of volunteers like Vinodbhai, Gajendrabhai and Ashishbhai serve with the singular goal of pleasing guru Mahant Swami Maharaj. In return, they are rewarded with inner peace – a lasting sense of calm with the strength to endure the strongest winds. Reflecting on his experiences, Akashbhai from Charlotte, North Carolina reveals, "*Seva* is about giving yourself completely without expecting anything in return. I've discovered profound happiness in giving rather than anticipating what I might receive." Ashishbhai Patel of Chattanooga, Tennessee, adds, "One good thing came out of this life: I used this body to fulfil my guru's vision. After *seva*, I always feel happy. I don't feel stressed anymore." Thousands of similar voices raise tributes to the strength of *samarpan* (selfless dedication). Through *samarpan*, seemingly ordinary individuals serve in extraordinary ways. Joining their ranks means embarking on a rewarding spiritual journey, where selfless service leads to tireless enthusiasm, meaningful contentment and everlasting fortitude. ♦



A Year of Transformative Reflections at Swaminarayan Akshardham



Akshardham, marking a momentous occasion that transcends architectural splendour.

Akshardham has emerged as a sanctuary where the soul finds solace, where life's questions are met with clarity, and where the extraordinary manifests in the everyday. Over the past year, it has welcomed a multitude of visitors, each arriving with their own stories and aspirations. Within these sacred walls, they discovered a realm that transcends physical structure—a living testament to the vision of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and the guidance of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The true impact of Akshardham is reflected in the heartfelt voices of those who have walked its corridors. Here, breaths are taken away, peace is deeply felt, and the essence of humanity is celebrated in its most sublime form.

VOICES OF INSPIRATION

In this inaugural year, Akshardham has not only stood as a monumental structure of architectural splendour but has also become a profound source of inspiration for many distinguished visitors. This section captures their unique perspectives and deeply personal experiences during their visits revealing Akshardham's impact, transcending mere physicality to touch the very core of human emotion and spirituality.

Voices from the Dais

Osorachukwu Ifesinachukwu, football alumni from Yale University, emphasized the importance of cultural exchange and understanding that Akshardham fosters. "I think

INTRODUCTION

As the inaugural year of BAPS Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, New Jersey, ends, its true essence is revealed not just in the grandeur of its design but in the profound experiences of those who have visited. On 8 October 2023, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed North America and the world by inaugurating



Osorachukwu Ifesinachukwu

it's always important that cultures learn from each other because there's no one way to look at the world, the universe, or God. It's something so big that you could never look at it through one lens," he noted, highlighting how Akshardham connects visitors with the broader spectrum of humanity. He further expressed, "I think places like this are good for that."

Vikas Khanna, renowned chef and restaurateur, saw Akshardham as a bridge between generations, uniting past, present, and future through shared heritage. "This is a part of an extension of our culture, our heritage, our ancestral values, and I think it's very important because this temple stands as a unifying force between us and the generations to come," Khanna remarked. His words resonate deeply with those who see Akshardham not just as a place of worship but as a powerful force in cultural preservation. "It builds you and it also turns you into a stronger convinced voice to represent your culture," he added.

Samit Hirawat, Chief Medical Officer at Bristol Myers Squibb, an international pharmaceutical company, reflected on his Indian roots and was profoundly moved by the selflessness and dedication that brought Akshardham to life. "As I heard the stories behind people who came and volunteered for this organization, it reminds you about what really is important as we think about cultures and humanity and society," Hirawat shared. He recognized Akshardham as a testament to the power of community and collective effort,

noting, "It really is something to be proud of."

Greg Mayers, Chief Technology Officer at Bristol Myers Squibb, echoed Hirawat's sentiments. "It's impressive to see what you've accomplished here... a testament to what can happen when a community can come together to really accomplish a vision," Myers stated, acknowledging the collective spirit that is the foundation of Akshardham.

The inclusivity of Akshardham was particularly significant for **Cynthia Victor, a social media influencer**, "You're creating a space for other people to come in... It's not just for people in the BAPS community or any religion specifically," Victor observed, emphasizing the Akshardham's role in promoting unity and a sense of belonging for all. She praised Akshardham's ability to welcome diverse cultures and perspectives, making it a truly inclusive space where everyone can feel at home.

Congressman Hank Johnson, U.S. representative for Georgia's 4th congressional district, found in Akshardham a representation of peace, harmony, and unity. His visit renewed his commitment to service, inspired by Akshardham's mission to serve mankind. "The mandir itself is a representation of peace and harmony and unity," he noted, recognizing the universal values that Akshardham embodies.

Reshma Saujani, founder and CEO of Girls Who Code, a nonprofit organization that aims to support and increase the number of women in computer science, is a prominent advocate



Vikas Khanna, renowned chef and restaurateur



Congressman Hank Johnson, US representative for Georgia's 4th congressional district



Reshma Saujani, founder and CEO of Girls Who Code

for women's empowerment and was particularly moved by the contributions of 9,000 women to the construction of Akshardham. "It just shows our power to be and create and build anything," Saujani remarked, seeing in Akshardham a symbol of peace, love, and grace, brought to life by the dedication of women. For her, Akshardham stands as a powerful testament to the strength and resilience of women.

Moments of Awe

Scott Murphy, President of Dunkin', an American multinational coffee and donut company, found his visit to Akshardham to be nothing short of transformative. "I don't want to exaggerate, but it's literally life-changing," Murphy shared, reflecting on how the experience allowed him to contemplate life's challenges and joys. "It was just a great experience to put your phone away and just be in the moment," he added, underscoring Akshardham's ability to inspire introspection and connection.

For Vikas Khanna, Akshardham is a place of immense spiritual gravity. "This is a temple of gravity. It should pull us all in... because every stone tells a beautiful story here," he remarked, highlighting the profound narratives embedded within Akshardham's architecture.

Samit Hirawat, a physician, felt a deep resonance with Akshardham's spirit of service. "As I look at what has been built and the message that it is sending to people who come here... You get that feeling of peace and calm, and that

really resonates with me," Hirawat reflected, acknowledging the tranquil and healing energy of Akshardham.

B.J. Bass, managing partner of the sports marketing agency RBA Showcase and an NBA agent, was overwhelmed by the sheer scale and craftsmanship of Akshardham. "Wow, just overwhelming. What a great experience," he exclaimed, finding himself at a loss for words to describe the impact of his visit. "You get a sense walking in here that this was a project that was done with love," he added, recognizing the devotion and care that went into Akshardham's creation.

Greg Olson, a venture capitalist, echoed this sentiment, describing his experience as "overwhelming." He left Akshardham with a desire to return and learn more, captivated by Akshardham's intricate beauty and profound spiritual significance.

Rohan Sachdev, owner of a logistics transportation company and a New Jersey resident, felt a deep pride in having Akshardham so close to home. "It is truly one of the most amazing parts of it... to have such a beautiful testament to God's work and have a place of universal peace," Sachdev remarked, recognizing Akshardham as a beacon of positivity and peace in the community.

Ramesh Jaipal, Executive Director of Harirama Foundation of Pakistan, poetically described Akshardham's spiritual nourishment, stating, "The food of your soul is available



Scott Murphy,
President of Dunkin'



B.J. Bass, managing partner
of RBA Showcase and an NBA
agent



Rohan Sachdev, owner of
a logistics transportation
company

here.” His words capture the essence of what Akshardham offers to all who visit – a space for spiritual enrichment and inner peace.

Chief Kenneth Dubosky of Hamilton Township Police, was similarly moved by the spiritual atmosphere of Akshardham. “The feeling that you get when you walk through such a beautiful house of worship like this is very similar and just awe-inspiring,” Chief Dubosky shared, finding a profound sense of closeness to the divine.

These personal accounts and insights from distinguished visitors reveal the true essence of Akshardham – not just as a magnificent structure, but as a sacred space that touches the soul, inspires awe, and leaves an indelible impact on all who experience it. The voices from the dais and the moments of awe they describe offer a glimpse into the profound spiritual and emotional resonance that Akshardham has fostered in its first year, affirming its place as a sanctuary for all humanity.

JOURNEY OF SOUL

Akshardham serves as more than just an architectural marvel; it is a sanctuary where visitors experience profound spiritual transformations. This section captures the essence of Akshardham’s impact, from moments of peace to life-altering revelations, revealing a tapestry of spiritual awakening and personal growth.

Seeking Solace

Visitors from diverse backgrounds have found Akshardham to be a place of deep peace and spiritual insight. **Stephanie Seitman**, a visitor, expressed, “Most of what I feel is gratitude. For all your hard work and for the privilege of being around something so magnificent created by a community for the common good.” **Smit Pandya**, a visitor from Vadodara, described the experience as one where “thoughts get stopped” and one feels divine, emphasizing the volunteers’ heartfelt dedication. **Kelly Barns**, a

visitor from Levittown, PA, shared that her visit was “spectacular and educational,” highlighting the warm welcome she received, which made her feel a sense of peace and belonging she hadn’t experienced in years. Meanwhile, **Joe Sanders**, a visitor from Ontario, CA, called his visit “once in a lifetime,” describing it as a serene and peaceful experience, while **Raphael Sevilla**, another visitor to the Akshardham campus, noted that stepping into Akshardham made “everything feel calm.”

Transformative Encounters

The influence of Akshardham often extends far beyond the visit itself, reshaping visitors’ outlooks and spirituality. **Harihar Sivanandh**, a visitor from Sharon, MA, was deeply moved by Akshardham’s scale and the volunteers’ humbleness, which “pushed me to be a better human.” **Nirav Vyas**, a visitor from Breinigsville, PA, reflected on his visit as “very auspicious and impeccable,” noting Akshardham’s role in “initiating Hindu values for generations to come in the USA.” These narratives illustrate how Akshardham’s impact resonates on both personal and cultural levels, inspiring visitors to embrace and uphold spiritual values in their lives.

Moments of Revelation

For many, a visit to Akshardham has been a catalyst for personal revelations and a deeper understanding of their spiritual journeys. **Laila Dadvand**, a visitor from Glassboro, NJ, left Akshardham with her “heart and spirit filled with positive energy,” moved by the “enormous spirit of love, devotion, kindness, and service” she encountered. **Arun Mukharji**, a visitor from Gainesville, VA, praised Akshardham as “a window for a larger sight of our past,” reflecting pride in India’s heritage and spirituality. **Barbara Hanley**, a visitor from Perth Amboy, NJ, noted that the teachings at Akshardham offer “interesting understandings of Hindu teachings by which all our world’s religions can become ‘one,’”

highlighting the universal appeal and unifying message of Akshardham.

From Reflection to Action

The true essence of Akshardham's influence is evident in how visitors integrate their experiences into their daily lives. Samit Hirawat reflected on the spirit of service at Akshardham, saying, "As a spiritual place, certainly a lot of things resonated with me as we think about what we do every day in life in terms of service for others." He connected this spirit with his professional life as a physician, dedicated to serving others. Similarly, Maithrahi Kamble, a visitor from Maharashtra, India, spoke of the "amazing" collaboration among volunteers, emphasizing that "when you put spirituality and your values, core values in place... you can bring and you can collaborate on something so amazing despite your gender, your identities, your background." These stories highlight how the peace and wisdom found at Akshardham continue to guide visitors long after their visit, shaping their actions and spiritual practices.

As the exploration of individual spiritual journeys within Akshardham unfolds, it becomes evident that this sanctuary has touched lives in deeply personal and transformative ways. From the inner peace discovered by visitors to the profound shifts in outlook and understanding, Akshardham serves as a beacon of spiritual illumination and growth. These narratives not only highlight Akshardham's role in facilitating moments of revelation but also underscore its influence on the everyday lives and practices of its visitors.

SPIRIT OF AKSHARDHAM

As the journey through Akshardham unveils the deep inner transformations of its visitors, it also highlights a broader communal experience – the essence that binds individuals from diverse backgrounds into a unified whole. This section

delves into how Akshardham has become a beacon of togetherness, a shared refuge where people find common ground, and where significant events have created connections, bringing hearts together in lasting and meaningful ways.

A Shared Sanctuary

Akshardham serves as a refuge where individuals from all walks of life gather, united by a shared desire for peace, harmony, and spiritual fulfilment. Congressman Hank Johnson eloquently expressed this, noting, "When people come, this is a place of peace and harmony... that is where harmony and unity come in among people." This sentiment is echoed by visitors like Milinda Parande, Secretary General of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, who observed Akshardham's embodiment of values that reach beyond cultural and religious boundaries, said, "Hindu philosophy thinks about everybody... for people from any community coming from any background. This temple will be very inspiring." The influence of Akshardham extends beyond individual spiritual journeys, cultivating a global sense of community where visitors leave enriched, carrying forward universal values of love, respect, and understanding. JP Gupta, Additional Chief Secretary, Finance Department, Government of Gujarat, reflected on this collective pride, stating, "I see a sense of accomplishment... and to a larger Indian community that this place of Indian culture and renaissance has come alive." These reflections affirm Akshardham's role as a space where unity flourishes, nurturing connections that bridge cultural and religious differences.

Gathering of Hearts

The spirit of Akshardham is not only reflected in individual reflections but also in the powerful collective experiences that have unfolded within its sacred grounds. Events like the 'Adhyatmik Group Session' brought together seekers from the local Hindu community for deep spiritual

discussions, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. The 'New Jersey Symphony: Sounds of India' performance solidified Akshardham as a venue where tradition and modernity coexist, blending cultural heritage with contemporary expressions, and leaving attendees with a lasting sense of inspiration. The 'Veteran's Appreciation Event' honoured those who have served, creating a space for gratitude and reflection, while the 'Empowering Youth Seminar' inspired the next generation, planting seeds of leadership and service in young minds. Other gatherings like the 'Tourism Open House' and 'Robbinsville Night Off' allowed visitors to experience the welcoming embrace of Akshardham, creating cherished memories and strengthening bonds within the local community. Through these events, Akshardham has become a hub of connection, where every occasion is an opportunity to weave together the diverse experiences of its visitors into a rich and enduring fabric of shared human experience.

In the 'Spirit of Akshardham,' the true essence of connection is revealed through the shared experiences and collective reflections of those who walk through its gates. This sacred space has not only served as a sanctuary for individual spiritual growth but has also become a powerful force for unity, fostering a deep sense of community among its visitors. Here, in the embrace of Akshardham, hearts have found common ground, and lives have been enriched through the collective spirit of togetherness and harmony.

