

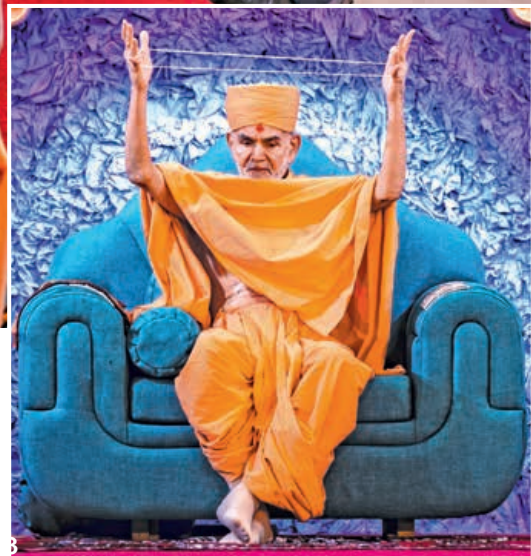
SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January–February 2018

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



*Pramukh Swami Maharaj's
97th Birthday Celebration
27 November 2017, Anand*



PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 97th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

19–27 November 2017, Anand

1. Around 5,700 *yajmans* participated in the Vishwashanti Mahayag at Akshar Farm, 25–26 November.
- 2-3. Mahant Swami Maharaj initiates 37 youths into the sadhu order, 26 November.



97th Birthday Celebration, Anand

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January–February 2018, Vol. 41, No. 1



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



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.

Founder: HDH Pramukh Swami Maharaj

Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas

Contributors: Sadhu Vivekjiandas, Sadhu Amrutvijaydas

Designer: Sadhu Shrijiswarupdas

Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharpathi, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad - 380004, India

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Outside India (By Air Mail)

	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	India Rupees
1 Year	630	9	14	80
2 Years	1300	18	28	150
3 Years	1900	27	42	220

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MUKTANAND SWAMI'S WISH

All the members of Dharmakul were living happily in Gadhada and getting the benefit of Shri Hari's spiritual association. One day, Muktanand Swami put forward a proposal to Shri Hari...

MAHARAJ INSTRUCTS BRAHMANAND SWAMI TO BUILD A MANDIR IN VARTAL

Shri Hari instructs Brahmanand Swami, "Swami, I have performed the foundation-stone laying rituals for the mandir in Vartal. Now, you go to Vartal and build the mandir." Then, Maharaj called Harji Thakkar and said, "Since Brahmanand Swami will be going to Vartal for constructing a mandir, give him Rs. 12 for his expenses."

Brahmanand Swami humorously witnessed Shri Hari's divine *lila*. He asked Maharaj, "When do I have to leave for Vartal?"

Maharaj replied, "Tomorrow, after lunch. Make a small mandir in Vartal like the Hanumanji Mandir by the pond."

Brahmanand Swami smiled and commented, "Maharaj, with Rs. 12 one cannot construct even a smaller mandir than the Hanumanji Mandir. So, the room in which you have installed the *murtis* of Nar-Narayan will suffice as a mandir."

Shri Hari understood the purport of Brahmanand Swami's words. Maharaj added, "Narayan Giri, who is there, is your friend. Take his help and build a one-*shikhar* mandir." Brahmanand Swami remained silent.



The next day, Maharaj gave *prasad* to Brahmanand Swami from his own *thal*. After having lunch Maharaj went to attend the satsang assembly. Brahmanand Swami came to the assembly with his group of sadhus. He prostrated before Maharaj. Shri Hari blessed him, "Bhagwan will fulfil all your wishes."

Brahmanand Swami asked, "Maharaj, which Bhagwan?" Shri Hari replied with a smile, "The Bhagwan on whom you meditate and whose name you chant. Which other Bhagwan can there be?"

Shortly thereafter, Maharaj advised, "I had performed the foundation-stone laying ritual on the spot where the Nar-Narayan *murtis* are presently installed. Furthermore, acquire the title deed for the land that the devotees have promised to give."

Swami asked, "If it takes time to get it done, what should I do?"

"Then start the construction work. It can be acquired later, however, you'll have to remind them about it daily," Maharaj advised.

Brahmanand Swami took leave of Maharaj and departed for Vartal. Swami and his group of sadhus travelled to Kariyani, Polarpur, Kamiyala and Sinjivala before arriving in Vartal.

I'M NO ONE'S FATHER-IN-LAW

With the Dharmakul staying in Gadhada, Maharaj daily dined, at the insistence of all, at Rampratapbhai's and Ichchharambhai's residences. Once, Maharaj went to Ichchharambhai's residence to have lunch. Shri Hari sat down to eat. At that time Raghuvirji's wife, Virja Devi, covered her head and face with her sari to observe the social protocol. Shri Hari smiled on seeing this and asked her, "By observing this protocol how will you meditate [upon me]? I am no one's father-in-law; I'm everyone's Parameshwar!"

On hearing this, Virja Devi uncovered her face and replied, "Maharaj, we are body-conscious, so in spite of your divine form we have family feelings for you. But, today, since you have revealed your divine form, I will no longer observe this social protocol." Shri Hari was pleased with her new understanding.

* * *

The winter month of Posh (December-January) was coming to an end. One day, Maharaj was seated on a bed in the porch of the north-facing room in Dada Khachar's *darbar*. At that time, Muktanand Swami came for darshan and sat down. He was happy because the Dharmakul had come from Chhapaiya. He then desired that Maharaj select and appoint an appropriate member of the Dharmakul as the *acharya*. On the other hand, Muktanand Swami was aware of Maharaj's nature and disinclinations. He knew that Maharaj was not inclined to associate himself with his family. Shri Hari believed that whoever was a staunch *satsangi* was a part of his family.

Muktanand Swami gently raised the point, "Maharaj, with the arrival of your family, those who falsely said that you belong to a low caste and thus criticized you have been proved wrong. Thus, they will now refrain and resign from maligning you."

Shri Hari smiled softly. Maharaj knew what Muktanand Swami was trying to get at. He always

respected Muktanand Swami on par with guru Ramanand Swami and abided by his wishes. Muktanand Swami was humble and understood Maharaj's divine glory. He staunchly believed Maharaj to be Bhagwan. He said, "Maharaj, no one will be able to criticize you once someone appropriate from the Dharmakul is appointed as the *acharya* of the Sampradaya."

Shri Hari replied, "I believe you to be a senior sadhu. I will do whatever you say. Whatever you like is what I like. I am inclined to those who have love for God and dharma. Tell me one who has these two virtues. You can install one who is in tune with the Satsang traditions, has greater love for the scriptures than his material property and belongings, is inclined to listening to *katha* and doing bhajan, propagates the glory of God and dharma and reveres the God-realized Sadhu."

Muktanand Swami was pleased to hear this because he felt Maharaj would definitely appoint someone from the Dharmakul as the *acharya*. He thus started pondering about the ideal candidate. Then, he asked Shri Hari's opinion about who to select. Maharaj replied, "Ichchharam possesses saintly virtues. He has faith in me. His son is frank and without deceit. Whereas Rampratapbhai does not have faith and trust in what I say. However, his son Nandram has saintly virtues. Suvasini Bhabhi is simple, pure-hearted and loving by nature. Nandram and his two brothers abide by Rampratapbhai's wish. Whereas, Ichchharam's family do what I say."

Muktanand Swami felt Maharaj had gauged the personalities of all the members of Dharmakul in a very short time. At that time Suvasini Bhabhi and her son, Nandram, arrived. Instantly, Muktanand Swami got up and moved away to one side. Then, Maharaj asked them both, "Muktanand Swami wishes to choose an appropriate member from the Dharmakul and appoint him as the *acharya* of Satsang. What is your wish?"

Suvasini Bhabhi replied humbly, "You know

what is best for us in this world and the world beyond. How can we suggest to you? We have faith in you. One who has no trust in you, can never be happy despite all the talents he has.” Shri Hari was pleased to hear the candid words of his sister-in-law.

In the evening, Maharaj asked the opinions of other sadhus, *brahmacharis* and senior devotees. Muktanand Swami opined, “I think Sitaramji is most suitable to be appointed as the *acharya*.”

The next day, according to Muktanand Swami’s wish, a raised seat was arranged on the porch of the north-facing rooms of Dada Khachar’s *darbar*. Ichchharam’s seven-year-old son, Sitaramji, was told to sit on the raised seat and appointed as the *acharya*. A chorus of *jais* filled the air to mark the investiture. Muktanand Swami was very happy on the occasion. Shri Hari had a *safo* tied on Sitaramji. Then, sadhus, *brahmacharis* and devotees bowed to Sitaramji, and the devotees offered donations to him. Dada Khachar tied gold bangles on Sitaramji’s wrists. Shri Hari told Sitaram’s elder brother, Gopalji, “You sit next to Sitaramji and take whatever gifts or donations that are offered to your brother. Furthermore, you should not allow him to touch them because he is too young to understand their value. It would be foolish to touch money after sitting on a spiritual seat. I like an *acharya* who abstains from associating with women and wealth. In so doing, there is little chance of him getting sullied. One who is blessed with the seat of Satsang should understand and imbibe its principles and be free from lethargy and laziness. One who occupies the seat of Satsang and remains lazy should be dethroned because laziness is a form of *maya*. One who occupies the seat of Satsang should be respected and loved as long as he observes the moral regulations I have prescribed. To revere one who disobeys morality is contrary to the Satsang tradition. In fact, it is the way of *kusang*.” Thereafter, Maharaj went to the Akshar Ordi to have his meal.

O MAHARAJ, YOU’RE TRULY FIBBING

Soon thereafter, Sura Khachar arrived. He bowed and touched Maharaj’s feet and sat down. Maharaj asked him, “Have you had your meal?” He replied in a dejected tone, “Maharaj, ever since the day you started having meals at Dharmakul’s house no one has eaten. When I got *prasad* from your *thal* in Dada’s *darbar* I felt satisfied that I had eaten.” Shri Hari responded with a smile. Suddenly, there was a noise from behind the *darbar*. Maharaj told Sura Khachar, “Go outside and have a look at the back. What is the noise about?” Sura Khachar got up and he saw Manki eating grass. Sura Khachar informed Shri Hari about Manki. But Maharaj told him to have a look again and said, “It seems as if Garud is there.” Sura Khachar commented, “Maharaj, you are really fibbing. I saw with my own eyes that it is Manki.”

Shri Hari merely smiled and was about to say something when Muktanand Swami spoke, “Sura Khachar, in spite of you having seen with your own eyes you need to see with Maharaj’s perception. He can transform Manki into Garud. Thus, say that you saw Garud.”

Sura Khachar was perplexed. He got up and went out to have a look, and to his surprise he saw Garud flapping its wings. He rubbed his eyes to make sure, but he saw Garud again. Sura Khachar returned and fell at Maharaj’s feet and said, “Maharaj, it is not possible to understand your *lila*!”

Shriji Maharaj replied, “You can do so providing you develop Muktanand Swami’s spiritual understanding.” ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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



ADHYĀY 4

BOWING, ENQUIRING AND SERVING

Part 22

तद् विद्धि – Attain the Knowledge of Paramātmā

The shloka starts with the two words ‘*tad*’ and ‘*viddhi*’. ‘*Tad*’ means ‘that’, referring to and hence continuing the previous matter. Prior to this, words like ‘*Sambhavāmi yuge yuge*’ (Gitā 4.8) and ‘*Janma karma cha me divyam*’ (Gitā 4.8), conveyed the message of properly knowing the form of Paramātmā manifest in human form. ‘*Viddhi*’ means ‘attain knowledge’. Thus the words mean ‘O Arjuna, attain the knowledge of the form of Paramātmā.’ Here, Krishna does not advise Arjuna to attain knowledge of Paramātmā, but commands him to do so.

Moreover, the knowledge that Krishna is talking of here is not mere information, but realization. Mere information cannot impart experience. And without experience, there is no peace. To attain knowledge of Paramātmā’s divinity means to experience that divinity. Experience is realization. One who experiences such realized knowledge of the form of Paramātmā obtains the fruits mentioned previously, such as, ‘*Tyaktvā deham punarjanma naiti māmeti so’rjuna*’ – ‘Does not, upon leaving the body, take birth again in this material world, but attains my eternal abode’ (Gita 4.9).

Surrender to the Wise, Realized Guru

Explaining that anyone who wants to attain such knowledge must go to a guru, Shri Krishna says, ‘उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः।।’ – ‘*Upadekshyanti te gnānam gnāninastattvadarshinaha*’ – ‘Wise and realized men will teach you that knowledge’ (Gitā 4.34).

Nowadays, everyone wants to develop their skills. We all constantly strive to learn something new and progress. We continually endeavour to attain expertise or success. Someone may want to become a good scientist, someone a good manager, and someone a good musician – everyone has some dream in their heart. To fulfil these dreams, we take advice and strive in many ways. The Bhagavad Gitā also gives us clear guidance in this direction. The fourth *adhyay* of the Gitā describes a definite method to attain our dreams. The context may be completely spiritual – aimed at fulfilling the greatest dream, but the steps shown can be universally applied to all aspects of life. We will look at this in this article.

Shri Krishna Bhagwan says, ‘तद् विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया। उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः।।’ – ‘*Tad viddhi pranipātena pariprashnena sevayā. Upadekshyanti te gnānam gnāninastattvadarshinaha*’ – ‘Know that by bowing, enquiring and serving; the wise realized gurus will teach you that knowledge’ (Gitā 4.34).

knowledge’ (Gitā 4.34).

To experience Paramātmā, surrendering to a guru is essential – this is the first crucial message of these words. Furthermore, that this guru should be experienced, i.e. God-realized, is the second message.

The Gitā has described such an experienced guru as having two qualities: first, *jnāni* and second, *tattvadarshi*. Both of these words describe the attributes of the guru. *Jnāni* means experienced, and *tattvadarshi* means seeing things as they really are. In a way, the gist of both of these words is the same, but people often regard someone with a lot of information to be a *jnāni*, so the word *tattvadarshi* has been included to prevent this misconception here. Information can be obtained from anywhere. It is even possible for an atheist to teach beliefs on God well, and for the students to also feel that they have understood everything well; but that is all information. It does not necessarily mean that either the teacher or the students are experienced. The *jnān* spoken of in the Gitā is about realization. For realization, it is not fruitful to go to those with merely an abundance of information. For realization, it is necessary to go to a realized guru. The word *tattvadarshi* expresses that principle.

The Bhagavad Gitā’s teaching of surrendering to the guru echoes the principle of the Upanishads. For example, in the Mundaka Upanishad, showing the means to realize *brahma vidyā*, it says, ‘तद् विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निष्ठम्’ – ‘*Tad vigñānārtham sa gurumevābhigacchet samitpānihi shrotriyam brahma nishtham*’ – ‘To realize *brahma vidyā*, one must surrender to the guru who knows the essence of all the shastras, is Aksharbrahman himself and has firm conviction in Paramātmā’ (Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.12).

Thus, the words ‘*gnāninaha*’ and ‘*tattvadarshi-naha*’ tell us to go to a guru who is realized.

Attributes of the Disciple

It is indeed a great accomplishment to

surrender to a *jnāni* and *tattvadarshi* guru. It is a great comfort to have found a true guru. But to surrender to a true guru does not mean that the work is done. Surrendering is the beginning of the spiritual journey. After surrendering, the disciple has certain responsibilities. If the disciple can fulfil these properly he will attain the state of realization. In this shloka, in the same manner in which Shri Krishna has explained the attributes of the guru, he has also explained the attributes of the disciple. Let us take a look at them.

प्रणिपातेन – Bow

Pranipāta means to bow. Know, but first bow. It is a wonderful sight when someone thirsting for knowledge bows with folded hands in front of the guru. This is the original method of education in Indian culture. The classes on knowledge start with bowing. Bowing is the doorway to progress. To bow to someone is not helplessness or weakness. There is great power in bowing. Bowing brings knowledge at full speed.

Things that hinder us in attaining knowledge most are our arrogance, vanity and stubbornness. The arrogant are well aware of their ignorance, but their ego does not let them bow anywhere, it does not let them become anyone’s disciple. Vanity and stubbornness are also forms of ego. Sometimes, we boast ‘I know everything’, and become so overbearing that no one would dare even to try to make us aware of the truth in a conversation; not even the guru. Stubbornness means to resolutely adhere to one’s own opinions. Everyone has different opinions, but to unreasonably stick to them is stubbornness. By adopting humility, one will be freed from these obstacles, because once one bows one will receive knowledge from all directions.

When we bow, we become humble. To become humble means to become receptive. A humble person has a much greater capacity to grasp knowledge than others. If someone is thirsty for knowledge and humble, then they will have a

great capacity to become *jnāni*.

