

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January–February 2020

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**Pramukh Swami Maharaj's
98th Birthday Celebration**

4 December 2019, Mumbai



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN MUMBAI 4 December 2019

Thousands of devotees gathered at the BAPS Swaminarayan Kalakendra in Vashi on the morning of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th birthday celebration in the presence of Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj.

1. Swamishri reads the Shikshapatri in his morning puja.

2. Devotees absorbed in Swamishri's puja darshan.

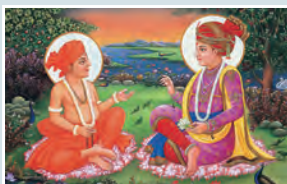
Inset: Pujya Doctor Swami addresses the evening celebration assembly at the D.Y. Patil Stadium.



98th Birthday Celebration at D.Y. Patil Stadium, New Mumbai

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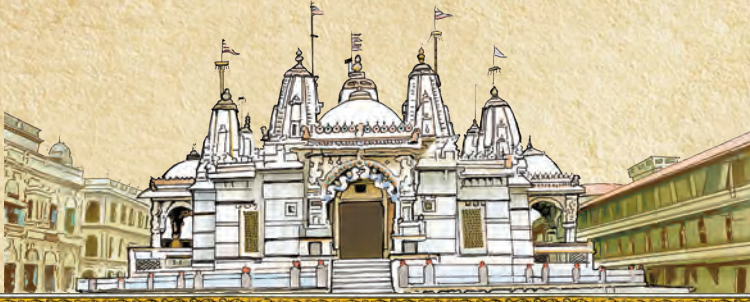
SUBSCRIPTION RATES

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1 Year	630	9	14	80
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3 Years	1900	27	42	220

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

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POST-PRATISHTHA RITUALS OF VARTAL MANDIR

After performing the pratishtha rituals of Vartal Mandir Shri Hari stays to complete the remaining arrangements...

A JIVA'S INTELLECT IS LIMITED WHEREAS MAHARAJ'S GREATNESS IS INFINITE

To conclude the *murti-pratishtha yagna* of the Vartal Mandir Shri Hari entered the *yagnashala* and offered a conconut and ghee into the *yagna* fire. The devotees boisterously hailed the *jais* of Lakshmi-Narayan Dev as part of the concluding *pratishtha yagna* rituals. Shri Hari smiled with the hailing of the loud *jais*. He felt that the intellects of *jivas* are *mayik* and limited in understanding the glory of his infinite and divine form. How could his supreme form be understood by the *mayik* intellects of *jivas*. However, an auspicious beginning had been made that day. In future, the foundations of *upasana* would become profound.

Shri Hari gave donations and gifts to the principal sculptors and then sat on a seat arranged to the west of the mandir. The swamis and devotees gathered before him and a spiritual

assembly commenced. As others came to know of it they all hurriedly came to Shri Hari. Maharaj clapped his hands to silence the drone of conversations in the assembly. Then he spoke, "Because Muktanand Swami had expressed his wish in Panchala of having mandirs I consecrated the first mandir in Shrinagar [Ahmedabad], the second in Bhuj and the third today in Vartal. Still more mandirs will be built. The mandirs are being built for spiritual aspirants to understand and realize the glory of the deity they worship. Today, in Vartal, the consecrated *murtis* of Shri Vasudev-Narayan represents my child-form and Shri Harikrishna Maharaj my present form. Engage in *dhyana*, *bhajan* and *upasana* of both the *murtis*. The *murtis* of the other avatars that I have consecrated are my divine forms. Hence, you should also do *pujan* of them with devotion and love."

Then, Shri Hari called Brahmacharis Narayanand and Madhvanand and instructed them, “You are staunch celibates and also restrain your senses from engaging in enticing worldly objects. Thus, both of you stay here as pujaris and worship the *murtis* with devotion so that the deities I have consecrated reside here.”

During the three-day *murti-pratishtha* ceremonies a *yagna* for scriptural reading and offerings of ghee into the *yagna* fire were carried out concurrently by Brahmin priests. The former were rewarded with donations and the latter were treated with meals. Maharaj instructed Brahmanand Swami and the other *sadguru* swamis, “Keep the kitchens open to feed the Brahmins and other visitors till the full moon day [*punam*]. Till then, let the offering of oblations continue in the *yagnva*.” Then, Shriji Maharaj himself served laddus to the Brahmin priests and pleased them.

On the other hand, the residents of Vartal wondered that despite the dire shortage of finance how were the thousands of devotees being fed! Shri Hari’s divine powers were inscrutable.

WE WILL COMPROMISE ONLY IF MAHARAJ COMES TO SURAT

Brahmanand Swami revealed to Shriji Maharaj, “I have resolved the tussle between the devotees of Surat and Vadodara with regards to who would hoist the flag on the southern *shikhar* (pinnacle). Finally, the devotees of Vadodara hoisted the flag. And, the devotees of Surat compromised on this issue with the demand that Shriji Maharaj comes to Surat. I agreed to their condition and so you’ll have to visit Surat whenever it suits you.”

Shri Hari was pleased with the devotees sentiments and declared, “I’ll surely go to Surat. Tell them to return to Surat and make preparations.” Brahmanand Swami breathed a sigh of relief and joy on hearing this.

Thereafter, Shri Hari sat on a raised seat as devotees performed his *pujan* and offered either

donations, clothes or jewellery. At that time a group of devotees from Buranpur arrived. They performed Maharaj’s *pujan* and offered him expensive clothes, gold rings, anklets and bracelets. While Brahmanand Swami was watching all this he felt that Maharaj would donate the costly clothes to a Brahmin. So, he took them.

Shri Hari asked, “Why did you take my clothes away?”

Brahmanand Swami replied, “Because I wish to dress you with them tomorrow.” Shri Hari remained silent and understood his wish.

THE MURTIS OF NARAYAN AND NAR ARE SENT TO BURANPUR AND NIMAD REGION

The devotees of Buranpur prayed to Shri Hari, “Maharaj, we live in a remote region, So, it is not possible for us to come often to Gujarat for your darshan. Thus, if you give us this *murti* of Narayan we will install it in our village along with Lakshmiji and offer worship and do darshan.”

Shri Hari was pleased with their request. Then, the devotees of Dhargam in the Nimad region (central India or Madhya Pradesh) asked for the *murti* of Nar. They said, “Maharaj, this *murti* has been sanctified by you because you had been worshipping it for many years. So, if you give it to us we will name it Narayan and install it with a *murti* of Lakshmiji. Thus, we too would get the benefit of worshipping them and doing darshan.”

Shriji Maharaj gave the *murtis* as requested by the devotees.

DON ORDINARY CLOTHES ON THE LAKSHMI-NARAYAN MURTIS TOMORROW

The next day, Brahmanand Swami instructed the pujari, Madhvanand Brahmachari, “Don the *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan Dev with ordinary clothes.” The Brahmachari did as he was told. Brahmanand Swami dressed Maharaj in the beautiful clothes and jewellery donated

by the devotees of Buranpur. Thereafter, Shri Hari came for darshan of the deities. On seeing the *murtis* adorned in ordinary clothes Shri Hari asked Brahmanand Swami, “Why are the *murtis* dressed like this?”

Brahmanand Swami replied, “The *murtis* are expressing their state of poverty!”

Shri Hari ordered, “Swami, bring my ordinary clothes.” Hurriedly, someone brought a pair of simple, white clothes for Maharaj to wear. He put them on and gave away his rich clothes for the *murtis*.



ONE SHOULD ABIDE BY ONE'S SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

After performing Shri Hari's *pujan*, the donations offered by the devotees sufficed in paying the debts of the mandir construction. Maharaj paid Bhaga Doshi the amount he had given and instructed him to give the saffron garland to Rajuba of Muli. Bhaga Doshi requested, “Maharaj, I'll give the garland, but keep the amount I had given to you as a donation from me.”

Shri Hari was pleased with his generosity and said, “Bhaga Doshi, one has to abide by the rules of social responsibilities. You give a lot of donations and I'll ask for more later. However for now, you'll have to accept this amount.” Bhaga Doshi perceived that Maharaj was pleased upon him and because of his instruction he happily took the amount with the surety of doing *seva* in the future.

The *murtis* of Lakshmi-Narayan Dev were installed in Vartal. Lakshmiji had performed austerities on the very place the mandir was constructed. Maharaj had also sat on this very spot when he came here as Nilkanth Varni. By consecrating the mandir, Shriji Maharaj gave Lakshmiji the fruits of her austerities.

BHAKTI WILL BE REALIZED WITH THE OBSERVANCE OF BRAHMACHARYA

On the morning of *punam*, Shri Hari called the senior *paramhansas* and informed, “I shall depart tomorrow from Vartal. Do *seva* of and worship the deities according to the arrangements I've made and maintain the piety and cleanliness of this pilgrim place. I have propagated the practice of bhakti coupled with dharma. If *brahmacharya* dharma is observed then one will be able to integrate bhakti in one's life. I have introduced this

moral discipline between men and women in order to protect the dharma [character] of sadhus and devotees. I daily perform 108 *pradakshinas* of Lakshmi-Narayan Dev so that all of you are inspired to offer devotion and understand the glory of the deities, and thus become sterling devotees.”

Brahmanand Swami asked, “Maharaj, have we not become sterling devotees?”

Shriji Maharaj replied, “You are all devotees, but not of sterling quality. One who has cultivated firm faith in me only then can he be called a sterling devotee.” Brahmanand Swami and the senior *paramhansas* clearly understood the implication of Maharaj's words with regards to whose *murti* should have been installed in the middle shrine of the mandir. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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



HISTORY OF BAPS SATSANG IN MUMBAI

In 1816, for the grand Pusphadolotsav celebrated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Vartal, the vast quantity of gulal was supplied by the first three Swaminarayan devotees of Mumbai: Khengarbhai Bhavsar, Rudabhai Suthar and Chapsibhai. In the 200 years since, thousands of dedicated BAPS devotees have contributed to the rich history of satsang in Mumbai through their devotion, service, sacrifices and upasana.

Although Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami did not visit Mumbai in person, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's divine teachings and works attracted the British Governor of Mumbai, Sir John Malcolm. His correspondence with Bhagwan Swaminarayan led to a historic meeting between the two in Rajkot in 1830. Subsequently, the gurus of the Gunatit guru parampara have nurtured and inspired the satsang in Mumbai. A brief photographic history is provided in the following pages.



Bhagwan Swaminarayan presents a copy of the Shikshapatri to the British Governor of Mumbai, Sir John Malcolm, Rajkot, 1830

HISTORIC MOMENTS IN SATSANG

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's historic meeting in Rajkot with the British Governor of Mumbai, Sir John Malcom, was a landmark occasion. Building on the Swaminarayan satsang practised by the three pioneer devotees of Mumbai, Shastriji Maharaj visited Mumbai on many occasions between 1903 and 1950 to consolidate the true *upasana*.



Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj (centre) with sadhus and devotees at the Suryanarayan Vadi, 1943



Shastriji Maharaj with the devotees of Mumbai during a *parayan* at the Suryanarayan Vadi, 1945



A young Pramukh Swami standing (L) between Yogiji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj. Seated right is Nirgundas Swami. In front, (L to R) are Shri Harshadbhai T. Dave, a young Arun H. Dave (presently Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami) and other devotees, 1941



Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Nirgundas Swami and other devotees of Mumbai at the opening of Shri H.T. Dave's factory



Shastriji Maharaj with Parsi devotees, 1948



Shastriji Maharaj with Narayanswarup Swami during a *parayan* in Mumbai, 1945

AFFECTION AND FRIENDSHIP

The trio of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Nirgundas Swami affectionately visited the homes of devotees in Mumbai and strengthened their satsang. Their inspiring discourses conducted at the Suryanarayan Vadi, Chhipi Chal and numerous other places embedded the true *upasana* in the hearts of devotees. Even Parsi and other non-Gujarati devotees, like Gulzarilal Nandaji, readily accepted the *upasana*. Yogiji Maharaj initiated the nine Yogeshwars in Mumbai.



Shastriji Maharaj presents a *murti* of Shriji Maharaj to Shri Gulzarilal Nanda, 1950



Yogiji Maharaj initiated the nine Yogeshwars, led by Vinu Bhagat (Mahant Swami), into the *parshad* fold, 1960



Yogiji Maharaj inaugurated the Akshar Bhuvan, Mumbai, 1961



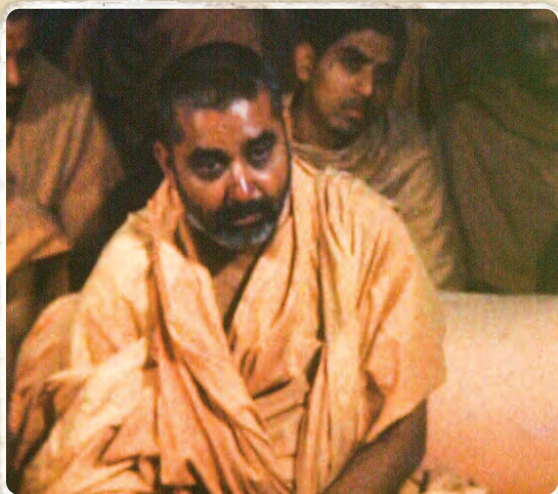
Yogiji Maharaj celebrates Jal-Jhilani Ekadashi at the Gateway of India, 1965



Opening of the Yagnapurush Vyakhyan Khand in the Akshar Bhuvan in the presence of Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami, 1963



Mahant Swami reads while Yogiji Maharaj discourses in a daily assembly, Akshar Bhuvan, 1968



Pramukh Swami during his 48th birthday celebration, 1968



"Celebrate Pramukh Swami's birthday with grandeur," Yogiji Maharaj instructed all, 1968



Yogiji Maharaj honoured in Shanmukhanand Hall on returning from his overseas Satsang visit to Africa and England, 1970



"Pramukh Swami is my all..." Yogiji Maharaj revealed, 1970

CENTRE OF SAINTLINESS AND LEARNING

Yogiji Maharaj spread *brahmavidya* throughout Mumbai. He established the Akshar Bhuvan to add impetus to the satsang. He guided the newly initiated sadhus, who were supervised by Mahant Swami. He celebrated Pramukh Swami's 48th birthday and instructed that it be celebrated every year with grandeur. On returning from his overseas tour in 1970, many welcome assemblies were held in his honour. In Mumbai, Yogiji Maharaj revealed, "Pramukh Swami is my everything."



During the inauguration of the new Akshar Bhuvan, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahant Swami and Bhaktipriya Swami, 1978

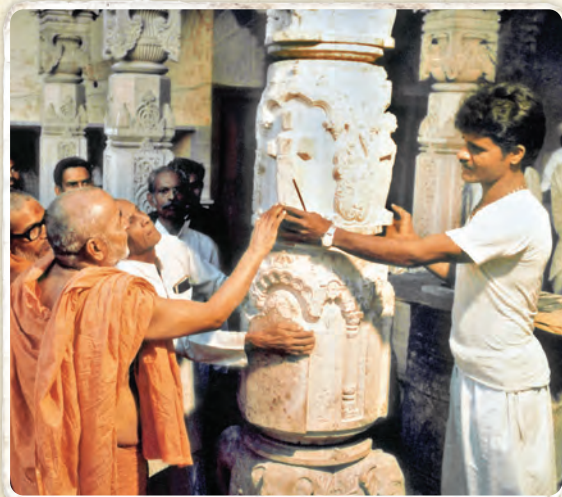
TAKING THE SATSANG TO NEW HEIGHTS

Pramukh Swami Maharaj beheld the sacred pot of Satsang and lifted it to new heights through his tireless efforts.

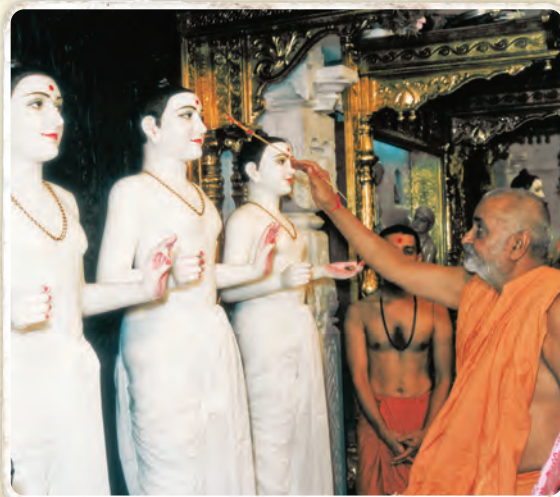
He celebrated grand festivals, established a magnificent *shikharbaddha* mandir and inspired *hari* mandirs in the suburbs of Mumbai and other cities of Maharashtra. He gave the bliss of satsang to all.



