

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January–February 2021

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Islington, London
Inaugurated by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj in 1970



Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami Murti-Pratishtha Celebrations, 30-31 October 2020, Nenpur

On the auspicious occasion of Sharad Purnima, the *panchdhatu murti* of Aksharbrahma Shri Gunatitanand Swami was ritually consecrated beside Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj by Mahant Swami Maharaj.

1. The divine duo: Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami.

2. Swamishri performs the *mahayag arti* (30 October).

3-4. Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals (31 October).

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BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, London



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

January–February 2021, Vol. 44, No. 1

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 Aksharpith, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad - 380004. India**SUBSCRIPTION RATES**

	Outside India (By Air Mail)			India
	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	Rupees
1 Year	630	9	14	80
2 Years	1300	18	28	150
3 Years	1900	27	42	220



The previous digital edition of *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–December 2020, was published online and is accessible on baps.org



At the end of each event report, a QR code is provided to enable convenient access to further information, photographs and videos about that event.

Contributors to the UK celebration reports: Sadhu Amrutvijaydas, Sadhu Paramattvadas, Shri Hasit Patel.

A Summer of

Commemorating

50 Years of Yogiji Maharaj's Visit to the UK
& 25 Years of London Mandir



Satsang in the UK dates back to the 1950s, but two landmark events, 25 years apart, dominate its history and growth: Yogiji Maharaj's visit to the UK in 1970 to inaugurate the Islington Mandir and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inauguration in 1995 of the Neasden Mandir. Thus, 2020 marked their golden and silver jubilees, respectively.

To commemorate these milestone occasions, year-long celebrations were launched in the summer of 2019 in the presence of Pujya Doctor Swami and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and were scheduled to culminate in the physical presence of *guruhari* Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj in August 2020 with a series of grand celebrations.

Since the launch, devotees of the UK had been anticipating to serve in and experience YMUK50 and LM25 – the short forms of the two historic celebrations – at first hand.

But then the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic struck. Every industry, enterprise, service, sport, indeed, every facet of life – education, health, travel, exercise, cuisine, entertainment – was affected. From March 2020, widespread lockdowns and restrictions were rightly mandated to protect public health and safety.

Major international events throughout the world, many years in the planning, had to be

postponed or cancelled at great cost. Wikipedia has a dedicated page listing over 400 major national and international sporting events, conventions, conferences, trade shows, awards ceremonies, religious events, political events, music and art events and many others affected by the pandemic.

It was amid these challenging times that the resilience, resolve and resourcefulness of people all over the world came to the fore.

Naturally, as the extent and severity of the pandemic unfolded, plans for the in-person celebrations commemorating the 50th anniversary of Yogiji Maharaj's visit to the UK and the 25th anniversary of London Mandir were cancelled and preparations began to replace them with on-line celebrations.

The best laid plans for these momentous celebrations had to be shelved and, at short notice, new ones formulated. This obviously resulted in a significant rethink and tight deadlines – with so much to be done in very little time.

Undeterred, the resident swamis and many volunteers adapted to the new requirements to plan, produce and execute the online events in a way that would still enable all to enjoy and experience the events personally and with their families.

Teams were rapidly formed for the various

Celebrations



celebratory events, and following comprehensive brainstorming sessions, plans of action, recording of interviews, as well as analysis, selection and editing of audio, video, photographic and other materials and many other tasks were commenced.

The majority of the volunteers were inexperienced in the roles they had to fulfil, yet their determination to please Maharaj and Swami provided them the constant drive to complete the tasks and to meet the deadlines for an online, worldwide audience of devotees. The nature of the circumstances also added extra barriers that had to be overcome.

Volunteers completed countless hours of physically demanding, intellectually challenging work by sacrificing sleep, working long hours into the night and at weekends, utilizing commute times, adjusting work and study schedules, and rescheduling family commitments, all while coping with health issues and learning new skills to expedite their tasks and finish their duties on time.

Since everything would be online, the audio-visual (AV) team was involved in all the celebratory events. Hence, the technical setup in the mandir had to be increased, while still keeping personnel to a minimum. Various locations throughout the mandir in London were used to set up as work

areas and so communication between the separate teams was essential to ensure efficient and effective coordination of the work. This also enabled the specific requirements of each event to be met.

The sudden lockdown in March left little time to prepare for the first celebration in June commemorating Yogiji Maharaj's visit to the UK in 1970. Only a few weeks remained to accomplish the mammoth task of producing a three-hour documentary for a global audience.

Then, in August, was the series of celebratory events to commemorate the 25th anniversary, silver jubilee, of London Mandir, inaugurated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in August 1995.

The following pages of this special issue present, first, a concise overview of Yogiji Maharaj's 1970 visit and the history of the making of London Mandir. Next, a summary of the celebratory events, their planning and production, together with the feedback and feelings from viewers of the online programmes. Then, some of the congratulatory messages from prominent people on the occasion of the silver jubilee of London Mandir. We conclude with an overview of the mandir's spiritual and community activities and the major accolades received. ♦





Yogiji Maharaj in the UK

Satsang in the UK: 1950s to 1970s

Yogiji Maharaj visited the UK from 23 May to 7 July 1970, during which he inaugurated one of the first Hindu mandirs in the UK – Shri Swaminarayan Hindu Temple at 77 Elmore Street, Islington, London.

During his stay he also travelled to Banbury, Loughborough, Leicester, Luton and Kent (see background map). He encouraged the devotees to sustain their Swaminarayan traditions even as they were settling in and finding their feet in an unfamiliar land and challenging times. For he knew that true prosperity was grounded in spirituality and satsang. He gave them a true direction in life and energized them to live it daily. This historic visit and its lasting legacy are briefly presented in the following pages.



1950s: With Yogiji Maharaj's blessings Mahendrabhai Patel (Barrister) promoted Satsang in the UK



1950s: Dahyabhai D. Meghani (L) and Prafulbhai Patel were pioneers of Satsang in the UK

1950

The seeds of BAPS satsang in the UK were sown in 1950, when, with the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, Mahendrabhai Patel (Barrister), Purushottambhai Patel and a few other devotees began to meet occasionally for satsang in London.

1953

In India, Yogiji Maharaj blessed Dahyabhai D. Meghani (nephew of renowned Gujarati author, Zaverchand Meghani), saying, "Go to London, and ensure you continue to practice satsang."

Chandubhai, Maganbhai and others met regularly in D.D. Meghani's office and read letters from Yogiji Maharaj written weekly from India.

1958

Later, devotees from India and East Africa arrived and started the weekly assembly at Prahladbhai's house. The annual Annakut festival was also celebrated at his house for several years.

1959

A constitution for the Satsang Mandal was registered under the name of 'Swaminarayan Hindu Mission, London Fellowship Centre'.

D.D. Meghani was appointed as Chairman, Mahendrabhai Barrister as Vice Chairman, Prafulbhai Patel as Secretary and Chandrakantbhai N. Dhupelia as Treasurer.

In September 1959, Gulzarilal Nanda (then Union Labour Minister of India and later twice acting Prime Minister of India), a staunch devotee of BAPS, visited London.

At Yogiji Maharaj's behest a reception was held in his honour in the presence of the Indian High Commissioner in London, Mrs Vijayalaxmi Pandit, and over a hundred dignitaries and guests. Nandaji was impressed by the youths and devotees who, though living in a far off land, were wedded to the moral codes prescribed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Yogiji Maharaj.

1962

Devotees were spiritually nourished by regular letters from Yogiji Maharaj and visits by learned devotees.

Ravibhai Pandya of Mombasa (Kenya) often made business trips to London and also inspired the devotees with his talks.

In 1962, Harmanbhai Patel from Nairobi (Kenya) visited London to consolidate the Satsang and encourage the devotees. A.P. Patel (Dharmaj) also visited. K.C. Patel came to study in London.



1958:

Weekly satsang assembly at the house of Prahladbhai



1963

Shri Swaminarayan Student Centre was established at the wish of Yogiji Maharaj.



1964

Navinbhai Swaminarayan started a satsang assembly in Manchester.

Regular satsang *sabhas* began at the home of Chittranjanbhai P. Patel in the late 1960s.



1970

During Yogiji Maharaj's visit to East Africa, on 17 and 18 March, Jashbhai, Bhanubhai, Dineshbhai and Surendrabhai met Yogiji Maharaj in Kampala and invited him to come to London. He agreed to come if they acquired a place for a mandir.



1970: Yogiji Maharaj telephones the devotees of London to prepare a mandir for inauguration



1970, 25 March:

Yogiji Maharaj writes an inspiring letter from Kampala

A few years earlier in India, while looking at a map of London, Yogiji Maharaj had marked with a pencil the locale of a place which would be suitable for a mandir.

With the blessings of Yogiji Maharaj, the devotees searched for a suitable place.

On searching, the devotees found St John's Baptist Church in Islington, London. The proprietors asked for £12,000 and the devotees made an offer of £9,500. A devotee, Jayantibhai of Changa, had a vision of Yogi Bapa in a dream, who told him that they would get the church for around £9,000. And that was exactly what happened. The next day the church authorities said, "You are doing good work and so we will sell it to you for £9,500." By the wish of Swamiji, the church on 77 Elmore Street was bought to create a mandir.

Thus, in May 1970, a property was indeed found in the area marked by Yogiji Maharaj.



1970, 23 May: Yogiji Maharaj is welcomed in the UK with flower garlands



1970, 24 May: Yogiji Maharaj was welcomed at the new premises in Islington



23 May (Vaishakh vad 3)

Yogiji Maharaj departed from Entebbe Airport near Kampala (10.30 a.m.) to fly to London. He set foot on UK soil at 5.00 p.m. His stay was at Arvindbhai (Guru) Patel's home in Dollis Hill.

Pramukh Swami and other sadhus stayed at C.P. Patel's home at 7 Manor Drive, Wembley.



24 May (Vaishakh vad 4)

In the evening, Yogiji Maharaj visited Islington to see the new mandir premises and its 40 ft x 40 ft hall.

The welcome assembly in the Islington church hall was attended by 500 people. Here, Yogiji Maharaj revealed his vision for a grand *shikharbaddha* mandir in London.



1970, 31 May: *The Sunday Times* article on Yogiji Maharaj's purity and saintliness



1970, 27 May: David Blondi (left), a reporter for *The Sunday Times* interviews Yogiji Maharaj



27 May (Vaishakh vad 7)

David Blondi, a reporter from *The Sunday Times*, interviewed Yogiji Maharaj. Yogiji Maharaj revealed, "*Apna pachhi pan chhe, amara Pramukh Swami* – After me will be our Pramukh Swami."



30 May (Vaishakh vad 10)

First of five Yogi Jayanti assemblies. Celebrated at Durning Hall.

Garavi Gujarat published a 4-page supplement on Yogi Bapa's visit.

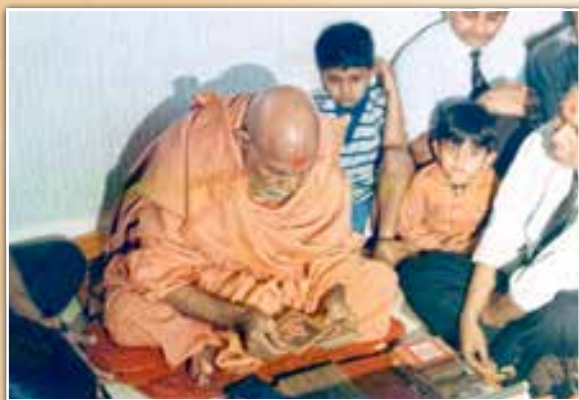


31 May (Vaishakh vad 11)

Article with photos of Yogiji Maharaj published in *The Sunday Times*.



1970, 31 May:
Yogi Jayanti assembly at Porchester Hall



1970, 27 May:
Yogiji Maharaj performs his morning puja



1970, 1 June:
Yogiji Jayanti assembly at Brent Town Hall

Second Yogi Jayanti Parva assembly held at Porchester Hall in Paddington, West London.



1 June (Vaishakh vad 12)

Celebration of Yogiji Maharaj's 79th birthday at Brent Town Hall in Wembley, North London.



2 June (Vaishakh vad 13)

Mr Davies, a reporter from the News Agency, interviewed Yogiji Maharaj. Mr Davies asked nine questions to Swamishri.

Mr Davies: How are you the all-knower of all the *jivas*? Yogiji Maharaj: That power has not been given to anyone by Shriji Maharaj.

Yogiji Maharaj was also interviewed by a BBC Radio reporter.

Fourth Yogi Jayanti Parva assembly held at Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton, South London.



3 June (Vaishakh vad 14)

Yogeshwar Swami showed a photo of Pramukh Swami doing puja to Yogiji Maharaj, who wrote blessings on the photo with a red pen. Yogiji Maharaj said, "This photo is very good to put in puja. *A amaru swarup chhe* (This is my form), so keep it in your puja."

Fifth Yogi Jayanti Parva assembly held in Islington, with cakes decorated with 79 candles.



1970, 3 June:
Yogi Jayanti assembly at Islington Mandir



1970, 6 June:
Yogiji Maharaj in Leicester



1970, 6 June: Yogiji Maharaj greets Mr Johnson of the *Banbury Guardian*



1970, 13 June:
Murti-pratishtha yagna in Islington



6 June (Jeth sud 2)

Yogiji Maharaj visited Banbury and met Mr Johnson and Mr Dennis, local press reporters of *Banbury Guardian*.

Yogiji Maharaj arrived at 8.45 p.m. in Loughborough for a *sabha* at Trinity Church Hall.

After the *sabha*, Yogiji Maharaj performed a *padhramani* before reaching Leicester at 11.30 p.m.



12 June (Jeth sud 8)

David Mertens from *News of the World* interviewed Yogiji Maharaj.



1970, 13 June:
Grand procession in central London



13 June (Jeth sud 9)

Over 50 youths and devotees had served daily to refurbish, paint and decorate Islington Mandir under the guidance of Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami.

‘Shree Swaminarayan Hindu Temple’ sign-board was prepared under the guidance of Mahant Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami.

The *murti-pratishtha yagna* was completed at 1.00 p.m.

In the evening at 8.00 p.m., Yogiji Maharaj went again to Islington Mandir to see the preparations for the *murti-pratishtha*.



14 June (Jeth sud 10)

Led by the Scottish Royal Air Force Pipe Band,



1970, 14 June: Yogiji Maharaj performs the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony in Islington



1970, 14 June:

Yogiji Maharaj blesses the *murti-pratishtha* assembly



1970, 19 June:

Devotees during an assembly in Islington Mandir

the *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* started at 9.45 a.m. from Hyde Park Corner. It passed through Oxford Street, Oxford Circus, Regent Street, Piccadilly Circus, Haymarket, Trafalgar Square, Charing Cross, Northumberland Avenue before reaching the Embankment at 11.20 a.m. From there, everyone went in vehicles to Islington, arriving at 11.45 a.m.

The *murti-pratishtha* rituals were performed by Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami. The *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Bhagatji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj had been brought from Kampala. Shastriji Maharaj had performed the *arti* of these *murtis* in 1948 in India for Prabhudas Lalaji's *ghar* mandir. The *sinhasan* was prepared in London by local craftsmen.

An *annakut* of various delicacies was offered to the *murtis* and the *murti-pratishtha arti* was performed at 12.22 p.m.

Yogiji Maharaj blessed the *pratishtha* assembly, "*Pratishtha thai gai. Brahmandma danko vagadyo*. Maharaj will take all to Akshardham. That Maharaj-Swami have been seated in London is not ordinary. Now he will fulfil all wishes."

The assembly concluded at 2.20 p.m. Over 2,500 devotees from London, Leicester, Loughborough, Luton, Cardiff, Cambridge, Manchester, Birmingham, Banbury, Bradford, Liverpool and Boston attended the *nagar-yatra* and *murti-pratishtha*.

A public assembly was held in the mandir from 5.00 to 6.30 p.m. in the presence



1970, 28 June: Yogiji Maharaj bathes

Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj in the River Thames



1970, 6 July: Peter Langley of the Scotland Yard

Department of Race Relations meets Yogiji Maharaj

of the Indian High Commissioner and other dignitaries.

Yogiji Maharaj blessed, “It was Shriji Maharaj’s wish that Maharaj and Swami will preside in Europe. In Dham, Maharaj is delighted.”

The celebration was covered on the BBC news at 10.00 p.m.



16 June (Jeth sud 12)

Peter Brent, author of *Godmen of India*, interviewed Yogiji Maharaj, who gave him a *niyam* to stop drinking.

Yogiji Maharaj visited the Shri Swaminarayan Centre in Hendon.



20 June (Jeth vad 1)

Author Leslie Shepherd met Yogiji Maharaj.

Around 300 youths attended the special assembly for youths.



21 June 1970

Article on Yogiji Maharaj in *News of the World*.



23 June (Jeth vad 5)

Swaminarayan Hindu Mission established. Yogiji Maharaj appointed members of the Board of Trustees.



28 June (Jeth vad 10)

Yogiji Maharaj bathed Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in the River Thames at Putney Bridge; over 300 devotees were present. On way to the evening assembly, Yogiji Maharaj blessed, “Now, whoever bathes in the Thames will be born into Sat-sang. Instant *moksha*.”



5 July (Ashadh sud 2)

The Rath Yatra was celebrated in the evening *sabha* at the mandir, along with the farewell assembly.



6 July (Ashadh sud 3)

Peter Langley of Scotland Yard’s Department of Race Relations met Yogiji Maharaj again.

Evening assembly. It was announced that four swamis would stay in London before going to America for *vicharan*.



7 July (Ashadh sud 4)

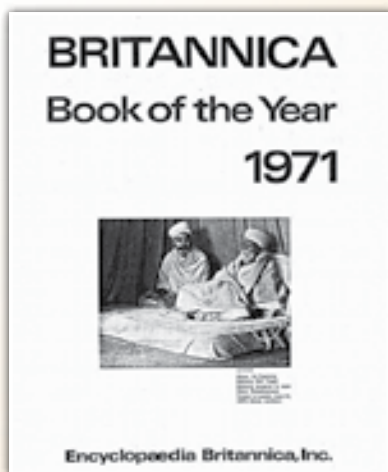
Yogiji Maharaj departed from London for Mumbai via Paris, Zurich and Beirut.



Legacy

1974: At the mandir in Islington, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated the large painted *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev and the Guru Parampara, retrieved from the Tororo Mandir just prior to the expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972.

1995: Yogiji Maharaj’s vision for a *shikhARBaddha* mandir in London was realized with the opening of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, on 20 August 1995 by Pramukh Swami Maharaj with the support and efforts of thousands of devotees from throughout the UK. ♦



Yogiji Maharaj’s visit was featured in the *Britannica Book of the Year 1971*





THE MAKING OF LONDON BAPS MANDIR

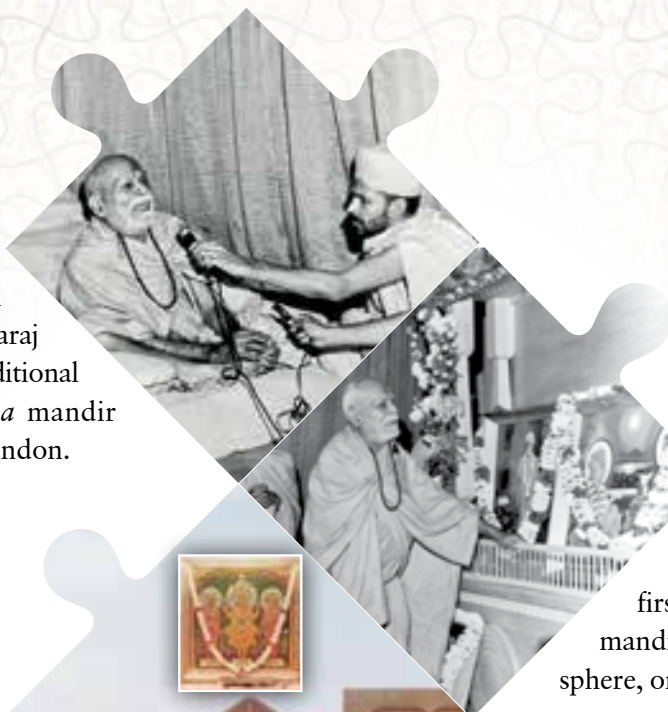
London BAPS Mandir was Yogiji Maharaj's vision, fulfilled and created by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In 1970, even though he was in London for his first and only visit, Yogiji Maharaj had envisioned the trajectory of the Satsang in the UK, voicing his wish that London would be home to a grand *shikharbaddha* mandir.

In 1972, Pramukh Swami Maharaj revived that vision in the small town of Piplana, by praying for such a mandir in London. And, gradually, as the Satsang in the UK grew, the necessary pieces of the jigsaw were taking shape. But it was never going to be easy. In fact, only Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the master puzzle solver, was capable of assembling all the jigsaw pieces together to form the complete end product. Truly, he was single-handedly instrumental in bringing together the major and minor pieces of the project – finance, design, manpower, stones, carving, sculpting, transport, construction, utilities, facilities, and so many others – from their disparate locations and putting them together to produce the magnificent London BAPS Mandir.

The story of its making and Swamishri's monumental efforts is worthy of many volumes, but to commemorate the occasion of the mandir's 25th anniversary, we present the following brief overview...

1970

During an evening assembly in Islington, Yogiji Maharaj prophesied that a traditional stone *shikharbaddha* mandir would be built in London.

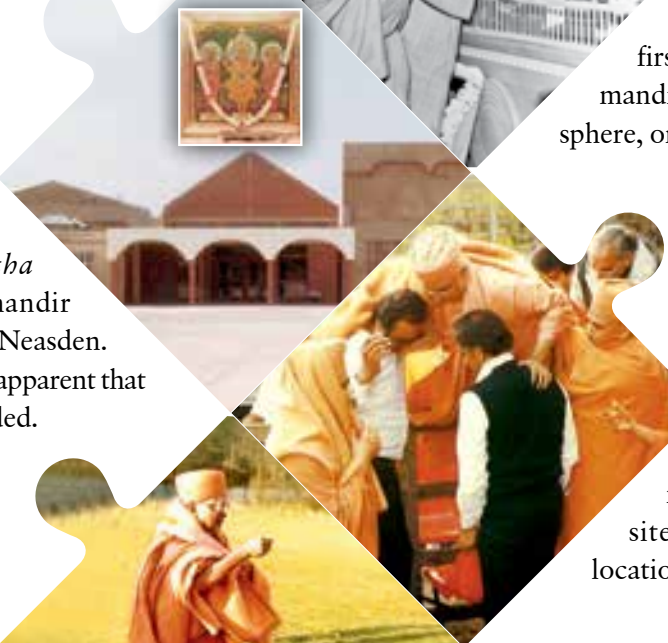


1970

Yogiji Maharaj inaugurated the Islington Mandir, the first Swaminarayan Hindu mandir in the western hemisphere, on Sunday 14 June 1970.

