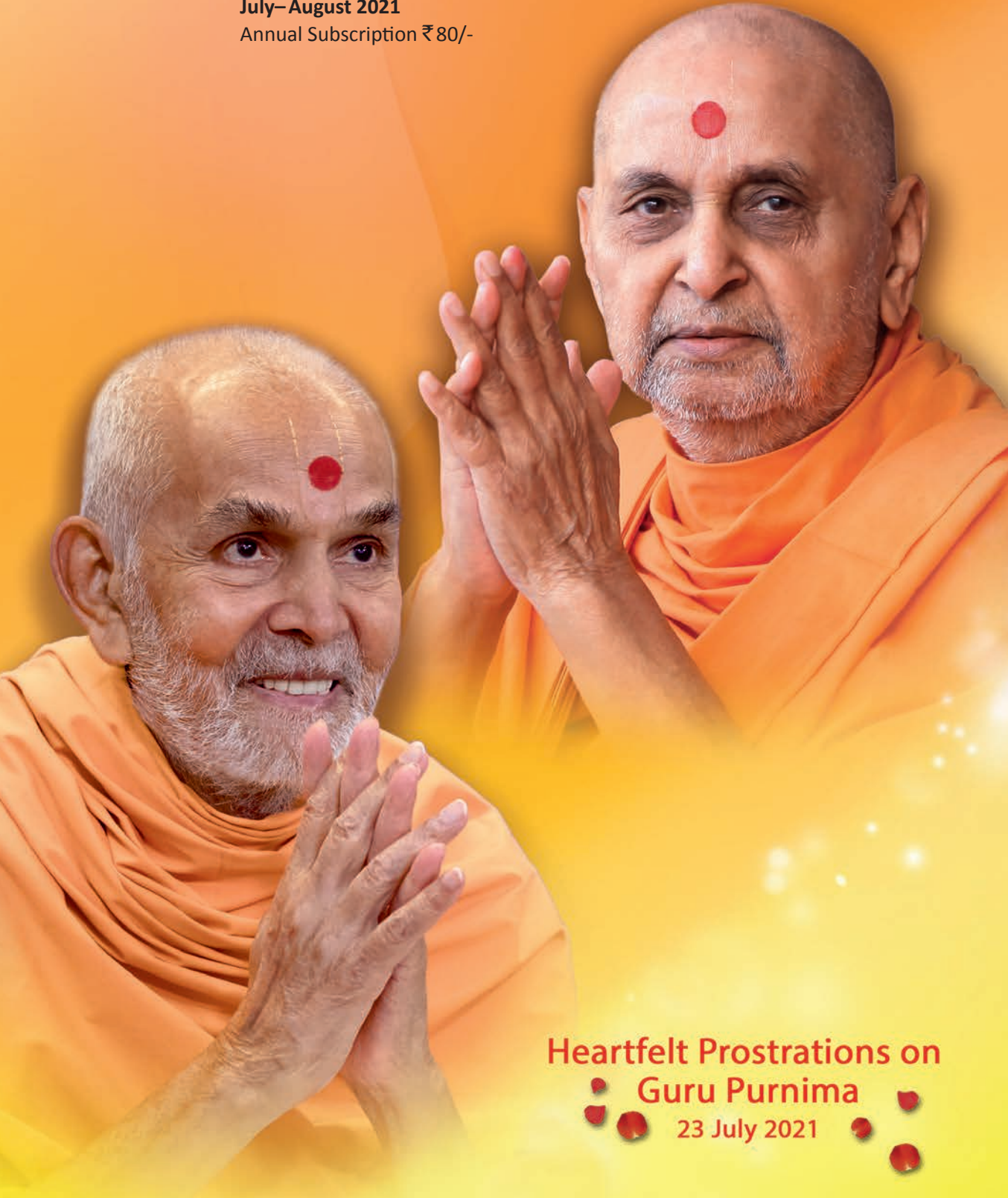


# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July– August 2021

Annual Subscription ₹ 80/-



Heartfelt Prostrations on

Guru Purnima

23 July 2021





### **CYCLONE TAUKTAE RELIEF WORK BY BAPS** **May 2021, Gujarat**

In the aftermath of the powerful 160 kmph Cyclone Tauktae, which caused widespread damage and disruption in Gujarat, BAPS provided emergency aid to the affected. BAPS provided over 14,500 people with hot meals, as well as packaged and delivered ration kits to thousands of affected families.





Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj

# SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

July–August 2021, Vol. 44, No. 4



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

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# THE NAWAB INVITES SHRI HARI

*The devotees of Surat offer their devotion and services to Shri Hari. The Nawab, too, honours Maharaj in his palace...*

## SWAMINARAYAN IS A TORCHBEARER

Renowned singers of Surat also came for Shri Hari's darshan. When they heard the *hindola* bhajans sung by the sadhus they were amazed by their proficiency and devotion. Their misunderstandings and prejudices about sadhus being a burden to society were dissolved. They were impressed and thought Bhagwan Swaminarayan was a torchbearer of culture and religion. The singers wished to sing before Shri Hari. The sadhus gave their instruments to them and they sang bhajans of Mira and Narsinh Mehta. Shri Hari was pleased and gifted each of them with a potful of *ghari*.

The afternoon meal was ready and Mukund Brahmachari (Varni), the attendant, was waiting for the kirtan bhakti to end. He saw that Shri Hari was absorbed in listening to the bhajans, so he did not disturb him. Once it was over, Mukund Varni came to Shri Hari. Maharaj smiled on seeing him and said, "All of you abide by my wishes and instructions, similarly, I obey Brahmachari's wishes." And so Shri Hari got up to have his meal.

Today's meal was sponsored by Bhikharidas Sheth, a renowned devotee of Surat. After lunch, he performed Shri Hari's *pujan* with *chandan* mixed with saffron. Then he offered a stole lined



with gold edges, a glittering coat and *surwal*. He also decorated Shri Hari's wrists with gold bangles, placed a gold necklace studded with gems around his neck and attached a string of pearls on his *pagh*. Thereafter, Bhikaridas Sheth performed *pujan* of the Dharmakul Brahmins and also of the sadhus. He also gifted all of them clothes according to their ranks. Shri Hari was happily observing all this and he liked the Sheth's devotion. He always said, "I am very

pleased on seeing anyone who offers bhakti, because it is the greatest purpose and benefit of life."

## TASTY MEALS OF SURAT

Shri Hari returned to the canopied hall and sat on the *hindolo*. Muni Bawa, Bhaichand Sheth, Lakshmichand Sheth and others came to Shri Hari. Maharaj asked them, "How have you organized the sponsorship for our daily meals? Devotees may be eager to contribute, but you should consider their financial condition and accept their donations accordingly. If there is any deficit you can add the remaining amount from the other donations you have received."

Lakshmichand Sheth informed, "Maharaj, everyone is enthusiastic and eager to contribute.



So, we collect the sponsorship for each meal by including one generous donor [devotee] and ten to fifteen minor donors.”

Maharaj said, “Read out the names of the main devotees who have donated generously.”

Lakshmichand Sheth took out a list and started reading aloud, “Today’s meal is sponsored by Bhikharidas Sheth. Tomorrow, on the 9th, I have sponsored a meal of *biranj* and puri. On the 10th, Govindbhai has sponsored a meal of bananas and chapattis. On *ekadashi*, there is *falahar*. On the 12th, Lallubha Sheth has sponsored a meal of *dudhpak* and *malpua*. On the 13th, the Bhavsar devotees of Khandesh, residing in Surat, have sponsored a meal of bananas and chapattis. On the 14th, Girdharbhai, Bhagubhai, Bhagwandas, Ramdas Sheth and other *satsangis* have sponsored a meal of *dudhpak* and puri. On Amas, Vipra Ambaram, Krushnadas, Kruparam, Narottambhai, Surbhai, Nathubhai, Dhanjibhai and others have sponsored a meal of *dudhpak* and *malpua*. On Maghshar *sud* 1, Krushnaji Desai has sponsored a meal of *basundi* and puri. And on *sud* 2, the remaining devotees have sponsored a meal of *biranj* and *shiro*.”

Shri Hari replied, “The devotees of Surat have been yearning for years for such an opportunity to serve us. This time, their wishes will be fulfilled. All have immense faith.”

## THE NAWAB OF SURAT INVITES MAHARAJ TO HIS COURT

Shri Hari ate a meal sponsored by Lallubhai and then sat in a satsang assembly. Soon after, Ardeshar Sheth came, bowed to Shri Hari, and sat down near his feet. He said, “Maharaj, the Nawab of Surat, Mir Afjulladin Ahmad Khan, who appointed me as the chief administrator, wishes to invite you to his court. He will send an elephant and horses for you and your entourage. So, when will you go there?”

Shri Hari replied, “Today, at 4.00 p.m.” On hearing this Ardeshar got up to leave. Shri Hari

asked him, “Shethji, how much power does the Nawab have?” Ardesharji replied in a plaintive tone, “Maharaj, due to the growth of British power the Nawab’s rule is fast ebbing. He will be the last Nawab, and he is very devout.”

Shri Hari heard Ardeshar and said, “Whether he remains as the Nawab or not, but he will surely attain the eternal kingdom of God by his *seva* of inviting us.” Ardesharji pondered upon Shri Hari’s words and believed, “The Nawab will lose his sovereignty, however, with Shri Hari’s blessings his life will become worthwhile.”

The Nawab’s court was profusely decorated for Maharaj’s arrival. After making all the other arrangements Ardeshar Sheth returned to escort Shri Hari. Maharaj and the Kathi Darbars mounted their horses. Nityanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami, Anandanand Swami, Muni Bawa, Premanand Swami and other *sadguru* swamis sat in horse-drawn carriages. Other sadhus were ready to walk all the way. Nandram and Gopalji were in a buggy. Shobharam Shastri, Dinanath Bhatt, Raghunath Shastri, Ramchandra Vaidya, Harishchandra Vaidya, Bapu Parmanand (a leading devotee of Amod), Harijivan Sheth and Sadashiv Vipra also sat in horse-drawn carriages. Soon enough, the Nawab’s musicians arrived with *dhols*, shehnais and other instruments to auspiciously lead them to the Nawab’s court. The procession commenced.

The entire town of Surat, every house and bazaar, was cleaned and decorated by its citizens, because they felt it was an auspicious occasion for them as well. All were eager to have Shri Hari’s darshan when he passed by, and so they gathered on their terraces, balconies and streets.

When Maharaj was not far from the Nawab’s palace, the Nawab, his family and officers came to receive Shri Hari. He folded his palms and bowed to Maharaj. Shri Hari alighted from his horse, caught his hand and walked with him. On reaching his court the Nawab led Shri Hari to a golden chair. The rest were offered chairs and





cushions. The Nawab prayed, “You are God’s prophet, thus bless me that by praying to Him I attain his divine abode. This kingdom of mine is like a shackle that binds, however, by your blessings I will be freed soon.”

Shri Hari was pleased with his understanding because only one having noble values (*sanskars*) could have such sentiments in his heart.

The Nawab instructed a Brahmin to perform *pujan* of Shri Hari and his sadhus and then garlanded him. Then, he sprayed perfume and rose water on Maharaj’s clothes. He gave twelve rolls of premium quality soft cloth, a shawl embroidered with glittering threads, a *pagh* (headgear) studded with gems and a plateful of rupees. The citizens and officers present at the Nawab’s invitation also offered gifts according to their means. Then, Shri Hari discoursed a little and his sadhus sang bhajans.

Finally, Shri Hari got up to leave. The Nawab bowed again and prayed, “Always shower such grace upon me.” Shri Hari smiled and blessed him. Maharaj then proceeded towards Pirusha’s guesthouse in Salatpara.

He, too, had decorated his bungalow and its precincts with lamps. Pirusha performed puja and offered garlands to Shri Hari and his sadhus.

He then gifted Maharaj with an expensive cloth and prayed. Then, Maharaj left for his residence with his entourage. Since it would soon be time for the evening *arti* Maharaj was in a hurry to reach his residence. As the procession proceeded Premanand Swami was also singing bhajans with the rest of the sadhus. Suddenly, he was captivated by the wonderful musical notes sung by a female. As a music maestro, Premanand Swami realized that the classical singing was of an extraordinary calibre. While listening, his pace slowed. He became so engrossed that he soon forgot it was a lady’s voice. He also failed to realize that the other sadhus had advanced far ahead of him while he was walking slowly all by himself. Only when his mind became unhinged from the singing and remembered Maharaj’s form did he realize his mistake. He felt remorse for the lapse in his vows. Instantly, he ran and joined the group of sadhus. After reaching their residence Shri Hari gently reprimanded him and told him to atone for his lapse by observing the *chandrayan vrat*. Premanand Swami acknowledged his lapse and complied to Shri Hari’s command. ♦

To be continued in next issue.  
Translated from the Gujarati text of  
Bhagwan Swaminarayan authored by Shri H.T. Dave





## Need for a Guru

**T**he guru-*shishya* (master-disciple) relationship is integral to Hinduism. It is not only crucial to spirituality, but in all areas of life. For example, an Indian classical musician readily accepts a guru to become a competent musician. Self-perseverance alone is not sufficient. In the United States, where I reside, independence and self-perseverance are the elements that one believes will lead to success. Yet, with this mentality, one rides the tumultuous waves of success, happiness, failure and misery. Life from this perspective is unstable and feels out of our control despite all of our efforts.

Although the guru-*shishya* relationship is largely a foreign concept in the United States, it is still a part of life whether one likes it or not. Everyone is a servant of someone at a higher position, be it parents, teachers, bosses, coaches, etc. It is an inescapable part of human life. But the inclination is to resist authority and become the master of one's domain. This is futile and leads

to frustration. At the very base level, people are servants to their senses (*indriyas*) and mind. But such service leads to dissatisfaction, as the senses always ask for more. The solution is to serve a guru who will cleanse the senses and the mind with divinity and bring about peace and fulfillment. The Brahmaswarup Guru, not the senses, will now be in charge. Mahant Swami Maharaj is this current guru.

Hinduism teaches that being a servant and accepting a guru is humanity's dharma, or inherent nature. In the United States, capitalism is based on competition, and if one works hard enough by one's own will, one can become the CEO of a fortune 500 company. However, due to the dharma to be a servant, one can see that even a big CEO is still subservient to someone else. Such CEOs will be at the mercy of investors and the stock market, for example. In the United States, people generally believe that to be one's own boss will lead to happiness. But that is not always true.





The point here is that it is human dharma, or inherent human nature to be subservient. In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjun achieved true knowledge and happiness only when he totally surrendered to Shri Krishna and gave up his false sense of free will. Arjun put complete faith and trust in Shri Krishna.

The guru-*sisya* ethos and the attitude of humble service permeates Indian culture. India is known for hospitality. Whether it is in hotels, homes or shops on the street, I have experienced the humble kindness of the Indian people first-hand. The Indian people are ready to serve with the belief that the guest is a god, ‘Atithi Devo Bhava.’ BAPS gurus teach ‘Das na Das’, meaning ‘servant of a servant’. Yet, the attitude of such humble service is not as prevalent in the United States. One can see how reluctant customer service workers are to serve customers. Customers are also to blame, bringing a sense of entitlement that they must be served. This is the inverse of ‘Das na Das’ and leads to anger, conflict and stress.

The ego dictates to us that we are in control and entitled to the pleasures and luxuries of the material world. Giving up the ego and surrendering to the guru will bring relief from

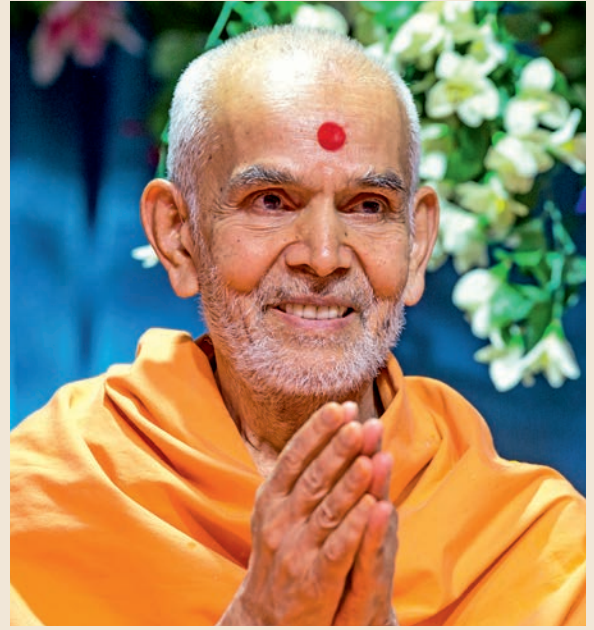
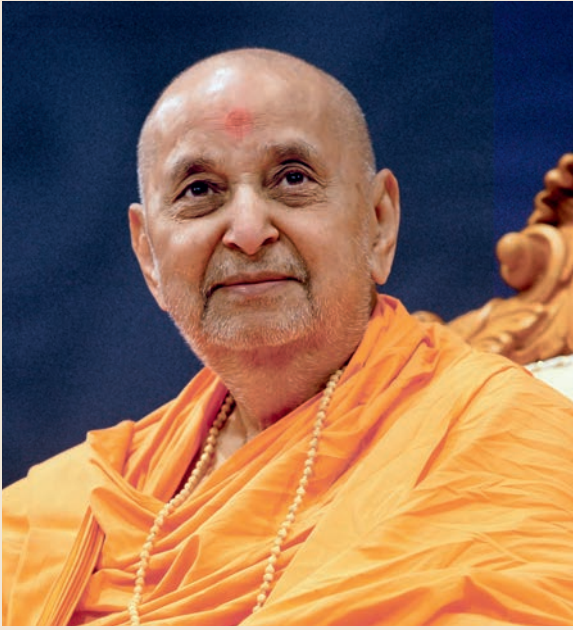
such stress and misery. BAPS gurus have always taught that Bhagwan Swaminarayan is ‘*sarva karta*’ or ‘the all-doer’. Stress comes from not getting the expected results of one’s labour. Stress and anger are at epidemic levels in the United States and cause serious mental and physical health problems. Bhagwan Krishna teaches in the Bhagavad Gita that only God gives the fruits of one’s work and one should not be attached to such fruits. Knowing this can bring peace of mind. The attitude that whatever happens is Bhagwan’s will brings contentment. After Arjun accepted Shri Krishna completely, Shri Krishna took the reigns of the chariot during the battle of Kurukshetra.

Satsang Diksha *shloka* 152 elaborates on this point: “One should understand that all which has happened, which is happening, and which will happen is solely due to Swaminarayan Bhagwan’s will and only for my benefit.” In this way, when we fully accept the guru, we understand that Bhagwan is in total control. This lifts life’s burdens from our shoulders.

In the United States many have conflicts with their bosses at work. One finds so many flaws and imperfections in one’s boss, which leads to disrespect and an unhealthy work environment. This is also the case in schools. Many students do not respect teachers because they do not want to be told what to do by someone with imperfections and flaws.

In Hinduism obedience to a guru is absolutely essential to happiness and success. One of the most important teachings is to never see flaws in one’s guru. This is especially important in BAPS, and accepting the Pragat Brahmaswarup Guru, who is presently Mahant Swami Maharaj, is critical for spiritual progress. The Pragat Brahmaswarup Guru is Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s choicest servant (Akshar), is flawless and fully divine. He displays human qualities and apparent flaws to relate to the common people and become accessible to them. His divine peace comes from total mastery over





his mind and *indriyas*. He is not God, but always remains a servant of God. He is completely egoless. Bhagwan Krishna teaches in the Bhagavad Gita that anger, greed and lust are the gateways to the bottomless pits of misery. Thus, the Brahmaswarup Guru fully embodies *nishkam* (non-lust), *niswad* (non-taste), *nisneh* (non-attachment), *nirlobh* (non-greed), and *nirman* (non-ego). When we encounter this true guru, we begin to imbibe these qualities.