Swami Chinmayanandji felicitates Swamishri on his 63rd birthday celebration, 1983



Swamishri guides the construction of the *shikharbaddha* mandir in Dadar, 1982



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the new mandir in Dadar, 1983



Pramukh Swami Maharaj encourages youth volunteers, 1987



Pramukh Swami Maharaj addresses a large gathering for the Narmada River project, 1990

SELFLESS SERVICES TO UPLIFT ALL

Pramukh Swami Maharaj lovingly guided the youths of Mumbai to use their skills and energy to serve society: earthquake-relief work in Latur, de-addiction campaigns and other social uplift projects. He inaugurated an eye hospital and selflessly served to uplift all.



Eye hospital inauguration. Chief Minister Shri Manohar Joshi also present, 1995



Blessing an assembly during the Amrut Mahotsav, 1995



Swamishri visits and prays for the earthquake victims, Latur, 1993



Pramukh Swami Maharaj presides over an assembly in the Yogi Hall, Dadar, Mumbai, 2003

SPREAD OF SATSANG THROUGH SELFLESS LOVE

Pramukh Swami Maharaj facilitated the growth of satsang in Mumbai, establishing facilities such as the Yogi Hall, where regular discourses take place. He consecrated the *abhishek* murti of Shri Nilkanth Varni to accept everyone's prayers. Swamishri reached out to and comforted people of all ages and backgrounds, strengthening their satsang.



Swamishri honours a labourer, 1992



Swamishri consecrates the *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni, 2009



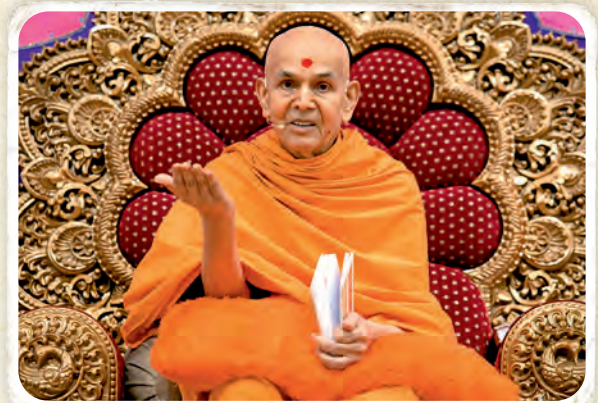
Swamishri's affection spontaneously appealed to children, 2005



Mahant Swami Maharaj further strengthens the BAPS satsang in Mumbai, 2018

‘MAHANT OF MUMBAI’ NOW EVERYONE’S MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

After Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahant Swami Maharaj has furthered the growth of satsang. The ‘Mahant of Mumbai’ is now everyone’s beloved Mahant Swami Maharaj. He organized Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s first birthday celebration in 1968 and since then Mumbai has hosted numerous celebrations.



Mahant Swami Maharaj blesses an assembly, 2018



Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurates the BAPS Swaminarayan Kalakendra – a Centre for Arts & Culture in Vashi, New Mumbai, 2019

YEAR-LONG BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION ACTIVITIES

Mumbai, 2019



“In the joy of others lies our own; In the good of others rests our own; In the progress of others lies our own.” This was Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life motto. He lived his life for the benefit of others and inspired countless through his saintly virtues. In the year-long build-up to Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 98th birthday celebrations in Mumbai, numerous event and activities were held to commemorate the occasion.

OVER ONE LAKH HOMES BLESSED

Between March and July 2019, men and women *karyakars* visited the homes of well-wishers with a *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. At each home, the *karyakars* talked about the inspiring life, work and teachings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. They prayed for harmony between all family members and encouraged them to conduct a regular *ghar sabha*.

Then, all family members performed *pujan*, *arti* and *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni and offered prayers.

In this way, a total of 110,000 home-visits were carried out. Of these, 27,000 were carried out by 184 BAPS sadhus over a 10-day period.

HANDMADE FLOWER GARLAND OFFERED TO MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

Over 100,000 devotees and well-wishers were

given a handmade flower petal to worship in their personal daily puja for two days. Thereafter, all the petals were collected and weaved into a garland, which was then presented to Mahant Swami Maharaj.

DEADDICTION MESSAGE BY CHILDREN

To honour Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s work in weaning over 4 million people from addictions, around 1,000 children gathered at the BAPS Mandir in Dadar on 31 May – World No Tobacco Day – for a prayer assembly and a public rally calling on people to give up their addictions. The children also set up a public exhibition highlighting the harmful effects of addictions.

OTHER PROGRAMMES

Throughout the year:

- Devotees participated in Vedic *mahapuja* rituals.
- Devotees sang devotional bhajans at the BAPS Mandir in Dadar every morning between the *mangala* and *shangar artis*.
- Special assemblies for women were held.
- Women devotees conducted prayer and support visits to old age homes and hospitals.



PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S



98th

BIRTHDAY

CELEBRATION

4 December 2019, Mumbai



By whose birth, this earth was blessed.

*By whose darshan and divine
association (satsang) countless
people found the right path.*

*By whose life, innumerable
people felt fulfilled.*

*By whose loving company,
countless experienced the
presence of God and attainment
of ultimate moksha.*

*That Gunatit Saint was Brahmaswarup
Pramukh Swami Maharaj.*





Aerial view of D.Y. Patil Stadium during the celebration assembly

The grand celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th birthday were held on 4 December 2019 in Mumbai in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had visited the city of Mumbai over 150 times to inspire and bless the satsang.

In fact, in 1968, at the express wish of Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 48th birthday was celebrated in Mumbai. Thus, Swamishri's birthday was publicly celebrated for the first time in Yogiji Maharaj's presence. Thereafter, Swamishri's main birthday celebrations were held in Mumbai in 1983, 1986, 1987, 1995, 2010 and 2011.

Over 72,000 devotees and well-wishers from throughout India and the world flocked to the D.Y. Patil Stadium in Vashi, New Mumbai, to witness the grand 98th birthday celebration assembly of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

A grand stage had been erected on the east side of the stadium. The audience were seated on the

lawn in front and in the stands.

The stage backdrop comprised fibreglass models of the *shikhars* of Swaminarayan Akshardham and decorative arches housing large LED screens for use during the celebration presentations. The lighting effects added to the appeal of the stage. To each side of the stage were large LED screens for the audience to view the stage programmes.

The celebration assembly began at 5.30 p.m. with *dhun* and bhajans by sadhus and youths. The entire celebration assembly was compered by Adarshjivan Swami and Bhagvatsetu Swami.

After the *dhun* and bhajans, Pujya Viveksagar Swami spoke briefly about Swamishri's visits to Mumbai.

Thereafter, while children performed a colourful traditional dance in honour of Swamishri's centenary to the bhajan '*Shat shat varas sare, guru jivanjyot jale...*' images of Swamishri were displayed on the multiple stage screens.

Then, Dr Swami addressed the packed



Mahant Swami Maharaj welcomed into the assembly with traditional dances representing various regions of India

assembly, explaining the significance of Swamishri's centenary, "What message should we learn from this celebration? The glory of God and his Sadhu. That God is present in our hearts. God is the cause of everything. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had this profound understanding. He lived an extraordinary life. We cannot even contemplate the innumerable honours he received, yet he never became egoistic. He always used to say, 'Everything happens by the wish of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the blessings of gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.' He always highlighted the efforts of the sadhus and devotees. The words 'I' and 'mine' were not even in his dictionary. He always kept God at the forefront.

"From his life, let us imbibe the message 'In the good of others lies our own.' By truly understanding that everything happens due to God's blessings, we will progress in all aspects of our life and experience inner peace."

The time now came to welcome Mahant Swami

Maharaj into the celebration assembly. From the right of the stage, two decorated chariots entered the stadium grounds. The first housed a life-sized seated *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and in the second Mahant Swami Maharaj was seated with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. The two chariots were paraded around the perimeter, on the pathway between the audience seated on the field and in the stands, so that all could have the close darshan of Swamishri.

Meanwhile, on the stage, children and youths performed an exhilarating welcome dance and youths of the Pramukhraj Band from Khandesh (Maharashtra) played the drums in their lively, traditional style. Also, as the chariots passed by, *balaks* in traditional costumes showered flower petals. With the stage and stadium lighting effects, the entire atmosphere echoed with divine joy.

The welcome dance consisted of a series of short presentations of the traditional dances of various regions of India.



Shri Vijaybhai Patil drives Swamishri's chariot around the perimeter of the stadium

Shri Dr Vijaybhai Patil, Founder President of the D.Y. Patil Stadium, devoutly drove Mahant Swami Maharaj's chariot around the stadium.

After completing the perimeter circuit, Swamishri took his seat on a raised platform in front of the main stage to view the birthday celebration presentations. Seated with him were the Home Minister of India, Shri Amitbhai Shah; former governor and educationist, Shri Dr D.Y. Patil; Maharashtra legislative Assembly Opposition Leader and former Chief Minister, Shri Devendra Fadnavis; distinguished Dubai businessman and philanthropist, Shri Dr B.R. Shetty, other guests and the *sadguru* sadhus.

In the audience, many well-known and respected dignitaries from throughout Mumbai were also present.

The main part of the celebration then commenced, based on the theme: 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Divine Touch.' By Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine touch, countless people have been transformed and elevated.

Through his pious words and proximity, and by remembering and praying to him, innumerable people have felt his divine touch and experienced divine joy and success in their lives.

Reflecting the sentiment 'Your birth on our earth made my world special, made our world special', youths presented a devotional dance to

the lyrics '*Purvanā punya falyā, jivan ādhar malyā, Swami tarā rupe āj Shriji malyā*' ('Past merits have borne fruit, we have attained our life's support and through you, Swami, today we have attained Shriji [Maharaj]').

Pramukh Swami Maharaj constantly strived to give solutions to the variety of problems faced by the modern world: addictions, depression, anger and ego, discord and faithlessness.

The celebration programme presented these five topics in creative ways. After each presentation, the audience was requested to recite a pledge to resolve such problems in their lives.

FREED FROM ADDICTIONS



Pramukh Swami Maharaj liberated countless people from the shackles of addictions. As an example, through the creative use of dance and screen animations, the uplifting effect of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine touch on Shri Harshadbhai Brahmabhatt, a senior vice president for Reliance corporate affairs, was depicted. Thereafter, he narrated his story, "I developed the habit of smoking *bidis* and cigarettes from a young age. Even in school I would smoke about 20–25 *bidis* a day. As a youth, I upgraded to cigarettes, smoking up to 40–45 a day. For 35 years I was a chain smoker.



Presentation highlighting the power of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine touch to eradicate addictions

I sincerely tried to quit this addiction. I resolved to quit at many holy places of pilgrimage, when my son was born, when my father passed away and on numerous other occasions – but I failed every time.

“Once, I visited the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Ahmedabad, where I had the darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I described my addiction problem to him. This was a magical moment in my life. At that moment my life's direction changed. Pramukh Swami Maharaj said to me, ‘You do not have any addiction. In fact, you will free many from addictions.’ I was really surprised.

“Bapa then placed a *kanthi* on me and blessed me. It was as if a switch had been pressed and the tube light turned off. Instantly, I was freed from my addiction. His blessings have come true and today I help others quit their addictions.

“I am not alone in receiving such blessings from Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swami Bapa inspired lakhs of people and they now spread the light of an addiction-free life.”

Then, a video was shown revealing the uplifting experiences of some who had been inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj to quit their addictions.

Thereafter, the audience recited a pledge to remain free of addictions.

UPLIFTED FROM DEPRESSION

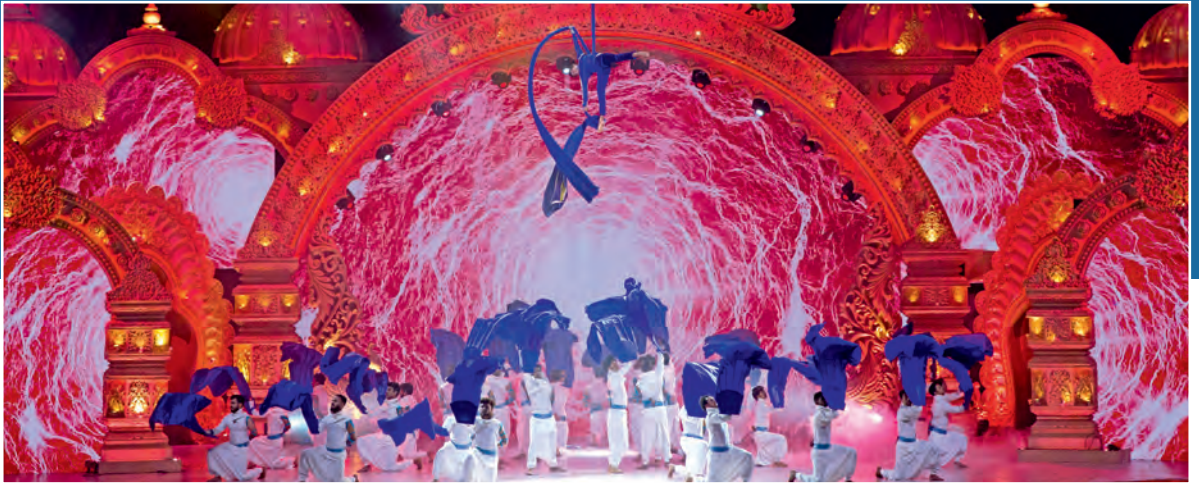


Depression is a burning problem worldwide. Its darkness envelopes the life of those affected, preventing them from leading a productive, joyful life.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj uplifted many from the shadows of depression into the light of joy.

Youths presented a creative dance based on the story of Shri Arunbhai Thakkar.

Thereafter, Atmatrupt Swami narrated Arunbhai's story, “Arunbhai Thakkar lives in the Chembur suburb of Mumbai. He became burdened with massive debts and frustrated by the daily demands of payments and repayments. This led to family discord. To escape, he resorted to heavy smoking, but eventually decided that the only way out was suicide. He decided to end his life, but first went to visit the Hanumanji Mandir in Sarangpur. When he reached Sarangpur, he inadvertently entered the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, where he saw many people joyously making their way in one direction. He learnt that they were going for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's darshan. He went along with them and sat in the assembly. Shortly, Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived and this first darshan filled Arunbhai with peace and quelled his inner turmoil. His worries were banished and his mind was rejuvenated. He felt as if Pramukh



Creative presentation depicting the removal of depression

Swami Maharaj had grasped his hand. He dropped his plan to commit suicide and stayed a few days in Sarangpur. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's daily darshan removed all his negative thoughts and generated positive thoughts. His external circumstances had not changed, but his inner landscape had been transformed and charged with new energy. When he returned to Mumbai, others noticed the change. With great patience, he gradually began to resolve his financial and other difficulties. He believed that Swamishri's blessings were with him. He eventually cleared all his debts, overcame his addiction and banished all negative thoughts from his mind."



Concluding, Atmatript Swami said, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj's contact not only converted negative thoughts into positive ones, but also removed the fear of death – as demonstrated by the story of Niral Patel of Chicago, USA."

Then, a video depicting Niral's inspiring story was shown.

Niral was born with polycystic kidney disease. Doctors first operated on him when he was 15 months old. By the age of 35, he had undergone 74 operations, including 4 kidney transplants. But when his latest kidneys failed, the doctors said that due to the scarring from all his operations, there was no place to put another kidney. His family

was in tears. But Niral had tremendous faith in Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj and gave his family immense courage. He revealed, "I currently experience the divine bliss of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Maybe, due to some deficiency in me, this has all happened. But God has kept my ears healthy so I can listen to bhajans. He has preserved my hands, so that I can turn the *mala*. What more do I need than this?"

He continued, "In 1997, Pramukh Swami Maharaj covered me with his *gatariyu* (upper robe) and promised to take me to Akshardham. After that I have never experienced any misery."

Despite his unbearable physical pain and difficulties, Niral was never depressed and remained joyous till the end, in the knowledge that Pramukh Swami Maharaj will take him to Akshardham.

Such is Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine touch that it removes all negativity and replaces it with courage.

Then, all pledged to shun negative thoughts and adopt a positive, courageous outlook.

BEYOND EGO AND ANGER



Ego and anger cause much personal and inter-personal strife.

A creative dance depicted how ego and anger result in much discord and that removing them



Presentation portraying the shedding of ego and anger

brings tremendous peace. Hemantbhai Patel was plagued by these twin evils.

He narrated, “During the 1985 Bicentenary Celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami, I rented a stall, in the belief that due to the lakhs of visitors, I would make a healthy profit. But, my expectations were not met. In any case, I had animosity towards sadhus and *sampradayas* from a young age. So, this was an opportunity for me to display it. Without reason, I attributed the blame for our slow trade on Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I spoke abusive and unwarranted words about him and I publicly desecrated his *murti*.

“Three years passed, during which time I learned about Pramukh Swami Maharaj – his piety, selfless services, devotion and faith in God. I repented for my past actions and wanted to seek his forgiveness. So, on 9 April 1989 I went to Sarangpur to meet him. I revealed everything to him and feared how he would respond to my having insulted him. But he was the epitome of tranquility. He calmly and lovingly said, ‘Forget, whatever you did then and begin afresh.’ His soothing words, free of any anger or malice, gave me great inner peace. I broke down in tears; he placed my head in his lap and blessed me.