1982

Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony at the mandir on Meadow Garth, Neasden. Over time, it became apparent that a larger site was needed.

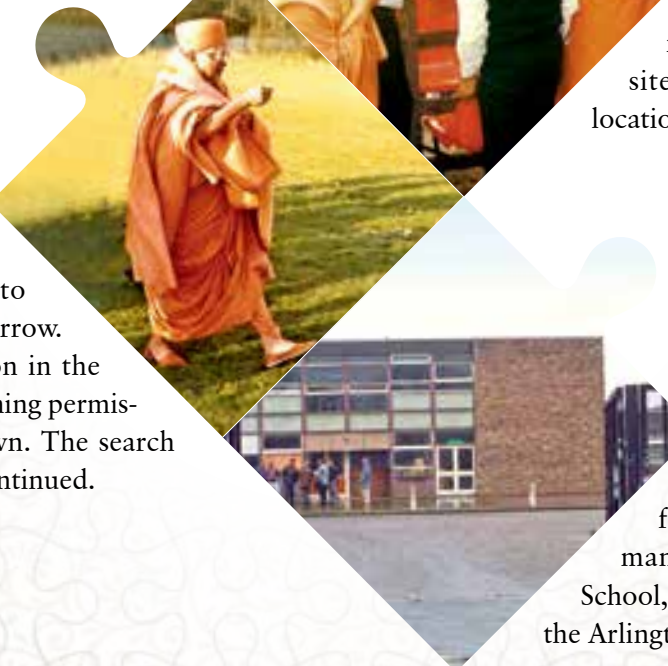


1984

Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the newly acquired Ducker site in Harrow, a prime location for a traditional *shikharbaddha* mandir.

1984

Pramukh Swami Maharaj showered flower petals to bless the land in Harrow. However, opposition in the borough led to planning permission being withdrawn. The search for a suitable site continued.



1990

After the ground-breaking ceremony for a *shikharbaddha* mandir at Neasden High School, Swamishri noticed that the Arlington site was up for sale.

1990

In October, Pramukh Swami Maharaj, along with trustees and senior devotees, visited the newly acquired Arlington site in Neasden.



1990

Pramukh Swami Maharaj discussed the mandir design to be built on the Arlington site with C.M. Patel, James Cornell, Nigel Lane, Akshaymuni Swami, Madhusudan Patel, Amrish Patel and others.



1991

The ground-breaking ceremony for the Neasden Mandir took place on 7 July in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami.



1992

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had instructed that the mandir be completed in three years, a seemingly impossible task



1993

Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the stone carving workshops in Kandla, Gujarat. He meticulously observed the carvings and ensured timely completion to the highest quality.



1993

Between 1993 and 1995, Swamishri visited the workshops where a total of 26,300 pieces of stone were intricately carved for the main mandir.



1993

The 'Aluminium Can Collection' scheme was launched to raise funds for the mandir during a devastating recession in the UK.



1993

From 1993, the large corps of female volunteers served diligently to prepare freshly cooked meals for the craftsmen and volunteers on site.

1994

Senior swamis provided an update on the project to Pramukh Swami Maharaj during a site visit.



1994

Another fundraising scheme – the 'Care Patrika' – was sanctified by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



1994

In order to complete the construction of the mandir on time, over 1,000 BAPS volunteers dedicated their efforts to help in whatever way required.



1994

Devotees, young and old, from across the UK regularly came to the site to serve, arriving early in the morning and working until late at night.

1994

Men and women of all ages were inspired to help in whatever way they could.



1994

Volunteers on site polished the sculpted stones that had arrived from India. Here, one of the *torans* (decorative arches) is being polished.



1994

The mandir began to take shape as the beautifully carved pillars were secured in place.



1994

Around 100 artisans from India assisted in the stone carving in the UK, speeding up the process of construction.



1994

In January, the UK Satsang Mandal was shaken with the sudden passing of the chairman and close friend of Swamishri, Shri C.M. Patel. Swamishri and Mahant Swami served as pall-bearers during his funeral rites in Atladara.



1994

Many questioned whether the mandir would be completed on time, but Swamishri visited the construction site, inspiring and reinvigorating everyone.



1994

During one visit, Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed, “*Patthar satsang karavshe* – the stones will spread the glory of satsang in the UK.”



1994

Despite suffering from a frozen shoulder and other health issues, Swamishri continued to drive the project forward by making regular visits to the construction site.



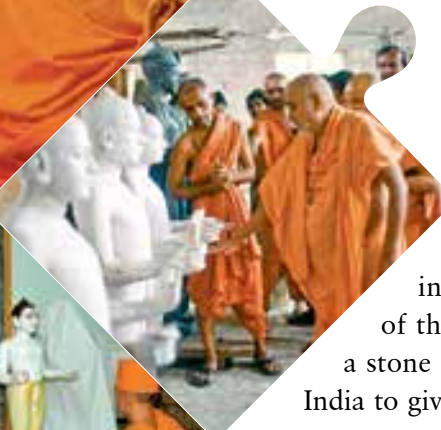
1994

Devotees flocked to Pramukh Swami Maharaj to pledge more funds to ensure the successful and timely completion of the mandir.



1994

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was deeply involved in the design of the mandir. He visited a stone carving workshop in India to give guidance regarding the *murtis*.



1994

Mahant Swami was also instrumental in the sculpting of the *murtis*, advising the swamis and craftsmen to make key adjustments.



1994

As the deadline approached, volunteers worked on site throughout the night to complete the mandir on time.



1995

The mandir neared completion as the opening ceremony loomed a mere few months away.



1995

An aerial view of the mandir under construction and the adjacent haveli.



1995

The ceremonial main gate, under construction, situated in front of the mandir.



1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived in the UK in July 1995 to oversee the final stages of the construction of the mandir.



1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj frequently visited the construction site to ensure that the work was done in good time and to the highest quality.



1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj on a site visit of the mandir and the haveli advising swamis and the project team on specific design elements.



1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj advised that an exhibition be set up on the ground floor of the mandir, to help explain Hinduism to the wider community in Britain.



1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's wish was to create a pillarless assembly hall. On his visits to the haveli, he often pointed out design details and provided valuable guidance to the project team.



1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj regularly continued visiting the construction site, ensuring the timely and proper completion of the mandir.



1995

The Mandir Mahotsav, Festival of Inspirations, celebrated the grand opening. Marquees were set up on Gibbons Recreational Ground, where celebratory events were held.



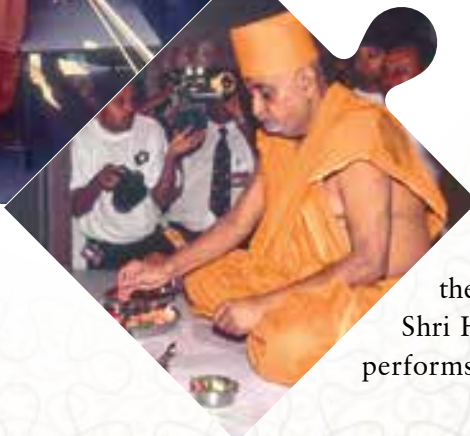
1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited every exhibit in the Bal Nagari (Children's Pavilion), participating in the interactive elements set up by volunteers.



1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, seated in the central shrine before Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, performs the *vastu puja* on 18 August.



1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *prasad pravesha* ceremony, with Mahant Swami and Ishwarcharan Swami.



1995

Beautiful floats were created on which the *murtis* were paraded in a grand procession through the heart of the City of London on 18 August.



1995

The *nagar-yatra* began at Hyde Park Corner and ended at Trafalgar Square, passing through Piccadilly Circus. Thousands participated in and witnessed this historic procession.



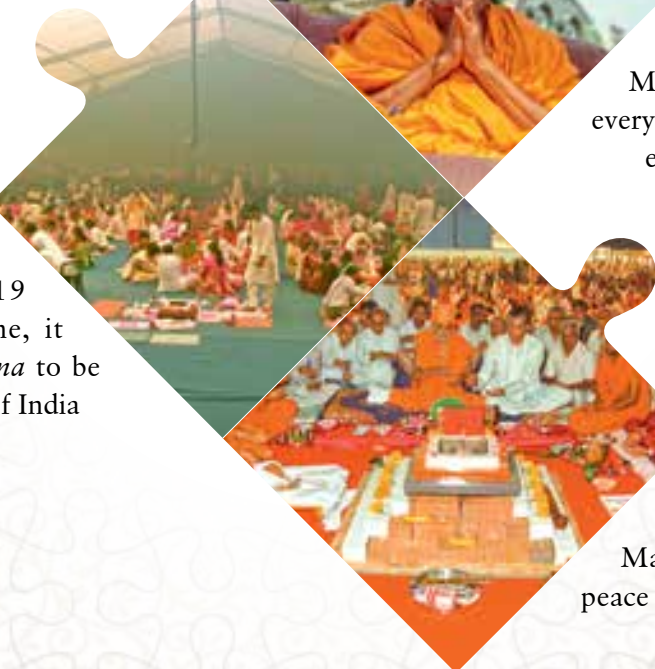
1995

To the surprise of every devotee present, Pramukh Swami Maharaj joyfully blessed everyone with his divine presence at Piccadilly Circus.



1995

A Vishwa Shanti Mahayagna was performed on 19 August. At the time, it was the largest *yagna* to be performed outside of India



1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj graced the Vishwa Shanti Mahayagna, praying for peace and prosperity all over the world.

1995

20 August – the day of the grand opening of the mandir.



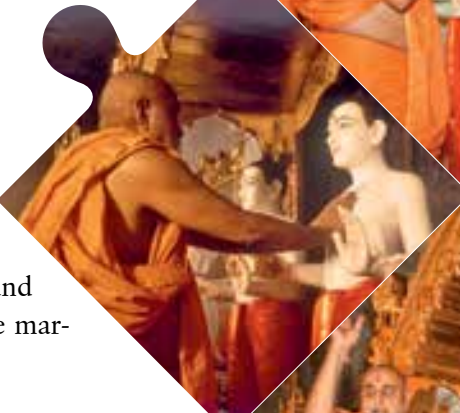
1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj stands before the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to perform the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals.



1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj invokes the divine presence and power of God in the marble *murtis*.



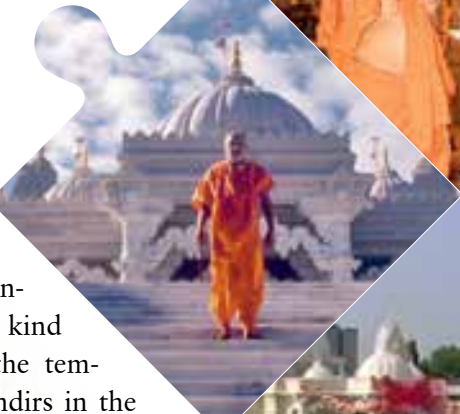
1995

Pramukh Swami Maharaj signals his joy during the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony. The haveli (cultural) complex was also opened by Swamishri on 20 August.



1995

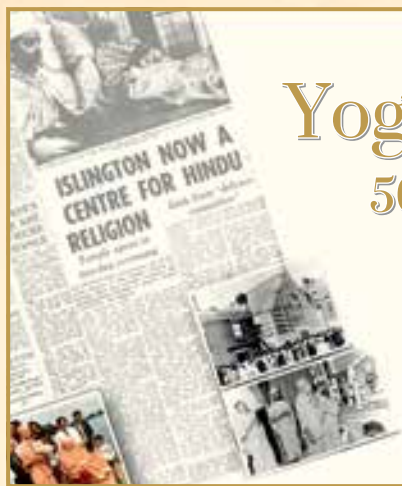
Pramukh Swami Maharaj stands on the steps of the mandir, the first of its kind outside India and the template for future mandirs in the West.



1995

From the first day, thousands of devotees and well-wishers flocked for darshan of the majestic new *shikharbaddha* mandir built of marble and limestone. ♦

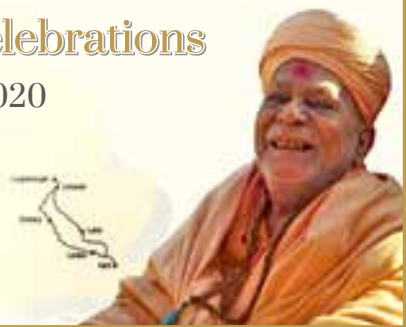




Yogiji Maharaj in the UK

50th Anniversary Celebrations

Sunday, 14 June 2020



From 23 May to 7 July 1970, His Holiness Yogiji Maharaj led a group of 12 swamis to the UK – the first time that sadhus of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya were visiting the country. During their one-and-a-half-month stay, on Sunday, 14 June 1970, Yogiji Maharaj inaugurated the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Islington, north London. It was one of the first Hindu mandirs in the UK and the first ever Swaminarayan mandir in the western hemisphere – setting in motion a grand legacy that lives on and continues to thrive today.

Exactly 50 years to the day, on Sunday, 14 June 2020, a grand celebration commemorating the 50th anniversary of this historic occasion was webcast to many thousands across the world. The *pratishtha* in 1970 had concluded with the *arti* of the *murtis* at 12.22 p.m., which was replicated 50 years later at precisely that time with the original *murtis* under the dome of the new, stone temple in Neasden that Yogiji Maharaj himself had prophesied 50 years previously. An *annakut* of sweet delicacies and other items was also offered to the *murtis* in the shrines.

The celebrations began much earlier, at 1.30 a.m. BST, when the resident swamis of London Mandir sang a medley of kirtans during Mahant Swami Maharaj's puja (6.00 a.m. IST). The live performance in London, relayed to Nienpur via

video conference, retold in brief the history and impact of Yogiji Maharaj's visit in 1970. The kirtans and narrations were interspersed with audio recordings of Yogiji Maharaj himself, much to the interest and delight of Mahant Swami Maharaj in India.

In the evening, the 50th anniversary celebrations climaxed with a riveting, eye-opening three-hour documentary-style production reliving one of the most momentous periods of BAPS history. Told through rare video footage, photographs, letters and audio records as well as eyewitness accounts from senior devotees, swamis, His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and His Divine Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, it brought to life the history in a way never seen before.

In his video blessings from India, Mahant Swami Maharaj drew upon this golden history and Yogiji Maharaj's unfathomable vision, encouraging everyone to continue his ethos of humility, devotion and sincere service with *samp* (unity) – values close to Yogiji Maharaj's heart.

The grand celebrations concluded with the evening *arti* and a closing prayer offered to Yogiji Maharaj, paying tribute to his love, pristine saintliness and exuberant enthusiasm, with heartfelt pledges to live by his teachings and wishes.

Families had joined in the celebrations from home throughout the day by decorating their *ghar*



Resident swamis perform the *patotsav arti* of the original *murtis* consecrated by Yogiji Maharaj in Islington Mandir



Yogiji Maharaj revealed Pramukh Swami as his spiritual successor on several occasions during his visit to the UK

mandirs, offering celebratory food to their *murtis* and participating in the special *arti* at the end.

The unforgettable programme rekindled golden memories for those present in 1970, while for others, it presented an opportunity to learn, appreciate and be inspired by the priceless history upon which they stand today.

One viewer commented, “It’s very rare to watch a historic documentary and feel as if you were really there. What a truly wonderful programme. My whole family, including my younger children, were captivated and learned so much about the history of satsang and the legacy that Yogiji Maharaj created for Hindus and the many migrant Indians from East Africa.”

BEHIND THE SCENES

The event commemorating the 50th anniversary of Yogiji Maharaj’s visit to the UK had to be organized and produced within a few weeks. A team read through Yogiji Maharaj’s *jivan charitra* to prepare relevant questions for the *sadguru* swamis who had come in 1970. All these interviews were swiftly conducted in India within one week and their recordings sent to London. Devotees were also interviewed.

The rare audio recordings of Yogiji Maharaj from 50 years ago were a great challenge due to the quality of the recordings. The transcribers worked extremely hard in the short amount of

time they had to listen to each audio recording and transcribe them accurately.

One of the most exciting and delightful finds were the recordings of Yogiji Maharaj on the flight from Uganda to London. V.H. Patel, who was on the flight, had the incredible foresight to record the audio on the flight. Mahant Swami Maharaj especially derived great joy listening to these particular recordings.

Similarly, the recording of phone calls between Yogiji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and devotees in the UK brought to life this incredible story.

Audio recordings and videos of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the letters in which he had written about Yogiji Maharaj’s visit in 1970 were also incorporated.

Video footage and photographs of Yogiji Maharaj’s visit were reviewed. Press cuttings from that time were accessed.

A replica of the Islington Mandir *sinhasan* was created in which the original sanctified *murtis* were placed for worship. Mahant Swami Maharaj also offered *pujan* and *arti* to a replica of these same *murtis* in Nenpur.

The following pages present an overview of the various celebrations to commemorate the 25th anniversary of London Mandir





Mandir Darshan & Abhishek

Wednesday, 12 August 2020

In the interest of public health and the safety of all devotees and visitors, the mandir in London had closed on 13 March 2020 due to the global coronavirus pandemic. However, the mandir still continued to meet the spiritual needs of the devotees and community through daily webcast services and weekly online programmes.

As part of the London Mandir Silver Jubilee, between 12 and 20 August, with the permission of the local authorities, devotees were given the opportunity for mandir darshan and *abhishek*

of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj by registering through an online booking system.

When visiting, devotees were required to wear face coverings and follow other safety measures implemented to minimize risks.

After devotees enjoyed darshan in the upper sanctum and *abhishek* in the lower chamber, swamis greeted seniors, youths and children from a safe distance in the corridor. Their interactions added to a truly memorable and uplifting experience for the devotees. ♦



Devotees enjoy darshan of the *murtis*



Devotees perform *abhishek* of Shri Nilkanth Varni



Shri Krishna Janmashtami

Wednesday, 12 August 2020

The London Mandir 25th Anniversary Celebrations began on Janmashtami, the birth anniversary of Shri Krishna Bhagwan. This was fitting, as the mandir's inauguration festivities in 1995 had also begun on Shri Krishna Janmashtami.

A special online evening celebration assembly began with resident swamis lighting traditional *divas* under the central dome of the mandir, which was reciprocated by devotees in their homes.

The assembly presented messages of faith, loyalty, and intense love for and protection of

devotees based on the life of Shri Krishna through an enlightening programme of bhajans sung eloquently by swamis, a captivating drama and insightful discourses.

The video blessings of Mahant Swami Maharaj reiterated this message, encouraging devotees to remain faithful to God.

The festivities culminated with the *arti* to signify the birth of Shri Krishna and then the joyous swinging of the *paramu* (cradle) accompanied with devotional singing. ♦



Swamis sing bhajans during the assembly



Devotees celebrate at home



Mahila Celebrations

Saturday, 15 August 2020

A special online programme for women devotees, titled ‘Sarvasva Arpanam: Inspiration, Creation and Celebration’, centred on the inspirational sacrifices by women that made the mandir possible and their continuing contributions over the last 25 years.

The documentary-style production drew upon rare video footage, historical photographs and personal accounts from young and senior women devotees.

Women shared their experiences of the incredible sacrifices made to raise funds for the mandir as well as their physical services during its construction – all whilst continuing to support their families and further their own careers.

The programme creatively presented the six-day Mandir Mahotsav of 1995 through a series of couplets, narrations and drawings. Their vivid descriptions and treasured personal memories brought to life the divine atmosphere of the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Over the last 25 years, the mandir has brought together multiple generations and supported countless women through every stage of their life journey.

The mandir’s profound impact on the wider community was illustrated through written and recorded messages from prominent women, led by Secretary of State for the Home Department, Rt Hon. Priti Patel. She reflected on the mandir’s contribution to London’s “multi-culturalism” and the way in which “it has brought together people of all faiths and no faiths and all backgrounds.”

Carolyn Downs, CEO of Brent Council, described the mandir as “one of the most important sights in Britain.” Dame Cressida Dick, Head of London’s Metropolitan Police Service, praised the mandir’s work “in promoting universal values of social stability, moral dignity, family unity, cultural harmony, moral integration and global responsibility.” Dawn Butler, MP for Brent Central, spoke of the experience of “peace, calmness and serenity” during her visits, and commended the mandir’s support

for the community during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The celebrations concluded with heartfelt prayers of gratitude from all women and pledges to uphold the mandir's noble values of charity and service for generations to come.

The 2½-hour programme vividly revealed how and why women of all ages are an indispensable part of the mandir's past, present and future.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This online presentation was produced by a team of women senior devotees and supported by numerous others, young and old.

The team coordinated their efforts to collect interviews, record voiceovers, prepare videos and select appropriate music.

Over a period of three days, they interviewed a total of 50 women devotees from London, other centres in the UK and even the USA. All interviews were transcribed with time stamps and relevant tags to allow indexing and categorizing. Once categorized, appropriate clips were selected and ordered. A series of reviews and edits were then made until the final edits were ready.

They analyzed 5,000 images and more than 100 hours of videos from the archives to select photos and footage to include in the final presentation. It took approximately 300 hours of editing to create the more than 75 videos that were combined to create the webcast celebration.

EVENT FEEDBACK

■ Learning about the commitment and dedication of women to help create this magnificent mandir has provided me with even more motivation to serve like they have. I also now understand the sacrifices that my mother and grandmother and many other women made to fulfil the vision of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

■ Absolutely amazing from beginning to end! Full of history and emotion, and an inspiration for all of us younger generations and for future generations of *mahilas* to come.



Young *balikas* participate in the celebrations by sharing what London Mandir teaches them



A young *balika* performs *arti* with her mother

■ Brought back so many memories and tears to my eyes too. So nice to see so many old faces... some who are sadly no longer with us. Truly was a Labour of Love.

■ Absolutely amazing celebrations. So creative, heart touching, captivating, and so immaculately executed. Well done!

■ So great to hear all these amazing *prasangs*. Such inspirational ladies amongst us. Such a wonderful celebration of our *mahilas*.