ENDURING IMPRESSIONS

As the first anniversary of Akshardham in Robbinsville, New Jersey approaches, the reflections of those who have walked through its doors stand as a testament to its profound impact. Akshardham has become a sanctuary where visitors, regardless of their backgrounds, find solace, inspiration, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Many who have visited speak of an overwhelming sense of peace that envelops them as they step into Akshardham. Some describe the experience as transcendent, where the world outside fades away, allowing them to connect deeply with their inner selves. It is a place where people are not merely spectators but participants in a journey towards spiritual awakening.

One visitor remarked, "In the presence of Akshardham, I felt a connection to something far greater than myself. It felt like the stone and carvings were whispering timeless wisdom and eternal truths." Another shared, "The ethos of 'In the Joy of Others, Lies Our Own' is palpable here. Every interaction, every smile, every act of kindness reflects this life motto of Pramukh Swami Maharaj."

These reflections are a powerful reminder of what Akshardham embodies. It is more than just a space for worship; it is a place of transformation, where lives are touched, and hearts are uplifted. The magnificence of Akshardham lies not only in its grand architecture but in the countless stories of those who have found peace, joy, and a sense of belonging within its embrace.

In the quiet corners of Akshardham, where whispers of devotion linger, one can hear the echoes of lives changed, hopes rekindled, and spirits renewed. It is here, within these sacred walls, that the true essence of Akshardham comes alive—not in the grandeur of its structure but in the silent, powerful moments that touch the soul.

Where prayers are felt, not just heard, Where joy is found in the service of others, Where hearts are healed and spirits are freed, Akshardham stands as a beacon of hope and humanity. ♦



Humming for Health: The Science Behind an Ancient Practice

FROM RIDICULE TO RECOGNITION

India, like many other countries, is home to many traditions that have sustained the physical health, mental stability, social fabric and spiritual welfare of its citizens.

In our modern age, in an era when scientific proof in the form of double-blind randomized controlled trials (RCTs) is regarded as the gold standard, these traditional practices, handed down through generations, often get a bad rap and are dismissed as mere folklore lacking the rigour of empirical evidence. Yet, when scientifically vindicated and the wisdom embedded in these age-old practices is unearthed, these same ridiculed practices come into vogue.

A prime example is the practice of *pranayam* and the simple act of humming. Both practices have been lauded for their health benefits in many ancient texts,¹ yet only recently has scientific

research begun to uncover the mechanisms behind these benefits, particularly their role in enhancing nitric oxide (NO) production, which leads to significant health improvements. *Pranayam* can also significantly impact the vagus nerve, leading to various benefits, which we will also highlight below.

THE NOBEL-WINNING DISCOVERY OF NITRIC OXIDE

Nitric oxide, a gas with chemical formula NO – not to be confused with nitrous oxide (laughing gas), chemical formula N₂O – is a small molecule that plays a crucial role in numerous bodily functions. Its discovery as a signalling molecule in the cardiovascular system earned three scientists the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1998. Robert F. Furchgott, Louis J. Ignarro, and Ferid Murad uncovered

1. These include: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, *Shiva Samhita*, Mandukya Upanishad and others.

how NO relaxes blood vessels, thus regulating blood pressure and improving cardiovascular health. Their research demonstrated that NO is produced by the endothelial cells lining the blood vessels and is essential for maintaining vascular health. It regulates blood pressure, prevents blood clots and inhibits the build up of plaque in the arteries. This breakthrough highlighted NO's potential in various therapeutic applications and sparked interest in how traditional practices might influence NO production. Numerous studies have explored NO's role in the body.

Interestingly, the traditional practice of *pranayam*, breath control exercises in yoga, correlates with increased NO production. This

discovery laid the groundwork for understanding how *pranayam*, especially techniques involving humming and sound vibration, long advocated for their health benefits in ancient traditions, might actually work at a molecular level to enhance the release of NO in the nasal passages.

Dr Jon Lundberg and Dr Eddie Weitzberg of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm were among the first to connect the dots between humming and nitric oxide production. In a 2002 study published in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, they found that humming increased nasal nitric oxide levels by a factor of 15 compared to quiet exhalation.² It was as if the body had been hiding a pharmacy in plain sight.

2. Weitzberg, E., & Lundberg, J. O. (2002). Humming greatly increases nasal nitric oxide. *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, 166(2), 144–145.

Cascade of Events from Stimulus to Nitric Oxide Production and Absorption

1. Mechanical Vibration, Increased Airflow and Oscillation (Stimulus)

Humming is due to vocal cord vibration. It produces sound waves that travel through the nasal cavity and sinuses, causing the nasal mucosa and sinus tissues to oscillate.

2. Shear Stress, Friction and Endothelial Response

The mechanical shear stress from the vibrations stimulates the endothelial cells lining the sinuses. Endothelial cells have mechanosensitive properties and respond to mechanical stimuli by activating certain biochemical pathways.

3. Activation of Nitric Oxide Synthase (NOS)

The mechanical stimulation of the endothelial cells activates nitric oxide synthase (NOS) enzymes, particularly the endothelial NOS (eNOS). This activation is due to the increase in intracellular calcium levels, which is a common response to mechanical stress.

4. Synthesis of Nitric Oxide

Once activated, eNOS catalyzes the conversion of the amino acid L-arginine into L-citrulline, producing NO as a by-product. This reaction also requires oxygen and cofactors such as tetrahydrobiopterin (BH4) and NADPH.

5. NO Release and Accumulation

The produced NO is released into the sinus cavities. Due to the enclosed nature of the sinuses and the continuous mechanical stimulation from humming, NO levels can accumulate significantly and diffuse into the surrounding tissues, including the nasal mucosa, sinuses and blood vessels.

7. Diffusion of NO into the Respiratory Tract

NO is a gas and diffuses easily through tissues. From the sinuses, NO diffuses into the nasal

PRANAYAM AND NO PRODUCTION

During *pranayam*, particularly during practices involving humming or prolonged exhalation, the vibrations and airflow stimulate the nasal passages and sinuses to produce and release NO. The key lies in the mechanics of these practices. See box for detailed mechanism.

PRANAYAM EXERCISES FOR NO PRODUCTION

The effects of nasally produced NO are relatively short-lived. However, regular practice of *pranayam* ensures a sustained supply of NO, leading to long-term health benefits.

Even *pranayam* techniques that do not involve humming can lead to a significant increase in NO production through mechanisms like increased airflow and turbulence in the nasal passages,

resulting in mechanical stimulation of the nasal passages, thus promoting health.

The following are some exercises and techniques that may significantly increase nasal NO production:

AUM Chanting: The prolonged chanting of 'AUM' involves deep, rhythmic breathing and vocal cord vibrations, which can stimulate the production of NO. The vibration of the vocal cords and the resonating sound waves likely enhance NO release in the nasal passages and sinuses.

Brahmari Pranayam: Also known as humming bee breath, this involves making a humming sound during exhalation. This technique not only calms the mind but also promotes the release of NO due to the vibrations created in the respiratory tract.

passages and further down into the lower respiratory tract. This diffusion is facilitated by the increased airflow generated during humming.

8. Absorption and Systemic Effects

From the respiratory tract, NO is absorbed into the bloodstream through the alveoli in the lungs.

Despite being an exhalational process, humming-produced NO doesn't escape into the air. During inhalation, the NO produced in the nasal passages and sinuses is carried into the lower respiratory tract, including the trachea, bronchi and ultimately the lungs. From there, it enters the bloodstream and spreads throughout the body. This allows NO to exert its physiological effects in various tissues and organs, influencing overall health and well-being.

1. Blood Pressure Regulation: NO is a potent vasodilator, meaning it relaxes the smooth muscles of the blood vessels, causing them to widen. This process helps lower blood pressure and improves blood flow, reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke.

2. Infection Control and Immune Response: NO has antimicrobial properties. It helps in defending the body against bacteria, viruses, fungi and other pathogens, reducing the risk of infections. This is particularly relevant for respiratory infections, where increased NO levels can help to keep the airways clear of bacteria and viruses. NO also has anti-inflammatory effects, supporting immune function and mucosal health.

3. Neurological Benefits: NO acts as a neurotransmitter, playing a key role in various neural processes. It can improve cognitive function and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, offering potential benefits for mental health, and influences processes that underlie learning and memory.

4. Respiratory Function: By promoting vasodilation and improving blood flow, NO helps enhance overall respiratory efficiency. This can be particularly beneficial for individuals with conditions like asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Ujjayi Pranayam (Ocean/Victorious Breath):

Constricting the back of the throat slightly and breathing in and out through the nose with a soft hissing sound, produces a sound reminiscent of ocean waves.

Bhastrika Pranayam: This breathing technique, according to BKS Iyengar, involves slow inhalations and exhalations through the nose, with a brief hold in between both.

Nadi Shodhan/Anulom-Vilom (Alternate Nostril Breathing): The technique is as follows: Place the left hand in front of the face, with the thumb and little finger forming a ‘V’ shape. Close the left nostril with the thumb and inhale through the right nostril. Close the right nostril with the little finger and exhale through the left nostril. Inhale through the left nostril, close it with the thumb, and exhale through the right nostril. Repeat the cycle, alternating nostrils. This exercise can also be done with the right hand.

Aim for at least 10–15 minutes of *pranayam* daily. Consistency is key to reaping long-term health benefits.

Remember to practice these techniques under the guidance of a qualified yoga or *pranayam* instructor, especially if you are new to these practices.

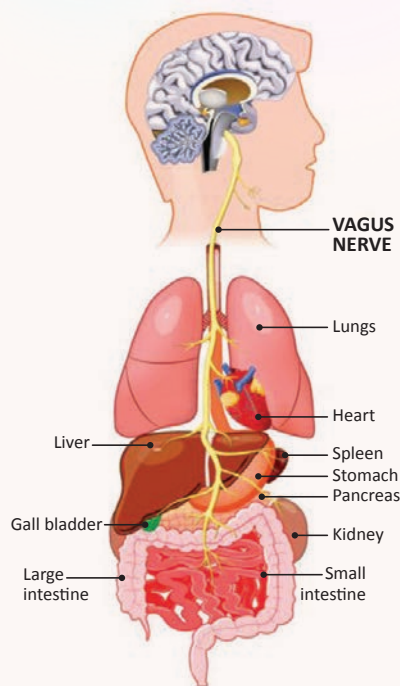
ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR ENHANCING NO PRODUCTION

Proper Nasal Breathing

Ensure that breathing is primarily through the nose rather than the mouth. Nasal breathing naturally increases NO production due to the presence of NOS enzymes in the nasal passages.

Maintaining Humidity

Keeping the nasal passages moist through proper hydration can help maintain the health of the mucous membranes, supporting optimal NO production.



Healthy Diet

Consuming a diet rich in nitrates (found in green leafy vegetables, beets and fruits) can provide the body with the raw materials needed for NO production.

The Impact of Aging on Nasal NO Production

Aging affects the body's physiological processes, including the production of NO. With age, the efficiency of NOS enzymes can decline, leading to reduced NO levels. However, regular practice of *pranayam* can help mitigate this decline by continuously stimulating NO production in the nasal passages. Older adults can benefit significantly from incorporating *pranayam* into their daily routines to maintain optimal NO levels and support overall health.

Pranayam and the Vagus Nerve

The vagus nerve, or the 10th cranial nerve, is a mixed nerve that contains both sensory and motor fibres. This means it carries motor signals to the organs it innervates, and also returns sensory information from these organs back to the central

nervous system. It is the longest and most complex of the twelve cranial nerves that emerge from the brain, and supplies organs in the head, neck, thorax and abdomen.

Pranayam exercises can significantly impact the vagus nerve, which plays a crucial role in many bodily functions. Deep, slow breathing and other conscious breathing practices can stimulate the vagus nerve, resulting in:

1. Better control of blood pressure and heart rate variability.
2. Improved lung function and overall respiratory health.
3. Relaxation and reduced stress hormones like cortisol.
4. Improved gut motility and reduced symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).
5. Regulation of neurotransmitters like serotonin, dopamine and acetylcholine, influencing mood, cognitive function, and overall well-being.

Other ways of stimulating the vagus nerve include: meditation and mindfulness practices, yoga asanas and *mudras*, cold shower or ice bath (cold thermogenesis), massage therapy (targeting neck, throat, and chest areas), laughter, exercise and physical activity (especially aerobic exercise), gargling and humming.

Other Health Benefits of Pranayam

Beyond the specific benefits of NO production and vagus nerve stimulation *pranayam* offers a range of physical and mental health advantages:

Improved Lung Capacity: *Pranayam* exercises enhance lung function, and increase lung capacity and respiratory efficiency, benefiting overall respiratory health.

Stress Reduction: *Pranayam* techniques activate the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting relaxation and reducing stress.

Enhanced Focus and Concentration: By calming the mind and increasing oxygen flow to the brain, *pranayam* can improve mental clarity

and cognitive function.

Emotional Balance: *Pranayam* helps regulate emotions, reducing anxiety and depression symptoms and promoting a positive outlook.

Better Sleep: Regular practice of *pranayam* can improve sleep quality by reducing stress and promoting relaxation.

Physical Vitality: The increased oxygenation and improved circulation from *pranayam* boost overall physical vitality and energy levels.

Pranayam is one aspect of *ashtang* yoga and when practised in combination with its other aspects, it enhances physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

BRIDGING TRADITION AND MODERN SCIENCE

The journey from ridicule to recognition is not uncommon for traditional practices. *Pranayam*, with its profound effects on nitric oxide production, vagus nerve stimulation and overall health, exemplifies this transformation. By integrating these age-old practices, celebrated in ancient cultures, into our daily lives, we can harness the power of breath to enhance our physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

It is possible that although the ancient Hindu sages may not have performed RCTs and may not have known of the detailed underlying science, they observed the widespread and varied benefits of these traditional practices among the population and hence promoted them vigorously.

So, as scientific inquiry continues to explore and confirm the benefits of ancient practices, we gain a deeper appreciation for the wisdom of our sages. And we are reminded that, sometimes, the answers to modern health challenges lie in the past, waiting to be rediscovered, opening the door to a richer, more holistic approach to health. ♦

INSPIRATIONS

*A potpourri of inspiring and
interesting information and wisdom*



KUKADDAM

There was a very cunning fox, craftier than all the rest. He would steal *barfi*, *ghari*, *mesub* and other sweets from the sweet shop regularly. The shop owner noticed his stock disappear everyday. "I'll have to catch the thief," he thought to himself.

One night the owner sat awake. Two o'clock at night the fox came. The shopkeeper felled him with a chair and dragged the fox outside. The fox was still alive, but he decided to just lay there and pretend to be dead. The next morning the village people got together. They found out that the sweet shopkeeper had killed a fox. It was decided to punish the owner. The fox lay quietly listening to everything. He thought it right that the owner be punished.