“After meeting him, I thought that although Swamishri has forgiven me, God would never forgive me. With this thought, I was among a crowd

of people as Swamishri was climbing down the mandir steps later that day. He spotted me from a distance and came up to me. Placing a hand on my shoulder, he said, ‘Do not consider yourself as a sinner. You are not at fault.’ His loving facial expression convinced me that now even God has forgiven me.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s forgiving and humble nature changed my life. I now live in America and am a photographer. I have taken many photographs of him. See his impact. The one whose *murti* I desecrated, now gives me great joy to photograph.”

Then, further describing Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s egolessness, Anandswarup Swami spoke, “Thousands of devotees have, like Hemantbhai, been transformed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s humility.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj successfully completed innumerable works which received worldwide acclaim. Among them was Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. The *Guinness World Records* have recognized it. Visitors see every part of Akshardham as magical. But the most amazing fact is that it was completed in only five years.

“Padma Vibhushan Shri Satishbhai Gujral, a renowned architect, said, ‘In my experience a large complex like Akshardham should take about



Presentation on nurturing harmony

50 years to build. But by the grace of God it was completed in five.’

“The late Mahamandaleshwar Pujya Swami Satyamitranand Giriji said to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, ‘Even Brahma would be surprised that it took him countless years to create the earth, whereas you built Akshardham in five. Swami, you are a divine incarnation, otherwise it is not possible to build such a pilgrimage place.’ Former American ambassador to India, Shri Robert Mulford saw Akshardham and commented, ‘If you want to begin to understand this country’s roots, then Akshardham is the first and best place.’

“Millions of people from 193 countries, numerous national leaders, royal and other dignitaries have visited and praised the work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Yet, Pramukh Swami Maharaj never took credit for building Akshardham. He always humbly attributed all accolades at the feet of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, guru Yogiji Maharaj, and the hard work of the sadhus and devotees.

“His humility was not due to any compulsion, but was due to his constant communion with Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He believed himself to be a mere drop compared to the ocean-like God. Due to such humility, he constantly experienced joy, peace and happiness in his life. So, to experience such joy and success and to please God, humility is essential.”

Thereafter, a video of Dr Abul Kalam narrating how he had experienced the egolessness of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was shown.

Then, everyone pledged to shed ego and anger from their lives.

DISMISS DISCORD, HARBOUR HARMONY

For joy, peace and prosperity in the family and the world, harmony is necessary. Today, instead of harmony, discord is growing, because people have become more self-centric.

Through a creative dance and an animation video, such discord and how the divine touch of Pramukh Swami Maharaj leads to harmony was portrayed.



Then, Aksharvatsal Swami described the story of Kanuji Thakor, “Everyone feels that their view is the best and that is what causes conflict and discord. This is what happened to Kanuji Thakor, who got married in 2002. Outwardly, everything appeared fine, but within a short time, the flames of inner turmoil exploded. Conflicts between husband, wife and mother-in-law surfaced. Sometimes, the arguments became so unbearable, that Kanuji would call his in-laws to say, ‘Please take back your daughter, I cannot live with her anymore.’ Such family discord continued for about 12 years and



The story of Prahlad illustrates the fostering of faith

it adversely affected their young children. The internal conflicts became so intense that the only way out seemed to be divorce. But the effect of such a step on their young children worried them.

“Then, suddenly, the situation changed. From somewhere, Kanuji got a copy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s Vachanamrut and began to read it. He was drawn to the deep spiritual principles explained by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in simple language. This led him to the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad, where, by attending the satsang *sabhas*, he learnt about Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s insistence on conducting a 15–20-minute *ghar sabha* for family harmony.

“So, in 2014, Kanuji began conducting a regular *ghar sabha* with his family. And today, in 2019, this gift from Pramukh Swami Maharaj has transformed his family’s discord into harmony. His easily triggered anger and other family conflicts have been extinguished. Their home feels like a mandir, due to the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

“The *ghar sabha* is the divine touch of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He brought harmony not only to families, but promoted harmony between communities, villages and faiths.”

Thereafter, a video of Pramukh Swami Maharaj promoting interfaith harmony by offering prayers

at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem was shown. He placed two sanctified flowers in this sacred Jewish place of pilgrimage and prayed, “May the prayers of all who have prayed here and will pray here in the future be fulfilled.” The video also showed an excerpt of Swamishri’s speech at the Millennium World Peace Conference for Religious Leaders at the United Nations in 2000, in which he set out a roadmap for world harmony.

Thereafter, everyone recited a pledge to maintain harmony.

ESTABLISHING FAITH

Pramukh Swami Maharaj enriched the lives of many by removing their faithlessness and establishing faith – in themselves, their family, the guru and God. Such faith released them from many difficulties.

The strength derived from faith was depicted through the story of Prahlad, effectively portrayed by a splendid fusion of dance, videos and acting.

Then, Brahmavihari Swami spoke about how Pramukh Swami Maharaj generated faith in all he met, “The story of Prahlad is one of faith, and the question facing the world is one of faithlessness. This is a big challenge. The miracle of faith is not just that it gives you the power to do the impossible, but the power to see the invisible and to feel the presence of

God in everything. Faith gives you the power to believe, the power to hope and to be positive. This was perhaps the greatest miracle Pramukh Swami Maharaj worked. He inspired and rejuvenated faith in everyone he met, whether you were faithful or faithless. No wonder Dr APJ Abdul Kalam often said, 'I learnt the value of thinking from Socrates, truth from Galileo, nonviolence from Gandhi, equality from Lincoln, forgiveness from Mandela, compassion from Buddha, but I learnt the value of faith in God from Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He became my ultimate teacher.' Thereafter, Brahmavihari Swami narrated the occasion when President Kalam phoned and then sent his close friend and famous cartoonist, Shri R.K. Laxman, to visit Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi. He was 85 years old, frail and wheelchair bound, but he had lost none of his powers of observation and ability to pass sharp, focused comments.

He visited the main Akshardham mandir, the cultural boat ride and then, just after the Neelkanth Varni large format film had started, he abruptly decided to leave.

The next morning President Kalam called again to say that Shri R.K. Laxman wanted to visit again and finish watching the film. So, he returned and attentively watched the film till the end.

Continuing his narration, Brahmavihari Swami said, "I asked R.K. Laxman, 'Do you want to meet Pramukh Swamiji?' He questioned, 'Why? Who's

he?' I replied, 'He's our spiritual leader, the creator of Akshardham.' 'So what? Why should I see him?' Then, he asked, 'Has Kalam met him?' I replied, 'Yes. Several times.' Then suddenly, he exclaimed, 'OK, Let's go to meet him.'

"When he was wheeled into Swamishri's room, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was reading letters and gently talking to two saints. Swamishri wondered who the guest was. Swamishri did not know English, had never read the *Times of India* nor seen the Common Man cartoons. Swamishri did not know who R.K. Laxman was and R.K. Laxman did not know who Pramukh Swami was. This was a meeting of strangers. Swamishri lovingly stretched out his hand and held R.K. Laxman's hand. At that moment, R.K. Laxman broke down and started crying nonstop for a few minutes like a baby. Innocently, Pramukh Swami asked, 'What is the name of the guest?' This is when the sparkle happened. R.K. Laxman clenched his throat, held back his breath and said, 'There is a flood of peace... a flood of peace. All my life I have found faults with everything and in everyone. There's always something to criticize. My day begins with criticism and ends with criticism. Today is the first day in my life where there is nothing to criticize. My perspective of life has changed.' On his way out R.K. Laxman once again asked, 'What was the Swami's name?' I said, 'Pramukh Swami.' He respectfully repeated it five times and said, 'I am going to go back to Kalam

Pramukh Swami Maharaj greets Shri R.K. Laxman at Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, November 2005



and tell him that today I met the finest person on this earth.’ Now more at ease, he questioned, ‘Was I really crying? Please send the pictures of me crying. My wife will be really happy!’

“That very night, President Kalam called and said, ‘Miracles still do happen. My friend Laxman has come back with renewed faith, more faith in life, more faith in people.’ Pramukh Swamiji’s single touch created this magic. Neither knew each other, had never met, and did not talk. But one single touch impacted his life.

“The miracle of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was that he rejuvenated faith in the hearts of millions wherever they were, and whoever they were... believers or nonbelievers... whether it was faith in God, faith in people, or faith in life. He painted everything positive.”

Thus, through even the fleeting divine touch of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, countless have been infused with faith – faith in life, people and God.

Thereafter, everyone pledged to establish and nurture faith in their lives.

OUR FUTURE IS BRIGHT



After these five presentations, Shri Dilipbhai Joshi, a renowned Bollywood actor and a dedicated BAPS devotee, addressed the assembly on a topic of everyone’s interest: ‘Concern for the Future.’

He said, “I want to express my debt to guru

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, because I firmly believe that whatever I have achieved is entirely due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s blessings. He lived his entire life for the benefit and joy of others. My many years of acting experience have taught me that it is easy to make people laugh for a few seconds, but difficult to always keep them joyous. Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave everyone inner joy – I am one of them.

“In 1986–7, I first had the darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. A college friend, Nitinbhai Desai, insisted that I visit Dadar Mandir for Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s darshan. I, too, wanted to have his darshan, but for some reason, I was unable to go.

“Once, I was riding a scooter with Nitinbhai seated behind me. We were travelling from the Haji Ali area to Vile Parle. Again, he reminded me to come for Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s darshan. I told him I really want to come, and couldn’t understand why I was unable to arrange it. Just then, a car passed by with Pramukh Swami Maharaj seated in the front passenger seat. I wondered if this was a mistake. No, it was real. Every time I recall this, my hair stands on end. Even today, by sincerely remembering him, he is present in a divine form amidst us and in the form of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

“I want to present a problem: even a person who is successful and happy has a concern about his future. It’s because the future is unknown, uncertain, unclear. People wonder, ‘What is my

Children proclaim that the future is bright due to the association of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj





Mahant Swami Maharaj, Hon. Shri Amitbhai Shah, dignitaries and *sadguru* sadhus on stage

future. What is the future of this country and the world?”

Having presented this question, children entered on to the stage while a large round cutout of the world was seen at the centre of the stage.

The earth was lifted to reveal Mahant Swami Maharaj seated on the stage. Everyone greeted this darshan with tremendous applause. Everyone believed that their future is bright because Pramukh Swami Maharaj has gifted Mahant Swami Maharaj. He has also nurtured a divine community which will continue to spread pious living and service.

Representing this future, six young children presented a glimpse of the future, confidently ensuring all that with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, children will free their families and society from the concerns of the future. The children resolved to live by the wishes of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

Thereafter, the chief guests and senior sadhus

took their seats on the stage: Shri Amitbhai Shah (Home Minister of India), Shri Devendra Fadnavis (former Chief Minister of Maharashtra), Padmashri Dr D.Y. Patil (Founder, D.Y. Patil Group, and former Governor of Tripura, Bihar and West Bengal), Shri Dr Vijaybhai D. Patil (Chancellor, D.Y. Patil University and Founder President of D.Y. Patil Stadium), Shri Dr B.R. Shetty (Philanthropist and Businessman, UAE).

Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami welcomed all the stage guests with garlands.

Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Convener of BAPS’ international activities, delivered the Vote of Thanks and announced the major events arranged during the forthcoming year.

Thereafter, Home Minister of India, Shri Amitbhai Shah addressed the assembly. “Today, seeing over 60,000 devotees seated in this assembly reflects how much Pramukh Swami Maharaj has touched and inspired your lives.

“Pramukh Swami Maharaj has rejuvenated



Top: A child interacts with Swamishri; Hon. Shri Amitbhai Shah addresses the assembly
Bottom: Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami recites a prayer on behalf of all; Swamishri blesses the assembly

society's faith in saints and spirituality. BAPS and its hardworking saints have strived in India and abroad to remove negative ideas and actions and replaced them with positivity. The world will appreciate their efforts.

"Pramukh Swami Maharaj lit the flame of inner peace, faith, devotion and fraternity in countless people through his travels to over 17,000 cities, towns and villages. Today, people endeavour to advance spirituality, but do not know the essence of spirituality. During his long life, Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not give long lectures, but through his life and works explained the essence of spirituality.

"In my personal life, whenever I have faced difficulties, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was the first to phone. He would bless me, 'Everything will turn out fine. Leave all your worries on God, on Shriji [Maharaj].' His words would inspire and re-energize me to face the challenges and fight for the truth.

"Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired many like me. Today, his sadhus spread his teachings to the society with great dignity."

Then, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami prayed before Mahant Swami Maharaj on behalf of all, "May all attain perfection in *ekantik* dharma. May *samp*, *suhradbhav* and *ekta* increase in families, society, satsang and the world. May all see the good in everyone and not the faults. May we be able to serve all and progress on the path of devotion."

Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the assembly, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a divine saint, with a pure mind. His whole life was divine and pure. He was simple, but he touched everyone. He guided countless on to the paths of righteousness and devotion to God. He accomplished many great works.

"It is difficult to control the mind. But Pramukh Swami Maharaj had conquered his mind, travelled within society, and uplifted and



Children and youths perform a traditional dance

awakened it. Through his divine touch many great things were achieved.”

On this occasion, Mahant Swami Maharaj and Shri Amitbhai Shah inaugurated the third part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s detailed biography, written by Adharshjivan Swami.

Also, it was announced that on 28 November 2019, Mahant Swami Maharaj had inaugurated the BAPS Kalakendra in Vashi, New Mumbai.

Then, the *sadguru* and other sadhus honoured Mahant Swami Maharaj with garlands, after which everyone in the stadium participated in the *samuh arti*. The entire arena resembled a sea of lights amid the dark night.

To celebrate this occasion, 80 youths from Vadodara had pilgrimaged in a Jyot Yatra by foot carrying *mashals* (flame torches) from Chhapaiya in Uttar Pradesh (the birthplace of Bhagwan Swaminarayan), through various places of pilgrimage, including Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh) – the birthplace of Mahant Swami Maharaj. They were welcomed into the stadium. From here, after the celebration, they would continue their pilgrimage to Chansad and then Vadodara, where Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 99th birthday will take place in 2020. This will complete their 2,100-km pilgrimage.

Also, every year, since the launch of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s centenary celebrations in 2015,

BAPS youths of Chansad have participated in a Jyot Yatra to the venue of the birthday celebrations: 2015 – Sarangpur, 2016 – Surat, 2017 – Anand and 2018 – Rajkot. This year, around 100 youths participated in the 480-km Jyot Yatra to Mumbai for the celebration.

The entire birthday celebration was possible due to the tireless efforts of the sadhus and volunteers.

The excellent stage presentations were prepared under the guidance of renowned creative director Shri Arunbhai Sheshkumar and Pankitaben Sadrani.

To prepare for the celebration, Shri Vijaybhai Patil generously allowed the use of the stadium for 18 days, free of charge. He also provided accommodation for Mahant Swami Maharaj in his hospital, adjacent to the stadium, and supported the celebrations in numerous other ways.

To house the volunteers preparing for the celebration, many builders provided their flats.

And on the day of the celebration, over 640 buses were used to transport devotees to and from the stadium and the various suburbs of Mumbai.



- Translated from Swaminarayan Prakash
by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



CELEBRATION REFLECTIONS

Paramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th birthday celebrations in Mumbai was possible due to the sincere efforts and service of over 10,000 dedicated volunteers. They served in the accommodations, *sabha* arrangements, security, electric, decoration, kitchen, transport, parking, stage presentations, public relations, press, house-keeping and other departments.

Some quit their jobs to serve for an extended period, while students adjusted their timetables to attend classes and still serve. Some had health and family difficulties, yet enthusiastically served.

In addition to the services of young and old BAPS devotees, others also provided significant and beyond-the-expected support.

Of particular note was the generous support provided by the owners of D.Y. Patil Stadium, Shri Vijaybhai Patil and his father Shri Dr D.Y. Patil. They permitted the use of their stadium 18 days prior to the celebration so that the necessary decorations and arrangements could be set up. They also provided for Mahant Swami Maharaj's accommodations on the day of the celebration in a suite in their adjacent hospital. In addition, they arranged for the 90 doctors and other hospital staff to provide any medical treatment that may be required for the attending devotees.

For parking, Raheja Builders provided open space to park 3,300 vehicles.

The creative, thematic stage presentations were prepared under the guidance of distinguished directors Shri Arun Sheshkumar and Pankitaben Sadrani.

Many builders also graciously allowed the use of their flats to accommodate the devotees visiting from outside Mumbai.

After the celebration, the volunteers were joined by the Sanstha's sadhus to clean the entire stadium and the numerous flats that had been used. Shri Vijaybhai Patil, and the flat owners were astonished by the speed and thoroughness with which the cleaning was done.

Throughout Mumbai, many celebration signboards had been set up. These, too, were removed after the celebration.