■ So incredible to see so much *seva* and hear all the *prasangs*! I am sure this is only a snippet of what really went on and there must be so much more! Such a privilege to be surrounded by so many amazing women.

■ Omg! Speechless I am. I feel I want to do *dandvats* to these *mahila haribhaktas*.

■ Absolutely amazing. Just no words. Even my children loved it. Such a brilliant *sabha* and so well thought out and put together.

■ Well executed with great ideas. So proud to belong to the BAPS *parivar*.





Children's Celebrations

Sunday, 16 August 2020

Thousands of children and their families joined the specially scripted online presentation for children.

The interactive programme followed the adventures of a young boy, Tilak, who celebrated his eleventh birthday by embarking upon a thrilling 'journey of discovery' at the mandir. He followed a series of clues and unravelled riddles which led him around London Mandir. During his search, he learned about the mandir's history and charitable activities, as well as its environmentally friendly features and community outreach programmes.

Tilak's interactions with swamis along the way provided him with valuable life lessons of Growth, Identity, Faith and Thoughtfulness – forming the eternal 'GIFT' of profound teachings with which the mandir has inspired countless children over the last 25 years.

Children joined Tilak in his journey from their homes by answering questions through

interactive online polls. They also discussed and debated how they, too, would overcome some of the obstacles and dilemmas that he faced.

Mahant Swami Maharaj elaborated further upon these key values through a specially recorded video message, encouraging children to work hard, study sincerely, imbibe purity of thought and action in their daily lives, serve with unity and develop firm faith in God.

The programme concluded with pledges from children to reflect upon the precious legacy of values that the mandir has bestowed upon them and to embody them in their lives.

Both children and parents thoroughly enjoyed the enlightening programme.

BEHIND THE SCENES

In the planning phase, 28 *bal-balika karyakars*, aged 16 to 40 years, brainstormed during their almost daily conference call meetings. Meetings would begin at around 6.00 p.m. and end after

midnight – sometimes continuing even up to 2.30 a.m. – with a short break for *arti* and dinner. All *karyakars* attended every meeting until the very end; such was their commitment to the *seva*.

The *karyakars* included students, professionals working from home, and some with demanding family responsibilities, such as cooking and taking care of their children.

The script was written by Bhavik Shah. It featured only one main actor: 11-year-old Darsh Goverdhan who played the role of Tilak and memorized the 47-page script in one week.

Thereafter, filming was completed over two days. Then, a team of five editors, who despite their very limited editing experience, learnt the required skills while daily reviewing the footage and editing.

EVENT FEEDBACK

■ Thank you so much for this superb programme. My daughter was fixated on the drama throughout, and so were we. We learned so much.

■ I am so touched that my son was able to learn about the importance of the mandir and how much it can offer him. To deliver this so engagingly in the current climate was fantastic.

■ That was brilliant! I really liked that we could follow Tilak around and help him on his journey and learn with him.

■ Wow! This webcast was so much fun and I really learnt loads today. Thank you London Mandir for everything you have given me in my life. I hope I can give you something back as well.

■ Today, the Bal celebrations put us all in a different orbit altogether. Brilliant concept and exceptional delivery by all participants. Couldn't move. No words are sufficient to praise.

■ Way better than expected guys! Really impressed with the shooting... overall flow... scripting... suspense... and quality was ace.

■ GIFT as the key is a great idea!



Tilak learns a valuable message



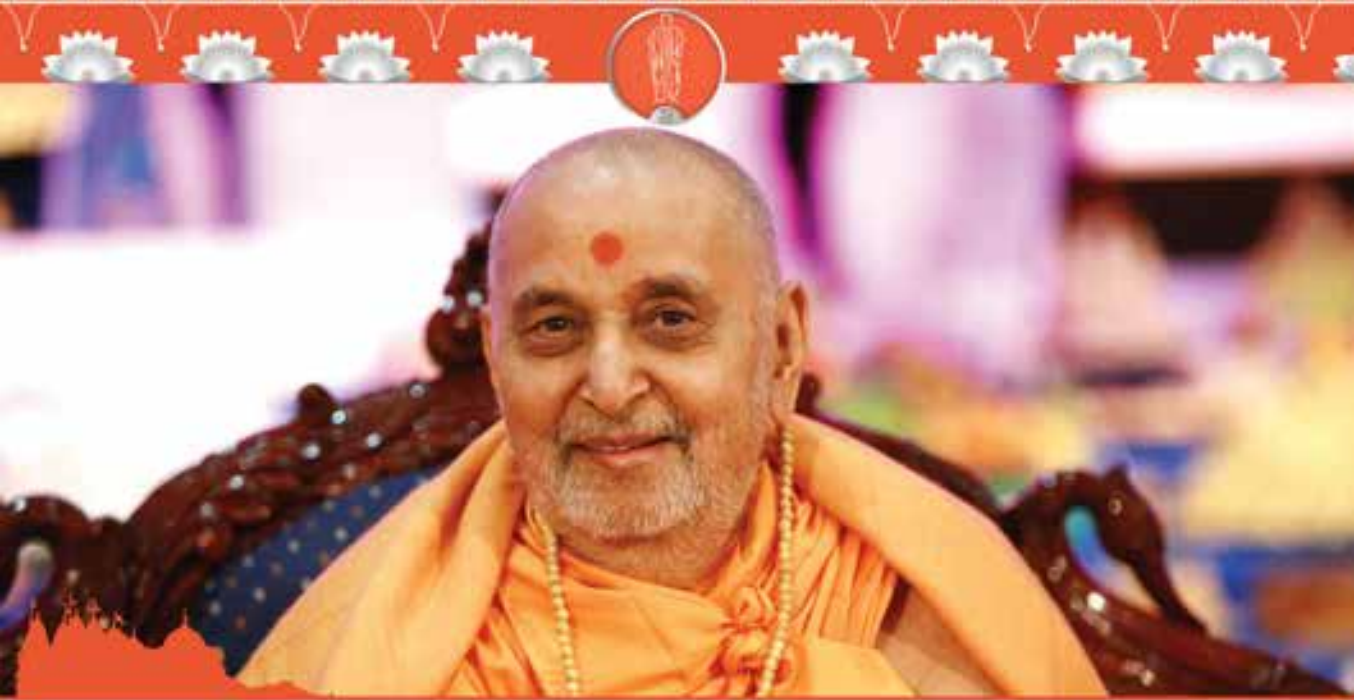
Online poll to determine Tilak's next move



Tilak attains the GIFT key



Children watch the programme at home



Pramukh Swami Maharaj Smruti Din

Sunday, 16 August 2020

After inaugurating the London Mandir in August 1995, Pramukh Swami Maharaj visited the UK and Europe again in 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2006 and 2007, showering devotees and well-wishers with immeasurable bliss.

During these visits, every room, every passage-way, every corner of London Mandir has been infused with unforgettable and inspiring moments of his presence.

A memorable online programme brought these historic memories alive through a montage of eye-witness accounts and previously unseen footage from the past 25 years.

The video and photo montages were interspersed with narrations from resident swamis who shared their insights and the backstory of these incidents. It revealed the spiritual love, sacrifice and compassion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj to please and inspire young and old.

The programme concluded with a pledge of gratitude to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and a final collage of recollections from Mahant Swami Maharaj's visit to the UK in 2017. It revealed how he has continued Pramukh Swami Maharaj's legacy of unconditional love and gifted new chapters of blissful memories.

The heartwarming programme rekindled golden memories for those present during his visits, while for others, particularly younger children, it presented an opportunity to learn, appreciate and be inspired by the selfless love that Pramukh Swami Maharaj had showered upon the devotees of UK and Europe.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Of the two ideas on how to portray Pramukh Swami Maharaj's visits to London Mandir over the past 25 years – by year of visit or by location



Devotees joyfully welcome Swamishri during one of his many arrivals at London Mandir



Swamishri playfully interacts with a child, 2004



Swamishri interacts with devotees in between darshan of the murtis



Swamishri departs from London

in the mandir – the latter was chosen.

The goal was to portray the affection and memories Swamishri had showered throughout the mandir to all devotees.

The challenge was to create a programme that was distinctly suitable for webcasting and that could not be replicated for an in-person event.

Hence, to show as much footage of Swamishri as possible, the entire mandir was covered in a ‘one-take’ style format.

Volunteers reviewed hundreds of hours of old video tapes covering Swamishri’s eight visits from 1995 to 2007.

Each tape was analyzed and categorized according to the mandir locations of its content and the year of Swamishri’s visit.

This categorization was used to make highlight reels for each year, as well as each location throughout the mandir.

Simultaneously, another team managed by *yuvak karyakars* contacted all the swamis, studied Swamishri’s *vicharan* reports and other such sources to identify *prasangs* that may not have been recorded on tape.

After identifying the *prasangs*, the swamis were matched to the location of their *prasang* and highlight reels of Pramukh Swami Maharaj within each location were created.

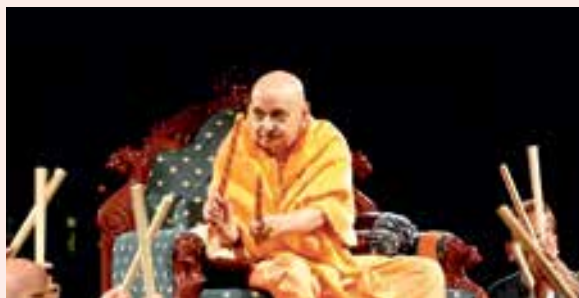
The team also reviewed thousands of photos from Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s visits and found pictures that matched the commentaries the swamis provided.

One of the biggest tasks was the huge amount of footage to go through and categorize. Furthermore, most of the team had not witnessed these *prasangs* in Swamishri’s presence. Hence, it was a fresh look for them to truly understand the impact Pramukh Swami Maharaj had on the devotees of London and other UK centres.

Editing the final product was another challenge for the inexperienced team. Despite the steep learning curve, the team, with the support of more experienced *yuvaks* achieved their goals.

EVENT FEEDBACK

■ I am lost for words. Those wonderful memories of great festivals with Swamishri here in London, and witnessing so many of his daily acts



Swamishri plays *ras* with senior devotees during an assembly in the haveli, 2004



Swamishri blesses a *balak* in Sarvasva

of service – watching him guide, console, laugh with us and stand beside us through every stage of our lives – these moments were truly brought to life. The programme truly filled my heart with warmth and joy.

■ My dad always tells me about the special places and moments here at the mandir with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I now understand how precious these places are in the mandir and I feel so lucky to have seen these. They are just as special for me now.

■ Absolutely touching, full of emotions...it took us all back on a long divine and unforgettable journey.

■ Today's memories of Swamishri brought tears to my eyes at the *labh* Bapa gave.

■ It was a truly grand effort. Well done for taking me through the journey of 25 years with Swami Bapa.

■ Truly awesome programme. A wonderful trip down memory lane. Beautiful, unforgettable, cherished memories.

■ Absolutely wonderful programme. All the *santos* spoke well and good video clips. Just

didn't want the programme to finish. Great memories over the years with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

■ Just exceptional. What *smruti*. He was alive in our rooms today. Thanks to all of you.

■ All the selected clips, *prasangs* and transitions were the best *ma* best!

■ What an epic of a story of Bapa. Thank you.

■ What an excellent programme. Truly brought back memories of some of my visits. It brought me to tears. Thank you all for the journey back in time.

■ Today's programme was amazing... was glued throughout... very memorable and emotional.

■ Lovely presentation... Bapa was always at home in London.

■ Wow! What a great *sabha* with some emotional and special memories of Swamishri in London Mandir. In every corner of the mandir, Bapa has given someone a special *smruti*. ♦



Swamishri during his visit to London in 1998



Swamishri plays the *kartals*, 2004



Global Online Vishwa Shanti Mahapuja

Saturday, 22 August 2020

The unique global online Vishwa Shanti Mahapuja in the presence of Mahant Swami Maharaj and senior swamis was a collective prayer for family harmony and world peace.

The fact that the mandir in London created by Pramukh Swami Maharaj has touched the lives of people across the world was reflected in the eager participation on this momentous occasion of more than 31,000 people from 33 countries. They registered to participate in the *mahapuja* from their own homes, with several thousand more joining even without registering.

The *mahapuja* was conducted from the shrines of London Mandir by the resident swamis. While, from Nenpur in India, Mahant Swami Maharaj presided over the opening of the *mahapuja* through a live video link. He also offered his personal blessings in which he paid tribute to the tireless commitment of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

in gifting London with this mandir and gave blessings that satsang activities would continue to flourish in the UK and throughout Europe.

In addition, Pujya Bhaktipriya (Kothari) Swami joined from Pune, India, to lead the main prayers of the ceremony, and Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami addressed the online audience from Gandhinagar, India, at the conclusion of the *mahapuja*.

The millennia-old Vedic *mahapuja* prayers and mantras, beautifully chanted by the swamis to the accompaniment of musical instruments, bestow purity, peace and harmony in the world and bless all participants with peace of mind, righteous prosperity and family harmony – attributes that the mandir has provided to countless worshippers and visitors over the last 25 years.

The explanations of the components and rituals of the *mahapuja* ceremony were narrated in English and Gujarati, and were accompanied by



Resident swamis sing and recite the *mahapuja* verses



Families participate in the *mahapuja* from their homes



Families participate in the *mahapuja* from their homes



Families participate in the *mahapuja* from their homes

on-screen guidance throughout the ceremony, helping families to understand the meanings of the Sanskrit verses and perform the *mahapuja* rituals correctly.

Pre-registered families were sent a special pack beforehand with all the items needed to fully participate in the *mahapuja* ceremony from their own homes.

More than 6,500 photos were received of families participating from all over the world.

BEHIND THE SCENES

With the original plans to begin the LM25 celebrations with a Vishwa Shanti Mahayagna not possible due to the ongoing pandemic, the team decided to incorporate a Vishwa Shanti Mahapuja as part of the online celebrations.

The aim was to make it as interactive as possible so that devotees felt a tangible connection during the puja.

The challenge was getting families registered both locally and internationally and getting the packs delivered to them on time.

Registration

Registration was launched on 4 July. Thereafter, through emails, myBAPS app notifications and WhatsApp messages a national drive was conducted to contact all *satsangi* families in UK and Europe.

All *kothari* swamis outside India were given details to share with their local devotees who may be interested in participating.

All registrations were conducted online, with each household filling in the online form to register and specify the number of participants.

Karyakars assisted those unable to use the online process themselves. Only registered households were sent the *mahapuja* pack as per the details they provided. In total, 9,158 households and 31,725 individuals from 33 countries registered as *yajmans* for the *mahapuja*.

Preparation & Delivery

The Swaminarayan School gym was used for storage of the *mahapuja* items and packaging of the family-specific *mahapuja* kits while adhering to government COVID safety guidelines.

Over 300 volunteers registered and served in shifts from 8.00 a.m. to midnight over four days.

Each household's kit was packed based on the number of registered household members, so due care, concentration and checks were applied throughout the process.

Boxes were assembled, filled and packed by unique ID for each registered household.

Most of the packs for the UK centres were then transported personally by *karyakars* from London to the various centres. At the respective centres, in line with mandir and government COVID guidelines, collection and delivery processes were implemented.

Overseas packs were mostly shipped in bulk to specific centres, after which local *karyakars* arranged for delivery to the households.

EVENT FEEDBACK

- The *mahapuja* was a once in a life experience.
- We received the beautiful puja box today and were so touched and impressed.

- We truly appreciate the love, affection and devotion that has come with the puja pack and all the efforts that have been made in organizing such an incredible global puja.

- A truly unique and uplifting experience and we were overjoyed that Mahant Swami Maharaj joined the ceremony. We've seen the *mahapuja* performed before, but to be able to fully participate from our homes and understand the intricate meanings, and convey these to our children, made this very special. It is so heartwarming to see how the mandir continues to give to us all 25 years on.

- That was an awesome experience! Didn't feel as though we were away from mandir. Bapa and the mandir had both come to us! ◆



An individual *mahapuja* kit



Over 300 volunteers helped to pack the *mahapuja* boxes



Volunteers pack the *mahapuja* boxes



Boxes packed and ready for delivery to the various centres



Kirtan Aradhana

Sunday, 23 August 2020

The final day of the celebrations marking the 25th anniversary of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, began at 1.30 a.m. BST, when the swamis of London sang a medley of kirtans during Mahant Swami Maharaj's puja (at 6.00 a.m. IST).

The live performance in London, relayed to Nenpur, India, via video conference facilities, journeyed through the inspiring history of the mandir. Swamis eloquently sang a selection of kirtans – some written and composed especially for this occasion – describing the story behind the historic inauguration of London Mandir, the first traditional Hindu mandir in the western hemisphere.

The kirtan narrative was interspersed with audio recordings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj which included notable conversations with senior devotees, such as Shri C.M. Patel (former Chairman of UK Satsang Mandal), as well as excerpts of

Swamishri's blessings, enthusing everyone with renewed vigour amid the challenging periods of the mandir's construction.

The medley began with a Sanskrit laudation to the mandir and Yogiji Maharaj, its initial visionary.

Compositions such as '*Samarpan Jivan Arpanam*' illustrated the sacrifices and dedication of devotees to build the mandir, while '*Hālo Hālo ne Mandir Banāviye*' described the devotees' enthusiasm to construct the mandir.

Excerpts from *Shri Swaminarayan Charit Manas*, '*Arvāchin Yuga me Badā Mandir Ehi Kahāi*', narrated the 1995 Mandir Mahotsav inauguration festivities, including the grand *nagar-yatra* in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj through the famous streets of Central London, including Piccadilly Circus.

Swamis shared the sentiment of welcoming devotees and well-wishers to the newly



Swamishri performs his daily puja in Nenpur

inaugurated mandir by singing ‘*Āvo Bhakto Bhale Padhāryā, Mandire Sadā Swāgatam*’. The beauty of the *murtis* was then described in ‘*Aniyāli re Tāri Ānkhāladi*’, noting Mahant Swami Maharaj’s guidance in the sculpting of the *murtis*, particularly their eyes.

Over the last 25 years, the mandir’s beauty, tranquility and spirituality have attracted many distinguished personalities from around the world. Some of these were mentioned in another passage of verses from *Shri Swaminarayan Charit Manas*, ‘*Āvyā Englandnā Rājvi Jevā*’.

The musical tribute also captured the profound impact that the mandir has made in the lives of countless people and rekindled precious memories with Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj since its opening. Nishkulanand Swami’s popular kirtan, ‘*Āj Ānand Mārā Uramā*’, gave perfect voice to these emotions and interactions.

The musical tribute concluded with the mandir’s 25th anniversary celebratory kirtan, ‘*London Mandir Rajat Mahotsav*’, sung to the waving of BAPS flags.

After the kirtans concluded, Swamishri gave his blessings, expressing his delight on the occasion and lauding the efforts of the devotees and swamis of UK and Europe. The swamis then made a number of offerings on behalf of all the devotees, including an album and *kalash* of prayers, which Swamishri blessed.



Swamishri listens to the bhajans during his puja



Swamis offer a shawl to Swamishri



Swamishri reads the prayers offered by the devotees



Swamishri gestures to embrace everyone



Mandir Patotsav Ceremony

Sunday, 23 August 2020

The early morning *kirtan aradhana* was followed by the Patotsav Ceremony at 9.30 a.m. BST, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the mandir's *murtis* when they were infused with divine presence by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1995.

Swamis performed the *patotsav* rituals, including the *abhishek* of the *murtis*, in a special service during the morning, which was webcast to thousands across the world. During the ceremony,

they offered prayers for everyone affected by the global Covid-19 pandemic, as well as for peace and harmony to prevail in the world. Devotees and well-wishers joined in these prayers from their homes.

Mahant Swami Maharaj had expressed a wish to personally join in the Patotsav Ceremony. So, earlier in the morning, he had performed the *abhishek* of the *murtis* in London remotely from Nenpur, India, using a wireless trigger. Video



Devotees perform the *patotsav arti* at home



A *balak* performs the *patotsav arti* at home

Swamishri performs the *patotsav arti* in Nenpur

Abhishek is offered to Shri Nilkanth Varni



Abhishek is offered to Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj



Abhishek is offered to Shri Hari Krishna Maharaj

highlights of this unique participation were also shown during the main ceremony.

Kothari Yogvivek Swami delivered a discourse on the significance of mandirs, especially their theological importance as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Vachanamrut. He also reflected upon the history of the mandir's inauguration and the tireless commitment of devotees who, inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj, offered their dedication and devotion upon which today's 25th anniversary celebrations were founded. Video highlights of the cultural festival leading to the mandir's inauguration in 1995 were also shown, bringing

together these messages and rekindling cherished memories.

As part of the *patotsav* celebrations, an *an-nakut* of sweet and savoury dishes was devoutly offered in the main shrines. Swamis sang *thals* offering these delicacies to the deities to sanctify, while devotees joined in by offering *thal* in their own mandirs at home.

The *patotsav* celebrations concluded with the ceremonial *arti* at noon, which was performed by the swamis in London Mandir and simultaneously by Mahant Swami Maharaj in Nenpur, and webcast live to everyone.

Devotees participate in the *patotsav* celebrations at homeA family performs the *patotsav arti* at home



London Mandir 25th Anniversary Finale Celebration

Sunday, 23 August 2020

The year-long celebrations marking the 25th anniversary of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, culminated with a gripping documentary-style production that explored the mandir's rich history, challenging creation and profound international impact.

The four-hour finale programme featured a compilation of audio clips, photographs and unseen video footage charting the mandir's history from inception to inauguration and its profound lasting legacy that continues to inspire everyone.

The journey gave an insight into the arduous search for suitable land and the challenging economic climate in the early 1990s. Narrations from senior swamis, volunteers and devotees revealed Pramukh Swami Maharaj's unshakeable faith and personal connection that inspired devotees to join this 'labour of love' and offer their heartwarming personal sacrifices.

The mandir's opening in 1995 was marked by a six-day Mandir Mahotsav titled Festival of Inspirations, which included a magnificent procession of the *murtis* through the streets of London with Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessing the devotees from a decorated dais at Piccadilly Circus.

Following its inauguration, the mandir has harnessed the efforts and collective spirit of thousands of volunteers who have served individuals and families to create a better community, a better nation and a better world. This profound impact has been acknowledged by some of the country's most prominent individuals. A selection of these, including HRH The Prince of Wales and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, shared their personal testimonies through written and video messages of goodwill and gratitude.

