



SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July–August 2018

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-

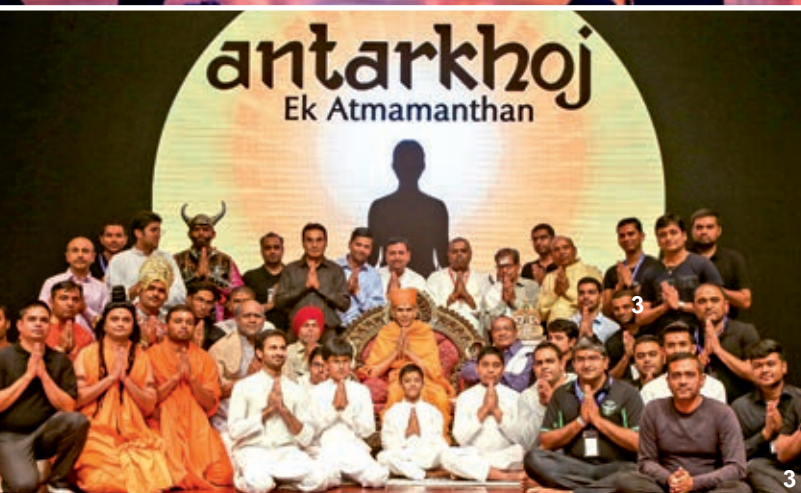
The Science and Spirituality of Fasting



1



2



3

3

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN IN PERTH, AUSTRALIA

March 2018

1. A traditional welcome dance during Bal-Kishore Din (29 March).
2. The story of Shravan enacted by children and youths during the cultural programme, Antar Khoj (31 March).
3. Swamishri with children and youths who participated in the 'Antar Khoj' cultural programme.



Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July–August 2018, Vol. 41, No. 4

CONTENTS

- | | |
|---|---|
| 4 Shri Hari Showers His Grace Upon
Premanand Swami | 33 Living with Swamishri |
| 7 Adhyāy 4:
Faith, Enthusiasm and Self-Control;
Part 23 | 38 BAPS Mandir in Himachal Pradesh,
Shimla |
| 12 The Purpose and Benefits of Fasting | 40 New Mandir Inaugurations |
| 14 The Science and Spirituality of Fasting | 42 International Seminar on
Akshar-Purushottam Darshan |
| 20 Yogi Yuvak Upvas College | 44 London Mandir Acclaimed by
TripAdvisor |
| 24 Chaturmas – The Four Sacred Months | 45 BAPS News |
| 26 Mahant Swami Maharaj's Vicharan | 50 New Publications |

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

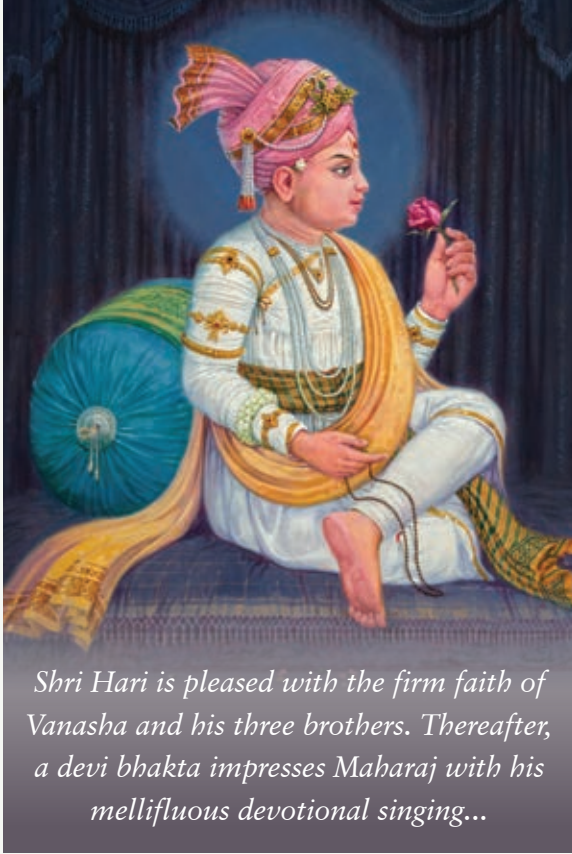
Designer: Sadhu Shrijiwarupdas

Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan Aksharpath, 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

SHRI HARI SHOWERS HIS GRACE UPON PREMANAND SWAMI



Shri Hari is pleased with the firm faith of Vanasha and his three brothers. Thereafter, a devi bhakta impresses Maharaj with his mellifluous devotional singing...

MAY YOUR DIVINE FORM BE FOREVER WITH US

The next day, as Shriji Maharaj was about to depart from Sundariyana, Vanasha beseeched, “Maharaj, there are still a lot of laddus left. So, stay here for one more day.”

Shri Hari said, “Give two laddus each to all the sadhus and devotees.”

Vanasha saw his plan to have Maharaj’s company for an extra day fizzle out. Out of his love for Shri Hari tears rolled down his eyes at Maharaj’s departure. Shriji Maharaj consoled him and praised, “Sheth, you have served us and sacrificed immensely for Satsang. Only one who is bold and has a strong affinity and allegiance for

Satsang can do this. Therefore, there is no need for you to be sad. Remember whatever happiness and memories I have given to you and they will make you happy.” Then, Maharaj happily said, “Sheth, ask for whatever you wish.”

The four brothers danced with inner joy at Shriji Maharaj’s *rajipo* upon them. They prayed, “Maharaj, may your divine *murti* forever appear in our meditation. Other than that there is nothing else we desire.”

Shri Hari blessed, “So be it.” Then, Maharaj departed from Sundariyana and headed towards Gadhpur.

SATSANG CANNOT BE REALIZED BY DOING RITUALS ALONE

After arriving in Gadhpur, Shri Hari repeatedly remembered the devotees of Sundariyana. During his discourses, Maharaj generously sang about the relentless faith of Himraj Shah’s family. He said, “They severed social ties with their community, disregarded the pressures from close relatives and even bore the brunt of ostracization from their spiritual guru. Only those who have profound faith in satsang can sustain their spiritual bonds with audacity and steadfastness. Even later they will face a flurry of troubles due to their satsang ties, but because of Himraj Shah’s strong satsang *sanskars* their future generations will not capitulate.”

Everyone understood the essence of Shri Hari’s words. They felt that the divine satsang cannot be realized by wearing the *kanthi*, saying the *mala* or doing the *tilak-chandlo* alone. By practicing the *upasana* of the supreme Purushottam Narayan, abiding by his moral code of conduct, having firm *paksh* for Satsang and by cultivating *vairagya* can satsang be realized.

* * *

A few days later, Shri Hari instructed the Dharmakul members to go on a pilgrimage to Dwarika. Maharaj told Sachchidanand Swami to accompany them as their guide and Dayaram Shukla of Umreth to attend to them.

SHRI HARI PRAISES PREMANAND SWAMI

Once, Shriji Maharaj was seated in a satsang assembly near the Vasudev Narayan room in Dada Khachar's *darbar*. At that time, a devi *bhakta* arrived. He had a *sindoor* mark on his forehead, a trident in his hand and a red handkerchief tied around his head. He bowed before Shri Hari and said, "Maharaj, you are Bhagwan. If you permit me I would like to sing a song in praise of my devi."

Shri Hari appreciated his sentiments and permitted him to do so. He sang, "*Mā tu Pāvāni patrāni, Bhavāni Mā Kālkā re lol; Mā tāre dun-garde chadvu tu, ati ghanu dohyalu re lol.*"

"Mother, you are the queen of Pavagad [a mountain], you are Bhavani and mother Kalika [the wife of Shiv]; Mother, I want to climb your mountain, but it is very difficult."

Shri Hari was pleased with his mellifluous *garbi* style of singing. He gave the devi *bhakta* a gift and pleased him. The *bhakta* bowed to Maharaj and left.

Thereafter, Maharaj told Premanand Swami, "Swami, did you see how passionately the devi *bhakta* sang Mataji's *garbo*? The tune was also beautiful and his style of singing was captivating and soothing. Compose a bhajan in that tune." Premanand Swami was happy to abide by Maharaj's words.

The next day, on 28 February (Maha *vad* 14), Maharaj was seated in the east-facing verandah of Dada Khachar's *darbar*. At that time, Premanand Swami plucked the strings of his *tanpuro* and started spontaneously composing and singing one bhajan after another in the same tune sung by the devi *bhakta*: "*Vandu Sahajanand rasrup, anu-pam sārne lol; Jene bhajtā chhute fand, kare bhav pārne re lol.*" – "I bow to Sahajanand's profoundly

beautiful form, which is the essence of everything. By worshipping him one is liberated from this troubling world and the ocean of *sansar*."

Premanand Swami beautifully composed and sang eight *pads*. Shriji Maharaj was immensely pleased with him and declared, "With Premanand Swami having such contemplation of Bhagwan's *murti* I get the thought of getting up and prostrating to him."

MAHARAJ WORRIES ABOUT THE MAGNITUDE OF BRAHMANAND SWAMI'S WORK

Shri Hari was eager to go to Vartal because Brahmanand Swami had started building a much bigger mandir than the proposed one-pinnacled mandir. Joban Pagi had given the orders to the brickmakers of Bamnoli, Sanjaya and Vartal to provide bricks for the mandir. Brahmanand Swami begged for food in the neighbouring villages to feed the labourers. All wished to contribute to Shriji Maharaj's work in whatever way they could. Thus, some would donate grains and others would donate building materials for the project. Even the local brickmakers contributed by inspiring nine owners to donate 100,000 bricks each. Everyone was fascinated as to how such a mammoth task was being supported and executed with great ease.

Brahmanand Swami had started the excavation work on the two foundation pits for the shrines of Lakshmi-Narayan and Dharmadev. Since the soil in Gujarat (Kheda) was bereft of any stones, the foundation pit had to be dug deeper than usual. However, during the excavation work water would well up, which was then removed with the aid of water wheels pulled by oxen. And then the pit would be laid with bricks. In this way, around 700,000 bricks were used in preparing the foundation pits. When Brahmanand Swami started the mandir project he had only Rs. 12. The money was still unspent and the monumental work proceeded unhindered.

When Shri Hari came to learn about the enormity of Brahmanand Swami's work, he was

worried about how he would be able to accomplish it. He recalled that he had instructed him to construct a small mandir with a single *shikhar*, and yet he had embarked upon building a mandir that was beyond their financial means. So, Maharaj called Aksharanand Swami and told him, “You go to Vartal and tell Brahmanand Swami not to make the three-*shikhar* mandir. The mandir should have only one *shikhar*.”

Aksharanand Swami hurriedly travelled to Vartal and conveyed Maharaj’s message. In response, Brahmanand Swami told Aksharanand Swami, “Swami, you will not be able to understand what is happening here. Only one who has inspired this will enable us to complete it. You go and tell this to Shriji Maharaj.”

START ANY WORK ACCORDING TO ONE’S MEANS

After hearing the report from Aksharanand Swami, Shri Hari called Nityanand Swami. He told him, “Brahmanand Swami is building a big mandir without thinking about our coffers. Finally, he will have to give it up and the task of completing it will come upon me. Thus, you go to Vartal and convince Swami that it is still not too late to turn back.” Then, Maharaj wrote a letter with a verse, “*Apni pahonch bichārke, karie teti dod; Tetā pau pasārie, jeti lambi sod.*” (“One should think about one’s capacity before running. One should stretch one’s legs according to the length of one’s blanket.”) Shri Hari cautioned Brahmanand Swami to build the mandir according to their financial capacity.

Nityanand Swami reached Vartal with Maharaj’s letter. He saw the large lotus-shaped foundation pits being filled and readied for the mandir construction. Nityanand Swami asked Brahmanand Swami, “What are you doing?” Brahmanand Swami smiled and said, “The mandir is being built according to Shriji Maharaj’s wish. How can the supreme Paramatma have a small mandir plan. I believe even this is also small.”

Nityanand Swami was left pondering. He trusted Brahmanand Swami’s intelligence and his devotion to Shriji Maharaj. So, he did not say anything further. Then, he gave Shriji Maharaj’s letter to him. Brahmanand Swami opened the letter and smiled as he started reading it. Nityanand Swami was surprised to see him smile. Then, Brahmanand Swami said, “You might as well stay here because Maharaj will be coming here shortly to celebrate the Fuldol festival. With you here with me I will feel fortified. I will write a reply to Maharaj and send a messenger to deliver it.” Nityanand Swami agreed and added, “You have my support in your task.” Brahmanand Swami was happy to hear this.

A SKY-SOARING SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR

Brahmanand Swami wrote about the details of the mandir construction in his letter to Maharaj and added a verse, “*Saheb sarikhā shethiyā, base nagarke māhi; Tāke dhanki kyā kami, hundi chale navkhand māhi.*” (“When Bhagwan is the master and he is manifest on earth, how can there be any shortage of money when his promissory note can be encashed throughout the world.”) Brahmanand Swami conveyed his trust and faith in Shri Hari’s greatness and capacity to fulfil the monumental task.

Brahmanand Swami gave the letter to Nityanand Swami to read. Nityanand Swami understood that Swami was building the mandir according to Maharaj’s wish. He recalled Brahmanand Swami’s words, “A Swaminarayan Mandir should soar into the sky, and it should not be a small shrine.” He smiled and said, “Send the letter to Maharaj.” Then Brahmanand Swami urged, “You, too, add a few words of encouragement in the letter.” Nityanand Swami replied, “You write that Nityanand Swami supports the construction of the mandir.” And Brahmanand Swami added these words before sending the letter to Maharaj. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

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

ADHYĀY 4

Faith, Enthusiasm and Self-Control

Part 23



have self-control attain knowledge. On attaining such knowledge, they attain ultimate peace' (Gitā 4.39).

‘Shraddhāvān Labhate Gnānam’

The Gitā tells us that the faithful attain knowledge. Here, knowledge and faith are both presented together, where knowledge is the ultimate goal and faith is the means to attain it. Realization is the fruit of faith, and peace is the fruit of realization. This is the gist of the *shloka*.

Faith Means Trust

The word faith means trust. To trust means to believe in and accept something that one has not directly experienced. There are many things in this world that exist, but of which we are completely unaware. To accept the existence of such unknown things is a form of trust. The truly wise are very trusting. It is their trust that leads them to experience the unknown.

Trust is a special part of life. Just like breathing enables us to live, trust breathes happiness into life.

Trust is imbibed in every action and every aspect of life. For example, we may know of cases of a brother killing his own brother, a husband deceiving his wife or a wife poisoning her husband, nevertheless, if we are at ease while eating,

Previously, from the *shloka* ‘*Tad vid-dhi pranipātena pariprashnena sevayā; Upadekshyanti te gnānam gnāninastat-tvadarshinaha*’ (Gitā 4.34), we saw how Shri Krishna explained that to attain knowledge one must attain the three qualities of bowing, asking and serving. Alongside these three qualities, Shri Krishna mentions three other qualities that a disciple must imbibe.