What it really means to bow and become humble must also be understood. To bow is not something merely physical. It is not just outward formality or manners. It is not a way to fool the guru. Bowing is not merely in the action, but also in the mind. The thought first arises in the mind and is then reflected in one's actions. To become humble means to become receptive, receptive from within, to jettison our arrogance, to dismiss our vanity. Humility in thoughts means to drop the stubbornness for our own ideas. To bow to the guru means to relinquish all our own concepts at the guru's feet, to abandon one's own conceptions. If we can drop anything that affects our decisions, beliefs and opinions, then we are ready to attain knowledge. Without this, there is no benefit from merely bowing physically. The extent to which we can let go of our ideas is the extent to which we can be said to have bowed. Otherwise, if our body bows, but not our mind, then we will not attain what we were to attain from the guru. Our knowledge will not develop, and we remain unchanged. Our thoughts and experiences are all conceited/meddlesome; they obstruct us from obtaining knowledge from the guru. Thus, by mentally bowing, put them aside. A dialogue that commences with a humble bow by the disciple opens the doors to the infinite knowledge possessed by the guru.

Since humility is the first step to attaining knowledge, it has been mentioned first with the word '*pranipāta*'. Now let us look at the second step.

परिप्रश्नेन – Ask Pleading Questions

'परिप्रश्न' – '*Pariprashna*' means to enquire. What a superb sequence – ask, but first bow. It is also inspiring to see the disciple thirsting for knowledge humbly presenting himself with unanswered questions. Bowing makes the question sound. It makes knowledge unpolluted. Humility rids the question of enmity and ill will, quarrel

and dispute, controversy and difference of opinion, envy and jealousy, and fraud and treachery. Such untainted questions bring forth eagerness and enthusiasm for knowledge within us. Thus, the duo of '*pranipāta*' and '*pariprashna*' contain the technique to attaining knowledge.

Here, the word '*pariprashna*' has been used for asking, not just the word '*prashna*'. By using the word '*pariprashna*' the Gitā scrutinizes the question too. Here the questions are not just questions asked for the sake of asking, but questions on life.

To have questions is but human nature. Life gives rise to one question after another. Questions are continually asked. Some ask for the sake of asking, some ask to impress others, some ask to evaluate the person being asked, some ask to pass time, and some just have a tendency to ask. Thus, there is no end to questions. But, of these, which questions are truly relevant to life is something worth thinking about.

Here, the Gitā calls questions of life '*pariprashna*'. Such questions are cries of despair; they are heartfelt prayers.

Questions asked with a craving for liberation are more profound than those asked from curiosity. The '*pariprashna*' of the Gitā are not merely questions asked out of curiosity, but are questions asked with a craving for liberation. To be curious is a good thing, but to become a spiritual aspirant seeking liberation is even greater. By using the word '*pariprashna*' the Gitā aims to take us beyond curiosity and make us spiritual aspirants.

Let us look at an analogy. The questions asked to a cancer specialist about how to cure a cancer by a student, a fellow passenger on a train journey and a cancer patient may seem the same, but they are different. The student is curious, the passenger is just passing time, and the third is an actual cancer patient. The third is in a different situation all together and so the sincerity of the question is also different. The third is not just curious, but craves to be relieved from cancer, thus the question the patient asks is a '*pariprashna*'. It is a cry

of despair. The *pariprashna* of the Gitā refer to such cries of despair. Whatever questions Arjuna has asked in the Gitā are not merely *prashna* but *pariprashna*, because he was really in a dilemma and miserable. He was suffering from the burden of attachment, and was therefore enquiring about the means to liberation. We find the same situation applies in Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Vachanamrut; many questions are asked, but they are all *pariprashna*. They are not questions asked due to mere curiosity, but are cries of despair and prayers for liberation by spiritual aspirants to Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Only such questions can truly change one's life.

By highlighting this approach of *pariprashna*, the Gitā has shown us the true guru-disciple relationship of Indian culture. A disciple brought up in the Indian tradition is not a blind follower; he is able to freely and repeatedly ask the guru. In fact, to ask questions is actually believed to be an important means to attaining knowledge. The difference is that these questions commence with a humble bow, are of the calibre of *pariprashna* and are prayerful.

This is the second step to attaining knowledge. Now let us look at the third.

सेवया – Serving the Guru

Sevā is the third step. Hearing the word *sevā*, its direct meaning 'service' comes to mind – to cook, wash clothes, etc. – are things commonly associated with *sevā*. That is true, but the word *sevā* is not limited to this alone. Here *sevā* means *sevan* – to regularly associate with or partake. Like one takes food or medicine daily, the Gitā tells us that one should associate with the guru daily. In Vachanamrut Gadhada I 54, Bhagwan Swaminarayan uses the word *prasang* for such *sevan*, and the word *sadhu* instead of *guru*. Furthermore, In Vachanamrut Gadhada II 31, he speaks of associating with Brahman through contemplation. All of these precepts are directed at *sevan* of the guru. *Sevan* of the guru means to

associate with him fully, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has given a boon that a disciple who does so will attain the virtues of the guru.

In society we see such *sevan* as a natural occurrence. Let us look at an example. In India, cricket is very a popular sport. Someone who wants to become a cricketer has some cricketer whom he idolizes. He continuously keeps that idol in mind – he is continuously doing the *sevan* of his ideal sportsman. No matter what he is doing, he always has that idol in focus. When such *sevan* reaches its summit, the person begins to speak, walk and act like his idol. You may have seen a young boy walking on the street impersonating the bowling or batting action of a cricketer; he may not even know he is doing this. Years of doing so leads to one attaining skills similar to that of one's ideal sportsman.

Thus, the word *sevan* tells us a lot. By *sevan* of the guru, a disciple is able to closely observe the most subtle actions of the guru. By this, the disciple is able to understand the purpose behind those actions and is able to see the guru's skilful manner of working. He is able to see the guru's self-control, confidence, faith in Paramātmā, devotion to his own guru, and devotion to Paramātmā, and so learn how to imbibe philosophy into daily life, how to pray and much more. The disciple begins to get a glimpse of the guru's true glory. He gradually attains the favour of the guru. He begins to change, and finally the guru makes him like himself – *gunātī*, *brahmarup*. Once he is *brahmarup*, there is nothing else to be known, he has attained the pinnacle of knowledge.

To do the guru's *sevan* means to be by the guru's side. It is said that one who spends time in the Gir region undergoes a complete change; the same applies to one who does *sevan* of the guru.

Here, we must remember our Gunatit guru *parampara*. They are not only ideal gurus, but they are also ideal disciples.

Take the example of Bhagatji Maharaj. Although he was Aksharbrahman himself, to

establish the ideals of spirituality, he undertook spiritual endeavours in his life. He did *sevan* of his guru, Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami. The guru was at the pinnacle of spirituality and the disciple at the pinnacle of guru *sevan*, thus the result was also of the highest degree. Bhagatji Maharaj was completely transformed. Once, when he was sleeping, Gunatitanand Swami told Balmukund Swami to wake him. Balmukund Swami tried to wake him by saying, “Bhagatji, wake up! Bhagatji, wake up!” two or three times, but he did not wake up. Balmukund Swami returned to Gunatitanand Swami and explained the situation. Gunatitanand Swami laughed and said, “If you say ‘Gunatit, wake up!’ then he will wake up.” And that is indeed exactly what happened, the words ‘Gunatit, wake up!’ awoke Bhagatji Maharaj instantaneously. This is the utmost state of *sevan*.

Shastriji Maharaj did the *sevan* of Bhagatji Maharaj. He would keep him in mind day and night. He had only one incentive, to please Bhagatji Maharaj. Whatever he did – *sevā*, bhakti, discourses, etc. – was only to please Bhagatji Maharaj.

It is not correct to say that Yogiji Maharaj stayed with Shastriji Maharaj, but it is correct to say that Yogiji Maharaj did the *sevan* of Shastriji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj himself used to say, “I have served such a person that I am constantly at peace within.” This is the echo of true *sevan*.

Guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj did the *sevan* of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. Extraordinarily, even after the passing away to Akshardham of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj continued to do their *sevan*. In the same manner in which he obeyed their every wish and command in their presence, he continued to do so in their absence. This is the ideal example of *sevan* that we have seen with our own eyes.

Today, *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj lives such a life. He has done the *sevan* of Yogiji

Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He is continuously engrossed in them. He has no other thoughts. He has become our guru, but has not forsaken *sevan*; he still thinks of himself as a disciple. He continuously remembers Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, without even the slightest effort. He is always immersed in supreme peace. Continuously engrossed in experiencing the divinity of his gurus and their disciples. This is the fruit of true *sevan*.

If someone merely physically stays near the guru and does not understand the true meaning of *sevan* as described here, then they are bereft of the priceless and important things in life, they do not attain their goal, they do not attain the virtues of the guru and they are not transformed.

Conclusion

Thus, this shloka describes the best means to attain knowledge. First, surrender to a guru as described in the shastras. Second, bow to him, i.e. surrender one’s own thoughts at his feet. Third, accept his principles and if one cannot understand them then humbly ask. And fourth, do *sevan* of the guru, i.e. profoundly associate with him. Whoever follows these precepts of the Gitā will attain realization. Thereafter, he knows everything, nothing remains to be understood, to be asked or to be known.

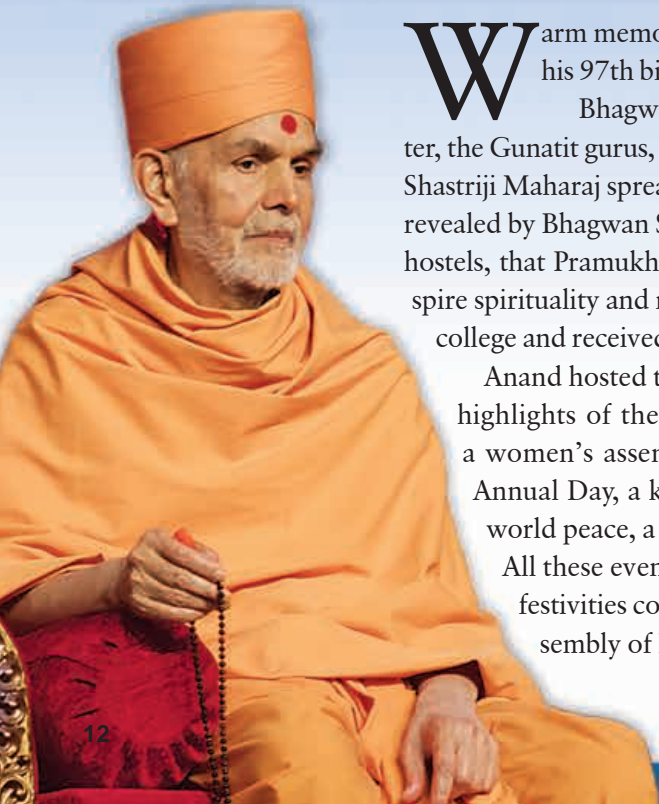
If the guru is himself the confluence of humility, *pariprashna* and *sevā*, then what is there in the world can we not achieve!

We are all fortunate that we have attained such a guru. Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj is such a guru. Thus, for us, he is the Gitā personified. Now, all that remains is that we bow to him daily; if we do not understand something, then we should ask him, either in person, via phone or letter; and should do his *sevan* just as all our gurus have done of their gurus, and, in doing so, attain the ultimate knowledge. ♦

DIVINE MEMORIES OF PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ

97th Birthday Celebrations

19-27 November 2017, Anand



Warm memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were shared during his 97th birthday celebrations in Anand on 27 November 2017.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan had sanctified Anand and, thereafter, the Gunatit gurus, have regularly graced the city. It was from Anand that Shastriji Maharaj spread the principles of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, that Yogiji Maharaj established youth hostels, that Pramukh Swami Maharaj toured neighbouring villages to inspire spirituality and morality, and that Mahant Swami Maharaj studied in college and received the grace of his gurus. Such is the divinity of Anand.

Anand hosted the celebrations from 19 to 27 November 2017. The highlights of the 9-day celebrations included a welcome assembly, a women's assembly, a *bal-yuva* assembly, the BAPS Vidyamandir Annual Day, a kirtan *aradhana*, a volunteers' assembly, a *yagna* for world peace, a *diksha* ceremony and the *patotsav* of Anand mandir.

All these events were held in Akshar Farm and at the mandir. The festivities concluded with the grand 97th birthday celebration assembly of Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the outskirts of the city.



Memories of his boundless affection brings fulfilment to the atma. Memories of our indebtedness to him fill our hearts with emotion.

Memories of his pure, soothing care for us, even today, fill us with peace. This is our Pramukh Swami Maharaj – a pinnacle of saintliness, embodiment of selfless service to mankind and an ocean of compassion...

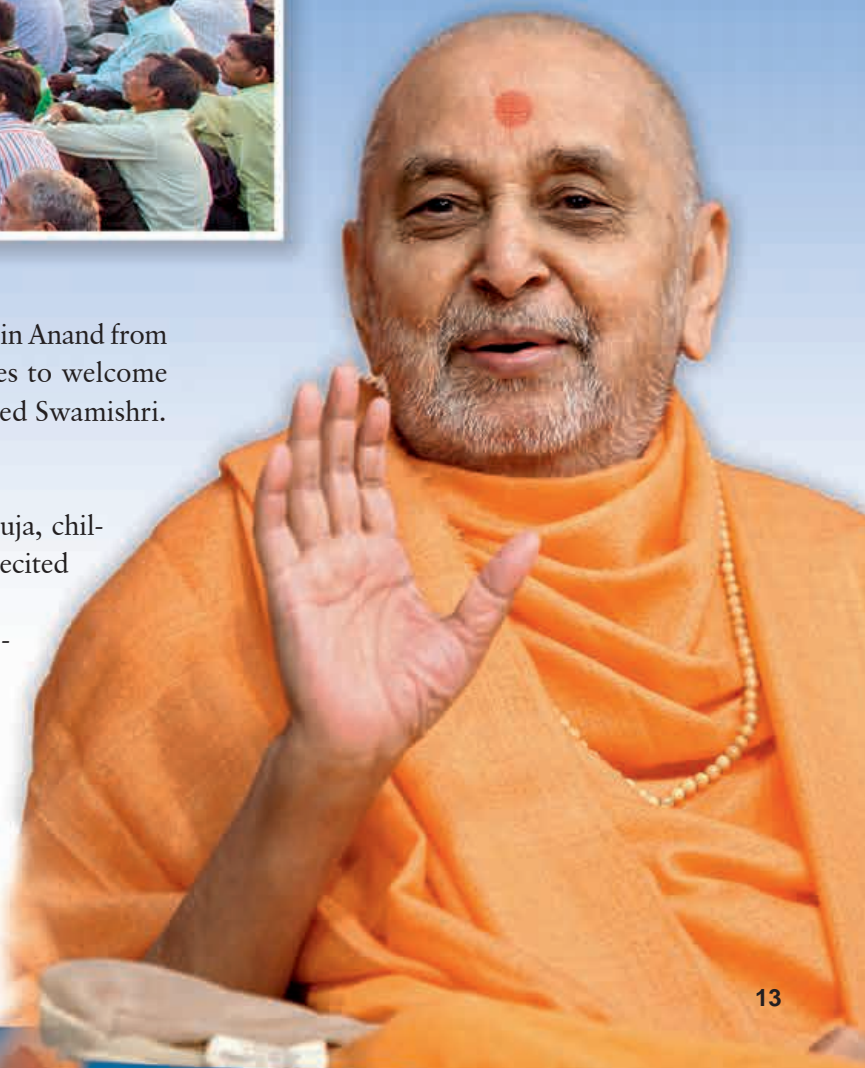
19: Welcome Assembly

Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived in Anand from Mumbai. Youths performed dances to welcome Swamishri and dignitaries honoured Swamishri.

20: Bal-Yuva Din

During Swamishri's morning puja, children and youths sang kirtans and recited passages from the scriptures.

In the evening assembly, children and youths depicted Pramukh Swami Maharaj's unconditional affection towards all through speeches, a drama, videos, kirtans and traditional dances. Following the inspiring speeches of Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami and Pujya Doctor Swami, Swamishri blessed





BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Anand



Youths present a skit during the Bal-Yuva Din assembly



Akshar Deri erected at the centre of 'Pramukh Swami Maharaj Circle', Vidyanagar



Swamishri, sadguru sadhus and dignitaries during the Road Naming Assembly, Vidyanagar

the assembly, “The bond these children and youths have with satsang may not be visible today, but will become evident in the future. Due to one’s body and family, one may feel troubled, but if one believes that one has attained the highest in the form of God, then there will be no misery. Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj have strengthened our faith and observance of *niyam*-dharma. If these two are properly practised, then Akshardham is guaranteed.”

21: Vidyamandir Annual Day

In the evening, the 12th Annual Day assembly of the BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir in Bakrol was held at Akshar Farm.

Students of the Vidyamandir presented traditional dances, a drama and bhajans. Parents of former students narrated how the Vidyamandir had inspired their children to study and develop a good character.

In his blessings, Mahant Swami Maharaj emphasized to the students the need to observe *niyams* and dharma and cultivate a noble character to progress in life.