The mandir's opening sparked an explosion of local, national and international media coverage,

paying homage to its glorious addition to the London skyline and religious landscape of Great Britain. A selection of this coverage also featured in the programme.

Over the last 25 years, the mandir has provided hope for countless people in the most adverse of circumstances. Viewers learned about some of these life-changing inspirations through powerful and emotive testimonies.

On behalf of all devotees, a young boy offered a concluding prayer inscribed on a paper swan with sentiments of gratitude to Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj for the gift of London Mandir.

Mahant Swami Maharaj responded to the prayer by saying, “Today we celebrate 25 years of London Mandir. A day we were all meant to be together. But not a moment has passed where we have been apart. Pramukh Swami Maharaj made this mandir so that you can make yours within your hearts. Your hearts are my mandir, forever my home. We will meet again and reunite – together as a family; together as one.”

His swan joined more than 10,000 others that were created by devotees and placed inside the assembly hall as a symbol of togetherness with him. It marked a fitting end to the overarching theme of the programme, with Mahant Swami Maharaj having written on his swan: ‘London Mandir is Our Home’.

BEHIND THE SCENES

In May 2019, an initial meeting was held with Atmatrupt Swami and Yogvivek Swami to produce a standalone documentary on Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s creation of London Mandir to accompany the main celebrations.

A young team began preparing a comprehensive documentary detailing the history of London Mandir and its subsequent impact on the life of devotees and the wider community. Although initially separate projects, the in-person celebration and documentary teams combined to create



Swamishri watches the Finale Celebration webcast



A balak offers a prayer on behalf of all the devotees



Swamishri writes and sends his reply



Folded swans represent devotees seated before Swamishri

A family perform the *arti* at home

Devotees keenly watch the webcast

a moving webcast programme to deliver the same impact and emotion.

A programme outline was formulated and small teams were assigned specific tasks: sequencing (team of 10), editing (3), colour grading (2), audio levelling (2), music creation (2) and mastering (2). As production proceeded the creative elements began to flourish.

The AV team, led by Viral Patel, liaised with these teams to ensure that each segment was in tune with the overall production. The swamis and senior *karyakars* reviewed the segments in detail to ensure authenticity and correct messaging.

Simultaneously, volunteers undertook the mammoth task of ensuring that old and new video footage, audio and photography were properly archived and available to the editing teams.

The initial task was to gather all the relevant information, as outlined below.

Conducting Interviews

The team interviewed *sadguru* swamis, mandir and Sanstha trustees, BAPS Planning Cell members and many more involved in the making of the mandir. Each revealed many special *prasangs* with Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Some members of the team travelled to India to conduct interviews. With support from the swamis and AV team in North America, some key interviews were also carried out there.

Mahant Swami Maharaj was also interviewed, recounting his vivid memories of Yogiji Maharaj's

visit, and his memories and *prasangs* from the time of the London Mandir construction.

In total, 88 interviews totalling 110 hours were conducted.

Transcribing Interviews

A team of 10 ladies and 10 gents transcribed every interview word for word with time codes.

Transcribing an interview would take up to four times the length of the interview. Transcribers would use any spare time they had to transcribe. Some transcribed on their commute to work or university, while some would even use their lunch and other break times to transcribe.

All the transcribed documents were read and categorized in great detail, resulting in over 2,000 pages of text. Thus, every bit of information provided by each interviewee was slotted into the wider story of the London Mandir.

For the transcribers, the experience was special. One volunteer noted, "Every minute of every interview teaches you more about the mandir, about the *samarpan* that went behind UK satsang, and ultimately about Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *mahima*. The whole process has been life changing and surreal. The stone, wood, *kalashes*, haveli, foyer, offices, carvings, *sinhasans* and the *divya murtis*... each with their own intricate story handwritten by Bapa for us. The world's greatest gift from the world's greatest person."



Interviews of Madhusudanbhai Patel (L) and Sagoonbhai Patel, members of the mandir project core team

Transcribing the Blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

From the hundreds of hours of audio and video blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in the UK, relevant portions were transcribed. Also, the rare audio recordings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj in meetings and on phone calls, which provided a unique insight into Pramukh Swami Maharaj's way of working, were similarly transcribed and categorized.

For many years, Harishbhai Patel has been logging and archiving these blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, and so identified many priceless clips of Pramukh Swami Maharaj narrating the story of London Mandir. These added great value to the documentary.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Letters

Of the countless letters Pramukh Swami Maharaj had written regarding the construction of London Mandir, 55 letters – some up to 10



Many interviews of volunteers were recorded

pages long – were scanned, deciphered, logged, categorized and summarized.

Regarding the letters, one volunteer noted, "To see him in 'action' gave me a deep, real and authentic insight into the complexities of creating a mandir and most importantly the sheer efforts of Bapa. These letters evidence Swamishri's timely involvement in every step of the process. He was always thorough and made sure the right people were informed at all times. He took interest and gave hope to *haribhaktas* who felt the burden of the task. He never lost faith in Shriji Maharaj and he made sure his *haribhaktas* didn't either.

"He wrote these letters from different locations and amidst hectic *vicharan*. But reading these letters, I never got the sense that Bapa was in any way tired or anxious. Instead, he constantly instilled faith and hope to all his correspondents. He truly was the force behind the entire project."



Some of the video archives



Some of the photographic archives



A volunteer scans various photos and documents



Searching and selecting historic documents



A volunteer transcribes the interviews

Historic Documents

There were also many historic documents, such as legal documents, meetings minutes, hand calculations by the engineers and many others.

Mukeshbhai Patel, secretary to the UK Board of Trustees, has been serving the Sanstha since 1982 and has kept meticulous records. He even found a copy of the 20,000 signatures collected in the 1980s for the planning permission appeal on the Harrow land.

All these historic documents were scanned and logged based on date and topic.

Timelines

In order to maintain an accurate storyline, all documents and events were placed in chronological order, providing the team with a holistic view of events from 1970 to 1995. This was a vital reference to ensure that the content of each episode was in order.

Swamishri's *vicharan* reports (1990–95) were

vital in cross-checking dates, times and places with the information collected from the interviews and also provided many new *prasangs*.

Photographs, Audio and Videos

Pramukh Swami Maharaj had told the AV team in 1990 to capture everything in such a way that it could be found and used with ease for years to come.

Yogicharan Swami also took many photographs at the time, capturing some of the best photos of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Shrijiswarup Swami sent these and other visuals to the team.

Devotees also generously contributed by sending in old photographs and videos they had.

Overall, the collection included tens of thousands of photographs, and hundreds of hours of videos and audio recordings. Much of the old footage and photographs were in the form of old VHS tapes or negative strips. These were converted to a digital format, scanned and categorized.

Also, the audio had to be cleaned to ensure each interviewee and *ashirwad* could be heard crisply without any background noise.

Compiling the Documentary

This huge collection of materials now had to all be brought together to form a coherent and captivating documentary.

On 12 July 2020, the young core team, all of whom were born after the opening of London



A volunteer prepares a map graphic



A volunteer designs graphics for the various events

Mandir in 1995, began creating the documentary for the finale event.

The first challenging task for the team was to weave together the various *prasangs*, historical events, virtues of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, blessings and other aspects into a coherent and captivating storyline.

Numerous brainstorming meetings were held to discuss the documentary structure. Ultimately, the team decided to use 11 sections:

1. Sankalp
2. Land search
3. Initial research and design
4. Stone and craftsmanship
5. Financial hardships
6. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's design input
7. Site seva and volunteers
8. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's fundraising efforts in 1994
9. Pramukh Swami Maharaj's site visits in 1994 and 1995
10. Mandir Mahotsav
11. Pramukh Swami Maharaj as the ultimate creator.

A storyboard was created for each section with selected excerpts of interviews to present the full story.

The aim throughout this whole process was to highlight Pramukh Swami Maharaj's role. That he had almost single-handedly coordinated the numerous facets of the project and combined them to complete the mandir.



A volunteer engaged in editing the documentary

The main problem with this was that there was way too much content for the time allocated.

Each section started off being over an hour long and this had to be edited down to a mere 10 minutes while maintaining a coherent flow, not only within each episode, but also between episodes.

The first part of the finale event documentary on the construction and creation of the mandir was eventually allocated 2½ hours. Thus, the team had to make tough decisions about what to include and what to omit, since everything was deemed worthy. The team worked long hours late into the nights to meet the deadlines.

Graphics and Text

Graphics and animations were designed. These included: overall design themes, templates, maps, routes and other visual elements.

Scripts for narration, subtitles, translations and other texts were prepared.



Volunteers compile and edit the documentary



Final editing of the documentary

Reviewing

Yogvivek Swami and other swamis spent many hours reviewing the videos multiple times to ensure quality and accuracy. Their enthusiasm, drive and constant guidance enhanced the documentaries.

The camaraderie and unity between the swamis and youths created an atmosphere that was always light and joyful despite the pressures, and contributed to the success of the project.

Final Editing

Once the young team had completed the final rough sequence, the project was then passed on to the experienced central AV team for the final edit. They colour graded, adjusted audio levels, mastered and perfected the entire celebration video to ensure it was seamless.

The camaraderie and willingness to help and share between the separate event teams was highlighted by the exchange between the Pramukh

Smruti Din team and the Finale Event team.

The Pramukh Smruti Din team had decided to use a museum template theme, which the LM25 documentary team thought would better suit the LM25 documentary. They agreed immediately and readily gave up their theme and found a different approach for their presentation.

Mahant Swami Maharaj was very pleased on hearing about this practical demonstration of unity and cooperation between the volunteers.

Narration and Music

Multiple recording sessions were required for the various commentaries.

Also, appropriate background music for the documentaries had to be found to match the mood of the segment, producing sound effects and even creating new music to suit the mood of particular sections within each segment.

As this was usually the final task in the production, it came with immense time pressures.



Background music and narration are added



Prayers are offered in Sarangpur for a successful event

Prayers and Blessings

On 8 January 2020 in Surat, blessing the documentary Mahant Swami Maharaj had said, “*Khub saras thashe, khub samas thashe.*” It was his words which inspired everything and his words rang true.

On the day before the final showing, a draft version of the finale programme was sent to Sarangpur to be offered at Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s *samadhi sthan* and prayers were offered to ensure the smooth running and success of the programme.

Some feedback from the core team:

■ We were not alive when the mandir was being created, but through this *seva* we feel like we were able to witness it all.

■ Bapa said then that he’s making this mandir for future generations; we are directly reaping the fruits of this. Every day as we edited and brainstormed, we were continually in awe of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

■ Throughout this *seva*, we got to learn about the *mahima* of many *haribhaktas* as well. We see these people week in, week out in the mandir, but we were totally oblivious of what they had done for this mandir, for Bapa. They had given their lives up for him. It’s generated a whole new level of respect for the *haribhaktas* as well.

■ This *seva* of creating and editing this documentary, listening to the interviews, learning about London mandir, changed the way we saw our mandir. We don’t see it in the same way anymore. We have developed a greater *mahima* for it.

EVENT FEEDBACK

■ We will never know the full extent of how much Pramukh Swami Maharaj has done for us. But the brilliant programme brought to light some *prasangs*, told first-hand.

■ Wow...What a divine *sabha*. I was in tears. We saw this diamond coming up in front of our eyes. It is our home. It gave us everything we

lacked in life. We knew Bapa was instrumental in building it but to this extent... Lost for words... Forever indebted to the ultimate master.

■ Can’t describe in words, only tears!

■ Mesmerising... breathtaking... superb.

■ I’m absolutely moved to the core. Thank you so much for teaching us the history of how the mandir got built, the *mahima* of our *haribhaktas* and the *shraddha*, *niyams* and *dharma* we must imbibe.

■ It was an emotional experience. Learnt so much more about the mandir. I had no idea how much Pramukh Swami Maharaj was involved in the design.

■ Gobsnacked to learn what Bapa has done without us even getting a sniff of it.

■ People go to film school for so many years to create something like this. Companies pay millions to have creative production houses make something like this. To deliver the type of programmes we’ve seen in such a short time frame (and having to pivot from plan A) is unbelievable.

■ Who would have thought that a virtual *utsav* would be so impactful and energizing? London Mandir and Bapa pervaded our homes today. The impact of today’s LM25 celebrations will be immeasurable.

■ Truly one of the most memorable and inspiring programmes that left even people like me who do not have a direct history with London Mandir feeling I was a part of that. Despite the pandemic and its limitations, arguably an even better experience of LM25.

■ It was seriously the best programme I’ve ever seen. Even though we may not all have direct connections to London Mandir, you reminded us what it means to be a part of BAPS. You have showed all of us why we’re here and what we need to become.



MESSAGES

Many dignitaries and organizations shared messages of gratitude and congratulations on London Mandir's 25th anniversary.



Her Majesty The Queen



The Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall

- Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
- His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales
- Boris Johnson, Prime Minister, UK
- Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India
- Priti Patel, Home Secretary, UK
- Piyush Goyal, Minister of Railways and Commerce & Industry; Deputy Leader of the Rajya Sabha, India
- Lord Tariq Ahmad, Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth, UK
- Vijay Rupani, Chief Minister of Gujarat, India
- HE Gaitri Issar Kumar, The High Commissioner of India to the UK
- Keir Starmer, Leader of the Opposition, UK
- Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, UK
- Angela Rayner, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, UK
- Rajesh Agrawal, Deputy Mayor of London for Business, UK
- Dame Cressida Dick, Commissioner, Metropolitan Police Service, UK
- Lord Jitesh Gadhia, UK
- Dawn Butler, MP for Brent Central, UK
- Bob Blackman, MP for Harrow East, UK
- Gareth Thomas, MP for Harrow West, UK
- Navendu Mishra, MP for Stockport, UK
- Krupesh Hirani, Councillor for Brent and Harrow, UK



UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson



UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson



Keir Starmer,
Leader of the Opposition

- Ketan Sheth, Councillor for Tokyngton, Wembley Hill & Wembley Park, UK
- Pranav Bhanot, Chairman, Chigwell Parish Council, UK
- Ajay Maru, Councillor for Kenton West, UK
- Ameet Jogia, Councillor for Canons, Harrow, UK
- Anjana Patel, Councillor for Belmont, UK
- Vimal Choksi, Councillor for Ashton Waterloo, UK
- Mark Stewart, Royal Photographer, UK
- Dr Vijay Chauthaiwale, Foreign Affairs Department, India
- Nicola Mendelsohn CBE, Vice President, Facebook EMEA, UK
- Ashish Chauhan, CEO, Bombay Stock Exchange, India
- Lakshmi Kaul, Head & Representative, Confederation of Indian Industry UK
- Reena Ranger, Chair, Women Empowered, UK
- Pinky Lilani CBE DL, Chair, Asian Women of Achievement Awards, UK
- Metropolitan Police Hindu Association, UK
- National Health Service, North West London, UK
- NHS Organ Donation, UK
- National Kidney Federation, UK
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, UK
- Alzheimer's Society, UK



Mayor of London



Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi



Visakha Dasi, President, Bhaktivedanta Manor



The Rt Rev Nicholas Hudson



Malcolm Deboo, ZTFE President



Cressida Dick,
Metropolitan Police Commissioner



Priti Patel, UK Home Secretary

- Carers UK
- Cancer Research UK, South East Roadshow
- Breast Cancer Now, UK
- Glaucoma UK
- Rosa Fund for Women, UK
- Matthew Reed, CEO, Marie Curie, UK
- Richard Hawkes, CEO, British Asian Trust, UK
- National Hindu Students Forum UK
- Ministry of Tourism, India
- Brent 2020, London Borough of Culture, UK
- Brent Libraries, Arts and Heritage, UK
- Brent Museum Archives, UK
- Wembley Park, UK
- Inter Faith Network UK
- Interfaith Matters, UK
- The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, Global Head of the Church of England, UK
- Nicholas Hudson, Auxillary Bishop of Westminster, on behalf of Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop



Vijay Rupani, Chief Minister of Gujarat



Ashish Chauhan, CEO Bombay Stock Exchange



Angela Rayner MP



Lord Gadhia

of Westminster, Head of the Roman Catholic Church for England and Wales

- Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, Head of the United Hebrew Congregations of the UK and the Commonwealth
- Visakha Dasi, President, ISKCON Bhaktivedanta Manor, UK
- Shri Rakeshbhai Zaveri, Shrimad Rajchandra Mission, Dharampur, India
- Gumail Singh Malhi, President, Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall, UK
- Malcolm M. Deboo, Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe, UK
- Defence Hindu Network, UK
- Clear Channel UK
- Anthony Angel, Community Investment Manager, The Football Association, UK

Also, Wembley Stadium lit up its famous arch and displayed a congratulatory message on its screens (see photo at top of p. 50) ◆



Gurmail Singh Malhi,
President, Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Southall



Defence Hindu Network, UK



Dr Vijay Chauthaiwale



BAPS Satsang in the UK and Europe

The steady growth of satsang has led to new facilities at BAPS centres throughout the UK and Europe. The following is an overview of the main BAPS mandirs as of January 2021.

Leicester

Satsang activities began at a small semi-detached house on Doncaster Road. *Pratishtha* 1977.

Moved to larger facilities at St James Street in 1979.

Growth led to the inauguration of a purpose-built mandir in 2011.

Wellingborough

Satsang activities began at a small house on Mill Lane. *Pratishtha* 1977.

After expanding to more houses, the mandir was still too small for its needs. The existing mandir was further expanded, culminating in a new purpose-built and larger mandir inaugurated in 2009.

Manchester

Satsang activities began in Ashton-under-Lyne at a small house on Cowhill Lane. *Pratishtha* 1977.

Old factory converted to a new *hari mandir* in 1980.

New marble *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Shri Radha-Krishna, were installed in 1994.

New mandir being constructed on new site, scheduled to open in the summer of 2021.

Preston

The first BAPS Mandir in Preston was established in 1984 in a disused synagogue.

With the need for a larger facility, a property was acquired in the heart of the city and converted to a mandir which was inaugurated in 2015.



Leicester



Wellingborough



Preston

Birmingham

Swaminarayan Satsang Bhavan was inaugurated in 1990 by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Activities moved to a new site on Pitmaston Road in 2002, with additional refurbishments by 2006.

Continued growth and development has led to the need of a purpose-built facility which is currently under construction at the same site and is scheduled to open in the summer of 2021.

Loughborough

Yogiji Maharaj had sanctified Loughborough during his visit to the UK in 1970 and it has been blessed many times thereafter by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

A BAPS Mandir was inaugurated in 2001.

Coventry

The BAPS Mandir in Coventry was inaugurated on 10 December 2006. Following refurbishments, new *murtis* were consecrated on 23 June 2019

Nottingham

Regular satsang *sabhas* began in Nottingham in 1988 and a BAPS Mandir was inaugurated in 2007.

Luton

The BAPS Mandir in Luton was inaugurated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 2004.

Leeds

Regular weekly *sabhas* since 1989. New BAPS Mandir opened in 2015.

Chigwell, East London

Regular satsang *sabhas* in East London since 1995. *Murti-pratishtha* of the new BAPS Mandir in Chigwell was performed by Mahant Swami Maharaj on 8 October 2017. The Sabha Hall was inaugurated in June 2018.

Havant

The BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Satsang Bhavan in Havant was opened by Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami) on 28 May 2006. New *murtis* were consecrated on 30 June 2019.

Southend-on-Sea

After regular satsang assemblies in Essex for many years, a spacious hall in Southend-on-Sea was converted to a new BAPS Mandir in 2003. New *murtis* were consecrated in 2004.

Lisbon, Portugal

House acquired for mandir in 1998.

In 2000, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *arti*. He also met with the then President of Portugal, Jorge Sampaio, and blessed the people of Lisbon.

A new BAPS Mandir was opened in September 2014 in the presence of Mahant Swami and Bhaktipriya Swami (Kothari Swami).

Antwerp, Belgium

The BAPS Mandir in Antwerp was opened in 2003. New *murtis* were consecrated in 2006.



Loughborough



Lisbon



Chigwell

Spiritual and Community Activities

Over the past 25 years since its inauguration, the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, London, has contributed in significant ways to the lives of people of all ages and backgrounds. The following is a brief overview of the activities enabled by the mandir for devotees and the community.

CHILDREN & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Character-building and skill development activities have helped young people become responsible and contributing members of society. These include:

- Assemblies for Children, Teenagers and Youths
- Assemblies for Campus Students
- Conventions
- Summer and Winter Camps
- Substance Abuse Awareness
- 'Experience India' Trips
- Outings and Educational Retreats
- Educational Mentoring
- Educational Tutoring
- Revision Workshops
- Careers Fairs
- Language Classes
- Art Classes
- Music Classes
- Yoga Classes
- Cooking Classes
- Folk Dances

- Musical Performances
- Festival Celebrations
- Sporting Events and Tournaments
- Kidz Ultimate Challenge

FAMILY UNITY

Emphasizing the value of families and family unity, parents and children are encouraged to hold a regular *ghar sabha* (family assembly) and eat together during *samuh bhojan*. Motivation and guidance is provided through periodic meetings for parents and family conventions.

- Parents Meetings
- Family Conventions
- Parent-Children Assemblies
- Parenting Seminars
- Garbha Sanskar Seminars

CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

BAPS in the UK strives to provide meaningful and enjoyable activities for the elderly, making them feel valued, loved and respected.

Specially tailored programmes cater to the specific needs of the elderly, including their physical, financial, emotional and spiritual welfare.



Kishore-Kishori Mandal Winter Camp, London



Balaks in Sarangpur during an 'Experience India' trip

- Sabhas (Assemblies)
- Vadil Seva Kendra
- Shibirs (Conventions)
- Goshthis (Discussion Forums)
- Festival Celebrations
- Musical Performances
- Elderly Appreciation Days
- Dinners with Entertainment
- Outings and Retreats
- Care Home Visits
- Health Workshops
- Seminars for Elderly Living
- Medical Screenings
- Seva (Volunteering)

COEXISTENCE & HARMONY

Worshippers and visitors are welcomed with warmth and respect at BAPS mandirs in the UK. This helps enrich and empower society with understanding and trust, mutual respect and peaceful cooperation.

BAPS members, young and old, live harmoniously with their neighbours and proactively contribute to their community through a variety of activities.

BAPS's participation in interfaith activities and dialogue with societal and religious leaders fosters peaceful coexistence with other cultures, faiths and civic bodies.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Hindu culture is a beautiful mosaic of art, music, dance, cuisine and festivals with roots dating back thousands of years. BAPS in the UK

celebrates Hindu culture through various cultural events and educational programmes including all the major festivals of the Hindu calendar: Shivratri, Holi, Ram Navmi, Swaminarayan Jayanti, Rath Yatra, Guru Purnima, Raksha Bandhan, Krishna Janmashtami, Diwali and the Hindu New Year Annakut.