Shri Krishna Bhagwan says, ‘*श्रद्धावान् लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः । ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परं शान्तिम् अचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥*’ – ‘*Shraddhāvān labhate gnānam tatparaha samy-atendriyaha; gnānam labdhvā parām shāntim achirenādhigachchhati.*’ – ‘Those with faith, who are keen to abide by the guru’s wishes, and

it means we trust whoever has made the meal. Earthquakes can happen at any time and anywhere, nevertheless, if we can comfortably live in a multi-storey building and travel merrily through narrow alleys, it means we are living in trust. We are well aware that thousands of travellers die in accidents every day, and we even inform others of such news; yet, if we joyously travel at ease by car, train or plane, it means we have trust in the driver and much more. Many buildings are robbed; even entire doors are removed and houses robbed of valuable items. We know of this too, yet, when we lock our flimsy doors with a flimsy lock and go out without any worries, it means we have great trust in an ordinary lock. In this way, we continuously live by trust. It would not be an exaggeration to say that we would not even be able to breathe without trust.

Here, the words '*shraddhāvān labhate gnānam*' associate trust with knowledge. This clarifies the relationship with the guru – one must surrender to the guru to obtain knowledge. Upon surrendering, one must have complete trust in him. The guru naturally showers his grace on a trusting disciple and the disciple's life is automatically filled with peace and knowledge. More work is done in less time.

Today, there is a common belief that to obtain knowledge one must raise as many arguments and doubts as possible. The effects of this can even be seen in today's education system. One who questions attains knowledge, or one who doubts attains knowledge seem to be the new maxims. As a result, this has affected man's lifestyle and relationship with others. But, the Gītā's stance on this is clear: if you want to attain knowledge, you must first trust; that is a principle. Here, knowledge refers to knowledge of the atman. The means to gaining experience is to go to an experienced guru who is spiritually realized.

To trust the guru means to first accept his spiritual form and calibre. Further, to have faith in the form of the guru is to believe that the guru one

has attained is truly wise, has realized Paramātmā, experiences the ultimate bliss of Paramātmā, is divine, has countless virtues, is flawless, is omniscient, and that he will enable one to experience that bliss of Paramātmā, make one *brahmarup* like himself and liberate one. Only such trust leads to true surrenderance and true association.

Secondly, to trust the guru means to believe his precepts as the highest truth. Bhagwan Swaminarayan has explained this in the Vachanamrut, saying that one who has discretion 'accepts whatever words of advice God and the Sant offer as the highest truth' (Vachanamrut Gadhada I 16). The highest truth refers to principles in which no further improvements or additions are necessary, and in which there is no further need for debate, discussion or speculation. This is a liberating lesson for how the disciple should treat the guru's words.

We deal with a great number of people in our lives. We hear a lot from a lot of people. We think about what we have heard, then, based on our experiences or the doubts that have arisen in our minds, we decide what is appropriate and what is not. Then, we may or may not think about following it. This is how we examine the words of others. Such scrutiny gives us discretion as to what is and what is not appropriate. In a social world, such scrutiny is helpful.

Nevertheless, if the same method of scrutiny were applied with a true spiritual guru, a great loss would be incurred. The guru is no ordinary person. The relationship one has with the guru should be different to that with others. The guru's words are not like an ordinary person's; we cannot listen to the guru's words in the same way we listen to an ordinary person's. We cannot take the same approach with the guru as we take to the ideas of people the world thinks are intelligent. The guru's words are our lifeline; his words are spoken from his state of realization. Whatever he says, he does not merely believe, he experiences. He has imbibed the principles that Paramātmā has

given for the ultimate liberation of the atman, and thereafter teaches them to us. Therefore, these principles are the utmost truth and, here, Shri Krishna tells us that those who trust attain that ultimate true knowledge.

Which of the guru's words require such trust? Foremost are those regarding conviction in the form of Paramātmā. Furthermore, faith is needed in words explaining the form of the atman, the feeling of the atman being *brahman*, and Paramātmā as residing within the atman. For example, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, “‘You are distinct from the mind, body, *indriyas* and *prāns*; you are *satya*; you are the knower of the body, *indriyas* and *prāns*, which are all *asatya*’ – he accepts this to be the truth. He then behaves as the atman – distinct from them all – but never follows the instincts of his own mind” (Vachanamrut Gadhada I 16). Here, the instincts of the mind imply one's own thoughts. The *viveki* put aside their own thoughts and follow the guru's principles with complete faith. Generally, one who eats, walks, sits, stands, etc. aptly is considered to be *viveki*; that is true. But Bhagwan Swaminarayan considers the trusting to be *viveki*. This is indeed a definition worth deeply thinking about. We respect the guru by speaking to him politely, not raising our voice, obeying his wishes, standing on his arrival, etc., but to attain knowledge we must show respect to him in the form of trust.

Thereafter, to explain the importance of faith, or trust, Shri Krishna acquaints Arjuna with those things that hinder knowledge. He says, ‘अज्ञश्चाश्रद्धानश्च संशयात्मा विनश्यति। नायं लोकोऽस्ति न परो न सुखं संशयात्मनः॥’ – ‘Agnashchāshraddhānashcha sanshayātmā vinashyati; nāyam loko'sti na paro na sukham sanshayātmanaha.’ – ‘Those who are ignorant, without faith and doubtful are ruined. For such people, neither this world or the afterworld exist, and they never attain happiness’ (Gitā 4.40).

Doubt and lack of faith are the two major hindrances to attaining knowledge. This *shloka*

shows how much damage they do.

One meaning of lack of faith means distrust. To distrust means to disbelieve and to not accept the truth. We do not believe the words spoken by certain people to be true; that means we do not trust them. Our opinions and beliefs regarding a person form the basis for whether we trust or distrust his words and ideas. To distrust the guru is destructive. If we do not trust one from whom we are to obtain knowledge, we should accept that our ignorance is irremovable.

The second point is that of doubt. ‘*Sanshayātmā vinashyati*’ – doubt invites destruction. Doubt makes life poison. Doubt and happiness are never found together. Doubt tends to paralyze a person with fear, anxiety, uncertainty and indecisiveness. Doubt can ruin relationships and even destroy one's life. While trust is our lifeline, doubt is deadly. There is no substance to the lives of the doubtful – things happen randomly. Fundamental principles themselves are doubted, and so even though life continues, it is without fulfilment. There is a constant feeling of uneasiness and emptiness. Thus, doubt is a terrible thing, especially if cast upon the life, words and principles of the guru. Doubt distances the disciple from the guru. It is the wickedness of the heart. Therefore, the Gitā awakens us to this fact.

On the topic of obtaining knowledge, along with trust, distrust and doubt, logic should also be considered. Logic involves reasoning. People use reason and logic to prove their own thoughts to be true. Logical thinking is considered a skill. It signifies intelligence. But, it is important to remember that logic cannot give a definite decision. It is, however, possible to use logic to confuse and overturn decisions that have already been made. Logic does not have a ‘side’. It aids even opposing views.

Furthermore, logic is a result of the human intellect. The intellect is formed from experience. Experiences are momentary, incomplete or even mistaken. They are inconsistent, repeatedly

proven to be false and then rectified, and constantly fluctuating. How can logic formed from such experiences lead one to the ultimate truth? Therefore, our shastras have clarified that spiritual truths are beyond logic.

This does not mean that logic and reasoning should not be used at all. It is a matter of not being misled by them. Argumentative reasoning has a place, but it is not to establish principles. Instead reason should be used to reaffirm principles that already exist, and that too, only if necessary. Those who trust have peace of mind and do not have the hassle of having to decide on eternal principles. They, if necessary, use reason as a tool to affirm the principles that the guru has revealed to be true. They experience the bliss of the guru's grace.

In this manner, Shri Krishna alerts Arjuna not to let flaws such as distrust and doubt affect him.

Moreover, by instilling an air of trust, the Gitā makes the guru-disciple relationship healthy and strong.

तत्परः - Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm is the second step to attaining knowledge. Enthusiasm is needed alongside trust. Enthusiasm is the confluence of intense desire, eagerness and engrossment. To not rest at ease until one attains knowledge is intense desire – What can I do to please the guru? How can I swiftly imbibe his precepts in my life? To not want to delay in the slightest is eagerness. To remain focused in the form of the guru and his precepts is engrossment. When a disciple is keen or enthusiastic, they have all of the above. Even if the goal has not been attained, such enthusiasm saves one from gloominess, lethargy or idleness. For such a person endeavour is not a burden, but a delight. For such enthusiasm, Bhagwan Swaminarayan uses words like zeal, attachment, fervour and yearning.

The guru is also enthusiastic to give such a keen disciple knowledge.

संयतेन्द्रियः - Control of the Senses

By indulging in unnecessary or forbidden pleasures, the senses become feeble and one's ability to grasp knowledge diminishes. Knowledge cannot be attained without concentration. If students do not have control over their senses, their minds are constantly engrossed in trifling matters such as eating, watching and going out; they cannot concentrate. They never feel like sitting down to read, write or listen. If they do sit down to study, they do not like it, do not understand it and do not remember it. They get fed up and feel agitated. If one has self-control, then concentration comes easily, the senses become sharp, one is able to grasp more, knowledge becomes easy to attain and enthusiasm increases. To focus all of one's senses on the guru is a form of self-control – this means to obey the guru's commands and to see, listen, eat, etc. as per the guru's instructions. By doing this, one is ready to attain the guru's knowledge.

Thus, in this *shloka*, Shri Krishna explains to Arjuna three imperative qualities a disciple must have – faith, keenness and self-control. Shri Krishna then proceeds to reveal the fruits a disciple who sincerely imbibes these qualities attains.

ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शान्तिम् अधिगच्छति॥ - Peace from Knowledge

A disciple who imbibes the above qualities obtains both knowledge and peace. The first outcome of the above virtues is knowledge. But that is not all, '*Gnānam labdhvā parām shāntim achirenādhigachchhati*' – it is the path to ultimate peace. If one knows a lot but does not have peace, then one has not understood correctly. Where there is true knowledge, peace inevitably exists. True understanding can only be obtained from the guru. Therefore, the knowledge that the Gitā is speaking of is knowledge obtained from the guru by surrendering to him. The Gitā is not speaking of information gathered from contemplation or a variety of books. No matter how

much such information is collected, it does not lead to the experience of even a fraction of the ultimate peace.

Therefore, one becomes wise by attaining knowledge from the *brahmaswarup* guru. One becomes *brahmarup* by the association of Brahman. Those who are *brahmarup* do not have to go looking for peace; they are at peace. Knowledge, love, delight, bliss, satisfaction and contentment obtained by the association and grace of the guru all combine to establish inner peace. This peace is the greatest achievement in life.

The Ideal Discipleship of the Brahmaswarup Guru

Our succession of *brahmaswarup* gurus is a living example of these words of the Gitā.

Doctrinally, Bhagatji Maharaj was a manifest form of the *brahmaswarup satpurush*, yet, from a worldly perspective, he was also the disciple of Aksharmurti Gunatitanand Swami. All three qualities mentioned in the above *shloka*, as well as their fruits, can be seen in Bhagatji Maharaj's life.

Once, Gunatitanand Swami came to Sarangpur. Bhagatji Maharaj was with him. Swami answered a call of nature and, on returning, Bhagatji Maharaj helped him to wash his hands. Swami said to Bhagatji Maharaj, "If I find a truly worthy person, I would like to give him knowledge."

"Give that knowledge to me!" Bhagatji Maharaj immediately requested.

"This knowledge cannot be easily attained," Gunatitanand Swami clarified. "It can only be attained by one who is prepared to completely surrender his body and senses."

Hearing this, Bhagatji Maharaj's enthusiasm multiplied. He felt ready to do anything for Gunatitanand Swami. He devoted himself to Swami with body and mind, ready to serve at his every word.

His intense zeal to please his guru added self-control to his keenness. He started a repeating cycle of fasting for two days and eating only once

on the third day.

Alongside keenness and self-control, he was full of trust. He learnt from Gunatitanand Swami with complete and pure faith. Once, Swami told him to call Mt. Girnar. Hearing this command, those standing by thought it weird, but Bhagatji, without a second's delay, went and told the mountain of Gunatitanand Swami's summons. This reflects his paramount faith in the guru's words.

Faith, keenness and self-control had become natural to Bhagatji Maharaj, and as a result, he attained the utmost state of realization and knowledge, and experienced ultimate peace. This is why Bhagatji Maharaj was always seen to be in a blissful mood.

Shri Krishna wished that Arjuna experience ultimate peace and thus gave him this extraordinary precept.

Conclusion

In this manner, the Gitā has given complete guidance on how to achieve the highest knowledge and experience ultimate peace. In essence, if there is a wise and realized guru, and the disciple bows, enquires and serves with qualities such as faith, keenness and self-control, then *brahma-vidya* is realized of its own accord and the disciple is immersed in ultimate peace.

We are fortunate that we have had this opportunity with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. We have served him and heard his divine words. Today too, we continue to serve Mahant Swami Maharaj and listen to him. It is now our responsibility to put aside any distrust, doubts, argumentative reasoning and differences of opinion and listen to what our guru has said and continue to say with complete faith, patience, keenness and self-control imbibed in our lives. We should please our guru in this manner, realize the knowledge that he wants to give us and become eligible for ultimate peace. ♦

The Purpose and Benefits of FASTING

*HH Mahant Swami Maharaj gave an inspiring discourse in Gujarati
on the purpose and benefits of fasting on 6 June 2018 in Limbdi*



Generally, people fast for health reasons. And there are many benefits of fasting. One, fasting for 24 hours cleans one's body from the inside. Many also fast by drinking only water, which is also a good thing. For us, the benefits are immense because Bhagwan becomes pleased upon us. One of the names of Shriji Maharaj is *tapaha priyay namaha* (we bow to him because he loves austerity). He liked to perform austerities a lot. There is a saying, "One should go to a pilgrim place for the sake of doing austerities, and not for eating and drinking."

Another benefit of fasting is that there are certain (harmful) substances in our blood that are eliminated by fasting. Some animals fast for several days prior to mating. The reason being that a certain amount of wholesome energy is created within themselves, which is beneficial to their body.

By fasting one's body may become physically weak, but there are other good energies that are created. One, the body becomes clean, which is a very big thing. Some fast for one day, two days or five days, whereas some fast by drinking liquids.

In short, such fasts are very beneficial. One is never at a loss through fasting.

Sometimes, fasting increases acidity (in one's stomach), but, with practice, things turn out to be beneficial for us. Even if the acidity increases it allows the body to flush out toxins. In other words, the body flushes out waste.

By fasting, our cells are rejuvenated. One may experience physical fatigue, but ultimately, fasting is definitely beneficial. A renowned naturopathy doctor did a lot of research on this subject. He said that [through fasting] old cells are flushed out and replaced by new ones. In Morogoro [Tanzania], after a person had fasted for ten continuous days, he appeared healthy like a red tomato. So, fasting is very good for health. Fasting therapy is a useful health therapy. After doing that a person may look the same, but there is a drastic change in the internal parts of his body. For us the fruit of fasting is Shriji Maharaj's *rajipo*.

In our Sampradaya, many observe *ektana* (eating only once a day), *dharna-parna* (alternate fasts) on other endeavours, but they must be observed properly, to provide more benefits. To get more benefits one must abide by the guidelines. For us, fasting is important for self-restraint. To reign over lust it is necessary to fast. There are also other benefits of fasting. Austerity should be performed with self-restraint (*sanyam*) and *niyams*. However, by over-indulging in food one's attention becomes outwardly and one gains no benefits. Yogi Bapa talked about the benefits of fasting. He said that one does not suffer from flatulence and colds.