After a little while a carpenter came by. He said to the shopkeeper, "I'd like to take away the fox's tail." The owner said, "Take it. Cut it off."

The fox decided, "Let him take my tail. I won't say a word. But I want that shopkeeper punished." The carpenter cut off the fox's tail and went away pleased.

After a little while another man was passing by. He said to the shopkeeper, "I'd like the fox's ears." "Cut them and take them," replied the shopkeeper. The man did so. A third man arrived, he said, "I'd like the fox's teeth." Hearing this the fox thought, "If I let my teeth go I'll really end up dead. How will I eat without teeth?" And so he jumped up and ran for his life.

It so happened that a dyer in the village was making colour in a small pit. The fox jumped into it. When he came out he was coloured red and yellow all over.

No one recognized the strangely coloured fox with no ears and no tail. All the animals in the forest were scared and would run away from him. The fox named himself Kukaddam. He began making plans to become king of the forest.

One day, he proudly declared to those who were frightened of him, "I am king of the forest. You shall all obey me from now onwards." All the wild animals began to come to him and pay homage. For his protection the fox placed sentries in three circles around him. In the inner circle near to him there were only foxes. In the next circle were men and finally the tigers and lions. He ordered the tigers and lions, "You should stand guard six kilometres distant from here."

Two months passed in this way. Winter arrived. The foxes began to howl in the cold. Kukaddam would also quietly howl with those foxes around him. In the colder months they would howl more.

One day, the tiger and lion said to themselves, "We're the original kings of the forest, and so it is not right that we are not allowed to go near the king." They went to Kukaddam with their request, "Sire, we were the previous kings of the forest. For two months the foxes have stayed near Your Highness. Please send them away and let us stay close to you as your personal bodyguards. Kukaddam could not stop himself from saying yes. The tigers and lions stood close to him as guards.

In the winter cold Kukaddam felt an urge to howl as before. In the distance the other foxes began to howl. But what could he do. If he howled he would be caught and everyone would kill him. The cold soon increased and his desire to howl became more intense. Kukaddam would make strange noises in his throat, “Oohoo, Oohoo.” The lion asked him, “Sire, what is wrong? Does your stomach hurt?”

What answer could the fox give. Slowly, the noises increased and then Kukaddam couldn't resist any longer – he began to howl. The lion at once realized, “This Kukaddam is a fox! He's fooling us.” With one pounce he killed the pretender.

Truth can never be hidden for long. Even on eating garlic in secret its smell cannot be hidden. In the same way, just by wearing the clothes of a sadhu and declaring oneself to be a great soul one does not become so. Such an impostor is sure to be exposed. One should become a real sadhu. Weakness for the sense pleasures can be compared to Kukaddam's howling.

- 101 Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj

MEDICINE AND SURGERY



Sir William Hunter

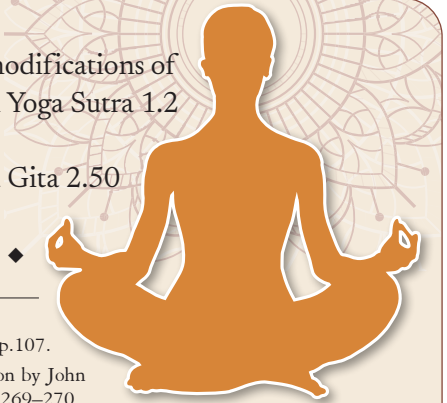
According to Prof. H.H. Wilson (1796–1860 CE), “The ancient Hindus attained as thorough a proficiency in medicine and surgery as any people whose acquisitions are recorded.”¹

Sir William Hunter (1840–1900 CE), a British historian and Vice-President of the Asiatic Society, described the expanse and depth that Indian medicine had acquired, “Indian medicine dealt with the whole area of the science. It described the structure of the body, its organs, ligaments, muscles, vessels and tissues. The *Materia Medica* of the Hindus embraces a vast collection of drugs belonging to the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, many of which have now been adopted by European physicians. Their pharmacy contained ingenious processes of preparation, with elaborate directions for the administration and classification of medicines. Much attention was devoted to hygiene, to the regimen of the body, and to diet.”²

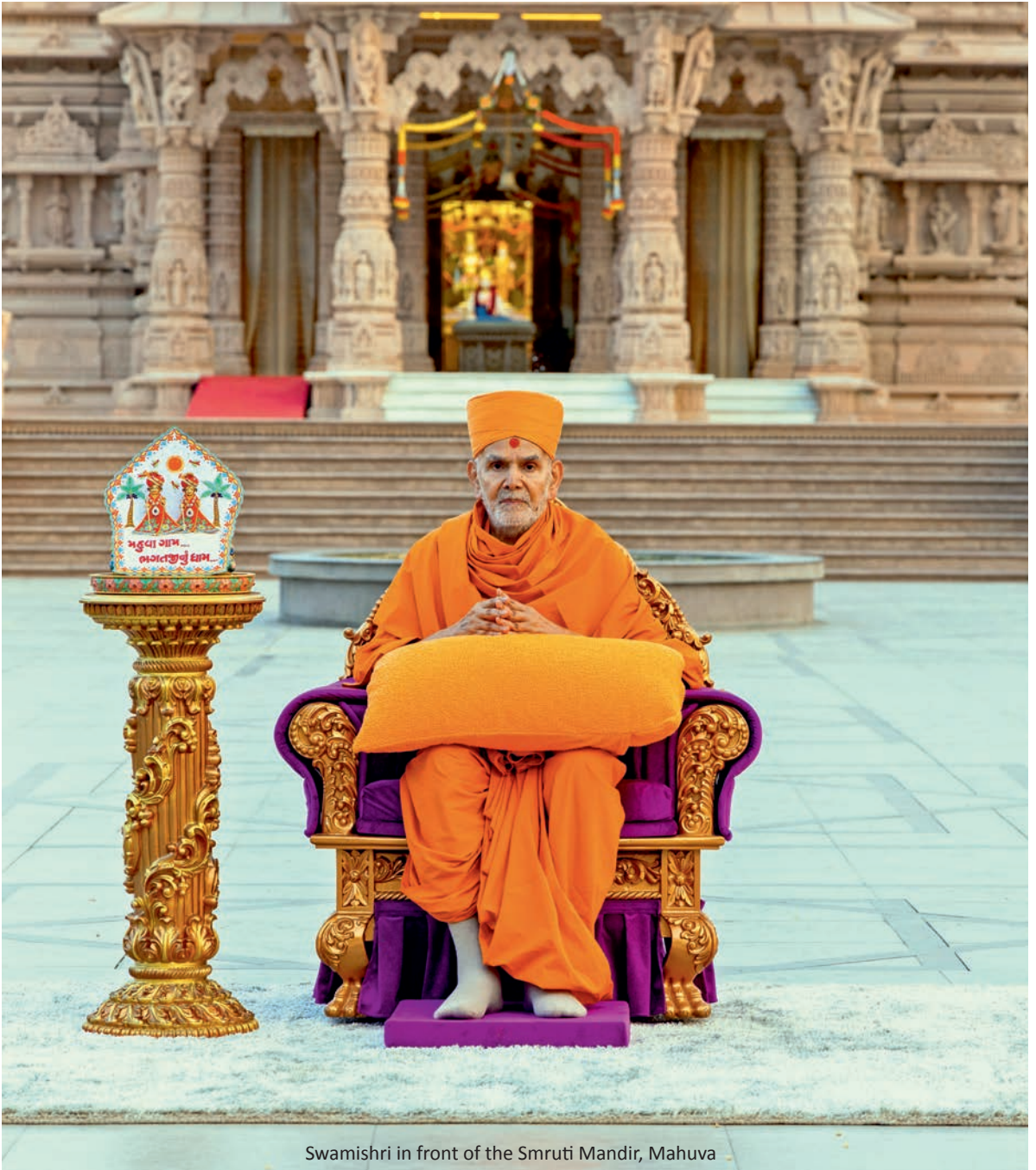
With reference to surgery, Albrecht Friedrich Weber (1825–1901 CE), a German Indologist and historian, notes, “In surgery, too, the Indians seem to have attained a special proficiency, and in this department European surgeons might perhaps even at the present day still learn something from them, as indeed they have already borrowed from them the operation of rhinoplasty [making artificial noses and ears].”³

THREE IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS OF YOGA

1. *Yogash chitta vrutti nirodhaha* – Yoga is the suppression of the modifications of the mind.
- Patanjali Yoga Sutra 1.2
2. *Yogaha karmasu kaushalam* – Excellence in action is yoga.
- Bhagavad Gita 2.50
3. *Samatvam yoga uchyate* – Equanimity is yoga.
- Bhagavad Gita 2.48 ♦



1. Sarda, Har Bilas. *Hindu Superiority*. Ajmer: Rajputana Printing Works, 1906, p.302.
2. Hunter, W.W. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. VI, 2nd edn. London: Trübner & Co., 1886, p.107.
3. Weber, Albrecht. *The History of Indian Literature*. Translated from the second German edition by John Mann and Theodor Zachariae. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1878, pp.269–270.



Swamishri in front of the Smruti Mandir, Mahuva



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

VICHARAN

8 June to 13 August 2024

Mahuva, Rajkot, Bhadra and Bochasan

The *vicharan* report in this issue briefly covers highlights of Swamishri's stay in Mahuva from 6 to 14 June, Rajkot from 14 June to 10 July, Bhadra from 10 to 18 July and Bochasan from 18 July to 13 August.

JUNE: MAHUVA

8: Darshan at Smruti Mandir and Birthplace

Swamishri arrived for darshan at the Smruti Mandir of Bhagatji Maharaj by the River Malan on the outskirts of Mahuva town. Nestled in a grove of stately coconut trees, the ornately carved Smruti Mandir was consecrated in 2022. Swamishri first came to the shrine situated beneath the middle dome of the mandir. The shrine owes its sanctity to a pot containing Bhagatji Maharaj's *asthi* buried underneath and to a replica of Shriji Maharaj's *charanarvind*. The shrine also contains a sanctified cloth of Bhagatji Maharaj and the *asthi-pushpas* of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. A letter of Mahant Swami Maharaj's blessings, describing the glory of the memorial mandir, is displayed here. The letter reads, "Maharaj, Swami and Bhagatji Maharaj will fulfil the good wishes of whoever circumambulates this memorial mandir of Bhagatji Maharaj."

Thereafter, Swamishri came to the sanctum-sanctorum of the mandir. Here, Swamishri did darshan of the *charanarvind* installed by Yogiji Maharaj and the new *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Bhagatji Maharaj. Swamishri prayed, "May the wishes of those who come here be fulfilled." Swamishri performed *arti* and thereafter praised the glory of the memorial mandir, "Here, one has darshan of the personified form of Bhagatji Maharaj and everything here has a divine feeling. The *murti* of Bhagatji Maharaj is beautiful. The importance of this place will grow with time. People will come here in abundance for darshan."

Then, Swamishri was given a cloth piece and



Swamishri at the Smruti Mandir sanctum, Mahuva
a sewing needle in his hand to give a *smruti* of Bhagatji Maharaj. Swamishri rang the bell at the Smruti Mandir.

Swamishri proceeded to Bhagatji Maharaj's birthplace in the town centre. Swamishri did darshan of the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the guru *parampara*. Swamishri recalled memories of Yogiji Maharaj in Mahuva and about Vallabhnbhai Tank's *seva* for many years. Swamishri chanted *dhun* and performed *mala* for the good of all and did darshan of the sanctified places and objects at the birthplace. Finally, Swamishri returned to the BAPS mandir and blessed the devotees standing along the route.

9: Satsang Day

The highlights of the evening satsang assembly are as follows.

- *Dhun*, *prarthana* and kirtan by youths.
- Speech by Pujya Viveksagar Swami.
- Welcome dance by youths.
- Everyone collectively expressed their appreciations to Swamishri for coming to Mahuva



On Pramukh Varni Din, Swamishri engrossed in darshan of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahuva mandir

at the age of 91 years to give darshan and *labh* to all.

- Narration of incidents of the *labh* given by Mahant Swami Maharaj to the devotees and people of Mahuva.

- Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed through a question-answer session. Swamishri said, “We all have to become *brahmarup* because Shriji Maharaj resolved to make all *jivas* *brahmarup*. Shriji Maharaj is so powerful that he elevated ordinary *jivas* to the state of *brahmarup*. Thus, we are incredibly blessed.

“Secondly, this satsang is rare to obtain. So, it is not ordinary. The Gunatit gurus have the power to uplift ordinary *jivas* to the state of *brahmarup*. Therefore, all should tap for inner strength from the guru and do satsang.”

10: Pramukh Varni Din

Today, according to the Indian calendar (Jeth *sud* 4), was Pramukh Varni Din. To commemorate this day an *annakut* was offered to Thakorji in the mandir sanctums. A *rangoli* was created in the mandir courtyard to celebrate the occasion.

The devotees honoured Swamishri’s Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj with a *rajat-tula* (weighing Thakorji with silver).

The evening satsang assembly celebrated Pramukh Varni Din in the presence of thousands of devotees. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s divine virtues were presented through a drama, videos and speeches by swamis. Then, children performed an energetic traditional dance, while swamis honoured Swamishri with garlands. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly through a question-answer session about bhakti coupled with humility and *seva*.

12: Samip Darshan

Swamishri gave *samip* darshan while his car slowly passed by the devotees seated in the mandir precincts. Thereafter, Swamishri performed *arti* and blessed all. *Kothari* Vinamramuni Swami and *sant nirdeshak* Akhandmangal Swami appreciated Swamishri for giving darshan and *labh* to the devotees of Mahuva and neighbouring satsang centres for nine days.

On 14 June, Swamishri departed from Mahuva to Rajkot.



Swamishri honoured with a garland after his arrival, Rajkot



Devotees during the welcome assembly, Rajkot.
(Below) Swamishri gives darshan



a welcome dance was performed by children and youths. Leading devotees of Rajkot placed baskets of fruits and sweets before Thakorji and Swamishri. To please Swamishri hundreds of male and female devotees had observed austerities and offered bhakti from 14 February to 14 June (Swamishri's arrival): 2,963,560 *malas*, 1,735,872 *pradakshinas*, 1,886,861 *dandvats* and *panchang pranams*, 3,032 chain water fasts and 1,470 chain waterless fasts. Many more devotees participated in memorizing *shloks* and verses, doing *ghar sabha*, *mahima yagnas* and *suhrudbhav yagnas*.