Through various activities, BAPS encourages younger generations to experience the beauty and richness of Hindu culture and to develop a sense of appreciation for their heritage.

BAPS is also an integral part of the British Hindu community in the UK in celebrating its shared values and culture.

SERVING SOCIETY

BAPS serves society through a wide range of national and local activities.

- Free Screening Clinics
- Health Awareness Lectures
- Health & Safety for the Elderly
- Blood Donation Drive
- Bone Marrow Drive
- Organ Donation Awareness and Seminars
- Food and Clothes Drives
- Care Home Visits
- Careers Fairs
- Scholarships
- Tree-Planting Campaigns
- Energy Awareness
- Recycling Projects
- Community Clean-Up
- Annual Sponsored Walks and Events



Balikas visit elderly care homes, London



Winter clothes and food collection for the homeless



Women celebrate Swaminarayan Jayanti & Ram Navmi



Elderly Appreciation Day, 2015

- Support for victims of earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and other natural disasters
- Covid-19 National Care and Connect Programme
- Annual Winter and Food Clothes Collection for the Vulnerable
- Observing Earth Hour
- Participation in Open House London
- Observance and celebrations of International Women's Day
- Prarthana Sabhas (Memorial Assemblies)
- Interfaith Workshops
- Observance of National Interfaith Week
- Interfaith Conferences
- Interfaith Armistice Day Remembrance Ceremony
- Interfaith Music Festival participation
- Interfaith Peace Walk
- Tributes to WWI Soldiers

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

The mandir is primarily a spiritual sanctuary

which serves to enable devotion and service to God and guru so that individuals of all ages and backgrounds can advance spiritually. The mandir is home to a multitude of activities that foster such spiritual growth.

- Sabhas (Assemblies)
- Festivals
- Cultural Programmes
- Musical Performances
- Shibirs (Conventions)
- Samuh Puja (Group Worship)
- Seva (Volunteer Services)
- Goshthi (Group Discussion)
- Group Outings
- Cultural Programmes
- Adhiveshans (Spiritual Competitions)
- Webcasts
- Chaturmas Parayans
- Satsang Assessments
- Karyakar (Leadership) Conventions



Covid-19 Pandemic: Supporting the community and frontline workers



Annual summer *shibir* for devotees

Awards & Accolades



Since its celebrated inauguration in 1995, the BAPS Mandir in London has received many awards and accolades and has been a hub for many activities that have also been recognized by leading authorities. The following is a selection of the many recognitions and honours bestowed upon London Mandir and its activities.

Guinness World Records

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha and London Mandir have been highlighted many times over the years:

2002: Influential People: Pramukh Swami Maharaj was chosen as one of the most influential people in recognition of his contribution in transforming the lives of millions through the building of mandirs.

2001: London Mandir: The largest traditionally-built Hindu temple outside India.

2000: Record-Breaking Annakut Festival: In recognition of the world record of offering 1247 vegetarian dishes during the Annakut Festival held at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, on 27 October 2000.

2000: Pramukh Swami Maharaj: The Millennium Edition of Guinness World Records hailed His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj as a masterbuilder, highlighting his efforts in the Architects & Masterbuilders category of the Knowledge section.

1998: London Mandir: Mentioned in the Religious Architecture section, as the “Largest Hindu Temple outside India”.

1997: London Mandir: Recognized in the Architecture category of the Commerce section as the “Largest stone Hindu temple outside India.”

Natural Stone Award, 1995

The Stone Federation issued a special award

to the Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir in 1995 as part of its Natural Stone Awards.

Brent Green Leaf Award, 1995

Environmental award presented by the Brent Council to the Mandir for “using environmentally friendly materials and techniques”, including collecting over 7 million aluminium cans in less than three years.

Most Enterprising Building Award, 1996

Awarded by the Royal Fine Art Commission & British Sky Broadcasting for the Swaminarayan Mandir in London.

Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1997–98

In its Annual Report, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, featured the Mandir as a “modern building of major importance in our multicultural society”.

The Eventful 20th Century – 70 Wonders of the Modern World

This prestigious Reader’s Digest publication (1998) prominently mentions the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, lauding its scale, intricate detail and the extraordinary story of how it was built and inspired by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



BAPS Volunteers set new Guinness World Record at Brent Respect Festival for World's Largest Finger Painting, 2007

'Mystic India' Wins 'The Audience's Choice Prize' at the 10th International Large Format Film Festival, UK & Europe – January 2005

At the 10th International Large Format Film Festival at La Geode in Paris, France, *Mystic India* won 'The Audience's Choice Prize'.

Cultural Cosmic Voyage CD-Rom Wins BECTA Award 2005, London, UK – 13 January 2005

'Cultural Cosmic Voyage', a CD-ROM prepared by the BAPS Bal-Balika Mandal, UK, in July 2004 came joint-first in the 'Innovation and Change' category of the BECTA (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency) Awards.

Seven Wonders of London, 2007

Time Out, the highly respected international city-guide publishers, declared the mandir as one of the "Seven Wonders of London".

UK Pride of Place Award, 2007

The Mandir was awarded the 'UK Pride of Place' award by Government authorities after a nationwide online poll. The mandir was voted as the place that generates the greatest pride amongst local residents. Ministers hailed it as "an inspiring building of which the whole country can be proud".

Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, 2009

The Children's Forum of BAPS Swaminarayan



'Landmark London' Olympic Pin Badge of Neasden Temple, 2012

Sanstha, London, UK, was announced as one of 95 volunteer groups from across the country – and only one of two in London – as winners of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. The Award recognizes the outstanding contributions made to local communities by groups voluntarily devoting their time for the benefit of others.

Olympic 'Landmark London' Pin Badge Featuring Brent's Neasden Temple, 2010

For the London 2012 Olympic Games, the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) and London Councils launched the 'Landmark London' competition. Londoners were invited to vote for the most iconic landmark in their borough that they would most like to see featured in an individual pin badge. Each of London's 33 boroughs was required to shortlist four landmarks which represents what "makes their borough great". BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden was featuring as the selected landmark for the London Borough of Brent, and an Olympic pin badge was created with the image of the Mandir.

BAPS Children's Forum Receives Bronze Award from ContinYou, London, UK – 2 December 2011

The Sunday School was awarded the Bronze Award from ContinYou – one of the UK's leading education charities.

The Bronze Award signifies that the BAPS

supplementary school meets all the essential requirements of the NRC and has all the policies and procedures in place to safely and effectively offer children's activities to a nationally recognised standard.

Under a separate category, ContinYou recognized The Swaminarayan School for its exceptional support to the BAPS supplementary school.

Outstanding Achievement Award in 'Brent in Bloom' Competition, 2012

Following awards in 2009 and 2010, the mandir was again acknowledged for its outstanding achievements in helping make the local community "a greener, cleaner place to live, work and visit" as part of the Royal Horticultural Society's 'Britain in Bloom' campaign to help "communities become better places to live."

BAPS Children's Forum Receives Gold Award for Supplementary Education – 7 July 2012

BAPS Children's Forum received the Gold Award from the National Resource Centre (NRC) for its "high standards of service in providing supplementary education to the community".

BAPS Swaminarayan Sunday School in London Receives British Academy Schools Language Award, London, UK – November 2012

The BAPS Swaminarayan Sunday School received an award for its 'Gujarati – Learn it or Lose it' project.

British Astronomical Association gives Good Lighting Award to BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Leicester, UK – 2 February 2012

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Leicester was conferred the Good Lighting Award by the British Astronomical Association (BAA) for its use of responsible, efficient, and 'sky-friendly' night-time lighting.

This was the first time the award was being presented to a place of worship anywhere in the UK.



'Brent in Bloom' Garden Award, 2009

The Swaminarayan School Receives New National Award for Able Children, London, UK – 28 February 2013

The Swaminarayan Preparatory School was recognized by the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) with its special Challenge Award for "helping pupils achieve their best". It honours schools that produce high quality work and encourage pupils to achieve their best and is regarded as "one of the most purposeful, rigorous yet supportive awards that schools can achieve".

BAPS Swaminarayan Sunday School Wins British Academy Award for Gujarati Teaching, London, UK – 15 December 2015

The BAPS Swaminarayan Sunday School won a British Academy Schools Language Award for its provision of Gujarati teaching. It was the only school in the UK to receive an award for Gujarati Language development.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj Awarded Certification of Distinction, Preston, UK – 22 October 2017

The 'Certificate of Distinction' was awarded by His Worshipful Mayor of Preston, Councillor Brian Rollo, to His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj in recognition of his spiritual, humanitarian and charitable contribution to Preston since 1974. Pramukh Swami Maharaj became one of only three individuals to have received this award in the history of the City.

‘Health and Wellbeing’ Community Award from the Faith & Belief Forum, London, UK – 27 November 2018

London Mandir received an award under the ‘Health and Wellbeing’ category of the London Faith & Community Awards organized by The Faith & Belief Forum in recognition of its commitment to the health and welfare of elderly community members through regular visits to residential care homes.

BAPS Trustee Receives Queen’s Honour for Community Cohesion and Charitable Service, UK – 31 December 2020

Sanjay Kara, a trustee for BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in the UK, was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) by Her Majesty The Queen in the New Year’s Honours List for 2021.

The citation reads: Sanjay Kara, Trustee, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (Neasden Temple). For services to community cohesion and public and charitable service in the UK.

Threlford Memorial Cup Awarded for Gujarati Teaching to BAPS, UK & Europe – 23 December 2020

The Threlford Cup, awarded annually since 1935, is presented to individuals or organisations that have evidenced a significant contribution in fostering the study of languages. BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in the UK was awarded the prestigious Threlford Memorial Cup for 2020 by the Chartered Institute of Linguists to “celebrate the importance of language and cultural understanding... and excellence in language learning.”

‘Community Resourcefulness in Response to Covid-19’ Award from the Faith & Belief Forum – 30 November 2020

The London Faith & Community Awards organized by The Faith & Belief Forum recognized the mandir’s nationwide care programme to support individuals and local communities in response to the coronavirus pandemic. ♦

Pioneer Devotees

BAPS Satsang in the UK and Europe is founded on the dedication of innumerable men and women devotees who, since the 1950s, have contributed in countless ways to the development of the Sanstha. Each BAPS centre has its history and pioneer devotees. The following names represent just the tip of the iceberg of devotees who have made significant contributions to the Satsang in various capacities over the past few decades.

LONDON

Start of Satsang: 1950s

- Mahendrabhai Patel
- Dahyabhai D. Meghani
- Chandrakant N. Dhupalia
- Purushottam Patel (Kent)
- Prafulbhai R.C. Patel
- Prahladbhai (Prahladiji)

- Dr Babubhai Karia
- Chitrnanbhai P. Patel
- Navinbhai Swaminarayan
- Arvindbhai Patel (Guru)
- Chunibhai Patel (Vaso)
- Jayantibhai Patel (Changa)
- Poonambhai Patel

London Pioneers from 1970

- Durgeshbhai Dave
- Ishwarbhai Patel (Master)
- Mahendrabhai Amin
- P.C. Patel
- Sumanbhai D. Patel
- Thakorbhai Patel
- C.M. Patel

- G.D. Patel
- Dr Indravadan P. Patel
- Arvindbhai P. Patel
- Gunvantbhai S. Patel
- Harmanbhai Patel
- Jashbhai P. Patel
- Vinubhai G. Bhattessa
- Gopalbhai Bakrania
- Vinodbhai H. Patel
- Dr R.B. Shah
- Motilal Chag
- Bhanubhai C. Patel
- Chandubhai C. Dalia
- Chimanbhai Z. Darji
- Dineshbhai C. Patel
- Jitubhai M. Patel
- Krishnamurti Pattni
- Maheshbhai M. Patel
- Purushottam N. Morzaria
- Pravinbhai C. Patel
- Ratilal. K. Patel
- Sagoonbhai S. Patel

LEICESTER

Start of Satsang: 1968

- Dahyabhai Patel
- Chunibhai U. Patel
- Bhupendrabhai Bhatt
- Achratbhai Bhatt
- Nareshbhai Patel
- Vadilal Modi
- Dipakbhai Raja
- Kantibhai Bhatt
- Dr Harikrishnabhai Patel
- Chunibhai Patel (Pujari)
- Narsinhbhai Patel
- Mahijibhai Patel
- Prabhudasbhai Patel
- Becharbhai Patel
- Jaywantbhai P. Patel
- Dinubhai J. Patel
- Mukeshbhai Patel (Wigan)
- Bachubhai C. Patel

- Navnitbhai Pancholi
- Rameshbhai Mashru
- Narendrabhai Waghela
- Kiritbhai P. Patel
- Umeshbhai Raja
- Jitubhai Pancholi

MANCHESTER, ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE

Start of Satsang: 1971

- Kishorbhai B. Desai
- Naginbhai Mistry
- Chaganbhai B. Patel
- Sumanbhai Patel
- Kantibhai (Ekantik) Patel
- Thakorabhai Patel
- Sumanbhai Patel
- Pitamberbhai Dhokia
- Vijaybhai Patel
- Maganbhai Patel
- Mohanbhai Patel
- Kalyanjibhai Patel
- Popatbhai Bhatt
- Gopalbhai Patel
- Rameshbhai H Patel
- Vikrambhai Patel
- Jagjivanbhai Patel
- Mohanbhai V Patel
- Bachubhai Rao
- Jaydev Brahmabhatt
- Vinubhai Patel
- Harishbhai Brahmabhatt

WELLINGBOROUGH

Start of Satsang: 1972

- Ambalalbhai A. Patel
- Mohanbhai Patel
- Chunibhai Patel
- Ambalalbhai Patel
- Rasikbhai Patel
- Natubhai Patel
- Vipinbhai Patel
- Ramanbhai Patel
- Chimanbhai Patel
- Bipinbhai Patel

- Ramanbhai Patel

PRESTON

Start of Satsang: 1974

- Chimanbhai Patel
- Govindbhai Limbachia
- Nagindas Gandhi
- Bhanubhai Patel
- Suryakantbhai Patel
- Ravjibhai Patel
- Vinubhai Limbachia
- Satishbhai Limbachia
- Ghanshyambhai Patel
- Ratilal Limbachia
- Balwantbhai Sharma
- Rameshchandra Parekh

BIRMINGHAM

Start of Satsang: 1972

- Shankarbhai Parekh
- Mulshankarbhai Joshee
- Dhoribhai Patel
- Chimanbhai Patel
- Manibhai Patel

LOUGHBOROUGH

Start of Satsang: 1982

- Ramubhai K. Patel
- Chandrakantbhai Panchmatia
- Dalpatbhai V. Mistry
- Jagubhai M. Mistry
- Arvindbhai V. Mistry
- Atulbhai R. Patel
- Narharibhai V. Mistry
- Pravinbhai K. Ladwa
- Madhusudanbhai Kanabar
- Narendrabhai D. Mistry
- Rameshbhai C. Patel

COVENTRY

Start of Satsang: 1988

- Madhubhai Patel
- Ishwarbhai Patel
- Pravinbhai Patel
- Indravadanbhai Gandhi

- Narendrabhai Chohan
- Natubhai Ladva
- Yogeshbhai Thakar
- Pravinbhai Jagatia
- Indubhai Patel
- Sureshbhai Patel
- Jagdishbhai Chohan
- Rasikbhai Kavia
- Balwantbhai Mistry
- Pravinbhai Karia

NOTTINGHAM

Start of Satsang: 1989

- Mohanbhai Popat
- Dr P.D. Patel
- Divyesh Rughani
- Jamnadas Maniar
- Pankaj Popat
- Pradeep Popat
- Virendra Dave
- Jayprakash Patel
- Kirti Patel
- Gajendra Maniar
- Sandeep Patel
- Kailash Dal

LUTON

Start of Satsang: 1981

- Shasikantbhai L. Patel
- Rameshbhai B. Shah
- Harshadbhai H. Patel
- Prakashbhai H. Pancholi
- Mansukhbhai D. Lalji
- Arvindbhai R. Patel
- Natwarlal G. Pancholi
- Maheshbhai R. Patel

LEEDS

Start of Satsang: 1977

- Rameshbhai Patel
- Vijaybhai Pancholi
- Rasikbhai Patel
- Mohanbhai Patel
- Sumanbhai Patel
- Jagubhai Patel
- Thakorabhai Patel

- Rameshbhai Purohit
- Mohanbhai Patel
- Ghanshyambhai Patel
- Kishorbhai Patel
- Girish Sonigra
- Ashishbhai Patel

SOUTH LONDON (CROYDON)

Start of Satsang: 1970

- Sumanbhai Patel
- Arunkumar Patel
- Arvindbhai Patel
- Ravindrabhai Patel
- Hemantbhai Patel
- Prakashbhai Patel
- Rajubhai Patel
- Natubhai Patel
- Manubhai Patel
- Gordhanbhai Patel
- Shrikantbhai Patel
- Prakashbhai Amin
- Kiranbhai Patel

CHIGWELL, EAST LONDON

Start of Satsang: 1962

- Punambhai Patel
- Shivprasad C. Trivedi
- Chandrakantbhai
Brahmabhatt
- Girishbhai Patel
- Somabhai C Amin
- Mohanbhai Harji
- Hariprasad Bhatt
- Sumanbhai C Patel
- Gordhanbhai
Brahmabhatt
- Jayantibhai Patel

HAVANT

Start of Satsang: 1988

- Narendra S. Patel
- Prafulbhai I. Patel
- Prafulbhai G. Patel
- Hiteshbhai M. Patel
- Mahendrabhai R. Patel

- Subhashbhai Patel
- Pushpakantbhai Patel
- Mitul Patel
- Rashmikant Shah

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA

Start of Satsang: 1988

- Bipinbhai Desai
- Kantibhai C. Patel
- Rajendra D. Patel
- Mahendrabhai M. Patel
- Rameshbhai Morzaria
- Ghanshyambhai Patel
- Pravinbhai Patel (Kenya)
- Has mukhbhai Swami
- Dineshbhai N. Patel
- Harishbhai Patel
- Dilipbhai D. Patel

LISBON, PORTUGAL

Start of Satsang: 1994

- Mahendrabhai Mashroo
- Mansingbhai
- Girishbhai Mashroo
- Shantilal Deugi
- Harakchandbhai
- Manilal Samgi
- Ashok Naggi
- Ashwin Chhagan

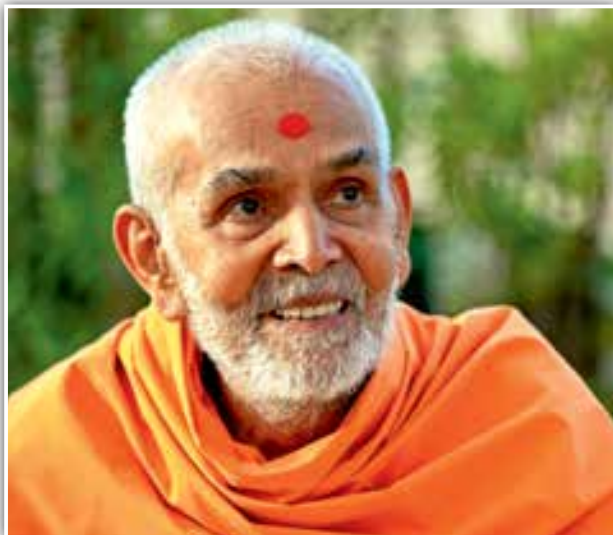
ANTWERP, BELGIUM

Start of Satsang: 1982

- Shamjibhai Patel
- Premjibhai Patel
- Premjibhai Vanani
- Mohanbhai Dhameliya
- Girdharbhai Gajera
- Babubhai Bharodiya
- Nanubhai Surani
- Rameshbhai Kamani ◆

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

April–November 2020, Nenpur



In the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic conditions, His Divine Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj has been residing in Nenpur for the last nine months. During this period Mahant Swami Maharaj has celebrated many festivals and satsang events and has given puja darshan and blessings online. Swamis and devotees throughout the world have been inspired and spiritually nourished by Swamishri's online darshan and spiritual discourses. A brief report of events and festivals celebrated by Swamishri in Nenpur is as follows.

- **2 April 2020:** Bhagwan Swaminarayan's birthday celebration (Hari Jayanti).
- **11 May 2020:** Mahant Swami Maharaj's 59th *bhagwati diksha* anniversary (according to the English calendar).
- **19 May 2020:** Yogi Jayanti or Yogiji Maharaj's birthday.
- **26 May 2020:** Pramukh Varni Din, the day when Pramukh Swami Maharaj was appointed as the president of BAPS.
- **14 June 2020:** A special online assembly to commemorate Yogiji Maharaj's consecration of the BAPS *hari* mandir in Islington in 1970, fifty years previously.
- **23 June 2020:** Rath Yatra festival.
- **24 June 2020:** Commemoration assembly of 75 years of BAPS Mandir, Atladara.
- **1 July 2020:** Beginning of the four holy months of Chaturmaas, on Dev Podhi Ekadashi. All took *niyams* while doing Swamishri's puja darshan.