Yogi Bapa used to say that to eat one less morsel amounts to subtle austerity (*sukshma tapa*). One needs to cure one's habit of gluttony. All day long one should have an attitude of austerity. It is not that one should not eat, but one must observe subtle austerity. One's body weight will not increase by eating only once in a day (*paka ektana*). By observing *paka ektana* for one month there a lot of benefits to the body.

Paka ektana is necessary for health and spiritual stability. It increases soul strength. One is also able to achieve self-control over one's mind. We find people over-indulging in eating everywhere. There's no self-restraint. Those who are health conscious observe self-restraint because they are concerned about the benefits for their body only. Even for those who do not believe in religion it is necessary for them to observe fasts.

To observe fasts one has to cultivate the will to do them. One has to decide resolutely in one's mind that one wants to observe fasts. Otherwise, one will give up midway. Some who start observing the month-long austerity of *khatras* give it up in the first week. [because they lack self-restraint]. In all types of austerities one gains spiritual strength. If one observes any austerities with a firm resolve then one progresses.

Yogi Bapa used to say that no one dies due to observing a fast. In fact, many die due to over-eating. By eating less, one becomes energetic and strong. Eating less means not experiencing one's stomach to be heavy or full. In so doing, one's inner strength increases.

There are two benefits behind fasting: one is spiritual – it helps one to develop self-restraint (*sanyam*) and other virtues; and the second is the increase in inner strength. By fasting one's thoughts are transformed. For this, one must have a resolute mind. By having a strong mind all tasks can be done.

For us, the main purpose of observing fasts should be to please Bhagwan and his Sadhu. Other people fast and we, too, observe fasts, but our purpose is to please Bhagwan. Those who fast with the purpose to please Bhagwan and his Sadhu, then their fasts are considered to be (spiritually) more fruitful.

All devotees should fast on *ekadashis* and observe austerities in the holy month of Shravan or the whole of Chaturmas according to their health and capacities. ♦

The Science and Spirituality of FASTING

THE SCIENCE OF FASTING

American scientist and author, Benjamin Franklin, advised, “The best of all medicines is rest and fasting.” Mark Twain’s experience was similar, “A little starvation can really do more for the average sick man than can the best medicines and the best doctors. I do not mean a restricted diet. I mean total abstention from food for one or two days. I speak from experience. Starvation has been my cold and fever doctor for 15 years and has accomplished a cure in all instances.” Jack Goldstein, an American physician, suffering from ulcerative colitis only recovered after observing lengthy fasts of 30 to 40 days once a year for three years.¹

The ancient Ayurvedic texts equally laud fasting: *langhanam param aushadham* – fasting is the greatest medicine – and *jvarādaṁ langhanam proctam* – at the onset of fever, fast.² In the *Ashtanghrudaya*,³ Vagbhatt Rishi lists the benefits of fasting: “disappearance of aggravated *doshas*, boosting of the digestive fire, weight reduction, increased vigour and *ojas* (vitality), digestion of *aam* (toxins), true hunger and thirst, and the desire to eat.”

Fasting has been a survival mechanism for organisms since the advent of life on earth. During times of drought and food scarcity, organisms enter into a mode of inactivity to conserve energy for survival. Such organisms include single-celled microbes, insects, fish,

1. *Turning Point*, Part 1, p. 270, 2015

2. *Bhavprakash*, Madhya Khand, Jvaradhikar 25

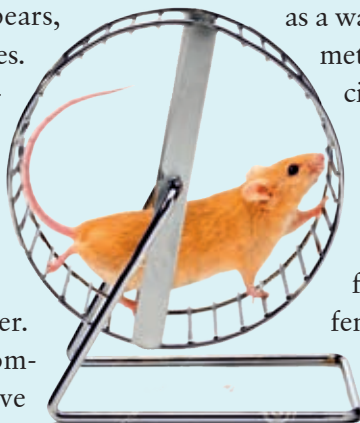
3. *Chikitsasthan* 1.3

lizards, bats, squirrels, rodents, bears, crocodiles and even shrubs and trees. Some hibernate during winter, living on stored body fat.

Many mammals also fast during illness or injury, such as dogs, cats, horses and cows. They will avoid even the most delicious food offered to them, taking only water. They resume food only after complete recovery. How do they survive without food? Through a process called autophagy. This word is derived from the Greek *auto* 'self' and *phagein* 'to eat'. Thus, autophagy means 'self-eating' or 'self-cannibalization'. The word 'autophagy' was coined by a Belgian scientist named Christian de Duve in 1963. In 1974, he won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for discovering a cell component known as the lysosome, where autophagy takes place. Autophagy is the process by which cells degrade macromolecules, old cell parts and microorganisms and recycle their components to provide fuel for energy and building blocks for cell renewal. However, the exact mechanism of this process remained unknown. In the 1990s, a Japanese cell biologist, Yoshinori Ohsumi, performing experiments on yeast cells discovered genes essential for autophagy. In 2016, he won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for discovering the mechanisms of autophagy.

Why is autophagy important? Because it is the process by which the body cleans out damaged cells and toxins to help regenerate newer, healthier cells. It is also important in counteracting aging. When autophagy goes awry, it leads to aging and many age-related diseases, including cancer. Autophagy is so beneficial that it is now regarded as an important factor in preventing diseases such as cancer, neurodegeneration, cardiomyopathy, diabetes, liver disease, autoimmune diseases and infections.

Autophagy is activated during times of stress,



as a way to protect the body. This stress is metabolic stress due to strenuous exercise and food restriction. Activating autophagy slows down the aging process, reduces inflammation and boosts the body's natural ability to function. Autophagy is important for 'cleaning up' the body and defending against the negative effects of such stress.

Since the 1990s, scientists have been hotly pursuing research on animals to discover mechanisms which promote autophagy and drugs which can activate the pathways of autophagy. In a nutshell, this is the science of fasting at the cellular level, since autophagy is enhanced when a person fasts.

Here, it is worth examining the results of experiments on autophagy through fasting in the quest to discover the secrets of health and longevity. Globally, scientists have used various fasting protocols on mice and rats. These include IF – intermittent fasting, TRF – time-restricted feeding, FMDs – fasting mimicking diets and PF – periodic fasting. Their amazing findings have prompted research on humans. A list of conclusions of their results from IF is listed below. IF is similar to the Hindu fasting *vrata* known as *dharna-parna* – food one day, fast the next day.

BENEFITS OF IF BASED ON ANIMAL STUDIES

1. Reduces levels of insulin and leptin (a hormone which controls satiety – the feeling of fullness after a meal).
2. Increases the sensitivity of insulin and leptin.
3. Reduces abdominal fat and hence aids weight loss.
4. Reduces heart rate and blood pressure.
5. Increases heart rate variability.
6. Increases resistance of the brain and heart to stress.

7. Reduces inflammation in the whole body.
8. Improves resistance to diabetes.
9. Protects against metabolic syndrome – a group of conditions such as obesity, high blood pressure, insulin resistance, etc.
10. Protects against heart disease.
11. Improves learning and memory.
12. Delays age-related brain degeneration, especially the onset of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Huntington's diseases.
13. Gives favourable results in multiple sclerosis and cancer risk factors.⁴

Although the above results in rodents seem amazing, scientists do not (yet) claim that they may all apply equally to humans. Only human trials can reveal this.

In humans, scientists have so far performed trials on one meal a day, similarly to the Hindu fast of *ektana* during the month of Shravan. Their results reveal reduction of fasting glucose levels, and healthier levels of LDL and HDL cholesterol.⁵

Some research on humans on CR – (caloric restriction) showed improved memory and IF showed increased levels of adiponectin – a hormone which helps to regulate body weight and fat, and also decreases insulin resistance. This induces health benefits and longevity. Studies of centenarians have also shown high levels of adiponectin.⁶

These findings of science reflect the remarkable benefits to the body and brain of restricting food intake through fasts such as *ekadashi*, *ektana* and *dharna-parna*. Bearing this in mind, Hindus who faithfully observe these *vrats* will be protected from many diseases and may accrue longevity. As far as the science of fasting is



concerned, the benefits can be summed up in the phrase: 'Eat less, live healthily.'

Next, we discuss the spiritual perspectives of fasting.

THE SPIRITUALITY OF FASTING

Bharatvarsha is famed for its rishis and mystics, who are equally famed for fasting as a form of *sadhana*. In the ancient past, some lived only on air, water and mantra *japa* for life. Today, many live only on one meal a day, while others live only on fruit. A grand old Ayurvedic physician and expert on *darshan chikitsa* – facial diagnosis – claimed that many mystics in the Himalayas lived for up to 300 years, eating only one meal of cooked barley (*jav*) and *amla*. Ancient Ayurvedic texts such as the *Charak Samhita* (Sutrasthan 22/34–35) and *Ashtanghrudaya* (Sutrasthan 14/16–17) cite various fasting methods to treat diseases.

FASTING IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Fasting prevailed in ancient cultures and lands such as Egypt, Assyria, Scythia, Greece, Babylon, Persia, Nineveh, Palestine, Rome, China, among the Druids, Celts, Scandinavians, Indians of North America, and Aztecs and Incas of South America. Moses fasted for 120 days on Mount Sinai. Jesus fasted for 40 days. The Bible also cites fasting by the apostles. Muslims observe the month-long fast of Ramazan (Ramadan). In Jainism, fasting is an important form of *sadhana*.

4. Longo, V. et al. Fasting: molecular mechanisms & clinical applications. *Cell Metabolism*, 19, 4 Feb. 2014, 181.

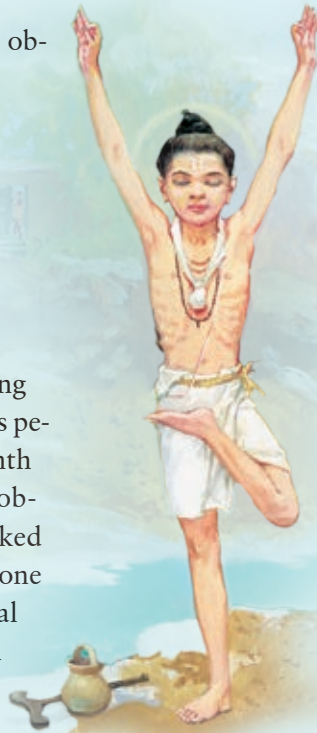
5. Paterson, RE, et al. Intermittent fasting & human metabolic health. *J. Aca. Nutr. & Dietetics*, 6 April 2015.

6. Witte, A.V., et al. Caloric restriction improves memory in elderly humans. *PNAS*, Jan. 2009, 106, 4, 1285-1260 and Golbidi, S. et al. Health benefits of fasting & caloric restriction. *Curr. Diab. Rep.* (2017) 67: 123.

FASTING IN HINDUISM

Hindus fast during religious observances, as well as for penance – *prayashchitta*. Important *ti-this* of fasting include *ekadashi*, *purnima*, the anniversaries of avatars and deities, such as Maha Shivaratri, Ramnavmi, Swaminarayan Jayanti, Krishna Janmashtami, Sharad Purnima, Guru Purnima and others. During the holy for months of Chaturmas period, many fast during the month of Shravan. The type of fasts observed include *ektana* (one cooked meal daily), *dharna-parna* (food one day, fast next day), and several forms of *chandrayan* – based on the waxing and waning of the moon. The sages of yore advocated fasting during these four monsoon months for health reasons as well, since cloudy skies, humidity and water-logged countrysides dampened the digestive fire. Additionally, plants and vegetables are often rendered inedible due to infestation by insects. The initial surface water run-off would sweep pollutants into rivers and water bodies. Hence, it was prudent to avoid drinking such water until healthy water arrived later, to prevent waterborne diseases. Not surprisingly, the highest number of festivals which are celebrated by fasting occur during Chaturmas.

Hindus observe such *vrats-upvases* as a form of self-denial to accrue *punya*, by pleasing one's *ishtadeva*. The time saved from cooking and eating is spent in bhakti such as singing *bhajans*, mantra *japa*, *deva* darshan and so forth. Fasting induces clarity of mind which aids mantra chanting, *katha* and *smruti* (recalling Bhagwan's divine *lila*).



Shri Nilkanth Varni engaged in austerities

Most importantly, fasting purifies the *indriyas* and *antahkaran*, which in turn strengthen the *atma*. Aspirants overcome *dehabhav* – body-consciousness – and develop control over the mind and the ten *indriyas*. The key *indriya* to be controlled, which affects other *indriyas*, is *rasna* – the sense of taste (Shikshapatri 189). In the Vachanamrut, Bhagwan Swaminarayan cites such control over the *indriyas* and mind in observing *ekadashi* (Gadhada II 8). He further says that the shastras consider this as the true *ekadashi* (Padma Puran, Uttarkand 38).

FASTING IN THE SWAMINARAYAN SAMPRADAYA

A few examples of fasting in the Swaminarayan Sampradaya are worth citing. At the age of eleven, Nilkanth Varni renounced Ayodhya for his Kalyan Yatra through Bharat. He reached Badrinath during Diwali (7 November 1792). The pujari offered him Annakut *prasad*. Nilkanth Varni then visited Mansarovar and returned to Badrinath on Akha Trij (13 May 1793), when the pujari offered him some food. Nilkanth Varni remarked, “This is my first morsel of food after you had offered me the Annakut *prasad*.” Hence, he had fasted for six months during this period. Even today, there is no human habitation in this region during winter, nor does any edible vegetation grow in the rocky, barren landscape.

The second remarkable fasting episode is of his second successor, Bhagatji Maharaj. With Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami's *agna*, he fasted for two days and then took only one meal on the third day for 3.5 years! That amounted to one meal



Shri Bhagatji Maharaj



Prayashchitta prescribed by the shastras

every 72 hours. This *vrat* is now known as the ‘Bhagatji Vrat’.

Yogiji Maharaj, the fourth successor, used to fast about 8 to 10 times a month. During the late 50s and 60s, he routinely prescribed *nirjala upvas* to youths to develop them spiritually. Among them was Vinubhai (now, Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj), to whom he often advocated two consecutive *nirjala* fasts. Once, in 1956, he even directed him to fast for five consecutive days!

BAPS sadhus usually observe, on average, five to seven fasts a month. Many devotees, young and old, observe *nirjala ekadashi*. During Shravan, devotees observe one of the following *vrats*: *ek-tana*, *dharna-parna* or *chandrayan*. Many also observe *dharna-parna* for months or even years as a vow until a *shikharbaddha* mandir is built in their city or region. This was the case for the mandir in Robbinsville.

PRAYASHCHITTA

Prayashchitta or atonement is an important spiritual discipline which lessens the burden of *vasana* resulting from any lapses in the observance of vows. It lightens the heart of the sincere aspirant. To subjugate lust, especially during one’s youth, Shriji Maharaj advocates *dharna-parna* and the various forms of *chandrayan* in the Satsangijivanam as *prayashchitta*. He once prescribed a month-long *chandrayan* to Premanand Swami for having halted momentarily in an alley

in Surat to listen to a female singing in a nearby house.

Another vital discipline is ahimsa, especially by speech and action. For lapses in this vow, Shriji Maharaj advocated *prayashchitta* depending on the severity of the karmas as follows:

- Killing an insect, bug, etc. – one *mala*.
- Killing a mouse, rat, etc. – one *upvas*.
- Harsh speech, anger, mimicry, foul words – one *upvas*
- Injuring someone resulting in a swelling or laceration – four consecutive *upvas*.
- Breaking someone’s limb – *parak vrat* – a fast of 12 days (no food or water).