If someone so spiritually elevated as the Pragat Brahmaswarup Guru is eternally a servant of God, what to say of us common human beings? It is our nature to serve, and the source of our unhappiness is that we are serving imperfect bosses, teachers, etc. while thinking we are masters. But once we accept the Brahmaswarup Guru, we begin to see divine qualities in everyone. We learn that Bhagwan resides within all. Thus, the guru teaches us not to find flaws in others. In this way, everyone becomes elevated to a divine platform and we develop servitude to all.

More and more westerners are seeking out Hindu gurus, as they are dissatisfied with the western competitive, stressful lifestyle. I have accepted Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj

and now Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj as my gurus and am catching glimpses of spiritual happiness in my life. Being a Hindu in the US has its challenges. Many spaces of the country are devoid of Hindu culture. In India, mandirs are on every corner, and thus one is continuously reminded of Bhagwan. In the US, we have the challenge to be much more disciplined. We can make our homes a mandir, but need to follow a strict set of practices, as would a mandir pujari. Ultimately, we need to realize Bhagwan is within. We practise to become *brahmarup* and not succumb to outside situations and challenges no matter where we are in the world. Our minds should be completely stable no matter what the situation. Simply remembering experiences (*smruti*) with our guru can be sufficient to bring peace. These teachings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj and now Mahant Swami Maharaj have helped me manage stress and become a more positive person overall, but I am full of flaws and have a long way to go. ♦

*Jerry Barr (Jay Bhakta) holds a PhD in English Literature. He is also a tabla performer. He has passed all four Satsang exams with first-class and distinction.*





# The Guru Is a Living Shashtra

*Gunatitanand Swami has provided a yardstick by which to spiritually evaluate one's guru (Swamini Vato 2.1): Examine the guru's predecessors – from what spiritual pedigree he comes, examine the guru's followers – what is the spiritual calibre of the devotees he has nurtured, and examine the guru's own life – how spiritually enlightened is he.*

*As devotees of BAPS, Bhagwan Swaminarayan has blessed us with a succession of Gunatit gurus whose spiritual credentials are immaculate and whose exemplary lives have inspired countless.*

*Learning from the life of one's guru provides clarity and direction on the spiritual path.*

*The guru not only preaches, but perfectly practises the principles of the shastras.*

*His life is our lighthouse. To navigate the turbulences of life, focus on him and he will escort us to the shores of spiritual bliss.*

*To celebrate Guru Purnima, on 23 July 2021, the following articles present an insight into Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life based on selected verses of the Satsang Diksha shashtra written by Pragat Brahmaswarup Mahant Swami Maharaj.*





BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Toronto, Canada

# Making Mandirs Within

## MASTER BUILDER

Pramukh Swami Maharaj is the Guinness World Record holder for building the most mandirs worldwide. Over a period of 45 years, Pramukh Swami Maharaj built two Akshardham mandirs and complexes, 37 traditional stone *shikharbaddha* mandirs, over 1,100 *hari* mandirs, and inspired thousands of families to install *ghar* mandirs in their homes.

He inspired volunteers and artisans to contribute to the task of building mandirs, which attract millions of devotees and tourists every year. These mandirs serve as centres for a spectrum of spiritual, social and cultural activities and celebrations. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was indeed a master builder. But, one wonders: Why build so many mandirs? For whom did he build these mandirs?

Highlighting the tradition of building mandirs initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Mahant

Swami Maharaj writes in *shloka* 90 of the Satsang Diksha:

मन्दिराणां हि निर्माणं तदाज्ञामनुसृत्य च ।  
दिव्यानां क्रियते भक्त्या सर्वकल्याणहेतुना ॥

*Mandirānām hi nirmānam  
tad-āgnām-anusrutya cha;  
Divyānām kriyate bhaktyā  
sarva-kalyāna-hetunā.*

To fulfil this ordinance and to grant *moksha* to all, divine mandirs are devoutly constructed.

Thus, in accordance with Bhagwan Swaminarayan's noble objective of granting *moksha* to everyone, Pramukh Swami Maharaj built mandirs to help people eradicate their vices, transform and strengthen their minds, and offer devotion to God. The mandirs he built are vibrant hubs from where activities that benefit



individuals, families and society are performed.

## ERADICATING VICES

Mandirs have helped thousands of people eliminate their vices, like drug and alcohol addiction, gambling, smoking and others.

Birju Patel of Toronto, Canada, was a drug addict. From a young age of 16, he began experimenting with drugs. He soon became hooked and from his \$500,000 annual salary, he spent a substantial \$120,000 on purchasing cocaine. According to his doctors, he was taking enough cocaine to kill a horse. These vices shattered his family and personal life.

In early 2016, after much convincing and insistence by his friends and family, Birju reluctantly came to the BAPS Mandir in Toronto. Sirish, a friend of Birju, accompanied him to the mandir for darshan. Hesitant at first, Birju climbed the steps and began doing darshan of all the *murtis*. When they reached Pramukh Swami Maharaj's *murti*, Sirish noticed that Birju suddenly became still, and his eyes began tearing. He somehow felt connected to Swamishri. Pointing to his chest Birju described his experience as "a sense of being full. I feel that there is something in here." He added that for the first time in many years, he felt emotions like love, hope and peace.

Thereafter, Birju regularly visited the mandir for three months and performed *seva*. He would meet the resident sadhus and listen to their discourses. Despite numerous previous attempts at rehabilitation, Birju had relapsed. However, visiting the mandir helped Birju to stay positive and refrain from taking drugs. He developed a deep love for the mandir and Swamishri. On 11 April 2016, Birju had the opportunity to personally receive blessings from Pramukh Swami



Murti of Pramukh Swami Maharaj at  
BAPS Mandir, Toronto

Maharaj in Sarangpur. While Swamishri was informed of his situation, Birju began saying his prayers in tears. Just a mere five minutes with Pramukh Swami Maharaj brought new hope in Birju's life.

Today, because of the BAPS Mandir in Toronto, Birju has overcome his addictions. He has restored his broken relationships. He has also become an active volunteer. He helps others fight addictions by

motivating them and bringing them to the mandir.

Birju is one of the thousands of people who have been helped by the mandirs built by Pramukh Swami Maharaj to eradicate addictions, harmful habits and vices.

## STABILIZING MINDS

During times of despair, a person needs support and guidance to prevent them from falling prey to depression and inappropriate actions. Mandirs provide mental stability in such trying times.

In 2001, to raise funds for the construction of a *shikharbaddha* mandir in Bharuch, Gujarat, the local devotees went house-to-house to collect old newspapers. The collected papers would then be sold to recycling centres. One evening, at 8:00 p.m., devotees arrived at a home and rang the doorbell.

After a few minutes, a man opened the door and the devotees explained, "We are disciples of Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He is building a mandir here in Bharuch. Do you wish to take part in *seva* for the mandir?" The man expressed his interest, "You're building a mandir by collecting old newspapers?" After explaining the details of the fundraising project, the devotees described some of the mandir's socio-spiritual activities and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's pious, selfless life. As they continued talking, the man suddenly began





BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Bharuch

crying. The devotees became confused, “What’s wrong?” The man’s answer left them speechless.

He explained, “When you rang the doorbell, my wife, two kids and I, had collectively decided to take poison to end our lives and free ourselves from the dire problems we are facing.” Hearing this, the devotees spoke at length about Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s teachings about the value of life. They also asked the family to come to mandir, seek advice from the sadhus and meet Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

At the mandir, sadhus and devotees supported, comforted and guided this family during a pivotal period. Their negative thoughts were eliminated and replaced with positivity. By coming to the mandir, this family gained spiritual strength and learned to see past their crisis. In this manner, by stabilizing their minds, the mandir helped to saved the lives of the family. Today, the entire family is living happily, while regularly taking part in mandir activities.

Mandirs have played a vital role in stabilizing people’s minds and giving them the inner strength to overcome the challenges of daily life.

## INSPIRING DEVOTION

Mandirs have inspired devotion in the hearts of wealthy entrepreneurs and simple villagers. Located within deep, dense forests, the tribal villages of Selvas were rampant with drugs, alcohol, misconduct and violence. The poor communities also lacked hygiene and discipline. In 2000, Makrand Mehta, a respected historian of Gujarat, was researching the work of BAPS mandirs in improving the rural communities surrounding Selvas. So, Makrand Mehta, accompanied by two other historians, visited a randomly selected village named Sorangi.

When they arrived at Sorangi, a volunteer escorted them to the local mandir and around the village. The village devotees folded their hands and paid respects to the volunteer, and warmly welcomed Makrand Mehta and his companions. The historians spoke to many devotees. They were stunned to see the transformation that had taken place in the people of this village.

When Makrand Mehta requested the volunteer to show them some homes, the volunteer accompanied Makrand Mehta to the home of a devotee. His humble hut was tidy and spotless. A





Swamishri inspires tribal villagers



A family conducts a *ghar sabha*

miniature mandir with the *murtis* of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj and the guru *parampara* was a prominent feature of the small main room. There were no signs of drugs nor alcohol anywhere in the house. A neat, small stack of books was resting in the corner. All the males of the residence had a *tilak-chandlo* on their foreheads, while the women had a *chandlo*. Noticing the wife of the devotee preparing flatbread made of rice flour, Makrand Mehta requested the woman if he could taste the flatbread. Politely, she responded, “Only after I have served it to God.” Makrand Mehta, an educated Brahmin, was awestruck that such devotional values were being practised by uneducated, common villagers.

While preparing to leave, Makrand Mehta wished to offer a monetary gift. However, Dilip Sate, a youth devotee living in Sorangi, said, “There is something thing better that you can give. Sir, you have been chewing tobacco ever since you arrived, and if you really wish to give something, then give up your addiction.” Makrand Mehta’s eyes filled with tears, as instead of giving a gift, he had received a gift of de-addiction from this youth devotee. Makrand Mehta witnessed firsthand the devout and addiction-free lives inspired in these villagers by mandirs.

## CHAITANYA MANDIRS

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was not merely a master builder of stone structures, but also a maker of mandirs within the hearts of people. In the lives of all who came in his association, Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired moral values, character, culture,

principled and disciplined living, and heartfelt devotion. Pramukh Swami Maharaj transformed people into mandirs. His devotees became living mandirs – *chaitanya* mandirs. The practices and values learned at *shikharbaddha* and *hari* mandirs became important and inseparable parts of the lives of all devotees. Even in difficult situations, devotees practise these values and duties. The following examples illustrate how mandirs have ingrained spiritual values in the lives of people of all ages and backgrounds and transformed individuals into *chaitanya* mandirs.

On a highway, Chaitanya Patel (Houston, USA) pulled over on to the shoulder lane to perform the evening *arti*.

Even while on active duty as soldiers amidst the horrors of war, Angie Amin and Meera Amin (Los Angeles, USA) never ate a morsel of food without first performing their daily puja.

Before his entire class in Westminster College, Vinal Patel (London, UK) explained to his fellow students the significance of the *tilak-chandlo*.

When his wife worked in Lumberton, son worked in Washington, and daughter studied in Raleigh, Harish Patel (Knoxville, USA) regularly set up conference calls for *ghar sabha*.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has made countless such *chaitanya* mandirs. This was his true purpose behind building mandirs across the world: to spiritually inspire people and enable them to attain ultimate liberation. These *chaitanya* mandirs live such pure, virtuous and devout lives that they are a source of inspiration to all. ♦





Swamishri firmly believed his gurus, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj, as the manifest forms of God

## The Guru Is God Manifest

**O**n 18 June 2002, in Tithal, during a special *shibir*, youths asked Pramukh Swami Maharaj, “How would you describe Shastriji Maharaj?” Swamishri immediately responded, “Bhagwan manifest. Write it down.”

Bhagwan Swaminarayan revealed, “When one has the darshan of such a Sant, one should realize, ‘I have had the darshan of God himself.’”<sup>1</sup> That is why when Swamishri was asked if he has seen God, with his hand on his heart, he emphatically said, “Yes, [I have seen God] in my gurus Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.” It was with this conviction that Swamishri told the youths to write down ‘Bhagwan manifest’ to describe Shastriji Maharaj. To further cement this sentiment he also proceeded to write it down himself. In fact, throughout his life, Swamishri served his gurus – Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj – with this conviction. To him, his gurus were the manifest

form of Bhagwan.

This is also a message that Mahant Swami Maharaj has emphasized in *shloka* 108 of the Satsang Diksha:

प्रीतिः कार्याऽऽत्मबुद्धिश्च ब्रह्माऽक्षरे गुरौ दृढा ।

प्रत्यक्षभगवद्भावात्सेव्यो ध्येयः स भक्तितः ॥

*Pritih kār्या’tma-buddhish-cha*

*brahmā’kshare gurau dradhā;*

*Pratyaksha-bhagavad-bhāvāt sevyo*

*dhyeyah sa bhaktitaha.*

One should foster intense love and *atmabuddhi* (profound attachment) for the Aksharbrahma guru. Believing the guru as the manifest form of Bhagwan, one should serve him and meditate on him with devotion.

Thus, for all genuine spiritual seekers, realizing

1. Vachanamrut Sarangpur 10





Pramukh Swami with guru Shastriji Maharaj during a *parayan*, Mumbai, 1947

one's guru to be the manifest form of Bhagwan facilitates one's devotion and service to God and guru, and enables progress on the spiritual path.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life illustrates how such understanding sustains one's spiritual endeavours.

## INTENSE LOVE

Bhagwan Swaminarayan states that if one develops intense love for the Sant, in the same way that one has for Bhagwan, then one will perform all actions according to the wishes of that Aksharbrahma Sant.<sup>2</sup> Swamishri's intense love for his gurus was his motivating force, and so serving according to their wishes was an honour for him. He viewed it as his duty to them.

In 1991, Swamishri revealed, "Since the day I came, my focus was set only on Shastriji Maharaj... Pleasing him was my only aim. It is because of this, I have not experienced any difficulties."

The early days of the Sanstha were marked by a

lack of facilities, unrelenting financial difficulties, and inadequate manpower. But, because Pramukh Swami Maharaj's focus was on Shastriji Maharaj, he did not view these as hardships. Even when his body was being put through strenuous tasks, he never viewed his condition as harsh; his only focus was pleasing Shastriji Maharaj.

During the construction of Atladara mandir, Shastriji Maharaj assigned Swamishri and others the task of preparing lime mortar. When performed by hand, it was a laborious and taxing process. The punishingly hot sun intensified the already unbearable heat generated from the limestone mixture, causing many to abandon the *seva*. As it was Shastriji Maharaj's wish, Swamishri persisted through the discomfort and potential risk. Etched in Swamishri's mind was Shastriji Maharaj's desire to complete Atladara mandir and so he was willing to work tirelessly, even if it meant that he had to risk his health to prepare exothermic mortar three times a day.

Due to repeated exposure to this intense heat, Swamishri's body became covered with blisters and rashes. Yet, he did not use his condition to excuse himself from his duty and forgo the chance to fulfil his guru's wishes.

Shortly afterwards, when Shastriji Maharaj was suffering from pneumonia, he called Swamishri to Jhadeshwar, not far from Bharuch. Upon seeing him covered in blisters, Shastriji Maharaj asked what had happened. But Swamishri remained silent; he was not concerned by his own condition. Shastriji Maharaj understood the meaning of his silence and placed his hands on Swamishri. He repeated this daily and soon the rashes and blisters disappeared. While describing this incident, Swamishri said, "Shastriji Maharaj used his illness to call me to his *seva* and cured my ailment. Such was his compassion. Anything the guru says or does is solely for our benefit."

Shastriji Maharaj then instructed Devprasad Swami, who was leading the construction

2. Vachanamrut Gadhada III 29



activities, to give Swamishri a different *seva*. On returning to Atladara, Devprasad Swami asked Swamishri to help bring stones to the mandir from the train station. Swamishri's slim build did not prevent him from following the *agna*. Describing these moments, Swamishri said, "From the beginning, I was always eager to serve. I did every task given to me, big or small."

Once, Swamishri had accompanied Devprasad Swami to retrieve the stones from the train station. "I was standing at the edge of the wagon," Swamishri described. "Harjivandas and Devprasaddas lifted the stones using a crowbar. Unknown to them, I was putting packing underneath. They suddenly released the stone and, as a result, the first two fingers of my right hand were trapped between the stone and the wagon. Due to the pain from the immense weight of the stone, I fainted instantly." Even after a two-month recovery period, Swamishri's fingernails never regrew properly. Nevertheless, undeterred by the previous injury, Swamishri rejoined the same *seva* of moving stones. When asked about this incident later, Swamishri revealed his motivation to continue such arduous tasks, "Pleasing the guru was the only goal... never did a second thought arise, like 'let us quit'." Swamishri's mentality of pleasing his gurus, no matter the hardship, was a result of his intense love for his gurus, whom he revered as the manifest form of Bhagwan.

Years later, facing a similar situation in the arid region of Makrana, where Yogiji Maharaj had sent him to quarry stones for mandir construction, Swamishri explained to his accompanying sadhu, "We have been given this *seva*, how can we abandon it? If we leave, we will have let Yogiji Maharaj down." Despite the tough circumstances, Swamishri performed every *seva* with the sole desire to fulfil the wishes of his gurus.

### ATMABUDDHI: PROFOUND ATTACHMENT

Fulfilling his gurus' wishes was always at the

forefront of Swamishri's thoughts and actions. Since he believed his gurus to be Bhagwan manifest and was profoundly attached to them, he never doubted their wishes or actions.

Such *atmabuddhi* is explained by Bhagwan Swaminarayan through an analogy of a king.<sup>3</sup> "If a king who is childless receives a son in old age, then even if that son swears at the king or misbehaves, for example, by pulling his moustache, the king would not find faults in him. Even if the son hits another child or causes problems in the village, still the king would never attribute faults to his child. Why? Because the king is profoundly attached to his son." Such was Swamishri's *atmabuddhi* towards his gurus that he understood their every action to be divine.

On 4 November 1966, devotees from Sardargadh invited Yogiji Maharaj to attend the *murti-pratishtha* of the mandir. Yogiji Maharaj usually consulted Pramukh Swami before making any decisions, but this time he directly accepted. Gunvantbhai Dani, who was present, even asked Yogiji Maharaj, "Should we not ask Pramukh Swami first?" Yogiji Maharaj remarked, "They will tell him."

When Pramukh Swami was informed by the devotees about attending, he immediately foresaw hostility, as many spiteful individuals resided near Sardargadh. As president of the Sanstha, Swamishri could have overruled Yogiji Maharaj's decision. But this was not Swamishri's way. Years earlier, when someone attempted to influence Swamishri to counter Yogiji Maharaj, Swamishri fervently responded, "I would never oppose Yogiji Maharaj's wishes." Swamishri maintained this approach when he learnt that Yogiji Maharaj had accepted the invitation to Sardargadh. Swamishri believed Yogiji Maharaj's every action to be divine and flawless.

On the day of the *murti-pratishtha*, Yogiji Maharaj, Swamishri and other sadhus reached Sardargadh. Upon arriving, Swamishri sensed the tension, and quickly organized an exit plan.





Pramukh Swami with guru Yogiji Maharaj

Following the *pratishtha*, Swamishri hurried Yogiji Maharaj towards his car. Just then, a stone came flying and shattered the windshield of a nearby car. In the commotion that followed, Yogiji Maharaj and Swamishri rushed off to Junagadh. Here, they spent the night at Pragjibhai's house. Swamishri was relieved that he was able to escort Yogiji Maharaj away safely and that Yogiji Maharaj's wish to attend the *pratishtha* was fulfilled.

When Yogiji Maharaj reached Gondal the next morning, everyone was relieved to see his safe return. They were, however, upset by the events that had occurred and senior members held a meeting to discuss the previous day's events. The first question asked was: "Who scheduled the visit despite knowing the situation in Sardargadh?" Yogiji Maharaj avoided any eye contact and said, "Pramukh Swami scheduled it. I do not know anything." Everyone turned their heads towards Swamishri, their eyes filled with fury. Seeing this situation as a test, Swamishri immediately folded his hands and said, "It was my mistake and it will not happen again." Everyone looked upon

Swamishri with utter disapproval. However, seeing Swamishri understand his wishes, Yogiji Maharaj beamed with pride.