Swamishri performs the Hari Jayanti arti



Swamishri celebrates Rath Yatra by operating Shri Harikrishna Maharaj's rath with a remote control



On 15 August, Swamishri and sadhus wave the Indian tricolour



Swamishri performs *pujan* of Shri Ganeshji



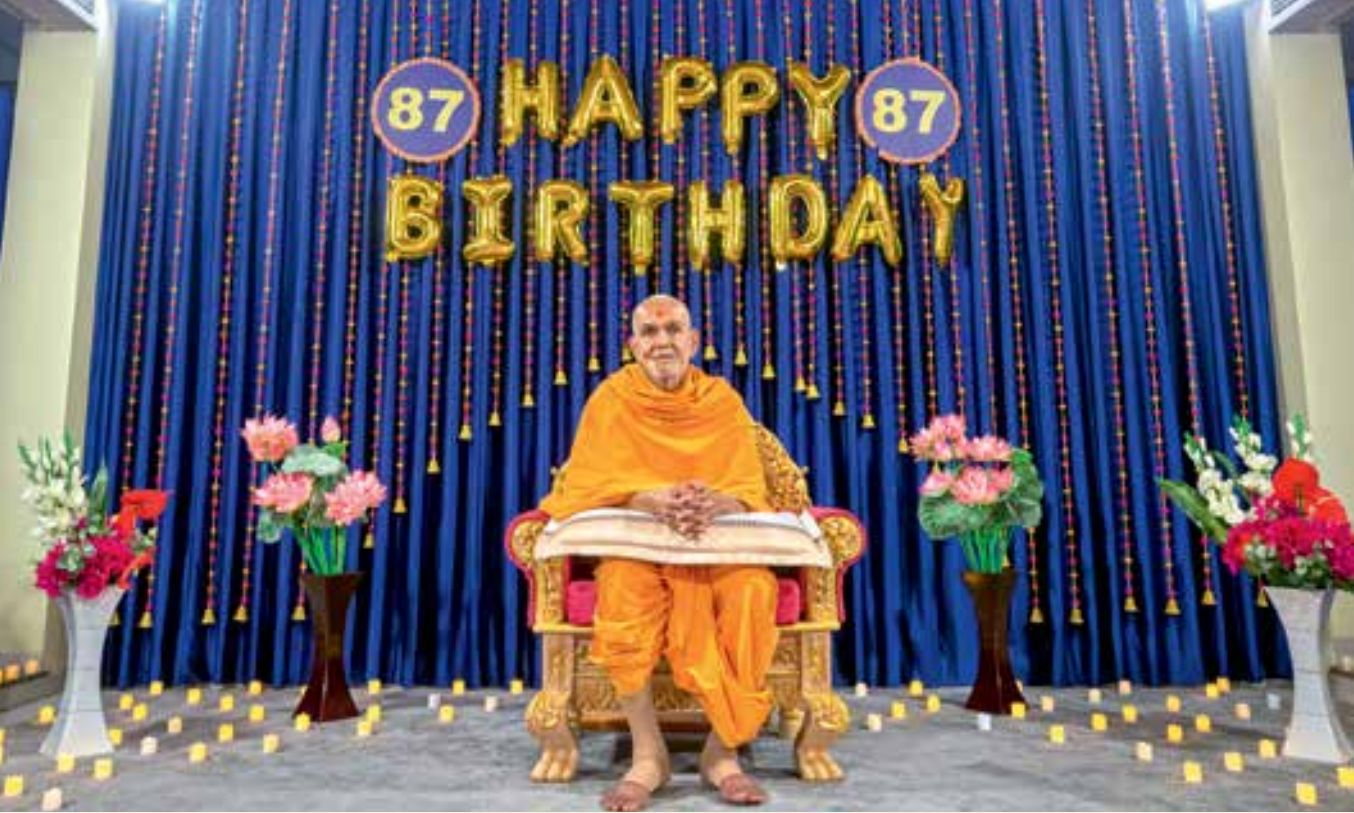
During Chopda Pujan Swamishri showers sanctified rice grains on account books



On New Year's day, Swamishri performs the *annakut arti*

- **5 July 2020:** Guru Purnima celebration.
- **20 July 2020:** Mahant Swami Maharaj was appointed as guru (Pramukh Varni Din) by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
- **29 July 2020 (Shravan *sud* 10):** According to the Indian calendar, all offered tributes to Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the fourth anniversary of his earthly departure.
- **3 August 2020:** Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed all for spiritual and physical protection on Raksha Bandhan.
- **12 August 2020:** Janmashtami festival.
- **15 August 2020:** Hoisting of the Indian flag on India's 73rd independence day celebration and prayers offered for the welfare and progress of India.
- **22 August 2020:** *Pujan* of Shri Ganeshji's *murti* on Ganesh Chaturthi.
- **29 August 2020:** Jal Jhilani festival in which Swamishri steered Thakorji's boat in a pool by remote control.
- **6 September 2020:** Shastriji Maharaj's Smruti Parva.
- **14 November 2020:** Chopda Pujan rituals on Diwali day. Countless devotees in India and abroad performed the online rituals at home while doing Swamishri's darshan.
- **15 November 2020:** Low-key Annakut festival held online due to the coronavirus pandemic. Similarly, a small *annakut* was offered to Thakorji at all BAPS mandirs worldwide.
- **16 November 2020:** Swamishri's online puja and *mahapuja* darshan on New Year's day. Swamishri also showered New Year's blessings on all.
- **25 November 2020:** Swamishri's online puja darshan on Dev Uthi (Prabodhini) Ekadashi and thereafter the *shakotsav (haathdi)* was held.
- **29 November 2020:** Kartik Purnima festival assembly. ◆

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



Mahant Swami Maharaj's 87th Birthday Celebration

13 September 2020, Nenpur

On 13 September 2020, Mahant Swami Maharaj's 87th Birthday Celebration was festively held online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. With the aid of computer technology BAPS swamis created a virtual stage with Mahant Swami Maharaj in Nenpur, and the *sadguru* swamis and other speaker swamis located in different mandirs. The entire celebration programme was relayed in Gujarati, Hindi and English. Countless devotees in India and abroad savoured the celebrations at home.

The programme commenced at 5.00 p.m. (IST) and streamed from live.baps.org and relayed on GTPL channel. The celebrations began with *dhun* and kirtans by swamis. Thereafter, Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived on the stage. Since the birthday celebration

coincided with Yogiji Maharaj's *smruti parva*, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami spoke about's Yogiji Maharaj's glory and saintliness.

Thereafter, a video of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj praising the saintliness and greatness of Mahant Swami Maharaj was shown. The divine revelations by the two gurus enthused the audience and further consolidated their spiritual bonds with Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The birthday celebration was based on the theme 'Sadhuta na Shikhar – Mahant Swami Maharaj' (Summit of Saintliness – Mahant Swami Maharaj) and based upon the words of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The great shastras of Sanatan Dharma, namely, Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, Shrimad Bhagvat,

Ramacharitmanas, Vachanamrut and others, describe the ideal qualities of a true Sant. And these qualities match with the life, work and virtues of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj. Each of the swamis who spoke, namely, Anirdeshdas Swami, Adarshjivandas Swami, Atmatruptdas Swami, Apurvamunidas Swami, Brahmaviharidas Swami and Anandswarupdas Swami, beautifully elaborated upon Mahant Swami Maharaj's virtues of egolessness, purity, compassion, equality, faith and divine impressions respectively.

Puja Dr Swami reminisced about Mahant Swami Maharaj's *parshad* and subsequent years, "I have known Mahant Swami Maharaj since many decades. Never have I heard him express faults or negative things about anyone. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has stated in the Vachanamrut that the spiritual association with a Sant is like a *param-chintamani* [the highest wish-fulfilling stone] and *kalpavruksh* [a wish-fulfilling tree]. We should make efforts to mould our lives in accordance with his *agna* and whatever that pleases him. Also, we should improve ourselves through introspection. The true measure of celebrating Mahant Swami Maharaj's birthday celebration would be to foster harmony [*samp*] everywhere."

On behalf of all BAPS swamis and devotees worldwide, Atmoswarupdas Swami honoured Mahant Swami Maharaj with a garland.

The celebratory event evoked spiritual joy and reverence in all. Then, everyone honoured Mahant Swami Maharaj by performing the *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual.

Finally, the virtual celebration event climaxed with Mahant Swami Maharaj's blessings, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj had done a lot by covering all aspects [of satsang]. He left for me to be honoured with garlands and respects by the devotees and others. Now, we all should do satsang with harmony, brotherhood and unity. Yogi

Bapa mentioned these three things and Pramukh Swami Maharaj lived every second of his life in that manner. When we observe how the gurus lived then our own satsang foundations become strong and we experience happiness in life."

In conclusion, everyone performed *arti* from their homes and experienced the bliss of today's celebration.

* * *

On 11 September 2020, Mahant Swami Maharaj's 87th birthday was celebrated according to the Indian calendar. Swamishri's morning puja was relayed live on the Sanstha's website. Thereafter he blessed, "We have attained a glorious association [*prapti*], and so nothing else remains to be attained. The essence of all the shastras is Brahma and Parabrahma. These two divine entities nourish and provide *moksha* to all. We have the association of Maharaj and Swami, which is a great *prapti*. All should consolidate *nishtha* and consider everything else to be trifle. If these two entities had not come in this *brahmand* then everything would have been meaningless. We have that Bhagwan and Sant. If one understands this then one's bliss will be boundless.

"May all be very happy in body, mind and wealth. May your problems be resolved. May you understand this [spiritual] knowledge so that everything [in life] becomes balanced. My prayers that all of you be blessed with the knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam."

In his blessings, Swamishri focused on realizing the *prapti* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Thereafter, the *sadguru* swamis offered garlands to honour Swamishri from their respective centres. The occasion also marked the inauguration of translations of the Satsang Diksha shastra in English, Swahili, Telugu and Uddiya. ♦





Vedic Installation Ceremony of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami Alongside Shri Harikrishna Maharaj

31 October 2020, Nenpur

For decades Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj worshipped the small chal murti of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, also worshipped by Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, and taught us the ideal path of offering bhakti to Bhagwan. Today, Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj daily worships Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. On 31 October 2020, in consonance with the Vedic Akshar-Purushottam Darshan, Mahant Swami Maharaj ritually installed a chal murti of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami besides Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. A brief account of the ceremonies is as follows.

His Divine Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj expressed a wish to install a *chal murti* of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami alongside the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Swamishri recalled the words of Yogiji Maharaj who had said that our bhakti to Bhagwan would be incomplete without the presence of his ideal devotee, Gunatitanand Swami, besides him. So, Swamishri festively consecrated the *chal murti* of Gunatitanand Swami on Sharad Purnima, 31 October 2020. Prior to the culmination of the historic *pratishtha* rituals a *maha-yagna* for world peace and a devotional and colourful procession were carried out on the precincts of Nenpur.



Swamishri performs the *mahayag arti* in the *yagnashala*, Nenpur

MAHA-YAGNA: Friday, 30 October

In the morning, the *maha-yagna* for world peace commenced in a *yagnashala* on the grounds of Shantivan, Nenpur. The *yagnashala* was created according to Mahant Swami Maharaj's instructions. Accordingly, a Vedic *padma-kund* (lotus-shaped altar), *sinhasans* with the *murtis* of Guru Parampara and the floor smeared with sacred cow dung were accomplished. The entire *yagna* rituals were conducted by Bhadreshdas Swami in Sarangpur, Shrutiprakashdas Swami in Gandhinagar and Mukeshbhai Shastri and his Brahmin colleagues in Ahmedabad.

At 7.08 a.m., Mahant Swami Maharaj commenced the *yagna* rituals amidst the auspicious chantings of Vedic mantras.

Swamishri blessed the occasion, saying, "Out of the five entities revealed by Shriji Maharaj we have Parabrahma, the highest entity, and Aksharbrahma, the second entity. Maharaj and Swami are eternally together. There is only one Parabrahma and only one Brahma.

"By the grace of Yogi Bapa we got Shri Harikrishna Maharaj, who was worshipped for many years by Gunatitanand Swami. For years I had been feeling that something was missing. Now, the

murti [of Gunatitanand Swami] has been prepared by *santos* and we will now have the divine pair [*jod*]. [They are both] eternally together. They are above *kal*, karma and *maya*. Maharaj and Swami are present before us. Shastriji Maharaj installed the *murtis* of Dham and Dhama in mandirs. But the pairing of a *murti* [of Gunatitanand Swami] with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was lacking. Now, we have them together.

"Maharaj must be very joyous. We must savour divine joy and not the joys of this world. All [of you] will become *ekantik* devotees and sit at Shriji Maharaj's holy feet. You will experience divine joy after becoming desireless, *brahmarup* and by offering *upasana* to Shriji Maharaj. This is bhakti. We have to join the ranks of the *muktas*."

Then, Swamishri devoutly performed *pujan*, *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami. After Swamishri completed the initial *yagna* rituals Atmaswarupdas Swami and other swamis performed the subsequent rituals.

At 11.30 a.m., Swamishri returned to the *yagnashala* and made offerings into the *yagna* altar. Swamishri also sanctified the list of devotees



Swamis pull the chariot of Thakorji and Guru Parampara during the *nagar-yatra*

who had offered *seva* for this milestone *pratishtha* ceremony. Then, Swamishri performed the *nyas* rituals of invoking the divine in all parts of Gunatitanand Swami's *murti*.

GRAND PROCESSION

As part of the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony a grand procession was arranged on the grounds of Shantivan during late afternoon. All swamis at BAPS mandirs in India and abroad witnessed the *nagar-yatra* through a live transmission.

At about 5.00 p.m., the decorated peacock float with the *utsav murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and Guru Parampara was ready. Swamishri stepped out of his residence (Sarvasva) and sat in a decorated float, wearing a garland of flowers, leaves and beads along with the *chal murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in his lap. The procession commenced with bhajans of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the bursting of firecrackers to give a festive flair to the occasion. All the swamis, youths and devotees serving in Shantivan participated in the procession by holding banners, waving flags, playing drums and dancing to the lyrics of bhajans. Behind Mahant Swami Maharaj's

float swamis danced in a devotional style with *kartals*.

The procession festively advanced along the main pathway of Shantivan and then passed by the dining hall to conclude at 5.40 p.m. outside Sarvasva, from where it had started. When the bhajan 'Āj Pragatyā Puraṇa Brahma re Swami Sukhkāri...' was being relayed Swamishri joyfully played the *kartals* with raised hands.

AKSHARBRAHMA MURTI-PRATISHTHA FESTIVAL: Saturday, 31 October 2020

Sharad Purnima, 31 October 2020, marked the 236th birthday celebration of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. Today's consecration ceremony would be chronicled as a historic day in the annals of BAPS. There was spiritual joy in all BAPS mandirs.

The Satsang Activities Central Office (Satsang Madhyastha Karyalaya) had given instructions to all devotees worldwide to participate in the *mahapuja* rituals, and Swamishri had instructed all the devotees to welcome Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami by decorating their *ghar* mandir and homes like they do on Diwali day.



Swamishri performs the *pratishtha* rituals of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami



Today, in Swamishri's morning puja, swamis in Sarangpur sang bhajans lauding the glory of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami. At 8.30 a.m., the initial *pratishtha* rituals for Gunatitanand Swami's *chal murti* commenced with the chanting of mantras by swamis in Sarangpur. The entire ceremony was relayed live on live.baps.org. For the first time devotees spanning from North America to Australia participated in the online rituals along with swamis from their respective mandirs.

At about 8.45 a.m., the *mahapuja pratishtha* rituals began. Madhurvadandas Swami and swamis sang the Vedic and *sampradayik shloks*. Bhadreshdas Swami gave instructions for each of the rituals. The initial *mahapuja* rituals were performed by Atmaswarupdas Swami in Nenpur and by *sadguru* swamis located in different mandirs. Thereafter, Atmaswarupdas Swami described Mahant Swami Maharaj's effort and enthusiasm for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony.

At 10.20 a.m., the final *mahapuja* rituals commenced at Swamishri's hands. The *chal murtis* of Gunatitanand Swami and Harikrishna Maharaj were placed before Swamishri, who devoutly performed the Vedic rituals of *jal-prokshan*, *nyas* and other rituals. At 10.43 a.m., Swamishri touched Gunatitanand Swami's chest with his hands. Then, he placed his right thumb on the *murti*'s chest to invoke the soul of Gunatitanand Swami and thereafter ritually opened the *murti*'s eyes (*netronmilan*). Swamishri held a mirror before the *murti*'s face while chanting the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*. In conclusion, all the swamis and devotees throughout the world hailed 'Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj *ni jai*'.



Swamishri performs the *netronmilan* ritual by holding a mirror

The *murti* of Gunatitanand Swami was taken



Swamishri performs the *pratishtha arti* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

away to be donned with clothes and decorations. Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriyadas Swami expressed many divine wishes and prayed to Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj for their fulfilment. Then, Narayanmunidas Swami narrated Swamishri's guidance in the making of Gunatitanand Swami's *murti*.

Thereafter, Swamishri carefully tried to install the *chal murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj first in the new *sinhasan*, but it could not be done. Swamishri responded, "Shriji Maharaj has decided that, 'Since it is Gunatitanand Swami's birthday he should be installed first and I should be installed thereafter.' By that time, the beautifully donned *murti* of Gunatitanand Swami was brought before Swamishri and he installed him in the ornate *sinhasan* at 11.25 a.m. The special moment was celebrated with *jais*, ringing of bells, blowing of conch shells and the sounds of *jhalars* and drums. Then, Swamishri installed the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj at 11.26 a.m. This historic and priceless event was welcomed with fervent pride and joy by all. Swamishri then personally adorned the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj with jewellery and a small garland of pearls that he

himself had made.

Several days prior to the *pratishtha* rituals Swamishri deeply desired to make two small garlands of pearls. So, he wrote a letter to Sarangpur, "I have often heard in kirtans about 'bringing a garland of pearls...' Thus, for the scheduled *murti-pratishtha* of Gunatitanand Swami's *chal murti*, I would like to make two garlands; one each for Maharaj and Swami. Therefore, send me colourful pearls." Once the pearls arrived Swamishri selected them and threaded them to make two small beautiful garlands.

With reference to the design of the new *sinhasan* for Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Gunatitanand Swami, Swamishri wrote in a letter, "It would be nice to have a golden *sinhasan*, like we have in the central shrines of our big mandirs."

Swamishri's subtle instructions and personal *seva* reflected his profound devotion to Thakorji. Later, the *sinhasan* was made according to Swamishri's guidance and sent to Nenpur.

Thereafter, Swamishri, beaming with joy, performed the *pujan* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras. Then, swamis in Sarangpur sang Sanskrit *shloks* from the *Akshar-Purushottam Darshan* shastra.

According to Swamishri's wish Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj were installed in a golden *sinhasan* shaped like a mandir. An *annakut* was offered before the *murtis* and the *thal* “*Āvo jo chhogalā dhāri...*” was sung. As per Swamishri's instruction, a *thal* with a variety of food items was offered in all BAPS mandirs in India and abroad as well in the *ghar* mandirs of countless devotees.

At 11.48 a.m., Swamishri performed the first *arti* of the *chal murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj amidst great joy and devotion. Then, Swamishri performed the *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual and showered rice grains to symbolically bless all the devotees worldwide.

To welcome and honour Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, the bhajan “*Aj Pragatyā Puran Brahma re...*” sung by Pramukh Swami Maharaj was relayed. Swamis in Nenpur danced with joy while Swamishri played *kartals* to welcome the *chal murtis*.

Then, the *sadguru* swamis spoke about the glory of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the importance of today's *murti-pratishtha* event.



Pujya Viveksagardas Swami recollected, “Whenever Pujya Akshar-purushdas Swami, who belonged to the disciplic tradition of Gunatitanand Swami in Junagadh, met Yogiji Maharaj

he would say, ‘Install the *murti* of Gunatitanand Swami alongside the *chal murti* of Harikrishna Maharaj that you have with you.’ Yogiji Maharaj also deeply wished to do so. And today, his wish was fulfilled by Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj.” Thereafter, he narrated about the 11 *chal murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj consecrated by Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He also mentioned the places where the *murtis* were installed and also displayed their photographs.



Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami spoke, “First of all we must offer our appreciations and thanks to Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj. The situation in which Yogiji Maharaj left Junagadh was

very sensitive and critical. Still, he brought the *murti* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj with him. When Shastriji Maharaj was in Vartal he had arranged for Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj to be installed in Vadhwan. At that time, he had responded to Govardhanbhai Kothari's unhappy reaction by saying, ‘Shriji has done this!’ In this way, Shastriji Maharaj performed the divine work of consecrating Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in mandirs. Later, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in over a thousand mandirs.

“Very often, Yogiji Maharaj elaborated upon Vachanamrut Vartal 5, saying that similar *seva* means to serve Gunatitanand Swami in the same manner that one serves Shriji Maharaj. Only when Gunatitanand Swami is next to him does Shriji Maharaj accept one's *seva*. For us, both these forms are ideal, because we have to become *gunatit* [aksharrup] and offer *upasana* to Maharaj. Today, a great deed has been accomplished in a festive way by Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj. I pray that Mahant Swami Maharaj blesses us all so that we strengthen *upasana* in our lives and understand the same glory of Swami along with Maharaj.”



Pujya Dr Swami said, “Probably a celebration of this type is the first of its kind in the history of the world; because more than 100,000 devotees in India and abroad are participating in this celebration. Bhagatji Maharaj propagated the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. Then Shastriji Maharaj, after understanding this knowledge, totally dedicated himself against great odds in giving a

tangible form [to the Akshar-Purushottam principle]. Then, Yogiji Maharaj advanced the work of Shastriji Maharaj. And, Pramukh Swami Maharaj successfully spread it throughout the world.” Then, Pujya Dr Swami elaborated upon Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s creation of Akshardham, mandirs and the immense impact of his socio-spiritual works in India and abroad.

On this divine occasion, on behalf of the entire BAPS Satsang, Atmaswarupdas Swami honoured Swamishri with a garland. Then, Swamishri inaugurated a *bhashya* on Satsang Diksha by Bhadreshdas Swami. Swamishri named it ‘Pramukh Bhashya’ and dedicated it to Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the occasion of his centenary celebrations.

The swamis in Sarangpur had prepared a text to honour and welcome the *chal murti* of Gunatitanand Swami called ‘Brahma Stavanam’. The book contained 410 Sanskrit *shloks* in 31 different metres (*chhands*). In addition, there were literary creations in 11 languages. The text was offered at the holy feet of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and then to Swamishri, who expressed his pleasure and blessings. Thereafter, Swamishri inaugurated a Punjabi translation of Satsang Diksha.



In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the occasion, “Yogi Bapa, out of his humility (*dasbhav*), brought Shri Harikrishna Maharaj with him [from Junagadh]. And we have got the benefit of the *murti* worshipped by Gunatitanand Swami. Today, Gunatitanand Swami has been installed besides Maharaj, which is an extraordinary and divine occasion.

“The manner in which Maharaj and Swami are present in Akshardham, they are also present here on earth. However, they suppress their powers for the sole reason that we do not get spiritually diverted. It would be difficult to realize Maharaj if we were interested only in his miracles. Thus,

Maharaj arranged the path of doing bhakti with *ekantikbhav*. Hence, our focus would be on Shriji Maharaj and nothing else; in becoming *akshar-rup* and sitting at his holy feet. *Aksharrup* means to attain the virtues of Gunatitanand Swami. In other words, attain his spiritual state and offer *upasana* to Shriji Maharaj.