Such fasts of *prayashchitta* reflect Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s insistence on observing ahimsa in speech and physical karmas and the depth of discipline he expected from followers.

While scientists continue to eagerly pursue the secrets of health and longevity through fasting, an enigma remains: what should one do with the resulting health and longevity? Many millennia ago, the sages of Sanatan Dharma had already realized the answer: *shariramādyam khalu dharma sādhanam* – to observe dharma to attain Paramatma. Aware of man’s innate psyche, that he would not readily shun culinary pleasures, they interweaved religious practices such as fasting in festivals, *vrats* and bhakti rituals at regular intervals throughout the year. Thus, people happily observe fasts as part of the festival celebrations. This serves two purposes – helps to control one’s gluttony, which benefits one’s physical health, and simultaneously divert the *indriyas*, mind and *antahkaran* towards the bhakti of Paramatma. Such bhakti sadhana would hasten one’s spiritual progress towards *moksha*. Without dharma and bhakti, one would be entrenched deeper in the quicksands of samsara. Though the wise rishis remain happy with the scientists’ health phrases cited earlier, they are compelled to add two words: eat less, live healthily – for *moksha*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Charak Samhita
- Ashtanghrudaya
- Satsangijivanam
- Vachanamrut
- Shikshapatri
- Mukundcharandas, Sadhu. *Hindu Festivals* (Origin, Sentiments & Rituals), 2010.
- Shelton, H. *The Science & Fine Art of Fasting*, 1978.

BREAKING A FAST (PARNA)

During the fast, the digestive *agni* is dampened. It needs to be rekindled gradually. Consuming heavy foods and fluids is dangerous. These may cause indigestion, cramping, sour belching, acidity, vomiting, diarrhoea or constipation. Hence, experts advise great caution when breaking a fast.



SUGGESTED METHOD

1. Take a glassful of lukewarm water (200 ml), add half a lemon, a pinch of rock salt (*sindhav*), roasted cumin powder or a few drops of fresh ginger juice. Sip a mouthful. Swish it inside the mouth 8 to 10 times. Then swallow gradually. In this manner, drink a whole glassful. If need to drink more, then have another half a glassful.

2. Then, either take a walk or do some house chores. About an hour later repeat the above to drink about 1 to 2 glassfuls more.

3. One hour later, have a light meal of just *mungdal khichdi*. Mung is lighter to digest than *tuver* dal.

4. If one wishes to sweeten the juice, use an artificial sweetener of stevia. Avoid sugar, honey, jaggery, fresh or packaged fruit juices. All sugars contain varying proportions of fructose and glucose. Excess fructose in the body is converted into fat and uric acid. Due to the way that fructose is metabolized, eating foods that contain it leaves one still feeling hungry, which can lead to overeating. This ruins all the benefits of fasting. Moreover, a fast also produces uric acid in the body, which needs to be excreted. Hence, the above method of drinking several glasses of lemon water is ideal.

5. Those who do *dharna-parna* for a month or longer should be extremely cautious in taking sugars, dairy products and flour products during the period of the *vrata* since these may lead to hyperuricaemia (and gout) which creates a host of problems. Hence, fasting only on juices, as many do during Shravan or even Chaturmas, is inadvisable.

“Our studies raise serious concerns for the common practice among adolescents and young adults, to drink soft drinks as a means to quench thirst following an episode of dehydration.”¹

6. Avoid yogurt for *parna*. Being *vishtambhi* and *abhishyandi*, it is constipative and heavy to digest. Ideally, on the day of *parna*, it is more desirable to flush wastes and dried stools from the gut rather than curtail stool motion.



1. Garcia-Arroyo, F.T. et al. (2016). Rehydration with soft drinks and beverages exacerbates dehydration and worsens dehydration-associated renal injury. *Am. J. Physical. Regul. Integv. Comp. Physical.* 311: R57-R65.

YOGI Yuvak Upvas College

Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, who served as Yogiji Maharaj's personal attendant for many years, discourses in Gujarati about Yogiji Maharaj's natural desire for fasting and how he motivated the youths to fast



Yogiji Maharaj had a special fervour for inspiring youths to observe fasts. On many occasions Yogiji Maharaj instructed youths to fast. In particular, if youths lapsed in the observance of *niyams* and dharma, he would direct them to observe a *nirjala* (waterless) fast as atonement.

In his later years, for youths who served while he bathed, Yogiji Maharaj would tell them to observe a fast in return for that special service opportunity.

In 1968, when Yogiji Maharaj went to Nadiad, after his visit to Kolkata, a *parayan* sponsored by Ishwarbhai Desai had been arranged. Yogiji Maharaj's birthday also fell during

this period – on Vaishakh *vad* 12. But a few days earlier, Yogiji Maharaj was intent that all should observe the *ekadashi* fast. From the first day of the *parayan*, he initiated a list of names of all who would observe a *nirjala* fast on the day of *ekadashi*. In addition to the youths travelling with Yogiji Maharaj, other youths, and men and women devotees from Nadiad and the Kheda district enlisted. Over 1,000 youths, and men and women devotees willingly volunteered to observe the *ekadashi* fast. Yogiji Maharaj was delighted and said, “This is our Janma Jayanti. As everybody has observed a *nirjala*, I feel great peace.”

In fact, he had no interest at all in the birthday celebrations. He was only interested that everyone observed a fast on *ekadashi*.

In 1970, Yogiji Maharaj was in Mombasa for the Ram Navmi celebration. Many devotees from throughout East Africa had come there. He instructed the youths to make a list of the youths and devotees who would observe a *nirjala* fast on that day. Over 1,000 youths, and men and women devotees observed a fast. He was delighted by this.

So, he was really pleased when so many observed a fast. Throughout his life – for over 40 years – he himself observed a fast every third day; that is, 9 or 10 per month. And he had such eagerness for fasting that one never saw any frustration on his face or physical fatigue or lethargy. He was always joyous and would happily declare, “Today is a fast. So it’s a holiday. No food, no water. Only bhajan and devotion. Today will be really enjoyable.” Throughout the day, his face never even slightly reflected that he was fasting. And he would engage in discourses, bhajan, devotion, *seva*, *padhramanis* and everything else. He never stopped that.

In 1960, we went to Aden. We had left by plane from Nairobi at night and arrived in the morning in Aden. In those days, Yogiji Maharaj observed a fast when he travelled, despite all appropriate arrangements being made to ensure that the sadhus’ vows were not infringed.

So, when we arrived in Aden, on the first day, Yogiji Maharaj observed a fast. And it was a very busy day. Swami visited the Jalaram Samaj, some bhajan groups, the haveli of Krishna Bhagwan, and other spiritual and social organizations based there.

In many of the places he discoursed and sang bhajans. Amid all this hectic activity, he observed a *nirjala* fast. The devotees requested him repeatedly and insisted that he eat some *faral* because it was so hot – over 45°C. The heat was intolerable. But, Bapa refused. So, the devotees requested him to eat some fruit, if not *faral*. Again, he refused. They offered him coconut water, which he also declined. He did not take anything at all for the whole day. At night, after a day full of *padhramanis*, *sabhas*, discourses and other things, he was very tired. It was hot at night. In those days, there was no AC. We were staying at the home of Girdharbhai Depala. In the room Bapa was staying, for the only time in his life, he himself switched on the fan. The fan setting was on one – a slow speed. For us, it made no difference – it did not allay the heat to cool us. But, he slept under the slowly rotating fan and woke up at 3.00 a.m. He bathed – the water in the taps was also hot. Then, he performed puja. We had prepared lemon water, orange juice and juicy mango slices. Normally, he did not drink anything to break his fast (*parna*). Only very occasionally would he drink lemon water, but it would be very dilute and without sugar. You could barely taste the lemon in it. And, he would only drink a few sips.

We had gathered fresh oranges from the store to make the juice. But, he did not have any, since he always believed that oranges tasted sour. From the mango slices, he had a couple and the gave the rest to Sant Swami, Balmukund Swami and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. To break his fast, he ate some *khichdi* with a little buttermilk.

In this way, throughout his life, he had a strong inclination for fasting. And he would encourage youths to fast as well.

Every year, Yogi Bapa celebrated the Guru



Purnima festival in Bochasan. Many devotees would come and so he would be busy all day, engaged in discoursing to them in the assembly and in meeting them. When Bapa went to his room, about 50 youths from the Akshar-Purushottam Chhatralaya in Vidyanagar would be present. He would meet them and give them *niyams* to observe during Chaturmas. He would tell them to fast by observing *dharna-parna* for one month. He also told them to read shastras, turn an extra 51 *malas*, and perform 51 *dandvats* and *pradakshinas*. In this way, the youths and other devotees fasted, read shastras and performed other devotional rituals.

He also firmly insisted on everyone to daily read the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato. He would lovingly insist on everyone to observe these instructions.

For the youths who came to serve him, he would instruct them to observe a fast every two, three or four days. He would say, “Today fast. Say you’ll do the fast.”

While he bathed, he instructed youths who came to serve to fast. He would fill a pitcher with water, pour some water into the palms of the youths and make them pledge to observe a fast. Sometimes he said, “Today fast,” and sometimes, “Tomorrow fast.” Such was his insistence on fasting.

If someone had lapsed in observing major *niyams*, he would tell him to fast. Sometimes, he would tell the youths to observe *dharna-parna* for a week or 15 days or a month.

Throughout his life, Yogiji Maharaj himself

observed intense austerities and also motivated youths to observe austerities.

Also, he would lovingly serve them food whenever there was a feast or during festival celebrations.

In reality, someone who observes such detachment, would make others do likewise; he would not be able to lovingly serve others and feed them. But, Yogiji Maharaj joyously served and fed the youths and devotees and pleased them immensely. He himself practised tremendous restraint, but he would feed the youths and devotees so much that they would remember it with great delight.

So, Yogiji Maharaj was always eager to feed the youths and devotees, and to motivate them to fast.

His life was an ideal of austerity, renunciation and detachment. But he never boasted even slightly about this. He never highlighted that he had observed so many austerities over so many years, and never drew attention to himself.

Often, he would cook the food and then unexpected visitors would arrive. He would happily serve and feed them, and there would be no food left for him. So, he would automatically have to fast, unexpectedly. Still, he was always happy that he could serve the devotees. He really enjoyed that.

Once, in Dangra, someone brought some mangos. So, Yogi Bapa extracted the juice and prepared *ras*. He served and fed everyone and then sat down to eat. Just then, some devotees arrived from Bhavnagar. Without hesitation, he happily served the remaining *ras* to them. There was none left for him, but he was not disturbed by it or concerned about it. He was just delighted to have served and satisfied the devotees. You could see that joy on his face.

So, for Yogi Bapa to fast was a natural part of his life – just as it is natural for us to eat! For us, having to fast raises many thoughts and frustrations. And we reluctantly observe fasts, but for Yogi Bapa it was the opposite. He had no

interest in eating. But on fast days he would be really happy.

When he ate, he ate very little. He ate with only his fingertips. Even on a typical day, he would eat only a couple of puri-sized *rotlis*, *dudhi*, and a little rice and dal for lunch. In the morning, he would drink two saucers of *ukalo* (spiced milk), a couple of small *dudhi dhebras*. In the evening, he would again eat just a couple of *dudhi dhebras*. So, essentially, almost every day was like a fast.

He also used to say that to maintain such restraint is itself a great austerity (*tapas*). If we eat half of what we normally eat that is a form of austerity. Subtle *tapas* is to eat only till you're 50% full, and leave 25% for water and 25% for air.

Thus, Yogiji Maharaj's austerities, renunciation, detachment and self-control were more than Himalayan-like. Yet, he never let others know, but always motivated them. He purified them by encouraging them to observe austerities. That was his pure intention. In this way, we can learn so much from his life.

In Gondal, Yogiji Bapa's routine was that after the morning discourse, he would assign various tasks to the devotees. He did not like to employ labourers for such duties, since that would mean spending Thakorji's money. So, he lovingly motivated the devotees to serve.

At that time, between the mandir and kitchen, a big 9ft x 9ft pit had to be dug. So, Krishnabhai of Nadiad and his *mandal* started digging from the morning. It was a day of fasting. So, all the devotees observed a fast while serving vigorously to dig the pit. Helping them were two young boys. They would run around to supply empty baskets to the adults to fill with soil.

Then, in the afternoon, Yogi Bapa would go to where the devotees were serving to meet them and see how the work had progressed. He would abundantly encourage and bless all. When Yogi Bapa arrived, Krishnabhai and the others had finished digging the hole. So, Yogi Bapa was delighted and blessed everyone. Then, Krishnabhai



told Swami about the two boys who had served tirelessly all day by supplying the empty baskets. And that they had observed a fast. Then, because of the summer heat, Krishnabhai requested Bapa to permit the boys to end their fast and drink some lemon water. But, Bapa replied, "No, let them continue their fast!"

Krishnabhai lovingly insisted several times for permission. Normally, Yogi Bapa would accept his requests, but this time Yogi Bapa firmly refused. Then, Yogi Bapa said, "See, you are looking at their physical bodies, and I am looking at their *jivas*. So, let them continue their fast." A little later, however, Yogi Bapa did permit the boys to drink lemon water. In this way, even for the young, Yogi Bapa insisted on fasts.

In Mumbai, Harikrishna, son of Balubhai TT, had observed *nirjala* fasts since the age of seven. Whenever Yogi Bapa visited Mumbai, he would make him stand up in the Sunday assembly and say, "See, he is my sample. Such a young boy fasts, so the adults must also fast."

When youths came to serve Yogi Bapa while he bathed, in the morning and evening, he would instruct them to fast. So, one youth said to Bapa, "This is your *upvas* [fasting] college, since you instruct everyone to fast." So, Yogi Bapa said, "No, not just an *upvas* college, but Yogi Yuvak Upvas College (YYUC)." This is the name Yogi Bapa himself gave and he encouraged youths to fast.

All these examples reveal his deep inclination for austerities. ♦

CHATURMAS

The Four Sacred Months

“No country upon earth rejoices in a longer list of holidays [*utsavs*] and seasons of rejoicing, qualified by fasts [*upvas, vrats*], vigils [*jagran*] and seasons of mortification than India.”

- Sir M. Monier Williams
Boden Professor of Sanskrit, Oxford

The above observation was later corroborated by the Anthropological Survey of India. Between 1959 and 1961, it cited 50 regional festivals and about 300 festivals in 290 districts in 19 Indian states. In this article, we discuss the festivals occurring during Chaturmas – the four sacred months of the monsoon in India.

Firstly, it must be clarified that these festivals are of a religious nature with their origin in the

shastras, rather than seasonal festivals celebrated with feasting and gaiety.