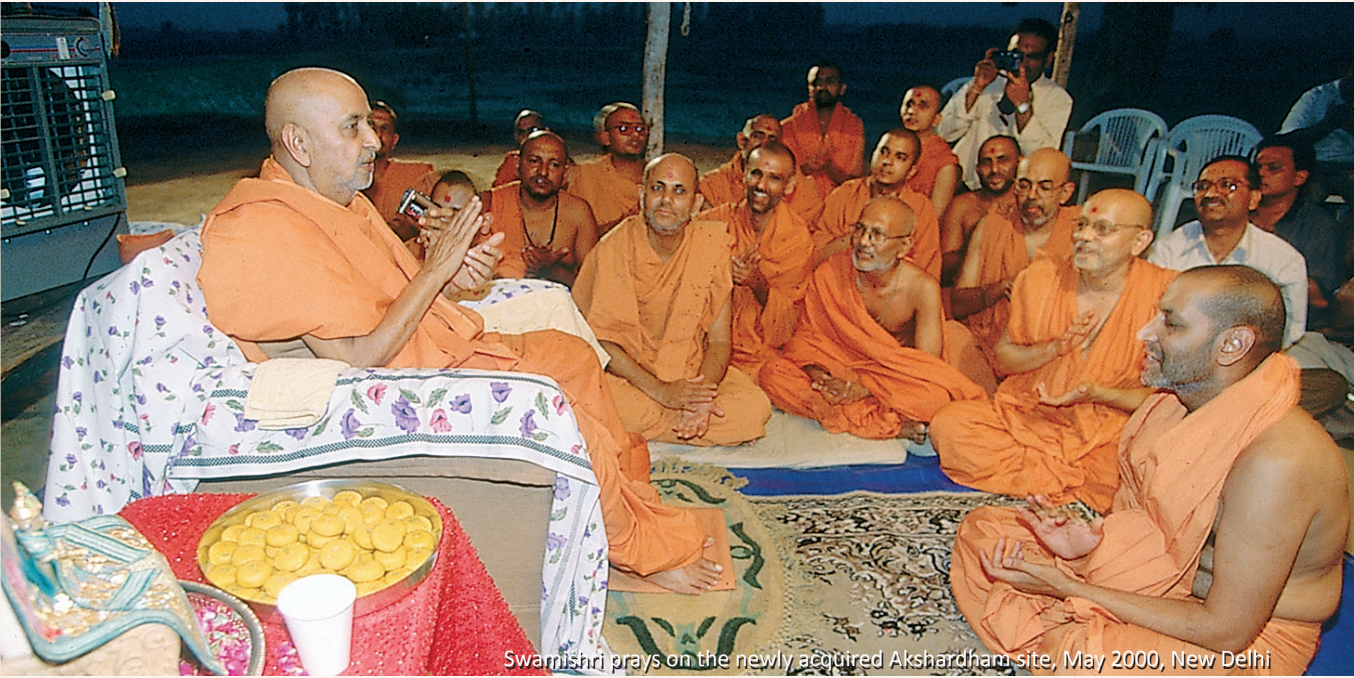
Reflecting on this incident years later, Swamishri said, "Even if I had to look bad in front of others, it was, after all, for Yogiji Maharaj. This happened occasionally during Yogiji Maharaj's time. He would unexpectedly announce, 'Pramukh Swami knows everything.' As a result, the responsibility would rest with me. But what is wrong in taking the blame on his behalf?" Swamishri's *atmabuddhi* for his divine gurus was exemplary. He harboured profound attachment towards his gurus, believing them to be flawless and the manifest form of Bhagwan.

Once, Harjivan Swami, the *kothari* of Gadhada mandir, questioned Swamishri about why he never used his authority as president of the Sanstha to change Yogiji Maharaj's decisions. Swamishri firmly answered, "I do not know of any authority beyond Yogiji Maharaj's *agna*... Therefore, do not cast any doubts on any of his decisions. Everything he does is divine." Even in challenging situations, Swamishri supported everything his gurus did. It was such *atmabuddhi* that distinguished Swamishri from others.

## MY NORTH STAR

After revealing to the youths in the Tithal *shibir* who Shastriji Maharaj was, Swamishri called them towards him and affectionately said, "We have already obtained Bhagwan manifest. If you fully understand who he truly is, then your happiness will never diminish." Swamishri taught how to serve one's guru and set an example for others through his own life. Swamishri once revealed, "Yogiji Maharaj is my North Star."

Today, Bhagwan Swaminarayan resides through Mahant Swami Maharaj; he is our North Star and guiding light. He continues to teach us that by developing profound love and intense *atmabuddhi* towards the manifest form of Bhagwan, we will experience everlasting bliss. ♦



Swamishri prays on the newly acquired Akshardham site, May 2000, New Delhi

## Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Bhajan-based Leadership

**P**ramukh Swami Maharaj's life as a guru and work as a leader are testament to his passion for bhajan. His each activity, social or spiritual, was bhajan-centric and inspired faith.

In fact, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's life and work exemplify the sentiments stated by Mahant Swami Maharaj in *shloka* 124 of the Satsang Diksha:

कुर्याद्धि भजनं कुर्वन्क्रिया आज्ञानुसारतः ।  
क्रियाबन्धः क्रियाभार क्रियामानस्ततो नहि ॥  
*Kuryāddhi bhajanam kurvan  
kriyā āgnā anusārataha;  
Kriyā-bandhah kriyā-bhāra  
kriyāmānas-tato nahi.*

One should perform tasks while engaging in devotion and according to *agna*. By doing so, one will not become attached to one's actions, be burdened by them or develop ego because of them.

This essay demonstrates Swamishri's bhajan-based leadership through the lens of just two of his innumerable projects – Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi and the BAPS Cattle Camps conducted during the 1987 famine in Gujarat. These projects reveal three aspects of the special devotion, or bhajan, innate in Swamishri's life – his natural inclination for prayer, the selfless sentiments with which he served and his faith in God's doership.

### SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM, NEW DELHI: A PROJECT DRIVEN BY PRAYER

On 6 November 2005, Swamishri inaugurated the largest Hindu mandir in the world, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi. It was the culmination of over four decades of patience, perseverance and prayer. Even after BAPS acquired the 100-acre riverside plot in 2000, after 32 years





Swamishri prays during the *mahapuja* rituals to place the first sculpted stone of the Akshardham Mandir, New Delhi, June 2001



Swamishri prays during the ritual worship of the keystone for the main dome, Swaminarayan Akshardham, New Delhi, November 2003

of persistent efforts, the project was fraught with challenges. With the land sprawled across state borders, there were a range of administrative compliance, governmental regulation and legal considerations, as well as the demanding resource and financial requirements of such a project. Yet, Swamishri guided it to success through his leadership skills and his faith in prayer in a mere five years.

Even though Shastriji Maharaj had appointed him as the president of the Sanstha in 1950, Pramukh Swami Maharaj always remained a loyal and obedient servant and *shishya* of guru Yogiji Maharaj. In 1967, Yogiji Maharaj slowly introduced a new topic into his discourses saying, “Yamunaji is waiting. We want to build a *shikharbaddha* mandir in Delhi.” Pramukh Swami made this vision his mission, with prayer as his

driving force. After Yogiji Maharaj’s passing in 1971, Pramukh Swami Maharaj encouraged local devotees to continue the search for land and himself visited Delhi on numerous occasions. His efforts commenced with and were complemented by constant prayer.

For over three decades, from concept to acquisition, not a *mahapuja* went by in which Pramukh Swami Maharaj did not pray that suitable land be found in Delhi to fulfil Yogiji Maharaj’s wish. During the annual Diwali-Annakut *mahapujas* in Gondal, the frequent ground-breaking ceremonies or *murti-pratishtha* rituals of other mandirs and on many other occasions, one prayer was always on Swamishri’s lips, “May land be acquired in Delhi and may Yogiji Maharaj’s wish be fulfilled.”

Suitable land in the eastern part of Delhi, on the banks of Yamuna, was finally acquired in the year 2000. On the day of the Posh Purnima celebration that year (21 January 2000) in Dabhan, Dharmavatsal Swami and sadhus arrived to personally deliver the great news to Swamishri. Even during this moment of tremendous joy, Swamishri immediately offered the title documents to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and prayed that Akshardham be erected on this land as soon as possible. A few months later, on 26 April, Swamshri arrived in Delhi to inspect the new land. As soon as he first set foot on it, here too, his first action was to gather the sadhus and volunteers to join together to offer prostrations to the land and pray for the unimpeded and timely construction of Akshardham.

Swamishri’s faith in prayer was so firm that it inspired others to engage in prayer themselves. After the first-stone laying ceremony on 2 June 2001, Swamishri requested all devotees to perform two extra *malas* daily for the successful completion of the Akshardham project. Devotees worldwide received this call with enthusiastically. Thereafter, for the following four years, thousands of men and women



Swamishri feeds grass to cattle at a BAPS Cattle Camp, 1987

devotees, young and old, across the globe daily joined Swamishri in this prayer.

Even as construction progressed, Swamishri's prayers continued to be an inseparable part of the project. At every milestone, at each hurdle and when unseasonable rain struck three days before the inauguration, Swamishri's prayers were incessant. And when addressing the grand opening assembly of Akshardham on 6 November 2005 in the presence of the president and prime minister of India, Swamishri said, "I pray to God that whoever sees Akshardham is inspired and experiences peace... May there be an increase in spiritual faith in all."

Each comment and action of Swamishri unveiled his propensity for prayer. The Delhi Akshardham project shows how, despite the hurdles he faced or the successes he celebrated, Swamishri remained constantly immersed in bhajan through prayer.

We now consider another activity led by Swamishri to understand other facets of his bhajan-based leadership.

## **BAPS CATTLE CAMP: SHELTERING SPIRITUAL IDEALS**

After being battered with floods in 1982 and 1983, Gujarat was then gripped with severe droughts for several years. Land was untillable and livestock was dying. Of the 34 million cattle across Gujarat, the Gujarat government later reported that some 18 million had died by the time rains arrived in 1988. At the height of the famine in 1987, BAPS organized cattle camps at four locations to assist farmers. The camps fed and tended to the cattle for over eight months, until the rains came and their owners were financially and agriculturally stable enough to support them once again. During this time, Swamishri's passion for bhajan was revealed through the sentiments behind his service to society.

Under Pramukh Swami Maharaj's leadership, what appeared to be primarily a famine-relief activity, was actually something more profound. Swamishri's clear vision and deep-rooted faith enriched the project with sincere spirituality





Swamishri performs *puja*, BAPS Cattle Camp, 1987

through his natural inclination for bhajan and bhakti.

“These are not menial efforts but a form of bhakti,” explained Swamishri. “Any service you do for these cattle is bhakti... Serving these cattle is like serving Bhagwan, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj.” Thus, Swamishri would often remind the sadhus and volunteers of this spiritual sentiment behind the service they were performing.

In Vachanamrut Gadhadra II 11, Bhagwan Swaminarayan explains, “All activities of a devotee of God are solely for serving God and his devotee. As a result, the devotee’s activities become a form of bhakti.” To Swamishri, tending to these helpless animals was the need of the hour and a service to God. He firmly believed that by serving with such an understanding, even menial tasks become a form of devotion.

It was this clarity of purpose that allowed Swamishri to remain undisturbed even in the face of baseless criticism. Once, Swamishri instructed volunteers to prepare and distribute buttermilk and *sukhdi*, a nutritious sweet, to famine-affected villages. Some misguided community leaders criticized this kind gesture saying that BAPS is hoarding stockpiles of food and other resources

while distributing only a small fraction. Such reports disheartened the volunteers. They felt hurt that despite their pure intentions, some were making such baseless claims. Many lost their motivation to continue serving. During one of his routine visits to camps in the Saurashtra region, Swamishri reminded the volunteers, “We are not helping people to win them over, but we are doing this service to please Bhagwan. Therefore, continue to serve, and ignore the criticism.” Swamishri’s words rekindled their spirits and realigned them to the objective of their service.

Another key element of Swamishri’s bhajan-centric leadership was his absolute faith in God’s all-doership. It was the reason for him accrediting all his success to God and guru and the reason for his resilience in failures or setbacks.

One hot afternoon, in the Vadodara cattle camp, the main haystack kept for livestock was completely destroyed in a fire. Swamishri arrived as soon as possible to inspect the damage. “Whatever happens is by God’s wish,” he said calmly. “He is warning us to be more cautious.” With that, Swamishri alleviated all the volunteers’ tension and steered them well clear of any blame game.

On another occasion, writing to a volunteer, Swamishri said, “Maharaj has met all our needs, and he will do so in future as well. Do not worry. Placing all the burden on Bhagwan’s shoulders allows us to remain stable, even in the face of obstacles.” These words encapsulate the understanding with which Swamishri led the BAPS Cattle Camps, and indeed all of his projects.

These brief examples of Swaminarayan Akshardham and the BAPS Cattle Camps bear witness that Swamishri performed every project or service while engaged in bhajan. His prayers, sentiments and faith reveal a distinguished, spiritual style of leadership. Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life is a testament to Satsang Diksha *shloka* 124, and his bhajan-based leadership will remain a legacy for generations to come. ♦



Swamishri addresses a Volunteers Assembly during the Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami Bicentenary Celebrations, Ahmedabad, 1985

# Honoured Yet Humble

## CONTRADICTIONARY VIRTUES

Kalidas, the classical Sanskrit author, in his epic poem, *Raghuvansha*, describes unique qualities of King Dilip in Sarg 1, verse 22:

“*Gnāne maunam kshmā shaktāo, tyāge shlāghāviparyayaha.*”

“Knowledgeable, silent, able to forgive, strong, charitable, above self-praise.”

Instead of just a simple list of virtues, Kalidas informs the reader that King Dilip brought together contradictory qualities. He was knowledgeable (*gnāne*), but without the desire to let everyone know it. Rather he was blessed with modest silence (*maunam*). In addition, the king was powerful (*shaktāo*) and capable of inflicting punishment on criminals, but he often chose to forgive (*kshmā*). His charity and detachment (*tyāge*) were free from self-praise (*shlāghāviparyayaha*). King Dilip exemplified virtues that seemingly could not coexist.

Similarly, in *shloka* 313 of the Satsang Diksha, Mahant Swami Maharaj describes two contrasting virtues that Pramukh Swami Maharaj brought together effortlessly.

विश्ववन्द्य विनम्राय गुरवे प्रमुखाय च ॥  
*Vishuvandya vinamrāya gurave  
Pramukhāya cha.*

Pramukh Swami Maharaj who is revered throughout the world, yet is ever humble.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was praised by both politicians and paupers, royalty and religious leaders, tribesmen and technocrats. Yet, despite such widespread praise and honour, Swamishri was always humble and deflected the tributes towards God and guru.

## REVERED AND RENOWNED WORLDWIDE

Measuring the praise Swamishri received is as futile as measuring the water in the ocean with



a mere cup. However, the experiences of others give an insight into how Swamishri's life touched people from different backgrounds all over the world in multiple ways.

The Solicitor General of Canada, Bob Kaplan, said, "If the world learnt from Swamishri, then it can become a place free of crime, war and terrorism, and become a more peaceful place to live."

Jain Acharya Pujya Muni Sushilkumarji hailed Pramukh Swami Maharaj's leadership, proclaiming, "He is not only the leader of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya... not only Hindu Dharma, but of all Indian society."

Head of the Ramanuj Sampradaya, Pujya Varad Yatiraj Jeer Swami, said, "By the presence of such a Sadhu, all of humanity is uplifted."

Pujya Swami Chinmayanandji, of the Chinmaya Mission, lauded, "Pramukh Swami Maharaj is a God-realized sadhu. His presence rids people of their materialistic desires."

Such was the world's exalted opinion of Swamishri's spotless character, selfless service to society and spirituality. Just as Kalidas described King Dilip as a confluence of opposing qualities, Mahant Swami Maharaj highlights that though Swamishri was praised by all, he remained ever humble.

### EVER HUMBLE... SHUNNING PRAISE

The craving for praise is intrinsic in all. Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami summarizes this in Bhaktachintamani chapter 110:

*"Evā nar najar na āve, jenā manne mān na bhāve."*

"I cannot find a single person, whose mind does not crave praise."

Pramukh Swami Maharaj, however, was not just anyone. On countless occasions throughout his life he shunned any acclaim that came his way and deflected it to others.

After Akshardham, New Delhi, opened in 2005, many lauded Swamishri for building such

a breathtaking monument. Instead of accepting this, Swamishri, adamantly attributed all the achievements and glory to guru Yogiji Maharaj.

A Sanskrit verse very eloquently describes Swamishri's dislike for praise:

*Adyāpi durnivāram stutikanyā vahati  
kaumāryam;*

*Sadbhyo na rochate sā santastasyai na rochante.*

The verse highlights the situation of an unmarried woman. Everyone wishes to marry her, but she harbours no desire to marry anyone. However, the one person she does wish to marry, does not desire her. Here, the young woman represents fame. Everyone chases fame, but she does not desire any of them. However, fame follows great sadhus such as Swamishri wherever they go. However, they do not desire it at all.

### UNFAZED BY UNIVERSAL ACCLAIM

Despite receiving so many accolades, Swamishri remained untouched by them. Just as fruit-bearing branches of a tree bow due to their weight, Swamishri, too, remained ever humble. The following incident illustrates this perfectly.

Once, the famous artist Mr M. Pandit, expressed a desire to paint a portrait of Swamishri. At Paramanandbhai Patel's residence in Mumbai, he was photographing Swamishri and requested, "Swami, please puff out your chest?" Swamishri replied instinctively, "I have never puffed out my chest."

Although the incident is simple and casual, it sheds light on the extent of Swamishri's humility and the absence of pretence in his every act. He always shunned praise; but when it came it did not affect him, nor did he accept that he was responsible for the sort of acclaim he received. Therefore, Swamishri was able to reply immediately that he had never puffed out his chest in a show of ego.

In the Mahabharat (Dhrona Parva 76.25), Shri Krishna Bhagwan explains to Arjun that great sadhus possess this unique quality:

*Dhruvā sādhusu sannatihi.*

“Great sadhus remain forever humble.”

### PRAISING OTHERS

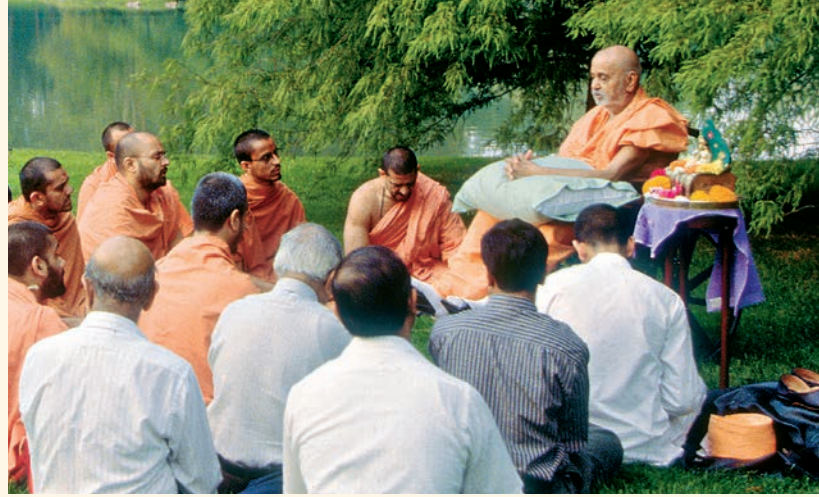
The Vishnusahasranam shastra describes Shrihari as ‘Mānadaha’ – one who bestows praise onto others.

Swamishri’s humility was of tremendous depth, because not only did he never desire the accolades and was not affected by them, but he was able to effortlessly congratulate those around him. Just as the roots of a tree send water and nutrients to each leaf through the trunk, branches, twigs and leaves, while themselves tolerating the dark underground, Swamishri tolerated untold hardships, while praising and nurturing those around him.