22 November:

Road Naming Ceremony; Kirtan Aradhana

In the evening, the local authorities honoured the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and his profound impact on Anand by naming the circle (roundabout) near the Akshar-Purushottam Chhatralaya in Vidyanagar, as ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Circle’. The road leading from that circle to the university was named ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg’. A special function was held, with the Chhatralaya in the background, in the presence of Shri P.K. Lehri (Former Chief Secretary, Gujarat State), Shri Mahendrabhai Patel (Nagarpalika President, Vidyanagar), Shri Jitubhai Patel (Nagarpalika Vice-President, Vidyanagar), Dr B.G. Patel (Vice-Chancellor, Charuset) and other guests.

After the initial speeches, Mahant Swami

Maharaj and the dignitaries went to the delightful *deri* that had been built in the centre of the circle. There, they untied a *nadachhadi* and officially declared the circle as ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Circle’. Then, they ceremoniously declared the ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg’ as hails of ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj ni Jai’ resounded in the air.

From here, Mahant Swami Maharaj went to Akshar Farm, where Shri Jaydeep Swadiya and youths were presenting a kirtan *aradhana*.

23: Felicitation Assembly

For the 97th birthday celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, many people had generously and wholeheartedly extended their support. Among them, around 80 farmers had permitted the use of their land for the celebration assembly and so had not planted any crops. In all, the farmers had provided 200 acres of land to facilitate all the arrangements for the main celebration assembly on 27 November.

In the evening assembly, Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed and felicitated all for their support.

24: Mandir Patotsav

In the early morning, the 17th *patotsav* of Anand Mandir was celebrated. Senior sadhus performed the initial *mahapuja* rituals. Then, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *pujan* of all the consecrated *murtis*. An *annakut* was arranged before the *murtis* and then the *patotsav arti* was performed.

Swamishri blessed the assembly, “God is pleased by such devotion. Everyone has faith that God manifested, Maharaj himself incarnated and we experienced him through Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This is a great attainment. Live with this understanding that Shastriji Maharaj has firmly established *agna* and *upasana*. Maharaj has said, ‘Without the manifest (*pragat*), nothing is achieved.’ We have been blessed to have attained



Swamishri and senior sadhus on stage during an evening assembly at Akshar Farm



Devotees seated in an evening assembly at Akshar Farm



Devotees participate in the Yagna for World Peace



Blood donation camp at Akshar Farm

Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

In the evening assembly, children and youths of Valasan and Vidyanagar presented ‘Anand Gatha’, a devotional dance depicting the history of Swaminarayan Satsang in Anand.

25: Volunteers’ Assembly

To ensure the appropriate and timely preparations for all the celebration events and their smooth execution, 8,500 men and 6,500 women volunteers had selflessly contributed their services, day and night. Appreciating their devout efforts, Swamishri blessed the special volunteers’ assembly, which was held at the same location where the main birthday celebration assembly was to be held. Swamishri said, “Believe that you are all living in Akshardham. While doing this *seva*, we must see everyone as divine. Serve in a way that everyone who comes is taken care of. Serve with humility and respect. Treat everyone as honoured guests. How would you look after someone who visits your home? Treat everyone who comes here in this way and see all as divine. The *sadguru* sadhus and numerous devotees have attained that state. Offer *seva* and bhakti in that *ekantik* state. So, we too will benefit. This *seva* will remain with you forever. You have the opportunity to serve here, so become trained such that this [*ekantik*] state is attained.”

25 and 26: Vishwashanti Mahayagna

A total of 5,700 *yajmans* participated in Vishwashanti Mahayagna (Yagna for World Peace) over the two days of rituals. For the *yagna*, 349 *kunds* had been set up in Akshar Farm. On both days, the *yagna* rituals commenced at 6.00 a.m. in the presence of *sadguru* sadhus. Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj would ritually place the offerings in the *yagna*.

At the conclusion of the *yagna*, Swamishri blessed, “Even if we celebrate Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s birthday every day, it would not be enough. He was such a divine personality. He

has granted us peace in all ways. Going to him resulted in peace. The biggest gift he has given is that of *moksha*. Nobody else can give that.

“The work of Shastriji Maharaj and Akshar-Purushottam will continue. And it will be achieved through *samp* and *suhradbhav*. We must join in this and offer *ekantik* bhakti.”

26: Diksha Ceremony

In Akshar Farm, the *diksha mahapuja* rituals commenced at 4.15 p.m. in the presence of Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami.

Then, Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Swamishri then gave the guru mantra and initiated 37 *parshads* into the sadhu-order. Swamishri applied sandalwood paste to each new initiate and blessed them individually.

Then, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “Congratulations and blessings to the parents of these sadhus. A son is regarded as part of one’s own body. It is possible to donate money, but to give a son is difficult. Yet, many have given – even if they have only one son. This is a great feat. By Yogiji Maharaj’s wish, there will be thousands of sadhus.

“Yogi Bapa used to say, ‘If someone gives a son to become a sadhu, it is like they have donated one crore rupees.’ Today, that would be equal to 10, 20, 25 crores. All who took *diksha* today prayed for only one thing, ‘May we develop *divyabhav* and not engage in *abhav-avgun*.’ Our *sampradaya* is based on *samp*. Going forward, we have to serve and offer bhakti with unity. Due to God everything runs smoothly and will continue to do so. We have attained the principle of Akshar-Purushottam. That is a great thing.”

During the celebration period, a blood donation camp was organized in which a total of 361 units of blood were collected at the festival grounds and donated to the local authorities. ♦

Translated by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
from Swaminarayan Prakash, January 2018



PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 97TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION ASSEMBLY

27 November 2017, Anand

The eight-day celebrations to commemorate the 97th birthday of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj concluded with a grand assembly of over 175,000 devotees and well-wishers from throughout India and from countries across the globe, including, USA, UK, France, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa and the Middle East.

About 15 km outside Anand, in the village of Morad, around 200 acres of farm land had been developed to make the 'Pramukh Swami Nagar', for the finale of Pramukh Swami Maharaj 97th birthday celebrations.

A significant portion of land had been used for the temporary, canopied offices of the various departments – construction, electric, water, kitchen, decoration, medical, volunteers and others – required to set up the celebration site.

The rest was flattened to prepare a vast open

area for seating for all the devotees. At the front of this seating area were the large decorated main and performance stages.

The main stage was embellished with various fibreglass and thermocol figures and designs. At the centre were the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Beneath was the seat for Mahant Swami Maharaj. To both his sides, were seats for the *sadguru* sadhus and dignitaries.

The entire assembly was broadcast live on the AASTHA channel and webcast on the Sanstha's website: live.baps.org.

The theme of the assembly was '*He Guruji! Nahi Bhule Tamne...*' (O Guruji! I Will Not Forget You...) in which memories of Pramukh Swami Maharaj were depicted through speeches and video interviews.

The celebration assembly commenced at 5.00 p.m. with *dhun* and bhajans.

Sadhus sang the bhajan '*Shat shat varas sare*



Main entrance gate to Swaminarayan Nagar



Swamishri on stage during the celebration assembly

guru jivan jyot dhare...' in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's centenary. Youths and children also performed thematic dances in his honour.

It had been over 15 months since Pramukh Swami Maharaj had passed away to Akshardham, yet for lakhs of devotees, not a day had gone without remembering him. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had bestowed motherly love, fatherly support, a friend's assistance, a guru's guidance, empathy and comfort and had touched everyone in a multitude of ways.

His letters had guided countless through the maze of life and on his one word many have moulded their lives. Such emotional experiences of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's affection overflow from everyone's hearts. Thus, his memories are engraved in everyone's hearts.

Reflecting his love for all, devotees narrated their experiences of how Pramukh Swami Maharaj had impacted their lives. Devotees remember Pramukh Swami Maharaj because he may have selected their name, blessed their marriage, guided them in their studies, job or business, sanctified their home, instilled them with confidence, sacrificed his sleep for them and for many other reasons.

Not only devotees, but sadhus also narrated how Pramukh Swami Maharaj had touched them in a multitude of ways.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had initiated the annual Satsang Examinations and constantly

inspired devotees to study for them. Towards the end of the assembly, an announcement was made that the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), based in New Delhi, would be establishing the 'BAPS Swaminarayan Pith' and offering certificate, graduate and postgraduate courses in 'Swaminarayan Vedic Studies'.

Representing IGNOU, Shri Ravindrakumarji (Vice-Chancellor), Shri Venugopal (Director, Regional Services Division) and Shri Jitendra Srivastava (Registrar), officially launched the courses at the hands of Mahant Swami Maharaj and received his blessings.

The celebration assembly concluded with the majestic sight of the entire gathering performing *arti* together with lighted lamps.

The following are translations of the speeches and video interviews depicting the myriad ways in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj had touched people's lives.

JAYESHBHAI MANDANKA Ahmedabad



14 February 1998. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Vallabh Vidyanagar.

In the afternoon, I presented to him my sister's wedding invitation. He read it in full, enquired about the arrangements and gave his blessings.

In the evening, after the assembly, I sat in

the Matador van with the sadhus to return to Ahmedabad. As we were leaving, a youth came running and asked, “Is Jayesh Mandanka here? Swami Bapa is calling him.”

So, I immediately went to him. Swami Bapa lovingly said, “The wedding will go smoothly. Blessings.” Then, giving me a bag from the adjacent table, he said, “This is for you.” He patted me on my back and blessed me.

Outside, Narayancharan Swami asked, “Jayesh, have you seen what’s in the bag?” When I looked I saw new clothes of my size. Thereafter, I learnt that after I had met Swami Bapa in the afternoon, as he was preparing for his rest, he had worried that “Jayesh would not have new clothes to wear for his sister’s wedding. So, we should arrange for his clothes.” Swami Bapa knew that in those days I was serving as a volunteer at Akshardham in Gandhinagar and that I had no source of income. I had never spoken to Swami Bapa or anyone else about my financial status, since I had become used to my frugal life. Even though it was my sister’s wedding, I had not even thought about what I would wear at the wedding. But Swami Bapa cared. That’s why he told Narayancharan Swami, “By the evening, get some clothes for him. I want to gift them to him myself. Jayesh should be well-dressed for his sister’s wedding.” And Swami Bapa gave me that gift. I was just an ordinary youth and Swami Bapa was a great *mahapurush*. I was stunned and speechless by his gesture.

Some years later, Swami Bapa also ensured that my wedding went smoothly.

As I look back over the years, I see the overwhelming love that Swami Bapa had showered upon me. He had taken care of my meals, residence, education, livelihood, wedding, health, satsang and everything else. Today, when anyone shows me love or respect, I remember Swami Bapa and feel that it is him who is showering his affection on me through this person.

HITENDRA SHAMBHUSINH JADEJA

Ahmedabad



My family, my father and I will never forget this incident with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

On 25 February 2001, the *murti-pratishtha* of the mandir in Satellite, Ahmedabad, was performed. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was suffering from a fever, yet he came and immediately after the *pratishtha* assembly he was to return to the mandir in Shahibaug.

The assembly was held in an open area next to the Satellite mandir. And, in the society behind the mandir, we had been living there for one year in our new house. That day, my father had told Dharmacharan Swami, “When Bapa comes to the assembly, tell him that the terraces of the homes in the society behind the mandir are visible. And that the third house is Hitendra’s. Please bless it from here.” However, I did not know about this conversation.

When I approached for Swami Bapa’s darshan, he gave me two rose flowers and said, “These are for your new home.” I was taken by surprise. Then, as he was leaving the stage, he called Brahmavihari Swami and asked, “Shambhusinh has bought a house around here. Is it upstairs or downstairs? I want to go there.” Brahmavihari Swami immediately called me and sat me in the police escort car in front of Swami Bapa’s car.

The roads of our society are narrow and, with cars parked on the sides, Swami Bapa’s car just managed to get through to park opposite my house. I said, “Bapa! Please sit in the car and bless the house from here. Do not take the trouble to come out.” But, Swamishri began to open the car door. So, I told him the reality that I did not have the house keys. Bapa said, “Doesn’t matter. At least I can come out and see the house.” Seeing Swamishri’s eagerness to get down, Krishnavallabh Swami said, “Bapa. There’s

no need. You are ill.”

Swamishri said, “I’m the one who is ill. So, you can get down.” So, Krishnavallabh Swami and Parmanand Swami got out of the car. Then, Swamishri, too, opened his door and stepped out.

The house was locked. Swamishri arrived on the porch. The windows were shut. He looked inside and asked, “What’s here?” In this way, he circled the entire house and asked at each window, showering flowers there. He enquired with such interest that it was as if a senior family member was viewing a house purchased by his grandson. Then, he told me, “Tell Shambhusinh that the *padhramani* has been done.”

After showering this unexpected grace, Swamishri departed. But, when I narrated all this to my father, he burst into tears – since this was not the first time something like this had happened.

In 1972, we were planning to buy a house in Rajkot. And, then, also, in our absence, Swamishri had sanctified it. He had operated the water-pump, inspected the walls and checked everything. Later, he told us that he had visited the home and that it was good to buy .

Again, in 1986, we had bought a new house. And under the pretence of visiting the bathroom, he had come to our house on the way to Gondal from Rajkot.

In 2011, we sent the drawings for our new house in Rajkot to Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Gandhinagar for him to sanctify. At that time, he studied the plans in details and by phone, for five minutes, gave us guidance. He said, “I have seen your plans, but there is no balcony outside Shambhusinh’s room. Do make one, since he likes the open air.”

Swami Bapa! Our water-pump, windows, balconies and everything remind us of your grace. Our entire family will never forget you.

TARUNBHAI PATEL, London (Speech in English)



We measure our lives in numbers and define it by moments. One such moment for me was in 1989, when I was fortunate enough to spend six weeks with Swamishri during his South India *vicharan*. Swamishri took care of all my arrangements and made sure that over the six weeks I had a good time. Those six weeks passed away in the blink of an eye.

On my last day, I wanted to meet him and thank him. And I knew that he was going to Madras [from Bangalore] by train in the evening. So, I thought that there would be enough time during the day to tell him. After morning puja, Swamishri was busy in meeting local devotees, so there was no time. Thereafter, at lunchtime, same story – he was tied up. In the afternoon, during the fruits session, I was alone with Swamishri in his room and I knew that this is the moment I could talk to him. For ten minutes I looked at him and he looked at me. But, there was silence. No talk. After Swamishri had his fruits, I left the room. Evening came. Swamishri got ready to go to the train station. I went on behind him. When I got to the train station platform, I saw hundreds of people. They were not passengers, but they were devotees doing darshan. And at that moment, I realized that I would not be able to speak to Swamishri today. So, from a distance, I looked at him. I saw him get on the train and then the devotees departed. I stood there. The carriage door was open and, overwhelmingly, to my surprise, I got onto the train and started looking for him. Pujya Kothari Swami told me that Swamishri is in the washroom. I went towards there and as I approached it, Swamishri came out. He looked into my eyes. I went to bow down, but he stopped me. Again, he looked deeply into my eyes and then he hugged me, squeezing every air space between me and him. It was not short, nor long, but it was sincere, assuring and full of emotions.

And, above all, it was unconditional. This is the strength of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. During that whole day there was no interaction of words, only interaction of feelings. Even today, whenever I see this picture, that moment comes alive. I can feel that affection that Swamishri showed me some 28 years ago. There may be geographical distances, but emotionally there are no distances.

For me, my father passed away when I was nine months old. But, Swamishri made sure that throughout my life the love of a father and the guidance of a father was never lost. Therefore, I owe him and who I am is because of him. I would like to conclude by saying, three simple words, ‘Happy Birthday, Dad.’

PUJYA VIVEKSAGAR SWAMI



For the benefit of all, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited over 17,000 villages and sanctified over 250,000 homes in over 50 countries. I was blessed to travel with him for 42 years. I have many memories of being with him. But, I will present two incidents that took place here in Anand.

In the 1980, Swamishri was performing home-to-home *padhramanis*. The number of homes increased and the visits concluded around 2.30 p.m. Then, Swamishri sat down to eat lunch at Dahyabhai Gajjar’s home. His *pattar* and the food were placed in front of him. At that time, a breathless devotee came and said, “Swami! You went to my house, but I was not there. Because you were delayed, I had gone out to look for you. And, in the meantime, you visited my house.” Hearing this, I said, “You were not present, but other members of your family were, so Swamishri sanctified every single room of your home and showered flowers. And he even went right up to the terrace.”

The devotee heard this and did not reply, but tears dripped from his eyes, reflecting his regret that he was not present.

Instantly, Swamishri pushed his *pattar* to the side, got up and said to me, “Come, put your *pagh* on. Let us go to his house.” Joyfully, Swamishri visited the devotee’s home, showered flowers in every room and on the terrace and blessed him. The devotee was overwhelmed by Swamishri’s readiness to delay his lunch even at 2.30 p.m. to fulfil his wish.

Swamishri has not merely visited devotees’ homes, but has penetrated their hearts.