ORIGIN & OBSERVANCES

The four sacred months of Chaturmas are Ashadh, Shravan, Bhadarvo (Bhadrapad) and Aso (Ashwin). Chaturmas begins on Ashadh *sud* Ekadashi, also known as Dev Podhi Ekadashi, when Bhagwan Vishnu descends into the Kshirsagar – the ocean of milk – to guard King Bali’s kingdom for four months. This stemmed from King Bali’s immense sacrifice by offering to Bhagwan three strides of land, which included himself. Chaturmas ends on Kartik *sud* 11 – Dev Prabodhini Ekadashi, when Bhagwan Vishnu awakens, rather returns to Vaikunth from

Bhagwan Vishnu and King Bali



Hindola Festival and Raksha Bandhan



Krishna Janmashtami



Bali's kingdom. During Chaturmas the shastras prescribe extra bhakti along with *vrats* to please Bhagwan. Bhagwan Swaminarayan also advocates this in the Shikshapatri (76, 77, 78)

*Vishesh niyamo
dhāryashchāturmāsyai-khilairapi;
Ekasmin shrāvane masi sa tvashaktāi-
stu mānavāihi.*

My devotees shall observe additional bhakti rituals during Chaturmas, such as reading and listening to *katha*, singing bhajans, performing *mantra japa*, chanting stotras, doing *pradakshinas*, *dandvat pranams*, etc.

Aware of man's inherent instinct of gluttony rather than self-denial, sages of the bhakti shastras recommended fasting as a form of sadhana to strengthen the mind and *atma* by controlling *rasna* – the sense of taste. The weather during Chaturmas proved conducive for this. Specifically, the damp and humid air and the polluted run-off water into rivers and lakes induced water pollution and insect infestation of

vegetation. The heat during the final month of Jeth in the summer and the dampness during the monsoon aggravated all three humours of the body, namely, *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* (*Charak Samhita*, Sutrasthan 6/33). This would induce illness and mass disease. Hence, the shastras advocated *vrats*. The Bhavishyottara Puran states that curbing the senses during Chaturmas leads to Bhagwan's proximity and *moksha*. And the most important *utsavs* during Chaturmas are celebrated by fasting and bhakti. Bhakti diverts the *indriyas* from worldly pursuits towards the Divine. Forms of bhakti rituals which encourage the *mumukshu* to introspect on his spiritual progress towards *moksha* are *katha* and *dhyan*.

The most important utsavs during Chaturmas are Guru Purnima, Hindola (Jhulan Yatra), Raksha Bandhan, Krishna Janmashtami, Ganesh Chaturthi, Jal-Jhilani Ekadashi, Dashera, Sharad Purnima, Diwali Parva – which includes Dhan Teras, Kali Chaudash, Diwali, Nutan Varsh and Annakut – and Dev Prabodhini Ekadashi. ♦

Ganesh Utsav



Dashera and Annakut festivals



Vicharan

MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

January–March 2018

Himmatnagar, Surat, Ahmedabad, Sarangpur, Gondal, New Delhi,
Singapore, Melbourne (Australia), Auckland (New Zealand), Wellington,
Brisbane (Australia), Sydney, Adelaide, Gold Coast, Sydney, Perth

JANUARY

HIMMATNAGAR: 1–2

1, Monday; Youth Day

The evening satsang assembly was celebrated as Youth Day and it was themed on unity. A drama was performed by the local youth members. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “When we live with the spirit of unity there will be peace for everyone. When one person quarrels, it leaves everyone agitated and unrestful. Yogi Bapa used to say, ‘May God do good to all.’ This sentiment of Yogiji Maharaj was very noble. He did not merely utter it, but lived it all his life. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s sentiments were also divine. He used to say, ‘In the joy of others lies our own. In the good of others rests our own.’ Wishing bad for others causes conflicts and clashes. May we correct our lives from the mistakes of others.”

2, Tuesday

Sanctioned by the Himmatnagar city municipality, Swamishri inaugurated ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj Marg’, a 1.6-km road from Chhapariya four-roads to Sahakari Gin.

At 4.00 p.m., Swamishri departed from Himmatnagar and headed by road to Ahmedabad and thereafter took a flight to Surat. Swamishri arrived at the Surat mandir at 6.50 p.m. amidst a grand welcome.

SURAT: 2–15

During Swamishri’s stay the evening satsang assemblies were themed on various subjects: Welcome Day (3), *Bhāgya Jāgyā Re...* (4), Children’s Day (6), 21st Patotsav (7), Pushpadolotsav (8), Gramya Din (9), Youth Day (10), Infant’s Day (11) and the Uttarayan Festival (14). Every day Swamishri blessed the devotees during a personal audience with them.



Swamishri performs his morning puja, Himmatnagar



Swamishri reads a passage from the Vachanamrut during the Children's Day assembly, Surat



Swamishri performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the BAPS hari mandirs, Surat

6, Saturday; Children's Day

Swamishri arrived in the Children's Day assembly at 6.50 p.m. Children welcomed him with a beautiful traditional dance. Thereafter, skits were performed on the theme, 'To Be Absorbed in Swami.' After each skit Swamishri responded with answers. The first scene was about the struggle a kid faces in waking up every morning. The second topic was about which thought one should have while doing one's daily puja. The third scene was about how mobile phones, television and video games disturb one's studies. The fourth subject was about the importance of playing daily. And the fifth scene was about diet, wherein a vegetable hawker announced that kids do not prefer to eat green vegetables.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "One should remember Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Guru Parampara in all one's daily actions. Have trust that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is true and whatever he said is true. Thus, one should abide by his commands."

7, Sunday

In the evening satsang assembly, Swamishri inaugurated new audio CDs published by Swaminarayan Aksharpathi: 'Suryapur Kathamangal' and 'Sarangpur ni Rang Bhumi'.

8, Monday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* and *mantra-pushpanjali* of 16 hari mandirs: Bhutsar (Tithal region), Lakadmala (Tithal region), Valod (Sankari region), Kamrej (Sankari region), Sonagadh (Ukai region), Khaanjar, Khapatiya (Ukai), Dosvada (Ukai), Kharsi, Don, Hanumantiya, Tokarva, Mokhamal, Mal, Luvchali and Singana.

In the evening assembly, Pushpadolotsav was celebrated in Swamishri's presence. After Swamishri blessed the assembly, he showered flowers on Shri Harikrishna Maharaj. Then, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami and senior sadhus showered flower petals on Swamishri and Swamishri also showered petals on the sadhus. Thereafter, the devotees passed by Swamishri and were showered with flower petals from two large blower pipes. Senior sadhus also showered flower petals on the devotees. Swamishri showered his grace with folded hands upon all the devotees.

10, Wednesday; Youth Day

In the evening Youth Day assembly, the youths performed a traditional dance on the stage. Thereafter, a drama was performed about how a father tries to wean his son from his addiction to his mobile phone. At the end, the youth admits to the fact and prays before Swamishri to liberate him.

Swamishri said, "It is important to exercise



Youths during the Youth Day assembly, Surat



'Narayan Hare, Sachchidanand Prabho...' Swamishri, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami proclaim the *jholi* call, Surat

vivek (discrimination) while using the mobile because it contains global trash. Pramukh Swami Maharaj had warned, 'No matter how much *vivek* you may have in using the mobile still you will slip.' Therefore, you should use it honestly. Once you see an inappropriate picture, it enters your mind and it takes a very long time to erase it. The mobile phone is a vile thing. If you give it up then it will be your *bhakti*. Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to say, 'Not using it will give you security.'

14, Sunday; Makar Sankranti

The Makar Sankranti Festival assembly commenced at 6.30 p.m. Pujya Viveksagar Swami discoursed about the meaning and significance of Makar Sankranti. On Swamishri's arrival the youths performed a traditional dance. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the mammoth assembly, "Bhagwan expects one to practise true devotion. One should desire for Bhagwan only and harbour no worldly desires. Then, no matter what corner of the world you may be in, Bhagwan accepts your devotion. May happy and prosperous times prevail upon you."

Thereafter, two *jholis* were hung from Swamishri's shoulders and he hailed the *jholi* mantra – 'Narayan Hare Sacchidanand Prabho.' Thereafter, Swamishri gave *samip darshan* to 17,000 male devotees; a total of 36,000 male and female devotees and well-wishers had attended.

AHMEDABAD: 15–18

16, Tuesday; Symbolic Jholi Utsav

In the evening, Swamishri blessed the symbolic *jholi* festival and hailed the *jholi* mantra.

SARANGPUR: 18–19

19, Friday

According to the Indian calendar (Maha *sud* 2), today marked Swamishri's 61st *diksha* anniversary. In 1957, Yogiji Maharaj gave Vinubhai the *parshad diksha* in Akshar Deri, Gondal. In his blessings Swamishri reminisced about the occasion, "On 2 February 1957, Yogi Bapa was in the Akshar Deri before the holy *charnarvind*. I was standing half inside and half outside the shrine. The day before, he spread a gunny bag (in the kitchen) and told me to sit on it. Then, he generously served food to me. Thereafter, he gave me three *pans* (betel leaves containing baked *dal* and fennel seeds) and told me to eat them. I wondered why was he suddenly doing all this. Then, he gently revealed, 'Tomorrow I want to give you *diksha*.' In fact I was scheduled to get *diksha* six months later, but he initiated me before that. Prior to taking *diksha*, it would take a month to visit all the [relatives] homes for my last lunch with them, but Yogi Bapa bypassed all that. So, without giving any hint in advance to anyone – and even to me – he gave me the [*parshadi*] *diksha*. No [relatives] were present at that time.



Swamishri offers a garland at the *samadhi* of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Sarangpur



Swamishri performs the *diksha* rituals, Gondal

“At that time there were only three devotees present in the Akshar Deri. Yogi Bapa told them to do *dandvats*. Then Yogi Bapa gave me a *loto* (pot) and *pattar* (wooden eating bowl).

“He gave me the second *diksha* in Kapol Vadi [in 1960]. I still remember that occasion. I was garlanded. The *dhotiyas* and *gatariyas* he gave to us were thick. Then we were told to stay at Ghatkopar for Sanskrit studies.”

GONDAL: 19–30

Swamishri celebrated the 150th Anniversary Celebrations of Akshar Deri in Gondal for ten days.

On 20 January, Swamishri inaugurated the 200-acre grand festival venue, named Swaminarayan Nagar. The Nagar remained open for ten days. Various exhibition halls were also inaugurated. On 21st morning the *murti-pratishtha* ritual of Yogi Smruti Mandir was performed by Swamishri and, thereafter, in the late afternoon, a grand Vedic *mahapuja* was held at the Swaminarayan Nagar. On 22nd morning, the newly renovated Akshar Deri was inaugurated by Swamishri. The festival climaxed in the afternoon with the 150th Anniversary Celebration of the Akshar Deri, which was attended by the President of India, H.E. Shri Ramnath Kovind. (For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, March–April 2018, pp. 14–35)

25, Thursday

In the morning assembly, Swamishri gave the *parshad diksha* to 25 youths and *bhagwati diksha* to 5 *parshads*. In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, “All the newly initiated youths will attain the *ekantik* state, of which there is no doubt. I congratulate the parents for their contribution. To give away one’s son is like giving away a part of one’s heart. None of these parents have thought about what will happen to them after offering their sons at the feet of God. Satyug indeed prevails today.”

27, Saturday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Sundarana (Bochasan region), Dhoolkot (Bhadra region), Mavdi (Rajkot region), Karelibaug (Vadodara) and Tarsali.

In the evening, a kick-off assembly for the year-long 98th Birthday Celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and the 20th anniversary celebrations of Rajkot BAPS Mandir took place in the mandir auditorium. The youths of Rajkot performed a welcome dance for Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, a drama with two leading characters narrated the memories given and the contributions made by Shriji Maharaj and the entire guru *parampara* to Rajkot. Swamishri



Swamishri and sadguru sadhus perform the *pratishtha arti* of BAPS hari mandirs, Gondal

ignited the inaugural lamp for the year-long celebrations and blessed the assembly, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj had undergone great hardships all his life for the progress of satsang. He took care of little children and everyone. Yogi Bapa said, ‘May Bhagwan do good to all’ and Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, ‘I’ve never wished bad for anyone.’ What a great thing this is. His birthday should be celebrated every day.”

28, Sunday

Swamishri inaugurated ‘Glory of Akshar Deri and Mandir’, a book published by Swaminarayan Aksharpith and translated by Vivekjivan Swami from the Gujarati book ‘Shri Akshar Tirtha’.

The Annual Day programme of the BAPS Swaminarayan Gurukul was held in Swamishri’s presence.

30, Tuesday

A grand *annakut* was arranged before Thakorji in all the three shrines of the mandir.

After Swamishri’s puja, Swamishri blessed Aksharanand Swami for having attained a PhD from Lancaster University, England. The subject of his thesis was ‘Swadharma in the Bhagavad Gita’. Thereafter, Swamishri inaugurated a publication by Swaminarayan Aksharpith ‘Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Akshar Deri’ translated by Amrutvijay Swami from the Gujarati book ‘Akshar Dwar ni Atariye’.

In the evening, Swamishri travelled to Rajkot and departed by flight to New Delhi.

NEW DELHI: 30–31

From 6.15 p.m., Swamishri observed the lunar eclipse by attending a special assembly which comprised of skits by youths and discourses by senior sadhus.

FEBRUARY

DELHI: 1–3

2, Friday

On Swamishri’s 61st *diksha* day (according to the English calendar), he was honoured with garlands. In his morning blessings, Swamishri recounted the way in which Yogiji Maharaj gave him the *parshad diksha* in the Akshar Deri. He also described how Yogiji Maharaj generously served food to him on the day before the *diksha*.

3, Saturday

A beautiful *annakut* was arranged in all the three shrines of Thakorji. Swamishri was pleased and performed the *arti* of Thakorji in the central shrine.

At 10.30 a.m., the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Shri Yogi Adityanath, came to Swamishri after visiting Akshardham.

In the evening, Swamishri reached the Indira Gandhi International Airport at 7.15 p.m. to fly to Singapore on his Asia-Pacific satsang tour.



Swamishri showers sanctified saffron-scented water during the Pushpadolotsav, Sydney

The flight took off at 10.20 p.m. and landed at Singapore airport on 4 February at 3.00 a.m.

him as Bhagat. He was a pure and faultless person who appealed to all.”

ASIA-PACIFIC: 4–28

Singapore: 4–5, Melbourne (Australia): 5–13, Auckland (New Zealand): 13–20, Wellington: 20–22, Brisbane (Australia): 22–27, Sydney: 27–28. (For a detailed report refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–June 2018, pp 7–23.)

In all the centres, various programmes and performances were presented in the evening satsang assemblies, including, a welcome day, *bal-kishore din*, *yuva din*, *samp din*, cultural programme (Antar Khoj), *samarpan din*, Brahma Satra and a one-day *shibir* (*Bhāgya jā-gya re...*).

MARCH

SYDNEY: 1–7

1, Thursday; Bhagatji Maharaj’s Birthday Celebration

Today, marked Bhagatji Maharaj’s 189th birthday celebration. Swamishri blessed the morning assembly, “With respect to our worldly parameters Bhagatji Maharaj was uneducated and he was a tailor by caste, whereas Shastriji Maharaj was very learned and a Patel by caste. On the one hand Bhagatji Maharaj was insulted and on the other Shastriji Maharaj used to prostrate to him. Bhagatji Maharaj was brave from childhood and a staunch celibate. Everyone in Mahuva addressed

2, Sydney; Pushpadolotsav

For details of Pushpadolotsav and *bhumi pu-jan* rituals of the mandir site (3 March) refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–June, p. 17.