After his quintuple bypass operation on 7 July 1998, Swamishri recuperated in Westchester, New York. Every day, Swamishri would visit the nearby Pepsico Park, where he could walk in the fresh air and late evening sun. On the evening of 30 August, a small group of sadhus was seated with Swamishri. Discussing Yogiji Maharaj’s many virtues prompted Swamishri to praise Ishwarcharan Swami for authoring Yogiji Maharaj’s six-part *jivan charitra*. He then commended all the *sadguru* sadhus by commenting, “All the *sadgurus* are experts in their fields.” One by one, Swamishri extolled the qualities of each:

“Look at Mahant Swami. He is quiet. His saintliness. Constantly engaging in spiritual talks. His ability to tolerate hardships. Doctor Swami never tires of spiritual talks. Viveksagar Swami is an all-rounder! He is talented at everything. Spiritual talks, kirtan, *padhramani*, *sampradayik* knowledge. Tyagvallabh Swami is the image of renunciation. Kothari Bapa is ideal saintliness.”

Swamishri then remembered sadhus from each mandir: Mumbai, Selvas, Sankari, Surat... and



Swamishri at Pepsico Park, August 1998

began recalling their virtues. His mind travelled thousands of miles to India and remembered each sadhu and his virtues. He praised Yogicharan Swami’s diverse talents; he admired Yagneshwar Swami’s considerable efforts in spreading satsang in South India; he exalted Jnaneshwar Swami, Narayanmuni Swami and Aksharcharan Swami for the attention they give to training young sadhus in Sarangpur, and acclaimed Atmaswarup Swami and all the sadhus in London, UK.

Swamishri continued unabated for a staggering 70 minutes! It was only when the sun set that the sadhus realized it was time to go, but still there was no dampening Swamishri’s unrelenting enthusiasm. The conversation continued as they drove back to his residence.

Swamishri remembered so many sadhus and recalled all their virtues in such detail. Even the sadhus he remembered may not have been aware of how high a regard Swamishri had for them. After all of this, Swamishri still felt he had not said enough.

Not only sadhus, but Pramukh Swami Maharaj was able to praise his devotees. In 1985, at the conclusion of the grand 59-day bicentenary celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami, all praised Swamishri’s ability to execute such a remarkable festival.

On the final day, during the concluding



volunteers assembly, Swamishri said to the 15,000 volunteers, “Nothing is achieved by one person. This festival was a success because of all of you. Everyone contributed in their own way. We are truly blessed by God and guru. Your efforts have made this all possible. All I did was just sit on this chair...”

Swamishri praised the devotees for their selfless service and sacrifice, and claimed to have done nothing himself. However, the previous two years leading to the bicentenary celebrations highlights the depth of Swamishri’s humility.

On 5 February 1983, in Sundalpura, near Vadodara, Swamishri suffered a serious heart attack. All *vicharan* was immediately cancelled, and Swamishri rested in Vadodara until 15 May. Doctors advised Swamishri to avoid any form of exertion, speak only for short periods and eat at regular times. However, Swamishri’s journey for the next two-and-a-half years show that with nothing less than derision for his own fragile health, he broke every one of the regulations on a daily basis to prepare for and promote the bicentenary celebrations of Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami.

On 15 May 1983, Swamishri travelled to Mumbai. Soon after, his *vicharan* continued throughout Gujarat for the remainder of the year. In 1984, Swamishri travelled to Africa, then to UK and Europe. He then crossed the Atlantic and touched down in New York. For the next 125 days, Swamishri’s relentless *vicharan* took him across the USA and Canada. He then crossed the Pacific and visited devotees in Fiji, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Bangkok, and Singapore.

After returning to India, Swamishri continued his hectic schedule. In March 1985, Swamishri visited the Middle East for 25 days and then returned to India. Then, in June, he left for a 44-day stay in London. Thereafter, Swamishri returned to India for the 59-day bicentenary celebrations of Gunatitanand Swami from 19 October 1985 in Ahmedabad.

In this period of 888 days (from 15 May 1983 to 19 October 1985), Swamishri visited a dizzying 737 villages, towns and cities worldwide. This ranged from cosmopolitan cities such as London and New York, to villages in Gujarat, such as Dangra and Bhilpura. He travelled in everything from a bullock cart to international flights. The physical difficulties Swamishri endured defy belief. During his *vicharan*, there was only one certainty – that nothing was certain. His rest and meal times were erratic. The 20 *padhramanis* scheduled in the morning would become a 100 in the blink of an eye. Just as a flag flies in the direction of the wind, Swamishri’s *vicharan* was determined purely by the wishes of his devotees.

During this time, Swamishri travelled a staggering 133,404 km. To put this into context, in 888 days, Swamishri, circled the globe more than three times!

Such was Swamishri’s humility that despite his immeasurable efforts, he could openly praise his devotees for the outstanding success of the festival.

### ALL THE PRAISE IS NOT ENOUGH...

There was not an aspect of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s life that did not touch someone. Some were impressed by his humanitarian work, while others were moved by his spotless character. His mandir-building or how he inspired youths to renounce worldly ambitions astounded many. Others were left speechless when they witnessed his devotion to God and his gurus. The mountains of praise Swamishri received bears testament to this. Amidst this, he remained untouched by ego, in fact he shunned the tributes, and was even able to shower praise on everyone else. His life was a pinnacle of humility. ♦



Celebratory feast arranged on Eid, Morbi, August 1979

## Ceaseless Compassion

**I**t was an unforgettable day: 17 August 2016. Rainless clouds scurried across the sky. The only water that poured was that which gushed forth from the eyes of mourners. The air was filled with the sound of gusting wind and thousands weeping. The fire crackled loudly from the funeral pyre as they watched in grief. The world bid farewell to a great personality on this day. Men and women of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds flocked to Sarangpur. They all shared one common desire – to have one final darshan of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

The love and friendship that echoed from the wide spectrum of people gives a glimpse into Pramukh Swami Maharaj's unconditional love for others, playing an integral role in the lives he touched. It was a reflection of his *suhradbhav* towards all.

In the words of Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji

of the Divine Life Society, there was an “aura of saintliness, brotherhood and world harmony radiating around him.” This very sentiment is reflected by Mahant Swami Maharaj in *shloka* 140 of the Satsang Diksha:

सत्सङ्गिषु सुहृद्भावो दिव्यभावस्तथैव च।  
अक्षरब्रह्मभावश्च विधातव्यो मुमुक्षुणा॥

*Satsangishu suhrad-bhāvo  
divya-bhāvas-tathaiva cha;  
Aksharabrahma-bhāvash-cha  
vidhātavyo mumukshunā.*

*Mumukshus should keep suhradbhav,  
divyabhav and brahmabhav towards  
satsangis.*

Yogiji Maharaj propagated the virtue of *suhradbhav* – fraternity – as an all-encompassing, crown jewel of spiritual endeavours. It was this quality of Pramukh Swami Maharaj which endeared him not only to his devotees, but also to





Swamishri encourages BAPS volunteers during the Morbi Dam Relief Services, August 1979

individuals from many walks of life. Swamishri's *suhradbhav* for all enabled him to build bridges and meaningful relationships with people of all backgrounds. With such *suhradbhav* he was able to serve as an ever-loving parent, caring friend, and forgiving leader.

### EVER-LOVING PARENT

The strongest experience children have is the love from their parents. Bhaskar Mehta of Bharuch, lost his father at a young age. However, this gap was filled by Swamishri, who regularly mentored Bhaskar through important decisions in his life and showered him with fatherly love.

One such decision was his marriage. Despite Swamishri's hectic schedule, he guided Bhaskar in planning his new future. Swamishri aided in the search of a suitable companion for Bhaskar and helped plan the wedding details. Just as a father would, Swamishri coordinated with Bhaskar and the family of his fiancée, Snehal, arranging

everything from the wedding date to invitations, and the menu to marriage rituals.

However, Bhaskar faced a major hurdle – financing the wedding. Overwhelmed with tension, he met Swamishri regarding his financial challenge. Swamishri reassured him, “Don't worry about the wedding. I am coming to Bharuch soon. I will arrange your wedding during my visit and take care of everything.” One can imagine how comforted Bhaskar must have felt upon hearing these words.

True to his promise, Swamishri instructed sadhus and devotees to assist in organizing the wedding. When the wedding day arrived, both Bhaskar and Snehal were left speechless. There was a great amount of detail paid to the wedding decoration and arrangements. Both families celebrated this memorable occasion with joy and gratitude. Swamishri, who oversaw the entire wedding, filled the void of a father for Bhaskar, who lost his father before he had learned to walk and the bride who had lost her father to a fatal accident. Bhaskar and Snehal's eyes filled with tears as their hearts danced with joy.

### EVER-CARING FRIEND

The sun and the rain do not discriminate as they shine and shower for one and all. Similarly, Pramukh Swami Maharaj's affection not only reached individuals, but also comforted communities. Many witnessed this in Morbi after a disaster struck the city in 1979.

Incessant rainfall led to a deluge, causing the collapse of the nearby Machhu Dam. The destruction was overwhelming. Streets drowned in the debris of battered buildings and were filled with the pungent stench of rotting corpses. Displaced, destitute and despondent, the people of Morbi were in a state of confusion. To aid in the relief effort, Swamishri urged volunteers to make their way to Morbi, and within a short time, over 1,500 sadhus and volunteers were mobilized. On 22 August 1979, Swamishri visited



Prayer Assembly, Swaminarayan Akshardham, Gandhinagar, 29 September 2002

the tragedy-inflicted individuals and selfless volunteers in Morbi. Seeing thousands of lives and livelihoods washed away, his eyes welled with tears.

During these catastrophic times, Swamishri worked in unity with other relief organizations to help restore normalcy in Morbi. Swamishri was notified of the forthcoming Islamic holiday, Eid. This marks an important day for Muslims as they gather for a communal feast to bring unity within their community, but the flooding removed any hope of celebrating Eid. However, a student-volunteer from Vadodara, Shri Iqbalbhai recalls, “Someone told Swamishri that the Eid festival was in four days time. Swamishri immediately instructed Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, who was in charge of the kitchen, that we should not serve a simple meal to our Muslim brothers on Eid. We should offer them special sweets such as *jalebis*. Swamishri asked volunteers to make announcements around the town regarding the festivities. He also selected an open ground for the grand feast and gathered sadhus and

volunteers to prepare for the celebrations. When informed that mosques were filled with mud and mire, he instructed volunteers to clean every mosque in Morbi. He even personally visited the mosques to check the cleaning efforts and other arrangements.”

The Eid celebrations not only brought joy to the people of Morbi, but also highlighted Swamishri’s cordial and harmonious nature. Swamishri’s sentiments were echoed by the Bishop of Saurashtra and Kutch, Reverend Dr Jose, who eulogized, “Pramukh Swami Maharaj believed that we are all God’s [children], we are all one humanity, and we are to live as brothers and sisters. He always respected other religions and considered everybody as God’s own people, loving and serving them.”

### EVER-FORGIVING LEADER

Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s selfless acts in 1979 were not mere gestures of kindness, but they were a testament to his genuine belief in unifying people.



A tragedy unfolded on 24 September 2002. A day which stands witness to Swamishri's ability to forgive others, sustain *suhradbhav* and preserve peace. At 4:50 p.m., Swamishri was in Sarangpur in a meeting discussing BAPS earthquake relief work in Bhuj. Suddenly, he was interrupted with an emergency phone call alerting him of a terrorist attack on Swaminarayan Akshardham in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. Swamishri was composed as he received the heartbreaking news. He turned to prayer and urged those around him to also pray for the lives of the victims and hostages inside the campus.

As a religious leader, whose decision had the potential to weaken or strengthen interfaith harmony, Swamishri appealed for all to preserve peace throughout Gujarat and India at a very critical time. Without Swamishri's peaceful response – later coined the 'Akshardham Response' – communal violence may have ensued. Swamishri's instinctive reaction reveals his distinct qualities of encouraging forgiveness, tolerance and solidarity.

A few days after the attack when Swamishri visited Akshardham, he sanctified the grounds with rose petals and prayed for the victims. Then he asked to be taken to where the terrorists were shot down by the commandos. Stunned, everyone watched Swamishri also pray for the souls of the terrorists. This was his profound spirit of compassion, untainted by hostility or resentment.

Pardoning. Forgiving. Merciful. Words fall short when trying to describe Pramukh Swami Maharaj. To love those who hate is the epitome of *suhradbhav*, which Swamishri wholly embodied.

It is for this reason that so many gathered on 17 August 2016 to bid their final farewell. On that day, an Urdu poet's heart took form in the words:

"Swamishri was an angel who came to this Earth to spread love amongst humankind...

He never saw us as Hindus, Muslims, Sikh, or Christians.

To him, all humans were equal, and he was helpful to all as his kith and kin."<sup>1</sup>

## HIS LEGACY

Ultimately, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was a trusted ear and revered voice for countless people, and his life of *suhradbhav* stirred not only the hearts of his followers, but also of men and women across the globe. His endearing nature touched the lives of many, including:

18-year-old Tilak Desai, who felt insecure and alone as he acclimatized to a new country, found a father in Swamishri through his counselling.

Dutch Nationals Han Kop and Jeanette Groenen, who despite being from a different culture, language and generation, took to Swamishri like a childhood friend.

Former President of India, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, an inspiration to millions of youths across India, saw Swamishri as a leader driven by compassion and as his own 'ultimate guru'.

Swamishri's divine love cut across barriers of young and old, poor and rich, and educated and illiterate. He believed in the worth of all people and dedicated himself to serving those in need. Swamishri's life teaches us how our common humanity binds us together and of our responsibility to love and care for one another in the world we share. This is his legacy, the gift of *suhradbhav*, which lives on today through his successor, Mahant Swami Maharaj. ♦

1. *Ek farishtā āyā thā aura dīl me samā ke chalā gayā...*

*Na Hindū kā, na Muslim kā, na vah Sikh Isāī kā; har insān hain usako barābar madadagār har bhāī kā.*

# Perceiving All to Be Equal (Samdrashta) Part 2

*Pramukh Swami Maharaj perceived  
people of all classes, religions,  
countries and climes to be equal.  
He abundantly showered his  
compassion, love and respect upon all*

Once, a poor devotee came to offer a donation. Swamishri enquired about his income. The devotee replied, “I’ll pay the amount by begging if necessary.” Swamishri was pleased with his spirit to serve and remarked to the swamis around him, “Look, how much faith he has!” Then, in spite of his insistence to donate the sum he wished, Swamishri explained to him and finally convinced him to reduce his donation.

The devotees of Rajkot came to Swamishri to pledge their donations for the mandir construction project in Rajkot. At that time, Dahya Bhagat, an old devotee, came. Swamishri asked him, “What do you do for a living?” He replied, “I work as a watchman in a factory.” Considering his measly earnings Swamishri said no to his donation. However, Dahya Bhagat insisted and donated ₹101. Swamishri said, “His *seva* is like that of Dubli Bhatt.”

Once, Swamishri was about to depart from Bochasan mandir. The devotees rushed near to him to have his last darshan. But Manibhai of Thasra, who was blind, remained seated where he was. Swamishri saw him, went up to him and placed his hand on his head. Manibhai was surprised and asked, “Who is it?”

“I am Pramukh Swami.” On hearing Swamishri’s voice he was deeply moved. “Oh, Swami!” he exclaimed in a voice choked with emotions. He was so overwhelmed that he could not utter any more words. Everyone around understood Manibhai’s heartfelt emotions and realized that Swamishri belongs to all.

Yes, everyone felt that Pramukh Swami Maharaj was theirs. He never differentiated between people regarding their caste, colour, religion or wealth. That is why Mamdibhai of Botad, who was fasting in the month of Ramzan, requested for *prasad* from Swamishri to conclude his fast. At that time, Swamishri did not have *prasad* with him. However, on reaching his next destination, Paliyad, Swamishri sent *prasad* to him. Mamdibhai was overwhelmed and brimmed



with joy. Swamishri respected everyone, and everyone also respected him.

Swamishri once visited the town of Chhota Udepur in the Panchmahal district of Gujarat. On his previous visit, Rasul had served as his driver. On not seeing Rasul, Swamishri enquired about him. When someone informed that he had retired from work, Swamishri asked a volunteer to call him. When Rasul came Swamishri told him, “I have been remembering you since we entered the town.” Rasul was touched by Swamishri’s love for an ordinary person like him, and as he bowed he broke down, sobbing profusely.

In Mombasa, Swamishri was travelling in J.C. Patel’s car to his accommodation. J.C. Patel requested Swamishri to give him a *kanthi* for his African servant. Then, he decided to halt his car by his servant’s house and the servant would come and wear the *kanthi* at Swamishri’s hands. This arrangement would avoid giving Swamishri any physical strain. When they reached the house J.C. Patel got out to call his servant. Swamishri also got out of the car and came to the servant’s house. The servant, who was wearing shorts and cleaning his house, was surprised to see Swamishri. He ran to an inside room to change his clothes. Swamishri called out, “Where has he gone? Tell him Swami has come for him.” When he came, Swamishri placed the *kanthi* around his neck and inspired him to give up liquor and meat.

In 1974, Swamishri had gone for a *padhramani* at Chandubhai Patel’s home in London. His neighbour, Mr Stringer, came in. While getting acquainted with him, Swamishri learnt that his sons had left him. Mr Stringer was living a solitary and unhappy life. Swamishri instructed Chandubhai to look after him. Then, at Mr Stringer’s request, Swamishri also sanctified his home next door. Ten years later, in 1984, when Swamishri was in London, Mr Stringer came to the mandir for his darshan. Swamishri instantly recognized him and blessed him. Mr Stringer thanked Swamishri because Chandubhai,

on his instruction, was still taking care of him. Swamishri’s care and compassion extended to people of all countries and cultures.

Once, after his evening walk in Navsari, Swamishri started scattering sanctified flowers on Thakorbbhai’s land. At that time a woman tending cows came running towards Swamishri for darshan and to offer one rupee at his feet. Since she was unaware of the disciplines of Swaminarayan sadhus the devotees stopped her. Swamishri instantly perceived the situation from the movements of the devotees and sent Thakorji with a devotee so that she could have darshan. The lady was happy and satisfied with Thakorji’s darshan and offered one rupee at the *murti*’s holy feet.

In spite of Swamishri’s strict observance of Shriji Maharaj’s *niyams* he never disrespected or insulted anyone. The women devotees fully understood and respected Swami’s disciplines and that was why they happily offered their beloved young sons to be initiated as sadhus at his holy hands.

Any person who superficially observes the ocean will not be able to appreciate it fully. However, anyone who dives deep into it gets pearls and understands the true worth or greatness of the ocean. Similarly, Swamishri’s life was deep like an unfathomable ocean. Only those who dived deep into his life could realize Swamishri’s greatness and universality.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj was as much for the poor as he was for the rich. He respected both the higher class as well as the backward class, poor and rich, and literate and illiterate. Swamishri perceived the true form of all beings as *atmas*. The art of equality could be learnt from him. Swamishri once introduced Hira Bharwad, a cowherd serving in Sarangpur mandir, to an affluent devotee, Shri Harshadbhai Rana of Nairobi. Swamishri had equal respect, honour and love for both.

Once, the Patels and leaders of Sankari village



Swamishri cared for and fulfilled the devotion of the tribal devotees

came to meet Swamishri. Though they lived comfortable and luxurious lives they were addicted to cigarettes and liquor. Swamishri explained to them about the harmful consequences of addictions and inspired them to quit altogether. When the village youths came to meet Swamishri, he also de-addicted them and gave each a puja to perform daily. That same evening, when Swamishri was going from his accommodation to the nearby Sankari mandir, he saw some poor labourers sitting idly on top of a wall. Swamishri stopped, but they were inattentive and uninterested. Swamishri called out to them, saying, “Jai Swaminarayan.” They looked at Swamishri and Swamishri addressed them, “All of you should come daily to the mandir for darshan. The mandir is not only for Patels, but for all. If you come to the mandir for a short time and do bhajan, you will be relieved of your fatigue due to your day’s labour. I am pained because you do not take the benefit of attending the mandir. Give up your addictions. The monsoon is in the offing. If your houses are not in good condition

they will collapse. Houses start leaking during the rainy season, you feel cold during winter and hot in summer. Because of your addictions you have invited miseries. No matter how much I or the government help you, your money will be lost in addictions and you’ll always remain poor. Nor will you be able to improve your huts or will your children be able to study. And, to the contrary, if you save money by giving up addictions your children will be able to wear good clothes, study and progress. Then, they will also be useful to you. I am not asking for money from you, but when you come to the mandir and fold your hands before God it will be equivalent to lakhs of rupees to me.”