Swamishri appreciated the bhakti of everyone and blessed the audience, "Today marks the day of Shriji Maharaj's departure from earth. However, for us Shriji Maharaj is always present through

RAJKOT

14: Arrival in Rajkot

Swamishri travelled from Mahuva to Rajkot airport in a helicopter. *Kothari* Brahmatirth Swami and *sant nirdeshak* Apurvamuni Swami welcomed and honoured Swamishri with a flower garland on behalf of Rajkot Satsang *mandal*. Swamishri proceeded in a decorated car towards the BAPS mandir. He was escorted by youths on motorbikes and cars. The mandir grounds were decorated with flower *rangolis*, flags and buntings. Children dressed in colourful costumes showered flower petals on Swamishri and youths danced to various welcome kirtans.

Swamishri went to the mandir for Thakorji's darshan and thereafter he entered the Pramukh Swami Sabhagruh amidst fervent welcome *jais*. Swamis and devotees had performed various austerities to please and welcome Mahant Swami Maharaj. Swamishri blessed all by saying "Jai Swaminarayan".

16: Welcome Assembly

After Swamishri arrived on the assembly stage, Brahmatirth Swami and Apurvamuni Swami performed Swamishri's *pujan*. Thereafter,



Children and volunteers perform during the Sanskar Din assembly themed on 'Values are Wealth', Rajkot

the Satpurush (guru). We are very fortunate and blessed that we have the company of a living Satpurush. Now, our sadhana is to firmly bond with him."

Finally, the devotees were each given a sanctified mango for *prasad*.

17: Sanskar Din (Values Day)

Children celebrated Bal Din as Sanskar Din. The evening assembly was themed on 'Values Are Wealth'. Children welcomed Thakorji and Swamishri with brief dances from the dramatic presentations of Sheru, Buzo and Suvarna performed during Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary celebrations.

Prior to Swamishri's arrival, a drama portraying *bal sabha* had begun. Thereafter, a question-answer session was held with Swamishri. Swamishri talked about the benefits of *bal sabha* and then addressed the parents, "First, love your children, and then instil understanding (*samjan*) in them. When you love them, they will obey you. And when you instil understanding in them then their good practices will endure."

20: Yuva Din (Youth Day)

In the evening assembly, the youths celebrated Yuva Din as 'Sanyam Din' (Self-restraint Day). They performed a drama themed on 'Alertness Is Security'. Then, inspiring stories of youths moulded by the BAPS youth activities were narrated. Pujya Viveksagar Swami honoured these youths with garlands and Swamishri blessed them. A question-answer session with Swamishri followed. In conclusion, garlands made by male and female youths were offered by swamis to Swamishri.

21: Siddhant Din (Principles Day)

The evening assembly was themed on the Akshar-Purushottam *siddhant* (philosophical principle). Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke about Bhagwan Swaminarayan's principle of Akshar-Purushottam. Thereafter, an inspiring drama called 'Upasak nu Upavastra' was enacted. Swamishri then performed the *pratishtha* rituals of 700 *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj to be installed at the homes of devotees.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, "The Akshar-Purushottam principle was hidden in the Vedas, Upanishads, Purans and Vachanamrut. No one



Chhatralaya students engage with Swamishri in a question-answer session, Rajkot

could fully grasp or understand it. However, Shastriji Maharaj, a great spiritual luminary, out of immense grace gave the Akshar-Purushottam principle as the essence of all the Hindu shastras. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired thousands of Akshar-Purushottam mandirs in all corners of the world and thus spread this principle. And the work is still ongoing today. I am very happy that more than 700 *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj will be installed at the homes of devotees. Believe these *murtis* to be true and real and offer bhakti and *seva*.”

Children and youths performed a thrilling dance on the bhajan ‘Akshar-Purushottam dayālu Prabhu...’ A *pagh*, similar to what Shastriji Maharaj used to put on, was tied on Swamishri’s head. Then, Swamishri rang a bell and waved the BAPS flag in tune with the spirited dance.

The day also marked the International Yoga Day. In the morning, Swamishri performed yoga *asans* and inspired all to practise a healthy way of life.

22: Shikshan Din (Education Day)

Students of BAPS Chhatralaya, Rajkot, celebrated Education Day. They sang bhajans in

Swamishri’s morning puja. The evening assembly was themed on ‘Path Darshak’ (Guide Showing the Way). The students performed a drama, ‘Brahmastra’, before Swamishri. The students also expressed the benefits of living in the Chhatralaya. Then, garlands and shawls made by the students were offered to Swamishri. The students then performed a fast-paced traditional dance.

Swamishri blessed the assembly through a question-answer session, emphasizing the importance of adhering to *niyam*-dharma and in exercising self-control in using mobile phones and social media platforms.

23: Samarpan Din (Dedication Day)

The evening assembly commemorated the dedication and services rendered by devotees. A drama was performed to portray incidents of devotees’ dedications at the guru’s behest and wishes. In conclusion, Swamishri expressed a wish, “A wonderful school be constructed here, where students will be taught values so that they can concentrate and study well.” The devotees responded with thunderous claps and pledged to fulfil Swamishri’s wish.



On Suhrudbhav Din, a skit presentation on *sampilo parivar*, Rajkot

A video of the proposed educational complex was shown and Swamishri performed the *bhumi puja* rituals of the complex. Swamishri blessed, “The complex will turn out to be the best and it will become very popular.”

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed 400 devotees from Kutch.

25: Suhrudbhav Din (Friendship Day)

In the evening assembly, an inspiring drama ‘Sampilo Parivar’ (Harmonious Family) was enacted before Swamishri. Thereafter, Apurvamuni Swami spoke about the benefits experienced by families in Rajkot by doing *ghar sabha*. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly through a question-answer session. Swamishri said, “Many problems will be solved if we are inclined towards ‘What is right?’ instead of ‘Who is right?’ Tussles and conflicts arise from ‘Who is Right?’ Pramukh Swami Maharaj has given us a solution called *ghar sabha*. If one practises it then one will become happy and immortal.”

27: Sampark Din (Personal Contact Day)

In the evening assembly, a drama ‘Inspiring

Satsang in Rajkot’ was performed by the local youths, in which inspiring incidents of personal contact by devotees were presented. Thereafter, Swamishri initiated 1,100 aspirants into satsang by giving *vartman*. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Gurus Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj had truly endeavoured very hard for the growth of satsang in Rajkot. By looking at their efforts we should strive to inspire satsang in Rajkot.”

OTHER SPECIAL DAYS CELEBRATED IN RAJKOT

28: Satkar Din (Honour Day)

Under the auspices of the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav, the volunteers of Rajkot were honoured and presented with memorabilia.

29: Sanskruti Din (Cultural Day)

Swamishri blessed hundreds of devotees from Morbi who had come for darshan.

30: Seva Din (Service Day)

In the morning, Swamishri blessed 2,500 *karyakars* (volunteers) dressed in uniform and seated in the mandir courtyard. Swamishri and



Swamishri and Puja Viveksagar Swami release balloons to commemorate the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav, Rajkot

the *karyakars* released balloons and waved the BAPS flags to celebrate the year-long Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav.

Swamishri inaugurated an online course for the UPSC and GPSC exams named 'Pramukh Sankalp Programme'. Then Swamishri blessed, "If you study this course properly it will benefit you and the country."

The evening assembly was themed 'Seva Din'. The *karyakars* presented a skit portraying their situations while doing *seva*. This was followed by a question-answer session in which Swamishri explained about *prapti*, "By contemplating about *prapti* one's ego and other base natures will be eradicated. The *prapti* we have attained is like the Himalayas and our problems are trifle like a small clod of earth. Thus, continue contemplating on *prapti*." Thereafter, Swamishri was honoured with flower garlands and a shawl with the names of all the *karyakars*.

JULY: RAJKOT

1: Swamishri performed the *pratishta* rituals of *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in the Pramukhraj and Chandan Park suburbs of Rajkot.

3: According to the English calendar, today marked Swamishri's second *parshad diksha* celebration. Swamishri recalled his *diksha* memories through a question-answer session.

8: Satpurush Din (Guru Day)

Today, was the last evening satsang *sabha* of Swamishri's stay in Rajkot. Thus, devotees were present in very large numbers. Children performed a drama in which they lovingly insisted Swamishri to stay more. Swamishri had revealed five points during his entire stay about his omnipresence. They are: 1. All should have a harmonious relationship with each other and perceive each other's virtues. 2. Dedication. 3. Personal contact and spread of satsang. 4. Contemplation of *prapti*. 5. *Ahanik* or listening to *katha*, performing *arti* and *mansi* and singing *cheshta*.

In response to whoever pledged to practise the five vows, Swamishri promised in writing, "I will always be with you." The packed audience of devotees responded with thunderous claps. Then, Swamishri gave spiritual guidance through a question-answer session. Prayers were offered to Swamishri, who then raised his hands to bless all.



After his arrival, Swamishri gives darshan from the mandir podium, Bhadra

In conclusion, everyone performed *arti* of Thakorji in unison with Swamishri. Thereafter, youths performed a traditional dance during which swamis honoured Swamishri with a variety of garlands.

On 10 July 2024, Swamishri departed from Rajkot and travelled to Bhadra.

JULY: BHADRA



Swamishri at the birthplace shrine of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, Bhadra

From 10 to 18 July, Swamishri resided at the BAPS Mandir, Bhadra.

10: Swamishri's Arrival

Swamishri arrived in Bhadra village in the evening. He was escorted by youths on motorbikes. Children showered flower petals and youths waved BAPS flags on his arrival in the mandir precincts. Hundreds of devotees were seated on the mandir ground. After doing Thakorji's darshan, Swamishri gave darshan to all from the mandir podium. Swamis garlanded and welcomed Swamishri. Many swamis and devotees had observed austerities and bhakti rituals: 363,127 *malas*, 196,272 *dandvats* and *panchang* pranams, 204,086 *pradakshinas* and various other *niyams*. Swamishri was pleased and blessed them all.

The women devotees had prepared a variety of *rangolis* to welcome Swamishri.

11: Darshan of Mandir and Birthplace

Swamishri had specially arranged his visit to and stay in Bhadra to do darshan of the renovated birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami and the

RATH YATRA FESTIVAL

7 July 2024, Rajkot



The Rath Yatra festival was celebrated at all the BAPS mandirs in India and abroad.

Swamishri celebrated the Rath Yatra festival on the grounds of Rajkot mandir. The day also marked the conclusion of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Rajkot mandir. During early morning the entire mandir precincts was occupied by devotees. An *annakut* was offered to Thakorji in the main mandir. After doing Thakorji's darshan, Swamishri performed his morning puja in the assembly hall. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed, "Our whole life is like a journey (*rath yatra*). It is in our hands in which direction we steer our life's chariot. We are greatly blessed that we have attained Bhagwan and guru, who are the drivers of our life-chariot. No matter what tribulations we encounter never give up the

guru. The guru will steer our chariot to God's abode, Akshardham."

Swamishri then performed *pujan* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (Thakorji) and Bhagwan Krishna, Subhadraji and Balramji. Then, Swamishri steered, with a remote controlled console, the chariot of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj on the stage. Swamishri also inaugurated a stone inscription titled BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir Chowk. The mandir *chowk* was officially named by the Rajkot Municipal Corporation.

The evening assembly was organized in the mandir precincts to celebrate the Rath Yatra festival and Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Rajkot mandir. On Swamishri's arrival, he first performed the *pujan* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Bhagwan Krishna, Subhadraji and Balramji

and inaugurated the celebration. At the forefront of the procession swamis carried a decorated palanquin with the *murtis* of Bhagwan Krishna, Subhadraji and Balramji. Other swamis pulled a decorated chariot in which Swamishri was seated with Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. A red carpet laid around the mandir defined the route of the *rath yatra*. Youths led the festive procession by waving flags. They were followed by swamis singing kirtans and playing *kartals*. The procession was welcomed by showers of flower petals and confetti. Thousands of devotees hailed *jais* and did darshan of the *rath yatra*.

In conclusion, Swamishri spoke, “Today, is the

auspicious festival of Rath Yatra. I pray to Maharaj and Swami to consolidate satsang in the lives of all. May all be happy in body, mind and wealth. Satsang keeps us stable in our life chequered with pain and joy. Having attained such a glorious satsang we should introspect as to who we are and what we are doing. In doing so, our life’s chariot will become free from worldly desires and reach Akshardham.” Swamishri waved a BAPS flag and concluded the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Rajkot mandir. Finally, while Swamishri performed the *arti* the sky was illuminated by a display of fireworks. ♦

holy *charanarvind*. Swamishri performed two *pradakshinas* of the *charanarvind* shrine and was pleased to know about the daily performance of the *mahapuja* ritual here.

13: Swamishri visited the old Swaminarayan Mandir in the village for darshan and performed *arti*. Swamishri did darshan of Shriji Maharaj’s sacred bowl (*pattar*) and holy places. Thereafter, Swamishri returned to the mandir.

14: Symbolic Guru Purnima Celebration

An *annakut* was arranged at the birthplace and before Thakorji in the mandir. Swamishri was pleased with the darshan of *annakut* and Thakorji adorned with flowers. A tulsi *tula* was arranged for the devotees in Swamishri’s puja. In his blessings after the puja, Swamishri said, “Whoever participates in the tulsi *tula* will advance on the path of *moksha*. Bhagwan believes your little *seva* to be a lot. Therefore, do *seva* with faith and according to your means.” Then, swamis honoured Swamishri with garlands.

In the evening celebration assembly the attendant swamis of Swamishri spoke about his virtues and divinity. Adarshjivan Swami spoke about the meaning of true guru *pujan*. Youths from Rajkot performed a vibrant welcome dance. The

swamis residing and serving in Bhadra performed *pujan* of Thakorji and Swamishri. Other swamis offered flowers after the *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual to Swamishri. *Kothari* Dharmakunvar Swami and other swamis thanked and garlanded Swamishri for his abundant divine grace.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Obeying Bhagwan’s command is equivalent to having performed guru *pujan*. The moral command for householder devotees is to practise fidelity. Thus, for men all women other than their wife are equivalent to their mother, sister or daughter and for women all other men other than their husband are equal to father, brother or son. By following this command amounts to guru *pujan*. For a renunciant or *tyagi* the observance of absolute celibacy and *panch vartmans* amounts to guru *pujan*.

“Secondly, guru *pujan* means having *nirdoshbhav* for the guru. Guru is the personified form of Bhagwan. Yogi Bapa used to say having *nirdoshbhav* is guru *pujan*.”