On the occasion of Pushpadolotsav, Hon. Chris Bowen, MP and Shadow Treasurer of Australia, addressed the assembly, “It is always a pleasure to be with this wonderful community. Your Holiness you do a great honour to our country by your visit. Can I say as Member of Parliament of McMahon, how honoured I am and how much forward I am looking forward to the temple of Kemps Creek, and I am sure it will be as beautiful, as important and as peaceful as every temple around the world.”

Thereafter, Hon. Luke Foley, leader of the Opposition, NSW, said, “I pay tribute to the work of BAPS in Australia and in the 22 countries around the world. The Bhagavad Gita tells us, ‘The wise work for the welfare of the world without thoughts of themselves.’ That is the spirit that motivates the work of BAPS. You, your Holiness, and your followers are spearheading a spiritual and moral renaissance in our world today. It is indeed an honour to welcome you and to worship with you on this holy festival.”



Swamishri blesses the Bal-Kishore Din assembly, Perth



Swamishri with children and youths after the cultural programme (Antar Khoj), Perth

Adelaide: 7–12

For details of Swamishri's stay in Adelaide refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–June, pp. 19–21.

Gold Coast: 12–23

During Swamishri's stay in Gold Coast three 4-day *shibirs* were held for *kishores-kishoris*, *yuvaks-yuvatis* and for *karyakars* (National Leadership Seminar). For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–June, pp. 21–22.

Sydney: 23–28

Swamishri celebrated the 237th Shri Hari Jayanti. For details refer to *Swaminarayan Bliss*, May–June, p. 23.

PERTH: 28–31

29, Thursday; Bal-Kishore Din and Swagat Din

In the evening assembly, children and teenagers presented a special programme and performed a welcome dance. Thereafter, Albert Jacob, the Mayor of Joondalup city was welcomed and garlanded by Swamishri and Tracey Roberts, Mayor of Wannero city, was honoured by a female volunteer.

Finally, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "The spiritual path is very difficult to tread, though it may seem easy. The bumps of finding faults in others thwart one's progress. Do not fall into the trap of being critical and talking ill of others. There is so much joy in positive talks and those

related to unity and perceiving the virtues of others. By not spoiling another's work or life, one receives a great reward – Akshardham."

31, Saturday; Cultural Programme

The evening assembly was held at the famous Consult Hall. The highlight of the assembly was a cultural programme 'Antar Khoj' (Inner Search) presented by children and youths. The chief guests were MLA Yaz Mubarakai, who came on behalf of the Premier of Western Australia, Mr Mark McGowan, and the Consul General of India in Perth Shri Amitkumar Mishra. They honoured Swamishri with garlands.

In conclusion, Swamishri blessed the assembly, "By changing our contorted thoughts our lives will be improved. Outwardly, we appear to be proper, but our thoughts are bad. That is why we need spirituality to improve them. Science also states that negative thoughts destroy us. Spirituality allows us to think rightly and wonderfully.

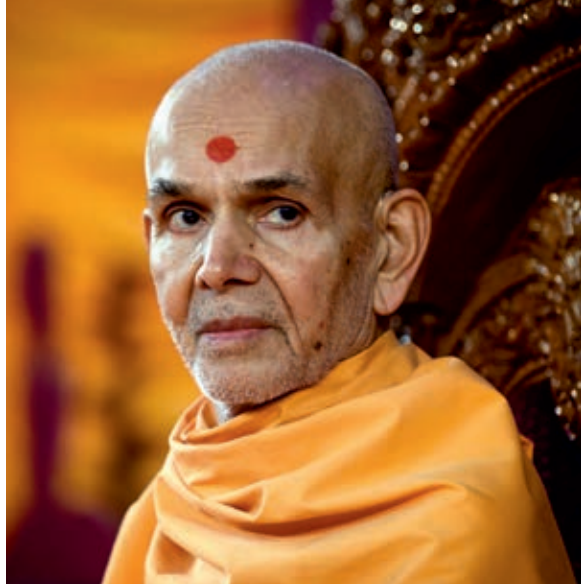
"Through the spiritual association of a true sadhu our lives become righteous. Subsequently, we become very happy and make others happy. Pramukh Swami Maharaj said that he had never thought ill of anyone. Countless have become happy through the association of such a Sant." ♦

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

LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

January–March 2018

*Inspiring incidents from the life of
Mahant Swami Maharaj*



JANUARY

UNMINDFUL OF PHYSICAL STRAIN

1, Himmatnagar

Today, Mahant Swami Maharaj personally blessed 1,750 devotees and well-wishers. After the session, the administrative head of the mandir bowed down at Swamishri's feet and said, "Swami, thank you for giving your divine joy to all. However, we ask that you forgive us for putting you through a lot of hardship (*bhido*). Swami, it is our mistake for arranging so many devotees for your personal darshan."

Swamishri was totally unmindful of the physical strain he had borne that day. He replied, "[For me] the growth of satsang is rest. Maharaj, Swami and the gurus had travelled and endeavoured a lot. They made tremendous efforts."

Swamishri's face beamed with joy for having pleased the devotees. Furthermore, discounting his physical efforts, Swamishri deeply appreciated and sung the glory of Shriji Maharaj and his gurus' efforts.

COMPASSION AND CARE

3, Surat

Yesterday, Swamishri's attendant sadhus had informed Swamishri about a serious problem that Rupabhai, a devotee of Himmatnagar, was facing. A doctor had told him that his wife needed to have

her heart valve replaced. But, Rupabhai did not have the money for the operation.

Swamishri said we should help him. On the night of 2 January, Swamishri thought about Rupabhai from 2.30 to 3.30 a.m. The attendant asked Swamishri, "Swami were you praying for him for one hour?" Swamishri replied, "Yes."

Swamishri stayed awake to offer prayers out of his care and compassion for a poor devotee. Rupabhai's problem was resolved.

SWAMISHRI'S RAJIPO UPON A YOUTH

11, Surat

A *satsangi* youth studying in Standard 11, Bhargav Bhalala, was inspired by Swamishri's cautious note to students about the damaging effects of using a mobile phone. Subsequently, Bhargav gave his cellphone to his father, Durlabhbhai.

When Swamishri was informed about Bhargav's sacrifice, he joyfully looked and smiled at the youth. Then, Swamishri walked two steps towards him and showered his grace by embracing him. Furthermore, Swamishri told him, "Be firm and resolute in your pledge." Everyone around was touched by Swamishri's *raji*po upon Bhargav. Then, Durlabhbhai said to Swamishri, "Swami, bless him because he is studying in 11th grade science and he aspires to become a cardiac surgeon."

Swamishri responded happily, “Since you have given it up, things will work out wonderfully for you.”

Countless cases have shown the bad effects of smart phones on school and college students. Swamishri genuinely cares for the students’ academic performance and character.

FOLLOWING THE GURU’S WAY

21, Gondal

Yesterday, during the grand *mahapuja* ritual held on the festival ground, Swamishri stood up to perform the *mahapuja arti*. This routine has been observed on many occasions in Swamishri’s life. In spite of Swamishri being told to sit and perform the *arti* on all the occasions, he has always stood up.

Today, Brahmavatsal Swami asked Swamishri, “Swami, why is it that you stand up to perform the *arti*? Is it out of respect for Thakorji?”

Swamishri replied in the affirmative and then added, “Swami Bapa [Pramukh Swami Maharaj] always stood up to perform *arti*. Later, he did it while sitting in a chair because of old age. That’s why I stand up to perform the *arti*.”

Swamishri follows the devotional tradition practiced by his guru.

AT SUPREME PEACE

31, New Delhi

Swamishri arrived at Akshardham in New Delhi yesterday after celebrating the 150th Anniversary Celebrations of Akshar Deri in Gondal. As against the presence of thousands of devotees and 800 sadhus in Gondal, here, there were only a few sadhus seated before him. Due to this stark contrast, Harinivas Swami asked Swamishri, “After celebrating the festival in Gondal, you must be feeling at ease and peace here with only a few sadhus before you.”

Swamishri replied, “[I] experience supreme peace no matter how many are present or not. I’m connected with two – Maharaj and Swami – and

so I’m always at peace – 24 hours.”

Everyone around was left speechless and realized that Swamishri’s inner peace was not defined by mundane standards and equations.

FEBRUARY

PRAYERS FOR THE WELFARE OF ALL

13, Melbourne

Swamishri often prays in the middle of the night for the good of all, disregarding his sleep and fatigue.

At 1.30 a.m., Swamishri woke up and started praying for the welfare of all the devotees of Melbourne and also for all those who had visited the festival venue. He further extended his prayers for the good and progress of Australia and its people.

GLORY OF SEVA

13, Melbourne

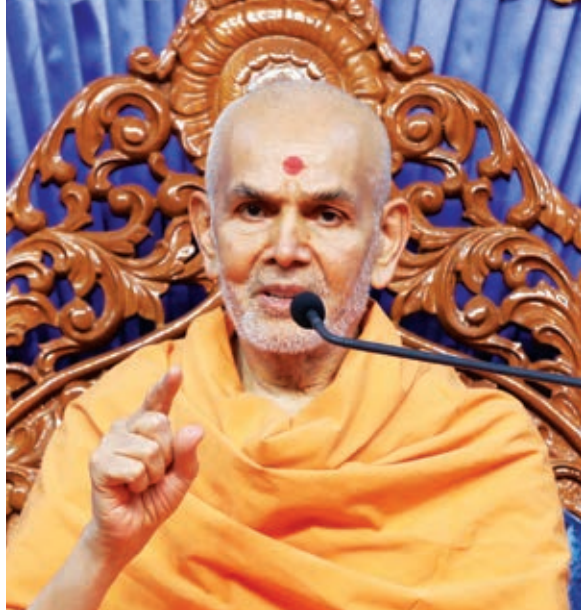
Paramchintan Swami narrated an inspiring incident of Mahant Swami Maharaj during his satsang tour in Australia in 2015. “Swamishri had reached the airport to take the flight from Melbourne to Auckland. There was a lot of luggage. Two youths and an attendant sadhu were carrying bags to the check-in counter. Mahant Swami Maharaj also started carrying two hand bags to the check-in counter. The sadhus and youths tried to restrain him, saying, ‘Swami, there’s no need for you to carry them. We will do it.’ But Swamishri said, ‘How can I get this opportunity of doing such *seva*!’ In this way, Swamishri performed *seva* and explained to us its glory.” ♦

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

Answers and Revelations

January–March 2018

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



JANUARY

■ One who finds faults (*abhav*) in others has to definitely bear the outcome. What outcome? His intellect becomes corrupt and he gets bad thoughts.

(1, Himmatnagar)

Q. “Swami, do you get angry?” a disciple asked.

A. Swamishri answered frankly, “Yes, but it is benign. Shriji Maharaj has said in Vachanamrut Gadhada III 24 that he gets angry when there is harm to thousands of people. However, there’s no anger for no reason or petty things. And [I] never get angry for reasons related to me.”

(1, Himmatnagar)

■ What is the purpose of a mango tree? To produce mangoes. The purpose of a banana plant is to give bananas. Similarly, have you thought about the fruit of doing satsang? To be redeemed of *dehabhiman* (attachment and ego for one’s body) and to believe one is not the body, but the *atma*.

(4, Surat)

Q. While thinking about *mahima* (glory) what type of thoughts should we have?

A. Bhagwan and his Sadhu are divine. Maharaj has said they are not like humans though they may seem so. Thus, one should not perceive *manushyabhav* (human traits) in them. They eat, drink, sit and stand, but all their actions are divine. Their actions and ours seem to be similar, but they are different. They are divine.

(5, Surat)

■ To know one’s base nature (*swabhav*) is *vivek* (discrimination). And to dissolve them is *param vivek* (highest discrimination).

(13, Surat)

■ One who observes *niyams* is never afraid of anyone, whereas one who does not, always fears others.

(26, Gondal)

■ Humility is like a key. On attaining it, all other virtues remain bound and packed together. However, without humility, all the virtues exit one after the other and one becomes empty.

(30, Gondal)

FEBRUARY

■ Shriji Maharaj has shut all the channels of



miracles, glory, powers [in us] and left the channel of becoming an *ekantik bhakta* open.

■ One must observe *niyams* and do *seva* and the bhakti rituals. One has to consolidate humility in oneself and perceive *divya bhav* in all. Only then will Bhagwan be won over.

(7, Melbourne)

■ In our world there are different types of powers – atomic power, human power – but there is no tolerance power. To tolerate is a very big thing.

(8, Melbourne)

■ Not having *mahima* is like *dudhpak* (sweetened milk) without sugar and a cooked meal without salt.

(9, Melbourne)

■ Where there is harmony (*samp*) therein lies material wealth, spiritual achievements and godliness. There, a divine ambience prevails.

■ People collaborate for wrong things and do not do so for the right things.

(10, Melbourne)

■ Follow *agna* (instructions) and believe all to be *divya* (divine). Everything is included in these two [virtues]. Furthermore, become *das na das* (a humble servant of servants) and understand

everyone's *mahima*.

(12, Melbourne)

■ There is nothing greater than humility. Humility is God's virtue. It is the father of all virtues. The seed of all virtues lies in humility.

If one does not have humility then whatever virtues one has will trouble oneself.

(15, Auckland)

Q. Youths asked Swamishri about how to become God's favourite devotee by choosing one out of the following four types of *seva*: 1. Wash dishes, 2. Perform housekeeping in the mandir, 3. To give spiritual discourses, or 4. To decorate the mandir.

A. Swamishri replied, "Whatever [spiritual *seva*] you do with *divyabhav* will enable you to become God's favourite disciple."

(15, Auckland)

■ By contemplating on *prapti* (the glory of having attained God and his Sadhu) then all of one's instincts and inner faults will be destroyed.

(15, Auckland)

■ By being humble Bhagwan will sit you on his shoulders and rejoice by twirling you around. However, ego is a big bump, which stops one's car or breaks its axle.

(16, Auckland)

■ Becoming a servant of a devotee's servants is the safest, purest and most beautiful of all things. By becoming *das na das* everything [in spirituality] is included.

■ By having *das bhav*, *divya bhav* and *mahima* one becomes happy and is liked by Shriji Maharaj.

(17, Auckland)

■ Keep away from the company of one who is critical of others, because he will spoil your

intellect (*buddhi*). Like a rotten potato that spoils another potato by its association, keep away from such a person.

(18, Auckland)

Q. How can we attain the virtues of austerity (*tapa*), renunciation (*tyag*) and detachment (*vairagya*) like that of Nilkanth Varni?

A. By realizing the glory of our *prapti* (the attainment of God and his Sadhu).

Q. How can we acquire the guru bhakti that you have attained by pleasing Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj?

A. Through grace. And this grace is acquired by having firm faith (*nishtha*) and staunchly observing *niyams*.

Q. Due to the unity of flower petals they attain a place at your holy feet, similarly, how can we attain a place at your holy feet?

A. By having *divya bhav* and *mahima*.

(19, Auckland)

MARCH

■ When you bow down, others will also bow down to you. However, if you remain stiff with ego, others will also remain stiff. You may think that you are great, but for others you are fake. One who is not humble is not liked by anyone.