In God’s home, there is no discrimination between a farmer and a millionaire. However, when someone does not pray to God and spoils his life by smoking and drinking, Swamishri became pained and unhappy. A mandir is open to all. Swamishri was also for all. That was why Swamishri made equal efforts for all and visited every hut and farm in the tribal regions of





He visited the mud-huts of the poor and liberated them from addictions

Gujarat. Swamishri de-addicted them by telling them to remove the pots of liquor in their huts and also inspired them to adopt a vegetarian diet. Due to Swamishri's and his swamis' efforts there are satsang centres in 41 out of 72 villages in the Dadra-Nagar Haveli region of Gujarat. There are mandirs in many of these villages. In the backward areas of Panchmahal, 35,000 tribals have become *satsangis*, living addiction-free and contented lives. Two BAPS students' hostels, in Pavi Jetpur and Ukai, provide free accommodation and inspire a value-based life in hundreds of children. As a result, tribal children and youths have never lagged in successfully participating in the Sanstha's *bal mahotsavs*, *yuva mahotsavs* and festival celebrations.

Swamishri's and his swamis' efforts in inculcating values and providing education to tribal children have inspired them to transform their parents to become vegetarians and live addiction-free lives. Such life transformations have also taken place in the lives of countless

fishermen. The fishermen living by the shores of Valsad district had a tradition of drinking liquor when their relatives passed away. But after adopting satsang the fishermen youths introduced the custom of drinking milk instead of liquor.

Harishbhai, the son of a reputed and wealthy devotee, Shri I.K. Patel, resides in London, UK. Due to the satsang values he practises, Harishbhai refused to serve alcoholic drinks in his own marriage party. Such sincere observance of satsang *niyams* was due to Swamishri's association.

Once, Swamishri was doing *padhramanis* in the straw huts of tribals in Sindubar. Swamishri observed and revealed, "Look at how clean the dishes, utensils and water pots are. The front yard is also spick and span." Swamishri was quick to see and appreciate whatever was good in the tribal homes. On another occasion Swamishri said to an assembly of tribals in Pavi Jetpur, "I see God in you all."

Swamishri rarely talked about his own virtues, methods or insights. But his words revealed his

perception of equality towards all. He saw God in everyone. To accept a human as a human and to see a human in a human being is humanism. But to see God in a human is divinity. This is the highest perception and state of seeing others with equality.

After meeting many persons for the opening ceremony of the Parikshit Majmudar Ashram in Navsari, the leading members of the Harijan society came to Swamishri and asked, “We have invited many spiritual leaders to inaugurate our ashram, but no one has said yes. Will you come?” Swamishri agreed instantly. And the ashram was ritually declared open at Swamishri’s hands. On another occasion, Jethabhai remarked to his friend Atmarambhai, a Harijan devotee residing in Ahmedabad, “Pramukh Swami will never come to our pilgrim place in Jhanjharka!” Atmarambhai replied, “Pramukh Swami never differentiates between high and low castes. He visits everywhere.” Atmarambhai met Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who was departing from Ahmedabad on his onward *vicharan*, and invited him to come to Jhanjharka. Two years later, Swamishri was in Limbdi and he informed that he wished to visit Jhanjharka and do darshan at the Savgunnath Mandir. The mandir is the main spiritual seat of the Harijan community. Swamishri did darshan at the mandir, met Mahant Baldevdasji and addressed an assembly.

On many occasions Swamishri had sanctified the homes of the Harijan community. He used to say, “God belongs to one who worships him.” He sanctified the homes of low caste people in Ramodadi village and preached to them about refraining from addictions and observing moral purity. Many even wore *kanthis* and took moral pledges from Swamishri. A few days later, some of them came to the Bochasan mandir for Swamishri’s darshan. They were practising the *niyams* they had pledged. When Swamishri came to know of this he expressed his *rajipo* and said, “I am happy to know that you are observing the

*niyams*. May you remain firm in following them. Work with integrity and also with great effort. God will provide food and peace in your lives.”

Swamishri endeavoured to usher in a silent and peaceful revolution. One would never find a tinge of anger, impetuosity, obstinacy or contempt in his life and manner of serving all. Swamishri believed in transforming lives to introduce positive changes in society. Hence, the roots of such a revolution, which occurred with a determined and slow pace, were deep and intangible on the surface. But only this type of revolution generated strong, sustainable results and has continued to do so.

The case of Chhagan, a Harijan of Thikariya village, is different altogether. His praises reached the shores of USA through the speeches of swamis. Though Chhagan was poor, using a broken earthen plate for cooking, his spirit of joy in satsang was ever buoyant. So many devotees have been inspired by his exalted state. It was Swamishri who truly transformed Chhagan into a true Harijan – votary of God.

Swamishri’s equanimity and inclination to do good for all had worked wonders in reforming hardcore criminals like Rishubha Vala of Tadaja, Ramsangh Bapu of Odarka, Manu Dada of Ghelapur, Dalubhai of Karcheliya and many others. All of them experienced that Swamishri never spurned others, boasted about reforming others, spoke to intimidate others or talked down to others. They were touched by his simple discourses and transparent life and thus surrendered themselves at his feet. In meeting Swamishri, they experienced a dramatic transformation in their own lives.

Meeting Swamishri seemed routine, not something special or unique. Yet, even notorious people or people renowned for their successes in various fields were awestruck and bowed to him. When we think about this we are puzzled by questions like, what method did he employ to change them? What did he talk about? How did



he behave and with what things did he impress others? On analyzing, one finds that he did not talk in a unique way; in fact, he talked ordinarily and still left a profound and enduring impact. He behaved naturally and with his usual equipoise on meeting important people or on special occasions. This was what was special about him. In all situations, his demeanour was one of ease and tranquillity.

Swamishri was never overwhelmed by or frightened of anyone, because he never desired for honour nor was he affected by insult. He also did not have any desires to enjoy the worldly objects. He was never insistent or obstinate about doing any particular work and neither did he expect the laurels of accomplishing any work. He did not have any faulty nature at all nor boast about his infinite virtues.

Once, Swamishri was sitting with *satsangi* youths in London. The conversation was about Swamishri's childhood years and his birthplace, Chansad. At that time Swamishri revealed, "There is no birthplace [for me], so where lies the question of remembering it? For me there is no London, no house... nothing. I have kept Bhagwan and that is enough. I do bhajan and inspire others to do bhajan."

In Mumbai, a youth asked Swamishri, "How does Bhagwan Swaminarayan talk to you?" Swamishri replied explicitly, "The same way you are talking to me." Swamishri was God-realized and that was the essence of his life and work, and the source of his infinite virtues. He harboured no differences or prejudices towards anyone. He not only wished for the good of others, but did his best for them. Once, Swamishri replied, "I have never ever thought of hurting anyone."

There had been cases where some spiteful or prejudiced people made false accusations about Swamishri, but Swamishri never spoke against or responded bitterly to them. Sometimes, when the devotees became agitated, Swamishri would calm them and wished for the good of his detractors.

In 1977, certain opponents in Gadhada had hatched a sinister plot to put Swamishri behind bars. They persuaded a police sub-inspector to go and arrest Swamishri at the Gadhada mandir. When the police inspector came Swamishri was doing darshan in the mandir. The inspector declared to Swamishri that he was under arrest. In response, Swamishri stood patiently and calmly. Then, someone asked the inspector for the official arrest warrant. The inspector did not have it. On making enquiries by phone at the central police department in Gandhinagar it became known that no such order had been issued. The plot was exposed. The police sub-inspector became anxious and thought about what would happen to his career. Swamishri, however, spoke to him cordially and invited him for lunch. Swamishri made sure the inspector's seat was arranged near to his own. While eating, Swamishri took care that the inspector was served properly. The inspector was touched by Swamishri's forbearance and large-heartedness. A few years later, the person who had plotted the arrest came to meet Swamishri in Sarangpur with a request for help. Swamishri met him and fulfilled his request to help one of his acquaintances. Everyone was astonished by Swamishri's magnanimity and generosity. To forgive someone or not retaliate for a wrong action is understandable, but to respect a malicious person's request in the same manner that one respects a friend's is beyond the ken of human imagination. Only a God-realized soul can do this.

Swamishri's perception and actions of equality towards all reflect his great, divine personality. His love, care and respect for all will forever remain as a beacon of inspiration for generations to come.

Gujarati text from *Brahmopanishad*:

Sadhu Narayanmunidas

Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas



# SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

*Translation of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's discourses in  
Gujarati printed in Swaminarayan Prakash, July 2015*

*“Harijan thaine, harijan thaine,  
Hān-varadh sukh-dukh manmā nav dhārie.”*

Meaning: “Being a devotee, do not be affected by damage or growth, happiness or misery in one’s mind.”

The above verse is from a bhajan by Muktanand Swami. In the entire bhajan, Muktanand Swami mentions about the virtues of patience and tolerance in devotees. He describes the pains and difficulties that some devotees had faced, yet they displayed forbearance. Muktanand Swami explains that a devotee, no matter what amount of destruction, pain, material growth or happiness comes his way, he should not become miserable or overjoyed.

Many times we question that we are

devotees of God, *satsangis*, deliver spiritual discourses, do bhajan and *seva*, yet why do we have difficulties and problems? We believe in our mind that there should be no difficulties for one who does bhakti. But when we look at the examples mentioned in this bhajan (by Muktanand Swami), we find that devotees have to undergo trials and tribulations.

Who or what is tested? Is brass ever put to the acid test to check its validity? No, but gold is! Though gold is gold, yet it has to face the test! And brass is brass, but it is never put to the test. Similarly, those who are good or righteous in the world are put to the test. You look at the stories of people (in history) and you will find that God’s devotees and good people have faced





problems and trials in their lives. Even great sages and divine incarnations have faced miseries.

In short, we will also face problems and trials in life or issues and hurdles will arise. At that time be patient and do not lose courage. Do not be confused and frustrated when miseries and pain befall us; remember God. When we face losses or problems at work or in our activities, believe it to be God's wish.

Bhagwan is the all-doer. Gunatitanand Swami says in his discourses that Bhagwan is the all-doer. With this understanding enjoy whatever happiness comes our way, and also accept whatever misery befalls us. Be firm about the belief that whatever God does is for our good.

The nature of *sansar* (the world) is such that no matter how spiritually knowledgeable, meditative or worshipful we may be, all experience problems and miseries. But the devotees of God take God's strength, remain patient and keep doing their work.

Muktanand Swami explains by giving a wonderful example. He says, "*Juo Pandav Prabhu ne ati pyārā!*" The Pandavs were very dear to Bhagwan Krishna. They all lived with him and followed whatever he instructed. Despite all this, they had to roam in the forest for 14 years. If

Bhagwan had so wished, couldn't their miseries have been solved? But in spite of Bhagwan being with them the Pandavs had to bear the miseries. What a devastating war they had to fight and how much pain and suffering they had to bear?

This is known as a trial!

In such testing situations if our understanding and bhakti remain robust, then know that God is pleased with us. When we are firm in this way, God takes care of us. Shriji Maharaj has spoken in the same vein and Nishkulanand Swami similarly writes in the Bhaktachintamani:

*"Sukh dukh āve sarve bhelu, temā rākhjo sthir mati,*

*Jālavish mārā janne, atishe jatan kari."*

"Keep your mind calm when joys and miseries come together, I will take great care of my devotees."

We must understand that there is misery in worldly happiness. Gunatitanand Swami says, "Whatever happiness lies in *maya* is not without misery." Muktanand Swami has written in another verse, "*Rājā bhi dukhiyā, rank bhi dukhiyā, dhanpati dukhit vikār me...*" – "A king is unhappy, a pauper is unhappy and a wealthy person is also unhappy in worldly things..."

In the past, the kings in India had vast

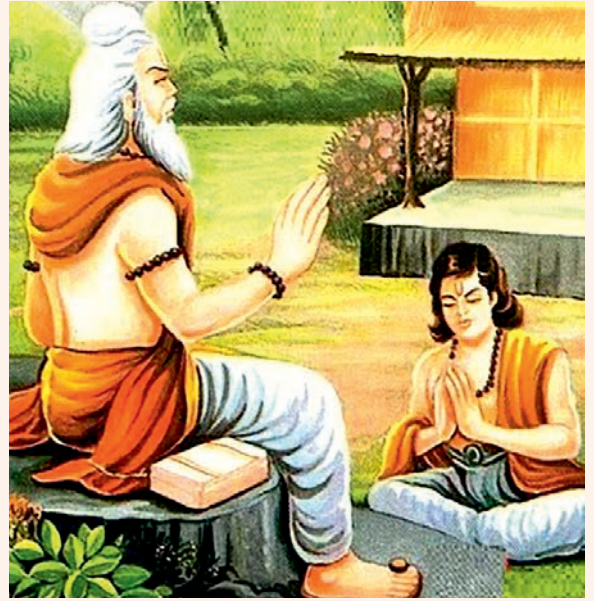
kingdoms, but they were still unhappy and miserable. The reason being their desire to expand their kingdoms. Subsequently, they were always engaged in conflicts and wars with others.

The poor, who don't have anything, are also miserable. Their conundrums are about where to stay, what to eat and what to do? Thus, they spend their whole lives in misery and pain. And those who have lots of wealth are also miserable.

You may wonder how a rich man is miserable. It is not true that when a person gains large amounts of money he becomes very happy. He, too, worries about where to deposit it, how to invest it, what if thieves come and what if the government takes it away? So, in spite of having money the rich are plagued by many such thoughts and remain miserable and unable to enjoy whatever happiness they have. Some, in spite of having money, are unable to use it for good purposes. I have seen many millionaires and billionaires appear outwardly happy, but unfortunately they suffer from some misery related to their *sansar*, family or society.

Then who is happy? Those who are renunciants or saffron-clad? Muktanand Swami says, "*Binā vivek bhekh sab dukhiyā*" – "Without *vivek* [discrimination between right and wrong] even renunciants are unhappy."

Those who have renounced the world are unhappy if they do not have *vivek*. One who has renounced home, wealth and everything, but if he desires, "It would be nice if I get this," then he will not be happy. Furthermore, when an ascetic starts amassing property and other things even after having renounced everything, then, is he not inviting problems for himself? From possessing a mere needle he creates his own *sansar*. The reason behind it is that he lacks *vivek*. One who has *vivek* never seeks for something he has renounced. When one has understood all worldly things to be temporary and destructible then how can one have desires for them? Without *vivek* countless have become miserable and unhappy. An ascetic



who has nothing has no fear of being robbed, however one who has possessions, fears.

Himda and Khimda were two ascetics who wore only loincloths. While they were travelling from one place to another they arrived at a village. They lay down to sleep at night at the village square. However, there were lots of mosquitoes harassing them, so they tried to ward them off by waving their hands. At that time a thief came, thinking that the ascetics had valuables to steal. So, he started searching Khimda. Then, Bhimda told Khimda, "Send the thief to me so that he can get rid off the mosquitoes troubling me."

How can such renunciants, who have nothing, get robbed?

Once, there was a guru and a disciple. The disciple was good and pious. The guru had a gold brick and some other things in his cloth bag (*jholi*). Once, while they were walking through a jungle their journey became difficult. The guru asked his disciple, "Disciple, have a look whether there is anything to fear."

The disciple replied, "There is nothing to fear. All is well here." After walking a little further the guru asked again, "Disciple, have a look over there to see whether there is anything to fear." The disciple answered, "There is nothing to fear,



so let us keep on moving.” So, they continued ahead. However, after every few kilometres, the guru asked repeatedly, “Is there anything to fear or not?” The disciple felt that there must be some reason behind his guru’s persistent enquiries. When the guru was not present for a short while, the disciple searched his *jholi* and found gold and money. The disciple threw them away in a nearby well.

Both then resumed their journey and after travelling for some time, the guru asked again, “Is there any fear?” The disciple replied, “Yes, there was fear and I threw it in the well.” The guru asked, “What?” The disciple advised, “As an ascetic why do you keep fear with you? The things that you were afraid to lose were themselves the root of fear. So, I threw them into the well. One who keeps only Bhagwan with him has peace and happiness.”

In this way when an ascetic harbours worldly desires and things, then he too is unhappy and miserable. By merely renouncing home one cannot be liberated. A lot more is required to renounce after giving up one’s home. One has to give up ego, jealousy, anger and material desires. A householder, too, has to become free from material desires. Only when an ascetic and a householder devotee become free from material desires can they attain God’s divine abode. Through spiritual understanding a householder has to give up his worldly desires from his soul.

Muktanand Swami says that whoever harbours such worldly desires is unhappy and miserable. Then who is happy? The answer, “*Sant sukhi sansār me,*” – “A Sant [true saint] is happy.”

A Sant has no desires and expectations for anything in this world. He is happy only by attaining the bliss of God. He is satisfied and happy with whatever he gets by God’s wish. He remains unruffled whether he gets or does not get anything. He remains happy towards those who give him and also for those who do not give him anything.

The causes of misery and pain lie in having worldly wishes and expectations. As long as one has worldly wishes there will be miseries. One who has ₹5,000, desires for ₹10,000. Subsequently, he is unable to enjoy the ₹5,000 he has, and because of his worry and goal to acquire ₹10,000 he starts manipulating and deceiving others. This consequently invites more misery.

Nobody’s desires have ever been completely satisfied and will ever be so. Acquire things only according to one’s needs. It’s fine if we get them, but believe it to be God’s wish if we do not get them. Make efforts or work hard, but do not become obsessed about them. Never forget God while making efforts and also thereafter. We become happy through God’s blessings and powers, thus never forget that he has given us everything.

When we attain spiritual knowledge through God or guru then we experience divine joy. For a devotee, God is his greatest wealth. “*Re Shyām tame sāchu nānu, biju sarve dukhdāyak jānu...*” – “God is true wealth, and believe all else to be full of misery...” God’s bliss is spiritual wealth.

Narsinh Mehta did not possess anything other than God. He did not have any land, factory or money. But he had God as his wealth, and so he remained ever blissful. Today, we hear the verses of Narsinh Mehta’s kirtan, “*Sāchu nānu Shyāmalo re...*” – “God is true wealth.”

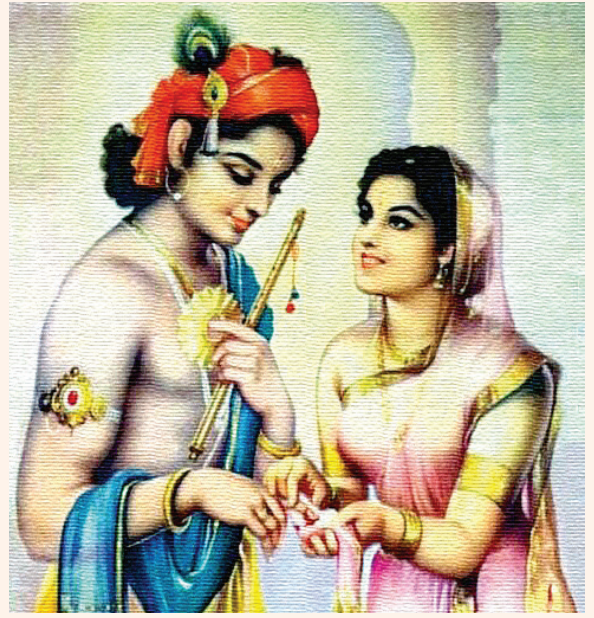
Mirabai, too, gave up her royal opulence and enshrined God in her heart. We also hear the bhajans of Shriji Maharaj’s *paramhansas*. They, too, had God as their wealth, and that is why we remember them: Brahmanand, Muktanand, Nishkulanand, Nityanand and others.

Spiritual wealth is true wealth. The more we take care of it, the more our material wealth will make us happy, and even things which give misery will eventually lead us to experience happiness.

Using our material wealth for the sake of God and for good purposes will provide us happiness. Using everything for God and the Sant will make



Jivan Bhagat (Koli) offered a *rotlo* and cooked spinach to Shriji Maharaj



Draupadi tied a bandage on Shri Krishna's finger

us happy. Whatever is not utilized in the service of God leads to misery and bondage.