The support of the police, traffic police, local municipality staff and other local officials and organizations also contributed significantly to the smooth management of the whole event.

EXPERIENCES

Many distinguished guests from throughout Mumbai attended the 98th birthday celebration. They were all delighted by the arrangements

and programme, commenting, “Indescribable, unique, unforgettable, wonderful...”

Some were touched by the presentations, some by the service of the volunteers, some by the pure saintliness of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, and some by the BAPS Sanstha’s arrangements.

Dr Ramakant Panda, a renowned cardiac surgeon who has performed over 25,000 operations, said, “About 17 years ago, when I met Pramukh Swami Maharaj for the first time, I felt that I had met God. I could see the divine powers coming from him, and that experience is still with me today.”

Shri Motilal Oswal, a successful businessman and owner of a prominent financial corporation, said, “I was really touched by Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s simplicity. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has done so much for society. I was privileged to have met him.”

After the celebration, when the volunteers came to clean up, some guests commented, “Such a big event. Good food. And the volunteers even came to take away the garbage.” Among the housekeeping volunteers were Dev Ajmera, a young member of the Ajmera Group of Companies, commercial pilots Saurabh Vaghela and Dhaval Patel, and other professionals. Guests were surprised to learn that they and many other such youths were diligently serving as volunteers in such menial duties for this occasion.

At the start of the event, more guests than expected arrived. Subsequently, many sadhus and *sadhaks* vacated their chairs and sat on the floor so that the guests could be accommodated. The guests were deeply touched by this gesture. A leading businessman, Shri Amrutbhai Shah, said, “I will remember this celebration as long as I live. It was really enjoyable. I will also never forget how the sadhus vacated their seats for us. If I had not come, I would have regretted it.”

Shri Asit Modi, producer of the popular TV serial ‘Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah’, said, “Over 72,000 people arrived, attended and

departed without any problems or disturbance.”

Shri Vijaybhai Patel, owner of the D.Y. Patil Stadium, has witnessed many events and the accompanying chaos and occasional disturbances that occur when so many people gather. He was apprehensive that the same would happen on this occasion. But he was impressed to see the organization, planning and discipline of all, and said, “Even we have to learn such discipline from BAPS. For the final 15 minutes, I felt that I was in heaven!”

On duty for the celebration was Mumbai’s Assistant Commissioner of Traffic Police, Shri Rajendraji Chauhan. He was deeply touched by the deaddiction presentation during the celebration assembly and resolved to give up his own addictions. A few days later, when he came for the darshan of Mahant Swami Maharaj, he sought blessings to enable him to give up all his addictions and to stop eating meat. Swamishri blessed him and said, “By Rajendraji taking such pledges, our celebration has served its purpose.” Afterwards, Rajendraji described his feelings, “I felt I was in transcendence, divinity mode.”

The print and electronic media journalists of Mumbai cover many such events that take place throughout the city. However, here they had a different experience. One journalist said, “I have reported on Bollywood and other celebrity events for 35 years, but I have never seen anything like this.”

Another commented, “To get so many people to come for an event in this part of Mumbai on a working day is not possible. This is all due to the attraction for Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj.”

Representatives of other religious organizations also attended. These included: Shrimad Rajchandra Mission of Dharampur, Chaitanyaswarup Swami of Vallabh Ashram, saints of Maninagar Swaminarayan Sanstha, as well as representatives of Jain, Sikh and Parsi organizations.

The celebration enriched everyone – guests, devotees and volunteers – with memories to cherish forever.





LOVE FOR HIS DISCIPLES

After Yogiji Maharaj departed to Dham, Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived in Gondal for the first time. We had set up Swamishri's seat on a wooden platform for him to deliver a discourse (*parayan*) from. Swamishri came and, standing besides his seat, he humbly asked me, "May I sit here?" Though the question asked was quite small, his humility was so great. He was modest and shy when I replied, "Please be seated. It is meant for you and we are also yours."

I fondly remember another incident of Swamishri.

In 1984, I had a grave illness. I underwent a major surgery and was resting in a hospital in Rajkot. I felt as if I would no longer live. During those days, Swamishri was in Mumbai. After hearing news of my illness, he arranged that I be brought by air for treatment to Mumbai. After arriving in Mumbai, I was transported in an ambulance from the airport to the hospital. On the way, we came to the Dadar mandir. Swamishri was sitting on a chair, waiting for me, on the footpath

by the road! Many devotees were also standing there. When my ambulance reached there, I was about to get down for his darshan, but he stopped me and said, "Wait, I am coming there!"

After getting into the ambulance, Swamishri applied a *chandlo* on my forehead and placed his hand on my head. Then, he told me to have Thakorji's darshan, whom an attendant was holding. Then he blessed, "You have had Thakorji's darshan, so you will be all right. Go to the hospital, Maharaj will protect you." Thereafter, during my stay in the hospital and when I returned to the mandir, Swamishri constantly took care of me by making phone calls and writing letters. When he again came to Mumbai, he would daily visit Sant Swami and me to ask us about our health. He took great care and also instructed others to take care of me.

I experienced his love and compassion for his disciples in such times. It is not easy to love selflessly.

(Cont. on p. 41)



SUCH A SANT IS GOD HIMSELF

Mumbai's Dadar railway station was packed with devotees before Swamishri's arrival. Swamishri was going to Pune on 17 December 1989. Devotees filled the station with loving outbursts of *jais* and joyful praises when Swamishri arrived at the station. The devotees were running here and there to have Swamishri's last darshan. Swamishri was to walk all the way to the last coach. However, due to a tight cordon of volunteers, it didn't cause any inconvenience to Swamishri. The scene outside the cordon was worth seeing. Youth (men and women) were running in such a way that the handcarts arranged were pushed aside in disorder, many lost their sandals and some dashed against others. This scene was indescribable. As the departure time of the train drew nearer, Swamishri entered into the carriage. The devotees started bidding goodbye by waving their hands high. In two minutes, the train started moving. The devotees started running with the train. Their frenzy was uncontrollable like their love. Swamishri kept saying, "Stop now, please go back. Do not

run! You might slip and fall." But Swamishri's voice was drowned by the din and excitement. No one was ready to hear what Swamishri was saying. The platform ended. One youth, in his zeal for having darshan fell down, but luckily he was not hurt.

What was that element which never let the devotees feel satiated even after having Swamishri's darshan, touch and blessings continuously for one week?

It was the great pleasure of getting lost in the joyfulness of Swamishri's divine personality – where there was sheer divinity, where place and time dissolved and worldly affairs just ceased to be remembered. What did that divinity mean?

Shriji Maharaj gives the meaning of divinity or divine feelings as follows: God is one and unique. He remains in his Akshardham always in the divine form only. He is full of endless supremacy, endless power and endless redemptory virtues. He is free from all faults. When this same God descends on earth in human form for the *moksha* of countless souls, he comes by

bringing with him all his supreme powers and his Akshardham. But he is constantly keen on hiding his powers. Not only that, he displays human nature, such as fear or fearlessness, hunger or thirst, mineness or yourness. Those who are wise can perceive divine traits in such human traits. They can comprehend and experience such human episodes of God as liberating (*kalyankari*). In short, divinity means there is no difference between God who has assumed human form and God who is sitting in Akshardham. Both are one and the same.

Just like the human form of God is divine, the form of the Sant, through whom God is fully manifest, is also equally divine. Shriji Maharaj explains in Vachanamrut Vartal 13 that when God manifests on earth in the form of a sadhu or a king, though he appears like a human, he is divine. Therefore, spiritual aspirants get casually attracted to him. I shall describe episodes where such aspirants got intuition and received inspirations for moulding their lives by the divine experiences they had with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

EXPERIENCES OF SWAMISHRI'S PERSONALITY

Some experienced Swamishri's yogic powers. Some perceived a slow pace in his brisk walking routine. Some saw Swamishri becoming stable in a moment after winding up all his activities, just like a tortoise withdraws all its body parts in a moment. Some saw him in an easy mood in spite of him being engrossed in activities and saw him appear fresh even after hard work. Some saw him in a casual mood like someone behaving in private (even) in the presence of thousands of people. Some had witnessed Swamishri's spiritual joy even in his solitary moments. Some experienced righteous anger in him at one moment and a loud laughter in the very next second. Some experienced his tenderness, simplicity and disinterest in tasty foods, whereas some experienced

his state of desirelessness. Some had darshan of Swamishri's fearlessness and some had the sight of his compassion. Some experienced his egolessness and some experienced him being free of (even) the pride of egolessness. Some had seen him being happy even amidst insults. Some saw him solemn and some saw in him childlike innocence. On seeing him, many hearts echoed, "Oh! He is Truth incarnate! He is Bliss incarnate! What couldn't we do for him?" Some saw him as the ideal listener of spiritual discourses. Some had darshan of him having intense love for Thakorji. Some had seen in him Shastriji Maharaj's personality, while others had seen Yogiji Maharaj in him. It is impossible to count or note thousands of such experiences because they kept happening every moment and there were thousands who experienced them.

Some gained strength to quit addictions, while some to give up superstitions and some to give up their base natures. Many experienced their prejudices dissolve. Some experienced becoming free from all physical pain. Through Swamishri's gentle touch some received inspiration to become humble, some burst into tears, some felt their callousness dissolve, some experienced warmth, some became free of the guilt that was corroding their hearts due to some mistakes, some received self-confidence, some tasted love more than that of a hundred mothers, some experienced as if Swamishri loved them the most. Then, in Swamishri's presence, some received inspiration to work sincerely hard and offer selfless service. Some experienced fearlessness; some experienced fulfillment. Some felt deep peace even by offering a simple thing like a glass of water to Swamishri. Some experienced divine peace by Swamishri's touch, speech, laughter, smile, and glance or by his letter. Some were inspired with faith in God on listening to his pure speech.

Some may witness certain virtues or achievements such as compassion, tastelessness,

desirelessness, calmness and miracles in some ordinary humans, spiritual aspirants or spiritually elevated people from the above mentioned experiences; but the quality and the quantity of these virtues were quite different and much greater in Swamishri. He was different; he was divine. This was a statement from thousands of devotees and swamis who experienced Swamishri's divinity. Whoever came into Swamishri's contact experienced that he was greater than a human even though he appeared to be so. He was divine.

* * *

In December 1987, devotees of the Naroda suburb in Ahmedabad were celebrating Swamishri's 67th symbolic birthday. Bhaktivallabh Swami and I went there. After the assembly, one stranger requested to allow him to address the assembly for five minutes. When we agreed, he addressed the meeting, "I am Mr. More, a disciple of Pujya Chidanand Swami of Rushikesh. Many years before, I had the darshan of Pujya Pramukh Swami from a great distance. I had then wished to see him from close quarters, but it did not happen. One day, I received news that Pujya Chidanand Swami was going to attend Swamishri's birthday celebration in Mehsana. However, due to ill health, he sent Adhyatmanand Swami. I was fortunate to accompany him to Mehsana. Adhyatmanand Swami met and had Swamishri's darshan. Thereafter, I went for Swamishri's darshan. Something extraordinary happened at that time. Pujya Pramukh Swami touched my head and said, 'Has your wish to have darshan from near been fulfilled?' Swamishri declared my wish that I had made many years ago. I was greatly pleased; that joy was even greater than getting lakhs of rupees."

Such power is not usually seen in human beings. Even if someone with the power of austerities, yoga or mantra could reveal the thoughts in one's mind, but he may not be liberated from worldly desires or may not possess virtues. But,

Swamishri had a limitless repository of virtues, and his humility, which is the foundation of all virtues, pervaded through his every pore.

* * *

In 1981, during the Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, a convention of the Bharat Sadhu Samaj was held in Swamishri's presence in Ahmedabad. All the sadhus and sannyasis present were invited to the Akshar-Purushottam Mandir (in Shahibaug) for a felicitation programme. Swamishri was seated in the mandir prayer hall. Swamishri started felicitating each sadhu or sannyasi by offering a shawl and respectfully bowing down and touching their feet. Mohanbhai Patel (of Colorama Studios, London) was giving each sannyasi an envelope containing a monetary donation. Suddenly, one of the sannyasis felt that the chief of the Sadhu Samaj was discriminating against him, so he tore the envelope and started ranting before Swamishri. The atmosphere turned tense, but Swamishri remained undisturbed and said with folded hands, "It is my mistake. Please forgive me." That sadhu replied, "No! No! It is not your mistake. I am pointing out at that person's mistake." Even after this clarification, Swamishri still went on saying, "Kindly forgive me for my mistake." Then, the sadhu calmed down. All witnessed Swamishri's unique humility. He took on himself the mistake of someone else!

It is very difficult to remain humble in such a situation. Even if somebody were to behave humbly then pride for one's humility would arise and come in the way. Swamishri's humility was pure. He never harboured pride for his humility, because it was selfless and he wanted to please God only. In this way, one who is completely selfless possesses all the virtues, and one who has all the virtues experiences constant peace.

* * *

Once Swamishri was sitting on a cot in his room in Sarangpur mandir. Some sadhus and

parshads were seated near him. There was a discussion about how to maintain peace and calmness even amidst a flurry of activities. I asked Swamishri, “How do you feel?” Swamishri replied, “By the grace of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj I experience constant peace.”

There are distinctions among various kinds of peace. The peace one experiences in the solitude of a jungle is different from the peace that Swamishri possessed. Swamishri always stayed in the midst of society. He would meet people who were illiterate, ignorant forest dwellers as well as learned city people from countries across the world, including world-renowned artists, millionaires, industrialists and political leaders, and solve their problems. Apart from that, he was the spiritual and administrative head of the worldwide BAPS. The organization has hundreds of mandirs in India and abroad, and the chief responsibility of shouldering its activities was on him. He was also the guru of 450 (in 1990) well-educated sadhus and hundreds of thousands of householder devotees. He conducted many activities to sustain their wellbeing and to nurture their spiritual and material betterment. Even amidst all of this, Swamishri’s calmness remained unbroken. Finding such a person among millions would indeed be a rare phenomenon. Even if such a person were found, would he be able to give peace to others? If he could, he would not merely be a human being but a manifestation of God.

* * *

In 1972, Han Kop, a citizen of Holland who was on world tour, reached the city of Mombasa in Kenya. Seeing a photo of Yogi Bapa, he was attracted and expressed his desire to meet him. C.T. Patel, president of Mombasa Satsang Mandal, informed him that Yogi Bapa had passed away and Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, a saint of the same spiritual calibre, was now in his place. He (Han Kop) would have to go to India if he wanted to meet him. Han Kop’s spiritual

inclinations were further kindled. He cancelled his world tour programme and came to India. At that time, Swamishri was in Gondal. Han Kop drove to Gondal in a Land Rover. He had vowed not to take any food until he had Swamishri’s darshan. On seeing Swamishri, he had a divine experience. He says, “The very moment I had darshan of Pramukh Swami, my hunger, thirst and fatigue disappeared and I experienced unprecedented peace.”

Thousands experienced such peace on Swamishri’s darshan, and he had blessed many sadhus and devotees with constant peace as a fruit of their spiritual sadhanas. Such an experience of divinity in someone can only be possible when the latter is devoid of any worldly desires and when he can also liberate others of their desires. Such a person is God or the Gunatit Sadhu, who is God-realized. God or such a Sadhu is always divine, and that is why a spiritual aspirant experiences divine joy in the activities of such a Sadhu: eating, drinking, sleeping, sitting, walking and letter writing or even in a minor activity like taking medicine.

* * *

When God and the Gunatit Sadhu manifest in this world, a human being cannot recognize them out of his human senses and mind alone. That is why God and his Sadhu shower their grace and reveal their divinity. Sometimes they reveal their divine personality through their own words. Now, let’s have some insights of Swamishri’s divine personality in his own holy words.

Swamishri Takes Care of Our Soul **25 January 1987, Mumbai**

Introducing Pithawala Saheb to Dr Samani, Swamishri said, “This is Pithawala Saheb. He has deep feelings for sadhus. When we go to his house, he takes much care.”

Dr Samani: “In fact it is to be seen who actually takes care of whom.”

Swamishri: “This is all mutual; you take care of us physically, and we take care of your soul.”

Swamishri Had Kept God

20 August 1988, San Jose, California

Youths: “Which games did you play when you were a child?”

Swamishri: “I used to play ordinary games like *kho-kho*, *hutututu* and *amli pipli*.”

Youths: “Does that tree [where you played *amli-pipli*] still exist?”

Swamishri: “How can it exist [after so many years]? Everything has gone. Why remember it after leaving [Chansad]?”

Then Swamishri said, “Why remember when it never existed at all! [For me there is] no London, no house, other things and people. [I] have kept only God and that is sufficient. I do bhajan and make others do it.”

Swamishri’s Total Engrossment in God

11 April 1990, Bhavnagar

After completing dinner and a few meetings, Swamishri was reading letters in a room at night. There was a light bulb right above his head. Suddenly, it slipped out of the socket, fell on to Swamishri’s neck and slid down his back. In spite of this, Swamishri kept reading the letters. After reading the letters, Bhadresh Swami informed him about what had happened.