15: Swamishri’s Second Parshad Diksha Anniversary

Today, according to the Indian calendar, marked Swamishri’s second *parshad diksha* anniversary. Sixty-four years ago Yogiji Maharaj

gave Swamishri the *parshad diksha* for the second time in Kapol Vadi, Mumbai.

Swamishri performed his morning puja at the birthplace of Gunatitanand Swami. Thereafter, Swamishri reminisced about his experiences in Bhadra and about his *parshad diksha*.

16: Swamishri at the Ghat of River Und

In the evening, Swamishri visited the holy River Und. With Swamishri's blessings the new gate, built on the road leading to the banks of River Und, was inaugurated. Swamis bathed in the holy waters of River Und. Adarshjivan Swami narrated past incidents of Swamishri's association with the River Und.

Swamishri offered *abhishek* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj with the waters of River Und and sprinkled the consecrated water on his head. *Dhun* and prayers were offered for the fulfilment of various auspicious wishes. Thereafter, swamis and *parshads* offered *abhishek* at Swamishri's feet and touched his feet. Then, Swamishri sprayed the holy waters of River Und on the swamis and blessed them.

Jnanprasad Swami and Dharmakunvar Swami showed Swamishri the well that had been dug to provide water for the Bhadra mandir *murti-pratishtha* event in 1969. Thereafter, Swamishri sat beneath the banyan tree and Adarshjivan Swami narrated incidents of Mahant Swami Maharaj with Yogiji Maharaj.

Finally, Swamishri sat on a small stage and was garlanded by Dharmakunvar Swami. Then, Swamishri held a pair of *raas* sticks while swamis, *parshads* and *sadhaks* played *raas* as they circled around Swamishri. Swamishri compassionately looked at and graced all. After the *raas* celebration Swamishri returned to the mandir.

17: Dev Podhi Ekadashi

Swamis touched Swamishri's feet and pledged special *niyams* and austerities for the holy months of Chaturmas.

On 18 July, Swamishri departed from Bhadra and travelled to Bochasan.

JULY: BOCHASAN

18: Swamishri's Arrival

Swamishri departed from Bhadra and travelled by helicopter from Dhrol to Bochasan. Vedagna Swami, Bhagvatcharan Swami and Govindvallabh Swami welcomed Swamishri after his landing on the school grounds by garlanding him with flowers. Thereafter, Swamishri was driven in a decorated vehicle and escorted by youths on motorbikes to the mandir. On entering the mandir, children and youths cheerfully waved BAPS flags and devotees hailed *jais* to welcome Swamishri.

After doing Thakorji's darshan Swamishri came to the mandir courtyard and released a bouquet of balloons. Then, Swamishri performed *abhishek* of Nilkanth Varni's *murti* and arrived in the assembly hall. Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami offered a garland of roses to Swamishri and welcomed him. Swamishri then blessed all those who had observed austerities and performed special bhakti rituals by saying 'Jai Swaminarayan'.

19: Palkhi Yatra

Today was Ashadh *sud* 13 – a historic day celebrating Yogiji Maharaj's departure from Junagadh with the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj to join Shastriji Maharaj in Rajkot. To celebrate this occasion a *palkhi yatra* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj was carried out in the mandir grounds with great festivity. Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performed *pujan* and honoured the *murtis*.

23: Yagnapurush ne Dwar

In the evening assembly, *karyakars* (volunteers) of the Mahelav region presented a programme themed on Shastriji Maharaj's grit in spreading the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. The programme included a drama, a traditional dance by youths and a monoact on Nirgundas Swami by a child.



Karyakars of Mahelav perform a skit in the evening satsang assembly, Bochasan

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Shastriji Maharaj was born to promulgate the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. His life was such that there was nothing other than Akshar-Purushottam. In matters of *upasana* he never succumbed to anyone.”

The *kishores* and *kishoris* of UK, Europe and North America took the opportunity of Swamishri’s morning puja darshan. *Kishores* sang bhajans and also took *labh* of the Guru Punam celebration.

25: Kishore Sabha

The *kishores* and *kishoris* of the UK, Europe and North America attended a special *sabha*. The theme of the assembly was ‘Malya Mune Shastriji Maharaj’. The *kishores* narrated incidents of Shastriji Maharaj’s devotees: Hira Mukhi, Jivabhai (Bhaili), Soma Bhagat and others. Swamishri also participated during their presentations. As a gift to all, Swamishri performed the *pratishtha* of *murtis* for their puja. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed them, “Shriji Maharaj is genuine, Gunatitanand Swami is genuine, *ekantik* dharma is genuine,

devotees are genuine and everything is genuine. Consolidate this *nishtha* in your soul.”

26: Satsang Sabha

The evening assembly programme theme of ‘Karuna Aparampar’ was presented by *karyakars* from the Anand region. An enthralling musical performance portrayed incidents of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s and the guru *parampara*’s compassion upon the people of Anand. They included Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s tolerance of insults by the people of Anand, Shastriji Maharaj’s resolution in Anand to build a mandir in Bochasan and Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s appeal to shopkeepers of Anand to donate lentils. Thereafter, incidents about Mahant Swami Maharaj’s association with Anand were narrated. Then, youths performed a beautiful, traditional dance.

In conclusion, Swamishri briefly blessed, “Jai Swaminarayan and blessings to all. May you all be happy in body, mind and wealth.”

28: Chhatralaya Day

In the evening Sunday assembly students of



Youths from the UK, Europe and North America offer prayers to Swamishri, Bochasan

the BAPS Chhatralaya, Vidyanagar, presented a programme that revived memories about the Vidyanagar *chhatralaya*. They also gave a presentation on how Shastriji Maharaj established and spread the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* through hard work, tolerance, saintliness and strict observance of *niyams* and dharma.

Swamishri was pleased to know about the austerities and bhakti rituals practised by the students. Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Nothing has been left out in the *niyams* prescribed by Shriji Maharaj. By observing them Maharaj and the guru *parampara* will be happy upon you. You will be secure and protected by observing the *niyams* and dharma.”

30: Satsang Sabha

In the evening satsang assembly, youths of Bochasan *mandal* performed a drama, ‘Ten Stupid Persons’. Thereafter, youths of Alindra *mandal* performed a drama, ‘Prapti’. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly through a question-answer session. Swamishri said, “Our true identity is *atma*. Thus, believe oneself to be

atma. Become *aksharup* and offer bhakti then all our problems will be solved.”

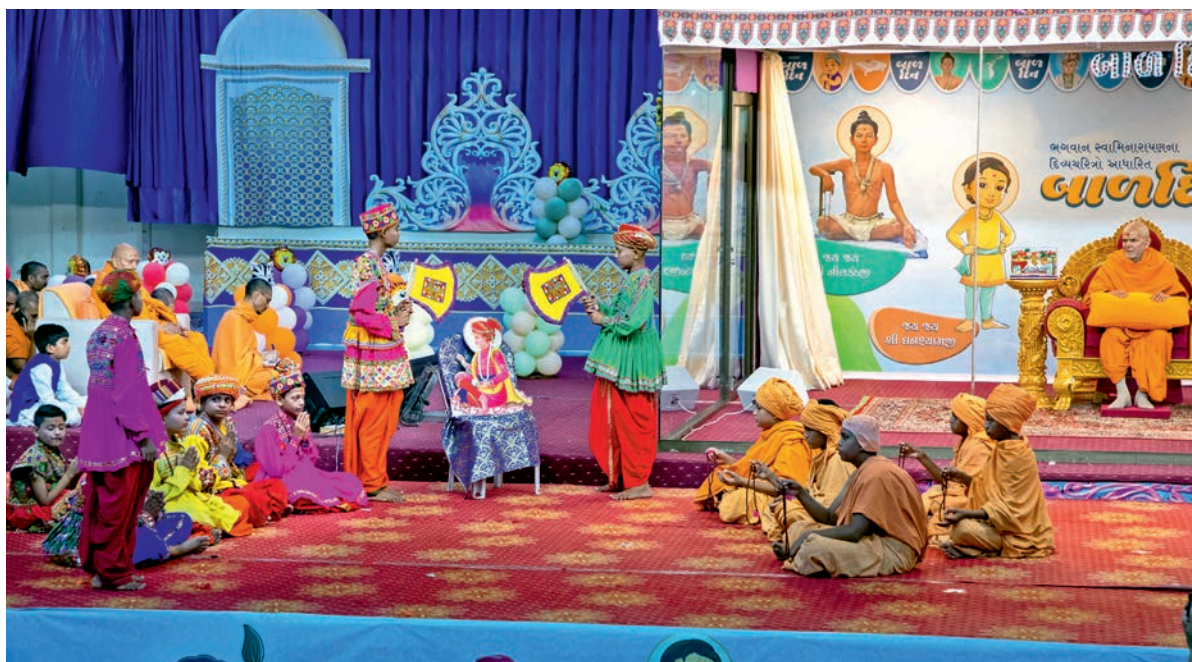
31: Darshan of Holy Places

Swamishri embarked upon a round of darshan of the holy places in Bochasan mandir: room where Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj resided; shrine outside the mandir where Nilkanth Varni stayed; shrine of Purushottam Swami and sacred cart, wooden stairs and giant door.

AUGUST: BOCHASAN

2: Smruti Sabha

In the evening assembly, devotees of the Badalpur region presented a programme themed on *vicharan* of the Satpurush in their villages. Incidents and situations of Shastriji Maharaj’s, Yogiji Maharaj’s, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s and Mahant Swami Maharaj’s *vicharans* were recalled. Swamishri also spoke about his gurus’ *vicharans*. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed, “Maharaj and Swami loves *samp* (harmony), which all of you have fostered while doing *seva* and establishing



On Children's Day, Swamishri keenly sees a performance by children, Bochasan

mandirs. Swami Bapa looked at *jivas* and not at their bodies and poor conditions. Thus, he travelled extensively in the Badalpur region.”

4: Prapti Sabha

In the evening Sunday assembly, devotees from Bochasan region presented a short humorous drama, ‘The Coin Fell Down’, which portrayed how minor problems often overwhelm us. Thereafter, incidents of devotees who remained in vibrant spirits during adverse situations were presented.

A question-answer session on *prapti* was held with Swamishri. Swamishri explained, “By contemplating on *prapti* Bhagwan showers his *rājipo*, one gains mental stability, our problems are solved and we experience eternal joy.”

Swamishri sanctified the hand-peeled rice grains sent by the women devotees. Swamishri also blessed the students of Nadiad and Atladara Chhatralayas for pledging austerities and bhakti rituals during Chaturmas.

7: Children's Day

In the evening assembly, 4,000 *balaks* and

balikas were present during the Children's Day programme, themed on ‘Swaminarayan Charitra’. Children enacted incidents of how Ghanshyam Maharaj destroyed Kalidatt and Nilkanth Varni served Sevakram. Thereafter, children performed a dance, engaged in a competition and game. An incident of a boy of Jagamedi village was performed, portraying his resolute faith in spite of being threatened with death. Then, Swamishri was garlanded by swamis. Thereafter, in a question-session Swamishri replied, “May you all advance immensely in your studies. Break all records in your studies. Obey *niyams* and follow the instructions given to you in your class and please your teachers. Also, do satsang.”

Swamishri sanctified *rakhis* for the devotees for the Raksha Bandhan festival.

11: Samarpan Din

In the evening assembly, Adarshjivan Swami spoke on the benefits of spiritual dedication. Thereafter, a drama, ‘Samarpan’, in which stories of dedicated devotees in the times of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Shastriji Maharaj were enacted.

Since this was Swamishri's last satsang assembly for this stay, Vedagna Swami heartily appreciated Swamishri for giving *labh* and all those who had helped and contributed during Swamishri's stay. Swamishri blessed by inspiring all to contribute for the renovation project of Bochasan mandir. Swamishri said, "Your contribution will be for the service of Shastriji Maharaj. Thus, do *seva* by believing that one is blessed and fortunate. He will give you the fruits of your *seva* because he had installed the *murti* of Akshar-Purushottam here."

Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriyadas Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Vedagna Swami and Bhaktavatsal Swami garlanded and honoured Swami.

In conclusion, Swamishri and the whole assembly prayed for peace and order to prevail in the current turmoil in Bangladesh.

On 13 August, Swamishri departed from Bochasan to New Delhi. ♦

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

GURU PURNIMA

21 July 2024, Bochasan



From 8.30 a.m. to 12.15 p.m., 60,000 devotees from throughout India and many other countries had gathered in Bochasan to celebrate the auspicious Guru Purnima festival in the divine presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The colourful main stage included the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the guru *parampara*. The assembly commenced with the Rig Vedic prayer of love, peace and harmony, "*Sangachhadhvam Samvadadhvam...*"

Thereafter, kirtans extolling the glory of the guru were sung: "*Guru Parmeshwar re...*", "*Guru mālya gun vālā...*", and '*Gurudevna charanmā karie karod vandan...*'

Then, the letter by Pramukh Swami



Maharaj, dated 20 July 2012, declaring Mahant Swami as his spiritual successor and head of BAPS, was read to commemorate the twelve years of this momentous revelation.

The Guru Purnima festival assembly was themed on Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami's teachings from his 'Swamini Vato' about the

virtues of the Gunatit Sant. In chapter 2, discourse 1, Gunatitanand Swami says that before accepting and associating with a guru, check the following three aspects. First, check the guru's behaviour; second, check the behaviour of his guru; and third, check the behaviour of his disciples.

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

Addressing the assembly on the theme 'Guruna Guruni Gatha' (Story of the Guru's Guru), Anirdesh Swami elaborated upon the glory of an ideal guru based on the Prasthantrayi, i.e. the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras. He shared inspiring incidents from the lives of gurus Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj regarding their *swarup* (glory of the Gunatit guru according to the shastras), *sthiti* (state of egolessness, equipoise, etc.) and *samarthyā* (power to eradicate base natures and bless with *moksha*).

On the subject 'Guruni Swayam Gatha' (story of the current guru), Adarshjivan Swami shared inspiring incidents of humility, selflessness, *seva*, and many other virtues of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Thereafter, a captivating video about the divine life and works of Mahant Swami Maharaj was shown. Since he became a guru in 2016, at the age of 83, Mahant Swami Maharaj has inspired and consecrated over 350 mandirs, including the iconic Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Jersey, and the historic BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi. Swamiji has given the sadhu *diksha* to 300 youths and established over 13 Swaminarayan Research Institutes worldwide. Mahant Swami Maharaj has guided countless devotees on the spiritual path and embodies the life motto of his guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 'In the joy of others lies our own.'

Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami spoke on the life and work of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and reiterated how Bhagwan Swaminarayan is manifest through the illustrious tradition of the Gunatit gurus, and

today through Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Pujya Anandswarup Swami narrated the inspiring virtues and stories of disciples on the subject 'Story of the Guru's Disciples'. He described stories about how, in spite of life's adverse circumstances, many *satsangi* children, young men and women, lead virtuous lives coupled with spiritual understanding. He mentioned how an ideal guru transforms people and creates an ethically and spiritually upright society.

Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami mentioned, "Yogiji Maharaj has said in the Yogi Gita that true guru *pujan* is having *nirdosh buddhi* in the guru, i.e. believing the guru to be pure, and obeying his wishes."

Pujya Doctor Swami talked about the significance of the Guru Purnima festival. He mentioned that guru Veda Vyasji, after thoroughly reading all the shastras of Sanatan Dharma, gave the essence, "Human life's aim is to attain God. True Guru Purnima means to obey the guru's words, live a pure moral life and serve society, country and *satsang*."

After the speeches, *sadguru* swamis and senior swamis garlanded and honoured Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, the mammoth gathering offered reverence to Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and guru Mahant Swami Maharaj by performing the *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual.

Finally, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, "Obeying the guru and keeping *nirdosh buddhi* in him is true guru *pujan*. May all prosper and serve through body, mind and wealth. Let us understand the glory (*mahima*) of each other, respect each other and see all as divine. This is true guru *pujan*."

Thereafter, devotees took *prasad* and departed with joyous and divine memories of the occasion. In all, 5,000 volunteers served for the efficient planning, preparation and execution of the celebration.

The celebration was webcast live on baps.org.



Satsang Vicharan by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami

10–23 July 2024, Hong Kong and Thailand



DASHABDI MAHOTSAV

12–15 July 2024, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir,
Hong Kong, China

Four days of celebrations marked the tenth anniversary of the BAPS Mandir in Hong Kong and its ten memorable years of social and spiritual contributions in the region.

Bhakti Sangeet

On 12 July, the tenth anniversary celebrations commenced with Bhakti Sangeet, in which over 300 devotees were enthralled by the bhajans sung in various Indian languages by Yogipremdas Swami.

Also, Pujya Viveksagardas Swami elaborated on how singing devotional bhajans enhances our devotion to God.

Satsang Sabha

On 13 July, over 600 devotees and well-wishers attended the evening assembly, in which *balaks* and *kishores* presented a fascinating skit titled 'Mandirma Prabhu Biraje Chhe', highlighting the vital role mandirs play in nurturing spiritual and moral values in devotees of all ages, contributing to the greater good of society.

Pujya Viveksagardas Swami gave practical insights into the 'Aksharam Aham Purushottam



Dasosmi' mantra imparted by Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami explained the three pillars of Hinduism – Shastras, Mandirs and Sant – and discussed how mandirs uphold our values and traditions. He also highlighted the significant contributions of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj in establishing over 1,500 BAPS mandirs worldwide.

Dashabdi Mahotsav Celebration

On the morning of 14 July, over 600 devotees participated in the Dashabdi Mahotsav Vedic Mahapuja along with Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami and Pujya Viveksagardas Swami.

During the subsequent assembly, *balaks* and *kishores* performed a vibrant dance. Dharmavatsaldas Swami spoke about how mandirs inspire value-based living by sharing real-life stories. Shri Rajababu Gupta and Shri Vasantbhai Jethva, two founding members of BAPS in Hong Kong, provided a brief history of the remarkable social and spiritual activities conducted by the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir over the past decade.

Pujya Viveksagardas Swami shared insights on how BAPS activities began in East Asia, including Hong Kong, and how Pramukh Swami Maharaj

and Mahant Swami Maharaj have nurtured these centres over the years.

Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami further elaborated on how to sustain and nurture satsang in future generations.

Among the guests were the Honourable Consul General of India to Hong Kong, Ms. Satwant Khanalia; Consul Mr. K. Venkata Ramana; former District Council member of Kowloon City District, Mr. Admond Yue; and other dignitaries from various communities.

Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav

On 15 July, the Karyakar Survana Mahotsav was celebrated to honour the exceptional contributions of BAPS *karyakars* in Hong Kong, recognizing their sincere dedication, devotion, and sacrifice over the years.

Pujya Viveksagardas Swami spoke about the life, work, and message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and how this message has spread across the world.



He also highlighted the contributions of our gurus, swamis, and devotees in promoting the practical spirituality advocated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami elaborated on the foundational values of *karyakars* – *samp*, *suhruadbhav*, and *ekta* – as explained by Yogiji Maharaj.

As part of the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir Dashabdi Mahotsav in Hong Kong, members of the *balika* and *kishori* mandals created a unique exhibition showcasing inspiring messages of satsang. ♦



NEW BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN HINDU MANDIR INAUGURATION

18–21 July 2024, Bangkok, Thailand

BAPS satsang activities in Thailand began in 1984 with a visit from Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He also visited again in 1996. Regular visits by *sadguru* swamis and other swamis have also significantly contributed to the growth of satsang over the years. During his visit

to Bangkok in 2018, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the devotees to find land for a mandir. Soon after, a suitable plot was found, and plans were drawn.

The Shilanyas Ceremony was performed by the devotees during the COVID-19 period when international flights were temporarily halted.

Construction work began after the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. Through the guidance of Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami, the sincere efforts of Surenbhai Patel, Mayurbhai Desai and the devotees in Bangkok, and the creative designs and hard work of Brahmacharandas Swami and his team, a beautiful mandir was soon erected.

The inauguration of the new BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir Mahotsav featured four days of rituals and celebrations.

On 28 April 2024, in Sarangpur, Gujarat, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the Vedic *pran-pratishtha* of the *murtis* for Bangkok mandir.



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj Puja

On 18 July, the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir Mahotsav began with the Vedic *puja* of the small *chal murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj by Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami. These *murtis* had been sanctified by Mahant Swami Maharaj in India before arriving in Bangkok, where they were daily worshipped by Surenbhai Patel and his family. The *murtis* were then ceremoniously moved to the newly constructed mandir.

Prasad Pravesh & Yagna

On 19 July, the Prasad Pravesh ceremony, the ritual of first entry into the new premises, to sanctify the newly built BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir in Bangkok was marked with a Vedic *yagna* performed by Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami and Pujya Viveksagardas Swami in the presence of over 150 devotees.

In the assembly thereafter, Pujya Viveksagardas Swami enlightened the devotees and well-wishers present on the significance and importance of such a *yagna* according to the Swaminarayan tradition. Then, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami inspired them by explaining the nine forms of bhakti and how a mandir facilitates a deeper connection with God.

Mahapuja, Shobha Yatra & Bhajan Sandhya

On the morning of 20 July, over 350 devotees participated in the Vedic *mahapuja* ceremony to pray for blessings and protection from God, who



will reside in this mandir. Prayers were offered for the prosperity of the country and for the people of Thailand to experience lasting happiness.

After the *mahapuja*, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami explained that this mandir is where one can offer devotion and *seva* to God, attain enlightenment through satsang, and children can learn about good character.

In the evening, over 450 devotees, accompanied by traditional Thai performers, participated in the colourful Shobha Yatra. The procession travelled from the Phow Leng Association of Thailand Hall through the by-lanes of Bangkok en route to the mandir, celebrating with joy and fanfare the arrival of God to the newly built mandir.

Murti-Pratishtha Ceremony & Assembly

On the morning of 21 July, Guru Purnima, over 500 devotees and well-wishers from Thailand and overseas, including H.E. Shri Nagesh Singh, Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of Thailand, gathered for the climax of the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir Mahotsav.

Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami and Pujya Viveksagardas Swami performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the BAPS Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir in Bangkok, as swamis recited ceremonial Vedic verses.

H.E. Shri Nagesh Singh commented, "I am extremely honoured to be present here today on this very divine occasion as I hail from a village which is very near to Chhapaiya, the



janmabhumi of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. My work as a representative of India has taken me to many places around the world. And I have seen at first hand the commendable services conducted by BAPS. I was fortunate to have had the blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj in 2017, at Atlanta, USA. Here, too, I feel blessed that today this beautiful mandir, a cultural embassy in a way, will serve by preserving and fostering the historical and cultural bonds between India and Thailand.”

Pujya Viveksagardas Swami explained the role and importance of a mandir for individuals, families and society at large, and how one can find peace of mind by regularly visiting the mandir. To mark the occasion of Guru Purnima, he also enlightened everyone on how pure gurus like Pramukh Swami Maharaj and today, Mahant Swami Maharaj, live not for themselves but to serve for the greater good of society.

Then, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami spoke about how God resides in the *murtis* and accepts our love, *seva* and *bhakti*. He said, “God will be waiting every day for us, his devotees, to come here and be with him. Here, *arti* will take place morning and evening, *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni can be offered, regular satsang assemblies for everyone, including children and youths. Also, festivals like Diwali, Annakut, Ram Navami, Hari Jayanti, Janmashtami and more will be celebrated according to our tradition.”

Thereafter, the dedication assembly was held at the Phow Leng Association of Thailand Hall



where those who had helped with this project were honoured. A special video blessings for this occasion by Mahant Swami Maharaj was shown.

KARYAKAR SUVARNA MAHOTSAV CELEBRATION

22 July 2024, Bangkok, Thailand

Over 280 devotees participated in the Karyakar Suvarna Mahotsav celebration in the revered presence of Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami and Pujya Viveksagardas Swami. The celebration was held on a cruise ship while sailing along the Chao Phraya River in Bangkok.

The celebration honoured the outstanding contributions of BAPS *karyakars* in Thailand, recognizing their sincere dedication, devotion, and sacrifice in serving the BAPS Satsang.

Pujya Viveksagardas Swami began by explaining that Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifested on earth to reveal the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* and how our gurus spread this understanding worldwide over the decades. He also highlighted the crucial role *karyakars* have played in this great service throughout the history of BAPS Satsang.

Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami elaborated on the foundational qualities of great *karyakars*: *samp*, *suhrudbhav*, *seva*, *samarpan*, *divyabhav*, *dasbhav*, *namrata*, and respect for others. He emphasized that serving as *karyakars* was a great opportunity to earn the *rajipo* of our gurus and the blessings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. ♦

Satsang Vicharan by Pujya Doctor Swami

14–27 August 2024, Secunderabad



Pujya Doctor Swami (Swayamprakashdas Swami) visited Hyderabad-Secunderabad during the holy month of Shravan. Children, youths and elders welcomed him with great enthusiasm and grandeur. Many inspiring and enlightening programmes were held in his presence, as described as below:

On the morning of 14 August, office bearers of the many Gujarati associations in Hyderabad, representing the Gujarati Ekta Manch, came to meet Pujya Dr Swami.

On the afternoon of 15 August, India's Independence Day, around 150 *balaks* and *balikas* participated in the Bal Din (Children's Day). The program began with fun games for all, followed by special message-oriented activities, inspiring the children to excel in their studies, contribute to the progress of India and become exemplary citizens. Through his speech, Pujya Doctor Swami motivated and guided the children to aim for excellence in everything they do.

On the evening of 16 August, around 100 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* attended the Yuva Din assembly. Based on the theme 'Sanyam', the youths were inspired through the life of Shri Nilkanth Varni, the teenage yogi form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. In conclusion, Pujya Doctor Swami blessed and encouraged the youths to develop self-control, which is the basis for all success.

On the morning of 17 August, 400 Telugu devotees of Hyderabad attended the special Telugu Maha Sabha based on the topic 'Shastra, Mandir and Sant'.

In the evening a grand Karyakar Abhivadan Samaroh was organized in which BAPS karyakars from across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana were felicitated by Pujya Doctor Swami and other swamis for their *seva* and dedication.

Thereafter, evening assemblies celebrating Family Harmony Day (20 August), Gurubhakti Din (22 August) and Senior Devotee Felicitation Day (23 August) were held in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami.

On the evening of 25 August, about 600 devotees attended the symbolic Janmashtami celebration. After bhajans and a short video on Janmashtami, the *bal* and *yuvak mandals* of BAPS Mandir, Secunderabad, presented the 'Krishna Leela' dance-drama, which highlights some of the major life incidents of Bhagwan Shri Krishna.

Thereafter, a special family harmony activity took place. Amid the male and female sections, family members had been sat together. Thereafter, to help strengthen family bonds, family members applied a chandan tilak and tied a nadachhadi to each other.

Then, younger members of the family bowed to their elders and asked for forgiveness for their wrongdoings. The emotional atmosphere of the assembly touched everyone.

At the end, Pujya Doctor Swami blessed the assembly, guiding devotees on how to adopt the teachings of Bhagwan Shri Krishna in their lives and develop the values of unity, fraternity and peace.

The celebration assembly concluded with *samuh arti*.

On 26 August, a special assembly for the local karyakars was organized in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami in which all the *karyakars* received great inspiration and energy to excel in their *seva*.

On the afternoon of 27 August, Pujya Doctor Swami departed from Hyderabad. ♦



INDIA

REGIONAL TRAINING CAMPS:

'BE A PERFECT KARYAKAR'

23 June to 4 August 2024

Gujarat & Maharashtra



Around 6,325 men and 5,526 women children's activities *karyakars* attended the one-day Regional Training Camps conducted by the BAPS Children Activities Central Office throughout Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Based on the topic 'Be a Perfect Karyakar', the camps guided the dedicated *karyakars* how to excel in their duties in their respective centres.

The camps featured an array of training sessions and practical insights designed to empower and elevate the *karyakars*' capabilities on effective communication with children and fellow volunteers, and techniques to maintain the children's interest in the weekly assemblies.

The sessions employed a diverse mix of speeches, multimedia presentations, insightful discussions, dramatic enactments, and fun activities to train the *karyakars*.

The camps inspired the *karyakars* to continue their devout and dedicated services in helping children learn about Hindu culture and spirituality to the best of their ability.

YOUTH CONVENTION

28 July 2024, Bengaluru



More than 200 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* participated in the Youth Convention titled 'Exploring the Path of Truth' in the presence of Pujya Dr Swami and other BAPS swamis. The convention featured speeches by swamis, skits and videos. A presentation based on the story of Bhakta Nachiketa in the Kathopanishad guided the youths on fearlessness, moderation and integrity.

Pujya Dr Swami inspired the youths to strive for punctuality, clarity of goals and moral values in life by practising self-control and satsang.

BAL-BALIKA SHIBIR

3-4 August 2024, Bengaluru



A total of 515 boys and girls participated in the two-day *shibir* in the presence of Pujya Dr Swami. Themed 'Sanskriti', the *shibir* informed

the children about the history and meaning of major Hindu festivals celebrated during the year through speeches by BAPS swamis, thematic skits and dances, video presentations and other activities. During the *shibir* all the major festivals were celebrated to give the children a first-hand experience of the various festival traditions.