Dada Khachar had dedicated his wealth, home and family in the service of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. So, for him, *maya* became a bestower of happiness. There are countless such devotees whose names have been noted in the shastras. As a matter of fact all our wealth and belongings will one day perish; either they will break, get destroyed or someone will take them away. So, it would be better to utilize them for Bhagwan and his Sant and thus serve their highest and true purpose. Draupadi cut a strip of cloth from her clothes and used it as a bandage for Shri Krishna; Sudama offered a fistful of rice grains to Shri Krishna and Jivan Bhagat (Koli) of Jetalpur offered a *rotlo* and cooked spinach to Shriji Maharaj – all have been immortalized in the shastras.

We must firmly believe that God is our true wealth. When we take care of this wealth by doing Bhagwan's bhajan with faith, we will experience bliss.

Be determined that we will not give up Bhagwan no matter what magnitude of material

joy or misery comes our way. The Pandavs faced untold pain and misery, but they did not give up Bhagwan. We take great care of the land and property we inherit from our forefathers, likewise, we must also preserve the satsang and dharma we have inherited. Increase and consolidate the role of satsang in our life. Make efforts to inspire all the members of our family to become *satsangis* and virtuous.

This understanding is the foundation of happiness. Constructing a house without a foundation will lead to its collapse and destruction. How strong are the foundations of high-rise buildings! People can happily reside and sleep inside them because of strong foundations. Similarly, when our spiritual foundations are strong, we will remain unaffected by the buffeting storms of life. Thereafter, our life will be priceless! ♦





# Letters to Pramukh Swami Maharaj



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

Thank you for leading us from the darkness to light. Thank you for helping us take out negative thoughts from our minds and replacing them with positive thoughts. Every time I used to have your darshan, I could sense a twinkle of divine grace in your eyes. An ecstatic energy would hover around me when I saw you play with the *chhadi*. I am so grateful to have you bring meaning to my life. You are a true role model for us youngsters and the adults.

Your empathy and respect has so much meaning and power that it directly hit my heart. Physically, you are not near me, but mentally, I can feel you right next to me.

- Ramya

Your life is an example to what I strive to live. Your teachings, values and principles have inspired me to be who I am today and who I want to become in this satsang lifetime. Your pure and generous love for all humankind has showed me how to love and treat all who come on my path with the same love that you have showed all throughout your lifetime.

Bapa, you have been a mother who shows love and care, a father who protects and guides, a sibling who understands and best of all a guru to whom we can look up to and say with pride, that is 'my guru'.

Please give me the strength and blessings to live a life just how you want it to be; to become *brahmarup* and offer bhakti at your holy feet for which you will accept me in Akshardham to be in your eternal *seva*.

Bapa, thank you from the bottom of my heart. You are my true hero to whom I will forever be indebted.

- Bhavini Thaker, 28, Accountant, Johannesburg, South Africa

I still remember till this date, meeting you at Heathrow Airport. It was one of the blessed times of my life. The divine image of you always has and will remain in my mind.

- Dharmen

From the beginning of this life, I have known you to be my guru. You were the one fixed, perpetual and ever-strong constant I had. Your love and guidance always flowed to me and I never felt happier than when I was with you.

You guided me in choosing my schools, university and career. You blessed my wedding and gave me a *murti* of Nilkanth Varni that I worship and serve daily. Your connection and blessings live on, in my home and in my heart.

You always managed to be a guiding light and taught me to be a better version of myself.

For everything I could never have done alone, I thank you for pushing me and guiding me. For saving me from this *maya* and keeping me firm in Satsang, thank you.

- Dr Nirav Amin, 30, Physician & GP, London, UK

The more I thought about it, the more I realized how impossible it is to write on a piece of paper our thoughts and feelings about your life, work and teachings. Words will never explain the vastness of you.

Swamishri has always helped me whenever I am in any problem or situation I felt I cannot do anything about. Whether it is a moment of happiness or sadness, Swamishri has always been my backbone and supported me. Swamishri is always going to be my closest best friend. I am very fortunate to have found Bapa and this satsang.

No words can express my love for Bapa and what he has done for me. I am also very fortunate to receive the most precious gift from Bapa to everyone: Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj is the greatest gift I have ever received. I truly believe that Swamishri is here with me always.

- Aayushi Barot, 15, Student, Nairobi, Kenya

My father, like my mother, had satsang in their household but did not practise it. They smoked, ate meat, drank beer ... the list of deeds is long. But because of your *krupa*, we left everything behind just to make you happy. Your love and help have always comforted me in every way and made me stronger. How can we ever forget that! All the hard work, you never gave up, you have only ever seen the good in everyone.

You are Gunatit, Ekantik, only you can cleanse our hearts and redeem our souls and take us personally to Akshardham. Swami Bapa, make us good and virtuous, bless everyone and stay in our hearts.

- Parth Patel, Vienna, Austria (Original letter in German)

I know the strings of my life are in your hands, and as long as I am holding your hand and you are holding mine, I am safe, I am happy, I am at peace.

You are the one constant in my life I can always depend on. Without you, today I would be a different person. Your love, your influence and your guidance have moulded me into a *satsangi*.

I pray to you to forever keep me in your *seva*. Whether I share it with you in my *prarthana* or not, I know you understand me, you hear me, you know me. Without saying a single word, you understand my every thought and handle any worries I may have.

I feel incredibly proud to talk about you to people outside of satsang. I feel proud to call myself yours. Give me the strength to make you proud.

- Nisha Patel, 21, Asset Management Analyst, London, UK



You have helped me figure out the radical and realistic riddle of my life and you have continued helping me, as I keep on cruising and tumbling over the bumps coming along the freeway. This has been viable only because of your

Pious,  
Radiant,  
Authentic,  
Magical,  
Ubiquitous,  
Kempt,  
Heavenly,  
Sacred,  
Wondrous,  
Auspicious,  
Meaningful and  
Impeccable love.

I definitely miss you, but as soon as I feel so, I just reminisce the portrait in which you are holding the hand of Mahant Swami Maharaj. Thank you Swami for giving us the gift of Mahant Swami Maharaj and fulfilling your promise of staying with us always.

I promise to keep you always in my daily routine through *ahnik*, reading and regular *sant samagam*...

I respect and admire you to be my best friend and you are mine forever, Pramukh Swami Maharaj...

I will do my best to remove I and mine and enjoy the eternal *sukh* of your Dham.

- Krupa Darji, 33, Physical Therapist, USA

In 1991 you conveyed your blessings to my *satsangi* wife to marry me. Yet you had never even seen me before. I was a hard drinking, smoking, meat-loving, fun-seeking and sinful young man. Yet you trusted and forgave me, and took me into your fold. Thank you for accepting me.

In 1998 we came to London to see you. On stage you asked me to give up meat and alcohol. One look into those forgiving eyes of yours changed me and you made me a *satsangi* from then onwards. I could never be grateful enough for making me yours. Thank you Bapa.

You are like a magician Bapa. You made every trouble of mine always disappear. You gave me everything I ever desired. You transformed me completely Bapa. I am proud to belong to you. You only gave & gave & gave. Thank you Bapa.

You have promised me Akshardham in this life. I believe you completely and thank you again for purifying me completely.

I am eternally grateful to you Bapa.

Love you with all my heart.

Your *das* forever...

- Bhasker

At the age of 21 when me and my family immigrated to the UK, I was fortunate enough to come into Satsang. We came to live near Leicester mandir. I got inspired to come to the mandir and start my satsang journey. I was not a spiritual person before, but what attracted me to satsang was how one man led and kept together 1,000 ascetics from different backgrounds and continents. This one man was you, Bapa.

As I learnt more about you, the two ideologies which struck me the most were: '*Bijani liti bhusva karta potani liti vadharvi*' [Meaning: Extend your achievements instead of trying to hinder others] and your life motto, 'In the joy of others lies our own'.

Without this invaluable satsang and mandir, I would have been lost in this materialistic world, not knowing my true identity and purpose. I was not able to meet you personally, however I have experienced your presence during my times of difficulty, guiding and inspiring me through it. I pray that I am able to serve Param Puja Mahant Swami Maharaj.

- Harshal Patel, 29, Software Engineer, London, UK

I have been in Satsang since birth, but my Satsang journey truly began in 2014 when I was 13 and attended the Bal-Balika India trip. Although that wasn't my first darshan of you it was the first time I felt that connection with you.

You have taught me so much from basic morals at a young age to fundamental life skills that will help me build a career and build a future for myself. Your teachings have given us so much and it is evident in the other *kishoris* around me that the purity that you spread is so genuine and real that it makes me and everyone around me in the mandir want to be better people. By looking at your actions I always strive to improve not just in my satsang life, but in my worldly life too.

I pray to you that my satsang continues to grow and that I can always serve you through *seva* and *bhakti* and ultimately gain your *rajipo* and attain *moksha*.

- Nirali Shah, 19, University Student, London, UK

I wholeheartedly thank you for when you were in Nairobi, and I had a chance to speak Vachanamrut Gadhada Pratham 5 in front of you while you were walking. I was barely 8 years old.

I also had a chance to speak a *prasang* in front of you and when I forgot what to speak next you encouraged me to speak and I was able to finish the *prasang*.

Bapa, you have truly blessed my life by showing me the correct path. I'm proud to have you as my guru, and like a GPS system, you always keep me on track.

I have made so many mistakes and Bapa I take this opportunity to ask for forgiveness and also your blessings.

- Akash Patel, 22, Civil Engineering Student, Nairobi, Kenya ♦

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

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



A portrait of an elderly man with a white beard and hair, wearing an orange shawl. He has a red tilak on his forehead and is holding a string of prayer beads (mala) in his hands, which are clasped in a prayer position. The background is a soft, blue gradient.

# *Mahant Swami Maharaj*

A Brief Introduction



*On the occasion of  
Guru Purnima celebration  
we offer heartfelt obeisances  
to Swamishri by presenting  
a brief introduction  
about his great life...*



## BIRTH IN JABALPUR

On 13 September 1933, a spiritual star was born in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, India. Manibhai and Dahiben Patel, originally from Anand, Gujarat, were blessed with a son, Vinubhai (Mahant Swami Maharaj). Manibhai was an ardent disciple of Shastriji Maharaj.

## SHASTRIJI MAHARAJ'S BLESSINGS

In March 1934, Shastriji Maharaj came to Jabalpur and blessed the six-month-old Vinubhai and initiated him into the Fellowship. Shastriji Maharaj named him 'Keshav' and told Manibhai, "Your son will grow up to be a sadhu and render great service to the Sampradaya."



## SCHOOL AND COLLEGE YEARS

Up to 1951, Vinubhai studied at Christ Church Boys' School in Jabalpur, completing 11th grade. He was quiet, thoughtful, ever-smiling and exceptionally brilliant. He was inclined towards reading good books. He studied with unwavering attention and interest in school, ranking either first or second in his class. Vinubhai possessed excellent and innate drawing skills. Football was his favourite sport.

\* \* \*



In 1951, his parents returned to Anand. Here, he joined the V.P. Science College and enrolled to study BSc Agriculture at the Bansilal Amrutlal College of Agriculture in Anand. Though he could have chosen medical science or an engineering stream he decided to study agriculture so that he could often avail of Yogiji Maharaj's spiritual company and fulfil his aim of becoming a sadhu at the earliest.

## LOVE FOR YOGIJI MAHARAJ

In spite of his father being a BAPS devotee, Vinubhai was not initially interested in Satsang. However, in 1951, during Yogiji Maharaj's stay in Anand, Vinubhai was touched by his saintliness and humility. He became attached to Yogiji Maharaj and rushed off to him whenever he got time from his college studies in Anand.





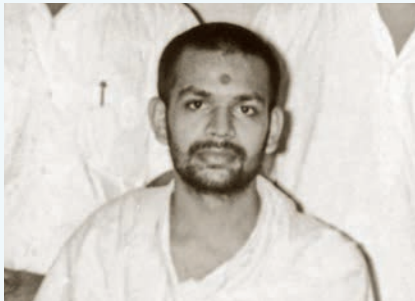


### FIRST MEETING WITH PRAMUKH SWAMI

After Shastriji Maharaj passed away in 1951, Vinubhai went to Sarangpur and then to Gadhada for the murti-pratishtha ceremony. Here, 17-year-old Vinubhai first met Pramukh Swami, who was 29 years old. A lasting impression of him being a true sadhu, having a simple, straightforward and frank personality became forever etched in Vinubhai's mind. It was Pramukh Swami who first told him to become a sadhu. Yogiji Maharaj further consolidated the idea of becoming a sadhu and Vinubhai became determined to do so.

### OPPOSITION FOR RENOUNCING HOME

As word spread among his relatives that Vinubhai desired to become a sadhu, there was stiff opposition. His mother and other relatives were strongly against him becoming a sadhu. But Vinubhai's determination and the guru's blessings eventually convinced all to permit him to renounce home.



### PARSHAD DIKSHA AFTER COMPLETING COLLEGE

In 1956, as soon as Vinubhai graduated with a BSc in Agriculture, he rushed to Yogiji Maharaj in Gondal. He served him as a youth for one year. Yogiji Maharaj showered his affection and started mentoring him in *brahmavidya*. He engaged him in various menial *seva*, often told him to observe waterless fasts and to listen to spiritual discourses.

On 2 February 1957, Gondal, Yogiji Maharaj gave Vinubhai the *parshad diksha* and named him Vinu Bhagat.

### YOGIJI MAHARAJ'S BLESSED SEVAK

Thereafter, Yogiji Maharaj kept Vinu Bhagat in his service for three-and-a-half years (1957–1960). He served by washing utensils, attending to correspondences and other *seva*. Yogiji Maharaj moulded the young disciple for his future responsibility as the spiritual head of the BAPS Santha.

In 1959–60, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami took Vinu Bhagat with them on a satsang tour of Africa.



### HISTORIC SAFFRON DIKSHA

In May 1961, Yogiji Maharaj gave the *bhagwati diksha* to 51 educated youths during the ceremonial installation of *kalashes* on top of the *shikhars* of Gadhada mandir.

When Yogiji Maharaj gave the first *diksha* to Vinu Bhagat he ecstatically raised his hand and named him Keshavjivandas Swami. The event is of great significance in BAPS history.



### AS MAHANT SWAMI

In 1962, Yogiji Maharaj consecrated a *hari* mandir in Dadar, Mumbai. At the guru's behest the 51 newly initiated swamis stayed in Akshar Bhuvan, Dadar, to study Sanskrit and do *seva*. Yogiji Maharaj appointed Keshavjivandas Swami as the head of all the swamis and from thenceforth he addressed him as 'Mahant Swami'.

### DEVOTION TO BHAGWAN AND GURU

Mahant Swami inspired the swamis in Dadar mandir with bhakti, *seva*, *katha*, kirtan, *vairagya*, fasting and other spiritual sadhanas. His personal bhakti towards Bhagwan and guru Yogiji Maharaj was unique. He made decorative flower garlands for Thakorji and Yogiji Maharaj, offered and sang *thals*, made ornate *hindolas* to devoutly rock Thakorji and meticulously arranged *annakut* before Thakorji. In addition, he never tired of doing the daily *seva* of washing dishes and large cooking pots.



### SATSANG IN MUMBAI

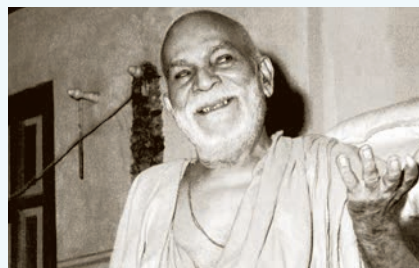
During his stay in Dadar mandir, Mahant Swami also discoursed to the devotees, solved their woes and sanctified their homes. His profound and spiritually enlightening discourses infused faith and joy in the lives of the swamis and devotees of Mumbai. All eagerly awaited to hear him and to be blessed by him.

Mahant Swami also travelled to the villages of Gujarat and Maharashtra to nourish and inspire satsang.

### YOGIJI MAHARAJ REVEALS MAHANT SWAMI'S GLORY

On many occasions, Yogiji Maharaj spoke profusely about the glory and greatness of Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami:

- Pramukh Swami is the greatest among all. He is the head of all. By obeying his instructions you will progress. Also, follow whatever Mahant Swami says. He will resolve your distress.
- If you worship God and abide by the instructions of Pramukh Swami and Mahant Swami you will become like gold.
- If you wish to go to Akshardham you will require a stamp [visa]. When Mahant Swami gives you the stamp, then nothing up to Prakruti Purush can obstruct you.
- Our Mahant Swami's spiritual state is like that of Bhagatji Maharaj. He will not take to mind whether anyone respects him or insults him.







## PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ BECOMES THE SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR

On 23 January 1971, Yogiji Maharaj passed away. The entire Satsang community was plunged into deep grief and sadness. Prior to his departure, Yogiji Maharaj declared, “After me, Pramukh Swami is present. Pramukh Swami is my all.”

Mahant Swami says, “Yogiji Maharaj showered such love that I was naturally drawn and attached to him. But, Pramukh Swami gradually made such an impact, that soon I became attached to him. Ultimately, they are both one. It was only the outer form that had changed.

“The things that drew me to Yogi Bapa I saw in Pramukh Swami Maharaj as well. There was no hypocrisy in Yogiji Maharaj and none in Pramukh Swami Maharaj either. There was an innate simplicity in his life. In all his work, he was totally natural. He had many other virtues. These became evident over

time and I developed affection for him like I had for Yogi Bapa.”

After Yogiji Maharaj’s earthly departure, Mahant Swami continued his services under the wings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.



## IN PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ’S SERVICE

In 1977, Mahant Swami travelled on an overseas satsang tour with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. After returning to Mumbai, he left Mumbai to start *vicharan* (travelling) to satsang centres throughout India.

In 1979, Pramukh Swami Maharaj appointed him as the leader of the Swaminarayan Akshardham project for Gandhinagar. Mahant Swami also offered his services during the mega festivals held in Gujarat, UK and USA. He gave inspiring speeches during *shibirs* to children, youth and *karyakars* in India and abroad. Sometimes, regardless of his poor health and difficulties during *vicharan*, he travelled extensively in Satsang to please the devotees. He also performed the foundation stone-laying ceremonies and *murti-pratishtha* rituals of mandirs.



## HIGHER RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SATSANG FELLOWSHIP

With Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s advancing age and ailments Mahant Swami’s *vicharan* and satsang responsibilities increased.

In Ahmedabad, on Wednesday, 6 March 2013, Pramukh Swami Maharaj wrote a letter to the BAPS Satsang community, “You are all aware that for some time now my health has not remained well and so I have been unable to meet everyone in person. Therefore, from now on, all sadhus and devotees

should meet Pujya Mahant Swami for guidance on their personal matters and questions to obtain solutions.”

Mahant Swami’s humility, saintliness and profound discourses are a hallmark of his life, and devotees and well-wishers became impressed with his darshan and experienced inner peace.



## PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S EARTHLY DEPARTURE

In Sarangpur, on Saturday, 13 August 2016, Pramukh Swami Maharaj left his physical body to depart to Akshardham. The entire Satsang community was plunged into grief at Swamishri's departure. For four days countless devotees and well-wishers came to Sarangpur to pay their last respects to Swamishri.

On Wednesday, 17 August, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the last rites by igniting the funeral pyre.

On Sunday, 14 August, Pujya Dr Swami announced that four years previously, on Friday, 20 July 2012, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had written a letter that Pujya Mahant Swami would succeed him as the guru and president of the BAPS. The letter said, "I appoint with happiness and joy, and in my fullest conscious state, Pujya Mahant Swami, Sadhu Keshvajivandas (Guru Jnanjivandas), as the president of BAPS, that is, as guru, after my physical departure."