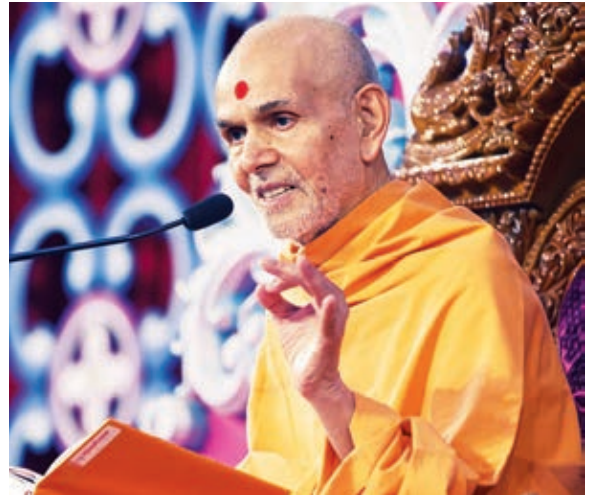
(5, Sydney)

Q. Dilan, a *satsangi* youth, asked, “What should one do to avoid becoming arrogant while doing *seva*?”

A. Swamishri replied, “By understanding the *mahima* (glory) of Bhagwan and his Sant. Because one has not fully realized their *mahima* one experiences ego.”

(6, Sydney)

■ By being wilful one fails to receive the blessings of Bhagwan and his Sadhu. However, by giving up wilfulness one receives their abundant blessings.



■ There is no joy in the worldly pleasures; one has to overcome them. Only by understanding the *mahima* of Bhagwan can one be redeemed of those pleasures.

(7, Adelaide)

■ A big cross [no] for *abhav-avgun*. One has to become *das na das* and understand *mahima*. By internalizing these virtues while doing satsang one attains Akshardham.

(11, Adelaide)

■ An ant picks up four to five grains of sugar from a heap of sand. It never utters critically, “Oh, there’s so much sand!” If an ant can do it, why can’t we pick out others’ virtues?

(18, Gold Coast)

■ To be frank (*nishkapatpanu*) means to be straightforward and what you are internally is what you should be externally.

(20, Gold Coast)

■ Mahant Swami Maharaj’s credo, “Vishwas ej Prapti.” – “Trust [in Bhagwan and Sant] is [spiritual] attainment.”

(29, Perth)



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



Mahant Swami Maharaj performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj.

BAPS Mandir in Himachal Pradesh

22 April 2018, Shimla

The newly built BAPS *hari* mandir in Shimla, the capital of Himachal Pradesh (snow-laden province), a hilly and verdant state in north India, was consecrated by Mahant Swami Maharaj on 22 April 2018. The account of how the seeds of satsang were sown, climaxing with the consecration of the mandir, is one of divine grace and 10 years of immense effort by BAPS sadhus.

In 2006, at Pramukh Swami Maharaj's behest, Atmaswarup Swami, Munivatsal Swami, Jnanmangal Swami, Aksharprem Swami and other swamis first organized a satsang *sabha* in Shimla. Thereafter, swamis started visiting Shimla on a regular basis.

In 2009, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Anandswarup Swami, Atmaswarup Swami and *sant mandal* travelled to Himachal Pradesh on a satsang tour. From then onwards, a weekly satsang *sabha* was launched at Akshokbhai Sud's home in Shimla. In 2012, Mahant Swami Maharaj visited Sundarnagar, Mandi, Naggur, Manali, Shimla and other towns during a satsang tour. He sanctified the homes of devotees and well-wishers and discoursed to them to foster spiritual faith. Subsequently, with the regular visits



The BAPS mandir flag flutters in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

of Munivatsal Swami, the satsang community slowly grew to the point where the need for a mandir arose.

In May 2015, the land for the mandir was acquired and the *shilanyas* rituals were performed by Pujya Dr Swami and Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami. Thereafter, the construction work for the mandir commenced.

On 10 August 2016, three days prior to his passing away, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the Guru Parampara *murtis* for the BAPS Mandir in Shimla.

On 20 April 2018, Mahant Swami Maharaj arrived in Shimla to perform the *murti-pratishtha* rituals. He was welcomed by the local devotees in a traditional style by playing the *turi*, a local musical instrument. Devotees from USA, England, Middle East and many parts of India had arrived to participate in the *pratishtha* ceremonies.

On 21 April 2018, a *mahapuja* and satsang assembly were held from 5 to 8 p.m. at the Kufri Fun Campus as part of the *murti-pratishtha* rituals. The *mahapuja* was performed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Anandswarup



Swami and 175 devotees. Thereafter, senior sadhus delivered discourses. The Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Shri Jairam Thakur, was welcomed in the assembly. In his address he praised, “Swamishri has built mandirs in India and throughout the world to foster Indian culture and values. Countless do darshan in mandirs and also perform various social services. We are very grateful to Swamiji, who has come here and sanctified this land in spite of the chilly weather. You are doing a significant service to society which we are unable to do. I have faith that through your blessings Himachal Pradesh will develop and progress immensely.” Thereafter, Swamishri blessed all those who had contributed to making the mandir possible. Two government state ministers, Shri Kishan Kapoor (Minister for Food and Supplies) and Shri Suresh Bharadwaj (Education), and Shri Sandeep Sharma (High Court Judge) also received Swamishri’s blessings. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed the devotees and well-wishers who had helped in constructing the mandir: Adarsh Sud, Ashok Sud, Gulabsinh Verma, Atul Chitkari, M.P. Sud, Baldevsinh Thakur (Owner of Kufri Fun Campus) and others.



Devotees and well-wishers participate in the *mahapuja* rituals in a pandal.

Swamishri also blessed the youth volunteers who had served during the *murti-pratishtha* festival.

On 22 April 2018, at 8.30 a.m., the rituals prior to the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony were completed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami. On his arrival, Swamishri ritually opened the mandir doors and entered the mandir. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the final *murti-pratishtha* rituals and blessed the assembly, “Whoever performs *pradakshinas* of these *murtis* will have their good wishes fulfilled. At least perform five *pradakshinas* whenever you come here for darshan.” Then, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha arti* and five *pradakshinas* of Thakorji. Thereafter, Swamishri blessed Shri Virbhadrasinghji, the former Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh.

The mandir was built with the blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj and under the guidance of Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami. Kirtisagar Swami had made tremendous efforts in raising the mandir, and the local satsang was fostered through the visits of Munivatsal Swami, Jnanmangal Swami, Priyavandan Swami and other swamis. The contributions of the devotees in Delhi was also praiseworthy.

The first *hari* mandir in Shimla now allows the local devotees to do darshan, offer devotion and do satsang on a regular basis. ♦

New Mandir Inaugurations



Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *hari* mandir in Tarsali (Vadodara)



The newly consecrated *hari* mandir in Karelilbaug (Vadodara)

TARSALI, VADODARA 19–21 April 2018, India

Satsang was established in 1977 by Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, and in 2013, he performed the ground-breaking ceremony for the *hari* mandir.

On the morning of 19 April 2018, the grand Swaminarayan Yagna for World Peace was held in which 1,000 devotees participated. On 20 April, a colourful *nagar-yatra* of the *murtis* took place through the city.

On 21 April, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performed the consecration rituals of the *murtis* in the new *hari* mandir. The Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* had previously been performed by Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj on 27 January 2018 in Gondal.

KARELIBAUG, VADODARA 28–30 April 2018, India

The satsang activities here began in 1982. In 2000, a Satsang Bhuvan was started in the house donated by Shri Rameshbhai Patel (Bro) of London.

Then, on 14 December 2013, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami performed the ground-breaking ceremony for a new mandir after demolishing the Satsang Bhuvan.

On 28 April 2018, a colourful *nagar yatra*

of the *murtis* to be consecrated took place. In the evening, youths presented a melodious programme of devotional bhajans.

On 29 April, the Swaminarayan Yagna for World Peace was held in which 1,215 *yajamans* participated.

On 30 April, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami consecrated the *murtis* in the new mandir. Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* on 27 January 2018 in Gondal.

MILWAUKEE, WI, USA 2–3 June 2018

Satsang in the greater Milwaukee area began through the inspiration of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who personally visited and blessed the devotees of the region during his *vicharan* in 1984 and 1988. Over the years, as the Satsang grew the need for a mandir became evident.

The two-day *murti-pratishtha* celebrations began on 2 June with a Vishwashanti Mahayagna, in which devotees prayed for peace in the world and the welfare of the community. In the afternoon, swamis and devotees presented a kirtan *aradhana*.

The auspicious *murti-pratishtha* ceremony took place on 3 June. Devotees and well-wishers



Pujya Anandswarup Swami performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *hari* mandir, Chigwell, London

participated in the Vedic *mahapuja*. Thereafter, Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami performed the *pratishtha* rituals, amidst the chanting of Vedic mantras and prayers. The *murtis* had previously been consecrated by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Sarangpur, India, on 6 February 2015.

During the afternoon, a special Women's Cultural Programme was held in which young and adult women presented dances, dramas and speeches, portraying the integral role that the mandir plays in positively shaping their lives.

CHIGWELL, LONDON

9 June 2018

The inauguration of the new *hari* mandir was performed by Pujya Anandswarup Swami and included Vedic prayers, chanting and a cultural programme of bhajans and traditional dances.

The *murtis* of the mandir had previously been consecrated by His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj in a special Vedic ceremony in October 2017. Volunteers worked tirelessly to complete the adjoining cultural complex that includes an assembly hall, community dining hall, classrooms, crèche, library and more.

Among the prominent guests present for the opening were Dame Eleanor Laing, MP for Epping Forest and Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons, Cllr Darshan Sungar, Cllr Gagan Mohindra and Cllr Aniket Patel, and all members of the Epping Forest District Council.



Pujya Ghanshyamcharan Swami performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *hari* mandir, Milwaukee, WI, USA

BOMET, KENYA

26–27 May 2018

Bomet town is situated in the former Rift Valley province of Kenya.

Satsang in Bomet started in 1997 and was nurtured by the efforts of *sadguru* swamis, other swamis and devotees. In 2014, land for a mandir was acquired. With the dedicated efforts of all the devotees of Bomet, and the support of the devotees of Sotik and Narok, the Bomet mandir was completed. On 9 May 2016, in Sarangpur, Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for Bomet mandir.

The auspicious mandir opening celebrations were held on 26–27 May 2018 in the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriyadas (Kothari) Swami.

On the afternoon of 26 May, a colourful *na-gar-yatra* of the *murtis* to be installed was held in Bomet. Over 1,500 devotees from Bomet, Sotik, Narok, Nairobi, Nakuru, Kisumu and Mombasa joined in the procession. Prayers were offered for



Pujya Kothari Swami performs the *pratishtha arti* in the *hari* mandir, Bomet, Kenya



Brahmanuni Swami performs the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *hari* mandir, Hamilton, New Zealand

the peace and prosperity of the people of Bomet.

On the morning of 27 May, Pujya Bhaktipriyadas (Kothari) Swami performed the *murti-pratishtha mahapuja* and, thereafter, consecrated the *murtis* in the mandir. This occasion was attended by over 1,500 people.

The mandir project was enthusiastically supported by Dr. Joyce Laboso, Governor of Bomet County. She called the mandir “an important landmark for Bomet County”.

To commemorate the centenary celebrations of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the Governor renamed a road in the town as ‘Pramukh Swami Avenue’.

She also recognized the efforts of BAPS Charities for providing infrastructure support to Tarakwa High School in the Mutarakwa Division of Bomet county.

HAMILTON, NEW ZEALAND

16–17 June 2018

The two-day celebrations commemorating the mandir opening was attended by many devotees and well-wishers from the local and regional community.

Satsang in Hamilton city began in 2002 through the inspiration of His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. As the Satsang grew, the devotees wholeheartedly dedicated themselves to establish a *hari* mandir.

The celebrations began on the evening of 16 June with a cultural programme, in which youths and children presented dances, dramas and speeches portraying the timeless traditions and values inspired by mandirs and the integral role that they play in positively shaping people’s lives.

On 17 June, BAPS swamis, devotees and members of the local Hindu community participated in the Vedic consecration *mahapuja* ceremony. Thereafter, Brahmanuni Swami installed the auspicious *murtis* in the new mandir to the accompaniment of Vedic verses.

HH Mahant Swami Maharaj had previously performed the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* on 19 February 2018 in Auckland, New Zealand. ♦

International Seminar on Akshar-Purushottam Darshan

10–12 June 2018, AARSH, Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar

As part of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Centenary Celebrations, a 3-day international seminar titled ‘Akshar-Purushottam Darshan: Shastra, History and Daily Sadhana’ was organized by AARSH, Gandhinagar.

The inaugural session was addressed by Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami and Prof. Parimal Vyas, Vice-Chancellor, Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara. In other sessions, research papers on the Vachanamrut, Swamini Vato, Prasthantrayi

bhashyas and other shastras were presented in Gujarati, Hindi, English and Sanskrit by scholars of the BAPS Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya, Sarangpur, and by other national and international scholars. The concluding session was addressed by Pujya Aksharcharan Swami and Dr Himanshu Pandya, Vice-chancellor, Gujarat University. Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj also conveyed his blessings via video.

Among the distinguished scholars who attended



Puja Ishwarcharan Swami, Atmatrupta Swami and Prof. Parimal Vyas, Vice-Chancellor of Maharaja Sayajirao University were Dr Jankisharan Acharya, Head, Vedant Department, Somnath Sanskrit University; Shri Govindbhai Patel, President, Gurjardesh Sanskrit Pathshala Shikshan Mandal; Shri Bipinbhai Joshi, Principal, Babdeshwar Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya,



Audience during the seminar

Porbandar; Dr Amrutlal Bhogayata, Principal, Brahmarshi Sanskrit Vidyalaya, Nadiad; and Dr Ravindrakumar Panda, Head, Sanskrit-Prakrut Department, MS University. ♦

CHATURMAS NIYAMS

23 July to 19 October 2018

As instructed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Shikshapatri and by the wish of *guruhari* Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj, devotees should undertake extra spiritual observances during the four holy months of Chaturmas. This year, Chaturmas is from 23 July 2018 (Ashadh *sud* 11) to 19 November 2018 (Kartak *sud* 11). To please Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, the following extra observances should be undertaken:

Reading

The following books should be read throughout the year:

1. Yugatit Yugpurush Pramukh Swami Maharaj.
2. Jeva Me Nirakhiya Re... (Divine Memories, Part 4) (Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj's divine memories of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj.)
3. Akshar-Purushottam Darshan.

Austerities

- One month *dharna-parna*, *chandrayan*, etc. or *ektana* during the month of Shravan (12 August to 9 September 2018)

Listening

- Daily listen to 7–10 minutes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's incidents and blessings.
- Daily listen to one track for two months.

Darshan

- Video darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 7–10 minutes daily.

Devotion

- Daily turn an extra five *malas*. Perform extra *dandvats*, *pradakshinas*, etc. as per one's capacity.
- Inspire one friend to join satsang, such that they daily apply *tilak-chandlo* and perform puja.
- Contemplate for five minutes every day on the *mahima* of Pramukh Swami Maharaj – his virtues, work and divine form.

Gun Kathan

- Every week, narrate in person or via letter, email or social media, one incident of Pramukh Swami Maharaj to as many relatives and friends as possible.

Family

- Conduct *ghar-sabha*: gather your family to read about, listen to, have darshan of and contemplate on our guru.
- Once a month, for one year, invite a family to your *ghar sabha*. (Invite the same family every month, not new families each time.)
- Inspire one family to start conducting their own *ghar sabha*.