Pujya Dr Swami also guided the youngsters to daily offer prayers to God, daily perform *panchang pranam* to their parents and elders, and judiciously use mobiles and other modern media technology.

UK & EUROPE

NEASDEN TEMPLE RECEIVES TRIPADVISOR TRAVELLERS' CHOICE AWARD FOR 2024

2 July 2024, London, UK



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London – popularly known as ‘Neasden Temple’ – was honoured with the prestigious Tripadvisor Travellers’ Choice Award for 2024.

Tripadvisor is the world’s largest travel platform, featuring more than 860 million reviews of attractions and places of interest. More than 450 million travellers use Tripadvisor each month to plan their visits.

The Travellers’ Choice Awards places the mandir amongst the top 10% ‘things to do’ in the world from more than 8.7 million attractions, experiences, hotels, restaurants, and other places covered on its listing.

The winners of the award are determined by the quality and quantity of travellers’ reviews and ratings over a 12-month period.

As explained by Tripadvisor, the award means

that the mandir has received “consistently great reviews” and is among places that “consistently demonstrate a commitment to hospitality excellence”.

HINDU FAITH CENTRE AT THE OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC GAMES 2024

26 July to 8 September 2024, Paris, France



BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha was invited to manage the Hindu Faith Centre at the Olympic and Paralympic Games 2024 in Paris, France, providing essential spiritual support and meditation facilities to athletes from around the world. The service provided a serene space for athletes to engage in prayers, meditation, and reflection, helping them maintain their spiritual and mental well-being amidst intense competition.

Enshrining *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj (Bhagwan Shri Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami), Bhagwan Shri Radha-Krishna, Bhagwan Shri Sita-Rama and Bhagwan Shri Parvati-Shankar, the Hindu Centre offered athletes the opportunity to offer their respects and also participate in various prayer ceremonies, including the *arti* and *abhishek*.

The popular Hindu festivals of Shri Krishna Janmasthami and Shri Ganesh Chaturthi were also celebrated during the Games, with athletes of various nationalities and backgrounds also participating in the devotional festivities.

In addition, a dedicated chaplaincy service offered Hindu and Jain athletes personalized spiritual guidance and support.

Archana Girish Kamath, who represented Team India in Table Tennis, expressed her gratitude for the support and comfort provided by the Hindu Faith Centre, “Thank you for having a centre like this. It has been really nice to come down here and pray. Thank you so much.”

The Centre was open to athletes of all faiths, nationalities and backgrounds, with many appreciating the opportunity to learn about Hindu values and culture.

Deep Patel, a BAPS volunteer from Paris, added, “We are pleased and grateful that BAPS was invited to set up this centre to serve athletes at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The centre reflects His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj’s emphasis on peace, harmony and spiritual strength as values that transcend national and cultural boundaries to truly unite people, whether at the world’s foremost sporting event or far beyond.”

AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM DARSHAN AT THE WORLD CONGRESS OF PHILOSOPHY 2024 1–8 August 2024, Rome, Italy



Akshar-Purushottam Darshan was presented and warmly received during the World Congress of Philosophy in Rome.

The eight-day 25th World Congress of Philosophy, at the Sapienza University in Rome, brought together more than 5,000 scholars and students of philosophy from over 120 countries and diverse disciplines and backgrounds. This prestigious event, organized by the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP),

served as a platform for scholars, thinkers, and enthusiasts to engage in profound discussions and a rigorous exchange of ideas on various philosophical topics.

Throughout the conference, attendees had the opportunity to participate in a wide array of sessions covering 89 diverse philosophical sub-disciplines.

Round Table Session on Spiritual Ecology and Akshar-Purushottam Darshan



On 2 August, an insightful round table session was held on Spiritual Ecology and Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, as part of an emerging field of study that integrates ecology, science and religion.

Chaired by Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami, the session re-examined underlying attitudes and beliefs about the environment through a lens of religious philosophy, specifically Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

Bhadreshdas Swami provided a succinct introduction to Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Swaminarayan tradition, and the Akshar-Purushottam school of thought, before explaining how the philosophical exploration of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan finds practical expression through devotion, ethical living, and service to humanity and the natural world.

Aksharananddas Swami presented a paper on ‘Bridging Worlds, Reframing Dichotomies: The Ecological Relevance of the Bhagavad Gita’s Yagnas,’ in which he proposed an ecological framework through *yagna*, emphasizing

selfless action and interconnectedness for environmental stewardship.

Paramvivekdas Swami, presenting on ‘Ahimsa and Ecological Ethics,’ demonstrated how key philosophical principles underlying the practice of ahimsa can provide a robust, sustainable framework for a more environmentally friendly way of life.

Professor Balaganapathi Devarakonda, Professor of Philosophy at Delhi University, spoke on ‘Spirituality Meets Sustainability,’ drawing upon several key Vedic passages elucidating Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

Paramtattvadas Swami’s paper on ‘Rethinking Nature according to Akshar-Purushottam Darshan,’ unpacked the spiritual connection between Purushottam, creation, and humanity to underpin humanity’s relationship with and responsibility towards nature.

Tilak Parekh, a doctoral researcher from the University of Cambridge in the UK, explained how mandirs can be useful vehicles for addressing our current environmental challenges.

KARYAKAR SHIBIR

10 August 2024, Dublin, Ireland



Volunteers from across Ireland and Northern Ireland attended the Karyakar Shibir on the theme, ‘Maru Kartavya’ (My Duty). The *shibir* helped to deepen their understanding of *seva* in their respective centres through inspiring presentations by BAPS swamis, Q&A sessions, discussions, workshops and team-building activities that provided profound insights into the

spirit of selfless service, and duty in one’s personal and spiritual life. They also learnt the importance of living according to the values and principles revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and lived by the Gunatit gurus.

NORTH AMERICA

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS SHIBIR 2024

13–14 July 2024, Toronto, Canada



Over 1,000 international higher education students from across Canada attended the International Students Shibir themed ‘Jivan Sutro: The Path to Success’. The *shibir* provided guidance and encouragement by focusing on three essential principles for success: study regularly, adhere to *niyams* and daily rituals, and engage in spiritual activities regularly.

The *shibir* included guidance from BAPS swamis and professionals through panel discussions, as well as skits, videos, and interactive Q&A sessions. Attendees participated in sessions to enhance communication skills and discuss academic and life challenges. Additionally, workshop activities encouraged participants to disconnect from social media for enhanced focus and time management, and discussed immigration challenges, dietary choices, financial pressures, and strategies for balancing academic success while practising daily spirituality.

Hon. David Piccini, Ontario’s Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training & Skills Development highlighted the significant contributions of newcomers to Ontario’s

prosperity and participated enthusiastically in an interactive Q&A session, providing valuable insights to the delegates.

Jnaneshwardas Swami shared personal experiences from his own student life and offered detailed guidance. He encouraged students to maintain discipline and focus in their academic and personal pursuits.

BAPS PARTICIPATES IN INTERFAITH EVENT **20 July 2024, Toronto, Canada**



Over 500 attendees from across the Greater Toronto Area gathered at the Bombay Palace Banquet Hall in Brampton, Ontario, for the Interfaith Insights – Building Bridges of Humanity event, organized by the Namdhari Sikh Sangat Canada in the presence of Sri Satguru Uday Singh Ji.

This inspiring conference aimed to foster interfaith unity, harmony, and progress. It featured a distinguished panel of religious, spiritual, and community leaders and officials representing various faiths and traditions. The event highlighted the importance of nurturing harmony and understanding among different faith communities and showcased how religious institutions can champion sustainable practices that celebrate Canada's rich multiculturalism.

Representing the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, Pujya Gunsagardas Swami, Head Swami of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto, shared insights on interfaith cohesion, peace, and progress based on Vedic Sanatan Hindu

philosophy and the teachings of HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj and HH Mahant Swami Maharaj. He highlighted the close 40-year relationship between BAPS and the Namdhari Sangat.

The conference also featured contributions from esteemed religious and community leaders, including: Imam Nasim Butt, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at of Canada; Sant Yadvinder Singh Ji, Nirmalya Mahamandal; Monk Bhante Jeevanda, Mahamevnawa Buddhist Monastery; Vallabh Hari Das, Hare Krishna Temple; Professor Joseph Chandrakanthan, University of Toronto; Rakesh Goenka, Hindu Sabha Mandir; Arun Kumar, Consulate General of India in Toronto.

Thereafter, on 22 July, Sri Satguru Uday Singh Ji graced the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto, fostering a spirit of peace and harmony throughout the community.

BIPARTISAN CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTION **TO MARK 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF BAPS** **9 August 2024, USA**



In 2024, BAPS commemorates 50 years of satsang in North America. Since the inauguration of the first BAPS Mandir in 1974 in Flushing, New York, BAPS has grown to encompass 116 mandirs across North America, a testament to the enduring legacy of the BAPS community and its profound impact on the spiritual and cultural fabric of the continent.

On 30 July 2024, Congressman Thomas Suozzi (NY-3) and Congresswoman Young Kim (CA-40) introduced a bipartisan House

Resolution, H.Res.1394, in the 118th Congress recognizing this achievement. The resolution highlights the democratic partnership between the United States and India as “grounded in shared principles of democracy, religious pluralism, human rights, freedom, and the rule of law”. BAPS is committed to these principles and recognizes the importance of fostering these values in its initiatives and collaborations.

To honour this significant milestone, proclamations and commendations were received from a multitude of distinguished cities and officials across the United States. The following declared 4 August 2024 as BAPS Day:

Alabama: Alabama House of Representatives, Alabama Senate, City of Dothan, City of Hoover, City of Montgomery, City of Opelika; **California:** California State Assembly, City of Irvine, City of San Jose; **Florida:** Hillsborough County, City of Tampa; **Kentucky:** State of Kentucky, Kentucky House of Representatives; **Indiana:** City of Greenwood; **Maryland:** State of Maryland, Prince George’s County; **Massachusetts:** City of Lowell; **Mississippi:** State of Mississippi, City of Jackson, City of Flowood, City of Vicksburg; **Missouri:** City of St. Louis; **New Jersey:** Township of Edison; **New York:** Town of Colonie; **North Carolina:** North Carolina House of Representatives, Wake County, Town of Cary; **Pennsylvania:** Hatfield Township; **Tennessee:** Tennessee Senate, Tennessee House of Representatives, Town of Collierville, City of Germantown, Town of Arlington, City of Murfreesboro, City of Clarksville, City of Columbia, City of Franklin, City of Memphis, Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, City of Bartlett; **Texas:** Dallas County, City of Austin, City of Carrollton, City of Irving, City of San Antonio, City of Sugar Land, Town of Prosper, City of Round Rock; **Virginia:** County of Fairfax; **Washington:** City of Bellevue.

Other acknowledgments include:
Alabama: City of Birmingham; **Florida:**

Commendation by Tampa City Council;
Illinois: Proclamation from Illinois Senate;
Kentucky: City of Bowling Green declaring 31 July 2024 as BAPS Day; **Maryland:** Citation by Governor Wes Moore; **Massachusetts:** Citation by Massachusetts State Senate; **Minnesota:** Certificate of Recognition by Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan; **Mississippi:** Resolution by Governor Tate Reeves; **New York:** Resolutions by New York State Senate and Assembly; **Tennessee:** Congratulations Letter from Senator Marsha Blackburn, Proclamation from the City of Brentwood, Proclamation from the City of Hendersonville; **Texas:** Recognition by Governor Greg Abbott, Recognition by the City of Frisco.

These accolades reflect the broad and deep appreciation for BAPS’s architectural, cultural, spiritual and community services.

ASIA-PACIFIC

KISHORE-KISHORI SHIBIRS

1 June to 20 July 2024

Australia & New Zealand



Over 475 high school- and university-aged youths participated in the Kishore-Kishori Shibirs held during June and July across Australia and New Zealand at six centres: Adelaide, Auckland, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.

The theme, ‘My Akshardham, My Home: Let’s Build It Together’ was based on Mahant Swami Maharaj’s handwritten blessings to devotees of the Asia Pacific region on his vision to build

an awe-inspiring Akshardham in Melbourne, Australia. Thus, the *shibirs* focused on detailing how the *kishores* and *kishoris* could bring this vision to life, through the pillars of Satpurush, Samp, Samarpan and Saiyam.

Each session was a blend of group discussions, involvement activities and enlightening elaborations by BAPS swamis on the essence of each pillar. The *shibir* sessions highlighted the importance and benefits of *samp* (teamwork), selfless service and observing *niyams* for success in any task.

The *shibirs* provided guidance to the youths to facilitate their spiritual learning, personal growth and cultural engagement with the community.

SANSKRIT CONFERENCE

8–14 July 2024, Adelaide, Australia



A total of 388 delegates aged between 4 and 63 from across Australia and New Zealand participated in the first-ever seven-day Sanskrit Conference in the Pacific region organized by the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute, Australia. In the presence of Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami and resident swamis from Australia and New Zealand, the conference explored the significance of the Sanskrit language, its cultural importance, and its usefulness in the 21st century.

Among the delegates were 285 *balaks*, *balikas*, *kishores*, *kishoris*, *yuvaks*, and *yuvatis* who have memorized either the entire Satsang Diksha in Sanskrit, Siddhant Karika, Siddhant Samamnaya or Shri Swaminarayan Mahapuja.

Since 2023, the Research Institute has offered online courses on Satsang Diksha, Siddhant Karika, Siddhant Samamnaya, and Shri Swaminarayan Mahapuja taught by teachers from around the country. Of these, 52 teachers also attended the conference.

On day two, the delegates participated in the various ‘Swaminarayan Siddhant Mukhpath Mahotsav’ challenges based on the *mukhpath* they had completed:

Vinu Challenge – Satsang Diksha Mukhpath
Keshav Challenge – Satsang Diksha and Siddhant Karika Mukhpath
Mahant Challenge – Satsang Diksha, Siddhant Karika and Shri Swaminarayan Mahapuja Mukhpath

Gold, silver and bronze medals were awarded to the top three male and female performers in each challenge. In the final round, the top two from each challenge faced off in a Shalaka Spardha, conducted using a special Suvarnamay Satsang Diksha and Survarna Shalaka sanctified by Mahant Swami Maharaj in Rajkot, India. The winners were awarded a special trophy for their outstanding performances.