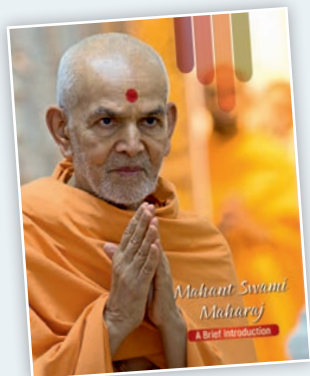
Pramukh Swami Maharaj had often spoken about Mahant Swami's spiritual virtues and greatness. In 1968, in Mumbai, Pramukh Swami Maharaj had praised, "Doing darshan of Param Pujya Mahant Swami fills one with profound tranquillity. Everyone is captivated by his saintliness and humility, and he has always given me his fullest support."

In 1966, in Atladara, while remembering Mahant Swami Maharaj's father, Manibhai Naranbhai Patel, Pramukh Swami Maharaj said, "He has gifted us a great gem. That great gem is Mahant Swami! That is the greatest of all gifts; Mahant Swami is such that his darshan bestows peace. He has been blessed immensely by Yogi Maharaj."

## TIRELESS VICHARAN

After becoming the guru at 83 years of age, Mahant Swami Maharaj's *vicharan* and activities have increased manifold. He has travelled on satsang tours to Africa, UK and North America in 2017, the Asia-Pacific in 2018, and the UAE and Africa in 2019.

His tireless *vicharan in India*, meeting devotees and well-wishers, responding to their letters, attending to the flurry of daily phone calls and performing the foundation stone-laying and *murti-pratishtha* ceremonies of new mandirs and overseeing many other activities provide spiritual and moral nourishment to countless. In addition, Mahant Swami Maharaj has given impetus to BAPS social services in India and abroad. He does all this with calmness, humility, love and devotion. ♦



## Mahant Swami Maharaj

### A Brief Introduction

- ♦ His Early Years ♦ With Yogiji Maharaj
- ♦ With Pramukh Swami Maharaj ♦ As the Guru...



**Publisher: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, Ahmedabad**  
Available at all BAPS bookstores and on [baps.store](http://baps.store)



# Mahant Swami Maharaj's Sublime Guru Bhakti



**A**shadh *sud* Purnima is celebrated as Guru Purnima, also known as Vyas Purnima. In the current year, 2021, this occurs on 23 July. Devotees offer puja to their spiritual guru. The word ‘guru’ means one who removes the darkness of ignorance from the hearts of devotees (or *jivas*).

As our guru, Mahant Swami Maharaj’s devotion to his two gurus, namely, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, is exemplary for us; it teaches us how we may offer devotion to him in our daily life. Here, we cite some incidents from his life which depict various facets of his sublime devotion to his gurus.

In 1957, after Yogiji Maharaj initiated Vinubhai as Vinu Bhagat, the former adopted *maunvrata* (silence) with only Vinu Bhagat, though he continued talking to other people. During the subsequent *vicharan* to towns and villages, Vinu Bhagat served him sincerely in all aspects of personal *seva* without entertaining a single thought or doubt about Yogi Bapa’s lack of interactions with him. One day, after three months, Yogi Bapa heartily blessed him with a *thapo* (pat) on his back saying, “You have passed

the test!” Apparently, Yogi Bapa had wanted to test Vinu Bhagat’s *divyabhav* – divine regard – for him.

In 1969, Yogiji Maharaj was going to celebrate the Shri Hari Jayanti in Gondal. A few devotees in Mumbai informed the sadhus in Dadar Mandir that they would be attending this festival by flying to Rajkot. Within a short time, Mahant Swami and other sadhus made a grand six-foot rose garland weighing 15 kilos for Yogi Bapa! In Gondal, Yogi Bapa requested the pujari sadhu to adorn it on Ghanshyam Maharaj. While doing darshan of Ghanshyam Maharaj, he praised Swamishri’s bhakti, “Mahant Swami made the garland in one hour and sent it by plane. Such bhakti! I offer five *dandvats* to each flower!”

To spiritually strengthen youths and sadhus, Yogi Bapa loved to prescribe them *nirjala* (waterless) fasts. To his favourite sadhus he would prescribe two consecutive fasts! Once, by his *agna*, Vinubhai observed a fast. The next morning, before *parna* (breaking the fast), he went for Yogi Bapa’s darshan. When he bowed down, Yogi Bapa said, “Swami will be greatly pleased if you fast today.” On the third day also, Yogi Bapa repeated his blessings! In this way Vinubhai observed five consecutive *nirjala* fasts without entertaining any doubts and with equal enthusiasm. On the sixth day, pleased with Vinu Bhagat’s unflinching faith to obey, Yogi Bapa blessed and offered him lemon juice, which he had personally made for *parna*.

Once, at Santram Mandir in Nadiad, for breakfast, Vinu Bhagat was about to be served *patarvelia*. Yogi Bapa said, “No, he does not like *patarvelia*, but *mamra*.” Gleaning Yogi Bapa’s inner wish, known as *anuvrutti*, he vowed to avoid eating *patarvelia* and instead adopt eating *mamra* for life! On 27 June 2017, in Atlanta, after



narrating this incident, sadhus asked him about whether he still liked *patarvelia*. He replied, “Yes, but I do not eat them.” In Chicago, on 14 July 2017, he added, “Since it was not Bapa’s wish.”

Even regarding philosophical principles advocated by Yogiji Maharaj, Swamishri remains vigilant in not failing to point out the truth. On 16 January 2017, in Ahmedabad, a sadhu casually remarked about *samp*, “Where there is *samp*, Akshardham is guaranteed. This is your inner principle.” Swamishri instantly corrected him, “It is Yogi Bapa’s.” On 26 March 2017, in Lenasia, Johannesburg, during a *shishu sabha* (conducted by 5–6-year-old *balaks*) when they asked him what makes him happy, healthy and relaxed, he replied, “I like capital S, capital A, capital M, capital P.” Then he added, “I also like *nirdosh buddhi*, *suhradbhav* and *seva*. Yogi Bapa taught us this. That is why we obey the guru’s *agna*. Pramukh Swami Maharaj also likes it. Therefore, we should have *samp*, *suhradbhav* and *ekta*. Okay?” On 26 June 2017, in Atlanta, a sadhu sang a bhajan which narrated what Swamishri liked, which included principles such as *dasbhav* and *suhradbhav*. At the end Swamishri pointed out, “You should add one more verse, that is, ‘I like it because Yogi Bapa liked it.’” Swamishri always follows the footsteps of his gurus.

Swamishri’s guru bhakti also manifested while studying Sanskrit in an ashram in Ghatkopar, Mumbai. Along with eight other sadhus after *diksha* in 1961, they lived a life of great frugality

and austerity. He often describes, “The food was so simple, tasteless and unpalatable. The *rotis* were thick, and difficult to break and chew! The *dal* had no spices. Yet, we experienced great joy.” Additionally, they observed *nirjala* fasts such as *ekadashi* and *dharna-parna* with *parna* being very simple. On 24 July 2017, in Toronto, when asked, “What was joyful about such a meagre diet and harsh life.” Swamishri replied, “Yogi Bapa’s warmth.” “But Yogi Bapa was not there physically,” someone said. He replied, “He was present through his [distant] vision as well as his weekly letter. We used to eagerly look forward to it. When it arrived we tussled [with each other in a friendly manner] to read it.”

Now we shall consider some occasions of his guru bhakti for Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

In the first few months after Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s return to Akshardham in August 2016, devotees in several places used to hail the ‘Jai’ of Mahant Swami Maharaj first. Such occasions hurt Swamishri because people did not hail the ‘Jai’ of Pramukh Swami Maharaj prior to that. In Atladara and Anand, Swamishri softly, but firmly, reprimanded them. Then, he added, “Without hailing Swami Bapa’s ‘Jai’ first I feel that you have chopped off both my arms!”

When Swamishri was leaving the Sarangpur Mandir after Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s post-cremation *parayan*, a young sadhu approached the car window and gave him a note (in Gujarati) to sign, “Now onwards please give us your *labh*



1.25 times more than Swami Bapa.” Swamishri signed it, but cancelled “1.25 times more than”. He would not accept any sentiments that might excel or override Pramukh Swami Maharaj. On 22 October 2016, in Junagadh, he made a similar remark, “Without Swami Bapa’s ‘Jai’, it sounds blunt. I am frightened by this!” To be frightened depicts the acme of his guru bhakti.

Similarly, on 14 September 2016, in Mumbai, while signing letters to devotees, he wrote, “With Swami Bapa’s blessings and my *prarthana*.” When the *sevak* sadhus prayerfully urged him to write, “You have my blessings,” he refused. The *sevaks* then pointed out that since he was now the guru, devotees would wish this. Not compromising on his guru bhakti for Swami Bapa, he wrote, “I have prayed to Harikrishna Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I offer my prayers and blessings.”

About a week later, on 22 September 2016, when Swamishri arrived in Bochasan, he was not happy with the way his sofa was arranged on the stage. He instructed the sadhus to place Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s sofa in the centre instead of his before the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj, and shift his sofa to Swami Bapa’s right side and on an equal level rather than higher as it was originally so. Only when everything was arranged to his satisfaction and *dasatva* bhakti, did he sit on his sofa.

On 5 December 2016, in Surat, during the celebration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s 96th birthday celebrations in the ‘Swaminarayan Nagar’ outside the city, Swamishri noted Swami Bapa’s photos, on the main gate about 50 feet high. In one photo, he saw some computerized fluffy clouds on Swami Bapa’s head which looked unaesthetic. He pointed this out and requested the appropriate department to remove the clouds. He told them, “This troubles me every day, but I am pointing it out to you today.”

Swamishri’s guru bhakti for Pramukh Swami Maharaj also manifests in seemingly minor sentiments uttered by him. Swami Bapa often

said, “I love you all” in English to children and young devotees abroad. On 13 July 2017, in Chicago, Swamishri sat on a chair. As usual, a small new mat was placed daily on the floor for him to rest his feet, and to sanctify the mat. On this day, the mat had Bapa’s sentence “I love you all” and his name printed on it. Swamishri visibly felt hurt and remarked to the sadhus, “You should not do this, because my feet touch it.” But the *sevaks* argued, “It is precisely to sanctify the mat that we have placed it here.”

Yet Swamishri said, “It is fine if it was my name, but this has Swami Bapa’s words and name.” Hence, he did not allow his feet to be placed on his guru’s name and sentiments. He also never allows his feet to face a *murti* of the guru or Bhagwan.

On 4 January 2017, in Ahmedabad, while he lay down on his bed to begin a naturopathy therapy session, his feet faced a wall on which hung Shastriji Maharaj’s photo. So, he requested a *sevak* sadhu to cover the *murti*.

“Why?” asked the *sevak*.

Swamishri: “My feet are facing Shastriji Maharaj.”

Sevak: “But the photo is higher up than your feet.”

Swamishri: “No, even so, cover the picture.”

Sevak: “Is it okay if we cover your feet?”

Swamishri agreed. The *sevak* covered his feet. Only then did Swamishri allow the therapy to begin.

Finally, as a supreme tribute of his guru bhakti on the occasion of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s centenary celebrations, Swamishri wrote and dedicated the Satsang Diksha to the three gurus. In aphorisms 311 to 314, he dedicates in the following manner: “Yagnapurushdasji (Shastriji Maharaj) – the protector of the true *siddhant*, the forever affectionate and blissful embodiment of Aksharbrahma Yogiji Maharaj and Guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who is humble and revered throughout the world.” ♦

# A Gift from the Present

**Celebrating the First Anniversary of the Satsang Diksha Shastra**



Mahant Swami Maharaj began writing the Satsang Diksha shastra on Vasant Panchami (31 January) 2020 in Navsari and completed writing the original Gujarati text on Shri Hari Jayanti (2 April) 2020 in Nenpur. Thereafter, he requested Mahamahopadhyaya Bhadrash Swami to compose Sanskrit verses of the 315 Gujarati maxims, in keeping with the tradition of Hindu shastras. When this was completed, Swamishri ceremoniously revealed the historic text on the auspicious occasion of Guru Punam, 5 July 2020, and presented the Satsang Diksha shastra to the worldwide BAPS Satsang community of sadhus and devotees. This coming Guru Punam, 23 July 2021, marks the first anniversary of the Satsang Diksha.

Emphasizing its importance, over the past year, Swamishri has frequently said that the shastra expresses the essential spiritual guidance, philosophical understanding, and daily practices of dharma and devotion that are in the minds of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus and which they wish all to know and observe. To enable everyone to become familiar with this fundamental knowledge, he prescribed all to read the shastra daily, whole or in part. He has also inspired thousands of devotees, young and old, to memorize this concise shastra and appreciated their efforts by conferring them the honorary title of 'Akshar-Purushottam Vidvan' – an Akshar-Purushottam scholar.

The Satsang Diksha is a living shastra, gifted to us by the manifest form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the Gunatit gurus. This poem is in honour of the first anniversary of the public presentation of the Satsang Diksha shastra by Mahant Swami Maharaj.





### A GIFT FROM THE PRESENT

The shastras are the source code  
To know them is a titanic load,  
Only Akshar from them can derive  
The essence of the shastras in three-one-five.

From the pen of Akshar in three-one-five  
The mind of God in three-one-five  
The wishes of the Gurus in three-one-five  
Agnā and Upasana in three-one-five.

On Vasant Panchami the first words penned  
The sublimest thoughts in a perfect blend,  
From Navsari to Nenpur the text did journey  
To completion on the day of birth of  
Supreme Hari.

From simple Gujarati to scholarly Sanskrit  
Your words from prose to verse did transit,  
And on Guru Punam to seekers all  
You revealed the Satsang Diksha,  
your divine call.

A purposeful gift from the Present  
That's special and extremely precious,  
Now and forever it will continue to nourish  
And provide the framework for all to flourish.

The eternal wisdom of Akshar-Purushottam  
The daily practices of dharma and devotion,  
Short and sweet, precise and concise  
An everlasting spiritual promise.

Commit it to memory is your repeated appeal  
To gain your 'Akshar-Purushottam Vidvan' seal,  
Its messages will make our life steady  
And enable us to become *moksha*-ready.

We must grip the hand of the Present  
To guide us through our ups and downs,  
To take us past our taxing trials  
And to restore our beaming smiles.

May we live up to your measure  
And receive your pure innermost pleasure,  
From your words may we never stray  
That, O Swami, is what we pray.

Happy Birthday! Satsang Diksha  
The textual form of Shri Hari,  
Thank You! O Mahant Swami!

Our dear Present form of Akshar  
For gifting us this divine treasure.

# INSPIRATIONS

*A potpourri of inspiring and interesting  
information and wisdom*

## POSITIVE THINKING



George Dantzig, a professor at Stanford University, describes an interesting experience he had while studying mathematics at Berkeley University in California:

I arrived late to my mathematics lecture, and quickly copied the two maths problems on the blackboard, assuming they were for homework.

When I sat down to work on them that evening, I found them to be the most difficult problems my professor had ever assigned. Night after night I tried to solve one and then the other with no success. But I remained unflagging in my efforts.

Several days later, I cracked them both and took the homework to the professor. The professor told me to leave my note on his desk. I was hesitant and concerned because I felt my homework would get lost in the clutter on his desk. However, there was no choice and I placed my note on his desk.

Six weeks later, on a Sunday morning, I was awakened by my professor knocking at my front door. On seeing me he excitedly exclaimed, “George, you have solved them.”

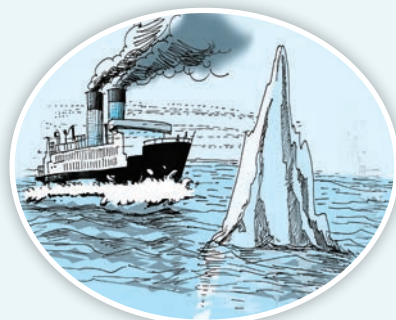
I asked, “Was I not supposed to?” The professor explained that the two problems on the board were not for homework, but two famous problems that leading mathematicians of the world had so far been unable to solve. He could hardly believe that I had solved them both in a matter of a few days.

If someone had told me that they were two famous unsolved problems, I probably would not have tried to solve them. It goes to show the power of positive thinking!

*- Bits & Pieces*

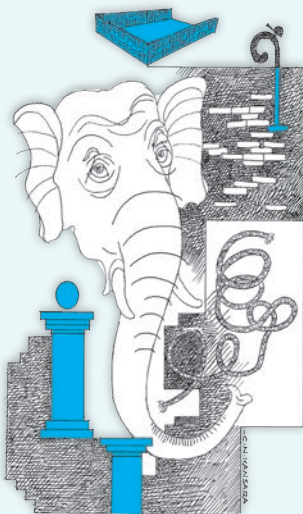
## MURTI MAGNETISM

With comprehensive knowledge, one realizes the divinity of God and His magnetic appeal to all who have developed faith in Him. In Vachanamrut Vartal 13, Shriji Maharaj reveals how engaging in the darshan of the *murti* of God with faith and understanding leads to an experience of divine bliss, “By appearance, God’s form appears similar to that of any human; however, it is an exceptionally divine form. For example, a magnetic rock appears similar to all the other rocks on the earth; yet there is a natural magical property in it – when a ship sails past a mountain of magnetic rock, then all the iron nails of the ship are drawn towards the magnetic rock. Similarly, when a person does darshan of God’s form with *shraddha*, be it the form of a king or the form of a sadhu, his *indriyas* are drawn towards God. Then one attains *samadhi*.”



*- Analogy from The Vachanamrut*





## FOUR BLIND MEN SEE AN ELEPHANT

A sannyasi came to a village with his elephant. The villagers gathered to see the elephant. Four blind men lived in the village. They also gathered with the rest of the village. The people patted the elephant. It was tame and so didn't cause any problems.

One blind man grasped the elephant's neck and said, "The elephant is like a pestle." The second blind man caught the elephant's tail. He said, "No, the elephant is like a piece of rope." The third blind man found the elephant's ears. He said, "Why! The elephant is like a dustpan." The fourth blind man was holding a leg, so he said, "No, no, the elephant is like a pillar."

In this way the four blind men described the elephant. But because they didn't have eyes they couldn't see the whole elephant.

One who has seen the *atma* through the sense organs and mind cannot be said to have completely seen the *atma*. It is only when one comes into contact with an enlightened Sadhu that true *atma* darshan – realization of one's *atma* – is possible. Else it can be compared to the four blind men who 'saw' the elephant and yet didn't.

- 101 Tales of Wisdom by Yogiji Maharaj

## ABOUT INDIAN MEDICINE



### Sir William Hunter (1840–1900 CE)

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

- Hunter, W.W., *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, p.107, Vol. VI, 2nd ed., 1886, London: Trübner & Co.

## SWAMINI VATO



- No amount of money can give us eyes, ears and other senses, but God has given them. Yet the *jiva* is forever ungrateful.
- Do not feel miserable, for we have got what we want. If too much wealth is given, one forgets God and does not worship him. Therefore, he does not give it to us.

- Gunatitanand Swami

## ENLIGHTENING QUOTES

- The greatest lesson a leader can teach is that life is a process, not an event.
- Practice makes perfect; so be careful what you practice.
- Most people find fault like there's a reward for it.



# MAHANT SWAMI MAHARAJ'S VICHARAN

March 2021, Nenpur

**MARCH**

**10, Wednesday**

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the BAPS *hari* mandirs in Songadh (Ukai region), Sinhol (Anand region) and Ba (Fiji). Swamishri also performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *abhishek murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj for the *hari* mandir in Perth (Australia). Swamishri performed the *pujan* rituals of the *kalashes* and flagstuffs for the *hari* mandir in Sinhol.

Swamishri blessed (online) all the devotees offering their *seva* in the above mentioned mandirs.

**18, Thursday**

Today, marked one year of Swamishri's stay in Nenpur in the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic. The day was marked by devotional activities: morning puja and various *sabhas* till evening, tree planting, *annakut* and others.