Swamishri said, “When did it fall down?” Bhadresh Swami replied, “It fell down when you were reading the letters.” Then, Narayancharan Swami remarked, “Your stability of mind is remarkable!”

Swamishri replied with a smile, “When my mind is engrossed in God how would I know of it?”

God Dwells in Swamishri

29 January 1987

Nilkanth, an 8-year-old child from Mumbai, often asked questions to Swamishri.

Once, Nilkanth asked, “Do you have God within you?”

Swamishri said, “That’s why I am sitting here [serving as the guru].” In the Satpurush, God exists fully, and in others, he remains as the indweller (*antaryami*).

God Is Worshipped by Offering Pujan to

Swamishri

9 August 1988, Bryan, Texas

Dr Sudhirbhai asked Swamishri, “Since I have not physically seen Shriji Maharaj it is difficult to imagine him while doing *mansi puja*. However, I have seen you, so can I imagine your *murti* in *mansi puja*?”

Swamishri replied, “Shriji Maharaj is God. We have faith in him. So, we have to worship him in *mansi puja*. But having an association with a God-realized guru, God can be reached. Such a guru has a direct communion with God. He has seen God, so remember the guru. [Just as] when one wants to worship the waters of River Ganga, one does *pujan* of the pot because the pot contains Ganga water. Likewise, God dwells in a true guru, so by offering *pujan* to him one worships God.”

Swamishri Is Everywhere

14 December 1988, Nairobi

After Swamishri’s morning bath, his attendant swami was inserting the contact lenses in Swamishri’s eyes. At that time Vishwavihari Swami asked, “When are you coming to Ahmedabad?”

Swamishri replied, “I am here now, so why should you worry about Ahmedabad? Take the benefit [of this opportunity]!”

Then, suddenly, Swamishri revealed, “I have nothing like coming and going [from one place to another]. This is a game in between; otherwise, I am here as well as there.”

Such a Sant Is God Himself

12 November 1988, Nairobi

In Nairobi mandir, Swamishri was sitting alone

on a sofa in the hall outside his room. Shukmuni Swami came running to him and asked, “Why are you sitting alone?”

Swamishri replied, “I am not alone. Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, and sadhus and *muktas* like you are with me. I am seated with God within me, so one cannot say I am alone.”

Shukmuni Swami: “I cannot see God.”

Swamishri: “Do you wish to see him?”

Shukmuni Swami: “Yes.”

Swamishri became exuberant and gazed into Shukmuni Swami’s eyes and revealed, “Now see.”

After seeing in this way for about twenty seconds Swamishri said, “The one [Shriji Maharaj] who is in Akshardham, the same [Divinity] is also here. Therefore, remain in a state of joy,

bliss and courage [with the faith] that you have met God himself. If someone asks you whether you have seen God, you should say ‘Yes’. Realize Vachanamrut Vartal 11. Believe the Satpurush to be your *atma*. Have affection only for him. He is the only means to realize your *atma* and God.”

A complete comprehension of Swamishri’s divine personality is encapsulated in a verse written by Nishkulanmand Swami:

“*Āp tali malyā Bhagwanmā, Jenā āpamā Hari no vyāp, Sant te swayam Hari.*”

Meaning: “A Sant who has unity with God, in him, God completely pervades. Such a Sant is God himself.” ♦

(Cont. from p. 35)

When I joined Satsang, I first came into contact with Shastriji Maharaj. Once, I had heard Shastriji Maharaj say, “I and Yogi are one. I am Yogi and Yogi is me.” So, after Shastriji Maharaj departed to Dham, I bonded with Yogiji Maharaj without any difficulty. Yogi Bapa had told me, “Do what Pramukh Swami says.” So, through my association with Yogi Bapa, I understood the greatness of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. However, after Yogiji Maharaj departed to Dham, many experiences affirmed that the Bhagwan manifest in Yogiji Maharaj is the same Bhagwan manifest in Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In the time of Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to remain very unassuming. He remained low profile. No one could fathom Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s immense greatness.

Afterwards, seeing all of Swami Bapa’s actions, I realized that he had the sentiments of giving *moksha* to all. He walked for the liberation of all. He tolerated a heart attack and went through minor and major operations, and that, too, for the liberation of others.

Shriji Maharaj says in the Vachanamrut that when such a great Sadhu acts extrovertedly, he then blesses countless souls with the spiritual state of Jadbharat and Shukji. Swamishri’s illnesses were his extroverted behaviour through which he made many *brahmarup*. People would perceive him to be sick, but through his divine episodes he cured many and granted them *moksha*. Those who remember his illnesses will attain *moksha*. So, one should not perceive *manushybhav* (human traits) in him.

I have experienced that when we obey his injunctions, he completely takes responsibility for us. We then feel secure and at ease. By obeying him he showers his divine grace upon us. I have experienced the same grace that Yogi Bapa had upon me being showered by Swami Bapa. Thus, I wish to spend the rest of my life obeying his instructions and follow him in his footsteps. There is great joy and worth in doing that! ♦



Letters to Pramukh Swami Maharaj



Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired, influenced and impacted the lives of many people, young and old, men and women, in a multitude of ways. As we approach his birth centenary celebration in 2021, we have reached out to the worldwide satsang community to express their feelings and memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the form of a letter addressed to him. This is a selection from the letters received so far.

I was young when I came into contact with *santos*. Their way of life spoke volumes about their guru. Through them, I was experiencing a fraction of your *sukh*. They mentored me in satsang, and slowly you started pulling me closer to you. I started reading your books three hours a night, and before I knew it you were painting my soul in your colours. Almost every night, without a miss, I would get a new dream with you. Some days, I am playing soccer with you. Other days, I am your personal attendant pushing your wheelchair to take you for darshan. Whatever desires I had, you fulfilled. Recalling those vivid dreams, reminds me of our time together, Swami. Even though I only saw you once in my life, we met every single night.

The crazy thing about you is that a person can never have enough. One night isn't enough, and neither is one lifetime. The day I lost you shocked me to my core. Up till that point, I didn't take life too seriously. I would carelessly move on with my life thinking, "Oh well, Bapa's got me covered." That moment when my safety net, you, left I felt like the loneliest man in the world. It was hard to imagine that someone who I had so many mental conversations with, who kept me pushing during struggles, and someone who no matter what type of person I was would accept me instantly suddenly isn't there for me anymore.

How could I ever imagine that the Pramukh Swami who nurtured me in satsang without ever having met me would leave me? Through Mahant Swami Maharaj, you established that safety net of my life. I could fall, trip, hurdle, crash, or burn... I know you are there for me. Just like in that *swarup*, the second that I started to make a genuine effort to connect with this new *swarup* of yours you showered me with love again. The dreams were the same, but Swarup had changed. I don't know what I did in my previous lives to deserve you, and I don't know what I did in this life to earn you, but all I know is that the impressions you have made on me are enough to last infinite lifetimes.

- Joy Patel, 24, USA (Doctor)

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, what you have done for me and family words cannot do justice. I was born and raised in East Africa. Growing up in Uganda, there was no future. I finished my high school there and with your blessings you advised my father to settle in America, and specifically, Chicago. When I was younger my family was not *satsangi*. We were the exact opposite. Bapa, you took a personal interest in my father and that changed the course of all our lives. I interacted with you personally when you visited Uganda, but I was too young and dumb to understand your *mahima*. But, as I grew older and experienced the world I saw how you changed our lives from animals to humans. You have saved my father's life multiple times. You advised my father to not take a flight that later ended up crashing. You changed his life and it impacted lives other than just him. My mother, brother and me all were impacted so positively. We would not be where we are today without your intervention.

I only wish to be the good *satsangi* you planned for me to be.

- Arjun Patel, 26, USA (Medical Student)



Swami Bapa has saved my life just by his glance. When I was 17 I hung around the wrong crowd, but didn't think much of it. I went to mandir every week, did *nitya* puja, prayed and did *arti* every day, but following *niyam*-dharma became bland and I didn't put much thought into my actions. I started smoking marijuana and developed a habit of doing it every day as a social thing with my friends. When I was 18 and about to start college things got even worse and my habits worsened. That is when I decided to see Bapa in Sarangpur in December 2015. I just thought I was going to see an ordinary person even though I used to pray to him every day; the *mahima* was just not strong. But when I first glanced at Swami Bapa I started crying like a baby. I felt like I was put into samadhi. It seemed like I was an ant looking at an elephant. I felt so small in the universe and I knew I was looking at a God-realized Sant. When I came back to America, I hoped things would get better, but in reality they got worse. My habits had gotten worse and I moved onto harder substances. Things got so bad that I actually got kicked out of the mandir. Out of all things this was the lowest point I had ever been. I moved out with my friends and lived a crappy life dealing drugs in a different town. Something changed six months into living with my friends as I started to realize this was not the path for me. From being stuck in *maya* and being around *kusang* for so long I had to wake up. For one whole week I just felt so out of it as I would not talk to any of my friends and was just reading the Vachanamrut constantly. That is when I realized I had to move back home to live a better, purer life. I called my parents and they picked me up that same evening to take me back home. The next day after I had left, my friends got held up at gunpoint. There is no coincidence to this situation. Swami Bapa had saved me from dying. I am finally living a pure life, following *niyam*-dharma and have no addictions. I ask myself daily in my puja, "Who am I without Swami Bapa?"

- College Student, 22, USA

I love you; I know I love you,
Since 2007, from the first time I saw you in person,
My mind became attached to you. My eyes simply wanted to see you again.
But back then, I was so little, so naïve, I wouldn't know what it meant to love.
Your compassion, your selfless service, your humility.
Qualities nowhere else to be find, besides in you.
Picking up toothpicks from the floor on your birthday, sweeping rooms, caring for others,
helping others, cleaning the bathrooms, and taking on many tasks.
You arrived, blessing the land of America, exactly 7 years later.
At the age of 94, you arrived.
Showing once again, what it meant to have attained absolute bliss, absolute peace.
However, this time you couldn't talk.
Your actions were used as your words, yet, I fell in love all over again.
Such divine actions, such pure intentions.
Not one speck of impurity can be found, for you are perfect.
The perfection we all want to achieve.
As you entered the land of New Jersey,
Thousands waiting for a divine glimpse,
The world stopped, and all I could hear was my heart beating.
At that moment, nothing mattered.
All I could think of is the love you've showered upon us all, a love that was selfless.
Despite our many wrongdoings, your hands have always been holding ours, grasping onto
them without fail.
My mind wanders, "What have I done to achieve you?"
Nothing. Absolutely nothing.
Your selfless love, your sparkling eyes, and your divine actions, are all that I am grateful for.
August 13th, 2016. All of our worlds stopped.
We thought there would never be a way to survive, to go on.
When I first heard the news, I had just woken up. Tears fell, hitting my bed. My head
pounded, about to explode.
However, the beauty of it is, that the Guru never leaves the earth.
You've taught us this.
Your form transfers to your successor, who you had picked out through the form of a letter.
We see you as human, but you're divine.
Worried. How will I ever love someone like I've learned to love you?
What felt like seconds later, the first time I heard him speak, I fell in love.
That is the beauty of the guru, he never leaves the earth.
Despite the change in human body, he is the same.
I belong to you.
And every waking moment, I wait for the day I can see you again.

- Krishna Brahmhatt, 19, USA (College Student)

Pramukh Swami Maharaj: An Ode

Powerful emotions churn upon hearing
your name

Rays of bliss and happiness abound
upon seeing your smile

A guide, a teacher, a mentor, a friend
you became

My guide, my teacher, my mentor, my
friend. That was your style

Ubiquitous was your love. Unique was
each individual's affection

Kirtan. My name, given by you. From
day one, such was our connection

*Heji me to harkhe nihalyā Nāth/Āj māro
jhālyo Swāmīe hāth...*

Swamibapa, you sang the *jay naad* with
me

Waves of memories wash over of you
watching me dance

Automatic was your smile despite me
fumbling an emcee

Majestic are the recollections of holding
your hand, feelings of magic and trance

*Idhar tere darshan se mai pāvan ba-
nungā/Udhar teri murti dilme basegi...*

My first memory: wearing an army suit
walking abreast as your guard

Ah, silly me. Childhood me, I should I
have known the reality as reverse

How you easily became my companion.
Early on, my soul was unbarred

Although soon enough, you became my
universe

Revisiting our memories is a joy, time
and time again

Again, and again. And with you,
Mahant Swāmi, everything is still the same

*Jaykār ho, jay jay Pramukh
Swāmi Mahārāj...*

- Kirtan Chauhan, 25, USA (Doctor)

The more I thought about it, the more
I realized how impossible it is to write on
a piece of paper our thoughts and feelings
about your life, work and teachings. How
can we just simplify what you have done for
us? How can I put it into mere words the
sacrifice, the love and the compassion you've
shown to us by being present? Yet, here I am
still trying to condense the magnitude of your
being into words that will never explain the
vastness of you.

So instead, I want to write about how
much you have changed my life. As I reflect
back at my life, prior to you coming into it,
the words that come to mind are meaning-
less and empty. There was no purpose to my
being, but rather a race to the finish line. My
goal was to be in the spotlight, by looking
and acting a certain way. To be completely
transparent, I do not even recognize that per-
son anymore. You have given me a new life
with a purpose and a real goal.

As I reflect back on this new life, I can
honestly say I needed you the whole time,
thank you for holding my hand. Thank you
for never giving up on me, even when I did
not recognize you. Thank you for being with
me, even when I thought I did not need you.
And most of all, thank you for being patient
with me.

- Nisha Bhayani, 35, USA (Dentist)

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

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

LAZINESS: A Living Person's Grave

Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj wrote about laziness on the occasion of the Vachanamrut

Bicentenary Celebrations. His article in Gujarati was published in the October 2019 issue of Swaminarayan Prakash. A translation of it is as follows.



Bhagwan Swaminarayan recommends in the Vachanamrut to beware of laziness. He says that one should abstain from the company of a lazy person. Laziness is the biggest obstacle on the spiritual and temporal paths. Thus, let us contemplate a little about laziness.

A teacher in a school held an extempore essay writing competition. The subject was, “Laziness Means...” All the students immediately started writing on laziness. Someone wrote, “Laziness is a great enemy.” Another wrote, “Laziness is a living person’s grave.” All wrote something of this nature. One student handed four pages to the teacher, but they were all blank except for the words, “This is called laziness,” at the bottom of the last page.

Once, a teacher asked his students, “Those who have been affected by laziness raise your hands.” Nearly all the students raised their hands, except one. The teacher asked him, “Why haven’t you raised your hand?” The boy replied coolly, “Sir, I feel lazy in raising my hand.”

These two incidents demonstrate what laziness is. Laziness is a sign of weakness, being irresponsible and careless. Laziness means not feeling like doing anything and remaining inactive. Laziness also means to rest (or sleep) more than required.

Many people state, “Laziness is a living person’s grave.” Does anyone say, “The root of poverty is

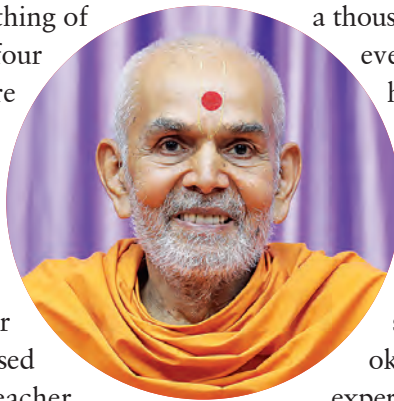
laziness.”? Someone has also opined, “An idle mind is a devil’s workshop.” The surprising thing is that those who say these things and who have given such adages indulge in and enjoy laziness.

Laziness is a sweet poison. It is difficult to give it up. Many times a question arises in one’s mind that though most people enjoy being lazy, why have great people been critical of laziness?

Laziness seems interesting and joyful, but its fruits are not. They are in fact deadly! One may enjoy being lazy, but one has to bear its bad consequences a thousand-fold more. No lazy person has ever lived happily in life. A thinker has said, “It is easy to escape from one’s responsibility, but one cannot escape the results of shirking responsibilities.” Under the pretext of laziness one postpones or neglects the responsibilities assigned to oneself. This, may seem okay for a short while, but one will experience its bitter consequences.

There is a saying, “Heaven never helps the man who will not act.” When we do not help ourselves then Bhagwan will be helpless in doing good to us.

Laziness is one of society’s greatest evils. An expert in criminal law, Dr Shethna, once proposed, “Prisoners should always be engaged in constant activity in jails.” Referring to this, someone remarked, “Since the prisoners are in jail, that itself is punishment for their crimes. So, what more punishment should they be given?”



Dr Shethna replied, “Lethargy and laziness have devastated countless people. Due to laziness they resort to stealing and other crimes. To avoid work they resort to stealing! Thus, through activity they should be redeemed from their habit of laziness.” Laziness gives birth to so many wrong things!