“I would like to thank all the devotees in India and abroad for watching and participating in this festival. You have fervently and with *divyabhav* followed my *agna* by decorating your homes and adorning your children for this occasion. May all become very happy by cultivating spiritual understanding. Other than that the joys and miseries of life come and go. Shriji Maharaj and his 500 *paramhansas* experienced physical miseries, but because of their spiritual understanding they rejoiced in the spirit of *prapti*. We, too, should adopt this. We, should carry forward Yogi Bapa’s formula of *samp*, *suhrudbhav* and *ekta*. All of you have it, but may you fortify it further and make it your life’s mantra [goal] and attain peace and happiness.”

Swamishri’s blessings crowned the *pratishtha* celebration.

The entire *murti-pratishtha* event was personally guided with immense interest by Swamishri himself. Swamishri had also instructed the swamis in Sarangpur to organize a 15-day Aksharbrahma Gunatit Satra under the auspices of the *pratishtha* ceremony. Henceforth, a 15-day lecture series was organized every evening, from Sharad Purnima to Labh Pancham, in which scholarly swamis delivered enlightening and inspiring discourses about the glory of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. Swamishri attended these lectures and showered his blessings daily. These lectures were webcast daily for the devotees. Finally, Swamishri expressed his wish to celebrate the 15-day Aksharbrahma Gunatit Satra every year.





Swamishri with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and the sanctified *amalak* in front

Swamishri Performs Vedic Pujan Rituals of the Ornate Amalak Stone for Swaminarayan Akshardham, Robbinsville

25 October 2020, Nenpur

Amongst the countless spiritual works of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the ongoing construction of Swaminarayan Akshardham in Robbinsville, New Jersey, will be the crowning glory. The planning of the mega-project, *shilanyas* rituals and *pratishta* rituals of the *shikharbaddha* mandir in Robbinsville were performed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Presently, under the spiritual leadership of Mahant Swami Maharaj, the construction work of Akshardham has entered into its final stage. The ornately carved *amalak* (or *amalsaro*) stone

is ready to be fixed on top of the *maha-shikhar*, and occupy the apex of the Akshardham *maha*-mandir. On the early morning of 25 October, the *mahapuja* rituals of the *amalak* were commenced by Swamishri in Nenpur. The entire *mahapuja* rituals were relayed live on live.baps.org for all the devotees worldwide. The rituals were also simultaneously performed at the Akshardham site in Robbinsville. One was performed at the static Akshardham in Robbinsville and the other was performed by a living, dynamic Akshardham in Nenpur.

Today's important ceremonial event



Top left clockwise: Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriyadas Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabhdas Swami perform the *amalak puja* rituals

commenced with the auspicious sounds of *shehnai* and *tabla* by BAPS youths in Robbinsville, followed by the screening of a special video. At 6.17 a.m., Swamishri inaugurated the rituals by igniting a *divo*. The huge *amalak* was placed on a raised platform before Swamishri. Shri Harikrishna Maharaj was installed on the *amalak* and Swamishri became absorbed in performing his morning puja. BAPS children, teenagers and youths of North America sang a prayer, “*Ek ful swikāro, Akshardhamne kāj...*”

Then, the ritual *mahapuja* commenced with the singing of mantras interlaced with instructions and photos of each ritual. In the *garbhgruh* of Akshardham in Robbinsville, a large LED screen enabled the swamis performing the *mahapuja* rituals to see Swamishri before them.

Parallel to Swamishri’s puja the *mahapuja* rituals were also being performed by Yagnavallabhdas Swami and swamis in Robbinsville and thousands

of devotees, children and youths in their homes in North America.

During the week prior to the *amalak puja* rituals, the *sadguru* swamis – Pujya Dr Swami, Pujya Kothari Bhaktipriyadas Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabhdas Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami, Pujya Viveksagardas Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharandas Swami – had performed the *puja* rituals of the small *amalaks* of Akshardham at the mandirs they were residing in. Their locations spanned from the Akshar Deri in Gondal to Akshardham in Gandhinagar and Pune. Thereafter, these small *amalaks* were brought for the final rituals by Mahant Swami Maharaj in Nenpur. Similarly, the *puja* rituals of several small *amalaks* were also performed earlier by swamis in the *shikharbaddha* mandirs of North America and then brought to the mandir in Robbinsville for the final rituals.

After Swamishri completed the *puja* rituals



Swamis perform the *pujan* rituals of *amalak*s in Robbinsville, New Jersey

of the *amalsaro*, Aksharvatsaldas Swami conducted the assembly programme. He chanted *dhun* for the fulfilment of good wishes and the successful completion of all ongoing BAPS projects. Thereafter, a video of the ongoing work on Akshardham was shown.

As part of today's ceremonial event 18,000 mini *amalak*s were sent to the homes of devotees (*yajmans*). Prior to beginning the rituals a female member of each household carried the mini-*amalak* on her head and installed it on an *asan* in her home.

In Nenpur, a 10 ft wide stone *amalak* along with smaller *amalak*s were ritually worshipped and sanctified by Swamishri. Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami chanted the *mahapuja* mantra of the main wish (*pradhan sankalp*) before the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar. At that time Mahant Swami Maharaj took a spoonful of water to perform the ritual.

After completing the *pradhan sankalp* Swamishri performed *pujan* of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj with sandalwood paste, rice grains and

flowers. Then, on behalf of all BAPS swamis and devotees, Atmaswarupdas Swami applied *chandan* on Swamishri's forehead and also rice grains. Thereafter, Swamishri poured the sanctified water of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj on the *amalak*. Then, Swamishri ritually bathed the *amalak* with *panchamrut* and the holy waters of rivers from India and rivers sanctified by Shriji Maharaj and the Gunatit Parampara. Thereafter, Swamishri tied a large *nada-chhadi* or *raksha-sutra* so that the *amalak*, once placed on the *shikhar*, remains steady and strong. Swamishri performed *pujan* of the *amalak* with *chandan*, rice grains, flowers and auspicious materials. This was followed by Swamishri performing the *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* rituals of Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and the sanctified *amalak*.

Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami, convener of the Akshardham project, briefly explained the project and appealed to the devotees to contribute for the *murtis* to be installed in Swaminarayan Akshardham.

The *amalak* puja ceremony climaxed with Mahant Swami Maharaj's blessings, "The project



Swamis perform the *amalaka* puja rituals, Atlanta

is being done with *samp*, *suhradbhav* and *ekta*. The first Akshardham was built in Gandhinagar, the second in New Delhi and the third is under construction [in Robbinsville]. Our mandirs have been accomplished with Yogi Bapa's formula of *samp*, *suhradbhav* and *ekta*.

“People from all over the world will come to visit Akshardham. They will be amazed by the carvings and write articles and essays on it. It's glory will spread beyond our imagination. The reason for this lies in the sacrifices made by devotees through body, mind and wealth. Pujya Ishwar Swami talked about the *murtis*, thus do *seva*. It is indeed amazing that devotees have been donating in spite of their financial constraints due to the corona pandemic. May you all also join in contributing for the *murtis*. The fruits of it will be infinite. The value of contributions offered devoutly cannot be described.

“Shriji Maharaj came on earth with his *muktas* and through them the *seva* is being accomplished. You have all attained *moksha*, however, according to Vachanamrut Vartal 12, whoever does your darshan will also attain *moksha*. You

will sit in the ranks of the *muktas* and forever become engaged in doing Maharaj's darshan. We have read about the benefits of *seva* done by Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj.”

Thereafter, all the devotees took flower petals in their hands and performed the *mantra-pushpanjali* ritual and showered them on the *amalaks*, and the *murti* of Thakorji and *guruhari* Mahant Swami Maharaj. In conclusion, all had darshan of Mahant Swami Maharaj standing with Thakorji in hand before a flex-backdrop of the *maha-shikhar* of Akshardham and the sanctified *amalaka* in front. Finally, Swamishri blessed the devotees seen on the zoom screen for their *seva*.

After the ceremonial *puja* of the *amalaka*, all aspired and prayed for the early completion of Akshardham and to be present for the grand inauguration event.

Akshardham Amalak Mahotsav *ni jai!*





99th Birthday Celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj

22 December 2020



Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th birthday was celebrated with an absorbing three-hour programme that combined the physical and the virtual worlds and paid homage to his divine, saintly life.

With the coronavirus pandemic preventing in-person celebrations, 3D animations and special effects were used to create the virtual stage and settings of the celebration in the Himalayan mountains, the abode of the great sages of ancient India.

The great sages of ancient India have revealed the eternal qualities of a true saint. Based on the personal experiences of revered modern spiritual leaders, the celebration highlighted Pramukh Swami Maharaj's qualities of transparency, purity, serenity, cultural sustenance, universal selfless love and profound devotion to God.

Expanding upon the words of renowned modern sages – Pujya Swami Shri Chidanandji Maharaj, Pujya Swami Shri Atmanandji, Pujya Swami Shri Satyamitranandgiriji Maharaj, Pujya Pejavar Swami Shri Visveshtirthji Maharaj and Pujya Swami Shri Balgangadharnathji – senior and learned BAPS swamis in different locations were presented on the same virtual stage to deliver speeches on these qualities. At the end, Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed all.

The celebration assembly also featured insightful videos, thematic dances, Vedic prayers, *mantra-pushpanjali* and *arti*.

The captivating programme was broadcast in Hindi and English both online and via terrestrial TV to a worldwide audience.



INDIA

SATSANG DIKSHA ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE COMPETITION 1 & 8 November 2020



The Satsang and Bal Pravrutti Central Offices in Ahmedabad organized two separate nationwide online Satsang Diksha questionnaire competitions for (1) all *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* and (2) *karyakars* of all wings (satsang, *mahila*, *yuvak*, *yuvati*, *bal* and *balika*).

The first test on 1 November was for *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* and the second on 8 November was for all the *karyakars*.

Both tests involved 100 questions of two types – true/false and MCQs – to be completed in 30 minutes.

A total 13,250 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis*, and 39,000 *karyakars* participated in their respective tests.

Prior to the main tests, daily study questions and pre-tests were provided online to help all to prepare.

By participating in this competition all the youths and *karyakars* received the blessings of Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj.

INAUGURATION OF SATSANG DIKSHA SCRIPTURE TRANSCRIBED INTO BRAILLE 3 December 2020, Nenpur



His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj wrote the ‘Satsang Diksha’ scripture in Gujarati and has expressed his wish to make it available for all so that everyone can benefit from its message and guidance.

The original Gujarati text was first rendered into Sanskrit. Thereafter, it has been translated into Hindi, English, Marathi, Punjabi, Bengali, Swahili and seven European languages: French, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, German, Polish and Russian. Translations into other languages are in progress and will help devotees worldwide.

For the benefit of the visually challenged, two braille versions have been prepared. One is by the respected CNIB Foundation (formerly known as Canadian National Institute for the Blind) in Toronto. The Foundation generously and enthusiastically undertook the task to transcribe the scripture into English Braille. The other is by Vision Australia.

The first copies of these historic publications were blessed and inaugurated by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj in Nenpur.

BAPS sincerely appreciates the support of

the CNIB and Vision Australia in making the ‘Satsang Diksha’ scripture available to those with visual difficulties.

Executive Director of the CNIB, Suzanne Decary-van den Broek, said, “CNIB welcomed the opportunity to support BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in creating an accessible braille version of one of their scriptures. As an organization dedicated to transforming our communities into beacons of accessibility and inclusion, braille remains an essential tool to independence for people who are blind or partially sighted. It opens the door to literacy, access to information, equality, education and employment. The scripture is a perfect example of something that should be available for people to access whenever and however they choose.”

The Satsang Diksha in braille printed by CNIB is available through the Centre for Equitable Library Access for registered members who would like to read the scripture. Individuals can also request copies through their local libraries within Canada.

GOVERNOR OF WEST BENGAL VISITS BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR 27 December 2020, Kolkata



West Bengal Governor Shri Jagdeep Dhankar and his wife Smt. Sudesh Dhankar visited the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Kolkata at Bhasa, Joka, to offer prayers and seek blessings.

On behalf of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, the resident swamis of the mandir traditionally welcomed Governor Dhankar. After respectfully offering flower petals to the holy

charanarvind of Bhagwan Swaminarayan at the entry, the governor and delegation were then guided around the mandir campus.

While having darshan in the mandir and paying respects, the governor and his wife offered prayers for world peace and unity. Thereafter, they offered *abhishek* in the Neelkanth Mandapam and prayed for well-being of their family, the people of West Bengal, all Indians and for all of humanity.

Kothari Aksharnandan Swami and other swamis held a spiritual dialogue with Governor Dhankar, during which he was informed about the universal messages of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj and His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj.

The swamis gifted him a copy of the Satsang Diksha and recited verses 201 and 202, which highlight the physical, moral and spiritual duties of individuals holding public responsibility.

West Bengal Governor Shri Jagdeep Dhankar was so moved by this message that when addressing the press, he said, “The state of West Bengal is a culture hub; it is an epicentre of everything good in life. Look at our *sants* and see our great sages. Their words echo in the country and in the world. They have strongly inspired and positively influenced society. I have taken a pledge in this holy place where I have offered puja that may I have that same basic mantra of resolve. I will also strive to inspire everyone to bring happiness and peace in the lives of people.”

UK

ONLINE CPR SKILLS SESSIONS FOR WORLD RESTART A HEART DAY 21 and 28 October 2020, UK

BAPS Charities in the UK partnered with St John Ambulance to deliver two online CPR skills sessions for adults and children. CPR training has the potential to save thousands of lives each year.

The online seminars built on previous skills



sessions, including collaboration with the London Ambulance Service (LAS) to provide Emergency Life Support Training to volunteers.

Over 1,750 people registered for the two on-line sessions, and all were also invited to two shorter follow-up sessions with practical advice and an opportunity to practice CPR techniques.

The online sessions demonstrated the correct method of performing effective CPR whilst taking the necessary safety precautions during the pandemic to minimize any risk to the deliverer. The aim was to instil confidence and empower a positive reaction in such a situation.

PARENTING WEBINARS: UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

4–6 November 2020, UK & Europe



Around 50% of mental health difficulties begin before a child is 14 years of age, and the current pandemic has only increased the number of cases. To address this important issue, BAPS in the UK & Europe held two mental health webinars.

The first, on 4 November, ‘Understanding Children’s Mental Health’, was tailored for parents of children in Reception to Year 6. The

second, on 6 November, ‘Understanding Teenager Mental Health’ focused on issues relevant to parents of teenagers in Years 7 to 13.

Over 500 parents participated in the two webinars delivered by two BAPS volunteers serving in the Parenting Team, Dr Nisha Patel, a clinical psychologist, and Ms Priya Amlani, an anxiety specialist. These experts provided guidance on how to better understand the mental health of children and teenagers and techniques to resolve mental health concerns.

Many attendees expressed their appreciation for these valuable insights and practical guidance towards child mental health.

COMMUNITY AWARD TO BAPS FROM THE FAITH & BELIEF FORUM 30 November 2020, London



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, received an award from the London Faith & Belief Community Awards in recognition of the mandir’s nationwide ‘Connect & Care’ coronavirus pandemic programme to support individuals and local communities which was launched in March 2020.

The focus was to mitigate emotional and social isolation by ‘connecting’ with them via telephone calls and then providing a custom ‘care’ package which included freshly cooked meals, groceries and medications through a dedicated team of 1,100 volunteers. A series of health awareness videos in English and Gujarati as well as parenting toolkits were also created. In addition, daily services, weekly assemblies and regular programmes were webcast.

The award was presented during an interactive online ceremony that was attended by distinguished guests, including Sir Kenneth Olisa, the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London, Reverend Richard Coles, Chancellor of the University of Northampton, and Baroness Floella Benjamin DBE DL, president of the Elizabeth R Commonwealth Broadcasting Fund and governor of the National Film and Television School.

THRELFORD MEMORIAL CUP AWARDED FOR GUJARATI TEACHING TO BAPS 23 December 2020, UK & Europe



BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in the UK was awarded the prestigious Threlford Memorial Cup for 2020 by the Chartered Institute of Linguists.

The Threlford Cup, awarded annually since 1935, is presented to individuals or organizations that have evidenced a significant contribution in fostering the study of languages, and is a part of the Institute's wider initiative to "celebrate the importance of language and cultural understanding... and excellence in language learning". This award recognizes the important and impactful contribution to the development of tools, resources and training to promote the learning of the Gujarati language.

This latest accolade, adding to past awards, pays tribute to the efforts of many BAPS volunteers who have transformed the learning and teaching of Gujarati into an enjoyable, accessible and innovative experience.

The multifarious resources include an eight-book comprehensive Gujarati syllabus to GCSE

level, many interactive board and card games, as well as games and resources for pre-school children.

The award was accepted by Rahul Bhagvat on behalf of a team of creative and dedicated BAPS volunteers.

BAPS TRUSTEE AWARDED BRITISH EMPIRE MEDAL

31 December 2020, London



Sanjay Kara, a trustee of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha in the UK, has been awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) by Her Majesty The Queen in the New Year's Honours List for 2021.

The citation reads: Sanjay Kara, Trustee, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (Neasden Temple). For services to community cohesion and public and charitable service in the UK.

The British Empire Medal (formally British Empire Medal for Meritorious Service) is a British medal awarded for meritorious civil or military service worthy of recognition by the Crown. Recipients are entitled to use the post-nominal letters 'BEM'.

Accepting the award, Sanjay, in fact, attributed this honour to the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, and the dedicated selfless services of the volunteers of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha and the entire Hindu community.

PRAMUKH PARVA 2020 December 2020, UK & Europe

Devotees in the UK and Europe marked Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th birthday from

‘PRAMUKH SWAMI ROAD’ IN HONOUR OF THE CREATOR OF NEASDEN TEMPLE

11 January 2021, London



The eastern section of Meadow Garth in north-west London, the home of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir – popularly known as ‘Neasden Temple’ – has been officially renamed ‘Pramukh Swami Road’ in honour of the mandir’s creator, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Swamishri’s and the Sanstha’s longstanding relationship with Meadow Garth began in 1980 with a small temple located opposite the existing complex Meadow Garth which Pramukh Swami Maharaj inaugurated in August 1995.

For 25 years now, Neasden Temple has served as a place of worship, a hub of learning, harmony and community service, and an internationally acclaimed attraction. To date, it has received over 10.5 million visitors from more than 120 countries. In Britain, it has become an integral part of the religious landscape while in London it has been woven into the social fabric of the local community.

The decision to name the eastern section of Meadow Garth as ‘Pramukh Swami Road’ was formally approved by the Brent Cabinet on 12 October 2020. The Council acknowledged the mandir’s position as an “international landmark” in Brent, as well as its contribution to the borough.

In a tweet to his more than 3.2 millions followers, the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan wrote: “Pleased to see that the street outside world-famous @NeasdenTemple has been renamed after its founder Pramukh Swami. This is such an important space in London, and I very much look forward to visiting and celebrating with you all once again post-COVID.” In another tweet from his personal account, Mr Khan added, “Thank you @NeasdenTemple for the huge contribution you make to our city.”

their homes with festive decorations and devotional artwork. Young and senior members of families also decorated their *ghar* mandirs and placed intricately crafted garlands around the *murti* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

As part of a devotional initiative by the

kishore-kishori mandal, many young devotees participated in the ‘Pramukh Parva Bake Off’ in which they made and offered a variety of celebratory desserts to mark the occasion.

A total of twelve *sabhas* formed a part of ‘Pramukh Parva 2020’, spanning four weeks. The



weekly *sabhas* for children, teenagers, youths, women and adult devotees all focused on the divine virtues of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM VADHAMANA: SHATABDI FAMILY MAHAPUJA 1 January 2021, UK & Europe



Families across the UK and Europe heralded the New Year by taking part in a family *mahapuja* from their own homes.

This unique global experience was enjoyed by more than 5,000 households who prayed for world peace, family harmony, and a safe and successful year ahead, particularly for those affected by the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic.

Children, youths and adults paid tribute to the inspirational life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the start of 2021, his centennial birth year. Devotees also welcomed into their homes the new *murti* Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami which was consecrated besides Shri Harikrishna Maharaj by Mahant Swami Maharaj on 31 October 2020.

The mahapuja was conducted from the shrines of London Mandir by the resident swamis. Mahant Swami Maharaj presided over the

opening of the mahapuja through a live video link from Nenpur in India. He was welcomed by a *balak* who, invited Swamishri into each and every home to conduct a *padhramani*.

The explanations of the various rituals were narrated in English and Gujarati, and were accompanied with on-screen guidance throughout the ceremony, helping families to understand the meaning of the Sanskrit verses and perform the *mahapuja* correctly.

In his blessings following the conclusion of the *mahapuja*, Mahant Swami Maharaj elaborated on the spiritual significance of the dual *murtis* Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Shri Gunatitanand Swami, and encouraged everyone to imbibe and share with others the exemplary virtues of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

NORTH AMERICA

BAPS CAMPUS FELLOWSHIP CELEBRATES VIRTUAL DIWALI

5 November 2020, North America



Youths in over 50 North American university campuses participated in the virtual BAPS Campus Diwali celebration, based on the theme 'Forgiving in Turbulent Times' and rekindled their commitment to positivity, integrity and spirituality. The programme focused on the paramount virtue of forgiveness, extolling the virtues of Bhagwan Ram, whose forgiving nature gave rise to the annual festival of Diwali.

The virtual programme also featured the personal reflections of youths from across North

America, over 20 BAPS swamis who are alumni of North American educational institutions, and alumni leaders across the BAPS community.

Viewers were inspired by the timely and honest conversation on imbibing the value of forgiveness in order to experience the true happiness of Diwali, a reflective time of year.

KIDS' DIWALI VIRTUAL CELEBRATION 2020 **7 November 2020, North America**



A virtual Diwali celebration programme took place for all school-aged children across North America. The theme, 'Choose to be Good', reminded children that righteousness is a key tenet of living a more fulfilling life. In past years, children would participate personally in carnival rides, board games, and engaging activities to learn of the significance of Diwali, while this year's live broadcast involved a special storytelling experience and interactive activities through creative mediums to engage the children.

PRASAD PRAVESH CEREMONY, BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR **21 November 2020, Winnipeg, MB, Canada**



The Prasad Pravesh Ceremony for a new BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Winnipeg was performed virtually by Gunsagar Swami and other swamis from the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto, as well as senior swamis from India. Over 900 families also participated in the ceremony from their homes.

Along with the traditional rituals, prayers were offered for peace and well-being throughout the community, province and country.