Once, Swamishri had come to Anand to inaugurate the Women’s Mandir. The devotees deeply wished to honour Swamishri in a procession on an elephant. But, Swamishri was totally against the idea. Yet, he relented and abided by their wish. Afterwards, he said, “You have done this, but from tomorrow, I have to visit 400 shops in the market and beg for dal, since the dealers of Anand provide the dal for all our mandirs.” Over the next several days, Swamishri went to all the shops. Some would give 2 kg, some 5, some 20 and some would give more. However, some would sarcastically say, “Has it already been a year since you came?”, while others would comment, “My father had faith, but I don’t, so I won’t give.” Despite these varied experiences, Swamishri never flinched. He would say, “At least we are able to do this *seva*. Everyone will be liberated.”

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has stated in the Vachanamrut that one who maintains equanimity when honoured on an elephant and when begging is a true saint. That equanimity was evident in Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life.

BIPINBHAI PATEL

Vadodara (Video Interview)

In 1980, I was travelling with Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the villages. We arrived in the village of Dasaj in North Gujarat. After the evening public assembly, Swamishri reached the village school, where his lodgings had been arranged. He sang *chestha* and then retired to sleep. We youths and the other sadhus were also sleeping in the same

room. I was sleeping close to Swamishri. And, during the night, due to the intense cold, I unknowingly pulled Swamishri's blanket and covered myself with it. All night, Pramukh Swami Maharaj slept in the biting cold. But I only realized this in the morning. I was standing nearby while Swamishri was washing his hands after ablutions. He looked at me, smiled and joked, "By staying with mahatmas, you have become a mahatma!"

I was an ordinary volunteer youth and Swamishri was a great spiritual guru. Yet, he did not scold me and become angry with me. He just showered his selfless affection, which I will never forget.

SUKEKTUBHAI PATEL

Sunav (Video Interview)

In 1995, during the Amrut Mahotsav, I was serving in the *bal nagari*. One day, during the festival, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the *bal nagari* and I garlanded him. Instantly, Swamishri placed that garland around my neck. I thought that it would be nice if I could get a photo of this as a memory. After a couple of days, I wrote to Swamishri in my child-like words, asking for that photo. After some days, when I went home, my father gave me an envelope, in which was the photo of Swamishri garlanding me. I was overjoyed. Swamishri was the leader of such a big Sanstha, yet he took the time to find that photographer and send me the photo.

Due to such affection, I will never forget Swamishri.

BHASKARBHAI MEHTA

Bharuch (Video Interview)

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has cared for me in every moment of my life. He has showered me with motherly and fatherly love. He has cared for me more than I have cared for myself.

Of all things, I will never forget the occasion of my marriage. Amid all his other duties, he lovingly made all the arrangements for my marriage.

He took much more care for it than even I or my family did. He took care of the smallest of details. And what's more, he was even ready to join my wedding procession. In the morning, after his puja, he garlanded me in public and said, "It is my duty to come to your wedding, so sit in my car. Then I will have been a part of your procession. Believe that I am present in your procession."

Swamishri even came to see my wedding car decorated with flowers. He said, "Now, it's fine. You have my blessings. Come after your wedding ceremony. I will be waiting."

That day, after lunch, instead of going for rest, Swamishri stayed up to wait for me. After I arrived he embraced me and blessed me profusely.

From start to finish, Swamishri gave me such joy, that I will never forget him.

RILESHBHAI BAROT

Ahmedabad (Video Interview)

My native village is Jalsan in the Charotar region [of Gujarat]. My father was a *satsangi*, but when I was young I was not interested in satsang. Whenever my father went for Pramukh Swami Maharaj's darshan, he would tell me to go with him. But, I would refuse and not go.

On 23 April 1976, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Jalsan and came for *padhramani* to our home. I was 14 years old then. I had Swamishri's darshan and had such an experience that I accepted *vartman* and received the *kanthi* from him.

Then, I thought that if such a great Sadhu places his hands on and blesses our buffalo, it would give more milk. So, I said to Swamishri, "Please place your hands on our buffalo." My father and others said, "It is not proper to ask him to go to the buffalo." The sadhus said, "Here, take these sanctified flowers and shower them on the buffalo."

However, Swamishri stood up and began to shower flowers in our home – in the kitchen, on the water tank and in the grains store. Then he opened the back door, and went straight to the buffalo. I was afraid that the horned buffalo

might hurt Swamishri. But Swamishri placed his hand on its head and showered flowers on it. Swamishri looked at me, smiled and returned inside. Thus, Swamishri fulfilled my wish.

In the afternoon, Swamishri was to go to another village. After lunch, the devotees told Swamishri, “There’s nobody in the village here to coordinate the *sabha*.” Swamishri called me and said, “You have to run the *sabha* in the village.” I said, “I don’t know how.”

Bapa said, “You wash your hands and feet and return.”

When I went back to him, he gave me a puja and said, “You must do puja daily. I will teach you how.” Then, he showed me. He prepared the sandalwood paste for applying the *tilak*, by adding a few drops of water in his own palm and mixed the sandalwood stick. He applied a *tilak-chandlo* to my forehead. Then, he taught me how to turn the *mala*. When I tried to perform *tapni mala*, I fell. So, Bapa himself stood on one leg, showed me and told me to focus on the *murtis* in front. Bapa had to leave at 3.30 p.m. for the neighbouring village, so Viveksagar Swami [then, as Narayan Bhagat] said to Swamishri, “You rest. I will teach him.” Swami Bapa said, “For me, this is rest.” Then, he taught me to sing *dhun*, “*Swami ane Narayan, Akshar ane Purushottam...*” He would sing and I would repeat. He then had me write the prayer “*Ame sau Swaminā bālak...*” and taught me how to sing it.

Thus, he stayed up all afternoon to give me training. By the time he had finished, it was time for him to leave, so without rest, he departed.

Since that day, till today I have been serving as a BAPS *karyakar*. When I face challenges, I remember that Swami Bapa stayed up to teach me and am invigorated.

In 2011, I had a heart operation and the doctors advised that I should not travel too much or exert myself unduly. So, I thought about leaving my post as a *karyakar*, but in hospital I recalled Bapa’s words from that afternoon: “For me, this is rest.”



Swamishri blesses Shri Dashrathbhai Dhodi

Due to his loving guidance, I resolved to continue and serve for life as a *karyakar*.

ARVINDBHAI PATEL/DASHRATHBHAI DHODI Khodali, Selvas



I live in the tribal area of Selvas (Dadra and Nagar Haveli). My village is Khodali, 14 km from Selvas. It is a remote village. Dashrathbhai Dhodi is from our village and due to polio in childhood, he has great difficulty in walking.

On 3 February 1994, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had come to Selvas mandir. I was serving there as a *karyakar*. Dashrathbhai decided to go for Bapa’s darshan. At 6.00 a.m. he went to the bus stand, but no buses came. So, he started to walk. By afternoon, he had covered only 7 km and reached Rakholi village. After a little rest, a rickshaw took him a further 3 km. He waited for another vehicle, but none came. Walking slowly and with great difficulty, he reached Selvas mandir at 10.30 p.m. There, he met Anandmurti Swami, who took him towards Bapa’s room. But Bapa had retired to rest. So, Anandmurti Swami told Dashrathbhai that it was not possible to have darshan now.

It was the month of Posh and the weather was cold. Swamishri had the flu, yet he had gone to the neighbouring village in the afternoon.

Then, Anandmurti Swami went into Swamishri’s room and whispered to Chinmay Swami about Dashrathbhai. Swamishri overheard them and

asked “Who has come?” Chinmay Swami said, “A youth had come, but it’s late so there’s no need to see him now.” Swamishri said, “I am not sleeping. Call him. I will meet him now,” and got up from his bed. Due to his flu and the cold, he kept the blanket wrapped around him. When Anandmurti Swami came out, Dashrathbhai was not there. I ran and found him and brought him to Swamishri’s room. Bapa showered so much affection on him. He asked, “You are handicapped, so how did you come?” Dashrathbhai explained the details of his journey. Swamishri looked at the sadhus and said, “See, he has such difficulties, so that’s why he arrived so late. So, a little delay in my rest is not a problem.” Swamishri met him unhurriedly, asking about his home, family and occupation.

Swamishri asked Dashrathbhai, “On the way, did you eat?” “No,” he replied. Swamishri arranged for him to eat and then retired to sleep after 11.00 p.m.

Dashrathbhai added, emotionally, “That day, I was so tired after walking so much, but when I had Bapa’s darshan, all my fatigue disappeared. Since then, whenever I recall that *murti* of Bapa wrapped in a blanket, I feel great joy.”

YOGESHBHAI VANDRA

Khambha, Amreli



I am a native of Khambha village in the Amreli district. I was raised in this little-developed village, in a poor and socially challenged family. My father, Keshavlal, had been profusely blessed by Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

I studied up to Standard 10 in the village school. I did not even know that I could study further. But, Pramukh Swami Maharaj told me and in 1987 arranged for me to study in Vidyanagar and stay at the BAPS Chhatralaya there. Swamishri arranged for all the fees, since my father could not afford them.

Since I was from a small village, I suffered

from an inferiority complex and found it difficult to adjust to life in the *chhatralaya*. Yagnapriya Swami informed Swamishri about this. Swamishri asked me, “What do you find difficult?”

I did not have anything specific in mind, but I said, “I don’t like the food.” Then he reminded me that two years previously I had told him that when I eat *ganthiya* and *marcha* (peppers) I get problems. At that time Swamishri had stroked his hand over my abdomen, blessed me and said, “Now, nothing will happen.” And, in fact, now I have no difficulty eating them.

So, Swamishri said, “If you don’t like the food, take one morsel, then drink some water. You will gradually like it.”

Then, he asked, “What other difficulties do you have?” I said, “Bapa, I don’t have a blanket or pillow.” He called Sadhujiwan Swami to make the arrangements.

Swamishri asked, “How do you go to school?” I said I walked. So, Swamishri told Yagnapriya Swami to arrange a cycle for me.

Again Swamishri asked, “What else?” So, I told him about my main problem, “I am struggling in studies and my shy nature is hindering me.”

Suddenly, he said, “Do you dig a grave before someone’s death?” He guided me in detail and even today I remember his words. Due to his encouragement, from 60% in my 10th I got 84% in my 12th Science exam. Then, Swamishri arranged my higher studies and I graduated in electric engineering. He even guided me on finding a job. Six months later while I was serving in the Amrut Mahotsav, I met Swamishri along with other *chhatralaya* students. When he asked me about my job I told him that I did not have one.

Immediately, he called Bhagvacharan Swami and said, “I had told you that we must educate this boy, arrange for his job, and his marriage. And even arrange for the education of his children.”

And, even after arranging a job, he continued to care for me and my family.

Due to Swamishri’s love, I was able to

overcome my inferiority complex. Raised in a poor family, and shy to speak in front of even a few people, I am able to stand before you all today and speak because of Swamishri's motivation, blessings and affection.

Swamishri blessed me in every aspect of my life. He has blessed my children. And so I have no worries at all.

How can I ever forget this selfless love that Swamishri showered upon me.

PUJYA KOTHARI BHAKTIPRIYA SWAMI



In 1960, I received *parshad diksha* from Yogiji Maharaj. The previous year, in 1959, I was planning with other youths to spend the summer vacation with Yogiji Maharaj. We learnt that he would be travelling in the villages around Atladara. I went to Atladara and planned to ask someone how I could reach Yogiji Maharaj.

As I entered the mandir, I met Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I had not interacted with him much before but I asked him, "Where is Yogiji Maharaj and how can I reach him?" Pramukh Swami told me, "He is in Jambusar and a bus that leaves from outside our mandir will take you there." Then he added, "There's still plenty of time. Come, let us talk."

So, we sat under a fan in the small assembly hall. He sat me opposite and began to talk. He said, "Bhagwan Swaminarayan manifested and spread this divine Satsang. The 500 *paramhansas* toured the villages. They faced many difficulties – even beatings. Even in Shastriji Maharaj's time there were no such extreme hardships. And now, in Yogiji Maharaj's time, there are no hardships at all like this. Everyone honours us. See, we're seated here under a fan. So, in this Satsang, we must keep our focus on the Satpurush. Just like in the ocean there are big fish, small fish, pearls and many other things, but what does a *marjiva* focus on? The pearls. Similarly in the ocean of Satsang, Yogiji Maharaj is like a pearl, so focus on him. Focus on

the Satpurush." He explained this principle to me.

Another thing he said, "What should one do to remain strong and firm in Satsang? Never listen to discouraging talks." Then, he narrated his own story, "When I was small, I came to Atladara mandir and sat with a devotee. While he was talking, Shastriji Maharaj passed by. He saw me talking to that devotee. When that devotee had finished, I went to meet Shastriji Maharaj in his room. Shastriji Maharaj told me, "Do not sit with that devotee, because his talks discourage. And by listening to his talks, one's satsang declines. We must strive to progress in satsang, and for that, you must listen to encouraging talks." Thus, with such foresight, he told me this, since he knew that in future we would face such situations. So, if one's focus remains on the Satpurush, then one continues to progress.

So, just as a child is guided in his formative years, Swamishri guided me then. His talks have enabled me to remain firm. He had no selfish motive. He wanted only to help us to progress.

DR HARISHBHAI TRIVEDI Ahmedabad (Video Interview)

In the 1970s and 1980s, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *vicharan* was relentless, day and night. At that time, I was serving as a surgeon in Kheda. Whenever Swamishri went from Ahmedabad to Vadodara, Mumbai or South Gujarat, his route would take him past Kheda. So, once, I said to him, "My bungalow is not far from the highway, so if you could come there once, everyone would be delighted." Swamishri promised to come.

Some time later, he made a surprise, unannounced visit. The driver told him, "Doctor Saheb's house is locked and he doesn't seem to be at home."

Swamishri said, "Let's go anyway." So, he got out of the car, climbed the steps, touched the door with his hand and returned to sit in the car.

After some time, when I met him in Ahmedabad, he said, "Trivedi Saheb, I have

obeyed your *agna*. I had bid ‘Jai Swaminarayan’ to your door lock!”

I realized then how seriously he took my casual invitation.

AMITBHAI BRAHMABHATT

Nadiad (Video Interview)

Once, my daughter contracted a fever and as a result suffered from fits. The doctor advised me to take her to Ahmedabad. So, we left for Ahmedabad. But, on the way, she went into a coma. We took her to a reputable hospital in Ahmedabad. Seeing a photo of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the hospital I felt that everything would be fine.

I phoned Pramukh Swami Maharaj and informed him about my daughter’s situation. He gave me much courage and blessings. Then, for the next nine days, at around 6.30 p.m., he would phone, ask for an update and give his blessings. He told me, “You do not worry. I am praying to Maharaj-Swami, Harikrishna Maharaj”.

Daily, he phoned, showered his affection and removed our tension in such trying circumstances. I will never forget him.

SUNILBHAI TALATI

Ahmedabad



Until I was 40 years old, I had no knowledge of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. My first introduction was when Gandhinagar Akshardham was inaugurated in 1992. At that time my friend, Dr Mrudul Parekh, arranged for Dr Swami to visit my home. Thereafter, I had darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Akshardham Mandir. Subsequently, many important changes took place in my life.

In 1992, I had the opportunity of serving BAPS in my professional capacity as a chartered accountant, during which I experienced Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s divine personality.

Between 1992 and 1995, I met and was blessed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj many times.

However, in 1995, I suffered two car accidents and discovered that my eyesight was in jeopardy. There was a possibility I would lose my eyesight within a few years. I met several of India’s leading eye doctors and they all told me that over a period of six to seven years my eyesight would decline and I would become blind. They advised me to leave my practice.

So, I went to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and he blessed me, “Sunilbhai, do not worry. You will be able to have darshan of God for the rest of your life.” Due to this, even in the darkness of this evening, I can see you all.

Then, two years later, I suffered from a serious kidney problem. The doctors predicted that I would need a kidney transplant within three years and advised me to begin to look for a donor.

My health continued to decline. I was losing protein and my body temperature rose to 107°F. I was taken to hospital. Pramukh Swami Maharaj found out about this and sent four sadhus to see me. Swamishri blessed me, “Sunilbhai, do not worry. Everything will be fine.” And, in three days, I was well enough to return home and I am now standing before you.

In 1999–2000, there was a state election in The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India. Pramukh Swami Maharaj spent one hour with me. He blessed me and we discussed many other things. At that time, I also had the opportunity of entering politics, so I asked him what I should do. He advised, “You do not need to enter politics. Progress in the chartered accountants institute.” In the election, I stood against someone who had defeated everyone over the previous nine years. After the election, as the votes were being counted, we were level. I went to the mandir at 10.30 a.m. Darshan was closed, but for one hour I turned the *mala* and prayed to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. After, one hour, darshan opened and the result was declared in my favour.

But, my biggest experience was in 2007, when, with his blessings, I was elected as

national president of The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India. For 60 years, all the presidents had been from Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata or Chennai. I was the first from Gujarat.