Because of laziness one tends to be irresponsible and prone to neglecting things. Benjamin Franklin narrated a story that reflects the consequences of laziness. Once, a king went to battle. A nail in his horse’s shoe came out and subsequently the king lost the battle. Thereafter, a saying became popular, “For the want of a nail the king lost his reign.”

In contrast to being neglectful or lazy there are so many examples of people who have made their lives noble (and successful) through intense effort and labour. Swami Shraddhanandji was a learned sannyasi. He was nationally renowned and was always actively working. Once, someone asked him, “Despite your old age there’s not an iota of laziness in you! What is the reason behind this?” Swami Shraddhanandji replied, “Laziness is a person’s grave. I do not wish to lie down in it from now!”

All through his life Pramukh Swami Maharaj remained active and persevered in his work. He never postponed or delayed his work, no matter how small or big it was.

REASONS FOR LAZINESS

What are the reasons for laziness?

- One of the biggest reasons for laziness is not having a goal. People who have no fixed goal in life do not know the value of every second. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel said, “A person without a goal is like a ship without a captain.” A person devoid of a goal or one who has no clear goal flies here and there like flecks of dust. He does a little work for some time and then something else thereafter. Then, he gives both of them up.
- Another reason for laziness is ignorance.
- The third reason is the habit of leaving everything to fate.

When it comes to doing work some people leave it to fate or Bhagwan and say, “Whatever either does is okay.” But, prior to starting your task, there is no need to leave it to either of them. Bring them on to the centre stage after accomplishing the task. It is not proper to leave things to fate. This is cowardice.

On seeing Panini’s palm, an astrologer remarked, “You do not have the palm line denoting good studies.” Panini asked, “Show me where it should be.” When the astrologer showed it, Panini instantly took out a knife and cut a line on his palm. Then, he expressed, “Now, I will become a great scholar!” Thereafter, he worked hard and succeeded in becoming a renowned Sanskrit scholar. He did not leave it to fate.

At 10 years, Dr Radhakrishnan told an astrologer, “I will go abroad not to study, but to teach others.” Thereafter, Radhakrishnan worked intensely hard and progressed phenomenally. He did not leave it to fate.

- Often, some people simply make wishes but do not endeavour to realize them. But it does not suffice to make wishes. After making a wish and deciding upon the goal one has to make efforts. One has to firmly adhere to making efforts.
- Lack of patience and tolerance are also reasons for being lazy. When one fails in any work or one doesn’t get the desired amount of success one’s patience and tolerance comes to an end. Subsequently, one feels like doing nothing. We lose interest in our work. Disraeli (of England) lost three times for the prime ministerial election, but he persevered with patience and finally succeeded in becoming the prime minister. Abraham Lincoln lost fourteen times before he became the president on his fifteenth attempt. How much patience he had!

HOW TO BECOME FREE FROM LAZINESS

We explored the words of the Vachanamrut about why God dislikes laziness. So, efforts should be made to overcome it. Let us see some solutions to overcoming laziness.

1. Clarity of Goal

Firstly, it is important to have a clear goal. Fix your goal with regards to doing bhajan, bhakti, satsang work or your social duties. Then, organize your time to achieve your goal. Thereafter, focus on your daily timetable by detailing your schedule from morning till evening. Thereafter, firmly decide to finish the amount of work by evening.

At night, evaluate how much you have accomplished and schedule the unfinished work for the next day. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had emphasized many times to write your timetable for each day.

2. Believing One's Faults to Be One's Enemy

Bhagwan Swaminarayan said that if one wants to oust any fault in oneself then one must develop a feeling of hatred for it. Make a resolute pledge, "Laziness is my enemy. It has spoilt a lot of things in my life."

3. Stop Deceiving Ourselves

Quite often we push ourselves into the pit of laziness by exclaiming, "Oh, I've laboured a lot, so I must rest for a while." Such words are uttered out of self-deception and self-pity. But, never have self-pity on ourselves. Renounce self-pity. Only when we are strict upon ourselves can we be saved from self-pity. Yogiji Maharaj often said, "'Crush' one's senses and mind. They should quake with fear."

4. Inclination for Change

Always develop an inclination to constantly improve yourself. For example, you daily perform your morning puja. However, to make your puja and *ghar sabha* ideal, you should consistently make efforts to improve them, otherwise laziness



will raise its head.

5. Take Inspiration from Those Who Are Good

Focus on those who have given up laziness. Once, (many years ago), I went to the terrace of Dadar mandir. I saw three people sleeping there. When I went near, one person got up. But on seeing the other two sleeping, he went back to sleep. So, I woke him up and asked, "Why did you lie down to sleep?" He replied, "Because the two are sleeping." I remarked, "Besides them, can't you think of the 30 persons who have already got up and gone?" (The person remained silent.) We imitate those who have regressed. Having such an attitude, especially when one wants to give up laziness, is not correct. Instead, take inspiration from those who have given it up.

In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 20, Bhagwan Swaminarayan states about giving up laziness: Bhagwan blesses that for one who has satsang it is easy to attain *atma* darshan or God-realization, however, whatever lapses that a devotee has is due to his laziness. In Vachanamrut Loya 6, Maharaj says, "If he [devotee] is very lazy, sleeps too much and when told by others to bathe, meditate or observe other *niyams*, says, 'I'll do it later; what's the hurry. I'll do them slowly' – then even though we may be good, one should avoid his company."

Give up laziness to become a recipient of Shriji Maharaj's grace.

- Translation: Sadhu Vivekjiandas

IMPACT OF PARENTAL CARE AND SATSANG

Akshar Modi's success story comprises of hard work, parental care, regular attendance of weekly satsang sabha and the divine grace of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj



Akshar Modi (23 years old), a *satsangi*, was born and brought up in Ahmedabad. He did his schooling and completed his undergraduate studies in Computer Science in 2018 at Nirma University, Ahmedabad. In August 2018, Akshar moved to the USA for a master's degree in Management in Information Systems.

Akshar initially stayed in Bapunagar (Ahmedabad), a middle-lower class area, and his parents made sure that he attended the *bal sabha* regularly. Because of the training he got in *bal sabha* he confidently started delivering speeches in satsang assemblies. *Bal sabha* also instilled in him satsang values.

In 2002, under the aegis of the Bal Pravrutti Suvarna Mahotsav, Akshar (6 years) took a *niyam* to abstain from watching TV. Initially, it was tough, but he did not watch TV for five years. Subsequently, this gave him a lot of spare time which he utilized in reading. His parents enrolled him as a member of numerous libraries, and over several years he read over 2,100 children's magazines, books and articles. In 2011, Akshar secured first place in the 'Vanche Gujarat' competition and was felicitated by Shri Narendrabhai Modi, the then Chief Minister of Gujarat. Akshar says that reading satsang and good books improved his memory and concentration.

In 2003, at seven years of age, he participated in the Bal Pravrutti Suvarna Mahotsav Adhiveshan in Sarangpur. He memorized 350 *shloks* and *sakhis* (175 each). At that time, he was unable to read Gujarati, but his mother tirelessly repeated one verse several times and made Akshar repeat it. In this way, Akshar memorized the *shloks* and *sakhis*. He secured distinction in the *adhiveshan* and received a medal in the Fuldol Festival and the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In the 2005 *adhiveshan*, Akshar memorized over 500 Swami ni Vato and again received Bapa's blessings. In 2007, one of Akshar's fondest childhood memories of the BAPS Centenary Celebrations, Ahmedabad was that he was felicitated for his achievements and received Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings on the main stage during the Bal Din programme.

In 2012, during the Yuva Pravrutti Shashtipurti Mahotsav, Akshar participated in the National Adhiveshan held in Sarangpur. He memorized 62 Vachanamruts, 124 kirtans, 310 Swami ni Vato and 310 *sakhis*. He achieved a distinction and attained Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *rajipo*.

After Akshar finished 3rd grade, his parents decided to move to Memnagar (a more affluent suburb), solely for his better education. This was a tough decision for Akshar's father,

given that he had to drive several extra kilometres to attend to his shop in Naroda. Thereafter, Akshar studied at the St. Kabir School till 7th grade and then enrolled at the Maharaja Agrasen School (CBSE Board). With Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings, hard work and quality education, Akshar achieved 10 CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average) in his 10th grade exam, and 93% in his 12th grade exam. With such excellent marks Akshar got admission to Nirma University to study for a B.Tech degree in Information Technology. In 2014, Akshar moved with his parents to the suburb of Science City in Ahmedabad. Along with his academic studies Akshar also studied and passed the annual Satsang exams till the Pragna 3 level.

With Mahant Swami Maharaj's *agna*, Akshar started preparing for his GRE (Graduate Record Examinations) and TOEFL exams in order to apply for a Master's degree in universities in the USA. With Swamishri's grace he achieved 331/340 in his GRE and 114/120 in the TOEFL exams. Thereafter, Akshar got admission into the reputed Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

After coming to the USA in 2018, Akshar has steadfastly continued observing the satsang *niyams* and in doing puja and *tilak-chandlo* daily. He

As a child, Akshar read over 2,100 children's magazines, books and articles

* * *

Memorized 62 Vachanamruts, 124 kirtans, 310 Swami ni Vato and 310 *sakhis*

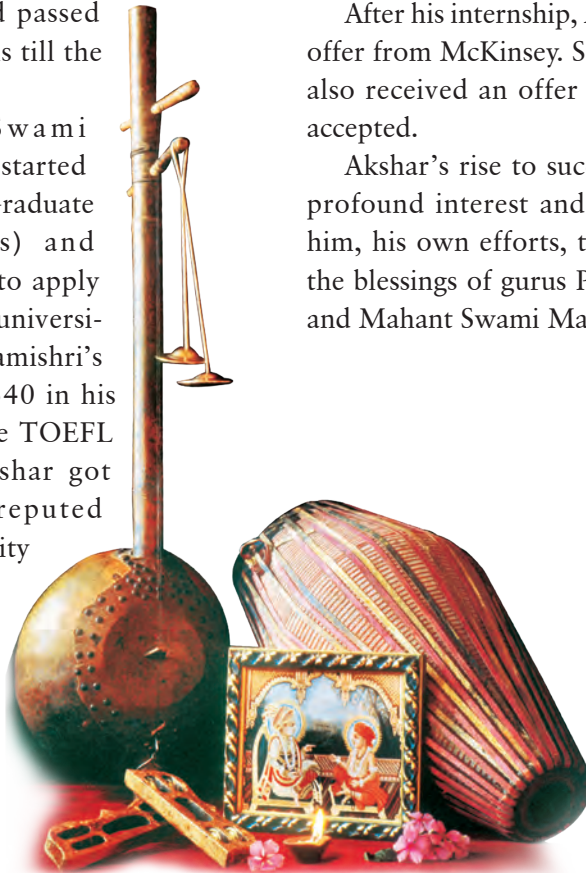
regularly attends the Sunday *sabha* and daily reads one Vachanamrut and five Swami ni Vato and the *jivan charitras* (biographies of Maharaj and the Guru Parampara). He shares that reading satsang books has helped him through thick and thin.

Last summer, Akshar got the opportunity to intern with McKinsey in Manhattan. During a cruise ride organized by the company, Akshar stayed

away from alcohol and non-vegetarian food, which greatly impressed the head lady of HR. At the end of his internship she specifically recalled the cruise ride and told Akshar that she liked the way he was respectful of other cultures while religiously following his own beliefs.

After his internship, Akshar got a full-time job offer from McKinsey. Shortly thereafter, Akshar also received an offer from Google, which he accepted.

Akshar's rise to success reflects his parents' profound interest and contribution in raising him, his own efforts, the effect of satsang and the blessings of gurus Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. ♦



Vicharan

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

August–September 2019

Gandhinagar, Dar-es-Salaam, Kampala, Johannesburg, Nairobi, Limuru

AUGUST

GANDHINAGAR: 1–8

During Swamishri's stay two evening assemblies were organized on special themes: Yuva Din (5) and Bal Din (6).

3, Saturday

After his morning puja, Swamishri inaugurated an English publication, *Adornments of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut*, authored by Sadhu Mukundcharandas and published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath.

8, Thursday, Gandhinagar, Dar-es-Salaam

At about 12 noon, Swamishri and his entourage of swamis and devotees departed by flight from Ahmedabad and landed in Dar-es-Salaam at 6.25 p.m. (IST).

AUGUST–SEPTEMBER

Swamishri stayed in Dar-es-Salaam (8–29). Thereafter, he travelled to Kampala (29–31 & 1–6 September), Johannesburg (6–19) Nairobi (19–29) and Limuru (29–30).

For a detailed report of Swamishri's *vicharan* in the centres mentioned above see *Swaminarayan Bliss*, November–December 2019, pp. 29–48.

SEPTEMBER

NAIROBI: 19–29

During Swamishri's stay the special evening assemblies, events and celebrations organized were: Welcome Assembly (21), Samip Darshan (22), Mahant Swami Maharaj's 86th Birthday Celebration (23), Pramukh Swami Maharaj Centenary Day Celebration (24), Vachanamrut Din (27), Bal Din (28) and Ghar Sabha Din (29).

19, Thursday, Johannesburg, Nairobi

At 4.45 p.m., Swamishri departed by flight from Johannesburg airport and landed at Jomo

Kenyatta Airport in Nairobi at about 9.00 p.m. (Kenya Standard Time). Swamishri was welcomed in the mandir precincts with the tunes played by a music band, fireworks and *jais*. After briefly attending the assembly in the mandir auditorium Swamishri retired for the night. On Saturday, 21st, a grand evening welcome assembly was held in a giant marquee on the grounds of Premier Club adjacent to the BAPS Mandir.

27, Nairobi; Vachanamrut Din

Under the auspices of the Vachanamrut Bicentenary Celebrations an evening assembly was dedicated to commemorating the Vachanamrut. Like all the other main centres of East Africa and South Africa, handwritten copies of the Vachanamrut were placed on the opposite pan of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj's *tula*.

In Kenya, 75 handwritten copies of the Vachanamrut, weighing 84.5 kg, were prepared by the devotees. Out of the 75 devotees, 25 had single-handedly written the entire Vachanamrut. Harshadbhai K. Patel wrote the entire Vachanamrut despite him not being able to fully read or write Gujarati. In addition, Bharatbhai Makwana had read the Vachanamrut 108 times, Kalpeshbhai Patel had written 47 Vachanamruts during the different times of day and night that Shriji Maharaj had spoken, a non-devotee lady in Mwanza had written the entire Vachanamrut and Prabhaben, a devotee of Kitwe (Zambia), declared that on reading the Vachanamrut she was redeemed of her depression.

During the Vachanamrut Tula each devotee came with a handwritten copy on to the main stage. Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami showered petals on each copy and offered *pujan*. Thereafter,

each devotee walked past Swamishri, who blessed them from far, and then placed the copy on the weighing balance. A few swamis also placed some copies on the weighing balance. In conclusion, Swamishri placed one handwritten copy and

performed *arti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and the Vachanamruts. ◆

*From Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas.
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekjiandas*



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 86 BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

23 September 2019, Dar-es-Salaam

In the morning, Swamishri inaugurated the new Nilkanth Varni Abhishek Mandap and performed the *pratishtha* rituals of *pujan*, *arti* and *mantra pushpanjali* of Shri Nilkanth Varni. Swamishri blessed Swami Kirtisagardas and Swami Nityamunidas for their efforts

in making the new *abhishek mandap*.

After Swamishri's morning puja, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami inaugurated an Aksharpith publication, *Brahmno Sang*, about Mahant Swami Maharaj's inspiring incidents. Thereafter, Swamishri inaugurated an audio publication, *Sant Vykhyanmala*, Part 17: Satsang Samjan – comprising of Anandswarup Swami's discourses on various subjects.

At 6.00 p.m., the evening birthday celebration assembly commenced with *dhun* and prayers. It was themed on the glory of a true Sant described in the shastras. The celebration assembly was interspersed with videos, speeches and traditional dances. The speeches by swamis included incidents of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. The programme was as follows:

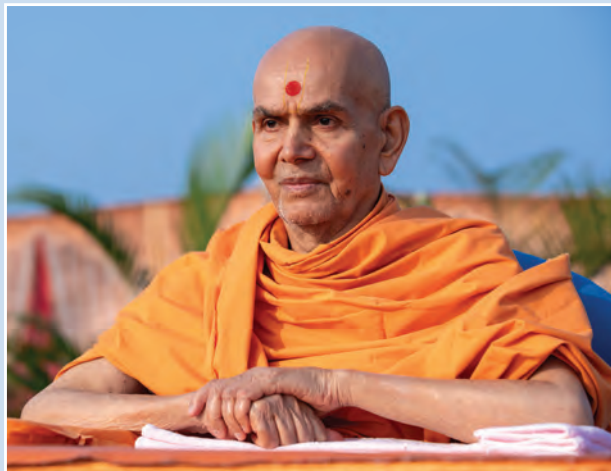
- **Ramcharitmanas:** How God resides in a Sant – Priyavrat Swami.
- **Shrimad Bhagvat:** Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj remains ever-absorbed in God – Jnanpriya Swami.
- **Bhagavad Gita:** Above all worldly desires – Shrutiprakash Swami.
- **Vachanamrut:** Swamishri's tolerance in spite of being all-powerful – Atmaswarup Swami.
- **Mundaka Upanishad:** The characteristics of Aksharbrahman – Atmatrupt Swami.
- Rahul Chhabra, Indian High Commissioner in Kenya, conveyed his good wishes to Swamishri in his brief address.
- Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami spoke about Mahant Swami Maharaj's divinity and virtues.
- Mahant Swami Maharaj was honoured with garlands by Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and other swamis.