Dignitaries, community leaders and well-wishers from across Canada and around the world also attended virtually.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S 99TH BIRTHDAY HOME CELEBRATIONS **December 2020, North America**



Thousands of devotees participated in the five days of interactive, home-based celebrations paying tribute to the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Devotees expressed their love and bhakti with personal and family-based activities.

The five days of virtual programmes included reflections from sadhus, devotees and notable personalities on the positive impact Pramukh Swami Maharaj had on their lives. With a focus on *samp*, *seva*, *samjan*, *sadhana* and *smruti*, the programmes highlighted Pramukh Swami Maharaj's spiritual teachings and wisdom. The interactive and introspective celebrations left families with a deeper appreciation of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life and work, and a firm resolve to imbibe and carry forward their beloved guru's legacy.

**BAPS MANDIRS JOIN COVID-19
NATIONWIDE TRIBUTE**
19 January 2021, USA



BAPS Mandirs across the United States joined in the nationwide COVID-19 Memorial Tribute organized by the Presidential Inauguration Committee to remember and honour the lives lost to the pandemic. Mandirs in Robbinsville, Atlanta, Houston, Los Angeles, and Chicago were illuminated for five minutes in unity with cities, communities, non-profits, and other religious places of worship at 5.30 p.m. (local time) on 19 January 2021.

Many BAPS families across the country also participated by lighting candles from home to honour those lost to the coronavirus pandemic.

MIDDLE EAST

**BAPS HINDU MANDIR WINS INTERIOR
DESIGN AWARD**

25 November 2020, Abu Dhabi, UAE



BAPS Hindu Mandir, Abu Dhabi, and RSP were awarded the prestigious Interior Design Concept of the Year 2020 at the Commercial Interior Design (CID) Awards. The award

recognizes the vision that interior designers have provided for projects that have not yet been completed. The judges looked at “ambition and innovation, but will also include practical concerns when reaching a decision.” The mandir’s design was selected as exemplary in a category with 16 finalists from hundreds of entries.

RSP’s team produced the final design inspired and informed by their discussions with BAPS swamis led by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, and their visits to Akshardham in New Delhi and Gandhinagar and the mandirs in Sarangpur and London.

Michael McGill, Creative Director of RSP Middle East, and Anthony Taylor, the main designer of the concept, shared the following thoughts, “It is great to see fellow professionals recognize the beauty of the vision of uniquely mixing of modern and traditional styles into a harmonious design. It was wonderful assisting the swamis at BAPS realize their ideas.”

This is the second award for this historic project. Earlier the mandir was awarded the Best Mechanical Design at the Middle East MEP Awards.

ASIA PACIFIC

**ANNAKUT IN THE NEW ZEALAND
PARLIAMENT**

18 November 2020, Wellington



Hosted by Minister Melissa Lee, and facilitated by BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, 120 attendees including members of parliament, esteemed guests and notable community leaders gathered to celebrate the festivals of Diwali and the Hindu New Year.

As per tradition, the event was inaugurated by the lighting of a lamp. Thereafter, the ‘Shanti Path’ and *thals* were sung. All then joined in performing the *arti*.

The chief guests included His Excellency Muktesh Kumar Pardeshi from the High Commission of India; Mellissa Lee, National MP; Dr Deborah Russell, Labour MP; former MP Mr Kanwaljit Singh Bakshi; Inspector Rakesh Naidoo, Head of NZ Police Ethnic Services; and Vanisa Dhiru, Commissioner for UNESCO & National Library & Internet NZ.

Addressing the audience during this evening event, Dr Deborah Russell also commended the BAPS centres in New Zealand and worldwide for their services during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

SATSANG DIKSHA ADHIVESHAN

12–13 December 2020, Australia & New Zealand



To commemorate the 99th birthday of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, children and teenagers of the Bal-Balika and Kishore-Kishori Mandals in Australia (Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Gold Coast, Melbourne, Perth, Shepparton, Sydney) and New Zealand (Auckland, Christchurch, Hamilton, Wellington) participated in the ‘Race for Rajipo’ Adhiveshan.

Based on the 315 *shloks* (verses) of the Satsang Diksha, the *adhiveshan* consisted of memorizing *shloks* based on three challenge levels from which the youngsters chose to participate: the Vinu Challenge (memorize 1–50 *shloks*), the Keshav Challenge (1–95 *shloks*) and the Mahant

Challenge (1–130 *shloks*).

In total, 561 *balaks* and *balikas* and 275 *kishores* and *kishoris* took part. Participants were graded based on having memorized a certain percentage of their particular challenge. For each challenge level, the Gold Award required 90% or higher, Silver required 80–89% and Bronze required 70–79%.

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ JIVAN CHARITRA PARAYANS

12 & 19 December 2020, Australia & New Zealand



On the occasion of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 99th birthday celebrations, one-day *parayans* (readings) of all four published parts of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Jivan Charitra were organized at 95 centres across Australia and New Zealand.

The *parayans* were recited by local swamis and more than 3,755 young and old devotees from their homes in different locations throughout Australia and New Zealand. The *parayans* commenced at 6:00 a.m. with *pujan* and *arti* of the texts. Devotees participated in 20-minute sessions by reading the text from where the previous participant had stopped. At each centre, the first part was read by adult men devotees, the second by adult women devotees, the third part by *yuvatis* and the fourth part by *yuvaks*. In this way, during the 24 hours of continuous reading all four parts of the *jivan charitra* were read 95 times.

Following their participation in this endeavour, many have resolved to read Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Jivan Charitra on a daily basis.

**PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ JIVAN
CHARITRA VIDEO PARAYAN BY CHILDREN
AND TEENAGERS**

19 December 2020, Australia and New Zealand



To celebrate Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th birthday, over 600 *balaks*, *balikas*, *kishores* and *kishoris* from BAPS centres in Australia and New Zealand participated in a video parayan based on the videos from parts 1 to 4 of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Jivan Charitra.

The children and teenagers were split into 131 groups, with each being allocated a set number of videos to watch for about one hour. Each parayan viewing session began with puja and a short speech on the life and work of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. In total, viewing of the 21 ½ hours of video was completed six times.

GHAR GHAR JANMOTSAV

December 2020, Australia & New Zealand



A special 'Ghar Ghar Janmotsav' event was organized as part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th birthday celebrations.

More than 3,000 BAPS families throughout Australia & New Zealand celebrated Pramukh

Swami Maharaj's birthday in their homes by decorating their *ghar* mandirs and with all family members participating by devoutly offering *annakut* and *arti*.

AFRICA

**ORDER OF THE BURNING SPEAR AWARDED
TO BAPS DEVOTEE**

12 December 2020, Nairobi, Kenya



Annually, to celebrate Kenya's Republic (Jamhuri) Day, the President of Kenya confers orders, decorations and medals to individuals 'in recognition of outstanding or distinguished services rendered to the nation in various capacities and responsibilities.' These awards are presented by the president upon the advice of a National Honours and Awards Committee.

The second highest category of the awards is the Order of the Burning Spear, which is divided into three classes: 1st class (the Chief of the Order of the Burning Spear: C.B.S.), 2nd class (Elder of the Order of the Burning Spear: E.B.S.) and 3rd class (Moran of the Order of the Burning Spear: M.B.S.).

On the 2020 Republic (Jamhuri) Day celebrations, dedicated BAPS devotee, Shri Hitanbhai Majevdia, received the E.B.S award from the President of Kenya. This adds to the O.G.W (Order of the Grand Warrior) award the president presented to him in 2019. ♦

TRIBUTES



SHRI SUBHASHBHAI PATEL, (Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania)

31 October 1958–14 December 2020 (62 years)

Bhaktaraj Shri Subhashbhai was a well-known industrialist, prominent social worker and a humble, dedicated devotee.

His origins lay in Bochasan, a village in the Charotar region of Gujarat. He was born and brought up in Dar-es-Salaam. Through his ingenuity and sheer hard work, he built a vast business empire from scratch. His business was spread across Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Mozambique and many other African countries.

In 1960, when he was only two years old, he had the fortune of being blessed by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj in Morogoro, a small town in Tanzania. This was his fleeting contact with satsang and thereafter, for the next 35 years, he remained totally disconnected. In 1995, he came in touch with Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and was deeply impressed by his saintliness and divinity.

Consequently, he quit all his vices of hunting, addictions, etc. and a drastic transformation was ushered in his life. Thereafter, satsang, *seva* and bhakti became the focus of his life. Swamishri entrusted him with the responsibility of the renovation of Dar-es-Salaam mandir.

In 1996, at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's behest he started attending satsang assemblies. From then onwards until his health permitted he never missed a single satsang assembly. He always attended the morning and evening *artis*, as well as the daily discourses held in the Dar-es-Salaam mandir.

He was so impressed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life and work that from the year 2000 he started attending every festival in India. From 2007 onwards, he started visiting Swamishri every month for his darshan. Such was his love and attachment for Swamishri.

With his increasing involvement in Satsang, Swamishri appointed him in 1999 as the chairman

of Tanzania Satsang Mandal. He helmed the satsang activities for 18 years, from 1999–2017. Despite his vast business empire he always gave priority and importance to satsang activities. He never missed a single satsang meeting, satsang *jnan goshthi*, *satsang sabha* or *satsang shibir*.

He never cared for himself or for his comforts when it came to helping fellow devotees and standing by their side in times of need. Even young children at the mandir would run up to him and call him 'Dada, Dada...' out of respect and affection. He was so genuinely attached to all at the mandir that he knew every individual by name, be they children, teenagers or elderly people. No one could escape his sharp eyes and he often, without fail, enquired about those who were absent in the weekly satsang *sabhas*. He would personally follow-up with the non-attendees. After the satsang *sabhas* or festivals he always served *prasad* first to every one and then ate last. Though he was a leader and senior himself, he gave utmost respect to other elderly people at the mandir. In spite of being the chairman of the Satsang he humbly and eagerly took up the *seva* of sweeping and cleaning the mandir floor.

Subhashbhai was an ideal example of service and sacrifice. On Pramukh Swami Maharaj's and Mahant Swami Maharaj's single word he always contributed unhesitatingly. He never worried about his worldly affairs and always focused and prioritized in obeying Swamishri's word at any cost. Along with his family, he dedicated his everything – body, mind and wealth – for the benefit of Satsang and the devotees.

He dedicated everything for Satsang, whereas in his own life he was extremely frugal and simple. He never expected any personal honours or special arrangements for himself in Satsang.

He respected all swamis, young and old,

enquired about their well-being and ensured their travels were safe and smooth.

Between 2017 and 2019, he accepted a very difficult and challenging project. At Mahant Swami Maharaj's behest, he personally managed the renovation and construction work of the BAPS Mandir in Kampala. During those two years he flew every weekend from Dar-es-Salaam to Kampala to supervise and accomplish the project. Mahant Swami Maharaj showered his profuse blessings upon him for his dedicated service and sacrifice.

Along with satsang *seva*, he never missed an opportunity to serve his country as a responsible citizen. He was truly benevolent through his multifaceted charitable services to society.

For the last several months Subhashbhai was suffering from an illness. Even during these difficult times, he spent his time constantly doing bhajan, listening to kirtans and *katha*. On Monday, 14 December 2020, he left his mortal body in Dar-es-Salaam to forever reside in the service of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in Akshardham.

Subhashbhai Patel's departure was not only a deep loss for his family, the BAPS family and the Swaminarayan fellowship, but also for the present and former presidents of Tanzania and innumerable African citizens who were associated with him. He was truly a humble servant, an ideal devotee and a brave disciple. His loss will be irreplaceable.

During his cremation rites thousands of devotees from Africa and other countries, Indian organizations in Dar-es-Salaam, two former presidents

of Tanzania, government officials, businessmen, local Africans, men and women, Muslims, Khojas and Christians bid him a teary adieu.

The President of Tanzania, H.E. John Magufuli, paid tributes to Subhashbhai's generous charity to thousands of poor Africans and Indians and his services to the nation. He conveyed, "Subhashbhai's contribution for the progress of the nation is most notable. I offer my tributes to him on behalf of the whole nation."

Mahant Swami Maharaj sent a sanctified piece of sandalwood, flower garland and saffron cloth for Subhashbhai's last rites. Swamishri appreciated his *seva* and sacrifice and eulogized, "He was a very dear devotee of Swami-Shriji and a pillar among the great devotees like *muktaraj* Maganbhai, Harmanbhai and others. In a matter of a few years he attained immense spiritual earnings." In accordance with Mahant Swami Maharaj's detailed instructions the last rites were befittingly performed by Priyavratdas Swami (Kothari of Africa Satsang), other swamis, his son Pavanbhai, leading devotees, friends and others.

Tributes to Subhashbhai, who had earned Pramukh Swami Maharaj's and Mahant Swami Maharaj's immense grace, and ideally imbibed the virtues of *seva*, sacrifice, simplicity, morality, faith and *paksh*. His demise is a great loss to the BAPS. We offer our sincere condolences to his family and pay tribute to his exemplary life. ♦

**Translation of Gujarati text written by
Pujya Ishwarcharandas Swami**



**SHRI HARISHBHAI DAVE (LLB, CS; Retired General Secretary, BAPS;
Former Chief Accountant, Modern Bakery)
Passed Away: 21 December 2020, Age 75**

Shri Harishbhai Dave served as the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha's general secretary from 1981 to 2015. He hailed from Anand and completed his studies in law (LLB), chartered accountancy (CA) and company secretary (CS) in Anand. During his college years he was recognized for his

oratory skills and had successfully participated in competitions and functions. Thereafter, he worked in Ahmedabad as the chief accountant of Modern Bakery. Highly qualified and experienced, he left his lucrative job at a young age to serve the Sanstha full-time at the wish of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

Due to his dedicated, systematic and professional

approach, the Sanstha was lauded as one of the best by the Charity Commissioner of Gujarat.

He worked tirelessly with Pramukh Swami Maharaj and other senior swamis to ensure that all the proper legal documentations were in place for all the Sanstha's properties, allied trusts and activities throughout India. In addition to his office duties he would travel throughout India to represent the Sanstha and guide local devotees and swamis for the Sanstha's growth and development.

He was also instrumental in ensuring the necessary government approvals and documentation for the Sanstha's major international festivals in 1981, 1985, 1992, 2007, the *murti-pratishtha* celebrations of *shikharbaddha* mandirs, and the Sanstha's social relief works in earthquakes, famines, cattle camp, tsunamis and other disasters.

Harishbhai diligently served to establish the sound administrative, legal and accounting

framework of the Sanstha. His calm and reassuring personality, and insightful and decisive work earned him the innermost blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Mahant Swami Maharaj and the senior sadhus.

His affable nature endeared him to all. In spite of his position and status as the general secretary, he never hesitated in meeting and encouraging junior *sevaks* serving at the Ahmedabad mandir.

In addition to his formal duties, he was a staunch devotee, who adhered sincerely to the codes of satsang. He regularly attended the weekly Sunday satsang assembly and also instilled the values of satsang in his family. In his young adult years his speeches in the *yuvak mandal* at the Ahmedabad mandir were received with great applause.

We offer our heartfelt tribute to Shri Harishbhai, a dedicated *sevak* and stalwart *satsangi* of BAPS. ♦



PUJYA AKSHARSEVA SWAMI

Passed Away: 24 December 2020, Age 82

Pujya Aksharseva Swami was initiated into the sadhu-order by Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1981 on the occasion of the inauguration of Yagnapurush Smruti Mandir in Sarangpur. From 1985, for 35 years, he was stationed at Sankari mandir. His simple lifestyle, hardworking and cooperative nature, and eagerness to serve and support others in any situation endeared him to

all. Even in advancing age, he remained actively engaged in *vicharan*. He also enthusiastically engaged in de-addiction activities, and personally inspired over 10,000 people to quit addictions. Till the end, he remained regular in his daily devotional routines. He passed away due to a heart attack. We pray tribute to such a hardworking, dedicated, humble and devout sadhu. ♦



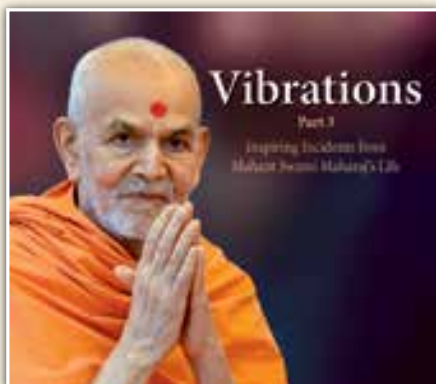
PUJYA CHAITANYAVIVEK SWAMI

Passed Away: 7 January 2021, Age 25

A native of Demol town, Pujya Chaitanyavivek Swami hailed from a staunch *satsangi* family. His grandfather, Shri Dahyabhai Patel, was a stalwart devotee of Yogiji Maharaj. Chaitanyavivek Swami was given *diksha* by Mahant Swami Maharaj in 2018 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Akshar Deri in Gondal.

While studying at the Sant Talim Kendra in

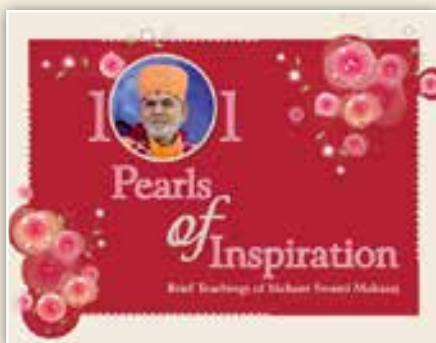
Sarangpur, his many qualities came to the fore. He was humble, hardworking and helpful to all. He never complained and was always ready to contribute in physically demanding tasks. Sadly, while engaged in *seva* with other swamis, he suffered a sudden heart attack and passed away. We pay tribute to a young sadhu who touched others through his austere, disciplined and devout life. ♦



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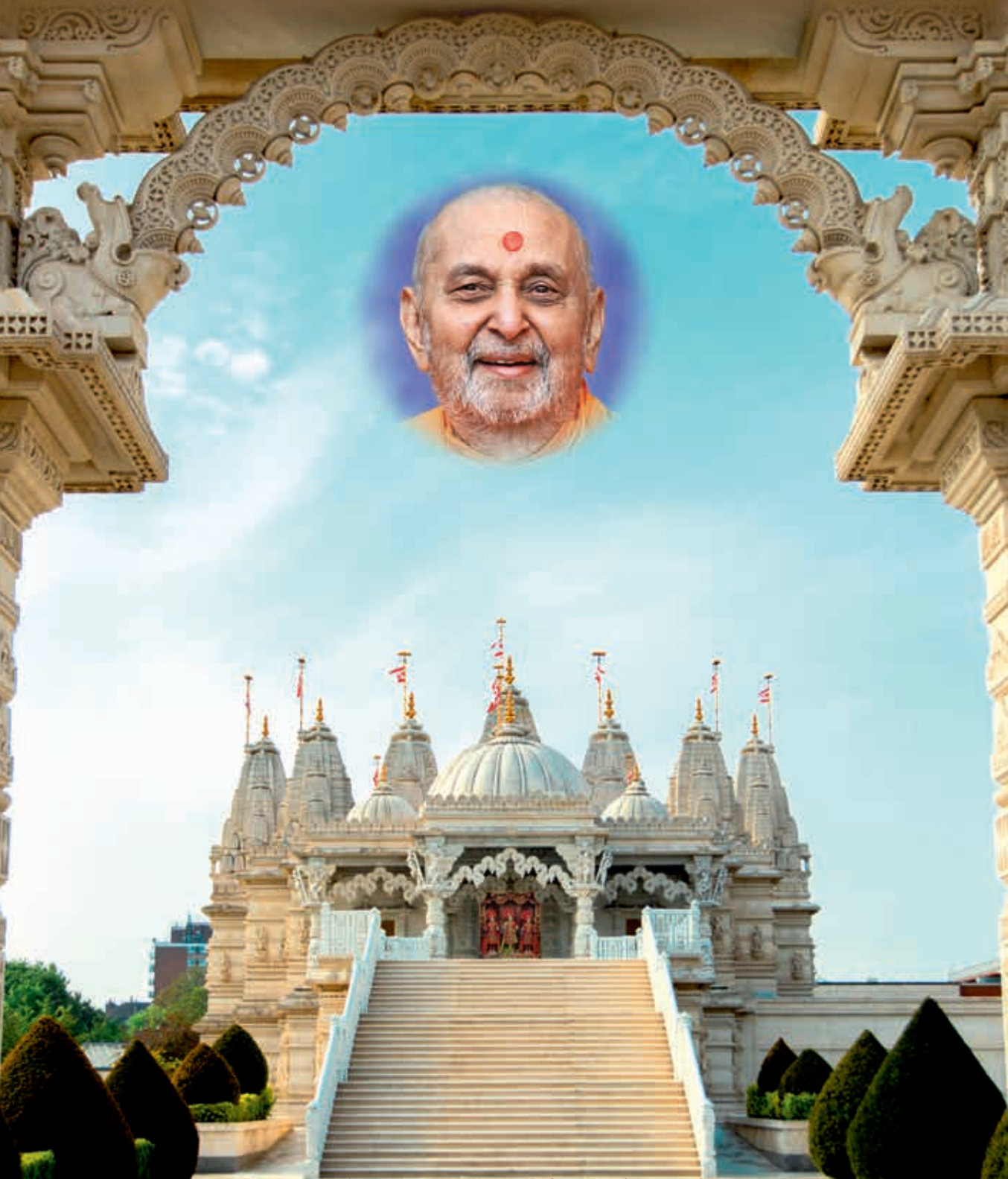


Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th Birthday Celebration 21 December 2020

The online celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 99th birthday utilized 3D technology to create an aesthetic virtual scenario to house the presentations by Mahant Swami Maharaj, *sadguru* and other swamis, and youths. Highlighting the virtues of Pramukh Swami Maharaj as experienced by revered spiritual leaders, the online assembly was broadcast to a global audience of tens of thousands.

1. Swamishri and *sadguru* swamis on the virtual stage, with youths performing a cultural dance in the foreground.
2. Swamishri honoured with a garland.

Printed and Published by Sadhu Swayamprakashdas on behalf of Swaminarayan Aksharpith
and Printed at Swaminarayan Mudran Mandir, Shahibaug Road, Ahmedabad - 380 004 and Published
from Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Shahibaug Road, Ahmedabad - 380 004. Editor: Sadhu Swayamprakashdas.



**BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Neasden, London
Inaugurated by Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj in 1995**