It is due to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings that I am here before you today. That is why I will never forget him.

NAZEEM AL KUDSI

Abu Dhabi (Speech in English)



Salaam Alaikum.

Jai Swaminarayan.

Today, I am delighted to be present in the land of the Vedas. Also, I am happy to be in the land sanctified by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's true family.

I have a little story to tell you tonight. A story perhaps that can pay back a very very small percentage for what I have received from Pramukh Swami. I was born in the city of Aleppo in northern Syria. The city of Aleppo was one of the most important cities on the Silk Road. Your grandfathers and great-grandfathers, the Indian traders from the state of Gujarat and elsewhere, used to go down this road and dominate the Silk Road.

My grandfather was the president of Syria, and my father was the Chief of Protocol for the United Arab Emirates government. Because of my work and circumstances, I have had the chance to meet many world leaders and presidents from the US to Russia to China and many, many other countries.

But, what happened to me in 2012, the most auspicious year of my life, was like nothing that I had experienced before.

The grace of the guru brought me to a specific place at a specific time. I sat there at the mandir and Pramukh Swami, as he was passing by, looked into my eyes. He gazed into my eyes. That *agni* that day I shall never forget. That *agni* was not the kind of *agni* you might think of as the *agni* that burns. It was an *agni* that gives you warmth in one of the coldest nights up in the Himalayas.



Swamishri presents a memento to Nazeem al Kudsi

I knew on the spot, that second, that my life was about to take a major turn. Pramukh Swami asked me to come upstairs. There, as I knelt at his feet, I asked him a question, "Guruji, I have a strong feeling in the sense that I need to go to nature. Somewhere far away." In the back of my head, I thought that the guru will send me to some mandir or ashram in the mountains.

But, the guru said, "The time has come for you to get in touch with your true nature; for you to embrace your true nature, not any other nature."

For a man who has lived most of his life as very independent and very strong, at that second I felt the love of a mother engulfing me. I felt so defenceless, and at the same time, so reliant on that love. It was the most amazing, powerful pouring of love that I have ever experienced in my life.

That love I experienced that day with Pramukh Swami was the kind of love that did not discriminate against me because I am of a certain colour, certain religion or certain culture. That love took me and accepted me the way I am. I have never, ever experienced that kind of love.

I would love to say that Pramukh Swami was a father to me also – of course he was. But, deep inside, every one of you knows that the love of a mother is irreplaceable. That was the love that Pramukh Swami gave me that day.

What has followed is the most amazing experience of my life. You see, the idea of a temple in the Middle East – the land of Arabia – started being talked about. Being a man who lives in *maya*,

my mind was telling me that this is a very very difficult proposition. But I had to be polite and had to be diplomatic to the swamis as they talked about the idea.

I started a wonderful association with Brahnavihari Swami. One day, he shared with me a quote from the late President Kalam, President of India, when the guru told him that for a person, rather than organizing his words in his prayers, instead, it is far more important that he should organize his heart.

And, as I tried to lower the power of my mind, a mind that has been technically trained through the years, and let my heart take over I saw the impossible start taking shape.

You see, what the guru, what Pramukh Swami has done, no other politician or businessman or anybody else would be able to achieve. Through his grace, all members of society, from the ruling class to senior civil servants to leaders of the business community and others, were all collaborating for this temple to become a reality.

Through these few years that I have been blessed, I have learnt that the power of bhakti, the power of devotion, is the most powerful energy in this universe. And no matter what other means there are, unless there is bhakti nothing can happen.

Tonight, I stand here humbly asking the permission of Mahant Swami Maharaj that I become a volunteer at that temple and that I get the opportunity to clean the floors of that temple.

And if I can leave one final thought, that *agni* that I felt that day, that warmth that one needs in the coldest of nights up very high in the mountains, I started feeling again tonight as I looked in the eyes of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

PUJYA TYAGVALLABH SWAMI



Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Bochasan. He was scheduled to go from there to Atladara for the Vasant Panchami celebration. Swamishri called me and

said, “This time, we will go to Atladara via Vasad and on the way go to Jitodia to visit the home of our dedicated devotee Ishwarbhai.”

Ishwarbhai was in poor health and had much affection for Swamishri. I informed the *karyakars* in Jitodia of Swamishri’s wish. A few days later, when Swamishri visited, many devotees had gathered, so Ishwarbhai’s bed had been brought out into the compound. A cot had been placed next to it. Swamishri sat in the middle, Viveksagar Swami sat to his right and I sat to his left. To my left was a wooden chair with armrests. A large all-in-one *murti* had been placed on the armrests and on the seat of the chair a *divo* had been lit and placed.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj stroked his hand over Ishwarbhai’s body, blessed him profusely and talked to him. Meanwhile, someone brought a large plate of fruits, which they placed on the armrests before the *murti*. After a while, Swamishri told me to offer the *thal* to Thakorji and give it to a *karyakar* to distribute among the devotees. As I was about to give the *thal* to a *karyakar*, Swamishri himself took the plate from me, turned it and told the *karyakar* that the plate was very hot on the other side. I did not realize at the time what had happened, but when we sat back in the car, Swamishri said, “If we have any Burnol cream, I can apply it to my finger.” That’s when I realized that a blister had developed on the tip of the first finger of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s right hand.

I was shocked, realizing that the metallic dish in which the *thal* had been offered had become hot due to the *divo* under it and Swamishri had handled that hot side. Even if the end of a lit *agarbatti* touches us, we scream, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not make a sound. It was a measure of his *atmanishtha* that he could lift such a hot plate. Whenever I recall this event, I am saddened. Then, after the Vasant Panchami festival in Atladara, I went to take leave of Swamishri before returning to Bochasan. I prayed to him, “Swami! Please forgive me for this mistake.” But, Swamishri totally denied any problem. Such was

his forgiving nature. The fault was indeed mine and I deserved to be told off, but he did not utter a word about it. Such was his tolerance. If someone else had lifted that hot plate they would have dropped it, but not Swamishri.

Everyone participating in today's celebration will have a joyful memory of Swamishri. But, this was a sad occasion for me in my life. Even today, I can see that blister on Swamishri's finger. This memory reminds me of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's divine and forgiving personality.

PUJYA BRAHMAVIHARI SWAMI



After Swamishri went to Dham, memorial assemblies in his honour were held throughout the world – from small villages to large cities.

One night, I received a phone call from Shri Keshav Kumar, a senior high-ranking IAS officer, who said he wanted to meet me. So, he came to the mandir. There was much joy writ on his face. He said, "Please call Pramukh Swamiji right now. It's about 9.00 p.m., so he will have eaten. I have some good news to tell him."

I thought to myself about how much this person is connected to Swamishri – he knows Swamishri would eat at 8.30 and engage in other work from 9.00 p.m. But, I became hesitant, because Swamishri had returned to Dham. Slowly, I told him, "Saheb, Swamishri has gone to Dham!"

Hearing this, he became despondent and tearful. I added, "Saheb, you even attended Swamishri's memorial assembly in Gandhinagar. So, what can explain this experience of yours?" He replied, "Swami, what can I do? I am unable to forget Pramukh Swamiji. When I first came to Gujarat, Swamishri was the first to garland me. He even blessed me when I got married. Whenever I had a new posting, he blessed me. When I went to study in London, he looked after me like a son. Pramukh Swamiji has cared for me in all ways. That's why I cannot forget Pramukh Swamiji."

Hearing his words, I, too, became emotional recalling our debt to Swamishri. I was deeply touched by this example of how much a guru cares for all.

This is the core of our *sampradaya*: undivided devotion to our guru. Ours is a guru-centric *sampradaya*. This is especially experienced in the lives of all our gurus. Gunatitanand Swami did not forget Bhagwan Swaminarayan for even a moment. Bhagatji Maharaj was lost in Gunatit, whether awake or in deep sleep. I have heard from Harshadbhai Dave that Shastriji Maharaj would awake in the middle of the night hailing, "Pragji... Pragji..." Whenever Shastriji Maharaj said "Yogi", Yogiji Maharaj would leave even his meal and run to him. It is almost 70 years since Shastriji Maharaj returned to Dham, 50 years since Yogiji Maharaj returned to Dham, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj offered such devotion to his gurus that we feel their presence even today. Never has Pramukh Swami Maharaj let us forget Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

And, now, when we speak to Mahant Swami Maharaj to seek his guidance and blessings, he always says, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj has blessed you,... Bapa has said so... Bapa himself has done this..."

In this *sampradaya*, devotion to the guru is undivided. Pramukh Swami Maharaj gave the credit for all his accomplishments to his gurus.

Whenever I remember this following incident, I am deeply moved from within.

In 2011, Swamishri was in Atladara. He had slipped in the bathroom and suffered a minor injury to his back. As a result, some changes were made to his schedule to go to Godhra and Bodeli to consecrate the new BAPS mandirs there.

First, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* in Godhra and then went to Bodeli. There, on 13 March, the *adivasi* devotees had arranged a large assembly. That morning Swamishri developed a fever. He rested until 6.30 p.m. in his room. Outside, the assembly began in the

presence of around 25,000 devotees.

Swamishri's seat had been arranged on stage. At that time, Yogicharan Swami phoned me and said, "Please come here immediately with Viveksagar Swami, Narayanmuni Swami and Divyaswarup Swami."

The situation was that Swamishri had a high fever, yet he wanted to go to the assembly.

When we reached the room, Swamishri was lying in bed amid dim light. He was covered up to his face in a blanket and was shivering. Seeing us, Swamishri said, "I know why you have all come."

Viveksagar Swami asked, "Bapa! How is your health?"

Swamishri replied, "It's good."

Viveksagar Swami said, "But you have a fever."

Swamishri said, "The fever comes and goes."

Viveksagar Swami said, "There is no need to go to the assembly."

Swamishri said, "But, I do want to go to the assembly."

Yogicharan Swami said, "The doctors have said that you should not go outside."

Swamishri said, "The doctors are right in their own way, but I want to go."

Yogicharan Swami said, "Bapa! You have a fever and are shivering. In this situation, it's better you do not go out. This is all done with much thought."

Swamishri said, "I'm not saying that you have not thought about this, but I want to go for Thakorji's darshan."

Yogicharan Swami said, "You did have darshan in the morning."

Swamishri said, "I want to go again."

Softly, Narayancharan Swami said, "If you remove the fever we can go."

Swamishri said, "If we go, the fever will subside. It won't go while lying here!"

Then, I mustered the courage to ask, "If you were Shastriji Maharaj's attendant and he was ill, he had a fever, was shivering and had a variable heartbeat, would you take Shastriji

Maharaj outside?"

Swamishri said, "Yes, I would take Shastriji Maharaj outside." Then, he added, "Had you seen Shastriji Maharaj?" I said, "No."

Swamishri said, "I have seen Shastriji Maharaj. He would have arthritis pain in his legs, a fever and yet would spread a thin mattress in a bullock cart and still go for *padhramanis*. I have seen Shastriji Maharaj do *padhramanis* even when he was ill."

Swamishri was immersed in devotion to his gurus. Then, softly, Swamishri said, "You are all right in your way. But in your mind you fear that if I go out and something happens, who will be responsible? Give me a pen and paper and I will write that I am responsible for whatever happens. But, let me go to the assembly."

Keeping his focus on his gurus, Swamishri has lived his life for others.

India's former president and eminent scientist, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, regarded Swamishri as his guru and wrote the book *Transcendence*. Dr Kalam had met many dignitaries and spiritual leaders, but he said that Pramukh Swami Maharaj is "my ultimate teacher." This was not merely words, but he lived accordingly. It was decided to hold a grand book launch ceremony in Delhi in the presence of dignitaries from India and abroad. At that time Dr Kalam said, "There are seven billion people on this earth, but for me Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the most important. I just want to present the book only to him." One month after he did this, Dr Kalam passed away.

Ten days before he passed away, we went to meet him at his residence. His secretary, R.K. Prasad said, "Swami! After Dr Kalam returned from giving his *Transcendence* book to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, there has been a total transformation. He has taken all his certificates and awards in his office and home and packed them away in the cupboards. He has even rolled up his Bharat Ratna and placed it in a wooden box. All he keeps next to his seat now is a photo of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and an elephant like

the one he saw next to Pramukh Swami Maharaj when they met in Sarangpur, which we purchased from here.”

In the true sense, he was immersed in his guru – Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

If true devotion towards one’s guru arises in one’s heart, then all one’s accomplishments are seen as insignificant.

PUJYA AKSHARVATSAL SWAMI



On the morning of 7 July 1998 at the Lenox Hill Hospital in New York, experienced cardiologists, Dr Jeffrey Moses and Dr William Schwarz, performed Swamishri’s angiography. They noted that whereas, normally, people undergoing angiography are anxious, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was joyful and engaged in cheerful conversation.

Within 15 minutes, they realized that Swamishri’s heart situation was critical. They met Viveksagar Swami, Dr K.C. Patel and others and said, “Swamiji looks healthy, but he is not. His heart condition is critical. He is sitting on a volcano which may erupt at any moment! He needs to undergo bypass surgery immediately.” So, all preparations began. Head of the Lenox Hill cardiothoracic division, Dr V.A. Subramanian prepared his operating team and theatre. When Pramukh Swami Maharaj was informed of what needed to be done, he merely said, “Whatever God wishes and slept soundly for two hours. At 10.00 a.m. when he awoke, he was informed that everything was ready for his operation. Swamishri asked, “How long will the surgery take?” He was told that it would take about six hours.

So, Swamishri said, “Then we will go for the operation at 3.00 p.m.” Everyone was surprised. In such a life-threatening situation, why has Swamishri delayed the surgery? Nobody knew. Meanwhile, Swamishri told me to read from the *Haricharitramrut Sagar* text.

When Swamishri went for the operation at

3.00 p.m., he ensured Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was present with him inside the theatre and placed directly opposite him. After six hours, Swamishri was brought out of the theatre.

A few days later, while conversing with him, we learnt the reason why he had insisted on delaying the operation. He explained that if they had started at 10.00 a.m. and the operation would take six hours, then Shri Harikrishna Maharaj’s lunch and afternoon rest would have been disturbed. But if the surgery started at three, then everything could be taken care of. Thus, even at the risk to his life, he did not compromise in his undivided devotion to Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Initially, after the operation, Swamishri did not regain consciousness all night. This worried the doctors.

At 5.30 a.m., Viveksagar Swami and I went for his darshan in the ICU. Swamishri was connected to various tubes and had an oxygen mask around his mouth.

Viveksagar Swami said, “Jai Swaminarayan.” Swamishri slowly opened his eyes and on seeing Viveksagar Swami, he smiled. The doctors removed the tubes from his mouth and placed another mask over his mouth.

We asked Swamishri, “Do you want to say anything?” Swamishri’s lips were moving, but because of the mask, it was not audible. We went closer and heard him say, “Thakorji.” Immediately, Tyagswarup Swami came with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and held him in front of Swamishri. He wore glasses and in the initial moments after gaining consciousness, Swamishri had darshan with great devotion and faith.

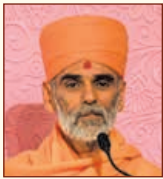
Despite his weakness, he lifted his two hands, but they were restrained by many tubes. Yet, despite this, he brought his trembling hands together and bowed his head to Thakorji, saying, “Maharaj-Swami! Thakorji has given darshan. Jai Swaminarayan.”

Even today, this memory of Swamishri’s devotion to Thakorji fills me with emotion. I had

heard about his undivided faith and devotion to Thakorji, but that day I experienced it.

I will never forget this.

PUJYA ANANDSWARUP SWAMI



Lakhs of devotees are indebted to Pramukh Swami Maharaj for the gift of *brahmavidya*. *Brahmavidya* covers a wide range of things. At one end is deaddiction and at the other is God-realization. Whoever has come into Swamishri's contact has become free of addictions, free of bad traits, experienced peace, developed faith in God, attained knowledge of one's true form and learnt how to offer devotion to God.

The following story is in relation to peace. In 1982, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited Leicester in England. A public satsang assembly had been arranged in Granby Halls. While Viveksagar Swami was discoursing, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was on stage writing letters. A British gentleman named Frank came there and told me that he wanted to meet Pramukh Swami Maharaj urgently. He explained, "My son committed suicide and people are saying that it was because we had not given him enough love. I am in great distress."

I briefed Pramukh Swami Maharaj about this and then took Frank to meet him. Pramukh Swami Maharaj listened to everything he said and then asked, "Had you given him your love?" He replied, "Yes, we had given him our 100% love."

Swamishri said, "Then, do not worry about what others say. In God's eyes you are innocent."

Then, Swamishri told him three things, "Pray daily to God for the peace of your son's soul. Second, go to church every Sunday." And for the third, Swamishri told me to tell him to tithe.

I was taken aback and thought to myself that since this person is not a devotee, how can I ask him to donate. Pramukh Swami Maharaj realized my confusion and explained, "I don't mean that he donates to our mandir, but to his church."