The celebration climaxed with Mahant Swami Maharaj's blessings. He said, "Bhagwan Swaminarayan emphasized that on meeting the Satpurush [Guru] one attains *moksha*. Then one does not need to do any special spiritual endeavours other than lovingly attaching oneself with him. Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj were God-realized. They travelled on this earth with God in their hearts. We should worship and do bhajan of God in whatever physical and social conditions he blesses us with. We should keep our minds focused on Bhagwan and attach ourselves to the God-realized Sant." In conclusion, a *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual was performed to honour Thakorji and Swamishri.

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

August–September, 2019

*Inspiring incidents from the life of
Mahant Swami Maharaj*



AUGUST

SAYING GOD'S NAME AND PRAYERS

8, Dar-es-Salaam

Swamishri landed in Dar-es-Salaam after an eight hour flight from India. While he was retiring for the night the attendant swamis requested, “After a long, tiring journey take a grand sleep.”

Swamishri revealed, “I don’t take a grand sleep. I didn’t sleep in the plane this afternoon.”

A surprised swami enquired, “Then what were you thinking of?”

Swamishri replied, “[I was chanting] Swaminarayan, Swaminarayan, Maharaj-Swami and praying for solutions to some devotees’ problems.”

LESSONS IN DEVOTION AND LIFE

10, Dar-es-Salaam

Prior to his morning puja, Swamishri was absorbed in performing *arti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj with swamis in a room. One swami was singing the *arti* in his sweet voice. After completing the *arti*, Swamishri sat on a sofa and asked the swami about a word he had sung in the last verse of the *arti*, “Is it *sharane* or *charane* [feet]?” The swami replied, “*charane*.” The other swamis corrected him and said, “*sharane*.”

Swamishri’s sharp attention had grasped the erroneous word and the swami who sang it. Since

none of the swamis present had noticed this, they were all amazed at Swamishri’s profound concentration and grace in correcting the swami’s error.

Thereafter, during his morning puja, Swamishri applied *chandan tilaks* on his arms, chest and forehead. But he was not satisfied with the imperfect *tilak* he had done on his forehead. Thus, Swamishri wiped it clean with a wet tissue and applied a perfect *tilak*.

Swamishri’s small actions teach important lessons of perfection in devotion and life.

SWAMISHRI’S GRACE AND COMPASSION UPON AN ORDINARY MAN

10, Saturday, Dar-es-Salaam

Swamishri and his entourage of swamis were staying at the White Sands Hotel for the 9-day Divyam *shibirs* for volunteers, devotees, teenagers and youths.

Today, after his morning walk, Swamishri came across Steven, a young, local native. He was standing with a pile of green coconuts. While Swamishri was enquiring about Steven, the latter started slicing a coconut and offered it to him to drink the coconut water. Swamishri told his attendant swami to offer it to Thakorji. The coconut was offered, without a straw, to an all-in-one *murti*. When the attendant swami offered it to Mahant Swami Maharaj, Swamishri told him

to offer the coconut to Thakorji with a straw. After doing so, Swamishri drank a little. This became a daily routine for Swamishri. Once, when Steven was stationed at another spot, Swamishri enquired whether he had sold enough coconuts that day. On knowing that he hadn't, the volunteers told him to stand at his original spot. Daily, Swamishri drank the coconut water and sanctified the remaining coconuts. Subsequently, the volunteers and devotees would buy the sanctified coconuts and pay a handsome sum to Steven.

Once Swamishri, looking at Steven's old, ram-shackled bicycle, said to a devotee, "Buy him a new bicycle." The next day, Steven was waiting besides his new bicycle and a pile of coconuts. Swamishri placed a sanctified garland around the headlight of the bicycle. An elated Steven sliced a fresh coconut and held it while Swamishri drank from it.

Swamishri's grace and compassion towards an ordinary person like Steven touched everyone's hearts. Even though coconut water is not conducive to Swamishri's constitution he took it to please Steven and sanctified all his coconuts so that he could earn a good daily income.

A LESSON IN UNDERSTANDING GLORY AND OFFERING RESPECT

17, Saturday, Dar-es-Salaam

After having his afternoon meal, Swamishri took a brief walk along a lobby and on a garden walkway of the White Sands Hotel. The attendant swamis informed Swamishri that the sadhus were staying in the rooms they were passing by. Then, someone added, "Tyagvallabh Swami also stays here."

Swamishri asked out of interest, "Where is Tyagvallabh Swami's room?" When an attendant pointed it out Swamishri started heading in that direction. Then someone said, "But Tyagvallabh Swami is out." The words did not dampen Swamishri's pace. On reaching the closed door of Tyagvallabh Swami's room 123, Swamishri folded his hands with glory (*mahima*), touched

his forehead to the door and uttered, "Here lies countless pilgrim places [*tirths*]."

On 25 August, an attendant swami showed Swamishri a tall building some distance away and said, "Kumarbhai [Chairman of Tanzania Satsang Mandal] lives on the topmost floor of that flat. At present, Tyavallabh Swami's stay is arranged there." On hearing this, Swamishri folded his palms and bowed down.

Swamishri's heartfelt respect for the *sadguru* swamis and singing their greatness and glory on many occasions reflects the deep divinity he perceives in them. It is a lesson in respecting all and understanding their glory.

MENIAL SEVA

29, Dar-es-Salaam

Swamishri retired for his afternoon sleep on the last day of his stay at Subhashbhai Patel's home. After waking up, Swamishri went to the bathroom for his afternoon ablutions. After some time, the attendant swami entered the bathroom and found Swamishri cleaning the toilet. The attendant swami stopped Swamishri and asked, "Why are you cleaning when there is no need for you to do it?" Swamishri smilingly replied, "[It's] *seva*. It's self-service. At least, I should do it on some days."

At 86 years, Swamishri, in spite of being the guru, often performs such menial *seva*. He considers himself as a *sevak* and not the guru of a worldwide organization.

SEPTEMBER

PLEASING THE DEVOTEES

16, Johannesburg

For all occasions, Swamishri always gets ready and arrives before the stipulated time. The attendant swamis recalled some incidents before Swamishri. Brahmavatsal Swami narrated one particular incident that had occurred in Nasik on 11 November 2017.

"Swamishri was scheduled to depart from a devotee's home for his onward destination at 4.45

p.m. However, Swamishri got ready at 3.45 p.m. Even Thakorji and Thakorji's pujari swami had not awakened. The plane in which Swamishri was going to travel in had not yet landed at the local airport. A question arose as to what Swamishri would do for an entire hour? Swamishri began meeting the members of the host family. He then listened to the introductions of the other devotees present. Then, each one approached Swamishri for his signature. Some brought ordinary pieces of paper, a few offered pages from a notebook and some even gave their volunteer ID cards for Swamishri to sign. Because not all of them had papers at hand, a few devotees tore their pages into four pieces and shared them with others. Swamishri happily signed his name on each piece of paper.

"But still there was time. Then the devotees started giving whatever they had with them to Swamishri to sanctify. Swamishri happily complied to their wishes. Thereafter, all the devotees met Swamishri individually and asked for solutions to their problems.

"In short, everyone got the opportunity to personally meet Swamishri. By now, 25 minutes had elapsed and still there was time left. Then, Swamishri visited all the rooms, even the bathrooms, of the house and sanctified them. Finally, Swamishri attended to phone calls before departing to the airport."

After listening to the above incident, Swamishri revealed his sentiments, "When some of them cut one page into four pieces, I felt I must please them all, even though the pieces of paper were not of good quality. There was no other thought in my mind other than pleasing them in the way they wanted."

Swamishri's entire life revolves around pleasing the devotees.

SWAMISHRI'S RAJIPO

18, Johannesburg

Prior to the evening satsang assembly, the Mayor of Johannesburg, Honourable Herman

Mashaba, came to meet Swamishri. The mayor praised and welcomed the proposed mandir project in Johannesburg. Viratswarup Swami informed Swamishri, "The mayor is the joint leader of five parties of the city municipal corporation. The parties all work in harmony and unity to run the city of Johannesburg. Prior to coming here, the mayor sat for five hours with his staff members to solve their problems. The mayor listened to their issues and explained that they should work harmoniously and unitedly."

Swamishri was happy to hear that the mayor strives for harmony.

Thereafter, Swamishri and the mayor attended the evening satsang assembly. After the mayor spoke Swamishri blessed the assembly. Thereafter, a unique garland was being brought by swamis as a farewell honour to Swamishri on his last evening in Johannesburg. The garland, prepared by all the women devotees of Africa, consisted of more than 130,000 puffed rice grains, each inscribed with the name of Swaminarayan. At that time, Swamishri called the mayor; who joined the swamis in carrying the garland. The garland was first offered to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and then to Swamishri. Immediately thereafter, Swamishri called the mayor near to him and garlanded him to everyone's surprise and joy. The mayor was overwhelmed with joy.

On leaving the dais, Swamishri asked whether the mayor was going to have dinner and added, "Serve him *dudhpak* [sweetened, spicy milk]."

Later, Swamishri was asked why he had expressed his profuse pleasure and joy on the mayor by garlanding him with the giant garland. Swamishri replied, "He is a good person. He unites five parties and works harmoniously. He talked to them collectively about working unitedly and harmoniously." ◆

*From Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas.
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekjivandas*



ANSWERS AND REVELATIONS

August–September 2019

When questions were posed to Mahant Swami Maharaj he revealed his spiritual understanding, perspective and sometimes his own spiritual state. Let us see some of his fascinating answers and revelations

AUGUST

■ (Outwardly) we have to fulfil our social duties and work, whereas in our minds and hearts we should have love for God.

(4, Gandhinagar)

Q. What should we do to achieve Akshardham (God's abode)?

A. The stronger your (observance of) dharma-niyams, the nearer will Akshardham be. (Consolidate) *upasana* and *agna* (in your life).

■ Once you fall into a wrong habit, it will be difficult to correct it.

(5, Gandhinagar)

■ A devotee of God should enter the domain of soul-strength and the strength of God's glory. Then, many problems will be solved. Physical strength, intellectual strength and other strengths are of no use (in solving acute issues).

■ A husband should think, 'How can I become a good husband?' And a wife should think, 'How can I become a good wife?' Subsequently, there will be no conflicts and court cases between them.

(6, Gandhinagar)

■ Without having faith in the supreme Bhagwan and practising self-introspection one cannot rid oneself of ego. (10, Dar-es-Salaam)

Q. Why is it difficult to believe that we have attained Bhagwan?

A. Our intellect (*buddhi*) obstructs us in subtle ways. But if we apply our heart, meaning bhakti, we become the humblest of the humble (*das na das*).

(11, Dar-es-Salaam)

■ A divine mind means to perceive positive things. Also, having humility and glory for others, and mutually touching the dust of devotees' feet amounts to a divine mind.

(13, Dar-es-Salaam)

■ Talking about others' faults, even though they may be true, is called gossip (*khatpat*). And, if they are not true, it is intense gossip (*maha khatpat*).

(25, Dar-es-Salaam)

■ We don't like to be humble. And, when we express humility we do so out of force (or because we have to). However, by becoming humble from within you'll attain Akshardham.

Q. Explain about what is the true identity of a Satpurush?

A. (One who has) an eternal bond with Bhagwan.

(26, Dar-es-Salaam)

SEPTEMBER

■ Self-restraint has the power to revive a crumbling world.

■ Humility (*dasbhav*), glory (*mahima*) and other values elevate us to great heights and make us happy.

■ Understand satsang, have trust for satsang and follow satsang's instructions, and you will attain the *ekantik* state and other great spiritual achievements (*siddhis*). (3, Kampala)

■ In satsang, there is light for one who perceives virtues and darkness for one who perceives others' faults. (8, Johannesburg)

■ Doing one's worldly work improperly obstructs oneself immensely. Thus, do it properly, and also do satsang properly.

■ To remain stable amidst praise and insult is a great thing. The more one gives up ego the more secure one becomes. An egoist will never ever

experience true happiness. (12, Johannesburg)

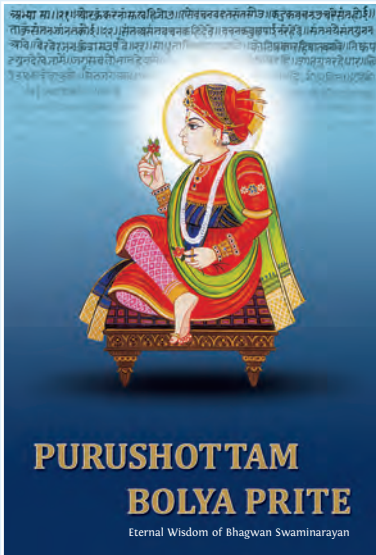
■ Having trust in God is *moksha*, because God takes you towards *moksha*. (14, Johannesburg)

■ By saying 'May God do good to all' on meeting anyone will bestow you with eternal peace, and will keep you stable in all types of situations. (15, Johannesburg)

■ The benefits of working harmoniously are tremendous: one progresses immensely, attains colossal (inner) development and the country becomes happier. However, when a person fights, he destroys everything. (18, Johannesburg)

*From Swamishri's daily report in Gujarati by Sadhu Brahmavatsaldas.
Translation of excerpts by Sadhu Vivekjiandas*

NEW ENGLISH PUBLICATION



Translation
Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

PURUSHOTTAM BOLYA PRITE

The divine words of Bhagwan Swaminarayan convey an eternal wisdom that can elevate any genuine spiritual aspirant to a God-realized state.

At every opportunity, he imparted this wisdom to all who were eager to listen. And these talks have been recorded in many of the Sampradaya's sacred texts.

Purushottam Bolya Prite: Eternal Wisdom of Bhagwan Swaminarayan is an inspiring compilation of his enlightening teachings derived from the voluminous text 'Shri Haricharitamrut Sagar'.

It provides sound practical solutions to the multitude of problems faced by spiritual aspirants of all eras and is a valuable timeless resource of transcendental wisdom for all.

Acclaimed Scholars Participate in Akshar-Purushottam Darshan Conference

15–17 November 2019, Akshardham, New Delhi



Under the benefaction of the ICPR (The Indian Council of Philosophical Research), the BAPS Swaminarayan Research Institute conducted a three-day conference titled ‘The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan in Dialogue with Other Darshans’. Scholars at the conference presented in-depth research on the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan from their unique disciplinary perspectives, and also engaged in productive reflections and discussions on the topics presented.

Among the acclaimed scholars from throughout India who presented their research at the conference were Shri S.R. Bhatta, president of the Indian Philosophical Congress and former president of ICPR; Shri R.C. Sinha, president of ICPR;

Prof. Shri Jatashankaraji, president of Akhila Bharatiya Darshan Parishad; Mahamahopadhyaya Shri Vashishtha Tripathi (Varanasi); Shri Rameshakumara Pande, vice-chancellor of Lalabhadura Rashtriya Sanskrita Vidyapitha (New Delhi); Shrinivasa Varakhedi, vice-chancellor of Kavi Kulaguru Kalidasa Vishvavidyalaya (Nagapura); Shri Haridasa Bhattaji, principal of Purnaprajna Sanskrita Vidyapitha (Bangalore, Karnataka); Prof. Shri P.N. Shastri, vice-chancellor of Rashtriya Sanskrita Sansthana (Delhi); and Prof. Pankaja Jani, vice-chancellor of Maharshi Panini Sanskrita Vishvavidyalaya (Ujjain).

In his address, Prof. Shrinivasa Varakhediji stated, “Many claim that discussions are only



conducted on outdated philosophies and that it is impossible for new philosophies to be born. However, when we listen to the principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan and read its commentarial works, we realize that an altogether distinct philosophical system is introduced. It serves as a prime example to demonstrate that original streams of Indian thought have not ceased to flow. The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is an original darshan system and possesses all of the requirements necessary to engage in dialogue with other darshan systems.”

Thereafter, Prof. Rameshachandra Pandeyji said, “The Swaminarayan Bhashya on the Prasthanatrayi is a contemporary addition to the tradition of our ancient Darshans. The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is entirely founded on the revelations of the Vedas.”

Shri Vashishtha Tripathiji expressed, “I have read through this entire commentary. There is not a single letter that contradicts the Shrutis. The Akshar-Purushottam Darshan is rooted in the Vedas.”