Note: During Chaturmas, devotees should not eat brinjals, white and red radish, sugarcane and *mogri*.



London Mandir Acclaimed by TripAdvisor

23 May 2018, London



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London – popularly known as the ‘Neasden Temple’ – has been awarded a ‘Certificate of Excellence’ from TripAdvisor for the fifth consecutive year, entering the Mandir into the TripAdvisor ‘HALL OF FAME’.

“TripAdvisor is excited to announce the 2018 Certificate of Excellence Hall of Fame recipients, which have consistently received strong praise and ratings from travellers,” said Heather Leisman, Vice President of Industry Marketing, TripAdvisor. The annual recognition is based on the quality, quantity and recency of reviews posted by travellers on TripAdvisor over a 12-month period.

The Mandir currently ranks 77th among 5,871 attractions or 1,828 ‘things to do’ in London. More specifically, it ranks 5th on the list of ‘Architectural Buildings of London’, and

2nd (after Westminster Abbey) among ‘Sacred & Religious Sites in London’.

TripAdvisor is considered the world’s largest and most popular travel site, with more than 455 million unique monthly visitors giving over 630 million reviews and opinions so far on 7.5 million hotels, restaurants, airlines and attractions worldwide. ♦



INDIA

**AKSHAR-PURUSHOTTAM DARSHAN
MAHOTSAV
7–15 April 2018, Surat**



Celebrations were held in Surat to honour the Swaminarayan Bhashyas and Vadagrantha written by Bhadrash Swami explaining the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

On 7 April, a colourful *nagar-yatra* of Thakorji, the guru *parampara* and the texts was organized along a 12-km route through Surat. The procession featured 12 decorated and thematic floats, adorned mounted horses, a marching band, youths on motorbikes, groups of dancing youths and thousands of devotees. Onlookers greeted the procession with devotion as it passed through the city. The procession concluded at 7.30 p.m. at the BAPS Akshar Vadi with *samuh arti*.

Then, on 8 and 15 April, a total of around 20,000 devotees attended the day-long Akshar-Purushottam Chhavani sessions in which Bhadrash Swami systematically explained the Akshar-Purushottam Darshan. At the end of each session, devotees performed *pujan* of and honoured the texts.

YUVA SHIBIRS 2018: SAMP

1–12 May 2018, Gujarat & Maharashtra



Thousands of *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from throughout Gujarat and Maharashtra gathered at 30 BAPS centres to participate in the day-long Annual Yuva Shibirs, based on the theme ‘Samp’ – ‘Unity’.

Through speeches by experienced swamis, audio-visual presentations, skits, workshops and other engaging activities, the *shibirs* guided the youths on developing unity in Satsang, their families and society. The youths were also instructed on road safety, especially the importance of wearing helmets when riding motorbikes, and the appropriate use of mobile phones.

VADODARA YUVAK-YUVATI SHIBIR: PRAMUKH SWAMI CHHE SATHE 12–14 May 2018, Sankari

A total of around 1,100 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from BAPS centres in Vadodara attended the three-day *shibir* held at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sankari. Based on the theme ‘Pramukh Swami Chhe Sathe,’ the *shibir* elaborated on the principle that the Gunatit Satpurush’s divine presence on earth is eternal and that he is always with us. The presence of the Gunatit Satpurush is experienced through his ‘Shasvat Prem’ (Eternal



Affection), ‘Shasvat Prerna’ (Eternal Inspiration) and ‘Shasvat Astitva’ (Eternal Existence).

To perceive this presence of the Gunatit guru, the youths were guided on imbibing (1) Mahima, (2) Smruti, (3) Samp, (4) Prarthana, (5) Agna and (6) Satsang Prachar.

These topics were presented through speeches by senior swamis, quizzes, skits, audiovisual presentations and question-answer sessions. During the *shibir* the youths also performed *samuh puja*.

The *shibir* inspired the youths to practice satsang in their daily lives to earn the blessings of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Mahant Swami Maharaj, and enlightened them on the manifest presence of the *satpurush* to guide them in every phase of life.

PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN BY YOUTHS

13–17 May 2018, Gujarat



A total of 92 youths from the current batch under training at the Yuva Talim Kendra formed 43 groups to conduct a Public Awareness Campaign in remote villages around Ukai in South Gujarat.

The youths visited 98 villages during the four days, conducting home visits, children’s assemblies and evening public assemblies. They encouraged villagers to become addiction-free, children to study sincerely, and families to live in harmony.

YUVA SHIBIR: ASMITA

22–24 May 2018, Udaipur



Over 390 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* from throughout Rajasthan attended the Yuva Shibir based on the theme ‘Asmita’.

During the *shibir*, the youths were inspired by speeches by *sadguru* sadhus and other experienced and learned sadhus. The *shibir* also featured motivational skits, debates and video shows on topics such as family unity, celibacy in youth, necessity of *upasana* for liberation, attachment to the eternal Gunatit Satpurush, satsang reading, and others.

The *shibir* inspired the youths to sincerely practise satsang in their daily lives.

YUVA SEVAK SABHA KARYAKAR SHIBIR

26–27 May 2018, Ahmedabad

From throughout Gujarat and Mumbai, around 600 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* newly appointed as *karyakars* (*sanchalaks* and assistant *sanchalaks*) for the soon-to-be-launched Yuva Sevak Sabha (YSS) attended this training *shibir* in the presence of Pujya Viveksagar Swami.

The youths were guided through speeches by senior swamis, workshops and audio-visual presentations. They received practical training on how to understand and interact with the youngsters they will be teaching. They also practised how to



present the various items that will be included in the monthly assembly they will be conducting.

Mahant Swami Maharaj also blessed the youths via video.

**HIS HIGHNESS SHEIKH ABDULLAH
BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN VISITS
SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM
26 June 2018, New Delhi**



His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, was traditionally welcomed on behalf of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj and the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha by Brahmavihari Swami, as well as senior BAPS devotees and representatives from the UAE: Dr. B.R. Shetty, Shri Rohitbhai Patel, Shri Sudhir Shetty, Shri Yogesh Mehta, Shri Ashok Kotecha, Shri Keyur Nagori and others.

On viewing the magnificent Akshardham Mandir, His Highness was fascinated by the intricate carvings, amazing artwork and challenging stone engineering. He specially commended the spirit of the volunteers, “Incredible. In this age and time, volunteerism itself makes

Akshardham special.”

Inside the Mandir, His Highness offered his respects at the central shrine of Bhagwan Swaminarayan by placing flowers.

He was delighted to see the excellent sculptures of the elephant plinth, and reflecting upon its messages of harmony patience, strength and wisdom, he commented, “Everyone in this world needs to understand each other and cooperate with one another.”

Thereafter, His Highness performed the *abhishek* ritual, and enjoyed the experiential boat ride through 10,000 years of Indian culture and the state-of-the-art Sahaj Anand water show depicting a timeless message from the Upanishads. He added, “We must build a future better than our past.”

His Highness also took this opportunity to openly express his support for the historic BAPS Hindu Mandir to be built in Abu Dhabi.

Sharing his sentiments about Akshardham, His Highness wrote: “With much pride I express my gratitude and appreciation to all those who took part in erecting this historical, cultural and religious monument, which reflects the power of the man upon whom God bestowed the mind in order to be blessed in doing this good.”

**PRESIDENT MR. MOON JAE-IN OF
SOUTH KOREA VISITS SWAMINARAYAN
AKSHARDHAM, NEW DELHI
8 July 2018**



Marking his first ever state visit to India, His Excellency Moon Jae-in, President of the Republic of Korea, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in

New Delhi to experience India's ageless beauty, borderless culture and timeless values. He was accompanied by First Lady Kim Jung-sook and a delegation of South Korean officials.

On behalf of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj and BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, senior sadhus and trustees traditionally welcomed President Moon.

President Moon and his delegation admired the Swaminarayan Akshardham Mandir where they offered their respects and were delighted to see the Mandir's art and architecture. They also viewed the Gajendra Pithika. Then, President Moon and First Lady Kim shared their sentiments for world peace and harmony by offering *abhishek* to the sacred *murti* of Shri Neelkanth Varni.

Describing his experience at Akshardham, President Moon Jae-in said, "I am very delighted to visit this grand temple as part of the first leg of my visit. After seeing this, the feeling that I get is that India and Korea may be having different cultures, but the two countries share commonalities in values such as peace, harmony and unity in diversity."

UK

SANYUKTA MANDAL HEALTH CONVENTION

14 April 2018, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London

Over 200 40- to 55-year-olds attended the health convention organized to provide valuable guidance for managing personal health, diet and fitness.

Experienced doctors and experts in other fields outlined key health indicators that attendees should understand and monitor regularly, how to prepare for long-term physical exercises – including stretching and body coordination, cooking techniques and practical tips for preparing healthier Gujarati meals, and the health benefits of yoga and spiritual techniques that enhance the holistic wellbeing of an individual.



Prevention and treatment of sports injuries was discussed by an expert from the Tottenham Hotspur Foundation, which has recently begun a partnership with London Mandir and BAPS Charities to improve wellbeing and fitness in the local community.

NORTH AMERICA

NORTH AMERICAN YUVAK-YUVATI KARYAKAR CONVENTION 2018 14–17 June 2018, Robbinsville, NJ



From June 14 to June 17, 700 *yuvak* and *yuvati* volunteers from centres across North America gathered for a leadership training seminar (Karyakar Convention) on the theme of 'Samp'. As volunteers, they were also able to gain insights into improving their performance in various youth activities.

The delegates were delighted to have the presence of Pujya Anandswarup Swami and many other swamis, who gave discourses, highlighting the history, theory and practical application of unity, as directed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the guru *parampara*. Also, the attendees participated

in workshop sessions and discussion groups to learn about how achieving unity requires time, self-awareness, strength, compromise, mutual respect and the actionable steps that can be taken when one encounters challenges. His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj blessed the convention through a live video message and inspired the volunteers to continue their *seva* and imbibe the virtue of unity in their lives.

ASIA-PACIFIC

YOUTH SEMINARS

May–June 2018, Australia

A total of over 970 *yuvaks* and *yuvatis* attended the ‘Towards Better Living’ seminars held at centres throughout Australia: Brisbane, Perth, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.

The *shibir* theme was presented to the youths through speeches by experienced swamis, videos, a drama and other activities. The seminars revealed that a better life is the result of not more luxuries, but better actions. The youths learnt that practicing daily satsang is the key to achieving one’s desired goals and satisfaction in life.

BAPS CHARITIES

FLOOD RELIEF

22 April 2018, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania



Following the floods brought on by heavy rains in and around Dar es Salaam, BAPS Charities donated 2000 kg of food items and 150 food packs to support 150 affected families, providing

them a full one-month supply of food while recovery and rebuilding efforts continue.

BONE MARROW RECRUITMENT DRIVE

18–27 May 2018, Birmingham, UK



BAPS Charities, in collaboration with DKMS, organized bone marrow recruitment drives in Newbury (East London), Croydon (South London), Greenwich (South East London), Birmingham and Leicester to enrol members of the South Asian community onto the British Bone Marrow Registry. A total of 759 new potential donors registered in support of patients.

DKMS is an international non-profit advocacy group that works to raise awareness of the need for donors for hematopoietic stem cell transplantation, which people with blood cancers need for treatment.

The drive is part of BAPS Charities’ ongoing commitment to support the British Bone Marrow Registry.

OBSERVING WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

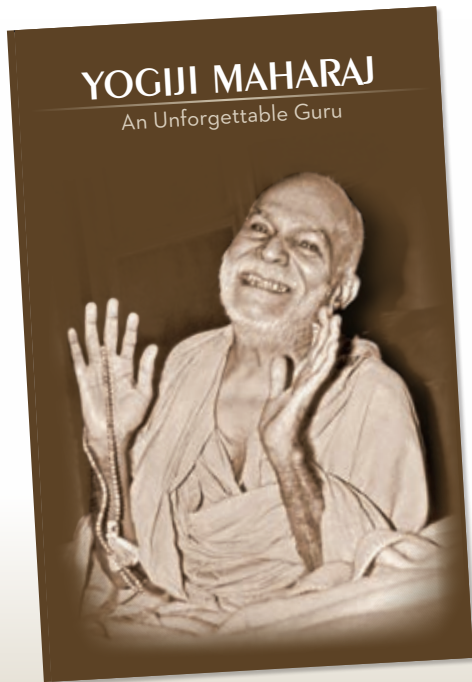
2–10 June 2018, UK

Every year, 5 June is celebrated by millions internationally as World Environment Day (WED).

BAPS Charities observed World Environment Day in the UK with public awareness presentations at all BAPS Charities centres around the UK between 2 and 10 June, supporting this year’s theme, **Beating Plastic Pollution**.

The presentations featured eye-opening facts and inspirational tips about reducing single-use plastic consumption. ♦

NEW PUBLICATIONS



YOGIJI MAHARAJ

An Unforgettable Guru

by Kaushik Joshi



Contents

Childhood in Dhari

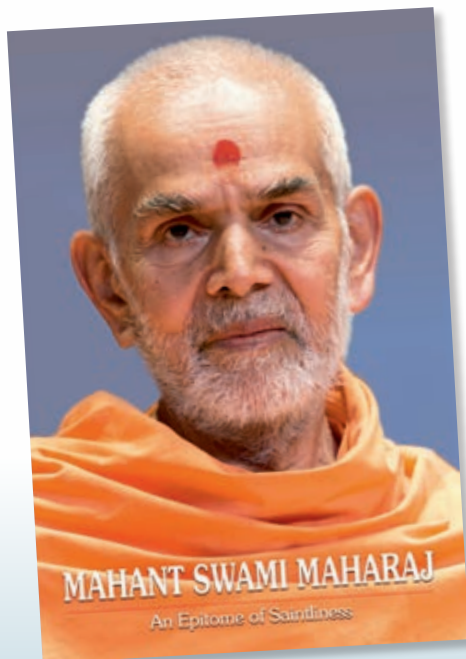
Under the Wings of Shastriji Maharaj

A Hard Life

Icon of Motherly Love

Youths Are My Heart

Healing Touch of Divinity...



MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ

An Epitome of Saintliness

Translation by

Sadhu Vivekshivandas & Sadhu Amrutvijaydas



Contents

Birth

Brilliant School Years

Absorbed in Yogiji Maharaj's Divine Love

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's
Affectionate Shelter...



Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad ♦ Available at all BAPS bookstores in India and abroad



NEW BAPS MANDIR INAUGURATION 21-22 April 2018, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

Due to the goodwill generated by Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi, satsang has grown in North India.

On 21-22 April 2018, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* of the new BAPS mandir in Shimla.

1. H.H. Mahant Swami Maharaj performs the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals in the mandir.
2. Devotees participate in the *mahapuja* rituals.
3. Swamishri and Chief Minister Shri Jairam Thakur with Shri Harikrishna Maharaj.
4. Swamishri presents a memento to former CM Shri Raja Virbhadrasinghji.
5. Swamishri unties the *nada-chhadi* to ritually open the mandir.



HIS HOLINESS MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ IN RAJKOT

21 May–3 June 2018

1. Grand kick-off assembly of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 98th birthday celebrations (27 May).
2. Swamishri performs his morning puja in the mandir's main assembly hall.

Inset: Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijaybhai Rupani with Swamishri and Shri Harikrishna Maharaj during the kick-off assembly (27 May).