So, I told this to Frank. After we left, Frank

told me, "I have never experienced such peace before in my life. I am really indebted to Pramukh Swami Maharaj."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has granted lakhs of people an experience of peace. Not only peace, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj has enabled them to realize *atma* and Paramatma. The senior sadhus seated here on this stage have experienced this knowledge of *atma* and Paramatma.

There is a large community of sadhus and devotees who are unaffected by base inner natures, experience peace and have faith that they have attained *moksha*.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has so effortlessly granted us *brahmavidya* that we can never forget him. Swamishri forever resides in us all. To continue our experience of *brahmavidya* and to liberate countless *jivas*, he has given us the gift of Mahant Swami Maharaj.

PUJYA ISHWARCHARAN SWAMI



I have been associated with the Swaminarayan Sampradaya since childhood. And, ever since then, I have been drawn to Pramukh Swami Maharaj's personality. As a youth I had the opportunity to travel with him. After becoming a sadhu, I got to know him even more. I had heard his glory from Yogiji Maharaj and experienced his saintliness. My reverence for him increased.

In 1969, Yogiji Maharaj was performing the *murti-pratishtha* in Bhadra, and he was delighted that a beautiful *shikharbaddha* mandir had been built over the birthplace of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami where Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj would be consecrated. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had contributed greatly to building the mandir. And I was also fortunate to serve in the project.

On the day of the *murti-pratishtha*, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Sant Swami, other sadhus and many devotees were present

around the small *garbhagruha* area. So, I sat in a raised 4-ft. recess along one of the walls for darshan.

The ritual of placing the *murtis* on the *sinhasan* was to be performed. First, though, the spot had to be filled with cement. Pramukh Swami Maharaj started looking for me, but he did not spot me. He called out my name several times, and then saw me. He immediately grabbed my hand and pulled me down. He said, “I have been calling you to place some cement on this spot.”

In this way, Pramukh Swami Maharaj insisted on me performing the rituals during the *murti-pratishtha*, since he had involved me in preparing the *sinhasan*. Swamishri never forgot even the smallest service performed by anyone.

In 1981, during the *murti-pratishtha* of Shastriji Maharaj’s Smruti Mandir in Sarangpur, I was standing in a corner. After the rituals and *arti*, Swamishri saw me. He pulled my hand, drew me near and said, “This *sinhasan* is very nice. You have made it as I wished by having the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj above that of Shastriji Maharaj.” Again, he acknowledged even this small *seva*.

The Satpurush always regards us as his own and gives much joy, because he has a place for everyone in his heart.

In 1985, the grand celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami’s bicentenary took place in Ahmedabad. On 12 December, the last of the 59-day celebrations, the then President of India, Shri Gyani Zail Singh was due to visit. It was the first time an Indian president had graced one of our functions. He gave a great speech and even placed a personal donation before Thakorji.

After the president had departed, Swamishri was seated on a sofa in his meeting room. In front, I and several other sadhus were sitting on the floor. Next to Swamishri, the sofa for the president was empty. Swamishri suddenly grabbed and pulled my hand, said, “You are our Zail Singh” and insisted that I sit on that sofa.

Swamishri is our guru, so it is not appropriate

to sit like this, yet he forced me to sit on the sofa. Swamishri was in a divine joyous mood since the celebrations had taken place smoothly. Many leading dignitaries from throughout India had come and the programmes had been good.

In this way, the Satpurush gives us much joy. How can we forget such a divine Satpurush. We are truly fortunate.

PUJYA DOCTOR SWAMI



When I first entered Satsang, I did not know who Pramukh Swami Maharaj was. I only found out that he is the president of BAPS after several years.

In 1965, Shastriji Maharaj’s centenary celebrations were to be celebrated. The committee had decided to invite the president of India to the celebration. For this, I was to accompany Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the plane to Delhi. It was my first time on a plane. Pramukh Swami Maharaj sat by the window and I was sitting in the adjacent seat. After take off, I tried to look out of the window to see what the ground looked like. Pramukh Swami Maharaj realized this, and immediately got up and said, “Please, you sit by the window.” I experienced then how he understood other people’s feelings and how helpful he was to others.

In February 1983, Swamishri suffered a heart attack in the village of Sundalpura. I was in a nearby village, so, on receiving the news we rushed there. Then, Mahant Swami also arrived from a nearby village. Even though he had suffered a heart attack, Swamishri worried about Mahant Swami’s lunch and asked his attendant sadhus, “Have you made *mung* for Mahant Swami?” This again reflected his natural instinct of helping and thinking of others.

The scriptures state that one quality of a *sant* is the ability to understand the needs of others.

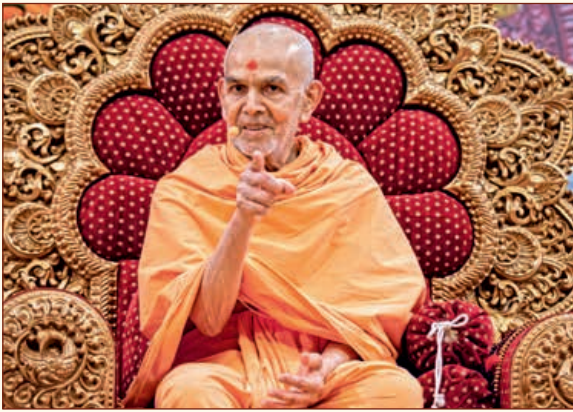
Another quality is that of *samdrashti*: whether a person is young or old, famous or ordinary, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, and regardless of

their community, country or faith, he treats all with genuine equal respect.

After his 1977 overseas satsang tour, Swamishri was in an assembly in Atladara in which several dignitaries and devotees were present. During the assembly Mahiji, an unkempt local devotee, entered. At the time, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was discoursing on Gunatitanand Swami's Vato. Despite this, Mahiji made his way to the front and stood in the middle with folded hands. I was sitting next to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and was irritated by this. However, unfazed, Pramukh Swami Maharaj patiently and lovingly blessed him. Swamishri gave respect to all.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has said, "There is no greater status than that of a Sadhu." It is also possible to define a sadhu as one who lives for others. This sentiment was practised by Pramukh Swami Maharaj throughout his entire life.

PARAM PUJYA MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ



Pramukh Swami Maharaj was everyone's friend. He loved all and gave joy to all, regardless of their worldly status.

Swami Bapa was a very humble person. His humility was mountainous, like Mt. Meru. Shriji Maharaj has said that God resides in a humble sadhu. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was such a sadhu of Himalayan humility.

Swami Bapa was very straightforward. Yogi Bapa used to say that one should always be straightforward. This is what Pramukh Swami Maharaj

did. He even forsaked his own wishes to comply with the wishes of others. His speech was very simple and sweet. There was never any arrogance or hypocrisy in it. He always spoke his mind. Shriji Maharaj has said, "God likes one who has a straightforward nature. One who is not straightforward cannot be regarded as a sadhu or devotee." Swamishri had many such virtues. And so, God resided in him eternally. There is no doubt in this.

Swami Bapa never had any barriers with anyone. He accepted all. God resides in such a sadhu.

For over 60 years, Swami Bapa gave everyone much joy. He would say, "A turban fits on one's head and one's head fits into the turban." Similarly, he interacted seamlessly with all.

Swami Bapa never talked about needs for himself. Once, we tried to talk to him about such things, but he reversed everything and started talking about our needs.

He did not like being honoured. Yet, to keep us happy, he would accept accolades from us. In his heart, there was nothing except Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.

Once, in Bochasan, Yogiji Maharaj was honoured in a procession. After it, when Yogi Bapa went for a bath, the youths said, "Bapa! The *na-gar-yatra* was great. Outstanding." Yogiji Bapa, in his typical style said, "Yes, I have attained Shastriji Maharaj, so I am in peace."

I thought about what Yogiji Bapa said and realized that for Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, their gurus were foremost in their minds. For them, having attained the guru was everything. Pramukh Swami Maharaj has offered devotion while keeping his gurus at the forefront.

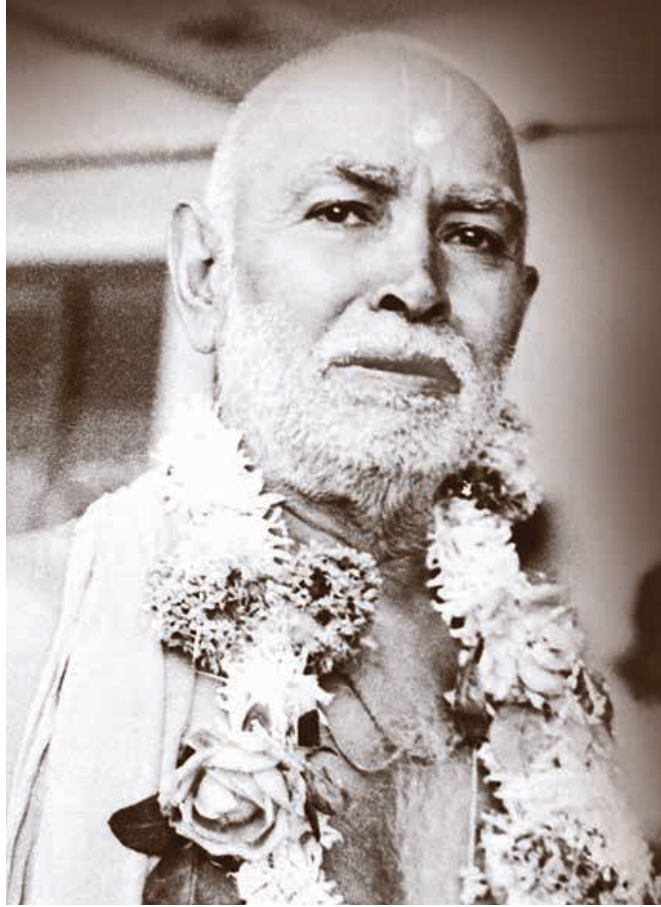
Swami Bapa's devotion to Thakorji was exemplary. For him, God was actually manifest in the *murti*. It is difficult to attain such feelings.

Such was Bapa's life and we have many things to learn from it. ♦

*Translated by Sadhu Amrutvijaydas
from Swaminarayan Prakash, January 2018*

BRAHMASWARUP SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ

Propagator of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan



Standing up for the truth amid a barrage of opposition and at the risk of one's life requires conviction, commitment, courage and character. Shastriji Maharaj had them in abundance and that is why he remained resolute and successfully revived the philosophy of Akshar and Purushottam as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut. A thousand prostrations to Shastriji Maharaj on the occasion of his birthday celebration on Vasant Panchami, 22 January 2018, Gondal...



INTRODUCTION

Shastriji Maharaj was a spiritual dynamo, constantly energizing his devotees with the qualities of optimism, enthusiasm, duty and dedication. As a leader he was incomparable. He led by example, with his dynamic, disciplined, determined, decisive, daring, dependable and diplomatic style, generating the desired dedication from his sadhus and devotees. His saintly virtues of devotion, detachment, spiritual wisdom, compassion and many other qualities charged everyone in a similar way. Shastriji Maharaj's powerful and

magnetic personality left a deep impression on everyone who came into his contact.

After learning from guru Bhagatji Maharaj the true interpretation of the Akshar-Purushottam doctrine revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Shastriji Maharaj unceasingly imparted it to others.

Shastriji Maharaj's decision to depart from Vartal after tolerating years of hostility, saddened many *satsangis*. Among them was Dolatram Kripashankar Pandya, a renowned Sanskrit Scholar, Gujarati poet and a member of the Vartal

Temple Committee. Having known Shastriji Maharaj for many years, he knew that Shastriji Maharaj would never do anything that was contrary to Bhagwan Swaminarayan's true principles. So, he asked Shastriji Maharaj, "I know that you would not leave without a true reason. So please explain to me this principle."

Accordingly, Shastriji Maharaj explained, "In the mandirs Shriji Maharaj built, he consecrated the *murtis* of Gopinathji, Nar-Narayan, Lakshmi-Narayan, Radha-Krishna and others. Maharaj himself was supreme God and the source of all avatars, yet to appease others, he consecrated his own *murti* only in Vartal. However, in Vachanamrut Gadhada II 21, Shriji Maharaj has revealed the essential principle to be understood by all spiritual aspirants to attain ultimate *moksha*. In it he says, 'If a person realizes the greatness of manifest God and his holy Sadhu in exactly the same way as he realizes the greatness of past avatars of God such as Ram, Krishna, etc., as well as the greatness of past sadhus such as Narad, the Sanakadik, Shukji, Jadbharat, Hanuman, Uddhav etc. – then nothing remains to be understood on the path of liberation.'

"On the basis of this Vachanamrut, Shriji Maharaj is himself the manifest form of God and Gunatitanand Swami is the manifest form of his holy Sadhu. So, only if one understands their true glory and consecrates mandirs with their *murtis* in the central shrine has the fundamental principle been understood fully. Also, just as God and his ideal devotee are worshipped together, for example, Radha and Krishna, Nar and Narayan, Lakshmi and Narayan, Sita and Ram, similarly Shriji Maharaj has instructed that one should attain virtues like his ideal devotee, Aksharbrahman, and offer worship to him, Purushottam. So just as Radha with Krishna is Radha-Krishna and Lakshmi with Narayan is Lakshmi-Narayan, similarly Swami (Akshar) with Narayan (Purushottam) is Swaminarayan (Akshar-Purushottam). This is the true *upasana*.

"Swami is Gunatitanand Swami and Narayan is Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It is to teach this true principle that we have left Vartal."

Thus, Shastriji Maharaj gave a detailed explanation of the true interpretation of Shriji Maharaj's words in the Vachanamrut. At the end, Dolatram Pandya bowed to Shastriji Maharaj and remarked, "Swami, you are doing the work for which Shriji Maharaj would have had to incarnate again. Your greatness is immeasurable, since you have explained the true and pure philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam on the basis of the scriptures."

It was Shastriji Maharaj's unwavering faith in God which enabled him to fulfil Shriji Maharaj's wish to enshrine the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam. It was this faith which formed the foundation of his struggle to achieve what many deemed as being impossible. In fact, Shastriji Maharaj's life embodied the true spirit of the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

MODEL MANDIRS

Even as a child, while playing, Shastriji Maharaj's devotion and God-centric life came to the fore.

While his friends played various popular games he spent his time building mandirs. Ignoring the pleas of his friends to join them in sports, he would sit on the ground, and build a model mandir out of clay, stones, wood and other natural materials. He would then place the *murti* of God in it, offer food and perform *arti*. In this way, even in his play, he offered pure and loving devotion to Shriji Maharaj. Such inclinations from childhood were a prelude to his life-long endeavours to build mandirs enshrining the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam and explaining the doctrine of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan to all.

COURAGEOUS GALBHAI

At the Chaitra Punam festival in Vartal, the sadhus and devotees opposed to Shastriji Maharaj

had arranged a meeting to censure him for his support in building the mandir in Vadhwan and plan some mischief to harm him. However, Shastriji Maharaj prophesied, “They will quarrel among themselves and disperse. So they will not be able to do anything.”

Then, Shastriji Maharaj turned to Galbhai, smiled and asked him, “Do you have the courage to hail the victory call of Akshar-Purushottam in that assembly?” This task was like entering the lion’s den and awakening it from slumber, risking severe injury. But, Galbhai, who had developed firm faith in the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy by his association with Shastriji Maharaj, was ready to do as asked. Shastriji Maharaj was pleased by Galbhai’s readiness to carry out his wish.

So, in the Chaitra Punam assembly, as soon as the Acharya took his seat, Galbhai called out, “*Sahajanand Swami Maharaj ni Jai.*” Everyone joined him in this. Then, he immediately hailed, “*Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj ni Jai.*” Again, everyone joined him in hailing the call, before realizing what had happened. There was a moment of stunned silence before ripples of discussion erupted. This bold chant infuriated the gathered sadhus and devotees, but seeing the robust and powerful Galbhai and his associates, nobody dared to say anything. Shastriji Maharaj had inspired such courage in his devotees.

CONSTRUCTION OF BOCHASAN MANDIR

Due to the persistent opposition and harassment, Shastriji Maharaj had to leave the Vartal Sanstha in November 1905. The following year, on 30 November 1906 (Magshar *sud* Punam, Samvat 1963), many devotees came to Bochasan for the *punam* festival. In the assembly Shastriji Maharaj declared, “We now have enough land to build a mandir and the site has been cleared. So, we are now ready to dig the foundations. All of you are requested to lend your help in whatever way necessary, even by reducing your farming,

so that the *murti-pratishtha* can be performed in six months.” Hearing Shastriji Maharaj’s request inspired everyone to commit their resources for this noble task.

Thus, devotees and sadhus, alike, put all their energies into meeting Shastriji Maharaj’s deadline. Shastriji Maharaj, too, helped in the construction work and continually discoursed to the devotees. In all his talks he spoke about the doctrine of Akshar and Purushottam as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut and he emphasized that the goal of life is to become *brahmarup* and offer devotion to Purushottam, the supreme God. His powerful speech and effective style appealed to all, motivating them to serve in every way possible.

AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM ENSHRINED IN BOCHASAN

Through the dedicated efforts of the devotees and sadhus, the mammoth construction work proceeded at such great speed that Shastriji Maharaj’s challenging deadline was met. The *murti-pratishtha* date was set for 5 June 1907 (Vaishakh *vad* 10, Samvat 1963). With just a few weeks to go before this historic event, invitations were sent out. Devotees everywhere planned enthusiastically to participate in the ceremony.

With all preparations complete, the *murti-pratishtha* day dawned. In the morning, learned and experienced Brahmins recited the traditional Vedic verses, guiding Shastriji Maharaj and other devotees devoutly through the *yagna* rituals. Then, the auspicious time for the *murti-pratishtha* approached. The metallic *murti* of Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan was placed in position in the central shrine of the mandir. Then, the sadhus and devotees attempted to place the *murti* of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. But, even though it was lighter, the *murti* would not budge. More help was called, but still the *murti* could not be lifted. They tried again and again, but without success. Finally, they went to Shastriji Maharaj



Swaminarayan Mandir, Bochasan



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Bochasan

and informed him of the puzzling situation. He immediately got up and accompanied the devotees to the *murti*. There, Shastriji Maharaj prayed, “O Swami! We have left Vartal for you, and tolerated much abuse, hardship and danger. So please shower your grace on us by taking your rightful place.” Then, he took a small chisel and inserted it at the base of the *murti*, slightly lifting it off the ground. The sadhus and devotees then lifted the *murti* into place. Then Shastriji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha arti*. In this way, for the first time, the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam were consecrated in the central shrine.

Now, Bochasan Mandir provided a centre for people to offer their devotion. As a result, more and more people throughout the Charotar region began to openly embrace the worship of Akshar-Purushottam. The philosophy that was once restricted to a corner of Vartal was now becoming widespread throughout Charotar, and beyond.

MANDIR AT SARANGPUR

Shastriji Maharaj used Sarangpur as a base and toured the surrounding villages to teach the message of Akshar and Purushottam. When Shastriji Maharaj arrived in Limbdi, Jhaverbhai, the Diwan

proposed, “If you agree to build a *shikharbaddha* mandir in Sarangpur, I will convince the Thakor to give you enough land.” Nirgundas Swami and other sadhus and devotees were excited by this offer. But Shastriji Maharaj had his own way of dealing with things.

He told the Diwan, “We are short of funds, but if you give us a few acres we will build a small mandir.” The Diwan was well aware of Shastriji Maharaj’s capabilities and reasoned that such a small mandir would not be appropriate. So, again, he offered to obtain sanction for as much land as was necessary. Seeing the genuine intentions of the Diwan, Shastriji Maharaj agreed. After a few days, Shastriji Maharaj returned to Sarangpur. Meanwhile, Jhaverbhai, the Diwan, had talked to the Thakor of Limbdi and sent Meghabhai to meet Shastriji Maharaj. When he arrived, Shastriji Maharaj took him to the southern part of the village and requested for the entire 24-acre area Bhagwan Swaminarayan had sanctified and where he had performed the groundbreaking ceremony by riding his horse. In this way, the land was procured from the Thakor of Limbdi.

Work began in earnest to prepare the area for construction. Times were difficult and they

received insufficient alms to feed all. Still, everyone worked with enthusiasm, realizing the glory of the service they were engaged in. All were eager to contribute their services for the cause of Akshar and Purushottam, no matter what hardship they had to endure. In due course, as the mandir construction neared completion, Shastriji Maharaj declared the date for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony.

The opponents tried to interfere in Shastriji Maharaj's work. They approached the Thakor of Limbdi, who had allocated the land for the mandir to Shastriji Maharaj, and convinced him that the *murtis* of Radha-Krishna should be consecrated in the central shrine. Thus, when the Thakor went to meet Shastriji Maharaj, he made several suggestions and asked where the *murtis* of Radha-Krishna would be installed. Shastriji Maharaj realized the purpose of his question and decisively replied, "We have tolerated many difficulties for Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami. We have become sadhus and dedicated our lives for them. So, the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam will be consecrated in the central shrine, while the *murtis* of Radha-Krishna will be placed in the first shrine." The Thakor and his accomplices were left speechless by Shastriji Maharaj's bold and forthright statements and happily agreed to his plans. Invitations were sent to all devotees to attend the *murti-pratishtha* on 8 May 1916 (Vaishakh *sud* 6, Samvat 1972).

On the preceding day, Shastriji Maharaj blessed, "This mandir, which has been built here in Sarangpur, fulfils the promise made by Shriji Maharaj to Jiva Khachar. Tomorrow, the *murtis* of supreme God, Purushottam, and his divine abode, Akshar, will be consecrated here. The glory of this mandir will increase in the years to come."

The following day, Shastriji Maharaj performed the Vedic *yagna* rituals and then consecrated the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami in the central shrine.



Swaminarayan Mandir, Sarangpur

Once again, everyone experienced Shastriji Maharaj's devotion and determination in establishing and enshrining the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy.

AKSHAR MANDIR, GONDAL

In a relatively short span of nine years, Shastriji Maharaj had inspired two majestic mandirs, consecrating the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam in the central shrines. Shastriji Maharaj continued his spiritual tours to the villages, towns, and cities, explaining the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut.

In the summer of 1932 CE (Samvat 1988) Shastriji Maharaj was in Sarangpur, where Haribhai Amin, a native of Virsad, a village near Borsad, came to meet him. Haribhai had negotiated a deal with the Maharaja of Gondal, Bhagvatsinhji, to purchase the land surrounding the Akshar Deri, the auspicious memorial shrine built over the cremation site of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami.

The all-knowing Shastriji Maharaj stated, "The price of Rs. 25,000 you have accepted is reasonable." Haribhai was left speechless. Since



Swaminarayan Mandir, Gondal

that, in fact, was the price he had agreed upon with the Maharaja. He realized that he could not hide anything from Shastriji Maharaj. He told Shastriji Maharaj about the terms the Maharaja had stipulated: that the memorial shrine be preserved and a mandir be built over it in three years at a cost of at least one million rupees. Shastriji Maharaj assuringly said, “Gunatitanand Swami’s memorial shrine is very sacred and miraculous. Maharaj and Swami are eternally manifest there. Over a million rupees will be spent there, so there is no need for you to worry about it.” Then with Shastriji Maharaj’s approval Haribhai returned to Gondal to finalize the land deal.

Throughout Gujarat, the devotees were thrilled that a mandir was to be built in Gondal over the auspicious memorial shrine of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. Thousands attended the groundbreaking ceremony on 18 January 1932 (Posh *sud* 10, Samvat 1988). Soon afterwards, construction work began on the site. Many devotees eagerly contributed their time, energy and other necessary resources for this noble cause.

Shastriji Maharaj instructed the young and spirited Yogiji Swami to cook for the sadhus, devotees and labourers serving there and also to

help in the construction work. The building work proceeded at full speed and soon, with the enthusiastic and devout efforts of the sadhus and devotees, the mandir neared completion – it had taken just two-and-a-quarter years – much less than the time stipulated by the Maharaja of Gondal.

Invitations were sent for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony on 24 May 1934 (Vaishakh *sud* 10, Samvat 1990). Devotees began to arrive in Gondal several days beforehand to attend the spiritual discourses and participate in the preliminary Vedic rituals. Shastriji Maharaj and other senior sadhus and devotees spoke in detail about the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Everyone revelled in the divine and joyous atmosphere.

On the day of the *murti-pratishtha*, the *murtis* of Akshar and Purushottam were placed in the central shrine and Shastriji Maharaj performed the Vedic rituals, invoking the divine presence of Maharaj and Swami in the *murtis*. Then, when Shastriji Maharaj held the mirror before the *murtis* it cracked due to the divine gaze of the Lord, demonstrating Shriji Maharaj’s divine presence in the *murtis* to all.

In the *murti-pratishtha* assembly, Shastriji Maharaj described the glory of the Akshar Deri, emphasizing that Gunatitanand Swami was the incarnation of Aksharbrahman, and that only by total surrender to such a God-realized Sadhu can one attain virtues like Akshar and become eligible to worship Purushottam. Then, Shastriji Maharaj appointed Yogiji Swami as the mahant of the Akshar Mandir in Gondal, to the universal approval of all.

MANDIR IN ATLADARA

Mathurbhai of Atladara was of good upbringing and honest intentions, but due to bad company he had taken to addictions. Still, he frequently visited the small Swaminarayan mandir in the village. And often he told Ranchhod Bhagat, the priest there, “Bhagat! Why don’t you build

a bigger mandir?” After some time, Ranchhod Bhagat acquired some land and began to build a bigger mandir. He managed to prepare the foundations, but then ran out of money and support. So the work stopped. Seeing this, Mathurbhai repeatedly commented, “You will not be able to finish this mandir. You need a capable person to help you.” One day, Ranchhod Bhagat told Mathurbhai, “In the entire Swaminarayan Sampradaya, only Shastri Yagnapurushdasji is capable enough of building a mandir to your satisfaction.” Mathurbhai was alerted by this statement and asked who this Shastri was.

Hearing Ranchhod Bhagat describe the glory of Shastriji Maharaj in detail humbled Mathurbhai. He resolved to bring Shastriji Maharaj to Atladara. When Shastriji Maharaj arrived, other local devotees joined Mathurbhai as they showed Shastriji Maharaj the site of the incomplete new mandir. Shastriji Maharaj inspected the foundation and then said, “Only a one-pinnacled mandir is possible on this site. For a three-pinnacled mandir we need the bigger area of land which is located by the roadside.” Then Shastriji Maharaj added, “In the time of Shriji Maharaj, Mulu Metar and Krishna Mali lived there. Shriji Maharaj had visited and sanctified their homes. Let us build a mandir over that sacred area.” With this, Shastriji Maharaj showed them the land. Mathurbhai obtained permission from the residents to acquire the land and built new homes for them at another suitable site.

Shastriji Maharaj performed the groundbreaking ceremony for Atladara mandir on 2 April 1940 (Fagan *vad* 10, Samvat 1996). The construction work then began in earnest. Shastriji Maharaj delegated responsibilities to the appropriate sadhus and devotees. With the sincere, dedicated efforts of sadhus and devotees over a period of five years, the mandir was ready. Shastriji Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* on 12 July 1945 (Ashadh *sud* 3, Samvat 2001), consecrating the *murtis* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Aksharbrahman



Swaminarayan Mandir, Atladara

Gunatitanand Swami and Gopalanand Swami in the central sanctum. In the assembly afterwards, Shastriji Maharaj prophesied, “This mandir in Atladara will become among the best, since this place has been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj. At present it is distant from Vadodara, but in the future it will become one of its suburbs.”

Thus, yet another glorious achievement, the fourth mandir, had been made possible by Shastriji Maharaj’s inspiring leadership.

MARBLE MANDIR IN GADHADA

Shriji Maharaj had lived in Dada Khachar’s court in Gadhada for nearly 30 years, using it as a base for his spiritual travels throughout Gujarat and beyond. Shriji Maharaj wished to build a magnificent mandir on the hillock next to the River Ghela on the outskirts of the village. The land there was jointly owned by Dada Khachar and his uncle, Jiva Khachar. When Shriji Maharaj asked for the land, Dada Khachar agreed to give his part, but Jiva Khachar refused to give his share. As a result, Maharaj’s wish remained unfulfilled.

For many years, Shastriji Maharaj had endeavoured to acquire the land on the hillock so that Maharaj’s wish for a mandir there could be



Swaminarayan Mandir under construction, Gadhada

fulfilled. At that time, the land was under the jurisdiction of the Bhavnagar State. Shastriji Maharaj's efforts to acquire the land had been thwarted by opposing elements, who used their influence with the authorities to prevent the allocation of the land to Shastriji Maharaj. Still, Shastriji Maharaj persevered, never giving up the hope that one day Shriji Maharaj's wish for a mandir on the hillock would come true.

Revealing his faith in Shriji Maharaj as the all-doer, Shastriji Maharaj said, "Maharaj will effect a change in the government and facilitate the mandir." And sure enough that is exactly what happened.

In 1947, India gained independence from British rule. Consequently, the numerous small, separate territories, which were governed by different rulers, lost their autonomy and were merged into the new union. Under the new administration, Govindsinh Chudasama, a devotee of Shastriji Maharaj's, was appointed as the Collector of Gohilvad District. Subsequently, Bhanbhai Khachar, a descendent of Dada Khachar, together with Govindsinh Chudasama proposed to Shastriji Maharaj that he build a mandir on the hillock in Gadhada. Shastriji Maharaj said, "If

you help us to acquire the land we will certainly build a mandir there." With Shastriji Maharaj's consent, the devotees sought and obtained the necessary permission for the land. At long last Shriji Maharaj's wish was nearing fulfilment.

Once the land had been acquired Shastriji Maharaj arranged for the traditional Vedic ground-breaking ceremony to be performed on 16 November 1949 (Kartik *vad* 11, Samvat 2006) by His Highness Krishnakumar Sinhji, the former Maharaja of Bhavnagar, who was then the Governor of Madras. Thus, Shastriji Maharaj's patient persistence had paid off and now construction of the fifth BAPS mandir inspired by Shastriji Maharaj proceeded at full speed.

The *murti-pratishtha* was set to take place on 16 May 1951 (Vaishakh *sud* 10, Samvat 2007).

Swamishri was in Sarangpur and his health was deteriorating. Yet, Swamishri was eager to go to Gadhada. On arrival, he inspected the work in progress and blessed everyone serving there day and night to finish the mandir. Swamishri then asked to see the *murtis* to be installed. He requested that water from the sacred river Ghela be brought and with it he bathed the *murtis*. Then he placed a sacred thread around each *murti*, applied a *chandlo* and garlanded all the *murtis*. Finally, he performed the *arti* and then said, "My ritual is over. The *murti-pratishtha* has been performed. Now I will not come. Yogi Maharaj will come and perform the *arti*." Satisfied that everything was in order, Swamishri said, "Now I will go to Sarangpur and remain there forever." Nobody grasped the real meaning of Swamishri's prophetic words.

In Sarangpur, Swamishri's condition became critical. He requested to be taken to the Rang Mandap (mandir basement). There, with the sadhus and devotees looking on anxiously and praying to Maharaj, a divine glow illuminated the room. Swamishri, while repeating "Swami! Maharaj!" breathed his last and passed away to Akshardham on 10 May 1951 (Vaishakh *sud* 4, Samvat 2007). Everyone was heartbroken at

Swamishri's departure, but Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami comforted everyone and helped them to overcome their grief.

The *murti-pratishtha* in Gadhada was to take place after only six days. Everyone was unsure whether or not to postpone the occasion. But Yogiji Maharaj gave everyone strength and direction, "Swami has not left us at all. He is ever present in the Satsang. It was his wish to hold the *murti-pratishtha* on the tenth, so he will be pleased only if we fulfil it." These words encouraged everyone and they recalled Swamishri's prophetic words, "Yogi will perform the *arti*." And so, the auspicious *murti-pratishtha* ceremony was performed by Yogiji Maharaj as planned.

BASIS OF UNDERSTANDING

Shastriji Maharaj spent much of his time teaching the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan to people, either individually, in groups or in assemblies. However, once, the devotees of Africa wrote to him, requesting that he elaborate upon the reasons why Gunatitanand Swami is Akshar. So, Shastriji Maharaj wrote a comprehensive reply, highlighting what he felt were the salient reasons. The following is a translation of excerpts of the letter written by Shastriji Maharaj on 7 December 1938:

"You had written asking me to let you know of examples from the time of Shriji Maharaj illustrating that Gunatitanand Swami is Mul Akshar.

"When Shriji Maharaj held the Hutashani festival at Rathod Dhadhal's home in Sarangpur, He recited the verse, '*Sadguru khele vasant. Koti Krishna jode hāth, koti Vishnu name māth, koti Brahmā kathe jñān, koti Shiv dhare dhyān, Ho Sadguru khele vasant.*' Saying this He asked Muktanand Swami and Anand Swami 'Who is such a Sadguru?' Then both said, 'You are such a Sadguru.' So, Maharaj said, 'I am Purushottam Bhagwan, and am worshipped by this Sadguru. And such a Sadguru is this Gunatitanand Swami. He is Mul Akshar.' The above incident in

Sarangpur was narrated by Rathod Dhadhal to Jasa Gor and Nagji Sheth, from whom I have heard the details.

"At Jhinabhai's *darbar* in Panchala, Gunatitanand Swami was seated among the 500 *paramhansas*. Then Maharaj asked Kalyanbhai, 'Do you know this sadhu?' He replied, 'Yes, he is very austere and detached. He understands your true glory.' Maharaj said, 'Not just that. He is my Akshardham, where I dwell eternally.' Thus, Maharaj himself convinced Kalyanbhai. And I heard this incident from Kalyanbhai's son (Devjibhai)."