Throughout the conference, scholars presented over 30 research papers on the distinctive features of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan in context to the other darshan systems in English, Sanskrit and Hindi. The topics covered included: the distinct metaphysical aspects of the Darshan, its unique understanding

of epistemology, the creation narrative of the Darshan, exposition on its characteristic understanding of liberation, the Darshan’s unique reading of Upanishadic revelations and its distinctive reading of the Brahmasutra aphorism: ‘Athāto brahmajijñāsā.’ Scholars also contrasted the Darshan’s philosophical positions with that of the Sankhya Darshan, demonstrated the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as distinct from the Advaita, Vishishtadvaita, and other Vedanta Darshans, and analyzed the literary features of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan’s commentarial texts and its *vada*-text according to methods of Sanskrit *sahitya*. In addition, scholars presented their analysis of these works from a Sanskrit grammatical perspective, contrasted its exposition with those from the Nyaya Darshan and highlighted how the Swaminarayan Bhashya’s elaborations were founded on expositions offered by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut. All these presentations clarified many of the distinct features of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan and gave new insights into its principles, through which delegates developed a deep appreciation for its unique contributions to darshan thought. ◆

British Prime Minister Visits Neasden Mandir

7 December 2019, London



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit to the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in London coincided with the 98th birthday celebrations of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

This was Mr Johnson's fourth visit to the Mandir. He had also visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, India, in 2012, when he was Mayor of London. This time, he was accompanied by the British Home Secretary, Priti Patel, and his partner, Carrie Symonds.

After a traditional welcome, the Prime Minister performed an *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni, before proceeding to the inner sanctum where he offered flower petals at the central shrine of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

During his visit, Mr Johnson met young and old BAPS volunteers and learned about the Mandir's multifarious activities to serve families, children, the elderly and the wider community.

The Prime Minister also met several leaders of other Hindu organizations and members of the Hindu community.

In the assembly hall, the Prime Minister addressed the congregation by firstly thanking His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj for "gifting

the UK this magnificent temple".

Mr Johnson then paid tribute to the values which Pramukh Swami Maharaj promoted – "family unity, service and duty" – before adding, "He dedicated his whole life to the service of others. Rarely has anyone in public life served for so long, served so brilliantly, worked so hard and brought so many people together. He has left behind a lasting legacy for us all to follow.

"This temple is one of the greatest gifts to our country. But it is more than just a building. It is brought to life by the amazing community spirit that inhabits it. You are giving back to our society through the great charitable work that you do. Thank you for everything that you do for this country. London and the UK are lucky to have you."

The Prime Minister also praised the British Indian community for the invaluable contributions they make to enrich the culture, public services and commerce of Great Britain.

The Prime Minister was presented with mementos of his visit before meeting several of the congregation as he departed from the Mandir. ♦



INDIA

NEW BAPS MANDIR AT MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S BIRTHPLACE Jabalpur, 18–20 August 2019



The city of Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, was privileged to witness the childhood of Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, from his birth in 1933 until 1951.

On the holy site of his childhood home, an elegant new BAPS mandir has been built.

To commemorate its inauguration, BAPS sadhus presented a melodious kirtan *aradhana* on 18 August. On 19 August, a special celebration assembly was held highlighting the life, work and teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and his Gunatit Guru Parampara.

On the morning of 20 August, Pujya Viveksagar Swami consecrated the *murtis* in the new mandir.

NEW BAPS MANDIR 15–17 November 2019, Modasa

To mark the opening of the new mandir, three days of celebrations were organized.

On the morning of 15 November, a special women's assembly was held.

On 16 November, 2,753 *yajmans* participated in the Shri Swaminarayan Vishwashanti Mahayagna. Then, in the afternoon, a grand

nagaryatra of the *murtis* took place through the streets.

On 17 November, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Pujya Viveksagar Swami consecrated the *murtis* in the new mandir.

Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in Gondal on 18 October 2019.

KARYAKAR SHIBIRS: 'GURUNO MAHIMA VISHWE VAHAVIE' 13 December 2019 to 7 January 2020, Gujarat



This year's annual Karyakar Shibirs were held in Ahmedabad, Sarangpur, Gondal, Bochasan, Atladara, Sankari and Tithal.

The theme of the *shibirs* was 'Guruno Mahima Vishwe Vahavie' (Let us Proclaim the Glory of Our Guru Worldwide). The 36 separate *shibirs*, organized and conducted jointly by the Satsang and Bal Pravrutti Madhyastha Karyalays, were attended by over 23,000 *bal-balika*, *yuvak-yuvati* and *vadil-mahila* volunteers. In the *shibirs*, the various projects to be carried out for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary Celebrations were explained in detail.

Also, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami as well as other senior and experienced sadhus gave inspiring guidance to all *karyakars*.

UK & EUROPE

ORGAN DONATION SEMINARS

20 April 2019 to 28 September 2019

Health seminars were held at BAPS Swaminarayan mandirs and centres around the UK to raise awareness about living organ donation amongst British Hindus in the local community.

The seminars included an educational presentation about the medical benefits of living organ donation, and provided practical guidance on how to improve organ donation rates among the Hindu community. It especially reiterated the act of donating an organ in line with the core Hindu values of *seva* and *daan*, i.e. selfless giving.

The seminars also featured an informative video documentary produced by BAPS with support from NHS Blood and Transplant and the National BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) Transplant Association. It shared testimonies from kidney donors, organ recipients, medical professionals and Hindu representatives as well as blessings from Mahant Swami Maharaj encouraging everyone to consider this great act of religious merit.

NORTH AMERICA

ADVOCACY DAY AND DIWALI

CELEBRATION AT THE U.S. CAPITOL

14 November 2019, Washington DC



BAPS representatives organized its third ‘Advocacy Day’ – an initiative to meet elected representatives in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to discuss legislative policy

relating to issues affecting the Indian American community. A total of 187 Congressional offices were consulted.

In a historic first, a member of the BAPS congregation from Pennsylvania led the opening prayer on the floor of the House of Representatives with the traditional Shanti Path and by remembering the teachings of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The day culminated in the ‘Diwali on the Hill’ celebration at the Dirksen Senate Office Building. Over 400 members of the Indian American community from all over the United States were in attendance to celebrate alongside members of Congress, as well as Indian Ambassador to the United States Harsh Vardhan Shringla.

Commenting on the importance of BAPS’ advocacy work in educating members of Congress on Indian American affairs, Rep. Chu remarked, “I understand that you had over 180 visits to different offices, and that’s very impressive because you’ve been able to reach out and carry out your message and talk about issues very important to you. I think it’s so important to bring the most important cultural events right here so that we in Washington DC can celebrate right along with you.”

Ambassador Shringla recollected his experience working with BAPS in the past, “It was in South Africa many years ago that I had the opportunity to work closely with [BAPS] and also had been greatly inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj himself, and continue to be inspired by his teachings and writings. I am very thankful to BAPS for conveying [Indian American] sentiments and views on issues that are important to you with your representatives.”

Earlier in the day, Rep. Al Green (TX-09) presented BAPS with the Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for its service to the community, dedication to promoting Indian culture, and contributions to communities across the nation.

Members from several co-hosting and

co-sponsoring organizations, including India America Movement, Hindu American Foundation, Indiaspora, The Art of Living, Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA), Jain Society of Metropolitan Washington (JSMW), the U.S.-India Business Council, among others, were also in attendance.

MIDDLE EAST

UAE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS VISIT TOLERANCE EXHIBITION 24 December 2019, Abu Dhabi, UAE



As a part of the Year of Tolerance, 15 members of the Ministry of Economy visited the site of the BAPS Hindu Mandir at Abu Dhabi. They were welcomed by children and volunteers and taken on a special guided tour of the Tolerance Exhibition. The exhibition celebrates tolerance in three sections:

1. The World of Tolerance shares views of world leaders on tolerance and harmony.
2. The Land of Tolerance exhibits the UAE's dedication to tolerance through its seven pillars.
3. The Home of Tolerance expresses the aspiration and design of the BAPS Hindu Mandir as a Spiritual Oasis for Global Harmony.

After viewing the exhibition, the officials attended a small presentation on the history and purpose of the mandir. His Excellency Sultan Al Darwish, leading the delegation, was very pleased with the exhibition and deeply commended the dedication, knowledge and enthusiasm of the volunteers.

AKHAND VACHANAMRUT VANCHAN YAGNA 8–16 November 2019, Kuwait



To commemorate the Vachanamrut Bicentenary, a total of 105 *yuvaks*, *balaks*, *kishores* and *vadils* of the Kuwait Satsang Mandal enthusiastically participated in a 200-hour 'Akhand Vachanamrut Vanchan Yagna'.

During the 8 days and 8 hours of continuous reading, a total of 2,277 Vachanamruts were read. The complete Vachanamrut was read eight times.

Following their involvement in this endeavour, many were inspired and resolved to daily read a Vachanamrut.

ASIA PACIFIC

PRAYER ASSEMBLIES AND SUPPORT DURING BUSHFIRES 14 December 2019 to 5 January 2020, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandirs, Australia



The BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha held prayer assemblies at its centres around Australia praying for a rapid end to the deadly bushfires and recovery of the communities impacted by this tragedy.

In India, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj,

spiritual leader of the BAPS, also offered his personal prayers and turned the rosary for all victims and their families. He prayed for rains in Australia to help control the fires and provide respite for those impacted by and fighting the fires.

Furthermore, the BAPS community in Australia assisted the relief efforts by distributing food for volunteer firefighters through the respective state and federal government disaster management agencies. BAPS volunteers served more than 1,000 hot meals to frontline volunteers fighting the fire and mobilized support across Australia.

In addition, the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha contributed over \$27,000 through its bushfire appeals to aid in the relief and support efforts for the communities and families affected.

Hon. Jing Lee, Assistant Minister to Premier of South Australia, appreciated the dedication and the hard work of BAPS in raising funds for the State Emergency Relief Fund in South Australia.

BAPS CHARITIES

£5,000 DONATIONS TO MY AFK AND BRITTLE BONE SOCIETY

12 January 2020, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London



BAPS Charities presented cheques of £5,000 to My AFK (formerly known as Action for Kids) and the Brittle Bone Society. The funds were donated by the family of Meesha Patel, who suffered from brittle bone disease, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of her passing.

The Action for Kids charitable trust was

established in 1992 and was rebranded as 'my AFK' in 2018. It provides mobility equipment unavailable through the NHS and prepares students with learning disabilities for life after school through accredited education, training and work experience programmes.

The Brittle Bone Society was established in 1968 and is the only national charity in the UK that provides a support network and facilities to assist those with brittle bone disease.

Ben Bridger, representing my AFK, and Mr John Phillips (Vice-Chair) and Patricia Osborne (Chief Executive) of the Brittle Bone Society appreciated the contributions.

WINTER CLOTHES AND FOOD

COLLECTION FOR THE HOMELESS

December 2019, Wellingborough & South London



BAPS Charities in Wellingborough and South London collected winter clothing and food for the homeless as part of an ongoing commitment to serve the needy in the local community.

In Wellingborough, over 250 items of warm clothing were distributed to The Daylight Centre, an independent local charity striving to help people meet personal challenges such as mental health issues, substance abuse, learning difficulties and homelessness.

In Croydon, South London, large collections of tinned food were deposited at the Beddington Conference Centre, Croydon Foodbank and Croydon Nightwatch. Also, over 300 items of winter clothing were collected and distributed to Crisis Skylight Croydon. ♦

BAPS CHARITIES 2019, NORTH AMERICA

BAPS Charities harnesses the efforts and collective spirit of volunteers around the world to serve individuals, families and communities in five key areas



HEALTH & WELLNESS

Through wellness services and awareness programmes community members are encouraged to lead a healthy lifestyle and help others.

Health Fairs

- 59 locations in North America
- 1,858 volunteers, doctors & healthcare professionals
- 468 health fairs since 2010, benefiting over 110,000 participants

Health Awareness Lectures

- 220 lectures in 55 centres
- 7 topics in 2019
- Children's Health & Safety Days

Blood Donation Drives

- 43 locations in North America
- 1,523 pints donated

Bone Marrow Drives

- 3 matches in recent years
- 3 drives in North America
- 6,537 individuals added to registry since 2005 in 126 drives

Flu Vaccination Drives

- 29 locations in North America
- 2,475 people benefited

Health Care Centres Support

Carol G Simon Centre, Parsippany, NJ; American Cancer Society, Hartford, CT; JFK Medical Center

Foundation, Edison, NJ; MD Anderson Cancer Center at Cooper – Cooper University Hospital, Cherry Hill, NJ; American Cancer Society, Augusta, GA; American Cancer Society, Jackson, MS

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

BAPS Charities serves communities through cleanup activities and sporting events. Also:

Walkathons

- Over 26,000 walkers in 78 locations throughout USA and Canada

Food Drives

- 6 food drives in North America: Cleveland, OH; Columbus, OH; Dallas, TX; Warrington, PA; San Jose, CA; Pittsburgh, PA.

Community Organizations Supported

Warrington Cares, Warrington, PA; Family Service League, Long Island, NY; Live On NY, Long Island, NY; Women in Distress of Broward County Inc., Miami, FL; Bright Blessings, Charlotte, NC; Lighthouse For The Blind & Vision Impaired, San Antonio, TX; The Rose, Houston, TX; Brighter Tomorrows, Dallas, TX; Pomeroy Recreation & Rehabilitation Center (PRRC), San Francisco, CA; House of Ruth, Los Angeles, CA; Behind The Badge, Houston, TX; Ignite The Courage, Chicago, IL; Robbinsville Community Addiction; Recovery Effort,



Robbinsville, NJ; Down Syndrome Association of Central California, Fresno, CA; Merrimack Valley Food Bank, Boston, MA.

Fire & Police

Hanover Township Foundation, Chicago, IL; Fraternal Order of Police, Chicago, IL; Avon Fire Department, Indianapolis, IN; Sharonville Police Association–Shop with Cop, Cincinnati, OH; Bartlett Parks Foundation, Chicago, IL; Westborough Police Department, Westborough, MA; Beltsville Volunteer Fire Department, Washington, DC; Colmar Volunteer Fire Company, Lansdale, PA; Newington Police Dept, Hartford, CT; Newington Volunteer Fire Dept, Hartford, CT; Fuller Road Fire Department, Albany, NY; Hillsborough County Fire Rescue (HCFR), Tampa, FL; Gwinnett County Sheriff's Department, Atlanta, GA; North Little Rock Police Athletic League (PAL), Little Rock, AR; Keep Irving Beautiful, Dallas, TX; Irving Police Athletic League, Dallas, TX; Spring Valley Volunteer Fire Department (SVVFD), San Jose, CA; Redmond Police Foundation, Seattle, WA; Chino Hills Fire Department, Los Angeles, CA.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Education is the primary driver of development and progress in the world. BAPS Charities provides extensive support through careers fairs, scholarships and assistance to educational institutions: Boys & Girls Club of Clifton, Clifton, NJ; Sunflower House, Kansas City, NJ; Martin

Luther King, Jr. Middle School, Washington, DC; Bensalem Education Foundation, Philadelphia, PA; Queens Borough Public Library, New York, NY; The Jersey City Public Schools, Jersey City, NJ; Middlesex County College Foundation, Edison, NJ; WakeEd Partnership, Raleigh, NC; Pace Center for Girls, Jacksonville, FL; Lexington One Educational Foundation, Columbia, SC; Stafford Municipal School District; Education Foundation, Houston, TX; Fort Bend ISD Education Foundation, Houston, TX.

HUMANITARIAN RELIEF

BAPS Charities serves and supports affected communities.

- Earthquake Disaster Relief
- Wildfire Relief
- Hurricane Relief

Disaster Relief Efforts

- California wildfires
- BAPS Charities donated \$25,000 to Paradise Unified School District, CA

ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

Awareness of important environmental issues is raised through:

- Earth Day
- Tree-planting Campaigns: 61,000 trees planted in 2019 in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy; 360,000 trees planted in last 4 years (2016–2019).
- Earth Hour





**MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ HONOURED
IN A SPECIAL ASSEMBLY
21 December 2019, Mumbai**

During Swamishri's stay at the BAPS Mandir in Dadar, the Shrimad Rajchandra Mission held a satsang assembly in the mandir's Yogi Hall in the presence of Gurudev Pujya Shri Rakeshbhai. He honoured Swamishri in the assembly and praised the saintly life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri also felicitated Pujya Shri Rakeshbhai and blessed the assembly.



1. British Prime Minister The Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson pays respects to the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the BAPS Mandir in Neasden, London, 7 December 2019.
2. The Prime Minister is honoured during the assembly in the haveli.
3. Swamishri welcomes the Home Minister of India, Shri Amitabh Shah, to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th birthday celebration assembly, 4 December 2019.
4. Swamishri felicitates Dr D.Y. Patil and his son, Dr Vijaybhai Patil.
5. Swamishri blesses former Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri Devendra Fadnavis.

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