Four days of the Sanskrit Conference focused on Shastriji Maharaj’s four great sayings (*mahavakyas*). The delegates learnt the history, importance and relevance of these *mahavakyas* in today’s world through interactive presentations, skits, group discussions, question-answer sessions and special activities.

A graduation ceremony was also held for all who had completed the courses. They all received certificates, trophies and a special garland for their outstanding achievements. Swamis and volunteers honoured them by showering sanctified flowers on their heads.

The conference provided the delegates with a clear understanding of the importance of Sanskrit, and they all pledged to learn the language to enhance their understanding of Hindu culture and history.

SATSANG JNAN SATRAS

17 July to 7 September 2024

Australia & New Zealand



A total of over 4,000 devotees attended the one-day Satsang Jnan Satras held in Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne North, Melbourne South, Perth, Wellington, Auckland, and Brisbane. Participants from other centers travelled to their nearest main centre to join the events.

Held in the presence of Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadresh Swami and other BAPS swamis, the Satsang Jnan Satras addressed three key topics: 1) A thorough exploration of the forms of Brahma and Parabrahma, 2) The importance of having a Gunatit guru in the form of guruhari Mahant Swami Maharaj, and 3) Methods for connecting with such a Gunatit guru. The attendees gained a deeper understanding of these topics through inspiring talks by swamis, interactive group discussions, video presentations, Q&A sessions, and stories of virtues shared by devotees.

The Jnan Satras also featured discussions on the significance of nishtha and the true essence of Sanatan Dharma. They offered spiritual insights and practical tools to navigate daily challenges and find peace and purpose in life, promoting spiritual growth.

NSW PREMIER HONOURS SANSKRIT AND CULTURAL UNITY

24 July 2024, Sydney, Australia

Honourable Chris Minns, Premier of New South Wales, was traditionally welcomed to



the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Sydney by Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami.

Young boys and girls melodiously recited Sanskrit *shlokas* from the Satsang Diksha, filling the air with messages of world peace, prosperity, and unity. Deeply touched by the recitation, the NSW Premier remarked, “To see young Australian kids recite Sanskrit is wonderful. It’s not an easy thing to do, but the BAPS community’s dedication to and understanding of these ancient rites, scripts, and languages means that 100 years from now, the great-grandchildren of the young kids here will be speaking the exact same tongue, preserving that culture and religion, and passing them on to the next generation.”

He added, “I take it upon myself as a personal commitment to take the scriptures from swami and the BAPS Community in Sydney, put them in the NSW Parliament, and make them available to the members of parliament and to people from other races and religions as a message of peace, tolerance, and togetherness. I can think of no finer message for a modern Australian community such as ours.”

ANZ BAL-KISHORE ADHIVESHANS

27 July and 3 August 2024

Australia & New Zealand

After two months of preparation, a total of 454 *balaks*, 499 *balikas*, 158 *kishores* and 144 *kishoris* from across Australia (Adelaide, Brisbane Mandir, Brisbane North, Canberra, Darwin, Geelong, Gold Coast, Griffith, Melbourne East, Melbourne Mandir, Melbourne South, Melbourne West,



Perth Mandir, Perth South, Shepparton, Sunshine Coast, Sydney) and New Zealand (Auckland, Christchurch, Hamilton, Wellington) participated in the many local and national competitions as part of the ANZ Bal-Kishore Adhiveshans.

The local competitions, conducted in-person and marked by judges from the local centre, were based on memorizing and understanding key shlokas and cultural concepts. Through the 'questions and answers' activities, the participants gained an insight into core Hindu beliefs. The 'debating' and 'interview' activities helped to improve their communication skills. Participation in the 'story telling' and 'explaining *mahima*' activities created a deeper connection with Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Around 400 youngsters participated in the national competitions. The competitions were split into two categories, written and visual. Writing activities like 'comic strips' or 'poetry' encouraged participants to improve their literary techniques. Visual activities like 'photography' or 'graphic design' enabled them to explore their creative interests and hobbies. The participants submitted their entries prior to the in-person local *adhiveshans*. These were then graded by judges from various centres across the Pacific.

Through the various challenges, the *adhiveshans* gave the children, teenagers and youths an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of culture, enhance their communication skills and express their creativity.

CONFERENCES ON HINDU FESTIVALS

7 July to 8 September 2024

Australia & New Zealand



The BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute in Australia organized a series of conferences titled 'Timeless Inspirations from Hindu Festivals', celebrating the spiritual and cultural essence of key Hindu festivals. The conferences were held in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth and Brisbane (Australia) and Auckland (New Zealand). Around 200 representatives from over 115 organizations from various community groups, and Hindu temples and organizations participated in the conferences, which were attended by over 5,800 people.

Each conference featured a keynote address that explored the profound meanings behind three Hindu festivals: Janmashtami, Ram Navami and Ganesh Chaturthi. The significance of each festival was discussed in depth: Bhagwan Shri Krishna's teachings on devotion and karma; Bhagwan Shri Ram's ideals of virtue and leadership; and the wisdom and obstacle-removing powers of Shri Ganeshji.

Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami also presented deep insights into the philosophical significance of these festivals.

Additionally, traditional dance performances and celebrations were organized to represent these festivals as well as the Rath Yatra and Navaratri festivals.

Also, certificates were awarded to students who had completed the 'Introduction to Hinduism' course conducted by the BAPS Swaminarayan

Research Institute, Australia. In addition, the new ‘Memorising Sanskrit Verses from the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita’ course was launched.

The conferences fostered unity within the global Hindu community, reinforcing the importance of devotion, harmony, and spiritual growth.

AFRICA

BAL-BALIKA SHIBIRS

5 July to 25 August 2024



Over 860 *balaks* and *balikas* and 215 *karyakars* from 42 BAPS centres throughout Africa participated in the five Bal-Balika Shibirs held in Johannesburg, South Africa; Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania; Lilongwe, Malawi; Kisumu, Kenya; and Lusaka, Zambia.

Based on the theme ‘Chhiye Ame to Chhotaji’, the *shibirs* featured a rich mix of inspiring presentations and fun interactive activities. The sessions focused on teaching essential values to children, such as performing personal daily puja correctly, respecting and appreciating parents, managing screen time wisely, valuing education, avoiding negative influences, dedicating time to daily devotional rituals, and developing *mahima* and trust towards the Satpurush.

The *shibirs* provided valuable life lessons and fun-filled memories to all the participants.

UAE

RAKSHABANDHAN RAKHIS TIED TO OVER 4,000 LABOURERS

18–19 August 2024, Abu Dhabi

The BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi



celebrated the auspicious Rakshabandhan festival in two stages.

In the first stage, on the afternoon of 18 August, over 2,500 labourers from across the seven emirates of the UAE were welcomed at the mandir, where BAPS swamis tied a special *rakhi* on their right wrist. The *rakhis* had been handmade by BAPS women volunteers.

The celebrations featured a captivating programme of traditional devotional songs, presented by volunteers and community members, and a speech by Brahmaviharidas Swami.

On the following day, 19 August, in the second stage of the Rakshabandhan celebration, BAPS swamis personally visited labour camps across the region to reach out to more than 1,500 labourers who could not attend the previous day’s celebrations. Over the course of 14 hours, the swamis personally went to over 16 companies, tying *rakhis* and distributing *prasad*.

GRAND PREMIERE OF ‘THE FAIRY TALE’ IMMERSIVE SHOW, BAPS HINDU MANDIR

9 September 2024, Abu Dhabi, UAE



The grand premiere of ‘The Fairy Tale’, a one-of-a-kind immersive show, which recreates the incredible journey of the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, took place in the presence of 250 guests comprising UAE leaders, religious heads, government officials, donors, dignitaries, and successful well-wishers of various professions.

The Fairy Tale immersive show is the result of over three months of creative conceptualization, scripting, visualization, animation, and meticulous designing by an in-house BAPS team of swamis and volunteers, with selfless assistance from professional audio-visual experts.

The show, housed in a specially constructed auditorium, is projected on all four walls and the floor using 20 video projectors and provides a cutting-edge surround sound experience. The audience is transported through time and space to witness the pivotal moments of the Mandir’s history, such as, Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s first prayer in the deserts of Sharjah (1997), the generosity of the UAE President HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in the Presidential Palace (2018), and the spiritually

charged inauguration performed by Mahant Swami Maharaj and Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2024).

The evening premiere event began with a welcome speech by Brahmavihari Swami.

Addressing the distinguished gathering, the Consul General of India in Dubai, H.E. Mr. Satish Kumar Sivan, said, “The true fairy tale is the construction of the Swaminarayan Temple here in Abu Dhabi. I am of the firm belief that India and UAE can together create a pathway for all of humankind to emulate. Let’s dedicate ourselves to spreading the message of peace because that’s the healing potion that the world desperately is in need of today.”

H.E. Dr Mugheer Khamis Al Khaili, Chairman of the Department of Community Development, expressed, “This immersive experience truly summarizes the values of tolerance and harmony which are very dear to our nation and very important in this world. It is incredible, inspiring, and extraordinary.” ♦

TRIBUTE

PUJYA DHARMATANAY SWAMI: Passed Away: 20 August 2024, Age: 75



Pujya Dharmatanay Swami was a native of Bhadra (Gunatitnagar) village. In his youth, he served tirelessly in the construction of the Bhadra mandir under Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj.

In 1970, after he was initiated by Yogiji Maharaj, he served as a pujari at Akshar Mandir in Gondal and also helped in the maintenance of the mandir campus. From 1981, for about five years, Dharmatanay Swami served in the Mehsana mandir, engaging in vicharan and other seva.

Thereafter, for many years, he resided at the BAPS Mandir in Mumbai helping in satsang activities and other mandir duties. From 2013, he remained in Sarangpur. Despite suffering from Parkinson’s disease, he was dedicated to enthusiastically performing his daily devotional rituals and attending the discourses. Even amid many physical challenges, he remained joyful and content. He passed away after suffering a heart attack. We pay our humble heartfelt tributes to Pujya Dharmatanay Swami. ♦



BAPS FLOOD RELIEF WORK

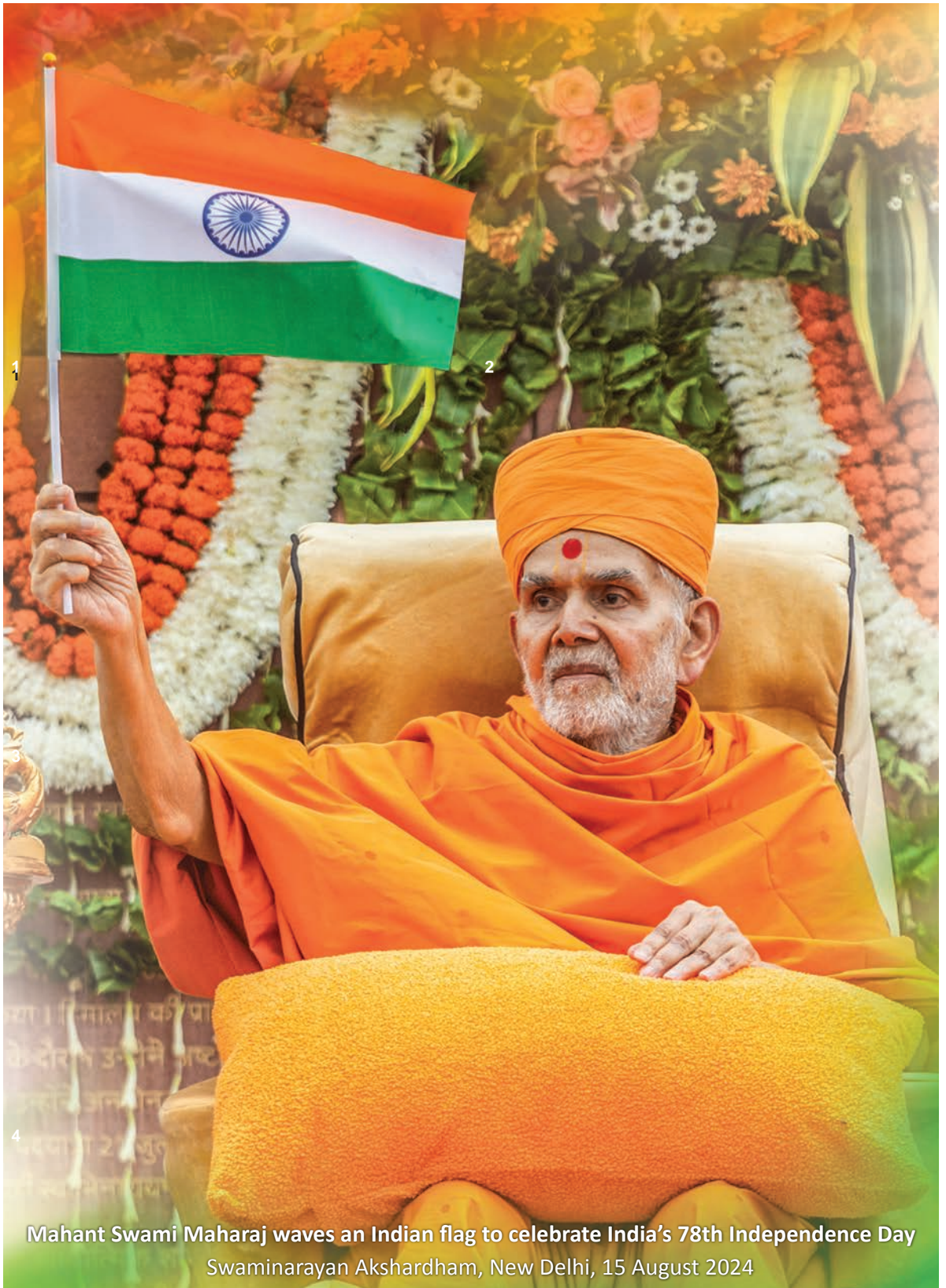
26–29 August 2024

Due to heavy seasonal rains throughout Gujarat and the subsequent floods, many people were stranded in areas of Vadodara and Jamnagar.

In both places, under the guidance of Mahant Swami Maharaj, swamis and volunteers of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha contributed to the emergency flood relief efforts as requested by the local government authorities.

In Vadodara, BAPS prepared and distributed hot *khichdi* to 60,000 people, hot *shiro* to 25,000 people and over 50,000 food packets comprising *sev*, *bundi*, biscuits and drinking water to those affected by the floods.

In Jamnagar, BAPS prepared 5,000 food packets, of which 2,000 were distributed to the flood-affected by BAPS volunteers and 3,000 were handed to the local government for distribution.



Mahant Swami Maharaj waves an Indian flag to celebrate India's 78th Independence Day
Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, 15 August 2024