In this way, throughout the detailed letter, Shastriji Maharaj described many occasions where Shriji Maharaj, *paramhansas* and devotees had all identified Gunatitanand Swami as Akshar.

LIFE-LONG DEDICATION

Thus, Shastriji Maharaj never tired in teaching the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. Until his last breath, he endeavoured to develop this true understanding in all. Shastriji Maharaj's enthusiasm and determination for the cause of Akshar-Purushottam stemmed from his deep-rooted conviction in the truth revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut. Shastriji Maharaj established five mandirs in Gujarat in which he consecrated the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine. He accomplished his mission amidst great difficulties, hardships and challenges. With only five sadhus and a handful of devotees he pioneered the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar-Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) in 1907 CE. Today, Bhagwan Swaminarayan's unique philosophy of Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, which is based on the Vedas, continues to be lived and taught by Mahant Swami Maharaj. He has expanded upon the efforts of Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj and inspired many to understand and live by the divine revelations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. ♦



MS University auditorium

Maharaja Sayajirao and 26 Universities Felicitate Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadreshdas Swami

16 November 2017, Vadodara

It has been nearly 150 years since a *bhashya*, or commentary, on any of the Upanishads, Brahmasutras and the Bhagavad Gita – collectively known as the *prasthantrayi* – has been written. Inspired by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Bhadreshdas Swami is the latest in the lineage of *acharyas* to author *bhashyas* in Sanskrit on the *prasthantrayi*. The creation of the *bhashyas* by Bhadreshdas Swami is considered by many scholars to be this century's most important work in Vedanta philosophy.

To acknowledge this, senior representatives of 27 prestigious universities from Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and other states gathered at the C.C. Mehta Auditorium of Maharaja Sayajirao (M.S.) University in Vadodara to honour Mahamahopadhyaya Swami Bhadreshdasji for authoring two contemporary Sanskrit texts: 'Swaminarayan Bhashyam' and 'Swaminarayan-Siddhant-Sudha'.

Organized by Maharaja Sayajirao University

in Vadodara, the occasion was graced by the vice-chancellors of Gujarat University, Saurashtra University, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University, Maharaja Krishnakumarsinhji Bhavnagar University, Bhakta Kavi Narsinh Mehta University, Krantiguru Shyamji Krishna Verma Kachchh University, Gujarat Vidyapith, Shri Govind Guru University, Shree Somnath Sanskrit University, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, and other universities. Chancellor Shri Balvant Jani from Dr Harisinh Gaur Vishwavidyalaya, Sagar (Madhya Pradesh) was also present, while the vice-chancellors of Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, Tirupati (Dr Murlidhar Sharmaji), and Jagadguru Ramanandacharya Rajasthan Sanskrit University (Dr Vinodkumar Sharma) addressed the assembly and honoured Swami Bhadreshdas and his works.

The event began with the singing of Vedic mantras. Thereafter, M.S. University's vice-chancellor, Shri Parimal Vyas, gave a welcome address,



Senior sadhus and Vice-chancellors and representatives of 27 prestigious universities on the stage

“The *bhashyas* written by Bhadreshdas Swami are seminal contributions to the world of 21st century scholarship and spirituality.”

Pujya Viveksagardas Swami spoke about the significance of writing *bhashyas* on the *prasthan-trayi* within the Sanatan Vedic tradition, the history of Bhadreshdas Swami’s *bhashyas*, and the importance and modern relevance of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

Chancellor Shri Balvant Jani of Dr Harisinh Gaur Vishwavidyalaya, Sagar (Madhya Pradesh), said, “We were not witness to Sant Jnaneshwar’s devotion or to the founding of the Arya Samaj, but we can proudly say that we have had the darshan of Pramukh Swami and the cadre of scholarly sadhus he has inspired.”

Following the addresses of the vice-chancellors of the various universities, Bhadreshdas Swami addressed the gathering, dedicating all the honours to gurus Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, “If Bhagwan Swaminarayan had not revealed this doctrine, what could I have written? So, all these honours truly belong to him. And also to Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In 2006, in Bhavnagar, I said to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, ‘Swami, you are the manifest form of *brahma-vidya*, you are *brahmaswarup*, yet you are not

writing these *bhashyas* on *brahmavidya*. While, I do not have any experience of it and you are instructing me to write about it. So, it would be better if you wrote the *bhashyas*.’ In reply, he said, ‘You are not writing them. Through you, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj will write them.’ Swamishri mentioned the names of his gurus, but I understood that I was merely his medium for writing these *bhashyas*.”

Then, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami spoke, “All the concepts of this doctrine have been revealed in simple Gujarati language by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut. And, with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Bhadreshdas Swami has done great service by presenting them in the accepted *shastriya* tradition. May all become *aksharrup* and offer humble devotion to Purushottam.”

In conclusion, Pujya Doctor Swami gave remarked, “This timeless doctrine has to be practiced in our lives. The pious lives of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj were such that many scholars and even non-believers were touched. There are no degrees awarded for ‘living’. But Bhagwan Swaminarayan gives that degree. May we derive inspiration from the *bhashyas* to live in a way that pleases Shriji Maharaj.”

Bhadreshdas Swami was presented felicitation



Some plaques of honour presented to Pujya Bhadresh Swami

plaques by the vice-chancellors or representatives of the 27 universities.

The event concluded with the singing of the national anthem.

Many great scholars have written *bhashyas* on the Upanishads, Brahmasutras, and Bhagavad Gita in the past. Shankaracharya's *bhashya* was the first of its kind to be recognized within this tradition, followed by the *bhashyas* written by Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, Nimbarkacharya, Vallabhacharya, and others, who respectively went on to establish the Advaita, Vishistadvaita, Dvaita, Dvaitadvaita, Shuddhadvaita and various other schools of Vedanta philosophy.

Baldev Vidyabhushan, the 19th century follower of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Achintyabhedabheda School of Philosophy, was the last author of a *bhashya* on the Brahmasutras around 150 years ago. Thereafter, no *bhashya* has been written until Bhadresh Swami's 'Swaminarayan Bhashyam'.

Inspired by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and blessed by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, Bhadresh Swami took on this monumental task and made it his life's work. He presented the completed five-volume, 2,150-page *bhashya* to Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj on 17 December 2007 at the BAPS Centenary Celebrations in Ahmedabad.

Bhadresh Swami has also written a *vadagranth* entitled 'Swaminarayan-Siddhant-Sudha', establishing Bhagwan Swaminarayan's unique philosophy, Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. This Sanskrit text uses the authority of Hindu scriptures such as



Shri Parimal Vyas, M.S. University's Vice-chancellor, honours Pujya Bhadresh Swami

the Upanishads, Brahmasutras, and the Bhagavad Gita, to support the philosophical doctrine of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Akshar-Purushottam Darshan as found in the Vachanamrut – the principal scripture of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

After Shankaracharya's *bhashya*, this is the first time in 1,200 years that a *bhashya* has been written by one author on all three texts of the *prasthantrayi*. Also, it is the only time in the history of Vedanta philosophy that a *vadagranth* has been written by the same author of a *prasthantrayi bhashya*. Hence, many Vedanta and Sanskrit scholars from around the world consider Bhadresh Swami's works to be one of the greatest accomplishments of modern time.

Through these works, the lost art of writing Sanskrit texts has been revived in this day and age. These texts are not only important for the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, but are gifts to society that will foster the study of Sanskrit and Vedanta for generations to come. ♦



INDIA

SHISHU KARYAKAR SHIBIR: ATMABUDDHI 30 September & 2 October 2017, Rajkot and Sankari



Around 1,600 *shishu mandal* volunteers participated in the two *shibirs* on the theme of ‘Atmabuddhi’ conducted by the Children’s Activities Central Office in Ahmedabad. Through speeches, seminars, workshops and discussions, they learnt the meaning and purpose of *atmabuddhi* and how to foster a stronger relationship with the Satpurush. The volunteers were guided on how to teach the young children the basic concepts and traditions of satsang, such as, *panchang pranam*, daily puja, and weekly assembly. Also, they learnt to better understand how children learn and relate to others.

SATSANG VISITS TO TRIBAL VILLAGES 29 November to 3 December 2017, Ukai



From the second 2017 batch of the Yuva Talim Kendra, 61 youths, divided into 25 groups, visited a total of 150 tribal villages in the Ukai region. During their five-day schedule, the youths held 105 public and 77 school assemblies to promote an addiction-free moral life and to encourage children to study. They also made 385 home visits to reinforce these values and unity within families.

AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM DARSHAN MAHOTSAV: SWAMINARAYAN BHASHYA SHOBHA YATRA

8 December 2017, Atladara (Vadodara)



As part of the 4-day celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 97th birthday, a grand *nagar, yatra* in honour of the *bhashyas* and *vadagranth* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s Akshar-Purushottam Darshan was carried out through the main streets of Vadodara. The *bhashyas* and *vadagranth* were honoured in traditional style by placing them atop a decorated elephant, together with the *murti* of Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj.

The grand procession, which stretched for two kilometres, included 12 decorated floats, sadhus singing devotional songs, dancing troupes of children and youths, mounted horses, women devotees carrying *kalashes*, groups of devotees from various places and other items. Thousands

joyously participated in the procession to honour the texts and the liberating doctrine revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

**BRAHMASUTRA SWAMINARAYAN
BHASHYA SHALAKA COMPETITION
16 December 2017,
Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi**



Shri Somnath Sanskrit University, Somnath, and the BAPS Research Institute at Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi jointly organized a special Shalaka (Memorizing) Competition based on the first *adhikaran* of the Brahmasutra Swaminarayan Bhashya written by Bhadrash Swami.

In the preliminary phase, over 1,000 students studying Sanskrit at various universities and institutes throughout India participated. Of these, 125 were selected to compete in the final in New Delhi.

In the final, the students underwent written and oral tests on the memorized verses of the Bhashya. Among the expert scholars present for this competition were Prof. P.N. Shastriji (Vice-chancellor, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, Delhi), Dr Kameshwar Upadhyayji (National Secretary, Akhil Bhartiya Vidvat Parishad, Varanasi), Dr Rameshchandra Pandeyaji (Vice-chancellor, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapith, Delhi), Dr Deven Patel (Associate Professor, University of Pennsylvania, USA), Dr Gajendra Panda (Head of Department, L.D. Arts College, Ahmedabad), Pujya Shrutiprakash Swami (Head, AARSH, Gandhinagar), and others.

The expert judges were very impressed by the

standard of knowledge and recitation of the participants. A total of 20 prizes were awarded to the outstanding performers.

BAL KARYAKAR SHIBIRS

17 December 2017 to 7 January 2018, Gujarat

A total of about 11,500 *bal-balika* volunteers involved in BAPS Children's Activities attended the 11 Annual Karyakar Shibirs conducted by the Children's Activities Central Office based in Ahmedabad. The *shibirs* were held at Godhra, Sankari, Tithal, Silvassa, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Atladara, Himmatnagar, Bochasan, Gadhada and Gondal.

The theme of this year's *shibirs* was 'Atma-buddhi', which means 'intense love and attachment with God and his holy Sadhu, just as one has for one's body and relatives'. The *shibirs* helped the volunteers to understand the concept that intense love for the Satpurush is the only means by which to attain self-realization and God-realization.

The concept was explained through speeches by *sadguru* sadhus, learned swamis and experienced volunteers, audio-visual presentations, workshops, individual and group activities, and skits. The volunteers also received the video blessings of *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj.

UK

NATIONAL INTERFAITH WEEK

12–19 November 2017, London



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, joined hundreds of faith communities, interfaith bodies and various other commercial, educational,

governmental and charitable organizations across the UK for a week-long programme to observe National Interfaith Week.

The initiative aims to strengthen interfaith relations at all levels, increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities in the UK, and increase understanding between people of religious and non-religious beliefs.

The Mandir welcomed more than 1,100 children from over 50 schools and many more other visitors during the week. The visitors were also taken on a guided tour of the Mandir and discussed various aspects of their respective faiths amongst one another.

Africa

KISHORE SUMMER CAMP

11–14 December 2017, Kampala, Uganda



Over 100 youths aged between 14 and 22 from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania attended the four-day Summer Camp themed ‘Destination Akshardham’. Through workshops, individual and team activities, story-telling and group discussions, the topics covered included importance of satsang scriptures, daily satsang rituals, daily introspection, unity, courteous speech, recognizing *kusang* in the 21st century, and others. The camp also guided the youths on decision-making, prioritization, team spirit, and value-based living.

The sadhus and senior volunteers narrated incidents from the lives of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj to highlight the necessity of a guru in guiding one’s journey to Akshardham.

Asia Pacific

WALKATHON

12 November 2017, Sydney, Australia



Families, children and the elderly devotees of the BAPS participated in the 4-km walk through the International Regatta Centre, Penrith, in support of the new Nepean Hospital Redevelopment Project and the Chappell Foundation, which provides essential support for homeless youths. Among the chief guest walkers were Hon. Geoffrey Lee, Liberal MP for Parramatta; Mr Darshak Mehta, patron of the Chappell Foundation; Mr Stuart MacGill, Ex-Cricketer for Australia and Member of the Chappell Foundation; and Mr Paul Summers, Executive Consultant for the Nepean Hospital Project.

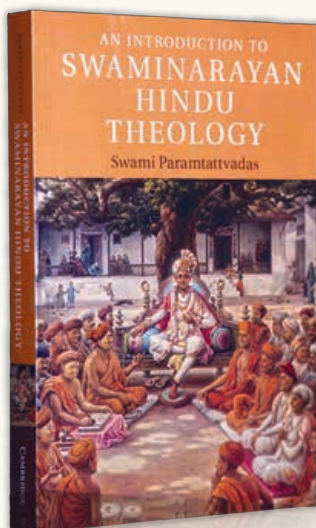
BAPS Charities

SCHOOL SUPPLIES TO SCHOOLS

23 December 2017, Kampala, Uganda



BAPS Charities in Uganda engaged with 10 schools in Kampala and its surrounding suburbs to provide notebooks, mathematical sets and educational supplies, benefiting over 5,000 students. BAPS Charities continues to serve the community through various programmes to empower young people to reach their potential. ♦



AN INTRODUCTION TO SWAMINARAYAN HINDU THEOLOGY

6 September & 25 September 2017, USA & UK

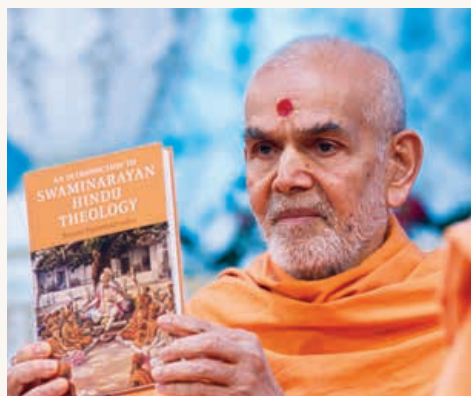
Cambridge University Press (CUP), the world's oldest publishing house and one of the most reputed academic publishers in the world, has released *An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hindu Theology*, a 350-page book in English on Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

Authored by Paramtattvadas Swami, *An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hindu Theology* provides a comprehensive doctrinal account of the Swaminarayan tradition's belief system, drawing on its rich corpus of theological literature, including the teachings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan himself and classical commentaries on the three canonical Vedantic texts, the Upanishads, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras. Part 1 of the book delineates the sources and tools of Swaminarayan Hindu theology, while Part 2 systematically expounds upon its distinctive five eternal entities – Parabrahman, Aksharbrahman, *maya*, *ishwar* and *jiva* – and *mukti* (spiritual liberation). In presenting these key themes theologically and lucidly, Paramtattvadas Swami makes the Swaminarayan Hindu belief system intelligible to scholars, students and serious readers.

Available at amazon.com and other bookshops



Mahant Swami Maharaj inaugurates the publication presented by Paramtattvadas Swami, Robbinsville, USA



Opening Ceremony in London, UK



PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 97th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION ASSEMBLY

27 November 2017, Anand

1. Youths present a traditional dance in honour of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
2. Mahant Swami Maharaj and senior representatives of IGNOU inaugurate the 'BAPS Swaminarayan Pith', which will offer certificate, graduate and postgraduate courses in 'Swaminarayan Vedic Studies'.
3. Around 175,000 devotees in the celebration assembly perform *samuh arti*.



PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 97th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION ASSEMBLY

27 November 2017, Anand

Based on the central theme 'Guruji! Nahi Bhulu Tamne...' devotees and sadhus narrated their memorable interactions and experiences with Pramukh Swami Maharaj, highlighting his selfless love, compassion, devotion and other virtues.

1. Mahant Swami Maharaj graces the main stage, with *sadguru* sadhus and dignitaries.
 2. Youths perform a traditional dance.
- (Inset) Mahant Swami Maharaj on the stage during the assembly.