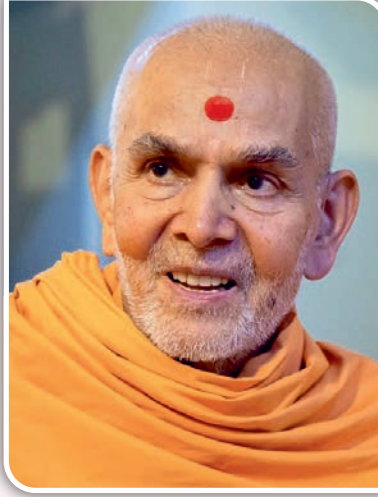
**20, Saturday**

Swamishri kindled a lamp in Nenpur to inaugurate the 'North America Leadership Seminar'. The central theme of the seminar was 'Guru Bhakti'. On the first day, Swamishri addressed the participants on this theme and on the next day gave answers to their problems and enquiries.

**25, Thursday**

On this day, 23 years ago, Mahant Swami Maharaj's heart bypass surgery was performed in Mumbai in 1997 by a leading heart surgeon, Dr Sudhanshu Bhattacharya.

A morning satsang assembly was held to recall



the incidents of that day. A video testimonial of Dr Bhattacharya was shown. He recalled the occasion, "The experience I had while operating on Mahant Swami Maharaj cannot be duplicated. I have not got it again [at any another point]. That time it felt as if I was operating on somebody special. And my feeling was that this man was destined to be the chief of this organization. I had that feeling at that stage when I operated on him.

"At that time I told Tejas [Dr Tejas Patel] that I was experiencing something different. I believe that there is a supernatural power, which touches and goes."

Dr Bhattacharya is intellectually-rationally-and work-oriented. He is deeply touched by Mahant Swami Maharaj. Later, he emailed with reference to the video testimony he gave, "Every word I said is true and from my heart."

Thereafter, the attendant swamis also recalled their own experiences of that time. In conclusion, the gist of all the reminiscences pointed to Swamishri's *brahmic* state and divinity.

Today, Swamishri also gave a special *labh* by operating a sewing machine in memory of Bhagatji Maharaj's effort in stitching cloth to make a canopy (*chandni*).

**30, Tuesday**

Swamishri took his first dose of the Corona vaccine. Thereafter, he appealed to the satsang community and to all to take the vaccine. ♦

*Translation by Sadhu Vivekjiandas from a concise Gujarati report by Brahmapatsaldas Swami*



# LIVING WITH SWAMISHRI

February 2021, Nenpur

## FEBRUARY

### PERCEPTION AND INNER JOY

2, Tuesday

A devotee wrote to Swamishri, “As per your emphasis to perceive all devotees to be divine, I have been practising your wish. As a result I experience a lot of joy and peace in my heart.”

Swamishri expressed his *rajipo* and added, “That is the right way. Devotees are divine [*muktas*]. By perceiving them as *muktas* one experiences joy. Whoever is associated with Maharaj and Swami are *muktas* [of Akshardham].”

All through his life Swamishri has not only been perceiving everyone to be divine, but he has repeatedly preached and inspired this attitude in countless devotees.

### SWAMISHRI'S FRIENDS

5, Friday

In the evening, Swamishri was engaged in a discussion with the sadhus. The topic revolved around remembering past friends.

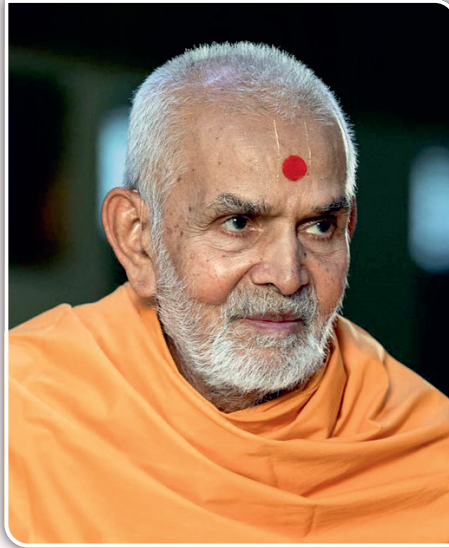
Uttamyogidas Swami asked Swamishri, “Do you remember your friends?”

“All are my friends. I have no enemies,” Swamishri replied instantly.

“Do you have a best friend?”

“Whoever is *ekantik* is a best friend.”

In the eyes of the God-realized Sadhu all are his friends and those who have attained the virtues of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and *bhakti*



(*ekantik* dharma) are his foremost friends.

\* \* \*

### MEANING OF SPIRITUAL ASSOCIATION

An attendant swami asked Swamishri, “Today, you said that ‘One who has good spiritual company would make one’s intellect spiritually pure [*nirdosh buddhi*].’ Thus, I have a spiritually good company [with Swamishri himself], which means I will become pure.”

Swamishri underscored, “Only if one truly associates spiritually.”

The attendant swami enquired, “Since I stay with you am I not spiritually associating with you?”

Swamishri said, “No. All these are also with me – the table and everything else. True association means attaining the virtues of the person one associates with.”

Swamishri revealed the meaning of spiritual association.

### INNATE SPIRITUAL WISDOM

7, Sunday

Swamishri often stresses upon the devastating effects of looking at or talking about others’ faults in satsang. Today, he explained, “A person who perceives faults in another has fallen into a pit. Even though he is in satsang, he is in a pit. One who does not perceive faults in others is considered to have started doing satsang.”

All who were present learnt a novel interpretation about the beginning of satsang

and the serious effect of faultfinding. Swamishri's innate spiritual wisdom is truly profound and enlightening.

## DISSOLVING REGRET

10, Wednesday

Atmaswarupdas Swami talked to Swamishri about a devotee's regret, "Swami, he deeply wished to become a sadhu in Yogiji Maharaj's time. But he was unable to do so because his mother did not permit him. Today, after all these years, he feels deeply regretful about it."

Swamishri phoned the devotee and said, "Jai Swaminarayan. You will attain the divine abode of Akshardham regardless of being a renunciant or a householder." Absolute faith [*upasana*] is the means to attain it. Parvatbhai and Kalyanbhai were householders, yet they had advanced spiritually, like Muktanand Swami. So it all rests upon the level of *nishtha* [faith], *prem* [love] and *lagni* [passion]."

Swamishri lovingly dissolved the devotee's regret forever.

## FAITH AND PERSEVERANCE

14, Sunday

During a discussion session a swami informed, "Babubhai Patel is 80 years old and serves as the pujari of the *abhishek murti* of Nilkanth Varni in the Mehsana mandir. He has read the Satsang Diksha shastra 1,000 times. Daily, he reads it four to five times."

Swamishri expressed his *rajipo* (pleasure and joy) and rang him and blessed, "I congratulate you for your faith and effort. To read it 1,000 times requires a lot of faith. To read the same thing repeatedly is possible only because of your faith. In such matters one's intellect will mostly not allow one to accomplish this."

After blessing Babubhai, Swamishri said, "It has been said '*Shraddhavān labhate jñānam*' ['One who has faith and perseverance attains knowledge.'] and not '*Buddhimān*

*labhate jñānam*.' ['One who has intelligence attains knowledge.']"

## AKSHAR

20, Saturday

A painting included the figures of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Mahant Swami Maharaj. The meaning of it was that one should become *aksharrup*, i.e. become like Mahant Swami Maharaj, and offer bhakti to and remain a servant (*das*) of Bhagwan. Attendant Uttamyogidas Swami pointed to the figure of Mahant Swami Maharaj in the painting and asked Swamishri, "Who is this?"

"Satpurush," replied Swamishri.

"What is the Satpurush's name?" someone asked.

"Yogiji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Pramukh Swami Maharaj," Swamishri replied.

"But they were Satpurushes of the past. Who is the present Satpurush?" an attendant sadhu asked.

"How can you say they were in the past? They are present [*pragat*]!" Swamishri replied emphatically.

"But I mean one who is visible before our eyes."

"Yes, you mean *pratyaksh*!" Swamishri spelled out the right word.

"Yes, *pratyaksh*. What is his name?" the attendant enquired.

"Akshar!" Swamishri replied.

All the gurus in the BAPS guru *parampara* are Gunatit or Akshar, meaning eternally God-realized, the divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and the means to attain *moksha*. ♦

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



# QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION WITH SWAMISHRI

27 February 2021, Nenpur



**Q.** Can you narrate the incident from which you always started experiencing the presence of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj? Though you may have been physically far away from them, yet you always felt they are with you.

**A.** When I was in my student years I was once climbing the three steps of the Anand mandir. A small distance away, Yogiji Maharaj was washing his hands after answering nature's call. At that time our eyes met. From then onwards I have always experienced that Bapa is with me.

Shriji Maharaj has said, "My words are my form. Therefore, no matter which part of the world you may be in, if you obey his commands then he is with you."

**Q.** Can you give us the assurance that you will never forsake us and take us all the way to Akshardham?

**A.** Yes, it's guaranteed. Look, I have held Maharaj and Swami's hands and I have also held your hands. Thus it is like a chain and so I will not give up holding your hands all the way to Akshardham. Having such a spiritual association is a great thing. Only through association one attains *moksha*; human endeavours or sadhanas fall short. Thus association, and that too when

one understands who's association one has, is important!"

**Q.** We are physically far from you. What should we do so that we can always remember or think of you?

**A.** Have strong spiritual faith (*nishtha*) in Maharaj and Swami. Believe firmly that Maharaj is genuine, Gunatitanand Swami is genuine, Bhagatiji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj are all true and genuine, and satsang is also genuine; then wherever you go and do things they will always be with you.

**Q.** How is Maharaj and Swami always with us? Because physically we don't feel that they are with us.

**A.** (In its spiritual sense), being together does not mean proximity, but obeying their instructions and wishes does. We give the analogy of the kite and string when we talk of obeying Shriji Maharaj's words. This means that as long as the string, which refers to obedience to his or the guru's words, is attached to the kite, symbolic of Bhagwan's *murti*, you have the kite at hand.

**Q.** What should we experience when you are with us in a divine way?

**A.** You experience inner peace. You are no longer plagued by any worldly desires and keep remembering God.

**Q.** We wish to make our association with Maharaj, Swami and yourself strong and intense. Show us the one way that includes all other ways.

**A.** Having firm trust or faith (*vishwas*) in Shriji Maharaj – that he is genuine and true. There should not be an iota of doubt in him.

Q. Which one thought should we think of daily so that we can consolidate the *prapti* (association of Maharaj and Swami) we have attained?

A. By having trust or faith (*vishwas*) everything can be attained. *Vishwas* means that all the Satpurushes are genuine. By having firm trust everything will work out by itself.

Q. What does one experience when such firm trust has been established?

A. One experiences inner peace. Absolute peace. The mind remains still. No matter what type of situations arise, good or bad, your mind will remain unruffled. It will not lose its anchor on God.

Q. During the day when should we think about *prapti*?

A. Always. You will get so much spiritual strength that your questions or problems will disappear. However, it is not possible to think

constantly about *prapti*. Also, one becomes bored by thinking repetitively all day. But if one is fully convinced within or if one has firm faith (*nishtha*) then Gunatitanand Swami has said, “He has attained everything and nothing else remains to be done.”

Q. How to think about *prapti*?

A. Ponder upon the fact that we have never had the association of Shriji Maharaj before, and were not going to have it either. However, out of his compassion he came to this *brahmand* and stayed with and entertained us. Presently, we have attained him in the form of a Sant – Yogi Bapa and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. They may appear to be like ordinary humans, who eat and behave like us, but they are divine.

They have no worldly thoughts; they transcend *maya* and are of an extraordinary divine state. ♦

Translation by Sadhu Vivekchandras from a concise Gujarati report by Brahmavatsaldas Swami



## CHATURMAS NIYAMS

20 July to 15 November 2021



As instructed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Shikshapatri and by the wish of *guruhari* Param Pujya Mahant Swami Maharaj, devotees should undertake extra spiritual observances during the four holy months of Chaturmas. This year, Chaturmas is from 20 July 2021 (Ashadh *sud* 11) to 15 November 2021 (Kartik *sud* 11). To please Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Brahmawarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Pragat Brahmawarup Mahant Swami Maharaj, the following extra observances should be undertaken:

### Reading

The following books should be read throughout the year:

1. Brahmawarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Parts 3 & 4
2. Mahant Swami Maharaj: A Epitome of Saintliness
3. Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Bhaktaratno, Parts 1 & 2 (or listen to their audio on the Akshar Amrutam app)
4. Daily read the Vachanamrut & Swamini Vato

### Austerities

- In view of the prevailing pandemic, observe austerities that will help to sustain good immunity. Or observe *ektana* during the month of Shravan.

### Listening

- Daily listen to 7–10 minutes of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's inspiring incidents and blessings.

### Darshan

- Video darshan of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 7–10 minutes daily to commemorate his Centenary Celebrations (1921–2021).

### Devotion

- Daily turn an extra five or more *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 daily puja.
- Contemplate for five minutes every day on the *mahima* of Swamishri – his virtues, work and divine form.

### Homage to Guru

- Every week, narrate in person or via letter, email or social media, one incident highlighting the virtues of Swamishri to as many relatives and friends as possible.

### Family

- Conduct *ghar sabha*: In commemoration of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's Centenary, gather your family to read about, listen to, have darshan of and contemplate on our guru.
- For one year invite the same one family to your *ghar sabha* once a month.
- 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*.





## INDIA

### CYCLONE TAUKTAE RELIEF AID 19–21 May 2021



To help people in the immediate aftermath of the fierce 160 kmph Cyclone Tauktae that raged through Gujarat, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha supported the local government relief efforts by providing over 15,250 packets of hot food (*puri* and cooked vegetables) and snacks (*bundi*, *papdi*, *ganthiya*, *sev*) and 4,910 ration kits consisting of rice, dal, flour and vegetables.

## UK

### NEASDEN TEMPLE DONATES FLOUR TO FEED THE VULNERABLE 24 May 2021, London



BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, donated 24 tonnes of flour to The Felix Project, which collects fresh, nutritious food to deliver to

charities and schools to enable them to provide healthy meals and help the vulnerable, homeless and others. The Felix Project has found many grateful charities to pass on this donation from Neasden Temple.

In November 2020, Neasden Temple provided rations for 40,000 meals to The Felix Project for distribution across London.

## USA

### NEPALESE AMBASSADOR VISITS BAPS MANDIR 5 June 2021, Los Angeles



In the wake of the COVID-19 surge afflicting Nepal, the Nepalese Ambassador to the United States, Dr Yubaraj Khatiwada, and his 10-member delegation offered special prayers of peace and good health for the people of Nepal by performing *abhishek* at the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Los Angeles.

Ambassador Khatiwada and the delegation were traditionally greeted by the resident sadhus and volunteers.

The Nepalese delegation offered their respects, admired the art and architecture and viewed the mandir exhibition. During the visit the ambassador and his delegation prayed for the good health, safety and peace of the people of Nepal by performing *abhishek* of the *murti* of Shri Nilkanth Varni.

Ambassador Khatiwada said, “It is an honor to be here, in such a sacred place. I am very proud that in the United States, in California, the South Asian population, especially Hindus, have a place like this to call home. Temples like this are always symbols of faith and peace. I appreciate the art, culture, structure and the devotion to make such temples a reality.”

On this occasion, BAPS Charities, the charitable arm of BAPS, donated \$5,000 to the Government of Nepal’s COVID-19 relief efforts.

## COMMEMORATING THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY

**20 June 2021, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Los Angeles**



The United Nations International Day of Yoga was observed at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Los Angeles. While adhering to local, state and federal COVID-19 regulations, and guided by instructors, over 60 participants practised various yogic postures and breathing techniques amidst the mandir’s peaceful ambience and breathtaking architecture.

Mayur Yadav, a local pharmacist, said, “Beyond the spiritual benefits I find from doing yoga, there are immense health benefits. Especially at a time where mental health is key, yoga has been the best resource for my family and me.”

## ASIA PACIFIC

### YOUTH SEMINAR: BREAKING HABITS

**1 March–30 April 2021**

More than 400 teenagers and youths aged



14 to 22 years from seven centres in Australia (Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney) and New Zealand (Auckland and Wellington) attended the Youth Seminar on the theme ‘Breaking Habits’.

The three main topics were overcoming bad sleeping habits, excessive use of the internet and procrastination. The seminar included live dramas which depicted a typical youth’s bad habit tendencies. Thereafter, experienced swamis spoke about the issues and their solutions, using scientific facts and inspiring examples on how to shed bad habits and develop positive ones.

Youths were inspired to reflect on their habits and make changes to their study routines, sleep routines, and use of internet and technology.

## GURUHARI DARSHAN VIDEO PARAYANS

**22–29 May 2021, Australia & New Zealand**



As part of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s Centenary Celebrations, Guruhari Darshan Video Parayans were conducted at 96 locations across Australia and New Zealand. The *parayans* featured selected videos from Parts 1 to 4 of Pramukh Swami Maharaj’s *jivan charitra*. After viewing the



videos, discussions were conducted in which the great qualities of Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj were analyzed by the participants.

At each location, the Yuvak, Yuvati, Mahila and Sanyukta Mandals conducted the *parayans* in separate groups one after another from 4.00 to 10.00 p.m. The locations were especially decorated for the occasion, and *pujan* of Thakorji and Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj was performed at the beginning of each session.

Overall, more than 3,300 devotees in a total of 320 groups participated in these Guruhari Darshan Video Parayans.

## AFRICA

### SHILA PUJAN CEREMONY OF BAPS SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR 29 May 2021, Johannesburg, South Africa



On 25 March 2017, Mahant Swami Maharaj performed the Shilanyas Ceremony of the haveli at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Johannesburg. Since then, the construction work has progressed steadily.

On Saturday, 29 May 2021, Mahant Swami Maharaj initiated the next phase of the project by blessing the foundation *shilas* (stones) for the *shikharbaddha* mandir. In Nenpur, Gujarat, at 11.00 a.m. IST (7.30 a.m. in South Africa), the initial Vedic *mahapuja* rituals of the stones were performed by Atmaswarup Swami. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the concluding Vedic *mahapuja* rituals and performed *pujan* of the stones, *yantras* and construction instruments.

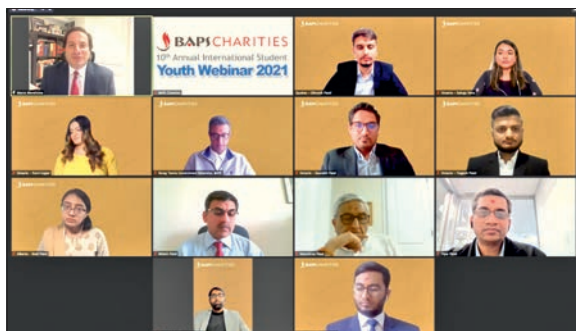
*Pujan* packs had been sent to 450 homes

throughout Southern Africa for *satsangis* and members of the community to join in this momentous occasion.

This entire *shila pujan* ceremony was streamed live globally and was attended by over 5,000 devotees and well-wishers. Swamishri was honoured via video conference by the senior devotees of South Africa with a special garland made of the *shila* replicas. Swamishri blessed all the devotees and also wrote a special letter after the ceremony to bless the devotees for the historic project.

## BAPS CHARITIES

### BAPS CHARITIES 10TH ANNUAL YOUTH WEBINAR 8 May 2021, Toronto, Canada



Over 4,000 international students and youth from various colleges and universities across Canada attended the BAPS Charities 10th Annual Youth Webinar. The webinar was held in the presence of Honourable Marco E.L. Mendicino, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a difficult time for all, including youths who have had to adjust to online studies and work.

During these challenging times, BAPS Charities has continued to support youths by hosting leaders from various backgrounds to speak on relevant topics through a series of virtual events and webinars. These interactive sessions enabled youths to connect with and learn from prominent figures in their respective fields. ◆



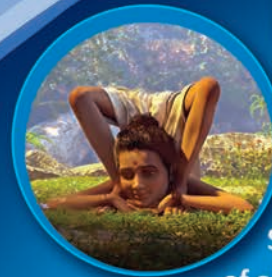
1. In Nenpur, Mahant Swami Maharaj performs *puja* of the *shilas* to be placed in the foundations of the new *shikharbaddha* mandir in Johannesburg, South Africa. (29 May 2021)
2. Guruhari Darshan Video Parayans, Australia & New Zealand. (22 to 29 May 2021)
3. Youths participate in the International Yoga Day celebration at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Los Angeles, USA. (20 June 2021)



Swaminarayan Charitra  
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